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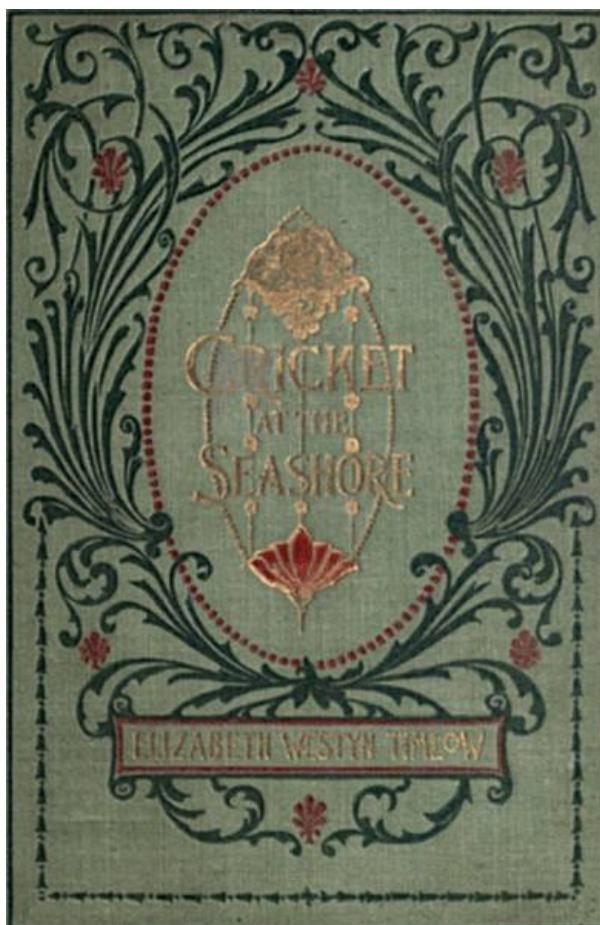
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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK CRICKET AT THE SEASHORE ***





"CRICKET WENT TO THE WINDOW AND PEEPED OUT"

CRICKET AT THE SEASHORE

BY
ELIZABETH WESTYN TIMLOW
AUTHOR OF "CRICKET: A STORY FOR LITTLE GIRLS"

ILLUSTRATED BY
HARRIET ROOSEVELT RICHARDS

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TO
My Mother

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CRICKET AT THE SEASHORE

CHAPTER I.

OLD BILLY.

The summer at Marbury had begun. On the 20th of June, after seeing the Europe-bound party off for New York, the Ward children had arrived, bag and baggage, under Auntie Jean's escort.

Early the first morning after their arrival, Cricket awoke Eunice with a punch.

"Eunice, what do you think I am going to do to-day? and I'm going to do it every day till I succeed."

"Don't know, I'm sure," said Eunice, sleepily. "Don't tumble round so. It isn't time to get up."

"Oh, you're such a lazybones," sighed Cricket, whose light, active frame required less sleep than Eunice's heavier build. "It's six o'clock, for the clock just struck. Now I'll tell you what I want to do. Let's dig in the sand-banks every day, and see if we can't find mamma's money-bag, that she and auntie buried there so long ago."

"All right, and let's search in the cove for the little turquoise ring you lost two years ago, in bathing," answered Eunice, still sleepily, but with much sarcasm.

"Now, Eunice, you needn't come out with any of your sarcastic sinuates," said Cricket, tossing her curly head. "I'm going to do it anyway, and I'm going to find it. I feel it in my bones, as 'Liza says, and I'm going to begin straight after breakfast, if we don't do anything else. Don't tell any one, for I want to surprise everybody."

"I think you're safe to do it, if you want to. I won't tell. Wonder if they've sailed yet," with a thought of the travellers.

"The steamer doesn't sail till eleven; don't you remember? Prob'ly they're just getting up. Come, Eunice, get up. I hear the boys, now."

Cricket scrambled out of bed and ran to the window to peep out.

"There they go now for their swim. Boys! Boys! wait for me!" and Cricket dropped into her bathing-suit, which had been put out all ready the night before, and flew down-stairs to join the boys in their morning plunge in the sea, her bare arms gleaming from the dark-blue of her suit, and bathing-shoes protecting her feet from the sharp stones in the rough lane that led to the cove.

They had a glorious swim. At least, Will and Archie swam, and Cricket splashed under their directions. She had almost learned to swim the last time that she had been at Marbury in the summer-time, two years before, and she could already float nicely and go "dog-paddle," but she had great difficulty in making any headway in swimming.

"There!" she sputtered, in triumph, at last, clinging hold of the swimming-raft; "I almost got away from the place where I was, then." She turned over on her back to rest herself, and float for a moment, then prepared for another start.

"I don't seem to wiggle my feet right. I get so distracted thinking of my hands, that I always forget to kick. I can't keep my mind in two places at once."

"Now try again," said Will, good-naturedly. "See here. Draw up your feet as you bring your hands together and kick *hard*, when you throw them out. Go just like a frog. That's fine. Now again. Draw up, kick out, draw up, kick out—fine!" and Cricket, sputtering and laughing, drew herself up on the swimming-raft, having really swum two feet. And then it was time to go out.

The cove was some little distance from the house, so, after scampering up the lane, their bathing-suits were almost dry. There were bathing-houses down there, but for this early morning dip they liked better to get into their bathing-suits at the house, and dress there.

When Cricket flew up-stairs into her room, glowing and rosy, she found Eunice only partly dressed, with the sleep not half out of her drowsy eyes.

"Oh, you lazy thing!" cried Cricket, retiring behind the screen. "You don't know how fine I feel. My skin is all little prickles."

"I shouldn't think that would be very comfortable," said Eunice, brushing out her long, dark hair, and braiding it. "I like to sleep in the morning better than you do, anyway. Did you dive for mamma's money-bag?"

"You needn't laugh at me," said Cricket, emerging, half-dressed already. "I mean to find it. You'll see." But she inwardly registered a vow that she would pursue her search alone.

The Ward children had never spent much time at Marbury, with grandma, since they had their own summer home at Kayuna, in East Wellsboro. They had often been there for short visits, however, as mamma generally took one or another of her little flock with her, in her frequent trips to see grandma.

Marbury lies in Marbury Bay, which is very large, but so shallow that at low tide the mud-flats are all exposed for a long distance out. A long tongue of land, principally sand-banks, stretches half around the bay, making a break-water from the ocean, and rendering the harbour a very safe one for sailing. Will and Archie Somers were capital sailors, inheriting their grandfather's love of the sea. Back of the house, over a short, steep hill, lay the beginning of the sand-banks, where mamma and auntie had buried their money-bags long ago. Then beyond these sand-banks, on the ocean-side, was another deep small curve, called the cove, where the children bathed. It was a safe, sheltered spot, with a good bit of beach. Altogether, Marbury had many

attractions.

What chattering and gabbling there was that first morning at breakfast, when all sorts of plans were projected for the summer's amusement! Mrs. Somers and her children had spent most of the warm weather at Marbury, for years, so that Will, and Archie, and Edna knew every inch of the country for miles around, and were eager to do the honours.

"Wot larks' we're going to have," cried Archie, as they all got up from the table. "Think of it, grandma! all summer! whoop!" with a shout, as he vanished, that made grandma cover her deafened ears in dismay, as the whole flock trooped after.

"Dear me! mother," said Mrs. Somers, privately, as they stood together on the piazza, "I begin to think that we've undertaken a great deal, to keep this horde in order for a whole season. Can you ever stand it in the world? I scarcely realized that there would be eight of them."

"We'll manage beautifully," said grandma, cheerily. "The boys go to their camp for a month, you know, and the little girls will soon settle down."

"Yes, and Edna will have to spend two weeks with her Grandmother Somers, at Lake Clear, as usual, and as for the twins, Eliza manages them really beautifully, and Kenneth is no more trouble than a kitten. Eunice and Cricket are used to running pretty wild all summer. If the confusion is not too much for you, that's all I'm thinking of."

"And I'm on special police duty," broke in Arthur, popping up from behind the vines. "I'll chuck the baddest ones overboard any time you say."

"And there's old Billy for special guard duty," added auntie, laughing. "See him now, poor old fellow! he doesn't know whether he's scared out of his few wits, or whether he likes the commotion."

Grandma followed auntie's glance.

"He likes it," she said, "for see, he's bringing out his music-box, and that's the highest honour he can pay any one."

I must stop right here and tell you about old Billy, for he was a life-long institution at grandma's. I wish I could make you see the dear old fellow as I see him now, in my mind's eye. A tall, thin, bent old man he was, not much over fifty, in reality, though he looked seventy. A shock of rough gray hair stood out all over his head, and a gray, tousled-looking beard covered half his face. A pair of keen, startled-looking eyes flashed sharp, observant glances this way and that, from under his shaggy eyebrows. Few words he had on any occasions, but he generally spoke straight to the point.

A sad story had poor old Billy. He had been a bright lad in a neighbouring village, and, when he was about eighteen, had come to work for Captain Maxwell. He was very faithful and responsible, and soon became a fixture on the place. Then poor Billy one day got a terrible fall in the barn, and was taken up for dead. However, he was not dead, only unconscious, and terribly hurt. He had a long and severe illness, during which Mrs. Maxwell had him carefully nursed and cared for in her own home.

At length he recovered, but, alas! his poor mind was hopelessly affected, and the doctor said that, though he might be much better, he would never be quite right again. Everybody thought they ought to send him to the poorhouse, as he had no home to be sent to, but Captain Maxwell refused to do this. So he stayed on, and, gradually, as he grew stronger, he took up some simple duties again. However, he had forgotten everything, even how to read.

But he was very happy in his dim way, for he did not realize all that had happened to him. So several years passed, when suddenly a lawyer's letter was received, stating that William Ruggles was heir to a large amount of money from a brother who had gone West many years before and had never been heard of since. He had died leaving no family, and no other heir than Billy.

Of course there was a great deal of troublesome law business to be adjusted, but the end of it was that, a few months later, Billy was in possession of a small fortune. The next question was, what to do with him. He could not stay on as a servant at the Maxwells, and he was entirely unable to take care of himself. Captain Maxwell had been appointed his guardian, and trustee of his property. There chanced to be a small unused building, once an office, on the grounds, and this was easily changed into a suitable abode for Billy. He had his little sitting-room, bedroom, and kitchen, and some one to take care of it and of him, and here lived Billy, as happy as a king. When Captain Maxwell died, Mrs. Maxwell took Billy as one of her legacies, and here he probably would end his days.

It was hard at first to make him understand that he need not do any more work, and yet could have what he called his "pay," just the same, for it was useless to tell him about his property. His allowance had to be a small one, for it was soon found that generous Billy emptied his pockets on all occasions to any one asking. So his allowance was limited to twenty-five cents a week in his own hands, but the spending of his "dollar," as he always called his quarter, gave him quite as much pleasure as if it had been hundreds. He always spent this for tobacco and peppermint candy, his two luxuries.

Mrs. Ward and Mrs. Somers had been little girls of ten and twelve when Billy first came there, and all through their childhood he had been their devoted slave, for the poor soul was patience and fidelity itself. And to the second generation, old Billy was as much part of the landscape as the bay itself.

CHAPTER II.

A BROKEN WHEEL.

"Let's take a ride, the very first thing we do," said Eunice, eagerly, after breakfast. "I'm wild to get behind Mopsie and Charcoal again," for the ponies had been sent over from East Wellsboro for the children's use.

"I'm going to—" began Cricket, and then she stopped, remembering that she was going to surprise the family with what she felt sure would be the result of her mining explorations,—the finding of mamma's long-buried money-bag. But then, she could dig any time, she reflected.

So Luke, the man, brought up the ponies, harnessed to the little cart, that was getting to be close quarters for Eunice and Cricket, to say nothing of Edna.

"Dearest old Charcoal!" said Eunice, caressing her pony, as he rubbed his affectionate head against her shoulder, expecting sugar; "isn't it lovely to have him again! But, Cricket, don't you think he is really getting smaller all the time? Last summer his head came above my shoulder, and look at him now!"

"Does it occur to you that your shoulder may be growing above his head?" suggested Auntie Jean, laughing. "Unless you put a brick on your head, I am sadly afraid that you wouldn't be able to ride Charcoal next summer."

"When Eunice and Cricket are big ladies, Helen and I are going to have the ponies. Papa said so," piped up Zaidee.

"Dear me!" said Cricket, mournfully. "I wish I could take a tuck in my legs. I don't want them to get so long that I can't ride Mopsie. Get in, girls. Hello, Billy! If we had any room, we'd take you, too."

Billy grinned.

"Old Billy can walk as fast as them little tikes can run," he said, with scorn.

"All right, then, you come, too," said Edna, jumping into the cart; "you jog along behind. Don't you want to?" And off started the little cavalcade, with Cricket driving, because she was the smallest, and could perch up on the others' knees, while old Billy, all beam, jogged after, making almost as good time, with his long legs and shambling gait, as the ponies.

Back of Marbury there are miles of level roads, almost free of underbrush, intersected in every direction with roads and lanes, and one can drive for hours without leaving the shelter of the stately forest trees.

They had been riding for an hour or more, laughing and singing, and shouting sometimes, since there was no one to be disturbed, when suddenly one wheel went over a big stone, which Cricket, in glancing back to see if Billy were in sight, did not notice and turn out for.

"Look out, Cricket!" warned Eunice, but too late. Thump came down the wheel and crack went something, and in a twinkling down came one side of the cart, while the wheel lay on the ground. The well-trained little ponies stood still at the first "whoa!" and the children were out in a flash.

They looked at each other in dismay. How should they get the cart home again with only one wheel?

"And we must be twenty miles from home," said Eunice, soberly.

"Oh, no, we're not," said Edna, for as she usually spent her summers at Marbury, she knew this country-side well. "Only two or three miles, that's all. You see we've been driving around so much that it seems longer, but it's not really far. This lane leads out on to the Bainbridge road, by the old Ellison Place, and that's only two miles from home. But, after all, nobody may come along here for hours to help us about the cart."

Just then old Billy came lumbering up around the curve behind them.

"Sho, now!" he said, surveying the wreck. "Wheel's come off."

"Exactly so, Billy. Now the question is, can we get it on?" returned Eunice.

But something was broken, and getting it on proved impossible.

"Billy carry the cart," suggested that individual, who had a high opinion of his own strength.

"Well, hardly, Billy,—but, oh, I have an idea! Billy, you hold up the cart on that side, so it will run on the other wheel as the ponies draw it, and Cricket can lead them, and Edna and I will roll the wheel along. You said it wasn't far, Edna."

Billy lifted the side of the cart, obediently, while Cricket started the ponies forward. This worked very well. Then Edna and Eunice armed themselves with sticks and found that their new variety of wheel rolled in fine style, with a little persuasion.

"What a come down," laughed Eunice. "We start out in state, and we come back on foot."

"Let's play we're a triumphant procession," instantly suggested Cricket, the fertile of resource. "I'll be the emperor, what was his name? The one that conquered Zenobia. I'll be that one, and Billy is one of my slaves, a captive of war, and you can be Zenobia, Eunice, and you're her daughter, Edna, coming into Rome at the head of my procession after you're conquered. You go ahead singing 'Hail to the Chief.' That's it; march along like that. Now don't go too fast. I really ought to be riding in the cart, but I'm afraid Billy couldn't hold me up, so I'll play I'm tired of riding in state. Play we haven't come into the city yet."

"I can't think how 'Hail to the Chief' goes," said Eunice, after one or two attempts at the tune. "I keep getting into 'Hail Columbia happy land.'"

"That won't do, for this is Rome and not Columbia we're coming to. This is the way that 'Hail to the Chief' goes," and Cricket sang the first line.

Now Cricket, alas, was, unfortunately, absolutely devoid of voice to sing. She loved music dearly, but she could not keep to a tune to save her life. Like a certain modern heroine, she could not even keep the shape of the tune. Consequently, unless the girls had known the words, they could not have told whether she was singing "Old Hundred," or "Tommy, make room for your uncle."

Edna and Eunice almost doubled up with laughter. Edna sang like a little woodthrush, and Eunice also had a sweet and tuneful voice.

"Oh, Cricket, you'll kill me," gasped Edna. "Your voice goes up when it should go down, and down when you ought to go up, and the rest of the time you go straight along."

Cricket looked injured, for, strange to say, she was sensitive on the subject. She loved music so dearly, that she never could understand why she couldn't make the sounds she wished come out of her little round throat.

"I never pretended that I thought I could be singeress to the President," she remarked, with dignity. "Anyway, if I'm emperor, I have people to sing for me. Begin, Zenobia."

"I don't know 'Hail to the Chief,'" said Edna. "Let's sing 'Highland Laddie'—I love that," and Edna piped up in a gay little voice, that startled the birds overhead, and presently attracted the attention of two prowlers, who were getting birds' eggs for their collection.

"The kids have had an accident," said one of them, peering through the trees. "Hi! there!"

"There are the boys," said Eunice, as the "triumphant procession" halted at the voice. "Come and help us," she called.

"No, we don't want any help," said Edna, moving on, "and boys are such a bother. Don't call them." But the boys needed no calling, and so she added, with decision, "You can't come with us unless you behave yourselves."

"We're a triumphant procession," explained Cricket, "and you must go behind and be slaves. I'm the emperor that captured Zenobia, and Edna and Eunice are Zenobia and her daughter. They're to march in front, singing, and Billy is one of my captives who carries my chariot because the wheel came off, and these are my elephants that draw it. Ho, there, base minion! are you tired?" for Billy was grunting a little under his burden.

"Guess one of them boys better spell old Billy a little," suggested the slave, putting down his side of the chariot, and mopping off his face with his red bandanna. "Cart's kinder heavy when you carry it so fur. Hurts your hand, too."

"That's so, boys," said the emperor, stopping her diminutive elephants. "Do help him, please. There, now, Zenobia and her daughter are almost out of sight. Put your eggs and things in the cart, Will,—I mean in the chariot. Now let's start. Billy, you can walk in front of me now."

They started on again, the boys holding up the side of the demoralized chariot, and keeping up a fire of jokes.

"Next time you're emperor, Marcus Aurelius, see that your groom looks after your chariot wheels before you start," said Archie, finally. "It would be inconvenient to have a wheel come off when you're making a charge, and it would give your majesty a nasty fall."

"Yes, my grooms are getting very careless. I think I'll make gladiolas of them, and get some new ones. I captured a couple of pretty fair looking slaves, a little while ago, that I'm thinking will do. If they don't," she added, severely, "I'll cut off their heads, and put them in a dungeon."

"Don't do that. I'd rather you'd make a 'gladiola' of me, too. I don't mind so much about my head, but don't put me in a dungeon. See here, emperor, next time you break down, please do it within easy reach of your ancestral halls. The side of this chariot hurts my hands, and I wouldn't demean myself so for any one but your majesty."

"That's too bad. Shall I carry it a little while?" asked the emperor, sympathizingly, as they turned into the main road. "My hands are pretty strong."

"No; your humble slaves can manage a little longer."

"It's a good mile home, now," said Archie. "See here. The blacksmith shop is not far down the road. We'll leave the cart there, to be mended. Edna! Eunice! Stop at the blacksmith's."

So the "triumphant procession" came to a halt, while the ponies were unharnessed, and the cart and wheel left for repairs. Cricket mounted Mopsie, with the boys walking beside her, while Billy stalked along, leading Charcoal, since Eunice and Edna were walking along together.

Will was very fond of his merry little cousin, who laughed at his jokes, took his teasing good-naturedly, and loved and admired him with all her heart. He was nearly sixteen, big and strong of his age, and Cricket thought him the nicest boy in the world. She was not nearly so fond of Archie, who was a year younger than Will. He teased her more, was quicker-tempered, somewhat conceited, and rather liked to order the girls around. He was slight and small for his age, and he did not have his reddish hair for nothing.

Auntie met them at the gate, with an anxious face.

"What has happened, children?" she asked, resignedly.

"Nothing, much, auntie," answered Cricket, cheerfully. "We lost the cart-wheel off, that's all. It was real fun coming home. We left it at the blacksmith's to get it mended."

"So you've begun already," said auntie, laughing, but relieved.



"OLD BILLY TELLS HIS STORY TO THE TWINS"

CHAPTER III.

CRICKET'S DISCOVERY.

Old Billy sat in the front yard, under a big tree, telling stories to the twins. Perhaps I should say telling a story, for Billy's range was limited to a single tale, and when he had told this, if any child wanted more, he simply had to tell it over again. It was a story with a moral, and was drawn from Billy's own experience. It was about a bad little boy, who ate up all his sister's pep'mint drops. This was the worst of crimes, in Billy's eyes, for to him pep'mint drops were a sacred possession, not even to be lightly referred to.

"His marmar," went on Billy, impressively, "kep' a-whippin' him, an' a-whippin' him, but it warn't no kind o' use, an' didn't do a mite o' good. And just think, children," finished Billy, solemnly, "when that bad, naughty, selfish little boy died, he couldn't go to Heaven and be a good little angel, but he had to go to the Bad Place."

The children listened with wide-open eyes.

"Where is the Bad Place, Billy?" questioned Zaidee, looking interestedly up into Billy's face.

Billy looked slowly all about him, and above him, and then at the ground, puzzled, now, what to say. He was not very clear, himself. He looked again at the blue sky, flecked with soft, white clouds.

"Wal, I think, children," he said, in his slow way, "that Heaven is up there where all them little bright specks is at night. I guess them's holes in the floor. Can't see 'em daytimes, you know, when the lights are out, up above. 'N' I ruther guess t'other place is down under there, pointing to the ground."

Helen jumped.

"Oh, I don't want it right under our foots. The ground might crack, Billy, and we'd fall in. *Please* don't say it's there," she begged, earnestly.

But Zaidee immediately began to poke the ground with great interest, and stamp hard upon it.

"Do you really think it's down there, Billy?" she asked, excitedly. "Oh, Helen, let's dig and find it! How far down is it, Billy?"

"Wal, now, I dunno as it's down there at all. Dunno as it is, dunno as it is. Folks say it's purty hot there."

"I know a nice place to dig, Helen, and that's the sand-banks. They're so nice and soft. Let's go and try it."

But Helen hung back, and Billy said, anxiously, "I wouldn't. Folks say that Somebody lives there."

"Who?" demanded Zaidee.

"Wal, folks says as Mr. Satan lives round them parts," answered Billy, cautiously.

"Oh, don't let's dig, Zaidee, I'm afraid," said timid little Helen, clinging to Zaidee's hand. "He might not like it, if we find him."

Zaidee, always more daring than her delicate little twin, did not think so.

"Course we'll be careful not to bunk right into him," she conceded. "We'll dig very slowly when we get pretty near there. Come on, Helen. Want to come, Billy?"

"Sho, now!" said Billy, looking very unhappy over this unexpected result of his little moral tale. Once, long ago, a mischievous boy-visitor had taken and eaten all Billy's peppermints, and he never forgot it. He always took occasion to tell it as a story to every little newcomer, to ensure the safety of his valued peppermints, but no one had ever thus applied the story before.

"Seems as if I wouldn't try, children," he repeated, anxiously. "You might tumble in."

But when Zaidee's mind was once set on an enterprise, nothing could turn her. She ran away for the shovels and dragged reluctant Helen with her. They selected a nice hollow place in the sand, and began to dig furiously. In a few minutes they had a hole a foot deep. Zaidee balanced herself on the edge, on her knees, and put her hands down on the bottom of the hole.

"I do think it's getting hotter, Helen, just feel."

Helen put her hand down, rather fearfully.

"It's getting *very* hot, Zaidee, and don't let's dig any more."

"Don't be a 'fraid cat," responded Zaidee, promptly. "It's only a little bit hot. We must dig until it's ever so much hotter yet," and Zaidee went on throwing up the sand, energetically.

"Oh, dear! how it all slides down the sides. I'll have to get in it and dig," she said, presently.

"Don't! don't!" cried Helen, in great terror, clutching Zaidee with both hands. "Don't go down there. You might tumble right through any time right on Mr. Satam's head!"

But Zaidee, unheeding, jumped into the hole, and went on digging, sturdily, while Helen, frightened and apprehensive, watched her from above. Suddenly she shrieked in new terror:

"Oh, Zaidee! come out! please come out! I see the feathers on his cap sticking right up there! oh, you'll hit him in a minute, and he'll jump up!" for "Mr. Satam," and Indian chiefs, with waving plumes, and tomahawks, formed a very confused picture in her mind.

Zaidee scrambled up in a flash.

"Where? Where?" she cried, peering down when safe above. Truly, at the bottom of the hole was seen the top of a feather dropped from a sea-gull's wing, and buried under the drifting sand, but the startled children never doubted that it was growing fast on the top of "Mr. Satam's" head, and they waited in terrified silence for that head to rise and confront them.

Meanwhile, Billy was wandering around in great anguish of soul, not knowing what dreadful thing might happen any moment. He started back to the house at last. Cricket came skipping down the piazza steps.

"See here, young 'un," Billy began, eagerly,—he seldom called the children by their names. "I'm afraid suthin' dretful's goin' to happen."

"What's the matter, Billy? Why, how your hands shake!"

"Perhaps you can stop 'em," went on Billy, hurriedly; "them ere little tikes is a-doin' a dretful thing. They're over by the sand-bank, a-diggin' fur—hell." He brought out this last word in a deep, half-frightened whisper.

"Digging for *what*? Oh, Billy!" and Cricket's laugh rang out. "You know better than that. Where are they? I'm going to dig a little myself, and they might help me."

Billy looked a little shamefaced at Cricket's laugh.

"Don't you think they could get there, then?" he asked, looking relieved. "I don't really know just where 'tis, myself. Didn't want them little tikes to come to no harm, that's all."

"Billy, think how silly of you to think that place is under the ground. Think how men dig wells and mines, and things, and nothing ever happens, unless they cave in, or something like that, which doesn't count," said Cricket, skipping and dancing on, as usual, while Billy shambled along by her side. "I'm just ashamed of you."

Billy looked crushed.

"I s'pose I'm a silly boy," he said, meekly, for the poor old fellow was never anything but a boy in his own eyes. "See here, don't say nothin' to Mis' Maxwell, will you?" he added, anxiously.

Just then the children, who still stood, frightened yet curious, by the hole, caught sight of them coming. They both made a wild rush and caught Cricket's hands.

"I'm so 'fraid, Cricket," half sobbed Helen. "Zaidee digged for the Bad Place and we've most found it, and there's a feather of Mr. Satam's head, sticking right up, and I'm 'fraid he may bounce up and get us."

Cricket doubled up with laughter.

"Oh, you silly children! You're thinking of a red Indian, I guess. That's nothing but some bird's feather. If you dug long enough, you'd come to China, that's all."

"But it got so hot, Cricket," insisted Zaidee, "an' Billy says it's awfully hot there."

"'Course it's hot when you dig down, because the centre of the earth is all burning up, you know, but I don't think you'll get far enough to get scorched any. You're silly children, any way," finished Cricket, with a very elder-sisterly air.

Nevertheless, Helen did not feel secure until Cricket had jumped into the hole and pulled up the feather, triumphantly.

"Now I'm going to dig myself," with a deep-laid purpose in her mind, "and you may dig, too. You start another hole, right here. I'll dig this big one out more, and I'll be an incubus"—meaning nobody knows what—"and live in it, and you be little crabs trying to get out of my way in these holes of yours."

The children, quite reassured now as to the safety of their pet amusement, dug away merrily, while Billy, like an amiable Turk, sat cross-legged near by.

The shifting stretches of sand changed their shape year by year with the wind and rain, and Cricket had no definite idea of the exact locality of the spot where mamma and auntie had buried their money-bags, thirty years before. She enlarged the hole the children had begun, till it was quite an excavation, carrying on her game of "incubus" with the children all the time. At last she concluded to sit down and rest. She planted herself in the bottom of the hole, with her curly crop not visible above the top of it. She pulled up her sleeve, plunging her hand idly in the dry, cool sand, till her arm was buried far above the elbow. Then her hand struck a resisting object.

"Oh, *oh!*" she shrieked, immediately, not daring to move her hand lest she should lose the object, which *might* prove what she was searching for. It was too large to bring up through the weight of sand.

"Come here, Zaidee, quick," she cried. "Dig me out. Dig out my arm, quick."

Helen looked fearfully into the hole, then set up a shriek in her turn.

"Mr. Satam's got Cricket's hand, and he's holding her down. Pull, pull, Zaidee," and the child began tugging at Cricket's nearest shoulder, which she could reach without committing herself to the dreadful possibilities of that hole. Zaidee instantly jumped in, however, and, screaming, herself, added her small strength to pull up Cricket's arm, while Billy, startled by this sudden hubbub, ran distractedly from side to side, trying to find something to pull, likewise adding his peculiar "Hi! Hi!" his expression of great excitement. Cricket laughed so at the general uproar that she could not explain.

"Oh, children," she managed to cry at last. "Stop pulling the sockets out of my arms—I mean the arms out of my sockets. Goodness, Zaidee, how you pinch! There isn't anybody down there, but I've got hold of something and I don't want to lose it. Just dig down around my arm, that's all. Stop crying, Helen. That's a good girl, Zaidee." And so in a few minutes, by their united exertions, a hole was scraped around Cricket's arm, and she could bring up the object she was grasping.

"What is it?" cried the excited little twins. Cricket plunged both hands under the object, and, if you'll believe me, she actually brought up a little buckskin money-bag.

"Hoo-ray!" she shrieked, wild with delight at her discovery. "It's mamma's bag, children, that she planted ever so long ago, when she was a little girl. There's money in it."

The bag, indeed, had been perfectly preserved all these years in the sand. The sand-banks there were too high to be ever overflowed by the tides, and were very dry, even to the depth of many feet. But the string fell to pieces in Cricket's eager hands as she tried to unfasten it, and the pennies and dimes came to view.

A few minutes later, the young woman, breathless and excited, flew up the walk, with the twins toiling on behind. Auntie Jean and grandma were sitting on the porch, when suddenly a shower of dull-looking coins fell into auntie's blue lawn lap.

"I've found it!" Cricket cried, triumphantly. "Knew I would. Won't I laugh at those girls now!"

"But what in the world—" began Auntie Jean, in amazement, hastily transferring the heap to a newspaper. Cricket waved the chamois bag in wild delight.

"It's one of the bags, auntie, that you and mamma buried so long ago in the sand-banks, because you thought it was the right kind of a bank to put money in."

"We digged the hole," put in Zaidee, eager for her share of the glory. "We digged for Mr. Satam's house, an' most found him, an' Cricket came an' said he'd gone to China, an' then Cricket digged this up, and we're going to dig every day, now, and get lots of money," for the whole performance was very mysterious in Zaidee's mind.

You can imagine the clatter when the rest of the children arrived on the scene, and Cricket, flushed with

victory, waved her bag, which had been found to have mamma's initials on it. Therefore, auntie's was still unbound, and, strange to say, it never *has* been found, although, after Cricket's remarkable achievement, the sand-banks in that locality were excavated to a point just short of China.

CHAPTER IV.

KEEPING STORE.

It was voted by all that the money in the bag belonged undeniably to Cricket, by right of discovery, but she would not touch it till she had written to mamma the astounding news. She was very anxious to cable the important announcement, and Auntie Jean had some difficulty in persuading her that a letter would convey it just as well. The money only amounted to two dollars and sixty-four cents in all, but this was larger in Cricket's eyes than any money she had ever owned before. She spent it in imagination a hundred times, and the others helped her, till even little Kenneth caught the fever, and begged "Tritet, buy Tennet bikachine," his own invention for bicycle.

"Goody!" exclaimed Cricket, "that's just what I'll do for myself. Eunice, I'm going to put the money in the really-truly bank this time, and keep putting more in, and I'll save my allowance and get a bicycle to ride when I'm too big to ride Mopsie. Wonder how long it would take."

"Years," said Eunice, with a cold-water expression. "Why, Cricket, bicycles cost lots of money. You never could do it."

"I can ride on the boys' bicycles when they get them, to learn how, and keep saving till I'm grown up. Couldn't I get enough by that time? Wish I could earn money."

"Keep a peanut stand," suggested Archie.

"I wonder if I couldn't," said Cricket, instantly attracted by the idea. "What fun! Where could I have one? I'd just love to. I'd have that big white umbrella that used to stand up in the old phaeton, over my head, and I'd have a chair and a table. Do you suppose auntie would let me go down on the dock and sell peanuts?"

"I should think not!" cried Edna, horrified.

"I'm going to ask her," returned Cricket, undaunted. "I'll make great piles of money. Everybody will stop and buy of me when they're going out sailing. Peanuts are always good when you're sailing."

"Discount to the family?" asked Will.

"Discount to me, anyway," put in Archie, insinuatingly, "for my suggestion. Really, you know you ought to supply me free."

"Free!" replied Cricket, with much scorn. "I might as well try to fill up Marbury Bay as you, Mr. Archie. I know who ate twenty-seven griddle-cakes for breakfast."

"Don't confess it right out loud, Miss Scrocket, if you did get away with that number. I'm not astonished, but I'm overcome."

"Dear me," answered Cricket, tossing her curls, "you think you're abdominally smart, I know, but—"

A howl of laughter stopped her, and Cricket looked dismayed. They always made so much fun of her when she made one of her constant mistakes in the use of words.

"She means abnormally," shouted Archie, rolling on the ground. "Abdominally smart, oh, my!"

"Well, abnormally, if you like it better," returned Cricket, amiably. "I don't see much difference, anyway. I am going to ask auntie, right away, about the peanut stand," she continued, changing the subject quickly, as long experience had taught her to do. Off she ran, returning, jubilant, in a few moments.

"Auntie says to be sure I may; there, now, Edna; she says I may sell all the peanuts I like, and on the dock, if I want to, and she'll give me a pint cup to measure them out with. And since you all make so much fun of it, I'll keep it all alone, without any partner."

"You might go shares with me," pleaded Archie; but Cricket was resolute.

"If you'd been more polite to me, perhaps I might have. Now I sha'n't. I don't know that I'll even sell you any."

"But I'll be partner, sha'n't I, Cricket?" asked Eunice, accustomed to sharing everything with her younger sister.

"You all laughed at me, first about finding the bag, then about the peanuts," she said, firmly, "and I'm going to be my own partner. If I take any one it shall be Billy. *He* never teases."

"But if you put in the capital," urged Archie, "you should have somebody else to supply the experience."

"All the experience that any of you would supply would be experience in eating them," Cricket replied, with severity. "Then I'd lose my money and my peanuts, too. Good-by. I'm going to make my arrangements now."

"If you buy your peanuts of old Simon, at the corner, make him give them to you wholesale," called Archie after her; and then he departed on a little private expedition.

Cricket was busy all the rest of the afternoon, getting her establishment together. First, a little, square table was unearthed in the garret, and was scrubbed and polished by Cricket's own hands. Then the old white phaeton umbrella was found and brushed, and a long slit in one side of the cover mended with stitches of heroic size. This was, with much painstaking, lashed firmly to the back of the stout, wooden chair, contributed by the kitchen. All these, old Billy, proud and happy at being selected as chief aid, took down to the little dock, where she was to set up business. She decided to invest a capital of fifty cents, not part of her new-found funds, but her private and personal possession, and expected to come out of her venture a millionaire. She made up her mind that she would not take even Billy into partnership, for it would be so much fun for him to buy peanuts of her; but she graciously allowed him to go to the village store with her the next morning, after breakfast, to help her carry home her stock in trade. She would have driven Mopsie, but the cart was not yet home from the blacksmith's.

Acting on the boys' suggestion, she proposed to old Simon Hodges, who kept the village store, that he should give her the peanuts wholesale, and they struck a bargain that she should buy them at nine cents a quart instead of ten, which Cricket regarded as a most generous reduction.

She invested in four quarts to begin with.

"Say, little 'un," suddenly proposed old Billy, nudging her, "why don't you buy some o' those pep'mint drops long o' the peanits. I'd just as lives buy 'em o' you as o' Simon. Fact is, I'd liver."

"What a good idea, Billy. 'Course I will."

Billy grinned from ear to ear.

"How will you sell them, Mr. Simon?"

Simon, a weather-beaten old sailor, who had taken to keeping store in his old age, thought he could sell her as many as she could take aboard at the rate of six for five cents, instead of the regular rate of a penny apiece. These peppermint drops must have been peculiar to Marbury, I think, for I have never seen any just like them anywhere else. They were thick and round, and about two inches across, indented in the middle, like a rosette. They were not soft and creamy, but hard and crunchy, though how much of this latter property rose from the lack of absolute freshness, I am not prepared to say, for it was a standing joke with the boys that Simon had once been heard to remark that he hadn't gotten in his summer stock of candy yet. Some of the peppermints were pink, and some were striped red and white. Cricket supplied herself with six of each.

"That makes forty-six cents, doesn't it? I ought to spend the whole of my money," she said, twirling her half-dollar on the counter.

"Tobaccer?" queried Billy, quickly, thinking of his other indulgence. "I'd just as lives—"

"Oh, *no*, Billy, I wouldn't have tobacco for anything, nasty stuff," said Cricket.

Billy looked dejected.

"Didn't mean no harm," he said, meekly.

"Never mind, Billy. Now what shall I get?"

"Lemons," suggested Simon, deferentially. "I'll let you have 'em for a cent apiece, and water's cheap. Lemonade would sell well these hot days," for Simon had been taken into Cricket's confidence.

"That's a good idea," beamed the small merchant. "There's the sugar, and I guess grandma would give me that, and I'd let her have a glass of lemonade free. Yes, I'll take four lemons, Mr. Simon, thank you. Now, Billy, you take the peanuts and put the lemons in your coat pocket, and I'll carry the peppermints."

Thus laden the two went gaily homeward.

"For goodness sake! look there, Billy!" Cricket suddenly exclaimed, as they approached the little dock, where they had arranged the table, chair, and canopy, the night before. Archie had evidently been busy during their absence. He liked to tease Cricket, because, as he said, she was so "gamey." Edna would grow peevish and fretful if he teased her, and his mother would never allow it. But Cricket never cared, and enjoyed a joke on herself as well as on any one else.

