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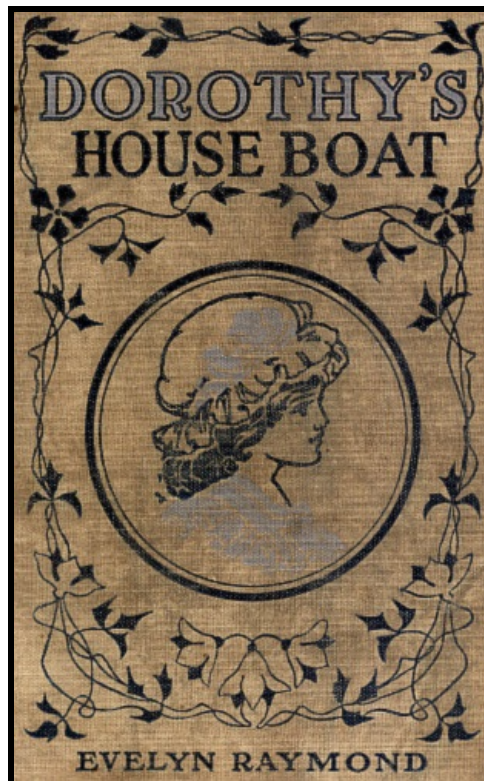
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DOROTHY ON A HOUSE-BOAT

By

EVELYN RAYMOND



ILLUSTRATED



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**THE
DOROTHY BOOKS**

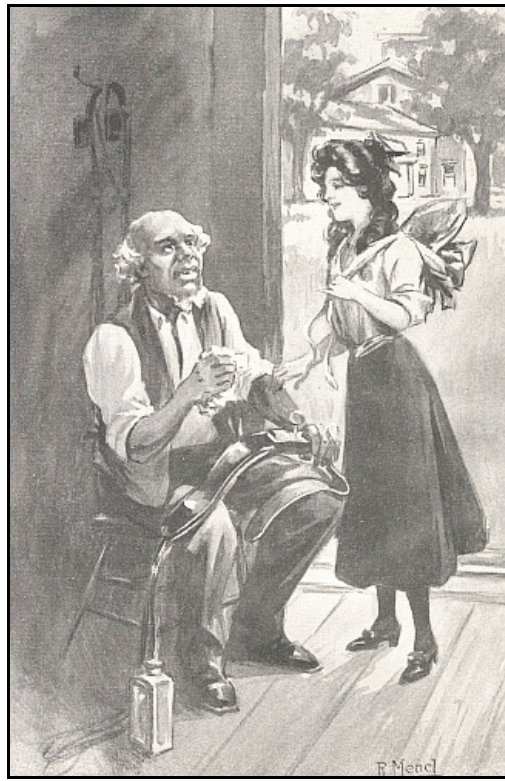
By EVELYN RAYMOND

These stories of an American girl by an American author have made "Dorothy" a household synonym for all that is fascinating. Truth and realism are stamped on every page. The interest never flags, and is oftentimes intense. No more happy choice can be made for gift books, so sure are they to win approval and please not only the young in years, but also "grown-ups" who are young in heart and spirit.

Dorothy
Dorothy at Skyrrie
Dorothy's
Schooling
Dorothy's Travels
Dorothy's House
Party
Dorothy in
California
Dorothy on a Ranch
Dorothy's House-
Boat
Dorothy at Oak
Knowe
Dorothy's Triumph
Dorothy's Tour

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"EPHRAIM, DID YOU EVER LIVE IN A HOUSE-BOAT?"—P 15 *Dorothy's House-Boat*

FOREWORD.

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Those who have followed the story of Dorothy Calvert's life thus far will remember that it has been full of interest and many adventures—pleasant and otherwise. Beginning as a foundling left upon the steps of a little house in Brown street, Baltimore, she was adopted by its childless owners, a letter-carrier and his wife. When his health failed she removed with them to the Highlands of the Hudson. There followed her "Schooling" at a fashionable academy; her vacation "[Travels](#)" in beautiful Nova Scotia; her "[House Party](#)" at the home of her newly discovered great aunt, Mrs. Betty Calvert; their winter together "In California"; a wonderful summer "[On a Ranch](#)" in Colorado; and now the early autumn has found the old lady and the girl once more in the ancestral home of the Calverts. Enjoying their morning's mail in the pleasant library of old Bellvue, they are both astonished by the contents of one letter which offers for Dorothy's acceptance the magnificent gift of a "House-Boat." What follows the receipt of this letter is now to be told.

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CHAPTER I

[Pg 11]

A BIG GIFT FOR A SMALL MAID.

"Well, of all things!" exclaimed Mrs. Betty Calvert, shaking her white head and tossing her hands in a gesture of amazement. Then, as the letter she had held fell to the floor, her dark eyes twinkled with amusement and she smilingly demanded: "Dorothy, do you want an elephant?"

The girl had been reading her own letters, just come in the morning's mail, but she paused to stare at her great-aunt and to ask in turn:

"Aunt Betty, what do you mean?"

"Because if you do here's the chance of your life to get one!" answered the old lady, motioning toward the fallen letter.

Dolly understood that she was to pick it up and read it, and, having done so, remarked:

"Auntie dear, this doesn't say anything about an elephant, as I can see."

"Amounts to the same thing. The idea of a house-boat as a gift to a girl like you! My cousin Seth Winters must be getting into his dotage! Of course, girlie, I don't mean that fully, but isn't it a queer notion? What in the world can you, could you, do with a house-boat?"

"Live in it, sail in it, have the jolliest time in it! Why not, Auntie, darling?"

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Dorothy's face was shining with eagerness and she ran to clasp Mrs. Calvert with coaxing arms. "Why not, indeed, Aunt Betty? You've been shut up in this hot city all summer long; you haven't had a bit of an outing, anywhere; it would do you lots of good to go sailing about on the river or bay; and—and—do say 'yes,' please, to dear Mr. Seth's offer! Oh! do!"

The old lady kissed the uplifted face, merrily exclaiming:

"Don't pretend it's for my benefit, little wheedler! The idea of such a thing is preposterous—simply preposterous! Run away and write the silly man that we've no use for house-boats, but if he does happen to have an elephant on hand, a white elephant, we might consider accepting it as a gift! We could have it kept at the park Zoo, maybe, and some city youngsters might like that."

Dorothy's face clouded. She had become accustomed to receiving rich gifts, during her Summer on a Ranch, as the guest of the wealthy Fords, and now to have a house-boat offered her was only one more of the wonderful things life brought to her.

Going back to her seat beside the open window she pushed her own letters aside, for the moment, to re-read that of her old teacher and guardian, during her life on the mountain by the Hudson. She had always believed Mr. Winters to be the wisest of men, justly entitled to his nickname of the "Learned Blacksmith." He wasn't one to do anything without a good reason and, of course, Aunt Betty's remarks about him had been only in jest. That both of them understood; and Dorothy now searched for the reason of this surprising gift. This was the letter:

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"Dear Cousin Betty:

"Mr. Blank has failed in business, just as you warned me he would, and all I can recover of the money I loaned him is what is tied up in a house-boat, one of his many extravagances—though, in this case, not a great one.

"Of course, I have no use for such a floating structure on top of a mountain and I want to give it to our little Dorothy. As she has now become a shareholder in a mine with a small income of her own, she can afford to accept the boat and I know she will enjoy it. I have forwarded the deed of gift to my lawyers in your town and trust your own tangled business affairs are coming out right in the end. All well at Deerhurst. Jim Barlow came down to say that Dr. Sterling is going abroad for a few months and that the manse will be closed. I wish the boy were ready for college, but he isn't. Also, that he wasn't too proud to accept any help from Mr. Ford—but he is. He says the discovery of that mine on that gentleman's property was an 'accident' on his own part, and he 'won't yet awhile.' He wants 'to earn his own way through the world' and, from present appearances, I think he'll have a chance to try. He's on the lookout now for another job."

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There followed a few more sentences about affairs in the highland village where the writer lived, but not a doubt was expressed as to the fitness of his extraordinary gift to a little girl, nor of its acceptance by her. Indeed, it was a puzzled, disappointed face which was now raised from the letter and an appealing glance that was cast upon the old lady in the chair by the desk.

Meanwhile Aunt Betty had been doing some thinking of her own. She loved novelty with all the zest of a girl and she was fond of the water. Mr. Winters's offer began to seem less absurd. Finally, she remarked:

"Well, dear, you may leave the writing of that note for a time. I'm obliged to go down town on business, this morning, and after my errands are done we will drive to that out-of-the-way place where this house-boat is moored and take a look at it. Are all those letters from your summer-friends? For a small person you have established a big correspondence, but, of course, it won't last long. Now run and tell Ephraim to get up the carriage. I'll be ready in twenty minutes."

Dorothy hastily piled her notes on the wide window-ledge and skipped from the room, clapping her hands and singing as she went. To her mind Mrs. Calvert's consent to visit the house-boat was almost proof that it would be accepted. If it were—Ah! glorious!

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"Ephraim, did you ever live in a house-boat?" she demanded, bursting in upon the old colored coachman, engaged in his daily task of "shinin' up de harness."

He glanced at her over his "specs," then as hastily removed them and stuffed them into his pocket. It was his boast that he could see as "well as evah" and needed no such aids to his sight. He hated to grow old and those whom he served so faithfully rarely referred to the fact.

So Dorothy ignored the "specs," though she couldn't help smiling to see one end of their steel frame sticking out from the pocket, while she repeated to his astonished ears her question.

"Evah lib in a house-boat? Evah kiss a cat's lef' hind foot? Nebah heered o' no such contraption. Wheah's it at—dat t'ing?"

"Away down at some one of the wharves and we're going to see it right away. Oh! I forget. Aunt Betty wants the carriage at the door in twenty minutes. In fifteen, now, I guess because 'time flies' fairly away from me. But, Ephy, dear, try to put your mind to the fact that likely, I guess, maybe, you and I and everybody will go and live on the loveliest boat, night and day, and every day go sailing—sailing—sailing—on pretty rivers, between green banks and heaps of flowers, and—"

Ephraim rose from his stool and waved her away.

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"Gwan erlong wid yo' foolishness honey gell! Yo' dreamin', an' my Miss Betty ain' gwine done erlow no such notions. My Miss Betty done got sense, she hab, bress her! She ain' gwine hab not'in' so scan'lous in yo' raisin' as dat yeah boat talk. Gwan an' hunt yo' bunnit, if you-all 'spects to ride in ouah bawoosh."

Dorothy always exploded in a gale of laughter to hear Ephraim's efforts to pronounce "barouche," as he liked to call the old carriage; and she now swept a mocking curtsy to his pompous dismissal, as she hurried away to put on her "bunnit" and coat. To Ephraim, any sort of feminine headgear was simply a "bunnit" and every wrap was a "shawl."

Soon the fat horses drew the glistening carriage through the gateway of Bellvue, the fine old residence of the Calverts, and down through the narrow, crowded streets of the business part of old Baltimore. To loyal Mrs. Betty, who had passed the greater part of her

long life in the southern city, it was very dear and even beautiful; but to Dorothy's young eyes it seemed, on that early autumn day, very "smelly" and almost squalid. Her mind still dwelt upon visions of sunny rivers and green fields, and she was too anxious for her aunt's acceptance of Mr. Winters's gift to keep still.

Fidgetting from side to side of the carriage seat, where she had been left to wait, the impatient girl felt that Aunt Betty's errands were endless. Even the fat horses, used to standing quietly on the street, grew restless during a long delay at the law offices of Kidder and Kidder, Mrs. Calvert's men of business. This, the lady had said, would be the last stop by the way; and when she at length emerged from the building, she moved as if but half conscious of what she was doing. Her face was troubled and looked far older than when she had left the carriage; and, with sudden sympathy and pity, Dorothy's mood changed.

"Aunt Betty, aren't you well? Let's go straight home, then, and not bother about that boat."

Mrs. Calvert smiled and bravely put her own worries behind her.

"Thank you, dear, for your consideration, but 'the last's the best of all the game,' as you children say. I've begun to believe that this boat errand of ours may prove so. Ephraim, drive to Halcyon Point."

If his mistress had bidden him drive straight into the Chesapeake, the old coachman would have attempted to obey; but he could not refrain from one glance of dismay as he received this order. He wouldn't have risked his own respectability by a visit to such a "low down, ornery" resort, alone; but if Miss Betty chose to go there it was all right. Her wish was "sutney cur'us" but being hers not to be denied.

And now, indeed, did Dorothy find the city with its heat a "smelly" place, but a most interesting one as well. The route lay through the narrowest of streets, where tumble-down old houses swarmed with strange looking people. To her it all seemed like some foreign country, with its Hebrew signs on the walls, its bearded men of many nations, and its untidy women leaning from the narrow windows, scolding the dirty children in the gutters beneath.

But after a time, the lane-like streets gave place to wider ones, the air grew purer, and soon a breath from the salt water beyond refreshed them all. Almost at once, it seemed, they had arrived; and Dorothy eagerly sought to tell which of the various craft clustered about the Point was her coveted house-boat.

The carriage drew up beside a little office on the pier and a man came out. He courteously assisted Aunt Betty to descend, while he promptly pointed out a rather squat, but pretty, boat which he informed her was the "Water Lily," lately the property of Mr. Blank, but now consigned to one Mr. Seth Winters, of New York, to be held at the commands of Miss Dorothy Calvert.

"A friend of yours, Madam?" he inquired, concluding that this stately old lady could not be the "Miss" in question and wholly forgetting that the little maid beside her might possibly be such.

Aunt Betty laid her hand on Dolly's shoulder and answered:

"This is Miss Dorothy Calvert and the 'Water Lily' is a gift from Mr. Winters to her. Can we go on board and inspect?"

The gentleman pursed his lips to whistle, he was so surprised, but instead exclaimed:

"What a lucky girl! The 'Water Lily' is the most complete craft of its kind I ever saw. Mr. Blank spared no trouble nor expense in fitting her up for a summer home for his family. She is yacht-shaped and smooth-motioned; and even her tender is better than most house-boats in this country. Blank must be a fanciful man, for he named the tender 'The Pad,' meaning leaf, I suppose, and the row-boat belonging is 'The Stem.' Odd, isn't it, Madam?"

"Rather; but will just suit this romantic girl, here," she replied; almost as keen pleasure now lighting her face as was shining from Dorothy's. At her aunt's words she caught the lady's hand and kissed it rapturously, exclaiming:

"Then you do mean to let me accept it, you precious, darling dear! You do, you do!"

They all laughed, even Ephraim, who was close at his lady's heels, acting the stout body-guard who would permit nothing to harm her in this strange place.

The Water Lily lay lower in the water than the dock and Mrs. Calvert was carefully helped down the gang plank to its deck. Another plank rested upon the top of the cabin, or main room of the house-boat, and Dorothy sped across this and hurried down the steep little

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winding stair, leading from it to the lower deck, to join in her aunt's inspection of the novel "ship."

Delighted astonishment hushed for the time her nimble tongue. Then her exclamations burst forth:

"It's so big!"

"About one hundred feet long, all told, and eighteen wide;" the wharf master explained.

"It's all furnished, just like a really, truly house!"

"Indeed, yes; with every needful comfort but not one superfluous article. See this, please. The way the 'bedrooms' are shut off;" continued the gentleman, showing how the three feet wide window-seats were converted into sleeping quarters. Heavy sail cloth had been shaped into partitions, and these fastened to ceiling and side wall separated the cots into cosy little staterooms. Extra seats, pulled from under the first ones, furnished additional cots, if needed.

The walls of the saloon had been sunk below the deck line, giving ample head room, and the forward part was of solid glass, while numerous side-windows afforded fine views in every direction. The roof of this large room could be covered by awnings and became a charming promenade deck.

Even Aunt Betty became speechless with pleasure as she wandered over the beautiful boat, examining every detail, from the steam-heating arrangements to the tiny "kitchen," which was upon the "tender" behind. [Pg 21]

"I thought the tug, or towing boat was always in front," she remarked at length.

"Mr. Blank found this the best arrangement. The 'Pad' has a steam engine and its prow fastened to the stern of the Lily propels it ahead. None of the smoke comes into the Lily and that, too, was why the galley, or kitchen, was built on the smaller boat. A little bridge is slung between the two for foot passage and—Well, Madam, I can't stop admiring the whole affair. It shows what a man's brain can do in the way of invention, when his heart is in it, too. I fancy that parting with his Water Lily was about the hardest trial poor old Blank had to bear."

Silence fell on them all and Dorothy's face grew very sober. It was a wonderful thing that this great gift should come to her but it grieved her to know it had so come by means of another's misfortune. Aunt Betty, too, grew more serious and she asked the practical question:

"Is it a very expensive thing to run? Say for about three months?"

The official shrugged his shoulders, replying:

"That depends on what one considers expensive. It would smash my pocket-book to flinders. The greatest cost would be the engineer's salary. One might take the job for three dollars a day and keep. He might—I don't know. Then the coal, the power for the electric lights—the lots of little things that crop up to eat up cash as if it were good bread and butter. Ah! yes. It's a lovely toy—for those who can afford it. I only wish I could!" [Pg 22]

The man's remarks ended in a sigh and he looked at Dorothy as if he envied her. His expression hurt her, somehow, and she turned away her eyes, asking a practical question of her own:

"Would three hundred dollars do it?"

"Yes—for a time, at least. But——"

He broke off abruptly and helped Aunt Betty to ascend the plank to the wharf, while Dorothy followed, soberly, and Ephraim with all the pomposity he could assume.

There Methuselah Bonaparte Washington, the small colored boy who had always lived at Bellvieu and now served as Mrs. Betty's page as well as footman, descended from his perch and untied the horses from the place where careful Ephraim had fastened them. His air was a perfect imitation of the old man's and sat so funnily upon his small person that the wharf master chuckled and Dorothy laughed outright.

"Metty," as he was commonly called, disdained to see the mirth he caused but climbed to his seat behind, folded his arms as well as he could for his too big livery, and became as rigid as a statue—or as all well-conducted footmen should be.

Then good-byes were exchanged, after the good old Maryland fashion and the carriage [Pg 23]

rolled away.

As it vanished from view the man left behind sighed again and clenched his fists, muttering:

“This horrible, uneven world! Why should one child have so much and my Elsa—nothing! Elsa, my poor, unhappy child!”

Then he went about his duties and tried to forget Dorothy’s beauty, perfect health, and apparent wealth.

For some time neither Mrs. Calvert nor Dorothy spoke; then the girl said:

“Aunt Betty, Jim Barlow could tend that engine. And he’s out of a place. Maybe——”

“Yes, dear, I’ve been thinking of him, too. Somehow none of our plans seem quite perfect without good, faithful James sharing them.”

“And that poor Mr. Blank——”

“A very dishonest scoundrel, my child, according to all accounts. Don’t waste pity on him.”

“But his folks mayn’t be scoundrels. He loved them, too, same as we love or he wouldn’t have built such a lovely Water Lily. Auntie, that boat would hold a lot of people, wouldn’t it?”

“I suppose so,” answered the lady, absently.

“When we go house-boating may I invite anybody I choose to go with us?”

“I haven’t said yet that we would go!”

“But you’ve looked it and that’s better.”

Just then an automobile whizzed by and the horses pretended to be afraid. Mrs. Calvert was frightened and leaned forward anxiously till Ephraim had brought them down to quietness again. Then she settled back against her cushions and became once more absorbed in her own sombre thoughts. She scarcely heard and wholly failed to understand Dorothy’s repeated question:

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“May I, dear Aunt Betty?”

She answered carelessly:

“Why, yes, child. You may do what you like with your own.”

But that consent, so rashly given, was to bring some strange adventures in its train.

CHAPTER II

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INVITATIONS TO A CRUISE OF LOVING KINDNESS.

“Huh! Dolly’s caught the Ford fashion of sending telegrams where a letter would do!” exclaimed Jim Barlow, after he had opened the yellow envelope which Griselda Roemer gave him when he came in from work.

He was back at Deerhurst, living with old Hans and Griselda, the caretakers, and feeling more at home in his little room above the lodge doorway than anywhere else. He had come to do any sort of labor by which he might earn his keep, and to go on with his studies whenever he had leisure. Mr. Seth Winters, the “Learned Blacksmith,” and his faithful friend, would give him such help as was needed; and the lad had settled down in the prospect of a fine winter at his beloved books. After his long summer on the Colorado mountains he felt rested and keener for knowledge than ever.

Now as he held the telegram in his hand his face clouded, so that Griselda, watching, anxiously inquired:

“Is something wrong? Is our good lady sick?”

“It doesn’t say so. It’s from Dorothy. She wants me to come to Baltimore and help her fool away lots more time on a house-boat! I wish she’d mind her business!”

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The friendly German woman stared. She had grown to look upon her lodger, Jim, very much as if he were her own son. He wasn’t often so cross as this and never had been so against

Dorothy.

“Well, well! Ah so! Well!”

With this brief comment she made haste to set the dinner on the table and to call Hans from his own task of hoeing the driveway. Presently he had washed his face and hands at the little sink in the kitchen, rubbed them into a fine glow with the spotless roller-towel, and was ready for the great meal of the day—his generous “Dutch dinner.”

Usually Jim was as ready as Hans to enjoy it; but, to-day, he left his food untasted on his plate while he stared gloomily out of the window, and for so long that Griselda grew curious and went to see what might be happening without.

“What seest thou, lad? Is aught wrong beyond already?”

“No. Oh! come back to table, Mrs. Roemer. I’ll tell you. I’d just got fixed, you know, to do a lot of hard work—both kinds. Now comes this silly thing! I suppose Mrs. Calvert must have let Dolly ask me else she wouldn’t have done it. It seems some simpleton or other, likely as not that Mr. Ford—”

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“Call no names, son!” warned Hans, disposing of a great mouthful, to promptly reprimand the angry youth. Hans was a man of peace. He hated nothing so much as ill temper.

Jim said no more, but his wrath cooling began to eat his dinner with a zeal that made up for lost time. Having finished he went out saying:

“I’ll finish my job when I come back. I’m off now for the Shop.”

He always spoke of the smithy under the Great Balm of Gilead Tree as if it began with a capital letter. The old man who called himself a “blacksmith”—and was, in fact, a good one—and dwelt in the place stood to eager James Barlow as the type of everything good and great. He was sure, as he hurried along the road, that Mr. Seth would agree with him in regard to Dorothy’s telegram.

“Hello, Jim! What’s up? You look excited,” was the blacksmith’s greeting as the lad’s shadow darkened the smithy entrance.

“Read that, will you, Mr. Winters?”

The gentleman put on his “reading specs,” adjusted the yellow slip of paper conveniently, and exclaimed:

“Good enough! Mistress Betty has allowed the darling to accept it then! First rate. Well?”

Then he looked up inquiringly, surprised by the impatience of the boy’s expression.

“Well—of course I sha’n’t go. The idea of loafing for another two, three months is—ridiculous! And what fool would give such a thing as a house-boat to a chit of a girl like our Dorothy?”

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Mr. Seth laughed and pointed to the settee.

“Sit down, chap, and cool off. The world is as full of fools as it is of wise men. Which is which depends upon the point of view. I’m sorry to have you number me amongst the first; because I happen to be the stupid man who gave the ‘Water Lily’ and its belongings to little Dorothy. I knew she’d make good use of it, if her aunt would let her accept the gift, and she flatters you, I think, by inviting you to come and engineer the craft. You’ll go, of course.”

Jim did sit down then, rather suddenly, while his face reddened with shame, remembering what he had just called the wise man before him. Finally, he faltered:

“I know next to nothing about a steam engine.”

“I thought you had a good idea of the matter. Not as a trained expert, of course, but enough to manage a simple affair like the one in question. Dr. Sterling told me that you were often pottering about the machine shops in Newburgh and had picked up some good notions about steam and its force. He thought you might, eventually, turn your attention to such a line of work. From the beginning I had you in mind as helping Dolly to carry out her pleasant autumn plans.”

“I’d likely enough blow up the whole concern—through dumb ignorance. And—and—I was going to study double hard. I do want to get to college next year!”

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“This trip will help you. I wish I could take it myself, though I couldn’t manage even a tiny engine. Besides, lad, as I understand, the ‘Water Lily’ doesn’t wholly depend upon steam for her ‘power.’ She—but you’ll find out in two minutes of inspection more than I can suggest

in an hour. If you take the seven-thirty train to New York, to-morrow morning, you can reach Baltimore by three in the afternoon, easily enough. 'James Barlow. Been given house-boat. You're engineer. Be Union Station, three, Wednesday.' Signed: 'Dorothy.'"

