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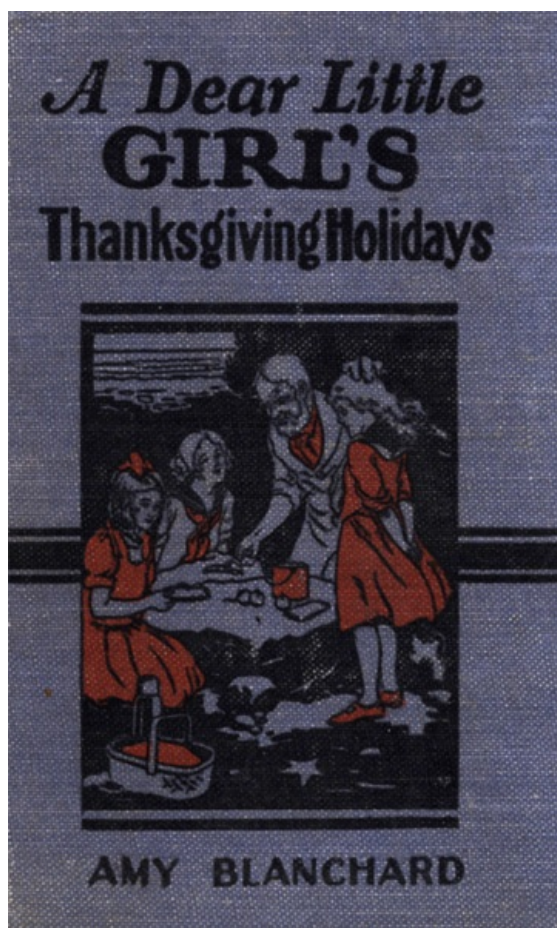
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## A DEAR LITTLE GIRL'S THANKSGIVING HOLIDAYS

## **The "Dear Little Girl" Series**

A Dear Little Girl

A Dear Little Girl at School

A Dear Little Girl's Summer Holidays

A Dear Little Girl's Thanksgiving Holidays

# A DEAR LITTLE GIRL'S THANKSGIVING HOLIDAYS

*Amy E. Blanchard*



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# A DEAR LITTLE GIRL'S THANKSGIVING HOLIDAYS

## CHAPTER I

### THE INVITATION

"ANY news, mother?" asked Edna one Friday afternoon when she came home from school.

"There's a letter from grandma," replied Mrs. Conway after kissing the lips held up to hers. "There isn't any real news in it, but there is an invitation."

"What kind of an invitation?"

"A Thanksgiving kind."

"Oh, mother, what do you mean?"

"I mean that grandma wants us all to spend an old-fashioned Thanksgiving with her; the kind she used to have when she was young. She says she and grandpa are both getting old and they may not be able to have the whole family there together again."

"And are we going?"

"Yes, I think so."

"The whole family?"

"I think perhaps you and I will go on a day or two ahead and let the others follow. Celia and the boys can come with your father, who probably could not get off till Wednesday afternoon. Grandma asks that I bring my baby with me."

"And that means me," returned Edna, hugging herself. "How long shall we stay, mother?"

"That depends upon several things which will have to be learned later, so I can't tell just yet."

Edna danced off to hunt up her brothers that she might tell them the news. She found them in their little workshop over the stable. Charlie was making a new box to put in his pigeon house and Frank was watching him. They had not seen their little sister since Monday for she and her sister Celia went to school in the city, remaining until the Friday afternoon of each week.

"Hello!" cried Charlie, looking up. "When did you come?"

"Oh, we've just come, only a few minutes ago, and what do you think is the news?"

"The Dutch have taken Holland," returned Charlie, hammering away at his box. "Just hand me that box of nails, Frank, won't you?"

"That's a silly answer," said Edna with contempt.

"Well, if it's news, how did you expect me to know it?"

"I didn't expect you to know it, only to guess."

[12] "Well, I guessed," replied Charlie teasingly. "I suppose it's a foolish sort of thing; Uncle Justus has grown another hair in his eyebrows or your friend Dorothy has a new hat."

"It's nothing so unimportant," Edna continued; "for it concerns you boys, too, but if you don't want to know I'll go up to Dorothy's; she'll be interested even if she isn't going."

"Going? Where?" cried both boys.

"That's for me to know and for you to find out," retorted Edna, beginning to scramble down the ladder. Both boys darted after; Charlie swung himself down ahead of her to the floor below and was ready to grab her before she reached the last rung. Then there was much laughing, scrambling, tickling and protesting till at last Edna was compelled to give up her secret, ending triumphantly with: "And I'm going first with mother."

[13] "Who said so?" questioned Charlie.

"Mother did. We are to go two or three days ahead of anyone else."

"Oh, well, I don't care," returned Charlie. "There wouldn't be any boys for me to play with anyhow."

"How many are coming for Thanksgiving?" asked Frank.

"I don't know exactly," Edna answered, "but I suppose all the aunts and cousins and uncles that can get there. Aunt Lucia and Uncle Bert and of course Aunt Alice and her boys, Ben and his brother. Ben will have to go, and I'm awfully glad; he's my favoritest cousin."

"How about Louis?"

"He is not any relation to grandma and grandpa Willis, is he?"

[14] "I don't know; I never could get relations straight. I hope he isn't any kin to them and I am sorry he is to us, for he is a pill. You know he is, no matter what you say. Just look how he acted last summer. You needn't try to excuse him, for Dorothy told me all about it."

Edna could not deny facts, for it was quite true that her cousin Louis was not above blame in sundry instances, so she changed the subject by saying, "I think I'll go over to Dorothy's anyhow."

The boys did not try to detain her and she ran out along the road and up to the old-fashioned house where her friend Dorothy Evans lived. Dorothy was playing with her kitten out on the side porch. She had dressed the little creature in long clothes and was walking up and down singing to it as it lay contentedly in her arms, its two gray paws sticking out from the sleeves of a little red sacque belonging to one of Dorothy's dolls.

[15] "Doesn't Tiddlywinks look funny?" said Dorothy by way of greeting. "And isn't he good? I believe he likes to be dressed up, for he lies as still as anything. Of course, if he fussed and meowed, I would take off the things and let him go."

Edna touched the soft silvery paws gently. "I believe he does like it," she returned. "See, he shuts his eyes exactly as if he felt nice and cozy. Oh, Dorothy, guess what! We are all going to grandpa Willis's next week. We are all going for Thanksgiving, only mother and I are going first. Isn't that lovely?"

"Lovely for you, I suppose," replied Dorothy dejectedly, "but I shall miss you dreadfully."

"Oh, no, you won't, when you have Margaret and Nettie so near. Besides I shall not be gone long, not more than a week."

"Are there any girls there?" asked Dorothy, a little jealously.

[16] "Not like us. There is a little girl, mother says, that grandma has taken in to help her and Amanda; Amanda is the woman who lives there and cooks and churns and does all sorts of things."

"Is it in the real country?"

"It is real country and yet it isn't, for it is a village. Grandpa has a farm, but just across the street is a store and the church is only a few steps away, and there are lots of neighbors; some have big places and some have little ones. Grandpa's isn't as big as the biggest nor as little as the littlest."

"Does he keep horses and cows and chickens and things?"

"Oh, my, yes, and ducks and turkeys and sheep."

"I should think it would be a pretty nice sort of place."

"It is lovely and I am always crazy about going there."

"But please don't stay too long this time," urged Dorothy.

[17] "I'll have to stay till mother brings me back," returned Edna cheerfully. "I wish there were another kitten, Dorothy, so I could have a live doll, too."

"You might take the mother cat," Dorothy suggested; "she is very gentle and nice."

They went in search of Tiddlywinks' mother, but Madam Pittypat objected to being made a baby of, for, though she was gentle enough, she squirmed and twisted herself out of every garment they tried upon her, and, at the first opportunity, walked off in a most dignified manner, as though she would say: "Such a way to treat the mother of a family!"

So the two little girls concluded that they would free Tiddlywinks and turn him again into a kitten. They left him stretching himself and yawning lazily, as they trudged off to see their friend, Margaret McDonald, that they might tell her Edna's news.

[18] The days sped by quickly until Tuesday came, when Edna and her mother were to start on their journey. Edna at first decided to take her doll Ada "because she is more used to traveling," she said, but at the last moment she changed her mind saying that Ada had been on so many journeys that she thought someone else should have a chance and, therefore, it was her new doll, Virginia, who was dressed for the trip. The previous year Edna had spent Thanksgiving Day with her Uncle Justus; this year it would be quite a different thing to sit at table with a whole company of cousins instead of dining alone with Uncle Justus.

[19] It was a journey of three hours before the station of Mayville was reached, then a drive of four miles to Overlea lay before them. But there was grandpa himself waiting to help them off the train, to see that their trunks were safely stowed into the big farm wagon, and at last to tuck them snugly into the carriage which was to bear them to the white house set in behind a stately row of maples. These had lost their leaves, but a crimson oak still showed its red against the sky, and the vines clambering up the porch waved out scarlet banners to welcome the guests.

Grandma Willis was standing on the porch to greet them as they drew up before the door. Behind her stood Amanda and behind Amanda a little girl about twelve or thirteen. Behind the little girl trailed a cat and three kittens. At the sight of these Edna gave a squeal of delight. "New kittens, grandma? How lovely! I'm so glad," she cried.

Grandma smiled. "Well, give me a good hug and kiss first and then Reliance can let you take one of the kittens to hug."

"Who is Reliance? Is that what you call the mother-cat?"

[20] "No, her name is Tippy. Reliance is the little girl who, we hope, is going to carry out the promise of her name."

Edna did not understand this latter speech but she smiled encouragingly at Reliance who smiled back at her. Then after the huggings and kissings were given to Mrs. Willis, Reliance picked up one of the kittens and held it out to Edna who cuddled it up to her and followed the others into the house.

It was a big old-fashioned place where the Willis family had lived for many generations. In the large living-room was a huge fireplace in which now a roaring fire crackled and leaped high. There was a small seat close to it and on this Edna settled herself.

"Here, here, aren't you going to stay a while?" cried grandpa who had given over the carriage into the hands of Ira, the hired man, and who had just come in.

[21] "Why, of course we are going to stay," replied Edna.

"Then why don't you take off your things? Mother, isn't there any place they can lay their bonnets and coats? It seems to me there should be a bed or cupboard somewhere."

"Now, father," protested Mrs. Willis, "you know this house is big enough to hold the hats and coats of the entire family."

"Didn't know but you were house-cleaning and had every place turned upside down."

"Now, father," Mrs. Willis continued, "you know we've been days getting the house cleaned and that everything is in apple-pie order for Thanksgiving."

[22] Grandpa gave Mrs. Conway a sly wink. "You'd think it ought to be in apple-pie order," he said, "by the way they have been tearing up the place. Couldn't find my papers, my sticks, my umbrella or anything when I wanted them. I am glad you all have come so you can help me hunt for them."

"Why, father, how you do go on," Mrs. Willis interposed. The old gentleman laughed. He was a great tease, as Edna well knew.

"Where shall we go to lay off our things, mother?" asked Mrs. Conway.

"Up to your own old room over the dining-room. Here, Reliance, take the kitten and you, Edna, can come along with your mother."

"There's no need for you to go up, mother," said Mrs. Conway. "I have been there before, you know, and I think I can find the way." Then the two smiled wisely at one another.

[23]

But grandma would go and presently Edna found herself in a large room which looked out upon the west. Mrs. Conway stood still and gazed around her. "How natural it all seems," she said, "even to the pictures upon the walls. I went from this room a bride, Edna, and when I come back to it I feel not a day older. This is the same furniture, but this is a new carpet, mother, and new curtains, and the little cot you have put in for Edna, I suppose."

"Yes, there are some things that will not last a lifetime," answered Mrs. Willis, "and we must furbish up once in a while. I thought you would rather have Edna here with you than elsewhere, and at such a crowded time we have to stow away as we can. I have put another cot in my room for one of the other children and Celia is to go in with Becky."

[24]

While they were talking Ira brought up the trunks and Mrs. Conway commenced the task of unpacking, so very soon they were settled and ready for dinner, which was served in the big dining-room where was another open fireplace not quite so large as the first, but ample enough. Reliance waited upon the table and helped to clear away the dishes afterward.

"When you are through with your tasks, Reliance, you can take Edna out and show her the chickens and pigs and things," said grandma.

"Reliance is quite a recent addition to the family, isn't she?" said Mrs. Conway when the little maid went out.

"Yes," Mrs. Willis replied. "Amanda isn't as young as she was and we thought it would be a good thing to have someone here who could save her steps and who could be trained to take her place after a while. I think Reliance promises to be very capable in time."

[25]

While her mother talked to the grandparents, Edna walked softly around the room looking at the different things, the pictures, books and ornaments. There was a high mantel upon which stood a pair of Dresden vases and two quaint little figures. In the middle was a china house with a red door and vines over the windows. Edna had always admired it and was glad to see it still there. She stood looking at it for a long time. She liked to have her grandmother tell her its history. "That was brought to me by my grandfather when he returned from England," Mrs. Willis always said. "I was a little girl about six years old. Later he brought me those two China figures. He was a naval officer and that is his portrait you see hanging on the wall."

"I love the little house," remarked Edna, knowing that the next word would be: "You may play with it if you are very careful. It is one of my oldest treasures and I should be very grieved if it were broken."

[26]

The little house was then handed down and Edna examined it carefully. "It is so very pretty," she said, "that I should like to live in it. I would like to live in a house with a bright red door."

"I used to think that same thing when I was a little girl," her grandmother told her.

"I think maybe you'd better put it back so I won't break it," said Edna, carefully handing the treasure to her grandmother, "and then will you please tell me about the pictures?"

"The one over the mantel is called 'The Signing of the Declaration of Independence,' and that small framed affair by the chimney is a key to it, for it tells the names of the different men who figure in the picture."

[27]

"I will look at it some day and see if I can find out which is which," said Edna. "That is Napoleon Bonaparte over there; I know him."

"Yes; and that other is General Washington, whom, of course, you know."

"Oh, yes, of course; and I know that little girl, the black head over there; it is my great-great-grandmother."

"The silhouette, you mean? Yes, that is she, and she is the same one who did that sampler you see hanging between the windows. She was not so old as you when she did it."

Edna crossed the room and knelt on a chair in front of the sampler. It was dim with age, but she could discern a border of pink flowers with green leaves and letters worked in blue silk. She followed the letters with the tip of her finger, tracing them on the glass and at last spelling out the name of "Annabel Lisle, wrought in her seventh year."

[28]

"Poor little Annabel, how hard she must have worked," sighed Edna. "I am glad I don't have to do samplers."

"You might be worse employed," said her grandmother, smiling.

"Did you ever do a sampler?" asked Edna.

"Not a sampler like this one, but I learned to work in cross stitch. Do you remember the little stool in the living-room by the fireplace?"

"The one with roses on it that I was sitting on?"

"Yes; that I did when I was about your age, and the sofa pillow with the two doves on it I did

when I was about Celia's age. I was very proud of it, I remember."

"May I go look at them?"

"Assuredly."

[29] So Edna went into the next room and carefully examined the two pieces of work which now had a new importance in her eyes. A little girl about her age had done them long ago. She discovered, too, a queer-looking picture behind the door. It was of a lady leaning against an urn, a weeping-willow tree near by. The lady held a handkerchief in her hand and looked very sorrowful. Edna wondered why she seemed so sad. There were some words written below but they were too faint for her to decipher, and she determined to ask her grandmother about this picture which she had never noticed before. While she was still looking at it, Reliance came to the door to say, "I can go now; I've finished what I had to do." Edna turned with alacrity and the two went out together.

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## [30] CHAPTER II

### RELIANCE

"How long have you lived here?" Edna asked her companion when they were outside.

"About six months," was the reply.

"Are you 'dopted?" came the next question.

"No, I'm bound."

Edna looked puzzled. "I don't know what that is. I know a girl that was a Friendless and she was 'dopted so now she has a mother and a beautiful home. Her name used to be Maggie Horn, but now it is Margaret McDonald. Is your name Reliance Willis?"

[31] "No, it is Reliance Fairman, and it wasn't ever anything else. I was friendless, too, till Mrs. Willis took me."

"Oh, and did you live in a house with a lot of other Friendlesses?"

"No, I wasn't in an orphan asylum, if that's what you mean, but I reckon I would have had to go there or else to the almshouse."

"Oh!" This seemed even more dreadful to Edna and she looked at her companion with new interest, at the same time slipping her hand into the other's to show her sympathy. "Tell me about it," she said.

"Why, you see, my parents died. We lived about three miles from here, and your grandmother used to know my grandmother; they went to the same school, so when us children were left without any home or any money your grandmother said she would take me and keep me till I was of age, so they bound me."

[32] "How many children were there?"

"Three boys and me. Two of the boys are with Mr. Lukens and the other is in a home; he is a little chap, only six. If he'd been bigger maybe your grandfather would have had him here, and perhaps he will come when he is big enough to be of any use."

"I think that would be very nice and I shall ask grandfather to be sure to take him. Do you like it here?"

"Oh, yes, I like it. Amanda is awful pernickity sometimes, but I just love your grandmother and it is a heap sight better than being hungry and cold."

"Would you have to stay supposing you didn't like it?" Edna was determined to get all the particulars.

"I suppose so; I'd have to stay till I was eighteen; I'm bound to do that."

[33] Edna reflected. "I suppose that is what it means by being bound; you are just bound to stay. I wonder if anyone else was ever named Reliance," she went on, being much interested to hear something about so peculiar a name.

"My grandmother was, her that your grandmother knew."

"Oh, was she? Then you are named after your grandmother just as my sister Celia is named Cecelia after hers. Yours is a funny name, isn't it? I don't mean funny exactly, for I think it is

quite pretty, but I never knew of anyone named that."

"I don't mind it when I get it all, but when my brothers called me Li I didn't like it. Your grandmother gives me the whole name, and I am glad she does; but she said they generally used to call my grandmother Lyley when she was a little girl."

"I think that is rather pretty, too, don't you?"

[34] "Yes, but I like the whole name better."

"Then I will always call you by the whole name," Edna assured her. "Can you tell stories, Reliance?"

"Do you mean fibs or reading stories like—let's see—Cinderella and Jack and the Beanstalk?"

"Oh, I mean the Cinderella kind; I'd hate to think you told fibs."

"I can tell 'em, but I guess I don't care to. I know two or three of the other kind and Bible stories, some of them: Eli and Samuel, and David and Goliath, and all those."

"Do you go to school?"

"Half the year, but I guess I won't be going very much longer. I'll soon be going on fourteen; I'll stop when I'm fifteen."

"Oh, shall you? Then what will you do?"

[35] "I'll learn to housekeep and cook, and to sew and all that. Mrs. Willis says it is more important for me to be educated in the useful things, that I'll get along better if I am, and I guess she is right. My mother couldn't cook worth a cent and she just hated it, so we didn't get very good vittles."

"Was it your mother's mother after whom you were named?"

"No, my father's mother. The Fairmans lived around here, but there ain't many of them left now. My father was an only child, and he married my mother out of town; she hadn't ever been used to the country. She used to work in a store and that's why she couldn't cook, you see."

Edna pondered over this information, wondering if everyone who worked in a store must necessarily turn out a poor cook.

[36] "You ought just to see what's getting ready for Thanksgiving," said Reliance, changing the subject, "I never seen such a pile of stuff. It fair makes my mouth water to think of it; pies and cakes and doughnuts and jellies and I don't know what all. I guess there's as many as twenty or thirty coming, ain't there?"

