

The Talkative Wig

Eliza Lee Follen

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"Pray, dear Mother," said the boys, "tell us what else you heard in the old garret."

"You know," said she, "it was on a rainy Sunday when my mother sent me up there with my book, Pilgrim's Progress. This book always delighted me, and set my fancy to work in some way or other.

After reading a while, I began to look at the queer old things in the garret. Pussy began to purr louder and louder, and at last I fell again into the same dreamy sleep that I was in at first.

Presently I heard the same confused sound which I heard before when the old tenants of the garret began to speak. There seemed also to be a slight motion among them, and a sort of mysterious appearance came over the whole apartment, as if they were all living, though very shadowy beings. Presently I heard the creak of the curling tongs, and he uttered these words:—

"I think we have all been wronged by our friend the wig; he approved of our all relating our own histories, and promised that, after we had done so, he would give us his, frankly and truly, as we have done; instead of that he, as well as the rest of us, fell asleep when our friend spinning wheel related her story; and, when we all waked up, he did not fulfil his promise. I move that he be requested now to give us a faithful account of his whole life, till he was consigned with us to this dark, gloomy old place. I probably have been more intimately acquainted with him than any one present; for once or twice I have assisted in smoothing, or rather frizzing, his ruffled hairs, and making him fit for company; and, with your leave, my friends, I urge him in your name to relate his history." A sort of hum of approbation sounded through the long, dark old garret, and then the wig spoke.

"Friend Frizzle is right: I did agree to relate my adventures, but I said I would wait till all had told their stories; now, here are two of this brilliant company that have not said one word of themselves, that comical coat and that old cloak; after they have related their history I will relate mine. The wig hitched a little on his block, and was silent.

"I am ready," said the coat, "to tell all I know of myself, and I shall not keep you long, I trust. My friend the baize gown and I had the same origin on the back of a sheep, only I was of a nicer texture, and had, from my earliest days, a more refined character; and, of course, was used for higher purposes. Major Sword there may know perhaps that I had as much to do with making the major of Cadets as he had, only I did not make people run when they looked at me, as he says he did.

I was originally of the most delicate white, and I was made into one of the very first coats that ever appeared on the parade as one of the Governor's guards. I think I did more to make the major than my Lord Sword did. Think of a major without a coat! He would not be a major, for a moment. He would be hooted at. Now, even were he without a sword, and had me, such as I once was, on his back, he would still be known as a major of the Cadets."

"Self-glorification! Come to your story," cried the musket, with a bounce.

"I will," said the coat. "I was, as I have told you, the major's military coat, admired by all who looked at me; and I appeared often on parade days till he gave up his office, and left this country, when I was left hanging up in his dressing room, and all my glory was gone.

As the major's boys grew bigger, they would often beg their mother to allow them to put me on. The rogues were so short then that I trailed on the ground. I was even so far abused as to be worn by girls. This tried my feelings sorely, but I was forced to submit. Once I was so far disgraced as to be worn by one of the girls while she danced with her brother who was dressed like a monkey, with a tail over a yard long; and this was not all, she pulled the monkey's tail too hard, it came off, and then the monkey boy seized the tail and beat me with it,

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meaning to beat his sister, but I got the worst of it. So I lived to be made fun of, and lived for nothing else.

At last, the major's wife, our dear mistress, took me one day into her gentle hands, and after examining me carefully and making up her mind to the act, deliberately took her scissors, ripped me up into pieces, and sent me to the dyer's, to be colored brown. This was too horrid—I was soused into the vilest mixture you can imagine, and suffered every thing abominable, such as being stretched within an inch of my life, and then almost burned to death. At last, I came out with the color you now see me, not a handsome brown, but a real sickish rhubarb color. My dear mistress laughed when she looked at me. "This is a dose," said she, "but it will do for an every day coat for Jonathan, and I can make it myself, with Keziah Vose's aid; so I will not grieve about it. So Keziah was sent for and set to work.

Now Jonathan was a white-haired, chubby boy, and this was his first coat. Keziah went by her eye altogether. She took no measures except for the sleeves, and these she said she would make large and long, to allow for Jonathan's growing. She made me so broad behind that one brass button could not see the other, although they were, as you see, almost as large as a small plate; the skirts came down so as to hide the calves of his legs, and were so full as nearly to meet before. My sleeves had a regular slouch. There was no hollow in the back, and I looked as if I was made for one of the boys' snow men, not for a human being.

When I was finished and put on for the first time, all the children and their mother were present, as it happened. My droll looks and rhubarb color, the comical expression of Jonathan's face,—for he was a great rogue,—and his sun-bleached hair, half hidden by my high, stiff collar, set them all into a gale of laughter. He took hold of my full skirts, one on each side, and began to dance; and even his mother and Keziah laughed too. Nothing was to be done. A few times, the mother of Jonathan tried to induce him to wear me at home, for she could not afford, she said, to lose all I had cost her; but it was all in vain—giggle, giggle, went all the children when they saw me, and I had to be hung up, as you see me now. Whenever they wanted a comical dress in any of their plays, I was brought out, and that little girl asleep there, and her brothers still amuse themselves with my comical looks. Alas! I am of no other use in this world.

The young people used to amuse themselves by acting little plays, or some other nonsense; and when they wanted to make a very ridiculous figure, I noticed they came for me. I always observed that whoever had me on talked through his nose, with an ugly drawl, and used vulgar words and expressions, such as "Now you don't! Do tell! Sartin true!"

Once they put me on a dancing bear. This was insulting. I don't like to think of it. I try to forget it.

In short, every one laughs when I am present, for some reason or other; and I suppose I have been kept on account of the merriment I have afforded the family. After all, my friends, I am not sure that he who adds to the innocent gayety of people is not as valuable a person as one who has more dignity, and who never made any one laugh in his life.

I have done, my friends—the old cloak is a more serious, dignified person than I, and will now, I trust, give us her history."

The old cloak began to speak in a different tone from that of the coat. I cannot say the tone was gloomy, though it was very serious. It was a kindly, affectionate tone, that made you not unhappy, but thoughtful. "I agree," said she, "with my neighbor who has just spoken, that no one deserves better of society than he who promotes its innocent merriment. No bad person can know what true gayety of heart is. Goodness and cheerfulness are like substance and shadow; where the one is, the other will always follow.