This was the short dispatch which Mr. Winters now re-read, aloud, with the comment:

"The child is learning to condense. She's got this message down to the regulation ten-words-for-a-quarter."

Then he crossed to the bookcase and began to select certain volumes from its shelves, while Jim watched eagerly, almost hungrily. One after another, these were the beloved books whose contents he had hoped to master during the weeks to come. To see them now from the outside only was fresh disappointment and he rose to leave, saying:

"Well, if I must I must an' no bones about it. I wouldn't stir hand nor foot, 'cept it's Mrs. Calvert and——"

"Don't leave out Dolly Doodles, boy! She was your first friend among us all, and your first little teacher in the art of spelling. Oh! I know. Of course, such a boy as you would have learned, anyway, but 'Praise the bridge that carries you safe over.' Dorothy was the first 'bridge' between you and these volumes, in those far-back days when you both picked strawberries on Miranda Stott's truck-farm. There. I think these will be all you can do justice to before you come back. There's an old 'telescope' satchel of mine in the inner closet that will hold them nicely. Fetch it and be off with you." [Pg 30]

"Those—why, those are your own best beloved books! Would you trust them with me away from home? Will they be of any use on a house-boat?"

"Yes, yes, you 'doubting Thomas.' Now—how much money have you on hand?"

"Ten dollars. I'd saved it for a lexicon and some—some other things."

"This bulky fellow is a lexicon I used in my youth; and since Latin is a 'dead language' it's as much alive and as helpful now as ever. That book is my parting gift to you; and ten dollars is sufficient for your fare and a day's needs. good-bye."

All the time he had been talking Mr. Winters had been deftly packing the calf-bound volumes in the shabby "telescope," and now strapped it securely. Then he held out his hand with a cheerful smile lighting his fine face, and remarking: [Pg 31]

"When you see my dear ones just say everything good to them and say I said it. Good-bye."

Jim hurried away lest his friend should see the moisture that suddenly filled his eyes. He "hated good-byes" and could never get used to partings. So he fairly ran over the road to the gates of Deerhurst and worked off his troublesome emotion by hoeing every vestige of a weed from the broad driveways on its grounds. He toiled so swiftly and so well that old Hans felt himself relieved of the task and quietly went to sleep in his chair by the lodge door.

Gradually, too, the house-boat idea began to interest him. He had but a vague notion of what such a craft was like and found himself thinking about it with considerable pleasure. So that when, at three o'clock the next afternoon, he stepped down from the train at Union Station he was his old, eager, good-natured self.

"Hello, Doll!"

"O Jim! The three weeks since I saw you seems an age! Isn't it just glorious? I'm so glad!"

With that the impulsive girl threw her arms around the lad's neck and tip-toed upwards to reach his brown cheek with her lips. Only to find her arms unclasped and herself set down with considerable energy.

"Quit that, girlie. Makes me look like a fool!"

"I should think it did. Your face is as red—as red! Aren't you glad to see me, again?" demanded Miss Dorothy, folding her arms and standing firmly before him. [Pg 32]

She looked so pretty, so bewitching, that some passers-by smiled, at which poor Jim's face turned even a deeper crimson and he picked up his luggage to go forward with the crowd.

"But aren't you glad, Jim?" she again mischievously asked, playfully obstructing his progress.

"Oh! bother! Course. But boys can be glad without such silly kissin'. I don't know what ails girls, anyway, likin' so to make a feller look ridic'lous."

Dorothy laughed and now marched along beside him, contenting herself by a clasp of his burdened arms.

"Jim, you're a dear. But you're cross. I can always tell when you're that by your 'relapsing into the vernacular,' as I read in Aunt Betty's book. Never mind, Jim, I'm in trouble!"

"Shucks! I'd never dream it!"

They had climbed the iron stairway leading to the street above and were now waiting for a street-car to carry them to Bellvieu. So Jim set down his heavy telescope and light bag of clothing to rest his arms, while old Ephraim approached from the rear. He had gone with his "li'l miss" to meet the newcomer but had kept out of sight until now.

"Howdy, Marse Jim. Howdy."

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Then he picked up the bag of books and shrugged his shoulders at its weight. Setting it back on the sidewalk he raised his hand and beckoned small Methuselah, half-hiding behind a pillar of the building. That youngster came tremblingly forward. He was attired in his livery, that he had been forbidden to wear when "off duty," or save when in attendance upon "Miss Betty." But having been so recently promoted to the glory of a uniform he appeared in it whenever possible.

On this trip to the station he had lingered till his grandfather had already boarded the street-car and too late for him to be sent home to change. Now he cowered before Ephraim's frown and fear of what would happen when they two were alone together in the "harness room" of the old stable. On its walls reposed other whips than those used for Mrs. Calvert's horses.

"Yeah, chile. Tote dem valeeshes home. Doan' yo let no grass grow, nudder, whiles yo' doin' it. I'll tend to yo' case bimeby. I ain' gwine fo'get."

Then he put the little fellow aboard the first car that came by, hoisted the luggage after him, and had to join in the mirth the child's appearance afforded—with his scrawny body half-buried beneath the livery "made to grow in."

Jim was laughing, too, yet anxious over the disappearance of his books, and explained to Dorothy:

"That gray telescope's full of Mr. Seth's books. We better get the next car an' follow, else maybe he'll lose 'em."

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"He'll not dare. And we're not going home yet. We're going down to the Water Lily. Oh! she's a beauty! and think that we can do just what we like with her! No, not that one! This is our car. It runs away down to the jumping-off place of the city and out to the wharves beyond. Yes, of course, Ephraim will go with us. That's why Metty was brought along. To take your things home and to let Aunt Betty know you had come. O Jim, I'm so worried!"

He looked and laughed his surprise, but she shook her head, and when they were well on their way disclosed her perplexities, that were, indeed, real and serious enough.

"Jim Barlow, Aunt Betty's got to give up Bellvieu—and it's just killing her!"

"Dolly Doodles—what you sayin'?"

It sounded very pleasant to hear that old pet name again and proved that this was the same loving, faithful Jim, even if he did hate kissing. But then he'd always done that.

"I mean just what I say and I'm so glad to have you to talk it over with. I daren't say a word to her about it, of course, and I can't talk to the servants. They get just frantic. Once I said something to Dinah and she went into a fit, nearly. Said she'd tear the house down stone by stone 'scusin' she'd let her 'li'l Miss Betty what was borned yeah be tu'ned outen it.' You see that dear Auntie, in the goodness of her heart, has taken care of a lot of old women and old men, in a big house the family used to own down in the country. Something or somebody has 'failed' whatever that means and most of Aunt Betty's money has failed too. If she sells Bellvieu, as the 'city' has been urging her to do for ever so long, she'll have enough money left to still take care of her 'old folks' and keep up their Home. If she doesn't—Well there isn't enough to do everything. And, though she doesn't say a word of complaint, it's heart-breaking to see the way she goes around the house and grounds, laying her old white hand on this thing or that in such a loving way—as if she were saying good-bye to it! Then, too, Jim, did you know that poor Mabel Bruce has lost her father? He died very suddenly and her mother has been left real poor. Mabel grieves dreadfully; so, of course, she must be one of our guests on the Water Lily. She won't cheer up Aunt Betty very well, but you must do that. She's very fond of *you*, Jim, Aunt Betty is, and it's just splendid that you're free from Dr. Sterling now and can come to manage our boat. Why,

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boy, what's the matter? Why do you look so 'sollumcolic?' Didn't you want to come? Aren't you glad that 'Uncle Seth' gave me the 'Water Lily'?"

"No. I didn't want to come. And if Mrs. Betty's so poor, what you doing with a house-boat, anyway?"

Promptly, they fell into such a heated argument that Ephraim felt obliged to interfere and remind his "li'l miss" that she was in a public conveyance and must be more "succumspec' in yo' behavesomeness." But she gaily returned that they were now the only passengers left in the car and she must make stupid Jim understand—everything. [Pg 36]

Finally, she succeeded so far that he knew the facts:

How and why the house-boat had become Dorothy's property; that she had three hundred dollars in money, all her own; and that, instead of putting it in the bank as she had expected, she was going to use it to sail the Water Lily and give some unhappy people a real good time; that Jim was expected to work without wages and must manage the craft for pure love of the folks who sailed in it; that Aunt Betty had said Dorothy might invite whom she chose to be her guests; and that, first and foremost, Mrs. Calvert herself must be made perfectly happy and comfortable.

"Here we are! There she is! That pretty thing all white and gold, with the white flag flying her own sweet name—Water Lily! Doesn't she look exactly like one? Wasn't it a pretty notion to paint the tender green like a real lily 'Pad?' and that cute little row-boat a reddish brown, like an actual 'Stem?' Aren't you glad you came? Aren't we going to be gloriously happy? Does it seem it can be true that it's really, truly ours?" demanded Dorothy, skipping along the pier beside the soberer Jim. [Pg 37]

But his face brightened as he drew nearer the beautiful boat and a great pride thrilled him that he was to be in practical charge of her.

"Skipper Jim, the Water Lily. Water Lily, let me introduce you to your Commodore!" cried Dorothy, as they reached the gang-plank and were about to go aboard. Then her expression changed to one of astonishment. Somebody—several somebodies, indeed—had presumed to take possession of the house-boat and were evidently having "afternoon tea" in the main saloon.

The wharf master came out of his office and hastily joined the newcomers. He was evidently annoyed and hastened to explain:

"Son and daughter of Mr. Blank with some of their friends. Come down here while I was off duty and told my helper they had a right to do that. He didn't look for you to come, to-day, and anyway, he'd hardly have stopped them. Sorry. Ah! Elsa! Afraid to stay alone back there?"

A girl, about Dorothy's age, had followed the master and now slipped her hand about his arm. She was very thin and sallow, with eyes that seemed too large for her face, and walked with a painful limp. There was an expression of great timidity on her countenance, so that she shrank half behind her father, though he patted her hand to reassure her and explained to Dorothy:

"This is my own motherless little girl. She's not very strong and rather nervous. I brought her down here this afternoon to show her your boat, but we haven't been aboard. Those people—they had no right—I regret—" [Pg 38]

Dolly, vexatious with the "interlopers," as she considered the party aboard the Water Lily, gave place to a sudden, keen liking for the fragile Elsa. She looked as if she had never had a good time in her life and the more fortunate girl instantly resolved to give her one. Taking Elsa's other hand in both of hers, she exclaimed:

"Come along with Jim and me and pick out the little stateroom you'll have for your own when we start on our cruise—next Monday morning! You'll be my guest, won't you? The first one invited."

Elsa's large eyes were lifted in amazed delight; then as quickly dropped, while a fit of violent trembling shook her slight frame. She was so agitated that her equally astonished father put his arm about her to support her, and the look he gave Dorothy was very keen as he said:

"Elsa has always lived alone. She isn't used to the jests of other girls, Miss Calvert."

"Isn't she? But I wasn't jesting. My aunt has given me permission to choose my own guests and I choose Elsa, first, if she will come. Will you, dear?" and again Dolly gave the hand she held an affectionate squeeze. "Come and help us make our little cruise a perfectly delightful

one.”

Once more the great, dark eyes looked into Dorothy’s brown ones and Elsa answered softly: [Pg 39]
“Ye-es, I’ll come. If—if you begin like this—with a poor girl like me—it should be called ‘The Cruise of Loving Kindness.’ I guess—I know—God sent you.”

Neither Dorothy nor Jim could find anything to say. It was evident that this stranger was different from any of their old companions, and it scarcely needed the father’s explanation to convince them that “Elsa is a deeply religious dreamer.” Jim hoped that she wouldn’t prove a “wet blanket” and was provoked with Dorothy’s impulsive invitation; deciding to warn her against any more such as soon as he could get her alone.

Already the lad was feeling as if he, too, were proprietor of this wonderful Water Lily, and carried himself with a masterful air which made Dolly smile, as he now stepped across the little deck into the main cabin.

It was funny, too, to see the “How-dare-you” sort of expression with which he regarded the “impudent” company of youngsters that filled the place, and he was again annoyed by the graciousness with which “Doll” advanced to meet them. In her place—hello! what was that she was saying?

“Very happy to meet you, Miss Blank—if I am right in the name.”

A tall girl, somewhat resembling Helena Montaigne, though with less refinement of appearance, had risen as Dorothy moved forward and stood defiantly awaiting what might happen. Her face turned as pink as her rose-trimmed hat but she still retained her haughty pose, as she stiffly returned: [Pg 40]

“Quite right. I’m Aurora Blank. These are my friends. That’s my brother. My father owns—I mean—he ought—We came down for a farewell lark. We’d all expected to cruise in her all autumn till—. Have a cup of tea, Miss—Calvert, is it?”

“Yes, I’m Dorothy. This is Elsa Carruthers and this—James Barlow. You seem to be having a lovely time and we won’t disturb you. We’re going to inspect the tender. Ephraim, please help Elsa across when we come to the plank.”

The silence which followed proved that the company of merrymakers was duly impressed by Dolly’s treatment of their intrusion. Also, the dignity with which the old colored man followed and obeyed his small mistress convinced these other Southerners that his “family” was “quality.” Dorothy’s simple suit, worn with her own unconscious “style,” seemed to make the gayer costumes of the Blank party look tawdry and loud; while the eager spirituality of Elsa’s face became a silent reproof to their boisterous fun, which ceased before it.

Only one member of the tea-party joined the later visitors. This was the foppish youth whom Aurora had designated as “my brother.” Though ill at ease he forced himself to follow and accost Dorothy with the excuse: [Pg 41]

“Beg pardon, Miss Calvert, but we owe you an apology. We had no business down here, you know, and I say—it’s beastly. I told Rora so, but—I mean, I’m as much to blame as she. And I say, you know, I hope you’ll have as good times in the Lily as we expected to have—and—I’ll bid you good day. We’ll clear out, at once.”

But Dorothy laid her hand on his arm to detain him a moment.

“Please don’t. Finish your stay—I should be so sorry if you didn’t, and you’ve saved me a lot of trouble.”

Gerald Blank stared and asked:

“In what way, please? I’m glad to think it.”

“Why, I was going to hunt up your address, or that of your family. I’d like to have you and your sister go with us next week on our cruise. We mayn’t take the same route you’d have chosen, but—will you come? It’s fair you should and I’d be real glad. Talk it over with your sister and let me know, to-morrow, please, at this address. good-bye.”

She had slipped a visiting-card into his hand and while he stood still, surprised by her unexpected invitation, she hurried after her own friends—and to meet the disgusted look on Jim Barlow’s face.

“I say, Dolly Calvert, have you lost your senses?” [Pg 42]

“I hope not. Why?”

"Askin' that fellow to go with us! The idea! Well, I'll tell you right here and now, there won't be room enough on this boat for that popinjay an' me at the same time. I don't like his cut. Mrs. Calvert won't, either, and you'd ought to consult your elders before you launch out promiscuous, this way. All told, it's nothing but a boat. Where you going to stow them all, child?"

"Oh, there'll be room enough, and you should be studying your engine instead of scolding me. You're all right, though, Jimmy-boy, so I don't mind telling you that whatever invitations I've given so far, were planned from the very day I was allowed to accept the Lily. Now get pleasant right away and find out how much or little you know about that engine."

Jim laughed. Nobody could be offended with happy Dorothy that day, and he was soon deep in exploration of his new charge; his pride in his ability to handle such a perfect bit of machinery increasing every moment.

When they returned from the tender to the main saloon they found it empty and in order. Everything was as shipshape as possible, the young Blanks having proudly demonstrated their father's skill in arrangement, and then quietly departing. Gerald's whispered announcement to his sister had secured her prompt help in breaking up their tea-party, and she now felt as ashamed of the affair as he had been.

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At last, even Jim was willing to leave the Water Lily, reminded by hunger that he'd eaten nothing since his early breakfast; and returning the grateful Elsa to her father's care, he and Dorothy walked swiftly down the pier to the car line beyond, to take the first car which came. It was full of workmen returning from the factories beyond and for a time Dorothy found no seat, while Jim went far forward and Ephraim remained on the rear platform, whence, by peering through the back window, he could still keep a watchful eye over his beloved "li'l miss."

Somebody left the car and he saw the girl pushed into a vacant place beside a rough, seafaring man with crutches, and poorly clad. He resented the "old codger's" nearness to his dainty darling and his talking to her. Next he saw that the talk was mostly on Dorothy's side and that when the cripple presently left the car it was with a cordial handshake of his little lady, and a smiling good-bye from her. Then the "codger" limped to the street and Ephraim looked after him curiously. Little did he guess how much he would yet owe that vagrant.

CHAPTER III

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THE DIFFICULTIES OF GETTING UNDER WAY.

How that week flew! How busy was everybody concerned in the cruise of the wonderful Water Lily!

Early on the morning after his arrival, Jim Barlow repaired to Halcyon Point, taking an expert engineer with him, as Aunt Betty had insisted, and from that time till the Water Lily sailed he spent every moment of his waking hours in studying his engine and its management. At the end he felt fully competent to handle it safely and was as impatient as Dorothy herself to be off; and, at last, here they all were waiting on the little pier for the word of command or, as it appeared, for one tardy arrival.

From her own comfortable steamer-chair, Aunt Betty watched the gathering of the company and wondered if anybody except Dolly could have collected such a peculiar lot of contrasts. But the girl was already "calling the roll" and she listened for the responses as they came.

"Mrs. Elisabeth Cecil Somerset Calvert?"

"Present!"

"Mrs. Charlotte Bruce?"

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"Here."

"Mabel Bruce?"

"Present!"

"Elsa Carruthers?"

"Oh! I—don't know—I guess—" But a firm voice, her father's, answered for the hesitating girl, whose timidity made her shrink from all these strangers.

"Aurora Blank? Gerald Blank?"

"Oh, we're both right on hand, don't you know? Pop's pride rather stood in the way, but—Present!"

"Mr. Ephraim Brown-Calvert?"

The old man bowed profoundly and answered:

"Yeah 'm I, li'l miss!"

"That ends the passengers. Now for the crew. Captain Jack Hurry?"

Nobody responded. Whoever owned the rapid name was slow to claim it. But Dorothy smiled and proceeded. "Cap'n Jack" was a surprise of her own. He would keep for a time.

"Engineer James Barlow?"

"At his post!"

"Master Engineer, John Stinson?"

"Present!" called that person, laughing. He was Jim's instructor and would see them down the bay and into the quiet river where they would make their first stop.

"Mrs. Chloe Brown, assistant chef and dishwasher?"

"Yeah 'm I?" returned the only one of Aunt Betty's household-women who dared to trust herself on board a boat "to lib." She was Methuselah's mother and as his imposing name was read, answered for him; while the "cabin boy and general utility man" ducked his woolly head beneath her skirts, for once embarrassed by the attention he received. [Pg 46]

"Miss Calvert, did you know that you make the thirteenth person?" asked Aurora Blank, who had kept tally on her white-gloved fingers.

"I hope I do—there's 'luck in odd numbers' one hears. But I'm not—I'm not! Auntie, Jim, look yonder—quick! It's Melvin! It surely is!"

With a cry of delight Dorothy now rushed down the pier to where a street-car had just stopped and a lad alighted. She clasped his hands and fairly pumped them up and down in her eagerness, but she didn't offer to kiss him though she wanted to do so. She remembered in time that the young Nova Scotian was even shyer than James Barlow and mustn't be embarrassed. But her questions came swiftly enough, though his answers were disappointing.

However, she led him straight to Mrs. Calvert, his one-time hostess at Deerhurst, and there was now no awkward shyness in his respectful greeting of her, and the acknowledgment he made to the general introductions which followed.

Seating himself on a rail close to Mrs. Betty's chair he explained his presence.

"The Judge sent me to Baltimore on some errands of his own, and after they were done I was to call upon you, Madam, and say why her father couldn't spare Miss Molly so soon again. He missed her so much, I fancy, while she was at San Leon ranch, don't you know, and she is to go away to school after a time—that's why. But——" [Pg 47]

The lad paused, colored, and was seized by a fit of his old bashfulness. He had improved wonderfully during the year since he had been a member of "Dorothy's House Party" and had almost conquered that fault. No boy could be associated for so long a time with such a man as Judge Breckenridge and fail to learn much; but it wasn't easy to offer himself as a substitute for merry Molly, which he had really arrived to do.

However, Dolly was quick to understand and caught his hands again, exclaiming:

"You're to have your vacation on our Water Lily! I see, I see! Goody! Aunt Betty, isn't that fine? Next to Molly darling I'd rather have you."

Everybody laughed at this frank statement, even Dolly herself; yet promptly adding the name of Melvin Cook to her list of passengers. Then as he walked forward over the plank to where Jim Barlow smilingly awaited him, carrying his small suit-case—his only luggage, she called after him:

"I hope you brought your bugle! Then we can have 'bells' for time, as on the steamer!" [Pg 48]

He nodded over his shoulder and Dorothy strained her eyes toward the next car approaching over the street line, while Mrs. Calvert asked:

“For whom are we still waiting, child? Why don’t we go aboard and start?”

“For dear old Cap’n Jack! He’s coming now, this minute.”

All eyes followed hers and beheld an old man approaching. Even at that distance his wrinkled face was so shining with happiness and good nature that they smiled too. He wore a very faded blue uniform made dazzlingly bright by scores of very new brass buttons. His white hair and beard had been closely trimmed, and the discarded cap of a street-car conductor crowned his proudly held head. The cap was adorned in rather shaky letters of gilt: “Water Lily. Skipper.”

Though he limped upon crutches he gave these supports an airy flourish between steps, as if he scarcely needed them but carried them for ornaments. Nobody knew him, except Dorothy; not even Ephraim recognizing in this almost dapper stranger the ragged vagrant he had once seen on a street car.

But Dorothy knew and ran to meet him—“last but not least of all our company, good Cap’n Jack, Skipper of the Water Lily.”

Then she brought him to Aunt Betty and formally presented him, expressing by nods and smiles that she would “explain him” later on. Afterward, each and all were introduced to “our Captain,” at whom some stared rather rudely, Aurora even declining to acknowledge the presentation.

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“Captain Hurry, we’re ready to embark. Is that the truly nautical way to speak? Because, you know, we long to be real sailors on this cruise and talk real sailor-talk. We cease to be ‘land lubbers’ from this instant. Kind Captain, lead ahead!” cried Dorothy, in a very gale of high spirits and running to help Aunt Betty on the way.

But there was no hurry about this skipper, except his name. With an air of vast importance and dignity he stalked to the end of the pier and scanned the face of the water, sluggishly moving to and fro. Then he pulled out a spy glass, somewhat damaged in appearance, and tried to adjust it to his eye. This was more difficult because the lens was broken; but the use of it, the old man reckoned, would be imposing on his untrained crew, and he had expended his last dollar—presented him by some old cronies—in the purchase of the thing at a junk shop by the waterside. Indeed, the Captain’s motions were so deliberate, and apparently, senseless, that Aunt Betty lost patience and indignantly demanded:

“Dorothy, who is this old humbug you’ve picked up? You quite forgot—or didn’t forget—to mention him when you named your guests.”

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“No, Auntie, I didn’t forget. I kept him as a delightful surprise. I knew you’d feel so much safer with a real captain in charge.”

“Humph! Who told you he was a captain, or had ever been afloat?”

“Why—he did;” answered the girl, under her breath. “I—I met him on a car. He used to own a boat. He brought oysters to the city. I think it was a—a bugeye, some such name. Auntie, don’t you like him? I’m so sorry! because you said, you remember, that I might choose all to go and to have a real captain who’ll work for nothing but his ‘grub’—that’s food, he says —”

“That will do. For the present I won’t turn him off, but I think his management of the Water Lily will be brief. On a quiet craft—Don’t look so disappointed. I shall not hurt your skipper’s feelings though I’ll put up with no nonsense.”

At that moment the old man had decided to go aboard and leading the way with a gallant flourish of crutches, guided them into the cabin, or saloon, and made his little speech.

“Ladies and gents, mostly ladies, welcome to my new ship—the Water Lily. Bein’ old an’ seasoned in the knowledge of navigation I’ll do my duty to the death. Anybody wishin’ to consult me will find me on the bridge.”

With a wave of his cap the queer old fellow stumped away to the crooked stairway, which he climbed by means of the baluster instead of the steps, his crutches thump-thumping along behind him.

