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AN AUSTRALIAN LASSIE



"Seated on a partly submerged post ... was John Brown." (Page 25.)

AN AUSTRALIAN

LASSIE

BY

LILIAN TURNER

AUTHOR OF "THE PERRY GIRLS," ETC.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY A. J. JOHNSON

WARD, LOCK & CO., LIMITED
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TO
MY STEPFATHER
CHARLES COPE

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CHAPTER I

[8]

WYGATE SCHOOL

[9]

"EMILY UNDERWOOD, 19; Stanley Smith, 20; Cyril Bruce, 21; Nellie Underwood, 22; Elizabeth Bruce, 23—bottom of the class!"

Mr. Sharman took off his eyeglasses, rubbed them, and put them on again. Then he looked very hard at the little girl at the end of the furthest form, who was hanging her head and industriously biting a slate pencil.

"Stand up, Elizabeth Bruce. Put down your pencil and fold your hands behind you."

Elizabeth did as she was told instantly. Her rosy face looked anxiously into the master's stern one.

"Yesterday morning," the master said, "you were head of the class. This morning I find your name at the end of the list. How was that?"

Elizabeth hung her head again, and her dimpled chin hid itself behind the needlework of her pinafore. [10]

A small girl, a few seats higher, held up her hand and waved it impatiently.

"Well?" asked the master.

"Please sir, she was promptin' Cyril Bruce."

"Silence!" thundered the master sternly. Then his gaze went back to the bent head of the little culprit.

"Stand upon the form," he said, "and tell me in a clear voice how it is you went down twenty-two places in one afternoon."

The rosiness left the little girl's face. She raised her head, and her brown eyes looked pleadingly into the master's, her white face besought him, for one second. Then she scrambled up to the form by the aid of the desk in front of her.

Down the room near the master's desk stood a new boy, an awkward looking figure of twelve years old or so, waiting to be given a place in the class. Elizabeth knew that her disgrace was meant as a solemn warning to him. So she tossed back the short dark curls that hardly reached her neck, and looking angrily at him, said— [11]

"I was top and I pulled Nelly Martin's hair, and was sent down three. Then I was fourth, and my pencil squeaked my slate and I was sent down six. Then Cyril had to spell 'giraffe,' and I said 'one r and two f's,' and she sent me to the bottom."

All of this speech was directed to the new boy who stood on one leg and grew red. It was an immense relief to him when the master rapped the front desk with his cane and said—

"Look at me, miss. Whom do you mean by 'she'?"

At the end of the room a sharp visaged lady of forty-five was watching the proceedings of the first class from over the heads of a row of small students who comprised the "Babies' Class."

"D-o, do; g-o, go," she said mechanically, and looked anxiously from little Elizabeth to her stern son, the master of Wygate School.

Elizabeth jerked her head, "Mrs. Sharman," she said.

"Sit down and fold your hands behind you," ordered the master. He turned to the new boy. "John Brown," he said, "go and take your seat next to Elizabeth Bruce—but one above her." [12]

The new boy moved across the room, red-faced and clumsy in every movement. When he found himself in front of the class he grew still redder, and hung hesitatingly upon the step that led to the platform upon which the form was placed.

Elizabeth looked at him disdainfully and drew her dress close around her.

"Sit down, you silly," she said in a sharp whisper, and indicated with a little head toss the seat above her.

John Brown slunk past her and dropped heavily into his seat. The master retired to his desk and made an entry or two in his long blue book while silence hung over the schoolroom.

In Elizabeth's heart a flame of anger was spreading. That this boy, this new boy, should be placed above her, was in her eyes the greatest injustice. A small voice within told her that she had been punished sufficiently yesterday afternoon. [13]

Her head moved slightly in the direction of the new boy and her rosy lips opened.

"You cheat!" she whispered.

The boy sat motionless and the anger burned hotter in Elizabeth's heart.

"Cheaty, cheaty; go home and tell your mother!" she said in a sing-song way.

Still Brown did not move.

Elizabeth slid her hand along the seat and gave him a sharp pinch, and he started uneasily.

"Stand up the boy or girl who was speaking," ordered the master, without looking up.

A small fair-haired fair-complexioned boy, two seats above Elizabeth, flushed. His name was Cyril Bruce and he was Elizabeth's twin brother—twelve years old.

"I was only talking to myself—that's not speaking," he murmured.

Elizabeth rose slowly to her feet and stood working a corner of her pinafore into a knot. The master looked around, and his brow grew dark when he saw the small offender.

"Repeat aloud what you said, Elizabeth Bruce," he ordered.

[14]

The little girl grew white, then red, then white again, and went on twisting her pinafore.

"Do you hear me?" shouted the master. "Stand upon the form and repeat your words."

Once again Elizabeth clambered into a higher position.

"I said—I said, 'Cheaty, cheaty; go home and tell your mother,'" she said in a clear voice that sounded all over the room.

A shocked expression passed over the face of the class.

"To whom were you addressing yourself?" asked the master.

"The new boy," said the little girl.

"Sit down, and stay in the dinner-hour and write out the sentence fifty times."

Elizabeth sat down, and again her anger against the new boy blazed high.

She put out her foot and kicked the heel of his boot, but this time she eschewed words, for the face of the master was towards her, and an expectant silence hung over the schoolroom.

[15]

The clock struck ten, and the boy at the head of the class immediately began passing slates down—one to each pupil, with a piece of pencil upon it.

The sight of the well-cleaned slate and nicely pointed pencil brought a feeling of great uneasiness to Elizabeth.

It had been in her mind how nicely she could climb above the new boy, and the tell-tale girl, and all the other boys and girls, and now the order of the day was—sums.

The master was writing them down on the blackboard, making them up as he went along, with due care working nines and eights and sevens into his multiplicand and dealing but sparsely with fives and twos and threes.

Elizabeth copied it down and rubbed it out. Copied it down and rubbed out half, by judicious breathings directed judiciously; looked up the class to see how Cyril was progressing, and back to the board to see if a pleasant little short division sum was lurking near this obnoxious multiplication; then back to her slate to count the number of nines once more. And by that time the master was giving out his order: "Pencils down. Hands behind you. *At—tention.*"

[16]

Brown's face expressed such placidity that the master asked him to stand and give out the answer, and he gave it gladly enough—999.009—which sounded particularly learned to a class not yet introduced to decimals.

The master nodded. "You are right," he said, "but no one is up to decimals yet."

So it happened that Brown made his reputation straightway, and with such ease did he solve every arithmetical puzzle, that dinner-time saw him sitting smiling and covered with laurels at the head of the class, and Elizabeth still at the bottom cleaning her slate to write "Cheaty, cheaty; go home and tell your mother," fifty

times.

Wygate School was a preparatory school for boys and girls, although the girls outnumbered the boys. At the present stage of its existence it had eighteen girls and twelve boys. Not half a mile distant was a public school, to the precincts of which flocked fifty pupils daily, each of whom paid a modest threepence a week for educational advantages.

[17]

Wygate School was the only private school in the district, and was regarded respectfully by the neighbourhood. So many "undesirables" were precluded from its benefits, by its charge of one guinea a quarter.

John Brown, the new boy, whose age it appeared was thirteen years, was the eldest pupil in the school, and Floss Jones, who was four, was the baby.

The neighbourhood frequently moaned that there was no private school for those of riper years—fifteen and sixteen or so; but in some cases it called in a governess, in others it forewent its dignity and adopted the public school, and in others again it sent its young folk over the water to Sydney—a matter of three miles or more.

But the North Shore Highlands was at this time uncatered for by the tramway authorities. An old coach ran twice daily from Willoughby to the steamer—a morning trip and an evening-tide one—there and back. It was largely patronized by the Chinese, and parents of the artisan class hesitated and frequently refused to allow their young folk to make the journey.

[18]

The three young Bruces went every day across a beaten bush track, from their weather-board cottage home, past the big iron gates of Dene Hall, a house built of grey stone in the early days of the colony, where their irascible grandsire dwelt, up a red dusty road to the little school-house on the hill.

And special terms were arranged for them because they were three—Cyril, and Elizabeth the twins, and six-year-old Nancy.

They had always been three. For even in the days when Cyril and Elizabeth had belonged to the baby class there had been Dorothea, Dorothea who was sixteen and quite old now, who was a weekly boarder in a fashionable Sydney school (for a ridiculously small quarterly fee).

And when Dorothea had left Wygate School little Nancy's hand had been put into Elizabeth's and she too had taken the long red road to school. And after Nancy there was still a wee toddler who, it was said, would make the number up to three again when Cyril went to a "real" boy's school.

[19]

CHAPTER II

[20]

THE PEARL SEEKERS

THEY were round the corner and away from school—Cyril, Elizabeth and Nancy. Behind them were all the trials and vexations of the day, among which may be counted Mrs. Sharman, Mr. Sharman—and John Brown.

Cyril spoke with awe of John Brown's big hands and feet, and looked over his shoulder as he spoke. For that small hope of the Bruces had in the cloak-room inadvertently trodden upon Brown's hat, and had been startled by the way in which Brown had swung him round by his collar.

"I pinched him," said Betty proudly. "He shouldn't have gone above me. I'll pinch him every time."

Her sun-bonnet was tucked away under her arm, her boots and stockings were in the family lunch-basket that she carried, boy-like, swung over her shoulder, and she covered the ground most of the time with a hop, skip, and a jump, aided by a long stout stick.

[21]

"I suppose," she said, "we'll have to try the dangerous little coral islands this time. I know that's where the black pearl is hidden."

"Oh dear," sighed Nancy, "I don't like curral islands a bit. Let's go home to-day."

"Silly!" said Cyril loftily. "We've got to find the black pearl somehow."

"It'll be worth hundreds and thousands of pounds," said Elizabeth. "Just *think* of taking that to mother, just *think* of all we could do. It wouldn't matter *then* grandfather not speaking. *We* could drive past him in our carriage then! Come on my lass." This last was to Nancy.

"I want to go in the water, too, Betty," said the small lassie, following at a trot. "Don't want to be your old wife. I've been your wife for a lot of days now."

"I don't know who you mean when you say Betty," declared Elizabeth, and leapt forward so far that the other two had to sharpen their pace suddenly.

"Peter Lucky," said Nancy imploringly. "Oh, Peter Lucky, let Cywil be your wife a bit—do." [22]

"Cywil's"—it may be stated that Betty was still very backward sometimes in the matter of r's—"Cywil's got to be my chum—don't be such a stupid Nancy—er—Polly. He's got to try to murder me in the middle of the night to get the pearl. Look here, we've only just put you in to amuse you a bit, we can *just* as well do without you."

Nancy's face fell. Such statements were lavishly used by these two elders of hers towards herself. But the indignity she feared most was to be told to go home and play with the baby, and she looked at her sister with an eager smile now to stop the words if possible.

"Oh, don't do wivout me, Betty dear," she said. "I'll love to be your wife. I was only thinking it would be nice to have your feet in the water."

"You're six," said Betty. "You ought to be able to be my wife well now—cook the dinner, and wash up, and all that. If you do well at this, we'll see how you'll do as a man some day." [23]

For a second they stopped before their grandfather's gates and peered up the long drive. It was an old habit of theirs, varied for instance by challenges of who dared to walk the furthest distance up the drive. Betty had once advanced just beyond that mysterious bend, but she had scudded back again soon, declaring her grandfather had a gun and was coming after them, with it aimed at her head. Oh, how they had run home that day!

Another time she had climbed upon the topmost rail of the gate and, scrambling down quickly, had set off madly for home, followed breathlessly by the others who were afraid even to look over their shoulders. "He's set the emus loose," Betty told them as they ran, "and emus are like bloodhounds for scenting you out. And besides, they can fly."

But that was fully a year ago now, and much of the terror had departed from their grandfather's gates for the two elder ones. It was only Nancy who had cold thrills down her back and shudderings at passing the dread gates. [24]

To-day Betty did no more than peep through the railing, declare there was nobody about, and swing off again with her long pole. "Nobody there to-day," she said, and Nancy breathed easier and ran after her.

They were on the well-trodden bush-track now, the track that led home between great gums and slim saplings. The iron roof of the cottage came into view and the row of tall pines that stood like grim sentinels between the two-rail fence and the sweet-scented garden. A small wicket gate stood invitingly ajar, and a black dog, lying meditatively outside it, pricked up his ears and raised his head as the trio came into sight.

They took a cross-track, however, and disappeared into the bush again, and the dog shook off his thoughtful mood and ran gleefully after them.

For he had not grown up from puppyhood to doghood with these children without knowing what tracks led to school and home, and what to the wonderful realm of play and fancy. Moreover, his anticipations were always aroused when Elizabeth changed her habit, and he had seen in the twinkling of his eye that she was bare-legged and bare-headed and provided with a pole. So he barked joyously and scampered away upon that cross-track too. [25]

Down in the gully where the growth was thicker, and where the wattles and willows made many a fairy grove, a small creek ran. The widest end of it ran into their grandfather's grounds, and had at one time in its career broken down the two-rail dividing fence, which now lay submerged in its waters and formed the "dangerous coral islands" alluded to by Betty.

It pleased Elizabeth's fancy to state that her grandfather was unaware of this creek, but that some one would tell him soon, and then he would send men and have

it well examined by divers.

To-day, however, a dire disappointment awaited them. Seated on a partly submerged post, and holding a fishing-line in his hands, was John Brown. The three stared at him for a minute in speechless disgust, but he returned their stare with a nod and a small smile and looked at his line.

[26]

"Better come home," whispered Cyril, with a lively recollection in his mind of the big hand that had played with his collar so short a time past.

But Betty was trying to swallow her indignation and to keep her voice quiet.

"This is our place," she said. "This was our place before yours."

"Well," said Brown, "it's mine now."

"It isn't yours," said Betty shrilly; "it belongs to our grandfather—so there!"

Again Brown smiled.

"Well, that's a stuffer," he said, "it belongs to *my* grandfather."

Betty's eyes widened in horror at the new boy's depravity. "Oh, you story!" she said in a shocked voice, then turning to the uneasy Cyril, "Hit him, Cyril!" she said. "Hit him one in the eye for taking our place and telling such a wicked story."

But Cyril was already widening the distance between himself and John Brown, and a feeling of anger was beginning to stir in his small breast against Betty for trying to mix him up in this quarrel.

[27]

"Come on home," he said, "what's the good of having a row with a fellow like that?"

"But it's our water," said Betty, her face red with anger towards the fisher. She stooped down and picked up a stone.

Brown turned and looked at the little group; Cyril a good distance in the rear; and angry-faced Betty, with Nancy cowering in terror behind her.

"Look here," he said, "I'm not going to have any of you people poaching on my grandfather's property. You can come as far as the fence *if* you like, but I advise you to come no further."

Betty's stone flew through the air—many yards distant from the boy on the post.

"Good, again," he said. "There are plenty more stones and I'm here yet."

Again Betty repeated the process, and with even worse results. She never *could* aim straight in all her life!

"Good shot!" said Brown, laughing again.

"Oh, Cywil, do *smash* him," begged Betty in desperation.

[28]

"He daren't, he hasn't the pluck," mocked Brown.

"No Bruce is afraid," said Betty, using her favourite taunt. "Come on Cyril!"

But when she looked over her shoulder Cyril was nowhere in sight, and Nancy was scudding away, like a terrified rabbit, through the scrub around her.

Through the air rang a clear shrill voice—it belonged to golden haired Dorothea—"Betty, come home."

"You're called," said Brown, winding up a yard or so of his line.

Betty stooped, grasped another stone, took aim at a distant wattle in sheer desperation, and caught Brown on the hand.

The pain of it drew a sharp exclamation from him, and brought him from his post in a towering rage.

And Betty took to her bare heels and ran—ran as though her grandfather and all his emus were after her.

Near the wicket-gate she ran against Cyril, who was throwing stones in the air for the dog to snap at as they fell.

[29]

"Bwoun!" she gasped. "He's coming!"

Cyril looked down the track and beheld no one.

"It's all right," he said; "go inside and shut the gate. I'll give him what for. I'd just like to see him touch you. I'd knock him into next year as soon as look at him."

But no Brown appeared.

Cyril put his hands in his pockets and strutted towards the track through the bush—to the intense admiration of Elizabeth.

"No Bruce is afraid of any one," he said. "You and Nancy go in."

A girl in a short long print dress ran down the verandah steps. A mane of golden hair hung down her back and some of it lay over her shoulders, and when she stood still she tossed it away.

"You're to come home at once, Betty," she said, "and mind baby. And oh, you naughty girl, you've got your boots and stockings off again. What *will* mother say?"

CHAPTER III

[30]

"THE DAILY ROUND—THE COMMON TASK"

BETTY'S boots and stockings were on once more, and her school frock exchanged for one whose school days lay far behind it. In spite of "lettings down" and repeated patchings and mendings it was in what its small wearer called the "ragetty tagetty" stage of its existence, and was donned only when she was about the dirty part of "cleaning up."

It was Saturday morning now, and she was very busy. Her mother could never capably wield a broom, or scrub, or dust, or cook—she had done all four, but the results were pathetic. Even Nancy knew the story of her life, which began with "once upon a time, almost twenty years ago," and was told in varying fragments whenever a story was begged for.

There was the story of the jolly sea-captain and his one wee daughter—their own mother—and of how they had sailed the seas and seen many people and many lands. There was the story of the old house within the iron gates—built by convicts more than fifty years ago—and of how the sea-captain had bought it and built a tower and spiral staircase and a roof promenade, which he called his "deck." And of how he and his small daughter settled down in the great house together; and how her wardrobe was always full of beautiful clothes and her purse full of real sovereigns; and two ponies she had to her name, and a great dog that was the terror of the neighbourhood, and a little dog that lived as much as it could in her lap. There was the story of her garden full of rare flowers, and her ferneries of rare ferns, and her aviary of rare birds.

[31]

Then there was the story of the little girl "grown up," with hair done on the top of her head, and long sweeping dresses, and a lover chosen by her father himself—by name John Brown; and of the pale young author who lived beyond the iron gates, in a small weather-board cottage with an iron roof who wrote dainty little sonnets and ballads, which he read to her under the old gum trees.

[32]

And lastly, there was the story of the captain's pretty daughter slipping away from the great house—to become mistress of the wee cottage behind the pine trees. And of how the captain returned all letters unopened and sailed away to other lands for five years; of how afterwards the poor author lay ill unto death, and the little wife—"mother" now—carried pretty Dorothy to the great house and sent her trotting into the library, saying "grandpa" as she ran; and of how the little girl had been lifted outside the house by a servant, who had civilly stated the orders he had received, never to allow any one from the author's house to "cross the threshold" of that other great one.

And now it was to-day—and besides Dorothea there were the twins (Cyril and Elizabeth), Nancy and the baby; a goodly number for the small weather-board cottage to shelter and for the author, who had only had one book published, to bring up.

[33]

So it fell out that there was only a rough state girl to do the work of the cottage, and much sweeping and dusting was Elizabeth's "share"; much "washing-up" and tidying. To Nancy belonged the task of setting the tables and amusing the baby; and Cyril was engaged at a penny a week to stock the barrel in the kitchen with firewood

and chips, and bits of bark to coax contrary fires. He was the only one who received payment for his work, and no one demurred, for was he not the only boy of the family and in the eyes of them all a sort of king!

So Betty was dressed in working garb and was bestowing her usual Saturday morning attention upon the "living-room"—drawing-room they had none. The little room that had evidently been destined by its builder to fulfil such a mission, had been seized and occupied by the author in the beginning of his residence at The Gunyah.

The living-room was a low-ceiled room with French windows leading to the verandah. It had a centre table, several cane chairs, a small piano, a rocking-chair and a dilapidated sofa. Its floor was oilclothed and its windows uncurtained—only Dorothea had arrived at the stage that sighed for prettinesses.

[34]

Betty was quite happy when she had swept the floor, shaken the cloth, put all the chairs with their backs to the wall, and polished the piano.

She was surveying the room with pride when Dorothea walked in. Dorothea in the frock she had worn for five mornings during the week, and which was still clean and fresh; with her wonderful hair in a shining mass down her back, and a serviette in her hand (an extempore duster). It always took her the better part of Saturday to even find her own niche in the home.

"I was going to dust this room, Betty," she said—"somehow, everything I am going to do, I find you've done."

Elizabeth smiled drily. She could not even sweep a room and be just Elizabeth Bruce. Saturdays usually found her in imagination Cinderella; and consequently harsh words from Dorothea, who in her eyes was a cruel step-sister, would have found more favour with her than kind ones.

[35]

"There is the kitchen to be swept," said Betty; "the ashes are thick on the hearth and the breakfast things are not washed up."

Dorothea looked startled. Betty's voice sounded tired and resigned.

"Oh dear!" said Dorothea, "I do so *hate* doing kitchen work. It makes my hands so red and rough, and just spoils my dress."

"The work is there and must be done," remarked Betty.

Mrs. Bruce looked in at the door. Her face was just Dorothea's grown older, and without its roses; her hair was Dorothea's with its gold grown dull; her very voice and dimples were Dorothea's. A large poppy-trimmed hat adorned her head, and a basket with an old pair of scissors in it was swung over her arm.

"Of course you'll not do kitchen work, my chicken," she said gaily; "slip on your hat and come and gather roses with me. It's little enough of you home your get—that little shall not be spoilt by ashes and dust."

[36]

"It's Mary's work, and Betty can see that she does it well."

Betty stalked into the kitchen and regarded the fireplace in gleeful gloom, sitting down in front of it and staring into the heart of the small wood fire.

Mary, the maid-of-all-work, took her duties in a very haphazard way. She had no particular time for doing anything, and no particular place for keeping anything. And alas! it is to be regretted her mistress was the last woman in the world to train her in the way she should go.

To-day she had taken it into her head to try the effect of a few bows of blue ribbon upon her cherry-coloured straw hat, before the breakfast things were washed or the sweeping and scrubbing done. But the washing-up belonged to Betty.

Outside in the garden Mrs. Bruce was drawing Dorothea's attention to the scent of the violets and mignonette, and her gay voice caused Betty to sigh heavily.

"If my own mother had lived," she said gloomily, "I too might gather flowers. But what am I?—the family drudge!"

[37]

Cyril entered the back door, his arms piled up with firewood.

"I'm getting sick of chopping wood," he said grumblingly, "it's all very well to be you and stay in a nice cool kitchen. How'd you like it if you had to be me and stay chopping in the hot sun? I know what *I* wish."

"What?" asked Betty, glancing round her "nice cool kitchen" without any

appreciation of it lighting her eyes.

"Why, I wish mother had never run away and made grandfather mad. And I wish he'd suddenly think he was going to die, and say he wanted to adopt me."

"How about me? Why shouldn't he adopt me?" demanded Betty.

"'Cause I'm the only son," said Cyril. "He's got his pick of four girls, but if he wants a boy there's only me."

He went outside and loaded himself with wood once more.

"Cecil Duncan's father gives him threepence a week, and he doesn't have to do anything to earn it," he said when he came in again. "He says every Monday morning his father gives him a threepenny bit and his mother's *always* giving him pennies."

