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**Title:** Dorothy's House Party

**Author:** Evelyn Raymond

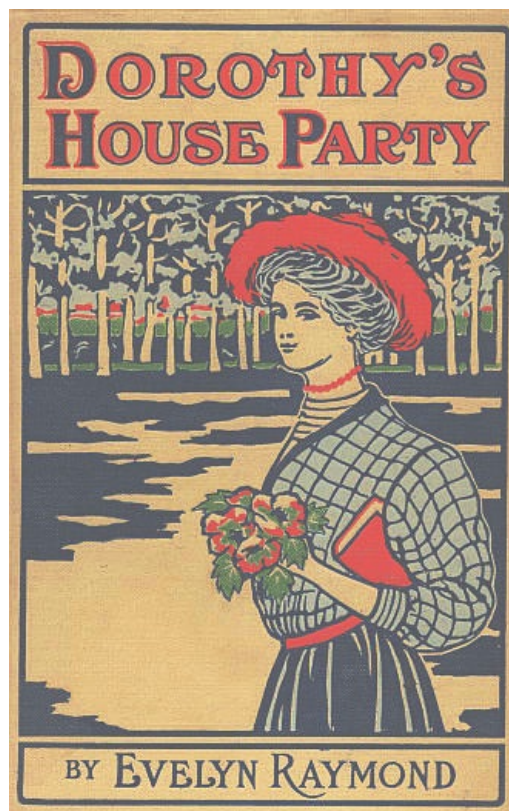
**Illustrator:** S. Schneider

**Release Date:** May 15, 2009 [EBook #28805]

**Language:** English

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## Dorothy's House Party

BY  
**EVELYN RAYMOND**  
Illustrations by S. Schneider

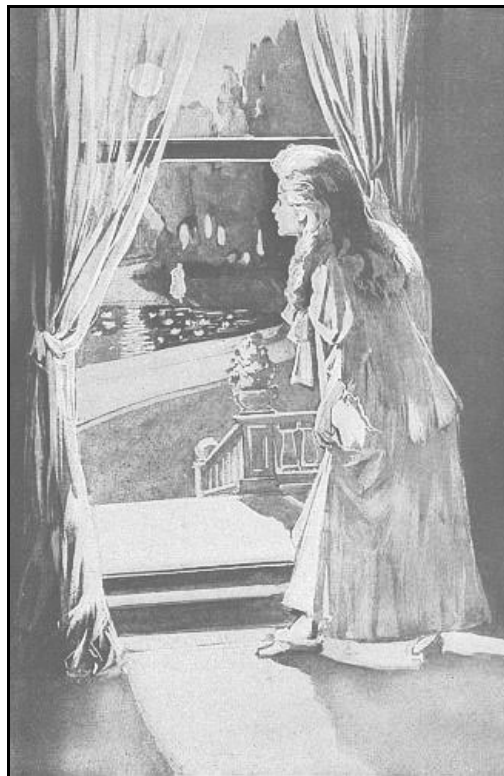


**CHATTERTON-PECK COMPANY**  
NEW YORK, N. Y.

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**THE MOONLIGHTED FIGURE BY  
THE LILY POND.**  
*Dorothy's House Party.*

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## DOROTHY'S HOUSE PARTY

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### CHAPTER I

#### THE END OF AN INFAIR

Dorothy sat up in bed and looked about her. For a moment she did not realize where she was nor how she came to be in such a strange and charming room. Then from somewhere in the distance sounded a merry, musical voice, singing:

“Old Noah of old he built an ark—  
One more river to cross!  
He built it out of hickory bark—  
One more riv——”

The refrain was never finished. Dorothy was at the open window calling lustily:

“Alfy! Alfy Babcock! Come right up here this very, very minute!”

“Heigho, Sleepy Head! You awake at last? Well, I should think it was time. I’ll be right up, just as soon as I can put these yeller artemisias into Mis’ Calvert’s yeller bowl.”

A fleeting regret that she had not waked earlier, that it was not she who had gathered the morning nosegay for Mrs. Betty’s table, shadowed the fair face of the late riser; but was promptly banished as the full memory of all that happened on the night before came back to her. Skipping from point to point of the pretty chamber she examined it in detail, exclaiming in delight over this or that and, finally, darting within the white-tiled bathroom where some thoughtful person had already drawn water for her bath.

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“Oh! it’s like a fairy-tale and I’m in a real fairy-land, seems if! What a dainty tub! What heaps of great soft towels! and what a lovely bath-robe! And oh! what a wonderful great-aunt Betty!”

A moisture not wholly due to the luxurious bath filled Dorothy’s eyes, as she took her plunge, for her heart was touched by the evidences of the loving forethought which had thus prepared for her home-coming before she herself knew she possessed a birthright home. Of her past life the reader if interested may learn quite fully, for the facts are detailed in the two books known as “Dorothy’s Schooling,” and “[Dorothy’s Travels.](#)”

So though it was still a radiantly happy girl who welcomed Alfaretta it was a thoughtful one; so that Alfy again paused in her caroling to demand:

“Well, Dolly Doodles, what’s the matter? If I’d been as lucky as you be I wouldn’t draw no down-corners to my mouth, I wouldn’t! I’d sing louder’n ever and just hustle them ‘animals’ into that ‘ark’ ‘two by two,’ for ‘There’s one more river to cross! One more river—One more

river to cro-o-o-oss!”

But without waiting for an answer the young farm girl caught her old playmate in her strong arms and gave her a vigorous hug. [Pg 11]

“There, Miss Dorothy Calvert, that don’t begin to show how tickled I am ’bout your good fortune! I’m so full of it all ’t I couldn’t hardly sleep. Fact. You needn’t stare, though ’tis a queer thing, ’cause if there’s one thing more to my liking than another it’s going to bed on such a bed as Mis’ Calvert has in every single one of her rooms. There ain’t no husk-mattresses nor straw shake-downs to Deerhurst. No, siree! I know, for I went into every single chamber from roof to cellar and pinched ’em all. The ‘help’ sleep just as soft as the old lady does herself. Softer, Ma says, ’cause old-timers like her if they didn’t use feathers just laid on hard things ’t even Ma’d despise to have in her house. However, everybody to their taste! and say, Dolly, which of all them pretty dresses are you goin’ to put on? What? That plain old white linen? Well, if you don’t beat the Dutch and always did! If I had all them silks and satins I’d pick out the handsomest and wear that first, and next handsome next, and keep right on, one after another, till I’d tried the lot, if I had to change a dozen times a day. See! I found them cardinal flowers down by the brook and fetched ’em to you.”

With one of her sudden changes of mood Alfaretta dropped down upon the floor and pulled from the pocket of her old-fashioned skirt a cheap paper pad. It was well scribbled with penciled notes which the girl critically examined, as she explained: [Pg 12]

“You see, Dorothy, that your story is like reading a library book, only more so; and lest I should forget some part of it I’ve wrote it all down. Listen. I’ll read while you finish fixin’. My! What a finicky girl you are! You was born——”

“But, Alfy, please! I protest against hearing my own history that way!” cried the other, making a playful dash toward the notes, which Alfaretta as promptly hid behind her. Then, knowing from experience that contest was useless, Dorothy resigned herself to hearing the following data droned forth:

“You was born——”

“Of course!”

“’Twon’t do you a mite of good to interrupt. I’m in real down earnest. You’ll—you’ll be goin’ away again, pretty soon, and having come into your fortunes you’ll be forgettin’——” Here Alfy sobbed and dabbed her knuckles into her eyes——“Cause Ma says ’tain’t likely you’ll ever be the same girl again——”

“I should like to know why not? Go on with your story-notes. I’d even rather hear them than you talking foolishly!”

“Well, I’ll have to begin all over again. You was born. Your parents were respectful—respective—hmm! all right folks though deluged with poverty. Then they died and left you a little, squallin’ baby——” [Pg 13]

“Alfy, dear, that’s unkind! I don’t admit that I ever could be a squaller!”

Alfaretta raised her big eyes and replied:

“I ain’t makin’ that up. It’s exactly what Mis’ Calvert said her own self. ’Twas why she wouldn’t bother raisin’ you herself after your Pa and Ma died and sent you to her. So she turned you into a foundling orphan and your Father John and Mother Martha brung you up. Then your old Aunt Betty got acquainted with you an’ liked you, and sort of hankered to get you back again out of the folkses’ hands what had took all the trouble of your growing into a sizable girl. Some other folks appear to have took a hand in the business of huntin’ up your really truly name; and Ma Babcock she says that Mis’ Calvert’d have had to own up to your bein’ her kin after awhile, whether or no; so she just up and told the whole business; and here you be—a naires! and so rich you won’t never know old friends again—maybe—though I always thought you—you—you—Oh! my!”

Alfaretta bowed her head to her knees and began to cry with the same vigor she brought to every act of her life. But she didn’t cry for long; because Dorothy was promptly down upon the floor, also, and pulling the weeper’s hands from her flushed face, commanded: [Pg 14]

“It’s my turn. I’ve a story to tell. It’s all about a girl named Alfaretta Babcock, who was the first friend I ever had ‘up-mounting,’ and is going to be my friend all my life unless she chooses otherwise. This Alfy I’m talking about is one of the truest, bravest girls in the world. The only trouble is that she gets silly notions into her auburn head, once in a while, and it takes kisses just like these—and these—and these—to drive them out. She’s going to be a teacher when she grows up——”

Alfy's tears were dried, her face smiling, as she now interrupted:

"No. I've changed my mind. I'm either going to be a trained nurse or a singer in an opera. Premier donnors, they call 'em."

"Heigho! Why all that?"

Alfaretta dropped her voice to a whisper and cautiously glanced over her shoulder as she explained:

"Creatorex!"

"Miss Creatorex? What has that poor, learned dear to do with it?" demanded Dorothy, astonished.

"Everything. You see, she's the first woman teacher I ever saw—the first *woman* one. Rather than grow into such a stiff, can't-bend-to-save-your-life kind of person I'd do 'most anything. Hark! There's somebody to the door!"

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Both girls sprang to open it and found a maid with a summons to breakfast; also with the request that "Miss Dorothy should attend Mrs. Calvert in her own room before going below stairs."

Dorothy sped away but Alfaretta lingered to put the cardinal flowers into a vase and to admire afresh the beautiful apartment assigned to her friend.

There was honest pleasure in the good fortune which had come to another and yet there was a little envy mingled with the pleasure. It was with a rather vicious little shake that she picked up the soft bath-robe Dorothy had discarded and folded it about her own shoulders; but the reflection of her own face in the mirror opposite so surprised her by its crossness that she stared, then laughed aloud.

"Huh! Ain't you ashamed of yourself, Alfy Babcock? When you put on that two-sticks, ten-penny-nails-look you're homely enough to eat hay! 'Tain't so long ago that Dolly hadn't no more in this world than you've got this minute. Not half so much either, 'cause she hadn't nobody belongin', nobody at all, whilst you had a Ma and Pa and a whole slew of brothers and sisters. All she's found yet is a terrible-old great-aunt and some money. Pa says 'money's no good,' and—I guess I'll go get my breakfast, too."

Her good temper quite restored, this young philosopher skipped away and joined her mother and sisters in the great kitchen where they were already seated at table.

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In Mrs. Calvert's room the happy old lady greeted Dorothy with such a warmth of affection that the girl felt no lack of others "belongin'"—for which lack Alfaretta had pitied her—and only yearned to find a way to show her own love and gratitude. There followed a happy half-hour of mutual confidences, a brief reading of the Word, a simple prayer for blessing on their new lives together, and the pair descended to the cheerful room where their guests were assembling: each, it seemed, enjoying to the utmost their beautiful surroundings and their hostess's hospitality.

Jests flew, laughter rang, and the Judge could scarcely refrain from song; when just as the meal was over James Barlow appeared at the long, open window, his mail bag over his shoulder, and instant silence succeeded as each person within waited eagerly for his share in the contents of the pouch.

There were letters in plenty, and some faces grew grave over their reading, while for the Judge there was a telegram which Jim explained had just come to the office where was, also, the post-office.

"Hmm! that ends my vacation in earnest! I meant to stay a bit longer out of business, but—Mrs. Calvert, when's the next train cityward, please?"

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Mrs. Betty returned:

"I've half a mind not to tell you! But, of course, if—Dorothy, you'll find a parcel of time tables in that desk by the fireplace. Take them to Judge Breckenridge, please."

Nor was he the only one to make them useful; for it followed that the Deerhurst "infair," begun on the night before and planned to extend over several days must be abruptly ended. The hostess was herself summoned elsewhere, to attend the sick bed of a lifelong friend, and the summons was not one to be denied. Even while she was reading the brief note she knew that she must forsake her post and with a thrill of pride reflected that now she had one of her own kin to install in her place. Young as Dorothy was she must act as the hostess of Deerhurst, even to these gray-headed guests now gathered there. But, presently it

appeared, that there would be no guests to entertain. President Ryall was needed to supervise some changes at his college; merchant Ihrie must hasten to disentangle some badly mixed business affairs; Dr. Mantler would miss the "most interesting case on record if he did not come at once to his hospital;" and so, to the four old "boys," who had camped together in the Markland forests, the end of playtime had indeed come, and each after his kind must resume his man's work for the world.

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Young Tom Hungerford's furlough from West Point expired that morning, and his mother felt that when he returned to the Academy she must establish herself for a time at the hotel near-by. At her invitation Mrs. Cook and Melvin were to accompany her; that these Nova Scotians might see something of lads' military training outside their own beloved Province.

Catching the general spirit of unrest, Miss Greatorex suddenly announced that it was time she returned to the Rhinelander. Maybe she dreaded being left the only adult in the house, for as yet no mention had been made as to the disposal of her charges, Molly and Dolly. Certainly, she felt that having been burdened with their cares during the long summer she was entitled to a few days' rest before the beginning of a new school year. The lady added:

"Besides all that, I shall have no more than sufficient time to arrange my specimens that I obtained in Markland."

A short silence fell once more upon that company in the breakfast room, and somehow the brilliant sunshine seemed to dim as if a storm were rising; or was it but a mist of disappointment rising to Dorothy's eyes as she glanced from one to another and realized how well she loved them each and all, and how sad the parting was.

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But her last glance fell upon her Aunt Betty's face and she bravely smiled back into the kindly eyes so tenderly smiling upon her. After all, that was the Calvert way! To meet whatever came with "head erect and colors flying," and she, too, was Calvert. She'd prove it! Cried she, with that characteristic toss of her brown curls:

"Well, if everybody *must*—what can I do to help? As for you two, darling 'father' and 'mother,' I hope nothing's going to take you away from Deerhurst all of a sudden, like the rest!"

But there was, although there was no suddenness in this decision. As they presently informed her, the crippled ex-postman had made himself so useful at the sanitarium where he had spent the summer that he had been offered a permanent position there, at a larger salary than he had ever received as letter-carrier in Baltimore. He had also secured for his wife Martha a position as matron of the institution; and the independence thus achieved meant more to that ambitious woman than even a care-free home with her beloved foster-child. The death of their old aunt had released Martha from that separation from her husband which had so sorely tried her and, though sorry to part again from Dorothy, she was still a very happy woman.

"We shall always love one another, Dolly dear, but we've come to 'the parting of the ways.' Each as the Lord leads, little girl; but what is the reason, now that Mrs. Calvert's grown-up party has ended, what is the reason, I say, that you don't give a House Party of your very own?"

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## CHAPTER II

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### CHOOSING THE GUESTS

Those who must go went quickly. By trains and boats, the various guests who had gathered at Deerhurst to welcome Dorothy's home-coming had departed, and at nightfall the great house seemed strangely empty and deserted. Even Ma Babcock had relinquished her post as temporary housekeeper and had hurried across the river to nurse a seriously ill neighbor.

"I may be back tomorrer and I may not be back till the day after never! I declare I'm all of a fluster, what with Mis' Calvert goin' away sort of leavin' me in charge—though them old colored folks o' her'n didn't like that none too well!—and me havin' to turn my back on duty this way. But sickness don't wait for time nor tide and typhoid's got to be tended mighty sharp; and I couldn't nohow refuse to go to one Mis' Judge Satterlee's nieces, she that's been as friendly with me as if I was a regular 'ristocratic like herself. No, when a body's earned a repitation for fetchin' folks through typhoid you got to live up to it. Sorry, Dolly C.; but I'll stow the girls, Barry and Clarry and the rest, 'round amongst the neighbors

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somewhere, 'fore I start. As for you, Alfy——”

“Oh, Mrs. Babcock! Don't take Alfy away! Please, please don't!” cried Dorothy, fairly clutching at the matron's flying skirts, already disappearing through the doorway.

Mrs. Babcock switched herself free and answered through the opening:

“All right. Alfy can do as she likes. She can go down help tend store to Liza Jane's, t'other village, where she's been asked to go more'n once, or finish her visit to you. Ary one suits me so long as you don't let nor hender me no more.”

Not all of this reply was distinct, for it was finished on the floor above, whither the energetic farm-wife had sped to “pack her duds”; but enough was heard to set Alfaretta skipping around the room in an ecstasy of delight, exclaiming:

“I'm to be to the House Party! Oh! I'm to be to the Party!”

But this little episode had been by daylight, and now the dusk had fallen. The great parlors were shut and dark. Prudent old Ephraim had declared:

“I ain't gwine see my Miss Betty's substance wasted, now she's outer de way he'se'f. One lamp in de hall's ernuf fo' seein' an' doan' none yo chillen's go foolin' to ast mo'.”

So the long halls were dim and full of shadows; the wind had risen and howled about the windows, which were being carefully shuttered by the servants against the coming storm which Dinah prophesied would prove the “ekernoctial” and a “turr'ble one”; and to banish the loneliness which now tormented her, Dorothy proposed: [Pg 23]

“Let's go into the library. There's a fine fire on the hearth and the big lamp is stationary. Ephraim can't find fault with us for using that. We'll make out a list of the folks to ask. You, Alfy, shall do the writing, you do write such a fine, big hand. Come on, Molly girl! I'm so glad you begged to stay behind your Auntie Lu. Aren't you?”

“Ye-es, I reckon so!” answered the little Southerner, with unflattering hesitation. “But it's mighty lonesome in this big house without her and West Point's just—just heavenly!”

“Any place would be 'heavenly' to you, Molly Breckenridge, that was full of boys!” retorted Dolly. “But don't fancy you'd be allowed to see any of those cadets even if you were there. Beg pardon, girlie, I don't want to be cross, but how can I have a decent party if you don't help? Besides, there's Monty and Jim left. They ought to count for something.”

“Count for mighty little, seems if, the way they sneak off by themselves and leave us alone. Gentlemen, *Southern* gentlemen, wouldn't act that way!” [Pg 24]

“Oh, sillies! What's the use of spoiling a splendid time? It's just like a cow givin' a pailful of milk then turnin' round and kickin' it over!” cried good-natured Alfy, throwing an arm around each girl's shoulders and playfully forcing her into the cheery library and into a great, soft chair. Of course, they all laughed and hugged one another and acknowledged that they had been “sillies” indeed; and a moment later three girlish heads were bending together above the roomy table, whereon was set such wonderful writing materials as fairly dazzled Alfaretta's eyes. So impressed was she that she exclaimed as if to herself:

“After all, I guess I won't be a trained nurse nor a opera singer. I'll be a writin' woman and have just such pens and things as these.”

“Oh, Alfy, you funny dear! You change your mind just as often as I used to!”

“Don't you change it no more, then, Dorothy C.?” demanded the other, quickly.

“No. I don't think I shall ever change it again. I shall do everything the best I can, my music and lessons and all that, but it'll be just for one thing. I lay awake last night wondering how best I could prove grateful for all that's come to me and I reckon I've found out, and it's so—so simple, too.”

“Ha! Let's hear this fine and simple thing, darling Dolly Doodles, and maybe we'll both follow your illustrious example!” cried Molly, smiling. [Pg 25]

“To—to make everybody I know as—as happy as I can;” answered the other slowly.

“Huh! That's nothing! And you can begin right now, on ME!” declared Miss Alfaretta Babcock, with emphasis.

“How?”

“Help me to tell who's to be invited.”

"All right. Head the list with Alfaretta Babcock."

"Cor-rect! I've got her down already. Next?"

"Molly Breckenridge."

"Good enough. Down she goes. Wait till I get her wrote before you say any more."

They waited while Alfie laboriously inscribed the name and finished with the exclamation:

"That's the crookedest back-name I ever wrote."

"You acted as if it hurt you, girlie! You wriggled your tongue like they do in the funny pictures;" teased Molly, but the writer paid no heed.

"Next?"

"Dorothy Calvert."

"So far so good. But them three's all girls. To a party there ought to be as many boys. That's the way we did to our last winter's school treat," declared Alfaretta.

"Well, there's Jim Barlow. He's a boy."

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"He's no *party* kind of a boy," objected Molly, "and he's only—*us*. She hasn't anybody down that isn't us, so far. We few can't make a whole party."

But Dolly and Alfie were wholly serious.

"Montmorency Vavasour-Stark," suggested the former, and the writer essayed that formidable name. Then she threw down the pen in dismay, exclaiming:

"You'll have to indite that yourself or spell it out to me letter by letter. He'll take more'n a whole line if I write him to match the others."

"Oh! he doesn't take up much room, he's so little," reassured idle Molly, with a mischievous glance toward the doorway which the other girls did not observe; while by dint of considerable assistance Alfie "got him down" and "all on one line!" as she triumphantly remarked.

"That's two boys and three girls. Who's your next boy?"

"Melvin Cook. He's easy to write," said Dolly.

"But he's gone."

"Yes, Alfie, but he can come back. They'll all have to 'come' except we who don't have to."

A giggle from behind the portières commented upon this remark and speeding to part them Dolly revealed the hiding figures of their two boy house-mates.

"That's not nice of young gentlemen, to peep and listen," remarked Molly, severely; "but since you've done it, come and take your punishment. You'll have to help. James Barlow, you are appointed the committee of 'ways and means.' I haven't an idea what that 'means,' but I know they always have such a committee."

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"What 'they,' Miss Molly?"

"I don't know, Mister Barlow, but you're—it."

"Monty, you'll furnish the entertainment," she continued.

The recipient of this honor bowed profoundly, then lifted his head with a sudden interest as Dorothy suggested the next name:

"Molly Martin."

Even Alfie looked up in surprise. "Do you mean it, Dorothy C.?"

"Surely. After her put Jane Potter."

James was listening now and inquired:

"What you raking up old times for, Dorothy? Inviting them south-siders that made such a lot of trouble when you lived 'up-mounting' afore your folks leased their farm?"

"Whose 'Party' is this?" asked the young hostess, calmly, yet with a twinkle in her eye.

"All of our'n," answered Alfaretta, complacently.



"How many girls now, Alfy?" questioned Molly, who longed to suggest some of her schoolmates but didn't like a similar reproof to that which fell so harmlessly from Alfaretta's mind. [Pg 28]

"Five," said the secretary, counting upon her fingers. "Me, and you, and her, and—five. Correct."

"Mabel Bruce."

"Who's she? I never heard of her," wondered Molly, while Jim answered:

"She's a girl 'way down in Baltimore. Why, Dorothy C., you know she can't come here!"

"Why not? Listen, all of you. This is to be *my* House Party. It's to be the very nicest ever was. One that everyone who is in it will never, never forget. My darling Aunt Betty gave me permission to ask anybody I chose and to do anything I wanted. She said I had learned some of the lessons of poverty and now I had to begin the harder ones of having more money than most girls have. She said that I mustn't feel badly if the money brought me enemies and some folks got envious."

Here, all unseen by the speaker, honest Alfaretta winced and put her hand to her face; but she quickly dropped it, to listen more closely.

"Mabel was a dear friend even when I was that 'squalling baby' Alfy wrote about. I am to telegraph for her and to send her a telegraphic order for her expenses, though Aunt Betty wasn't sure *that* would be acceptable to Mr. and Mrs. Bruce. To prevent any misunderstanding on that point, you are to make the telegram real long and explicit. I reckon that's what it means to be that committee Molly named. She'll make six girls and that's enough. Six boys—how many yet Alfy?" [Pg 29]

"Three. Them two that are and the one that isn't."

"Mike Martin."

Both Jim and Alfy exclaimed in mutual protest:

"Why Dorothy! That fellow? you must be crazy."

"No, indeed! I'm the sanest one here. That boy is doing the noblest work anybody ever did on this dear old mountain; he's making and keeping the peace between south-side and north-side."

"How do you know, Dorothy?" asked Jim, seriously.

"No matter how I know but I do know. Why, I wouldn't leave him out of my Party for anything. I'd almost rather be out of it myself!"

Then both he and Alfaretta remembered that winter day on the mountain when Dorothy had been the means of saving Mike Martin from an accidental death and the quiet conference afterward of the two, in that inner room of the old forge under the Great Balm Tree. Probably something had happened then and there to make Dolly so sure of Mike's worthiness. But she was already passing on to "next," nodding toward Alfy, with the words: [Pg 30]

"The two Smith boys, Littlejohn and Danny."

Jim Barlow laughed but did not object. The sons of farmer Smith were jolly lads and deserved a good time, once in their hard-worked lives; yet he did stare when Dorothy concluded her list of lads with the name:

"Frazer Moore."

"You don't know him very well, Dolly girl. Beside that, he'll make an odd number. He's the seventh—"

"Son of the seventh son—fact!" interrupted Alfaretta; "and now we'll have to find another girl to match him."

"I've found the girl, Dolly, but she won't match. Helena Montaigne came up on the train by which your Father John left for the north. You could hardly leave her out from your House Party, or from givin' her the bid to it, any way."

"Helena home? Oh! I am so glad, I am so glad! Of course, she'll get the 'bid'; I'll take it to her myself the first thing to-morrow morning. But you didn't mention Herbert. Hasn't he come, too?"

James Barlow nodded assent but grudgingly. He had never in his heart quite forgiven

Herbert Montaigne for their difference in life; as if it were the fault of the one that he had been born the son of the wealthy owner of The Towers and of the other that he was a penniless almshouse child. Second thoughts, however, always brought nobler feeling into the honest heart of Jim and a flush of shame rose to his face as he forced himself to answer.

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"Yes, course. The hull fambly's here."

Dorothy checked the teasing words which rose to her lips, for when ambitious Jim relapsed so hopelessly into incorrect speech it was a sign that he was deeply moved; and it was a relief to see Alfaretta once more diligently count upon her fingers and to hear her declare:

"We'll never'll get this here list straight and even, never in this endurin' world. First there's a girl too many and now there's a girl too short!"

"Never mind; we'll make them come out even some way, and I'll find another girl. I don't know who, yet, and we mustn't ask any more or there'll be no places for them to sleep. Now we've settled the guests let's settle the time. We'll have to put it off two or three days, to let them get here. I wish your cousin Tom Hungerford could be asked to join us but I don't suppose he could come," said Dolly to her friend Molly.

"No, he couldn't. It was the greatest favor his getting off just for those few hours. A boy might as well be in prison as at West Point!"

"What? At that 'heavenly' place? Let's see. This is Wednesday night. Saturday would be a nice time to begin the Party, don't you all think?"

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"Fine. Week-end ones always do begin on Saturday but the trouble is they break up on Monday after;" answered Molly.

"Then ours is to be a double week-ender. Aunt Betty said 'invite them for a week.' That's seven days, and now Master Stark comes your task. As a committee of entertainment you are to provide some new, some different, fun for us every single one of those seven days; and it must be something out of the common. I long, I just long to have my home-finding House Party so perfectly beautiful that nobody in it will ever, ever forget it!"

Looking into her glowing face the few who were gathered about her inwardly echoed her wish, and each, in his or her own way, resolved to aid in making it as "perfect" as their young hostess desired.

Monty heaved a prodigious sigh.

"You've given me the biggest task, Dolly Doodles! When a fellow's brain is no better than mine——"

"Nonsense, Montmorency Vavasour-Stark! You know in your little insides that you're 'nigh tickled to death' as Alfie would say. Aren't you the one who always plans the entertainments—the social ones—at your school, Brentnor Hall? You're as proud as Punch this minute, and you know it, sir. Don't pretend otherwise!" reproved Molly, severely.

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"Yes, but—that was different. I had money then. I hadn't announced my decision to be independent of my father and he—he hadn't taken me too literally at my word;" and with a whimsical expression the lad emptied his pockets of the small sums they contained and spread the amount on the table. "There it is, all of it, Lady of the Manor, at your service! Getting up entertainments is a costly thing, but—as far as it goes, I'll try my level best!"

They all laughed and Dorothy merrily heaped the coins again before him.

"You forget, and so I have to remind you, that this is to be *my* Party! I don't ask you to spend your money but just your brains in this affair."

"Huh! Dorothy! I'm afraid they won't go much further than the cash!" he returned, but nobody paid attention to this remark, they were so closely watching Dorothy. She had opened a little leather bag which lay upon the table and now drew from it a roll of bills. Crisp bank notes, ten of them, and each of value ten dollars.

"Whew! Where did you get all that, Dorothy Calvert?" demanded Jim Barlow, almost sternly. To him the money seemed a fortune, and that his old companion of the truck-farm must still be as poor in purse as he.

She was nearly as grave as he, as she spread the notes out one by one in the place where Monty had displayed his meager sum.

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"My Great-Aunt Betty gave them to me. It is her wish that I should use this money for the pleasure of my friends. She says that it is a first portion of my own personal inheritance, and that if I need more——"

"More!" they fairly gasped; for ten times ten is a hundred, and a hundred dollars—Ah! What might not be done with a whole one hundred dollars?

"'Twould be wicked," began James, in an awestruck tone, but was not allowed to finish, for practical Alfaretta, her big eyes fairly glittering, was rapidly counting upon her fingers and trying to do that rather difficult "example" of "how many times will seven go into one hundred and how much over?" "Seven into ten, once and three; seven into thirty—Ouch!"

Her computation came to a sudden end. The storm had broken, all unnoticed till then, and a mighty crash as if the whole house were falling sent them startled to their feet.

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## CHAPTER III

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### THE FIRST AND UNINVITED GUEST

For an instant the group was motionless from fear; then Jim made a dash for the front entrance whence, apparently, the crash had come. There had been no thunder accompanying the storm which now raged wildly over the mountain top, and Alf found sufficient voice to cry:

"'Tain't no lightnin' stroke. *Somethin's* fell!"

The words were so inadequate to the description that Molly laughed nervously, and in relieved tension all followed James forward; only to find themselves rudely forced back by old Ephraim, gray with fear and anxiety.

"Stan' back dere, stan' back, you-alls! 'Tis Eph'am's place to gyard Miss Betty's chillens!"

He didn't look as if the task were an agreeable one and the lads placed themselves beside him as he advanced and with trembling hands tried to unbar the door. This time he did not repulse them, and it was well, for as the bolts slid and the heavy door was set free it fell inward with such force that he would have been crushed beneath it had they not been there to draw him out of its reach.

"Oh! oh! oh! The great horse chestnut!" cried Dorothy, springing aside from contact with the branches which fell crowding through the doorway. Hinges were torn from their places and the marvel was that the beautifully carved door had not itself been broken in bits.

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Jim was the first to rally and to find some comfort in the situation, exclaiming:

"That's happened exactly as I feared it would, some day; and it's a mercy there wasn't nobody sittin' on that piazza. They'd ha' been killed dead, sure as pisen!"

"Killing generally does mean death, Jim Barlow, but if you knew that splendid tree was bound to fall some day why didn't you say so? We—" with a fine assumption of proprietorship in Deerhurst—"we would have had it prevented," demanded Dorothy.

Already she felt that this was home; already she loved the fallen tree almost as its mistress had done and her feeling was so sincere, if new, that nobody smiled, and the lad answered soberly:

"I have told, Dolly girl. I kept on tellin' Mrs. Calvert how that lily-pond she would have dug out deeper an' deeper, and made bigger all the time, would for certain undermine that tree and make it fall. But—but she's an old lady 't knows her own mind and don't allow nobody else to know it for her! Old Hans, the gardener, he talked a heap, too; begged her to have the pond cemented an' that wouldn't hender the lilies blowin' and'd stop trouble. But, no. She wouldn't listen. Said she 'liked things perfectly natural' and—Well, she's got 'em now!"

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"Jim Barlow, you're—just horrid! and—ungrateful to my precious Aunt Betty!" cried Dorothy, indignant tears springing to her eyes. To her the fallen tree seemed like a stricken human being and the catastrophe a terrible one. "It's taken that grand chestnut years and years and years—longer'n you or I will ever live, like enough—to grow that big, and to be thrown down all in a minute, and—you don't care a mite, except to find your own silly opinion prove true!"

"Hold on, Dolly girl. This ain't no time for you an' me to begin quarrelin'. I do care. I care more'n I can say but that don't hender the course o' nature. The pond was below; 'twas fed by a spring from above; she had trenches dug so that spring-water flowed right spang through the roots of that chestnut into the pond; and what could follow except what did? I'm powerful sorry it's happened but I can't help bein' common-sensible over it."

