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FOREWORD

This little volume and its predecessor, "Mostly Mary," the first two of the "Berta and Beth Books," have been written to comply with the wishes of the young readers of Clementia's other books, "Uncle Frank's Mary," "The Quest of Mary Selwyn," and "Bird-a-Lea." In them the author narrates the events leading up to "Uncle Frank's Mary," and endeavors to satisfy the demand for "more about Berta and Beth," those mischievous, lovable "twinnies," who furnish much of the amusement and not a little of the excitement in the "Mary Selwyn Books."

Mary's Rainbow

by

"CLEMENTIA"

[Transcriber's note: Real name—Sister Mary Edward Feehan]

Author of

**Mostly Mary
Uncle Frank's Mary**

**The Quest of Mary Selwyn
Bird-a-Lea, etc.**

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Two little girls on a swing.

*To
another very dear little
Mary*

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MARY'S RAINBOW

CHAPTER I.

GENE.

"You have grown very fond of your good nurse, haven't you, Mary?"

"Indeed I have, Uncle. I wish she could go South with us after Christmas."

"But don't you think it would be selfish of us to take her away from little folks who really need her? That brings us to a matter of importance which I must discuss with you this evening."

Mary, in her usual place on her uncle's knee, fixed her eyes on the fire, folded her hands, and tried to look very grave and grown-up; for to talk over a matter of importance with Doctor Carlton was, in her opinion, a very serious thing indeed.

"I have a patient, a little boy four years old, who has injured his spine. He can be cured, I think, if he has proper care. He is an only child and is somewhat spoiled, and the pain he is suffering makes him very peevish and cross. His poor mother is quite worn out, for he insists on having her beside him day and night. We had a fine nurse for him, but he took a dislike to her and would not let her come near him. Now, the only one I know who can handle this case is Sister Julia. She has a way of her own with children, as you well know. You are improving so fast that you really no longer need her; so I think we had better let her go to that poor little fellow who does; don't you?"

The Doctor watched Mary's face over which a look of dismay had spread, and he saw the struggle that was going on in her heart, which sank very low at the thought of the long, long days all alone, except for the servants, in the big house. She locked her frail little fingers tightly together and winked very hard before she answered in a voice scarcely above a whisper; "Ye—es, Uncle,—and—and maybe you can come home a little earlier, just a *little* earlier every evening, and—and stay longer at luncheon, and—and will you ask Mrs. Burns and Mrs. Lee to let Hazel and Rosemary come in to play with me for a while every day on their way home from school and take turns spending the day with me on Saturdays—"

Her voice broke, and she hid her face against his coat.

"Why, little one, you don't think for an instant that you will be here alone all day, do you? Of course, you may have as many of your little friends as you please come to visit you. I could not allow that while you were so weak; but there is no reason now why they may not come very often. I have made plans, however, so that you need not be alone for a single moment of the day. Sister Julia has a young friend,

Miss Donnelly, who often takes her place in cases like this. I know her quite well and feel very sure that you will like her. She is about sixteen—not a bit too old to enjoy your games—and she is an expert dolls' dress-maker."

"Is she a little young lady or a big young lady, Uncle? I do hope she is small. I like little people best."

"Thank you, ma'am."

"Oh, I mean small ladies. Mother is not very big, you know, and all of her friends that I love best are small. But I like men to be big like you and Father. You are both just exactly right. I have often seen a great big lady pass here, and I am sure that I would not like her at all. She wears a long black coat like an overcoat, and a hat almost exactly like a man's. Her hair is always brushed back as smooth as smooth can be. She hasn't any pretty, soft, little curls like Mother's."

"I know that lady very well. She is a doctor, and her patients, especially children, think everything of her. So you see how unwise it is to judge from a person's appearance." The Doctor tweaked the little girl's ear, and his eyes twinkled as he went on, "At any rate, I have engaged Miss Donnelly without regard to her size or style of dress; so we shall have to give her a fair trial, at least."

"Ye—es, Uncle, of course. It wouldn't be very p'lite to tell her we don't want her after you have asked her to come. And I shall try as hard as I can to love her even if she is as big as the doctor lady and wears a man's hat and coat."

Mary smiled bravely up at him as she lifted her face for his good-night kiss. "When—when is she coming, Uncle?"

"To-morrow morning, dear. By the way, you must not try to come down to breakfast for a few days. Luncheon and dinner will be enough for you, so take a long sleep in the morning."

Mary's heart was very heavy as she went up the stairs with Sister Julia. Even with this good friend to comfort and cheer her, the little girl had spent many lonely hours since her parents and baby sisters had sailed for Europe, where her father's business required that he should live for a year. Mary had not been able to go with them, because she had been very ill and was not strong enough for the long voyage. So she had been left with her mother's brother, who had always made his home with the Selwyns. During her long illness, Mary had grown to love Sister Julia very, very much. What would she ever do now with a stranger? And the letters from her father and mother, which her uncle had felt so sure would arrive that day, had not come. Yes, it was a sad-hearted little Mary who laid her head on her pillow that night and tried to picture the new companion her uncle had found for her.

Two hours later, the Doctor himself was sorry that he had not told her more of Miss Donnelly; for when he tiptoed to her bedside, he found her pillow wet with tears; and as he lightly kissed her forehead, she murmured in her sleep, "O Uncle! I wish she wasn't so big—not *quite* so big."

After dreaming for the greater part of the night of a very large, strong young girl with fair hair drawn back so tightly that she could scarcely wink, Mary slept quite late in the morning. She had just finished her breakfast when Liza, the house-maid, came in with a card for Sister Julia. Mary felt that the dreaded hour had come, and remembering her promise to her uncle, braced herself to meet the Miss Donnelly of her dreams. Yes, they were coming up the stairs. She could hear Sister Julia's merry laugh. The next moment the nurse entered the room followed by a young girl dressed in brown from top to toe. Laughing, dark eyes in a small, oval face framed in soft, little, brown curls won Mary at once. She stretched out her arms with a cry of delight. "Oh, you are just too dear!"

"And you are just too darling!" The little brown lady ran to the bedside and hugged the child.

"I wish, oh, I wish that you were going to stay with me instead—instead of—"

"Instead of that cross old Sister Julia," laughed the nurse.

"No, no, *no*, Sister! You have never, *never* been cross—not once. I mean instead of—well, it isn't very nice to say, but I just can't help it—instead of Miss Donnelly."

"But this is Miss Donnelly, dear."

"Why—why—but Uncle said—no, he didn't exactly say it, but I thought Miss Donnelly was—different."

"And I thought *you* were different. Just wait until I see your uncle! As you say, he did not exactly tell me so, but I thought I was to take care of a little old lady who would not give me a chance to sit still one minute. What sort of a Miss Donnelly did you think I would be?"

"The one I dreamed of all night was big and strong and had a very loud voice and wore her hair plastered back and—and oh! I *am* so glad she isn't real! Isn't Uncle a tease! But I am not going to scold him one bit since he sent me the right kind of a Miss Donnelly."

"And now, dear, I must say good-bye. Your Uncle sent the carriage for Miss Donnelly, and Liza says that Jim is waiting to drive me to the home of my new patient."

"But you will come to see us often and often, Sister, and when the little boy is well, you will come back to us, won't you?"

"I hope you will be so well and strong by that time, Mary, that you will not need me. My work is to take care of the sick, you know. But I shall stop in to see you on the days when I return to our convent; and when you are able to go out, you and Gene must come to see me. I am sure that my new patient will be glad to have you visit him."

Mary threw her arms about Sister Julia and clung to her until Gene declared that she was growing jealous. On her return to the little girl's room after seeing the Sister into the carriage, she caught Mary hastily wiping her eyes, but pretended not to see and asked cheerfully, "Now, what shall we do first?"

"The very first thing, Miss Donnelly, will be for me to get dressed."

"Very well, Miss Selwyn," was the prim reply.

"Why—why I am just Mary, Miss Donnelly. I am only seven and a half. No one *ever* calls me *Miss Selwyn*."

"And I am just Eugenia, Miss Selwyn. I am only sixteen, and no one ever calls me anything but Gene. So if you wish me to call you Mary, you must call me Gene."

"But—but I think I ought to call you *Miss Gene*. Mother told me always to say Miss before the names of the big sisters of the little girls I know."

"This is a very different case. I should so like to play that I am your big sister; for, you see, I am the youngest in our family, so I have never had a little sister. Don't you think that we could pretend we are sisters?"

"Yes, yes, of course we can! I have never had a big sister; but if I had one, I should wish her to be exactly like you."

Gene promptly hugged the little girl. "And you would not call her *Miss Gene*, would you? Oh, I shall be very lonely if you call me that."

"I know what we can do. I shall call you Gene until Uncle comes home to luncheon; and then, if he thinks it will be all right, I can tell Mother about it when I write to her. I wish you knew Father and Mother and my darling little twin sisters and dear old Aunt Mandy, their nurse. But I shall show you their pictures the very first thing. They are in that kodak book on the table. You will have to know everything about them if you are going to be my big sister, you know; and some day when Uncle thinks I am well enough, we shall go out to Maryvale to see Aunt Mary. She is a Sister, and Maryvale is the name of the convent. Her name is Sister Madeline." And while Gene helped Mary to dress, the little girl told her so much about her dear ones that she soon felt she knew them very well indeed.

Later on, when Gene had seen her dolls and games and books, Mary said, "There is something very important that I must ask you about, Gene. It is Christmas presents. Do you know any things that I can make? Of course, they will have to be easy things. Mother and I always went shopping early in December and bought some of the presents—things for Aunt Mandy and Liza and Susie and Tom and for some of the little girls I know; but ever since I was a little bit of a thing, she helped me make something for Father and Uncle Frank and Aunt Mary. And Father helped me with a present for Mother. She says people 'preciate gifts more when they know we have made them specially for them. The trouble is, I can't sew very well, and I don't know how to crochet anything but chain stitch; and there is nothing a person can make out of a long string of chain stitch."

"Oh, yes, there is, Mary. If you crochet very heavy silk thread in chain stitch, it makes the loveliest cord for calendars and things like that."

"I made calendars last year, but we used ribbon for hanging them up. Mother bought me some cards with holes in them, and I sewed them with colored silks and pasted a little calendar on each one. Father's card had a rose on it; and Uncle's a Christmas tree; and Aunt Mary's had Santa Claus going down a chimney. Then Father went to the very same store where Mother had bought the cards and got one for her with a bluebird on it, because Mother calls me her little bluebird. I always wear blue and white, because I am dedicated to Blessed Mother. Beth is, too; and Berta, to the Sacred Heart. And one day when Mother was out, I made her calendar, and she was so s'prised. I just love to s'prise people, don't you? And the bluebird is for happiness; so it was just right for Mother, because I want her to be happy every minute of the whole year. I s'pose it won't do to make calendars again."

"They are very useful things, Mary, and everyone likes a pretty one. You could make a different kind this year. Do you ever use these paints? I see you have crayolas, too."

"Yes, Gene, I often try to draw and paint; but I am better at pasting than anything else."

"The calendars I have in mind will have to be pasted, too. This afternoon while you are taking your nap, I shall go to a store not far from here where I can get everything we need; and to-morrow we shall begin work."

"Oh, goody! Uncle said last evening that the things we are going to send to Italy must be ready

early next week. But what can I make for the babies? They can't use calendars, you know. Aunt Mandy was going to teach me to knit something for them, and then I got sick. I even had some nice, soft, white worsted to begin with."

"Have you any colored worsted?"

"There is a big box of all colors on the shelf of the closet in Mother's room. I know that it will be all right for us to use it, because Mother always gave me some of it when I needed it for my dolls."

After a little search, they found the box.

"This is just the thing, Mary, and it is so heavy that it will work up quickly."

"But please tell me what I am going to make, Gene."

"It is something that the babies cannot use until they are a little older, but they will have ever so much fun with it then. It is a pair of horse reins; and we shall sew tiny brass sleigh bells across the front and over the shoulders. Now, the first thing we need is a large spool."

"I know where to find one—in the machine drawer."

Into the top of the spool, Gene drove four strong pins, and fastening the red worsted around them, began the reins. "We shall make about five inches of each color, and your little sisters——"

"*Our* little sisters, Gene."

"Yes, of course—our little sisters will have the gayest horse reins you ever did see."

For the rest of the morning, Mary worked busily while Gene unpacked her trunk; and when the Doctor came home to luncheon, the little girl had added five inches of blue and five of yellow to the reins. She took her work down stairs to show it to him. "And, Uncle, I have something very important to ask you. Miss Donnelly says it will make her lonely to be called Miss anybody, and she has asked me to call her Gene. Of course, Mother told me always to say Miss. But Miss Donnelly thinks it would be nice to pretend we are sisters, and I wouldn't call my big sister, Miss."

"I am very sure, dear, that if it will make Miss Donnelly feel more at home with us, Mother would approve of your calling her Gene."

"Then you will have to call her that, too, Uncle; because if she is my sister, she is your niece; and you wouldn't call your own niece Miss somebody."

"Very well, if Miss Donnelly wishes me to call her Gene, I shall do so."

"Thank you, Doctor. I feel very much at home already."

"But——but Gene, if you are my big sister, you ought to say Uncle Frank, not Doctor."

"We must let Gene please herself about that, Mary," laughed the Doctor. "I can easily see how she might wish to have you for her little sister without adopting the whole family."

"W——ell,——but I think she will be sorry if she doesn't adopt you, Uncle. Oh, that reminds me! We need some ribbon and Christmas tags and seals and ever so many things for the presents we are going to make; and Gene says that she will buy them for me this afternoon while I am taking my nap. I am afraid I haven't money enough in my bank to pay for them, Uncle."

The Doctor took a bill from his pocket book.

"This will probably cover the cost of your purchases. When you need more, Gene, let me know."

CHAPTER II.

BUSY DAYS.

Mary was watching at the library window when Gene returned from her shopping trip with her arms filled with packages—long ones, square ones, round ones, flat ones. The little girl's eyes shone with an eager light as she helped to carry them upstairs. She clapped her hands and danced about the room as Gene opened one after another. There were rolls of crepe paper; bolts of narrow ribbon, green, red, and white with tiny sprays of holly; a big sheet of dark green cardboard; another of blotting paper; spools of coarse silk; a package of calendar pads; and a box of outline pictures ready to be colored with paints or crayolas.

"I think these will be just the thing for the calendars, Mary. You can color them, and we shall

mount them on this dark green cardboard and paste one of these tiny calendars under each. You may either use ribbon to hang them by or crochet a cord of this silk. I knew that you would not wish to send your father and mother each a calendar, so I thought we could make a blotter for your mother and use one of these long, narrow pictures for the cover."

"Gene, you are just wonderful for thinking up things! I didn't know what in the world to make for Mother. Do you know of anything for Aunt Mandy?"

"I can show you an easy way to make a whisk broom holder."

"That will be just the thing, Gene! Dear, me! These pictures are all so pretty that I don't know which to choose for Father's calendar. Let us make his present first. Here is a snow scene. I shall paint that. It is so warm in Italy that Father will be glad to have something cool-looking hanging over his desk. If we have time to make them, I think I shall send Father and Mother each a calendar and a blotter. Father can take his to his office, you know."

Together they worked and chatted until dusk, when Mary had two pictures colored, and Gene had everything ready for the next day's work.

"Letters! Letters!" called the Doctor from the foot of the stairs.

"Why, Gene! I never thought of the postman this afternoon. I was so busy." And Mary ran down to hear the first real news of her dear ones.

"Oh, what lovely fat letters, Uncle!"

"Yes, indeed. This one from your father is in the form of a diary. He wrote a little every day and mailed it on the steamer before it reached Queenstown, as I told you he would do."

The little girl listened breathlessly to every word of those two letters, and her eyes filled with tears when she heard all the loving messages which they contained.

"By this time they have that fine, long letter we wrote them ten days ago. That was a nice little surprise for them, because they wouldn't expect us to write until we had heard from them. So we are one ahead on surprises."

"But Father s'prised us with the cablegram from Liverpool, Uncle."

"So he did. Well, we are quits at any rate."

After dinner, Mary proposed that they spend the evening before the fire in the sitting-room. The Doctor saw that Gene hesitated and asked kindly, "Won't you join us?"

"You see so little of each other, Doctor, that I think you should have this time together every evening."

"But we would like to have you with us, too, Gene," urged Mary.

"Perhaps I shall join you later, dearie. I really ought to write to my mother this evening. It will make her very happy to know that I have at last found a little sister."

During the week that followed, a busier little girl than Mary could scarcely have been found in New York City. So well did she work that she was able to finish not only two blotters, two calendars, the horse reins and the whisk broom holder, but also a little card for Tom, Aunt Mandy's grandson, whom Mr. Selwyn had taken with him to Italy. A whole evening was spent in carefully wrapping each gift in white tissue paper, tying it with bright ribbon, and sealing it in every possible place with heads of jolly old Santa Claus.

Among the many gifts which the Doctor had brought home during the week were the following: For Mr. Selwyn, a large, framed photograph of Mary, an enlarged copy of a kodak picture which he had taken of her after her parents had gone away; for his sister, a beautiful black lace mantilla which, as he explained to the little girl, her mother would wear on her head when she had an audience with the Pope; for the babies, tiny gold chains and miraculous medals. Nor had he forgotten Aunt Mandy and Tom. The table in the playroom was scarcely large enough to hold all the gay-looking packages; and they were just about to carry them down stairs to pack them in the strong, wooden box in the lower hall when who should appear in the doorway but the two servants—Liza with a big plum pudding decked with sprays of holly, and old Susie with an immense fruit cake.

"We 'lowed dey wouldn't see nuffin lak dis yeah obah yondah in dat savage land whah dey's done gone to, nohow, Massa Frank," chuckled the old cook. "What yo' spects dem Eyetalians knows 'bout fruit cake an' plum puddin', huh?"

"They certainly know nothing about the kind you make, Susie, or we would have them all inviting themselves to our Christmas dinner."

"I'se got a few t'ings what I made ma own self, Massa Frank, ef'n yo' reckons dey'll be room fo' dem in dat box."

"We shall find room for them, Liza, or get a larger box. Bring them along."

At last the box was packed; and as the Doctor reached for the hammer to nail down the cover, Mary caught his hand in both of hers and held it to her cheek while she murmured wistfully, "Wouldn't it be lovely if we could pack ourselves in the box and go, too, Uncle?"