[38]

"H'em," said Cinderella, and fell to work sweeping up the hearth vigorously. Her own grievances faded away, as she looked at Cyril's—which was a way they had.

"And he's not the only boy neither," said Cyril. He threw the wood angrily into the barrel. "There's Harry and Jim besides. I suppose they get threepence each as well. What's a penny a week? You can't do anything with it."

Elizabeth lifted down a tin bowl and filled it with water; placed in it a piece of yellow soap, a piece of sand soap and a scrubbing brush, and then began to roll up her sleeves. She was no longer Cinderella. A new and wonderful thought had flashed into her mind even as she listened to Cyril's plaint. It certainly *was* hard for him, her heart admitted, very hard.

"How would you like to be rich, Cywil?" she asked, turning a shining face to him.

[39]

Cyril thought a reply was one of those many things that could be dispensed with—he merely showered a little extra vindictiveness upon the firewood and kicked the cask with a shabby copper-toed boot.

Betty danced across to him and put her sun-tanned face close to his fair freckled one.

"How would you like to be *very* rich?" she said, "and to have a pony of your own, and jelly and things to eat, and a lovely house to live in, and——"

"Don't be so silly, Betty," said the boy irritably.

Betty wagged her head. "I've got a thought," she said.

"Your silly-old pearl-seeking is no good. There are no pearls, so there," said Cyril crossly. "You needn't go thinking you really take me in. It's only a game—bah!"

Betty was still dancing around him in a convincing, yet aggravating way.

"How'd you like to be adopted, Cywil?" she asked—"really adopted, not pretending? Oh, I've got a very big thought, and it wants a lot of thinking. You go on getting your wood while I think."

[40]

And Cyril gave her one of his old respectful looks as he went out of the kitchen door.

CHAPTER IV

[41]

GHOSTS

BETTY's plan was beautifully simple. As Cyril said, he could easily have thought of it himself. It was nothing more than to effect a reconciliation between their grandfather and their mother, and the means to bring it about was to be "ghosts."

"Mother said he was superstitious," said Betty; "she says all sailors are. He doesn't like omens and things, mother says. What we want to do is to give him a severe fright."

She had thought out alone all the details of her plan, helped only by a few incidental words of her mother's. The story of baby Dorothea being taken to melt a father's heart, for instance, had fired Betty with the resolve to try what baby Nancy could do in that direction.

Cyril was more matter-of-fact.

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"If he wouldn't forgive mother when she took Dot, he's not very likely to soften to you with Baby," he said.

But Betty had counted that risk too.

"You forget he's ever so many years older," she said. "He's an old man now, and it's quite time he woke up. I've been thinking of everything we've to do and everything we've to say."

"Ghosts don't talk," said Cyril.

"They moan," replied Betty; "and they *do* talk. In *Lady Anne's Causeway* there's a ghost, and it speaks in sepulchral tones and says: 'Come hither, come hither to my home; thy time is come.'"

The little girl's eyes were shining; the very thought of that other ghost's "sepulchral" tones gave her a thrill down her back and lifted her out of herself. Of all her plots and plans, and they were many and various, there was not one to compare in magnitude with this. In her thoughts she became a ghost, straightway. She glided about the house, her lips moved but gave no sound, her eyes shone. Underneath the exhilaration, that her ghostly feelings gave, was the smooth sense of being about to do a great deed that would benefit every one—Cyril, her mother, her father, Dot, every one. Tears glistened in her eyes as she thought of the meeting between her grandfather and her mother, and beheld in fancy her pretty mother clasped at last in the sea-captain's arms.

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Throughout that Saturday afternoon she made her preparations, only now and then giving Cyril a trifling explanation. He was much relieved to hear he would not be expected to take any active part in the proceedings, only to be at hand, in hiding, to help his ghostly sister carry the baby.

Tea was always an early meal at The Gunyah, that Mr. Bruce might have a long evening at his writing, and the children at their home lessons.

To-night, after the last cup and saucer had been washed and dried by Betty and put away by Dot, and after the baby, had been tucked into her little crib, by Betty again, a long pleasant evening seemed to stretch before every one.

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Mr. Bruce brought out *My Study Windows*, and declared he had "broken up" till Monday. Mrs. Bruce opened a certain exercise book her eldest daughter had given her, imploring secrecy, and Dot sat down to the piano and wandered stumbingly into Mendelssohn's Duetto. The twins, to every one's entire satisfaction, "slipped away"—Betty to her bedroom to make her preparations, and Cyril (who was strictly forbidden even to peep through the key-hole) to the dark passage that ran from the bedrooms to the dining-room and front door. He went on with his plans while he waited. All day he had been thinking of the rainbow coloured future Betty assured him was his. He had quite decided to leave school directly he was adopted, and to have "some one" come to teach him at home. Of course his grandfather would not be able to bear him out of his sight. He had heard of such cases, and supposed he was about to become one. Then he decided to have a pony, a nice quiet little thing with a back not *too* far from the ground; and he would have a boat and sail her where the coral islands were, and he would have a few new marbles—and get his grandfather to have the emus killed.

[45]

He had just arrived at the part of the story where his grandfather was giving orders for the destruction of his emus, when Betty opened the bedroom door a crack, and whispered his name.

She shut the door at once, before he was fairly inside the room, and then he saw her.

Such a strange new Betty she was, that he almost cried out. Her face was white—white as death; two black cork lines stood for eyebrows, and black lines lay under her eyes, making them larger and unnatural-looking. She wore a black gown of her mother's, and a black capacious bonnet, and had a rusty dog chain tied to one arm. She moved her arm and fixed her eyes on her startled brother.

"Do you hear my clanking chain?" she asked in what she fondly believed to be "sepulchral tones." "Ghosts always have them. Come on."

But Cyril hung back somewhat—perhaps the glories of "being adopted" paled beside the unpleasantness of walking a lonely road in such unusual company.

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"It's—it's a silly game," he said. "I don't see any good in it at all."

But the little ghost turned upon him spiritedly.

"This isn't a game at all," she said. "This is *real*. It'll make mother friends with grandfather, and get you adopted. Get baby and come on—it might frighten her if she saw me."

"They'll find out that she's gone," said Cyril, still leaning upon the bed-foot and eyeing his sister distrustfully. "Let's chuck it, Betty, we'll only get in a row."

"We won't get in a row," said Betty staunchly. "She'll be only too glad when we come back and tell them all. I didn't undress Baby to-night, and I put on her blue sash and everything. All you've to do is to wrap that shawl round her and catch me up. I'll be at the gate."

Baby was used, as were all of the others except Dot, to an open-air existence. Most of her daylight hours were spent, either rolling on the rough lawn, or sleeping in a hammock swung beneath an apple tree, and as a result, night-tide found her a very drowsy baby indeed. The children might romp and sing and chatter around her very cot as she slept, but she could not steal out of her slumbers even to blink a golden eyelash at them.

[47]

So that when Cyril overtook Elizabeth at the gate, my Lady Baby was asleep in his arms, and so she stayed in spite of the thumping of his heart, and the chatter of the ghost, and the rough road.

The night was dark with the luminous darkness of an Australian summer night. The tender sky was scattered with star-dust, a baby-moon peeped over the hill-top and the leaves and branches of the great bush trees lay like dark fretwork over the heavens.

Betty, holding her dress well up, and Cyril carrying the sleeping baby, hurried through the belt of bush that lay between their home and their grandfather's. Betty strove to instil energy into her listless brother, telling him stories of a golden future in store for him. But at the two-rail fence below "Coral Island Brook," Cyril came to a standstill, and urged Betty, who was under it in a trice and on her feet again, to "come along home."

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Betty turned her ghastly face towards him indignantly. "I won't," she said fiercely. "Give me the baby and go home yourself if you like."

Between the outer world of bush and the house was a slip of ground called the banana grove, and known in story to both boy and girl, as the play-place of their mother.

Cyril followed Betty through this grove, trying to make up his mind as he went, whether to go or stay. To stay and take his part in the proceedings; to do and be bold—as an inner voice kept urging him—to blend his moans with Betty's, and carry the heavy baby; or to turn upon his heels, and fly through the darkness from these horrid haunted grounds where his grandsire, and the great emus and dogs lived; where John Brown stated he had his dwelling—away from all these terrors to his small cottage home on the other edge of the bush, where were parents and sisters, music and lights—and another voice urged this.

[49]

So he neither followed Betty nor went home; but, in dreadful doubt and great fear, he hung between the two courses in the banana grove, and shivered at the tree-trunks and the rustling leaves and the stray patches of moonlight.

And Betty went forward alone with the baby. Her heart was beating in a sickening way, but her courage was, as usual, equal to the occasion. It was far easier to her to go forward than backward now, and she braced herself up with a few of her stock phrases—"He won't eat me anyway"; "It'll be all the same in a hundred years"; "No Bruce is afraid *ever*."

A great bay window jutted into the darkness and gave out a blaze of light. This was the lowest room in the tower portion of the house and was, as Betty knew, her grandfather's study.

Betty's mind was swiftly made up. All fear had left her, and she stepped into the soft moonlight—a ghost indeed.

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She called Cyril, and her voice was so imperative that he quitted his sheltering tree and ran to where she stood on the edge of the grove.

"Take Baby," she said whisperingly; "I can't do what I want with her in my arms."

"Come home, B—B—Betty," implored the small youth—and his teeth chattered as he spoke—"I—I don't want to be adopted. I—"

"Hush!" urged Betty, and filled his arms with the baby. "I—I don't want to be r—rich," cried Cyril. "It's b—b—better to be poor."

"H—sh!" said Betty again.

"I—I don't want to be like a c—camel!" whimpered the boy. "R—remember about rich men getting to Heaven."

"Stay close here with Baby," ordered the little ghost, and the next second she had glided away over the path to the verandah. She went close to the window—three blinds had been left undrawn and the window panes ran down to the verandah floor. Surely the room had been designed expressly for this night.

[51]

Cyril, in horror, beheld his sister creep to the first window and peep in; creep to the second—to the third.

All the other windows were darkened; only this one room in all the great house seemed to be awake.

Then, in the silence which lay everywhere, a blood-curdling thing happened. Betty's "clanking chain" came in contact with something of iron reared up near the window and gave forth a fearsome sound. Cold chills played about Cyril's back, a distant dog barked—and Baby awoke.

Betty at once perceived this to be the one moment. Many people can recognize their moment when it has gone. Betty's talent lay in seeing it just as it arrived.

If truth must be confessed, fear had once or twice during this campaign tugged at her heart; when Cyril had urged home, her greatest desire had been to flee. But Betty never quite knew herself—was never in any crisis of her life absolutely certain what this second terribly insistent self would do.

[52]

Instead of scampering away with Cyril through the night, her feet had taken her to the windows, and the proportions of her plan had grown gloriously, albeit her heartbeats could be heard aloud.

Now, when her chain clanked, it seemed to her the war drum had been sounded. She darted from the verandah across the path and snatched the baby from her brother's arms; then, running back to the verandah, her chain clanked again and again, and she rent the air with a dismal wail—

"Father! Father!"

From the depths of an easy chair whose back was to her there rose the tall bent figure of an old man.

Betty had arranged to "rend the air with wail upon wail"—to "press her pinched white face, and her little one's, time after time upon the window pane," but opportunity interfered, the window flew up, and Betty crouched on the floor in terror.

In the banana grove Cyril fled from tree to tree, crying dismally. The darkness, the screams, the chain, the opening of the window, had each and all terrified him almost past endurance. Now he felt convinced his grandfather was chasing him with the emus.

[53]

Meanwhile Betty on the verandah was also quaking. A stern voice from the open window demanded "Who is there?" but her fortitude was not equal to a wail.

"I heard some one say 'Father, Father,' I'll swear," said a somewhat familiar boyish voice.

"I saw a face," said the old man.

And then Baby began to whimper piteously, and Betty's heart sank into her shabby small shoes.

Footsteps were coming her way; the inevitable was at hand and she recognized it, and with an effort stood upright cuddling the baby close.

The old man put his hand on her shoulder, and with a "I'll just trouble you—this way please," and not so much as a quaver in his voice, led her into the brightly-lighted study.

And there followed him "big John Brown," of mathematical and pugilistic renown.

He stared at Betty very hard, and Betty stared at him—only for a moment, though, for Baby began to cry and had to be hushed—and the chain clanked and frightened her while it produced no visible effect upon her grandfather.

[54]

The old man turned sharply to the wondering boy.

"Is this a trick of yours, John?" he demanded sharply.

"No," said Betty, "it's—it's only me," and she looked straight into her grandfather's face, although her voice was trembling.

"And who are *only you*?"

The child hesitated. In a vague way she felt she would be doing her mother's and Cyril's great future an injury to tell her name. And yet, quick-witted as she was, it did not occur to her to find a new one.

The young face in the old black bonnet looked beseechingly into the man's.

"*Please* don't ask my name," she begged.

"Take off your bonnet."

She put Baby on the floor at her feet and pulled off her bonnet. And her dark curly hair fell loosely around her odd white face. [55]

"Now—your name!" shouted the old captain, as if he were calling to a sailor high up a mast.

"Elizabeth Bruce," faltered the girl, for her reason showed her in a second how John Brown would give it if she did not.

A certain gleam that had been in the old man's eyes went away and his brow grew black as thunder. Betty instinctively picked up the baby again and gathered up the train of her dress.

"Ah!" said the old man, breathing hard.

Then suddenly a light dawned on Betty and she saw things as this old man would see them, which was the very way of all others that he must not do.

She repeated swiftly to herself her old charm against fear—"No Bruce is afraid. I can only die once. He won't eat me."

"It's all my fault," she said, and her brown eyes looked into his brown ones. "Cyril and I got tried of being poor, and I—I thought it would be a good plan if you adopted Cyril—and—and I came to frighten you."

"Ah——" [56]

"I thought you were old, and—and—might be sorry now, and I thought a bit of a fright—I thought if a ghost——"

Her chain clanked and her hands trembled, and Baby bumped up and down in her arms. The very remembrance of her words left her, for a great frown was spreading over the old man's face. He turned angrily to the boy.

"Put her out of the door," he said. "Put her out of the place!" and some hot words, fearful and unintelligible some of them to the small girl, burst from his lips.

And Betty, Baby and chain and all went out into the darkness. Only the bonnet remained.

Cyril was on the outermost edge of the grove, and with danger behind him, and Betty and Baby before his eyes, safe and unhurt, a wave of very ill-temper swept over him. He refused to have part in any more of Betty's "silly games," left her to carry the baby unaided, and told her she had spoilt his chance of ever being adopted. But he was all the time wishing passionately that he too had "done and dared"—that he had not crouched there among the trees, afraid and trembling. A small inner voice, that spoke to him very sharply after such occasions, told him contemptuously, that he had been more afraid than a girl; that he had been a coward; and as soon as he reached their small lamp-lit home, he ran away from silent Betty and the babbling baby, to his own bedroom, to cry in loneliness over this second self who had done the wrong. [57]

And Betty stole silently into her bedroom. The dining room door was still closed, and those quiet elder ones were having their "pleasant" evening. She undressed the baby, and kissed her over and over, then put her into her little cot and gave her a dimpled thumb to suck. And she herself cuddled up very close to her, and began to cry too. So much for all her show of bravery now.

And a small voice spoke to her also, and showed her the seamy side of this great deed of hers. Told her that no one else in all the world would have dreamed of doing [58]

so wrong a thing; pointed out her mother and father and pretty Dot, Mrs. and Mr. Sharman as examples of great goodness. When the baby was placidly sleeping, she sat upright on the end of her mother's bed in her earnestness to "see" if any of those righteous five would be guilty of the wickedness of becoming ghosts to frighten an old man. She would have felt easier at once if she could have convinced herself that they would; but she could only see each of them rounding eyes of horror at her, and her sobs, broke out afresh.

The door opened and Cyril came into the darkness, whispering and whimpering,—

"I didn't play fair, Betty," he said—"I wish I'd played fair—I——"

"Oh," said Betty sobbingly—"Oh, Cyril, you're ever so much nobler than I am. You wouldn't frighten an old man, neither. Oh, I wish I was as good as you!"

Whereat a sweet sense of well-doing stole over Cyril. "Never mind," he said cheerfully, "do as I do another time."

"There won't be another time," said Betty. "I'm going to turn over a new leaf, and be as good as if I was grown up."

CHAPTER V

[59]

JOHN BROWN

JOHN BROWN'S life had hitherto been a curiously rough and tumble sort of existence. There had been a season, brief and entirely unremembered by him, when his home had been in one of Sydney's most fashionable suburbs; when a tender-eyed mother had watched delightedly over his first gleams of intelligence, and a proud father had perched him on his shoulder for a bed-time romp. When he had been taken tenderly for an "airing" by the trimmest of nursemaids, and in the daintiest of perambulators. When he had worn tiny silk frocks and socks and bonnets. When hopes and fears had arisen over "teething-time." When he had been carried round a drawing-room, to display to admiring friends, his chubby wrists, his dimpled fat legs, his quite remarkable length of limb and growth of bone.

[60]

Then Death slipped in unawares, and called the sweet young mother from that happy home, and little John Brown became a perplexity and a care to a grief-maddened father.

For a space it was conjectured that the baby, pending the arrival of a step-mother, would be handed over to the cook, a rotund motherly person who was fond of asserting that she had buried thirteen children and reared one.

But conjectures have a way of falling beside the mark.

One morning an old schoolmate of poor little Mrs. Brown's arrived from "out back," packed up the baby's things with her own quick brown hands and returned "out back" the same evening.

The perambulator, the cradle, the cot, the dainty baby basket and a multitude of other things were sold the next week along with the tables and chairs and other "household effects," and Mr. John Brown, senior, a cabin box and a portmanteau, left by a mail steamer for Japan.

[61]

And the small suburban house became "to let." Thenceforward the pattern of little John Brown's existence became altered. He was one of three other children, and not even the baby, although scarcely one year old.

His elegant lace-trimmed silken and muslin garments were "laid by." He wore dark laundry-saving dresses and neither boots nor socks. He was never carried around for admiration, for the very good reason that visitors were few and far between—and there was (except to doting parents, perhaps) very little to admire about him. He lost his chubbiness and his pink prettiness and became thin and wiry, brown faced and brown limbed.

He was always abnormally tall and abnormally strong, so that he became almost a jest on the station. He learned to fight at three, to swim at four, shoot at seven, ride, yard cattle, milk, chop wood, make bush fires and put them out again, ring bark trees all before he was eleven. In short, to do, and to do remarkably well, the hundred and one things that make up a man's and boy's existence on an Australian station.

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At thirteen he learned that his name was Brown, and that he had a father other than the bluff squatter he had grown up with. And at thirteen he was taken from the station-life he loved, and, after much travelling, delivered by a station-hand into his father's care in Sydney.

Before he could form any idea as to what was about to happen to him, and to this grey-bearded father of his, he was taken across the blue harbour water, and thence by coach to the little township over the northern hills.

They walked past the small weather-board school together, and few, if any, words passed between them. For the man's thoughts were away down the slope of many years, and the boy's were away in that flat country "out back" where he had been brought up.

They were close to the great iron gates when the man broke the silence; pointing beyond them he remarked—

"This is where your home will be in the future, John."

John considered the prospect thoughtfully and shook his head—

"I'd rather go home," he said. "Let me go home."

"No," said his father, "it can't be done. I ought to have fetched you away sooner, only I shirked a duty. Open the little gate, I see the big ones are padlocked. Push, it's stiff."

They walked up the long red drive, John's mind busy over the questions he wished to ask his father and he began to lag behind considering them.

"This will be your home," repeated Mr. Brown quietly, "and it's a marvellous thing how life has arranged itself. The turn of Fortune's wheel, we may say. Walk quicker, John."

When they stood before the great front door, Mr. Brown became retrospective again.

"We played here together," he said—, "down these very steps, along these very paths. It is strange how life has fallen out—how my boy will be——" He put out his hand and pulled the bell vigorously, then turned his back to the house and surveyed the garden.

"Is it a school?" whispered John. But before his father could reply the door had rolled back and a man-servant stood looking at them.

Mr. Brown walked in, put his hat on a table, motioned to John, and opened a door at one side of the wide hall.

"It's me—Brown," he said as he entered the room. "I've brought the boy."

John followed very quickly, being curious now. His father stood half-way across the room, looking hesitating and apologetic.

A man of sixty or so, with a red, merry-looking face, and an unmistakable sea-captain air, glanced up from a paper he was reading.

"Eh?" he asked.

Then he sent his look—it was a quick darting look that saw everything in the twinkling of an ordinary person's eye—to the thin badly-dressed figure in the rear. "Eh? The boy? Oh—ah! My newly-found grandson."

"He is scarcely what I had hoped to find," said Mr. Brown, apologetic still. "Yet his mother was a good-looking woman and——"

"Be hanged to looks," said Mr. Carew. "He'll get on all the better without 'em. And you were never anything to boast of yourself you know. What's his name?"

"John."

"Um! John Brown. John Carew-Brown, we'll say. It's a pity it's not John Brown Carew."

"That's a matter that can easily be altered. It can be merely John Carew, if you like, and let the melodious Brown go hang."

"Eh? What does the boy say? What do you say John to changing your name and letting the Brown go hang?"

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To Mr. Brown's surprise and consternation, the boy gave an emphatic "No."

"Ah!" said old Mr. Carew, "and how's that? Speak up, John."

"The boys 'ud forget me," said John anxiously, "and I'd have to begin all over agen."

[66]

"What with?—Leave him alone, Brown."

"Thrashing 'em. They know me everywhere about Warrena. I can make 'em all sit up. I don't want to change my name."

A sparkle came into the old man's eyes.

"Well said, my lad," he snapped. "I'd not have given a rap for you if you'd have cast your name away as easily as a pinching pair o' boots. Stick to your own name, John, and you'll look all the better after mine."

He waited a bit, eyeing the boy up and down keenly. The thin brown face, with its square determined mouth, quiet grey eyes and high forehead; the sturdy figure, countrified clothes, copper-toed boots, all passed under his scrutiny.

"So you're of the fighting kind?" he asked at last.

"Yes," said John proudly.

"Ah! You never were, you remember, Brown. Things might have been different if you had been."

He waited again. Then he smiled queerly.

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"John," he said, "your father's going away again to-night. You're my grandson. It may not seem a great matter to you now—but it is, all the same. You stay here. You and I have to take life together, boy—though you're at one end of the ladder and I'm at t'other. Your name's your name right enough, but I want you to be good enough to tack mine on to it, and to do a bit of fighting for mine too if necessary. I've fought for it hard in my day too. And now, John Carew-Brown, we'll have a bit of lunch if it's all the same to you."

CHAPTER VI

[68]

MONDAY MORNING

MRS. BRUCE was down on her knees caressing tiny Czar violets. Quite early in the morning (before the breakfast things were washed or the beds made) she had slipped on one of Dot's picturesque poppy-trimmed hats and declared her intention of planting the bed outside the study windows thick with these the sweetest-scented of all flowers.

"And all the time you are working and thinking and plotting, daddie darling, the sweetest scents will be stealing round you," she said.

