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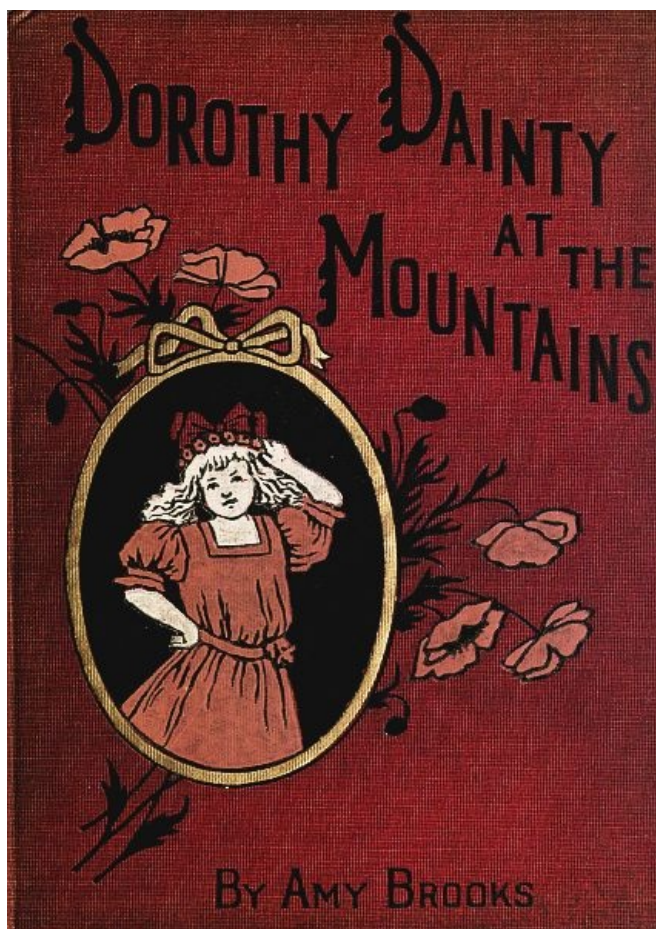
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"HERE! HERE!" CRIED DOROTHY, AND ECHO ANSWERED, "HERE,—  
ERE!"—[PAGE 4](#).

**DOROTHY DAINTY**

# AT THE MOUNTAINS

BY

**AMY BROOKS**

AUTHOR OF "DOROTHY DAINTY SERIES," "THE RANDY BOOKS," "THE PRUE BOOKS," AND  
"A JOLLY CAT TALE"

*WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY THE AUTHOR*



BOSTON  
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DOROTHY DAINTY AT THE MOUNTAINS

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## DOROTHY DAINTY AT THE MOUNTAINS

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[1]

### CHAPTER I

#### AT THE CLEVERTON

THE great hotel on the crest of the hill was bathed in sunlight that poured from a rift in the clouds, as if sent for the sole purpose of showing the grand portico, the broad piazza, and the flag that floated gracefully on the summer breeze.

Its many windows seemed to be looking across the valley to opposite mountain peaks, and one could easily imagine that its wide, open doorway, smiled genially as if offering a welcome to all arriving guests.

[2]

Two little girls ran across the lawn, the one with flaxen curls, the other with sunny brown ringlets.

The fair-haired little girl had eyes as blue as the blue blossoms that she held in her hand, while her playmate's eyes were soft and brown, and told that her heart was loving and true.

The little blue-eyed girl was Dorothy Dainty, and the child who clasped her hand was her dearest friend, Nancy Ferris.

Nancy had no parents, and a few years before Dorothy's mamma had taken her under her care and protection, and she was being trained and educated as carefully as was Dorothy, the little daughter of the house.

They had come to the Hotel Cleverton to spend the summer, and the first few days of their stay, they had explored all the land that lay immediately around the hotel, and had found many beautiful spots, but one thing held their interest,—they loved the echo, and never tired of awakening it.

[3]

"Come!" cried Dorothy. "Run with me over to the white birches, and we'll shout, and listen!"

Mrs. Dainty had told them the story of Echo, the nymph, who for loving Pan and following him and calling to him had been changed into a huge rock on the mountainside, and forever compelled to mock each voice she heard.

The old legend of the nymph had caught their fancy, and often they paused in their play to shout, and listen to what seemed to them the voice of some fairy of the mountains.

Now they stood beside the birches, Dorothy with one arm around a white trunk, and Nancy near her. At their feet were countless bluebells, overhead the blue sky, while across and beyond the valley rose the mountain capped by white clouds that looked as soft as swan's-down.

[4]

"Here! Here!" cried Dorothy, and echo answered, "Here,—ere!"

"Listen!" cried Dorothy, clasping her hands, and laughing with delight. "It answers as if it was a truly voice that heard and replied.

"Nancy, I love you!" she cried, and again they plainly heard:—

"Love you-oo!"

They thought it great fun to shout and call, and hear their cries so cleverly repeated.

And now another child ran out from the great doorway, paused a moment as if looking for some one, then, seeing the two little figures near the clump of birches, stole softly near them.

[5]

On tiptoe, and with tread as soft and noiseless as a cat, she made her way over the short grass, until she was quite near them. Then, hiding behind a low bush, she watched them. How still she stood! For what was she waiting? Her bold eyes were full of mischief, as she whispered, "Oh, hurry *up!*"

Dorothy Dainty put her hands to her mouth, trumpet fashion, and called:

"Come and catch us!" and instantly the echo from the distant mountain and a shrill voice

behind them, repeated:

"Come and catch us!"

"Oh, oh-o!" cried Dorothy, and Nancy ran to her, and threw her arms about her. [6]

"You ought not to frighten Dorothy like that!" cried Nancy.

A saucy laugh answered her.

"Well, it isn't nice to be shrieked at, and you do it just like the echo, you know you do, and it's enough to frighten any one," said Nancy.

The little tease was not in the least abashed. She could imitate almost any sound that she had ever heard, and each success made her eager to repeat her efforts at mocking.

"I made old Mrs. Hermanton fly up out of her chair, and drop her ball of worsted and knitting-needles, when I shouted close to her ear."

"Why, Floretta!" cried Nancy.

Now you think that was horrid, but *I* tell you it was funny. She'd just been telling about her darling little lap-dog that died *ten years ago*, and she got out her handkerchief to cry, and put it up to her eyes. [7]

"Oh, if I only could hear his lovely bark again!" she said, and right behind her chair, I said:

"Ki-yi! Yip! Yip!" and she jumped up much as a foot from her seat."

Nancy laughed. How could she help it? The old lady had told every man, woman, and child who sat upon the piazza, how much she had suffered in the loss of the dog.

One testy old gentleman who was troubled with gout, spoke rather plainly. "Madam," he said, "I've heard that story every day of this week, and all I can say is, I wish you had gout in your feet as I have, and you'd have no time to waste crying for a puppy!" [8]

He certainly was hopelessly rude, but one must admit every day is far too often to be forced to listen to an uninteresting tale.

Floretta stood looking down at the toe of her shoe. She moved it from side to side along the grass for a moment, then she spoke again.

"You know old Mr. Cunningham has gout, and is awful cross?"

Dorothy and Nancy nodded. They did indeed know that.

"Well, he sat on the piazza and laughed when I scared Mrs. Hermanton, so I want to know if he'll think it's funny *every* time I do things. You know he puts one foot up on a chair, and every time any one touches that chair ever so little, he cries: '*Oh, oh, oh!*' and holds on to his foot.

"The next time I'm near him, I'm going to make b'lieve hit my foot against something, and then I'll cry out, just 'zactly as he does: [9]

"*Oh, oh, oh!*" and I'll hold on to my foot," said Floretta.

"I know it's funny," said Dorothy, "but I don't think you ought to."

"Well, *you* needn't. P'raps you couldn't do it just like other folks, but I *can*, and I'm going to!" said Floretta.

She was a handsome child, but her boldness marred her beauty.

She was, indeed, a clever imitator, but she had been told so too often. Her mother constantly praised her cleverness, and unwise friends applauded her efforts, until Floretta acquired the idea that she must, on all occasions, mimic some one.

Sometimes those whom she mocked thought it clever, and laughed when they had thus been held up to derision. [10]

At other times Floretta found that she had chosen the wrong person to mimic, and had received a sharp rebuke.

This taught her nothing, however.

She thought any one who did not enjoy her antics must be very ill-natured, while her silly mother considered that Floretta had been abused.

While Dorothy and Nancy were talking with Floretta, they were picking large bouquets of bluebells and a tiny white flower that grew as abundantly as the bluebells, and blossomed as freely.

It pleased her, for the moment, to gather some of the blossoms, and soon the three were too busy to talk, each trying to see which could gather the largest bouquet.

On the hotel piazza Mrs. Paxton sat, occupied with her embroidery, but not too busy to talk. She was *never* too busy to talk, if she could find any one to listen. [11]

Near her sat two ladies who had just arrived, and old Mr. Cunningham, who frowned darkly at the magazine that he was trying to read.

It was not that the story displeased him that he frowned, but that he was bored with hearing what Mrs. Paxton was saying, mainly because she always said the same thing.

"You see, with our wealth and position, it is impossible that little Floretta should ever make any use of her talents for any purpose other than the amusement of her friends," she said.

One of the two ladies, whose fine face and sweet low voice bespoke refinement, looked fixedly at Mrs. Paxton, and wondered that any woman should be willing to boast so foolishly. [12]

The other, whose garments told of a great love of display, seemed interested, and even impressed.

"What is her especial talent?" she asked, "I really should like to know. Is she musical?"

"O dear, yes," Mrs. Paxton hastened to reply; "she plays delightfully, and she has a voice that is really quite unusual for a child; she dances, too, but her greatest gift is her power of imitation. She has a sensitive nature that is open to impressions, and she sees the funny side of everything. She really is a wonderful little mimic. You must see her to appreciate her charm."

The quiet woman looked as if she thought this a doubtful accomplishment, but the one who had eagerly listened said: [13]

"Where is she? I should be *so* pleased to see her. Not all children are so interesting. Many are dull."

"And lucky they are!" growled old Mr. Cunningham, under his breath, but the ladies did not hear that.

---

"I don't want these flowers now I've picked them," cried Floretta. "You can have them if you want them," she said, as she turned toward Dorothy.

"I can't hold any more than I have," said Dorothy, "but you could—"

"Then here they go!" cried Floretta, as she flung them broadcast, to lie and wilt in the sunlight.

"Oh, it was too bad to throw them away," said Dorothy. "I was going to say, if you didn't care for them, perhaps Mrs. Hermanton might like them. She said she liked wild flowers and used to pick them, but her rheumatism won't let her pick them now." [14]

"Pooh! I wouldn't have bothered to take them back to her," Floretta replied; and turning about, she ran back to the hotel.

"Come here, Floretta!" said Mrs. Paxton. "This lady wishes to see you."

Usually Floretta when asked to do anything, preferred to do something else.

This time, thinking that she saw an opportunity for a lark, she went promptly and paused beside her mother's chair.

"This is Mrs. Dayne, Floretta. Mrs. Dayne, this is my little daughter."

Floretta looked up and smiled, but said nothing. She had never been taught that she must reply courteously when spoken to.

Her pretty face pleased Mrs. Dayne, who was much the same sort of woman that Mrs. Paxton was. She wished that Floretta could be induced to perform. [15]

*Induced!* She was already wondering if she would have a chance to show off.

The opportunity came soon, and she was delighted.

Mr. Cunningham had become drowsy, and his magazine dropped to the piazza floor.

In stooping to recover it, he hurt his gouty foot, and cried out.

"Oh, oh-o!" he cried, and like an echo, "Oh, oh-o!" cried Floretta, catching hold of her own foot and hopping wildly about.

Of course Mrs. Paxton laughed gaily, as if Floretta had done a very smart thing, while Mrs. Dayne, who was as silly a woman as Mrs. Paxton, joined in the merriment, thus hoping to gain favor with her new friend. [16]

Mr. Cunningham, without a word, took his magazine and, limping painfully, left the piazza, and went indoors.

Mrs. Vinton, an odd expression on her fine face, took her parasol from the chair where it lay, and went for a walk down the path toward the birches. She was disgusted with Mrs. Paxton, Floretta, and Mrs. Dayne, although she felt that the little girl was least of all at fault.

She was only an untaught, untrained child, to be pitied rather than blamed. She knew that they would think her very unkind if she did not seem to approve of Floretta, and she could not laugh at cruelty.

The child was indeed a clever imitator, but the fact remained that it *was* cruel to mock an outcry caused by pain. [17]

Dorothy and Nancy were coming toward her, on their way toward the hotel, their hands filled with blossoms, faces bright and smiling.

They greeted her gaily, and Dorothy offered her some of the flowers.

"I'll give half to you, and half to mamma," said Dorothy. "I mean, I will if you'd like to have them."

"It is a sweet gift, and I shall enjoy them in my room," Mrs. Vinton said. "I have a lovely vase that is worthy to hold such beautiful blossoms."

"I'll divide mine between Aunt Charlotte and Mrs. Hermanton," said Nancy.

"You both like to give," said Mrs. Vinton.

"Oh, yes!" they cried together, and as she left them, Dorothy said:

"Isn't she a sweet, lovely lady?" [18]

"Yes, and I like to hear her talk, her voice always sounds so pleasant."

Mrs. Vinton, as she walked along the little path, her flowers in her hand, thought of Dorothy and Nancy.

"They are two dear little girls," she said, "and add to the charm of this lovely place."

"Would you dare to give Mr. Cunningham some bluebells for his buttonhole?" said Nancy. "I'd like to, but *I* wouldn't dare."

"I don't know," Dorothy said. "I'd like to, too, and he 'most always has a rosebud, but sometimes he doesn't. When we get back, if he's on the piazza, and hasn't a bud in his buttonhole, I'll try to dare to offer him some of these blossoms."

Dear little Dorothy! She wondered if she would be rewarded with a frown! [19]

Floretta and her mother were not there, neither was Mrs. Dayne, but in a shady corner sat Mr. Cunningham.

Nancy ran in to take her flowers to Aunt Charlotte and Mrs. Hermanton.

Dorothy hesitated. She would have been even more timid, had she known how recently he had been offended.

He looked up from his book, frowned, then smiled and nodded pleasantly.

He had thought that Floretta had returned, and was pleasantly surprised to see Dorothy, instead.

Softly she crossed the piazza until she stood beside him.

"May I give you a few of these bluebells for your buttonhole?" she said. "They're only wild flowers, but they're pretty ones," she added, fearing that, after all, he might not care for them. [20]

"Why, thank you, my dear. I surely would like them, especially as they are offered me by a real little lady."

He placed the cluster that she offered him in his lapel, as he spoke, and looked to Dorothy for approval.

"They are wild flowers, truly," he said, "but I think they are quite as attractive as the buds I have been wearing," and Dorothy was glad that she had offered them.

---

## CHAPTER II

 [21]

### A DELIGHTFUL SURPRISE

**T**HREE weeks had passed, and as nearly every day had been fair, the guests at the Cleverton had lived out of doors, appearing at the hotel at meal-time, and at night.

Other wild flowers beside the bluebells were blossoming gaily, peeping up from the grass as if offering a welcome to all who looked at them; and even great rocks and ledges held tiny blossoming plants in their crevices.

The pony, Romeo, had come to the mountains with the family, and seemed to enjoy the outing.

Every morning Dorothy and Nancy went for a drive, and Romeo tossed his mane, and pranced as if to show his delight.

[22]

One morning the pony was standing at the porch, waiting for his little mistress, who soon came running down the stairs.

Floretta was standing in the hall, spinning a top.

A sign on the wall plainly stated that children must not play in the hall, but that did not disturb Floretta.

Deftly she wound the string, and the great top fell to the floor, where it hummed and spun as rapidly as if a boy's hand had flung it.

She picked it up, and again wound it, this time throwing it with even greater force.

"Look! Look!" she cried. "I b'lieve it spins faster every time I throw it!"

Dorothy looked over the baluster at the humming top, but said nothing.

[23]

She knew that Floretta had seen the notice; indeed a number of the children had stood in the hall when it had been tacked up.

Looking up at Dorothy, Floretta noticed the whip in her hand.

"Riding?" she asked.

"Yes, for a little while," said Dorothy. "It's a lovely morning, and I mean to see how quickly Romeo will take me to the 'Spring.'"

"I wouldn't care to ride horseback," said Floretta, rudely.

"You won't care to spin tops in this hall if Matson catches you," cried a shrill voice, from an upper hall.

"Pooh! I'm not afraid of Matson," Floretta said, boldly, looking up at the boy who had tried to frighten her.

"Oh, aren't you?" said the boy in a teasing voice. "Well, he manages this hotel, and he'll *make* you stop if he catches you!"

[24]

"You stop, Jack Tiverton!" cried Floretta.

"You'll be the one to stop!" said Jack, with a loud laugh.

Dorothy crossed the hall, stepping around Floretta, who stood exactly in the way.

Looking back, she saw Floretta show the tip of her tongue to Jack, while Jack, not to be outdone, made a most outrageous face.

"I wish they weren't so horrid!" Dorothy said to herself, as she left the hall.

Having mounted Romeo, with the groom's aid, she rode off down the lovely, shady road, the man on his horse, following at a respectful distance.

[25]

She touched the pony lightly with her whip, and he responded by breaking into a gentle gallop.

Dorothy's bright curls flew back from her flushed face, and she laughed as she flew over the road.

The groom watched her admiringly, and marvelled that so small a girl could be such a perfect little equestrienne.

The ride had brightened her eyes, and she always looked smaller than she really was when mounted upon Romeo.

He was a handsome animal, with flowing mane and tail, and the groom spoke truthfully when he muttered:

"Them two makes a high-bred pair. Miss Dorothy is a girl 'ristycrat, an' the little hoss is a hoss 'ristycrat, if ever there was one."

The groom had been in the service of the Dainty family but a few months, but in that time he had become devoted to the little daughter of the house. All the servants loved Dorothy, and were almost as fond of Nancy Ferris.

[26]

The young groom had heard Nancy's story, and he felt a deep interest in the little girl, who once had been a waif.

Now, his pleasant face wore a smile as he followed Dorothy, and saw how firmly the little figure stuck to the saddle, and rode as if girl and pony were one and inseparable.

They reached the "Spring," a spot whose beauty drew all travellers to it, and artists lingered there to paint, and thus perpetuate its charm.

Romeo looked down at the clear stream that reflected his figure so perfectly.



"He wants a drink," said Dorothy; "lead him to a good place, Thomas, please."

[27]

He helped her to dismount, and then led the pony to a shady spot where he could drink, and enjoy the cool, clear water.

Dorothy at once commenced to gather some of the lovely wild flowers that grew near the water's edge, but farther up the stream.

"These are different from any that I've ever found here," she thought.