[37] "Let me see; I shall have to count. There will be Aunt Alice and her two boys, Ben and Willis, and Uncle Bert Willis with his five children and Aunt Lucia; that makes ten, and then there will be all of us, papa and mamma and us four children; that makes—let me see—" she counted hurriedly on her fingers. "How many did I say, Reliance? Ten? Oh, yes, and six make sixteen. Then there are the greats; great Aunt Emmeline and her brother, Wilbur Merrifield, and his daughter, Cousin Becky. Sixteen did I say? and three make nineteen. Oh, yes, Cousin Becky's sweetheart that she is going to marry soon; he is coming and he will make it just twenty. Counting grandpa and grandma there will be twenty-two, and counting you and Amanda there will be twenty-four to eat the goodies."

"You didn't count the two men, Ira and Jim," said Reliance; "they will eat here, too."

"Oh, yes, I forgot them. What a crowd, twenty-six people. If they cut a pie in six pieces it would take over four to go around once, wouldn't it?"

"I suppose we would be allowed a second piece on Thanksgiving Day," remarked Reliance, "though maybe with the other things no one would want it."

"How many kinds of pie will there be?" asked Edna.

[38] "Three at least. I heard Amanda say that she would make the fillings to-day for pumpkin, lemon and apple; she has the crust all done. She has made the jelly, too; it's to be served with whipped cream. Your grandma was talking about having plum pudding, but Amanda said she didn't see the sense of having it when it wasn't Christmas, and there would be such lots of other things, all the nuts and apples and such things. There is going to be chicken pie, besides the turkeys and the oysters."

"Dear me," sighed Edna, "I am afraid I shall eat a great deal and be very uncomfortable. I was last year for a little while because I ate two Thanksgiving dinners. What did you do last year, Reliance?"

[39] Reliance looked very sober. "We didn't have much of a Thanksgiving last year, for it was just before my mother died and she was ill then, so us children just had to get along the best we could. Somebody sent us in a pie and some jelly for mother and that is about all we had to be thankful for. I suppose it was much better than nothing. We ate all the pie at one meal. Billy said we might as well for it wouldn't last two days anyhow unless we had little bits of pieces, so each of us had a whole quarter. Billy tried to trap a rabbit or shoot a squirrel or something, but he



hadn't enough shot and the rabbits didn't trap."

[40] Secretly Edna was rather glad to hear this, even though it meant that the Fairmans went without meat for dinner. She walked along pondering over these facts and wondering which were to be preferred. She could not tell whether to be glad the squirrels and rabbits had escaped or to be sorry that the Fairmans could not have had game for Thanksgiving. It was rather a hard matter to settle, so finally she dismissed the subject and gave her attention to the pigs whose pen they now had reached. Edna did not think them very cleanly or attractive creatures, however, and was very soon ready to leave them that she might see the chickens and ducks which she found much more interesting.

The short November day was already so near its end that the fowls were thinking of going to roost, though the hour was not late, and after watching them take their supper, which Edna helped Reliance to distribute, the two girls went on to the garden, now robbed of most of its vegetables. There were a few tomatoes to be found on the vines; though celery, turnips and cabbages made a brave showing. Edna felt that she was quite a discoverer when she came across some tiny yellow tomatoes which the frost had not yet touched, and which she gathered in triumph to carry back to her mother.

[41] "I know where there's a chestnut tree," announced Reliance suddenly.

"Oh, do let's find it," said Edna. "I will put the tomatoes in my handkerchief and carry them that way. We ought to gather all the chestnuts we can, for I know mighty well after the boys come there won't be a nut left." There was a rush down the hill to the big chestnut tree about whose roots lay the prickly burs which the frost had opened to show the shining brown nuts within.

"I don't see how we are going to carry them," said Edna after a while, when she had gathered together quite a little heap.

[42] "I'll show you," Reliance told her, and began tying knots in the corners of the apron she wore. "There," she said, "that makes a very good bag, and what we can't carry that way we can leave and come back for to-morrow. We'd better take as many as we can, though, for to-morrow will be such a busy day I may not be able to come, and if we don't, the squirrels will get them all."

"I could come alone, now that I know the way," said Edna, "or maybe mamma would come with me."

[41] "I suppose we'd better be going back," said Reliance when she lifted the improvised bag to her arm. "It is near to milking time and that means getting ready for supper."

"What do you do to get ready for supper?" asked Edna taking hold of one side of the bag.

"Oh, I set the table and go down to the spring-house for the butter and cream. I can skim milk now, but I couldn't at first, I got it all mixed up."

"Do you skim all the milk?"

"Oh, no, that we put on the table to drink is never skimmed. The skimmed milk goes to the pigs."

[43] "Oh, does it? I think you feed your pigs pretty well. Are we going to watch them milk?"

"You can if you like; I've got to go right back."

"You don't help with the milking then?"

"No; Ira does it. Your grandpa says it is man's work, but Ira lets me do a little sometimes so I will learn."

"Aren't you afraid of the cows?"

"No, indeed, are you?"

"Kind of. They have such sharp horns sometimes," answered Edna by way of excusing her fear.

"Your grandpa's don't have; he keeps only dehorned cattle."

"What are they?"

"The kind that have had their horns taken off so they don't do any damage."

[44] "I think maybe I wouldn't mind that kind so much," said Edna, after considering the matter for a moment. "If you don't mind, I think I would like to stop and see Ira milk."

Reliance said she didn't mind in the least and, therefore, she left the little girl at the bars of the stable yard which was quite as near as she wished to stand to the herd of cows gathered within.

"Want to come in and learn to milk?" asked Ira, looking up with a smile at the little red-capped figure.

"Oh, no, thank you," returned Edna hastily. "I'd rather watch you." She would really have like to try her hand if there had been but one cow, but when there were six, how could a young person be certain that one of the number would not turn and rend her? To be sure, they were much less fearsome without horns, but still they were too big and dreadful to be entirely trusted. So she

[45] stood watching the milk foam into the shining tin buckets and then she walked contentedly with Ira to where Amanda was waiting to strain the milk and put it away in the spring-house.

"Do you keep it out here all winter and doesn't it freeze?" asked Edna.

"In winter we keep it in the pantry up at the house. If it should turn cold suddenly now, we'd have to bring it in," Amanda told her, as she carefully lifted the earthen crocks into place. "There comes Reliance for the cream and butter," she went on. "Reliance, I'll carry up the milk and you come along with the rest. Don't tarry down here, and be sure you lock the spring-house door and fetch in the key." Then she went out leaving the two little girls behind.

[46] Reliance carefully attended to her duties, Edna watching her admiringly. It must be a fine thing to be so big a girl as this, one who could be trusted to do work like a grown-up woman. "Let me carry something," she offered, when Reliance stepped up the stone steps and outside, carrying the butter in one hand and the pitcher of cream in the other.

"If you would lock the door and wouldn't mind taking the key along, I wouldn't have to set down these things," Reliance said.

Edna did as she was asked, standing tip-toe in order to turn the big key in the heavy door.

"When we get to the house you can hang the key on its nail behind the kitchen door," Reliance told her. "It is always kept there."

Edna swung the big key on her finger by its string and trotted along by the side of Reliance, asking many questions, and delighting to hear Reliance enlarge upon the all-important subject of the Thanksgiving festivities.

[47] "We've got to get up good and early," Reliance remarked, "for there's a heap to be done, even if we are ahead with the baking. I expect to be up before daylight, myself, and I reckon Ira will be milking by candlelight," she added, as she entered the kitchen door. Mrs. Conway was in the kitchen talking to Amanda, and Edna hastened to show her little hoard of tomatoes. "We gathered a whole lot of chestnuts, too," she told her mother. "They were all on the ground down the hill behind the barn."

"I know the very tree," Mrs. Conway told her. "We must roast some in the ashes this evening. Come along, supper is ready and you must get yourself freshened up."

[48] Edna followed along and, in the prospect of supper and then of roasting chestnuts, she forgot all about the spring-house key. This, by the way, was lying on the door-mat where she had dropped it. A little later on, it was picked up by Reliance and was slipped into the pocket of her gingham apron. "I won't remind her that she dropped it. Likely as not she forgot all about it," said Reliance to herself. "I ought not to have trusted it to as little a girl as she is."

It was not till after she was in bed that Edna remembered that she had ever had the key. Where had she put it? She had no recollection of it after she had swung it by its string upon her finger on the way to the house. "It must be on the kitchen table," she told herself. "I opened my handkerchief there to show mother the tomatoes." She sat up in bed wondering if she would better get up and go down, but she finally decided to wait till her mother should have come to bed and then confide in her.

[49] However, try as she would, she could not keep awake. It had been an exciting and fatiguing day and she was in the land of dreams in a few minutes, not even having visions of keys, spring-houses or Thanksgiving dinners, but of the mother cat and her three kittens who were climbing chestnut trees and throwing down chestnuts to her.

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## [50] CHAPTER III

### WHERE'S THE KEY?

VERY, very early in the morning Edna was awake. She was not used to farmyard sounds and could not tell if it were a lusty rooster, an insistent guinea-fowl or a gobbling turkey whose voice first reached her. But whichever it was, she was quite broad awake while it was yet dark. She lay still for a few minutes, with an uncertain feeling of something not very pleasant overshadowing her, then she remembered the key. "Oh, dear," she sighed, "if they can't get into the spring-house there will be no cream for breakfast and no butter, either. The key must be found."

[51] She got up and softly crept to the window. A bright star hung low in the sky and there was the faintest hint of light along the eastern horizon. Presently Edna saw a lighted lantern bobbing around down by the stable and concluded that Ira must be up and that it was morning, or at least

what meant morning to farmers. She stood watching the light grow in the east and finally decided that she would dress and be all ready by the time it was light enough to hunt for the lost key.

[52] By now she could see well enough to find her clothes, but, fearing lest she should waken her mother, she determined to go to the bathroom at the end of the hall rather than use the washstand in the room where she was, so she gathered up her clothing in her arms, and went down the entry, made her toilet and crept down stairs. There was a light burning in the lower hallway, but it was dark all through the rest of the house and she was obliged to feel her way through the rooms. There was a noise of some one stirring in the pantry. She opened the door of the kitchen gently and peeped in. A lamp was burning on the table, but no key lay there. Edna tip-toed in quietly and felt on the nail where the key should hang, thrusting aside a gingham apron belonging to Reliance which hung just above its place, but the nail was empty and she was forced to believe she had dropped the key somewhere between the spring-house and the kitchen. She tip-toed out of the kitchen, turned the key of the outside door and closed it after her as noiselessly as possible, and in another moment was outside in the chill November air. It was rather fearsome to make one's way down dim paths where some wild creature might still be [53] lurking after a night's raid from the woods near by, and she imagined all sorts of things. First, something stole softly by her and was off like a shot through the tall weeds growing beyond the fence; it was only a rabbit who was more frightened at Edna than she at it. Next, the bushes parted and a small white figure crept stealthily forth. The child's heart stood still and she stopped short. Then came a plaintive meow and she discovered one of the three kittens out on an adventuring tour. She picked up the little creature which purred contentedly as she snuggled it to her, continuing her way.

[54] The garden left behind, there was the lane to be passed through, and here some real cause for fear in Edna's opinion, for the cows that Ira had just finished milking were coming through the bars he had let down. They stumbled along clumsily, following one another over the rail, and ambled on to another set of bars where they stood till Ira should let them through. At first, Edna did not realize that they were not making for the spot where she stood and she took to her heels, fleeing frantically back to the garden, banging the gate behind her and standing still waiting till the cows were through and the bars up again. Seeing the cows safely shut out from the lane she ventured forth again and followed Ira's lantern to the barn. Here she stood looking around and presently the beams from the lantern fell upon her little figure with the white kitten still clasped in her arms.

Ira looked up in surprise. "Hello!" he cried. "What's took you up so airy? Why, I jest got through milkin', and, doggone it, it ain't skeerce light yit."

"I know," said Edna, "but I had to get up early, you see, so as to find the key before breakfast."

"Key? What key?"

[55] "The key of the spring-house. Reliance gave it to me to carry and I was to have hung it up on a nail behind the kitchen door, and I forgot all about it till I was in bed. You see if it isn't found nobody can have any milk or cream for breakfast."

"Oh, I guess we could manage," returned Ira reassuringly. "Didn't drop it indoors, did you?"

"I don't think so. I looked in the kitchen as I came out and I didn't find it there. If it had been picked up, it would be on the nail, I should think."

"Most likely it would; it would be there sure if 'Mandy found it; she don't let nothin' stay out of place very long, I kin tell ye."

"As long as I didn't find it in the kitchen I thought I would come here because I saw you had a lantern, and it really isn't quite light enough to see very plainly, is it?"

[56] "No, it ain't. Sun don't rise till somewheres around seven this time o' year. Well, you come with me and we'll work our way long the path from the spring-house and if we don't find the key we will go inside and inquire. I alwuz find it don't do no harm to ask questions, and that there key is bound to be somewheres betwixt this and the house."

He swung his lantern so its rays would shed a broad light along the way, and Edna pattered along just behind him, trying very hard to keep up with his long strides. When at last they reached the spring-house, he slackened his pace and began carefully to look to the right and to the left.

"You come right straight along, did you?" he questioned. "Didn't go cavortin' off nowheres pickin' weeds or chasin' cats, did you?"

[57] "No, we came as straight as could be. Reliance had the butter and cream and we didn't stop once."

"Then I guess you likely dropped it inside, for I've sarched careful and I can't find it. Maybe when it comes real bright daylight you could look again, but I should advise askin' at the house next thing you do."

He led the way into the kitchen where Amanda was briskly stirring about. "Well," she began, "what's wanting? Well, I declare if there ain't Edna. What's got you up so early, missy? I guess

you're like the rest of us, couldn't sleep for thinking of all that's to do for Thanksgiving."

"You ain't picked up the spring-house key nowheres about, have you?" asked Ira.

"Why, no. You had it?"

[58] "No, I ain't, but sissy there says 'Liance gave it to her to carry and she ain't no notion of what she done with it, thought mebbe she might ha' drapped it in here. She got so worried over it she riz from her bed and come out to hunt it up, says she was afraid nobody couldn't get no breakfast because of her losing of it."

"I guess we won't suffer for breakfast," said Amanda, looking down kindly at the little girl. "I don't carry back the milk nights this time of year. Any that's left I just set in the pantry and there is what was left from supper this blessed minute; butter, too, and cream, plenty for breakfast. You just rest your mind on that score."

"But," said Edna, "you will want a whole lot of things for the Thanksgiving cooking and what will you do with them all locked up?"

[59] Ira laughed. "'Twouldn't be such an awful job to lift the door from its hinges, and if a body was right spry he could climb in at the window after he'd prised it open and the things could be handed out. Besides we've got all the morning's milk and there'll be the night's milk and tomorrow's milk, so I don't see that we shan't get along first-rate. There is more than one way out of that trouble, ain't there, 'Mandy?'"

"I should say so. Wait till the sun's real high and I guess we'll find the key fast enough," she said to Edna. "Now, you stay right here and don't go running about in the cold; you'll be down sick traipsing about in the wet grass, and then where will your Thanksgiving be?"

[60] Thus warned, Edna was content to stay in the kitchen into which the morning light was beginning to creep and which was already warm from the big stove. In a few minutes, Reliance appeared from the next room where she had been setting the table. She was much astonished to learn that Edna had been down before her. "What in the world did you get up so soon for?" she asked.

"To find the key," Edna answered, and then told her all about the search, ending up with, "You haven't seen anything of it, have you, Reliance?"

Reliance's face broadened into a smile, as for answer she went behind the kitchen door and produced the key from its nail, holding it up to view.

"Why, where in the world did you get it?" inquired Edna in a tone of surprise. "It wasn't on the nail when I looked there for it a little while ago."

"You dropped it on the door-mat last evening," Reliance told her. "I found it there and slipped it into the pocket of my apron, and this morning when I went to get my apron, there it was so I just hung it up where it belonged."

[61] "Well, I'm sure," said Amanda, "that's easily explained."

"Who'd ha' thought it," said Ira. "Well, that let's us out of another hunt. I won't have to wrestle with the door after all, will I?"

So, after all, Edna's early rising was unnecessary, but she did not feel sorry that she had had such an experience, and was content to sit and watch Amanda mould her biscuits and to help Reliance finish setting the table. Amanda insisted upon giving her a drink of buttermilk from the spring-house to which she despatched Reliance, advising Edna not to go this time. "You've had one tramp," she said, "and moreover you'll be starved by breakfast time if you don't have something to stay you."

[62] The sausages were sizzling in the pan, and the griddle was ready for the buckwheat cakes when Mrs. Conway appeared. "Well, you did steal a march on us," she said to her little daughter. "How long have you been up? I didn't hear a sound. You must have been a veritable mouse to be so quiet."

"I've been up since before daylight," Edna told her. "I took my things into the bathroom so as not to disturb you; it was lovely and warm in there." Then again she repeated her story of the lost key.

"Reliance had the joke on her," said Amanda, "for she had the key all the time."

"Why didn't you tell me you had found it?" asked Edna a little reproachfully as she turned to Reliance, who had by this time returned from the spring-house.

[63] "I thought you would forget all about it, and I didn't think it was worth while to mention. Besides," she added, "I ought to have carried the key myself anyway."

"You're right there," remarked Amanda. "It is your especial charge and you oughtn't to have let anyone else fetch it in. Moreover, you'd ought to have hung it up the minute you found it, and there it would have been when it was looked for."

"Oh, don't scold her," begged Edna. "It was all my fault, really."

Amanda smiled. "I don't see it just that way. Folks had ought to learn when they're young that in this house there's a place for everything, and everything should be in its place. I rather guess, though, that that special key won't get lost again right away."

[64] Edna felt that she had brought this lecture upon Reliance and felt rather badly to have done so, but the prospect of buckwheat cakes soon drove her self-reproach away and she went in to say good morning to her grandparents, well satisfied with the world in general and content to look ahead rather than at what was now past and gone, and which could not be altered.

Before the day had far advanced, came the first of the arrivals, Aunt Alice Barker and her two boys, Ben and Willis. Ben and Edna were great chums, though he was the older of the two boys. Ben was alert, full of fun and ready to joke on every occasion, while Willis was rather shy and had not much to say to his little cousin, whom, by the way, he did not know so very well.

[65] Edna would fain have spent the morning in the kitchen from which issued delectable odors, but Amanda had declared she wanted all the room there was, that she had scatted out the cats and dogs and she would have to scat out children, too, if they came bothering around. Therefore, to avoid this catastrophe, Edna took herself to a different part of the house, and was standing at one of the front windows when the carriage drove up.

"Oh, grandpa," she sang out, "here come Aunt Alice and her boys! Hurry! Hurry! or they will get here before we can be there to meet them."

Her grandfather threw down his newspaper and laid aside his spectacles. "Well, well," he said, "it takes the young eyes to find out who is coming. I didn't suppose Allie would be here till afternoon. What team have they. Why didn't they let us know so we could send for them!"

[66] He followed Edna, who was already at the front door tugging at the bolt, then in another moment the two were out on the porch while yet the carriage was some yards away. Ben caught sight of them. "Hello!" he cried out. "Here we are, bag and baggage. Didn't expect us so soon, did you grandpa?"

"No, son, we didn't. How did you come to steal a march on us in this way?"

