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[Frontispiece: The Little Florida Lady]

A LITTLE FLORIDA LADY

by

Dorothy C. Paine

Philadelphia

George W. Jacobs & Company

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CONTENTS

- I. THE JOURNEY TO FLORIDA
- II. THE NEW HOME
- III. BETH'S FIRST FISHING LESSON
- IV. VISITING
- V. WALKING ON STILTS
- VI. HOUSE BUILDING
- VII. BETH'S NEW PLAYFELLOW
- VIII. LEARNING TO SWIM
- IX. THE LITTLE DRESSMAKER
- X. THE HORSE RACE
- XI. DON MEETS A SAD FATE
- XII. THE ARRIVAL OF DUKE
- XIII. ANXIOUS HOURS
- XIV. THE RESCUE

ILLUSTRATIONS

The Little Florida Lady *Frontispiece*

Beth Thought a Cotton Field a Pretty Sight [missing from book]

Beth's New Home [missing from book]

Maggie, a Typical Old-Time Mammy

Laura Corner in the Treasured Easter Hat

Harvey [missing from book]

"The Cutest Things Yon Ever Saw"

January with His Perpetual Laugh and Fiddle

The Darkies' Quarters

A Little Florida Lady

CHAPTER I

The Journey to Florida.

New York was in the throes of a blizzard. The wind howled and shrieked, heralding the approach of March, the Wind King's month of the year. Mrs. Davenport stood at a second story window of a room of the Gilsey House, and looked down idly on the bleak thoroughfare. She was a young-looking woman for her thirty-five years, and had an extremely sweet face, denoting kindness of heart.

The hall door opened, and Elizabeth Davenport entered, carrying in her arms a little ball of fluffy gray.

Elizabeth, or Beth, as she was more commonly called at the age of seven, might have been compared to a good fairy had she not been so plump. She almost always radiated sunshine, and her face was generally lighted with a smile, the outcome of a warm heart. Sometimes clouds slightly dimmed the sunshine, but they always proved to be summer clouds that quickly passed. Her face was now flushed, and her eyes sparkled.

Mrs. Davenport turned, and smiled in greeting, but, at the same time, brushed a tear from her eye.

"Why, mamma, dear, what's the matter?" cried Beth.

Mrs. Davenport's eyes filled, but she bravely smiled. "I'm a little unhappy over leaving all our friends, Beth. Florida seems very far away."

"I wouldn't be unhappy."

"How would you help it, dearie?"

"Why mamma," she answered triumphantly after a second's thought, "there are so many pleasant things to think about that I just never think of the unpleasant ones," and her face broke into a smile, so cheery that Mrs. Davenport's heart lightened.

"Mamma," she continued, "it's very easy for me to be happy. Every one is so good to me. The chambermaid just gave me this dear, dear kitty. Isn't it too cute for anything? I mean to take it to Florida with me."

"Why, Beth, that would never do."

Beth was about to demur, when a door into an adjoining room opened, and Mr. Davenport called:

"Mary, come here a minute, please."

Mrs. Davenport hastened to answer the call. She was hardly out of the room before Beth rushed to an open trunk. Impatiently, she began pulling things out. She burrowed almost to the very bottom. Lastly, she took out a skirt of her mother's, and wrapped something very carefully in it.

The door into the adjoining room creaked. Beth blushed scarlet, and dropped the bundle into the trunk. Then as no one came, she threw the other articles pell-mell on top of the bundle, and scampered guiltily to the other end of the room. Not an instant too soon to escape immediate detection, for Mrs. Davenport reentered the room, followed by a girl of thirteen. This was Marian, Beth's sister. The two girls were totally unlike both in looks and in disposition. Marian was a tall blonde, and slight for her age. She had quiet, gentle ways.

"Mother, here's my red dress on the floor," she said, picking it up near the trunk.

"Beth, what have you been doing?"

Beth kept her blushing, telltale face turned from her mother, and did not answer. Without another word, Mrs. Davenport went to the trunk, and began smoothing things out.

"I declare, there's something alive in here," and she drew out a poor, half smothered kitten.

"I think you might let her go in the trunk," cried Beth, aggrieved.

"Child, it would kill the poor kitty. Marian, you take it back to the chambermaid." Marian left the room with it, and Beth began to pout, whereupon Mrs. Davenport said:

"Beth, you are so set upon having your own way, I hardly know what to do with you."

Immediately Beth's pouting gave place to a mischievous smile. "You'd better call in a policeman, and have me taken away."

Mrs. Davenport smiled too. "So my little girl remembers the policeman, does she? I was at my wits' end to know how to manage you when I thought of him. Even as a little bit of a thing, you would laugh instead of cry, if I punished you with a whipping."

"Well, I was afraid of the policeman, anyway. I thought you really meant it when you said I was a naughty child, and not your nice Beth, and that the policeman would take the naughty child away."

"It worked like magic," said Mrs. Davenport. "You stopped crying almost immediately, and held out towards me a red dress of which you were very proud, and cried, 'I'm your Beth. Don't you know my pretty red dress? Don't you see my curls?'" She sat down, having finished straightening out the trunk, and Beth crept up into her mother's lap.

"Beth, do you remember one night when you were ready for bed in your little cotton-flannel night-drawers, that you lost your temper over some trifling matter? You danced up and down, yelling, 'I won't. I won't.' I could hardly keep from laughing. My young spitfire looked very funny capering around and around, her long curls ruffled about her determined, flushed face, and her feet not still an instant in her flapping night-drawers. Many and many a time you escaped punishment, Beth, because you were so very comical even in your naughtiness."

"I remember that night well," answered Beth. "You said, 'There, that bad girl has come back. Even though it's night, she'll have to go.'"

"And," interrupted Mrs. Davenport, "you threw yourself into my arms, crying, 'Mamma, whip me, but don't send me away.' I knew better than to whip you, but I punished you by not kissing you good-night."

"And I cried myself to sleep," put in Beth, snuggling more closely to her mother. "I thought I must be very naughty not to get my usual good-night kiss. I do try to be good, but it's very hard work sometimes. But I'll get the better of the bad girl, I'll leave her here in New York, so she won't bother you in Florida."—

Just then Mr. Davenport entered the room. He was a tall, dark man with a very kindly face.

"I think the snow is not deep enough to detain the trains," he said. "It's time for us to start. The porter is here to take the trunks."

"We'll be ready in a moment," answered his wife. "I fear we'll find it very disagreeable driving to the station."

And, in truth, outside the weather proved bitterly cold. The wind swept with blinding power up the now mostly deserted thoroughfare. The Davenports were glad of the shelter of the carriage which carried them swiftly along the icy pavement. Mrs. Davenport drew her furs around her, while the children snuggled together.

"I'm glad we're going, aren't you, Marian?" asked Beth, as they descended from the carriage at the station.

"I guess so," answered Marian doubtfully, remembering the friends she was leaving behind, perhaps forever.

Mr. Davenport already had their tickets, and the family immediately boarded a sleeper bound for Jacksonville.

Beth loved to travel, and soon was on speaking terms with every one on the car. She hesitated slightly about being friends with the porter. He made her think of the first colored person she had ever seen. She remembered even now how the man's rolling black eyes had frightened her, although it was the blackness of his skin that had impressed her the most. She believed that he had become dirty, the way she sometimes did, only in a greater degree.

"Mamma," she whispered, "I never get as black as that man, do I? Do you s'pose he ever washes himself?"

Mrs. Davenport explained that cleanliness had nothing to do with the man's blackness.

"Is he black inside?" Beth questioned in great awe.

"No. All people are alike at heart. Clean thinking makes even the black man white within, dear."

Beth had not seen another colored person from that time until this. Therefore, she was a little doubtful about making up with the porter. But he proved so very genial that before night arrived, he and "little missy," as he called Beth, were so very friendly that he considered her his special charge.

That night both children slept as peacefully as if they had been in their own home.

In the morning, Beth was wakened by Marian pulling up the shade. A stream of sunshine flooded their berth, blinding Beth for a second or two. Snow and clouds had been left far behind.

"It's almost like summer," cried Beth, hastening to dress.

After breakfast, the porter, whose name Beth learned was "Bob," took her out on the back platform while the engine was taking on water. To the left of the train were five colored children clustered around a stump.

"Bob, how many children have you?" asked Beth, and her eyes opened wide in astonishment.

"Law, honey," and Bob's grin widened, "I ain't got any chillun. I'se a bachelor."

Beth stamped her foot. She could not bear deceit. "Bob, it's very wrong to tell stories. These children must be yours; they're just like you."

He laughed so heartily at the idea, that Beth feared his mouth never would get into shape again. "Ha, ha, ha. Dem my chillun! Ha, ha, ha. Law, honey, dem ain't mine. Thank de Lord, I don't have to feed all dem hungry, sassy, little niggahs."

"Well, Bob, if they're not yours, whose are they?"

"Dem's jes' culled chillun."

A whistle sounded, and the train was soon under way again. Beth ran to her mother.

"Mamma, there were a lot of little Bobs outside, but he says they are not his children—that they're just colored children."

Mrs. Davenport had a hard time making her understand that Bob had told the truth. Beth sat very still for a while by a window. Suddenly, she cried out:

"What are those little specks of white? They look like little balls of snow, only they can't be. It's too warm, and then I never saw snow grow on bushes."

"That is cotton."

Although the bushes were not in their full glory—only having on them a little of last year's fruitage that was not picked—Beth thought a cotton field a very pretty sight.

[Illustration: Beth thought a cotton field a very pretty sight. (Illustration missing from book)]

The pine trees of Georgia prove monotonous to most people, except that their perpetual green is restful to the eye in the midst of white sand and dazzling sunshine. Beth, however, liked even the pines, being a lover of all trees. They seemed almost human to her. She believed that trees could speak if they would. She often talked to them, and fondled their rough old bark. Children can have worse companions than trees. They were a great comfort to Beth all through life.

On the way through Georgia, the train was delayed by a hot box. While it was being fixed, Bob took Beth for a walk, and she saw a moss-laden oak for the first time.

"Oh, Bob," she cried, "I never before saw a tree with hair."

His hearty laugh broke out anew. "Ha, ha, ha. I'll jes' pull some of dat hair for you, missy," and he raised his great, black hand to grab the curling, greenish, gray moss.

"Don't, Bob," and when he gave her no heed, she added, "I'm afraid it'll hurt the tree. I know it hurts me greatly when any one pulls my hair."

He laughed more than ever at her, until Beth grew ashamed, and meekly accepted the moss that he piled up in her little arms.

The hot box so delayed the train that Jacksonville was not reached until the middle of the night.

Bob took a sleeping child in his arms, and carried her out to the bus.

"Good-bye, little missy," he murmured, before handing her to her father.

Her arms tightened around his neck while her eyes opened for a second.

"Don't leave me, Bob. I love you."

Then she did not remember anything more until she wakened in a strange room the next morning.

At first, she could not think where she was. Then it came to her that she was in a hotel in Jacksonville. She sprang out of bed, and ran to a window. The room faced a park, and afforded Beth her first glimpse of tropical beauty. Strange trees glistened in the glorious sunshine. From pictures she had seen, Beth recognized the palms, and the orange trees. Below, on the piazza, the band was playing "Dixie." Delighted as Beth was, she did not linger long by the window, but dressed as fast as she could.

Mr. Davenport entered the room.

"Do you know what time it is? It's fully eleven, and I was up at six this morning."

"At six, papa? What have you been doing?"

"I went down town, and then I drove far out into the country."

"Oh, why didn't you waken me and let me go?"

"I had business on hand. Come along down to the dining-room. Your mother had some breakfast saved for you. I have a surprise for you."

"A surprise, papa? What is it?"

"It wouldn't be as great a surprise if I told you." This was all the satisfaction she received until after she had breakfasted.

"We're going for a drive," said Mr. Davenport as she came out of the dining-room.

"Is the drive the surprise, papa?"

"You'll know all in good time, Beth. You must have patience," he answered as he led the way out to the piazza.

"Get your hats, and bring Beth's with you," he said to Mrs. Davenport and Marian who were listening to the music.

"What do you think of that man and the rig?" asked Mr. Davenport of Beth, indicating a middle-aged negro who stood holding a bay mare hitched to a surrey.

Beth noted that the man looked good-natured. There were funny little curves on his face suggestive of laughter even when in repose. Jolly wrinkles lurked around his eyes. Beth saw two rows of pearly teeth though his mouth was partly hidden by a mustache and beard. His nose was large and flat. It looked like a dirty piece of putty thrown at haphazard on a black background. Beth, however, did not mind his homeliness.

"He's nice, and the horse is beautiful," she said.

"Then let's go down and talk to the man."

As Mr. Davenport and Beth walked to the side of the darky, he lifted his stovepipe hat that had been brushed until the silk was wearing away. He revealed thereby a shock of iron-gray wool. He made a sweeping bow.

"Massa, am dis de little missy dat yo' wuz tellin' 'bout? I'se powerful glad to meet yo', missy."

He was so very polite that even irrepressible Beth was a little awed. She hid halfway behind her father.

"This is January, Beth."

"What a very queer name," she whispered.

"It is queer, but you are in a strange land. For awhile you'll think you are in fairy-land. Everything will be so different. Do you want to stay with January while I go in to bring your mother?"

She nodded that she did. Mr. Davenport reentered the hotel. Beth seated herself upon the curbstone, and looked at the bay horse behind which she was soon to have the bliss of driving. She thought it about as nice a horse as she had ever seen. Her curiosity overcame her momentary shyness. "Is it your horse, January?"

He smiled. "No, 'deed, missy, but I raised her from a colt, and she loves me like I wuz her massa. Why, she runs to me from de pasture when I jes' calls, while she's dat ornary wid odders, dey jes' can't cotch her. It takes old January to cotch dis horse, don't it, Dolly?"

The horse whinnied.

"Is Dolly her name?"

"Dat's what I calls her, honey. It ain't her real name. Her real name——"

"Oh, has she a nickname, too? She's like me then. My name isn't really Beth."

"'Deed?" he asked with polite interest.

"It's Elizabeth, but I'm called that only when I have tantrums."

"What am dem, missy?"

"Well," she blushingly stammered, "I sometimes forget to be good, and then I can't help having them—tantrums, you know. Just like the little girl with the curl who, when she was bad, was horrid. January, are you ever horrid?"

He looked self-conscious. "Law, missy, I nebber tinks I am, but Titus 'lows I am, but he don't know much nohow."

Dolly whinnied again, which recalled Beth's thoughts to the horse. "Who owns Dolly, January?"

"Law, missy, didn't I tole yo' dat she 'longs to yer paw now?"

Beth was so excited that she jumped to her feet, and began to clap her hands.

Her antics made her parents and Marian smile as they came from the hotel.

"Mamma, she's our horse. January said so. Dolly, do you like me?"

Dolly pricked up her ears as if she understood, and whinnied.

"She wants some sugar," declared Beth, believing that she understood horse language. She took a stale piece of candy out of her pocket, and gave it to Dolly. This attention sealed a never-ending friendship between the two.

"Dolly's the surprise, isn't she?" asked Beth, running up to her father. He smiled enigmatically, and that was all the answer she received.

Meantime, January, hat in hand, was bowing with Chesterfieldian politeness to Mrs. Davenport and Marian.

"All aboard," cried Mr. Davenport.

"Let me sit with January," begged Beth.

Marian, also, expressed a like wish. The two children, therefore, scrambled up in front beside the driver, while Mr. and Mrs. Davenport took the back seat.

January sat bolt upright. His dignity fitted the occasion. His driving, however, worried Beth.

She loved to go fast. She knew no fear of horses. She would have undertaken to drive the car of Phaeton, himself, had she been given the chance. She had little patience to poke along, and that was exactly what Dolly did when January drove.

"Can't she go faster?" she asked.

"She don't 'pear to go very fast, does she?" said January mildly. "Missy Beth, yo' jes' wait until her racing blood am up, and den she'll go so fast, yo'll wish she didn't go so fast."

Beth had her doubts of this, and even of Dolly's racing blood. Its truth, however, was to be proven by a later experience which will be told in due course.

"Has Dolly really racing blood?" asked Marian. Although January was sitting so straight that it seemed impossible for him to sit any straighter, he stiffened up at least an inch.

"Racing blood? Well, I jes' 'lows she has. Onct she wuz de fastest horse in dis State or any odder, I reckon. She could clean beat ebbery horse far and near. Many's de race I'se ridden her in, an' nebber onct lost. My ole massa wuz powerful proud of us. Now he's gone, an' Dolly an' me's gettin' old."

"How old are you, January?"

"Powerful ole, massa. I reckon I'm nigh on a hundred."

"That's impossible," interrupted Mrs. Davenport. "When were you born?"

He scratched his head to help his memory. "Well, de truf is, Miss Mary"—he had heard Mr. Davenport call her Mary, and so from the start he addressed her in Southern style—"I can't say 'xactly, but I know I'se powerful old. I wuz an ole man when de wah broke out. I must have been 'bout—well 'bout twenty then."

"The war was only about forty years ago, January," broke in Marian, "and that would make you sixty now."

"I reckon, I'm 'bout dat." He had no idea of his age. The longer the Davenports knew him, the more they realized the truth of this. Sometimes he would make himself out a centenarian, and then, by his own reckoning, he was not out of his teens.

"Get up, Dolly," he cried. She paid no more attention to this mild command than she would have to the buzzing of a fly—probably not so much.

"Papa, may I drive?" asked Marian in her quiet way. Receiving consent, she took the reins. Dolly soon noticed a difference in drivers. Presently she went so fast, that she satisfied even Beth as to speed.

"Look at the river," cried Beth. They were driving under great, over-arching trees. To the right of them, between the openings of the trees, the glorious St. Johns was to be seen gleaming under the brilliant tropical sun.

"That's a beautiful hammock yonder," said Mr. Davenport.

Beth could see no hammock. There was a wonderful, intricate growth of shrubs, trees, and vines which formed an almost impenetrable mass of green, but no hammock.

"Where is it?" she asked. "It seems a very queer place for a hammock."

Mr. Davenport laughed at her, and explained that such a mass of green is called a hammock in Florida, not hummock as in the North.

Very soon they were past the swamps. The banks of the river grew higher and nice houses were to be seen on either side of the road.

Dolly, of her own accord, turned in at the gate of an unusually beautiful place. There are no fine lawns in Florida. In this case, the lack of such green was made up by a waving mass of blooming cardinal phlox, behind which was an orange grove in full bearing. In the well-cultivated grounds there were many inviting drives through avenues of trees.

"What are we going in here for?" asked Beth.

"Do you think it a pretty place?" returned Mr. Davenport.

"I never saw a prettier place. It's grand."

"Guess who owns it."

"How should I know? I don't know any people in Florida."

"You know the Davenports. They are to live here. I bought the place this morning."

Beth could hardly believe her father. He had, indeed, greatly surprised her. That she was to be a little Florida lady henceforth, hardly seemed possible. She thought she must be a fairy-story princess, and that the fairies were vying with one another in showering upon her the good things of life.

"I'm so happy, I don't know what to say or do. Why, if a good fairy offered to grant me three wishes, I shouldn't know what to ask. I have everything," declared Beth.

"There aren't any fairies, and you know it. So what's the use of talking about them," interrupted practical Marian.

"Mamma says our thoughts are the real fairies," returned Beth, nothing daunted, and added, "papa has given me plenty of good ones to-day."

"I was in great luck to secure this place," said Mr. Davenport. "It had just been put on the market as Mr. Marlowe, the former owner, was called North by the death of his wife. The agent brought me out this morning, and I was so delighted with it that I would look no farther. I found the title all right, and so I signed the papers at once."

CHAPTER II

The New Home

The house on the place just described was a rambling two-storied building with many porches—a typical vine-covered Southern cottage. It was picturesque from every side, and seemed to have no prosaic back. Marechal Niel roses, and honeysuckles, and some tropical vines, climbed over latticework almost to the roof. There were, also, many trees near the house, some of which were rare.

[Illustration: Beth's new home. (Illustration missing from book)]

A colored woman bustled out of a side door, and looked down the road leading to the gate through which the Davenports' carriage had entered. Evidently, she was no common negro, but had served "quality" all her life—a typical old-time mammy. A red bandanna was drawn tightly over her short curly wool. Her dress was of flowered calico, and around her neck was a brilliant-hued shawl. A neat gingham apron covered her skirt. Her face broke into a smile, and she pointed to the palm-lined driveway.

"Yo' Titus—yo' Glory—Indianna—all yo' niggahs come hyere. De new massa and missus am comin'," she called.

Out from the house, from the fields, from the quarters, they came trooping; old and young; weazened and pretty; black and yellow; all rolling their gleaming black eyes in the direction of the carriage which they saw come to a sudden standstill.

"What's de mattah?" they cried, and one young darky started down the road to see. He beheld January descend from the carriage, and walk to a persimmon tree and pluck some of the fruit.

The darky wondered what was to be done with the fruit that he knew was still green. His curiosity made him sneak up within earshot.

January returned to the carriage, and handed the fruit to Beth. The darky heard him say:

"I wouldn't eat dem, Missy Beth, if I wuz yo'. Dey am powerful green."

To her the little round fruit looked very tempting, especially the light yellow ones. Therefore she did not heed him. She selected one, but, instead of taking a dainty nibble, she put the whole fruit into her mouth, and bit down on it. Immediately, she set up a cry, and spit out the persimmon. "Ow-ow-ow, how it puckers!"

January chuckled, and, before driving on, he said: "I tole yo' so, Missy Beth."

Marian laughed until she was tired. "Beth, if you are drawn up inside the way your face is outside, it must be terrible."

"It is. It is." But she did not receive any sympathy. Even Mr. Davenport laughed at her. He had told her not to have January get them, but she had insisted on having her own way.

"Beth," he said, "I hope this may teach you a lesson. You must not taste things that you know nothing about."

Her mouth was still so drawn up that she did not care to do any more tasting—at least, not for the present. When she thought nobody was looking, she let the rest of the persimmons roll out of the carriage.

"What do they all do?" asked Beth as the carriage came to a standstill, and she noted the

waiting negroes. As January helped her out, he chuckled, and swelled visibly with pride. "Dey all work for us, Missy Beth. She's de boss," he added in a low tone pointing to the colored woman with the bandanna. "Dat's Maggie; yo'd bettah make up with her."



[Illustration: Maggie, a typical old-time mammy.]

The darkies courtesied. Their manners were of the old school. Beth ran up to Maggie.

"I hope you'll like me, Maggie, for I know I'll like you."

Maggie's face beamed. "Of cou'se, honey, I jes' kan't help likin' yo'. Yo'se de sweetest little missy I knows," and then she added: "Massa, I'se 'sidered yore proposition, an' me an' Titus 'cided to stay."

"All right, Maggie. You can show Mrs. Davenport and the children around the house."

Marian was willing to go with her mother, but Beth hung back.

"I don't care for the house. I want to see the front yard and river. May I go, papa?"

"If you'll come back in half an hour, you may go."

"All right, papa," and Beth was off like a flash around the corner of the house. She was impatient to see everything in that half hour. She felt that she needed a thousand eyes. The trees bewildered her. There were so many varieties she had never seen before—magnolias with their wonderful glossy foliage; bamboos with their tropical stalks covered with luxuriant green; pomegranates; live-oaks and water-oaks; the wild olive with its feathery white blossoms, and many others.

The moss on the oaks swayed back and forth, seeming to murmur, "Beth, these trees are the best of playfellows. Climb up here with us. We'll have great fun," but she would not heed them. There was too much to see.

All of a sudden, she stopped perfectly still. She thought there must be a fairy up in one of the trees with the most wonderful voice she had ever heard. Such singing, she thought, was too sweet to be human.

She looked up and beheld a bird of medium size, and of plain plumage. It cocked its little head to one side, and eyed the child as if it knew no fear. It sang on undisturbed.

"Beth," this is what the warbler said to her, "come up into this beautiful tree with us. Stay with us." The enticement of the bird, added to the fascination trees had for her, was almost too much for so little a girl to resist. However, she put her fingers into her ears, and ran on. But, she did not escape temptation thus. Countless beds of roses, of geraniums, and of many other flowers tempted her to linger, and gather the fragrant blossoms, but, still she did not succumb, for there was greater beauty ahead. She beheld a lovely avenue formed of orange trees and red and white oleanders trimmed to a perfect archway. The winter had been a mild one. Not only did luscious ripe oranges cling to the trees, but green fruit was forming, and there was, also, a wealth of

fragrant blossoms. The oleanders, too, were coming into bloom.

Beth stopped for a moment to draw in some of the wonderful fragrance that filled the air. No perfume is more delightful than that of orange blossoms in their native grove. The fruit, too, looks more tempting on the trees. The glistening green leaves are just the right setting for the golden yellow balls. Beth wished to stop and eat some of the fruit, but again she proved firm. She ran on and on under the shade of the archway that extended a quarter of a mile at the very least. She ran so fast that her breath shortened and her cheeks flamed.

At the end of the avenue was an arch of stone covered with climbing Cherokees spread in wild confusion. Beth did not stop to gather any of the pure, fragrant blossoms, for right in front of the arch was a wharf leading out on the beautiful St. Johns. The river was from one to two miles wide at this point. It glistened and rippled under the brilliant sunshine. As Beth ran out on the wharf, she thought she had never seen a sight more charming.