"I hate common-sense!" cried Molly, coming to the support of her friend. "Anyway, I don't see what good we girls do standing here in this draughty hall. Let's go to bed."

"And leave the house wide open this way?"

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Dorothy's sense of responsibility was serious enough to her though amusing to the others, and it was Monty who brought her back to facts by remarking:

"The house always has been taken care of, Dolly Doodles, and I guess it will be now. Jim and I will get some axes and lop off these branches that forced the door in and prop it shut the best way we can. Then I'll go down to the lodge with him to sleep for he says there's a room I can have. See? You girls will be well protected!" and he nodded toward the group of servants gathered at the rear of the great hall. "So you'd better take Molly's advice and go up-stairs."

Dolly wasn't pleased to be thus set coolly aside in "her own house" but there seemed nothing better to do than follow this frank advice; therefore, taking a hand of each of her girl friends, she led the way toward her own pretty chamber and two small rooms adjoining.

"Aunt Betty thought we three'd like to be close together, and anyway, if we had all come that I wanted to invite we'd have to snug up some. So she told Dinah to fix her dressing-room for one of you—that's this side mine; and the little sewing-room for the other. She's put single beds in them and Dinah is to sleep on her cot in this wide hall outside our doors. It seemed sort of foolish to me, first off, when darling Auntie planned it, as if anything could happen to make us need Dinah so near; but now—My! I can't stop trembling, somehow. I was so frightened and sorry."

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"I'm sorry, too, and I'm scared, too; but I'm sleepier'n I'm ary one," yawned Alfaretta.

"I'm sleepy, too;" assented Molly; and even the excited Dorothy felt a strange drowsiness creeping over her. It would be the correct thing, she had imagined, to lie awake and grieve over the loss of Mrs. Calvert's beloved tree, which would now be cut into ignominious firewood and burned upon a hearth; but—in five minutes after her head had touched her pillow she was sound asleep as her mates already were.

Outside, the storm abated and the moon arose, lighting the scenery with its brilliance and setting the still dripping trees aglitter with its glory. Moonlight often made Dorothy wakeful and did so on this eventful night. Its rays streaming across her unshaded window roused her to sit up, and with the action came remembrance.

"My heart! That money! All those beautiful new bills that are to buy pleasant things for my Party guests! I had it all spread out on the library table when that crash came and I never thought of it again! Nobody else, either, I fancy. I'll go right down and get it and I mustn't wake the girls or Dinah. It was careless of me, it surely was; but I know enough about money to understand it shouldn't be left lying about in that way."

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Creeping softly from her bed she drew on her slippers and kimono as Miss Rhinelander had taught her pupils always to do when leaving their rooms at night, and the familiar school-habit proved her in good stead this time. Once she would have stopped for neither; but now folding the warm little garment about her she tiptoed past old Dinah, snoring, and down the thickly carpeted stairs, whereon her slippered feet made no sound. Quite noiselessly she came to the library door and pushed the portière aside.

Into this room, also, the moonlight streamed, making every object visible. She had glanced, as she came along the hall, toward the big door, bolstered into place by the heavy settle and hat-rack; and the latter object looked so like a gigantic man standing guard that she cast no second look but darted within the lighter space.

Hark! What was that sound? Somebody breathing? Snoring? A man's snore, so like that of dear Father John who used, sometimes, to keep her awake, though she hadn't minded that because she loved him so. The sound, frightful at first, became less so as she remembered those long past nights, and mustering her courage she tiptoed toward the figure on the lounge.

Old Ephraim! Well, she didn't believe Aunt Betty would have permitted even that faithful servant to spend a night upon her cherished leather couch; but the morning would be time enough to reprimand him for his audacity, which, of course, she must do, since she stood now in Mrs. Calvert's place, as temporary head of the family. She felt gravely responsible and offended as she crossed the room to the table where three chairs still grouped sociably together, exactly as the three girls had left them.

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Ah! yes. The chairs were in their places, Alfaretta's list of guests as well, and even the little leather bag out of which she had drawn the wealth that so surprised her mates. But the ten

crisp notes she had so spread out in the sight of all—where were they?

Certainly nowhere to be seen, although that revealing moonlight made even Alfy's written words quite legible. What could have become of them? Who had taken them? And why? Supposing somebody had stolen in and stolen them? Supposing that was why he was sleeping in the library? Yet, if there had been thievery there, wouldn't he have kept awake, to watch? Supposing—here a horrible thought crept into her mind—supposing *he*, himself, had been the thief! She was southern born and had the southerner's racial distrust of a "nigger's" honesty; yet—as soon as thought she was ashamed of the suspicion. Aunt Betty trusted him with far more than she missed now. She would go over to that window and think it out. Maybe the sleeper would awake in a minute and she could ask him about it.

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The question was one destined to remain unasked. As she stood gazing vacantly outward, her hands clasped in perplexity, something moving arrested her attention. A small figure in white, or what seemed white in that light. It was circling the pond where the water-lilies grew and was swaying to and fro as if dancing to some strange measure. Its skirts were caught up on either side by the hands resting upon its hips and the apparition was enough to startle nerves that had not already been tried by the events of that night.

Dorothy stood rooted to the spot. Then a sudden movement of the dancer which brought her perilously near the water's edge recalled her common sense.

"Why, it's one of the girls! It must be! Which? She doesn't look like either—is she sleep-walking? Who, what can it mean?"

Another instant and she had opened the long sash and sped out upon the rain-soaked lawn; and she was none too soon. As if unseeing, or unfearing, the strange figure swept nearer and nearer to the moonlit water, its feet already splashing in it, when Dorothy's arms were flung around it to draw it into safety.

"Why—" began the rescuer and could say no more. The face that slowly turned toward her was one that she had never seen before. It was the face of a child under a mass of gray hair, and its expression strangely vacant and inconsequent. Danger, fear, responsibility meant nothing to this little creature whom Dorothy had saved from drowning, and with a sudden pitiful memory of poor, half-witted Peter Piper who had loved her so, she realized that here was another such as he. In body and mind the child had never grown up, though her years were many.

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"Come this way, little lady. Come with me. Let us go into the house;" said the girl gently, and led the stranger to the window she had left open. "You must be the odd guest I needed for my House Party, to make the couples even, and so I bid you welcome. Strange, the window should be shut!"

But closed it was; nor could all the girl's puny pounding bring help to open it. Against the front door the great tree still pressed and she could not reach its bell; and confused by all she had passed through Dorothy forgot that there were other entrances where help could be summoned and sank down on the piazza floor beside her first, her uninvited guest, to wait for morning.

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## CHAPTER IV

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### TROUBLES LIGHTEN IN THE TELLING

But a few moments sufficed to show that this would not do. Despite her own heavy kimono she was already chilled by the air of that late September night, while the little creature beside her was shivering as if in ague, although she seemed to be half-asleep.

She reasoned that Ephraim must have waked and closed the library window and departed to his own quarters. But there must be some way in which a girl could get into her own house; and then she exclaimed:

"Why, yes! The sun-parlor, right at the end of this very piazza. All that south side is covered with glass and if I can get a sash up we can climb through. The place is as nice as a bedroom. Anyway, I'll try!"

She left the stranger where she lay and ran to make the effort, and though for a time the heavy sash resisted her strength, it did yield slightly and her fresh fear that it had been locked vanished. Yet with her utmost endeavor she could lift it but a few inches and she wondered if she would be able to get her visitor through that scant opening.

"I shall have to make her go through flat-wise, like crawling through fence bars, and I wonder if she will! Anyhow, I must try. I—I don't like it out here in the night and we'll both be sick of cold, and that would end our party." [Pg 45]

Dorothy never quite realized how that affair was managed.

Though the wanderer appeared to hear well enough she did not speak and had not from the first. Probably she could not, but she could be as stubborn and difficult as possible and she was certainly exhausted from exposure. It was a harder task than lifting the great window, but, at last, by dint of pushing and coaxing, even shoving, the inert small woman was forced through the opening and dropped upon the matted floor, where she remained motionless.

Dolly squeezed herself after and stooped above her guest, anxiously asking:

"Did that hurt you? I'm sorry, but there was no other way. Please try to get up and lie down. See? There are two nice lounges here and lots of 'comfy' chairs. Shawls and couch-covers in plenty—Why! it'll be like a picnic!"

The guest made no effort to rise but waved the other aside with a sleepy, impatient gesture, then fell to shaking again as if she were desperately cold. Dorothy was too frightened to heed these objections and since it was easier to roll a lounge to the sufferer than to argue, she did so and promptly had her charge upon it; but she first stripped off the damp cotton gown from the shaking body and wrapped it in all the rugs and covers she could find. She did not attempt to penetrate further into the house then, because she knew that Ephraim had bolted and barred the door leading thither. She had watched him do so with some amusement, early in the evening, and had playfully asked him if he expected any burglars. He had disdained to reply further than by shaking his wise old head, but had omitted no precaution because of her raillery. [Pg 46]

"Well, this may not be as nice as in my own room but it's a deal better than out of doors. That poor little thing isn't shivering so much and—she's asleep! She's tired out, whoever she is and wherever she came from, and I'm tired, also. I can't do any better till daylight comes and I'll curl up in this big chair and go to sleep, too," said Dorothy to herself.

She wakened to find the sunlight streaming through the glass and to hear a chorus of voices demanding, each in a various key:

"Why, Dorothy C!" "How could you?" "Yo' done gib we-all de wussenenes' sca', you' ca'less chile! What yo' s'posin' my Miss Betty gwine ter say when she heahs ob dis yeah cuttin's up? Hey, honey? Tell me dat!"

But Dinah's reproofs were cut short as her eye fell upon the rug-heaped lounge and saw the pile of them begin to move. As yet no person was visible and she stared at the suddenly agitated covers as if they were bewitched. Presently, they were flung aside; and revealed upon a crimson pillow lay a face almost as crimson. [Pg 47]

"Fo' de lan' ob lub! How come dat yeah—dis—What's hit mean, li'l gal Do'thy?"

Dolly had not long been missed nor, when she was, had anybody felt serious alarm, though the girl guests had both been aggrieved that she should not have wakened them in time to be prompt for breakfast. They dressed hurriedly when Norah came a second time to summon them, explaining:

"Miss Dorothy's room is empty and her clothes on the chairs. I must go seek her for she shouldn't do this way if she wants to keep cook good natured for the Party. Delaying breakfast is a bad beginning."

Then Norah departed and went about her business of dusting; and it was she who had found the missing girl in the sun-parlor, and it had been her cry of relief that brought the household to that place.

Demanded old Ephraim sternly:

"Why fo' yo'-all done leab yo' baid in de middle ob de night an' go sky-la'kin' eround dis yere scan'lous way, Missy Dolly Calve't? Tole me dat!"

"Why do you leave yours, to sleep on the library couch, Ephraim?" she returned, keenly observing him from the enclosure of her girl friends' arms, who held her fast that she might not again elude them. [Pg 48]

Ephraim fairly jumped; though he looked not at her but in a timid way toward Dinah, still bending in anxious curiosity over the stranger on the couch; and she was not so engrossed but that her turbaned head rose with a snap and she fixed her fellow servant with a fiercely glaring eye. Between these two equally devoted members of "Miss Betty's" family had

always existed a bitter jealousy as to which was the most loyal to their mistress's interests. Let either presume upon that loyalty, to indulge in a forbidden privilege, and the wrath of the other waxed furious. Both knew that for Ephraim to have lain where Dorothy had discovered him, during that past night, was "intol'able" presumption, and at Dinah's care would be duly reported upon and reprimanded.

Alas! The old man's start and down-dropped gaze was proof in Dorothy's opinion of a graver guilt than Dinah imputed to him, and when he made no answer save a hasty exit from the room her heart sank.

"Oh! how could he do it, how could he!" and then honesty suggested. "But I haven't asked him yet if he did take the bills!" and she smiled again at her own thoughts. [Pg 49]

Attention was now diverted to Dinah's picking up the stranger from the couch and also departing, muttering:

"I 'low dis yeah's a mighty sick li'l creatur'! Whoebah she be she's done fotched a high fevah wid her, an' I'se gwine put her to baid right now!"

Illness was always enough to enlist the old nurse's deepest interest and she had no further reproof for the delayed breakfasts or Ephraim's behavior.

There followed a morning full of business for all. Jim Barlow and old Hans, with some grumbling assistance from the "roomatical" Ephraim, whose "misery" Dinah assured him had been aggravated by sleeping on a cold leather lounge instead of in his own feather-bed—these three spent the morning in clearing away the fallen tree, while a carpenter from the town repaired the injured doorway.

When Dorothy approached Jim, intending to speak freely of her suspicions about the lost money, he cut her short by remarking:

"What silliness! Course, it isn't really lost. You've just mislaid it, that's all, an' forgot. I do that, time an' again. Put something away so careful 't I can't find it for ever so long. You'll remember after a spell, and say, Dolly! I won't be able to write that telegram to Mabel Bruce. I've got no time to bother with a parcel o' girls. If I don't keep a nudgin' them two old men they won't do a decent axe's stroke. They spend all their time complainin' of their j'int's!" [Pg 50]

"Well, why don't you get a regular woodman to chop it up, then?"

"An' waste Mrs. Calvert's good money, whilst there's a lot of idlers on her premises, eatin' her out of house and home? I guess not. I'd save for her quicker'n I would for myself, an' that's saying considerable. I'm no eye-servant, I'm not."

"Huh! You're one mighty stubborn boy! And I don't think my darling Aunt Betty would hesitate to pay one extra day's help. I've heard her say that she disliked amateur labor. She likes professional skill," returned the girl, with decision.

James Barlow laughed.

"I reckon, Dolly C., that you've forgot the days when you and I were on Miranda Stott's truck-farm; when I cut firewood by the cord and you sat on the logs an' taught me how to spell. 'Twouldn't do for me to claim I can't split up one tree; and this one'll be as neat a job as you ever see, time I've done with it. Trot along and write your own telegrams; or get that Starky to do it for you. Ha, ha! He thought he could saw wood, himself. Said he learned it campin' out; but the first blow he struck he hit his own toes and blamed it on the axe being too heavy. Trot along with him, girlie, and don't hender me talkin'." [Pg 51]

The "Little Lady of the Manor," as President Ryall had called her, walked away with her nose in the air. Preferred to chop wood, did he? And it wasn't nice of him—it certainly wasn't nice—to set her thinking of that miserable old truck-farm and the days of her direst poverty. She was Dorothy Calvert now; a girl with a name and heiress of Deerhurst. She'd show him, horrid boy that he was!

But just then his cheerful whistling reached her, and her indignation vanished. By no effort could she stay long angry with Jim. He was annoyingly "common-sensible," as he claimed, but he was also so straight and dependable that she admired him almost as much as she loved him. Yes, she had other friends now, and would doubtless gain many more, but none could ever be a truer one than this homely, plain-spoken lad.

She spied the girls and Monty in the arbor and joined them; promptly announcing:

"If our House Party is to be a success you three must help. Jim won't. He's going to chop wood. Monty, will you ride to the village and send that telegram to Mabel Bruce?"

The lad looked up from the foot he had been contemplating and over which Molly and Alfy had been bending in sympathy, to answer by another question:

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"See that shoe, Dolly Calvert? Close shave that. Might have been my very flesh itself, and I'd have blood poisoning and an amputation, and then there'd have been telegrams sent—galore! Imagine my mother—if they had been!"

"It wasn't your flesh, was it?"

"That's as Yankee as I am. Always answer your own questions when you ask them and save a lot of trouble to the other fellow. No, I *wasn't* hurt but I *might* have been! Since I'm not, I'm at your service, Lady D. Providing you word your own message and give me a decent horse to ride."

"There are none but 'decent' horses in our stable, Master Stark. I shall need Portia myself, or we girls will. You can go ask a groom to saddle one—that he thinks best. I see through you. You've just been getting these girls to waste sympathy on you and you shall be punished by our leaving you alone till lunch time. I'll write the message, of course. I'd be afraid you wouldn't put enough in. Only—let me think. How much do telegrams cost?"

"Twenty-five cents for ten words," came the prompt reply.

"But ten would hardly begin to talk! Is telephoning cheaper? You ought to know, being a boy."

"Long distance telephoning is about as expensive a luxury as one can buy, young lady. But, why hesitate? It won't take all of that hundred dollars," he answered, swaggering a trifle over his superior knowledge.

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Out it came without pause or pretense, the dark suspicion that had risen in Dorothy's innocent mind:

"But I haven't that hundred dollars! It's gone. It's—*stolen!*"

"Dorothy Calvert! How dare you say such a thing?"

It was Molly's horrified question that broke the long silence which had fallen on the group; and hearing her ask it gave to poor Dorothy the first realization of what an evil thing it was she had voiced.

"I don't know! Oh! I don't know! I wish I hadn't. I didn't mean to tell, not yet; and I wish, I wish I had kept it to myself!" she cried in keen regret.

For instantly she read in the young faces before her a reflection of her own hard suspicion and loss of faith in others; and something that her beloved Seth Winters had once said came to her mind:

"Evil thoughts are more catching than the measles."

Seth, that grand old "Learned Blacksmith!" To him she would go, at once, and he would help her in every way. Turning again to her mates she begged:

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"Forget that I fancied anybody might have taken it to keep. Of course, nobody would. Let's hurry in and get Mabel's invitation off. I think I've enough money to pay for a message long enough to explain what I want; and her fare here—well she'll have to pay that herself or her father will. I've asked to have Portia put to the pony cart and we girls will drive around and ask all the others. So glad they live on the mountain where we can get to them quick."

"Dolly, shall you go to The Towers, to see that Montaigne girl?" asked Alfaretta, rather anxiously.

"Yes, but you needn't go in if you don't want to, Alfy dear. I shall stay only just long enough to bid her welcome home and invite her for Saturday."

"Oh! I shouldn't mind. I'd just as lief. Fact, I'd *admire*, only if I put on my best dress to go callin' in the morning what'll I have left to wear to the Party? And Ma Babcock says them Montaignes won't have folks around that ain't dressed up;" said the girl, so frankly that Molly laughed and Dorothy hastened to assure her:

"That's a mistake, Alfy, dear, I think. They don't care about a person's clothes. It's what's inside the clothes that counts with sensible people, such as I believe they are. But, I'll tell you. It's not far from The Towers' gate to the old smithy and I must see Mr. Seth. I must. I'm so thankful that he didn't leave the mountain, too, with all the other grown-ups. So you can drop me at Helena's; and then you and Molly can drive around to all the other people we've decided to ask and invite them in my stead. You know where all of them live and

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Molly will go with you.”

“Can Alfie drive—safe?” asked Molly, rather anxiously.

Dolly laughed. “Anybody can drive gentle Portia and Alfie is a mountain girl. But what a funny question for such a fearless rider as you, Molly Breckenridge!”

“Not so funny as you think. It’s one thing to be on the back of a horse you know and quite another to be behind the heels of another that its driver doesn’t know! Never mind, Alfie. I’ll trust you.”

“You can,” Alfaretta complacently assured her; and the morning’s drive proved her right. A happier girl had never lived than she as she thus acted deputy for the new little mistress of Deerhurst; whose story had lost none of its interest for the mountain folk because of its latest development.

But it was not at all as a proud young heiress that Dorothy came at last to the shop under the Great Balm Tree and threw herself impetuously upon the breast of the farrier quietly reading beside his silent forge. [Pg 56]

“O, Mr. Seth! My darling Mr. Seth! I’m in terrible trouble and only you can help me!”

His book went one way, his spectacles another, dashed from his hands by her heedless onrush; but he let them lie where they had fallen and putting his arm around her, assured her:

“So am I. Therefore, let us condole with one another. You first.”

“I’ve lost Aunt Betty’s hundred dollars!”

Her friend fairly gasped, and held her from him to search her troubled face.

“Whe-ew! That is serious. Yet lost articles are sometimes found. Out with the whole story, ‘body and bones’—as my man Owen would say.”

Already relieved by the chance of telling her worries, Dorothy related the incidents of the night, and she met the sympathy she expected. But it was like the nature-loving Mr. Winters that he was more disturbed by the loss of the great chestnut tree than by that of the money. Also, the story of the stranger she had found wandering by the lily-pond moved him deeply. All suffering or afflicted creatures were precious in the sight of this noble old man and he commented now with pity on the distress of the friends from whom the unknown one had strayed.

“How grieved they’ll be! For it must have been from some private household she came, or escaped. There is no public asylum or retreat within many miles of our mountain, so far as I know. I wonder if we ought to advertise her in the local newspaper? Or, do you think it would be kinder to wait and let her people hunt her up? Tell me, Dolly, dear. The opinion of a child often goes straight to the point.” [Pg 57]

“Oh! Don’t advertise, please, Mr. Seth! Think. If she belonged to you or me we wouldn’t want it put in the paper that—about—you know, the lost one being not quite right, somehow. If anybody’s loved her well enough to keep her out of an asylum they’ve loved her well enough to come and find her, quiet like, without anybody but kind hearted people having to know. If they don’t love her—well, she’s all right for now. Dinah’s put her to bed and told me, just before I came away, that it was only the exposure which had made her ill. She had roused all right, after a nap, and had taken a real hearty breakfast. She’s about as big as I am and Dinah’s going to put some of my clothes on her while her own are done up. Everybody in the house was so interested and kind about her, I was surprised.”

“You needn’t have been. People who have lived with such a mistress as Madam Betty Calvert must have learned kindness, even if they learned nothing else.”

Dorothy laughed. “Dear Mr. Seth, you love my darling Aunt Betty, too, don’t you, like everybody does?” [Pg 58]

“Of course, and loyally. That doesn’t prevent my thinking that she does unwise things.”

“O—oh!!”

“Like giving a little girl one hundred dollars at a time to spend in foolishness.”

Dorothy protested: “It wasn’t to be foolishness. It was to make people happy. You yourself say that to ‘spread happiness’ is the only thing worth while!”

“Surely, but it doesn’t take Uncle Sam’s greenbacks to do that. Not many of them. When

you've lived as long as I have you'll have learned that the things which dollars do *not* buy are the things that count. Hello! 'By the pricking of my thumbs, something wicked this way comes.'"

The blacksmith rose as he finished his quotation and went to the wide doorway, across which a shadow had fallen, and from whence the sound of an irritable: "Whoa-oa, there!" had come.

It was a rare patron of that old smithy and Seth concealed his surprise by addressing not the driver but the horse:

"Well, George Fox! Good-morning to you!"

George Fox was the property of miller Oliver Sands, and the Quaker and his steed were well known in all that locality. He was a fair-spoken man whom few loved and many feared, and between him and the "Learned Blacksmith" there was "no love lost." Why he had come to the smithy now Seth couldn't guess; nor why, as he stepped down from his buggy and observed, "I'd like to have thee look at George's off hind foot, farrier. He uses it——" he should do what he did.

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How it was "used" was not explained; for, leaving the animal where it stood, the miller sauntered into the building, hands in pockets, and over it in every part, even to its owner's private bedroom, as if he had a curiosity to see how his neighbor lived. Seth would have resented this, had it been worth while and if the miller's odd curiosity had not aroused the same feeling in himself. It was odd, he thought; but Seth Winters had nothing to hide and he didn't care. It was equally odd that George Fox's off hind foot was in perfect condition and had been newly shod at the other smithy, over the mountain, where all the miller's work was done.

"It seems to be all right, Friend Oliver."

"Forget that I troubled thee," answered the gray-clad Friend, as he climbed back to his seat and shook the reins over his horse's back, to instantly disappear down the road, but to leave a thoughtful neighbor, staring after him.

"Hmm. That man's in trouble. I wonder what!" murmured Seth, more to himself than to Dorothy, who had drawn near to slip her hand in his.

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"Dear me! Everybody seems to be, this morning, Mr. Seth; and you haven't told me yours yet!"

"Haven't I? Well, here it is!"

He stooped his gray head to her brown one and whispered it in her ear; with the result that he had completely banished all her own anxieties and sent her laughing down the road toward home.

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## CHAPTER V

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### RIDDLES

"There's a most remarkable thing about this House Party of ours! Every person invited has come and not one tried to get out of so doing! Three cheers for the Giver of the Party! and three times three for—all of us!" cried happy Seth Winters, from his seat of honor at the end of the great table in the dining-room, on the Saturday evening following.

Lamps and candles shone, silver glittered, flower-bedecked and spotlessly clean, the wide apartment was a fit setting for the crowd of joyous young folk which had gathered in it for supper; and the cheers rang out as heartily as the master of the feast desired.

Then said Alfaretta, triumphantly:

"The Party has begun and I'm to it, I'm in it!"

"So am I, so am I! Though I did have to invite myself!" returned Mr. Winters. "Strange that this little girl of mine should have left me out, that morning when she was inviting everybody, wholesale."

For to remind her that he "hadn't been invited" was the "trouble" which he had stooped to whisper in Dorothy's ear, as she left him at the smithy door. So she had run home and with

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the aid of her friends already there had concocted a big-worded document, in which they begged his presence at Deerhurst for "A Week of Days," as they named the coming festivities; and also that he would be "Entertainer in Chief."

"You see," confided Dolly, "now that the thing is settled and I've asked so many I begin to get a little scared. I've never been hostess before—not this way;—and sixteen people—I'm afraid I don't know enough to keep sixteen girls and boys real happy for a whole week. But dear Mr. Winters knows. Why, I believe that darling man could keep a world full happy, if he'd a mind."

"Are you sorry you started the affair, Dolly Doodles? 'Cause if you are, you might write notes all round and have it given up. You'd better do that than be unhappy. Society folks would, I reckon," said Molly, in an effort to comfort her friend's anxiety. "I'm as bad as you are. It begins to seem as if we'd get dreadful tired before the week is out."

"I'd be ashamed of myself if I did that, Molly, I'll go through with it even if none of you will help; though I must say I think it's—it's sort of mean for you boys, Jim and Monty, to beg off being 'committees.'"

"The trouble with me, Dolly, is that my ideas have entirely given out. If you hadn't lost that hundred dollars I could get up a lot of jolly things. But without a cent in either of our pockets—Hmm," answered Monty, shrugging his shoulders.

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Jim said nothing. He was still a shy lad and while he meant to forget his awkwardness and help all he could he shrank from taking a prominent part in the coming affair.

Alfaretta was the only one who wasn't dismayed, and her fear that the glorious event might be abandoned was ludicrous.

"Pooh, Dorothy Calvert! I wouldn't be a 'fraid-cat, I wouldn't! Not if I was a rich girl like you've got to be and had this big house to do it in and folks to do the cookin' and sweepin', and—and rooms to sleep 'em in and everything!" she argued, breathlessly.

"You funny, dear Alfaretta! It's not to be given up and I count on you more than anybody else to keep things going! With you and Mr. Seth—if he will—the Party cannot fail!" and Alf's honest face was alight again.

It had proved that the "Learned Blacksmith" "would" most gladly. At heart he was as young as any of them all and he had his own reasons for wishing to be at Deerhurst for a time. He had been more concerned than Dorothy perceived over the missing one hundred dollars, and he was anxious about the strange guest who had appeared in the night and who was so utterly unable to give an account of herself.

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So he had come, as had they all and now assembled for their first meal together, and Dorothy's hospitable anxiety had wholly vanished. Of course, all would go well. Of course, they would have a jolly time. The only trouble now, she thought, would be to choose among the many pleasures offering.

There had been a new barn built at Deerhurst that summer, and a large one. This Mr. Winters had decreed should be the scene of their gayest hours with the big rooms of the old mansion for quieter ones; and to the barn they went on that first evening together, as soon as supper was over and the dusk fell.

"Oh! how pretty!" cried Helena Montaigne, as she entered the place with her arm about Molly's waist, for they two had made instant friends. "I saw nothing so charming while I was abroad!"

"Didn't you?" asked the other, wondering. "But it *is* pretty!" In secret she feared that Helena would be a trifle "airish," and she felt that would be a pity.

"Oh! oh! O-H!" almost screamed Dorothy, who had not been permitted to enter the barn for the last two days while, under the farrier's direction, the boys had had it in charge. Palms had been brought from the greenhouse and arranged "with their best foot forward" as Jim declared. Evergreens deftly placed made charming little nooks of greenery, where camp-chairs and rustic benches made comfortable resting places. Rafters were hung with strings of corn and gay-hued vegetables, while grape-vines with the fruit upon them covered the stalls and stanchions. Wire strung with Chinese lanterns gave all the light was needed and these were all aglow as the wide doors were thrown open and the merry company filed in.

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"My land of love!" cried Alfaretta. "It's just like a livin'-in-house, ain't it! There's even a stove and a chimney! Who ever heard tell of a stove in a barn?"

"You have! And I, too, for the first time," said Littlejohn Smith at her elbow. "But I 'low it'll be real handy for the men in the winter time, to warm messes for the cattle and keep

themselves from freezin'. Guess I know what it means to do your chores with your hands like chunks of ice! Wish to goodness Pa Smith could see this barn; 'twould make him open his eyes a little!"

"A body could cook on that stove, it's so nice and flat. Or even pop corn," returned Alfaretta, practically.

"Bet that's a notion! Say, Alfy, don't let on, but I'll slip home first chance I get and fetch some of that! I've got a lot left over from last year, 't I raised myself. I'll fetch my popper and if you can get a little butter out the house, some night, we'll give these folks the treat of their lives. What say?"

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Whatever might be the case with others of that famous Party these two old schoolmates were certainly "happy as blackbirds"—the only comparison that the girl found to fully suit their mood.

When the premises had been fully explored and admired, cried Mr. Seth:

"Blind man's buff! Who betters me?"

"Nobody could—'Blind man's' it is!" seconded Monty, and gallantly offered: "I'll blind!"

"Oh! no choosing! Do it the regular way," said Dolly. "Get in a row, please, all of you, and I'll begin with Herbert. 'Intry-mintry-cutry-corn; Apple-seed-and-apple-thorn; Wire-brier-limber-lock; Six-geese-in-a-flock; Sit-and-sing-by-the-spring; O-U-T—OUT!' Frazer Moore, you're—IT!"

The bashful lad who was more astonished to find himself where he was than he could well express, and who had really been bullied into accepting Dorothy's invitation by his chum, Mike Martin, now awkwardly stepped forward from the circle. His face was as red as his hair and he felt as if he were all feet and hands, while it seemed to him that all the eyes in the room were boring into him, so pitilessly they watched him. In reality, if he had looked up, he would have seen that most of the company were only eagerly interested to begin the game, and that the supercilious glances cast his way came from Herbert Montaigne and Mabel Bruce alone.

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Another half-moment and awkwardness was forgotten. Dorothy had bandaged the blinder's eyes with Mr. Seth's big handkerchief, and in the welcome darkness thus afforded he realized nothing except that invisible hands were touching him, from this side and that, plucking at his jacket, tapping him upon the shoulder, and that he could catch none of them. Finally, a waft of perfume came his way, and the flutter of starched skirts, and with a lunge forward he clasped his arms about the figure of:

"That girl from Baltimore! her turn!" he declared and was for pulling off the handkerchief, but was not allowed.

"Which one? there are two Baltimore girls here, my lad. Which one have you caught?"

Mabel squirmed, and Frazer's face grew a deeper red. He had been formally introduced, early upon Mabel's arrival, but had been too confused and self-conscious to understand her name. He was as anxious now to release her as she was to be set free, but his tormentors insisted:

"Her name? her name? Not till you tell her name!"

"I don't know—I mean—I—'tain't our Dolly, it's t'other one that's just come and smells like a—a drug store!" he answered, desperately, and loosened his arms.

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Mabel was glad enough to escape, blushing furiously at the way he had identified her, yet good-naturedly joining in the laugh of the others. Though she secretly resolved to be more careful in the use of scents of which she was extravagantly fond; and she allowed herself to be blindfolded at once, yet explaining:

"Maybe I shall have to tell who you are by just such ways as he did me. I never was to a House Party before and you're all strangers, 'cept Dolly C., and anybody'd know her!"

But it wasn't Dolly she captured. Susceptible Monty beheld in the little Baltimorean a wonderfully attractive vision. She was as short and as plump as he was. Her taste ran riot in colors, as did his own. He was bewildered by the mass of ruffles and frills that one short frock could display and he considered her manner of "doing" her hair as quite "too stylish for words." It was natural, therefore, that he should deliberately put himself in her way and try his best to be caught, while his observant mates heartlessly laughed at his unsuccessful maneuvers.

But it was handsome Herbert upon whose capture Mabel's mind was set, and it was a disappointment that, instead of his arm she should clutch that of James Barlow. However, there was no help for it and she was obliged to blindfold in his turn the tall fellow who had to stoop to her shortness, while casting admiring glances upon the other lad.

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So the game went on till they were tired, and it was simple Molly Martin who suggested the next amusement.