For some little time she was quite happy among her violets. But presently a richly hued wall-flower called her attention to a cluster of its blooms, drooping on the pebbly path for a careless foot to crush,—all for the want of a few tacks and little shreds of cloth. A heavily-blossomed rose-tree begged that some of its buds might be clipped, and a favourite carnation put in its claim for a stake.

[69]

"So much to do!" said Mrs. Bruce, as she flitted here and there in the old-fashioned garden, which was a veritable paradise to her. "The roses *must* be clipped, the violets *must* be thinned, the carnations *must* be staked. And there are the new seedlings to be planted. Oh, I *think* I will take the week for my garden—and let the house go!"

A flush of almost girlish excitement was in her cheeks, her garden meant so very much to her. Certainly the house had strong claims—and it was Monday morning—the very morning for forming and carrying out good plans and resolutions! Meals wanted cooking, cupboards and drawers tidying; garments darning and patching! But then—the garden! Did it not also need her. Ah! and did she not also need it!

Even as she hesitated, balancing duty with beauty, Betty's voice floated out through the kitchen window, past the passion-fruit creeper and the white magnolia tree, past the tiny sweet violets and the study windows, right to where she stood among the roses and wall-flowers.

[70]

"I *am* so tired of washing up," it said, "it wasn't fair of Dot. She had four plates for her breakfast—I only had one. She might remember I've to go to school as well as her."

Then Mrs. Bruce advanced one foot towards the house, and in thought wielded the tea-towel and attacked the trayful of cups and saucers that she knew would be awaiting the tea-towel.

It was Cyril's voice that arrested her. It came from the kitchen too.

"What's washing up!" said Cyril contemptuously. "Washing up a few cups and spoons—pooh! How'd you like to be me and have to clean all the knives, I wonder."

Whereat Mrs. Bruce relinquished thoughts of the tea-towel. It would never do, she told herself, to assist Betty and leave poor Cyril unaided. "And I *couldn't* clean knives," she said.

But she ran indoors to her bedroom, whence came an angry crying voice. Six-year-old Nancy was, in the frequent intervals that occurred in the doing of her hair, frolicking about the small hot bedroom and trying frantically to catch the interest of the thumb-and-cot-disgusted baby. [71]

"Do your hair nicely," said Mrs. Bruce to her second youngest daughter. "I will take baby into the garden. Button your shoes and ask Betty to see that your ears are clean. And your nails. A little lady always has nice nails."

She carried her baby away, kissing her neck and cheeks and hands, and telling her, as she had told them all, from Dorothy downwards, that there never had been such a baby in the world before.

And she slipped her into the much used hammock under the old apple tree, and left her to play with her toes and fingers, whilst she went back to her violets and roses singing—

"Rock-a-bye, Baby on a tree top,
There you are put, there you must stop."

and trying to be rid of that uncomfortable feeling, of having done what she wanted and not what she ought. [72]

In the study Mr. Bruce sat before a paper-strewn table. Most of the papers related to his beloved book—which was almost half-completed. It had reached that stage several times before, and what had been written thereafter had been consigned to the kitchen fire.

Now it was necessary that he should put it away, even out of thought, and turn his attention towards something that would bring in a quick return. For Dot's school fees would be due very shortly, and he remembered, with a smile-lit sigh, that this quarter she had taken up two extras, singing and dancing.

His income would not admit of extras—and yet, as Mrs. Bruce frequently put it, Dot was the eldest and was very pretty. She certainly must be able to dance and sing!

He gathered up a few stray leaves of his manuscript, rolled them up with the bulk, and heroically put them away.

But, as he returned to his seat, he caught a glimpse of his wife, kneeling on the path, and making a little trench with a trowel in the bed outside his window. [73]

"Well, little mother!" he called, and felt blithe as he said it, and young and fresh hearted, just because of the bright face in the poppy-trimmed hat.

"I ought to be in the kitchen making a pudding," she said, screwing up her face into a grimace.

"You are far better where you are," he said fondly.

"Yes. But, oh, dear! I wish I had a cook, and laundress, and a housemaid. Oh, and a nursemaid, too! It is dreadful to be poor, isn't it, daddie?"

She went on with her gardening, just as happy as before, but the face that the little author took to his work-table had grown grave in a minute.

"She was born to have servants," he said, "servants and ease. I must work harder."

Cyril's voice broke into his reverie. He had come beneath the study windows to interview his mother.

"Can't I be raised to twopence a week now I'm going on for thirteen," he said. "Bert Davis gets threepence, and he's only nine."

Mr. Brace did not catch the reply. But he told himself that most men would have been more liberal in the matter of *£. s. d.* to their only son.

He began to pace round and round his study.

"I must work harder—harder—harder!" he said. "I must put my book away, and grind out those articles for Montgomery!"

Nancy, in a big white sun-bonnet, clean for the new week, passed under his window and turned her face to the wicket gate. He could hear that she was crying in a miserable forsaken way, crying and talking to herself away within that capacious bonnet of hers.

He called "Baby!" and leaned over his window sill to her. But she did not hear him. She just went murmuring on to the gate.

Then two other hurrying little figures came along. Cyril, with a battered hat crushed down on his head, and his school-bag over his shoulders, and Betty with her boots unlaced, a white bonnet under her arm, and a newspaper parcel, which she was trying to coax into neatness, in one hand.

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"It's all through you and your ghosts," Cyril was saying grumblingly. "I know I'd have done my lessons only for you, Betty Bruce."

"What is the matter with Nancy?" asked their father, leaning over the window sill once more. "Why was she crying?"

"'Cause she thinks she'll be late," said Betty easily. "She always cries if she thinks she's late."

Down the road they went, Nancy hurrying and crying, Cyril grumbling, Betty silent.

To none of them had Monday morning come exactly right—fresh and uncrumpled.

Betty sat down, just outside her grandfather's gate, to lace her boots, and Cyril went grumbling on about a hundred yards behind Nancy.

Then did a fresh crease get into the new week's first day for Betty. Looking under her arm as she bent over her boot, she beheld three figures walking down the road, and at the first glimpse of them her face grew hot.

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"Geraldine and Fay!" she exclaimed.

The centre figure was dressed in a lilac print, and wore a spotless apron and a straw hat. Upon either side of her walked a little golden-haired girl, one apparently about Betty's age, and one Nancy's. Their dresses were white and spotless, and reached almost to their knees; their hats were flat shady things trimmed with muslin and lace. Their hair was beautifully dressed and curled, their boots shining—and buttoned, and their faces smiling and happy-looking.

They were Betty's ideals! Little rich girls, who rode ponies, and drove—sometimes in a village cart with a nurse, and sometimes in a carriage with a lady who invariably wore beautiful hats and dresses. Sometimes, again, they were to be seen in a dog-cart with a dark man who seemed a splendid creature indeed to Betty.

The little girl by the roadside grasped her unbuttoned boot in one hand, her bonnet and newspaper parcel in the other, and in a trice had squeezed herself under her grandfather's fence, just at a point where two or three panels were broken down.

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Then she peeped out to see if they were looking. But no—they had not seen her. Betty gave a great sigh of relief as she watched them. How beautiful they were. How dainty! Betty looked down at her own old boots, old stockings, old dress. She turned her bonnet over disdainfully and thought of their lace-trimmed hats—their golden hair!

"Oh, I am glad they didn't see me!" she said aloud fervently.

Just then a voice shouted, a rough word to her from the path, and Betty awoke to two alarming facts. The one, that she was in the emu's enclosure and that one great bird was bearing curiously towards her already; the other, that her grandfather was the one who had called to her, and that John Brown, who was careering down the path on his bicycle, had stopped and was evidently giving information about her.

Her grandfather waved an angry hand.

"Out you go!" he shouted. "If you come here again, I'll set the dogs loose!"

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Betty squeezed herself under the fence just before the emu reached her, and once more faced a very crumpled Monday morning.

CHAPTER VII

[79]

"CAREW-BROWN"

It must be confessed that John Brown—or to be polite and up-to-date—John Carew-Brown surveyed the pupils of Wygate School with a fighting eye, which is to say, he considered them carefully with regard to their pugilistic abilities, and he decided very soon that he "could make them all sing small."

Even upon that first day when he, a new boy, had been standing in view of the whole school, his mind had chiefly been occupied in running over the boys' obvious fighting qualities—tall, short, fat, thin, all sorts and conditions of them were there.

The girls he had passed by with but slight notice; to him they were absolutely valueless and uninteresting. Betty Bruce had certainly caught his attention by her public punishment, and he had been taken aback by that sharp little pinch of hers. Hitherto he had had nothing to do with girls but he supposed immediately that that was their manner of fighting, and he did not admire it.

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Not many days later an opportunity occurred for him to defend his newly adopted name. Truth to tell, he had been longing for such an occasion from the day on which old Captain Carew had asked him to fight for his name too.

He was in the playground, round by the school house, just where the babies' end of the school room joined the cloak room, and school was over for the day. Having a piece of chalk in one hand, and nothing particular to do, he occupied a few minutes by writing upon the weather boards of the cloak-room—"J. C. Brown, J. C. Brown, John C. Brown, John C. Brown," and the hinting C. raised a small dispute in a circle of onlooking boys and girls.

It was Peter Bailey who said, "John Clara Brown," and it was silly little Jack Smith who said "John Codfish Brown."

A burst of laughter followed, and Peter Bailey and Jack Smith chased each other down the playground, and in and out among the sapling clump away at the end of it, where some shabby scrub and three gum trees grew.

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When they came back, John Brown was still silently writing apparently deaf to all the surmising going on around him.

Nellie Underwood said it was—"Crabby John Brown," and Arthur Smedley, the school bully, said—"John Brown the clown."

Whereupon Brown sought out a clean weather-board a shade or so above his head and wrote in bold letters.

"John Carew-Brown, Dene Hall, Willoughby," which made Bailey say—

"Hullo, he's got hold of Bruce's grandfather."

Cyril, who was one of the little circle of jesters, grew pink to the tips of his pretty pink ears, but feeling the majority and the bully were against Brown, ventured to say—

"He's only running you!"

Nellie Underwood pushed herself into a prominent position in the group and cried—

"I seen him coming out of Dene Hall gates, and old Mr. Carew was with him. So there!"

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John Brown chose another weather-board and the group closed round him to read—

"John Carew-Brown, only grandson of Captain Carew, of Dene Hall, Willoughby, Sydney, N.S. Wales, Australia, Southern Hemisphere," which certainly looked

imposing and had the effect of silencing every one for almost half a minute.

Then the bully's eyes glared into Cyril's pretty blue ones, and he said angrily—

"You said you were the only grandson."

Cyril did not speak.

"You said," repeated the bully, "you said the Captain was going to adopt you, and give you his collection of guinea pigs."

Cyril hung his crimson face and kicked the ground with the toe of his boot.

John Brown chose another weather-board and wrote—

"Captain Carew has no guinea pigs," which sent most of the blood away from Cyril's face. The bully was eyeing him angrily, and even went as far as doubling up one fist.

"You said he was going to give you five shillings a week pocket-money, and let you buy my white mice," he muttered, and Cyril found himself face to face with the occasion, and with no clever intervening Betty to throw the right word into the right place, and so save his skin and his honour.

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"So he is," he said, moving away from Brown as far as he dared—"and so I am the only grandson." He looked over his shoulder and beheld Brown's back, whereupon he felt if Brown could not see he could not hear. "*He's* only the gardener's boy," he said; "ask"—his mind made a swift excursion for an authority—"ask my grandfather," he said, "any of you who like, ask my grandfather."

Brown and his chalk advanced to Cyril.

"Who told you I was the gardener's boy?" he asked. Cyril looked from foe to foe, and the wild thought of denying he had said such words entered his mind, only to be followed by a swift remembrance of various daring deeds of the bully's.

So he went over recklessly to Arthur Smedley's side.

"My grandfather!" he said.

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"Are you going to be adopted?" asked the bully.

"Yes," said Cyril in desperation.

"Are you going to have five shillings a week?" demanded the bully.

"No—I'm going to have ten," roared Cyril.

A window belonging to Mr. Sharman's private house, which adjoined the school, flew open, and John Brown's name was sharply called. It entered into Arthur Smedley's mind to see what writing remained upon the wall, and he went across to the cloak-room for that purpose.

Whereupon Cyril looked to the right of him, to the left of him, to the back of him, and beheld neither friend nor foe in his vicinity; and he heaved a sigh of great satisfaction, ran to the fence, squeezed himself through a hole in it, and was upon the road towards home in a trice.

But before he had gone more than a hundred yards he heard quick footsteps behind him, and looking over his shoulder he saw John C. Brown. Then did a sickening sense of terror sweep over him, and his heart leapt into his mouth, for had he not said John Carew-Brown was "only the gardener's boy"?

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CHAPTER VIII

[86]

THE FIGHT

BETTY was in the belt of bush that lay between the wicket-gate of her home and the road. Her idea was to be sufficiently near to home to gather from the sound of the voices that might call her if she were *really* needed and yet to be so far from sight that the continual "Betty, come here," and "Betty, go there," could not be.

She had come home as soon as school was out, come home leaving Cyril and Nancy

behind her, flung herself beneath the shade of one of her favourite old gum trees, and begun to write.

When Mr. Bruce was busy over a story, or an article, or a book, every one in the house knew. Then the study door would be closed and the window only opened at the top; then the children would be banished from the side garden into which the study looked, and from the passage outside the study door; then Mrs. Bruce would carry his meals to him upon a tray, and he would have strong black coffee in the early evening. And then at last a neatly folded missive, gummed and tied with thin string, with a mysterious "*MS. only*" inscribed in one corner, would be carried to the post by either Cyril or Betty.

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When Dot wrote a story, as she very frequently did now-a-days, portions of it would be carried into the study for her father to see, and her mother would proudly read page after page of the neat round hand, and wonder where on earth the child got her ideas from.

But when Betty wrote her stories, no one in the house—excepting Cyril, of course—knew anything about it! no one kept the house quiet for Betty, and no one wondered wherever she got her ideas from. And yet she had quite a collection of fairy stories and poems of her own composition. She and an exercise book, or a few scraps of paper and a stumpy bit of pencil were to be seen sometimes in very close companionship.

But for all that no one did see; or seeing, they did not understand.

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Still Betty wrote her stories—not necessarily for publication like her father—nor as a guarantee that the scribbling genius was within her, like Dot—but for the love of story writing alone.

Her fairy story to-day had to do with the bold and handsome Waratah which ran mad in the bush behind her home, towards Middle Harbour. Her fertile fancy had suggested many roles for these flowers to take.

It occurred to her as she wrote that she had intended to write a poem which should stir Cyril—not one of *her* sort of poems, about streams and flowers and dells and birds, but a dashing sort of poem, one that would make Cyril say "*By Jup-i-ter, Betty,*" and learn it off by heart without any asking.

For a space she laid down her story, which began, "Once upon a time," and asked herself what there was that she could make a poem of for Cyril.

"It must be something brave," she said. "A horse, a dog, a fire, a man—a St. Bernard dog saving a boy—a soldier—I think a soldier would suit Cyril!"

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She stared through the bush to the red road consideringly, holding her pencil ready to write. As she looked she became aware of a small figure running along the road, and entering the bush track. It was Cyril, and Cyril in woe. She could see that at a glance, and of course the first thing she did was to throw down her paper and pencil and run to meet him.

As she got nearer to him she saw tears were running down his face and she heard, ever and anon as he ran, a great sob, half of anger and half of fear, come bursting from his lips.

"Oh, my poor boy, whatever *is* the matter?" she cried in her most motherly way.

"The g-g-great big bully!" sobbed Cyril.

"Oh dear!" exclaimed Betty in distress.

"Oh the b-b-big bully. Let's get home."

"Big John Brown?" asked Betty, for only yesterday this same John Brown had sent her small brother home weeping over a sore head.

"Yes, of course. He—he said he'd knock me into next year. Come on, can't you?"

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Betty was running by his side at quite a brisk trot to keep up with him.

"I—I hope you knocked him down," she said.

"He said grandfather isn't our grandfather at all."

"Oh!—and you *did* give him a black eye Cywil dear?" asked Betty eagerly. Her "r's" had a way of rolling themselves into "w's" whenever she was excited.

They were at the wicket-gate now, and Cyril slackened his speed, and looked over

his shoulder. No one was in sight.

"Oh, I will do!" he said boldly. "I told him no Bruce was afraid!"

"That's right," said Betty eagerly. "That's right Cywil. No Bruce is afraid. But you did knock him down, didn't you."

Cyril hesitated—then his trouble broke from him in a burst. "We fight to-night down at our coral islands at seven," he said.

"Oh my bwave Cywil!" exclaimed Betty admiringly. "Oh, I am so glad—oh, I am so very glad!"

But Cyril looked doleful, and was lagging behind his small eager sister. [91]

"I'm not so sure that he meant us to fight," he said. "He—he never asked me to."

"What did he say?"

"He only said something about a challenge and things."

"Oh," said Betty, eager again in a minute; "if he said 'challenge' you *must* fight. There's no get out."

"But I've hurt my leg."

"Oh never mind your leg—think of the honour of the Bruces!" said the fervent Betty, who regarded the family cognomen as something sacred and against which no breath of evil must be allowed to come.

"Honour of the Bruces be hanged, if I'm lame," said Cyril savagely.

A sense of foreboding swept over Betty as she followed Cyril into the house. Her imagination showed her willows and the "coral islands," and only John Brown—big square John Brown—there. She knew the story that would soon be all over the school—all over the neighbourhood—that Cyril had been *afraid* to fight. Of course she, Betty, his own twin sister, knew there would not be a grain of truth in it. She knew he was shy and delicate, and had hurt his leg. But for all that, she wished eagerly that he were not shy and delicate, and did not always have some bodily ill when fighting time came. And more than one sob shook her, for she beheld the honour of the Bruces being trampled under John Brown's big boots. [92]

She set the table and went about her usual household tasks in a very half-hearted way. Cyril would not look at her, and crept off to bed at six o'clock, complaining of the pain in his leg. Tea was over by then, and Betty, with her woeful look still on her face was helping "wash up" in the kitchen.

Cyril in his bedroom turned down his stocking and examined the little blue bruise near his knee. That there was some outward and visible sign of his hurt he was very thankful. It raised his self-respect and brought tears of self-pity to his eyes, that Betty should have expected him to fight under such circumstances! So much did the sight of his wound upset him that he only went on one leg while undressing, though it must be confessed it was not always the same leg that did the hopping. [93]

Presently, after he had been lying in bed for some little time and commiserating with himself over his sad fate, the door opened and Betty, with the wistfulness quite gone from her face, came in. And *such* a Betty! Her brown hair was bundled away under one of Cyril's battered straw hats, and thankful indeed had she been that she had so little hair to bundle. She wore one of Cyril's sailor jackets, and a pair of his serge knickers, and few looking at her casually, would have insulted her with the supposition that she was a mere girl.

Her face was alight with eagerness as she besought her brother to "just *see* if he'd know her!"

"It'll be almost dark when I get there," she said, "and he'll never *dream* I'm not you."

"But what'll you do when you get there?" asked Cyril, sitting up in bed; "perhaps a challenge *does* mean a fight!"

"Fight him!" said Betty stoutly; "I've been wanting to ever since he went above me." [94]

"You can't fight," said Cyril disgustedly. "You're only a girl."

Betty's face positively flamed with eagerness.

"Can't fight!" she said. "Why Fred Jones taught me. He says I've got the knack, but not *very* much strength. Anyway, I fought that Barry kid the other day, *I* can promise you!"

"But John Brown is three times as big as Ces Barry."

"I know!" she sighed dismally. "Anyway, it's better to be beaten than not to fight at all. And if you don't fight, they—they *might* say you were afraid." Her face grew scarlet as she put the horrid thought into words.

When the door was shut, Cyril jumped out of bed to watch her go, and so occupied was he over *her* danger, that he forgot his own hurt and did not limp at all.

Up and down the garden paths his mother and father were walking, his mother's arm through his father's, and a happy peaceful look on her face. The thought ran through the boy's mind, how little grown up ones know of the troubles of childhood. Nancy was rolling with baby on the little lawn, singing—

"John, John, John, the grey goose is gone,
The fox is away o'er the hill, Oh!"

and he thought how good it was to be a girl—a goose—a fox—anything but a boy!

Then he crept back to bed, covered up his head and began to cry. For he was afraid that Betty would be hurt—and once again had he hung back when he should have gone forward. And his heart told him that again he had been a coward.

Down by the willows John Brown was waiting. He had very much enjoyed issuing his "challenge" but he felt morally certain that it would not be accepted. He was therefore surprised when he saw his small adversary approaching him in the dusk.

Who shall say what fancies were running riot in his head! He was a squire going to punish a rash youth for trying to thrust himself into their family. He, his grandfather's grandson, was going to thrash a foolish boy for taking his grandfather's name in vain!

Meanwhile his little foe came on, over the rough sun-burnt grass, over a fallen tree through a small stretch of denser scrub, to the very shores of the "coral island sea." And the baby-moon chose the moment of their meeting to slip behind a cloud and leave the world in semi-darkness.

"Well done, Bruce!" said Brown coming forward and speaking in a hearty tone; "I didn't believe you'd come—I didn't think you had a fight in you."

"We Bruces fight till we die!" piped Betty, and bit her lip to still its quivering.

Brown laughed. He detected the nervousness in his opponent's voice, and had fully expected it. If he had found "Bruce" over-bold, he would have been surprised indeed. As it was, the reply in some way pleased him.

"Well," he said, "you're not going to fight me. *I'm* not in a fighting mood; I'm going to *thrash* you."

Betty caught her breath. It certainly entered into her mind to cry out and run away, but she did nothing of the sort, she only clenched her hands, and stood her ground—having as usual a sufficiency of courage for the occasion.

The next minute Brown's great hand had grasped her coat collar, and she felt herself swung round, stood down and swung round again. Then a sharp swish lashed her once, twice, thrice.

Whereupon Betty began to fight on her own account, forgetting all the advice Fred Jones had given her about "hitting out from the shoulder," etc. etc. She kicked Brown's legs with all the strength she could put into her own. She pinched his wrists and his cheek, and lastly and to his disgust she set her sharp little teeth into his hand.

He dropped her quickly, her hat rolled off, and down tumbled her short curly hair. And the moon chose that moment to sail from under the cloud and put Betty's face in a soft silver light.

Brown whistled. "By Jove!" he said, the "sister."

Betty crammed her hat down upon her head again.

"I'm not," she said. "It's not! It's me, Cyril. Come on, *coward, bully!*"

She made a little rush at him, but Brown threw down his switch.

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[98]

"Thanks," he said. "I'm not taking any this trip."

"Come on," urged Betty.

"I don't fight girls, thanks."

Betty began to cry in a heart-broken desperate way.

"It's not me," she said. "It's Cyril. It's Cyril. Oh, it's Cyril!"

But Brown, smiling darkly, turned from her, jumped over the fence, and took his way through the banana grove to his home.

And what pen could tell of his heaviness of heart, and great shame in that he had *thrashed* a girl. He could feel her light weight yet as he swung her round, hear her girlish voice crying, "We Bruces fight till we die!" see her thin white face in the moonlight as her hat fell off, and she looked at him and said—

"Come on, coward, bully!"

