PETERKIN

GABRIELLE E. JACKSON

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BY

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TO LORRAINE

IN LOVING MEMORY OF
OUR HAPPY HOURS IN
"SKY PARLOR,"
"AUNTY J."

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CHAPTER I

SAILING TOWARD THE PROMISED LAND

THE great ship rolled lazily upon the breathing sea. On the broad decks of the first-class cabin, and also the luxurious ones of the second, hundreds of passengers walked or reclined in their steamer-chairs. Others amused themselves with the endless forms of diversion now provided for the entertainment of the patrons of these floating hotels, the ocean liners. Others had gone forward to look down upon the emigrants crowding by hundreds and hundreds the quarters provided for them. Just now they were lining the ship's rails, for the first glimpse of the New World toward which they were sailing with such

ardent hopes lay far off upon the starboard bow, a faint blue line. The well-dressed, happy people upon the upper deck looked upon their less fortunate fellow-beings with divers emotions: some pityingly, some indifferently, some kindly, some with open repugnance. In one group a young girl, lovely as the morning light enveloping her, smiled and waved her hand to a little tad of seven or eight who stood near a frail-looking man, and a tired-looking woman, his bright, dark eyes darting from one object to another, his white, even little teeth gleaming as he smiled upon the world-at-large. He held an object which caused the girl to clap her hands and laugh aloud; it was so grotesque: a huge green cotton umbrella as tall as himself, and very nearly as thick through. As she looked at him the ship rolled just enough to bring the sunlight across his face, when up popped the comical umbrella, instantly turning its small bearer into a toadstool of enormous proportions. Cocking his parapluie at a rakish angle, he smiled

up at the girl, a smile so sunny, so winning and trustful that she cried:

"Oh, I must find out who or what that funny little kid is!"

"And how do you hope to do so, dear?" asked an older woman at whose side she stood and whom she so strongly resembled as to leave no doubt of their relationship. The words were accompanied by a smile and a lighting of the eyes as though in the object of her question the speaker's whole world centred as, indeed, it did, for in her daughter's lovely young girlhood wondrous spontaneity and sunshiny disposition Emilie Minot had found her inspiration for life, for the necessary effort for existence, in short, for any desire to live since her husband's tragic death when Loraine was a tiny child.

"Oh, I don't know, but if I *wish hard* enough it's sure to happen. But, Mother, look—look at him! Isn't he the cunningest little chap you ever saw?"

"Both cunning and picturesque, but we must not tarry here longer, dear. Yonder lies home—home! And our cabin is chaos. Come."

And meanwhile how fared the world with the object of their remarks? As the ship passed into the lower bay strange emotions filled the hearts of the jumble of passengers in its steerage. What would the new land prove? The land of promise for which they had hoped and prayed all through those glorious October days upon the broad Atlantic? Would it realise their dreams of a promised land? Bring to them the peace, prosperity, equality—the right to live and fill a place in the land of their adoption? A right denied to many of them in their native land which they had left behind them in the wake of the good ship which had brought them safely across the vast waste of waters.

But it was only the older passengers whose thoughts took this serious bent: The children were wild with curiosity, and as the October-

tinted hills of Fort Hamilton and Staten Island rose in all their gorgeousness upon port and starboard a babel of tongues clamoured in delight, for nearly every nation of the earth was represented on that lower deck.

And the big green umbrella? It had danced and gyrated wildly hither and yonder, colliding indiscriminately with Finlander, Jew, Syrian, Hungarian, Italian, German, Slav, and heaven knows what not, until a good-natured officer, moved to mirth even in the midst of his manifold duties, peeped beneath to discover the motive power of the green toadstool, and, encountering the happy, smiling little face, advised the toadstool's collapse partly by words and partly by smiles and sympathetic smiles. The advice was quickly and smilingly comprehended and acted upon, and the toadstool's stem sought sanctuary with his father and mother. Then, before one could think came Ellis Island, and the ways of those of the steerage and those of the upper decks

divided forever. Would fate ever bring any of them together again? We shall see.

Conventions in the lower, humbler world are elastic. There were no grooms, motor cars, obsequious attendants awaiting that cosmopolitan mass of human beings huddled beneath the inspectors' eyes. They were now, indeed, citizens of the world, and many of them had not the remotest idea where they would finally come to an anchorage or establish a home. Among such were the man and woman who called the owner of the big green umbrella son. They did not spell it in those three letters, but in strange, unfamiliar ones, difficult for the Anglo-Saxon tongue to pronounce. Their own name was Nekrasoff, and the name of the little lad Peter, or Petrovitch, as he would have been called in his native land. But if his parents were ill, disheartened, and almost hopeless, little Peter had no time for depressing emotions. Curiosity overcame all others.

At length the long, tedious examinations ended

and Peter, still grasping his beloved umbrella, went with his father and mother and numberless others to the park on the mainland which he had seen from Ellis Island, and toward which the huge statue of Liberty seemed, to his lively imagination, to be directing him.

Then came a journey through crowded streets, half a dozen of his friends huddled with him and their conglomerate luggage into an express wagon which finally deposited them at the door of a big crowded tenement house far over on the lower West side of the vast city. Peter had found his new home in the new world, guided thither by a friend his mother had made upon the voyage across the ocean. It was not much of a home after all. Just two rooms, huddled in between dozens and dozens of others which seemed to swarm with human beings, all busy with their own affairs. But there were *hundreds* of children, dark, light, clean, dirty, fat, or thin, and it seemed to little Peter that no two spoke the same language. At

least the languages which *they did speak* were beyond *his* understanding, and only signs and his wonderful smile could make up for words.