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By “bridge” he meant the forward point of the upper deck, or roof of the cabin, and there he proceeded to rig up a sort of “house” with pieces of the awning in which there had been inserted panes of glass.

But the effect of his address was to put all these strangers at ease, for none could help laughing at his happy pomposity, and after people laugh together once stiffness disappears.

Gerald Blank promptly followed Melvin Cook to Jim's little engine-room on the tender, and the colored folks as promptly followed him. Their own bunks were to be on the small boat and Chloe was anxious to see what they were like.

Then Mrs. Bruce roused from her silence and asked Aunt Betty about the provisions that had been brought on board and where she might find them. She had been asked to join the party as housekeeper, really for Mabel's sake, from whom she couldn't be separated now, and because Dorothy had argued:

"That dear woman loves to cook better than anything else. She always did. Now she hasn't anybody left to cook for, 'cept Mabel, and she'll forget to cry when she has to get a dinner for lots of hungry sailors."

The first sight of Mrs. Bruce's sad face, that morning, had been most depressing; and she was relieved to find a change in its aspect as the woman roused to action. There hadn't been much breakfast eaten by anybody and Dorothy had begged her old friend to:

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"Just give us lots of goodies, this first meal, Mrs. Bruce, no matter if we have to do with less afterwards. You see—three hundred dollars isn't so very much——"

"It seems a lot to me, now," sighed the widow.

But Dorothy went on quickly:

"And it's every bit there is. When the last penny goes we'll have to stop, even if the Lily is right out in the middle of the ocean."

"Pshaw, Dolly! I thought you weren't going out of sight of land!"

"Course, we're not. That is—we shall never go anywhere if my skipper doesn't start. I'll run up to his bridge and see what's the matter. You see I don't like to offend him at the beginning of things and though Jim Barlow is really to manage the boat, I thought it would please the old gentleman to be put in charge, too."

"Foolish girl, don't you know that there can't be two heads to any management?" returned the matron, now really smiling. "It's an odd lot, a job lot, seems to me, of widows and orphans and cripples and rich folks all jumbled together in one little house-boat. More 'n likely you'll find yourself in trouble real often amongst us all. That old chap above is mighty pleasant to look at now, but he's got too square a jaw to be very biddable, especially by a little girl like you."

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"But, Mrs. Bruce, he's so poor. Why, just for a smell of salt water—or fresh either—he's willing to sail this Lily; just for the sake of being afloat and—his board, course. He'll have to eat, but he told me that a piece of sailor's biscuit and a cup of warmed over tea would be all he'd ever 'ax' me. I told him right off then I couldn't pay him wages and he said he wouldn't touch them if I could. Think of that for generosity!"

"Yes, I'm thinking of it. Your plans are all right—I hope they'll turn out well. A captain for nothing, an engineer the same, a housekeeper who's glad to cook for the sake of her daughter's pleasure, and the rest of the crew belonging—so no more wages to earn than always. Sounds—fine. By the way, Dorothy, who deals out the provisions on this trip?"

"Why, you do, of course, Mrs. Bruce, if you'll be so kind. Aunt Betty can't be bothered and I don't know enough. Here's a key to the 'lockers,' I guess they call the pantries; and now I *must* make that old man give the word to start! Why, Aunt Betty thought we'd get as far as Annapolis by bed-time. She wants to cruise first on the Severn river. And we haven't moved an inch yet!"

"Well, I'll go talk with Chloe about dinner. She'll know best what'll suit your aunt."

Dorothy was glad to see her old friend's face brighten with a sense of her own importance, as "stewardess" for so big a company of "shipmates," and slipping her arm about the lady's waist went with her to the "galley," or tiny cook-room on the tender. There she left her, with strict injunctions to Chloe not to let her "new mistress" overtire herself.

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It was Aunt Betty's forethought which had advised this, saying:

"Let Chloe understand, in the beginning, that she is the helper—not the chief."

Leaving them to examine and delight in the compact arrangements of the galley she sped up the crooked stair to old Captain Jack. To her surprise she found him anything but the sunny old fellow who had strutted aboard, and he greeted her with a sharp demand:

"Where's them papers at?"

"Papers? What papers?"

"Ship's papers, child alive? Where's your gumption at?"

Dorothy laughed and seated herself on a camp-stool beside him.

"Reckon it must be 'at' the same place as the 'papers.' I certainly don't understand you."

"Land a sissy! 'Spect we'd be let to sail out o' port 'ithout showin' our licenses? Not likely; and the fust thing a ship's owner ought to 'tend to is gettin' a clean send off. For my part, I don't want to hug this dock no longer. I want to take her out with the tide, I do."

Dorothy was distressed. How much or how little this old captain of an oyster boat knew about this matter, he was evidently in earnest and angry with somebody—herself, apparently. [Pg 55]

"If we had any papers, and we haven't—who'd we show them to, anyway?"

Captain Hurry looked at her as if her ignorance were beyond belief. Then his good nature made him explain:

"What's a wharf-master for, d'ye s'pose? When you hand 'em over I'll see him an' up anchor."

But, at that moment, Mr. Carruthers himself appeared on the roof of the cabin, demanding:

"What's up, Cap'n Jack? Why don't you start—if it's you who's to manage this craft, as you claim? If you don't cut loose pretty quick, my Elsa will get homesick and desert."

The skipper rose to his feet, or his crutches, and retorted:

"Can't clear port without my dockyments, an' you know it! Where they at?"

"Safe in the locker meant for them, course. Young Barlow has all that are necessary and a safe keeper of them, too. Better give up this nonsense and let him go ahead. Easier for you, too, Cap'n, and everything's all right. Good-bye, Miss Dorothy. I'll slip off again without seeing Elsa, and you understand? If she gets too homesick for me, or is ill, or—anything happens, telegraph me from wherever you are and I'll come fetch her. Good-bye." [Pg 56]

He was off the boat in an instant and very soon the Water Lily had begun her trip. The engineer, Mr. Stinson, was a busy man and made short work of Captain Hurry's fussiness. He managed the start admirably, Jim and the other lads watching him closely, and each feeling perfectly capable of doing as much—or as little—as he. For it seemed so very simple; the turning of a crank here, another there, and the thing was done.

However, they didn't reach Annapolis that night, as Mrs. Calvert had hoped. Only a short distance down the coast they saw signs of a storm and the lady grew anxious at once.

"O Dolly! It's going to blow, and this is no kind of a boat to face a gale. Tell somebody, anybody, who is real captain of this Lily, to get to shore and anchor her fast. She must be tied to something strong. I never sailed on such a craft before nor taken the risk of caring for so many lives. Make haste."

This was a new spirit for fearless Aunt Betty to show and, although she herself saw no suggestions of a gale in the clouding sky, Dorothy's one desire was to make that dear lady happy. So, to the surprise of the engineers, she gave her message, that was practically a command, and a convenient beach being near it was promptly obeyed.

"O, Mr. Captain, stop the ship—I want to get out and walk!" chanted Gerald Blank, in irony; [Pg 57]
"Is anybody seasick? Has the wild raging of the Patapsco scared the lady passengers? I brought a lemon in my pocket—"

But Dorothy frowned at him and he stopped.

"It is Mrs. Calvert's wish," said the girl, with emphasis.

"But Pop would laugh at minding a few black clouds. He built the Water Lily to stand all sorts of weather. Why, he had her out in one of the worst hurricanes ever blew on the Chesapeake and she rode it out as quiet as a lamb. Fact. I wasn't with him, course, but I heard him tell. I say, Miss Dolly, Stinson's got to leave us, to-night, anyway, or early to-morrow morning. I wish you'd put me in command. I do so, don't you know. I understand everything about a boat. Pop has belonged to the best clubs all his life and I'm an 'Ariel' myself—on probation; that is, I've been proposed, only not voted on yet, and I could sail this Lily to beat the band. Aw, come! Won't you?" he finished coaxingly.

John Stinson was laughing, yet at the same time, deftly swinging both boats toward the shore; while Jim Barlow's face was dark with anger, Cap'n Jack was nervously thumping his crutches up and down, and even gentle Melvin had retreated as far from the spot as the little tender allowed. His shoulders were hunched in the fashion which showed him, also, to be provoked and, for an instant Dorothy was distressed. Then the absurdity of the whole matter made her laugh.

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"Seems if everybody wants to be captain, on this bit of a ship that isn't big enough for one real one! Captain Hurry, Captain Barlow, Captain Blank, Captain Cook——"

"What do Barlow and Cook know about the water? One said he was a 'farmer,' and the other a 'lawyer's clerk'——"

"But a lawyer's clerk that's sailed the ocean, mind you, Gerald. Melvin's a sailor-lad in reality, and the son of a sailor. You needn't gibe at Melvin. As for Jim, he's the smartest boy in the world. He understands everything about engines and machinery, and—Why, he can take a sewing-machine to pieces, all to pieces, and put it together as good as new. He did that for mother Martha and Mrs. Smith back home on the mountain, and at San Leon, last summer, he helped Mr. Ford decide on the way the new mine should be worked, just by the books he'd studied. Think of that! And Mr. Ford's a railroad man himself and is as clever as he can be. He knows mighty well what's what and he trusts our Jim——"

"Dorothy, shut up!"

This from Jim, that paragon she had so praised! The effect was a sudden silence and a flush of anger on her own face. If the lad had struck her she couldn't have been more surprised, nor when Melvin faced about and remarked:

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"Better stow this row. If Captain Murray, that I sailed under on the 'Prince,' heard it he'd say there'd be serious trouble before we saw land again. If we weren't too far out he'd put back to port and set every wrangler ashore and ship new hands. It's awful bad luck to fight at sea, don't you know?"

Sailors are said to be superstitious and Melvin had caught some of their notions and recalled them now. He had made a longer speech than common and colored a little as he now checked himself. Fortunately he just then caught Mrs. Bruce's eye and understood from her gestures that dinner was ready to serve. Then from the little locker he had appropriated to his personal use, he produced his bugle and hastily blew "assembly."

The unexpected sound restored peace on the instant. Dorothy clapped her hands and ran to inform Aunt Betty:

"First call for dinner; and seats not chosen yet!"

All unknown to her two tables had been pulled out from somewhere in the boat's walls and one end of the long saloon had been made a dining-room. The tables were as neatly spread as if in a stationary house and chairs had been placed beside them on one side, while the cushioned benches which ran along the wall would seat part of the diners.

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With his musical signals, Melvin walked the length of the Water Lily and climbed the stairs to cross the "promenade deck," as the awning-covered roof was always called. As he descended, Aunt Betty called him to the little room off one end the cabin, which was her own private apartment, and questioned him about his bugle.

"Yes, Madam, it's the one you gave me at Deerhurst, at the end of Dorothy's house-party. My old one I gave Miss Molly, don't you know? Because she happened to fancy—on account of her hearing it in the Nova Scotia woods, that time she was lost. It wasn't worth anything, but she liked it. Yours, Madam, is fine. I often go off for a walk and have a try at it, just to keep my hand in and to remind me of old Yarmouth. Miss Molly begged me to fetch it. She said Miss Dolly would be pleased and I fancy she is."

Then again conquering his shyness, he offered his arm to the lady and conducted her to dinner. There was no difficulty in seeing what place was meant for her, because of the fine chair that was set before it and the big bunch of late roses at her plate. These were from the Bellvieu garden, and were another of Dolly's "surprises."

As Melvin led her to her chair and bowed in leaving her, old Ephraim placed himself behind it and stood ready to serve her as he had always done, wherever she might happen to be.

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Then followed a strange thing. Though Mrs. Bruce and Chloe had prepared a fine meal, and the faces of all in the place showed eagerness to enjoy it, not one person moved; but each stood as rigid as possible and as if he or she would so remain for the rest of the day.

Only Dorothy. She had paused between the two tables and was half-crying, half-laughing

over the absurd dilemma which had presented itself.

“Why, good people, what’s the matter?” asked Mrs. Calvert, glancing from one to another. But nobody answered; and at this mark of disrespect she colored and stiffened herself majestically in her chair.

CHAPTER IV

[Pg 62]

MATTERS ARE SETTLED

“Aunt Betty, it’s Captain Hurry, again!” explained Dorothy, close to her aunt’s ear. “He claims that the captain of any boat always has head table. He’s acted so queer even the boys hate to sit near him, and the dinner’s spoiling and—and I wish I’d never seen him!”

“Very likely. Having seen him it would have been better for you to ask advice before you invited him. He was the picture of happiness when he appeared but—we must get rid of him right away. He must be put ashore at once.”

“But, Aunt Betty, I invited him. *Invited* him, don’t you see? How can a Calvert tell a guest to go home again after that?”

Mrs. Calvert laughed. This was quoting her own precepts against herself, indeed. But she was really disturbed at the way their trip was beginning and felt it was time “to take the helm” herself. So she stood up and quietly announced:

“This is my table. I invite Mrs. Bruce to take the end chair, opposite me. Aurora and Mabel, the wall seats on one side; Dorothy and Elsa, the other side, with Elsa next to me, so that she may be well looked after.

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“Captain Hurry, the other table is yours. Arrange it as you choose.”

She reseated herself amid a profound silence; but one glance into her face convinced the old Captain that here was an authority higher than his own. The truth was that he had been unduly elated by Dorothy’s invitation and her sincere admiration for the cleverness he boasted. He fancied that nobody aboard the Water Lily knew anything about “Navigation” except himself and flattered himself that he was very wise in the art. He believed that he ought to assert himself on all occasions and had tried to do so. Now, he suddenly resumed his ordinary, sunshiny manner, and with a grand gesture of welcome motioned the three lads to take seats at the second table.

Engineer Stinson was on the tender and would remain there till the others had finished; and the colored folks would take their meals in the galley after the white folks had been served.

“Well, that ghost is laid!” cried Dorothy, when dinner was over and she had helped Aunt Betty to lie down in her own little cabin. “But Cap’n Jack is so different, afloat and ashore!”

“Dolly, dear, I allowed you to invite whom you wished, but I’m rather surprised by your selections. Why, for instance, the two Blanks?”

“Because I was sorry for them.”

“They’re not objects of pity. They’re quite the reverse and the girl’s manners are rude and disagreeable. Her treatment of Elsa is heartless. Why didn’t you choose your own familiar friends?”

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“Elsa! Yes, indeed, Auntie, dear, without her dreaming of it, Elsa changed all my first plans for this house-boat party. I fell in love with her gentle, sad little face the first instant I saw it and I just wanted to see it brighten. She looked as if she’d never had a good time in her life and I wanted that she should have. Then she said it would be ‘A cruise of loving kindness’ and I thought that was beautiful. I just longed to give every poor, unhappy body in the world some pleasure. The Blanks aren’t really poor, I suppose, for their clothes are nice and Aurora has brought so many I don’t see where she’ll keep them. But she seemed poor in one way—like this: If you’d built the Water Lily for me and had had to give it up for debt I shouldn’t have felt nice to some other girl who was going to get it. I thought the least I could do was ask them to come with us and that would be almost the same thing as if they still owned the house-boat themselves. They were glad enough to come, too; and I know—I mean, I hope—they’ll be real nice after we get used to each other. You know we asked Jim because we were sort of sorry for him, too, and because he wouldn’t charge any wages for

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taking care the engine! Mrs. Bruce and Mabel—well, sorry for them was their reason just the same. You don't mind, really, do you, Auntie, darling? 'Cause——"

Dorothy paused and looked anxiously into the beloved face upon the pillow.

Aunt Betty laughed and drew the girl's own face down to kiss it fondly. Dorothy made just as many mistakes as any other impulsive girl would make, but her impulses were always on the side of generosity and so were readily forgiven.

"How about me, dear? Were you sorry for me, along with the rest?"

Dorothy flushed, then answered frankly:

"Yes, Aunt Betty, I was. You worried so about that horrid 'business,' of the Old Folks' Home and Bellvieu, that I just wanted to take you away from everything you'd ever known and let you have everything new around you. They are all new, aren't they? The Blanks and Elsa, and the Bruces; yes and Captain Jack, too. Melvin's always a dear and he seems sort of new now, he's grown so nice and friendly. I'd rather have had dear Molly, course, but, since I couldn't, Melvin will do. He'll be company for Jim—he and Gerald act like two pussy cats jealous of one another. But isn't it going to be just lovely, living on the Water Lily? I mean, course, after everybody gets used to each other and we get smoothed off on our corners. I guess it's like the engine in the Pad. Mr. Stinson says it'll run a great deal better after it's 'settled' and each part gets fitted to its place.

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"There! I've talked you nearly to sleep, so I'll go on deck with the girls. It isn't raining yet, and doesn't look as if it were going to. Sleep well, dear Aunt Betty, and don't you dare to worry a single worry while you're aboard the Lily. Think of it, Auntie! You are my guest now, my really, truly guest of honor! Doesn't that seem queer? But you're mistress, too, just the same."

Well, it did seem as if even this brief stay on the house-boat were doing Mrs. Calvert good, for Dorothy had scarcely slipped away before the lady was asleep. No sound came to her ears but the gentle lapping of the water against the boat's keel and a low murmur of voices from the narrow deck which ran all around the sides.

When she awoke the craft was in motion and the sun shining far in the west. She was rather surprised at this, having expected the Lily to remain anchored in that safe spot which had been chosen close to shore. However, everything was so calm and beautiful when she stepped out, the smooth gliding along the wooded banks was so beautiful, that she readily forgave anybody who had disobeyed her orders. Indeed, she smilingly assured herself that she was now:

"Nothing and nobody but a guest and must remember the fact and not interfere. Indeed, it will be delightful just to rest and idle for a time."

Dorothy came to meet her, somewhat afraid to explain:

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"I couldn't help it this time, Aunt Betty. Mr. Stinson says he must leave at midnight and he wants to 'make' a little town a few miles further down the shore, where he can catch a train back to city. That will give him time to go on with his work in the morning. Old Cap'n Jack, too, says we'd better get along. The storm passed over, to-day, but he says we're bound to get it soon or late."

Mrs. Calvert's nap had certainly done her good, for she was able now to laugh at her own nervousness and gaily returned:

"It would be strange, indeed, if we didn't get a storm sometime or other. But how is the man conducting himself now?"

"Why, Aunt Betty, he's just lovely. Lovely!"

"Doesn't seem as if that adjective fitted very well, but—Ah! yes. Thank you, my child, I will enjoy sitting in that cosy corner and watching the water. How low down upon it the Water Lily rides."

Most of this was said to Elsa, who had timidly drawn near and silently motioned to a sheltered spot on the deck and an empty chair that waited there. She had never seen such a wonderful old lady as this; a person who made old age seem even lovelier than youth.

Aunt Betty's simple gown of lavender suited her fairness well, and she had pinned one of Dorothy's roses upon her waist. Her still abundant hair of snowy whiteness and the dark eyes, that were yet bright as a girl's, had a beauty which appealed to the sensitive Elsa's spirit. A fine color rose in the frail girl's face as her little attention was so graciously accepted, and from that moment she became Aunt Betty's devoted slave.

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Her shyness lessened so that she dared to flash a look of scorn upon Aurora, who shrugged her shoulder with annoyance at the lady's appearance on deck and audibly whispered to Mabel Bruce that:

"She didn't see why an old woman like that had to join a house-boat party. When we had the Water Lily we planned to have nobody but the jolliest ones we knew. We wouldn't have had *my* grandmother along, no matter what."

Mabel looked at the girl with shocked eyes. She had been fascinated by Aurora's dashing appearance and the stated fact that she had only worn her "commonest things," which to Mabel's finery-loving soul seemed really grand. But to hear that aristocratic dame yonder spoken of as an "old woman," like any ordinary person, was startling.

"Why Aurora—you said I might call you that——"

"Yes, you may. While we happen to be boatmates and out of the city, you know. At home, I don't know as Mommer would—would—You see she's very particular about the girls I know. I shall be in 'Society' sometime, when Popper makes money again. But, what were you going to say?"

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"I was going to say that maybe you don't know who that lady is. She is Mrs. Elisabeth Cecil-Somerset-Calvert!"

"Well, what of it? Anybody can tie a lot of names on a string and wear 'em that way. Even Mommer calls herself Mrs. Edward Newcomer-Blank of R."

"Why 'of R?' What does it mean?" asked Mabel, again impressed.

"Doesn't mean anything, really, as far as I know. But don't you know a lot of Baltimoreans, or Marylanders, write their names that way? Haven't you seen it in the papers?"

"No. I never read a paper."

"You ought. To improve your mind and keep you posted on—on current events. I'm in the current event class at school—I go to the Western High. I was going to the Girls' Latin, this year, only—only—Hmm. So I have to keep up with the times."

Aurora settled her silken skirts with a little swagger and again Mabel felt it a privilege to know so exalted a young person, even if their acquaintance was limited to a few weeks of boat life. Then she listened quite humbly while Aurora related some of her social experiences and discussed with a grown-up air her various flirtations.

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But after a time she tired of all this, and looked longingly across to the tender, on whose rail Dorothy was now perched, with the three lads clustered about her, and all intently listening to the "yarns" with which Cap'n Jack was entertaining them.

All that worthy's animation had returned to him. He had eaten the best of dinners in place of the "ship's biscuit" he had suggested to his small hostess: he was relieved of care—which he had pretended to covet; and the group of youngsters before him listened to his marvellous tales of the sea with perfect faith in his truthfulness.

Some of the tales had a slight foundation in fact; but even these were so embellished by fiction as to be almost incredible. In any case, the shouts of laughter or the cries of horror that rose from his audience so attracted Mabel that, at last, she broke away from Aurora's tamer recitals, saying:

"I'm getting stiff, sitting in one place so long. I'll go over to Dolly. She and me have been friends ever since time was. good-bye. Or, will you come, too?"

In her heart, Aurora wished to do so. But hoping to impress her new acquaintance by her magnificence, she had put on a fanciful white silk frock, wholly unfitted for her present trip and, indeed, slyly packed in her trunk without her mother's knowledge. The deck of the Pad wasn't as spotless as this of the Lily. Even at that moment small Methuselah was swashing it with a great mop, which dripped more water than it wiped up. His big eyes were fairly bulging from his round black face and, having drawn as near the story-teller as he could, he mopped one spot until Dolly called out:

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"That'll do, Metty, boy! Tackle another board. Mustn't wear out the deck with your neatness!"

Whereupon old Captain Hurry swung his crutch around and caught the youngster with such suddenness that he pitched head-first into his own big bucket. Freeing himself with a howl, he raised his mop as high as his strength would allow and brought it down upon the captain's glittering cap.

It was the seaman's turn to howl and an ill-matched fight would have followed if Jim hadn't caught the pickaninny away and Dorothy seized the cripple's headgear before it suffered any great harm. Gently brushing it with her handkerchief she restored it to its owner's head, with the remark:

"Don't mind Metty, Cap'n Jack. He means well, every time, only he has a little too hasty a temper. He never heard such wonderful stories before—nor I, either, for that matter. Did you, boys?"

She had believed them wholly, but Jim had begun to doubt; and Melvin was bold enough to say: [Pg 72]

"I've sailed a good many times between New York and Yarmouth, Nova Scotia, but I never saw—I mean, I haven't happened, don't you know? I wouldn't fancy being out alone in a cat-boat and having a devil-fish rise up alongside that way. I——"

"Young man, do you doubt my word, sir?" demanded the Captain, rising with all the dignity his lameness and the dropping of his crutch would allow.

"Oh! no, sir. I doubt nothing—nothing, sir. The Judge says the world is full of marvels and I fancy, your encounter with that giant squid is one of them. You should have that story published, Captain. You should, don't you know?"

Melvin's blue eyes twinkled but the otherwise gravity of his face harmlessly deceived the old seaman and brought back his good temper.

"Reckon I'll go aloft and make out my log," he remarked, with an air of importance, and stumped forward to his "bridge" above stairs. These he ascended, as before, by a hand-over-hand climb of the baluster, his crutches dragging behind; and it was this nimbleness of arm which convinced the watchers, far more than his impossible yarns had done, that he had indeed once been a sailor and could ascend the rigging of a ship.

Then soon came supper and again such hearty appetites were brought to it that Mrs. Bruce wondered how so much good food could disappear at one meal. Also, she remembered that the sum of three hundred dollars had a limit, large as it seemed; and while she sat silent in her place she was inwardly computing whether it would possibly furnish board for all these people for six long weeks. [Pg 73]

Then she proceeded to "count noses," and suddenly perceived that after Mr. Stinson's departure there would be left the "unlucky number" of thirteen souls aboard the Water Lily.

