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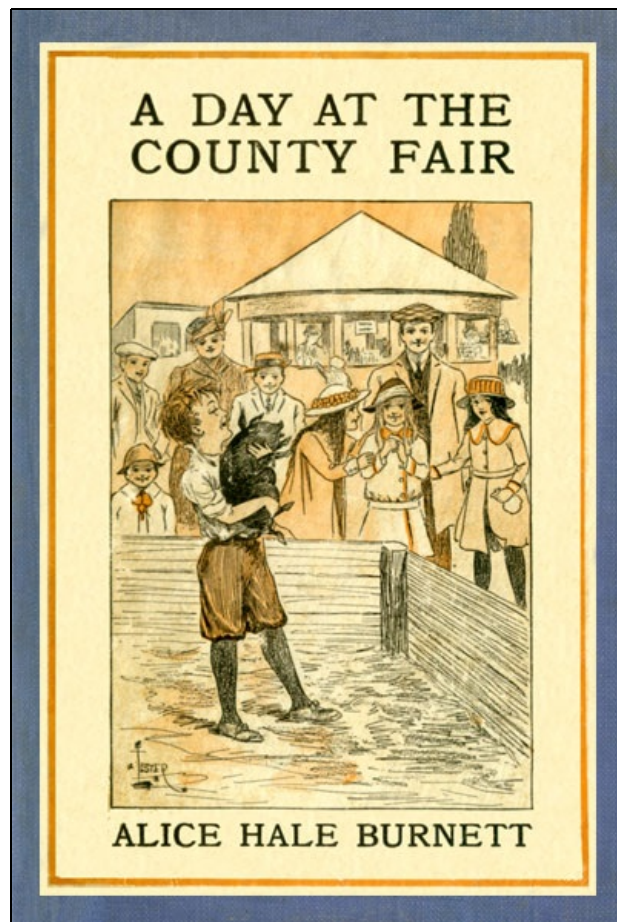
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**With a queer swaying motion the huge ball
rose slowly in the air.**

THE MERRYVALE GIRLS

A DAY AT THE COUNTY FAIR

BY

ALICE HALE BURNETT

AUTHOR OF

"BETH'S GARDEN PARTY,"

"GERALDINE'S BIRTHDAY SURPRISE,"

"A DAY AT THE COUNTY FAIR," ETC.

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A DAY

[Pg 9]

AT THE COUNTY FAIR

CHAPTER I

THE INVITATION

"Oh, push it harder, much harder, so I can go away up to the tree tops," cried Jerry. "Don't you just love to fly through the air this way?"

Mary Lee gave the swing one more push.

"There!" she exclaimed, "that's the best I can do, Geraldine White. I'm hot all over now," and she dropped down on the soft grass at the foot of a big tree.

"After the old cat dies, I'll give you a fine swing," promised Jerry. "You'll think you're in an airship." [Pg 10]

"Indeed you won't," protested Mary. "It's horrid and makes me feel ill. Oh, look," she exclaimed, "here comes Beth Burton."

Flying down the street, her hair streaming behind her, came Beth, her cheeks aglow and her dark eyes dancing with excitement.

Mary had run at once to meet her and Jerry followed as soon as she could stop the swing.

"It's the loveliest news," panted Beth when she had reached them—"an invitation."

"Oh, do tell us what it is," demanded the other two in chorus. [Pg 11]

"Well," continued Beth, placing an arm about each as they all walked up the path, "it's to go motoring. My uncle Billy is going to take us," and she gave each girl a little hug. "But that isn't all," she added. "There's a surprise on the end of the ride."

Jerry danced up the path with joy.

"A motor ride and a surprise all in one day," thought Jerry.

"I think it's just dear of him to ask us to go, too," said Mary. "He could have taken you alone."

Beth smiled, as she replied:

"It wouldn't be half as much fun without you, and I don't know what the surprise is, either; Uncle Billy wouldn't tell me." [Pg 12]

Jerry suddenly stopped dancing.

"Mary Lee," she said, "you're just as big a goose as I am. We've never asked Beth when it's to be."

"Why, to-day, of course," was the laughing answer; "that's why I hurried so. We'll stop for you both at eleven o'clock, and Uncle Billy says he'll bring us all back safely by six o'clock to-night. I do hope your mothers will allow you to go."