Her hands were nearly filled with the lovely blossoms, and she was reaching out to grasp an especially pretty one, when a strangely familiar voice, just behind her, said:

"I think I see some one I've *often* seen before!"

Dorothy turned, and a little cry of surprise and pleasure escaped her lips.

[28]

There were Mrs. Barnet and dear little Flossie coming toward her, while very near her was the owner of the voice, Flossie's handsome, merry-hearted Uncle Harry! Just behind him was his lovely young wife, and the baby in charge of a maid.

"Oh, I *am* glad, *so* glad to see you!" cried Dorothy. "And Flossie Barnet, did you know you were coming up here, when I said 'good-by' to you and Molly Merton at Merrivale?"

"I didn't know *surely*, but I *almost* knew," Flossie admitted, "but Uncle Harry said, 'Don't tell 'til you *know*,' and I didn't *truly* know until after you were gone."

"Well, it's fine to have you here," said Dorothy, "but I do truly b'lieve it's almost nicer to be surprised, and have you;" and she threw her arm around Flossie, as she walked beside her.

[29]

Tall, handsome Uncle Harry thought he saw a chance for a bit of a joke.

"I wonder why some one isn't surprised to see *me*?" he said.

"Oh, I am," said Dorothy, "and glad, too."

"Well, thank you," said Uncle Harry; then with a face that he tried to make sad, he said:

"But I know you aren't as glad as you were to see Flossie, because,—you didn't put your arm around *my* waist!"

He had tried to look very glum, but his blue eyes were laughing.

Big, handsome Uncle Harry could not look woebegone, and the two little girls laughed at his attempt.

"The barge is taking our party over to the 'Cleverton,' and I see you have the pony, Dorothy," said Uncle Harry. "Will you run a race with the barge?"

[30]

"Oh, yes, yes!" cried Dorothy, "and Romeo will come in ahead!"

"If he does," said Uncle Harry, "I'll surely decorate him with a blue ribbon!"

With many a laugh and jest, and much guessing as to which would be the winner, the merry party clambered into the barge; Dorothy mounted Romeo, and they were off over the road, on the way to the hotel.

The horses, like the average barge horses, were not beauties, but they saw the pony rush forward, and they made an effort at speed. They plunged forward, at what, to them, seemed a reckless pace, but the fine, handsome Romeo shot past them, his nostrils dilated, and his eyes bright with excitement. Dorothy's gay laugh rang out as she passed them, and Uncle Harry, as he looked after the flying figure, exclaimed:

[31]

"The little fairy! I believe no other child could ride so fearlessly as that!"

Often she looked back, as she sped over the road. Try as they would, the old horses could not overtake her.

As soon as the barge appeared in sight between the trees, she touched Romeo lightly with her whip-stock, and then she laughed gaily as he plunged forward, the old barge rattling along far behind.

She did not permit Romeo to again slacken his pace, and thus arrived at the Cleverton before the barge was in sight, so slow had been its progress.

"Oh, Nancy!" she cried, "Who *do* you think has come?"

[32]



OFTEN SHE LOOKED BACK, AS SHE SPED OVER THE ROAD.—PAGE 31.

"Who has come?" Nancy asked. "Where are they?"

"I mean you can't guess who is coming, and there they come now, Nancy, just look!"

Nancy did look, saw the barge swinging around the curve of the road, saw a tiny handkerchief waving, and then a sweet little face looked out to smile at her.

"Oh, it's Flossie Barnet!" cried Nancy, joyfully, "and her mamma, and,—why, yes it *is!* It's Flossie's Uncle Harry!"

He heard the cry, and heard the welcome in her voice.

"Yes, it's Flossie's Uncle Harry, and all the other little girls' Uncle Harry who care to claim him for an uncle," he said, with a laugh, as he lifted his little niece down from the barge.

"Oh, I'm *so* glad he came, too," said Dorothy, upon hearing which, he turned and lifting his hat, bowed, thus acknowledging the compliment that she had paid him. His eyes twinkled with pleasure, for he loved children, and he valued their regard. He was a big, manly fellow, with a warm heart, as loving, and as merry as that of a child.

[33]

The Barnet party added much to the pleasure of little events and entertainments at the Hotel Cleverton. Flossie became, at once, a favorite with the other children, and her charming mother was deservedly popular with all.

Uncle Harry, who possessed a fine voice, willingly sang whenever a musical program was arranged for an evening, while his lovely young wife, who was an accomplished pianist, played his accompaniments, or rendered solos, thus generously adding to the pleasure of the other guests.

[34]

---

"I tell you what it is," said old Mr. Cunningham, "that big bank of clouds hanging over that mountain means rain, and plenty of it, I believe."

"I think you are right," said Uncle Harry, "and if we *do* have a three days' rain, as we sometimes do, we shall have to use every effort to keep things humming, and so forget the storm."

They had been sitting on the piazza, and talking of the days of uninterrupted sunshine that they had enjoyed, when, in a few minutes, the blue sky had been hidden, as if by a thin, pearly veil, while hanging over the mountain was the mass of leaden clouds that had seemed to prophesy rain.

"Oh, *I* don't want it to rain," wailed Floretta, who stood near them, her pretty face puckered into a most unpleasant frown.

[35]

"I'm afraid the weather can't be arranged especially for you," said Mr. Cunningham.

He, like all the guests, was very tired of the child who was either whining, or boisterously, rudely gay. Just at this point, Mrs. Paxton came out on the piazza, a small note-book and pencil in her hand.

She hastened toward the two gentlemen, and smiled as if she were conferring a favor.

"With the chance of a stormy evening, we are trying to arrange a program that will give us a pleasant evening indoors," she said. "I am sure you will help me."

She had smiled at both, and old Mr. Cunningham, who heartily disliked her, was only too glad to reply. [36]

"I'm not musical, madam," he said, "but I'll whistle 'Hail Columbia' for you, if you will promise not to reprimand me if I get off the key."

"Dear, dear!" she cried. "You are always so amusing. One never knows if you are joking, or serious."

"It would be very serious, and no joke, I assure you, if you were actually obliged to listen to my whistling," was the curt reply, and he turned once more to scan the sky and the distant mountains.

Uncle Harry, of course, agreed to sing, his wife promised to play, and Mrs. Paxton moved toward where Mrs. Dainty and her companion, Aunt Charlotte, were sitting, with Dorothy and Nancy near them.

"Will your little daughter sing for us this evening?" she asked. "We are eager to have quite a fine program." [37]

"Dorothy shall sing for you, surely," Mrs. Dainty said, "and Nancy, I am sure, will give a little solo."

"Oh, does Nancy sing or play?" Mrs. Paxton asked, in surprise, for thus far Nancy had not exhibited her talent, whatever it might be.

"She will give you a solo that shall be neither singing nor playing," Mrs. Dainty replied, with a quiet smile.

"How very interesting!" said Mrs. Paxton. She had invited Dorothy to sing because other guests had expressed the wish to hear her.

Here was a *second* child with talent of *some* kind! Well, Floretta's imitations of other people would certainly eclipse the efforts of the other little girls! Mrs. Paxton's sole idea in arranging the entertainment was for the purpose of showing Floretta's mimicry. [38]

A small figure paused a moment in the doorway, then stepped back, and peeped out, scanning the groups upon the piazza.

"She isn't there!" he whispered. "She's backed out, an' she *said* she'd do it!"

He drew back into the shadow, and waited, hoping that when he looked again he might see her.

A second peep at the guests on the piazza showed that Floretta was not among them.

"She didn't *try* to do it!" he muttered.

He held something in his hand, which he kept behind his back.

He was about to peep again when a light hand touched his shoulder.

He turned, and there stood Floretta, looking prettier than usual in her short white frock, white shoes, and pink hair ribbons. [39]

"Did you get one?" whispered Jack.

"Look!" said Floretta, and from behind her back she produced a long corn-cob. "I took mine from the table at noon, when ma wasn't looking, and ran from the dining-room, and hid it in our room," said Floretta. "How did you get yours?"

"I asked the head waiter to get mine for me," said Jack, "and he acted as if he thought me a ninny. He gave it to me all the same, and asked what I was up to. I didn't tell him, though."

They giggled softly.

"Ready?" whispered Jack, softly.

"Yes," whispered Floretta, and then, with corn-cobs held to their mouths, and their fingers working as if playing upon flutes, they marched out on to the piazza, loudly singing, "Hail Columbia." [40]

Some of the guests laughed, none so loudly as Mrs. Paxton, who declared that it taxed her intellect to imagine what put such outrageously funny notions into children's heads.

"I can answer that, madam, and without trying very hard, either. It's Satan, madam, Satan, who from watching their actions, takes them to be his near relatives," said Mr. Cunningham.

Meanwhile the little procession of two, encouraged by the laughter, marched in and out between the groups of guests, until unlucky Floretta let her corn-cob slip from her fingers, the

moist, sticky thing falling upon the light silk skirt of a lady who sat near Mrs. Paxton.

"There, there, Floretta, never mind," said Mrs. Paxton; then turning to the wearer of the gown, she said, "I don't think it will stain it in the least. Children will be children, and must have their fun!" [41]

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## CHAPTER III [42]

### AN ENTERTAINMENT

**M**RS. PAXTON had laughed at what she chose to call the "funny" antics of Floretta and Jack, but in truth, she had been very angry.

She swept from the piazza, Floretta, firmly grasped, walking beside her. Jack Tiverton's mother took him to her room, where she could talk to him, without fear of interruption.

Floretta sat on a low divan, sullen and obstinate.

For twenty minutes she had listened, while her mother had told what a disrespectful thing she had done.

"I don't see how it was not respectful," grumbled Floretta, "we were just having a little fun." [43]

"And it was fun at my expense," said Mrs. Paxton. "I was annoyed, just when I was making plans for a *fine* entertainment, to have you and that boy parade out on to the piazza with those old corn-cobs, singing, or rather *howling*, like young savages!"

This, and much more Floretta was forced to listen to, but during the remainder of the scolding, she did not speak, or reply in any way.

She was still very sullen when her mother left the room, and no one saw her until she appeared in the dining-room at dinner.

She tasted one dish after another, but managed to eat but little dinner. She wished her mother to think that the scolding had made her ill. [44]

It proved to be wasted effort. Mrs. Paxton had been so interested in what Mrs. Dayne was saying that she had not noticed that Floretta let the various courses go untasted.

She had hoped to worry her mother, but had only punished herself!

She was very hungry when they left the table, and also very angry.

"I might just as well have eaten my dinner," she muttered, "she never noticed that I didn't."

When the hour arrived that had been set for the concert, every guest was present, and all were talking and laughing gaily, and very glad that an evening's amusement had been provided.

Outside, the rain was descending in torrents, while a cold wind whistled around the corners, as if demanding admittance. [45]

Indoors the heavy red hangings were drawn over the lace draperies, great logs blazed in the fireplaces, while over all softly shaded lights gave an air of cozy comfort that made one feel sheltered and safe from the storm.

A group of ladies sat chatting together, and one, a recent arrival, was saying that she had understood that children were not permitted as guests at the Cleverton.

"There are only a few children here," Mrs. Vinton said, "and some of them are charming."

"While others are *not*?" questioned the stranger, with an odd smile.

"I'd rather not say just that," Mrs. Vinton said, "but I will say that Mrs. Dainty's little daughter, and Dorothy's little friend, Nancy, and Flossie Barnet, are three of the sweetest children I have ever met. My stay here is brighter and far pleasanter because they are also here." [46]

"Dorothy Dainty is an unusually fine singer for a child," another lady said, "and she is to sing for us to-night. I believe Nancy Ferris is to do something, but I do not know what. Does any one know if Nancy sings?"

"I've not the least idea what her talent is," said a pleasant-voiced matron, "but she is such a bright, interesting child that I feel sure that whatever she is able to do at all, she will do exceedingly well."

"Aunt Vera is to play a solo for the first number," said little Flossie Barnet, to a lady who sat near her.

"That is delightful," said the lady, "and what are you to do?"

"Oh, I'll listen, and listen," said Flossie, "and then, I'll clap to show how much I liked what the people did." [47]

"And your friend Dorothy is to sing," said the lady, "do you know what Nancy does?"

"Oh, yes, I do!" cried Flossie, "and she does it so lovely, you'll wonder how she could! I'm not to tell *what* she'll do, none of us are to tell. You'll *see* when she does it!"

"Dear little girl, you seem quite as happy as if you were to be a soloist," said the lady.

"Why, yes," said Flossie, "for when the other little girls do pretty things, I see them, but I couldn't see myself do anything!"

"Oh, you sweet, funny little girl," the pleasant-faced lady said, as she drew Flossie closer, "I never knew so dear a child."

[48]

"Dorothy and Nancy are dear," said Flossie, "and oh, you haven't seen Molly Merton! She's another one of my little friends, and she's *always* lovely to play with. We're always together when I'm at home at Merrivale."

Before the lady could express regret that she did not know Molly, the orchestra began the opening chords of an overture.

The musicians gave an afternoon and evening concert daily, throughout the season, but tonight their numbers were to be interspersed with solos given by the guests.

The orchestra was generously applauded, and then a slender figure in a gown of soft, pink satin seated itself at the piano, and with light touch and brilliant execution, played a rondo that delighted all.

In response to repeated applause, she played the "Caprice Hongroise," which aroused wild enthusiasm.

[49]

She smiled, and bowed gracefully in acknowledgment, then turning toward her husband, who now stood beside her, took from his hand the duplicate of the song that he was to sing. She always played his accompaniments.

How full of music was his rare voice, how like the tones of a silver trumpet when he sang "A Song of the Sea," how tender his tones when for a second number, he sang an "Italian Love Song!"

"Didn't he sing *fine*, just *fine*?" Flossie asked, eagerly.

"Indeed he did," the lady replied, "I never heard a more excellent voice."

"Well, he's my own Uncle Harry!" said Flossie, a world of love and pride in her voice.

[50]

A young girl played a serenade on the guitar, and a member of the orchestra played a waltz for violin, and both were encored.

Those who were to perform were in a small room awaiting their turn. They were laughing and chatting while they waited, and all, save a little girl, who kept apart from the others, seemed bright and happy. Her eyes were dull, and her red lips pouting. It was Floretta Paxton, and she was watching Nancy Ferris, noticing every detail of her costume, and looking as unpleasant as possible.

Nancy wore a frock of white gauze, thickly strewn with tiny gold spangles. Her girdle was white satin, her slippers were white, and she wore a cluster of pink rosebuds in her hair.

"What's she going to do?" Floretta asked in a fretful voice, but Mrs. Paxton, who stood beside her, could not tell her that. She knew no more of Nancy's talent than Floretta did.

[51]

Floretta had been angry in the afternoon; she had foolishly refused dinner, and was very hungry; she was made more angry because hers was not the first number on the program, and now, here was Nancy Ferris wearing a beautiful frock that far outshone her own!

She was wearing a simple pink muslin, and had felt that she was finely dressed, until Nancy appeared.

The satin girdle, the white slippers, and the spangles were more than she could forgive.

"What's she going to *do*?" she asked again, more fretfully than before.

"I *don't know*," Mrs. Paxton said.

[52]

"Well, I won't do a thing 'til I do know!" said Floretta.

Silly little girl! Always a jealous child, she now thought that Nancy *might* be another impersonator or imitator, and she was nearly wild.

The orchestra was now playing a dreamy waltz. Nancy's foot tapped the measure. Her eyes were brighter.

"What *is* she going to do?" whispered Floretta.

The tall man, who had been announcing the numbers, now swung aside the portière, and Nancy slipped from her chair, ran out upon the stage, and then,—oh, the fairy motion of her arms, the lightness with which, on the tips of her toes, she flew across the stage!

With her finger-tips she lifted the hem of her skirt, and courtesied low, then away in a dreamy whirl she sped, turning to look over her shoulder, and laugh at the faces that showed greatest surprise.

[53]

On swept the strains of sweetest music, and little Nancy, carried away with love of the music, danced more charmingly than ever before.

Aunt Charlotte and Mrs. Dainty watched her flying figure, and often as they had seen her, they knew that she was excelling herself.

"Nancy, Nancy, dear child!" murmured Aunt Charlotte.

Now, with her feet crossed, and still on the tips of her toes she whirled like a top, did the graceful rocking step, swayed like a flower in the wind, whirled about again, courtesied once more, and laughing like a merry, dark-eyed sprite, ran back into the little waiting-room.

[54]

Oh, what thunders of applause greeted her, yet she sat quietly chatting with a lady who stood near her!

Again and again they seemed to be begging that the little dancer might return.

"I'll bow to them," said Nancy, and she ran out to do so.

"Once more, once more!" cried an eager voice, and then more clapping, and even a few shrill whistles from some very young men begged her to respond.

She extended her arms for a second, then whirling rapidly, she repeated the last half of the dance, courtesied again, and when she ran back to the little room, Dorothy embraced her tenderly.

"Oh, Nancy darling!" she cried, "you never danced finer. Do you know how pleased every one is?"

"I danced to please and surprise them," said Nancy. "I *do* love to see people look happy. They couldn't remember how hard it was raining while I was whirling and dancing for them."

[55]

Floretta, now more unhappy than before, turned so that she might not see Nancy, nor note the shimmer of her spangles.

Mrs. Paxton, who had been talking with a friend, now turned toward Floretta.

"Come!" she said, "now run out, and do your very best, Floretta."

"I'm not going out!" said Floretta.

"What an idea!" cried Mrs. Paxton. "Of course you'll run out, and show every one how cute you are. Why, I planned this entertainment just to give you a chance to show off!"

"And made me the last one on the whole list!" snarled Floretta.

"Come, come!" cried her mother, "every one couldn't be first. I thought I'd have the others perform first, and then *you* could show who was the smartest! Come! They're just wild to see what you can do, and they're waiting."

[56]

"They'll *have* to wait!" hissed Floretta, like a cross little cat.

It was no use to urge, plead, or insist. Floretta was stubborn, and when once she had determined what she would, or would not do, nothing could move her.

Prayers and threats were equally useless.

Dorothy sang very sweetly, and was cordially received.

Uncle Harry and his wife sang a charming duet that delighted all, the orchestra played a military caprice, and then the remainder of the evening was spent in a little, informal dance.

[57]

All was light, laughter, and music, and there were two kinds of music that gladdened their hearts,—the sweet music of the violins, and the still sweeter melody of happy voices!

Silly little Floretta had ruined the evening for no one save her own jealous little self.

Because she could not be the first on the program, she would not appear at all, although, at heart, she longed to show her really clever mimicry. Later, after having sulked during the early part of the evening, she refused to join the dancers, and ran away to her room, angry, very angry with every one save the one person who was really at fault,—herself.

Her efforts at imitating would surely have amused, and would, doubtless, have been well received. She was rather a graceful dancer, in any of the ordinary ballroom dances, and she thus might have joined the other children when the concert was over. She had needlessly spent a most unhappy evening.