Two weeks slipped by, during which his father and mother arranged their scanty belongings and sought employment, but while they were thus occupied Peter went upon many a little exploring expedition of his own. He dared not lose sight of the door of his dwelling and had already learned to distinguish it from many other doors exactly like it by a window which flanked it upon the left; a window filled with all manner of good things to eat. Peter wished he might have some of them, but was wise enough to know that one must have copecks to buy such things even in this wonderful new world where people truly found gold right in the earth if they dug deep enough,—had not a big boy on the ship told him so? And of late, since leaving the ship where food had been provided when one was hungry, he had never had quite enough for a boy of his size. But it would

no doubt be better when his mother got stronger and could sew again and his father got a place to play his violin as he had done in the big theatre in Russia. There would, of course, be theatres in New York, too, and if they could once hear his father make his violin speak as Peter loved to hear it,—why everybody would want him to play as a matter of course. Peter loved that violin and could already draw from its mysterious interior some very sweet notes. He often wondered where they were hidden; if a fairy lived inside and sang when the magic of the horsehair bow touched the strings? It was like a human voice, but, oh, so much sweeter and softer; so weird and ethereal. Yes, a fairy must live inside his father's violin, and some day he would make her come forth. At any rate he would make her sing for him as she sang for his father. That he was confident would be easy. But meanwhile more material things must be grasped.

Upon a sunny afternoon a group of children

were playing a strange game upon the crowded sidewalk in front of Peter's home. Peter had never seen such a game but he was mightily interested and wished he, too, might play. But how could he? Gradually he drew nearer and nearer until a girl, apparently the leader of the game, noticed him.

"Want to play-a with us?" she asked. She was a good deal bigger and older than Peter. He did not understand her words, but there is a common language in the world of little people, especially the little people of the big tenement districts of New York. The girl's expression and gestures conveyed her meaning to Peter, and Peter's smile conveyed his desire to her, and the next moment little Peter Nekrasoff was playing with America's little citizens of which he had unconsciously become one. Joining hands with his new playfellows he began to circle around with them singing a song of which a moment before he had never heard a note, and doing his best to catch the odd

sounds which were the words. His nearest approach to it was:

"Leetllesal-lee Vaterszet-ten endersun."

But there was no trouble whatever in catching the tune and his clear, childish voice rose above all the others.

As the merry song and dance proceeded, a lady came down the crowded street. The same who had stood upon the deck of the ocean liner. She did not recognise Peter, he was only one of a group of children, but she heard the flutelike, wonderful notes of that voice and paused to listen, a smile lighting her face as she thought.

"If we could only have *that* voice in St. John's."

Quick to feel the sympathy of her interest the children paused in their play and looked up at her. She smiled at them and asked:

"Who is your soprano?"

The big girl shook her head. She knew English pretty well but that was a new word, and she repeated questioningly:

"So-a-pre-nyo?"

"The little boy who sings so wonderfully. What is his name?"

"We not-a know-a. He come-a the last weeks. He live up-a there: high." Pointing to the upper windows of the tenement. "He of-a Roosha. No speak-a like-a us. No savvy."

"Ah, a little Russian lad. Well I have enjoyed my music, I must pay my musicians," and opening a small change purse the lady took from it ten new Lincoln cents which a few moments before had been given her in change. There were ten children, including Peter. All eyes were bent eagerly upon her. These little New Yorkers understood the initial move. Not so Peter; he was less sophisticated. He had never received largess.

"He did but sing because he must and piped but as the linnets do."

When the shining coin was offered him he smiled and shook his head bashfully.

"You-a take-a tha cent," commanded the girl.

The lady looked puzzled. Where had she seen that smiling face before. She could not recall. Laying her hand upon the funny little dark green Russian cassock she asked:

"Your name?"

A negative head-shake was the only reply.

"Nicholas? John? Ivan? Peter?"

Frantic nods in the affirmative. An answering nod and smile from the lady.

"Peter? Peter?"

"Petrovitch," was the funny answer.

"Peterkin. Peter-kin."

"Pee-pee-ter-keen," was the smiling reply. He understood.

"I shall come to see you again some day very soon. I must hear you sing again."

Peter's face was blank. The girl understood.

"I'll get Dombroski to tell him. He speak-a Americano and ze Roosh, too. We go to buy da gum. Thank-a you lady."

The lady went her way resolved to learn more

of the owner of that voice later. But did Peter buy gum as the other children did? No, he went straight into the fruit shop under his home, held forth the shining cent and pointed to a big orange. Surely *that* wonderful, shining coin could purchase the entire windowful. Peterkin had never possessed one so wonderful. Indeed he had never possessed any. The Italian looked at the cent, at the eager, smiling little face and then a miracle happened: A five-cent orange became Peterkin's for one. With a joyous cry he fled from the shop and scrambled up the tenement stairs like a monkey. The new world *was* a land of golden miracles.

CHAPTER II

A LITTLE DERELICT

THE two weeks in the new world had not fully realised the hopes of Peter's parents. True, his father had obtained a situation to play for a few hours each afternoon and evening in a German beer garden on the East side of the city, but the employment was, at best, temporary, and the pay pitifully meagre.

His mother had sought fine sewing such as she had done in Russia, but fine sewing means a good recommendation, and who was to recommend an unknown foreigner who could not understand one word of English? Then, too, of late, his mother had seemed so wretchedly ill; feverish, dazed, and hardly able to perform the simple household duties, much less sew upon the heavy cloth coats which she obtained from a big wholesale clothing

house over on a terrible street called Broadway: A street where no boy of Peter's age must venture, his mother warned him. And how his mother trembled when she reached the top of the big tenement with her heavy burden. She would drop it upon the floor, fling herself upon their one apology for a bed and tremble and sob until Peter would crawl up beside her and in his soft, musical voice endeavour to comfort her, meanwhile patting and stroking her as he would have caressed a dog.

Then she would say:

"Ah, my little son. My loved one. Thy mother has come a long, weary journey to a new land for freedom for thy father's sake, that the cruel prisons of Russia might not close upon him, for innocent as he is of all evil toward the great Tzar, his enemies would have proved him guilty: He fed his friend who betrayed him. Yes, we came a long journey, beloved, but thy mother must go a longer one and leave thee behind."

"But why? Why? I do not wish to be left

behind. I love thee, Matyiiika (Matischka). I wish to go with thee."

"Would that I could take thee beloved, but—but—"

The words ended. She could not explain.

But now—now! He had the wonderful golden fruit. He did not know what the American children would call it, but he knew its Russian name, and with it clasped tightly in his hands he rushed into the room where he had left his mother at work a few hours before. She was not there, and the room was silent. He ran into the adjoining room. There upon the bed lay the one he loved best on earth. He flew to the bedside crying:

"Matischka! Matischka! See! See! The golden fruit for thee and me and for the Batka when he comes home. Into *three* halves we make it and all are to be well and strong to sew and to make the music once again."