The wharf extended far out into the river, and near the end of it, Beth came suddenly upon a boy with a loaf of bread in his hand. She stopped undecided, and looked at the boy. He was, perhaps, three or four years older than Beth. His hair was as light as hers was dark. His eyes were blue, and his naturally fair skin was tanned. He looked up at Beth for an instant, and frowned.

"What are you doing here, little un? I don't like girls to bother me. Go away."

If there was one thing above another that made Beth's temper rise, it was to be called "little one," and to be twitted upon being a girl. She felt like making up a face at this boy, but, instead, she assumed as much dignity as she could command.

"I won't go away. This is my place. What are you doing here?"

The boy laughed incredulously. "Your place, indeed. The Marlowes own this place, and they are away. Good-bye."

This was too much for her. She stamped her foot in rage. "I won't go. My papa bought this place to-day."

He looked a little interested. "Indeed? What's your name?"

"Elizabeth Davenport;" she said 'Elizabeth' to be dignified, "and really my father owns the place."

"If what you say is so, I'd better go," he said somewhat sheepishly.

She relented. "Oh, I'll let you stay."

"I'm not sure I want to. I don't like girls. They're 'fraid-cats."

"I'm no 'fraid-cat," and her eyes snapped.

"How can you prove it, Elizabeth?"

"Don't call me that. I hate to be called Elizabeth."

"But you told me that was your name."

"Everybody calls me Beth. If you're nice, you may call me Beth."

"All right. How are you going to prove you're no 'fraid-cat, Eli—Beth?"

She pondered a moment. "'Fraid-cats cry when they're hurt, don't they?"

"Of course. So do girls."

"I don't cry when I'm hurt," and she looked triumphant as if that settled the matter. "Once when I was a little bit of a girl——"

"You're pretty small now."

"I'm a big girl, and you shouldn't interrupt. Well, once Marian——"

"Who's she?"

"She's my sister. Well, I wanted to light the gas, but Marian said I was too small, but I'd not listen. I jumped up on a rocker to light the gas. The chair rocked and, I fell against the windowsill. Marian screamed, 'Beth's killed. She's covered with blood!'"

"Were you really?"

"Yes." Beth felt she was arguing her case well. "Mamma thought I just had the nose bleed, but what do you s'pose? I had two mouths."

The boy's eyes grew big. "Two mouths—how jolly. How did it happen?"

"The window-sill had cut me right across here," she pointed to the space just below her nose. "The doctor took five stitches, and when it healed, took them out again. It hurt very much, but I didn't cry a bit."

"Didn't it leave a scar on your face?"

She threw back her head.

"There, do you see that little white line under my nose? You can hardly see it now."

The boy examined the spot critically. Then he changed the subject. "Where did you live before you came here?"

"New York."

"Did you like it there?"

"No, it was horrid. I hated to be dressed up and sent for a walk."

He looked incredulous. "Most girls like to be dressed up."

"I don't."

"Don't you like to be told you are a pretty little girl with nice clothes?"

"No, I don't."

He sniffed disdainfully. "Oh, go long. I don't believe that."

Beth grew very much in earnest, and thought of another little illustration.

"Truth 'pon honor. One day a strange lady in a store put her hand on my head, and said: 'What a pretty little girl.' It made me mad, so that I just grunted and made up a face at her. My mamma said, 'Why, Beth, that is very naughty.' I said, 'Well, mamma, what business is it of hers whether I am pretty or not? It isn't my fault if I am pretty and people shouldn't bother me.'"

The boy laughed. "I believe I rather like you, Beth, but I only have your word for it that you are not like other girls. I have a big mind to try you. Shall I?"

She was a little afraid to consent, but she was ashamed to show it. So she delayed matters by asking "How?"

The boy drew down his face until it was very long, and when he spoke it was in an awe-inspiring whisper.

"Swear never to tell what I tell you. Repeat after me, 'Harvey Baker——'"

"Is that your name?"

"Yes—don't interrupt me. 'Harvey Baker, if I tell what you show me, I hope I may be forever doomed and tortured.'"

Beth looked shocked. "I won't say that."

"'Fraid-cat. 'Fraid-cat."

Again she stamped her foot. "I won't be called that. It's not true. I will promise not to tell. Can't you believe me?"

The boy considered. "Girls are hardly ever to be trusted, but I'll try you. In this river there is a great, big, black animal that hates afraid-cats as much as I do. He eats them up. Why, he has such fierce jaws and sharp teeth that he could gobble up a little girl like you in one mouthful."

Beth felt that her hair must be standing up on end. She would have run away, had not pride detained her—and then the recital rather fascinated her. Harvey continued, relishing the effect of his story:

"Now I have only to whistle to have the awful animal appear. His head will slowly rise above the water. His jaws will open. His teeth will gleam. If any little girl cries, he will snap at her, and it will be good-bye girl. Now, if you are not a afraid-cat you'll say, 'Harvey Baker, whistle.'"

She wanted to run more than ever, but instead she repeated slowly:

"Harvey Baker, whistle."

The boy pursed up his lips, but he then made an impressive pause, and finally pointed his finger at Beth.

"Elizabeth Davenport, remember. If you give the least little bit of a cry, you die. But, if you keep perfectly still, and never tell what you see, I am your friend for life." Thereupon he whistled very shrilly.

Beth's eyes were glued upon the water. Every little ripple seemed to her excited imagination an awful head rising to gobble her up. However, nothing appeared. Beth gave a sigh of relief.

"Harvey Baker, you were fooling."

He motioned to her to be silent. Again, he whistled. Still no horrible head appeared. Beth was now fully convinced that he was only making believe, but still she could not take her eyes off the water.

For the third time, Harvey whistled. Suddenly the waters parted. There, right below them, was a head more fearful than anything Beth had imagined. There was no doubt of the reality of this fearful apparition. The jaws and teeth that Harvey had spoken about were even worse than he had predicted. Slowly, slowly, those loathsome jaws parted. Beth looked down into that awful gulf, like a great dark pit, opening to receive her. There were the two rows of gleaming white teeth ready to devour girls who screamed. How she kept from screaming she never knew. Perhaps she was too much paralyzed with fear. However, she kept so still that she hardly breathed. The color ebbed out of her face.

Harvey picked up some meat that lay on the wharf beside him, and threw that and the bread into the waiting mouth below. The jaws snapped together, and opened again as suddenly.

Beth shuddered a little, involuntarily. She wondered if she would have disappeared as quickly as the meat if she had screamed.

Harvey had no more food for the animal below. It waited an instant, then slowly sank. The waters closed where the head had been. Beth felt as though she were waking from a horrible nightmare.

"Three cheers for Beth," cried Harvey so unexpectedly that she gave a great start.

"Was it a dragon?" asked Beth with her eyes unnaturally big.

He laughed. "A dragon— No, indeed. It's only a 'gator."

"A 'gator— Would it really have eaten me if I had screamed?"

"It might, although I said that to try you. They do say, though, that 'gators sometimes eat pickaninnies. The Northerners who come down here winters are killing off the 'gators pretty fast, so the pickaninnies are likely to live. Now mind, Beth, don't say a word about my 'gator. You see if my folks heard about it, they might put a stop to my feeding it. They don't think 'gators as nice as I do."

"I think they are just horrid."

Harvey laughed. "Oh, you'll like them in time."

She had her doubts about ever being fond of such pets, but did not say so.

"I can't whistle, but would it come if I could whistle, Harvey?"

He looked very superior. "No, indeed. It won't come for any one but me."

"How did you get it to come for you?"

"Well, you see, I used to watch that 'gator in the river; then began bringing food for it. I reckon it thought that an easy way to live, and it soon grew to know me. Then it learned my whistle. That's all."

Beth now remembered that her half hour must be more than over.

"Harvey, I must go. Good-bye."

"Wait a minute. I say, I really like you, and will teach you how to fish some day."

This was the greatest compliment he could pay her, for he was an expert angler, and had never allowed a girl to share in the sport with him. Such an invitation as he had just extended surprised even himself, but he actually hoped that it would be accepted. He even decided to set a definite time.

"Come here—well, say Monday afternoon between four and five."

"I'll come if mamma will let me."

"Remember, you mustn't tell any one about the 'gator."

"Not even mamma?"

"No, indeed. You wouldn't break your word, would you?"

"I never do that."

"You're a trump, Beth. Good-bye."

She skipped back towards the house, revelling in her adventure now that it was over. Being called a trump by Harvey pleased her, but even this praise only half reconciled her for keeping any secret from her mother.

Halfway up the avenue, a homely, impudent, scraggy little dog, sprang from among the trees and yelped at Beth. A ragged little darky followed. Beth had never seen any human being quite so ragged.

"Come 'way, Fritz. What yo' mean by jumpin' on de missy?"

Beth eyed doubtfully both the dog and his master. The latter looked at her reassuringly.

"Yo' needn't be 'fraid, missy. I won't let Fritz hurt yo'."

"I—afraid—of him! He don't look as if he could harm anything," and Beth laughed.

The boy appeared grieved.

"Really, missy, he's a wonderful dog. I'll show yo' what he can do. Come, Fritz, dance for missy."

The ragged leader held up a warning finger. Fritz wagged his stubby tail, but did not budge.

"Come, come, Fritz. Dance for de missy."

Fritz wagged his stubby tail more vigorously, but gave no other response. The boy looked wise.

"He's bashful, missy, jes' like me. Perhaps, if I whipped him like my mother whips me——"

"Does she whip you?"

"Yes, 'deed she does—if she katches me," added the boy laughingly. "If I'd whip Fritz, he'd dance, but I likes him too well to whip him."

Beth liked all dogs, with or without pedigree, and said warmly:

"I wouldn't whip him either, but it's too bad he won't dance. I'd really like to see him."

Again the boy said coaxingly, "Fritz, do dance," but the dog was not to be coaxed.

The boy frowned. "Yo'll think he can't dance, but 'deed he can. Maybe, if I dance, he'll dance too."

At the word, the ragged pickaninny began whistling, and then he capered around and around performing some wonderful steps. Whereupon Fritz began to bark and caught at his master's heels.

"Stop, Fritz, stop," but the dog would not heed, and so the dancing came to a sudden standstill.

The pickaninny cocked his head on one side and whispered to Beth:

"He's out of sorts with me. I'm disgraced in his sight. He can dance so much bettah 'n me."

"Can he really?"

"Oh, a hundred times bettah."

"He must be a wonderful dog"—Beth was about to add, "Although he doesn't look it," and then desisted out of consideration for the dog's master.

"He's mighty smart. Why, 'less yo'd see all the tricks he does, yo'd never believe dem. Besides dancin', he jumps the rope, plays ball, says his prayers, gives his paw, jumps that high yo' wouldn't b'lieve it possible, rolls over——"

"What kind of dog is he?"

The boy scratched his head. "Well, missy, I can't jes' 'xactly say."

"If he is so very wonderful, you ought to know."

The boy was nonplused for a moment. Then he declared triumphantly; "Angels am very wonderful, ain't they? But yo' can't say 'xactly what they am."

Beth had not been much impressed by the dog, but now she began to feel astounded that she had had so little discernment.

"I'd like to own such a dog," she said.

"I'd give him to yo', only I couldn't spare him. Fritz never goes any place widout me. But, I'll tell yo' what: I'll let yo' play with him when yo' want to."

"Do you work for us?"

Again the boy laughed. "I work for yo'? No, 'deed; I'se too no 'count to work for the likes of yo'. I wuz jes' cuttin' 'cross fields through yo'r yard. If Titus found me here, he'd kick me an' Fritz out."

"What is your name?"

"Caesar Augustus Jones, but they calls me Gustus. I wish I could work for yo'."

Beth pondered a moment. "If you did, would you keep Fritz here?"

Gustus caught the trend of her thoughts. His eyes sparkled and his teeth gleamed.

"Me and Fritz 'd stay all the time—nights, too, if yo' wanted."

"I'll ask papa. He'll take you to please me, I know. Come on."

Gustus hung back, and his face sobered.

"Why, what's the matter?"

"Titus 'll kick me."

"I won't let him. Come on."

Thus encouraged, Gustus and Fritz followed her as she ran to the front steps, and on into a large old-fashioned hall. She stopped, momentarily, to peek into rooms on either side. There were two apartments on the right. She afterwards learned that they were parlor and library. On the left was one spacious room designed either for a sitting-room or a bedroom.

At the end of the hall was the dining-room, running two-thirds of the way across the house. To Beth's surprise, she found the table unset, and no one within. She feared she had missed luncheon. Chancing, however, to look out through an open door, she immediately gave a little cry of delight, for she beheld Mr. and Mrs. Davenport and Marian seated at a table on the roomy piazza that ran between the dining-room and the kitchen.

Beth seized Gustus by the hand and drew him towards the family party. Fritz bounded and yelped at their heels. His cries attracted the attention of the occupants of the piazza.

"Why, Elizabeth Davenport, what——"

"Oh, papa, this is Gustus, and I want you to let him work for us. This wonderful, wonderful dog is his, and if Gustus works for us, I can have Fritz to play with."

Beth stopped an instant for breath, which gave some of the others a chance to speak.

"Mamma, aren't his rags disgraceful?" whispered Marian to her mother.

"James, what shall we do?"

Mr. Davenport addressed the boy. "Are you looking for work?"

Gustus hung his head, but managed to say:

"Yes, massa, an' little missy 'lowed yo'd hire me and Fritz."

"Oh, papa, please, please hire them. Fritz is such a very wonderful dog."

Whereupon Indianna Scott, who was acting as waitress, spoke up:

"Don't yo' b'lieve dat, missy. Dat dog am nothin' but a no 'count fice."

Beth had never heard a dog called a fice. She feared it might be something very terrible. Afterwards she learned that it was a Southern provincialism for a common dog.

"Do you know the boy, Indianna?"

"I know of him, massa. His paw am dead, an' his maw has a dozen or so of chilun, an' dey are

so pooh dat the maw can't get clothes 'nuff to cover dem. Dey say as how dis boy am always braggin' of his dog, and dat the dog am no 'count."

Gustus lost his hang-dog appearance. His eyes snapped.

"Dat ain't true. Fritz kin do all I say, only he's bashful."

Fritz did not appear very bashful, but was capering around Beth. However, her heart was won, and she cried:

"Anyway, Gustus, you and I love Fritz, don't we? Dear papa, please, please keep them."

"What can you do, Gustus?" he asked slowly.

"I—I kin brush flies," cried he exultantly.

"The boy must have some clothes, anyway. Come with me, and we'll see what we can do for you," said Mrs. Davenport.

Beth felt that she had won. In her joy she cried:

"Here, Fritz, you stay with me."

Fritz gladly obeyed. His hungry little stomach craved some of the chicken a la Creole which was being passed to Beth. As she started to put some of it into her mouth, she felt something pawing her lap. Fritz was making his wants known. Needless to say, he got some chicken from her, and from that time on these two became fast friends.

CHAPTER III

Beth's First Fishing Lesson

On Monday morning, Gustus came to Beth, bringing a cat with three kittens. The cat was of only a common breed, but Beth was delighted with the present.

Gustus was no longer ragged, but he looked very comical. There had been no boy's clothes in the house for him, and so Mrs. Davenport had fitted him out in an old suit of her husband's until another could be had. Of course, everything was much too large for Gustus, but he was as proud as Lucifer. He strutted up and down before Beth with his hands in his pockets and Fritz as usual tagging at his heels.

"Missy, I looks like de quality now shure, don't I?" he asked, grinning from ear to ear; and, not waiting for an answer, he added, "Yo'se been powerful good to me, missy, an' I'm goin' to give yo' Fritz, too."

Such generosity quite overcame Beth. "But, Gustus, I couldn't think of taking him away from you."

"Don't yo' worry, missy," he answered with a chuckle. "Yo' ain't takin' him 'way from me. I'se yo'r niggah now. Yo' owns Fritz an' me."

Beth hardly knew what to say. She thought it would be wrong to "own" Gustus. Slave days were a thing of the past. However, his devotion made her feel self-important.

"Well, Gustus, you must be a good boy," was all she could think to say.

"Yes, 'deed, missy. Come with me, an' I'll show yo' a bird's nest."

"I can't, Gustus. Mamma told me I must play indoors unless it clears. You know she's gone to town with Marian to see about a school for her. I'm not to go until next winter.

"I went to school once for a little while," she continued presently. "It happened this way: Marian attended a private school kept by a poor lady that mamma felt sorry for. Marian was not well, so mamma let me go in her place, so the lady wouldn't lose money. They didn't think I'd study hard, but, Gustus, I like to know things, and learning to read was a great help. So I studied very hard. Then I was taken very sick and was out of my head. I talked about books all the time. The doctor said I came near having brain fever, and it wouldn't do for me to go for awhile. I don't believe it would hurt me, but that's why I'm not going to school this year. Did you ever go to school, Gustus?"

"No, missy; me an' Fritz don't need no larnin'."

"But you do, Gustus, and I'm going to teach you."

He did not look particularly pleased at the offer. Nevertheless, Beth put the cat and the kittens down, and started to run for her books.

Bent as usual on mischief, Fritz made a dive and, catching the prettiest kitten by the neck, started away with it. The mother cat was after him in an instant. Her back was ruffled, and she struck Fritz with her sharp paw. He dropped the kitten and ran howling from the room. Gustus thought it a good opportunity to escape and started after Fritz.

"Gustus, come back," called Beth.

He looked crestfallen, but felt in duty bound to do as his little mistress bade. She brought her books, and had Gustus sit down beside her. Then she tried him with the alphabet. He proved woefully ignorant. After pointing out to him, A, B, and C, many, many times, she said:

"Show me A, Gustus."

He grinned. "A what, missy?"

"The letter A, of course, g—" She almost said "goosie," but thought in time that such a word would not be dignified for a teacher to use.

She did not find the fun in teaching that she had expected. Nevertheless, she persevered. Her face grew flushed as Gustus proved himself more and more ignorant.

When Mrs. Davenport returned from town, she found Beth at her self-imposed task.

"Mamma, Gustus ought to go to school."

"I don't wants to go," he cried, his eyes rolling so there was hardly any black visible in them.

Mrs. Davenport did not press the point. She intended to talk it over with her husband.

"Mr. Davenport and I bought these for you," she said, untying a package and drawing out a suit of boy's clothes, stockings, shoes, and underwear.

Gustus's pride now passed all bounds. He let forth a perfect avalanche of thanks, using large words, the meaning of which he had little idea. Even young darkies like big-sounding speech.

The morning passed quickly to Beth. To her delight, towards noon the sun broke through the clouds. This reminded her of Harvey Baker's invitation to fish.

"Mamma, may I go down to the wharf?" she asked immediately after luncheon. "Harvey Baker asked me to fish with him. He's a neighbor's boy I met Saturday."

"Well, I declare. Why didn't you tell me before?"

"I forgot." She had had so many things to think of and talk about, that she had not thought much about Harvey except at night. Then that awful alligator haunted her until she wanted to call her mamma, but she had not dared because of her promise.

"May I go, mamma?"

"But I do not know anything about him. He may not be nice at all."

Maggie, who chanced to be present, now spoke up:

"De Bakers am quality, Miss Mary. I wouldn't be feared to let missy go wid any Baker. I'se s'prised, do, dat Harvey axed her, 'cause he don't like girls. Are yo' sure, honey, he axed yo'?"

"Of course I am."

"Den yo' needn't fear, Miss Mary. Harvey's a big boy, and he'll take good care of her."

With this assurance, Mrs. Davenport gave her consent.

Beth put on her hat and hurried down the avenue to the river. On the end of the wharf sat Harvey, holding a fishing pole. He turned his head at her approach.

"Hello, Beth. I hardly expected you. I thought your mamma might be 'fraid to let you come."

She smiled. "Maggie said you were 'quality,' and would take care of me."

Harvey gave a grunt. "Don't know about quality, but as long as your mamma trusted me, she shan't repent. Take this line, and go to fishing."

He handed one to her and she dropped the end into the water. Harvey broke into a hearty laugh.

"You don't 'spect to catch fish without bait, do you?"

She answered meekly: "I s'pose not, but what is bait?"

Harvey laughed harder than ever. "Well, you are silly."

Beth felt aggrieved over being called silly, but she tried to look dignified.

"Don't care, you're just as silly as me. My papa says if people don't keep quiet, they'll scare all the fish away. You're laughing awful loud."

He immediately sobered down. "True for you, Beth. It is silly to laugh and you're a wise girl. You'll make a good fisher. Here, I'll put the bait on for you."

He baited her line and threw it out into deep water for her.

She waited patiently for the fish to bite, but it seemed as if her patience was to go unrewarded. She wished for Harvey's good opinion, and so she did not even speak. It proved pretty dull work and to make matters worse, Harvey pulled in a number of fish, while she did not get even a nibble.

She would have given up in despair had not her pride prevented. Harvey felt sorry for her and proved himself magnanimous.

"Beth, the fish are biting lively here. You take my place—yes, you must, and I'll go around on the other side."

Matters did not mend for Beth even with the change. The fish seemed to follow the boy. He caught several on the other side of the wharf, while the patient little fisher maiden waited in vain for the fish to take pity on her.

Presently, she almost feel asleep, fishing proved so uninteresting. Then there was a terrible jerk on her line, followed by a steady pull. Beth was afraid the alligator had swallowed the line, and that she would be dragged into the river. Nevertheless, she hung on bravely.

"Harvey, Harvey, come quick. I can't pull it in. Come quick."

He rushed to her assistance. The two children began pulling together. Harvey's eyes grew almost as big as his companion's.

"Beth, I believe you've caught a whale."

It was a very hard tug for them, but finally something black wiggled out of the water. Beth gave a little cry.

"Harvey, it's a snake. I don't want it, do you?"

His eyes sparkled. "It's no snake, Beth. It's an eel and a beauty too. My, what a monster!"

"Are you sure it is not a snake?"

"Of course I am. Darkies call them second cousins to snakes and won't eat them, but they are fine eating. My, just see him squirm. Isn't he big, though? You're a brick, Beth, to catch him."

By this time, the eel was safely landed on the wharf, and proved to be indeed a monster. It was a wonder that the children had ever been able to pull him in. Harvey tried to unhook him, but failed; for just as the boy thought he had him, the eel would slip away.

"Let's take him up to the house on the line. I want to show him to mamma," cried Beth.

"All right, but first we'll fix some lines for crabs."

"What are crabs?"

"My, don't you know? Well, we'll catch some when we come back and then you'll see."

He took some lines without hooks and tied raw beef on the ends of them. Then he threw them into the water.

Beth, as proud as if she had caught a tarpon, took up her line with the eel on it, and away marched the children to the house.

"Mamma, just see what I caught."

"Well, I declare," cried Mrs. Davenport at sight of the eel. "Did you really catch that all by yourself, child?"

"Yes, mamma, except that Harvey had to help me pull it in, or else the eel would have pulled me into the water. It tugged awfully hard, but I wouldn't let go. Mamma, this is Harvey and we're

just having heaps of fun." She had forgotten, already, that a few minutes before she thought she was having a very stupid time.

Harvey raised his cap. Mrs. Davenport liked the boy's appearance.

"Mamma, you keep the eel to show papa. Harvey and I are going back to catch crabs. Come on, Harvey."

Mrs. Davenport detained them a moment. "Harvey, you'll take good care of my little girl, won't you?"

"Yes, ma'am," and back the children scampered to the wharf.

"You see if there is anything on this line, Beth, while I go around to the other lines. If there is, call me, and I'll come with the net, and help you land him."

Away went Harvey. Beth began pulling in the line. There, hanging on the meat with two awful claws, was a great big greenish crab. His eyes bulged out, and altogether he looked so fierce that Beth was somewhat frightened at him, but she wished to surprise Harvey. Therefore she overcame her fear, and continued pulling up the line. For a wonder, the crab hung on all the way from the water to the wharf. Beth was delighted to think she had caught something without Harvey's aid. Mr. Crab, however, as soon as he felt himself trapped, let go of the meat, and began crawling towards the side of the wharf. Beth saw her prize vanishing, and made a dive for it. Up went the crab's claws, and caught the child by the fingers. A scream immediately rent the air.

Harvey came running to find the cause of the commotion. He had to laugh, notwithstanding tears were streaming down Beth's face. She looked so ludicrous, dancing up and down with that awful crab hanging on like grim death.

"Beware of the Jabberwock that bites, my child," quoted Harvey.

Beth stopped screaming an instant. "I thought it was a crab."

"So it is. I was just repeating a line from *Alice in Wonderland*."

While Harvey spoke, he was trying to loosen the crab. The harder he pulled, the more angry it grew, and the harder it bit. Finally, he pulled so desperately that the crab came, but a claw was left hanging to poor Beth's finger.

Harvey started to drop the crab. Again Beth ceased her yelling.

"Harvey, don't you dare let my crab go. Put it in the basket and then come and get this awful claw off my finger."

He did as he was bid, secretly admiring his little friend's pluck. They had a great time getting off the dismembered claw, but, finally, they succeeded. Poor Beth's finger was bitten to the bone. Harvey really felt very sympathetic, but, boy-like, was somewhat bashful about expressing it.

"Beth, does it hurt much?" was all he said.

"Pretty bad," she admitted, forcing back the tears. "Say, Harvey, were there any other crabs?"

"I had time to look at only two of the lines, I got three crabs from the two. There were two on one line, so with yours we have four. But never mind the crabs; we must go up to the house and have your finger dressed."