"I, for one, strongly object to traveling in a packing box, little one; and I think you would be begging to be taken out after the express man had bumped you down the front steps. Never mind. A box will arrive from Italy one of these fine days, and we shall have a great time opening it. If it should come while I am not here, no fair peeping!"

"As if I would, Uncle!"

The next morning, Mary began a calendar for her uncle.

"I don't have to hurry with anything now, Gene, even with Aunt Mary's gift. We always take her presents to her Christmas afternoon."

But the little girl was puzzled about a gift for Gene herself. The Doctor would not allow her to use her eyes at night, because they had been weakened by her long illness; and she could think of no excuse for locking herself in her room while she made the present she had in mind. At last one evening at dinner, her uncle solved the question for her by asking: "Gene, will you kindly look over Mary's wardrobe and see what she will need in the way of new frocks, shoes, and so on? I fear that I shall have to ask you to do some shopping for her before she will be ready for the trip South. I have never tried to buy so much as a pair of shoes for a young lady."

"Indeed, Doctor, I shall be only too glad to select anything she needs." For Gene, like all girls, loved to shop, especially when every penny did not have to be counted twice before it was spent.

Mary clapped her hands and laughed so gleefully that the Doctor looked at her in surprise. "Hm! There is mischief in your eye, young lady. We may look out for something, Gene, on the day you go shopping."

A little later when alone with Mary, he drew a letter from his pocket. "I had a few lines from Aunt Mary to-day, and this little note for you came in the same envelope. Shall I read it to you?"

"Please, Uncle. Writing is so hard for me to read. Big people write such a funny way. They make points instead of curves at the top and bottom of m's, n's, and u's, so that I can hardly tell which is which."

"Yes, we grown-ups should be more careful when writing to little folks. Now, let us see what Aunt Mary has to say: 'My dear Mary, Mother Johanna is so very busy these days that she has asked me to write this little note for her and invite you to spend Christmas with us at Maryvale. Your little friends are all around me telling me what to say to you. They wish you to come out Friday morning, for they have many, many things to do to aid Santa Claus, and they know what a great help you will be to them. Eight of them will spend the holidays here, so you will have plenty of company. Do not disappoint us. Your loving Aunt Mary.' Well, what do you think of that?"

"It is just lovely for Mother Johanna to invite me, Uncle; but, of course, I won't go."

"And why not, pray tell me?"

"Go to Maryvale and leave you alone for Christmas!"

"But I do not intend to be left alone. I, too, am invited. Aunt Mary tells me that Father Hartley, the chaplain, will be happy to have me spend a few nights at his cottage, and I am looking forward to a very good time indeed."

"But—but, Uncle,——oh, it will be bad enough not to have Father and Mother and the babies home for Christmas, but if I have to be away from you, too—"

"You do not understand, dear. I shall be with you during the day—at meals and all—and in the evening until bedtime. Indeed, you will see far more of me than if we remain at home."

"But—but we won't be in the same house at night. Father Hartley's cottage is as far from the convent as—as—"

"Why, pet, it is right on the convent grounds, not more than two hundred yards away."

"But you can't come when I am asleep and kiss me good-night."

"Whatever put such an idea into your head? So you think I go prowling about the house at night at the risk of waking you and having you think I am a burglar?"

"If you don't come, Uncle, I must dream that you do; but it seems very strange that I should have the same dream every night at the same time."

"If you are asleep, how do you know the time?"

"W—ell, I must wake up a little, for I hear the big clock at the foot of the stairs strike ten just after you have gone."

"Just after I have gone! So you take it for granted that I do go into your room every night, eh? then why not prove it? At Maryvale, I can not possibly go to you at ten o'clock at night." The Doctor was more than anxious that the little girl should accept the invitation, for he well knew how very lonely this Christmas would be for her at home. "I was so sure that you would like to go, that I have made plans for a jolly time. One of them is that we shall send that big, old-fashioned sleigh, which has stood in the barn for years, out to Maryvale, and I shall take you and your little friends for a sleigh ride every day. Perhaps Aunt Mary and some of the Sisters could go with you. And then we could help Santa Claus in regard to the tree and some gifts for those little girls who do not go home for Christmas. If we do go, Gene will be able to spend Christmas at her own home. Don't you think you had better sleep over it, Goldilocks, before sending your regrets to Mother Johanna? You might change your mind when it is too late."

But the thought of making the holidays happier for the little girls who could not go home and, more than all, for Gene, was quite enough to win Mary over to her uncle's view of the matter.

"I have already changed my mind, Uncle. We won't send our regrets."

CHAPTER III.

MARY'S SECRET.

The following day, just after luncheon, Gene handed the Doctor a list of the things she thought Mary would need, and told him that she had decided to go down town that afternoon. "Mary will not have so much time to get into mischief after her nap as she would have if I were to go in the morning," she explained, her eyes twinkling.

"A very good idea indeed, Gene; but if you had given me a little hint, I could have put a sleeping powder into her glass of milk, and that would have kept her in bed until dinner time. Well, I think we can trust her not to eat matches or burn the house down. I shall tell Liza to keep an eye on her."

"But Liza is going to help me."

"Oho! a plot, is it? Well, do your worst, for you may never have the house to yourselves again," laughed the Doctor, putting on his overcoat.

"Gene, please excuse me, but I must whisper something to Uncle." And Mary drew him into the library. "The reason I am so glad, Uncle, is because I want to make Gene's Christmas present while she is out; and don't you think I could do without a nap for just this once? I can take two to-morrow, one in the morning and one in the afternoon, to make up, you know."

"Better go to bed an hour earlier to-night. By all means use every moment while Gene is out to make her gift."

"And will you help me tie it up to-night, Uncle? I make such funny bows."

"I shall do my best, but I am no hand at tying ribbons. Shoe strings are more in my line, you know."

"That's so, Uncle. I don't see how we would have managed to tie up the things for the box without Gene. But I can't ask her to tie the ribbon on her own present. Oh, maybe Liza can help me."

"I am sure she can. And now you must excuse *me* while I speak to Gene a moment. Ask Liza to tell Jim to have the carriage ready to take her down town. It is a very cold day."

Leaving Mary in the library, the Doctor returned to the hall, where Gene was waiting at the foot of the stairs for the little girl.

"You may see something to-day, Gene, that will take your fancy as a Christmas gift for the home folks; so I am going to pay my debts a little ahead of time."

"Really, Doctor, I do not feel that you owe me anything. I have been treated as a guest—no, as a member of the family; and you have no idea what it has meant to me."

"And you have no idea how much all that you have done for my little niece has meant to me. If any one had told me that she could be so happy and contented without her parents and little sisters, I would not have believed it. Of course, I know that she has her lonely hours. Such things are to be expected."

"Yes, Doctor, there have been times when I was tempted to telephone for you. It seemed to me that she needed someone of her very own to comfort her. But even at her worst, she has always been so

sweet and gentle—so different from the children that I have usually dealt with."

"She is a winsome little lassie, and for that very reason I appreciate anything that is done to make her happy. Sister Julia gave me no idea of your powers in that line, so I do not feel bound by the bargain I made with you and have taken it upon myself to do what I think common justice requires. Even then, I shall be in your debt; for there are things which mere money can never repay."

He placed an envelope in her hand and was gone before she could do more than thank him. On the sidewalk he turned to wave at Mary, who always stood at the window until he had passed out of sight; but a cry from Gene had called the little girl into the hall, and the Doctor chuckled as he pictured the two examining the contents of the envelope.

"Oh, it is a mistake—a mistake! Look at this, Mary!" And Gene sank on the lowest step of the stairs and burst into tears.

"But, Gene,—oh, don't, *don't* cry, Gene!" Mary threw her arms about the sobbing girl. "Isn't it good money? O Gene! Uncle didn't mean to give you bad money, you know. Here, I shall throw it right into the fire, and he will give you the good kind the very minute he comes home." The child seized the two crisp bills lying in Gene's lap and ran toward the library.

"Mary, Mary, don't! No, no!" Gene hurried after her. "It is good money! Too good to be true! Look at it! Two one hundred dollar bills! And it isn't a mistake, either. Your Uncle meant to give them to me. He said so himself; but I was too much surprised to remember. Think of it, Mary! *Two hundred dollars* for the very loveliest time I have ever had in my life."

"Is that very much money, Gene? I don't know much about money."

"It is ever so much more than I have ever handled at one time. Oh, you little darling! You have no idea what this means to me. My father is an invalid. He injured his back two years ago and has not been able to walk since. But wait until he gets the comfortable wheel chair that this money will buy for him. I shall not buy it to-day, though, for I should like to ask your uncle about the best place to get such a thing. So you see, dearie, why I am so, so happy over my two hundred dollars. But come! The minutes are flying, and I must dress to go out."

When Mary had seen the carriage drive down the street with Gene safe inside it, she flew out to the kitchen to ask Susie to make her some paste.

"Gwine to papah yo' doll house agin, honey?"

"No, Susie, I have to make Gene's Christmas present while she is down town, and I have used every speck of paste in the bottle she bought for me. I really think the kind you make sticks better."

"Co'se it do, Miss May-ree. Homemade t'ings am alwuz de bestest dey is. Yo' run 'long an' git de res' ob yo' fixin's ready, an' Liza'll fotch dis up to yo' when it gits cool. 'Tain't no good hot, nohow."

"And will you come up to see the gift when it is finished, Susie? I would like your 'pinion about it. You see, this is the only one I have tried to make all by myself."

"I sho'ly will, honey; but I reckon ma 'pinion ain't wuf much, nohow."

"Indeed it is, Susie. I shall call you the very minute the gift is finished."

Mary knew exactly what she intended to make for Gene, so lost no time in planning it. She began at once to cut a circular piece of cardboard, but found it hard work for her little hands. In the center of it, she pasted a photograph of herself, which she knew Gene liked very much; and then she cut strips of crepe paper, pink and dark green, and carefully pulled out the edges to make ruffles. Beginning at the edge of the cardboard, she pasted the green paper, circle within circle, singing all the while; and her sweet little voice reached the ears of Liza and Susie, who stole up the back stairs and peeped in at her as she cut and clipped and snipped and pasted and patted.

"Now, I am ready for the pink paper. There's the clock striking—one—two—three. I wonder when Gene will be home. Liza! Li—za—a—a! Li—i—i—za!"

The two women in the hall fled on tiptoe; and after a few moments, Liza entered from the next room. "Wuz yo' callin', honey?"

"Yes, Liza. What time do you think Gene will be home?"

"Don't know'm, Miss May-ree. 'Bout five, I reckon."

"That's exactly what I think. Then I have only two hours. But I shall have this finished unless she comes earlier. It won't take so long to paste the pink ruffles on, because the nearer I come to the center, the smaller the circles are. How do you think it's going to look, Liza?"

"Scrumptious, honey, scrumptious! An' when yo's ready fo' to tie dem ribbings, jes' yo' call me agin."

Mary thought over every word Gene had said that afternoon.

"I am going to tell Uncle all about her poor, sick father. If anyone can make him well, he can. And about the chair—that one has been up in the attic for years and years. There, my frame is finished all but the ribbons to hang it up by. I shall have to ask Liza to punch the holes for me. Liza! Li—za! Li—za—a!"

"Yas'm, Miss May-ree, yas'm! Wal, ain't dat de mos' bu'ful present I ebah did see! Wait, honey, twell I calls ole Susie."

The cook was as loud as Liza in her praise of the little girl's work.

"And now I am going to put it in Uncle's room so Gene won't see it."

What matter that the crepe paper was not cut very evenly, or that the paste showed through in several places? The love that was worked into every inch of that picture frame and the dear little face peeping out of the very heart of the flower brightened many a sad day in Gene's after life.

"Oh, oh! Liza! there's the door bell!" Mary stopped short at the door of her uncle's room.

"Dat's all right, honey. I'se gwine turn out de light in heah, an' ef'n it's Miss Gene, yo' come 'long down right aftah me an' tek her in de liberry an' keep her dah talkin' while I comes back up heah an' cleahs away de scraps."

Mary was half way down the stairs when Liza opened the door to admit Gene, who was followed by Jim with his arms piled high with boxes.

"There is so much delay about sending things these days that I thought I had better bring them since I had the carriage," explained the young girl.

"Liza will show Jim where to put the boxes, Gene. Come in here and warm yourself by the fire. Do tell me what you bought—every single thing. Did you see about that nice chair for your father?" Though Mary tried to ask the question in her usual tone, there was an anxious note in her voice, which did not escape Gene; neither did the child's little sigh of relief when she answered, "No, Mary, I wish to ask your uncle's advice about that."

After dinner, the Doctor went upstairs with them to see Gene's purchases. The young girl spread the pretty little dresses on Mary's bed. There was a soft, white, cloth one braided with pale blue; a dark blue cashmere trimmed with tiny, white pearl buttons; several dainty white frocks of summer material, besides ginghams, lawns, and dimities in blue and white plaids, checks, and stripes.

"They are just lovely, Gene, lovely!" cried Mary.

"Yes, indeed, Gene, you have shown very good taste in making your choice."

"Thank you, Doctor. I was not sure whether you and Mary would care for the little dark blue dress, as she seems to have nothing but white and pale blue ones. It may be worn with a white guimpe as a change from the blue silk one that goes with it."

Gene began to return the things to their boxes, and the Doctor, in response to a sign from Mary, followed the child into the hall and to his own room.

"You don't mean to tell me you made that, Goldilocks!"

"I did! I did! All except tying the ribbons. The edges of the ruffles are not very even, so will you please trim them a little?"

"Leave them just as they are. The whole frame looks like a big hollyhock, and the uneven places make it more natural. The petals of a flower are not all exactly even, you know."

"Then let us wrap it up and put it away. Where can we hide it so Gene won't see it?"

"How about the bottom drawer of my dresser? There is a large flat box in there that we shall lay it in."

A few minutes later when the two were enjoying their usual evening chat before the sitting-room fire, Mary told her uncle Gene's story. "And I just know you can cure Mr. Donnelly, Uncle."

"I am not so sure about that, pet; but there will be no harm in going to see him if Gene would like me to do so. As for the wheel chair in the storeroom upstairs, I shall have to think of a way to get around that. Perhaps I can offer to lend it to her for as long a time as her father may need it. Run off to bed now. You have had a busy afternoon cutting and pasting and planning for the happiness of others. After Gene has tucked you in for the night, ask her to come in here for a few minutes."

Before leaving for his office the next morning, the Doctor told Mary that he had promised Gene to go to see her father the day after Christmas, and that he had advised her not to buy a chair until after his visit. "From what she has told me of the case, I think he will have to be brought to a hospital in the city. So say nothing of the wheel chair in the storeroom."

It took quite a while that morning to try on all the new dresses.

"I am glad they do not need altering, Mary, for I ought to pack your trunk this afternoon. Do you wish to take any dolls and games and books away with you?"

"Santa Claus always brings me books and games, so they will be enough to take to San Antonio. About my dolls—I think I shall just take Amelia Anabelle." This was a large baby doll which Mr. Selwyn had given his little girl just before he went away. There was a button at the back of its neck, and when it was pressed, the head turned around in the baby cap, showing a crying face instead of hair. At the same time, the doll cried and kicked and waved its arms about just as a very cross baby would do. Then, Mary said, Amelia Anabelle was in a tantrum. "My other children are old enough to stay with their aunt in the country. (That's my toy box, Gene.) I shall carry Amelia Anabelle; but goodness, me! the poor child has no cloak. Those belonging to my other children won't fit her."

"Babies as young as she is are often wrapped in a warm shawl."

"Then I know the very thing—the pretty white shawl Mother made for me to wear when I began to sit up after I was so sick. I shall wrap that around her, and the robe from my doll carriage, too. Now, Gene, you are laughing at me. Your eyes are all twinkly. Yes, they are. Do you think Amelia Anabelle will look funny bundled up that way?"

"Not at all, Mary. I was not smiling at what you said, but at a thought of my own."

"I hope Santa Claus will bring me the nice little suitcase I asked him for. I showed Uncle my letter before I sent it up the chimney, because he is one of Santa Claus' helpers, you know, and if the letter should be lost, Uncle will remember exactly what I asked for. I should like a suitcase that I can carry myself—one just large enough for the things I need on the train. I am so glad we can go as far as Maryvale together, but I do wish you could stop off to see Aunt Mary. How far is your home from Maryvale, Gene?"

"I shall travel sixty miles on the train after you leave me, dearie, and then drive two miles out into the country."

"After we have packed my trunk, Gene, we must help Susie with the baskets for the poor people that Mother always remembered at Christmas time."

CHAPTER IV.

MARYVALE.

Friday morning, Mary was half dressed when Gene came to wake her.

"There are so many things that I must do before it is time to start, you know, Gene."

"Why, Mary, you have nothing to do but to eat your breakfast and put your comb and brush in your suitcase. Neither have I," laughed the young girl.

"Indeed, I have some very important things to do, Gene, and I wish you would try to go around with your eyes closed and not fasten your suitcase until I tell you."

"Now, Mary, what did I say about gifts? You promised, you know."

"Yes, I know I promised not to let Uncle Frank buy you anything, and not to make anything myself; but his gift was already bought, and mine was already made; so we can't do anything but give them to you, can we?"

"You little mischief! I told you that I would like to have that picture of you and that was all. I thought we would surely find it before this."

"And I looked everywhere for the large ones like it that Mother has put away somewhere, but I couldn't find them. Never mind, Gene, you shall have that picture some day."

After breakfast when the Doctor had said good-bye to Gene, Mary clung to him, making him promise to leave early that evening for Maryvale.

"And I have telephoned to Aunt Mary to expect you on the ten-thirty train. She will send the sleigh with two or three of the large girls to meet you. Be sure to catch that train, for it will take you out there in good time for luncheon. Good-bye until evening."

"Now we must fly around and get ready, Gene. You know we have to stop at little Paul's home to give him and Sister Julia their presents. He may wish us to stay a few minutes, too. Oh, oh! don't fasten your suitcase yet, please!" Mary hurried to her uncle's room for Gene's gift, and returning, peeped in at the door. "Please look out the window a minute, Gene." Carefully laying the package on top of the

things in the suitcase, she slammed down the cover and sat on it. "Now, you may fasten it, but I won't let you have even one, teeny, weeny peep. And you must promise not to open the suitcase until Christmas morning."