I was made of German wool; and, in my country, the people all laugh and sing. They keep still a saying of old Martin Luther, which runs, if I remember rightly,—

"Wo man singt, leg' ich mich freilich nieder. Bose Menschen haben keine Lieder."

"Keep to plain English, you Hushan!" shouted the musket with a kick.

"I am sorry to hurt your feelings, my old soldier," said the good natured cloak. "I think, however, it is rather hard of you to keep the name of Hessian as a term of reproach forever, just because a few poor miserable fellows once came over here to fight you. Was it not enough to have treated them as you say you did in the Jerseys? For the benefit of you and those less prejudiced, I will translate the couplet:—

"Where I singing hear,
I lay me, free from fear.

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Men intent on wrong
Never have a song."

I was a singer myself once during the short time when I was connected with one of dame spinning wheel's relatives. I am not even a laugher now. Still I am contented and cheerful, and I remember past trials without any bitterness. I went through all processes of carding, spinning, weaving, dyeing, stretching, dressing, and was at last placed in a shop for sale. A beautiful young girl purchased me for her bridal pelisse. Never did a happier heart beat than did hers on the Sunday after she was married, when she wore me to the church, holding by her husband's arm. I could not but partake of the pleasure which she received from the gentle pressure of his arm when she put hers within his, saying, "I am glad, dear, you like my pelisse so much."

O, how happy we all were! How proud my mistress was of me! How proud I was of her! I hate to pass hastily over these happy days, but I suppose the history of them would not be very interesting to any of my hearers; for one day was very much like another. Never did any garment cover a more innocent, joyful heart than that of my mistress.

I lasted well for some years, but my sleeves, at last, became threadbare; soon after, there were actual holes in them, and holes also in my waist; I was, I must confess, a shabby-looking pelisse.

My dear mistress took me into her hands one day, and, after examining me all over, said, with a sigh, "I cannot wear it any longer; I must give it up." At last, her expression brightened and she added, "I can give it to cousin Jane; I am very tall, and she is very short. The skirt is good, and she can make a cloak of it; and so my precious pelisse will still be where I can see it."

Forthwith I was sent to cousin Jane, with a very pretty note explaining to her the reasons why her cousin took the liberty of offering her the old pelisse. Cousin Jane wanted a cloak, and could not afford to buy one; so I was carefully ripped up and turned, and made into a very respectable garment.

Cousin Jane was a dressmaker; and, in her service, I learned something of what dressmakers have to endure. She had not been long engaged in her trade; and, at first, she would put me on in the morning with a brisk, vigorous manner, but in the evening, when she returned home, how differently she took me up! how differently she threw me over her weary shoulders!

Soon she ceased to put me on in the morning in the same strong, elastic manner, but took me up languidly, and as if she dreaded the day, and, when she went into the air, wrapped me very closely about her, just as if I was her only comfort, and pressed me to her heart, as if in hopes it would ache less.

Poor dear cousin Jane, my heart aches to think of her. Day after day, from morning till night, and often till the next day began, she toiled and toiled, stooping over her work, sewing, sewing, hour after hour, and day after day, stooping all the time, till her eyes lost their brightness, her step all its elasticity, till her shoulders grew round, and her health failed.

O, had those for whom she labored, for her small day's wages, but observed how the lamp of life was gradually going out, they would not have allowed her so to work without any respite; they would have made her take better care of her own health; they would have sent her home early; they would not have allowed her to work thirteen or fourteen hours a day in their service.

There was one family in which she worked where the master and mistress insisted that at one o'clock Jane should lay aside her work, and walk till two, when they dined. Then they insisted upon her dining at their own table, and tried to make her meal a social and pleasant one.

O, these were white days for poor Jane. Could I not tell when she was going to work in this family by the way she threw me over her shoulders? Did I not feel her gentle heart beating with unwonted warmth as she came home from this family before eight o'clock, accompanied by the truly good man of the house or some trusty person? When she hung me up in her small bed room, did I not notice her grateful, happy smile? She felt that she was recognized by these good people as a sister and friend, and that the words which we hear at church and read in the Bible, "All men are brethren," were not mere words with them.

These evenings she would make her small fire, and sometimes indulge herself in reading a little while; she would go to bed early, and did not look so pale in the morning.

Had all the customers of cousin Jane been as kind and considerate as these good people were, she might have

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lived; and I should, perhaps, have continued in her possession; but life was too hard for her,—— she struggled with it for many years, and then her sweet spirit turned wearily away from it; she grew weaker and weaker, the color grew brighter and brighter on her cheek, and the light in her eye; she looked like a spirit; and, ere long, she was one.

My first owner came, as soon as she heard how ill Jane was, and took her home to this house in the country. Here our good mistress nursed her poor cousin, and made the last days as happy as she could; but Jane was weary of this life, and longed for a better one. She passed away as gently and sweetly as a summer evening cloud or a dying flower.

Our mistress said to her husband, "All Jane's clothes, except this dear cloak, I have given to the poor. This I must keep myself; for it was one of my wedding garments, and dear Jane has made it all the dearer to me. I shall keep it to lend to friends who are caught here in the rain; it shall be called the friend's cloak, and shall always be kept in the closet in the hall, close at hand."

Now, I suppose every one knows of how much use such a cloak is in a family. Never was a cloak more employed than I, and for all sorts of things. I was used to play dumb orator. I was at every one's service. I don't know how they ever did without me.

Don't be astonished that I did not wear out; my lining was strong, and I tell you an old cloak has a charmed life; you cannot wear it out; like charity, it suffereth long and is kind.

As my dear mistress's children grew up, I was treated very much as you all have been; that is to say, with no respect at all. What a different life was mine from that which I led with dear, gentle cousin Jane. Peace be with her sweet spirit!

One prank which the boys played some years after Jane's death, I must relate, and then I have done. The eldest, whose name was Willie, took me, the evening before thanksgiving day, and, having dressed himself up in some of the cook's dirty old clothes, and hung a basket on his arm, put me over his shoulders, and I went begging of all the neighbors for something to keep thanksgiving with. He disguised his voice by putting cotton wool in his mouth, and I wonder myself how I came to know him. Two or three boys of his acquaintance went with him, all dressed as beggars; and a grand frolic they had.