"Oh, mercy! I must hurry. I'll have to ask Mother, and then change my dress," and Mary darted down the path. "I'll come back here when I'm ready," she called to them over her shoulder.

"I shall have to hurry home, too," laughed Beth, "but, Jerry, before I leave, do go in and ask your [Pg 13]

mother if you may go."

It took but a moment for Jerry to reach the house and in another she had reached the room where her mother sat sewing.

"Oh, it's going to be such fun! May I go? The whole day, and a motor ride, and a surprise, too. Isn't it sweet of Beth?"

"Jerry, what are you talking about?" asked Mrs. White; "a motor ride and a surprise; what do you mean, dear?"

"Oh," giggled Jerry, "I always get mixed up when I talk fast," and standing beside her mother, she explained about the invitation she had just received from Beth.

"Indeed you may go, and I'm sure you will enjoy it very much," was her mother's reply. "But now you'd better run upstairs and get ready, for you haven't much time." [Pg 14]

Jerry, happy to receive her mother's permission, flew to the door.

"It's all right, Beth dear," she called. "I may go."

"Oh, I'm so glad," answered Beth; "be sure you're ready at eleven."

CHAPTER II

[Pg 15]

THE MOTOR TRIP

"Mercy, goodness! Five minutes to eleven, and I can't find my hat," and poor Jerry darted from one closet to another in her search. "Where do you suppose it is?"

"It's just where you left it," answered Mary, who had arrived ten minutes before and had been helping Jerry hunt for the missing hat. "Now stop running around and try to think a minute."

Jerry stood still and thought very hard.

"Why, I believe it's—it's in my hat box, you dear thing! Why didn't you tell me to do that before?" and Jerry darted up the stairs to her room, and in another minute called out: [Pg 16]

"Yes, here it is, safe and sound," at which Mary burst into laughter.

"Honk, honk!" sounded from without.

"Here they are,—here they come," and both girls flew to meet Beth, who had just stepped out of the car as it stopped before the house.

Mrs. White followed the girls down the path and Uncle Billy smilingly promised her to have the girls home before dark.

"Jerry, you sit in front for a while with Uncle Billy," suggested Beth. "I think it will be nice if we take turns riding beside him." [Pg 17]

"Fine idea," laughed Uncle Billy, "then I can get acquainted with all of you."

Jerry climbed in the front seat while Mary and Beth sat in the wide seat behind, with a large wicker lunch basket on the floor before them.

"Good-bye," they called as the car started, and Mrs. White waved her handkerchief until they were out of sight.

It was the beautiful month of September and the leaves were turning to red and gold. The air was soft and cool against their faces and the sky was dotted here and there with tiny white clouds that looked like little ships sailing on an ocean of blue. [Pg 18]

Uncle Billy had headed the car toward the west and it sped down the country road, leaving the town of Merryvale far behind. Past fields and farms they flew, through woodlands and over little bridges under which ran tiny, bubbling brooks.

"It's like being in fairyland," whispered Mary. "Look, the leaves have made a gold and crimson carpet."



"Don't you just love to fly through the air this way?" cried Jerry.

"Yes, and at night the fairies dance in the moonlight," answered Beth, "and drink honey from the blue bells. Wouldn't that soft mossy bank make a lovely throne for the queen?"

"What are you two talking about?" demanded Jerry, turning around in her seat and facing them. "I don't believe you know that Beth's Uncle Billy let me drive this car for a long way and he hardly helped at all."

[Pg 19]

"Well, I should say we didn't, or we'd have been scared to death," laughed Beth.

"Well, it's not half as dangerous as driving an airship, and I'm going to do that some day. I'd love to go away up above the clouds."

"And talk to the man in the moon, I suppose," teased Mary.

"That would be fun, if you didn't have any engine trouble," chuckled Uncle Billy, joining in the fun.

[Pg 20]

"What's engine trouble?" demanded Jerry. "Do you mean something happening to the works of it?"

"That's it," declared Uncle Billy, "and when it happens down you come faster than even you would like."

"Just down right side up or head over heels," insisted Jerry.

"Well, it needn't make any difference to you, because you are not going to do it, Geraldine White," interrupted Beth, looking at Mary, who hastened to agree with her.

"Lots of times I've wished I were a boy," sighed Jerry. "Nobody ever seems to mind what they do."

"What's the surprise, Uncle Billy?" asked Beth. "Why are you stopping?"

