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NINE LITTLE GOSLINGS.

By **SUSAN COOLIDGE,**

AUTHOR OF "THE NEW YEAR'S BARGAIN," "MISCHIEF'S THANKSGIVING," "WHAT KATY DID," "WHAT KATY DID AT SCHOOL."

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS.

CURLY LOCKS.

ONE, TWO, BUCKLE MY SHOE.

GOOSEY, GOOSEY GANDER.	RIDE A COCK-HORSE.
LITTLE BO-PEEP.	LADY QUEEN ANNE.
MISTRESS MARY.	UP, UP, UP, AND DOWN, DOWN, DOWN-Y.
LADY BIRD.	

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CAMBRIDGE.

*When nursery lamps are veiled, and nurse is singing
In accents low,
Timing her music to the cradle's swinging,
Now fast, now slow,—*

*Singing of Baby Bunting, soft and furry
In rabbit cloak,
Or rock-a-byed amid the toss and flurry
Of wind-swept oak;*

*Of Boy-Blue sleeping with his horn beside him,
Of my son John,
Who went to bed (let all good boys deride him)
With stockings on;*

*Of sweet Bo-Peep following her lambkins straying;
Of Dames in shoes;
Of cows, considerate, 'mid the Piper's playing,
Which tune to choose;*

*Of Gotham's wise men bowling o'er the billow,
Or him, less wise,
Who chose rough bramble-bushes for a pillow,
And scratched his eyes,—*

*It may be, while she sings, that through the portal
Soft footsteps glide,
And, all invisible to grown-up mortal,
At cradle side*

*Sits Mother Goose herself, the dear old mother,
And rocks and croons,
In tones which Baby hearkens, but no other,
Her old-new tunes!*

*I think it must be so, else why, years after,
Do we retrace
And mix with shadowy, recollected laughter
Thoughts of that face;*

*Seen, yet unseen, beaming across the ages,
Brimful of fun*

*And wit and wisdom, baffling all the sages
Under the sun?*

*A grown-up child has place still, which no other
May dare refuse;
I, grown up, bring this offering to our Mother,
To Mother Goose;*

*And, standing with the babies at that olden,
Immortal knee,
I seem to feel her smile, benign and golden,
Falling on me.*



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[1]

CURLY LOCKS.

WHEN a little girl is six and a little boy is six, they like pretty much the same things and enjoy pretty much the same games. She wears an apron, and he a jacket and trousers, but they are both equally fond of running races, spinning tops, flying kites, going down hill on sleds, and making a noise in the open air. But when the little girl gets to be eleven or twelve, and to grow

[2]

thin and long, so that every two months a tuck has to be let down in her frocks, then a great difference becomes visible. The boy goes on racing and whooping and comporting himself generally like a young colt in a pasture; but she turns quiet and shy, cares no longer for rough play or exercise, takes droll little sentimental fancies into her head, and likes best the books which make her cry. Almost all girls have a fit of this kind some time or other in the course of their lives; and it is rather a good thing to have it early, for little folks get over such attacks more easily than big ones. Perhaps we may live to see the day when wise mammas, going through the list of nursery diseases which their children have had, will wind up triumphantly with, "Mumps, measles, chicken-pox,—and they are all over with 'Amy Herbert,' 'The Heir of Redclyffe,' and the notion that they are going to be miserable for the rest of their lives!" [3]

Sometimes this odd change comes after an illness when a little girl feels weak and out of sorts, and does not know exactly what is the matter. This is the way it came to Johnnie Carr, a girl whom some of you who read this are already acquainted with. She had intermittent fever the year after her sisters Katy and Clover came from boarding-school, and was quite ill for several weeks. Everybody in the house was sorry to have Johnnie sick. Katy nursed, petted, and cosseted her in the tenderest way. Clover brought flowers to the bedside and read books aloud, and told Johnnie interesting stories. Elsie cut out paper dolls for her by dozens, painted their cheeks pink and their eyes blue, and made for them beautiful dresses and jackets of every color and fashion. Papa never came in without some little present or treat in his pocket for Johnnie. So long as she was in bed, and all these nice things were doing for her, Johnnie liked being ill very much, but when she began to sit up and go down to dinner, and the family spoke of her as almost well again, *then* a time of unhappiness set in. The Johnnie who got out of bed after the fever was not the Johnnie of a month before. There were two inches more of her for one thing, for she had taken the opportunity to grow prodigiously, as sick children often do. Her head ached at times, her back felt weak, and her legs shook when she tried to run about. All sorts of queer and disagreeable feelings attacked her. Her hair had fallen out during the fever so that Papa thought it best to have it shaved close. Katy made a pretty silk-lined cap for her to wear, but the girls at school laughed at the cap, and that troubled Johnnie very much. Then, when the new hair grew, thick and soft as the plumy down on a bird's wing, a fresh affliction set in, for the hair came out in small round rings all over her head, which made her look like a baby. Elsie called her "Curly," and gradually the others adopted the name, till at last nobody used any other except the servants, who still said "Miss Johnnie." It was hard to recognize the old Johnnie, square and sturdy and full of merry life, in poor, thin, whining Curly, always complaining of something, who lay on the sofa reading story-books, and begging Phil and Dorry to let her alone, not to tease her, and to go off and play by themselves. Her eyes looked twice as big as usual, because her face was so small and pale, and though she was still a pretty child, it was in a different way from the old prettiness. Katy and Clover were very kind and gentle always, but Elsie sometimes lost patience entirely, and the boys openly declared that Curly was a cross-patch, and hadn't a bit of fun left in her. [4]

One afternoon she was lying on the sofa with the "Wide Wide World" in her hand. Her eyelids were very red from crying over Alice's death, but she had galloped on, and was now reading the part where Ellen Montgomery goes to live with her rich relatives in Scotland. [5]

"Oh, dear," sighed Johnnie. "How splendid it was for her! Just think, Clover, riding lessons, and a watch, and her uncle takes her to see all sorts of places, and they call her their White Rose! Oh, dear! I wish *we* had relations in Scotland."

"We haven't, you know," remarked Clover, threading her needle with a fresh bit of blue worsted.

"I know it. It's too bad. Nothing ever does happen in this stupid place. The girls in books always do have such nice times. Ellen could leap, and she spoke French *beautifully*. She learned at that place, you know, the place where the Humphreys lived."

"Litchfield Co., Connecticut," said Clover mischievously. "Katy was there last summer, you recollect. I guess they don't *all* speak such good French. Katy didn't notice it."

"Ellen did," persisted Johnnie. "Her uncle and all those people were so surprised when they heard her. Wouldn't it be grand to be an adopted child, Clover?" [6]

"To be adopted by people who gave you your bath like a baby when you were thirteen years old, and tapped your lips when they didn't want you to speak, and stole your Pilgrim's Progresses? No, thank you. I would much rather stay as I am."

"I wouldn't," replied Johnnie pensively. "I don't like this place very much. I should love to be rich and to travel in Europe."

At this moment Papa and Katy came in together. Katy was laughing, and Papa looked as if he had just bitten a smile off short. In his hand was a letter.

"Oh, Clovy," began Katy, but Papa interposed with "Katy, hold your tongue;" and though he looked quizzical as he said it, Katy saw that he was half in earnest, and stopped at once.

"We're about to have a visitor," he went on, picking Johnnie up and settling her in his lap,—a distinguished visitor. Curly, you must put on your best manners, for she comes especially to see you." [7]

"A visitor! How nice! Who is it?" cried Clover and Johnnie with one voice. Visitors were rare in

Burnet, and the children regarded them always as a treat.

"Her name is Miss Inches,—Marion Joanna Inches," replied Dr. Carr, glancing at the letter. "She's a sort of godmother of yours, Curly; you've got half her name."

"Was I really named after her?"

"Yes. She and Mamma were school-friends, and though they never met after leaving school, Mamma was fond of her, and when little No. 4 came, she decided to call her after her old intimate. That silver mug of yours was a present from her."

"Was it? Where does she live?"

"At a place called Inches Mills, in Massachusetts. She's the rich lady of the village, and has a beautiful house and grounds, where she lives all alone by herself. Her letter is written at Niagara. She is going to the Mammoth Cave, and writes to ask if it will be convenient for us to have her stop for a few days on the way. She wants to see her old friend's children, she says, and especially her namesake." [9]

"Oh, dear!" sighed Johnnie, ruffling her short hairs with her fingers. "I wish my curls were longer. What *will* she think when she sees me?"

"She'll think

"There is a little girl, and she has a little curl
Right in the middle of her forehead;
When she is good she is very, very good,
And when she is bad she is horrid—"

said Dr. Carr, laughing. But Johnnie didn't laugh back. Her lip trembled, and she said,—

"I'm not horrid *really*, am I?"

"Not a bit," replied her father; "you're only a little goose now and then, and I'm such an old gander that I don't mind that a bit." [10]

Johnnie smiled and was comforted. Her thoughts turned to the coming visitor.

"Perhaps she'll be like the rich ladies in story-books," she said to herself.

Next day Miss Inches came. Katy was an experienced housekeeper now, and did not worry over coming guests as once she did. The house was always in pleasant, home-like order; and though Debby and Alexander had fulfilled Aunt Izzie's prediction by marrying one another, both stayed on at Dr. Carr's and were as good and faithful as ever, so Katy had no anxieties as to the dinners and breakfasts. It was late in the afternoon when the visitor arrived. Fresh flowers filled the vases, for it was early June, and the garden-beds were sweet with roses and lilies of the valley. The older girls wore new summer muslins, and Johnnie in white, her short curls tied back with a blue ribbon, looked unusually pretty and delicate.

Miss Inches, a wide-awake, handsome woman, seemed much pleased to see them all. [11]

"So this is my name-child," she said, putting her arm about Johnnie. "This is my little Joanna? You're the only child I have any share in, Joanna; I hope we shall love each other very deeply."

Miss Inches' hand was large and white, with beautiful rings on the fingers. Johnnie was flattered at being patted by such a hand, and cuddled affectionately to the side of her name-mamma.

"What eyes she has!" murmured Miss Inches to Dr. Carr. She lowered her voice, but Johnnie caught every word. "Such a lambent blue, and so full of soul. She is quite different from the rest of your daughters, Dr. Carr; don't you think so?"

"She has been ill recently, and is looking thin," replied the prosaic Papa.

"Oh, it isn't *that*! There is something else,—hard to put into words, but I feel it! You don't see it? Well, that only confirms a theory of mine, that people are often blind to the qualities of their nearest relations. We cannot get our own families into proper perspective. It isn't possible." [12]

These fine words were lost on Johnnie, but she understood that she was pronounced nicer than the rest of the family. This pleased her: she began to think that she should like Miss Inches very much indeed.

Dr. Carr was not so much pleased. The note from Miss Inches, over which he and Katy had laughed, but which was not shown to the rest, had prepared him for a visitor of rather high-flown ideas, but he did not like having Johnnie singled out as the subject of this kind of praise. However, he said to himself, "It doesn't matter. She means well, and jolly little Johnnie won't be harmed by a few days of it."

Jolly little Johnnie would not have been harmed, but the pale, sentimental Johnnie left behind by the recently departed intermittent fever, decidedly *was*. Before Miss Inches had been four days in Burnet, Johnnie adored her and followed her about like a shadow. Never had anybody loved her as Miss Inches did, she thought, or discovered such fine things in her character. Ten long years and a half had she lived with Papa and the children, and not one of them had found [13]

out that her eyes were full of soul, and an expression "of mingled mirth and melancholy unusual in a childish face, and more like that of *Goethe's Mignon* than any thing else in the world of fiction!" Johnnie had never heard of "*Mignon*," but it was delightful to be told that she resembled her, and she made Miss Inches a present of the whole of her foolish little heart on the spot.

"Oh, if Papa would but give you to me!" exclaimed Miss Inches one day. "If only I could have you for my own, what a delight it would be! My whole theory of training is so different,—you should never waste your energies in house-work, my darling, (Johnnie had been dusting the parlor); it is sheer waste, with an intelligence like yours lying fallow and only waiting for the master's hand. Would you come, Johnnie, if Papa consented? Inches Mills is a quiet place, but lovely. There are a few bright minds in the neighborhood; we are near Boston, and not too far from Concord. Such a pretty room as you should have, darling, fitted up in blue and rose-buds, or —no, Morris green and Pompeian-red would be prettier, perhaps. What a joy it would be to choose pictures for it,—pictures, every one of which should be an impulse in the best Art direction! And how you would revel in the garden, and in the fruit! My strawberries are the finest I ever saw; I have two Alderney cows and quantities of cream. Don't you think you could be happy to come and be my own little Curly, if Papa would consent?"

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"Yes, yes," said Johnnie eagerly. "And I could come home sometimes, couldn't I?"

"Every year," replied Miss Inches. "We'll take such lovely journeys together, Johnnie, and see all sorts of interesting places. Would you like best to go to California or to Switzerland next summer? I think, on the whole, Switzerland would be best. I want you to form a good French accent at once, but, above all, to study German, the language of *thought*. Then there is music. We might spend the winter at *Stuttgart*—"

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Decidedly Miss Inches was counting on her chicken before hatching it, for Dr. Carr had yet to be consulted, and he was not a parent who enjoyed interference with his nest or nestlings. When Miss Inches attacked him on the subject, his first impulse was to whistle with amazement. Next he laughed, and then he became almost angry. Miss Inches talked very fast, describing the fine things she would do with Johnnie, and for her; and Dr. Carr, having no chance to put in a word, listened patiently, and watched his little girl, who was clinging to her new friend and looking very eager and anxious. He saw that her heart was set on being "adopted," and, wise man that he was, it occurred to him that it might be well to grant her wish in part, and let her find out by experiment what was really the best and happiest thing. So he did not say "No" decidedly, as he at first meant, but took Johnnie on his knee, and asked,—

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"Well, Curly, so you want to leave Papa and Katy and Clover, and go away to be Miss Inches' little girl, do you?"

"I'm coming home to see you every single summer," said Johnnie.

"Indeed! That will be nice for us," responded Dr. Carr cheerfully. "But somehow I don't seem to feel as if I could quite make up my mind to give my Curly Locks away. Perhaps in a year or two, when we are used to being without her, I may feel differently. Suppose, instead, we make a compromise."

"Yes," said Miss Inches, eagerly.

"Yes," put in Johnnie, who had not the least idea of what a compromise might be.

"I can't *give* away my little girl,—not yet,"—went on Dr. Carr fondly. "But if Miss Inches likes I'll *lend* her for a little while. You may go home with Miss Inches, Johnnie, and stay four months, —to the first of October, let us say." ("She'll miss two weeks' schooling, but that's no great matter," thought Papa to himself.) "This will give you, my dear lady, a chance to try the experiment of having a child in your house. Perhaps you may not like it so well as you fancy. If you do, and if Johnnie still prefers to remain with you, there will be time enough then to talk over further plans. How will this answer?"

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Johnnie was delighted, Miss Inches not so much so.

"Of course," she said, "it isn't so satisfactory to have the thing left uncertain, because it retards the regular plan of development which I have formed for Johnnie. However, I can allow for a parent's feelings, and I thank you very much, Dr. Carr. I feel assured that, as you have five other children, you will in time make up your mind to let me keep Johnnie entirely as mine. It puts a new value into life,—this chance of having an immortal intelligence placed in my hands to train. It will be a real delight to do so, and I flatter myself the result will surprise you all."

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Dr. Carr's eyes twinkled wickedly, but he made Miss Inches the politest of bows, and said: "You are very kind, I am sure, and I hope Johnnie will be good and not give you much trouble. When would you wish her visit to commence?"

"Oh—now, if you do not object. I should so enjoy taking her with me to the Mammoth Cave, and afterward straight home to Massachusetts. You would like to see the Cave and the eyeless fish, wouldn't you, darling?"

"Oh yes, Papa, yes!" cried Johnnie. Dr. Carr was rather taken aback, but he made no objection, and Johnnie ran off to tell the rest of the family the news of her good fortune.

Their dismay cannot be described. "I really do think that Papa is crazy," said Clover that night;

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and though Katy scolded her for using such an expression, her own confidence in his judgment was puzzled and shaken. She comforted herself with a long letter to Cousin Helen, telling her all about the affair. Elsie cried herself to sleep three nights running, and the boys were furious.

"The *idea* of such a thing," cried Dorry, flinging himself about, while Phil put a tablespoonful of black pepper and two spools of thread into his cannon, and announced that if Miss Inches dared to take Johnnie outside the gate, he would shoot her dead, he would, just as sure as he was alive!

In spite of this awful threat, Miss Inches persisted in her plan. Johnnie's little trunk was packed by Clover and Katy, who watered its contents with tears as they smoothed and folded the frocks and aprons, which looked so like their Curly as to seem a part of herself,—their Curly, who was so glad to leave them!

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"Never mind the thick things," remarked Dr. Carr, as Katy came through the hall with Johnnie's winter jacket on her arm. "Put in one warmish dress for cool days, and leave the rest. They can be sent on *if* Johnnie decides to stay."

Papa looked so droll and gave such a large wink at the word "if," that Katy and Clover felt their hearts lighten surprisingly, and finished the packing in better spirits. The good-by, however, was a sorry affair. The girls cried; Dorry and Phil sniffed and looked fiercely at Miss Inches; old Mary stood on the steps with her apron thrown over her head; and Dr. Carr's face was so grave and sad that it quite frightened Johnnie. She cried too, and clung to Katy. Almost she said, "I won't go," but she thought of the eyeless fish, and didn't say it. The carriage drove off, Miss Inches petted her, everything was new and exciting, and before long she was happy again, only now and then a thought of home would come to make her lips quiver and her eyes fill.

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The wonderful Cave, with its vaults and galleries hung with glittering crystals, its underground river and dark lake, was so like a fairy tale, that Johnnie felt as if she *must* go right back and tell the family at home about it. She relieved her feelings by a long letter to Elsie, which made them all laugh very much. In it she said, "Ellen Montgomery didn't have any thing half so nice as the Cave, and Mamma Marion never taps my lips." Miss Inches, it seemed, wished to be called "Mamma Marion." Every mile of the journey was an enjoyment to Johnnie. Miss Inches bought pretty presents for her wherever they stopped: altogether, it was quite like being some little girl taking a beautiful excursion in a story-book, instead of plain Johnnie Carr, and Johnnie felt that to be an "adopted child" was every bit as nice as she had supposed, and even nicer.

It was late in the evening when they reached Inches Mills, so nothing could be seen of the house, except that it was big and had trees around it. Johnnie went to sleep in a large bedroom with a huge double bed all to herself, and felt very grown-up and important.

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The next day was given to unpacking and seeing the grounds; after that, Miss Inches said they must begin to lead a regular life, and Johnnie must study. Johnnie had been to school all winter, and in the natural course of things would have had holidays now. Mamma Marion, however, declared that so long an idle time would not do at all.

"Education, my darling, is not a thing of periods," she explained. "It should be like the air, absorbed, as it were, all the time, not like a meal, eaten just so often in the day. This idea of teaching by paroxysms is one of the fatal mistakes of the age."

So all that warm July Johnnie had French lessons and German, and lessons in natural philosophy, beside studying English literature after a plan of Miss Inches' own, which combined history and geography and geology, with readings from various books, and accounted for the existence of all the great geniuses of the world, as if they had been made after a regular recipe,—something like this:—

[23]

TO MAKE A POET.

Take a political situation, add a rocky soil, and the western slope of a great water-shed, pour into a mould and garnish with laurel leaves. It will be found delicious!

The "lambent blue" of Johnnie's eyes grew more lambent than ever as she tried to make head and tail of this wonderful hash of people and facts. I am afraid that Mamma Marion was disappointed in the intelligence of her pupil, but Johnnie did her best, though she was rather aggrieved at being obliged to study at all in summer, which at home was always play-time. The children she knew were having a delightful vacation there, and living out of doors from morning till night.

As the weeks went on she felt this more and more. Change of air was making her rosy and fat, and with returning strength a good deal of the old romping, hearty Johnnie came back; or would have come, had there been anybody to romp with. But there was nobody, for Miss Inches scarcely ever invited children to her house. They were brought up so poorly she said. There was nothing inspiring in their contact. She wanted Johnnie to be something quite different.

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So Johnnie seldom saw anybody except "Mamma Marion" and her friends, who came to drink tea and talk about "Protoplasm," and the "Higher Education of Women," which wasn't at all interesting to poor Curly. She always sat by, quietly and demurely, and Miss Inches hoped was listening and being improved, but really she was thinking about something else, or longing to climb a tree or have a good game of play with real boys and girls. Once, in the middle of a tea-party, she stole upstairs and indulged in a hearty cry all to herself, over the thought of a little

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house which she and Dorry and Phil had built in Paradise the summer before; a house of stumps and old boards, lined with moss, in which they had had *such* a good time.

[25]

Almost as soon as they got home, Miss Inches sent to Boston for papers and furniture, and devoted her spare time to fitting up a room for her adopted child. Johnnie was not allowed to see it till all was done, then she was led triumphantly in. It was pretty—and queer—perhaps queerer than pretty. The walls were green-gray, the carpet gray-green, the furniture pale yellow, almost white, with brass handles and hinges, and lines of dull red tiles set into the wood. Every picture on the walls had a meaning, Miss Inches explained.

"Some of these I chose to strengthen your mind, Johnnie, dear," she said. "These portraits, for example. Here are Luther, Mahomet, and Theodore Parker, three of the great Protestants of the world. Life, to be worthy, must be more or less of a protest always. I want you to renumber that. This photograph is of Michael Angelo's Moses. I got you that too, because it is so strong. I want you to be strong. Do you like it?"

[26]

"I think it would be prettier without the curl-papers," faltered the bewildered Johnnie.

"Curl-papers! My dear child, where are your eyes? Those are horns. He wore horns as a law-giver."

"Yes, ma'am," said Johnnie, not daring to ask any more questions for fear of making more mistakes.

"These splendid autotypes are from the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in Rome, the glory of the world," went on Miss Inches. "And here, Johnnie, is the most precious of all. This I got expressly for you. It is an education to have such a painting as that before your eyes. I rely very much upon its influence on you."

The painting represented what seemed to be a grove of tall yellow-green sea-weeds, waving against a strange purple sky. There was a path between the stems of the sea-weeds, and up this path trotted a pig, rather soft and smudgy about his edges, as if he were running a little into the background. His quirky tail was smudgy also; and altogether it was more like the ghost of a pig than a real animal, but Miss Inches said *that* was the great beauty of the picture.

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Johnnie didn't care much for the painted pig, but she liked him better than the great Reformers, who struck her as grim and frightful; while the very idea of going to sleep in the room with the horned Moses scared her almost to death. It preyed on her mind all day; and at night, after Johnnie had gone to bed, Miss Inches, passing the door, heard a little sob, half strangled by the pillows. She went in.

"What *is* the matter?" she cried.

"It's that awful man with horns," gasped Johnnie, taking her head out from under the bedclothes. "I can't go to sleep, he frightens me so."

"Oh, my darling, what, *what* weakness," cried Mamma Marion.

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She was too kind, however, to persist in any plan which made Johnnie unhappy, so Moses came down, and Johnnie was allowed to choose a picture to fill his place. She selected a chromo of three little girls in a swing, a dreadful thing, all blue and red and green, which Miss Inches almost wept over. But it was a great comfort to Johnnie. I think it was the chromo which put it into Mamma Marion's head that the course of instruction chosen for her adopted child was perhaps a little above her years. Soon after she surprised Johnnie by the gift of a doll, a boy doll, dressed in a suit of Swedish gray, with pockets. In one hand the doll carried a hammer, and under the other arm was tucked a small portfolio.

"I like to make your sports a little instructive when I can," she said, "so I have dressed this doll in the costume of Linnæus, the great botanist. See what a nice little herbarium he has got under his arm. There are twenty-four tiny specimens in it, with the Latin and English names of each written underneath. If you could learn these perfectly, Johnnie, it would give you a real start in botany, which is the most beautiful of the sciences. Suppose you try. What will you name your doll, darling?"

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"I don't know," replied Johnnie, glaring at the wax-boy with very hostile feelings.

"Linnæus? No, I don't quite like to give that name to a doll. Suppose, Johnnie, we christen him *Hortus Siccus*. That's the Latin name for a herbal, and will help you to remember it when you form one of your own. Now take him and have a good play."

How was it possible to have a good play with a doll named *Hortus Siccus*? Johnnie hated him, and could not conceal the fact. Miss Inches was grieved and disappointed. But she said to herself, "Perhaps she is just too old for dolls and just too young to care for pictures. It isn't so easy to fix a child's mental position as I thought it would be. I must try something else."

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She really loved Johnnie and wished to make her happy, so the thought occurred of giving her a child's party. "I don't approve of them," she told her friends. "But perhaps it may be possible to combine some instruction with the amusements, and Johnnie is *so* pleased. Dear little creature, she is only eleven, and small things are great at that age. I suppose it is always so with youth."

Twenty children were asked to the party. They were to come at four, play for two hours in the

garden, then have supper, and afterward games in the parlor.

Johnnie felt as if she had taken a dose of laughing-gas, at the sight of twenty boys and girls all at once, real boys, real girls! How long it was since she had seen any! She capered and jumped in a way which astonished Miss Inches, and her high spirits so infected the rest that a general romp set in, and the party grew noisy to an appalling degree.

"Oh, Johnnie dear, no more 'Tag,'" cried poor Mamma Marion, catching her adopted child and wiping her hot face with a handkerchief. "It is really too rude, such a game as that. It is only fit for boys." [31]

"Oh, please!—please!—*please!*" entreated Johnnie. "It is splendid. Papa always let us; he did indeed, he always did."

"I thought you were my child now, and anxious for better things than tag," said Miss Inches gravely. Johnnie had to submit, but she pouted, shrugged her shoulders, and looked crossly about her, in a way which Mamma Marion had never seen before, and which annoyed her very much.

"Now it is time to go to supper," she announced. "Form yourselves into a procession, children. Johnnie shall take this tambourine and Willy Parker these castanets, and we will march in to the sound of music."

Johnnie liked to beat the tambourine very much, so her sulks gave place at once to smiles. The boys and girls sorted themselves into couples, Miss Inches took the head of the procession with an accordion, Willy Parker clashed the castanets as well as he could, and they all marched into the house. The table was beautifully spread with flowers and grapes and pretty china. Johnnie took the head, Willy the foot, and Dinah the housemaid helped them all round to sliced peaches and cream. [32]

Miss Inches meanwhile sat down in the corner of the room and drew a little table full of books near her. As soon as they were all served, she began,—

"Now, dear children, while you eat, I will read aloud a little. I should like to think that each one of you carried away one thought at least from this entertainment,—a thought which would stay by you, and be, as it were, seed-grain for other thoughts in years to come. First, I will read 'Abou Ben Adhem,' by Leigh Hunt, an English poet."

The children listened quietly to Abou Ben Adhem, but when Miss Inches opened another book and began to read sentences from Emerson, a deep gloom fell upon the party. Willy Parker kicked his neighbor and made a face. Lucy Hooper and Grace Sherwood whispered behind their napkins, and got to laughing till they both choked. Johnnie's cross feelings came back; she felt as if the party was being spoiled, and she wanted to cry. A low buzz of whispers, broken by titters, went round the table, and through it all Miss Inches' voice sounded solemn and distinct, as she slowly read one passage after another, pausing between each to let the meaning sink properly into the youthful mind. [33]

Altogether the supper was a failure, in spite of peaches and cream and a delicious cake full of plums and citron. When it was over they went into the parlor to play. The game of "Twenty Questions" was the first one chosen. Miss Inches played too. The word she suggested was "iconoclast."

"We don't know what it means," objected the children. [34]

"Oh, don't you, dears? It means a breaker of idols. However, if you are not familiar with it we will choose something else. How would 'Michael Angelo' do?"

"But we never heard any thing about him."

Miss Inches was shocked at this, and began a little art-lecture on the spot, in the midst of which Willy Parker broke in with, "I've thought of a word,—'hash'?"

