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THE ASH-GIRL.

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One bright May morning, a little ash-girl was sitting on the pavement, leaning back against the railing of Stuyvesant Square, thinking. A little while before, a lady had appeared at a window in one of the houses opposite, looked across into the park, and smiled to her children who were playing there. The ash-girl had laughed and blushed, through all the dirt upon her face and under the tangled mass of hair that hung over it, for she thought the lady had smiled at her too, and she had never before caught a look of so much love from anybody. A few minutes afterward, the lady had come out upon the door-step, the children had run to meet her, calling, 'Mother! mother!' and they had all walked away together.

The ash-girl, thinking that the lady would certainly see her and smile again to her, jumped up, stood first on one bare foot, then on the other, clasped and unclasped her hands, brushed her hair away from her eyes, pulled off her hood, swung it to and fro, wound the strings around her wrists, and did not know at all what she was about. But the lady had only said, 'Come, my darlings!' to her children, and walked away. So the ash-girl had sat down on the pavement, and was thinking about it all.

'Mother!' she muttered. 'They all said, 'Mother!' The little one couldn't talk plain, but even she said, 'Muzzer!' Ha! ha! laughed the ash-girl all to her self, and hugging her knee a little tighter. 'Did I ever in my life see anything so funny as three childers all running after a woman and callin', 'Mother?' One on 'em was as big as me, too! What's she want of a mother to be lookin' out for her all the time? I'd be 'shamed, if I was her. How'd I look, now, runnin' after somebody—so.'

She stopped to enjoy the joke for a moment, but suddenly she looked grave and whispered, in a tone of mystery and some awe:

'I wonder—I wonder what a lady'd say if I wur after her! If I'd a-run after that mother, now! I wonder what she'd a-done! I aint so awful different from them childers, I don't think. If I was washed, an' had my hair fixed in curls, an' a feather down behind—I wonder if I'd look then as if I b'longed to a good, beautiful, reel mother, that'd come to the window an' see me rollin' my hoop, an' look down at me a-smilin' the beautiful way that lady did!

The ash-girl sat, resting her elbow on her knee and her chin in her hand, for a long time, thinking about all this. After awhile, another thought came.

'I wish—I wish I had a mother!' she said at last. 'I wouldn't care if Biddy Dolan an' the others did laugh at me, then! I wouldn't care if all the ash-boys an' rag-pickers that ever I seen in my life follered after me a-mockin' of me. She wouldn't! My mother wouldn't laugh at me! No, indeed, she wouldn't. When the others did it, she'd hold out her

hand an' take mine into it, an' pull me close to her side an' look down at me an' say—what that lady did to her childers—she'd say, 'Come, my darling.' Oh! I wonder—I wonder, if I went all over the city, an' hunted an' hunted an' watched in the streets, an' axed at the doors—I wonder if I could find any one that'd be my mother! I wont ax that lady that lives acrost the way, 'cause she don't want me; she never looked at me when she came out ag'in. An' she's got all o' them others, too. But she's a reel mother. She's the first reel mother that ever I seen. She come out of a pretty house, too. They's flowers in the windies, an' lace curtains all the way up. I guess the best mothers is in the beautifullest houses. I'll go to all of them I can find. And I'll go right off, now—just as soon as I git my basket full and take it to Biddy's.'

'I said I didn't want a mother like Biddy,' she said to herself; 'nor I know my mother wont want a young un like me, neither! I better fix myself up. I can't help my clothes, (looking down at her rags, hopelessly), but I'll wash myself, and my mother'll put me on a nice, pretty dress and things. Yes, I know she will do that.'

So she pulled off her hood, caught up a basin, and proceeded to wash her face. She wiped it on an old towel, and then, having tried to smooth her hair with a piece of a broken comb, she hurried away unobserved.

She made her way as fast as possible to a more decent part of the city, bent upon finding the prettiest houses, and soon reached Fifth Avenue. She walked slowly along for a number of blocks, looking, not at the basement doors, as she did on her begging tours, but up at the windows, trying to decide at which house to try her luck first. But they all looked pretty much alike.