"But, darling, I can't promise that. There are things in it that I shall need as soon as I get home." Mary's face fell. "But I shall promise not to open your gift until Christmas. Will that do? is it wrapped?"

"Yes, Gene, it is wrapped, so you really can't see the pic—the—the *thing*, anyway."

"Jim jes' done tol' me dat he's gwine to dribe around to de front now, so yo' bettah lemme holp yo' git yo' t'ings on, Miss May-ree, so's Miss Gene kin git her's on at de same time."

Liza smiled in a knowing fashion at Mary and took up the little girl's pretty, white coat and hat.

"Just a minute, Liza. I must wrap up Amelia Anabelle first. Will you please get the shawl out of the middle drawer?" Mary crossed the room to the door of the playroom, and Gene pretended to be busy with her suitcase.

"Why—oh! oh! oh!" Back ran the little girl to throw her arms about Gene and dance with her around the room. "You dear, darling, dumpling Gene! *Now* I know who the little friend is that you were knitting the pretty white mittens and leggings and embroidering the beautiful baby cloak and cap for. *You* are the mischief!" And Mary was off again to the playroom, returning with Amelia Anabelle dressed for the trip. "See how nicely the ruching on her inside cap sticks out—just exactly enough. O Gene, you are too good to me!"

"I could never be that, dearie."

Then came Gene's turn for a surprise. She went into her own room, Mary and Liza following her as far as the door. She took up her hat and turned to the dresser, then gave a glad little cry; for on it lay a handsome, brown leather bag mounted in silver. Opening it, she found an envelope containing a twenty dollar gold piece and the Doctor's card on which was written, "May this bag never contain less."

Nearly two hours later, the train stopped at the village near Maryvale, and Mary at once spied the sleigh filled with the children from the convent. Two of the older ones were waiting on the station platform. One of them took Mary's suitcase, the other her doll, and the little girl threw her arms around Gene.

"Happy, happy Christmas and good-bye, Gene, until Monday. Uncle is going to take me with him when he goes to see your father, you know."

The young girl stood on the platform of the car, waving to the little, white-clad figure until a curve in the track cut off the view.

"Here's a place for you, Mary!" "Oh, sit by me, *please!*" "You'll be warmer right here, between Frances and me!" "Oh, what a darling doll!" "Let me hold her, please, Mary!" were some of the cries from the sleigh.

At last all were comfortably settled, and a jolly ride they had. Before they had gone very far, Amelia Anabelle had a tantrum which added greatly to the fun. Sister Madeline was at the door to welcome the little girl.

"Mother Johanna told me to give you one of the big girls' rooms, so we shall go there at once to take off your wraps. Let me carry that lovely baby. She looks too heavy for you."

"She is heavy, Aunt Mary; but I wouldn't mind that so much if she wasn't so cross. On the train there was a baby crying; but when Amelia Anabelle began, it just stopped to stare at her. And in the sleigh—well, I was 'shamed of her!" As her aunt laid the doll on the bed, Mary slyly pushed the button. "Did you ever see such a child! I s'pose I shall have to walk the floor with her." And then Mary laughed gaily at the look on Sister Madeline's face. "There now, she will be good until the next time."

But her aunt caught up the doll and soon found the cause of her antics. "You must take her with you when you go to see Mother Johanna after dinner, Mary. The dear old soul won't know what to make of her. Then I shall borrow her to amuse the Sisters at recreation. It is just dinner time, so we shall go down stairs. We close the large refectory when so few of the children are here, and they have their meals in the lunch room."

"'M, 'm, it smells Christmassy down here."

"Yes, Dora and Frances have decorated the lunch room with holly and evergreens. Have you brought an apron with you? They expect you to work, you know."

"I think it is going to be make-b-lieve work, Aunt Mary. Yes, Liza put an apron in my suitcase, because this dress doesn't wash, and I am going to wear it to travel in."

The afternoon passed quickly for the nine little girls gathered around the table in the recreation room, where the roaring flames were dancing up the big chimney. They strung popcorn to help Santa Claus deck the tree, and it is safe to say that quite as much went into their mouths as on the long threads.

"The tree will be right there in the bay window, Mary."

"Yes, and we hang our stockings around the fireplace."

"But we don't get a peep at our presents until after the Masses on Christmas morning."

"We have Midnight Mass you know, Mary, and then we have a lunch and go back to bed. At six o'clock Father Hartley begins and says two more Masses."

"Midnight Mass! Oh, I have never been to Midnight Mass. It must be lovely. Four o'clock Mass was the earliest at our church, and Mother and Father and Uncle Frank and I went. It was pitch dark, and the stars were shining, and the snow was so nice and crunchy. That reminds me. We must do all we can this afternoon, Sister, because Uncle is going to take us for a long sleigh ride to-morrow."

A chorus of "Goody!" greeted this statement.

"Let's tell stories while we work, Sister," proposed Dora. "Christmas stories. You begin, please."

"Oh, no, save Sister Austin's for the last. Begin with the youngest. That's you, Effie." And the little five-year-old began, "Oncey-ponny-time."

When at last Sister Austin's turn came, she told them the beautiful story which never grows old—the story which gives the true meaning to Christmas. The sun had set when she finished, and Mary leaned toward her, asking in a low voice, "Do you know what time it is, Sister? Aunt Mary said she would come for me when it is time to watch for Uncle; but I am afraid she might forget."

"No danger of that, dear. It is only a quarter to five. At this time of year, the days are very short, you know."

Before another hour had passed, Sister Madeline came for the little girl.

"I have sent Peter with the sleigh to meet Uncle Frank, for it is a long, cold walk from the station. The small room at the right of the front door will be the very best place to watch for him. There is no light there, and we can see straight down the drive to the gate."

"And the sleighbells will tell us when he is coming, Aunt Mary."

Together they peered out into the darkness. After a long silence, Mary asked, "Aunt Mary, did you know that Father Lacey was going to let me make my First Communion when I was so sick, but I was unwise all the time? Oh, if I had not been that way, I could go to Holy Communion on Christmas! [1] Why do you think I never woke even for one little minute?"

"God alone can answer that question, darling. Clearly it was not His will that you should make your First Communion at that time; for Mother told me that everything possible was done to rouse you. But even though you cannot actually receive our dear Lord on His birthday, you can form the desire to do so, not only on that day but many times every day. Tell Him that you believe in Him, hope in Him, love Him, and are sorry for having offended Him, and that you wish you could receive Him. You will then be making a Spiritual Communion which so pleases our Divine Lord that He once said to a Saint, who was in the habit of making Spiritual Communions: 'My daughter, thy desire has penetrated so deeply into My heart that if I had not instituted this Sacrament of Love, I would do it now for thee alone, to become thy food, to have the pleasure of dwelling in thy breast, to take my loving repose in thy heart. I find such pleasure in being desired, that so often as a heart forms this desire, so often do I lovingly behold it to draw it unto Myself.'"

"I am so glad you told me that, Aunt Mary. I won't forget. Listen! I thought I heard the bells—Yes, there they are again." Mary flattened her nose against the window pane so as to catch the first glimpse of the sleigh. "There it is! there it is!"

The meeting between the two showed Sister Madeline how much Mary had missed her uncle that day.

"And now for supper! I think the children are hoping that you and Mary will join them, Frank; but no doubt you would prefer to have it together in the priest's dining-room."

"Not a bit of it! I am in for all the fun going. 'Make me a child again just for to-night,' and to-morrow and the day after. If we can make the little folks happy by joining them at their meals, we shall certainly do so. I suppose I must be proper and call you Sister Madeline before them."

No child at that supper table could remember a jollier meal; and when it was over, the Doctor went with them to the recreation room, where he played the piano and sang and told stories until bedtime. On the way to the front door with him, Mary was very quiet.

"Don't forget that you are to prove to-night whether I have been paying you a visit at ten P. M."

"Uncle," whispered the little girl, "*don't* you think I could go down to Father Hartley's with you? Oh, I would sleep on a lounge or anything."

"But hasn't Aunt Mary told you of her little plan? Then I shall have to spoil her surprise. She is

going to sleep in the very next room to yours and leave the door open between. Try it for just one night, dear."

The Doctor's first question the next morning was, "Did I call on you in your dreams, last night, Goldilocks?"

"Oh, you rogue, you rogue! You know very well who came and kissed me good-night; and you put her up to it!"

The Doctor tried to look surprised. "I put whom up to it?"

"Oho! don't try to pretend you don't know, sir! Your eyes are twinkling, and so are Aunt Mary's. But I caught her right around the neck when she leaned over; for I wasn't sound asleep, and I heard her beads rattle."

"But what was Aunt Mary doing up at the very late hour of ten o'clock? Don't you know that in convents the rule is, 'Early to bed, early to rise'?"

"But p'r'aps it wasn't quite ten o'clock, Uncle. No, no, I have caught you both this time!"

[1] The decree of Pope Pius X., concerning the First Communion of little children, had not at this time been issued.

CHAPTER V.

CHRISTMAS.

Mary never forgot that Midnight Mass. The beautiful altar decked with countless lights and masses of crimson roses; the kind, old, white-haired priest; the incense, the music, the wonderful Crib, which she could see from where she knelt beside her uncle in one of the front pews—all made her wish that her father and mother were there, too. After the two morning Masses, the children rushed to the recreation room for a peep at their gifts before breakfast. The great tree at the far end of the room first caught their eyes. It was bright with colored lights, and was turning slowly around in the metal box in which it stood, and from which came forth the sweet tones of the *Adeste, Holy Night*, and other Christmas hymns. The branches of the tree bent low with the weight of gifts and goodies.

"Oh! oh! see the big bunches of white grapes and the raisins and the oranges and—and everything!"

"Yes, and all those boxes tied up in white paper with holly ribbon, and our names on them. Last year the tree wasn't half so splendid."

"You must thank Doctor Carlton for all the extra things," Sister Austin explained. "He is one of Santa Claus' helpers, you know; and besides many of the presents and good things, he brought with him the lights and the musical stand which have been used every year for Mary's tree."

The covers of their boxes from home had been loosened so that the children could remove them easily; and such ohs! and ahs! and cries of delight as filled the big room! There were two boxes for Mary, who could scarcely wait until her uncle had opened them. He first pried off the cover of the one bearing a foreign label; and with eager hands, the little girl unwrapped a beautiful, white marble statue of Our Lady of Lourdes, her mother's gift. Then came a small mosaic picture of her favorite Madonna and a blackeyed, dark-haired doll dressed in Italian costume, from her father; an album of Kodak pictures of the babies with a tiny card saying, "To our big sister from Berta and Beth;" a dear, little, white, knitted sack for Amelia Anabelle from Aunt Mandy; and a gay card from Tom. Two flat boxes for her uncle and aunt contained some fine large photographs of famous paintings and other gifts suitable for them.

The second box was filled with books and games which the Doctor had told Santa Claus to bring her. Nor had the little suitcase been forgotten; and opening it, Mary found a travelling case containing brush, comb, tooth and nail-brush holders, and all that she would need on the journey. A dear little prayer book from her aunt and holy pictures and medals from a number of the Sisters made her feel that she had fared very well indeed; and in spite of her great longing for the dear ones so far away, Christmas was a very happy day for her.

The greatest fun came just after supper when the sound of sleighbells outside the windows surprised the children. Presently, Mother Johanna herself ushered Santa Claus into the room—a dear, roly-poly, little old man, his hair and beard shining with frost. Effie and the younger children took refuge in the folds of Sister Austin's habit; but Mary, fearing that he might think he was not welcome,

overcame her shyness, and running to him, caught his hand in both of hers and led him to the tree. The Doctor mounted a ladder, and beginning at the very top of the tree, handed Santa Claus the presents and good things which he, with funny little speeches, then presented to the children. But the tree was not stripped by any means. All the lights and tinsel and gay balls and other ornaments were left on it to delight the little folks during the holidays.

The happy day closed with Benediction, and Mary went to bed looking forward to her visit to Gene's home.

But when the Doctor came up from the chaplain's cottage the following morning, he told her that it had grown so much colder during the night that he really feared to take her with him. "It is ten below zero, and your poor little nose would be frozen during the long drive from the station to Mr. Donnelly's. I shall be back early."

At noon, however, Sister Madeline came to tell Mary that her uncle had just telephoned to say that Mr. Donnelly was far worse than he had expected to find him, and that they were preparing to take him to a hospital in the city.

"And—and won't Uncle come back here this evening, Aunt Mary?"

"He wishes you to meet the four o'clock train and return home with him. Several things make it impossible for him to stop off here again. So we must lose our dear little guest."

"I am truly sorry to go, Aunt Mary, for I have had such a good time in spite of—of—oh, it will be so lonely at home now without Gene. Uncle can be there only in the morning for a little while and at noon and in the evening."

"Don't borrow trouble, dear. Uncle has a beautiful plan; but as it is a surprise for you, I think it would be unfair to tell it now. Come, we shall pack your suitcase, and then you will still have some time to play with the children."

Great was their disappointment when Mary told her little friends that she was about to leave them. In spite of the intense cold, all insisted on going to the station with her. The Doctor was on the platform of the car when the train stopped, and springing off, he lifted Mary aboard. Entering the car, the little girl spied Gene coming down the aisle to meet her. Mr. Donnelly and his wife were in the drawing-room, where the poor sufferer had been made as comfortable as possible. Gene took Mary to meet her father and mother, and then brought her back to the doctor, who at once began to explain matters to her.

"I thought it best to bring Mr. Donnelly in to the city this evening as it would make it easier for Gene and her mother to have me with them to manage things. We drove him to the station in an ambulance, and one will be waiting to meet this train. You will be glad to know that Gene will be with us until we leave for Texas. She and her mother will stay at our home while Mr. Donnelly is at the hospital, where he will probably be for some months. I shall feel better knowing that someone is looking after things during our absence. Liza and Susie are always to be trusted, of course; but they have never been left alone for any length of time."

This was merely the Doctor's way of making things easy for Gene and her mother. Mary was delighted with the plan, as much for Gene's sake as for her own.

CHAPTER VI.

THE LAND OF SUNSHINE.

"All aboard for San Antonio! and remember, young lady, you are to make yourself as small as possible and look out the window when the conductor comes around so that he will not insist on my paying full fare for such a big, overgrown child as you are."

"Now, Uncle! Every dress Gene bought for me is seven-year-old size, and not one of them had to be shortened."

"Hm! I thought you told me that you are 'going on' eight. Well, never mind, let us hope that you will grow longer and broader in the wonderful Texas climate."

Mary looked with some curiosity about the sleeper, for this was her first trip of more than two or three hours. She leaned toward her uncle and whispered, "I mean to try ever so hard, Uncle, to keep awake, but I really don't see how I can do it for three nights and two days." And she was almost ashamed of the way the Doctor laughed.

"I do not see how I can do so, either, pet; but perhaps you will let me put my head on your shoulder and take a little nap now and then, and you can do the same with me." And he went off in another peal

of merriment.

A few hours later she exclaimed, "Why—why, Uncle! Look at that porter! He is pulling down the roof of the car!"

"Watch him a few minutes, and your fears will be set at rest."

Mary's eyes grew rounder and rounder as she saw the porter jerk down a mattress, blankets, pillows, and everything necessary to make up the lower berth; but her wonder became greater when he began on the upper one.

"Uncle! he is making a two-story bed! Did you *ever* see anything like it!"

"Very often indeed. To save time, I travel at night whenever possible, you know."

"Hm! I think I ought to get off this train and go straight home to Gene."

"A nice way to talk when I am taking you away for your health, miss! What fault have you to find with this train? Isn't it far more comfortable than you expected it to be, eh?"

"Of course it is, Uncle; but oh! you are *such* a tease!"

"So I am; but I do not often find anyone who forgives a teasing as readily as you do. Come, let us move into the opposite section and give the porter a chance to make up our berths. Do you think you can climb into the upper one?"

"I am afraid you will have to boost me up there, Uncle, and ask the porter to put a little railing across the front so I won't fall out."

"No, no, pet, I am only joking. I shall do the climbing."

Through the snow-clad mountains of Pennsylvania, across frozen rivers and great white plains sped the train until at last the Doctor said, "We shall soon see the 'Father of Waters.'"

"Is Mr. Waters an old friend of yours, Uncle?"

Many a laugh had the Doctor enjoyed since leaving New York, and often the passengers had been forced to join him, though they had not always heard what Mary had said. "I forgot that you have not studied geography, dearie. I am speaking of the Mississippi River, which is called by that name. We change cars at St. Louis, a fine old city on its banks."

The next afternoon when Mary awoke from her nap, the Doctor called her to see some Indians. Instead of looking out the window, she caught up Amelia Anabelle's white coat and wound it around her head, insisting, "Tie your muffler or something white around your head, Uncle! Oh, be quick! Do you think they will come on the train?"

The Doctor looked at the child in surprise.

"O Uncle! Please, *please* hurry! If they do come, they may try to scalp everyone; and if they see our heads tied up, they will think we have already been scalped."

"Is that the way you would try to deceive the poor Indians? I am surprised at you! Come here and take a look at them."

Mary timidly peeped out the window; but instead of a band of braves in war paint and feathers, she saw only two men standing on the platform, quietly talking.

"You don't mean to say those are *Indians*, Uncle! Why, they look just like men."

"And what are Indians, eh? birds?"

"Now, Uncle! But I s'pose those are tame Indians, not wild ones."

"Yes, those men are civilized. We are now in Oklahoma, and by bedtime we shall be in Texas with one more night's ride before us."

The little girl was delighted that the journey was nearing its end. Though the Doctor had taken her out to walk and run about on the station platform whenever the train had stopped for any length of time, she was tired of sitting still so long and would have been quite happy if she could have left the train and enjoyed a good romp over the vast plains which stretched as far as the eye could see.

The next morning, Mary was perfectly sure that she knew just how Rip van Winkle felt when he came down from the mountain after his long sleep. She and her uncle had boarded the train in New York in the midst of a whirling snowstorm; and they stepped off it at San Antonio into the very mildest of spring weather. She looked with delight at the grass and trees and beautiful palms, some of them as high as the second story windows; and if it had not been for Amelia Anabelle's wraps and the new books and games in her trunk, she could not have believed that scarcely two weeks had passed since Christmas.

