

THE LITTLE GREEN DOOR.

NOT A TRUE STORY.

By MARY E. WILKINS.

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LETITIA lived in the same house where her grandmother and her great-grandmother had lived and died. Her own parents died when she was very young, and she had come to live there with her great-aunt Peggy. Great-aunt Peggy was her grandfather's sister, and was a very old woman. However, she was very active and bright, and good company for Letitia. That was fortunate, because there were no little girls of Letitia's age nearer than a mile. The one maid-servant whom Aunt Peggy kept was older than she, and had chronic rheumatism in the right foot and the left shoulder-blade, which affected her temper.

Letitia's great-aunt Peggy used to play grace-hoops with her, and dominoes and checkers, and even dolls. Sometimes it was hard for Letitia to realise that she was not another little girl. Her Aunt Peggy was very kind to her and fond of her, and took care of her as well as her own mother could have done. Letitia had all the care and comforts and pleasant society that she really needed, but she was not a very contented little girl. She was naturally rather idle, and her Aunt Peggy, who was a wise old woman and believed thoroughly in the proverb about Satan and idle hands, would keep her always busy at something.

If she was not playing she had to sew, or study, or dust, or read a stent in a story-book. Letitia had very nice story-books, but she was not particularly fond of reading. She liked best of anything to sit quite idle and plan what she would do some other time and think what she would like to have if she could have her wish, and that her Aunt Peggy would not allow.

Letitia was not satisfied with her dolls and little treasures: she wanted new ones. She wanted fine clothes like one little girl and plenty of candy like another. When Letitia went to school in pleasant weather she always came home more dissatisfied.

She wanted her room newly furnished, and thought the furniture in the whole house very shabby. She disliked to rise so early in the morning. She did not like to take a walk every day, and besides everything else to make her discontented, there was the little green door which she must never open and pass through.

This house where Letitia lived was, of course, a very old one. It had a top roof, saggy and mossy, grey shingles in the walls, lilac-bushes half hiding the great windows, and a well-sweep in the yard. It was quite a large house, and there were sheds and a great barn attached to it, but they were all on the south side. At the back of the house the fields stretched away for acres, and there were no out-buildings. The little green door was at the very back of the house, towards the fields, in a room opening out of the kitchen. It was called the cheese-room, because Letitia's grandmother, who made cheeses, used to keep them there. She fancied she could smell cheese, though none had been kept there for years, and it was used now only for a lumber-room. She always sniffed hard for cheese, and then she eyed the little green door with wonder and longing. It was a small green door, scarcely higher than her head. A grown person could not have passed through without stooping almost double. It was very narrow, too, and no one who was not slender could have squeezed through it. In this door there was a little black keyhole with no key in it, but it was always locked. Letitia knew that her Aunt Peggy kept the key in some very safe place, but she would never show it to her nor unlock the door.

"It is not best for you, my dear," she always replied when Letitia teased her; and when Letitia begged only to know why she could not go out of the door, she made the same reply, "It is not best for you, my dear."

Sometimes, when Aunt Peggy was not by, Letitia would tease the old maid-servant about the little green door; but she always seemed both cross and stupid, and gave her no satisfaction. She even seemed to think there was no little green door there, but that was nonsense, because Letitia knew there was. Her curiosity grew greater and greater; she took every chance she could get to steal into the cheese-room and shake the door softly, but it was always locked. She even tried to look through the keyhole, but she could see nothing. One thing puzzled her more than anything, and that was that the little green door was on the inside of the house only and not on the outside. When Letitia went out in the field behind the house there was nothing but the blank wall to be seen. There was no sign of a door in it. But the cheese-room was certainly the last room in the house, and the little green door was in the rear wall. It was very strange. When Letitia asked her great-aunt Peggy to explain that, she only got that same answer, "It is not best for you to know, my dear."

Letitia studied the little green door more than she studied her lesson-books; but she never got any nearer the solution of the mystery until one Sunday morning in January. It was a very cold day, and she had begged hard to stay home from church. Her Aunt Peggy and her maid-servant, old as they were, were going; but Letitia shivered and coughed a little, and pleaded, and finally had her own way.

