

**AMY'S KITCHEN: A
VILLAGE
ROMANCE**

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Amy's kitchen: a village romance by Various

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VARIOUS

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ROMANCE**

AMY'S KITCHEN:

A VILLAGE ROMANCE.

BY THE

AUTHOR OF "A TRAY TO CATCH A SUNBEAM;"

"OLD JOLLIFFE;" "SIBERT'S WOLD;"

"THE DREAM CHINTZ;"

&c., &c.

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J. E. ADLARD, BARTHOLOMEW CLOSE, LONDON.

AMY'S KITCHEN.

"DEAR heart alive! what a noise those children are making," said a clean, bright-looking, elderly woman, as she crossed the hall of a large country-house on her way up stairs.

"Yes," said the man she addressed, "Mr. Everard is at high romps with them in the dining-room."

"Well, I hope it won't be too much for Miss Everard."

"Oh no, bless you, mistress likes it," and the man went on, with the lunch-tray he was carrying through the baize door into the kitchen, and nurse proceeded up stairs with the burden she conveyed—a baby some eight months old. There was a noise going on in the dining-room, truly. Five children, varying in age from seven to two, were romping with a

gentleman who, notwithstanding his white hair, seemed as much a child in his enjoyment of the fun as any there. He was pretending to be a tiger, and crawling on his hands and knees from under the dining-room table, which was supposed to be his den, after the children, who screamed as loudly as though he was the veritable voracious beast he pretended to be. The noise and fun had been going on for some time, when the door opened and a lady entered, whose presence quieted the tumult for a moment.

"Oh! Aunt Margaret," the children exclaimed, running to her, "we are having such jolly fun: Uncle Dick's a tiger."

"Is he, really?" answered the lady. "I hope he's not very hungry, then, or he may be tempted to eat me."

"No, he's not hungry," said one boy, "for he's just ate Franky."

"Poor little man!" said Aunt Margaret. "What am I to do without my little Franky?"

"I'se here," said the little fellow, running up to her and taking her hand.

"Oh! I'm so glad," she said, stooping down to kiss him. "My dear Richard, how hot you look," she continued, turning to the gentleman, who had flung himself into a chair to

rest; "and, I declare! not one piece of holly or mistletoe hung yet," and she pointed to a large basket, which stood in one corner of the room, filled with holly, mistletoe, and evergreens.

"Oh, please, Aunt Margaret, don't scold us, and we'll begin directly," said the gentleman. "Ring the bell, Fred, and Foreman shall bring us the steps and a ball of string, and to work we'll go. *Please don't scold.*"

It seemed quite unnecessary to make such a request, for scolding and Aunt Margaret never could be named together, her low, musical voice, and sweet, I might almost say holy, face could only be associated with all that was gentle and loveable. Her life had been a very sad one; but, like gold tried in the furnace, her sorrows had only rendered her more pure and good, and now, in her declining years, her chief happiness consisted in making others happy. At Christmas time she loved to collect around her her nephews and nieces, her bachelor brother, and any who would come to see her who would not in their own homes rejoice as she felt those should who called themselves Christians. Her sister's child had not married well, and had now a large family about her, for whom she felt it difficult to provide; no Christmas rejoicings would therefore have gladdened their little

hearts, had not kind Aunt Margaret remembered them, and not only invited them to her house, but sent funds for their transit from London. Her brother, from his cheerless, dark chambers, she lured away too, and the only child of her eldest brother, who, having no mother, poor girl, would have passed Christmas with the grave lady under whose care she was placed, but for Aunt Margaret, whose pressing letter of invitation could not be refused; and so she came. Aunt Margaret had not seen her for some time, and greatly was she grieved at the air of listless indifference she assumed—so unnatural in a young girl. She was very handsome, and possessed of a good property; so that, in a worldly sense, she appeared to have everything to make her happy. Her parents died before she could sufficiently love or remember them so as to deplore their loss; and Aunt Margaret could not, therefore, imagine the cause of the melancholy and want of interest she so evidently evinced. While the merry party I have described were busy decorating the room with the holly, and Aunt Margaret watching them, smiling her approval of their efforts, Helen Everard was alone in her own room; she was standing by the window, looking out on the landscape enveloped in its mantle of snow,

and shuddering as she looked and thought how dreary it was. She heard every now and then, as the door opened, the merry shouts of the children below, but she seemed to have no wish to join them; to look out on that cold, dreary scene seemed more consistent with her feelings. A tap at her door at length disturbed her; the permission to come in was followed by the entrance of her aunt.

"My dear child, why are you alone here? They are all so merry and busy down stairs, putting up the Christmas decorations: why do you not help them with your taste?"

"I will, if you like, dearest aunt," said Helen, gently.

"I should like it, dear girl; I think you are too fond of brooding alone: it is not good for young folks to be so much in dream-land. Of what does my Helen think so much?" said her aunt, putting her arm round the young girl's waist, and drawing her towards her.

"Of nothing very pleasant, dear."

"Indeed, my child! Why, at your sunny age nothing but pleasant thoughts should ever come to you. What have you to worry you?"

"I cannot explain to any one, aunt."

"Well, I will not force your confidence; but only just remind you, dear, that God has given