"My sake! I'm all beat out! I can't scarcely breathe, I've run and laughed so much. I never had so much fun in my life! Let's all sit down in a row and tell riddles. We'll get rested that way."

To some there this seemed a very childish suggestion, but not to wise Seth Winters. The very fact that shy Molly Martin had so far forgotten her own self-consciousness as to offer her bit of entertainment argued well for the success of Dorothy's House Party with its oddly assorted members. But he surprised Helena's lifted eyebrows and the glance she exchanged with the other Molly, so hastened to endorse the proposition:

"A happy thought, my lass; and as I'm the oldest 'child' here I'll open the game myself with one of the oldest riddles on record. Did anybody ever happen to hear of the Sphinx?"

"Why, of course! Egypt——" began Monty eagerly, hoping to shine in the coming contest of wits.

Seth Winters shook his head.

"In one sense a correct answer; but, Jamie lad, out with it! I believe *you* know which Sphinx I mean. All your delving into books—out with it, man!"

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"The monster of the ancients, I guess. That had the head of a woman, the body of a dog, the tail of a serpent, the wings of a bird, the paws of a lion, and a human voice;" answered Jim blushing a little thus to be airing his knowledge before so many.

"The very creature! What connection had this beauty with riddles, if you please?"

They were all listening now, and smiling a little over the old farrier's whimsical manner, as the boy student went on to explain:

"The Sphinx was sent into Thebes by Juno for her private revenge. The fable is that he laid all that country waste by proposing riddles and killing all who could not guess them. The calamity was so great that Creon promised his crown to anyone who could guess one, and the guessing would mean the death of the Sphinx."

"Why do you stop just there, Jim, in the most interesting part? Please go on and finish—if you can!" cried Dorothy.

Mr. Winters also nodded and the boy added:

"This was the riddle: What animal in the morning walks on four feet, at noon on two, and at evening on three?"

"At it, youngsters, at it! Cudgel your brains for the answer. We don't want any mixed-anatomy Sphinxes rampaging around here," urged the farrier.

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Many and various were the guesses hazarded but each fell wide of the mark. Helena alone preserved a smiling silence and waited to hear what the others had to say.

"Time's up! Five minutes to a riddle is more than ample. Helena has it, I see by the twinkle of her eyes. Well, my dear?"

"I can't call it a real guess, Mr. Winters, for I read it, as James did the story. The answer is —*Man*. In his babyhood, the morning of life, he crawls or walks on 'all fours'; in youth and middle age he goes upright on two feet; and at evening, old age, he supplements them by a staff or crutch—his three feet."

"Oh! how simple! Why couldn't I guess that!" exclaimed Molly, impatiently. "But who did solve the silly thing, first off?"

"Ædipus; and this so angered the Sphinx that he dashed his head against a rock and so died."

"Umm. I never dreamed there could be riddles like that," said Molly Martin; "all I thought of was 'Round as an apple, busy as a bee, The prettiest little thing you ever did see,' and such. I'd like to learn some others worth while, to tell of winter evenings before we go to bed."

"I know a good one, please, Mr. Seth. Shall I tell it?" asked Frazer Moore. "Pa found it in a 'Farmers' Almanac,' so maybe the rest have seen it, too." [Pg 72]

"Begin, Frazer. Five minutes per riddle! If anybody knows it 'twon't take so long," advised Mr. Seth, whom Dolly had called "the Master of the Feast."

"What is it men and women all despise,  
Yet one and all so highly prize?  
Which kings possess not? though full sure am I  
That for the luxury they often sigh.  
That never was for sale, yet, any day,  
The poorest beggar may the best display.  
The farmer needs it for his growing corn;  
Nor its dear comfort will the rich man scorn;  
Fittest for use within a sick friend's room,  
Its coming silent as spring's early bloom.  
A great, soft, yielding thing that no one fears—  
A little thing oft wet with mother's tears.  
A thing so hol(e)y that when it we wear  
We screen it safely from the world's rude stare."

"Hmm. Seems if there were handles enough to that long riddle, but I can't catch on to any of them. They contradict themselves so," cried Dorothy, after a long silence had followed Frazer's recitation.

Handles enough, to be sure; but like Dorothy, nobody could grasp one, and as the five minutes ended the mountain lad had the proud knowledge that he had puzzled them all, and gayly announced: [Pg 73]

"That was an easy one! Every word I said fits—AN OLD SHOE!"

"Oh!" "A-ah!" "How stupid I was not to see!" "The farmer needs it for his growing corn!" cried the Master, drawing up his foot and facetiously rubbing his toes. "Even a farmer may raise two kinds of corn," suggested he and thus solved one line over which Jane Potter was still puzzling.

Thereupon, Monty sprang up and snapped his fingers, schoolroom fashion:

"Master, Master! Me next! Me! I know one good as his and not near so long! My turn, please!"

They all laughed. Laughter came easily now, provoked even by silliness, and again a thankful, happy feeling rose in the young hostess's heart that her House Party was to be so delightful to everybody. Helena Montaigne now sat resting shoulder to shoulder with proud Alfaretta upon a little divan of straw whose back was a row of grain sheaves; Mabel was radiant amid a trio of admiring lads—Monty, Mike Martin, and Danny Smith; Herbert was eagerly discussing camp-life with shy Melvin, who had warmed to enthusiasm over his Nova Scotian forests; and all the different elements of that young assembly were proving most harmonious, as even smaller parties, arranged by old hostesses, do not always prove. [Pg 74]

"All right, Master Montmorency. Make it easy, please. A diversion not a brain tax," answered Seth.

"If Rider Haggard had been Lew Wallace, what would 'She' have been?"

"Ben Hur!" promptly shouted Frazer, before another had a chance to speak, and Monty sank back with a well-feigned groan. "I read that in the Almanac, too. I've read 'Ben Hur,' it's in our school lib'ry, but not 'She,' though Pa told me that was another book, wrote by the other feller."

"I'll never try again; I never do try to distinguish myself but I make a failure of it!" wailed Monty, jestingly.

"But Herbert hasn't failed, nor Melvin. Let's have at least one more wit-sharpener," coaxed Dorothy.

But Herbert declined, though courteously enough.

"Indeed, Dorothy, I don't know a single riddle and I never could guess one. Try Melvin, instead, please."

The English boy flushed, as he always did at finding himself observed, but he remembered that he had heard strangers comment upon the obligingness of the Canadians and he must maintain the honor of his beloved Province. So, after a trifling hesitation, he answered: [Pg 75]

"I can think of only one, Dorothy, and it's rather long, I fancy. My mother made me learn it as a punishment, once, when I was a little tacker, don't you know, and I never forgot it. The one by Lord Byron. I'll render that, if you wish."

"We do wish, we do!" cried Molly, while the Master nodded approvingly.

So without further prelude Melvin recited:

"'Twas whispered in Heaven, 'twas muttered in Hell,  
And Echo caught softly the sound as it fell;  
On the confines of Earth 'twas permitted to rest,  
And the Depths of the ocean its presence confessed.  
'Twill be found in the Sphere when 'tis riven asunder,  
Be seen in the Lightning and heard in the Thunder.  
'Twas allotted to man with his earliest Breath,  
Attends at his Birth and awaits him in Death;  
It presides o'er his Happiness, Honor, and Health,  
Is the prop of his House and the end of his Wealth.  
Without it the soldier and seaman may roam,  
But woe to the Wretch who expels it from Home.  
In the Whispers of conscience its voice will be found,  
Nor e'en in the Whirlwind of passion be drowned.  
'Twill not soften the Heart; and tho' deaf to the ear  
'Twill make it acutely and instantly Hear.  
But in Shade, let it rest like a delicate flower—  
Oh! Breathe on it softly—it dies in an Hour."

Several had heard the riddle before and knew its significance; but those who had not found it as difficult to guess as Frazer's "Old Shoe" had been. So Melvin had to explain that it was a play of words each containing the letter H; and this explanation was no sooner given than a diversion was made by Mabel Bruce's irrelevant remark:

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"I never picked grapes off a vine in my life, never!"

"Hi! Does that mean you want to do so now?" demanded Monty, alert. He, too, had grown tired of a game in which he did not excel, and eagerly followed the direction of her pointing, chubby finger. A finger on which sparkled a diamond ring, more fitting for a matron than a schoolgirl young as she.

Along that side of the barn, rising from the hay strewn floor to the loft above, ran a row of upright posts set a few inches apart and designed to guard a great space beyond. This space was to be filled with the winter's stock of hay and its cemented bottom was several feet lower than the floor whereon the merry-makers sat. As yet but little hay had been stored there, and the posts which would give needful ventilation as well as keep the hay from falling inward, had been utilized now for decoration.

The boyish decorators had not scrupled to rifle the Deerhurst vineyards of their most attractive vines, and the cluster of fruit on which Mabel had fixed a covetous eye was certainly a tempting one. The rays from two Chinese lanterns, hung near it, brought out its juicy lusciousness with even more than daylight clearness, and Mabel's mouth fairly watered for these translucent grapes.

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"That bunch? Of course you shall have it!" cried Monty, springing up and standing on tiptoe to reach what either Jim or Herbert could have plucked with ease.

Alas! His efforts but hindered himself. The vine was only loosely twined around the upright and, as he grasped it, swung lightly about and the cluster he sought was forced to the inner side of the post, even higher than it had hung before.

"Huh! That's what my father would call 'the aggravation of inanimate things'! Those grapes knew that you wanted them, that I wanted to get them for you, and see how they act? But I'll have them yet. Don't fear. That old fellow I camped-out with this last summer told me it was a coward who ever gave up 'discouraged.' I'll have that bunch of grapes—or I'll know the reason why! I almost reached them that time!" cried the struggler, proudly, and leaped again.

By this time all the company was watching his efforts, the lads offering jeering suggestions about "sheets of paper to stand on," and Danny Smith even inquiring if the other was "practising for a climb on a greased pole, come next Fourth."

Even the girls laughed over Monty's ludicrous attempts, though Mabel entreated him to give up and let somebody else try.

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"I—I rather guess not! When I set out to serve a lady I do it or die in the attempt!" returned the perspiring lad, vigorously waving aside the proffered help of his taller mates. "I—I—My heart! Oh! Jiminy! I—I'm stuck!"

He was. One of the newly set uprights had slipped a little and again wedged itself fast; and between this and its neighbor, unfortunate Montmorency hung suspended, the upper half of his body forced inward over the empty "bay" and his fat legs left to wave wildly about in their effort to find a resting place. To add to his predicament, a scream of uncontrollable laughter rose from all the observers, even Mabel, in whose sake he so gallantly suffered, adding her shrill cackle to the others.

All but the Master. Only the fleetest smile crossed his face, then it grew instantly grave as he said:

"We've tried our hand at riddles but here's another, harder than any of the others. Monty is in a fix—how shall we get him out?"

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## CHAPTER VI

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### A MORNING CALL

So ended the first "Day" of Dorothy's famous "Week."

At sight of the gravity that had fallen upon Seth Winter's face her own sobered, though she had to turn her eyes away from the absurd appearance of poor Monty's waving legs. Then the legs ceased to wave and hung limp and inert.

The Master silently pointed toward the door and gathering her girl guests about her the young hostess led them houseward, remarking:

"That looks funnier than it is and dear Mr. Seth wants us out of the way. I reckon they'll have to cut that post down for I saw that even he and Jim together couldn't move it. It's so new and sticky, maybe—I don't know. Poor Monty!"

"When he kept still, just now, I believe he fainted. I'm terribly frightened," said Helena Montaigne, laying a trembling hand on Dolly's shoulder. "It would be so perfectly awful to have your House Party broken up by a tragedy!"

Mabel began to cry, and the two mountain girls, Molly Martin and Jane, slipped their arms about her to comfort her, Jane practically observing:

"It takes a good deal to kill a boy. Ma says they've as many lives as a cat, and Ma knows. She brought up seven." [Pg 80]

"She didn't bring 'em far, then, Jane. They didn't grow to be more than a dozen years old, ary one of 'em. You're the last one left and you know it yourself," corrected the too-exact Alfaretta.

"Pooh, Alfy! Don't talk solemn talk now. That Monty boy isn't dead yet and Janie's a girl. They'll get him out his fix, course, such a lot of folks around to help. And, Mabel, it wasn't your fault, anyway. He needn't have let himself get so fat, then he wouldn't have had no trouble. I could slip in and out them uprights, easy as fallin' off a log. He must be an awful eater. Fat folks gen'ally are," said Molly Martin.

Mabel winced and shook off the comforter's embrace. She was "fat" herself and also "an awful eater," as Dolly could well remember and had been from the days of their earliest childhood. But the regretful girl could not stop crying and bitterly blamed herself for wanting "those horrible grapes. I'll never eat another grape as long as I live. I shall feel like—like a——"

"Like a dear sensible girl, Mabel Bruce! And don't forget you haven't eaten any grapes *yet*, here. Of course, it will be all right. Molly Martin is sensible. Let's just go in and sit awhile in the library, where cook, Aunt Malinda, was going to put some cake and lemonade. There'll be a basket of fruit there, too; and we can have a little music, waiting for the boys to come in," said Dorothy, with more confidence in her voice than in her heart. Then when Mabel's tears had promptly ceased—could it have been at the mention of refreshments?—she added, considerately: "and let's all resolve not to say a single word about poor Monty's mishap. He's more sensitive than he seems and will be mortified enough, remembering how silly he looked, without our reminding him of it." [Pg 81]



"That's right, Dorothy. I'm glad you spoke of it. I'm sure nobody would wish to hurt his feelings and it was—ridiculous, one way;" added Helena, heartily, and Dorothy smiled gratefully upon her. She well knew that the rich girl's opinion carried weight with these poorer ones and of Alfaretta's teasing tongue she had been especially afraid.

Nor was it long before they heard the boys come in, and from the merry voices and even whistling of the irrepressible Danny, they knew that the untoward incident had ended well. Yet when the lads had joined them, as eager for refreshments as Mabel now proved, neither Jim, Mr. Seth, nor Monty was with them; and, to the credit of all it was, that the subject of the misadventure did not come up at all, although inquisitive Alfie had fairly to bite her tongue to keep the questions back.

They ended the evening by an hour in the music room, where gay college songs and a few old-fashioned "rounds" sent them all to bed a care-free, merry company; though Dorothy lingered long enough to write a brief note to Mrs. Calvert and to drop it into the letter-box whence it would find the earliest mail to town.

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A satisfactory little epistle to its recipient, though it said only this:

"Our House Party is a success! Dear Mr. Seth is the nicest boy of the lot, and I know you're as glad as I am that he invited himself. I thank you and I love you, love you, love you! Dolly."

Next morning, as beautiful a Sunday as ever dawned, came old Dinah to Dorothy with a long face, and the lament:

"I cayn't fo' de life make dat li'l creatur' eat wid a fo'k an' howcome I erlows he' to eat to de table alongside you-alls, lak yo' tole me, Miss Do'thy? I'se done putten it into he' han', time an' time ergin, an' she jes natchally flings hit undah foot an' grabs a spoon. An' she stuffs an' stuffs, wussen you' fixin' er big tu'key. I'se gwine gib up teachin' he' mannehs. I sutney is. She ain' no quality, she ain'."

"But that's all right, Dinah. She's only a child, a little child it seems to me. And whether she's 'quality' or not makes no difference. I've talked it all over with Mr. Seth and he says I may do as I like. Whoever she is, she's somebody! She came uninvited and sometimes it seems as if God sent her. She can't understand our good times but I want her to share them. So, now that you say she is perfectly well, just let her take the place at table near the door where we settled she should sit. Let Norah wait upon her and I do believe the sight of all of us, so happy, will give some happiness to her. 'Touched of God,' some people call these 'naturals.' She's a human being, she was once a girl like me, and she's simply—*not finished!* She isn't a bit repulsive and I'm sure it's right to have her with us all we can."

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"She's a ole woman, Miss Do'thy, she ain' no gal-chile. He' haid's whitah nor my Miss Betty's. I erlow she wouldn'—"

"There, there, good Dinah! You and I have threshed this subject threadbare. You are so kind to me, have done and will do so much to make my Party go off all right, that I do hate to go against anything you say. But I can't give up in this. That poor little wanderer who strayed into Deerhurst grounds, whom nobody comes to claim, shall not be the first to find it inhospitable. I've written Aunt Betty all about this 'Luna' and I know she'll approve, just as Mr. Winters does. So don't try to keep her shut up out of sight, any longer, Dinah dear. It goes to my heart to see her pace, pace around any room you put her in by herself. Like a poor wild animal caged! It fairly made me shiver to see her, yesterday, when you led her into the great storeroom and left her. She followed you to the door and peered, and peered, out after you but didn't offer to follow. As if she were fastened by invisible chains and couldn't. Then around and around she went again, playing with those bits of bright rags you found in the pocket of her own dress. I'm so glad she likes that red one of mine and that it fits her so well. So don't worry, Dinah, over the proprieties of your Miss Betty's home. There's something better than propriety—that's loving kindness!"

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Nobody had ever accused old Dinah of want of kindness and Dorothy did not mean to do so now. The faithful woman had been devoted to the unknown visitor, from the moment of discovering her asleep upon the sun-parlor lounge; but she could not make it seem right that such an afflicted creature, and one who was evidently so far along in life, should mix at all familiarly with all those gay young people now staying in the house. But she had never heard her new "li'l Missy" talk at such length before and she was impressed by the multitude of words if not by their meaning. Besides, her quick ear had caught that "Luna," and she now impatiently demanded:

"Howcome you' knows he' name, Miss Do'thy, an' nebah tole ole Dinah?"

"Oh! I don't know it, honey. Not her real one. That's a fancy one I made up. She came to us

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in the moonlight and Luna stands for moon. So that's why, and that's all! So go, good Dinah, and send your charge in with Norah. All the others are down and waiting and, I hope, as hungry for their breakfast as I am!"

Dinah departed, grumbling. In few things would she oppose her "Miss Do'thy" but in the matter of this "unfinished" stranger she felt strongly. However, she objected no more. If Mr. Seth Winters, her Miss Betty's trusted friend, endorsed such triflin', ornery gwines-on, she had no more to say. The blame was on his shoulders and not hers!

Since nobody knew a better name for the stranger than "Luna" it was promptly accepted by all as a fitting one. She answered to it just as she answered to anything else—and that was not at all. She allowed herself to be led, fed, and otherwise attended, without resistance, and if she was especially comfortable she wore a happy smile on her small wrinkled face. But she never spoke and to the superstitious servants her silence seemed uncanny:

"I just believe she could talk, if she wanted to, for she certainly hears quick enough. She's real impish, witch-like, and she fair gives me the creeps," complained Norah to a stable lad early on that Sunday morning. "And I don't half like for Miss Dolly to 'point me special nurse to the creatur'. I'd rather by far be left to me bedmakin' an' dustin'. She may be one of them 'little people' lives at home in old Ireland—that's the power to work ill charms on a body, if they wish it."

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"True ye say, Norah girl. 'Twas an' ill charm, she worked on me not an hour agone. I was in the back porch, slippin' off me stable jacket 'fore eatin' my food, an' Dinah had the creature by the hand scrubbin' a bit dirt off it. I was takin' my money out one pocket into another and quick as chain-lightnin' grabs this queer old woman and hides the money behind her. She may be a fool, indeed, but she knows money when she sees it! and the look on her was like a miser!"

"Did you get it back, lad?"

"Deed, that did I! If there's one more'n another this Luny dwarf fears—and likes, too, which is odd!—it's old black Dinah; and even she had to squeeze the poor little hand tight to make its fingers open and the silver drop out. Then the creature forgot all about it same's she'd never seen it at all, at all. But Tim's learned his lesson, and 'tis that there's nobody in this world so silly 't he don't know money when he sees it! 'Twas a she this time, though just as greedy."

But if Norah dreaded the charge of poor Luna the latter made very little trouble for her attendant. She did not understand the use of knife and fork and all her food had to be cut up, as for a helpless infant; but she fed herself with a spoon neatly enough, though in great haste. Afterwards she leaned back in her chair and stared vacantly at one or another of the young folks gathered around that big table. Finally, her eyes rested upon the gaily bedecked person of Mabel Bruce and a smile settled upon her features; while so unobtrusive was she that her presence was almost forgotten by the other, happy chatterers in the room.

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"Who's for church?" asked Mr. Winters, with a little tap on the table to secure attention. "Hands up, so I can count noses!"

Every hand went up, even Luna following the example of the rest, quite unknowing why. Seeing this, Dorothy must needs leave her seat and run around to the poor thing's chair and pat her shoulder approvingly.

"The landau will hold four, and it's four miles to our church. Who is for that?" again demanded the Master.

There was a swift exchange of glances between him and the young hostess as she returned:

"Shall I say?"

"Aye, aye!" shouted Monty, with his ordinary fervor. The considerate silence of his house-mates concerning his mishap in the barn had restored his self-possession, and though he had felt silly and awkward when he had joined them he did not now.

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"Very well. Then I nominate Jane, Molly Martin, Alfaretta, and Mabel Bruce, for the state carriage," said Dorothy.

"Sho! I thought if that was used at all 'twould be Helena and the other 'ristocrats would ride in that," whispered the delighted Alfy to Jane.

But the young hostess had quickly reflected that landaus and other luxurious equipages were familiar and commonplace to her richer guests but that, probably, none of these others had ever ridden in such state; therefore the greater pleasure to them.

The Master produced a slip of paper and checked off the names:

"Landau, with the bays; and Ephraim and Boots in livery—settled. Next?"

"There's the pony cart and Portia," suggested Dolly.

"Helena and Melvin? Jolly Molly, and Jim to drive? Satisfactory all round?" again asked the note-taker; and if this second apportionment was not so at least nobody objected, although poor Jim looked forward to an eight-mile drive beside mischievous Molly Breckenridge with some misgiving.

"Very well. I'll admit I never tackled such an amiable young crowd. Commonly, in parties as big as this there are just as many different wishes as there are people. I congratulate you, my dears, and may this beatific state of things continue till the end of the chapter!" cried Mr. Seth, really delighted.

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"Why, of course, Mr. Winters. How could we do otherwise? In society one never puts one's own desires in opposition to those of others. That's what society is for, is what it means, isn't it? Good breeding means unselfishness;" said Helena, then added, with a little flush of modesty: "Not that I am an oracle, but that's what I've read and—and seen—abroad."

"Right, Miss Helena, and thank you for the explanation. And apropos of that subject: What's the oldest, most unalterable book of etiquette we have?"

Nobody answered, apparently nobody knew; till Melvin timidly ventured:

"I fancy it's the Bible, sir. My mother, don't you know, often remarks that anybody who makes the Bible a rule of conduct can't help being a gentleman or gentlewoman. Can't help it, don't you know?"

Old Seth beamed upon the lad who had so bravely fought his own shyness, to answer when he could, and so prove himself by that same ancient Book a "gentleman."

"Thank you, my boy. You've a mother to be proud of and she—has a pretty decent sort of son! However, we've arranged places for but half our number. As I said the distance is four miles going and it will seem about eight returning—we shall all be so desperately hungry. We might go to some church nearer except that at this distant one there will be to-day a famous preacher whom I would like you all to hear. He is a guest in the neighborhood and that is why we have this one chance. Come, Dolly Doodles. You're the hostess and must provide for your guests. How shall eight people be conveyed to that far-away church?"

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"I've been thinking, Master. There's the big open wagon, used for hauling stuff. It has a lot of seats belonging though only one is often used. So Ephy told me once. We could have the seats put in and the rest of us ride in that."

"Good enough. The rest of us are wholly willing to be 'hauled' to please our southern hostess. The rest of us are—let's see."

"You, Mr. Seth; Littlejohn and Danny; Mike and Frazer; Luna and me. Coming home, if we wish, some of us could change places. Well, Mabel? What is it? Don't you like the arrangement?"

"Ye-es, I suppose so. Only—you've put four girls in our carriage and four boys in your own. That isn't dividing even; and if it's such an awful long way hadn't we—shouldn't—shan't we be terrible late to dinner?"

Poor Mabel! Nature would out. That mountain air was famous for sharpening every newcomer's appetite and it had made hers perfectly ravenous. It seemed to her that she had never tasted such delicious food as Aunt Malinda prepared and that she should never be able to get enough. A shout of laughter greeted her question but did not dismay her, for the matter was too serious; and she was greatly relieved when the Master returned, kindly and with entire gravity:

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"Little Mabel is right. We shall all be glad of a 'snack' when service is over and before we start back. Dolly, please see that a basket of sandwiches is put up and carried along. Also a basket of grapes. Some of us are fond of grapes!" he finished, significantly, and that was the only reference made to the episode of the night before.

But there was one more objector and that outspoken Alf, who begged of Dorothy, in a sibilant whisper:

"Do you mean it? Are you really goin' to take that loony Luna to meeting?"

"I certainly am. She is not to be hidden, nor deprived of any pleasure my other guests enjoy. Besides, somebody who knows her may see and claim her. Poor thing! It's terrible

that she can't tell us who she is nor where she belongs!"

"Hmm. I'm glad she ain't goin' to ride alongside of me, then. Folks will stare so, on the road, at that old woman rigged out like a girl."

"Never mind, Alfie dear. Let them stare. She's delighted with the red frock and hat, and it's something to have made her happy even that much. Remember how she clung to those bits of gay rags Dinah found on her? She certainly knows enough to love color, and I shall keep her close to me. I'd be afraid if I didn't her feelings might be hurt by—by somebody's thoughtlessness." [Pg 92]

"Mine, I s'pose you mean, Dorothy C. But—my stars and garters! Look a-there! Look round, I tell you, quick!"

Dolly looked and her own eyes opened in amazement. Framed in the long window that reached to the piazza floor stood a curiously garbed old man holding firmly before him two tiny children. He wore an old black skull cap and a ragged cassock, and he announced in a croaking voice:

"I pass these children on to you. I go to deliver the message upon which I am sent;" and having said this, before anyone could protest or interfere, he was disappearing down the driveway at an astonishing pace, as if his "message" abided not the slightest delay.

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## CHAPTER VII

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### A MEMORABLE CHURCH GOING

"Of all things! If that don't beat the Dutch!" cried Alfaretta, and at sound of her voice the others rallied from their amazement, while Mr. Winters begged:

"Run, lads, some of you and stop that man. Owen Bryan spoke of a half-crazy fanatic, a self-ordained exhorter, who had lately come to the mountain and lived somewhere about, in hiding as it were. An escaped convict, he'd heard. Run. He mustn't leave those children here."

Jim and Frazer were already on the way, obedient to the Master's first words, without tarrying to hear the conclusion of his speech. But they were not quick enough. They caught one glimpse of a ragged, flying cassock and no more. The man had vanished from sight, and though they lingered to search the low-growing evergreens, and every hidden nook bordering the drive, they could not find him. So they returned to report and were just in time to hear Dorothy and Molly questioning the babies, for they were little more than that.

They were clad exactly alike, in little denim overalls, faded by many washings and stiff with starch. Their feet were bare as were their heads, and clinging to one another they stared with round-eyed curiosity into the great room. [Pg 94]

"Oh! aren't they cute! They're too funny for words. What's your name, little boy? If you are a boy!" demanded Molly.

The little one shook her too familiar hand from his small shoulder and answered with a solemnity and distinctness that was amazing, when one anticipated an infantile lisp:

"A-n an, a ana, n-i ni, anani, a-s as, Ananias."

Monty Stark rolled over backward on the floor and fairly yelled in laughter, while the laughter of the others echoed his, but nothing perturbed by this reception of his, to him, commonplace statement, master Ananias looked about in cherubic satisfaction.

Then again demanded Molly of the other midget.

"What's yours, twinsy? For twins you must be!"

Evidently tutored as to what would be expected of her the other child replied in exact imitation of her mate and with equal clearness:

"S-a-p sap, p-h-i phi, sapphi, r-a ra, Sapphira."

Utter silence greeted this absurd reply, then another noisy burst of laughter in which even the really disturbed Master joined.

"Surely a man must be out of his mind to fasten such names on two such innocents! But

they must be taken elsewhere. Deerhurst must not become a receptacle for all the cast-off burdens of humanity. I must go ask Bryan all he knows about the case," said Mr. Seth, as soon as he had recovered his gravity. [Pg 95]

But Dorothy nodded toward the great clock and with a frown he observed the hour. If they were to make ready for their long drive to church, yet be in time for the beginning of the service, they must be making ready, so he consented:

"I don't suppose any great mischief can be done by their remaining here till we get back; but——"

"Why not take them with us, Teacher?" asked Alfaretta. "We could take one in the lander with us." Her tone was as complacent as if the vehicle in question were her own and her head was tossed as she waited for his reply.

But it was Dorothy who forestalled him and her decision was so sensible he did not oppose it:

"Beg pardon, Mr. Seth, but I think we would better take them. If we leave them they may get into mischief and the servants have enough to do without worrying with them. They're so little we can tuck them into the big wagon with us and it won't hurt even babies to go to church. But I wonder which is which! Now they've moved around and changed places I can't tell which is Ananias and which Sapphira! Poor little kiddies, to be named after liars!"

"I know. This one has a kink in its hair the other one hasn't. I think it was Sapphira. Or— was it Ananias? Baby, which are you?" [Pg 96]

Neither child replied. They clung each to the other and stared at this too inquisitive Molly Breckenridge with the disconcerting stare of childhood, till she turned away and gathering a handful of biscuits from the table bade them sit down and eat. She forbade them to drop a single crumb and they were obedient even to absurdity.

A half-hour later the three vehicles were at the door and the happy guests made haste to take the places allotted them; the big wagon following last, with Luna smilingly, yet in a half-frightened clutch of Dorothy, sitting on the comfortable back seat. Mr. Seth had lifted her bodily into the wagon and she had submitted without realizing what was happening to her till the wagon began to move. Then she screamed, as if in terror, and hid her face on Dolly's shoulder.

"Doan' take he'. 'Peah's lak she's done afeered o' ridin'. Nebah min', Miss Do'thy. Some yo' lads jes' han' he' down to Dinah and she'll be taken' ca' ob, scusin' dey is a big dinnah in de way an' half de he'ps' Sunday out. Han' 'er down!"

However, without physical force this was not to be done. When Jim strove to lift her, as he might easily have done in his strong arms, she clung the closer to her little hostess and screamed afresh. So he gave up the attempt and turned his attention to the twins, the last arriving members of this famous House Party. [Pg 97]

There was no reluctance about them—not the slightest. They were fairly dancing with impatience and Ananias—or was it Sapphira?—was already attempting to enter the "wagging" by way of climbing up the "nigh" horse's leg, while her—or his—mate clung to the spokes of the forward wheel, wholly ready to be whirled around and around with its forward progress.

"Evidently, these babies aren't afraid to ride!" cried Dorothy, laughing yet half-frightened over the little creatures' boldness. "Please set them right on the bottom, between your knees and Littlejohn's, Mr. Seth! Then they'll be safe. And there, Luna dear, poor Luna, you see we're off at last and— isn't it just lovely?"

Luna made no more response than usual but her hidden face sank lower and more heavily upon Dorothy's shoulder, till, presently, she was sound asleep. Then Mike Martin climbed back over the seats to the spot and deftly placed his own cushion behind the sleeper's head. Dolly thanked him with a smile but wondered to see him stare at the sleeper's face with that puzzled expression on his own. Then he scratched his head and asked in a whisper: [Pg 98]

"Can you tell who she looks like? Terrible familiar, somehow, but can't guess. Can you?"

Dorothy shook her head.

"No, I've never seen another like her. I hope I never will."

"If we could think, we might find her folks and you could get rid of her," continued the lad.

"I don't know as I'm so anxious to be rid of her. I do believe she's happy—happier than

when she came—and—Look out! If the wagon goes over another thank-ye-ma-am and you're still standing up you'll likely be pitched over into the road. My! But the horses are in fine fettle this morning!"

A fresh jolt made Mike cling fast to escape the accident she suggested and he returned to his place, riding on the uncushioned seat as cheerfully as any knight errant of old. Dorothy was his ideal of a girl. She had taught him the difference between bravery and bullying and she had been his inspiration in the task to which he had pledged himself—to be a peacemaker on the mountain. Once, her coolness and courage had saved his life, and on that day he had promised to fulfil her desire, to bridge the enmity between south-side and north-side. His methods had not always been such as Dorothy would have approved but the result was satisfactory. In school and out of it, peace prevailed on the "Heights," and Mike Martin was a nobler boy himself because of his efforts to make others noble.

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There was a little stir of excitement in the small country church when Seth Winters and his following of young folks entered it, and by mere force of numbers so impressing the ushers that the very front pews were vacated in their behalf, although the farrier protested against this. However, he wasn't sorry to have his company all together, and motioned Dorothy into the same pew with himself, and to a place directly under the pulpit. Into this, also, they led the still drowsy Luna, Dorothy gently settling her in the corner with her head resting upon the pew's back, and here she slept on during most of the service. Here, also, they settled the twins, but could not avoid seeing the curious and amused glances cast upon this odd pair as they trotted up the aisle in Dorothy's wake.