How he tingled with shame. Coward, bully! Yes, he had hit a girl.

Betty started for home at a brisk run, for during her adventure the night had advanced, and her imagination peopled the surrounding bush with bogeys, and imps and elves.

And as she ran, sobs broke from her, solely on account of her physical woes.

Within the wicket gate she walked slowly. How could fear of outer darkness remain, when the dinning-room window sent such a bar of light beyond.

She crept softly along the verandah to the window and peeped in. Her father was lying on the old cane lounge, his eyes upon her mother who sat at the piano, in a pretty fresh dress, flower-like as ever. For a space, while little boy-Betty looked, she just touched the keys tenderly as if she loved them like her flowers, then she struck a few chords, and began to sing "Home, Sweet Home," in her sweet girlish voice.

And Betty turned away, the tears running down her cheeks, and her small heart aching.

"I've been bad again," she said, "and I meant to be good always. I don't believe you *can* be good till you are grown up." She ran along the passage into the little bedroom which she and Dot and Nancy shared, and she fell down by Dot's quiet white bed and buried her face in the quilt.

"Bad again," she sobbed. "I've been bad again. Oh, I'm *glad* I got thrashed, it ought to do me good." But it is to be feared her gladness was not very deep, because a sense of great satisfaction swept over her as she remembered, she had kicked, really kicked, big John Brown.

CHAPTER IX

DOROTHEA'S FRIENDS

ALMA MONTAGUE, a wealthy doctor's daughter; Elsie and Minnie Stevenson, daughters of a Queensland squatter; and Nellie Harden, only child of a Supreme Court Judge, were Dorothea Bruce's "intimate" friends. Mona Parbury was her only "bosom" friend. Thus she defined them herself when speaking of them to members of her family and to the girls themselves, who were one and all eager to stand a "bosom" friend to pretty Thea Bruce as they called her.

The difference between an "intimate" friend and a "bosom" friend is too subtle to be described, but school-girls all the world over, and those who have left school days just behind them, will know and understand.

Mona Parbury was one week older than Dorothea and one inch (they measured upon the verandah wall) taller. Her waist was two sizes larger; her boots and gloves were three. In every way she was cast in a different mould from Dorothea. She was a heavily built girl, who looked at sixteen as though her teens were a year or two behind her. Her features were pronounced—high cheek-bones, square chin, high forehead; her hair was black and straight and plentiful, and she wore it in a heavy plait down her back. Her eyes were brown, clear, faithful, good eyes, and her mouth

was distinctly large and ill-shaped.

Such was Mona in the days when Dorothea loved her—in the days when Dorothea told her all her hopes, and dreams, and often very foolish thoughts; when she made her the heroine of her stories; and wrote little poems to her as—"her love"—and little loving letters if the cruel fate which sometimes hovers over such friendships separated them for half a day.

We have seen Dorothea before. She was small and fairy-like; slender-waisted and light in movement. Her hair was golden and curly, and was usually worn quite loose about her shoulders; her eyes were blue and sunshiny and lashed by dark curling lashes; her mouth was small and red, and her complexion delicate pink and white. All of her "intimate" friends gave her the frankest admiration—they all loved her, and they were all eager to stand first with her. [103]

But it was Mona who loved her the most. Mona who kept and treasured every one of the little "private" notes sent to her by Dot. She worked out all her most troublesome sums, brushed and curled her hair; bore many of her punishments; brought her numberless fal-lals (keepsakes she called them); wore a lock of her golden hair in a locket around her neck, and told her all of her secrets—she had as many as ten a week sometimes.

Miss Weir, the "principal" of the school, had, many years ago, given to Dorothea's mother much the same sort of love as Mona Parbury now gave to Dorothea. And it was owing to this old love that Dorothea was now admitted on very low terms to the most fashionable school in Sydney. [104]

No one among all the pupils (there were fifteen) knew anything about poverty—no one but Dorothea. As she once said in a burst of anguish to her mother—

"They are all rich, every *one* of them. They live in beautiful houses and have parlourmaids and housemaids and nursemaids, and kitchenmaids and cooks and carriages, and as much money to spend as we have to live on, I believe."

It was very rarely, though, that any of her troubles ruffled her calm serenity. Dorothea was usually as placid as the placidest baby. She longed to be rich, and to have pretty things to wear and a handsome house to live in, but she never talked of her poverty. Instead she draped its cloven foot gracefully, and turned her back on it—and *imagined* she was rich—from Monday till Friday.

She discussed "fashion" and "society" with Alma Montague and Nellie Harden, and grew quite familiar with the names and doings of the great society dames. She even learned—at considerable pains—a "society" tone of voice with a drawl in it and a little lisp. [105]

School life was a great happiness to her—the regular hours, the beautifully ordered house, the neat table, the daily constitutional, the morning and evening prayer-time, and the hour in the drawing-room at night, everything that made life from Monday till Friday.

It was Friday till Monday that was the cross, Friday till Monday, the days when the cloven foot would not be draped, when the elegancies of life were left behind in the city, when the twins and the babies were everywhere, when the meals were often but suddenly thought of snatches of food.

Sometimes the thought of the looming future—the time when all the days would be as Friday till Monday, when there would no longer be any school days to be lived by her—would quite break down her placidity, and make her feel she could put down her head anywhere and cry.

Yet away they were marching, one by one, all the beautiful school-days, all the days of discipline and pleasant duty, and the ugly slack days, when there would be nothing but home with house-work to do, were drawing near. [106]

And at last she could bear the thought of it by herself no longer.

It was early evening, and she was on the schoolroom verandah, watching the young moon rise over a distant chimney. Every moment she expected the prayer-bell to ring, and meanwhile, as it was not ringing, she filled up the time by counting how many more evening prayer-bells would ring before the end of term.

She counted on her fingers, out aloud, and found there were just twenty-nine—twenty-nine without Fridays, Saturdays, or Sundays. Twenty-nine days, and then came the end of term, and the end of her school-days.

It would then be Betty's turn—larrikin Betty's! The moon sailed over the chimney, and Dot put her head down on the verandah railing and began to cry. She did not cry

in the vigorous whole-hearted way in which Betty cried, but she sighed heavily, and sobbed gently, and allowed two or three tears to run down her cheek before she brought out her dainty handkerchief and dabbed at her eyes.

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And at that precise moment Mona was crossing the schoolroom floor, and she saw her darling Thea in tears! She was not given to light impulsive movements at all, but this time she really did *spring* forward and kneel at Dot's side.

"Dear, darling Thea!" she whispered, "what is the matter? Miss Cowdell has been bullying you for the silly old French? That's it, isn't it dear?"

"Oh, no!" said Dot hopelessly, "nothing *half* as small as that."

"You've lost the new sleeve-links Alma gave you? Never mind—there are plenty more. Not that? What then? Tell your own Mona—tell your own old Mona."

Two more tears ran down Dot's cheeks.

"It's—it's nearly the end of term," she said.

Mona nodded.

"And I'm going to leave school," she said.

Again Mona nodded and waited.

"I've to go home," said Dot, and she put her head down on Mona's shoulder heavily.

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"I've to go home too," said Mona, and she sighed, "right away to the Richmond river, where you girls never come."

"My home," said Dot, "is like a little plain, hedged round with prickly pear, and put on the top of a mountain. No one ever comes in, and we never go out."

"Poor little Thea," said Mona.

"And we're very poor," went on Dorothea with strange recklessness; "we ought to be rich, but we're not, and the house is full of children, and there's never any peace from morning till night."

Mona grew crimson. She wanted to say something very much, and she lacked the courage. Instead she asked how old were the children, as if she did not know!

"There's Betty," said Dot, "she's to come here when I leave, and she won't enjoy it a bit—she's such a romp—and there's Cyril, they're both about twelve. And there's Nancy, she's six, and the baby."

"I wish," said Mona, "I *wish* they belonged to me."

[109]

"How can I practise with them everywhere about. How can I read, how can I paint even, write my book, do anything, with them everywhere?" asked Dot dismally. "They just fill the house."

Again Mona stumbled to what she wanted to say, and stopped. Dot would say she was "lecturing." It would never do.

"You're rich," said pretty Dot pouting; "you can have everything you want, do anything, go anywhere."

A few puckers got into Mona's high forehead.

"Once," she said, "I had four sisters, all younger than myself, and they all died. I told you, didn't I?"

"But it's long ago," said Dot. "Three years ago since the baby died. You must have forgotten."

"I'd promised my mother, when she was dying, to be a mother to them. Father and aunt *made* me go to school, and all the time I was counting on when I should leave, and be an elder sister."

Dot opened her eyes very wide.

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"Why did you want to be an elder sister?" she asked.

Mona still looked red and ashamed.

"You should read *The Flower of the Family*," she said, and "*The Eldest of Seven, Holding in Trust*. You'd know then."

Dorothea had read the last, and she began to see and understand.

"You've got your mother and sisters," said Mona shyly.

And then for the first time it occurred to Dorothea that she herself was an elder sister, that she was the eldest of five, and that infinite possibilities lay before her.

"There's only my father and my aunt and brother when *I* go home," said Mona. "And I've only twenty-nine days, too, and then, oh! Thea darling, I have to lose you."

"We'll write twice a week always," whispered Dot, twining her arms round her friend's waist.

"And always be each other's bosom friend," said Mona.

Then the prayer-bell rang, and the four intimate friends scanned Thea closely, seeing that she had been crying, and feeling angry with "that" Mona Parbury for letting her.

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CHAPTER X

[112]

RICHES OR RAGS

CAPTAIN CAREW and John Brown—big John Brown in Betty's parlance—sat at dinner together.

Although not an elegant dinner table it was very far removed from being a poor one. The linen, silver and glass were all of the best, the very best; the man-servant was decorous and swift of eye, foot and hand, and the menu was beyond any that had entered into John Brown's knowledge, before he came to Dene Hall. Yet he was out of love with it all.

Captain Carew had his glass of clear saffron-coloured wine at his right hand. His silver fork was making easy journeyings from a slice of cold turkey on his plate, to his mouth, and his eyes were now and again running over a long type-written letter that lay before him.

He was well pleased, well fed, and interested, and he had no reason to suppose John Brown was in any other humour than himself.

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He had heard that the thoughts of youth were of vast length, and perhaps he believed it. But he did not think John's had reached quite as far as wishing to be a cobbler in a country village.

And it must be confessed that few, seeing the appetite the boy brought to his plate of cold turkey and "snowed" potato, would have suspected him of longing for a "crust of bread and a drink of cold water."

The truth was, he had been of late ransacking his grandfather's library and had found besides sea-stories and stories of wrecks, and foreign lands and pirates and deep sea treasure—what interested him more than all, a volume of biographies of self-made men.

He had lingered longingly over their boyhoods; their brief school times (when such times were lacking altogether he liked both man and story better); their privations, struggles, self-reliance and success. The success interested him the least. That came, of course, he decided, to all who tried hard enough. But the privations! The struggle! The self-reliance! How his eyes shone and his heart beat at it!

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There was the story of Richard Arkwright, the great mechanic. *He* was never at school in his life—never forced to do ridiculous sums, to spell correctly, to parse, to drill, to sing! His biographer said that the only education he ever received he gave himself—that he was fifty years of age when he set to work to learn grammar and to improve his hand-writing. He did not waste the precious hours of his youth over such things. When he was a boy he was apprenticed to a barber, and when he set up in business for himself he occupied an underground cellar and put up his sign—"Come to the subterraneous barber; he shaves for a penny." This caused brisk competition, and a general reduction in barber's prices. Yet not to be beaten, Arkwright altered his sign to "A clean shave for a halfpenny." Then he turned his attention to wig-making, and from that to machine-making. And years and years passed. Years filled with patient labour, privations, obstacles, and at last *Success!* "Eighteen years after he had constructed his first machine he rose to such estimation in Derbyshire that he

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was appointed High Sheriff of the county, and shortly afterwards George III conferred upon him the honour of knighthood." So said the book.

Shakespeare, he read, was the son of a butcher and grazier; Sir Cloudesley Shovel, the great admiral, a cobbler's son; Stephenson was an engine-fireman; Turner, the great painter, came from a barber's shop.

Life after life he had turned over of men who had risen from the ranks and gotten for themselves fame and riches. So that at last he came to regard humble birth and poverty as the necessary foundations of ultimate success. He noticed that his heroes all worked hard and patiently; were all brave and sternly self-disciplined, plodding onwards past every obstacle and hardship. But he forgot to notice that they all made the *best of that sphere of life into which they were born*.

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He had quite decided to be a self-made man. That was simple enough. The question that troubled him was what sort of a self-made man to be! A Newton? A Shakespeare? A Stephenson? A Turner? An Arkwright?

The wide choice worried and perplexed him. It was pitiful to his thinking that he could, try and strive as he might, only be *one*.

He had put himself through several examinations. He had lain under a pear tree and watched the leaves fall; he felt another man had the monopoly of apple trees. And he had decided that the leaves fell because they had become unfastened from the branches, and that they did not fall straight because the wind blew them sideways. And there was an end of the leaves.

He had studied kitchen furnishings and their ways, avoiding only the kettle, since some one else had risen on its steam.

He had tried himself with a pencil and paper, but he had composed nothing even reminiscent of Shakespeare. In fact, he had composed nothing at all.

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And at last he became convinced it was the circumstances of his life that were at fault, not he himself. *If* he had only been a cobbler's son, a tailor's, a barber's!

But alas! he was well-dressed, well-fed, well-housed; sent to a good school. He had a pony of his own and a man to groom him; a bicycle; a watch; every equipment for cricket and football; a dog; pigeons and most of the possessions dear to the heart of a boy.

He had almost finished his dinner to-day when he put a question to the Captain sitting there smiling over his letter.

"Grandfather," he asked, "are you rich?"

His grandfather sat straight immediately, which is to speak of his features as well as his figure.

"Well, what do you think, lad?" he asked.

John shook his head dolefully.

"I think you are," he said, "but *are* you?"

"That depends on how riches are counted," said the old man cautiously, "and who does the counting. King Solomon, now, might consider me but an old pauper."

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John went on with his dinner thoughtfully.

"Are you wondering what I am going to do with my money?" asked the old man, watching him closely.

John looked him straight in the face.

"I expect you're going to leave it to me," he said.

"Ah!" said his grandfather. "And who has been talking to you now? Who told you that?"

"Oh, Johnson and Roberts and Mrs. Wilkins. Mrs. Wilkins says you'll give it me in a will," said John carelessly.

"Who the dickens is Mrs. Wilkins?"

John opened his eyes widely. Not to know Mrs. Wilkins was indeed to argue oneself unknown.

"Why the lady at the store next our school," he said. "She sells pea-nuts and

chewing gum and everything."

"And she says I'll leave all my money to you, eh? Hum. Well, how'd you like it if I do?"

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"I don't want it," said John with blunt force. He went on sturdily with his blanc-mange, arranging his strawberry jam carefully, that he should have an excess of that for the last spoonful.

Captain Carew stared surprisedly at him.

"Eh? What's that?" he asked.

"When you were as old as me," said John, lifting his carefully trimmed spoon to his mouth, "were you as rich as now?"

The question stirred the old man immediately. His eyes brightened, he put down his letter, pushed his glasses up high on his forehead and struck the table with one hand.

"I should think not," he said excitedly, "I should rather think not. As rich as now—God bless my life!"

"I thought you weren't," said John calmly.

"I can't remember my father and mother," said Captain Carew, speaking a little more quietly as his thoughts began to run backwards. "I lived with my uncle in London; he kept a ham and beef shop, and had thirteen or fourteen youngsters of his own to bring up. He was going to put me to the butchering, but I settled all that myself. I ran away."

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"You ran away?" asked John breathlessly, and regarding the old man with more interest than he had ever given him yet.

"Ay! When I was no older than you. Half a crown I had in my pocket, I remember. It was all the start in life *I* ever got."

John put down his spoon and stared at his grandfather earnestly, eagerly, admiringly.

"You're a self-made man!" he said. And old as the Captain was, and young as was his admirer, he warmed pleasantly at the words.

"Ay!" he said exultingly, "I'm a self-made man right enough. Every bit of me! I started life as an errand boy in the London slums, and it seemed for a time as if I was going to die an errand boy in the London slums. At least, it might have seemed so to most people. *I'd* made up my mind how it was to be, how it had got to be."

"What did you do?" asked John eagerly.

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"Do—well, I had about a year at errand running and then I got a chance to go to sea, and I took it. I went first to China. By gad, how well I remember that trip!"

And forthwith he launched into a sea-story more enthralling by far to the boy than any in that library so stocked with sea-stories.

At dinner again, at night, the talk was the same. The usually silent ruminative old man was positively loquacious, and John gave him a rapt attention.

When nine o'clock struck a dim remembrance came to the boy that he was still a pupil of Wygate School and had home tasks to prepare for the morrow.

But he had slipped too far out of his groove to go back again that night.

He began to wander in and out of the lower floor rooms; out of the front door, round the verandah, and in by the French windows to the dining-room.

"I'll chuck school," he said. "Catch any of those self-made men going to school when they were thirteen. I'll have to struggle and screw and put myself to a night-school. That's what they did. A self-made man is good enough for me."

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CHAPTER XI

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THE ARTIST BY THE WAYSIDE

ELIZABETH BRUCE was "detained for inattention."

No one else out of all the four and thirty scholars of Wygate School was kept in to-day. One after the other, hands folded behind them, they had marched to the door. Then delightful sounds—the scuffling of feet, stifled screams, giggings and low buzzings of talk—had stolen over the partition that separated the cloak-room from the class-room, and Elizabeth, sitting on the high-backed form, with all the other empty forms in front of her, nibbled her pencil in melancholy loneliness.

She wondered if Nellie Underwood and Cyril would wait for her. Only yesterday she had waited a dreary hour for them and had carried Cyril's bag home for him to ease his wounded spirit.

Then she began her task. She seized a slate, arranged two slate-pencils to work together and expedite her task and wrote: "Elizabeth Bruce detained for inattention." [124]

When she had written the statement ten times the silence in the cloak-room struck chill upon her. All the rest had found their hats and bonnets then and gone outside.

She sat on the floor under her desk and tried to see the playground through the open door. Two small pinkly-clad figures dashed past the door, chased by a maiden in blue—all screaming and laughing.

"Nell Underwood!" ejaculated Betty gladly, and went back to her slate warmed and cheered.

She made her pencils work harder than before, kneeling upon the form in an excess of industry.

Even as she wrote the statement for the fortieth time, voices and laughter came from the playground—but a cold silence had come by the fiftieth.

At the sixtieth her little moist hand was cramped, and she had to stay to work her fingers rapidly. At the seventieth the tears were trickling down her cheeks, for she was only Elizabeth Bruce "detained for inattention," the schoolroom was only a schoolroom, and the forms were only forms—and empty. And that was the master down at the desk there, exercise books and slates around him and a pen behind his ear. For a space the tears splashed down hard and fast upon her slate and the sight of the big drops aroused her self-pity. The larger the splashes the larger her self-sorrow. [125]

A sharp "Go on with your work, Elizabeth Bruce" waked her to the necessity of drying her eyes and slate and adjusting her pencils for again writing, "Elizabeth Bruce detained for inattention."

But at the eightieth time of writing it, she was no longer Elizabeth Bruce, the daughter of a moneyless author. Her name was now Geraldine Montgomery, and she was the adopted daughter of a millionaire. Her mother, she had decided, was a gipsy, and was even now hovering near at hand to steal back her beautifully dressed child.

By the time she had written the melancholy statement of Elizabeth Bruce's detention, her face had all its old smiling serenity again. [126]

She rose, sighing thankfully, and collecting her slates, walked down soberly to the busy master at his desk.

"Let this be a lesson to you, Elizabeth," he said, running his eye down slate after slate. "Ten times each side, twenty times each slate, five slates—one hundred. More punishments are meted out to you than to any other child in the school. I shall find it necessary, if this state of things continues, to write to your father. Clean the slates and return them to their places—then go."

Elizabeth found the cloak-room empty. She assured herself that every one had gone home—of course; but her eyes flashed round the press room, and to that corner between the press and the door, for a blue-frocked little girl with red hair. And, of course, as she was now Geraldine Montgomery, the disappointment of finding the corner empty was not so keen as it would have been merely to Elizabeth Bruce.

"I think," said this foolish little girl aloud, "I'll wear my leghorn hat with the ostrich feathers in it to-day. Papa always likes that." And she took her old pink bonnet down from her peg and slipped it upon her head. Then she stuffed her books into her black school-bag and turned to the door. [127]

Elizabeth Bruce fancied Cyril would be away there under the saplings playing knucklebones impatiently, and her eyes eagerly scanned the deserted playground.

No kneeling figures, no Nellie Underwood, no Cyril, no knucklebones. For a second the tears trembled in her eyes at the thought that no one had waited for her, but in a minute Elizabeth Bruce slipped away, and Geraldine Montgomery in her leghorn hat was treading the homeward way.

Behind her, she told herself, an old gipsy woman was skulking—she had seen the ostrich feathers, the "rare lace upon the simple rich dress."

It was just behind the store that the gipsy and Geraldine both disappeared.

The store turned one blank wall upon Carlyle Road—which was the home road—and Elizabeth came round the corner sharply and then stood still. There, kneeling upon the red clayey earth, his face to the wall, was big John Brown.

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Elizabeth made out that he was writing or figuring with blue chalk upon the wall's blankness, and although her heart feared the big rough boy she had "fought," she drew nearer.

"Hulloa!" said John Brown, flushing when he saw the small pinafored maiden he had an unpleasant recollection of beating so short a time ago, and whom he had carefully avoided ever since.

"Hulloa!" said Betty, surprised into speaking to him.

Brown made a seat of his boot-heels and surveyed her, being much too bashful to open up a conversation.

But Betty was not bashful.

"What are you doing?" she asked, and a very inquisitive face stared at him from the depths of the pink sun-bonnet.



"Is it a horse?" queried Betty."

"H'm!" said John, and made a few more strokes with his pencil.

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"Is it a horse?" queried Betty. "Yes it is—there are no horns, and it's too big for a dog or cat. Yes, it's a horse."

"H'm!" said John again. Then he looked at his handiwork, drawing further off to see it from Betty's point of view.

"Yes," he said, with badly concealed pride; "it's a horse right enough. It's a race-horse. I drew him from memory."

"Why didn't you draw him on paper?" asked the small girl.

"Won't be let. And no sooner do I see a bit of blank wall than I begin drawing something on it," said the reader of *Self-made Men*.

Betty only heeded the first part of his sentence.

"Who won't let you?" she asked, standing on one leg as she put the question.

"My people," said John. "They don't want me to be an artist."

Betty's eyes rounded themselves.

"Are you going to be an artist?" she asked. She was intensely interested. The boys who played in her kingdom had not arrived at the stage of thinking what they were going to be. What they were was all-sufficient unto them. Cyril had once declared his intention of keeping a sweets' shop, but that was quite a year ago now. [130]

Betty had read many stories about artists, and they were always set in romantic or tragic circumstances. The look she gave to the one before her warmed him into becoming confidential on the spot. He did not tell her all at once, not all even that first afternoon, although they took the homeward way together.