Instead of staying at a hotel, the Doctor had arranged to board at a big, old-fashioned house, standing far back from the street in the midst of fine old trees. Mary liked this plan very much, and soon became a great favorite with everyone there. She spent most of the time outdoors; and in the fresh air and warm, bright sunshine, she grew stronger day by day. The Doctor, true to the promise he had made when she found she could not go to Rome with her parents, lost no time in getting a pony for her and a horse for himself; and every morning they went for a ride through the parks of the city. The one Mary liked best was Brackenridge Park, where long, gray streamers of Spanish moss hang from the trees, and bright redbirds flit among the branches. She liked the plazas, too,—big open squares in the heart of the city, laid out like little parks with fountains, trees, and beautiful flowers. And she liked the San Antonio River, the "Old Santone," as the natives lovingly call it, with its banks bordered with myrtle and cresses and shaded by old trees. And as they rode through the beautiful city, the Doctor told the little girl of the saintly Franciscan Fathers, who, more than a century before La Salle sailed down the Mississippi, and almost a century before the Mayflower brought the Pilgrims to Plymouth Rock, came to the great, wild, lonely, Texas plains to bring the light of Faith to the savage Indians roaming there. It was the Monks of the same order who founded the city of San Antonio in 1689, and who built the Cathedral of San Fernando and the Mission Chapel of the Alamo; also, the four other Mission Churches which lie from two to eight miles outside the city.

One of the first buildings they visited was San Fernando Cathedral. Its old gray walls, built in 1734, are still in good condition; and inside, the soft light from its stained-glass windows falls on beautiful statues and pictures of our Blessed Mother and the saints. When they left the church, the Doctor pointed out the time-blackened roof at the rear of the building, where the Mexican general, Santa Ana, planted his cannon so as to fire on the Alamo, the fort and Mission Chapel, "The Cradle of Texas' Liberty," as it is fittingly called. As they walked over to it, Mary listened eagerly to her uncle's story of Texas' brave fight for freedom from Mexico, to which country it belonged until 1836. He told her of the terrible siege of the Alamo, which took place in the early spring of that year, when less than two hundred Texans held the fort against six or seven thousand Mexicans until not one of the brave little band remained alive; and of the battle of San Jacinto a month later, in which the Mexicans suffered defeat, and Santa Ana was taken prisoner. Soon after this, Texas became a republic; and some time later, asked to be admitted to the United States.

A feeling of awe came over the little girl as they entered the Alamo and walked along its dim hallways and stood in the rooms where the fearfully unequal hand-to-hand fight was carried on. She saw the Chapel where Mass had so often been said, and the burial place of the Monks. But this sacred old building is no longer used as a chapel. It is now the property of the State, and is visited by travelers from all over the country.

Other spots which were of great interest to Mary were the old Missions outside the city. Several times the Doctor drove her out along the beautiful country roads to visit them; and as they had all the time they needed, he stopped by the roadside as often as Mary wished to get out to examine the cactus blossoms or to pick the other wild flowers, especially the bluebonnet, the State flower of Texas.

Built during the eleven years between 1720 and 1731, the Missions are now in ruins, but they stand as silent witnesses to the courage and zeal of the saintly Monks who gave their lives to the work of converting the Indians. The Mission San Jose, or Saint Joseph, is still very beautiful. It is said that the front of this church with its carvings and statues of saints above the door, was brought all the way from Spain to Mexico City, then overland, through forests, across rivers, over mountains to where it now stands. The Doctor showed Mary the part of the building which had been used as a school for the Indians, and explained that, besides being a church, school, and home for the Monks, each Mission served as a place of refuge from unfriendly Indian tribes.

Another place Mary liked to visit was Fort Sam Houston, one of the largest military posts in the country. It was here that Roosevelt trained his famous "Rough Riders." Some little distance from it is a beautiful convent school; and one day as they rode past it, Mary reined in her pony and sat watching the children at play. The Doctor proposed a visit to the Sisters, and Mary promptly agreed, hoping that the little girls would invite her to join in their games. This they did, and she spent a happy hour with them.

And so the winter passed, bringing the days when every shanty was almost hidden by the beautiful roses which climbed over it, and violets peeped out from places where one would least expect to find them. Only one thing marred the pleasure of these sunny months. This was the death of Gene's father. The Doctor had placed him in the care of a famous specialist; but though everything possible was done for him, he failed very quickly. Mary felt better about Gene's loss after her uncle had explained to her that, even had Mr. Donnelly lived, he would always have been a great sufferer.

The little girl never tired of seeing the Mexicans, who live in and around San Antonio, in their native costume. Often on the roads to the Missions, she and her uncle met one of the men dressed in light-colored breeches, white shirt, a gay sash around his waist, and a very broad-brimmed sombrero trimmed with silver braid and ornaments on his head. Usually, he had a tiny donkey, or burro, with him, almost hidden by a great load of hay or mesquite wood. They saw the women in their miserable huts, or jacales, built of a few sticks driven into the ground and covered with old blankets and thatches of straw. These women were always kneeling at the open door, pounding out tortillos, the Mexican johnny-cake, in the matat, or very old-fashioned corn mill; or they were down at the little ditch, washing their coarse linen, using a great flat rock for a washboard. The men make beautiful things of clay, feathers, grasses, leather and wool; and the Doctor bought small jugs, baskets, little pocket books, and many other trinkets for Mary to take to her friends at home. As for the Mexican candy, the little girl

was sure she had never tasted any better.

On the twenty-first of April, she saw a sight which she never forgot. This was the Flower Parade, followed by the "Battle of the Flowers," in memory of the battle of San Jacinto. Foremost in the parade marched the soldiers from the Fort. They were followed by automobiles and carriages decked with beautiful flowers. One small auto in particular made Mary clap her hands in delight. It was entirely covered with pure white flowers so arranged as to represent a swan. The flowers were built up in front for the long neck and head, and bright yellow blossoms formed the bill. As it glided gracefully along, it was greeted with cheers on all sides. In the evening, a fierce battle was waged in Alamo Plaza, ladies and gentlemen on horseback pelting one another with flowers. But Mary enjoyed the parade better. She loved flowers too much to wish to see them fall and be trampled under the horses' hoofs.

A few days later, she and her uncle said good-bye to San Antonio and set out on the long journey to New York.

CHAPTER VII.

THROUGH STORM TO THE RAINBOW.

"And you will come out to see me every Sunday and Tuesday and Thursday, Uncle?"

"Yes, pet, unless something very important happens to prevent my doing so. In that case, we shall have a long chat over the telephone. I know that you will be very happy here, little one, with Aunt Mary to look after you, and so many, many friends among the Sisters and little girls."

But in spite of his words, the Doctor felt the hand within his own tighten its hold and saw a very wistful light in the blue eyes raised to his.

It was the first week of May. The beautiful spring day had tempted the Doctor and Mary to walk from the station, and they had just entered the big gates at the entrance to the convent grounds.

"See that orchard! Isn't it a picture? And those shrubs in blossom! Really, I would not mind being a little girl myself if I could go to school in such a beautiful place."

"Oh, I know that I shall like to go to school here, Uncle; but I do wish I could see you every evening. Couldn't you live with Father Hartley and go into the city on the train every day?"

"That would not be possible, Goldilocks; but I shall invite myself to stay over night with the chaplain now and then since you wish it so much."

Sister Madeline had a warm welcome for the travelers. The Doctor remained for dinner and left on the early afternoon train; and Mary began her life as a boarder at Maryvale. It was the custom for children of her age to sleep in a dormitory; but Mrs. Selwyn had written to Mother Johanna, asking that Mary might have her own room fitted up with her furniture from home. And a very dainty little room it was, with pale blue-tinted walls and light woodwork, soft mull curtains looped back with pale blue ribbons, the brass bed, satin-wood dresser, writing desk, and chairs, and the little bookcase from her playroom. On the top of this stood her marble statue of our Blessed Mother and a pair of vases which Mary always kept filled with fresh flowers. Her toy box with a few sofa cushions on it made a very good window seat; and all the girls agreed that Mary Selwyn's room was the very prettiest one in the house.

As a surprise to her father and mother, she was allowed to begin to study music and soon showed so much talent for it that Sister Dominic was delighted with her. She never begged to be excused from practice; for was she not "making a s'prise" for those whom she loved better than all the fun and frolics in the world? And every time she was called to the parlor to see her uncle, the same question was on her lips: "How many days is it now, Uncle, before they will be home?" until he at last brought her a large calendar and a blue pencil with which she could mark off each day before she went to bed at night. Toward the end of May, she sighed when she found that there were five whole pages of days to be marked off before the first of November.

But, somehow, the summer passed more quickly than she had believed possible. She was glad to find that September has only thirty days; and when October came, she could scarcely wait for the letter that would tell the exact date when her dear ones would sail for home. Toward the end of the month, the Doctor came with a letter, yes,—but the little girl was sorely disappointed; for baby Beth had been very ill, and the doctor who had attended her would not hear of her being brought back to New York just at the beginning of the long, cold winter. So the return home must be put off until the next May.

Poor little Mary! For her Uncle's sake she tried to be brave and agreed with him when he reminded her of how much better able she would be to play the piano in another six months; but the longing for her father and mother and the babies grew stronger than ever, and she studied the calendar to see whether there were more months of thirty than of thirty-one days between November and May. Looking over the pages which she had turned back when she had first hung the calendar in her room, she

danced about at sight of only twenty-eight days in February, and ran to Sister Austin to ask whether the new year would bring any change in the number. But she learned that it would not be a leap year and went away somewhat consoled that there would be no extra day to put off her happiness.

Again the month of May came; but into it and the months which followed were crowded sorrows and trials which seldom fall to the lot of so young a child. The sad, sad news of her father's death in distant India was swiftly followed by word of her mother's illness which again delayed the homecoming. And when, shortly after her tenth birthday, the Doctor, pale and haggard, came to Maryvale and as gently as possible told her of the wreck of the great ocean steamer and the loss of those so dear to them, she felt that she was indeed his little Mary, and that she now belonged to our Blessed Mother in a very special way. For some weeks her aunt and uncle were much worried about her, for she became so thin and pale and played no more with the little ones who were spending the summer vacation at the convent; but after a month with the Doctor in the mountains and another in Georgia at the home of Wilhelmina Marvin, the little daughter of old, old friends of her father, mother, and uncle, she returned to Maryvale looking more like herself.

Many long, lonely hours did she spend. She could not talk much about her sorrows to her uncle and aunt, for she knew that they felt the terrible loss almost as deeply as she did; but she had learned where to find the comfort she so sorely needed; and when she could no longer bear the merry laughter and noisy pranks of her playmates, she would steal away to the chapel and whisper all that she wished to say to the loving Heart in the Tabernacle.

Wilhelmina and she had become fast friends; for the little Southern girl had come as a boarder to Maryvale the year before. Mary had found her the same lively, fun-loving, little romp whom the Doctor had described to her, with just one difference—she had grown more lively, more fun-loving, more full of mischief; and poor Sister Austin's nerves were sorely tried, for Wilhelmina was never happier than when swinging from the highest limbs of the very tallest trees she could find. Sister Madeline had been made Mother Superior at Maryvale; and Wilhelmina was a frequent visitor to her office, where she was called to answer for her pranks. But she was such a truthful, generous, whole-hearted child that no one could be very hard on her. In a short time, she had Mary playing base-ball and many games which she had never heard of; and by degrees, our little girl lost some of her old-fashioned manner, while her gentle ways did much toward keeping Wilhelmina within bounds.

After Mary's visit to Sunnymead, as Wilhelmina's home was called, the two little girls returned to school, Wilhelmina full of good resolutions, most of which she broke the first day. She and Mary were in the same class; for, although eight months younger than Mary, she had not missed nearly a whole year of school on account of illness, and she had been taught at home by a governess—that is, when that young woman could find her and keep her in the schoolroom long enough to teach her anything. She, too, took music lessons; and poor Sister Dominic had her hands full with her. Wilhelmina's favorite tunes were *Yankee Doodle*, *The Wearing of the Green*, *Oh, Dem Golden Slippers*, and several others which she had picked out for herself on the piano at home, and which she faithfully practiced instead of the lesson which her teacher expected her to prepare.

"But, Sister, I can't play scales and exercises for folks. The boys would chase me out of the house if I tried it. You don't know what it means to have eight brothers. They want tunes with lots of swing and go to them."

"The lively things will come later, Wilhelmina, after you have mastered these very important scales and exercises. How can you expect to play runs and trills and such things unless you learn to do it properly?"

"This is the easiest way to play a run, Sister." And the young lady drew her thumb quickly across the length of the keyboard.

Sister Dominic sighed. So did Wilhelmina.

And still, between this harum-scarum little girl and Mary there sprang up a warm friendship, which grew stronger and stronger as the years went on, each of the children gaining much from the good traits she found in the other.

During the fall and winter, many things which Mary had heard about the wreck passed and repassed through her busy little brain; and at last she made up her mind that the stories did not agree, and that there must be a mistake somewhere. She spoke of the matter to her uncle; but he insisted that everything possible had been done at the time of the wreck to make sure that there was no mistake. Mary was not convinced and began praying to our Blessed Mother to obtain for her light and guidance. Many a half hour she spent in the chapel, besides denying herself candy and other goodies; and her belief that her dear ones had not been lost in the wreck grew stronger and stronger as the bright spring days went by. Where they were, why they had sent no word of their rescue, she had no idea; but she felt sure that our Lady would in some way make it known to her. So she prayed and trusted and made hundreds of little acts of self-denial.

And then—*then* things began to happen so quickly as almost to take her breath away.

One night in the early part of June, she went to bed wondering how many more prayers she would have to say before her uncle would begin to feel as she did; and the very next morning, she noticed a marked change in him. She did not ask what had caused it. It was enough for her to know that her

prayers had at last been partly answered. And beyond asking a few questions and showing unusual restlessness, the Doctor said nothing of the story he had heard from a boy who had been saved from the wreck, and who insisted that Mrs. Selwyn had been in the same lifeboat and had reached Bordeaux, France, very ill, but still alive. But the fact that she had sent no word of her rescue made the Doctor fear that she had died before she was able to do so; and he made up his mind not to arouse Mary's hopes until he was perfectly sure that there was no danger of her being again cruelly disappointed. He at once began to make use of every means in his power to follow up the slight clue the boy had given him; but it was not through notices in the newspapers, nor through his visits to all the hospitals and orphan asylums in Bordeaux, nor through the efforts of the many detectives employed on the case that Mary's trusting prayer was answered. An errand of pure charity brought the Doctor face to face with his loved sister. The sight of him and the sound of his voice restored her memory, which she had completely lost as a result of the shock of the wreck.

And six weeks later Mary's cup of happiness was filled to overflowing by the sudden return of her father, who had been captured, but not killed as was reported, by a savage tribe in India.

On the eighth of September, our Blessed Mother's birthday, there was a wonderful family gathering in the big east parlor at Maryvale, where Mother Madeline listened, her eyes filled with grateful tears, to the story which Mr. Selwyn told.

And the twins! the dear, mischief-loving, four-year-old twins were hugged and kissed and petted until, if their little curly heads had not been so filled with "s'prises" which they were planning for everyone present, they would have been badly spoiled that day.

Then, to Mary's delight, the whole family walked across the lawn and through the orchard to the little gate in the low stone wall which separated Maryvale from Bird-a-Lea, a beautiful place east of the convent. Here Mother Madeline left them to continue their way over the velvety lawn to the big, homey-looking, gray stone house with its roof of warm red tiles. On the wide porch, which ran all the way around the house, sat Mrs. Elliot, a dear old lady who owned this beautiful home. The Doctor had met her once before, and Mary knew her quite well, for she and Wilhelmina had often been sent to her with messages from Mother Madeline. She wished to sell Bird-a-Lea; and while Mr. and Mrs. Selwyn and the Doctor talked matters over with her, Mary took the little ones to see the big bird cage around near the barn. It was built so as to enclose two small trees in which rare birds sang and flitted about. Next to it stood a small house where these birds lived during the winter; for they had been brought from warm countries and would die if left out in the cold. Besides these beautiful birds, there were peacocks strutting about under the great old trees; while robins, bluebirds, orioles, and other birds which the children had often seen before came quite close to them, and frisky gray squirrels peeped around the trunks of the trees at them.

Returning to the front porch, the children learned that Bird-a-Lea was to be their new home; and the twins were much disappointed because they could not take off their hats and begin to live there at once.

CHAPTER VIII.

THAT MOVING WEEK—MONDAY.

"Mary, will you see what is keeping the little folks? Perhaps Aunt Mandy does not find it an easy matter to get both Berta and Beth ready in time for breakfast."

"Yes, Father; but the twinnies ran past my room and down the stairs some time ago. Maybe they are in the yard."

"I think that is where you will find them, Mary," said Mrs. Marvin. "Dick spied them from the window and could hardly wait until I had finished brushing his hair. He said Jack was needed, too."

Mr. and Mrs. Marvin with Wilhelmina and their eight boys had arrived in New York a few days before the landing of the steamer on which the Selwyns returned from Europe. They had come all the way from Georgia to welcome these old friends whom they had never expected to see again in this world; and there had been great rejoicing at the dock when the steamer landed. Mr. Marvin had planned to start for home with his six eldest boys that same evening, leaving his wife with four-year-old Dick and baby Jack as company for Wilhelmina until school should reopen at Maryvale. But Mr. Selwyn and Doctor Carlton would not listen to such a plan; and at last Mr. Marvin had to promise that his whole family should be their guests until it was time for his two eldest boys to return to college. But when he learned of the purchase of Bird-a-Lea, he declared that he could not be held to his promise, because it would be out of the question for the Selwyns to begin moving with so many children in the house. So on Sunday evening he left with Phil, Harry, Joe, Frank, Bob and Freddie for Sunnymead, their beautiful plantation home.

And now, Monday morning, the four little ones were missing from the breakfast table.

"Making a s'prise, I'll be bound," laughed the Doctor. "I hope it will turn out more happily than most of those that the twins plan."