[58]

Now, in her room, she heard the strains of the orchestra, and for the first time realized how foolish she had been.

"I *had* a chance, and I lost it," she sobbed, but her tears were not tears of grieving. They were

angry tears, and the droll part of it was that while she alone was at fault, she was angry with every one but herself.

For a few moments she lay, her face hidden in her pillow. Then, she turned over into a more comfortable position, and softly she whispered, "I'll do enough to-morrow to make up!"

She did not say *what* she intended to do, but the idea evidently pleased her, for she laughed through her tears. [59]

She sprang from her bed, found a box of bonbons that her mother had won as a prize in an afternoon whist party the day before, and crept back into bed. When she had eaten nearly all of the candy, she sat up and in the softly shaded light, looked at the box with its few remaining bits of candy. She was wondering where she could hide it.

"Ma will surely notice the empty box, or anyway, I've made it *almost* empty," she said. "She might not miss it if I hid it!"

She had never been taught to be honest, so whenever she did a naughty thing, her first thought was to hide, or cover up the act. She never felt regret.

No one ever heard her gently say, "I'm sorry." [60]

Softly she crept from her bed, and made her way across the floor to the dressing-case.

She put the box upon the floor, and pushed it well under it, and wholly out of sight.

"There!" she whispered. "That's all right. I would have finished the candy, but I didn't want the whole of it. I ate the best of it. The others weren't very nice."

Down in the long parlor the guests were no longer dancing.

They were resting, and listening to a lovely barcarolle played softly by the orchestra.

Flossie, clinging to Uncle Harry's hand, drew him toward the window.

"Look!" she said, as she parted the curtains. "It isn't raining now, and the moon is coming out. It will be pleasant to-morrow! And it has been lovely in here to-night." [61]

"Dear little Flossie, dear little niece, it was your cheery, loving nature that led us to give your name to our baby. She has two fine names, she is Beatrice Florence. The first is Vera's mother's name, the second, dear, is yours."

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## CHAPTER IV [62]

### IN A BIRCH ARBOR

**T**HE storm had cleared the air, no mist veiled the mountains, the sunlight lay everywhere, gilding valley and stream.

Many of the guests had started early in the morning for a trip to a distant mountain from the summit of which a delightful view might be enjoyed.

They were to ride over in the barge to the base of the mountain, have a picnic lunch under the trees, and then climb the rugged path up the mountain side.

It would occupy half the day and it would be afternoon before the barge would return with its merry, tired party.

Floretta Paxton and Jack Tiverton were usually in sight, or, as they were always noisy, within hearing might be nearer the truth, but they had gone over to a spot that the children called "The Pool," a bit of water not much larger than a big puddle. [63]

It existed only after a heavy rain, but near its edge the slender birches grew, and their silvery white trunks and the bright, blue sky were clearly reflected on its surface.

Jack had decided to launch his toy boat there, and, as Floretta had hemmed the tiny sails, he had felt obliged to listen to her coaxing, and permit her to go with him.

"I'll let you christen her," he had said, in a moment of generosity, and then regretted it.

Floretta's idea of a christening ceremony was very elaborate, while Jack thought that shouting the vessel's name, and shoving it into the water was all that was necessary. [64]

Nancy was helping Aunt Charlotte, so when Dorothy ran out to the piazza, she found it deserted, and she stood looking in surprise at the rocking chairs and hammocks that were swaying in the wind.

"Every one has gone somewhere," she thought; "didn't any one stay at home?"

She stood for a moment in the doorway, wondering what to do. Suddenly her face brightened, and she clapped her hands.

"The very thing!" she said, and she turned and hastened to her room to find her latest gift.

It was a beautiful book of fairy tales, and although it had been given her over a week ago, she had read but a few of the stories. Mrs. Dainty had sent to the city for the book, and ever since the day of its arrival Dorothy had been wild to read it. [65]

Something had been planned for each sunny day, and as the weather had continued fair, the book had been opened but a few times, and then for only a brief glance at the tales or the illustrations.

Mrs. Dainty had gone to the village, a ride of about an hour from the hotel, and Aunt Charlotte was still occupied with her letters.

Nancy was sealing and stamping the envelopes, as Dorothy passed the door.

"I'm going over to the little 'birch arbor,'" she said. "I'm taking my new fairy book for company."

"I'll come, too, just as soon as I've finished these envelopes," said Nancy, and she began to work faster. [66]



"OH, WHAT A LOVELY, *LOVELY* STORY!" SAID DOROTHY.—PAGE 67.

The "birch arbor" was not an actual arbor, but it was a lovely spot, and the birches were exceptionally fine. Nancy and Dorothy had often been there together, and they had given it the name.

A tiny mountain brook ran through it, and it was a lovely spot in which to enjoy legends or fairy tales.

In a few moments Dorothy had reached the place, and when she had seated herself, she opened the book where a fine picture showed the prince, whose father had given him three wishes as his only inheritance, and then had sent him out to seek his fortune.

Twice she had commenced to read the story, and had been obliged to lay it aside. Now, with only the bees and the butterflies hovering about her, she read the fascinating tale. [67]

It proved to be even more charming than she had expected.

The prince was tall, and dark, and handsome, and his heart was so good and true, that Dorothy felt that he richly deserved the beautiful princess whom he finally won.

Her eyes sparkled as she read of the great court wedding.

"And the lovely princess looked more beautiful than ever in her wedding gown of cloth of gold, thickly set with diamonds, and her crown of diamonds and sapphires."

"Oh what a lovely, *lovely* story!" said Dorothy, as she turned the page.

"Tiny princes carried her train, and as the happy pair reached the palace gates, and were about to enter the royal coach, the blare of trumpets sounded, as the guards in blue and gold played a gay fanfare." [68]

"Toot! Toot! Toot!"



Dorothy sprang to her feet.

It was as if those silver-toned trumpets had sounded close beside her. A moment more, and a huge automobile appeared from behind the trees and shrubbery, and slackening its speed, came, at last, to a standstill, and an old lady leaned out to question her.

"Are we going in the right direction, my dear, to reach the Hotel Cleverton?"

Dorothy walked toward the car, and looked up into the hard, old face.

"This little road is *right*," said Dorothy, "but the broad road that leads out of this one is not so rough, and it is a *little* shorter."

"There, Minturn, I *said plainly* that I believed we could get there quicker some other way!" [69]

"You are *sure* about the Cleverton?" the old lady asked. "You *know* where it is?"

"I'm staying there with mamma, and that truly is the right way," said Dorothy, her soft eyes looking up into the hard, old face.

"I guess I can trust you," the old lady said, not smiling, but looking a bit less stern.

"Now, Minturn, we'll *try* to reach the hotel, sometime before dark!" she said curtly.

Puffing and whirring the big automobile started off up the road, the old lady sitting stern and erect, as if she thought her driver needed watching, and she was determined to keep a sharp eye upon him.

"Why, how queer!" said Dorothy. "She didn't even say 'good-bye,' or 'good-morning.' Perhaps she was very tired, and forgot,"—then after a moment she added, "but my beautiful mamma *never* forgets." [70]

She went back to the pretty spot where she had been reading, and sitting down, opened the book, but she could not keep her mind upon the stories. The strange face of the old lady seemed to look at her from the printed page.

How small and sharp her eyes had been, and how she asked the same question again and again. Did she doubt the answer given her?

All these, and many more questions puzzled Dorothy, and with the open book lying upon her lap, she looked off where the sunlight lay upon the grass.

She was still sitting thus when a merry voice aroused her, and she turned to see Nancy running toward her. [71]

"Oh, Dorothy!" she cried. "You ought to have been up at the hotel just a few moments ago. A new guest came, and she was so cross, it *must* be that she didn't want to come. But if she truly *didn't* want to, then why *did* she?"

"Why, Nancy, who wouldn't think it fine to come up here to the mountains, and stay at the Cleverton?" said Dorothy in surprise.

"Well, you wouldn't have thought the old lady was glad to be there, if you'd seen her," said Nancy.

"Oh, was it an old lady that you were talking about?" Dorothy asked quickly.

"Yes, and you ought to have seen her eyes snap when she scolded her chauffeur. She told him she might have arrived an hour before just as well as not, and she kept right on scolding to herself, all the way up to the piazza, and, Dorothy, she looked so cross, I wouldn't wonder if she was scolding up in her room now!" [72]

"She must be the same one that was here just a little while ago," Dorothy said, "and she asked me to tell her the nearest way to the Cleverton. When I told her, she made the man rush off over the road, and she was scolding him when they left here. Perhaps she was tired, and will feel pleasanter when she has rested."

"Perhaps," agreed Nancy, "but I know Aunt Charlotte and your mamma don't act that way when they are tired."

Dorothy could not dispute that, and soon the two little girls were enjoying the fairy book together.

"Now, this is the story I've just been reading," said Dorothy, "and this is the picture of the prince. Isn't he handsome?" [73]

"Oh, yes," said Nancy, "and doesn't he look like Flossie's Uncle Harry?"

"Why, he *does*, truly," cried Dorothy. "I'll show the picture to Flossie, and I'm sure she'll say it looks ever so much like him."

"Oh, she will," agreed Nancy.

"Why, it would look *exactly* like him, if *he* only had a cap with plumes," said Dorothy.

Uncle Harry, coming briskly up the path, was just in time to hear the last few words.

"I'm very curious to know who it is who needs a cap with plumes," he said.

"Oh, who knew you were right here to hear it?" said Dorothy.

"Oh, was it a state secret?" he asked. "Well, now it's a pity I heard it, but as it happens I *did*, I think I must ask for the rest of the secret." [74]

"Oh, *would* you tell?" Dorothy asked, turning to Nancy, but before she could reply, Uncle Harry spoke.

"I'm really too curious," he said, "so I think I'll threaten to sit on this stump, until you tell me the secret, and let me tell you two little friends, that *I've* a secret; it's a nice one, too, but,—" he paused to watch the effect of his words.

"But—But—" they cried.

"But,—" said Uncle Harry, "I wouldn't tell mine *first!*"

Wag that he was, he could not resist the temptation to tease just a bit.

Dorothy took the pretty book, and opening it at the page that showed the picture of the prince, she said, "We only said the brave prince looked like you, no, I mean you look like him, and we said you'd look *just* like him if you had a cap with plumes." [75]

Uncle Harry appeared to study the picture very carefully. After a moment, he said:

"That's a fine compliment, but there's one thing about it that worries me, so I'll have to ask about it.

"In this picture the prince wears a blue blouse and a pair of green shoes, a pink cap with white plumes, gray hose, and crimson trunks. Now, if I should decide to purchase a pink cap with white plumes, would you expect me to come out arrayed in all those colors? I really feel that the costume is a *bit*, just a *bit* too gay."

"Oh, we'll not ask you to be quite as gay as that," said Dorothy, "and we'll promise one thing. We won't even ask you to buy a pink cap if you'll tell us your secret now." [76]

He laughed gaily.

"Perhaps I really *ought* to keep it a little longer. How would it do if I should tell you my secret some time next week?" he asked.

"Oh, no, no!" they cried, "tell it now!"

"Well, then, there's to be a fair 'way down in the village, a real country fair, and I'm intending to hire a barge, and take all of the *very* young ladies over with me to see the fun. I mean ladies as young as you, and Nancy, and Flossie. I shall invite all the wee ladies that are stopping at the hotel, and I shall take all who accept."

He looked into their bright faces, and laughed when Dorothy said:

"As if *any* little girl *wouldn't* accept!"

"You mustn't expect it to be a grand affair. It will be, as I said, a real old-fashioned country fair, but there will be a jolly ride over there, and the return trip, and I fancy you will enjoy it all," he said, "and I shall have the delight of giving pleasure." [77]

A friend who had been looking for Uncle Harry, now appeared on the winding path, a clump of large trees having hidden his approach.

The two young men started off for a long tramp, and Dorothy and Nancy walked slowly back to the hotel.

"The prince *did* look like Uncle Harry," said Nancy, "and the picture of the naughty old fairy that enchanted the sleeping beauty, looks like the lady that came this morning, and was so very cross."

"Then that *is* the same one who stopped to ask the way, for she looked just like that. I'll always think, every time I look at her, that she's the black fairy." [78]

And when they ran up on to the piazza, there sat the very person whom they had been speaking of, looking somewhat cooler with her long travelling cloak removed.

Her black gown was of some thin material, and just as the two little girls ran up on to the piazza, she dropped the large, black fan that she had been wielding.

Nancy, who was nearer to her than Dorothy, picked up the fan for her. Without a smile, she took the fan, and they heard some slight sound. Possibly it might have been a softly murmured word of thanks, but it did not sound like it.

"She seems very strange," said Dorothy, "but perhaps she's still tired."

She was always unwilling to say that any one was wilfully rude or disagreeable. [79]

And now Aunt Charlotte, with Mrs. Dainty, came out to enjoy the fine air, and Dorothy and Nancy ran to them to tell them of the treat that Uncle Harry had in store for them.

"It's only a few days to wait, and isn't he kind to take us?" said Dorothy.

"He is indeed," said Mrs. Dainty, "and I hope all his little friends will be very thoughtful, and make him just as little trouble as possible. He takes quite a care in inviting so many children."

"Oh, all the children love him, and there isn't one who would want to be any bother, unless it was Floretta," said Dorothy, "and perhaps she'll be having such a nice time, she won't think to be naughty."

Mrs. Dainty smiled at this view of it. She could not help thinking that Floretta never needed time to think in order to be disagreeable, but she did not say so. [80]

Aunt Charlotte Grayson, seeing the stranger sitting alone, paused near her chair to say a friendly word.

She remained but few moments, however, because the woman seemed not inclined to talk.

Aunt Charlotte well knew that the stranger was not courteous, but she tried to think, as Dorothy had, that fatigue, after a long journey, made her eager for silence and rest.

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## CHAPTER V

 [81]

### THE MOUNTAIN PARTY

AS the days flew by, the stranger became a bit more friendly, conversing sometimes with Mrs. Dainty and Aunt Charlotte, but often, far more often, with Mrs. Paxton.

It was not that she sought to become acquainted with Floretta's mother; it was, rather, that Mrs. Paxton seemed determined to force the friendship.

"Her name is Fenton, Mrs. Fenton, and isn't it odd, *my* name was Fenton before I married. Floretta's middle name is Fenton. I really feel almost as if I were related to her, because of the name," declared Mrs. Paxton one morning, whereupon Mrs. Fenton, coming out on to the piazza, remarked: [82]

"Oh, indeed!"

Mrs. Paxton blushed and hesitated, then recovering herself, she said:

"I was just telling these ladies of my friendly feeling for you."

"Oh, indeed!" Mrs. Fenton repeated, as she sank into a large rocker, and looked off across the valley to the distant mountains.

After a few moments she seemed to have lost interest in the view, and, taking up a small embroidery frame, commenced to ply her needle as if she were eager to finish the pretty doily.

Two little figures came slowly up the path to the piazza. They were returning from the christening of the little boat.

"What is wrong, Jack? You don't look very happy," said Mrs. Tiverton. [83]

"He wanted me to christen his boat, but he wouldn't give it my name!" said Floretta, before Jack could reply.

"She thought just because she hemmed the sails I'd name it the *Floretta*, but I wouldn't, so I shoved it into the water myself, and shouted *Carlotta*. That's the name of a girl that goes to my school, and I like her."

"You say Floretta hemmed your sails," said Mrs. Tiverton.

"Well, I thanked her for that, and I let her go to the launching, and I let her christen it, but I don't see that I need name it for her," said Jack, stoutly.

Mrs. Fenton had not heeded what the children were saying. One might have fancied that she did not hear, although both Floretta and Jack stood quite near her chair. [84]

A large spool that she had wound with colored silk slipped from her lap, and rolled toward Floretta.

"Pick it up, dear," Mrs. Paxton said.

"Don't want to," said Floretta.

Mrs. Fenton stooped, and recovered the spool, and, taking her embroidery frame in her hand, left the piazza, and mounted the stairs to her room.

"Why *were* you so rude?" said Mrs. Paxton, but Floretta, perching upon the low railing, began

softly humming "Yankee Doodle."

Jack Tiverton, espying a boy that he knew, whistled loudly, and then, as the other boy turned, ran after him, the two whooping and shouting like savages.

"It is almost lunch time, Jack!" Mrs. Tiverton cried, and the boy turned, and waved his hand to show that he heard her. [85]

"Boys aren't apt to forget meal time," muttered old Mr. Cunningham behind his paper.

True enough, Jack returned in ample time, and was the first at the table.

Early in the afternoon Dorothy and Nancy went out for a drive with Romeo.

It was one of those sunny days that tempt nearly every one to ride or walk.

The mountain roads were rather lonely, and Mrs. Dainty insisted that whether Dorothy were riding Romeo, or driving in the phaeton, the groom must ride at a little distance behind her.

There were the lovely, slender birches on either side of the roads, there were patches of bright green moss upon which the sunlight rested, there were blackberry vines and woodbine wreathing the low stone walls, and here and there a mullein raised its stately head from its base of velvet leaves. [86]

Oh, it seemed like an enchanted country, where new beauties were to be found on either hand!

"Look!" cried Dorothy, "close beside that mullein is an evening primrose, and their blossoms are the same color."

Then a tiny chipmunk sprang upon the wall, sat erect, and watched them for a moment, then ran up the trunk of a slender tree, where from a low branch he watched until they had passed. Then back to the wall he sprang, where he chattered as if scolding the little girls who had disturbed his solitude. It may be that, instead, he was talking to himself, and telling what charming little girls they were.

A long way from the hotel they passed Jack Tiverton, with a number of other boys who were staying at a hotel a few miles distant from the Cleverton. [87]

They were all somewhat larger than Jack, and he thought it fine to be with them.

He had met them at a ball game three weeks before, and he had been very busy holding their acquaintance ever since.

"We're going to catch the echo, and keep it, too!" shouted Jack.

"It's mocking you now," said Dorothy, with a laugh.

"I know it," said Jack, "but we'll catch it, and fasten it so it can't get away."

"How will you fasten an echo?" Nancy asked, turning, and looking over her shoulder as the little phaeton sped past.

"Trust us to find a way!" cried Jack, and the others laughed as if they already knew exactly how to do it.

They left the road, and, vaulting over the wall, crossed the open field, singing a gay, rollicking song as they went. [88]

"They just say they're going hunting for the echo," said Dorothy, "and they say it for fun, but I wonder where they are going, and what they truly are going to do."

The groom, riding nearer, touched his hat.

"Please, Miss Dorothy, I heard the lads saying that there's an old house over near that mountain, where a hermit lived years ago, and they're off to find it if they can."

"Then why didn't they say so, instead of telling such a tale about catching the echo?" Dorothy asked.