"Two peas in a pod," whispered one farmer's wife to her seat neighbor.

"Where'd they pick up two such little owls? They're all eyes and solemn as the parson himself, but them ridiculous clothes! My heart! What won't fashionable folks do next, to make their youngsters look different from ours!" returned the other. Nobody guessed that the funny little creatures were an accidental addition to the House Party; and after the strangers were settled nobody was further concerned with them.

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The service began and duly proceeded. The singing was congregational and in it all the young people joined, making the familiar hymns seem uncommonly beautiful to the hearers; and it was not till the sermon was well under way that anything unusual happened to divert attention. Then there came a soft yet heavy patter on the uncarpeted aisle and two black animals stalked majestically forward and seated themselves upon their haunches directly beneath the pulpit. With an air of profound interest they fixed their eyes upon the speaker therein and, for an instant, disconcerted even that self-possessed orator.

"Ponce and Peter! Aunt Betty's Great Danes! However has this happened!" thought poor Dorothy, unable quite to control a smile yet wofully anxious lest the dogs should create a disturbance. However, nothing happened. The Danes might have been regular worshipers in the place for all notice was accorded them by the well trained congregation; and after they were tired of watching the minister the animals quietly stretched themselves to sleep.

Their movement and the prodigious yawn of one had bad results. The twins had been having their own peaceful naps upon the kneeling bench at Mr. Seth's feet, but, now, with the suddenness native to them, awoke, discovered the dogs, and leaped out of the pew into the aisle. There they flung themselves upon the dogs with shrieks of delight. It was as if they had found old friends and playmates—as later developments proved to be true.

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Poor Mr. Winters stared in consternation. He detested a scene but saw one imminent; and how to get both dogs and babies out of that sacred place without great trouble he could not guess. But Dorothy put her hand on his arm and gently patted it. She, too, was frightened but she trusted the animals' instincts; she was right. After a moment's sniffing of the twins, they quietly lay down again and the twins did likewise! and though they did not go to sleep again they behaved well enough, until growing impassioned with his own eloquence the speaker lifted his voice loudly and imploringly.

That was a sound they knew. Up sprang one and shouted: "Amen!" and up sprang the other and echoed him!

The minister flushed, stammered, and valiantly went on; but he never reached the climax of that sermon. Those continually interrupting groans and "Amens!" uttered in that childish treble, were too much for him. A suppressed titter ran over the whole congregation, in which all the Deerhurst party joined though they strove not to do so; and amid that subdued mirth the clergyman brought his discourse to a sudden end.

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The benediction spoken there was a rush for the door, in which the Great Danes and the twins led; riotously tumbling over one another, barking and squealing, while the outpouring congregation stepped aside to give them way.

Happy-hearted Seth Winters had rarely felt so annoyed or mortified, while Dorothy's face was scarlet even though her lips twitched with laughter. These two lingered in their places till the clergyman descended from his pulpit and prepared to leave the church. Then they advanced and offered what apologies they could; the farrier relating in few words the story of the morning and disclaiming any knowledge as to the identity of the twins or how the dogs had been set loose.

"Don't mention it. Of course, I could see that it was accidental, and it isn't of the slightest consequence. Doubtless I had preached as long as was good for my hearers and—I wish you good morning," said the minister, smiling but rather hastily moving away.

Mr. Winters also bowed and followed his party out of doors. But he wasn't smiling, not in the least; and it was a timid touch Dorothy laid upon his arm as she came to the big wagon to take her place for the drive home. He looked down at her, and at sight of tears in her eyes, his anger melted.

"There, there, child, don't fret! It was one of those unavoidable annoyances that really amount to nothing yet are so hard to bear. Here, let me swing you up. But we must get rid of those youngsters! Sabbath day or not I shall make it my business so to do at the earliest possible moment. By the way, where are they now?"

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For a moment nobody could say, though the Deerhurst wagons waited while the lads searched and all the regular congregation departed to their homes. Then called Mabel from her seat of honor in the landau:

"Dolly Doodles, whilst we're waiting we might as well eat our lunch."

For once Mabel's greediness served her neighbors a good purpose. Mr. Seth promptly replied, with something like a wink in Dorothy's direction:

"Couldn't do better. There's the church well, too, a famous one, from which to quench our thirst. There's an old saying that 'Meal time brings all rogues home' and likely the presence of food may attract our little runaways. Indeed, I've half a mind to leave them behind, any way. 'Pass them on' to the world at large as that old man 'passed them on' to us."

To this there was protest from every side, even Alfaretta declaring she had never heard of such a heartless thing! But she need not have feared, and Dorothy certainly did not. She knew the big heart of her old friend too well; and producing the basket of sandwiches she went about offering them to all.

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Nobody declined although Monty triumphantly exclaimed:

"We haven't any right to be so hungry for an hour yet, 'cause if the dogs hadn't come to church we'd have been kept in that much longer." Then still munching a sandwich he set about to bring water for all, in the one tin dipper that hung by the well, the other lads relieving him from time to time.

They were all so merry, so innocently happy under the great trees which bordered the church grounds, that the Master grew happy, too, watching and listening to them and forgot the untoward incident of the service; even forgot, for a moment, that either twins or dogs existed. Then, after both fruit and sandwich baskets had been wholly emptied and all had declared they wanted no more water, the cavalcade prepared to move; Dorothy begging:

"Can Luna and I sit on the front seat, with Littlejohn driving, going back? See, she's no longer afraid and I always do love to ride close to the horses."

"Very well. Here goes then," answered Mr. Seth gently lifting Luna—wholly unresisting now and placidly smiling—to the place desired while Dolly swiftly sprang after. Then the others seated themselves and Ephraim cracked his whip, the landau leading as befitted its grandeur.

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Then there were shrieks for delay. From Molly Breckenridge at first, echoed by piping little tongues as the lost "twinses" came into sight. Over the stone wall bordering the road leaped Ponce and Peter, dripping wet and shaking their great bodies vigorously, the while they yelped and barked in sheer delight. Behind them Ananias and Sapphira, equally wet, equally noisy, equally rapturous, and beginning at once to climb into the richly cushioned landau as fast as their funny little legs would permit.

Then came another shriek as, rather than let her beautiful clothes be smirched by contact with the drenched children, Mabel Bruce drew her skirts about her, gave one headlong leap to the ground, and fell prone.

### CONCERNING VARIOUS MATTERS

The laughter which rose to the lips of some of the observers was promptly checked as they saw that the girl lay perfectly still in the dust where she had fallen, making no effort to rise, and unconscious of her injured finery.

"She'd better have kep' still an' let 'em wet her," said Alf, nudging Jane Potter.

"She ain't gettin' up because she can't," answered Jane and sprang out of the landau, to kneel beside the prostrate girl; then to look up and cry out: "She's hurt! She's dreadful hurt!"

Unhappy Mr. Winters set his teeth and his lips were grim. "If ever I'm so misguided as to engineer another young folks' House Party, I hope——"

He didn't express this "hope" but stooped and with utmost tenderness lifted Mabel to her feet. She had begun to rally from the shock of her fall and opened her eyes again, while the pallor that had banished her usual rosiness began to yield to the returning circulation. Already many hands were outstretched to help, some with the dipper from the well, others with dripping wooden plates whereon their luncheon had been packed. Mabel pushed the plates aside, fretfully, explaining as soon as she could speak:

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"If that gets on my clothes—they're so dusty—Oh! what made me—Oh! oh! A-ah!"

Then she began to laugh and cry alternately, as the misfortune and its absurdity fully appeared, and Helena saw that the girl was fast becoming hysterical. Evidently, in their wearer's eyes, the beautiful frock now so badly smirched and the white gloves which had split asunder in her fall were treasures beyond compute, and Helena herself loved pretty clothes. She felt a keen sympathy in that and another respect—she had suffered from hysteria and always went prepared for an emergency. Stepping quietly to Mabel's side, she waved aside the other eager helpers, saying:

"I'm going to ride back in the landau, Alf, please take my place in the cart. Here, Mabel, swallow a drop of this medicine. 'Twill set you right at once."

Her movements and words were as decided as they were quiet and Mabel unconsciously obeyed. She submitted to be helped back into the carriage and as Helena took the empty seat beside her, Ephraim drove swiftly away.

Thus ignored the dripping twins stared ruefully after the vanishing vehicle and Mr. Seth looked as ruefully at them. But Molly begged:

"Let them go in the cart with us. Alf's frock and mine will wash, even if they soil us. One can ride between Jim and me and Melvin and Alf must look after the other. Let's choose. I take Ananias. I just love boys!"

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"Be sure you've chosen one then," laughed Jim as he rather gingerly picked up one infant and placed it behind the dashboard. He had on his own Sunday attire and realized the cost of it, so objected almost as strongly as Mabel had done to contact with this well-soused youngster. "Say, sonny, what made you tumble in the brook? Don't you know this is Sunday?"

"Yep. Didn't tumble, just *went*. I'm no 'sonny'; I'm sissy. S-a-p sap, p-h-i——" began the little one, glibly and distinctly.

"You can't be! You surely are Ananias! Your hair is cut exactly like a boy's and you wear boy's panties! You're spelling the wrong name. Look out! What next?" cried Molly anxiously, as the active baby suddenly climbed over the back of that seat to join her mate behind. There master Ananias—or was it really Sapphira?—cuddled down on the rug in the bottom of the cart and settled himself—herself—for sleep.

Neither Alf nor Melvin interfered with these too-close small neighbors; but withdrawing to the extreme edges of the seat left them to sleep and get dry at their leisure. After that the homeward drive proceeded in peace; only Herbert calling out now and then from his place in the big wagon to make Melvin admire some particular beauty of the scene, challenging the Provincial to beat it if he could in that far away Markland of his own.

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"But you haven't the sea!" retorted Melvin, proudly.



"We don't need it. We have the HUDSON RIVER!" came as swiftly back; and as they had come just then to a turn in the road where an ancient building stood beneath a canopy of trees, he asked: "Hold up the horses a minute, will you, Littlejohn? I'd like our English friend to say if he ever saw anything more picturesque than this."

"This" was a more than century-old Friends' meeting-house. Unpainted and shingled all over its outward surface. "Old shingle-sides" was its local name, and a lovelier location could not have been chosen even by a less austere body of worshipers.

Meeting had been prolonged that First Day. The hand clasp of neighbor with neighbor which signaled its close had just been given. From the doorways on either side, the men's and the women's, these silent worshipers were now issuing; the men to seek the vehicles waiting beneath the long shed and the women to gossip a moment of neighborhood affairs.

Mr. Winters was willing to rest and "breathe the horses" for a little, the day being warm and the drive long, and to observe with interest the decorous home-going of these Plain People; and it so chanced that the big wagon, where Dorothy sat on the front seat with Luna resting against her, halted just beside the entrance to the meeting-house grounds. From her place she watched the departing congregation with the keen interest she brought to everything; and among them she recognized the familiar outlines of George Fox, the miller's fine horse; and, holding the reins over its back, Oliver Sands, the miller himself. So close he drove to the big wagon that George Fox's nose touched Littlejohn's leader, and the boy pulled back a little.

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"Huh! That's old Oliver in his First Day grays! But he's in the grumps. Guess the Spirit hasn't moved him to anything pleasant, by the look," he remarked to Dorothy beside him.

"He does look as if he were in trouble. I don't like him. I never did. He wasn't—well, nice to Father John once. But I'm sorry he's unhappy. Nobody ought to be on such a heavenly day."

If Oliver saw those watching beside the gate he made no sign. His fat shoulders, commonly so erect, were bowed as if he had suddenly grown old. His face had lost its unctuous smile and was haggard with care; and for once he paid no heed to George Fox's un-Quakerlike gambols, fraught with danger to the open buggy he drew. A pale-faced woman in the orthodox attire of the birthright Friends sat beside the miller and clung to him in evident terror at the horse's behavior. It was she who saw how close the contact between their own and the Deerhurst team, and her eye fell anxiously upon the two girlish figures upon the front seat of the wagon. For a girl the unknown Luna seemed, clad in the scarlet frock and hat that Dorothy had given; while Dolly, herself, clasping the little creature close lest she should be frightened looked even younger than she was.

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"Sisters," thought Dorcas Sands, "yet not alike." Then casting a second, critical glance upon Luna she uttered a strange cry and clutched her husband's arm.

"Dorcas, thee is too old for foolishness," was all the heed he paid to her gesture, and drove stolidly on, unseeing aught but his own inward perturbation which had found no solace in that morning's Meeting.

Dorcas looked back once over her shoulder and Dorothy returned a friendly smile to the sweet old face in the white-lined gray bonnet. Then the bonnet faced about again and George Fox whisked its wearer out of sight.

"I declare I'd love to be a Quakeress and wear such clothes as these women do. They look so sweet and peaceful and happy. As if nothing ever troubled them. Don't you think they're lovely, Littlejohn?"

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"Huh! I don't know. That there Mrs. Sands—Dorcas Sands is the way she's called 'cause the Friends don't give nobody titles—I guess there ain't a more unhappy woman on our mountain than her."

"Why, Littlejohn! Fancy! With such a—a good man; isn't he?"

"Good accordin' as you call goodness. He ain't bad, not so bad; only you want to look sharp when you have dealings with him. They say he measures the milk his folks use in the cookin' and if more butter goes one week than he thinks ought to he skimps 'em the next. I ain't stuck on that kind of a man, myself, even if he is all-fired rich. Gid-dap, boys!"

With which expression of his sentiments the young mountaineer touched up the team that had rather lagged behind the others and the conversation dropped. But during all that homeward ride there lingered in Dorothy's memory that strange, startled, half-cognizant gaze which gentle Dorcas Sands had cast upon poor Luna. But by this time, the afflicted guest had become as one of the family; and the fleeting interest of any passer-by was accepted as mere curiosity and soon forgotten.

After dinner Mr. Winters disappeared; and the younger members of the House Party disposed themselves after their desires; some for a stroll in the woods, some in select, cosy spots for quiet reading; and a few—as Mabel, Helena, and Monty—for a nap. But all gathered again at supper-time and a happy evening followed; with music and talk and a brief bedtime service at which the Master officiated.

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But Dorothy noticed that he still looked anxious and that he was preoccupied, a manner wholly new to her beloved Mr. Seth. So, as she bade him good-night she asked:

“Is it anything I can help, dear Master?”

“Why do you fancy anything’s amiss, lassie?”

“Oh! you show it in your eyes. Can I help?”

“Yes. You may break the news to Dinah that those twins are on our hands for—to-night at least. I’m sorry, but together you two must find them a place to sleep. We can’t be unchristian you know—not on the Lord’s own day!”

He smiled his familiar, whimsical smile as he said this and it reassured the girl at once. Pointing to a distant corner of the room, where some considerate person had tossed down a sofa cushion, she showed him the ill-named babies asleep with their arms about each other’s neck and their red lips parted in happy slumber.

“They’ve found their own place you see; will it do?”

“Admirable! They’re like kittens or puppies—one spot’s as good as another. Throw a rug over them and let them be. I think they’ll need nothing more to-night, but if they do they’re of the sort will make it known. Good-night, little Dorothy. Sleep well.”

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After a custom which Father John had taught her, though he could not himself explain it, Dorothy “set her mind” like an alarm clock to wake her at six the next morning and it did so. She bathed and dressed with utmost carefulness and succeeded in doing this without waking anybody. Those whose business it was to be awake, as the house servants, gave her a silent nod for good-morning and smiled to think of her energy. The reason appeared when she drew a chair to a desk by the library window and wrote the following letter:

“MY DARLING AUNT BETTY:

“Good-morning, please, and I hope you’ll have a happy day. I’ve written you a post card or a letter every day since you went away but I haven’t had one back. I wonder and am sorry but I suppose you are too busy with your sick friend. I hope you aren’t angry with me for anything. I was terrible sorry about somebody—losing—stealing that money! There, it’s out! and I feel better. Sorrier, too, about it’s being *him*. Well, that’s gone, and as you have so much more I guess you won’t care much. Besides, we don’t need much. Dear Mr. Seth is just too splendid for words. He thinks of something nice to do all the time.

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“Yesterday we went to church and so did the dogs and the twins. I haven’t told you about them for this is the first letter since they came and that was just after breakfast Sunday. A crazy man brought them and said he’d ‘passed them on.’ They’re the cutest little mites with such horrible names—Ananias and Sapphira! Imagine anybody cruel enough to give babies those names. They aren’t much bigger than buttons but they talk as plain as you do. They said ‘A-ah!’ and ‘A-A-men!’ in the middle of the sermon and stopped the minister preaching. I wasn’t sorry they did for I didn’t know what they’d do next nor Luna either. They three and Mr. Seth are the uninvited, or self-invited, ones and they’re more fun than all the rest. Mabel fell out the carriage, or jumped out, and spoiled her dress and fainted away.

“My House Party is just fine! Monty got stuck in the barn and had to be sawed apart. I mean the barn had to be, not Monty; and not one of us said a word about it.

“I’m writing this before the rest are up because afterward I shan’t have a minute’s chance. It’s a great care to have a House Party, though the Master—we call Mr. Winters that, all of us—takes the care. I don’t know what we would do without him, and what we can without that stolen money. Monty says if he had that or had some of his own, he’d be able to manage without any old Master, he would. That was when he wanted to go sailing Sunday afternoon and Mr. Seth said ‘no.’

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"Monty's real smooth outside but he has prickly tempers sometimes; and I guess he—he sort of 'sassed' the Master, 'cause he refused to give us any money to hire a sail boat and Monty hadn't any left himself. But it all blew over. Mr. Seth doesn't seem to mind Monty any more'n he does his tortoise-shell cat; and he's a very nice boy, a very nice boy, indeed. So are they all. I'm proud of them all. So is Mabel. So is Molly B. Those two are so proud they squabble quite consid'able over which is the nicest, and the boys just laugh.

"Oh! I must stop. It's getting real near breakfast time; and dear Aunt Betty, will you please send me another one hundred dollars by the return of the mail? I mean as quick as you can. You see to-day, we're going around visiting 'Headquarters' of all the revolution people. There's a lot of them and they won't cost anything to see; but to-morrow there's 'The Greatest Show on Earth' coming to Newburgh and I *must* take my guests to it. I really must.

"Good-by, darling Aunt Betty.

"DOROTHY.

"P. S.—I've heard that people can telegraph money and that it goes quicker that way. Please do it.

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"D.

"P. P. S.—Mr Seth says that this Headquartering will be as good as the circus, but it isn't easy to believe; and Melvin isn't particularly pleased over the trip. I suppose that's because our folks whipped his; and please be sure to telegraph the money at once. The tickets are fifty cents a-piece and ten cents extra for every side-show; and Molly and I have ciphered it out that it will take a lot, more'n I'd like to have the Master pay, generous as he is. Isn't it lovely to be a rich girl and just ask for as much money as you want and get it? Oh! I love you, Aunt Betty!

"DOROTHY; for sure the last time."

One of the men was going to early market and by him the writer dispatched this epistle. Promptly posted, it reached Mrs. Calvert that morning, who replied as promptly and by telegram as her young relative had requested. The yellow envelope was awaiting Dorothy that evening, when she came home from "Headquartering" with her guests, and she opened it eagerly.

But there seemed something wrong with the message. Having read it in silence once—twice—three times, she crumpled it in her hand and dashed out of the room scarlet with shame and anger.

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## CHAPTER IX

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### HEADQUARTERS

"Well, lads and lassies—or lassies and lads, it's due you to hear all I've found out concerning Ananias and Sapphira. I don't believe that those are their real names but I've heard no other. The curious old man who left them here is, presumably, insane on the subject of religion. He appeared on the mountain early in the summer, with these little ones, and preëmpted that tumble-down cottage over the bluff beyond our gates. Most of you know it by sight; eh?"

"Yes, indeed! It looks as if it had been thrown over the edge of the road, just there where it's so steep. Old Griselda, the lodge-keeper's wife I live with claims it's haunted, and always has been. Hans says not, except by tramps and such," answered James Barlow.

"Tramps? Are tramps on this mountain? Oh! I don't like that. I'd have been afraid to come if I'd known that!" protested Molly Breckenridge with a little shiver.

Of course they all laughed at her and Monty valiantly assured her:

"Don't you worry. I'm here." Then added as an after-thought, "and so are the other boys."

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Laughter came easily that Monday morning and it was Monty's turn to get his share of it, and he accepted it with great good nature. They were such a happy company with almost a whole week of unknown enjoyment before them, and the gravity of Mr. Seth's face did not affect their own hilarity. Dorothy had confided to Alfaretta that she had written to Mrs. Calvert for "another hundred dollars" and the matter was a "secret" between these two.

"You, Alfie dear, because you never had, and likely never will have, a hundred dollars of your own, may have the privilege of planning what we will do with mine. That's to prove I love you; and if you plan nice things—real nice ones, Alfie—I'll spend it just as you want."

Sensible, but not too-sensitive, Alfaretta shook her head, and asked:

"Do you know how to make a hare pie?"

"Why, of course not. How should I? I'm not a cook!"

"First catch your hare! You haven't got your money yet and I shan't wear my brains out, plannin' no plans—yet. You couldn't get up nicer times'n the Master does, and he hasn't spent a cent on this House Party, so far forth as I know, savin' what he put in the collection plate to church, yesterday. Come on; he promised to tell all he'd found out about the twines and all the rest of us is listenin' to him now."

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So Dorothy had followed to the wide piazza where the young people had grouped themselves affectionately about their beloved Master; who now repeated for the newcomers' information:

"The old man is the children's grandfather, on their father's side. The twins are orphans, whom the mother's family repudiate, and he has cared for them, off and on, ever since their father died, as their mother did when they were born."

"Oh! the poor little creatures!" cried Helena Montaigne, and snuggled a twin to her side; while there were tears in Molly Breckenridge's eyes as she caressed the other.

"I said 'off and on.' The off times are when the old man is seized by the desire to preach to anyone who will listen. Then he wanders away, sleeps where the night finds him, and eats what charity bestows. Ordinarily, he does not so much as place the babies anywhere; just leaves them to chance. When they are with him he is very stern with them, punishing them severely if they disobey his least command; and they are greatly afraid of him. Well, here they are! I've tried to place them elsewhere, in a legitimate home; but I hesitate about an Orphanage until—Time sometimes softens hard hearts!" with this curious ending Mr. Winters relapsed into a profound reverie and nobody presumed to disturb him.

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Until Mabel Bruce suddenly demanded:

"Where's their other clothes?"

The farrier laughed. Mabel was an interesting study to him. He had never seen a little girl just like her; and he answered promptly:

"That's what neither Norah nor I can find out. Only from the appearance of some ashes in the fireplace of the hut I fear they have been burned. I took Norah down there early this morning, for a woman sees more than a man, but even she was disappointed. However, that's easily remedied. One of the Headquarters we shall visit is in Newburgh, where are also many shops. Some of you girls must take the little tackers to one of these places and outfit them with what is actually needed. Nothing more; and I will pay the bill."

"Beg pardon, Mr. Seth, but you will not! I will pay myself," cried Dorothy, eagerly.

"With what, Dolly dear? I thought you were the most impecunious young person of the lot."

"I am—just now; but I shan't be long," answered the young hostess, with a confident wink in Alfaretta's direction. To which that matter-of-fact maid replied by a contemptuous toss of her head and the enigmatical words:

"Hare pie!"

"Wagons all ready, Mr. Winters!" announced a stable boy, appearing around the house corner.

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"Passengers all ready!" shouted Danny Smith, perhaps the very happiest member of that happy Party. Never in his short, hard-worked life had he recreated for a whole week, with no chores to do, no reprimands to hear, and no solitude in distant corn-fields where the only sound he heard was the whack-whack of his own hoe. A week of idleness, jolly companionship, feasting and luxury—Danny had to rub his eyes, sometimes, to see if he were really awake.

"All ready, all?"

"All ready!"

Much in the order of their Sunday's division they settled themselves for the drive to

Newburgh, where the first stop was to be made, except that Molly Breckenridge declared she must ride beside Dorothy, having something most important to discuss with her friend. Also, she insisted that the twins ride with them, on the wagon-bottom between their feet.

"They can't fall out that way, and it's about them—I'll tell everybody later."

It was an hour when nobody wished to dash the pleasure of anybody else, so Mr. Seth nodded compliance; saying:

"Then I'll take this other little lady alongside myself!" and lifted Luna to the place.

This time she showed neither fear nor hesitation. She accepted the situation with that blankly smiling countenance she wore when she was physically comfortable, and the horses had not traveled far before her head drooped against the Master's shoulder, as it had against Dorothy's, and she fell asleep.

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"Poor thing! She has so little strength. She looks well but the least exertion exhausts her. Like one who has been imprisoned till he has lost the use of his limbs. I wonder who she is! I wonder, are we doing right not to advertise her!" thought the farrier; then contented himself with his former arguments against the advertising and the fact that Mrs. Calvert would soon be coming home and would decide the matter at once.

"Cousin Betty can solve many a riddle, and will this one. Meanwhile, the waif is well cared for and as happy as she can ever be, I fancy. Best not to disturb her yet."

When the wagon stopped at the door of the old stone Headquarters on the outskirts of Newburgh city, Helena said:

"It will save time, Mr. Winters, if some of us drive on to the business streets and do the shopping for these twins. I'm familiar with this old house—have often brought our guests to see it; so I could help in the errands."

"And I!" "And I!" cried Molly and Dolly, together. "Our school used to come here to study history, sometimes, right from the very things themselves. Besides—" Here Molly gave her chum such a pinch on the arm that Dolly ended her explanation with a squeal.

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So it was quickly settled. Mr. Winters handed Helena his purse, which she at first politely declined to take—having designs herself in that line. But when he as courteously and firmly insisted, she took it and said no more. Helena Montaigne would never carry her own wishes to the point of rudeness; yet in her heart she was longing to clothe the really pretty children after a fancy of her own. However, she put this wish aside, and the three girls with the orphans were swiftly driven to the best department stores the city afforded.

Here trouble awaited. At the statement that one was a girl and one a boy—which her own perception would not have taught her—the saleswoman produced garments suitable for the two sexes.

"Now which shall I fit first?" she asked smiling at the close resemblance of the pair.

"Why, ladies first, I suppose!" laughed Helena and moved one child forward. The other immediately placed itself alongside, and Molly exclaimed:

"Now, I don't know which is which! Anybody got a ribbon? or anything will answer to tie upon one and so distinguish them. Baby, which are *you*?"

The twin she had clasped smiled at her seraphically but made no reply; merely cocked its flaxen head aside and thrust its finger in mouth. At once its mate did likewise, and Helena tossed her hands in comical dismay.

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"Oh! Get the ribbon, please! Then we'll make them *spell* themselves and tie the mark on before we forget."

So they did; and the attendant listened in amusement to the performance; till finding themselves of so much interest to others the midgets began again glibly to spell and—both together. Prancing and giggling, fully realizing their own mischievousness, the babies made that hour of shopping one which all concerned—save themselves—long remembered. Also, if there were the slightest difference between the garments selected for them they set up such a violent protest that peace could only be restored by clothing them alike.

So they emerged from the establishment clad in snowy little suits that seemed as fitting for a girl as for a boy, with pretty hats which they elected to wear upon their backs, and sandals on their stubby feet—the nearest approach to shoes to which they would submit. A big box of suitable underwear was put into the wagon and they were lifted in after it, while Molly begged to walk a block or two till she found a confectioner's.

Here she expended all her pocket-money, and climbing back beside Dorothy politely opened her big box and offered it to her friends. Incidentally, to the twins; who stared, tasted, and stared again!

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"My heart! I don't believe they have ever tasted candy! They don't know what it means!" cried Molly, laughing.

They soon found out. In a flash they had seized the pasteboard box and snuggled it between them. Then with it securely wedged beneath their knees they proceeded to empty it at lightning speed.

"Why! I never saw anything eat like that, not even a dog! You can't see them swallow!" said Helena, amazed. "They're getting themselves all daubed with that chocolate, too—The pity!"

"Give it back to me, at once!" commanded Molly sternly, but she spoke to unhearing ears. Then she tried to snatch it away, but they were too strong for her, as anybody who has ever thus contested with sturdy five-year-olds can guess.

"They'll make themselves ill! and they'll ruin their new clothes. What will Mr. Winters say? Molly, how could you!" wailed Dorothy. "I wish we'd never brought them. I mean, I wish you hadn't thought of candy. I wish——"

"You'd hold your tongue!" snapped Molly, so viciously that her friends both stared and Dolly said no more. "I don't mean to be so horrid, girls, but it is so vexatious! I'd spent all I had and meant it to be such an addition to our picnic dinner in the woods. I'm ashamed—course—and I apologize. Though I remember Miss Penelope says that apologies and explanations are almost worse than useless. Besides——"

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Here Molly paused and looked at Dorothy most meaningfully; but whatever she meant to say further Dolly stopped by a shake of her head, adding:

"Now it's my turn to apologize, Helena dear, but there's something we two have in mind that we want to spring on the whole lot of you at once. Will you forgive and wait?"

"Surely. But—those children! I hope we'll get back to the others soon and that Mr. Winters will have more influence with them than we've had."

It proved that he had. One glance and word from him and the twins cowered as if they expected cruel blows, and without the slightest resistance permitted him to take away the nearly empty box.

"Doesn't look very tempting now, I think. Best throw it away, especially as I had already provided sweeties for the crowd. Now, lads, westward ho! It's nearly dinner time again, and I believe it's being with so many other hungry youngsters makes me one too!" cried the Master, stepping to his place and saying with an air of authority which nobody disputed: "Hand over the twins. I'll take them under my care for the rest of this day!"

The Headquarters which they were next to visit, and on whose grounds they were to picnic, was bordered by a stream that just there widened into a little lake. As they approached the place, cramped by their long ride, most of the lads left the wagons to finish the distance on foot.

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"Ever hear the story of General Lafayette and this creek, Melvin?" asked Herbert. "Good enough to tell and not against your side either."

"Go on," said Melvin, resignedly. "I fancy I can match any yarn of yours with one of my own, don't you know."

"Can't beat this. In those days there was no bridge here, not even a footbridge. One had to ford the stream. The General was going to a party at that very house yonder and was in his best togs. Course, he didn't want to get his pumps wet so he hired an Irishman—more likely a Britisher—to carry him over. Half way over—a little slip—not intentional, of course!—and down goes my General, ker-splash! Just this way it was! Only it's turn and turn about, now. Young America totes old England and——"

"Lads, lads! That footbridge is unsafe! See! The plank's gone in the middle—Oh! the careless fellows!"

Having been a boy himself the farrier was prepared for pranks; and the good-natured badinage between Herbert and the young Canadian had aroused no anxiety till now. He had been near enough to hear Herbert's recital of the Lafayette incident but had merely been amused. Now—Oh! why didn't they keep to the wide, safe bridge, that wagons used!

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Already it was too late even for his warning. Herbert had only meant to catch up the slighter Melvin, scare him by pretending to drop him, but in reality carry him pick-a-pack safely to the further shore. He considered himself an athlete and wished to show "young England how they do things in Yankeeland," and with a shout he darted forward. Headlong he came to the spot above the water where no foothold was—a space too wide for even his long legs to cover, and all the watchers shivered in fear.

But from his elevation on Herbert's back, Melvin had already seen the chasm and as if he had been shot from a catapult—he cleared it!

"Hip, hip, hooray! England forever!" yelled Frazer Moore and every other lad in the company added his cheers.

Then Melvin, from his side the chasm, doffed his cap and bowed his graceful acknowledgments for his country's sake. And at sight of that the girls cheered, too, for Herbert had already regained his feet in that shallow stream and they could see that he had taken no hurt beyond a slight wetting.

"Never mind that. He'll dry off, same as the twins did," laughed Molly Breckenridge. Which he did, for the sun was warm and his plunge had been a brief one; and in fact this "little international episode," as Monty called it, but served to increase the jollity of that day.

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Such a day it proved; without cloud or untoward incident to mar its happiness; and as they wandered here and there, inspecting for the last time the historical spot which had given them hospitable shelter, none dreamed of any mishap to come. Even the twins were tired enough to behave with uncommon docility, beyond continually removing from one another the ribbon which should have designated Ananias from Sapphira.

"They've changed it so often I've really forgotten which is which, but I'm sure—that is I think—I'm really positive—that the hair with a kink belongs to Sapphira! After all, that isn't such a dreadful name when you say it softly," said Molly.

"I think this is the loveliest old house I ever saw. I'd just like to stay here forever, seems if. The funny roof, so high up in front and away down, low almost as the ground behind. The great chimney—think of standing in a chimney so big you can look straight up, clear through to the sky!" murmured studious Jane Potter.

"Tisn't as big as the Newburgh one, and they haven't any such Hessian boots, though it does have a secret staircase and chamber," answered Jim who, also, was greatly interested in the ancient building. "But come on, Janie; they're getting ready to leave."