He clambered upon the bed but won no rational response from the figure lying there. Only

strange, rambling words and wild glances from fever-stricken eyes.

In vain he talked, caressed, and at length sang as had been his final recourse when heretofore all else had failed, but nothing availed, and terrified beyond measure he fell to sobbing until dear Mother Nature came pityingly to his rescue and he fell asleep crouched against the moaning figure, his big orange clasped tightly in his grimy little hands.

Two hours later his father returning from the beer garden found the two, and nearly mad with grief sought aid from neighbours. But they knew little more than he did, and presently the police officer on the beat was summoned. That kindly son of Erin had seen more than one typhoid case in the course of his fifteen years' service, and within twenty minutes an ambulance stood at the door and the sick woman was borne down the stairs and placed within it. Then away sped the splendid horse to St. Vincent's Hospital, and Peter and

his father were left alone, and the busy world beyond their humble abode went on in its usual way and forgot little Peter and his grief-stricken father. Two days later the ambulance was again summoned and Peter's father followed his mother. But what of Peter? The woman occupying the adjoining rooms took him in for temporary shelter and sent for his mother's only friend: The one she had made on shipboard and who lived several blocks away.

Peter was desolate. She took him to her home and then went to St. Vincent's to learn of his parents. By this time a week had passed: only seven days, but enough. Peter's mother had gone on the long journey upon which she could not take Peter, and five days later, lonely, heart-sick, discouraged, the same disease gave his father his passport to that Land of Peace.

Poor little Peter! It was far from a land of peace in which he was compelled by some seemingly cruel fate to remain. Fatherless, mother-

less, homeless, a little derelict upon life's great ocean, he was an object of the most profound pity. For days he sobbed and begged for Matischka and Batka. To be taken to them, or for them to return to him. No one dared tell him the truth, though the truth might have been kinder. His only comfort was his father's violin. That, the big umbrella, and his parent's and his own scanty wearing apparel represented all his personal property—his worldly goods. His mother's friend had slipped these away to her home when she learned the hopelessness of the situation. All the household effects were claimed for rent. The violin and umbrella Peter kept under his little pallet and when most miserable placed the former beneath his small chin and drew from it strange, wailing notes. They voiced his sorrow though again and again he would ask:

"The Batka? Will he permit? Will he be angry when he comes back?"

"No, never, never angry. It is yours to play

upon," the busy, kindly woman would reply, and Peter worked away at his self-imposed task of making the fairy who lived within the violin sing for him as she had sung for his father—one of the Liashiee, perhaps, of whom his father had told him the wonderful fairy tales of the woodland spirits which make such tender, haunting music. And day by day the inherited talent, a talent which had never found adequate opportunity for expression in his father, grew in the little lad, and the violin, valuable beyond Peter's dreams, responded more and more kindly to the little fingers which drew the long bow across its strings, and Peter in some degree forgot his grief, for the dear Father is kind to childish woe.

And so passed the cold winter months, and Peter never knew that the lady who had given him the golden coin had gone back to inquire for him about three weeks later, but no one knew what had become of him. A pebble dropped into the ocean could not have been more completely swallowed

up. In that vast city what was one family of Russian emigrants? Much less one small Russian boy.

Disappointed Emilie Minot returned to her home in a near-by suburb and told the sunshiny daughter of her failure to find the little lad of the flutelike voice in whom their interest had grown so keen, and for whom a place might have been found in St. John's choir, had all gone well. He became a mere incident in their lives, until something made him a very real factor.

But to Peter.

Many a time had he thought in a vague way of the donor of the coin. She must, of course, be at least a Kniajna (Princess) for only a princess would have a purseful of golden coins. He wished in a vague way that he might see her again, but princesses did not often stray into the world of humble-folk. He remembered her face, but had no recollection of its association with the long voyage across the great ocean or the lovely

young girl on shipboard. He had seen only the girl at that time.

And what was it the princess lady had called him? Pee-pee-ter-kin. A droll name. Perhaps that was his name in the American tongue. He would remember that name and if ever asked his name would give it in American instead of Russian. He liked the Americans. They smiled oftener than the Russians and Peter liked smiles. He was beginning to smile again himself, though the woman with whom he now lived kept him pretty busy. She was busy herself making wonderful clusters of flowers from silks and muslins, and Peter had to sit for hours twisting stems and doing other curious things to help her. But as the spring days grew warmer and lovelier, Peterkin, as we shall henceforth call him, longed for the real flowers which he had known in Russia, for their home had been in the suburbs of a great city and wild flowers grew abundantly in its woods and fields. With the artist's soul dominating his

little body, no wonder Peterkin loved all that was delicate or beautiful in this big world.

But even in the busy life of the tenement where Peterkin lived with the kindly soul who had made room in her home and heart for the little orphaned lad, though she had scant time to give to his mental, spiritual, or artistic development, he found spare hours in which he could slip away to a park not far off and feast his eyes upon the gorgeous tulip beds, the hyacinths and daffodils which seemed to jump right out of the warm, moist, delicious-smelling earth during that springtide. It was while spending one of his rare hours in Washington Square that he made an acquaintance which changed his whole future, for the great Shepherd certainly had this little strayling in his care even though it seemed for a time that He had overlooked him entirely.

On one corner of the Square was a news stand and upon it hung newspapers, periodicals and magazines galore. On his way home one after-

noon Peterkin paused to look at the gay pictures on some of the covers, posters and advertisements. The proprietor, a boy about eighteen or nineteen cried:

"Hey Dago, pipe de high-brows! Some class to that goil, ain't there now?"

Now Peterkin had picked up a good bit of English during the seven months spent in America, and he knew he was no Dago.

"I no Dago. I come out of the great Russhia. I serve the Tzar!" he answered, drawing himself up proudly.

"Ah, g'wan! Czar nothin'! You serve the President o' the 'Nited States. D'cher git that? We ain't got no Czars near the 'Merican Eagle. Ours ain't got but *one* head, but she's some bird. See!"

