

**"KEEP A GOOD HEART".
A STORY FOR THE
MERRY CHRISTMAS TIME**

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"Keep a good heart". A story for the merry Christmas time by Cousin Carrie

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THE ERRAND BOY BRINGING "FAITIL"

“KEEP A GOOD HEART.”

A Story

FOR

THE MERRY CHRISTMAS TIME.

BY

COUSIN CARRIE.

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“KEEP A GOOD HEART.”

CHAPTER I.

“I AM sorry for you, Lilian, but they say the change must be made, and, much as I regret, I am unable to prevent it.”

The speaker, a tall, grave-looking, middle-aged man, was principal of the public school in a small New England village. The words were addressed to a young girl not more than fifteen years of age, in deep mourning, who, with her head bowed upon the desk before which she was seated, and her whole frame quivering with suppressed sobs, seemed the very picture of helpless distress. The stern man's features lost much of their sternness, and something very like a tear shone for a moment in his usually cold gray eye, as he glanced from the weeping girl to a little child who stood by her side, crying because

her sister did, though she scarcely knew the reason why. He moved uneasily, and hastily repeated, "I am very sorry, Lillian."

The young girl arose, and, extending her hand to him, said, with trembling lips, "Thank you for your kind sympathy, Mr. Wise. I know it is not in your power to help me, or you would do so." Then hastily tying on her bonnet, she took her little sister's hand, and, leaving the schoolhouse, walked with a hurried step to a pretty little cottage situated on the same street.

Lilian Ross was an orphan. Her father died when she was but nine years old, her brother Herbert fourteen, and little Eva a beautiful blue-eyed baby. In less than a year after his father's death, Herbert went away on a sea voyage with an uncle. The ship was lost on its homeward trip, and all on board perished.

Mrs. Ross with her remaining children continued to reside in the little white cottage which had long been their home, until about six months previous to the time at which our story commences, when, after a long sickness, she died, leaving her young daughters alone in the world, penniless and almost friendless.

Lilian soon learned that, as the annuity upon which they had hitherto lived ceased at

her mother's death, she must do something for the support of herself and little Eva, and hearing that an assistant teacher in the village school was about leaving, she applied for the situation, which, notwithstanding her youth, was readily granted her, for she had been a favorite pupil in the school, and all felt sympathy for her in her unprotected situation.

The cottage was taken by a nice, motherly old lady, Mrs. Smith, and her daughter. They had been friends of Mrs. Ross, and were much attached to her children. Lilian and Eva boarded with them, so they were not obliged to leave their old home; and though they sadly missed their mother, these kind friends did all in their power to supply her place; and if Lilian *did* sometimes feel very weary when the day's task was over, still she was happy in the thought that by her own exertion she was enabled to support herself and little sister in comfort.

But this Friday evening, Mr. Wise had asked her to remain a few moments after school, and when the children had all gone away with their merry voices and careless hearts, he told her that the school committee had decided that it would be necessary to have an older and more experienced teacher in her place, and that consequently, after the

next week, which closed the fall term, her services would be no longer required.

The good man felt very sad at the pain he was obliged to inflict, and it is with his words of pity that our story opens.

With a sad heart Lillian performed the duties of her last week in school. Many a time did her tears blister the page of the primer from which some little child was laboriously lisping A, B, C, to the sorrowful surprise of the little one, who missed the encouraging smile of its young teacher.

Friday evening again came around. She received her quarter's salary from Mr. Wise, and for the last time crossed the threshold of the old red schoolhouse, where she had spent so many hours of happy childhood, and where she had had her first struggle with the cares and responsibilities of life.

The next day, Lillian sat by the windows of her own room, thinking sadly of the hard lot which had deprived her of her only support, and striving in vain to form some plan for the future. All was dark to her, and as the chilling November blast swept the few dead leaves from the naked branches, and the great drops of rain slowly trickled over the window pane, Nature seemed to have no message for her but of death, desolation, and tears.

Presently the door was thrown open and little Eva bounded into the room. She had quite forgotten the sorrow which she could not comprehend, and her bright eyes sparkled with pleasure, as she ran to her sister's side, holding up a few autumn flowers which she had found in a sheltered nook of their little garden.

Lilian tried to force an answering smile, but the child saw that she was too sad to share her delight in her treasures, and with a subdued look and quiet step, she stole away, and throwing herself on the rug before the fire, she commenced arranging her flowers. A very pretty picture was little Eva Ross as she sat there. Her bright curls, which lay in wild confusion over her black dress, shone in the firelight like burnished gold; her cheeks were flushed with exercise, and her red lips parted with a smile of satisfaction as the bouquet grew beneath her skilful little fingers.

Presently she began to sing—at first in a low murmuring tone that did not arouse her sister from her sad musings; but soon her voice rose more clearly, and the words she sang became distinct.

Lilian turned to listen. A bright contrast was the happy child and her gay flowers to the dark clouds and bare tempest-tossed