"They were saying that they wanted to find the hut, and hunt in it, and around it to find things the old fellow may have hidden. They feared you or Miss Nancy might tell some other lad. They're wanting it all to themselves." [89]

Having told this bit of information, the groom allowed the carriage to pass him, and once more rode behind it.

The two little girls talked of the long tramp that the boys would have before they would find the hermit's hut.

"And perhaps they won't find it at all, after all their hunting," said Nancy.

"Well, I hope they will," said Dorothy, "because it's so horrid to hunt and hunt, for nothing."

"Oh, look!" she cried a moment later. "See the lovely mosses! Let's take some back to mamma and Aunt Charlotte."

They were, indeed, beautiful. There was green moss that looked like velvet, and gray moss formed like tiny cups with scarlet edges, and other moss tipped with red.

[90]

On an old stump they found shell-like fungus, some a creamy white, others white, with soft brown markings.

Oh, a fine collection of rarely beautiful mosses and lichens they gathered, and heaped on the bottom of the phaeton.

Romeo turned his head to watch them as if he wondered when they would have gathered enough.

"Oh, we do keep you standing, dear, don't we?" Dorothy said, patting his neck as she spoke.

"Oh, you needn't look for sugar," she said, laughing, "for I haven't any with me, but we'll get you some fresh clover."

With Nancy's help she soon had a fine bunch of pink clover for Romeo, and he seemed quite as pleased as if it had been the cubes that he so often enjoyed.

[91]

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When the party of boys had left the road to cross the fields that lay between them, and the forest at the foot of the mountain, they had believed that they knew exactly how to go to reach the hermit's hut.

The old hermit had been dead for years, but every season the summer guests at the hotels and farmhouses searched all around the deserted hut, expecting to find some relic to take home and label as a bit of the hermit's property.

The boys supposed that they had the woods to themselves, and that they would be uninterrupted in their search of the place.

They did not know that the mountain climbers had taken the same direction, intending, before they enjoyed their lunch beneath the trees, to stop at the old, deserted house.

[92]

Mrs. Paxton and little Floretta had worked more persistently than any others of the party, and Mrs. Paxton had found a small, brass button.

The others had laughed at the prize, asking her if she intended to keep it as a souvenir.

"Certainly," said Mrs. Paxton. "I'm sure this brass button must have belonged on some old coat that the hermit wore!"

"Perhaps in his youth, before he came up here to live, he may have been a janitor," said a young man, with a saucy laugh.

"Or a brakeman," suggested another.

[93]

Mrs. Paxton pretended not to hear their teasing, and though the prize that she had found had been only a valueless thing, she kept it.

Floretta was very eager to stay, and continue to peep into cracks in the floor and walls, and to poke with a stick under the doorsill, and in the soft earth around the hut.

The older members of the party knew that if they were to ascend the mountain, see the view, and descend before twilight, they must start at once.

As soon as their picnic lunch had been enjoyed they commenced to climb the rugged mountain path.

It was very steep and rough, and it had been said that no children should be allowed in the party.

Mrs. Paxton had insisted that her small daughter was a wonderful little climber, who was quite equal to the demands of a long tramp.

[94]

Floretta had wished to remain at the hut, but as she could not do that, she proceeded to make herself as unpleasant as possible, by complaining every step of the way, until one young man voiced the feeling of the entire party.

"This is a horrid, rough old path, and I'm tired. I wish I'd stayed at *home!*" said Floretta.

"I wish so, *too!*" said the young man, and several of the party, too polite to say it, at heart, agreed with him.

Floretta's was the only gloomy face, however. The others tramped gaily onward, singing snatches of song, and laughing as they stepped upon rolling stones, or tripped over long, gnarled roots that rose above the surface, as if especially designed to catch lagging feet.

[95]

"All day upon the hills  
We've chased the chamois far,  
But deeper joy now thrills

The youth sang gaily, and several of his friends joined him in singing the old song.

Arrived at the summit they rested, enjoyed the view, laughed and joked about their weariness, and made many wild guesses as to how long it would take them to make the descent and drive back to the hotel.

"It will be three o'clock before we reach the Cleverton," said one.

"Nonsense!" cried another, "this is really called a mountain by courtesy. It's only a big hill. I say we shall be on the piazza, and wondering what we can do next, as early as half-past two." [96]

"It's more likely to be half-past *three!*" declared another, and when all felt sufficiently rested, they commenced the descent.

Floretta refused to keep closely beside her mother, insisting upon clinging to another member of the party, to whom she had taken a fancy.

The party was a large one, much larger, indeed, than had at first been planned, and while half of the number were guests at the Cleverton, the others were from the Merlington, a hotel situated nearer the village, and from several large farmhouses that entertained summer boarders.

The guests from the Cleverton had kept closely together during the trip, while those from the Merlington had done the same. [97]

They had reached the foot of the mountain, and were tramping along a path that ran nearly parallel to that on which the hermit's house stood.

Floretta saw the boys, near the house, and also saw that Jack Tiverton was with them.

Without a word, she left the lady to whose arm she had been clinging, and making her way along behind bushes and underbrush, she managed to sneak in at the door of the hut, without having been seen by the party of boys.

The lady, with whom she had been walking, supposed that she had run back to join her mother, while Mrs. Paxton felt quite undisturbed, because she believed that her little girl was still clinging to the arm of the lady with whom she had chosen to walk. [98]

It had required two barges to convey the party, and now they found them waiting, the horses a bit impatient to be off.

The guests from the Merlington clambered into the first barge, and they with a few of the farmhouse party filled it to overflowing, some of the men being obliged to ride homeward, seated upon the steps. Meanwhile the Cleverton people were forced to wait until the barge for their party drove up.

The first barge had started, and was rolling along, and a chorus of college songs was wafted back on the breeze, while handkerchiefs fluttered as the gay passengers laughed at the crowd that had not yet started.

Mrs. Paxton paused with her foot on the step, and looked back.

"Why, where's Floretta?" she asked. [99]

"In the first barge," cried a voice in reply.

"Are you *sure?*" she asked.

"Why, certainly," said the other, "she's with that tall, fine-looking lady from the Merlington. She'll be home before you are."

The second barge was soon filled and on its way. The horses were less fresh than those of the first barge, and seemed determined to lag. Indeed, they required constant urging to keep them from dropping into a slow walk.

"Those other fellows ahead of us started some lively college songs," said a disgusted passenger, "and they're actually out of sight now; but the way these nags are poking I couldn't think of anything to sing that would be slow enough to be appropriate." [100]

And while one barge was going over the road at a lively rate of speed, and the other jogging along at a snail's pace, Floretta, at the hut, was having a most exciting time.

Once inside the place, she had crouched beneath a window to learn, if possible, what the boys were talking about.

She had wanted to remain there when the party had started for the mountain path, and she had been very impatient during the long tramp. She cared nothing for the view, and determined, on the return, to stop, if only for a few moments, at the hut.

## THE ECHO CAPTURED

FLORETTA had intended to hunt for treasure, hoping to get something more valuable than the brass button that her mother had found.

She was not at all afraid of Jack Tiverton, but of those larger boys she was not quite sure.

As she knelt beneath the window she could hear only the voices of the boys that were nearest to the hut, and hearing only parts of their conversation, she could not understand what the first speaker expected to find.

"If I find it, I'll put it where it will be safe," he said. [102]

There was a pause, and then a voice more distant replied.

She did not hear what it said, but she did hear the answer made by the boy who had first spoken.

"If the ghost of the old hermit was in the hut, it might hear you."

"Yes, and what would he say about your hunting for things that may have belonged to him?" said another, with a teasing laugh.

"Oh, I'm not afraid," was the careless answer.

"You're not?" jeered a laughing voice.

"I think we've poked around out here long enough without finding anything," said Jack Tiverton, "let's hunt inside the house."

"Wait a minute," called a boy who had not yet spoken, "just till I've looked into this hollow tree trunk." [103]

"And *then* what?" asked a merry voice.

"*Then* hunt in the house, of course!" was the curt reply.

Floretta thought she saw a chance for fun.

Softly, yet quickly, she crept up the rickety little stairway, built close against the wall, and leading to the tiny loft.

The loft was really little more than a space beneath the roof where the old hermit might have stored a few provisions. She could not stand, or even sit, erect, and she crouched upon the bit of dusty flooring.

She was none too soon, for in a few seconds the boys rushed in, and then began a discussion as to whether it would be safe to take a plank up from the floor to look beneath it for hidden treasure. [104]

"You oughtn't to do that," said Jack Tiverton, "somebody might arrest you, or all of us, if folks found out we did it."

"Arrest us for spoiling a floor in this old hut!" cried an older boy. "I wonder you don't think the old hermit might holler if he heard us pull up a plank!"

"Well," said Jack stoutly, "you'd be as scared as I would if he did holler!"

"You're a small boy, Jack, and easily scared," was the taunting reply.

"Well, pull up a plank, and see what happens. I dare you to!" cried Jack.

"Here goes then!" said the older boy, and catching hold of a plank that had rotted at one end, he pulled it up.

"*Oh, let it alone!*" groaned a boy in a farther corner of the room, in an attempt to imitate an old voice. [105]

"*Oh, let it alone!*" came in exactly the same voice from the loft.

Sidney Cumston, the big boy, who had laughed at little Jack Tiverton, dropped the plank, and turned pale, while not a boy spoke or moved.

"Come, come!" said Sidney, when he caught his breath, "we're a precious pack of sillies! Help me lift this big board, will you?"

"Will you?" came from the loft, in the very manner in which he had said it.

Again he dropped the plank.

"What does it mean?" cried Sidney.

"Mean?" came his last word repeated.

The boys were now thoroughly frightened.

"Come!" cried Sidney, "let's leave here!"

[106]

"Here!" came a repetition of his last word, and big as he was, he had turned to run, when a faint ripple of smothered laughter came down from the loft.

Immediately Sidney's pale face flushed red. It flashed through his mind that these younger boys had seen that he was frightened.

He had been laughed at by the owner of the voice that had mocked him, and the boys would *never* stop laughing.

Quickly he mounted the steps, and roughly he dragged little Floretta from her hiding place, half carrying her down the stairway, because it was too narrow for two to descend.

"So you thought it was funny, just *funny* to mock us, did you?" he asked, when they reached the floor.

Floretta was not laughing now.

[107]

She was sullen, and at the same time frightened.

What would they do to her?

They crowded around her, frowning and making all sorts of wild suggestions as to what should be done with her.

"Keep her mocking till she's got enough of it!" cried one.

"Put her back in the loft, and leave her there! She seemed to like there," said another.

The big boy, whose hand was still on her shoulder, was more angry than either of the others.

He was a bully, always ready to torment some one smaller than himself.

He had reason to be provoked with Floretta, and the fact that she was only a little girl, made no impression upon him.

He would as willingly punish a girl, as a boy, and the fact that his captive was smaller than he, only proved that the task would be an easy one.

[108]

"You think it's smart to imitate, and it is. P'raps you think you're the echo that's over in the mountain!" he sneered.

She made no answer. She was crying now.

"Say! Let her off!" cried Jack Tiverton. "She's only a girl!"

The smallest boy in the crowd, he saw Sidney's cowardice.

"Oh, are you sweet on Floretta?" jeered Sidney.

Jack drew back abashed. He did not like Floretta at all, but he did think it mean for a big boy to frighten so small a girl.

"I ain't going to hurt you," said Sidney, "but I'm going to give you a chance to play echo, till you're tired of it. I guess you'll get enough of it before you get through!"

[109]

"Come, fellows! Get some good long pieces of wild grape-vine! I'll fasten Miss Echo where she can shout all day, and nobody'll stop her!"

"I won't go with you!" screamed Floretta, who had found her voice, "You sha'n't tie me!"

"Oh, is that so?" said Sidney, in a teasing tone. "We'll tie you so you can't get away!"

She pulled back.

"No, you don't!" said Sidney, grasping her arm with a firmer hold.

"Now, walk right along, or these other fellows will help me carry you!" he added, and Floretta thought best to walk.

"Where'll you take her?" asked one.

[110]

"Right there," said Sidney. "That rock is just covered with vines that cling fast to it. Hurry, now! Pull down some long, strong pieces! Here, you scratch like a cat! Stop that!"

Floretta, half wild to get away, was attacking his hand in the manner of a little wild animal.

"Let me go, then!" she screamed.

"Not much!" cried Sidney, and with the help of another boy, he dragged her, screaming and kicking, all the way, until they reached the rocky ledge.

"There, now! Hold on! You're showing too much temper!" cried a stout lad who was helping to bind her.



"I won't stay! You sha'n't tie me!" she screamed, but without replying, they drew the tough vines closer about her, lashing her into such a network of stems and stout vines that it would be impossible for her to escape. [111]

"There!" cried Sidney, when he felt sure that she was securely made a little prisoner, "You can shout till you're tired, and if you want to mock any one, you can mock yourself! Good-afternoon, Miss Echo!"

He lifted his cap, with elaborate courtesy, and marched off whistling:

"The Girl I Left Behind Me."

They did not look back. Sidney marched boldly away, believing that he had done a very smart thing, but the other boys felt less comfortable.

They had been angry with her, and they had wished to see her punished, but they could not help thinking that she was a little girl, and they were leaving her alone in the woods! [112]

Jack Tiverton was, by far, the most uneasy.

He was the smallest of the party, and, while he had asked Sidney to let Floretta go, he had known it was useless to do more.

The eight other boys were stronger than he, and any attempt upon his part to free her would be worse than useless. They would not listen, but instead, would pounce upon him.

The other boys talked, laughed, and whistled, to imply that they were not thinking of what they had done, but all the way back to the Cleverton, little Jack was wondering what he could do.

He dared not go straight to Floretta's mother, and tell her of her little girl's plight.

He knew if he did that, the boys would soon learn who had played "tell-tale," and then,—what would they do to *him*? [113]

And yet, he was determined, in some way, to help Floretta.

How could he let a little girl stay out there in the woods all night?

Of course some one, walking through the woods might find her, but if no one happened to?

Jack knew that the risk was too great. It was just before he reached the Cleverton, that he thought of the best way that he could do it.

He would write a note to Mrs. Paxton. He would drop that note into the mail box that hung at the side door. The letters were always distributed at four, and Sidney Cumston, who had a fine watch, had just said that it was three. He left the boys at the entrance to the Merlington, and hurried on that he might have plenty of time for his note. [114]

Mrs. Tiverton was out driving with a friend, and Jack had quite a hunt before he could find pencil or paper for his note.

At last he found a blank book, and with a pencil he wrote this note.

"Deer Mrs. Paxton:—

"Yor litle girl is tied up in the woods opsite the hermits hut. You better go get her real quick or somethin may happen too her.

"Yors trooly."

He folded it, and, in place of the envelope that he could not find, he tied around it a bit of string that he found in his pocket.

Boldly he addressed it, in very large letters, and sneaking down the stairway, and around on the piazza toward the side door, watched his chance, and slipped it into the mail box. [115]

There was much excitement on the front piazza, because the guests had arrived in the barge but a few moments before, and Mrs. Paxton had given a maid a generous "tip" to go over to the Merlington, and bring Floretta back with her.

"She returned with the party that came from the Merlington, and I don't wish her to remain there. I want her to come right back to me," said Mrs. Paxton.

"Very well, ma'am," the maid had replied, and with the coins in her hand, had started off at once toward the other hotel.

When little Jack Tiverton ran around to the front piazza, the maid had just returned.

"If you please, Mrs. Paxton, your little girl isn't over to the Merlington, and hasn't been there, and a lady that was with the party that came home from the mountain trip, says the child wasn't in their barge at all. I asked her if she was *sure*, and she said, she couldn't help being sure, because there wasn't *any* child in their barge." [116]

Of course excitement reigned supreme. Mrs. Paxton seemed half wild, and every one shared her anxiety.

The fact that Floretta was not a favorite made no difference. No one liked to think of a little girl out there alone on the mountain path, or in the woods, especially as it was already late afternoon.

"What a dreadful thing!" cried Mrs. Paxton, wringing her hands, and walking up and down the piazza.

"Who will go with me? I cannot go alone, and where, *where* shall we look first? Who saw her last?"

[117]

At this moment a man-servant came out from the hall with a tray of letters that he began to distribute.

"One for you, Mrs. Paxton," said the man, as he touched her arm gently.

"Oh, I can't think of letters now," she said, but something about the note seemed so unusual that she looked at it.

She drew off the string that had been loosely tied, and read the hastily scrawled lines.

She screamed, and Aunt Charlotte, who was standing near her, put her arm around her and supported her, or she would have fallen.

Many of those who gathered around Mrs. Paxton were inclined to think the note a hoax, but Mrs. Dainty, coming forward, lifted her handsome head, and looking at the men who were lounging comfortably in the large rockers, or sitting upon the piazza railing, spoke the word that spurred them to action.

[118]

"Is it safe to *guess* that this is a joke? True, it is written in a boyish hand, and while it *may* be a boy's joke, may it not be a boy's means of telling us what has actually happened? I would not, were I a man, take the responsibility or chance, of leaving Floretta out there, because I would go to the place, and thus learn, not guess, if this information be true."

She had scarcely finished speaking when a number of men rose, and one, who chose to lead the party, lifted his hat to Mrs. Dainty, saying:

"We are off, madam. We only needed an inspiration to move us to endeavor."

She bowed and smiled, as she said:

"One thing I ask of you. Go as quickly as possible, for the sake of the frightened child, and the anxious mother."

[119]

"In all possible haste," was the quick reply, and she turned to offer what comfort she might to the woman who seemed nearly distracted.

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And all this time, what had been happening in the wood? For a long time Floretta had cried, screamed, and shouted, hoping that the boys would come back and release her.

Then, when she knew that they must be too far away to hear her, she tore at the clasping bonds, trying in every way to free herself. With feet and hands she strove to loosen the tough, wiry vines, kicking and trampling with her restless feet, beating and bending with her little hands, until they were torn and bleeding, and the tormenting vines seemed only to hold her with a firmer grasp, as if to prove how useless was her struggle.

[120]



WITH FEET AND HANDS SHE STROVE TO LOOSEN THE TOUGH, WIRY VINES.

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She had cried until she could cry no more, and the sturdy vines had cut and bruised her.

So firmly was she bound that she could not sink to the grass to rest, and she had only the hard, rocky ledge to lean against.

How still the woodland seemed! Sometimes a twig would snap, or a buzzing insect would pause, as if to look at her, but no one came to set her free.

She waited for a moment to regain her breath, and then again she fought and struggled with those tough, sturdy vines.

She tried to wrench them apart, to break, to tear them from her, but they only yielded enough to bend, and then snap back into the very place that she had pushed them from. [121]

Not a vine broke, not a stem gave way, and she set her lips tightly for yet greater effort!

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## CHAPTER VII

[122]

### FLORETTA'S RETURN

**A**T a far corner of the piazza sat Dorothy, her eyes terrified, and her cheeks pale. Nancy, close beside her, wound her arms about her, and sought, in every way, to comfort her.