"But you must sit down quietly," charged Aunt Peggy, "and you must learn your text to repeat to me when I get home."

After Aunt Peggy and the old servant, in their great cloaks and bonnets and fur tippets, had gone out of the yard and down the road, Letitia sat quiet for fifteen minutes or so, hunting in the Bible for four easy texts; then suddenly she thought of the little green door, and wondered, as she had done so many times before, if it could possibly be opened. She laid down her Bible, and stole out through the kitchen to the cheese-room and tried the door. It was locked, just as usual. "Oh dear!" sighed Letitia, and was ready to cry. It seemed to her that the little green door was the very worst of all her trials—that she would rather open that, and see what was beyond, than have all the nice things she wanted and had to do without.

Suddenly she thought of a little satin-wood box with a picture on the lid which Aunt Peggy kept in her top bureau

drawer. Letitia had often seen this box, but had never been allowed to open it. "I wonder if the key can be in that box," said she.

She did not wait a minute. She was so naughty that she dared not wait for fear she should remember that she ought to be good. She ran out of the cheese-room through the kitchen and the sitting-room to her aunt's bed-room, and opened the bureau drawer and then the satinwood box. It contained some bits of old lace, an old brooch, a yellow letter, some other things which she did not examine, and, sure enough, a little black key on a green ribbon. Letitia had not a doubt that it was the key of the little green door. She trembled all over, she panted for breath, she was so frightened, but she did not hesitate. She took the key and ran back to the cheese-room. She did not stop to shut the satinwood box or the bureau drawer. She was so cold and her hands shook so that she had some difficulty in fitting the key into the lock of the little green door, but at last she succeeded and turned it quite easily. Then, for a second, she hesitated—she was almost afraid to open the door. She put her hand on the latch and drew it back; it seemed to her, too, that she heard strange alarming sounds on the other side. Finally, with a great effort of her will, she unlatched the little green door and flung it open and ran out.

Then she gave a scream of surprise and terror, and stood still, staring. She did not dare stir or breathe. She was not in the open fields which she had always seen behind the house: she was in the midst of a gloomy forest of trees, so tall that she could just see the wintry sky through their tops. She was hemmed in, too, by a wide heeping undergrowth of bushes and brambles, all stiff with snow. There was something dreadful and ghastly about this forest, which had the breathless odour of a cellar. And suddenly Letitia heard again those strange sounds she had heard before coming out, and she knew that they were the savage whoops of Indians, just as she had read about them in her history-book; and she saw also dark forms skulking about behind the trees as she had read.

Then Letitia, wild with fright, turned to run back into the house through the little green door, but there was no little green door, and more than that, there was no house. Nothing was to be seen but the forest and a bridle-path leading through it.



A MAN WITH A WIDE CAPE FLYING BACK LIKE BLACK WINGS CAME RUSHING DOWN THE PATH.

Letitia gasped; she could not believe her eyes. She plunged out into the path and down it a little way, but there was no house. The dreadful yells sounded nearer. She looked wildly at the undergrowth beside the path, wondering if she could hide under that, when suddenly she heard a gun-shot and the tramp of a horse's feet. She sprang aside just as a great horse, with a woman and two little girls on his back, came plunging down the bridle-path and past her. Then there was another gun-shot, and a man with a wide cape flying back like black wings, came rushing down the path. Letitia gave a little cry, and he heard her. "Who are you?" he cried breathlessly. Then, without waiting for answer, he caught her up and bore her along with him.

"Don't speak," he panted in her ear. "The Indians are upon us, but we're almost home." Then, all at once, a log-house appeared beside the path, and someone was holding the door ajar, and a white face was peering out. The door was flung open wide as they came up, the man rushed in, set Letitia down, shut the door with a crash, and shot some heavy bolts at top and bottom.