Peterkin didn't see, but he smiled and the smile won the day. Then he asked:

"What all those?"

"Books, magazines, noospapers. Tell yer

everything in the world. Get yer anything yer ask fer—if yer keep on askin'. Say, where do yer live?"

"By the Spring Street, down there," pointed Peterkin.

"Gee! Don't say so. Well, you know that big building—high—tall—on Spring Street?"

Peterkin nodded in the affirmative.

"They make all *them* in that place," with a comprehensive sweep toward several magazines.

"Make those beeg book?" asked Peterkin, wonderingly.

"Betcherlife," answered the youthful merchant, then forgot all about Peterkin as a customer demanded his services. But Peterkin did not forget *him* nor his words, and all the homeward way his busy little brain was revolving a plan of action:

"Get anything in the world you asked for if you kept on asking."

Peterkin had never asked much of the world, *now* he would do so.

CHAPTER III

SEEKING HIS FORTUNE

IT was too late when Peterkin reached his abiding-place to venture forth in search of his fortune. Mrs. Golowski was preparing the evening meal for her husband and there was plenty for Peterkin to do in their room which served as parlour, bedroom, dining-room, and kitchen all in one. Mr. and Mrs. Golowski had not yet "arrived" in worldly success, though they were prospering, and with no family to provide for as the majority of their neighbours had, could save and accumulate, and Peterkin's needs were small indeed. At all events, he surely earned his keep in the help he gave his benefactors.

Supper eaten, Peterkin was free to go down to the crowded sidewalk and play with the laughing, screaming, quarrelling mob of little foreigners

whose only breathing place it was, and who, during the long spring evenings, practically lived there.

In the adjoining flathouse lived a family which had come from the same province in Russia. In this family were ten children, and two of them girls, but little older than Peterkin, had elected themselves his guides, philosophers, and friends. He sought them out. Did they know anything about that big house at the end of the street?

Sure they knew. It was a gold mine, that big house.

"Did they make books like his father's and mother's Bible, in which was written the date of his parents' marriage and his own birth?"

"No they won't to make Bibles, and they wouldn't to make *your* kind of Bibles anyways. They ain't to know Greek Church Bibles nor Jewish Bibles. No, it was stylish books they would to make in that big house so ladies can dress up fine and grand and their children be elegant. Yes, it

was true what the big boy at the news stand had said: People wrote all things in those books they made in that big house. If you wanted to know how to make fine white American bread, they would tell you how. If you loved a nice young man they would tell you what magic you must use to make him return your love. If your baby was sick you ask in that big house, and lo! A long list of things you should do for him would straightway be printed for you to read. If you wished to make fine furniture out of an ash-barrel, presto! It was the simplest thing in the world. And if you wished to make a wornout gown into a brand new one, defying the closest scrutiny, you had only to go there."

"But you must have money—yes?" asked Peterkin.

"Money? Perish the thought! Far from it. On the contrary, money was *given* to you—yes, from *silver* money *if you measured twenty-four!* Had not she, Dagma, and her sister, Olga, been

given truly fabulous sums because they measured twenty-four? Yes, so much as a quarter of a dollar each! Hope to die for the truth!"

"If you measure twenty-four?" What mysterious words. What could they mean? And a silver piece? Well, the silver piece would be a delightful thing to have, possessing marvellous possibilities, as he had discovered that silver pieces did, but—but—no, he did not care so much for the silver piece. Deep, deep down in his heart was a far more ardent wish: A wish so impelling, so intense that it made him quiver just to think about it. He had never put it into words either in his newly acquired language or his native one. He had kept the thought sacred in that "Holy of Holies," his own yearning little heart.

A few more questions then he shrewdly dropped the subject and addressed himself to the games of his companions with all the ardour of his merry little soul. It would never do to arouse too much curiosity. *But.*

The following morning Mrs. Golowski went to get a new supply of material for her flower work, and Peterkin embraced his opportunity.

Few children were on the street at that hour, for the schools had not yet closed for the summer vacation. Peterkin had never been sent to school. Education was a minor consideration from Mrs. Golowski's view-point, and being tiny for his age, Peterkin had been somehow overlooked by those whose duty it is to see that young America is educated.

Peterkin had arrayed himself in his best for this venture in quest of his fortune, his best consisting of the little Russian suit, rarely worn since his residence with his self-constituted guardian, who favoured American raiment. Then, as an afterthought to elegance and the warmth of the day the green cotton umbrella was brought forth and hugged in his arms as he sped upon his way.

It was only two blocks to the big building, but, oh, how dwarfed and insignificant he felt as he

stood in its shadow. His courage nearly failed him and he was upon the point of running away, umbrella and all, when a huge truck laden with monstrous rolls of paper and drawn by three stout horses came thundering up.

"Hi, clear out of the way, you kid! Beat it!" yelled a man waving his arms at Peterkin. He happened to wave in the direction of the wide archway toward which the truckman was urging his horses, and without another thought Peterkin rushed into the dark cavern and was swallowed up. No one paid any attention to him and on he went in the darkness. It was not, in reality, so very dark, but by contrast with the outer sunlight seemed a perfect dungeon. For a few moments Peterkin could scarcely see. Then he stumbled against an iron staircasing and began to climb upward. Up, up, up! Would those stairs never end? There were dozens of elevators in that building, but they were not for small boys seeking a fortune, and, moreover, Peterkin would have

been scared to death had he been whisked skyward in one of them.

So up he toiled companionless—wiser beings took the elevators—and at length came to the end. Surely he must be near his namesake's eternal home. Here he found himself in a strange labyrinth of shelves and endless passages. The shelves reached to the ceiling and were piled full of little flat paper packages. No matter which way he turned he came upon more and more of them, and terror began to fill his small soul and something closely resembling tears filled his large, soft eyes, when suddenly the maze ended and he stood at the door of a sun-flooded office filled with wonderful ladies. Ladies with golden hair, with brown hair, and one, *one* with dark, waving hair and eyes like his mother's. At the moment Peterkin stepped into the bewildering light of her office door the lady glanced up. In that instant she won Peterkin's heart.

"Could it be? Could it be the Matischka?"