"No, we must first see if there are any other crabs. Here, tie my handkerchief around my finger. I guess I can stand it awhile."

The handkerchief was tied about the sore finger, and then Beth watched Harvey while he pulled up the lines. There were crabs on every one, and on some of them there were two. Harvey would pull the crabs to the surface of the water and then scoop the net under them. In moving the crabs from the net to the basket, he held them by the hind legs, because, in this position, a crab cannot reach around with its claws to bite.

Altogether, the children caught about fifteen crabs, and they took them up to the house with them. Arriving there, they found that Mrs. Davenport had driven to town to bring home Mr. Davenport and Marian.

Beth therefore went to Maggie about the finger, and Harvey accompanied her. Maggie proved very sympathetic.

"Yo' precious little honey, yo'. Dat finger jes' am awful, but I knows what'll cure it in no time. Here, yo', Gustus, yo' run and fetch me some tar. Hurry, yo' lazy niggah yo'. Dar, dar, honey chile, it'll be all right in no time. Tar am jes' fine for a sore."

For a wonder, Gustus did hurry and was back in no time with the tar. Maggie dressed the

wound with it very gently and Beth began to feel easier immediately.

"Now, honey, it'll be all right. If yo'd only known, and jes' held yo'r finger with dat crab out over the watah, it 'd have seen its shadah and gone aftah it."

"Here, Beth," Harvey now said, "you can have all of the crabs; I guess I'd better go."

"Please don't go, Harvey; I want you to stay. Say, Harvey, are crabs good to eat?"

"Of course, they are. You just put them in water and boil them and they are dandy."

"Oh, how I wish we could boil them. Wouldn't papa be surprised? Maggie, can't we boil them?" and Beth seized the cook's hand and held it, pressing it coaxingly.

"Law, honey, dar ain't no room on de stove. I's gettin' de dinnah."

"Please, Maggie, make room," continued Beth, already having learned her power of persuasion over her new mammy.

"I can't, honey, but I'll tell yo' what. Yo' an' Harvey kin do it if he knows how to boil dem."

"Of course, I know how."

"Well, I'll let yo' take dis big iron kettle into de library. Yo' kin put de kettle on de fire, dar, an' boil dem."

Beth danced up and down for joy. "Oh, won't that be fun. Thank you, Maggie. You're a lovely Maggie."

"Dar ain't no hot watah, but I'll take dis cold watah in fur yo', an' it'll heat in no time."

Maggie carried the kettle, half-filled with water, and placed it securely, as she thought, on the big open wood-fire in the library. Then she left the children to their own devices, Fritz alone keeping them company. A watched kettle never boils, and the children did not have the patience to test the truth of this.

"I hate to wait for water to boil," said Beth.

Just then Harvey conceived a brilliant idea.

"Say, Beth, we'll put in the crabs before it begins to boil. Then we can play until they're done."

"And the cold water won't hurt them like hot, will it, Harvey?"

Without answering, he emptied the crabs into the kettle. Beth viewed them critically.

"There's the horrid old thing that bit me. I know him by his one claw."

"He shall be the first one eaten to show how mean he was. What shall we play?"

"Let's play stage."

He accepted the suggestion, and while they played, Fritz snoozed comfortably before the fire.

The water began to get hot, and the crabs became lively. They crawled around so vigorously that a log slipped and upset the kettle. There was a sizzling of water, and, in an instant, fifteen crabs were loose in the Davenport library.

This avalanche of crabs awakened Fritz, who opened his eyes halfway and beheld a crab at his very nose. Perhaps in his sleepiness, he thought it another kind of kitten ready for a frolic. At any rate, he put out his paw towards the crab, which met his advances more than halfway. With a wild howl, Fritz jumped up on three feet while the crab clung grimly to the fourth.

"Poor Fritz! You, too, should beware of the Jabberwock that bites," cried Beth from the lounge where she had taken refuge.

Around and around whirled Fritz in a most lively manner.

"Just see him," cried Beth triumphantly. "Gustus always said he could dance, and this proves it."

Harvey, who was trying to catch some of the crabs, grunted disdainfully, but continued his unsuccessful chase without any other comment.

Fortunately for Fritz, the crab dropped of its own accord, and the frightened dog tore like a streak of lightning through the house and on outdoors.

Once Harvey stooped and thought he surely had a crab, when Beth beheld another crab with

claws upstretched right behind.

"Harvey, come here quick," cried Beth; "a crab's going to bite you in the back."

Thereupon, he, too, jumped upon the lounge to escape the threatening claws. Immediately, however, he said:

"Oh, pshaw, it's silly to be afraid of crabs. I'm going to get down again." Beth, however, caught hold of his hand, saying:

"No, I won't let you. I wish somebody would come to help us. I'm going to try to make Maggie hear me. Maggie. Maggie."

Back from the kitchen floated the slow tones of Maggie.

"What am it, honey?"

"Maggie, come here, quick."

Then they heard the soft tread of her feet crossing the piazza.

"She's coming, Harvey."

Maggie poked her head through the door and beheld the children upon the lounge.

"Laws a massy, what am yo' doin' thar, honeys?"

Then she saw the crabs on the floor, and she began to laugh.

Now when Maggie laughed it meant more than ordinary merriment. Her eyes rolled and her sides shook.

"Ha, ha, ha. Oh my, oh me. Ha, ha, ha. Well, dis am a sight. I jes' 'lows I must go to Titus about dis yere. Ha, ha, ha," and away she went.

"But, Maggie," cried Beth in protest, "I think you're real mean. We want you to help us catch them."

But Maggie paid no attention to the appeal.

The one-clawed crab stopped for a moment in front of the lounge.

"Harvey, he's making fun of us, too,"

"The impudent thing," exclaimed Harvey, jumping down.

By a dexterous move, he captured the crab.

"Don't you come back here with it," commanded Beth.

There was a space free from crabs between Harvey and the window. He ran to the window and threw the crab out.

January chanced to be working not far away, and Harvey spied him.

"Come in here quick, January," he cried. "There are a lot of crabs after us."

January, for a wonder, came running, and his valor for once proved remarkable. He showed no fear of the crabs, and darted around so quickly that he caught every one in the room. The one-legged one that Harvey had thrown out of the window was never found. Perhaps it made its way back to the river, and told of its harrowing experiences on land, and especially how it had lost its claw.

Fritz limped for several days after his experience with the crab and Beth had a terrible nightmare that night in which crabs were giants with claws of iron.

CHAPTER IV

Visiting

Beth was seated with Fritz and the kittens in a large Mexican hammock on the front porch. She held up a warning finger to her mother who stood in the doorway.

"Mamma, do not frighten birdie away. He is not the least bit afraid of me, and I love to hear him sing."

Mrs. Davenport was surprised to see a mocking bird perched on the railing directly by the side of Beth. His little head was cocked sidewise, and floods of sweet sounds issued from his throat.

His spouse, who was guarding their nest up in the big live oak in the front yard, trilled her limited paeon of praise.

Beth, who often acted as interpreter for beast and bird, thought the proud wife-bird meant to say:

"Bravo. Isn't he the most wonderful tenor that ever lived? Are you surprised that I love him so? He is the best and smartest husband in all the world."

Fritz and black pussy grew restless. She spit at him, and he barked at her.

"Now, my dears, do let me enjoy this beautiful music in peace," Beth said reprovingly.

Hardly had she spoken, before black pussy sprang away, and Fritz was after her in an instant.

Beth did not dare follow for fear of frightening away Mr. Mocking Bird, who stopped singing as cat and dog scampered away, but who had not yet flown back to his mate. He was watching fearfully every move of the frolicsome pair.

Away scurried kitty to the other end of the porch with Fritz a close second. Suddenly, she turned, settling down on her back with her claws out-stretched, ready to receive Fritz. In an instant he was on her. Over and over they rolled in their wild play. Fritz became too rough to suit puss, and she gave him a sudden dab with her sharp little claws. The blow disabled him for a moment, allowing puss to spring away from him. She scampered down the steps and towards the big tree with Fritz again after her.

Mr. Mocking Bird was up in arms in an instant. How dared the impudent creatures approach that tree where dwelt his wife and children! He flew to the rescue.

Mrs. Mocking Bird, too, had grown so nervous that she, also, left her young, and joined in the fray. Together Mr. and Mrs. Mocking Bird dived and pecked at the cat and the dog in a most ferocious manner.

Beth rushed out, ready to assist the birds, if necessary, but her aid was not needed.

Black puss and Fritz were so taken by surprise at the fierce onslaught of the birds that they turned and sneaked away as fast as they could go. Thus, through the power of love, the weaker triumphed over the stronger. Later on the mocking birds also came out victors in another contest, and against greater numbers, too. It happened in this wise:

As the days went by, Beth grew somewhat restless. She did not exactly tire of Fritz, puss, and Arabella, but she longed for diversion. Then one evening Mr. Davenport brought home a large coop of chickens, and calling Beth to him, he said:

"You are to tend these, daughter, and hunt eggs every day."

"Oh you dear, good papa. I want to take one of the sweet things in my arms."

Thereupon she tried to get a chicken, but somehow, in so doing, she upset the coop. Away flurried the chickens in every direction. Beth felt ready to cry.

"Never mind," said Mr. Davenport; "when they go to roost to-night, we can catch them, and put them in the chicken house."

That night, some of the chickens perched on sheds, and some on trees. A few had the hardihood to fly up on the branches of the live oak in the front yard.

Mrs. Mocking Bird was just falling asleep in the nest with her young, and Mr. Mocking Bird was already asleep not far from her side. The chickens aroused the mother bird in an instant.

"Dearest," she piped, "I hear a dreadful noise down-stairs. I think there must be burglars in the house. You must go down and see."

Now, every one knows that a man hates to be disturbed from a sound sleep, and Mr. Mocking Bird proved no exception.

"Oh, birdie," he grumbled, "do leave me alone; you're always imagining things."

"Imagining things, am I?" she answered shrilly. "Just hear that awful noise. You're so lazy that you would see me and the children murdered before you'd move. If you don't want me to think you a coward, you'll go down this instant. This instant, I say."

Now Mr. Mocking Bird was, as Mrs. Mocking Bird knew, very brave, and he also loved her praise. So he only blinked his eyes once more, and literally flew down-stairs. There he spied the chickens settling down for a good night's rest. Such impudence aroused his ire. He did not hesitate a second, but dived into their midst and pecked furiously at the poor, unsuspecting intruders. The chickens, taken utterly by surprise, fluttered to the ground without offering any resistance. They cackled so loudly, however, that the noise brought Titus to their rescue, and he succeeded in capturing the badly frightened hens.

Mr. Mocking Bird, triumphant, ascended to his anxious spouse.

"Dearest," she cried, "you're not hurt, are you?"

"Hurt!" he repeated boastfully, "hurt? Well, I should say not. It was only some upstart chickens who dared to sneak into the house, and I'm more than a match for any number of such. I guess we shan't be disturbed again by chickens or by impudent dogs and cats."

Mr. Mocking Bird proved right in his surmise. The birds thereafter enjoyed their home without further intrusion.

Under Beth's care, the chickens flourished finely. They laid many an egg which in due time were placed beneath mamma hens.

There was a very proud little girl in the Davenport family when finally balls of yellow broke through the egg shells.

Then Beth began saving eggs for Easter, and, on Easter Day, she found that she had enough to give every darky one, besides having all that were wanted for her own family.

This Eastertide brought new diversions to Beth. For one thing, she received an invitation to spend a night in town with a little girl named Laura Corner. The Davenports and the Corners had been friends in the North before the two families moved South.

Beth had never before spent a night away from home. She thought it would be a "sperience" to go, and prevailed upon Mrs. Davenport to let her accept the invitation.

The momentous day arrived at last. Beth wished to take all her belongings with her, from Fritz to a small trunk. She had to be content, however, with a valise.

Fritz and Arabella were admonished to be good during her absence, and the chickens were entrusted to Marian's care.

Mrs. Davenport drove Beth to town. Upon reaching the Corners' home, Beth's heart sank unaccountably, and she had a hard time to keep the tears back, when she kissed her mother good-bye. However, Laura and the Corners were so very cordial that her spirits soon revived.

In the afternoon several little girls, who had been invited to play, came in. Among the number was one who especially attracted Beth. She was slight and graceful. Her hair was golden and her eyes were blue. Beth, of course, was introduced to all the girls, but did not catch the name of this one.

"She looks like that picture of the cherub we have at home," decided Beth. "I wonder what her name is. I guess I'll call her 'Cherub' to myself. Cherub, you're very pretty, but you're too quiet to be much fun."

Most of the little girls had their dolls with them; all, in fact, excepting Beth and the "Cherub." The latter sat apart from the other children. She looked so very demure that Beth thought her bashful, and took pity on her. Seating herself beside her, she asked:

"Wouldn't your mamma let you bring your doll? My mamma thought I had better not bring mine so far."

The "Cherub" showed little interest in the conversation. She answered curtly:

"I haven't a doll."

Beth's eyes opened in surprise. "You haven't any doll? What a pity."

Then she hesitated. She feared the "Cherub" might be too poor to afford dolls. She was soon undeceived, however, by the "Cherub" exclaiming:

"I don't think it a pity. I don't care for dolls; they're a nuisance. I like to play outdoors."

"So do I."

The "Cherub" grew animated. "Do you? Say, can you climb trees and walk on stilts and——"

"What are stilts?"

"Don't you know?" There was a slight contempt expressed for such woeful ignorance. "They

are long pieces of wood with places for your feet up from the ground. It's just as if you had wooden legs, only they make you tall so that you feel quite grown up."

"I'd like to walk on stilts."

"Would you? Where do you live?"

"Out on the old shell road."

"What! are your folks the people who bought the place near us?"

"Do you live on the shell road, too?" Beth was delighted. She was beginning to think the "Cherub" might prove very companionable.

"Yes. Your name is Beth Davenport, isn't it? Mine's Julia Gordon. Say, Beth, I'll come to see you and teach you how to walk on stilts if you like."

"Will you, really? When will you come?"

"To-morrow morning."

Beth's face fell. "Oh, that's a pity. I shan't be home. I'm going to stay here all night."

"Well, never mind. I'll come the morning after."

"All right, don't forget."

"No, I'll be there right after breakfast."

Games were started at this juncture, and then came refreshments. Soon afterwards, the guests took their departure. The "Cherub" said in parting:

"We'll have a jolly time with the stilts, Beth. I've been wanting to teach somebody for a long time."

Laura and Beth had a merry time together until tea-time. Then, after tea, Laura's older sister, Florrie, told them stories. Beth was simply fascinated. She could listen forever, she thought, and not grow weary. Florrie made her characters live by the magic of her voice and words.

Just before it was time for the children to retire, Florrie took down the Bible and read a chapter to them.

Then the children went up-stairs to bed. They had a pillow fight after they were in their night-dresses. Sad to relate, in the scuffle, their clothes were strewn around the room, and Beth carelessly failed to gather hers together again.

They talked in bed until Mrs. Corner called to them to stop. Laura soon fell asleep, but Beth's heart, again, grew heavy. She missed the good-night kiss from her mamma, and tears rose to her eyes. She tried not to sob for fear of awakening Laura. Minutes seemed hours to her. She realized more than ever the depth of her love for her mother, and she resolved in future to be the best girl alive. That resolve somehow quieted her so that she fell asleep and forgot her heartache in pleasant dreams. She dreamed that it was the day after the morrow, and that Julia had come with stilts so high that they touched the clouds. Beth walked on them without the least difficulty; then, all of a sudden, she dropped them, and found herself flying with the utmost ease. She wondered she had never tried it before; it was so very delightful to fly. But, suddenly, the clouds turned into smoke and fire. Beth awakened with a start. The room was very light, as light as if it was broad daylight.

Beth gave Laura a poke, "Laura, it must be late. See how light it is."

Laura jumped out of bed, and, running to one of the windows, raised the curtain. Both of the children cried out in fright then. Flames shot and curled to the very window of their room. Laura could not tell whether their house was on fire or not. She feared so, and the house next door was one mass of flames.

Beth sprang out of bed, too.

"Mamma, mamma," screamed Laura. Nobody answered. "Come quick or we'll burn." Still only the crackling of the flames could be heard.

"They've forgotten us," cried Beth with chattering teeth. "Laura, you know the way down-stairs, don't you? Let's go."

"We must dress first," answered Laura.

Beth stamped her foot. "I'm not going to wait to dress. Besides, I don't know where my things are. Oh, why didn't I mind mamma and put them away carefully. Now they'll burn."

The more prudent Laura gathered up her clothes from a chair where she had laid them, and

led the way into the hall. They found it pitch dark there.

Suddenly Laura stopped. "Oh, Beth, I can't let it burn."

"What will burn, Laura?"

"My beautiful new Easter hat. I must go for it."

"Laura Corner, you *must not* go back for it. We ourselves might burn while you were getting it."

But Laura had thrust her clothes into Beth's unwilling arms, and was off like a flash to rescue her Easter hat. Beth did not know the way sufficiently well to go on by herself, and so, trembling, she awaited Laura's return.



[Illustration: Laura Corner in the treasured Easter hat.]

Laura was soon back, pressing the precious hat close to her side. Such treatment was likely to do it great damage, but, in her excitement, Laura did not stop to think of this.

Down-stairs a light shone in the parlor. Guided by its friendly beams, Laura led the way there. No one was within. The house was deserted but for the two trembling girls.

"Beth, God alone can help us," and Laura's face was almost as white as the Easter hat under her arm.

Beth's lip trembled. "He's so far away. I wish mamma were here."

"Beth, God will hear us if we pray. Get down on your knees beside me."

"I'd rather run out into the street," answered Beth, who always believed in action rather than words.

"You're a wicked little girl. My mamma says I must never go on the street without some grown-up person. So get on your knees this minute."

Beth meekly obeyed. Laura folded her hands. Beth imitated her.

"Begin," said Laura.

"Begin what?" and Beth's eyes were wide open from surprise; yes, and from fear, too.

"Why, to pray, of course."

"I'm not going to. You're the one who wanted to. Why don't you begin yourself?"

"I can't. I'm too scared. Go on, Beth, and pray."

"I—I don't know what to say. Would 'Now I lay me down to sleep,' do?"

"No, silly. We're not laying us down to sleep. It's a fire. God's to keep us from burning to death. So pray."

"I—I'm not going to," and Beth jumped to her feet.

Laura began crying: "You're very wicked, Beth Davenport, and we'll burn to death, and it'll all be your fault."

"We won't burn if you'll come with me into the street. I'm going anyway."

"Why, children, what are you doing here?" asked Mrs. Corner, coming into the parlor.

Laura rushed to her mamma and threw her arms around her neck.

"Oh, mamma, we thought you'd forgotten us, and would let us burn to death."

"Why, you poor little things. Of course, I hadn't forgotten you. Our house is not on fire. The fire is next door. We've been over there helping, and we thought we would not waken you unless there was danger of this house burning. They're getting the flames under control. Charlie has been working with wet blankets to keep our roof from catching. Now, children, you must go back to bed. Come, I'll go up with you."

When the two were again in bed and alone, Beth said;

"Laura, you ought to want to make up for calling me wicked."

"I guess you aren't wicked, after all, for God didn't let us burn. I'm sorry, Beth."

The children kissed. Then, worn out by the thrilling events of the night, slumber claimed them and held them captive until late next day.

CHAPTER V

Walking on Stilts

Julia came on the promised morning, and, to the delight of Beth, she brought not only her own stilts, but bore an extra pair as a gift to Beth.

Poor Beth was black and blue all over before she conquered those unruly stilts, but it took more than bruises to dampen her ardor.

Julia was an expert in stilt walking. She could go up and down steps on hers; she could dance with them, and do other feats that appeared marvelous to Beth, and made her ambitious to do likewise.

However, Beth persevered so faithfully that soon she was on the road to being an expert herself. Stilts took up a good share of the morning, and, by lunch time, both children had fine appetites, although Beth was very tired.

Mrs. Davenport suggested that the children play in the house for a change. They soon tired, however, of the indoor sports, and Beth, although she was so lame that she could hardly move, declared that she had never felt better, and away they ran to their stilts again.

Julia had already shown off about all of her stilt accomplishments, so she thought and thought to devise something new whereby to arouse Beth's admiration afresh.

"Beth, I have it. We'll walk out in the river on our stilts. I've never tried that. It will be great."

Beth looked somewhat doubtful.

"Weren't stilts made for land? They're not boats."

"Oh, pshaw. If you're afraid, you can watch me."

Watch her indeed! Dragons could not have kept Beth from making the attempt if Julia did.

They took their stilts to the river. Beth was in such a hurry to show Julia she was not afraid, that she had great difficulty in starting. Julia mounted, and walked out into the water as proudly

as a peacock. Beth followed, but, of necessity, more slowly, and she kept near the wharf. Julia skimmed through the water for a minute or two almost as easily as she went on land. But alas, pride goes before a fall.

The river bed near the shore is of hard sand, but a little way out it becomes marshy.

Suddenly Julia's stilts stuck. She tried to raise them, but they would not budge. Now, as every stilt walker knows, it is impossible to stay motionless on stilts. Over Julia went into the water, headforemost.

Beth was so startled that she herself almost lost her balance, but, fortunately, she grabbed the wharf, and scrambled up on that. Away floated her stilts.

"Hello, what have we here?" and Harvey's boat darted towards them from under the bridge.

"Oh, Harvey, save her," cried poor Beth, almost in tears but somewhat reassured now that her boy friend was near.

"The water is hardly deep enough to drown a flea," he answered.

However, he rowed up to Julia, and held out his hand.

"You had better step into my boat; you might be a worse stick in the mud than ever if you waded ashore."

"I prefer to walk."

Julia tried to look dignified, but the attempt was an utter failure. Dirty water dripped from her matted hair, while her face and clothes were streaked with mud.

Harvey could not keep back his laughter at the odd sight, and it made Julia very indignant. She said nothing to him, however, but instead seemed to be angry with her innocent little girl friend.

Beth ran to meet her and Julia gave vent to her feelings by crying:

"Beth Davenport, are you laughing at me too? Well, I'd rather be laughed at than be a 'fraid cat like you."

Now Beth thought this was very mean, especially when she had considered herself so brave. She therefore could not resist the temptation of saying:

"Well, anyway, I told you that stilts weren't boats."

"I'm going home, Beth Davenport."

Poor Julia looked so forlorn that Beth relented.

"Julia, really I didn't laugh. Please come home with me."

"Beth," called Harvey from the river, "I wish you'd get Miss Stick-in-the-Mud's picture for me. It would be the funniest thing I ever saw."

"What a horrid boy," exclaimed Julia.

By the time the children reached the house, Julia had been persuaded to remain.

Mrs. Davenport refrained from giving them much of a scolding, as she thought Julia really needed coddling a little. She was soon arrayed in some of Beth's clothes.

Shortly after, Mrs. Gordon came in to make a call on Mrs. Davenport. She proved a very lovable woman, and won the hearts of both Beth and her mother immediately.

The accident was related to her. She drew Julia to her side and said:

"Daughter, you really must be more careful. What would mamma do if anything happened to her little girl? Never again try walking in the river on stilts."

Both Julia and Beth immediately experienced a sinking of the heart. Her words reminded them that their beloved stilts had not been rescued from the river. Julia ran towards the door.

"Daughter, where are you going?"

"After my stilts. They're in the river."

"Leave them there. You've had enough of stilts." And remain in the river they did, although the girls pleaded very hard to get them.

Julia was asked to stay all night, and her mother consented, taking her departure alone.

"Julia," said Beth, "I must tell you about a dream I had the night of the fire. It was about stilts that reached up to the clouds, and I walked on them. Then I began to fly. Oh, it was lovely. I wish we could really fly."

"So do I. I believe we could if we tried. Let's try. We'll go up on that great high shed and jump off. We can make our arms go for wings, and it will be just like flying. Come on."

Away they hurried to the shed. After they had climbed up on it, it seemed dreadfully high to Beth, but she did not say so. Perhaps it seemed formidable to Julia, also, but her actions would not have led one to believe it.

"I'll try first, Beth."

Thereupon Julia leaped from the shed, making her arms flap for wings. Strange to relate, she landed safely and without feeling much jar from it.

"Oh, it's lovely, Beth. Come on."

Poor Beth did not think it so lovely. She put a bold face on the matter, though, and jumped as she had seen Julia do, also keeping her arms going in the same manner as Julia. However, she landed with a sickening thud that jarred every bone in her body.

"Isn't it fun, Beth? Let's try it again."

Up Julia scampered upon the shed. Beth, not to be outdone, followed after, but more slowly.

Again Julia jumped and Beth followed. She felt the jar even more the second time than she had the first.

Fortunately, Mr. Davenport arrived on the scene just in time to see their last leap.

"Children, children, what are you thinking about to jump off that high shed? You might hurt yourselves badly. Don't do such a thing as that again. Run into the house now; it is about dinner time."

The children did as they were bidden; but when Mrs. Davenport beheld Beth, she exclaimed:

"Why, Beth, what is the matter? You seem to be limping."

Beth tried to brace up. "Oh, it's nothing, mamma. I'm a little stiff, that's all."

"What have you two been up to?"

"We've been flying."

Julia clasped her hands in an ecstasy of delight. "And it was such fun, Mrs. Davenport."

"Flying? What do you mean?"

"Well, you see, we got up on that shed back of the barn, and jumped off. We made our arms go for wings."