"The express was behind time so we caught it at the junction, instead of having to wait for the train we expected to take. It didn't seem worth while to telephone; in fact we didn't have time, so we just got this team from Mayville and here we are. How are you Pinky Blooms?" He darted at Edna, tousled her hair, picked her up and slung her over his shoulder as if she were a bag of meal, and dropped her on the top step of the porch, she laughing and protesting the while.

"Oh, Ben," she panted, "you are perfectly dreadful."

[67] "Why, is that you, Edna?" said Ben in pretended surprise. "I thought you were my valise; it is too bad I made the mistake and dumped you down so unceremoniously."

Edna knew perfectly well how to take this so she picked herself up laughing, and started after Ben who leaped over the railing of the porch thus making his escape. By this time Mrs. Willis and Mrs. Conway had come out and the whole company went indoors, Ben the last to come, peeping in through a crack of the door, and then slinking in with a pretense of being afraid of Edna. An hour later, these two were tramping over the place, hand in hand, making all sorts of discoveries, leaving Willis deep in a book and the older people chatting cozily before the open fire.

Aunt Emmeline, Uncle Wilbur and Becky were the next to come, Becky being in a pout because her sweetheart had failed to make the train, and Aunt Emmeline fussing and arguing with her.

[68] "You know, Becky, that he is coming, and I don't see what difference a couple of hours will make," she said as she gave her hand, to her sister, Mrs. Willis. "I am just telling Becky, Cecelia, that she is very foolish to make such a fuss because Howard is detained; he missed the train, you see, and can't arrive till the next comes in." She passed on into the house still talking, while Edna made her escape upstairs. She had not noticed the little girl, and Edna felt rather slighted.

[69] However, this was all forgotten a little later when her own brothers and sister as well as her father were to be welcomed. You would suppose Edna had been parted from them for at least a year, so joyous were her greetings, and so much did she have to tell. She had scarcely unburdened herself of all her happenings, before in swarmed Uncle Bert and his family. There was so many of these that for a little while they seemed to fill the entire house, for, first appeared Aunt Lucia and after her the nurse carrying the baby, then Uncle Bert with little Herbert in his arms, and then Lulie and Allen and Ted. Cousin Becky's sweetheart, Howard Colby, came on the last train and ended the list of guests. What a houseful it was, to be sure, and what long, long tables in the dining-room. Reliance was not able to wait on everybody, and so Amanda's niece Fanny, took a hand, thus everyone was served.

[70] Edna was rather shy of those cousins whom she had not seen for two or three years, and after supper preferred to stay close to her sister Celia and Ben, though her brothers were soon hobnobbing with Allen and Ted, and were planning expeditions for the morrow. Ben told such a funny story about the lady by the willow tree, that Edna could never look at the picture again without laughing, but he had scarcely finished it before some one called out: "Bedtime for little folks!" and all the younger ones trooped off upstairs, grandma herself leading the way to see that each one was tucked in comfortably.

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## CHAPTER IV

### A HEARTY DINNER

It would be quite a task if one were to try to compute the number of buckwheat cakes consumed at the long tables the next morning, and there might have been more but that Charlie stopped Frank in the act of helping himself to a further supply by saying: "Look here, son, if you keep on eating cakes you won't give your Thanksgiving dinner any show at all. I'm thinking about that turkey."

This remark was passed down the table and had the effect of bringing the breakfast to a conclusion. The boys scampered off out of doors to scour the place for nuts or to dive into unfrequented woodsy places, while the girls gathered around the crowing baby, in high good-humor with herself and the world at large. Then the nurse bore baby off and Edna turned to her mother for advice.

"What can I do, mother?" she asked.

"Why, let me see. Your Aunt Alice and I are going to help your grandma to arrange the tables, after a while. We shall want a lot of decorations besides the roses your Uncle Bert brought. Suppose you little girls constitute yourselves an order of flower girls with Celia at your head, and go out to find whatever may do for the tables."

"There are some chrysanthemums, little yellow ones, and there are a few white ones, too; I saw them yesterday down by the fence."

"They will do nicely; we will have those and anything else that will be pretty for the table or the rooms."

"Shall we ask Lulie to go with us?" whispered Edna.

"Certainly I would. She isn't quite so old as you, but she is the only other little girl here, and it would be very rude and unkind to leave her out."

"You ask her," continued Edna in a low tone.

For answer Mrs. Conway smiled over at Lulie. "Don't you want to be a flower girl?" she asked; "Celia, I propose that you take these two little girls in tow and go on an expedition to gather flowers to deck the tables and the house, I know you will enjoy it."

"Indeed I shall," replied Celia. "Come on, girls, let's see what we can find." And the three sallied forth to discover what might be of use.

An hour later they came back laden with small branches of scarlet oak, with graceful weeds, with the little buttony chrysanthemums, and with actually a few late roses which had braved the frost and were showing pale faces in a sheltered corner when the girls came upon them. By this time, the three cousins were well acquainted, the two younger the best friends possible, so that when dinner was really ready they were quite happy at being allowed to sit side by side.

It would fill a whole chapter if I were to tell you about all the good things on that table. Grandpa carved a huge brown turkey at one end, while Uncle Bert carved an equally huge and brown one at the other end. Grandma served the flakiest of noble chicken-pies at her side of the table, while Aunt Alice served an oyster-pie of the same proportions and quite as delicious. The boys, not in the least disturbed by the memory of the buckwheat cakes, were ready with full-sized appetites, while the girls, after their scramble in search of decorations, had no reason to complain of not being hungry. To Cousin Becky's lot fell one of the wishbones, and to Edna's joy she had the other. Cousin Becky put hers up over the front door after dinner, and it was the strangest thing in the world that Mr. Howard Colby should be the first to come in afterward. Edna decided to save hers till it was entirely dry.

"What are you going to do with it then?" asked Lulie.

"I haven't quite decided. I shall take it home, and maybe I'll pull it with Dorothy or maybe I will make a pen-wiper of it for a Christmas gift. I might give it to Ben."

"I never heard of wishbone pen-wipers," said Lulie. "Are they very hard to make?"

"Not so very, if you have anyone to help you with the sealing-wax head. Celia could help me with that. You make a head, you know, and then the wishbone has two legs and you dress it up so it is a pen-wiper." This was not a very clear description, but Lulie was satisfied, especially as at that moment Ben came to them and said that everyone was going to play games, in order that

their dinners might properly digest.

"Everybody?" inquired Lulie. "The grandparents, too?"

"Of course," Ben told her. "We are going to begin with something easy, like forfeits, and work up to the real snappy ones after."

"What are the snappy ones?" asked Edna.

"Oh, things like Hide-and-Seek and lively things that will keep us on the jump."

[77]

The two little girls followed Ben into the next room and before long everyone was trying to escape from grandpa who was as eager for a game of Blind Man's Buff as anybody, and who at last caught Becky, who in turn caught Howard Colby because he didn't try to get out of her way. This ended that game, but everybody was so warmed up to the fun that when it was proposed to carry on a game of Hide and Seek out of doors all agreed, and Edna was so convulsed with laughter to see her dignified, great-uncle Wilbur crouching behind a wood-pile and peeping fearfully over the top that she forgot to hide herself properly and was discovered by Ben in a moment.

"You're no good at all at hiding," Ben told her. "Anybody could have found you with half an eye."

"Oh, I don't care," replied Edna; "I'll have just as much fun finding out some one else," and she it was who made straight for Uncle Wilbur's wood-pile to which he had returned with the fond belief of its serving as good a turn a second time.

[78]

It was not so very long before the older persons declared that they had had enough of it. The men returned to the house to have a smoke and the ladies to chat around the fire. As for the children, it was quite too much to expect them to go in while there was a twinkle of daylight left, and, as Amanda expressed it, "They took the place." The girls did not roam far from the house but the boys wandered much further afield, bringing caps and pockets full of nuts, and clothes full of burs and stick-tights, even Ben brought back a hoard of persimmons touched by the frost and as sweet as honey.

He poured these out on a flat stone near which Edna was standing. "Come here, Edna," he said, "let's divvy up. I'll give you half; you can take what you don't eat to your mother and I'll take what I don't eat to my mother."

[79]

Edna squatted down by the stone and began delicately to nibble at the fruit which still bore its soft purple bloom. "I don't believe I shall eat very many," she said, "for my dinner is still lasting, and there will be supper before I am ready for it. We are not going to have a real, regular set-the-table supper, because grandma thinks Amanda and Reliance should have some holiday, too, but we are going to have sandwiches and cakes and nuts and apples and cider and a whole lot of things; something like a party you know. Aren't you going to eat any of your persimmons, Ben?"

"No, that coming supper party sounds too seductive; I'll wait so that I can do it justice."

"What did you see out in the woods?" asked Edna.

"Foxy grape-vines and bare trees," he answered promptly.

[80]

"Do you mean b-e-a-r trees or b-a-r-e trees?"

"Which ever you like; I've no doubt there were both kinds."

"Oh, Ben," Edna glanced around fearfully, "do you really think there are bears around here?"

"I know there are, sometimes." He drew down his mouth in a way which made Edna suspect a joke.

"When is the sometimes?" she asked suspiciously.

"When they have a circus at Mayville."

"Oh, you Ben Barker, you are the worst," cried Edna roguishly pulling his nose.

"Here, here," he exclaimed, "look out, it might come off like the fox's tail."

"What fox?"

[81]

"Don't you know the story of 'Reynard, the Fox'? It is in one of those big, red books that lie on that claw-footed table in the living-room."

"Here, in this house?"

"Yea, verily. You don't mean to say you have never read those books! Why, there is not a year since I was eight years old that I haven't pored over them. Every time I have been here, and that is at least once a year, I go for those books, I'd advise you to make their acquaintance."

"You tell me the story; then I won't have to read it."

"No, my child, I shall not allow you to neglect your opportunities through any weakness on my part. Read it for yourself, and thereafter, the red book will be one of your prized memories of 'Overlea.'"

"Then tell me again about the lady and the willow tree," begged Edna; "that was so funny."

[82] Ben laughed. "I am afraid I don't remember that so well as I do the fox story, but maybe I will think of some more about her. Come, it is time to go in. They may be eating those chicken or turkey sandwiches this very minute."

Hanging on his arm, Edna skipped along to the house to find that it was quite too early to think of sandwiches, though the lamps were lighted in all but the living-room where a cheerful fire made the place light enough. Around the fire sat grandma, Aunt Emmeline, Aunt Alice and Mrs. Conway. Aunt Lucia was upstairs with the babies. Uncle Wilbur was taking a nap, and grandpa and Uncle Bert were out looking after the stock, as Ira and the other man had been allowed a holiday. Over in the corner of the sofa sat Cousin Becky and her lover talking in low tones.

[83] "Dear me," said grandma, as the children all trooped in, "we must have a light; these little folks may not like to sit in the dark."

"This is the best kind of light," declared Ben, "and the very time for telling tales. Let's all sit around the fire and have a good time. We'll begin with the oldest and so on down to the youngest. If we don't have time to go all the way down the line, we'll stop when we're hungry. How's that, grandma? Do you like the plan?"

"It is just as the others say, my dear," she answered.

"It's a lovely plan, Ben," said Mrs. Conway. "You will have to begin, mother, and Aunt Emmeline can come next."

"Oh, dear," protested that lady, "I never was one for telling tales; you will have to count me out."

[84] "I am sure if I can, you can," grandma assured her. "What shall it be about, children?"

"Oh, about when you were a little girl," cried Edna.

"About the time the horse ran away with you," spoke up the boys.

"About your first ball please," begged Celia.

Grandma laughed. "Just listen to them. They have heard all those things dozens of times. I'll tell you what we will do. I will tell about the runaway horse, that belongs to the time when I was a little girl, and Emmeline shall tell about her first ball, and I can remind her if she forgets anything. I remember her first ball even better than my first, for it was at hers I met your grandfather."

[85] This was all so satisfactory that there was not a murmur of dissent, and grandma began: "It was when I was about ten years old that I went one day with my father to the nearest village. He was driving a pair of spirited horses, and on our way home a parcel we were bringing home, fell out of the buggy. My father stopped the horses and ran back to pick up the parcel, but before he could get to the buggy, the horses took fright at a piece of paper blowing along the road in front of them and off they started, full tilt, down the road. In vain my father cried, 'Hey, there! Whoa, Barney! Whoa Pet!' on they went faster and faster. I managed to hold on to the reins but my young hands were not strong enough to control the wild creatures, and I thought every minute would be my last, for up hill and down dale we went at such a pace I had never known. Over a stump would jounce the buggy, and I would nearly pitch out. Around the last curve they went with a swing which I thought would land me on my back or my head, but I managed to keep my seat and at last saw the open gate of our own lane before me. Would the horses go through without hitting a gate post? Would they run into a fence or over a pile of stones at one side? My heart was in my mouth. I jerked the reins in a vain attempt to guide them, but on they went, pell-mell, making straight for the open gate. Presently I saw some one rush from the house and then another person come flying from the stables. Just before we reached the gate, it was flung to with a bang. The horses pranced, swung a little to one side and stopped short, and I heard some one say, 'So, Barney, so Pet!' I didn't know what happened next but the first thing I knew I was lying on the lounge in the sitting-room, my mother bending over me, and holding a bottle of salts to my nose, 'Oh, dear, oh, dear,' my mother was crying, 'another minute and the child might have been killed.'"

[86] "Who was it shut the gate?" asked Allen eagerly.

"Amanda's mother, who was living with us at that time."

"And who caught the horses?" queried Ted.

"Jim Doughty, who was our hired man."

[87] "Weren't you nearly frightened to death?" Lulie put the question.

"Very nearly, and so was my father. He was as pale as a ghost when he got home. He had to walk all the way, and said he thought he should never get there. The country wasn't as thickly settled as it is now, and there were no houses between us and the spot where the horses took fright."

"Where is the place you lived?" asked Allen.



[88]

"About five miles from here."

"I should like to see it," said the boy musingly. "I suppose those horses are dead. I'd like to see horses that could run like that."

"They would be somewhere in the neighborhood of sixty-five or seventy years old by this time," said grandma with a smile, "and the oldest horse I ever knew was forty."

"Gee! but that was old," remarked Frank. "Whose was it, grandma? Yours?"

"No, my grandfather's. Her name was Dolly, and she took my grandparents to church every Sunday for many years, up to a little while before she died. Now, Emmeline, let's hear about the ball."

"It was just a ball," began Aunt Emmeline.

[89]

"The County Ball," put in grandma. "They always have one every year at Fair time. Emmeline was sixteen and I was eighteen. Now go on, Emmeline."

"I wore white tarlatan trimmed with forget-me-nots," said Aunt Emmeline, "and I danced my first dance with Steve Hardesty." She paused and gave a little sigh. "He took me into supper, too, poor Steve." Grandma leaned over and laid her hand softly on her sister's. "It is such a long time, such a very long time ago," she said softly.

Aunt Emmeline smiled a little sadly. "Yes, a long time," she repeated. "You wore, what was it you wore, Cecelia?"

"I wore pink tarlatan trimmed with rosebuds and a wreath of them in my hair. The skirt was caught up with bunches of the little buds and green leaves, and I thought it the prettiest dress I ever saw."

"It was a great ball," Aunt Emmeline went on, brightening. "I danced every set, and so did you, Cecelia."

[90]

"And how everyone did talk because I danced so many with Ben Willis whom I had met for the first time that night. He would see me home, you remember, although Uncle Phil and Cousin Dick were both there to look after us; we were staying at our uncle's, my dears. It was during the early days of the war, and there was much talk of what would happen next and who would be going off to join the army, you remember."

"It was not till two years after, that Steve went," said Aunt Emmeline wistfully.

"Tell us about Steve," spoke up Frank. "Did he become a soldier?"

Celia shook her head warningly at her little brother, for she knew Aunt Emmeline's story, and of how her young lover was killed in battle, but Aunt Emmeline did not hesitate to answer. "Yes, he went, but he never came back."

[91]

Silence fell upon the little group for a moment till Aunt Emmeline herself broke it by saying, "Do you remember, Cecelia, how angry you were with Polly Parker because she copied your dress, and how you were going to have yours trimmed with daisies, and changed all that at the last moment? I can see you now, ripping off those inoffensive daisies and flinging them on the floor."

Grandma laughed. "Well, after all, hers wasn't a bit like mine, for it was a different shade of pink and wasn't made the same way. Yes, I was furious, I remember, because it wasn't the first time Polly had copied my things; she had a way of doing it."

"Here comes grandpa," announced Herbert who did not find all this talk of dress and balls very interesting.

[92]

The entrance of grandpa and Uncle Bert broke up the party by the fire, for soon the sandwiches and other things were brought in, then came songs and games till, before anyone realized it, bedtime came and Thanksgiving Day was over.

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## CHAPTER V

### THE RED BOOK

WHETHER it was the search for the key in the chill of the early morning, or whether it was that she ate too heartily of grandma's good things, certain it was that when Edna waked up the morning after Thanksgiving, she felt very listless and miserable. Her father was already up and dressed,

and her mother was making her toilet when the little girl turned over and watched her with heavy eyes.

"Well, little girl," said Mrs. Conway, "it seems to me that it is time for you to get up."

[94] Edna gave a long sigh, closed her eyes, but presently found the courage to make an effort towards rising. She threw aside the covers, slipped her feet into her red worsted slippers, and then sat on the side of her cot in so dejected an attitude that her mother noticed it. "What," she said, "are you so very sleepy still? I suspect you are tired out from yesterday's doings."

"My head aches and there are cold creeps running up and down my back," Edna told her.

Her mother came nearer, and laid her cool hand on the throbbing temples. "Your head is hot," she declared. "I am afraid you have taken cold. Cuddle back under the covers and I will bring or send your breakfast up to you."

"I don't think I want any breakfast," said Edna, snuggling down with a grateful feeling for the warmth and quiet.

"Not want any breakfast? Then you certainly aren't well. When waffles and fried chicken cannot tempt you, I know something is wrong."

[95] Mrs. Conway went on with the finishing touches to her dress and hair while Edna dozed, but half conscious of what was going on around her. She did not hear her mother leave the room, and did not know how long it was before she heard Celia's voice saying: "Mother says you'd better try to drink this."

"This" was a cup of hot milk of which Edna tried to take a few sips and then lay back on her pillow. "I don't want it," she said.

"Poor little sister," said Celia commiseratingly. "It is too bad you don't feel well. Is there anything I can do for you?"

"No, thank you," replied Edna weakly.

"Mother is coming up in a minute," Celia went on. "Uncle Bert and all of them are going this morning, but as soon as they are off she will come up to see how you are."

[96] "Is everyone going?" asked Edna languidly.

"No, not this morning. Uncle Bert and his family take the morning train because they have the furthest to go, and Aunt Lucia wants to get home with the children before dark. Uncle Wilbur, Aunt Emmeline and all those are going on the afternoon train. Father thinks he must get back today, too."

Edna made no answer, but closed her eyes again drowsily.

"I'll set the milk down here," Celia went on, "and maybe you will feel like drinking some more of it after a little while."

[97] She set the cup on a chair by Edna's bedside and stole softly out of the room, leaving her sister to fall into another doze from which she was awakened by hearing a timid voice say: "Excuse me. I hope you are not asleep, but I want to say good-bye," and turning over, Edna saw her little Cousin Lulie.

"Oh, are you going?" came from the little girl in bed.

"Yes, we are all ready. I am so sorry you are sick. I like you so much and I wish you would come to our house some day."