She went into shrieks of laughter, at the new decorations adorning her place of business. From every rib of the umbrella hung a little, live, wriggling crab. Four horseshoe shells, stuck up on the sharp points, decorated the four corners of the table, and a drapery of seaweed festooned its legs, and the back of her chair. A flapping sign was suspended on one side, on which, in big letters, they read:

PEANUT EMPORIUM!!
SIGN OF THE CRAB
MISS SCRICKET, BILLY & CO.
PEANUTS STRICTLY FRESH EVERY YEAR
CALL EARLY AND OFTEN

Billy glanced from Cricket to the peanut stand, and back again, not knowing whether to join in her laughter or not. He didn't see anything funny himself in it, for he had a horror of creeping, crawling things.

"Drat them boys!" he said, at length; "how be we goin' to get them things off?"

"You go get me a basket and a pair of scissors, Billy," ordered Cricket of her willing slave, "and I'll take them away. *Don't* they look funny?"

In a very little while the crabs were restored to their native element, the seaweed was thrown over the dock, the chair and table wiped clean and dry, and everything was again in order. The horseshoe shells were left sticking up for ornaments. Then she proceeded to lay out her stock, and dispose of it to the best advantage. Grandma contributed a big cracked dish for the peanuts, which stood in the middle of the table. The peppermints were arranged in a row, a red one and a striped one alternating.

"Now, Billy, you stay here and watch things while I go to the house for a pitcher for the lemonade, and some tumblers. I mustn't forget the sugar, either, and a knife. Oh, and the lemon-squeezer. I do hope everybody will keep out of the way till I get it all fixed."

Fortunately, auntie had sent Edna and Eunice on an errand, and had told Eliza to keep the children away till the little merchant was ready to begin her sales, so Cricket was left in peace, as Archie, after he had finished his adornments, had gone for a sail with Will.

A little later, and the peanut vender had everything in order. A pitcher of lemonade—not of the strongest, it must be confessed—was added to the table. At the first signal, the twins, who had been eagerly watching from a distance, darted forward, with pennies in hand, and trade began. Then the girls appeared, and each bought a glass of lemonade, and when Will and Archie landed, as they did, a few minutes later, the demand for peanuts increased. Cricket measured them out in a teacup, and poured them into the purchaser's outstretched hands.

"Put in some more for good measure," somebody would say. "Some of mine spilled."

"Pick them right up, then," said the little store-keeper, thriftily. "'Twon't hurt the nuts a bit. No, Zaidee, you can't have another thing till you bring me some more money. A peppermint drop, Eunice? No, you can't have two for a cent. Don't they look good? B'lieve I'll just taste one," hastily putting her words into practice. "Yes, Billy, what do you want? a red one or a striped one?"

"Say, little un," asked Billy, uncertainly, "which would you take, if you was me? I want two cents' wuth. Would you get two reds, or two striped?"

"Two reds," advised Edna, as Eunice said, "Two striped."

"I can't buy so many, can I?" he asked, holding out his hand, with six cents in it. "I want some peanits, too, and some lemonade. Will this buy 'em all?"

"Get one striped and one white," said Eunice, "and two cents' worth of peanuts and a glass of lemonade."

"Lemonade is three cents a glass," said Cricket, "but, Billy, you can have it for two, because you've helped me so much."

"By the way, Will," broke in Archie, suddenly, "how much are crabs selling for, in the market, to-day?"

"Ten cents," answered Will, promptly.

"Now, then, Cricket, you owe me a lot on those crabs that I furnished you this morning. It took me all yesterday afternoon to catch them, too. You have sold them all off, I see, already. How much did they bring? Give me all the lemonade I want, and we'll call it square."

"I don't care whether you call it square or round," answered Cricket, briefly, snipping Zaidee's fingers, which were creeping too near the peppermints. "Zaidee, keep your hands away. You've broken a whole piece out of that."

"How could she break a whole piece?" teased Archie. "If it's a piece, 't isn't whole, Miss Scricket."

"If catching crabs makes you so brilliant, you'd better catch some more," said Cricket serenely. "Now, do all of you go away. I see some other people coming down to the dock, and I know they'll buy something, if you go away, so they can see me," she added, rearranging her wares. "Billy, drive them off." Thus ordered, Billy made a lunge at the twins first, and they, secretly half-terrified out of their wits if he spoke to them in his gruff tones, scampered off to Eliza. Eunice and Edna strolled off, eating peanuts, and the boys betook themselves to new sports.

All day the little maid and her faithful ally sat on the little wharf, vending her wares. The dock had half a dozen sailboats moored there, and their various owners, in passing to and fro, stopped, laughed, and bought. Soon Billy had to take some of the accumulated money and go up to Simon's to replenish the stock, and frequent expeditions there through the day were made. The two refreshed themselves in the intervals of business with sundry glasses of lemonade, and occasional "peanits," while every now and then a piece of a red or of a striped peppermint found its way down Cricket's throat. Billy scrupulously paid for all he ate. By supper-time nearly everything had disappeared.

"Now, I think, Billy, we might just as well drink up this little bit of lemonade, and eat up those peanuts," said the tired little merchant. "All the peppermints are gone, and it's most supper-time."

Billy was nothing loth, and together they soon cleared the board.

"Well, my little peanut woman, how went the day with you?" asked Auntie Jean, at supper. She had, of course, patronized the peanut stand herself during the day, with grandma. "All your wares sold?"

"Yes, auntie, everything," answered Cricket, as the always hungry tribe gathered around the supper-table. "Billy and I ate up what little there was left so it shouldn't be wasted."

"Then you don't mean to go on with your speculations in peanuts?" asked grandma.

"No-o, I think not, grandma, thank you," answered Cricket. "It was very nice to-day, but I think I couldn't stand keeping still all day for *every* day. But we made a lot of money," she added, with much satisfaction.

"Well, dear, that is always gratifying," replied auntie. "How much did you make? if we may be admitted to the financial secrets of the firm."

"We made twenty-one cents," cried Cricket, proudly, "and I think that's pretty good."

"Indeed, it is. You're quite a financier. And you invested fifty cents? Then you have seventy-one cents now."

"No, we haven't," returned Cricket, looking puzzled. "I have twenty-one cents, now. Oh, I spent a lot more than fifty cents. Billy went up to the store five or six times and got more peanuts and things, as fast as the money came in. Now, I have twenty-one cents to put in my box. Isn't that making twenty-one cents?" she asked, looking up, anxiously.

There was a burst of laughter from the older ones.

"My dear little girl," said Auntie Jean, "I'm afraid your affairs are not on a sound financial basis. You must have been too generous. People don't call it making money unless they get back all they spend, and more besides. As it is, you had fifty cents this morning and, to-night, you have twenty-one. That looks like losing."

Cricket stared.

"I don't believe I'm a good speculator," she sighed, at last, looking crestfallen. "Well, I don't care much. I didn't want to keep store any more anyway. It's too poky. Can we be excused, grandma? I *must* have a ride on Mopsie, or I'll burst!"

CHAPTER V.

A BATH IN CURDS AND WHEY.

All the younger fry were playing in the barn. It was much smaller than the great barns at Kayuna, for there was no farm attached to Mrs. Maxwell's place, but the new-mown hay was just as sweet and soft to jump on as the haymows were at dear old Kayuna. There was a little added excitement in the fact that Luke was not nearly so good-natured as 'Gustus John was, and was very apt to chase them off his premises when he found them there. He said the horses would not eat the hay after the children had jumped on it. However, as grandma always said that they could play in the barn as long as they didn't do any damage to anything, Luke's disapproval did not trouble them much. To be sure, they would scamper off if they heard him coming, and breathlessly fly around corners, and eagerly report if the "coast was clear," but, after all, all this was more for fun than anything else. This morning they had a clear three hours before them, for Luke had gone to drive grandma and auntie over to Plymouth, and they would not be back till almost dinner-time. Of course the time must be improved by a grand romp in the barn.

Eliza sat in the doorway crocheting. The older girls climbed the ladder to a high beam, and then would shoot off on to the soft hay far below. Zaidee ambitiously tried to follow. But half-way up the ladder her courage invariably failed her, and she would sit still and shriek till one of her sisters came and carried her down.

"Zaidee, don't climb up this ladder again," said Eunice, sharply, after she had rescued her small sister for the tenth time. "If you do, I'll leave you there. It's too high for you, and you're always afraid."

"I isn't a bit afraid," returned Zaidee, stoutly. "It's only when I get up there, the ladder gets so dizzy."

"You get dizzy, you mean. At any rate, don't climb up there again."

"You mustn't speak cross to me," said Zaidee, who was a born rebel, and resented any orders of her older sisters. "If you speak cross to me I'll run away."

"Oh, don't, Zaidee!" begged Helen, in alarm.

"Yes, I will. I'll run away, and then she'll be sorry. Let's jump on this little hay, Helen."

But after a time the high ladder looked so very tempting, and it was such wild excitement to see the girls flying off that great, high beam, with shrieks of fun and laughter, that Zaidee tried the experiment again, of climbing up herself. She went up eight rounds bravely, and then it suddenly looked so very far to the bottom that she screamed for help, as usual.

"You're a naughty little girl, to climb up there again, after I had told you not to," said Eunice, severely. "Now you must stay there and scream till you promise me not to try it again." She knew there was really no danger, and Zaidee was always trying to do what she could not.

"Take me down, 'Liza! take me down, Eunice!" she shrieked, till Edna said:

"Oh, do take her down, Eunice, and have her stop."

So Eunice helped her off her high perch once more, with the warning that if she did it again she would certainly leave her there and go away where she couldn't hear her call. Then the older girls resumed their fun. Zaidee and Helen ran out into the yard.

Presently, Helen came flying back in a great panic.

"Do come here, 'Liza! do come quick, Eunice! Zaidee's eating worms! She's eaten two woolly ones, and one plain one. I'm afraid they'll make her sick. Do come, 'Liza, and make her stop."

"Isn't she the funniest child!" exclaimed Eunice, as Eliza hurried off to rescue the worms.

"If somebody won't give her what she wants, or if anything makes her cross, she always does something disagreeable to herself. Sometimes she says she won't eat any luncheon or dinner, or won't go to walk. Think of eating those worms, just because I scolded her about climbing up on the ladder. Ugh!"

"I should think she *was* funny. Girls, let's go up to Simon's, and buy some peppermints," suggested Edna. "It's such a hot day, and peppermints make your throat so cool when you breathe, don't you know? I've five cents in my pocket."

Zaidee, having reluctantly consented to forego her diet of worms, watched the three girls go out into the road, and ran after them.

"Let me go, too," she called, toiling after.

"No, you can't go, my dear. It's too far. You stay with 'Liza," said Eunice, but speaking very pleasantly, to avoid another scene.

"It isn't a bit too far, Eunice. We go there lots of times with 'Liza. If you're going for peppermints, I want some, too."

"Run and ask Billy to give you some of his, then. Zaidee, you *can't* go. Now, run back."

"Then I'll run away," said Zaidee, repeating her former threat. She had lately heard some one speaking of running away, and it seemed a very nice punishment to inflict on Eunice.

"Very well," said Eunice, turning away. "Only don't eat any more worms;" for the way to manage Zaidee was not to take much notice of her. She was a headstrong little thing, and grew very obstinate if she was opposed.

"Run back to 'Liza, children," repeated Eunice, looking back. "Come on, girls."

"It's awfully hot walking up this road," observed Edna, as they went up the slight incline to the village. The treeless road was made of white sea-shells, powdered fine, and reflected the glare of the sun powerfully.

"Don't your feet burn, walking along here? Mine do, awfully," said Cricket. "I wish I had wooden legs like Maggie Sampson's father's. His feet can't burn."

"He can't feel the heat through the soles of his feet, 'cause he ain't built that way," chanted Eunice, instantly, for she shared the family failing for rhyme.

"We might have stilts, I suppose," said Cricket. "I love stilts. Here we are. Let's rest and get cool before we go back."

It was half an hour before the girls strolled leisurely into the yard again, munching their peppermints.

"Where are the children?" asked Eliza, hastily, seeing the girls come back alone.

"Not with us. We sent them back to you," said Eunice, quickly. "What have those tiresome children done now? They ought to be put in barrels and kept there. It's the only way to be sure of them. When did you miss them?"

"Ever since you've been gone. Zaidee ran past, saying she was going with you, so I let her."

"They must be somewhere around the house or barn," answered Eunice, beginning to call "Helen! Helen!" She knew that Helen would answer if she were within earshot, but Zaidee was quite equal to letting them call, if she were in a fit of temper. But they searched in vain. Kenneth insisted they went "that way," pointing down the beach, but Billy thought he had seen them going up the beach. They searched the house and barn, and then, as it was near dinner-time, Will and Archie appeared and joined the detective force.

"This is getting serious," said Will, presently. "I think the little skivers have really run off."

"Could they have fallen off the dock?" asked Cricket, anxiously. But, fortunately, it was low tide, and there was no water to fall into. They inquired of all passers-by, and of the immediate neighbours, with no better result. The children had not been seen. Faces began to grow grave, and feet began to fly faster in every direction. Archie saddled the ponies, and Cricket started off in one direction, Eunice in another, while he and Will went back into the woodland roads.

Meanwhile, the twins, after being sent back by Eunice, had marched disconsolately down on the beach, without Eliza's seeing them.

"I'm going to run away now," said Zaidee, firmly. She must have gotten out of the wrong side of the bed that morning, for everything seemed to go wrong. She was usually a sunny little soul.

"Where shall we run to?" asked Helen, hanging back.

"Let's go this way," said Zaidee, selecting "this way," for no particular reason. It led them back of the house, on to one of the woodland roads, out of sight of anybody.

They trudged on for half a mile or more, and then suddenly came upon a small cheese factory, which stood upon one side of a little brook. There was a dam here, and a small pond, and on the other side of the brook a

little saw-mill stood.

Zaidee, of course, immediately wanted to go into this queer looking house, as she called it. Finding the door open, and no one there, she entered, boldly. As it was just noon, the few men employed were at dinner, and the place was deserted.

"What a queer house!" exclaimed Zaidee. It was a long bare place, with a platform on one side, and on that were three or four vats or tanks, only, of course, the children did not know what they were. These vats were for the milk. There was also the most remarkable number of new brooms decorating the walls.

The children ran here and there with the greatest interest and curiosity; and very soon discovered that there were spigots in the tanks. Of course Zaidee instantly proceeded to turn one, and out came a spurting deluge of whey, all over their feet. They jumped back, hastily.

"Oh, what pretty white water!" cried Zaidee, eagerly, stooping down and spitting her hands in the trough, and then throwing it up in the air. It came down all over herself and Helen.

"I don't like it. It smells so *loud*," said dainty Helen, drawing back.

Zaidee sniffed, critically.

"Yes, it does, Helen. But isn't it pretty? Let's look over the wall and see what it looks like."

They were not, however, quite tall enough to do this, but Zaidee's quick eyes, roving around, spied a wooden stool which she immediately dragged up on the little platform, to stand on. She climbed up and looked in. It was not the vat in which she had turned the spigot, and it was half full of whey with great pieces of the curd floating around on it.

"Here's more nice white water, with pretty white stones floating on it," Zaidee cried, eagerly. She stretched down her hand to grasp some. She could just reach it, but to her surprise the "white stone" separated as she grasped it.

"I can't pick it up," she cried, puzzled, as she tried again and again.

"Let me see," begged Helen. But the stool was not big enough for both to stand on, and Zaidee was too interested to get down. A bigger piece of curd came floating towards her, and she leaned quickly forward to reach it. She lost her balance, and went headlong into the milky pool.

In a moment, sputtering and screaming, she found her feet, for the liquid was only up to her waist, but the top of the tank being even with her head, of course she could not get out. Helen stood open-mouthed with astonishment at Zaidee's sudden disappearance; then she quickly climbed upon the stool to see for herself. Zaidee stood immersed to her waist, with her short, silky black hair plastered to her head with the whey, and small lumps of curd sticking all over her head and shoulders, so that she looked as if she had been out in a sharp-cornered snow storm. She tried to rub her streaming eyes dry with her wet fists.

"I don't like this white water," she said, wiping her wet face on her wetter sleeve. "It's nasty stuff. It's worse than the ocean. It's sour water, Helen. Just taste it."

"I can't," said Helen. "How can you get out? Can you step on those white stones?"

"They won't hold me up. They're such funny stones. They all go to pieces when you squeeze them," said Zaidee, grasping some with both hands, to illustrate. "Could you put the stool over for me to stand on?"

"I can't, 'cause I'm standing on it. P'raps I can pull you out, Zaidee. See if I can."

Zaidee waded over to the side of the tank, and tried to climb up the smooth, tin-lined surface, while Helen tugged from above.

When this did not work, the children stared at each other wistfully.

"Do you s'pose you'll have to stay there always?" said Helen, at last, in a half whisper.

"No. I'll holler," said Zaidee, with confidence, "and somebody will come. If only I could get *boosted* a little bit! Helen!" with a sudden inspiration, "you jump over here and I'll stand on your knee as I do on 'Liza's when she boosts me up into the apple-tree. Then I could climb right over."

Helen hesitated. This plan did not strike her favourably.

"Oh, Zaidee! I don't want to get down there into that white water. It smells so loud, and I'd get my feet all wet, and my dress wet, too." Helen was one of the children whom dirt distresses, and no soil ever seemed to cling to her clothes or hands. Zaidee was not in the least particular, or, perhaps, she would not have lunched on woolly worms.

"But I've got to get out, Helen," she persisted. "I'm all sticky inside. I don't like it. Please jump in and boost me out;" for the problem of getting Helen out never occurred to either of these young philosophers.

Helen looked very unwilling, but she was too used to doing as Zaidee ordered to object further; she slowly put one leg over the edge of the tank till her foot touched the whey. Then she shivered, and hesitated. Zaidee took hold of her leg for fear she would draw it back, but, pulling it a little harder than she intended, Helen immediately fell over on to Zaidee, who, unable to keep her footing on the smooth tin bottom, took a second plunge, dragging Helen with her.

Then two curded and wheyey heads arose.

"Oh, Helen, you look so funny!" said Zaidee, as Helen spluttered in her turn. "Doesn't it feel awful nasty? And see how funny these little stones look now!"

The curd being pretty thoroughly churned up now, with the gyrations of the two children, it was settling in a smooth, even layer over the top of the whey. Zaidee slapped and splashed it about in high glee, perfectly satisfied to stay in the tank any length of time, now that she had Helen beside her there.

Just then steps sounded on the planks outside, and the voices of men were heard.

"Great guns! Who left this 'ere spigot a-runnin'!" exclaimed one, coming hastily forward. "Look at the whey goin' galumphin out. Suthin' must hev gorn bust."

A breathless silence settled on Zaidee and Helen.

"There warn't nothin' a-runnin' when I went off to dinner," said another, "and I was the last feller out."

The next moment the astonished men were gazing at the pair of guilty-looking little mermaids, who wore curds for seaweeds. Helen's floating golden hair, all stringy with whey, was a funnier sight even than Zaidee's short plastered locks. The two frightened, dirty, streaming little faces, were raised appealingly.

"Wal, I vum! We've caught suthin' in *this* cheese, for sure," said one man, coming nearer.

"We falled in," said Zaidee, regaining her courage, which never long deserted her. "We don't like this white water, and it's all smelly. Please take us out."

"I swan," said the other man. "Where did you come from, young uns?"

"We live at the beach, at grandma's. Take us out, please. Take Helen first."

"What are you doin' around here, then, a-tumblin' into our vats, and a-spilin' good curds and whey? You don't suppose we want to flavour it with little gals, do you?"

Zaidee wasn't sure of anything but that she wanted to get out of her new bath-tub, so she only repeated:

"Please take us out, Mr. Man, and we won't fall in again, ever, 'cause we don't like this white water, truly we don't. There are such funny little snow stones in it. We like really truly water best. Please take us out."

"Was it you turned my spigot?" demanded her jailer, very sternly.

Zaidee quaked. She had forgotten about turning the spigot.

"We won't ever turn it again," she promised, hastily.

"Oh, come, Steve, take the kid out," said the other man.

"Ef it was one of our children they'd get a trouncin', but they belong to some of them city folks down by the beach. Them city children dunno nothin'—can't expect 'em to. Come, young uns," and, in a moment, Zaidee and Helen stood on the planks.

"Sech capers!" grumbled the other man, setting down the dripping little figures he had lifted out. "Hull batch spiled. Now, scoot." And the children hastily scooted, leaving a milky track behind.

They had no idea of the way home, but, as Zaidee was not ready to return yet, that did not trouble her. Once outside of the cheese factory they got leaves and wiped off each other's dripping faces and hair, as best they could.

"My shoes are all sobby," said Helen, tiptoeing along, uncomfortably.

"Let's take 'em off," said Zaidee, instantly, sitting down and tugging at the wet buttonholes, which would not yield to her small fingers. Helen's were loose, and unbuttoned easily. When she got her shoes off, however, she found she could not walk, for the sticks and prickles on the ground hurt her tender feet.

"I'll have to put my shoes on again," she said. "The palms of my feet hurt so. Don't take yours off, Zaidee."

So Zaidee got up out of the little pool of whey that had dripped from her dress while she had been sitting, and after Helen had, with some difficulty, crowded her feet into her wet shoes again, the children started off in search of a new adventure. The hot sun on their clothes was fast making them very unpleasant objects to a sensitive nose, but they were getting used to the odour of sour milk.

There was a little foot-bridge above the dam, for on the other side of the stream stood a little sawmill. The children ran across the bridge, gaily. Back of the sawmill were high heaps of delightful yellow sawdust.

"See those beautiful yellow hills!" cried Zaidee, rapturously, running forward and throwing herself full length into one, bringing a cloud of yellow powder about her. "It's awfully nice, Helen; come on."

Helen, nothing loth, came on, and in a moment the children were wallowing in the soft, light dust. In the somewhat damp state of their clothes, the immediate result can be imagined.

"You look just like a woolly worm, Helen," said Zaidee, gleefully. "You're all fuzzy with sawdust. Lie down and I'll bury you all up."

Helen obediently sat down, and Zaidee heaped a yellow mound over her.

"You're like a yellow Santa Claus," cried Zaidee, as Helen emerged, presently, somewhat smothered. "Now, bury me!"

"I love to feel it all running down my back like ants," Zaidee said, wriggling, but enjoying the sensation, as Helen let the dry dust drop through her fingers on her head.

A little later, Will, running through the woods, came past the sawmill, and stopped to listen, at the sound of children's voices. Following this, he immediately discovered two strange looking objects, rolling, with shrieks of laughter, down the sawdust heaps.

"You're a pretty pair of kids," he said, approaching them. "Scaring people into fits, for two hours! By Jove! where have you been?" he broke off, holding his nose, as he drew nearer.

"Let's go home, now; I'm hungry," was all the answer Zaidee deigned.

And so it happened that just as auntie and grandma drove up in front of the gate the first thing they saw was two remarkable little figures coming slowly around the house, golden hair and black all of a colour, faces begrimed with dust and streaked with sour milk, draggled dresses, with plasters of sawdust here and there, and odorous,—but the less said about that, the better.

CHAPTER VI.

BEAR ISLAND.

Eunice and Edna were devoted little friends. Edna came just between the two sisters. But, as she had always been somewhat delicate, Cricket's tireless energy often wearied her, and Eunice's naturally quieter temperament suited her much better. Edna was more deliberate in everything than her little cousins were, more literal, less full of fun and frolic, and sometimes fretful under the mere burden of not feeling quite well and strong, as they always did. But she was neither selfish nor exacting, as delicate children often are; she was always gentle and polite, never reckless and forgetful of consequences, as Cricket so often was, and so she made an excellent balance for her little cousins.

Cricket sometimes found herself rather in the cold, when Eunice and Edna were together, however, for Edna loved to get Eunice down in some cool, shady corner, or under the rocks on the beach, to chatter or do fancy work together. Cricket thought this was dreadfully stupid, and whenever the other girls settled themselves for what Edna called a "cozy hour," she would slip off by herself, to find the boys, or go off with old Billy, with whom she had struck up such a comical friendship, for he followed her round like a big dog, and permitted all sorts of liberties with his possessions from her, that he was very chary of allowing the others. Or else she would go alone for a scamper on Mopsie, or even perch herself up on a branch of some tree in the orchard, and pore over the pages of her beloved "Little Women," or some other of her favourites. Reading was the sole sitting-down occupation that Cricket did not think was intolerably stupid, and a sheer waste of time. Fortunately, she always had boundless resources of amusement within herself, and she would not have been lonely on a desert island.

"Come for a row, girls," said Eunice, the next morning. "The water is like glass."

"Suppose we row over to Bear Island," said Edna. "I'll take my embroidery, and you can take a book and read to me, Eunice. If we take the boat off the boys can't get to us and tease us."

"All right," assented Eunice. "We'll take the 'Light-house Girl.' I'm dying to finish it. Cricket, you bring your knitting, won't you, and we'll take some cookies and things to eat, and stay all the morning."

"'Not mush,' as baby says," responded Cricket, with decision. "Think I'm going to waste this glorious day, knitting *washrags*?" with ineffable scorn. "You two old grandmothers can knit and read all you want to. I've too much else to do."

"Cricket is afraid she'll get her washrag done, if she works on it," laughed Eunice.

"Well, what if I am?" returned Cricket, defensively. "As long as I have that on hand, nobody can ask me to do anything else. If I'm careful how I work on it, I can make it last till I'm grown up."

They all laughed at Cricket's scheme. Her knitting was a standing joke. Mamma had insisted on her learning how to knit, when she was quite small, telling her that it would be a very useful accomplishment when she was grown up, and that it was very much easier to learn to knit quickly, if one learns very young. So Cricket had toiled her way through a pair of reins for Kenneth, and had also accomplished a red and white striped washrag for Helen. Her present undertaking was a blue and white one for Zaidee. It was now a year old.

"If Zaidee was in need of that washrag, she'd be a blackamoor before she gets it," said Eunice.

"She isn't starving for it," returned Cricket, comfortably. "And I've dropped so many stitches, anyway, and couldn't find them, that it isn't much but holes. The knitting only just holds the holes together. 'Liza will have to darn it a lot, before she can use it for Zaidee."

"You're old enough to like to sew and embroider things," said Edna, reprovingly.

"No, I'm not," said Cricket, quickly. "When I have to wear plaguy long dresses, and when I can't play football, nor climb trees, nor perform on the trapeze, nor do anything nice, then I'll get some glasses and store teeth, and sit down and console myself by knitting and sewing all day. Ugh! I wish I were a boy! I mean, sometimes I wish I were," with a quick glance around, to see if those omnipresent cousins of hers were within earshot, for, before them, nothing would have induced her to admit anything of the kind.

"You and I will go, then, Edna," said Eunice. "I'll run down and get the boat ready, while you bring the cushions, and get something to eat for a lunch. Better come, Cricket."

"I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll row you over, and then I'll row round a little, for fun, myself, while you two are having a nice stupid time, all by yourselves. You can call me when you want me to come back.

"Oh, I'll tell you what let's do. Let's play we're shipwrecked. You get some luncheon, Edna, lots of it, and we'll have a very exciting time."

"You always want to *play* something," said Edna, who couldn't quite understand how Cricket could always change the aspect of everything—even of things she had to do, that she didn't like—by the magic formula, "Let's play."

"It's so much more fun to play things, than just plain *do* them," Cricket contented herself with saying now.

"I'll run the boat down, Eunice, if you'll go with Edna, and get all the things, cushions and books and luncheon, and *don't* forget your precious work, Edna," and Cricket skipped off to the dock, while the girls went to the house.

"Shall we be the 'Swiss Family Robinson,' or 'The Young Crusoes,' or shall we be a new set altogether?" asked Cricket, when they were all afloat.

"A new set, I say," answered Eunice. "We've played 'Swiss Family' so much I'm tired of it. Let us be two boys, and Edna our sister."

"No, our grandmother," said Cricket, soberly. "It's more appropriate. She likes to knit so much."

"I won't be a grandmother," said Edna, decidedly. "If I can't be a sister, I won't play."

"I was only in fun. I'd just as soon that you'd be a sister," said Cricket, pacifically. "I was only joking. We've escaped from a burning vessel, you know, and every one else is either burned or drowned. We've provisions for a month, if we don't eat too much, and we're in the South Sea Islands. South Sea Islands sound nice and shipwrecky, don't you think so?"

"Splendid. No sail is in sight," went on Eunice, striking in, "and a wild waste of waters stretch on every side," quoting freely, as she swept her hand around the expanse of the wide, calm bay, dotted with white sails and rowboats.

"A savage, rock-bound coast appears before us," she added, as Cricket's muscular little arms sent the light boat along towards the small island ahead of them. It consisted of little more than a mass of rocks, with a bit of shelving beach on the west side, and, here and there, a scrubby pine.

But it was a picturesque spot, and the children were very fond of coming over there, since no one else ever seemed to think of it, and they had it to themselves.

"Methinks this coast looks bare, indeed," said Cricket, in her character of shipwrecked mariner, as she rested on her oars. "Shall we land here, brother?"

"'Tis the only land in sight," returned Eunice, shielding her eyes, and looking forward. "What say you, sister?"

Edna giggled. "Suppose there are cannibals there?" she asked. "I don't want to be eaten up alive."

"We will defend you, with our last breath," promised Eunice, valiantly, as they shot up on the pebbly bit of beach. "Shall we explore it, brother?"

"You explore, and I'll row around the island, and see if there are any signs of cannibals or savages. Perhaps I'll find a settlement of white people," she said, as she pushed off with her oar, after the girls had disembarked with the baggage.

"Don't forget to come back, if you do," called Edna, over her shoulder.

"I'll row off," said Cricket, conveniently deaf to this remark, "and reconnoitre," aiming at reconnoitre, "and if you are in any trouble, give the call, and wave a handkerchief on a stick. Perhaps I'll row back to the burning vessel, and see if I can pick up any one who is floating around."

The call was a vigorous whoop, that had been long ago adopted. It consisted in drawing a deep breath, and then crying, "Wah-whoop-wah! wah-whoop-wah! *Crick-et! Crick-et!* wah-whoop-wah!" putting in the name of the person wanted.



LANDING ON BEAR ISLAND

Eunice and Edna watched Cricket off, and then sauntered slowly across the island, to a dear little spot, their favourite nook. It was a smooth bit of sand, under the shadow of a pine, and well sheltered by rugged overhanging rocks. They had an uninterrupted view of the bay outward, with the long tongue of land that partly enclosed it, and the lighthouse standing on the rocky point. Marbury lay behind them, out of sight.

They settled themselves comfortably, in the cushions, with the rocks at their backs. Edna took her work, a linen cover for her bureau, which she was embroidering exquisitely. Her deft little fingers accomplished really beautiful work, and she loved to do it.

She had done outline work when her tiny fingers were hardly firm enough to grasp the needle, and her kindergarten sewing, when she was a small child, had been the delight of her teachers, and the envy of her little companions. Eunice was fond of her needle, too, though she was not equal to such deft workmanship as Edna was.

"You do such *lovely* things," she said, now, taking up the strip of linen, on which graceful maidenhair fern was growing rapidly. "I don't see where you get time to do so much."

"I do suppose it makes a difference that, when I'm at home, I haven't any one to play with, as you have. Probably you and Cricket play games together, while I am doing my fancy work. What do you do in the winter evenings at home?"

"Different things," answered Eunice, lifting up the soft, pale-green silks, admiringly. "Sometimes I study. Not often, though, for papa doesn't like us to study in the evening much. You see, our school is out at one, and lunch is at half-past. Then, till half-past four, we can do anything we like out-of-doors. We skate, if there is any skating in the park, we coast down hill on Sawyer Street, or walk, or papa takes us to drive.

"In spring and fall days, we often walk out to Manton Lake for wild flowers or chestnuts. But we must always be in the house at half-past four in winter, and at five when the days get longer. Then we always study in the upper hall till quarter after six, and then we get ready for dinner."

"How nice it is always to have somebody to do things with. I am sure I could study better if I had somebody to talk things over with. Then if you do your studying in the afternoon, what do you do in the evening?"

"After dinner we are all in the back parlour for awhile, papa, and Donald, and Marjorie, and everybody, and we have fun then, I tell you, if there isn't any company. We play games, or papa plays with us. Then if I haven't gotten through my lessons in the afternoon, papa lets me study for half an hour. But we *never* can study after half-past eight, no matter what."

"But suppose you didn't study hard in the afternoon, and *can't* get through by half-past eight?" asked Edna.

"Oh, but we *must* study hard," said well-trained Eunice, surprised. "Papa hates dawdling."

"Does your mother help you with your lessons?"

"Not much. Sometimes she explains something we don't understand, but papa says we should not need help. Well, then, generally we read for a little while, or mamma reads to us, and if she does, I embroider something. Sometimes we sew on Saturday mornings. What do you do?"

"Nothing, much," sighed Edna, dolefully. "It's so stupid to be an only daughter. The boys are older, you see, and they have each other, and they do study very hard in the winter. You see, I've no one to go out with, after luncheon, unless I go with some of the girls. Of course mamma often takes me with her, but lots of times she can't. And if she's out when I come in, the house is so stupid. And evenings I just sit and do fancy work, all by myself, if mamma is invited out to dinner, or anything, and she is invited out such a lot. I wish you were my sister, Eunice."

"Poor Edna! I wish you were *my* sister, and could live with me all the time. I don't think I *could* leave Cricket and the rest to come and live with you. Wouldn't it be nice if one of your brothers was only a sister? I don't think boys mind nearly as much about being the only one. And sisters are such a comfort. Let's read now. I peeked ahead, and Jessica is an only child, too."

In the interest of their story the time slipped by. They munched some cookies, but decided to wait till Cricket's return before eating a regular luncheon. They always provided themselves with luncheons on the slightest pretext.

"Isn't it time for Cricket to turn up?" said Eunice, at last, suddenly interrupting herself. "She's been gone perfect ages. I really believe her cannibals have eaten her up."

"If they have," replied Edna, decidedly, "they would soon repent it. Nobody could digest her, for she would fly around so. I believe even the *pieces* of her would jump up and down in their stomachs."

"I thought she would just row around the island, and then come back and hail us, at all events," said Eunice, laying down her book and standing up to give the call. The "wah-who-wah!" rang across the water, but brought no answering cry. They gave it again and again, with no better success.

"What geese we were to let that child go away with the boat!" exclaimed Edna, vexedly. "We should have known better. Likely as not she's rowed over to Plymouth and forgotten us entirely. Let's go up and see if we can see her from the top of the rocks."

Accordingly they climbed to the highest point. It was high noon now, by the sun, and very hot. Not a sail was in sight, nor even a rowboat anywhere.

Everybody had evidently been driven in by the heat, which was intense. The tide was going out, and soon a mud-flat would lie between them and the home shore.

"Gracious, isn't it sizzling hot!" cried Eunice, shading her eyes. "The heat just quavers up from these rocks. I believe a coffee-pot would boil if you put it on top of my head. Where *is* Cricket?"

"The tide is going out very fast," said Edna, anxiously. "Look at the high-water mark. If we're not off here in less than half an hour we have to wait till the tide is up again. That's a nice prospect, too, to stay here and broil all the afternoon."

"Horrors!" cried Eunice. "I like to stay here when I want to, but I don't want to be made to. When could we get off, then?" for Eunice knew much less accurately the times and tides than Edna, who always spent her summers at Marbury.

"It was high tide at eight this morning, so it won't be entirely out till two. But you know there is about an hour and a half before ebb tide that the flats are bare, and, of course, it's the same time after that before enough water comes in to float a boat. I don't believe it's more than twelve now. Think of staying here till, say, four o'clock. Let's call again. She might be over on the other side of Clark's Island."

"Wah-who-wah! Wah-who-wah! Come *back*, Cricket! Wah-who-wah!" Eunice sent her clear, strong voice ringing across the smooth waters, but with no better success than before.

"You don't suppose she's purposely hiding somewhere, do you?" asked Edna, doubtfully.

"No, indeed," returned Eunice, promptly. "She's only forgotten, if anything, unless something has happened to her," she added, somewhat anxiously.

"Nothing could happen in Marbury Bay," replied Edna, positively. "It's the safest old hole. And since we are not really in the South Sea Islands, there aren't any cannibals to eat her up."

The island was only about a mile and a half from shore, and they could plainly see grandma's house on the Neck. Not a soul was in sight, not even Eliza and the children.

"Let's wave a handkerchief," suggested Eunice, looking for hers, "for the boys may see it and come out for us."

"It's not much use," said Edna, "for I don't believe any one would notice a little white handkerchief fluttering over here, and, besides, I'm getting dreadfully afraid that there isn't time for any one to pull out here and get us in before the tide would be so far out that we would stick in the mud. You see the bottom is so flat that the water goes out very quickly. But let's try a handkerchief."

"I haven't any with me," said Eunice. "Take yours."

"Bother! I haven't either. Oh, there's a boat coming past. If that man would take us in, we might just get to the shore. Wave *something*. Call! Call!"

The girls shouted vigorously, but the little rowboat aggravatingly kept on its way, the oarsman having his back towards them. Then he turned his course a little, keeping in the channel where the water was deeper.

"What *can* we wave?"

"Take your work, Edna. Tie it to a stick."

"Tie my work to a *stick*? Why, it would ruin it."

"No, it wouldn't. What if it did? We don't want to stay here all day;" and Eunice caught the linen scarf from Edna's half-unwilling hand, and, tying it to a stick, waved it furiously.

"Oh, dear, I wonder if it will ruin it? Wave harder, Eunice. Wah-who-wah! Why don't you turn, whoever you are! I wonder if I can iron it out," went on poor Edna, distracted between the fear of injury to her beloved work and her desire to get off the island. But the little boat pulled swiftly down the channel, its owner evidently not desirous of being caught himself on the mud-flats, and was soon a speck on the water.

"Where *can* Cricket be?" wondered Eunice, for the hundredth time. "Edna, I am afraid she's drowned or something," for she began to be much more worried over Cricket's non-appearance than at the prospect of spending a few more hours than they had intended on the island.

"I'm sure nothing has happened to her. Cricket will never be drowned, don't be afraid. I think she's just plain gone off and forgotten us—that bad girl! Won't I make the boys tease her for this! There! perhaps I can iron that out smooth."



"THE EXILES"

CHAPTER VII.

THE EXILES.

Eunice made a telescope of her hands and studied the shore intently.

"Isn't that our boat, now, drawn up by those rocks? No, not near the docks, but up to the right."

Edna followed her gaze.