"The very idea of jumping off that tall shed! No wonder you are lame. Beth cannot play another bit to-day. You two will have to go to bed very early to-night."

Beth for once in her life did not demur. She was so worn out that she was really glad to go to bed. After a good night's rest she was much better, but she continued lame for several days.

CHAPTER VI

House Building

The Gordons had several cords of square cut wood in their back yard, and this inspired Julia and Beth to a great undertaking. They built a house, piling two sticks lengthways and two crossways, one above the other, and so on until they had laid the walls for three rooms. They worked like beavers, and Mrs. Gordon, amused by this new scheme of the two indefatigables, and thinking to herself that the children would probably be tired of the house by the time the wood was needed, allowed one of the servants to help. He used the top of the box in which the piano came for a roof, boarded the floors, and, in the middle room, helped to make an alcove. In this Julia and Beth piled up wood for a bed, saying that they did not mind if it was hard.

When completed, the girls took out to their new paradise everything they dared lay hands on,

and asked Mrs. Gordon to inspect their work.

"'Walk into my house,' said the spider to the fly. 'It's the beautifullest house you ever did spy,'" quoted Julia, purposely changing parlor to house. "Just walk in. You can stand up—well, almost—if you stoop a little bit. This is the kitchen," she continued, for she had taken her mother in the back way with a purpose in view. "Oh, mamma, we do so want a stove. No family can keep house without one. We don't know what to do. Please, please help us."

"How would a Dutch oven do?" suggested Mrs. Gordon.

"What's that? How's it made?"

Mrs. Gordon explained: "It's made of brick, and——"

"How good you are. Who'll make it?"

Mrs. Gordon could not find it in her heart to disappoint the girls, so she furnished the materials, and had a darky make the oven. When done, it was somewhat clumsy, but it looked serviceable.

"Beth," said Julia, "we can't be just you and me. We must be man and wife. Our names will be Mr. and Mrs. Newbeginner. I'm John Newbeginner, and——"

"I'd rather be the man, because he's the head of the family and he doesn't work so hard. Besides, I don't want a little bit of a man like you. I'm the taller."

"Well, but I'm the elder, and the elder is always the man."

"All right, but you have to help about the house. You can't go away to business."

"Let's stay here all night, to-night."

Away they ran to beg permission.

The two mothers, however, seriously objected. Finally the young couple were pacified by Mrs. Newbeginner being allowed to spend the night with her spouse at the Gordon homestead which adjoined the Newbeginner mansion.

The next morning, Mrs. Newbeginner awakened at peep of day. She gave Mr. Newbeginner a poke and then jumped out of bed.

"Jul—John, I mean, it's time to get up and build the fire."

"Leave me alone," snapped Mr. Newbeginner in a truly masculine style.

"But Jul—John, you know we are going to get our own breakfast, and I can't build the fire all by myself. Please get up."

Thus entreated, Mr. Newbeginner condescended to arise. His wife was already dressing.

Together they descended to the kitchen, and Jemima, the cook, furnished them with some uncooked steak, some potatoes, butter, material to make cakes, and other necessaries.

The fire was soon built. Then such a hustling as ensued. Mr. and Mrs. Newbeginner had many a dispute before breakfast was ready. Mrs. Newbeginner might have foreseen the result of allowing a man in her kitchen.

Such a running back and forth as there was between their house and the Gordons'; for the Newbeginners began housekeeping by borrowing almost everything.

Mr. Newbeginner insisted that he knew how to make pancakes better than his wife. She therefore allowed him to try his hand at them while she cooked the meat and potatoes. Her part of the breakfast was ready before his. Thereupon, she set the pans containing the viands on a ledge of the oven above the live coals to keep them warm.

Mr. Newbeginner, as soon as he had cooked one batch of cakes, placed them beside the meat and potatoes. Then he baked another and another.

Alas, just as the last cake was baked, Mrs. Newbeginner bustled in from the bedroom where they had set the table. Now there was a long pole that ran out from the oven as its main support. Poor Mrs. Newbeginner in her excitement over their first breakfast somehow stumbled over the pole. Down she fell. But worse, down fell the stove also, and the breakfast which had caused them so much trouble tumbled into the red hot coals.

Up jumped Mrs. Newbeginner, and threw some water that happened to be handy on the fire. Her quickness saved their home from being burned, but not their breakfast. Tears rose and welled over the face of Mr. Newbeginner in a very unmanly fashion as he gave vent to his anger.

"Well, I declare, you are the clumsiest person I ever saw. I am sorry I ever invited you to this

house."

Mrs. Newbeginner looked grieved and angry. "It's as much mine as yours."

"No, it isn't. The wood belongs to me, and it is built on my place. My beautiful pancakes are gone." He did not seem to mind so much about the food that Mrs. Newbeginner had cooked, and on which she had prided herself. "You are the most careless girl I ever saw."

"I couldn't help it. It hurt my legs awfully. See how they are skinned, but I didn't cry, did I?"

Even the sight of a pair of poor, bruised shins did not soften Mr. Newbeginner.

"I suppose we'll have to go into the house, after all, for our breakfast. It'll be dreadfully humil-ia-ting."

"Can't we go to work and cook another?" proposed tired, redfaced little Mrs. Newbeginner.

"No, we can't. The stove would have to be fixed, and we haven't time. Even if we had, though, I wouldn't trust you to help with another meal."

Now this was too much for Mrs. Newbeginner's overtaxed nerves. "You're just horrid to say that and I'll never play with you again as long as I live. I'm going home to my mamma."

Whereupon she stalked out through the door. The sight of her retreating figure brought Mr. Newbeginner to his senses. He ran to the door after her.

"Please come back. I'm sorry."

His repentance came too late, however. His wife pretended not to hear. He grew desperate.

"If you don't come back, I'll never make up with you, either. Please, please, come back."

Either she did not hear, or else she was too grieved to be moved by his entreaties. She did not return, but wended her way back to her mother's home.

Now this unfortunate matrimonial experience made Beth reckless. Unluckily, upon reaching home, she discovered that both her mother and Marian had gone into town to spend the day with the Corners. Still worse, temptation assailed her in the form of an invitation from Harvey Baker.

Beth had not seen him for several days. She had been so absorbed in her new love that she had scarcely even thought of him. Harvey, on his part, had thought of her very often. He had haunted the Davenport wharf, but no Beth appeared. At first, pride had held him back from seeking her out, but her very indifference finally proved an irresistible attraction. Such is the masculine nature.

He came on this morning of all others to invite her out for a row. She, at first, resisted the temptation.

"Oh, Harvey, what a shame. Mamma is not here, so I cannot go."

"Do you think she would let you go if she were here?"

"Yes, I think so."

"Then what harm would there be in your going? We would be back before she returned."

Now, as stated before, Beth was reckless. She just felt like doing something a little wrong.

"I believe I'll go, Harvey."

"Bully for you, Beth. What time did you say your mother would return?"

"Not before five or six this afternoon."

"What do you say then to taking our lunch with us, and having a picnic?"

"I'll ask Maggie."

Beth knew by this time that there was little danger of Maggie refusing her anything. If the child had asked her for the moon she would probably have said, "Shure, honey, I'll try to git it for yo'."

So now Beth hunted up Maggie, who hustled around and soon had a tempting feast ready for them.

"Does yo' maw know yo's gwine?" asked Maggie, as she handed the lunch to Beth.

"No, but she would not mind, I know."

Away ran Harvey and Beth to the boat. The river was as smooth as glass. Beth, at first, sat in the back seat, and Harvey rowed.

"I guess we'll go directly across the river. I wish it wasn't so far to Mrs. Harriet Beecher Stowe's," said Harvey.

"Who is she?"

"Don't you know? I thought everybody knew about her. She wrote 'Uncle Tom's Cabin.'"

"Oh, I saw that acted at the theatre once. Does she live here?"

"She has a place up the river away, but it is deserted now. She used to come down here quite often. We'll row straight across the river. Did you ever row, Beth?"

"No, but you can teach me, can't you?"

"All right. Now move very carefully. I wouldn't have you fall overboard for the world."

Harvey suspended the oars in the air while Beth took the seat beside him. Then he showed her how to hold the oar.

"Now begin so—carefully and with me."

"That's easy. Is that all there is to rowing?"

"It won't be so easy presently."

Beth pulled away with all her might, and in silence. Suddenly, there was a splash of water on her side, and she almost tumbled into the bottom of the boat. Harvey laughed.

"I thought you'd be catching a crab before long."

Beth's eyes opened wide. "I didn't see any crab, Harvey. My oar just balked."

"That's what is called catching a crab, you know, when your oar doesn't go far enough into the water. Say, Beth, you had better not try to row any more. It'll tire you. Don't you want to stop?"

"No indeed. I like to row."

Again Beth pulled away with all her might. Very soon, she began to feel uncomfortably warm. Her hands burned terribly, and presently she rested a moment on her oar and pointed to the land, now within easy rowing distance.

"Wouldn't that be a good spot for our picnic?"

Harvey saw how tired she was and answered:

"It's just the place, and say, Beth, we'll catch some fish, first. Here are lines and bait."

They thereupon went to fishing, and both caught a number of fish.

"Now," said Harvey, "it's time to go ashore and cook them."

"Oh, I'm so terribly hungry I can't wait. I didn't have any breakfast."

"Why, you poor child. Why didn't you say so before?"

"I didn't think of it. I was having such a good time."

"I couldn't forget that I hadn't had breakfast. How did it happen?"

Beth hung her head. She was thinking of her choleric spouse, and she had hard work forcing the tears back.

"How did it happen, Beth?"

"Why—it just happened. That's all. I'm dreadfully hungry, Harvey."

"Suppose then, you eat a sandwich or so, now, and then we'll cook the fish and have lunch later."

Harvey thought he could also eat a sandwich. It ended by their eating three apiece. Then he assisted her out of the boat, which he moored fast on shore.

"Now for the fish, Beth."

"How are we going to cook them? Have you any matches?"

"Yes, and there's a frying-pan in my boat. I always carry one, as I cook fish quite often. Didn't I see some butter and salt in the lunch basket?"

"Yes, and, Harvey, here's just the spot to build our fire. This straight bank back of the beach will make a good chimney for the smoke to go up."

Harvey looked at the spot a little critically. Scrub palmettoes and grass overhung the bank above, which made him wonder if there was any danger of their catching fire. A little breeze was springing up, but he decided that it was not strong enough to carry the sparks to the undergrowth above.

So Beth gathered dry leaves and sticks of wood while Harvey cleaned the fish. Then he applied a match to the bonfire, and it blazed up and crackled noisily. He next placed the butter and fish in the frying-pan and set it on the fire.

At that moment, a little rabbit darted past the children, running up the bank towards the woods.

Harvey started after it calling:

"Come on, Beth. Maybe it will lead us to some young rabbits."

"But the fish."

"They don't need watching for awhile. Hurry on."

It was quite a climb up the bank for Beth, but she succeeded in following close after Harvey.

The rabbit, however, had quite a start of the children, and soon they acknowledged the uselessness of pursuit, and sat down on a log under a tree to rest.

Harvey started to tell Beth of his experience in trying to tame rabbits.

"Yes," he said, "I've had all kinds, from young ones that had to be fed milk out of a spoon to old ones that were so wild that they never could be tamed. I never could raise the young ones. If they didn't die a natural death, a cat or a dog or something would eat them up. For a long time, I never wakened up mornings without finding a dead rabbit. I have rows and rows of rabbit graves over on our place. You must come over and see——"

He was interrupted by a bird that flew screeching from the tree under which they sat. At the same instant a crackling sound caused them to spring to their feet in terror. The woods around them were on fire. The breeze had grown stronger, and had carried the sparks upward to the palmettoes and pines, so full of oil. Then it was but a question of seconds before the awful fire sped with lightning speed over the dry undergrowth. Again, it swelled upwards on the scrub palmettoes, and with a flash leaped skywards to the taller trees as if demons were lifting the flames to the very heavens. It was at this point that the children discovered their danger.

Only a person who has seen a fire in the open among shrubs and trees already parched for lack of water, and fanned by a wind each moment growing stronger, can realize with what rapidity the fire spread. To Harvey and Beth, it seemed as if from the moment of discovery, the fire hemmed them in.

The air was sultry, notwithstanding the wind, and with the spread of the fire it grew more so. The sky was marked with fantastic clouds which turned from gray to flaming red.

Beth gazed around her helplessly. She felt as if there was no escape for them from a fiery death, which made her heartily repentant that she had come. She silently prayed to God to deliver them, and vowed if she lived, never, never to do anything again without her mother's knowledge.

The awfulness of their surroundings and the enormity of his responsibility, came upon Harvey with overwhelming force. He was too horrified for speech, and, for a few seconds, too stunned for action.

On rushed the triumphant flames, blasting everything within range. The hot breath from the fire recalled Harvey to the need of action.

"Oh, Beth, how can I get you out of this horrible place? We are surrounded by fire." Then, in a moment, he added, "I see a way out, if we run."

He caught her hand and half-dragged her through scorching shrubs, circling to the left. Fortunately, they managed to reach a road skirting the woods without serious injury.

Here they saw excited men running towards the woods. "It will burn our homes, our all," they heard one cry. "Our one hope is to start counter fires," another cried.

At the word, to the horror of Beth who did not understand, the men set fire to the low palmettoes a short distance away where there was an open space.

It seemed wicked to her to set more trees on fire, especially when the men seemed so anxious about their homes burning.

"Let's go," she sobbed.

Harvey held his head high. "No, indeed, I won't go. If their houses burn, it's my fault. I have some money in the bank and I'll give them every cent of it. They look like poor fishermen. Oh, Beth, it's too terrible. See how high the flames go."

Up, up, they leaped, growing higher and more fierce every moment. The sparks flew inland. If some change did not occur, no power under the sun could save the poor fishermen's homes.

The two poor, forlorn little culprits waited in the roadway and watched the progress of the awful flames.

The two fires looked like immense dragons that were rushing at each other in uncontrolled fury. The sparks flew right and left, but the counter fire served its purpose somewhat in that part of the flames' force was spent upon the other.

The fires crackled and hissed, and to Harvey these were the voices of the dragons defying and mocking him. To him they said:

"What can you do to stop us? Nothing. Yes, you may well tremble. It was you, you alone, that set us monsters free and we will not be chained now that we are loose." Upward the fire dragons flew, and even as they sank down somewhat, their mocking did not cease.

"Counter fires may check us momentarily, but presently we will sweep upwards and devour the fishermen's huts in our fiery grasp. It is awful to you, but to us it is fun, fun, fun, and we will not be stopped. Look at us. Look at us."

Again the flames leaped higher and higher. Harvey covered his face with his hands. He could not bear the sight another instant.

Beth would have comforted him if she had known how, but what could she say? She, too, felt that nothing could stop the onward rush of the dragons.

But the one opponent that had power over them suddenly descended to take part in the fray.

Beth clapped her hands in glee. "It's raining, Harvey; it's raining."

The sun was still shining brightly, but, sure enough, one of those showers peculiar to tropical lands was descending, and the wind, too, abated somewhat.

"Thank God," murmured Harvey. "Beth, I'm going to speak to the men."

She grasped him by the arm. "Oh, Harvey, they might arrest you."

"Nonsense, Beth; they don't know how the fire started, and if their houses don't burn, there's no use in telling. You wait here for me."

He was gone only a few minutes, and, when Beth caught sight of his radiant face, she knew the good news before he said a word.

"Beth, they say the houses won't burn. We can go now."

They circled around the woods by the road, and, when they came to the river, walked down the beach to their boat which they found unharmed.

The fish were burned to cinders.

"We don't care, do we, Beth? I couldn't eat them, anyway, after all the trouble they have caused us. It was all their fault. If they hadn't been so foolish as to be caught, there wouldn't have been any fire. But I've built fires a hundred times before and never had anything like this to happen."

Trouble, it is said, never comes singly. When they were once more back in the boat, Harvey found that he had both tide and wind against him, and the river had become very squally. The St. Johns is one of the most treacherous rivers in the world. It takes only a very short time for her waters to become white-capped.

Harvey pulled manfully on the oars, but it was very hard for him to make any headway. Beth finally asked if she could not help to row.

"No, keep perfectly still where you are," he answered in such a short manner that his little companion felt grieved. She tried to let him know that she was hurt, by not saying another word, but he was too busy to mind. By this time, he was worried.

"Supposing anything happened to us," he thought to himself, "Beth's mother would never forgive me. It was my fault that Beth came."

He never knew exactly how it happened. Either the oar was defective, or else he pulled too hard on it as it struck a large wave; whichever it was, one of the oars snapped suddenly. For a moment or so the boat rocked helplessly on the waves, and it was driven backwards towards the shore from which they had just come.

"Harvey," asked Beth almost in a whisper, "are we going to be drowned? Can't I ever tell mamma how sorry, how very sorry, I am?"

"I won't let you drown, Beth."

He spoke with more assurance than he really felt, but his manner comforted her. He also proved that he was a born sailor. First, he skilfully steered the boat with the remaining oar. Next, he picked up from under one of the seats an old umbrella which chanced to be in the boat, and used it for a sail. Thus they were quickly carried back to shore not far from the scene of the fire.

Harvey once more helped Beth out, and made the boat fast. His plans were already made.

"Beth, wait here for me. I'm going to hire one of the men to take us back."

Beth had time, while he was gone, to consider all that had happened. More than ever, she felt that it had been very wrong for her to come without permission.

Harvey presently returned with a man who carried a pair of oars.

"He's going to row us across, Beth."

"Is it safe?"

The man smiled. "You needn't fear. I'm strong, and the squall has about blown over."

He helped the children in, and jumped into the boat himself as he pushed it from shore.

"How are you ever going to get back yourself?" asked Beth, as the man took his place at the oars. She was fearful that Harvey would have to row him back. Otherwise, his return trip appeared to her as intricate as some of the puzzles she had heard about crossing streams.

"I'm going to walk into town from your place. I have some errands there, and will take the ferry back."

Beth quieted down and watched the man. His rowing aroused her admiration. She wished that some time she could prove as great an expert as he, and resolved to do her very best to imitate him. She noted especially, the long swinging strokes that he took. Crossing the river was little work for him, and the other side was reached in safety. They drew up alongside the Davenport wharf.

Harvey offered to go up to the house with Beth, and take the blame upon himself, but she thought that her mother would rather hear of the adventure from her. So the three occupants of the boat parted company.

Mrs. Davenport had not yet returned when Beth reached the house, but came soon afterwards. Beth immediately confessed to her every incident of the day.

"This has taught you a lesson, Beth, without mamma's saying anything," Mrs. Davenport said, when the little penitent had finished. "You know yourself it was very wrong to go without permission, and I do not think you will ever do such a thing again, will you?"

"Never," answered Beth so earnestly that Mrs. Davenport had full faith in her promise.

CHAPTER VII

Beth's New Playfellow

Beth could not find Fritz high or low and she was worried about him.

She ran out to the barn to ask January if he had seen anything of her pet. She found the former inside the barn leaning up against a partition wall with his eyes shut and his mouth wide open. He was fast asleep and looked very droll.

Beth could hardly keep from laughing, but she managed to say sternly:

"January, you ought to be working instead of sleeping."

He wakened with a start. A look of conscious guilt overspread his face.

"My eyes were closed, Missy Beth; dat wuz all. I jes' came in and sot down to comb my hair."

Beth shook her finger at him. "You were snoring."

"Wuz I? Well, I'm powe'ful warm, Missy Beth. Don't yo' tole on me, an' I'll swah nevah to do so agin."

Beth felt it her duty to lecture him a bit.

"You ought to tell things when you do wrong. I do. January, have you seen Fritz?"

"Not since dis mornin', Missy Beth. He wuz down by the river watchin' a great big 'gator."

She looked apprehensive. "January, do 'gators ever eat dogs?"

"I've heard tell dey do sometimes."

"What would I do if that 'gator has eaten my Fritz!"

Whereupon away she ran, as fast as her little legs could carry her, to the river, calling her beloved dog. But no Fritz came bounding at her call. In fact, he did not return even to supper, nor for breakfast the next morning.

The conviction grew with Beth that Harvey Baker's 'gator had eaten Fritz. Her resentment rose against the boy and his pet, she even shedding some tears of anger and of grief.

Soon after breakfast, a red-eyed little girl started out to give Harvey Baker a piece of her mind. She found him, as usual, on the wharf. He was perfectly unconscious of the storm that was in store for him. In fact, he was in the very act of feeding the 'gator.

"Hello, Beth, don't make a noise. I've just whistled for it."

Her eyes snapped. "I just guess I'll make all the noise I want to, so there; and I hope I'll scare the horrid old 'gator away," she concluded, bursting into tears.

Harvey, in his surprise, dropped the meat which he held, and walked over to comfort her. She, however, turned on him like a veritable little shrew.

"Go away, Harvey Baker. I hate both you and your 'gator. That's what makes me cry."

He could not fathom her meaning. He thought, perhaps, she was cross because of the affair of yesterday.

"Was your mamma very angry? Stop crying and I'll go with you and tell her it's——"

"It's not that. Your 'gator——" She could not finish because of sobs. Harvey waited for her tears to subside, but at last grew desperate.

"Can't you tell me what's the matter, Beth?"

"Your horrid old 'gator—it—has eaten—my Fritz."

"I don't believe it."

"My dog's gone and——"

"I'm very sorry, Beth, that Fritz is gone; but I don't believe the 'gator ate him."

"No, you're not sorry. You were just going to feed that horrid beast, and after it had eaten my Fritz, too."

"I didn't know about Fritz; but please don't blame me, Beth, even if the 'gator did eat him." He tried to take her hand, but she pulled it away.

"I want my dog," she said angrily.

"O Beth, only like me again, and I'll promise never to feed the 'gator as long as I live."

She was too grieved over the loss of Fritz to accept any such promise. Harvey would have searched with her for Fritz, but she was so hurt that she wished to be alone. In fact, she was very cool towards him for many a day thereafter.

A week passed; then two, and nothing was heard of Fritz. The feeling grew with Beth that the 'gator really had made way with her pet. She grieved more and more as time passed and nothing was heard of her dog. At first, she was inclined to be very bitter towards Harvey, but she could not hold a grudge long against any one. Then, as she acknowledged, she was not sure the 'gator had eaten Fritz.

One day, about three weeks after the loss of Fritz, Harvey walked into the Davenports' house, leading a handsome, big black dog. The minute that the dog saw Beth, he bounded away from Harvey, and up to her. He licked her hand, and was altogether so affectionate that he won her heart immediately.

"Oh, what a beautiful fellow. Where did you get him? Is he yours, Harvey?"

The boy's eyes were very bright as he answered:

"Well, I guess so. I'll tell you how I happened to get him, and then you can judge for yourself. I was in town day before yesterday, and, while walking along Bay Street, I felt something licking my hand. I looked around, and saw this dog. I had several errands that morning and the dog followed me every place. I simply couldn't get rid of him. Then I made inquiries to find out who owned him. For a long time nobody seemed to know anything about him. Finally I met a man down by the market who said he had seen him come off a Spanish vessel that was in port that morning. I asked the man where the vessel was, and he said it had sailed. Then I asked him what I ought to do about the dog, and he replied that he supposed I might as well keep him. After that, I went to father and told him about the dog and asked what I should do. He said he would advertise it, and then if nobody answered, I might do what I liked with him. We have heard nothing so far of an owner, so it begins to look as if the dog was mine."

"Why haven't you told me before? You have had it two whole days."

"Well, Beth, I didn't want you to know about it until I was sure he was mine. Besides, I'm going to give him away."

Beth's eyes opened wide with astonishment.

"Going to give this lovely dog away! Don't you like him?"

"Yes, but I like the person I'm going to give him to better."

"You must be awfully fond of that person, then." Beth was ashamed to think that she was a little jealous and tried not to show it by her manner.

"I am. Guess to whom I am going to give him."

"I can't."

"To the only nice girl I know, and her name is Beth Davenport."

"Not me?" Her eyes had grown very big.

"Yes, you—really."

Beth could not believe it for a while. When she did realize that Harvey was truly in earnest, she gave one long gasp of delight. Then she surprised both herself and Harvey by throwing her arms around his neck and kissing him.

Harvey, boylike, was a little embarrassed, but he did not object, however.

"Harvey, you're the nicest boy living. I don't know how to thank you."

He looked very much pleased. "Do you really like him, Beth?"

"Like him!——" She could not think of words strong enough to tell how much she liked him.

"Is he as nice as Fritz? Do you forgive me now?"

She immediately felt guilty, for it was a fact that she had not been friendly towards Harvey since the disappearance of Fritz.

"He's a thousand times nicer, but perhaps you're just giving him to me because you think you ought to. Maybe the 'gator didn't eat Fritz after all."

"I'm not giving him to you because of Fritz. You may keep Don even if Fritz comes back."

"Is Don his name?"

"I call him Don because he came off a Spanish vessel, and he seems to like the name, but you can call him anything you wish."

"It's a pretty name, and I shall call him Don. Shan't I, Don?"

The dog looked up at her with his intelligent eyes to see what his new mistress wished. She threw her arms about his neck and kissed him.

"Don, I love you, I love you. You're my dog now. Harvey has given you to me."

Harvey felt a little jealous to see lavished on a dog caresses, such as had been given to him only once. He tried to distract Beth's attention.