Letitia was so dazed that she scarcely knew what happened for the next few minutes. She saw there was a pale-faced woman and three girls—one about her own age, and two a little younger. She saw, to her great amazement, the horse tied in the corner; she saw that the door was of a mighty thickness, and, moreover, hasped with iron, and studded with great iron nails, so that some rattling blows that were rained upon it presently had no effect. She saw three guns set in loop-holes in the walls, and the man, the woman, and the girl of her own age firing them with great reports, which made the house quake, while the younger girls raced from one to the other with powder and bullets. Still she was not sure she saw right, it was all so strange. She stood back in a corner, out of the way, and waited trembling; and at last the fierce yells outside died away, and the firing stopped.

"They have fled," said the woman, with a thankful sigh.

"Yes," said the man. "We are delivered once more out of the hands of the enemy."

"We must not unbar the door or the shutters yet," said the woman anxiously. "I will get supper by candle-light."

Then Letitia realised what she had not done before, that all the daylight was shut out of the house, that they had for light

only one tallow candle, and a low hearth fire. It was very cold then; Letitia began to shiver with cold as well as fear.

Suddenly the woman turned to her with motherly kindness and curiosity.

"Who is this little damsel whom you rescued, husband?" said she.

"She must speak for herself," replied her husband smiling.

"I thought at first she was neighbour Adam's Phœbe, but I see she is not."

"What is your name, child?" asked the woman, while the three little girls looked wonderingly at the new-comer.

"Letitia Hopkins," repeated Letitia in a small, scared voice.

The others started.

"Letitia Hopkins, did you say?" said the woman doubtfully.

"Yes, M'm."

They all stared at her, then at one another.

"It is very strange," said the woman finally, with a puzzled, half-alarmed look. "Letitia Hopkins is my name."

"And it is mine, too," said the eldest girl.

Letitia gave a great jump. There was something very strange about this. Letitia Hopkins was her family name. Her grandmother, her father's mother, had been Letitia Hopkins, and she had always heard that the name could be traced back in the same order for generations, as the Hopkinses had intermarried. She looked up trembling at the man who had saved her from the Indians.

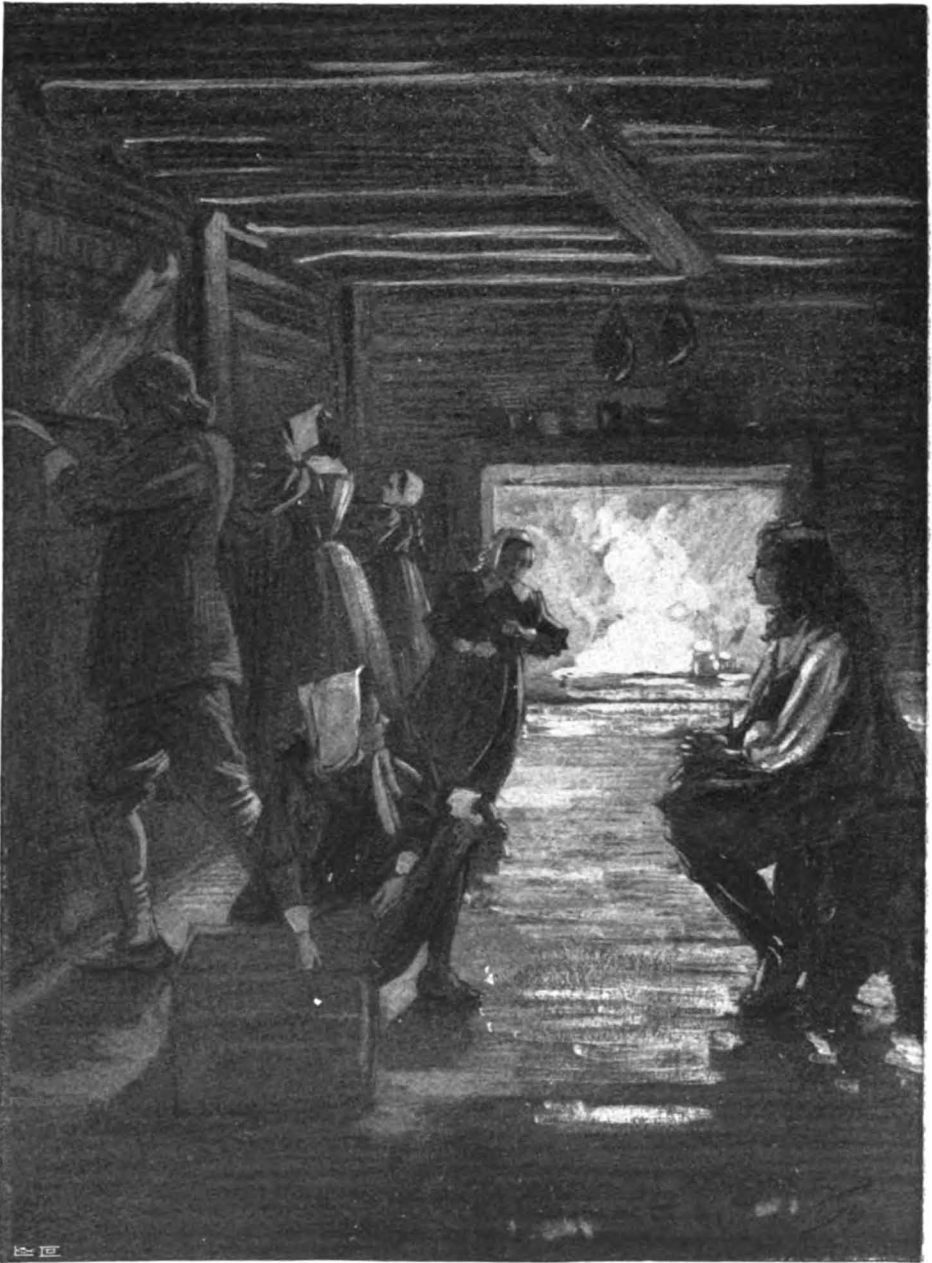
"Will you please tell me your name, Sir?" she said.

