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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK PEGGY IN HER BLUE FROCK ***

THEY TOOK THEIR SNOW-SHOVELS AND TRIED TO MAKE A PATH TO THE HEN-HOUSE (page 136)

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TO MY YOUNG COUSINS
CORNELIA AND CAROL

Contents

PEGGY IN HER BLUE FROCK

I

THE MOVING

Peggy, with flying yellow hair, was climbing the high stepladder in the library, getting down books for her mother to pack. She skipped up the stepladder as joyously as a kitten climbs a tree. Everything about Peggy seemed alive, from her gray eyes that met one's glance so fearlessly, to her small feet that danced about the room between her trips up and down the stepladder. Her skirts were very short, and her legs were very long and thin, so that she reminded one of a young colt kinking up its heels for a scamper about the pasture.

"Peggy, you will break your neck if you are not careful," said her grandmother. "And don't throw the books down in that way; see how carefully Alice puts them down."

Alice smiled at the compliment and showed her dimples. She was a pretty little thing with brown hair and big brown eyes. She was two years younger than her sister Peggy, and was as small for her age as Peggy was large for hers. She was taking the books from the lowest shelf, as she was afraid to climb the stepladder.

"I'll risk Peggy's neck," said her mother, as Peggy once more skipped up the stepladder.

This time she put the books down more carefully.

The family were moving from the large, old-fashioned house where the children had been born to a very small one, more than a mile farther from the village. Peggy and Alice were greatly interested in the moving. Their father's mother had come all the way from New York to help about it.

Their father had been a country doctor with a large practice and he had gone into the war to save the lives of others; but the hospital where he was at work had been shelled, and he had lost his own life. This had happened almost at the end of the war. It seemed to the children a long time since the war was over, and a very long time since their father had gone overseas.

Peggy and Alice had been very much overcome when they heard of their father's death, but now the world was very pleasant again. Another doctor was coming to town, to move into their roomy old house and take the practice which had been their father's.

Peggy looked out of the window at the garden. It looked its worst on this March day, for it was all patches of white and brown. There was not enough of the white snow for winter sports, nor was the brown earth ready for planting seeds. Peggy was glad there were children in the doctor's family because they would be sure to enjoy the croquet ground and the apple trees. How she should miss the apple trees! There was only one apple tree where they were going, but there was a cherry tree. Peggy's face brightened when she thought of the cherry tree. And they were to have a garden full of vegetables.

"Mary," said the children's grandmother to their mother, "I'll give you a year to try your experiment; and remember, if you don't succeed, my offer holds good. I'll always have a room in my small apartment for one of the children; and Peggy is old enough to get a great deal of good from a New York school."

Peggy looked as if nothing would induce her to leave her mother. Not that she disliked her grandmother. Peggy liked people of all ages. She did not like old ladies so well as people of her mother's age, because the younger ones were so much more active; and she liked children better still, for the same reason; and boys even better than girls, because they never expected you to play dolls with them. Peggy did not care for dolls as Alice did. When the world was so full of live things that scampered and frisked, or flew or crawled, why tie one's self down to make-believe people that could neither speak nor move? Pussy was much more interesting than any doll.

Peggy looked at the furniture, standing forlornly about in strange places. Her own mahogany bureau was downstairs. "It looks for all the world," said Peggy, "like a cat in a strange garret." She had read this phrase in a book the day before, and it took her fancy. And then she wondered how their own cat would feel in her new home. And there was not any garret in the tiny house where they were going.

The cat walked in just then, but seeing the confusion she fled upstairs. She was a gray pussy, with darker gray stripes, and a pronounced purr that was almost as cozy as the sound of a tea-

kettle. She had a pleasant habit of having young families of kittens, two or three times a year. The only drawback was, the kittens had to be given away just as they got to the most interesting age. There were no kittens now, only pussy, whose whole name was Lady Jane Grey.

Their grandmother was making a list of the books, for some of the boxes were to go to her in New York, others to the Town Library, while many of them they were to keep themselves. All the medical books were to be left in their father's office for the new doctor to dispose of as he thought best.

"Do you know, mother, how many children the doctor has, and whether they are boys or girls?" Peggy asked.

"No, he just said 'children' in his letter."

"I hope there will be a girl, and that she will like to play with dolls," said Alice. 5

"But you've Clara, I don't see what more you want," said Peggy.

"But Clara is never here in the winter," said Alice.

That night, after the children had gone to bed, they began to talk about the doctor's family. It was the last night they were to spend in the old house, and they felt a little sad as they climbed into the mahogany four-poster bedstead, for the room looked desolate. The curtains had been packed, and all the furniture was gone except the bed.

"Anyway, we'll be sleeping on it to-morrow night," said Peggy. "We'll have Roxanna Bedpost with us just the same."

She looked at the lower bedpost at her right that she had christened by this name when she was a tiny child, because her mother had hung Peggy's blue sunbonnet on it.

"Shut up your eyes, Peggy, and see things," said Alice. "Perhaps you can see the children who are going to live here."

Peggy had a delightful way of seeing things that Alice could not see. She shut her eyes up and thought hard and then she opened them and looked at the opposite wall.

It seemed quite simple, but whenever Alice tried it she could see nothing. "Do you really see things, Peggy?" she once asked.

"I see them in my mind's eye," said Peggy.

"What do you see to-night, Peggy?" said Alice. 6

"I see two children, a boy and a girl; and they are picking red apples in our orchard."

"In March?"

"It's not March in my mind's eye. They are beautiful, big, red apples. The girl is a little bigger than you and a little smaller than me, so she's just right for both of us to play with, and her name is Matilda Ann."

"I don't think that is at all a pretty name."

"I did not say it was a pretty name; I just said her name was Matilda Ann."

"I hope it isn't."

"Well, what do you guess it is?"

"Oh, I don't know."

"You must guess something."

"Oh, well, Fanny."

"Fanny! That's a very stupid sort of name," said Peggy.

They were still talking about the possible names of the possible girl and boy when their mother came in to see if they were tucked up for the night.

"Are you still awake?" she asked. "I wonder what you do find to talk about when you see each other all day long."

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CHAPTER II

A CAT IN A STRANGE GARRET

There were others who felt as if they were in a strange garret, after the moving, besides the cat. The children's mother was very homesick, for she was tired out; and she felt sad and lonely in the small house where her husband had never lived. The children did not mind so much, but it was strange, when they waked in the morning, to see the unfamiliar stretch of pasture from their window instead of the garden and the next house.

But Pussy minded it so much that she slipped out while the others were having their breakfast. They were all so busy that no one missed her until dinnertime, and then Peggy and Alice looked everywhere in the small house and they called "Lady Jane" many times, but no little furry, gray pussy answered.

Their grandmother had gone back to New York and their mother was too busy getting settled to hunt for the cat.

"She'll come back when she gets hungry," she said. "I want you children to help me unpack. See these nice drawers for the linen."

"I don't think they are half so nice as the linen closet in the other house," said Alice. 8

"Now, children," said their mother, "no one ever said this house was so nice as the large one where you were born, and we can't pretend life is so pleasant as if we had your father here with us; but we have a great deal to be thankful for. If we haven't much money, we have health and strength and each other. Your father said to me when he went away: 'Mary, if I don't come back, I don't want you and the children ever to forget me, but I want you to remember all the happy times we have had together, and to think how glad I'd be of all the happy times you'd have by yourselves.'"

The children got very much interested in arranging the linen in the drawers.

"Oh, Peggy, you are no housekeeper; the pillowcases don't go in that drawer," said her mother. "See how carefully Alice puts the towels in."

Alice smiled and showed her dimples, and Peggy stopped and gave Alice a hug.

"Things seem just to slide out of my hands," said Peggy; "and I can't remember which drawer the things go in."

There was a cupboard where Alice's dolls were to live, and it interested her greatly to get this apartment ready for them. So they all again forgot about Lady Jane Grey until supper-time. Their mother put bowls of milk on the table for the children, with plenty of bread and jam; and there was a big saucer of milk for Lady Jane, warmed just the way she liked it. Again they called 9 her, but she did not come. Peggy made a trip down cellar, thinking she might have hidden there, and she hunted the house from top to bottom, but there was no dainty Lady Jane to be seen.

"She'll come back sometime," said their mother; but the children were not so sure of this.

It seemed sad to go to bed without knowing what fate had befallen Lady Jane; but their mother was sure she would come back that night.

In the morning Peggy ran downstairs eagerly before she was dressed.

"Has she come, mother?" she asked.

"Has who come?" said her mother, whose mind was on starting the kitchen fire.

"Lady Jane."

"No, she hasn't come."

"And it is so wet," said Peggy, as she looked at the falling rain; "she'll get drenched without any rubbers or raincoat."

"You can be sure she is under shelter somewhere. A cat can always look out for herself."

"But, mother, I'm worried about her."

"I think," said Mrs. Owen, as she put the oatmeal into the double-boiler, "that she has gone back to her old home."

"But, mother dear, she couldn't like strange people better than she likes us!"

"Cats are strange creatures," said Mrs. Owen. "Run along and get dressed. After breakfast if the 10 rain holds up you and Alice can run over to the Hortons' house and telephone to the Carters', to see if she is there. I shall be glad when we get our telephone in."

The rain did not stop, but the children were so persistent that after breakfast Mrs. Owen let them put on their rubbers and raincoats and run over to the Hortons' house. The house was up a long avenue of trees. On this March day there were no leaves on the trees, and the bare branches looked black against the gray sky as they were tossed about by the wind. There were patches of snow by the side of the road. It all looked very dismal, for the house was closed, as the family did not come back until June, and only the care-takers were living in the back part of the house. It was where Clara lived in the summer. She was the children's most intimate friend. She was a little more than a year younger than Peggy and about a year older than Alice. The

children went around to the back door and asked if they could come in and telephone.

“It is something very important or we would not have come,” said Peggy.

“I hope your mother isn’t sick,” said Mrs. Jones.

“No, it is about the cat.”

“And you came out in all this rain about a cat?”

“She’s as dear to us as if she was our child,” said Alice. 11

“Well, I never!” said Mrs. Jones, as she led the way to the telephone room.

Peggy called up their old number. It made her a little homesick as she did so.

“Is Mrs. Carter there?” she asked as a shrill voice said “Hullo.”

“It’s a boy’s voice,” said Peggy. “There’s one boy in the family. I’m glad of that.”

She heard the boy call “Mother,” and presently Mrs. Carter came to the telephone.

“Hullo,” said Mrs. Carter, in a warm voice that Peggy liked.

“I’m Peggy Owen. Mother said I might come over and telephone you about the cat. She’s lost—I mean the cat. We thought she might be at your house. She doesn’t seem to like ours. Have you seen anything of a gray pussy with dark gray stripes?”

“I really don’t know whether that one has been around or not. I’ll ask them in the kitchen. We’ve been feeding a lot of stray cats.”

“You didn’t say enough about the way she looks. She may get her mixed with the gray tramp cat,” said Alice, taking the telephone from Peggy.

“She’s two shades of gray,” she said to Mrs. Carter. “Such lovely dark stripes and then light ones; and there are thirteen stripes on her tail—first a dark and then a light, and so on; and her eyes are the shiniest things—most as bright as lights, only they are a kind of green; and she has 12
a purr you can hear all across the room. Her name is Lady Jane, and she’ll come for it.”

Mrs. Carter came back to the telephone presently. “There has been a gray cat around,” she said, “but she isn’t here now. If she comes back I’ll send one of the boys up with her.”

“One of the boys,” said Peggy to Alice, “so there must be two anyhow.”

The day passed and nothing was heard of the cat, and once more the little girls had to go to bed with anxious hearts. It was still raining when the children waked up the next morning, and no pussy had yet appeared. They wanted to go back and hunt for her themselves, but it was too wet for so long a tramp, and, besides, Mrs. Owen was sure Mrs. Carter was too busy getting settled in her new house to want visitors.

“You don’t seem a bit worried about Lady Jane, mother,” said Peggy.

“I have a few other things to think about, and I am sure she is all right.”

It was a three days’ storm, and it was so wet on Sunday that they did not go to church or Sunday School. The day seemed very long. They helped their mother get dinner and they washed and wiped the inside dishes for her. They both liked to wash better than to wipe—it was such fun to splash the mop about in the soapy water.

“It is my turn to wash to-day,” Alice reminded Peggy. 13

“But you are so slow,” said Peggy. “I can do it a lot faster. However, it is your turn,” she said, handing the mop to Alice with a little sigh.

It was toward the end of the afternoon and they were beginning to get tired of reading when the door bell rang.

“It is our first caller; go to the door, Peggy,” said Mrs. Owen.

Alice followed Peggy as she ran to the door. As Peggy opened it, a sweep of wind and a swirl of rain came in. The wind was so strong it almost blew the door to. A freckled-faced boy with a pleasant smile and honest blue eyes was standing on the doorstep. Oh, joy! He had a basket in his hand.

“It’s some rain,” said the boy.

“Oh, have you got our cat in that basket?” Peggy asked.

“Now, what do you know about that!” said the boy. “Why should I know anything about your cat? Maybe I have cabbages in this basket.”

“Cabbages wouldn’t mew,” said Peggy, as the occupant of the basket gave a long wail.

“It’s our cat, I know her voice!” cried Alice in delight.

“Won’t you come in and see mother?” Peggy asked, as the boy stepped inside the small entry

and put his basket down.

"Can't stop." He had pulled his cap off politely when he came into the house, and Peggy saw that his hair was as yellow as her own. She wished hers might have been cropped as short.

"Oh, dear! what fun boys had! They could go out on the rainiest days."

The boy touched his cap and went quickly down the walk. Peggy's glance followed him regretfully. He was a big boy; he must be two years older than she was, just a nice size to play with.

"And we never asked him his name or if he had brothers and sisters," Alice said.

It was a lost opportunity and the children both regretted it, but they had been too much taken up with the return of Lady Jane to think of anything else at the moment. They had opened the basket and Lady Jane was purring about the place.

"You darling!" Alice cried as she stroked her gray striped coat. "You do like us best, don't you, after all?"

There was an odd expression in Lady Jane's green eyes. If she could have spoken, she would have said, "I like old friends, but I do like old places better still." And the very next morning she disappeared again.

CHAPTER III

WHY PEGGY WORE BLUE FROCKS

Early in April there came a very hot day, and this reminded Mrs. Owen that she must be looking over the children's summer dresses to see what new ones they would need, for it would take some time to make them, with all the other work she had to do. She went up into the large store-closet, which was all they had in the way of an attic, and she unpacked the trunk that held the dresses. There were only four of Peggy's, for she was very hard on her clothes, and she had stained or torn several of them. There were six of Alice's in excellent condition. They were a little short for her, but there were tucks that could be let down. Peggy had two white dresses, a pink one, and a plaid dress. She tried on one of the white dresses first and pranced about the room with it. Her legs looked longer than ever, for the skirt was several inches above her knees.

"You look just like a mushroom, Peggy," said Alice.

"Oh, dear! I didn't know I'd grown such a lot," said Peggy ruefully, "but you can let down the tucks, mother," she added hopefully.

"But there aren't any tucks. I let those down last summer."

"I guess I'll have to have that dress," said Alice joyously.

She was so fond of her sister that she liked Peggy's clothes better than her own.

"Oh, dear!" said Peggy. "I like it so much because it's smocked. But I hope I can wear the dotted muslin. That's my favorite dress."

But, alas, the dotted muslin was only half an inch longer than the cotton rep, and there were no tucks in that either.

Peggy skipped about the room again, and she tried to persuade her mother that it would be possible for her to wear the dress.

"I don't mind if it is rather short, mother," she said.

"I can't have you going around with skirts like a ballet dancer."

"But you could let the hem down, or put in insertion, or something," said Peggy.

"But the waist is too small for you, and the dress will be just right for Alice."

The pink dress and the plaid one were too small for Peggy, too, so Alice became the proud possessor of Peggy's frocks, which would fit her very well after tucks had been taken in them.

"I've three pink dresses now and four white ones and two plaids and a yellow," said Alice.

"And I've nothing at all," said Peggy.

"It's too bad," said Alice, "but yours will all be new."

The first chance Mrs. Owen had to go to the village she said she would buy the materials for Peggy's summer frocks.

“I’ve got to get something for working dresses for myself, too,” she said.

She took the children with her, and they had a joyous time, for it was one of those sunshiny afternoons when everything was so gay and cheerful that it seemed to Peggy as if the whole world were smiling. The sun seemed positively to laugh, and the blue sky and the white clouds seemed almost as glad as he. Alice walked quietly along, taking hold of her mother’s hand; but Peggy had to run along ahead of them every now and then. She wanted to dance and shout with the joy of it all.

“Oh, Mother, there’s Mrs. Butler and her canary-bird,” said Peggy, as they passed a small gray house. “Let’s stop and make her a call.”

“Not to-day,” said Mrs. Owen. “We’ll never get our shopping done if we stop to call on all the neighbors.”

When they came to the smoothly finished stone wall in front of the Thorntons’ large place, Peggy climbed up so she could have the pleasure of walking across it.

“Come, Alice,” she said, helping her small sister up.

“Oh, children,” said their mother in despair, “we shall never get downtown.”

But they did get there at last, although they met several of their neighbors on the road, and 18
Peggy stopped to caress a black pussy-cat and make friends with a yellow collie dog. The shop seemed very dark after the brightness of the spring sunshine outdoors. The saleswomen seemed sleepy and not at all interested in what they were selling. Peggy thought they probably did not live so far from the village; they could not have had such a joyous walk as they had had, or met so many friends.

“Oh, that beautiful collie dog! How lucky the Thorntons were to have him! And the black pussy was a darling, not half so beautiful, of course, as Lady Jane, but still, a darling.” She sighed when she thought of Lady Jane.

She had slipped away again to her old home, and a few days later the same boy had brought her back in the same basket. The children had not seen him, for they were at school when he came, and their mother did not ask him how many children there were in the family. She had discovered, however, that his name was Christopher. They had kept Pussy in the house since then, hoping in this way to get her used to the place. But she seemed very anxious to get out, and in this April weather Peggy did not feel it quite kind to keep her indoors. She would not like it herself, and one should do as one would be done by.

Peggy’s mother went to the back of the store, where there was a man behind the counter who
seemed more alive than the girls. Peggy followed her mother, but Alice’s attention had been 19
caught by some doll carriages.

“I want you to show me something strong and serviceable for frocks for my little girl, who is very hard on her clothes,” said Mrs. Owen.

Peggy hung her head. She wished her mother had not said that. The man did not look as if he ever could have been hard on his clothes, even when he was a small boy.

“This plaid is a great favorite,” he said.

Mrs. Owen asked the price, and it was too high. “Why, it is double what it was before the war,” she said.

Everything was either too expensive or too frail. Mrs. Owen bought some white materials for best dresses for Peggy, but there seemed to be nothing in the shop that would do for common.

“I am afraid I shall have to wait until later in the season,” said Mrs. Owen. “I suppose you’ll have new things in?”

“The new goods will be more expensive still.”

Mrs. Owen sighed. There were drawbacks about having so little money. She had turned to leave the store when the man called after her:

“Mrs. Owen, I have something on the top shelf I think may suit you. It’s strong as nails, and it’s cheap. It’s almost as strong as the stuff butcher’s frocks are made of.”

Peggy gave a little cry of pleasure when she saw it, for it was such a delicious color. It made her 20
think of the sky when it was a deep blue. Mrs. Owen was attracted to it because it was dark enough not to soil easily. But Peggy did not think of this; she just thought what a pleasure it would be to be dressed in something so pretty. It was so cheap that Mrs. Owen could hardly believe her ears when the man told her the price.