They went to one house where a man lived that made great pretensions to religion and goodness, but who the boys strongly suspected was not very compassionate to the poor.

"Please," said Willie, "give us a little flour and raisins for our mother to make a thanksgiving pudding with to-morrow." His answer was a slam of the door in his face.

"Let us go to Granny Horton's," said one of the boys; "she has not gone to bed yet."

"O," said Willie, "you know she has nothing but what mother sends her, or some of the neighbors. It would be a shame. I carried her a pair of chickens this morning, and some flour and raisins; and it is a shame to beg of her, she is so kind. But won't it be funny if she gives us something, when Squire Marsh would not; at any rate, she'll not slam the door in our faces. Come, let's go quickly, before she puts out her little light and goes to bed. I bet she'll give us one of her chickens. But let us take whatever she gives us, just for the fun, and for fear we should be found out."

Willie was to be the spokesman. He felt rather queerly at first; but the fun of the thing was too tempting, so he agreed to speak. He was dressed as a girl, and wrapped me closely about him, as if he was very cold. He had on an old straw bonnet, and his face was painted, so that she could not recognize him, he knew.

They knocked at Granny Horton's door, and she, in a kind, gentle voice, replied, "Come in!" Willie, pretending to be a girl, told how she and her brother and sister had come from the farther part of the town, where they lived in the woods with a mother who was very old, and had hardly any thing to eat; and how they wanted something good to carry to her for thanksgiving day——a little flour, or a chicken, or any thing; that it was too hard for his dear mother to have nothing but beans on that day; that beans were what they lived on commonly.

He looked so mournful, and spoke in such a mournful tone that the dear old woman, after thinking one moment, said to him, "I have two chickens, a quart of flour, and two pounds of raisins, sent to me by a good lady this morning, and brought to me by a real good little boy called Willie. I can't ask their leave, but I guess they would not scold me for giving your mother half of what he brought me; so you shall have it, dear. 'Tis more blessed to give than to receive.' 'The Lord gave and the Lord taketh away. Blessed be His name.'"

While she was saying over these blessed words, she was busy dividing the flour and the raisins, and putting

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them and the chicken into the basket which Willie gave her.

They all thanked the old woman very kindly, and went off with her flour and chicken.

"What shall we do with it all?" said they, as soon as they were out of the house.

"Let us," said Willie, "beg all we can every where, and get our basket full, and carry it back to her, and, when she is asleep, get into her house again, and put it on her hearth. I know how to open the window on the outside when she thinks it fast."

This was a good joke for the boys; so they went from house to house, and, except at the squire's and one other place, got something from every one, till, at last, their basket was full. Then they went home, and got a peck of apples from their mother.

Willie then led the way to Granny Horton's again. They looked in at the window, and, by the light of the few embers still burning, saw the good woman asleep in her great, old-fashioned chair, with her spectacles on, and by her side a little stand on which lay her Bible open at the place where she had been reading.

"I can get in," said Willie, "and put the basket down by her side before she wakes."

Accordingly, he went to a little window in the back part of the house, climbed in, came softly into the room where she was, and set the baskets, all running over with good things, down on the hearth. Willie had hardly got back to the window, when the good woman waked up; and there, directly before her eyes, stood the baskets. She took them up, and looked at them for some minutes before she took any thing out. At last, she began to examine their contents. When she came to her chicken and flour and raisins, in the very papers in which she had wrapped them; she looked up and clasped her hands with such astonishment, with such a look of wonder and gratitude, that the boys, in their glee, laughed outright, and so loud that she heard them.

She ran to the window, but they were gone; and she never knew how it was that her chicken and flour brought her back seven fold.

When next the cook went to see her, with me on,—I was every body's cloak,—the old lady told her the whole story of finding the chicken and flour, and so many other good things with them. The secret was kept; and it was Granny Horton's firm faith that it was the wings of angels she heard when she went to the window. Indeed she thought she had seen the wings, for as Willie turned to run, he forgot to hold me tight, and the wind blew me up so as to hide him entirely, and she took me for great dark wings.

I fear you may be weary of my story. I have much more that I could relate, but I have already been too long.

I am, as you see, ragged and worn, but the dear family have an affection for me still, as well as for all the rest of us; and so I am allowed to remain here in this most respectable company. I trust the wig will now give us his history for which we have waited so long."

"There is time enough before eight o'clock for the story of the wig," said Frank, "if you can remember it, Mother. He ought to tell his story now, as he promised."

"As the wig began to speak," said their mother, "he gave a slight hitch on one side, just as if some one pushed him up a little, and then, after a short pause, began thus: "You will be astonished, perhaps, to know that it is more than a hundred years since I first saw the light. None of you have lived so long, or seen as much as I have. I cannot tell all I have seen or known. It would take too long, and weary you too much. I can only give a slight sketch of my long life.

In the year seventeen hundred and fifty, the baby head upon which I grew came into this strange world in which we live. O, how happy was the mother who saw me for the first time! How full was her joy when she stroked the small head of her little girl, and exclaimed, "How beautiful and soft her hair is! softer than velvet or satin." Even then, every one said, "What a beautiful head of hair! What a lovely baby!"

The little girl whose head I adorned was the daughter of a poor vicar who lived with his wife in an obscure country town in England.

Alice was their fifth child, but their only daughter. She was very beautiful, and, I may say it surely without vanity now, I was her greatest ornament. I was of a beautiful auburn color, and fell in thick clusters all over her happy, gentle head, and shaded her laughter-loving face. After a day of hard work, how fond her mother was of taking her little pet in her lap, and twisting up every curl in nice order under her white linen night-cap, before putting her to bed! Her father, too, would wind my ringlets around his great fingers, made hard and rough with toil in the garden, and would kiss every one of them, and pray God to bless the young head on which they grew.

As the dear head grew larger, I grew larger and thicker. Every one who saw me noticed me. One would say,

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"It looks like a pot of hyacinths"; another, "It has caught the sunshine and kept it."

What a pleasant life I led! When Alice grew a large girl, she became something of a romp, and one of her favorite amusements was to go to the top of a hill near her father's house, when there was a high wind, and let it blow through her curls, and sing and shout and dance from the fulness of her joy. When she came home, she would say "Mother, the wind has been combing my hair."