This time the engineer was at table and Jim had taken his place on the tender; but after this, he had assured everybody that the engine did not need such constant attention and could be left to itself during meal-time at least.

However, nobody tarried long at table that night. There was to follow the first arrangement of the "staterooms," as the canvas-partitioned spaces for each one of the party were called.

"Cute little cubby-holes," Mabel named them, and promptly selected her own between her mother's and Aurora's. Dorothy was next to Aurora and Elsa between her and Mrs. Calvert's bigger room.

Politely giving Elsa her choice, Dorothy couldn't help a keen disappointment that it separated herself from Aunt Betty. Then she reflected that she had offered this choice as far back as on the day of their first meeting; and that she would herself serve as shield between Aurora's haughtiness and Elsa's timidity. [Pg 74]

Those two guests didn't hit it off at all well. Elsa shivered and shrank before Aurora's boisterous high spirits and the look of contempt the elder girl bestowed upon her plain attire.

Poor little Elsa had done her best to honor the occasion. She had forced herself to go with her loving father to a department store and had suffered real distress in being fitted at the hands of a kindly, but too outspoken, saleswoman.

The suit selected had been of an ugly blue which brought out all the sallowness of the poor child's complexion. It had been padded on one shoulder, "'cause she's crooked in them shoulders," and had been shortened on one side, "to suit the way she limps." A hat of the same vicious blue had been purchased, and this trimmed with red roses, "to sort of set her up like."

Thus attired, Mr. Carruthers had looked with pride upon his motherless darling, and felt himself amply justified in the expense he had incurred. The girl's own better taste had rebelled and she would rather have worn the old gray frock that was at least modest and

unobtrusive; but she saw the pride and tenderness in her father's eyes and said nothing save fervent thanks.

However, all the varied emotions of the travellers were soon forgotten in the healthy slumber which came to them. The Water Lily glided quietly along, forced onward by the tender where the trio of lads sat long, exchanging experiences and, under cover of the friendly darkness, growing natural and familiar. [Pg 75]

But after a time even they grew drowsy and "turned in," finding their new "bunks" as snug as comfortable. The chug-chug of the small engine chimed in with the snores of the colored folks, in their own quarters beyond the galley and formed a soothing lullaby.

So deeply they slept that none knew how a storm was gathering thick and fast, except the alert engineer, who made all speed possible to reach the shelter of the little cove and wharf where he hoped to tie up; and from whence he could cross the swampy fields to the station and the midnight train for home.

It proved a race of steam and storm, with the latter victor; for at almost boat's length from the pier there came a blinding flash of lightning and a peal of thunder most terrific. At the same moment a whirlwind shook the Water Lily like a feather, it seemed, and the shrieks of the awaking negroes startled every soul awake.

"'Tis de yend o' de worl'! 'Tis de Jedgmen' Day! Rise up, sinnahs, rise to yo' jedgmen'!"

CHAPTER V

[Pg 76]

THE STORM AND WHAT FOLLOWED

In an instant a crowd of terrified people had gathered in the cabin, clasping one another's hands, sobbing and shivering as gust after gust shook the Water Lily so that it seemed its timbers must part.

"We mought ha' knowed! Thirteen po' creatures shet up in dis yeah boat! Oh! My——"

The greatest outcry was from poor Chloe, now kneeling, or crouching, at the feet of her Miss Betty, and clutching the lady's gown so that she could not move. But if her feet were hindered her tongue was not. In her most peremptory manner she bade:

"Chloe, get up and be still! This is no time for nonsense. Close those windows. Stop the rain pouring in. Call back your common sense. Do——"

"O, Ole Miss! I'se done dyin'! I'se gwine——"

"No, you're not. You couldn't screech like that if you were anywhere's near death. Shut—those—windows—or—let—me!"

Habit was stronger than fear. The idea of her mistress doing Chloe's own task roused the frightened creature to obey, scarce knowing that she did so. Seeing her at work restored the calmness of the others, in a measure, and Dorothy and Mabel rushed each to the sliding panels of glass, which had been left open for the night and pushed them into place. [Pg 77]

This lessened the roar of the tempest and courage returned as they found themselves still unhurt, though the constant flashes of light revealed a group of very white faces, and bodies still shaking with terror of nature's rage. Mrs. Bruce had always been a coward during thunderstorms, but even she rallied enough to run for a wrap and fold it about Mrs. Calvert, who was also shaking; but from cold rather than fear.

Then between claps, they could hear the scurrying of feet on the roof overhead, the stumping of Captain Jack's crutches, and the issuing of sharp orders in tones that were positively cheerful!

"Hark! What are they doing? Can anybody see the tender?" asked Dorothy, excitedly.

Strangely enough, it was frail, timid Elsa who answered:

"I've been listening. They're taking off the canvas. The boys are up there. The other boat is away out—yonder. See? Oh! it's grand! grand! Doesn't it make us all seem puny! If it would only last till everyone was humble and—adoring!"

Even while she answered, the slender girl turned again to the window and gazed through it as if she could not have enough of the scene so frightful to her mates. These watched her, [Pg 78]

astonished, yet certainly calmed by her own fearless behavior; so that, presently, all were hastily dressing.

Mabel had set the example in this, saying quaintly:

"If I've got to be drowned I might as well look decent when I'm picked up."

"Mabel and her clothes! The 'ruling passion strong in death'!" cried Dorothy, in a tone meant to be natural but was still rather shaky. Somebody laughed and that lessened the excitement, so that even Chloe remembered she had appeared without her white turban and hastily put her hands smoothing her wool, as if afraid now only of her mistress's reprimand.

But that lady had joined Elsa at the glass; and standing with her arm about the girl, drew the slight figure within the folds of her own roomy wrapper, with a comforting warmth and pressure. For it had turned icy cold and the unusual heat of the evening before seemed like a dream.

"Dear little girl, I am glad you came. Brave soul and frail body, you're stronger than even my healthy Dorothy. And it is magnificent—magnificent. Only, I dread what the morning will reveal. If we are damaged much it will mean the end of our trip—at its very beginning."

"Dear lady; it won't mean that. Even if it had to do it would be all right—for me, at least. I should have some beautiful things to remember always." [Pg 79]

Then the cheerfulest of whistling was heard; Cap'n Jack's warning that he was coming down the stairs and that any feminines in night attire might take warning and flee.

But nobody fled, and Dorothy tried to turn on the electric light which had been one of the fine features of this palatial house-boat. No radiance followed, and, watching from the doorway, Cap'n Jack triumphantly exclaimed:

"Didn't I know it? What's them new-fangled notions wuth in a case o' need? Taller's the stuff, or good, reli'ble whale-ile. Well, ship's comp'ny, how'd ye like it? Warn't that the purtiest leetle blow 't ever you see? Didn't I warn ye 'twas comin'? Yet ye went an' allowed I warn't no real captain and couldn't run a boat like this easy as George Washin'ton! Now you're wiser. That there leetle gale has larnt ye all somethin'. And 'nough said. Give old Jack a couple o' sail or so an' a man to climb the riggin' an' he'll beat all the steam engines ever was hatched. Oh! I'm just feelin' prime. That bit o' wind has blowed all the land-fog out o' my head an' left it clear as glass.

"A life on the ocean wave,
A home on the rolling de-
e-ep."

The old man's rich voice trailed off toward the tender—or where the tender should have been—while a clear and boyish one took up the ditty from the roof above, with: [Pg 80]

"Where the scattered waters
rave
And the wi-i-inds their vigils ke-
e-ep!"

"Melvin! Jim! Gerald! Are you all up there? Come down, come down!"

"Yes, Captain Dolly! Coming! Here!" shouted Melvin, rattling down the crooked stair, while Jim's voice responded: "Present!" and Gerald finished with a merry: "Accounted for!"

Then Aurora ran to meet her brother and to kiss him with an unexpected affection. To his credit it was that he gently returned her caress, but laughed at her statement that she had feared he was drowned.

"Not a bit of it! But this doesn't look much like mourning, if you did!" he jested, pointing at the white silk frock she had again put on.

"Well, it was the first one I got hold of. That's why. But, tell—tell—how came you up there?"

"Yes, everything, tell everything!" begged Dorothy, fairly dancing about them in her eagerness.

"Melvin—Melvin did it!" said Jim. "We might all be at the bottom of the sea——"

"Hush!" almost screamed Aurora, beginning to tremble. "It was so horrible—I——"

With more of sympathy than had been between them before, Dolly slipped her arm around [Pg 81]

Aurora's shoulders and playfully ordered:

"If you boys don't tell how you came on our promenade deck, when you belonged on the tender, you sha'n't have any breakfast!"

"Melvin. I tell you it was Melvin. He's the only one of us didn't sleep like a log. He felt the hurricane coming, right through his dreams, and waked the lot of us, as soon as the first clap came. So he rushed us over the plank to take off the awnings——"

"With such a wind sucking under them might have made the boat turn turtle, Mrs. Calvert, don't you know? At sea—that's why I presumed to give orders without——"

"Oh, my dear lad, I now 'order' you to 'give orders' whenever you think best. We can trust you, and do thank you. But how dark it seems now the lightning has stopped. Isn't there any sort of light we can get?" said Aunt Betty, sitting down with Elsa and folding a steamer rug around them both.

Cap'n Jack came stumping back from the rear of the boat in a high state of excitement and actual glee.

"Clean gone! Plank a-swingin' loose—caught it a-board just in time—t'other boat flip-floppin' around like she was all-possessed. Reckon she is. The idee! A reg'lar steam engine on a craft not much bigger 'n itself! What this house-boat needs isn't steam engines but a set of stout sails an' a few fust-class poles. Come, lads, let's anchor her—if the fool that built her didn't put them on the tender, too, alongside his other silly contraptions."

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Mrs. Calvert wondered if the old fellow knew what he was talking about, but found the resolute tones of his voice a comfort. Whoever else was frightened he was not and she liked him better at that moment than she would have thought possible. All his whining discontent was gone and he was honestly happy. What the others felt to be a terrible misfortune was his opportunity to prove himself the fine "skipper" he had boasted of being.

But now that the roar of the storm had subsided, there came across the little space of water between the Lily and its Pad the outcries of Ephraim and Methuselah, mingled with halloes of the engineer, John Stinson.

"They want to come alongside! They're signallin'!" cried Cap'n Jack, promptly putting his hands before his mouth, trumpet-fashion, and returning such a lusty answer that those near him clapped hands over ears.

Then came Melvin, more sea-wise than the other lads, saying:

"I've been fumbling around and there are some poles lashed outside the rail. Let's unsheath 'em, but it'll take us all to keep them from tumbling over."

"That's so! You're right! When Pop had this boat built he was told to provide for all sorts of things. The engine going broke was the last notion he had, but he had the poles made to please Mommer. I know—I mean—I guess I do—how they use 'em, but they're mighty heavy."

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It was Captain Hurry who again came to the front. In a twinkling he had inspected the stout poles and explained, that by putting one end of each down through the water till it reached the bottom, the house-boat could not only be held steady but could be propelled.

"It's slow but it's safe an' easy, Ma'am," he informed Mrs. Calvert.

"Then it's the very thing, the only thing, we want," she answered, promptly. "I never did believe in that engine in the hands of an amateur."

Jim didn't fancy this reflection on his skill, believing that he already knew as much about machinery as an expert did and that he had mastered all that John Stinson could teach him. However, he was beyond reach of the beloved little engine now and the first thing to do was to bring the two boats together again.

Under Cap'n Jack's direction this was promptly done; and great was old Ephraim's rejoicing when, at last, the familiar gang-plank was once more in place and he had crossed over it to his beloved mistress's presence.

"T'ank de Lord, Miss Betty, you didn't get sca'ed to death! I sutney beliebed we was all gwine to de bottom of de ribbah! An' I was plumb scan'lized ter t'ink o' yo' po' li'l white body all kivered wid mud, stidder lyin' in a nice, clean tomb lak yo' oughter. I——"

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"That'll do, Ephraim. I'll take all the rest you were going to say for granted. Here, Metty, sit down in that corner and keep still. You're safe now and—are you hungry?"

The morning light was rapidly increasing and seen by it the little black face looked piteous indeed. But there were few troubles of Methuselah's which "eatings" couldn't cure; so his mistress promptly dispatched Dorothy to her stateroom for a big box of candy, brought along "in case of need." Never would need be more urgent than now, and not only did the little page's countenance brighten, when the box appeared, but everybody else dipped into it as eagerly—it seemed such a relief to do such an ordinary thing once more.

The sun rose and shone as if to make them forget the night of storm; and after a breakfast, hastily prepared on the little oil stove in the tender, a feeling of great content spread through the little company. Engineer Stinson had missed his train, but was now glad of it; for he had gained time to examine the engine, though disappointed at the report he had to make.

"Useless, for the present, Madam, I regret to say. Owing to the sudden jar against the end of the wharf, or the wind's dashing the tender about, some parts are broken. To get it repaired will take some time. Shall I send down a tug to tow you back to the city? And have a man from the shop attend to it? My own job will keep me from doing it myself, though I'd like to."

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"Thank you," said Aunt Betty, and, for a moment, said nothing more. But she looked from one to another of the eager young faces about her and read but one desire on all. This was so evident that she smiled as she asked:

"Who thinks best to give up this trip? Or, rather, to go back and start over again—if we dare?"

Nobody spoke but a sort of groan ran around the little company.

"All in favor of going on, with some other sort of 'power,' or of anchoring the Water Lily at some pleasant point near shore and staying there, say 'Aye'."

So lusty a chorus of "Ayes" answered that Aunt Betty playfully covered her ears, till the clamor had subsided. Then a council of ways and means was held, in which everyone took part, and out of which the decision came:

That Cap'n Jack should rig up the sails which was another one of Mr. Blank's provisions against just such a dilemma, and instruct the three lads how to use them; that when they didn't want to sail they should use the poles; or using neither, should remain quietly at rest in the most delightful spot they could find; that the Lily and its Pad should be fastened together in the strongest way, so that no more separation by wind or storm could be possible.

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"The tender adds a great weight to your 'power' in such a case," suggested Mr. Stinson. "Without it you could move much faster."

"And without it, where could Ephy sleep and Chloe cook? The boys, too, will need their warm bunks if it happens to be cold," said Dolly. "Besides—the kitchen is out there. Oh! we can't possibly spare the tender."

"Most house-boats get along without one," explained the engineer.

"What about a horse, or a mule? I've seen such a thing somewhere, on some of our little trips with Mr. Bruce," suggested the widow, then touched by her own reference to the dead relapsed into silence.

"Many of the little rivers of the Western Shore have banks as level as those of a canal," said Mrs. Calvert. The idea had approved itself to her. "I'm afraid you lads would get very tired of the poling, even if the water was shallow enough. Without wind, sails wouldn't help us; so Mrs. Bruce's notion is the best one yet."

"A mule would be nice and safe!" commented Mabel.

"First catch your mule," cried Gerald.

"And who'd ride it?" asked Jim.

"You would," promptly answered Melvin, laughing.

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"Not all the time, sir!" retorted Jim, yet with an expression which showed he was really considering the subject. "Turn and turn about's fair play."

"All right. I'll stand my turn and call it my 'watch.' I could fancy I was still on shipboard, don't you know?"

"I'd do my third—if we didn't keep it up all the time. A fellow wants a little chance to fish

and have some fun," added Gerald. Now that they had all been in danger together he was acting like the really fine lad he was and had dropped the silly affectations of his first manner.

Aurora, too, seemed more sensible, and, breakfast over, had shut herself in her tiny stateroom to put on the plainest frock she had. An approving smile from Mrs. Calvert greeted her reappearance and the girl began to think it wasn't so bad after all have an old lady aboard.

"Really, Mabel, there doesn't seem anything old about her except a few of her looks. I mean her white hair and some wrinkles. I guess it was all right she came, anyway."

"It surely was all right. Why, what would any of us have done if she hadn't been here? Mamma was scared worse than I was, even. You know she saw a person killed by lightning once and has never got over it. You'll find, if you watch out, that Mrs. Calvert will help us have a good time, rather than spoil it; if—if—we don't go back. I guess Mamma wishes we'd have to do that."

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Aurora did not answer, for just then the others were eagerly discussing the situation. They were to "up anchor," run up the sails to catch the stiff breeze that was rising with the sun, and proceed down the coast as far as they could while the engineer remained, as he had agreed to do for a few hours longer, because of Mrs. Calvert's earnest request.

"Get us safe into some snug harbor, please Mr. Stinson, and I will see that you lose nothing by the delay."

"That is all right, Madam. I only wish I could join your cruise for all its length. I'm sure you're bound to have a grand trip, despite the bad beginning—which should bring the proverbial good ending."

"I wish you could. Oh! I do wish you could," said Aunt Betty. She was somewhat surprised to find the engineer a man of culture, but was delighted by the fact. She felt that the presence of such a man would keep her three boys straight, for she was a little afraid of "pranks" should they indulge in any.

She had hoped, too, to make the most of their trip up and down the Severn, with which lovely river her earliest memories lingered. However, they were not to reach it yet. The friendly wind forsook them and both Cap'n Jack and Mr. Stinson felt that it would be wise to enter a little bay further north; and making their slow way between some islands come to anchor on the shores of the Magothy.

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"The Maggotty! That's where the best cantaloupes come from!" cried Mabel. "Who'll buy my fine wattymillyouns, growed on de Maggotty, down in An'erunnel! Wattymillyouns! Cant-e-lopes! Oh! I want one this minute!"

"What a dreadful name for a river! Who'd eat melons full of maggots!" demanded Aurora, with a little shiver. Evidently, though she must often have heard them, she had paid scant attention to the cries of the negro hucksters through her own city's streets.

"It isn't 'Maggotty' but 'Magothy'," explained Dorothy. "I used to think just as you do until I learned better. I'm bad as Mabel. I just can't wait. I must have a 'cantaloupe' for supper, I must! Scooped out and filled with ice—sweet and juicy——"

"Hold on! Hold on! Wait till I fetch it!" returned Gerald, with a smack of his own lips. Then leaving the others to follow as they chose he ran to the stern of the tender which the men had brought close to a grassy bank, and leaped ashore.

"Wheah's he gwine at?" demanded Ephraim, who had been in the way and unceremoniously pushed aside.

"Wattymillyouns!" yelled Jim, following the other boy's lead.

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"Wattymillyouns? Wat-ty-mill-youns? My hea't o' grace! I'se done gwine get some fo' my Miss Betty!"

"For yo'se'f you-all means, yo' po' triflin' ornery ole niggah! Ain't it de trufe?" laughed Chloe, coming to the old man's side, and laying a restraining hand upon his shoulder, while all her white teeth showed in a wide grin.

Safely anchored, the engineer gone, the old Captain bustling about on the roof of the boat, making all snug and shipshape for the coming night, every heart was light. None more so than those of the colored folks, always in the habit of leaving care to "their white" friends and like children in their readiness to forget the past.

Ephraim didn't leap the plank, his "roomaticals" prevented; but he displayed a marvelous agility in getting ashore and speed in following the vanishing lads.

"What's up?" demanded Melvin, running to where Chloe stood, holding her sides and shaking with laughter, "where have they gone?"

"Maggotty millyouns! Spyed a millyoun patch ovah yondah an'—Lan' ob Goshen! If he ain' done gwine, too! Well, my sake! Mebbe Chloe doan' lub millyouns same's anuddah, mebbe!"

As Melvin disappeared over the side, his own mouth watering for the southern delicacies so rare to his own northern home, mistress Chloe gathered up her petticoats and sprang ashore.

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Little Methuselah called after her but she did not pause. She meant to get her own share from that distant melon-patch, and her maternal ears were deaf to his outcries.

Sharing the common feeling of repose and safety which had fallen upon all the company when the Water Lily had been tied up for the night, Metty had felt it a fine time to don his livery and show off his finery before the white folks. Clad in its loose misfit, but proud as ever, he clung to the stern-rail of the Pad and gazed after his departing parent.

What had happened? Why were all those people running away so fast? Was another frightful tempest coming?

"Mammy! Mam-my! Lemme! Lemme come! Mammy, Mammy, wait—I'se com——"

A point on the water side of the Pad commanded a better view of the fleeing figures, climbing the gentle rise of ground beyond. Thither the little fellow rushed; gave one glance downward into the water and another upon his gorgeous attire; then upward and onward where a fold of scarlet calico fluttered like a signal; shut his great eyes, and leaped.

Alas! The fat little legs couldn't compass that space! and Methuselah Bonaparte Washington Brown sank beneath the waves his own impact had created.

CHAPTER VI.

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A MULE AND MELON TRANSACTION.

The five melon-hungry deserters from the Water Lily came breathlessly to the "snake" rail-fence which bordered the "patch" and paused with what Gerald called "neatness and dispatch."

Suddenly there rose from behind the fence a curious figure to confront them. Two figures, in fact, a man's and a mule's. Both were of a dusty brown color, both were solemn in expression, and so like one another in length of countenance that Melvin giggled and nudged Jim, declaring under his breath:

"Look like brothers, don't you know?"

Ephraim was the first to recover composure as, removing his hat, he explained:

"We-all's trabellers an' jes' natchally stopped to enquiah has yo' wattymillyouns fo' sale."

Chloe sniggered at the old man's deft turn of the matter, for she knew perfectly well that the idea of buying the melons hadn't entered his mind until that moment. He was an honest creature in general, but no southern negro considers it a crime to steal a water-melon—until he is caught at it!

The air with which Ephy bowed and scraped sent the boys into roars of laughter but didn't in the least lessen the gloom of the farmer's face. At last he opened his lips, closed them, reopened them and answered:

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"Ye-es. I have. But—I cayn't sell 'em. They ain't never no sale for *my* truck. Is they, Billy?"

The mournfulness of his voice was absurd. As absurd as to call the solemn-visaged mule by the frivolous name of "Billy." Evidently the animal understood human speech, for in response to his owner's appeal the creature opened his own great jaws in a prodigious bray. Whereupon the farmer nodded, gravely, as if to say:

"You see. Billy knows."

"How much yo' tax 'em at?" asked Chloe, gazing over the fence with longing eyes and mentally selecting the ripest and juiciest of the fruit.

"I ain't taxin' 'em. I leave it to you."

Then he immediately sat down upon the rock beside the fence where he had been "resting" for most of that afternoon, or "evenin'" as he called it. Billy doubled himself up and sprawled on the ground near his master, to the injury of the vines and one especially big melon.

"O, suh! *Doan'* let him squush it!" begged Chloe; while Ephraim turned upon her with a reproving:

"You-all min' yo' place! *Ah* 'm 'tendin' to dis yeah business."

"Va'y well. Jes' gimme mah millyoun ter tote home to Miss Betty. Ah mus' ha' left mah pocket-book behin' me!" she jeered. Then, before they knew what she was about, she had sprung over the fence and picked up the melon she had all along selected as her own. [Pg 94]

Nobody interfered, not even the somber owner of the patch; and with amazing lightness Chloe scrambled back again, the great melon held in the skirt of her red gown, and was off down the slope at the top of her speed.

Ephraim put on his "specs" and gravely stared after her; then shook his head, saying:

"Dat yeah gell's de flightiest evah! Ain't it de trufe?"

But now a new idea had come to Jim, and laying a hand on the collars of the other lads, he brought their heads into whispering nearness of his own:

"Say, fellows, *let's buy Billy!* A mule that understands English is the mule to draw the Water Lily!"

A pause, while the notion was considered, then Melvin exclaimed:

"Good enough! If he doesn't ask too much. Try him!"

"Yes, ask him. I'll contribute a fiver, myself," added Gerald.

Ephraim had now struggled over the fence and was pottering about among the melons, with the eye of a connoisseur selecting and laying aside a dozen of the choicest. Those which were not already black of stem he passed by as worthless, as he did those which did not yield a peculiar softness to the pressure of his thumb. His face fairly glittered and his "roomaticals" were wholly forgotten; till his attention was suddenly arrested by the word "money," spoken by one of the boys beyond the fence. At that he stood up, put his hands on his hips, and groaned; then keenly listened to what was being said. [Pg 95]

"Ye-es. I *might* want to sell Billy, but I cayn't. I cayn't never sell anything."

"Well, we're looking for a mule, a likely mule. One strong enough to haul a house-boat. Billy's pretty big; looks as if he could."

"Billy can do anything he's asked to. Cayn't you, Billy?"

It was funny to see the clever beast rise slowly to his feet, shake the dust from his great frame, turn his sorrowful gaze upon his master's face, and utter his assenting bray.