Peterkin turned white. Stared, then rushing toward her cried in his native tongue:

"Art thou—*art thou* the Matischka come back to me?"

CHAPTER IV

OPEN SESAME

NOW many curious things take place in the office of the editor of a big magazine, some of which have been expected as a matter of course *to* take place, but many, many others, far beyond the liveliest imagination of the most imaginative editorial staff.

The editor of this particular magazine had passed through many remarkable experiences, amusing, pathetic, trying, pleasing, but never in all the ten years during which she had sat at that big desk, and so ably directed its staff, had such a remarkable scene as this one occurred.

But she was equal to the situation. The small human being who had rushed across the room speaking wholly unintelligible words so rapidly

and with such intense emotion was a bonny lad, bright of face, sweet, clean, wholesome, and the eyes in which tears seemed to well were as dark, expressive and beautiful as a fawn's; the voice exquisitely soft and musical. It had not been so many years since Mrs. VanCourtlandt's little son had cast himself upon her knees when eager to have some childish wish granted, though he was now in Yale and the very core of her heart. So, the maternal instinct which rarely fails true womanhood, rose to the emergency in a splendid manner in spite of the many eyes upon her, for the office was a busy one and the staff numerous. She slipped an arm about the little figure and drew him close to her side as she asked:

"Why, little man, who are you and where did you come from? How in this world did you ever reach the thirteenth story of this great building? Did someone send or bring you? And now that you are here what can I do for you? Can you speak English?"

Peterkin's face, so full of yearning eagerness, was raised to hers, his ears drank in her words, his heart thrilled to the gentle voice. No, this was not the Matischka as his first bewildered glance had so eagerly hinted. A second, saner look had banished that wild hope. But perhaps if he spoke slowly in his newly acquired American words this wonderful lady could tell him *where* she really was: No one seemed to know, but perhaps that was because those whom he asked were poor, humble folk like himself and could not be expected to know all that great folk knew. So smiling trustfully into the kind face he asked:

"The Matischka, the moother, mine, Pee-ter-keen's. She go away, long, long time. Never come back, I want her mooch—mooch. You have the eyes—the hair, the—the—" but words failed him and he was compelled to resort to his sign-language, so reaching upward he drew one finger gently across her cheek, touched the smiling eyes, then ever, ever so softly laid one small hand

upon the silky hair, his eager face a personified question.

His hearer was not lacking in intuition. She grasped a good bit of her small visitor's meaning.

"And you hoped to find the mother here in this great house? You thought she had come here? When?"

"Long, long time go by. Trees all—all red, gold. Flowers, leaves die. Snow come. No Matischka—moother. No Batka—father—no —nobody."

"And they have never come back to you? You live near here? Where?"

"Down this way," answered Peterkin, pointing toward the window.

"With your—your aunt? Cousins? Someone you love?"

But these words were beyond Peterkin. He could only shake his head in the negative. Finally he said:

"With nobody."

"Poor wee man, it must be somebody. And what do you hope to find here? I wish I could tell you where to find the father and mother but I fear I cannot. They are not here, but you think I am like the mother, do you?"

Peterkin nodded eagerly. Mrs.VanCourtlandt took from him the great green umbrella to which he had tenaciously clung with one hand—Peter started slightly, but was reassured by the words: "You may have it when you go," then lifted the little wanderer to her lap. "Now let me hear all about it," she said gently. "Tell me why you came and what you want."

Then in spite of all handicaps of broken English the words poured forth:

"He tell how I ask for something here in this big house I get. Dagma say if measure twenty-four, much silver. *No* silver. Silver good for big—big mens. Pee-ter-keen not big. Pee-ter-keen not need silver. Need—need trees—big place—flo—flowers,—so," and his hand was raised to his small

nose which drew in long whiffs as though inhaling the perfume of a nosegay.

"Ah, I think I understand. You wish to live where you can smell these," and reaching behind her, Mrs. VanCourtlandt took from a small shelf a vase of daffodils.

Peterkin gave a little cry of joy and stretched forth eager hands. The flowers were taken from the vase and given into his keeping. He buried his face in them half laughing, half sobbing. The eyes regarding him grew suspiciously bright.

Then Peterkin's nose emerged slightly pollen-coated; his face radiant.

"And birds to make the singing?" supplemented Peterkin, eagerly. "You ask it in the book if I *measure twenty-four*, and it sure come?"

"Measure twenty-four? Measure twenty-four?" this was a poser even for the editor until one of her staff crossed the room to her and said:

"I think I can explain, Mrs. VanCourtland. A

few days ago, Miss Jordan, the head of the pattern department, wanted the correct proportion of an eight year old child. She sent down to the street for half a dozen of the little Italian children, Joe ushered them up here. They were scared half to death at first, but at length Miss Jordon found two who were right as to prescribed age and proportions and some of the new designs were tried on them. She gave each of the fortunate ones twenty-five cents, and I daresay the news has circulated throughout the entire community and we shall have hundreds of children applying as models. Great results from small beginnings," and the explanation ended in an amused laugh.

Peterkin had listened to every word; some understood, others meaningless. But he grasped enough to reassure him, and nodded approval vigorously. Mrs. VanCourtland turned to him:

"And you heard all this and came here to be measured?"

"Yes—yes," eagerly assented Peterkin.

"Bring me a tape-measure, please, Miss Downs."

The measure was brought, Peterkin was placed upon a chair and arms, legs, waist, neck—all proportions carefully measured.

How his bright, dark eyes followed every movement. The measurements were noted upon a memorandum pad. At length the measuring ended. Then the lady took a pencil and drew a huge twenty-four upon the paper and showed it to Peterkin, smiling reassuringly and nodding cheerfully as she said:

"See? It is 24!"

"Me? Pee-ter-keen twenty-four? Now I can have?"

"Surely," said the editor reaching for her purse which lay upon her desk and taking from it a bright, new quarter.

But then came her surprise. Peterkin put his hands behind him and shook his head.

"You do not wish it?" she answered in amaze-

ment. "Not even when you measure twenty-four?"