"Say, Beth, you just ought to see him in the water. He loves the water."

"Does he? Let's go down to the river."

This was just what Harvey wished, and therefore he readily consented.

The two started ahead. Don followed majestically.

Mrs. Davenport saw them from the window, and stopped them.

"Where are you going, Beth?"

"Down to the river with Harvey, mamma. Just see what he gave me."

Beth led Don up to the window where her mother was.

"Why, you nice dog, you. He is a beauty. Where did you get him, Harvey? He must be a very valuable dog."

Thereupon the history of Don's discovery was repeated to Mrs. Davenport.

"Harvey ought to keep him himself," she declared.

"But I wish Beth to have him, Mrs. Davenport. Father said I might do what I wished with Don, and when I told mother I was going to give him to Beth, she thought it a very nice idea."

"You are very generous, Harvey, and both Beth and I appreciate your present. I love dogs almost as much as Beth does, but I don't know how we can repay you."

"Mother says that you more than repay me by letting Beth play with me. You know I haven't any sisters."

"Well, you and Beth must be careful not to get into mischief. She may play by the water this morning, but I don't care to have her go rowing. The river is too rough to-day."

"We won't go rowing, mamma."

Thereupon they hurried with Don down to the river.

The wind was quite high, which made the water choppy. The waves were white-capped in many places.

"Now, Beth, you just watch and see Don perform."

Harvey held in his hand a good-sized stick, which he threw as far as possible out into the water.

[Illustration: Harvey. (Illustration missing from book)]

Away bounded Don after it. He easily breasted the waves, and returned in triumph with the stick.

He did this time and again, much to Beth's delight.

"Say, Beth, let's try him from the end of the wharf. I wonder if he would dare jump in from there."

"I don't like to try. He might drown."

Harvey laughed the idea to scorn, and took a stick out to the end of the wharf. Beth and Don accompanied him. Don seemed anxious to have the stick thrown, for he watched it with glistening eyes. Harvey threw it. Don immediately jumped after it, and succeeded in swimming to shore with it. By this time, he was probably tired, for he did not return to the children, but lay down on the bank for a rest.

The boat had been left outside the boat house, tied to a stake of the wharf. Harvey eyed it longingly.

"I wish we could go rowing, Beth."

"So do I, but mamma said I couldn't. You wouldn't have me disobey her, would you?"

"Nobody has asked you to, has there? Say, Beth, she never said for you not to sit in the boat, did she?"

"No, but——"

"She said you couldn't row. Now, sitting in a boat that's tied isn't rowing, is it?"

"No, but——"

"Oh, come on, Beth. It's perfectly safe when it's tied."

She hesitated. Harvey was too much of a diplomat not to press his advantage.

"Now, Beth, I think you might. I wouldn't ask you to do anything your mamma didn't like. She won't mind, I know."

Still Beth was undecided.

"And, Beth, you ought to want to please me after I gave you Don."

This argument appealed to her. She wished to show her appreciation.

"All right, if you really think mamma wouldn't mind."

Harvey did not answer. He jumped down into the boat, and then helped Beth.

"Say, Beth, we'll play we're pirates. We're out in a storm, but we are pursuing that boat there."

"What boat?"

"Why, that one there. Don't you see that stick of wood? It carries chests of gold which we are after. Now sit down and we'll start the chase."

The younger pirate thereupon seated herself in the stern of the craft while its gallant commander took charge on the middle deck. He swayed from side to side. The boat rocked in a perilous manner. Sometimes the water even dashed over the pirates.

"Isn't it kind of dangerous, Harvey?" suggested the younger pirate.

"My name isn't Harvey. I'm Captain Kidd, and you must never speak to me without saluting,—so."

His self-importance caused him to move around more lively than ever, while the boat shipped water afresh.

"But isn't it dangerous, Har—, Captain Kidd?"

The captain again looked very self-important. "Pirates never think of danger. See how near we are to the English brig. Ha, ha, mate, the gold is ours. Steady now, mate, she's coming your way. When we are once alongside of her, you make a dive for her, and pinion her until I can rush to your assistance. Steady now."

Nearer and nearer floated the English boat, unconscious of danger. Perhaps the nature of the pirate craft was unsuspected. It floated no black flag.

The younger pirate grew excited over the nearness of the prize. She arose to her feet. Surely, it was within grasp now. Just as she was about to reach out for it, however, a wave took the English boat and started to carry it out of reach.

This made the younger pirate desperate. She leaned far out over the water. Suddenly, the commander cried out in fear:

"Beth, don't try. It's too far away."

His warning came too late. The younger pirate had already reached out for the English boat. A wave at that moment struck the pirate craft, and swayed it to one side. Over went the younger pirate into the water.

Fortunately, Beth got only a wetting. Before she was really in the water, Harvey had her by the dress. For a second or two, it seemed as if the boat would upset. But presently a wet, unhappy little girl stood shivering beside Harvey. Her teeth chattered from fright more than from cold.

"What'll mamma say?"

"I'll tell her it was all my fault."

"How good you are," and Beth edged up nearer to him.

"Stop dripping water all over me and come on."

They hurried towards the house, and circled around to the back entrance to escape Beth's mother.

The washerwoman, at the tubs on the kitchen porch, and Maggie were the only ones to see poor Beth. Maggie raised her arms skyward. "Laws a massa"—then she broke into hearty laughter. "I 'lows, Penny,"—the name of the washerwoman,—"hyere's moh washin' fur yo'. How yo' 'specs it'd be if we'd jes' run chile an' all frugh de wringer?"

Beth was too humiliated to say a word, and rushed up-stairs the back way.

When the affair was reported to Mrs. Davenport, she considered the situation well before seeing her little daughter.

Beth was getting to be a terrible tomboy, she thought, but she was growing strong physically with the outdoor life. And even while she did sometimes fall into danger, the same thing often occurred when mothers watched a child's every breath. Mrs. Davenport decided that the wiser way was to educate a child to be self-reliant and fearless, trusting to God's guardianship and protection.

She knew that in the years to come, Beth would learn the gentler graces, for she had a kindly heart; so, instead of punishing Beth, Mrs. Davenport had a long talk with her that did Beth a world of good. In fact, her mother's gentleness was an inspiration to right living all through her life.

CHAPTER VIII

Learning to Swim

Marian, Julia, Beth, Harvey, and Don were in bathing. The deep water enclosed by the walk and piling surrounding the boat house made a safe bathing place for them,—safe at least from the alligators, though the water was deep. Harvey and Don were the only ones in the party who knew how to swim.

The other children struggled hard to learn. Harvey was a very willing teacher, but did not know exactly how to impart his knowledge. He said:

"Why, it's very easy. See, you just have to start out like this, and there you are."

Thereupon, they started out as directed, but, alas, they were not there as he said. Their feet grew unaccountably light so that their heads disappeared under the water. However, they enjoyed even the ducking.

Don reveled in the water frolic as much, if not more, than any of them. He was ever ready to do the children's bidding, and ever kept a watchful eye on his charges. Beth, however, was his especial care. He seemed to feel an ownership for her.

Don, too, tried to encourage the children in their efforts to swim. He plunged out into deep water, and then looked persuasively back at the children nearer shore, as if to say:

"Follow me. It's really very easy."

Beth as usual proved the venturesome one, and started out after Don.

Mrs. Davenport, who was sitting on the wharf doing some fancy work and at the same time watching the children, called:

"Beth, do be careful or you'll get into trouble."

"Why, mamma, I am careful."

Mrs. Davenport again became absorbed in her work. Suddenly, she was startled by screams from the children. Above the other voices she heard Marian calling:

"Don, Don, save her."

Poor Mrs. Davenport sprang to her feet in a frenzy of terror. It was as she expected. She saw her beloved Beth sinking. She was so horrified that for a second or two she could not cry out.

Harvey was near Beth, but made no effort to rescue her.

"Harvey, Harvey," screamed Mrs. Davenport, "save her."

But even as she cried another was swimming to the rescue, and this was faithful Don. He had no idea of letting his beloved little mistress drown. He grabbed her by her bathing suit and swam towards the shore with her.

"Why, Mrs. Davenport, we didn't think you'd be frightened. It's only play," called Harvey.

How proud the delighted dog was. He thought he had really saved Beth's life. He did not know that she was just pretending for the fun of having him come to her.

Day after day, the children struggled to learn to swim, but with rather poor success.

At last, they thought of trying light logs to keep them up. This proved quite successful. They placed the log across their chests, and under their armpits, and then made their hands and feet go. This was quite like swimming. After a time they tried it even in the deep water inside the boat house.

One day Beth ran down ahead of the others. Don, for a wonder, was not with her that morning. She thought she would have some fun all by herself.

Her log was in the boat house. She fearlessly jumped into deep water with it, but somehow, she got beyond the range of the walk. In trying to paddle back to it, her log slipped away from her. Then she grew very much frightened.

It was a case of swim or sink. Terrified as she was, she had presence of mind to keep her hands and feet going. To her surprise, she did not sink. She had only a little ways to go and made it without very much effort.

When the other children came, she was all excitement.

"Just see. I can swim, I can swim."

Beth hastened to show off her wonderful accomplishment. She was disgusted when Harvey laughed at her.

"Why, Beth, you swim in regular dog fashion. You claw the water just like Don. You ought to go like this."

She tried striking out with her arms as he bid, but could not swim that way. Whereupon, she declared:

"I like swimming dog fashion best."

One evening Mr. Davenport came home and said:

"Mary, how would you like to go down to the seashore for a week?"

"And take us?" exclaimed Beth.

Mr. Davenport was in a teasing mood.

"I will take Marian because she has been good, but as to you, I must find out first from mamma if any bad girl has been around here lately. We can't take bad girls with us."

Beth held her breath for her mother's answer.

"Well, James, for a wonder we have had an unusually good girl here for the past week. If we go, she may go too."

Beth danced a jig in the intensity of her joy.

"Where are we going, papa?"

"Down to Fort George Island, which is at the mouth of the St. Johns. We will leave to-morrow morning. Can you be ready by that time, Mary?"

"I guess so."

Mrs. Davenport was accustomed to her husband's desire to start at a moment's notice. He had made a like suggestion many times before.

At Beth's earnest solicitation, she was allowed to take Don with her.

The next morning, when they boarded the boat for Fort George's, Beth was very much surprised to behold Julia.

"Why, Julia, how nice of you to come down to see us off, but how did you know we were going?"

"I didn't come to see you off; I'm going to Fort George, too. Your papa was over last night and persuaded papa and mamma to go."

"Oh goody, goody, goody."

Julia and Beth took possession of the boat from the first moment. They inspected it from one end to the other. They made friends with the captain and those under him. They went up even to the pilot house and helped run the boat, or, at least, they thought they were helping. The morning proved a very happy one for them.

The trip delighted their parents also. They were content to sit still and watch the St. Johns as it curved and widened on its course to the ocean. There is hardly a more picturesque river in America.

As they neared the sea, its briny odor was wafted to them by the breeze. Great sand dunes rose on both sides of the river.

Upon reaching Fort George, the Davenport party drove in the 'bus to the hotel, over the hardest of shell roads. Magnificent palms lined the way on both sides. All the foliage, in fact, was extremely luxuriant. The island was more tropical than anything that the Davenports had seen, so far, in Florida.

A gentleman in the 'bus proffered the information to Mr. Davenport that the island had once been visited by Talleyrand. He said it had been owned by French grandees who carried on an extensive slave trade from the island.

When questioned about the mounds of shells that are so numerous at Fort George, the gentleman explained that for many centuries the Indians had congregated on the island in oyster season, and held high festivals. They probably feasted on oysters and corn, and these mounds were the result.

The week that followed was one of almost unalloyed bliss to Julia and Beth. They got into very little mischief, although they simply lived out of doors, and up in the trees.

Each morning, a number of the people from the hotel went in surf bathing. Beth was always one of the party. Mrs. Davenport did not care to go in, but she generally sat on the beach and watched the bathers.

Since Beth had learned how to swim, she caused her mother much anxiety. She was very venturesome, and would often swim far out beyond her depth.

Don did not enjoy salt water as much as he did fresh, and therefore he often rested beside Mrs. Davenport.

One morning only children went in bathing. All the men were away fishing, and the women did not care for the sport. Mrs. Davenport was unusually anxious, and she warned Beth to stay near shore with the other children. Beth obeyed pretty well at first, but before she knew it she was out where the water was over her head.

"Beth, it's time to come in," called her mother.

Beth raised her head and spurted out some water.

"Why, mamma, I'm coming."

"No, you're not. You're going out," and Mrs. Davenport sprang to her feet in sudden terror.

"Why, mamma, I'm swimming as hard as ever I can."

In fact, Beth was trying her very best to reach shore, but notwithstanding her desperate efforts, she was slowly but surely drifting out to sea. One of those treacherous undertows that abound on the Florida coast had her in its deadly power.

Mark Charlesworth, one of the boys, rushed to the side of Beth's mother.

"Oh, Mrs. Davenport, she'll surely drown unless some one saves her. A boy was drowned just that way last winter."

Mrs. Davenport was almost frenzied. She could not swim and she knew that personally she could not rescue her child. She looked in vain for assistance.

The other children had come from the water, and rushed frantically up and down the beach wringing their hands in terror.

Beth realized that her position was critical, and she struck out with such desperate energy that soon she felt her strength failing her. Terror seized upon her so that she feared she could not keep up another instant.

"Mamma," she screamed, "I'm sinking."

Mrs. Davenport's heart grew leaden. Was there no hope for her child? Must she stand helpless and see her drown? No, no, there must be some way of saving her. She would not despair.

"Dearie, don't give out," she cried; "mamma will save you."

The words strengthened Beth to strive anew. At this instant, Mrs. Davenport's eye rested upon Don lying fast asleep in the shade. Her heart seemed to jump into her mouth in the intensity of a new hope.

"Don, Don, go to Beth," she cried.

But Don would not heed. He did not realize the danger. He was tired and wished to sleep.

"Beth, call Don."

Beth who was drifting farther and farther away heard, and yelled:

"Don, Don."

The dog immediately pricked up his ears. Then he jumped to his feet.

"Don, Don."

At that second appeal, he bounded into the water.

Mrs. Davenport felt like falling on her knees in thanksgiving.

"Dearie, don't give up. Don's coming."

Beth heard and her strength revived sufficiently for her to struggle afresh against that terrible undertow.

The big waves swirled around Don who swam directly towards Beth.

Mrs. Davenport's heart almost stood still while her anxious eyes kept watch on her struggling child and the noble dog.

"Thank God, the eddy has Don too in its wake and is helping him on to my child. Beth's strength again seems to be failing. Will she be able to hold out? On, Don, on. Supposing he cannot make it. Supposing the child sinks before he reaches her?" These seconds of watching seemed an eternity to the frantic mother.

"Thank God, he is almost within reach of her. Bravo, Don, bravo. He has Beth fast by the bathing suit. Brave, brave dog. Now he has headed towards shore. Will he ever be able to make it with that awful undertow to work against besides the extra precious burden he carries? How heroically he struggles. Oh, noble, noble Don, you will save her yet, and keep a mother's heart from breaking. Yes, he is slowly but surely making headway against the eddying waters. Now, now, his feet surely touch bottom. Yes, and Beth knows it and struggles to her feet. Thank God, she is still conscious."

Though Beth was very much frightened, she was in no way harmed by her watery experience, and rushed straight to her mother's open arms, both unmindful of the wetting Mrs. Davenport received.

Don pricked up his ears, and wagged his tail from side to side. He could not understand why they did not notice him immediately as they had done before when he rescued Beth. Really, it was enough to ruffle the patience of any dog. He barked to attract attention. Thereupon, Mrs. Davenport turned to him, and patted him while tears trickled down her cheeks.

"Yes, Don, we know what a very noble fellow you are, and love you with all our hearts. We'll never forget what you've done."

Beth said nothing, but patted Don who expressed his appreciation as best he could by licking Beth's hands and face. If he could have talked, he would have said:

"Little mistress, I'm so glad I could show my love for you. I do dearly love you all, and am thankful that I saved you. Life with you is better than it was at sea. I will always be faithful to you."

This narrow escape of Beth's made Mrs. Davenport wish to return home. She said she would not stay with the children where the water was treacherous. The following day, therefore, they all returned to Jacksonville.

CHAPTER IX

The Little Dressmaker

It must not be imagined that Beth always romped. Although she was a tomboy, she was a very industrious little girl. She did not go to school the first year she was in Florida, and on rainy days she learned how to sew.

Mr. Davenport started a bank in Jacksonville, and soon after was elected president of the State's fair. He was a liberal-minded citizen, and therefore accepted the position, wishing to advance the standard of Florida exhibits.

Beth became interested in the undertaking. She asked to enter the lists herself and compete for prizes.

Mr. Davenport thought it an excellent idea that children should be encouraged to exhibit, and therefore offered prizes for juvenile displays.

Beth decided to make a dress all by herself. Her mother suggested that she was rather young for such a big undertaking, and that, perhaps, she had better first dress a doll, but Beth would not listen to such a thing.

Mrs. Davenport, therefore, bought the material and a pattern, and gave them to Beth. She offered to cut out the dress, but Beth thought that this would not be honorable nor fair. She must do it all by herself. Mrs. Davenport admired the spirit, and encouraged it in her, although she feared she might make a failure.

Beth, however, had one great quality of success,—perseverance. She would never give up anything in which she was interested, until she had succeeded. For the next three days, she could not be enticed from her work.

"Beth, please, come with me," begged Harvey, who came quite regularly to persuade her from her undertaking. But she was deaf to all persuasion. Julia had no better success, and it ended by Beth infecting Julia with the sewing fever. Julia brought material for a dress over to the Davenports' and went to work on it. She sewed faithfully for an hour or two, and then jumped up in disgust.

"Oh, botheration, Beth; I can't get the horrid thing right, and I'm not going to try."

"Let me help you, Julia. Maybe we'll get prizes."

"Oh, bother prizes. Let's quit."

"No, I'm going to finish this dress. Please stay and sew with me."

"If I do, what will you do for me?"

"Anything you want me to."

"All right then, I'll stay, but when you've finished, you have to go up in a tree with me and spend the night. We'll be like the captive princess."

They had just finished a fairy tale of a princess confined in a tower which she never left during many years. The tower was well provisioned so that she did not starve.

"It'll be great fun," continued Julia. "We'll take plenty of food up with us. I'm so glad you promised to go."

"May I tell mamma about it?"

"No."

"Then I won't go. I know mamma wouldn't like it, Julia, and it's wrong to worry her."

"And it's downright wicked to break one's word. You aren't going to be wicked, are you?"

Beth looked worried. "Please don't ask me to play princess, Julia."

"But you just have to, Beth; that's all there is about it."

This was Julia's ultimatum. She persisted in remaining with Beth until the dress was finished, although, she, herself, did comparatively little sewing. She even stayed nights at the Davenports for fear Beth would betray her secret.

Beth worked so steadily that Mrs. Davenport feared that she would make herself sick, and was glad when finally Beth jumped up and said:

"There, mamma, it's finished. Buttonholes and all. I guess it's all right, isn't it?"

The dress was very creditably made for so young a girl. Mrs. Davenport was justly proud of it

and of Beth.

"Mrs. Davenport," began Julia, "can't Beth stay all night with me?"

"Yes, I'll be glad to have her out of doors. Run along, Beth."

Beth, however, held back. "I'd rather stay with you, mamma."

"Why, child, what is the matter?"

"Oh, she's just tired from this everlasting sewing, Mrs. Davenport;" and then Julia whispered to Beth, "You're not going to be wicked and break your word, are you? I'll never speak to you again if you don't come."

Thus pressed, Beth reluctantly kissed her mother and departed.

"We'll go over to my house, and get enough food for supper and breakfast."

Away they hurried to the Gordons. Julia robbed the larder to quite an extent.

"Mamma, I'm going back to Beth's. You don't mind, do you?"

"No."

Thereupon, avoiding observation, they ran back to Beth's. They selected a grand water oak with immense spreading branches that would effectually screen them from view. Besides, it was quite a ways from the house, which suited Julia's purpose.

Julia, carrying the provisions, scrambled up into the tree as nimbly as a squirrel, crying:

"Isn't this the grandest fortress you ever did see?"

Beth was too busy climbing to answer. She was a natural born climber, but she lacked practice. Besides, her plumpness would prevent her from ever being quite as agile as Julia.

"This will be my bedroom. See, I do not have to build any bed. These branches and leaves make a perfect resting-place," declared Julia.

"Yes, but suppose you fell asleep and rolled out. You'd break your neck."

"I don't roll out of bed at home, and I'm not going to here."

"But I do, and I don't want to break my neck. I guess I'll stay awake all night, but I'll lie down."

As Beth spoke, she lay back on some inviting looking branches. Their appearance, however, proved deceitful. They were not as strong as they looked, and she came very near having the tumble that she dreaded. Luckily, however, she caught on to a strong branch, and with Julia's assistance was soon in comparative safety.

"I guess I'd better sit up all the time."

"I reckon you'll do nothing of the sort. I'll tell you what: You may have my bedroom, and I'll find another higher up."

Although Beth was still trembling from the narrowness of her escape, she did not wish to take advantage of Julia's generosity, but the latter insisted.

Thus persuaded, Beth, cautiously this time, tried reclining on the branches. She found that they really made a delightful bed.

"It is beautiful, Julia. Why, I don't believe I should be afraid to sleep here. These limbs would keep me from falling."

"And here is another bed just as good. You see I'm right across the hall from you. I didn't have to go to the next floor as I feared at first. It's nicer being near each other, isn't it, Beth?"

"Yes, much nicer, but wouldn't you rather have this room, Julia? It is so lovely."

"No, it isn't. Mine is best. I can look way up to the sky."

"Why, that isn't nice at all. I wouldn't sleep in a room without a roof. Mine has a roof painted green."

"I don't care, mine's nicer."

"No, it isn't. Mine is."

Whereupon they had a fuss, such as all children sometimes have. They declared that "they

didn't like each other," and that one was "hateful" and the other "too mean to live," and that "they'd never speak again."

In a minute or two after, they were talking as lively as two young magpies. They had figuratively kissed and made up.

"Now," said Julia, "I'm going to draw the portcullis so we can never go down unless some one comes to release us."

"I don't care to stay here always."

"We're only playing, goosie, but you have to stay until morning because you promised."

After that one thrust, Julia relented and tried to be as nice as she possibly could, and Beth had such a good time that her conscience stopped troubling her.

The minutes passed so quickly that they both were surprised to see how low the sun was. The captive ladies decided it was time to eat supper, so they divided supplies, using their laps as tables.

Beth, the unfortunate, had not taken a mouthful when a great pinching bug dropped on her head. She jumped to her feet screaming, and her supper was all scattered to the ground. She decided to go after it.

"Where are you going, Beth?"

"After my supper."

"But the portcullis is drawn."

"I'm going to have my supper, portcullis or no portcullis."

Already it was growing so dark that objects were becoming indistinguishable. Suddenly Beth uttered a cry.

"What's the matter?"

"I,—I thought it was a bear. It's only Don, however, and he's eaten up all my supper, the mean thing, and now he's run away."

"Never mind, Beth. You can have half of mine."

They ate their scanty meal in silence. It was growing so dark that immediately after supper they went to bed.

Neither of the children felt comfortable, but neither would own it.

"Isn't this heaps of fun, Beth?"

"Yes, heaps, Julia."

Then each of them let a great sigh escape. Silence prevailed for awhile. All the world seemed asleep. Such stillness was terrifying to the children.

"Are you asleep, Julia?"

"No, but I thought you were."

Again they were quiet until it had grown pitch dark.

"I can't sleep."

"Neither can I, but it's fun, isn't it?"

"It's a sperience, Julia."

Again two great sighs, and then quiet once more.

Suddenly, there was a hoot right above them. Julia and Beth both gave such a start that they almost tumbled out of the tree. Then two scared whispers were heard:

"What was that?"

"I don't know."

Another hoot.

"I wish we were together, Julia."

"So do I. Say, Beth, I believe there's room for you here with me. Let's try it."

"I'm afraid to come."

"Don't be a 'fraid cat."

"I'm not, only——" For the third time that melancholy hoot above them.

"Julia, come to me."

"I won't do it. I spoke first You come here."

Solitude was so terrifying that Beth risked the trip across for companionship. Fortunately, the hoot did not occur during her trip to Julia, or she would probably have landed on the ground.

The space proved rather narrow, and rather perilous for two, but Beth and Julia snuggled together very close.

Soon the hooting began again, and continued at regular intervals.

"I believe it's a hoot-owl."

"So it is."

Although they knew it was only an owl, the melancholy cry was neither conducive to sleep nor to high spirits. The children found it decidedly depressing. They talked awhile in whispers. The sound of one's own voice even is startling in such a situation. Very often they sighed, and sometimes there was a pensive quietness broken only by the hoot-owl.

"What time do you s'pose it is, Julia?"

"I think it must be twelve at least. They're not coming for us to-night. They've forgotten us."

Their parents had not forgotten them, but when meal-time came and they did not appear, the Davenports supposed they were over at the Gordons', and the Gordons thought they were at the Davenports'. The children often stayed for meals without asking, and so neither family worried.

About half-past eight the Gordons decided to go and bring Julia home. When they walked in at the Davenports, the first question asked them was:

"Why did you not bring the children with you?"

"The children? Why, they are here, are they not?"