"I don't know myself," said Uncle Billy with a frown on his forehead, as the car gradually came to a stop, "but I'll have to find out."

[Pg 21]

"Whatever's the matter?" cried Jerry. "Do you think we're having engine trouble?" and she hopped out and stood by the roadside gazing at the car.

"Nothing so easy as that," answered Uncle Billy, in great disgust; "it's gas. We have run out of it. Looks as though they didn't fill up the tank in the garage before we started, as I told them to do."

"Gasoline!" gasped Beth, "and that's what makes it go."

THE PICNIC LUNCH

"Oh, cheer up," said Uncle Billy in his jolly way, "some one will be along before a great while and we'll all drive to the nearest town with them."

Beth stood up on the seat and clapped her hands.

"Listen, everyone," she said, "let's have luncheon while we're waiting."

All were delighted with her plan and in less time than it takes to tell it the basket was lifted out of the car and in the shade of a large tree close by the little party made merry over the dainty sandwiches and iced lemonade.

[Pg 23]

There were little cakes, too, with pink and white icing.

"I know Martha made these," commented Jerry; "they taste like a cake we had at your party, Beth."

Uncle Billy declared that never before in his life had he eaten so many good things, all at one time.

"There's a wagon!" and Mary, who had been the first to see it, jumped to her feet and pointed up the road toward a farm wagon, piled high with hay, which was approaching them.

Uncle Billy started off at once to meet it and while the girls were busily packing the things back into the basket he was telling the man who drove the wagon about their mishap.

[Pg 24]

"You can all come along with me to town and then send some one back with gasoline to fetch in your car, if you like. I'm driving in to the county fair," explained the farmer.

"Fine!" decided Uncle Billy. "We'll do it." So in great haste the girls were soon swung up, one by one, to the top of the hay. Then Uncle Billy climbed on.

"All aboard!" he shouted, and at the word the farmer started his team. As the wagon bumped and swayed along the road, the girls held hands to keep from sliding off.

CHAPTER IV

[Pg 25]

THE FUN BEGINS

"Did you ever see so many wagons in all your life? Why, there are hundreds of them," declared Jerry, when they had reached the little town and were driving down the main street.

"How would you like to go to the fair?" suggested Uncle Billy with his eyes twinkling with merriment.

"Oh, do you really mean it?" questioned Mary. "I've always wanted to see a county fair."

"So have I," echoed each of the others.

"All right; it's a bargain," nodded Uncle Billy. "You all wait here," he told the girls a few minutes later, as he helped them out of the wagon, "while I get some one to bring the car into town."

[Pg 26]

He left the girls chatting together in great excitement over the unexpected treat, and when he returned there were a great many questions to answer as he led the way toward the great entrance gate.

"Tickets, tickets to the fair grounds! Here you are, boss! This way to the ticket booth."

"I wonder if he thinks you all belong to me?" said Uncle Billy, smiling and nodding to the man in the plaid suit and high hat who had addressed them.

"How funny!" laughed Beth. "You don't look a bit like our fathers."

[Pg 27]

"There's the merry-go-round," pointed out Mary when they were inside the grounds, "and there's one of those funny houses you get lost in."

"Oh," exclaimed Jerry to Uncle Billy, "look at yourself in that mirror. You're only a foot high and fat as a butter ball."

The three girls laughed until they cried, as Uncle Billy bowed and smiled at himself before the mystic mirror that made the tallest person seem short and squatty.

"Let's ride on the merry-go-round," proposed Beth; "it's almost ready to start."

"Jump aboard," ordered her uncle, "I'll see to the tickets."

[Pg 28]

Jerry had at once chosen a very wild-looking lion to ride upon, but Mary and Beth decided on two

beautiful white horses, that rose up and down on the iron rods that ran through their wooden bodies, as the platform circled about.

The music was a jolly tune that the girls had heard before, so they laughed and sang and waved each time to Uncle Billy as they sped past him.

When the ride was over they walked to the other side of the grounds, where a great crowd had gathered.

"What is it?" asked Jerry. "What is the fun about?" for everyone seemed to be laughing.

Uncle Billy soon found a place for the girls near the inner circle, and to their great surprise they saw a number of boys trying to catch some very shiny little black pigs within a small enclosure. The crowd roared with delight whenever a pig would slip through the fingers of the boy trying to catch him. [Pg 29]

"What makes them so shiny?" asked Beth, "and why do they want to catch them?"

