THE BOW ARM—A STORY: BY ANNIE HAMILTON DONNELL

"YOU better be glad"—Virginia's pointing forefinger aided her little sighing voice—"You better be glad, Nobilissimus, that you haven't got a bow arm."

She lifted a small, soft paw and brought it into range of his vision. "This would be it, if you had one," she said explainingly. "You couldn't catch flies with it or rats or anything. They won't let me."

The shouts of a rabble of children filtered through the vines to them. Virginia's ear, tuned to delicate melodies, refused to recognize discords here. She said stiffly to herself that it was a beautiful sound.

"They flat a little," she acknowledged; "but I like the sound of it, Nobilissimus," appealing again to the little dun-colored dog. "If *we* did that the folks would all come a-flying, wouldn't they? Mother and Mademoiselle and Janice and Aunt Chlo, every single." The vision of Aunt Chlo "a-flying" wheezily in the rear improved Virginia's spirits. Visions of Aunt Chlo had that tendency always. Undefined but ever present in Virginia's consciousness was the suspicion that Aunt Chlo would never have come a-flying at all of her own accord. She of all the child's corps of guardians recognized the child's extreme youth and coveted for it its own. Yet Aunt Chlo, black and massive and obedient, had been schooled successfully.

"Yo' po' little lamb!" she pitied, and in the same breath, "Don' yo' go carousin' roun' or yo'll hurt yo' bow ahm!" It had to be. Virginia herself on all but rare occasions accepted the decree.

This was a rare occasion. Rebellion bit at the child's soul, and in the smart of it she writhed feebly. Away off on her little horizon she had long ago descried a cloud the size of a man's hand. It was slowly growing larger; to-day it was the size of—of Aunt Chlo's hand. When it grew very big indeed, something would happen—oh, something that would bring them all a-flying. Virginia clasped delicate white fingers around her knees and sat and saw it coming. From the solemnity of his attitude the little dun-colored dog might have been sitting that way and seeing, too.

But it would not come to-day. To-day was a holiday. On holidays Virginia only practiced an hour and a half. Her lessons with Mademoiselle were excused. There was leisure to sit like this, out on

the porch with Nobilissimus, and listen to the rabble of joyous children. On days that were not holidays Virginia practiced four hours.

The next Concert was a very little way off now. The new dress was done. Virginia got up at the remembrance of it and went upstairs to look at it, the little dog a-heel. New dresses recompensed so much, especially this new one which seemed to Virginia softer and daintier and lovelier than any of its predecessors. She gloated over it in a rapt, miserly little way.

"This is the way I shall bow, Most Noble"—the little dun dog was designated impartially in English or Latin—"Like this—and they will all clap their hands. You ought to hear them clap their hands when I bow! And when I get through playing—" The child's eyes took on triumph. Dreaminess crept over her small, sweet face. She was in the beautiful new dress, looking down not at the patient little creature at her feet but at a sea of smiling faces. Ripples of applause ran over the sea—the people clapping! She smiled in shy response. The old intoxication went to her head like wine.

Unconsciously her small body straightened, her chin lifted, she nestled under it an imaginary violin. Her sacred little bow arm swept back and forth over imaginary strings. And the little dun dog, because he was Most Noble, listened patiently in his trying role of smiling sea.

Something stirred behind Virginia and she swept about to face a laughing maid.

"Janice!" She stamped her foot imperiously, "you've been there a'listening!"

"You played beautiful, Miss Virginia," with spurious gravity.

Virginia's stormy mood was snuffed out in a sudden little gale of merriment. It must have been funny to Janice!

"I'll play you some more," she cried, and nodded and smiled and played. But the maid interfered in alarm.

"No, no, don't, Miss Virginia, you mustn't! You'll get tired out and you're—you're wasting your arm!"

"It's *my* bow arm," Virginia retorted grandly, but she let it fall to her side. "I'll stop, though, because I want to. Janice, am I lovely?"

"Dear, yes!" Janice was taken off her guard, but ready.

"Am I remarkable?"

"Dear, yes!" This answer seemed serviceable while casting about for a better.

"Can any other little girl like me play at concerts and be clapped? —can your little sister?"

"My little sis—" Janice gasped at the thought. "No, oh, no, Nelly can't—no indeed."

"What can Nelly do?"

What could Nelly do? Run and leap and swing her arms, unafraid—

"Her bow arm?" persisted Virginia. "Will they let her swing that one and do—do stunts with it?" She had picked up the word at some unguarded moment.

"Dear, yes, anything, Miss Virginia."

"Then I suppose she isn't valuable. It must be nice not to be valuable. Just a little girl and your bow arm just an arm—but I don't suppose she has lacey new dresses every time she pl—she doesn't play? Like my new one, Janice?"

The expression on the face of the maid hurried from chagrin to tenderness. *Nelly* in a lacey dress! No, no, Nelly never had any new dress.

"She wears mine made over," Janice said simply.

"But she has good times?—and laughs?" Virginia was oddly persistent. Yes, Nelly had good times and laughed. Janice laughed in sympathy.