O the horrid combing that I had to endure every morning! One must be a head of curly hair to know how terrible is a comb.

If you will not think me too long, I must talk a little more about the dear Alice, and tell you what I witnessed till I was separated from her."

"Go ahead," said the old musket.

"I must tell you how her sweetness and goodness once saved the house from robbery. It was the custom of her father and mother, on Sunday, to lock up the house, while they went to church. A pot of pork and beans, and a pudding of Indian meal was put in the oven to bake for their dinner.

One Sunday, as Alice had a heavy cold, they left her at home. She was then fourteen years old, and felt herself quite equal to taking charge of the house.

It was generally known that the curate's house was locked up on Sunday; and a poor, foolish, as well as wicked fellow, determined to take that opportunity to help himself to the good curate's silver, or any other valuable, he could find in the house. It happened that the man took the Sunday when Alice was left at home for his wicked purpose.

When he came to the door which he intended to break open, he was admitted by Alice, who saw him coming. She asked him to come in and sit down, then inquired if he had travelled far, and set before him some bread and butter and cold water.

"My father is a minister," she said, "and always asks travellers to stay. We have some dinner in the oven, and we shall all of us like to have you stay and dine. You look pale and tired; you had better stay."

These words Alice said with such a sweet, confiding earnestness, that the wicked purpose died away from the heart of the intended thief. He felt as if he was in the presence of an angel. He looked at her in wonder. All the evil in him seemed to depart.

"You are very good," he said. "Do you take care of the house all alone by yourself?"

"O yes," she replied; "it does not take much trouble. There is no one to harm us. Would you like a book to read till papa and mamma come home; here is my Testament; or would you like I should read to you?"

"Read to me," said the man.

As Alice read from the history of Jesus, the tears ran down the robber's cheeks; he said nothing.

When the curate came home, he repeated Alice's invitation to dine. The man accepted it. After dinner, when he thanked Alice and her father for their kindness to him, he said to the curate, "Your daughter is an angel, and has saved me from sin. I go away a better man than I came."

He then confessed the evil intentions with which he had entered the house, told how Alice's trusting, gentle kindness had disarmed him, and promised the curate that he would henceforward be a better man.

I do not mean to say that Alice never did any wrong thing. She was, however, so sorry for a fault, she repented so soon, and then did all she could to repair it, that no one could help forgiving her. She had a trick of squinting now and then. Her mother thought that my curls perplexed the bright eyes under them; and, to prevent the evil, drew up all the pretty locks in a bunch, tied them together, and said, "Now, Alice, your hair is all out of the way, and you will not squint."

Alice was annoyed by this; she was a little vain of my beauty, and the disregard of her looks, which she thought these words indicated, fretted her.

Her father saw this, and, to make the tying less disagreeable, said to her, one day, "Alice, I see you don't like to have your hair tied up; you don't think it reasonable. Come now, bear it patiently for a month; and, at the end of that time, I will give you the little work box I am ornamenting with straw."

Alice agreed, and promised to be patient, and to keep her hair tied up.

During the month, it happened that Alice was invited to a little party of girls at her aunt's.

Alice hoped that her father and mother would absolve her from the promise, that afternoon; but no, her mother only tied up her hair with a new ribbon for the occasion. I, with all my beautiful curls, was drawn away from her

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dear face as far as possible. Alice found this hard to bear.

As she was on the way to the party, she could hardly keep from crying.

"What is the matter?" said her father.

"Nothing, father," said Alice, "only a little headache; mother has tied my hair too tight."

"Loosen it," said her father.

Alice did loosen it, so that the string was just ready to come off.

When she arrived at her aunt's, where her father left her, I was just escaping from my hateful confinement, and her aunt took hold of the hair as the string fell on the floor.

"Shall I tie it on again, Alice, or shall your pretty hair go just so? I don't see the use of tying it, but, if you really wish it, my dear, just step up stairs, and Jane will do it for you very nicely. Perhaps your mother would choose it to be tied; she is very particular. It is a pity to confine such beautiful curls, but, if it must be so, we can't help it. Will you go up stairs? Here is the string; it dropped on the floor."

"No," said Alice, "it is of no consequence;" and she put the string into her pocket.

Again I fell upon her beautiful forehead, and kissed her rosy cheeks; and every one admired my beauty.

Alice tried to forget that she was breaking her promise, and enjoyed herself pretty well.

When she went home, her mother said, "Why, Alice, your hair is all over your face; how comes that?"

"The string was nearly off when I went in, and then it fell on the floor, and aunt said I looked better without it. Here is the string, which she picked up."

"I should have thought your aunt would have let you go up to Jane, and have it tied properly; you should have asked her leave."

"I suppose," said the father, "that Alice felt too shy. It is no matter for one day. Alice, I dare say, kept her promise as well as she could; and, next week, she shall have her box; a right pretty one it is."

Alice kissed her father and mother, and went to bed; but there was a little cloud between her and the all-pure Being to whom she prayed that night, and her precious tears wetted my locks, ere she went to sleep.

Alice felt that she had not been true to her promise, and her parents' entire trust was the most severe reproach. Still she could not quite make up her mind to say so; and she tried not to think so. She had set her heart upon the little work box made and ornamented by her father whom she loved dearly. One day after another passed away, and every day it became harder to confess her fault. How often I heard her sigh during these days! Nothing makes a perfectly light heart but entire uprightness.

One day, her father called her to him, and said, "Come, Alice, and tell me which color I shall use to ornament the border of your box—— blue or green?"

"Just which you please, Father."

"But you know it is for you, and I want to know what you like best."

"If it should ever be mine, Father, I like blue best."

"Blue it shall be," said her father. "It will be finished to-morrow, and then your month for keeping your hair tied will end. I think your eyes are better, and you have learned also that you can keep a promise. You are my good child."

Alice could not speak. She ran out of doors into her garden where her father had made her a little arbor, and there, all alone, she struggled with herself, till courage and truth prevailed. Then she went back into her father's study where she found him still at work on her box.