"John Hopkins," replied the man, smiling kindly at her.

"Captain John Hopkins," corrected his wife.

Letitia gasped. That settled it. Captain John Hopkins was her great-great-great-grandfather. Great-aunt Peggy had often told her about him. He had been a notable man in his day among the first settlers, and many a story concerning him had come down to his descendants. A queer little miniature of him in a little gilt frame hung in the best parlour, and Letitia had often looked at it. She had thought from the first that there was something familiar about the man's face, and now she recognised the likeness to the miniature.

It seemed awful and impossible, but the little green door had led into the past, and Letitia Hopkins was visiting her great-great-great-grandfather and grandmother, her great-great-grandmother, and her two great-great-aunts.



SHE SAW THREE GUNS SET IN LOOP-HOLES IN THE WALLS, AND THE MAN, THE WOMAN, AND THE GIRL OF HER OWN AGE FIRING THEM.

PART II.

Letitia looked up in the faces, all staring wonderingly at her, and all of them had that familiar look, though she had no miniatures of the others. Suddenly she knew that it was a likeness to her own face which she recognised, and it was as if she saw herself in a five-fold looking-glass. She felt as if her head was turning round and round, and presently her feet began to follow the motion of her head, then strong arms caught her, or she would have fallen.

When Letitia came to herself again, she was in a great feather-bed in the unfinished loft of the log-house. The wind blew in her face, a great star shone in her eyes. She thought at first she was out of doors, then she heard a kind but commanding voice repeating, "Open your mouth," and stared up wildly in her great-great-great-grandmother's face, then around the strange little garret lighted with a wisp of rag in a pewter dish of tallow, and the stars shining through the cracks in the logs. Not a bit of furniture was there in the room beside the bed and an oak chest. Some queer-looking garments hung about on pegs and swung in the draughts of wind. It must have been snowing outside, for little piles of snow were scattered here and there about the room.

"Where—am—I?" Letitia asked feebly, but no sooner had she opened her mouth than her great-great-great-grandmother, Goodwife Hopkins, who had been watching her chance, popped in the great pewter spoon full of some horribly black and bitter medicine.

Letitia nearly choked. "Swallow it," said Goodwife Hopkins. "You swooned away, and it is good physic. It will soon make you well." Goodwife Hopkins had a kind and motherly way, but a way from which there was no appeal. Letitia swallowed the bitter dose.