“We got in a lot of the material before the prices went up,” said he. “It is entirely out of fashion now. Nobody wants it.”

Peggy and her mother cared nothing about the fashion; and indeed they seemed to set the fashion, whatever they wore.

“How many yards are there in the piece?” Mrs. Owen asked. He told her and she made a rapid

calculation. “I’ll take it all,” she said.

The man could not conceal his surprise. “We only sell seven yards for a grown person and four would do for her.”

“I know, but I am going to make two dresses for myself and she will need four. It is so much cheaper and stronger than any of the other wash materials that I shall make all her dresses out of the same piece. She won’t mind having them all alike, will you, Peggy?”

“I’ll like it; it’s so pretty.”

“Oh, please, mother, do make me one,” Alice begged. 21

“I’m afraid you will have to be contented with the ten dresses you already have,” said her mother. “For, as I will have six dresses to make for Peggy and two for myself, I think that will be all I can manage.”

“Perhaps one of my dolls can have a dress out of it,” Alice said hopefully.

“Yes, I’ll cut out a dress for Belle, and I can teach you to make that so you can be sewing on it while I am making Peggy’s frocks.”

But it was some time before Peggy began to wear them, for it took her mother a long time to make them. The very next afternoon, after the dinner dishes were washed, Mrs. Owen got out the blue material and she cut out a dress for Peggy, and then a small one for Belle. Alice was learning to hem and she took as careful stitches as a grown-up person. Peggy was divided between wanting to do what the others were doing and hating to be tied down. She made frequent trips to the kitchen for a drink of water and to see how Lady Jane was getting on.

“You can overcast these sleeves, Peggy,” her mother said later in the afternoon. “That is much easier than hemming.”

“It’s better than hemming,” Peggy said, “because you can take such long spidery stitches. But I just hate sewing. I’m never going to sew when I grow up.”

“But that is just the time you’ll have to sew,” said Alice. 22

“No, I’m going to be a writing lady.”

“But they have to wear just as many frocks as other people,” said Alice.

“I’ll have them made for me. I’ll get such a lot of money by my writings.”

“You may be married and have to make clothes for your children,” said her mother.

“I’ll just have boys,” said Peggy. “That would be much the best. Then I could climb trees with them and climb over the roofs of houses, and nobody could say, ‘Peggy, you’ll break your neck,’ because I’d be their mother, so everything I did would be all right.”

“Oh, Peggy, you haven’t been putting your mind on your work,” said her mother. “Pull out those last few stitches and do them over again, and think what you are doing and not how you will climb trees with your sons.”

“I’ll have all girls,” said Alice. “Some will be dressed in pink and some in blue.”

“And some in red and some in yellow, and some in purple and some in green,” added Peggy, “and you’ll be called the rainbow family. There, mother, is that any better?”

“A little better, but you don’t seem to make any two stitches quite the same length.”

Peggy suddenly flung down her work. “There’s somebody at the back door,” she said.

“It’s the grocer’s boy. You can go and get the things, only be sure not to let the cat out.” 23

Peggy never quite knew how it happened. She did not mean to disobey her mother, but the afternoon was very pleasant and the kitchen was hot. It seemed cruel to keep a cat in the house. She held the door open and, while she was debating whether it would not be possible for her and the cat to take a walk together, Lady Jane slipped out. Something gray and fluffy seemed to fly along the grass and disappear under the fence. She had gone without waiting for their pleasant walk together. Instead they would have a mad race. Peggy liked the idea of a chase. It was much more exciting than overcasting seams.

Peggy and the pussy-cat had a wild race, and more than one person looked back to see why Peggy Owen, with flying yellow hair, was running at such speed cross-lots, through back yards, and climbing over fences. Suddenly Peggy was caught, as she was scrambling over a fence, by a piece of barbed wire. Her one remaining winter school frock was torn past mending. “Oh, dear, what will mother say?” said Peggy.

The skirt was almost torn from the waist, and Peggy felt like a beggar-maid as she crept home. “Only, everybody will know I am not a beggar-maid,” thought Peggy. “They’ll all say, ‘What mischief has Peggy Owen been up to now?’”

And her mother did say something very much like it when she came in. “Peggy, what have you been doing now?” she asked. 24

“I was hunting for Lady Jane,” she said breathlessly. “She slipped out of the kitchen door.”

“Peggy, how could you be so careless?” said her mother. Then, as she noticed the confusion on Peggy’s face, she said, “Did you let her out?”

“Not exactly,” said Peggy. “I was thinking perhaps it would be nice for us to have a walk together, when she ran away.”

“You don’t deserve to have any new clothes,” said her mother, as she looked at Peggy’s torn frock.

“The blue ones will be stronger than this old thing,” said Peggy.

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CHAPTER IV

PEGGY GOES FOR A YEAST-CAKE

“Dear me,” said Mrs. Owen, one hot morning, a few days later, as she started to make bread, “this yeast-cake isn’t fresh. What a shame! Peggy, you’ll have to go down to the village and get me another.”

Peggy was delighted at the chance for an errand. She never minded the heat, and she always liked to be out of doors better than in. It was Saturday morning so there was no school. This heat in April was very trying to Mrs. Owen and Alice.

“You’ll have to change your dress if you go to the village,” said Peggy’s mother. “You can put on one of your blue frocks if you like.”

So a few minutes later Peggy in her blue frock went out into the spring sunshine, a very happy little girl, with a small covered basket in her hand, for her mother had told her she might get half a dozen lemons and some sugar and a box of fancy crackers, so they could have some lemonade and crackers in the afternoon.

“Be sure you don’t forget the yeast-cake,” her mother said, “and don’t stop to talk to any strange children, and don’t call on any of the neighbors. Don’t run, it is too hot, but don’t waste any time on the road, for I want to get my bread started as soon as I can.” 26

Peggy danced along the road in spite of the heat, for it was a happy thing to be alive. She had not gone far when she saw a boy coming out of a crossroad. It was Christopher Carter, and he too had a covered basket in his hand.

“Hullo!” said Peggy.

“Hullo!” said Christopher. He joined her as he spoke.

“What have you got in your basket?” Peggy asked with interest.

“Butter and eggs from the Miller farm. What have you got in yours?”

“Nothing. Mother’s sent me to the grocery store to get some things.”

“How’s the cat?” he asked.

“She’s all right, only we have to keep her shut up, for if we let her out she’d go straight to your house. I can’t think why she likes you better than us.”

“She gets lots of scraps of fish and meat, because we are such a big family; and then I suppose she likes her own old home, just as a person would.”

“I know, but Alice is so crazy about her: Alice is my sister,” she explained.

“My sister is just as crazy about her.”

“So you’ve got a sister? I thought you had, and I guessed her name was Matilda Ann.” 27

“Matilda Ann! What an awful name! What made you think her name was Matilda Ann?”

“I don’t know. It just came into my head that her name was Matilda Ann.”

“Well, it isn’t.”

“Alice guessed it was Fanny,” Peggy hastened to add, hoping that the credit of the family might be restored.

“It isn’t Fanny either. You could guess and guess and you’d never guess it. It’s such an unusual name.”

Peggy was full of interest. She guessed several uncommon names, but they were all of them

wrong.

“What letter does it begin with?” she asked finally.

“It begins with a D.”

“Dorothy?”

“No, that’s a very common name. I know lots of Dorothys.”

“Doris?”

“That isn’t uncommon, either. I know two Dorises.”

“Dora?”

“That isn’t uncommon, either. I know some Doras.”

Peggy was amazed at the size of the acquaintance of this boy who had come from the city, and she was very envious. She wished she knew all those Dorothys and Dorises and Doras. She wanted to hear all about each one of them. But he did not want to take the trouble to tell her about them.

“Guess again,” he said.

“I can’t think of any more girls’ names beginning with a D, except Dorcas, in the Bible.”

“It isn’t Dorcas.”

“Delia?”

“No.”

“You’ll have to tell me; I can’t think of another thing.”

“Her name is Diana.”

“Diana! What a pretty name! Is she pretty?”

“She’s all right,” the boy said heartily; “only she isn’t very strong; and she has to stay in bed a lot when she is sick, and the cat amused her. She came and would get on the bed and would curl down by her.”

“She would? Mother would never let her go into our bedrooms.”

Peggy was beginning to see why Lady Jane liked to live with the Carters. But she had a pang of jealousy when she thought of that adorable gray striped pussy, with her soft fur and her greenish eyes, curling down contentedly and giving her cheerful purr while she was stroked by another little girl.

“Is she the only sister you’ve got?” Peggy asked.

“Yes.”

“Have you only one brother?”

“That’s all. He’s older than me. He’s some brother,” he added proudly. “He writes poetry.”

“Poetry? I write it too,” said Peggy; “only mine is just nursery rhymes to amuse Alice, about bees and hens and things.”

“Tom is writing a poem about you.”

“About me?” Peggy was deeply interested. “Can you say any of it?”

Christopher became very red and looked confused. “I can’t remember it,” he said.

“You must remember some of it.”

She persisted until she wrung from him the confession that he could remember one line, and she teased and teased him to repeat it until he said, “All right, if you must hear it, I suppose you must: ‘Peggy, Peggy, long and leggy.’ It gets nicer as it goes on, but that’s all I can remember.”

Peggy looked down at her long legs thoughtfully. The poem was a distinct shock. She had never had one written to her before.

“If he’s like most boys I guess he’s longer and leggier than I am,” she said.

“You are right there, he is.”

“I’m glad I have long legs,” said Peggy. “They are so useful when you are climbing trees.”

Christopher looked at her with new interest. “Do you like to climb trees?” he asked.

“I just love to,” said Peggy.

They were coming to the stone wall that enclosed the Thornton place. Peggy climbed up and began to walk across it. At one end was a pine tree, with convenient branches that she had often

longed to climb. It looked very tall and symmetrical with its spreading green branches against the heavenly blue of the sky.

She could never quite remember whether it was she or Christopher who first suggested climbing the tree. But they hid their baskets on the other side of the wall, and presently she and Christopher were climbing quickly from branch to branch. Peggy had never had a more blissful time. She had often envied Lady Jane her power to scramble up trees with no mother at hand to tell her to come down, or to warn her against spoiling her frock. But now she envied nobody. It was too wonderful to be sitting in the topmost branches of that pine tree. But the thought of Lady Jane's furry garment made her look down at her less substantial frock, and, to her dismay, she saw a long streak on it. She put her hand down and it felt sticky.

"Oh, dear," she said, "I've got some of the pitch from the pine all over my dress! Oh, dear, what will mother say? She told me to be sure not to stop on the way, and not to talk to any strange children."

"I'm not a strange child," said Christopher. "She wouldn't mind your talking to me."

"Yes, but I have stopped on the way. I'll have to hurry," she said. "But, oh, dear, I'm afraid my dress is spoiled! Oh, what will mother say? I've only worn it one other time, and she's only got one more of these blue frocks finished." 31

"Only one more! How many are you going to have?"

"Four," said Peggy. She glanced up at him, and he looked as if he, too, would be hard on his clothes and would have some sympathy for her, so she added: "You see, it doesn't tear easily. The man in the shop said it was as strong as nails. I am always spoiling my things."

He looked down at the long smear with genuine concern. "If I hadn't come along it wouldn't have happened," he said. "I'll take you round to Aunt Betsy's. She's got stuff that takes out all kinds of spots. She's got them out for me."

"Is your Aunt Betsy the same as Clara's Aunt Betsy?" Peggy asked.

"My Aunt Betsy is father's aunt," he said. "That's the reason we came here to live. She told us your house was going to be sold and there wasn't any good doctor here any more."

They turned down a side street. "That's the house she lives in," he said, pointing to a small white cottage with green blinds.

"Oh, yes, I know her," said Peggy. "She's Miss Betsy Porter."

Aunt Betsy was in her pleasant kitchen taking something with a delicious, spicy smell out of the oven. She came to the door and asked the children to come in. She was tall and thin, with gray hair and dark eyes. Peggy thought of her as an old lady, but much more interesting than old ladies usually were. There always seemed to be something very nice in the way of food at her house, no matter at what time one arrived. 32

"Now you children must each have a piece of my gingerbread," she said. "I've just taken it out of the oven."

Miss Betsy Porter was deeply interested in the stain on Peggy's frock.

"That's a very enticing tree to climb," she said, when the children had told her the whole story. "I climbed it once when I was a little girl."

Peggy looked with wonder into the kindly face of Aunt Betsy, with its many lines. It seemed so impossible to think that she had ever been a little girl climbing trees.

"I've got some stuff here that will take that out," said Aunt Betsy, going to a cupboard in the other room. "It would be a great pity for you to spoil that pretty dress."

There was a jet-black cat curled up on the red bricks of the kitchen hearth. After the spots had been taken out, Peggy went over to make friends with the cat. It did not seem polite to eat and run when Miss Betsy had been so kind about taking the stain out of her dress, so Peggy stayed to make a call, after the gingerbread had been eaten. And she and Christopher told her all about Lady Jane Grey, and how she lived first at one house and then at the other. Finally, the striking of a clock made Peggy realize that the morning was slipping away. 33

"I guess I'll have to be going now," said Peggy, "for mother told me to hurry and not to stop on the way. Oh, dear, what did I do with my basket?"

"You didn't have any basket when you came in here," said Miss Betsy.

"We left our baskets behind the stone wall," said Christopher. "I forgot all about them. I'll run back and get them."

"I'll run, too," said Peggy. "I guess I can run as fast as you can."

"It's too hot a morning to run, children," Miss Betsy called after them.

But they were already some distance away. Christopher in his brown suit was a little ahead, but he was closely followed by Peggy in her blue frock, with her flying yellow hair, and her long,

slim legs.

The children gathered up their baskets and Peggy started to go to the grocery store when her attention was caught by the melodious singing of Mrs. Butler's canary-bird. "He's crazy about being alive, just as I am," thought Peggy. "I wish I could sing like that."

"I must just go and say good-morning to Mrs. Butler. See, she's got the window open and the cage hanging there. Don't you wish you could sing like a canary-bird?"

"No, I don't. What strange things you do think up!" 34

"Well, I'd like to sing like one," said Peggy, "because it sounds so joyous, and there's never anything I can do to show how joyous I feel."

Mrs. Butler came to the open window, to speak to the children. She didn't look at all joyous, for she had been having rheumatism, but this warm day made her feel better.

"Won't you come in?" she asked. "I've just baked some gingerbread. You must be hungry. Come in and let me give you some."

Peggy was about to say that they had already had some gingerbread, but she had only had one piece, and it seemed to make her hungry for more. She knew she ought not to stop again, but the temptation was too great. So they went into Mrs. Butler's cool parlor. This time it was crisp, thin gingerbread. One could eat several pieces and it seemed nothing at all. And all the time, the canary-bird in the sunshine was singing his glad song, "Spring is coming, spring is really coming," he seemed to say, "and there will be daffodils out, and tulips and Mayflowers. And the days will grow longer and longer, and more and more sunshiny." A clock on the mantelpiece struck the half-hour. That was not a joyous sound.

"I guess I ought to be going," said Peggy. "Mother told me to hurry and not to stop on the way."

"Mother told me she was in a hurry for the butter and eggs," said Christopher. "I'll have to go right home." 35

Christopher left Peggy when they came to her old house, which was now his, and she felt a little pang of regret when she saw how pleasant it looked with its new coat of paint, behind the two horse-chestnut trees, which would soon be coming into blossom. At one of the upper windows she saw a boy who she was sure must be the poet, and she hurried by, very conscious of her long legs.

The grocery store was a place full of interest—there were such delightful things to be seen. There was a box full of oranges and another full of grapefruit, and a lady was buying some raisins. Peggy was sure her mother would like some raisins if she had only happened to remember about them, and it would be such a good chance to get some oranges and grapefruit. But she remembered that her mother had not liked it at all when she had brought back some oranges once that she had not been told to order, so she turned regretfully from the oranges and grapefruit to the lemons that were in another box.

"I'd like six lemons, please," she said to the clerk, "and two pounds of sugar and a box of Butter Thins."

"Is that all?" he asked.

"Yes," said Peggy. She never once thought of the yeast-cake, for so many exciting things had happened since she left home.

When she reached the house her mother said, "What have you been doing, Peggy? You are an hour and a half late. There is no use now in starting my bread before night." 36

It was then that Peggy remembered the yeast-cake. She turned red and looked very unhappy.

"Mother, I forgot all about the yeast-cake," she confessed miserably. "I remembered everything else."

"You remembered all the things you wanted yourself, but the one thing you were sent for, the only important thing, you forgot. I wonder what I can do to make you less careless. What is this smell? Why, it comes from your frock! Peggy, what mischief have you been in now?"

Peggy and her mother were intimate friends, and they shared each other's confidence, but Peggy had not intended to tell her about the frock until the next day. However, there was no escape now.

"Christopher and I climbed the pine tree, the one by the Thornton place, and I got pitch all over me, and I thought you'd be so discouraged that he took me to his Aunt Betsy's house and she got the spots out."

"I told you not to stop to talk to any children."

"You said 'strange children.' He wasn't 'strange.'"

When Mrs. Owen had heard the whole history of the morning, she said: "Now Peggy, I think you ought to be punished in some way. While you were out Mrs. Horton telephoned to say that she and Miss Rand and Clara had come up to spend part of the Easter vacation. She wants you and 37

Alice to come over and play with Clara this afternoon. I think Alice had better go without you."

"Oh, mother," Alice protested, "that would be punishing Clara and me too."

"I think it would be too awful a punishment," said Peggy.

"Yes, I suppose it would," said Mrs. Owen thoughtfully. She was a very just mother, and Peggy always felt her punishments were deserved.

"I can't let it go and do nothing about it," said Mrs. Owen. "I tell you what I'll do. I'll go over to Mrs. Horton's with Alice and leave you to keep house, Peggy, until I come back. Old Michael may come with some seed catalogues. If he does you can keep him until I get back. As soon as I do, you can run right down for the yeast-cake, and this time I am sure you will not stop on the way. Then you can go to Clara's for what is left of the afternoon."

38

CHAPTER V

AT CLARA'S HOUSE

Peggy was walking up the long avenue that led to Clara's house. She had had a wonderful afternoon. "Only I haven't been punished at all," thought Peggy. This was because old Michael had arrived with his seed catalogues soon after her mother left, and, as he was one of her best friends, Peggy was very happy.

"Mother will be back soon," said Peggy. "Let's play that I am mother, and we'll look at all the pictures of flowers and vegetables and mark the ones I want, just as she does."

Old Michael was quite ready to play the game, only he said it might be confusing to her mother if they marked the catalogues; so Peggy got a sheet of her own best note-paper, with some children in colored frocks at the top of it.

"It's a pity to waste that good paper," said he.

"It's my own paper, Mr. Farrell," said Peggy, in a grown-up voice. "You forget that I am Mrs. Owen and can do as I please."

"Sure enough, ma'am, I did forget," he said as he looked at the small lady in her blue frock.

"Peonies, poppies, portulaca," said Peggy; "we'll have a lot of all of those, Mr. Farrell. And we'll have the poppies planted in a lovely ring." 39

"It was vegetables we were to talk about to-day, ma'am," said Mr. Farrell respectfully. "How many rows of string-beans do you want to start with, and how many butter-beans? And are you planning to have peas and corn and tomatoes?"