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"In just a minute. Just one single minute, 'cause I shan't ever likely come here again, even if I do live so near it as our mountain."

Home through the twilight they drove, for kindly Seth couldn't abridge for his beloved young folks that long, delightful day; and they were ready to declare, most of them, that even the circus to come could hardly be more enjoyable than this day's "Headquartering" had been.

It was then, on that happy return, that Dorothy had found the telegram awaiting, and had caught it up with a loving thought of her indulgent Aunt Betty. Then her happiness dashed as by cold water she had flown out of the room and shut herself in her pretty chamber to cry and feel herself the most unhappy girl in all the world.

Twice had Norah come to her door to summon her to supper before she felt composed enough to go below among her guests.

Over and over she assured herself that none of them should ever know how badly she had been treated. Nobody, of course, except Alfaretta, and the first thing that girl would be sure to ask would be:

"Have you caught your hare?" In other words: "Did she send the money?"

But in this she did poor Alfie great injustice. It had needed but one glance to tell her—being in the secret—what sort of an answer had come to Dorothy by way of that unexplained yellow envelope. Well, it was too bad! After all, Mrs. Betty Calvert must be a terribly stingy old woman not to give all the money she wanted to her new-found, or new-acknowledged great niece! Huh! She was awful sorry for Dolly Doodles, to have to belong to just—great aunts! She'd rather have Ma Babcock, a thousand times over, than a rich old creature like Dolly had to live with. She would so!

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Therefore it was not at all of news from town that warm-hearted Alfaretta inquired, as Dorothy at last appeared in the supper room, but with an indifferent glance around:

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## CHAPTER X

### MUSIC AND APPARITIONS

Where, indeed, was good Jane Potter! The least troublesome, the most self-effacing, staidest girl of them all.

“Didn’t she ride home with *you*?”

“Why no. I supposed she did with *you*. That is—I never thought.”

“But—somebody should have thought!” cried Dorothy, diverted from her own unhappiness by this strange happening.

“Yes, and that ‘somebody’ should have been myself,” admitted Mr. Seth, after question had followed question and paling faces had turned toward one another.

“Are you sure she isn’t in her room?” asked Helena.

“Sure as sure. I thought it funny she didn’t come to clean herself, I mean put on her afternoon things; but I guessed she was too tired, and, anyway, Jane never gets mussed up as I do,” answered Molly Martin, tears rising in her eyes.

The Master rose from his unfinished meal.

“Then we’ve left her behind and the poor child will be terrified. I’ll have one of the work horses put to the pony cart at once, and go back for her. I’d like one of you lads to go with me. I might need somebody.”

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Jim rose and Herbert, and, oddly enough, Mr. Winters nodded to Herbert; adding to Dorothy:

“Have a bottle of milk and some food, besides a heavy wrap sent out to the cart. She will have missed her supper.”

“But you and Herbert are missing yours, too. I shall send something extra for you two and mind you eat it. I—I’m sure you’ll find Jane all right only maybe frightened,” said Dorothy, doing her utmost to banish anxiety from her friends, though she felt troubled enough in her own mind. If it had been any other girl but Jane, the steady!

However, there was the long evening to get through, even though the rescuing party made their best speed. Many miles stretched between the old mansion and this with the distance to cover twice; and all the time there lay on the hostess’s heart the burden of her own personal grief. But she mustn’t think of that. She must not. She was a Calvert, no matter what Aunt Betty said. A gentlewoman.

Only yesterday Helena had explained that a gentlewoman, “in society,” had no thought save for the comfort of others. Well, she was in “society” now, and—She almost wished she wasn’t! She’d rather have been a poor little girl, unknowing her own name, who’d never dreamed of being an heiress and who’d have been free to run away and hide and cry her eyes out—if she wished!

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So she put her best efforts to her task of entertaining and a jolly evening followed; though now and then one or another would pause in the midst of a game and ask:

“Ought we to be carrying on like this, while we don’t know what’s happened to Janie?” Then the spirit of fun would sway them all again; for, as Alfaretta practically put it: “Whether we laugh or cry don’t make any difference to her. Time enough to solemn down when we find out she’s hurt.”

They were rather noisily singing the old round of “Three Blind Mice,” with each particular “mouse” putting itself into its neighbors’ way, so that the refrain never would come out in the proper order, when it was caught up by lusty voices in the outer hall and Mr. Seth’s deep tones leading.

“They’ve come! They’ve come—and it must be all right, else they wouldn’t sing like that!” cried Molly Martin, infinitely relieved on her friend’s and room-mate’s account; she and the sedate Jane being as close chums as Dolly and the other Molly were.



"The Campbells Are Coming," whistled Herbert merrily, and with the air of a courtier led the embarrassed Jane into the midst of the circle. She jerked her hand away with the reproof:

"Don't be silly! I've made trouble enough without acting foolish over it."

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She seemed so completely ashamed of herself that Dorothy pitied her and hastened to put her arm about her and say:

"Why should you think of trouble to anybody else since you're—alive?"

"Alive! Did you think I might be dead, then? That makes it worse, still. I was never in the slightest danger. I was only just a—dunce."

"You couldn't ever be that, Jane Potter!" cried Molly Martin, enthusiastically embracing the restored one from her other side.

But Jane shook herself free from the caresses of both and calmly explained:

"Since you'll all want to know I may as well tell just how thoughtless I was. I wanted to find that secret staircase Jim had told about, and the hidden chamber above it, under the roof. I couldn't at first. It led out of the paneled chamber, he said, where all the side walls looked like doors and only one of them would move. Finally, after I'd tried 'em all, and that took some time, I slid one open. It was the secret stair; nothing but a close sealed cupboard, so little that even I could hardly squeeze up it. It wasn't a regular stair, only tiny three-cornered pieces of board nailed in the back angles, first one side and then another. They are far apart and some are gone. I thought I'd never get up the thing, but I hadn't stayed behind to be worsted by a sort of old grain-chute like that."

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"Weren't you scared? Didn't you feel as if some enemy were after you?" Molly Breckenridge interrupted to ask.

Jane coolly sat down and glanced contemptuously at the questioner. All the company felt a trifle disappointed by Jane's manner. They had expected a more exciting revelation.

"What should I be afraid of? I haven't any enemies, as I know."

"But it must have been very dark in such a place, a shut-in box like that," protested Helena, who as well as the others thought Jane might have made more out of her adventure.

"No, it wasn't, not there. The panel-door let the light through from the big room where there are no blinds or curtains. All the light there was—only dusk, you know—came through. It was at the top, after I'd climbed off the top step into the hidden chamber that it got dark—black as night. Because, you see, I accidentally hit my foot against the trap-door and it fell shut. That's all. I ain't dead, you see, and there's nothing to be sorry for except the trouble I gave Mr. Winters and this boy. I've told them I was sorry, so that's all there can be done about it now. Anyway I've learned something, and that is how a prisoner must feel, shut up in a box like that."

A sort of groan came from the further side of the room where the Master had sunk into a great chair as if he were utterly weary. Then he said:

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"I'm glad Jane is so philosophical. I think she doesn't know just how dangerous her situation was. The 'hidden chamber' under the roof was nothing but a closely sealed box, without any possible ventilation. Nobody could have lived long shut up in that space, breathing the vitiated air. It was well we found her, and you must all thank God for a tragedy averted. Nor would I have thought of looking there for her if Jim hadn't remembered talking with her about the place and told Herbert just as we started. He'd inspected it himself, had read of it, yet even I who had visited that old mansion many times didn't know of its existence."

"Oh! I wish you'd told us all, Jim Barlow, when we were there! I think it was selfish mean of you not to, when we were sight-seeing on purpose," pouted Jolly Molly.

"Wish 't I had, now, since you all seem to care. I didn't think then anybody—I mean—I didn't think at all, except for myself," frankly answered the lad, which made them laugh again and so restored their ordinary mood.

"Well, it's about breaking up time. I move that Dorothy C. give us a bit of music from her violin," said the Master, smiling upon his beloved child.

She smiled in return but it was such a wan little attempt that it pained more than pleased him. Something was sorely troubling sunshiny Dolly and he wondered what, not knowing the purport of her begging letter to Mrs. Calvert nor what the telegram had said. He feared

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she was still grieving about the lost one hundred dollars and could sympathize in that, for he also grieved and puzzled. He made up his mind to ask her about it at the first opportunity; meanwhile, there was the obliging girl already tuning her violin and asking from her place beside the mantel piece:

“What shall it be—when I’ve done squeaking this way?”

“Yankee Doodle!” “God Save the King!” cried Herbert and Melvin, together; and immediately she began, first a strain of one, then the other, till even the mischievous petitioners cried that they had had enough of that medley and would be glad of a change.

One after another she played the selections asked, watching with curiosity which all the others shared, the strange effect her music had on Luna. The waif now seemed to consider herself entirely one of the Party—the “Silent Partner,” Danny called her; for though she never spoke she had learned to keep close to some one or other of the young folks, and so to avoid that big room where Dinah had placed her earlier on her visit. She took no part in any of their games but watched them with that vacant smile upon her wrinkled face, keeping out of the way of being jostled by cuddling down in some corner just as the twins did. Indeed, there was a close intimacy between the three “uninvited”; the little ones promptly realizing that no matter how mischievous they had been and how much they deserved punishment, they would be unmolested in Luna’s neighborhood. She paid scant attention to them, no more than she did to anything, except gay colors and music. She slept much of the time, and just as the twins did; cuddled upon the floor or lounge or wherever drowsiness had overcome her. Yet let even the faintest strain of music be heard and she would instantly arouse, her eyes wide open and her head bent forward as one intently listening; and the strangest part of this attraction was that she dumbly realized the sort of melody she heard.

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At the jumble of the two national airs she had smiled, then frowned, and finally looked distressed. It was this expression upon the dull face she watched that had made Dorothy give over that nonsense, even more than the protests of her mates; and now as Molly begged:

“Something of your own making-up, Dolly Doodles!” she let her bow wander idly over the strings, until a sort of rhythmic measure came to her; fragments she knew of many compositions but bound into a sheaf, as it were, by a theme of her own.

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It was a minor, moving melody and slowly but effectually touched the heart of every listener. Melvin leaned back in his chair and closed his eyes, picturing to his sometime homesick soul a far-away Yarmouth garden, with roses such as bloomed no other where and a sweet-faced, widowed mother gently tending them.

Helena pondered if she did right to be in this house, a guest, with her own home so near and her parents thus deserted of both their children, and unconsciously she sighed.

James Barlow and Jane Potter, after the habit of each, drifted into thought of the wide field of learning and the apparent hopelessness of ever crossing far beyond its boundaries. “The worst of studying is that it makes you see how little bit you can ever know;” considered the ambitious lad, while Jane regretted that she had not been left in peace in that old house from which she had been rescued and so have had the chance of her life to learn history on the spot.

More or less, all within the sound of that violin grew thoughtful; but it was upon poor, “unfinished” Luna that the greatest stress was wrought. She did not rise to her feet but began to creep toward the player, inch by inch, almost imperceptibly advancing as if drawn forward by some invisible force.

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Presently they all became aware of her movement and of nothing else, save that low undercurrent of melody that wailed and sobbed from the delicate instrument, as the player’s own emotions ruled her fingers.

Even the Master sat erect, he who made a study of all mankind, touched and influenced beyond himself with speculations concerning this aged woman who was still a child.

“Music! Who knows but that was the key to unlock her closed intelligence? Oh! what a pity that it came so late! But how sad is Dorothy’s mood to evoke such almost unearthly strains! It’s getting too much for her and for that helpless creature. I must stop it;” thought the farrier, but didn’t put his thought into action. Just then he could not.

“Makes me think of a snake charmer I saw once,” whispered Monty Stark to Littlejohn.

“Ssh! Luna’s cryin’! Did you ever see the beat? Alf Babcock, stop snivellin’ as if you was at a first class funeral!” returned master Smith, himself swallowing rather hard as he

happened to think of his mother bringing in her own firewood.

Luna had reached the spot directly before Dorothy and was on her knees looking up with a timid, fascinated stare. Her small hands were so tightly clasped that their large veins seemed bursting, and great tears chased one another down her pink, wrinkled cheeks. Her close cropped head was thrown back and her back was toward the windows over which no curtains had been drawn. In her gay frock, which firelight and lamplight touched to a brilliant flame color, she must have appeared to one beyond the panes like a suppliant child begging pardon for some grave misdoing.

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Suddenly Alfaretta screamed, and Molly Breckenridge promptly echoed her; then bounded to Dorothy's side and snatched the violin from her hands.

"Stop it, Dolly, stop it! I couldn't help doing that, for in another minute you'd have had me and—and everybody crazy! What made you—"

"Why, Alfaretta! Whatever is the matter? Why do you stand like that, pointing out into the night as if you'd seen a ghost?" demanded Jane Potter, going to her schoolmate and shaking her vigorously. "Don't yell again. It's—it's more frightful to hear you than it was to be locked up in that hidden chamber, with a spring-locked trap shut between you and liberty." Which was the only admission this self-contained young person ever gave that she had once known fear.

Alfy gulped, shivered, and slowly answered:

"So I did. It—was a ghost. Or—or—just the same as one! A—lookin'—a lookin' right through the window—with his face—big and white—He—he wore a hat—"

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"Wise ghost! Not to cavort around bare-headed on a damp September night!" cried Monty, as much to reassure his own shaken nerves as those of the mountain girl.

"Dorothy's music was so strange—weird you might say—that she's made us all feel spooky; but we have no apparitions at Deerhurst, let me tell you," said Herbert, consolingly.

"Huh! You may say what you like, but that one apparited all right. I seen it with my very own eyes and nobody else's!" retorted Alfaretta, with such decision and twisting of good English that those who heard her laughed loudly.

The laughter effectually banished "spookiness" and as now poor Luna sank down upon the floor in her accustomed drowsiness, her enwrapped mood already forgotten, the Master lifted her in his strong arms and carried her away to Dinah and to bed. But as he went he cast one keen glance toward the windows, where nothing could now be seen—if ever had been—save the dimly outlined trees beyond. Yet even he almost jumped when Jim, having followed him from the room, touched his arm and asked:

"What do you s'pose sent old Oliver Sands to peekin' in our windows?"

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**THE GHOST AT THE WINDOW.**  
*Dorothy's House Party.*

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## CHAPTER XI

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### MORNING TALKS

"Did anybody ever know such a succession of beautiful days?" asked Helena, next morning, stepping out into a world full of bird-song and sunshine. "And without doing anything extraordinary, nothing that anybody in the world couldn't have done, what a happy time we're having. Why, Dolly darling, you—what's wrong, honey? Are you in trouble? Can I help you?"

Dorothy had been sitting on the broad piazza, waiting for her guests and breakfast, a very sober, worried girl. But she now sprang up to greet her friend and tossing back her dark curls seemed to toss away anxiety also. A smile rose the more readily, too, for at that moment there came around the corner Monty Stark and Danny Smith, kindred spirits, each singing at the top of his voice:

"The elephant now goes round and round,  
The band begins to play,  
The little boys under the monkeys' cage  
Had better get out of the way—  
Better get out of the wa-a-a-ay!"

"Mornin' ladies! And let me assure you there'll be peanuts and pink lemonade enough to go around; for Daniel, my friend here, has just unearthed a quarter from one of his multitudinous pockets and I'll agree—to-lay-it-out-for-him-to-the-best-possible-advantage—Right this way, ladies and gentlemen, only ten cents to see the Double Headed Woman and to witness the astonishing feat of an Anaconda Swallowing his own Skin! Right this way, only ten——"

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"Monty Stark, behave yourself! The place for you, young sir, is in the monkeys' cage, not *under* it! What have you horrid boys been doing out there in the barn so early, waking tired little girls out of their beauty-sleep?" demanded Molly B., appearing on the scene and interrupting the boy's harangue.

"Oh! Just doing a few stunts. Practising, you know, against they call on us to take part in the 'ceremonies.' But it's a pity about that beauty-sleep. You needed it and I apologize! I mean I never saw you so charming! Hooray for the circus!"

"Hooray!" answered Herbert, coming through the doorway, a twin on either arm. "Say it, 'Nias! Say it, 'Phira!"

The youngsters squirmed to get away, to slide down out of the boy's grasp, but he held them securely till, at last grown desperate, one of them began gravely and distinctly to recite the doggerel which Monty and Daniel had just sung.

The performance received great applause and amid the jests and laughter all turned to follow the summons to breakfast; Herbert restraining the little ones long enough to adjure them to: "Mind, you've promised! And you know what happened to some folks you're named for! No, I shouldn't have said that, poor innocents! I mean you must do what I told you or you'll lose what I promised."

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"Yep. We's do it, we's do it! I wants my brekkus!" answered one, while the other echoed: "Brekus, brekkus!"

Herbert placed them at a small low table in the corner where Dinah had decided they must eat, or "take deir meals; fo' as fo' eatins, dey's cwyin' fo' dem all de whole endu'in time! 'Peahs lak dem li'l ones nebah would get filled up an' nebah had ernough yet in dis yere world."

Yet once at table nobody could find fault with their behavior, except for the extreme rapidity with which they stowed away their rations. They seemed afraid to drop a crumb or mess themselves in any way and the furtive looks they shot out from beneath their long lashes were pitiful, as if they feared their food would be snatched from them and themselves punished with blows. That many blows had been administered, Dinah had early found out, since when bathing them she saw the scars upon their poor little bodies.

This had been sufficient to reconcile her to the extra care and labor their presence imposed upon her; for labor, indeed, they caused. For instance: stealing into the kitchen where Aunt Malinda had set upon the hearth a big pan of bread "sponge," to rise, they industriously dotted its top with lumps of coal from the hod, in imitation of a huckleberry pudding which had appeared at table. They even essayed to eat the mixture; but finding this impracticable set to work to force one another down into the pan of dough—with sufficient success to ruin the new suits they wore as well as Aunt Malinda's "risin'." Having discovered that sugar was sweet they emptied a jar of what looked like it into a fine "floating island" and turned the custard to brine. They hid Ephraim's glasses, and Dinah's bandana; they unloosed the dogs, let the chains be fastened ever so securely; they opened the gate to the "new meadow" and let the young cattle wander therein; and with the most innocent, even angelic expressions, they plotted mischief the livelong day. But they redeemed all their wickedness by their entire truthfulness. Despite their handicap of names, they acknowledged every misdemeanor and took every punishment without a whimper.

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"They're regular little imps! But, alanna, what'd this big house be widout 'em and their pranks?" cried poor Norah, laughing and frowning together, when called upon for the third time that morning to change the youngsters' clothes; the last necessity arising from the fact that they had filled the bathtub and taken a glorious dip without the formality of removing their garments. "You're the plague of my life, so you are; but poor motherless darlin's, I can't but love you! And sorra the day, when him 't you belongs to comes for you again!"

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When that morning's meal was over, the Master planned their day as had become his habit. Said he:

"A circus day and the first day of the county fair, as this is, will crowd the streets of the city with all sorts of teams and people. I've decided not to risk Mrs. Calvert's horses in Newburgh to-day. We can all go up by train and have no anxiety about anything. It's but a down-hill walk, if a rather long one, from here to our own station, and in town there'll be plenty of stages to carry us to the grounds. Jim has consented to ride over on horseback early and secure our places on the front row of seats, if this is possible. I've seen no reserved seats advertised, but I don't like those insecure upper benches—or boards—of the tiers of scaffolding, where a fellow has to swing his feet in space or jab his toes into the back of the spectator below. Besides, I always did like to be close to the 'ring' when I go to the circus."

"O, Teacher! As if you ever went!" cried Alfaretta, giggling.

"Go? Of course I go every chance I get—to a real country circus—which isn't often. There's nothing so convinces me that I am still a little boy as the smell of tanbark and sawdust, and the sound of the clown's squeaking voice!"

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They laughed. It was so easy and so natural to laugh that morning. Even Helena, who had enjoyed many superior entertainments, felt her pulses thrill in anticipation of that day's

amusement; and she meant to let herself "go" for all the fun there might be, with as full—if not as noisy an abandon—as any "mountain girl" among them.

Continued Mr. Seth, closely observing Dorothy who, alone of all the company, was not smiling: "Now, for the morning. I suggest that you pass it quietly at home; tennis, reading, lounging in hammocks—any way to leave yourselves free from fatigue for the afternoon. Dinah says 'Y'arly dinnah'; because all the 'help' want to go to the circus and I want to have them. So we must get the dishes washed betimes, for the 'Greatest Show On Earth' opens its afternoon performance at two o'clock sharp precisely to the minute! and I, for one, cannot, positively cannot, miss the Grand Entrance! Umm. I see them now, in fancy's eye, the cream colored horses, the glittering spangles, the acrobats in tights, the monkeys, the—the——"

"Oh! Don't say any more, dear Master, or I shall have to ride over with Jim this morning and see the street parade!" cried Molly Breckenridge clasping her plump hands in absurd entreaty, while every lad present looked enviously upon the thus honored James. [Pg 151]

"I could buy circus tickets if I put my whole mind to it. How about you, Littlejohn Smith?" observed Monty.

"Give me the cash and let me try!"

Danny said nothing but his eyes were wistfully fixed upon vacancy, while Frazer Moore sadly stated:

"All I ever did see about a circus—so far—was the parade. I run away to that—once."

"And got a lickin' for it afterwards, I remember," commented Mike Martin.

This was too much for the discipline of that dear old "boy," Seth Winters, and he cried:

"See here, lads! I can't stand for that. Nor need I be afraid of fatigue for *you*. Nothing will tire a single boy of the lot, to-day, except missing some part of this delectable Show! Scamper! Scatter! Trot! Vamoose! In short, run to the stables and see if there are horses enough to go around, counting in the workers. There'll none of them be needed at Deerhurst to-day. Then you can all ride to town with our treasurer and put your horses up at the big livery on the High Street back of the town. See to it that they are made perfectly safe and comfortable for the day, and tell the proprietor that they are to be looked after for me. Here, Jamie lad, is an extra ten dollar bill. Use it judiciously, for anything needed, especially for luncheon for eight hungry boys. Better get that at some reputable restaurant and not on the grounds. Also, one of you meet the rest of us at the station at one o'clock with the tickets. Our whole big Party will make our own Grand Entrance!" [Pg 152]

"Oh! thank you, thank you!"

With a simultaneous cry of rapture the lads sped stablewards, leaving some rather downcast girlish faces behind them.

"I—I can ride horseback," said Molly B., with a sigh.

"So can I; and 'tain't far to our house. I guess Pa Martin'd have let me have old Bess to ride on," responded the other Molly.

"Shucks! Molly M. How'd you look, rockin' along on that old mare? Besides, you couldn't keep in sight, even, of the way them boys'll tear along. Another besides; you know, well's I do, that Mr. Martin wouldn't hold with no such nonsense as your trapesin' after a circus parade. Who wants to, anyway? We're born girls and we can't be boys, no matter how much we try. Since I ain't let to go I'd rather—I guess I'd rather stay to home and crochet some lace," said practical Alfaretta and pushed back from table. [Pg 153]

"Wait a minute, Alf. There's something else I've got to say. It has been a secret between Dolly and me, but of course we can't keep it always and I can't a minute longer. It's this: We two girls have adopted for all their lives the two twins! We've adopted them with our pocket-money," proudly stated Molly B.

"Molly! Molly!" cried Dorothy, her face aflame and her eyes swiftly filling.

"Yes I shall tell, too. Secrets are the killingest things to bear. I expect Papa will scold and Auntie Lu make fun but I'm doing it for charity. I shall put away every bit of my allowance to educate my—my son—and I shall call him Augustus Algernon Breckenridge. I thought you might as well know," and with this startling statement the Judge's daughter threw back her head and eyed the company defiantly.

The girls stared, all save Dorothy, and the Master laughed, while from their corners the

twins echoed a shrill cackle; then immediately began to practice the somersaults which Herbert had been at such pains to teach them. Then Molly rose, with what she considered great dignity, and, forcing Ananias to stand upon his feet, said in a sweet maternal tone:

"Come, my little boy. I want you to keep nice and rested till I take you to the circus." Then she led him away, Sapphira tugging at her skirts and Alfaretta remarking: [Pg 154]

"Guess you'll have to adopt the pair, Molly Breckenridge. Them two stick closer'n glue!"

In another moment all but the Master and Dorothy had left the room, and seizing this opportunity he called her to him.

"Dolly Doodles, I want to talk with you a little. Let's go out to the old barn—I mean the new one—and have a visit. We haven't had any cosy confidence talks, remember, since this House Party began."

It was the very thing she craved. Frank and outspoken by nature, long used to telling everything to this wise old friend, they had no sooner settled themselves upon the straw divan, than out it came, with a burst of sobs:

"Oh! dear Mr. Seth, I'm so unhappy!"

"Yes, child. I've seen it. Such a pity, too, on a circus day!"

"Please, please don't tease me now. Aunt Betty thinks—thinks—I hardly know—only—read that!"

From the tiny pocket of her blouse she pulled the fateful telegram and thrust it into his hand. He had some ado to smooth it out and decipher the blurred writing, for it had been wet with many tears and frequently handled.

"You have made me dangerously angry. You must find that money. Heretofore there has been no thievery in my house." Signed, "Mrs. Elisabeth Cecil Somerset-Calvert." [Pg 155]

The farrier whistled softly, and slowly refolded the document; then drew Dorothy's wet face to his shoulder and said:

"Yes, little girl, we must find that money. We must. There is no other way."

"But how can we? And why should she—she be so angry after having told me I was all the world to her and that all she had was mine, or would be."

"Well, dearie, 'would be' and 'is' are two widely differing conditions. Besides, she is Betty Calvert and you are you."

"That's no answer, as I can see."

"It is all the answer there is. She is an old, old lady though she doesn't realize it herself. All her life long she has been accustomed to doing exactly what she wished and when she wished. She has idealized you and you have idealized her. Neither of you is at all perfect—though mighty nice, the pair of you!—and you've got to fit yourselves to one another. Naturally, most of the fitting must be on your part, since you're the younger. You will love each other dearly, you do now, despite this temporary cloud, but you, my child, will have to cultivate the grace of patience; cultivate it as if it were a cherished rose in your own old garden. It will all come right, don't fear." [Pg 156]

"How can it come right? How ever in this world? I've promised to adopt one of the twins and Molly trusts me in that and I haven't a cent. I'm poorer than I used to be before I was an heiress. Molly will never believe me again. Then there's all this expense you're paying—the circus tickets and railway fares and all. It was to be *my* House Party, my very own, to celebrate my coming into my rightful name and home and it isn't at all. It's yours and—Oh! dear! Oh! dear! Nothing is right. I wish I could run away and hide somewhere before Aunt Betty comes home. I shall never dare to look at her again after I've made her 'dangerously angry.' What can that mean? I used to vex Mother Martha, often, but never like that. Oh! I wish I was *her* little girl again and not this—"

Seth laid his finger on her lip and the wish she might have uttered and bitterly regretted was never spoken. But the old man's face was grave as he said:

"You did not know, but my Cousin Betty means that you have excited her beyond physical safety. She has a weak heart and has always been cautioned against undue agitation. It has been a sad business altogether and I wish you had had more confidence in me and come to me with that letter before you sent it. As for the 'expenses' of your Party—it is yours, dear, entirely—they are slight and my contribution to the general happiness. The only real thing that does matter, that will be most difficult to set straight is—your suspicion of old [Pg 157]

Ephraim. It was that I believe which angered Mrs. Calvert, far more than the money loss, although she is exact enough to keep a cent per cent account of all her own expenses—giving lavishly the meanwhile to any purpose she elects. Poor Ephraim! His heart is wellnigh broken, and old hearts are hard to mend!”

Dorothy was aghast.

“Does he know? Oh! has anybody told him that I suspected him?”

“Not in words; and at first he didn’t dream it possible that his honesty could be doubted. But—that’s the horrible part of suspicion—once started it’s incurable. Side glances, inuendoes, shrugged shoulders—Oh! by many a little channel the fact has come home to him that he is connected in all our minds with the loss of your one hundred dollars. Haven’t you seen? How he goes about with bowed head, with none of his quaint jests and ‘darkyisms, a sober, astonished old man whose world is suddenly turned upside down. That’s why he refused my money this morning which I offered him for his circus expenses. ‘No, Massa Seth, I’se gwine bide ter home.’ Yet of all the family of Deerhurst, before this happened, he would have been the most eager for the ‘Show.’ However, he refuses; and in a certain way maybe it is as well. Otherwise the place would be left unguarded. I should keep watch myself, if I didn’t think my Dorothy and her mates were better worth protecting than all Deerhurst.

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“So now, shorten up that doleful countenance. The mischief that has been done must be undone. Aunt Betty must come home to a loving, forgiving child; old Ephraim must be reinstated in his own and everybody’s respect; and to do this—that money must be found! Now, for our friends—and brighter thoughts!”

“That money *shall* be found! I don’t know how, I cannot guess—but it shall!” answered Dorothy with great confidence, born of some sudden inspiration. The talk with the Master had lightened her heart and it was with a fine resolution to be everything that was dutiful and tender toward Aunt Betty that she left the barn and rejoined her mates.

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## CHAPTER XII

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### THE GREATEST SHOW ON EARTH

Deerhurst was deserted.

With a down-sinking heart old Ephraim had watched the last of the merry-makers vanish through the gateway, even gray haired Hans and Griselda joining their fellow employees on this trip to the circus. The watcher’s disappointment was almost more than he could bear. His love of junketing was like a child’s and for many days, as he drove his bays about the countryside, he had gloated over the brilliant posters which heralded the coming of “The Greatest Show on Earth.” He had even invited Aunt Malinda to accompany him at his expense, and now she had gone but he was left.

“Hmm. It do seem pow’ful ha’d on me, hit sutney do. But—if all dem folkses is suspicionin’ ‘t ole Eph’aim is a t’ief—My lan’, a T’IEF! Not a step Ah steps to no ca’yins’ on, scusin dey fin’s Ah isn’t. If my Miss Betty was to home! Oh! fo’ my Miss Betty! She’s gwine tole dese yeah Pa’ty folks somepin’ when she comes ma’chin’ in de doah. Dey ain’ no suspicions ertwixt my Miss Betty an’ me.”

His thoughts having taken this course Ephraim found some comfort. Then the responsibility of his position forced itself to mind. No, he couldn’t go stretch himself on the back porch in the September sunshine and sleep just yet. Though it was against all custom and tradition in that honest locality, he would lock up the whole house. He would begin at the front door and fasten every window and entrance even to the scullery. There should nothing more be missing, and no more suspicion fixed on a poor old man. He didn’t yet know who had set the miserable idea afloat in the beginning, and he didn’t dream of its being Dorothy. He had found himself strangely questioned by the other servants and had met curious glances from the visitors in the house. Finally, a stable lad had suddenly propounded the inquiry:

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“What did you do with that money, anyway, Ephy? If you don’t hand it back pretty soon there’ll be trouble for you, old man.”

He had returned indignant inquiries himself, at last worming the whole matter out; and then, with almost bursting heart, had gone to Seth Winters with his trouble. The farrier had comforted as best he could, had assured the old negro of his own utmost faith in him, but—



he could not explain the absence of the money and his assurances had been of small avail.

Whenever he was alone poor Ephraim brooded over the matter. He now avoided his fellow workers as much as he could. His appetite failed, his nights were sleepless, and Dinah impressively declared that: "He's yeitheh been hoodooed or he stole dat money." She was inclined to accept the first possibility, but with the superstition of her race felt that one was about as derogatory as the other. So nobody, except Mr. Winters, had been very sorry to have him stay behind on this occasion when jollity and not low spirits was desirable.

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At last when all was secure, the care-taker retired to his bench and his nap, and had been enjoying himself thus for an hour or so, when the sound of wheels and somebody's "Whooa-a!" aroused him.

"Ah, friend! Can thee afford to waste time like this?" demanded a blandly reproving voice; and Ephraim opened his eyes to behold George Fox and his owner reined up before him. He knew that equipage and wondered to see it at Deerhurst, whose mistress, he knew, had scant liking for the miller.

"Yes, sah. I'se reckon Ah c'n afford hit; bein' mo' inclined to take mah rest 'an to go rampagin' eroun' to circuses an' such. On yo' way dar, sah?"

"I? // On my way to a circus? Thee must know little of a Friend's habits to accuse me of such frivolity. Where is that Seth Winters?" asked Oliver Sands, well knowing what the answer would be and having timed his visit with that knowledge.

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"He's done gone to de Show, sah. He natchally injoys a good time. Yes, sah, he's one mighty happy ole man, Massa Seth Winters is, sah."