"Almost done, Alice," said he; "see how pretty it is." "It must not be mine, Father," said Alice, very quietly, for she was determined to command herself. "I have not kept my promise, Father. I have deceived you and mother. I don't deserve the box. Give it to my cousin." Then she told her father the whole story, just as it was. As she went on, she grew braver, and felt happier; so that she was able to look up into her father's face, and say, very calmly, "I could not take any pleasure in your pretty box, for I know I do not deserve it. Please, dear Father, to tell Mother all about it, and put away the box, if you choose not to give it to some one else. It is very pretty, but it is not to be my box."

The tears began to come in her eyes, and she turned to go out of the room. Her father stopped her. "Come here, my Child," he said. "You did wrong, but you have done all you could to repair your fault. You will never again, I think, be guilty of falsehood. At the end of another month, if you feel sure of yourself, come to me for your box."

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"No, Father, that would seem like being paid for speaking the truth. I should never ask for the box."

"Would you rather I should give it to your cousin?"

"If you please, I should;" and then the tears ran fast down her cheeks. "You know my cousin Edith has very few pretty things. I should like her to have it."

"Take it, Alice, and give it to her yourself."

"As your present, Father, not as mine. You know it is not, and cannot be mine. I have been so unhappy at my untruth, that I think I shall never commit such a fault again."

Alice never did again, in the slightest thing, depart from the strictest truth and uprightness, in action as well as in word. It was common for her friends to say when there was a question about any thing that had occurred, "We will ask Alice. She always tells the exact truth."

At last, Alice was a woman; and I, of course, led a more sober life, as she became more serious. I grew so long and thick that, when she took out her comb, and shook her head slightly, I fell in curls all around her neck and shoulders, like a golden veil, and you could but just see her laughing blue eyes, and white teeth through me.

You may readily guess that the pretty Alice was beloved by all who knew her; and, ere long, the son of the village apothecary won her heart. He was a good-hearted fellow, but never fitted himself to be of much use in the world. He took Alice to a distant village, where, with his father's assistance, he set up as an apothecary, on rather a small scale, of course; but Alice was used to simple fare and to helping herself.

All would have been well with them but for one thing—the husband became a drunkard; not immediately—his love for his wife kept him sober for some time. Nothing was more beautiful than the way they lived for a year or two; but the habit of drinking a little, a habit which he had formed in his father's shop, and which he intended to cure, returned. The wretched man had not strength to resist it.

He became fretful, and Alice, for the first time in her life, became unhappy. She had never before heard any but the voice of kindness; and now, from him she loved best in the world she received sometimes sharp and disagreeable words. He was very sorry afterwards, and all would seem well again, but he did not really reform, and, many a time, my locks, falling over her innocent round cheek, were wetted with her tears.

Alice was good as an angel. She forgave her husband, believed him when he promised to leave off drinking, and never said a harsh word to him. James kept his promise for a month or two, but fell again, and then more hopelessly; for, after he had drunk a little, he feared his wife would know what he had done, and felt so unhappy that he drank more to drown his feelings; and, for the first time, he was brought home to his wife dead drunk.

Alice tended her husband as if he were only a sick man; she had him put into a nice bed, she washed and mended his soiled and torn clothes, she was near him to catch his first word when he recovered his senses, she never reproached him, she tried, by love, to win him back to sobriety and duty, she wept, she prayed for him.

He suffered all that man can from shame; he could not look her in the face; he had destroyed the charm and glory of life; he was unable, or rather he thought he was, to conquer his enemy; and, before six years were at an end, partly from broken and ruined health, and partly from utter misery, he fell into a rapid decline, and died.

Alice loved her husband; and never was sick man nursed with more loving, cheerful patience than was he. He wept over his sins; he asked her, with every returning and every setting sun, to forgive him and to pray God to pardon him.

She was an angel of pity and mercy to him, to the end. When she leaned over him to kiss him, he would pull her beautiful hair—for I was still beautiful—over his face which he was ashamed to show when he thought of his folly and wickedness. Many a time have I felt his hot tears of contrition as he pressed me against his sunken cheeks, and to his parched lips.

After her husband's death, the vicar of the parish came to see Alice, and did all he could to comfort and aid her.

She found that her husband had died largely in debt; that, when all the stock in his shop was sold, and the creditors paid, there would be nothing left for herself and two children.

She did not want to go back to her old father's house, and burden him with care and expense, and she resolved to open a little school for small children in the cottage in which she lived.

She had one spare room which she could let to an old lady who wanted just such a home as Alice could give her.

With a strong and hopeful heart, did Alice dedicate herself to the work before her, of supporting and educating

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her two orphan children. Alice's strict honesty had made her give up to her husband's creditors every thing she had, except the barest necessities; and, now that she wanted to commence her school, she felt very much the want of a little cash to buy a few indispensable things.

The grocer and butcher had offered to supply her on credit, till her first payment from her scholars and boarder should come in. Still a little ready money was essential to her to begin. She would not borrow it, and was one day thinking what she should do, when her eye, wandering over a newspaper which the vicar had kindly lent her, fell on an advertisement offering a high price for handsome hair long and thick enough to make wigs.

Alice heard the good curate say that he was going to London on business in a day or two, and her determination was made in a moment.

I said that Alice had kept nothing that she could do without; she had, however, kept the white muslin gown she wore when she was married. She thought she could not give this up. "I shall never wear a white muslin gown again," she said, as she ripped out one of the breadths and made herself two or three plain caps of it.

The next day she rose early before the children were awake, and, standing before a very small looking glass which she had kept to dress her hair, she looked at me curling all over her precious head, and hanging down upon her shoulders.

"He loved these locks," said she, "and, for his sake, I would keep them; but they had better be devoted to the good of our children. Some school books will be worth more than all these golden locks. I am glad the children are asleep, for they love to play with my hair, and it would grieve them to see me cut it off."

The good Alice took her scissors, and cut off lock after lock, till all were gone, save a few which she left around her forehead. Then she put on her simple muslin cap and tied it with a muslin string under her chin.

Just then, her boy awoke. Alice had laid him down on his bed, and the first sight the little fellow saw, when he awoke, was his mother's hair which almost covered him up.

"Why, Mother, how could you do so? How could you cut off your pretty hair, and put on that ugly cap? What would father say? You said we must do what we thought would please him. It would not please him to have you cut off your pretty hair;" and the child burst into an agony of tears.