Edna was too polite not to make some effort of appreciation, so she sat up and held out her little hot hand. "Oh, thank you," she answered; "I should love to come, and I wish you could come to see us. Ask Uncle Bert to bring you real soon."

"Mother said I had better not kiss you," remarked Lulie honestly, "for I might take your cold, but I have folded up a kiss in this piece of paper and I will put it here so you can get it when I am gone."

[98] Edna smiled at this and liked Lulie all the better for the fancy. "I won't forget it," she said earnestly. "I will send you one when I get well, but you'd better not take a feverish one with you. Good-bye, and say good-bye to all the others."

"They would have come, too," Lulie informed her, "but mother thought one of us was enough when you had a headache, and that I could bring all the good-byes for the others. Now I must go. Get well soon." And she was off leaving Edna with a consciousness of it's being a wise decree which prevented more visitors, for her headache was so much the worse for having had but one.

[99] She lay very still wishing the noises below would cease, the running back and forth, the shutting of doors, the calling of the boys to one another and the crying of the baby. But last of all she heard the carriage wheels on the gravel, and then it was suddenly silent. The boys had all gone off to play, and the only sounds were occasional footsteps on the stair, the stirring of the kitchen fire, and outside, the distant "Caw! Caw!" of the crows in the trees. For a long time she was very quiet. Once her mother came to the door and peeped in, but, seeing no movement,

believed the child asleep, but later she came in and Edna opened her eyes to see her standing by her bedside.

"Poor little lass," said her mother, "you're not feeling well at all, are you? I am afraid you have a little fever. I will give you something that I hope will make you feel better."

"Not any nasty medicine," begged Edna.

[100] "No, only some tiny tablets that you can swallow right down with a little water." She went to the bureau and found the little phial she was in search of. After shaking out a few pellets in her hand, she brought them to Edna with a glass of water and the child took the dose obediently, for she knew these small tablets of old.

"Now," Mrs. Conway went on, "I will cover you up warm, and you must try to get to sleep. Grandma is trying to keep the house quiet and Ben has taken off the boys. I am going to tidy up the room and stay here with you for awhile. There, now; you will be more comfortable that way," and under her mother's loving touches Edna felt happier already and in a short time fell into a sound sleep from which she awakened feeling brighter. Her mother was sitting by the window crocheting where the sun was streaming in.

Edna sat up and pushed back the hair from her face. Her mother noticed the movement. "Well, dearie," she said, "you have had a nice nap and I hope you feel ever so much better."

[101] "Yes, I think I do," said the child a little doubtfully.

"That wasn't a very enthusiastic voice. You can't be sure about it?"

"Yes, I can. I do feel a great deal better."

"And as if you would like a little something to eat?"

"Why—what could I eat?"

"How would some milk toast and a soft-boiled egg do?"

"I like milk toast pretty well, but I don't believe I want the egg."

"Not when it will be freshly laid this morning?"

"I couldn't have it fried, I suppose?"

[102] "Better not. I'll tell you what I will do; I will go down and ask grandma what she thinks would be best for you. Would you like to sit up in bed? I can put something over your shoulders and prop you up with pillows, or how would you like to get into my bed? There is more room and you can look out of the window. I will bundle you up and carry you over."

"I'd like that," returned Edna in a satisfied tone; it was always a treat to get into mother's bed.

Mrs. Conway turned down the covers of her own bed, slipped Edna into her flannel wrapper, threw a shawl around her and carried her across the room to deposit her in the big bed. "There," she said, "you can keep your wrapper on till you get quite warm. Let me put this pillow behind your back. That's it. Now, then, how do you like the change?"

"Oh, I like it," Edna assured her. "And my head is much better."

"I think you'd better stay in bed, however, for we want to break up that cold. There is no better way to do it than to keep you in bed for to-day at least. Now I will go down and interview grandma."

[103] She left the room, and Edna heard her talking to some one in the entry. Then the door opened and grandma herself came in. "Good morning, dear child," she said. "I wanted to come up before, but it seemed best to keep you quiet. I am so glad to hear that you are feeling better, but you must be careful not to take more cold. Would you like to have Serena to keep you company?"

"Oh, I should like her very much," returned Edna.

[104] Her grandmother left the room returning presently with an old-fashioned doll which had been hers when she was a little girl. The doll was dressed in the fashion of sixty years ago and was quite a different creature from Edna's Virginia. She always liked Serena in spite of her black corkscrew curls and staring blue eyes. Whenever she visited Overlea, Serena was given to her to play with, as a special privilege. Her grandma knew that Edna was careful, but she would not have brought out this relic of her childhood for everyone. "I will put this little shawl around her before you take her, for she has been in a cooler room, and it might chill you to touch her," said grandma, as she wound a small worsted shawl over Serena's blue silk frock. "I will put her on the bed there right by you and then I will go down to see if Amanda has anything that is fit for a little invalid to eat." She kissed the top of Edna's head and went out leaving her to Serena's company.

It was not long before Edna heard some one coming slowly up the stair, then there was a pause before the door, next a knock and second pause before Edna's "Come in" was answered by Reliance who carefully bore a tray on which stood several covered dishes.

[105] "I asked Mrs. Willis to please let me bring this up," said Reliance. "I am so sorry you are sick, I am dreadfully afraid you took cold hunting that key."

"Oh, I don't suppose it was that," Edna tried to reassure her. "I might have taken cold yesterday, for I got so warm running when we were playing Hide-and-Seek. Oh, how lovely, Reliance, you have brought up grandma's dear little dishes that were given her when she was a little girl. I love those little dishes with the flowers on them."

"You're to eat this first," said Reliance, uncovering a small tureen in which some delicious chicken broth was steaming. "There is toast to go with it. Then if you feel as if you wanted any more, there is a little piece of cold turkey and some jelly."

[106] But in spite of her belief that she could eat every bit of what was before her, Edna could do no more than manage the broth and one piece of toast, Reliance watching her solicitously while she ate. "You're not very peckish, are you?" she said. "Well, anyhow I am glad this didn't come on before you had your Thanksgiving; it would have been dreadful if it had happened yesterday."

"I am glad, too," returned Edna. "What time is it, Reliance?"

[107] "It's most dinner time. As soon as the boys come in, it will be ready. I'll take back the tray, but I have to go awful careful, for I would sooner break my leg than these dishes." She bore off the tray as Edna snuggled back against her pillows, holding one of Serena's kid hands in hers in order that she might feel less alone. She was not left long to Serena's sole company, however, for first came her father to say good-bye, then Aunt Emmeline stopped at the door, and behind her, Cousin Becky and Uncle Wilbur, all ready with sympathy and good wishes. A little later, she heard the carriage drive off which should take all these to the train. There was silence for a time which finally was interrupted by a tap at the door.

"Come in," called Edna.

The door opened, and in walked Ben with a large red book under his arm. "Hello, you little old scalawag," he said. "What in the world did you go and do this for?"

"I couldn't help it," said Edna apologetically.

[108] "You poor, little, old kitten, of course you couldn't. Well, I have brought you up Mr. Fox, and I wanted to tell you that the lady by the willow has had another accident; she dropped her last chocolate marshmallow and the dog stepped on it. Of course, that wasn't as bad as the first, but when you have only one handkerchief it is pretty hard to have to cry it twice full of tears. Fortunately, hers has had a chance to dry between whiles."

Edna smiled. It was good to have Ben come in with his nonsense. "Hasn't she found her eyelash yet?"

"No, and it was a wet one which is awfully hard to find unless it is raining; it is hard enough then, goodness knows. How did you stand all the racket this morning? If a noisy noise annoys an oyster, how much of a noisy noise does it take to annoy Pinky Blooms? That sounds like a problem in mental arithmetic, but it isn't. Shall I read to you a little?"

"Oh, please."

"About Reynard, the Fox, shall it be?"

"Oh, yes. I do so want to know how he lost his tail."

[109] "Then, here goes," said Ben, as he opened the big, red book. Edna settled herself back against the pillows and Ben began the story, while Edna was so interested that she forgot all about her headache. He finished the tale before he put the book down. "How do you like it?" he asked.

"It is perfectly fine. Are there other stories in that book?"

"Yes, some mighty good ones. Here, do you want to see the pictures? They are funny and old-fashioned, but they are pretty good for all that." He laid the book across Edna's knees and showed her the illustrations relating to Reynard, the Fox, all of which interested her vastly.

"I am so glad I know about this book," she said as she came to the last page. "I always thought it was only for grown-ups, and never even looked at it. Will you read me some more to-morrow?"

"Sorry I can't, ducky dear, for I am off by the morning train to a football game which I can't miss."

[110] "Oh, I forgot about that. Are the boys going, too?"

"Yes, and Celia. We are all going back together. There is something on at the Evanses Saturday night, and Celia wouldn't miss that."

"Neither would you," said Edna slyly.

"You're a mean, horrid, little girl," said Ben in a high, little voice. "I'm just going to take my book and go home, so I am."

"It isn't your book; it is grandma's."

"I don't care if it is; I'm not going to play with you, and I will slap your doll real hard."

"Do you mean Serena? She isn't my doll; she is grandma's. Her name is Serena, don't you remember? I've known her ever since I was a little, little thing."

"And what are you now but a little, little thing, I should like to know."

[111] "I'm bigger than Lulie Willis, but I'm not big enough to go to Agnes's party Saturday night." She spoke somewhat soberly, for she did want to be there.

"Oh, never mind," said Ben, with an air of comforting her, "I shall be there and I am as big as two of you."

"I don't see how that makes it any better," said Edna, after searching her mind for a reason why it should be of any comfort to her.

"Oh, yes it does," returned Ben, "for if I were only as big as you I shouldn't be there either."

"As if that helped it."

"Oh, yes it does, for, you see, they will have a lot of good things and I can eat enough for you and me both, I am sure," he added triumphantly. "That is an excellent argument. If a thing can be done for two persons instead of one, it makes all the difference in the world."

[112] Edna put her head back against the pillows. Ben was too much for her when he took that stand.

"There," said the lad contritely, "I'm making your head worse by my foolishness. Are you tired? Is there anything I can do for you? Would you like one of the kittens?"

"Oh, yes, Ben, I would. They are so comforting and cozy. I am glad you thought of that."

"Shall I leave the red book or take it down?"

"Leave it, please; I might like to look at it after a while."

So Ben went off, returning directly with one of the kittens which he deposited on the bed and which presently cuddled close to the child. Then Ben left her, Serena by her side and the kitten purring contentedly in her arms.

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## [113] CHAPTER VI

### THE OLD HOUSE

ALTHOUGH Edna was much better the next day, it was thought prudent to keep her indoors. All the guests departed with the exception of her mother, her Aunt Alice and her own self, the house resumed its ordinary quiet and seemed rather an empty place after its throng of Thanksgiving visitors.

"You'd better make up your mind to stay another week, daughter," said grandma to Edna's mother. "This child isn't fit to be out, and won't be for two or three days."

"Oh, I think she will be able to go by Monday," replied Mrs. Conway. "I shouldn't like to keep her out of school so long."

[114] "Her health is of much more importance than school," grandma went on. "She is always well up in her studies, isn't she? You remember that I didn't have the usual visit last summer, and as Alice is going to stay we could all have a nice cozy time together."

"But how would things go on at home without me?"

"Plenty well enough. I am sure Lizzie can take care of Henry and the boys."

"I am not so sure about the boys, though I suppose Henry could get along very well, and Celia is in town all through the week."

"Why couldn't Charlie and Frank stay with the Porter boys till we get back?" piped up Edna from her stool by the fire. "You know, mother, that Mrs. Porter has asked and asked them, for her boys have already stayed weeks with us in the summer."

[115] "Ye-es, I know," returned Mrs. Conway, a little doubtfully.

"I am sure that is an excellent plan," said grandma, beaming at Edna over her knitting. "Edna will be all the better for a week here, and indeed for a longer time."

"Oh, we couldn't stay longer than next Saturday at the very outside," put in Mrs. Conway hastily. "I'd love to stay, mother dear, but you know a housekeeper cannot be too long away, especially when she has not arranged beforehand to do so."

Grandma nodded at Edna. "We'll consider it settled that you are to stay for another week. Let's have it all arranged, daughter. Call up long distance and let Henry know."

[116]

"I promised him, anyhow, that I would let him know to-day how Edna was getting along. He was afraid when he went away that she might be in for a serious illness. I shall be glad to let him know she is better."

"And he will be so glad to hear that, he won't mind your telling him you will stay longer," remarked grandma with a little laugh.

Mrs. Conway went to the telephone and soon it was settled that they were to remain. "I don't know what Uncle Justus will say," Mrs. Conway observed when she reentered the room. "He will think I am a very injudicious mother to keep you out of school so long."

"Not if you tell him I was sick," returned Edna, who secretly rather enjoyed the prospect of making such an announcement. Like most children, she liked the importance which an illness gave to her small self.

[117]

Saturday was an indoors day spent with Serena, Virginia and the big, red book. Sunday, too, Edna was shut in except for the few minutes she was allowed to walk up and down the porch in the sun. She was well wrapped up for this event, and was charged not to put foot on the damp ground.

It had been rather a lonesome morning, with everyone at church except Amanda, but the little girl stood it pretty well. She read aloud to an audience consisting of the two dolls and the three kittens, she sang hymns, in rather a husky voice to be sure, and she stood at the window a long time watching the people pass by on their way to and from church.

[118]

In the afternoon, her grandfather took his two daughters to see some relative, Reliance went off to Sunday school, and Edna was left alone with her grandmother who told her stories and sang, to the accompaniment of the melodeon she had used when a little girl. Edna enjoyed this performance very much, but after a while grandma was tired of an instrument that skipped notes and wheezed like an old horse, so they went back to the big chair by the open fire. Grandma continued the singing, rocking Edna in her arms till the child fell fast asleep, the drowsy hum of the tea-kettle, hanging on the crane, helping to make a lullaby. When she woke up it was nearly dark. She heard her mother's voice in the hall and realized that the long Sabbath day was nearly over.

[119]

This was the last shut-in day, for the weather was clear and bracing, and, well wrapped up, Edna was able to enjoy it. Reliance always joined her when the work was done in the afternoon, and she led her to the acquaintance of two or three other little girls: Alcinda Hewlett, the daughter of the postmaster, Reba Manning, the minister's daughter, and Esther Ann Taber who lived just across the way. These three were playing with Reliance and Edna in front of Esther Ann's one day when suddenly Esther spoke up: "I know where there is an empty house and anyone can go into it who wants to."

"Where is it?" asked Reba, with interest.

"Down past old Sam Titus's. Don't you know that brown house back there by the orchard?"

"Oh, but it is haunted," cried Alcinda.

"Nonsense, it couldn't be," put in Reba. "My father says there aren't such things as haunted houses, and he ought to know."

The word of such high authority as the minister could not be gainsaid, though the suggestion gave the girls rather a creepy feeling.

"I'll dare you all to go in there with me," spoke up Esther Ann.

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"Oh, Esther Ann, dast we?" said Alcinda.

"Why not? Nobody lives there, and I don't believe anyone owns it, for there is never a person goes in or out, even to do spring cleaning. I heard my mother say that two old ladies lived there, sisters, and they didn't speak to one another for years; that was long ago and since they died nobody knows who the place belongs to, for it isn't ever lived in."

"Like that place where we go to gather chestnuts," spoke up Reba. "Anybody can go there and get all they want. My father said I could go, and that it was all right, and he knows."

"Of course he does," agreed Esther Ann. "Come, who is going with me?"

"I'd as soon go as not," Reliance was the first to speak.

"How do you get in?" asked Alcinda, a little doubtfully.

[121]

"Walk in, goosey. Just open the door and walk in."

"Isn't the door locked?"

"The back door isn't, I tried it one day," replied Esther Ann.

"Why didn't you go in then?" asked Alcinda.

"Well, I was all by myself, and—and—I thought it would be nicer to have some one with me; it always is when you want to explore."

This seemed a perfectly reasonable answer, and the others were reassured, moreover, to a company of five, nothing was likely to happen, they thought, and the spirit of adventure was high in the breast of more than one.

"We'd better start right along," suggested Reliance, "for I have to be back, and Edna mustn't stay out after dark."

"Then, come along, all that want to go," cried Esther Ann, taking the lead.

[122]

Off they started down the wide street bordered by maples, now shorn of their leaves, but furnishing a carpet of yellow underfoot, past the church, the store, the schoolhouse and on to the old brown house sitting back behind an orchard of gnarled, crooked apple trees. The place was all grown up with weeds, though here and there were signs of a former garden. Up the rotting pillars of the porch a woodbine still clambered, and around the door, lilac bushes kept their green.

Though she had come thus far without mishap, Alcinda's courage suddenly failed her and she turned and ran.

"'Fraid cat! 'Fraid cat!" called Esther Ann after her.

This had the effect of arresting Alcinda in her flight and she stood still.

"Come on," cried Esther Ann.

"I don't want to," called back Alcinda. "I'll wait out here for you."

[123]

"You don't know what you're missing," Esther Ann called back, trying once more to persuade her.

"I'll wait for you here," repeated Alcinda taking up her position on the horse block by the gate.

"All right," responded Esther Ann, and opened the door which gave easily as she turned the knob.

The four little girls found themselves in a dingy kitchen whose belongings remained as they had been left years before. Cobwebs hung from the ceiling; dust was everywhere. The stove rusty and falling to pieces, still held one or two pots and pans. There was crockery on the dresser, and a lamp on the table.

Esther Ann led the way to the next room. "I don't think this one is a bit interesting," she made the remark as she penetrated further.

[124]

"Do you think we ought to go?" whispered Edna to Reliance, as these two lagged a little in the rear.

"Why not? Anyone can come in if it belongs to no one, and they say it doesn't belong to a soul. Nobody lives here and why haven't we a right as well as the rest of the world?"

This argument satisfied Edna and she followed along through the deserted rooms, catching sight of a moth-eaten cover here, a bunch of withered flowers there. Books, long untouched, lay half open on a table in one room, the bed was still unmade in another, and everything was confusion.

"Isn't it lovely and spooky?" said Esther Ann, tingling with excitement. "I'm going to see what is in those bureau drawers."

[125]

She darted toward an old-fashioned bureau which stood in the room, flopped down on her knees, and drew out the lower drawer. "Oh, girls," she cried, "look here."

The others gathered around her to see boxes in which were the treasures of a forgotten owner, —strings of beads, half-worn white kid gloves, a fan with ivory sticks, combs, and ornaments of various kinds.

"Let's each take something home to her mother," proposed Esther Ann. "I speak for the fan."

"Oh, Esther, do you dare?" asked Reba.

"Why not? They don't belong to anyone," came back the old argument.

"Some one else will most likely take them if we don't," remarked Reliance conclusively.

[126]

This satisfied the less venturesome, and they all sat down on the floor to make a selection. Reba chose a quaint, silver buckle, Reliance selected a mother-of-pearl card-case, Edna decided upon a tortoise-shell comb.

"Wasn't it lovely that we should find them?" said Esther Ann enthusiastically. "It will be so nice to be able to take home presents. I am glad no one else found them before we did."

"I wonder how long the back door has been opened," said Reba. "Has it always been?"

"I don't know. I never tried it till the other day," Esther Ann told her.

[127] After rummaging a little further and discovering frocks and coats of unfamiliar cut hanging in the closets and wardrobes, and coming upon mouldy slippers, and queer-looking hats in other places, they concluded they must go. Alcinda had wearied of waiting and had gone off long before, therefore, the four, after shutting the door behind them, took their way through the leaf-strewn path to the gate, then up the street to their respective homes.