"Oh, yes! Capital! Hash is a splendid word!" chorussed the others, and poor Miss Inches, who had only got as far as Michael Angelo's fourteenth year, found that no one was listening, and stopped abruptly. Hash seemed to her a vulgar word for the children to choose, but there was no help for it, and she resigned herself.

Johnnie thought hash an excellent word. It was so funny when Lucy asked whether the thing chosen was animal, vegetable, or mineral? and Willy replied, "All three," for he explained in a whisper, there was always salt in hash, and salt was a mineral. "Have you all seen it?" questioned Lucy. "Lots of times," shouted the children, and there was much laughing. After "Twenty Questions," they played "Sim says wiggle-waggle," and after that, "Hunt the Slipper." Poor, kind, puzzled Miss Inches was relieved when they went away, for it seemed to her that their games were all noisy and a fearful waste of time. She resolved that she would never give Johnnie any more parties; they upset the child completely, and demoralized her mind. [35]

Johnnie was upset. After the party she was never so studious or so docile as she had been before. The little taste of play made her dislike work, and set her to longing after the home-life where play and work were mixed with each other as a matter of course. She began to think that it would be only pleasant to make up her bed, or dust a room again, and she pined for the old nursery, for Phil's whistle, for Elsie and the paper-dolls, and to feel Katy's arms round her once more. Her letters showed the growing home-sickness. Dr. Carr felt that the experiment had [36]

lasted long enough. So he discovered that he had business in Boston, and one fine September day, as Johnnie was forlornly poring over her lesson in moral philosophy, the door opened and in came Papa. Such a shriek as she gave! Miss Inches happened to be out, and they had the house to themselves for a while.

"So you are glad to see me?" said Papa, when Johnnie had dried her eyes after the violent fit of crying which was his welcome, and had raised her head from his shoulder. His own eyes were a little moist, but he spoke gaily.

"Oh, Papa, *so* glad! I was just longing for you to come. How did it happen?"

"I had business in this part of the world, and I thought you might be wanting your winter clothes."

Johnnie's face fell.

"*Must* I stay all winter?" she said in a trembling voice. "Aren't you going to take me home?" [37]

"But I thought you wanted to be 'adopted,' and to go to Europe, and have all sorts of fine things happen to you."

"Oh, Papa, don't tease me. Mamma Marion is ever so kind, but I want to come back and be your little girl again. Please let me. If you don't, I shall *die*—" and Johnnie wrung her hands.

"We'll see about it," said Dr. Carr. "Don't die, but kiss me and wash your face. It won't do for Miss Inches to come home and find you with those impolite red rims to your eyes."

"Come upstairs, too, and see my room, while I wash 'em," pleaded Johnnie.

All the time that Johnnie was bathing her eyes, Papa walked leisurely about looking at the pictures. His mouth wore a furtive smile.

"This is a sweet thing," he observed, "this one with the pickled asparagus and the donkey, or is it a cat?" [38]

"Papa! it's a pig!"

Then they both laughed.

I think there was a little bit of relief mixed with Miss Inches' disappointment at hearing of Johnnie's decision. The child of theory was a delightful thing to have in the house, but this real child, with moods and tempers and a will of her own, who preferred chromos to Raphael, and pined after "tag," tried her considerably. They parted, however, most affectionately.

"Good-by, dear Mamma Marion," whispered Johnnie. "You've been just as good as good to me, and I love you so much,—but you know I am *used* to the girls and Papa."

"Yes, dear, I know. You're to come back often, Papa says, and I shall call you my girl always." So, with kisses, they separated, and Miss Inches went back to her old life, feeling that it was rather comfortable not to be any longer responsible for a "young intelligence," and that she should never envy mammas with big families of children again, as once she had done. [39]

"So we've got our Curly Locks back," said Katy, fondly stroking Johnnie's hair, the night after the travellers' return. "And you'll never go away from us any more, will you?"

"Never, never, never!" protested Johnnie, emphasizing each word by a kiss.

"Not even to be adopted, travel in Europe, or speak Litchfield Co. French?" put in naughty Clover.

"No. I've been adopted once, and that's enough. Now I'm going to be Papa's little girl always, and when the rest of you get married I shall stay at home and keep house for him."

"That's right," said Dr. Carr.

GOOSEY, GOOSEY GANDER.

 [40]

"BUT why must I go to bed? It isn't time, and I'm not sleepy yet," pleaded Dickie, holding fast by the side of the door.

"Now, Dickie, don't be naughty. It's time because I say that it's time."

"Papa never tells me it's time when it's light like this," argued Dickie. "*He* doesn't ever send me to bed till seven o'clock. I'm not going till it's a great deal darker than this. So there, Mally Spence." [41]

"Oh, yes, you are, Dickie darling," replied Mally coaxingly. "The reason it's light is because the days are so long now. It's quite late really,—almost seven o'clock,—that is," she added hastily, "it's past six (two minutes past!), and sister wants to put Dickie to bed, because she's going to take tea with Jane Foster, and unless Dick is safe and sound she can't go. Dickie would be sorry



to make sister lose her pleasure, wouldn't he?"

"I wiss you didn't want me to go," urged Dick, but he was a sweet-tempered little soul, so he yielded to Mally's gentle pull, and suffered her to lead him indoors. Upstairs they went, past Mally's room, Papa's,—up another flight of stairs, and into the attic chamber where Dick slept alone. It was a tiny chamber. The ceiling was low, and the walls sloped inward like the sides of a tent. It would have been too small to hold a grown person comfortably, but there was room in plenty for Dickie's bed, one chair, and the chest of drawers which held his clothes and toys. One narrow window lighted it, opening toward the West. On the white plastered wall beside it, lay a window-shaped patch of warm pink light. The light was reflected from the sunset. Dickie had seen this light come and go very often. He liked to have it there; it was so pretty, he thought.

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Malvina undressed him. She did not talk as much as usual, for her head was full of the tea-party, and she was in a hurry to get through and be off. Dickie, however, was not the least in a hurry. Slowly he raised one foot, then the other, to have his shoes untied, slowly turned himself that Mally might unfasten his apron. All the time he talked. Mally thought she had never known him ask so many questions, or take so much time about every thing.

"What makes the wall pink?" he said. "It never is 'cept just at bedtime."

"It's the sun."

"Why doesn't the sun make it that color always?"

"The sun is setting now. He is not setting always."

"That's an improper word. You mustn't say it."

"What's an improper word?"

"Papa *said*, when I said 'setting on the door-steps,' that it wasn't proper to say that. He said I must say *sitting* on the door steps."

"That isn't the same thing, Goosey Gander," cried Mally laughing. "The sun sets and little boys sit."

"I'm not a goosey gander," responded Dickie. "And Papa *said* it wasn't proper."

"Never mind," said Mally, whipping on his night-gown: "you're a darling, if you are a goosey. Now say your prayers nicely."

"Yes," replied Dick, dreamily. He knelt down and began his usual prayer. "Please, God, bless Papa and Mally and Gwandmamma and—" "make Dick a good boy" should have come next, but his thoughts wandered. "Why don't the sun sit as well as little boys?" he asked.

[44]

"Oh, Dickie, Dickie!" cried the scandalized Malvina. "You're saying your prayers, you know. Good children don't stop to ask questions when they're saying their prayers."

Dickie felt rebuked. He finished the little prayer quickly. Mally lifted him into bed. "It's so warm that you won't want this," she said, folding back the blanket. Then she stooped to kiss him.

"Tell me a story before you go," pleaded Dickie, holding her tight.

"Oh, not to-night, darling, because I shall be late to Jane's if I do." She kissed him hastily.

"I don't think it's nice at all to go to bed when the sun hasn't sit, and I'm not sleepy a bit, and there isn't nothing to play with," remarked Dick, plaintively.

"You'll fall asleep in a minute or two, Goosey, then you won't want any thing to play with," said Mally, hurrying away.

[45]

"I'm *not* a goosey," shouted Dick after her. Ten minutes later, as she was tying her bonnet strings, she heard him calling from the top of the stairs.

"What is it, Dickie?"

"I'm not a goose. Goosies has feathers. They say 'quack.'"

"You're the kind that hasn't feathers and doesn't say quack," replied Mally from below. "No, darling, you're not a goose; you're Mally's good boy. Now, run back to bed."

"Yes, I will," replied Dick, satisfied by this concession. He climbed into bed again, and lay watching the pink patch on the wall. Yellow bars began to appear and to dance in the midst of the

pink.

"Like teeny-weeney little ladders," thought Dick. There was a ladder outside his door, at top of which was a scuttle opening on to the roof. Dickie turned his head to look at the ladder. The scuttle-door stood open; from above, the pink light streamed in and lay on the rungs of the ladder.

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"I did go up that ladder once," soliloquized Dick. "Papa took me. It was velly nice up there. I wiss Papa would take me again. Mally, she said it was dangewous. I wonder why she said it was dangewous? Mally's a very funny girl, I think. She didn't ought to put me to bed so early. I can't go to sleep at all. Perhaps I sha'n't ever go to sleep, not till morning,—then she'd feel sorry.

"If I was a bird I could climb little bits of ladders like that," was his next reflection. "Or a fly. I'd like to be a fly, and eat sugar, and say b-u-z-z-z all day long. Only then perhaps some little boy would get me into the corner of the window and squeeze me all up tight with his fum." Dickie cast a rueful look at his own guilty thumb as he thought this. "I wouldn't like that! But I'd like very much indeed to buzz and tickle Mally's nose when she was twying to sew. She'd slap and slap, and not hit me, and I'd buzz and tickle. How I'd laugh! But perhaps flies don't know how to laugh, only just to buzz.

[47]

"Pretty, curious, buzzy fly."

That's what my book says."

The pink glow was all gone now, and Dick shifted his position.

"I wiss I could go to sleep," he thought. "It isn't nice at all to be up here and not have any playthings. Mally's gone, else she'd get me something to amoose myself with. I'd like my dwum best. It's under the hall table, I guess. P'waps if I went down I could get it."

As this idea crossed his mind, Dickie popped quickly out of bed. The floor felt cool and pleasant to his bare little feet as he crossed to the door. He had almost reached the head of the stairs when, looking up, something so pretty met his eyes that he stopped to admire. It was a star, shining against the pure sky like a twinkling silver lamp. It seemed to beckon, and the ladder to lead straight up to it. Almost without stopping to think, Dickie put his foot on the first rung and climbed nimbly to the top of the ladder. The star was just as much out of reach when he got there as it had been before, but there were other beautiful sights close at hand which were well worth the trouble of climbing after.

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Miles and miles and miles of sky for one thing. It rose above Dickie's head like a great blue dome pierced with pin-pricks of holes, through which little points of bright light quivered and danced. Far away against the sky appeared a church spire, like a long sharp finger pointing to Heaven. One little star exactly above, seemed stuck on the end of the spire. Dickie wondered if it hurt the star to be there. He stepped out on to the roof and wandered about. The evening was warm and soft. No dew fell. The shingles still kept the heat of the sun, and felt pleasant and comfortable under his feet. By-and-by a splendid rocker-shaped moon came from behind the sky's edge where she had been hiding away, and sailed slowly upward. She was a great deal bigger than the stars, but they didn't seem afraid of her in the least. Dickie reflected that if he were a star he should hurry to get out of her way; but the stars didn't mind the moon's being there at all, they kept their places, and shone calmly on as they had done before she came.

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He was standing, when the moon appeared, by the low railing which guarded the edge of the roof. The railing was of a very desirable height. Dickie could just rest his chin on top of it, which was nice. Suddenly a loud "Maau-w!" resounded from above. Dickie jumped, and gave his poor chin a knock against the railing. It couldn't be the moon, could it? Moons didn't make noises like that.

He looked up. There, on the ridge pole of the next roof, sat a black cat, big and terrible against the sky. "Ma-a-uw," said the cat again, louder than before.

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"Why, pussy, what's the matter?" cried Dick. His voice quavered a little, but he tried to speak boldly. Pussy was displeased at the question. She hissed, put up her back, swelled her tail to a puff, and fled to a distant part of the roof, where, from some hidden ambush, Dick could hear her scolding savagely.

"She's a cwiss cat, I guess," he remarked philosophically. "Why, this chimney is warm," he cried, as his arm touched the bricks. "It's 'cause there used to be a fire in there. But there isn't any smoke coming out. I wonder if all the chimneys are warm too, like this one."

There was another chimney not far off, and Dick hastened to try the experiment. To do this he was obliged to climb a railing, but it was low and easy to get over. The second chimney was cold, but a little farther on appeared a third, and Dick proceeded to climb another railing.

But before he reached this third chimney, a surprising and interesting sight attracted his attention. This was a scuttle door just like the one at home, standing open, with a ladder leading down into a garret below.

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Dick peered over the edge of the scuttle. There was no little chamber in this attic like his at home. It was all an open space, crammed with trunks, furniture, boxes, and barrels. He caught sight of a rocking-horse standing in a corner; a rocking-horse with a blue saddle on his wooden

back, and a fierce bristling mane much in need of brush and comb. Drawn by irresistible attraction, Dickie put, first one foot, then the other, over the scuttle's edge, crept down the ladder, and in another moment stood by the motionless steed. Thick dust lay on the saddle, on the rockers, and on the stiffly stretched-out tail, from which most of the red paint had been worn away. It was evidently a long time since any little boy had mounted there, chirruped to the horse, and ridden gloriously away, pursuing a fairy fox through imaginary fields. The eye of the wooden horse was glazed and dim. Life had lost its interest to the poor animal, turned out, as it were, to pasture as best he might in the dull, silent garret.

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Dickie patted the red neck, a timid, affectionate pat, but it startled the horse a little, for he shook visibly, and swayed to and fro. There was evidently some "go" left in him, in spite of his dejected expression of countenance. The shabby stirrup hung at his side. Dickie could just reach it with his foot. He seized the mane, and, pulling hard, clambered into the saddle. Once there, reins in hand, he clucked and encouraged the time-worn steed to his best paces. To and fro, to and fro they swung, faster, slower, Dickie beating with his heels, the wooden horse curveting and prancing. It was famous! The dull thud of the rockers echoed through the garret, and somebody sitting in the room below raised his head to listen to the strange sound.

This somebody was an old man with white hair and a gray, stern face, who sat beside a table on which were paper and lighted candles. A letter lay before him, but he was not reading it. When the sound of the rocking began, he started and turned pale. A little boy once used to rock in that way in the garret overhead, but it was long ago, and for many years past the garret had been silent and deserted. "Harry's horse!" muttered the old man with a look of fear as he heard the sound. He half rose from his chair, then he sat down again. But soon the noise ceased. Dickie had caught sight of another thing in the garret which interested him, and had dismounted to examine it. The old man sank into his chair again with a look of relief, muttering something about the wind.

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The thing which Dickie had gone to examine was a little arm-chair cushioned with red. It was just the size for him, and he seated himself in it with a look of great satisfaction.

"I wiss this chair was mine," he said. "P'waps Mally'll let me take it home if I ask her."

A noise below attracted his attention. He peeped over the balusters and saw an elderly woman, with a candle in her hand, coming up from the lower story. She went into a room at the foot of the attic stair, leaving the door open. "Hester! Hester!" called a voice from below. The woman came from the room and went down again. She did not take the candle with her: Dick could see it shining through the open door.

[54]

Like a little moth attracted by a flame, Dick wandered down the stair in the direction of the light. The candle was standing on the table in a bedroom,—a pretty room, Dickie thought, though it did not seem as if anybody could have lived in it lately. He didn't know why this idea came into his mind, but it did. It was a girl's bedroom, for a small blue dress hung on the wall, and on the bureau were brushes, combs, and hair-pins. Beside the bureau was a wooden shelf full of books. A bird-cage swung in the window, but there was no bird in it, and the seed glass and water cup were empty. The narrow bed had a white coverlid and a great white pillow. It looked all ready for somebody, but it was years since the girl who once owned the room had slept there. The old housekeeper, who still loved the girl, came every day to dust and smooth and air and sweep. She kept all things in their places just as they used to be in the former time, but she could not give to the room the air of life which once it had, and, do what she would, it looked deserted always—empty—and dreary.

[55]

On the chimney-piece were ranged a row of toys, plaster cats, barking dogs, a Noah's ark, and an enormous woolly lamb. This last struck Dick with admiration. He stood on tip-toe with his hands clasped behind his back to examine it.

"Oh, dear," he sighed, "I wiss I had that lamb." Then he gave a jump, for close to him, in a small chair, he saw what seemed to be a little girl, staring straight at him.

It was a big, beautiful doll, in a dress of faded pink, and a pink hat and feather. Dick had never seen such a fine lady before; she quite fascinated him. He leaned gently forward and touched the waxen hand. It was cold and clammy; Dick did not like the feel, and retreated. The unwinking eyes of the doll followed him as he sidled away, and made him uncomfortable.

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In the opposite room the old man still sat with his letter before him. The letter was from the girl who once played with the big doll and slept in the smooth white bed. She was not a child now. Years before she had left her father's house against his will, and in company with a person he did not like. He had said then that he should never forgive her, and till now she had not asked to be forgiven. It was a long time since he had known any thing about her. Nobody ever mentioned her name in his hearing, not even the old housekeeper who loved her still, and never went to bed without praying that Miss Ellen might one day come back. Now Ellen had written to her father. The letter lay on the table.

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"I was wrong," she wrote, "but I have been punished. We have suffered much. My husband is dead. I will not speak of him, for I know that his name will anger you; but, father, I am alone, ill, and very poor. Can you not forgive me now? Do not think of me as the wild, reckless girl who disobeyed you and brought sorrow to your life. I am a weary, sorrowful woman, longing, above all other things, to be pardoned before I die,—to come home again to the house where all my happy years were spent. Let me come, father. My little Hester, named after our dear nurse, mine and

Harry's, is a child whom you would love. She is like me as I used to be, but far gentler and sweeter than I ever was. Let me put her in your arms. Let me feel that I am forgiven for my great fault, and I will bless you every day that I live. Dear father, say yes. Your penitent ELLEN."

Two angels stood behind the old man as he read this letter. He did not see them, but he heard their voices as first one and then the other bent and whispered in his ear.

[58]

"Listen," murmured the white angel with radiant moonlit wings. "Listen. You loved her once so dearly. You love her still. I know you do."

"No," breathed the darker angel. "You swore that you would not forgive her. Keep your word. You always said that she would come back as soon as she was poor or unhappy, or that scamp treated her badly. It makes no difference in the facts. Let her suffer; it serves her right."

"Remember what a dear child she used to be," said the fair angel, "so bright, so loving. How she used to dance about the house and sing; the sun seemed to shine always when she came into the room. She loved you truly then. Her little warm arms were always about your neck. She loves you still."

"What is love worth," came the other voice, "when it deceives and hurts and betrays? All these long years you have suffered. It is her turn now."

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"Remember that it was partly your fault," whispered the spirit of good. "You were harsh and stern. You did not appeal to her love, but to her obedience. She had a high spirit; you forgot that. And she was only sixteen."

"Quite old enough to know better," urged the spirit of evil. "Remember the hard life you have led ever since. The neighbors speak of you as a stern, cruel man; the little children run away when you appear. Whose fault is that? Hers. She ought to pay for it."

"Think of the innocent child who never did you wrong, and who suffers too. Think of the dear Lord who forgives your sins. Pray to him. He will help you to forgive her,"—urged the good angel, but in fainter tones, for the black angel spoke louder, and thrust between with his fierce voice.

"The thing is settled. Why talk of prayer or pardon? Let her go her way."

As this last whisper reached his ear the old man raised his bent head. A hard, vindictive look was in his eyes. He seized the letter and tore it in two. "Alas! alas!" sighed the sweet angel, while the evil one rejoiced and waved his dark wings in triumph.

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It was at this moment that Dickie, attracted by the rustle of paper, appeared at the door. His eyes were beginning to droop a little. He rubbed them hard as he crossed the entry. The pit-pat of his bare feet made no sound on the carpeted floor, so that the old man had no warning of his presence till, turning, he saw the little night-gowned figure standing motionless in the door-way.

He sprang from his chair and stretched out his hands. He tried to speak, but no voice came at first; then in a hoarse whisper he said,—"Harry—is it you? Ellen—"

Dickie, terrified, fled back into the hall as if shod with wings. In one moment he was in the attic, up the ladder, on the roof. The old man ran blindly after him.

"Come back, Ellen—come back!" he cried. "I will forgive you,—come back to your poor old father, dear child." His foot slipped as he spoke. It was at the stair-head. He fell forward heavily, and lump, bump, bump, down stairs he tumbled, and landed heavily in the hall below.

[61]

Hester and the housemaid ran hastily from the kitchen at the sound of the fall. When they saw the old man lying in a heap at the foot of the stair, they were terribly frightened. Blood was on his face. He was quite unconscious.

"He is dead. Mr. Kirton is dead!" cried the housemaid, wringing her hands.

"No,—his heart beats," said Hester. "Run for Doctor Poster, Hannah, and ask Richard Wallis to come at once and help me lift the poor old gentleman."

Hannah flew to do this errand. A moment after, Mr. Kirton opened his eyes.

"Where is Ellen?" he said. Then he shut them again. Hester glanced at the torn letter, which through all his fall the old man had held tightly clasped in his hand, and gave a loud cry.

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"Miss Ellen, come back!" she exclaimed. "My own Miss Ellen. God has heard my prayers."

When Mr. Kirton's senses returned, late in the night, he found himself in his own bed. His head felt strangely; one arm was tied up in a queer stiff bandage, so that he could not move it. A cloth wet with water lay on his forehead. When he stirred and groaned, a hand lifted the cloth, dipped it in ice-water, and put it back again fresh and cool. He looked up. Some one was bending over him, some one with a face which he knew and did not know. It puzzled him strangely. At last, a look of recognition came into his eyes. "Ellen?" he said, in a tone of question.

"Yes, dear father, it is I."

"Why did you come dressed as a little child to frighten me? You are a woman," he said wonderingly; "your hair is gray!"

[63]

"I did not come as a little child, father. I am an old woman now. I have come to be your nurse."

"I don't understand," muttered the old man, but he asked no more, and presently dropped asleep. Ellen watched him for a long time, then she went across the hall to her old room, where Hester stood looking at a little girl, who lay on the bed sleeping soundly, with the pink doll hugged tight in her arms.

"She is just like yourself, Miss Ellen," said Hester, with joyful tears in her eyes,— "just like your old self, with a thought more brown in the hair. Ah! good times have begun again for my poor old master; the light has come back to the house."

But neither Hester nor Ellen saw the white-robed angel, who bent over the old man's bed with a face of immortal joy, and sang low songs of peace to make sleep deep and healing. The dark spirit has fled away.

Meantime Dickie, unconscious messenger of Fate, scrambling easily over the roofs, had gained his own room, and was comfortably tucked up in his little bed. His dreams were of dolls, rocking-horses, black cats. So soundly did he sleep, that, when morning came, Mally had to shake him and call loudly in his ear before she could wake him up. [64]

"Why, Dick!" she cried, "look at your night-gown. It's all over dust, and there are one—two—three tears in the cotton. What *have* you been doing?"

But Dickie could not tell.

"I dweamed that I walked about on the woof," he said. "But I guess I didn't weally, did I?"



[65]

LITTLE BO PEEP.

THE sun was setting at the end of an August day. Everybody was glad to see the last of him, for the whole world felt scorched and hot,—the ground, the houses,—even the ponds looked warm as they stretched in the steaming distance. On the edge of the horizon the sun winked with a red eye, as much as to say, "Don't flatter yourselves, I shall be back again soon;" then he slowly sank out of sight. It was comforting to have him go, if only for a little while. "Perhaps," thought the people, "a thunder-storm or something may come along before morning, and cool him off." [66]

Little Mell Davis was as glad as anybody when the sun disappeared. It had been a hard day. Her step-mother had spent it in making soap. Soap-making is ill-smelling, uncomfortable work at all times, and especially in August. Mrs. Davis had been cross and fractious, had scolded a great deal, and found many little jobs for Mell to do in addition to her usual tasks of dish-washing, table-setting, and looking after the children. Mell was tired of the heat; tired of the smell of soap, of being lectured; and when supper was over was very glad to sit at peace on the door-steps and read her favorite book, a tattered copy of the Fairy Tales. Soon she forgot the trials of the day. [67] "Once upon a time there lived a beautiful Princess," she read, but just then came a sharp call. "Mell, Mell, you tiresome girl, see what Tommy is about;" and Mrs. Davis, dashing past, snatched Tommy away from the pump-handle, which he was plying vigorously for the benefit of his small sisters, who stood in a row under the spout, all dripping wet. Tommy was wetter still, having impartially pumped on himself first of all. Frocks, aprons, jacket, all were soaked, shoes and stockings were drenched, the long pig tails of the girls streamed large drops, as if they had been little rusty-colored water-pipes.

"Look at that!" cried Mrs. Davis, exhibiting the half-drowned brood. "You might as well be deaf and blind, Mell, for any care you take of 'em. Give you a silly book to read, and the children might perish before your eyes for all you'd notice. Look at Isaphine, and Gabella Sarah. Little lambs,—as likely as not they've taken their deaths. It shan't happen again, though. Give me that book—" [68] And, snatching Mell's treasure from her hands, Mrs. Davis flung it into the fire. It flamed, shrivelled: the White Cat, Cinderella, Beauty and the Beast,—all, all were turned in one moment into a heap of unreadable ashes! Mell gave one clutch, one scream; then she stood quite still, with a hard, vindictive look on her face, which so provoked her step-mother that she gave her a slap as she hurried the children upstairs. Mrs. Davis did not often slap Mell. "I punish my own

children," she would say, "not other people's." "Other people's children" meant poor Mell.

It was not a very happy home, this of the Davis's. Mell's father was captain of a whaler, and almost always at sea. It was three years now since he sailed on his last voyage. No word had come from him for a great many months, and his wife was growing anxious. This did not sweeten her temper, for in case he never returned, Mell's would be another back to clothe, another mouth to fill, when food, perhaps, would not be easily come by. Mell was not anxious about her father. She was used to having him absent. In fact, she seldom thought of him one way or another. If Mrs. Davis had been kinder, and had given her more time to read the Fairy Tales, she would have been quite a happy little girl, for she lived in dreams, and it did not take much to content her. Half her time was spent in a sort of inward play which never came out in words. Sometimes in these plays she was a Princess with a gold crown, and a delightful Prince making love to her all day long. Sometimes she kept a candy-shop, and lived entirely on sugar-almonds and sassafras-stick. These plays were so real to her mind that it seemed as if they *must* some day come true. Her step-mother and the children did not often figure in them, though once in a while she made believe that they were all changed into agreeable people, and shared her good luck. There was one thing in the house, however, which invariably took part in her visions. This was a large wooden chest with brass handles which stood upstairs in Mrs. Davis's room, and was always kept locked.

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Mell had never seen the inside of this chest but once. Then she caught glimpses of a red shawl, of some coral beads in a box, and of various interesting looking bundles tied up in paper. "How beautiful!" she had cried out eagerly, whereupon Mrs. Davis had closed the lid with a snap, and locked it, looking quite vexed. "What is it? Are all those lovely things yours?" asked Mell, and she had been bidden to hold her tongue, and see if the kitchen fire didn't need another stick of wood. It was two years since this happened. Mell had never seen the lid raised since, but every day she had played about the big chest and its contents.

Sometimes she played that the chest belonged to the beautiful Princess, and was full of her clothes and jewels. Sometimes a fairy lived there, who popped out, wand in hand, and made things over to Mell's liking. Again, Mell played that she locked her step-mother up into the chest, and refused to release her till she promised never, never again, so long as she lived, to scold about any thing. Mrs. Davis would have been very vexed had she known about these plays. It made her angry if Mell so much as glanced at the chest. "There you are again, peeping, peeping," she would cry, and drive Mell before her downstairs.