"Now go to sleep," ordered Goodwife Hopkins. Letitia went to sleep. There might have been something quieting to the nerves in the good physic.

She was awakened a little later by her great-great-grandmother and her two great-great-aunts coming to bed.

They were to sleep with her—there were only two beds in Captain John Hopkins's house.

Letitia had never slept four in a bed before. There was not much room. She had to turn herself crosswise, and then her toes stuck out into the icy air unless she kept them well covered up; but soon she fell asleep again.

About midnight she was awakened by wild cries in the wood outside, and lay a minute numb with fright before she remembered where she was. Then she nudged her great-great-grandmother Letitia, who lay next her.

"What's that?" she whispered fearfully.

"Oh, it's nothing but a catamount; go to sleep again," said her great-great-grandmother sleepily. Her great-great-aunt Phyllis, the youngest of them all, laughed on the other side.

"She's afraid of a catamount," said she.

Letitia could not go to sleep for a long while, for the wild cries continued, and she thought several times that the catamount was scratching up the walls of the house. When she did fall asleep it was not for long, for the fierce yells she had heard when she had first opened the green door sounded again in her ears.

This time she did not need to wake her great-great-grandmother, who sat straight up in bed at the first sound. "What's that?" Letitia whispered.

"Hush!" replied the others. "Injuns."

Both the great-great-aunts were awake; they all listened, scarcely breathing. The yells came again, but fainter; then again, and fainter still. Then they were heard no more. Letitia's great-great-grandmother settled back in bed again. "Go to sleep now," said she; "they've gone away."

But Letitia was weeping with fright. "I can't go to sleep," she sobbed. "I'm afraid they'll come again."

"Very likely they will," replied the other Letitia coolly. "They come most every night."

The little great-great-aunt Phyllis laughed again. "She can't go to sleep because she heard Injuns," she tittered.

"Hush!" said her older sister; "she'll get accustomed to them in time."

But poor Letitia slept no more till four o'clock. Then she had just fallen into a sweet doze when she was pulled vigorously out of bed. "Come, come," said the great-great-great-grandmother Goodwife Hopkins; "we can have no lazy damsels here."

Letitia found that her bedfellows were up and dressed and downstairs. She heard a queer buzzing sound from below as she stood on her bare feet on the icy floor and gazed about her, dizzy with sleep. "Hasten and dress yourself," said Goodwife Hopkins; "here are some of Letitia's garments I have laid out for you. Those which you wore here I have put

away in the chest. They are too gay and do not befit a sober, God-fearing damsel."

With that Goodwife Hopkins descended to the room below, and Letitia dressed herself. It did not take her long; there was not much to put on beside a coarse wool petticoat and a straight little wool gown, rough yarn stockings, and such shoes as she had never seen. "I couldn't run from Injuns in these," thought Letitia miserably. When she got downstairs she discovered what the buzzing noise was. Her great-great-grandmother was spinning. Her great-great-aunt Candace was knitting, and little Phyllis was scouring the hearth. Goodwife Hopkins was preparing breakfast. "Go to the other wheel," said she to Letitia, "and spin until the porridge is done; we can have no idle hands here."

Letitia looked helplessly at a spinning-wheel in the corner, then at her great-great-grandmother.

"I don't know how," she faltered.

Then all the great-grandmothers and the aunts cried out with astonishment. "She doesn't know how to spin!" they said to one another.

Letitia felt dreadfully ashamed.

"You must have been strangely brought up," said Goodwife Hopkins. "Well, take this stocking and mend the toe; there will be just about time enough for that before breakfast."

"I don't know how to knit," stammered Letitia.

Then there was another cry of astonishment. Goodwife Hopkins cast about in her mind for another task for this ignorant guest.

"Explain the doctrine of predestination," she said suddenly.

Letitia jumped and stared at her with scared eyes.

"Don't you know what predestination is?" demanded Goodwife Hopkins.

"No, Ma'am," half sobbed Letitia.

Her great-great-grandmother and her great-great-aunts made shocked exclamations.