"Mother is planning to can things to sell," Peggy began. "Oh, dear, I forgot I was mother! I think a hundred rows of string-beans will be enough to start with, Mr. Farrell. I am afraid that is all my children can take care of. They are to help me with the garden. We haven't much money; and we have to earn some or Peggy may have to go to live with her grandmother, and I just couldn't stand that. I could not be separated from my child; and Peggy and Alice must always be together. Perhaps you can't understand this, Mr. Farrell, never having been a mother yourself. It is no laughing matter," she said, looking at old Michael reprovingly.

Her mother came a great deal too soon; and she did not approve of all of Peggy's suggestions about the garden. "Run along now, Peggy, and get the yeast-cake, and don't bother us any more," she said unfeelingly.

Surely no little girl had ever gone to the village and back so quickly as Peggy went. She resisted the temptation to get two yeast-cakes, for fear one might not be fresh, thinking it wiser to do exactly as her mother said. 40

And now, as she was walking between the rows of trees, she could hardly wait to see Clara. She had not seen her since Thanksgiving Day.

There were three men at work at the Hortons' place, raking leaves and uncovering the bushes in the rose garden. Peggy was glad they did not have so many people at work. It was much more fun doing a lot of the work one's self and talking things over with old Michael. Mrs. Horton was talking with the man in the rose garden. He looked cross as if he did not like to be interrupted. Mrs. Horton was short and plump, with beautifully fitting clothes, but she never looked half so nice, in spite of them, as Peggy's mother did in her oldest dresses, for Mrs. Owen carried her head as if she were the equal of any one in the land.

Mrs. Horton looked pleased when she saw Peggy. She shook hands with her and said how tall she had grown. Peggy was tired of hearing this. And then she told her that the children were up

in the apple tree. “You can go right through the house and out at the other door,” she said. “The path is too muddy. Miss Rand will let you in. We are camping out; we haven’t brought any of the servants with us.”

They only had the care-taker and her husband and these men on the place. If this was camping out, Peggy wondered what she and her mother and Alice were doing, with nobody but themselves to do anything, except old Michael or Mrs. Crozier for an occasional day. 41

Miss Rand opened the door for Peggy. She was a small, slim little thing, with big frightened eyes with red rims. She looked as if she had been crying. Peggy wondered what the trouble was. She felt sorry for her, so she gave her a kiss and a big hug and said how glad she was to see her. And Miss Rand smiled and her face looked as if the sun had come out. She was very nice-looking when she smiled.

“You are the same old Peggy,” said Miss Rand, and Peggy was so grateful to her for not saying how tall she had grown that she stopped and told her all about Lady Jane and how she lived first at one house and then at the other; for Miss Rand had a heart for cats, and it was a trial to her that Mrs. Horton would never have one.

Speaking of Lady Jane, Peggy had an awful feeling that she had slipped out of the kitchen door when old Michael came in. “I didn’t see her after he left when I went into the kitchen for a drink of water,” said Peggy. “Wouldn’t that be too bad?”

“It would be nice for Diana to have a little visit from her,” said Miss Rand.

“Do you know Diana?”

“Yes, I used to teach in a school near where they lived. She came to school when she was well enough, and when she wasn’t I gave her lessons at home. She is a dear child.” 42

But Peggy was getting too impatient to see Clara to stop to hear more about Diana. So she went through the wide hall and out of the other door to the brick terrace and down the steps that led to the formal garden and the orchard beyond. A peacock was strutting about as if he owned the place. His tail looked so very beautiful that Peggy felt a little envious. “I wish people could wear ready-made clothes as lovely as his,” she thought. “They are much nicer than my blue frocks, and they can never get spoiled.”

She ran quickly along past the pool, where the water-lilies would blossom later on, to the orchard. In one of the nearest apple trees there was a platform built around it with a flight of steps leading up to it. It was what the children called the apple tree house. Here Clara and Alice were playing dolls. Peggy could seldom be induced to play dolls. She ran up the steps and made a dash for Clara. Clara, in a lilac frock, was sitting primly on one of the wooden chairs with which the platform was furnished. Her hair was a darker brown than Alice’s, and her face had the pallor of the city child who has lived indoors all winter. She was rather a stiff little girl in her manners, and however glad she might feel inside at seeing Peggy again, she did not show it. She submitted to being kissed and hugged gravely as if she were taking a doctor’s prescription, and she kissed Peggy’s cheek with a gentle peck. 43

“Dear me, but you have grown a lot,” said Clara.

“Well, I can’t help it if I have,” said Peggy.

She felt cross and a little hurt because Clara had not seemed any more glad to see her when she had been just crazy to see Clara. Miss Rand had been delighted to see her, and even Mrs. Horton had seemed more glad than Clara. Only the peacock and Clara had seemed proud. Perhaps Clara had been afraid Peggy would rumple her dress. It was a very lovely shimmery dress with smocking. Peggy liked dresses that were smocked. She seated herself on a branch of the apple tree and began to swing back and forth. She was never shy herself, so it did not occur to her that Clara was shy. There did not seem to be anything to say, and it seemed a long, long time, since Thanksgiving Day, when she had last seen Clara, and as if they would have to get acquainted all over again.

“Did you have a nice journey?” said Peggy.

“No, horrid! I’m always car-sick. Father’s coming for us and we are going back in the automobile.”

“That will be great fun,” said Peggy.

“It will be better than the train,” said Clara, “but it’s a long ride, and I always get awfully tired.”

“Do you?” said Peggy, swinging back and forth again.

“How long your legs are,” said Clara.

Peggy stopped short in her swinging. “If you say anything about my legs I shall go crazy,” she announced. Then she climbed as high in the apple tree as she could get and dared them to come and join her. “Come up into my house, you short-legged people,” she called down. “I have a room in a tower and there are windows in it, and I can see all over the place. Come up here—why don’t you come?” 44

“Don’t be cross, Peggy,” said Alice. “You know I am scared to, and Clara would spoil her dress if

she climbed up there."

"What are dresses for if you can't climb trees in them?" Peggy called down.

"I wish I had a frock like yours, it is such a pretty color," said Clara, who always liked other people's things better than her own.

The compliment to her dress restored Peggy's good humor. She was very seldom cross, and she felt thoroughly ashamed of herself. So she condescended to play dolls with Clara and Alice, and there was no fun so great as to have Peggy play dolls. She put them through such adventures and made them have such narrow escapes that the little mothers were positively thrilled. So it was a very happy afternoon for every one, even for Miss Rand, who came out just before it was time for the children to go home, with a tray on which there was a pitcher of something nice and cold that tasted of orange, and some small doughnuts. Miss Rand sat down on an apple branch, which seat she preferred to a chair, and she sang for them, at Peggy's request, some Scotch songs, in a sweet contralto voice. 45

"It has been a nice afternoon," said Peggy, as she kissed Clara good-bye, and this time Clara gave her a most responsive kiss.

46

CHAPTER VI

DIANA

Peggy did not think of Lady Jane again until supper-time, when Mrs. Owen said to Alice, "I've warmed some milk for the cat. It is in the blue pitcher; you can turn it into her saucer."

Peggy kept very still. She hoped against hope that her furry little gray friend would come at the sound of her name. "I can't find her anywhere, mother," said Alice.

"I haven't seen her all the afternoon, now I think of it," said Mrs. Owen. "Did you see her, Peggy? Do you suppose she could have slipped out when Michael Farrell came in?"

"I am afraid she did, mother," said Peggy.

"Well, Peggy Owen," said Alice, "I never knew any one as careless as you are. You ought to be punished."

"You are not my mother," said Peggy.

"It is a very serious matter," and Alice gave a wise shake to her small head. "It is the second time you've let her get out."

"Well," said Mrs. Owen, "if she is so anxious to live at the other house and they want to keep her, suppose we let them have her? The other day when I called, Mrs. Carter told me how fond her little girl was of her, and the child hasn't been well." 47

"Give up Lady Jane!" cried Peggy in dismay.

"Mother, what are you thinking of!" said Alice. "She's one of the family. Would you give me up if I kept going back to the Carters'?"

"Certainly not; but that is entirely different."

"I love Lady Jane just as much as you love me, mother," said Alice.

"That is impossible. Don't talk such nonsense," said her mother.

It seemed an extreme statement, even to Peggy. "Do you love her as much as you love mother?" she asked.

Alice paused to consider.

"Don't ask her such a trying question, Peggy. She would probably find it a little less convenient to live without me than without the cat; but if you children care so much about her you can go and get her. It is too much to expect them to send her back again."

Mrs. Owen telephoned to Mrs. Carter and found that the cat had been spending the afternoon with them.

"I won't trouble you to send her back," said Mrs. Owen. "The children will go for her to-morrow afternoon."

The next day Peggy and Alice could hardly wait to finish their dinner, they were so eager to go for Lady Jane and get back in time to spend a long afternoon with Clara. As they came near the Carters' house, they saw Christopher just coming out of the gate. 48

“So you are going to take the cat back again?” he said disapprovingly, as he looked at the basket.

“She’s our cat,” Alice said sweetly, but very firmly.

Christopher looked down at Alice, who smiled up at him and showed her dimples.

“Yes, of course, she is your cat,” he said; for nobody could resist Alice. “But it seems too bad to yank her out every time she comes back to her old place.”

“We’ve had her a very long time,” said Alice. “I can hardly remember anything before we had her.”

“She must be a very old cat,” said Christopher, laughing.

It seemed strange to ring the doorbell of their own old house. The front door was painted green now and it had a shiny brass knocker. The office door was green, too. It was sad not to see their dear father’s name there any more. “Dr. T. H. Carter” seemed very unnatural. The grass was beginning to grow green, and the snowdrops and crocuses were in blossom by the front door. Mrs. Carter opened the door for them herself. She looked so pleasant that Peggy wanted to kiss her.

“I know you’ve come for Lady Jane,” she said, glancing at the basket. “She’s out calling this afternoon, but I’m sure she’ll be in before long. While you are waiting for her you can go up and see Diana. She is expecting you. You can go upstairs; she is out on the piazza.” 49

Everything seemed strange and yet familiar about the house. There was a new paper in the hall, and the floor and the stairs had been done over. They went out on the upper side piazza, which was glassed in, and here Diana was lying in a hammock that looked almost like a bed. Peggy loved Diana the moment she saw her. She had the same friendly face that Mrs. Carter had. Her hair was a sunshiny brown and so were her eyes, and her face, too, was a warm color, as if she had been out of doors a great deal. She had on a pale green wrapper with pink roses and green leaves embroidered on it. Peggy thought she had never seen anything so sweet in her life as Diana was, lying there in her green wrapper. She seemed a part of the pleasant springtime. Peggy noticed a copy of “Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland” lying on the hammock. This was one of her favorite books, and she began to talk about it at once.

Alice’s attention was caught by the sight of a flaxen-haired doll lying beside Diana in the hammock. “So you like dolls?” Alice said.

“I just love them,” said Diana.

“So do I,” said Alice.

And Peggy felt quite left out.

“What’s her name?” Alice asked. 50

“Alice.”

“That’s my name.”

“I named her for the ‘Wonderland Alice.’”

“Oh, but now she must be my namesake. I’ll be her aunt. She can call me ‘Aunt Alice.’”

Peggy picked up “Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland” while Diana and Alice made friends over the doll.

“Doesn’t your sister like to play dolls?” asked Diana.

“No,” said Alice, “and I don’t see why, for she makes up such exciting things when she does play. Yesterday when we played with Clara she had the dolls fly in an aeroplane, and she took them up into the highest branch of the apple tree.”

“Oh, do play with us now,” Diana begged.

So Peggy good-naturedly put down her book, and Alice, the doll, had never had so many exciting adventures in all her young life. They were so busy playing they did not any of them hear Lady Jane’s quiet footsteps as she climbed the rose trellis. Peggy saw her first, a furry, gray ball, poised lightly on the piazza rail. Alice saw her give a spring through the open pane of glass and land on the hammock. She was giving her joyous tea-kettle purr, and, oh, it was too much to bear, she was actually licking Diana’s hand.

“Darling pussy,” said Diana. She held her lovingly against her shoulder, and stroked her gray back. 51

Alice could hardly bear it. “Lady Jane, I am here,” she said.

But Lady Jane did not stir. Diana moved her into a more comfortable position, and she curled herself down for a nap.

Alice could bear it no longer. She went over, and, picking her up, she said, “You are going to stay with me.”

But Lady Jane scratched Alice's hands in her desire to escape, and gave a flying leap back to the hammock.

Peggy almost decided to take her mother's advice and let Diana keep the cat. She seemed to love her so very much, and to have so much less to make her happy than they had. It must be hard to lie still instead of being able to frisk about wherever one pleased. And yet, Diana looked happy. She didn't see why; she knew she could not be happy if she had to keep still like that.

"I think we ought to be going now," said Peggy, "because we told Clara we'd come early. We might leave Lady Jane to make Diana a little visit." This seemed a good compromise.

"No," said Alice, with decision, "I want to take her back right off now."

So Peggy helped Alice put the struggling cat into the basket. They shut the cover down tight, paying no attention to Lady Jane's dismal mews.

"I wish you didn't have to go," said Diana, a little sadly. "Do come again soon, and perhaps you'll bring Lady Jane with you." 52

"We'll come again soon," said Peggy.

"Yes," said Alice; and in her own mind she thought, "We'll never, never bring Lady Jane."

53

CHAPTER VII

THE CANARY-BIRD

Peggy and Alice had a very happy time the next few days playing with Clara. Their school had a vacation, too, so the children were able to spend long hours together, sometimes at one house and sometimes at the other. They liked better going to see Clara on account of the tree-house; and Clara liked better going to see them. She liked to come early and help to make the beds and do the dishes, for she was never allowed to help about the work at her own house, even now, when they were supposed to be camping out. The field behind the Owens' house, where the garden was to be, was a delightful place to play, and so was the little hill beyond.

The time passed only too quickly, and, at the end of the vacation, Clara was whisked back to New York with her father and mother and Miss Rand, this time in an automobile. The children missed her very much at first; and June, when she would be coming back again, seemed a long way off.

But they soon got interested in the children at school. Peggy liked school, and she was very fond of her teacher. On the way to school they passed Mrs. Butler's house. Peggy was always eager to stop and listen to the canary and have a little talk with Mrs. Butler, but Alice was always eager to go on for fear they would be late. 54

Sometimes they saw Mrs. Butler's daughter Flora, starting off for her work. She was in a milliner's store and wore the prettiest hats. Every time Peggy went by the milliner's window, she stopped to look at the hats. She had longed to have a new one for Easter, for her old brown straw looked so shabby. One day, when she was with her mother and Alice, she made them cross the street to look at a hat in the window that she wanted very much. It was a peanut straw with a ribbon of the same color around it, with long ends. The ribbon had a blue edge, just the color of Peggy's blue frocks.

"It does seem as if I'd got to have it," said Peggy. "Why should there be a hat with blue on it, just the color of my dresses, if it wasn't for me?"

"I wish I could get it for you, Peggy," said her mother. "When my ship comes in perhaps I will."

"When will it come in, mother?" Alice asked.

"I have not even got a ship—that's the worst of it. However, as we don't live at the seashore a garden is more useful. If we make the garden pay perhaps we can all have new hats."

"But they'll be winter hats if we wait for the garden, and I want the peanut straw," said Peggy.

Flora Butler, who was behind the counter, came to the door and spoke to them. 55

"How much is the peanut straw hat?" Peggy asked.

"Peggy, I have told you I can't get the hat for you," said her mother.

"It really is a bargain," said Miss Butler.

"It is a very pretty hat," said Mrs. Owen, "but I am spending more than I can afford on my garden."

“How’s the canary?” Peggy asked.

“He is all right. He will give you a free concert any time you can stop to hear him.”

“It seemed too bad he could not be free like the other birds,” Peggy thought.

And then one day, as they were coming back from school, she saw the empty cage in the window, and Mrs. Butler, half distracted, was asking the school-children if any of them had seen her canary-bird. “I don’t know what my husband will say when he comes back from the store for his dinner, and he finds it gone,” she said. “He sets as much store by that canary as if it was a puppy.”

The school-children stood about in an interested group.

“How did it get out?” Peggy asked.

“I was cleaning Sol’s cage, as usual, and he was out in the room. The window was open a little at the top, same as I’ve had it before once or twice these spring days, and Sol never took notice. The worst of it is, my husband told me I hadn’t orter keep it open, even a speck, while the bird was out of his cage. ‘Sol can wriggle through the smallest kind of a crack,’ says he; and it appears he was right. My, but he’ll be angry! ‘Marthy, it’ll serve you right,’ he’ll say.” 56

The children saw Mr. Butler coming down the street, just then, and they waited in fascinated silence to see what would happen next. One of the schoolboys, who always loved to make a sensation, called out as he passed, “Did you know your canary-bird is lost?”

“You don’t expect I am going to swallow that yarn, Gilbert Lawson?” the old man said. “You’d better shut up. ’Taint the first of April.”

“But it really and truly has flown away, Mr. Butler,” said Peggy.

“Flown away! Did my old woman leave the window open? Marthy, didn’t I tell you what would happen?” he said angrily as he vanished into the house. They could hear his voice raised louder and louder.

Peggy could see Mrs. Butler putting her handkerchief up to her eyes. “She’s crying,” said Peggy in an awed voice. “Oh, let’s see if we can’t find the canary-bird.”

“Find it!” said Gilbert scornfully. “You might as well look for a needle in a haymow.”

“Perhaps if we put the cage out he’d come back into it,” said Peggy.

“Do you suppose anything clever enough to get out of prison would be fool enough to go back again?” said he. “Well, there seems to be nothing doing now and I guess I’ll go home.” 57

Gilbert and his brother Ralph and the other boys went toward the village, and so did the girls who lived in that direction. But Peggy and Alice and Anita Spaulding still lingered.

“I’m going to tell them that I’ll come back as soon as dinner is over and find the bird for them,” said Peggy. “I know I can find it.”

“Oh, Peggy, maybe mother won’t let you come,” said Alice.

“She’s a sensible mother; I know she’ll let me come,” said Peggy, as she ran up the steps.

Mrs. Butler came to the door. Her eyes looked very red and she still seemed quite upset.

“Oh, Mrs. Butler,” said Peggy breathlessly, “I know I can find the canary-bird—I know I can. I’ll come right straight back as soon as I’ve had my dinner.”

Alice and Peggy ran home and Peggy explained breathlessly about the canary. “Mother dear, Mrs. Butler has lost Sol; and I know I can find him. So please give us our dinner quick.”

“Who is Sol?” Mrs. Owen asked.

“The canary—I know I can find him. I can tell him by his song, and then I can climb up and put his cage in a tree and get him back into it.”

“He won’t come back once he’s free: Gilbert says he won’t,” said Alice. 58

“Don’t you pay any attention to what Gilbert says,” said Peggy.

Mrs. Owen was very much interested. “Peggy is right,” she said. “I once knew of a canary-bird that escaped and went back into his old cage. If you can only find him it is not impossible.”

“There, I told you she was a sensible mother,” said Peggy.

She could hardly wait to finish her dinner, and thought of going off without any dessert. But when she found it was rice pudding with raisins, she changed her mind. The two little girls went so fast to Mrs. Butler’s it was almost like flying.

“We’ve come to find Sol,” said Peggy.

Mr. Butler was just finishing his dinner. “I tell you what,” he said, “I’ll give five dollars to any one who’ll bring back that canary-bird safe and sound.”

Peggy and Alice went across the street and they ran along until they thought they had reached a spot that might appeal to Sol. This was the Thornton place, which was a bower of green with its partly open foliage.