But he gave her a rough outline of the lives of several artists who had sprung from the ranks, and of one in particular who lived in a cellar, and tasted of starvation as a boy; one who, denied paper, could not yet deny the genius within him, but drew in coloured chalks upon any vacant wall that came in his way. And he always drew animals—and usually horses and dogs.

The little brown face under the sun-bonnet glowed with delight. Never in all her life had the imaginative small maiden come across a boy like this. Big John Brown, indeed! Bully, indeed! Gardener's boy, indeed! How could she and Cyril ever have said, ever have thought, such things? [131]

Presently, for the boy had never had such a listener in his life before, he told her of other men—Stephenson, Newton, Shakespeare—and Betty took off her bonnet as her earnestness increased, and tucked it under her arm after a way she had when agitated.

"Oh, I wish I was a boy," she said. "What's the good of a girl? What can a girl do? Don't you know anything about self-made women?"

John knew very little. In fact he too very much doubted the "good of a girl." He told her so quite bluntly, but added that she'd better make the best of it.

"There *must* be some self-made women," insisted Betty. "I'll ask father to-night."

John thought deeply for a few minutes, seeing her distress. He really ransacked his mind, for besides sorrow for her sorrowing he could plainly see the admiration with which she regarded him, and he wanted to show her that he knew something about women too. [132]

"There's Joan of Arc," he said, "and—there's Grace Darling!"

But Betty was indignant. "They're in the history book!" she said.

John thought again, but could only shake his head.

"All women can do," he said, "is wash up, and cook dinners, and mend clothes!"

Betty's lips quivered.

"I won't be a woman," she said, "I *won't!*"

John owned to sharing her craving to be rich, but he wanted to *make* his wealth himself—which set Betty's imagination galloping down a new road. *She* had only thought hitherto of her grandfather's riches, which had seemed to her and Cyril to be all the money there was in the world.

But now John had slid back a door and let her peep into all the glories of a new world, and she had seen there wealth and fame to be had for the earning—by men and boys!

"Try and find out about self-made women," she said, when he left her at the turn through the bush. "See if there were any women artists, or women inventors, or [133]

CHAPTER XII

[134]

BETTY IN THE LION'S DEN

So that it was John who showed Betty the thing in all its beauty. It was he, who, so to speak, called her to the mountain top, and pointed out to her the cities of the world to be climbed above. And it seemed to little independent-hearted Betty to be the most glorious thing in the world to climb upon one's own feet, pulling oneself upwards with one's own hands.

She wondered how she could have ever wanted such a very ordinary happening as for her grandfather to *adopt* them and give them *his* money. Here was this wonderful John Brown actually longing to give up her grandfather—his grandfather. For he had soon convinced her that Captain Carew was his grandfather too, and while allowing that he might be hers, he showed her how very little in the eyes of the world *her* relationship counted for. He, he said, was the son of his grandfather's eldest son—that their names were different was solely owing to the fact that his father had changed his name for private reasons. She and Cyril and all the rest of them were merely the children of his grandfather's *daughter*. And, as he impressed upon Betty, women didn't count for much in the world's eyes.

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Yet Betty was very earnest in her intention to be something great—something self-made, and John was willing enough not to stand in her way. He himself was going to start at once; *he* was not going to waste any more time over going to school and doing lessons. He pointed to his grandfather as a fine example of a man who had risen *because* he had not wasted time in learning. He told Betty they could not begin their "career" too early.

It was Betty who suggested waiting till the Christmas holidays, and it was John who said—

"Perhaps you'd better wait till the next Christmas. I will have got a bit of a start by then and will be able to help you."

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But Betty was indignant at that.

"I won't be helped!" she said. "I won't be helped by you, John Brown. Stay at home till Christmas yourself—I'm going *now*!"

Her career had to be decided upon, and very little time remained in which to decide. John intended beginning life as an errand boy. In his spare time, he said, he would go on with his drawing, and if an opportunity occurred, he would work his passage out somewhere in some ship. He was rather vague about all but the errand running; that he saw to be the first step towards greatness.

Betty was not long before she decided he was keeping some part of his design from her. And every afternoon when they had left school and each other, she was nervous lest he should have gone by morning—gone and left her to find her way into the world alone!

And here was she unable to decide upon her career! She even asked questions about Joan of Arc and Grace Darling, and set herself to find out if there were any other women in the history book.

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"It isn't fair!" she said at last to the thoughtful John Brown. "You'd never have known about being an errand boy and an artist only for your books. You've got a lot of books to help you."

But John told her how he had been decided upon his "career" all his life, ever since his father had left him alone on the station in the country which time was, as the reader will be aware, situated somewhere about his first birthday. But he magnanimously proposed to place his grandfather's library at her feet, or rather to place her feet within his grandfather's library.

"You can come and take your pick," he said.

At this period of her life Betty was not troubled with pride—the pride of the slighted and poor relation.

She accepted his offer rapturously, only adding, "You'd better keep my grandfather

out of the way when I come."

"Come when he's having his afternoon sleep," said John.

So Betty was smuggled into her grandfather's library.

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It was Saturday afternoon when she went to the great house. She had to slip away from Dot, who was making elaborate alterations to a pretty blue muslin frock (she was invited to spend the next Saturday and Sunday with Alma Montague, the doctor's daughter); her mother was calling "Betty, come here," in the front garden as she reached the track through the bush, and Cyril and Nancy had implored her to "come and play something."

But Betty had a "career" to think of. She ran through the bush and arrived breathless at that part of her grandfather's fence which ran past their coral islands. At a certain hour every afternoon, John said, his grandfather went to sleep. It was during this sleep time that Betty was to search the shelves of his library for a book that should enlighten her as to the best way to become a "self-made woman."

She slipped under the fence, and into the little belt of bush that bounded the emu run, and where she, as a ghost, had waited.

John's signal came very soon, and Betty immediately took off her bonnet and rolled it up under her arm—the better to hear—and marched boldly across the gravel paths to the library window where John stood.

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"Where is he?" asked Betty.

"Asleep on the little verandah," said John; "he always sleeps a long time after dinner."

Betty stepped into the room and looked around her curiously.

It was such a room as she had never seen yet, and it pleased her greatly. Two enormous bookcases full of books stood side by side against one wall. Another wall was book-lined for about eight feet of its height and ten of its length. The centre-table had a dark blue cloth upon it and bore magazines, books and newspapers and writing materials.

Betty's feet rested pleasantly on the thick rich carpet and her eyes went from easy chair to easy chair.

"My father ought to have this room," she said, "he writes the most beautiful books, and I know he'd write ever so many more if he lived here."

"Here's the book I got myself from," said John, advancing to a bookcase.

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But Betty was oblivious of her errand. She lingered by the table, turning over the covers of the magazines, and picture after picture caught her eye.

One in particular she lingered over. It represented a bric-a-brac strewn room.

"The boudoir of Madam S——," it said.

"Oh!" exclaimed Betty, and dropped her sun-bonnet into her grandfather's chair. "Oh, John, when I've made myself, I'll have a room like *this*!"

She began to read and her eyes smiled. Then she sank down on the floor, carrying the book with her, and leaning her back against a table-leg she lost herself in an interview with Madam S——.

Madam replied to several searching questions blithely. She told a little story about her large family of brothers and sisters, their extreme poverty and her own inordinate love of music. Then there was a pathetic touch when sickness, poverty and hunger darkened the poor little home, and she, a mite of eight, had stood at a street corner in a foreign city and sung a simple song. A crowd had soon collected, and a keen-eyed, bent-shouldered man had been passing by hurriedly, and had stopped, caught by a "something" in the little singer's voice, and face, and attitude. He had finally pushed his way through the crowd and stood beside the little girl in the tattered frock.

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That song and *that* interview had been the beginning of a great career. Hard work and small pay had intervened, but success had followed success, and now not one of her concerts to-day meant less to her than hundreds of pounds. Dukes threw flowers at her feet, Princes loaded her with diamond brooches, tiaras, necklaces, bangles; kings and queens and emperors "commanded her to sing before them," and gave her beautiful mementos.

Betty was breathing quickly as she came to this stage of Madam S—'s career. She turned a leaf, and a face smiling under a coronet looked at her.

"Madame S—, present day," the words below said.

A neighbouring photograph showed a mite with a pinched face and a tattered frock. [142]

"Madame S—, at eight years old!" was the inscription.

"And I'm twelve," said Betty. "Twelve and a bit."

She turned her head, then raised it sharply. There standing beside her was her grandfather.

The two looked at each other.

What Betty saw at first—it must be confessed—was the keen-eyed, bent-shouldered individual who had appeared to the little street singer, and the silly little imaginative maiden waited for him to speak.

What the grandfather saw was a small girl of "twelve and a bit," in a pink print frock; a small girl with a brown shining face, golden-brown hair and brown eyes, and parted red lips, a little person in every way different from the pale-faced ghost who had visited him awhile back—so different that he did not know her.

He simply took her for a little school-girl and no more.

Then Betty remembered who he was—who she was—where she was—and a few other matters of similar importance, and a red, red flush spread over her face and to the tips of her small pink ears. [143]

The sea-captain opened his mouth in a jocular roar.

"Who's been sitting in my room?" he demanded. "Why, here she is!"

Betty's lip quivered. She *was* beginning to be afraid—or rather she was afraid.

"I—I just wanted to see a book," she said.

"And what book did you *just* want to see?"

He took the magazine from her and noticed two things—how her hand shook and how bravely her eyes met his.

His glance wandered over the open page, and a wonderment came to him what there was here to interest such a child.

The next second the fatal question was on his lips.

"And what is your name?" he asked.

Betty's lips moved, but no sound left them. She just sat dumbly there gazing into her grandsire's face.

The old man sat down on the pink bonnet. He was not in the least anxious over her name. She was a schoolmate of John's, of course; he had often stumbled over these active eager little creatures in the back yard, in the near paddock, by the emus' run, near the pigeon-boxes, on the staircase. *Only* hitherto they had been of John's own sex. This pretty little nervous girl interested him. [144]

He drew her magazine towards him.

"We're waiting for the name—aren't we, Jack?" he said.

Then Betty realized that her hour was indeed come. She rose to her feet and stood in front of him gulping down a few hard breaths.

"I—I didn't come to get us adopted this time," she quavered.

"Eh?" said Captain Carew. He spoke dully, yet the faintest glimmerings of light were beginning to break on him. Her attitude, something familiar in her voice, her height and shining curly head brought that evening to his mind, when she had owned to an intention of wishing to frighten him. A slow anger stirred him, anger against this child, her parents, and himself. [145]

"Your name!" he said harshly.

And at the sound of his own voice his anger grew. His lip thrust itself out when he

had spoken, and his whole face wore its hardest, most unlovely look.

"Your name, girl?"

And Betty hesitated no longer. Her only point of pride at this age lay in assuming bravery whether she had it or not. "We Bruces are afraid of no one," being her favourite speech, and as inspiring to her as the sound of the war-drum to a warrior bold.

She stood straight and her brown eyes looked straight into his brown eyes.

"Elizabeth Bruce," she said.

The old man's anger blazed fiercely.

"Look here my girl," he said, "you can tell your father it's a bit late in the day for these games. Tell him I've got the only grandchild here that ever I want. Now—go."

But Betty stood her ground.

"My father didn't send me," she said, and her face went from red to white. "He didn't know I was coming at all—and—sure's death! he never knew anything about the ghosts. I came to get Cyril adopted because he's getting tired of cutting wood an' only getting a penny a week."

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The old man broke into a hoarse laugh.

"And this time to get yourself adopted," he said.

But Betty shook her head vigorously.

"No, I only wanted to see what sort of woman to be," she said. She walked to the open window.

"I'm not going to adopt you," said the old man, "so go—GO! Never let me see you inside my gates again—by day or by night. Go!"

And once more Betty took a swift departure by way of the balcony door. And again she left a bonnet behind her.

CHAPTER XIII

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"IF I WERE ONLY YOU!"

THE third Saturday and Sunday before the ending of term, Dorothea spent with her "intimate" friend, Alma Montague.

Alma's home was a very beautiful one at Elizabeth Bay, and, as Dot told her mother, there were parlour-maid, housemaid, kitchen-maid and every other sort of maid there.

Dot slept in one of the visitor's rooms, and had a bathroom and a sitting-room opening off her bedroom for her exclusive use. The sitting-room and bedroom were "treated" with the same colouring—a tender wonderful shade of blue. The wall paper was just suggestive of blue; the ceiling was delicately veined with blue; the curtains were, Dot felt certain, blue. The easy chairs and the lounge, the footstools and the cushions were dull blue.

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Such a beautiful room.

Again, in the bedroom, there were delicate suggestions of blue among the whiteness.

And the bathroom! How different in every way from the little wooden unlined room at home. There the ceiling-joists were gracefully festooned with cobwebs, the floor had many a great hole in it, caused by white ant and damp. No water was laid on—only a tap came from a tank outside, which in its turn was fed from an underground well. And whenever Dot wanted a bath she had to coax or bribe Cyril or Betty to work the pump. Dot herself hated working the pump—it blistered her little hands.

Here the floor was leaved the walls tiled, the bath itself painted a delicate sea blue. There was a square of carpet just beyond the edge of the lead; a cushioned chair, two hospitable taps, one offering cold, one hot water. All sorts of toilet luxuries were at

hand, pretty coloured soaps, loofahs, lavender-water, ammonia, violet powder, violet scent.

No wonder poor Dot was in an ecstasy with her surroundings, and that she roamed round her rooms and sighed with happiness because she was here, and with sorrow because she was going away in two days.

On Saturday morning she and Alma went shopping. They breakfasted alone at nine o'clock, Alma's father being in his consulting-room and her mother in bed (she had been at the theatre on Friday evening and Dot had not even seen her).

So the two girls lingered over a very dainty breakfast table till nearly ten o'clock, when Alma suggested "shopping."

Dot had only two frocks, besides her morning pink print with her. One was a blue muslin that had to last her for next week at school; the other was a white muslin and her best. She had taken them out of her dress-basket and hung them carefully in her pretty wardrobe, and now that Alma spoke of shopping she was in miserable doubt which to wear.

"I'm going to wear a blue," said Alma, "you wear yours, too, Thea dear, and then people will think we are sisters. Sisters! Oh, don't I wish I had a sister!"

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Dot, who possessed three, shook her head as she handled her muslin dress.

"I think it's very nice to be the only one," she said. "The only child! It's lovely!"

"But I'm so lonely except when I'm at school," said Alma sadly.

Dot opened her eyes. She was just slipping her blue frock carefully over her shining curly head, but she stopped with her head half through to wonder at Alma.

"Lonely!" she said. "Here! In this house! And you've got your father and mother!"

Alma shook her head dolefully.

"Father is always busy," she said, "and mother is always out—or entertaining. Oh, Thea, I would love to have you for my very own sister. I would give everything I have if I could have you."

Dorothea smiled kindly. Mona Parbury had told her the same—and Minnie Stevenson, and Nellie Harden. They all wanted her for their *very* own sister. It was only such little madcaps as her own sisters, Betty and Nancy, who were indifferent.

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Alma was small and undeveloped. She was seventeen and looked hardly fifteen. Her large dark eyes looked pathetic in her thin sallow face. Her lips were thin and colourless, her hair straight and dull brown. No prettiness at all belonged to her. Only wistfulness and gentleness.

So they went shopping together, the two little girls in blue. And they had no chaperon at all with them, no schoolmistress, or governess, or mother, or aunt—no one to direct their eyes where they should look, and their smiles when they should be given out and when withheld. No one to carry the purse.

Dot had two shillings and sixpence halfpenny in her small worn purse. Her mother had slipped the money in. "I can't bear for you to be without money, Dot dear," she had said, "but try your best not to spend it."

Alma's purse seemed full of half-crowns and shillings and sixpences!

Dot bought herself a new hat-band and a pretty lace-trimmed handkerchief; and she tried to hide from Alma how very little both had cost.

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Alma made several peculiar mistakes in her purchases. For instance, she bought just twice as much gold liberty silk as she would need for a sash, and she had to beg Dot to accept the part that was too much, as she would be so tired of the thing if she had two *just* alike. And she bought a pair of size two evening shoes, and remembered when they were going home that size two was a size too big for her. She wished she knew of any one who wore two's. Dot wore three's, didn't she? No?—two's! How lovely! Then Dot would take the shoes, wouldn't she, and save them from becoming mouldy! And she bought two pretty lace-trimmed collars, just alike—and she hated two of her things to be alike. So Dot would take one off her hands, wouldn't she?

Only each time she said "Thea," or "Thea darling!" And she bought her a silver "wish" bangle as a keepsake, and a little scent bottle and fan for "remembrance."

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Before they went home they went into an arcade shop and had strawberries and cream, and a big ice cream and sponge cake each. And they met several straw-hatted

youths to whom Alma bowed.

She told Dot to count how many hats were taken off to her, and Dot counted, and behold, the number was ten.

Dot herself felt rather envious. She only knew one grammar-school boy, who smiled from ear to ear and blushed with delight on seeing her.

Then they went home.

When they opened the dining-room door the table was set for luncheon, and a bald-headed gentleman was waiting at the head of it, a book propped up before him.

When the girls came in he went on reading just as before, deaf to their chatter, blind to the pretty blue of their dresses.

Alma ran down the room to him, and kissed the top of his head.

"Home again, father!" she said.

And then he looked up smiling, and stroked her little sallow face with one finger.

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"This is my *very* dearest friend—Dorothea Bruce!" said Alma delightedly, and drawing Dot forward.

The great doctor, who was small in stature, stood up then and took little Dot's hand in his, and a very kindly smile came to his eyes as he looked into her lovely childish face.

"I'm very glad to see my daughter's dearest friend," he said, and he patted her soft pink cheeks also.

The door opened again just as this introduction was over, and a new nervousness attacked Alma. Another tinge of yellowness crept into her skin, her eyes grew wistful, and she began to stammer.

"My f-friend, mother—Thea—Dorothea Bruce," and Dot turned curiously and shyly round to the door. Entering there was a very beautiful woman in a tea gown. Her eyes were like Alma's, only far lovelier, her complexion was only a few years less fresh and perfect than Dorothea's own—and her hair was red-gold and beautiful.

When her glance rested on Dorothea's face, a look of pleasure crept into them—just pleasure at seeing any one so flower-like and sweet as this little maid from school.

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"I am very pleased to see you, dear," she said graciously, and she stooped forward and kissed the girl's cheek.

Then she looked at Alma—poor undersized Alma, with her yellow skin and bloodless lips—and she sighed. But she kissed her also, and asked how she had spent her morning and whether she had come from school this morning or yesterday afternoon.

When luncheon became the order of the day conversation died out. Dr. Montague, indeed made two or three attempts at light talk—but Dot was shy and Alma was nervous and Mrs. Montague was apparently elsewhere in thought, so that presently silence fell.

Dinner was at seven that night. It was a meal of many courses, several wines two servants, and finger glasses. And again Dot was perfectly if silently happy—although the finger glasses (of which she had seen none before) threw, her off her balance until she had stolen a glance at Alma to "see how she did," whereupon Dot performed the operation with infinitely more grace than Alma.

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Alma wore a white silk dress and gold sash, and Dorothea white muslin and gold sash, and the doctor's eyes went from one little whitely clad maid to the other, smilingly.

The happy look on his small daughter's face pleased him greatly.

His wife often said he neither saw nor heard what was going on around him, but he had very soon discovered his little girl's supreme contentment.

He asked Dorothea if she were going away for Christmas and the holidays, and Dorothea shook her golden head and said, "No; she was going to stay at home."

Whereupon he asked Alma if she wouldn't like to carry her "dearest friend" up the mountains with her, and Alma went quite pink with delight and said—

"Oh, Father! Oh, Thea *dear!*"

And Dot raised her pretty shy eyes and said—

"Oh, Alma!" and then looked at Mrs. Montague as if to ask if such happiness was possible. [157]

Mrs. Montague laughed.

"I will write and ask your mother," she said, "but we really can't take 'no.'" And she said it so graciously that the tears came into Alma's eyes.

"It would be *too* lovely!" said Dot breathlessly.

On Sunday afternoon, just as the evening shadows were stealing out and the daylight was growing grey, Alma ran into the little blue sitting-room, her great eyes luminous.

"Oh, Thea *darling!*" she said, and then she stopped in surprise. Only a little while ago Dot had tripped upstairs, her hair in a golden plait down her back, her dress not so low as her boot-tops by quite three inches.

And now! She was sitting in an easy chair, her dress skirt lowered till it reached the floor, her hair loosely done up on the top of her head, her blue, blue eyes staring through the windows to the darkening harbour waters, afar off. [158]

She blushed rosily red when Alma ran in.

"I—I was just thinking," she said.

"What were you thinking of, Thea?" asked Alma, "and what have you done your hair like this for? You *do* look so pretty—I wish the girls could see you."

Dot pulled her friend towards her and patted the arm of her chair for her to sit there. Then she leaned her head upon Alma's shoulder and held one of her hands between her own two.

"I was *wishing* I were grown-up, really grown-up," she said; "I did my hair up to see how I looked. I tried to do it like your mother does hers."

Alma stroked her head gently.

"My mother is in love with you," she said. "She has just been saying all sorts of *beautiful* things about you. She says she wishes you were her daughter."

"Oh!" said Dot. "Her daughter! How I *wish* I were!"—and no disloyalty to her own mother was meant. "To live here always! To be rich! To——"

She paused. "Oh, Alma," she added, "you *are* a lucky girl." [159]

But Alma only sighed.

Dot began to think again, comparing in her own mind this home of Alma's with her own little bush home.

"Oh!" she said at last; "How happy you ought to be. How would you like to change places with me!"

And to her surprise Alma burst into tears, covering her face with her little trembling hands.

Gentle ways belonged to Dorothea.

She stood up and put her friend into her chair and then she knelt beside her, and slipped her arm round her waist.

"*Dearest* Alma!" she whispered.

"Oh," sobbed Alma, "if only you were my *very* own sister Thea—I *couldn't* love you more. I'm *so* lonely. Father is always busy, and mother—mother is disappointed in me."

Dot opened her eyes in surprise. She had never dreamed of a mother being *disappointed* in her child.

"I'm not pretty—or clever—or *anything*," sobbed Alma. "She's always been disappointed in me—ever since I was a tiny baby—and I've always known it—and—and—she doesn't know I know. Oh dear!" [160]

Dot was shocked. "Darling Alma!" she said again.

"It's dreadful to be the only child—and to be a disappointment," said Alma. "I think father is sorry for us both."

Dot stroked the girl's straight hair.

"You've got lovely eyes," she said, "and you're very clever at crotchet work."

"What's that!" said Alma drearily. "Mother wouldn't mind if I never touched a needle. She says if a girl hasn't beauty she has only one other chance in the world—and that is to be brilliant. I *do* try to be clever—but it's no good."

Dot kissed her.

"When you are grown up you'll look different," she said. "You'll wear long trailing dresses—and—do your hair like this—and—"

But Alma sprang to her feet.