Melvin flung himself on the grass and laughed till his sides ached; then sprang up again wild with eagerness to possess such a comical creature:

"Oh! Buy him—buy him—no matter the price! He'd be the life of the whole trip! I'll give something, too, as much as I can spare!"

Jim tried to keep his face straight as he inquired:

"What is the price of Billy, sir?"

The farmer sighed, so long and deeply, that the mule lay down again as if pondering the matter. [Pg 96]

"Young man, that there Billy-mule is beyond price. There ain't another like him, neither along the Magothy nor on the Eastern Sho'. I cayn't sell Billy."

During his life upon the mountains James Barlow had seen something of "horse-traders" and he surmised that he had such an one to deal with now. He expected that the man would name a price, after a time, much higher than he really would accept, and the boy was ready for a "dicker." He meant to show the other lads how clever and astute he could be. So he

now returned:

"Oh, yes. I think you can if you get your price. Everything has its price, I've read somewhere—even mules!"

"Young man, life ain't no merry jest. I've found that out and so'll you. *I cayn't sell Billy.*"

"Ten dollars?"

No reply, but the man sat down again beside his priceless mule and reopened the old book he had been reading when interrupted by these visitors.

"Fifteen?"

"Twenty?" volunteered Gerald.

"Twenty-five?" asked Melvin. Then in an aside to the other boys: "I wonder if Dorothy will help pay for him!"

"Sure. This is her racket, isn't it? It was Mrs. Calvert, or somebody, said we could be towed along shore, as if the Lily were a canal-boat. Sure! We'll be doing her a kindness if we buy it for her and save her all the trouble of looking for one;" argued Gerald, who had but a small stock of money and wasn't eager to spend it.

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Jim cast one look of scorn upon him, then returned to his "dickering." He had so little cash of his own that he couldn't assume payment, but he reasoned that, after he had written an account of their predicament to Mr. Winters, the generous donor of the Lily would see that she was equipped with the necessary "power," even if that power lay in the muscles of a gigantic mule.

"Oh! sir, please think it over. Hark, I'll tell you the whole story, then I'm sure you'll want to help a lady—several ladies—out of a scrape," argued Jim, with such a persuasive manner that Melvin was astonished. This didn't seem at all like the rather close-tongued student he had known before.

But the truth was that Jim had become infatuated with the idea of owning at least a share in Billy. He was used to mules. He had handled and lived among them during his days upon Mrs. Stott's truck-farm. He was sure that the animal could be made useful in many ways and—in short, he wanted, he must have Billy!

In a very few moments he had told the whole tale of the house-boat and its misfortunes, laying great stress upon the "quality" of its owners, and thus shrewdly appealing to the chivalry of this southern gentleman who was playing at farming.

For a time his only apparent listener was old Ephraim, who had picked up a hoe somewhere and now leaned upon it, resting from his selection of the melons. But, though he didn't interfere with the glib narrative, he confirmed it by nods of his gray head, and an occasional "Dat's so, Cunnel."

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Evidently, the farmer was impressed. He stopped pretending to read and folding his arms, leaned back against the rails, his eyes closed, an expression of patient, sad endurance upon his long face. His manner said as plainly as words:

"If this young gabbler *will* talk I suppose I must listen."

But gradually this manner changed. His eyes opened. The book slid to the ground. In spite of his own unwillingness he was interested. A house-boat! He'd never heard of such a thing; but, if the tale were true, it would be something new to see. Besides, ladies in distress? That was an appeal no gentleman could deny, even though that gentleman were as poor as himself. He might well have added "as shiftless;" for another man in his position would have been stirring himself to get that fine crop of melons into market.

Jim finished his recital with the eager inquiry:

"Now, sir, don't you think you can sell Billy and put a reasonable price on him?"

The lad rose to his feet as he asked this and the man slowly followed his example. Then laying his hand on heart he bowed, saying:

"I cayn't sell Billy. I give you my word. But, a southern planter is never beyond the power, sir, to bestow a gift. Kindly convey said Billy to Miss Calvert with the compliments of Colonel Judah Dillingham of T. Yonder are the bars. They are down. They are always down. So are my fortunes. Billy, old friend, farewell."

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This strange gentleman then solemnly reseated himself and again picked up his book. A

deeper gloom than ever had settled upon him and a sigh that was almost a sob shook him from head to foot.

Billy, also, slowly and stiffly rose, regarded the reader with what seemed like grieved amazement and dismally brayed. There was an old harness upon him, half-leather, half-rope, with a few wisps of corn-husk, and without delay Jim laid his hand on the bit-ring and started away.

"Of course, sir, we will pay for the mule. My folks wouldn't, I mean couldn't, accept such a gift from a stranger. Our house-boat is tied up at the little wharf down yonder and we'll likely be there for awhile. I'll come back soon and tell what they say."

Colonel Dillingham made no motion as if he heard and James was too afraid he would repent of the bargain to tarry. But Billy wasn't easy to lead. He followed peaceably enough as far as the designated bars, even stepped over the fallen rails into the grassy fields beyond. But there he firmly planted his fore-feet and refused to go further.

Left behind and scarcely believing his own eyes, Ephraim now respectfully inquired, with pride at having guessed the man's title: [Pg 100]

"How much dese yeah millyouns wuth, Cunnel?"

The question was ignored although the gentleman seemed listening to something. It was the dispute now waging in the field beyond, where Jim was trying to induce Billy to move and the other lads were offering suggestions in the case. At last something akin to a smile stole over the farmer's grim features and he roughly ordered:

"Shut up, you nigger! Huh! Just as I thought. I couldn't sell Billy and Billy won't be given. Eh? what? Price of melons? You black idiot, do you reckon a gentleman who can afford to give away a mule's goin' to take money for a few trumpery water-melons? Go on away. Go to the packin'-house yonder and find a sack. Fill it. Take the whole field full. Eat enough to kill yourself. I wish you would!"

Far from being offended by this outbreak, Ephraim murmured:

"Yes, suh, t'ank yo', suh," and hobbled over the uneven ground toward the whitewashed building in the middle of the patch. Some more thrifty predecessor had built this for the storing and packing of produce, but under the present owner's management it was fast tumbling to ruin. But neither did this fact surprise Ephy, nor hinder him from choosing the largest sack from a pile on the floor. With this in hand he hurried back to the goodly heap of melons he had made ready and hastily loaded them into the sack. [Pg 101]

Not till then did he consider how he was to get that heavy load to the Water Lily. Standing up, he took off his hat, scratched his wool, hefted the melons, and finally chuckled in delight.

"'Mo' ways 'an one to skin a cat'! Down-hill's easier 'an up!"

With that he began to drag the sack toward the fence and, having reached it, took out its contents and tossed them over the fence. When the bag was empty he rolled and tucked it into the back of his coat, then climbed back to the field outside. The controversy with Billy was still going lustily on, but Ephy had more serious work on hand than that. Such a heap of luscious melons meant many a day's feast, if they could be stored in some safe, cool place.

"Hello! Look at old Eph!" suddenly cried Gerald, happening to turn about.

"Huh! Now ain't that clever? Wonder I never thought o' that myself!" cried the Colonel, with some animation. "Clever enough for a white man. Billy, you'd ought have conjured that yourself. But that's always the way. I cayn't think a thought but somebody else has thought it before me. I cayn't never get ahead of the tail end of things. Oh! hum!"

The Colonel might be sighing but the three lads were laughing heartily enough to drown the sighs, for there was the old negro starting one after another of the great melons a-roll down the gentle slope, to bring up on the grassy bank at the very side of the Water Lily. If a few fell over into the water they could easily be fished out, reasoned Ephraim, proud of his own ingenuity. [Pg 102]

But the group beside the bars didn't watch to see the outcome of that matter, nor Ephraim's reception. They were too busy expostulating with Billy, and lavishing endearments upon him.

"'Stubborn as a mule'," quoted Melvin, losing patience.

"Or fate," responded the Colonel, drearily.

"Please, sir, won't you try to make him go?" pleaded Gerald. "I think if you just started him on the right way he'd keep at it."

"Billy is—Billy!" said the farmer. He was really greatly interested. Nothing so agreeable as this had happened in his monotonous life since he could remember. Here were three lads, as full of life as he had been once, jolly, hearty, with a will to do and conquer everything; and—here was Billy. A great, awkward, inert mass of bone and muscle, merely, calmly holding these clever youngsters at bay.

"Can he be ridden?" demanded Jim, at length.

"He might. Try;" said the man, in heart-broken accents.

Jim tried. Melvin tried. Gerald tried. With every attempt to cross his back the animal threw up his heels and calmly shook the intruder off.

The Colonel folded his arms and sorrowfully regarded these various attempts and failures; then dolefully remarked: [Pg 103]

"It seems I cayn't even *give* Billy away. Ah! hum."

Jim lost his temper.

"Well, sir, we'll call it off and bid you good night. Somebody will come back to pay you for the melons."

As he turned away in a huff his mates started to follow him; but Melvin was surprised by a touch on his shoulder and looked up to see the Colonel beside him.

"Young man, you look as if you came of gentle stock. Billy was brought up by a gentlewoman, my daughter. She forsook him and me for another man. I mean she got married. That's why Billy and I live alone now, except for the niggers. They's a right and a wrong way to everything. *This*—is the right way with Billy. Billy, lie down."

For an instant the animal hesitated as if suspecting some treachery in this familiar command; then he doubled himself together like a jack-knife, or till he was but a mound of mule-flesh upon the grass.

"She taught him. She rode this way. Billy, get up."

This strange man had seated himself sidewise upon the mule's back, leisurely freeing his feet from the loose-hanging harness and balancing himself easily as the animal got up. Then still sitting sidewise he ordered:

"Billy, proceed." [Pg 104]

At once Billy "proceeded" at an even and decorous pace, while the lads walked alongside, vastly entertained by this unusual rider and his mount. He seemed to think a further explanation necessary, for as they neared the bottom of the slope he remarked:

"Learned that in Egypt. Camel riding. She came home and taught him."

Then they came to the edge of the bank and paused in surprise. Instead of the gay welcome they had expected, there was Chloe walking frantically up and down, hugging a still dripping little figure to her breast and refusing to yield it to the outstretched arms of poor old Ephraim, who stood in the midst of his melons, a woe-begone, miserable creature, wholly unlike his jubilant self of a brief while before.

"What's—happened?" asked Jim, running to Chloe's side.

"'Tis a jedgmen'! A jedgmen'! Oh! de misery—de misery!" she wailed, breaking away from him and wildly running to and fro again, in the fierce excitement of her race.

Yet there upon the roof of the cabin, cheerily looking out from his "bridge" was Cap'n Jack. He was waving his crutches in jovial welcome and trying to cover Chloe's wailing by his exultant:

"I fished him out with a boat-hook! With—a—boat-hook, d'ye hear?"

CHAPTER VII.

VISITORS.

Attracted by the wild flowers growing in the fields around the cove where the Water Lily was moored, the four girls had left the boat a little while before the melon seekers had done so.

Mabel and Aurora cared little for flowers in themselves but Dorothy's eagerness was infectious, and Elsa's pale face had lighted with pleasure. But even then her timidity moved her to say:

"Suppose something happens? Suppose we should get lost? It's a strange, new place—I guess—I'm afraid—I'll stay with Mrs. Calvert, please."

"You'll do nothing of the kind, my dear," said that lady, smiling. "You've done altogether too much 'staying' in your short life. Time now to get outdoor air and girlish fun. Go with Dorothy and get some color into your cheeks. You want to go back to that father of yours looking a very different Elsa from the one he trusted to us. Run along! Don't bother about a hat and jacket. Exercise will keep you from taking cold. Dolly, dear, see that the child has a good time."

Elsa's mother had died of consumption and her father had feared that his child might inherit that disease. In his excessive love and care for her he had kept her closely housed in the poor apartment of a crowded tenement, the only home he could afford. The result had been to render her more frail than she would otherwise have been. Her shyness, her lameness, and her love of books with only her father for teacher, made her contented enough in such a life, but was far from good for her. The best thing that had ever happened to her was this temporary breaking up of this unwholesome routine and her having companions of her own age.

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So that even now she had looked wistfully upon the small bookshelf in the cabin, with the few volumes placed there; but Mrs. Calvert shook her head and Elsa had to obey.

"But, Dorothy, aren't you afraid? There might be snakes. It might rain. It looks wet and swampy—I daren't get my feet wet—father's so particular——"

"If it rains I'll run back and get you an umbrella, Aunt Betty's own—the only one aboard, I fancy. And as for fear—child alive! Did you never get into the woods and smell the ferns and things? There's nothing so sweet in the world as the delicious woodsy smell! Ah! um! Let's hurry!" cried Dolly, linking her arm in the lame girl's and helping her over the grassy hummocks.

Even then Elsa would have retreated, startled by the idea of "woods" where the worst she had anticipated was a leisurely stroll over a green meadow. But there was no resisting her friend's enthusiasm; besides, looking backward she was as much afraid to return and try clambering aboard the Lily, unaided, as she was to go forward.

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So within a few minutes all four had entered the bit of woodland and, following Dorothy's example, were eagerly searching for belated blossoms. Learning, too, from that nature-loving girl, things they hadn't known before.

"A cardinal flower—more of them—a whole lot! Yes, of course, it's wet there. Cardinals always grow in damp places, along little streams like this I've slipped my foot into! Oh! aren't they beauties! Won't dear Aunt Betty go just wild over them! if Father John, the darling man who 'raised' me, were only here! He's a deal lamer than you, Elsa Carruthers, but nobody's feet would get over the ground faster than his crutches if he could just have one glimpse of this wonderland!

"Did you ever notice? Almost all the autumn flowers are either purple or yellow or white? There are no real blues, no rose-colors; with just this lovely, lovely cardinal for an exception."

Dorothy sped back to where Elsa stood nervously balancing herself upon a fallen tree-trunk and laid the brilliant flowers in her hands. Elsa looked at them in wonder and then exclaimed:

"My! how pretty! They look just as if they were made out of velvet in the milliner's window! And how did you know all that about the colors?"

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"Oh! Father John, and Mr. Winters—Uncle Seth, he likes me to call him—the dear man that gave us the Water Lily—they told me. Though I guessed some things myself. You can't help that, you know, when you love anything. I think, I just do think, that the little bits of things which grow right under a body's feet are enough to make one glad forever. Sometime, when I grow up, if Aunt Betty's willing, and I don't have to work for my living, I shall build

us a little house right in the woods and live there.”

“Pshaw, Dolly Doodles! You couldn’t build a house if you tried. And you’d get mighty sick of staying in the woods all the time, with nobody coming to visit you——” remarked Mabel coming up behind them.

“I should have the birds and the squirrels, and all the lovely creatures that live in the forest!”

“And wild-cats, and rattlesnakes, and horrid buggy things! Who’d see any of your new clothes?”

“I shouldn’t want any. I’d wear one frock till it fell to pieces——”

“You wouldn’t be let! Mrs. Calvert’s awful particular about your things.”

“That’s so,” commented Aurora. “They’re terrible plain but they look just right, somehow. Righter ’n mine do, Gerry says, though I don’t believe they cost near as much.”

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“Well, we didn’t come into these lovely woods to talk about clothes. Anybody can make clothes but only the dear God can make a cardinal flower!” cried Dorothy, springing up, with a sudden sweet reverence on her mobile face.

Elsa as suddenly bent and kissed her, and even the other matter-of-fact girls grew thoughtful.

“It’s like a church, isn’t it? Only more beautiful,” whispered the lame girl.

“Yes, isn’t it? Makes all the petty hatefulness of things seem not worth while. What matter if the storm did break the engine—that stranded us right here and gave us *this*. If we’d kept on down the bay we’d have missed it. That’s like dear Uncle Seth says—that things are *meant*. So I believe that it was ‘meant’ you should come here to-day and have your first taste of the woods. You’ll never be afraid of them again, I reckon.”

“Never—never! I’m glad you made me come. I didn’t want to. I wanted to read, but this is better than any book could be, because like you said—God made it.”

Aurora and Mabel had already turned back toward the Lily and now called that it was time to go. Though the little outing had meant less to them than it had to Elsa and Dorothy, it had still given them a pleasure that was simple and did them good. Aurora had gathered a big bunch of purple asters for the table, thinking how well they would harmonize with the dainty lavender of her hostess’s gown; and Mabel had plucked a lot of “boneset” for her mother, remembering how much that lady valued it as a preventive of “malaria”—the disease she had been sure she would contract, cruising in shallow streams.

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“Come on, girls! Something’s happened! The boys are waving to us like all possessed!” shouted Mabel, when they had neared the wharf and the boat which already seemed like home to them.

Indeed, Gerald and Melvin were dancing about on the little pier beckoning and calling: “Hurry up, hurry up!” and the girls did hurry, even Elsa moving faster than she had ever done before. Already she felt stronger for her one visit to that wonderful forest and she was hoping that the Water Lily might remain just where it was, so that she might go again and again.

Then Gerald came to meet them, balancing a water-melon on his head, trying to imitate the ease with which the colored folks did that same trick. But he had to use his hands to keep it in place and even so it slipped from his grasp and fell, broken to pieces at Elsa’s feet.

“Oh! What a pity!” she cried, then dropped her eyes because she had been surprised into speaking to this boy who had never noticed her before.

“Not a bit! Here, my lady, taste!”

She drew back her head from the great piece he held at her lips but was forced to take one mouthful in self-defence. But Dorothy, in similar fix was eating as if she were afraid of losing the dainty, while Gerald merrily pretended to snatch it away.

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“Ha! That shows the difference—greed and daintiness!”

Then in a changed tone he exclaimed:

“Pretty close shave for the pickaninny!”

Dorothy held her dripping bit of melon at arm’s length and quickly asked:

"What do you mean? Why do you look so sober all of a sudden?"

"Metty came near drowning. Tried to follow his mother over the field to the melon-patch and fell into the water. Mrs. Calvert was walking around the deck and heard the splash. Nobody else was near. She ran around to that side and saw him. Then she screamed. Old Cap'n says by the time he got there the little chap was going under for the last time. Don't know how he knew that—doubt if he did—but if he did—but he wouldn't spoil a story for a little thing like a lie. Queer old boy, that skipper, with his pretended log and his broken spy-glass. He——"

"Never mind that, go on—go on! He was saved, wasn't he? Oh! say that he was!" begged Dolly, wringing her hands.

"Course. And you're dripping pink juice all over your skirt!"

"If you're going to be so tantalizing——" she returned and forgetful of lame Elsa, sped away to find out the state of things for herself. [Pg 112]

Left alone Elsa began to tremble, so that her teeth chattered when Gerald again held the fruit to her lips.

"Please don't! I—I can't bear it! It seems so dreadful! Nothing's so dreadful as—death! Poor, poor, little boy!"

The girl's face turned paler than ordinary and she shook so that Gerald could do no less than put his arm around her to steady her.

"Don't feel that way, Elsa! Metty isn't dead. I tell you he's all right. He's the most alive youngster this minute there is in the country. Old Cap'n is lame; of course he couldn't swim, even if he'd tried. But he didn't. He just used his wits, and they're pretty nimble, let me tell you! There was a boat-hook hanging on the rail—that's a long thing with a spike, or hook, at one end, to pull a boat to shore, don't you know? He caught that up and hitched it into the seat of Metty's trousers and fished him out all right. Fact."

Elsa's nervousness now took the form of tears, mingled with hysterical laughter, and it was Gerald's turn to grow pale. What curious sort of a girl was this who laughed and cried all in one breath, and just because a little chap wasn't drowned, though he might have been?

"I say, girlie, Elsa, whatever your name is, quit it! You're behaving horrid! *Metty isn't dead.* He's very much happier than—than I am, at this minute. He's eating water-melon and you'd show some sense if you'd do that, too. When his mother got back, after stealing her melon, she found things in a fine mess. Old Cap'n had fished the youngster out but he wasn't going to have him drip muddy water all over his nice clean 'ship.' Not by a long shot! So he carries him by the boat-hook, just as he'd got him, over to the grass and hung him up in a little tree that was there, to dry. Yes, sir! Gave him a good spanking, too, Mrs. Bruce said, just to keep him from taking cold! Funny old snoozer, ain't he?" [Pg 113]

In spite of herself Elsa stopped sobbing and smiled; while relieved by this change Gerald hurriedly finished his tale.

"He was hanging there, the Cap'n holding him from falling, when his mother came tearing down the hill and stopped so short her melon fell out her skirt—ker-smash! 'What you-all doin' ter mah li'l lamb?' says she. 'Just waterin' the grass,' says he. 'Why-fo'?' says she. 'Cause the ornery little fool fell into the river and tried to spile his nice new livery. Why else?' says he. Then—Did you ever hear a colored woman holler? Made no difference to her that the trouble was all over and Methuselah Washington Bonaparte was considerable cleaner than he had been before his plunge; she kept on yelling till everybody was half-crazy and we happened along with—Billy! Say, Elsa——" [Pg 114]

"Gerald, I mean Mr. Blank, is all that true?"

"What's the use eyeing a fellow like that? I guess it's true. That's about the way it must have been and, anyway, that part that our good skipper fished the boy out of the water is a fact. Old Ephraim grand-daddy hated Cap'n Jack like poison before; now he'd kiss the ground he walks on, if he wasn't ashamed to be caught at it. Funny! That folks should make such an everlasting fuss over one little black boy!"

"I suppose they love him," answered Elsa. She was amazed to find herself walking along so quietly beside this boy whom she had thought so rough, and from whom she shrank more than from any of the others. He had certainly been kind. He was the one who had stayed to help her home when even Dorothy forsook her. She had hated his rude boisterous ways and the sound of his voice, with its sudden changes from a deep bass to a squeaking falsetto. Now she felt ashamed and punished, that she had so misjudged the beautiful world into

which she had come, and, lifting her large eyes to Gerald's face, said so very prettily.

But the lad had little sentiment in his nature and hated it in others. If she was going to act silly and "sissy" he'd leave her to get home the best way she could. The ground was pretty even now and, with her hand resting on his arm, she was walking steadily enough. Of course, her lame foot did drag but—

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A prolonged bray broke into his uncomfortable mood and turning to the startled Elsa, he merrily explained:

"That's Billy! Hurry up and be introduced to Billy! I tell you he's a character—"

"Billy? *Billy!* Don't tell me there's another boy come to stay on the Lily!"

"Fact. The smartest one of the lot! Hurry up!"

Elsa had to hurry, though she shrank from meeting any more strangers, because Gerald forgot that he still grasped her arm and forced her along beside him, whether or no. But she released herself as they came to the wharf and the people gathered there.

This company included not only the house-boat party but a number of other people. So novel a craft as a house-boat couldn't be moored within walking distance of Four-Corners' Post-Office, and the waterside village of Jimpson's Landing, without arousing great curiosity. Also, the other boats passing up and down stream, scows and freighters mostly these were, plying between the fertile lands of Anne Arundel and the Baltimore markets, had spread the tale.

Now, at evening, when work was over, crowds flocked from the little towns to inspect the Water Lily and its occupants. Also, many of them to offer supplies for its convenience. The better to do this last, they unceremoniously climbed aboard, roamed at will over both boat and tender, inspected and commented upon everything and, finally, demanded to see the "Boss."

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Outside on the grass beside the wharf sat Colonel Dillingham of T, side-saddle-wise upon great Billy, who had gone to sleep. He was waiting to be presented to Mrs. Calvert and would not presume to disturb her till she sent for him. Meanwhile he was very comfortable, and with folded arms, his habitual attitude, he sadly observed the movements of his neighbors.

Most of these nodded to him as they passed, with an indifferent "Howdy, Cunnel?" paying no further attention to him. Yet there was something about the man on mule-back that showed him to be of better breeding than the rustics who disdained him. Despite his soiled and most unhappy appearance he spoke with the accents of a gentleman, and when his name was repeated to Mrs. Calvert she mused over it with a smile.

"Dillingham? Dillingham of T? Why, of course, Dolly dear, he's of good family. One of the best in Maryland. I reckon I'll have to go into the cabin and receive him. Is it still full of those ill-bred men, who swarmed over this boat as if they owned it?"

"Yes, Aunt Betty, pretty full. Some, a few, have gone. Those who haven't want to see the 'Boss.'"

Mrs. Calvert peered from her stateroom whither she had fled at the first invasion of visitors, and smiled. Then she remarked:

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"Just go ashore and be interviewed there, dear."

"Auntie! What do you mean?"