"I do think it is! Yes, and that's Billy, isn't it? and those little things are the twins. And Eunice! that's Cricket, this instant! See she's standing up now. I know her by the broad white flannel collar on her blue dress. Now they are coming down to the beach. She did row over for something and sat down to talk, and forgot us. What crazy lunatics we were to let her go off with the boat!"

"Cricket hasn't forgotten anything serious since she forgot mamma's invitation last spring. You see, she never

thought about the tide going out, and meant to come back and get us later. It takes so long to get used to the tide. I do wish it would settle upon some time of day, and keep to it. Don't you? It's a great nuisance."

"I guess I do," replied Edna, with inelegant emphasis. "If I had my way, the tide shouldn't go out but once a day, and that's at night. These ugly old mud-flats that have to be seen some time during every day are the one thing that spoil Marbury. It's so pretty when the bay is full. But, Eunice, we've got to make up our minds to stay here and broil, this whole afternoon. Even if Cricket should start this minute, she couldn't get here. Do you see that broad, smooth place, with the water rippling a little on each side? That means that there is a mud-flat there, and it will be bare in about ten minutes. Oh, goodness gracious me! enchanting prospect!" and Edna plumped herself down on the rock in despair.

"It's no worse really than many a time when we've been over here and staid five or six hours and meant to," said Eunice, philosophically, "only we never happened to be caught and obliged to stay. And it might be worse," she added, cheerfully. "We have luncheon, for one thing. You know we stayed here all day, once."

"But then we *expected* to," said Edna, looking very unresigned. "We had made up our minds to."

"Very well, then," said Eunice, brightly, "let us make up our minds to stay, now. Let's play we want to, and meant to all the time. We'll eat our luncheon, and then you can embroider and I'll read to you some more. Or let's go on playing that we're shipwrecked, and that Cricket has gone back with a raft to the ship, to bring some things back. Of course, that would take all day."

"If the ship was burned," objected Edna, "there wouldn't be any wreck to bring things from."

"We'll play it rained and put out the fire," returned Eunice, imperturbably. "Plenty of ways to fix it. Wasn't it fortunate we rescued your work and my book from the wreck," she went on, changing her tone. "And don't let's stay here and bake in the sun any longer. I'm just drizzling away. Come back to the rocks and eat our luncheon. There's evidently no use waiting any longer for Cricket," she added, with a laugh. "We'll have a lovely afternoon, and we'll pretend we meant to stay all the time."

"Oh, pretend! I believe you girls would *pretend* if you were going to be hung. You'd play you liked it," said Edna, laughing, herself.

"Why not?" answered Eunice, sturdily. "It makes things lots easier. Besides, it's more fun. Do you suppose auntie and grandma will worry when we're not back to dinner?"

"No, because I told mamma where we were going, and Cricket will have to tell them we're safe, and that she's forgotten us. We can't be run away with very well, and nothing can happen to us here. And, why, Eunice! look! isn't that Cricket, now, rowing towards us? No, this way. Not far from shore."

"It is! it is! Wah-whooh-wah! wah-whooh-wah! Naughty, naughty Cricket! wah-whooh-wah!" shrieked Eunice, clapping her hands.

But Edna instantly put her hands to her mouth to form a trumpet, and called with all her might:

"Go back, Cricket! go back! You'll get aground."

"Wah-whooh-wah!" came back faintly over the water, and they could see the little figure bend to the oar.

"Go *back!*" screamed Edna, fairly dancing up and down in her excitement, for she knew what would happen better than Eunice did. But Cricket evidently did not understand. She looked over her shoulder, waved her oar, and pulled on.

"Oh, *dear!*" cried Edna, "see, that mud-flat back of her will be all bare in two minutes, and she doesn't know it, and she's pulling right across it. Oh, oh, she's aground!"

And, indeed, the last stroke of the oars had landed the boat on the treacherous bank, where it stuck fast. The girls watched her, eagerly, as the oars came up, dripping with mud, in her frantic efforts to push over it.

"Why doesn't she sit still?" exclaimed Edna, anxiously. "She'll get the boat wedged fast!"

But, by some good luck, one final shove of the oars sent the light boat through the yielding mud, and into a little depression beyond, where the water still flowed. Cricket pulled with all her strength, realizing now the inconvenience of being stuck fast. There was still another flat, which was fast uncovering itself, between her and the island, but if she could only get through that, there was water enough beyond to float her to the island. That had a rock foundation, and the water was unexpectedly deep around it. But, unfortunately, the next mud-flat was too wide to get over it before the swiftly ebbing tide left it entirely bare, and so there, within five hundred feet of the island, she finally stuck, immovably. The girls ran down to the edge of the island, waving their hands, and shouting.

"I—guess—I'm—stuck!" called Cricket, standing up, carefully, and turning around. Fortunately her voice could just be heard.

Eunice and Edna laughed at the obvious truth of her remark.

"I should think she *was* stuck! What a little goose to try to get out here when the tide was so low!"

"She isn't used to it," said Eunice, defensively. "See, now. Five minutes ago there seemed to be water enough in the bay, and now look at it!"

It was a sight to look at, for the broad mud-flats were now visible in every direction, while streams of water still lay in the deeper depressions.

"I never noticed before, in all my life, how quickly the tide goes out," added Eunice.

"We never happened to be caught on a desert island before," said Edna, "when you *have* to notice it. I suppose we get so in the habit of calculating upon it, and knowing by the looks of the water how long it will take, that we forget you don't know so well. But what will Cricket do? Think of her staying out there for about four hours, in that broiling sun, and nothing to eat. Gracious, she has the worst of it."

"Couldn't she take off her shoes and stockings, and wade in through the mud?" suddenly asked Eunice, brightening.

"No, indeed. She'd sink down to China, I guess. There's just about no bottom at all to this mud, if you step in it. Keep—perfectly—still—Cricket," she hallooed, suddenly, through her hands, as Cricket shows signs of restlessness.

"What will she do?" groaned Eunice. "It seems perfectly heartless to sit down and eat our luncheon, when she can't get a mouthful."

"But our not eating won't do her any good," objected Edna, very sensibly.

"Anyway, I'm not going to eat anything, with my Cricket out there, starving," cried Eunice, determinedly.

"But *Eunice!* how silly! It won't help Cricket any. She wouldn't like to have you not eat."

"I sha'n't eat a mouthful," replied Eunice, obstinately, shaking her head.

"Well, then, I'll tell you what we'll do. We'll eat just one tiny sandwich apiece, so we won't just die with hunger, then we'll call to Cricket that we won't eat the rest till she can get in here. Then we'll eat it before we go back."

"Yes, I'll do that," answered Eunice, after considering a moment. And then they called to Cricket.

"We—won't—eat—any—luncheon—till you—get—here. Can—you—wait?"

"Have—to!" called back Cricket, cheerfully. "Will—it—be—long?"

"Three—or—four—hours!" answered Edna. "Keep—as—still—as—you—can, —so—the—boat—won't—sink. *Can* she keep still?" added Edna, to Eunice.

"I think so," answered Eunice, somewhat doubtfully, it must be confessed. Then they sat down, and, opening their luncheon, selected a small sandwich each. It really took considerable self-control not to satisfy two hearty appetites, then and there, for the luncheon looked very tempting. But Eunice resolutely put the basket away.

"What will auntie think?" asked Eunice, anxiously, glancing toward the shore. "It's dinner-time, I guess."

"There are the boys, now," cried Edna. "Yes, it's dinner-time, and they've come down to see where we are." She stood up and waved her bureau cover. The boys, catching sight of the signal, waved frantically in return. Presently, all the others, grandma, auntie, old Billy, and the children, were seen to gather there. The boys ran up and down the beach, then all the figures clustered together, evidently holding a council of war.

"There's just nothing to be done," sighed Edna, "except to wait for the water."

"Wait for the water, and we'll all take a ride," sang Eunice. "It's really much harder for them to be anxious about us, and about Cricket, than for us to be here. And hardest of all for Cricket. For pity's sake! what is the child doing?"

In watching the shore people, they had forgotten for a moment the stranded boat and its small occupant. As they looked again, they saw she had stuck the oars in the mud, blade down, and was now evidently lashing them to the oar-locks. This done, she stood up and slipped off the blue flannel skirt of her little sailor suit, standing up in her short white petticoat. She hung the skirt by the hem over the oars, and immediately she had a very fair substitute for a tent, to shield her from the blazing sun. Then, apparently quite contented, she sat down in the bottom of the boat, adjusting the cushion from the stern seat, for a back. She had her face towards the island, and, when she was comfortably settled, she waved her hand, crying out:

"Isn't—this—exciting? I'm—playing—I'm—Marco—Bozzaris—in—his—shrouded—tent."

After their consultation, the shore people had evidently decided there was nothing to be done for the shipwrecked mariner and her exiled companions, as presently every one went into the house.

"Think of the soup and roast beef they're devouring!" sighed Eunice, with a thrill of envy,—but she stood fast to her resolution not to eat luncheon till Cricket could have some, too.

Fortunately, there was no special danger for Cricket, unless she actually tumbled out of the boat into the deep, soft mud, which she could scarcely do, unless she deliberately jumped out, so securely was the boat held. So the time went on, and Eunice and Edna, after a while, submitted to the inevitable, and resumed work and reading, stopping now and then to look towards Cricket, and call out sympathizing messages.

"Isn't—it—nice—I'm—near—enough—to—talk—to—you?" called back this little Mark Tapley once.

"Are—you—*very*—hungry?" shouted Eunice, after a long lapse in this high-keyed conversation. But there was no answer, and, looking again, they saw that Cricket's head was down on her arm, which was stretched out over the seat.

"She's actually gone to sleep!" said Eunice, in amazement. "Well, I never knew Cricket to go to sleep in the

daytime before in her life."

"I should think she'd do anything for variety," returned Edna. "If this isn't the longest day that ever was! I should think it was to-morrow morning. It's worse than that day last summer when we went blackberrying and came home at ten in the morning, thinking it was six. Do you remember?"

"I should think I did! I never had a chance to forget it," answered Eunice, "between papa and Donald. I suppose it *was* funny to them, but I never could see how the time seems so long to us."

"Oh, look, look!" cried Edna, suddenly. "Do you see that little ripple where the water lies in the channel? The tide is turning at last. In an hour or so, now, the water will be high enough for Cricket to get over here at least,—though we can't get home for a long time yet."

If the time had dragged before, this last hour fairly crawled. Eagerly the girls watched the strengthening ripples and the eddying current in the channel, as the water slowly crept higher in the outer bay. Slowly the brown ooze became a smooth, even, brown paste, and then, a few minutes later, the usual transformation scene took place. The bay was so protected by the long arm of land that half surrounded it that there was not only no surf, but no large waves even. The first you knew, the deepening water hid the ugly mud-flats, which were so level that only two or three inches of water were needed to transform the bay into a thing of beauty.

"Cricket! Cricket!" shrieked both girls, in eager chorus. "Wake—up! wake—up! the—tide's—coming—in. *Cricket*—et!"

Cricket, evidently bewildered, sat up, and looked around her, then grasped the situation. Quickly she pulled down her tent, and restored her skirt to its original use. She unlashed her oars, and adjusted them in the oarlocks.

"Push—off—as—soon—as—you—can!" called Edna. "Rock—the—boat—to—loosen—it."

Cricket obeyed instructions. She kept up a steady swaying movement, dipping her oars lightly in the deepening water. At last, like Longfellow's ship, "she starts! she moves!"

"Hurrah!" shouted Cricket, waving her oar, and then applying it vigorously. "I'm off!"

One more determined shove and she *was* off, and her boat floated in the hollow between herself and the island. It was but a moment's work then to pull in shore. If the two sisters had been parted for a year, they could not have greeted each other more rapturously. They rushed into each other's arms, kissing and hugging each other, while Edna declared she would eat up all the luncheon if they didn't stop.

"If I'm not starved!" cried Cricket, eagerly falling to as soon as the luncheon was opened. "I almost thought I'd eat my shoes out in the boat. It was awfully good of you not to eat anything till I got here."

"There's enough to last us till we get home, anyway," said Edna, munching away at the sandwiches with much satisfaction. "Now tell us, Cricket, what became of you?"

"Nothing became of me. I thought I'd row over home for a drink, and old Billy and the children were down on the beach, and I took them out for a little row, and I played they were castaways from the burning ship. Then I took them in, and sat down to rest, and then I thought it was time to come back for you. I never thought about the tide, and there seemed to be plenty of water around, and suddenly I found the water had all turned into mud."

"Cricket, your stockings are all coming down," interrupted Eunice.

"Yes, I know," said Cricket, coolly, stopping long enough to produce her side-elastics from her pocket. "I took off my stocking-coddies to tie the oars up with, to make my tent. Why, I had lots of fun, girls. I couldn't think of any shipwrecked hero who was ever stuck in the mud, so I played the mud was a desert, and that I was Marco What's-his-name in his shrouded tent, and—"

"It was the Turk, who was at midnight in his shrouded tent," interrupted Eunice, again.

"Was it? Well, I played it, anyway. Then I put my head down on my arm to look like him, and I must have gone to sleep, for the sun was pretty hot, even under my tent, and it made me dreadfully sleepy. Then I heard you call me, and there was the water all around me. Can't we start, now, Edna?"

"We can't get over that last bar nearest the shore, yet awhile," answered Edna, "but we can start as soon as there is the least bit of water over it, for by the time we get there the water will be deep enough to float us."

"I don't care how long we stay, now," said Eunice, contentedly, "since Cricket is here, and not out there all alone. I'll row in, Cricket."

"See, there are the boys running along the shore, and beckoning. Probably they mean it is safe to start now. Let's get ready. My goody, doesn't it seem as if we had been here a week?"

"Don't let's come again till it's high tide in the middle of the day," said Eunice. "Here, now we have the things all in."

"Isn't this boat a spectacle?" said Eunice, surveying its mud-splashed sides. "Won't the boys give you a blessing, Miss Cricket!"

"A blessing is a good thing to have," answered Cricket, quite undisturbed, as she yielded the oars to Eunice, and sat in the stern with Edna.

CHAPTER VIII.

A NEW PLASTER.

"It seems to me, my dear," said grandma, standing on the piazza, and drawing on her gloves, "that it is a *very* great risk to run to go and leave those children to themselves for six whole hours. If you *could* manage without me, I think I'll stay at home, even now," and grandma looked somewhat irresolutely at the carriage, which was waiting at the gate to take them to the station.

"I am afraid you must come, mother, on account of those business matters," Mrs. Somers answered. "But the children will be all right, I know. Eliza will look out for the small fry, and the elders must look out for themselves," she added, looking down at the three, Eunice, Edna, and Cricket, with a smile. "Don't get into any mischief, will you?"

The girls looked insulted.

"The very *idea*, auntie!" exclaimed Eunice. "As if we ever got into mischief! Nobody looks after us especially, at Kayuna."

"And, consequently," said auntie, with a sly smile, "you go to the cider-mill when you are put in charge of the children, and get run away with by the oxen."

Eunice got very red.

"Well, that was a great while ago, auntie, when we were quite young," she said, with as much dignity as if the occurrence auntie referred to was half a dozen years ago, instead of one. "Anyway," changing the subject, "we'll look after everything now, and you can stay till the last train, if you want to."

"No, dear, thank you. We'll come on the 5.10, I think, at any rate. Perhaps earlier, if we accomplish all our business. There! I didn't put on my watch. Edna, will you run up-stairs and get it, from my bureau or table? I think I laid it on the table. No, wait. Have you yours, mother? Never mind, then, Edna. But will you please put it back in my drawer, when you go up-stairs, dear? Don't forget. Well, good-by. Be good children," and with a kiss all round, auntie and grandma got into the carriage.

"Good-by. Be sure and bring me some chocolate caramels," called Edna.

Auntie smiled, nodded, and waved her hand, and then Luke turned the corner, and they rolled away.

"The boys said that the tide would be right for bathing, about eleven," Cricket said, after they had watched them out of sight. "Come on, it's most time," and off they trooped for their plunge. The children were already over at the Cove, with Eliza, running about in their little blue bathing-suits, though they generally went in only ankle deep. Edna could swim well, and Cricket had made good progress in the last week. Eunice took to the water as naturally as a duck, and, strange to say, had learned to swim well, before Cricket did.

After their bath they came back to the house, where Eunice and Cricket settled themselves on the piazza, to write letters to the travellers. Cricket kept a journal letter and scribbled industriously every day. Both Eunice and Cricket had sometimes very homesick moments, when papa and mamma seemed very far away, and Cricket, in particular, occasionally conjured up very gloomy possibilities of her pining away, and dying of homesickness, before they returned, so that when they should come home, they would find only her grave, covered with flowers. She even went so far, in one desperate moment, as to compose a fitting epitaph for her tombstone, which was to be of white marble, of course, with an angel on top.

This was the epitaph.

"Oh, stranger, pause! Beneath this mossy stone
Lies a poor child, who died, forsaken and alone.
Her mother far in distant lands did roam,
Leaving her daughter, Jean, to die at home.
She pined away in sad and lonely grief,
Not any pleasures brought to her relief,
And when at last her family returned,
With sorrow great, about her death they learned.
So, pause, oh, stranger! drop a single tear,
Pity the grief of her who liest here."

This effusion was the greatest consolation to Cricket. She never showed it to anybody, not even to Eunice, but she often took it out, and read it with much satisfaction, and was almost inclined to begin pining away directly.

But on the whole they were very contented, and it was much easier for them than if they had been left at Kayuna.

Dinner-time—dinner was a one o'clock feast, in the summer—came when they had finished their letters, and had them ready for the mail.

"We'll have the European letters to-night," said Eunice, joyfully, as they sat down to the table. "Does it seem as if we'd been here two weeks? Mamma won't seem so far away, when we get the first letters."

"There was the cablegram," said Edna.

"That doesn't count," said Eunice. "It wasn't mamma's own dear handwriting."

"Papa writed it," chirped in Helen.

"No, he didn't, goosie," said Cricket. "The man here wrote it. Papa only sent it."

"I know!" exclaimed Zaidee. "Papa talked it into the box, and the man writed it down when he talked," confusing the telephone at home with the cablegram, which, directed to Miss Eunice Ward, as the eldest representative, had been the occasion of much excitement on its arrival.

After dinner the three girls started down on the beach, to sit down under the rocks till it should be cool enough, later, to go for a ride with the ponies.

"There comes the baby, all alone," said Cricket, presently, as that young man slipped out of the yard all by himself, and ran across the road and down towards the beach where the girls were. "Doesn't he look cunning? The darling!"

Kenneth, although he was nearly four, was still The Baby to the family. His broad-brimmed hat hung down his back, held around his chin by its elastic, and his golden hair was rampant. His blue eyes were dancing with mischief, and his hands were clasped behind his back.

"Dess what I dot?" he demanded, pausing at a safe distance, and looking up roguishly from under his long lashes.

"What have you there, baby? See what he has, Cricket, and tell him he mustn't have it," said Eunice.

"Bring it to Cricket, baby," said that young lady, holding out her hand.

"Dess what I dot," repeated the baby, edging off a little.

Just then Zaidee appeared from the house. Kenneth immediately trotted off up the beach at the sight of her. She ran after him.

"Do away!" he cried, holding his possession, whatever it was, more tightly. "You tan't have it, Zaidee. I dot it."

"What's the matter, Zaidee?" called Eunice. "Where's Eliza?"

"She's dressing Helen. Eunice, Kenneth has auntie's gold watch. She left it on the little table where she keeps her God-books—for so the twins always called the Bible and Prayer-book—and he's run off with it. I guess auntie forgot it. Ought he to have it, Eunice?"

"Of course not," said Eunice, springing up. "Edna, auntie told us to put it away, and we forgot it. Dear me! I hope he won't drop it. Baby, come here and give the watch to Eunice." She went slowly towards him, holding out her hand.

But baby hugged his treasure. "I dot tick-tick!" he announced, triumphantly. "Tennet likes it. Oo tan't have it," and off he started as fast as two little legs could carry him, over the soft sand till he reached the firmer beach, which the receding tide had left hard.

Eunice sprang after him. The baby looked back over his shoulder, greatly enjoying the race, tripped over a bit of stone, and fell headlong, the watch shooting on ahead. He gave a frightened cry as he fell, but the next instant, when Eunice reached him, he lay motionless. Hurriedly she raised him up. A stream of blood poured from an ugly gash in his poor little forehead, cut on a piece of glass that was half imbedded in the sand. As she raised him his golden head fell back heavily, and his eyes were closed.

"Oh, girls, girls!" shrieked Eunice. "Kenneth is dead! he's killed! he's killed!"

Cricket and Edna were already by her side.

"Run, Zaidee—Edna—run for Eliza. Get some water, Cricket. Oh, baby, speak to me," poor frightened Eunice cried, half beside herself at the gruesome sight of the baby's white, still face, and that dreadful blood welling up so fast, and staining everything with its vivid red. Cricket flew to the edge of the beach, dipping water up in the crown of her sailor hat. She tore off her soft Windsor tie to use for a handkerchief (which, of course, she didn't have), to wipe off the streaming blood. The little face looked ghastly white, in contrast to the blood-soaked hair about it.

Eliza came flying from the house with the Pond's Extract bottle in one hand and a bundle of old linen in the other, articles that were always at hand, ready for use.

"Bring him into the shade," she called, as she ran, and Eunice, with Kenneth in her arms, hurried up the beach. Eliza took him as they met, and fairly flew back into the yard.

"Oh, Billy!" she called, passing him, "go for the doctor as fast as you can. Kenneth's dreadfully hurt. No, Miss Edna, you go. You can go quicker;" and Edna flew.

Eliza, frightened herself by the child's unconsciousness, dropped on the grass under a tree, trying to stanch the blood that now flowed less freely. Eunice ran for hartshorn, Cricket for water. As they washed away the blood, they could see the long, ugly cut just over his eye. Eliza laid linen bandages soaking in Pond's Extract over the place, but in a moment they were stained through.

Edna came rushing back, panting and breathless.

"The doctor's gone away—won't be back for ever so long—they'll send him right over when he comes. Oh, Eliza! will Kenneth die?"

Zaidee set up a shriek at the word.

"Be still, Zaidee," ordered Cricket, slipping her hand over the little girl's mouth. "You go and find poor Helen, and help her finish her dressing."

Zaidee went off, sobbing, and Eunice asked, anxiously:

"Couldn't we plaster it up ourselves? I know papa says the edges of a cut like that ought to be drawn together as soon as possible, and bandaged. I know how he does it. He sops the place off, and washes the cut out, and puts strips of sticking-plaster over it, and then ties it up in a dry bandage."

"Oh, it's a head you have, Miss Eunice," said Eliza, who showed her Irish blood by her terror.

"You get some sticking-plaster, Miss Cricket, while I sop off the blood. Oh, my pretty! my pretty! See! he's opening his eyes. Do you know 'Liza, lovey?"

The heavy blue eyes opened, languidly, and the yellow head stirred a little. The motion set the blood flowing again.

"Kenneth," said Eunice, bending down beside him; "here's sister! wake him up, if you can, 'Liza. Papa wouldn't let Zaidee go to sleep last winter when she fell off the bedstead and bumped her head so. Baby! wake up, pet!" and she kissed him, eagerly.

In a few minutes, Cricket came running out of the house. "We can't find any sticking-plaster, and we've looked everywhere. Edna says she doesn't know if her mother has any. What shall we do? I know it ought to be put together right away, else it wouldn't heal so well. Oh, wait! I know!" and back she darted. Immediately she reappeared with a part of a sheet of postage stamps.

"These will do, 'Liza," she said, excitedly. "Now, is the cut all washed out? Here, I can do it. I've watched papa lots of times."

Cricket knelt down by the baby and dipped a piece of linen in water. The flow of blood was very slight by this time. She wiped Kenneth's forehead off, carefully, over and over, and then the cut itself, looking to see if any bit of glass or sand was still in it. Then, with firm, gentle little fingers, she drew the gaping edges together closely, and held them, while Eunice moistened some postage stamps in water, and laid them in place.

"Cricket! how can you do that? How do you know how?" exclaimed Edna, who kept in the rear, since the sight of the blood made her feel a little faint and sick.

"I've seen papa *loads* of times," answered Cricket, in her matter-of-fact way. "If only we had some surgeon's plaster. But that will hold for now. Bind this strip tight around it now, 'Liza. Baby, can't you talk a little? Do you know Cricket?"

"Tritet," repeated Kenneth, with a faint little smile. "Tritet take baby."

"Let me have him," begged Cricket, and Eliza laid him gently in his little sister's arms.

"Eunice, there's Mrs. Bemis coming over," said Edna, "I'm so glad."

Mrs. Bemis was the doctor's wife. She came hastily up to the little group.

"I was out when Edna came, and just got in. The girl told me some one was hurt, so I came right over. The baby, is it? poor little soul! has he lost all that blood? did he cut himself?"

Eunice explained, and Cricket told Eliza to unfasten the bandage to ask Mrs. Bemis if it was all right. At the sight of four pink stamps, the doctor's wife exclaimed in astonishment:

"What have you put on for a plaster? It looks beautifully done."

"Them's postage stamps," volunteered Eliza, quickly. "Miss Cricket couldn't find any sticking-plaster, so she brought this. Oh, she's her father's own child for the doctorin'."

"I thought they might do," explained Cricket, rather shyly. "I knew I ought to have strips of plaster, of course, but I couldn't find any. I thought the cut ought to be drawn together as soon as possible."

"You're a thoughtful child," said Mrs. Bemis, warmly.

"But Eunice thought of doing it first," answered Cricket, quickly. "I only thought of the postage stamps."

"He's too heavy for you, my dear," said Mrs. Bemis, then. "Carry him gently into the house, Eliza. He's faint with the loss of so much blood. Let him go, dear," as Cricket demurred. "Eliza can carry him better than you. Let me give him a few drops of this, first," and she moistened the baby's lips with a few drops from a flask she had brought in her hand.

When the little procession reached the hall door, Mrs. Bemis said:

"Let me take care of him now, with Eliza, girls. You keep the twins amused out-of-doors," for Zaidee and Helen came creeping down the staircase, looking frightened to death. The girls willingly turned back, having taken them in charge.

"Oh, the watch!" suddenly exclaimed Edna, and they all raced down to the beach, where the accident had happened. The watch still lay, gleaming in the sunlight, where it had fallen, ticking as unconcernedly as if no adventure had befallen it. Fortunately, it had alighted on a particularly soft bit of sand. Edna picked it up.

"If only I hadn't forgotten to put this away when mamma told me to, all this wouldn't have happened," she

said, remorsefully.

"I suppose Kenneth just slipped in there after 'Liza finished dressing him," said Eunice, "and saw it lying on the table. You know he's always teasing auntie to show him her 'tick-tick.'"

They went slowly back into the yard, scarcely knowing what to do with themselves. They could not settle to any of their regular amusements, and nobody wanted to go off riding. The twins were still under the tree, where they had left them. Helen ran towards them.

"Eunice, won't you please make Zaidee stop drinking up all the Pond's Extrap? She says she likes it, and I'm afraid it will kill her," she said, half crying. "I told her to don't, and she didn't don't."

"Put the bottle right down, Zaidee," ordered Eunice, laughing. "If you drink the Pond's Extract, what will you do when you fall down and hurt yourself, next time?"

Zaidee took a last hasty swallow. Strange to say, she did like it, very much.

"I suppose it goes all down inside my legs," she said, with calm conviction, "and if I bump my legs it will do them lots more good inside than outside. Come on, Helen. 'Liza said cook would give us our supper to-night, and she's calling us."

"What funny children," exclaimed Edna. "Does Zaidee really *like* it?"

"Yes, really. 'Liza keeps the bottle locked up. Isn't it funny?"

Just before auntie and grandma returned, Dr. Bemis came over, and went to see his little patient. He was amused at Cricket's original plaster, for which he carefully substituted the proper article, but he pronounced the dressing of the cut very nicely done, and said that the cut would not have healed so well as he hoped it would now, if it had been left open for that two hours that elapsed before he could get there.

CHAPTER IX.

GEORGE W. AND MARTHA.

A rattling, banging, clattering sound, like a small army of tin pans on a rampage, suddenly woke the echoes one still, sultry afternoon. Auntie Jean thought it was the circus, and sighed as she wondered if they were going to keep it up long enough to make it worth while for her to leave her cool room and her afternoon nap, to go and stop them. Grandma heard it, and supposed it was Cricket, trying some new experiment as a tinware merchant, and hoped she would soon turn her attention to some different employment. Cricket heard it, and promptly started for the scene of action, meeting, in the hall, Eunice and Edna, who came running down-stairs, as well as the boys, who appeared from the kitchen, where they had been foraging for a mid-afternoon lunch.

The disturbance came from the front piazza, but when they went out there nothing, for a moment, was visible, though the same mysterious whacking and banging went on, under the table.

"What is it?" they all exclaimed, but straightway the question was solved, for out from under the table-cover backed a half-grown black kitten, with its head firmly wedged into a tin tomato can. Backing and scratching, as a cat will when its head is covered, the poor little thing, evidently half frantic, tumbled up against the chairs and the side of the house, mewling most frightfully and banging its inconvenient headdress against the piazza floor.

"You poor little cat! Has some horrid boy been abusing you?" cried Cricket, making a dive for it, but dropping it, when she caught it, with equal promptness, as its sharp claws tore her hands. "Why, stop! you dreadful little thing! How you hurt me!"

"Pick it up, boys," begged Edna, as the cat resumed its backward way. "Do get that can off. How did any one ever get it on, do you suppose? Here, kitty! kitty!"

"Curiosity killed a cat, they say," said Will, watching his chance at it. "I suppose it wanted to see the inside of that can, and now that it has seen it, it isn't satisfied. There's no suiting some people. There you are, sir!" and Will, having caught the table-cloth from the table, sending the magazines and papers in a shower to the floor, threw it over the poor little black thing, so that, in picking it up, he could muffle its claws, so that it could not scratch. Its neck was torn a little, with the sharp, rough edges of the tin can, and a redoubled chorus of frightened meows greeted his first attempt to remove it.

"Should think a whole orchestra of cats was shut up in here," Will observed, trying another direction. "Arch, get out your knife, and see if you can rip up this can a little. Jove, but it's snug! We can dispense with a little of that music, my fine fellow. There—you—are," as Archie, with a final careful twist, drew off the can. Once out of its tin bondage, the little creature seemed too frightened to move, and suddenly curled down under the protecting table-cover, to restore its ruffled fur, with many a piteous mew.

The girls gathered around to pet and soothe it.

"Keep away, girls. Don't touch it yet with your hands. It's so frightened still it might scratch you. Here, Cricket, take it in the table-cloth, there. Better give it something to eat. It's a stray cat, and probably half starved, and that's why it tried to eat tomato cans, like a goat."

Cricket bore off her charge to the kitchen, where she fed and soothed it with such good effect that, when she came back, half an hour later, the little black cat cuddled down on her arm, purring like a teakettle in spite of its wounded neck.

"Isn't it a dear?" she said, admiringly. "I think grandma will let me keep it. We haven't any cat in the house since Wallops died, and I love them."

Grandma was entirely willing that the little waif should be added to the family, and so it was legally adopted by Cricket, with all sorts of solemn ceremonies. Then came the naming it, always a serious difficulty.

"I want a very appropriate name," meditated Cricket, aloud.

"The Cat in the Iron Mask," suggested Will.

"Too long. Think of calling all that out when I want him in a hurry."

"Cantankerous," said Archie.

"No, I want a regular name."

"Can-on Farrar, then. That's a regular name, and it's a very appropriate one."

"I don't like that, either. I want just a plain, common, every-day sort of name, like George Washington."

"Very well, take George Washington, then. That is very appropriate indeed. He couldn't tell a lie, and probably your cat can't either."

"Do you think he's dignified enough to be called George Washington!" asked Cricket, doubtfully, watching the Nameless jump around after his tail. She had had him for two days now, and he had quite recovered from his tinny imprisonment. He proved to be a most well-bred and entertaining little cat, for he came when he was called and went when he was bid, in orthodox fashion, and made himself entirely at home.

"Probably George was frisky in his youth," said Will. "Especially when he was courting Martha."

"Then I'll do this: I'll call him George Washington as far as his tail, and I'll call that Martha, because he runs after it. Come here, George W., you've run after Martha long enough now. Come here, and be christened."



FEEDING GEORGE WASHINGTON—"CRICKET BORE OFF HER CHARGE TO THE KITCHEN"

And so George Washington he remained to the end of the chapter. He soon learned his name, and would come flying at the first sound of it. He proved to be a pet that required considerable attention. He was of an especially sociable nature, and, if left alone in any room, he would howl in mournful and prolonged meows, that speedily brought some one to the rescue. He tagged the girls like a little dog, and would stand on the shore crying like a child if they went off in the boat and would not take him. He slept in Cricket's bed at night, and if by any chance he was shut out when the family went to bed, and the house was locked up, he would make night hideous with lamentations, to an extent that would soon bring some one down to let him in.

One day the familiar meow sounded, and Cricket, who was curled up in the hammock, reading, instantly sprang up.

"There's George W.," for so his name was generally abbreviated, "and he's shut up somewhere, and I let him out myself only a few minutes ago. I believe he gets into places through the keyholes, and I don't see why he doesn't get out through 'em."

But George was not to be found in any of his usual haunts, and his meows ceasing, Cricket went back to her book. Presently, a prolonged cry was heard again, and again Cricket started in quest of him. She looked and called everywhere, but George W. was nowhere to be found, though his meow, with a quality peculiar to himself, seemed to come from no particular place, but to pervade the air generally.

"Come and help me find George W.," she called to Eunice and Edna, who were also on the piazza. "He's mewling dreadfully, and I can't find him."

"He's worse than a baby," said Eunice, unwinding herself from the comfortable, twisted-up position in the steamer chair, which she loved. "Couldn't you let him cry a little while and give him a lesson?"

"I wouldn't mind giving *him* a lesson, but I'm afraid he'd give me one in patience," returned Cricket, laughing. "I'm sure I don't want to listen to that music long. There, he's stopped again, now."

But five minutes later, George W. renewed his complaints.

"Now I'm going to let him cry!" said Cricket, returning in despair from another search. So down she sat, shutting her ears to outside sounds in her comfortable fashion.

Presently grandma appeared at the hall door.

"Cricket, my dear, George Washington seems to want something. Don't you think you'd better try and find him?"

"Grandma, he's been crying and weeping for an hour at least, and I just can't find him. But I'll look again."

But wherever George W. was, he was certainly securely hidden. He cried now and then at intervals, but it was impossible to locate the sound, since it came first from one side, then from another.

"He's between the floors somewhere," said Will, who had joined the search. "The question is, where?"

"We'll have to decide that question at once," said auntie, "because we can scarcely have all the floors in the house taken up. How could he have gotten in?"

"Perhaps through some small hole in the garret floor. He's probably forgotten the way back. Or, perhaps there's some hole down cellar where he got inside, and ran up after the mice."

"Perhaps the mice have gotten the best of him, and are tearing him limb from limb," suggested Archie, making such a horrible face that Helen retreated behind Aunt Jean in terror.

All the afternoon they followed the sounds at intervals, listening at the floor, and calling over and over. George W. seemed to be exploring the entire interior of the house. Late in the afternoon, the cries came more constantly from the floor of the trunkroom, a small apartment off the garret, and directly over Eunice's room. There was a small knot-hole in the floor, and the light from a window fell directly on it, probably attracting George W. there. Saws and hatchets were brought, and the boys soon had a piece of the floor up, making a hole large enough for several cats the size of George to come up.

"George evidently likes this sort of thing," said Archie, hacking away. "First the tin can, then the floor. Come out here, old fellow." But he was evidently frightened away by the noise, and could not be induced to come up.

"Bring a saucer of milk, Edna," said Mrs. Somers. "Stand it at one side, and then we will all go away and he will soon come up." So the milk was brought, and as it was supper-time, they all went down and left George W. to his own devices. Cricket was much disposed to stay and make sure that he came up, but she was finally persuaded to come down with the rest.

"Isn't it funny how his voice came from all over?" she said, at the supper-table. "Probably he was right there under the trunkroom floor all the time. He was a regular philanthropist."

"A regular what?" asked grandma and Auntie Jean, together.

"A philanthropist. Don't you know? a man who—who talks where he isn't?"

"A *ventriloquist!*" said Will. "That's what you mean."

"Do I? Auntie, what is a philanthropist, then?"

"A philanthropist is one who loves man, dear, and who—"

"Then when a girl's engaged, is she a philanthropist?" broke in Cricket, with her glass of milk half raised. The others all laughed.

"She is, very often," said grandma.

"I know the man she is engaged to is called her *financé*, but I never knew she was called a philanthropist," went on Cricket, thoughtfully.

There was another shout.

"*Fiancé*, dear," said auntie, as soon as she could speak, "and the girl isn't often *called* a philanthropist, though she often is one."

"Dear me," sighed Cricket. "Words are very puzzling. They seem to be made to say what you don't think."

"Oftentimes, my little Talleyrand," said grandma.

After supper, Cricket ran up to see if George W. had made his appearance yet. A few moments later, the household, assembled on the front piazza, was startled by a crash and a scream in Cricket's voice. With one accord, everybody rushed up-stairs. The sounds seemed to come from Eunice's room. As they opened the door, a cloud of dust poured out, from a mass of plaster that lay on the floor, while from a hole in the ceiling a length of black-stockinged leg kicked wildly. Above, a pair of fists beat a tattoo on the floor, while Cricket called, loudly:

"For goodness' sake, somebody come and pull me up; I'm breaking my other leg off."

Will sprang for the garret stairs, stumbling headlong, at the top, over George W., who took the opportunity to spring over his head, alighting right in the midst of the group of eager children, each of whom was trying to get up-stairs first, and in a moment everybody lay on top of everybody else, at the foot of the staircase.

Will, meantime, found his feet, and went to Cricket's rescue. It was dark in the trunkroom, under the eaves, but there was light enough to see Cricket, with one leg stretched out straight, and the other one so firmly wedged into the hole in the floor that she could not move.

"My leg feels as George W.'s head must have when he was caught in the tomato can," said Cricket, as Will drew up. "It's a pretty tight squeeze. I don't believe there's any skin left on it. I just came up quickly, and I couldn't see very well, and the first thing I knew my foot slipped into a hole, and there was not any floor there, and I slumped through."

"Are you hurt? Is Cricket hurt?" cried everybody, scrambling in, in hot haste.