Anxiety immediately possessed every one present. Mrs. Davenport's first thought was of the river, and her heart became leaden. She gave voice to her fear.

"Nonsense," answered Mr. Davenport decidedly, although he himself was not so sure as he seemed; "they are not drowned."

With lanterns to aid them, a search was begun through the grounds.

Two scared little girls presently saw lights flitting like fireflies below them.

"Perhaps it's burglars."

"Or—or the Prince to rescue us."

"I don't want any Prince; Julia. I want my mamma. I'm tired of being a Princess. I want to go home. Let's call."

"But what if they are burglars."

"Burglars don't carry lights, do they?"

Then they heard voices calling:

"Julia, Beth."

"Here we are, papa. Here, up in this big tree."

This answer brought relief to many hearts. Even Julia was not sorry to descend again to earth, and be once more an ordinary girl. Romance is not always as pleasant as being practical. Let children who are inclined to run away from home, remember this.

CHAPTER X

The Horse Race

"I'm going to double the recipe, Maggie."

"Law, honey, yo' hadn't best. I 'lows it's more partickiler to get good dat way."

"I can't help it. I want plenty of it so the judges can all have a taste. They'll be sure to give me a prize."

Beth had on an apron in which she was almost lost. In her hand, she held an open cook book from which she read:

"'The whites of five eggs.' Twice five is ten. Give me ten eggs, Maggie."

The good-natured Maggie counted out the desired number.

"I'll break dem for yo', honey."

"No, Maggie, I must do it every bit myself or it wouldn't be fair. Oh, dear me. The yolk has got into this one so it's no good. Another egg, please, Maggie."

All ten of the whites were finally in one dish. Beth tried to beat them and splattered them not only over herself but over the pantry floor.

"Whites of eggs are very slippery, Maggie."

"I wouldn't beat more'n half at a time, honey."

Beth accepted the suggestion and succeeded in getting a good stiff froth from the eggs. Next, she measured out the other ingredients. She tried to be careful, but somehow she spilled flour not only over the pantry floor but also over herself.

"Beth, you are a powdered beauty," called a boyish voice from the open pantry door.

"Why, Harvey, where did you come from?"

"Oh, I came to see you, and your mother told me I'd find you here. What are you making?"

"Wait until I put this pan in the oven, and I'll tell you all about it. Maggie," added Beth to the cook, "you're not to peep at my cake even. Promise me."

"Law, honey, I won't even go into the kitchen if yo' don't want me to. I'll stay here in de pantry until yo' calls me, but I fear you'll forget it."

"No, indeed, I won't."

The precious cake was consigned to the oven, and then Beth joined Harvey on the piazza.

"I've made an angel's cake, Harvey, and I'm going to get a prize for it. Mamma says the only way to learn to cook is just to cook."

All this time, Harvey had been holding one hand behind him. Beth now noticed that he was hiding something.

"What have you there?" she asked.

Harvey looked bashful. "Well, ever since I came so near burning you up, I've been saving my money to buy you a present, and here it is."

Beth drew in her breath at sight of a beautiful dog collar. "Oh, it's for Don, and what's this mark on it? 'Don. Owned by Beth Davenport.' Oh, it's too lovely for anything. Where is Don? I must try it on him."

The prize cake was all forgotten. Away she and Harvey scampered.

Don was out near the stable. The collar fitted him exactly, and the children talked and admired it for some time.

Suddenly Beth gasped, "Oh, my cake," and ran as fast as she could back to the kitchen.

Upon opening the oven, an avalanche of smoke came forth. The cake was burned to charcoal.

The heart-broken little cook sat down on the floor and cried bitterly. Maggie stuck her head through the pantry window.

"For de law's sake—dat beau'ful cake. I knew I jes' ought to have 'tended it."

"Maggie, Maggie, why didn't you tell me it was time to look at it?"

"Sure, honey, didn't yo' tol' me I must have nuffin to do with it?"

"Yes, but——" the sentence ended in sobs.

"Never mind, Beth," said Harvey; "Maggie will make you another, won't you, Maggie?"

"I don't want her to make me another. I was going to take a prize with this one, and the judges won't give prizes for burnt cake, boo-hoo."

Suddenly Beth resolved not to cry over spilt milk. She jumped to her feet.

"Harvey, run away. I'm going to make another cake, and I won't let it burn. I'll get the prize yet."

Harvey reluctantly departed. Beth immediately went to work and made another. When once it was in the oven, she watched it so carefully that Maggie feared it would be spoiled by overzeal. For a wonder, it was a great success. A professional cook could not have made a better-looking cake.

By this time, it was growing so late that Beth did not wait to make frosting.

She took her dress and cake over to the Fair building, which was about a quarter of a mile from her home. She was in plenty of time to make her entries.

Dollie was grazing in the pasture when Beth returned. This reminded her of her great desire to ride Dollie, so she called the horse to her, and she came running at the call. Dollie was always sure of sugar from Beth.

Beth put her hand up against the horse and whispered:

"I wish I might ride you, Dollie. I know I could. I'll go and ask mamma if I may."

Away ran Beth to her mother.

"Mamma, may I ride Dollie this morning?"

"No, dear, I'm going to use Dollie myself. I'm going to get Mrs. Corner, who is to spend the day with me. We are going to the races this afternoon."

"Won't you bring Laura back, too?"

"She probably can't come. She goes to school, you know."

"Mamma, will you let me ride Dollie sometime?"

"Yes, dear, sometime, but don't tease now."

Beth took this as a decided promise. She told Maggie, January, Harvey, and Julia that she was to ride Dollie; that her mamma had said so. She did nothing but talk about the matter the whole morning.

Mrs. Davenport returned with Mrs. Corner in time for luncheon. About two o'clock Beth ran into the library where her mother and her guest were having a cozy chat before starting for the races. She had thought so much about her ride that she took it for granted that Mrs. Davenport must know her thoughts.

"Mamma, I'm going now. May I?"

At this particular moment the conversation between the two women was especially absorbing so that Mrs. Davenport hardly heeded Beth.

"May I, mamma?"

Mrs. Davenport glanced towards her for a second. She took it for granted that Beth wished to play with either Julia or Harvey.

"All right. Run along, dear."

In the seventh heaven of happiness, Beth skipped up-stairs.

She decided that it would never do to ride in an ordinary dress, and believed that her mother would not object if she borrowed her riding habit. Beth knew just where to find it. The skirt was one of those now old-fashioned affairs that almost swept the ground even on a grown-up person.

However, Beth was not to be daunted. She heroically jumped into the skirt, but found that the belt was almost twice too large for her. This necessitated the use of a safety pin. She took a step towards the bureau, and fell sprawling over the floor, tangled in yards of trailing skirt. She tried

to rise, and tripped again. For a moment, she rested on the floor, thinking to herself that it must be a much harder matter to manage a habit than a horse. Then, gathering up the unruly skirt in both hands, she managed to reach the bureau where she pinned the skirt tightly around her. But even now her troubles were not over.

The waist proved almost as big a problem as the skirt. She buttoned it on over her own dress, but even then it was about twice too large for her.

She looked at herself in a glass, and burst forth into hearty peals of laughter.

"I declah"—already she pronounced "declare" almost like the darkies—"I feel like a cat dressed up in clothes. It can't move without tumbling all over itself, and neither can I."

She held up her arms and flapped them. They were almost lost in the voluminous sleeves. Her hands were not to be seen at all.

"I never can manage a horse without hands," she murmured.

She overcame this difficulty by pinning up the bothersome sleeves.

Next, she jammed her mother's riding hat down on her curls. It, too, was much too large for her, and had some blond frizzes sewn across the front of it. The hat with its false front added the finishing touch of rakishness to Beth. She, however, was as proud as a peacock over her attire.

As fast as her awkward skirt would allow, she hurried in search of January.

He was very much amused over her appearance.

"Missy, I declah, yo' looks like a rag bag dat needs some rags to fill it out. Whaffor don't yo' get chuck full of somethin'?"

She would not heed such remarks, but said with great dignity:

"I wish the saddle put on Dollie."

"I'm skeered yo'r maw won't like me to."

"But she told me I might ride."

Still January hesitated.

"I dunno as I kin kotch Dollie."

"You can try. Hurry, January."

For once Dollie was easily caught and saddled. January helped Beth to mount. Nobody but him saw the start. He was so much interested that he walked down as far as the gate and opened it.

Dollie did not seem to wish to go for Beth, but the latter settled the question with a switch cut by January. She headed Dollie in the direction of the Fair grounds.

There was more driving than usual on the shell road, because of the Fair and the races. Many a person turned, stared, and smiled to see that quaint little figure on Dollie going along so primly.

A young lady, a cousin of Beth's, was spending the winter in Jacksonville that year, and was very popular in society. On this particular afternoon she, too, was driving on the shell road and chanced upon Beth. She and her escort laughed so heartily over the child's ludicrous appearance that Beth, at first, was inclined to be offended. However, she drew Dollie up alongside of the carriage.

"Are you laughing because we're going slow? I'm not a bit afraid. Say, Cousin Lulu, would you like to have a race with me?"

Lulu and her escort laughed harder than ever. Beth tried to look more dignified.

"I bet I could beat you, Cousin Lulu. Are you afraid I would? Come on and try."

The young man in the carriage leaned forward.

"Do you ride well enough for that?"

"Of course, I do."

This was hardly true, as she had never ridden at a fast pace in her life. She did not think it necessary to own to this, however.

The young man was highly amused.

"Well, little lady, we'll try your skill. If you reach the Fair grounds gate before we do, I'll give you a box of candy. Now when I count three and say go, we'll both start. Now one, two, three, go."

Beth gave Dollie a cut with the switch. She was bound to win that box of candy.

Dollie, surprised by the sudden blow, leaped forward, almost unseating Beth who, however, managed in some way not to fall.

The young man had a fine horse which also started forward at a good fast pace, and soon nosed ahead of his rival.

Dollie, not to be outdone, quickened her gait. Both horses began to feel the contagion of the race, especially Dollie who had been, as January said, a race horse in her day. Her mouth tightened on the bit.

Beth's blood quickened too. After she found she could cling on, she was not a particle frightened but began to enjoy the sport.

The young man turned to Lulu, saying:

"She does well for such a little thing, doesn't she?"

He touched his horse with the whip. It went faster. Whereupon Dollie took the bit so completely that Beth had no control over her. Her racing blood was thoroughly aroused, and it would have taken an extremely strong hold to quiet her. She simply flew, and Beth began to be scared. The words of January flashed through her mind: "She'll go so fast, you'll wish you hadn't got on her."

Nose to nose the horses sped over the hard shell road. The situation grew critical for Beth.

She wondered what her mother would say if she were thrown and her lifeless body were carried home.

"She will be so sorry that she scolded me yesterday. I wish I could tell her that I know I deserved it. I don't want to die."

The world seemed more beautiful than ever now that death seemed near her.

"Whoa, Dollie, whoa," she cried.

But Dollie paid not the slightest attention. With head curved well down she sped as fast as in her palmiest racing days. Slowly but surely she forged ahead of her fast rival.

"The horse is running away with the child. Stop her, stop her," cried Cousin Lulu in alarm.

Her warning came too late.

They were now opposite the Fair grounds, which had a very high fence surrounding them. There were two gates, one for pedestrians and the other for carriages.

Dollie swerved in at the foot passageway and her helpless rider could not stop her. People scattered in every direction before the runaway horse. Even the gate-keeper stepped aside, dropping his tickets in his fright.

"Oh, what shall we do? She'll surely be killed. She'll be dragged from her horse. Her dress has caught on the gate," cried Cousin Lulu with her heart in her mouth.

Beth let go the reins and held with one hand to the saddle pommel, and with the other to Dollie's mane. This saved her. Her skirt tore loose from the gate. Onward flew horse and child.

Cousin Lulu and her escort hastened after through the driveway. Far ahead of them they saw Dollie and Beth flying towards the race track with lightning speed.

Mr. Davenport chanced to come from the Fair building at this very minute.

"Oh, Uncle James," screamed Lulu, "Dollie is running away with Beth."

He hardly understood, but saw the runaway horse now nearing the race track and hastened after it.

With the long memory of a horse, Dollie recognized the track as a scene of bygone triumphs, and made straight for it. No rider urged her on as of old, no rivals were by her side; but Dollie of her own accord started around that course at a breakneck speed with a little girl clinging wildly to her mane.

People were already gathering on the grandstand and they held their breath for very fear, Beth held hers also. Dollie needed all of her breath for her solitary run. On, on, she flew. Beth clung closer, while people sprang to their feet in their anxiety over the outcome.

By this time Beth was hatless. Her long curls and the clumsy torn skirt were flying backwards.

On, on they came. People leaned far over the stand. Jockeys ran out on the track. One of them cried enthusiastically:

"It is a beautiful run if only the little one isn't killed."

Dollie in truth was making a wonderful run for a horse that had no competition. With long swinging strides she came around the track, and her speed remained unabated. If people had not been so fearful for the child's life, some one might have thought to time Dollie, and it is very probable that it would then have been proved that she was fully equaling her record if she was not breaking it.

Mr. Davenport ran up the track in an agony of fear, ready to head off the runaway animal if it seemed advisable. The jockeys followed in his wake.

"That is the child's father. How terrible it must be for him," said some of the spectators.

Dollie's speed remained unabated.

When she was three-quarters of the way around, Mr. Davenport was almost within hailing distance of his brave little girl who still clung to the excited horse.

Mr. Davenport was undecided whether to try to stop the horse or not, for fear a sudden stop might unseat his child.

Beth saw her father and grew excited.

"Oh, papa," she cried, taking her hand from the pommel to wave it to him.

The action came near being fatal. Dollie was making the curve. Beth swayed, and Mr. Davenport and many another spectator shuddered, fearing she would be dashed to death. She, however, proved a better rider than they expected. She was growing accustomed to the rapid motion of the horse, and gained confidence thereby. She straightened herself, clinging with one hand and gathering up the reins that had been hanging loose, with the other. Then she pulled on them again, crying:

"Whoa, Dollie, whoa."

Dollie perhaps was tiring of her mad run, for she heeded the frantic appeal. Gently as any well-regulated machinery, she slackened speed.

Delighted at the success of her horsemanship, Beth repeated the action, crying:

"Whoa—nice Dollie." Then in a tumult of relief she shouted:

"Hurrah, I'm not going to die after all."

People on the grandstand heard the sweet childish cry of joy and saw Dollie a moment after come to a standstill. Instantly a wild outburst of enthusiasm followed. People clapped and stamped wildly, shouting themselves hoarse. Mr. Davenport, too agitated for speech, rushed up to Beth, and clasped her close to his heart. The jockeys clustered around, and they too clapped their hands in approval.

"Why are all the people shouting?" asked Beth.

Mr. Davenport gave her a convulsive hug and answered:

"They are shouting for you, my dear."

For a few seconds Beth was quite overcome, and then she whispered to her father:

"I guess they're not shouting for me, but for Dollie. I didn't really want her to go so fast, but I couldn't stop her at first. In fact, I thought I was going to be killed, sure. I am very, very glad I was not thrown."

If she was glad, Mr. Davenport was more so, but he was still too overcome to say much. Beth was rather surprised to have him hug and kiss her so often, for generally he was not a demonstrative man.

Presently Beth said:

"Papa, I know how to ride now, don't I? And say, papa, I won a box of candy from Cousin Lulu's beau."

One of the jockeys heard her. He grinned his approval and said:

"She's got pluck enough to be one of us. I reckon she's born with a liking for horses. My,

didn't the old mare go!"

CHAPTER XI

Don Meets a Sad Fate

Marian and Beth were getting ready for bed. Marian looked tragic. She brushed her hair so energetically that it seemed as if she must be pulling it out by the handfuls. Suddenly, she threw down the brush, and clasped her hands dramatically.

"I simply must have the money."

Beth, interested, looked up at her,

"What's the matter, Marian? I thought you had plenty of money. You've been saving your allowance for weeks to spend at the Fair."

"So I have, but I lost my pocketbook with every bit of the money at the Fair to-day."

"Why, Marian Davenport," Beth gasped.

Marian burst into tears. Beth rushed up to her sister and threw her arms around her neck.

"I'm awfully sorry, Marian."

Marian brushed the tears away and continued:

"I hate to have papa and mamma think me so dreadfully careless, so I'm not going to let them know, but I've just got to have some money. Beth, won't you lend me part of yours? I'll pay you just as soon as I can get some more."

Beth hung her head. "I'm awfully sorry, but I've spent all my money."

Marian looked at her in surprise. "Why, Beth Davenport, how is that?"

Beth seated herself upon the floor. "Well, Marian, you know both you and I decided to buy mamma's birthday present before the Fair began for fear we wouldn't have anything left to buy it with. Well, after that I had only a dollar."

"But that dollar was to last you all the week."

Beth took down a brush and brushed out the snarls while she talked.

"Yes, I know it was, but you see, Marian, Julia and Harvey were with me to-day. They were my guests. Papa gave me the tickets to take them. Well, it was dreadfully hot, and we did want some ice cream awfully, so I asked them to have some. There was thirty cents gone."

Marian looked judicial. "Well, what about the other seventy?"

Beth brushed snarls so vigorously that she winced once or twice.

"Well, you may think me dreadfully foolish, but I invited them to the Punch and Judy show. That took thirty cents more."

"Well, but you still should have forty cents."

Beth stopped brushing and clasped her hands.

"Well, I just couldn't help it. I—well, this is how it happened. You know papa gave Gustus tickets for the Fair for himself, his brothers and sisters, and mamma let him have the afternoon off. Well, just as we came out of the Punch and Judy show we met them. You know mamma gives Gustus clothes, but the others looked dreadfully ragged. I stopped and spoke to them and asked them if they were going into the show. Marian, tears came into Gustus's eyes, as he said, 'Missy Beth, the likes of us don't go to shows. I've never been to a show in my life.'"

"Never been to a show in his life? How was that, Beth?"

"That was just what I asked him, Marian. I knew mamma paid him for waiting on us. He told me that he took all his money to his mother. Marian, I just couldn't help it. I spent my last forty cents for four Punch and Judy tickets for four of them, and Harvey and Julia bought some for the others. Do you think we were foolish?"

Marian hesitated for an instant.

"I suppose I should have done the same thing in your place. I am awfully sorry, though, you haven't any money to lend me."

"Maybe my dress and cake will take prizes. Then I'll have some to lend you."

Beth could hardly wait for the last day of the exhibition to see if she would be awarded any prize. She thought that nothing could mar her happiness if she received one.

The prizes were decided upon on Friday night, but were not to be made public until Saturday morning. Beth was up bright and early, therefore, on Saturday. She was all impatience to be through breakfast that she might learn her fate, but she found that she might as well possess her soul in patience, as Maggie proved provoking, and would not hurry in the least.

To pass away the time, Beth hunted up Don. At sight of her, he barked and wagged his tail. She threw her arms about his neck. "Yes, Don, I know you're glad to see me, and I love you with all my heart. Come on and we'll have a play."

But, for some unaccountable reason, he did not seem ready for a frolic. As soon as she let go of him, he walked back by the stable and lay down.

"Come on, Don," she called coaxingly.

He did not budge. She stamped her foot impatiently.

"Oh, everybody's provoking this morning. You're horrid and mean, Don, and I don't believe I love you, after all."

He looked up at this. His gaze seemed a reproach to her, but she grew only the crosser.

"Oh, you needn't be looking that way at me. You're lazy, and you know it. If you were sorry, you'd play with me. No, I don't love you one little bit."

She walked back to the house, and then sulked until the breakfast gong sounded.

To make up for being somewhat late, Maggie had prepared an extra fine meal. Mr. and Mrs. Davenport and even Marian proved unusually talkative that morning, and they started their breakfast very happily. Beth, too, could not withstand the general good humor, and soon her spirits began to rise. She said, however:

"Do you know, that horrid old Don would not play with me this morning. He——"

At that instant, January came running up on the piazza, where they were eating breakfast.

"Missy Beth," he cried, "come quick; Don acts mighty queer. 'Pears like he's dying."

Not only Beth, but Mr. and Mrs. Davenport and Marian jumped up from the table and ran out to the barn.

They found the noble dog where Beth had left him. He was, in truth, in the very throes of death.

Beth fell on her knees beside him, and lifted his head upon her lap. Tears were streaming from her eyes so that she could hardly see him.

"Don," she cried, "you know I didn't mean it. You know I love you."

His fast glazing eye brightened momentarily at the sound of her voice. If he could have spoken, he would have said:

"Little mistress, I never doubted your love. I wasn't lazy. You know now why I wouldn't play."

"Oh, we must do something for him. It would break my heart if he died," cried poor Beth.

"I'm skeered it's too late, but mebber, if I fotch," began January. But Don, with one long, loving look at Beth, gave up his breath with a gasp, stretching out in the rigidity of death.

"It is too late," said Mr. Davenport huskily.

"No, no, no," cried Beth; "God wouldn't be so cruel as to let him die. Don, look at me. Dear old doggie, I love you, I love you."

But Don was beyond range of her call. Mrs. Davenport and Marian were crying softly, too, and there were tears even in the eyes of Mr. Davenport and January.

"You'se breakfasts all gettin' cole," called Maggie, not knowing of the trouble.

"Food would choke me," declared Marian.

"I couldn't eat either. Do you want anything, James?" asked Mrs. Davenport.

"No,—I'm not hungry now," there was a break in Mr. Davenport's voice.

"Clear off the table, Maggie. Don is dead."

"Don dead?" cried Maggie, running out, "Why what am de mattah?"

"I 'lows he got hole some of de rat pizen," said January.

At sight of Beth's intense grief, Maggie's heart melted.

"Dar, dar, honey, don't yo' cry. Yo'se pah'll get you anoder dog."

"I don't want another dog. I—want—my—Don. I want him, I'll never be happy again," and Beth cried so hard that Mr. Davenport tried to comfort her.

"Beth," he said, "I have some news that will make you happy. I knew all about it last night, but I wouldn't tell you because I wanted you to find it out for yourself. Both your dress and cake have taken prizes—first prizes at that."

Her sobs did not lessen in the least. She hid her face on her father's shoulder and murmured:

"A hundred prizes wouldn't make up for dear old Don,—my dear old doggie who saved my life."

CHAPTER XII

The Arrival of Duke

The death of Don so preyed upon Beth's spirits, that one night Mrs. Davenport took her in her arms and said:

"Do you remember that once when I was sad about something, you slipped your arms around my neck and asked, 'Mamma, what makes you think of the unpleasant things? why don't you just think of the nice things? That's the way I do.'"

"Did I say that really?"

Mrs. Davenport smiled at the mournfulness of Beth's tones.

"Yes, dear, and now mamma wants you to practice what you preached. I think you and I will have to form a 'Pleasant Club.' Every night we will tell each other all the pleasant things that happen during the day. What do you say?"

The child nestled close to her mother.

"It would be nice, mamma, only nothing pleasant happens now that Don is dead."

"Why, why," exclaimed Mrs. Davenport, "that isn't at all like my happy Beth. Put on your thinking cap and see if you can't remember something nice that happened to-day."

Beth remained silent for a moment, and then suddenly smiled.

"Why, yes, mamma, now that I think of it, a whole lot of nice things happened. Do you know, ever since Don died, Julia has been perfectly lovely. She always plays just as I want to. And what do you think? Harvey played with Julia and me to-day, and he would never stay before when Julia was here. We even got him to play dolls with us, although he said dolls were beneath a boy."

Mrs. Davenport smiled. "Why should he feel that way?"

"Well, you see, mamma, he doesn't think much of girls and their play. He's always saying to me, 'Beth, don't you wish you were a boy?' So one day I answered, 'No, indeed, Harvey.' It wasn't quite the truth, mamma, for I should like to be a boy, but I wouldn't let him know it. Then I asked him: 'Don't you wish you were a girl, Harvey?'"

"What did he say, dear?"

"He grunted and said, 'Eh—be a girl? I'd rather be nothing than be a girl.'"

Mrs. Davenport could hardly keep her face straight; nevertheless, she said gravely:

"If Harvey ever says that to you again, you tell him your mamma says that girls are of just as

much consequence as boys. God would not have created them otherwise. Well, what else happened to-day?"

"Oh, Harvey offered me a bird's nest that he'd stolen. Mamma, I couldn't help scolding him about it. You know papa doesn't think it right. So I had Harvey take the nest back."

"That was a good girl."

"And oh, mamma, I forgot to tell you how nice Marian has been. This afternoon after school, she made some candy for Julia and Harvey and me. It was just lovely. And now that I think of it, Maggie has been good too. She hasn't scolded us once, although I guess we are in her way very much sometimes."

Mrs. Davenport now kissed Beth good-night.

"Doesn't my little girl see that there never was a sorrow so great but that it has its bright side? You have much for which to be thankful, dear, and you must try to be happy."

This talk helped Beth somewhat. Nevertheless, for weeks thereafter, a dog did not cross her path without bringing tears to her eyes. And many a night she cried herself to sleep, grieving for Don.

Sorrow, however, is not eternal, and comfort came to her from an unexpected source.

One afternoon the Davenports were driving home from Jacksonville, when Beth chanced to look back. She thereupon uttered such an exclamation of delight that Mr. Davenport, who was driving, pulled in on the horses.

"Oh, just see the beautiful dog!" exclaimed Beth. "I believe he's following us."

