

JACK'S HOUSE

BY RACHEL B. HAMILTON

IT was only a plain, snug little house, rising slowly from the small, neatly fenced lot, and gradually assuming house-like proportions; but Content watched its daily growth with a wonderful light of satisfaction in her brown eyes. She could see it plainly from Aunt Prissy's little shop window, looking down the quiet road and across a field white with daisies; and she loved to watch the sea of bending blossoms, and whisper softly to herself, "The path that leads to it is all pure white."

"Growin' finely ain't it?" said Miss Prissy, cheerily, dusting and arranging the bright silk handkerchiefs, skeins of yarn, boxes of needles, jars of candy and the rosy-cheeked apples that decorated the shop window, even while she looked beyond the new building. "It's goin' up slick as a new pin."

"Yes, yes," returned Uncle Joachim, shaking his head; "if there only don't come a hard wind and blow it over, or a heavy rain to flood the cellar, or somebody set it afire, mebby. There's no tellin'—never no tellin' in this uncertain world!"

"La, Joachim," said Miss Prissy, nimbly mounting the counter and pursuing conversation and a spider-web together, "we hain't had a drop of rain this three weeks, and it's just what we're needin'." As for winds, 'twould take something more'n common to blow such walls as them down."

"I don't know 'bout that—don't know," answered Uncle Joachim, unconvinced. "It blew a pretty smart breeze last night, and I could feel our house shake. Thought very likely our roof would be carried away before to-morrow; I went up to the garret to-day and tied a rope to the rafters and then hitched the other end fast to the old spinnin' wheel; but it's doubtful if that'll save it—doubtful."

Content laughed softly, but Uncle Joachim heard it.

"Don't make fun of somm'n things, child; don't never do that," he said, reprovingly. "I knew a man once that ridiculed the idea of any burglars ever breakin' into his house, and the very next day his brother had his pockets picked. A good many folks have a good many things happen to 'em, and it's best to be prepared."

"Well," commented Miss Prissy, briskly, "I must say fort, I'm 'bout as well prepared for pickpockets as for anything I know of. Nobody'd make much out of my pockets, unless they was sufferin' for pair of steel-bowed spectacles and an old brass thimble. There comes the mail," she added, as a rusty, dusty horseman stopped at the door. "Content and me'll tend to it, Joachim, dear; you're feelin' poorly to-day. I know, and you'd better sit still."

He had no idea of doing anything else; but it was a pleasant fiction of Miss Prissy's that "brother Joachim" was always just about to do something useful and energetic—a belief that had never died out in all the twenty years that she had taken care of him. Father, mother, sister, all were gone but these two and the sister's orphaned child, Content, a bonny, winsome mien, who had come like sunshine to the quaint, quiet old house.

Uncle Joachim sat in his easy chair with gaze that wandered afar off, musing over the hills that were not steeled, the valleys that never would roll up and the mountains that

were to Mohammed. He had

strength to shave in helping the weak and bear the

trials, because he was hold-

ing himself as a sort of reserve corps against the terrible calamities that never came. But Miss Prissy's keen and kindly eyes could, fortunately, see nearer home—even to the sewing of buttons on brother Joachim's coat, the mauling of rents in his linen, and the necessity of providing for three meals a day. So she whisked about, always busy, worked and planned, turned and darned; made over her dresses wrong side up and inside out, contrived near caps out of nothing, and collars out of what was left. She took care of the small store that was also the village postoffice, and looked after the diminutive garden besides, all the whole family grateful and innocently playing any "poor lone" women folks that had a man to help or protect 'em."

The arrival of the post days was a pleasant little stir, and the day's still current, and the sun was bright. Aunt Prissy sorted the snail-mail with some good natured guessing and neighborly sympathy—hoping this or that was from her son, and that this or that was from her daughter. Content was listening with deepening color meanwhile for a step that was sure soon to come.

"Any letters for me, Miss Prissy?" asked Jack Howard's clear, hearty voice.

"Not one," answered Content, laughing up into the blue eyes that did not look particularly disappointed. In fact, Jack's correspondence was not immense; but it was a satisfaction to know whether there was anything or not—a great satisfaction, one would have said, seeing how regularly he did his modest mount of success.

"How are you to-day, Uncle?"

"Hard to say—be as I feel as I feel myself."

"Content, I heard you'd got un-

by room, window by window, it had been dreamed and talked of, larger and fairer than it now could be in reality, but that only Jack and Content knew. Jack was skillful and energetic; he had laid up some five or six hundred dollars and that was not all.