"Not much," said Cricket, ruefully, feeling her barked knee. "I came down pretty hard on my elbow, and I nearly knocked it up to the top of my head, and my back feels funny, but I'm *not* hurt, not a bit!"

"What a mercy the child didn't fall all the way through, and go down on the lower floor," said grandma, who had just arrived on the scene.

"Why, I couldn't," said Cricket, surprised. "My other leg stopped me."

CHAPTER X.

THE ECHO CLUB.

Eunice and Edna went sauntering along the beach, with arms around each other's waists. They were bending their steps towards one of their favourite retreats, under some big rocks. It was high tide, and the water lay dimpling and smiling in the sunlight. Down beside the dock, Will and Archie were giving their sailboat, the *Gentle Jane*, a thorough cleaning and overhauling. Cricket was—the girls didn't know exactly where.

"There she is now," said Eunice, as they came around the rocks. Cricket lay in her favourite attitude, full length on the sand, in which her elbows were buried, with a book under her nose. She sat up as the girls came nearer.

"I have an idea," she announced, beamingly.

"*Very* hot weather for ideas!" said Eunice, fanning herself with her broad-brimmed hat.

"Eunice, you're dreadfully brilliant, aren't you? Anyway, I *have* an idea, and I just got it from 'Little Women.'"

Edna threw herself on the sand. "Don't let's do it, if we have to *do* anything," she said, fanning likewise.

"Now, you're brilliant. But you're a lazybones, you know. Tell us your idea, Cricket."

"You know how Jo and the rest had a club and published a paper? Now, then, let *us* have a club and publish a paper ourselves. It would be lots of fun."

Eunice and Edna looked rather startled at Cricket's ambition.

"Who would write the pieces for it?" demanded Edna, instantly.

"*We* would, of course," answered Cricket, superbly. "I'd love to do it."

"Write stories, and poems, and everything," urged Edna, aghast.

"Of course," repeated Cricket, undauntedly. "It's as easy as rolling off a log. That isn't slang, Eunice, and you needn't look at me. Rolling off a log is really very easy indeed." For Eunice, though her own language was not always above reproach, was very apt to play censor to her younger sister. "We'd just make them up ourselves."

"Make them *up*!" Unimaginative Edna opened her mouth and eyes wider. "I couldn't, to save my life!"

"Oh, you *could*. I've made up billions of stories," answered Cricket, hugging her knees, and talking earnestly.

"But how?" persisted Edna. "Oh, I couldn't! I wouldn't try!"

"I don't know exactly *how*," returned Cricket, considering. "Just make them up, that's all. Things come into your head all by themselves, somehow."

"It *would* be fun, Cricket," put in Eunice, who had been thinking over the project. "We could print the paper all out on foolscap."

"Would we each write our own story out?"

"We could if we wanted to. I thought we might take turns being editor, and printing everything out like a real paper. We might have one every week, and get subscribers," added Cricket, ambitiously.

"Subscribers!" groaned Edna, "and print a copy out for each one? Not if I know myself. It's too warm weather."

"Well, then, we might hand the one around to the subscribers, and each one could pass it to the next, like a Magazine Club," said Edna.

"No," said Eunice. "Don't let us have subscribers, or anything like that. We'll just do it for fun. We'll write one number out for ourselves. I do think it will be fun. Shall we let the boys know?"

"No," said Edna, instantly. "They would tease and spoil things, just as they always do."

"They don't tease much," said Cricket, defensively. "They're a great deal nicer than they were last summer, I think, anyway. They did tease, last summer, dreadfully, and they never played with Eunice and me, but were always with Donald." For the summer before, Will and Archie had spent two months at Kayuna, as grandma had been ill, and was not able to have them at Marbury, as usual.

"This summer I think they're awfully nice. At least Will always is, and Archie is, sometimes. They let me be around with them all the time."

"But I think we'd better not let them into it," said Eunice, judicially. Eunice generally settled all questions. "They would not stick to it, and they would want us to do it some other way from what we wanted,"—speaking from long experience with boys,— "and they would want to have it their own way. Now what shall we call ourselves?"

"We ought to be the 'Echo Club,'" suggested Edna, who often had practical ideas. "We copy it from 'Little Women.'"

"Splendid!" cried Cricket, clapping her hands. "That's just the name, Edna. How clever of you! We'll be the Echo Club, and the paper shall be the 'Echo,' and we'll have badges with 'E. C.' on them, and we'll choose a certain colour ribbon to wear them on, always, and we'll have meetings, and oh, we'll have some by-laws!" her imagination instantly running away with her. "I always wanted to have a club, and have by-laws, and rules, all written out. Do let's begin, right away!"

"We can't very well begin a paper, till we have some stories written to print in it," said Eunice, laughing. "We'll have to get some ideas, first."

"You don't want ideas," answered Cricket, scornfully. "We want to write some stories and things."

"I *never* can!" sighed Edna, despairingly.

"But you can try," insisted Cricket. "It's so easy." And at last, Edna, with a groan, promised she would at least try.

For the next few days, the three girls were never seen without the accompaniment of blank books and pencils. The blank books were Cricket's idea. She said that they could carry around blank books with them, and write whenever they thought of anything to say. So they tied pencils around their necks, by long ribbons, and scribbled industriously in corners. Edna groaned, and protested, and chewed up her pencil, but Cricket was inexorable, and gave her no peace, till she made a beginning.

Suddenly Cricket discovered that they were not properly organized yet.

"Let's have a meeting at two o'clock this afternoon, and choose a president, and secretary, and treasurer, and an editor, to print the paper when it is done. We must make up our rules and by-laws, too. Oh, we must have a regular business meeting," with an air of much importance.

"Let's have it now, for we're all here," proposed Edna.

"No, indeed, that would not do at all," said Cricket, decidedly, quite disgusted with this suggestion. "We must call the meeting first, just as grown-up people do." For Cricket, with all her harum-scarum ways, had a strong liking for organization.

"You're a fuss," said Edna, laughing, but yielding the point.

So at two o'clock, the three girls duly and solemnly convened behind the rocks, where they were completely screened from observation, both from the house, and from any one passing along the beach. All felt the importance of the occasion, and had preternaturally grave faces.

"What do we do first?" asked Edna, uncertainly.

"I know," said Cricket, quickly. "We nominate some one for president, and somebody seconds the motive. Papa has often told us about it, and once I went with mamma to a club of hers. I'll nominate Eunice for

president, and you must second the motive, Edna, and then we'll vote."

"There'll be nobody to vote, but me, then," objected Eunice. "Shall I vote for myself?"

"Might as well. You'll have to be president anyway, because you're the oldest, and it's more appropriate. Or let's do this: You say, 'All in favour say, aye. Contrary-minded, no,' and then we'll all vote. That's the way they did in mamma's meeting, only, of course, there were more to vote. Now, I nominate Eunice Ward as president of the Echo Club."

"I second the motive," said Edna, promptly, trying not to laugh.

"All in favour of my being president, say aye," said Eunice, in her turn.

A very vigorous aye from the two others followed.

"Contrary-minded, say no."

There being nobody to say no, it was considered a unanimous election, and Cricket so declared it, with a slight variation.

"Eunice is a *unaminous* president," she announced.

"What is a *unaminous* president," asked Edna.

"I don't know. It's something they always say. Now we must choose a secretary and treasurer."

"What do they do?"

"Why, the secretary writes things," said Cricket, vaguely.

"All the stories?" said Edna, brightening. "I nominate Cricket for secretary."

"Of course not. We each write our own stories. I mean letters and things. Don't you know, Eunice, that Marjorie was secretary to her club last winter, and what a lot of writing she had to do?"

"Who to?" persisted Edna. "What do they have to write letters for? We've nobody to write letters to but Aunt Margaret and the rest."

"Not to them, of *course*," returned Cricket, somewhat impatiently, as she did not at all know the duties of a secretary. "And the treasurer takes care of the money, of course," she went on, quickly shifting the subject to something she was sure of.

"How are we going to get any money, will you kindly tell me?" pursued Edna.

"Keeping a peanut stand," suggested Eunice, slyly.

"No, don't let's," answered Cricket, seriously. "It isn't really *much* fun, and you don't make very much, anyway. First, let's take up a collection to buy the paper with, for we've got to have that. And, well, if we should have any money in any way, the treasurer would be all ready to take care of it. Don't you see?"

"Ye-es. I nominate Cricket for secretary and treasurer, then—"

"I'll second the motive—Cricket, that doesn't sound right."

"It is," said Cricket, positively. "When I went to that meeting with mamma, they kept saying that—I'll second the motive."

"All right, then, I'll second the motive, but then Edna will have to be the editor."

"No, no," cried Edna, looking alarmed. "I'll nominate myself for secretary and treasurer, and we'll have Cricket for editor. There won't be any letters to write, and I'm sure there won't be much money to take care of."

"It will be lots of work to be editor," meditated Eunice. "Wouldn't this be better, girls? Let each be editor in turn."

"Yes, that will be best," said Cricket. "I'd just as lief be first editor, though, if Edna doesn't want to."

"And I'd *lievser* you would," said Edna. "Shall I be secretary and treasurer, then? All in favour say aye;" and Eunice and Cricket said aye, loudly.

"What do we do now the officers are all chosen?" asked Edna.

"Make rules and by-laws," answered Cricket, promptly.

"What *are* by-laws?" asked Edna, again.

"Why, they are—by-laws. I don't know just exactly what they are," broke off Cricket, honestly. "But I think they sound very interesting and grown-up-y. Do you know what they are, Eunice?"

"N—o, not exactly. Do you suppose they are the laws about buying things? or who must buy them, or anything like that?"

"Why, of course!" exclaimed Cricket, with an air of conviction. "You see then, we'll *have* to have by-laws to see about buying the paper, won't we?"

"And what sort of rules do we have?" went on Edna, in the pursuit of information.

"Oh, everything! Let's begin to make them now. You write them down, Edna, for your handwriting is so nice and neat. Take the last leaf of your blank book."

Edna obediently opened her book, and took up her pencil.

"Write 'Rules for the Echo Club' at the top of the page," directed Cricket. "Now, Rule One," when this was down in Edna's careful handwriting.

"How would this do for rule one? 'We make ourselves into a club called the Echo Club.'"

"That's good. Now for rule two.

"Every two weeks we will print a paper called the *Echo*," said Cricket. "Edna, you make up rule three."

"The secretary shall be excused from writing stories," laughed Edna.

"You lazy, lazy thing. That sha'n't be a rule at all," answered Eunice, laughing also.

"How would this do, then, for rule three? 'The Echo Club will not do anything in very hot weather, but sit under the trees and embroider and read, and none of the members shall be allowed to make the others go on long walks and things when it's so roasting hot that nobody wants to stir.' That's a beautiful rule," said Edna, mischievously. Whereupon Cricket flew at her, and rolled her over on the sand, till she cried for mercy.

"Will the meeting please come to order," announced the president. "Let's have the third rule about our ribbons. We'll choose one colour. I vote for pale-green."

"Blue," said Edna, and "Pink," said Cricket, in one breath. The children looked at each other and laughed.

"I'd just as soon have pale-green," said Edna, amiably.

"So would I," agreed Cricket. "Eunice is president, so let's vote for pale-green. How would this do? 'The club will have pale-green ribbon to tie its pencils round its necks.'"

"Round its necks' sounds funny," commented Edna, writing.

"Round its neck, then. But that sounds as if we had only one neck."

"Say, the club will have pale-green ribbon to tie their pencils round their necks," amended Eunice.

"That will do. Now rule four," said Edna, waiting, with pencil raised.

"Shouldn't we have a by-law now?" asked Cricket. "For instance, By-law one: 'The club will buy foolscap paper to print on, and will take up a surscription of five cents to buy it with.'"

"*Subscription*," corrected Eunice. "I should think that would do."

So Edna wrote, neatly:

"Buy-law I. The club will take up a subscription of five cents each, and buy foolscap paper, as much as it needs."

"That's good. Do we need any more by-laws? What else have we to buy?"

"Ain't those enough rules?" asked Eunice. "I can't seem to think of any more rules we want to make."

"When will we have the paper?" asked Edna.

"Depends on when you send in your stories. This is Wednesday. Have you your stories nearly done, girls? I guess it will take some time to print them all out carefully."

"I can finish mine to-morrow," said Eunice.

"Mine's a horrid little thing, but I wasn't born bright," sighed Edna. "I'll get it done by Friday. I can't think up more than five lines a day."

"Mine's all done," said Cricket. "But, oh, girls! a newspaper ought to have ever so many more things than stories in it. We ought to have jokes, and advertisements, and deaths, and marriages, and all that. And puzzles, too."

"Oh-h!" groaned Edna. "Then you'll have to make them up, that's all. I think it's the editor's business, anyway."

"We'll each do a few. That won't be hard," suggested Eunice.

"Suppose nobody dies, or gets married, that we know of?" asked literal Edna.

"Make them up, child," answered Cricket, with a funny air of superiority. "In a paper you can make up *anything*. It doesn't have to be true. Don't you know how often papa says 'that's only a newspaper story?'"

"Making them up is just the trouble," persisted Edna. "If anybody really died, or married, or anything, it would be easy enough to write of it, of course. How silly people are who make real newspapers. Why do they ever make up anything, when real things are happening all the time?"

"It's more fun to make things up," answered Cricket, from the depths of her experience. "But we can write about that old red hen, and about poor little Wallops"—referring to a little black cat, lately deceased. "Then each of you must send me in some things besides your stories, and I'll make some up myself. Let's appoint next Tuesday for a meeting, if I can get the paper done. If I don't, we'll have it as soon as I can get it ready."

"Shall that be a rule?" laughed Eunice.

"No, miss. But suppose we make this a rule—how many rules have we now?"

"Three," said Edna, referring to the constitution.

"Then rule four: 'The paper shall be read on Wednesday afternoons, at three o'clock, in Rocky Nook.' Why, girls! I made up that name just then!" interrupting herself, in her surprise.

"It's a splendid name," the girls said.

"We might call it 'Exiles' Bower,'" laughed Edna, teasingly, for the boys had given that name to Bear Island since the girls' imprisonment there.

"If you like," said Cricket, the unteasable, serenely.

"Don't you think that the next rule ought to be that we won't tell the boys?" asked Edna. "I just know they will tease us out of our senses."

So rule five was duly registered, to the effect that strict secrecy was to be observed, and that they would tell no one but grandma and Auntie Jean.

"There must be another by-law," put in Cricket, reflectively, here, "for we must have some badges, like Marjorie's society."

"What are they?" asked Edna.

"Marjorie took a dime and had the jeweller rub it off smooth, and put some letters on it. We could have E. C. put on ours. Then he put a little pin on it, and she wears it all the time. Don't you suppose auntie would see about them for us?"

"I'm sure she would. She would lend us the money, I guess, and let us make it up from our allowances."

So the next regulation read:

"Buy-law two. We will have badges, made of dimes, with E. C. on them, and will ask mamma to let us have the money for them."

"Doesn't that look club-by?" exclaimed Cricket, enthusiastically, surveying the neatly written page, with its rules and "buy-laws."

"You ought to be the first editor, Edna, for you do write *beautifully*."

"You write my stories, and I'll print the paper, any time," said Edna, brightening.

"No, I won't. I won't let you wiggle out of writing your stories, Edna, if I print *all* the papers. Come, girls, I'm nearly dead with sitting still so long," added Cricket, springing up. "Let's go to ride."

"No, I thank you. This is all I want to do, this hot day," answered Edna, stretching herself out on the sand, with her head in Eunice's lap.

"Oh, lazybones! I'm going to find old Billy, and take him to ride. Good-by!"

CHAPTER XI.

"THE ECHO."

"Girls, we forgot one very important thing," said Cricket, suddenly pausing in her work of copying out carefully, in print, on legal cap, the much-interlined and very untidy looking manuscripts that had been handed in. The three girls were sitting cosily in one end of the broad piazza, Edna lying back in a bamboo steamer chair, reading, Eunice in the hammock, while Cricket, at the table, with both feet curled up on the round of her chair, worked industriously.

"What did we forget?" asked Edna, languidly.

"We forgot to choose names for ourselves, as Jo and the rest did. I don't want to sign just plain Edna Somers to your piece."

"I'm sure I don't want you to," said Edna, with sudden energy. "I just hate my name. I wish mamma hadn't named me till I could choose for myself."

"What a good idea!" said Eunice, admiringly. "I never thought of that. What name would you choose?"

"Hildegarde Genevieve," answered Edna, promptly. "Those are my favourite names. And I wish my last name was Montague."

"Hildegarde Genevieve Montague! That's a beautiful name!" exclaimed Cricket. "Have that for your club name, Edna. Now you choose, Eunice."

"Let me see!" considered Eunice. "I think Esmeralda is just splendid, and I *love* Muriel. Esmeralda Muriel would do."

"And have Le Grand for your last name," begged Cricket. "I think anything with a *Le* in it is so—so stately. But Muriel is one of my favourite names, too, Eunice. What shall I choose? Do you like Seretta?"

"That isn't a real name, is it," asked Edna.

"I made it up the other night, and I think it's sweet. I'll be Seretta Carlillian. I made that up, too. So that's settled," said Cricket, resuming her work, and signing, "Hildegarde Genevieve Montague," very carefully.

The rest of the family had, of course, noticed the sudden literary bent of these young women, and were all curiosity to know the reason of it. The boys gave them no peace, and though the girls stuck to their secret valiantly, Will and Archie managed to worm it from them at last. To the relief of the girls, however, they did not tease, but, on the contrary, quite approved, and even offered to contribute, an offer which the small editor would not accept unconditionally.

"You may write things," she said, rather dubiously, "and *if* I like them I'll print them. But I'm not going to put in any nonsense. This is a really-truly paper, and the girls have written beautiful stories."

She was sole judge of the production, however, for the other girls had agreed that it would be more fun if nobody but the editor knew the contents of the paper till it was read. It proved to be a great deal of work to copy all the paper neatly in printing letters, but Cricket stuck to it faithfully. Auntie advised that she should work regularly, one hour in the morning, and one hour in the afternoon, till she got it done, and Cricket, who, at first, felt obliged to work at it all the morning, very willingly followed her suggestion. Auntie had also undertaken to advance the money for the badges, which a little local watchmaker had promised to have done before Wednesday. He kept his promise, and three prouder little girls never walked than these three, when they fastened on these round, shining pins, with "E. C." embroidered on them, as Cricket said.

Would my little readers like a glimpse of this "really-truly" paper of "really-truly" little girls?

Well, then, the club meeting was held, by common consent, on the piazza, instead of in "Rocky Nook," for the boys insisted on being present, and Auntie Jean hinted that an invitation to herself and grandma would be much appreciated.

"You mustn't anybody laugh," said Eunice, finally, in some trepidation.

"We'll be as sober as—crocodiles," promised Will, "and I don't know anything more serious than a crocodile."

So, when the audience was duly assembled on the piazza, the "Echo Club" marched out of the house, headed by President Eunice, the secretary and treasurer following, while the editor, all in a flutter, carrying the precious paper laid flat in an atlas, brought up the rear. The president sat down, gravely, in a big chair reserved for her, while the secretary took a seat by her side, though she cast a longing look at the hammock, which was regarded as undignified. The editor, vainly trying to control her smiles and restrain her dimples, stood behind the table, and began.

"I copied the top part of it from a real newspaper, auntie," she said, opening the sheet. "Now, boys, remember, if you laugh the least bit, I'll stop. And, oh, auntie, I forgot to say that the boys wrote some of the atoms."

"Atoms?" repeated Auntie Jean, puzzled.

"*Atoms!* Miss Scricket, oh, ho!" called Archie; then, recollecting himself just in time, he clapped his hands over his mouth.

"That's what you said they were, I thought," said Cricket, anxiously. "Don't you know, auntie, those little things that come between the stories, and all that? General atoms. I have written it down."

"Items, dear," said auntie, soberly.

"Items—atoms," repeated Cricket, thoughtfully, comparing the sounds. "Yes, of course. How silly of me. I'll change it right away. Well, the boys wrote most of them, anyway. Now, I'm all ready," and Cricket cleared her throat, and began.

The Echo.

SERELLA CARLILLIAN, *Editor.*

No. 1. *Marbury, Wednesday, July 15th, 18—.* VOL. I.

DELL'S COMPOSITION.

"Oh, dear!" sighed Dell Ripley, "next Friday is Composition Day, and I've got to write a composition. What subject shall I take, mamma?"

"Are there not any subjects in your school composition-book?" asked Mrs. Ripley, a pleasant looking lady of apparently thirty-five.

"Yes'm, but not any I want. Oh, it seems to me that I saw a book up-stairs in the garret with something about compositions in it," and, shaking back her floating curls, the little girl bounded from the room. She ran up the garret stairs, and then began to look for the book. At last she found it, and eagerly opened it, and, as she opened it, a paper fluttered to the floor.

She picked it up, and saw the name "Amy Willard" on it. "Why," she thought, "it's something of Aunt Amy's," and she read it. It was a composition.

"Joan of Arc," cried Dell, "splendid subject, and splendid composition. I wish I could write one as nice."

"Why not take this one?" asked the tempter. Then there was a very long struggle in Dell's heart, but the tempter conquered, and Dell carried the composition down to her own room to copy it. When she had finished it, she read it over, trying to think that it sounded just like any of her own, and that no one would ever know it.

"It sounds just like mine," she said, trying to get rid of that uneasy feeling. "I guess I'll just change this sentence and that one."

"Have you written your composition, dear?" asked Mrs. Ripley, pleasantly, as Dell came slowly down-stairs, and out on the piazza.

"Yes'm," answered Dell, very low.

"You look tired, dear."

"I am."

"What shall I do if I am found out?" thought Dell.

When she went to bed that night she was very unhappy. Her conscience troubled her very much. She wished she had never found the composition, and almost made up her mind to confess, but, alas, only almost.

She turned and tossed till nearly ten o'clock, and then fell asleep, and dreamed that, just as she was reading the composition before the school, her Aunt Amy appeared, and claimed it as her own, thus showing her niece's wickedness. She awoke with a scream that brought her mother to her bedside. Dell's first thought was to tell her mother all, and, without waiting a moment, she confessed her sin.

After that, Dell's compositions were her own.

ESMERALDA MURIEL LE GRAND.

POLLY'S NECKLACE.

"Oh, mamma," exclaimed little Polly More. "To-morrow is my birthday, and what are you going to give me for a present?"

"What do you want?" asked Mrs. More.

"I should like a necklace of some sort. Oh, papa," bounding toward her father, "are you going to give me something?"

"What would you like me to give you?"

"Oh, anything," said Polly.

So the next morning, Polly found by her bedside, when she woke up, a pretty little coral necklace, and a red purse with seventy-five cents in it, and a penknife.

Three or four weeks after, Polly went to visit her uncle, who lived in the country. He was a farmer, and it was haying time, and he was getting in the new hay, and Polly liked to play in the hay with her cousin May. One day, as they were playing there, her coral necklace came unclasped and fell into the hay. She hunted a long time, but could not find it.

Polly went home the next week sorrowing, but the next spring, when the cows had eaten up all the hay, the news came that May had found the necklace, and Polly was happy again.

HILDEGARDE GENEVIEVE MONTAGUE.

POETRY.

TO MY MOTHER.

(*A Lament.*)

Oh, mother dear, why hast thou gone,
And left thy Cricket all alone?
The tears flow often from my eye,
And oft, indeed, I almost cry.

Should danger chance to come to thee,
While thou are sailing on the sea,
With sorrow would our hearts be torn,
And we would be here all forlorn.

Perhaps thou may fall from the deck,
Before papa thy fall could check,
Perhaps they could not rescue thee,
And then, alas! what grief to me.

Of course papa might pull thee out,
Or else some burly sailor, stout.
Oh, dear mamma! I pray thee, strive
To keep thyself, for us alive!

And dear papa, we miss him, too,
Almost as much as we do you.
We long to see his dear old face,
And fold him in our close embrace.

And Marjorie and Donald, too,
We miss you all, but mostly you.
Oh, hurry and grow very strong,
That we may have you back ere long.

SERETTA CARLILLIAN.

Miss Zaidee and Miss Helen Ward have decided that they will patronize the ocean hereafter for their daily bath, rather than the tanks in the cheese factory.

A SAD ACCIDENT.

The other day our editor, and one of the valuable contributors to this paper, were seated on two posts, playing the manly game of bean-bag. The bag was coming to the editor, but somehow, when he grabbed for it, it fell on the ground. Our editor immediately sprang after it, but, in doing so, his dress caught on the post, and he hung up there. He was rescued by Miss Le G. He is now doing well.

POOR PATTY.

Little Patty looked very poor indeed. She sat on a rough stone that was used as a door-step, with her head resting on her hand. Her beautiful golden curls fell way below her waist, over her white neck and shoulders, which her ragged dress did not hide.

Patty had been stolen by gypsies three years before, when she was seven years old. She was very pretty, and because of that the gypsies had stolen her to sell. One night she ran away from the gypsies, and during the day she wandered on till she came to a large town. When it was night again, she was tired and hungry, and she sat down on a door-step and fell fast asleep, and here she was found by Mrs. Bruce, who took her home, thinking she could make her useful in running errands.

So Patty was sitting on the door-step when a rough voice called from inside the house, "Be off with you, you lazy thing! Didn't I tell you an hour ago to be off for the milk? Be off with you, I say."

Poor Patty got off rather slowly, for she didn't feel well, and ran down the street and didn't stop till she got to the store. But coming home she didn't run so fast, for her head ached, and when she got home Nan Bruce scolded her. In a few minutes Patty went up-stairs to her poor garret, where she slept, and threw herself upon the bed, and cried herself to sleep. When she woke up she had a high fever, and in a short time she was delirious. Nan was much alarmed, and sent for the doctor, who said she had scarlet fever, and he got a good nurse for her. For three months no one expected she would recover, but after that she began to get well.

One morning, when she was nearly well, she said suddenly to the doctor, "Doctor, it seems to me as if I had seen you before."

"You have, I guess," said the doctor, laughing. "I have been here every day for three months."

"I don't mean that," said Patty, "but I feel as if I had seen you before those people took me off."

"How old were you when they took you off?" asked the doctor, who knew she had been stolen.

"I think I was seven, for it was on the very day after my birthday, I remember."

"Why, I had a little girl that was stolen the very day after she was seven years old," said the

doctor. "She was carried off by gypsies."

"Why, the gypsies were the very people that carried me off, too."

"Patty, would you like to go and live with me?" asked the doctor.

"Oh, yes, I would. Perhaps I am your little girl, for I am not *hers*."

"Perhaps so. I will see if I can find out about it." The doctor asked Nan Bruce, and she told him all she knew. He then made arrangements to take Patty home with him, for he knew now she was his own little girl. So Patty went to live with the doctor, and she had lovely dresses of porcelain to wear, and a servant to stand *in statu quo* behind her chair at dinner.

SERETTA CARLILLIAN.

MARRIAGES.

Hopvine—Woodbine. On the 21st, Mr. Hopvine, to Miss Woodbine, both of Marbury. No cards.

DEATHS.

On the first of June, little Robin, only child of Mr. and Mrs. Redbreast, aged two months, four days, and three hours.

Little Robin, thou hast left us,
We shall hear thy chirp no more;
Very lonely hast thou left us,
And our hearts are very sore.

On the 7th of June, two little kittens, in the barn of Mrs. Maxwell. We grieve greatly at recording the deaths of these loving and lovely twins, so sad and unexpected. They had a large circle of admirers and friends, who feel greatly overcome that these beautiful young twins are called away.

Also, Wallops, older brother of the above, departed this life on June 10th. He was found dead on the seashore.

Poor little Wallops,
Died of eating scallops.
(He really ate crabs, but crabs wouldn't rhyme.)
We'll see him frisk no more,
For we found him on the shore,
All stiff and cold, expiring in his prime.

TOWN TOPICS.

Miss Cricket Ward has decided to sell out her peanut stand at cost.

Mr. Will and Archie Somers have cleaned the *Gentle Jane*, and they are now prepared to take out parties at reasonable rates. Come early and often.

Mr. Kenneth Ward has nearly recovered from a serious wound he received when he was eloping with his aunt's watch. The path of the transgressor is hard. It was the stones in this case.

Miss Hilda Mason, of East Wellsboro', is expected soon to spend a week with her friend, the editor.

WIT AND HUMOUR.

["None of the wits are original, auntie," put in Cricket, here. "The boys sent some of them in, and they *said* they were, but I don't believe them, and I copied mine, anyway."]

How to get along in the world. Walk.

A little girl visiting the country for the first time, saw a man milking. After looking a few minutes, she asked, "Where do they put it in?"

When is a man thinner than a shingle? When he's a-shaving.

What was the first carriage Washington ever rode in? When he took a *hack* at the little cherry-tree.

What did Lot do when his wife became a pillar of salt? He got a fresh one.

"Mike," asked a man, addressing a bow-legged friend, "are them legs of yourn natural or artificial?" "Artificial, me lad. I went up in a balloon, and walked back."

GENERAL ITEMS.

Letters were received from Dr. Ward and family, that they are enjoying themselves in the Swiss mountains. Mamma is better. She says they have such funny little boys there.

Mr. Billy Ruggles is going to have a new shiny hat. Kenneth sat down on his other one, and it got all flattened out, and it looks like fury, and grandma says he can't wear it any more.

Bridget has a new dishpan.

Luke says he has forty-eight chickens.

Maggie Sampson's little donkey can't go nearly as fast as Mopsie and Charcoal Ward.

Mr. Simon has his summer stock of fresh red and white peppermints in. He won't have any chocolates till August, because he bought such a large stock in May.

There is to be a church sociable in the Methodist church. I wish auntie would condescend to let us go, for we haven't ever been to a Methodist sociable. I never went to any kind of a sociable.

Miss Hildegarde Genevieve Montague wishes to say that, if she was a boy, she doesn't think it would be any fun to cut up pieces of whalebones, and put them under the sheet in his sister's bed.

There will be a special and *very* private meeting of the E. C. in some *very* secret place, to decide whether we will let the boys be honorary members or not. If they are elected honorary members, we will turn them out any time that they don't behave themselves very well indeed.



THE END—FINIS.

The tail-piece was Cricket's ambitious flight of fancy. She drew a long breath and sat down, amid vigorous applause.

"That's very creditable, my little authorlings," said auntie, encouragingly. "Cricket, you did more than your share, I think, if you copied all that, and wrote a story and a poem beside."

"I had them all thought before, auntie. I made up the poetry the day I was caught on the mud-flat. I love to think out stories."

"Oh-h!" groaned Edna. "How any one can think out stories just for fun, I *don't* see. I'd almost rather fight skeeters. Mine's the stupidest story that ever was, but I don't believe I slept a wink for three nights, while I was making it up. You don't catch me writing any stories, girls, when I am editor."

"I am afraid you weren't intended for an author, my dear," said her mother, laughing.

"Somebody must *read* the stories," said Edna, defensively.

CHAPTER XII.

THE HAIRS OF HIS HEAD.

The Maxwell family were coming home from church along the sandy, sunny road. Eunice and Edna, arm in arm, were ahead, laughing and talking over some profound secret. Will and Archie mimicked them behind, while grandmamma and Auntie Jean, under a generous black sun-umbrella, strolled slowly along some distance in the rear. Cricket, in the misery of a dainty organdie, which she *must* keep clean for another Sunday, and with the unhappy consciousness of her Sunday hat of wide, white Leghorn, which, with its weight of pink roses, flopped uncomfortably about her ears, walked along by herself, in an unusually meditative frame of mind. She refused, with dignity, the boys' proposal to walk with them, and told the girls it was too hot to go three abreast.

Presently, down a cross street, she spied a familiar figure, tall and bent, with a head of bristling hair, and a high silk hat,—it was Billy, and she instantly ran to meet him. Billy could never be induced to attend the little Episcopal chapel where Mrs. Maxwell went, but "favoured his own meetin'-'us," he said, which was the little

white Unitarian church by the post-office.

"Folks didn't set easy in Mrs. Maxwell's church," he often said, "and he didn't like to see a minister in a white petticoat, with a black ribbund around his neck." It didn't seem respectful to him to have so much to do with the service. But Billy was very devout in his own way, and never missed service nor Wednesday evening prayer-meeting in his own church.

"H'lo, Billy!" cried Cricket, beaming. "Don't you want to carry my prayer-book? I want to get those wild roses."

Billy was only too delighted.

"Had a good sermon?" pursued Cricket, in very grown-up fashion, as they walked along, side by side, after the roses were secured.

"Oh, very decent, very decent," answered Billy, who always nodded from the text to "Finally."

"What was it about?" went on Cricket, feeling that she must give a Sunday tone to the conversation.

Billy took off his hat and scratched his head, to assist his ideas.

"'Bout—'bout very good things," he said, vaguely. "We sang a pretty hymn, too."

"Did you? What was it?"

"That hymn about 'Hand Around the Wash-rag.' I've heard you a-singin' it."

"Hand around the *wash*-rag! Why Billy Ruggles, what can you mean?"

"Yes," insisted Billy, who had a good ear for music in his poor, cracked head. "You was singin' it las' night."

"I can't imagine what you mean, Billy. When we were on the piazza, do you mean? We didn't sing anything about wash-rags, I'm sure. We didn't sing but three things, anyway, because grandma had a headache."

"It was the first thing you sang," persisted Billy.

"Oh—h! 'Rally Round the Watchword,'" and Cricket, regardless of her Sunday finery, sat down on a stone to laugh. "You *funny* Billy!"

Billy grinned, though he did not see the joke.

"That's as bad as what Helen insisted they sang last Christmas, in the infant class, something about 'Christmas soda's on the breeze!' I don't know what she means," said Cricket, forgetting that Billy would not understand. It was such a relief when any one else, even old Billy, mispronounced words, and thus gave her a chance to laugh at them. It was her heedlessness that made her make so many mistakes, for her quick eyes flashed along the page, taking in the meaning and general form of the words, without grasping the exact spelling.

"Hope you heard a good sermon," said Billy, making conversation in his turn.

"Oh, *yes*, very. I listened to almost all of it. Mr. Clark said something about something being as many as the hairs of your head, and there was a bald-headed man who sat right in front of us, and he only had the teentiest bit of hair, just like a little lambrequin around his head. So I thought I could easily count his hairs, because they were so straight and so long, and so few of them, anyway. And, Billy, do you know, I got so interested that I began to count right out loud once, and I stood up, right there in church, Billy, while the minister was preaching, to see round his head better, and Eunice pulled me down. I was *so* ashamed."

Billy looked so shocked that Cricket hastened to add:

"There weren't very many people who saw me, though, for we sat pretty far back. I *did* listen to the sermon after that, though. I had only counted up to two hundred. I just wonder how many hairs a person has on his head, anyway. I mean a person with the regular amount."

"Three hundred?" hazarded Billy, hazily.

"No, indeed; more than that. Many as a thousand, I guess. Oh, Billy, you have a splendid lot of hair! S'pose I count it this afternoon?"

Billy chuckled assent.

"Let's go out in the orchard, back of the beach. It's all quiet and shady there. The girls will be down by the rocks, and the boys are going for a long walk. So there will be nobody to interrupt us. It will take most all the afternoon, I guess, but I've always wanted to know how many hairs grow on a person's head. I'll come for you after dinner, Billy, don't forget!" and, having arrived at the house, Cricket skipped up the porch steps, and went up-stairs to relieve herself of the bondage of her pink organdie as soon as possible.

After dinner, Cricket found her willing slave waiting for her on the piazza.

"Let's go right off before the others come out, for we don't want a whole raft of children after us," she said, and so they went around the house, through the side gate, into the orchard.

"Here's a lovely, shady spot. You sit right down on this hummock, Billy," ordered Cricket. "Your hair is just *fine* for counting," she went on, taking off Billy's shining beaver.

Billy looked much flattered. He certainly did have a good crop for the purpose. His hair was rather coarse,

very wiry and bristling, about two inches long, and as clean as a daily scrubbing in soap and water could make it.

"Now, where shall I begin? You see you haven't any part, Billy, and there's no place to start from."

"Seem's if my hair wouldn't stay parted," said Billy, meekly, looking troubled by the fact.

"I'll part it right in the middle, and you put your hand up and hold this side down, while I count the other. I'll begin right in front. One—two—three—there, Billy, you moved your hand a little, and some of your hair slipped right up again, and I've lost my place."

"I didn't go to do it," said Billy, pressing his hand down harder on the rebellious hairs. "Is that all right now?"

"Yes, that will do. Now, hold still," and Cricket began again.

"Ninety-nine—one hundred—oh, *Billy!*" for an inquiring wasp came whizzing near, and Billy ducked suddenly to avoid it. "Now I've lost that, and I've got to begin again. Billy, you haven't any string in your pocket, have you? Then I could tie up your hair in bunches when I get to one hundred, and count the bunches afterward."

But Billy hadn't a string.

"I'll run up to the house and get some," said Cricket, darting away. She was back in a few minutes, with a small pasteboard box in her hand.

"This is better than string," she panted. "I got auntie's little box of rubber bands. Now we can count. Never mind holding your hand up, for I can begin anywhere."

She gathered up a lock of hair, counted to one hundred, and twisted an elastic band around it, close to the roots.

"That's one hundred. Now, for the next," she said, with much satisfaction. She counted on, industriously, and soon poor Billy's head bristled with queer-looking little bunches on one side. She was much too engrossed to notice the effect at first.

Some time later, grandmamma and Auntie Jean, strolling leisurely through the orchard, saw ahead of them a funny sight: Billy, sitting meekly on a hummock, his hands on his black broadcloth knees, while Cricket stood behind him, bending over his head, all over the top of which bristled plumy bunches of white hair, which stood up rampantly.

"What in the world is that child doing, making Billy look like a porcupine?" exclaimed grandma, standing still in amazement, unseen by the two.

"Playing Horned Lady, I should think. But I dare say she has purpose in her mind. Listen. Why, mother! she's actually counting Billy's hair!"

At this moment, Cricket, pausing to snap another elastic band around the last bunch, for the first time noticed the effect of her hair dressing.

"Oh, Billy! if you don't look just as if you had a lot of little feather dusters growing on your head!" she cried, holding on to her sides as she laughed.

Billy looked disturbed. He decidedly objected to being laughed at. He put up his hand to feel.