"What a croaker I am," she said. "I *never* told this to any one before. Thea—it is my very *biggest* secret. You'll never tell any one, will you? Never! never! Father says if I'm good I'll be beautiful enough for *him*. But oh, I wish I were you!"

"And *I've* been wishing I were you," said Dot.

"I suppose," said Alma, with one of her most wistful looks, "I suppose we're *meant* to be ourselves for some reason. And we must make the best of ourselves just as we are!"

And the two girls kissed each other tenderly.

"I've to be an elder sister," said Dot, with a sudden thought towards Mona Parbury.

"And I've to be an only child," said Alma, "and we've both to make the best of our state of life—eh?"

CHAPTER XIV

JOHN'S PLANS

ON Monday morning Betty took the road to school with running feet. A fear was at her heart that John Brown had set out upon his expedition into the world this day. Had gone—and left her behind! Had begun "life" and left her at school!

And it must be confessed that she liked the thought of two waifs facing the world together, very much better than one.

She was not at all disturbed (when it was over) about the interview with her grandfather. It had not, like its predecessor, sent her to bed weeping and ashamed and resolved upon the expediency of "turning over a new leaf."

She had been vexed that her grandfather had had so short a sleep—and that John had not given her warning of his approach—as he had promised to do.

And she was very much distressed to find she had left her pink bonnet behind her. Her mother had discovered its loss when giving out the week's clean one, and had insisted upon her searching every corner in the house for it.

"It's was Dot's," said Mrs. Bruce. "Dot never lost a bonnet in her life. You will have done with bonnets soon, but yours will do for Nancy. I expect you left it at school, you tiresome child."

It certainly would have electrified Mrs. Bruce if her small daughter had confessed to her bonnet's whereabouts. But Betty's scrapes were many and various at this period of her life, and it never entered into her head to tell them to her mother, who was absorbed in her garden and her books, nor to her father, who was supposed to be always "thinking stories."

So Betty ran to school with her clean bonnet tucked under her arm, after promising that she would "try to bring the other one home with her."

Her mind was now at rest upon her future "career." She had quite determined to

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be a second Madam S— with this sole difference in their lives—Madam S— faced the world at *her* street corner at the age of eight, and Betty was not beginning till she was "twelve and a bit."

Still, she had a few worries.

She was worried over John—lest he should have gone and left her; and she was worried over the great question, "What song to sing?" as many singers have been before.

She had thought of "God save the Queen," but the words did not fulfil all requirements, while "Please give me a penny, sir"—that song she had found among a heap of yellow old ones with her mother's name—maiden name, Dorothea Carew—upon them, seemed to have been written just for the occasion. The only pity was, that whereas Betty knew "God Save the Queen" perfectly, "Please give me a penny, sir" was almost a stranger to her.

She had learnt a verse of it on Saturday night when she ought to have been doing her arithmetic; and on Sunday evening she had coaxed her mother to the piano, and begged her to sing "*just* this one song, *please*." Her mother sang very prettily—like Dot—and she had thrown a good deal of pathos into the old song, so that Betty's ambition was fired, and she had *almost* decided upon the song straightaway.

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This morning she arrived at school flushed and hot, before either Cyril or Nancy, and she began at once to explore the playground for John Brown the artist. Two little lines of boys and girls were playing a sober game of French and English away under the gum trees, and Betty ran her eyes along the lines—but no John Brown was there.

Two boys were skirmishing just behind the cloak-room, but neither of them was John Brown. Five were playing "leap frog," but John Brown was not there. One sat on the doorstep learning a lesson, but that was only Artie Jones.

Then a motley crowd of boys and girls came trailing in at the gate, and the bell began to ring.

Betty drew into the shadow of the new wing, the "Babies' Wing," and scanned the new arrivals eagerly.

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Fat Nellie Underwood gave her a bunch of jonquils and fell into line to march into the schoolroom. Minute Hetty Ferguson begged to be allowed to do her hair in the dinner-hour. "*Please*, Betty dear," she urged. But Betty was looking for John and did not heed.

Cyril was there and grumbling. He was pushing a boy who had pushed him, and pressing his lips together as he pushed, when, all at once, he saw Betty, and left the field to the other boy.

"You're going to catch it, Betty Bruce!" he whispered. "You'll just see! I'm going to tell of you when I go home. Teach you to sneak off to school by yourself."

But Betty's eyes were looking past Cyril, looking for a squarely built figure in grey.

Cyril drew nearer. "You never washed up the porridge plates," he said. "I found them in the dresser cupboard. An' the knives an' forks. An' baby's basin. I'll tell of you."

Then he fell into line and carried his fair pretty face into the schoolroom, where Miss Sharman patted his cheeks when he went to present a little bunch of Czar violets to her.

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Miss Sharman presided over Class A for grammar upon Mondays and Thursdays, and Cyril, who was but very weak on adverbs and prepositions, always gave her a sweet-smelling nosegay to begin the day with.

And Miss Sharman had a very tender spot in her heart for pretty Cyril, where she had none for scapegrace Betty. She had doctored Cyril for bruises, had washed his face in her own room and brushed his wavy hair; had kissed him, and given him cakes, and acid drops, and bananas. And although these small sweet matters were just between Miss Sharman and Cyril—their influence might be felt upon grammar days.

Nancy came into school crying—crying noisily. She was rubbing her eyes with one hand, a moist dirty hand, and leaving her face the worse for the contact.

The master inquired sternly what was the matter, and called her to his side. And Nancy told him sobbingly that she "fort she was late, an' now she wasn't." And he patted her head so kindly that the little maid lowered her sobs at once and finally let

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them die away in an occasional hiccough of sorrow.

Betty came in at last. She had run as far as the store and back again in search of John Brown—and had found him not. She felt quite certain now that he was away practising his genius upon some wall in the great world.

When she came into the schoolroom her face was red with running and excitement, her hair was rough, and her bonnet under her arm still, so oblivious was she to the things of this very every-day and commonplace world.

"Elizabeth Bruce, what is that you have under your arm," Miss Sharman inquired, as Betty walked to her place, which was somewhere in the second form.

Betty looked in surprise—and there was her bonnet. She had to walk out and hang it up, while the class, and even the babies tittered at her blunder. [169]

But there in the cloak-room she found John Brown. He was in the act of hanging his hat upon his own particular peg—the highest one in the room.

"Oh!" said Betty, "*here* you are!"

"You're a nice one," said John Brown.

"What have I done?" asked the little girl eagerly.

But John Brown simply looked his scorn, and it made his face very ugly indeed.

"Oh, what *have* I done?" begged Betty. "Do tell me."

"Trust a girl to mull things up," said John.

"Elizabeth Bruce, return to your class," said a stern voice from the schoolroom, and Betty shot herself back through the door in the twinkling of an eye.

A lengthy space of valuable time was given over to moods and tenses, perfects, pluperfects, pasts, futures; and Betty, whose fortitude was much shaken by John Brown's remarks, sat listlessly five places above him, caring not the least about such mighty words as "cans" and "coulds" and "shalls" and "shoulds," although the air was full of them. [170]

She went down a place, through not being able to find a passive participle for the verb "to bid," Miss Sharman shaking an angry head at her eager "bided." And she went down two for knowing nothing of the present tense of "slain."

That brought her one place removed from John Brown, and all her eagerness now was to go one lower and learn at once wherein lay her offence.

So, although she knew perfectly that the verb "to fall" had "fell" for its past participle, she uttered an eager "failed" and sat next to John Brown.

"Disgraceful!" said Miss Sharman. "You could not have opened your book, Elizabeth (which was only too true). Your little sister Nancy, in the babies' class, could have told you that."

But Elizabeth saved herself with the verb, "to sing," and sat uneasily in case John should blunder over "to fight." But he was quite correct and did not need his small neighbour's eager whisper. [171]

And then Miss Sharman passed on to other verbs and other pupils, and John and Betty were left in peace, side by side, outwardly two indifferently intelligent pupils, inwardly perplexed, distressed and elated by their new ambition.

"What have I done?" whispered Betty.

"Silly!" whispered John.

"But—what *have* I done?"

"Girl!" whispered John in scorn.

The trouble at Betty's heart stirred and hurt her. Was it not enough *to be* a girl, without being *called* one—and in such a whisper. She sat still, and, to save herself from tears, bit her lips and pressed them together, and pinched her left arm with her right hand, as she sat there with her arms folded behind her.

And John thought she didn't care!

He looked at her out of an eye-corner and added, "I'm done with you," as a final stab.

Betty said, "Oh no, John," imploringly, and Miss Sharman caught her whisper and saw her lips move, and said—

"Elizabeth Bruce—don't let me have to look at you again this morning. You are very troublesome. Why can you not take a leaf out of your brother's book, I wonder?"

The morning wore on, and tenses and moods gave place to drill. Then they all went into the playground, and armed themselves with poles, and formed into lines.

John, as the tallest and straightest-backed and sturdiest-limbed pupil in the school, was always at the head of one line. While Nellie Underwood and Betty Bruce, being of a height and age, headed a line alternately.

It fell to Betty's lot to be head of a line to-day, and though she had to "right wheel and march," with John for a partner, down the middle and up again, and "left wheel and march" from John to meet again, and "right wheel and march," and all of it over and over and over again, John's eyes only ignored the little distressed face in the cotton bonnet, or told her contemptuously that she was a "girl."

At eleven o'clock recess he was skirmishing with four smaller boys (using only one hand to their eight) and Betty walked up and down under the gum trees arm in arm with two other girls in sun-bonnets.

At dinner-time John scampered home to roast fowl and bread sauce, and Betty and Cyril and Nancy carried their lunch bag to a shady corner and ate bread and jam sandwiches with relish, finishing up with a banana each.

It was not until afternoon school was well over that Betty found John in any way approachable. He was skimming stones along the dusty road with practised skill, and Betty, alone and hurrying, caught him up.

She artfully admired a stone that sped for a couple of hundred yards an inch or so above the earth, without, to all seeming, ever touching it. And John condescended to be pleased at her praise.

When she had at his command tried her hand at throwing and been condemned by him, she put her question again.

"Why aren't you speaking to me, John? What have I done?"

"I'm speaking!" quoth John. "But I'm done with you."

"But what have I done?"

"Done! Only got me into a row with my grandfather. Only got me to bed at six o'clock without any tea for speaking to you. That's all."

"And shan't you speak to me any more?" asked Betty.

"Only just speak," said John.

"And—and——" Betty's voice quavered with anxiety—"shan't you run away with me?"

"Mightn't" said John. He sent another stone speeding down the road, and Betty watched it with misty eyes, as she trudged along behind him. She did not speak.

"You should have cleared when I coughed," said John. "I told you I'd cough, but you sat there reading and wouldn't look up."

Still Betty was silent.

"You'd give the whole blessed show away," said John. "What's the good of running away and being brought back to school. That comes of being a girl."

And then he looked at her and saw the tears were running down her cheeks and her lips quivering.

"You're crying!" he said, turning round to her sharply.

"Oh, I'm not," said Betty, and dragged her bonnet further over her face. "That horrid stone of yours made a d-dust, and its—it's got in my eyes."

John laughed. "If you do run away," he said, "what shall you do?"

Betty's ambition leapt to life, and her tears dried themselves on her cheeks and in her eyes.

"I'm going to sing," she said. "I'm going to stand at a street corner and sing, and

I'm going to wear a tattered old dress and no boots and stockings. And then an old gentleman will pass by and he'll hear me and stand still, and he'll take me away to make a singer of me; and even lords will come to hear me sing, and kings and queens."

John was stirred.

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"I'm going without boots, too," he said, "and I shall be in tattered things. I shall get a place as errand boy first, and——"

"When are you going?" asked Betty artfully.

"To-morrow," said John.

"Why, so am I," said Betty. "How funny."

"If you like," said John, "I'll see you to some street corner. I'm going at five o'clock in the morning."

"Why, so am I," said Betty. "Oh, yes; let's go together."

"You can be down at the store by half-past five," said John. "That'll give us time to get a bit of breakfast. And we'll be in Sydney early, before they find out we've gone."



"She went back to her bedroom, to place by Nancy's side her only remaining doll."

CHAPTER XV

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ON THE ROAD

NEEDLESS to say Betty did not "waste" any time that night over home-lessons. How can the beginner of a great singer be expected to care whether the pronoun "that" in "I dare do all 'that' may become a man," is relative or possessive? or whether Smyrna is the capital of Turkey or Japan? or even whether the Red Sea has to do with Africa or China.

Betty did not even open her school satchel, or peep at the cover of her books.

Instead, she copied out the words of her song and learnt them sitting there at the table with Cyril.

Neither was Cyril doing home-lessons. He certainly had his books spread out before him, but the contents of his pockets were strewn upon his open books, and he was examining them and grumbling now and again at the rapacity of certain school-mates who had caused him to lose certain treasures, or accept less valuable ones, on the school system of "I'll give you this for that."

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He turned over three coloured marbles in disgust. For them he had bartered away a catapult, and now his heart was heavy over the exchange.

"Artie Jones is a sneak," he grumbled. "He ought to have given me six marbles for that catapult. Eh? What do you say?"

The question was directed to Betty, whose lips were moving.

She shook her head, and sighed drearily, for she had entered into the very being of the little beggar girl who sang for a penny.

"Nothing," she said. "Nothing you'd understand. Don't chatter."

"Don't be so silly," said Cyril. "I'm as old as you, any way."

"Mother says I'm an hour older than you," said Betty.

"That's nothing," said Cyril.

"You can learn a lot in an hour," quoth Betty, and bent her attention to her strip of paper.

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"I told mother about the dirty plates, so there," said the boy. "And——"

"Bah!" said Betty, and pushed her fingers into her ears.

Betty had several plans for waking early, amongst which may be named—putting marbles in her bed that in rolling unconsciously about for comfort she might be awakened by the discomfort. That had answered very well once or twice. Another was to place her pillow half-way down the bed, that she might be within reach of the foot of it—and then to rest her own foot on a lower rail and tie it there. Another was to prop herself into a sitting position and fold her hands across her chest, that by sleeping badly she might not sleep long.

Many a night had her father and mother laughed at the attitude chosen by their second daughter, and arranged her that her sleep might be easier.

"Betty wants to get up early," they would say and smile. But upon this night—the night before the battle—they did not go to her room at all.

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Mrs. Bruce was reading a new magazine, and saying now and again, as she turned a leaf or smiled at her husband, that she *had* intended doing a bit of mending; and Mr. Bruce was polishing up a chapter in his book, and saying now and again as he paused for a choicer word, or smiled at his wife, that he *had* intended doing that blessed article on Cats, for Flavelle. So they both went on being uncomfortably comfortable.

Betty tried all her expedients for early rising, and yet peaceful was her sleep throughout the night. Her lashes lay still on her rounded cheeks, her rosy lips smiled and her brown curls strewed the pillow, just as effectively as though she were on a velvet couch, and a living illustration of a small princess, sleeping to be awakened by a kiss.

She awoke just as the day was pinkly breaking and the night stealing greyly away, awoke under the impression that John Brown was cutting off her foot. It was a great comfort to find it there and merely cold and cramped from lack of covering and an unnatural position.

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She remembered everything immediately without even waiting to rub her eyes, and she sprang out of bed at once, even though her right foot refused to do its duty, and she had to stand for a valuable minute on her left.

The clock hands (she had carried the kitchen clock into her bedroom to Mary's chagrin), pointed to a quarter to five, and Betty realized she had only an hour in which to dress eat her breakfast, bid good-bye to any home objects she held dear, and travel down the road to the store.

She was vexed, for she had meant to get up at four.

She got into her tattered Saturday's frock (her Cinderella costume) and she brushed and plaited her short curly hair, as well as it would allow itself to be plaited. Then she made a bundle of her boots and stockings and school-day frock and hid them away under the skirt of her draped dressing-table, and opened her money-box and extracted the contents (thirteen half-pennies). This was the fortune with which she purposed to face the world.

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And so real had this thing become to her now, that she crept to the far side of the double bed to kiss the sleeping Nancy, and down the passage to Cyril's room, to look at his face upon the pillows; and the tears were heavy in her eyes because she was quitting her "early" home.

When she had reached the pantry she remembered something, and went back to her bed room, to place by Nancy's side her only remaining doll, a faded hairless beauty, Belinda, by name.

And she pinned a note upon the pincushion (all her heroines who fled from their early homes, left notes upon the pincushion) addressed to "Father and Mother," and as she passed their door she stroked it lovingly. In the pantry she was guilty of several sobs, while she cut the bread, it seemed so pitiful to her to be going away from her home in the grey dawn to seek a livelihood for her family. In truth her small heart ached creditably as she ate her solitary breakfast, and it might have gone on aching only that she suddenly bethought herself of time. Half-past five, John had said, and she remembered all that she had done since half-past four.

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"It *must* be half-past five now," she said. "I'll eat this as I go," and she folded two pieces of bread and butter together.

Then she found her bonnet and the strip of paper with the song upon it, and grasping her half-pennies set forth.

She ran most of the way to the store, which, it may be remembered, occupied the corner, just before you come to Wygate School.

As Betty came in sight of it she saw John standing still there, and she thought gratefully how good it was of him to wait for her.

He wore a very old and very baggy suit, a dirty torn straw hat (of which it must be owned he had plenty), and neither boots nor stockings.

The children eyed each other carefully, noting every detail, and both in their own heart admiring the other exceedingly.

Betty's face had lost its traces of tears, but had not got back its happy look. Her mouth drooped sadly.

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"What's up?" asked John as they turned their faces towards the silent south.

"It hurts me, leaving the little ones," said Betty, who was now in imagination Madam S——. "You have no brothers and sisters to provide for."

John sighed. "No," he said, "I've no one but an old grandfather, and he grudges me every crust I eat. He's cut me off with a shilling."

For a space Betty was envious. For a space she liked John's imagination better than her own. That "cutting off with a shilling" seemed to her very fine.

He showed her his shilling. "I've *that*," he said, "to begin life on. Many a fellow would starve on it. *I'm* going to make my fortune with it."

They were the words one of his heroes had spoken, and sounded splendid to both.

"I've sixpence-halfpenny," said Betty, and unclosed her little brown hand for a second. "That's all!"

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They walked on. In front of them and behind ran the dusty road, like a red line dividing a still bush world. Overhead was a tender sky, grey stealing shyly away to give place to a soft still blue. Already the daylight was wakening others than these foolish barefooted waifs. Here and there a frog uttered its protest against, mayhap, the water it had discovered, or been born to; the locusts lustily prophesied a hot day. Occasionally an industrious rabbit travelled at express speed from the world on one side of the red road to the world on the other. And above all this bustle and business and frivolity rang the brazen laugh of a company of kookaburras, who were answering each other from every corner of the bush.

After some little travelling the fortune seekers came upon a cottage standing alone in a small bush-clearing on their right. Three cows stood chewing their cud, and waiting to be milked, a scattering of fowls was shaking off dull sleep, and making no

little ado about it, and near the door a shock-headed youth was rubbing both eyes with both hands.

Betty and John walked on. These signs of awakening life roused them to a livelier sense of being alive.

Yet a little further and they came to what Betty always called a "calico" cottage, which is to say, a cottage made of scrim, and white-washed. Windows belonged to it, and a door, and a garden enclosed by a brushwood fence.

"Let's peep in the gate," said Betty, "it's such a *sweet* little house."

"Wait till you see the house *I* mean to have," quoth John.

But Betty preferred to peep in then. She went close to the half-open gate and popped in her head.

Inside the gate was a garden, and all its beds were defined by upended stout bottles—weedless, sweet-scented beds wherein grew such blooms as daisies, and violets, stocks, sweetpeas, sweet williams, lad's love and mignonette.

"Oh!" said Betty. "Oh—just smell! just put your head in for a minute, John."

But John was for "pushing on," and getting to Sydney to make his shilling two.

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While they were parleying, a man came round the corner of the "sweet little house," and his eyes fell on the bonneted maiden.

"Hullo!" he exclaimed, "and who's this? Polly?"

"No," said Betty.

"Na-o. Then p'raps it's Lucy. Eh?"

John tugged at Betty's dress and said "Come on," urgingly; but the man was already letting down two slip-rails a little way from the crazy gate, and his eyes rested on the second barefooted imp.

"Hullo!" he exclaimed, "An' how's this any'ow?"

John, who had a greater dread of capture than Betty, inquired innocently if there were any wild flowers up this way.

The man drew his hand across his eyes to banish sleep inclinations. "Not many now, I reckon," he said. "There might be a few sprigs of 'eath an' the flannel flowers ain't all done yet. Goin' to town?"

Betty nodded, and John said,—

"Yes—we'll be gettin' back 'ome" in a fair imitation of his questioner's voice.

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"I'll be goin' as far as the markets," said the man "an' I don't mind givin' you a lift ef you like."

John's eyes brightened, for he was longing for the centre of the city, and he had felt they were covering ground very slowly. And Betty's brightened because she thought she would soon coax the man into letting her drive.

So the fortune seekers made their entry into town in a fruit cart.

CHAPTER XVI

[189]

THE NOTE ON THE PINCUSHION

EVERY morning there was a skirmish between Betty and Cyril as to who should have the first bath, and Betty generally won, because as she pointed out, she had Nancy to bath, too, and to make her bed, and set the table, and cut the lunches, whereas Cyril only had to bring up two loads of wood.

But this morning, to Cyril's delight, he was first and he got right into the room and fastened the door with the prop (a short thick stick which was wedged between the centre of the door and the bath, and was Mr. Bruce's patent to replace the handle that "lost itself"), and still Betty came not. And he loitered in the bathroom and

played, and half-dressed, and then undressed, and got back into the bath, and out again, and dressed, and still no Betty banged at the door.

"Can't make out where Miss Betty's got to," said Mary sulkily, "I'll tell your mother on her. She's not set the table, and she's not cut the lunches, and she's not done nothing."

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Cyril, who had brought up his wood and otherwise and in every way performed his morning's duties, waxed indignant at Betty and her negligence, and went down the passage to her room, muttering—

"I'll tell mother of you, Betty Bruce, so there!"

But no Betty Bruce was there. Only Nancy in her nightgown still, and playing with poor faded Belinda.

Mary had to set the table, and Mary had to cut the lunches, and Nancy had to miss her bath, and go to Mary for the buttoning of her clothes. And all because Betty had gone out to make her fortune!

Mrs. Bruce came out of her room late—which was a very usual thing for her to do—and she called:—

"Nancy, come and take baby. Betty, find me a safety pin *quickly*. I think I saw one on the floor near the piano."

And Mr. Bruce followed her in his slippers, and called—

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"Nancy—Betty—one of you go down to the gate and bring up the paper."

Cyril ran to them breathless with his news—

"Betty's never got up yet. Mary's had to do all her work an' she's not got breakfast ready yet. And Nancy's had to dress herself an' all."

Mrs. Bruce opened her eyes—just like Dot did when she was very surprised, and said,—

"Then go and *make* Betty get up at once." But Cyril interrupted with—

"She's not in bed at all. She's out playing somewhere; I daresay she's gone to school so's to be before me and Nancy. She's always doing that now."