"I wish you could hear her, Miss Virginia!"

"Oh, I wish I could—I wish I could!" cried, sick with longing, the child who played at concerts and was clapped. The cloud on her little horizon grew larger than Aunt Chlo's big black hand.

HER name on a program was spelled Virginie and looked beautiful. There were strings of programs hanging by their silken tassels on Virginia's walls, and sometimes when she was very tired and her bow arm ached especially hard she peeped into them, one by one, and found the Virginie. It was a help, like looking at the new dresses and remembering the clapping.

On the day but one before a concert Virginia practiced six hours, three in the morning, three in the afternoon. Her master came and practiced with her, and Mother staid in the room and gave her spoonfuls of things out of bottles to give her strength. There was always a strange excitement in the air. On the day but one before a concert

Nobilissimus kept his tail much between his legs and staid under things.

On the day before there was no practicing at all. Janice lowered the shades in Virginia's room to keep her asleep in the morning, and every one went through the halls and up and down stairs softly. Aunt Chlo brought in bowls of steaming things as soon as the child got up and took her on her knee and fed her out of them like a baby.

"Po' little lamb! Po' little lamb!" Aunt Chlo crooned.

Then came the day itself and the journey with Mother on the cars, with the smart little violin case on the seat between them. That was Virginia's best day. Her cheeks were pink and her eyes shone with excitement; the clapping was already in her ears.

On this particular best day the child dozed intermittently, while Mother talked to some one behind in a proud voice. Virginia caught snatches of what was said, but she thought she dreamed them.

"Only nine—yes. She has played ever since she was five. . . . Oh, yes, of course, she practices a great deal. . . . Oh, no, she does not mind it at all. . . . Yes, the most difficult. Her repertoire is remarkable for a child."

The other voice was too low to get into Virginia's dreams. The spaces between the things that Mother said were empty spaces. Suddenly Virginia sat up and knew she was awake. This was no dream.

"Yes, four hours now, but her master says we must soon be making it five—then six—increasing as she grows older. It has to be—ah, do you get off here? I wish you were going to hear her play."

"Five—then six—increasing"—Virginia stared blankly into a dreary future. Her poor little bow arm throbbed in self-pity. Even the glamor of the near future—of to-night—faded into insignificance. The beautiful new dress, the smiling faces, footlights, clapping hands—they dimmed and disappeared. The rattle of the train beat out, "Five—then six—increasing," in her ears.

Villages and scattered homes flashed by her window. Everywhere there seemed to be little children romping and laughing and swinging their arms like Nellies. None of them appeared to have bow arms. They must all be Nellies.

On Virginia's horizon the cloud was ominously spreading. By the time the end of the journey was reached it enveloped her little world. What had been coming all this while to Virginia was now

all but here, separated only by the little space the concert must occupy. After that—

"As soon as I get home—" the child reflected with the temerity of despair. "I can't wait any longer than that."

She would take Most Noble with her. In her heart was born a wistful premonition that Most Noble would be the only one who would really care, and so she could not leave him behind. They would go together hand in hand, Virginia thought.

Mother and Mademoiselle and Janice and Aunt Chlo would be a little sorry on account of the wasted little concert dresses and the wasted violin. It would seem queer to them all not to have anyone to run about after and keep from injury—not to have any bow arm to take care of.

Virginia had never laid up against any one her weary hours of practicing; as Mother had told the strange person on the train, it "had to be." You never laid up things that had to be, you only ran away from them.

THAT particular concert was always a good deal like a dream to Virginia; not an unpleasant dream, for there were the lights in it and the flowers and a beautiful sound of clapping, but a misty, elusive one that refused to stand out clearly against the background of her memory. It seemed always to have been some other child that stood on the edge of the smiling sea and nodded and lifted a small round chin—some one else's little bow arm that swept the bow across the strings. She herself stood off a little way and pitied the child that was playing and laughed elfishly to think they were going to make her practice five hours soon—then six—increasing.

Virginia had decided upon the very morning after she got home as the time to do it. Fortunately for her, the difficulties in her way were materially lessened by Mother's lying in bed and its being a holiday from lessons, which eliminated Mademoiselle. That left Janice to run away from and Aunt Chlo. But Janice, it came about, had a toothache, and it is not difficult to run away from a person with a toothache. Hence of Virginia's row of "blackbirds" in her way one flew away and another. Then there was one—Aunt Chlo, very black indeed. To eliminate Aunt Chlo with least trouble Virginia had recourse to artifice.

"Aunt Chlo," she asked with sweet solicitude, "how is your misery?"

"Bress yo' heart, honey," groaned Aunt Chlo searching out a promising spot and rubbing it, "it's a-takin' holt ag'in dis mornin'!"

"Then I guess you better not sit out on the porch in the—the draught. I'll take the teeny silver bell and ring it if anything happens to me. You stay in here by the fire and keep your misery warm."