"I fancy you're the real 'boss,' or head of this company, when it comes to fact. It's *your* Water Lily, *you* are bearing the expenses, I'm your guest, and 'where the honey is the bees will gather.' If these good people once understand that it's you who carry the purse—"

"But I don't! You know that. I gave it to Mrs. Bruce. I asked her to take care of the money because—Well, because I'm careless, sometimes, you know, and might lose it."

"It's the same thing. Ask her to go with you and advise you, if there is anything you need. But, remember, money goes fast if one doesn't take care."

It sounded rather strange to Dorothy to hear Aunt Betty say this for it wasn't the lady's habit to discuss money matters. However, she hadn't time to think about that for here was Mrs. Bruce, urging:

"Dorothy, do come and do something with these men. There's one fairly badgering me to buy cantaloupes—and they do look nice—but with all the water-melons—Yes, sir; this is the

'Boss;' this is Miss Calvert, the owner of the Water Lily."

A man with a basket of freshly dug potatoes had followed Mrs. Bruce to the door of Mrs. Calvert's stateroom which, with a hasty "Beg pardon" from within, had been closed in their faces. Another man, carrying smaller baskets of tempting plums, was trying to out-talk his neighbor; while a third, dangling a pair of chickens above the heads of the other two, was urging the sale of these, "raised myself, right here on Annyrunnell sile! Nicest, fattest, little br'ilers ever you see, Ma'am!"

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"Huh! that pair of chickens wouldn't make a mouthful for our family!" cried the matron, desperately anxious to clear the cabin of these hucksters. She had made it her business to keep the Water Lily in spotless order and this invasion of muddy boots and dirt-scattering baskets fretted her. Besides, like all the rest of that "ship's company," her one desire was to make Mrs. Calvert perfectly comfortable and happy. She knew that this intrusion of strangers would greatly annoy her hostess and felt she must put an end to it at once. But how?

Dorothy rose to the occasion. Assuming all the dignity her little body could summon she clapped her hands for silence and unexpectedly obtained it. People climbing the crooked stairs to the roof and the "Skipper's bridge" craned their necks to look at her; those testing the arrangement of the canvas partitions between the cots on one side stopped with the partitions half-adjusted and stared; while the chattering peddlers listened, astonished.

"Excuse me, good people, but this boat is private property. None should come aboard it without an invitation. Please all go away at once. I'll step ashore with this lady and there we'll buy whatever she thinks best."

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Probably because her words made some of the intruders ashamed a few turned to leave; more lingered, among these the hucksters, and Dorothy got angry. Folding her arms and firmly standing in her place she glared upon them till one by one they slipped away over the gang-plank and contented themselves with viewing the Water Lily and its Pad from that point.

As the last smock-clad farmer disappeared Dorothy dropped upon the floor and laughed.

"O Mrs. Bruce! Wasn't that funny? Those great big men and I—a little girl! They mustn't do it again. They shall not!"

"The best way to stop them is to do as you promised—step to the shore and see them there. Those potatoes were real nice. We might get some of them, but the chickens—it would take so many. Might get one for Mrs. Calvert's breakfast—oatmeal will do for the rest of us."

Dorothy sprang up and hurried with her friend off from the Lily. But she made a wry face at the mention of oatmeal-breakfasts and explained:

"Aunt Betty wouldn't eat chicken if none of the others had it. And just oatmeal—I hate oatmeal! It hasn't a bit of expression and I'm as hungry after it as before. Just do get enough of those 'br'ilers' for all. Please, Mrs. Bruce! There's nobody in the world can broil a chicken as you do! I remember! I've eaten them at your house before I ever left Baltimore!"

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Naturally, the matron was flattered. She wasn't herself averse to fine, tasty poultry, and resolved to gratify the teasing girl that once. But she qualified her consent with the remark:

"It mustn't be such luxury very often, child, if you're to come out even with this trip and the money. My! What a great mule! What a curious man on it! Why does he sit sidewise and gloom at everybody, that way?"

Dorothy hadn't yet spoken with Colonel Dillingham though the boys had given her a brief description of him and their attempted purchase. But she was unprepared to have him descend from his perch and approach her, saying:

"Your servant, Miss Calvert. You resemble your great-grandfather. *He* was a man. He—*was* a man! Ah! yes! he was a—*man*! I cayn't be too thankful that you are you, and that it's to a descendant of a true southern nobleman I now present—Billy. Billy, Miss Calvert. Miss Calvert, Billy!"

With a sigh that seemed to come from his very boots the gallant Colonel placed one of the mule's reins in Dorothy's astonished hand and bowed again; and as if fully appreciating the introduction old Billy bobbed his head up and down in the mournfulest manner and gravely brayed, while the observant bystanders burst into a loud guffaw.

THE COLONEL'S REVELATION.

"Aunt Betty, what does that 'of T' mean after that queer Colonel's name?"

"There is no sense in it, dear, of course. The family explained it this way. The gentleman's real name is Trowbridge. His wife's family was Dillingham. It was of much older origin than his and she was very proud of it. When she consented to marry him it was upon the condition that he would take her name, not she take his. A slight legal proceeding made it right enough but he added the 'of T.' It was a tribute to his honesty, I fancy, though it's quite a custom of Marylanders to do as the Dillinghams did. Here he comes now. I must ask him about his daughter. He had one, a very nice girl I've heard."

"Coming! Why, Aunt Betty, we haven't had breakfast yet!"

Mrs. Betty laughed.

"Another familiar custom, dear, among country neighbors in this old State. Why, my own dear mother thought nothing of having a party of uninvited guests arrive with the sunrise, expecting just the same cordial welcome she would have accorded later and invited ones. It never made any difference in the good old days. There was always plenty of food in the storehouse and plenty of help to prepare it. The Colonel isn't so very old but he seems to cling to the traditions of his ancestors. I wonder, will he expect us to feed Billy also! And I do hope Mrs. Bruce will have something nice for breakfast. The poor gentleman looks half-starved."

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"Oh! yes, she has. We bought a half-dozen pairs of 'broilers' last night; but she meant them to last for supper, too."

"Run. Bid her cook the lot. There'll be none too many."

"But, Auntie, dear! They cost fifty cents a-piece. Six whole dollars for one single breakfast? Besides the potatoes and bread and other stuff! Six dollars a meal, eighteen dollars a day, how long will what is left of three hundred dollars last, after we pay for Billy, as you said we must?"

This was on the morning after the Colonel's first call at the Water Lily. This had been a prolonged one because of—Billy. That wise animal saw no stable anywhere about and, having been petted beyond reason by his loving, sad-hearted master, decided that he dared not—at his time of life—sleep out of doors. At least that was the way James Barlow understood it, and no persuasion on the part of his new friends could induce the mule to remain after the Colonel started for home.

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"Tie him to the end of the wharf," suggested Gerald.

"That would be cruel. He might fall into the water in his sleep. We don't want two to do that in one day," protested Dorothy.

At that point Billy began to bray; so mournfully and continuously that Mrs. Calvert sent word:

"Stop that beast! We shan't be able to sleep a wink if he keeps that noise up!"

The Colonel paused once more. His departure had been a succession of pauses, occasioned by two things: one that the lazy man never walked when he could ride; the other, that he could not bring himself to part from his "only faithful friend." The result was that he had again mounted the stubborn beast and disappeared in the darkness of his melon-patch.

Now he was back again, making his mount double himself up on the ground and so spare his rider the trouble of getting off in the usual way.

"My hearties! Will you see that, lads?" demanded Melvin, coming down the bank with his towels over his arm. He had promptly discovered a sheltered spot, up stream, where he could take his morning dip, without which his English training made him uncomfortable. "Pooh! He's given the mule and himself with it! He's fun for a day, but we can't stand him long. I hope Mrs. Calvert will give him his 'discharge papers' right away."

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"If she doesn't I will!" answered Gerald, stoutly. "A very little of the 'Cunnel' goes a long way with yours truly."

Jim looked up sharply. His own face showed annoyance at the reappearance of the farmer but he hadn't forgotten some things the others had.

"Look here, fellows! This isn't our picnic, you know!"

Melvin flushed and ducked his head, as if from a blow, but Gerald retorted:

"I don't care if it isn't. I'd rather quit than have that old snoozer for my daily!"

"I don't suppose anybody will object to your quitting when you want to. The Water Lily ain't yours, though you 'pear to think so. And let me tell you right now; if you don't do the civil to anybody my mistress has around I'll teach you better manners—that's all!"

With that Jim returned to the polishing of his useless engine, making no further response to Gerald's taunts.

"Mistress! *Mistress?* Well, I'll have you to know, you young hireling, that I'm my own master. *I* don't work for any mistress, without wages or with 'em, and in my set we don't hobnob with workmen—ever. Hear that? And mind you keep your own place, after this!"

An ugly look came over Jim's face and his hands clenched. With utmost difficulty he kept from rising to knock the insolent Gerald down, and a few words more might have brought on a regular battle of fists, had not Melvin interposed in his mild voice yet with indignation in his eyes:

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"You don't mean that, Gerald. 'A man's a man for a' that.' I'm a 'hireling,' too, d'ye mind? A gentleman, that you boast you are, doesn't bully his inferiors nor behave like a ruffian in a lady's house—or boat—which is the same thing. Gentlemen don't do that—Not in our Province."

Then, fortunately, Chloe appeared, asking if one of them would go to the nearest farmhouse and fetch a pail of cream for breakfast.

"They's quality come, so li'l Miss says, an' ole Miss boun' ter hev t'ings right down scrumptious, lak wese do to home in Baltimo'."

With great willingness each and every lad offered to do the errand; and in a general tussle to grab her outstretched "bucket" their anger vanished in a laugh. The "good side" of Gerald came uppermost and he awkwardly apologized:

"Just forget I was a cad, will you, boys? I didn't mean it. I'd just as lief go for that cream as not."

"I'd liefer!" said Melvin.

Jim said nothing but the ugly look vanished from his face and it was he who secured the pail and started with it on a run over the plank and the field beyond.

"I'll beat you there!" shouted Melvin; and "You can't do it!" yelled Gerald; while Chloe clasped her hands in dismay, murmuring:

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"Looks lak dere won't be much cweam lef' in de bucket if it comes same's it goes!"

That visit to the farmhouse, short though it was, gave a turn to affairs on the Water Lily. The farmer told the lads of a little branch a few miles further on, which would be an ideal place for such a craft to anchor, for "a day, a week, or a lifetime."

"It's too fur off for them village loafers to bother any. You won't have to anchor in midstream to get shet of 'em, as would be your only chance where you be now. I was down with the crowd, myself, last night an' I was plumb scandalized the way some folks acted. No, sir, I wasn't aboard the Water Lily nor set foot to be. I come home and told my wife: 'Lizzie,' says I, 'them water-travellers'll have a lot o' trouble with the Corner-ites and Jimpson-ites. It's one thing to be civil an' another to be imperdent.' I 'lowed to Lizzie, I says: 'I ain't volunteerin' my opinion till it's asked, but when it is I'll just mention Deer-Copse on the Ottawotta Run. Ain't a purtier spot on the whole map o' Maryland 'an that is. Good boatin', good fishin', good springs in the woods, good current to the Run and no malarly. Better 'n that—good neighbors on the high ground above.' That's what I says to Lizzie."

Jim's attention was caught by the name Deer-Copse. He thought Mrs. Calvert would like that, it was so much like her own Deerpark on the Hudson. Also, he had overheard her saying to Mrs. Bruce: "I do wish we could find some quiet stream, right through the heart of green woods, where there'd be no danger and no intruders." From this friendly farmer's description it seemed as if that bit of forest on the Ottawotta would be an ideal camping-ground.

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There followed questions and answers. Yes, the Water Lily might be hauled there by a mule walking on the bank, as far as the turn into the branch. After that, poling and hauling, according to the depth of the water and what the Lily's keel "drewed," or required. They

could obtain fresh vegetables real near.

‘I’m runnin’ a farm that-a-way, myself; leastwise me an’ my brother together. He’s got no kind of a wife like Lizzie. A poor, shiftless creatur’ with more babies under foot ‘an she can count, herself. One them easy-goin’ meek-as-Moses sort. Good? Oh! yes, real good. Too good. Thinks more o’ meetin’ than of gettin’ her man a decent meal o’ victuals. Do I know what sort of mule Cunnel Dillingham has? Well, I guess! That ain’t no ornery mule, Billy Dillingham ain’t. You see, him and the Cunnel has lived so long together ‘t they’ve growed alike. After the Cunnel’s daughter quit home an’ married Jabb, Cunnel up an’ sold the old place. Thought he’d go into truck-farmin’—him the laziest man in the state. Farmin’ pays, course, ‘specially here in Annyrunnell. Why, my crop o’ melons keeps my family all the year round an’ my yuther earnin’s is put in the bank. Cunnel’s got as big a patch as mine an’ you cayn’t just stop melons from growin’ down here in Annyrunnell! No, sir, cayn’t stop ‘em! Not if you ‘tend ‘em right. They’s an old sayin’, maybe you’ve heard. ‘He that by the plough would thrive, Himself must either hold or drive.’ The Cunnel won’t do ary one. He leaves the whole thing to his crew o’ niggers an’, course, they’re some shiftlesser ‘n he is. They’re so plumb lazy, the whole crowd, ‘t they won’t even haul their truck as fur as Jimpson’s, to have it loaded on a boat for market, an’ that ain’t further ‘n you could swing a cat! Losin’ his old home an’ losin’ his gal, an’ failin’ to make truck pay, has made him downhearteder ‘an he was by natur’—and that’s sayin’ consid’able. Must ye go, boys? Got any melons? Give ye as many as ye can carry if ye want ‘em. Call again. Yes, the cream’s wuth five cents. Not this time, though. Lizzie’d be plumb scandalized if I took pay for a mite o’ cream for breakfast—such a late one, too. We had ours couple hours ago. Eh? About Billy? Well, if he war mine, which he ain’t, an’ if I war asked to set a price on him, which I couldn’t, I should say how ‘t he war a fust-class mule, but not wuth a continental without the Cunnel—nor with him, nuther. If you take one you’ll have to take t’other. Call again. My respects to the lady owns the house-boat an’—Good-by!”

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As the lads thanked their talkative neighbor and hurried down the fields, Jim exclaimed:

“Was afraid this cream’d all turn to butter before he’d quit and let us go! But, we’ve learned a lot about some things. I’m thinking that Ottawotta Run is the business for us: and I fear—Billy isn’t. There must be other mules in Anne Arundel county will suit us better. Mrs. Calvert won’t want him as a gift—with the Colonel thrown in!”

Mrs. Bruce met them impatiently.

“Seems as if boys never could do an errand without loitering. There’s all those chickens drying to flinders in that oil-stove-oven, and that horrid old man talking Mrs. Calvert into a headache. Least, he isn’t talking so much as she is. Thinks she must entertain him, I suppose. The idea! Anybody going visiting to *breakfast* without being asked!”

But by this time the good woman had talked her annoyance off, and while she dished up the breakfast—a task she wouldn’t leave to Chloe on this state occasion—Jim hastily condensed the information he had received and was glad that she promptly decided, as he had, that a sojourn on the quiet, inland Run would best please Aunt Betty.

“It would certainly suit me,” assented the matron.

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“Oh! hang it all! What’s the use? Hiding in a silly little creek when there’s the whole Chesapeake to cruise in!” cried the disgusted Gerald, leaning upon the little table and hungrily eyeing the platter of chicken.

“How can we dare, how could we if we dared, try the Bay? We haven’t any engine to use now,” said Jim.

“Well, get one, then! If that girl can afford to run a house-boat and ask folks to stay on it, she ought to provide something decent for their entertainment. When we owned the Water Lily we did things up to the queen’s taste. I’m not going to bury myself in any backwoods. I’ll quit first.”

“Boy, are you always so cross before breakfast?” asked a girl’s voice over his shoulder, and he turned to see Dorothy smiling upon him.

“No. Except when I’m sent for cream and hear fool talk from a measly old farmer in a blue smock,” he answered, laughing rather foolishly.

“Was it the color of his smock made him measly? And what was that I heard about quitting?”

“Oh! nothing. I was just fooling. But, I say, Dorothy, don’t you let any old woman coax you into a dead-and-alive hole in the woods. Mark what I say. They’ll be trying it, but the Water Lily’s your boat now, isn’t it?”

"So I understood. But from the amount of advice I receive as to managing it, I think, maybe, it isn't. Well, I've heard you—now listen to me. 'The one who eats the most bread-and-butter can have the most cake'—or chicken. They look terrible little, don't they, now they're cooked? And I warn you, I never saw anybody look so hungry in all my life—no, not even you three boys!—as that poor, unhappy Colonel of T, in there with Aunt Betty. Yes, Mrs. Bruce, we're ready for breakfast at last. But mind what I say—*all we youngsters like oatmeal!* We *must* like it this time for politeness sake. Fourteen eaters and twelve halves of broiled chicken—Problem, who goes without?"

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But nobody really did that. Mrs. Bruce was mistress of the art of carving and managed that each should have at least a small portion of the delicacies provided, though she had to tax her ingenuity to accomplish this.

At the head of her table Mrs. Calvert motioned Chloe to serve her guest again and again; and each time that Ephraim jealously snatched a dainty portion for her own plate she as promptly and quietly restored it to the platter.

Also, the "Skipper" at his own board played such a lively knife and fork that dishes were emptied almost before filled and Gerald viciously remarked:

"Aren't as fond of ship's biscuit as you were, are you, Cap'n Jack?"

The Captain helped himself afresh and answered with good nature:

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"Oh! yes. Jes' as fond. But I likes a change. Yes, I c'n make out to relish 'most anything. I ain't a mite partic'lar."

This was too much for the lads and a laugh arose; but the old man merely peered over his specs at them and mildly asked:

"What you-all laughin' at? Tell me an' lemme laugh, too. Laughin' does old folks good. Eh, Cunnel? Don't you think so?" he asked, wheeling around to address the guest of honor.

But that gentleman was too engaged at that moment to reply, even if he would have condescended so to do. Just now, in the presence of Mrs. Calvert, whose mere name was a certificate of "quality," he felt himself an aristocrat, quite too exalted in life to notice a poor captain of a house-boat.

Breakfast over, Aunt Betty excused herself and withdrew to the shelter of her little stateroom. Shelter it really was, now, against her uninvited guest. She had done her best to make his early call agreeable and to satisfy him with more substantial things than old memories. They had discussed all the prominent Maryland families, from the first Proprietor down to that present day; had discovered a possible relationship, exceedingly distant, he being the discoverer; and had talked of their beloved state in its past and present glories till she was utterly worn out.

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He had again "given" her his most cherished possession, Billy the mule; and she had again declined to receive it. Buy him, of course, Dorothy would and should, if it proved that a mule was really needed. But not without fair payment for the animal would she permit "him" to become a member of her family. The Colonel so persistently spoke of the creature as a human being that she began to think of Billy as a monstrosity.

The morning passed. Aunt Betty had deserted, and Dorothy had to take her place as hostess. All her heart was longing for the green shore beyond that little wharf, where now all the other young folks were having a lively frolic. It was such a pity to waste that glorious sunshine just sitting in that little cabin talking to a dull old man.

He did little talking himself. Indeed, warmed by the sunshine on the deck where he sat, and comfortably satisfied with a more generous meal than he had enjoyed for many months, the Colonel settled back on the steamer chair which was Aunt Betty's own favorite and went to sleep. He slept so long and quietly that she was upon the point of leaving him, reflecting:

"Even a Calvert ought not to have to stay here now, and watch an old man—snore. It's dreadful, sometimes, to have a 'family name.' Living up to it is such a tax. I wish—I almost wish—I was just a Smith, Jones, Brown, or anybody! I will run away, just for a minute, sure! and see what happens!"

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But, despite the snores, the visitor was a light sleeper. At her first movement from her own chair, he awoke and actually smiled upon her.

"Beg pardon, little lady. I forgot where I was and just lost myself. Before I dropped off I was goin' to tell you—Pshaw! I cayn't talk. I enjoy quiet. D'ye happen to see Billy, anywhere?"

"Certainly. He's right over on that bank yonder and the boys are trying to fix a rope to his

harness, so he can begin to draw the boats up stream. They want to try and see if it will work. Funny! To turn this lovely Water Lily into a mere canal-boat. But I suppose we can still have some good times even that way."

The Colonel shook his head.

"No, you cayn't. Nobody can. They ain't any good times for anybody any more."

"What a lot of 'anys'! Seems as if out of so many there might be one good time for somebody. I was in hopes you were having such just now. What can I do to make it pleasanter for you?"

"Sit right down and let me speak. Your name's Calvert, ain't it?"

"Why, of course. I thought you knew;" answered the girl, reluctantly resuming her seat.

"Never take anything for granted. I cayn't do it, you cayn't do it. Something'll always go wrong. It did with your great-grandfather's brother that time when he hid—Ah! hum! It ought to be yours, but it won't be. There couldn't be any such luck in this world. Is Billy lookin' comf'table?"

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Billy answered for himself by a most doleful bray. Indeed, he was resenting the lads' endeavors to remove his harness. Jim fancied he could fix it better for the purpose of hauling the Water Lily, but the animal objected, because that harness had never been taken from his back since it was put on early in the spring. Then the more ambitious of the negroes who managed the Colonel's truck-farm had equipped Billy for ploughing the melon-patch. After each day's work the beast had seemed tired and the gentleman-farmer had suggested:

"Don't fret him takin' it off. You'll only have to put it on again, to-morrow."

This saved labor and suited all around; and Billy was trying to explain to these tormenting lads how ill-at-ease and undressed he would feel, if he were stripped of his regalia.

"Sounds like he was in trouble, poor Billy. But, of course, he is. Everybody is. You are. If you had that buried—Pshaw! What's the use! You ain't, you cayn't, nobody could find it, else things wouldn't have happened the way they did; and your great-grandfather wouldn't have forgot where he buried it; and it wouldn't have gone out the family; and since your great-grandfather's brother married my great-grandmother's sister we'd all have shared and shared alike. It's sad to think any man would be so careless for his descendants as to go and do what your great-grandfather's brother did and then forget it. But—it's the way things always go in this lop-sided world. Ah! um."

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The Colonel's breakfast had made him more talkative than had seemed possible and because she could do no better for her own amusement, Dorothy inquired:

"Tell me the story of our great-grand-folks and what they buried. Please. It would be interesting, I think."

"Very well, child, I'll try. But just keep an eye on Billy. Is he comf'table? I don't ask if he's happy. He isn't. Nobody is."

"Beg pardon, but you are mistaken about that mule. No matter what the boys and Captain Hurry try to do with him, he manages to get his nose back to the ground again and eat—Why, he hasn't really stopped eating one full minute since he came. That makes me think. Will the man who owns that grass like to have him graze it that way? Isn't grass really hay? Don't they sell hay up home at Baltimore? Won't it cost a great deal to let Billy do that, if hay is worth much?"

"You ask as many questions as—as I've heard your folks always do. But it's no use worryin' over a little hay. It ain't wuth much. Nothing's wuth anything in Annyrunnell. The only thing in the whole county wuth a continental is what your great-grandfather's brother buried in the woods on Ottawotta Run. Deer-Copse was the spot. Buried it in a brass-bound chest, kept the key, and then forgot. Ah! hum."

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"Ottawotta Run? Deer-Copse! Why, that's the very place the boys said the man said that you say—Oh! Aunt Betty! Aunt Betty! There's a buried fortune belonging to our family out in the woods! We'll find it, we *must* find it, and that will save all your Old Folks their Home and you won't have to sell Bellvieu!" almost shrieked Dolly, running to her aunt's stateroom and flinging wide the little door, regardless of knocking for admittance. But disappointment awaited her—the stateroom was empty.

CHAPTER IX.

FISH AND MONKEYS.

Farmer Wickliffe Stillwell proved a friend in need.

About the middle of that eventful morning he appeared with a big basket on either arm, his blue-checked smock swaying in the breeze that had arisen, his iron-gray, luxuriant whiskers doing the same, and his head bare.

He had started with his Sunday hat perched on his "bald-spot," which was oddly in contrast with the hirsute growth below. Lizzie, his wife, had affirmed such headgear was "more politer" than the old straw hat he commonly wore and that had the virtue of staying where it was put, as the stiff Derby did not.

Having arrived at the wharf where the Water Lily was fastened he paused and awaited the invitation without which he wouldn't have crossed the gang-plank. He had plenty of time to rest before the invitation came. None of the lads who had visited his place for cream was in sight. Mrs. Calvert and Mrs. Bruce glanced toward him and looked away. They supposed him to be another of those "peddlers" who had swarmed over the boat the evening of its arrival, and didn't wish "to be annoyed."