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So this evening, after the burning of the book, Mell's sore and angry fancies flew as usual to the chest. "It's so big," she thought, "that all the children could get into it. I'll play that a wicked enchanter came and flew away with mother, and never let her come back. Then I should have to take care of the children; and I'd get somebody to nail some boards, so as to make five dear little cubby-houses inside the chest. I'd put Tommy in one, Isaphine in another, Arabella Jane in another, Belinda in another, and Gabella Sarah in another. Then I'd shut the lid down and fasten it, and wouldn't I have a good time! When dinner was ready I'd fetch a plate and spoon, feed 'em all round, and shut 'em up again. It would be just the same when I washed their faces; I'd just take a wet cloth and do 'em all with a couple of scrubs. They couldn't get into mischief I suppose in there. Yet I don't know. Tommy is so bad that he would if he could. Let me see,—what could he do? If he had a gimlet he'd bore holes in the boards, and stick pins through to make the others cry. I must be sure to see if he has any gimlets in his pocket before I put him in. Oh, dear, I hope I shan't forget!"

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Mell was so absorbed in these visions that she did not hear the gate open, and when a hand was suddenly laid on her shoulder she gave a little cry and a great jump. A tall man had come in, and was standing close to her.

"Does Mrs. Captain Davis live here?" asked the tall man.

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"Yes," said Mell, staring at him with her big eyes.

"Is she to home?"

"Yes," said Mell again. "She's in there," pointing to the kitchen.

The tall man stepped over Mell, and went in. Mell heard the sound of voices, and grew curious. She peeped in at the door. Her step-mother was folding a letter. She looked vexed about something.

"What time shall you start?" she said.

"Half-past five," replied the man. "I've my hands to pay at ten, and the weather's so hot it's best to get off early."

"I suppose I must go," went on Mrs. Davis, "though I'd rather be whipped than do it. You can stop if you've a mind to: I'll be ready."

"Very well," said the man. "You haven't got a drink of cider in the house, have you? This dust has made me as dry as a chip."

"Mell, run down cellar and fetch some," said Mrs. Davis. "It was good cider once, but I'm afraid it's pretty hard now." She bustled about; brought doughnuts and a pitcher of water. The man drank a glass of the sour cider and went away. Mrs. Davis sat awhile thinking. Then she turned

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sharply on Mell.

"I've got to go from home to-morrow on business," she said. "Perhaps I shall be back by tea-time, and perhaps I sha'n't. If there was anybody I could get to leave the house with I would, but there isn't anybody. Now, listen to me, Mell Davis. Don't you open a book to-morrow, not once; but keep your eyes on the children, and see that they don't get into mischief. If they do, I shall know who to thank for it. I'll make a batch of biscuit to-night before I go to bed; there's a pie in the cupboard, and some cold pork, and you can boil potatoes for the children's breakfast and for dinner. Are you listening?"

"Yes'm," replied Mell.

"See that the children have their faces and hands washed," went on her step-mother. "Oh, dear, if you were a different kind of girl how much easier would it be! I wish your father would come home and look after his own affairs, instead of my having to leave things at sixes and sevens and go running round the country hunting up his sick relations for him." [75]

"Is it grandmother who is sick?" asked Mell timidly. She had never seen her grandmother, but she had played about her very often.

"No," snapped Mrs. Davis. "It's your Uncle Peter. Don't ask questions; it's none of your business who's sick. Mind you strain the milk the first thing to-morrow, and wring out the dishcloth when you're through with it. Oh, dear, to think that I should have to go!"

Mell crept to bed. She was so very tired that it seemed just one moment before Mrs. Davis was shaking her arm, and calling her to get up at once, for it was five o'clock. Slowly she unclosed her sleepy eyes. Sure enough, the night was gone. A fiery red bar in the East showed that the sun too was getting out of bed, and making ready for a hot day's work. Mell rubbed her eyes. She wished that it was all a dream, from which she had waked only to fall asleep again. But it was no use playing at dreams with Mrs. Davis standing by. [76]

Mrs. Davis was by no means in a humor for play. People rarely are at five in the morning. She rushed about the house like a whirlwind, giving Mell directions, and scolding her in advance for all the wrong things she was going to do, till the poor child was completely stunned and confused. By and by the tall man appeared with his wagon. Mrs. Davis got in and drove away, ordering and lecturing till the last moment. "What's the use of telling, for you're sure to get it all wrong," were her last words, and Mell thought so too.

She walked back to the house feeling stupid and unhappy. But the quiet did her good, and as gradually she realized that her step-mother was actually gone,—gone for the whole day,—her spirits revived, and she began to smile and sing softly to herself. Very few little girls of twelve would, I think, have managed better than Mell did for the first half of that morning. [77]

First she got breakfast, only bread and milk and baked potatoes, but there is a wrong as well as a right way with even such simple things, and Mell really did all very cleverly. She swept the kitchen, strained the milk, wound the clock. Then, as a sound of twittering voices began above, she ran up to the children, washed and dressed, braided the red pigtails, and got them downstairs successfully, with only one fight between Tommy and Isaphine, and a roaring fit from Arabella Jane, who was a tearful child. After breakfast, while the little ones played on the door-steps, she tidied the room, mended the fire, washed plates and cups, and put them away in the cupboard, wrung out the dishcloth according to orders, and hung it on its nail. When this was finished she looked about with pride. The children were unusually peaceful; altogether, the day promised well. "Mother'll not say that I'm a good-for-nothing girl *this* time," thought Mell, and tried to recollect what should be done next. [78]

The kerosene can caught her eye.

"I'll clean the lamp," she said.

She had never cleaned the lamp before, but had seen her step-mother do it very often. First, she took the lamp-scissors from the table drawer and cut the wick, rather jaggedly, but Mell did not know that. Then she tipped the can to fill the lamp. Here the misfortunes of the day began; for the can slipped, and some of the oil was spilled on the floor. This terrified Mell, for that kitchen-floor was the idol of Mrs. Davis's heart. It was scrubbed every day, and kept as white as snow. Mell knew that her step-mother's eyes would be keen as Blue Beard's to detect a spot; and, with all the energy of despair, she rubbed and scoured with soap and hot water. It was all in vain. The spot would not come out.

"I'll put a chair there," thought Mell. "Then perhaps she won't see it just at first." [79]

"I want that scissors," cried Tommy from the door.

"You can't have it," replied Mell, hurrying them into the drawer. "It's a bad scissors, Tommy, all oily and dirty. Nice little boys don't want to play with such dirty scissors as that."

"Yes, they do," whined Tommy, quite unconvinced.

"Now, children," continued Mell, "I'm going upstairs to make the beds. You must play just here, and not go outside the gate till I come down again. I shall be at the window, and see you all the time. Will you promise to be good and do as I tell you?"

"Es," lisped Gabella Sarah.

"Es," said Isaphine.

"Yes, yes," clamored the others, headed by Tommy, who was a child of promise if ever there was one. All the time his eyes were fixed on the table drawer!

Mell went upstairs. First into the children's room, then into her own. She put her head out of the window once or twice. The children were playing quietly; Tommy had gone in for something, they said. Last of all, Mell went to her step-mother's room. She had just begun to smooth the bed, when an astonishing sight caught her eyes. *The key was in the lock of the big chest!* [80]

Yes, actually, the fairy treasury, home of so many fancies, was left unlocked! How Mrs. Davis came to do so careless a thing will never be known, but that she had done so was a fact.

Mell thought at first that her eyes deceived her. She stole across the room and touched the key timidly with her forefinger to make sure. Then she lifted the lid a little way and let it fall again, looking over her shoulder as if fearing to hear a sharp voice from the stairs. Next, grown bolder, she opened the lid wide. There lay the red shawl, just as she remembered it, the coral beads in their lidless box, the blue paper parcels, and, forgetting all consequences in a rapture of curiosity, Mell sat down on the floor, lifted out the red shawl, tied the coral beads round her neck, and plunged boldly into the contents of the big chest. [81]

Such a delightful chest as it proved to be! Mell thought it a great deal better than any fairy tale, as one by one she lifted out and handled the things which it contained. First and most beautiful was a parasol. It was covered with faded pink silk trimmed with fringe, and had a long white handle ending in a curved hook. Mell had never seen a parasol so fine. She opened it, shut it, opened it again; she held it over her head and went to the glass to see the effect. It was gorgeous, it was like the parasols of Fairy-land, Mell thought. She laid it on the floor close beside her, that she might see it all the while she explored the chest.

Below the parasol was a big paper box. Mell lifted the lid. A muff and tippet lay inside, made of yellow and brown fur like the back of a tortoise-shell cat. These were beautiful, too. Then came rolls of calico and woollen pieces, some of which were very pretty, and would make nice doll's dresses, Mell thought. [82]

A newspaper parcel next claimed her attention. It held an old-fashioned work-bag made of melon seeds strung on wire, and lined with green. Mell admired this exceedingly, and pinned it to her waist. Then she found a fan of white feathers with pink sticks. This was most charming of all. Mell fanned herself a long time. She could not bear to put it away. Princesses, she thought, must use fans like that. On the paper which wrapped the fan was something written in pencil. Mell spelled it out. "For my little Melicent" was what the writing said.

Was the fan really hers? Perhaps the parasol was hers too, the coral beads, the muff and tippet! All sorts of delightful possibilities whirled through her brain, as she tossed and tumbled the parcels in the chest out on to the floor. More bundles of pieces, some knitting-needles, an old-fashioned pair of bellows (Mell did not know what these were), a book or two, a package of snuff, which flew up into her face and made her sneeze. Then an overcoat and some men's clothes folded smoothly. Mell did not care for the overcoat, but there were two dresses pinned in towels which delighted her. One was purple muslin, the other faded blue silk; and again she found her own name pinned on the towel,—"For my little Mell." A faint pleasant odor came from the folds of the blue silk dress. Mell searched the pocket, and found there a Tonquin bean, screwed up in a bit of paper. It was the Tonquin bean which had made the dress smell so pleasantly. Mell pressed the folds close to her nose. She was fond of perfumes, and this seemed to her the most delicious thing she ever smelt. [83]

Suddenly the clock downstairs struck something very long, and Mell, waking up as it were, recollected that it was a good while since she had heard any sounds from the children in the yard. She jumped up and ran to the window. No children were there. [84]

"Children, children, where are you?" she called; but nobody answered.

"Tiresome little things," thought Mell. "They've gone round to the pump again. I must hurry, or they will be all sopping wet." She seized the parasol, which she could not bear to part with, and, leaving the other things on the floor, ran downstairs. The red shawl, which had been lying in her lap, trailed after her as far as the kitchen, and then fell, but Mell did not notice it.

"What!" she cried, looking at the clock, "noon already! Why, where has the morning gone to?"

Where had the children gone to? was another question. Back yard, side yard, front yard, cellar, shed, Mell searched. There were no small figures ranged about the pump, no voices replied to her calls. Mell ran to the gate. She strained her eyes down the road, this way, that way; not a sign of the little flock was visible in any direction. [85]

Now Mell *was* frightened. "What *will* mother say?" she thought, and began to run distractedly along the road, crying and sobbing as she went, and telling herself that it wasn't her fault, that she only went upstairs to make the beds,—but here her conscience gave a great prick. It was but ten o'clock when she went upstairs to make the beds!

"Oh, dear!" she sobbed. "If only Tommy isn't drowned!" Drowning came into her head first,

because her step-mother was always in an agony about the pond. The pond was a mile off at least, but Mrs. Davis never let the children even look that way if she could help it.

Toward the pond poor Mell bent her way; for she thought as Tommy had been strictly forbidden to go there, it was probably the very road he had taken. The sun beat on her head and she put up the parasol, which through all her trouble she had grasped firmly in her hand. Even under these dreadful circumstances, with the children lost, and the certainty of her step-mother's wrath before her, there was joy in carrying a parasol like that. [86]

By and by she met a farmer with a yoke of oxen.

"Oh, please," said Mell, "have you seen five children going this way,—four girls and one little boy?"

The farmer hummed and hawed. "I did see some children," he said at last. "It was a good piece back, nearly an hour ago, I reckon. They was making for the pond?"

"Oh, dear!" sighed Mell. She thanked the farmer, and ran on faster than ever.

"Have you passed any children on this road?" she demanded of a boy with a wheelbarrow, who was the next person she met.

"Boys or girls?"

"One boy and four girls."

"Do they belong to you?"

"Yes, they're my brothers and sisters," said Mell. "Where did you see them?" [87]

"Haven't seen 'em," replied the boy. He grinned as he spoke, seized his barrow, and wheeled rapidly away.

Mell's tears broke forth afresh. What a horrid boy!

The pond was very near now. It was a large pond. There were hills on one side of it; on the other the shore was low, and covered with thick bushes. In and out among these bushes went Mell, hunting for her lost flock. It was green and shady. Flowers grew here and there; bright berries hung on the boughs above her head; birds sang; a saucy squirrel ran to the end of a branch, and chattered to her as she passed. But Mell saw none of these things. She was too anxious and unhappy to enjoy what on any other day would have been a great pleasure; and she passed the flowers, the berries, and the chattering squirrel unheeded by.

No signs of the children appeared, till at last, in a marshy place, a small shoe was seen sticking in the mud. Belinda's shoe! Mell knew it in a minute. [88]

She picked up the shoe, wiped the mud from it with a tuft of dried grass, and, carrying it in her hand, went forward. She was on the track now, and here and there prints of small feet in the earth guided her. She called "Tommy! Isaphine! Belinda!" but no answer came. They were either hidden cleverly, or else they had wandered a longer distance than seemed possible in so short a time.

Suddenly Mell gave a shriek and a jump. There on the path before her lay a snake, or what looked like one. It did not move. Mell grew bold and went nearer. Alas! alas! it was not a snake. It was a pigtail of braided hair,—Isaphine's hair: the red color was unmistakable. She seized it. A smell of kerosene met her nose. Oh that Tommy!

With the pigtail coiled inside of the lost shoe, Mell ran on. She was passing a thicket of sassafras bushes, when a sound of crying met her ears. Instantly she stopped, and, parting the bushes with her hands, peered in. There they were, sitting in a little circle close together,—Arabella and Gabella Sarah fast asleep, with their heads in Belinda's lap; Isaphine crying; Tommy sitting a little apart, an evil smile on his face, in his hand a pair of scissors! [89]

"You naughty, naughty, naughty boy," screamed Mell, flinging herself upon him.

With a howl of terror, Tommy started up and prepared to flee. Mell caught and held him tight. Something flew from his lap and fell to the ground. Alas! alas! three more pigtails. Mell looked at the children. Each little head was cropped close. What *would* mother say?

"He cut off my hair," sobbed Isaphine.

"So did he cut mine," whined Belinda. "He took those nassy scissors you told him not to take, and he cut off all our hairs. Boo-hoo! boo-hoo! Tommy's a notty boy, he is."

"I'm going to tell Ma when she comes home, see if I don't," added Isaphine. [90]

"I ain't a bad boy," cried Tommy. "Stop a-shaking of me, Mell Davis. We was playing they was sheep. I was a-shearing of em."

"O Tommy, Tommy!" cried poor Mell, hot, angry, and dismayed, "how could you do such a thing?"

"They was sheep," retorted Tommy sulkily.

"Boo-hoo! boo-hoo!" blubbered Belinda. "I don't like my hair to be cut off. It makes my head feel all cold."

"He didn't play nice a bit," sobbed Isaphine. "He's always notty to us."

"I'll cut off your head," declared Tommy, threatening with the scissors.

Mell seized the scissors, and captured them, Tommy kicking and struggling meantime. Then she waked up the babies, tied on Belinda's shoe, collected the unhappy pigtailed, and said they must all go home. Home! The very idea made her sick with fright.

I don't suppose such a deplorable little procession was ever seen before. Isaphine and Belinda went first; then the little ones, very cross after their nap; and, lastly, Mell, holding Tommy's arm, and driving the poor little shorn sheep before her with the handle of the parasol, which she used as a shepherdess uses her crook. They were all tired and hungry. The babies cried. The sun was very hot. The road seemed miles long. Every now and then Mell had to let them sit down to rest. It was nearly four o'clock when they reached home; and, long before that, Mell was so weary and discouraged that it seemed as if she should like to lie down and die.

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They got home at last. Mell's hand was on the garden gate, when suddenly a sight so terrible met her eyes that she stood rooted to the spot, unable to move an inch further. There in the doorway was Mrs. Davis. Her face was white with anger as she looked at the children. Mell felt the coral beads burn about her throat. She dropped the parasol as if her arm was broken, the guilty tails hung from her hand, and she wished with all her heart that the earth could open and swallow her up.

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It was a full moment before anybody spoke. Then "What does this mean?" asked Mrs. Davis, in an awful voice.

Mell could not answer. But the children broke out in full chorus of lament.

"Tommy was so bad to us." "He lost us in the woods." "He stole the scissors, and they were dirty scissors." "Mell went away and left us all alone."

"Yes," cried Mrs. Davis, her wrath rising with each word, "I know very well what you were up to, miss. All my things upset. As soon as I found out that I had forgotten my key, I knew very well—" her voice died away into the silence of horror. She had just caught sight of Belinda's cropped head.

"Tommy did it. He cut off all our hairs," blubbered Belinda.

Mell shut her eyes tight. She was too frightened to move. She felt herself clutched, dragged in-doors, upstairs, and her ears boxed, all in a moment. Mrs. Davis pushed her violently forward, a door banged, a key turned.

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"There you stay for a week, and on bread and water," cried a voice through the keyhole; and Mell, opening her eyes, found herself in the dark and alone. She knew very well where she was,—in the closet under the attic stairs; a place she dreaded, because she had once seen a mouse there, and Mell was particularly afraid of mice.

"Oh, don't shut me up here! Please don't; please let me out, please," she shrieked. But Mrs. Davis had gone downstairs, and nobody replied.

"They'll come and eat me up as soon as it grows dark," thought Mell; and this idea so terrified her that she began to beat on the door with her hands, and scream at the top of her voice. No one came. And after a while she grew so weary that she could scream no longer; so she curled herself up on the floor of the closet and went to sleep.

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When she woke the closet was darker than ever. Mell felt weak and ill for want of food. Her head ached; her bones ached from lying on the hard floor; she was feverish and very miserable.

"It's dark; she's going to leave me here all night," sobbed Mell. "Oh! won't somebody come and let me out?" Now *would* have been a chance to play that she was a princess shut up in a dark dungeon! But Mell didn't feel like playing. She was a real little girl shut up in a closet, and it wasn't nice at all. There was no "make believe" left in her just then.

Suddenly a fine scratching sound began in the wall close to her head. "The mouse, the mouse," thought Mell, and she gave a shriek so loud that it would have scared away a whole army of mice. The shriek sounded all over the house. It woke the children in their beds, and rang in the ears of Mrs. Davis, who was sitting down to supper in the kitchen with somebody just arrived,—a big, brown, rough-bearded somebody, who smelt of salt-water; Mell's father, in short, returned from sea.

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"What's that?" asked Captain Davis, putting down his cup.

Mrs. Davis was frightened. In the excitement of her husband's sudden return she had quite forgotten poor Mell in her closet.

"Some of the children," she answered, trying to speak carelessly. "I'll run up."

Another terrible shriek. Captain Davis seized a candle, and hurried upstairs after his wife.

He was just in time to see her unlock the closet door, and poor Mell tumble out, tear-stained,

white, frightened almost out of her wits. She clutched her step-mother's dress with both hands.

"Oh, don't make me go in there again!" she pleaded. "I will be good. I'll never meddle with the things in the chest any more. There are mice in there, hundreds of 'em; they'll run all over me; they'll eat me up. Oh, *don't* make me go in there again!"

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"Why, it's my little Mell!" cried the amazed Captain. "Shiver my timbers! what does this mean?" He lifted Mell into his arms and looked sternly at his wife.

"She's been a *very* naughty girl," said Mrs. Davis, trying to speak boldly. "So naughty that I had to shut her up. Stop crying so, Mell. I forgive you now. I hope you'll never be so bad again."

"Oh, may I come out?" sobbed Mell, clinging to her father's neck. "You said I must stay a week, but I couldn't do that, the mice would kill me. Mice are so awful!" She shuddered with horror as she spoke.

"This ain't a pleasant welcome for a man just in from sea," remarked Captain Davis.

Mrs. Davis explained and tried to smooth the matter over, but the Captain continued very sober all that evening. Mell thought it was because he was angry with her, but her step-mother knew very well that she also was in disgrace. The truth was that the Captain was thinking what to do. He was not a man of many words, but he felt that affairs at home must go very wrong when he was away, and that such a state of things was bad for his wife, and very bad for Mell.

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So in a day or two he went off to Cape Cod, "to see his old mother," as he said, in reality to consult her as to what should be done. When he came back, he asked Mell how she would like to go and live with Grandmother and be her little girl.

"Will she shut me up in closets?" asked Mell apprehensively.

"No, she'll be very kind to you if you are a good girl. Grandma's an old lady now. She wants a handy child about the house to help, and sort of pet and make much of."

"I—guess—I'll—like—it," said Mell slowly. "It's a good way from here, isn't it?"

"Yes,—a good way."

Mell nodded her head in a satisfied manner. "*She'll* not often come there," she thought. "She" meant Mrs. Davis.

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Mrs. Davis was unusually pleasant for the few remaining days which Mell spent at home. I do not think she had ever meant to treat Mell unkindly, but she had a hot temper, and the care of five unruly children is a good deal for one woman to undertake, without counting in a little step-daughter with a head stuffed with fairy stories. She washed and ironed, mended and packed for Mell as kindly as possible, and did not say one cross word, not even when her husband brought the coral necklace from the big chest and gave it to Mell for her very own. "The child had a right to her mother's necklace," he said. All was peaceful and serene, and when Mell said good-by she surprised herself by feeling quite sorry to go, and kissed Gabella Sarah's small face with tears in her eyes.

Grandmother was just such a dear old woman as one reads about in books. Her cheeks were all criss-crossed with little wrinkles, which made her look as if she were always smiling. Her forehead was smooth, her eyes kind and blue. She was small, thin, and wiry. Her laugh was as fresh as a young woman's. Mell loved her at once, and was sure that she should be happy to live with her and be her little girl.

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"Why, Bethuel, you've brought me a real good helper," said Grandmother, as Mell ran to and fro, setting the tea-table, cutting bread, and learning where things were kept. "I shall sit like a lady and do nothing but rock in my cheer now that I've got Mell." Mell heard the kind words, and sprang about more busily than ever. It was a new thing to be praised.

Before Captain Davis went next day he walked over to Barnstable, and came back with a parcel in his hand. The parcel was for Mell. It contained the Fairy Tales,—all new and complete, bound in beautiful red covers.

"You shall read them aloud to me in the evenings," said Grandmother.

That night, if anybody had peeped through the window of Grandmother's little house he would have seen a pleasant sight. The kitchen was all in order; the lamp burned clear; Grandmother sat in her rocking-chair with a smile on her kind old face, while Mell, at her feet on a little stool, opened the Fairy Tales, and prepared to read. "Once upon a time there lived a beautiful Princess," she began;—then a sudden sense of the delightfulness of all this overcame her. She dropped the book into her lap, clasped her hands tight, and said, half to herself, half to Grandmother, "*Isn't* it nice?"

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MISTRESS MARY.

IT was the first of May; but May was in an April mood,—half cloudy, half shiny,—and belied her name. Sprinkles of silvery rain dotted the way-side dust; flashes of sun caught the drops as they fell, and turned each into a tiny mirror fit for fairy faces. The trees were raining too, showers of willow-catkins and cherry-bud calyxes, which fell noiselessly and strewed the ground. The children kicked the soft brown drifts aside with their feet as they walked along.

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The doors of the Methodist meeting-house at Valley Hill stood open, and crowds of men and women and children were going into them. It was not Sunday which called the people together: it was the annual Conference meeting; and all the country round was there to hear the reports and learn where the ministers were to be sent for the next two years. Methodist clergymen, you know, are not "called" by the people of the parish, as other clergymen are. They go where the church sends them, and every second year they are all changed to other parishes. This, it is thought, keeps the people and pastors fresh and interested in each other. But I don't know. Human beings, as well as vegetables, have a trick of putting down roots; and even a cabbage or a potato would resent such transplanting, and would refuse to thrive.

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Sometimes, when a parish has become attached to its minister, it will plead to have him stay longer. Now and then this request is granted; but, as a rule, the minister has to go. And it is a hard rule for his wife and children, who have to go too.

The Valley Hill people "thought a heap" of their minister, Mr. Forcythe, and had begged hard that he might stay with them for another term. Everybody belonging to the church had come to the meeting feeling anxious, and yet pretty certain that the answer would be favorable. All over the building, people were whispering about the matter, and heads were nodding and bowing. The bonnets on these heads were curiously alike. Mrs. Perry, the village milliner, never had more than one pattern hat. "That is what is worn," she said; and nobody disputed the fact, which saved Mrs. Perry trouble. The Valley Hill people liked it just as well, and didn't mind the lack of variety. This year Mrs. Perry had announced yellow to be the fashion, so nine out of ten of the hats present were trimmed with yellow ribbon crossed in just the same way over a yellow straw crown; and the church looked like a bed of sisterly tulips nodding and bowing in the wind.

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Bishop Judson was the person to read the announcements. He was a nice old man, kind at heart, though formal in manner, and anxious eyes were fixed on him as he got up with a paper in his hand. That important little paper held comfort or discomfort for ever so many people. Every one bent forward to listen. It was so still all over the church that you might have heard a pin drop. The Bishop began with a little speech about the virtues of patience and contentment, and how important it was that everybody should be quite satisfied whatever happened to them. Then he opened the paper.

"Brother Johnson, Middlebury," he read. Middlebury was a favorite parish, so Brother Johnson looked pleased, and Sister Johnson was congratulated by the friends who sat near her. "Brother Woodward, Little Falls; Brother Ashe, Plunxet; Brother Allen, Claxton Corners." And so on. Some faces grew bright, some sad, as the reading proceeded. At last "Brother Forcythe, Redding; Brother Martin, Valley Hill," was announced. A quiver of disappointment went over the church, and a little girl sitting in the gallery began to cry.

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"My dear, my dear," whispered her mother, much distressed at her sobs and gulps. People looked up from below; but Mary could not stop. She took her mother's handkerchief and held it tight over her mouth; but the sobs would come. Her heart was half-broken at the idea of leaving Valley Hill and going to that horrid Redding, where nobody wanted to go.

Old Mrs. Clapp, from behind, reached over and gave her a bunch of fennel. But the fennel only made Mary cry harder. In Redding, she was sure, would be no kind Mrs. Clapp, no "meeting-house seed;" and her sobs grew thicker at the thought.

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"I observe that your little daughter seems to be distressed," said Bishop Judson, as Mrs. Forcythe led the sobbing Mary down from the gallery at the end of service. "Children of her age form strong attachments to places, I am aware. But it is well to break them before they become unduly strong. Here we have no continuing city, you know."

"Yes," said poor Mrs. Forcythe, with a meek sigh. She had been married fourteen years, and this was her seventh move.

"Redding—hum—is a desirable place in some respects," went on the Bishop. "There is a great work to do there,—a great work. It requires a man of Brother Forcythe's energy to meet it. Mistress Mary here will doubtless find consolation in the thought that her father's sphere of usefulness is—h'm—enlarged."

"But we shan't have any garden," faltered Mary, "Tilly Brooks, who was there before, says it isn't a bit nice. She never saw a flower all the time she was there, she said. I'd just planted my bed in the garden here. Mrs. Clapp gave me six pansies, and it was going to be so pretty. Now I've got to—leave—'em." Her voice died away into sobs. [107]

"Tut, tut!" said the Bishop. "The customs of a church cannot be set aside to accommodate a child's flower-bed. You'll find other things to please you in Redding, Mistress Mary. Come, come, dry your eyes. Your father's daughter should not set an example like this."

"No, sir," gulped Mary, mortified at this reproof from the Bishop, who was an important person, and much looked up to. She did her best to stop crying, but it was hard work. When they reached home, the sight of the pansies perking their yellow and purple faces up to meet her, renewed her grief. There was her mignonette seed not yet sprouted. If she had known that they were going away, she would not have planted any. There, worst of all, was the corner where she had planned such a nice surprise for her mother,—"A. F." in green parsley letters. A. F. stood for Anne Forcythe. Now, mother would never see the letters or know any thing about it. Oh dear, oh dear! [108]

Mrs. Forcythe's own disappointment was great, for they had all made sure that they should stay. But, like a true mother, she put her share of the grief aside, and thought only of comforting Mary.