Mrs. Bruce had to hurry to make up for lost time—as she had perpetually to do—and she could not stay to lend an ear to Cyril's tale. So he was left grumbling on about Betty, and school, and a hundred and one things that were "not fair."

Nancy had a bowl of porridge and milk in the kitchen, superintended in the eating of it by Mary, who was giving baby her morning portion of bread and milk.

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Cyril carried his porridge plate to the verandah that he might watch if Betty was lurking around in the hopes of breakfast.

And Mr. Bruce read the paper and sipped a cup of abominably made coffee serenely.

They were such a scattered family at breakfast time usually, that one away made little difference. No one but Cyril missed Betty at the table. Her services in the house were missed—so many duties had almost unnoticeably slipped upon her small shoulders, and now it was found there was no one to do them but slipshod overworked Mary.

Just as Cyril was setting off to school Mary ran after him with a newspaper parcel of clumsy bread and jam sandwiches.

"I'm not sending Miss Betty's," she said—"it'll teach her not to clear out of the way again."

Mrs. Bruce put her head out of the kitchen window—she had not had "time" for any breakfast yet beyond a cup of tea.

"Send Betty home again," she said; "she *shan't* go to school till her work's done."

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But even at eleven o'clock no Betty had arrived. Mary, who had done all the washing-up—and done some of it very badly—was sent by her mistress to strip Betty's bed and leave it to air. And she found the note on the pincushion, and after reading it through twice, carried it in open-eyed amazement to her mistress, who was eating a peach as she sat on the verandah edge, and merely said, "Very well, give it

to your master."

So Mr. Bruce took it, and opened it very leisurely, and then started and said: "Ye gods!" and read it through to himself first and then out aloud.

"DEAR FATHER AND MOTHER" (it said)—

"I am going away from my childhood's home to make a fortune for all of you. My voice is my fortune. When I've made it I shall come back to you. So good-bye to you all, and may you be very happy always.

"Your loving daughter,
"BETTY."

Mrs. Bruce put down her peach and said: "Read it again, will you, dear," in a quiet steady way as though she were trying to understand. [194]

And Mr. Bruce read it again, and then passed it over to her to read for herself.

"She's somewhere close at hand, of course!" he said. "Silly child!"

"She *couldn't* go very far, could she?" asked Mrs. Bruce, seeking comfort.

Mr. Bruce shook his head.

"One never quite knows *what* Betty could do," he said. "She's gone to find her fortune, she says. I wonder now if that is her old crazy idea of hunting for a gold mine. No! 'My voice is my fortune,' she says. Good lord! Whom has she been talking to? What books has she been reading?"

Mrs. Bruce sighed and smiled. As no immediate danger seemed to threaten Betty, there appeared no reason for instant action. They could still take life leisurely, as they had done all their married days. It was only madcap Betty who ever tried to hurry their pace or upset the calm of their domestic sky—Betty with her ways and plans and pranks. [195]

So Mrs. Bruce leaned back on the verandah post.

"Where one has only *one* child," she said, "life must be a simple matter. It is when there are several of several ages that the difficulty comes in. Now we, for instance, need to be—just a year old—and six years old—and twelve and seventeen—all in addition to our own weight of years."

Her husband smiled. "You do very well," he said. "I saw you playing with Baby this morning, and I've heard you and Dot talk, and could have imagined she had a school-friend here."

"Dot—yes! But Betty—no!"

"Betty is at an awkward age," said Mr. Bruce. "I confess *I* know very little of her. What is her *singing* voice like? I think, dear, you'd better give me a list of the clothing she has on, and I'll go down the road and make a few inquiries."

The only dress they could discover "missing," to Mrs. Bruce's horror, was the tattered Saturday frock. And Mary found the boots and stockings under the dressing-table, so the conviction that she had gone barefoot was forced upon them. [196]

At twelve o'clock Cyril was startled to see his father enter the schoolroom, and he observed that Mr. Sharman shook hands with him in a very affable manner, which was, of course, very condescending of Mr. Sharman. In fact, it led Cyril to hope for leniency from him in the looming arithmetic lesson.

A low voiced conversation took place, and then Cyril was called down to the desk and questioned closely about his truant sister.

But of course Cyril knew nothing.

Then another very strange thing happened.

While Mr. Bruce and Mr. Sharman and Cyril were standing in the middle of the floor—Cyril feeling covered with glory from his father's and Mr. Sharman's intimacy in the eyes of the whole school—another shadow darkened the doorway. And the other shadow belonged to no smaller a person than Captain Carew, of Dene Hall, Willoughby, N.S. Wales. [197]

Miss Sharman went out to meet him before the little trio knew he was there, and his hearty "Good morning, ma'am! I've come for news of that young scapegrace, my grandson, John Brown," filled the room.

Whereat Mr. Bruce turned round, and he and the captain faced each other, and Cyril, in great fear, looked up to see if Arthur Smedley, the dread bully, had heard how the great captain of Dene Hall had absolutely, and in the hearing of the whole school acknowledged John Brown to be his grandson, and had not so much as glanced at Cyril, who stood there quite close to him.

It was the first time for more than seventeen years that Captain Carew and Mr. Bruce had been so close together, despite the fact that the fences of their respective properties were within sight of each other.

To-day Captain Carew grew a deep dark-red from his neck to the top of his forehead, and Mr. Bruce went quite white and held his head very high.

And Mr. Sharman drew back nervously, for he, like most other people, knew all about the relationship of these two men to each other, and about their deadly feud. [198]

But the captain strode down the room, just as though he owned Mr. and Miss Sharman and every boy in the school, and he raised his voice somewhat as he repeated his statement about his grandson, "John Brown."

"And if you'll kindly excuse Cyril, I'll take him with me," said Mr. Bruce quietly, continuing his sentence, just as if no interruption had occurred at all.

In the playground Cyril received his commands, glad indeed to have them to execute instead of the arithmetic lesson and play-hour which the ordinary happenings of life would have brought about.

"Go into the bush," said his father, "and search there for her. Look everywhere where you are accustomed to play. She may have fallen down somewhere and hurt herself."

"Yes, father," said the boy obediently. "How'd it be to see if she's fallen in the creek?"

His father gave him an angry look. [199]

"Afterwards go home," he said. "Let the creek alone, and don't talk such folly—Betty is more than five. Tell your mother I'm going to give it into the hands of the police."

Cyril went into the bush—not very far—because the growth was thick, and he had a great dread of snakes.

"S'pose I were bitten," he said, "and I just had to stay here by myself and die! Wonder where Betty is; it's very silly of her to go and lose herself like this. *I* never lose myself at all."

He came to a two-rail fence, and climbed up and sat on one of its posts, and then he looked around as far as the bush would let him see.

"It's better to keep near a fence," he said. "Then if a bull comes, you're safe. If he jumped over I could roll under, and we could keep doing it, an' he couldn't catch me.... 'Tis silly of Betty to get lost. *I* wouldn't get lost. You never know how many bulls and things there are about."

He looked round again, and then he climbed down and ran back to the road. [200]

"I'll go home now," he said, "I can't find Betty anywhere. I've looked and looked. And school will be out soon, and how do I know Arthur Smedley took his lunch to-day; he might be coming home."

Whereat this valiant youth looked over his shoulder, and saw the boys running out of the school gate. So he took to his heels and ran home as fast as ever he could.

CHAPTER XVII

IN THE CITY

THE fortune seekers were set down at a street corner near the Quay at half-past six.

When it had come to the matter of crossing the harbour, from the Northern Shore to the Quay, in the punt (they two sitting in the cart the while), they had found [201]

themselves called upon to pay a penny each for the passage over, which they had enjoyed amazingly. Betty paid both pennies, having the coppers, but she urged John to be quick and get his shilling changed to pay her back.

At the street corner John suggested leaving her for awhile. "This would be as good a corner as any other for you, Betty," he said, and slapped the shutters of a chemist's shop as he spoke, "You stand here, and you'll catch everybody who goes by."

"There's no one going by yet," said Betty. "What are you going to do? You're not going to leave me all alone?" [202]

"Well," said John, "we might stick together a bit longer, anyway. I'll come back for you. You sing your song, and I'll just go and see if any shops want a boy. I don't suppose the offices are opened yet. What I'd like is a good warehouse, and then I'd rise to be manager, and partner. That's the sort of thing. I don't think there's much in a shop after all, but I'll have to find out where the warehouses are. A tea warehouse is good, I can tell you. You get sent out to India for the firm, and then come back and are made a partner."

He started off, only to be stopped after he had gone a few steps, by Betty's voice calling, "Get your shilling changed, I want my penny"; to which he nodded.

Betty had the corner all to herself then. Down the street, and up the street, and down the side street, whichever way she craned her neck she could see no one.

It seemed to her a very good opportunity to try her powers. So she commenced. At first it must be confessed she made no more sound than she had done in talking to John. And the street was so used to voices that it did not open an eye. [203]

Therefore Betty grew bolder, and forgot in singing that she was not at the bend in the old home-road, where she had practised once or twice since she had decided upon her career. Her voice rose clearly—shrilly—and sometimes she remembered the tune quite fairly. When she forgot it, she filled in what would have otherwise been a pause with a little bit out of any other tune that came into her head.

For those who would like to know the words of the song she was singing, and who may not have it among their mother's girlhood songs, as Betty had, it may be as well to copy them from the paper she held in her hand to refresh her memory from—

"Please give me a penny, sir; my mother dear is dead,
And, oh! I am so hungry, sir—a penny please for bread;
All day I have been asking, but no one heeds my cry,
Will you not give me something, or surely I must die?"

"Please give me a penny, sir; you won't say 'no' to me,
Because I'm poor and ragged, sir, and oh! so cold you see;
We were not always begging—we once were rich like you,
But father died a drunkard, and mother she died too." [204]

Chorus—

"Please give me a penny, sir; my mother dear is dead,
And, oh! I am so hungry, sir—a penny please for bread."

At the end of the first verse she found it necessary to run her eye over the paper before beginning the second.

Perhaps it was just as well for her serenity that she did not look up as she sang. For just as soon as her voice rose into anything approaching a tune—it was near the end of the first verse—a face looked down upon her from the corner window of the second story of the chemist's house.

It was a young face, early old—white and drawn and marked by the unmistakable lines of suffering.

Betty knew nothing about the trouble of the world in those days; nothing of suffering, nothing of sorrow. And the woman above her knew of all. She leaned over the window-sill and her eyes smiled pityingly as they rested on the small bared head. [205]

She had been praying her morning prayer near the open window, begging for strength to bear her sorrows, and for as many as might be to be taken from her, when Betty's voice quavered right up to her window.

She looked down, and there was the small singer's curly brown head. She looked longer, and saw Betty clasp a bare foot in one hand and stand on one foot, drop the foot from her hand and reverse the action.

It was merely a habit of Betty's, but the woman found in it a sign that the child was

worn and weary—worn and weary before seven o'clock in the morning.

She drew her dressing-gown around her, searched her dress pocket for her purse, and leaning out dropped sixpence upon the pavement close to the little singer.

Betty stopped at once and looked around her, down the street and around the corner; at the shop shutters and door, but never once so high as the windows.

The woman smiled to herself.

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"Poor little mite," she said. "I must remember even the little children have their griefs! It should make me grumble less."

Betty ran along the street in the direction John had taken. She felt she *must* tell some one. Then, as a thought struck her, she ran back to the house, looked up to the second story and saw a smiling face, and then set off again, running down the street for John.

Not seeing him, she stopped at the next corner and examined her coin lovingly. Then she looked up at *that* corner window and began to sing again.

But this time her reward came from the street. Three bluejackets were walking down the street to the Quay, lurching over the pavement as they walked. The child's song touched and stirred that latent sentimentality of theirs.

Her "or *surely* I shall die," brought a silver threepence from one of them, and a copper from each of the others.

Betty felt wealthy now, beyond the dreams of avarice. She had made a shilling in an hour!

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She looked at the post office clock high up in the air there above her head, and it informed her that it was only a quarter past seven. Not eight o'clock yet! And she had made a shilling! Twelve pennies! As much as she received in six months by staying at home!

She sat down on the kerbstone to count her money, putting her feet in the dry gutter *a la manière* born. She made first of all a stack of her half-pennies, and then of her pennies. There were nine half-pennies, three pennies, a threepenny bit and a sixpence. The grand total she found was one and fourpence halfpenny. More than even John had started out with.

While she was thus like a small miser counting her money, a hand swooped suddenly down upon the heap of coppers and swept them away. Betty looked up to scream, but it was only John. And he warned her solemnly how easily such a dreadful theft could be committed.

"I wish to goodness the shops would open," he said discontentedly. "I'm beginning to want some breakfast, I can tell you."

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Betty unfolded her hands and displayed her wealth of coin. "A shilling in an hour," she said, and John's look of surprised unbelief delighted her.

"You picked it up!" he said.

"Oh, I didn't!" cried Betty. "People gave it to me just for singing! A shilling an hour! I forget how much Madam S—— makes in an hour. I think its more than a pound!"

"Don't you want your breakfast?" asked John.

"Let's count how many hours in a day," said Betty, twisting about to see a clock, the high post office clock they were walking under now, and found it. "I want to make my fortune quickly and go home and surprise them. How much money is in a fortune, John?"

John considered deeply for a minute and then gave it as his idea that five hundred pounds was usually called a fortune.



"The child's song touched and stirred that latent sentimentality of theirs."

"That'll take a good bit of making," said Betty.

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"Well, you didn't expect to make it in a day did you?" asked John roughly.

"Oh, no," said Betty cheerfully, "I was only wondering how many hours there are in a day—at a shilling an hour."

She began to count slowly on the fingers of one hand all the hours until seven o'clock at night, the first hour to be from eight till nine o'clock in the morning.

"Eleven hours!" she said. "That's eleven shillings! Eleven shillings, John. Oh, and one hour gone, that's twelve! Twelve *shillings* a day, just fancy, John! Oh, I'll soon be rich."

"But you couldn't sing every hour in the day," said sensible John, although his eyes plainly expressed admiration for her brilliant career. "Why, you'd get hoarse!"

"I only sang twice in this hour," said Betty; "the rest of the time I've just been counting my money and looking round me."

"But you mightn't make a shilling every hour," said John.

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"*But*—some hours I may make more, so it's about equal."

"I wish we could have some breakfast," said John, reverting to his trouble. "I'm jolly hungry, I can tell you."

"So am I," said Betty. "Twelve shillings a day—six days in a week. Oh, can I sing on Sundays, John?"

"Hymns," quoth the boy.

"Um! I could sing 'Scatter seeds of kindness' and 'Yield not to temptation.' Um! I never thought of hymns. I think I'll sing hymns to-day as well, 'cause I'm not very sure of my song yet, and every now and then I have to stop to look at the words. Can I sing hymns on other days than Sundays, John?"

"Better not," said the cautious John; "better keep the proper things for the proper days. Well, Betty Bruce, if you're going to stay here all day, I'm not. I'm getting awfully hungry."

At last Betty's motherliness awoke.

"My poor John!" she said, "of course you're hungry. We'll go to a shop and get a really good breakfast. I wasn't thinking. When a person begins to make a lot of money, they generally forget other things, don't they?"

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"Um!" said John, who had made nothing at all. "We'll go and get a good breakfast and then we'll be fit for anything, won't we. Come on."

They turned round the corner into King Street, and there to their delight found the shops one by one opening their eyes—drapers, chemist, fruiterers, and then at last a shop with cakes in the window.

The children stood at the door and peeped in. They saw myriads of white tables and a couple of sleepy looking girls. One girl held a broom and was leaning on its handle and surveying the stretch of floor to be swept. Her eyes at last went to the door, and Betty, seeing they had been observed walked slowly in, leaving John outside.

"No," said the girl, shaking her head.

"We want some breakfast," said Betty, and added "please," as her eyes fell on a trayful of pastry on the counter.

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Again the girl shook her head.

"Can't give you any here," she said; "now run away."

Then Betty's face flushed; for though one may sing to earn an honest livelihood and competency, it is quite another thing to be taken for a beggar.

"We'll pay for it," she said, and then forgot her pride and urged, "Go on, we're so hungry! We've been walking about since five o'clock."

Something in the child's face touched the girl's heart. She herself had been up at half-past five and knew a great deal about poverty and privation.

"Well, come on then," she said. "Go and sit down at one of them tables and I'll fetch you something."

Betty ran to the door and called "John," in an ecstatic tone, "come on."

Then the two of them chose a table and sat down.

"Not porridge, please," called Betty to the girl. "Just cakes and things, and lemonade instead of tea. *I'll* pay the bill."

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But John brought out his shilling.

"I'll pay for myself," he said grimly, "and I'll pay you back the penny I owe you, too."

CHAPTER XVIII

[214]

ALMA'S SHILLING

By ten o'clock Betty had made another shilling, having caught the workers of the city as they were going to their day's toil.

And it must be owned it was a mysterious "something" about the child herself that arrested what attention she drew. Perhaps it lay in the fresh rosiness of her face, in the clearness of her sweet eyes, in the brightness of her young hair; for her courage ebbed away so soon as two or three were gathered around her; her voice sank to a whisper, she drooped her head, trifled with one wristband or the other, stood first on one foot and then on the other, and displayed the various signs of nervousness Mr. Sharman's stern eye provoked her to.

At eleven o'clock, John, who had made threepence by carrying a bag for a lady, looked Betty up at the appointed corner and proposed lemonade and currant buns, for which she was quite ready.

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Afterwards they stood for a valuable half-hour outside the waxworks and explored the markets, where Betty sang "Scatter seeds of kindness," in spite of John's

solemnly given advice to keep it for Sunday. Here she only made a penny halfpenny by her song, but as she said to John—

"Every one must expect some bad hours."

Then, too, there was in her heart a feeling of certainty that a keen eyed, bent shouldered old gentleman would be passing soon, and carry her away straight to the very threshold of fame, as Madam S——'s old gentleman carried *her*.

When they had become thoroughly acquainted with the markets, John suggested she should again "count up," with a view of deciding what sort of lodgings she could afford for the night.

Betty had not thought of such a trivial thing, leaving it possibly for her old gentleman to settle. But she was more than willing to "count up" again.

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So they went into a corner behind a deserted fruit stall, sat down upon an empty case, and made little stacks of pennies and half-pennies and small silver coins.

She had two shillings and a penny, she found in all, and John told her she could afford to go to one of the places he had seen this morning, where a bed and breakfast were to be had for sixpence.

"I have seen some places where they charge a shilling," said John. "It seems an awful lot to pay for a bed and a bit of breakfast. But a sixpenny place will do for you, and as you're only twelve they might take you for threepence."

"And where will you go?" asked Betty anxiously.

"Oh, I'd be sixpence, you see, because I'm thirteen and a half," said John. "I can't afford to pay sixpence. It's always harder for a fellow to get on than for a girl. That's why you hear more about self-made men than self-made women—they're thought more of. No bed for me, I expect, for some time to come. I'll have to sleep in the Domain. I heard a fellow talking this morning, and he said he's been sleeping there for a week now. And, you know, Peterborough, the artist I told you about—well, he slept for a week in a *barrel!*"

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"How much money have you got?" asked Betty.

"Eightpence!" said John. "No one seems to want an errand boy to-day."

Betty began to feel very doleful at being one step above John in this the beginning of their career. But she dared not offer to lend to him, he had been so very insistent upon paying her back her penny, and paying for his own breakfast and lemonade and buns.

He took her and showed her two houses which bore the words, "Bed and breakfast, 6*d.*!" and then he led the way to the Domain, having been through it many times with his grandfather, while to stay-at-home Betty it was no more than a name. Macquarie Street lay asleep as they travelled through it and past Parliament House and the Hospital and the Public Library.

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It never for a moment occurred to Betty that Dot was domiciled in that street of big high houses and hushed sounds. She knew Dot's school address was "Westmead House, Macquarie Street," but she had not the remotest idea that she and John were travelling down Macquarie Street past Westmead House.

Just inside the Domain gates they paused to admire Governor Burke's statue, and to count their money again in its shade.

Then John pointed out to her the tree-shaded path that runs to Woollomooloo Bay and the great sweeping grass stretch that lay on one side of it.

Many men were there already, full length upon the grass, their hats over their eyes, asleep or callous to waking.

Betty at once signified her intention of spending her first night out here, also, and pointed to a seat under a Norfolk Island pine tree.

"We could be quite cosy there," she said, "and you could lend me your coat."

"But I'd want it myself," said John.

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"John in *Girls and Boys Abroad* used always to give Virginia his coat," said Betty.

It was slightly to the right of Governor Burke's statue that Betty was inspired to sing "Yield not to temptation," standing with her back to the iron railing.

And it was just as she was being carried out of herself and singing her shrillest in the second verse that Miss Arnott, the English governess in Westmead House, brought her line of pupils for their daily constitutional down the Domain.

Pretty Dot, and the judge's daughter, Nellie Harden, were at the head of the line, and were conversing in an affable manner and low voices upon the newest trimmings for summer hats, when the little couple near the statue came into view.

Betty's eyes were downcast that she might not be distracted by her audience, but John, who was clinging to the railing near her, saw the marching school, saw Dot, and knew that she had seen.

"Each victory will help you
Some other to win,"

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sang Betty shrilly.

Dot's face went white, sheet white. She heard the judge's daughter speak of eau de nil chiffon, and a hat turned up at the side. She was at the head of thirty fashionable "young ladies," and a fashionable young governess was close by. She wore her best shoes (the ones with the toe-caps of Russian leather) and her best dress (white with the gold silk sash given by Alma Montague).

And there was Betty—dreadful scapegrace Betty, barefooted, dirty faced, bare-headed (her bonnet was of course under her arm), singing songs for coppers!

Dot coughed, went white, choked, and walked on. She simply had not the courage to step out from that line of fashionable demoiselles and claim her little sister.

But Alma Montague, who carried her purse for the purchase of chocolate nougats should a favourable opportunity occur, had her tender little heart touched by Betty's face and song.

"Each victory will help you
Some other to win."

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spoke directly to her, and her longing for chocolate nougats. She only had a shilling in her purse, wonderful to relate, and she and her conscience had a sharp short battle. Chocolate nougats or—pitiful hunger! Her face flushed as conscience won the battle.

The next second she had slipped out of line and run across to Betty.

"Here; little girl!" she said, and thrust a shilling into Betty's hand.

The little singer looked up, shy and startled, and her song died on her lips while her eyes plainly rejoiced over the shilling.

Then the English governess awoke from a happy day-dream and sharply ordered Alma back to her place.

"You should have asked permission," she said stiffly. "I cannot have such disorders. I will punish you when we return to school!"

Just as if the lost chocolates were not punishment enough.

The deed and the reprimand travelled along the line, whispered from mouth to mouth, till it came to Dot.

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"That silly Alma Montague," the whisper ran, "has just broken line to give her money to that little beggar girl. She gave a shilling. She was going to buy chocolate nougats. Miss Arnott's going to punish her."