"Don't take them down," said Cricket, pushing his hand away. "I'm going on. My! what a lot of hair people have. Let's see how many bunches I have. Twenty-two—twenty-three. That makes twenty-three hundred, and there's lots more to do, yet. I don't wonder people mean so much when they say, as many as the hairs of your head, do you?"

"How many, Cricket?" asked auntie, laughing, as she and grandma drew nearer.

"Who's that? Oh, auntie!" Cricket looked a little abashed. "I'm only counting Billy's hair," she explained. "Mr. Clark said this morning that, if we counted our mercies, we should find them as many as the hairs of our heads."

"It might be easier to count the mercies," said auntie, still laughing.

"Yes, I thought of that coming home from church," said Cricket, going on with her work of gathering up wisps of Billy's hair into plumes, and fastening them by the bands, though without counting. "Then I didn't know exactly what my mercies are, excepting that 'Liza says it is a mercy I'm not twins."

"What had you been doing when she said that, Jean?" immediately asked grandma, who never used her nickname.

"Nothing, much," said Cricket, "only 'Liza gets cranky sometimes, you know."

"That won't do, Cricket," said Auntie Jean, scenting mischief. "Tell me what you did."

"Really, it wasn't much. It was this morning, and 'Liza had Helen in the bath-tub bathing her, and I went into the nursery a moment, and Zaidee was in bed, and she said her leg hurt her, and 'Liza was going to rub it with 'Pond's Extrap,—that's what she calls Pond's Extract, you know," taking breath,—and I only meant to help 'Liza, really and truly. So I took down the bottle and began to rub Zaidee's legs. I thought the Pond's Extract seemed to have gotten dreadfully sticky, and it was all thick and dark like molasses, and I could hardly rub at all with it, and Zaidee said she didn't like it, and she cried. But I thought it was the best thing to do for her, so I told her a story to keep her quiet, till I got both her legs all rubbed. Then 'Liza came in, and

wanted to know what made Zaidee's legs so sticky, and the sheets and her nightdress were pretty bad, because she wiggled so that I spilled some. 'Liza just snatched the bottle away, very unpolitely, when I only told her that I had been helping her because she was so busy, and Zaidee wanted her legs rubbed. 'It's Kemp's Balsam,' she said, 'and I'm giving it to Helen for her cough, and it's not Pond's Extract, at all.' But it was a Pond's Extract bottle, auntie, truly, so how should I know? And then she said, 'it was a mercy I wasn't twins,'" finished Cricket, looking much aggrieved.

Auntie laughed till the tears came into her eyes.

"Kemp's Balsam, of all sticky things!" she said. "Poor Zaidee! did she have to be scraped?"

"'Liza said she guessed she would have to scrape her,'" admitted Cricket, reluctantly. "And the things on the bed, and her nightdress, had to be changed. I kept thinking it was pretty funny looking stuff for Pond's Extract, but I thought perhaps it was rancid."

"Rancid Pond's Extract! Oh, what a girl!" laughed grandma, but patting her head, consolingly, "Our little Jean is very nice, but I think I'm glad, myself, you're not twins."

"There'd be two of us to fall through ceilings, then," meditated Cricket, "for I suppose if I was twins we'd be always together like Zaidee and Helen. No, I'm glad there is only one of me. It's more convenient. I don't want to count any more, now, Billy, but would you mind keeping your hair that way for a day or two, so I could count whenever I like?"

And if auntie had not interposed in his behalf, I do not know but Billy might still be walking the streets of Marbury with his crested decoration.

CHAPTER XIII.

A WRESTLING MATCH.

"That's it! Prime! Now, again!" shouted Will, encouragingly, and Cricket, in her blue gymnasium suit, panting and laughing, put her shoulder to Archie's again, and stood in position. Will was giving her a lesson in wrestling, at her particular request, and she was proving an apt pupil, for the slender, elastic little figure and supple muscles made up for any lack of strength.

"Good, good!" repeated Will, as Cricket, swaying and tugging, and bending backward almost double, came up like a steel wire. "Bravo! we'll soon have you champion lady wrestler in a dime museum. At him again! good enough! hurra!" for Cricket, slipping through Archie's grasp like a knotless thread, took him suddenly unawares, and fairly and squarely tripped him up.

"By jove!" ejaculated Archie, still on his back, too much surprised to get up.

"Well done, Miss Scricket!" applauded Will. "Bet you can't do it again."

"Come over here, and I'll try *you*," offered Cricket, and Will, laughingly, put his arm around her waist. But his superior size and strength soon told, and Cricket found herself down on her back.

"But you do well, youngster," said Will, patronizingly. "Try that twist once more that you tripped Archie up on. That's a good one! Now, again! That would fetch anybody if they weren't expecting it."

"I'm tired now," said Cricket, throwing herself on the grass, for they were in the orchard. "Let's rest awhile." She clasped her hands above her head, and lay back on the grass. Archie drew himself up on to one of the low gnarled trees and balanced himself in a very precarious way directly over her head.

"If you fall off that limb, you will come straight down and break my nose," warned Cricket.

"There isn't enough of it to break, miss," said Archie, balancing himself with care, as he tried to see if he could kneel upon a horizontal branch without holding on.

"You'll have to be of a very *equilibrrious* nature to do that," said Cricket, rolling hastily out of her dangerous position, just in time, for Archie overbalanced himself, and came down with a crash.

"Now, see what you've done," said Archie, sitting up and feeling of his back. "You spoke at the wrong time. I might have broken my neck."

Cricket meditated a moment, then addressed the sky, thoughtfully.

"Isn't it funny that when anything happens to a boy all by his own fault, he always says to somebody, 'See what you've made me do.' Anybody would think *I'd* made Archie fall there."

"Well, didn't you?"

"When Donald can't find anything that he's gone and lost himself," went on Cricket, still addressing the sky, "he always says he wishes the girls would let his things alone. Boys are the *funniest*."

"If they're any funnier than girls, I'll eat my boots," said Archie, firing green apples at a mark. "Girls are so finicky. There's Edna, squeals if you touch her. If I give her hair just one little yank, you would think I'd pulled her scalp off. If I give Will a good punch"—illustrating with a resounding whack—"he doesn't squeal."

"No, but he hits back," said Cricket, laughing, as Will levelled Archie, by a vigorous thump. "If Edna should hit you a few times like that, you wouldn't tease her so."

"And she's always so careful of her clothes," went on Archie, ignoring this point; "can't do this, because she'll spoil her apron, can't do that, because she'll muss her hair."

"Boys ar'n't talked to about their clothes as girls are," said Cricket, with a sigh. "If you just heard 'Liza talk when we tear our clothes! She has to mend them. Wouldn't I be happy if I could go around all the time in my gymnasium suit. I feel *so* light and airy."

"And girls are so affected," pursued Archie. "You wouldn't walk with us yesterday coming home from church, and why not? 'Cause you had your best bonnet on, and you carried your head too high. *So* affected!"

"It wasn't affectedness, it was got-to-do-it-ness," said Cricket, stoutly. "If you had to go to church with a great, big, flappy, floppy hat on, that joggled your ears all the time, 'cause the roses were so heavy, and if you had to be careful to keep your pink organdie clean for next Sunday, and if you had a teasy cousin, who, likely as not, would take hold of your arm, and crunch your sleeves all down, most probably you'd have walked all by yourself, too, and tried to keep yourself respectable so 'Liza wouldn't scold. But you're a boy," finished Cricket, with a burst of envy, "and so you don't bother about clothes. And, anyway, boys will never admit they're to blame about anything," returning suddenly to the original charge.

"Because they never are, of course," answered Archie, turning a back somersault. "It's always somebody else's fault."

"Did you hear auntie tell that funny story about Archie, last night, Will?" asked Cricket.

"Funny story about me, miss? There never was any funny story about me."

"This was a little bit funny, anyway. Auntie said you weren't but three years old, and she was visiting with you, at Kayuna. It was early one morning, before breakfast, and the piazza had just been washed up, and wasn't dry yet. Papa was reading a newspaper, and you were running up and down the piazza, showing off."

"Showing off!" repeated Archie, with a sniff of disdain.

"Yes, sir, showing off. Auntie said so. She said you always liked to, even then. Stop firing apples at me. You nearly hit me that time. You stood still just in front of papa, and gave a little kick at him, and your foot slipped, and down you went on your back. And you got up, as angry as could be, and you said, 'Now see what you made me do,' and you gave another kick at him, and down you went again. Then auntie said you screamed out, 'Now you've done it again. You've done it again.' And she says that ever since, you always say that, no matter what happens to you."

"There comes grandma," said Archie, changing the subject, immediately, since he knew by long experience that Cricket was apt to get the best of him, in such conversations.

"She's been to see that sick woman," said Cricket, jumping up and running to meet her. She had the most unbounded admiration for her stately, handsome grandmother, who by some strange attraction of opposites, had an especially soft place in her heart for her hoydenish little namesake.

Grandmother Maxwell was by no means an old lady yet, in spite of her flock of grandchildren, for she was only just sixty, and was as erect and vigorous, in spite of her snow-white hair, as a girl. Beauty-loving little Cricket thought her dead perfection, and adored her.

"What a hot little face," said grandmother, lightly touching Cricket's cheek. Cricket put her arm about her grandmother's waist, which she was just tall enough to do, and walked along beside her.

"The boys have been teaching me to wrestle," she explained. "I'm learning fast, grandma. It's just as easy. Get up, Archie, and let me show grandma how I can throw you."

"Throw me! well, I like that. I happened to stumble on a stone, grandma, and Cricket thinks she threw me. She couldn't do it again to save her life."

"Come and try, then," said Cricket, invitingly. But Archie declined, on the plea of its being too hot.

"Isn't he lazy, grandma?" said Cricket, disdainfully. "But I can show you, grandma, how we do it. Put your arm around me this way, and take hold of my hand. Now then, see. I try to get my foot around your ankle, quickly, and give a little jerk, and pull this way—"

And to the unbounded astonishment of all three, stately grandma suddenly and unexpectedly measured her length on the grass, with Cricket on top of her. Cricket's illustration had been altogether too graphic.

"Jean!" gasped grandma, as she went over. Cricket rolled over and sprang to her feet in a flash.

"Oh, grandma! please excuse me! I'm so sorry! I didn't mean to. I never thought I could do it so quickly, for you're so large. I only meant to show you."

Will and Archie were bending over grandma, to help her rise. Her foot was twisted under her.

"Wait, boys," she said. "I'm lying on my foot."

It is not easy for a large person who is lying on her back, with her foot doubled up under her, to find her centre of gravity. It was several minutes before she could be helped to a sitting position. She was very pale, although she laughed.

"Children, I'm really afraid,—Jean, you absurd child! how did you throw me over so quickly? I really *am* afraid

that my ankle is sprained. I don't think I can step on it. See if you can help me to stand, boys, and I'll try it."

"Oh, grandma!" groaned Cricket, in horror. "Have I sprained your ankle?"

"It probably isn't bad, dear," said grandma, quickly. "At any rate, you didn't mean to—Hush, Archie!" as that young man gave Cricket a reproachful—

"Now you *have* done it!"

Will and Archie, being stout, well-grown boys, easily raised grandma to her feet, or, to her foot, rather, for she immediately found she could not bear her weight on her left ankle, and she sat down rather suddenly again.

"Dear me! this is a dignified position for a grandmother," she said. "Never mind, dear. It was only an accident. Take off my shoe, please, for my foot is swelling, I think. Archie, go for Luke, and tell him to bring a piazza-chair, and I think you can manage to carry me in on that, can't you? Then tell Auntie Jean that I'm here, and have sprained my ankle, and tell her to have some arnica and bandages ready when I get there. Why, *don't* cry, darling," as two big tears welled up in Cricket's gray eyes, and splashed over her cheeks, where her dimples were entirely out of sight, at the dreadful thought that she had sprained grandma's ankle.

In a few moments Auntie Jean came flying across the orchard, bandages and arnica in hand, while the waitress came after with a water-pitcher.

"*Mother!*" said Mrs. Somers, in greatest surprise. "How did you manage to fall and sprain your ankle on this perfectly level ground?"

"It's rather humiliating to confess that I was wrestling with my granddaughter, and that she got the best of me," returned grandma, patting Cricket's hand. "It's my first and last pugilistic performance."

"It's my fault," burst out Cricket, "and I ought to be put in jail. Will had been showing me how to wrestle, and he had taught me such a good twist, that I caught Archie on, and I thought I'd just show grandma—just barely show her, auntie, and I put my foot around her ankle, and somehow, she went right over like ninepins, and doubled up her foot. Oh, grandma! can you ever walk again?"

Grandma's lips were getting rather white with pain from her foot, but she laughed again, and said, brightly:

"Yes, indeed, little maid, I will be all right in a week or two."

"A week!" groaned Cricket. "I thought you were going to say to-morrow."

Auntie Jean had slipped off grandma's stocking, and was bathing her rapidly swelling foot with arnica. In a few minutes, Will, and Archie, and Luke appeared, bringing a piazza-chair, and two stout poles. Auntie Jean bandaged the foot temporarily, and then Luke and Will helped grandma up in the chair. They slipped the poles lengthwise under the chair, and Luke stood ready to lift the front ends as Will and Archie took the rear ones.

"Wait a moment," said Aunt Jean, as the procession was ready to start. "Can't I fix a support for your foot, mother? It will hurt it dreadfully to hang it down."

"Put a stick across the poles, and the cushion on it," suggested Cricket, quickly, "and lay her foot on that." She picked up a stout stick, and laid it in place, while Archie put the cushion on it, and adjusted grandma's foot on it.

"That's a capital suggestion," said grandma, approvingly. "That feels very comfortable. Are you sure you can lift me, boys?"

"Could carry a ton this way, Mrs. Maxwell," said Luke. "All ready, boys. Hist all together, now." And as they all "histed" the procession moved. Auntie Jean and Cricket walked on either side, keeping the cushion and stick in place. So grandma finally arrived, was helped up the piazza steps, and into her own room, which was, fortunately, on the first floor.

CHAPTER XIV.

PLAYING NURSE.

Poor Cricket went around with a face as long as her arm, all the rest of the day, dreadfully cast down by this unfortunate result of her wrestling lessons. For a while, she was almost ready to vow that she would never do anything again that the boys did, but when she thought of all the lovely things this would cut her off from, she couldn't make up her mind to go that length.



"SHE BURIED HERSELF IN THE STORY FOR 'THE ECHO'"

Auntie Jean soon assured her that the sprain was not at all serious, and that the inflammation seemed to be going down already, but her heart was very heavy. She would not go sailing with the boys, nor sit under the rocks with the girls, and at last she buried herself in her next story for the *Echo*. A very tragic and mournful tale it was, of a naughty little girl, who was left in charge of her small brother, but who ran away, all by herself, up garret, to play, and when she went back she found her poor little baby brother had fallen into the bath-tub, which was left half full of water, and was drowned. Picturing the remorse of her heroine, and how they finally brought the baby back to life, although he had been in the water all the afternoon,—of course Cricket did not mind a little thing like that,—somewhat relieved her mind. By supper-time she had sufficiently recovered so that she could allow herself to smile.

Will came in from the post-office, waving a letter that finished the work. It was from Hilda Mason, saying that she could come on Friday next, as Cricket, with auntie's permission, had written, asking her to do, to spend a week.

"Goody! goody!" cried Cricket, dancing around, with her dimples quite in evidence again. "Won't we have fun! and she can write a story for the 'Echo,' too."

"What bliss!" remarked Archie, bringing all her curly hair over her face with a sweep of his arm.

"It's a great honour to be a contributor to a paper, Mr. Archie, so," shaking back her hair, and pulling his.

"Especially for one that pays so liberally as the 'Echo,'" teased Archie.

"You're a model of sarcasticity, I suppose you think," said Cricket, tossing her head. "Auntie, will you take us to Plymouth some day? I know Hilda will want to see Plymouth Rock."

"Watch her that she doesn't carry it off in her pocket," advised Archie.

"And all the other interesting things in Plymouth," went on Cricket, turning her back on him. "And we'll go over to Bear Island for a picnic, girls."

"Yes, if you'll promise—" began Edna.

"Goodness, yes! if you won't say anything more about it," interrupted Cricket, hastily. "And, oh, auntie! couldn't we have some charades? Some real, regular charades, I mean, not little ones all by ourselves."

"I'll be in them, if you'll have something I like," offered Archie, condescendingly.

"If we have any charades, you may be sure we won't ask you," returned Cricket, crushingly. "I'll have Will, though. He's a very good actress, and he doesn't spoil everything, as some other people do."

"Thank you," said Will, making a bow, with his hand on his heart.

"I'm out of it, then," said Archie, "for I know I'm not a good actress."

"Of course I meant actor. There isn't much difference, anyway. Just two letters. Anyway, we'll have a beautiful

time. You'll have Edna, Eunice, and I'll have Hilda."

"What do you suppose would happen if it should chance to be a rainy week, and I should have you all on my hands to entertain in the house, now, while grandma is laid up? Would there be any house left?" asked Auntie Jean.

"The cellar," said Eunice. "But I'd be sorry for you, auntie."

"And I for myself. But I don't think it will rain, and you'll probably have a lovely time together."

"Don't expect too much," advised Will. "Anticipation is always better than reality, you know."

"It wouldn't be, if people always had as good a time as they expected," remarked Cricket, thoughtfully.

There was a shout at this.

"Exactly, little wiseacre. That's the trouble," laughed auntie. "Write to Hilda to come on the 4.10 train Friday afternoon, and we'll all be ready to help you both have as good a time as you anticipate."

Cricket departed to write the following letter:

"DEAREST OLD HILDA:

"I was so glad to get your letter that I nearly jumped out of my shoes. We'll have the greatest fun that ever was, and auntie will take us to Plymouth, and I'll guess Will will sail us out beyond the Gurnet Light, and we can have a picnic on the island, perhaps. What do you think I've gone and done to-day? I expect you'll say it's just like me, and I'm sure it isn't like anybody else, and I'm awfully morterfied. I wrestled with grandmother, my grandmother Maxwell, when she didn't know I was going to, and I tipped her right over accidentally, without meaning to, and I've almost broken her leg!!! Isn't that *too dreadful*? I didn't quite break her leg, but I sprained her ankle, so she can't walk. I never knew anybody to do such terrible, morterfying things as I do. I do hope I'll get to be proper and good when I'm grown-up. It would be very nice to be born proper, and *very* nice for my mother, but then I wouldn't have had so much fun. I want to see you so much that I can't wait, hardly. It seems a million years till Friday. Remember you're to stay a whole week, and we'll have *loads* of fun. Auntie says come on the 4.10 train, and we'll meet you.

"Yours very lovingest,

"JEAN MAXWELL."

The next morning, after breakfast, when grandma was up and dressed, with her sprained foot resting on a cushioned chair in front of her, Cricket presented herself at the door.

"I've come to be your legger, grandma," she announced, "and I'll read to you, or amuse you, or play dominos or halma with you, or anything you like. Or we might play go-bang. That's very interesting."

"Thank you, little granddaughter," said grandmother, much amused, but touched as well. "I'll be very glad to have a legger, but, after all, it wasn't my eyes that were sprained, so I can read very well for myself. I couldn't think of keeping you in all this beautiful day."

But Cricket begged to be allowed to stay with her, and stay she did. A deft little nurse she proved. She initiated grandmother into the mysteries of go-bang, and the "Chequered Game of Life;" she read in the morning papers the articles that grandmother pointed out, and let herself be taught checkers and backgammon, showing surprising quickness in learning. At last she nearly paralyzed her grandmother by voluntarily suggesting her going and bringing her knitting, to knit a little, "while we just plain talk for a change," she said.

So the little maid ensconced herself in a chair near grandma's large one, with her wash-rag. Grandma took up her knitting, also, and the needles clicked, socially.

"Why couldn't you tell me a story? I always forget to talk while I'm knitting, so I can't be very entertaining," said Cricket, laboriously pushing her needle through her very tight stitches, and twisting her face into a very hard knot. The boys said Cricket knit as much with her face as with her fingers.

CHAPTER XV.

A KNITTING BEE.

"What shall the story be about?" asked grandma, her needles flashing as they flew.

"When you were a little girl," answered Cricket, promptly, in the usual formula. "Oh, grandma! I have an idea! haven't you a box of old things that I could look over, and select something for you to tell me a story about, like that dear old grandma in 'Old-Fashioned Girl?'"

"Yes, Jean, I have the very thing, and it's a good idea. Bring me that little table that stands in the corner. That's right. Put it close beside me. Now, open these drawers—yes, pull them way out. Now, lift that dividing piece. You see the bottom is inlaid. Touch the second one of the little black inlaid circles."

"A secret drawer!" cried Cricket, excitedly. "Oh, grandma! how book-y!"

"Yes. Grandpa brought this table from China, years ago. It is full of secret places."

Cricket touched the spring, and the supposed bottom flew up, showing a box below. The little stand was really more of a cabinet than a table, though it had a flat top and rolled easily on its castors. In the box thus opened were all sorts of things.

"They are all old keepsakes," said grandma. "Find something you want to hear about."

Cricket lifted a string of oddly carved beads.

"This, grandma. Isn't it funny? Has it an interesting story?"

Grandma took the beads in her hands, thoughtfully.

"It's an old keepsake, to be sure, and I used to be very fond of it when I was a girl, and I wore it a good deal, but I don't know that there is any story connected with it. But I'll tell you how I got it. It taught me a bit of a lesson. I'll tell you the story, and you can guess the lesson for yourself, if you can.

"You know I lived in Boston when I was a girl. I went to a private school there, of, perhaps, twenty girls. It was kept by Miss Sarah and Miss Abbie Cartwright. We all loved Miss Sarah, but none of us liked Miss Abbie, and I don't wonder at it when I think how little she understood girls.

"We used to recite seated in a semi-circle around the teacher, and all whispering was strictly forbidden during the recitation. One day—but I must stop here, and tell you that we all wore white stockings and low shoes then. We never had any high shoes at all. Our white stockings must always be fresh and clean, of course, and I always put on a clean pair every day. A soiled stocking would have made us feel simply disgraced. Coloured stockings were perfectly unknown as far as I remember, and I should have felt dreadfully mortified to wear anything but white."

"Oh, I know! like Ellen in the 'Wide, Wide World,'" broke in Cricket. "Don't you remember her horrid aunt, who dyed all her white stockings gray, and she felt so badly? I never knew why. Wouldn't I feel *silly* in white stockings now!"

"Yes, but if everybody wore them, it would be different. There was one girl, Phœbe Dawson, in my class, who was a very untidy girl. She always had hooks off her dress, or a hook and eye put together that did not mate, or her dress was broken from its gathers. *Her* stockings were always grimy around the ankles. Ours were always smoothly gartered up, but hers wrinkled down over her shoes."

"Yes," nodded Cricket, "Sort of mousquetaire stockings."

Grandma laughed. "That exactly describes it. I know now there was some excuse for her getting her stockings so dirty, for she had a much longer walk to school than any of us did, as she came from Charlestown,—over a long, dusty road.

"So, one day, as I was saying, the recitation was just over, and Miss Abbie was talking about something just to fill up the time till the class bell should ring. Phœbe Dawson sat just opposite me in the half circle. I can see her now. The part in her hair was as uneven as possible—what we used to call a 'rail-fence' parting, and her braids straggled unevenly down behind her ears. She had forgotten the brooch that should have fastened her collar. The facing of her dress was ripped and was hanging down, and her pantalets were actually dirty."

"Pantalets, grandma?"

"Yes, we all wore pantalets, beautifully starched and ironed, that came nearly to the tops of our village-ties, as we called them. We had very fancy ones for Sundays, and plainer ones for every day, but we were very particular about them. Phœbe sat with her feet crossed and actually sticking out in front of her—which was considered very bad manners—and her stockings were very grimy.

"I forgot about the rule of no whispering, and I said, suddenly, to Dolly Chipman, who sat on the other side of me, 'Pearl-gray stockings are the latest thing from Paris. You can always depend on Phœbe Dawson to set the style—pig-sty-le.'

"Instantly Miss Abbie's cold, gray eyes were on me.

"'Did you speak, Miss Winthrop?' for we were all called, very formally, by our last names.

"'Yes'm,' I answered, very meekly.

"'Very well, then, we will hear the remark you made, and judge if it was necessary enough to excuse you for breaking the rule.'

"I fairly gasped, for nothing would have made me repeat the remark, and hurt Phœbe's feelings. In spite of her untidiness, we all liked her, for she was always good company. Besides, we really respected her, for she was one of the best scholars in the class.

"'Please excuse me, Miss Abbie,' I said, getting furiously red. 'It was a silly little remark I made, and I had no business to make it.'

"'We will be the best judge of that, Miss Winthrop,' she said, in her severest tones. Just then the class bell rang outside the room. This happened to be the last class of the morning. Some of the girls got up to go, but Miss Abbie motioned them down.

"'If you choose to keep the whole class waiting,' she said to me, 'it will not be pleasant, but we can wait. I

hope you enjoy feeling we are all waiting for you."

"How perfectly horrid of her!" cried Cricket.

"I really think it was, myself. Well, the girls groaned softly, and frowned at me, and motioned 'tell,' with their lips, but nothing would have induced me to have repeated my silly little speech, and make them all laugh at Phœbe.

"I was ashamed of myself already, for saying a mean thing of one of my classmates, even to one girl, and I certainly did not intend to repeat the remark for the benefit of the whole class.

"I can't tell you before them all, Miss Abbie,' I said, desperately, 'but I will tell you all by yourself. It was something I had no business to say.'

"If it was fitting to be said to one girl, it is fitting to be heard by all,' she said, inexorably. I have always thought that she was very dull not to see that it must have been some uncomplimentary personal remark—possibly about herself, for all she knew."

"Oh, I wish it had been!" broke in Cricket.

"I am very glad it wasn't. But we were well-trained girls in those days, and rarely thought of grumbling at anything our teachers did. We might not like them, but I don't remember talking about them much.

"We are waiting,' she said, again, after a moment.

"I *can't* tell you before the class,' I repeated, obstinately. 'But I'll tell you by yourself. I'm ashamed I said it, anyway.'

"Perhaps Phœbe had noticed me glance at her, or perhaps she knew, more than we realized, that we sometimes made fun of her untidiness, for she suddenly said, good-naturedly:

"Do tell what it is, if it's anything about me, I sha'n't care. I'd much rather go home and get my dinner.'

"Was it about Phœbe?' asked Miss Abbie, instantly.

"To this point-blank question, I had to say 'Yes.'

"Tell it,' urged Phœbe, good-naturedly.

"Well, then,' I began, desperately,—but I could not say it. I hesitated, and then added, quickly:

"I said I wondered how Phœbe Dawson always managed to keep herself looking so nice!"

"A little surprised look, then a laugh, went around the class. Every one knew that I was not speaking the truth, and I dare say Miss Abbie knew it herself. She cast a very sharp glance at me, but, nevertheless, dismissed the class. Every one surrounded me in the cloak-room, laughing, and teasing me about what I had said. But I only waited till Miss Sarah was at liberty, and then I went to her and told her the story. I was very angry, and in a state of great indignation against Miss Abbie, and finally I burst out with, 'She made me tell that lie, herself!'"

"Hush! my dear!" Miss Sarah said, gravely. 'If you think, you will see that the trouble was that your sense of politeness was stronger than your sense of truth. Again, if you hadn't broken the rule about whispering in class in the first place, nothing would have happened. So I think we won't blame Miss Abbie. I will tell her about it myself, and nothing more will be said about it to you.'

"I thought Miss Sarah was very good and kind, but my conscience troubled me very much. Phœbe Dawson, too, made me feel thoroughly ashamed of myself. When she came to school the next day she brought me this lovely string of beads, which she said her uncle had brought her home from India.

"You had all that trouble on my account yesterday,' she said, in her good-natured way, 'so I brought you these to make up. My uncle brings me quantities of things, so you must take these, to please me,' for, of course, I protested against taking them.

"You needn't have minded about telling what you really did say,' she went on. 'I know I'm dreadfully untidy, but if I had a mother, or a sister, or any one to look out for me, I'd be different, perhaps,' and her eyes filled with tears.

"Well, I grew very fond of Phœbe Dawson after that, and soon I went to see her. She had a lovely home, full of beautiful things, but everything was as untidy and uncared for as she was herself. Phœbe's mother had died when she was a baby, and her father was a great scholar, who was always buried in his books, and the two servants managed things as they liked. But Phœbe improved very much as she grew older, and we remained friends always."

"Is she living now?" asked Cricket, turning over the beads with interest.

"No, she died several years ago, and she was the grandmother of your little friend, Emily Drayton."

"Was she? How funny! And what was the lesson you learned, grandma?"

"You may guess that for yourself," said grandma, smiling. "Will you choose again?"

CHAPTER XVI.

TWO LITTLE RUNAWAYS.

Cricket dived into the box again.

"What's in this paper?" she asked.

Grandma took the folded sheet, and carefully opened it. There were two soft curls of bright gold hair, fastened to the middle of it by sealing wax.

"These are two little curls I cut from the children's heads when they were small. *My* children, I mean. Your mamma's and Auntie Jean's. It was the first time their hair was ever cut, and how badly I felt, to have to have it done!"

"But why did you do it?" asked Cricket.

"Naughty little things! I had to."

"Oh, *do* tell me about that. I just love hearing about mamma when she was naughty!" begged Cricket, turning over the soft gold curls. "It's just exactly like Kenneth's and Helen's, isn't it? And mamma's hair isn't very much darker, now, is it? What a shame you had to cut it!"

"Indeed it was. I was so proud of their lovely hair, and they were such lovely children, everybody said. They were little things. Auntie Jean was nearly five, and your mamma was three. I was visiting my sister in Philadelphia with them both. It was in May, but it was very warm. The children were still in the habit of taking an afternoon nap. One day they were put to bed, as usual, about two o'clock, and my sister and myself went down-town for some shopping. I had a new nursemaid, whom I left in charge, of course. But she was careless, I suppose, and probably went down-stairs to gossip with the other servants.

"Presently the children woke up, and as they found there was no one with them, they slipped off the bed by themselves. They were entirely undressed and in their little night-clothes, with bare feet. They ran around upstairs for a while, and then, finding nobody about, they ran down-stairs. The front door stood ajar, so out they slipped, and pattered away down the street. They were always independent children, and not a bit afraid of anything, so when they found they were out all alone by themselves, they decided to go and 'see uncle.' They had been taken to his office down-town several times. My sister lived in what was then a very quiet part of Philadelphia, and near their home were several vacant lots. The children strayed in here to pick some grasses and weeds, which they thought were flowers.

"Unfortunately, a lot of burdocks grew there, and, of course, the children picked them, and stuck them together, with great delight. Probably some of them got caught accidentally in the hair of one of them, for, as far as we could make out from their story afterwards, they twisted them in each other's curls, till there was just a mat of burs, all over their heads. Then, of course, when they tried to take them out, they only made matters worse, so they gave it up and trotted on. Presently they came to a grocery store, where all sorts of things stood outside of the door.

"Strawberries were in the market, so these little wretches instantly plunged both hands into a box of them, and stuffed them into their mouths. Next they sat themselves down in a corner made by some big boxes, and quietly helped themselves to a box of strawberries apiece. You can imagine the state of their little night-dresses, when they were through with this feast, just a mass of strawberry stain. They were so small and so quiet, that no one in the store noticed them for some time, and no one chanced to pass. At last a lady came by, and spied them. Of course she instantly saw they were runaways, and spoke to them.

"'We isn't yunning away,' Jean insisted, 'we is only going to see uncle.'"

"'But where is your mamma?' persisted the lady.

"'Her's gone to see uncle, too,' said Jean. The lady knew they had probably run away from some neighbouring house, so she went into the store to ask a clerk to come and see if he knew them. But while she was gone, the children slipped away down the side street. The clerk told us all about this afterwards, for it was a store where my sister often went.

"Then the little ones probably wandered around a good deal, though we never knew where, except that they came to some water in a gutter, somewhere, and took to it like ducks. They must have paddled in it for some time—'washing their feet,' Jean told us afterwards, as an excuse.

"Of course, by this time they had collected a crowd around them, for just imagine what they looked like! Nothing on but white night-dresses—I mean, of course, that were originally white,—but now spattered a foot deep with muddy water, and stained all over with crushed strawberries; and they were barefooted, with their golden curls stuck full of burs, till they looked like little porcupines."

"*Grandma!* how funny! and to think that was mamma," broke in Cricket, in great enjoyment of the picture.

"They must have looked as badly as Zaidee and Helen did when they came in from swimming in the tanks at the cheese factory the other day."

"Worse, if anything, because the strawberry stains made them look as if they had been through the wars, poor little mites. At last a policeman took them in charge."

"Think of mamma being actually arrested! That's worse than anything that's ever happened to me," said Cricket.

"That's your good fortune," laughed grandma. "Your wash-rag isn't getting along very fast, is it? I thought you were going to knit as I talk."

"Oh, I am! I am!" cried Cricket, scrabbling up her wash-rag, which she had entirely forgotten. "Go on, grandma."

"So a policeman took them in charge. He said the children didn't seem a bit frightened, but took everything very coolly, insisting all the time that they were on the way to see uncle."

"'Who is uncle?' asked the policeman, and Jean said: 'He's Uncle Darling, and he lives on Wide Stweet.'

"'But what's his name?' asked the policeman, thinking the children were calling him by their pet name."

"'Uncle Darling,' Jean kept repeating."

"'We'll take them to the station, and report at headquarters,' said the policeman, finally."

"Think of mamma's actually being taken to the lock-up," murmured Cricket.

"But the children were very determined little things, and insisted that they were going to Wide Stweet to see uncle. Presently a gentleman passed, and asked the reason of the commotion."

"'Runaways,' somebody answered, whereupon Jean instantly piped up, 'I say I *isn't* yunning away. I is goin' to Wide Stweet to see Uncle Darling.'

"'Darling?' said the gentleman. 'I know Darling of Broad Street. These little scraps must have slipped away from his house. Call a cab, policeman, and we'll go and see.'

"So a cab was called, and the policeman mounted the box, and the man got inside with the children, and off they went to Broad Street, which Jean called Wide Stweet."

"Imagine your great-uncle's feelings, when suddenly his office door opened, and a gentleman appeared leading those two ridiculous looking little creatures."

"Their faces were grimy, their hair bristling with burs, their feet splashed with mud, their little straight night-gowns stained with strawberry juice from neck to hem,—looking startingly like blood at first sight,—but in spite of all, the most beaming of smiles, for they had had a beautiful time."

"'We has tum to see 'oo,' said Margaret, giving him a very burry hug, for as she threw her arms around his neck, the burs in her hair caught in his heavy beard. Margaret screamed as her hair pulled, and they had some trouble to get her disentangled."

"'We hasn't yunned away, Uncle Darling. We has came in a carriage,' said Jean."

"The gentleman was a business friend of your great-uncle's. He delivered the children over into his charge, telling him the story. Of course he started home with them immediately, knowing how frightened we would be if we got home and discovered that they were missing."

"Fortunately for my peace of mind, we had been detained later than we expected to be, and so just as we got out of the horse-cars in front of my sister's house, a cab drew up at the door, and out got your uncle, and with him two of the most disreputable looking little objects you ever saw. We could hardly believe our eyes."

"'We has tum home aden,' Margaret called, cheerfully, as she saw us."

"Well you can imagine how quickly we got both those children into the house, and into the bath-tub, where we satisfied ourselves that they were not bleeding to death."

"We had to get the first coating of dirt off before we could undertake to disentangle those dreadful burs. My heart sank at the sight, I must say. I was so proud of their beautiful golden hair. They each had so much of it, and it was as fine as floss; but this only made it the more difficult to get those sticky burs out. My sister and I each took a child, and began at the burs. We worked at them a long time, but they were so hopelessly twisted in, and the fine silky hair was so wound up in them, that at last I had to get the scissors, very sorrowfully. Way underneath, close to their necks, we found these little locks, that by some work and careful snipping we managed to get quite free of burs, so I cut them off to preserve. I simply cut the rest off, in any way, as best I could, to do for the night, as it was too late to take them to the barber's that afternoon."

"What dreadful looking little things they were then! Did you ever see a sheared sheep? Well, they looked just like that, for I had snipped their hair here and there, as best I could, and it stood up in little, rough, jagged, irregular tufts all over their heads. I almost cried as I looked at them. 'I had thought I had two pretty children,' I said, mournfully. Their heads looked so comically small, and their necks like little pipe-stems."

"Of course the barber clipped their hair smooth the next day, but I felt for a long time as if I could not let people see them. Their heads were simply lost in every hat and bonnet they had."

"To think of my mother having been such a little *scallawag*," murmured Cricket, in an awestruck tone."

"Poor little things! They had a sad time the next day, for their feet were so swollen and cut that they couldn't get on a shoe. I can't imagine how they managed to walk so far on the hot pavements with their tender little feet."

"I know. The palms of your feet get dreadfully hot and sting-y when you go barefoot. I've tried it. Did they ever run away again?"

"No, never, I believe. That one experience was enough. And now, my small maid, will you go and ask Luke to

harness Mopsie for you? I would like to send a note over to Mrs. Carter, if you would please take it for me."

Cricket sprang up with a bound.

"Would you really like me to go? Oh, thank you! I mean, of course, I love to stay with you, but—"

"Yes," said grandma, smiling, "and I enjoy my little maid's company extremely, but I think she had better have some fresh air, this lovely day."

Cricket gave a hop, skip, and jump.

"Thank you so much for your stories, grandma, dear. I'd love to go with your note. Oh, George W., you bad, bad cat! You've gone and snarled your Aunt Zaidee's wash-rag all up while I was listening to a beautiful story about your Grandma Ward. Look, grandma! he's made it just as worse as burs!"

"I'll put it in order, while you're gone," said grandma, taking the very hopeless looking knitting.

"Hand me my writing things, and I'll have the note ready when you come back for it. Really, I shall be tempted to sprain my ankle again, Jean, if it brings me such a dear little nurse."

"We've had a lovely time, I think," said Cricket, giving her dear, comforting grandma a prodigious hug. "Let's have a knitting bee again, sometime, grandma. Perhaps, I'd get my wash-rag done this summer if we did."



HILDA'S ARRIVAL

CHAPTER XVII.

HILDA ARRIVES.

Of course, Cricket went with Auntie Jean to the station on Friday afternoon to meet Hilda.