"No! NO! Not the silver but you to write—write in the big book, the book what bring everything—everything you ask—write for a Matischka, a—a moother, Batka—the fa-ther, the big, big land, the flowers, the birds, *no* houses, no so many stairs up, up, up. The birds the—the—" Peterkin paused to think. He wished to describe the tinkle of a running brook, but how? Then he had an inspiration. Waving his hands with the undulating, flowing motion of running water, he began to sing softly a weird, lilting little song suggestive of woodland brooks and piping birds.

It was his crowning stroke. His audience applauded vigorously.

"The water? The water what runs? The trees? The birds? Yes?"

"Yes, yes, we understand. It shall be written the whole wonderful story of Peterkin. But tell me your whole name."

"Pee-ter-keen, Petrovitch Nekrasoff."

"And do you know how old you are?"

"Yes, yes, just—just eight and—and nothing else goes with it."

"And you live?"

"With Mrs. Golowski, by—Spring Street."

"And you wish a father and a mother to take you to the big country to live?"

"Yes, oh, yes? Am I to have all that in the book?"

"If we can get it for you and we will surely try. But we want your picture to put in the book. See, like this little boy's," and the editor opened one of the magazines to show the picture of a small boy holding a big dog in leash.

Peterkin's face fell.

"No,—not got—a—woof—woof!" imitating a dog's bark.

"No, but you have the umbrella. Come," and leading Peterkin by the hand, the umbrella clasped in his, Mrs. VanCourtlandt made her way

to the photographic department of the great establishment and there Peterkin was photographed as we see him, green umbrella and all.

Then the story as he told it of crossing the big water, the wagon which bore away the Matischka and the Batka whom he had never since seen, his longing for a home in the country, in short, all Peterkin's history as she could glean or supplement it, was taken in notes by the editor's stenographer, and before many hours had passed was rushed to press for the current issue caught at the ultimate moment.

And what that issue brought forth was beyond the wildest hopes or dreams of Peterkin or his benefactress.

CHAPTER V

WHAT THE MAGICAL WORDS OPENED

TWO weeks had passed since Peterkin's venturing forth in search of his fortune. Twice during that period he had climbed the stairs of the big building to the office of his ladye faire, for nothing could induce him to step foot into that strange, terrifying cage which whisked men and women skyward at such speed. His ladye faire was at the top of those endless, endless stairs but had she not said to him as she bade him goodbye, with oh, such heavenly kindness, such a tenderness of tone—the tone of the Matischka's voice—:

"Next Thursday you will come again, and the next again, and by that time perhaps I shall have good news for you." But the second Thursday had now come, his pilgrimage had been made, yet noth-

ing had come of it. Not two hours before he had descended those innumerable steps and his heart was heavy in his breast as he sat down in the silent room he called home, for on each Thursday Mrs. Golowski went for her new supply of work and the dwelling-place was deserted.

For a long time Peterkin sat lonely and disconsolate. "Had the big boy really spoken the truth? Had— Ah, *how* he hated even to think such a disloyal thought! But *had* his layde faire been mistaken? Could one so kind be in error? Would the book bring him his heart's desire? And if the book failed to do so what hope was left?"

Why only an hour or two before he had sat upon Mrs. VanCourtlandt's lap and actually seen himself as others saw him: She had shown him the issue of the magazine which contained his picture. Peterkin had smiled coyly as he looked upon his own shadow; had thrilled with a secret pride to know that the little lad smiling up at him beneath the big umbrella was really Peterkin Ne-

krasoff. The printed words meant nothing to him. He could not even remotely guess what they were, or even faintly comprehend how deeply they had stirred hundreds who had read them. Their writer had a ready, facile pen; she had made a pretty tale of Peterkin's life, her instincts had been keen; her play upon human sympathies most subtile.

How could Peterkin know that even as he turned toward his little pallet and drew from beneath it his consoler, the violin, that fate was busy in his cause? Yet it was even so. When barely a half hour before Peterkin was wending his way down those iron stairs, the elevator was whisking to the thirteenth floor of that big publishing house the very Kniajna who months before had given him the wonderful golden coin.

But it was true.

Emilie Minot, for years a contributor to that magazine, had read the article, seen the picture, as had Loraine, her daughter, and the recognition

had been instantaneous. *Then* she recalled where she had earlier seen the little lad to whom she had given the new Lincoln cent, and her daughter had cried:

"Oh, Mother, Mother, the little tad whom we saw on board the ——! The very same! And how do you think he came in this magazine?"

"There is only one way to learn; I shall go to town and see Mrs. VanCourtlandt to-morrow morning."

For Emilie Minot to resolve was to act. As she bade Loraine good-bye the following morning, the one bound for school the other for the great city, she said:

"We may yet have that voice in St. John's choir."

And now she was seated in the Editor's office talking rapidly, asking a hundred questions, supplementing many missing links in the story chain of the little lad who sat not three blocks away drawing plaintive notes from his father's violin.

"You were clever in your opening sentence, Mrs. VanCourtlandt. Who could fail to read a whole history between the lines:

"Wanted, by a boy of eight 'a father and a mother; a home in the big, big land where the flowers come up and the birds are to make singing.' Where the brooks sing as sweetly as he himself does. Where there are 'no houses, no stairs to go up, up, up.' And the picture told me at once who he was. Poor little forlornity in an alien land. Where can I find him?"

"Not three blocks from here. I had Joe follow him home last Thursday for I was a little doubtful of his address; his English is still in its early stages—very early," and Mrs. Courtlandt smiled.

"Can Joe take me there now? I wish to see the child's surroundings."

"Certainly he can and may."

Five minutes later Mrs. Minot was toiling up the five flights of murky stairs to the top floor of

number —— Spring Street. As she neared the top she heard the soft, weird strains of a violin and paused to listen. Then followed the liquid notes of the voice she had heard singing "Little Sally Waters." This time it was singing the Russian National Hymn to the accompaniment of the violin.

How mournfully, how lingeringly the notes fell upon her ears, and with what wonderful softness of touch. Who could be playing? Feeling that the situation warranted the act she hurried to the door, turned the knob very gently and peeped into the room, Joe craning his neck to see over her shoulder.

And this is what she saw.