"Would it not please him that you should have a spelling book and a slate to write on, William? With this hair I can buy them for you. I have no other riches now."

The poor boy still wept. The hair was more to him, at that time, than all learning. He could not then have believed that the time would come, when he would remember with gratitude his mother's sacrifice for him and his little sister.

Alice gathered the locks, took from a drawer her last bit of blue ribbon, and tied them, saying, "This is the way he liked to see my hair tied when I was at my father's cottage. I shall never tie it so again."

When the good vicar came to see Alice, as he did every day, she met him with me all nicely done up in a paper in her hands, and asked him if he would be so good as to take me to the hair dresser who had advertised for hair, make the best bargain he could for her, and, with the proceeds, get the few necessities for commencing her small school. The good man cheerfully promised to do so, took the parcel from Alice, and carried it to his own house.

And so I bade farewell to dear Alice, and her neat cottage, and her sweet children. I was parted forever from that innocent head that had cherished only good and pure thoughts. I was no longer to be dressed by her dear hands. I was never again to shade and adorn her lovely face, nor fall in ringlets around her sloping shoulders, nor ever tremble again with the beatings of her gay and generous heart, as I often had when she let me fall over her neck and shoulders.

Nothing that ever had life in it could be insensible to such a sorrow as this. How I envied the few locks she kept around her precious forehead! How I wished that scissors had never been invented!

The good curate, faithful to his promise, took me to the hair dresser in London, according to the direction in the advertisement; and, before opening the paper which contained me, told him the story of Alice, of her trials, and of her excellent character and conduct, of her present need, and of her purpose to support and educate her children by her own efforts. He told him that there never was such a beautiful head of hair, and that he hoped he would be willing to give something handsome for it.

When the old clergyman opened the paper, and exhibited me to the hair dresser, he took me out as fondly as if I had been a baby, and shook me so as to make the ringlets curl again, but they would not.

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I felt the difference between the old man's hard fingers, and rough shake, and the soft touch of the dear Alice. "Is it not beautiful?" said the old man.

"It is well enough," said the dealer. "I shall have to make a man's wig of it. The curls will all boil out."

You may imagine my horror at these words; and, as for the poor vicar, he seemed thunderstruck.

"If I had any money to spare," said he, "I would buy this beautiful hair myself, and have it framed with a glass over it, and hang it up in my best parlor, with that blue ribbon that looks so like her; it's as handsome as a picture; and then her dear children should have it at my death."

Whether it was that the hair dresser was afraid of losing me, or that his heart was slightly touched with compassion for Alice and her orphan children, I know not; but he offered the good curate a sum for me which satisfied him.

As the curate gave me up, he untied the blue ribbon, folded it up nicely, and put it into his pocket; and I think he dropped a tear as he did so.

The wig maker examined me again when he was by himself. "A fine head of hair it really is," said he. "It will make a good wig for a youngish sort of a man; and the curls will make it work easier."

Then he tied me up with a piece of twine, and tossed me into a large drawer with great bunches of hair of all colors and fineness.

Here I remained for I know not how long, without air or light, in this disagreeable company. At last, one day we were all taken out, and what we were made to endure I now shudder to think of. We were boiled, we were pulled and mauled and greased; in short, I wonder we had a whole hair left; but, after undergoing every thing you can imagine, I found myself on a pole in the shape of a gentleman's wig, covered with high-scented pomatum and powder.

No one would have recognized me as the same beautiful hair that had adorned the head of Alice. There were a number of poles with wigs on them close by me, and I knew, as a matter of course, that I must look just like them. They looked perfectly hateful to me, and I felt disgusted with myself, because I knew I resembled them.

It is now a puzzle to me how men could have ever been so foolish as to make such a thing as I am, to put on their heads; these great unmeaning curls, this ugly club, as they called it, hanging down behind, and this horrid grease and powder too.

Most of my life, of course, has been passed in this horrid shape in which you now see me; but the remembrance of my early days clings to me, and the love of freedom, and the sense of beauty which I acquired when the wind played through my natural curls as they covered the head of my dear Alice, have never forsaken me. It was then only that I truly lived. But, forgive me—I have the weakness of old age, and love to talk of youthful pleasures.

One morning, in the year seventeen hundred and seventy-eight, when I was just twenty-eight years old, a gentleman of middle age came into the hair dresser's shop, and asked to look at his wigs. I was shown to him with some others. After examining us all, and trying on several, he chose me, because, he said, he thought I was made of the finest hair.

"This," said he, "will visit the American colonies, and probably remain there, for that will, I think, be my home."

I rejoiced to hear this, for I was weary of my present life, and longed for some variety.

The good gentleman who purchased me seemed well satisfied with my looks; but, when I saw myself in the glass, upon his long, narrow face, with his great bottle nose, and cheeks like the sides of a sulky, and all my pretty curls and my bright color gone, I wonder that each hair did not stand on end with fright; most likely it would have stood up, but for weight of pomatum and powder.

Soon after my owner purchased me, he set sail for America. As I was his new and best wig, I was packed carefully in a box, and knew nothing till he arrived here, and was settled in his place of residence.

The first time I was taken out of my box was on Sunday, when I was carefully adjusted on the Squire's head. I call him Squire, for I soon found that Squire was the title every one gave him, as he was the most important personage in the town in which he lived. I was as well pleased as a wig could be with the appearance of things in and around the house I was to inhabit. It was in a village about thirty miles from Boston, and was like an English country gentleman's house. A wide hall passed through the middle of it, with a grand staircase. From the doors at either end of the hall ran rows of elm trees. One led to the high road, the other up a gentle hill, on the top of which

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was a pretty burying ground with a path through it leading to a small church.

The Squire had a black man whom he called his boy, and who was, in fact, his slave, but whom he treated like a friend and brother.

Some years after, when slavery was abolished in Massachusetts, the Squire called Cato to him, and said, "Cato, you are no longer my slave; you are free."

"But, massa, you will not sell me."

"No, Cato, you are a freeman; I have no right to sell you. I don't think I ever had any right to sell you; but now the law of the land makes you free, and I am glad of it."

"Then I can stay with you of my own free will, massa."

"Yes, Cato, you can stay or go, just as you please."

"Then, massa, I stay with you for love, and not cause I am your slave. Now I your friend." And Cato never left the Squire till the day of his death. But to return to my story.