"One mighty——" began the miller then checked himself. "I came—but thee will answer just as well. I'd like to inspect that new barn Elisabeth Calvert has put up; and, if thee will, show me through her house as well. I've heard of its appointments and Dorcas, my wife, is anxious to learn of the range in the kitchen. Thee knows that women——"

Again the visitor paused, suggestively, and Ephraim reflected for a moment. He knew that his Miss Betty was the soul of hospitality and might upbraid him if he refused to show a neighbor through the premises. Even strangers sometimes drove into the park and were permitted to inspect the greenhouses and even some of the mansion's lower rooms. He had heard such visitors rave over the "old Colonial" appointments and knew that Deerhurst's mistress had been secretly flattered by this admiration.

Ah! but that was before this dreadful thing had happened! When—before somebody had stolen, some unknown thief had been within those walls!

"Well, sah, Ah is sutney sorry but, sah, when I'se lef' to care-take, sah, I care-takes. Some uddah time, when Miss Betty done be yeah, sah, sutney, sah——"

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The negro's exaggerated courtesy affronted Oliver Sands. It was not his policy to contest the point, and if he had fancied he could persuade this loyal care-taker to admit him that he might search the house as he had searched many other houses of late, he silently admitted his own mistake and drove away with no further word than: "Gid-dap, George Fox!"

But he drove home with head on breast and a keen disappointment in his heart; which expressed itself in a stern rebuke to his wife as he entered her kitchen and met her timid, inquiring glance:

"Thee has maggots in thy head, Dorcas Sands. I advise thee to get rid of them."

She might have retorted with equal truth: "So is thee maggoty, Oliver, else would thee do openly that which should bring thee peace."

But being a dutiful wife she kept silence, though she brooded many things in her tender heart; and the incident passed without further comment than Seth Winters's ambiguous remark, when Ephraim told of the miller's call: "So the leaven is working, after all."

But while this trivial affair was happening at Deerhurst, the train had swiftly carried the household to the hill-city a few miles up the river; and almost before they were comfortably settled in the crowded car, the conductor was announcing: "Newburgh next! All out for Newburgh!"

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"Here we are! And here's our stage! We've chartered a whole one to carry us up the hill. A hard climb and no time to lose!" called out a boyish voice and Herbert's tall shoulder shoved a path through the throng. "There's another empty over yonder, if the 'help' speak quick enough!"

But Aunt Malinda standing bewildered and Dinah indignantly correcting somebody for jostling her, rather delayed this operation; so, at a nod from the Master, Jim Barlow made a bee line for the vehicle and stoutly held it as "engaged!" against all comers.

"It's a case of every man for himself!" laughed Monty, squeezing his fat body toward the group of girls which was standing apart, amazed and somewhat dismayed by the press of people. "Oh! Don't get worried, Molly, by a little jam like this. Wait till you see the grounds. I declare it seems as if everybody between New York and Albany had come to the 'Show.' It is a big one, I guess, and the Parade was fine. Sorry we didn't bring all of you, pillion, old-style, so you could have seen it, too."

"Monty, stop! It's cruelty to girls to harrow up their feelings that way! As if we didn't all *think* 'pillion' and long to suggest it, only our diffidence prevailed. But come! Mr. Seth has piloted the servants to their stage and is waiting for us!" answered Molly Breckenridge and was the first to spring up the narrow steps at the rear of the rickety omnibus and run to its innermost corner, where she extended her arms to receive her "son" whom she had kept in charge during the ride in the car. The other Molly had passed him on to her, he submitting in wide-eyed astonishment at all the novelty of this trip. Helena held Sapphira as closely, and Dorothy's arm was tightly clasped about Luna's waist, who, oddly enough, was the least affrighted of them all.

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"Won't the horses be afraid? Supposin' they should run away!" cried Molly Martin, who had seldom been in the town and never on such an occasion as this.

"Pooh! Them horses won't run 'less they're prodded into it. They look as if they'd been draggin' stages up and down these hills all their lives and never expected to do anything else," answered Alfaretta, quickly. "Don't you get scared, Molly, I ain't."

Indeed, of all that happy party Alfaretta was, maybe, the happiest. Her face was one continual smile and her chatter touched upon everything they passed with such original remarks that she kept them all laughing. Seth beamed upon her from his place beside Luna, and was himself delighted to see that Dorothy was now as gay as any of the others. For the time being any worries she had had were forgotten; and it was she who exclaimed in astonishment, as they came to the grounds and climbed out of the stage:

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"Do I wake or am I dreaming! If there isn't Miss Penelope Rhinelander! and Miss Greatorex is with her! True, true! Who'd ever believe *they'd* come to a circus!"

"Reckon they'd say they did it to study natural history—elephants and things!" laughed Molly, waving her hand vigorously to attract the attention of her old teachers.

But they did not see her, so occupied were they in endeavoring to be of a crowd and yet not in it.

"Shucks! There's Dr. Sterling! That I worked for last year and went trampin' with last summer! Who'd ha' believed a *minister* would go to a circus!" now almost shouted Jim Barlow.

"Why, I would, laddie. I'll warrant you that every grown-up in the town who has a child friend he can make an excuse of to bring here has done it! Funny they should offer excuses, when there isn't a man or woman but, at sound of a circus band, remembers their childhood and longs to attend one once more. For myself, I prefer a good, old-fashioned 'show' to the finest opera going. The one touches my heart, the other my head. But here we are, and Miss Helena, I see you're beginning to perk up, now you find yourself in such good company."

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For he had overheard that young lady, despite her morning's resolution to "do just as the rest did and forget it was silly," remark to Mabel Bruce in confidence that:

"If I'd known, even dreamed, that we should have to mix with such a rabble, I should have stayed at Deerhurst!"

This was when they had had to scramble for their stage; and Mabel had affectedly replied:

"Me too. My folks never do like to have me make myself common; and this organdie dress will be torn to ribbons."

Seth had smiled then, overhearing, and bided his time. Well he understood how one emotion can sway an entire crowd, and he but waited till they should have arrived to see even these contemptuous lassies catch the "circus spirit." So he couldn't resist this little jest at Helena's expense, which she took now in great good nature; by then they had come to the entrance to the big tent where the chief performance would be given.

This entrance was guarded by a wooden stile, from which a narrow canvas-covered passage

led to the inner door. At the stile tickets were sold, and these were in turn taken up by the collector at the end of the passage which opened directly into the tent.

"Speaking of crowds! Was ever such another one as this!" gasped Melvin Cook, as he found himself in the swirl of persons seeming to move in two directions, as, indeed, they were. Then he looked around for his friends and to his consternation saw Molly Breckenridge tossed to and fro in a hopeless effort to extricate herself, and that she held one of the twins by hand, till suddenly the child fell beneath the very feet of the crowding adults. [Pg 168]

"My baby! Oh! O-oh!" screamed Molly, and an instant's halt followed, but the jam was to be immediately resumed.

Fortunately, however, that instant had been sufficient for tall Jim Barlow to stoop and lift the child on high.

"Hang on to me, Molly! I'll kick and jam a way through. 'Twill be over in a minute, soon's we get to the inside and have—you—got—your ticket?"

"Ye-e-es! But—but—I'll never come to a circus—again—never—never—"

"You haven't got to this one yet," returned Jim, breathlessly. Then he discovered Mr. Winters standing inside the tent, and extending his arms to receive the uplifted little one which Jim at once tossed forward like a ball.

At last they were all inside. The Master had been more fortunate in piloting his especial charges, Luna and Sapphira, through that struggling mob; but it was in a tone of deep disgust that he now exclaimed: [Pg 169]

"Oh! the selfishness of human nature! A moment's delay, a touch of courtesy, and such scenes would be avoided. The struggle for 'first place,' to better one's self at the expense of one's neighbor, is an ugly thing to witness."

"But, Teacher, when you get in such a place you have to just do like the rest and act piggish, too," said Alfaretta. "I guess I know now how 't one them panics that you read about, sometimes, could happen. If one them jammers went crazy, or scared, all the rest would too, likely."

"Exactly, Alfaretta. But, let's think of pleasanter things. Let's follow James."

After all, though Mr. Winters had doubted there would be, the lad had secured reserved seats and on "the front row near the entrance," just as that gentleman had desired; so presently, they had arranged themselves upon the low-down bench where, at least, their feet could touch bottom; and where with a comical air the farrier immediately began to sniff the familiar odor of fresh turned sod covered with sawdust, and turning to his next neighbor remarked:

"I think I'm nine years old, to-day, nine 'goin' on' ten."

But his facetiousness was wasted upon sedate Jane Potter; who did not even smile but reflected: [Pg 170]

"If that old man's going to talk silly I'll change places with Alfaretta. And if the performance isn't to begin right away I'll just walk around and look at the animals' cages."

She did this, laying her handkerchief and jacket on her vacated seat, though her host called after her:

"You may not be able to get your place again, in such a crowd."

However, if she heard she did not turn back and was presently out of sight in the line of promenaders continually passing. Also, his own face grew sober at the sound of thunder, and he clasped his arm more protectingly around Luna's waist, who sat on his other side, and counselled Dorothy, just beyond:

"Do you and Molly keep close care of the twins. There's a storm brewing and timid people may stampede past us toward the door."

"Why, would anybody be afraid in a big tent like this?" asked Dolly, surprised.

"Some might. But—Hark! Hooray! Here we come!"

The band which had been playing all the time now broke into a more blatant march, a gaily accoutred "herald" galloped forth from a wide opening at the rear of the tent, then turned his steed about to face that opening, waving his staff and curveting about in the most fantastic manner. Then the silence of expectation fell upon that mass of humanity, the [Pg 171]

promenaders settling into any seats available, warned by men in authority not to obstruct the view of those on the lower benches.

As a cavalcade of horses appeared Mr. Winters looked anxiously down into Luna's face. To his surprise it showed no interest in the scene before her but was fast settling into its habitual drowsiness.

"Well, after all, that's best. We could not leave her behind and I feared she would be frightened;" he observed to Dorothy.

"Yes, I'm glad, too. Keep still, 'Phira! You must keep still, else you may be hurt. Wait. I'll take you on my lap, as Molly has 'Nias. Now—see the pretty horses?" answered Dorothy, and involuntarily shivered as a fresh thunderclap fell on her ears.

Alfaretta leaned forward to remark:

"It's begun to rain! But isn't it cute to be under a tent and just let it rain! Ah! My soul! Ain't they beautiful? Look, girls, look, them first ones is almost here! A-ah! them clowns! And monkeys—to the far end there's real monkeys ridin' on Shetland ponies! Oh! my heart and soul and body! I'm so glad I come!"

She finished her comments, standing up and swaying wildly from side to side, till somebody from the rear jabbed her shoulders with an umbrella point, loudly commanding: "Down front! Down front!" [Pg 172]

She dropped into her seat with a shriek, which somebody somewhere promptly caught up and echoed, while at that same instant a flash of lightning illuminated even that interior which had grown so strangely dark, and on the instant came a terrific crash.

Another woman screamed, and Seth Winters's face paled. He knew how very little it would now take to start a panic. But the band played the louder, the performers went round and round the great ring, the clowns frolicked and the monkeys pranked, and he inwardly blessed the discipline which kept every player to his post, as if such electric storms were every day incidents.

"What are those men doing to the roof?" suddenly demanded Molly Martin of her neighbor, James, calling his attention to the sagging canvas and the employees hurrying hither and thither to lift it on the points of great poles. Then would follow a splash of water down the slope from the central supporting pole of that flimsy roof, dashing off at the scalloped edges upon the surrounding ground.

"Water's heavy. I guess they're afraid it'll break and douse the people. Hi! But that was a teaser! It don't stop a minute and it's getting blacker'n ink. Never heard such a roar and it don't let up a second. They'll have to stop the performance till it slacks up, and—What fools these folks are that's hurrying out into that downpour!" [Pg 173]

"Maybe—maybe—they're safer outside. Rain won't hurt—much—but circus tents are sometimes blown down—I've read—"

"Now come, Alf Babcock, just hold your tongue! Rough way to speak but I mean it. Hear what the Master said? How it was mighty easy to start a panic but impossible to stop one, or nigh so? Everyone that keeps still and behaves helps to make somebody else do it. Here, boy, fetch them peanuts this way? Dip in, Alf, I'll treat, and I see the lemonade feller's headed this way, too. Whilst we're waitin' we might as well—"

Even Jim's philosophy was put to the test just then, for with a peanut half-way to his lips his hand was arrested by another terrific crash and the swishing tear of wet canvas.

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## CHAPTER XIII

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### IN THE GREAT KITCHEN

Still the band played on. The cavalcade paced round and round the ring, while a hundred workmen—it seemed—swarmed to the repair of the torn tent. Fortunately, the injured portion was that occupied as dressing rooms and stables for the performers, so that few of the audience suffered more than fright. Indeed, most of the spectators realized as Mr. Winters had done, the danger of panic and the wisdom of composure, so remained in their places.

Also, with the same suddenness that had marked its rising the storm ended and the sun

shone out. One mighty sigh of relief swept over those crowded tiers of humanity, and the indefatigable band struck up a new and livelier note. The tight-rope dancer sprang lightly into the ring and went through her hazardous feats with smiling face and airy self-confidence; the elephants ascended absurdly small stools, and stood upon them, "lookin' terribly silly, as if they knew they were makin' guys of themselves," so Mike Martin exclaimed, though he still kept his fascinated eyes upon their every movement. There was the usual bareback riding and jumping through rings: the trapeze, and the pony quadrille; in short, all that could be expected of any well conducted "Show," while above all and below all sounded the clown's voice in a ceaseless clatter and cackle of nonsense.

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Laughter and badinage, peanuts and pink lemonade; men and women turned back to childhood, smiling at the foolishness enacted before them but more at their own in thus enjoying it; and the "Learned Blacksmith" who had pondered many books finding this company around him the most interesting study of them all.

It was this that he loved about a circus; and, to-day, at their first one, the faces of Ananias and Sapphira held his gaze enthralled.

"Dolly, Dolly Doodles! Do watch them!" he cried for sympathy in his delight. "Did ever you see eyes so bright? Mouths so wide agape? and happiness so intense! Ah! if those to whom they belong could see them now, all hardness would vanish in a flash!"

Dorothy looked as he desired, but her glance was less of admiration than of anxiety. She had seen what he did not see and was hearing what he did not; a face and figure somberly different from the tri-colored one of the clown, and a voice more raucously insistent than his.

All at once the twins also saw and heard. Their attention was clutched, as it were, from those adorable monkeys a-horseback, which had come once more to the very spot before where they stood, and whom in their baby-souls they envied frantically.

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"HIM!" shrieked Ananias.

"H-I-M!" echoed Sapphira, all her pretty pink-and-whiteness turned the pallor of fear.

There was a flash of bare feet and blue-denimed legs and the terrified twins had leaped the velvet-topped barrier bordering the ring and were scurrying heedlessly away, how and where they cared not except to be safe from that "Him" whose memory was a pain.

"My soul! They'll be killed—the little rascals!" cried Jim, and leaped the barrier, in pursuit.

"He can't catch 'em! I'll help!" and fat Monty rolled himself over the fence.

"What's up, boys?" demanded Frazer Moore; and, perceiving, added himself to the rescuing party. Ditto, Mike; then Littlejohn and Danny. This was the chance of a lifetime! to be themselves "performers." Only Melvin and Herbert rose, hesitating, amazed—and, seeing the little ones, whom everybody tried to catch and who eluded every grasp, in such imminent peril of trampling horse-hoofs, they also followed the leader.

Even Mr. Winters rose to his feet and watched in deep anxiety the outcome of this escapade, and the darting nimbleness of two small figures which everybody, from the ring-master down, was chasing like mad. Only the trained horsemen and their following troupe of monkeys kept on unmindful; while from the seats on every side ran shouts of laughter. To most of those onlookers this seemed a part, a delightfully arranged part, of the entertainment. Only those nearest, and the farrier was one of them, realized that the strange old man with the croaking voice was an alien to that scene. A half-crazed old man who felt called upon to deliver his "message" of warning to a sinful world, at all times, seasons, and places. He had stumbled upon this as a fine field and, unbalanced though his mind was, it had yet been clear enough for him to purchase a ticket and enter in the customary way.

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"Oh! will he take the twins away?" asked Dorothy, clasping her hands in dismay. "And will they—be—killed!"

"I think not, to both questions. Evidently he has not perceived the children though they were quick enough to discover him. The pity! that one should inspire such fear in his own household! But, see! See!"

Mr. Winters forgot the old exhorter for the moment and laughed aloud.

In the ring the clown had, at first, pretended to join in the pursuit of the nimble runaways, but only pretended. Then he suddenly perceived that they were growing breathless and had almost fallen beneath the feet of a mighty Norman horse. The man beneath his motley uniform rose to the emergency. Catching the bridle of a near-by pony, he flung the monkey

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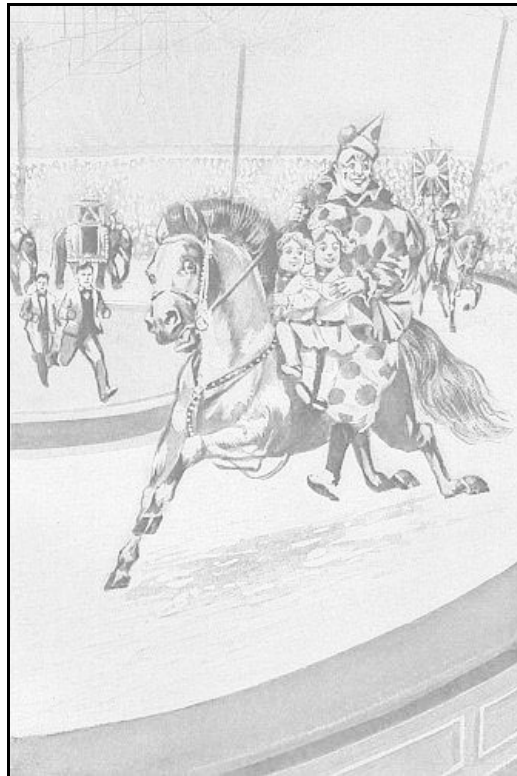
from its back, scooped the babies up from the ground, set them in the monkey's place and, mounting behind them, triumphantly fell into line.

It was all so quickly done that its bravery was but half appreciated; and the absurdly grinning mask which he now waggled from side to side, as if bowing to an outburst of applause, roused a roar of laughter. As for Ananias and Sapphira—their felicity was complete. The stern grandparent was forgotten and the only fact they knew was this marvelous ride on a marvelous steed, and most marvelous of all, in the friendly grasp of the tri-colored person behind them.

Mr. Winters turned from them for a moment, at the sound of a scuffle near by. An instant's glance showed him that the poor fanatic was being roughly handled by some employees of the circus, and he stepped forward protesting:

"Don't do that! He'll go quietly enough if you just ask him. He's a feeble old man—be gentle!"

"But we want no 'cranks' in here creating a disturbance! Enough has happened this performance, already!"



**THE TWINS AND CLOWN ON THE  
SHETLAND PONY.  
*Dorothy's House Party.***

"Jim! James Barlow! Herbert Montaigne!" These two were the only ones left still in the ring of the lot who had pursued the runaway twins, the others having shamefacedly retreated as soon as they saw the children were safe. They looked toward the Master yet lingered to receive the twins whom their captor was now willing to resign; they struggling to remain and a mixed array of flying legs and arms resulting. [Pg 179]

However, neither screams nor obstreperous kicks availed to prolong that delectable ride, and presently the little ones found themselves back in the grasp of a bevy of girls who made a human fence about them, and so hedged them in to safety.

"Lads, I must leave you to see our girls safe home. Do so immediately the performance is over and it must be nearly now. This poor old chap is ill and bemused by his rough handling. I'm going to take him to a hospital I know and have him cared for. I'll go down to Deerhurst as soon as I can but don't wait for me. Come, friend. Let us go;" and linking his strong arm within the weak one of the man, scarce older yet so much frailer than he, he walked quietly away, the fanatic unresisting and obedient.

With the Master's departure the glamour faded from the "Show"; and at Helena's suggestion the whole party promptly made their exit.

"It's a wise move, too, Helena. We can catch the five o'clock train down and it won't be

crowded, as the later one will be. I fancy we've all had about all the circus we want—this time. Anybody got a rope?" said Herbert.

"What in the world do you want of a rope?" asked his sister.

"I think if we could tie these irrepressibles together we could better keep track of them."

There were some regretful looks backward to that fascinating tent, when the older lads had marshalled their party outwards, with no difficulty now in passing the obstructing stile; but there were no objections raised, and the homeward trip began. But they had scarcely cleared the grounds when Molly Martin paused to ask:

"Where's Jane Potter?"

"Oh! hang Jane Potter! Is she lost again?" asked Danny Smith. Then with a happy thought, adding: "I'll go back and look for her!" In this way hoping for a second glimpse of the fairy-land he had been forced to leave.

Whereupon, his brother reminded him that he had no ticket, and no fellow gets in twice on one. Besides, that girl isn't—Hmm.

"She's probably lingered to study biology or—or something about animals," observed Monty. "Any way, we can afford to risk Jane Potter. Like enough we shall find her sitting on the piazza writing her impressions of a circus when we get home."

They did. She had early tired of the entertainment and had been one of the first to leave the tent after the accident to it. Once outside, she had met a mountain neighbor and had begged a ride home in his wagon. Jane was one to be careful of Jane and rather thoughtless of others, yet in the main a very good and proper maiden. [Pg 181]

But if they did not delay on account of Jane they were compelled to do so by the twins.

"These children are as slippery as eels," said Molly, who had never touched an eel. "I'll lend my 'son' to anybody wants him, for awhile. I'd—I'd as lief as not!" she finished, quoting an expression familiar to Alfy.

"And I'll lend 'Phira!" added Dorothy.

She had tried to lead the little one and still keep her arm about Luna, who by general consent was always left to her charge.

"All right. Give her here!" said Frazer; while Herbert whistled for a waiting stage to approach. But as it drew near and the girls began to clamber in, preparatory to their ride stationwards, Ananias jerked himself free and springing to one side the road began a series of would-be somersaults. It was an effort on his part to follow Herbert's instructions—with doubtful success. Of course, what brother did sister must do, and Sapphira promptly emulated her twin.

"Oh! the mud! Just look at them! How can we ever take them in that stage with us?" asked Mabel Bruce, in disgust. [Pg 182]

But the happy youngsters paid no attention to her. Having completed what Herbert had taught them to call their "stunt" they now approached their instructor and demanded:

"Candy, what you promised!"

"All right. Driver, we'll stop at the first confectioner's we pass and I'll fill them up."

"But, Herbert, you should not. Don't you remember how ill they were from Molly's supply? And I do say, if you led them into this scrape, getting themselves in such a mess, you'll have to ride in front and keep them with you."

Herbert made a wry face. He was always extremely careful in his dress and his sister's just suggestion wasn't pleasant. However, he made the best of it and no further untoward incident marked that day's outing.

Arrived at home they found Jane calmly reading, as has been told, and no other one about except old Ephraim, who had not unfastened the doors for "jes one l'il gal," but now threw them wide for the "House Party." Then he retreated to the kitchen, where Dorothy found him stirring about in a vain attempt to get supper—a function out of his line.

"Now, Ephy, dear, you can't do that, you know! You're a blessed old blunderer, but one doesn't boil water for tea in a leaky coffee-pot! Wait! I'll tell you! I'll call the girls and we'll make a 'bee' of it and get the supper ourselves, before Aunt Malinda and Dinah and the rest get back. They'll be sure to stay till the last——" [Pg 183]

"Till the 'last man is hung'!" finished Alfaretta, with prompt inelegance.

"Oh! I'm just starving!" wailed a boyish voice, and Monty rushed in.

"So are we all, so are we all!" cried others and the kitchen rang with the youthful, merry voices.

Ephraim scratched his gray wool and tried to look stern, but Dorothy's "Ephy, dear!" had gone straight to his simple heart, so lately wounded and sorrowful. After all, the world wasn't such a dark place, even if he had missed the circus, now that all these chatterers were treating him just as of old. They were so happy, themselves, that their happiness overflowed upon him.

Cried Jim Barlow, laying a friendly hand on the black man's shoulder:

"Come on, Ephy, boy! If the girls are going to make a 'bee,' and get supper for all hands—including the cook—let's match them by doing the chores for the men. The 'help' have done a lot for us, these days, and it's fair we do a hand's-turn for them now! Come on, all! Monty, you shall throw down fodder for the cattle—it's all you're equal to. Some of us will milk, some take care of the horses, everybody must do something, and I appoint Danny Smith to be story-teller-in-chief, and describe that circus so plain that Ephraim can see it without the worry of going!"

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"Hip, hip, hooray! Let's make a lark of it!" echoed Herbert, now forgetful of his good clothes and eager only to bear his part with the rest.

"Well, before we begin, let's get the twins each a bowl of bread and milk and tie them in their chairs, just as Dinah does when they bother. They mustn't touch that candy till afterward, though I don't know how Herbert ever kept it from them so long," said Molly Breckenridge, adjusting a kitchen apron to her short figure by tucking it into her belt.

"I know! I sat on it!" called back the lad and disappeared barnwards.

Luna was placed in her corner and given a bowl like the twins, and the girls set to work, even Jane Potter asking to help.

"What all shall we cook? I can make fudges," said Molly.

"Fudges are all right—you may make some, but I want something better than sweets. Helena, you're the oldest, you begin. Suggest—then follow your suggestions. Fortunately we've a pretty big range to work on and Ephraim can make a fire if he can't make tea. It's burning fine. Hurry up, Helena, and speak, else Alfaretta will explode. She's impatient enough," urged Dorothy.

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"Once—I made angel food," said Helena, rather timidly. "It didn't turn out a real success, but I think that was because I didn't use eggs enough."

"How many did you use?"

"A dozen."

"Try a dozen and a half. There's a basket of them yonder in the storeroom and everybody must wait on everybody's self. Else we'll never get through. I'll light up, it's getting dark already," answered Dorothy who, as hostess, was naturally considered director of affairs.

"Well, Alfy! What will you do?"

"I can fry chicken to beat the Dutch!"

"Hope you can," laughed Helena. "I'm not fond of Dutch cookery, I've tried it abroad. They put vinegar in everything."

"But where will you get chicken to fry?"

"There's a whole slew of them in the ice-box, all ready fixed to cook. I suppose Aunt Malinda won't like it, to have me take them, if she's planned them for some other time, but there's plenty more chickens in the world. Come along, Jane Potter, and get a pan of potatoes to peel. That's the sitting-downest job there is. Molly Martin, you can make nice raised—I mean bakin'-powder biscuit—there's the flour barrel. Don't waste any time. Everybody fly around sharp and do her level best!"

After all it was Alfaretta who took charge, and under her capable direction every girl was presently busy at work.

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"I'm going to make pies. Two lemons, two punkins, two apples. That ought to be enough to go around; only they'll all want the lemon ones. 'Christ Church,' Teacher told me when I



made him one once. Said 'twas the pastry cook at Christ Church College, in England, 't first thought them out. I can make 'em good, too. What you goin' to make, yourself, Dorothy Calvert?"

"I reckon—pop-overs. Mother Martha used to make them lovely. They're nothing but eggs and flour and—and—I'll have to think. Oh! I know. There's an old recipe book in the cupboard, though I don't believe Malinda can read a word in it. She just spreads it out on the table, important like, and pretends she follows its rules, but often I've seen it was upside down. Do you know how she makes jelly?"

"No, nor don't want to. We ain't makin' jelly to-night, and do for goodness' sake get to work!" cried Alfaretta, imparting energy to all by her own activity. "Ma says I'm a born cook and I'm going to prove it, to-night, though I don't expect to cook for a living. Jane Potter, you ought to know better than peel them 'tatoes so thick. 'Many littles make a mickle,' I mean a lot of potato skins make a potato—Oh! bother, do right, that's all. Just because Mrs. Calvert she's a rich 'ristocratic, 'tain't no reason we should waste her substance on the pigs."

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Jane did not retort, but it was noticeable that thereafter she kept her eyes more closely on her work and not dreamily upon the floor. Presently, from out that roomy kitchen rose a medley of odors that floated even to the workers out of doors; each odor most appetizing and distinct to the particular taste of one or another of the lads.

"That's fried chicken! Glad they had sense enough to give us something hearty," said Monty, smacking his lips.

Herbert sniffed, then advised: "I'll warrant you that Helena will try angel cake. If she does, don't any of you touch it; or if you think that isn't polite and will hurt her feelings, why take a piece and leave it lie beside your plate. Wonder if they'll ever get the supper ready, anyhow."

"Afraid it'll be just 'anyhow,'" wailed Monty. "Those girls can't cook worth a cent."

"Don't you think that, sir. Our up-mountain girls are no fools. I hope Alfaretta Babcock will make pies, I've et 'em to picnics and they're prime," said Mike Martin, loyally.

"Well, I only hope they don't keep us too long. I begin to feel as if I could eat hay with the cattle."

After all, the young cooks were fairly successful, and the delay not very great. Most of them were well trained helpers at home, even Dorothy had been such; but this time she had failed.

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"Three times I've made those things just exactly like the rule—only four times as much—and those miserable pop-overs just will not pop! We might as well call the boys and give them what there is. And—"

At this moment Dorothy withdrew her head from a careful scrutiny of the oven, and—screamed! The next instant she had darted forward to the imposing figure framed in the doorway and thrown her arms about it, crying:

"O, Aunt Betty, Aunt Betty! I'm a bad, careless girl, but I love you and I'm so glad, so glad you've come!"

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## CHAPTER XIV

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### AUNT BETTY TAKES A HAND

That picnic-supper! The fun of it must be imagined, not described. Sufficient to say that it was the merriest meal yet served in that great mansion; that all, including Mrs. Calvert, brought to it appetites which did not hesitate at "failures," and found even Helena's angel cake palatable, though Herbert did remark to his next neighbor:

"If they'd had that kind of leathery stuff instead of canvas to cover that circus tent it would never have broken through, never in the world!"

Not the least delighted of that company were the servants, who returned late from their outing, and had had to walk up the mountain from the Landing; they having lingered in the hill-city till the last possible train, which there were no local stages to meet.

"And to think that our Miss Dorothy had the kindness to get supper for us, too! Sure, she's the bonniest, dearest lass ever lived out of old Ireland. Hungry, say you? Sure I could have et the two shoes off my feet, I was that starved! And to think of her and them others just waitin' on us same's if we was the family! Bless her! And now I'm that filled I feel at peace with all the world and patience enough to chase them naughty spalpeens to their bed! See at 'em! As wide awake now as the morn and it past nine of the night!" cried Norah, coming into the room where the twins were having a delightful battle with the best sofa cushions; Mrs. Calvert looking on with much amusement and as yet not informed who they were and why so at home at Deerhurst.

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The chatter of tongues halted a little when, as the clock struck the half-hour, Mr. Seth came in. He looked very weary, but infinitely relieved at the unexpected return of the mistress of the house, and his greeting was most cordial. Indeed, there was something about it which suggested to the young guests that their elders might wish to be alone; so, one after another, they bade Mrs. Betty good-night and disappeared.

Dorothy, also, was for slipping quietly away, but Aunt Betty bade her remain; saying gently:

"We won't sleep, my child, till we have cleared away all the clouds between us. As for you, Cousin Seth, what has so wearied you? Something more than chaperoning a lot of young folks to a circus, I fancy."

"You're right. The afternoon performance was a pleasure; the ride home a trial."

"With whom did you ride?"

"Oliver Sands."

"Indeed? How came——"

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"It's a long story, Cousin Betty. Wouldn't we better wait till morning?"

"Don't you know how much curiosity I have? Do you want to keep me awake all night?" demanded the lady. But she believed that her old friend had some deep perplexity on his mind and that it would be a comfort to him to share it with her. "Is it something Dorothy may hear?"

"Certainly, if you wish. Already she knows part. Has she told you how the twins came here?"

"Somebody told, I forget who. All of the young folks talked at once, but I learned that they had been dropped on our premises, like a couple of kittens somebody wished to lose."

"Exactly; and though he did not personally 'drop' them, the man who most heartily wishes to lose them is miller Oliver Sands. They are his most unwelcome grandchildren."

"Why, Cousin Seth!" "Why, Master!" cried the hearers, amazed.

"True. Their mother was Rose Sands, whom her father always believed—or said—was ruined by the foolish name her mother gave her. His sons were like himself and are, I believe, good men enough, though tainted with their father's hardness."

"Hardness. That suave old Quaker! But you're right, and I never liked him."

"Nor I, I'm sorry to say, but I don't wish to let that fact stand in the way of fair judgment. The man is in trouble, deep trouble. I'm not the only one who has noticed it. His behavior for awhile back has been most peculiar. He neglects his business, leaves the fruit in his vineyards and orchards to go to waste, and to his workmen's question: 'What shall we do next,' returns no answer. He has taken to roaming about the country, calling at every house and inspecting each one and its surroundings as if he were looking for something he can't find. His face has lost its perpetual smile—or smirk—and betrays the fact that he is an old man and a most unhappy one."