Seated upon an upturned box near one of the windows upon the ledge of which some faded, withered daffodils stood in a cup of water, sat little Peterkin gazing out at the bit of sky which could be seen above the tall tenements. His chin was pressed to his violin, the bow moved with vel-

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vet touch across its strings, the clear, sweet voice was singing in his native tongue:

"God the all-merciful! earth hath forsaken
  Thy ways of blessedness, slighted Thy word:
Bid not Thy wrath in its terrors awaken;
  Give to us peace in our time, O Lord!

"God, the all-wise! by the fire of Thy chastening,
  Earth shall to freedom and truth be restored;
Through the thick darkness Thy kingdom is hastening;
  Thou wilt give peace in Thy time, O Lord!

"So will Thy people with thankful devotion,
  Praise Him who saved them from peril and sword;
Shouting in chorus, from ocean to ocean,
  Peace to the nations, and praise to the Lord."

It was the only hymn or song he knew; the sole expression of his loneliness, his yearning.

"America" would have meant much more to him, but America was still locked to him in every sense, nor did he suspect that the one peeping at him in the doorway held the key to give him entrance.

"Peterkin."

It was just one word, oh, so gently spoken. He sprang to his feet, turned and cried:

"My Kniajna! Oh, my Kniajna!" and rushed toward her.

She dropped upon a wooden chair and caught the little fellow in her arms.

"Your mother? Your father? Where are they?"

"Gone, gone! Long, long time. Never, never come back. The book bring the Kniajna?"

"Yes," she replied with quick comprehension. "And will you come to the big house with Joe and me? See Joe is here."

"I come! Yes—yes. I come—fast."

"Bring your violin, too."

Peterkin looked puzzled. He did not know the

English name of the instrument he had been playing.

"This," said his "Princess," touching it.

"Ah, yes, surely. You no let some boys take it? It is the Batka's. He come home, maybe, and ask for it some day."

"No one shall take it from you. I shall take care of you."

Down the five flights of stairs they hurried, Peterkin so eager that it seemed he must pitch headforemost to the bottom of them. His Princess took his hand to safeguard such a calamity.

Then the big house was reached and dismay claimed Peterkin: His Princess did not even know where the stairs *were;* had never given a thought to their existence; for her the iron cage was the only possible means of attaining to that sky-high editorial room.

Peterkin turned white. Even with his Princess to guide him that cage held inexpressible terrors.

Seating herself upon one of the great leather

chairs of the rotunda she took him in her arms to reassure and persuade him. He buried his head upon her shoulder and tried not to sob.

"See, Joe is not afraid. *I* am not afraid and—and—" looking helplessly about her for an inspiration, "Why here is a little *girl* who is going up, I know," for at that moment a gentleman leading a lovely little golden-haired child by the hand came toward the elevator. She was not more than six years of age, but as radiant as the spring sunshine. A few words explained the situation. The child comprehended. Smiling upon the terrified Peterkin, she took his hand in her tiny, silk-gloved one and said:

"You are too big to be afraid, and, besides, a *man* is never afraid. You are coming up with me, with Marie Hortense Lafarge."

Peterkin looked once into the lovely, imperious little face and capitulated.

Still holding his hand she led him into the iron cage.

"Please run a little slowly," Mrs. Minot requested the man who ran the elevator.

"Sure," answered the man good-naturedly, and never had that car crept up the thirteen stories so slowly. As they stepped from it Peterkin was more than astonished to find himself alive.

"*Now*, you see, there was nothing to be afraid of," said his guide half scornfully. "Boys must *never* be afraid. I should *hate* a boy who was afraid."

"I'll never, never be some more afraid. You will *no* hate me! You will love me. You are like—like the—" and a strange Russian word had to be pressed into service. It meant the Christ child's image as displayed upon feast days.

"I am like *myself*. Good-bye," and my little lady vanished into the office of one of the heads of that big firm.

"Come," said Peterkin's Princess, and led the way to Mrs. VanCourtlandt's special sanctum.

CHAPTER VI

IN THE LAND OF SONG AND FLOWERS

TIME, for two years, has sped away "Upon the wings of song," in Peterkin's world. After that wonderful ascent in the elevator with his Princess, events crowded so fast upon little Peterkin that his head was in a whirl from sunrise to sunset.

First had come a second rendering to the editor and his Princess of Russia's National Hymn, accompanied by the violin. Then such enthusiasm upon the part of his hearers as had caused little Peterkin utter bewilderment. Then a long, earnest talk, and finally the Princess' return to the tenement to talk with his guardian. That talk was miles above Peterkin's head. So far as he was concerned it might have been in Choctaw, but the outcome was as delightful as though it had been in

his native language. His Princess had bidden him good-bye, and said she would come again on the morrow, and when the morrow arrived she was as good as her word—yes, even better, for she had not only returned, but had packed him up bag and baggage and borne him away in a marvellous contrivance which whizzed through the streets without any apparent propelling power; certainly without horses to draw it.

And his bag and baggage? Well, it did not require the aid of a two-horse express wagon to transport it to the Christopher Street ferry. The taxicab was not overtaxed, which was more than could be said of its older passenger.

Then came a short, swift ride in a railway train, and, oh, joy of joys! green fields and growing things. Another ride in a cab, which seemed to Peterkin a vehicle of the greatest luxury, and then "The House in the Woods," as all who knew it called it. A long, low bungalow, quaint and picturesque, perched upon a plateau at the foot of

the mountain. Wonderful lawns and flower-beds in front of it, wonderful woodland behind it in which the wood-thrushes, the hermit thrushes, the catbirds, robins and countless warblers piped and sang from dawn till twilight, aye, more sweetly then than at any other hour of the twenty-four.

And here lived the musical director of the choir of St. John's with his charming, music-loving wife, surrounded by all that is inspiring in nature, happy in each other, but still lonely, for no childish voices filled their home, no little feet ever ran across the beautiful lawns or broad piazzas, no merry laughter rang through the big living-room. Ten years had passed since Edmond Powell had brought his bride to this home, and each year it had grown more beautiful—but alas! more lonely. Talented, charming, fine to their hearts' core, they would have made ideal parents, yet parentage was denied them.

Then they learned the story of Peterkin from Mrs. Minot. It was only a faint hope of realising

a dream, but surely worth the trial. Peterkin should be brought to their home and kept there for a time on probation. Would he, could he ever mean to them what a child of their own would have meant?