"You see, Content," he had said, gaily, when they talked of it in the spring time, with the old apple tree showering its pink blossoms around them where they stood—"you see, there is that work for Regan, if it succeeds, and I think it will. It is some sort of a pumping apparatus, you know. He had got the idea in his head, but wasn't workman enough to carry it out, and so he came to me. I dug into it until I fancied I knew what he wanted, and improved upon it a little, maybe. I've spent all the time I could give, evenings and odd hours, on it for nearly five months now, sometimes doing and sometimes undoing; and Regan is to pay me \$3000 if it works as he expects it to. He thinks I can do it."

"I think so, too," said Content.

"It will be something nice for us," remarked Jack, thoughtfully. "But we won't say anything to any one about it yet a while, until we are sure. There is no need, for we have enough for a little home, even without that."

Uncle Joachim and Miss Prissy were not very worldly wise. They thought, or Miss Prissy did, that love and even the smallest home promised considerable material for happiness; and her eyes twinkled with tears and smiles behind her old spectacles while, in one breath, she wondered how she was "ever goin' to do without Content," and in the next if they "hadn't better be hunkin' up rags to cut for a carpet for Content's floor—against she has one."

Uncle Joachim was as nearly con-

gratulatory as he knew how to be, but deprecatory also.

"I don't see why you two shouldn't stand as good a chance for comfort as anybody, sposin' there is any such thing, which is doubtful," he said. "Any way, 'tis risky, very risky; like as not you won't enjoy yourselves. It'll be a great affliction to have Content leave us, but it'll be a load off my mind to know she's safe out of the house. It's a dangerous place to live in, this is, keepin' a post office as we do. 'Counts of folks robbin' the mails keep comin' all the time, and I've just a feelin' that ours 'll be robbed, too, some night, and we all murdered in our beds."

"Dear me! I shouldn't think it would be worth while," exclaimed Aunt Prissy, unshyly, scanning the matter in the light of a speculation. "Our mail! Why, I don't believe there's ever more'n ten dollars in the whole at one time, and mostly there ain't anything."

"That don't make no difference, Prissy—no difference," persisted Uncle Joachim, with a doleful shake of the head. "You don't know the sight of wickedness there is in this world. I tell you there's plenty of folks that would do 'most anything for ten dollars."

"Well, well," murmured Uncle Joachim, tremulously breaking the solemn silence that had succeeded the dying echoes, "that was a narrow chance, and I'd never have got away but for you, Jack. I'm 'bliged to you, I really am; though, seein' as somethin' is sure to happen some time, I don't know as 'twould have made much difference—only for the women folk; 'twould have been a great loss to the women folks. More'n likely I'll be sick for a week or two now. Jack"—as a sudden thought struck him—"why, Jack, you left that jitmack of yours down there, didn't you? Kind of a pity to have it smashed up, though I s'pose it wasn't of much use."

Jack turned his eyes from the ruin and looked at him with a strange smile on his pale face. How little he knew of all the hopes and plans that had been, or could comprehend the value of that which he so carelessly called worthless! And yet, perhaps he himself could as little understand this work of the great Creator beside him, of comprehend His purpose in even this seemingly feeble and useless life that he had saved. There was nothing of contemptuous pity in the gentleness of Jack's voice as he said:

"Hadn't you better go home now, Uncle Joachim? I will go with you."

He told Content the story that day—only Content knew it all—and she listened with the light that shone through her tearful eyes growing brighter at every word. "Sorry but so glad!" she said, not so paradoxically but Jack could understand it.

"It was hard to decide for a minute, though it seems a shame even to say it now," Jack said, honestly. "But I couldn't sell myself, you know, and so a good many of our hopes and plans are ended for a long while to come, Content."

"But Jack, dear," answered Content, softly, "I think our work often reaches farther than we know. It may be in building our earthly houses we are building for our heavenly homes as well, and some things that crowd and cramp these may make those all the fairer."

"Bid it good speed, then," he said with a hopeful smile, turning away down the narrow garden path, while the sweet fact watched him from the doorway.

"It's just about done," said Jack, one day, stopping for a moment at the door. "Regan wants me to take it down to the old stone quarry and try it. It's a sort of quiet place, and there's always water there, you know; so I guess I'll go this afternoon."

"Oh, I do hope it will be all right; just what you expect of it," exclaimed Content.

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