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"Huh! I've no great sympathy for Oliver Sands. He has wronged too many people," said Mrs. Calvert, coldly. "But if those children are his grandchildren, what are they doing here?"

"I'm coming to that. His daughter, Rose, 'married out of meeting,' and against her father's will. He turned her out of doors, forbade her mother ever to see or speak to her again, and though—being a Friend—he took no oath, his resolution to cast her off was equivalent to one. That part of my tale is common neighborhood gossip."

"I never heard it," said Mrs. Betty.

"No; such would scarcely be retailed to you. Well, Rose took refuge with her husband's

people, and all misfortune followed her flight from her father's house. Her mother-in-law, her consumptive husband, and herself are dead; she passing away as the twins came into the world. The father-in-law, who was only a country-cobbler, but a profoundly religious man, became half-crazed by his troubles, and though I believe he honestly did his best by the babies left on his hands, they must have suffered much. They have never been so happy as now and I hope——"

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"Please, Mr. Seth, let me tell! Aunt Betty, if you'll let me, I want to adopt Sapphira!"

"Adopt—Sapphira! You? A child yourself?"

"Yes, please. I'll go without everything myself and I'd work, if I could, to earn money to do it. Molly is going to adopt Ananias. It will be lovely to have some object in life, and some the Seniors at the Rhinelander adopted some Chinese babies. True. They pay money each month, part of their allowance, to do it; so we thought——"

But Aunt Betty was leaning back in her chair and laughing in a most disconcerting manner. It's not easy to be enthusiastic on a subject that is ridiculed and Dorothy said no more. But if she were hurt by having her unselfish project thus lightly treated, she was made instantly glad by the tender way her guardian drew her close, and the gentle pat of the soft old hand on her own cheek.

"Oh! you child, you children! And I made the mistake of thinking you were as wise as a grown-up! We'll attend to the 'adoption' case, by and by. Let Cousin Seth say his say now."

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"Well, finally, the old man, Hiram Bowen, forsook his old home, sold his few belongings and came here to our mountain. He must have had some sense left, and realized that he was not long for this world, because though until lately he has been unforgiving to Oliver Sands for the treatment of Rose, he now sought to interest her father on the little ones' behalf. I've learned he made frequent visits to Heartsease, the Sands' farm, but only once saw its owner. But he often saw Dorcas, the wife, and found her powerless to help him; besides, he did not mend matters, even with her, by explaining that he had named the twins as he had —'after her husband, and herself!' He told her that she and Oliver were living liars, because the Scripture commanded Christians to look after their own households and they did not do so."

"But how could her heart, the heart of any woman, remain hard against the sight of her orphan grandchildren?" demanded Mrs. Calvert, impatiently. "I've met that Dorcas Sands on the road, going to meeting with the miller, and she looked the very soul of meekness and gentleness."

"So, I believe she is; but she never saw the children. I told you he was crazed, partially; and despite the fact that he felt their mother's family should care for the orphans he did not want to give them up, permanently. He felt that in doing so he would be consigning them to a life of deceit and unscrupulousness."

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"How strange! And, Seth, how strange that you should know all this. It's not many days since that old man 'passed them on' to us. You must have been busy gathering news," commented Mrs. Betty.

"I have; but the most of it I learned this afternoon, when I was taking the fanatic to the Hospital. Dolly, you tell her about his harangue in the tent and what the twins did there. It will give a diversion to my thoughts, for it *was* funny!"

So Dolly told and they all laughed over the recital, and in the laughter both Mrs. Calvert and Dorothy lost the last bit of constraint that had remained in their manner whenever either chanced to remember the missing one hundred dollars and the sharpness of the telegram.

Mrs. Calvert resumed:

"You say, taking him to the Hospital. Have you done that, then? And how came you with Oliver Sands? The last man in the world to be drawn to Newburgh to see a circus."

"Not the circus, of course, but the county fair. He got up enough interest in ordinary affairs to drive to the fair grounds to see his cattle safely housed. He will have, I presume, the finest exhibit of Holstein-Friesians on the grounds. He always has had, and has carried off many first premiums. He's on the board of managers, too, and they had a business meeting at the Chairman's, which is next door to St. Michael's—the semi-private establishment where I took Bowen. He was just unhitching George Fox, to come home, as I stepped out of the Hospital grounds and met him."

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"So you asked him for a lift down?" asked Aunt Betty, smiling.

"No, I didn't ask. He was so preoccupied, and I so full of what poor old Hiram had told me, that I just 'natchally' stepped into the rear seat without the formality of a request. Truly, I don't think he even noticed me till we were well out of the city limits and on to the quiet back road. Then I asked: 'How much will you pay, Friend Oliver, toward the support of Hiram Bowen at St. Michael's Hospital?'"

"Then he heard and noticed. Also, he tried to get rid of his passenger; but I wouldn't be set down. He gave me a rather strong bit of his opinion on meddlers in general and myself in particular, and finding he had me on his hands for all the distance here he said not another word. It was 'Quaker Meeting' in good earnest; but I felt as if I were riding with a man of iron and—it tired me!"

"Oh, you dear Master! Did you have any supper?" suddenly demanded Dorothy, with compunction that she hadn't thought of this earlier. [Pg 197]

"Oh! yes. Some little girls were holding a sidewalk 'fair' for the benefit of the children's ward and, while the authorities inside were arranging for Hiram's bestowal, I bought out their stock in trade and we ate it all together. I do love children!"

Aunt Betty rose and turning to Dorothy, remarked:

"That should be a much better use for your money when you find it than adopting the grandchildren of a rich old Hardheart! Come, child, we must to bed; and to-morrow, we'll take home the twins. 'Pass them on' to Heartsease."

"Oh! must we? But, maybe, they won't keep them there. Then, course, you wouldn't leave them just anywhere, out of doors, would you? Besides, I don't know what Molly will say. She's perfectly devoted to her 'son,' 'Nias.'"

"Do you not? Then I know very well what her Aunt Lucretia and his honor, the Judge, will say; I fancy that their remarks will have some weight! But I'm not hard-hearted, as you suggest, and we shall see what we shall see!" answered Aunt Betty, in her bright, whimsical way; adding as she bade Mr. Winters good-night and kissed Dorothy just as if no "cloud" had ever been between them:

"I am glad to be at home. I am so glad to come, even thus late to the House Party." [Pg 198]

And though she had said the misunderstanding that had made both herself and Dolly so unhappy "should be set right that very night," maybe this was her way of "setting" it so.

Thus ended another Day of that Wonderful Week, but the morning proved rainy and dark.

"No day for going to the County Fair," remarked Mrs. Calvert as she appeared among the young folks, just as they came trooping in to breakfast. "We must think of something else. What shall it be? Since I've invited myself to your Party I want to get some fun out of it!"

Helena thought she had never seen anything lovelier than this charming old lady, who moved as briskly as a girl and entered into their amusements like one; and when nobody answered her question she volunteered the suggestion:

"Charades? Or a little play in the big barn?"

"Just the thing; the charades, I mean. There would hardly be time for getting ready for a play, with parts to study and so on. We might plan that for Friday evening, our last one together. But do you, my dear, gather part of your friends about you and arrange the charades. Enough of us must be left for audience, you know. Well, Dorothy, what is it? You seem so anxious to speak?"

"Why not 'character' studies and make everybody guess. There's that attic full of trunks I discovered one day. Surely they must be full of lovely things; and oh! it's so jolly to 'dress up'! Afterward, we might have a little dance in the barn—May we, may we?" [Pg 199]

"Surely, we may! Dinah has the keys to the trunks, only I warn you—no carelessness. It's one of my notions to preserve the costumes of the passing years and I wouldn't like them injured. You may use anything you find, on the condition of being careful."

That rainy day promised to be the merriest of all; and Dorothy had quite forgotten some unpleasant things, till, breakfast being over and most of the company disappearing in pursuit of Dinah and her keys to the treasure-trunks, Aunt Betty laid a detaining touch upon her arm and said:

"But you and I, my dear, will have a little talk in my room."

Down went her happiness in a flash. The "misunderstanding" had not been passed by, then; and as yet there had been no "setting right." Mrs. Calvert's face was not stern, saying this,

but the girl so thought. Indeed, had she known it, Aunt Betty shrank more from the interview and the reproof she must give than did the culprit herself. However, shrinking did no good, and immediately the Mistress had seated herself she began:

"What grieved me most was your suspicion of Ephraim. Dorothy, that man's skin may be black but his soul is as white as a soul can be. He has served me ever since he was able to toddle and I have yet to find the first serious fault in him. The loss of the money was bad enough, and your scant value of it bad. Why, child, do you know whose money that was?"

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"I—I thought it was—mine."

"It was—God's."

"Aunt—Betty!" almost screamed Dorothy in the shock of this statement.

"Yes, my dear, I mean it. He has given me a great deal of wealth but it was His gift, only. Or, His loan, I might better call it. I have to give an account of my stewardship, and as you will inherit after me, so have you."

For a moment the girl could not reply, she was so amazed by what she heard. Then she ventured to urge:

"You said you gave it to me for my House Party. How could it be like that, then?"

"So I did. I 'passed it on,' as poor Hiram Bowen did the twins. Then it became your responsibility. It was a trust fund for the happiness of others, and for their benefit. Why, just think, if you hadn't been so careless of it, how much good it would have done even yesterday, for that very old man! Then dear Seth wouldn't have had to tax his small income to pay for a stranger's keep. Ah! believe me, my Cousin Seth spends money lavishly, but never unwisely, and always for others. When I said 'dangerously angry' I meant it. I am, in some respects, always in danger, physically. I shall pass out of your life quite suddenly, some day, my darling, but I do not wish to do so by your fault."

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"Now, enough of lectures. Kiss me and tell me that hereafter you will hold your inheritance as a 'trust,' and I shall trust you again to the uttermost. Next I want you to go over every incident of that night when you mislaid the money and maybe I can hit upon some clue to its recovery."

It was a very sober Dorothy who complied. It didn't seem a very pleasant thing to be an heiress. She had found that out before, but this grave interview confirmed the knowledge; and though they discussed the subject long and critically, they were no nearer any solution of the mystery than when they began.

"Well, it is a strange and most uncomfortable thing. However, we can do no more at present, and I'd like you to take a little drive with me."

"This morning, Aunt Betty, in all this rain? Ought you? Won't you get that bronchitis again? Dinah—"

"Dinah is an old fuss! She never has believed that I'm not soluble in water, like salt or sugar. Besides, I'm not going 'in the rain,' I'm going in the close carriage, along with you and the babies with the dreadful names. I'm going to have them renamed, if I can. Run along and put on your jacket. I think I've solved the riddle of my neighbor Oliver's unhappiness and I'll let no rain hinder me from making him glad again."

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"Dear Aunt Betty, will you do this for a man you do not like?"

"Of course. I'd do it for my worst enemy, if I knew—and maybe this poor miller is that. What ails that man is—remorse. He hasn't done right but I'm going to give him the chance now, and see his round face fall into its old curves again."

But good and unselfish as her mission was, for once the lady of Deerhurst's judgment was mistaken.

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## CHAPTER XV

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### A MARVELOUS TALE AND ITS ENDING

Oliver Sands was shut up in his private office. It opened from another larger room that had once been tenanted but was now empty. The emptiness of the great chamber, with its small

bed and simple furnishings, both attracted and repelled him, as was witnessed by the fact that he frequently rose and closed the door, only to rise again directly and open it again. Each time he did this he peered all about the big room, whose windows were screened by wire netting as well as by a row of spruce trees. These trees were trimmed in a peculiar manner and were often commented upon by passers along the road beyond. All the lower branches, to the height of the window-tops, were left to grow, luxuriantly, as nature had designed. But above that the tall trees were shaven almost bare, only sufficient branches being left to keep them alive. Also, beyond the trees and bordering the road was a high brick wall, presumably for the training of peach and other fruit trees, for such were carefully trained to it.

But the same wondering eyes which had noticed the trees had observed the wall, where indeed the fruit grew lusciously after a custom common enough in England but almost unknown in this region.

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"Looks like both trees and wall were planned to let light into that side the house and keep eyes out. But, has been so ever since Heartsease was, and nothing different now."

No, everything was outwardly unchanged, but his home was not like his home, that morning, when Mrs. Betty Calvert came to call. The rain that had kept him within had sent him to pass the hours of his imprisonment in his "den," or office, and to the congenial occupation of looking over the cash in his strong box. He was too wise to keep much there, but there had been a time when the occupation had served to amuse the inmate of the big room, and he was thinking of her now.

Indeed, when there came a knock on the outer door he started, and quickly demanded: "Well?"

"Oliver, Betty Calvert, from Deerhurst, has called to see thee," said the trembling voice of Dorcas.

"Why? What does she want?"

"To bring thee news. To bring thee a blessing, she says."

"I will come."

He rose and locked the strong box, inwardly resolving that its contents must be placed in the bank when next he drove to town, and he again carefully closed the door of the further room. But if there had been any to observe they would have seen his face grow eager with hope while his strong frame visibly trembled. He was not a superstitious man but he had dreamed of Deerhurst more than once of late and news from Deerhurst? A blessing, Dorcas said?

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He entered the living-room, cast one eager glance around, and sat down. He had offered no salutation whatever to Mrs. Calvert and the gloom had returned to his face even more deeply. Dorcas was standing wringing her hands, smiling and weeping by turns, and gazing in a perfect ecstasy of eagerness upon Ananias and Sapphira, huddled against Dorothy's knees. She held them close, as if fearing that cross old man would do them harm, but they were not at all abashed, either by him or by the novelty of the place.

"Well, Oliver Sands, you like plain speech and use it. So do I—on occasion. I have brought home your grandchildren, Rose's children. Their grandfather on the other side has been committed to an institution and will give you no trouble. He 'passed them on' to my household and I, in turn, 'pass them on,' to yours, their rightful home. You will feel happier now. Good-morning."

"What makes thee think he is unhappy?" ventured Dorcas, at last turning her eager gaze away from the twins.

"All the world sees that. He's a changed man since last we met, and I suppose his conscience is troubling him on account of the way he treated Rose and her children. Their demented grandfather, on the other side, gave them horrible names. I'd change them if I were you. Good-morning."

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But if the miller had not sought to detain her nor responded to her farewell, Dorcas caught at her cloak and begged:

"Wait, wait! Oliver, does thee hear? Elisabeth Calvert is going. She is leaving Rose's babies! What—what—shall I do? May I keep them here? Say it—Oliver speak, speak, quick! If thee does right in this thing mayhap the Lord will bless thee in the other! Oliver, Oliver!"

He shook her frail hand from his sleeve but he spoke the word she longed to hear, though the shadow on his face seemed rather to deepen than to lighten and astute Betty Calvert

was non-plussed. She had so fully counted upon the fact that it was remorse concerning his treatment of his daughter which burdened him that she could not understand his increased somberness.

But he did speak, as he left the room, and the words his wife desired:

"Thee may do as thee likes."

Then Mrs. Calvert, too, went out and Dorothy with her; strangely enough the twins making no effort to follow; in fact no effort toward anything except a pan of fresh cookies which stood upon the table! and with their fists full of these they submitted indifferently not only to the desertion of their friends but to the yearning embraces of their grandmother.

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"Oh! what perfectly disgusting little creatures! Didn't mind our leaving them with a stranger nor anything! Weren't they horrid? And it didn't make him look any happier, either, their coming."

"No, they were not disgusting, simply natural. They've been half-starved most of their lives and food seems to them, just now, the highest good;" said Aunt Betty, as the carriage door was shut upon them and they set out for home. "I cannot call it a wasted morning, since that timid little woman was made glad and two homeless ones have come into their own. But—my guess was wide of the mark. It isn't remorse ails my miller neighbor but some mystery still unsolved. Ah! me! And I thought I was beautifully helping Providence!"

"So you have, Aunt Betty. Course. Only how we shall miss those twins! Seems if I couldn't bear to quite give 'Phira up. Deerhurst will be so lonesome!"

"Lonesome, child! with all you young folks in it? Then just imagine for an instant what Heartsease must have been to that poor wife. Shut up alone with such a glum, indifferent husband, in that big house. I saw no other person anywhere about, did you?"

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"No, and, since you put it that way, of course I'm glad they're to be hers not Molly's and mine."

"The queer thing is that he was so indifferent. I thought, I was prepared to have him rage and act—ugly, at my interference in his affairs; but he paid no more attention than if I had dropped a couple of puppies at his fireside. Hmm. Queer, queer! But if I'm not mistaken his young relatives will wake him up a bit before he's done with them."

After all, though Dorothy had hated to leave the other young folks on such an errand, through such weather, and in some fear of further "lectures," the ride to Heartsease had proved delightful. She wouldn't have missed the rapture on lonely Dorcas Sands's pale face for the wildest frolic going and, after all, it was a relief to know the "twinses" could do no more mischief for which she might be blamed; and it remained now only to appease the wrath of Molly Breckenridge when she was told that her adopted "son" had been removed from her authority without so much as "By your leave."

Naturally, Molly said nothing in Mrs. Calvert's presence, but vented her displeasure on Dorothy in private; until the latter exclaimed:

"You would have been glad, just glad, Molly dear, to hear the way the poor old lady said over and over again: 'Rose's children! Rose's children!' Just that way she said it and she was a picture. I wish I was a Quaker and wore gray gowns and little, teeny-tiny white caps and white something folded around my shoulders. Oh! she was just too sweet for words! Besides—to come right to the bottom of things—neither of us *could* adopt a child, yet. We haven't any money."

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"Pshaw! We could get it!"

"I couldn't. Maybe you could; but—I'm glad they're gone. It's better for them and we shouldn't have been let anyway, and—where's Helena?"

"Up garret, yet. They're all up there. Let's hurry. They'll have all the nicest things picked out, if we don't."

They "hurried" and before they knew it the summons came for luncheon. After that was over Danny Smith and Alfaretta Babcock mysteriously disappeared for a time; returning to their mates with an I-know-something-you-don't sort of an air, which was tantalizing yet somehow suggested delighted possibilities. The afternoon passed with equal swiftness, and then came the costume parade in the barn; the charades; and, at last, that merry Roger de Coverly, with Mrs. Betty, herself, and Cousin Seth leading off, and doing their utmost to teach the mountain lads and lassies the figures.

All the servants came out to sit around and enjoy the merry spectacle while old Ephraim,

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perched upon a hay-cutter plied his violin—his fiddle he called it—and another workman plunked away on his banjo till the rafters rang.

“Oh, such a tangle! And it seems so easy!” cried Jane Potter, for once aroused to enthusiasm for something beside study. “Come on, Martin! Come half-way down and go round behind me—Oh! Pshaw! You stupid!”

Yet uttered in that tone the reproof meant no offense and Jane was as awkward as her partner, but the dance proved a jolly ending for a very jolly day. Only, the day was not ended yet; for with a crisp command:

“Every one of you get your places an’ set round in a circle. It’s Danny’s and my turn now, and—Come on, Daniel!” Alfaretta vanished in the harness room.

Danny followed, rather sheepishly, for despite his love of fun he didn’t enjoy being forced into prominence; and from this odd retreat the pair presently emerged with great pans of snowy popped-corn, balanced on their heads by the aid of one hand, while in the other they carried each a basket of the biggest apples even Melvin had ever seen; yet the wonder of the Nova Scotian apples had been one of his proudest boasts.

“Jump up, Jim, in your ‘Uncle Sam’ clothes and fetch the jugs out. Fresh sweet cider, made to farmer Smith’s this very day! There’s nuts in there all cracked, for some of you other fellows to bring and tumblers and plates ’t Aunt Malinda let us take. We’ve had ice-cream and plum-puddin’ and every kind of a thing under the sun and now we’re going to have just plain up-mounting stuff, and you’ll say it’s prime! Danny and me done this. We planned it that night Monty got stuck—Oh! my soul, I forgot!”

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“Never mind. I don’t care,” said Monty; and, maybe to prevent another doing so, promptly related for Mrs. Calvert’s benefit the tale of his misadventure. Indeed, he told it in such a funny way that it was plain he was no longer sensitive about it; and he finished with the remark that:

“If Deerhurst folks don’t stop feeding me so much I may even get stuck in that big door!”

The quiet sitting and talking after so much hilarity was pleasant to all and tended to a more thoughtful mood; and finally clapping her hands to insure attention Molly Breckenridge demanded:

“A story, a story! A composite story! Please begin, Mrs. Calvert: ‘Once upon a time——’ Then let Helena, my Lady of the Crinoline take it up and add a little, then the next one to her, and the next—and so on all around the ring. The most fun is to each say something that will fit—yet won’t make sense—with what went just before. Please!”

“Very well: ‘Once upon a time and very good times they was, there was a Mouse and a Grouse and a Little Red Hen and they all lived in the one house together. So wan day, as she was swapin’ the floor, they met a grain o’ cor-run.’ ‘Now, who’ll take that to the mill?’ ‘I won’t,’ says the Mouse. ‘Nayther will I!’ say the Grouse. ‘Then I’ll aven have to do it mesel,’ says the Little Red—Next!”

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Irish Norah was in ecstasies of laughter over her mistress’s imitation of her own brogue, and all the company was smiling, as Helena’s serious voice took up the tale:

“‘Twas in the dead of darksome, dreadful, dreary night, when the Little Red Hen set forth on her long, lonely, unfrequented road to the Mill. The Banshees howled, the weird Sisters of the Night made desperate attempts to seize the Grain of Corn—Next!”

“Which, for safe keeping the fearless Little Red Hen had already clapped into her own bill—just like this! So let the Banshees howl, the Weird Sisters Dree their Weird—for Only Three Grains of Corn, Alf! Only Three Grains of Corn!” cried Monty, passing his empty plate; “and I’ll grind them in a mill that’ll beat the Hen’s all hollow! while Jane Potter—next!”

“For the prisoner was terrified by the sounds upon the roof and after brief deliberation and close investigation he came to the conclusion, ‘twas a snare and a delusion to toy with imagination and fear assassination till the hallucination became habituation and his mental aberration get the better of his determination toward analyzation of the sound upon the roof. Of the pat, pat, patter and the clat, clat, clatter of small claws upon the roof! Then with loud cachinnation—Next!”

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“To drive the Little Red Hen off from the roof he sprang up and bumped his head against it; and the act was so unexpected by said Hen that she flew off, choked on her grain of corn and—Next!” cried Jim, while everybody shouted and Mrs. Calvert declared that she had never heard such a string of long words tied together and asked:

“How could you think of them all, Jane?”



“Oh! easily enough. I’d rather read the dictionary than any other book. I’ve only a school one yet but I’ve most enough saved to buy an Unabridged. Then——”

“Oh! then deliver us from the learned Jane Potter! Problem: If a small school dictionary can work such havoc with a young maid’s brain will the Unabridged drive her to a lunatic asylum? or to the mill where the Little Red Hen—Next!” put in Herbert, as his contribution.

“The little Red Hen being now corn-fed, and the Mill a thing she never would reach, the Mouse and the Grouse thought best to put an end to her checkered career and boil her in a pot over a slow fire; because that’s the way to make a fowl who had traveled and endured so much grow tender and soft-hearted and fit to eat, corn and all, popped or unpopped—Pass the pan, Alfaretta! while the pot boils and the Little Red Hen—Next!” continued Littlejohn Smith, with a readiness which was unexpected; while Molly B. took up the nonsense with the remark that:

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“The Little Red Hen has as many lives as a cat. All our great-great-great-grandmothers have heard about her. She was living ages and—and eons ago! She was in the Ark with Noah—in my toy Ark, anyway; and being made of wood she didn’t boil tender as had been hoped; also, all the lovely red she wore came off in the boil and—what’s happening? Tother side the ring where Dolly Doodles is holding Luna with both hands and staring—staring—staring—Oh! My! What’s happening to our own Little Red Hen!”

What, indeed!

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## CHAPTER XVI

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### THE FINDING OF THE MONEY

In this instance the Little Red Hen was Luna. As always when possible she had seated herself by Dorothy, who shared none of that repugnance which some of the others, especially Helena, felt toward the unfortunate. She had been cleanly if plainly clothed when she arrived at Deerhurst, but the changes which had been made in her attire pleased her by their bright colors and finer quality.

The waif always rebelled when Dinah or Norah sought to dress her in the gray gown she had originally worn or to put her hair into a snug knot. She clung to the cardinal-hued frock that Dorothy had given her and pulled out the pins with which her attendants tried to confine her white curls. In this respect she was like a spoiled child and she always carried her point—as spoiled children usually do.

Thus to-night: To the old nurse it had seemed wise that the witless one should go to her bed, instead of into that gay scene at the barn. Luna had decided otherwise. Commonly so drowsy and willing to sleep anywhere and anyhow, she was this night wide awake. Nothing could persuade her to stay indoors, nothing that is, short of actual force and, of course, such would never be tried. For there was infinite pity in the hearts of most at Deerhurst, and a general feeling that nothing they could do could possibly make up to her for the intelligence she had never possessed. Also, they were all sorry for her homelessness, as well as full of wonder concerning it. The indifferent manner in which she had been left uncalled for seemed to prove that she had been gotten rid of for a purpose. Those who had lost her evidently did not wish to find her again. Yet, there was still a mystery in the matter; and one which Mrs. Calvert, coming fresh upon it, was naturally resolved to discover. The poor thing was perfectly at home at Deerhurst now, and judging by her habitual smile, as happy as such an one could be. But though the mistress of the mansion felt that her household had done right in sheltering the wanderer and in allowing her to partake of all their festivities, she did not at all intend to give a permanent home to this stranger. She could not. Her own plans were for far different things; and since she had, at last, been so fortunate as to bestow the twins in their legitimate home, she meant to find the same for Luna.

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So the guest who was both child and woman had carried her point and was one in the ring of story-tellers. She paid no heed to what was going on but amused herself with folding and unfolding her red skirt; or in smoothing the fanciful silk in which Dorothy appeared as a belle of long ago.

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The pair were sitting on a pile of hay, leaning against a higher one, and Dorothy had been absorbed in listening to the composite story and wondering what she should add to it. Her head was bent toward Luna and she dreamily watched the movements of her neighbor’s

tiny wrinkled hands. Suddenly she became aware that there was a method in their action; that they were half-pulling out, half-thrusting back, something from the fastening of the scarlet blouse.

This something was green; it was paper; it was prized by its possessor, for each time Dorothy moved, Luna thrust her treasures back out of sight and smiled her meaningless smile into the face above her. But Dorothy ceased to move at all, and the dreaminess left her gaze, which had now become breathlessly alert and strained.

She watched her opportunity and when again Luna drew her plaything from her blouse, Dorothy snatched it from her and sprang to her feet, crying:

“The money is found! The money is found! My lost one hundred dollars!”

Strangely enough Luna neither protested nor noticed her loss. The drowsiness that often came upon her, like a flash, did so now and she sank back against her hay-support, sound asleep.

All crowded about Dorothy, excited, incredulous, delighted, sorely puzzled.

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“Could Luna have stolen it, that foolish one?”

“But she wasn’t in the house the night it was lost. Don’t you remember? It was then that Dolly found her out by the pond. It couldn’t have been she!”

“Do you suppose it blew out of the window and she picked it up?”

“It couldn’t. The window wasn’t opened. It stormed, you know.”

Such were the questions and answering speculations that followed Dorothy’s exclamation, as the lads and lassies found this real drama far more absorbing than the composite tale had been.

Mrs. Calvert and Mr. Seth alone said nothing, but they watched with tender anxiety to see Dorothy’s next action. That it satisfied them was evident, from the smiles of approval gathering on their faces and the joyous nodding of the gray heads. Their girl hadn’t disappointed them—she was their precious Dorothy still.

She had gone straight to where old Ephraim and his cronies now sat in a distant part of the barn, enjoying their share of the good things Alfy and Danny had provided, and kneeling down beside him had laid the roll of money on his knee. Then audibly enough for all to hear, she said:

“Dear Ephraim, forgive me, if you can. This is the money I lost, the ten crisp ten-dollar bills. Count them and see.”

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“No, no, li’l Missy! No, no. An’ fo’ de lan’, doan you-all kneel to a pore ole niggah lak me! Fo’ de lan’, Missy, whe’-all’s yo’ pride an’ mannehs?”

Her posture so distressed him that she rose and said, turning to her friends that all might hear:

“It was I, and I alone, who put that money out of sight. I remember now as clearly as if it were this minute. That red frock was the one I wore that night when Luna came. There is a rip in it, between the lining and the outside of the waist. It was an oversight of the maker’s, I suppose, that left it so, but I never mended it, because it made such a handy pocket, and there was no other. I remember plain. When the crash came I gathered up the money and thrust it into that place. Instinct told me it was something to be cared for, I guess, because I’m sure I didn’t stop to think. Then when I went to bed I must have been too excited to remember about it and left it there. The next day I gave that frock to Luna and she has worn it ever since. How long before she found the ‘pocket’ and what was in it, she can’t tell us. We’ve heard the ‘help’ say how quickly she noticed when money was around and I suppose she’s been afraid we’d take it from her; although she didn’t resent it just now when I did. Oh! I am so ashamed of myself, so ashamed!”

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Nobody spoke for a moment, till Ephraim rose and taking his fiddle solemnly played the Doxology. That wasn’t speaking, either, in a sense; but it told plainer than words the gratitude of the simple old man that the shadow on his character was banished forever.

Seth Winters nodded his own gray head in understanding of the negro’s sentiment, while Dorothy sped with the bills to lay them in her Aunt Betty’s lap, and to hide her mortified countenance upon the lady’s shoulder. Thence it was presently lifted, when Mrs. Calvert said:

“Now the lost is found, I’d like to inquire what shall be done with it? It’ll never seem just

like other money to me or to my forgetful darling here. Let's put it to vote. Here's my notebook, Dolly; tear out a few leaves and give a scrap of the paper to each. Pass the pencil along with them and let each write what she or he thinks the most beneficent use for this restored one hundred dollars."

So it was done; even those among the servants grouped inside the great doors, having their share of the evening's sport, even among these those who could write put down their wish.

Then Jim Barlow collected the ballots and sorted them; and Seth Winters's face shone with delight when it proved the majority had voted:

"For the old man at St. Michael's."

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So at once they made him take the money in charge; and it made all glad to hear him say:

"That will keep the poor old chap in comfort for many a day," for he would not damp their joy by his own knowledge that Hiram Bowen's days could not be "many," though he meant that they should be the most comfortable of all that pain-tormented life.

"Well, our rainy day has proved a blessed one! Also, the storm is over and to-morrow should bring us fair weather for—the County Fair! All in favor of going say Aye!" cried the Master.

The rafters rang again and again, and they moved doorwards, regretful for the fun just past yet eager for that to come; while there was not a young heart there but inwardly resolved never again to harbor suspicion of evil in others, but to keep faith in the goodness of humanity.

Meanwhile, what had this rainy day seen at Heartsease Farm? Where the twins of evil names had been left to their new life, and their maternal grandfather had so coolly turned his back upon them, while they satisfied their material little souls with such cookies as they had never tasted before.

Dorcas let them alone till they had devoured more than she felt was good for them, and until Ananias turning from the table demanded:

"Gimme a drink."

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"Gimme a drink!" echoed his mate; and the old lady thought it was wonderful to hear them speak so plainly, or even that they could speak at all. But she also felt that discipline should begin at once; and though not given to embellishment of language she realized that their "plain speech" was not exactly that of the Friends.

"Thee tell me thy name, first. Then thee shall drink."

"A-n an, a, ana, n-i ni, a-s as, Ananias."

"S-a-p sap, p-h-i phi, r-a ra," glibly repeated the girl, almost tripping over her brother in her eagerness to outdo him.

Dorcas Sands paled with horror. Such names as these! Forced upon the innocent babes of her Rose! It was incredible!

Then, in an instant, the meekness, the downtroddenness of the woman vanished. Her mission in life was not finished! Her sons had gone out from her home and her daughter was dead, but here were those who were dearer than all because they were "brands" to be saved from the burning.

"Hear me, Rose's Babies! Thee is Benjamin, and a truth-teller; and thee is Ruth. Let me never hear either say otherwise than as I said. Now come. There is the bench and there the basin. The first child that is clean shall have the first drink—but no quarreling. Birthright Friends are gentle and well mannered. Forget it not."

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The sternness of mild people is usually impressive. The twins found it so. For the rest of that day, either because of the novelty of their surroundings or their difficulty in mastering—without blows—the spelling of their new names, they behaved with exceptionable demureness; and when, in some fear their grandmother dispatched Benjamin to Oliver's office to announce dinner, the miller fairly stared to hear the midget say:

"Thee is to come to dinner, Oliver. Dorcas says so. Thee is to make haste because there is lamb and it soon cools. Dorcas says the lamb had wool once and that thee has the wool. Give it to me; Oliver. B-e-n ben, j-a ja, m-i-n min, Benjamin. That's who I am now and I'm to have anything I want on this Heartsease Farm because I'm Rose's baby. The Dorcas woman says so. Oliver, *did thee know Rose?*"

This was the "plain speech" with a vengeance! The miller could scarcely credit his own ears

and doubting them used his eyes to the greater advantage. What he saw was a bonny little face, from which looked out a pair of fearless eyes; and a crown of yellow hair that made a touch of sunlight in that dark room. "Did he know Rose?"