"Don't feel so badly, dear," she said. "Recollect, you'll have Papa still, and me and Frank and little Peter. We'll manage to be happy somehow. Redding isn't half so disagreeable as you think."

"Yes, it is. Tilly said so. I was going to have radishes and a rose-bush," replied Mary tearfully. "There's a robin just building in the elm-tree now. There won't be any trees in Redding; only horrid hard cobble-stones."

"We must hope for the best," said Mrs. Forcythe, who did not enjoy the idea of the cobble-stones any more than Mary did. [109]

"Only ten days more at Valley Hill," was the first thought that came into Mary's mind the next morning. She went downstairs cross and out of spirits. Her mother was laying sheets and table-cloths in a trunk. The books were gone from the little book-shelf; every thing had already begun to look unsettled and uncomfortable.

"I shall depend on you to take care of little Peter," said Mrs. Forcythe. "We shall all have to work hard if we are to get off next Monday week."

Mary gave an impatient shrug with her shoulders. She loved little Peter, but it seemed an injury just then to have to take care of him. All the time that her mother was sorting, counting, and arranging where things should go, she sat in the window sullen and unhappy, looking out at the pansy-bed. Peter grew tired of a companion who did nothing to amuse him, and began to sprawl and scramble upstairs. [110]

"O baby, come back!" cried Mary, and, I am sorry to say, gave him a shake. Peter cried, and that brought poor weary Mrs. Forcythe downstairs.

"Can't you manage to make him happy?" she said. Mary only pouted.

All that day and the next and the next it was the same. Mrs. Forcythe was busy every moment. There were a thousand things to do, another thousand to remember. People kept coming in to say good-by. Peter wandered out on the door-steps when Mary's back was turned, took cold, and was threatened with croup. Mrs. Forcythe was half sick herself from worry and fatigue. And all this time Mary, instead of helping, was one of her mother's chief anxieties. She fretted and complained continually. Every thing went wrong. Each article put into the boxes cost her a flood of tears. Each friend who dropped in, renewed the sense of loss. She scarcely noticed her mother's pale face at all. All the brightness and busy-ness in her was changed for selfish lamentations, and still the burden of her complaint was, "I shan't have any flowers in Redding. My garden, oh, my garden." [111]

"I don't know what's come to her," said poor Mrs. Forcythe. "She's not like the same child at all." And old Mrs. Clapp, who had been very fond of Mary, declared that she never knew a girl so altered.

"She's the most *contrary* piece you ever saw," she said to her daughter. "I could have given her a right-down good slap just now for the way she spoke to her mother. It's all her fault that the baby took cold. She don't lift a hand to help, and I expect as sure as Fate that we'll have Mrs. Forcythe sick before we get through. I wouldn't have believed that such a likely girl as Mary Forcythe could act so."

Poor "contrary" Mary! She was very unhappy. The fatal last morning came. All the boxes were

packed. The drays, laden with furniture and beds, stood at the gate. Mrs. Clapp, and Mrs. Elder, the class-leader, were going over the house collecting last things and doing last jobs. Mary wandered out alone into the garden for a farewell look at her pets.

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"Good-by, pansies," she said, bending over them. There were only five in the bed now, for Mary had taken up one and packed it in paper to carry with her. A big tear hopped down her nose and splashed into the middle of the yellow pansy, her favorite of all. It turned up its bright kitten-face just the same. None of them minded Mary's going away. Flowers are sometimes so unkind to people.

"Good-by, rose-bush," proceeded Mary, turning from the pansy-bed. "Good-by, honey-suckle. Good-by, peony. Good-by, matter-i-mony." This sounds funny, but Mary only meant by it a vine with a small purple flower which grew over the back-door. "Good-by, lilac," she went on. "Good-by, grass plot." This brought her to the gate. The wagon stood waiting to carry them to the railroad, three miles away. Mrs. Forcythe, with the baby in her arms, was just getting in. "Hurry, Mary," called her father. Slowly she opened the gate, slowly shut it. Her father helped her over the wheel. She sat down beside Frank. Mrs. Clapp waved her handkerchief, then put it to her eyes. Mary took a long look at the pretty garden just budding with spring, and burst into tears. Mr. Forcythe chirruped to the horse; they were off,—and that was their good-by to Valley Hill.

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Redding was certainly very different. It was an old-fashioned town with narrow streets, which smelt of fish. Most of the people were sailors, or had something to do with ships. There were several nice churches, and outside the town a few handsome houses, but there were a great many poor people in the place and not many rich ones.

In the very narrowest of all the streets stood the parsonage; a little brick house with a paved yard behind, just wide enough for clothes-lines. When the wash was hung out there was not an inch to spare on either side. Mary gave up all hope as soon as she saw it. There was not room even for *one* pansy. The windows looked out on chimneys and roofs and other backyards, with lines of wet clothes flapping in the sun. Not a tree was to be seen. Any one might be excused for thinking it doleful; and Mary, having made up her mind beforehand to dislike it, found it easy to keep her resolution.

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There was no possibility of getting things to rights that night; though several people came in to help, and a comfortable supper was ready spread for the travellers on their arrival. Mrs. Forcythe was cheered by this kindness, but Mary could not be cheerful. She had to sleep upon a mattress laid on the floor. At another time this would have been fun, but now it did not seem funny at all; it was only part and parcel of the misery of coming to live in Redding. She cried herself to sleep, and came down in the morning with swollen eyelids and a disposition to make the very worst of things,—easy enough for any girl to do if she sets about it.

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She scarcely thanked her father when he went out and bought a red pot for the unlucky pansy, which, after its travels and its night in brown paper, looked as disconsolate as Mary herself. "I know it'll die right away," she muttered as she set it on the window-sill. "Oh, dear, there's mother calling. What *does* she want?"

"Mary, dear," said Mrs. Forcythe when she went down, "where have you been? I want you to put away the dishes for me."

"I'm so tired," objected Mary crossly.

"Don't you think that mother must be tired too?" asked her father gravely.

Mary blushed and began to place the cups and plates on the cupboard shelves. Her slow movements attracted her father's attention.

"What's the matter?" he said. "At Valley Hill you were as brisk as a bee, always wanting to help in every thing. Here you seem unwilling to move. How is it?"

"I—don't—like—Redding," broke out Mary in a burst of petulance.

"You haven't seen it yet."

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"Yes, I have, Papa. I've seen it as much as I want to. It's horrid!"

"I never knew her to behave so before," said Mr. Forcythe in a perplexed tone, as Mary, having unpacked the dishes, sobbed her way upstairs.

"She'll brighten when we are settled," replied Mrs. Forcythe, indulgent as mothers are, and ready to hope the best of her child. "Oh, dear! there's the baby waked up. Would you call Mary to go to him?"

So it went on all that week. Mr. and Mrs. Forcythe were very patient with Mary, hoping always that this evil mood would pass, and their bright, helpful little daughter come back to them again. She never refused to do any thing that was asked of her; but you know the difference between willing and unwilling service: Mary just did the tasks set her, no more, and as soon as they were finished fled to her own room to fret and cry. Her father took her out to walk and showed her the new church, but Mary thought the church ugly, and the outside view of Redding as unpleasant as the inside one. Dull streets, small houses everywhere; no gardens, except now and then a single bed, edged with a row of stiff cockle-shells by way of fence, and planted with pert sweet-williams or crown imperials. These Mary thought were worse than no flowers at all. Every thing smelt of

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fish. The very sea was made ugly by warehouses and shabby wharves. The people they met were strangers; and, altogether, the effect of Mary's walk was to send her back more homesick than ever for Valley Hill.

By Friday night the little parsonage was in order. Mrs. Forcythe was a capital manager. She planned and contrived, turned and twisted and made things comfortable in a surprising way. But she overtired herself greatly in doing this, and on Saturday morning Mary was waked by her father calling from below that mother was very ill, and she must come down at once and stay with her while he went for a doctor. [118]

"Oh, dear!" sighed Mary, as she hurried on her clothes. "Now mother is sick. It's all this hateful Redding. She never was sick when we lived in the country."

But the hard mood melted the moment she saw her mother's pale face and feeble smile.

"I hope I'm not going to be very ill," said Mrs. Forcythe; "probably it's only that I have tired myself out. You'll have to be 'Mamma' for a day or two, Mary dear. Make Papa as comfortable as you can. See that Frank has his lunch put up for school, and don't let Peter take cold. Oh, dear!—my head aches so hard that I can't talk. I know you'll do your best Mary, won't you?"

Guess how Mary felt at this appeal! All her better nature came back in a moment. She saw how wrong she had been in nursing her selfish griefs, and letting this dear mother over-work herself. "O mother, I will, indeed I will!" she cried, kissing the pale face; and, only waiting to draw the blind so that the sun should not shine in, she flew downstairs, eager to do all she could to make up for past ill-conduct. [119]

The Doctor came. He said Mrs. Forcythe was threatened with fever, and must be kept very quiet for several days. Mary had never in her life worked so hard as she did that Saturday. There was breakfast, dinner, supper to get, dishes to wash, water to heat, the fire to tend, rooms to dust, beds to make, the baby to keep out of mischief. She was very tired by night, but her heart felt lighter than it had for many days past. Do you wonder at this? I can tell you the reason. Mary's troubles were selfish troubles, and the moment she forgot herself in thinking of somebody else, they became small and began to creep away.

"Pitty, pitty!" said little Peter, as he heard her singing over her dish-washing. Mary caught him up and gave him a hearty kiss,—a real Valley Hill kiss, such as she had given no one since they came to Redding.

"Mary is doing famously," Mr. Forcythe told his wife that night. "She has a first-rate head on her shoulders for a girl of her age." Mary heard him, and was pleased. She liked—we all like—to be counted useful and valuable. The bit of praise sent her back to her work with redoubled zeal. [120]

Next morning Mrs. Forcythe was a little better. Her head ached less; she sat up on her pillows and drank a cup of tea. Mary was smoothing her mother's hair with soft pats of the brush, when suddenly the church bells began to ring. She had never heard such sounds before. The bell at Valley Hill was cracked, and went tang—tang—tang, as if the meeting-house were an old cow walking slowly about. These bells had a dozen different voices,—some deep and solemn, others bright and clear, but all beautiful; and across their pealing a soft, delicious chime from the tower of the Episcopal church went to and fro, and wove itself in and out like a thread of silver embroidery. Mary dropped the brush, and clasped her hands tight. It was like listening to a song of which she could not hear enough. When the last tinkle of the chime died away, she unclasped her hands, and, turning from the window, cried, "O mother! wasn't that lovely? There is *one* pleasant thing in Redding, after all!" [121]

I do not think matters ever seemed so hard again after that morning when Mary made friends with the church bells. It was the beginning of a better understanding between her and her new home; and there is a great deal in beginnings, even though they may work slowly toward their ends.

By the close of the week Mrs. Forcythe was downstairs again, weak and pale, but able to sit in her chair and direct things, which Mary felt to be a great comfort. The parishioners began to call. There were no rich people among them; but it was a hard-working, active parish, and did a great deal for its means. The Sunday-school was large and flourishing; there was a missionary association, a home missionary association, a mite society, and a sewing circle, which met every week to make clothes for the poor and partake of tea, soda biscuit, and six sorts of cake. Beside these, a new project had just been started, "The Seamen's Daughters' Industrial Society;" or, in other words, a sewing-school for little girls whose fathers were sailors. There were plenty of such little girls in Redding. [122]

"Your daughter will join, of course," said Mrs. Wallis, when she came to call on her minister's wife. "It's important that the pastor's family should take a part in every good work." Mrs. Wallis was the most energetic woman of the congregation,—at the head of every thing.

"I'm afraid Mary's sewing is not good enough," replied Mrs. Forcythe. "She isn't very skilful with her needle yet."

"Oh! she knows enough to teach those ignorant little creatures. Half of them are foreigners, and never touch a needle in their homes. It's every thing to give them some ideas beyond their own shiftless ways." [123]

"Would you like to try, Mary?" asked her mother.

"I—don't—know," replied Mary, afraid to refuse, because Mrs. Wallis looked so sharp and decided.

"Very well, then I'll call for you on Saturday, at half-past ten," went on Mrs. Wallis, quite regardless of Mary's hesitating tone. "I'm glad you'll come. It would never do not to have some of the minister's family. Saturday morning, at half-past ten! Good-by, Mrs. Forcythe. Don't get up; you look peaked still. To-morrow is baking day, and I shall send you a green-currant pie. Perhaps *that'll* do you good." With these words she departed.

"Must I really teach in that school?" asked Mary dolefully.

"I think you'd better. The people expect it, and it will be a good thing for you to practise sewing a little," replied her mother. "I daresay it will be pleasanter than you think." [124]

"It seems so funny that I should be set to teach any one to sew," said Mary, bursting into a laugh. "Don't you recollect how Mrs. Clapp used to scold me, and say I 'gobbled' my darns?"

"You mustn't 'gobble' before the seamen's daughters," said Mrs. Forcythe, smiling. "It will be a capital lesson for you to try to teach what you haven't quite learned yourself."

Punctual as the clock Mrs. Wallis appeared on Saturday, and bore the unwilling Mary away to the sewing-school. Mrs. Forcythe watched them from the window. She couldn't help laughing, their movements were so comically different,—Mrs. Wallis was so brisk and decided, while Mary lagged behind, dragging one slow foot after the other as if each moment she longed to stop and dared not. Very different was her movement, however, two hours later, when she returned. She came with a kind of burst, her eyes bright with excitement, and her cheeks pinker than they had been since she left Valley Hill. [125]

"O mother, it is *so* nice! Ever so many children were there,—thirty at least; and Mrs. Wallis said I might choose any five I liked to be my class. First, I chose the dearest little Irish girl. Her name is Norah, and she's just as pretty as she can be, only her face was dreadfully dirty, and her clothes all rags. Then her little sister Kathleen cried to come; so I took her too. Then I chose a cunning little German tot named Gretchen. She has yellow hair, braided in tight little tails down her back, and is a good deal cleaner than the rest, but not very clean, you know; and she hadn't any shoes at all. Then Mrs. Wallis brought up the funniest little French girl, with a name I can't pronounce. I'm going to call her Amy. And the last of all is an American, real pretty. Her name is Rachel Gray. Her father is gone on a whaling voyage, and won't be back for three years. Don't they sound nice, mother? I think I shall like teaching them so much!"

"Do they know any thing about sewing?" asked Mrs. Forcythe. [126]

"Not a thing. They made dreadful stitches. Kathleen cried because the needle pricked her, and Rachel wanted to wear the thimble on the wrong finger. Amy did the best. When they went away they all wanted to kiss me, and Norah said she guessed I was the best teacher in the school. Wasn't that cunning? Mrs. Wallis is real kind. She brought ever so much gingerbread, and gave each of the children a piece."

"I'm glad it begins so well—"

"Yes. There's just one thing, though. The children's faces! You can't think how dirty they are. I should like to give them a good scrub all round."

"Well, why don't you?"

"How can I? There isn't any wash-bowl down at the school-room."

"If you liked you might have them all come here at ten o'clock, and walk down with you. Then you could take them up to your room, wash their faces and hands, and brush their hair smooth before you start. I really think you would enjoy your teaching more if the scholars were clean." [127]

"May I really do that?"

"Yes. I'll buy you a fresh cake of soap and a brush, and you can take two clean towels from the drawer every Saturday morning. Make it a rule, but be very gentle and pleasant about it or the children may refuse."

"O mother, what a good plan! Thank you so much," said Mary with sparkling eyes. "Now I shall have real comfort with them."

There was great excitement in the sewing-class when they were told that in future they were to go to "Teacher's" house every Saturday, and walk down to school with her. They were a droll little procession enough when they appeared the next week at the appointed time. Norah's toes were out of her shoes. Her tangled curls were as rough as a bird's-nest, and the hat on top of them looked as if it had sailed across every mud-puddle in town. Little Kathleen's scanty garments were rather rags than clothes. And Gretchen, tidiest of all, had smears of sausage on her rosy face, and did not seem to have been brought into contact with soap and water for weeks. [128]

Mary led them up into her own room, which, plain as it was, looked like a palace to the little ones after the dirt and discomfort of their crowded homes. There were the nice clean towels, the new hair-brush, and the big cake of honey-soap, mother's contributions to the undertaking. The

washing was quite a frolic. Norah cried a little at having her hair pulled, but Mary was gentle and pleasant, and made the affair so amusing that the children thought it pleasant to be clean, instead of disliking it. She rewarded their patience by a kiss all round. Kathleen threw her arms about Mary's neck and gave her a great hug. "You're iver so nice," she said, and Mary kissed her again.

So every Saturday from that time forward, Mary went to school followed by a crowd of clean little faces, which looked all the brighter and happier for their cleanliness. She was proud of her class, but their ragged clothes distressed her greatly. [129]

"It is such a pity," she told her mother. "They are so pretty, and they look like beggars."

Mrs. Forcythe had only been waiting for this. She was not a woman to give much advice, even to her own child. "Drop in a seed and let it grow," was her motto.

"There's that old gingham of yours," she suggested. "You could spare that for one of them, if there were anybody to make it over."

"*I'll* make it!" cried Mary, "only—" her, face falling, "I don't know how to cut dresses."

"I'll cut it for you if you like," said Mrs. Forcythe quietly.

"Will you, mother dear? How splendid. I'll make it for Norah. She's the raggedest of all."

The gingham was measured, and proved enough to make frocks for Norah and Kathleen too. Mary had double work to undertake, but her heart was in her fingers, and they flew fast. It took every spare moment for a fortnight to make the frocks, but when they were done and tried on to the delighted children, they looked so nicely that Mary was rewarded for her trouble and for the many needle-pricks in her forefinger. [130]

"Only it's such a pity about the others," she told her mother. "They'll think I'm partial, and I'm not, though I *do* love Norah a little bit the best, she's so affectionate. I wish we were rich. Then I could buy frocks for them all."

"If you were rich, perhaps you wouldn't care about it," said her mother. "A little here and a little there, a stitch, a kind word, a small self-denial, these are in the power of all of us, and in course of time they mount up and make a great deal. And, Mary dear, I've always found if you once start in a path and are determined to keep on, somebody's sure to come along and lend a helping hand, when you think you have got to the end of every thing, and must stop or turn back." [131]

"Well, I've got to the end of every thing now," said Mary. "There aren't any more old frocks to make over, and we can't afford to buy new ones."

"Don't be discouraged," said her mother. "The way is sure to open somehow."

"How wise mother is," thought Mary, when the very next week on their way back from school Mrs. Wallis said, "I noticed that two of your scholars had respectable frocks on to-day. I wonder if their mothers made them? If they did, I've an old chintz dress which I could spare, and perhaps Gretchen's mother and Amadine's could take it and fit them out too."

"I made the dresses," cried Mary joyfully. "And if you'll let me have the old chintz, I'll make some more for the others, Mrs. Wallis. Oh, I'm so glad."

"Did you make them," said Mrs. Wallis in a pleased tone. "Well, that's first-rate. I'll send the chintz round to-night; and any other old things I can find to help along." [132]

So that night came a great bundle, which, on opening, revealed not only the chintz, but a nice calico, some plaid ribbon, a large black alpaca apron, and an old shirt of Mr. Wallis's. Such a busy time as Mary had in planning how to make the most of these gifts. The chintz was long and full. It had a cape, and made two beautiful frocks. The calico made another frock and two nice pinafores, the black alpaca some small aprons. Mary trimmed the two worst hats with the ribbon. Last of all, she cut and stitched five narrow bands of the linen, which mother washed and starched, and behold, the class had collars! I don't know which was most pleased at this last decoration, Mary or the children.

"They are just as good as dolls to you, aren't they," said her father.

"O Papa! much better than *that*. Dolls can't laugh and talk, and they don't really care any thing about you, you only just make believe that they do. It's horrid to fit a doll's clothes; she sticks her arm out stiff and won't bend it a bit. I'd rather have my class than all the dolls in the world." [133]

"Teaching those children is having a capital effect on Mary herself," said Mrs. Forcythe to her husband after Mary had gone away. "She gains all the time in patience and industry, and is twice as careful of her things as she used to be. I found her crying the other day because she had torn her oldest frock, and the darn was sure to come in a bad place when the frock was made over for Gretchen! Think of Mary's crying because of having torn any thing!"

Time flies rapidly when people are busy and happy. Days crept into weeks, weeks into months; before any one knew it two years were passed and another Conference day was at hand. It met this time at Redding.

Mary, a tall girl of fifteen now, went with her mother to hear the appointments read. The Redding people had applied to keep Mr. Forcythe for another term, but the request was denied; and, when his name was reached on the list, it appeared that he was to go back to Valley Hill.

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"There's one person I know will be pleased," said the Bishop, pausing on his way out of church to speak to Mrs. Forcythe. "Mistress Mary here! She'll be glad to go back to Valley Hill again. But, hey-day! she doesn't look glad. What! tears in her eyes. How is this?"

"I—don't—know—" sighed Mary. "I thought—I thought we should stay here. Of course I feel sorry just at first."

"Sorry! Not want to leave Redding! Why, what a contrary little maid you are! Don't you recollect how you cried, and said Redding was horrid."

"Yes," said Mary, on the verge of a sob. "But I like it now, Bishop. I don't mind the fish a bit, and the funny old streets and the posy-beds with cockle-shell edges are so nice, and the bells sound so sweet on Sunday morning!—I like Redding ever so much."

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"But your garden,—I remember how badly you felt to leave that. You can't have a garden in Redding."

"No, but I have my little girls. I'd rather have them than a garden, a great deal!"

"What does she mean?" asked the Bishop, turning to Mrs. Forcythe.

"Her sewing-class," replied Mrs. Forcythe, smiling.

"There they are!" cried Mary eagerly. "They're waiting for me. Do look at them, Bishop; it's those five little girls in a row behind the second pillar from the door. That big one is Norah, and the one in blue is Rachel, and the littlest is named Kathleen. Isn't she pretty? They're the sweetest little things, oh, I shall miss them so. I shan't ever have such good times again as I've had with them." Her voice faltered; a lump came in her throat. To hide it she slipped away, and went across the church to where the little ones sat.

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"That's a dear child of yours," said the good Bishop, looking after her. "I guess she'll *do* wherever she goes."

And I think Mary will.



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LADY BIRD.

"NOW, Pocahontas Maria, sit still and don't disturb the little ones. Imogene, that lesson must be learned before I come back, you know. Now, dear, that was very, very naughty. When Mamma tells you to do things you mustn't pout and poke Stella with your foot in that way. It isn't nice at all. Stella is younger than you, and you ought to set her samples, as Nursey says. Look at Ning Po Ganges, how good she is, and how she minds all I say, and yet she's the littlest child I've got."

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If anybody had been walking in Madam Bird's old-fashioned garden that morning, and had heard these wise words coming from the other side of the rose thicket, he would certainly have supposed that some old dame with a school was hidden away there, or at the least an anxious Mamma with a family of unruly children. But if this somebody had gone into the thicket, bobbing his head to avoid the prickly, wreath-like branches, he would have found on the other side only one person, little Lota Bird, playing all alone with her dolls. "Lady Bird" Nursey called Lota, because when, six years before, Papa fetched her home from China, she wore a speckled frock of

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orange-red and black, very much the color of those other tiny frocks in which the real lady-birds fly about in summer-time. The speckled frock was outgrown long ago, but the name still clung to Lota, and every one called her by it except Grandmamma, who said "Charlotte," sighing as she spoke, and Papa, whose letters always began, "My darling little Lota." Papa had been away so long now that Lota would quite have forgotten him had it not been for these letters which came regularly every month. The paper on which they were written had an odd, pleasant smell. Nurse said it was the smell of sandal-wood. Sometimes there were things inside for Lota, bird's feathers of gay colors, Chinese puzzles of carved ivory, or small pictures painted on rice paper. Lota liked these things very much. It was like playing at a Papa rather than really having one, but she enjoyed the play; and when they told her that Papa was soon coming home to stay always, she was only half glad, and said: "Won't there be any more letters then? I shan't like that." Poor little girlie: we, who know how nice it is to have real Papas, can feel sorry for her; can't we?

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But Lota did not pity herself in the least. Grandmamma's house was stiff and gloomy, shaded by high trees and thick vines which jealously shut out the sun whenever he tried to shine in at the window panes. Grandmamma's servants were old too, like the house. Most of them had gray hair. Nurse wore spectacles; the coachman indulged in rheumatism. Grandmamma herself was old and feeble. She rarely laughed or seemed to enjoy any thing, but sat in an easy chair all the year round, and read solemn books bound in black leather, which made her cry. Jennings her maid waited on her, fetched footstools and cushions, pushed the blinds down as soon as the cheerful noon got round to that side of the house. "Missus is uncommon poorly to-day," she announced every morning. "Miss, you must be very quiet." Lota was quiet. She was the only young thing in the sad old house, but the shadows of age and sorrow fell lightly upon her, and in spite of them she was as happy a child as you will find in a summer's day. The garden was her kingdom and her Paradise. It was a wide, fragrant, shaded place, full of the shrubs and flowers of former days. Huge pink and white oleanders, planted in tubs, stood on either side the walks. Thick spikes of purple lavender edged the beds; the summer-house was a tangle of honey-suckle, rosemary, and eglantine. Roses of all colors abounded. They towered high above Lota's head as she walked,—twined and clasped, shut her in with perfumed shadows, rained showers of many-colored petals on the grass. An old-fashioned fairy would have delighted to dwell in that garden, and perhaps one did dwell there, else why should little lonely Lota have been always so very, very happy left alone among the trees and flowers? Can any one tell me that?

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Far up in the curved angle made by the rose-hedge was the little house where she and her dollies lived. Jacob the gardener built this house, of roots and willow-osiers curiously twisted. It was just big enough for Lady Bird and her family. The walls were pasted over with gay prints cut from the "Illustrated News" and other papers. There was a real window. The moss floor had a blue cotton rug laid over it. A small table and chair for Lota and one apiece for the dolls made up the furniture, beside a shelf on which the baby-house tea-set was displayed. The roof kept out the weather pretty well, except when it rained hard; then things got wet. Here Lota sat all the morning, after she had finished her lessons with Nursey,—short lessons always, and easy ones, by Papa's particular request, for the doctors had said that Lota must not study much till she was really big and strong. Pocahontas Maria and the other children had to work much harder than their Mamma, I assure you. Lota was very strict with them. When they were idle she put them into the corner, and made them sit with their faces to the wall by way of punishment. Once Lota had the measles, and for two whole weeks was kept away entirely from the garden-house. When she came back, she found that during all this time poor little Ning-Po Ganges had been sitting in this ignominious position with her face hidden. Lota cried with remorse at this, and promised Ning-Po that never, so long as she lived, should she be put into the corner again; so after that, for convenience' sake, Ning-Po was always called the best child in the family. Now and then, when Lota felt hospitable, she would give a tea-party, and ask Lady Green and her children from under the snow-ball bush next door. Nobody but Lota and the dolls could see the Greens, even when they sat about the table talking and being talked to, but that was no matter; and when Nursey said, "Law, Miss Lady Bird, how can you; there's never any such people, you know," Lota would point triumphantly to a card tacked on to the snow-ball bush, which had "Lady Green" printed on it, and would say, "Naughty Nursey! can't you read? There's her door-plate!"

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As this story is all about Lota, I think I would better tell you just how she spent one week of her life, she and the dolls.

The week began with Sunday, which was always a dull day, because Lota was forbidden to go into the garden.

In the morning she went to church with Grandmamma, drawn thither by two fat old black horses, who seemed to think it almost too much trouble to switch the flies off with their tails. Church was warm and the sermon was drowsy, so poor Lady Bird fell asleep, and tumbled over suddenly on to Grandmamma's lap. This distressed the old lady a good deal, for she was very particular about behavior in church. By way of punishment, Lota had to learn four verses of a hymn after dinner. It was the hymn which begins,—

"Awake, my soul, and with the sun
Thy daily course of duty run,"

and learning it took all the time from dinner till four o'clock.