And her great-great-great-grandmother looked at her with horror. "You have been brought up as one of the heathen," said she. Then she produced a small book, and Letitia was bidden to seat herself on a stool and learn the doctrine of predestination before breakfast.

The kitchen was lighted only by one tallow candle and the firelight, for it was still far from dawn. Letitia drew her little stool close to the hearth, and bent anxiously over the fire-lit page. She

committed to memory easily, and repeated the text like a frightened parrot, when she was called upon. "The child has good parts, though she is wofully ignorant," Goodwife Hopkins said aside to her husband. "It shall be my care to instruct her."

Letitia, having completed her task, was given her breakfast. It was only a portion of corn-meal porridge in a pewter plate. She had never had such a strange breakfast in her life, and she did not like corn-meal. She sat with it untasted before her.

"Why don't you eat?" asked her great-great-grandmother severely.

"I—don't—like—it," faltered Letitia.

If possible, they were all more shocked by that than they had been by her ignorance.

"She doesn't like the good porridge," the little great-aunts said to each other.

"Eat the porridge," commanded Captain John Hopkins sternly, when he had gotten over his surprise.

Letitia ate the porridge, every grain of it. After breakfast the serious work of the day began. Letitia had never known anything like it. She felt like a baby who had just come into a new world. She was ignorant of everything that these strange relatives knew. It made no difference that she knew some things which they did not, some advanced things. She could, for instance, crochet, if she could not knit. She could repeat the multiplication-table, if she did not know the doctrine of predestination; she had also all the States of the Union by heart. But advanced knowledge is of no more value in the past than past knowledge in the future. She could not crochet because there were no crochet-needles; there were no States of the Union; and it seemed doubtful if there was a multiplication-table, there was so little to multiply.

So Letitia had to set herself to acquiring the wisdom of her ancestors. She learned to card, and hetchel, and spin, and weave. She learned to dye cloth, and make coarse garments, even for her great-great-great-grandfather, Captain John Hopkins. She knitted yarn stockings, she scoured brass and pewter, and, more than all, she learned the Catechism. Letitia had never before known what work was. From long before dawn until long after dark she toiled. She was not allowed to spend one idle moment, had no chance to steal out and search for the little green door, even had she not been so afraid of wild beasts and Indians.

She never went out of the house except on the Sabbath-day. Then, in fair or foul

weather, they all went to meeting, ten miles through the dense forest. Captain John Hopkins strode ahead, his gun over his shoulder. Goodwife Hopkins rode the grey horse, and the girls rode by turns, two at a time, clinging to the pillion at her back. Letitia was never allowed to wear her own pretty plaid dress with the velvet collar, even to meeting. "It would create a scandal in the sanctuary," said Goodwife Hopkins. So Letitia went always in the queer little coarse and scanty gown which seemed to her more like a bag than anything else; and for outside wraps she had, of all things, a homespun blanket pinned over her head. Her great-great-grandmother and her great-great-aunts were all fitted out in similar fashion. Goodwife Hopkins, however, had a great wadded hood and a fine red cloak.

There was never any fire in the meeting-house, and the services lasted all day, with a short recess at noon, during which they went into a neighbouring house, sat round the fire, warmed their half-frozen feet, and ate cold corn-cakes and pan-cakes for luncheon. There were no pews in the meeting-house, nothing but hard benches without backs. If Letitia fidgetted or fell asleep the tithing-man rapped her.

Letitia would never have been allowed to stay away from a meeting had she begged to do so, but she never did. She was afraid to stay alone in the house because of Indians.

Quite often there was a rumour of hostile Indians in the neighbourhood, and twice there were attacks. Letitia learned to load the guns and hand the powder and bullets.

She grew more and more homesick as the days went on. They were all kind to her, and she became fond of them, especially of the great-great-grandmother of her own age, and the little great-aunts, but they had seldom any girlish sports together. Goodwife Hopkins kept them too busy at work. Once in a while, as a great treat, they were allowed to play bean-porridge-hot for fifteen minutes. They were not allowed to talk after they went to bed, and there was also little opportunity for girlish confidences.