"They'll find her soon, Dorothy, so don't you be frightened," she whispered. "They'll *surely* find her soon."

Dear little Nancy knew, better than any of Dorothy's other friends could have known, how ready was her sympathy, how kind and loving was her heart.

She had not loved Floretta, but with Dorothy, that did not count. It was the dreadful fear that something had happened to a little girl, who, so recently had been at play with them,—ah, that was what grieved sweet Dorothy. [123]

She was thinking of what Mrs. Dainty had said to Aunt Charlotte when the mountain trip was first talked of.

"I think the long tramp is a rougher form of amusement than I can well endure. I should be so weary long before it was time to return, that I should derive but little pleasure from the trip. There is another thought in connection with the picnic," she continued, "and that is an element of danger. Not great danger perhaps, but such that I would not join the party, nor would I permit Dorothy, or Nancy to do so. One gentleman who was talking of the mountain path that they have chosen, spoke of the great danger to the climbers from small, rolling stones, and from places where the earth seems to crumble near the edge of the narrow foot-path. A careless step might lead to a fall that would mean, I hardly dare to say what!" [124]

Dorothy and Nancy had been wishing to join the party, but upon hearing this, they lost all

interest in it, and had cheerfully taken the drive behind gentle Romeo, instead. Now, as Dorothy sat with Nancy's arms about her, she was glad that they had not been permitted to go, and she heartily wished that Floretta had remained at the Cleverton.

"Had she rolled from the path, and fallen, fallen,—"

Dorothy covered her eyes with her hands, as if she almost saw the little girl falling, down, down to the ravine so far below the path, and was trying to shut out the picture. Nancy, still striving to quiet her fear, heard some one telling what the scribbled note had said. [125]

"Oh, Dorothy!" she whispered, eagerly, "Floretta is just where they know how to find her, and they've promised to hurry, and bring her back."

"Are you *sure*?" Dorothy asked.

"Yes, *sure*!" said Nancy.

Then Nancy climbed into the big chair beside her, and the two little girls sat, each tightly clasping the other's hands, while they waited and watched for the first glimpse of the men who should return, bringing Floretta with them.

Mrs. Dainty and Aunt Charlotte remained with Mrs. Paxton, who seemed to have lost all control of herself.

One moment she would cry as if her heart would break, and then she would spring up, threatening to follow the direction that the men had taken, and try to reach the woods, thus to sooner see her little girl. [126]

At last, after what seemed endless waiting, but was actually only an hour, some one espied the men in the distance, and cried out:

"They're coming! They're coming!"

"Have they got Floretta? Oh, *have* they found her?" shrieked Mrs. Paxton.

"We can't see from here," said the one who had spoken, and the mother rushed forward, shading her eyes with her hand, and straining to catch the first glimpse of her child.

She would have rushed down the road to meet them, but Mrs. Dainty held her back. She had seen that they were carrying Floretta, and she thought, in case the child were injured, the mother would far better save her strength. [127]

Two of the men had clasped their hands to form an "arm-chair," and thus they brought to the piazza, a very limp, tired Floretta, whose vivacity was all gone, and whose face bore the trace of desperate weeping, while her arms and hands were covered with cuts and bruises, and her little frock was torn and tattered by her struggle with the tough and tightly knotted vines.

She lay back against the shoulder of one man who supported her, and looked as if her strength were spent.

She changed on the instant that they set her on her feet.

Rushing to her mother, she permitted her to clasp her for a moment to her breast, then turning to the group that gathered around her, she cried fiercely: [128]

"Look! See my hands! See my arms! See the scratches, where I tried to get away, and it was Sidney Cumston who tied me! He *did* it, but the other boys *let* him. Not one tried to hinder him except Jack Tiverton, the littlest one of them all. He tried to make them let me go, but they wouldn't. Oh, somebody punish all but Jack! He *tried*, but he couldn't help me."

She was hysterical, and sank to the floor of the piazza, sobbing, and crying, before her mother could catch her.

She scrambled to her feet, and was clasped in her mother's arms.

Old Mr. Cunningham surprised every one by speaking most kindly to her. She had so often tormented him that it seemed generous that he should offer a bit of comfort. [129]

"I don't think we shall let those young rascals escape without a sharp reprimand, and if I was to venture a guess about it, I should say that little Jack, after all, managed to help you, Floretta," he said.

She turned in surprise to look at the old face, that now looked so kindly at her.

"Come out here, Jack," said the old gentleman, "didn't you write the note that sent us searching for this little girl?"

"Yes, sir," said Jack, "and I wrote it 'cause I thought the other big fellows were mean, but if they find out I told, they'll—"

"No, they won't," said Mr. Cunningham. "You're no 'tell-tale.' You did just right, and the men here will stand by you. Those big boys were the cowards to torment a little girl. You're the best boy up here in the mountains."

"Three cheers for young Tiverton!" shouted some one, and in the midst of the excitement, Mrs. [130]

Paxton, with her little daughter, slipped away to their room, after having thanked little Jack for his valuable assistance.

Meanwhile old Mr. Cunningham had been searching in this pocket and that for something which he seemed most anxious to find.

"Ah, I knew I had it! Come here, Jack!"

Blushing and diffident, Jack walked over to the big rocker.

"'Tisn't much, boy, but I think you ought to have a medal. Here's a silver dollar I've been keeping for a pocket piece. I'll give it to you for a medal, for being brave enough to tell what you knew *ought* to be told. That's not tale-bearing, and as you were afraid to tell, for fear of those big bullies, it was a brave act. You're a lad that knows *what* to do, *when* to do, and then *does* it!"

[131]

"Hurrah for Jack Tiverton!" some one cried again, and this time they were given with a will.

Mrs. Tiverton, returning from a long drive, wondered what all the excitement meant, and why they were cheering her little son.

Jack, with his silver dollar tightly clasped, hung his head, and looked as if overpowered by his conspicuous position.

Dorothy, now bright and happy, since Floretta was safe, saw that Jack hesitated.

"Oh, Mrs. Tiverton," she said, "Jack has been truly the *best* boy in the world, but he can't speak just now. When he tells you what he's done, you won't wonder why they cheered him!"

[132]

Mrs. Barnet and Flossie, with Uncle Harry and his wife, now arrived in their big automobile from a three-days' trip that they had been enjoying.

Of course Dorothy and Nancy tried to tell Flossie all about Floretta and Jack, and they were both so excited that Flossie got a very twisted idea of the affair.

Uncle Harry, not dreaming that the matter was at all serious, turned, after greeting the children, to enter the house.

"Oh, Uncle Harry!" cried Flossie, "you ought to hear about it. There were ever so many big boys, and only one little girl, and they tied her so she couldn't get away, and Jack wrote a note, and when they found her,—"

"Now, Flossie, dear, I'm perfectly willing to be scared half out of my wits, but I *must* know what I'm being scared about. You're getting me so mixed up that I've not the least idea what this is all about. Have you?" he asked.

[133]

"Oh, no," said Flossie, "I don't *half* understand it, but it does sound so frightful, that I'm so scared, I need to have you be scared, too."

"Well, then," Uncle Harry replied, "if it will help you to know it, I'll admit that my teeth are chattering, and shivers are running up and down my spine!"

"I thought at first that it was the draft across this piazza, but perhaps, after all, it was caused by what you were telling me."

When, at last, he had heard the story, he was full of disgust that any boy, and his friends, should have been guilty of such a contemptible act, and his sympathy for the little girl was deep and sincere.

"She will need rest and quiet to-morrow," he said, "and you three little friends will be kind, I think, if you stay rather closely here, and help, in some quiet way, to amuse her."

[134]

"We will," said Dorothy, "I'll let her read my new fairy book if she'd like to. She could lie in the hammock, and do that."

"I'll keep the hammock swinging," said Nancy.

"And I'll give her my new box of candy I just brought home," said Flossie.

"That's right," said Uncle Harry, "and for your sweet promises of kindness toward the child who has suffered so much to-day I'll remind you that on day after to-morrow I shall give myself the pleasure of taking you all to the fair. I promise you a *fine* time."

He turned to look over his shoulder, and laugh at their wild little cries of delight.

[135]

He was anticipating the pleasure quite as much as they.

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Dorothy, Nancy, and Flossie kept the promise that they had made, and Floretta fully enjoyed their kindness. She seemed unusually gentle, and Mrs. Paxton thanked them for so sweetly helping to amuse her, and thus make her willing to spend the day quietly.

The day set for the visit to the village fair dawned bright and sunny, a light breeze making it just cool enough to be delightful.

The barge was waiting for its gay little passengers.

The children stood with impatient feet on the piazza, waiting for their host, merry, handsome Uncle Harry.

At last a firm tread caused them to turn, and there he was, looking gayer than ever, a picture of health, strength, and kindness, and clad in a most becoming outing suit of light gray serge. [136]

The blue of his tie was not bluer than his fine eyes, and no one could have glanced at him without knowing that he possessed a generous, loving nature, a kind and merry heart.

"Come, little friends!" he cried. "Is every young lady that I invited here?" he added, looking anxiously lest some child be late, and thus by chance, be left behind.

"Every one is here!" said Flossie. "I know because I've counted."

"Then we'll start at once, unless some one would rather wait 'til to-morrow?" he said, his eyes twinkling.

"Oh, no! No!" they cried. "We just *couldn't* wait!"

"In that case we'll go now!" he said, with a droll expression, as if he started at once, merely as an accommodation. [137]

"Why, Uncle Harry! You're only joking," cried Flossie. "You wouldn't be willing to wait until to-morrow. I heard you tell Aunt Vera to hurry and find your tie, because you were in such a rush to start!"

"To think that my own little niece would tell tales like that, and thus let out the secret. What chance have I now, of making them think that I was really very shy about riding with such a large party of girls?"

Shouts of laughter greeted this speech, and Uncle Harry waited until it had subsided, then he said:

"Oh, well, if no one *believes* that I am shy or diffident, it's waste of time to try to appear so, so I shall not try. Instead, I shall be very bold. Come, dears, let me help you in!" [138]

And amid shouts of laughter from the children, he lifted each high in air, and placed her in the barge, thus saving her the trouble of mounting the steps.

Then taking his seat in the middle of the laughing, chattering little party, he called to the driver to start.

The long whip cracked, Jack Tiverton, from the piazza, blew loudly on a tin trumpet, and they were off over the road, the happiest party that ever filled a barge.

Uncle Harry told some amusing stories, then, led by his fine voice, they sang some gay little songs, and before they dreamed that they had arrived at the fair, the driver shouted:

"Here we are!" and sure enough, they had reached the fair grounds. [139]

"Why, I didn't suppose we were more than half-way here," said Dorothy, "and the reason is that the ride has been so jolly."

"That's just it," agreed Nancy.

"The reason *I* enjoyed the ride," said Uncle Harry, "is because I was so charmed with my little guests."

"And the reason why we had such a fine ride," said Flossie, "is because we had the *best* man in the world taking care of us."

Uncle Harry bowed low.

"This must be a wedding party, if I'm the 'best man,'" he said with a laugh, "so we'll not fuss because there's no musician to play a march for us, but we'll play you are all bridesmaids, and we'll hurry right along. The entrance is this way, I think, and under that evergreen arch."

A large tent had been pitched for the display of the various wares and numerous attractions; a smaller tent near it serving as fortune teller's booth. [140]

"We'll coax Uncle Harry to have his fortune told," whispered Flossie to Dorothy, when, to their great surprise, he said:

"Oh, Flossie, you little witch! Uncle Harry heard what you said, and not only is he going to have his fortune told, but he's going to make every one of you little girls have yours told, also!"

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## CHAPTER VIII

### AT THE FAIR

THE fair proved a great delight to the children. They had all been to fine fairs patronized by fashionable matrons, whose names were quite enough to insure success, but the country fair was an absolute novelty.

At the large city fairs, merry débutantes graced the booths, and sold flowers, or tickets for the various games of chance.

Here in the mountain village all was different, and the novelty gave greater interest.

Farmers' daughters were in the booths, and sold huge bouquets of old-fashioned garden flowers, homemade candy, and honey, while one rosy-cheeked lass dispensed sweet cider, or sweet apples, according to the preference of her customer. [142]

Uncle Harry purchased a huge stalk of hollyhocks for each of his guests, but for himself he chose an enormous sunflower which he insisted looked *fine* in his buttonhole.

There was music, if it could be called music, furnished by the local band.

Uncle Harry said he had never seen such independent people as those musicians were. He declared that the music sounded, to him, as if each man commenced to play when he chose, and stopped when he got ready, regardless of what the other players were doing.

"Oh, I do believe that is the way they play!" cried Dorothy, laughing. [143]

"Of course it is," cried Uncle Harry, "and a great deal of bother it saves, for no one has to direct them; they do not know that they are making discord, and thus they play and play with all their might, and are absolutely care-free and happy."

There were heaps of giant pumpkins, and more red and yellow ears of corn than they had ever seen before, while everywhere was laughter, and friendly gossip, and chatter, that made the fair a jolly place in which to roam about.

The children were determined to see every object in the big tent, and while some were interested in one thing, others wished to see something else, so they decided to divide into two groups.

One half of the little party turned to the right intent upon seeing some gaudy patchwork quilts, while the others turned to the left declaring their intention of investing all their pennies in the "fish-pond." [144]

There were so many things to see on the way, that it was a long time before they met, as they had agreed, at the entrance.

Somewhere on the way they had missed Uncle Harry, and they could not imagine where he had gone.

It happened that Uncle Harry had seen a very small girl crying, and his first thought was to help her, and thus dry her tears.

Upon questioning her, he found that the wee little maid had, by accident, knocked a small doll from one of the tables, and had been roundly scolded.

"That pretty girl with the black eyes says I did it a-purpose, but I didn't," she cried, "I wanted to see it, and I just touched it, and it tumbled off the table." [145]

Her tears fell afresh, and in place of a handkerchief, she drew up her blue-checked apron, and hid her face in it.

"Look up, little girl," Uncle Harry said, and his voice sounded so kindly, that she at once peeped at him through her tears.

"Which is the table where all this happened?"

"That one," said the child, "and the big girl is looking at me now."

"Then give me your hand, and, just for fun, *we'll* go and look at *her*."

A moment she hesitated.

"Come," he said, and with a sunny smile, the little girl placed her hand in his, and the big, handsome man with the wee country lass approached the table together.

"I'll lift you up so you can see nicely," he said. "Now, which was the doll that fell from the table?" [146]

Before the child could reply, the girl spoke sharply.

"'Twas that one, sir, and her meddlesome fingers,—"

"Never mind about that," said Uncle Harry, then turning to the child he said:

"Did you like that one best, or is that larger one finer?"

"That large one is the loveliest. I didn't *ever* see one so fine as that."

"We'll have that one, then," he said, offering a bill to the astonished salesgirl.

"There, little girl, she's yours," he said, as he placed the big doll in her arms.

"I can hold her a little while?" she asked, eagerly.

"You can hold her *always*, if you want to," he said gently, "I bought her for you."

Rapturously she clasped the gift in her arms.

[147]

"Oh, I love you, because you are good," she cried.

"Then tell me your name," he said.

"I'm Lois Ann Ferguson," chirped the little girl, "and father is Sandy Ferguson. Oh, there he is now. He's to play the pipes."

She ran toward a sturdy man dressed in Highland costume, and carrying the bagpipes under his arm.

Mr. Ferguson glanced at her flushed cheeks, saw the gorgeous doll that she flourished before his astonished eyes, and finally understood that the tall, handsome stranger had bestowed it upon his wee daughter, as a gift.

He took her little hand, and hurried forward, saying:

"I dinna ken why he should dae it for my wee lassie.

[148]

"I wad gladly thank ye, sir," he said, "but I'm lost in wonder that ye made wee Lois sae blithe an' gay wi' the braw gift."

"She's a dear little lass," said Uncle Harry, "and when I found her crying, I knew that a fine new doll would dry her tears. Don't bother to thank me. I made myself happy, when I comforted her."

"I wish there were mair like ye," said Sandy Ferguson, "an' some day when ye're older, an' ha' a wee daughter of yer ain,—"

"I have a wife and baby girl now," was the quick reply, "and they are my dearest possessions."

"An' I thought ye a braw, bonny laddie, wi' yer fair hair an' blue een! Weel, weel, ye dinna hae tae live 'til ye're auld before ye ken tae dae a kindly act," Sandy Ferguson replied, "an' later when I play the pipes, an' Lois dances, she shall make her first bow tae her new friend."

[149]

"Oh, Uncle Harry, *did* you buy the new doll for the little girl?"

It was little Flossie, who, after having searched every corner of the tent, had found him talking to the Scotchman and his little girl.

"Is he your own uncle?" little Lois asked, looking up into Flossie's lovely face.

"Oh, yes," said Flossie, "and he's the best uncle in the world."

"I know he must be," said the little girl. "See how good he was to me."

They turned to join the rest of their party, and little Lois looked over her shoulder, with one hand held fast in her father's, while with the other she tightly clasped the precious doll.

"I saw the notice near the entrance when we came in, that a Scotch farmer would play, and his little daughter would dance," said Uncle Harry, "but that child is not much more than a baby. She cannot be more than four. It will be amusing to see her dance, and Nancy Ferris will enjoy it most of all."

[150]

They found the others reading the notice of which they had been talking, and they were delighted when they heard what a very little girl it was who was to dance.

They had a lunch served by girls dressed as dairy maids, and it was just such a lunch as might have been enjoyed at a farmhouse.

The long table spread with its white cloth, and set with blue and white dishes, was decorated by a garland of small sunflowers that lay upon the cloth, down the centre, and the entire length of the table.

[151]

There were plates heaped with biscuit, there were dishes of both wild and cultivated strawberries, and delicious cream to be eaten with them, there were sandwiches and little cakes, honey enough to tempt the bees to the feast, and the children thought it finer than a hotel dinner. How they laughed, and chattered, as they enjoyed the spread!

Uncle Harry was in his sunniest mood, and told stories and jokes that kept them amused, and seemed to be the gayest member of the party.

"Tell us a story about when you were a *little* boy," said Flossie.

"My small niece thinks I'm nothing but a *big* boy now!" he said.

"Well, the big Scotchman thought you were only a lad. I heard him say so," said Flossie.

[152]



"When you were a boy were you ever naughty, *real* naughty?" Floretta asked.

She had been very quiet, and all were surprised at her question.

"Once upon a time, when I was little," said Uncle Harry, "I was very, *very* fond of good things, but the one thing that I liked better than anything else was strawberry jam.

"I was always allowed to have it, but I felt sure that it would taste even nicer if I had more of it at a time, and still finer if I could have a long handled spoon, and eat it right from the jar.

"I used often to think how fine it would be if I, some day, could have the chance to eat it that way, but I never could get even *very* near the jar.