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The hymn learned and repeated, Lota read for awhile in one of her Sunday books. She was ashamed of her sleepiness in the morning, and had every intention of being very good till bedtime; but unluckily she looked across to where the dolls were sitting, and, as she explained to

Nursesey afterward, Pocahontas Maria was whispering to Imogene, and both of them were laughing so hard and looking so mischievous that she *had* to see what was the matter. Result;—at five, Jennings, coming to call Lota, found her with all the dolls in a row before her teaching them hymns. And, though this seems most proper, Jennings, who was a strict Methodist, did not think so; so Lota had another lecture from Grandmamma, and went to bed under a sense of disgrace. So much for Sunday.

Monday opened with bright sunshine. It had rained all night; but by eleven o'clock the dear old garden was quite dry, and how sweet it did look! The pink roses twinkled and winked their whisker-like calyxes as she went by; the white ones shook their serene leaves, and sent out delicious smells. Every green thing looked greener than it had done before the rain. The blue sky, swept clear of clouds, seemed to have been rubbed and made brilliant. It was a day for gardens; and Lady Bird and her family celebrated it by a picnic, to which they invited all the Greens. [146]

"Lady Green hasn't treated me quite properly," remarked Lota to her oldest child, Pocahontas. "She didn't leave her card at this house I don't know when. But we won't mind about that, because it's such a nice day, and we want the picnic. And we can't have the picnic without the Greens, you know, dear, because there aren't any other people to invite."

So they had the picnic,—a delightful one. The young Greens behaved badly. They almost always did behave badly when they came to see Lady Bird; but it was rather a good thing, because she could warn her own children that, if they did the same, they would be severely punished. "Lady Green is too indulgent," she would say. "I want *my* children to be much gooder than hers. Mind that, Imogene." So, on this occasion, when Clarissa Green snatched at the rose-cakes which formed the staple of the feast, Lota looked very sharply at Stella, and said, "Don't let me ever see you do so, Stella, or I shall have to slap your little hands." Stella heeded the warning, and sat upright as a poker and perfectly still. [147]

Clarissa was perhaps not so much to blame, for the rose-cakes were delicious. Would you like Lady Bird's recipe? Any little girl can make them. Take a good many rose-leaves; put some sugar with them,—as much sugar as you can get; tie them up in paper, or in a good thick grape-leaf; lay them on a bench, and *sit down on them hard several times*: then they are done. Some epicures pretend that they must be buried in the ground, and left there for a week; but this takes time, and reasonable children will find them quite good enough without. These particular rose-cakes were the best Lota had ever made. The whole party, Greens and all, agreed to that. For the rest of the feast there was a motto-paper, which had ornamented several picnics before. It could not be eaten, but it looked well sitting in the middle of the table. At the close of the banquet all the party sang a song. Lady Green's voice was not very good, but Lota explained to the children afterward that it isn't polite to laugh at company even when they do make funny squeaks with their high notes. Pocahontas had to sit in the corner awhile for having done so. She was sorry, and promised never to offend again; as a reward for which, her Mamma gave her a small blank book made of writing-paper and a pin, which she told her was for her very own. [148]

"You are such a big girl now," said Mamma Lota, "that it is time you began to keep a Diary like I do. I shall read it over every day, and see how you spell." [149]

Here is Pocahontas Maria's journal as it stood on Tuesday afternoon, after the children had done their lessons and had their dinners:—

"Tuseday. I am going to keep a Diry like Mamma's. Studded as usel. Mamma said I was cairless, and didn't get my jography lesson properly. Stella had hers better than me. I hurt my ellbow against the table. It won't bend any more. Mamma is going to get Doctor Jacob to put in a wouldeen pin. I hope it won't hurt."

"Oh, Pocahontas! Pocahontas!" cried the scandalized Lady Bird as she read this effusion. "After all the pains I have taken, to think you should spell so horridly as this." Then she sat down and corrected all the words. "I don't wonder your cheeks are so red," she said severely. Pocahontas sat up straight and blushed, but made no excuses. It is not strange that Lota, who really spelt very nicely for a little girl of her age, should have been shocked. [150]

On Tuesday night it rained again, and the sun got up in a cloud next morning, and seemed uncertain whether or not to shine. Grandmamma was going to drive out to make a call, and Jennings came early to the nursery to tell Nurse to dress Lady Bird nicely, so that she might go too. Accordingly Nursesey put on Lota's freshest white cambric and her best blue sash, and laid a pair of white gloves and a little hat trimmed with blue ribbons and forget-me-nots on the bed, so that they might be ready when the carriage came to the door. "Now, Miss Lady Bird, you must sit still and keep yourself very nice," she said. This was hard, for the children had all been left in the garden-house the night before, and Lota wanted very much to see them. She stood at the window looking wistfully out. By and by the sun flashed gloriously from the clouds, and sent a bright ray right into her eyes. It touched the rain-drops which hung over the bushes, and instantly each became a tiny mimic sun, sending out separate rays of its own. Lota forgot all about Nursesey's injunctions. "I'll just run out one minute and fetch little Ning-Po in," she thought. "That child's too delicate to be left out in the damp. She catches cold so easily; really it quite troubles me sometimes the way she coughs." [151]

So down the garden walk she sped. The shrubs, shaken by her swift passage, scattered showers of bright drops upon the white frock and the pretty sash. But Lota didn't mind or notice. The air and sun, the clear, fresh feeling, the birds' songs, filled her with a kind of intoxication.

Her head spun, her feet danced as she ran along. Suddenly a cold feeling at the toes of her bronze boots startled her. She looked down. Behold, she was in a pool of water, left by the rain in a hollow of the gravel-walk. Was she frightened? Not at all. The water felt delightfully fresh, her spirits flashed out like the sun himself, and in the joy of her heart she began to waltz, scattering and splashing the water about her. The crisp ruffles of the cambric lost all their starch, the pretty boots were quite spoiled, but Lota waltzed on, and in this plight Nursey, flying indignantly out from the kitchen door, found her naughty pet.

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"Well, Miss Charlotte, I *am* discouraged," she said, as she pulled off the wet things. "Waltzing in a mud-puddle! That's nice work for a young lady! I am discouraged, Miss Charlotte."

Nursey never said "Miss Charlotte" except on the most solemn occasions, so Lota knew that she was very vexed. She should have been cast down by this, but somehow she was not.

"But *I'm* not discouraged," she replied. "I'm not discouraged a bit! And the birds aren't discouraged! They sang all the while I was waltzing in the mud-puddle, Nursey; I heard 'em!"

Nursey gave it up. She loved Lady Bird dearly, and could not hear to scold her or to have any one else do so. So she made haste to change the unlucky frock and shoes, so that she should be neat and trim whenever Grandmamma sent for her. I suppose this forbearance touched Lota's heart, for at the last moment she turned, ran back, threw her arms round Nursey's neck, and whispered, "I'm sorry, and I'll never waltz in mud-puddles again." Nursey squeezed her hard by way of answer. "Precious lamb!" she said, and Lota ran downstairs quite happy.

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The lady whom Grandmamma drove out to see, had a little granddaughter visiting her. Isabel Bernard was her name. She came from the city, and was so beautifully dressed and so well-mannered, that Grandmamma took quite a fancy to her, and invited her to spend a day with Lota.

"Charlotte will enjoy a young companion," said Grandmamma. So the next day was fixed upon.

This was a very exciting event for the Bird family, who rarely had any visitors except Lady Green, who did not count, being such a near neighbor. Pocahontas wrote in her journal, "A grand lady is coming to see Mamma. Me and all of us are going to have on our best frocks. I hope she'll think us pretty;" and though Lota told her that little girls ought not to mind about being pretty if only they obey their mammas and are good, the sentiment was so natural that she really hadn't the heart to scold the child much. The baby-house was swept and garnished for the occasion, a fresh batch of rose-cakes was made, and a general air of festivity pervaded the premises.

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Lota hoped that Isabel would come early, soon after breakfast, so as to have a longer day; but it was quite twelve o'clock before she made her appearance, all alone by herself in a huge barouche, which made her seem scarcely larger than a doll. She wore a fine frilled muslin frock over blue silk, a white hat, and dainty lemon-colored boots. When Lota, feeling shy at the spectacle of this magnificence, proposed going into the garden, she hung back.

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"Are you quite sure that it isn't damp?" she said, "because—you see—this is my best frock."

"Oh, quite sure," pleaded Lota. "The grass was cut only day before yesterday, and Jacob rolled the gravel last night. Do come! The children want to see you so much."

"The children!" said Isabel, surprised. But when she saw the doll-family sitting in a row with their best clothes on, and their four pairs of fixed blue eyes looking straight before them, she laughed scornfully.

"Do you play with dolls?" she asked. "I gave them up long ago."

Lady Bird's eyes grew large with distress. "Oh, don't call them *that*," she cried. "I never do. It hurts their feelings so. You can't think."

Isabel laughed again. She wasn't at all a nice girl to play with. The rose-cakes she pronounced "nasty." When Lota explained about Lady Green, she stared and said it was ridiculous, and that there was no such person. She turned up her nose at Pocahontas's journal, and declared that Lota wrote it herself! "Did you ever hear of such a thing?" asked Lady Bird afterward of Lady Green. "As if my child could not write!" It was just so all day. The only thing Isabel seemed to enjoy was dining in state with Grandmamma, and answering all her questions with the air of a little grown-up woman. Grandmamma said she was a very well-behaved child, and she wished Charlotte would take pattern by her. But Lota didn't agree with Grandmamma. She hoped with all her heart that Isabel would never come to visit her again.

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Pocahontas Maria wrote in her journal next day:—

"The lady who came to see Mamma wasn't very nice, I think. She didn't even speak to us children, and she made fun at my dirty. We didn't like her a bit. Stella says she's horrid, and Ning-Po hopes Mamma won't ever ask her any more." Lady Bird reproved Pocahontas very gravely for these sentiments, and reminded her again that "dirty" is not the way to spell diary; but she said to Lady Green, who dropped in for a call, "Poor little thing, I don't wonder! children always find out when people isn't nice; and Isabel, she *was* very disagreeable, you know, calling them 'dolls' and things like that! It's not surprising that they didn't like her, I'm sure."

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Saturday was an eventful day. There were no lessons to do for one thing, because Nursey's daughter had come to see her, and Grandmamma said Lady Bird might be excused for once. This gave her the whole morning to attend to domestic matters, which was nice, or would have been,

only unluckily little Stella took this opportunity to break out with measles. Of course Lady Bird was much distressed. She put Stella to bed at once, and sent the others to the farthest side of the room lest they should catch the disease also, "though," as she told Pocahontas, "You'll be sure to have it. It always runs straight through families; the doctor said so when I had it; and whatever I shall do with all of you on my hands at once, I can't imagine." There is always a great deal to do in times of sickness, so this was a very busy day. Lota had to make broth for Stella, to concoct medicine out of water and syringa-stems, to prepare dinner for the other children, and hear all their lessons, for of course education must not be neglected let who will have measles! Pocahontas was unusually troublesome. Imogene cried over the spelling lesson; and altogether Lady Bird had her hands full that morning.

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"I shall certainly send you all away to boarding-school if you don't learn to behave better," she cried in despair, at which awful threat the children wept aloud and promised to be good. Then came dinner,—real dinner, I mean,—which Lady Bird could scarcely eat, so anxious was she about her sick child in the garden. The moment it was over back she flew, oblivious of the charms of raisins and almonds. Stella was asleep, but she evidently had fever, for her cheeks were bright pink, and her lips as red as sealing-wax.

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"I must have a doctor for her," cried poor Lady Bird.

She tried to think what article would be best to choose for the doctor, and fixed on an old black muff of Nursey's which lived on the shelf of the nursery closet. To get it, however, it was needful to leave the children again.

"You must all be good," she said, fussing about and tidying the room, "very good and very quiet, so as not to wake up Stella. Dear me, what a queer smell there is here! Let me think. What did Nursey do when I had measles? She burned some sort of paper and made it smell nice again. I must burn some paper too, else Stella'll suffocate, won't you, dear?"

No sooner thought than done. Jacob had left his coat hanging near the tool-house while he went to dinner, and he always carried matches in his pipe-pocket. Lady Bird knew that. She put her hand in and drew one out, feeling guilty, for one of Nursey's chief maxims was, "Never touch matches, Lady Bird; remember what I say, never!"

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"If Nursey knew about Stella's having the measles she'd say different," she soliloquized.

There was a good-sized bit of brown paper in the garden-house. Lota rolled it up, laid it near the bedside, lit the edge, and carefully blew out the match. The paper did not flame, but smouldered slowly, sending up a curl of smoke. Lady Bird gazed at it with much satisfaction, then, with a last kiss to Stella, she went away to fetch the doctor, stopping at Lady Green's door as she passed, to tell her that she had better not let any of her children come over, because they might catch the measles and be sick too.

It took some time to rummage out the muff, for Nursey had tucked it far back on the shelf behind other things. There was nobody in the nursery. Something unusual seemed to be going on downstairs, for doors were opening and shutting, and persons were talking and exclaiming. Lota paid no attention to this; her head was full of her own affairs, and she had no time to spend on other people's. Muff in hand, she hastened down the garden walk. As she drew near she smelt smoke, and smiled with satisfaction. But the smell grew stronger, and the air was blue and thick. She became alarmed, and began to run. Another moment, and the house was in sight. Smoke was pouring from the door, from the window, and—what was that red thing which darted out from the smoke like a long tongue? Oh, Lady Bird! Lady Bird! fly, hasten, your house is on fire, and there are the children inside with none but you to aid them!

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Did ever mother hesitate when her little ones were in danger? Lady Bird did not. With a shriek of affright she plunged boldly into the midst of the smoke. An awful sight met her eyes through the open door. The wall-paper was on fire, the cotton rug, the table-cover! Little red flames were creeping up the valance of the crib in which poor sick Stella lay! The other children were sitting in a row opposite, very calm and still, but blisters had begun to form on Imogene's waxen cheeks, and a cinder, lodged on Ning-Po's flaxen wig, was scorching and singeing. What a spectacle to meet a mother's eyes! Oh, Lady Bird, haste to the rescue!

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She did not falter. In the twinkling of an eye she had dashed into the burning room, had caught Stella from her bed, the others from their chairs, and with all four hugged tight to her heart was making for the door. Ah! a spark fell on the white apron, on the holland frock! Her rapid movement fanned it. It flickered, blazed, the red flame rushed upward. What would have happened I dare not think, if just at that moment a gentleman, who was hastening down the garden walk, had not caught sight of the little figure, and, with a horrified exclamation, seized, held it fast, wrapped round it a great woollen shawl from his own shoulders, and in one moment put out the deadly fire which was snatching at the sweet young life. Who was this gentleman, do you think, thus arrived at the very nick of time? Why, no other than Lady Bird's own Papa, come home from China a few weeks before any one expected him!

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I cannot pretend to describe all that followed on that bewildering day, the dismay of Grandmamma and Nursey, the wrath of Jennings over the match, the joy of everybody at Lady Bird's escape, or her own confusion of mind at the fire and the excitement and the new Papa, who was and was not the Papa of the letters. At first she hugged the rescued dolls and said nothing. But Papa gave her time to get used to him, and she soon did so. He was very kind and nice, and did not laugh at the children and call them names as Isabel had done, but felt Stella's pulse,

recommended pomatum for the scorch on Imogene's forehead, and even produced a little out of his own dressing-case. Best of all, he led Lady Bird upstairs, unlocked a box and showed her a beautiful little Chinese lady in purple silk and lovely striped muslin trowsers, which he had brought for her.

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"Another child for you to take care of," said Papa.

Pocahontas Maria wrote in her Diary the next day:—

"My Grandpapa has come home from China. He is *very* nice. He brought me a little Chinese sister. Her name is Loo Choo, he says, but Mamma calls her Loo Loo, because it sounds prettier. Grandpapa treats us very kindly, and never says 'dolls,' as Isabel Berners did; and he went to call on Lady Green with Mamma. I'm so glad he is come."

When Lady Bird read this she kissed Pocahontas and said,—

"That's right, dear; so am I!"



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ONE, TWO, BUCKLE MY SHOE.

THE old clock on the stairs was drowsy. Its ticks, now lower, now louder, sounded like the breathings of one asleep. Now and then came a distincter tick, which might pass for a little machine-made snore. As striking-time drew near, it roused itself with a quiver and shake. "One, two, three, four, five," it rang in noisy tones, as who should say, "Behold, I am wide awake, and have never closed an eye all night." The sounds sped far. Marianne the cook heard them, rubbed her eyes, and put one foot out of bed. The nurse, Louisa, turned over and began to dream that she was at a wedding. Perhaps the sun heard too, for he stood up on tip-toe on the edge of the horizon, looked about him, then launched a long yellow ray directly at the crack in the nursery shutter. The ray was sharp: it smote full on Archie's eyelids, as he lay asleep, surrounded by "Robinson Crusoe," two red apples, a piece of gingerbread, and a spade, all of which he had taken to bed with him. When he felt the prick of the sun-ray he opened his eyes wide. "Why, morning's come!" he said, and without more ado raised himself and sat up.

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"What'll I do to-day?" he thought. "I know. I'll go into the wood and build a house, a nice little house, just like Wobinson Cwusoe's, all made of sticks, Nobody'll know where my house is; I'll not tell, not even Mamma, where it is. Then when I don't want to study or any thing, I can run away and hide, and they won't know where to find me. That'll be nice! I guess I'll go and begin it now, 'cause the days are getting short. Papa said so once. I wonder what makes 'em get short? Pr'aps sometime they'll be so short that there won't be any days at all, only nights. That wouldn't be pleasant, I think. Mamma'd have to buy lots of candles then, or else we couldn't see."

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With this he jumped out of bed.

"I must be very quiet," he thought, "else Loo—isa'll hear, and then she won't let me go till I've had my beakfast. Loo—isa's real cross sometimes; only sometimes she's kind when she makes my kite fly."

His clothes were folded on a chair by the bedside. Archie had never dressed himself before, but he managed pretty well, except that he turned the small ruffled shirt wrong-side out. The other things went on successfully. There were certain buttons which he could not reach, but that did not matter. The small stocking toes were folded neatly in, all ready to slip on to the feet. But the shoes *were* a difficulty; they fastened with morocco bands and buckles, and Archie couldn't manage them at all.

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"Oh, dear!" he said to himself, "I wish Loo—isa would come and buckle my shoes for me. No, I don't, though, 'cause p'raps she'd say, 'Go back to bed, naughty boy; it isn't time to get up.' I wouldn't like that. Sometimes Loo—isa does say things to me."

So he put on the shoes without buckling them, and, not stopping to brush his hair or wash his face, he clapped on his broad-brimmed straw hat, took "Robinson Crusoe" and the spade, dropped the red apples and the gingerbread into his pocket, and stole softly downstairs. The little feet made no noise as they passed over the thick carpets. Marianne, who was lighting the kitchen fire and clattering the tongs, heard nothing. He reached the front door, and, stretching up, pulled hard at the bolt. It was stiff, and would not move. [169]

"Oh, dear!" sighed Archie, "I wish somebody *would* come and open this door for me."

He looked at the bolt a minute. Then an idea struck him, and, laying "Robinson Crusoe" and the little spade down on the floor, he went into the dining-room pantry, where was a drawer with tools in it.

"I'll get Papa's hammer," he thought to himself, "and I'll pound that old bolt to pieces."

While he was gone, Marianne, who had lighted her fire, came from the kitchen with a broom in her hand. She opened the door, shook the mat, and began to sweep the steps. A sharp tinkle, tinkle met her ear from the back gate. It was the milkman ringing for some one to come and take in the milk. Marianne set her broom against the side of the door, and hurried back to the kitchen. Her foot struck against "Robinson Crusoe" as she went. She picked it up and laid it on the table. [170]

"Why, the door's open!" exclaimed Archie, who at that moment came from the dining-room, hammer in hand.

He did not trouble himself to speculate as to how the door happened to be open, but, picking up the spade, wandered forth into the garden. The gate gave no trouble. He walked fast, and long before Marianne came back to her sweeping he had gained the woods, which were near, and enclosed the house on two sides in a shady half-circle. They were pretty woods, full of flowers and squirrels and winding, puzzling paths. Archie had never been allowed to go into them alone before.

The morning was delicious, so full of snap and sunshine that it set him to dancing and skipping as he went along. All the wood-flowers were as wide awake as he. They nodded at Archie, as if saying "Good-morning," and sent out fresh smells into the air. Busy birds flapped and flew, doing their marketing, and fetching breakfast to hungry nestlings, chirping and whistling to each other, as they did so, that the sun was up and it was a fine day. A pair of striped squirrels frisked and laughed and called out something saucy as Archie trotted by. None of these wild things feared the child: he was too small and too quick in his movements to be fearful. They accepted him as one of themselves,—a featherless bird, or a squirrel of larger growth; while he, on his part, smiled vaguely at them and hurried past, intent on his projects for a house and careless of every thing else. [171]

The sun rose higher and higher. But the thick branching trees kept off the heat, and the wood remained shady and cool. The paths twisted in and out, and looped into each other like a tangled riband. No grown person could have kept a straight course in their mazes. Archie did not even try, but turned to right or to left just as it happened, taking always the path which looked prettiest, or which led into deepest shade. If he saw anywhere a particularly red checkerberry, he went that way; otherwise it was all one to him where he went. So it came to pass that, by the end of an hour, he was as delightfully and completely lost as ever little boy has succeeded in being since woods grew or the world was made. [172]

"I dess this is a nice place for my house," he said suddenly, as the path he had been following led into a small open space, across which lay a fallen tree, with gray moss, which looked like hair, hanging to its trunk. It *was* a nice place; also, Archie's feet were tired, and he was growing hungry, which aided in the decision. The ground about the fallen tree was carpeted with thick mosses. Some were bright green, with stems and little branches like tiny, tiny pine-trees. Others had horn-shaped cups of yellow and fiery red. Others still were bright beautiful brown, while here and there stood round cushion-shaped masses which looked as soft as down. [173]

Into the very middle of one of these pretty green cushions plumped Archie. He rested his back against a tree trunk, and gave a sigh of comfort. It was like an easy chair, except that it had no arms; but what does a little boy want of arms to chairs? He put his hand into his pocket and pulled out, first the red apples, and then the gingerbread. The gingerbread was rather mashed; but it tasted most delicious, only there was too little of it.

"I wish I'd brought a hundred more pieces," soliloquized Archie, as he nibbled the last crumb. "One isn't half enough beakfast."

The red apples, however, proved a consolation; and, quite rested and refreshed now, he jumped from the moss cushion and prepared to begin his house-building.

"First, I must pick up some sticks," he thought,—"*a* great many, many sticks, heaps of 'em. Then I'll hammer and make a house. Only—I haven't got any nails," he added with an after-thought. [174]

There were plenty of sticks to be had in that part of the wood; twigs and branches from the

dead tree, fragments of bark, odds and ends of dry brush. Close by stood a white birch. The thin, paper-like covering hung loose on its stem, like grey-white curls. Archie could pull off large pieces, and he enjoyed this so much that he pulled till the birch trunk, as far up as he could reach, was perfectly bare. Some of the boughs were crooked. Archie tried to lay them straight with the others, but they wouldn't fit in nicely, and stuck their stiff angles out in all directions.

"Those are naughty sticks," said Archie, giving the crookedest a shove. "They shan't go into my house at all."

The want of nails became serious as the heap of wood grew large and Archie was ready to build. What was the use of a hammer without nails? He tried various ways. At last he laid the longest boughs in a row against the side of the fallen tree. This left a little place beneath their slope into which it was possible to creep. Archie smiled with satisfaction, and proceeded to thatch the sloping roof with moss and bits of bark. Then he grubbed up the green cushion and transferred it bodily to his house. [175]

"This'll be my chair," he said to himself. "I dess I don't want any more furniture except just a chair. Loo—isa, she said, 'so many things to dust is a bodder.'"

At that moment came a rustling sound in the underbrush. "P'raps it's savages," thought Archie, and, half pleased, half frightened at the idea, he gave a loud whoop. Out flew a fat motherly hen, cackling and screaming. What she was doing there in the woods I cannot imagine. Perhaps she had lost her way. Perhaps she had private business there which only hens can understand. Or it may be that she, too, had built a little house and hidden it away so that no one should know where it was. [176]

Archie was enchanted. "A hen, a hen," he cried. "I'll catch her and keep her for my own. Then I'll have eggs, and I'll give 'em to Mamma, and I'll make custards. Custards *is* made of eggs. Loo—isa said so."

"Chicky, chicky, chicky," he warbled in a winning voice, waving his fingers as if he were sprinkling corn on the ground for the hen to eat. But the hen was not to be enticed in that manner, and, screaming louder than ever, ran into the bushes again. Then Archie began to run too. Twice he almost seized her brown wings, but she slipped through his hands. Had the hen been silent she would easily have escaped him, but she cackled as she flew, and that guided him along. His shoe came off, next the hammer flew out of his hand, but he did not stop for either. Running, plunging, diving, on he went, the frightened hen just before, till at last a root tripped him up and he fell forward on his face. The hen vanished into the thicket. Her voice died away in distance. By the time Archie had picked himself up there was not even the rustling of a leaf to show which way she had gone. [177]

He rose from the ground disconsolate. His nose bled from the fall, and there was a bump on his forehead, which ached painfully. A strong desire to cry came over him. But, like a brave fellow, he would not give way to it, and sat down under a tree to rest and decide what was to be done next.

"I'll go back again to my house," was his decision. But where *was* the house? He ran this way, that way; the paths all looked alike. The house had vanished like the hen. Archie had not the least idea which way he ought to turn to find it.

One big tear did force its way to his eyes when this fact became evident. House and hen, it was hard to lose both at once. The hammer, too, was gone. Only the spade remained, and, armed with this, Archie, like a true hero, started to find a good place and build another house. Surely nowhere, save in the histories of the great Boston and Chicago fires, is record to be found of parallel pluck and determination! [178]

House-building was not half so easy in this part of the wood where he then was, for the bushes were thick and stood closely together. Their branches hung so low, that, small as Archie was, he had to bend forward and walk almost double to avoid having his eyes scratched by them. At last, in the middle of a circle of junipers, he found a tolerably free space which he thought would do. The ground, however, was set thick with sharp uncomfortable stones, and the first thing needed was to get rid of them.

So for an hour, with fingers and spade, Archie dug and delved among the stones. It was hard work enough, but at last he cleared a place somewhat larger than his small body, which he carpeted with soft mosses brought from another part of the wood. This done, he lay down flat on his back, and looked dreamily up at the pretty green roof made by the juniper boughs overhead. "I dess I'll take a nappy now," he murmured, and in five minutes was sleeping as soundly as a dormouse. Two striped squirrels, which may or may not have been the same which he had seen in the early morning, came out on a bough not a yard from his head, chattered, winked, put their paws to their noses and made disrespectful remarks to each other about the motionless figure. Birds flew and sang, bees hummed, the wind went to and fro in the branches like the notes of a low song. But Archie heard none of these things. The hen herself might have come back, cackled her best, and flapped her wings in his very face without arousing him, so deep was his slumber. [179]

Meantime at home, two miles away, there was great commotion over the disappearance of Master Archie. Marianne had lingered quite a long time at the back gate. The milkman was a widower, looking out for a wife, and Marianne, as she said, could skim cream with anybody; so it was only natural that they should have a great deal to say to each other, and that measuring the [180]

milk at that particular gate should be a slow business. This morning their talk was so interesting that twenty minutes at least went by before Marianne, with very rosy cheeks and very bright eyes, came back, pail in hand, along the garden walk. As she took up the broom to finish her sweeping, she heard a great commotion overhead, steps running about, voices exclaiming; but her mind was full of the milkman, and she paid no attention, till Louisa came flying downstairs, half-dressed, and crying,—

"Sake's alive, Marianne, where's Master Archie?"

"How should I know? Not down here, anyway," was Marianne's reply.