Dot's sensitive soul shuddered over the terrible Betty. If she had been looking up instead of down! If she had rushed forward and claimed her before the eyes of the wondering school! If Miss Arnott had known! If Alma Montague had known! If any one of all those thirty girls had even guessed!

The very possibility was so dreadful that Dot found herself unable to discuss fashion for all the rest of that constitutional.

But later on in the day, in the evening, when the lamps were alight, she had crept away by herself to wonder where madcap Betty was. She felt quite sure she would go home again quite safely, she was always doing terrible things without any harm coming to her.

The tears that fell from Dot's eyes were not for Betty, but altogether for herself. She had disowned, by not owning, her sister! She had been afraid to step forward

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before those thirty pairs of eyes and say, "This is my sister!" And she felt as one guilty of a mean and dishonourable deed.

"I will tell every girl in the school in the morning," she said; and then, as her repentance increased: "I will tell them to-night."

And to her credit be it spoken, she descended to the schoolroom and weepingly told her story.

Some of the girls laughed, most of them "longed to know Betty," and all of the "intimate" friends tried to comfort Dot.

"You're *such* a darling," said Mona. "You've made us all love you more than ever."

She was very enthusiastic for she *felt* that Dot had been afraid and had conquered fear.

CHAPTER XIX

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THE BENT-SHOULDERED OLD GENTLEMAN

"LET'S go somewhere and count my money," said Betty, when she had watched the last pupil of Westmead House disappear down the long avenue. "You see I *easily* make a shilling an hour, don't I?"

John admitted she had chosen a good paying profession; and that if "things" didn't improve with him very soon he should try singing in the frequent spare moments of his errands running.

The day wore on, and although it must be recorded that Betty did not always make a shilling an hour, her "takings" were very fair, considering many things, notably her lack of voice and great shyness so soon as anything approaching an audience gathered around her.



"Only a little barefooted girl asleep—fast asleep upon his lounge."

By six o'clock a great weariness had crept over her. Unused to city pavements, her limbs ached wofully, her feet were blistered and swollen, her head ached from the noises of the busy city, and her heart ached for her little white bed at home. For the day was growing old and it was almost bed-time.

Presently the stars stole out and began to play at hide and seek, and Betty who had finished counting her money again, was still standing tiredly on one foot at the corner of Market and George Streets, waiting for John—John who had promised to be with her at six; and now it was after seven and he had not come.

The tears were too near for her to attempt to wile away the minutes with another song—tears of weariness and disappointment. The disappointment was caused by the non-arrival of the keen-eyed, bent-shouldered old gentleman who was to raise her eventually to the pinnacle of fame—and by John's absence.

It was just as this great matter was straining her heart almost to breaking point that a heavy hand fell upon her shoulders, and she looked up into the face of a roughly clad, ill-kempt looking man—a face that in some way seemed familiar to her.

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"I b'lieve you're the very little girl as I've been on the look-out for all day," he said. "Le's look at you! Yes, s'elp my Jimmy Johnson, you are! If you'll just come along with me, we'll talk about your name an' a few other things."

He held out his hand and took hers.

"Your name," he said, "as it ain't John Brown, may be Elizabeth Bruce. Ain't I right now?"

Betty tremblingly admitted that he was, and listened as she walked the length of a street by his side to his jocularly spoken lecture and to all the dire happenings—gaols, reformatories, ships, etc.—that befell she or he who left the home nest before such glorious time as they were twenty-one.

Finally Betty and her earnings were placed in a cab, and the man, holding her arm firmly, stepped in after her. He seemed to be afraid, all the time, that if he moved his hand from her she would be off and away. They rattled down the Sydney streets in the lamplight, which Betty had never seen before this night, to the harbour waters and across them in a punt, and the little girl thought tiredly of her journey in the greengrocer's cart not so very many hours ago.

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The remembrance brought with it a flash of light. This man by her side was the greengrocer!—their morning friend. She decided that she would soon ask him about John, ask him whether he had found John also.

But before she could satisfactorily arrange her question a great heaviness settled down upon her, and her head nodded and her eyes blinked and blinked and fell too. And all thought of money-making and street-singing, and John Brown slipped away and left her in a merry land of dreams playing with Cyril and Nancy in the old home garden.

"Poor little mite," said the man, and he slipped his roughly clad arm around her and drew her towards him so that her head might rest on his coat. "Poor little mite! She'd find the world but a rough place, I'm thinking!"

And they sped onwards into the hill country where Betty's home was, and John's, and the little school-house and the white church and the wonderful corner shop. Only they stopped before they came to Betty's home, stopped at the great iron gates of her grandfather's dwelling, drove through them and up the dark gum tree shaded path.

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The man, carrying the sleeping child in his arms, walked straight into the hall, to the huge astonishment of the sober man-servant who had opened the door.

"I'll wait here for yer master," he said.

The hall was wide and square, and contained besides three deck-chairs, a cane lounge covered with cushions.

Perhaps the man had some eye for dramatic effect, perhaps it was only accident, but he placed Betty carefully upon the cushions, and put a crimson-covered one under her dark curly head. Then he withdrew to the door.

It was not likely that, having worked hard for his reward, he was about to forego it. But he told himself that "his room would be better than his company" while the rejoicings over her recovery were going on.

The captain came through the door slowly. One hour ago a policeman had arrived in a cab with John—and had departed with a substantial reward in his pocket. During

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the last hour the captain had heard John's story—thrashed him with his own hands, and sent him to bed.

Now he was "wanted in the hall by a man with a little girl."

But there was no man visible in the hall, only a little barefooted girl asleep—fast asleep upon his lounge. He could hear her breathing, see her face, and he knew in a moment who she was.

He looked sharply at her, back to the door which was closed, forward to the front door which was drawn to, and around the empty hall.

Then slowly and as if fearful of being caught he went nearer to the sofa, and looked down at this little creature—blood of his blood—who had appeared before him again. Her lashes lay still on her rosy sun-tanned cheeks, her curly hair was in confusion upon the red cushion, her bare feet were upon another. Such a pretty tired child she looked although she was but a tattered and soiled representative of the small pink-bonneted maiden he had seen only the other day. [230]

He knew the story of her "career" now, and of her desire to be a self-made woman. John had told him about her in speaking of his own ambition. The captain's slow mind went back to the time when his own "career" had been forced upon him, when he had only too often "slept out." And as remembrance after remembrance awoke, his heart warmed strangely to this brown-haired girl who seemed to be always stumbling into his pathway.

Dirty, ragged imp as she was, that strange inexplicable sense of kinship stirred within him. Stirred as it had never stirred towards alien John, who was after all only the son of his first love's son, with no blood of his at all in him; stirred as it had stirred towards no one living since his daughter had left him more than seventeen years ago.

He put out one hand and touched her hair (she could not know, no one could know, of course)—his only daughter's little child!

And Betty slept on. Had she but known it, a bent-shouldered old gentleman, who might have exerted a wonderful influence over her whole life, was at that moment looking at her with softened eyes. But great possibilities are frequently blighted by small importunities. [231]

The greengrocer chose this moment to open the front door and look into the hall, and the captain saw him, started, and lost his feeling of kinship for the sleeper.

"Good evenin'," said the greengrocer blandly, "I found her about an hour ago, an' came straight 'ome with her."

Captain Carew explained briefly that his boy had been returned to him about an hour ago, and that the promised reward had been given on his behalf to the policeman.

The man looked crestfallen.

"My wife told me," he said, "when I come back from the markets. She said somebody had lost a boy, and you had lost a girl. And your reward was the biggest, so I went for the girl."

Captain Carew put his hand in his pocket, and shook his head. To pay for Betty seemed to him to be publicly claiming her. Yet he could not help being glad that she was found. [232]

"And she ain't nothin' to you?" said the man, most evidently disappointed.

"Nothing!" said Captain Carew firmly; "but I hear that she ran away with my boy—to make her fortune. She lives, I believe, in a small weather-board cottage a few yards further on."

He felt much stronger after he had spoken that sentence. Of course she was nothing to him. He walked to his library, and then looked over his shoulder, and saw the man just stooping over the little girl again. And then, for no reason at all, of course, he put his hand into his pocket again, drew out a sovereign and gave it to the man.

"To make up for your mistake," he said.

Then he went away and shut the library door, while the two went away.

"Little baggage!" he said, "she's nothing to me. John's the only grandchild I ever want."

But he had an uncomfortable feeling that he had owned her.

An hour later, on his way through the hall to his bedroom; he found a soiled crumpled piece of paper on the cane lounge, and opening it, read—"Please give me a penny, sir!"

"The little vagabond!" he muttered. But he put the paper into his pocket.

CHAPTER XX

THE DAY AFTER SCHOOL

A GREAT day had dawned for Dorothea Bruce, a day long dreamed of and alas, long dreaded!

The first day after school life!

She would joyfully have taken another two years of school-days, with their sober joys and sweet intimate friendships; their griefs and small quarrellings; their lessons and their play hours; their meetings and their breakings up.

But yesterday she had "broken up" for ever. Yesterday she had mournfully given eight locks of her beautiful hair away as "keepsakes," although it must be owned to-day she had examined her hair carefully, looking over her shoulder to see how it bore the loss of its tendrils.

Yesterday she had wept separately with each of her "intimate" friends, excepting only Alma Montague, at this dreadful parting that had come about.

Alma was not to lose Dorothea at all, instead she was to have her all to herself at Katoomba for the holidays, and her queer little yellow face wore a superior smile as she saw the other girls' sorrow at parting from their "darling Thea."

Many things were promised and vowed in this touching season. The little band of intimates were to write to each other every week; still to tell each other *every single* secret; to think of each other every night; to be each other's bridesmaids as long as there were maids to go round, and to visit each other in their married homes.

For of course they were all going to be married—every one of them.

It was Nellie Harden who had first alluded to the time "When I am married," "When you are married," etc. She said she was rather curious to see who would be married first, and even plain little Alma felt cheerful in looking forward to the time when she would be engaged. They simply took it for granted that in the great beautiful world into which they were going there were lovers—lovers in plenty; lovers who vowed beautiful vows, and performed gallant deeds, and wore immaculate clothing, and still more immaculate moustaches.

Dorothea had decided to be "elder sister" to the best of her ability. She intensely admired the beautiful elder sister in *The Mother of Eight*, a book Mona had just lent to her.

The mother of eight was a girl of eighteen, who had promised her mother on her death-bed to be a mother to all the little ones. Lovers had come to her, imploring her to "make their lives," friends had put in their claims, pleasures had beckoned; but the mother of eight had shaken her beautiful head and stood there at her post until the eight were married and settled in homes of their own, when the "mother" had suddenly died of a broken heart.

This book formed the basis of Dorothea's day-dreams. She, too, was going to be an "elder sister" and reform the home. In the flights of her imagination she saw herself making Betty and Nancy new frocks, mending Cyril's trousers, trimming her mother's hats, correcting her father's manuscripts.

Wherever she looked she seemed to be wanted. A great place gaped in the household, and it was for the elder sister to step in and fill it. And Betty, wild madcap Betty, would want talking to, and training and putting into the way in which she should go. And, of course, lovers would come for Dot, but until Baby was well started in life she would have none of them. And when she married, "a few silver threads would be discernible in her golden hair, and there would be patient tired lines at the corners of her mouth."

But it was only the first day after school now, and she had much to think of. She was not going to commence the new order of things by being an elder sister, although the home needed her sorely.

As things had fallen out, it was necessary, she found, to set duty aside for a while.

She was invited to spend the end of December and the whole of January with Alma Montague at Katoomba. They were to stay at the best hotel there—Mrs. Montague, her sister Mrs. Stacey, Alma and Dot. Rooms had already been engaged for the party (Alma's and Dot's adjoining each other's), and all sorts of intoxicating details been settled.

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Dot, indeed, spoke to her mother once about coming home to help, instead of going away, but even if she had meant it—which must be questioned—Mrs. Bruce was quite decided that she should go.

"It will do you good," she said, "and we don't need you at home at all. Betty will be here—it will be holiday-time and she must help."

For February Dot had an invitation to Tasmania. In her wildest imaginings she did not dream of accepting it, but Minnie Stevenson, whose school-days lay behind her too, was going down before Christmas and declared she could not be without Dot longer than the middle of February.

And Mona—Mona, her nearest and dearest friend, said it was *very* hot on the Richmond River till the end of March, but April was a perfect month there, and in April she would take *no* refusal. She must have Thea in her own home all to herself then.

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Nellie Harden had her mother's consent to ask Dot to "come out" with her. The *début* was to take place in June, at a big ball, and Nellie had "set her heart" on Thea and herself coming out at the *very* same ball, on the *very* same night as each other, "All in white, you know, Thea darling, and we *will* look so nice."

So it will be seen Dot's idea of being elder sister and home daughter had every chance of remaining an idea for the present. With such alluring pleasures, where was there room for duty?

"I'll do my best *every* time I am at home," said Dot to herself, weighing pleasure and duty in the balance and finding duty sadly wanting, "and I'll *write* Betty good letters of advice, and take some mending away with me to do."

But all that belonged to yesterday.

To-day Dot was at home, and in the important position of being about to set out upon a journey. She was to start early in the morning and to go direct to the Redfern railway station.

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Mr. Bruce had gone to town to draw a five guinea cheque for his eldest daughter. He also had to do a little shopping on her account. All his instructions were written down in Dot's fair round hand-writing upon a piece of foreign notepaper and slipped into his waistcoat pocket.

For those who are at all curious to know what the items were we will steal a look at the paper—

1. Pair of white canvas shoes, size 2.
2. One cake of blanco (for cleaning them with).
3. Two pairs of black silk *shoe* laces—not boot laces—(all of those things at the same shop).
4. 1¼ yds. of *white* chiffon (*very* thin—for a veil).
5. 1 bunch of scarlet poppies—just common ones (both of these at same shop—draper's).
6. *At a chemist's*: sponge (6*d.*), tooth-brush (9*d.*), Packet of violet powder (6*d.*).

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Mrs. Bruce was letting down Dot's dresses, and altering a pretty blue silk evening blouse (bought ready made). Cyril had cleaned her shoes and the family portmanteau, an ugly black thing, and run half a dozen errands grumblingly—all for Dot!

Betty was locked in her room in disgrace, for running away to seek her fortune. No one was allowed to speak to her, even Baby's "Bet, Bet," was sternly hushed; two slices of bread and a glass of water were placed outside her door three times a day; three times a day she was permitted to walk for five minutes, each time alone in the garden, then back again to her room.

This state of things, which had commenced on Wednesday morning, was, if Betty showed proper penitence and meekness, to terminate on Saturday morning.

Yet even prisoner Betty was employed on Dot's behalf. She had Dot's stockings to mend, and to add insignificant things like buttons and tapes and hooks and eyes to those of her garments which had an insufficiency of such trifles. And she was sewing away industriously as she brooded over her woes. [242]

Dot herself was unpacking and packing up. Unpacking all her exercise books, and notebooks, and stacks of neat examination papers; her lesson books and Czerney's *101 Exercises for the Pianoforte*; her sewing samples and wool-work; her study of a head in crayon, and waratahs and flannel flowers in oils, and peep of Sydney Harbour in water colours.

"When I come home again," she told herself gravely, "I will arrange life: I'll practise *at least* two hours every morning; I'll do some solid good reading *every* day—some one like Shakespeare or Milton or Bacon! I'll paint every afternoon. I really have a talent for landscapes. And I'll finish writing my novel. For some things I'm really glad I've finished learning."

A keen observer, regarding Dot's new scheme for life, would detect very little time or thought for reforming the household, and training Betty and teaching the younger ones. But then, Dot's schemes varied, and a day seemed to her a very big piece of time to have to play with as she liked, all in her own hands. Hitherto it had been given out to her in hours by Miss Weir—this hour for French, that for English, this for a constitutional, that for sewing, this for the Scriptures, that for practice, and so on. [243]

What wonder that she felt she could crowd all the arts and sciences into a day when all the hours belonged to her for her very own.

When she went to bed at night, by way of beginning the home reforms she looked at Betty very earnestly and shook her head, words being forbidden.

And she removed her own particular text from above her bed to above Betty's, feeling very old and sedate the while, for it must be owned conscious virtue has a sobering effect.

But the action threw Betty into a towering rage.

"If you don't take down your old text I won't get into bed at all. I've only been trying to make you all rich."

And Dot, who was always alarmed into placidity when she had provoked wrath, returned "Blessed are the pure in heart" to its own position on the wall. [244]

CHAPTER XXI

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"GOOD-BYE, GOOD-BYE"

ALL was ready very early in the morning, for Dot was to start upon her journey at ten o'clock.

The little school trunk and the family portmanteau stood side by side in the hall, labelled and ready to go forth—neat clean labels, bearing the inscription in Dot's best hand-writing—

MISS BRUCE,
Passenger to Katoomba,
Blue Mountains."

A strange excitement was upon Dot. She had never before in her life been upon a railway journey.

The household generally, from her father down to little Nancy, treated her with gentle politeness as a newly arrived and just departing guest.

At breakfast the bread was handed to her without her once asking for it; Nancy watched her plate eagerly, that she did not run out of butter; Mary ran in with a nicely poached egg just at the right moment; Mrs. Bruce kept her cup replenished without once asking if it was empty. [246]

"Don't do any view hunting or gully climbing alone," said Mr. Bruce. "It's the

easiest thing in life to be lost in the bush. Besides, no girl should roam about alone."

"Oh, don't be too venturesome, darling!" said Mrs. Bruce. "Just think if you fell down one of those valleys or gaps or falls!"

Yet Dot had never been "too venturesome" in her life.

"A little more bread?" inquired Cyril; "don't bother to eat that crusty bit; we can, and I'll give you some fresh."

"More butter?" piped Nancy; then taking a leaf from Cyril's book—"Don't bover to eat it if it's nasty; *we* will. Have some jam astead."

And Betty, in the silence of her bedroom, was drinking cold water and eating dry bread, without any one asking solicitously "if she would have a little more, or leave that if she did not like it, and have something nicer."

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"Yet I was trying to earn money for them all," she said aloud. "I won't try any more. Dot only spends it, but they love her more than me."

It was while these thoughts were busy in her mind that Dot ran down the passage and opened the door suddenly. Such a dainty pretty Dot, in her new blue muslin dress that *almost* reached to the ground, and fitted closely to her slender little figure, and a new white straw hat with a new white gossamer floating out behind waiting to be tied when the kisses were all given and taken.

The girl's face was like a tender blush rose; her eyes were shining with actual excitement (rare thing in placid Dot), and her hair hung down her back in a thick plait tied with blue ribbon.

It was the plait which caught Betty's attention.

"Oh!" she cried in disappointment, and then stopped, remembering the silence that had been imposed upon her.

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Dot ran to her and kissed her.

"It's all right," she said. "You may talk to me. I asked mother, and she says *yes* until I go."

"I can't when you're gone," said Betty; but she brightened up very much.

And she thought it very kind of Dot to have asked her mother to break the rule of silence, if it were only for an hour.

"I thought you were going to wear your hair on the top of your head," she said, surveying Dot's plait somewhat contemptuously.

"Mother won't let me," said Dot; "she says sixteen's too young."

"Why sixteen is *old*," said Betty, "and you've left school."

"I know. And mother was married at sixteen. But she says she wants me to keep my girlhood a little longer than she kept hers."

"Hem," said Betty.

"*I* don't want to," said Dot, and added virtuously, "but we can't do just as we like even with our own hair."

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"*I* shall," said Betty, and gave her morsel of a plait a convincing pull. "Wasn't my hair as long as yours once; and didn't I cut it off because I wanted to?"

Then Dot bethought her of the wisdom of sixteen, and the foolishness of twelve and a bit, and she slipped her arm as lovingly around her little sister as she was wont to do around any of her friends at Westmead House.

"Dear little Betty," she said, "promise me, you poor little thing, to be good all the time I am away."

But Betty, unused to caresses, slipped away.

"You always are away," she said. "I'll be as good as I want to. I wonder how good you'd be if suddenly you had to stay at home and wash up and dust."

The picture was quite unenticing to Dot. *Wash up and dust and stay at home!* She moved slowly to the door, feeling very sorry for Betty.

"I must go now," she said. "All this is just a finish up to my school time. Afterwards

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I shall have to stay at home and be eldest daughter while you have *your* time. Mother says you may come to the gate and see me off if you like."

But she was genuinely sorry for Betty all the way down the hall to the front door, and her heart gave her an unpleasant pang when Betty sprang after her and thrust a shilling into her hand.

"It's my own," whispered Betty; "take it; it will buy something; I earned it. Don't be afraid; I'll earn plenty more some day," and she ran away down the path to the gate.

"Dear little Betty," said Dot, and slipped the shilling into her purse. "I'll buy something for her with it."

They all came down to the gate to see the little traveller off.

Mr. Bruce wore his best suit—well brushed—because he was going to accompany his eldest daughter as far as Redfern station. As the others were saying good-bye to her, he occupied himself by counting his money, to make sure he had enough for a first-class return ticket for her, and the three half-sovereigns he had decided to slip into her purse before they reached the station.

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Mrs. Bruce, slight and small almost as Dot herself, put Baby down on the brown-green grass at the gate, while she put a few quite unnecessary finishing touches to her eldest daughter.

"I went away from my home for a visit when I was sixteen," she said—"to Katoomba, too!" Then she took Dot into her arms and held her closely for a minute. "Come back to us the same little girl we are sending away," she said as she let her go.

Cyril was waiting on the bush track, with the home-made "go-cart" piled up with Dot's luggage. He had to push it to the corner of the road and help it on the coach.

He was very anxious to get home again, for he had heard a few words whispered pleadingly by Dot, then a whispered consultation between Mr. and Mrs. Bruce. He knew what it was about. Even before his father patted Betty's head and told her to start afresh from that minute, and his mother kissed her and said, "Be a good madcap Betty, and we'll commence now instead of to-morrow morning."

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Whereat Cyril became anxious to get home again to discover his sister's plans for the day.

Nancy was crying and clinging to Dot's skirt.

"Be quick and come home again," she said. "You look so nice in that hat!"

Betty climbed over the gate instead of going through it.

"I'm going down to the road to wave my handkerchief to you," she said. "Oh, mother, will you lend me yours. Mine's gone."

When she reached the road corner, a dog-cart flashed by, almost upsetting Cyril's equilibrium as he laboured along the road.

In the dog-cart were Captain Carew and big John Brown. John looked steadily at the horse's head, fearing an explosion of wrath from his grandsire if he smiled at his fellow fortune-seeker. He, too, was going to the mountains for his holidays, preparation to commencing life at a Sydney Grammar School.

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But the Captain himself looked at Betty, and his grim face smiled. And there are not many who can translate a smile, so that we may take it that he was not altogether displeased with the little singer.

Down the road went Dot, after her father and Cyril—a little maid fresh from school—dainty and fresh and crying gentle tears that would not hurt her eyes, and yet *must* come because of all these partings.

Perhaps we shall see her again some day when she comes back again to try to be an elder sister. Perhaps we shall see Betty, too, in her new position as one of the "young ladies" of Westmead House.

But just now she has climbed an old tree-stump, and is standing there bare-headed and waving her handkerchief to cry—"Good-bye, good-bye."

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