The artifice succeeded. Virginia, with her little nightgown in a roll under her arm, and Nobilissimus, without his, stole guiltily away. They hurried until they were out of sight of the house, and then settled into a steady little jog. Neither of them spoke till more than a mile had slipped under their six trudging feet. It was Virginia who spoke then.

"I'll ring the teeny bell," she laughed, "for something's happened now!—I said I'd ring it if anything happened to me. Nobilissimus, we're running away! It feels a little queer to be, doesn't it?"

JANICE had so often described her home a few miles out into the country that the child had no great difficulty in finding it. There were so many things to go by. There was the blue pump—very blue, Janice said—and the red barn with a fish on it that swam north, east, south, west. Virginia stopped at the first red barn with a fish on it, swimming west. And it was the right place, for there was Nelly with Janice's good, round face!

"Here we are—we've got here, Nobilissimus!" the child cried excitedly. She advanced toward a shy, brown child and made her little concert bow.

"How do you do, Nelly?" she said in her gracious little way. "I've come to live with you. What shall we play?" For she wanted to lose no time. She had made out many little programs in her mind of the things—the Nelly-things—they would do. She realized most of them, if not all, would require practice, but she was used to practicing. Her name in all these programs was spelled Virginia and looked beautiful.

"I'm Virginia—Virginia—" she hurried as a necessary sop to the other child's bewildered curiosity. "The one that Janice sweeps and dusts. She said you had good times and laughed—so I came. I wish you'd laugh now." And Nelly after another astonished instant obeyed. It was splendid.

"That's one o' the things I came for—to learn, you know—and another's *trees,*" Virginia explained. "Janice says you can climb 'em."

"My gracious!" laughed on Nelly, unable to stop, "me climb trees!"

"Oh, can't—you?" disappointedly. "Then I suppose it was something else Janice said, but I understood—"

It was rather a tall tree with the playhouse tilting in its midst. To Virginia it was a California giant, but when she had climbed it and sat up there among the leaves she would be a Nelly!

"Come on! Come on!" she revelled. "You go ahead first and then me."

It seemed scarcely a moment before she lay in the long grass at the foot of the giant tree with Janice's Nelly stooping over her, her little brown face whitened by fright.

"What is it? What did I do?" Virginia murmured. She felt queer. The little white-brown face was two faces—three, four, five—above her. She thought of the teeny silver bell. She ought to ring it—something had happened to her.

"You didn't know how—you fell out," all five Nellies sobbed above her. All five were blanched and scared. "You've got to get up and come into the house with me and see mother. Give me your hand, I'll help you."

"*Don't!*" shrieked Virginia, and the new thing that happened rent her with grinding, awful anguish. Then merciful oblivion.

They told her when she woke up that she had broken her arm, and they had sent for the doctor and her folks. She must lie very still until they came.

Oh, yes—oh, yes, she would lie very still. The room seemed full of pain and she did not want it to come any nearer. Moving she was curiously certain would bring it close. She wondered a good many things while she lay still—when they would get there, what the doctor was coming for, but most of all *which arm.*

THEY took her home after rather a weary while, and she spent her time in her own beautiful room with Mother. It was a surprise to Virginia to have Mother there so much. The surprise grew into comfort. When she caught Mother's eye Mother smiled—Virginia thought it a beautiful smile.

"Shall I begin to practice to-morrow?" Virginia said one day. It seemed a great while after the accident. She was facing Mother and saw plainly the look that came into her face, but it was not a plain look. Virginia could not decide what it meant.

"Not to-morrow, dear," was Mother's smiling answer. "Dear" was another surprise that was growing into a comfort.

"I'd like my violin. Please bring it, Janice," she said. And to her surprise the maid burst into tears. The next time she asked Mother for it.

"Dear," Mother did not smile at all, "there was a little girl once who broke her arm."

"Yes," nodded Virginia, but there did not seem much relevancy in it. "It was me."

"Her bow arm," Mother added gently. "It was a pretty bad break, Virginia. And—and the doctors said it would always have to be a stiff arm—as long as she lived, Virginia—and it would have to stop being a bow arm—"

Virginia sat up from her cushions. This was something that could not be realized lying down. Even sitting up it was very hard. It took a number of minutes. Realization filtered into the child's brain, drop by drop. When it was all in she turned a white, shocked little face to Mother's white shocked face. Mother smiled, but not Virginia.

"Please bring it to me," she whispered as people whisper when some one is dead.

And when Mother brought it in its smart little case: "Now please you and Nobilissimus go," she whispered. With her left hand she took out the little violin and raised it awkwardly to its old place.

"Why!" she said softly, "Why, it seems queer to be sorry! It's queer not to be *glad*. You—you dear, you're dead now, aren't you, and pretty soon I'll put you back in your poor little coffin. But I want to say something first. It was you I ran away from, and—I wish I hadn't! I never supposed I'd wish that. It seems queer, doesn't it? And—and I'd like to practice five hours on you—then six—increasing. Oh, you dear, I think I'm going to cry!"

She hurried the little instrument back into its coffin and shut it in. One minute she laid her cheek against the smart little case.

"Good-bye," Virginia whispered.