As Mary neared the door leading to the side porch, she heard the little ones giggling; but at her call that breakfast was ready, there was a chorus of, "Oh! oh! don't come, Mary!" "Jes' a minute!" "No fair peeking!" "We's making a most beauty, grand s'prise for ev'ybody, and it's 'most ready!"

Mary, laughing, returned to the dining-room, and a few minutes later, the screen door banged. All at the table paused, smiling at the loud whispers and smothered giggles coming from the hall. Then they heard Dick say, "But Father always says, 'Ladies first.'"

"But we isn't ladies, Dick," gurgled Beth. "We's jes' little folkses." To which Berta agreed, "Yes, nennybody didn't ever call us ladies, Dick, not ever, ever at all."

"Not ever, ever at all," echoed her sister.

"But we can be-tend we's ladies, Beth, if Dick likes us to be. Mother says it isn't p'lite if we doesn't play same as our comp'ny likes us to. So I'll go first." And into the dining-room, single file, marched the four. Just inside the door they lined up, Berta proudly announcing, "We's going to help ev'ybody in the whole house."

"Indeed!" Mr. Selwyn was forced to laugh in spite of himself. "Don't you think you might have waited until after breakfast to don your working clothes? and where did you find the overalls for your guests, eh?"

"Oh, Dick finded them in Willy-mean's shootcase, Daddy; and Beth and I lended Aunt Mandy's apins. I'se quite sure she won't mind, 'cause we's going to help her 'mensely, too."

Wilhelmina stopped laughing long enough to explain: "Yes, Mother, Dick came to me at the last minute with his overalls and Jack's. I couldn't see why he wanted to bring them; but they didn't take up much room in my little suitcase."

Dick wriggled uneasily under his mother's surprised look.

"But you do not expect to sit at table in your working clothes, do you, son? Jack, being only two years old, does not know any better; but a big boy of nearly four and a half——"

"That's jes' 'zactly what Dick said, Aunt Etta." Though not related, the children of each family always called the grown folks of the other, uncle and aunt. "He told us you doesn't like over-halls so very well for breakfus; but——but——oh, dear, *me!* they's such a drefful many things to do, you see, that we thinked we ought to be ready afore breakfus. Doesn't you think you could possiglee 'scuse us jes' this once—you and Daddy and Mother and Uncle Frank? I'se quite sure Willy-mean and Mary doesn't mind over-halls and gingham apins."

"Perhaps we can do so, Berta, since this is the first moving-day that we have ever had in any of our lives." Mrs. Marvin looked very grave. "What do you think about it, Elizabeth?"

"I quite agree with you, Etta, if these little folks will remember to lay aside their working clothes at meal time in future." Mrs. Selwyn was just as serious as Mrs. Marvin.

"And the very first one we is going to help is Daddy."

"I fear you can not do anything to assist me until later in the day, Beth, thank you. I am going to take the library in hand, and the books that I shall pack this morning will be too large and heavy for such little people to handle. However, I am very sure that you can make yourselves useful by carrying messages for every one."

"Oh, goody! I hope they's going to be great, big, heavy ones. Dick has strong mushes in his arms, and he's going to show Beth and me how to get some, too, so we can lift big things like——like trunks!"

"Better begin with your doll trunks, then. It will take many years for even Dick's muscles to grow strong enough to lift a steamer trunk, for instance."

"Oh, but I'se quite sure you never did see Dick's mushes, Uncle Frank."

The morning was a very exciting one for the four little folks. Up the front stairs, through the halls, down the back stairs, they raced, Berta always leading, and baby Jack, carefully watched by Beth, bringing up the rear. At the door of every room where packing was being done, they stopped while their leader asked, "Does you s'pects you would like us to help you?" until the oft-repeated answer, "Not just at present," at last caused the twins to sink on the stairs and sob out their disappointment.

Knowing that his mother was with Mrs. Selwyn in the storeroom on the third floor, Dick ran for his sister and Mary, who were busy carrying piles of sheets, pillowcases, towels, and table linen from a closet in the hall to a big trunk in one of the bedrooms.

"Come quick, Willie! The girls are crying their eyes out, 'cause they can't help."

"I suppose they could carry some of these things, Mary. Then I can climb the ladder and hand you

the ones on the high shelves."

The twins were soon comforted, and for a time the four trotted back and forth with small piles of linen. It was not long before Berta thought of a "s'prise;" and when Mary went to the bedroom to see what was delaying them, she was just in time to see the procession starting down the back stairs, each member of it carefully bearing a piece of drawn work or embroidery. Her cry of dismay halted them.

"Oh, we's jes' going to wrap them in the nice w'ite disher paper what's on the table in the dining-room, and then we's going to pack them in one of those big boxes in the liberry, same as Daddy is doing with the books."

Mary, remembering the storm of a quarter of an hour before, thought a moment before speaking. "It's this way, Berta. When we get to Bird-a-Lea, it will be much easier for Mother to find these center pieces and things if they are packed in the trunk with the table cloths and napkins. She is not very strong yet, you know, and Uncle Frank has asked us to help her in every way we can; don't you remember?"

"Ye—es, Mary, but—but—"

"Why don't you go out in the yard to play for a little while? You need a rest, I think."

"Rest! *rest!* The very idea! *Rest* when ev'ybody is working so hard as they can, and they's such a drefful many things to do? Why, Mary, I'se on the shock at you! I s'pects you think we's lazy. We'll jes' go right down and help Liza, so we will!"

Liza in the pantry on the top step of a ladder heard them coming. "'Clah to goodness! Ef'n dem chilluns am gwine to come in heah pesterin' dis heah niggah, I reckon dey won't be no moah work *dis* mawnin'. Why fo' Aunt Mandy doan' keep dem upstairs wif her, I lak to know."

The four stood in the doorway.

"Does you s'pects we can help you, Liza?"

"Wal, now, Missy Berta, dey might be sumpin yo' alls kin do aftah while, but not jes' dis instinct, honey; 'kase yo' see, dis yeah chile got to git all dese t'ings down off'n de top shelf fust t'ing. Dey's milk an' cookies on de li'l table out on de back porch fo' yo' alls, an' aftah yo's done wif dat, Aunt Mandy wants yo' to help her, I reckon. She am powahful busy packin' up all yo' clothes and t'ings."

"We's going to help her the very 'zact instinct when we eat the milk and cookies, Liza."

"Dat's right, Missy Bef. I jes' knowed yo' would ef'n I told yo' how plumb tiahed out she am." And Liza chuckled as the little ones ran off.

They found the old nurse packing dainty white dresses in a trunk.

"We's going to help you, Aunt Mandy. We'll carry ev'ything right over by side you, and you can put them in the trunk, so you can."

"Bress yo' li'l heart, Missy Berta! Yo' sho'ly kin help yo' ole mammy a right smart. Ma ole laigs gits powahful tiahed walkin' round disaway. Dats' right, Missy Bef. Bring dem li'l pettiskirts right obah heah; an' Massa Dick kin fotch dem li'l shoes, an' Massa Jack dat stockin' pile."

All went well until Aunt Mandy caught Berta carefully wrapping a pair of slippers in a hand embroidered white dress, and Beth stuffing dainty little handkerchiefs into her rubbers.

"Laws a massy! Go 'long out'n heah wif yo'! Yo's nuffin but babies, nohow. Git yo' dollies an' play lak nice li'l chilluns." And she drove them before her into the playroom and closed the door on them.

But Dick Marvin had no more use for dolls than his elder brothers had; so the twins brought out their picture books and games, which he had already seen. At last a bright idea struck him.

"What's that big box for, Beth?"

"That's Mary's toy box when she was a little girl. She said we can have it now for our dollies and ev'ything."

"Then why don't you pack your dolls and things in it? Come on, I'll help you."

"That's zactly what we'll do, and then we'll be the same as big folkses, won't we, Dick?"

The little fellow was not quite sure of that and wisely said nothing, but began to examine the hinges and clasp of the strong oak box. Berta and Beth took their dolls and let Jack carry their other toys to him, and Dick stowed them away with more speed than care. Soon the box was filled to over-flowing.

"The cover doesn't close tight, so we'll have to jump on it, girls."

"Oh, goody, Dick! We jes' love to jump on trunks and things."

They scrambled up on the box and jumped, jumped, *jumped!* Snap! Crack!

"Oh, my dear! What's that, Beth?"

"It's just the things settling down, Berta," explained Dick, jumping off the box to fasten the clasp.

"Oh! oh! there's my big rubber ball under the table. That must go in the box, too, Dick."

"All right, Beth. I'll open it again." Dick threw back the cover; and with a cry of dismay, Beth snatched up a doll from the box.

"My Lucy doll! My mos' beauty chile! Oh, oh, oh!" And she sank to the floor, hugging the doll to her and rocking back and forth in her grief. "My chile, my mos' beauty chile!" she moaned. "Your face is all in seven, five, *ten pieces*, and your eyes— *Berta!* my Lucy's eyes are all *gone!*" Great sobs shook her frail, little form.

Berta flung her arms about her sister, doll and all, while Dick shifted uneasily from one foot to the other.

"Don't—don't cry, Beth. I'll ask Mother to get you another doll 'zactly like that one. It's all my fault, 'cause I told you to jump on the box. Mother'll get you a doll 'zactly like that one. I'll go with her to show her the kind."

"Oh, d—dear—m—m—me!" the little mother sobbed. "But she'll b—b—be some other d—dollie, n—not my Lucy d—doll what I love most of all. A—and 'sides—it isn't your fault—'c—'cause I jumped right—on t—top of her, so I d—did,—and—now she's d—deaded, so sh—she is! Oh, my poor little chile! M—my most beauty chile!"

"Oh, I say, Beth, don't cry like that! I'll tell you what we'll do. Let's have a fun'ral. You and Berta dress Lucy in her best white dress and put her in a nice white box with lace and shiny soft stuff and flowers all around her, and I'll dig a grave under that big rose bush in the garden, and we'll bury her. That's what they did with my little cousin when she died. My, she looked mighty pretty, only she was too white. And you two ought to wear black dresses and black veils hanging down behind, and— and —"

The little girls listened, eyes and mouths wide open.

"But what *is* a grave what you said you is going to dig, Dick?"

"It's a big hole in the ground, Berta, and—"

With a frightened scream, Beth sprang to her feet, and holding the doll close, ran from the room just as Aunt Mandy appeared at one door and Mary and Wilhelmina at the other.

"Don't let him! don't let him, Mary! Oh, my poor little chile, my Lucy doll is deaded, Mary!" Beth clung sobbing to her sister.

Wilhelmina's eyes flashed. "Dick, you ought to be ashamed of yourself—"

"Wait a minute, Wilhelmina. I'm sure Dick wouldn't break Beth's doll on purpose."

"Course I wouldn't, Mary."

"No, Willy-mean, it was a ac'cent; and Mother says ac'cents *will* happen in the very *best* famblies, and Aunt Mandy says we is the *very* best fambly in the land—and so is you, Willy-mean, I'se quite sure." And Berta gave an account of what had happened. "But Beth doesn't like to play fun'ral with Lucy, 'cause we has to put her in a hole in the ground—"

"But perhaps Lucy isn't quite dead, Bethy, and Uncle Frank may be able to cure her, you know. Let me look at her a minute."

At sight of the broken face, Mary's heart sank. She saw that no amount of glue would restore poor Lucy to health; but she did not tell Beth so, for another thought had entered her head. "I am afraid she is a very sick child. Let us put her to bed in my room until Uncle comes home. I think it will take a long, long time to cure her, Beth; so don't you think you had better have one of my dolls instead? Come, let us look in my little trunk where they are all packed away."

She led the sobbing child into her own room, Wilhelmina and three very sober little folks following; but though Mary gave Beth her choice, even placing the lovely Amelia Anabelle in her arms, the little girl could find no doll to take the place of her "most beauty chile."

Then another thought came to Mary. "Why, I do believe Lucy looks a little better. Don't you think so, Wilhelmina? We shall pull down the shades and let her take a long nap, and I am sure Uncle will be able to make her well very soon, Beth. Now, children, you mustn't come into this room again until Uncle has seen Lucy. She must be kept very quiet, you know. I shall take good care of her, Beth, so don't worry any more about her, precious."

Mary followed the little ones out into the hall and watched them as they went slowly down the stairs; then she returned to her own room, where Wilhelmina was trying to fit the pieces of the doll's face together.

"I don't blame Beth one bit for making a fuss over this doll, Mary. You know I have never had any use for dolls, but this one must have been dear with her brown eyes and fair, bobbed hair. I fished her eyes up out of her neck."

"She was a darling doll, Wilhelmina. The only thing that we can do is to go to the same store and try to get another exactly like her."

"Let me take another look at those dolls in the trunk, Mary." Wilhelmina had just succeeded in piecing Lucy's face together and stood with it between her hands. "There—that one with the long brown curls. Hold her beside this one and cover her hair."

"Wilhelmina! She is the image of Lucy! Oh, I'm so glad! We shall put Lucy's wig and clothes on her, and Beth will never know the difference."

CHAPTER IX.

MONDAY—CONTINUED.

Meanwhile, Berta had led the way to the door of the parlor, where the packers were at work. For some minutes the children watched them; then Berta asked her usual question: "Does you s'pects you would like us to help you?"

The men stopped work and straightened up to get a better view of the four. Some of them turned away to hide a smile; but one man pushed back his cap and thoughtfully scratched his head.

"Seems to me the boss did say something about needing more help; but you'll have to settle it with him. Wait, I'll ask him." With a chuckle, he went to the door of the next room.

"More help? I should say we do need it. But how did Gus get them here so soon? It's not ten minutes since I 'phoned to him to send me four more men."

The boss entered the parlor.

"There's your four to a man." And the packer, shaking with laughter, turned again to the chair he had been wrapping.

"Very happy to make your 'quaintance, Mr. Boss." Berta stepped forward and offered her hand.

"Eh? What's this? Oh, to be sure! And I'm delighted to make yours." The boss made up his mind that the other men should find him equal to the occasion. "So you're looking for a job, eh? Well, now, what kind of a one would you prefer?"

"We prefer ev'y kind they is, Mr. Boss, 'cept ones that's too big and heavy for us. But Dick's very strong. He has mushes in his arms, so he has. Show them to Mr. Boss, Dick."

The little fellow promptly rolled up his sleeve and proudly doubled up his arm.

"Well, well, who'd ever believe it! But you see how things are in here. The pictures have to come down next. Do you think you are equal to that job?"

"I guess I've got muscle enough; but you girls haven't any, and Jack's only a baby; and maybe Uncle Rob and Aunt 'Lisbeth won't like it so very well if you drop the pictures when I hand them down to you."

"No, Dick, I s'pects they won't. What does you think about it, Beth?"

"I'se quite sure they won't, Berta. But—but, Mr. Boss, isn't they anything else that won't break when we drop it? rugs or all things same as that?"

"Well, now, I'm sorry, but the rugs are all rolled up ready to put in the van when it comes. But hold on! Let me take another look at those muscles of yours, young man. Hm! There's a box on the front porch that has to come in here, and it doesn't matter how many times you drop it on the way——"

"We'll bring it! We'll bring it!" was the joyful shout; and the four raced for the front door. Just outside it they came to a sudden halt and looked in dismay at the box meant for the grand piano. Then Berta's sharp eyes turned toward the parlor window, and she drew the others around behind the box. "They's peeking out the windows and laughing at us, so they is! They's not nice gemmans at all to s'pect little folkses like us to carry such a drefful 'mense, 'normous, big box same as this. Let's go into the liberry and see if Daddy hasn't nenny of those things he said we could carry."

They scrambled through one of the long windows opening into the library, where they found Mr. Selwyn on the top of a ladder.

"Has you nenny of those things for us to carry yet, Daddy?"

"What things, pet?"

"Those things you said at breakfus. Doesn't you 'member?"

"Oh, messages. No, I have no messages to send to anyone just now. How about your own books and games? You may pack them in that nice low box if you like."

With a squeal of delight, the four scampered from the room and up the stairs.

"Lock that door, Mary! Quick! It will never do to let Beth see what we are up to. There, now, if she can tell that this is not her Lucy doll, she has better eyes than most people."

"We can't let her see it, though, until after Uncle has taken a look at it; so I shall lock the door after us, Wilhelmina, when we go out—Mercy on us! What *are* they up to!" For from the staircase came screams and wails and sounds of falling things which brought every one in the house to the banisters.

Wilhelmina caught Jack at the head of the stairs and bundled him into the playroom, closing the door on him; and then she hurried after Mary, who, picking her way over the books and games scattered on the stairs, was hurrying down to the three in a heap at the foot.

"We's deaded! Oh, we's all deaded; so we is!" wailed Berta as her father lifted her to her feet.

"No, no, pet, it is not so bad as that, I am sure."

Dick managed to pull himself together and sat on the lowest step, winking very hard; but Beth lay so still that Mr. Selwyn was frightened. He lifted her carefully and carried her into the library, feeling the frail little limbs to make sure that no bones were broken. Presently, she opened her eyes and looked at him in a dazed way. He passed his hand over her little yellow head and felt a great lump at the back of it.

Berta was awed at the grave look on his face and whispered, "Is—is little sister—dreffful much hurt, Daddy?"

"She certainly got the worst of this tumble, dear. I cannot tell how serious this bump on her head may be."

"Oh, dear, me! Poor Beth is all the time getting the worse of ev'ything, so she is! First her Lucy doll's head, and now her own!" And great tears rolled down Berta's chubby cheeks.

"My—my Lucy doll—did Uncle—make her well?"

"He hasn't come home yet, Bethy; but she is ever so much better, and I am sure she will soon be as well as ever," soothed Mary, who was kneeling beside her father.

"Jack—I was—taking care of him, Willy-mean—"

"He didn't fall, honey. He is up in the playroom."

"My—my head—Daddy—it hurts—dreffful much."

"You bumped it, dear; but here are Mother and Aunt Etta and Aunt Mandy, who all know the very best thing to do for bumps. Mary will get some ice, and we shall go upstairs where you can be quiet and rest for a little while."

"But—but I want to help pack, Daddy."

"We won't pack nennything at all till your poor little head is all well, honey. You see, Mother, our new, little kitty was all the time jumping round our feets ev'y whichy way." Berta thought that someone should explain matters. "And she falled Beth down, and Beth bumped Dick and falled him down, and he bumped me and falled me down, and—and ev'ything falled all down ev'y place, and—"

"But you and Dick are not hurt, dear, are you?"