"Why, grease makes them shiny," replied Uncle Billy, "and the boy who is clever enough to catch one gets the pig, or a prize."

"I do hope that boy with the red hair and freckles will catch his," whispered Mary; "he looks just like a boy I know."

"Oh, I know whom you mean;—Reddy," said Jerry with a smile. [Pg 30]

"Isn't it dreadful the way those pigs squeal," and Beth put her hands over her ears to shut out the sound.

At last the red-haired boy, whom Mary hoped would win, drove a pig into a corner, and as the crowd watched he managed to grasp it by a fore and hind leg and held it close to him.

"Now I've got you, you little rascal!" he cried, and the crowd cheered as the little black pig wriggled in his arms and tried in vain to get away.

The boy was now shown a number of prizes from which to choose. He selected a silver watch and chain, with which he started off as proud as a peacock.

"You brought him good luck, wishing that he would win," said Beth to Mary as they turned to go. [Pg 31]

CHAPTER V

[Pg 32]

THE GREASED POLE

"Did you ever see such large tomatoes?" exclaimed Jerry, pointing to a booth where some prize vegetables were being exhibited.

"I'm glad you like them," said a fat, smiling old woman who was standing near them, "for I grew them myself and they're prize winners."

"Oh, I don't see how you ever did it," declared Jerry. "I had a garden once and most everything died but the weeds."

"Well, my dear, wasn't that just too bad? Perhaps you forgot to water the plants. It's a bit of care every day that brings them along," and she patted Jerry's rosy cheeks. [Pg 33]

"I guess the poor things starved to death," thought Jerry as she joined the others, "for I'm sure I often forgot them."

"What an enormous pumpkin, Uncle Billy. Do you think it's real?" asked Beth, as they stopped before a large display of them.

"Yes, of course it's real," he assured her, "and just think of all the good pies it will make."

"I wonder if Cinderella's chariot was as big a pumpkin as that," mused Mary.

"What are those funny looking poles over there, with cross pieces at the top?" Jerry exclaimed, "there's a boy trying to climb up one of them." [Pg 34]

"Let's go over and see," suggested one of the others, so they made their way over and joined the crowd about the two poles and were soon watching the boys who tried to climb up to secure the presents hanging from the cross pieces.

"I believe they are greased to be slippery like the pigs were," remarked Mary.

"They are," Uncle Billy replied, "it's a game brought over from France."

It did seem for a while that not one of the boys ever would succeed in reaching the top. They would climb up a short way and then slide back, while the crowd laughed and cheered. [Pg 35]



"Now I've got you, you little rascal!" he cried, and the crowd cheered.

Finally a long-legged boy twisted himself around one of the poles and with funny, quick motions worked his way up near the top.

"Oh, I do hope he gets there," whispered Jerry, under her breath as the boy had almost reached the top, "his clothes look so ragged and poor."

"He's up," shouted the crowd. "What's he going to take?"

The boy now had one arm thrown about the crosspiece and was looking at all the different things he had to choose from.

"Take your time, sonny; look them all over first," called out a good-natured man in the crowd below, but the boy was quick to decide and slid a shining pair of skates from off the pole across his shoulders. [Pg 36]

"They'll come in handy before very long," he told the crowd with a laugh as he came down the pole.

"Good for you, Spider," called out his boy friends, running up to admire the fine new skates which he was proud to show.

"What a horrid name," commented Beth, "but I'm glad he won."

CHAPTER VI

[Pg 37]

JERRY'S TREAT

Uncle Billy now led the party over to the pop corn and peanut stand where he made several purchases for them, after which he told Jerry that he had a treat in store for her.

"It's a secret between us and we'll tell you all about it when we get back," he said to the others. "Now what would you like to do while we are away?"

"Ride on the merry-go-round," declared both the girls in a breath, and so after a few minutes, when they had reached the merry-go-round a long string of tickets was handed Beth and she willingly promised to remain there until Uncle Billy returned. [Pg 38]

"What is it we're going to do?" asked Jerry in great excitement, dancing along beside Uncle Billy as they started away.

"Away over your head I see something," he answered—"something round like a ball, with a basket hanging beneath it. Can you guess what it is?"

"Oh, do stop teasing," pleaded Jerry, "and tell me."