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The Colonel saw him but gave no sign of recognition. He waited to see what his hostess would do and would then follow her example. She looked away—so did this too chivalrous guest.

The girls had gone to the woods, searching for wild grapes; and Cap'n Jack, with the lads, had taken the row-boat down stream on a fishing trip. Fish, of many varieties, had been brought to the Lily for sale, but fish that one caught for one's self would be finer and cost less; so they reasoned with a fine access of economy.

Ephraim and Chloe were "tidying up;" and only little Methuselah and Billy-mule gave the visitor a word of welcome. These two were fast becoming friends, and both were prone on the ground; one suffering from a surfeit of grass—the other of water-melon.

Metty looked up and sat up—with a groan:

"Say, Mister, 'd you evah hab de tummy-ache?" while Billy's sad bray seemed to be asking the same question.

"Heaps of times. When I'd eaten too much green stuff. Got it?"

"Yep. Dey's a orful misery all eroun' me yeah! I'd lak some peppymint' but Mammy she ain' done got none. Oh! my!"

"Get a *rollin'*. Nothing cures a colic quicker than that. And, look-a-here? How's this for medicine?"

Metty considered this the "mos' splendides' gemplemum" he had ever met. A gentleman made to order, indeed, with a paper bag in his pocket, chock full of beautiful red and white "peppymint's" which he lavishly dealt out to the small sufferer—a half one at a time! But many halves make several wholes, and Metty's now happy tones, in place of complaints, brought Chloe to the spot, and to the knowledge of the stranger's real errand.

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"Come right erway in, suh. I sure gwine tell Miss Betty you-all ain' none dem peddlah gemplemums, but a genuwine calleh. Dis yeah way, suh. Metty, yo' triflin' little niggah! Why ain' yo' tote one dese yeah bastics?"

A familiar, not-too-heavy, cuff on the boy's ear set him briskly "toting" one basket while his mother carried the other. Mr. Stillwell followed his guide to where Mrs. Calvert sat and explained himself and his visit so simply and pleasantly that she was charmed and exclaimed:

"This is delightful, to find neighbors where we looked for strangers only. How kind and how generous of your wife! I wish I could see and thank her in person."

Chloe had uncovered the daintily packed baskets and Mrs. Bruce fairly glowed in housewifely pleasure over the contents.

"Looks as if an artist had packed them," said Aunt Betty; and it did.

Tomatoes resting in nests of green lettuce; half-husked green corn flanked by purple eggplant and creamy squashes; crimson beets and brown skinned potatoes; these filled one basket. The other was packed with grapes of varying colors, with fine peaches, pears, rosy

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apples and purple plums. Together they did make a bright spot of color on the sunny deck and brought a warm glow to Mrs. Calvert's heart. The cheerful face of the farmer and his open-hearted neighborliness were an agreeable contrast to the dolefulness of the more aristocratic Colonel—called such by courtesy and custom but not from any right to the title.

"If the girls would only come!" said Mrs. Bruce. "I'd like to have them see the things before we move one out of its pretty place."

"Well, they will. I'm sure Mr. Stillwell will wait and take our mid-day dinner with us. Besides being glad to make his acquaintance, I want to ask advice. What we are to do with the Water Lily; how to safely get the most pleasure out of it. Would you like to go over the boats, Mr. Stillwell?"

This was exactly what he did wish; and presently Aunt Betty was guiding him about, displaying and explaining every detail of the little craft, as eager and animated as if she had designed it. The Colonel stalked solemnly in the rear, sighing now and then over such wasted effort and enthusiasm, and silently wondering how a Calvert could meet on such equal terms a mere farmer, one of those "common Stillwells."

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However, neither of the others paid him any attention, being too absorbed in their own talk; and the stranger in maturing a plan to help his hostess and her household.

When everything had been examined and tested by his common sense he explained:

"If this here Water Lily war mine, which she isn't; and I wanted to get the most good and most fun out of her, which I don't, I'd light right out from this region. I'd get shet of all them gapin' Corner-ites and Jimpson-ites, and boats passin' by an' takin' notes of things. I'd get a sensible tug to haul me, tender an' all, a mite further up stream till I met the Branch. I'd be hauled clean into that fur as war practical, then I'd 'paddle my own canoe.' Meanin' that then I'd hitch a rope to my mule, or use my poles, till I fetched up alongside Deer-Copse on the Ottawotta Run. There ain't no purtier spot on the face of God's good earth nor that. I war born there, or nigh-hand to it. If a set of idle folks can't be happy on the Ottawotta, then they sure deserve to be unhappy."

Aunt Betty was enchanted. From his further description she felt that this wonderful Run was the very stream for them to seek; and with her old decision of manner she asked Mr. Stillwell to arrange everything for her and not to stint in the matter of expense. Then she laughed:

"I have really no right to say that, either, for I'm only a guest on this boat-party. The Water Lily belongs to my little niece and it is she who will pay the bills. I wonder how soon it could be arranged with such a tug! Do you know one?"

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"Sure. Right away, this evenin', if you like. I happen to have a loose foot, to-day, and can tend to it. To-morrow's market and I'll have to be up soon, and busy late. Is 't a bargain? If 'tis, I'll get right about it."

By "evening" meant with these Marylanders all the hours after mid-day; and, declining any refreshment, Mr. Stillwell departed about this business. His alertness and cheerfulness put new life into Aunt Betty and the widow, who hustled about putting into fresh order the already immaculate Lily.

"If we're going to move I want everything spick-and-span. And the girls'll come in right tired after their wood tramp. Wonderful, ain't it? How 't that peeked, puny Elsa is a gainin' right along. Never see the beat. She'll make a right smart lot of good, wholesome flesh, if she keeps on enjoyin' her victuals as she does now. Looks as if she lived on slops most of her short life. See anything more wants doing, Mrs. Calvert?"

"No, Mrs. Bruce, I do not. I wish you'd let Chloe bear her share of the work, not do so much yourself. I want you to rest—as I'm doing," answered the other.

"It plumb wears me out to have folks fussin' so, Ma'am. They ain't no use. A day's only a day, when all's said and done. Why not take it easy? Take it as easy as you can and it don't amount to much, life don't. Ah! hum."

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But the Colonel's protest was lost on energetic Mrs. Bruce. She tossed her comely head and retorted:

"Some folks find their rest in doin' their duty, not in loafin' round on other people's time and things. Not meaning any disrespect, I'm sure, but I never did have time to do nothin' in. I'm going right now and set to work on that dinner. I do wish the girls could see those baskets, first, though!"

"Leave them untouched, then, Mrs. Bruce. Surely, we had enough provided before we had

this present.”

“Yes, Mrs. Calvert, we did have—for our own folks; and counting a little on the fish the men-folks was to bring in. Seems if they’s gone a dreadful spell, don’t it? And I heard that old Cap’n Jack say something about the Bay. If he’s enticed ’em to row out onto that big water—Oh! dear! I wish they’d come!”

The Colonel roused himself to remark:

“Squalls is right frequent on the Chesapeake. And that old man is no captain at all. Used to work on an oyster boat and don’t know—shucks. Likely they’ve had an upset. Boys got to foolin’ and—Ah! hum! Wasn’t none of ’em your sons, were they, Ma’am?”

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From the moment of their first meeting there had been a silent battle between the capable housekeeper and the incapable “southern gentleman.” She had had several talks with Dorothy and Jim over the finances of this trip and she knew that it would have to be a short one if “ends were to meet.” She felt that this man, aristocrat though he might be, had no right to impose himself and his prodigious appetite upon them just because the lads had tried to buy his old mule and he had, instead, so generously presented it.

“I don’t see what good that yapping Billy does, anyway! He doesn’t work at all and he’s living on somebody else’s grass. There’ll be a bill coming in for his fodder, next we know;” she had grumbled. It may be said, to her credit, that she was infinitely more careful of Dorothy’s interests than she would have been of her own. But all her grumbling and hints failed to effect what she had hoped they would—the Colonel’s permanent departure for home along with the useless Billy.

Now all that was to be changed. Almost before he had gone, it seemed, Farmer Stillwell came steaming down stream on a small tugboat, which puffed and fussed as if it were some mighty steamship, and passing the Water Lily manoeuvred to turn around and face upstream again. Presently, a rope was made fast to the prow of the house-boat and securely tied, and Mr. Stillwell stepped aboard to announce:

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“All ready to move, Ma’am. Your company all back?”

“Not all. The girls have just come but the Captain and the boys are still away. We’ll have to wait for them.”

Mrs. Calvert’s answer fell on unheeding ears.

“Guess not, Ma’am. This here tug’s got another job right soon and if we lose this chance may not be another in a dog’s age. I knowed she was around and could help us out, was the reason I spoke to you about her. I guess it’s now or never with the ‘Nancy Jane.’ Once she goes up to Baltimo’ she’ll have more jobs an’ she can tackle. Wouldn’t be here now, only she had one down, fetching some truck-scows back. Well, what you say?”

A brief consultation was held in the cabin of the Water Lily in which the voices of four eager girls prevailed:

“Why, let’s take the chance, of course, Auntie dear. We can leave a note pinned to the wharf telling the boys and Cap’n Jack that we’ve gone on to the Ottawotta. They can follow in their row-boat. And, Colonel Dillingham, can’t you ride Billy alongside, on the shores we pass? We can’t possibly take him on board, and he won’t go without you.”

But now, at last, was the doughty Colonel energetic.

“No, sir. I mean, no, madam! I go to Ottawotta? I allow my faithful Billy to set foot on that soil? No, ma’am. I will not. I will simply bid you good day. And young miss, let me tell you, what your relative here seems to have forgot; that no old Marylander, of first quality, would ha’ turned a guest loose to shift for himself in such a way as this. But—what can you expect? Times ain’t what they were and you cayn’t count on anybody any more. I bid you all good day, and a pleasant v’yage. As for Billy an’ me, we’ll bestow ourselves where we are better appreciated.”

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Poor Mrs. Calvert was distressed. Not often in her long life had the charge of inhospitality been laid at her door, and she hastened to explain that she wished him still to remain with them, only—

With a magnificent wave of his not too clean hand and bowing in the courtliest fashion, the disappointed visitor stepped grandly over the gang-plank, and a moment later was ordering, in his saddest tones:

“Billy, lie down!”

Billy obediently shook his harness, disordered by the efforts of the lads to straighten it, and crumpled himself up on the sward. The Colonel majestically placed himself upon the back of "his only friend;" commanded: "Billy, get up!" and slowly rode away up-slope to his own deserted melon-patch.

"Now, isn't that a pity!" cried Dorothy, with tears in her eyes. "I didn't care for him while he was here, though Billy was just charming—for a mule! But I do hate quarreling and he's gone off mad." [Pg 148]

"Good riddance to bad rubbish!" said Mrs. Bruce, fervently. Then shaded her eyes with her hands to stare out toward the broader water in search of the missing fishermen, while the pretty Water Lily began to move away from the little wharf which had become so familiar.

Meanwhile, out beyond the mouth of the river, within the shelter of a tree-shaded cove, the would-be fishermen were having adventures of their own. It was a spot which Cap'n Jack knew well and was that he had intended to reach when the little red "Stem" of the Water Lily was lowed away from her. Here was a collection of small houses, mere huts in fact, occupied by fishermen during the mild seasons. Here would always be found some old cronies of his, shipmates of the oyster-boats that plied their trade during the cold months of the year.

The truth was that the "skipper" was not only lonely, so far from his accustomed haunts, but he wanted a chance to show these old mates of his how his fortunes had risen, to hear the news and give it.

"Are there any fish here?" demanded Jim, when they rested on their oars just off shore.

"More fish 'an you could catch in a lifetime! Look a yonder!" [Pg 149]

So saying, the captain raised his broken spy-glass to his good eye—he had the sight of but one—and surveyed the cove. Around and around he turned it, standing firmly on the bottom of the "Stem," his multitude of brass buttons glittering in the sun, and his squat figure a notable one, seen just then and there. At last, came a cry from shore.

"Ship ahoy!"

"Aye, aye! Port about!" roared the Captain, and dropped to his seat again. He had succeeded in his effort to attract attention, and now picked up the oars and began to pull in. Until now he had generously allowed the lads to do the rowing, despite considerable grumbling from Gerald, who was newer to that sort of work than he had pretended. But Cap'n Jack did not care for this; and he did succeed in impressing a small company of men who were industriously fishing in the cove.

Most of these were in small boats, like the "Stem," but a larger craft was moored at the little wharf and about it were gathered real sailors fresh from the sea. At sight of them, the three lads forgot fishing in eagerness to meet these sailors, who had come from—nobody could guess how far! At all events, they must have seen strange things and have many "yarns to spin," which it would be fine to hear.

Events proved that the sailors had never heard of "Cap'n Jack," and were duly impressed by the importance he assumed. On his tongue, the Water Lily became a magnificent yacht and he its famous Commodore, and though there were those among the fishermen who did know him well, they humored his harmless pretensions and added to his stories such marvelous details that even he was astonished into believing himself a much greater man than he had pretended. [Pg 150]

That was a gala day for the three lads. Somebody proposed lunch and some fishermen prepared it; of the freshly caught fish, cooked over a beach-wood fire, and flanked by the best things the hosts could offer. Over the food and the fire tongues were loosened, and the sailors did "yarn it" to their guests' content. At last the talk turned upon animals and one sailor, who was no older than these young landmen, remarked:

"Speakin' of monkeys, I've got a dandy pair right down in the hold now. Want to see 'em?"

Of course they did! They were in a mood to wish to see anything and everything which came from afar. For, during the "yarns," in imagination they had followed these men of the sea into wonderful lands, through tropical forests, and among strange people, till even Jim's fancy was kindled. As for Melvin and Gerald, their eyes fairly shone with eagerness, and when the sailor returned to the little camp-fire, bringing a wooden cage containing the monkeys, each was possessed of a desire to own them. [Pg 151]

"For sale?" asked Gerald.

"Course. I always bring home a few. Last trip I did a hundred and fifty for a Baltimore

department store. Fact! Head of the firm ordered 'em. He sold 'em for two-fifty a-piece, and they went like hot cakes. Women went crazy over 'em, I heard, and, course, it was good business for him. A woman would go in the store, out of curiosity to see the monks. See something else she'd buy, and finally be talked into buying one o' them. Reckon I'll lay alongside that same store and try for another consignment."

"How much?" asked Melvin. He was thinking that if so many "women went crazy" over such animals as pets, it would be a nice thing to buy this pair and present them to Dorothy. She did love animals so!

"Oh! I don't know, exactly. This is the last pair I've got—they are extra clever—could be taught to speak just as well as children, I believe, only, course, a sailor don't have time to fool with 'em." He might have added that not only was this his "last pair" but his only one; and that though the transaction he described was a fact, he was not the dealer who had supplied the monkey market. Besides—but there was no need to tell all he knew about monkeys to these two possible purchasers.

"Jim, don't you want to take a chance? Go thirds with us in 'em?"

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"No, Gerald. I don't. I mean I can't. I've only a little bit left in my purse on the boat, and I've got to get back to New York State sometime. Back to the Water Lily mighty sudden, too, seems if. Must ha' been here a terrible time. Shucks! I clean forgot our folks were waiting for their fish-dinner while we were eatin' our own. Come on! We must go! and not a single fish to show for our whole morning!"

"Wait a minute. It's so late now it can't matter. They'd have had their dinner, anyway. You won't join?" again asked Gerald.

"Can't."

"I will, if he doesn't ask too much. What's the price, sailor? We'll take them if it isn't too high," said Melvin.

The man named a sum that was greater than the combined capital of Gerald and Melvin. Then, although he wasn't a purchaser himself, Jim tried his usual "dickering" and succeeded in lowering the price of the simians, "clever enough to talk English," to ten dollars for the pair.

"All right! Here's my fiver!" cried Gerald, reluctantly pulling out a last, dilapidated bill from a very flat pocket-book.

"And mine," added Melvin, tendering his own part.

"Now, we must go, right away!" declared Jim, hastily rising.

He thought the sailor who had promptly pocketed the ten dollars of his friends was suspiciously kind, insisting upon carrying the cage of monkeys down to the "Stem," and himself placing it securely in the bottom of the boat. The little animals kept up a chattering and showed their teeth, after a manner that might be as clever as their late owner claimed but certainly showed anger.

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Indeed, they tore about their cage in such a fury of speed that it nearly fell overboard and in the haste of embarking everyone forgot the original object of this trip, till Jim exclaimed:

"Went a-fishin' and caught monkeys! Won't they laugh at us?"

An hour later they brought up alongside the wharf which they had begun to think was their own, so familiar and homelike it had become. But there was nothing familiar about it now. The water lapped gently against the deserted pier and a forgotten painter dangled limply from the post at its end.

"Gone!" cried one and another of the lads, looking with frightened eyes over the scene.

"Gone! Somebody's stole—my—ship!" groaned Cap'n Jack, for once in actual terror. For that the Water Lily could "navigate" without his aid under any circumstances was a thing beyond belief.

CHAPTER X.

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A MERE ANNE ARUNDEL GUST.

Then they found Dorothy's note.

"Dear boys and Captain:

"We've gone on to Ottawotta Run. Farmer Stillwell's tug, that he owns half of, is towing us to the Branch. There some more men will be hired to pole us to Deer-Copse. Aunt Betty says you're to hire a wagon, or horses, or somebody to bring you and the Stem after us. She will pay for it, or I will, that's just the same. And, oh! I can't wait to tell you! There's a *buried treasure* up there that we must find! A regular 'Captain Kidd' sort, you know, so just hurry up—I mean take it easy, as Auntie advises; but come, and do it quick! Don't forget to bring the fish. Mrs. Bruce says put them in a basket and trail them after you, if you come by boat; or, anyway, try to keep them fresh for breakfast. Dolly."

"I reckon they'll keep, seeing they aren't caught yet. What fools we were to go off just then! How do you suppose, in this mortal world, those women and girls had gumption enough to run away with that house-boat? I'll bet they did it just to get ahead of *me*, 'cause I'd said plain enough I wouldn't go to any old hole-in-the-woods. I simply wouldn't. And I shan't. I'll get passage on one these fruit-scows going back to Baltimore and quit the whole thing. I will so;" declared Gerald, fuming about the wharf in a fine rage.

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"Got money left for your 'passage?'" asked Jim. He was pondering how best and soonest to "follow" the Water Lily, as he had been bid. They were all too tired with their rowing to do any more of it that day, and his pride shrank from hiring a wagon, for his own convenience, that he wasn't able to pay for.

"What about your monkey, Gerry?" queried Melvin.

"Oh! I'll—I mean—you take it off my hands till—later."

"No, thank you. I've invested all I can afford in monkeys just now, don't you know? But I'd sell out, only I do want to give them to her. She's such a darling of a girl, to entertain us like this. She might have been born in our Province, I fancy, she's so like a Canadian in kindness and generosity."

It was a long speech for modest Melvin and an enthusiastic one. He blushed a little as he felt his comrades' eyes turned teasingly upon him, but he did not retract his words. He added to them:

"Dorothy Calvert makes me think of my mother, don't you know? And a girl that does that is an all right sort I fancy. Anyway, I've thought lots of times, since I found out it was she and not the rich aunt who was paying the expenses of our jaunt, that it was mighty unselfish of her to do it. Jim's let that 'cat out the bag.' He was too top-lofty to take a cent of profit from that mine he discovered last summer for Mr. Ford, but all the girls were made small shareholders and got three hundred dollars a-piece for a send-off. Miss Molly, whose father I work for, put hers right into gew-gaws or nonsense, but I think Dolly's done better. The least I can do to show her my appreciation is to give her the monkeys."

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"Speak for yourself, sir, please. Half that monkey transaction is mine, and I don't intend to impoverish myself for any girl. I mean to train them till they're worth a lot of money, then sell them."

"Oh! no you won't. You're not half bad, don't you know? You like to talk something fierce but it's *talk*. If it isn't, pick out your own monk and be off with it. You'll have to leave me the cage for Dorothy because she'll have to keep *my* monk, *her* monk, *the* monk in it sometimes."

"Most of the times I guess. I don't like the looks of the creatures anyway. They're ugly. I wish you fellows had left them on that sailor's hands. He just befooled us with his big talk. Why, sir, I got so interested myself I'd have hired out to any ship would have me if it had come along just then. Queer, ain't it? The way just *talk* can change a fellow's mind," said Jim. "Hello, Cap'n! What you found now?"

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The old man had been limping about on the bank where Billy had enjoyed himself, and which his teeth had shorn smooth as a mowing machine might have done. It was a field rarely used, which explains why Billy and Methuselah had been left to do as they pleased there. So Metty had carried thither all the trifling toys and playthings he had picked up during his trip. Shells, curious stones, old nails, a battered jew's-harp, and a string of buttons, had been stored in an old basket which the pickaninny called his playhouse.

The playhouse caught the old man's eye and the end of his crutch as well, and he glared angrily upon the "trash" which had come in his way. Also, he lifted the crutch and flung

Metty's treasures broadcast. Among them was an old wallet, still securely strapped with a bit of leather. Captain Jack had a notion he'd seen that wallet before, but couldn't recall where. Opening it he drew out a yellowed bit of old-fashioned letter-paper on which a rude picture was sketched. There were a few written words at the bottom of the sketch, but "readin' handwrite" was one of the accomplishments the good captain disdained.

But his curiosity was aroused and he whistled to the lads to join him, holding up the paper as an inducement. They did so, promptly, and Jim took the extended paper, thinking it was another note from the absent "Lilies," as the house-boat company had named itself. [Pg 158]

Then he, too, whistled, and cried:

"Hello! Here's a find! Has something to do with that fool talk o' Dolly's about 'buried treasure.' Somebody's been bamboozlin' her and this is part of it."

The four heads bent together above the odd little document, which had been folded and unfolded so often it was quite frayed in places with even some of the writing gone.

The drawing represented a bit of woodland, with a stream flowing past, and a ford indicated at one point, with animals drinking. It was marked by the initials of direction, N, S, E, W; and toward the latter point a zig-zag line suggested a path. The path ended at the root of a tree whose branches grew into something like the semblance of a cross. Unfortunately, the writing was in French, a language not one understood. But, found as it was, evidently lost by somebody who had valued it, and taken in conjunction with Dorothy's words—"buried treasure"—it was enough to set all those young heads afire with excitement. Even the Captain took the paper and again critically studied it; remarking as he replaced it in the wallet:

"Dretful sorry I didn't fetch my readin'-specs when I come away from town. Likely, if I had I could ha' explained its hull meanin'." [Pg 159]

"Dreadful sorry it wasn't Greek, or even Latin! I could have ciphered the meaning then, if it has a meaning. But every-day French, shucks!"

"How do you know it's French if you don't know French?" demanded Gerry.

"Oh! I've seen it in Dr. Sterling's library. I know a word or two an' I plan to know more. Don't it beat all? That just a little bit of ignorance can hide important things from a fellow, that way? I tell you there never was a truer word spoke than that 'knowledge is power'."

Melvin cried:

"Come off! That'll do. Once you get talking about learning and you're no good. Cap'n, you best stow that in your pocket and help us settle how to 'follow our leaders'. For my part, I've no notion of sleeping out doors, now that it looks so likely to storm. What'll we do?"

"Hoof it to the Landin' and hire a conveyance. One that'll carry us an' the boat, too. That's what she says, and if there's a girl in the hull state o' Maryland, or Annyrunnell, either, that's got more sense in her little head nor my 'fust mate', Dorothy, you show me the man 'at says so, an' I'll call him a liar to his face."

"That's all right, Cap'n, only don't get so excited about it. Nobody's trying to take the wind out of Dorothy's sails. So let's get on. I reckon I can punt along as far as that Landing, even with a cargo of monkeys. Then Gerry can take his and skip, and we'll take the other to our folks." [Pg 160]

Melvin was laughing as he talked. Gerald's angry, disgusted face had changed its expression entirely, since that finding of the curious map which made the possibility of the "buried treasure" seem so real.

"Oh! I won't bother now. I reckon I'd ought to go on and ask Aurora if she wants to go home with me, or not. Popper and Mommer'd be sure to ask me why I didn't bring her. We can settle about the monkeys later."