"Don't you think Mrs. Willis will be pleased with the card-case?" asked Reliance, as they were entering the gate at Overlea.

"I'm sure she will. She can use it when she goes to the city to see Uncle Bert, and I know mother will like this comb," returned Edna.

Reliance had no time to present her gift at that moment for Amanda called her to come at once to attend to her duties, remarking that she was late, but Edna hunted up her mother who was upstairs. "Oh, mother, mother," she cried, entering the room where her mother was, "see what I have for you. Isn't it pretty?"

Her mother looked up from the letter she was writing. "What is it, dear? Why, Edna, what a beautiful comb. Where did you get it?"

[128] "I found it," replied Edna in an assured tone. "We all found lovely things." Then she launched forth upon an account of the afternoon's adventures.

Her mother listened attentively, and when the child had finished her tale, she drew her close to her side, kissing the little, eager face, and saying, "Dear child, I am afraid you have made a mistake. The things were not for you little girls to take."

"But mother, they didn't belong to anyone. They have been there for years and years, and nobody wants them."

"They would have to belong to some one, dear child. We will ask grandma about the house and whose property it is. Let us go find her."

[129] They hunted up Mrs. Willis who listened interestedly to what they had to tell. "The old Topham house," she said when they had finished. "It belonged to two sisters, Miss Nancy and Miss Tabitha Topham. These two lived together for years, but finally they quarreled and each vowed that she would never speak to the other. They died within a few weeks of one another and there were no nearer heirs than distant cousins who have never troubled themselves to look after the place. Old Nathan Holcomb was the nearest neighbor and he used to keep things pretty well secured, but since his death the place has been going to rack and ruin more and more each year. There is some fine, old furniture there and it is a wonder everything in the house has not been stolen before now, but as the place has the reputation of being haunted it has been more or less avoided. I never heard of its being open to the public and I shall speak to some one who will see that it is made secure. Even if it is not valued by the present owners, it should not be left for tramps or any chance vagrant to make use of."

[130] Edna looked down at the comb which she still held in her hand. "What must I do about this?" she asked.

"You must take it back to-morrow and restore it to its place," her mother told her. "I am perfectly sure that not one of you little girls dreamed that she had no right to take the things, but nevertheless they were not yours, and I am very certain that the other mothers will say the same thing."

"Reliance has a lovely card-case," said Edna, regretfully. "She was going to give it to you, grandma."

Mrs. Willis smiled. "I appreciate the spirit, but she must not be allowed to keep it, my dear."

Edna's face sobered. She felt much crestfallen. She wondered what Reba's father would say.

[131] She did not have long to wait to find this out for after supper came two young callers who sidled in with rather shamefaced expressions. "Suppose you take Reba and Esther Ann into the dining-room for a little while," suggested grandma encouragingly. "Little folks like to chatter about their own affairs, I well know."

Edna shot her grandma a grateful look and soon was closeted with the little girls. "Oh, Edna, what did your mother say?" began Esther Ann.

"She said I must take back the comb, because I had no right to take it."

"That's just what my mother said," returned Esther Ann.

"My father said it's dishonest," put in Reba, "I mean dishonest to keep it. He knew we didn't mean to steal."

"Oh, Reba, don't say such a dreadful word," said Edna in distress.

[132] "It would be stealing, you know, if we were to keep the things," continued Reba bluntly. "My father says you couldn't call it by any other name, and that to break into a house is burglary."

This sounded even more dreadful, though Esther Ann relieved the speech of its effect by saying: "But we didn't break in; we just opened the door and walked in. There wouldn't have been



anyone to answer if we had knocked."

"That makes me feel kind of shivery," remarked Edna. "I would rather not go back, but I suppose we shall have to."

"Yes, we shall have to," Reba made the statement determinedly.

[133] Therefore, it was with anything but an adventurous spirit that the four little girls went on their errand the next afternoon. There was no poking into nooks and corners this time, but straight to the bureau went they. Solemnly was each article returned to the box from which it was taken. Silently they tip-toed down the dusty stairs and through the silent rooms to the outer air where each drew a sigh of relief. Esther Ann was the first to speak. "There, that's done," she said. "I don't ever want to go there again."

"Nor I."

"Nor I."

"Nor I," chanted the other three.

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## [134] CHAPTER VII

### THE MILL STREAM

ON their way home from the old house, the four girls saw Alcinda approaching. "Don't let's say anything to her about where we've been," said Esther Ann.

"No, don't let's," returned Reba; "you know she didn't want to go there in the first place."

"It was only because she was scared to," rejoined Esther Ann.

"Well, anyhow, don't let's say anything about it," continued Reba. "Don't you say so, girls?" She looked over her shoulder at Edna and Reliance who were walking behind.

[135] "I don't see any reason why we should," said Reliance. "Of course, if she should ask questions, we wouldn't tell her a story."

"Oh, no, we wouldn't do that," agreed the other girls.

But Alcinda had no thought of old houses or anything else at this time but her little dog, Jetty, a handsome, black Pommeranian to whom she was devoted and of whom she was very proud. "Oh, girls," she exclaimed as she came up, "have you seen or heard anything of Jetty? We haven't seen him since morning, and I am so afraid he has been stolen."

"Oh, wouldn't that be dreadful?" said Edna sympathetically.

"I don't see who would steal him," said Esther Ann, practically. "Everyone knows he belongs to you, and there aren't many strangers that come through the village."

[136] "There are a few. There was a tramp at our back door only a few days ago."

"But you didn't lose Jet a few days ago; it was only to-day that you missed him."

"I think it's more likely he is shut up somewhere," decided Reba. "Where have you looked, Alcinda?"

"Oh, pretty near everywhere I could think of, and I have asked everybody who might have seen him."

"Maybe he has gone off with some other dogs," suggested Reliance. "Dogs will do that, and sometimes they don't come back for two or three days. Mr. Prendergast had a dog that did that way. He lives near where we used to, you know, and he had a collie named Rob Roy that would go off now and then, and the other dogs would bring him back after a while. He would come in looking so ashamed, while they stood off to see how he would be treated."

[137] "Jetty never did run away before," said Alcinda, doubtfully, although Reliance's words were comforting.

"When did you see him last and what was he doing?" asked Esther Ann.

"Mother heard him barking at a wagon that was going by. He doesn't bark at everyone, but there are some people he can't bear."

"What people?" inquired Esther Ann, trying to get a clue.

"He doesn't like the butcher boy nor the man that drives the mill wagon, nor the man that brings the laundry. He always runs out and barks at them."

"Have you asked any of them about him?"

"No, not yet."

"Then I'll tell you what let's do, girls," proposed Esther Ann. "Two of us can go around by the mill, two of us can go to the butcher's and Alcinda can go to the laundry place."

[138] "All right," exclaimed Alcinda hopefully. "It would be lovely if you all would do that."

"I speak to go to the butcher's," spoke up Esther Ann. She was always ready to arrange affairs for everyone. "Reliance, you and Edna can go to the mill; it isn't such a very great way, and Reba can go with me."

The girls all accepted this arrangement and set off in the three different directions.

"Do you like going to the mill?" asked Edna when she and Reliance were fairly on their way.

"Oh, yes, much better than going to the butcher's. Although it is quite a little further, it is a much prettier walk. I always did like mill ponds, didn't you, Edna?"

"Why, I don't know much about them, but I should think I would like them. Do we turn off here?"

[139] "Yes, this road leads straight to the mill; you can see it presently through the trees."

"It isn't so very far, is it?"

"No, but it is a little further to the mill pond. I wonder if the miller is there."

"Isn't he always there?"

"He is always there in the morning, but not always in the afternoon. No, the mill is shut down."

"How do you know?"

"I don't hear it, and see there, the wheel isn't moving."

"Oh!" Edna thought that Reliance was very clever to know all this before they had even reached the mill which now loomed up before them, a grey stone structure in a little nest of trees which climbed the hill behind it, and spread along the sides of the stream, flowing on to join the river.

[140] "It is very pretty here, isn't it?" said Edna admiringly. "What do they call the stream, Reliance?"

"Black Creek. The mill pond and dam and sluice and all those are higher up. Do you want to go see them?"

"Why, yes, if we can't do anything about finding Jetty."

"I thought we might go around by the miller's house on our way back; it isn't much further, and we could ask there."

This seemed a wise thing to do, Edna thought, and she cheerfully followed Reliance to where the mill pond lay calm and smooth before them. "It must be lovely here in summer," remarked Edna enthusiastically.

"It is one of the prettiest places anywhere about. We come here sometimes for our picnics, all of us school children and the teacher. Would you dare go across, Edna?"

[141] Edna looked around but saw no bridge. "How could we get across?" she asked. "I don't see any way but to swim."

Reliance laughed. "There," she said, pointing to the heavy beam which stretched from shore to shore and below which the water was slowly trickling, "that's the bridge we children always use."

Edna drew back in dismay. "Oh, how can you? I wouldn't dare. It is so near the water and suppose you should fall in. I would be sure to get dizzy, and over I would go."

"Oh, pooh, I don't get dizzy," returned Reliance. "I will show you how easy it is," and in another minute she was standing on the beam, Edna shivering and with a queer sensation under her knees. "Oh, do come back, Reliance," she cried; "I am so afraid you will fall in."

[142] But Reliance did not hear her, or if she did hear, she paid no heed, but stood looking earnestly at a point beyond her in the water. "Edna, Edna," she presently called. "You will have to come. I really believe it is Jetty out there in the water."

Edna wrung her hands. "Oh, I can't, I can't," she wept.

"You must help me try to get him in. I'll come back for you."

Edna shrank away from the shore, divided between her fear of crossing and her desire to help in the rescue. Reliance lost no time in reaching her. "You will have to come," she cried excitedly.

[143] "He is nearer the other side. I must go over and try to find a board or two, and you must stay on the beam and watch so as to see which way he heads. Poor little fellow, I wonder how long he has been in there. Come, Edna, you can put your arms around my waist and I will go ahead; you mustn't look at the water, but just step along after me; I won't let you fall."

Terrible as this effort promised to be, Edna decided that she must make it if they would save Jetty, and she followed Reliance, who, encouraging, coaxing, and leading the way step by step, managed to get the child safely across. "Isn't there any other way of getting back?" quavered Edna when they were over.

"I think there is a little bridge further down, but never mind that now, Edna; you stay there and watch, while I get a board and put it out toward him. I shouldn't wonder if I could find one somewhere about."

[144] Fearfully, Edna crouched on the beam, which seemed but a few inches from the water. She kept her eyes fixed on the water that she might not lose sight of the little black head now not so very far away. "Jetty, Jetty," she called, "we'll get you out. Nice doggie. Please don't drown before Reliance comes."

The little dog renewed his struggles and began to swim toward her, Edna continuing her encouraging talk.

Presently Reliance came down the bank up which she had scrambled; she was dragging a board behind her and finding some difficulty in doing so. "Is he still there?" she panted.

"Yes, and trying to swim over to me."

"Don't let him, don't let him. Come over on the bank; it will be easier to get him from there. There's another board up there. I will go get it if you will hold on to this one." Edna hesitated to cross the few feet between her and the shore. "Quick, quick," insisted Reliance. "He might drift to the dam and get caught there. We must get him before he reaches it. Get down on your hands and knees and crawl."

[145] Edna obeyed and in another moment was running along the bank toward Reliance, forgetting everything but her eagerness to save the little dog, who, seeing both girls, turned and feebly swam to where they were standing. His strength was almost spent, and he had hard work to keep from being borne along by the current which was swifter in the center of the pond.

"I'll have to shove out the board so he can reach it," said Reliance excitedly. "Here, take this pole and try to keep the board from drifting toward the dam while I go get the other board." And she thrust the forked pole into Edna's hands and then sprang up the bank, while Edna crouched down, as near the water as possible, in order to make best use of her pole.

[146] It was not easy to keep the board from drifting out, but along the shallows it was quiet water and it did not go so very far, and before long, the little dog was able to reach it, crawling upon it and shivering while he wagged his tail feebly as Edna continued to cheer him. It was harder work now that the board was heavier by reason of the added weight, and once or twice Edna was afraid that after all her efforts would be in vain. It would be dreadful to abandon Jetty when he was so near to land, and she wished he would attempt to swim to her. But the little creature was too exhausted to make further effort now that he had reached footing, though he whined a little when the board drifted out.

[147] Just as she was afraid it would go beyond her reach, Reliance came scrambling back, breathless from her exercise. "I had such a time," she panted. "Oh, Edna, he is really safe, and it is really poor little Jetty. How glad Alcinda will be. Here, don't let the board go." She snatched the pole from Edna's hands. "I'll hold on to it while you push out the other board. I can wade in and get him if I can't do anything else."

But once so near shore as the second board brought him, Jetty was not afraid to swim the remaining distance, having gathered up a little added strength, and after coaxing, ordering and cajoling, the girls were rewarded by seeing the little creature creep to the edge of the board, take to the water again and paddle ashore, crouching at their feet in an ecstasy of joy.

"He is so sopping wet I am afraid he will take cold," said Reliance. "I am going to wrap him up in my sweater and carry him."

"But won't you take cold," said Edna anxiously.

[148] "No, for I am too warm with struggling up that bank and down again. We can walk fast."

At first Jetty did not even have power to shake himself, but before many minutes, his dripping coat was freed of many drops of water, which freely sprinkled the girls, who laughing ran at a safe distance, and then Reliance wrapped him up in her jersey and carried him away from the scene of his late disaster.

"How do you suppose he got in the water?" asked Edna as they trudged along.

"I think someone threw him in."

"Oh, Reliance, do you really?"

"Yes, I do. We go right by the miller's house and I am going to stop there and ask them what

they know about it all."

"Do you think the miller did it?"

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"Oh, no, he wouldn't do such a wicked thing; he is a very nice man, but he might have seen Jetty about the place and we may be able to find out something."

To Edna's satisfaction a small footbridge was discovered a short distance below and on this they crossed, reaching the miller's house just after. The miller himself was just going in the gate. Reliance marched up to him and without wasting words, said: "Do you know how this little dog happened to get into the mill pond?"

The miller paused and looked down at the black nose peeping from its scarlet wrapping.

"That little dog? I saw him around the mill this morning. A man that has been driving for me said he found it along the road. Is it your dog?"

"No, it belongs to Alcinda Hewlett."

"Bob Hewlett's daughter?"

"Yes, her father keeps the store and is the postmaster."

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"Humph!" The miller stroked his chin and looked speculatively at the little dog.

"How do you suppose he got so far from home?" ventured Edna.

"Shouldn't wonder if he was brought in my wagon in an empty sack. Bad man, bad man, that Jeb Wilkins."

"Jetty always barked at him," said Edna.

"I guess that accounts for it. Jeb got mad and thought he'd pay the little creature back. Barked at him, did he? Well, I don't blame the dog. I did some pretty tall growling myself before I discharged the man. He's gone now for good, or bad, whichever you like."

"Do you think he threw the dog in the water?" asked Reliance coming directly to the point.

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"That's just what I do think. I shouldn't wonder if he meant to steal him at first, and sell him, for it is a valuable dog, they tell me, but the dog got out, and I was keeping an eye on Jeb so he couldn't make way with the beast. I meant to take him home and advertise for his owner, but when I came to look for him, the dog was gone, though Jeb was there. Said, as innocent as you please, when I made inquiries, that some people drove by and took the dog back to town where he belonged."

"Oh!" exclaimed Edna, her eyes and mouth round with surprise and disapproval.

"Just what he said. Made it up out of whole cloth, of course, and meantime had taken his spite out on me and the poor little dog by throwing him overboard. How did you happen upon him?"

Reliance gave an account of the rescue and received approving nods. "Smart girls, you two," he commented.

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"Oh, I wasn't smart at all," piped up Edna. "It was all Reliance. I couldn't have done a thing without her."

"Well," said Mr. Millikin with a smile, "you did your part, and that's enough said. I was just going to unhitch, but there is my buggy all ready, and I guess the quickest way to get you back to the village is to take you there behind Dolly."

"Oh, but we can walk, thank you," protested Reliance.

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"It's pretty much of a walk, and the sooner you get there the more pleased several people will be, I for one, because I don't want Bob Hewlett's little girl to mourn for her pet any longer than she need, and again, because I am in a way responsible for what has happened. I'll go get the buggy right off. You wait here; it won't take a minute." So presently they were driving along toward home, Reliance with a horse blanket around her which Mr. Millikin fished out from under the seat and insisted upon her putting around her shoulders.

To say that Alcinda was overjoyed at the sight of her little pet which she had given up for lost, would be speaking mildly. "I'll never forget you two girls, never," she cried. "I shall thank you forever and ever, and you, too, Mr. Millikin."

"Me? I'm partly to blame, for I ought to have discharged that good-for-nothing scoundrel long ago, but he was a good driver, and I was waiting to fill his place. Well, it's all come out right, after all. I hope your little dog will be none the worse for the experience. I'll pay his doctor's bills if he gets sick." After which speech, the miller drove off, and the rescuers darted across the street to their home, where the tardiness of their appearance was entirely forgiven after they had told their story.

## CHAPTER VIII

### JETTY'S PARTY

GRANDMA was so concerned lest Edna had taken fresh cold by reason of this latest adventure that she insisted upon putting the little girl through a course of treatment to prevent possible evil results. "After dabbling in that cold water and getting her feet wet it will be a wonder if she isn't laid up," said grandma, coming into the room just as Edna was going to bed. "She must have her feet in mustard water, and Amanda is making a hot lemonade for her."

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So Edna's feet were thrust into the hot bath, and she was made to sip the hot drink, then was bundled into bed with charges not to allow her arms out from under the covers. It was rather a warm and unpleasant experience, and the worst of it was that grandma said the next morning that she mustn't think of going out-of-doors that day.

"Oh, dear," sighed the little girl, when she was alone with her mother, "don't you think grandma is very particular? Did she used to do so when you were a little girl?"

"She did indeed, and when she was a little girl it was even worse, for instead of lemonade to drink, she was made to take a very bitter dose of herb tea, or a dreadful mess called composition which had every sort of nauseous thing in it you can think of. Little folks nowadays get off very easily, it seems to me."

"I didn't mind the hot lemonade a bit, but I shall never forget the smell of that mustard water," said Edna after a pause.

Her mother laughed. "You must be thankful that it is no more than that."

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"What am I going to do to-day?" inquired the little girl. "I was going to do ever so many nice things out-of-doors and now I can't."

"Then we must think up some nice things to do indoors."

"What kind of things?"

"I shall have to put on my thinking cap in order to find that out. Meanwhile, suppose you run down to grandma with this tumbler; it had your lemonade in it and should go down to be washed."

Edna ran off to her grandma, coming back presently with a much brighter countenance than she took away. "Grandma is going to let me help with the turtle cakes," she said eagerly. "That's a very nice thing, don't you think?"

"I think that is very nice indeed."

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"Amanda is mixing them now, and when they are cut out, I am going to help with the turtles. Good-bye, mother; I will bring you one of my turtles as soon as they are baked."

These turtle cakes were much prized by the Conway children. When grandma sent a box from the farm there was always a supply of these famous cookies. Grandma had promised that Edna should take some home with her when she went on Saturday morning. She watched Amanda roll them out, cut them in rounds and place them in the pans; then came Edna's part in the preparation. Amanda showed her how to put first a big fat raisin in the center of the cake, then a current for the turtle's head, four cloves were then stuck in, part way under the raisin, thus making the feet, and for the tail, another clove with the sharp end out. Amanda could do them much faster than Edna, but the child was greatly pleased to have completed a whole pan all by herself, and when these were baked she carefully carried some of them to her mother and Aunt Alice. Grandma had already seen the results of her granddaughter's labors.