“I’m sure he’ll be here,” said Peggy. “I’d come here if I were a canary. Oh, Alice, listen!” From somewhere, far, far above them, there came delicious trills and the joyous sound that Peggy longed to make herself. Nothing but a canary could sing like that. “Spring has come and I am free; and the world is too beautiful for anything,” he seemed to say. 59

“It is Sol; I know his voice,” Peggy cried. “It seems ’most too bad to put him in prison again—only I’m sure he’ll be homesick when the dark night comes.”

“And it might rain and get his feathers all draggled,” said Alice.

“And perhaps the other birds would be horrid to him because he’s so different,” said Peggy. “Anyway, we’ve got to get him if we can. Look, Alice!” Far up at the top of the maple tree, the leaves of which were partly open, was a tiny golden ball, and from its throat came forth the glad spring song. “Stay and watch him, Alice, while I go over to Mrs. Butler’s and get the cage.”

Alice stood rooted to the spot, watching the little creature, like a yellow sunbeam among the green opening leaves. It seemed a long time before Peggy came back. Mrs. Butler was with her, creaking along heavily. She was carrying the cage.

“Of course, he won’t come back now he’s free,” said Mrs. Butler. “Dear help us, but it’s him that’s singin’!” she said. “I thought you’d just mistaken a song sparrow for him.” She looked up and saw her favorite in the tree-top.

Peggy took the cage out of Mrs. Butler’s hand.

“I’ll climb up,” she said, “and I’ll leave his house-door open, for he hasn’t any latch-key.”

“Well, if that isn’t the limit,” said Mrs. Butler with a laugh. “To think of Sol with a latch-key!” 60

“But I said he didn’t have one,” said Peggy.

Peggy, in her blue frock, climbed up into the maple tree, and her yellow hair looked almost as sunshiny as the canary. Mrs. Butler handed the cage up to her. There was some of the bird’s favorite seed in the cage and water for him to drink.

“I guess he’ll go home when he gets hungry,” said Peggy.

Mrs. Butler kept laughing to herself and saying over and over, “He hasn’t any latch-key; if that don’t beat all.”

Peggy scrambled down again, and they all stood waiting to see what would happen next; and nothing happened. It was very discouraging. Finally they sat down on the Thorntons’ wall to rest.

“Oh, look!” Peggy cried in excitement.

The bird gave a few little hops along the branch and then fluttered down to a lower perch nearer the cage. The children’s eyes grew big with excitement. Alice jumped down from the wall and ran nearer to the tree to get a better view. The noise she made startled the bird, and he flew on to a higher branch.

“There, Alice, see what you’ve done!” Peggy said.

“Oh, dear, oh, dear!”

They sat still for a long time, and after this Alice did not dare either to speak or move.

“Well, I guess I’ll go home,” said Mrs. Butler. “‘A watched pot never boils.’ Mebbe you’d like some refreshments as well as Sol. Don’t you want to go home with me and get some lemonade and cake?” 61

But even this offer could not lure the children from the spot. Peggy was afraid to go off, even for a moment, for fear the canary would slip in for a meal and out again before she could close him in. The time passed slowly. After what seemed hours Mrs. Butler came back and brought them some cake and lemonade. It tasted very good, but they soon finished it, and Mrs. Butler went away with the empty dishes, shaking her fist at Sol.

“You are the most provoking bird,” she said, “keeping everybody waiting, and you so small you could go in one’s pocket, if only you hadn’t wings.”

Alice lost her patience before Peggy did. “We ought to be going home,” she said. “Mother’ll wonder what has become of us.”

“All right, go home if you want to. I’m going to stick right here until he gets hungry and goes into his house.”

“Perhaps I’ll come back again,” said Alice.

It seemed lonely after Alice had left her. Peggy was tired of keeping still. She took one run across the Thornton place, but this seemed to disturb the canary, so she flung herself down on

the grass.

“I’ll look away while I count a hundred,” she said.

She counted a hundred and when she looked back, there was the canary in his cage, and she had not seen him go in. It was too provoking. She climbed up, breathless with excitement, and shut the door.

62

CHAPTER VIII

THE REWARD

Mr. Butler was just coming back from his work as Peggy reached the gate of his house.

“I’ve got him,” she called triumphantly.

“Bless my soul!” said the old man. “Have you been waiting for him all this time?”

“Yes,” said Peggy

“What a patient little girl you are.”

He put his hand in his trousers’ pocket and pulled out a roll of bills. He looked them over until he came to a crisp, new, five-dollar bill which he handed to Peggy.

Peggy ran all the way home, with the five-dollar bill clasped in her hand. She had never once thought of the money while she was watching the canary. He was so beautiful, with his yellow feathers against the branches of the tree, with the blue sky above him, and his song was so wonderful, that she had not thought about any reward. But now that she had the money, she felt as if some one had given her a fortune, for she had never had so much money at once, in all her short life. Now she could get the hat, for it did not cost nearly five dollars; and there would be some money left to buy—what should she buy? Something for Alice and her mother.

63

“Oh, mother,” she said, as she burst into the room, “I got him, and see what Mr. Butler gave me! Now I can get my new hat!”

“You don’t mean to say you took money for doing a kindness?” said Mrs. Owen.

“He gave it to me,” said Peggy.

“Yes, so I understood, but, my dear little girl, the Butlers haven’t any more money than we have. They are poor people. Five dollars means a great deal to them.”

“He seemed to want to give it to me,” said Peggy.

“That was very kind, but you ought to have said, ‘I didn’t think of the reward. I shouldn’t feel it right to be paid for doing a kindness. I am sure my mother wouldn’t want me to keep the money.’”

“But I never thought about you. Truly, mother, you never once came into my head. And I did not think it was being paid. I thought it was kind of a thank-offering.”

“Well, we’ll take the money back as soon as supper is over,” said Mrs. Owen.

Peggy ate her supper in silence. She was sure her mother could not know how much she wanted the new hat. And to think she felt so sure of having it, and then to have it snatched away was hard! And she was afraid Mr. Butler’s feelings would be hurt; for she was sure he did not think of a reward, but a thank-offering.

64

After supper Mrs. Owen and the two children went down the street to Mrs. Butler’s house. It was pleasant to see the canary-bird in his cage in the window. He was silent, as if he were tired out with the excitement of the day. Peggy felt tired, too, and she thought, “If I were only the kind of little girl who cried, I should cry now, because I am so disappointed about the hat.”

Mrs. Butler’s daughter Flora had just come in from the milliner’s shop. She was wearing a pretty hat, with a wreath of wild roses around it.

“Well, Peggy, I hear you have found the most important member of the family,” said Flora. “I’m sure they wouldn’t take on half so bad if I was lost.”

“I guess you could find your way home if you were lost,” said Peggy.

They begged Mrs. Owen and the children to sit down and have supper with them.

“Thank you, but we have had our supper,” said Mrs. Owen. “I only came down for a minute, just to say how good you were to give my little girl the five dollars, but I could not let her keep it. I

don’t want her to feel she is to be benefited in any other way when she does a kindness, except having the pleasure that comes from helping somebody.”

“I thought I’d like to have the pleasure of helping somebody,” said Mr. Butler. “I offered the reward, and she seemed real pleased to get it.” 65

“Of course, she was pleased,” said Peggy’s mother. “But I am sure it was not the idea of the reward that started her out to find the canary. So, if you please, Mr. Butler,”—and Mrs. Owen handed him the five-dollar bill as she spoke,—“I’d rather you kept this. We’ve always been good friends and neighbors, and I am glad if my little girl has been able to help you, and sometime, I am sure, you and Mrs. Butler will be ready to help me.”

Mrs. Butler had been watching Peggy’s face. She saw she was sorry not to have the money, and she shrewdly guessed there was something she wanted very much that the five dollars would buy.

“I see just the way your ma feels,” said Mrs. Butler, “but it does seem as if Sol might make you a little present. Can you think of anything you would like?”

“Yes,” said Peggy promptly, “the hat in the milliner’s window with the ribbon with the blue edge.”

“My dear little girl—?” began Mrs. Owen.

“That is just the thing,” said Mrs. Butler. “I’m sure Sol will be real pleased to give it to you.”

Mrs. Owen was about to say it was too much of a present, but she looked at Peggy’s shining eyes and then at Mrs. Butler’s beaming face. Who was she to stand out against these two? If it were indeed more blessed to give than to receive, Mr. and Mrs. Butler were getting their reward.

So the next day a paper box arrived at the Owens’ door for “Miss Peggy Owen, with the compliments and gratitude of her friend Sol.” 66

Oh, joy of joys! It was the hat. Peggy tried it on, and it was even nicer than she had thought, for it was so light, and it had such a good brim. She went down that very afternoon to make a special call on Mrs. Butler and Sol; and the canary sang again his melodious song.

67

CHAPTER IX

CHOOSING A KITTEN

Now the warm weather had come to stay, Mrs. Owen decided that it was cruel to keep Lady Jane in the house, besides being almost impossible. The children must take the risk. If she chose to live with the Carters, it could not be helped. Perhaps Diana needed her more than they did.

“But she is my cat,” said Alice. “Can’t I go and get her back whenever she goes there?”

“Yes, if you have the patience.”

“I shall have the patience to go a hundred and seventy-five times,” said Alice.

She and Peggy liked Diana, but whenever Mrs. Owen had suggested to her little girls that they should go to see her, they had always some good reason for not going. Mrs. Owen suspected it was on account of Lady Jane. It was awkward to meet Diana when they had locked Lady Jane up, knowing perfectly well that she preferred to live with Diana. Peggy thought it was not fair to take advantage of anything so small. But the cat was Alice’s, not hers, as Alice reminded her. And then, one pleasant day, Lady Jane decided to set up housekeeping for good and all in her old home. Alice wanted to go down at once and bring her back. But Mrs. Owen insisted that she should be allowed to stay in the home of her choice for at least a week. 68

And before the week was up, Diana telephoned to Alice. “What do you think, Alice,” she said, “Lady Jane has four teenty-tinety kittens—the darlingest, most cuddly things!”

“Oh, she does have such lovely children!” said Alice, with a pang of envy.

“They are in a wood-box out in the shed,” said Diana. “At least it looks like a wood-box, but there isn’t any wood in it.”

“Yes, that is her old house,” said Alice.

“Mother has put in an old piece of blanket so as to make them comfortable,” said Diana.

“Has she really?” said Alice.

“Mother won’t let us touch the kittens until they get their eyes open. She says in two weeks she

hopes you and Peggy will come down and see them."

"Not for two weeks?" said Alice. "We always look at them a lot. I'd like her back before two weeks. That is too long a visit."

"Mother says it is bad for kittens to be handled. She says to forget all about them for two weeks."

"Ask her if she knows what color they are," said Peggy.

"Have you seen them?" Alice asked.

"Yes, mother let us look at them just once, and we each chose a kitten for ourselves."

"Do you mean to say she is going to let you keep them all?" Alice asked. "Mother never let us keep but two." 69

"We can keep them if you will let us have them," said Diana. "Of course we know she is your cat, but mother thought maybe your mother wouldn't want the bother of four kittens."

"You didn't ask her what color they are. Let me talk to her," said Peggy, and she seized the receiver. "It is Peggy talking now. What color are the kittens?"

"Tipsy is black with just a white tip to his tail, and Topsy is black with a white vest and four white paws, and Lady Janet is silvery gray, almost exactly like her mother, and Gretchen is gray and white with a gray chin."

"And your mother doesn't mind the bother of four kittens?" said Peggy.

"Mother," she said, as Mrs. Owen came into the room, "Lady Jane has four children, and Mrs. Carter is going to keep all of them if we'll let her."

"We shall want one ourselves so as to keep her contented," said Alice.

"My dear little girl," said her mother, "it would be cruel to move Lady Jane until the kittens are big enough to look out for themselves. I have a few things to do besides taking care of her and her family. If the Carters want her and she wants to stay, there is no use in fighting any longer."

"But she is my darling cat," said Alice, with tears in her eyes. "How would you feel, mother, if I decided I would rather live in my old house with the Carters than with you. Would you let me stay?" 70

"Certainly not, because you are not capable of judging what is best for yourself, and because I could not spare you, and neither would Mrs. Carter want to bring up another child. But if you were my pussy-cat, instead of my child, and you preferred to live with a little girl who was sick half the time, and had so few pleasures, and if you had four furry children, and the Carters wanted to keep them, I should be glad to have everybody happy."

"All but me, mother," said Alice, "and Peggy—she will miss Lady Jane."

"I am sure they will let you have one of the kittens," said Mrs. Owen. "In about two months you can have one of them."

"Not for two months?" said Peggy. "Oh, mother, think of a catless house for two months. It will be so desolate."

"But you can go and choose your kitten in two weeks," said Mrs. Owen, "and you can often go to see it."

It was a bright spring afternoon when Peggy and Alice went down to Diana's house to choose the kitten. They took along with them a great bunch of Mayflowers for Diana. They had picked them the afternoon before, when they had gone with their mother up to their camp on the hill. It was a rude little hut that their father had built. Later in the season, wild strawberries would grow on the place, and then would come raspberries, and afterwards blueberries and blackberries. Mrs. Owen was planning to make preserves for themselves, and for some of the neighbors. She looked over the ground with interest while the children frisked about and stopped from time to time to pick Mayflowers. 71

Diana was sitting up in bed when the children arrived. The bed was of mahogany and had four twisted posts. The white quilt had been turned back and a book and Diana's doll Alice were lying on the blanket. The sun came shining in through the two west windows. The room looked very fresh, with the new white paint and pale green walls.

"This used to be mother's room when we had the house," said Peggy. "It is much prettier now."

Diana was wearing her green kimono with the pink roses on it. "They gave me the best room because I'm sick so much," said Diana. "Wasn't it nice of them, when I am the youngest in the family?"

"I'd rather have the smallest room in the house, and be well," said Peggy.

She was sorry she had said it, for a shadow seemed to cross Diana's bright face. "Father expects I'll be well much sooner, now we live in the country," she said.

“Oh, what lovely Mayflowers!” she added, as Peggy dropped the big bunch down beside her. Diana picked it up and plunged her nose into it. 72

“Peggy and I picked them for you yesterday,” said Alice. “We were up at our camp.”

Diana listened with interest to the children’s description of the place.

“There are pine woods around the camp,” said Peggy, “and on the hillside and in the pasture such delicious berries; and later on we shall go up and pick them; we always do. We have to walk now, for we haven’t a horse or automobile any more. But it is a nice walk and not so very long. Maybe your father will drive you up when you get better.”

“I’d like to see it,” said Diana.

Just then Mrs. Carter came into the room with a basket.

“Oh, have you brought the kittens?” Peggy asked.

“Yes, they are all here.” She took out one kitten after another and put them all on the bed in front of Diana.

“Oh, what sweet things!” Alice cried. She put her hand on the black kitten with the white tip to his tail. “This is Tipsy, isn’t it?” she asked.

“Yes.”

“And I know this is Topsy,” said Peggy, picking up the other black-and-white kitten.

“Oh, what a darling!” said Alice as she spied the gray-and-white kitten. “That must be Gretchen.”

“Oh, see that one, Alice,” and Peggy pointed to the silvery gray kitten that looked like a miniature Lady Jane. The children went into an ecstasy of delight over the four soft, furry little things that were so complete and yet small. 73

As Mrs. Carter was leaving the room, she said, “I’ll come back in a few minutes, for I want to take them home before Lady Jane comes back from her afternoon walk. She’d be terribly worried if she found they were gone. So you’ll have to choose your kitten quickly.”

“Can we choose whatever one we want?” Peggy asked.

“Almost any one,” said Diana. “We’ve each chosen for ourselves, but I’ll let you choose mine if you want her; and I don’t believe Tom would mind if you chose his. I’m not sure about Christopher—he’s so decided.”

“Well, anyway, I don’t know which I like best,” said Peggy.

“Well, I know which one I want,” said Alice, and she picked up the silvery gray kitten. “I want Lady Janet, she’s so like her mother, except she’s a lighter color.”

“That’s Christopher’s kitten,” said Diana.

“Well, I don’t care if it is,” said Alice in her gentlest voice; “I want it. I think if I am so unfortunate as to lose my precious Lady Jane, I ought to have the child that’s most like her.”

“They are all sweet,” said Peggy. “Which is the kitten that doesn’t belong to anybody?”

“Topsy.” 74

“Let’s take Topsy,” said Peggy. “It would be a change to have a black-and-white kitten.”

“It would not be a nice change,” said Alice. “I’d like to go and find Christopher.”

He came in while the kittens were still there. “Oh, Christopher,” said Alice, “please I want Lady Janet. I want her very much because she’s so like her mother. I know she’s your kitten, but I want her very much, please, Christopher.”

“I want her very much, too,” said Christopher.

In spite of his pleasant smile, he had a determined face. He looked as if when his mind was made up he did not easily change it.

“You see, if I can’t have Lady Jane I want Lady Janet,” said Alice.

“Who says you can’t have Lady Jane?” said Christopher. “You can have her back as soon as the kittens are old enough to look out for themselves.”

“You know she won’t stay with us,” said Alice reproachfully.

“Well, I can’t help that,” said Christopher.

“Come, Alice,” said Peggy, “we must be going now.”

She turned and looked at Christopher. “If you are so mean as not to let my sister have the kitten she wants when Lady Jane is her cat, I shall never speak to you as long as I live. I think you are a selfish pig. You can keep all four kittens. There are plenty of kittens in town. Good-bye,

Diana.”

“Oh, don’t go,” said Diana, looking very much worried. “Christopher was only teasing her.”

This was true, but Peggy was not sure of it. She thought Diana wanted to make peace.

“Peggy doesn’t really mean it,” Alice said. “Sometimes she gets angry, but she doesn’t stay angry. Please, Christopher,”—and she looked at him beseechingly,—“I would like Lady Janet.”

“She is my kitten,” said Christopher, and Alice’s face clouded, “but I will give her to you,” he added.

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CHAPTER X

THE WILD GARDEN

Meanwhile, as the kittens were growing, the garden was growing, too. Peggy thought it was strange that small furry things and plants and vegetables should change so much in a few weeks, while children did not seem to change at all.

The garden had been a delight from the very first, for they had found it so interesting to follow old Michael about with the horses, as he ploughed the field at the back of the house and got it ready for planting. It was still more exciting to watch their mother and the old gardener, as they planned where the different crops were to be. Mrs. Owen had made one of her blue frocks, which she wore, and Peggy had on one of hers, and Alice felt sorry not to be in uniform, but she made a nice bit of color in the landscape in a pink frock.

Next came the planting. They helped about this. It was such fun to pat the earth down after the seed had been put in. There were rows and rows of peas, and rows and rows of string-beans and shell-beans, and some corn and turnips and carrots, and, also, a great many tomato plants. Mrs. Owen was going to put up all the peas and beans and tomatoes that Mrs. Horton needed, as well as her jams and jellies. And she was going to put up vegetables, fruit, and berries for Mrs. Carter, also, as she had been too busy getting settled to have any time to start a garden this year. May was a joyous month. The planting was all done, and some bits of green were poking their heads above the ground.

77

In June Clara came back, and they had her to play with. They saw a great deal of Diana, too, for they made frequent trips to see how Lady Janet was getting on. One day Clara went with them, and she decided she must have Topsy just as soon as she was big enough to leave home. This would leave only two kittens for three children, but Diana said if Lady Jane was to be hers she would let Christopher have Gretchen.