For the first time in many a day he remembered that he *had* known Rose; not as a rebellious daughter gone astray from the safe fold of Quakerdom, but as a dutiful innocent little one whom he had loved. Rising at last after a prolonged inspection of his grandson, an inspection returned in kind with the unwinking stare of childhood, he took the boy's hand and said:

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"Very well, Benjamin, I will go with thee to dinner."

"But the wool? Can I have that? If I had that I could wrap it around Sap—I mean R-u ru, t-h thuh, Ruth, when it's cold at night and Him's off messagin'."

"Yes, yes. Thee can have anything if thee'll keep still while we ask blessing."

The face of Dorcas glowed with a holy light. Never had that silent grace been more earnestly felt than on that dark day when the coming of "Rose's babies" had wrought such a happy effect on her husband's sorrowful mood. True she also was sorrowful, though in less degree than he; but now she believed with all her heart that this one righteous thing he had done—this allowing of the orphans to come home—would in some way heal that sorrow, or end it in happiness for all.

All afternoon she busied herself in making ready for the permanent comfort of her new-found "blessings." She hunted up in the attic the long disused trundle-bed of her children; foraged in long-locked cupboards for the tiny sheets and quilts; dragged out of hiding a small chest of drawers and bestowed the twins' belongings therein, bemoaning meanwhile the worldliness that had selected such fanciful garments as a trio of young girls had done. However, there was plenty of good material somewhere about the house. A cast-off coat of Oliver's would make more than one suit for Benjamin; while for little Ruth, already the darling of her grandmother's soul, there were ample pieces of her own gowns to clothe her modestly and well.

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"To-morrow will be the Fifth day, and of course, though he seems so indifferent we shall all go to meeting. And when the neighbors ask: 'Whose children has thee found?' I shall just say 'Rosie's babies.' Then let them gaze and gossip as they will. I, Dorcas, will not heed. There will be peace at Heartsease now Rosie has come home—in the dear forms of her children."

Thus thought the tender Friend, sitting and sewing diligently upon such little garments as her fingers had not touched for so long a time; but the "peace" upon which she counted seemed at that moment a doubtful thing.

The day had worn itself out, and the miller had tired of indoors and his own thoughts. From the distant living-room he had been conscious of a strange sound—the prattle of childish voices and the gentle responses of his wife. His heart had been softened, all unknown to himself even, by a sorrow so recent it absorbed all his thought and kept him wakeful with anxiety; yet it was rather pleasant to reflect, in that gloomy afternoon, that he had given poor Dorcas her wish. Those twins would be a great trouble and little satisfaction. They were as much Bowen as Sands; still Dorcas had been good and patient, and he was glad he had let her have her wish.

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Ah! hum! The clouds were lifting. He wondered where those children were. He began to wonder with more interest than he had felt during all that endless week, what his workmen were doing. Maybe he would feel better, more like himself, if he went out to the barn and looked about. By this time the cows should be in the night-pasture, waiting to be milked, those which were not now in the stalls of the County Fair.

That Fair! He would have hated it had he not been a Friend and known the sinfulness of hatred. But there were cattle lowing—it sounded as if something were wrong. Habit resumed its sway, and with anxiety over his cherished stock now re-awakened, he passed swiftly out.

"Oliver, thee has forgotten thy goloshes!" called his thoughtful spouse, but he paid her no heed, though commonly most careful to guard against his rheumatism.

"Who left that gate open? Who drove that cow—her calf—Child! is thee possessed?"

Mrs. Betty Calvert was a true prophet—the twins had certainly waked their grandsire up a bit! The explanation was simple, the disaster great. They had tired of the quiet living-room and had also stolen out of doors. Animals never frightened them and they were immediately captivated by the goodly herd of cattle in the pasture. To open the gate was easy; easy, too,

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to let free from its small shed a crying calf. Between one cow and the calf there seemed a close interest.

"We oughtn't ha' did that! That big cow'll eat that little cow up. See Sapphi—Ruth, see them stairs? Let's drive the little cow up the stair past the big wagons and keep it all safe and nice," suggested Benjamin.

So they did; much to the surprise of the calf who bounded up the stairs readily enough, kicking its heels and cavorting in a most entrancing fashion; but when they tried to bar the big cow from following, she rushed past them and also ascended the stairs in a swift, lumbering manner. The relationship between the big and little cow now dawned even upon their limited intelligence, though there still remained the fear that the one would devour the other.

Then the twins turned and gazed upon one another, anxiety upon their faces; till spying the master of the premises most rapidly approaching they rushed to meet him, exclaiming:

"The little cow's all safe but how will we get the big cow down?"

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How, indeed! Oliver Sands was too angry to speak. For well he knew that it would require the efforts of all his force of helpers to drive that valuable Jersey down the stairs she had not hesitated to go up when driven by maternal love.

With one majestic wave of his hand the miller dismissed his grandchildren to the house and Dorcas; but so long and so hard he labored to lure that imprisoned quadruped from his carriage-loft, that, weary, he went early to bed and slept as he had not for nights. So, in that it seemed his "waking up" had proved a blessing.

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## CHAPTER XVII

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### THE STORY OF THE WORM THAT TURNED

The morning proved fair and cool, ideal weather for their visit to the County Fair; but Mrs. Calvert decided that a whole day there would be both inconvenient and too fatiguing. Now that she was at home the management of the House Party had been turned over to her by tacit consent, and she had laughingly accepted the trust.

"This was to be Dorothy's affair, but it's been more Mr. Winters's than hers and now more mine than his. Well, I like it. I like it so exceedingly that I propose to repeat the experiment some time. I love young people; and am I not quite a young person myself?"

"Of course, you are, dear Aunt Betty! The youngest of us all in some things, Mr. Seth says!"

"So the farrier has been talking, eh? Well, I want to talk a bit, too. In a multitude of counselors there is wisdom—as we have the highest authority to believe; and the case in question is: Shall we, or shall we not, take Luna to the Fair?"

They were all grouped on the big piazza, after their early lunch, waiting for the wagons to come from the stables and carry them to the city beyond; and as Mrs. Betty asked this question a hush of surprise fell on them all. Finally, said Helena:

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"We have taken her, she has gone with us, on all our jaunts. Doesn't it seem too bad to leave her out of this?"

One after another as the lady nodded to each to speak the answer was frankly given, and Dorothy remarked:

"It's about half-and-half, I guess. Yes, I know she does go to sleep in all sorts of queer places and at the strangest times, but I hate to leave her."

"Then if she goes she must wear her own clothes."

"Why, Aunt Betty, please? Of course, I don't want to see her in that red frock again—I'd like to burn that up so nobody would ever see it and be reminded how careless and unjust I was. But there's a pretty blue one she could have."

"That's not my reason, dearie. I think it has been a mistake, kindly meant, to dress her as you have; that is for longer than was necessary to freshen her own soiled things." She paused and Alfie remarked:

"She's the proudest thing for them bright colors. Red, and green, and blue—ary one just

sets her smilin'. Besides, once Dinah tried to put back her old brown dress and Luna wouldn't let her. Just folded her arms up tight and didn't—didn't look a mite pleasant."

Those who had seen Luna on the rare occasions when she showed anger smiled at this mild description of her appearance then. [Pg 231]

"I don't know as Dinah would be bothered with her, Aunt Betty, and Norah has a sick headache. But—I'll stay and take care of her if you don't want her to go," said Dorothy.

It was an effort to say this and dreading that her offer might be accepted the girl turned her face away to hide her disappointment; but whatever Mrs. Calvert's answer might have been she was not to hear it then.

Because there was Jim Barlow beckoning to her in a mysterious manner from behind a great hydrangea bush and looking vastly excited over something. So it was a relief to murmur: "Excuse me a minute, Aunt Betty," and to respond to that summons.

"Dolly, there's a man here wants to see you."

"A man? To see me? and not Aunt Betty? Who is he?"

Jim answered rather impatiently to this string of questions.

"I said a man, didn't I. He said he'd rather see you because he knows you, that is you gave him a lift on the road once in your pony cart and talked real sensible——"

"Couldn't have meant me, then, could he, Jim?"

"Don't fool, Dorothy. He looks as if he was in some trouble. He's the head man from Oliver Sands's grist-mill. Some relation to the miller, I've heard, and lives with him. Hurry up and don't hender the raft of us any longer'n you can help. Tell him, whatever his business is, 'twill have to wait, 't we're going to the Fair and all the teams are ready——" [Pg 232]

"Yes, I'll hurry. Where is he?"

"In that little summer-house beyond the lily pond. That's where he said he'd go. Get rid of him quick, for the horses don't like to stand after they're harnessed."

"All right, I'll try!" Gayly waving her hand in the direction of the piazza, she sped across the lawn to a group of silver birches, and the spot in question. Solidly roofed, with vine covered sides, and good board floor, the out-of-door building was a pleasant place, and had been greatly enjoyed by all the House Party. It was well furnished with wicker tables, chairs, and lounges, and heavy matting covered the floor. It was empty now except for the old man awaiting Dorothy, and his first remark showed that he appreciated this bit of outdoor comfort.

"It's real purty in here, ain't it? Anybody could spend a night here and take no hurt, couldn't she?"

"Why, ye-es, I suppose so; if anybody wished. James told me you asked for me. What is it, please, for we're just on the point of starting for the County Fair, and I don't like to delay the others." [Pg 233]

"Hmm. Yes. I suppose so. Hmm. Yes. Thee is the little girl that's had such a story-paper kind of life, isn't thee? Don't remember me, but I do thee. Gave me a ride once after that little piebald nag thee swopped Oliver's calf for. Thee sees I know thee, if thee has forgot me and how my floury clothes hit the black jacket thee wore, that day, and dusted it well, 'Dusty miller' thee laughed and called me, sayin' that was some sort of plant grows in gardens. But I knew that. Dorcas has a whole bed of it under her kitchen window. Hmm. Yes."

Dorothy tapped her foot impatiently, but did not sit down. Would the man never tell his errand? Finally, as he lapsed into a reverie she roused him, saying:

"What is your errand, please?"

"It's to help an old man in trouble. It—the—I don't find it so easy to begin. But—is there a little old woman here, no bigger than a child? Is she here? Is she safe?"

This was a question so unexpected that Dorothy sat down the better to consider it; then greatly wondering, answered:

"Yes, there is an afflicted little creature here. Why? What do you know about her?"

"All there is to know, child! All there is to know. Thee sees a most unhappy man before thee, lass." [Pg 234]

"Who is Luna? How came she here? Tell me, quick, quick; and if you know her home?"

"Verily, I know it, since it's my own, too. It's a long story, a long lane, but the worm turned. Ah! yes. It turned."

Dolly began to think her visitor was crazy and springing up ran toward the house, saying:

"I'm going for Aunt Betty. I'd rather you told your errand to her."

The man did not object, and, greatly surprised by the imperative summons though smiling at her darling's excitement, Mrs. Calvert left her guests and followed the girl through the shrubbery to the arbor where the vines hid her from the curious glances of those she had left.

"Something's up! I wonder what?" exclaimed Monty Stark.

"Whatever it is, if it concerns us we shall be told in due time; and if it doesn't—Hmm," answered Helena.

"Stand corrected, Miss Montaigne; but bet a cookie you're as curious as all the rest of us."

"Well, yes, I am; though I never bet—even cookies. Now let's talk of something else till they come back. I know they'll not be long."

Nor were they; for down in the summer-house, with Elisabeth Calvert's compelling gaze upon him, the visitor told his tale. [Pg 235]

"Thee can look upon me, lady, as the worm that turned. I am a poor relation of Oliver Sands and he felt he owned me."

"That man? Are we never to hear the end of Oliver Sands? He's the 'Old Man of the Mountain', in truth, for his name is on everyone's lips," cried Mistress Betty, crisply, yet resigning herself to the chair Dorothy pushed her way.

"Thee never said truer. He is the biggest man up-mounting in more ways'n one. I've not wasted more love on him than many another but I hadn't no call to break his heart. Hark, thee. I'll be as short as I can.

"When Oliver's mother died he was a boy and I was. She——"

"Beg pardon, please; but this afternoon I really have no time to learn the family history of my neighbor."

"But I have to tell thee part, to make thee understand. When his mother died, a widow, she left them two children, Oliver and Leah. He was a big boy, smart and trustable, and Leah was almost a baby. Her mother knew then that the child wasn't like others, she'd talked it with me, I bein' older'n him; but he didn't know it and from the time she was born he'd just about worshiped that baby. When she was dying Mehitabel made him promise, and a Friend's promise is as good as another man's oath, 't he'd always take care of little Leah and love her better'n anybody in the world. That nobody, even if he should grow up and marry and have children of his own, should ever come betwixt her and him. Well, 'twas a good spell before he found out 't he was brother to a fool. That's plain speech but I'm a Quaker. When he did find out, 'twas a'most more'n he could bear. He give out to anybody that asked, how 't she was sickly and had to be kept private. [Pg 236]

"Elisabeth Calvert, she *has* been kept private, all her life long, till I let out the secret. He and Dorcas and me, and the children while they lived at the farm, we was the only ones ever had to do with care of her or saw her even. I worked on for him, he makin' the money, I gettin' shorter wages each year, besides him investin' 'em for me as he pleased.

"But I'm old. I want a home of my own; and lately I've been pestering him to let me go. He'd always make excuse and talk plausible how 't he couldn't spare me nohow. I knew he told the truth, since if I left he'd have to get in strange help and it might get out 't his sister's sickness was plain want of brains. That'd have nigh killed him, he's so proud; to be pointed at as 'Oliver Sands, that's brother to a fool'."

"Well, well. This is exceedingly painful to hear, but to what does it tend?" asked Mrs. Calvert.

"Just this, Elisabeth. One day I got nursin' my wrongs and forgettin' my blessings, and the devil was on hand to give me the chance. Dorcas was off nursing a sick neighbor, Oliver was to Newburgh on some Fair business, and there wasn't nobody in the house but me and Leah. I took an old horse and wagon, 't he'd been meaning to sell, to the sales-stable at the Landing; and I coaxed Leah to come take a ride. She come ready enough. She didn't have much fun, anyway, except sitting with him in the office such times as he was lookin' over [Pg 237]

his accounts and reckonin' his money. She liked that. She always liked to handle money. That proved her a Sands, even if she was imbecile!

"Thinks I, I'll break his pride. I'll make him know 't he ain't no better than other folks, even if he does speak in meeting. I meant to carry her clear to the Landing and let things take their chance while I cleared out for good. But when I'd got as far as here I begun to get scared on her account. I'd set out to humble Oliver but I liked Leah, poor creatur'! and I'd forgot I might be hurtin' her the worst. She'd never been 'mongst folks and they might treat her rough. So then I remembered this little girl, and how there was talk 'round about her having a passel of young folks to visit her. So I thought Leah would have a chance amongst 'em and I fetched her in and laid her right in this summer-house, on that bench yonder and covered her with a shawl I saw. She was asleep as she is a lot of the time, and didn't notice.

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"Then I went on to the Landing, left the rig to the stable, and took the cars for York. I've been there ever since. I never meant to come back; but there's something about this mountain 't pulls wanderers' feet back to it, whether or no. And—is Leah here?"

"Rather it was your own guilty conscience that brought you back. Yes, I suppose it is 'Leah'—the witless waif my Dorothy found. And now I understand my poor neighbor's trouble. I am proud myself. Ah! yes I can understand! After the silence of a lifetime, how he shrank from publishing what he seems to have considered a disgrace to a gossiping world. But he was wrong. Such pride is always wrong; and he has spent a most unhappy time, searching with his own eyes everywhere but never asking for his lost Leah! but he was cruel in that, as cruel as misguided; and as for you, sir, the sooner you get upon your wicked feet and travel to Heartsease and tell its master where the poor thing may be found—the better for yourself. I think such an act as you committed is punishable by the strictest rigor of the law; but whether it is or not your own conscience will punish you forever. Now —"

Mrs. Calvert stopped speaking and rose. She had never been so stately nor so severe and Dorothy pitied the poor old man who cowered before her, even while she was herself fiercely indignant against him. By a clasp of Mrs. Betty's arm she stayed her leaving:

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"Wait a moment, Aunt Betty, please. It's just as bad as you say, he's just as bad; but—he's terrible tired and old. He looks sick, almost, and I've been thinking while he talked: You let me stay at home, take Portia and the pony cart and carry Luna—Leah—and him back to Heartsease right away. May I, please?"

"But to miss the Fair? He should have the unpleasant task of confessing himself, and nobody else to shield him."

"Please, Aunt Betty, please! I found her. Oh! let me be the one to give her back!"

Mrs. Calvert looked keenly into her darling's eyes, and after a moment, answered:

"I might be willing; but should you desert your guests? And if you do, what shall I say to them for you?"

"Just this: that a messenger has come who knows where Luna belongs and that I'm going with him to take her home. That'll make it all right. You might tell Dinah to keep Luna—Leah—I came pretty near her name, didn't I?—to keep her contented somewhere till I come for her and to put on her own old clothes. I have a feeling that that proud old miller would like it better that way."

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There was a mist in Aunt Betty's eyes as she stooped and kissed the eager face of her unselfish child; but she went quietly away and did as she was asked. Left in the summer-house alone with Dorothy Eli Wroth relapsed into silence. He had had hard work to make himself unburden his guilt and having done so he felt exhausted; remarking once only:

"Thee may be sure that the worm hurts itself too when it turns. Thee must never turn but kiss the cheek which smites thee."

After which rather mixed advice he said no more; not even when all the other carriages having rolled out of the great gateway, Dorothy disappeared in search of Portia and the cart; nor did he cast more than one inquiring glance upon Leah, sitting on the front seat beside the girlish driver. As for the other, she paid him no more heed than she did to anything else. She might have been seeing him every day, for all surprise she evinced; and as for resentment against him she was too innocent to feel that.

The ride was not a long one, but it seemed such to Dorothy. At times her thoughts would stray after her departed friends and a wish that she were with them, enjoying the novelties of the County Fair, disturb her. But she had only to glance at the little creature beside her to forget regret and be glad.

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Also, if her tongue was perforce silent, her brain was busy, and with something of her Aunt Betty's decision, she intended to have her say before that coming interview was finished.

All was very quiet at Heartsease when she reached it. Even the twins were abnormally serious, sitting on the wide, flat doorstep of the kitchen entrance, and looking so comical that Dolly laughed. For the Fifth Day meeting Dorcas had clothed them properly. Her ransacking of old closets had resulted in her finding a small lad's suit, after the fashion of a generation before. A tight little waist with large sleeves, which hung over the child's hands, and a full skirt completed the main part of his costume; while his nimble feet were imprisoned in stout "copper-toes," and a high-crowned, narrow-brimmed hat covered his already shorn head. Such was Benjamin, in the attire of his uncle at his own age.

As for Sapphira-Ruth,—a more bewitching small maiden could not be imagined. She wore her mother's own frock, when that mother was five. Its cut was that of Dorcas's own, even to the small cap and kerchief, while a stiff little bonnet of gray lay on the step beside her. Ruth's toes also shone coppery from under her long skirt; and the restraint of such foot gear upon usually bare feet may have been the reason why the little ones sat sedately where they had been placed without offering to run and meet their old friend. [Pg 242]

Eli Wroth started to get out of the cart, but Dorothy had a word to say about that.

"No, sir, please! You sit still with Leah and hold the horse. I'm going in first to speak to Mr. Sands, but I'll come back."

Tapping at the kitchen door, she stooped to kiss the twins, receiving no further response than to see Benjamin wipe her kiss away; Ruth, as a matter of course, immediately doing the same.

Nor was there any answer to her knock, and since the door was ajar she pushed it wide and entered. Dorcas sat there asleep; her work-worn hands folded on her lap, her tired body enjoying its Fifth Day rest.

Oliver was invisible but Dorothy softly crossed to a passage she saw and down that, stepping quietly, she came upon him alone in his office. The door to that inner, secluded room—Leah's room, she understood at a glance—this door was open, and the miller sat as if staring straight into it. So gently Dolly moved that he did not hear her, and she had gone around him to stand before his face ere he looked up and said:

"Thee? thee?"

"Yes, I. Mr. Sands, I know the whole story, and I'm sorry for you. I'm more sorry though for the little old woman who belongs in that room. It's pleasant enough but it has been her prison. It has deprived her of lots of fun. If I should bring her back to it, would you let her go out of it sometimes, into the world where she belongs? Would you let her come to visit me? Would you take her to meeting with you as is her birthright? Would you put your pride aside and—do right? If I would bring her back?" [Pg 243]

For a moment he stared at her as if he did not understand; then all that gloom which had so changed him vanished from his face and he answered with that promise which to a Quaker is better than an oath:

"I would. I will! If thee can bring her!"

A moment later Leah's hand was in her brother's and Dorothy had left them alone, and thus the House Party neared its end, to become but a happy memory to its soon to be homeward speeding guests. The thoughts of the young hostess were even now turning wholly to the future, her brain teeming with marvelous plans. What these were and how fulfilled in "Dorothy in California," to those interested, the story will be told.

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## CHAPTER XVIII

[Pg 244]

### CONCLUSION

"Friday! And to-morrow we part!" said Molly Breckenridge, with more of sadness on her sunny face than was often seen there. "It's been such a perfectly enchanting Week of Days, and this is the last one left! Oh! dear! Oh! I do hate good-bys. Saying that and packing one's trunk are two just unbearable things and make one wish, almost, that the nice times had never begun."

"Yes, beginnings are grand; but endings—Hmm. I agree with you, Miss Molly," echoed a boyish voice so close to her elbow that the girl wheeled briskly about to see who spoke.

"Why, Melvin Cook! Are you down in the dumps, too? I didn't know boys had—had feelings, don't you know."

He ignored her mockery and answered gravely:

"They do feel a deal more than they get credit for. A boy daren't cry and be silly like a girl —"

"Thanks, awfully!"

"He just has to keep everything bottled up. That's why he acts rude sometimes. I fancy that's what's amiss with the two Smiths yonder. They've been literally punching each other's heads because Danny happened to remark that Littlejohn would have to work the harder when he got home, to make up for this week's idleness. And——"

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"Here comes the Master and he doesn't look at all like crying! Why he's holding his hands above his head and—yes, he's clapping them! Call all the others with that new bugle of yours, and let's go meet him! Toot-te-toot-te-toot!"

Melvin obediently raised the handsome instrument which Dorothy had given him the night before, and which Mrs. Calvert had bought for him in the hill-city. It had not come from the County Fair but from the best establishment for such ware and Melvin was delighted with it. There had been a "keepsake" for each and all. For Jane Potter her "unabridged"; for Alfaretta, who had never minded rain nor snow, a long desired umbrella; for Jim a Greek lexicon; for Mabel Bruce an exquisite fan; and after the tastes of all something they would always prize. In fact, Mrs. Calvert had early left the Fair and spent her time in shopping; and Seth knew, if the younger ones did not, that far more than the equivalent of the famous one hundred dollars had been expended to give these young folks pleasure.

"Oh! what is it, Master! What is it? Have you settled on the play? Will you assign the characters and let us get to studying, so we can make a success of it to-night?" cried Helena, rather anxiously.

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"I have settled on the play. Rather it has been settled for me. As for characters they will need no study, since each and all are to appear in this most marvelous drama in their own original selves."

"Why, Mr. Seth, what do you mean? You look so happy and yet as if something had made you feel bad, too;" said Dorothy, slipping her hand into his as he dropped it to his side.

"Oh! I tell you I am happy! So will many another be, 'up-mounting' on this auspicious day. Talk about partings—there are going to be meetings, meetings galore. In short, I won't mystify you any longer though I am half-mystified myself. Attention! Leah Sands will give a House Party this afternoon at Heartsease Farm and we and all who'll accept are bidden to attend at three o'clock sharp."

"Leah—that's Luna? How can she do a thing like that?"

"Well, it can be done in her name, I reckon. Just as this was Dorothy's and somebody else managed it; eh, lassie? The Friends speak when the Spirit moves. At last, by the power of grief and remorse, by the power of Love, the Spirit of unselfishness and humility has moved upon the heart of Oliver Sands. One is never too old to learn; and, thank God, some are never too old to acknowledge their ignorance! He isn't, and to prove it he is doing this thing. His messengers are speeding everywhere. Caterers from Newburgh have had hurry-up orders to provide a bountiful feast and old Heartsease Farm is to be the scene of an 'Infair' that will beat Dorothy's to—smithereens! I mean, begging her ladyship's pardon, in point of size. Leah is to be the guest of honor, since she cannot preside; but be sure she'll not disgrace her proud brother since at Dorothy's Party she has learned how harmless are even strangers. Yes, I can safely say that Leah made her debut with us. Now, who'll accept? Don't all speak at once!"

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But they did. So joyfully, so earnestly, that the Master clapped hands over ears and, laughing, hurried away, while Mrs. Calvert beamed upon them all, the dearest hostess who had ever lived—so one and all declared.

The scene at Heartsease? It is useless even to try to depict that. Sufficient to say it was a marvelous Party; and he who marveled most was the giver of the Party himself. Because where he might easily have expected absences and "regrets" came hastening guests to shake him by the hand, to forgive hard dealings, to rejoice with him that she who had been lost, in every sense, had been found.

And when, at last, the young folks from Deerhurst tore themselves away and walked homeward over the moonlit road, it was with the feeling that this last outing of their Week of Days had been the dearest and the best. [Pg 248]

Partings? They had to come; but when on the Saturday morning the last guest had disappeared and Dorothy stood alone beside Aunt Betty on the broad piazza, there might be tears in her brown eyes, but there was no real heaviness in her heart.

God had given her a home. He had given her this dear old lady to love and serve, and the girl had already learned that there is joy only in Loving Service.

## THE END

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“We will ride part of the way with you,” suggested Fleet, “and see you safe on the road.”

“If you are going,” advised the major, “the sooner you get away the better.”

“Then I am going to get off at once,” announced Chot.

It was but a few moments before the horses were saddled and the little cavalcade started. After accompanying him for some half dozen miles the others bade Chot “adios” and returned to the ranch.

It was still early evening for the days were now very long, when Chot arrived at El Perro Negro, but unlike the other to be remembered evening there were but few persons about and these few paid no attention to him. He attended to his horse and as the supper hour was already over he asked the landlord to get him something to eat. The inner man satisfied he was off early to bed.

The night passed without any disturbance although he slept as Fleet would express it "with one eye awake" and with the coming of daylight he was astir. He fed his horse and gave him a rub down preparatory to an early start.

On his way to the shed that morning, he noticed several men whom he had not before seen. Among them he observed the outlaws Jose and Miguel. He paid no attention to them however until they came up beside him. He was engaged in currying his horse.

"That is a good beast you have there," said Miguel. "Cuanto? How much for him?"

"Good morning," responded Chot, and continued, "He isn't for sale."

"Your horse?" went on the man.

"No," said Chot, shortly. "He isn't mine."

"Where do you come from?" asked Miguel.

"I came from Captain Benson's," said Chot, guardedly, thinking it wise not to speak of Rosado.

"Isn't that Mr. Shelton's horse?" asked Jose.

"Yes," said Chot. "Do you know the owner?"

The man muttered something which Chot could not understand.

"Then you come from Rosado?" questioned Jose. This after a pause during which he eyed Chot narrowly.

"I have been stopping there," answered Chot.

"Are you going back there?" asked Miguel.

"I am going to meet Mr. and Mrs. Shelton," replied Chot, getting somewhat uneasy under the insistent questioning.

"That is what I told you," remarked Jose to Miguel, as the men started back to the Inn.

"I wonder what it was he told him?" mused Chot. "The best thing I can do is to get away from here as quickly as possible."

As soon as Chot could get his breakfast he was off on his way, having seen nothing more of the bandits.

From Estrada a good part of the journey was along the course of a stream that came down from the mountains and as the road was good Chot urged his horse on, but in spite of all his efforts the animal lagged; so that when at noon he stopped to rest in a small grove, he was much less than half way to Rosado. The presence of the bandits at the Inn had disquieted him and as soon as the worst of the heat was over he re-saddled his horse to resume his journey.

As he was starting off, as a matter of precaution he glanced back over the road and was disturbed to see two horsemen rapidly approaching.

"The quicker I can get away from here the better," he thought, and he urged his horse on as fast as he could.

"They may be all right," he reflected, "but I don't like the looks of it and it will be just as well to keep out of their way."

"I wonder what is the matter with Brownie," he cogitated after a bit, for in spite of all his efforts the horse's pace became more labored and slower. His pursuers, if such they were, were rapidly gaining on him.

"They may be after me and they may be only traveling in this direction," he reasoned, "but I am going to find out. I will ride over to the woods, it is out of my way and off the trail, if they follow I'll know they are after me."

Turning his horse's head in the direction of the forest he proceeded as fast as he could. Looking back after a few moments he saw that the men had changed their course and were

plainly headed toward and rapidly gaining on him. His position was decidedly unpleasant. The outlaws he was sure, had recognized him as one of the comrades who were visiting at the hacienda, and of whom they had heard enough, through Took, to regard as dangerous enemies and to be gotten out of the way. Whether they knew that the comrades had discovered the secret of the lost river or not, they were evidently anxious to be rid of them.

"I can't successfully resist them if they attack me," reasoned Chot, "I wish I had brought a gun of some kind. As it is the only thing I can do is to try and elude them." Chot thought quickly. "If I can jump from the saddle into one of the trees I won't leave any trail and they won't know where I have gone. I'll try it anyhow," he said to himself, "even if I fail I won't be any worse off, for my mount is laboring painfully."

The wood which he was now approaching was of very heavy timber and little underbrush had grown up between the trees. The trees themselves were well scattered yet were so large, their wide spreading branches interlaced. Even the lower branches were so high that Chot could not reach them with his extended hand. Climbing now on to the saddle he got first on his knees, as he and his chums had practiced in their efforts to imitate the tricks of the cowboys at the hacienda, then on to his feet; here he balanced himself for an instant. While the horse was loping along under his persistent urging he came to a slightly sagging branch, grasping it he sprang into the tree. Quickly he drew himself up out of sight of any one below.

He had scarcely succeeded in doing this when the bandits, who were only a short distance behind him when he entered the woods, were heard galloping below him.

"We have got him now," he overheard Jose saying to his companion.

"Don't be too sure of that," objected Miguel. "They are devils those Americans."

"A fig for your devils," returned Jose. "If I can get my hands on him I will take care of him all right."

"You want to pray the saints they don't get their claws on you," retorted Miguel.

Further words he could not catch as they rode along.

"I wonder what will be the next move," thought Chot as he made his way to better security farther up in the tree. "I think I will study up flying machines when I get out of this. A pair of wings would come in handy just now."

Chot was not long left in doubt for in ten minutes the men came back through the woods, evidently in search of him.

"What did I tell you," expostulated Miguel. "I knew he would get away somehow."

"He hasn't got away yet," growled the other, stopping beneath the tree in which Chot had taken refuge. "He disappeared in the woods somewhere and I am going to find him. He is somewhere between this locality and the edge of the wood where we found his horse. Say but you did not give him a big enough dose. The animal ought to have played out hours ago."

"So they tried to poison my horse," was Chot's thought.

"I am going to find him," repeated Jose.

"Quiza!" said Miguel, looking about him, "Maybe you will and maybe you won't. If he were human where could he go? There is no place here where he could hide."

"He is here somewhere," retorted Jose, "and I am going to search him out. He knows too much and I am going to get rid of him. He must be up a tree and so he must come down."

"Carambo! no," said Miguel. "Nothing but a cat could go up a tree so quick. We were just behind him. See there are the marks of his horse's hoofs, the animal never stopped in his stride. The boy went off just like that," and Miguel blew across his hand with an expressive little puff. "Same as they did in the cave. Better leave him alone. No good will come of it."

Chot, who had climbed up into the tree as high as he dared, now drew himself close to the trunk and waited for the next move on the part of his pursuers which was not long in coming. He could not see the speakers below, but of a sudden his attention was attracted to an adjoining tree. Chot had noted that the branch upon which he was resting his hands for partial support, was of a remarkable length and stretched out till it met and overlapped a branch of the next nearest tree. Some motion upon the branch of the farther tree caught his eye. To his horror he made out some sort of a wild beast stealthily approaching. Its yellow eyes were on a level with his own. He gazed in fascinated terror. Truly his predicament was

hopeless. There seemed no way for him to cope with one enemy or the other. To remain where he was, would be to become the sure prey of the wild beast. To make any move for defense would call to the attention of the outlaws his hiding place.

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