"It's a balloon," replied Uncle Billy. "Would you like to go up in it?"

"Oh, yes," she answered, her eyes dancing with delight. "Will it sail away off?"

"No, Jerry, it won't or you wouldn't catch me going up in it. I'm going to look it all over first to find out if it's perfectly safe." [Pg 39]

"But suppose the rope should break?" insisted Jerry as they hurried along.

"We'd let the gas escape from the bag, and that would make the balloon sink slowly to the earth. Of course we would not let all of the gas out, but just enough to let it sink to the ground. Why, you little monkey," added Uncle Billy, "I believe you wanted it to break away," and he laughed at her daring.

After the balloon ropes were well tested, both climbed into the basket where two women passengers were already standing beside the attendant.

"Only fifty cents for ten minutes above the clouds," shouted the man selling tickets, "step this way and get off the earth." [Pg 40]

"He's trying to be funny, isn't he?" laughed Jerry as she held tightly to the basket's edge.

"All aboard for the ascension," someone called, and with a queer, swaying motion and sudden lurches the huge ball of gas rose slowly into the air.

"Oh, dear, I wish I'd never come!" exclaimed the woman standing next to Jerry. "Aren't you scared, little girl?"

"Oh, but don't you like it?" was Jerry's surprised answer. "I think it's wonderful. It's almost like being a bird."

Uncle Billy bent down to look at Jerry as they arose higher into the air. [Pg 41]

"Is it as fine as you thought it would be?" he asked.

"Oh, it's heaps nicer," she cried, clapping her hands. "See how small everything is down there, and do you see the merry-go-round? What would Mary and Beth think if they knew?"

"Over those hills is Merryvale," he pointed out. "That road winding in and out leads into the town. It's the one we came by."

"Looks just like a piece of ribbon, doesn't it?" she answered.

"Seems as though we've stopped going up now," she observed a moment later.

"Well, thank goodness," sighed the woman seated next to her, "I'm sure it's plenty high enough for anybody. I'm most scared out of my wits now." [Pg 42]

Jerry squeezed Uncle Billy's hand as she looked up at him.

"She's afraid," she whispered.

"Which way is the ocean, Uncle Billy?" she added, a moment later.

"Which one—you know we have two of them?" was his teasing reply.

"Of course I know that, but I mean the Atlantic. That's the one I like the best because you go to Europe that way."

Uncle Billy then pointed his long arm toward the east.

"Away, way over there," he said.

"My, but the world's an awfully big place," declared Jerry, "and to think my doll, Togo Sen, has crossed an ocean and I've never even seen one." [Pg 43]

When the ten minutes had passed the balloon commenced to descend.

"It's been a beautiful surprise, Uncle Billy, I'll never forget it," said Jerry.

"I thought it would make you happy," was his answer.

CHAPTER VII

[Pg 44]

UNCLE BILLY'S STORY

"Here they are," cried Beth as Jerry and Uncle Billy came into view. "We thought you'd never

come," she reproved as they drew near. "Where in the world have you two been?"

"We haven't been anywhere in the world," laughed Jerry, "we've been far above it."

"What are you talking about?" demanded Mary. "Tell us this minute."

"Well, we've been ballooning," confessed Uncle Billy.

"The very idea," gasped Beth. "Do you mean you dared to go up in one of those awful things?" [Pg 45]

"Well, I'm glad you didn't invite us to go, for we'd never have done it," declared Mary, as the others laughed.

"Take a chance on a beautiful doll, only ten cents. Won't you young ladies take a chance?" said a boy, stepping up to them and waving a handful of tickets.

"How do we know she's beautiful?" asked Uncle Billy. "We'd like to see her first."

"Only a few tickets left," urged the boy, "you'd better take them now. The doll's right over there in the glass case for you to look at."

The three girls darted off for a peep at the doll and Uncle Billy, after buying four tickets from the boy, followed them, and all stood gazing at the beautiful large French doll. [Pg 46]

"Oh, if one of us could only win her!" exclaimed Mary, "she would be so stylish at our parties with that lovely French look, and we would call her Mlle. Marie, like your French teacher, Beth."

"We'd have to have very fancy parties when we invited her," responded Beth, "or she might turn up her nose."

"We will call out the winning number from this spot in just a half hour from now," called the ticket seller, "and everyone be on hand who has a ticket."