If Peggy and Alice took pleasure in the garden behind the house, this was nothing compared with their delight in what they called the wild garden, on the hill. The strawberries were the first of the berries to be picked. There were not a great many of them, but as Mrs. Horton and Mrs. Carter both wanted wild strawberry preserves, Mrs. Owen thought it best to get what she could from her own land. So one glorious June day she and the children started for the hill, with their luncheon, and pails to pick the berries in. Alice picked as carefully as her mother did, although not so fast; but Peggy put soft berries in with the good ones, and some bits of leaves somehow got in with her berries.

78

“Peggy, look what you are doing,” said her mother. “Those berries are over-ripe.”

“I don’t see what difference it makes, mother, so long as you are going to make strawberry jam. Oh, mother, look at that squirrel, he gave a skip from one branch to another. See what a bushy tail he has.”

“Peggy, do attend to your work.”

“Mother, you can’t expect me to work all the time on such a sunshiny day. It is just as important to watch squirrels and birds.”

“Well, perhaps it is for you, but not for me. I can’t put up squirrels for my neighbors by the cold-pack process.”

When it came to the preserving of the strawberries, Peggy and Alice were so interested that they went out into the kitchen so as to watch the whole process.

“Children, you mustn’t eat any more of the strawberries,” said their mother. “Remember, I am putting them up for other people.”

“But, mother, you’ve got lots and lots of them,” said Peggy. “I didn’t know we picked so many.”

“I had to buy a great many more to fill my orders,” said Mrs. Owen, “and even now I shan’t have

as much wild strawberry preserve as Mrs. Horton and Mrs. Carter wanted; remember the strawberries represent just so much money."

"But, mother," said Peggy, "I think it would be so much nicer to keep the strawberry preserve for ourselves than to have the money. We can't eat that." 79

"Children, do keep out of this kitchen."

"Mother, I don't see why it is called the 'cold-pack' process, when you heat the jars," said Peggy.

"Oh, do run along, children; you might go down to Diana's and see how Lady Janet is getting along."

"She is getting quite big," said Alice. "Can we bring her home to-day?"

"Not to-day," said her mother firmly. "I must get this preserving done before she comes."

Picking raspberries was even more delightful than picking strawberries, because they were bigger, and there were so many more of them; but going for blueberries was the best of all, for there were such quantities of them in the pasture on the hill that one could get quarts and quarts. Indeed, there were so many that Mrs. Owen was glad of extra pickers. She proposed having a picnic and asking Miss Rand and Clara, and Diana and her brothers. Diana was much stronger now, and her father was going to take her to the picnic in his automobile. Mrs. Carter decided she would like to go, too, and so did her brother, who was staying with them for a few days. Diana thought that, next to her father, there was no other man in the whole world so delightful as her Uncle Joe. He was tall and slim and had friendly brown eyes, and such a kind face and merry smile that Peggy and Alice and Clara liked him the first moment they saw him. 80

The first moment had been the day Clara went for her kitten. He had put the struggling Topsy into the basket in such a nice way, and he talked to her as if she had been a person. "Topsy, you are going to a very good home," he said. "Miss Rand is one who understands people like you, and so does Clara. You will have the choicest food—lamb and fish, and all that you most desire, and you will be so well fed you will not have to live, like the Chinese, on mice."

Lady Janet was still living at the Carters' on account of the preserving, but she was getting so big she was to come to them very soon.

"If we wait until she gets much bigger, she will be running home just as her mother did," said Peggy.

The day of the picnic was a glorious one. Peggy called it a "blue day" because the sky was so blue. It was a deep blue, and there were great fleecy clouds floating about. The blueberries were the most wonderful blue, two shades, dark and light, with a shimmer to them, and Peggy's blue frock seemed a part of all the brightness of the day. Alice had on her yellow frock, and Diana was in green, and Clara in pink. It was almost too beautiful a day for them to stop and pick berries, Peggy thought; but that was what they had come for. Mrs. Owen said she would give a pint of preserved blueberries to the boy or girl who picked the first quart, provided they were carefully picked. So every one set to work to pick with a will. 81

Tom got his pail filled first, but as he was older than the other children, Diana said she thought Peggy ought to have the prize, because she had filled her quart pail almost as soon as Tom had; for Peggy, who was naturally quick, had been so anxious to come out ahead that she had not stopped to look at squirrels and birds. When Mrs. Owen examined the berries, however, she found some that were not ripe in Peggy's pail. Diana and Alice had both of them picked slowly, but carefully. Christopher had almost as many as Peggy, but his had to be gone over, and some unripe ones taken out. Clara had the fewest and poorest of all. She was not used to applying herself, and very soon she said she was tired and that the sun made her head ache; so Miss Rand said she could go into the little hut and rest. But this did not suit her, for she liked to be with the other children.

"I am going to give the prize to Diana," said Mrs. Owen, "as Tom won't take it, for she has picked carefully."

"Let's see who has picked the most," said Peggy, as she examined the pails. "Oh, mother has a lot more than anybody. Mother, you'll have to keep some for yourself, and Alice and I can help you eat them."

Miss Rand had a great many, and so had Mrs. Carter, but her brother Joe had the fewest of all the grown people, for he had been building a fire in the hut, so that Mrs. Owen could fry bacon and heat cocoa for dinner. 82

When they all took a recess in picking and sat down on the piazza of the camp for their dinner, Peggy thought she had never tasted anything so good in her life as the bread and butter and hard-boiled eggs and crisp bacon. For dessert they had saucers of blueberries and cups of cocoa, and some cake and doughnuts, which Mrs. Carter and Mrs. Horton had contributed to the feast.

As they were resting after dinner, Mrs. Carter read a story aloud to them. Then they all picked blueberries again. Diana and Clara soon got tired, and Miss Rand fixed a comfortable place for them to lie down on the window-seats in the hut. Mrs. Owen took some gray blankets out of one

of the lockers and covered them up carefully.

At night, when Dr. Carter came for them with the automobile, they had the large pails Mrs. Owen had brought filled with blueberries as well as the quart pails. Peggy had never seen so many blueberries together in her life. The automobile had seats for seven. There were four grown people at the picnic, and Dr. Carter made five. And there were six children.

“I’ll come back for a second load,” Dr. Carter said. 83

“I’d rather walk,” said their Uncle Joe, “and I am sure the boys would.”

“We’ll go down by the short cut,” said Tom.

“All right. I can stow the rest of you in.”

The three ladies got in on the back seat, Diana was in front with her father, and Alice and Clara were in the side seats.

“Peggy, we can make room for you in front,” said Dr. Carter.

But Peggy had no idea of missing that walk down the hill with the boys and their Uncle Joe. “I’d rather walk,” she said.

“Jump in, Peggy,” said her mother, “you must be very tired.”

“I’m not a bit tired, truly I’m not, mother. I’ve been so tied down all day picking berries, I’m just crazy for a run.”

“Let the young colt have a scamper,” said Dr. Carter; “it will do her good.”

As Peggy danced along down the hillside, she thought how fortunate Diana was to have a father and an uncle and two brothers. She raced down the hill with Christopher while Tom and his uncle followed at their heels.

“There, I have beaten you, Christopher,” said Peggy, breathlessly, as she sank down on a rock at the bottom of the hill.

“I could have beaten you if I had tried,” said Christopher. 84

“Then why didn’t you?”

“Well, I thought, as you were a girl and younger, I’d let you get a start, and I expected to pass you.”

“Oh, dear, I am tired of being a girl. Just let’s play I’m a boy. You can call me Peter.”

“I don’t want to play you are a boy. I like you better the way you are,” Christopher said, as he glanced at her blue frock.

“Yes, Peggy,” said Uncle Joe, “we all like you better the way you are.”

“Well, I suppose I’ll have to be a girl and make the best of it. But I do wish I had men and boys in my family.”

“You might adopt us,” said Uncle Joe. “I would like you and Alice for nieces. A lot of children I’m no relation to call me ‘Uncle Joe,’ and I’m sure the boys would like you and Alice for cousins.”

“You bet we would,” said Christopher.

So Peggy came back from the picnic a much richer little girl than she had been when she went to it. “Alice,” she said, as she burst into the house, “Mr. Beal says we can call him ‘Uncle Joe,’ and we can play that Tom and Christopher are our cousins.”

“I’d like to call him ‘Uncle Joe,’” said Alice, “for he was so nice about Topsy, but I don’t want the boys for my cousins.”

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CHAPTER XI

THE GEOGRAPHY GAME

The children’s Uncle Joe was an architect. He was making some additions to Mrs. Horton’s house, and so he came up every little while to see how the work was getting on; and later, he was given the new Savings Bank to build. He often came on from New York for a few days and stayed with the Carters. All the children were delighted when he came, for he was just as nice as a child to play with. In fact, he was nicer, for he knew so much more. He was a great traveler, for he had been a Lieutenant in the army and had been across seas. He had traveled, also, in the United States, and there was hardly a State he had not stayed in. The children were never tired

of hearing his stories about places and people. He had, too, a delightful way of inventing games, making them up out of his own head.

One rainy October afternoon, Alice and Peggy were sitting in the living-room when the telephone rang. Alice had Lady Janet curled up in her arms, and Peggy was reading aloud from "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland." Peggy flung down her book and ran to the telephone.

"Oh, Peggy," said Diana's plaintive voice, "it is so wet I have had to stay in all day; can't you and Alice come and play with me?" 86

"I guess so," said Peggy, who was always ready to go anywhere; "I'll ask mother."

"Don't let's go out, it is so wet," said Alice, who was interested in the story.

"I'm going if mother'll let me," said Peggy.

Mrs. Owen had no objection, and, as Alice did not like to be left behind, she and Peggy put on their rubbers and raincoats.

Alice gave Lady Janet a parting hug. "You darling, I am going to see your mother," she said; "shall I give her your love? Peggy, she is licking my hand," said Alice.

The two children went out into the chilly October rain. Alice shivered, but Peggy was delighted to be out. She walked into every puddle she came to.

"You'll get your feet wet," said Alice.

"I'm just trying to see if it will go over my rubbers," said Peggy. "Oh, it did that time—I didn't think it would."

"You've got your feet very wet," said Alice.

"I know I have, but I can dry my shoes and stockings at Diana's."

Diana was sitting before the fire in her room with a book. She jumped up and flung her arms about Alice, who was nearer her, and then about Peggy.

"Peggy has got her feet wet," said Alice anxiously. "She'll have to put on some of your stockings while hers are drying." 87

"I can't get into Diana's stockings," Peggy said, as she looked down at her feet. "I'll just sit in my bare feet until my shoes and stockings are dry."

"Uncle Joe and the boys may come in. I'll get you some of mother's," said Diana.

So Peggy was dressed in a pair of black silk stockings that were much too large for her, and a pair of bedroom slippers that were so big that she was afraid to walk for fear they would fall off. She liked the slippers very much, however, for they were such a pretty shade of blue, and they had black fur all around the edge.

It was early in the afternoon, so the children settled down for a long play. They were beginning to wish they could think of something else to do when Uncle Joe came in.

"How cozy you look," said he. "Can you give a poor working-man a seat by the fire?"

Peggy who was nearest the fire, sprang up, forgetting all about her slippers.

"I think I see a bird in borrowed plumage," said Uncle Joe. "Did you get your feet wet?"

"I walked into a mud-puddle on purpose, for the fun of it," said Peggy. "I wanted to see if it would go over my rubbers. I didn't think it would, but it did."

"Oh, Uncle Joe, can't we play the geography game?" said Diana. "Peggy has never played it."

"I don't like geography so very much," said Alice. 88

"It's just a game," said Diana. "We have to see who can say the forty-eight States quickest. We say them like the alphabet, those beginning with A first, and the one who gets the A's done first looks them up on the map, to see where they are. It's lots of fun."

"Diana likes it because she always beats Tom and Christopher," said her uncle.

"Let's begin," said Diana, "one, two, three."

But neither Peggy nor Alice could think of a single State beginning with A.

"There are three," said Diana. "You can look them up on the map and find them." She brought out an atlas and turned to a map of the United States.

Alice and Peggy pored over the map eagerly.

"I've found one," said Peggy, "it's Arizona."

"Here is Alabama," said Alice.

"Here, is another one, Arkansas," said Peggy. "Now for the B's."

“There aren’t any B’s,” said Diana.

Tom and Christopher came in just then, and Peggy and Alice listened as the others played the game. Once in a while Peggy thought of a State beginning with the right letter, but, as a rule, she thought of the wrong States. Massachusetts would pop into her head when Uncle Joe was asking for I’s, and South Carolina when he wanted the K’s. It was quite discouraging, for the other children had played the game so much.

“This is only the first part of the game,” said Diana. “Uncle Joe has had us each trace a map of the United States, and then we play we have to live in one of the States that begins with the same letter our first name begins with; then we put the tracing over white cardboard and cut out our State, and we can paint it any color we like. We are going to put in the rivers and big towns by and by. I can’t live in any State but Delaware,” she said regretfully.

“There is only Pennsylvania for me to live in,” said Peggy.

“Alice can live in Arizona or Alabama or Arkansas,” said Christopher.

“I don’t want to live in any of them,” said Alice gently, with her sweetest smile. “I want to live just where I do live.”

“But New Hampshire doesn’t begin with an A,” said Peggy.

“I know it doesn’t, but I don’t want to live in any other State.”

“But it’s only a game,” said Peggy. “Don’t you want to play you live in nice Alabama where they have such warm winters, and there are such lots of cunning little black children?”

“No, I don’t. I want to cut out a map of New Hampshire and paint it pink.”

“But, Alice, you’ve got to play the game,” said Peggy.

“I’m going to play my own kind of game and cut out a map of New Hampshire and paint it pink.”

“If she doesn’t care to live in Alabama or Arizona or Arkansas, we might let her live in a State beginning with the first letter of her last name,” said Uncle Joe. “How do you feel about living in Ohio or Oklahoma or Oregon?”

“I don’t want to live in any of those States. I want to live in New Hampshire and paint it pink.”

“But you can’t,” Peggy insisted. “You’ve got to play the game.”

Alice looked up beseechingly at Uncle Joe. She smiled and showed her dimples. “Dear Uncle Joe,” she said sweetly, “can’t you fix the game some way so I can live in New Hampshire and paint it pink?”

Uncle Joe looked thoughtful. A bright idea occurred to him. “Alice, what word do the three last letters of your last name spell if you begin at the end and spell backwards?”

“New,” said Peggy, before Alice could speak.

“She can live in New Hampshire on that account,” said Uncle Joe.

“That isn’t fair,” said Peggy. “I ought to be able to live in New Hampshire.”

“You can if you like—or in New York, or New Jersey, or New Mexico.”

Peggy was dazzled by these opportunities for travel.

“It isn’t a bit fair,” said Christopher. “Poor Diana oughtn’t to have to live in Delaware when Peggy and Alice have such a lot of States to choose from.”

“It doesn’t seem quite fair,” Uncle Joe admitted. “I’ll have to let Diana live in a State beginning with a C if she prefers.”

“And I am C. C., so I don’t have much choice,” said Christopher.

“When I get my map of Delaware painted and fixed and I’ve lived there awhile, I’ll come and live in Colorado with you, Christopher.”

“I’m going to begin with Pennsylvania,” said Peggy. “I’m going to play the game in the right way. But where can Uncle Joe live? In Jersey with the New left off?”

“As I’m uncle to half the children I know, I feel justified in taking up my residence in the State of Utah,” he said.

“Mother,” Diana called out, as Mrs. Carter passed the door, “do come in; you can live in any of eight States, beginning with an M—Maine, Massachusetts—”

“My mother can, too,” Peggy interrupted. “Her name is Mary. What is your mother’s name?”

“Her name is Mary, too.”

The two little girls wondered at the coincidence.

“Tom can only live in Tennessee or Texas,” said Diana.

"I'm going to live in Texas," said Tom. "Uncle Joe has been there. He said he saw a prairie fire once and it looked like the waves of the sea. And at the ranch where he was, the turkeys roosted in trees and the moon looked as big as a cart wheel." 92

The children were soon busy tracing their States and cutting them out. Alice found New Hampshire so hard to do that she was sorry she had not chosen Alabama, but she would not let anybody know this on any account. She painted New Hampshire a delicate shade of pink. Peggy painted Pennsylvania a blue that shaded in with her blue frock. Diana painted Delaware green, and Tom chose crimson for Texas, the color of the college he hoped to go to some day.

"I was going to paint Colorado crimson," said Christopher.

"You can't," said Tom. "I have chosen crimson."

"Can't I paint Colorado crimson, Uncle Joe?"

"If you like. I think I'll paint Utah orange, so as to have as much variety as possible on the map."

"That is a good idea," said Christopher; "I'll paint Colorado yellow."

Alice and Peggy were so interested in the game that they played it every morning when they first waked up, and they got so they could say the forty-eight States while they were putting on their shoes and stockings. It amused them to see which States their different friends could live in.

They felt there were very few children and still fewer grown people who ought to be told the game. It was like a secret society. Some people were so scornful they would think it silly, and they did not care enough about most people to let them into the secret. Mrs. Owen thought it a good game, but she was too busy to play it. Age did not seem to make any difference. Old Michael, for instance, took to it very kindly. 93

Peggy sat in the wheelbarrow one day while he was raking leaves and she explained the game to him.

"You are very lucky," she ended, "for you can live in so many States—Maine, Massachusetts—" she began; and she said over the whole eight, ending with Minnesota.

"I think I'll try Minnesoty for a change," said the old man. "I've a cousin who went out to St. Paul. Will you be my grandchild and come and keep house for me?"

"I'd love to, Mr. Farrell, but I have to live in Pennsylvania. I'm learning all about William Penn and Independence Hall in Philadelphia, and Betsy Ross, who made the first flag, so I can tell it to Uncle Joe when he comes back. And I have to read about New Hampshire to Alice, so I'm quite busy. Did you know it was called the Granite State, Mr. Farrell?"

"I have heard tell as much."

"Oh, Mr. Farrell," said Peggy hopping up, "do let me try to rake the leaves. They dance about as if they were at a party. What does Mrs. Farrell's name begin with—can she go to Minnesota with you?" 94

"Her name is Hattie. I guess my old woman will have to stay right here in New Hampshire. It is hard to break up families that way. My old woman and I haven't been separated for forty-two years, come Christmas."

Miss Betsy Porter was another of Peggy's friends who was greatly interested in the game. Peggy often dropped in to see her and her cat. Miss Betsy Porter always had something very good and spicy to eat. This time it was spice cake. Peggy was on her way back from the village with some buttons and tape for her mother, so she could not stop long. Miss Porter thought it a grand game.

"Only, I am a woman without a country," she said. "There are no States beginning with B, and I can't even come in on Elizabeth."

"You can come in on your last name," said Peggy. "You can live in Pennsylvania with me."

"That is great. I went to Philadelphia once when I was a girl." And she told the eagerly listening Peggy all about the Quaker city with its straight streets and its old buildings.

"I am afraid if your mother is in a hurry for those buttons and that tape," said Miss Betsy, "you'd better be going home now, but some afternoon when you can stay longer I'll read you a book about some of the signers of the Declaration of Independence."

"What a lucky child I am to have my name begin with a P," Peggy said. "There can't be any other State as interesting as Pennsylvania."

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CHAPTER XII

HOW PEGGY SPENT HER MONEY

As Peggy was going out of Miss Betsy's kitchen door, some hens straggled along the grass. Some were brown and some were white and some were yellow. Peggy thought they were all fat, prosperous-looking hens. She admired their red combs and their yellow legs.