After a while, however, she got courage to go into one of the court-yards and pull the servants' bell. A scowling woman opened the door, and banged it to without a word.

'That's the way they does when I'm a-begging,' thought the child. 'How can I let them know I aint? Mebby its the basket. I'll leave it outside.'

So she put the basket down, and rang at another door. Pretty soon that door opened, and a boy showed himself just long enough to say: 'Clear out! Haint got nothing and never will have.'

She rang at a good many bells, with like results, but she was not to be discouraged.

One day, she was wandering about Madison Square, when an elegant carriage stopped before a house she was passing. The footman, in finest livery, opened the door; a lady stepped out of it, and Cathern, stopping to look at her, could hear her give the driver an order to come later in the day to drive her to the Park. Turning to go up the steps of the house, she brushed by Cathern, who, as she passed, caught at her dress, and for a moment held a fold of the delicate lace shawl she wore, while she looked up at her and said, in a pleading voice:

'Oh! please, ma'am, wont ye tell me—'

'Tell you what, child?' asked the lady, petulantly, and frowning a little. 'Let go of my lace; you will soil it. I have nothing for you.'

'I don't want nothing; I don't want nothing at all,' said Cathern, letting go of the lace and squeezing her hands together. 'I only want to know if—if—they's any lady in that house that wants a little girl for her own?'

A merry, light laugh rang from the lady as she answered: 'No, there isn't. I can tell you that very decidedly.'

And she ran up the steps, laughing still, her lace shawl and the folds of her delicate silk dress fluttering gracefully, and making little soft breeze touch the ash-girl's cheek as she passed.

The child watched her waiting on the step for the servant to open the door, and then, when she had disappeared through it looked up at the windows of the house, shading her eyes with her hand. Then she turned away with perplexed look, and, after her old way, sat down on the curb-stone to think the whole question over in a new light.

'It's queer!' she said to herself, after thinking a long time. 'It's very queer, and it must be all wrong. I guess, after all, that they don't have no reel mothers at all living in the illegant houses. That must be it! But—after another pause—"that first mother was in one. How did she come in it, then? I wonder how she did! But they aint no more of 'em, I've been everywhere. She was a real mother, too. She was the first one. I don't believe—I don't believe that house was her'n. I guess she only come to stay in it, and she lives somewheres else. That's it!—that's it! I'm sure it is. I've been a-doing it all wrong. I'll have to begin again.'

She sprang up with new hope at the thought, and was going to hurry away when, looking up again at the house a lady had entered, and seeing a group of children in one of the windows, she stopped.

'That's queer, too!' she thought. 'I wonder who takes care of the children in the big houses! She puzzled over the problem for a moment or two, and then said: 'I suppose the ladies does it. The ladies and the nusses, and the servants and the fine waiters! And the childers is like me—they don't have no reel mothers! Poor little things!—poor little things! And the ash-girl's heart was full of tenderness and pity for the rich children as she went on, slowly repeating, 'Poor little things!—poor little things!'

One afternoon in the autumn, she was sitting on a door-step idly watching a house opposite, where in the morning she had noticed some black and white ribbons on the bell. The shutters were closed, but she had seen flowers handed in at the door, carriages collect, something carried out all covered with the flowers, then people get into the carriages and drive away. Now the ribbons had been taken off the bell, and nothing, except the closed blinds, distinguished the house from all

the others.

'I wonder,' she was thinking, drawing her rags about her, for it was chilly, 'if it was a boy or a girl!—it wasn't very big, which ever it was,' when a carriage stopped at the door, and a lady, dressed in black and half covered with a long black veil, was helped out and supported tenderly up the steps and into the house by another lady who was with her.

Suddenly, her old fancy took possession of her. She stood up, sat down again, rubbed her face, tied and untied her hood, and at last, forgetting her basket, darted across the street, up the steps of the house, and rang the bell. She stood there restless and nervous, for a moment, until the door was opened by the girl. Then, putting her hands, one on the door and the other on the side, where it could not shut without crushing her fingers, she said, eagerly: 'I want to see the missus!'

'You can't,' answered the girl. 'She can't see nobody. What do you want with her?'