Hilda had never stayed at the seashore before, for her mother was very fond of the mountains, and went every summer to the Catskills. Therefore, there was everything to show her. Think of it. She had never even been in bathing in the ocean! This fact interested Cricket more than anything else, and so the very first morning she got Hilda up early to get a dip before breakfast.

"Ouch!" squealed Hilda, shrinking back, as the cold waves touched her bare toes. "Why, Cricket! it's cold!"

"It won't be as soon as you're fairly in," urged Cricket. "Just make a dash, and go in all over. Wade out to the raft, and dive off. You don't know what fun it is to go slap-dash into the water and get all gurgled," which was Cricket for choked.

"But I'll get all *wet*," objected Hilda, "besides, it's *so* cold, Cricket," and she drew back further up on the beach, and stood poking her toes into the warm sand.

"Get wet?" said Archie, politely. "No, you wouldn't. We keep dry water for any one making a first attempt."

"And if you *should* get wet, what would it matter? A bathing-suit isn't a party dress, Hilda," urged Cricket. "We usually expect to get wet when we go into the water, anyway."

"Mother, may I go out to swim?" sang Archie, teasingly.

"Come on, Hilda. Just go right forward, ker-chunk," and Cricket made a run and threw herself full length in the shallow water. She rolled over and over, and came up sputtering, and laughing. "Don't be afraid, you goosey girl."

"I'm not a goosey girl. Suppose I should go out there and get drowned?"

"You *can't* drown. Archie, and Will, and I, all can swim, and we'll save you. Will taught me this summer. It's lovely," and Cricket led Hilda, hanging back and protesting, into the water, ankle deep.

The truth really was, that Hilda did not want to wet her pretty new bathing-suit. She was such a careful, orderly little person, that she did not like the idea of doing anything so untidy. Besides, Cricket's dripping, clinging skirt looked very uncomfortable.

Just then, Will and Archie, at a private signal, threw themselves, splash, into the water on each side of her, spattering her well, and Cricket, seizing the opportunity, cried out:

"Now, you're a little wet, you must go under right away, or else you'll take cold," and Hilda yielded very unwillingly, and protesting that she was freezing to death. She squealed and choked as the boys ducked her under the water, and she really thought for one dreadful minute that her last hour had come.

"If *this* is bathing, I think it's *awful*," she said, with emphasis, as soon as she could speak. The boys had piloted her as far as the swimming raft, and, imitating Cricket's example, she climbed up on it, trying to rub off her wet face with her wetter sleeve, and looking perfectly miserable. "Archie, I've got to have a handkerchief, or a towel, or something, to dry my face. Please bring me one."

The boys both laughed at her. "Oh, certainly," said Archie. "I'll telephone to the laundry to send down a cartload right away. We usually have Luke put a supply of clean ones on the raft, all ready for us. He must have forgotten it this morning."

"You needn't laugh at me. I do hate to have my face stay wet."

"Dive again, then," advised Will, setting the example. "Come, Cricket, race me to the rock and back again."

Cricket promptly dived, but Hilda could not be coaxed off her perch till the others were ready to go in. So, altogether, the first bath was not a great success, and Hilda almost made up her mind that she would never try it again, for it was, by no means, such fun as it was reported to be. But over Sunday she had time to forget her sensations, and when Cricket sprang up early Monday morning, as usual, Hilda finally concluded she would try it again. To her great surprise—perhaps it was partly because the first newness was worn off her bathing-suit—she found that she enjoyed it a great deal more than the first time. She actually waded around with the water nearly up to her shoulders, and half learned to float, with Will supporting her. The next morning completed the lesson, and she began to feel very independent.

On Monday morning Auntie Jean drove the four girls over to Plymouth, to see the sights there. Hilda was full of eagerness and curiosity to see the famous Rock on which the Pilgrim Fathers landed.

"What! *that* little thing?" she exclaimed, in surprise and disgust, when a small affair was pointed out to her, a rock not even very near the water, but well up on the land, with a stone canopy over it. "How could they land on that little thing?"

"Archie says they came up on stilts," said Cricket. "Of course they had to land on Plymouth Rock, 'cause the histories said they must."

"I never believed that," said literal Edna. "How could they get the stilts?"

"Oh, *Edna!*" cried Eunice, while the rest laughed.

"Then they cut a piece off, and carried it up in front of Pilgrim Hall, and put it in front of it, and built a railing round it, the first thing they did," went on Cricket.

"But there wasn't any Pilgrim Hall, then," persisted Edna.

"Edna, you're a goose," said Eunice. "Now auntie, can we go and see the Statue of Faith, and the Pilgrim Hall, and the burying-ground, and all?"

They had a merry day in the quaint old town, with all its relics and curiosities. They went all over Pilgrim Hall, and saw the famous sword of Captain Myles Standish, the cradle of Peregrine White,—the little baby who was born at sea on that famous voyage,—and hosts of other interesting things.

Then they did a little shopping, and bought some candy to eat on the way home. This was always part of the fun.

"When will they have Captain Myles Standish's statue up?" asked Eunice, with her mouth full of caramels, as they passed Captain's Hill.

"Very soon, I believe, now. The pedestal is nearly done, and the statue is already there."

"Yes, I know," nodded Cricket. "We walked over there one day last week. Hilda, the statue is there waiting,

and it's all boxed up like a chicken-coop. You can see the statue right between the slats. And, oh, auntie! Archie made such a funny joke. Will had just asked Eunice why it would be the highest statue in the world, but she knew the answer—'cause it's Myles above the sea, of course. Then Archie stooped over and poked a stick through the slats, and said: 'Let's tickle his feet and see if he smiles.' Wasn't that good?"

"I don't see a bit of sense to it," declared Edna, "and I didn't then. Eunice and Cricket just laughed and laughed, mamma. Of *course* a statue couldn't smile."

"Edna, you wouldn't see a joke if one walked up and *bit* you," said Eunice. "Archie said: 'Let's tickle his feet and see if he's-Myles.' *Don't* you see?"

"If he's Myles. If he smiles. Oh, *yes!*" cried Edna, looking really excited. "I see! you can take it in two ways."

"Edna, it's easy to see your great-grandfather was a Scotchman," said Mrs. Somers, when she could speak for laughing at her very practical little daughter.

"Why, I don't see what that has to do with it. People laugh at such silly things, mamma. Eunice and Cricket just double up over some things that are too stupid for anything."

"That's your misfortune, dear. If there was a School of Jokes I should certainly send you to it."

"Well, for instance," went on Edna, "I'll leave it to Hilda if this wasn't silly. That day when we all walked over to Captain's Hill, we all sat down on some stones to rest. Nobody happened to be saying anything just then, and Cricket began to sing. Archie listened a moment, then he jumped up and started off on a run, as fast as he could go, all around the top of the hill, and came back all puffing and panting, and he said: 'Cricket, I've run all around the hill, and I can't catch that tune.' The girls thought it was awfully funny; what, do *you* think it was funny, too?" for Hilda went off in a peal of laughter, as well as auntie.

"Of course," went on Edna, "he couldn't tell the tune if he didn't stay and listen to it; and, perhaps, he wouldn't have known then," she added, thoughtfully.

Cricket grew very red, as she always did when any slighting allusion was made to her singing.

"Archie is a very funny boy, *I* think," she remarked quickly, to turn the attention of the others from this sore subject. "He isn't as nice as Will, but he's generally funnier. He gets so mad when Edna says, 'What's the sense to that?' when he makes a joke."

"Like yesterday, Mrs. Somers," said Hilda, "when Archie asked us a conundrum, 'How does a sculptor die?' do you know it? The answer is, 'He makes faces and *busts*.' And he got so mad when Edna only told him that *busts* wasn't correct. He ought to say, 'He makes faces and *bursts*.'"

"Well, he ought, oughtn't he, mamma? Nobody says busts."

"Edna, you're hopeless," answered her mother. "And here we are at home again."

At the supper-table Will announced that he and Archie and the *Gentle Jane* were all ready to take a sailing party to the Gurnet Lights the next day, if the party so desired. By the clapping of hands it was judged that the party did so desire.

"But about grandma?" asked Mrs. Somers, when she could make herself heard. "I can't go and leave her for all day when she is so helpless."

Cricket coloured at the allusion, but she instantly said, bravely:

"If you will go with the others, auntie, I'll stay with grandma."

"If you stay, Cricket, I'll stay, too," said Hilda, quickly.

"But you *can't*, Hilda. You're the party, don't you see? We've all been to the Gurnet, and we're going to get up this picnic on purpose for you. You've got to go."

"Yes, you've got to go," struck in Archie. "It's like the man who was on his way to be executed. He saw people all running along the street, and he called out to some one, 'No hurry, friend. It can't go on till I get there. I'm the man to be hung.'"

"Then, since Hilda is the man to be hung she'll have to go. That's certain. And besides, children, you can't go to-morrow, for we must give cook a day's notice if she is to provide luncheon enough to last you entirely hollow young people for a whole day. Then I'll see Mrs. Emmons, and perhaps she will come and spend the day with grandma on Wednesday, and we'll set sail then for the Gurnet Lights. Will that do? I'll go over directly after supper and see her, so you can put your minds at rest."

Mrs. Emmons would be delighted to come and spend the day with grandma, it proved, so the plans for Wednesday instantly began, as if they did not have a whole day before them. The hour of the start must be settled at once. As it would be low tide at eleven, they must be off at eight in the morning, to get well over the mud-flats before they were exposed. They would go outside the point for a little cruise, if it was not too rough, and then come back and land at the Gurnet, and show all the sights there to Hilda, and eat their luncheon either before or after, as they liked.

The boys were both good sailors, and understood a boat perfectly. Their grandfather Maxwell had trained them well from the time they were wee bits of boys, and even before his death, three years before, he had trusted them to go out alone.

But the next day the excitement began in earnest, and there was hurrying to and fro, and consultations over

what to take, and what to wear, and what to do, and proposals for this, and objections to that, till the whole house was in a whirl.

"Children, you couldn't make more preparation if you were going to Europe," cried distracted auntie, finally, as all the girls burst into her room for the fortieth time, as she was trying to take a nap that afternoon. "I don't know where your sketch-book is, Edna. Yes, wear your sailor caps. Of course you'll wear your sailor suits, and not gingham. Yours is torn, Edna? Then, my dear, please go and mend it directly. Your fishing-tackle is in the lobby, by the side kitchen door, Cricket. You left it in Billy's room, and he brought it over. Yes, I told cook to make some chocolate cake, Eunice. Now scamper, every one of you. I'm going to lock my door now, and don't anybody dare to come and disturb for an hour."

But within five minutes a small voice called through the keyhole, imploringly:

"Scuse me, auntie dear, but *couldn't* we take George W.? he's just begging to go, and I know he'll be good."

"Scat!" cried auntie, and Cricket scatted.

"Sha'n't we take some books, in case we get becalmed?" suggested Eunice, as they all finally rested on the piazza, and tried to think of something else to get ready.

"Of course. Sometimes we are becalmed for an hour, Hilda, and it's awfully stupid."

"I'll take 'Jack and Jill,'" said Cricket. "And, oh, girls, let's take our blank books and pencils, so we can write on our stories for the 'Echo' if we want to."

"I won't, and that's flat!" said Edna, decidedly. "Going on a picnic for fun, and writing stories! What do you think I'm made of, Cricket?"

"Sugar and spice, and all that's nice," returned Cricket, cheerfully. "Did I tell you, girls, that Hilda is going to write a story for our next 'Echo?' 'Our estinguished contributor, Miss Hilda Mason!' Doesn't that sound fine? And she's written some poetry, too! Isn't she lovely?" and Cricket hugged Hilda in a sudden burst of affection.

"This is the first poetry I ever wrote," said Hilda, trying not to look conscious.

"And it's lovely!" said Cricket, approvingly. "Read it to the girls, please, Hilda." And Hilda, waiting for a little urging, though she was really dying to read it, produced her "poem," and read:

"It was Christmas eve, now remember,
And out in the cold world alone,
A cold night, too, in December,
There wandered a poor little one.

"Waiting in sorrow and weeping,
Waiting out there in the cold,
Why should she have cause to sorrow?
Why, her mother lay there in the mould.

"And where was the child's own father?
Was he in the cold ground, too?
No, her father was in the billiard-room.
I pity the poor child, don't you?"

"That's too sweet for anything, Hilda! All you girls are clever but me," sighed Edna, half enviously.

"I've just decided that I'll be a poetess like Mrs. Browning, when I grow up," said Hilda, calmly. "I never tried writing poetry before, but it's just as *easy*. It would be very interesting to be a poetess," added Hilda, who was given to day-dreams, in which she was always famous.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A SAILING PARTY.

It was not long after dawn, early as that was, when the younger fry were all astir in the Maxwell household. The boys were up to see that everything was in order about the boat, and to transport the necessary number of cushions and rugs for the comfort of their passengers. Cricket dragged reluctant Hilda, who dearly loved her morning snooze, out of bed almost as early, though Eunice and Edna lazily turned over for another scrap of a nap. Still, they were not long able to withstand the general buzz of excitement, and long before seven they also were up and about, gathering together their various belongings. Cook had the generous luncheon-baskets all packed, with provision sufficient for a small regiment. Before breakfast everything was on board, the luncheon was packed away in the little locker, and cushions and extra wrappings were all in place.

Breakfast was a hasty ceremony, for the boys were eagerly watching the time, and tide, and breeze, and so would hardly give the rest time to eat. It was not quite eight when they mustered their party on the dock. At the last moment Cricket appeared with a small bundle, carefully wrapped in newspaper, the contents of which she absolutely refused to reveal.

"You'll know by and by," was all she would say, "and you needn't try to solve into the mystery now."

The breeze favoured the start, and the swelling sails swept the *Gentle Jane* along at a scudding pace. Hilda, who had never been sailing before, was delighted at the swift motion. The sky was as blue as blue could be, with flecks of white clouds all over it, the water was sparkling and clear, and dashed with a delightful little swish against the bow.

"But what do you do if the breeze stops?" she asked.

"We stop, too," said Archie, "unless somebody gets out and drags the boat along."

"Really? could any one drag this heavy boat along? would they swim? oh, you're teasing me!"

"Yes, of course he's teasing you," said Edna; "we have to row, if the breeze stops. Do you see these long oars? Why, boys! you haven't brought but one oar!"

"Yes, we have," answered the boys in chorus. Then they looked at where the oars should be, and then at each other. "I thought you brought the other oar," said Archie.

"And I thought you did," said Will. "Never mind. It looks as if we'd have a good breeze all day."

"But will the breeze turn for you to come home again?" asked Hilda. "For if the breeze blows us out, how can it blow us back again?"

"Tack, young woman, tack, but not with a hammer or nails. You'll see, coming home, if this breeze holds out."

"I'll bet you anything that the breeze *won't* hold, because you've forgotten the other oar," said Edna.

"Then we'll put Cricket up in the bow, to whistle up a breeze. That always brings it."

"It's so funny I can't whistle, when I'd love to, so," said Cricket, meditatively, for whistling was one boyish accomplishment which she could not manage.

"You needn't wish to," said Edna, who, strange to say, could whistle like a blackbird. "You would only have people always telling you, it is not ladylike. I don't know I'm whistling half the time when mamma tells me not to. It just whistles itself."

"Why *don't* I whistle right?" asked Cricket, dolefully, for the hundredth time. "I pucker my lips up so—and I blow—*so*—and I can give one straight whistle, but I can't make it go up and down. It doesn't twinkle as Edna's does."

Edna broke out into a perfect bird song of twittering and chirping and trilling.

"There, I just enjoyed that!" she said, at last, stopping breathlessly. "When I'm way out at sea, mamma lets me whistle all I like."

"Isn't it getting near luncheon-time, auntie?" asked Eunice. "I'm dreadfully hungry."

"Luncheon-time, dear child! It's only nine o'clock," said auntie, consulting her watch.

"Don't get mixed up in the time as you did last summer, when you went blackberrying and came home at ten o'clock in the morning and thought it was six at night. Hard-a-lee!" as the boom swung around and they changed their course. Hilda, not realizing what this meant, did not duck her head in time, and consequently got a smart rap. Her hat was knocked off, but, being Hilda's, it did not go in the water. She never had any accidents.

"You must duck, instanter, when you hear me call," said Will. "Sometimes the boom has to go around very suddenly, and you have to look out for yourselves. Archie, you steer now for a while," and Archie took the helm.

The little sailboat skimmed along over the glittering water, and now they were well past Clark's Island. As they came near the Gurnet lights they decided that they would touch there first, and show Hilda the lighthouse, and then they could take as much time as they liked for their cruise outside.

The tide was out, and they could not get the little boat up near enough the shore to land dry-shod. So Will and Archie, having anchored the boat, pulled off shoes and stockings, rolled up their trousers, and jumped overboard.

"What are they going to do?" asked Hilda, watching with much interest these preparations, which the rest seemed to take as a matter of course.

"They will carry us ashore, because we don't want to get our feet wet," said Edna. "They often do."

"*Carry* us! why, I'd be scared to death!" exclaimed Hilda. "Are you really going to let them take you, Mrs. Somers?"

"Yes, indeed, and they know just how to manage," said Mrs. Somers. "I'll go now, children, so they can take the heaviest weight first."

Will and Archie, knee deep in water, stood up by the boat, and Will easily lifted his mother from the side of the boat, where she was standing. Then Archie got hold of her also, in some mysterious way, and, in a moment, she was safely sitting on a "lady's chair," made by the boys' clasped hands. They went carefully up over the rocks and stones, and deposited her, dry-shod. Then they came back for the girls.

"I can take these kids better alone, Arch," said Will, taking Eunice like a baby.

"I'll take Cricket," said Archie.

"No, you won't, sir, not one step," said that young lady, sitting down, resolutely. "I know you. I'd find myself in a crab hole in about a minute. I'll wait for Will."

"Come on, Hilda, then. That's a base libel, you know."

But it ended by Will's carrying them all in.

"There are drawbacks to being so popular," said Will, setting down Edna, who was the last, and wiping his face.

A lighthouse is always an interesting place to visit, and many times as the Somers children had been there, they always enjoyed the trip. Cricket and Eunice had never been there but three or four times before. The good-natured keeper took them all over and showed them everything, from the twin-lights at the top to the life-boats, for Hilda's benefit.

When they had seen everything that was to be seen they went down to the shore again, to reëmbark. It was easier getting back, for the boys made a lady's chair for each passenger, and together carried her safely over the shallows, where the water was beginning to rise. They sailed outside the bar for a short distance, and then it was time to eat their luncheon.

The luncheon was a royal banquet in point of plenty and variety, for Mrs. Maxwell's old cook knew, by long experience, just what sort of appetites the salt air made, and there were seven hungry mouths to feed. They feasted and chattered, until Auntie Jean suddenly announced that it was time to turn about, and go in.

"It's too early," said Edna.

"Not with this wind," said her mother. "We'll have to tack all the way, and I want to get in by five or six."

"It's such fun," sighed Cricket. "I hate to go in. I love the water out here, when it's all rough and rock-y. I'd like to keep right on to Cape Cod." She stood in the bow of the boat, with one arm around the mast—it was a catboat—with the breeze fluttering her curly hair about, and her dress blowing back stiffly.

"Cricket, please don't stand there any longer," called Auntie Jean. "You make me nervous. You'll be overboard in a minute, I know."

"No, I won't, auntie, I've stood here heaps of times. I do love to feel the wind on my face. It makes one feel so *gay*."

"No, come back, please, dear. I feel safer with all my birds under my wings," answered auntie, for she knew Cricket of old.

Cricket turned, reluctantly, and at the same moment Will called "Hard-a-lee!" as the boom swung over, and the boat obeyed her helm, and came round. Cricket was still facing outward, and, as the boat keeled, she suddenly lost her balance, grasped at the mast which she had let go, missed it, and disappeared over the bows with a great splash. The boat swung away from her, fortunately, otherwise she might have been seriously hurt.

"Take the helm, Archie," shouted Will, as he tore off his shoes, and was over after her in a twinkling. Cricket rose to the surface, and struck out bravely, but her clothes hampered her, and she could do little more than keep herself up. In a few moments Will reached her, and Archie brought the boat around, so there were but a few strokes to swim before they could reach the oar which Edna and Eunice had seized and held out. By this they drew themselves up to the gunwale of the boat.

It all passed so quickly that in five minutes from the time when Auntie Jean had first spoken to Cricket, the dripping adventurers were in the boat again. There had been no real danger, for Cricket could easily have kept herself up till one of the boys could come to her, but the children felt very much excited, for all that, over the "rescue," as they called it.

In the small quarters of a little catboat, it is not exactly pleasant to have two dripping individuals as members of the crew, and the others began to draw themselves, feet and all, up on to the seat.

"Now, water-babies," began Auntie Jean, but Archie interrupted:

"Do pitch them out again, and let them swim home. They'll swamp the boat directly. Here, bail out, Edna," tossing her the sponge, which she caught and threw at Cricket, saying, "I can't get down in all that water. Your feet are wet, already, Cricket."

"It's too bad," said Cricket, meekly. "Couldn't you really tie a rope around me, auntie, and drag me along? I wouldn't mind. I couldn't swim all the way in, for I'd get tired, but I wouldn't mind being tied on behind."

"You're pretty bad, but we won't make a tow of you this time," said auntie, merrily. "I can't say what I'll do next time, though. Now we must get off those wet clothes, and wring them out, and hang them up to dry. You can put on your mackintosh."

Mackintoshes and shawls always formed part of the equipment of an all day's sail, since at any time a squall might come up. Edna and Eunice and Hilda held up a long shawl in a triangular fence around Cricket, while she got out of most of her clothes. Auntie rubbed her dry, and wrung out what she still had on, as best she could with another shawl, and then she put on her mackintosh. Will had also been getting rid of some of the superfluous water, but a boy's sailing dress is so beautifully simple that a wetting more or less does not matter. He took off his stockings, and hung them over the boom to dry, and presently Cricket's dress and petticoats fluttered beside them.

"Regular canal-boat style. Family wash drying on deck," said Archie, and then he hooted at Cricket as she

appeared from behind the shawl. A little figure draped in a mackintosh is not a model for an artist.

"That's very becoming, young one," said Archie. "You look as fat as a match."

"A match for you, then," returned Cricket, serenely, for Archie had the proportions of a hairpin.

"I want to call a meeting of the Echo Club, immediately," said Will, standing up, "and I put the motion as president *pro tem*; that on any expedition in the future, of which Miss Jean Ward, usually called Cricket, is a member, that a wringing-machine be furnished and carried, at the club's expense."

"Who would you have to poke fun at, if you didn't have me?" demanded Cricket, quite undisturbed. "But I'll second the motion about the wringing-machine. I wonder why you didn't get as wet as I did?"

Another shout at this.

"I only got a little damp on the outside," said Will, politely. "I'll soon evaporate."

"You needn't all laugh," said Cricket, defensively. "I was in the water longer than he was, and so I didn't suppose he'd had time to get as wet through."

"I didn't," said Will, "only as far as my skin. I'm not porous."

They had been tacking all the time, back and forth, much to Hilda's amazement, who could not understand how that crab-like motion would ever bring them home. They were now coming past the Gurnet Lights.

"We can put in there, mother, if you like," suggested Archie, "and get the mermaid dried off, if you think best."

"It's really not necessary. Cricket is rubbed pretty dry, and one rarely takes cold in sea-water. Keep down in the bottom of the boat, Cricket, out of the breeze as much as you can."

"I'm just thinking to myself," said Will, "that in five minutes you'll be hunting for a breeze to sit in. It's certainly dying down."

"Will, if you becalm us out here in this broiling sun when you've forgotten to bring the other oar to row with, I'll never forgive you," exclaimed Edna.

"I haven't the least desire to do it, my lady," said Will, scanning the now cloudless sky, "but I think it's what we're in for. Have you anything left to eat in case we make a night of it, mother?"

"A night of it?" cried Hilda, in dismay. "Where would we sleep?"

"All curled up in little bundles in the bottom of the boat," cut in Archie. "It's not bad. Only it takes some time next day to get the kinks out of your legs."

"He's teasing you, my dear," said Mrs. Somers. "We won't be here all night, but it often happens that we are becalmed for several hours, and I really don't enjoy the prospect. Come, Will, whistle up the breeze."

"It's Cricket that does that," said Archie; "she always scares the wind into coming up immediately. There's a puff now. The very mention of Cricket's whistling does the business."

But the wind only freshened for a moment, then died down, and in ten minutes more they lay motionless on a glassy sea.

"Now here we'll stay," said Edna with a sigh, "until the sea-breeze springs up this afternoon at four or five. What time is it now? Two o'clock! Think of it!"

"The tide takes us along a little," said Mrs. Somers. "If we only had the other oar now!"

"Scull," suggested Edna.

"Too much work," said Archie; but, nevertheless, he adjusted the oar at the stern, and sculled a little. The boat moved very slowly forward.

"If we go six feet in an hour, how long will it take us to go seven miles?" propounded Eunice.

"Those questions are too difficult to be answered off-hand," said Will, sculling in his turn. "Sounds like Alice in Wonderland. If two boys eat a turkey at Thanksgiving, how many girls will eat a plum-pudding at Christmas?"

"I know a better one than that," put in Archie. "Two men set out simultaneously, at different times, on a journey, both being unable to travel. For two hours they kept ahead of each other, and then a snow-storm came up, and they both lost their way. Query: Which got there first?"

"How silly!" said Edna. "How could they set out simultaneously, at different times, mamma?"

"That's the question for your deep brain, Miss Wiseacre," said Archie. "Perhaps you're equal to this. If three men work all day on a fertile farm, what is the logarithm?"

"The lager-in-'em?" echoed Cricket. "Depends on how much they drank."

Whereupon Mrs. Somers and the boys laughed themselves sore, and the girls clamoured to know the joke.

"Cricket's a born joke," said Will, resuming his sculling. "You'll be the death of me, young one."

"I always see jokes when there are any to see," Cricket answered, with dignity. "You know I do, Mr. Will. I'm

not just as worse as Edna."

"Just as bad, you mean," retorted Edna.

"Let's play some games, children," Mrs. Somers said, coming to the rescue. The children were all fond of games.

CHAPTER XIX.

BECALMED.

"What shall it be first, then?" went on Auntie Jean, adjusting the cushions behind her back and resting her umbrella against the rail.

"Teakettle," suggested Edna.

"What *is* teakettle?" asked Hilda.

"Don't you know? We play it lots. Somebody goes out—"

"Into the water?" put in Archie. "Then Cricket is 'it,' I say."

"Well, of course, Archie, I was thinking of dry land. Somebody shuts up her ears, then, and we choose a word. It must be one with two or three meanings. Then, whoever is 'it,' begins to ask questions, and we answer, only we put the word 'teakettle' in place of the real word. We can say 'teakettling,' you know, or 'teakettled,' if we want to. Who'll be 'it' first?"

"I'd just as lief," said Eunice, going to the bow, and putting her fingers in her ears, and burying her head in a cushion.

"What shall we choose for a word? It must have two or three meanings, you know."

"*Sail* would be very appropriate," suggested Will, who was still laboriously sculling.

"Oh, yes. See, Hilda? There's to sail, and taking a sail, and a sale of things."

"And the sail of the boat," said Archie.

"All ready, Eunice. Touch her, Archie. Begin, Eunice."

"The hardest part is to think of questions," said Eunice, turning around and meditating. "Let me see. Auntie, when do you think we will get home?"

"When we are on a teakettle, it is never safe to say," answered auntie.

"On a teakettle—on a boat—that doesn't fit," meditated Eunice. "Will, why don't you make Archie scull now?"

"Because he's such a lazy beggar. When he goes teakettling, he won't do anything else."

"Edna, is the moon made of green cheese?"

"What a hard question," groaned Edna. "What shall I say? If we teakettled up there, perhaps we could find out."

"I can't guess it yet," said Eunice, thinking over this answer. "Cricket, if you weren't a girl, what would you rather be?"

"I know—a boy," said Archie, quickly. "Wouldn't you, Miss Scricket?"

"No, I wouldn't, Mr. Archie. I would rather be a pig than a boy. A nice fat pig, and then nobody would laugh at my 'knitting-needles.' That's what papa calls my legs, always, auntie, you know, because they're *not* fat, I know. He always wants mamma to knit with them, and all that nonsense. It seems to amuse them very much," added Cricket, with a bored air.

"You haven't teakettled once, child," said Eunice. "Oh, auntie, I must just stop to tell you a funny story about Cricket. It was such a joke on her. Once we were playing 'She comes, she comes.' You know that, don't you? Somebody says, 'What does she come with?' and then you give the first letter of the thing you've thought of. It was Cricket's turn, and she—well, she *was* rather a little girl—gave 'N. N.' for the initials. We guessed and guessed, and had to give up, finally, and then she piped up, 'It's what papa calls my legs,' and she meant 'knitting-needles.'"

"I was *very* little," said Cricket, blushing and apologising. "It was as much as three years ago. I haven't answered your question yet, Eunice. I b'lieve I don't want to be a pig, after all, for in the fall the farmer has a teakettle, and sells his pigs, and I'd have to go to the butcher and be killed, and be cut up for sausage."

"I don't seem to get hold of it, yet," said Eunice, wrinkling her forehead. "Hilda, how do you like Marbury?"

"I think it's perfectly lovely," declared Hilda, enthusiastically. "Oh, I forgot to teakettle. I think teakettling is lovely, even if you do get becalmed."

"Teakettling—sailing! Sail is the word," exclaimed Eunice, instantly. "You gave it away, Hilda. I guessed it on

you, so you'll have to go out."

"I'll never be able to guess it in the world," said Hilda, looking disappointed.

"I'll take your place," said Will, instantly. "It's about time that Archie sculled. Take hold, old boy, and keep at it."

"Choose a hard one," said Eunice, when Will had duly stopped up his ears. "How would *steal* do?"

"Yes, or we might have *oar* and *ore*," said Hilda.

"Scull and skull," said Archie, pensively.

"That's good," said auntie. "Or else bough, and bow of the boat, and bow, to make a bow."

"Let's take that, for there are so many meanings," said Cricket.

"All right. Ready, Will," said Archie, kicking him.

Will uncovered his ears and began.

"Edna, how many sandwiches did you eat for luncheon?"

"I ought to make you a teakettle for asking me such an easy question," laughed Edna, "I ate two—I think."

"Whopper!" said Will. "Eunice, why is a crocodile like the North Pole?"

"Because there's a B in both," answered Eunice, promptly. "Will, ask sensible questions, or I'll get a teakettle when I get home, and hit you with it."

"That might be a stone, but stone won't do. Cricket, now think carefully over your answer. If three men work all day on a fertile farm—"

"I'll get Archie to throw you over the teakettle this minute, if you don't stop," threatened Cricket.

"Throw me over the teakettle—over the side—stern—bow. Bow. That's it, young lady. Caught you on that."

And so the game progressed, till they had sufficiently teakettled.

"What next?" asked some one.

"Suppose we have tableaux, and begin with Cricket for Venus," said Archie, looking at her with his head on one side.

"You needn't make fun of my looks, Mr. Archie. I know this mackintosh isn't *very* becoming, but I don't care for looks, anyway."

"You might as well intermingle a few looks if you can," said Eunice. "And you do look too funny. Your clothes are dry, now, anyway. Hadn't she better put them on, auntie?"

So the shawl screen was again put up, and the display of dress and petticoats disappeared from the sail of the *Gentle Jane*.

"I feel more respectable," teased Archie, "now the weekly wash is taken in. Hated to be taken for a canal-boat."

"No, we'd rather be taken for a tow," said Cricket, smartly, and Archie fell back, rigid with mock admiration.

"Now, if we only had pencils and paper," said auntie, "there are many games we might play."

"Oh, wait! wait!" exclaimed Cricket, jumping up suddenly and tumbling over auntie in her excitement. She dived into the tiny hold, and triumphantly brought out her mysterious newspaper package.

"I thought perhaps the girls would like to write on their stories for the 'Echo,'" she explained eagerly, "so I brought all the blank books and pencils. You can tear some leaves out of the back of mine and use them."

There was much applause at Cricket's forethought.

"Wise child," said auntie, approvingly, "I am glad to see that 'though on pleasure you are bent you have a'—literary mind. We might illustrate proverbs."

"Oh, I can't draw," said Eunice, quickly.

"So much the better. You need not draw well, for it's much more fun if you don't. I'll tear these leaves in two, Cricket, to make them long and narrow. Now, we must each illustrate some proverb at the bottom of the slip, or some line of poetry, if you prefer. Only label it, which it is. When we are all done, we each pass our slips to the next one, who writes what she thinks it is, and folds back the writing, and passes it on. When we have each written our comments, they are opened and read. Most of the fun comes from the different guesses, so you see you mustn't draw *too* well, and make your ideas too plain. Now, to work, all of you. Here are your slips."

They all fell industriously to work, interrupting themselves with many a groan and protest. When all were finished they passed on their slips to the next one. There was much giggling at the first sight of some of the very remarkable drawings.

"Now," said Auntie Jean, when the slips had all passed around, and had returned to the hands of their respective artists, "each of you unfold your papers, and read the comments aloud for the benefit of the

company. Cricket, you're the youngest. Suppose you begin."

Cricket giggled. Her picture consisted of a scraggy tree, with several long wavy lines near its foot. In the branches of the tree were two good-sized attempts at fowls of some description, while a third huge creature was flying near. She read the comments in order.

"There were three crows sat on a tree,
And they were black as crows could be." AUNTIE.

"The breaking waves dashed high,
Caught the pilgrims on the fly."

("Couldn't think how that last line goes," murmured Archie, "but I'm sure those are pilgrims on the fly.")

"Two's a company, three is none." EDNA.

"Good-morning! do you use Pears' Soap?" WILL.

"Early bird catches the first worm." (Guess those things down there are worms.) HILDA.

"Two birds in the bush are worth one in the hand."
(I had to make the proverb fit the drawing.) EUNICE.

"And it's just as plain," announced Cricket, contemptuously. "Birds of a feather flock together."

"Ho! what are those water streaks doing down there, then?" asked Archie. "The things I thought were breaking waves."

"I thought they were curly worms," added Hilda.

"They're not worms or water either. I just put some lines there to fill up. I think I meant them for grass. How silly you all are. Now, auntie."

Auntie's picture was beautifully simple. It was nothing but an inclined plane, with a round thing rolling down it. Of course everybody had written, "A rolling stone gathers no moss."

"Not at all," answered auntie, coolly. "I thought you would all think that, but it really is, 'Things are not what they seem.' It looks like a stone, but it isn't. Now, Eunice."

Eunice had a remarkable sketch of a darkly-shaded spot, with a house showing dimly through, and at one side a spiky sun was rising above a quavering line, evidently meant for the horizon. There were various guesses. "Any port in a storm." ("Which is the same as saying, any guess, if you can't make the right one," murmured Will.)

"Rising Sun Stove Polish." "Let not the sun go down upon your wrath." "Every cloud has a silver lining." ("That house is behind a cloud, isn't it?" asked Cricket.)

"It's a *very* easy one, too," said Eunice. "'It's always darkest just before dawn.' Don't you see the sun just coming up?"

Archie, who drew beautifully, had made a really very clever little sketch of a Spencerian pen, mounted on two thin legs, furnished with an equally thin pair of arms, and a face as well, engaged in a boxing match with a very plump and well-developed sword. In a second picture, the sword was flat on the ground, while the pen was dancing away, grinning. Of course this could be only, "The Pen is mightier than the Sword."

Hilda had drawn simply two long lines in perspective. As nobody could make anything of them, the guesses were wild.

"Why, don't you see? Those two lines are a lane. 'It's a long lane that has no turning.' That's the long lane. It has no turning," explained Hilda. "I thought you would guess it the very first thing."

When the last of the guesses were read, auntie rose to rest herself from a sitting position.

"Isn't there a bit of a breeze coming up?" she asked, shading her eyes with her hand, to look across the glassy sea, in search of the faintest sign of a ripple.

"Sorra a bit," said Archie. "Here, Will, you scull a while, and rest a fellow. Hello! we're really getting along. See how far the Gurnet Lights are behind us."

"Yes, but look at the distance ahead of us, to be sculled over yet," said Auntie Jean, "and here it is four o'clock," consulting her watch. "Come, Archie, it's time to whistle up the wind."

"I will!" said Edna, breaking out again into her blackbird whistle.

Cricket listened in rapt admiration.

"Why *can't* I do it?" she sighed.

"But, Mrs. Somers?" broke out Hilda, in amazement, "can they really whistle up a breeze?"

"No, indeed, dear. It's only an old saying about sailors. The children do it for fun when we're becalmed sometimes. Well, there's no signs of it yet. I'll tell you what I'll do, children. While you're whistling up the wind, I'll write an adjective story for you."

"Oh, that will be fun!" exclaimed one and all. All, that is, but Hilda, who asked again:

"Now, what *is* an adjective story?"

"I write a little story about anything," explained Mrs. Somers, giving her pencils to Will to be sharpened, "and I leave a space before every noun. When I have written it, you each give me adjectives in turn to fill in the spaces, and I write them just as you supply them. Of course they never fit, and a very funny hodge-podge is the result. Now, while I'm writing you must all be thinking up a good supply of adjectives, for I shall want a quantity."

So Auntie Jean took Cricket's blank-book and began to scribble; she wrote busily for ten or fifteen minutes, and then announced she was ready for the adjectives.

"I call it the 'Tale of the Shipwrecked Mariners,'" she said, when all the adjectives were duly written in. "And now for the tale."

"Once upon a time, in the pathetic town of Marbury, there lived a green and scrumptious lady with a wriggling troop of fantastic grandchildren, who made her life miserable. First of all was the eldest, the awful and weird William, who was quite intolerable. Next to him was the cute and sublime Archie, who was always jolly and superstitious. They had a sullen and sarcastic sister, the entrancing Edna, whom they delighted to tease. One summer their delightful and sarcastic cousins, the mournful and flowery Eunice, and the melodious Cricket ["Auntie! you put that there on purpose," came reproachfully from the last-mentioned young woman.

"No, I didn't, my dear. It really happened so."]