"But he *must* be down here," persisted Louisa. "He's gone out of the nursery, and so are his clothes. Whatever's taken him I can't imagine. I've searched the closets, and looked under the beds, and up in the attic, and I took Mr. Gray his hot water, and he isn't there. His spade's gone too, and his ap— Oh, mercy! there's his story-book now," and she pounced on "Robinson Crusoe," where it lay on the table. "He's been down here certain sure, for that book was on his bed when he went to sleep last night. Don't stand there, Marianne, but come and help me find him."

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Into the parlor, the dining-room, the pantry, ran the maids, calling "Archie! Archie!" at the tops of their voices. But Archie, who as we know was a good mile away by that time, did not hear them. They searched the kitchen, the cellar, the wood-shed, the store-closet. Marianne even lifted the lid of the great copper boiler and peeped in to make sure that he was not there! Louisa ran wildly about the garden, looking behind currant bushes and raspberry vines, and parting the tall feathers of the asparagus lest Archie should have chosen to hide among them. She tapped the great green watermelons with her fingers as she passed,—perhaps she fancied that Archie might be stowed away inside of one. All was in vain. Archie was not behind the currant bushes, not even in the melon patch. Louisa began to sob and cry, Marianne, never backward, joined her with a true Irish howl; and it was in this condition that Archie's Papa found things when he came downstairs to breakfast.

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Then ensued a fresh confusion.

"Where did you say the book was lying, Louisa?" said Mr. Gray, trying to make out the meaning of her sobbing explanation.

"Just here, sir, on the hall table. Oh, the darling child, whatever has come to him?"

"Oh, wurra! wurra!" chimed in Marianne. "He been and got took away by wicked people, perhaps. Well niver get him back, niver!"

"The hall table? Then he must have passed out this way. Surely you must have seen him or heard him open the door, Marianne?"

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"Is it I see him, sir? I'd niver forget it if I had. Oh, the pretty face of him! Wurra! wurra!"

"But, now I think of it, the child couldn't have opened the door for himself," went on Papa, growing impatient. "Did you leave it standing open at all, Marianne?"

"Only for a wee moment while I fetched in the milk," faltered Marianne, growing rosy-red as she reflected on the length of the "moment" which she had passed at the gate with the milkman.

"That must have been the time, then," said Mr. Gray. "Probably the little fellow has set off by himself for a walk. I'll go after and look for him. Don't frighten Mrs. Gray when she comes down, Louisa, but just say that Archie and I are both gone out. Try to look as you usually do."

This, however, was beyond Louisa's powers. Her eyes were as red as a ferret's, and her cheeks the color of purple cherries from crying and excitement of mind. Mrs. Gray saw at once that something was wrong. She began to question, Louisa to cry, and the secret came out in a burst of sobs and tears. "Master Archie—bless his little heart!—has got out of bed and ran away into the woods. The master was gone after him, but he'd niver find him at all at all"—(this was Marianne's addition). "The tramps had him fast by this time, no doubt. They'd niver let him go."

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"How could he get away all by himself?" asked poor frightened Mrs. Gray.

"Ah, who knows? Like as not the thaves came into the room and lifted him out of his very bed. They're iverywhere, thim tramps! There's no providing against thim. Oh, howly St. Patrick! who'd have thought it?"

This happy idea of tramps having lodged itself in Marianne's mind, the story grew rapidly. The butcher was informed of it when he came, the fishmonger, and the grocer's boy. By noon all the village had heard the tale, and farmers' wives for ten miles round were shuddering over these horrible facts, that three men in black masks, with knives as long as your arm, had broken into Mr. Gray's house at midnight, gagged the family, stowed the silver and money in pillow-cases, token the little boy from his bed,—that pretty little boy with curly hair, you know, my dear,—and, paying no attention to his screams and cries, had carried him off nobody knew where. Poor Mrs. Gray was half dead with grief, of course, and Mr. Gray had gone in pursuit; but law! my dear, he'll never catch 'em, and if he did, what could he do against three men?

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"He'd a ought to have taken the constable with him," said old Mrs. Fidgit, "then perhaps he'd have got him back. I guess the thieves won't keep the boy long though, he's too troublesome! His ma sent him over once on an errand, and I'd as lieve have a wild-cat in the house any day. Mark

As the day went on, Louisa began to disbelieve this theory about robbers. It was Marianne's theory for one thing; for another, she recollected that Archie must have taken his apples and gingerbread with him, and his spade. "Is it likely that thieves would stop to pack up things like that?" she asked Marianne, who was highly indignant at the question. The afternoon came, still Mr. Gray had not returned, and there were no tidings of Archie. Mrs. Gray, half ill with anxiety and headache, went to her room to lie down. Marianne was describing the exact appearance of the imaginary robbers to a crony, who stood outside the kitchen window. "Six foot high, ivery bit, and a face as black as chimney sut," Louisa heard her say. "Pshaw," she called out; but sitting still became unbearable; and the motion of her needle in and out of the work made her feel half crazy. She flung down the work,—it was a jacket for Archie,—and, tying on her bonnet, set off by herself in the direction of the woods. Where she was going she did not know,—somewhere, anywhere, to search for her lost boy!

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The blind wood paths puzzled Louisa more than they had puzzled Archie in the morning; for she wanted to keep her way, which he did not. She lost it, however, continually. Her eyes were scratched by boughs and brambles, the tree roots tripped her up, her dress caught in a briar and was torn. "Archie! Archie!" she cried, as she went along. Her voice came back from the forest in strange echoing tones which made her start. At last, after winding and turning for a long time, she found herself again upon the main path, not far from the place where she had entered the wood. She was hot, tired, and breathless; her voice was hoarse with crying and calling. "I'll wait here awhile," she thought. "Perhaps the blessed little dear'll come this way; but, whether he does or not, I'm too tired to move another step till I've had some rest." She found a smooth place under an oak, sat down, and leaned her back against the stem.

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"Cheep, cheep, chickeree," sang one bird to another. "What a stupid girl that is! I could tell her which way to go. Why, there's the mark of his big foot on the moss close by. Why doesn't she see it and follow? Cheep, cheep."

"Cluck, cluck, whirr, whillahu," sang the other bird. "Human beings are *too* stupid."

Poor stupid Louisa, her eyes blurred with tears, did not heed the birds' songs or understand those plain directions for finding Archie which they were so ready to give. The tree trunk felt comfortable against her back. The air came cool and spicy from the wood depths to steal the smart from her hot face. The rustle of the leaves was pleasant in her ear. So the faithful maid waited.

Mr. Gray meantime had tracked Archie for a little way by the traces of his small feet on the dewy grass. Then the marks became too confused to help him longer; he lost the track, and, after a long and weary walk, found himself on the far side of the wood, near a little village. There he hired a wagon, and drove home; resolving to rouse the neighbors, and give the wood a thorough search, even should it keep them out all night.

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While he was bargaining for his wagon in the distant village, Archie, in the midst of his nest of moss, was waking up. He had slept three hours, and so soundly that, at first arousing, he could not in the least remember where he was. He rubbed his eyes, and stared about him wonderingly. "Why, I'm out in the woods!" he said in a surprised voice. Gradually he recollected how he had built the house, chased a hen, and lost his hammer. This last accident troubled him a little. "Papa said I mustn't touch that big hammer ever," he thought to himself, "'cause I'd be sure to spoil it. But I'll tell him it isn't spoiled, and he can pick it up and put it back into the drawer; then he won't mind."

One of the striped squirrels came down from a bough overhead, and stopped just in front of the place where Archie sat. Archie looked at him; he looked at Archie. The squirrel put its paws together and rubbed its nose. It chattered a minute, twinkled its bead-like eyes, then, with a final flick of its tail, it was off, and up the tree again like a flash. Archie looked after it delighted.

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"What a pretty bunny!" he said out loud.

"Now I'll go home," was his next remark, getting suddenly up from the ground.

The cause of this resolution was a little gnawing sensation which had begun within him and was getting stronger every moment. In other words, he was hungry. Gingerbread and apples do not satisfy little boys as roast beef does. Archie's stomach was quite empty, and began to cry with an unmistakable voice, "I want my dinner, I want my dinner. Give me my dinner quick, or I shall do something desperate." Everybody in the world has to listen when voices like these begin to sound inside of them. All at once home seemed the most attractive spot in the world to Archie. Visions of Mamma and bread and milk and a great plate full of something hot arose before his eyes, and an immense longing for these delights took possession of him. So he shouldered his spade and set forth, not having the least notion—poor little soul!—as to which side home lay, but believing, with the confidence of childhood, that now he wanted to go that way, the way was sure to be easily found. Refreshed by his long sleep, he marched sturdily on, taking any path which struck his eye first.

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There is a pretty picture—I wonder if any of you have ever seen it?—in which a little child is seen walking across a narrow plank which bridges a deep chasm, while behind flies a tall, beautiful angel, with a hand on either side the child, guiding it along. The child does not see the angel, and walks fearlessly; but the heavenly hands are there, and the little one is safe. It may be

that just such a good angel flew behind our little Archie that afternoon to guide him through the mazes of the wood. Certain it is that, without knowing it, he turned, or something turned him, in the direction of home. It was far for such small feet to go, and he made the distance farther by straying, now to left and now to right; but, after each of these strayings, the unseen hands brought him back again to the right path and led him on. He did not stop to play now, for the hungry voices grew louder each minute, and he was in a hurry to get home. Speculations as to whether dinner would be all eaten up crossed his mind. "But I dess not," he said confidently, "'cause it isn't very long since morning." It was really four in the afternoon, but Archie's long nap had cheated the time, and he had no idea that it was so late.

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The path grew wider, and was hedged with barberries and wild roses. The lovely pink of the roses pleased Archie's eye. He stopped and tugged at a great branch till it broke, then he laid it across his shoulder to carry to Mamma. Suddenly, as he tramped along, a gasp and exclamation was heard, and a tall figure rose up from under a tree and caught him in its arms. It was Louisa, who had fallen half asleep at her post, and had been roused by the sound of the well-known little feet as they went by.

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"Master Archie, dear," she cried, sobbing, "how could you run away and scare us so?"

"Why, it's Loo—isa," said Archie wonderingly. "Did you come out here to build a house too, Loo—isa?"

"Where *have* you been?" clamored Louisa, holding him tight in her arms.

"Oh, out there," explained Archie, waving his hand toward the woods generally.

"How could you slip away and frighten Nursey so, and poor Mamma and Papa? Papa's been all the day hunting you. And where are you going now?"

"Home! Stop a squeezing of me, Loo—isa. I don't like to be squeezed. Has the dinner-bell runged yet? I want my dinner."

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"Dinner! Why it's most evening, Master Archie. And nobody could eat, because we was so frightened at your being lost."

"I wasn't lost!" cried Archie indignantly. "I was building a house. Come along, Loo—isa, I'll show you the way."

So Archie took Louisa's hand and led her along. Neither of them knew the path, but they were in the right direction, and by and by the trees grew thinner, and they could see where they were, on the edge of Mr. Plimpton's garden, not far from home.

Mr. and Mrs. Gray were consulting together on the piazza, when the click of the gate made them look up, and behold! the joyful Louisa, displaying Archie, who walked by her side.

"Here he is, ma'am," she cried. "I found him way off in the wood. He'd run away."

"I didn't," said Archie, squirming out of his mother's arms. "I was building houses. And you didn't find me a bit, Loo—isa. I found you, and I showed you the way home!"

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"Never mind who found who, so long as we have our little runaway back," said Mr. Gray, stooping to kiss Archie. "Another time we must have a talk about boys who go to build houses without leave from their Mamma's and Papa's, and make everybody anxious. Meantime, I fancy somebody I know about is half-starved. Tell Marianne to send some dinner in at once, Louisa."

"Yes, sir, I will." And Louisa hastened off to triumph over her friend Marianne.

"Archie, darling, how could you go away and frighten us so?" asked Mrs. Gray, taking him in her lap.

"Why, Mamma, were you frightened?" replied Archie wonderingly. "I was building a house. It's a *beau-tiful* house. I'll let you come and sit in it if you want to. And I've got a hen, and I'll give you all the eggs she lays, to cook, you know. Only the hen's runned away, and I couldn't find my house any more, and the hammer tumbled down, and I lost my shoe. I know where the hammer is, I dess, and to-morrow I'll go back and get it."—Here the expression of Archie's face changed. Louisa had appeared at the door with a plate of something which smelt excessively nice, and sent a little curl of steam into the air. She beckoned. He jumped down from Mamma's lap, ran to the door, and both disappeared. Nothing more was heard of him except his feet on the stairs, and by and by the sound of Louisa's rocking-chair, as she sat beside his bed singing Archie to sleep. Mamma and Papa went in together a little later and stood over their boy.

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"Oh, the comfort of seeing him safe in his little bed to-night!" said Mrs. Gray.

Roused by her voice, Archie stirred. "I *dess* I know where the hammer is," he said drowsily. Then his half-opened eyes closed, and he was sound asleep.

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RIDE A COCK-HORSE.

IT was a drizzly day in the old market-town of Banbury. The clouds hung low: all the world was wrapped in sulky mist. When the sun tried to shine out, as once or twice he did, his face looked like a dull yellow spot against the sky, and the clouds hurried up at once and extinguished him. Children tapped on window panes, repeating—

"Rain, rain, go away,
Come again some other day."

But the rain would not take the hint, and after awhile the sun gave up his attempts, hid his head, and went away disgusted, to shine somewhere else.

"It's too bad, it's *too* bad!" cried Alice Flower, the Mayor's little daughter, looking as much out of sorts as the weather itself.

"You mustn't say too bad. It is God who makes it rain or shine, and He is always right," remarked her Aunt.

"Yes—I know," replied Alice in a timid voice. "But, Aunt, I did want to go to the picnic very much."

"So did I. We are both disappointed," said Aunt, smiling.

"But I'm the *most* disappointed," persisted Alice, "because you're grown up, you know, and I haven't any thing pleasant to do. All my doll's spring clothes are made, and I've read my story-books till I'm tired of 'em, and I learned my lessons for to-morrow with Miss Boyd yesterday, because we were going to the picnic. Oh, dear, what a long morning this has been! It feels like a week."

Just then, Toot! toot! toot! sounded from the street below. Alice hurried back to the window. She pressed her nose close to the glass, but at first could see nothing; then, as the sound grew nearer, a man on horseback rode into view. He was gorgeously dressed in black velveteen, with orange sleeves and an orange lining to his cloak. He carried a brass trumpet, which every now and then he lifted to his lips, blowing a long blast. This was the sound which Alice had heard.

Following the man came a magnificent scarlet chariot, drawn by ten black horses with scarlet trappings and scarlet feathers in their heads. Each horse was ridden by a little page in a costume of emerald green. The chariot was full of musicians in red uniforms. They held umbrellas over their instruments, and looked sulky because of the rain, which was no wonder. Still, the effect of the whole was gay and dazzling. Behind the chariot came a long procession of horses, black, gray, sorrel, chestnut, or marked in odd patches of brown and white. These horses were ridden by ladies in wonderful blue and silver and pink and gold habits, and by knights in armor, all of whom carried umbrellas also. Pages walked beside the horses, waving banners and shields with "Visit Currie's World-Renowned Circus" painted on them. A droll little clown, mounted on an enormous bay horse, made fun of the pages, imitated their gestures, and rapped them on the back with his riding-stick in a droll way. A long line of blue and red wagons closed the cavalcade.

But prettiest of all was a little girl about ten years old, who rode in the middle of the procession upon a lovely horse as white as milk. The horse had not a single spot of dark color about him, and his trappings of pale blue were so slight that they seemed like ribbons hung on his graceful limbs. The little girl had hair of bright, pale yellow, which fell to her waist in loose shining waves. She was small and slender, but her color was like roses, and her blue eyes and sweet pink mouth smiled every moment as she bent and swayed to the motion of the horse, which she managed beautifully, though her bits of hands seemed almost too small to grasp the reins. Her riding-dress of blue was belted and buttoned with silver; a tiny blue cap with long blue

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plumes was on her head; and altogether she seemed to Alice like a fairy princess, or one of those girls in story-books who turn out to be kings' daughters or something else remarkable.

"O Aunty! come here do come," cried Alice.

Just then the procession halted directly beneath the window. The trumpeter took off his hat and made a low bow to Alice and her Aunt. Then he blew a final blast, rose in his stirrups and began to speak. Miss Flower opened the window that they might hear more distinctly. This seemed to bring the pretty little girl on the horse nearer. She looked up at Alice and smiled, and Alice smiled back at her. [202]

This is what the trumpeter said:—

"Ladies and gentlemen,—I have the honor to announce to you the arrival in Banbury of Signor James Currie's World-Renowned Circus and Grand Unrivalled Troupe of Equestrian Performers, whose feats of equitation and horsemanship have given unfeigned delight to all the courts of Europe, her Majesty the Queen, and the nobility and gentry of this and other countries. Among the principal attractions of this unrivalled troupe are Mr. Vernon Twomley, with his famous trained steed Bucephalus; Madame Orley, with her horse Chimborazo, who lacks only the gift of speech to take a first class at the University of Oxford; M. Aristide, the admired trapezeist; Goo-Goo, the unparalleled and side-splitting clown; and last, but not least, Mademoiselle Mignon, the child equestrienne, whose feats of agility are the wonder of the age! On account of Mr. Currie's unprecedented press of engagements, his appearance in Banbury is limited to a single performance, which will take place this evening under the Company's magnificent tent, in the Market Place, behind the old cross. Come one, come all! Performances to begin at eight precisely. Admission, one-and-sixpence. Children under ten years of age, half price. God save the Queen." [203]

Having finished this oration, the trumpeter bowed once more to the window, blew another blast, and rode on, followed by all the procession; the little girl on the white horse giving Alice a second smile as she moved away. For awhile the toot, toot, toot of the trumpet could be heard from down the street. Then the sounds grew fainter. At last they died in distance, and all was quiet as it had been before. [204]

Alice was sorry to have them go. But the interruption had done her good by taking her thoughts away from the rain and the lost picnic. She could think and talk of nothing now except the gay riders, and especially the pretty little girl on the white horse.

"Wasn't she sweet?" she asked her Aunt. "And didn't she ride *beautifully*. I wish I could ride like that. And what a pretty name, Mademoiselle Mignon! It must be very nice to belong to a circus, I think."

"I'm afraid that Mademoiselle Mignon does not always find it so nice," remarked Miss Flower.

"O Aunty, what makes you say so? She looks as if she were perfectly happy! Didn't you see her laugh when the clown stole the other man's cap from his head? And such a dear horse as she was riding! I never saw such a dear horse in all my life. I wish I had one just like him."

"It *was* a beauty. So perfectly white." [205]

"Wasn't it! O Aunty, don't you wish Papa would take you and me to the performance? There will only be one, you know, because Mr. Currie has such un—un—unpresidential engagements. I mean to ask Papa if he won't. There he is now! I hear his key in the door. May I run down and ask him, Aunty?"

"Yes, indeed—"

Downstairs ran Alice.

"O Papa!" she cried, "*did* you meet the Circus? It was the most wonderful Circus, Papa. Just like a story-book. And such a dear little girl on a white horse! Won't you please take me to see it, Papa—and Aunty too? We both want to go very much. It's only here for one night, the man said."

"We'll see," said the Mayor, taking off his coat. Alice danced with pleasure when she heard this "we'll see," for with Papa "we'll see" meant almost always the same thing as "yes." Alice was an only child, and a petted one, and Papa rarely refused any request on which his motherless little girl had set her heart. [206]

She skipped upstairs beside him, full of satisfaction, and had just settled herself on his knee for the half hour of frolic and talk which was her daily delight and his, when a knock came to the door below, and Phebe the maid appeared.

"Two persons to see you, sir."

"Show them in here," said the Mayor. Alice lingered and was rewarded, for the "persons" were no other than Signor Currie himself and his ring-master. Alice recognized them at once. Both were gorgeously dressed in black and orange and velvet-slashed sleeves, and came in holding their plumed hats in their hands. The object of the call was to solicit the honor of the Mayor's patronage for the evening's entertainment. How pleased Alice was when Papa engaged a box and paid for it!

"I shall bring my little daughter here," he told Signor Currie. "She is much taken by a child

whom she saw to-day among your performers."

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"Mademoiselle Mignon, no doubt," replied the Signor solemnly. "She is, indeed, a prodigy of talent,—one of the wonders of the age, I assure your worship!"

"Well," said his worship, smiling, "we shall see to-night. Good-day to you."

"O Papa, that is delightful!" cried Alice, the moment the men were gone. "How I wish it were evening already! I can scarcely wait."

Evenings come at last, even when waited for. Alice had not time, after all, to get *very* impatient before the carriage was at the door, and she and Papa and Aunt were in it, rolling away toward the market-place. Crowds of people were going in the same direction. Half the Papas and Mamas in Banbury had taken their boys and girls to see the show. There, behind the market cross, rose the great tent, a flapping red flag on top. Bright lights streamed from within. How exciting it was! The tent was so big inside that there was plenty of room for all the people who wished to come, and more. Ranges of benches ran up till they met the canvas roof. Below were the boxes, hung with red and white cloth and banners. Dazzling lights were everywhere, the band was playing, from behind the green curtain came sounds of voices and horses whinnying to each other. Alice had never been to a circus before. It seemed to her the most beautiful and bewildering place which she had ever imagined.

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By and by the performance began. How the Banbury children did enjoy it! The clown's little jokes had done duty in hundreds of places before. Some of them had even appeared in the almanac! But in Banbury they were all new, and so funny that everybody laughed till their sides ached. And the wonderful horses! Madame Orley's educated steed, which picked out letters from a card alphabet and spelled words with them, went through the military drill with the precision of a trooper, and waltzed about the arena with his mistress on his back!—well, he was not a horse; he was a wizard steed, like the one described in the "Arabian Nights Tales." Alice almost thought she detected the little peg behind his ear!

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She shuddered over the feats of the sky-blue trapezeist, who seemed to do every thing but fly. The knights in imitation armor were real knights to Alice; the pink and gold ladies were veritable damsels of romance, undergoing adventures. But, delightful as all this was, she was conscious that the best remained behind, and eagerly watched the door of entrance, in hopes of the appearance of the white steed and the little rider who had so fascinated her imagination in the morning. Papa noticed it, and laughed at her; but, for all that, she watched.

At last they came, and Alice was satisfied. Mignon looked prettier and daintier than ever in her light fantastic robe of white and spangles, with silver bracelets on her wrists and little anklets hung with bells about her slender ankles. Round and round and round galloped the white horse, the fairy figure on his back now standing, now lying, now on her knees, now poised on one small foot, or, again, dancing to the music on top of the broad saddle, keeping exact time, every movement graceful and light as that of a happy elf. Hoops, wreathed with roses and covered with silver paper, were raised across her path. She bounded through them easily, smiling as she sprang. The white horse seemed to love her, and to obey her every gesture; and Mignon evidently loved the horse, for more than once in the pauses Alice saw her pat and caress the pretty creature. At length the final bound was taken, the last rose-wreathed hoop was carried away, Mignon kissed her hand to the audience and disappeared at full gallop, the curtain fell, and the ring-master announced that Part First was ended, and that there would be an intermission of fifteen minutes.

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By this time Alice was in a state of tumultuous admiration which knew no bounds.

"Oh, if I could only speak to her and kiss her, just once!" she cried. "Isn't she the darlinest little thing you ever saw? I wish I could. Don't you think they'd let me, Papa?"

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"Would there be any harm in it, do you think?" asked the Mayor of his sister. "She's a pretty, innocent-looking little creature."

"I don't quite like having Alice associate with such people," objected Miss Flower. Then, softened by the wistful eagerness of Alice's face, she added, "Still, in this case, the child is so young that I really think there would be no harm, except that the manager might object to having the little girl disturbed between the acts."

"I'll inquire," said Papa.

The manager was most obliging. Managers generally are, I fancy, when Mayors express wishes. "Mademoiselle Mignon," he said, "would be very pleased and proud to receive Miss Flower, if she would take the trouble to come behind the scenes." So Alice, trembling with excitement, went with Papa behind the big green curtain. She had fancied it a sort of fairy world; but instead she found a great bare, disorderly place. Sawdust was scattered on the ground; huge boxes were standing about, some empty, some half unpacked. From farther away came sounds of loud voices talking and disputing, and the stamping of horses' feet. It was neither a pretty or a pleasant place; and Alice, feeling shy and half frightened, held Papa's hand tight, and squeezed it very hard as they waited.

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Pretty soon the manager came to them with Mignon beside him. She looked smaller and more childish than she had done on horseback. A little plaid shawl was pinned over her gauzy dress to keep her warm. Alice lost her fears at once. She realized that here was no fairy princess, but a

little girl like herself. Mignon's face was no less sweet when seen so near. Her cheeks were the loveliest pink imaginable. Her blue eyes looked up frankly and trustfully. When the Mayor spoke to her she blushed and made a pretty courtesy, clasping Alice's hand very tight in hers, but saying nothing.

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"The performances will recommence in ten minutes," said Signor Currie, consulting his watch. Then he and the Mayor moved a little aside and began talking together, leaving the little girls to make acquaintance.

"I saw you this morning," said Alice.

Mignon nodded and smiled.

"Oh, did you see me? I thought you did, but I wasn't sure, because we were up so high. Aunty and I thought the procession was beautiful. But I liked your horse best of all. Is he gentle?"

"Pluto? oh, he's very gentle," replied Mignon. "Only now and then he gets a little wild when the people hurrah and clap very loud. But he always knows me."

"How beautifully you do ride," went on Alice. "It looks just like flying when you jump through the hoops. I wish I knew how. Is it very hard to do?"

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"No—except when I get tired. Then I don't do it well. But as long as the music plays I don't feel tired. Sometimes before I come out I am frightened, and think I can't do it at all, but then I hear the band begin, and I know I can. Oh! don't you love music?"

"Y—es," said Alice wonderingly, for Mignon's eyes sparkled and her face flushed as she asked this question. "I like music when it's pretty."

"I love it so *so* much," went on Mignon confidentially. "It's like flowers—and colors—all sorts of things—sunsets too. Our band plays beautifully, don't you think so? It makes me feel as if I could do any thing in the world, fly or dance on the air,—any thing! It's quite different when they stop. Then I don't want to jump or spring, but just to sit still. If they would keep on playing always, I don't believe I should ever get tired."

"How funny!" said the practical Alice. "I never feel that way at all. Aunty says I haven't got a bit of ear for music. Did you see Aunty at the window this morning when you looked up?"

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"Was that your Aunty? I thought it was your Mamma."

"No; I haven't got any Mamma. She died when I was a little baby. I don't remember her a bit."

"Neither do I mine," said Mignon wistfully. "Mr. Currie says he guesses I never had any. Do you think I could? Little girls always have Mammias, don't they?"

"But haven't you an Aunty or any thing?" cried Alice.

Mignon shook her head.

"No," she said. "No Aunty."

"Why! Who takes care of you?"

"Oh, they all take care of me," replied Mignon smiling. "Madame Orley,—that's Mrs. Currie, you know,—she's very kind. She curls my hair and fastens my frock in the morning, and she always dresses me for the performance herself. Mr. Currie,—he's kind too. He gave me these anklets and my silver bracelets and two rings—see—one with a blue stone and one with a red stone. Aren't they pretty? Goo-Goo is nice too. He taught me to write last year. And old Jerry,—that's the head groom, you know,—he's the kindest of all. He says I'm like his little granddaughter that died, and wherever we go he almost always buys me a present. Look what he gave me this morning," putting her hand into the bosom of her frock and pulling out an ivory needle-case. "I keep it here for fear it'll get lost. There's always such a confusion when we only stop one night in a place."

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"Isn't it pretty," said Alice admiringly. "I'm glad Jerry gave it to you. But I wish you had an Aunty, because mine is so nice."

"Or a Mamma," said Mignon thoughtfully. "If I only had a Mamma of my own, and music which would play *all the time* and never stop, I should be just happy. I wouldn't mind the Enchanted Steed then,—or any thing."

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"What's the Enchanted Steed?" asked Alice.

"Oh,—one of the things I do. It's harder than the rest, so I don't like it quite so well. You'll see—it's the grand *finale* to-night."

A sharp little bell tinkled.

"That's to ring up the curtain," said Mignon. "I must go. Thank you so much for coming to see me."