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"I know just how to do them now, mother," said Edna, "and I think it is great fun. Grandma is going to save the pan I did so I can have them to carry home."

"You might have a tea-party for the dolls this afternoon, and use some of your cookies for refreshments."

"Could Reliance come?"

"Why, I should think so. I have thought of something else for you to do this morning; you could begin a Christmas gift for Celia. You know you always have a hard time keeping her gift a secret."

"What kind of thing could I make?"

[159]

"I noticed that your sister's little work bag was getting rather dingy and I am sure she would be delighted to have a new one."

"But where will I get anything to make it of?"

"No doubt grandma has something in her piece-bag; she always has all sorts of odds and ends, and it would give her pleasure to let you have anything that might serve the purpose. I will ask her, and we can get the ribbons for it any time between now and Christmas."

Her mother was as good as her word, and leaving the room came back in a few minutes with a large bag whose contents she emptied on the bed. "There," she said, "take your choice. Grandma says you are perfectly welcome to anything you find."

Edna began turning over the pieces. "You help me choose, mother," she said presently. "I don't know just how big the piece ought to be."

[160] Her mother drew up her chair and began to look over the bits of gay silk before her. "I declare," she said presently, "here is a piece of a party frock I wore when I was about Celia's age. It was almost my first real new party frock, for before that I always wore a simple white muslin. This is perfectly new, and must have been left over. To think of its being in this bag all those years. It appears to be sufficiently strong, however." She shook it out and held it up to the light. The material was a pale green silk with tiny bunches of flowers upon it. Edna thought it very pretty.

"I think Celia will be perfectly delighted to have a bag made of your first party frock, mother," she said. "Do you think grandma would mind my having it?"

[161] "I am sure she will be very much pleased. We will decide upon that, and you can put back the rest of the pieces. There will be an abundance in this for a nice, full bag I am sure. I will cut it out for you and show you just how to make it."

The time passed so rapidly in planning and making the bag that it was the dinner hour before they knew it, and after dinner came an unexpected call from Alcinda. She was a sedate-looking little girl with big blue eyes and straight, mouse-colored hair, but upon this occasion she was dimpling and smiling as she handed a tiny, three-cornered note to Edna. Upon opening this Edna discovered, written in a childish hand, the following words, "Mr. Jetty Hewlett requests the honor of Miss Edna Conway's company to a tea-party at four o'clock this afternoon."

[162] "Oh, dear," sighed Edna, "I'm awfully afraid I can't go, for grandma said it was as much as my life was worth to go out of the house to-day."

"Oh, but you aren't ill, are you?" asked Alcinda.

"No, but she is afraid I will be."

"But you must come," persisted Alcinda, "for it is in honor of you and Reliance, and Jetty is going to help receive."

"I will go ask mother," returned Edna, and running off she returned with Mrs. Conway.

"Mayn't Edna come to Jetty's tea-party?" begged Alcinda. "We have everything planned, and it will be perfectly dreadful if she stays away. She won't take cold, just going across the street, and our house is as warm as anything."

Edna looked beseechingly at her mother. "Do please say yes, mother," she begged.

[163] "I don't see how you could take cold going just across the street, if you wrap up well and wear your rubbers," said her mother.

"Goody! Goody!" cried Alcinda. "Here is an invitation for Reliance, too. Be sure to come at four o'clock. I have some more invitations to deliver so I must go."

"Now I needn't have a tea-party for the dolls," said Edna when Alcinda had gone. Her mother smiled. "You speak as if that would be a great hardship," she remarked.

"No, I don't mean that, but I would so much rather go to Alcinda's. Shall I wear my best frock, mother?"

"Why, yes, I think you may."

[164] "I wonder if grandma will let Reliance go, and what she will wear," said Edna, after a moment's thought. "I think I will go ask, mother, for I don't want to be better dressed than Reliance; it was really she who saved Jetty, you know."

"That is the proper feeling, dear child."

Edna flew off to find Reliance who had received her invitation, and hoped for the permission from Mrs. Willis. "I do hope she will let me go," she said fervently. "Come with me, Edna, when I ask her, won't you?"

Edna was very ready to do this, and hunted up her grandmother. "Oh, grandma," she cried, "we've been invited to a party over at Alcinda's. Jetty is giving it in honor of Reliance and me. Mother says I won't take cold just going across the street, and you are going to let Reliance go, too, aren't you?"

"What's all this?" inquired grandma.

[165] Edna repeated her news, but her grandmother did not reply for a moment. "I am afraid

Reliance will not be back in time to do her evening work," she said at last.

"Oh, but—" this was an unexpected objection, "couldn't she do some of it before she goes?"

"She might do some, but not all, however, we will see. Reliance, you bustle around and see how smart you can be, and I will think what can be done."

"I can set the table," said Edna eagerly. "Would you mind if it were done so much ahead of time for just this once?"

"No," replied her grandmother very kindly.

"And may I skim the milk and bring up the butter for supper? I can set it in the pantry where it will keep cool," Reliance said.

"You may do that," Mrs. Willis told her.

[166] "What else will there be to do?" asked Edna, as the two little girls hurried from the room.

"I have to turn down the beds and light the lamps when it gets dark."

"That isn't very much to do. Maybe Amanda wouldn't mind seeing to those things for just this one time. I am going to ask her."

Reliance was only too glad to have Edna take this request off her hands, herself having a wholesome awe of Amanda, but to her relief Amanda was in a good humor and promised to look after these extra duties, so in good season Reliance was free to prepare for the party, while Edna went to her mother to be dressed.

"Mother," she said, "do you think it is funny to go to a party with a bound girl? Is a bound girl the same as a Friendless? You know Margaret McDonald is our friend, and she used to be a Friendless."

[167] "I don't think it is funny at all. Reliance had no home, to be sure, till your grandmother took her, but she is a good, little girl, and I used to know her father when I lived here."

"Oh, mother, did you?"

"Oh, yes, he was quite a nice, young man. I never knew his wife, but I am afraid he did not marry very well. Reliance will probably have to work for her living, but that is no reason why she should not be treated as an equal. The people about here know she comes of good stock and that the poverty of the family was due more to misfortune than misbehavior. I have no doubt but Reliance will make a fine woman, as her grandmother was, and when she is grown up, she may marry some farmer of the neighborhood, and take the place she should."

[168] This was all very interesting to Edna, and she sat looking at the outstretched feet upon which she had just drawn her stockings till her mother reminded her that time was flying. "Wake up, dearie," she said. "Why, what a brown study you are in. Reliance will be ready long before you are. Hurry on with your shoes, and then come let me tie your hair."

At this Edna jumped and bustled around with such promptness that she was ready by the time Reliance came to the door neatly dressed in her bright plaid frock and scarlet hair ribbons. She was a dark-haired, dark-eyed little girl with rosy cheeks, and though not exactly pretty, had a pleasant, intelligent face. Edna had finally decided not to wear her best white frock, but had on a pretty blue challis, quite suited to the occasion, her mother told her.

[169] The two little girls set out in high feather and arrived at Alcinda's house to find that several had reached there before them. Jetty, with a huge red bow on his collar, barked a welcome, and Alcinda beamed upon them as they entered. "I was so afraid something would happen to keep you," she said.

Esther Ann hurried forward to talk as fast as she could, as was her habit, her words tumbling over one another in her effort and excitement. "Wasn't it splendid that you two found Jetty? I wish we had gone that way, but then maybe we wouldn't have found him after all. I think it is real nice of Alcinda to ask Reliance when she is a bound girl, don't you?" This in an aside to Edna. "I'm sure she is as good as anybody. How long are you going to stay? Here, I'll show you where to take off your things; you needn't go, Alcinda." And she swept the little hostess aside while she led the way to an upper room.

[170] By this time, the latest comers had arrived, so there were about a dozen in all, enough for almost any game they might choose to play. In the first, Hide the Handkerchief, Jetty joined with great zeal, being always the first one to find the handkerchief. "You see he does it with his nose," said Alcinda by way of explanation, a remark which made everyone laugh, and set the lively Esther Ann to sticking her nose into every corner the next time the handkerchief was hidden.

"You ought to put cologne on it and then maybe we could find it," she said, and this, too, raised a laugh as she meant it should, for it took very little to amuse them.

[171] At five o'clock a tray was brought in. Delicious cocoa and home-made cakes were served, followed by candies, nuts and raisins. While the girls were busy over these, Alcinda cast many glances toward the door and once or twice whispered to her mother, who nodded reassuringly. It was evident that some matter of surprise was to follow. What it was, came to light a little later

when Mr. Hewlett came in. He knew each little girl, for even Edna was no stranger to him, so he spoke to each by name. Then he stood up by the fireplace and said: "You have all heard of the medals which are given for the performance of brave deeds. Well, my little girl thinks her small dog would like to show his appreciation of the act which saved his life the other day, and so I have prepared two medals for the heroines of that occasion; they are not gold medals; in fact they are not real medals and of no special value except that they represent her, and our, gratitude to the little girls who were the life savers." He paused and looked at Alcinda who bustled forward and gave into his hands two tiny baskets.

[172] "Here, Jetty," called Mr. Hewlett, and Jetty, who had been sitting in Mrs. Hewlett's lap, jumped down and danced over to see what was required of him. Mr. Hewlett stooped down and gave the dog one of the small baskets which he took in his mouth with much wagging of tail.

"Take it, Jetty," ordered Mr. Hewlett. Jetty started off toward his little mistress, who quickly left her place and stood by Edna's chair. Jetty dropped the basket, not knowing exactly what was expected of him.

"Bring it here, Jet," said Alcinda. Therefore, being sure of himself, Jetty frisked over to where Alcinda was standing. "Give it to Edna," said Alcinda, laying her hand on Edna's lap. Jetty did as he was told and then scampered back to repeat the operation, this time it being Reliance to whom he was directed to go.

[173] "Do let's see," urged Esther Ann, edging up to Edna.

Edna uncovered the basket and saw a box lying there. Inside the box was a new quarter in which a hole had been drilled; a string had been passed through this and to the string was attached a bow of blue ribbon. Reliance found the same in her basket, only her ribbon was red.

"You must put them on and wear them," said Alcinda, "so everyone can see how honorable you are." She didn't just know why her father and mother smiled so broadly.

The girls proudly pinned on their medals and wore them home, for very soon came grandpa to say they must get ready to go.

"I'm going to keep mine forever and ever, aren't you?" whispered Reliance, as she started around to the kitchen door.

"Deed I am," returned Edna.

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## CHAPTER IX

### THE ELDERFLOWERS

[174] EDNA'S account of the G. R. club, to which she and most of her friends belonged, had quite excited the ambition of the little girls at Overlea to have a similar one.

"I told my father about it," said Reba to Edna when they met at Jetty's party, "and he thought it was a most beautiful club, didn't he, Esther Ann, and he ought to know. He said we could have one just like it."

"Oh, we don't want to do that," put in Esther Ann scornfully. "We don't want to be copy-cats. We want to have something all our own downy selves, and not just like somebody else."

[175] "That's just what I think," spoke up Emma Hunt. "Not that I don't think yours is the best I ever heard of, and I don't see why we couldn't have one something like it, just a little different."

"There aren't so very many girls of us, for there are more old people than children in this place," said Alcinda. "Would that make any difference, Edna? Yours is such a big club."

"It wasn't big when we began; there were only six of us to begin with."

"Oh, were there? Then we could do it easily. Let me see how many are here; one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven, and there is Mattie Bond who couldn't come because she is sick; she would make twelve."

"How many are there in your club?" asked Reliance.

"Oh, I don't know just how many by now. Uncle Justus has a pretty big school and almost every girl belongs to it," replied Edna.

[176] "The real big girls?"



"Yes, and we have one very grown-up lady, an honorary member; I'll tell you all about Miss Eloise some day. Agnes Evans was our first president, and she is really grown up, for she is at college."

"I think a little club would be nicer," Esther Ann spoke her mind.

"But what shall it be and what shall we call it?" asked Alcinda.

"I'll tell you what," proposed Edna, "you all ask your mothers what they think and I will ask my mother what she thinks, and we can meet somewhere to-morrow to talk it over."

"I haven't any mother," came a sorrowful little voice from the corner. Big Reliance put her arm around the younger girl. "Never mind, Letty," she whispered; "neither have I, but we can ask somebody else's mother."

[177] "I'll lend both of you my mother," whispered Edna from the other side.

So it was that the company of little girls went home from Jetty's party with quite a new plan. Even Edna, who would really have no part in the club, was much interested, and could scarcely wait to talk it over with her mother at bedtime. She began as soon as they were upstairs together. "Mother," she said, "do you think grandma would let Reliance come up while I am getting ready for bed?"

"Why, dearie, I don't know, I am sure. Why do you want her on this special night?"

"Because there is something we girls are going to talk over with our mothers, and Reliance hasn't any mother, neither has Letty Osgood, and I told them I would lend them my mother. You don't mind, do you, mother dear?" Edna put her two hands on each of her mother's cheeks and looked at her very earnestly.

[178] "Why, my darling, of course not," returned Mrs. Conway, kissing her. "You know mother is always very glad to mother any little girl who may need her. What is this wonderful something you are to talk over?"

"I think we'd better not begin until we know about Reliance though. I wish I had asked grandma before I came up, but I wanted to speak to you first, mother dear."

"Then I will go down and ask her. Where is Reliance?"

"I suppose she is in the kitchen with Amanda; I don't believe she has gone to bed yet."

[179] Her mother left the room, and while Edna unlaced her shoes, she listened for her return. In a few minutes she heard voices on the stair and realized that Reliance was coming up. "We haven't said a word about it yet," she nodded to Reliance who came in behind Mrs. Conway. "You begin, Reliance."

"No, you," said Reliance drawing back shyly.

"Well," began Edna, addressing her mother, "you see the girls want to get up a club something like ours, only not just like it, and they don't want the same name either. There aren't such a lot of girls here, because there are so many more old people than young ones in this village, and so you see—what kind of club would be nice, mother?"

"Why, dearie, I shall have to think it over."

"We ought to decide very soon," said Edna, "for I should hate to go away without knowing. Could Reliance bring Letty Osgood home with her from school to-morrow? I lent you to her, too, and maybe by that time you might think of something?"

[180] "We'll ask grandma about it, dear, though I am sure she will not object. Is that all now?"

Edna thought it was, and now that she was ready to pop into bed, Reliance left her with a happy "Good-night!" It was like sunshine in the house to have such a dear little girl as Edna, she thought as she went downstairs, and though Amanda reprimanded her sharply for not being in bed, she did not answer back, for, in fact, she scarcely heard her, so busy was she with pleasant thoughts, and so excited over the idea of the club.

[181] The next morning, Edna and her mother did a great deal of talking about the new club, so much, in fact, that when it was time for Reliance to return from school, Edna was on the lookout for her, feeling that she had so much to tell that there should be no time wasted. "Here they come, mother," she sang out. "Reliance and Letty. May I bring them right up here?"

"To be sure you may."

"I'm going down to tell Amanda to 'scuse Reliance for just a few minutes." She flew downstairs to the kitchen. "Manda," she said, "mother is going to talk over something very important with Reliance and Letty, so will you please not call her for a few minutes? I'll help her set the table."

"It seems to me you are making too much of Reliance," returned Amanda; "she can't be brought up to look for nothing but ease and pleasure; she will have to work for her living."

"But this isn't anything that is going to keep her from doing that," explained Edna, "and grandma said she could have a little time to play while I am here, specially when I help her."

[182] "Oh, well, go 'long," returned Amanda, "only don't keep her too long; there's more to do than set the table."

Though the permission was accorded rather ungraciously, Edna was satisfied, and ran to welcome Letty who was just coming in the gate. "I am so glad you could come," she said. "You are going to stay to dinner, aren't you? Did you ask your father?"

"Yes, and he said I might."

"Good! Then come right upstairs and take off your things. Oh, girls, mother has a lovely plan for a club, and the dearest name you ever heard. You can come, Reliance, grandma said so, and so did Amanda. I'm going to help set the table."

She led the way up to where her mother was sitting, her face bright with eagerness as she brought Letty forward. "This is Letty Osgood, mother, Dr. Osgood's daughter, you know."

[183] Mrs. Conway drew the shy little girl nearer. "It is very nice to see Letitia Osgood's daughter," she said. "I knew your dear mother very well, and I am glad to have my little girl making friends with her little girl."

"Now, mother," began Edna, breaking in, "won't you please not talk much at first about anything but the club, because Reliance has only a few minutes to stay."

[184] Her mother smiled and nodded to Letty. "Very well, Letty," she said, "well have a nice, little, cozy chat all to ourselves after awhile when this impatient young person has had her subject discussed. I was thinking, girlies, that as long as there are so many elderly and old people in the village, some of whom are poor and some who are partial invalids, that it would be a very sweet thing if you little girls could form yourselves into a club which would help to make their lives a little less sad. It would mean a great deal to old Miss Belinda Myers, for instance, if one of you would drop in once in a while with a flower, or any little thing for her. She is so crippled up with rheumatism that she can't leave her room, and must sit there by the window all day long. She is fond of children, too. Of course she has plenty of this world's goods, and her old friends do not neglect her, yet I am sure that you could give something to her by your mere presence which none of the older persons could. Then there is poor old Nathan Keener."

"Oh, but he is such an old cross patch," interrupted Edna.

[185] "So he is, but he has had enough to make him so. I wonder if any one of us would be very amiable if she were poverty-stricken, half sick all the time, had lost all her friends and had been cheated out of the little which would make old age comfortable? It is very easy to be smiling and agreeable when everything goes right, but when things go wrong, it isn't half so easy, especially when one hasn't a good disposition to begin with."

"But what in the world could we do for him?" asked Reliance. "If we stopped to speak to him, very likely he would get after us with a stick."

"Did any of the boys and girls ever try the experiment of speaking to him pleasantly? I am quite sure the boys do their best to annoy him in any way they can contrive, and even some of the girls tease him slyly and call him names, I am told."

"Yes, they do," replied Reliance, doubtfully, who herself was not entirely innocent in this regard.

[186] "Suppose you were to try the experiment of beginning by smiling when you go by and saying, pleasantly, 'Good-morning, Mr. Keener?' Then next day, even if he chased you away the first time, you might say, 'Isn't this a lovely morning, Mr. Keener?' and you could always make a point of saying something pleasant to him when you go by. Then some day when it is raining or too cold for him to sit in his doorway—"

"Like a great big, ugly spider," remarked Letty.

Mrs. Conway paid no heed to the comment, "you could leave a big apple on the doorsill for him, and so on, till in time I will venture to say he will learn that you wish him well and are trying to be friends. You must keep in your mind all the time that he is a poor, neglected, friendless, unhappy old man and that if you can succeed in bringing even a little sunshine into his life, you will be doing a great deal."

The girls were very sober for a few minutes, then Reliance said thoughtfully, "I believe I should like to try it anyway."

[187] "Of course," Mrs. Conway went on, "the girls may have found other and better ideas for a club, and a better name than I can suggest, but it seemed to me that this might be made something like the G. R., yet would not be exactly the same, and it could have quite a different name."

"Oh, mother," exclaimed Edna, "do tell the name you thought of, I think it is so lovely."