"I wish we had some hens," she said to Miss Betsy. "Eggs cost such a lot we can't ever have any cake."

"I'd give you some fresh eggs to take back to your mother, only I am afraid you might slip and break them."

Peggy looked thoughtful. It would be nice to have the eggs, but it would be hard to have to walk home with the eggs on her mind.

"Mother, I wish we kept hens," she said as she ran into the kitchen. "Miss Betsy has such nice ones."

"How do you happen to know anything about Miss Betsy's hens?" her mother asked. "Is calling on Miss Betsy your idea of coming straight home from the village?"

"You didn't say to come straight home, truly, you didn't, mother. I thought you wouldn't mind my making a short call on her and the cat." 96

Mrs. Owen found it as hard to find fault with Peggy as it had been to find fault with Peggy's father.

"We've got a hen-house out in the yard," Peggy went on. "The people who lived here before us must have kept hens, so it must be a good climate for them."

"I have a few things to do besides taking care of hens," said Mrs. Owen firmly.

"I'd take all the care of them."

"I should as soon trust them to Lady Janet's care."

"But Alice could help me. She'd remind me to feed them."

"And, besides, hens cost a great deal," said Mrs. Owen. She had been thinking of the possibility of keeping hens.

"Do chickens cost a lot? Couldn't we begin with little chickens and let them grow into hens?"

"If we want eggs this winter we'd have to buy hens."

"Maybe people will give us a few hens," said Peggy hopefully. "Miss Betsy has a lot, and the Hortons' farmer has millions; and the Thorntons have some, and so has Michael Farrell."

"My dear little girl, people who are so fortunate as to have hens prize them more than if they had gold. You might as well expect me to give away my preserves and canned vegetables."

Peggy was never tired of looking at the rows of jars of preserves and vegetables, and the tumblers of jelly that her mother had put up. The greater part of them had been sent away, and 97
there was enough money in the bank from their sale to buy winter coats and hats for both of the children, besides something toward then coal.

Peggy went into the pantry for another look at the shelves. There was a pint jar of the precious strawberry preserve and four pints of raspberries and a dozen pints of cherries from their own tree, and there were a great many jars of blueberries and blackberries, and there was currant jelly and grape jelly. Peggy liked the rich color of the strawberries and raspberries and cherries next the more somber blueberries and blackberries.

The shelf where the vegetables were was almost more delightful in color. The green peas and beans were next the red tomatoes, and beyond them were a few jars of pale yellow corn. They had turnips and carrots and beets stored in the cellar, ready for use.

The children felt very important, and as if their mother could not have had the garden without their help. As she believed in profit-sharing, she paid them for part of their work, while some they did just to help the garden along. At the end of the season they had each earned nearly two dollars. Their mother made it quite two dollars and told them they could spend the money exactly as they pleased, provided they did not get anything to eat with it, like candy. 98

"You can each get a toy if you like—something that won't break too easily; or you can get something to wear, or something growing—like a house plant."

As usual, Alice knew exactly what she wanted most. It was a doll carriage, and she and Peggy went down to the store and chose it.

Peggy did not care for any of the toys. "I want something that's alive," she said, "like a canary-bird, or one of Miss Betsy's hens. I think I'll buy a hen—that will be most useful. If she laid an egg every day we could take turns in having a fresh egg."

“That would be great,” said Alice.

Miss Betsy Porter was greatly interested in the children’s plan. “Only, are you sure your mother will be willing to let you keep hens?” she asked prudently.

“Yes, we have a house for them, and she said we could get anything we liked. She had thought about keeping hens, only they are so expensive.”

“I will sell you a Rhode Island Red,” said Miss Betsy. “They lay well, and I will throw in a fine young cock. My neighbors are complaining because the young spring roosters are beginning to crow, and I was expecting to have to send them to the market. I’ll let Michael Farrell take them up to your house this afternoon, if your mother will let you have them. You can stop at his house and send me word by him whether or not your mother wants them.” 99

Peggy and Alice went out into the yard with Miss Betsy to choose a hen and a rooster.

“It is like a family,” said Peggy, “having two of them. They won’t be lonely. I shall call them Henry Cox and Henrietta Cox.”

“Well, children, what did you buy with your two dollars?” Mrs. Owen asked when they came home that morning.

“I got a carriage for Belle,” said Alice.

“And what did you get, Peggy?”

She hesitated—“Something very useful,” she said. “Guess, mother. It’s something that will grow and something that is alive.”

“A rose in a pot,” said her mother.

Peggy laughed. “Oh, mother, you are ’way off. It has feathers.”

“You haven’t bought a canary-bird?” Mrs. Owen said in tones of dismay.

“No, mother, she is much more useful. It is a hen, and her name is Henrietta Cox, and Miss Betsy gave me a young cock because he crowed so he woke up the neighbors; and we haven’t any near neighbors. And his name is Henry Cox.”

“A hen and a cock! Peggy, what will you think of next!”

“You said I could get anything I liked, mother, and I am sure a hen is much more useful than a doll’s carriage. I’ll let you have one of her eggs every third morning for your breakfast.” 100

“Did you ever stop to think how they were to be fed? Grain is so high now many people have stopped raising hens.”

“Miss Betsy says the Rhode Island Reds aren’t so particular as some hens. She says you can feed them partly with sour milk and scraps off the table.”

“Sour milk!” said Mrs. Owen; “it’s all very well for Miss Betsy to talk about sour milk, for her brother keeps a cow, and he sends her all the skim milk she can use. I am surprised she let you have a hen and cock without consulting me.”

“She did say she would send them up this afternoon by old Michael if you would let me have them,” faltered Peggy. “But, oh, mother dear, I do want them so much. It isn’t as if I had spent my money on something foolish, like candy.”

“No, that is true,” said Mrs. Owen. After all, she had thought of keeping hens herself.

“I’ll tell you what we’ll do, Peggy,” she said. “You can sell Henrietta’s eggs to me, when she begins to lay, at whatever the market price is, and the money can go toward their food, and if there is any left you can have it to spend. That will be a good lesson in arithmetic for us.”

So Peggy and Alice ran over to old Michael’s house, where he was always to be found at his dinner-hour, to tell him the glad news.

Mrs. Farrell came to the door. She was a prosperous, comfortable looking person, with a plump, trig figure and smoothly arranged white hair. Peggy thought of telling her about the geography game, but there was something about her that made her hesitate. She was afraid Mrs. Farrell would think it a crazy game. 101

“Won’t you come in, you little dears?” said Mrs. Farrell.

Alice looked pleased at being called a “little dear,” but Peggy was all the more sure that Mrs. Farrell would not care for the geography game.

“I just wanted to see Mr. Farrell a minute,” she said.

“He is at dinner. Can’t you give me the message?”

“I don’t think I could,” said Peggy. “It is very important, and it is not easy to remember all of it. We’ll not keep him a minute—truly, we won’t.”

“I guess I can remember the message if you can.”

“It is about a hen and a rooster that Miss Betsy Porter wants him to call for to send down to our house—only mother wants our hen-house fixed first.”

How bald it seemed put in this way! If only she could have seen old Michael himself, how differently she would have worded the message!

“It isn’t very hard to remember that message, dearie,” said Mrs. Farrell, in her cooing voice.

Peggy hated to have her call her “dearie.” Half the pleasure in her purchase would be gone if she could not see old Michael. Suddenly, she had a bright idea. She ran around the side of the house to the kitchen window and waved her hand to old Michael.

It was one of the warm days in late autumn, and she was still wearing one of her blue frocks. Her hair was flying about and she pushed it back. Old Michael loved children, and he never hesitated to come at their call. He hastily shoved a large piece of apple pie into his mouth, and, seizing a piece of cheese, he came out of the kitchen door. They were out of hearing of Mrs. Farrell—that unfortunate “Hattie,” who was doomed always to live in New Hampshire, while her husband was free to travel into any State, beginning with M, where his imagination led him.

“Well, what is it now?” he asked.

“Oh, Mr. Farrell, the most wonderful thing has happened!” said Peggy; “I have bought such a lovely hen from Miss Betsy Porter, and she has given me a young rooster, and I am going to play they are people from the State of Rhode Island; and their names are Mr. Henry Cox and Mrs. Henrietta Cox—only, of course, for most people, they are just a cock and hen—just two Rhode Island Reds.”

“I see,” said old Michael. “But why are you telling me about it?”

“Miss Betsy said you could bring them to us this afternoon. She said you were working for her, but mother wanted the hen-house fixed up a little first. Can you do it to-morrow?”

“I see,” said old Michael; “you want the apartment in the hotel made ready for Mr. and Mrs. Cox?”

“Oh, yes,” Peggy said, laughing with delight; “I want everything done for the people who are renting my house.”

“All right, Peggy, I’ll look out for the comfort of your tenants.”

“My tenants are not going to keep any maid, Mr. Farrell; I’ve got to give them most of their meals, although they will get some out, and I thought you’d advise me what food is cheapest and best.”

They talked about the best food for Mr. and Mrs. Cox all the way to Peggy’s house, where Mr. Farrell stopped to inspect the hen-house on his way to Miss Porter’s.

“I always meant to keep hens sometime,” Mrs. Owen confided to Mr. Farrell, “but I did not mean to begin this winter.”

“If you have them at all, you might as well have a few more,” he said; “it is a little like summer boarders—the more you have, the more profit you get.”

“I know,” said Mrs. Owen, “but unfortunately, you have to begin by buying the hens.”

CHAPTER XIII

MRS. OWEN’S SURPRISE PARTY

Mrs. Owen was to have a birthday, and Peggy and Alice felt something especial ought to be done to celebrate it. It was Miss Pauline Thornton who put the idea of a surprise party into Peggy’s head. She came over one rainy evening to tell Mrs. Owen about a surprise party the Sewing Circle was to give to the minister’s wife on her fiftieth birthday. Miss Pauline Thornton lived with her father in the large gray stone house behind the stone wall on which Peggy was fond of walking. She was a great friend of Mrs. Owens, who could never understand why the children did not like her, for she was tall and good-looking and always wore beautiful clothes. Older people found her very agreeable and efficient. Mrs. Owen helped her off with her raincoat. Underneath it was a dress the color of violets.

If Miss Pauline had been the kind of person with whom one could play the geography game, Peggy thought what a good time they could have had living together in Pennsylvania. But as it was, she did not like to spend even a half-hour with her. Miss Pauline’s big house seemed dreary to Peggy, with its high ceilings and stately furniture and pictures. When she went there to call with her mother, she always hoped that she might see the collie dog and Miss Pauline’s father.

She liked old Mr. Thornton. He had white hair and a kind face, and he looked as if he might like to play the geography game, if only his daughter was not there, but she always was there.

Mrs. Owen was reading aloud to the children when Miss Thornton came in.

“I didn’t mean to interrupt; I thought the children were always in bed by this time,” she said, glancing at the clock.

“It is their bedtime, but I was late in beginning to read to them to-night. You can finish the story to yourselves if you like.”

“Aren’t you going to shake hands with me, Peggy?” Miss Thornton asked.

Peggy slowly unlocked her arms, which she had folded behind her, and held out an unwilling hand.

“What is the story that is so interesting?” Miss Thornton asked, as she took the book out of Peggy’s other hand.

“‘Snow White and Rose Red,’” she said. “I never cared for fairy-tales when I was a child.”

Peggy and Alice seated themselves in the same chair, with the book between them.

“You ought to come over nearer the light; you will strain your eyes,” said Miss Thornton.

Mrs. Owen gave up her seat to the children and Miss Thornton began to talk about the surprise party.

Peggy soon found herself listening.

“It is to be in the afternoon—like an afternoon tea,” she said.

“Are all the parish to be there—men as well as women?” asked Mrs. Owen.

“No, only the women. It is what Prissy Baker calls a ‘hen-party.’”

Peggy could keep silent no longer. “Do you mean people are going to give her hens?” she asked.

“Hens? No; that is just an expression, Peggy; that means a party of ladies.”

Peggy was silent. She might have known that they would not have thought of anything so interesting. The fact that they were to take the minister’s wife ten five-dollar gold pieces, in a silk bag, was a poor substitute, indeed, for living, cackling, laying hens.

After the children went to bed, they could still hear Miss Pauline’s voice going on and on.

“It’s funny mother likes her so much,” Peggy said. “If I ever grow up I shall have friends who like to do interesting things, and read fairy-stories, and talk on nice subjects, the way Miss Betsy Porter does. Oh, Alice,” she said, shutting up her eyes and then opening them wide, “I am beginning to see things on the wall. Look and see what is coming.”

Alice stared at the wall, in the darkness, but as usual, she could see nothing. “What do you see?” she asked.

“Hens!” Peggy exclaimed dramatically; “white ones, Rhode Island Reds, Plymouth Rocks, yellow ones—all kinds, a regular procession; and I see ladies, too, in bright dresses. They are all going to a hen party.”

“I wish I could see them,” said Alice. “Do you really see them, Peggy?”

“Yes, in my mind’s eye. It is such a nice picture, Alice,” she cried, “let’s have a surprise party of just hens for mother!”

“That would be great!” said Alice.

“We’d ask Mrs. Horton and Clara and Miss Rand.”

“They wouldn’t come all the way from New York.”

“They might come. Sometimes they do come for a week-end, and her birthday comes on a Saturday. And we’ll ask all the Carters, of course. Each family need only give one hen.”

“And Miss Pauline Thornton,” said Alice. “They have lots of hens.”

“No,” said Peggy firmly; “I’m not going to ask her. She’d spoil the party.”

“She had on a lovely gown,” said Alice, “and she’s one of mother’s best friends.”

Peggy went to consult Miss Betsy Porter about the party, and Miss Betsy thought it a fine idea. She said that Peggy and Alice could bring their note-paper, with colored pictures on it, down to her house, and write the notes, and she would enclose them in a note she would write each person, so they would know there was some responsible person to help about the surprise party, and that it was not merely an idea of the children’s. She said she would bring a loaf of her best spice cake and some cookies and sandwiches, and she knew that Mrs. Carter would be delighted to make and pour the tea, and Miss Thornton would pour the chocolate.

“But I don’t want Miss Pauline,” said Peggy. “She would spoil the party.”

“But she is one of your mother’s best friends. Whose birthday is it, Peggy? Yours or your mother’s?”

“Mother’s,” said Peggy, hanging her head.

“Pauline is a good sort,” said Miss Betsy. “There is no use in disliking good people, Peggy. I think it had better be a small party, for your mother would not want the care of many hens, and, besides, small parties are the most fun. We’ll ask all of the Carters—that will make five.”

“Six with Uncle Joe—I know he’ll come on ’specially for it, if I ask him,” said Peggy. “He needn’t bring a hen, because he belongs to the family. There’s to be just one hen for every family.”

“Then, if Mrs. Horton and Miss Rand and Clara should come on,” said Miss Porter, “that would make nine, I would make ten, and Miss Pauline eleven.” 109

“If I’ve got to have Miss Pauline,” said Peggy, with a sigh, “I’m going to have the dog and her father.”

“All right,” said Miss Betsy, “that will make one hen for the Carters, one for the Hortons,—for I’m sure they will give a hen, even if they can’t come themselves,—one for the Thorntons, and one for me.”

“Not one for you,” said Peggy. “You have given me Mr. Henry Cox already.”

“I would not be left out on any account,” said Miss Betsy. “Six hens would be as many as your mother would want, as she isn’t planning to run a poultry farm. I am sure Mrs. Horton would like to give a pair—she has so many. I’ll suggest they send Rhode Island Reds—it is better to have all of a kind.”

“I think it would be more fun to have them different,” said Peggy.

“They get along better if they are all of a kind,” said Miss Betsy. “I have too many kinds, but I can give you another Rhode Island Red. It is like the Jews and the Italians—they are happier in a quarter by themselves.”

“It will be a Rhode Island Red Quarter,” said Peggy, in delight. “I can name one Mrs. Rhoda Rhodes.”

“I know some people who are named Henn,” said Miss Betsy. 110

Peggy looked doubtful. “It may be all right for people,” she said, “but I don’t like it for hens. I think Henderson sounds nicer.”

She and Alice sat down to write the notes. Miss Betsy made no suggestions, but they were glad to ask her about the spelling. Peggy wrote the notes to the Carters and Hortons, and Alice wrote the one to Miss Thornton.

Dear Mrs. Carter, Peggy wrote—

Mother is to have a birthday a week from next Saturday, and we are going to celebrate it by giving her a surprise party consisting of hens,—each family to bring one hen,—Rhode Island Reds preferred,—as we have Mr. Henry Cox and Mrs. Henrietta Cox already. Please ask Uncle Joe to come. He need not bring a separate hen, but can join in with you. Old Michael Parrell has them for sale.

Your loving friend

PEGGY

This invitation is for you all,—Dr. Carter, if he is not too busy,—Tom, Christopher, and Diana.

“You haven’t given the hour, or asked her to pour tea,” Miss Betsy said, as she read the note through.

“Oh, bother! so I haven’t. I’ll put in a postscript:” 111

The party will begin at four o’clock. We’d like it if you would pour tea.

Alice’s note was as follows:

Dear Miss Pauline,

We are going to have a surprise party for mother a week from next Saturday, at four o’clock. Will you please wear your pretty violet gown and pour chocolate and bring a hen. Please bring your father and Bruno.

Your loving little friend

ALICE OWEN

When Saturday came there was great excitement at the Owens’ house. The children dressed Lady Janet up with a blue ribbon, which Peggy with difficulty tied in a bow around her resisting neck. They gave their mother the little presents they had for her at breakfast-time. It seemed strange she was so unsuspicious.

After the dinner dishes were done, she said she thought she would go down to see Miss Thornton for a little while, and she invited the children to go with her.

“We don’t want to go,” said Peggy.

“I think you ought to change your gown, mother, and put on your pretty black, one, with the thin sleeves,” said Alice. 112

“My dear child, why should I put on my best gown just to call on a friend?”

“Because it is your birthday,” said Peggy. “We are going to dress up, too. One never knows what may happen on a birthday. Somebody might call.”

If Mrs. Owen began to suspect that something unusual was to happen, she showed no sign of it, but she obediently went up and put on her black gown, with the thin sleeves, while Peggy and Alice dressed up in their best white frocks. Peggy wore a blue sash and Alice a pink one.

“It will be great to get mother out of the house,” said Peggy. “I’ll telephone to Miss Pauline that she is coming, so she can slip out before she gets there, and Mr. Thornton can keep mother until four o’clock, and then he and Bruno can walk back with her.”

“That will be great,” said Alice.

Mrs. Owen was disappointed not to find Pauline at home, and she was going to call on Mrs. Carter when Mr. Thornton invited her in with such a courtly bow that she could not refuse. She noticed that he gave an uneasy glance at the clock, from time to time.

“I am afraid I am keeping you from some engagement,” she said at last.

“I was going out for a walk with Bruno at four,” said he. “We will walk home with you if you will let us.” 113

“I shall be delighted, and so will the children.”

There was no one in sight when she opened the front door, but there was a suspicious noise from the dining-room. People seemed to be walking about and setting the table.

“I think I am going to have a surprise party,” said Mrs. Owen. “Won’t you stay for it?”

“That is just what I mean to do,” said Mr. Thornton. “Bruno and I had an especial invitation.”

The dining-room door opened, and who should come into the parlor but Mrs. Owen’s dear friend Mrs. Horton, who she thought was miles away.

“Hester!” she cried, in delight. And the two ladies kissed each other, just as heartily as if they had been little girls.