The Squire, as I said, put me on very carefully, and then as carefully put over me his three-cornered hat, and took his gold-headed cane, and, with Cato behind him, walked reverently up the hill to church.

I was accustomed to the Episcopal church, where dear Alice went every Sunday; but this was a Presbyterian church, and I had never been in one before.

As I said, had not my hairs lost their power of motion by what I had endured from the scissors, and the vile process of making me into my present shape, every one of them would have risen up against the so-called music in this church; but my misfortunes and pomatum kept me quiet.

The sermon was at least two hours long, and many a hitch did the Squire give me before it was over; that was the beginning of the little trick, which you see I have now, of jerking up a little on one side occasionally.

The Squire had brought with him from England a complete set of furniture for his house; and, after some time, the things reached our abode which was about thirty miles from the sea coast.

What all these fine things were for was soon explained. The Squire, one day, put me into my nice box, putting on an old wig which he wore on week days. I soon found that we were in some kind of a vehicle, and, ere long, we arrived at a hotel in Boston. But we did not stay there long. The Squire was going to be married, and, as I was his best wig, I, of course, adorned his head at the wedding.

Who would have believed that I was the same hair that covered the head of dear Alice when she was a bride? Then curling like hyacinths, and glowing like sunshine, now stiff, dull and dead; looking, as I thought then, and think now, like nothing human or divine.

It was the second time the Squire had been married, so he was very sedate in his happiness. He brought home his bride in a few days, and there, at his excellent, delightful country house, all was soon arranged in the most orderly way possible.

The lady had a proper pole arranged for my accommodation, and made the Squire a nice velvet cap to wear in the evenings, when they were alone, and he wished to be relieved of my weight.

The relations of the Squire and his wife often visited them, and always in parties, English fashion, and remained some days; and then what feasting and merriment there was!

The house was surrounded by beautiful woods, and near by was a lovely pond; and young and gay hearts were often there to wake the echoes with their cheerful, laughing voices. Cato played on the violin, and, when the evenings were chilly or rainy, the young people danced till the small hours of the night.

All this I witnessed, for the Squire was a gentleman of the old school, was always in his best clothes for his company, and gave no sign of weariness till they retired to bed.

I should mention that the Squire was a justice of the peace. As he lived in a remote and very quiet country town, he had not many culprits brought before him. But occasionally he was called upon to decide upon the proper punishment of some young rogue, and now and then he had to marry a couple.

At these times, I was always smoothed and new pomatumed with the greatest care, then put on very carefully, and examined in the looking glass two or three times, and readjusted over and over, till I was as even as justice itself, before the Squire took his gold-headed cane, and proceeded to consider the case.

Once a boy was brought before him for stealing chestnuts. Now there was such an abundance of chestnuts in the town that they were almost thought common property. It happened, however, that the Squire had some fine chestnuts himself, and he wished it to be considered an unpardonable thing to steal chestnuts. So he condemned

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the boy's father to pay a very good price for those his son had stolen, leaving it to the man from whom the chestnuts had been taken to say how large the quantity was.

This unjust decision made the man and his son very angry. But my master was the Squire; and, in those old times, we retained a great deal of the English reverence for a country gentleman.

The son of this man, however, had not much reverence for any thing, and was determined to be revenged upon the Squire, as you will see. I, however, was the greatest sufferer. It so happened that the pew in which the boy sat at church was directly behind the Squire's. The boy carried a piece of shoemaker's wax to meeting with him, and when, as was usually the case, the Squire's queue came over the edge of the pew, the young rascal took the opportunity, when no one was looking, to stick the short queue fast with the wax to the side of the pew.

When the Squire stood up, his wig was nearly jerked off his head, and would have been quite off, but for the boy's father who, seeing the good gentleman's danger, caught hold of me, tore off the horrid wax, and then pushed me back into my place.

All the foolish children in the church giggled at my expense. The simple Squire, thinking it was a nail or a hook, thanked the man who had aided him in his distress, and advised him to take out the troublesome hook. Cato, however, shook his black head and said, "Guess naughty Pickaninny did de queue of Massa's wig. Neber mind, Cato no make trouble; queue no feelins; I smood him up. Dem chestnuts in his gizzard, spoze."

Not long after this, the poor Squire lost his wife. Her health had always been very delicate, and he had been a most devoted husband.

The Squire was a good man, and tried to find consolation in the only way it may be found, in the religious performance of duty. He became the benefactor of the village. He was the friend of all who needed his aid.

Now, my friends, I must pass over the next ten years. What I have just related to you of the Squire passed in the year seventeen hundred and eighty. Now follow me to the year seventeen hundred and ninety-two.

The Americans, by their wisdom and bravery, had won their independence.

The Squire had done his part for his country by furnishing money, and by making his large retired mansion an asylum for all his friends who were in want of it.

He was now seventy years old; and a haler, heartier, more serene old man was never seen. His house was the summer rendezvous of all his young and his old friends.

Well do I remember one beautiful afternoon, just before sunset, the Squire's going to the glass, and adjusting me nicely, and then going to the door, and looking up through the avenue of elms which were young trees when I was first carried there, and saying, "It is time my niece and her husband and children were here."

In a few minutes, a carriage appeared with a lady and her son and daughter in it. That little girl, then five years old, was afterwards the mother of our little friend asleep yonder.

Never was there a more cordial welcome given to friends than the good Squire gave them, and never was welcome more acceptable.

There were other friends in the house, and such frolicking and laughing and dancing on the lawn you seldom see nowadays.

For many years, the nieces and nephews and their children and children's children came in this way to refresh body and soul at their good uncle's; till childhood blossomed into youth, and youth began to strengthen into maturity, and maturity to fade away into age. Years gathered around the old man's head, but his vigor remained.

You need not bounce in that way, my friend musket, and you, Messrs. tea-kettle and pitcher, need not try to turn up the noses you have lost, at my using these flowery expressions. Remember that, for more than half a century, I dwelt upon a human head. It is natural that I should have gained something from it, and that I should speak somewhat as human beings speak.

I hope you will pardon my talkativeness; and, even if you think me prosy, let me go on after my own fashion, and finish my story in my own way, for I am very old, and can speak in no other way. Remember, too, I shall never speak to you again."