"I thought you might call yourselves 'The Elderflowers,' because your good deeds would be directed toward your elders, and you would be cheerful, little flowers to bring sweetness to sad lives."

"I think it is the most beautiful idea," exclaimed Letty earnestly, "and I shall be dreadfully disappointed if the girls want something different. I begin to feel sorry for old Nathan Keener

already."

"That is an excellent beginning," said Mrs. Conway, with a smile.

[188]

Here came a call from Amanda, so Reliance and Edna scampered off leaving Letty to be entertained by Mrs. Conway.

When Reliance came home from school that afternoon, she brought the information that the girls were going to meet in Hewlett's old blacksmith shop that afternoon, and that Edna was to be sure to come. To her own great disappointment, she could not go herself, for Amanda declared that she could not get along without her, and that all this gallivanting about was a mistake, and that if Mrs. Willis was going to have a bound girl there for her to bother with and get no good of, she guessed it was time for younger folks to take her place. A girl that spent half her time at school and the other half skylarking wouldn't amount to much anyway was her opinion.

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So because the old servant had to be pacified and because it was a day on which Reliance could really be ill spared, she did not attend the meeting.

"I am sorry, dear," said Mrs. Willis, when Edna begged to have the decree altered, "but I am afraid we really cannot spare Reliance this afternoon. You know she has had a lot of time for play this past week; we have been very indulgent to her because of your being here." Edna saw that this was final and went to her mother with rather a grave face.

"Mother," she said, "isn't it too bad that Reliance can't go? She says she wouldn't mind so much if it were not for the voting, but you see if she isn't there, she will lose her vote, and we do so want the Elderflower plan to be the one."

"Why couldn't you be her proxy?" said Mrs. Conway.

"Proxy? What is proxy, mother?"

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"It is some one appointed in the place of another to do what would otherwise be done by the first person; for instance, in this case you could be proxy for Reliance and vote for her. She could sign a paper which would make it very plain."

"Oh, mother, will you write the paper and let me take it to her to sign?"

"Certainly I will." She drew the writing materials to her and wrote a few lines. "There," she said, "I think that will do."

"Please read it, mother."

Mrs. Conway read: "I hereby appoint Edna Conway to be my proxy and to vote upon any question which may come up before this meeting.

"Signed—"

"That sounds very important," said Edna, clasping her hands. "Show me where she is to sign her name, mother. I know she will be perfectly delighted that I can speak for her."

[191]

Reliance truly was pleased, the more that the sending of such an important legal document gave her a certain position with the others. She signed her name with a flourish, and Edna, armed with the indisputable right to take her place, started off for Hewlett's old blacksmith shop. This sat back some distance from the store, and was used as a storage place for empty boxes and such things.

Edna found most of the company gathered when she arrived. They were all chattering away with little idea of what must be done first. "Here comes Edna Conway," cried Esther Ann; "she can tell us just what to do. Come along, Edna. What was the first thing you did when you got up a club?"

"We had a president and a secretary the first thing; the president was called *pro tem.*; she wasn't the real president till we elected her."

"Then you be *pro tem.*, for you know just what to do."

[192]

"Oh, no, I couldn't," Edna shrank from such a public office, and her little round face took on a look of real distress at such a prospect.

"Somebody's got to be then," said Esther Ann. "I will."

"I will, I will," came from one and another of the girls, too eager for prominence to care about what was expected of them.

"We can't all be," remarked Milly Somers. "We're wasting time and we ought to have had this all settled at first. I wish there were some older person to get us started."

"Everyone isn't here yet," spoke up Alcinda. "Isn't Reliance coming, Edna?"

"No, she can't. She has too much to do this afternoon, but I am her proxy. I've got a paper that says so."

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The girls giggled. "Isn't she cute?" whispered Esther Ann. "Let's see the paper, Edna."

Edna solemnly drew it from the small bag she carried, and handed it to Esther Ann.

"Read it, Esther Ann, read it," clamored the girls. And Esther Ann read it aloud.

"How in the world did you know about such a thing," said Milly Somers.

"Oh, I didn't think of it," she answered; "it was my mother."

"She must be awfully smart," said Esther Ann admiringly. "I wish she were here to tell us just what to do, if you won't do it."

"Maybe she would come for just a little while," said Edna, feeling assured that if her mother were there to tell of her own ideas about the club that there would be no doubt of its being "The Elderflowers." "Suppose I go and ask her," she added.

[194]

"All right," agreed the girls. "Tell her if she will stay just long enough to tell us how to get started, it is all we ask."

Edna rushed back to the house and upstairs, where she breathlessly explained her errand. "You will go? won't you, mother, just for a few minutes," she begged. "You won't have to change your dress, or even put a hat on if you don't want to. We need you so very, very much. Nobody knows what to do, and they all talk at once, and giggle and say silly things. It ought to be real serious, oughtn't it?"

"Not too serious, I should say," returned her mother. "Very well, dear, I will come." She threw on a long coat and followed the little girl across the street to where the prospective club members waited expectantly.

[195]

It did not take long to set the ball in motion, and in less than half an hour Esther Ann was made president *pro tem.*, Milly Somers was appointed secretary, and the business of choosing came up. There were not very many original ideas offered. Few of the girls had any. Mrs. Conway listened to them all, and at last explained her own plan so clearly and with such earnestness that it was a matter of only a few minutes before it was decided that "The Elderflower Club" should start its existence at once.

To cap the climax, Edna was elected an honorary member, "for," said the girls, "if it hadn't been for you we should never have had a club at all. And when you come to your grandfather's, you will always know that you must attend the club meetings."

Therefore, it was a very happy little girl who went back to report to Reliance the happenings of this first meeting of the club.

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## CHAPTER X

### WHAT BEN DID

THE members of the Elderflower Club were so eager to begin business that they could scarcely wait till the next day. The more retiring ones, like Alcinda, contented themselves with beginning their ministrations to relatives or those they knew, but it was to adventurous spirits like Esther Ann and Reliance that a difficult case such as old Nathan Keener appealed. Reliance, following out Mrs. Conway's advice, gave a cheery "Good-morning, Mr. Keener," as she went by his dilapidated house on her way to school. She reported this performance to the other girls at recess.

[197]

"Oh, Reliance, you didn't dare, did you?" exclaimed Alcinda. "What did he do? Did he run after you?"

"No, he only frowned and grunted."

"Did you walk very fast when you went by?" asked little Letty Osgood, being very sure that she would not have loitered upon such an occasion.

"No, not so very. I just walked as I always do."

"Then I think you were very brave," continued Letty.

"Pooh!" exclaimed Esther Ann, "that wasn't anything to do. Just wait till you see what I am going to do."

"What, Esther Ann? What?" clamored the girls.

"Wait till this afternoon and you will see," was all Esther Ann would say to satisfy their curiosity.

[198] This being Friday and Edna's last day at her grandmother's, her friends begged that she be allowed to go with them to school that afternoon. "We don't have real lessons," Reliance told her, "for Miss Fay reads to us, and we have a sewing lesson."

"I'd love to go," said Edna, "and I could take the work bag I am making for Celia. I could finish it, I think. May I go?"

"I haven't the slightest objection," Mrs. Conway assured her. So she set off with Reliance, and felt quite at home since she knew all the girls of her own age, and older, and, as she said, "the littler ones don't count."

[199] Everything moved along pleasantly during the school session, and the girls started along in a bunch toward home. "You just come with me, Edna," said Esther Ann. "You see you are a member of the club, too, and this will be your only chance to do a deed. The others can follow along if they want. I'll tell you what I am going to do and you can take part, if you like."

The others were both timid and curious, and were quite content to obey Esther Ann's suggestion to "follow on." Edna, it may be said, was not inspired with that wholesome dread of old Nathan which possessed the others, for she had not been brought up under the shadow of his ogre-like actions, and she felt that this was an opportunity which she could not neglect. She trotted along valiantly by Esther Ann's side, the others keeping a safe distance behind.

"Tell me what you are going to do," said Edna to her companion, as they proceeded on their way.

[200] For answer, Esther Ann dived down into her school-bag and produced first one then another big, red apple. "I am going to give these to Nathan. You can give one. I mean just to walk right up to him and say, 'Won't you have an apple, Mr. Keener?'"

"Suppose he isn't there," returned Edna.

"Oh, he'll be there; he always is when it is a bright day like this. He sits in an old chair on that broad doorstep in front of his house, and leans on a big, thick stick he always carries."

"Who cooks for him?"

"Oh, he cooks for himself, when he has anything to cook. He has a little garden, but it doesn't amount to much. He has no apple trees except an old one that is nearly dead and never has but a few little, measly, knerly apples on it; that's why I thought he'd like these."

[201] Their walk was carrying them nearer and nearer the old man's door. "There he is now," whispered Esther Ann. "I'll go first and you come right up behind me. Here, take your apple." She thrust the fruit into Edna's hand and hastened her own pace a little. Edna's heart began to beat fast, for surely Nathan Keener was anything but an attractive figure as he sat there glowering and muttering, his gaunt hands resting on his knotted stick, and his grizzly old face wearing a wrathful look.

True to her guns, Esther Arm dashed forward and held out her apple saying in a shrill, excited voice, "Won't you have——"

But she got no further, for with a snarl the old man reached out one long, bony arm and grabbed her by the shoulder, raising his stick threateningly, "I'll larn ye, ye little varmint," he began.

Esther screamed. Edna, paralyzed with fright, looked on with affrighted eyes, but presently found voice to quaver out, "Please don't hurt her! Oh, please don't!"

[202] The other girls a little distance off stood huddled together like a flock of sheep. No one was brave enough to venture within reach of that terrible stick, but just then along came a crowd of boys from school. The foremost took in the situation in a glance, and in another instant was on the platform by Esther's side.

"Here, you old mut, what are you doing to my sister?" he cried, at the same time trying to wrest the stick from the old man's grasp.

But Nathan had too long wielded the stick with effect to lose it so readily. Loosing his hold upon Esther, he swiftly shifted his weapon to his other hand and brought down a blow on the boy's back.

[203] By this time the other boys had come up; there were cries, threats, screams from the girls, shouts from the boys. All was in a dreadful hub-bub when along the road approached a young man who stood for a moment and then dashed to the scene of battle. "Here, boys, here," he cried, "what are you doing to that old man?"

"He was going to beat my sister," spoke up the one who had first hurried to the front.

"You old scalawag," cried the young man, "what were you up to? If you are yearning to hit somebody, take a fellow your own size." He wrenched the stick from the man's grasp and threw it away. "Now," he said, "have it out if you will. I'm ready." He squared off, but the old man had neither strength nor desire to grapple with such a masterful opponent, and he slunk back against his door.

[204] "I guess if your life was pestered by a set of young wretches like these, you'd threaten, too," he said surlily. "I guess I'm getting too smart for their tricks, and know enough not to take anything they offer me. I don't have to have more'n one apple full of red pepper set on my doorsill. I guess I know who hides my loaf of bread, and puts salt in my can of milk. I guess I cut my eyeteeth a good many years ago, and can catch 'em at their tricks."

The young man looked around at the group of boys, now rather shamefaced, at the group of girls now gathered around Esther Ann. On the edge of this latter group he recognized a little round face now tear-stained and affrighted. In a moment he was by Edna's side. "Well, I'll be everlastingly switched," he exclaimed, "Edna, my child, what are you doing in this mix-up?"

"Oh, Ben," returned Edna, "it was all a mistake. Nobody meant to play a trick."

[205] "Come over here and tell me all about it," said Ben, leading her aside. Edna poured forth her tale of woe, during the recital of which more than once Ben's mouth twitched and his eyes grew merry. "It doesn't do to be too zealous, does it?" he said at the close of the story. "Here, old fellow, come back here." He made a dash at old Nathan who was now retreating within his own doorway. Ben pulled him back by his coat-tails. "We aren't through with this yet," he went on as the man turned upon him with a few smothered words. "That isn't a pretty way to talk. You have something of a case, I admit, but you happened to overreach yourself this time. No, you're not going in yet. A little more fresh air won't hurt you. Sit down there and be good and I will tell you a pretty little story." He pushed the old man gently into his chair and stood guard over him. "No, you don't need your stick yet; you might get careless with it. I'll just lean it up against the house. [206] Now, then, those little girls hadn't a notion of playing you a trick; they were trying to do you a kindness. They knew you were lonely and hadn't much chance to run around with the boys, or run an automobile, so they thought they would chirk you up a little by presenting you with a large, sweet, juicy, red apple. Their little hearts were throbbing with good-will; they had an unconquerable desire to bring a smile to your lips and a gleam of happiness to your eye. To prove this to you, I will now dissect this large, sweet, juicy, red apple. I will eat half and you will eat the other. If it isn't a good apple, I'll eat my hat." He carefully cut the apple, which Edna had given him, pared and quartered it, stuck a piece on the end of his knife and offered it to the old man, who pushed it away contemptuously. "Let me insist," Ben went on. "We are not playing Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden. There is no serpent in sight, not so much as a worm, and if you find so much as a grain of red pepper I'll acknowledge myself beaten." [207]

The old man muttered incoherently as Ben finished his harangue, but made no motion to take the apple. "You don't know what you are missing," Ben went on. "Now just for the sake of old times, let's try to be jolly and remember when we were boys. Why, many a time you and I have raced down this shaded street, shouting with mirth, have climbed the wall by the orchard and stuffed our pockets with apples like these. You never could take a joke, as I remember, but still you weren't a bad fellow, and I'll bet you were a wonder at baseball. I shouldn't wonder if your batting didn't beat the town. The way you swing around that stick of yours shows there is 'life in the old land yet.'" [208]

The old man's face had relaxed a little and he no longer muttered under his breath. Ben winked at the boys who had drawn nearer and were enjoying the situation to the utmost. "Now, just for old times' sake," continued Ben, "just tell me what was the last real, good, old-fashioned trick you ever played?" The old man cast a half-suspicious look at the smiling young man by his side, but made no reply. "Too bad you forget," said Ben, "but I'll bet an apple to an oyster you don't forget that last game you played."

"Who told you about it?" snapped out the old man.

"Never mind. Do you suppose such a game as that will ever be forgotten? I'm going to tell these boys all about it some day, see if I don't."

Nathan wheeled around in his chair and glanced over the row of young faces before him. Then he leaned back in his chair and sighed.

[209] "I'll bet you wouldn't mind a good game now, but you've no use for these boys and they haven't much for you. When's the next game, boys?" He turned to the row of faces.

"We've stopped playing baseball for this year," came in a chorus.

"Don't have football up here?"

"No, we haven't any team."

"Too bad. I might join you on that. Well, Mr. Keener, some of these days you and I will go to a game together; we'll get that fixed up. Which of you boys was it who so doughtily sped to the rescue of the young maiden?"

"Jim Tabor; it was his sister the old man was after," piped up the boys.

"All right, and mighty little respect I would have had for him, if he hadn't pitched in the way he did. Step up here, Jim."

[210] Jim came forward, a little awkwardly, the other boys snickering. "Mr. Keener, this is Jim Taber. I want you to look at him and tell me if, when you were a boy of his size you had seen anyone threatening your sister with a stick, you wouldn't have pitched in and fought for her for all you

[211] were worth. You weren't any slouch in those days when it came to fighting, I know. That's all, Jim, no apologies necessary. Now, Mr. Keener, there is just one thing more. I don't believe these children are really bad, only mischievous as you used to be when you were a youngster. The girls, I know, are all ready to be friends, bless their dear little hearts. As for the boys, I'll venture to say we can patch up a treaty of peace with them. If you will promise to be a little less free with that stick and not get a grouch on you every time a boy looks your way, they will promise to play no more tricks. If they don't promise, I'll give every mother's son of them Hail Columbia when I come this way again," and by his looks, the boys knew he meant what he said. They were conscious that Ben was standing up for old Nathan, and yet that he meant to be perfectly fair to them. Ben looked up and down the line. "Well?" he said.

The boys looked at one another. "If he'll promise, we will," spoke up Jim Taber.

"It's a go," said Ben. "Now, Mr. Keener, it's up to you."

[212] Old Nathan gave a grunt which might have meant anything, but Ben chose to interpret it his own way. "I think that is meant for assent," he said. "The gentleman seems to be speaking a foreign language to-day, Choctaw, I should say, or maybe Hindostanee. However, it is all right. Now, Mr. Keener, allow me, sir." He opened the door with a flourish and handed the old man his stick. Without a word, Nathan took the stick and went in, Ben bowing and scraping and saying, "Thank you for a very good time," then receiving no reply, not even a grunt, he added, "Not at all, the pleasure is entirely mine." The door closed and that was the end of it.

Edna came running up. "Oh, Ben," she said, "how glad I am to see you. Oh, wasn't it dreadful? How did you happen to come along?"

"Why, Pinky Blooms, I was on my way to grandpa's, thought I would come to take mother back to-morrow, and, as it was a fine afternoon, I concluded, to walk up from the station. Happened by just in the nick of time, didn't I? Funny old curmudgeon, isn't Nathan?"

"Oh, he is terrible," responded Edna, with a remembrance of the uplifted stick. "Are you going home with me?"

[213] "No; you trot along with the rest of the brood; I am going to stay here a few minutes and have a chat with the boys; I'll be along directly."

[214] So Edna left him, the boys crowding around and asking all sorts of questions. Ben was no new figure in the town, and most of them knew him at least by sight. Just what he said to the boys, Edna never knew, but it is a matter of comment that from that day on there were no more tricks played on old Nathan Keener, and though the big stick was not so much in evidence, it was a long time before any of the Elderflowers made any headway in winning even so much as a grunt from him. It was a great setback to the enthusiasm of the girls, but as Reliance told Esther Ann, she should not have tried so venturesome a thing at the very outset. "Mrs. Conway says we should have worked up to it gradually. It's just like training a wild animal, you have to win its confidence first." But Esther Ann declared she wanted no more of Nathan Keener, and Reliance was perfectly welcome to try any methods she liked so long as Esther Ann was not asked to share in the effort. It was a very exciting afternoon, taking it all in all, and was the means of bringing some ridicule and some censure upon the little club. One or two of the girls resigned, saying their mothers did not approve of such proceedings. All this, however, did not happen during Edna's Thanksgiving visit, but she heard of it afterward, and of further matters concerning the Elderflowers.

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## [215] CHAPTER XI

### FAREWELLS

EDNA had not finished telling her mother about the afternoon's adventures when Ben came in. The family had gathered in the living-room, Edna sitting on her grandfather's knee, and the others ranged around the big fireplace. "There comes Ben now," Edna sang out, catching sight of her cousin's figure, and running to meet him.

"Halloo, young man," was grandpa's greeting. "I hear you have been having a set-to with Nathan Keener. It isn't the first time that he has had a fisticuffs with a member of this family. He and I used to be continually at it when we were boys together."

[216] "Oh, but isn't he much older than you, grandpa?" said Edna, in surprise. "He looks like a very, very old man."

"And I don't? That's a nice compliment, missy. No, he and I are about of an age, and went to

school together in the little, old, red schoolhouse that was burned down some years ago. It is ill health and trouble that makes him look so old, I suppose. Poor old chap, he has lost most of the friends who would have stood by him, for he has taken such an attitude it is impossible to be on good terms with him."

"Ben thinks he used to play baseball," spoke up Edna. "Did they play it so many, many years ago?"