'I want to see her! Tell me—tell me if it was a girl; and has she got any others? Tell me that—do, please!' said Cathern so earnestly, that the woman, at first disposed to send her rudely away, answered: 'Yes, it was a girl: and she hasn't ne'er a one left—boy nor girl. Tell me what you want with her.'

'No, no; I must see her! I knows she'll see me. Do—do tell her!' cried Cathern, pleading very hard.

'Who is it, Ann?' asked a sweet voice, and the parlor door opened a little way.

'It's a poor child, ma'am, says she must see you, and I'm telling her—'

'No matter,' said the lady, opening the door wider, 'let her come in. Come in, child, and tell me what you want.'

Cathern stood in a pretty, quiet room, in the glow of a bright fire, squeezing her hands very tight together and looking up at the lady with all the yearning of her search in her little pinched face. After a moment, she said, pausing between every few words, her breath coming and going strangely:

'I come—I come—to ax you, ma'am—oh! I've been a-hunting and a-hunting through the streets—axing at the houses and everywhere for the mothers—because Biddy Dolan don't want me—and nobody want me, if—if— And she told me now at the door that it was a girl, and—I found out that you havn't any—any little girl—and I— Oh, ma'am, don't—don't you cry, too! I—I aint like any nice little girl—I'm only ugly. But I wants—oh, I wants a mother! And they aint any mother in the world that wants a little girl like me!'

Her hood thrown back, her hands clasped over her face, she stood sobbing and trembling, before the lady, who at first, as the child's meaning dawned upon her, drew herself away, turned her face to the wall, and bowed her head, weeping. But when she turned again saw the weak little frame trembling from head to foot, and heard her desolate cry she sud-

denly knelt down, spread wide her arms, and cried:

'Come! come to me! It is as if my child cried out to me from heaven! Put your little head, so, upon my breast, and I will be as true—as true a mother to you as I can. Yes, I will my darling!'

—St. Nicholas, for April.

A WISE ANSWER.

Some of the fancies of the Jewish Talmud are very witty and neat. Particularly so are those short apothegms which illustrate or defend some attribute of God by answering an infidel's objection. The following is a perfect specimen of Oriental retort:

A prince once said to Rabbi Gamilie:

'Your God is a thief; he surprised Adam in his sleep, and stole a rib from him.'

The Rabbi's daughter overheard this speech and whispered a word or two in her father's ear, asking his permission to answer this singular opinion herself. He gave his consent.

The girl stepped forward, and feigning terror and dismay, threw her arms aloft in surprise; and cried out:

'My liege, my liege! Justice. Revenge!'

'What has happened?' asked the prince.

'A wicked theft has taken place,' she replied. 'A robber has secretly crept in our house, carried away a silver goblet, and left a gold one in its stead.'

'What an upright thief!' exclaimed the prince. 'Would that such robberies were of more frequent occurrence!'

'Behold, then, sire, the kind of thief that our Creator was: He stole a rib from Adam, and gave him a beautiful wife instead.'

'Well said!' avowed the prince.

—Selected.

Shortly before his departure for India, the lamented Heber preached a sermon, which contained this beautiful sentiment: 'Life bears us on like the stream of a mighty river. Our boat glides down the narrow channel—through the playful murmuring of the little brook, and the winding of its grassy borders. The trees shed their blossoms over our young heads, the flowers on the brink seem to offer themselves to our young hands: we are happy in hope, and grasp eagerly at the beauties around us—but the stream hurries on, and still our hands are empty. Our course in youth and manhood is along a wider floor, amid objects more striking and magnificent. We are animated at the moving pictures of enjoyment and industry passing us, we are excited at some short lived disappointment. The stream bears us on, and our joys and griefs are alike left behind us. We may be shipwrecked, we cannot be delayed; whether rough or smooth, the river hastens to its home, till the roar of the ocean is in our ears, and the tossing of the waves is beneath our feet, and the land lessens from our eyes, and the floods are lifted around us, and we take our leave of earth and its inhabitants, until of our further voyage there is no witness, save the Infinite and Eternal.'