"The melodious Cricket, arrived to spend a long time with the dingy Somers family, much to their enjoyment. After various adventures, their ecstatic friend, the lively Hilda Mason, came to spend a few days. To entertain her, one day, they took her out in a wizened boat to sail over the garrulous bay. They dragged their silent auntie" [a howl] "with them, promising her a talkative day. All went well at first, but suddenly a gruesome storm arose, and beat upon their inky boat, which began to leak. The musical crew were all much frightened, and tried to bail out the ugly water, but it rose too fast, and soon the monkeyish boat began to sink. After it had sunk through the water about a mile, it struck plump on a rock, and then it glided into a dwarfish cave at the bottom of the sea. The grumpy and genial Cricket immediately fell out of the boat, in her surprise. Cunning Will jumped after her. The sugary party had come to a mountainous spot down below the sea, and they found a minute garden there, full of curly fruits. The aggravating Hilda, the indefinite Eunice, and the smooth Edna, seeing the proper Cricket" [another howl] "struggling in the water with the contrary Will, immediately jumped out after them, leaving the rough Archie and forlorn auntie in command of the boat. Suddenly a bold gnome popped up his dainty head from behind a rock, saying, 'Welcome, Englishmen! You are in the cave of accident. Look out for yourselves.' As he spoke, his watery head fell off. He felt around but could not find it, since his eyes had gone with his head, so he said, politely, 'Will some of you immense, raw people pick up my jealous head for me, and kindly put it on?' Snub-nosed Hilda" ["Ah, you've caught it now, young lady," from Archie] "being nearest, handed him his head, which had rolled to her idolatrous feet. The hysterical gnome immediately clapped it on—wrong side before. 'Never mind,' he said. 'Now I can go *to* school, or *from* school, just as I like, and nobody will ever know what I'm doing.' The dumpy party then went on their way exploring, leaving the squealing Archie and uncanny auntie calling after them, and weeping unmixed tears of terror, lest by some accident they should never come back. The noble gnome went along in front of them, when suddenly he began walking right up, in the water. When the others came up to the same place, to their surprise, they found themselves doing the same thing. They couldn't possibly stay on the ground. 'I don't want to go up,' said erratic Cricket, kicking, and shamefaced Will called to the sparkling gnome, to know what was the matter. 'Nothing at all,' he called back, cheerfully, 'only gravity doesn't happen to act just there. Sometimes it doesn't and then you're just as likely to go somewhere else.'

"'Let's go back!' said prim Eunice.

"'Very well. There's nowhere to go but back,' called back the rickety gnome. 'Stand on your heads, and go the other way.'

"The humble party upset themselves, and got along very nicely, and soon found themselves on the ground again.

"'I don't like to walk all sorts of ways,' said flighty Hilda. 'I like to go on my grateful feet best.' So they decided to go back to the boat as best they could. But when they came to the suave boat it wasn't there, for the ground had opened accidentally, and cowardly Archie and generous auntie had fallen right through the earth, to China, probably, if nothing happened to stop them. This was quite a disappointment to the naughty party, who didn't know what to do next. So they decided to do nothing at all, and, as far as the present dramatic and inconvenient historian knows, that is just what they are doing at the present time. Here ends the swaggering story of the mellow and gruff shipwrecked mariners."

"Is that all?" "What fun!" "Didn't the adjectives come in funny!" "Write another one!" came the various comments.

"Hurrah for Mumsey!" shouted Archie. "You're a regular Alice in Wonderland."

"I wish I were, and I would raise the wind," said Auntie Jean.

"Slang, madam!" both her sons instantly announced.

"Is it? Then I beg its pardon, and yours, and everybody's," answered Auntie Jean, promptly. "No, Edna, I will *not* write another one, till the next time we are becalmed. Isn't there a sign of a breeze, Will?"

"None yet, but we are making way slowly, with the sculling and the tide. We're half across the bay now."

"Guess this rebus," said Cricket, presenting a paper on which she had been drawing for a moment. There was a capital letter B,—a very wild and inebriated looking letter it was, too,—and beside it was another B, with beautiful, regular curves, lying flat on its back.

"It's one word," hinted Cricket.

"How doth the little busy B
Improve each shining hour,"

suggested Auntie Jean, instantly.

"No, that's good, but it isn't right; it's what we are now."

"B-calmed," said Archie. "And you're right. That B needed calming badly, you little Gloriana McQuirk." For every separate hair of Cricket's curly crop, having been wet in her involuntary bath, and afterward rubbed dry, stood out in a separate and distinct curl from all the others, making a veritable halo around her head.

"This is the way you look, Cricket," said Archie, seizing a pencil, and in a moment his clever fingers had drawn a head in which nothing was to be seen save a very wide smile, and a cloud of hair.

"I look very well, then," said Cricket, calmly. "It's like all those pictures in papa's 'Paradise Lost,' where the angels all have halos, you know. It would be very convenient to have a halo, really, wouldn't it, auntie? A saint could fry his own eggs right on his halo, for instance, if he wanted to, couldn't he?"

"That *would* be a practical use for a halo," laughed auntie. "And that brings up a suggestion of more lunch. Let us eat up the fragments. It's five o'clock."

"And here's a bit of a breeze coming," said Will, suddenly, wetting his finger, and holding it up. "Whoop-la! She's coming! Let's give her the call!" And all the vigorous young lungs joined in a wild salute of "Wah-who-wah! wah-who-wah! Come, little breezes! wah-who-wah!"

"I'll stop sculling, and eat in comfort now," said Will, shipping his oar, and taking a sandwich. "She's safe to come, now."

And the breeze did not belie his confidence, for in ten minutes more the sail began to flap, and then to fill. The boat instantly responded, and Archie took the helm. The breeze steadily freshened, and in two minutes more the *Gentle Jane* was skimming along like a bird. And so, not long after six, they landed at the dock.

CHAPTER XX.

A NEW HIDING-PLACE.

The four girls were in an unusually energetic frame of mind the next day, owing to so many hours confinement on the sailboat.

"Let's do something wild to-day," said Cricket, at the breakfast-table. "I'd like to ride a crazy horse."

"Are you tired of this world?" asked Will. "If you are, I'll go and borrow Mr. Gates's Josephus,—his new horse. He's only half broken, and that's the wrong half."

"Cricket, I put my foot down on your doing anything of the kind," said auntie, in alarm, not feeling at all sure of Cricket. "Remember you're strictly forbidden to mount anything but Mopsie."

"And the sawhorse?" broke in Archie.

"Yes, I'll except the sawhorse," conceded his mother.

"Why, auntie, I rode Columbus all around the field, bareback, the other day," said Cricket. "I didn't know you didn't want me to."

"*Columbus!* you crazy child! He's not at all safe even for a man to ride him. Understand, my dear, that's tabooed."

"Oh, auntie!" cried Cricket, clasping her hands, tragically, "If you've any filial affection for me, you won't say that! I do so love to ride a horse bareback. Mopsie is dear, but I like something *fiercer*."

"If you have any filial affection for *me*, my dear," returned auntie, laughing, "you will say no more about it. You know I've undertaken to restore all you children, as uninjured as possible, to your father and mother. Riding half-broken horses bareback is not exactly the safest thing in the world."

"What let's do, then?" asked Edna.

"I'm going to take grandma for a nice long ride after breakfast. Suppose two of you come with me, and the other two ride or drive Mopsie and Charcoal," proposed auntie.

"All right. Suppose you and I go in the carriage, Eunice," said Edna, "and let the children take the ponies."

"The children, indeed!" said Hilda, bridling. "I'm as old as you, Edna."

"Cricket's the only trundle-bed trash," said Archie, pulling her hair.

"Goodness me, auntie, if you'd whipped him a little when *he* was trundle-bed trash, he might have been very much nicer now," said Cricket, pulling away, and, by her hasty movement, upsetting her glass of milk. "There, now! I've done it again. *Please* excuse me, auntie."

"It was not your fault, dear. It's that bad boy of mine that must be blamed. I read a story a little while ago of a plan where all the small boys were put into a barrel when they were six, and fed and educated through the bung-hole, and not let out till they were twenty-one. Would you like to live there?"

"Oh, how lovely!" sighed Edna. "Let's go there! Think of having no one to tease you."

"Or pull your hair," said Cricket, feelingly.

"Or call you names," said Hilda, severely.

"Or hide your things," added Eunice, reproachfully.

"Or take you sailing, or teach you to wrestle, or write things for your old 'Echo,' or harness the ponies when Luke is not round, and look out for you generally," said Archie, in a breath. "If boys are barrelled in that place, girls ought to be—"

"Hung," said Edna, sweetly. "Please pass me the syrup."

"Since you've settled that question," said auntie, smiling, "shall we arrange it that Eunice and Edna go with us, and Cricket and Hilda ride the ponies? Or would you rather drive, Hilda?"

"I'll ride with Cricket, please," said Hilda.

"We'll have a splendid scamper, then," said Cricket. "Oh, Hilda! do you know, I've found out lately how to make Mopsie go up on his hind legs and walk around with me on his back. It's lots of fun and I don't fall off a bit, auntie."

"That seems rather dangerous, my dear," said auntie, looking disturbed. "When did you learn?"

"There's really not any danger, I think, mother," said Will. "Mopsie's such a gentle little chap and so well trained. He walks around on his hind legs as smoothly as Charcoal on four, and comes down so gently that you'd hardly know it. He knows just how."

"And if I fall off," said Cricket, "there isn't very far to fall, you know."

"Oh, girls!" said Eunice, suddenly changing the subject, "don't forget there is the meeting of the 'Echo Club' at three this afternoon, to read the 'Echo.' Do you want to hear it again, auntie?"

"To be sure I do. I want to know all about your budding geniuses. And it will amuse grandma, too. Meet on the piazza. And can't you make the hour four o'clock to suit us old ladies, that like a nap after luncheon?"

"Of course we will. I'm president, and I'll appoint the meeting at four. Can we be excused now, auntie? We will be round somewhere when you're ready to go to ride. I've got to do a little work on the 'Echo' yet. It isn't quite finished."

Even the long scamper on the ponies, of two or three hours, failed to exhaust Cricket's energy, and when they returned she wanted Hilda to go for a row with her. Hilda flatly refused.

"You *are* the most untiresome creature," she said. "I should think you'd be ready to drop. I am, I know. I'm going to get into the hammock, and I'm not going to stir till dinner-time. Do come and sit down yourself, and rest."

"Sit down and rest," repeated Cricket, with much scorn. "As if a little ride like that tired me. Well, if you won't go to row, come to walk!"

"I'm going to sit still, I say," returned Hilda, firmly, seating herself comfortably in the hammock. "I'll row this afternoon, perhaps, if it isn't too hot. Here come Eunice and Edna. Do sit down, Cricket, and be sensible."

"If I sat down I'd be insensible," answered Cricket, trying to sit cross-legged on the piazza-rail. "There's old Billy! I'll take him for a row," and Cricket, tipping herself sideways, alighted on her feet on the ground below, and ran off.

"Such a child," sighed Hilda, with the air of forty years. "She is reprehensible!" aiming at irrepressible.

Eunice and Edna joined her on the piazza.

"Where is Cricket?" Eunice asked.

"She's rampaging off," said Hilda. "I'm so hot that I don't know what to do, and there's Cricket calmly going out on that scorching water. Look at her, now!"

The girls followed Hilda's indignant finger, which pointed to where Cricket, having adjusted old Billy to her satisfaction in the stern, was pushing off the boat. The tide was nearly out, and in another half-hour the flats would be bare.



"CRICKET SAT DOWN ON THE BEACH WITH THE CHILDREN"

"I wonder if she'll get stuck again," said Edna, with interest, shading her eyes to look. "Cricket! Cricket! don't—forget—the—tide!" she called, making a speaking-tube of her hands.

"No," called Cricket, in reply, "I'm only going a little distance, just for exercise."

"For exercise!" groaned Hilda, sinking down in her hammock.

"For exercise!" echoed Edna, subsiding at full length in a steamer-chair.

"For exercise!" said Eunice, briskly, looking half inclined to follow her, when Edna pulled her down beside her.

"No, you don't want to go at all. Cricket will be back in a few moments. She can't go far, on account of the tide."

"I must finish my 'Echo,' any way," said Eunice, remembering her editorial duties, and vanishing into the house to get her materials.

It was not long before Cricket turned and pulled in. The children were on the beach with Eliza, and Cricket sat down on the sand with them, after landing, digging and laughing, as if she were six years old herself. Presently they all jumped up, and ran laughing and shouting after her.

"Come on, girls, and play 'Tick-den,'" called Cricket, as she passed.

"Come and sit down," chorused the girls, but Cricket laughed and ran on, the twins tagging after her, and Kenneth struggling in the rear.

"Tick-den" is a local variation of the time-honoured "hide-and-go-seek." There is not much fun in it when there are only three playing, especially when two of the three have very short legs, but Cricket seemed to find a certain amount of amusement in it, as she did in everything. The other girls made remarks of withering scorn to her, as she flew by, but Cricket only laughed and tossed back her curly head, and ran on.

At last there was a longer disappearance than usual. After a time Zaidee and Helen, with Kenneth lagging after, came disconsolately around to the front piazza. Zaidee's soft, silky, black hair lay in wet streaks, plastered down on her forehead, while Helen's golden locks were as tightly curled as grape-tendrils.

"We can't find Cricket any more, for she's runned away," announced Zaidee, aggrieved.

"We've hunted and hunted," said Helen. "We heard her calling once, but when we got where she was, she wasn't there any more."

"She'll be back in a moment," said Eunice, mopping off the little hot head with a practised hand. "You sit still and get cool. Really, 'Liza ought not to let you run around this way, in the hot sun."

"Just what I came out to say," said auntie, appearing in the doorway. "I came down to tell you, my dear little

girls, that it is much too hot to run around this way any more. You must sit down and rest till after dinner. Where's Cricket?"

"She's hided, and we can't find her anywhere," repeated Zaidee.

"She will come out presently, when she finds you aren't looking for her any more," said auntie, sitting down. "How fares our noble editor?"

"Your noble editor has most finished," said Eunice, surveying, with pride, her neatly printed pages. "If you could only stay next week, Hilda, we'd let you print a number."

"I would just as soon as not," said Hilda. "I can print very nicely. I'd like to. I'd put big, beautiful fancy capitals for the 'Echo,' and the names of the stories in fancy capitals also, and I'd draw tail-pieces."

Eunice and Edna exchanged glances.

"It's a very great pity you can't stay," said Edna, with marked politeness. "We can't do tail-pieces." The two little girls, Hilda and Edna, were just enough alike to clash very often, though Edna was never given to bragging, as Hilda sometimes was, and she was much more unselfish.

"I can draw very well," said Hilda, serenely, and with perfect truth. Like Edna, she had a dainty touch.

The minutes passed by, and still Cricket did not appear. Presently auntie raised her head, and listened.

"I thought I heard Cricket calling," she said, "but I don't hear it again."

A moment later, Eunice suddenly said:

"There certainly is some one calling. Is it Cricket?" She stood up to listen better. A muffled cry was certainly heard.

"Children! Eunice!"

Eunice shot off the piazza.

"Yes, Cricket, where are you?" running around the house. In a few moments she reappeared from the other side.

"Where can she be? I ran all around the barn, too. Hark! there it is again! Cricket! where are you?"

And again every one heard the same muffled cry, "Eunice!"

"Now it sounds *in* the house," said Mrs. Somers, going in.

They all joined in the search, running in every direction, and trying to locate the indistinct sounds. She was evidently in trouble, but they could not imagine why she did not tell them where she was. Somebody suggested the garret, and they all trooped up there and searched every corner in vain. Then closets, even to the rubbers-closet under the stairs, were investigated. If they stood inside the house, her call seemed to come from outside. If they went out, she seemed to be calling from inside. After the barn and woodshed were searched, there was really no place for her to conceal herself in.

"This is certainly the strangest thing!" said Auntie Jean, at last in despair. "Cricket, dear child, where *are* you?" looking up at the trees.

"I don't know!" wailed a voice so near them that they all jumped. They were near the open cellar window, where the coal was put in.

"Down cellar!" cried Eunice, darting away. "She must be caught somewhere!"

But down cellar, the sounds, though still audible, were more vague than ever.

"It really sounds in the furnace," suggested Eunice, hopefully, going forward. She threw open the door, rather expecting to see Cricket crouching in a bunch in the fire-box. But no! it was guiltless of Cricket, as every other place had been.

"This is getting positively uncanny," exclaimed auntie, when suddenly a tremendous pounding that seemed to come from their very feet was heard. Hilda grew pale, Edna clung to her mother, Zaidee began to roar, and Helen to whimper, while Eunice sprang forward, listening intently.

"Do that again, Cricket," she said, and immediately the pounding was repeated.

"If I had ever heard of an underground passage here, I should think she was in that," said auntie, looking puzzled. "If it were Governor Winthrop's house, all could be explained. Cricket, in the name of all that is weird, where are you?"

"I don't know," came in sepulchral tones. "I seem to be walled up!"

"Oh!" shrieked Hilda, clutching Mrs. Somers' other hand.

"Are you underground? Shall we dig you out?" called auntie.

Eunice stood turning her head from side to side, like a dog. Then she made a rush for a large closet at one side of the cellar. It was nearly empty except for a few stone jars.

"I looked in there once," said auntie, but as Eunice opened the door, the pounding began again, apparently directly back of it.

"But the back of the closet is against the cellar wall," said Auntie Jean in new bewilderment, but at the very moment, Cricket's voice, clearer now and more distinct, announced, "I'm here," with a vigorous kick, to emphasize her words. "*Can't* you get me out? I'm nearly dead."

"But *what* are you in, and how in the name of wonder did you get there?" said Auntie Jean, more puzzled than ever, surveying the blank boards before her. "Eunice, run and find Luke, and tell him to come here. Are you against the cellar wall, Cricket?"

"I don't seem to know where I am," answered Cricket, half-laughing. "I've fallen into something."

In a few minutes Eunice returned with Luke. The moment he looked in at the open closet door, he burst into a loud guffaw, slapping his thigh with his hand.

"She's in the cold-air box, by gosh!"

"The cold-air box!" echoed everybody in varying intonations. It was even so. The old house had an unusually deep cellar. When the furnace had been put into the house a few years before, the cold-air box had to go in as best it could. It happened to be more convenient to build it down the back of an unused closet which already had an opening for a window at the level of the ground. So the back of the closet had been partitioned off for it, and it was continued under the cemented floor to the furnace. Luke had lately been doing something to it, so both the cover that shuts off the cold air was out, and also the wire-netting, that went over the window.

Cricket seeing the window from the outside, took it for granted that it opened into the coal-bin, and, in her heedless fashion, backed hastily through, as she was looking for a good place to hide in, meaning to swing down by her hands, and drop on her feet. She *did* drop, what to her surprise seemed about to the middle of the earth, and it really was some distance. The cellar, as I said, was unusually deep, and Cricket was only four feet high. Every one knows how surprising it is to come down even a foot or two lower than we expect, and the swift, long drop, when she thought she must be already near the cellar bottom, not only startled, but slightly stunned her for a few moments. When she opened her eyes after the black, dizzy whirl that lasted for several minutes, she could not imagine what sort of a place she was in. The light above her showed her a square, well-like tunnel, set up on end, and about two feet square, with the window ledge five feet higher than her head. At first she tried to climb up the wall by bracing herself on opposite sides of it, but her muscles were not quite equal to this. It was not until it slowly dawned on her that she could not possibly get out by her own efforts, that she began to call. Of course her voice was carried by the furnace pipes all over the house, making it impossible to locate the sound.

"There's a big hole down by my feet," Cricket called out, when she heard them debating as to the best way to get her out. "Can't I crawl through that and come out somewhere?"

"You'd come out in the furnace, Miss," said Luke, "and you'd get stuck in the bend. I'll haul you up from the outside."

They all went outside, while Luke tried to reach down to her, but their hands could not make connections.

"Let a ladder down," said Eunice, but there was not room for both a ladder and Cricket, even if one could have been put down.

"Let a rope down, and tie it around her waist," said Luke, "and I'll haul it up."

"I'm afraid that would hurt her," said auntie, anxiously.

Just then Will and Archie arrived on the scene, and joined the group around the window.

"What's up? caught a burglar down there?" asked Will.

"Yes, one caught in the very act. Question is, getting it up."

"Will, is that you?" called a forlorn voice from the depths. "Do, for goodness sake, get me out of this hole."

Archie instantly poked his head through the opening, and looked down at her.

"Cricket, by jingo! How's the weather down there?"

"Don't tease now, Arch," begged Cricket. "Get me up, for I'm nearly dead down here."

"Why don't you knock away some of the boards from the partition down-stairs?" asked Will. "It wouldn't take a moment. Where's the axe, Luke?"

"Will, you're the Lady from Philadelphia," exclaimed his mother. "Of course we can."

And in ten minutes more Cricket was a free individual again, and quite ready to attack their belated dinner.

CHAPTER XXI.

BILLY'S PRAYER.

A little procession trailed slowly across the orchard, towards the cottage of the poor old woman in whom grandma was so much interested. The procession consisted of Hilda and Cricket, the latter walking very sedately along, because she had in charge a dish of something good to eat for the old woman; then the twins,

with their arms tight around each other's necks, as usual; then old Billy, shambling along, his gaunt figure a little bent forward, and his hands clasped behind his back, under his coat tails, as he generally walked. Last of all came George W., stepping daintily along, his tail arching high over his back, his head cocked a little on one side, like a dog's, and his ears briskly erect.

George was not an invited member of the party, but from his favorite perch, the roof of the well-house—for George W. was always of an aspiring mind—having seen the party set out, he immediately scrambled down and trotted after. It was some time before he was discovered; not, indeed, till an apple, tumbling down from a branch of a tree, chanced to hit the very tip of his little gray nose. Thereupon he uttered a surprised "me-ow," with an accent that belonged to George W. alone.

"There's that cat, coming along, too," observed Hilda, "isn't he a little tag-tail?"

"See how pretty Martha looks waving over his back like an ostrich feather!" said Cricket, in reply, making a dive for her pet with her one free hand, and nearly meeting with an accident, for George W. preferred walking on his own four legs just then, and darted past her.

"There! you nearly lost your blanc-mange off the dish!" cried Hilda, rescuing it. "I knew I'd better carry it!"

"It's all right," said Cricket, hastily straightening it. "I'll carry it. We go this way now," as they turned out of the orchard into a lane. Grandma's poor woman, "Marm Plunkett," as the whole neighbourhood called her, was a forlorn old creature, nearly crippled with rheumatism, who lived in a tiny cottage in the fields, half a mile from anybody. She had a daughter who had to go to work nearly every day to earn money to support them both, so the old mother was alone most of the time. She had worked a good deal for Mrs. Maxwell, when she was strong, and Mrs. Maxwell did much to make her comfortable now. Edna had often been there, and lately the twins had been over with Eliza, to take things to her, since grandma had been disabled, but it chanced that Cricket had never been over there before.

The poor old soul was delighted to see them coming. The cottage was in such a lonely place that few persons came within sight of the windows.

"You're as welcome as the flowers in May," quavered the thin old voice, as the children went in. "I've been a-settin' here just a-pinin' fer some one to come along to visit with me a spell. Take cheers, won't you? Leastways, take what cheers there be."

There were only two to take, and one of them was seatless. Hilda dropped into the whole one. Billy sat down on the doorstep. The twins sat upon the board edge of the bottomless chair. Cricket remained standing, with the blanc-mange still in her hand. All of them, shy, as children always are in the presence of poverty and sickness, stared helplessly about.

"We've brought you some blanc-mange, marm—I mean Mrs. Plunkett"—for grandma did not like them to use the village nickname—said Cricket, after a moment, "and Auntie Jean will be here to-morrow."

"An' it's a pretty-spoken lady she is," answered Marm Plunkett. "But it's Mis' Maxwell that I allers wants ter see most. When'll she git to see me agin?"

Cricket coloured furiously.

"Grandma's lame, now," she said, speaking up bravely. "I was wrestling with her, and I threw her, and sprained her ankle. She can't stand on it much yet."

"Good Land o' Goshen! a-wrestlin' with Mis' Maxwell! you little snip of a gal! and throwed her! for goodness' sake! deary me! throwed her!"

"Yes," said Cricket, with the air of confessing to a murder, as she set down the blanc-mange. "I *don't* see how I could have done it. I just twisted my foot around her ankle. I was just as much surprised as if the—the church had tumbled over. It was a week ago Monday."

"Jest to think on 't! I never heerd the beat o' that! An' nobody hain't told me of it, nuther. 'Lizy was here yestiddy, and she hain't never let on a word."

"I guess grandma told her not to," said Cricket, blushing again.

"Let me see," said the old woman, suddenly, bending forward and peering into her face. "Which one be you? You ain't Miss Edny. Be you Miss Eunice?"

"I'm Cricket," said that young lady, quite at her ease now. "Most probably you've never heard of me before. We're all grandma's grandchildren, and are spending the summer here. At least, we're all grandchildren but Hilda. She's visiting me. She is going home to-morrow, and I'm awfully sorry."

Marm Plunkett paid no attention to the end of this speech. She was bending eagerly forward, looking at Cricket through her big steel-bowed glasses.

"Have—I—seen—Miss—Cricket! Have—I—seen—her!" came slowly from the old woman's lips, as she clasped her hands over her staff, still gazing at her as if she were a rare, wild animal. Cricket felt somewhat disconcerted.

"Yes, I'm Cricket," she repeated, uncomfortably, feeling guilty of something. She felt as if she were confessing to being an alligator, for instance.

Mrs. Maxwell had often amused the old woman by tales of her grandchildren, and as Cricket always had more accidents and disasters than all the rest of the family put together, she had naturally figured largely in her grandmother's stories.

"Have—I—seen—Miss—Cricket!" repeated the old woman, stretching out her hand as if she wanted to touch her to make sure she was flesh and blood. Cricket went towards her, rather reluctantly. Marm Plunkett laid her shaking claws on her hands, felt of her arms, and even laid the point of her withered finger in the dimple of the round, pink cheek. Cricket winced. She felt as if she were a chicken, which the cook was trying, to see if it were tender.

"I—I—didn't know you knew me," she said, trying to be polite and not pull away.

"I—*have*—seen—Miss—Cricket," declared Marm Plunkett, triumphantly, at last. "Who'd 'a' thought it! She's come to see me. Won't Cindy be glad an' proud to hear of this honour."

"Dear me!" said Cricket, trying not to laugh. "I'd have come before, if I'd known you'd wanted to see me so much."

"Would you really, my pretty? Now, ain't that sweet of her?" admiringly, to Hilda.

Hilda sat looking on in dumb amazement. She was so accustomed to feeling a little superior to Cricket, on account of her orderliness and generally good behaviour, that she was struck with surprise at the old woman's joy over seeing her little friend, while she sat by unnoticed. She did not know how many a laugh and pleasant hour the stories of Cricket's mishaps had given the lonely old woman.

"Yer favour yer ma, I see," said Marm Plunkett, still holding Cricket's sleeve. "Dear! dear! she was a pretty one, that she was! You've got shiny eyes like her'n, but yer hair's a mite darker, ain't it? My! ain't them curls harndsome!" touching very gently one of the soft rings of Cricket's short hair. It was never regularly curled, but had a thorough brushing given it by Eliza every morning, and, five minutes after, the dampness or the summer heat made her like a Gloriana McQuirk.

Cricket looked dreadfully embarrassed, and hadn't the least idea what to say to this peculiar old woman, who repeated, softly, with no eyes for the rest:

"Have—I—seen—Miss—Cricket!"

Fortunately, here a howl from Zaidee created a diversion. She had pushed herself too far back on the bottomless chair, and had suddenly doubled up like a jack-knife into the hole. As Hilda and Cricket hastily turned, nothing was visible but a pair of kicking feet, for her little short petticoats had fallen back over her head, entirely extinguishing her. Helen instantly lifted up her voice and wept.

Cricket seized Zaidee's feet and Hilda her shoulders, and together they tried to pull her up. But she was a plump little thing, and was so firmly wedged in, that the chair rose as they pulled her.

"Billy, come hold the chair down, please," called Cricket. So, with Billy to brace his huge foot on the round of the chair, and to hold down the back with his hands, Cricket and Hilda, with another vigorous pull, managed to undouble Zaidee.

Marm Plunkett had been sitting in a state of great excitement, while the rescue was going on, and leaned back with a sigh of relief when the little girl was finally straightened out. Zaidee took it very philosophically.

"Stop crying, Helen," she said, "you are such a cry-baby. This is a very funny chair, Marm Plunkett. How do people sit down on it? Do you like it that way? I 'xpect I'm so little that I can't keep on the outside of it. I guess I don't want to sit down any more, any way."

Marm Plunkett cackled a thin, high laugh.

"Ef children don't beat the Dutch! Wisht I hed some a-runnin' in an' out to kinder chirk me up a bit when Cindy's away."

"I want a drink, please," announced Zaidee.

"Bless yer leetle heart! You shall hev a drink right outen the northeast corner of our well, where it's coldest. Take the dipper, Billy, an' give the leetle dears a good cold drink all around."

"I want one, too," said Cricket, and all the children trooped after Billy.

The well had the old-fashioned well-sweep.

It was always a mysterious delight to the children to see the water drawn from one of these, as the great end went slowly up and the bucket dipped, and then came down again with a stately, dignified sweep.

Cricket darted forward.

"I've always wanted to ride up on that end," she said, to herself, "and now I'm going to."

Quick as a flash she had jumped astride the end, grasping the pole with both hands. George W. instantly sprang lightly up in front of her, just out of her reach, poising himself with "Martha" arching over his back. The twins and Hilda, hanging over the edge and looking down on the mossy stones, did not notice her.

"Get it out of the northeast corner, she said," ordered Zaidee. "Which is the northeast corner, Billy? Is it where the water comes in? Billy, there aren't any corners. It's all round."

Billy was tugging at the slender pole that held the bucket.

"Goes down hard enough. Seems to want ilin' or suthin'. Land o' Jiminy!" He chanced to turn his head and saw Cricket calmly ascending as the pole went higher and higher. It was a wonder he did not lose his hold.

"Don't let go, Billy," Cricket screamed. "If you do, I'll go *kerflump*."

Billy grasped the pole tighter.

"You'll—you'll fall," he stammered.

"Course I will if you let go. Go on! Let the bucket down. I'm having a fine ride. Do you like it, George Washington?"

George Washington walked a step or two further down the beam. He was not at all sure he *did* like it. As there did not seem to be room enough for him to turn around and run back to Cricket, as he very much wanted to do, he stood still, mewling uncertainly. Billy, in agony of soul, but obedient as ever, lowered the pole carefully, casting reproachful glances over his shoulder. Hilda and the twins stood in fascinated silence, looking at Cricket getting such a beautiful high ride. As for George Washington, as the pole slanted more and more, making his head lower and his rear higher, he made a few despairing steps forward. Lower went the bucket, and George W.'s Martha lost her proud arch, and George stuck his claws deep into the wood.

"Oh-ee!" squealed Cricket, suddenly beginning to feel slightly uncomfortable herself. The ground looked very far below her, and she began to feel as if she were pitching headforemost. She held on with her hands, as tightly as George Washington did with his claws. Then the bucket hit the water, splash. Dipping it made the big pole dance a little.

"Oh-ee," squealed Cricket, again, clinging tighter. "Hurry up, Billy, bring me down."

"Miau-au," wailed George Washington, suddenly, giving a mighty spring of desperation. Alas! he missed his calculation, if he had time to make any, and disappeared from the eyes of the children into the dark depths of the well. Cricket, forgetting her own precarious position, involuntarily gave a little grasp after him, thus losing her own hold, lost her balance, and over she went,—and if she had fallen that fifteen feet to the hard ground below, it might have brought to a sudden end her summer at Marbury.

As it fortunately happened, however, she caught at the pole as she went over, grasped it, and hung suspended by her strong little hands. Frightened Billy had been holding the smaller pole all this time, in a vise-like grip.

"Let me down!" screamed Cricket. "Carefully, Billy!" and Billy, stiff with terror, nevertheless had the sense to obey. He raised the small pole steadily, lest the other, with Cricket's added weight, should come down too fast. In a moment more she was near enough to the ground to drop lightly down.

A tremendous splashing and mewling had been going on in the well, but the children had been too much absorbed in Cricket to notice it.

"'Tisn't as much fun as I thought it would be," was all she said, as she darted forward to look down the well after her pet. "Let the bucket down again, Billy, and see if he'll cling to it. Oh, you poor, poor George Washington. Billy, do hurry up! Why, he'll *drown*."

But Billy had given out. He was so thoroughly frightened when he discovered Cricket on her lofty perch, that, now that she was safely down, he was shaking like a leaf. Cricket pushed him unceremoniously away, as she peered down.

George Washington looked like a good-sized muskrat, as they saw him clinging to the wet, mossy stones, meowing pitifully. He was either too frightened or too cold to make any effort to climb up. Perhaps he could not have done so anyway. Cricket lowered the bucket again herself, till it struck the water. The splash seemed to frighten George Washington only the more, for his cries were redoubled.

"What a *stupid* cat!" cried Hilda. "Why doesn't he take hold and come up?"

"He's frightened to death down there in the cold. He's *never* stupid, are you, George W.? I'm *so* afraid he'll die of getting wet and cold before we can save him!" cried Cricket, anxiously, flopping the bucket about. "Do take hold of it, George! dear George, do!"

But Cricket's most coaxing tones availed nothing. George only meowed and meowed in accents that grew more pitiful every minute.

"Do run and tell Marm Plunkett that the kitten's in the well, Hilda," said Cricket, at last. "Perhaps she'll know something to do. Look out, children! don't lean over so far, else the first thing you know you'll be down there, too. Oh, George Washington, please take hold!"

Hilda ran off, and came back a moment later with rather a scared face.

"I told her, Cricket, and what do you think she said? That we must be sure not to let it die there, 'cause it would poison the water! She seemed dreadfully frightened about it, and tried to get up, but of course she couldn't, and then she said—she said—she'd *pray* for us." Hilda's voice sank to an awed whisper. Cricket looked blank.

Billy caught up the word eagerly.

"Yes, yes, children, that's right o' Marm Plunkett. It's allers good to pray," and down went simple old Billy on his knees. "You keep on a-danglin' that ere bucket, and I'll pray fur ye, young uns. That'll fetch him." He clasped his hands and shut his earnest eyes.

The children stood in awed silence. Billy, swaying back and forth in his eagerness, began in a high-keyed voice, sounding unlike his ordinary tones:

"How dothe the little busy bee

Improve each shining hour;
And gather honey all the day
From every fragrant flower'—Amen."

Poor old Billy! this scrap of a rhyme, learned in his far-away boyhood, was the one bit that had stuck in his clouded mind all these years, and had served this pious soul for a prayer ever since. Every night, kneeling reverently by his bedside, he had said it, and every morning when he awoke; only then he added the petition, "God bless Mrs. Maxwell, and make Billy good."

Cricket and Hilda, too much amazed to speak, but too much impressed with Billy's earnestness to laugh, stood stock-still as they were; Hilda in the act of stretching out her hands to draw Zaidee back from the well-curb,—where she hung, in imminent danger of following George W.,—and Cricket, still grasping the pole, and looking back over her shoulder, and Helen staring with her great eyes.

As Billy ceased, there was an oppressive moment of silence. He remained on his knees, swaying his gaunt frame slightly, with his eyes still closed. Suddenly Cricket felt the bucket lurch as it lay on the surface of the water below. She looked quickly over the well-curb.

"Oh, Hilda! Billy, hurrah! he's climbed upon the bucket at last! He's way up on it. Now, we'll have him!" and with Hilda to help, she began cautiously to raise the bucket.

Billy slowly got up from the ground, and dusted off his trouser knees.

"It's allers wuth while a-prayin' for things," he remarked.

In a few minutes the bucket was on a level with the well-curb, and while Hilda held the pole, Cricket drew out her dripping, shivering pet.

Such a rubbing as he got in Marm Plunkett's little kitchen! He was very much exhausted with his cold bath, and I'm afraid that a very few minutes longer in the icy water would have ended one of George Washington's nine lives.

"All the curl has gone out of Martha, even," remarked Cricket, mournfully, surveying his straight tail.

"His tail will curl over again, when he begins to chirk up a bit," said Marm Plunkett, comfortingly. "He'd orter hev a dish of milk het up for him right away," she added. "Wisht I hed some to offer you."

"I'll go right home with him, then, Marm Plunkett, and I'll run all the way. I'll borrow this little shawl of yours, if you'll let me, to keep him warm. Now, I'm going to run, but the rest of you needn't come so fast. Good-by, Marm Plunkett. I'll come and see you again, some other day;" and off darted Cricket, followed more leisurely by the rest, leaving Marm Plunkett still murmuring,—

"Have—I—seen—Miss—Cricket!"

CHAPTER XXII.

HELEN'S TEXT.

"Oh, dear me!" sighed Eunice, dolefully, the next morning at breakfast. "What dreadful changes there are going to be! Hilda goes to-day, the boys leave on Monday for their camp, and Edna goes on Tuesday to her grandmother's. Cricket and I will be left all forlorn."

"Yes," added Cricket, pulling a long face, "and on Tuesday morning Eunice and I will be wearing the garbage of woe."

"Whatever you rig yourself up in, Miss Scricket," said Archie, amid the general laughter, "don't deck yourself out in *garbage*. You'd be a public nuisance. Flowing 'robes of porcelain,' like the heroine of one of your stories, would be better."

"You needn't tease me about that, for you know as well as anything that I meant *percaline*."

But Auntie Jean and grandma had to enjoy this alone, for the boys were not equal to the fine distinctions of girl's apparel.

As Eunice said, there was a decided scattering of their little party. Hilda left Saturday afternoon, the boys departed on Monday, for their camp in the Maine woods, with a party of friends, and on Tuesday Edna had to go for her usual fortnight's visit to her grandmother Somers, who always spent July and August at Lake Clear. She was a *very* old lady, much older than Grandma Maxwell, and a good deal of an invalid. Edna much preferred staying with her cousins, but Grandmother Somers was very devoted to her only little granddaughter, and this was the particular time when she wanted her. Edna had never been there without her mother before, and really dreaded it. She had urged taking her cousins with her, but Auntie Jean knew this would be altogether too much responsibility for so old a lady to have, since she herself could not leave Marbury.

"I hate to go like poison," sighed Edna to Eunice, as they strolled up and down the station platform, while waiting for the train. "I wish I could stay here. I wish grandma wasn't so fond of me. I wish you could come, too. I wish the two weeks were over. I wish—"

"Toot-to-toot!" whistled the approaching train.

