

At Midnight.

The hour is late and the night dark. The wind raises from a moan to a wild shriek rattling the shutters, and grumbling down the chimney fans the dying embers into a flame and the sparks dance gayly about.

The patter of the early fall rain upon my window is congenial with my spirit tonight.

I am weary and the whole world seems weary when out in the storm and darkness the hour of midnight is tolled; another twenty four hours added to the years of yesterday.

As the days pile up into the building of our lives, the hours stand not as individual hours, but become part of the structure, the strength of the whole being as great as its weakest part.

To us, these hours are entrusted to be used at our own discretion; it is worth while then that we make "each one a pearl, each pearl a prayer" that when the building is complete, it be in His likeness and receive His approval of "well done."

But how still the house! the snapping song of the flame accompanied by the mournful night sounds, is all that breaks the silence.

The merry song of the children that made the walls echo by day, was hushed when sleep closed the weary eyelids.

What so peaceful as a child asleep! no brooding care or guilty conscience fretting itself far into the night, struggling to solve life's problems in cowardly efforts to forget!

It is the peace that passes understanding and one of the things laid aside when the boy becomes a man.

As yet, time is no fast hurrying stream, but a sportful, sunlit ocean.

Years to the child are as ages; ah! the secret of vicissitude is yet unknown and in a motionless universe we taste what afterward in this quick whirling universe is forever denied us the balm of rest.

As yet sleeping and waking are one.

But what is that in the corner? two pairs of little shoes!

What a story of long marches and frequent stumblings the scuffed toes tell!

What a tale of tramping and climbing the worn heel portrays.

What numberless trips of adventure through the boundless waste of the back yard, where the little owners stare over the fence at the busy hurrying throng and wonder, as we do, when we gaze into the infinite blue of the heaven "where does it all end?"

Ah! me—I remember—I

thought they found too much mud today—those little shoes—they tracked my carpet!

I wonder, tonight, if I wouldn't kiss those foot prints as things too precious to lose if I knew the little shoes had completed their journey and tomorrows sun would find them empty.

Oft times when the little shrill voices fill the room with laughter or whose hands are deep in mischief or a sweet childish face looks into mine with an oft repeated question—I feel impatient—I'm tired of answering questions—and I turn to the little soldier looking to me for reinforcements and say "run away dear, not now"—ah! yes with the busy past that once we held so cheap shall baby feet run—and not all the longing of our inmost hearts can then avail—nor all the out stretched hands fill empty arms.

Death may not rob us of our babies, but time surely will.

What then is our time worth? what can I learn from books that baby lips can not teach me? I have learned more of good from my children than they ever learned from me.

I have watched them in their play when little blocks and broken carts, were changed into palaces and chariots by their active fancy, and when childish troubles, like billows surge upon them, what so sure to comfort as those broken toys.

I have seen the eager little faces in the morning turn westward to the great mountain whose rugged sides and sharp crags are mist covered, piercing the clouds of the future is one peak surrounded by a halo, the wonderful "some day" that is always just ahead, where all the good things lie buried and where all the childish dreams will be realized.

Not as a vagary it appears to the child, but as a definite period of time—"When I am a man."

There's not such a space between the boy and the man. I, too have built "castles in Spain" to have them turn to ashes while I dreamed, and what toys have I taken for my pleasure when the sterner things wearied. Will the Great Master, then be impatient, will He not remember we are but dust and be sorry for our childishness? I, like my children, have had my time of questioning, have looked and longed for the wonderful "some day" with its hidden treasure, ever since I reached for the bright dancing things in the sunlight and found them to be motes—I am looking and longing yet and having climbed a portion of the mountain, on looking back in the evening, I find I left the fair life garden "that resulted in finite around and where every thing was dewy fragrance and

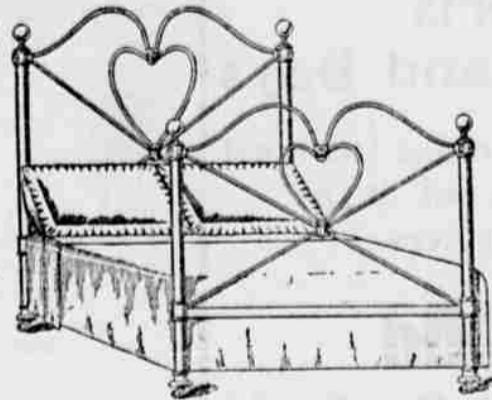
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budding hope" when I ceased to be a child.

Dear little shoes in the firelight dear little feet just starting life's journey! see you as you tramp the oft beaten paths of the back yard and as you swing high in the old maple tree, where like birds, some of your fondest memories will build their nest.

I see you reach the first cross road, the little feet that hitherto have known no path but the home path, now start toward the school house and the little hand that was clasped in mine waves childish glee, but the new road seen through my tears seems long and lonely. I see you join the hurrying throng just over the fence. I see you stop at the fountains by the way side and find much of the bitter is of your own brewing. I see you with joy break the furrow in the seed time, may there be joy when you bind the sheaf. I see you search for the some day—just over there.

Ah! my children, when an hour like this comes to you, I will know whats over there. Are we selfish? Or when the great God

allowed us to enter the sacred shrine of parenthood, did we taste a joy so sweet that frail human nation cries out in pain when the chords tighten and the children leave our hearth stone.

It seems to me tonight, were it possible for the tide of time to stop awhile, I'd cry "let it be now with the muddy tracks on my carpet and the little shoes in the firelight."

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