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SREPTY.

BY JENNIE COLTON.

The wide sunshower poured generously in at the June doors of the Merritt "great barn" and the large, clean room partitioned off for a carriage-house was full of the hum of summer.

Opposite the door stood the family "surrey," wearing the drapery provided for its hours of retirement, and in one corner was a table of slates, of various patterns and sizes. On the same side of the door stood the gaunt frame of an old-fashioned hand loom, and high in state before it was seated the mistress of the farmhouse. Many happy solitary hours Mrs. Merritt spent there.

"I love to weave," she said, in her gentle, meditative voice. "But this love was not merely for the weaving. It was more for the pleasant sights and sounds of the summer weather, and for the kindly letters of life's far-off friends. The peaceful task belonged to summer as much as did the swaying of the daisies and the hum of the bees. In winter the loom stood neglected and forgotten, but in the late days of May, when the grass was already dead and green by the footpath, and the apple-trees had shed their last lingering blossoms, Mrs. Merritt would bestir herself to set up a 'web'."

The old loom had come to her by inheritance, and she valued it as she treasured the ancestral homestead, and the family traditions which extended back even to the time when her brothers had come over from England.

She had often told her daughters of the remote grandmother who, when the men of the family had indignantly cast off the pick of the household, had taken an excursion to Ticonderoga and Crown Point, defended her home and babies with her own hands, and then, when the loom had been framed of oak timber cut when all the hillside beyond Hoarings Brook was a wilderness. But if "mother" pined, it was all right.

And Miss Srepty, who was welcome to bring her knitting-work and sit in the doorway, and tell who was dead, and who was married, from Hoarings Brook to the Nephew. For Srepty possessed many sisters and cousins in half the towns of the country, which gave her an immense advantage as a purveyor of news.

She was a meager little woman, who had never been credited with much alertness of mind or body. It added a little lightness to her existence even to look on from the outside at the life and stir, the coming and going, at the Merritt place.

"I had in the intervals when 'Srepty' sat and knitted, with her eyes shut to visible things, she was no more inattentive to the plodding musings of Mrs. Merritt than would have been a cat, dozing in the sunshine.

Back and forth moved the shuttle, then followed the coil stroke of the hatter. Occasionally the Merritts would descend from her seat to turn the racket of the beam upon which the fabric was wound. "How nice you do knit up your wavy hair!" exclaimed Mrs. Merritt, resting herself to admiration, "Miss Minks don't half do her, and Rosalia has said, time and again, she wouldn't send any more rags to her; but then she's kinder sorry for her."

"It's hard for her to struggle along," said Mrs. Merritt. "If her children had lived, it would have been different. 'Your loom got kind of crowded out of the house didn't it?' said Srepty. 'The old frame for me to go. Rosalia came from what you call England. Doolittle said when Square Lane galley round an' got him turned out of the galley to the Bap-tist meeting-house. He'd played the laws viol to lead the singin' for forty year. 'There ain't no loom left for the stable foundations of order,' sez he. 'Folks must keep up their own counterminin', an' improvin', sez he.'"

"It was my notion having the loom set up out here," said Mrs. Merritt. "He says it's my summer or summer weather, that I have to have, just as the girls play croquet and tennis."

Another long, dreamy silence, except for the shuttle that went on and on, and there was a sound of wheels, and all semblance of slumber fled from Srepty's eyes as there appeared at the front gate a very shiny top-buggy. And when in a few moments a slender shadow fell across the doorway, and Lois Merritt entered, no detail of her appearance was unobserved. The girl was tall, like her mother, with the same large, serious cast of countenance.

"What awful little bumps they are a-weavin'!" said Mrs. Merritt, as she obeyed an irresistible inner prompting. Lois received placidly this implied criticism of her new summer millinery, and her mother thought complacently, "Lionel don't see Srepty's. Emma and Lucia ain't so evented. They'd have flared up."

scale, after all, for she reserved her curiosity for the human species. Within a fortnight she was again spending her afternoon at Mrs. Merritt's, but she did not occupy her usual seat, commanding a view of the house. She had crowded her chair into a narrow space beside the loom. The window was above her head as she sat, and she was busy in darning a desperate rent in her brown alpaca dress. She had caught it upon a stake which was driven beside the path; one of several stakes which were visible from the doorway. Though her place was humble and retired, Srepty was full of lofty indignation. Her own special grievance of the rent even only added to her wrath at what she deemed a great public wrong.

For months there had been talk of a proposed new railroad. At last the line had been surveyed, and it crossed the Merritt farm, running between the house and the "great barn."

"Srepty had lost no time in going to console with her friend. 'Here I be-a-settin', mendin' a dress on me,' she remarked, 'it's a sign somebuddy's goin' to tell a lie about me, but I guess I can risk it if they can, 's long's 'tain't the truth. Wish I could make them railroad folks pay me a new dress! But you oughter git big damages, if you went on. 'It jist spiles your posy gear. It's lucky the girls is growed up big enough to keep off the track.'"

"An' to have 'em comin' an' trackin' in the middle of the night, shakin' the very pillars under your head! I know how the sister church's that the wass was when they was diggin' an' blastin', an' great stones a-flyin', an' Kettery's folks had to be all cluttered up in the cellar, an' 'nervid up when a blast went off. An' when they went to meetin', the road was all blocked up in front of Eben Clay's house, an' they had to drive upover the bank, expectin' the kerriage would slip off'n the alge. An' her a-lookin' out o' the front window, crosser 'n time, because there was wheelmarks on the terris, as she called 'em."

"The road will be easier to build here," said Mrs. Merritt. "And now they're beginnin', say they're goin' to rush it through."

"But the emigrants will have to come, then Kyalians," said Srepty. "An' the shanties will be right under your nose, an' the road'll be cookin' themselves, an' livin' on black bread."

Even this mixed statement, hinting at cannibals and tendencies on the part of the workmen, did not seem to shake the placid nerves of Mrs. Merritt.

"You're makin' a good, workmanlike job of that, that," she said kindly. "There's very few can beat you at mendin' Srepty."

Srepty drew her thread with a steadier hand. She was used to less disinterested compliments than this. Her eyes turned directly to great baskets full of tattered garments which had accumulated ready for her needle.

"Mother," said Lois Merritt one morning some days later, "here is Bradford Toker. He says 'Srepty is very sick and wants to see you.'"

"'Yes,' said Srepty, 'put in at the door, 'Srepty says, if you want to see her, alive again, to come soon's you can.'"

"'How long has Srepty been complainin'?" inquired Mrs. Merritt. "'Oh, most a week—an' last night we was kep' up with her 'bout all the forepart of the night,' said the small boy, with a careworn air. "'She was out of her head, an' took on pretty bad.'"

"I'll go over to your house as soon as I can," said Mrs. Merritt.

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