"Horrid old thing! I wish it would run off the track! Wish Mrs. Abbott would forget to start this morning. She isn't here yet. *Do* you suppose she's forgotten?" with sudden hopefulness.

Mrs. Abbott was a lady under whose care she was going.

"No such good luck!" murmured Eunice. "There she is now. Write to me every day, Edna."

"And you'll have time to write some lovely stories for the 'Echo,'" chirped Cricket, encouragingly.

"Yes, I will, and be glad too. It will be something to do. Think of my saying I'd be glad to write stories! Yes, mamma—good-by, everybody," and with hugs and kisses all around, Edna was put on the train and was off.

The children were both very quiet on their return ride from the station, and Auntie Jean began to fear that they might be homesick, with all their playmates gone. But when they reached home again Cricket drew Eunice into a quiet corner, and surprised her by flinging her arms around her neck, with a gigantic hug.

"I do love Hilda and Edna," she said, "but there's nobody like my old Eunice, and I'm *so* glad to have you all to myself for a little while again. I *don't* want to be selfish, and poor Edna hasn't any sister, but—"

"Why, you poor little thing!" said Eunice, hugging her small sister, heartily. "I expect *I've* been very selfish. I've never thought that, perhaps, you were being lonely when I was so much with Edna. You always seemed so happy."

"Oh, I am *happy!*" answered Cricket, surprised. "I always am, I guess. But I do love to be with you, all by your lonesome, and now let's have some real old Kayuna times. Come down on the beach, and let's talk about it," with another squeeze. And then, with their arms about each other's waists, they ran down the yard.

On the small sloping beach behind the big rocks, Zaidee and Helen and Kenneth were playing by themselves. Helen and Kenneth were sitting up very straight and stiff, with their little legs out straight in front of them, and their small hands folded in their laps. They were listening with intent faces, and round, wide-open eyes, to Zaidee, who, with small forefinger uplifted, was telling them something, with a very serious face. The girls crept softly near to see what they were doing.

"And these *naughty* chil'en," went on Zaidee, "came out of the city, and they made lots of fun of Lishers, and they ran after him, an' kept calling him names, an' saying, 'Go up, ole bullhead! go up, ole bullhead!' An' Lishers got very angry—as angry as Luke did the other day, when I asked him if he liked to have such mixed-up eyes," (poor Luke was very cross-eyed, and very sensitive about it), "and he said, 'There's some gre-at big bears in these woods, 'n' I'll call 'em to come and eat you chil'en up, if you doesn't stop calling names. Only bad little chil'en, 'thout any one to tell 'em any better, calls names.' But they didn't one of 'em stop, an' Lishers just whistled, an' forty-two bears came trotting right out of the woods, an' eated—up—every—one—of—those—bad—chil'en, quicker'n scat. 'Liza said so, herself. So, Helen and Kenneth, you mustn't ever call any one any names, an' *specialy* you mustn't call 'em 'bullheads,' cause bears will come out of the woods an' eat you all up, and it's very unpolite, too."

Helen looked awed, and Kenneth unbelieving.

"Ain't any bears," he said, stoutly.

"You mustn't inkerrupt the Sunday school," said Zaidee, severely. "Any way, there are crocky-dolls, if there ain't any bears. I saw a funny, long thing come out of the water the other day, and 'Liza said she guessed it was a crocky-doll."

"Tould it eat me up?" demanded Kenneth, hastily.

"I don't think it could eat you all up at once," said Zaidee, cautiously; "but it might take bites out of you."

"What are you doing, children?" said Eunice, coming forward, and throwing herself on the sand beside them, and pulling Helen, her special pet, down into her arms.

"Playing Sunday school, Eunice," said Zaidee, sitting down, herself. "We're going to have a Sunday school every Tuesday afternoon, just the same as you have the Echo Club, you know. Helen's going to make up the texts. She makes up *beautiful* texts, just like the Bible."

"Why, Zaidee!" remonstrated Eunice, looking shocked. "You mustn't say that anything is as nice as the Bible. What was it, pettinkins?"

But Helen was shy, and needed much coaxing before she could be persuaded to give her "text," which was a very practical one.

"She who doth not what she is told, gets worse."

"Bravo!" cried Eunice, laughing. "That *is* a fine text."

"She made it up all her own self," said Zaidee, quite as proud of her twin's performance as if it had been her own.

"I don't want to play Sunday school any more, Zaidee," said Kenneth, getting up. "I'd ravver play turch. I'm ze talking man, wiv white skirts on," he added, standing on a stone, and waving his short arms about, for the young man had made his first appearance at church the Sunday before, and had wanted to play "turch" ever since.

"You were a naughty boy," said Zaidee, reproachfully, "you talked out loud right in meetin'-church, and I was

so 'shamed."

"And you falled off the stool when all the people were kneeling down and saying, 'The seats they do hear us, O Lord;' and you made a great *big* noise," added Helen, severely, for her.

"The seats they do hear us," repeated Cricket. "What *does* she mean, Eunice, do you suppose?"

"Why, don't you know, Cricket," explained Helen, for herself. "When all the people are kneeling down, and the minister keeps saying things, and the people keep saying, 'The seats they do hear us,' 'course they hear them, 'cause they say it right at the back of the seats."

Eunice and Cricket shouted with laughter.

"She means, 'We beseech Thee to hear us,'" cried Cricket, choking, quite as if she never made any mistakes on her own account. But other people's mistakes are *so* different from our own. Helen, her sensitive feelings dreadfully hurt, instantly retired under her apron, and refused to be comforted. They always had to be careful about laughing at Helen, whereas Zaidee never seemed to mind.

"Never mind, pet," said Eunice, kissing and petting her. "It wasn't a very bad mistake."

"What's this?" said Cricket, to change the subject She had been plunging her arm down deep in the sand, and had struck something big and bony. She cleared away the loose sand.

"That's our cemi-terror," explained Zaidee; "we'd been having a frinyal before we had Sunday school, and we buried that thing. We finded it in the field the other day. Let's pull it up now, Helen. We've had lots of frinyals, Cricket, and we've buried ever so many things in our cemi-terror. Turkles and things like that, you know."

Cricket, with some difficulty, extricated the object. It was a great skull of a cow, bleached as white as snow.

"Liza says it was a cow, once," observed Zaidee, poking her fingers in the big holes where the eyes once were. "It was a pretty funny cow, *I* think. She says it has undressed all its flesh off, and we're all like that inside. But I'm not, see?" and Zaidee opened her mouth wide and offered it for inspection. "Mine's all red inside."

"Mamma says we're made of dust," said Helen, thoughtfully. "If we're made out of dust, I don't see why we don't get all muddy inside when we drink."

"I guess that's why my hands get so dirty," said Zaidee, suddenly, looking at her small, grimy palms with close attention. "I guess it sifts right through my skin. Course I can't keep clean when it keeps sifting through all the time, and 'Liza says she *don't* see *how* I get myself *so* dirty," with a funny imitation of Eliza's tones. "I'm going to tell her I can't help it. If she keeps scrubbing me as fast as it comes out, it may get all used up inside of me sometime," went on Zaidee, who was nothing if not logical.

Helen thoughtfully squeezed Eunice's arm, trying to squeeze some dust out, she said.

"Yours is all used up, I guess," she concluded, as she met with no success.

Cricket set the skull upon the high stone which Kenneth had been using for a pulpit.

"Look, Eunice! It looks just like an idol, sitting up there and grinning. Oh, let's play we're idollers ourselves and worship it! We'll build a shrine for it, and we'll offer it sacrifices. Come on!" and Cricket, with her usual energy, fell to work instantly, building stones up for an altar.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE JABBERWOCK.

"Let me help build up the shrime, too," said Zaidee, bringing up stones also. "I want to offer sacrumfices."

"You and Helen bring a lot of dried seaweed to decorate it," said Cricket, working busily. "That's right, Kenneth. Bring all the pretty shells you can, and we'll put them all around the sides. Look, Eunice! doesn't it look fine already!"

They had built up the "shrime" to a large square pile, about two feet high, on the top of which the grinning skull reposed. The dry seaweed draped the rough stones, and Kenneth's shells were arranged about it.

"Now we must begin to offer sacrifices," said Cricket. "We *must* have dishevelled hair, Eunice, as the women always do in stories. I can't muss mine up much more than it always is," regretfully, "but you can take your braid out, and throw your hair all around. Oh, that's *lovely!*" as Eunice loosened her heavy, dark braid, and threw the long, straight masses all about. "How beautifully dishevelled you are!"

"I'm glad I don't have to offer sacrifices every day," laughed Eunice, "for dishevelled hair is *not* comfortable, at least as dishevelled as this. Perhaps I wouldn't mind a little bit of it."

"Come here, Zaidee, if you wish to join the procession," and Eunice caught her small sister, and rubbed her hands vigorously over her short, soft, straight hair, till it fairly stood on end. Helen's hair curled like Cricket's, in a golden, fluffy mass.

"Now, we're all ready. We must march up before the shrine, and lay our sacrifices at the feet of the idol, and bow down before it."

"It hasn't any foots," observed Zaidee.

"Well, before its mouth, then. It's just as 'propriate, I guess. Come over here, and get into line, Eunice. You go first and I'll follow, and the children will come on behind. We must go up with weeping and wailing and gnashing our teeth," said Cricket, getting Biblical.

"How do you gnash your tooth?" inquired Helen.

"I'll show you," said Cricket, immediately rolling her eyes, and opening and shutting her mouth with such fearful snaps of her teeth, that Helen instantly retreated behind Zaidee for protection. "Clutch your hair with both hands, this way, and get into procession."

"Yes, but where's the sacrifice?" asked Eunice, suddenly recollecting this important part of the ceremony.

"I declare! I forgot all about it! What *shall* we sacrifice?"

"We find a little dead mouse in the woodshed after breakfast," said Zaidee. "We were going to give him to George Washington for dessert to-day. We buried it in the cemi-terror to keep till it was dinner-time."

"That will do. Dig it up. George Washington can sacrifice his mouse."

While Zaidee was unearthing George W.'s intended dessert, Cricket had found a shingle for a bier. They made a bed of seaweed on it, and stretched the little dead mouse thereon.

"I've an idea!" exclaimed Eunice. "Let's call the idol the Jabberwock, and sing the Jabberwock song as we go up."

"Splendid!" cried Cricket, clapping her hands. "How does it go?"

"Beware the Jabberwock, my son,
With jaws that bite and claws that catch."

"Isn't that it?"

"That's the second verse," said Eunice "Don't you remember,

""'Twas brillig, and the slimy sea—?""

"Yes, now I do. All ready."

So the procession formed itself anew. Zaidee and Helen bore the shingle-bier in front, Eunice and Cricket came behind, tearing their hair, and chanting in doleful tones how

"The Jabberwock, with eyes of flame,
me whiffling through the tulgey wood,
And burred as it came!"

Then, with appropriate ceremonies, they offered up the mouse to the Jabberwock, and then, joining hands, they danced around it, howling and shrieking.

"More! more!" growled Cricket, in awful tones, that were supposed to come from the yawning throat of the Jabberwock. The smaller children, by this time, were wildly excited, and ready to offer up all their possessions.

"You may have my Crumples," screamed Zaidee, making a dive for a little white china cat that lay near by with a pile of other playthings that the children had been playing with.

"We must stone it to pieces first," said Cricket, "and offer up the ashes," and soon the china cat lay in fragments, and its "ashes" were offered up.

"Let's take this old rubber-baby of Kenneth's," proposed Cricket. "You don't care for it, do you, baby? It has a hole in its head."

Kenneth looked doubtfully at his beloved Jacob for a moment, and then, quite carried away by the excitement of the occasion, he cried out, valiantly:

"You may have Dacob for ze Dabberwock."

One by one all the children's small possessions lay before the jaws of the Jabberwock.

"Oh, Eunice! children! let's have a fire, and burn up all these sacrifices to the Jabberwock. Think what a lovely thing he'd think that is! Idols always love to have scenes of devastation and ruin all about."

"I'm afraid that wouldn't be safe," said Eunice, hesitating. "Would auntie like it?"

"Oh, she wouldn't care. What harm? Nothing could get on fire out here on the sands, could there? Of course, we wouldn't if it was near the house anywhere. I'll go and get the matches," and off she darted like a flash.

"Oh, are we going to have a fire, and burn up the shrime?" cried Zaidee. "Goody! goody! what fun! they're going to burn up the shrime!"

Cricket flew back with a match-box in her hand.

"Now, get lots of dry seaweed, children," she ordered, "and we'll heap it around the pile, and tuck it under the pile of sacrifices, so they'll burn better. Oh, won't that make a blaze!" and Cricket danced about in anticipation. "There, Jabberwock! I hope you'll be 'tentified,' as Zaidee says. Stand back, children. Come, Eunice, and we'll march up singing, and lay our offering of a lighted match down before him," and Cricket, chanting another verse of the "Jabberwock," pranced up and struck a match.

The dry seaweed was instantly aflame, curling and leaping like a live thing, around the pile of stone. The children, dancing around and clapping their hands, screamed in ecstasy at the sight.

"Bring more seaweed," called Cricket, piling on all she had, to keep up the darting flames. The fire went springing up, licking the white bones of the Jabberwock. In their excitement the younger children scarcely noticed that their treasures were actually burning up, also, till Kenneth suddenly caught sight of his "Dacob," writhing, and curling, and jumping about in the most uncanny way, as if in mortal agony. The poor baby darted forward to rescue it.

"It's hurted Dacob! He's all wiggly!" he cried, and he tried to snatch his best beloved doll from the flames. Eunice caught him back.

"Don't touch, baby. It will burn you. Jacob can't feel it, and I'll buy you another."

"He *does* feel it. It's hurted him," cried Kenneth, struggling to get away. With the sudden spring he made, Eunice lost hold of him, and he made a snatch at the burning sacrifice. A long tongue of flame leaped up, caught like a live thing the baby's linen dress, and in an instant he was enveloped in flames.

For one horrible moment the other children stood paralyzed with fright. Not to the longest day she lives will Cricket forget the awful terror of that moment, as the thought surged up that, whatever happened, it was all her fault. Then, with a wild scream, to which all her previous ones had been as whispers, she darted forward. Kenneth, blind with terror and pain, beat at the flames with his tiny hands, and ran shrieking down the beach, fanning the fire to a brighter blaze.

Cricket was upon him in a moment. She flung both her arms closely around him, stopping his struggles, but the eager flames caught her own light dress as she did so. Then away she dashed, down over the few steps of beach between herself and the incoming tide, and, with him in her arms, threw herself forward in the water. As she rolled over and over, the sullen flames hissed and died.

Eunice was close behind her, shrieking for help. It was nearly high tide, and the beach sloped a little more abruptly there than in most places. Cricket rose to her knees with Kenneth in her arms, stumbled and fell forward again, face downward, limp with the excitement and the strain. Eunice, knee-deep in water, dragged them both up, and, between pulling and half carrying, got them to the water's edge, just as Auntie Jean, and Eliza, and Luke, came running from different directions. The flames, still fitfully shooting up from the smouldering seaweed, told the story.

"Run for the doctor, Luke," cried Auntie Jean, wasting no time in questions, as she lifted little drenched, burned Kenneth tenderly in her arms, and flew with him towards the house, leaving Eliza to help Cricket. Kenneth's clothes were so badly burned that they fell off from him when she laid him down. He was a dreadful sight, with his golden curls all gone, his face blackened with smoke and soot, which the water had only washed off in streaks. It was impossible for her to tell, at first, how much he was injured. Fortunately, the doctor came almost immediately.

It was an anxious hour that followed. Kenneth's most serious burns were on his arms and body, for, while the golden curls were nearly gone, his poor little face was, by some fortunate chance, only slightly burned, since, as he ran forward, his curls had blown back. Cricket was burned quite severely on her arms and hands, where she had clasped and held him.

After their wounds were dressed and bandaged, and Kenneth, a little mummy-like bundle of old white linen, lay asleep, worn out with pain and excitement, Auntie Jean found Cricket sobbing quietly under the sheet.

"What is the matter, dear?" asked auntie, tenderly. "Are you in such pain?" for she knew that Cricket was a little Spartan in respect to suffering.

"Yes, no-o," sobbed Cricket. "The pain is bad, but I don't care for that. My—conscience—aches—so—*here*. I—can't—stand—it, auntie. I ought to have been all burned up myself. I oughtn't to have had a fire. I knew better, only I just thought what fun it would be. To think the baby is burned, and all through my horrid badness!"

"My poor little girl!" said Auntie Jean, pitifully. "That is the hardest of all for you to bear, I well know. But after all, dear, you can comfort yourself by thinking that, but for your quickness, the little fellow must have burned to death. You saved his life, after all. You did what should have been done, so quickly."

"That isn't much comfort," sobbed Cricket. "He oughtn't to be burned at all. *Anybody* would have thought to throw him in the water."

"I'm not sure of that. In excitement people do not always use their wits—especially children. Even Eunice, thoughtful as she usually is, was behind you."

"And I sprained grandma's ankle, too. I ought to be put in prison," went on Cricket, in a fresh deluge of remorse.

"Nobody blamed you for that, dearie, though you *are* rather a thoughtless little body. But the ankle was purely an accident. When it comes to the playing with fire, however, you really should have known better than to do such a dangerous thing. But you have learned your lesson, and now we must be thankful the

consequences are no worse."

Cricket raised a tear-stained face.

"Yes, only—my dear baby! If only I could take all his burns! I'd set fire to myself and burn myself up, if he could be well. I did the mischief, and he gets the worst of it."

"Indeed, little Cricket," said Auntie Jean, softly, almost to herself, as she bent and kissed her little niece, "you will learn, as you grow older, that that's not the least hard part of all the harm we do—we do the mischief, and the one we love best often gets the burns."

CHAPTER XXIV.

AFTER THE SACRIFICE.

The next few days were not very happy ones. Auntie Jean had her hands full. Grandma's ankle was much better, to be sure, but still it did not allow her to walk or stand on it but very little, so that she could not be of much assistance in the nursing that followed. Poor little Kenneth suffered greatly from his burns, and his fever ran high, and the very hot weather made it harder for him to bear. He cried continually for his mother. He had not fretted for her, especially, while he was well, but now that he was sick he wailed constantly for "Mamma."

Cricket was up and about, after a day or two. Her arms and hands were still bandaged, and she was very helpless about dressing and undressing herself, but she felt better to be up. She longed to do something for Kenneth, but this was impossible, with both arms in slings. These were rather dark days for the poor little girl, for, on account of the anxiety about Kenneth, she received less attention than she otherwise would have had. She was very grateful, however, that nobody reminded her that it was chiefly her fault.

Unfortunately, her right hand, with which she had first clasped Kenneth, was much more seriously burned than the other. The left hand came out of its sling at the end of three or four days, and while the arm remained bandaged, she could use her fingers.

"If it was only the other way," she mourned, "I could write a lot of stories and things for the 'Echo,' and my time would not be *all* wasted."

"Learn to write with your left hand," suggested grandma.

"Could I?" said Cricket, brightening. "Why, why not? It won't be like learning to write over again. I've often tried it, only my left-hand fingers don't seem to have any *push* in them."

"If you practise half an hour a day, you will soon do wonders," said grandma, encouragingly. "I had a brother, once, who was left-handed, and he learned to use his right hand equally well. He drew beautifully, and would often work with a pencil in each hand. Not only that, but I have often seen him write with one hand and draw with the other."

"Isn't that wonderful?" exclaimed Cricket. "I'll begin to practise this minute, Eunice, if you'll get me paper and pencil," she added, eagerly.

She worked busily for a few minutes, in silence, after the materials were brought her.

"It looks exactly like Zaidee's writing," she said, at length, in disgust, after her first few attempts. She wrote a firm, pretty hand for a girl of her age, and these shaky, disjointed letters, sprawling across the page, were very discouraging.

"It looks like the tracks of a crazy ant," she said, half laughing.

"If you practise faithfully for a few days you will find they will look like the tracks of a very sane ant," said grandma. "And, besides, think how much easier it is to learn to write with your left hand than with your toes."

"With your *toes*, grandma," came in a united chorus.

"Yes, with your toes. I knew of a man, once, who was born without any arms, and—"

"No arms at all? Not one?"

"Not one," answered grandma, smiling on her eager questioner. "He was the son of a very poor woman here in the village. They lived in that little red cottage on the Bainbridge road, where you turn by the four oaks."

"Without any arms! Did he have shoulders?" asked Cricket.

"Oh, yes, indeed. I saw them often when he was a baby—bare, I mean. The shoulder ended smoothly where the arms should be. He grew up a very bright little fellow. Running barefoot all the time, as he did, I suppose he learned to pick up things with his toes very naturally. At any rate, when he was eight years old he could even handle his knife and fork with his toes."

"Ugh!" shuddered Eunice, "Did he sit on the table?"

"No, not quite so bad as that. He sat on a little low stool, and his plate was put on the floor in front of him. He would pick up his knife and fork, cut up his meat, and feed himself as deftly as possible. It was very funny."

"Think of washing his feet before dinner, instead of his hands!" giggled Cricket.

"Could he get his feet right up to his mouth?" asked Eunice.

"Yes, easily. He was very limber."

Zaidee instantly sat down on the piazza floor and attempted the performance.

"It most cracks my back," she said, getting up and trying to reach around behind herself to rub it.

"I could do it," said supple Cricket, who could sit on the floor and put her legs around her neck.

"He went to the district school," went on grandma, "and learned to read very quickly, and his mental arithmetic was really wonderful. Long examples that the others did on their slates, he did almost as quickly in his head. One year, they had a very good, patient teacher, who, noticing how deftly he picked up all sorts of things with his toes, had the bright idea of teaching him to write by holding his pen between his toes. Now his toes, by constant using, had grown longer and slenderer than most people's, and in a very short time he could guide a pencil sufficiently to make very legible letters. Quite as much so as your first attempts with your left hand, just now, Jean."

"Think of it!" exclaimed Cricket. "I'm going to try it to-night when we go to bed, Eunice."

"It was a funny sight to see him get ready for his school work. When he arrived at school his brother washed and dried his feet carefully, and put on him an old pair of loose slippers to keep them clean. His slate or paper would be put on the floor before him, and he would slip his foot out of his slipper, grasp his pencil, and begin. By the end of a year, he really wrote wonderfully well."

"Oh-h!" sighed Zaidée. "Helen and I practised lots, last winter, with mamma, and we can't write much now. We writed every day, too."

"Where is the man now?" asked Eunice. "What became of him?"

"When he was a boy of fourteen or so, a travelling circus manager heard of him, and offered him a large salary to go with him to be exhibited," answered grandma. "He got a large salary, and after that helped support his family. He learned to do many other things with his toes, later, people said. For instance, he drew beautifully, and could even hold a knife and whittle a stick. The family soon left here, and I never knew anything more about him. So, my little Jean, aren't you encouraged to practise writing with your left hand, with good hope of success?"

"Yes, indeed, grandma," answered Cricket, taking her pencil, and going to work again, awkwardly but energetically. And I may just say, in passing, that she worked to such good effect, that in ten days' time her left-handed writing, though it slanted backward, was firm and legible.

"There!" exclaimed Cricket, with a long sigh, after her first half-hour was over, as she rose to stretch her arm above her head, "I've written so long that I'm so tired that I can hardly put one foot before the other."

"That would be a more appropriate sentiment if you were my no-armed man," said grandma, smiling.

"I'm just *wild* with keeping still, grandma! Resting makes me *so* tired. I want to go rowing or riding or walking. I'd like to jump over the moon, as far as my feelings go, but it makes my arm ache if I move round much."

"Read aloud to us," suggested grandma, "and perhaps Eunice will hold the wool for me while you do."

Cricket liked to read aloud, and she got a book very willingly.

"Here's a lovely story," she said, "all about battles and fighting, and exciting things. 'How Captain Jack Won His Epaulements.'"

"Won his—*what*?" asked grandma, holding her ball suspended.

"His epaulements. He was just a plain, every-day soldier, you know, to start with."

"Oh! won his epaulements, you mean," said grandma, gravely.

"Won his—oh, of course! how stupid of me!" looking more closely at the word. "Now I've always thought that word was epaulements, grandma, truly I did."

"Go on and begin," said Eunice; "how did he win them?"

The reading proceeded quietly for a time. Eunice held the wool, grandma wound it off, and Zaidée and Helen played tonka on the piazza steps. Tonka was a little Japanese game on the order of jackstones, only, instead of hard, nobby stones, that spoil the dimpled knuckles, tiny bags of soft, gay silk, half full of rice, are used. Six little bags are made with the ends gathered, and one more, the tonka, is made flat and square of some different coloured silk, to distinguish it, as the gay little bags fly up and down. It was a very favourite amusement with all the children. Eliza was with Kenneth, and auntie was lying down, for the poor baby had been wakeful and in much pain the night before, and auntie had had little sleep.

Nearly an hour slipped by, when suddenly grandma stopped Cricket.

"How quiet the children are. Are they there still?" turning to see. Eunice looked up also.

"Dear me, I haven't thought of them for a long time. They've slipped off. I suppose I ought to go and see what Zaidée's doing, and tell her she mustn't," and Eunice lay down her work. She had had to have much care of the younger ones these last few days.

"I'll go, too," said Cricket, getting up gladly. "'Scuse us, please, grandma, for leaving you all alone."

Cricket had scarcely ever been ill a day in her life, not even with children's diseases, which she had always escaped, and, in all her adventures, she was very rarely hurt. Therefore, pain was a very dreadful thing to her. She bore it bravely, but it was strange to see her looking so pale and heavy-eyed. But these few days of suffering were teaching her many things.

Eunice and Cricket heard the sound of the children's voices as they turned the corner of the house.

"Oh, they're all right," said Eunice, relieved.

Just back of the house, in a tiny little shed, built especially for it, stood a big barrel of kerosene. It was kept outside, because grandma was very much afraid of the possibility of fire. Once, in an unlucky moment, the waitress, Delia, in drawing the oil into a small can to be carried into the house, had yielded to Zaidee's entreaty, and had let her turn that fascinating little spigot. After that the twins made several private expeditions to the barrel, but as the spigot was kept locked, of course they could not turn it. It chanced that this morning Delia had drawn the oil in a hurry, and had forgotten to turn the catch in the spigot that locked it.

Zaidee and Helen, prowling around for something to do, chanced to come past the barrel, and Zaidee tried the faucet. To their rapture a spurting stream of oil instantly poured out. An old dipper, lying near by, was immediately seized upon, as something to fill, and all the flower beds that were near by were well watered with kerosene. Next, they spied a small churn, which Bridget, the cook, had just put out in the sun to dry. This was an opportunity not to be neglected, and the next dipperful of kerosene went splash into Bridget's clean, white churn. Up and down went the dasher, worked by these eager hands, while, behind them, the kerosene still poured from the barrel.

"Yes, they're all right," repeated Eunice. "They're only working the churn-dasher up and down. Probably Bridget left some water in it to soak."

"Come over here," called Zaidee, hospitably.

"We're making butter, Eunice."

Eunice drew a little nearer, then, suddenly, she stopped, sniffed, and darted forward.

"Children, what *have* you there?"

"Caroseme," responded Zaidee, promptly. "We drew it from the pretty little fountain in the barrel."

Eunice turned hastily towards the "caroseme" barrel, then flew towards it. As the barrel had been lately filled there was plenty in it, still, and it was flowing merrily, while a pool of kerosene lay over the board floor.

"Goodness gracious me! How shall I ever get in there to turn it off?" cried Eunice. "I *can't* step in it?"

"Let Zaidee do it. She's soaking already with it. Zaidee, come here, directly, and turn this kerosene off."

Zaidee came up cheerfully, and waded in, regardless of her shoes.

"It's too bad to turn it off, when it looks so pretty," she said, regretfully.

"You are naughty children," said Eunice, severely, arraying the guilty twins before her, when this was done. "Whatever shall I do with you? I can't take you, all dripping like that, into the house to Eliza, because she's with Kenneth, and auntie's lying down, and I don't suppose Delia would know what to do with you."

"Hang them both up over the clothes-line to dry," suggested Cricket, darkly eying the chief culprit. "Dear me! how you do smell!"

"I don't like it pretty well," admitted Zaidee, sniffing at her hands. "I want to go in and get us washed off now."

"No, stop," commanded Eunice, as Zaidee was starting off. "You would ruin everything you touched, I suppose. You're reeking wet. You can't go into the nursery, for you mustn't disturb Kenneth. Auntie said particularly that we mustn't even make any noise around, so he can sleep. What *shall* I do with you?"

"I'll tell you," suggested Cricket, the ever-ready. "Take them down to the Cove and put them in the water just as they are, and wash off the worst of it. Then you can take off their clothes and leave them down there in the bathing-house, for 'Liza to look after when she can."

"Perhaps that might do. I could put on my own bathing-suit and take them in, and wash off the outside, anyway."

"Yes, let's," cried Zaidee, scampering off in high feather at the delightful possibility of going into the water all dressed, "just like a dog."

"Grandma wouldn't care, would she?"

"There's nothing else to do. You go on and I'll tell her. My arm aches so that I can't walk over there," said Cricket, turning away, very dolefully. She didn't like to miss the fun of ducking those naughty children. She watched them out of sight.

"But it isn't really a bit worse of Zaidee to turn that spigot, and play with the oil, than it was for me to play with the fire," she said, honestly, to herself, as she walked slowly back to grandma. "I can't say much. But it *is* funny how much badder things seem in other people, when they're really just as worse in ourselves."

And with this not very lucid statement of an undeniable fact, Cricket walked up the piazza steps and informed grandma of the state of affairs.

Half an hour later Eunice appeared, driving a pair of depressed looking children before her, clad only in their little blue bathing-suits.

She was hot and flushed, Zaidee cross and rebellious, and Helen tearful and subdued. Eunice had found that the plan of washing oily children, with all their clothes on, was much easier in theory than in practice. And such a task as it had been to get their dripping clothes off! Wet buttonholes refused to open, shoestrings knotted hopelessly, and everything stuck flabbily together.

Auntie Jean was with little Kenneth again, so Eliza was at liberty to take the children in hand, but before they went off, grandma said, very gravely, to them, that they were to go directly to bed for two whole hours, so that they might have a quiet time to think over the mischief they had done.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE END OF THE SUMMER.

Two weeks later everything was running again as usual. Kenneth, quite recovered, was as lively as possible, though he was a funny looking little object, with his lovely golden curls, to everybody's great grief, cropped as close to his head as a prize-fighter's.

"If it only will grow out a *little*, before mamma gets home," mourned Cricket. "He looks so ridiculous. He looks just like the sheep, after 'Gustus John has sheared them. Even the little lambs don't know their own mothers, sometimes, auntie, after they're clipped. Oh!" clasping her hands in horror at a new thought. "Do you suppose mamma won't even *know* Kenneth?"

"He doesn't look much like himself, certainly, but I don't fancy that there's the least danger that his mother won't know him instantly," said auntie, comfortingly.

"I'm so glad," said Cricket, with a sigh of relief, "if you really think so. But, anyway, he's the *sheepiest*-looking child."

But, fortunately, his burns had healed beautifully, and the doctor assured them that he would even outgrow every scar. Cricket was entirely herself again, with only one deep scar across her right wrist to remind her of that unlucky sacrifice to the Jabberwock.

Edna was at home, also, delighted to be back with her beloved Eunice. She proudly flourished, actually, two stories for the "Echo," as the result of her "banishment," as she insisted on calling her visit. She was so proud of them that she wanted to carry them about with her all the time, and was all impatience for the next number of the paper to be ready. Eunice had been working at it, during Edna's absence, and it was all ready, excepting to print Edna's story, for which space had been left.

It was getting well into September now, and the children were looking eagerly forward to the return of the travellers, who were to sail early in October. Letters said that mamma was improving so delightfully that she was quite as strong as ever, and that she was looking forward with quite as much impatience to seeing the children again as they could have to see her. The children didn't quite believe this, though.

"She *couldn't* be glad as I am," said Cricket, positively. "If she were she would just simply burst. Of *course* we're gladder to see her than she could be to see us, because she's *mamma*, and we're only just the children! I'm chock full of gladness!" and Cricket gave an ecstatic caper as she waved the letter that definitely set the date of the travellers' return.

"Look *out*, Cricket," said Eunice, hastily, "that's the second time you've nearly knocked my ink over," rescuing, as she spoke, the fresh, fair copy of the "Echo," to which she was giving the finishing touches, for the afternoon's reading.

"Please excuse me, but I'm so happy! Oh, auntie, it's worth while to have mamma and papa go to Europe and miss them so, when you are so gladder than glad when they come back."

"Now, I really flattered myself that you had been tolerably contented here, this summer," said Auntie Jean, pretending to look aggrieved. "I'm very sorry that you've been so wretched."

"Wretched! I *haven't*," said Cricket, giving auntie a rapturous hug, and, at the same time, sending her heels kicking out behind, like a little wild pony. "I've had an awfully good time."

"Cricket!" shrieked Eunice, "you knocked over the ink at last!" She snatched up the "Echo" just in time to save it from an inky bath. "Hand me that blotter, Edna. Never mind, auntie, for it's mostly on the newspapers. Cricket, you *are* the ink-spillingest girl!" scolded Eunice, scrubbing and cleaning as she talked. "Yesterday you knocked it out of the window, and only the other day you had it all over the piazza-floor."

Cricket looked much depressed, as she helped Eunice repair damages.

"I rather guess you'll be too relieved for anything to see the last of me, grandma," she said, mournfully. "I never saw anybody like me. I never mean to do things, and then I go and do them. I don't see how you've stood it all summer, anyway, with such racketting children around, I truly don't."

"You've been a pretty obedient set," said grandma, patting the hand that stole around her neck. "And when children are obedient and truthful, one can excuse a great deal else. Indeed, I shall miss my flock exceedingly, I assure you, in spite of your ink-spilling tendencies."

"Even if I did sprain your ankle?" whispered Cricket, very softly, "and burn up Kenneth's hair? and break through the plaster in your ceiling, and lots of other things?"

"Yes, in spite of it all," whispered grandma, back again, just as softly. "Because I never knew you to do anything I told you not to do, and whatever you tell me, I know is exactly true."

"You're such a beautiful grandma!" said Cricket, with a hug, and then she pranced off.

Zaidee and Helen came toiling up from the beach, with their arms full of dolls. Zaidee dropped down on the top piazza-step.

"Auntie Jean, I'm all in such a pusferation," she sighed. "It's so much work to take care of such a lot of children as I have. I wish I had a little live nurse to help me. Couldn't I?"

"Take Cricket," suggested Auntie Jean. "She wants something to do."

"No, I thank you," said that young woman, decidedly. "I'm glad *I* don't have to follow Zaidee up all day."

"And I wouldn't have you," returned Zaidee, with equal decision. "You took up my Beatrice by the neck, and it hurted her. She told me so. I don't want you for my dollie's nurse, or for my nurse, either."

"*Your* nurse!" exclaimed Cricket. "I wouldn't be 'Liza for anything! I'd as soon take care of a straw in a high wind, as take care of you."

Auntie Jean laughed, and drew Cricket down into her arms.

"Did you ever think, honestly," she whispered, "that Zaidee is a little, just a little, like one of her older sisters?"

"Oh, she's not so bad," responded Cricket, instantly. "But because she's like me is no reason I like it any better. I like it all the worse. Besides, I don't set up to be a polygon."

Hereupon Auntie Jean laughed until grandma demanded to know what the joke was, and why they were talking secrets.

"No secrets," answered auntie, wiping her eyes. "Cricket was only telling me that she didn't set up to be a *paragon*."

Cricket flashed a quick glance at auntie, caught her eye, and nodded her thanks.

"There's George Washington," she hastily remarked, changing the subject. "Come here, sir, and play a little. You've been as sober as a judge lately. I haven't seen you run after Martha for perfect ages."

The September days slipped by, until the first of October was just at hand. It was arranged that Auntie Jean should go and get the house in town in readiness for the family's return. At first she expected to go alone, but the girls begged to go with her, and finally she concluded to take them.

Will and Archie had already gone back to Philadelphia, on account of their school, so this arrangement would only leave the younger ones and Eliza with grandma for a few days longer.

Then, oh, joy! that blessed Auntie Jean further decided that she would take them all down to New York the day before the steamer was due, so that they might have the earliest possible glimpse of the family. Was not all this enough to fill any little girl's cup of bliss to overflowing?

For once, reality surpassed anticipation. Such excitement for the last week in packing up; such walks and rows and drives between times; such a fine number of the "Echo," to wind up with; such a funny farewell call—laden with all manner of good things—to the old woman, who was still overcome by the thought that she had seen Miss Cricket; then such parting hugs and kisses for dear grandma and the children; such handshakings with old Billy, who distributed peppermints like a red and white snow.

Then came the jolly three days' picnic in the empty house in town. The three girls thought that they rendered perfectly indispensable aid to auntie and the maids, in opening the house, getting off holland covers, and arranging everything, till it was all in apple-pie order for the homecomers.

Then came the last and loveliest treat,—the delightful trip to New York in the night boat, and the vast importance of the thought of going to meet their European travellers. They discussed them, as if they had been gone ten years, at least. Eunice wondered if she would know Marjorie, and if Donald's mustache would be as long as papa's, while Cricket was a little afraid that they might have forgotten how to talk English.

The steamer was not due till late in the afternoon, so that they had the day before them, and a day crammed with good things it was. Although they had often been there before, the children immediately voted for Central Park and the Metropolitan Museum first. Then they visited some of the great stores, and then lunched at Delmonico's. In the afternoon they went for a long, lovely ride up Riverside Park, and then, at last, came the crowning joy of watching the steamer's arrival.

"There's mamma!" shrieked Cricket, regardless of the crowd about her, as the great steamer swung into her moorings, and in five minutes more everybody was being rapturously hugged by everybody else.

THE END.

Transcriber's Note:

Variations in spelling and hyphenation, and unexpected spelling found in the original have been retained.

The following corrections have been made in this version: (corrections are indicated within content by text. Mouseover on highlighted text will display transcriber's note on many browsers.)

Punctuation errors have been corrected without comment.

page 76

'adventures' changed to 'adventure': a new adventure.

page 123

'liitle' corrected to 'little': his poor little

page 165

'sittingly' corrected to 'sitting': were sitting cosily

page 260

'at at any' corrected to 'at any': at any time

page 324

'Anntie' corrected to 'Auntie': Auntie Jean knew

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK CRICKET AT THE SEASHORE ***

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