"Oh, wait one minute!" cried Alice, diving into her pocket. "Yes, I thought so. Here's my silver thimble. Won't you take it for a keepsake, dear, to go with your needle-book, you know? And don't forget me, because I never, never shall forget you. My name's Alice,—Alice Flower."

"How pretty!" cried Mignon, looking admiringly at the thimble. "How kind you are! Good-by."

"Kiss your hand to me from the back of the horse, won't you, please?" said Alice. "That will be splendid! Good-by, dear, good-by."

The two children kissed each other; then Mignon ran away, tucking the thimble into her bosom as she went. [218]

"O Aunt! you never saw such a darling little thing as she is!" cried Alice, when they had got back to the box. "So sweet, and so pretty, prettier than any of the little girls we know, Aunt. I'm sure you'd think so if you saw her near. She hasn't any Mamma either, and no Aunt or any thing. She wishes so much she had. But she says all the circus people are real kind to her. You can't think how much she loves music. If the band would play all the time, she could fly, she says, or do any thing else that was hard. It was so queer to hear her talk about it. I never saw any little girl that I liked so much. I wish she was my sister, my own true sister; really I do, Aunt."

"Why, Alice, I never knew you so excited about anybody before," remarked Miss Flower.

"O Aunt! she isn't *anybody*; she's quite different from common people. How I wish she'd hurry and come out again. She promised to kiss her hand to me from the horse's back, Papa. Won't that be splendid?" [219]

The whole performance was more interesting to Alice since her conversation with Mignon. Madame Orley and her trained steed were quite new and different now that she knew that Madame Orley's real name was Currie, and that she curled Mignon's hair every morning. Goo-Goo seemed like an intimate friend, because of the writing-lessons. Alice was even sure that she could make out old Jerry of the needle-book among the attendants. Round and round and round sped the horses. Goo-Goo cracked his whip. The trapezeist swung high in air like a glittering blue spider suspended by silver threads. Mr. Vernon Twomley's Bucephalus did every thing but talk. Somebody else on another horse played the violin and stood on his head meanwhile, all at full gallop! It was delightful. But the best of all was when Mignon came out again. Her cheeks were rosier, her eyes brighter than ever, and—yes—she recollected her promise, for during the very first round she turned to Alice, poised on one foot like a true fairy, smiled charmingly, and kissed her hand twice. How delightful that was! Not Alice only, but all the children present were bewitched by Mignon that evening. Twenty little girls at least said to their mothers, "Oh, how I would like to ride like that!" and many who did not speak wished privately that they could change places and *be* Mignon. Alice did not wish this any longer. The noise and confusion behind the scenes, the stamping horses and swearing men, had given her a new idea of the life which poor Mignon had to lead among these sights and sounds, the only child among many grown people, dependant upon the chance kindness of clowns and head grooms for her few pleasures, her little education. She no longer desired to change places. What she now wanted was to carry Mignon away for a companion and friend, sharing lessons with her and Aunt and all the other good things which she had forgotten, when in the morning she wished herself a part of the gay circus troupe. [220]

And now the performances were almost over. One last feat remained, the *Finale*, of which Mignon had spoken. It stood on the bills thus:—

"GRAND FINALE!!
IN CONCLUSION
WILL BE GIVEN THE STUPEFYING FEAT
OF
THE ENCHANTED STEED,
AND
THE FLIGHT THROUGH THE AIR!

Performers:

MADEMOISELLE MIGNON; HER HORSE PLUTO; M. ARISTIDE; AND M. JOACHIN."

Alice watched with much interest the arrangements making for this feat. Fresh sawdust was sprinkled over the arena, the ropes of the trapezes were lowered and tested: evidently the feat was a difficult one, and needed careful preparation. M. Aristide and M. Joachin took their places on the suspended bars, the ring-master cleared the circle, and Mignon rode in at a gallop. Three times she went round the arena at full speed, then she was snatched from the horse's back by the long arm of M. Aristide extended from the trapeze above. Pluto galloped steadily on. One second only M. Aristide held Mignon poised in air, then he flung her lightly across the space to M. Joachin, who as lightly caught her, waited a second, and, as Pluto passed beneath, dropped her upon his back. It looked fearfully dangerous; all depended upon the exact time at which each movement was executed. The whole audience caught its breath, but Mignon did not seem to be frightened. Her little face was quite unruffled as the strong men tossed her to and fro, her limbs and dress fell into graceful lines as she went through the air; it was really like a bird's flight. Alice's hands were squeezed tightly together, she could hardly breathe. Ah!—Pluto was an instant too late, or M. Joachin a second too soon,—which was it? Mignon missed the saddle,—grazed it with her foot, fell,—striking one of the wooden supports of the tent with her head as she touched the ground. There was a universal thrill and shudder. Mr. Currie hurried up, Pluto faltered in his pace, whinnied and ran back to where his little mistress lay. But in one moment Mignon was on her feet again, making her graceful courtesy and kissing her hand, though she looked very pale. The curtain fell rapidly. Alice, looking anxiously that way, had a vague idea that she saw Mignon drop down again, but Aunt said, "How fortunate that that sweet little thing was not hurt;" and [221]

Alice, being used to finding Aunty always in the right, felt her heart lightened. They went out, following the audience, who were all praising Mignon, and saying that it might have been a terrible accident; and, for their part, it didn't seem right to let children run such risks, and they were thankful that the little dear was not injured. Many a child envied Mignon that night; many dreamed of silver spangles, galloping steeds, roses, applause, and waked up thinking how charming it must be to live on a horse's back with music always playing, and exciting things going on, and people praising you!

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Oh, dear! I wish I could stop here. Why should there be painful things in the world which must be written about? That pretty courtesy, that spring from the earth were poor Mignon's last. She had risen and bowed with the instinct which all players feel to act out their parts to the end, but as the curtain fell down she dropped again, this time heavily. Mr. Currie, much frightened, lifted and carried her to his wife's tent. The band, who were playing out the audience, stopped with a dismayed suddenness. Goo-Goo untied his mask and hurried in. Madame Orley, who was feeding Chimborazo with sugar, dropped the sugar on the floor and ran too. Jerry flew for a doctor. Mignon was laid on a bed. They fanned her, rubbed her feet, put brandy into her pale lips. But it was all of no use. The little hands were cold, the blue-veined eyelids would not uncloset. Madame Orley and the other women riders who were clustered beside the bed began to sob bitterly. They all loved Mignon; she was the pet and baby of the whole circus troupe.

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It was not long before the doctor came. He felt Mignon's pulse, and tried various things, but his face was very grave.

"She's a frail little creature," he said. "No stamina to carry her through."

"She's opening her eyes," cried Madame Orley. "She's coming to herself."

Slowly the blue eyes opened. At first she seemed not to see the anxious countenances bent over her. Then a look of recognition crept into her face, and a wan little smile parted the lips. She lifted one hand and began to fumble feebly in the bosom of her frock.

"What is it, Mignon, dear?" said one of the women. It was Alice's silver thimble that Mignon was seeking after. When it was given her she seemed content, and lay clasping it in her hand.

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Just then a strange noise came from outside. Pluto, suspecting that something had gone wrong, had slipped his halter. A groom tried to catch him. He snorted back and cantered away. At the door of Madame Orley's tent he paused, put in his head and gave a long whinny.

Mignon started. The bells on her ankles tinkled a little as she moved.

"Now, Pluto"—she whispered faintly,—"*steady*, dear Pluto. Ah, there's the music at last! I thought it would never begin. How sweet,—oh, how sweet! They never made such sweet music before. I can do it now." A smile brightened her face.

"Has she a mother?" asked the doctor.

The words caught Mignon's ear. She looked up. "Mamma," she said—"Mamma! Did *you* make the music?" Her head fell back, she closed her eyes.—That was all.

"She loved music so dearly," said one of the women weeping.

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"She has it now," replied the good old doctor, laying down the little hand from which the pulse had ebbed away. "Don't cry so over her, my good girl. She was a tender flower for such a life as this. Depend upon it, it is better as it is. Heaven is a home-like place for such little ones as she, and the angels' singing will be sweeter to her ears than the music of your brass band."

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LADY QUEEN ANNE.

"WHERE is Annie?" demanded old Mrs. Pickens.

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"I'm sure I don't know. Not far away, for I heard her voice just now singing in the woods near the house."

"That child is always singing, always," went on Mrs. Pickens in a melancholy voice. "What she finds to sing about in this miserable place I cannot imagine. It's really unnatural!"

"Oh, no! mother,—not unnatural. Remember what a child she is. She hardly remembers the old life, or misses it. The sun shines, and she sings,—she can't help it. We ought to be glad instead of sorry that she doesn't feel the changes as we do."

"Well, I *am* glad," responded the old lady. "You needn't take me up so sharply, Susan. All I say is that it seems to me *unreasonable*."

Miss Pickens glanced about the room, and suppressed a sigh. It was, indeed, a miserable dwelling, scarcely better than a hut. Very few of you who read this have ever seen a place so comfortless or so poor. The roof let in rain. Through the cracked, uneven floor the ground could be distinctly seen. A broken window-pane was stopped by an old hat thrust into the hole. For furniture was only a rusty stove, a table, three chairs, a few battered utensils for cooking, and a bed laid on the floor of the inner room,—that was all. And the dwellers in this wretched home, for which they were indebted to the charity of friends scarcely richer than themselves, were ladies born and bred, accustomed to all the comforts and enjoyments of life.

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It was the old story,—alas! too common in these times,—the story of a Southern family reduced to poverty by the ravages of war. Six years before, all had been different. Then the fighting was not begun, and the Southern Confederacy was a thing to boast over and make speeches about. The gray uniforms were smart and new then; the volunteers eager and full of zeal. All things went smoothly in the stately old house known to Charleston people as the "Pickens Mansion." The cotton was regularly harvested on the Sea Islands, and on the Beaufort plantation, which belonged to Annie; for little Annie, too, was an heiress, with acres and negroes of her own. War seemed an easy thing in those days, and a glorious one. There was no lack felt anywhere; only a set of fresh and exciting interests in lives which had always been interesting enough. Mrs. Pickens and the other Charleston ladies scraped lint and rolled bandages with busy fingers; but they smiled at each other as they did so, and said that these would never be needed, there would never be any real fighting! They stood on their balconies to cheer and applaud the incoming regiments,—regiments of gallant young men, their own sons and the sons of neighbors: and it was like the opening chapter of a story. Ah! the story had run through many chapters since then, and what different ones! The smart uniforms had lost all their gloss, blood was upon the flags, the glory had changed to ashes; every family wore mourning for somebody. The pleasant Charleston home, where Mrs. Pickens had stood on the balcony to watch the gray-coated troops pass by, and little Annie had fluttered her mite of a handkerchief, and laughed as the gay banners danced in air, where was it? Burned to the ground; only a sorry heap of ruin marked where once it stood. No more cotton bales came from the Sea Islands. First one army, then the other, had swept over the Beaufort plantation, trampling its fields into mire. It had been seized, confiscated, retaken, re-confiscated, sold to this person and that. Nobody knew exactly to whom it belonged nowadays; but it was not to little Annie, rightful heiress of all. Stripped of every thing, reduced to utter want, Mrs. Pickens and her daughter took refuge in a lonely village, far up among the Carolina hills, where some former friends, also ruined by the war, offered them the wretched

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home where now we find them. Little Annie, sole blossom left upon the blasted tree, went with them. It was a miserable life which they led. The pinch of poverty is never so keenly felt as when the recollection of better days mixes with it like a perpetual sting. All the bright hopes of six years before were over, and the poor ladies could have said, "Behold, was ever sorrow like unto my sorrow!" They grieved for themselves; they grieved most of all for their beautiful little Annie, but Annie did not grieve,—not she!

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Never was a happier little maiden,—as blithe and merry in her coarse cotton frock and bare feet as though the cotton were choicest satin. She was as pretty too. No frock could spoil that charming little face framed in thick chestnut curls, or hide the graceful movements which would have made her remarkable anywhere. Her eyes, which were brown like her curls, danced continually. Her mouth was always smiling. The dimples came and went with every word she spoke. And, however shabby might be her dress, she was a little lady always. No one could mistake it, who listened to her sweet voice and prettily chosen words. The pitiful sadness of her Grandmother, the rigid melancholy of her Aunt, passed over her as a cloud drifts over a blue sky on a summer's day, leaving the blue undimmed. She loved them, and was sorry when they were sorry; but God had given her such a happy nature, that happy she must be in spite of all. Just to be alive was pleasant enough, but there were many other pleasant things beside. The woods were full of flowers, and Annie loved flowers dearly. Then there were the beautiful pine forests themselves, with their cool shades and fragrant smell. There was sunshine too, and now and then a story, when Aunty felt brighter than usual. The negroes in the neighborhood were all fond of little "Missy Annie." They would catch squirrels for her, or climb for birds' eggs; and old Sambo scarcely ever passed the hut without bringing some little gift of flowers or nuts. There was Beppo, also, a large and handsome hound belonging to a distant plantation, who came now and then to make Annie visits. It was a case of pure affection on his part, for she was not allowed to give him any thing to eat, not even a piece of corn bread, for food was too precious with the stricken family to be shared with dogs. But Beppo came all the same, and seemed to like to race and romp with Annie just as well as though the entertainment had wound up with something more substantial. Oh! there were many pleasant things to do, Annie thought.

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When Aunty went out to call her that day, she was sitting under a tree with a lap full of yellow jessamines, which she was tying into a bunch. As she worked she sang.

"Who are those for, Annie?" asked Miss Pickens.

"I was going to give them to Mrs. Randolph, Aunty. She came yesterday to the camp, Juba says. I thought she'd like them."

Miss Pickens looked rigid, but she made no reply. "The Camp" was a depôt of United States supplies, established for the relief of the poor blacks and whites of the region, and Major Randolph was the officer in charge of it. In her great poverty, Miss Pickens had been forced to apply with the rest of her neighbors for this aid, going every week with a basket on her arm, and receiving the same rations of bacon and corn-meal which the poorest negroes received. It was bitter bread; but what can one do when one is starving? Major Randolph was sorry for the poor lady, and kind and courteous always, but Miss Pickens could not be grateful; he was one of the Northern invaders who had helped to crush her hopes and that of her State, and to bring them to this extremity; and though she took the corn-meal, she had no thanks in her heart.

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"We are going to the village this afternoon, aren't we, Aunty?" went on Annie.

"Yes, we must," replied her Aunt. "I came to tell you to get ready. And, Annie, don't sing so loud when you are near the house. Grandmamma doesn't like to hear it."

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"Doesn't she?" said Annie wondering. "I'll try to remember, Aunty. But sometimes I don't know when I am singing. It just sings of itself."

"Getting ready" consisted of tying on two faded, flapping sun-bonnets, to which Miss Pickens added an old ragged India shawl, relic of past grandeur. Annie's feet were bare, her Aunt wore army shoes made of cow-skin, part of the Bureau supply. She was a tall, thin woman, and, with the habit of former days, carried her head high in air as she walked along. Little fairy Annie danced by her side, now stopping to gather a flower, now to listen to a bird, chatting and laughing all the way, as though she were a bird herself, and never heeding Aunty's melancholy looks or short answers.

"Who *are* those people?" asked Mrs. Randolph of her husband, as she watched the odd-looking pair come along the road. "Do look, Harry. Such a strange woman, and—I do declare, the prettiest child I ever saw in my life. Tell me who they are?"

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"Oh, that's my little pet, Annie Pickens," replied the Major. Then he hastily told his wife the story.

"The poor ladies suffer dreadfully both in pride and in pocket, I fear," he added. "But Annie, bless her! she doesn't know what suffering means, any more than if she were a bird or a squirrel. I thought you'd take a fancy to her, Blanche; and perhaps you can think of some way to help them. Women know how to set about such things. I'm such a clumsy fellow that all I dared attempt was to deal out as much meal and bacon as the Aunt could carry."

Blanche Randolph found it easy to "take a fancy" to the sweet little creature who lifted to her such beaming eyes as she made her offering of the yellow jessamines. "Oh, dear!" she said to

herself, "how I wish she belonged to me." She kissed and fondled her, and while Miss Pickens transacted her business, Annie sat on Mrs. Randolph's lap and talked to her, quite as though they were old acquaintances.

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"What do you do all day, dear? Have you any one to play with?"

"Oh, yes, I have Beppo. That's Mr. Ashley's dog, you know. He runs over to see me almost every week, and we have such nice times."

"And don't you study any lessons?" asked Mrs. Randolph.

"No, not now. I used to, but Aunty is so busy now that she says she hasn't time to teach me. Beside, all my books were burned up."

"Come, Annie, it is time to go," said Miss Pickens, moving away, with a curt bow to Mrs. Randolph.

Annie lingered to kiss her new friend.

"I shall pick you some fresh flowers next time we come," she said.

"I'll tell you what, Harry," said Mrs. Randolph, "that is the most *pathetically* sweet little darling I ever saw."

"Pathetic? Why she's as happy as the day is long."

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"Ah, you don't understand! That's the very reason. 'I feel to cry' over her, as old Mauma Sally would say."

Medville was a quiet, lonely place. All the people, black and white alike, were very poor. Nobody called to see Mrs. Randolph; there were no parties to go to; and after a while she learned to look forward to little Annie's visit as the pleasantest thing in the whole week. Annie looked forward to it also. Her new friend was both kind and gay. Always some little treat was prepared for her coming,—a book, a parcel of cakes, or a picture-paper with gay colored illustrations. Mrs. Randolph chose these gifts carefully, because she was afraid of offending Miss Pickens, but Miss Pickens was not offended; she loved Annie too dearly for that, and became almost gracious as she thanked Mrs. Randolph for her kindness. After some time Mrs. Randolph ventured to walk out to the cottage. What she saw there horrified her, but I can best tell what that was by quoting a letter which she wrote about that time to her sister, Mrs. Boyd, who was spending the summer in England:—

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"Fancy, dear Mary, a miserable log hut not one bit better than those in which the negroes dwell. In fact, it used to be a negro hut, some say a pig-pen; but that is too bad, I cannot believe it. The roof lets in water, the floor is broken away, the windows are stuffed with rags and an old hat. Every thing is perfectly clean inside, swept and scrubbed continually by the poor ladies, and they are real ladies, Mary. It was pitiful to see old Mrs. Pickens sitting in her wooden chair in a dress which her former cook would have disdained, and yet with all the dignity and sad politeness of a duchess in difficulties. They make no secret of their extreme poverty; they cannot, in fact, for it stares you in the face; but they ask for nothing, and you would scarcely dare to offer aid. I was so shocked that I could not restrain my tears. Miss Pickens brought me a tin cupful of water, and I think my sympathy touched her, for she has thawed a little since, and has permitted Annie to accept a gingham frock which I made for her, and some stockings and shoes. Such dainty little feet as hers are, and such a lovely child! I have scarcely ever seen one so beautiful, and it is not common beauty, but of the rarest sort, with elegance and refinement in every feature and movement. It is a thousand pities that she should be left here to grow up in poverty without education, or any of the things she was born to, for, as I told you in my last, the family was once wealthy, and Annie herself would be a great heiress had not the war ruined them all."

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When Mrs. Boyd received this letter, she was making a visit to some friends who lived in a villa on the banks of the Thames. Mr. and Mrs. Grant were the names of these friends. They were all sitting on the lawn when the post came in. The sunset cast a pink glow on the curves of the beautiful river; the roses were in perfect bloom; overhead and underfoot the grass and trees were of that rich and tender green which is peculiar to England. The letter interested Mrs. Boyd so much that she read it aloud to her friends, who were rich and kind-hearted people, with one little boy of their own.

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Mrs. Grant almost cried over the letter. It was the saddest thing that she had ever heard of, and all that evening she and her husband could talk of nothing else. Little Annie, sound asleep in her Carolina cabin, did not dream that, three thousand miles away, two people, whom she had never heard of, were spending half the night in the discussion of her fate and fortunes! Long after their guest had gone to bed, the Grants sat up together conversing about Annie; and in the morning they came down with a proposal so astonishing, that Mrs. Boyd could hardly believe her ears when she heard it.

"We have been talking in a vague way for years past of adopting a little girl," said Mr. Grant. "We always wished for a daughter, and felt sure that to have a sister would be the best thing in the world for Rupert, who is an affectionate little fellow, and would enjoy such a playmate of all things. But you can easily guess that there have been difficulties in the way of these plans, especially as to finding the right child, so we have done nothing about it. Now it strikes my wife, and it strikes me also, that this story of your sister's is a clear leading of Providence. Here is a

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child who wants a home, and here are we who want a child. So we have made up our minds to send to America for Annie, and, if her relatives will consent, to adopt her as our own. Will you give me Mrs. Randolph's exact address?"

"But it is so sudden. Are you sure you won't repent?" asked Mrs. Boyd.

"I don't think we shall. And it seems less sudden to us than to you, because, as I have explained, this idea has been in our minds for a long time."

You can fancy the excitement of Major and Mrs. Randolph when Mr. Grant's letter reached Medville. He offered to adopt Annie, and treat her in every respect as though she were his own daughter, provided her Grandmother and Aunt would give her up entirely, and promise never again to claim her as theirs. [245]

"If they will consent to this," wrote Mr. Grant, "I will settle a hundred pounds a year on them for the rest of their lives. I will also employ a lawyer to see if any thing can be done towards getting back a part of the confiscated property. But all this is only on condition that the child is absolutely made over to me. I am not willing to take her with any loop-hole left open by which she may, by and by, be claimed back again just as we have learned to consider her our own. I beg that Major Randolph will have this point most clearly understood, and will attend to the drawing up of a legal paper which shall put it beyond the possibility of dispute."

The day after this letter came, Mrs. Randolph put it in her pocket and walked out to the mountain hut. She felt very nervous as she tapped at the door. [246]

"It was a terrible thing to do," she wrote afterwards to her sister. "There were the two poor ladies as stately as ever, and little Annie so bright and winning. It was like asking for the only happy thing left in their lives. I explained first about my letter to you, and how you happened to be staying with the Grants when you received it, and then I gave Miss Pickens Mr. Grant's letter. Her face was like iron as she read it, and she swallowed hard several times, but she never uttered one word. When she had done, she thought for several minutes; then she said, in a choked voice, 'If you will leave this with us, Madam, you shall have an answer to-morrow.' I came away. Dear little Annie walked half way down the hill with me. I hope, oh, so much, that they will let her go. The life they lead is too sad for such a child, and in every way it is better for them all; but oh, dear! I am so sorry for them that I don't know what to do." [247]

Next day Miss Pickens walked down alone to the Relief Station.

"My mother and I have talked it over," she said briefly, "and we have decided. Annie must go."

"I am glad," said Mrs. Randolph. "Glad for her, but very sorry for you."

"It is like cutting out my heart," said the poor Aunt. "But what can we do? I am not able to give the child proper food even, or decent clothes. If we keep her she must grow up in ignorance. These English strangers offer every thing; we have nothing to offer. If we could count on the bare necessaries of life,—no more than those,—I would never, never give up Annie. As it is, it would be sinning against her to refuse."

"Mr. Grant's assistance will do much to make your own lives more comfortable," suggested Mrs. Randolph.

"I don't care about that. We could go on suffering and not say a word, if only we might keep Annie. But she would suffer too, and more and more as she grows older. No, Annie must go." [248]

"The Grants are thoroughly good people, and will be kindness itself, I am sure. The only danger is that they may spoil your dear little girl with over-indulgence."

"She can stand a good deal, having had none for so long a time," replied Miss Pickens with a sad smile. "But Annie is not that sort of child; nothing could spoil her. When must she go, Mrs. Randolph?"

"Mr. Grant spoke of the 'Cuba,' on which some friends of his are to sail. She leaves on the 24th."

"The 24th. That is week after next."

"If it seems to you too soon—"

"No. The sooner it is over the better for us all."

"I half feel as if I had done you a wrong," said Mrs. Randolph, with tears in her eyes.

"No, you have done us no wrong. It is in our own hands, you see. We could say no, even now. Oh, if I dared say it! But I dare not,—that is worst of all,—I dare not." She gave a dry sort of sob and walked away rapidly. Mrs. Randolph, left behind, broke down and indulged in a good fit of crying. [249]

Dear little Annie! she was partly puzzled, partly pleased, partly pained by the news of what was going to befall her. She clung to her Aunty, and declared that she could not go. Then Mrs. Randolph talked with her and explained that Aunty would be better off, and Grandmamma have a more comfortable house to live in—making pictures of the sweet English home, the kind people, the dear little brother waiting for her on the other side of the sea, till Annie felt as if it would be

pleasant to go. There was not much time for discussion; every thing was done in a hurry. Mrs. Randolph sewed all day long on her machine, making little underclothes and a pretty blue travelling dress. Miss Pickens patched up one of her faded silks, for she was to accompany Annie to New York and see her sail, Mr. Grant paying all the expenses of the journey for both of them. Grandmamma cried all night, but in the daytime her face looked set and hard. There were papers to sign and boxes to pack. Beppo seemed to smell in the air that something was about to happen. All day long he hung around the hut, whining and sniffing. Now and then he would throw back his head and give a long, sorrowful bay, which echoed from some distant point in the pine wood. The last day came,—the last kisses. It was like a rapid whirling dream, the journey, the steam cars, the arrival in New York, and Annie only seemed to wake up when she stood on the steamer's deck and felt the vessel throb and move away. On the wharf, among the throng of people who had come down to say good-by, stood Aunty's tall figure in her faded silk and ragged shawl, looking so different from any one else there. She did not wave her handkerchief or make any sign, but fixed her eyes on Annie as if she could never look away, and there was something in the expression of her face which made Annie suddenly burst into tears. She wiped them fast, but before she could see clearly, the wharf was far distant, and Aunty's face was only a white spot among other white spots, which were partly faces and partly fluttering handkerchiefs. A few minutes more and the spots grew dim, the wharf could no longer be seen, the vessel began to rock and plunge in the waves, and the great steamer was fairly at sea.

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Do you suppose that Annie cried all the voyage? Bless you, no! It was not in her to be sorrowful long. In a very little while her tears dried, smiles came back, and the trustful brown eyes were as bright as ever. Everybody on board noticed the dear little girl and was kind. The Captain, who had little girls of his own at home, would walk with her on the deck for an hour at a time, telling her stories which he called "yarns," and which were very interesting. The old sailors would coax the little maiden amidships and tell her "yarns" also, about sharks and whales and albatrosses. One of them was such a nice old fellow. His name was "Jack," and he won Annie's affections completely, by catching a flying-fish in a bucket and making her a present of it. Did you ever see a flying-fish? Annie's did not seem at all happy in the bucket, so she threw him into the sea again, but none the less was she pleased that Jack gave him to her. She liked to watch the porpoises turn and wheel in the water, and the gulls skim and dive; but most of all she delighted in the Mother Carey's chickens, which on stormy days fluttered in and out, rocking on the waves, and never seeming afraid, however hard the wind might blow. Going to sea was to Annie as pleasant as all the other pleasant things in her life. She would have laughed hard enough had anybody asked whether unpleasant things had never happened to her, and would have said "No!" in a minute.

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The voyage ended at Liverpool. Annie felt sorry and homesick at leaving the vessel, as travellers are apt to do. But pretty soon a gentleman came on board, and a pretty little boy. It was Mr. Grant and Rupert, come down to meet her, and they were so pleasant and so glad to see Annie that she forgot all her home-sickness at once.

"What a funny carriage," she exclaimed, when, after they had all landed, Mr. Grant helped her into a cab.

"It's a Hansom," explained Rupert. "Papa engaged one because I asked him. It's such fun to ride in 'em, I think. Don't they have any in America where you live?"

"No,—not any carriages at all where I live," replied Annie, nestling down among the cushions,—"only mule carts and—wheelbarrows—and—oh, yes—Major Randolph had an ambulance. There were *beau*-tiful carriages in New York though, but I didn't see any like this."

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"Don't you like it?"

"Oh, yes,—very much," replied Annie, cuddling cosily between her new Papa and Brother.

"Isn't she pretty?" whispered Rupert to his father. "None of the other fellows at our school have got such a pretty sister as she is. And she's a jolly little thing, too," he added confidentially.