About three yards behind the carriage was a very large dog, but possessing a grace and a swiftness of motion unusual to his size. He was not only beautiful, but also intelligent-looking. His coat was of dark brown, and smooth as sealskin, showing every muscle of his body. His broad square head and monstrous jaw reminded the beholder of a tiger. His ears were close-cropped, which gave a compactness to his head that brought into prominence his great changeable eyes: eyes that the Davenports afterwards found so fiery sometimes that they reflected red lights; at other times so mildly brown that they beamed with the greatest affection. The dog was a combination of Russian bloodhound and mastiff.

"He looks the thoroughbred, through and through," declared Mrs. Davenport. "See how majestically he moves. Duke would be a good name for him. Here, Duke. Here, Duke."

At the call, the dog raised his head and came bounding up to the carriage. By a strange coincidence, Mrs. Davenport had hit upon his name.

"Come here, Duke," cried Beth.

Large as the dog was, he jumped into the back part of the carriage where Marian and Beth sat. Both children were wild with delight.

"Papa, let's take him home with us," begged Marian.

Mr. Davenport, however, would not listen to the suggestion.

"He is a very valuable dog, and it would not be honorable," he declared. "Push him out immediately."

Both children began pleading, but Mr. Davenport proved relentless. Therefore, Duke was finally put out of the carriage.

"Go home, Duke," cried Mr. Davenport, driving on.

The children looked back to see if the dog obeyed. To their joy, they saw him following as unconcerned as before. Mr. Davenport took out the whip and waved it at him. Duke stopped a second or two, and then started after them at a little greater distance.

"Well," said Mr. Davenport, "all we can do is to let him come with us now. To-morrow, I shall inquire in town and find his owner."

So Duke lodged at the Davenports that night, and was treated by the children as a royal guest. He captivated their hearts from the first, and he fully responded to their love.

At breakfast the next morning, Mr. Davenport looked up from his paper and said:

"Well, here is a notice of Duke's loss. I do not wonder that he ran away. This Brown who advertises is one of the hardest drinkers in town. Poor dog, to have such a master."

"Papa, couldn't you buy Duke?" asked Beth.

"I may consider the matter. Don't set your heart on the dog, however. He is very valuable, and Brown may not wish to part with him."

That day, at noon, Beth and Duke were frolicing near the barn. Suddenly, without seeming cause, Duke rushed towards the house, looking crestfallen. Beth, however, soon saw why Duke had run. She beheld a man walking up the driveway towards her. She had grown accustomed to Southern politeness, and resented the man's not raising his hat when he said:

"Hello, little un. I've come after my dog. Where is he?"

Beth's heart sank. "Who are you?" she stammered.

"My name is Brown, and I've come after Duke."

"But I thought my papa was going to buy him."

The man laughed. "The old fellow did offer to buy him, but I wouldn't sell. I told him I wouldn't take a hundred dollars for the dog. But hurry up, little un, and get Duke for me."

Beth felt more resentful than ever. The man had dared to call her father "old fellow," and herself "little un." Besides, he had come for Duke. There were tears in her eyes, but she brushed them angrily away, and declared defiantly:

"You can hunt him up for yourself. I don't know where he is."

The man swore under his breath, and muttered something about having no use for people who tried to steal dogs. However, he moved on towards the house.

Beth was so anxious about the outcome of his errand that she followed at a cautious distance.

The man met Maggie at the kitchen door.

"Hello, mammy," he said. "Where is my dog Duke?"

Maggie caught sight of Beth's eyes, and intuitively felt the child's solicitude. She was up in arms in a minute.

"Yo' needn't mammy me; I ain't yo'r mammy; and what's more if I cotch yo' takin' any dog from here, I'se gwineter give yo' the worst frailin' yo' ever had. So yo' jes' bettah be skeedadlin'."

At this instant, Mrs. Davenport came to the door.

"If you wish Duke, you'll have to come into the house and get him. He's hiding behind the bed in the spare room, and I can't get him to come out."

Brown, unmindful of Maggie's threat, perhaps realizing that her bark was worse than her bite, went with Mrs. Davenport to the spare room. Beth followed after them. Brown got down upon his knees and tried to entice the dog out. Duke, however, would not budge.

"Beth, if you called him perhaps he'd come," suggested Mrs. Davenport.

Beth burst into tears. "Mamma, I can't do it. It breaks my heart to have him go."

The man arose. There was a kindlier light in his eyes. "Little un, get him for me and I'll promise not to whip him."

"Dear," whispered Mrs. Davenport, "call him; it is a kindness to Duke. He belongs to the man."

So Beth called, and immediately Duke answered the summons. However, he shrank from his owner.

"Duke," said Beth, "we'd like to keep you, but we can't. You must go quietly."

Mr. Brown had a leather collar which he fastened on the dog. Then he led him quietly away. Beth cried, and even Mrs. Davenport's eyes were suspiciously moist.

That night it rained, and the Davenports had a wood-fire around which they gathered. Beth was just saying, "I wish I could have kept Duke," when she was interrupted by a noise upon the piazza.

"It sounds like a convict with chains," suggested Marian, who had a lively imagination.

Beth looked towards the front window and cried:

"It's Duke."

Sure enough, with his paws upon the window ledge, and his great intelligent eyes looking at them, there was Duke looking very triumphant.

Marian and Beth rushed to the front door, and called him into the house. He came all wet and muddy, dragging a great chain which he had evidently broken. Notwithstanding his drabbled condition, both children were demonstrative in their greeting, and their parents could not find it in their hearts to object. In fact, Duke was brought in beside the fire and made much of that night.

The next forenoon his owner came to carry Duke away. In leaving, he remarked to Maggie that he'd see—well, that the dog didn't get away again.

That day passed without any new developments, but the next morning the Davenport family was wakened by a series of barks.

Marian and Beth immediately jumped out of bed, and rushed out upon the upper piazza. In the yard below, looking as conscious as a truant child, was Duke.

Beth, not waiting to put on anything over her night-dress, rushed down-stairs and opened the door for the dog. At once, she noticed an ugly gash on the front of his chest. The Davenports could not imagine how he received it, but they doctored and petted him to his great delight.

Soon after breakfast, Mr. Brown again appeared, very indignant over Duke's truancy.

"I'll make the ugly beast pay for all the trouble he has caused me," he muttered, flourishing before the cowering dog a riding whip which he carried.

"You shan't whip him," declared Marian, her eyes blazing. "I'll—I'll have you arrested if you do."

Beth looked as if she would like to hug Marian for her boldness. The man laughed.

"I ain't going to whip him. It wouldn't do no sort of good. But I'll outwit the ugly beast yet. It seems as if I couldn't keep him from you, but I'll get the better of him yet. Last night I locked him in a room in the barn where all the lower sashes are barred with iron. He kept me awake howling most of the night. Not till morning was he quiet. I thought I'd conquered him, but when I went to the barn my dog was gone. I found the upper glass in one of the windows broken, and saw that he must have jumped and escaped that way, though it seems incredible."

"That's the way he cut himself," declared Marian, giving Duke a parting love pat.

That day, Mr. Brown, by means of a heavy chain, led Duke down to one of the river boats.

"Keep an eye on this dog," he said to the captain; "I'll chain him up well here. At Silver Lake a man'll come aboard for him. I'm sending him there because he runs away."

Duke howled so pitifully that after the boat was well under way from Jacksonville one of the sailors took pity on him and unloosed him, supposing him perfectly safe aboard boat in midwater.

However, Duke was not to be hindered by obstacles. With one bound, he leaped to the side of the boat and jumped overboard.

"Well," the captain muttered, "I don't know what Brown'll say, but it can't be helped."

Duke swam immediately to shore. There one of the wharf hands saw him as he landed, and exclaimed:

"Why, that's Brown's dog. Perhaps he'll give me something if I take him home."

So the wharf hand caught Duke and took him up to Brown's home at noon. Brown, who had been drinking and was in a very unpleasant mood, was struck with amazement at sight of the dog. He gave the wharf hand some small change, and, when he was gone, took Duke into the back yard and beat him. Next, he tied the dog with an extra heavy chain.

"There," he exclaimed, "you're stronger than I think you are if you break that."

Ill-usage had thoroughly aroused Duke. When Mr. Brown was out of sight, he struggled so vigorously that the collar around his neck worked into the raw flesh. Undaunted, however, he struggled on until he again broke his fetters. Away he bounded over the four miles to the Davenports'. Needless to say, the children were overjoyed to see him.

To their surprise, Mr. Brown did not appear that day, nor the following morning. Consequently, Mr. Davenport went up to his house at noon, and asked to see him. Brown by this time was sober, and at heart ashamed of his treatment of Duke.

"Brown," said Mr. Davenport in greeting, "I've come to tell you that your dog is out at our place again."

"I supposed as much," he answered curtly.

"Well, why haven't you been out for him?"

"It's labor lost. I can't keep the dog."

Mr. Davenport hesitated a moment.

"Brown, perhaps we've been somewhat to blame in this matter, but, really, I couldn't help the children's making a fuss over the dog. Beth, my youngest child, was grieving herself sick over the death of a favorite dog, and Duke won her heart at once. For her sake, I'd be very glad if you'd sell the dog."

"I won't sell the dog."

Mr. Davenport walked to the door.

"I don't see that there is anything that I can do then except to send Duke back to you. I'll have one of my darkies bring him in to-morrow morning."

Mr. Brown did not answer a word. However, when Mr. Davenport was halfway down the steps, he stopped him and said:

"I'm the only one to blame. I see that love is more powerful than hate. Tell your little girl to keep the dog. I make her a present of him with one condition. If you ever leave Florida, I want the dog back. Good-morning."

Before Mr. Davenport could utter a word, Brown closed the door as if fearful of gratitude.

CHAPTER XIII

Anxious Hours

One day, a strange white dog appeared at the Davenports'. No one knew whence she came. Perhaps Duke enticed her to the house. He tried to bespeak Beth's interest by barking vigorously and jumping up and down wildly, as if begging the child to keep her.

At first, it was hard for Beth to feel any interest in the dog. It was fearfully thin, and always acted as if it expected to be kicked. It had one redeeming feature in that its eyes were very beautiful. They were large and brown, with a mildly pathetic look that appealed to Beth's soft heart so that she decided to keep the dog.

For the first few days the newcomer sneaked under the house when any one was around. When she saw, however, that she was left unmolested, she gained courage. Duke was all devotion, and the white dog thrived under such attention. She freshened up so well that Beth wondered how she ever thought the dog ugly. Kindness and good food work wonders with dogs as well as with people. The days of her stay lengthened into months.

One morning, Beth came running in from the barn, her eyes brilliant from excitement.

"Mamma, mamma," she called, "what do you think? White dog"—they had never given her a name—"has seven of the cutest little puppies you ever saw. Duke took me out and showed them to me."

"Duke took you out?"

"Yes, mamma. When I went out to play with him this morning he caught hold of my dress and tried to pull me towards the barn. I thought he was just playing; but when he did it the second time, I followed him, and he led me to white dog and the puppies. Oh, they're the cutest things you ever saw."



[Illustration: "The cutest things you ever saw."]

Beth watched the growth of the puppies with great interest. She was delighted when their eyes opened, and when they began to run around she was almost too happy for words.

That night she said to her papa: "I've been thinking about Mr. Brown. He must miss Duke awfully. He wasn't such a horrid man after all, or he wouldn't have let me keep Duke."

Mr. Davenport smiled. "Beth, a man was talking to me about him to-day. The man said Brown was trying to reform; that he hadn't taken any liquor for some time past. I was very glad to hear it."

Beth pondered a minute or two, then asked:

"Do you think if he had a dog now he'd be nice to it?"

"Yes, I believe he would. Brown wasn't half bad except when he drank. But you're not thinking of giving Duke back to him, are you?"

Beth shook her head very vigorously. "I couldn't do that, papa. I love Duke too much."

She said no more but got out paper and pencil. She was backward in all schooling at this time, and could only print. However, she sat down at the table beside her father and went to work. It proved a very difficult task to her, but she persevered until she finished. Most of the correctly spelled words she learned from her father.

This is what she wrote:

"To dukes master duke has puppies wood you like a pup i havent thanked you for duke but i love duke very much and think you a nice man to give duke to me

"your little friend

"Beth davenport."

She put the note in an envelope and sealed it. Then she said to her father:

"Papa, will you give this to Mr. Brown? He's to have one of Duke's puppies if he wants it."

Mr. Davenport delivered the note as desired.

The next afternoon, Beth saw a buggy turn in at their place, and presently she discerned Mr. Brown within it. She waited, half-bashful, until he drove up.

He leaped from the buggy and raised his hat. Beth was delighted because in every way he seemed so much improved.

"I've come for the puppy."

"It's in the barn, I'll get it for you," cried Beth, running there as fast as she could.

Duke was playing with the puppies. When Beth appeared and took one he followed her out,

but at sight of his former owner, he stopped still. Mr. Brown, however, called out pleasantly:

"Hello, Duke, I'm not going to take you away. Won't you come to me? Come, nice dog."

Duke must have felt the transformation in his former master, for he allowed Mr. Brown to pat him. Beth did not say a word, but held out the puppy. Mr. Brown took it, and said a little brokenly:

"I'm not used to making nice speeches to little girls, but you're very good to give this puppy to me."

"Why, it's nothing at all. Didn't you give me Duke?" murmured Beth.

He hesitated an instant. "But it means a great deal to me. It shows that you trust me. Missy, I promise never to strike this one as long as I have him. Good-bye."

Thereupon he jumped into the buggy and drove away.

Beth returned to the barn with Duke. January as usual was idling. He had his fiddle and was playing "Dixie." Beth sat down on the hay near him, while the dog family frolicked around her. She was happy, so happy that from sheer light-heartedness she began to sing.

Duke pricked up his ears. White dog cocked her head to one side, and the six puppies followed their parents' example. Duke uttered a low deep howl that chimed in with Beth's singing. White dog howled in a high soprano and the six little dogs did likewise, but in shriller tones. Beth was so surprised that she stopped singing, and the dogs immediately ceased howling, evidently waiting for Beth to lead them.

She began to sing again, and the dogs began to howl, swaying their heads from side to side.

Their howling was so funny that Beth had to laugh, January joining in. Beth then ran into the house for Mrs. Davenport.

"Mamma, come and hear the concert," she cried.

"What concert?"

"Come with me and you'll see, if they'll do it again. It's the funniest singing you ever heard."

Beth led her mother to the barn.

"Where are the singers?" asked Mrs. Davenport.

"Wait," answered Beth, calling the dogs to her. Then she began singing and the dogs began howling, holding their heads high in the air. Duke, however, proved lazy. He would come in only once in a while with his deep bass, but this made the effect more funny.

Mrs. Davenport laughed over the performance until her sides ached. That afternoon Beth and the dogs had another concert for the benefit of Mr. Davenport and Marian. In the evening the Gordons and the Bakers called, and, hearing of the wonderful concert, they insisted upon a repetition of it. The lantern was brought in, therefore, and, with Beth heading the procession, the party adjourned to the barn. The dogs were asleep, but at the first sound of Beth's shrill little voice, they all, even to the smallest pup, pricked up their ears, and then howled in concert. After that Beth's concert became famous. People drove out from Jacksonville to see and hear the canine musicale. After a time Beth trained the dogs so that they would sit up in a row on their hind legs while they sang. They were apparently carried away by the music, and appeared quite human in their vanity, swaying their bodies and rolling their eyes in a very ludicrous manner, while howling an accompaniment to Beth's singing.



[Illustration: January with his perpetual laugh and fiddle.]

Duke greatly endeared himself to the Davenports by his wonderful sagacity. He could almost talk. One of the very smartest things he ever did happened in this wise:

Beth had a sudden attack of fever.

"We must have a doctor," said Mrs. Davenport.

Beth overheard the remark. Since her experience of the stitches under her nose, she hated all doctors; so she declared:

"I don't want any horrid doctor. I'll get well without one. Really I will."

Mrs. Davenport laid a cooling hand on her head, and said soothingly:

"Can't you trust mamma to do what is best?"

Thereupon she gave private instructions to Mr. Davenport to get a doctor as soon as possible, after which she neglected all work, trying to keep Beth quiet.

Two little kittens, brothers of those brought by Gustus in the winter, crawled up on the lounge ready for play. Even their antics tired Beth. When the doctor came, he looked serious over the child's condition.

"She must be put to bed immediately," was his first order.

"I'll have her carried up-stairs," said Mrs. Davenport.

The doctor was a very blunt man and declared plainly:

"She's too sick to be moved. Have a bed brought in here if you can."

Without arguing the question, Mrs. Davenport ordered the servants to bring down an iron cot. Her commands were carried out quietly and with haste, and soon Beth was undressed and in bed. She was delirious by this time, and did not even note that a doctor was present.

He studied the case silently for a few minutes. He was a well-meaning man, but a doctor of the old school. He believed that if medicine was a good thing, the more one took the better. Also, if dieting was good, semi-starvation was better.

He therefore wrote out five or six prescriptions, all of very strong drugs. He also ordered that she should be fed only on gruels.

Duke seemed to grieve over Beth's illness extremely. He would not play with the puppies, and would eat hardly anything. At first, he walked into the room where Beth was and lay down beside her cot. When he saw he was in the way there, he took up his position on the piazza outside the

door, and could hardly be induced to move. Even white dog failed to entice him away.

Anxious times followed for the Davenports. The fear of losing Beth made each member of the family realize, as never before, how very dear the little, mischievous child was to them. She was mischievous no longer, however. She was so patient that Mrs. Davenport feared more than ever that she would die. Often Beth would smile so beatifically that her mother thought she must be thinking of angels and heaven.

"Dearie, of what are you thinking?" she once asked.

Beth's face was illumined with a more heavenly light than ever as she drew a long breath and answered:

"Oh mamma, I was thinking how good some Bologna sausage, or anything besides horrid old gruel, would taste."

The truth of the matter was that the child was half-starved. Still the doctor insisted that she should have nothing but mutton or rice gruel, and those only in very small quantities. Under such treatment she wasted to a mere shadow of her former chubby self.

She proved a tyrant in one respect, in that she would have no one but her mother to watch her. If Mrs. Davenport left the room when Beth was awake, Beth at once worried herself into a high fever. The strain was telling upon Mrs. Davenport, but so great was her anxiety that she would hardly take needed rest.

One day Beth was asleep, and Maggie tip-toed into the room and whispered to Mrs. Davenport:

"Dear Miss Mary, won't yo' please let dis ole mammy watch de honey lamb for jes' a little while. Yo' knows I lub her wid all my heart, an' I wouldn't let nuffin harm de pet for de world. Yo' go into de odder room an' rest awhile. If de precious lamb wants yo', I'll call right away, honest."

Thus urged, Mrs. Davenport decided to grant Maggie's request, and she left the room without disturbing Beth's slumbers.

Maggie sat down by the cot. The sight of Beth so emaciated melted Maggie almost to tears. She thus soliloquized:

"Dat horrid ole medicine man, he jes' ought to be made to live on gruels de rest of his life, so he ought. It's jes' ter'ble to starve de chile de way he does. I'd like to be her doctah awhile. I'd order chicken and possum, an'——"

Suddenly Beth's eyes opened. "Maggie, what did you cook for dinner to-day?"

Maggie confided to her husband afterwards:

"Law, Titus, does yo' tink I could sit up dar an' tell dat precious chile we had chicken when I knew her little stomach was jes' groanin' for chicken? No, 'deed. Do I am deaconess, I'd rather be burned for a lie. So I jes' answers as pert-like as pos'ble. 'Law, honey, we jes' had mutton like yo'r brof is made of.'"

Beth, however, was not to be deceived. Her senses had grown unusually acute during her sickness. She pointed her finger at Maggie and said:

"Maggie, that's not true. You had chicken and biscuits, for I smelled them. Oh, I'm so hungry."

Maggie sighed sympathetically. "Law, honey, would yo' like some brof?"

"Broth," repeated Beth almost in tears. "I hate broth. I'll starve before I eat any more. I want chicken. Please, please get me some."

The appeal melted Maggie completely. She arose and called Duke from the doorway.

"Duke," she said, pointing to the cot, "don't yo' let any one come near missy till I come back. Do yo' understand?"

The delighted dog wagged his tail, and Maggie left the room.

Duke's first impulse was to rush up to the cot, and show his joy in true dog fashion. He longed to cover Beth's face and hands with kisses. He knew, however, that excitement was bad for her. He therefore walked quietly up to the cot and laid his head down beside his little playmate as if inviting a caress. She put a weak little hand on his head.

"Yes, Dukie, I know you love me."

Maggie re-entered the room. In her hand was a plate, and on that plate was a large slice of white chicken meat. Beth's eyes glistened at sight of it.

"Dar, honey chile, dey jes' shan't starve yo' to death. Here am a whole lot ob chicken for yo'."

Beth grabbed the plate. "Oh, Maggie, it's—it's heavenly."

Suddenly, Maggie heard Mrs. Davenport approaching. Her eyes rolled tragically.

"Law, honey, it's yo'r maw. Hide de chicken under yo'r pillow. I'll get rid of her, an' den yo' can eat de chicken in peace. Quick, honey, or she'll take it away from yo'."

Beth put the plate with the chicken under her pillow. Maggie tried to look unconcerned.

Mrs. Davenport entered the room. "Well, my dearie is awake, is she?"

"Oh, mamma, I'm so hungry. I do wish I could have a piece of chicken."

"No, no, dearie, that would never do. I'll get you some lovely mutton broth."

Tears rose in Beth's eyes. "I don't want broth."

"Oh, yes, you do, dearie." Mrs. Davenport left the room to get the broth. Maggie went to the bed and drew out the chicken.

"Quick, honey, yo' eat it while she's gone and she need neber know."

Beth's eyes feasted on the chicken for a second or two. She halfway put out a hand for it, but quickly drew it back again.

"No, Maggie, it wouldn't be honorable."

"Law, child, yo'd bettah eat it. Yo'r maw'll find me with it, and den she'll blame me."

Beth held out her hand for the plate. She looked at the chicken very longingly, and Maggie thought that she had made up her mind to eat it. She did take up the meat, but she held it out to Duke, saying:

"It'll be honorable for you to eat it. Duke, and then mamma'll never blame Maggie. It was very nice of you, Maggie, to get it for me, but I couldn't deceive mamma."

Duke gulped the meat down at one swallow much to the envy of Beth. She held out the empty plate to Maggie.

"Take it away, Maggie. The smell of it makes me so dreadfully hungry."

Maggie took it and left the room, muttering:

"It's a ter'ble shame, a ter'ble shame."

Mrs. Davenport came in with the steaming broth.

"Here, dearie, is your broth."

Beth burst into tears. "I can't eat it. I just can't touch the horrid stuff. Please take it away."

Her mother did not attempt to argue the question. That afternoon, when the doctor came, she asked:

"Isn't there something else we can feed her on, doctor?"

He pondered for a moment. "Well, she seems to be improving a little, and if we could get a bird or a rabbit we might make her some broth out of that."

"I think rabbit broth would be delicious," cried Beth rapturously.

Mrs. Davenport said:

"We'll send January to town to see if we can get a rabbit or a quail."

An hour later January returned and reported: "Dere ain't no rabbit or no bird in de market, Miss Mary."

Beth was very much disappointed, but was pacified, however, by the assurance that darkies would be sent out to hunt rabbits in the morning. She even consented to take a little rice gruel, cheered by the prospects of having something better on the morrow.

In the morning, when the darkies were ready for hunting rabbits, Mrs. Davenport said to Duke:

"Go with them, old fellow. Perhaps you can chase a rabbit down for your little mistress. She wants a rabbit very, very much."

He seemed to understand, for he rose and went with the hunters. Rabbit hunting was his favorite pastime. Therefore he displayed the first signs of joy that he had shown since Beth's sickness. He bounded lightly across the fields, sniffing the ground expectantly.

At first the darkies were encouraged by his manner, and followed him on and on. When, however, they had gone many miles, and most of the forenoon passed without Duke's scaring up a single rabbit for them, they became discouraged. In fact, they returned to the house and reported their ill-luck to Mrs. Davenport.

"I reckon dis ain't time for rabbits. We didn't see a single one all dis time."

"Where is Duke?" asked Mrs. Davenport.

The darkies grinned. "Oh, dat fool dog, he ain't no sense at all. We tried to get him to come wid us, but he went on sniffin' as if he was jes' bound to have a rabbit, even when dar ain't none."

"Well," said Mrs. Davenport, with feeling, "I only wish you had half the perseverance of Duke. If he could understand like you, he would go until he dropped before he'd give up."

She therefore had to go to Beth and report their failure. The poor child cried and cried, she was so very much disappointed.

"I'll—I'll starve, and I'm so terribly hungry," she moaned.

"Dearie, if you'll only take some gruel, I'll get you the most beautiful doll you ever saw, or a ring, or anything you wish."

At the moment, even this promise failed in appealing to Beth. She desired rabbit more than anything else in the world.

"Won't you please try some gruel, dear? Won't you, to please me?"

"I'll—I'll try, but I don't believe I can swallow a bit of the nasty stuff. I want rabbit."

Mrs. Davenport hurried away to get the gruel.

Left to herself, Beth continued to cry.

"I don't believe God cares for me, or He'd have sent me a rabbit. I asked Him last night when I prayed. Miss Smith"—her Sunday-school teacher—"says God always answers prayer if it is good for one, and I'm sure rabbit is good for me."