"I thinked we is deaded, Mother, but I guess we isn't."

After luncheon, Wilhelmina and Mary tiptoed into the twins' room, where Beth lay in a heavy sleep, an icebag at the back of her head and Aunt Mandy sitting beside her. They placed the new Lucy at the foot of the bed where the little one would see her the moment she opened her eyes. Then Mary insisted that the old nurse should go to her luncheon, and promised that she and Wilhelmina would stay with Beth. Presently, the child stirred, and the two slipped behind a screen to watch her when she woke. They heard a low gurgle of delight and saw her creep to the foot of the bed and clasp the doll in her arms, kissing her over and over again and crooning, "My most beauty chile, my most beauty chile!" And they almost laughed aloud when she began to examine the doll's sweet little face for the cracks which she knew should be there, feeling the rosy cheeks with her frail little finger, and rubbing her eyes for a better look. And when she had made sure that Lucy's face was as smooth as it had been before the accident, she began hugging and kissing her again, while she murmured, "Isn't Uncle good! *Isn't* he

good to make you all well, my most beauty chile! I must go find him this very 'zact instinct and love him tight as I can. But——but my head feels very queer, so it does."

Mary stole from behind the screen, ready to catch her if she should show any sign of falling as she climbed unsteadily over the side of her crib; but Beth, dazed from the pain in her head, took no notice of anyone. Her sister followed her down to the library, where Mr. Selwyn and the Doctor stood talking.

"I——I jes' want to give Uncle a big love for making my Lucy doll all well again, and——and then I'se going back to bed, 'cause——'cause I can't see so very well, and the bump hurts."

"No wonder, pet." The Doctor held her close. "But after you have taken another little nap, you will feel much better. I think Lucy should be kept in bed for the rest of the day, and I am sure she would like you to stay with her. She had a very narrow escape, you know. Come, we shall go upstairs again."

Berta and Dick begged off from their nap and began the afternoon by stripping pin-cushions and emptying trays of pins and hairpins which they scattered among the straw in a basket meant for china and glassware. This was too much for the real workers, who felt that they could breathe easily only when the four were sound asleep; and the little ones, worn out after their busy morning, did not open their eyes until time to dress for dinner.

CHAPTER X.

TUESDAY.

Beth, a little paler than usual, but quite ready for work, was the first at the breakfast table next morning. The evening before, when Berta and Dick had gone to see her for a few minutes, the three had planned what they would do the very first thing in the morning; and the glances and smiles which passed between them during the meal, did not escape the Doctor's eye. Before leaving the table, he whispered to his sister that mischief was brewing. Mrs. Marvin took Jack upstairs with her for safe keeping; and Mrs. Selwyn, with an eye on the other three, busied herself at the china closet while they brought in a bushel basket, filled it with straw from a barrel in the corner of the dining-room, carried it into the front hall and put it under the staircase. She waited until she saw them go into the library and begin to pack their books and games, when, knowing that her husband would look after them there, she hurried to the work waiting upstairs.

After packing and unpacking the box many times, the children decided that it was ready for the cover. Mr. Selwyn came down from his ladder to nail it on for them; but in order to please them, he had to drive so many nails into it that the heads of them made a very neat border around the edge. Then the telephone rang; and when he returned to the library, the little ones had gone. A half hour later, he needed the hammer and nails; but they were not to be seen. After a long search, he thought he must have carried them to the telephone with him; but no, not a nail could he find. Suddenly, he remembered that he had promised to call up his lawyer that morning, and not being sure of the number, he turned to look it up in the directory. The book was not in its usual place, nor could he find it anywhere else in the room. He asked the packers if they had seen it, but they had not. Then he called to Mary to see whether anyone upstairs had it or his hammer and nails. In a few moments, she came down empty-handed.

"Have you asked the twinnies, Father?"

"I thought they were upstairs with you. I have not seen them for a half hour."

"They are up to something then. I wouldn't be surprised if they were out in the yard driving nails into the fence and benches."

As she ran through the hall, she heard a muffled *meow* coming from under the staircase and saw there what looked like a heap of carpet with a hassock on top of it. Again came the *meow*. "Surely, Fluff can't be under there. The poor little thing would be smothered." She lifted the hassock and a thick rug and found a bushel basket carefully covered with a barrel head which began to move. She raised it, and out sprang the pretty Angora kitten which the Doctor had brought to her little sisters a few evenings before. Down the hall toward the kitchen it fled, and Mary hurried out the side door to the yard. No sign of the children there, and Tom in the barn had not seen them that morning. She searched the basement and then returned through the kitchen and dining-room to the front hall, where she decided that they must have gone up the back stairs while she was coming down the front ones. Just outside the dining-room door she paused. Surely, that was a whisper. There it was again. "Yes, she's gone. Goody!" The table cloth, which had not been taken off after breakfast, hung nearly to the floor. Mary lifted one corner of it, and three pairs of eyes, dancing with mischief, met hers.

"Sh! sh! we's making Daddy a s'prise—a most beauty, grand s'prise." Berta pointed to the box of nails before them and to the box cover in which lay a number of them carefully wrapped in white tissue paper. The hammer, also well wrapped, was near by.

"But how is Father going to fasten the covers on his boxes of books if you pack all his nails?"

"Oh, I'se quite sure Tom has plenty of nails and hammers and all things same as that in his big box in the barn——*plenty!*"

"Then why did Father go to the store last evening to buy these, Beth? He has looked everywhere for them and can't imagine what has become of them. Surely, when he has nailed your box up so nicely for you, you won't be so stingy as to take his hammer and all his nails from him."

"But——but you don't misstand, Mary. We's making a *s'prise* for Daddy."

"But Father would rather have his hammer and nails, Berta. It is too bad to spoil the surprise; but I know what we can do. Put all the nails that you have wrapped so nicely into the box cover, and I shall ask Father to try to get along with those in the box. If there are any left, you can pack them later; and it won't be very much trouble to wrap the hammer again."

The three looked rather mournful as they crept out from under the table.

"Oh, I almost forgot about it. Do you know anything about the telephone book?"

From the way they looked at one another, Mary felt sure that they knew a great deal about it. Just then, Fluff ran across the room.

"Why, Fluff, where *did* you come from? We thought you was all packed nice and comfy in the basket we fixed for you. Go right straight back there this instinct and don't be jumping around our feets and falling us down same as you did yesterday morning-time."

"O Berta! you don't want to kill poor Fluff, do you? She was almost smothered in the basket with that thick rug tucked in all around it; and I'm sure I wouldn't think that stiff straw very comfortable."

"Mary, I think you is jes' drefful! You is spoiling all our nice s'prises ev'y single time, so you is! And we's not going to tell you 'bout the telefome book, so now!"

"Ye——es," big tears filled Beth's eyes, "we thought we is making beauty s'prises for Daddy when we wrapped ev'y single nail so nice and smooth and packed the telefome book 'way, 'way down in the bottom of our box; and now you come and say they isn't nice s'prises at all, and——and——"

"Why, Bethy, I know you meant to make the loveliest surprises in the whole world, but you just made a little mistake, don't you see? Wilhelmina and I have made ever so many mistakes, and we didn't mind when Mother or Aunt Etta told us to unpack a great big trunk and pack it all over again a better way. But I know something that would be a beautiful surprise for everybody in the whole house, and I am sure that no one else would think of doing it. There are things in the yard that we shall need at Bird-a-Lea, and if you three would go around and mark them with some lovely colored chalk that I shall give you, it will save poor Father ever so much time and trouble. Wait for me on the side porch while I run upstairs for the chalk. Berta shall have a red stick, because red is her color; and Beth must have blue; and what color would you like, Dick?"

"Yellow's a pretty good color, Mary, and it shows, too."

In a very short time, Mary returned with the chalk, and to Beth's question, "Must we make ev'ything all red and blue and yellow all over?" she hastened to reply, "Indeed, no. Just a little criss-cross on the things you think we should take."

"But what kind of things, Mary?"

"I'll show you, Berta. I see one right now." And Dick bounded down the steps to put a yellow mark on a rake leaning against a tree.

"Oh, I know where they's whole lots of things. I saw them this morning-time when we went to get the basket. Come on, chilluns!" Berta led the way around to the back steps. A hoe and a spade stood between them and the fence and were promptly marked. Beth next spied a broom on the porch; and Dick, a basket of clothes pins.

"'M, 'm, 'm, it's going to take a puffedly drefful long time to mark ev'y single one of these."

"Just mark the basket, Berta," said Dick.

But the little girl thought each pin should be plainly marked, and the three were very busy for some time.

"Does you think we ought to mark the steps, Beth?"

"Why, Berta, they's plenty of steps at Bird-a-Lea, *plenty!* Doesn't you 'member? They's some in front and some in back and some at both sides all going up to the porch."

"W——ell, what else is they to take? Oh, I know! The wheely-ba'l, so we can have nice rides in our own garden same as Danny gives us in his wheely-ba'l in the garden at Aunt Mary's."

"If you'll come home with us, I'll let you ride in my billy goat cart."

"What *is* that, Dick?"

"Why—why, it's a dandy, little, red cart that we harness a billy goat to, 'stead of a pony or horse."

"But what *is* a billy goat?"

"A billy goat? Didn't you girls ever see a billy goat? He's just an animal for pulling carts and—and—"

"What kind of a amanal, Dick?"

"How big is he?"

"What color is he?"

"He's about as big as Thor—that's our dog—and he's a sort of a white color 'cept when he rolls in the dust, and he's got horns, and when he gets mad you've got to look out or he'll stick them into you —"

"Oh, oh! I guess I like a wheely-ba'l best of all."

"But, Beth, somebody has to push you in that, and you can drive our Billy 'zactly the same as a horse. He doesn't get mad very often; and when he does, we run behind trees so he can't get at us. Ask your father and mother to let you come home with us. We'll have no end of fun."

"But—but I 'splained to you, Dick, the why we can't go home with you. We has to live in our own house with Father and Mother and Uncle Frank and Mary. It would be ever so much better if you would bring your billy cart and come to live at Bird-a-Lea. They's so many chilluns in your fambly, and they's only three in ours, and we hasn't nenny little brothers 'cept two in heaven."

"But, you see, Berta, it doesn't make any diff'runce how many children we have in our family. A fellow's s'posed to live with his own father and mother."

"Maybe Daddy and Mother will take us to see Dick and Jack sometime, Berta; and then you will ride us in your billy cart, won't you, Dick? And when you come to see us at Bird-a-Lea, you can have a nice ride in our wheely-ba'l, so you can."

They next marked the garden benches and porch chairs.

"And I'se quite sure Daddy will say we must take this nice white walk. They's only all little stones on the walks at Bird-a-Lea."

"That's gravel. We have that on all our walks and on the driveway. Everybody in the country has that 'stead of walks like this."

They went around and around the old-fashioned yard, putting colored marks on everything they thought should be taken to the new home, until there was very little left of their sticks of chalk.

"I know what ought to be marked. Ourselves. We're not going to be left behind."

"Oh, yes, Dick, let's mark our own selves," cried the twins; and when poor old Aunt Mandy came to call them to get washed before luncheon, she threw up her hands in horror at sight of their faces streaked with red, blue, and yellow, in real Indian style.

After luncheon, Mr. Selwyn was taken out to see the "s'prise," and he had to turn aside and cough many times when he saw even the leaves of certain plants in the garden plainly marked.

"In course, Daddy, we know they's a big, *big* garden of most beauty flowers at Bird-a-Lea; but p'raps they isn't nenny jes' 'zactly like these. And Beth and I can't 'member if they's nenny Kismus trees out there; so we thinked it would be better to take this nice little one so Sandy Claws will find it when he comes, you know."

"Oho! trust him to find dozens of Christmas trees ever so much larger and finer than this one in the country around our new home, pet. Santa Claus does not depend on city yards and parks for his Christmas trees. No, indeed!"

The afternoon nap that day was very much shorter, for the three were bent on helping indoors. They were not very well pleased, therefore, when they were dressed for the afternoon and sent out to play in the yard. The Doctor, coming home early, saw them walking about in a listless way and went out to see what the trouble was.

"Well, what is wrong now, little folks?"

"O Uncle! ev'ybody is all the time saying, 'Not jes' now,' and 'After while,' and 'Not at present, thank you,' and all things same as that when we want to help, so they is," pouted Beth.

"Yes, and we didn't ask nennybody for presents, Uncle, not ever, ever at all."

"Not ever, ever at all. We jes' want to help."

"And when *is* 'after while,' anyway, Uncle Frank. Seems to me big folks are always saying that, and it never comes," added Dick.

"Dear, dear, it is too bad to have your feelings hurt in this way. I must see what can be done about it. Surely there must be something for such willing hands to do."

"Oh, we did whole lots of things this morning-time. See all those red and blue and yellow marks we made on ev'ything?" Beth lowered her voice. "All 'cept Jack. He's too little, you know; but he's so cute."

"Yes, I saw the marks as soon as I came out here. May I ask what they mean?"

"The why we made them is 'cause we want ev'ybody to know jes' 'zactly the things we must take to Bird-a-Lea with us."

"A very fine idea indeed, Berta. And now I have one that I am sure you will all like. It will never do, you know, for us to leave our old home looking untidy. I was thinking of hiring a man to put the yard in order after we go; but perhaps you would like to do it for me. There are a great many dead leaves on the grass, and the rain has washed the earth out on the walks in several places, and I saw some cobwebs on the porch——"

"Ugh! ugh! maybe they's spiders in them!"

"Never mind, Beth, I'se going to dead them for you. Beth doesn't like spiders and crawly things so very well, Uncle, you know."

"Then we shall leave the cobwebs to you and Dick, and let Beth and Jack rake leaves. But you will need the proper things to work with. Tom's rake and broom are too large and clumsy for you. Suppose you run up, Berta, to tell Mother and Aunt Etta that I am going to take you shopping with me."

The little girl soon returned, her face beaming. "Ev'ybody says they's puffeckly 'lighted to have you take us, Uncle."

Some time later, the neighbors were surprised at the strange procession coming up the street. It was led by Dick, proudly pushing a little red wheelbarrow filled with garden tools and big sun hats. Berta came next with a small broom over each shoulder. Beth followed in the same manner, and baby Jack strutted after her with a little hoe. The Doctor brought up the rear, carrying anything that the children could not manage.

"But where is we going to put all these things so ev'ybody won't see them, Uncle?"

"We shall go in at the side gate, Beth, and Tom will find a hiding place for them in the barn. We are a little late for dinner, so no one will see us on our way back there."

Flushed and happy, the four took their places at the table.

"Nennybody can't guess what Uncle buyed us, and nennybody doesn't know the beauty grand s'prise we's going to make to-morrow morning-time. Oh, I wish it was then now!" And Berta beamed on all present.

"But they's jes' one thing Uncle couldn't buy for us, 'cause they wasn't any room in the wheely-bal for it. But you'll take us for a nice walk this evening-time and buy it for us, won't you, Daddy?"

"There is some very important business which I must see your father about this evening, Beth," said the Doctor with a warning look which Mr. Selwyn did not catch. He had been so long separated from his family that he was anxious to do everything he could to make them happy. "Making up for lost time," he called it; and he would have spoiled the twins if it had not been for his wife, who would not let him buy everything they asked for.

"Perhaps I can go with you some other evening, pet. What is it you wish me to get for you?"

"O Daddy, it's the most beauty little bed for our dollies. Outside is all soft, white velvet, and inside is all white, shiny stuff and lace, and——and oh! it's jes *beauty!* And it has a cover to keep the flies and skeeties off when our chilluns go to sleep."

Mary and Wilhelmina left the table very quickly, and the Doctor chuckled. "We passed the undertaker's on the avenue, and it was all I could do to get them home."

The two mothers looked at each other.

"I shall see that Rob takes no more evening walks until we are safe in the country," Mrs. Selwyn declared, and then listened to her husband's answer to the twins' coaxing.

"We already have so many things to pack that I really do not see where we shall find room for anything else. Better wait until Christmas when I shall tell Santa Claus to bring each of you a pretty brass bed for your dollies, with soft, warm blankets and everything just as you have for your own cribs. Velvet and satin and lace soil so easily, you know."

Mrs. Selwyn breathed a sigh of relief, and Mary and Wilhelmina returned to the table.

CHAPTER XI.

WEDNESDAY.

"Nennybody mustn't look out the windows into the yard today, not ever, ever at all," insisted Berta at the breakfast table next morning.

"Not ever, ever at all," echoed Beth.

"No, indeed! Just let me hear that anyone has tried to find out what our surprise is." And the Doctor looked with a terrible frown at Wilhelmina and Mary, who declared that their feelings were very much hurt, because they were not let into the secret. "I shall depend on you, Dick, to let me know whether anyone disobeys my orders."

"All right, Uncle Frank, I'll 'member every single one I see peeking out the windows."

A short time later, Mary and Wilhelmina dropped the blanket they were folding and stared at each other.

"Forever more! What in the world is that? It gives me the creeps." Wilhelmina went to the window and, hidden by the curtains, peered down into the yard. From just below rose such a squeaking and a scraping as would make one's blood run cold.

"Ugh!" Mary clapped her hands to her ears. "It makes the shivers run up and down my spine!" She followed Wilhelmina to the window, and for some minutes the two watched the little ones hard at work with their hoes on patches of earth which the rain had washed out on the walk. Then they dodged back; for Berta, pushing back her big hat, stopped work to look carefully at each window on that side of the house. The two girls smiled at her gleeful, "Nennybody isn't looking, chilluns. They can't ever guess *this* s'prise, not ever, ever at all." And she turned to brush up the loose earth on her little spade which she then emptied into the waiting wheelbarrow.

All in the house chuckled behind the window curtains or blinds which hid them from Berta's sharp eyes. Squeak! Scrape! Screech! Dick and Beth used their little brooms and spades and added to the pile of earth in the wheelbarrow, while Jack scratched away at his special patch. Those indoors went back to their work, glad that the little ones were happy at last; but it was not long before frantic cries drew them again to the windows to see Jack making off down the walk with the wheelbarrow, out of which a steady stream of earth was pouring. After he had been stopped and the earth brushed up, Berta decided that it was too warm to work any longer in the sun.