"One day the opportunity came. My sister and I were in the nursery, and the maid had been down-stairs for a long time. [153]

"The rest of the family were away, and we were to have our tea in the nursery, as usual, only, as we had had to remain at home, we were to have an extra treat.

"Among other good things, we were to have strawberry jam.

"My sister, that is Flossie's mamma, was a little older than I, and she was always trying to give me lessons in good behavior.

"'Now, Harry,' she said, 'while nurse is down-stairs, we might commence to set our table.'

"'There isn't anything here to set it with but the tablecloth and the jam,' I said, 'but you're a girl, so you know how to put the cloth on, and I'll bring the jam.'"

"I guess Uncle Harry was so fond of the jam, that he liked even to carry the jar," said Flossie. [154]

"We wondered why the nurse stayed so long down-stairs," continued Uncle Harry, "and I told my sister that I was tired of waiting for tea, and I said I'd taste of the jam, if only I had a long handled spoon.

"'Why, Harry,' she answered in disgust, 'I wouldn't think you'd be so naughty, but,—if you really *want* to taste it, here's the spoon beside the jar.'"

"And *did* you?" questioned Dorothy.

"Well, yes, I have to admit that I did. In truth, I tasted and tasted until my sister cried:

"'Why, Harry, you naughty boy! When you get done tasting, there won't be any left!'

"'You won't care, because *you* wouldn't be so naughty as to taste it!' I said. [155]

"'Oh, wouldn't I?' she cried. 'Well, you just let me take that spoon, and you'll see!'

"Well, a funny mix-up followed, in which we each tried to get possession of the spoon and the jam. We were laughing while we struggled for it, but at last, one of us slipped, and fell, dragging the other down; the jar of jam tipped over, and her white frock, my gray jacket and trousers, and even my long, yellow curls became smeared with the jam.

"Nurse opened the door, and screamed with terror, for the red jam looked as if we had been terribly hurt, and it was some time before we could convince her that we were not cut or bruised, but only *very sticky!*

"Then came the scolding, and my sister tried to screen me. [156]

"'Harry couldn't help tasting it, he's so fond of jam,' she said.

"'Well, he's got a good share of it, inside and out,' said nurse, grimly.

"'She's got as much as I have,' I said, 'just look at her frock!'

"Of course our clothes were changed, and the jam cleaned from the polished floor, but we had our tea without jam.

"Nurse said we could eat our biscuits with the *memory* of the jam we had already enjoyed."

"Oh, Uncle Harry," cried Flossie, "I wish, even though you were naughty, she'd let you have more jam. She didn't know how good you'd be when you grew up."

"I still am fond of jam!" he said, and the children laughed to see him pour honey over his berries that already were covered with sugar. [157]

"You like *anything* that's sweet!" said Dorothy, "whether it's jam, or sugar, or honey,—"

"Or little girls," said Uncle Harry. "You notice, I made this party all little girls, and I'm having a *lovely* time."

"So are we," laughed Dorothy.

"And he says 'lovely' just as we do," said Nancy, "he does it to make us laugh."

"Then why don't you laugh?" said Uncle Harry, and they *did* laugh, every member of the party, and laughed because they could not help it.

And when the merry feast was over, they hastened to the small tent where the old gypsy was telling fortunes.

Each had intended to have her fortune told, and thus learn what the future held for her.

To their great surprise, she flatly refused to tell any child's fortune, saying that she would only foretell events for "grown ups." The little girls were rather afraid of her, but Uncle Harry boldly offered his hand, saying: [158]

"Am I big enough to hear my fortune?"

"No nonsense, young lad," she said, while the children dared not laugh. She bent over his palm for a moment, then she solemnly said:

"You're a brave lad, and you need to be for you will fall in love with a girl who'll have red hair, and the temper that usually goes with it."

"O dear!" sighed Uncle Harry.

"Don't worry, young man," said the old gypsy, "because it will be some months before you marry."

"Indeed," said Uncle Harry, "and what shall I do if the girl proves to have the temper you prophesy? Shall I try to calm her by holding her under a pump, or would you advise tying her until she feels less fiery?" [159]

"Young man, this is no laughing matter," was the sharp reply.

"Guess it isn't!" said Uncle Harry. "I've seldom been so discouraged. Here am I, a man who has a lovely wife and baby girl, and yet I've got to marry a red-haired girl, with a temper like chain lightning! Who was ever in a worse fix?"

The old gypsy flew into a rage. "You're poking fun at me!" she cried.

"There! There! The fun was worth that!" he cried, laying a handful of small coins on the table before her.

In her eagerness to count the money, she forgot her wrath, and they hastened from the tent, where, safely outside, they were free to laugh as much as they chose. [160]

As they re-entered the large tent, they saw that near the centre, a space had been cleared, and there was a crowd of people waiting, as if expecting some attraction to be exhibited.

They had not long to wait, for almost immediately the Scotch piper appeared, and tightly clasping her precious new doll in her arms was wee Lois, dressed in Highland costume.

Placing her doll on a table, and making sure that it was safe, she ran forward, courtesied first to Uncle Harry, as she had promised, and then, to the music of the pipes, the wee lassie did the "Highland Fling."

She was such a round, dimpled little girl, one would never have dreamed that she could dance with such infantile grace.

And when she had finished, with another courtesy, they crowded around her, and it was Nancy who most generously praised her. Dear little Nancy, who danced like a fairy, never had a jealous thought in her loving heart! [161]

It was Uncle Harry who caught little Lois, and lifted her so that he could look into her eyes.

"I want my dolly, now," she cried, anxious lest it be lost or stolen. Dorothy brought the doll, and the child clasped it to her breast.

"My wee lassie said she wisht she had a gift tae gi' ye," said Sandy.

"I have a dear little girl of my own, and I prize her baby kisses," said Uncle Harry. "Will *you* give me one, little Lois?"

She clasped her arms around his neck, and kissed him softly.

"Best man next to father," she said.

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## CHAPTER IX

### FLOSSIE'S LETTER

THE children said "good-by" to little Lois, and as her father carried her away, she waved her hand to them.

"Wasn't she cunning?" said Dorothy.

"She was very sweet," said Nancy, "and how well she did her little dance!" [162]

"She didn't dance half as fine as you do, Nancy Ferris," said Floretta. "You *know* that."

"Oh, but I was trained for dancing," said Nancy, "and, beside, she was very little to dance so cleverly."

Floretta made no reply, but she thought of what Nancy had said.

[163]

"Trained for dancing. She said she was *trained* to dance. I wonder where? I wish I knew, but I didn't quite dare to ask her."

Once more they walked around the big tent, and Uncle Harry purchased a gift for each to carry home as a souvenir.

There were little baskets that the gypsies had woven, and fancy boxes filled with woodland plants. The boxes were made from birch bark, and were very dainty.

These the children prized, and lovingly they thanked him for the pretty gifts.

At the candy table he purchased enough of the homemade bonbons to fill the baskets, and then they left the tent to start on the homeward trip.

The barge was waiting for them, and they clambered in, tired, but very happy.

"This is the nicest fair I ever went to," said Dorothy, "and I've had so many good things that I'm going to save my basket of candy until to-morrow."

[164]

"So am I," cried all the others.

"And so am I," said Uncle Harry, as he held up a huge basket filled with all kinds of candy.

How they laughed, and accused him of having a "sweet-tooth."

"Now, just a moment!" he cried, as he held up his finger for silence, "I'm taking this *big* basket home to treat the *big* ladies with. I took the *little* ladies with me, but I've not forgotten the *big* ladies that I left at the hotel."

"Because you don't ever forget any one," said Flossie, and the others cried:

"That's it! Just it! He does nice things for every one."

"Oh, spare my blushes," said Uncle Harry, but it was easy to see that their affection for him pleased him.

[165]

The ride home seemed shorter than the trip to the fair.

They joined in singing the merry songs that his fine voice led, and the horses, knowing that they were on the homeward trip, jogged along at a better pace than when they had started out.

Uncle Harry had found some bells, and fastened them to their harnesses, and they made a jingling accompaniment to the merry voices.

And when the barge drew up at the Cleverton, Uncle Harry, with elaborate courtesy, handed each young lady down, bowing low, and thanking her for the honor she had conferred upon him by permitting him to take her to the fair.

"Oh, you do truly know we have to thank you for giving us such a lovely day!" said Dorothy.

[166]

"But think how happy I have been," he said, and although his blue eyes were laughing, they knew that he meant it.

"Oh, mamma, we had the finest time," cried Dorothy, "and see the fine basket of candy and the pretty birch bark box! See the little ferns growing in it. Isn't he *dear*?"

"He surely is charming," said Mrs. Dainty. "His generous, sunny nature makes every one love him, and I believe he values the love of his friends more than most things."

"He has been gay, and full of fun all day," said Nancy, "and it will take a long time to tell you all the pleasant things he did for us. I do wish you and Aunt Charlotte *could* have been there when he had his fortune told."

[167]

"And he couldn't have been any nicer to us if we'd been tall ladies," said Floretta.

"I hope every one of you little friends were real *little ladies*, thus rewarding him for his kindness," Aunt Charlotte said, gently.

"Oh, we were," said Nancy, "not a single one of us did anything that could trouble him."

"There were a number of little girls who only came here last week, so we weren't much acquainted with them, but they were all very nice, and he said he had as fine a time as we did," said Dorothy.

She climbed into a large hammock, and with Nancy beside her, sat swinging, and thinking of the day that had been so delightfully spent.

[168]

Mrs. Fenton came out upon the piazza, and, instead of sitting down, seemed to be looking for something.

"Can I help you?" said Nancy, slipping from the hammock, and hastening toward her.

"I've mislaid my glasses," she said, "and I can't find them."

She did not thank Nancy for so kindly offering to help her, but Nancy seemed not to notice that. She peeped under chairs, lifted their cushions, and even looked between folds of newspapers that lay near at hand, but the glasses were not in sight.

"How trying!" said Mrs. Fenton, "I have some letters that I wish to read, and I can't read them until my glasses are found."

"Did you use them anywhere but just here?" Nancy asked. [169]

Mrs. Fenton stood for a moment thinking.

"Seems to me I *did* have them in the dining-room," she said.

"I'll go and ask the waitresses if they have seen them," said Nancy, as she ran toward the hall.

She paused in the doorway, amazed at what she saw.

Floretta, with a pair of eyeglasses upon her small nose, was walking up and down the room, as nearly as possible, in Mrs. Fenton's manner, and exactly imitating her voice, while a group of waitresses, the cook, and two kitchen maids laughed, and applauded her.

She cared not who composed her audience, so long as she obtained applause. Floretta was, evidently, quite herself once more! [170]

"Oh, Floretta!" cried Nancy, "you mustn't, truly you mustn't. Give me the glasses. Mrs. Fenton is looking everywhere for them!"

"Well, I shan't give them to you!" said Floretta, rudely. "You aren't Mrs. Fenton."

"But I've been helping her to hunt for them. She has some letters she wants to read, and she can't till she has her glasses," insisted Nancy.

"Then let her come for them!" cried Floretta, when a quiet voice spoke.

"Very well, I *have* come for them," it said, and there in the doorway stood Mrs. Fenton.

The silly maids who had laughed so loudly, now hastily disappeared in the kitchen.

Floretta dropped the glasses upon the table, and then, wholly ashamed, crawled under it, where Mrs. Fenton's sharp eyes might not look at her. [171]

Mrs. Fenton took the glasses, and without another word, swept from the room.

Nancy, waiting in the hall, crept softly toward her, and gently laid her hand on the lady's arm.

"I'm *so* sorry she did that. I wish I could have got the glasses from her, and brought them to you before you came to find them. Then you needn't have known how naughty,—" Nancy caught her breath.

"Never mind that, Nancy. Remember, as *I* shall, that *you* were not the naughty, disgusting child," said Mrs. Fenton, and she turned, with her letters and glasses in her hand, and went up the long stairway to her room.

It was nearly time to dress for dinner, which was always served promptly at six. [172]

Mrs. Dainty with Dorothy, and Aunt Charlotte with Nancy hastened to their rooms, to freshen their toilettes, and Nancy realized that there would not be time to tell Aunt Charlotte all about the unpleasant happening.

"I've something to tell you, but I'll have to wait till we've plenty of time," she said.

Aunt Charlotte, tying the soft, blue ribbon into the brown curls, looked into the mirror before which they were standing, and smiled at the thoughtful face.

"Will it keep until then, dear?" she asked.

"Oh, yes," said Nancy, "I only tell it to you because I love to tell you everything." [173]

"Dear child," said Aunt Charlotte, "I bless the day that you, as a little waif, were taken in by Mrs. Dainty, and that I was asked to come and care for you. I could not love you more if you were my own little girl."

"I never saw my own mamma; she died when I was a baby," said Nancy, "so, because you love me, you seem like my very own."

Gentle Aunt Charlotte's eyes were wet with happy tears, as she hooked the pretty, white muslin frock, with its slip of light blue, and tied the soft blue belt.

"Your shoes must be changed, Nancy," she said. "You know how particular Mrs. Dainty is about the matter of shoes and stockings. They must match the frock."

"Oh, yes," said Nancy, "and with this one she said: 'Wear blue stockings and bronze slippers,' [174]

so I will."

She found the blue hose and the pretty bronze slippers, then, with elfin grace, she caught the edge of her skirt, and with rosy, bare feet, tripped across the floor in a graceful, gliding step, crying:

"Look, Aunt Charlotte, look! This pretty step Bonfanti taught me."

Aunt Charlotte did look, and as she watched the pretty child, and saw her joy in dancing, she marvelled that little Nancy could smile as she danced, remembering all that she had been taught, while apparently forgetting all the unhappy months upon the stage.

She thought of poor little Nancy, forced to dance, night after night, to support her old Uncle Steve, who was too lazy to support himself. [175]

She thought of the time that the little pitiful note from Nancy had reached them, and, together, she and Mrs. Dainty had found the child, and brought her safely home.

She did not speak of all this. Nancy's happy little heart should never be reminded of sad days that were past.

Now her life was filled with bright sunshine, the sunshine of love, and it was reflected in her happy face.

A gong rang out a silvery note.

"Oh, my shoes!" cried Nancy, with a peal of merry laughter. "I wanted to show you those pretty steps, and I forgot all about dinner."

It was the work of but a few seconds for Nancy to draw on the light blue hose, and even less time to put on the pretty slippers. She ran to the mirror, and courtesied, took a few tripping steps, smiling at her reflection, and then hastened to the hall to join Dorothy. [176]



SHE TOOK A FEW TRIPPING STEPS, SMILING AT HER REFLECTION.—PAGE

176.

"All ready," cried Nancy, springing to her feet, to follow Dorothy.

A pretty pair they made as with arms about each other's waist, they tripped along the hall.

Fair, blue-eyed Dorothy Dainty was very lovely in a pale pink frock with soft frillings of fine lace. Her stockings were of the same shade, and her shoes were white. Mrs. Dainty in dark blue satin, and Aunt Charlotte in pearl color made, with the two children, a pleasing group.

In the lower hall they met Mrs. Paxton with Floretta, the former wearing a gown of purple satin, while Floretta wore a frock of scarlet silk. Mrs. Fenton, passing, on her way to the dining-room, looked sharply at the two groups, and *did* she look amused when her eyes rested upon Mrs. Paxton, and her small daughter? Dorothy noticed the look, and turned to her mamma. [177]

Mrs. Dainty read the question in Dorothy's eyes, and ever so slightly, shook her head, and they passed into the dining-room.

The next morning, when the mail was distributed, there was great excitement, because every one had so many letters.

"See mine!" cried Flossie Barnet. "Everybody see mine! It looks like boy's writing. See it!"

"If some very young man wrote it, he might not be delighted to have it so freely exhibited, Flossie," said Uncle Harry, with a laugh.

"Oh, why should he care?" she asked in surprise. "Who do you s'pose wrote it? Guess, Uncle Harry!" [178]

"Well, now let me think," said Uncle Harry, covering his eyes with his hand, then peeping through his fingers.

"There's a small boy at home, who glories in the name of Reginald Merton Deane. Open the letter, dear, and if I guessed right, you can give me a prize, and if I'm wrong, I'll give you one."

Flossie studied the address for a moment, then she opened the letter, and laughed with delight.

"I'll have to give you the prize, but why did he think to write to me?"

Dear little Flossie had never seemed aware that small Reginald preferred her to any of his friends. Even when she was so little that she could not pronounce his name, and called him "Weginald," he thought her the dearest of all his playmates. And this was his letter: [179]

"DEAR FLOSSIE:

"I miss you so much that I'm going to write, and tell you all the news.

"Our old dog had a fit yesterday, and my brother got the vet'nary doctor. When he came, he said Carlo hadn't any fit. He was acting just awful. I said 'what makes him tare round so?' an he said maybe I'd tare round sum if I had a fish-bone in my throat! The doctor took it out, and then Carlo was so glad he tore round worsen ever!

"Arabella Corryville is acting worse than Carlo did. You know her Aunt Matilda lives with them, an neether Arabella, or her pa, or her ma dare to do ennything without asking Aunt Matilda *first*. Well, her aunt has had to go way up to New Hampshur (I guess I didn't spell that rite) and Arabella thinks its just her chance to act awful. Carlo is real quiet side of Arabella when she acts the way she does now. [180]

"She stays out doors most all the time, and goes just where she pleases.

"Some days she's way down by the stashun until its almost dark.

"You know she's always taking medesin, and carries the bottles in her pockets.

"She carries em now, but she told me she's takin the kind she likes best. Theres two kinds her Aunt Matilda made her take, one tasted horrid, and the other tasted nice. Arabella threw the horrid one away, and ate the nice pills for candy. She told me this morning that her Aunt Matilda is coming home just for one day, and then they're all going up where you, and Dorothy, and Nancy are. I don't believe it, but if she does, and you see her, you needn't give my love to her. [181]

"Your tru friend,  
"REGINALD."

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## CHAPTER X [182]

### A GIFT OF WILDFLOWERS

**O**F course, Dorothy and Nancy were greatly interested in the letter, and Uncle Harry said that he was glad that Reginald had thought to say that the fish-bone had been removed from Carlo's throat.

He said it would have seemed quite a trip to take to leave the Cleverton, and go to Merrivale to feel Carlo's pulse, and inquire for his health.

"Now that that bone is removed, I breathe easier," said Uncle Harry, "and so does Carlo!"

"Oh, you wouldn't have gone home just to call on Carlo," said Flossie.

"Well, I don't know," he said, trying to look solemn, "I wouldn't like Carlo to feel neglected, and now I think of it, does Reginald speak of the cat?" [183]

"No," said Flossie, "but when I answer the letter, I'll tell Reginald you're anxious about her."

"I am," said Uncle Harry, "because the last time I saw her, Carlo was barking at her very rudely, and her back was up in a hump like a camel's. Reginald ought to have told us if her back

is *still* up, or whether she has taken the kink out of her spine. We might telephone and ask, instead of worrying."