The tears came a little faster.

"She says, though, one must ask awfully hard. Perhaps I don't ask hard enough. I'll ask again."

Beth folded her hands and closed her eyes.

"Dear God, I can't eat gruel any more. I'll die if I have to eat gruel, and I don't want to die. I want rabbit."

It would seem that the days of miracles had not passed; for even while she prayed, she felt two paws rest on her cot. She opened her eyes and there was Duke waiting impatiently for her to notice him. She could hardly believe her eyes, for in his mouth he held a little live rabbit as if for her to take it. To make sure she was not dreaming, she stretched forth her hand for the rabbit. Duke let her take it without offering the least resistance. In fact, he looked at her as much as to say:

"I heard them say that my little mistress wanted a rabbit. I was bound she should have a rabbit, and here it is."

Mrs. Davenport entered the room. "Here is your broth, dear."

"Take it away," cried Beth exultingly. "I'm going to have a rabbit. God sent Duke to bring me one. Wasn't he good not to eat it himself—he always used to eat them when he caught them, and God was so good to me, too."

The speech appeared a little ambiguous to Mrs. Davenport, but it was all very plain to the child.

Never did a stew seem more delicious to any one than did that rabbit stew to Beth. In fact, it proved a turning point with her, the fever subsiding thereafter very rapidly.

CHAPTER XIV

The Rescue

With the elasticity of childhood, Beth grew well rapidly, and was once more her mischievous self.

One evening about the middle of May, Mr. and Mrs. Davenport and Marian went up the river a short distance to a party, and invited the Gordons to drive with them.

Julia came over to spend the night with Beth, and Mrs. Davenport arranged for Maggie to stay in the house, that the girls might not be alone. Duke, also, was kept within doors for protection.

The girls passed a pleasant evening, and retired rather late. Duke followed them up to their room, and went to sleep just outside the door, which they left open on his account. Maggie slept in a room at the end of the hall.

Gustus that night had sneaked out to see some of his friends. He had stayed so late that he feared to return through the dark. Still he dreaded even more the scolding that he would get if he were missed in the morning. So he started home, whistling as he went, to keep up his spirits. Suddenly his attention was attracted by a reddened sky in the direction of the Davenport home.

"Foh de Lawd's sake," he muttered, "dat do look like our home wuz burnin' for sure. Jes' s'pose it wuz. Little missy am thar an' might burn. I'd jes' bettah take to my heels, an' run as fas' as ever I kin, an' see." He ran a few steps, and then stopped. Besides the red in the sky, he thought he saw sparks flying. His heart rose in his mouth.

"Jes' s'pose dat dar fire am de work ob de debbil. He might be waitin' dar spoutin' out fire to kotch me. Dat's it. I won't go near dar all by myself. I'll jes' go back."

He turned, and ran a few steps the other way, and then halted again.

"Jes' s'pose dat ain't de debbil, but a real shure nuff fire. Den missy'll burn, an' I'll be to blame. I jes' ought to go an' see, but what if it am de debbil? Den he'll hab me sure nuff, an' dat'd be worser dan burnin'."

The Davenports' home was really on fire. It was never discovered how the fire started. The only plausible explanation was a defective flue in the kitchen stove, but it could never be proved.

The house was built of fat pine, and the fire spread with alarming rapidity. First the kitchen burst into a mass of flames that leaped along the roof of the piazza to the main part of the building. There had been no rain for some time, and the dry wood proved as combustible as if oil had been applied. The sparks flew over all the house until it was one blaze of fire. The servants were sleeping in their quarters, and did not discover the terrible danger of the inmates of the house.

Maggie and the children slept on, and it seemed as if there would be no awakening until it was too late, unless Gustus ran to the rescue.

The flames crackled as if trying to rouse the poor, innocent sleepers, but still they slept. The fire rushed on and on as if anxious to wipe out the precious human lives before help arrived. Even Duke slept, and the silly superstition of Gustus might prove the death of those he loved.

"White folks ain't scared ob de debbil like us black people. Dey nebber see tings de way we do. Maybe de debbil only 'pears to us kose we's black like he am. If dar wuz only a white person wid me, dey wouldn't be scared to go an' see if it were a fire or de debbil. I ought to find out which it am. De fire might burn Missy Beth, and de debbil might carry her off if he don't kotch me. De debbil nebber goes 'way empty-handed."

Gustus tarried, harrowed by his superstition, but with love trying to master fear. Unless love conquered quickly, he would be too late to save her whom he worshiped.

"Missy Beth's been powerful good to me," he moralized to himself. "She wouldn't let me burn, nor she wouldn't let de debbil carry me off. She always tells me dar's nuffin to fear only my own b'liefs, but if she was black like me she'd know bettah. She's white like an angel, an' angels only see glory. Yes, she's an angel, an' God will save her. He won't let de debbil hab her nor de fire scorch her."

Trying to ease his conscience thus, he once more turned away from the fire as if the struggle were ended, but real love is never conquered. It still tugged at the heart strings of Gustus.

"God's far, far away. It's night, an' maybe He sometimes snoozes like de rest ob us. Den Missy Beth's in danger, an' unless I help her. God won't know anything 'bout it. I have it. I'll go an' wake Massa Harvey. He'll know what to do."

Gustus ran towards the Baker homestead which was the next place to the Davenports'. Love

had gained a half victory, but half victories are always dangerous. He might rouse Harvey, but unless God intervened in some way, Harvey would be too late, and his friend would burn.

On ran Gustus, while the fire raged more and more fiercely. Its fiery tongues leaped out nearer and nearer the children, Maggie, and Duke, sure to devour them unless God vouchsafed some other warning besides the one that had been given Gustus. He had been tried and found wanting.

"Massa Harvey, Massa Harvey," Gustus cried a few minutes later, under the window of the room where he knew Harvey slept. "For God's sake, come an' save Missy Beth."

Harvey wakened out of a sound sleep. He thought he was dreaming, but again he heard the agonized appeal:

"Massa Harvey, for God's sake, save Missy Beth."

Harvey sprang to the window. "What's the matter, Gustus?"

"I think de debbil am after Missy Beth," moaned Gustus, who had decided that it was the Evil One instead of a real fire.

His words gave Harvey no lucid idea of the situation. He feared Beth was in danger, but he little realized the urgency of the case. However, he did not stop to question, but slipped into his clothes as fast as he could, and went below to join Gustus. His parents had gone to the party, and he did not waken any of the servants.

The minute he opened the front door, one look to the right revealed the awful truth to him.

"Is Beth there?" he gasped to Gustus who had run around to the door to join him.

"I reckon so. Yo' won't let de debbil get her."

"The devil? It's worse. It's fire. She'll burn," cried Harvey in agony, tearing across the fields as fast as he could. Gustus followed trembling in every limb. He realized now that he had been a coward, that if his beloved little "missy" burned, he would be greatly to blame.

"I didn't know," he moaned to himself, and then his cry changed to a prayer, "Dear God, don't let her burn. Don't let her burn," he pleaded as he ran, pitifully penitent.

As Harvey flew towards the burning house, his thought dwelt on the other fire from which he and Beth had been saved.

"God won't let her burn. He won't do it," he cried to himself, and yet half fearful that the fire demon which seemed to pursue Beth might conquer this time.

"De Good Book says dat if we ask anything, an' believe, dat it will be granted us," gasped Gustus as if reading Harvey's doubts. "Let's both pray as hard as ever we kin dat God'll save Missy Beth, an' He'll do it."

The faith expressed by the superstitious colored boy heartened Harvey somewhat. He ran on as fast as ever, but both in his heart and in that of Gustus was the prayer that Beth might be saved.

That prayer was answered. After the colored boy was found wanting, an animal was used as God's messenger. The fire awakened Duke. The air all around him was full of smoke that almost choked him. He realized there was danger, but he thought more of another that he loved than of his own safety. With a bound, he sprang through the open doorway barking wildly. He leaped up on the bed where the children slept. He had no words in which to warn them of danger, but the ways of God are above those of men, and weak instruments prove strong in His hands.

Julia and Beth wakened at the same instant.

"What is it, Duke?" cried Beth only half awake, for the dog was pulling wildly at her night-dress. The smoke answered her question. Both of the girls knew that Duke was warning them that the house was on fire. They jumped out of bed, and ran to the door. The fire now was fast breaking into the house.

"What shall we do?" gasped Beth at sight of the smoke and flames circling around the stairs at the end of the hall.

"We can climb down the piazza," answered Julia turning towards it. Beth started to follow her, but a thought stopped her.

"If we go that way Maggie'll burn. I must try to warn her."

"But we'll choke to death," cried Julia, carried away for a moment by the terror fire has for the bravest.

"I can't help it. I can't let Maggie burn. You can climb down the piazza, but I'm going to try to reach Maggie," answered Beth, going towards the hall, with Duke at her heels.

It was a terrible temptation to Julia to take Beth at her words. She feared that Death waited in the hall. The thought made Julia shiver notwithstanding the sickening heat that was beginning to fill the house. Her face blanched, but it was no whiter than that of Beth, who felt fully as strongly as Julia the danger she ran in trying to save Maggie.

"Let's wrap ourselves in blankets," cried Julia seizing two from the bed, and throwing one to Beth. She had conquered her fear sufficiently to make a supreme effort to save Maggie. She was too brave to let Beth outshine her in daring.

"Maggie, Maggie, wake," yelled Beth, wrapping the blanket around her and rushing out into the smoke and fire towards the room where Maggie slept.

"Fire, fire, fire," screamed Julia, the smoke half choking her.

Their cries wakened Maggie. She jumped out of bed, and rushed out into the hall.

"Oh, de good Lo'd," she moaned, trembling all over in sudden horror; "dis house is burnin', an' we'll die." Then she saw the two girls. Their danger calmed her fears.

"No, we won't die, honeys," she cried more calmly. "We kin get down de stairs, I know. Come on, my honeys. I won't leave yo'. We'll jes' keep our mouths shut, an' we'll be all right."

She, too, seized a blanket to protect herself from the fire.

She was nearest the stairs, but she waited until the girls came up to her. Not another word was said. The smoke was drying up their throats and lungs, and they felt that they needed every bit of air just to breathe.

Fortunately, in the main part of the building, the fire was worse on the outside than the inside. Their greatest foe was the smoke that grew more dense every instant. Down the stairs they flew. Once at the bottom, the door leading outside seemed very far away. Still they did not make a sound, but used every effort to escape. There was no thought of trying to save anything but their lives. That was the one mercy that was asked of God. Other possessions could be replaced. On, on they flew. Thank God, the door is almost within reach. They gasp for breath. Even Duke pants. Will their strength last until they can reach God's pure air?

Maggie now proved leader. Her trembling hands unbarred the door that alone stood between them and liberty. With a last mighty effort, she swung it open. Out they flew, and now the flames which curled in wild fury about the piazza almost scorched them. Thank God, this fiery trial is but for a moment. They dash through the flames, and are safe. Breathing is no longer a pain. They make their way beyond the reach of the sparks. Maggie fell on her knees crying:

"Praise to de Lo'd. Praise to de Lo'd."

Julia looked at the piazza down which she had wished to climb.

"Beth, if we had tried to come that way we couldn't have done it," she said, and there was thankfulness in her heart that she had conquered her fear. Otherwise precious time would have been lost, and she might have been burned to death.

"Our home is gone," sobbed Beth, for at that instant the roof fell. Duke howled as if he, too, knew that something had been lost that never again could be exactly the same. His howls attracted Beth's attention.

"You dear, dear fellow," she cried, the tears flowing faster than ever. "If it hadn't been for you we'd all be dead."

He poked his nose into her outstretched hand, and looked up at her as if he would like to comfort her. At that instant Harvey and Gustus rushed upon the scene.

"Beth, Beth," cried Harvey wildly.

"We're here," she answered.

Tears of thankfulness rushed into the eyes of Harvey and Gustus, and for once they were not ashamed of crying.

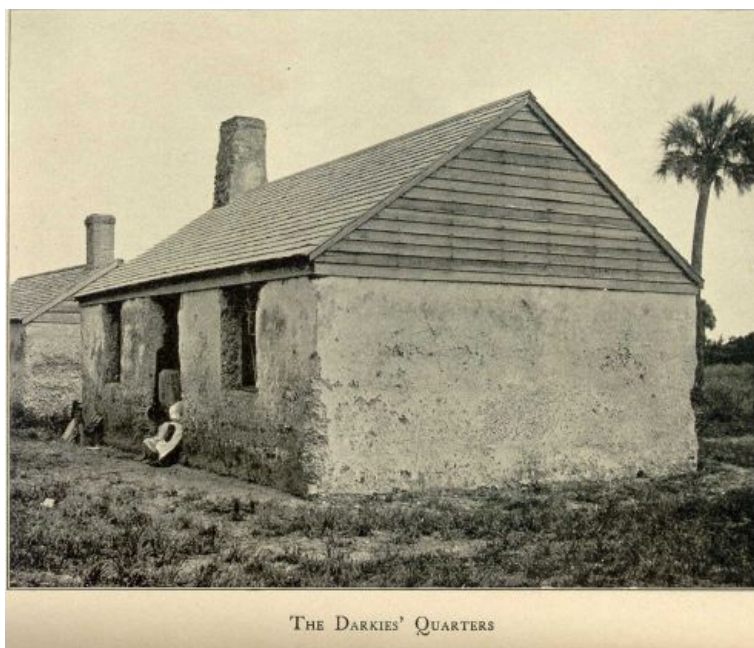
"Beth," repeated Harvey, running up to her and seizing her hands. His emotion choked back the words that rose. Never had he been more grateful, and never had he less power of expression.

"Little missy, I done feared yo'd went up in de flames," cried Gustus, and added, "but I had dat dar grain of mustard seed dat made me b'lieve de Lo'd would somehow save yo'."

"Somehow, even when I'm awfully scared, I don't think I'm going to be killed," said Beth.

"I jes' reckon yo' has dat grain of mustard seed I'se tellin' 'bout."

"I reckon it's a good thing to have, Gustus," put in Harvey. "But instead of letting the mustard seed do everything by itself, I believe we'd better rouse the servants. Unless care is taken their quarters and the barn may burn."



[Illustration: The darkies' quarters.]

This proved a happy suggestion; for while these buildings were far distant from the house, it was found the sparks had already set the barn afire. However, the servants managed to put the fire out.

The glare from the fire illuminated the sky, and attracted the attention of the Davenports and the Gordons returning in a merry mood from the party.

"It looks like a house burning," said Mrs. Davenport. "Supposing it were ours," she added forebodingly.

Mr. Davenport had experienced a like fear for some moments, but had refrained from letting any of the party know. They had remarked that he was driving the spirited span to their full speed, but supposed he was hurrying because of the lateness of the hour.

"It is a fire," cried Mrs. Gordon. "Our daughters—God keep them."

Moments seemed hours to the anxious parents. As dread became certainty, they felt as if the horses were almost standing still, whereas they were going as fast over the hard shell road as was possible. Ambulance or fire horses could not have passed the ones Mr. Davenport drove, urged both by his voice and by the whip.

"Beth—Julia," cried two mothers the same second, as they rushed from the carriage and gathered two blanketed figures to their hearts. Tears of relief and thankfulness flowed thick and fast.

"It's terrible that our lovely home is gone," cried Beth.

"In evil there is good. You are safe, my darling," her mother murmured.

The fathers felt no less keenly the escape of their beloved children, but expressed themselves less emotionally. Marian could get hardly any one to notice her, but finally managed to say so as to be heard:

"I don't think they ought to be standing around with bare feet, and blankets wrapped around them."

"You must all come home with us," cried Mrs. Gordon. "I will not accept a refusal. We have a great abundance of room."

Already the fire was beginning to die down, and Mr. Davenport saw that no good could be accomplished by remaining longer.

"January, I want you to watch to see that no damage is done by sparks," he said.

"Sparks won't have no sort of chance wid me aroun', massa."

Room was made in the carriage for the two children, and the horses were started in the direction of the Gordon homestead. For a few moments, in the excitement of telling about the fire, Beth forgot all about Duke. They were almost at the Gordons' door when she thought of him. She looked hastily back, half hoping he might be following, and to her joy saw him directly behind the carriage. Beth pleaded to be allowed to take her beloved dog up to Julia's room with them. Julia added her entreaties, and the children were permitted to do as they wished in the matter.

Once the children were in bed, they talked awhile of their fortunate deliverance. Duke came in for a big share of praise. Then Julia fell asleep, but Beth felt very wide awake. Presently, even Duke on the floor near their bed also slept. Beth knew that he was sleeping because he moaned as if he were haunted by a nightmare of the fire.

"Poor, poor fellow, he feels almost as bad as I," thought Beth. For a long time she lay awake wondering what her father would do now that their home with all its contents was burned.

"Just s'posing—just s'posing——" With these words Beth fell into a troubled sleep.

About ten minutes afterwards, she began crying in her sleep, which wakened Julia.

"Why, Beth dear, what's the matter?" and Julia twined her arm lovingly around her friend.

Beth wakened with a start. She sat up in bed. "Where am I, Julia? In Florida?"

"Of course, dear. What made you——"

"Oh, I'm so glad I'm here. I went to sleep s'posing——"

"Supposing what, Beth?"

"Oh, I don't like to tell for fear it may come true. I dreamed that it did come true and it made me very miserable."

"You're just nervous over the terrible fire. All the bad that can happen has already happened to you."

"I don't know about that," murmured Beth, but could not be persuaded to tell Julia more about her dream. Julia therefore sank back into slumberland, and forgot all about her friend's dream, but not so Beth. The fear of what she dreamed haunted her, waking and sleeping.

The next morning, Beth had quite a time dressing. Most of Julia's clothes proved a very tight fit.

"I'll have to pretend I'm a young lady. Then I shall not mind if it is tight," Beth said as she struggled into Julia's blue dress.

"It's a little short, but then short dresses are the style now," commented Julia in an effort to be polite.

Immediately after breakfast, the Davenports and the Gordons started over to view the fire. For some reason known only to herself, Beth did not care to go. She even refused to be moved by Julia's entreaties, and insisted that Julia go without her.

Duke remained to keep Beth company. When the two were alone, Beth put her arms around the faithful dog. He looked up into her eyes and whined.

"I believe you know," cried Beth. "Are you afraid of it, too?"

Again Duke whined.

"You do know, Duke." There were tears in Beth's eyes. "If it happens, they'll take you from me. Don't you remember what Mr. Brown said?"

Duke looked as if he understood.

"They shan't take you from me. I'll go in town and see Mr. Brown. You shall go with me, Duke."

He wagged his tail as if pleased, at the promise. Beth ran for a hat, and then, with Duke, started down the road towards town.

The day was extremely sultry, and the warmth in combination with the excitement of the night before soon caused Beth to tire, but she would not give up her undertaking.

"You'd do as much to stay with me, wouldn't you, Duke?" she asked, to encourage herself.

Duke barked. Perhaps it was because he did not mind the heat and was anxious for a frolic. Beth envied his spirits. To her the way seemed very long and dusty, but on and on she trudged. She did not know exactly where Mr. Brown lived, but thought by asking she could easily find out,

and so it proved.

It was a very tired, warm, and dusty little girl who finally turned in at the Browns'.

A great, overgrown puppy rushed at Beth and Duke as they opened the gate. At first, Beth could hardly believe her own eyes. It scarcely seemed possible that it was the same puppy she had given Mr. Brown such a short time before. The little fellow had outgrown all his brothers and sisters, and could no longer be rightly termed little. Duke was unaffectedly glad to see his son. Away they ran together.

"Duke, Duke, come back."

Beth's call did not bring him, but Mr. Brown came around the corner of the house.

"Why, missy," his face lighted up in greeting. Beth wondered how she ever thought him ugly-looking. "You saw my puppy, didn't you? I tell you he's a fine fellow. Duke never compared with him."

"Do you really like the puppy the best?" cried Beth, eagerly rushing up to him in her excitement.

"Not a doubt of it." He smiled at her evident delight. "Gift——"

"Is that what you call him?"

"Yes. The name is to remind me of your kindness. I——"

"Was I really kind?" she interrupted wistfully. She did not wait for an answer. "Then perhaps you'd be willing to do me a very, very great favor."

"What is it you want? But you'd better sit down first. You look tired."

"I am a little tired. It was pretty hot walking."

"You don't mean you walked here?—and on such a hot day?"

When he found that she had, he seated her in the shade on the cool piazza, and would not listen to another word until he went into the house and returned with a bottle of orangeade for her.

"Now while you drink, I'll tell you why I like Gift better than Duke. In the first place, Gift really loves me—why, I don't believe that even such a charming little lady as you could get Gift to leave me. Let's try and see. Here, Gift; come, Gift."

The two dogs came running at his call.

"He always answers just so promptly." Beth noted how proud he looked. "Now little missy, call Gift and make friends with him."

Beth did as bidden. Gift proved very friendly in response. Duke seemed inclined to be jealous.

"Now missy, rise as if to go and call Gift to follow. It will be as big a temptation as he ever had. He doesn't usually make friends the way he has with you and Duke. Perhaps I'm a fool to try him so."

"Then I will not——"

"No, no. I want to know if Gift cares for me as much as I think he does. You must try him."

Beth was growing nervous over the situation. Somehow, she realized that the love of Gift meant more to the man before her than almost anything in his life. If the dog failed him at this point it might have a very disastrous effect.

"Come, come; do as I say," cried Brown with somewhat of his original curtness of manner.

Beth did not dare refuse, but trembled for the result. She arose. Duke wagged his tail in delight that she was going.

"Come on, Gift." He paid no heed, but his master saw that she was not calling as if she really wanted the dog.

"Call as if you meant it."

She saw that she could not fool him. She felt compelled to act under his direction, but it seemed the irony of fate that once she had unwittingly taken his dog from him, and that now she should be made to try again when neither of them wished the dog to leave him. Tears were in her eyes, but she clapped her hands as if ready for a frolic. "Come on, Gift; come on." Duke also barked an invitation. Gift leaped down the steps and was by their side in an instant.

"Oh, please call him back, or let me come back."

"Go on. Don't you dare let him see that you don't want him. If he follows you home, I never want to see any of you again. Both dogs then are yours forever," growled Gift's owner.

Tears now blinded poor Beth so that she could hardly see to open the gate. Duke did not wait for it to be opened, but leaped over the fence. Gift hesitated about following. He was perfectly able to make the jump, but he evidently thought of his master for the first time. He looked back undecided what to do.

"Oh, if he only would call him," but Brown stood as if turned to stone. Suddenly Gift ran back to his side. Beth never felt more grateful.

"Call him. I am not sure of him yet," cried Brown in a strange voice.

"It's cruel to the dog and to me," thought Beth. She now held the gate open. "Come, Gift." Again Duke barked.

"I'm ashamed of you, Duke Davenport, for tempting your own son," thought Beth.

Gift looked up at his master as if for a word of instruction. He received no word or sign in reply. Then Gift made a slight move as if to follow Beth, but suddenly turned and licked his master's hand. Next, he settled down on the porch for a sleep as if the matter were settled once and forever.

Beth now expected to see Mr. Brown show some emotion, but he simply called, "Missy, come back."

She would have thought that she had overestimated his feelings in the matter if she had not caught sight of tears in his eyes when she returned.

"Gift is the best friend I have," he said quietly when Beth was reseated. "Do you know he helps keep me from saloons. If he is with me and I start in one, he growls. Now, what favor do you want to ask of me?"

She had almost forgotten the object of her visit, and the abruptness with which it was recalled to her embarrassed her.

"I—I want to pay you for Duke. I have some money of my own in the bank and I think——"

"But I gave Duke to you." He looked grieved. "I accepted Gift from you, I don't see——"

"You don't understand. Do you remember what you said when you gave me Duke? You said if I ever left Florida I'd have to give him back to you."

"That was before I had Gift."

"And you wouldn't take Duke from me?" She sprang to her feet.

"Not for the world."

Suddenly Beth seized Duke, and danced around and around with him. "Oh, goody. Duke, you old dear, we needn't stay awake nights worrying over that part any more."

Mr. Brown hitched up and drove Beth back. On the way, she told him of the fire, and how Duke had saved their lives. Duke and Gift were following the carriage, and perhaps Duke was telling his son of his own heroism, because Gift often barked as if excited over something.

Mr. Brown said he would like to see the ruins and so Beth drove with him to the homestead. They found Mr. Davenport, Julia, Harvey, Maggie, and Gustus out near the stables.

"Why Beth, where have you been?" cried her father.

She jumped out of the carriage and ran and threw herself into her father's arms. "Papa, now that our house is gone, I was afraid you'd take us back North to live. I don't want to go, but if I had to go, it would have broken my heart to part with Duke, but now, I'll never, never have to part with him, no matter what happens. Mr. Brown says he's mine forever."

"Dear, I do not expect to go back North. Next fall, we'll build a fine new house, and you shall be a little Florida lady the rest of your life, if you wish."

"I'm to live South always," cried Beth, turning a radiant face toward her friends.

"Three cheers for our little Florida lady," proposed Harvey. All present joined in the hurrahing that followed. Gustus's voice rang out the loudest of any.

Beth's face was radiant. The sun was shining once more for her. Her two great fears had proved groundless. Duke was hers, and henceforth she was to remain A Little Florida Lady.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK A LITTLE FLORIDA LADY ***

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