"Let's rake leaves. It's cool under the trees."

"That's jes' 'zactly what we'll do, Dick." Beth tossed off her hat and caught up her rake.

And how they raked! Not only leaves, but grass, roots and all, came up.

"By the time they finish, the yard will look as though a cyclone had struck it," laughed Wilhelmina.

"That doesn't matter one bit just so they are happy and out of mischief. Wasn't Uncle wonderful to think of such a thing for them to do?"

"I'm only afraid it's too good to last very long, Mary. They will soon get tired of such hard work."

Wilhelmina was right. After a few minutes under the trees, Dick and Berta threw down their rakes and went to sweep cobwebs from the railing of the porch; but Beth's fear of spiders kept her at the leaves, and she coaxed Jack to stay with her. At the end of a half hour, Wilhelmina again went to the window. "Didn't I tell you, Mary? Not one of them in sight. They are up to some mischief, mark my words. They are too quiet for any good to come of it."

"But what mischief can they possibly get into in the yard, Wilhelmina? Tom always closes the barn doors when he leaves it, and there is no way for them to hurt themselves. They have just found something to do around at the back of the house."

In one sense, Mary was right. The little ones had found something to do. But if she had known what that something was, she would not have gone about her work with such a light heart. She had many, many things to learn about the lively little sisters who had so suddenly come into her life again; and Wilhelmina, who knew very well what four-year-olds can be up to, chuckled at the thought of the surprises they would give Mary. Then she sniffed the air anxiously. "Mary, I smell smoke! I told you something is wrong!"

She ran from the room and down the back stairs, with Mary at her heels. But Liza in the kitchen had caught sight of the blaze down in the corner between the barn and the fence and had hurried out on the back porch. They heard her shouting, "Git away fum dah! Git away fum dat fiah, yo' heah me!" And before they reached the kitchen, she had run down the steps, and snatching up a carriage robe that lay airing on the grass, she rushed toward the children, who were clapping their hands and jumping about as near as possible to the burning rubbish. They did not hear Liza's shouts, nor did they notice what she had seen—a tiny flame leap out and catch the edge of the ruffle on Berta's little starched apron. Swiftly it crept along until a frightened cry from Beth warned Berta of her danger.

"Don't run, chile! Don't run! I'se gwine to put it out! Lay down on de ground, quick!"

But Berta jumped about and tore at her apron in frantic fear. Another moment and Liza was upon her, wrapping the robe around her and rolling her on the ground.

"Call yo' pa an' Tom, Miss May-ree, 'foah de fence kotches fiah! Missy Berta's all right! Tom's down in de cellah! Now, den." She removed the robe and made sure that nothing but Berta's apron had suffered from the fire, and that it was fright only which made the child cling to her, sobbing and moaning. She decided that a scolding all around would make everyone feel better and began, "What yo' s'pects ought to be did wif sech chilluns as yo' is, I lak to know! Which one ob yo' alls fetched de matches fo' to light dat fiah? 'Kase I knows Tom nebah done it. He's got moah sense dan to light a fiah wif yo' chilluns playin' round heah."

"I—I tooked—s—some—m—matches from the k—k—kitchen when you w—went in the pantry."

"Huh! An' see what yo' got fo' doin' sech a t'ing, Missy Berta. An' which one ob yo' alls put all dat rubbish in dat co'nah, 'spectin' to sot de bahn an' fence on fiah, I lak to know?"

"It—it was all there already, Liza, and—and we thinked we—we's going to make a nice s'prise for Tom, so we did."

"Huh! I reckon yo' bettah let Tom tek care ob de rubbish aftah dis, Missy Bef. Dat lazy niggah doan' need nobuddy to mek s'prises fo' him, nohow. An' which one ob yo' alls struck de matches an' sot fiah to dat rubbish, I lak to know?"

"I did, Liza."

"I w—wanted—to—to, b—but Dick—s—said girls don't know how to m—make fires s—so very well, s—so Beth and I let him d—do it."

"Huh! Wal, yo's comp'ny, Massa Dick, an' I ain't gwine to tell yo' what I thinks ob a li'l boy what's got sech a lubly ma as yo's got, teachin' li'l gels to mek fiahs an' sech lak."

"But—but we asked him to, Liza."

"Don't mek no diff'unce, Missy Bef. No-buddy ain't got no right to do nuffin wrong jes' 'kase somebuddy axes him to. Now, den, yo' alls gwine right 'long into de kitchen, an' you' ain't nebah gwine to watch yo' pa an' Tom put out dat fiah, so yo' ain't! Go long wif yo'!" Liza drove them before her and turned aside to answer Mr. Selwyn's anxious questions.

"No, sah, Massa Rob, she ain't hurt a mite, only skeered; an' I reckon I fixed dat all right by gibbin' dem all de bestest scoldin' dey ebah got. She's done forgot all 'bout de fiah fo' wondahing what I'se gwine to do wif dem when I gits dem into de kitchen, he! he! he!"

She kept her word in regard to the fire, for she wished to drive the memory of the fright from Berta's mind; but she set a big plate of cookies on the kitchen table and brought each of them a glass of milk. Then she hurried into the dining-room to meet the two mothers who, in spite of hearing from Mary and Wilhelmina that the children were safe, had hurried down stairs to see for themselves; and all agreed that the less said the better. But Mrs. Selwyn went to the telephone to ask her sister to let the little ones spend the next day at Maryvale.

When the twins heard of the plan at dinner that evening, they clapped their hands in delight.

"We must be ready to leave here as soon as we have had breakfast," said the Doctor. "I shall put you and Aunt Mandy on the train, and two or three of the older girls with the wagonette from the convent will meet you. Tom had better go, too, I think. He and Jerry, the gardener, can unpack the furniture as it is unloaded and set up the beds so that we shall have a place to sleep to-morrow night; for I am quite sure that we shall spend it at Bird-a-Lea."

CHAPTER XII.

THURSDAY.

"Great 'citement going on, isn't they, Uncle?" Berta hurried through the hall, lugging a suitcase almost as large as herself. It did not matter that there was nothing in it; that Aunt Mandy was taking a valise into which she had put two little dresses and two little suits for fear that, by evening, those the children were wearing would not be fit to be seen. But a valise was not a suitcase; and Berta, who had made up her mind to travel in proper style, insisted, "Ev'ybody going on a train always takes a shootcase."

"Leave that at the head of the stairs, and I shall carry it down for you. If you should fall with it, there *would* be some excitement."

"Very well, Uncle." And the child pattered down to join the group in the lower hall.

Then Beth thought of Fluff; and Mary hurried upstairs for the little covered basket which she had promised the twins, while Wilhelmina ran off to find the kitten. At last it was time to say good-bye; but when Mrs. Selwyn stooped to kiss Beth, the child drew back, her lips quivering.

"But—but isn't you and Daddy coming, too, Mother?"

"Not this morning, dear; but we shall be out there as early as possible this afternoon."

"Then—then I guess I'se going to wait till this afternoon-time, too." And seating herself on the lowest step of the stairs, she took off her hat.

"But, Beth—then—then I isn't going, too, till this afternoon-time, 'cause we's twins, you know, and we must do ev'ything 'zactly the same." Berta took her place beside her sister.

"Surely, Beth, you will not spoil the day for your little guests; for, of course, Dick and Jack will not care to go to Maryvale without you and Berta. And what will Aunt Mary and the Sisters and all your little friends at the convent think? They are looking forward to your visit. If I were to go down town to do some shopping, I would be away for the greater part of the day, you know, and you would think nothing of that. Come, dear, put on your hat and help Berta with the basket. Just think how many people you will make happy to-day."

Those in the hall drew a deep breath when the carriage door closed on the travelers. Half way to the ferry, Berta remembered the suitcase, which Mr. Selwyn had quietly slipped out of sight during the little delay at the front door. But the Doctor insisted that they would miss the train if they went back for it, so the little girl had to content herself with the basket containing the kitten. On the train, Aunt Mandy had her hands full; for the twins thought it was "puffeckly drefful" to keep Fluff shut up in such a way and took her out of the basket, placing her on the seat between them. But the kitten had her own ideas about traveling; and jumping off the seat, she raced up and down the aisle with the four after her. Under the seats, around the feet of the passengers, she scampered, until first one, then another of the children came back to Aunt Mandy, bumped and bruised. The poor old soul gave a great sigh of relief when, with the help of three of the large girls from the convent, she had them safely seated in the wagonette.

As they neared Bird-a-Lea, the children strained their eyes for the first glimpse of the new home; and when Patrick, the driver, turned in at the east gate and drove slowly up the broad, curving driveway, they clapped their hands in great glee. On past the house and down the drive to the west gate they went, then up the road to Maryvale. Mother Madeline was at the front door to welcome them. She had to hear of the new red wheelbarrow and the garden sets, of the surprises and accidents, of everything, in fact, that Dick and the twins could remember; and baby Jack put the finishing touches to the story by lisping, "Big fire! Burn Berta! Litha run fatht!" Of course, Mother Madeline pretended not to understand him, and the other three did not try to explain what he meant.

Such romps and frolics as they had with the little boarders; and when noontime came, a picnic luncheon was served under the trees.

To the great joy of the other three, Mother Madeline thought Jack was the only one who needed an afternoon nap; and as he was already half asleep, he went willingly into the house with Aunt Mandy. Then Sister Austin asked help to unpack school supplies; and trip after trip the children made, carrying boxes of chalk, pencils, and erasers, and packages of paper from the packing-box at the side door to the big press at the end of the hall. At first, Berta, Beth, and Dick walked very carefully on the polished floor; but it was not long before they followed the example of the other children, who made the return trips with a run and a long slide. When the packing-case was empty, Sister Austin opened a box of pencils, which she had laid aside on the window sill, and let the children take their choice. Dick spied a red, white, and blue striped one with a little gilt eagle instead of an eraser; and to keep from seizing it, he had to slip out of his place and go to the end of the line and say over and over to himself, "Ladies first. Father always says, 'Ladies first!'" His heart sank when one of the little girls picked it up; but she saw a bright green one with an emerald at the end of it, which she liked better. The little fellow's sigh of relief was not lost on Sister Austin, who had noticed him changing his place in the line. He felt safe now, for all but the twins had chosen, and he was sure that Berta would take a red pencil, and Beth a blue one. At last the striped one was safe in his little brown fist; and Sister Austin gave him a pat on the head and let him choose a pencil for Jack.

"Now, I shall put these that are left into the press and lock the doors until Monday. What a busy time we shall have down here that day!"

"Sister, please tell me the name of this beauty red stone in my pencil?"

"That is a make believe ruby, Berta, and Beth's is a sapphire."

"Oh, oh! Please, Sister, is there any other blue pencils in the box, or a white one?"

"Why, yes, Beth, here is a pale blue one with a turquoise in it."

"I think that's *ever* so much more beauty than this one; doesn't you, Sister?"

"I prefer the sapphire myself, Beth, but there is no reason why you may not have this other one."

"Beth doesn't like nennything with fire in it so very well, Sister, and I doesn't, too; and that's why she likes the turkey pencil best of all."

Sister Austin turned to the shelves to hide a smile; for she had heard of the event of the day before.

Presently, Mother Madeline came for the children. "Your father has just telephoned to say that they are leaving on the four-thirty train; and as Patrick is going to the station with the wagonette to meet them, I thought you might like to go, too. Aunt Mandy is waiting to wash your faces and hands."

A half hour later, the four with the old nurse were ready at the front door.

"Be sure to bring them all back with you, Aunt Mandy. We shall have an early supper for them. Bird-a-Lea is still very much upset, and Liza is too tired to try to get a meal this evening."

"Jes' as yo' says, Miss May-ree." For to the old servant, Mother Madeline was still her dear Miss Mary. "Jes' as yo' says. Lord lub yo'! Dey all am sho'ly tiahed out aftah dese days ob teahin' up an' teahin' down an' packin' an' eberyting, an' I'se gwine to delivah yo' message persackly de way yo's done tol' me, I sahtinly is."

It would be hard to tell how many blessings the old woman would have heaped on Mother Madeline's head if she had known that there were two guest rooms at the convent ready for Mrs. Selwyn and Mrs. Marvin, with two little cribs in each. Mary could share Wilhelmina's room, and Mother Madeline knew that her brother and Mr. Selwyn would be comfortable at Bird-a-Lea in the two bedrooms which she and some of the Sisters had put in fairly good order for them. Nor had Aunt Mandy and Liza been forgotten.

"So you see, little folks, someone else can 'make s'prises,' too," she laughed when, helping to serve at the supper table, she had told her plans for the night.

"I have always said that we are a very surprising family, Aunt Mary. It seems to me that nothing should really surprise us any more after all the wonderful things that have happened this summer."

"Perhaps you are right, Mary; but I feel quite sure that the 's'prises,' though not so important, will be greater in number from now on."

The little ones had found one day at Maryvale so pleasant that they did not need to be coaxed to spend a second and a third there; and with them safely out of the way, the new home was quickly put in order.

CHAPTER XIII.

NEW FRIENDS.

"Mary, see who is standing at the top of the front steps."

It was late Saturday afternoon. The two little girls had made the rounds of the house, and finding nothing more that they could do, were on their way over to the convent to see whether any of their classmates had arrived. The child on the steps was certainly not one of them; for she was no larger than Berta, and Mary was sure that she had never seen her before. She was surprised when Wilhelmina raced across the grass, calling, "Dorothy! Dorothy!"

The child turned, and her face brightened as she hurried down the steps, clapping her hands and crying, "It's Willie! Oh, it's Willie!"

"It must be someone from Georgia. No one around here ever calls her anything but Wilhelmina, because Aunt Etta asked the Sisters not to let the girls shorten her name."

Mary ran to join the two at the foot of the steps. She heard Dorothy say, "Daddy's in the house with a lady with a toothache."

"The lady with a toothache!" Wilhelmina's merry laugh rang out.

"Ye—es, Willie, 'cause she has a white thing tied around her face. And she has on such a funny dress and a veil hanging 'way down and a bib. Why does she wear such funny things?"

"You poor honey! Have you never seen Sisters before? That's a good one! They would keep the dentist busy. Mary, this is Dorothy Bond that I told you about—no, I didn't, either. We had so much to tell each other that I forgot about the afternoon we found Dorothy. We had gone down to the shore, and all of a sudden we saw a little row boat drifting out to sea, and Dorothy was in it. She and her father were at the resort up the beach, and her nurse left her alone, and she got into the boat and went to sleep. We thought she would fall overboard before Phil and Harry could swim out and tow her in. Her mother is in heaven, and her father was so worried about her that Father wrote to Mother Madeline to ask whether she would take Dorothy here, even though she is too young. And what do you think, Dorothy? Dick and Jack are here!"

"Your Dick and Jack?"

"My Dick and Jack—the very ones you played with two weeks ago. And Mary has the two dearest little sisters in the world. You will have so many little girls to play with now that you won't remember you were ever lonely. Here are the boys and the twins. They know that something is going on, and they are afraid of missing it."

Dick caught sight of Dorothy, and with a shout, he ran to meet her; and ten minutes later, when Mother Madeline and Mr. Bond came out to look for her, his little daughter's gleeful cries, as she ran from tree to tree playing *Pussy Wants a Corner*, lifted a great weight from the father's anxious heart; for he knew that she had found friends in her new home. Wilhelmina was the first to catch sight of him and led the race toward the steps.

"And Mother is here, too, Mr. Bond," she said after Mary and the twins had been introduced. "We are all visiting at Bird-a-Lea, Mary's new home next door. We have been helping them to move out here from the city. You will come over to see Mother and Uncle Rob and Aunt 'Lizabeth before you go, won't you?"

"I shall not have time to do so this evening, Wilhelmina; but I shall be out here again to-morrow and shall be delighted to see your mother and to meet Mr. and Mrs. Selwyn. You have no idea how happy it makes me to know that my little girl is to have so many good friends, especially some of her own age."

"Yes, Mr. Bond, we's all 'zactly four years old 'cept Jack and Dick—he's hap-past four."

"So he is; and Dorothy is about a quarter past. Her birthday is in June. But a few months more or less make no difference, Berta. I am sure you will have the very best times together."

"Yes, indeed, Mr. Bond, these little people will see a great deal of one another; for though Berta and Beth are too young to go to school, I am quite sure that they will spend more than half their time over here. Dorothy will enjoy going into the Kindergarten for a while every morning to learn the little songs with the other children; and, if you are willing, I shall allow her to visit at Bird-a-Lea very often."

"I shall be delighted to have her do so, Mother Madeline."

"O Dor'fy! Dor'fy! Aunt Mary is going to let you come over to our house——"

"And you can play with our dollies, and we's going to have tea parties, and——and ev'ything!"

The twins threw their arms around their new friend and danced about at the risk of falling head first down the steps.

"Aunt Mary, couldn't you let Dorothy stay with us until Monday? She knows us now, and she might be lonely here when we go home."

Mr. Bond answered before Mother Madeline could speak. "No, no, Mary, I could not think of imposing on your mother in that way. She must be pretty well worn out after moving from the city."

"But she won't mind jes' one more chilluns, Mr. Bond—not jes' *one*," pleaded Berta.

Mother Madeline laughed. "I think they are right, Mr. Bond. You had better let them have their way."

"I am so grateful to you, Mother, and to these little folks that it would be useless for me even to try to thank you for this happy ending of all my worry."

"Daddy, my dollie's nose is broken and her hand, and her hair comes off, and——and a tea party's going to be."

"Then it is time you had a new doll, isn't it? My little girl has very few toys. Taking her with me on my trips, I have found that picture books and a doll or two are the things most easily packed in a trunk."

But now I should like to get her whatever the other little ones have; and since Wilhelmina and Mary have spent some time at boarding school, perhaps they will make a list of the toys they think suitable."

"Oh, we shall be glad to do that, Mr. Bond. I am not great for girls' things, you know. I like boys' toys and games better. But Mary—well, I guess there isn't much in the way of things girls like that she hasn't had. You see, Uncle Frank just dotes on Mary. He thinks the twins are pretty fine, but his Mary! Well, I tell her that she has two fathers."