However, there came a day at last when Captain Hopkins and his wife were called away to visit a sick neighbour some twelve miles distant, and the four girls were left in charge of the house. At seven o'clock at night the two youngest went to bed, and Letitia and her great-great-grandmother remained up to wait for the return of their elders, as they had been instructed.

Then it was that the little great-great-grandmother showed Letitia her treasure. She had only one, and was not often allowed to look at it lest it should wear her heart away from more serious things. It was kept in a secret drawer of the great chest for safety, and was nothing but a little silver snuff-box with a picture on the top. It contained a little flat glass bottle about an inch and a half long.

"The box belonged to my grandfather, and the bottle to his mother. I have them because I am the eldest; but I must not set my heart on them unduly," said Letitia's great-great-grandmother. Letitia tried to count how many greats belonged to the ancestors who had first owned these treasures, but it made her dizzy. She had never told the story of the little green door to any of them. She had been afraid to, knowing how shocked they would be at her disobedience. Now, however, when the treasure was replaced, she was moved to confidence, and told her great-great-grandmother the whole story.

"That is very strange," said her great-great-grandmother when she had finished. "We have a little green door too, only ours is on the outside of the house, in the north wall. There's a spruce-tree growing close up against it that hides it, but it is there. Our parents have forbidden us to open it, too, but we have never disobeyed." She said the last with something of an air of superior virtues. Letitia felt terribly ashamed.

"Is there any key to your little green door?" she asked meekly.

For answer, her great-great-grandmother opened the secret drawer of the chest again, and pulled out a key with a green ribbon in it, the very counterpart of the one in the satin-wood box.

Letitia looked at it wistfully. "I should never think of disobeying my parents and opening the little green door," remarked her great-great-grandmother, as she put back the key in the drawer. "I should be afraid something dreadful would happen to me. I have heard whispered that the door opened into the future. It would be dreadful to be all alone in the future without one's kinsfolk."

"There might not be any Indians or catamounts there," ventured Letitia.

"There might be something a great deal worse," returned her great-great-grandmother severely.

After that there was silence between the two, and possibly a little coldness.

Letitia sat gazing forlornly into the fire, thinking that it would be much more

comfortable to be alive in the future than in the past, and her great-great-grandmother sat stiffly in her opposite stool, knitting with virtuous industry, until she began to nod.

Suddenly Letitia looked up, and she was fast asleep. Then, in a flash, she thought of the key and the little green door. It might be her only chance for nobody knew how long. She pulled off her shoes, tiptoed in her thick yarn stocking-feet up to the loft, got her own clothes out of the chest, and put them on instead of her home-spun garb. The little great-aunts did not stir. Then she tiptoed down, got the key out of the secret drawer, gave a loving farewell look at her great-great-grandmother, and was out of the house.

It was broad moonlight outside. She ran around to the north wall of the house, pressed in under the low branches of the spruce-tree, and there was the little green door. Letitia gave a sob of joy and thankfulness. She fitted the key in the lock, turned it, opened the door, and there she was, back in the cheese-room.

She shut the door hard, locked it, and carried the key back to its place in the satinwood box. Then she looked out of the window, and there were her great-aunt Peggy and the old maid - servant just coming home from church.

Letitia that afternoon confessed what she had done to her aunt, who listened gravely. "You were disobedient," said she, when she had finished. "But I think your disobedience brought its own punishment, and I hope now you will be more contented."

"Oh, Aunt Peggy," sobbed Letitia, "everything I've got is so beautiful, and I love to study and crochet, and go to church."

"Well, it was a hard lesson to learn, and I hoped to spare you from it, but perhaps it was for the best," said her great-aunt Peggy.

"I was there a whole winter," said Letitia, "but when I got back you were just coming home from church."

"It doesn't take as long to visit the past as it did to live it," replied her aunt.

Then she sent Letitia into her room for the satinwood box, and when she brought it, took out of it a little parcel, neatly folded in white paper, tied with a green ribbon.

"Open it," said she.

Letitia untied the green ribbon and unfolded the paper, and there was the little silver snuff-box which had been the treasure of her great-great-grandmother, Letitia Hopkins. She raised the lid, and there was also the little glass bottle.