He rose, and walked toward the hall, whistling as he went, an old nursery song that he used to sing to Flossie.

"The cat came fiddling out of the barn,  
With a pair of bagpipes under her arm."

How the children laughed!

[184]

"Look!" said Flossie, "he's going right toward the telephone, just to make us think that he's *truly* going to ring up Reginald, and inquire for the cat."

"Who is Arabella?" Floretta asked.

"She lives near us," said Dorothy, "and she used to go to Aunt Charlotte's private school with us."

"Doesn't she now?" asked Floretta.

"No, she left our class, and went to a large school in the city."

"By what the letter says, I'd think she was rather queer," said Floretta.

"Well—" said Dorothy, hesitating, "Arabella *is* queer."

"Why don't you like to say so?" was the sharp reply.

"Because Dorothy never likes to say anything that isn't kind about any one, but Arabella *is* queer, so Dorothy won't say she isn't," said Nancy.

[185]

It was a few days later that Dorothy was reminded of what Reginald had said in his letter to Flossie.

She was waiting for Nancy to go for a walk, and stooping to pick some of the pretty wildflowers that blossomed everywhere.

She had walked slowly along toward the clump of white birches where, when they had first arrived, they had called, and listened to the echo.

She looked back toward the hotel, but Nancy was not yet in sight, so she seated herself upon the grass, and began to arrange the flowers in a fine bouquet.

She was trying to mix the white blossoms and pink buds so as to show the beauty of each, when a carriage passed, and before she looked up a shrill little voice shouted:

[186]

"Dorothy! Dorothy! We're over at the farmhouse just beyond the Merlington. Aunt Matilda wouldn't *let* pa take us to a hotel. She doesn't approve of hotels. Aunt Matilda says,—"

She was looking back to shout at Dorothy, and doubtless would have given even more particulars, but a firm hand had hastily forced her to turn around, and sit down.

Nancy ran along the path a few moments later, and her eyes were dancing.

"Did you see Arabella?" she asked. "*Did* you?"

"Yes, just a few moments ago, and she turned around in the carriage and screamed to me," said Dorothy.

"I can guess what she said," laughed Nancy, "because she screamed at me. She told me she was staying at a farmhouse, and said that her Aunt Matilda didn't approve of hotels."

[187]

"That is *just* what she said," said Dorothy, "and she would have said more but some one, I think it was her Aunt Matilda, pulled her back into the carriage."

"Why, that's just the way it was when I saw her. I ran out on to the piazza, and down the steps, and the carriage rolled by, and she twisted round to shout. There was this difference, though," said Nancy. "You were out here alone, and no one would know if you laughed, but when I ran out, our piazza was full of people, and when Arabella shouted, you'd ought to have seen them look."

"Flossie and her Uncle Harry were on the lawn, and as she rode past, he said with a sigh:

[188]

"Arabella, Arabella,  
If I had my new umbrella,'

and I was wild to know the rest of it, but his wife, who was standing near him, said:

"Hush, Harry, really you mustn't,' and he only laughed, and said:

"Oh, *mustn't* I? Why, when I saw Arabella and her Aunt Matilda, I really felt as if I *must!*"

"Let's ask him what the rest of the verse is," said Dorothy.

"I'm wild to hear it," Nancy said, "because the very way he looked made me think that the other lines, whatever they were, would be funny."

She stooped to gather more of the little blossoms to add to Dorothy's bouquet, and then commenced to make a bouquet of her own.

[189]

"Arabella will be coming over to see you," she said, a moment later, "and I wonder if it is naughty to say, 'I wish she wouldn't?' Do you think it is?"

"I don't know," said Dorothy, "but I *do* wish it. I wouldn't, only she is so hard to please. Mamma wishes us to be nice to every one, but, Nancy, you *do* know that when we try the hardest to please Arabella, we don't please her at all."

"I know it," agreed Nancy, "but perhaps she'll come some time when we are out, and then we won't have to amuse her."

"I'm sure I ought not to say it, but I *do* wish it would happen that way," said Dorothy.

[190]

They had reached the birches, and they paused to wake the echo. What fun it was to hear their shouts repeated.

Again and again they called, and then a droll thing happened. They had called this name and that, and each time the echo, like a voice from the mountain, had repeated it with wonderful distinctness. Then Dorothy, leaning forward, called, loudly:

"Dorothy!"

"*What?*" came the reply.

She turned, and looked at Nancy. "Dorothy!" she cried, again.

"*Dainty!*" was the answer, and upon looking toward a little path that was nearly opposite where they were standing, they saw the low bushes move, and faintly they heard a smothered laugh.

Dorothy was laughing now.

[191]

"Boys!" she cried, and back came the laughing echo:

"*Girls!*" and then the boys peeped out a bit too far, and Dorothy saw who had been playing echo.

It was Jack Tiverton and a boy whom he had chosen for a "chum." Jack had not intended so soon to be discovered, and he and his friend disappeared in a little grove, while Dorothy and Nancy continued their walk.

There were sunny paths and bits of woodland that were so near the hotel as to be absolutely safe, where all the summer guests, especially the children, loved to roam at will. Along one of these little paths were sweet little yellow blossoms, and these they gathered to brighten their bouquets.

"Let's have some of these little vines to hang from our bouquets," said Dorothy, and the graceful vines proved to be an added beauty.

[192]

When they returned to the Cleverton there were but few people upon the piazza.

Mrs. Dainty and Aunt Charlotte sat talking with Mrs. Vinton, and farther along, Mrs. Fenton sat with an open book upon her lap, although she was not reading.

She often had a book or magazine, but rarely did she read them.

She would sit looking off at the distant mountain-range, the white clouds, or the sunny valley over which those clouds cast floating shadows.

Did she hear the conversation, or notice what was going on about her? Floretta Paxton said that Mrs. Fenton acted as if she sat there to watch some one; and was Floretta right? Mrs. Fenton's actions certainly seemed strange day after day. She talked little, took slight interest in what was going on about her, and was a mystery to all the other guests.

[193]

But what, or whom could she be watching?

Dorothy and Nancy, returning from their walk, saw the group, and also noticed Mrs. Fenton, who always chose to sit apart from the others.

"I'll give my flowers to mamma and Mrs. Vinton," said Dorothy.

"And I'll give mine to Aunt Charlotte and to Mrs. Fenton,—if she wants them," said Nancy, hesitating because it was so hard to guess what might, or might not, please Mrs. Fenton.

Dorothy ran to show her blossoms to her mamma and to Mrs. Vinton, while Nancy, pausing beside Mrs. Fenton's chair, held forth her pretty bouquet, as she said:

[194]

"We've just gathered them. Aren't they pretty?"

"Lovely, very lovely," said Mrs. Fenton, with more interest than usual. "I remember picking just such flowers; even the long vines I know are like those I used to see when I was a little girl."

"Would you enjoy some of these? I'd so like to give them to you," Nancy said, and she was



surprised at the quick reply.

"I would really prize them, Nancy, and you're a sweet child to give them to me," she said.

Quickly Nancy divided the bouquet, and smiled as she laid the pretty things in Mrs. Fenton's lap.

"I cannot let them wilt, so I will take them at once to my room," said Mrs. Fenton, and Nancy saw her bend to catch their perfume, as she turned toward the hall. [195]

That night, when nearly all the guests had entered the dining-room, Mrs. Fenton came in at the main entrance, and as she sat nearly opposite Mrs. Dainty's party, they noticed that the bodice of her black lace gown was given color by the pretty wildflowers that Nancy had given her. They were the first flowers that she had worn since her arrival.

Nancy smiled with pleasure, and Mrs. Fenton, looking across the table, returned the smile.

Had the gift of simple wildflowers cheered her?

Thus far she had worn only black, but to-night a dull gold slip shimmered through the black lace; and were her eyes brighter? [196]

Nancy thought so, and without knowing why, was glad.

There was a musicale in the evening, and Mrs. Fenton joined Mrs. Dainty and Aunt Charlotte, and seemed to enjoy the conversation, between the numbers of the program.

Once, while she was talking, she laid her hand lightly upon Nancy's shoulder, and Nancy looked up to smile. Aunt Charlotte saw that the lady was more cheerful, and also noticed that she wore Nancy's flowers. The evening passed pleasantly, and Nancy's drowsy words, just before she went to sleep, were:

"I do really think I cheered her."

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A few days later Mrs. Dainty invited Mrs. Fenton to be her guest during a drive over a lovely road that neither of them had yet seen. It was said to be one of the most picturesque roads in that section of the country. [197]

Mrs. Fenton accepted, and with Aunt Charlotte and Mrs. Vinton they formed a pleasant party.

Dorothy and Nancy were to drive in their little phaeton, and they felt quite as important as the four ladies in the barouche.

True, Mrs. Dainty owned a handsome span of bays, but was not the pony, Romeo, a beauty?

The road was some distance from the Cleverton, and there were some charming places to be seen on the way, so it happened that the trip, which proved to be most enjoyable, occupied the afternoon.

Mrs. Paxton had a number of letters to write, and Floretta, feeling very lonely, and wishing that she had some one to play with, climbed into a hammock, and wondered what she might do to amuse herself. [198]

"Every one but me has gone somewhere, and I wish *I* had," she said, as she gave a smart kick that sent the hammock higher.

"What's the fun of swinging alone?" she grumbled, but there was no one on the piazza to answer her, and she let the hammock sway lazily while she looked down the sunny road, and thought how strange it was that the place seemed so still.

Not a leaf stirred, and Floretta's disgust increased.

"Nothing in sight, not even an old hen," she said, when, way down where the road looked so narrow and distant, a little figure appeared, coming directly toward the Cleverton. She watched the approaching figure, and wondered who it might be. [199]

"'Tisn't any one I know," she thought, "and *doesn't* she look queer?"

Any one who had ever known Arabella Corryville would also have known that she always looked decidedly odd and strange, and it was Arabella who was marching steadily along the road.

So determined was her tread that one might have thought that there was a band behind her playing martial music to which she was obliged to keep step.

"Well, whoever she is, she's carrying an umbrella, this pleasant day," murmured Floretta; then as she came near, she added:

"And wearing rubbers and a raincoat, as true as I live!"

Arabella was more bundled and wrapped than at first appeared, for, as she came up the gravel walk, Floretta saw that a long veil was closely tied over her hat, and wound about her throat. [200]

From her appearance one might have thought that she expected freezing weather before night.

She walked up on to the piazza, and then stood, for a moment, looking about, as if in search of some one.

It was not politeness that prompted Floretta to speak. It was simply curiosity. She was wild to know who the strange-looking child was, and whom she wished to see.

"Are you looking for some one?" she asked, at the same time slipping from the hammock, and going so close to Arabella that she could peep into the queer little face.

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## CHAPTER XI

[201]

### ARABELLA MAKES A CALL

**A**RABELLA peered at Floretta through her spectacles, and was tempted not to reply, but after a moment's pause she changed her mind.

"I came to see Dorothy Dainty, and Nancy Ferris," she said.

"They're out driving," said Floretta.

"How do you know?" Arabella asked, rudely.

"Because I heard them say they were going, and because I saw them go," was the quick reply.

"It's a long way over here, and now I've got to take the same walk back," said Arabella.

[202]

"They're going to be out all the afternoon," said Floretta, "but why don't you sit down, and rest a while before you go back?"

It sounded kind, and Arabella at once seated herself, while Floretta sat near her.

She thought it would be great fun to question this odd child, and there was no one near to check her.

"Aren't you nearly roasted in that raincoat?" she asked.

"Well, I'm not chilly," said Arabella, fixing her sharp eyes upon the other little girl.

"Did you think it was going to rain?" was the next question. "You've rubbers, and umbrella."

Floretta barely managed to hide the fact that she wanted to laugh. Her question seemed so absurd with the blue sky overhead, and the sunshine everywhere.

[203]

"I didn't want to wear them," said Arabella, "and I told Aunt Matilda it was too pleasant to rain, but she said you never could tell, and she said, too, that I could wear them, or stay at home, so what could I do?"

"I'd have stayed at home," said Floretta, bluntly. "I wouldn't wear raincoat and rubbers, and lug an umbrella for any Aunt Matilda or Aunt Jemima!"

"Who is Aunt Jemima?" Arabella asked, stupidly.

"I don't know," said Floretta, sharply, "but then, I don't know your Aunt Matilda."

She longed to say that she did not want to, but for once she did not quite dare to say what she thought.

[204]

Then there was an awkward pause. Floretta could not think what to say next, while Arabella did not try.

Silence never made her uneasy. She could stare at any one who sat opposite her, for a half-hour, without so much as winking, and it rather amused her if the other person became nervous, and wriggled uneasily beneath her persistent stare. At last Floretta spoke.

"You might take some of those things off," she said; "you won't need them while you stay."

"Aunt Matilda told me not to," said Arabella, "and if I *did*, it would be just my luck to have her come right by here, and see me with them off. My! *Wouldn't* she be angry?"

Arabella's eyes dilated as she asked the question.

[205]

"Does your Aunt Matilda poke 'round after you like that?" asked Floretta.

"She doesn't ever *seem* to follow me, but all the same, she's always catching me doing something."

"Then you *do* risk doing what she tells you not to," said Floretta, with a saucy laugh.

"Look here!" cried Arabella, "I don't know you, but I'm going to tell you something. I can't do one single thing I want to, neither can my papa or mamma. Aunt Matilda is little, and my papa is

big. He says he was centre-rush on the college football team, but when Aunt Matilda tells him what to do, he says, 'Yes'm,' and does it. One of our neighbors at home says Aunt Matilda holds the purse-strings, but I don't know what that means. Her purse hasn't any strings on it."

[206]

"Well, if it *had*, I'd cut 'em off," said Floretta, "so she *couldn't* hold 'em."

"You wouldn't if she lived at *your* house," said Arabella.

Floretta, in spite of her boldness, was more than half convinced.

"Well,—perhaps I wouldn't," she said. "Why, what are you taking?"

"Pills," said Arabella, counting out six very pink pills from a little bottle, and taking them, then making a horrid face.

"You don't look sick," said Floretta, "but you're taking medicine."

"Aunt Matilda says these are for my color," was the answer.

"You haven't any; you're pale as a sheet," said Floretta.

"That's why I take them," said Arabella, "and look! I've got some green ones I take," and six green pills followed the pink ones.

[207]

"Why, what are those for?" gasped Floretta. "Ought you to take two kinds at the same time?"

Arabella, determined to startle her new acquaintance, took a third bottle from her pocket, and swallowed three very large white pills.

She was delighted with the effect that she had produced.

Floretta sprang to her feet, and tried to snatch the bottle, but Arabella had put it in her pocket, and was holding the pocket together.

She narrowed her shrewd little eyes, and smiled broadly.

"Guess you couldn't take all that, and not feel queer!" she said.

[208]

"I wouldn't wonder if you felt funny. *Do* you?" asked Floretta.

"Not *yet*," said Arabella.

Floretta was getting tired of her caller. She hoped that she hadn't any more kinds of medicine that she could take.

She wished that Dorothy would return and amuse Arabella.

She would have run away from any one else, and rudely left her alone, but there was something so strange about this child that she feared her.

She had a nervous feeling that if she turned to leave her, Arabella might snatch at her, and draw her back. She certainly did look odd.

There was something catlike in the way in which she kept her eyes riveted upon Floretta.

[209]

She looked as if, at any moment, she might spring at her!

She was not thinking of doing anything of the sort, however.

The truth was that she *did* feel just a bit queer.

Was it the three kinds of pills? She could not tell, but she began to feel as if she would be glad if she were at home.

"I guess I'll go now," she said. "I think it must be time."

"What time did your Aunt Matilda tell you to come home?" Floretta asked.

"She said I could stay to dinner if Dorothy asked me, but she doesn't come home, so I guess I won't wait."

"Go to dinner at the Cleverton in that plaid gingham!" thought Floretta, for she had seen the plain little frock beneath the raincoat.

[210]



SHE OFFERED TWO CARDS TO FLORETTA.—PAGE 210.

Arabella grasped her big umbrella firmly, and turned, as she went down the steps, to say:

"You may tell Dorothy Dainty that *Miss Corryville* called."

Floretta giggled.

"And you might tell your Aunt Matilda that you talked with *Miss Paxton*," she said.

"I will," said Arabella, without a sign of a smile.

"I wonder you don't leave cards," said Floretta, and to her surprise, the queer child put her hand in the pocket of her raincoat, and, without looking at them, offered two cards to Floretta, saying:

"There they are."

Then, without looking back, she marched resolutely down the road. She did not thank Floretta for talking with her while she rested, nor did she say "good-by."

[211]

For some moments Floretta stood watching the odd little figure as it tramped down the road, the umbrella, like a huge walking stick, thumping the gravel at every step. She thought Arabella would turn around, but she did not.

One might have thought that she had already forgotten the child with whom she had been talking. When, at last, she disappeared behind a clump of trees that hid the curve of the road, Floretta looked at the two cards in her hand, stared at them in amazement, and then laughed, laughed until her eyes were full of tears.

Who could have helped laughing? One card bore these lines:

[212]

JAMES HORTON WORTH,  
PAINLESS DENTISTRY,  
10 TREVOR STREET, MERRIVALE.

While the other, equally interesting, bore this statement:

ALTON JUSTUS MEER,  
JEWELLER,  
90 RUPERT ROAD, MERRIVALE.

"How perfectly funny," cried Floretta. "I'll run up and show them to mamma, and then I'll wait here to give them to Dorothy and Nancy when they come. I wonder if they'll have any choice?"

Dorothy and Nancy felt, as did the older members of the party, that the ride had been the most delightful of any that they had enjoyed since their arrival.

The horses were tossing their manes, and Romeo, as if in imitation, tossed his so that it showed all its silken beauty.

[213]

"See him!" cried Dorothy. "He thinks he's as fine as any horse."

"Well, he is as dear as they," said Nancy.

"Oh, yes," said Dorothy, "and dearer."

And when the horses and the pony had been led around to the stable, and the older members of the party had reached the piazza, Dorothy and Nancy, who had paused for a moment to talk, ran up the steps, intending to sit together in a large rocker.

Before they reached the chair, Floretta flew toward them.

"You had a funny caller while you were out driving," she said, with a giggle, "and she was so very fashionable that she left these cards. She told me to tell you that *Miss Corryville* had called."

"It was Arabella," said Nancy. [214]

"Did she truly say '*Miss?*'" Dorothy asked.

"Well, didn't I *say* so?" Floretta asked rudely; "and I told her to tell her Aunt Matilda that she talked with *Miss Paxton*, and she said she would. She waited a long time for you to come home, because she said she meant to stay to dinner with you. Say! She had on a calico dress! Wouldn't she have looked gay?"

"It isn't very kind to laugh at any one's clothes," said Dorothy, "and it's not very nice to laugh at other people's friends."