"Let's have some ice cream," suggested Uncle Billy, "it'll help pass the time while we're waiting to find out who's the lucky one." [Pg 47]

"Oh, goody, I love ice cream!" exclaimed Mary. "Uncle Billy, you always think of the nicest things."

When they had found a small table in one corner of the raised platform where refreshments were served, the little party seated themselves quickly and looked about at the crowds of people passing below them.

"Isn't it pretty here?" observed Mary, looking at the garlands of leaves and flowers that covered the beams above their heads.

"I think it's the best day I ever had," announced Jerry.

The band, almost hidden by palms and huge ferns, now struck up a lively tune, and Beth tapped her fingers on the table as she kept time with the music. [Pg 48]

Uncle Billy ordered for each the cream she most liked and a generous plate of little cakes.

"I'll take plain vanilla with chocolate sauce," he said to the waiter, and when Mary asked why he didn't take strawberry, as it was so good, he threw back his head and gave a hearty laugh.

"I'll tell you," he said, "but you must promise never to repeat it."

"We promise," they agreed, so leaning forward, until their heads were close together, he began:

"It happened a long time ago. I was just eight years old, and had been told by my mother to take a strawberry shortcake she had made, to our church where a supper was being held." [Pg 49]

Here Uncle Billy paused and looked at each of the smiling faces before him.

"I'm afraid you're going to think I was a pretty bad little chap," he said.

"Oh, no, really we won't," they assured him, "do go on and tell us."

"Well," he continued, "it was a long walk to the church, and after I had gone a way I sat down by the roadside to rest. Also I was very fond of strawberries, so I took just a peep to see what it looked like. Then I took, oh, just a little sample, to see how it tasted, and didn't I smack my lips over it."

"And then, I'm ashamed to say what followed. Although I knew it was wrong I ate more and more until a fourth of it was gone, then what was I to do? I couldn't take it to the supper that way, so I decided to eat it all and hoped my mother wouldn't ask any questions when I got back home." [Pg 50]

"Oh," giggled Jerry, "did you do it?"

"I almost did—there wasn't very much left when I started for home. My mother didn't say a word when she saw me, because as she told me years later, she didn't have to ask any questions, for my face was covered with strawberry stains and little flecks of cream."



"I think," answered Mary, "I shall call her Elizabeth Geraldine for her two aunts."

"Well, I went to bed early that night. I didn't feel any too well, and before long a real pain came and danced up and down inside me. Oh, wasn't I sorry I had eaten that cake. [Pg 51]

"Mother came in then, and I felt better—well enough to tell her about it. I said then I'd never eat strawberries as long as I lived. And I never have."

Jerry laughed until the tears rolled down her cheeks, and Mary said it always happened to her that way, too, when she did bad things. Beth thought how sweet it must have been to have a mother to comfort you, for her mother had died when she was just a tiny girl.

"We must hurry now," said Uncle Billy, "if we want to hear the lucky number called," so off they started.

CHAPTER VIII

[Pg 52]

AN EXCITING MOMENT

"We're just in time," announced Mary, "and here comes the man who sold us the tickets."

The crowd drew closer to the high box which served as a platform, as the man stepped upon it. The first thing he did was to open a shoe box, which he had been carrying under his arm. He then requested anyone who wished to step up so as to see that the numbers in the box ran from 1 to 100. Several people examined the slips in the box and seemed satisfied that what he had told them was true. [Pg 53]

"All right," he continued. "Now will some young lady step up on the platform and draw a number out of this box?"

"Isn't it exciting," cried Jerry. "It's so near."

Some one lifted a little girl of three or four years up to the platform and the man held the open box before her.

"Everyone look at his number—we don't want to be kept waiting," he shouted.

Uncle Billy then gave each of the girls one of the tickets he had bought and kept the fourth one himself.

At a nod from the man, the little girl stretched out her hand and plunged it down into the box. [Pg 54]

"Just take one of them out," directed the man and the little tot smilingly obeyed, holding up one of the pieces of cardboard.

"Number 97 wins the doll," called the man from the box, as his eyes swept the eager crowd.

For a moment there was not a sound, then,

"I have it," cried a hearty voice, so close to the girls that it made them jump, and Uncle Billy strode forward to show his number and receive the doll.

A roar of laughter went up from the crowd as he placed the doll on his shoulder and started to return to the girls.