Mrs. Grant had grown a little anxious about the first meeting. "If we *should* be disappointed!" she thought. But when the carriage drove up and her husband lifted Annie out, a glance made her easy. "I can love that child," she said to herself, and her embrace was so warm that Annie rested in her arms with the feeling that here was real home and a real Mamma, and that England was just as nice as America.

You can guess how she enjoyed the lawn with its roses, and the beautiful river. Fresh from the poor little cabin on the hill-top, she nevertheless fell with the greatest ease into the ways and habits of her new life. It did not puzzle or disturb her in the least to live in large rooms, be waited on by servants, or have nice things about her; she took to all these naturally. For a few days Mr. and Mrs. Grant watched with some anxiety, fearing to discover a flaw in their treasure, but no flaw appeared. Not that Annie was faultless, but hers were honest little faults; there was nothing hidden or concealed in her character, and in a short time her new friends had learned to trust her and to love her entirely.

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So here was our little girl fairly settled in England, with dainty dresses to wear, a governess coming every day to give her lessons, masters in French and music, a carriage to ride in, and half a dozen people at least ready to pet and make much of her all the time. Do you think she was happier than she had been before? How could she be? One cannot be more than happy. She was happy then, she was happy now,—no more, no less.

Rupert used to talk to her sometimes about that old life, which seemed to him so strange and dismal.

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"How you must have hated it!" he said once. "I can't bear to have you tell me any more. What's corn-meal? It sounds very nasty! And didn't you have anybody to play with, not anybody at all, or any fun, ever?"

"Fun!" cried Annie; "I should think so! Why, Rupert, our woods were full of squirrels. Such dear little things!—you never saw such pretty squirrels. One of them got so tamed that he used to eat out of my hand. His name was Torpedo. I named him myself. Then there was Beppo, the dearest dog! I wish you knew him. We used to run races and have the greatest fun. And Aunty and I had nice times going down to the camp."

"Oh, dear! oh, dear!" sighed Rupert. He could not see the fun at all.

When Annie had been three years with the Grants, Major and Mrs. Randolph came to London, and drove down to the villa to see her. It was a great pleasure to them all. Annie had a thousand questions to ask about Grandmamma and Aunty, who no longer lived in the hut, but in Medville, where Mr. Grant had hired a small house for them.

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"They are quite comfortable now," said Mrs. Randolph. "Aunty has gained a little flesh, and Grandmamma is stronger, and able to walk out sometimes. Old Sambo came down the very night before we left with a box of birds' eggs, which he wished to send to 'Missy Annie.' They are in the carriage; you shall have them presently. And here is a long letter from Aunty."

"Annie, you look just the same," remarked the Major; "only you are grown, and the sunburn has worn off and left you as fair as a lily. You used to be brown as a bun when I knew you first. I needn't ask if you are happy here?"

"Oh! very, very happy," said Annie warmly.

"A great deal happier than you were when you lived with Grandmamma and Aunty?" inquired Mrs. Randolph.

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"Why, no!" cried Annie wonderingly; "not any happier than *that*. I used to have lovely times then; but I have lovely times here too."

"That child will never lack for happiness," said the Major, as they drove back to London. "She's the brightest little being I ever saw."

"Yes," replied his wife; "rain or shine, it's all one with Annie. Her cheer comes from within, and is so warm and radiant that, whatever sky is overhead, she always rejoices. Let the clouds do what they may, it makes no difference: Annie will always sit in the sun,—the sunshine of her own sweet, happy little heart."



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UP, UP, UP, AND DOWN, DOWN, DOWN-Y.

"Now, Dinah, it's time to try the jelly."

"Wait a minute, Miss May; it can't be stiff yet."

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"Oh, yes! Dinah, it is; I think it is. I'll only just breathe on it, Dinah; I'll not disturb it a bit."

"Let me breathe on it too."

"And me."

Dinah chuckled silently to herself in a way she had. She opened the kitchen window, and in one second three little girls had climbed on three chairs, and three curly heads had met over the saucer of currant juice which stood on the sill.

"I *think* it's going to jelly," said May.

Lulu touched it delicately with the point of her small forefinger.

"There!" she cried triumphantly. "It *crinkled*; it did, Dinah! The jelly's come."

"Oh, how good!" added Bertha, applying her finger, not so gently, to the hot surface, and then putting it into her mouth to cool it! "It's the bestest jelly we ever made, Dinah."

Dinah chuckled again at this "we." But, after all, why not? Had not the children watched her scald and squeeze the currants, and stir and skim? Had not May wielded the big wooden spoon for at least three minutes? Had not Lulu eaten a mouthful of skimmings on the sly? Were they not testing the product now? The little ones had surely a right to say "we," and Dinah accepted the partnership willingly. She lifted the preserving kettle on to the table; and the junior (not silent!) members of the firm mounted on their chairs, watched with intense interest as she dipped the glasses in hot water, and filled each in turn with the clear red liquid. [261]

"It's first-rate jell," she remarked. "Be hard in no time."

"Put a tiny, tiny bit in my doll's tumbler," said Bertha, producing a minute vessel. "She likes jelly very much, my dolly does."

"Oh, isn't it nice to cook!" exclaimed Lulu, jumping up and down in her chair! "Such fun! I wish Mamma'd always let us do it."

"What shall we make next?" asked May. [262]

"Jumbles," responded the senior partner briefly.

"I like to make jumbles," cried May. "I may cut out all the diamond-shaped ones, mayn't I, Di?"

"And I, all the round ones?"

"And I, the hearts?"

Dinah nodded. The children got down from their chairs, and ran to the closet. They came back each with a tin cookie-pattern in her hand. Dinah sifted flour and jumbled egg and sugar rapidly together, with that precise carelessness which experience teaches. In a few minutes the smooth sheet of dough lay glistening on the board, and the children began cutting out the cakes; first a diamond, then a heart, then a round, each in turn. As fast as the shapes were cut, Dinah laid them in baking-tins, and carried them away to the oven. The work went busily on. It was great fun. But, alas! in the very midst of it, interruption came. The door opened, and a lady walked in,—a pretty lady in a beautiful silk gown of many flounces. When she saw what the children were doing, she frowned, and did not seem pleased. [263]

"My dears," she said, "I was wondering where you were. It is quite time that you should be dressed for the afternoon. Come upstairs at once."

"O Mamma!—we're helping Dinah. Mayn't we stay and finish?"

"Helping? Nonsense! Hindering, you mean. Dinah will be glad to get rid of you. Come at once."

May got down from her chair. But Lulu and Bertha pouted.

"We've hung all our dolls' things out on the line," they said. "It's washing-day in the baby-house, Mamma. Mayn't we stay just a little while to clap and fold up?"

"Clap and fold," exclaimed Mrs. Frisbie. "Where do you pick up such words, I wonder. Of course you can't stay, you must come and be made decent. Susan shall finish your dolls' wash." [264]

"Oh, no! please Mamma, it's so much nicer to do 'em ourselves," pleaded Lulu. "Don't let Susan touch them. We love so to wash. Dinah says we're worth our wages, we do it so well."

"Dinah should not say such things," said Mrs. Frisbie, severely, leading the unwilling flock upstairs. "Now, Lulu, do look pleasant. I really cannot have all this fuss made each time that I tell you to come and sit with me and behave like little ladies. This passion for house-work is vulgar; I don't like it at all. With plenty of servants in the house, and your Pa's money, and all, there's no need that you should know any thing about such common doings. Now, go upstairs and tell Justine to put on your French cambrics and your sashes, and when you're ready come straight down. I want you."

Mrs. Frisbie went into the drawing-room as she spoke, and shut the door behind her with a little bang. She was a good-natured woman in the main, but at that moment she was really put out. Why should *her* children have this outlandish taste for cooking and washing? *She* liked to be beautifully dressed, and sit on a sofa doing nothing. Why shouldn't they like to do the same? It was really too bad, she thought. The children were not a bit like her. They were "clear Frisbie straight through," and it was really a trial. She felt quite unhappy, and, as I said, gave the door a bang to relieve her feelings. [265]

While the children are putting on their French cambrics, I will tell you a Fairy story.

Once upon a time, in a wonderful country where all the inhabitants are Kings and Queens, a little Prince was born. His father's kingdom was not big, being only a farm-house, two clover fields, and a potato patch, but none the less was it a kingdom, because no one else had right to it or could dispute it. The Prince was born on a Sunday, and the Fairy who has charge of Sunday children came and stood by his cradle. [266]

"You shall be lucky always," she said, touching the baby's soft cheek with the point of her finger. "I give you four gifts, Sunday Prince. The first is a strong and handsome body,"—and the Fairy, as she spoke, stroked the small limbs with her wand. "The next is a sweet temper. The third is a brave heart—you'll need it, little Prince,—all people do in this world. Lastly,"—and the Fairy touched the sleeping eyelids lightly,—"I give you a pair of clear, keen eyes, which shall tell you the difference between hawks and hernshaws from the very beginning. This gift is worth something, as you'll soon find out. Now, good-by, my baby. Sleep well, and grow fast. Here's a pretty plaything for you,"—taking from her pocket a big, beautiful bubble, and tossing it in the air. "Run fast," she said, "blow hard, follow the bubble, catch it if you can; but, above all things, keep it flying. Its name is Fortune,—a pretty name. All the little boys like to run after my bubbles. As long as it keeps up, up, all will go brightly; but if you fail to blow, or blow unwisely, and it goes down, down—well—you'll be lucky either way, my Sunday Prince; 'tis I who say so." Thereupon the Fairy kissed the sleeping child and vanished. [267]

Only the clear eyes of the little Prince could see the rainbow bubble which hung in air above his head, and flew before, wherever he went. He began to see it when still very young, and as he grew bigger he saw it more clearly still. And he blew, blew, and the gay bubble went up, up, and all things prospered. Before long, the baby Prince was a man, and took possession of his kingdom; for in this wonderful country plenty of kingdoms are to be had, and Princes are not forced to wait until their fathers die before taking possession of their crowns. So, being a grown Prince, he began to look about for a Princess to share his throne with him. And he found a very nice little one; who, when he asked her, made a courtesy and said, "Yes, thank you," in the prettiest way possible. Then the Prince was pleased, and sent for a priest. The priest's name was Slack. He belonged to the Methodist persuasion, Otsego Conference, but he married the Prince and the Princess just as well as though he had been an archbishop. They went to live in a small palace of their own, and after awhile some little princelings came to live with them, and they were all very happy together. And the lucky Prince, being fairy-blessed, kept on being lucky. The rainbow bubble flew before; he blew strongly, wisely; it soared high, high, and all things prospered. His kingdom increased, his treasure-bags were filled with gold. By and by the little palace grew too small for them, or they fancied it so, and another was built, a real palace this time, with lawns, and fish-ponds, and graperies, and gardens. The only trouble was— [268]

But here come the children downstairs, so I must drop into plain prose, and tell you what already you have guessed, that the Prince I mean is their father, John Frisbie,—Prince John, if you like,—and the Princess's name was Mary Jones before she was married, but now, of course, it is Mary Frisbie. There were five of the princelings,—Jack and May and Arthur and Lulu and Bertha. The new palace was a beautiful house, with wide, lovely grounds. But since they came to live in it, Mrs. Frisbie had taken it into her head that so fine a house required manners to match, and that the things the children liked best, and had been allowed to do in the small house, were vulgar, and might not be permitted now. This was a real trouble to the little ones, for, as their mother said, they were "clear Frisbie all through;" and the thrift, energy, cleverness, and other qualities by which their father had made his fortune, were strong in them. Perhaps the Fairy had visited their cradles also. Who knows? [269]

The girls came down crisp and fresh in their ruffled frocks, with curls smoothed, sashes tied, and their company dolls in their hands.

"Now sit down and be comfortable," said Mrs. Frisbie. [270]

Dear me, what a number of meanings there are to that word "comfortable"! Mrs. Frisbie thought it meant pretty clothes, pretty rooms, and nothing to do. To the boys it took the form of hard, hearty work of some sort. Papa understood it as a cool day in his office, business brisk, but not too brisk, and an occasional cigar. May, Lulu, and Bertha would have translated it thus: "our old gingham and our own way;" while Dinah, if asked, would have defined "comfort" as having the kitchen "clar'd up" after a successful bake, and being free to sit down, darn stockings, and read the "Illustrated Pirate's Manual," a newspaper she much affected on account of the blood-thirstiness of its pictures. None of these various explanations of the word mean the same thing, you see. And the drollest part is that no one can ever be made "comfortable" in any way but his own: that is impossible. [271]

The company dolls were very fine ladies indeed; they came from Paris, and had trunks full of splendid dresses. The children did not care much for them, and liked better certain decrepit babies of rag and composition, which were thought too shabby to be allowed in the parlor.

"Where are the boys?" asked Mrs. Frisbie, when the small sisters had settled themselves.

"Jack was going to have his sale this afternoon," replied Mary. "And Arthur is auctioneer."

"His sale! What on earth is that?"

"Why, Mamma—don't you know? Jack's chickens, of course. Croppy had eleven and Top-knot

nine. There's a 'corner' in chickens just now, Arthur says, because most of the other boys have lost theirs. Alfred's were sick and died, and the rats ate all of Charley Ross's, and a hawk carried off five of Howard's. Jack expects to make a lot of money, because Croppy is a Bramahpootra hen, you know, and her chicks are very valuable."

"Corner! Lot of money! Oh, dear!" sighed poor Mrs. Frisbie, "what words the boys do teach you. Where they learn them I can't imagine. Not from me." [272]

"From Papa, I guess," explained Lulu innocently. "He used to have hens when he was little, and sell 'em. It was splendid fun, he says. Grandmamma thinks that Jack is just Papa over again."

"All of you are," said Mrs. Frisbie. "Not one of you is a bit like me. Can't you sit still, Bertha? What *are* you doing there with your handkerchief?"

"Only dusting the table leg, Mamma; it wasn't quite clean."

"Dear, dear! and in your nice frock. Do let the furniture alone, child. Ring for Bridget, if any thing wants cleaning. You're a real Meddlesome Matty, Bertha."

"O Mamma!" cried Bertha, aggrieved. "Grandmamma taught me to dust when we lived in the other house, you know. Grandmamma said it was a good thing for little girls to be useful. And I didn't meddle with any thing on the table; really I didn't, Mamma." [273]

"Never mind, dear," said Mrs. Frisbie. "It's no great matter, only I don't like to have you do such things. Now sit still and play with your doll." She opened a book and began to read. The children crept nearer to each other and talked in low whispers.

"Let's play that Eugenie and Victoria are little girls come to make each other a visit, and Isabella is their Mamma."

"You can't! Little girls never have trains to their dresses or necklaces."

"Oh! I wish Nippy Scatch-Face and old Maria were down here," sighed Lulu.

"I'll tell you," put in May. "We'll play they are three stiff old ladies, who always wear best clothes, you know, and sit so in chairs; and that Nippy and Maria are coming to make them a visit. They needn't really come, you know. Mrs. Eugenie, sit up straight. Now listen to the hateful old thing! She's talking to Victoria." [274]

"Sister, when are those children coming?"

"I don't know, sister," squeaked back Lulu in the character of Victoria. "I wish they wouldn't come at all. Children are the bane of my existence."

"You horrid doll, talking that way about *my* baby," cried Bertha, giving Victoria a shove.

"Don't, Beppie; you'll push her down," said May. Then changing her voice again, "Your manners is most awful, I'm sure," she squeaked, in the person of the irate Victoria.

All the children giggled, and Mrs. Frisbie looked up from her book.

At this moment in ran the two boys, hot, dusty, and excited,—Arthur with a handful of "fractional currency," and Jack waving a two-dollar bill.

"See!" they cried. "Four dollars and sixty-five cents. Isn't that splendid? Mr. Ashurst bought all the Croppys, and gave twenty-five cents a piece for them."

"Let us see, let us see!" cried the little girls, precipitating themselves on the money. [275]

"Look here, now, Mary Frisbie—no snatching!" protested Jack,—"I haven't told you the best yet. Mr. Ashurst says we're such good farmers, that he'll give us work whenever we like to take it. He says I could earn three dollars a week *now*! Think of that."

"Oh, how much!" cried Lulu, awe-struck. "What could you do with so much, Jacky?"

"Now boys,—listen to me," said their mother. "Go upstairs right away and get ready for tea. You look like real farmers' boys at this moment, I declare, so hot and dusty. I don't wonder Mr. Ashurst offered you work,—though I think it was very impertinent of him to do so. I hope you said that your father's sons didn't need to earn money in any such way."

"Why, Mamma, of course I didn't. Arthur and me like to work, and we are going to somehow just as soon as we're big enough. It's lots better fun than going to school. Besides, Papa says we may. He told us all American boys ought to work, whether their fathers are rich or poor." [276]

"Papa likes to talk nonsense with you," said Mrs. Frisbie, biting her lips. "Go up now and dress."

There was a howl from both boys.

"O Mamma! not yet. It's too early for that horrid dressing, oh, a great deal too early, Mamma. We've got a lot to do in our chicken house. Mayn't we go out again for a little while, just for half an hour, Mamma?"

"Well—for half an hour you may," said Mrs. Frisbie reluctantly, consulting her watch. Away clattered the boys,—the girls looking after them with envious eyes.

Presently Lulu slipped out and was gone a few minutes. She came back sparkling, with her cheeks very rosy.

"Mamma," she cried, "what *do* you think? David says if you haven't any objections, we may each of us have a little garden down there behind the asparagus beds. He'll make them for us, Mamma, he says, and we can plant just what we like in them. O Mamma! don't have any objections—please."

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"Will he really?" cried May. "I'll put peppergrass in mine,—and parsley. Dinah says she never has as much parsley as she wants."

"Yes, and little green cucumbers," added Bertha,—"little teeny-weeny ones, for pickles, you know. Dinah is always wishing she could get them, but David never sends in any but big ones. O Mamma! do say yes. It'll be so nice."

"Cucumbers! peppergrass! Well, you are the strangest children! Why don't you have pinks and pansies and pretty things?"

"Oh, we will, and make bouquets for you, Mamma; only we thought of the useful things first."

"Somehow you always do think of useful things first," murmured Mrs. Frisbie. "However, have the gardens if you like. I'm sure I don't care."

The children's thanks were cut short by the click of a latch-key in the hall-door.

"There's Papa!" cried Bertha; and, like three arrows dismissed from the string, the children were off to greet him. It was always a joy to have Papa come home.

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He was looking grave as he opened the door, but his face lit up at once at the sight of his little girls. Papa's face without a smile upon it would have seemed a strange sight indeed to that household. It did cross May's mind that evening that the smiles were not so merry as usual, and that Papa seemed tired; but no one else noticed it, either then or on the days that followed.

Bubbles are pretty things, but the keeping them in air grows wearisome after a while. About this time the rainbow bubble set afloat by the kind Fairy for the sleeping Prince began to misbehave itself. Contrary winds seized it; it flew wildly, now here, now there; and, instead of sailing steadily, it was first up, then down, then up again, but more down than up. Prince John blew his hardest and did his best to keep it from sinking; for he knew, as we all do, that once let a bubble touch the earth, and all is over,—its glittering wings collapse,—they fly no more.

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So the weeks went on. Unconscious of trouble, the children dug and planted in their little gardens. Each new leaf and shoot was a wonder and a delight to them. Bertha's plants flourished less than the others, because of a habit she had of digging them all up daily to see how the roots were coming on; but, except for that, all went well, and the bluest of skies stretched itself over the heads of the small gardeners. In the City, where Papa's office was, the sky was not blue at all. High winds were blowing, stormy black clouds shut out the sun. Bubbles were sinking and bursting on every side, and men's hearts were heavy and anxious. Prince John did his best. He watched his bubble anxiously, and followed it far. It was fairy-blessed, as I said, and its wings were stronger than bubble's wings usually are; but at last the day came when it could soar no longer. The pretty shining sphere hovered, sank, touched a rock, and in a minute—hey! presto!—there was no bubble there; it had utterly disappeared, and Prince Frisbie, with a very sober face, walked home to tell his wife that he had lost every thing they had in the world. This was not a pleasant or an easy thing to do, as you can readily imagine.

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The children never forgot this evening. They used to vaguely refer to it among themselves as "That time, you know." Papa came in very quiet and pale, and shut himself up with Mamma. She—poor soul!—was much distressed, and sobbed and cried. They heard her as they came downstairs dressed for the evening, and it frightened them. Papa, coming out after a while, found them huddled together in a dismayed little group in the corner of the entry.

"O Papa! is it any thing dreadful?" asked May. "Is Mamma sick?"

"No, not sick, darling, but very much troubled about something. Come with me and I will explain it to you." Then Papa led them into the dining-room; and, with Bertha on his knee and the others close to him, he told them that he had lost a great deal of money (almost all he had), and they would have to sell the place, and go and live in a little house somewhere,—he didn't yet know exactly where.

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The children had looked downcast enough when Papa commenced, but at this point their faces brightened.

"A really little house?" exclaimed May. "O Papa! do you know, I'm glad. Little houses are so pretty and cunning, I always wanted to live in one. Susie Brown's Papa does, and Susie can go into the kitchen whenever she likes, and she toasts the bread for tea, and does all sorts of things. Do you suppose that I may toast the bread when we go to live in our little house, Papa?"

"I daresay Mamma will be glad of your help in a great many ways," replied Papa.

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"Shall we be poor, very poor indeed?" demanded Bertha anxiously.

"Pretty poor for the present, I am afraid," replied her Father.

"Goody! goody!" cried May, hopping up and down on her toes. "I always wanted to be poor, it's so nice! We'll have the *best* times, Papa; see if we don't!"

Papa actually laughed, May's happy, eager face amused him so much.

"I know what we'll do," said Jack, who had been considering the matter in silence. "We'll raise lots of chickens, and give you all the money, Papa."

"My boy, I am afraid you must give up your chickens. There will be no place for them in the new home."

"Must we?" Jack gave a little gulp, but went on manfully, "Well, never mind, we'll find something else that we can do."

"Mr. Ashurst says Jack is the 'handiest' boy he ever saw, Papa," put in Arthur eagerly. [283]

"Well, handiness is a capital stock-in-trade. Now, dears, one thing,—be as good and gentle as possible with Mamma, and don't trouble her a bit more than you can help."

"We will, we will," promised the little flock. Mrs. Frisbie was quite right in saying that the children took after their father. Their brave, bright natures were as unlike hers as possible.

It is sad to see what short time it requires to pull down and destroy a home which has taken years to build. The Frisbies' handsome, luxurious house seemed to change and empty all in a moment. Carriages were sold, servants dismissed. Furniture was packed and carried away. In a few days nothing remained but a fine empty shell, with a staring advertisement of "For Sale" pasted on it. The familiar look was all gone, and everybody was glad to get away from the place. It took some time to find the "little house," and some time longer to put it to rights. Papa attended to all that, the children remaining meanwhile with Grandmamma. Mamma had taken to her bed with a nervous attack, and cried day and night. Everybody was sorry; they all waited on her, and did their best to raise her spirits. [284]

At last the new home was ready. It was evening when the carriage set them down at the gate, and they could only see that there were trees and shrubs in the tiny front yard, and a cheerful light streaming from the door, where Dinah stood to welcome them,—dear old Di, who had insisted on following their fortunes as maid of all work. As they drew nearer, they perceived that she stood in a small, carpeted entry, with a room on either side. The room on the right was a sitting-room; the room on the left, a kitchen. There were three bedrooms upstairs, and a small coop in the attic for Dinah. That was all; for it was indeed a "really little house," as Papa had said.

"Oh, how pretty!" cried Lulu, as she caught sight of the freshly papered parlor, with its cheerful carpet, and table laid for tea, and on the other hand of the glowing kitchen stove and steaming kettle. "Such a nice parlor, and the dearest kitchen. Why, it's smaller than Susie Brown's house, which we used to wish we lived in. Don't you like it, Mamma? I think it's *sweet*." [285]

Mrs. Frisbie only sighed by way of reply. But the children's pleasure was a comfort to Papa. He and Dinah had worked hard to make the little home look attractive. They had papered the walls themselves, put up shelves and hooks, arranged the furniture, and even set a few late flowers in the beds, that the garden might not seem bare and neglected.

The next day was a very busy one, for there were all the trunks to unpack, and the bureau drawers to fill, and places to be settled for this thing and that. By night they were in pretty good order, and began to feel at home, as people always do when their belongings are comfortably arranged about them.

Mrs. Frisbie was growing less doleful. Her husband, who was very tired, lay back in a big arm-chair. The evening was chilly, so Dinah had lighted a small fire of chips, which flickered and made the room bright. The glow danced on Bertha's glossy curls as she sat at Mamma's knee, and on the rosy faces of the two boys. All looked cheerful and cosy; a smell of toast came across the entry from the kitchen. [286]

"Bertha, your hair is very nicely curled to-night," said Mrs. Frisbie. "I don't know how Dinah found time to do it."

"Dinah didn't do it, Mamma. May did it. She did Lulu's too, and Lulu did hers. We're always going to dress each other now."

Just then May came in with a plate of hot toast in her hand. Lulu followed with the teapot.

"It's so nice having the kitchen close by," said May, "instead of way off as it was in the other house. This toast is as warm as—toast"—she concluded, not knowing exactly how to end her simile. [287]

"Your face looks as warm as toast, too," remarked her Father.

"Yes, Papa, that's because I toasted to-night. Dinah was bringing the clothes from the lines, so she let me."

"I stamped the butter, Papa," added Lulu. "Look, isn't it a pretty little pat?"

"And I sifted the sugar for the blackberries," put in Bertha from her place at Mamma's knee.

"You don't mind, do you Mamma?" observed Mary anxiously. "Di pinned a big apron over my

frock. See, it hasn't got a spot on it."

"I'm glad she did," said Mrs. Frisbie, surprised. "But it doesn't matter so much how you dress here, you know. It was in the other house I was so particular."

"But I like to please you, Mamma, and you always want us to look nice, you know. We mean to be very careful now, because if we don't we shall worry you all the time."

Mrs. Frisbie put her arm round Mary and kissed her.

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"I declare," she said, half-laughing, half-crying. "This house *is* pleasant. It seems snuggler somehow, as if we were closer together than we ever were before. I guess I shall like it after all."

"Hurrah!" cried Prince John, rousing from his fatigue at these comfortable words. "That's right, Molly, dear! You don't know what good it does me to hear you say so. If only you can look bright and the chicks keep well and happy, I shall go to work with a will, and the world will come right yet." He smiled with a look of conscious power as he spoke; his eyes were keen and eager.

I think that just then, as the children gathered round the table, as Mrs. Frisbie took up the teapot and began to pour the tea, and her husband pushed back his chair,—that just then, at that very moment, the Fairy entered the room. Nobody saw her, but there she was! She smiled on the group; then she took from her pocket another bubble, more splendid than the one she had brought before, and tossed it into the air above Prince John's head. "There," she said, "catch that. You'll have it this time, and it won't break and go to pieces as the first one did. Look at it sailing up, up, up,—this bubble has wings, but it sails toward and not away from you. Catch it, as I say, and make it yours. But even when it *is* yours, when you hold it in your hand and are sure of it, you'll be no luckier and no happier, my lucky Prince, than you are at this moment, in this small house, with love about you, hope in your heart, and all these precious little people to work for, and to reward you when work is done."

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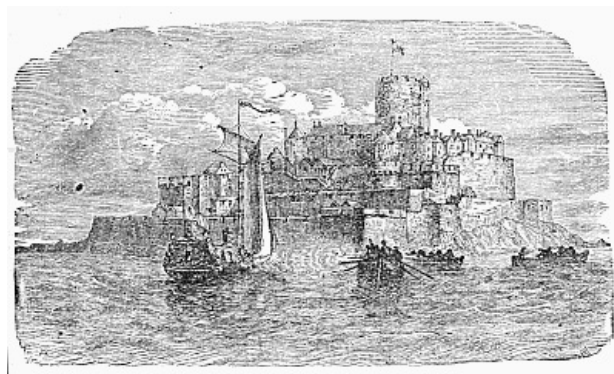
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