"You make me very anxious to meet Uncle Frank," laughed Mr. Bond, "and I shall feel perfectly safe in leaving the choice of toys to you, Mary. By the way, I think the Sisters will find in Dorothy's trunk everything mentioned on the list in the catalog; but those, I take it, are all very necessary articles. If you girls can think of anything else that will make my little one happier or more comfortable, put it on the list with the toys. I must hurry away now if I am to catch the next train to the city."

Returning to Bird-a-Lea, Mary at once found paper and pencil and sat down beside Wilhelmina on the steps to make out the list. The little ones crowded around to see that nothing was forgotten.

"Doll, doll bed, doll carriage—" Mary read aloud.

"A little trunk."

"Yes, Beth, that's a good idea."

"And a shootcase, so when Dor'fy brings her chile over to stay all night with our chilluns."

"And—and—oh, I know! A little broom, so she can help us sweep the nice house we's going to make on the side porch."

"And a cute little carpet sweeper 'zactly the same as Liza's big one, and a mop to rub all around the floor—"

"But you won't need a sweeper for the floor of the porch, Berta."

"Oh, we's going to have a nice rug in our house, Mary."

"But a broom—you will have two extra brooms when Dick and Jack go home, Beth."

"Why, Willy-mean, Uncle buyed those for them. They's theirs for keeps."

"But the boys have brooms and garden sets at home, and we thought it would be so nice if you and Berta would keep them here for them so they will have them when they come to visit you again. The boys will be glad to lend them to Dorothy, I know."

"Course we will," agreed Dick. "But I should think Dor'thy would want a ball—and—"

"Oh, I know! A billy cart same as Dick has."

"But a goat cart is for boys, Berta. Besides only one can ride in it at a time. Father is going to get us something ever so much nicer, but I can't tell what it is just now. They have one at Sunnymead, too."

"Oh, oh! what is it, Mary? Please tell us. *Please!*"

"But that wouldn't be fair, twinnies. Father is going to have it a surprise for you."

"We doesn't like big folkses to make s'prises so very well," murmured Berta.

"And perhaps the 'big folkses' don't like some of those you make, either," laughed Wilhelmina. "There is Aunt Mandy to get you ready for dinner."

"Now, we can think, Wilhelmina."

"But some of the things they said are all right. We have enough toys down there, for with the picture books Dorothy has, her shelf in the toy press in the little ones' playroom will be pretty well filled. The doll bed and carriage ought to be the folding kind, so they will fit on the shelf. How about the other things her father spoke of?"

"It would be nice if she had a little dressing table and a small rocker instead of the stand and chair at her place in the dormitory. Many of the little ones bring their own."

"But a dressing table would be too high for her, wouldn't it?"

"I know just the thing. A large-sized, doll's chiffonier with a mirror on it. She can keep her handkerchiefs and ribbons and comb and brush and such things in the little drawers. We shall ask Mr. Bond to get a white one and a little, white, wicker rocker." Mary looked over the list. "I think that ought to be enough to do her until Christmas. The children simply can't have all the toys they would like to bring to school with them. There isn't room for so many."

"Anyone would think that there ought to be all kinds of room in a big building like that; but with two hundred boarders besides all the Sisters, there's not much to spare, that's certain. And not one of

our class back yet. Trust them to stay out until the last toll of the bell. The ones who live in the city won't show up until five to nine Monday morning. I wish Mother wasn't going home Tuesday. Mother Madeline would let me stay here as long as she does. But she's a dear to promise that I may come over every Wednesday to stay all night and Saturday afternoon and all day Sunday. I must try to behave better than I did last year, or she might change her mind."

CHAPTER XIV.

NAMING THE PETS.

"Oh, dear! oh, dear! oh, *dear!* They's sech a drefful many things to do, and I doesn't see how we's ever going to do all of them, not ever, ever at all!"

"Not ever, ever at all!"

Mary and Wilhelmina stood still and looked at each other, then burst into a merry laugh. The great bell in the belfry high up over the roof of the convent had just stopped ringing to spread the news that a new school year was about to begin; and the two girls, with two book carriers apiece, were on their way across the lawn to the little gate in the low wall—the little gate, the hinges of which would have no chance now to rust.

"Forever more! What have you children to do that can't just as well be left undone, I should like to know? Even Mary and I don't expect to do any real work to-day. We just have to show up in the study hall and in our classroom and see our music teacher and find out where the lessons are for to-morrow. But we don't have to study or recite this morning; and the chances are, we won't have to go back at all this afternoon. The boarders will be unpacking their trunks, but I know Sister will let me off until Mother has gone. But just what you are groaning about, Berta, is more than I can see."

"Why, Willy-mean, they's ever and ever so many things we must do, and Jack and Dick won't be here to-morrow to help us, you know, 'cause Aunt Etta said she's going to take them home early, early in the morning-time 'mejetly after breakfus."

"Then I think it is too bad that you should ask them to work on the very last day of their visit. I am sure they did quite enough of that in the city. You ought to play all day and have a jolly time."

"Oh, we don't mind working, Mary; but there's one thing it seems to me we oughtn't to do, and that's sweep all the gravel off the paths and driveway. I told Berta everybody in the country has walks like that; but she thinks the kind you had in the city are nicer, and that if we sweep the little white stones off, we'll find that kind under them."

"No, no, you wouldn't, Berta; and Father won't be one bit pleased if you spoil the walks that way. And Jerry—well, I don't know what Jerry would think of little girls who would do such a thing after all the trouble he has taken to roll them so nice and smooth."

"But—but, Mary, when we fall ourselves down, we scratch our poor little hands and knees on those old stones, so we do."

"Then play on the grass where you can't hurt yourselves."

"And who would expect two, great, big girls like you to be tumbling around in such style anyway. Why, even Jack hardly ever falls now, do you, honey?"

"I too big, Willie."

"Of course you are."

"W—ell,—but, Willy-mean, we has *ever* so many other things we jes' *must* do afore Dick and Jack go, 'cause Beth and I can't possiglee do ev'y single one all by our own selves. For instinct, we has to think names for the two little kitties Patrick gave us, and for the bunnies and the teapots and the squirrels and all the birdies in the big cage and—"

"All 'cept Polly. She has her own name. She's all the time saying, 'Pretty Polly,' and 'Polly wants a cracker,' and 'Polly's a fine bird,' and all things same as that," explained Beth.

"You see, Willy-mean, that's the why I said we has so much to do to-day. Even if Dick and Jack help us, I don't see how we can possiglee think names for ev'ything."

"Then just give the names that you can think of easily, and Wilhelmina and I shall help you when we come home. We must run now, or we shall be late for school, and that wouldn't do at all on the very first morning."

"We's going all the way to the steps with you, Mary."

"But Mother said only to the gate, Beth. Oh, I know what I wish you would do. Ask Mother to let you come over about eleven o'clock. I want the girls to see what fine little brothers Wilhelmina has."

"And I want them to see what dear little sisters Mary has," laughed Wilhelmina.

"And we shall take you to the Kindergarten, and perhaps Sister Benigna will let Dorothy come home with us for the afternoon."

"Oh, goody, goody, good—*ee!* We'll have another tea party, so we will!"

"Ask Jerry for some fruit and flowers to bring to Aunt Mary—that is, if you have time to help him gather them."

"Oh, yes, Mary, we has plenty of time, *plenty!*" And the four raced back toward the house, leaving the two girls shaking with laughter.

The little ones hurried around to the back porch, where the kittens were asleep in a basket. They knelt around it, trying to decide on proper names for these new pets.

"Isn't they jes' too cute for nennything! The yellow one is Beth's, and the black one is mine. Why, Beth, now we has the three little kittens jes' like the ones that lost their mittens. Doesn't you 'member, honey?"

"They look like little balls of fur, so they does. I jes' can't think of a nice 'nuff name for mine. Can't you 'member us of some nice kitty names, Dick? Willy-mean helped us name Fluff."

"Seems to me I ought to know some. The big grey cat that lives in our barn to catch the mice is named Tabby."

"Oh, oh! I isn't going to let my little kitty live in *our* barn. The mice might bite her, so they might. And I isn't going into our barn again my own self, too, not ever, ever at all."

"Count of the mice? Why, Beth, they'll run a mile when they hear you coming."

But Beth closed her lips very firmly and shook her soft, little, yellow curls.

"Here's Fluff, and I'se 'fraid she doesn't like our new little kitties so very well. Willy-mean says she's—I doesn't quite 'member that name Willy-mean said; does you, Beth?"

"N—no, Berta; but it means 'zactly the same as some little folkses is when they get a nice new little sister or brother. They's so selfish that they doesn't want the new little baby not ever, ever at all, 'cause they's 'fraid ev'ybody might love it the best."

"M, 'm 'm! How puffedekly drefful! I wish we had a sweet little baby brother to love and rock in a cradle and sing nice songs to 'stead of jes' dollies what can't hear you. In course, we can be-tend they hear us, but that's not jes' 'zactly the same, you know, Dick."

"We need another boy in our family, too, Phil says, so we can have a baseball nine. Willie's almost as good as a boy, though. She's a better catch than Jack, anyway, and she's a pretty good batter; but she can't pitch a little bit. Harry says her in curves are punk."

Beth sighed deeply. "We doesn't know what any of those names mean, Dick. Won't you please 'splain them to us? Seems to me, Berta, they's a drefful many things we has to learn. Dick knows most ev'ything they is, I'se quite sure."

"Course I don't, Beth. I don't know all my A, B, C's yet. If you had some brothers, you'd have to play baseball with them, and then you'd know as much as I do. We'll have a game this afternoon when Mary and Willie are here. I saw a bat in the barn."

"Oh, oh! Not one of those horrid things we saw flying around last evening-time!"

Dick chuckled. "I should say not. How'd you 'spect to hit a ball with that thing, Beth? I s'pose you haven't a baseball. Maybe Tom has one."

"But—but isn't we going to name the amanal, Dick?"

"That's so, Berta, I forgot. Let me see. Fluff—Fluff—rough—tough—snuff—"

"I doesn't think those are very nice names—"

"Wait a minute, Beth. Puff—muff—buff—I say, Berta, how would Muff do for yours? You said it looks like a ball of fur, and muffs are made of fur, aren't they? The one Uncle Frank and Mary gave Willie last Christmas was."

"That's jes' a lovely name, Dick!"

"And how would you like Puff for yours, Beth? or Buff? That means a kind of a yellow color like the

suit I wore yesterday, and your kitten is yellow."

"Let's call it both names, Beth—something like Willy-mean. We'll say Puffy-buff, and then our kitties will be Fluff and Muff and Puffy-buff; and I'se quite sure they isn't nenny nicer kitty names in the whole world. Now, we'll go name the teapots," and Berta led the way around to the west side of the house in search of the peacocks.

"I know a name for that great big one with his tail all spread out. Let's call him King Cole."

"Beth! That's jes' lovely! And the one over there by the wall ought to be a queen. Can't nennybody 'member a queen's name?"

"'The queen was in the kitchen, eating bread and honey,' and 'The queen of hearts, she made some tarts, all on a summer day,' are all the queens I can think of just now." Dick puckered his forehead, trying to remember some other royal ladies.

"They was a queen in that fairy story Mary told us yesterday. Doesn't you 'member, Berta?"

"Oh, yes. Queen Mab. That's a nice name."

"Then the two young birds ought to be a prince and a princess."

"But they's two more teapots to name first, Dick, before we begin with the birds and squirrels and ev'ything same as that."

"But what do you think teapots are—oh, I say, Beth, why don't you call them right? Teapots are things you make tea in." The moment he had spoken, Dick was sorry. He had never teased the little girls about their mistakes; but it was too much for him when he found himself making the same ones. In dismay, he saw Beth's lips begin to quiver.

"But—but—I thinned—that was what ev'ybody—called them, Dick."

Berta's dark eyes flashed, and putting her arms around her sister, she began, "And that's jes' 'zactly what I thinned, too, and I said it first that afternoon-time when we came to see Bird-a-Lea, and ev'ybody makes 'stakes sometimes, Daddy says, and I thinned they's two kinds of teapots 'zactly the same as you said they's a bat that flies around and a bat that you hit a ball with, and—and—and I doesn't think it's very p'lite for you to laugh at our 'stakes, so I doesn't."

"Berta! why, *Berta!* Is that the way my little girl speaks to a guest?"

"I—I guess I wasn't a very p'lite guest, Aunt 'Lisbeth. I—I laughed at something Beth said and 'most made her cry; and Mother says a gentleman never makes a lady cry. But she didn't cry," Dick hastened to add. "They're not cry babies like some of my girl cousins are."

This praise, with his manly way of taking all the blame, quite softened Berta's heart.

"Please 'scuse me for saying such drefful things, Dick, and you can laugh at our 'stakes all you want to. Mother, what *does* you think Beth and I called those amanals over there? Teapots! *teapots!* Oh, my dear! Wasn't that jes' too funny! Wasn't that jes' too funny for nennything!" Berta sank on the steps, and even Beth had to join in her merry laugh, while her mother agreed with her: "So funny, dear, that I would be very much surprised if Dick and Jack, too, did not laugh at you. And it is better to speak of those animals as birds. Say the name after me."

When they had repeated it several times, Berta added, "But we's going to call them other names, Mother,—King Cole and Queen Mab for the father and mother birds; and *can* you 'member us of a prince and princess for the chillun birds?"

"The young birds, dear. A prince and princess? So you wish to have a royal family, do you? Let me see. What would you think of Prince Charming and Princess Winsome?"

"They're great, Aunt 'Lisbeth!"

"Jes' beauty, Mother!" And the twins danced about in great glee.

"It is time to find Jerry if you wish to take Aunt Mary some fruit and flowers. Come, we shall see whether he is in the garden."

Promptly at eleven o'clock, the four climbed the high front steps at the convent, the little girls with great bundles of flowers, the boys with a basket of peaches and grapes between them. Mother Madeline, busy as she was, took them to her office and gave each of them a pretty holy picture and a little medal, and then sent for Mary and Wilhelmina to look after them. Such a time as the girls made over them. Those who had been with Mary during the lonely years when she had been separated from her little sisters, crowded around the twins in particular, until Mary, fearing that the boys might be hurt, hurried the four away to the Kindergarten. Then the bell rang for dismissal, and with little Dorothy among them, they romped home to luncheon.

CHAPTER XV.

ONLY THE BEGINNING.

"No Beth, I jes' doesn't know *what* we's going to do 'bout it, so I doesn't." Berta seated herself on the lowest of the front steps, and with her dimpled elbows propped on her knees and her dimpled chin in her hands, stared straight ahead of her, winking very hard. "They isn't nennybody to play with nenny more, not ever, ever at all."

"Not ever, ever at all," came Beth's mournful echo; and all her winking could not keep back two big tears, which trickled down her fair little face.

Mary, with her books under her arm, was just turning the corner of the porch. She stopped and stared at the two on the steps. Then, "'Dear, dear, what can the matter be,'" she sang; and seating herself between them, she put an arm around each.

"They— they isn't nennybody to play with, and we can't have nenny fun, not ever, ever, nenny more at all." Berta gulped hard and winked faster than ever.

"No one to play with! No more fun! Why, haven't you each other? If you only knew it, you are the luckiest little girls in the world. When I was little like you, I would have given all my beautiful picture books and dolls and other toys for a little sister to play with, no matter how old she was. And here you are exactly the same age. And then what about me, I should like to know? Just because I have to go to school for a while every day, aren't you going to play with me any more? and Wilhelmina? and what about all those nice little girls you saw in the Kindergarten yesterday? Why, you just make me laugh when you say such things. Our good times are just beginning, twinnies; don't you know that?"

"But— but, Mary, we— we like Dick and Jack to stay at our house ev'y single time, so we do, and — and now they's gone home with Aunt Etta, and — and —"

"Of course, Beth, we are all sorry that they couldn't stay longer; but how do you think Uncle Phil and the other boys have been getting along without Aunt Etta? You wouldn't like it so very well if Mother should go away and take me and leave you and Father and Uncle Frank here all alone, would you?"

"N— no, Mary, but —"

"But jes' Dick and Jack could stay, Mary. Uncle Phil and Aunt Etta has so many chilluns— *nine whole chilluns*, you know; and they's only three in our fambly."

"But with Phil and Harry and Wilhelmina away at school, I am sure they feel that they can't spare any more. Aunt Etta will bring Dick and Jack to visit us again some time, and then we shall try to keep them longer. We ought to be glad that we have Wilhelmina. Here she comes now with Father."

"But where's Mother, Mary, where's Mother?" There was real fright in the little ones' voices.

"Mother and Uncle have gone into the city to put Aunt Etta and the boys on the train that will take them to Georgia. Father and Wilhelmina went with them only as far as the station in the village, you know, because she had to be back in time for school."

"Well, *my* good times are over, and I'll have to knuckle down to work now." Wilhelmina sighed deeply as she dropped on the step beside the three.

"That's jes' 'zactly what we thought, too, Willy-mean; but Mary says the good times are jes' beginning; so you is making a 'stake, a most drefful 'stake, you see."

"So I am, Beth. The very idea for me to be growling when I ought to be so thankful that you are living out here instead of in the city, and that I shall come in on ever so many of the good times you are going to have."

"It is a quarter to, Wilhelmina. I looked everywhere for your books, but couldn't find them."

"I had to hide them from Jack. He was bound that he would tear a picture of some soldiers out of my history. Wait for me." Wilhelmina bounded up the steps and ran into the house.

"Fluff and Muff and Puffy-buff were making a great fuss when I went to look for you on the back porch. Have they had any breakfast to-day? and King Cole and all our other pets? I won't have time to help you take care of them in the morning, because I have to practice a half hour before I leave for school."

"We's going to ask Liza for some nice milk for the kitties and for a big plate of crumbs for the peacocks and ev'ything this very 'zact instinct." And hand in hand, the twins hippity-hopped along the walk leading around to the kitchen.

Mary went slowly across the lawn, stopping at the little gate to wait for Wilhelmina. She turned and looked back over the beautiful grounds of her new home, and her eyes rested lovingly on her father on the front porch, then on her little sisters busily feeding their pets. She thought of the wonderful change which had come into her life since the first day of school a year ago. Then, returning from her visit to Wilhelmina's home, she had believed that she would never again see her dear ones in this life. Now, her heart beat high with the hope that they would be spared for many, many years to a peaceful, happy home life at beautiful Bird-a-Lea.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK MARY'S RAINBOW ***

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