"Isn't it wonderful," cried Mary in delight.

[Pg 55]

"Oh, I'm so glad he got it," and Jerry jumped up and down in her excitement.

"So am I," agreed Beth, "I'm so happy. But what will he do with it?"

The crowd disappeared, and after Uncle Billy had joined the girls they found a seat where all could take their time to examine the beautiful new doll.

"What will we name her?" inquired Mary, patting the doll's golden curls.

"Aren't her eyes beautiful? They're blue like your's, Mary," remarked Jerry.

Uncle Billy, who had said nothing up to this time, now drew a letter from his pocket from which he tore three little strips of paper.

"I'm going to chance her all over again," he declared. "Each of you take a slip. The shortest wins the doll."

[Pg 56]

"Not I," objected Jerry, "because I've had a balloon ride and I loved it more than anything else. Let Beth and Mary choose."

"Oh, that wouldn't be fair," protested Mary.

"Yes, it is," agreed Uncle Billy. "I understand. Jerry doesn't want to be selfish."

"Well," insisted Beth, "I have the best of all, so I'm not going to draw."

"What do you mean?" asked Mary.

"Why, can't you guess, my Uncle Billy," laughed Beth. "He's only make believe yours, but he's really mine."

Uncle Billy put his arm about her and kissed her happy face.

[Pg 57]

"That's right, too," he said. "Little Beth has me."

"Oh, Mary, don't you refuse, too," pleaded Jerry, her eyes shining, "or the poor dear won't have any home."

Mary held out her arms to take the doll which Uncle Billy handed to her.

"I'll love you always," she whispered, "and Annabel will love you too."

"Well, what is her name to be?" asked Uncle Billy, as Mary with her new-found daughter stood before them.

"I think," answered Mary, with a smile, holding the doll very close in her arms, "I shall call her 'Elizabeth Geraldine,' for her two aunts."

CHAPTER IX

[Pg 58]

HOME AGAIN

"If we're going to get home before dark, as I promised, we'd better be moving along," said Uncle Billy. "I expect to find a man with our car outside the grounds."

The three girls arose reluctantly from their seat on the long bench.

"Well, I suppose the very best of days must come to an end," sighed Jerry.

"Why, it hasn't ended yet," said Beth, cheerfully. "We still have the long ride home, and you must sit in front, for I'm sure Mary and I will have our hands full to keep Elizabeth Geraldine from falling out."

[Pg 59]

"Yes," agreed Mary, "for don't you remember how we lost poor Annabel driving home from the party that day?"

As Uncle Billy had planned, his car stood at the entrance gate, and he soon had the happy little

party aboard.

All the way home Jerry talked gaily to Uncle Billy, telling him all about the merry times she had with the others, and of her dog Patsy that she loved so well.

"I must see him," declared Uncle Billy. "He must be a fine dog, from all that you say about him."

Beth and Mary had many things to talk about.

"Now we'll have to give a big party to introduce Elizabeth Geraldine to society," planned Beth. [Pg 60]
"Won't it be fun?"

"We'll have to make new dresses for all the other children so they'll look nice too. And, of course, I shall have to make some plainer clothes for her," said Mary, looking at Elizabeth Geraldine, "because it wouldn't do for her to look so stylish all the time. Oh, Beth," she suddenly added, "it was just dear of you and Jerry to want me to have her. I'll never, never forget it."

"Where's the first stop?" asked Uncle Billy, when they had reached the town of Merryvale.

"Two blocks down on this side," directed Beth. "Mary lives in the brown house next to the corner." [Pg 61]

"I don't know what to say," declared Mary a few moments later as the car drew up before her door, "except that I've had a lovely time. It's been just like a fairy story," she laughed, "wishing for Elizabeth Geraldine and getting her."

"Good-bye, dear," called out Beth and Jerry.

"Good-bye, Uncle Billy," and Mary blew him a kiss from her fingertips as the car started away and he waved to her.

When they reached Jerry's home, she threw her arms about Beth.

"Oh, I've just had the best time, and I'll never forget you, Uncle Billy. It's been a wonderful day." [Pg 62]

Beth, who had now taken the front seat, sat close to Uncle Billy as they sped toward home.

"You're the very best uncle in the world," she told him. "We've all been happy, but I've been the happiest of all."

"You always will be, Beth, because you have found out that the greatest joy is in doing for others."

THE END

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