And now two years have passed and surely the days of miracles are not gone by.

Again it is a lovely May day. The air is soft as wine. The wind is playing little symphonies in the fir trees, and their sister trees are drawing wonderful shadow arabesques upon the velvety lawn. The flower-beds are a mass of gorgeous colour. Overhead the birds keep up a mad melody of song. It is four o'clock in the afternoon and carriages and motor cars are rolling along the driveway and depositing their occupants at the broad piazza. They hurry into the great hall and up the wide stairway to lay aside their wraps, then a moment later descend to the charming living-room where their host and hostess and their adopted son stand before great potted palms to receive them, Mrs.

Powell lovely and fascinating in a white lace gown, Mr. Powell, the ever delightful, genial host. And the adopted son?

Ah! Who will recognise in the handsome, manly, courtly little lad the same Peterkin who from the steerage smiled up from beneath his green cotton umbrella? The smile which won his fortune in the great new world.

Two years have done wonders for the little immigrant who came from a land of persecution to one of freedom—to a land which recognised and valued his fine instincts and the wonderful talent inherited from parents gently born but reduced to pitiful poverty through oppression. Peterkin has grown tall and sturdy during these two years. Grown also in grace of person and manner under the new Matischka's and Batka's loving care. He calls them by those odd names and they, keen of sympathy and understanding, realise why. He has won their hearts by his sunshine and gentleness, and profited beyond belief by their training.

A knowledge of their language came quickly under skilful teachers, and though he still speaks with a slight accent, and frequently introduces one of his own musical Russian words into his conversation, his vocabulary is surprisingly wide for a ten-year-old lad.

And to-day he stands beside his foster-parents assisting them to receive their numerous guests. A courtly bow, a warm hand-clasp, an unassuming word in response to their greeting, a bonny little lad in his white duck suit, his broad sailor collar of rich red, his patent-leather pumps. Entirely free from self-consciousness, no trace of self-conceit.

It is the day upon which Mr. and Mrs. Powell give their annual musicale. When St. John's choir gives its wonderful selections taken from the year's work, a testimony of what the year's efforts have developed.

From the big living-room the guests move forward to the music room, a truly wonderful room,

adjoining. Here chairs are arranged for a large audience. A magnificent grand piano stands upon a slightly raised platform. A large organ fills the wall space at the back of it. A harp is at one end of the platform, music racks and chairs at the other.

The last guest has been ushered in and is seated in expectancy for the opening number. Mr. Powell takes his place at the organ, the room is as silent as though suddenly deserted. Then, from behind a long aisle of palms the boy choir from St. John's files upon the platform led by Peterkin and the exquisite notes of "God so loved the world," quiver forth from the splendid instrument, the boys' voices rising in perfectly trained harmony. The opening chorus is rendered and then little Peterkin comes a step or two forward from among his companions, and that angelic voice fills the great music room. He has forgotten the world of human beings before him and lives in his own heavenly world of harmony as the clear, full, per-

fect notes mount up, up, still upward, without effort, without thought of aught save the joy of song; the joy of the skylark as he rises higher and higher above the world unto the clear blue ether.

Not until his last note is rendered and a storm of applause brings him back to the world of real things is Peterkin conscious of his surroundings. The artistic little soul had found its own form of expression. For a year he has led St. John's choir in this same unassuming simple manner. In his world of song he forgets all other worlds.

Several other numbers follow, then comes a violin solo accompanied by the piano. It is one of his incomparable slumber songs written by Mr. Powell for the boy who has crept so closely into his heart. Between these two there is so much in common in the world of music which each so ardently loves.

How quick he had been to recognise the child's talent, his craving to give expression to the marvellous possibilities inherited from his father,

smothered, crushed, killed in the parent, but finding such exquisite expression in the son. No pains have been spared and the reward of the two years is in every way beyond this good man's wildest dreams.

The rich chords of the piano fill the room with their harmony, and then the fairy hidden in the violin,—an instrument whose beauty and value Mr. Powell had instantly recognised,—lifts her silvery voice under Peterkin's magical touch. It seems as though the tenants of Elfin Land have crept upon the mortals sitting there, bringing with them the denizens of the woodland back of the bungalow, for there sweet and soft are the thrush's notes, the catbird's clear whistle, the warbler's trills and the robin's evensong, as well as the Slumber-Lied of the German mother, and the weird strains of other folk songs. A strange, thrilling, compelling medley all, all given by the fairy of the violin over whom little Peterkin holds absolute sway. Truly, he has haled her forth as

long ago he had averred he would do some day. Only the day has arrived sooner than he dreamed.

As the selection ends, Peterkin draws a long breath, shivers slightly, and lets the bow fall to his side. It is hard to come back to the real world from his fairy's world.

But in that audience there chanced to be one very real and very material human being; a little human being who curiously enough turned out to be Peterkin's near neighbour,—the very little lady who two years before compelled him to ascend in the big elevator. At *that* time she had dominated him absolutely. Now, by the magic of his talent he has strangely dominated the little eight-year-old girl. They have played together, romped together and, yes, quarrelled, too, during the two years, *she* invariably the ruling spirit. But to-day comes Peterkin's turn. This is *his* hour to triumph.

Her parents have no suspicion of her intention,

not the vaguest idea of the power that violin is wielding over the restless, petulant, often almost ungovernable child, but now without the slightest warning she breaks away from them, runs down the aisle, and flinging herself impetuously upon the astounded Peterkin, sobs out:

"I'll never, never again be horrid to you. I'll never, never again strike you if you'll only, only make the violin sing like that for me!"

Peterkin had conquered two worlds, though he does not guess it.

Placing his cherished violin and bow upon the piano he slips an arm about the excited child, and leading her from the platform, says gallantly:

"I shall play for you, yes, *always* when you wish. Always. The fairy shall sing for you—but—but —you may strike me just the same because a *man is never afraid* and—and—you are *you*."

THE END

PETERKIN

BY

GABRIELLE E. JACKSON

AUTHOR OF "PEGGY STEWART," "CAPTAIN POLLY," ETC., ETC.

ILLUSTRATED BY

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