“Why, Clara, how do you do? Here are more surprises,” she said.

Clara gave a stiff little curtsey and held up her cheek primly to be kissed.

“And Miss Rand, too; this is great! Oh, and Mr. Beal! I did not see you at first. What a delightful party this is!” and she greeted Mrs. Carter and her children, as they came out of the dining-room.

“The doctor had to go out of town to see a patient,” said Mrs. Carter, “but he hopes to get here before we go.”

Then the door from the kitchen opened, and Miss Betsy Porter came into the dining-room with the chocolate urn, and Miss Pauline followed with plates of cake. 114

It was a delightful party. Everybody enjoyed it. The only trouble was that Uncle Joe found so much to say to Miss Pauline that Peggy did not see as much of him as she would have liked. If he had to talk to a grown-up young lady, she did not see why he did not talk to Miss Rand—she was so much nicer.

Mrs. Owen had no idea there was anything more in the way of a surprise. She drank her cup of tea and talked to Mrs. Horton and Mrs. Carter with pleasure that seemed to shine out from her face.

“Would you take me out to the hen-house, to see your cock and hen, Mrs. Owen?” Mr. Thornton asked, a little later. “I have heard so much about Peggy’s new family, I’d like to see them.”

“Certainly,” said Mrs. Owen, a little surprised; “they are not much to look at, just a pair of Rhode Island Reds.”

She was surprised to find all of her guests following them, but she had no suspicions. They went out of the front door, and walked around through the side yard to the back of the house. What was Mrs. Owen’s surprise to see a sign on the hen-house, painted in red letters, outlined in white:

HOTEL HENNERY

she read. “Why, how amazing!” she said.

"It's Mr. Farrell's present to you, mother," Peggy said. "He has been working at home, painting that board, and he put it up while you were at Mr. Thornton's. Isn't it a nice sign?" 115

As Mrs. Owen came near the hen-house, she stood still, in amazement. It seemed as if something was the matter with her eyes, and she was seeing double. For there, walking about the netted-in hen-yard, with an air of being completely at home, were not only Henry and Henrietta Cox, but two others, closely resembling Henrietta.

"They are Henrietta's cousins," Peggy explained, "the Henderson sisters, Charity and Hope, and Faith is inside the house." Sure enough, there was Faith and another lady from Rhode Island whom Peggy introduced to her mother as Biddy Henshaw. But who was the seventh feathered person walking out of the door? Peggy counted again—yes, there were the three Hendersons and Biddy Henshaw—that made four; and Rhoda Rhodes, and her own dear Henrietta, and Henry Cox—six hens and a cock—there were surely seven hens. Where did the seventh come from? She counted them over and over again. There were seven. Who had brought the seventh? She asked everybody. No one knew. Suddenly, she knew as well as if she had been told. It must have been old Michael. He had brought it as a surprise when he came with the sign. And the hen's name flashed into her mind.

"Mother," she said, "this is Angelica Seraphina Hen-Farrell." 116

"What a silly name!" said Clara.

"I'm tired of giving them sensible names," said Peggy.

And so the surprise party turned into a surprise for Peggy herself. Peggy had asked old Michael to come to the surprise party, but he had refused.

"I haven't the right clothes to wear," he said.

"It doesn't matter about the clothes," said Peggy. "It is the person inside them."

Old Michael was so curious to see how Peggy took the surprise of the seventh hen that he strolled around to see. He had on his working clothes, but his face and hands had been well scrubbed after the day's work was over. He waited until the grown-up people turned to go back into the house, and then came forward where Peggy could see him. Alice, followed by the other children, was going toward the house.

"Well, Peggy, was it a good surprise party?" he asked.

"It was great, and I got surprised myself! How nice of you to give mother Angelica Seraphina Hen-Farrell! That is her name, isn't it?"

"Certainly," said Mr. Farrell. "How did you happen to know it?"

"It just popped into my head," said Peggy. "I shut up my eyes, and I just seemed to know she was Angelica Seraphina Hen-Farrell."

"She is called 'Angel' for short," he said. 117

"Angel? What a nice name! I'm so glad we have seven hens. Don't you like odd numbers best, Mr. Farrell? I think they are much more interesting."

"They say there is luck in odd numbers," he said.

"Alice likes even numbers best," said Peggy.

"Yes, she would; she's a kind of even-dispositioned young one."

"Yes, Alice is a darling," said Peggy.

"There are other darlings round here," he said.

"Yes, seven of them: Hope, Faith, and Charity Henderson; Biddy Henshaw, Rhoda Rhodes, Angel Hen-Farrell, and my own dear Henrietta Cox. Oh, there are eight—I forgot Mr. Henry Cox. He's the greatest darling of them all."

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CHAPTER XIV

A CHRISTMAS EGG

Carols are what one thinks of at Christmas, and eggs seem to belong to Easter, but this was an especial egg that was very dear to Peggy because it was one of the first. Peggy and Alice had hunted with such anxious care, every morning in Hotel Hennery, to see if they could find any eggs, and each morning they were disappointed; for all the hens were moulting.

“It does seem as if they needn’t all moult at the same time,” said Peggy. “I do hope somebody will begin to lay before Thanksgiving, so we can have a Thanksgiving egg. Henrietta, don’t you think you could give me just one egg for Thanksgiving?”

Whatever Henrietta’s thoughts were, she kept them to herself, and not one hen produced an egg in time for Thanksgiving.

Mrs. Owen, with Peggy and Alice, dined with the Carters. Mrs. Carter wrote saying what pleasure it would give them all if they could come, and she added there would be no other guests except her husband’s Aunt Betsy and her brother Joe. She hoped it would not be too hard for Mrs. Owen to have a Thanksgiving dinner in her own old house; if she did not feel like it, she would understand. 119

Dear Mrs. Carter Mrs. Owen replied—

> It would be much harder to stay at home than to go to you. The greatest cause I have for Thanksgiving this year is the fact that you are my friend, and that Diana is the friend of my children. Since we had to leave the house, I am glad it is you who are living in it.
>
> Faithfully yours
>
> Mary Owen

So the children had a happy Thanksgiving, even without the Thanksgiving egg. And still Peggy and Alice looked eagerly for eggs and could not find even one. Autumn had changed to winter, and still the hens were moulting, and there were no eggs. The vegetable garden, at the back of the house, was now turned into a fairy country, for the brown earth was covered with a snowy quilt, and every twig on the trees and shrubs was encased in diamonds. The snow came suddenly—one night, when the children went to bed, the ground had been bare, and in the morning the world seemed all made over new. But still the dwellers in Hotel Hennery showed no signs of laying eggs.

And then one morning, a few days before Christmas, just as the children had given up hope, Peggy found an egg. It was a thrilling moment; and Angel Hen-Farrell was so proud to be the first of the hens to lay an egg that she would not stop talking about it. What she said sounded to Alice like “Cut-cut-cad-ar-cut, cadarcut, cadarcut,” but Peggy said she was talking a foreign language. 120

“I can translate it for you, Alice,” she said; “it is the Rhode Island Red language.”

“What is she saying?”

“She is saying: ‘Come and look at my first egg of the season. It is very beautiful. The shell is of the palest brown, like coffee ice-cream. It is very beautiful. Look at it, all ye hens who have laid nothing. It is very beautiful—of palest brown, like coffee ice-cream.’”

Diana had one of her ill turns, just before Christmas; and the poor little girl had to spend Christmas in bed. She was much better when the day came, but her father said she must not get up, but that she could see Peggy and Alice for a little while in the afternoon.

The children had hung their stockings up the night before, and they had been surprised and delighted with their presents. Peggy wanted to take them up to show to Diana.

“But there are such a lot of them,” Alice protested, “and some of them are so big.”

“We can wear up the furs and stocking-caps and mittens,” said Peggy, “and we can put the other things in a basket and carry them up on our new sled. She’d love to see her namesake.”

“I’m not going to take Diana out in such slippery walking,” said Alice, “she might get a fall and break her head.” 121

“As you please,” said Peggy; “but I know if I liked a person well enough to name a child after her, I’d take her up the first minute, slippery or not.”

“You might,” said Alice, “but I’m not going to. She is my child, and she’s very breakable.”

“Well, anyway, I am going to take Diana a Christmas egg, breakable or not.”

“It isn’t your egg; it’s mother’s,” Alice reminded her; for Henrietta had not begun to lay.

“I’m sure mother will let me have an egg to give to Diana, won’t you, mother?”

“Certainly,” said Mrs. Owen; “I should never have had any of my Rhode Island friends if it had not been for Peggy.”

“I think I’ll write a verse to go with the egg,” said Peggy.

Alice admired the way in which Peggy could write verses. Peggy had only to take a pencil in hand, and a verse seemed to come out on the paper. “I think the verses live inside the pencil,” Peggy once said. She liked a blue pencil best. It seemed to have more interesting verses living inside it than a black one.

“I’d like to see if I can do it,” Alice said.

“All right,” and Peggy handed the pencil over. “Don’t hold it so tight; hold it loosely, like this.”

But the pencil would write nothing for Alice, no matter how she held it. And Peggy had only held it a few minutes before she wrote a verse. She sat with her eyes tight shut, for she said she could think better. And presently Peggy and the pencil wrote a Christmas verse. She liked it so 122
well she copied it on a sheet of her best Christmas note-paper. At the head of the sheet was the picture of a window with a lighted candle and a Christmas wreath; and there were a boy and a girl outside, singing Christmas carols. This was the verse that Peggy and the pencil wrote.

"I'd like to send a Christmas carol,
  To please and cheer my dear Diana:
But here's an egg Angel Hen-Farrell
  Has laid in her best Christmas manner."

Mrs. Owen packed the egg carefully with cotton wool in a small box. She folded the paper with the verse on it and put that on top. She tied the box up with some Christmas ribbon that had come around one of Peggy's presents. The ribbon had holly leaves with red berries on it. She slipped a tiny Santa Claus card under the ribbon. On the card Peggy wrote, "Diana, from a friend who lives in Hotel Hennery."

Peggy put the box in a bag, and some other presents for Diana, from Mrs. Owen and Alice and herself; and they put in a few of their presents and cards to show her. It was very slippery. Their mother went with them as far as the Thorntons' and she carried the bag. Then Peggy carried it, for a time, and then Alice. Peggy fell down once. She landed on the back of her head, but she held the bag out in front of her so the egg should not get broken. 123

Diana was delighted to see them. She was in bed, in a pretty brown woolen dressing-gown, that was just the shade of her hair and eyes. The bed was covered with books and games, and there were two dolls leaning against the footboard, and one in Diana's arms. She was a pretty doll, with yellow hair, almost the color of Peggy's hair, and eyes that opened and shut.

"See, she shuts her eyes tight, just as you do, Peggy, when you are thinking hard," said Diana. "She looks quite a lot like you."

"Her eyes are blue and mine are gray," said Peggy. "I wonder why they never make dolls with gray eyes."

"She is named for you," Diana announced. "Tom and Christopher gave her to me, and she came with her name written on a Christmas card that was pinned to her dress, 'Peggy Owen Carter,' and Tom wrote a poem that came with her."

Diana hunted through the box which held her Christmas cards and letters, and finally found the verses, which she read aloud.

"Closed in her room, in her white bed,
  Poor little suffering martyr,
While others skate or coast with sled,
  There lies Diana Carter.

"But she's so joyous in her mind,
  She makes our Christmas merry.
She's quite adorably kind,
  With lips like a red berry. 124
A holly berry, bright and gay,
 Some children may be smarter,
But there's no child on Christmas Day
 Sweeter than dear Di Carter.

"So, while in her white bed she lies,
 Poor little Christmas martyr,
We give her as a glad surprise,
 Miss Peggy Owen Carter.

"Her eyes are blue, her hair is gold,
 She surely is a charmer.
We rescued her, like knights of old,
 And vowed that naught should harm her.

"For she was living in a shop,
 In a glass case, this treasure,
Where she could neither run nor hop,
 With weary months of leisure.

"So Peggy Owen Carter comes,
 With joyous Christmas greeting,
A carol gay, she softly hums,
 Joy's long, if time is fleeting."

"What a nice poem," said Peggy, with a sigh of envy.

"Yes, isn't it?" said Diana.

“I wish I could write poetry like that,” said Peggy. “I just wrote one verse. It’s in my present to you.”

“Oh, have you brought me a present?” Diana said, in delight.

“Yes, mother and Alice and I have each given you one, and there is this one from Angel Hen-Farrell.”

“An egg!” Diana cried. “Father said I could have an egg for my supper. I’ll have it dropped on toast. I couldn’t have any of the Christmas dinner, except the oyster soup.” 125

“Oh, you poor darling!” said Peggy.

“It was very good soup,” said Diana, “and I was so happy to have Peggy Owen Carter and the rest of my presents; and the carols, last night, were so lovely!”

“Carols last night?” the children cried. “We didn’t hear any.”

“The Christmas Waits came and sang under my window. I could see them from my bed. The leader carried a torch so the others could see to read their books. He had on a red cloak. And they sang such beautiful carols!”

“Oh, why didn’t they come out and sing to us?” said Alice.

“You are pretty far out of town. I think they only sang to sick people and old people. They went up to the hospital, and they asked father for a list of his patients who were not too sick to be disturbed by the singing.”

“Well, anyway, I’d rather have been well than to have heard the carols,” said Peggy. “You poor dear, I can’t get over your being in bed on Christmas Day.”

But Diana’s eyes were shining. “I shouldn’t have had Tom’s poem if I had been well,” she said, “or the Christmas egg. Even if one is sick, Christmas is the happiest time in all the year.”

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CHAPTER XV

THE GREAT STORM

That was a winter of great storms. They began in November, and the snow piled up higher and higher, so that when one went down to the shops, one walked between walls of snow. The oldest inhabitant remembered nothing like it.

“It seems like going up mountains,” Peggy said to Alice, one day when they came to a house where the sidewalk had not been shoveled out.

It was a wonderful winter for children, for such coasting and tobogganing had never been known. It was not such a good winter for creatures who wore fur and feathers. Lady Janet, who had never known any other winter and did not realize that the oldest inhabitant had not known one like it, would return from an encounter with the snowflakes in dazed wonder and take her seat on a chair in front of the kitchen stove, or she would patiently watch by a mouse-hole for hours together.

The inhabitants of Hotel Hennery took life placidly, although they were confined to the hotel. But, having nothing more interesting to do, they turned their attention to laying eggs; after January set in, they all began to lay, so that Mrs. Owen and the children each had a fresh egg for breakfast most of the time. 127

The snow-storms grew more and more frequent as the winter passed, and the snow was deeper and deeper. It was all great fun for Alice and Peggy. They never tired of the coasting and the walk to and from school. It was hard for Diana, however, for in stormy or very cold weather she had to stay in the house. She was so much better after the summer that, in the autumn, she began to go to school. Diana was in the same room with Peggy, in the class below her. She had to be out of school almost half the time.

“I wouldn’t mind being out of school,” said Alice. “Think of having no lessons to get and staying in that lovely room with a wood fire on the hearth, and everybody coming to see you.”

“You wouldn’t like it a bit if you didn’t feel well,” said Peggy. “Think of not being able to go coasting.”

The children went to see Diana almost every day, and there did not seem to be any room quite so pleasant as Diana’s room, with the fire on the hearth and the blooming flowers.

Diana was often well enough to be downstairs in the parlor, and this was a pleasant room, too. It seemed strange to the children to think it was their own old parlor, for it was so differently

arranged. There was a large piano at which Diana practiced when she was well enough. It took up the side of the room where their mother's writing-desk had been. Their piano was an upright one, and it had been on the opposite side of the room. Small as it was, it almost filled up one side of their tiny parlor now. It had been used very little since it had gone to its new surroundings, for there was no longer any money for music-lessons, and Mrs. Owen had been too busy to touch it; besides, she had never played a great deal, except the accompaniments for her husband's singing. So the piano was resting. But Mrs. Owen had determined that, just as soon as she had got ahead a little, the children should have their music-lessons again. 128

Alice's birthday came in February, and when her mother asked her what she would like best, in the way of a celebration, she did not hesitate a minute.

"I should like to have Diana come the night before and spend the whole day."

"Don't you want any one else?"

"No one else," said Alice, "except you and Peggy, of course. I never have played dolls all I wanted to, because Peggy doesn't like to play, and so, on my birthday, I'd like to have just a feast of dolls, from morning until night."

"But there will be your school," said her mother. "I couldn't let you skip that."

"Couldn't you? I thought perhaps you could."

"No, I couldn't. I think it would be better if Diana came to dinner and for the afternoon."

"No," said Alice, "the night is the best part. Peggy can sleep in the spare room, and we can have our dolls sleep with us, and the next day, Diana can rest while I go to school." 129

It seemed a pretty good plan—Alice's plans were usually reasonable. The only doubt was, whether Diana would be well enough to make the little visit. But she was well enough, and her father drove her down in his sleigh, all bundled up in many wraps. Diana had on a brown cap made of beaver fur that almost matched her golden-brown hair. And over this, to make sure she did not take cold, was a thick, brown veil. Wrapped around her shoulders and pinned with a large gilt pin, in the shape of a feather, was a warm, green-and-blue plaid shawl. Under this was her own brown coat, and under that, a blue sweater. Peggy undid her wraps and pulled off her blue mittens.

They had a fire in the parlor because Diana was coming, and they gave Diana the small company chair that their grandmother used to sit in when she was a little girl.

While Peggy was busy getting Diana out of her wraps, Alice was taking off the wraps of her namesake Alice, and those of Peggy Owen Carter, for Diana had been asked to bring these two with her. The dolls were wrapped up in the same way their little mother was, only they wore hoods instead of fur caps, and they did not have sweaters under their coats. But they were carefully wrapped up in Turkish towels, instead of shawls. 130

"I hope my children have not taken cold," said Diana. "Peggy is rather delicate."

"I won't have a delicate namesake," said Peggy. "She can't be delicate if she is named for me."

No sooner had Peggy said it than she noticed a shadow on Diana's bright face, and she remembered that Diana was delicate. One never thought of her as an invalid, for she was always so cheerful.

"I think it is nice for people to be delicate," Peggy hastened to add, "but not for dolls. If a doll is delicate, she might get broken."

"Our dolls are people," Alice said, "aren't they, Diana?"

"Certainly," said Diana. "They are just as much people as the Rhode Island Reds are."

"Indeed, they are not," said Peggy. "My darling Rhode Island Reds are alive."

"Your Rhode Island Reds could be killed and eaten," said Alice. "Nobody would eat a doll any more than they would a person. And they look like people, and the Rhode Island Reds don't."

It was hard for Peggy to have Alice and Diana sleep together without wanting her. It was the first time in her life that she had not slept with Alice the night before her birthday. In fact, the only times she could remember their being separated at night was when Alice had the measles, and one other time, when she herself had gone for a short visit to her grandmother with her father. And the worst of it was, there was plenty of room for three in the wide bed, if it were not for the room those ridiculous dolls took up. Diana was her intimate friend just as much as she was Alice's. Indeed, even more, because they liked to read the same books and to write stories. Diana was nearer her age than Alice's; and yet, Alice liked to have these stupid dolls sleep with her better than her own flesh-and-blood sister! 131

Mrs. Owen noticed that Peggy looked very sober at supper time, and, while she was helping with the dishes, she said, "What is my little girl looking unhappy about?"

"Do I look unhappy, mother?"

"Yes, what is the trouble?"

Then Peggy told her the whole story.