"Pooh!" cried Floretta, "I shall laugh at whoever I please," and she turned and ran up to her room.

But she had laughed once too often! During the ride, Mrs. Fenton had spoken of Floretta's rude ways, and of the day when, upon following Nancy to the dining-room, she had caught the provoking child in the act of mimicking her. [215]

"Your little Nancy was grieved and distressed because she knew that I saw it. What a difference there is in children! The Paxton child is disgusting, while Nancy, who, I have heard, was a little waif, is as gentle as Dorothy, who was born the little daughter of a fine, old family."

Aunt Charlotte and Mrs. Dainty had told Mrs. Fenton something of Nancy's life, and noticed how deeply interested she seemed to be.

Mrs. Paxton had realized that ever since the day that Floretta had told of being caught mimicking Mrs. Fenton for the amusement of the waitresses and maids, Mrs. Fenton had shunned them. She had made desperate efforts to win Mrs. Fenton's friendship, but never very successfully, as she found that her little daughter's silly act had rendered any intimacy quite impossible. [216]

A few days after the ride, Mrs. Fenton did not appear at lunch, or at dinner, and when Mrs. Paxton, with elaborate interest, inquired for her, she learned that the lady had left very early that morning, before any guests were on the piazza to see her depart.

It certainly did seem odd that she should have left, without a word to those whom she had known, but Mrs. Dainty, with her customary good taste, made no comment, and Aunt Charlotte Grayson was equally silent.

Mrs. Paxton did just as one might have expected. She expressed, in a very loud voice, her disgust at being thus pointedly slighted, for so she chose to feel.

"After all my friendliness, I can't see how she could leave the Cleverton without so much as a word to me. Why, I felt almost like a relative, as my name was Fenton before I married!" [217]

"I guess Mrs. Fenton didn't have what you might call a family feeling," said old Mr. Cunningham, which so angered Mrs. Paxton that she politely turned her back.

Two letters arrived at the Cleverton that afternoon, and it would be difficult to say which caused the greater surprise.

Mrs. Paxton told the contents of hers to all who would listen, and there were enough who were curious, to make a good audience.

"To MRS. CLARA FENTON PAXTON:" it began, refraining from any endearing terms.

"I knew, before I met you, that you and your small daughter were related to my husband, and also knew that he entertained no admiration for you. He left his entire estate to me, and as you were but a distant relative, you could expect no inheritance. However, with a determination to deal fairly with all my kin (I have but three such), I came to the Cleverton to see you and your little daughter, intending, if she proved sweet-tempered and attractive, to will my property to her. She is the only one of the three relatives who bears my husband's name. [218]

"I do not wish to be harsh, but I am forced to admit that I find her to be bold, naturally unkind, and wholly lacking in the grace and courtesy which most children possess, either by training or inheritance.

"I, therefore, have made my will in favor of Nancy Ferris, once a little waif, now a sweet, gentle, and attractive child, whose little acts of courtesy and kindness are fully appreciated by [219]

"Her friend,

"A most singular woman, to leave her property to a waif, a child of the theatre, and not bequeath so much as a penny to my Floretta, whom *any* one could see is an aristocrat," said Mrs. Paxton.

"Mrs. Fenton, or anybody else, would need some rather strong glasses to see *that!*" muttered Mr. Cunningham.

He was a testy old fellow, and he, like other guests of the hotel, had become exceedingly tired of Mrs. Paxton and her unlovely child.

The other letter gave surprise and delight to the two who had shared in the care and training of little Nancy. [220]

"TO MRS. RUDOLPH DAINTY, AND TO MRS. CHARLOTTE GRAYSON,

"DEAR FRIENDS:—" was its greeting, and then followed the story of the writer's visit to the Cleverton, and the statement that her few relatives were too distant to have any valid claim to her estate.

"I was greatly displeased with the two of my kin whom I came to observe, and I will not dwell upon that, but, instead, will take this time to say that Dorothy Dainty and Nancy Ferris, are the two dearest children that it has been my pleasure to know.

"Dorothy's life has been sunny, and Nancy's story, as you told it to me, appealed to me, and I looked with even greater interest at the child who, under your loving care, had blossomed like a lovely flower.

"Dorothy has her parents, and will inherit a fortune. Nancy has no parents, and I know, will be kindly cared for by you, but that fact will not deter me from making a bequest that gives me greatest pleasure. [221]

"I shall leave all of my estate to Nancy Ferris, and I remind her, in some little verses that I enclose, how deeply I have appreciated her many little kindnesses.

TO NANCY

"Dear little girl, I know that you will daily  
Do loving acts of kindness, and of cheer,  
Thus urging life to sing its song more gaily  
And making friendship lasting and more dear.

"I felt your charm, dear child, I saw how sweetly  
You gave your kindness, with no thought of gain.  
I give you a reward, and how completely  
I joy in giving, words cannot explain."

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## CHAPTER XII [222]

### A SERENADE

JACK TIVERTON stood in the lower hall one morning, and appeared as if waiting for some one. In his hand was a short switch that he had cut from a shrub that grew beside the driveway. Often he looked up the staircase, and then, as no one appeared, he would continue to strike at the flies that flew past the doorway.

At last he heard merry voices upon the landing, and then Dorothy and Nancy came hurrying down the stairs.

"Good morning!" they called, but Jack, in his eagerness to ask questions, forgot to return their greeting.

"Say!" he cried, "do you know that Mrs. Paxton and Floretta left this morning before breakfast?" [223]

No, the little girls did not know that.

"Well, they have. I saw them go, and I'm glad. Floretta was fun to play with, but she wasn't fair. She'd get me to do things, and then if we got caught, she'd always say I planned it," said Jack.

Dorothy tried to think of something kind to say of Floretta, but she knew that what Jack said was true. Floretta truly was not in the habit of playing "fair."

"Her mamma said something queer just as she was going off. She was talking to a lady, I don't know what her name is, and Mrs. Paxton said:

"Well, Dorothy Dainty has always seemed to be fond of Nancy, but now that Nancy is to have a

*fortune*, shell love her a deal more than she ever did before."

[224]

And now Dorothy spoke, her blue eyes flashing, and her cheeks flushed.

"That's not true!" she cried. "That's not true! I've always loved Nancy, and always will. I'd love her if she had just nothing at all! Nothing could make any difference. I love her all I can. Nancy knows that. Every one knows that."

How keenly she felt Mrs. Paxton's silly speech!

She was indignant that any one should think her love for Nancy so little worth while that fortune could make it stronger.

How could she love Nancy more than she had always loved her?

Nancy threw her arms about her, and drew her closer.

"Don't you mind, Dorothy," she said, "I know how truly you love me. Mrs. Paxton didn't know, because I guess she couldn't understand it. *She* couldn't love the way you do."

[225]

Dorothy smiled through the tears that had filled her eyes.

"There's no one dearer than you, Nancy," she said.

Jack swung his switch at a dragon-fly that flew past the doorway.

"Did you see that darning-needle?" he asked.

"Well," he continued, without waiting for an answer, "I was down the road a few days ago, trying to catch some of those big steel-colored ones in my fly-net. I hadn't seen any one after I left this piazza, but just as I swung my net round to catch the dragon-fly, somebody said: 'Look out, or you'll get bitten!' and I turned round, but no one was in sight. I was just going to swing my net again, when some one giggled, and then I saw a little skinny girl looking at me from between some bushes."

[226]

"What was she doing?" Dorothy asked.

"You couldn't guess if you tried for a month!" said Jack.

"She was sitting on a big stone, beside a big puddle that was left there after the shower. She said she was playing she was a frog, and when she stared at me through her glasses, and smiled, no, *grinned* at me, I couldn't help thinking she looked like one. Say, she had on a green cloak, a regular frog-color."

"It must have been *Arabella!*" said Nancy.

"I don't know what her name was. I didn't ask her, but while I watched her she hopped off the stone into the puddle with both feet, and cried, 'po-dunk!' just like an old bullfrog. My! Weren't her shoes wet!"

[227]

"I wonder what her Aunt Matilda said when she went home with wet feet," said Dorothy.

Without noticing what she said, Jack continued.

"I never saw such a queer girl!" he said, in disgust, "for when I told her dragonflies would never bite, she said: 'They will. They'll sew your eyes, and nose, and mouth up. Po-dunk!' and she hopped back on to the stone, and grinned at me just as she did at first. Say! She made me feel queer to look at her, and I turned and ran away. I wasn't afraid of her, of course, but she *did* make me feel queer!"

"She'd make any one feel queer," said Nancy as they turned toward the dining-room.

[228]

Jack wished that they might have stayed longer in the hall. He had intended to ask them if they knew Arabella, and if she was always doing queer things, but Mrs. Dainty and Aunt Charlotte joined them, and they went in for breakfast.

Mrs. Tiverton, coming in from an early walk, took Jack with her to the other side of the dining-room. He looked across at them, and wondered what they could have told of Arabella if they had had a chance. He decided to question them, whispering softly to himself:

"I'll *make* them tell me all they know about that funny girl."

For several days he tried to catch Dorothy or Nancy at a time when he could question them.

He chased Dorothy up the long stairway one morning, only to see her disappear into her room. He had not told her that he had wished to talk with her, and she, believing that he was only chasing her for fun, ran from him, laughing as she went.

[229]

He found Nancy, a few minutes later, and coaxed her to wait on the landing.

"Now, Nancy," he said, "you've got to tell me something about that queer girl that you and Dorothy know."

"If you mean Arabella," said Nancy, "I don't see what I could tell you, only that she *is* queer, and you know that now."

"You'll better believe I know it!" cried Jack, "for I met her again yesterday, and guess what she was doing!"

"Oh, I couldn't," said Nancy. "No one ever could guess what Arabella Corryville would do."

"Well, she looked like a witch, and acted like one, too," Jack replied. "It was yesterday that I saw her. I was going across the field, and had nearly reached the wall, when I looked up, and saw her sitting on the top bar of the—the—oh, the place where they take down the bars to let the cattle through." [230]

"I know where you mean," said Nancy, "but why was it strange that she was sitting there?"

"It was what she was doing that was funny," Jack replied, "and because you couldn't guess, I'll tell you."

"She didn't look toward me, though I'm sure she must have heard me coming, for I was just tramping along, and whistling all the way. She was looking up at the clouds, and counting, 'one—two—three—' very slowly, and when I was close behind her, she said: [231]

"'Hush—sh—sh! I'm charming the crows!'

"'How long does it take to do it?' I said, for it sounded like nonsense, and I wanted to hurry. It was almost lunch time."

"'Hush—sh!' she said again. 'There comes one of them now!' and sure enough a big, black crow did come flying right down, and perched on the limb of an old tree near her."

"Why, Jack Tiverton," cried Nancy, "you don't believe Arabella really *made* him come down, do you?"

"Of course not," cried Jack, "but she wanted me to think so. Say! She said she was saying a charm, and when I asked her what it was, she wouldn't tell me. She said it would spoil the charm to tell it. She looked funny sitting up there on the top rail, and staring at the crows till her eyes watered. She didn't look like a 'charmer.' She looked ever so much more like a scarecrow!" [232]

"Oh, Jack, it's horrid to say that!" cried Nancy, at the same time trying not to let him see how near she was to laughing.

"Well, she *did*!" Jack insisted, "and you're almost laughing now, Nancy Ferris, and you'd have screamed if you'd seen her roosting there, and calling herself a charmer! Why, that old crow just flopped down there for fun, and when he saw the queer-looking girl, he cawed as if it made him mad, and I didn't blame him. Say! She had a shoe on one foot, and a slipper on the other. Her apron was put on back-side-to, and she had a hen's feather in each hand, and she waved them up and down while she mumbled some kind of a verse. She said her clothes were put on that way to help the charm. Isn't she a *ninny*?" [233]

Just at that moment, before Nancy could reply, Mrs. Tiverton called Jack, and Nancy ran to tell the story of Arabella's latest freak to Dorothy.

---

One afternoon, a number of little girls were sitting on the piazza at the Cleverton, and their merry voices attracted Jack Tiverton, who glanced up from the book that he was reading, and then, because he was curious to know what so interested them, crossed the piazza, and joined the group.

Dorothy and Nancy, in the big hammock, held the book of fairy tales, Flossie Barnet sat near them, while the others, all little guests at the hotel, sat upon the railing, or in the large rockers that stood near. [234]

Jack joined the row perched upon the railing.

"Tell a fellow what you are all talking about, will you? Will you, *please*, I mean?" he asked.

"Dorothy Dainty has been reading us a lovely story," said a little girl, whose merry eyes showed that she had enjoyed it.

"What's it about?" Jack asked, and then, "Oh, *fairy* tales!" he said.

"Don't you like fairy tales?" Flossie questioned, looking up at him.

No one liked to differ with dear little Flossie, least of all, Jack Tiverton.

"Oh, I like them *some*," he said, awkwardly, "but,—are there any stories about bandits or pirates in that book?"

"Oh, no," they cried, in a laughing chorus, "and there aren't any wild Indians in it, either." [235]

"I don't care much about Indian stories," Jack replied, "but I do like to read about pirates."

"But just hear what this one was about," said Nancy.

"The wandering prince had, for years, been searching for a lovely princess, who should look



like a beautiful picture that hung in his father's palace. One day he came to a castle where the people told him a handsome princess was imprisoned, and he asked why she was kept there. They told him that she was enchanted, and that some day, a wandering prince would sing beneath her window, and then the spell would be broken, and she would be free."

Jack was interested.

"But s'posing he couldn't sing?" he asked.

[236]

"Oh, a prince could surely sing!" said Flossie.

"And p'raps he could sing under her window, if he couldn't anywhere else," ventured a dreamy-eyed little girl who sat near Dorothy.

"And how would he know *what* to sing?" a cheery voice questioned, and a pair of merry eyes peered over the piazza railing.

"Oh, Uncle Harry!" cried Flossie, "what difference would it make?"

"All the difference in the world," declared Uncle Harry, "for while the proper melody would set the princess free, how are we to know that the wrong melody might not chain her closer than before!"

"Why, the story doesn't say that," said Nancy.

"Perhaps not, but the prince took an *awful* risk when he chose what to sing," declared Uncle Harry.

[237]

"You're laughing when you say it," said Dorothy.

"He is," agreed Flossie, "and what he says is funny, but I know this: I'd love to hear some one singing under *my* window!"

Some ladies, who sat near enough to hear the conversation, were amused at the children's enthusiasm, and at Uncle Harry's evident interest.

"The prince had his guitar slung over his shoulder by a ribbon," said Dorothy. "See the picture," and she slipped from the hammock, and offered the book that he might see the illustration.

"I'm glad he carried his guitar instead of a banjo," he said.

"Why are you glad of that?" Flossie asked.

[238]

"Oh, because I really *am*, in fact, I might even say I am delighted," he replied.

"I do believe he intends to serenade those children," said a handsome woman, to her friend who sat beside her; "he is a brilliant man, and one who is blessed with many talents, and one of his greatest charms is his love of children. He will go far out of his way to afford them a bit of fun."

That evening, when nearly every one had left the piazza, and all of the children were in their rooms, the soft twanging of guitar strings floated up toward Flossie's window.

She was not yet asleep, and she sat up in bed, and listened.

Yes, it was a guitar! Was it Uncle Harry's?

A little prelude softly played, drew her toward the window.

[239]

She crept closer, and peeped out. Yes, there he was, looking right up toward her window.

Now his fine voice was softly singing, and Flossie held her breath.

"Under thy window, my little lady,  
Under thy window, Flossie dear,  
Here where the moonbeams softly flicker,  
Sing I this song that you may hear.

"Moonlight, and starlight weave enchantment,  
Yet shall my song your freedom bring,  
You shall be happy little lady,  
Give me your love for the song I sing."

"Oh, Uncle Harry, you have it *now!*" cried Flossie. "I love you, when you're singing, and *all* the time."

"I know that, dear little girl, but I *must* have my fun, so I came here to sing the song I made for you," he said gently.

"Well, you're *dear*," she cried, "and I'll throw you a kiss," and she did, reaching far out of the window that he might surely see her.

[240]

"I caught it!" he cried, and as he turned toward the porch, she heard him softly strumming the prelude again.

Others had heard the pretty song, for Dorothy and Nancy had a room next to Flossie's.

The next morning he was coaxed and teased to sing the song again, but he declared that he could only sing it in the moonlight, that the daylight would spoil its effect.

The sunny days sped on wings, and soon the guests began to think of turning homeward.

Mrs. Dainty's party and the Barnets were to leave the hotel at the same time, and Dorothy, Nancy, and Flossie were delighted that they were to take the return trip together. [241]

They were talking of the pleasures that they were looking forward to, and telling of some delightful events that were already planned, when Jack Tiverton gave them a genuine surprise.

"Mamma has just told me something fine," he said, "and I ran right down to tell it to you."

"Oh, tell it quick!" said Flossie.

"We're going to live in Merrivale, and we'll be there soon after we leave here. I'm glad. Are you, *all* of you?" he asked.

"Of course we're glad," said Dorothy and Nancy; and Flossie hastened to add:

"Every one of us is glad."

There were bright days, and many pleasures in store for the little friends, and those who would like also to enjoy them, and to know what happened during the winter, may read of all this in [242]

"Dorothy Dainty's Holidays."

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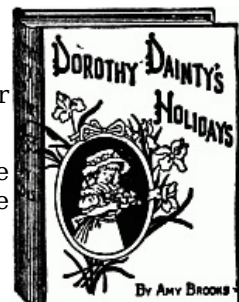
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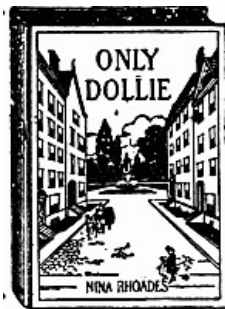
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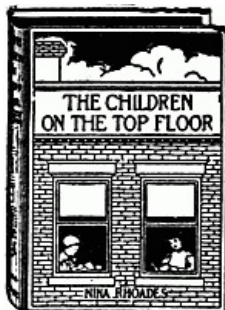
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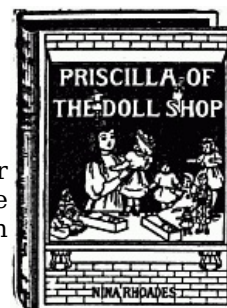
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her good heart carries her through, and her conscientiousness and moral courage win affection and happiness.



## **The Other Sylvia**

**E**IGHT-year-old Sylvia learns that girls who are "Kings' Daughters" pledge themselves to some kind act or service, and that one little girl named Mary has taken it upon herself to be helpful to all the Marys of her acquaintance. This is such an interesting way of doing good that she adopts it in spite of her unusual name, and really finds not only "the other Sylvia," but great happiness.

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Transcriber's Note: Obvious punctuation errors repaired.

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