[217] Her grandfather laughed. "They certainly did, and he was tremendous at it. Let me see, forty, fifty years ago isn't so long, and I can well remember the time the Overlea boys beat the Boxtown boys, and it was all because of Nat Keener's good playing. The Boxtown fellows thought all they had to do was to walk in and win, but we gave them a big surprise that day. I remember how we cheered and, after the game was over, carried Nat around the village on our shoulders."

Ben smiled and nodded as if this event came within his recollection, too. Edna looked at him in surprise. "Why, Ben," she said, "you weren't there."

Ben laughed. "No, but I heard about it all years ago, and it came to my mind to-day when I was having it out with Nathan. I'll venture to say he is thinking more of those old times, at this very minute, than he is of his troubles."

[218] "Poor old Nat," grandpa shook his head. "He was as high-spirited a young chap as ever lived, but uncontrolled and always fighting against the pricks. It must be pretty hard for him, pretty hard. He has grown so morose and snappish that no one takes the trouble to do more than nod to him nowadays. He wasn't a bad sort, too free and open-handed, too fond of pleasure, maybe."

"He doesn't have much chance to indulge himself there in these days," remarked grandma.

"False friends, a worthless wife and a bad son have about finished up what he had. With good money after bad all the time there is nothing left but that little tumbledown house he lives in."

"What does he live on?" asked Ben.

"Ask your grandpa," answered Mrs. Willis smiling across at her husband.

"Oh, pshaw!" exclaimed Mr. Willis, "nobody counts a load of wood or a bag of potatoes once in a while. I must stop and see if I can't draw him out of his shell some of these days."

"Talk to him about when you were boys, grandpa," said Ben; "that will fetch him."

[219] Just here, Reliance came to the door to say that Ira would like to speak to Mr. Willis, and Mrs. Barker appropriated Ben, so Edna was left to her grandmother and her mother.

"So we are going to lose our little girl to-morrow," grandma began.

"You won't be left without any little girl," replied Edna cheerfully, "for you will have Reliance."

"But that isn't the same thing as having my own little granddaughter," responded Mrs. Willis.

"No," returned Edna. "When are we coming here again, mother?"

"Why, my dear, I don't know. We have made grandma a good, long visit this time."

"It isn't what I call a long visit," grandma observed. "When I was a child I spent months at a time at my grandparents."

[220] "I spent months at Uncle Justus', but then I was there at school," remarked Edna. "I don't see why I couldn't come here on holidays, mother."

"You can do that sometimes, surely. We have promised you to Uncle Bert for the Christmas holidays, but maybe you could come at Easter, if grandma would like to have you."

"Grandma would like very much to have her," said that lady.

"Even if I came without mother?" questioned Edna.

"Even if you came by your own little self. We shall claim her for the Easter holidays, daughter, and you must let nothing prevent her coming. If it is not convenient for any of the rest of you to come, just put her on the train upon which Marcus Brown is conductor and he will see that she gets off safely at Mayville."

[221] Edna looked a little doubtful at the idea of making the journey by herself but she did not say anything.

"However," grandma went on, "I don't see why Celia couldn't come with her, or perhaps Ben could."

"Well, we shall see," responded Mrs. Conway. "Well try to get her here in some way."

"Then we shall consider that quite settled," said grandma with a satisfied air.

"I've had an awfully good time," said Edna thoughtfully.

"Even though you have been sick abed, and have had all sorts of unpleasant adventures?" said grandma with a smile.



"I wasn't so very sick," returned Edna, "and I wouldn't have minded that except for the mustard bath."

Her grandmother laughed. "Well hope that you won't need one the next time."

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"I didn't mind the adventures very much, either, and now that they are all over, I am awfully glad that I will have something so interesting to tell the girls at home. I think a great deal has happened in the time I have been here, don't you, grandma?"

"From the standpoint of a little girl I suppose that is true, though it hasn't seemed such a very exciting time to the rest of us. This is a quiet old village and we jog along pretty much the same way year in and year out, without very many changes."

"I think it is just lovely here," replied Edna, "and I like all the girls, too. I shall be glad to see them again. I sort of remembered some of them, but you know I haven't been here before for ever so many years, and I had forgotten lots of things, even about the house and the place."

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"Then don't stay away so long as to forget anything again," her grandmother charged her.

"I'm forgetting that this is the last chance I will have to help Reliance set the table," said Edna, jumping up.

She found Reliance had already begun this task and that Amanda was making some specially good tea-cakes in honor of this last evening. She was in a good humor and did not object, as she did sometimes, to Edna's being in the kitchen while supper was being prepared. "Just think," remarked Edna, as she leaned her elbows on the table to watch Amanda, "where I shall be tomorrow evening at this time."

"And are you sorry?" asked Amanda.

"No, not exactly. I am glad and sorry both. I should love to stay and yet I want to see them all at home."

"That's perfectly natural," Amanda returned, pricking the tea-cakes daintily.

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"What do you have to do that for?" asked the little girl.

"To keep 'em from blistering," Amanda told her. "There, open the oven door, Reliance, and then bring me that bowl of cottage cheese from the pantry. I didn't know as it would be warm enough to allow of us having any more this week, but you see it was."

"I just love cottage cheese," Edna made the remark, as she watched Amanda pour in the yellow cream and stir it into the cheese. "I wish we kept a cow, so we could have all the milky things you have here."

"Ain't your place big enough for one?" inquired Amanda, in rather a surprised tone.

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"No; it isn't just country, you know. Mrs. McDonald has a big place, and the Evanses have a nice garden and a grove of trees. We have some trees and some garden, and we have a stable, but we haven't any pasture for cows."

"You might pasture her out," Amanda suggested, scraping the contents of the bowl into a glass dish. "Here, Reliance, take that in and set it on the table, and then go after your milk and butter. The dark will catch you if you don't hurry."

"I'm going, too," announced Edna. "I can carry the butter, but I won't bring the key." The two little girls laughed, for this was a standing joke between them.

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They started out through the rustling leaves to the spring-house; the leaves gave forth a queer, though pleasant odor, as they pushed their feet through them. A big star blazed out against the pale rose of an evening sky. Over in the cornfields, crows were calling, and a few crickets, not yet driven to cover by the frost, chirped in the grass. The cows were standing in the stable yard. They had been milked, and Ira had brought the pails to the spring-house before this. The little white kitten which Edna had made a great pet of, followed her down the walk, frisking away after a falling leaf, or dancing sideways in pretended fear of its own tail. Edna picked it up but it had no desire to stay when this, of all hours in the day, was the best to play in, so it scrambled down from her arms and was off like a flash, darting half way up a tree, with ears back and claws outspread.

"I do hate to leave the kitten," said Edna. "I hope it won't miss me too much. You will try to give it a little attention, even though you love the grey one best, won't you, Reliance?"

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Reliance promised, and leaving the kitten to its own wild antics they went into the spring-house, issuing forth with the various things they had gone for. "Just think," sighed Reliance, "this is the very last time you will help me bring up the things. I shall miss you awfully, Edna. You have been so good to me."

"Why, no, I haven't," answered she; "you have been good to me. I'm coming back at Easter, Reliance, and it will be so nice, for I shall have so many questions to ask about the girls and the club and all that."

"Are you really coming at Easter? I didn't know that."

"Yes, mother just now promised grandma I should."

"Goody! Goody! I must tell the girls when I see them."

[228] The girls, however, found out before Reliance saw them, for knowing that Edna was to leave in the morning, they gave her a surprise that very evening. Supper was hardly over before Reliance, trying very hard to smother laughter, had a whispered consultation with Mrs. Willis, who, after it was over, came back to her place by the fire. In a few minutes she said, "Edna, dear, I wish you would go up to my room and see if you can find my other pair of glasses. Look on the bureau and the table in my room, and, if you don't find them there, look in the other rooms."

[229] Very obediently Edna trotted off upstairs, searched high and low, looked in this room and that, but no glasses were to be found. After much hunting, she came down without them. She stepped slowly down the stair, humming softly to herself. It was very quiet in the living-room, or did she hear whispers, and subdued titters? Was Reliance or maybe Ben going to play a trick on her? She heard a sudden "Hush! Hush!" as she reached the door of the living-room, but she made up her mind that she would appear perfectly unconcerned, and entered the room in a very don't-care sort of manner. "I couldn't find—" she began and then stopped short, for there, ranged around the room, were twelve little girls all smiling to see the look of surprise on her face. So that was what the trick was.

"We're a surprise party," spoke up Esther Ann.

"And we're a good-by party, too," added Reba.

"We've all brought you something," Alcinda spoke.

"We are going to stay an hour," Letty added.

Here Esther Ann darted forward with a bag of nuts which she plumped down in Edna's lap. "There," she said, "you must take those along with you."

Next, Reba presented a neat little book. It looked very religious, Edna thought, but the cover was pretty and there was an attractive picture in it.

[230] Alcinda came next with a very ornate vase which Edna remembered seeing on the glass case in Mr. Hewlett's store.

Letty brought the figure of a cunning cat playing with a ball; this Edna liked very much. Some brought candy, some brought cakes, one brought a paper doll, another a little cup and saucer, but each one had something to contribute till Edna exclaimed: "Why, it is just like a birthday, and these are lovely presents."

"Oh, they're nothing but some little souvenirs," remarked Esther Ann loftily. "We wanted you to have them to remember us by."

[231] "I shall never forget you, never," said Edna earnestly, "and I thank you ever and ever so much." She gathered up her booty and piled it on the table, then some one proposed a game, and they amused themselves till grandma sent out for nuts, cider, apples and cakes, which feast ended the entertainment, though it is safe to say it lasted more than an hour. At the last, the girls all crowded around Edna to kiss her good-night and to make their farewells, and then, like a flock of birds, they all took flight, scurrying home by the light of their lanterns, some across the street, some down, some up.

As the sound of the last merry voice died away, Edna threw herself into her grandmother's arms. "Oh, grandma," she cried, "wasn't it a lovely surprise? Did you know about it?"

"Not so very long before. Reliance came and told me what the girls wanted to do, and I promised to help in any way that I could."

"And was that why you sent me up for the glasses? I didn't tell you after all that I couldn't find them."

[232] "I didn't expect you to," said her grandmother, laughing. "I only told you to go see if you could find them so as to get you out of the way and keep you occupied long enough to allow the girls to come in."

"I didn't hear the front door shut."

"No, for they came around by way of the side door, and tip-toed in by way of the dining-room."

"Well, it was lovely," sighed Edna in full content.

[233] Although the real farewells had been said on that evening, that was not quite the last of it, for the girls were gathered in a body by the church the next morning when Edna drove by on her way to the train. She was squeezed in the back seat of the carriage between her mother and her Aunt Alice. Ben was on the front seat with his grandfather. Reliance at the gate was waving a tearful farewell, a white kitten under one arm and a grey one under the other. Grandma herself stood in the doorway. "Good-by! Good-by!" sounded fainter and fainter from Reliance, but the word was taken up by the girls who shouted a perfect chorus of good-bys as the black horses trotted nimbly along and bore Edna out of sight.

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## CHAPTER XII

### HOW ARE YOU?

IN what seemed an incredibly short time, Edna was getting out at the station nearest her own home. Ben and his mother had parted from them an hour before and were now on their way to their own home. Ben, however, would return on Monday to take up his college work again.

"There they are!" were the first words Edna heard as she and her mother descended from the train. And then the boys rushed forward to hug and kiss both herself and her mother and to make as much fuss over them as if they had been gone a year.

"Gee! but I'm glad to see you," cried Charlie. "It hasn't seemed like home at all without you, mother."

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"Didn't you have a good time at Mrs. Porter's?" asked Edna.

"Had a high old time," responded Frank. "Here, let me take some of those things. You look like country travellers with all those bundles. What you got there?"

"Oh, things," returned Edna vaguely. "All sorts of things the girls gave me to bring home."

"You look like a regular old emigrant with so many boxes and bags."

"We couldn't get them all in the trunk," Edna explained, "and so we had to bring them this way. When did you get back, Frank?"

"Last night. We came home with father."

"Then you haven't had such a very long time in which to miss us," said Mrs. Conway, with a smile.

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"Well, it seemed like a long time," returned Frank, "Nothing ever does go right when you're away, mother."

"What special thing has gone wrong this time?" asked his mother.

"Oh, I couldn't find anything I wanted this morning, and nobody knew where anything was, and Celia didn't know how to fix anything, and all that."

Mrs. Conway laughed. "That shows how I spoil you all. I am afraid I missed my boys, too, and am glad to get back to them."

"Where's Celia?" asked Edna.

"She's home. We all came up together last night. Lizzie had waffles for supper, and Frank ate ten pieces," spoke up Charlie.

"Well, that was all I could get," said Frank, in an injured way. "Lizzie said there were no more."

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"Oh, Frank, Frank," laughed his mother. "Well, at any rate, I am glad to know my absence has not affected your appetite."

"Tell us what you did at the Porter's," said Edna.

"Oh, we just racketed around. We went to a fierce old football game, and we did all sorts of stunts in the house. Steve and Roger have a fine little workshop. I don't believe I like living right in the city, though. We boys have a heap more fun at a place like this where we can get out-of-doors. Roger and Steve say so, too."

"I am glad you are so well content," observed Mrs. Conway.

"There's Celia," Edna sang out, seeing some one on the porch watching for them. It was a chill, wintry morning, and they were all glad to hurry indoors to the warm fire. The house looked cozy and cheerful, yellow chrysanthemums in tall vases graced the hall and library; in the latter, an open grate fire glowed, and Edna looked around complacently. "It is kind of nice to get home," she remarked. "I love it at grandma's, but I reckon we all like our own home better than other people's. How are you, Celia? Tell me everything that has been going on at school. How is Dorothy? Did you have a club-meeting and was it a nice one? Oh, I must tell you about the Elderflowers, mustn't I, mother? Has Agnes gone back to college? Have you seen Miss Eloise?"

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"Dear me," cried Celia, "what a lot of questions. I wonder if I can answer them all. Let me see. I'll have to go backwards, I think. I haven't seen Miss Eloise, but some of the girls have. She and

her sister dined at the Ramseys on Thanksgiving Day."

"I know they had a good dinner, then," remarked Edna, "for I was there myself last Thanksgiving."

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"Agnes has gone back to college. Dorothy is well. We had a nice club-meeting, and I missed my little sister's dear, round, little face. Dorothy has been so impatient that she can hardly wait to see you. She has been calling me up at intervals all morning to know if you had come yet. There is the telephone now. No doubt it is Dorothy calling."

Edna flew to the 'phone and Celia heard. "Yes, this is Edna. Oh, hello, Dorothy. I'm well, how are you? I don't know; I'll see. Oh, no, you come over here; that will be much nicer. I have some things to show you. What's that? Yes, indeed, I am glad to get back." Then a little tinkle of laughter. "You are a goosey goose; I'm not going to tell you. Come over. Yes, right away if you want to, Dorothy."

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She went back to her sister, and established herself in her lap, putting one arm around her neck and stretching out her feet to the warmth of the fire. "It was Dorothy," she said.

"That was quite evident, my dear," returned Celia. "What was it you wouldn't tell her?"

"Oh, Dorothy is such a goose. She was afraid I had gotten to like some of the Overlea girls better than I do her. Just because I wrote to her about Reliance and Alcinda and all of them. Just as if I couldn't like more than one girl. Don't you think it is silly, sister, for anyone to want you to have no other friend, I mean no other best friend? Of course I love Dorothy dearly, but I love Jennie, too, and I am very fond of Netty Black, and, oh, lots of girls. Are you that way about Agnes, Celia?"

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Celia felt a pang of self-reproach, for it must be admitted that she had felt a little jealous of the new friends Agnes was making at college. "I don't suppose I should be?" she answered after a pause. "I suppose it is very selfish and unfair to feel that way about it. Mother says it is very conceited of a person to think she can satisfy every need of a friend, and that it shows only love of self, and not love of your friend, when you want to exclude others from her friendship, and I am sure I don't want to be either selfish or conceited, and I should hate to be called a jealous person."

"Do you think Dorothy is conceited and selfish?"

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"I don't think she means to be, but when she wants to deprive you of good times with other girls, or is jealous of your friendship for them, she is encouraging conceit and selfishness. I'm glad you asked me about the way I feel toward Agnes, for it makes me see that I am by no means the true friend I ought to be. If I loved her as I should, I'd want her to have all the good times, all the love, all the benefit she could get from others, and I mean to fight against any other feeling but the right one. I don't believe my little sister will be the jealous kind," she said hugging Edna up.

"If you see me getting that way, I hope you won't let me," returned Edna earnestly.

"There's Dorothy now," said Celia, putting down the plump little figure from her lap. And Edna ran out to greet her friend.

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There was so much to talk about, so many things to show, that Dorothy must needs stay to lunch. A little later, over came Margaret McDonald to say "How do you do" and to bring some flowers from her mother's greenhouse. Edna's tongue ran so fast and she had so much to tell that the afternoon seemed all too short. Dorothy and Margaret, too, had their own affairs to talk about, and it was dark before the two little visitors were ready to go.

The next excitement was the coming of her father, for whom Dorothy watched and who appeared almost gladder than anyone that his wife and little girl were at home again. "This is something like," he said as he came in, his face wreathed in smiles.

"You poor dear," said Edna, in a motherly way, "it has been a lonely time for you, hasn't it?"

"Pretty lonely, but then it teaches me how to appreciate my family when they get back. My, my, what a difference it does make, to be sure. I don't think I can stand you all skylarking off again very soon."

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It was all very cozy and natural after dinner to be back again in the library, Mrs. Conway on one side the table with her fancy work, Mr. Conway on the other with the evening paper, the boys reading, or scrapping in the hall, Celia in the next room at the piano, and Edna herself with the Children's Page of the paper spread out before her where she lay at full length on the big rug before the fire. Somehow the page of stories and puzzles did not absorb her as much as usual. She wondered what Reliance was doing, if her grandmother felt lonely without her little granddaughter, and if the white kitten missed her. She saw the long street bordered by maples, the store and the postoffice, the white church. Presently she got up and went over to her mother. "Wouldn't it be nice," she said, "if one could be in two places at the same time?"

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Her mother nodded. "I shouldn't wonder if you and I were in two places at the same time, or that we had been during the last few minutes, for I am sure while our bodies are here our thoughts have been in Overlea."

"That is just where my thoughts have been," answered Edna. "Do you suppose they miss us, mother?"

"I am afraid they do, very much," said her mother, with a soft, little sigh. "I know if either of my daughters ever goes away to a home of her own, I shall miss her very much when she has left me after making a visit."

Edna stood with her arm still around her mother's neck. This was rather a new thought. Once her mother had been a little girl like her, of course, and had stood by her mother's side just like this, and now she was living in quite a different home. Edna tried to imagine how it would seem to come back to this, her childhood's home, from one of her very own, but it was entirely too difficult a matter so she gave it up and went back to her paper. But in a few minutes, the pictures on the page before her became pictures of Overlea. She was taking the spring-house key to old Nathan Keener that he might unlock his door and let out the white kitten. Then she was half conscious of hearing a voice say: "No, never mind; she is all tired out; I'll carry her up." Then she was helped to her feet, a pair of strong arms lifted her up, and she was borne up the stairs. She hardly knew who undressed her and stowed her away in bed. She felt a soft kiss on her cheek and then she sank into a deep slumber. The dear little girl's Thanksgiving holidays were over.

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### Transcriber's Note:

Alternative spelling for good-bye and good-by has been retained as it appears in the original publication.

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\*\*\* END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK A DEAR LITTLE GIRL'S THANKSGIVING HOLIDAYS \*\*\*

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