“Now, Peggy, let’s sit right down and see what we can do about it,” said Mrs. Owen. “You are jealous because Alice wants Diana all to herself. It is very natural, but it is not a nice feeling.”

“I am not jealous of Diana,” said Peggy; “but I just can’t stand having Alice like to play with dolls better than to play with me. I could tell them fairy-stories, and see things on the wall.”

“But that is no treat for Alice. You can do that any night. What she wants is somebody who likes to play dolls just as much as she does. It is Alice’s birthday we are celebrating, not yours. When your birthday comes, you can have Diana all to yourself, if you like, for the night.” 132

“But I’d always rather have Alice, too—always, always,” said Peggy.

“But if you were fond of dolls, and Alice had been saying impolite things about them, you might find it pleasanter to have Diana all to yourself. I suspect you have been saying some not very kind things about Alice’s family.”

“I said Belle looked as if she had smallpox,” Peggy owned, “and so she does. I said Sally Waters’s feet were so small she could put them in her mouth.”

“Do you think those remarks were very kind?”

Peggy looked thoughtful. “Perhaps not exactly kind,” she said.

“Now, Peggy, I am going to let you sleep with me to-night,” said Mrs. Owen.

“Truly mother,” said Peggy, with a radiant face.

“And now we will think out just how we can make Alice and Diana have a good time to-morrow,” Mrs. Owen went on. “Suppose, while I am making cookies and biscuit for the flesh-and-blood members of the family, you make small ones for the dolls? I am sure that will delight the little mothers. To tell the truth, Peggy, I didn’t like dolls a bit better than you do when I was a little girl. I liked playing around with my brother William and your father a great deal better.”

Peggy felt a little happier when Diana said, in a disappointed tone, “Isn’t Peggy going to sleep with us?” 133

“No,” said Alice; “the dolls are going to sleep with us. Peggy doesn’t care about dolls. I am going to have a real feast of dolls, for once in my life.”

“And I am going to sleep with mother,” said Peggy proudly.

“You are not!” said Alice, thinking Peggy was joking.

Peggy could hear the children’s voices going on and on in the other room, as she lay in bed. It made her feel lonely. Her mother always sat up late, so she would not come to bed for a long time. She tried to amuse herself by seeing things on the wall, but this was no fun without Alice. The voices in the other room went on and on until Peggy grew drowsy, and at last, fell asleep.

She was waked up by the slamming of a blind. The wind had risen, and she felt the cold air blowing in at her window. She looked at the face of the illuminated clock, which stood at the side of her mother’s bed, on a small table. The hands pointed to ten minutes past ten. Her mother would soon come upstairs. The wind was so cold she got up to shut the window, and her bare feet walked into a snowdrift. Yes, there was really quite a little mound of snow on the floor, for it had begun snowing fast just before supper. She stopped to brush it up, and then took the electric candle and went into the other room to see if there was any snow coming in there. But there was not, for the windows were not on the same side of the house. She could see by the 134 light of her candle that the bed was, indeed, too full to have left any place for her. On the outer side of the white pillow lay Belle, her staring brown eyes wide open; and next her was Sally Waters, peacefully sleeping; and beyond her, the doll that was Diana’s namesake. Then came Alice herself, fast asleep, her long, dark lashes against her cheek, and a happy look on her face. Beyond her lay Peggy Owen Carter, also asleep; and next to Alice’s namesake, and on the inner side of the bed and beyond her, lay Diana herself, fast asleep, with slightly parted lips.

“Well,” said Peggy, “I never saw anything like that before. She has dolls on both sides of her. I guess she has a feast of dolls, for once in her life.”

Peggy hurried back to bed, for her feet were icy cold. She was still awake when her mother came upstairs.

“Mother, what do you think? I walked into a snowdrift,” said Peggy.

“What do you mean?” said her mother.

So Peggy told her all about it.

“You ought to have called me,” said Mrs. Owen.

“But it was such fun sweeping it up and throwing it out of the window. We can’t throw dust out of the window.”

When Peggy waked in the morning, the air was thick with snowflakes, and everything was heaped and piled high with snow. It seemed as if it would be impossible to get out to feed the 135

hens, for not only was it very deep, but it was drifting with the wind.

“It is a real blizzard,” said Mrs. Owen. “It is the worst storm we have had yet.”

“Oh, there is no going to school to-day, mother,” Alice said, dancing about the room in glee.

It was not often that Alice danced. She was a quiet child. Peggy caught Alice by the waist, and they both danced together, and then they each took one of Diana’s hands and they all three danced in a strange dance that they made up as they went along. It was full of bobbing curtsies and racing and scampering about the room. They ended by coming up to Mrs. Owen and making more curtsies, just the number that Alice was years old.

“Madam, it is your daughter’s birthday,” said Peggy. “Madam, the Frost King has decided to celebrate it by his best blizzard. He has planned it so we can’t go to school, and so Diana can make us a longer visit. All hail to the Frost King!”

“I wish the Frost King had planned it so we could get our milk this morning,” said Mrs. Owen; “he didn’t tell me he was planning the blizzard, and now I haven’t a bit of milk in the house.”

“The Frost King says the water is all right for drinking,” said Peggy. “He says it is so cold it doesn’t have to be put on ice.”

The children had a merry time eating their breakfast, although even Peggy’s fertile imagination could think of no way by which the Frost King could make oatmeal taste well without milk. 136

Suddenly Mrs. Owen had a bright idea. “We can have maple syrup on our oatmeal,” she said.

This was, indeed, a treat, and so were the eggs the Rhode Island family had laid, and there was delicious toast and butter, and oranges, as an especial birthday treat.

“I am afraid old Michael won’t be able to come and shovel us out, on account of his rheumatism,” said Mrs. Owen.

Peggy and Alice put on their raincoats and rubber boots and stocking caps, and they took their snow-shovels and tried to make a path to the hen-house. Diana watched them, with her face close to the kitchen window. Peggy stopped to wave to Diana, and lost her footing, tumbling down into the snow. She got up, shaking herself and laughing heartily. Diana watched the children as their eyes grew brighter and their cheeks redder and redder with their exercise. The snow powdered them over with flakes from head to foot. It was impossible to make a good path, for the wind kept blowing the snow back, but they made enough headway so they could get out to Hotel Hennery. They came back to the house for food for its hungry inhabitants. There were others to be fed—blue jays, chickadees, sparrows, and crows; and then a flock of pheasants. And there was Lady Janet. She could not understand why there was no milk in her saucer and looked 137 at them with beseeching eyes.

As the long morning passed, and Peggy and Mrs. Owen were busy in the kitchen, making the large biscuits and cookies, and the small ones, even Alice had begun to get tired of playing with dolls.

“Can’t we come out in the kitchen and help you?” she asked.

“No, I don’t need your help.”

“Can’t Peggy come in and play games with us?”

“No, Peggy is helping me.”

“I am very busy,” said Peggy. “You can play games by yourselves.”

Then Alice realized how flat every game seemed without Peggy. It was all right so long as they were playing dolls, but one could not play dolls all day. The geography game would be a pleasant change. Alice proposed having an afternoon tea for the dolls, and Diana agreed, although it did not seem quite a suitable hour for it in the middle of the morning.

“I wish mother would let us go out into the kitchen and help her,” Alice said.

They had had too much play, and this was the truth. A little real work would have been interesting.

“I guess they are making some kind of a surprise for your birthday dinner,” said Diana.

And when dinner came, and they saw the big biscuits and the little ones, and large cookies with caraway seeds in them, and the small ones, they were perfectly delighted. 138

The dolls were all allowed to come to the table with them, and, as there were four people and five dolls, each doll was well looked after. Alice had two on one side of her and one on the other. It was a merry meal; Peggy, having made up her mind to play dolls, did it thoroughly. She answered for the dolls in a different voice for each. Her namesake, Peggy Owen Carter, who sat beside her, ate so much her little mother had to reprove her.

“My dear child, you mustn’t be so greedy,” said Diana. “I should think you had never tasted lamb stew before.”

“I haven’t,” said Peggy Owen Carter, in a shrill, high-pitched voice that made the children

laugh. “We only have such things as legs of lamb and roast beef and turkey and broiled chickens at our house.”

“Oh, please, can’t we help to do the dishes?” Diana asked, when the lively meal was over.

“Yes, you and Alice can do the dishes inside while Peggy helps me in the kitchen with the pots and pans.”

“Can’t Peggy help us?” Alice asked.

She had learned the value of Peggy. Everything was so much more exciting when she was around.

“You can begin by yourselves, and I’ll be through with her pretty soon,” said Mrs. Owen.

It kept on snowing fast all day, and, toward the end of the afternoon, Diana began to wonder how she was to get home. Mrs. Owen went to the telephone to call up the Carters, but could not 139
make it work. She tried again and again. The line was out of order. This had happened once before that winter in another snowstorm. Diana began to look a little sober. She was not exactly homesick, but the thought of home with her father and mother and her two brothers seemed very pleasant. It seemed forlorn not to be able to reach them by telephone. They knew where she was, however, and it was pleasant to have Peggy and Alice so overjoyed at the great storm.

“They never can come for Diana to-day,” Peggy said. “The roads aren’t broken out.”

When night came, both Diana and Alice begged Peggy to sleep with them, and this was a triumph. They asked her to sleep in the middle, as each wanted Peggy next to her; and they kept her telling stories of what she saw on the wall until Mrs. Owen came up and said, “Children, you must stop talking, or I shall take Peggy into my room again.”

Peggy saw wonderful things. They were all snow scenes, in deep forests where every twig was coated with diamonds or powdered with snow. She saw the Frost King there, having his revels, and finally, just before Mrs. Owen came up to stop their talking, she saw the roads being broken out, and Tom and Christopher coming for Diana with the big sled. Diana went to sleep with this
pleasant picture in her mind, and, toward the end of the next day, it really happened. It stopped 140
snowing early the next morning, but the snow-plough did not get around in time for the children to go to school. It was just after dinner when Tom and Christopher appeared.

“We’ve come to make a path to your front door, Mrs. Owen,” Tom said. “And we’ll make one to the hen-house, too.”

They had brought their snow-shovels along with them, and they began to dig with a will. Peggy got her shovel and went out to help them, and Alice and Diana watched the merry trio from the window.

“I can’t bear to have Diana go,” said Peggy. “I wish she could live here always.”

“I’ve had a lovely time,” said Diana.

But, like Lady Jane Grey, she was glad to get back to the other house.

141

CHAPTER XVI

GRANDMOTHER OWEN’S VISIT

There were other great storms before the winter was over, and spring was very late that year, but when it did come it seemed to the children as if the world had never been so beautiful. This was the joy of living in New England. There was no monotony about the seasons. After a winter with banks and banks of snow, and coasting enough to satisfy one’s wildest dreams, the snow vanished; and the brown earth soon became ready for planting; the same miracle began again, of green points poking their heads up to the light.

And if other springs had been delightful, this was so thrilling Peggy wanted to dance and shout with joy—for her own dearly beloved Henrietta Cox was sitting on a dozen eggs, and one day some downy, fluffy chickens were hatched out. Yes, actually, these tiny creatures—living, moving, breathing creatures, all of them Peggy’s very own—were chipping their shells, and making their entrance into this wonderful world. Alice took the chickens more calmly, but she was greatly interested in them in her quiet way.

“Oh, mother, I do hope grandmother likes chickens,” Peggy said, when Mrs. Owen told the children that she had a letter from their grandmother, fixing the time of her annual spring visit. 142

“Peggy, you never seem to be able to think of but one thing at a time,” said her mother. “What difference will it make whether your grandmother likes chickens? She won’t have to do anything

about them."

The children were very much interested in helping arrange the spare room for their grandmother. Alice got out the prettiest bureau cover from the linen closet, and the children helped their mother wash the china for the washstand. It was pretty china, covered with small pink roses, with green leaves. And there was a pincushion, that was white over pink, on the bureau. Peggy went out and picked some of the hemlock and put that in a green vase on the table.

It was a pleasant excitement to have their grandmother come. She always brought them presents. She was a quiet, dignified woman, and she had brown eyes very like Alice's, but her hair, that was once brown, was now snow-white. They all went down to the station to meet her, and they rode back with her in the taxi, and that was great fun.

Their grandmother was not a person who expressed a great deal, so, when she came into the house and said, "Mary, how pleasant you have made this little house look," they were all very much pleased.

The children could hardly wait for her trunk to be unpacked, for they were eager to see what she had brought. They did not venture to go into her room; she liked to have her room to herself. She was tired, and it was almost supper-time before she came down. She had some things in her hands. 143

"I have some blue gingham here for a dress for Peggy, and some pink for Alice," she said. "I have brought some material for new white dresses, too."

The children were delighted with the thought of their new frocks. Their grandmother brought them each a book besides.

Lady Janet wandered into the parlor.

"You have the same cat, I see," said their grandmother.

"Oh, no, grandmother, she's different," Alice said. "Don't you see how different she is? She's her daughter. She hasn't so many stripes on her tail, and she's a lighter gray. And she's got a different character."

"Has she?" said their grandmother, as pussy began to sharpen her claws on the sofa. "It seems to me her nature is very much the same. Do you let her come into the parlor?"

"Sometimes," said Mrs. Owen. "If the children see that she doesn't go up into the bedrooms and make small footmarks on the bed quilts—that is all I ask."

"You don't like cats very well, do you, grandmother?" said Peggy.

"Yes, I like them in their proper place." 144

"What is their proper place?" Peggy asked.

"I like to see a cat sitting patiently in front of a mouse-hole, or lying on the bricks in front of the kitchen stove; but I don't like to see it scratching the parlor furniture."

"Neither do I," said Mrs. Owen. "Put Lady Janet out into the kitchen, Alice."

They all went out to supper, and again the older Mrs. Owen praised the dainty appearance of the table.

"Mary, I don't know how you have done it, but you have made this tiny house just as attractive as your large one."

"All the paper and paint are new and fresh here, and I got rid of all my ugly furniture and have only kept the old pieces."

"I wish you would come and do my house over for me. And, by the way, I am hoping you and the children will come and spend three months with me this summer. I am sure the sea air will do the children good."

She did not notice how their faces clouded over. The mere suggestion filled them with despair. Leave her beloved Rhode Island Reds, Peggy was thinking, just as Henrietta had hatched out twelve downy, fluffy balls? Why, they would be big chickens when they came back. Leave Lady Janet? was Alice's thought. No sea-bathing and boating could make up for the loss of her friendly little face. 145

"Could I take Lady Janet with me, grandmother?" Alice asked.

"I hardly think so. A cat does not like to be moved."

"It is very kind of you to think of it," said Mrs. Owen, "but I am afraid I shall have to stay right here by my garden and my hens."

"Oh, have you hens?" Mrs. Owen asked.

"Yes, grandmother, seven of them and a cock," Peggy said; "and twelve teenty, tinety chickens, the dearest, cunningest things. Don't you remember," she added, reproachfully, "how I wrote

and told you we had a birthday surprise party of hens for mother?”

“I do remember it now.”

Peggy said no more about the hens. How terrible it was to be so old that the idea of seven hens and a cock and twelve chickens made no more impression on one than that! And yet, Miss Betsy Porter must be nearly as old as her grandmother, and Miss Betsy was deeply interested in hens. After all, it was the kind of person you were, and not the age.

Two or three days later, as Mrs. Owen was writing letters, she heard Peggy say to Alice, “I like it better when grandmother isn’t here.”

“So do I,” said Alice. “I wonder when she is going home?”

Mrs. Owen looked up from her writing. “She is going to stay ten days longer, and then, if I can persuade her, she will come back to us for the whole summer.” 146

Mrs. Owen turned to look at her little girls. Their faces wore a discontented, rebellious look.

“Did it ever occur to you that it is of no importance whether you like the way things are or not?” she asked. “You are two very small, unimportant people. Did you ever stop to think what your grandmother has had to bear?”

They had never thought anything about it. Their minds had been entirely taken up with their own affairs.

“Your father was your grandmother’s only child,” Mrs. Owen went on, and her voice was unsteady. “She owned the big house we used to live in, and every summer they came to it, so that your father and your Uncle William and I played together when we were children. When your father became a doctor and married me and settled down here, she gave us the house for a wedding present. Think, Peggy, for a minute, of what it meant to you to lose your father. But you had only known him a few short years, and you and Alice are so young you have a whole rich life before you. But your grandmother is not young; she had had him all his life, and he was her only child.”

There were tears in her mother’s eyes. Peggy had seldom seen them there. She slipped down from her chair and went over to her mother, putting an arm about her waist. It was not of her grandmother that she was thinking, but of her mother, who had lost so much, and yet was so brave. 147

Mrs. Owen dried her eyes and was silent for a minute.

Then she said: “Your grandmother is a very lonely person.”

“But she lives in the city where there are lots and lots of people,” said Alice.

“Yes, and she has many friends and acquaintances, but that does not prevent her being lonely. We are the only near relations she has. You remember how she wanted to take Peggy and bring her up. I could not consent to that. Then she wanted us all to spend the summer with her, and we all of us like better to be at home. But I think she would really like to spend the summer with us. Now, Peggy, the better one knows people, the more one finds to like in them, if they are good people; and it is just a question of what we are looking out for most in this world, whether it is to be happy ourselves, or to try to make other people happy. If we are trying to be happy ourselves, all kinds of things turn up that we did not expect, to spoil our fun. After all, it is not so very important, whether we are happy or not.”

“I think it is very important,” said Peggy. “And I guess you thought so when you were a little girl, mother.”

“You are right, Peggy, I did. But now the question is, will you children try to make your grandmother happy?” 148

“I’ll try,” said Peggy; “but I just can’t stand it if she doesn’t care about my dear Rhode Island Reds.”

But her grandmother did grow to appreciate them, to Peggy’s great surprise. One morning she went out with Peggy when she fed the chickens. It was a sunny morning, with a soft blue sky and fleecy clouds.

“To think of my being here all these days and not having seen your hens,” said Mrs. Owen.

“I thought, if you waited until you wanted to see them, it would be more of a treat,” said Peggy.

“Who put that idea into your head, your mother?”

“No, I don’t want people to see them unless it is a treat.”

Peggy’s grandmother looked at the little girl’s eager, upturned face.

“Do you like them so much, Peggy?” she asked.

Peggy hesitated. It was one of the great decisions of her life. On her answer depended the success or failure of her intercourse with her grandmother. If she said, “I like them well enough,” they would remain just seven Rhode Island hens and a cock, so far as her grandmother

was concerned. She looked up at her grandmother, inquiringly. Her grandmother smiled down at her pleasantly.

“I just love them!” said Peggy.

“What a handsome cock!” said her grandmother.

This compliment to her favorite pleased Peggy. “Isn’t he a beauty?” she said.

“He certainly is,” said her grandmother warmly.

“His name is Mr. Henry Cox,” said Peggy, in a burst of confidence.

“What a nice name,” said her grandmother.

And so it was that the elder Mrs. Owen became interested in feeding the hens and chickens and helping hunt for eggs, and when she went home, at the end of the visit, they were all glad to think that she was to spend the summer with them.

“I am glad she is coming back,” said Peggy to Alice. “Do you know, Alice, I think when she comes back, we’ll teach her the geography game.”

“I don’t think she’s got a very nice name,” said Alice. “I’m glad they didn’t call me Rebecca, for her. And she can only live in one State.”

“Yes,” said Peggy, “but it is such a nice State. She could live in Rhode Island, with all my dear Rhode Island Reds.”

THE END

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK PEGGY IN HER BLUE FROCK ***

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