"Go on, go on," cried the old coat, cloak, and baize gown.

The rest made no objection, and so the wig continued. "I assure you it was a very interesting thing to me to witness the changes that were going on among the Squire's visitors. I saw that child's mother come, first as a young lady, then as a bride, then as a mother; and then she came, first with one, then with two, and then with three children; and then, each year, I saw that these children had grown bigger, and it was pleasant, as I sat so quietly

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upon the old Squire's head, to see them jump out of the carriage each year, run up to the old man to receive his welcome, and then scamper off into the garden and fields like so many young animals; it was pleasant to watch their gleeful faces at his hospitable board, and to hear their merry shouts; it was pleasant, on Sunday, to see them, with their father and mother, follow the old gentleman respectfully at a distance, through the avenue of elms to church, with their small, solemn faces, just now and then slightly nodding to a buttercup and snatching it up; while he, with me and his three-cornered hat on his head, and his gold-headed cane in his hand, and his light drab suit of clothes, all his dress of the same cloth, and his shoes with gold buckles, strode along, while Cato, dressed in some of the Squire's old clothes, walked close behind him like his shadow. You would have thought my master forty instead of eighty.

Year after year I witnessed this, till, as I said, the children were youths, and their parents no longer young. Then the good Squire began to be, as I am now, a little garrulous; he loved to tell old stories more than once. But who was there that would not, with patient love, listen to them for many a time?

It was affecting to observe how all his dates were from the year fifty. No matter what story he told, or when it really did happen, he always finished by adding, "and that happened in the year fifty."

All his furniture and plate were purchased in the year fifty. It was to him the beginning of the world.

"Uncle," said one of his nieces one day to him, "let me try to dress your wig; I think it wants it."

"My dear, this wig was bought in the year fifty, and looks well now. It has done me good service."

"How beautiful this avenue of elms is!"

"Yes, they were set out in the year fifty."

"You have a good housekeeper, uncle."

"Yes, my dear, she came to me in the year fifty."

And so on with every thing in and about his house, and so it was with every event which had made an abiding mark on his memory.

There was but one thing about which the good Squire showed the real childishness of his old age, and that was his fruit. He had bushels and bushels of apples and pears and peaches, but he never thought them fit to eat till they were at least half rotten.

His nephews and nieces were of a decidedly different opinion, but did not like to debate the subject with him; so they had recourse to a little trick. I don't think it was quite right. The Squire was in the habit every day of gathering the ripe fruit in baskets, and putting it in what he called especially his room; it was a sort of half dressing, half business room. Here it was that he kept the pole upon which he placed me at night. These baskets of fruit, if the good man had had his own way, would have remained there till they were all rotten like the heaps of windfalls which was the fruit he told the family, and the children especially, they might eat.

Now it was the custom of two or three roguish boys and girls, who visited him, to gather baskets of this rotten fruit, and when the good man had gone to bed, to carry them into this room, and put them in the place of the baskets of sound ripe fruit, which they took for themselves and others to eat.

In a day or two, the good Squire would look at his baskets, and, finding the fruit decaying, would call it fit to eat, bring it into the parlor, and then call in the children, and say to them, "Here, boys and girls, here is nice ripe fruit for you; you can just cut out the rotten with your penknives;" and then he would distribute it among them.

The little monkeys, of course, could scarce repress their giggles.

I can make no apology for their cheat, except that, upon this point, the good man was really childish; and, as he did not eat the fruit himself, or sell it, or do any thing with it, but give to the pigs what was not eaten in the family, no one was wronged by the trick. It was, in fact, a piece of sport.

As you see, I had the benefit of being present at the whole of the fun; and I can hear now, it seems to me, as plainly as I did then, the suppressed laughter of these roguish children when they came into the room where I was, to exchange baskets of rotten for baskets of sound fruit.

In his eighty-seventh year, the old man ran a race with one of these children, and contrived, by an artifice, to win it. She got before him; when, fearing he would hurt himself, she stopped to look after him; he came up to her; and then, just pushing her back a little, got before her to the goal, which was very near them. How he did shout, as though he were only twenty, and what a hitch he gave me on the occasion!

In his ninety-seventh year he died. It was a pity he did not live to be a hundred. The night before he died, he went into his room to put me on my accustomed pole. He did not see clearly, and let me fall on the floor.

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"Ah!" said he, "the old head will fall too, before long. No matter; it is time it should go. Here, Cato, help your old master."

Cato was at hand, picked me up, put me in my place, and helped his master to bed.

I never saw the dear old man again.

The next thing that I remember, is being put into a box and carried I knew not whither.

The first light I saw was the dim light of this garret.

The mother of that little girl took me out; and as she put me on my pole, which she had caused to be brought here also, "People may laugh at me," said she, "but I will keep the dear old man's wig. It seems to me a part of him, and is a memorial of the happy hours I have passed under his hospitable roof."

It is now one hundred and six years since I was born into this world. For twenty-eight years I flourished on the beautiful head of dear Alice. Ever since then, I have been only a wig. I am now falling into utter decay. If any one were to shake me, I should fall to pieces. I have, like many of you, my friends, since inhabiting this garret, been abused and made fun of, by children. I was once put upon the head of a donkey, while a boy with a fool's cap on his head rode him, and took a love letter to a young man. I was also put upon the head of a great monkey brought to the house for exhibition, who took me off his head and threw me at the boys. Once, as you know, I was made to play the mock judge on the head of a dog. Once that little girl who sleeps there, used me to keep a litter of kittens warm in, on a cold winter night. This nearly killed me, and from that moment the children were forbidden to touch me.

"I have now," concluded the wig, "only to ask your pardon, my friends, for the impatience with which I have listened to your stories when I thought them too long, and for the truly human vanity and inconsistency which made me tell the longest story myself. But I knew that no one waited for me. I shall certainly never speak more. These are my last words. Farewell."

Just at these words, it seemed to me as if the wig gradually dissolved into a bright halo. Then suddenly it fell into golden ringlets all so soft and graceful and beautiful; while I looked, they seemed to shade such a lovely, innocent face, that I knew it must be that of dear Alice looking like an angel in heaven.

I awoke very happy. There was every thing in the old garret just as I first described it, and all as quiet and still as if nothing had happened."