"Huh! I tell you what I believe! 'Wild horses couldn't drag' you back to town till you've found out all about what that Frenchy letter means and have had a dig for the 'treasure'. I know it couldn't *me*. There isn't a word of sense in the whole business, course. Likely these whole States have been dug over, foot by foot, same's our Province has, don't you know? But my mother says there always have been just such foolish bodies and there always will be. Silly, I fancy; all the same, if Dorothy or anybody else starts on this business of digging, I'll ply the liveliest shovel of the lot."

Melvin but expressed the sentiments of all three lads. Even the old captain was recalling wonder-tales, such as this might be, and feeling thrills of excitement in his old veins. [Pg 161]

Suddenly, he burst out:

"Well, I'd be some hendered by my crutches but when you get to diggin' just lemme know an' I'll be thar!"

They waited no longer then, but stepped back into the "Stem," the caged monkeys viciously scolding and sometimes yelling, till the Captain fairly choked with fear and indignation. However, nothing serious happened. They reached Jimpson's in a little while, and were fortunate in finding a teamster about to start home along the river road. His wagon was empty, the row-boat could be slung across it, there would be abundant room for passengers—including monkeys—a new sort of "fare" to him.

But they had scarcely got started on this part of their journey before the threatening storm was upon them. This "gust" was a fearful one, and they were exposed to its full fury. The driver shielded himself as best he could under his blankets but offered none to his passengers. The sky grew dark as night, relieved only by the lightning, and rivalled, in fact, that tempest which had visited them on the first day of their trip.

Fortunately, horses know the homeward way—though to be literal these horses were mules—and they travelled doggedly along, unguided save by their own instinct. Also, when they had ridden so far that it seemed to the drenched travellers that they had always been so riding and always should be, there came a sudden slackening in the storm and an outburst of moonlight from behind the scattering clouds that was fairly startling.

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After a moment of surprise Melvin broke the silence, asking:

"Do you have this kind of thing often in Maryland?"

"Sure. Down in Annyrunnell we do. 'S nothin' but a 'gust'. Most gen'ally has 'em if the day opens up hot, like this one did. But it's purty when it's over, and yender's the turn to the Copse. My road lies t'other way. It's a quarter a-piece for you white folks an' fifty a-head fer the monks. I 'low 'twas them hoodooed the trip. Hey? What? Can't pay? What in reason 'd ye hire me for, then? I ain't workin' for fun, I'd let you know. We're honest folks in Annyrunnell an' we don't run up no expenses 't we can't meet. No, siree. You asked me to bring you an' I've brung. Now you don't leave this here wagon till I've got my money for my job."

"Look here, farmer! What sort of a man are you, anyway? We went off fishing not expecting our house-boat would go on without us. We had no mon——" began Jim, about as angry as he had ever been in his self-controlled life.

"You had money enough to buy fool monkeys, didn't you?"

Gerald answered promptly:

"That's none of your business! Suppose we did. We paid it and it's gone. So put that in your pipe and smoke it."

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Came the sullen answer: "Don't smoke. Don't waste *my* money. Pay up now, and get on. I want my supper, and it's past milkin' time a'ready."

Melvin was shaking with chill, sitting there in his wet clothes, but the absurdity of the situation appealed to him, and he asked:

"Since we've spent all our money for monkeys, will you take a monk for pay?"

"No, siree. I've no use fer such vermin an' you'll get sick enough of 'em, 'fore you're through." With that the teamster drew his driest blanket about him, settled himself comfortably, and pretended to go to sleep. "Wake me up when you get ready to pay."

Then began a fresh search in every pocket for the needed two dollars which would release them from this imprisonment.

"I haven't got a penny!" declared old Cap'n Jack with tearful earnestness. "I spent every last one a-fixin' up to look like a skipper'd ought to."

"I *did* have a little, but I left it in my bunk. I was afraid I'd spend it if I didn't almost hide it from myself," wailed honest Jim.

"All I had, except what I paid the sailor, is in my other clothes; that bill I gave the sailor was one I always carried with me because my mother gave——"

Melvin didn't finish his sentence. He couldn't. He was shivering too much and that sudden memory of his idolized mother almost unmanned him. Suppose he were to contract pneumonia? Her constant dread was that he should be ill and die.

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But it was Gerald who now suffered most. Because the morning had been so warm he had put on a white duck suit. He fancied himself in it and it was becoming; but it was also thin, and under present circumstances a costume of torment. If Melvin were shivering, Gerald was worse. He was shaking so that the rickety wagon rattled and he felt as if he were dying.

“Oh! man alive! Don’t act the tyrant this way! Tell us where you live and I give you my word of honor I’ll go to your place the first thing to-morrow and settle. I’ll even pay double,” begged Jim; and when the farmer remained obstinately silent, leaped from the wagon and dragged Gerald after him. “Run, run! You’ll get warm that way! Run, I tell you, for your life!”

But the poor lad couldn’t. He sank down upon the wet earth and was fast lapsing into unconsciousness when the lash of the teamster’s whip fell smartly about him.

“I’ll warm you, ye young scamp! Cheat an honest man of his earnin’s, will you?”

But the whip went no further. With a yell as of some enraged animal, Jim flew at the man and gathered all the strength of his labor-trained muscles for one fierce onslaught.

CHAPTER XI.

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A MORNING CALL OF MONKEYS.

Then a mighty din arose. With an answering yell the half-drunken teamster flew at his assailant, using his whip continually, but not wisely, for both wrath and liquor blinded him. Else would the result have been worse for Jim.

The startled Cap’n Jack tossed his crutches out of the wagon and recklessly tumbled after them; then picked them up to lay about him in an aimless effort to subdue the fighters. But he managed to hit nobody for, as he afterward stated, “they didn’t stan’ still long enough.”

Shrieking for peace Melvin jumped to the ground, upsetting the cage of monkeys, whose frantic yells and jabberings added a strange note to the racket, until their own wild antics forced their cage out of the wagon. Then, terrified by their fall, they became quiet enough till the Captain caught the bars of their little prison-house on his crutches and tossed it out of the way of the feet of the mules, which were also becoming excited.

Still pleading uselessly for peace, Melvin managed to drag poor Gerald out of the road to a safer place, then warmed himself by seeking to warm his poor friend. So engaged did he become in trying to reanimate the motionless form that he scarcely heard what was going on about him or knew when the frightened mules set out on a lively trot for home, leaving their owner behind them but carrying away the row-boat, well strapped to the wagon-box.

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Then suddenly, upon the uproar of angry voices, jabbering monkeys, the rumble of the disappearing wagon, and the screeching of an owl in the tree-top, broke another sound. A man came merrily whistling out of the woods, his gun over his shoulder, his dog at his heels.

“Shut up, Towse! What in Bedlam’s here!” cried the newcomer, running up. A moment later, when he had recognized the befused and battered teamster, demanding: “Who you fightin’ with now, By Smith? Never really at peace ’cept when ye’re rowin’, are ye?”

This salutation surprised the contestants into quiet, and the man addressed as “By” laughed sheepishly, and picked his hat out of the mud. Then he turned and discovered the loss of his wagon. At this his fury burst forth again and he slouched upon poor Cap’n Jack with uplifted fists and the demand:

“Whe’s my team at, you thief? You stole my wagon! What you done with my wagon you——”

But a hand laid across his lips prevented his saying more.

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“There, there, Byny, that’ll do. Lost your wagon, have you? Well, it serves you right. A fellow that takes the pledge ’s often as you do an’ breaks it as often. Now, sober up, or down, and tell what all this rumpus means and who these folks are.”

There was something very winning about this newcomer, with his frank manner and happy face, which smiled even while he reproved, but no words can well describe the utter carelessness of his attire and his general air of a ne’er-do-well. The lads, Melvin and Jim, began to explain, but a lofty wave of the cripple’s crutch bade them yield that point to him.

"I'm Cap'n Jack Hurry, of the Water Lily; a yacht cruisin' these here waters an'—an'—"

The excited old man paused. The man with the gun was laughing! As for that he, Cap'n Jack, saw nothing laughable in the present situation.

"Cruising in the woods, you mean, eh? Good enough! Haven't tumbled out of a balloon, have ye? Look 's if ye'd got soused, anyhow, and 'd ought to get under cover."

Then Jim took up the tale and in a moment had explained all. He finished by asking:

"Is there any house near where we can take this boy? He's been overcome with the wet and has done a lot of rowin', to-day, that he ain't used to. Is it far to Deer-Copse?"

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"Yes, a good mile or more. But my house ain't so far. We'll take him right there. Fetch some them saplings piled yonder. Get that blanket's tumbled out By's wagon. Fix a stretcher, no time."

Laziness seemed stamped all over this man's appearance but he wasn't lazy now. It seemed he might have often made such stretchers as this he so promptly manufactured by tying the four corners of the blanket upon the crossed saplings. The blanket was wet, of course, but so was poor Gerald; and in a jiffy they had laid him upon it and started off through the woods.

The hunter carried the head of the stretcher by hands held behind him and Jim the foot. Melvin courageously shouldered the cage of monkeys which he would gladly have left behind save for Gerald's partnership in them. The Cap'n wearily stumped along behind, sodden and forlorn, more homesick than ever for his old city haunts.

"Byny" was left behind, his fare still uncollected, to trudge home on foot to his belated milking. Even the lads who had been so furious against him had now utterly forgotten him in this prospect of shelter and help for Gerald. His condition frightened his mates. Neither knew much about illness and nothing of Gerry's really frail constitution, nor that it had been mostly on his account the Water Lily had been built.

"My name's Cornwallis Stillwell. Corny I'm called. That was my brother Wicky—Wickliffe, I mean—that tugged you up the Branch. He—he's as smart as I ain't. Ha, ha! But what's the odds? He likes workin', I like loafin' an' 'invitin' my soul', as the poets say. All be the same, a hundred years from now. Won't make a mite of odds to the world whether I hunt 'possums or he ploughs 'taters. I live on his farm an' Lucetty runs it, along with the kids. Wicky calls it mine, 'cause it was my share of father's property. But it ain't. It's only his good brotherliness make him say it. We et it up ages ago. Bit at it by way of mortgages, you know, till now there ain't a mouthful lef'. I mean, they can't another cent be raised on it. It's Wicky's yet, but I'm afraid it'll sometime be Dr. Jabb's. Wicky holds a mortgage on me, body and soul, and Doc holds one on Wicky, and so it's a kind of Peter-and-Paul job. Be all right in a hundred years and there ain't a man in old Maryland nor Anne Arundel can hold a taller candle to my brother Wickliffe Stillwell, nor a wax one, either. I can talk, can't I? So can he—when he can catch anybody an' make 'em listen. Here we be—most. That's my castle yonder. Hope Lucetty ain't asleep. If she is, she'll wake up lively when she hears my yodel. Nicest woman in the world, Lucetty. A pleasin' contrast to Lizzie, Wicky's wife. That woman'd drive *me* crazy but she suits him."

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All this information had not been given at once, but at intervals along the way through the forest where the travelling was smooth. But rough or smooth, the path had been a direct one, swiftly yet gently followed by this good Samaritan of the wilderness; and now, as he gave that warning cry he boasted, a light appeared in the windows of the whitewashed cabin they approached and, roused by the musical, piercing signal, Gerald stirred faintly on his litter.

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"Comin' to! Good enough! I knew he would, soon's he came within hailing distance of Lucetty!"

Seen by moonlight the humble dwelling looked rather pretty, so gleaming was its whitewash and so green the vines that clambered about its door. In reality it had once been negro quarters, a low ceiled cabin of three rooms—and a pig-pen! The latter a most important feature of this home.

Following the candle-light a woman appeared. She was slender to emaciation and her face almost colorless; but a beautiful smile habitually hovered about the thin lips and the blue eyes were gentle and serene. Evidently, she was among the poorest of the poor of this earth, but, also, the happiest.

"Why, Corny, dear! Back so soon? And you've brought me company I see. They are welcome, sure, but—what's wrong here?"

Stepping outside the woman bent above Gerald and earnestly studied his face. Then she swiftly turned, ordering: [Pg 171]

“Fetch him right in. Lay him there. Somebody light the kindlings in the stove. One of you fetch a pail of water from the well. Pour it into that tea-kettle, get it hot soon’s possible. Corny, fetch your good shirt. Haul that ‘comfort’ off the children’s bed—it’s warm from their little bodies, bless ‘em! Now help me get these wet things off and dry ones on. Soon’s the water boils make a cup of ginger tea. Thank goodness there’s enough ginger left in the can. Don’t know how? Corny, you darling, you grow stupider every day! Hear me! One teaspoonful of ginger to the blue bowl of water. Hot as he can drink it. Look in the crock and see if there’s a single lump of sugar left. No? Then those blessed children have been into it again and the poor fellow’ll have to drink his dose without.”

Swift as the directions were given they were obeyed, yet there was not the slightest confusion or excitement. Jim and Melvin watched from the wooden bench against the wall while Cap’n Jack hovered over the broken stove, deriving what comfort he could from the blaze of kindlings within. He would have added a stick of wood from a near-by pile, but the master of the house laughed and shook his head.

“Can’t waste anything while Lucetty’s around. Why, that woman can make a kettle boil with just one blazing newspaper under it. Fact!”

“That’s all right, Corny, dear, but you’d best add ‘t it was a big paper and a mighty little kettle. Now, that’s real nice. Your good shirt fits him to a T! And the ‘comfort’s’ a comfort indeed to his chilled body. Aye, my boy, you’re all right now. You’re visitin’ in Corny Stillwell’s house and you’ll be taken care of. Lie right still, I mean hold your head up if you can and swallow some this nice ginger tea. Set your circulation going quick. You’ve had a right smart duckin’ but you’re young and ‘twon’t harm you. What? Don’t like it? Foolish boy! Come here, one you others, or both. They’s enough in this bowl for all of you, that old officer into the bargain. Have a swallow, Commodore?” [Pg 172]

How this wise little woman chanced to hit upon the very title dearest to this old vagrant’s heart is a puzzle; but he beamed upon her as she said it and drained the last contents of the bowl without a shudder, even though most of the ginger had settled there and stung his throat to choking.

The bed upon which his hosts had placed Gerald was their own, and stood in one corner of the front room which was, also, kitchen, dining-room and parlor. It was of good size, with a rag carpet on its earthen floor and well ventilated by cracks between the clap-boarded sides. There were holes in the carpet and the Captain’s crutch caught in one, and lifted it, revealing the earth beneath. Seeing him look at it prompted the hostess to explain: [Pg 173]

“We’re going to put down boards, sometime, when Corny dear can get them and the time to fix them. The little rough spots and rents are from the children’s feet. They are such active little things, especially Saint Augustine.”

Then she looked at her husband inquiringly and he nodded his head in approval. After which he disappeared into the third room, or lean-to, and was gone some time. When he returned he had a well-worn pewter tray in hand upon which he had arranged with careful exactness four chunks of cold suppawn and four tin cups of buttermilk. These he passed to his guests with a fine air of hospitality, and they accepted the offering in the same courteous spirit. All except Gerald, who had fallen asleep and whose portion was set aside till he should wake. Melvin choked over the tasteless cold pudding and the very sour buttermilk, but he would have choked still more and from a different cause had he suspected that he was helping to eat the family breakfast, for want of which six healthy youngsters would go hungry on the coming day.

Presently, Mrs. Lucetta rose and blew out the candle. Jim’s early training in poverty told him that its burning longer was an “extravagance” when there was such brilliant moonlight to take its place, and that his hostess felt it such. Also, reminded him that they should be leaving this hospitable house if they were to reach the Water Lily that night. Only, what about Gerald? [Pg 174]

Rising, he asked:

“Mr. Stillwell, can you show us the way to Deer-Copse, or tell us I mean? Our house-boat must be there and our folks’ll be anxious. And don’t you s’pose we could carry Gerry there, just the same as we brought him here? I’m sure we’re more obliged to you and Mrs. Stillwell than I can very well say. You treated us prime—and——”

From the foot of the bed where she sat Mrs. Lucetta answered for her husband. Evidently she did most of his thinking for him.

"I've fixed all that. This sick boy must stay just where he is till he can walk to the Copse on his own feet. That won't be to-morrow nor next day. So one of you other boys had best stay, too. He might be afraid of me——"

"Hear! hear! afraid of Lucetty! He'd be the first livin' creatur' 't ever was, then!" interrupted Corny, with his hearty laugh.

"You can lead them the way better than tell it. On your way back you'd better call on Dr. Jabb and ask him to ride round."

"Lucetty? A doctor? Just because a healthy boy got caught in a 'gust'? Wh——"

"Yes, Corny, dear, but you see he isn't *our* boy. It would be better, and of course, if these people can afford a boat of their own, they can pay for a doctor. I'd have to have that understood," she finished with some hesitation and a flush of color rising in her pale cheek. [Pg 175]

"Sure. It will be, but I hope, it can't be, 't Gerry's really sick. If he is I'll be the one to stay take care of him. Melvin, you go along with this gentleman an' Cap'n Jack, and take care you don't worry any of them about Gerry. Can't be he's really sick."

"Yes, let's set sail! It's real comf'table here, Ma'am, but I'm anxious to get back to my bridge; an' my clo'es—sea-farin' men is apt to be rheumatic—they're jest a speck damp——"

"Of course. Sorry we couldn't offer you each a change. As it is you'd better go, soon as you can, too. What is in that box you brought along? Something alive, I know, for it keeps up such a queer noise."

"They're terribly alive, indeed, don't you know? And I fancy they're as hungry as I was. But," as his hostess hastily rose, doubtless to seek further refreshments, Melvin added: "I shouldn't know what in the world to give them. They're just a pair of monkeys, Mrs. Stillwell, and I haven't an idea, don't you know, what they would or would not eat."

"Monkeys! How lovely! Oh! please do leave them overnight, so that the children can see them. Why, Corny dear, it would be almost like going to a circus, as we did once before we were married. Down to Annapolis, you know. Do you remember?"

"Shall I ever forget? With you the prettiest show——" [Pg 176]

"Corny, dear, there are strangers present. Family speeches don't belong. Now be off."

Yet like a happy girl she submitted to her husband's parting kiss as if it were an ordinary, every-day matter, and as the trio passed out of sight she turned to Jim, explaining:

"I'm very glad *you* stayed and not the other. Gerald's fever is rising fast. He may get restless and Corny—Did he take his gun?"

"I believe so, ma'am. I think he picked it up as he went out the door."

Lucetta sighed.

"Then like as not he'll forget all about the doctor. He wouldn't mean to, not for a minute; only the dear fellow cannot resist the woods. He loves them so. I've known him to get up in the night and wander off, to be gone two or three days. But he always comes home so happy and rested. I'm glad to have him go."

"Do you stay here alone those times, ma'am? It seems a pretty lonesome sort of place. I didn't see any other houses nigh."

"Yes, I stay alone, that is with six of the sweetest children ever lived. So, of course, though there are no houses near, I'm never lonely. I'm busy, too, and to be busy is to be happy."

Jim wondered at the refined and cultured language of this isolated countrywoman, until she explained, after a moment: [Pg 177]

"I was a school teacher before we were married and we brought several books with us here. I teach the children now, instead of a larger school, and they're so bright! I'll have them recite to you in the morning."

"What does Mr. Stillwell do, your husband, to tire him, so't he needs the woods to rest him? Does he farm it?"

He had no sooner spoken the words than he was sorry; remembering the description of himself that Corny had given on their way out. And he was the more disturbed because his hostess left the question unanswered. In the silence of the room he began to grow very drowsy. His still wet clothing was uncomfortable and he would have been glad to replenish the scanty fire. But delicacy prevented this, so he settled back against the bench and was

soon asleep. He was a sound sleeper always, but that night his slumber lasted unbroken for many hours.

He awoke at last in affright, throwing off a breadth of rag carpet which, in want of something better, Mrs. Stillwell had folded about him. Dazed by his sudden rousing from such a profound sleep he fancied he was again mixed in a wild battle with somebody.

Shrieks and cries, of laughter and of pain, shrill voices of terrified children, the groans of men, the anxious tones of a woman, all these mingled in one hubbub of sound that was horrible indeed. [Pg 178]

Then something leaped to his shoulders and he felt his hair pulled viciously, while an ugly little face, absurdly human, leered into his and sharp little teeth seized upon his ear.

With a yell of distress he put up his hand to choke the creature, and saw on the other side of the room a bald-headed gentleman wrestling with a duplicate of his own enemy.

"Oh! oh! oh!" cried poor Lucetta, and could find nothing else to say; while a laughing face peered in from the field outside, enjoying the pandemonium within.

"Nothing but monkeys, dear! Do 'let's keep them over night just to show the blessed children'!" mocked the incorrigible Corny; while the indignant gentleman struggling in the kitchen with his long-tailed assailant, glared at him and yelled:

"Laugh, will you, you idle good-for-naught! I'll have you in the lock-up for this! Rousing me out of bed with your tale of a sick boy and luring me into this! Let me tell you, Cornwallis Stillwell, you've played your last practical joke, and into jail you go, soon as I can get a warrant for you! I mean it, this time, you miserable, worthless skunk!"

Corny's mirth died under the harsh words hurled at him and a grim closing of his square jaws showed that submission wasn't in his mind. But it was a voice from the bed in the corner which silenced both men, as Gerald awoke and regarded the scene. [Pg 179]

"The monkeys are mine. I mean they are Melvin's. No, Dorothy's. Somebody take 'em to Dorothy, quick, quick! Oh! my head, my head!"

Jim's fear of the simians vanished. With a signal to the man beyond the window he clutched the creature from his back and hurled it outward. Then he rushed to the irate doctor, grabbed his tormentor and hurried with it out of doors. A moment later the door of the cage, which the curious children had unfastened, was closed and locked and peace was again restored.

Then said Corny Stillwell: "I'll lug those monkeys to the Lily. That was hot talk Doc gave me! It's one thing to call myself a vagabond and another to have him say so. I'm for the woods, where I belong, with the rest of the brainless creatures!"

"Pshaw! He didn't mean that. You won't be locked up. The monkeys are ours, the blame is ours, don't be afraid!" counselled Jim, with his hand upon his host's shoulder.

But the other shook it off, indignantly. "Afraid? *Afraid!* I? Why that *is* a joke, indeed!" and with that, his gun upon his back, the cage in his hand, he marched away.

CHAPTER XII.

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UNDER THE PERSIMMON TREE.

Saint Augustine cocked his pretty head on one side and looked roguishly up into Jim Barlow's face.

"Be you goin' to stay to my house all your life? 'Cause if you be I know somethin'."

"I hope you do. But, I say, let that celery alone. What's the fun of pulling things up that way?"

"I was just helpin'. I helps Mamma, lots of times."

Saint Augustine was the second son of Lucetta Stillwell and certainly misnamed. There was nothing saintly about him except his wonderful blue eyes and his curly, golden hair. This, blowing in the wind, formed a sort of halo about his head and emphasized the beauty of the thin little face beneath.

Ten days had passed since Jim and his mates had come to Corny Stillwell's cabin and Gerald still lay on his bed there. He was almost well now, Dr. Jabb said, and to-morrow might try his strength in a short walk about the yard. His illness had been a severe attack of measles, which he had doubtless contracted before his leaving home, and lest he should carry the contagion to the "Lilies," Jim hadn't been near the house-boat all this time. He had been worried about the children of his hosts but the mother had calmly assured him:

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"They won't take it. They've had it. They've had everything they could in the way of diseases, but they always get well. I suppose that's because they are never pampered nor overfed."

"I should think they weren't!" Jim had burst out, impulsively, remembering the extremely meagre diet upon which they subsisted. In his heart he wished they might have the chance of "pampering" for a time, till their gaunt little faces filled out and grew rosy. He had thought he knew what poverty was but he hadn't, really; until he became an inmate of this cabin in the fields. To him it seemed pitiful, when at meal time the scant portions of food were distributed among the little brood, to see the eagerness of their eyes and the almost ravenous clutch of the little tin plates as they were given out. Even yet he had never seen his hostess eat. That she did so was of course a fact, else she would have died; but the more generous portions of the meal-pudding which were placed before him made him feel that he was, indeed, "taking bread from the children's mouths," and from the mother's, as well.

Dr. Jabb had gone to the Water Lily, now peacefully moored in "the loveliest spot on the earth," as Farmer "Wicky" had described it, and reported Gerald's condition. He had also added:

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"He won't need much nourishment till his fever goes down; then, Madam, if you can manage it you'd best send food across to the cabin for him. Let a messenger carry it to the entrance of the field and leave it there, where the lad, Jim, can get it. May not be need for such extreme precaution; but 'an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.' Lucetta Stillwell is a noble woman, tied to a worthless husband whom she adores. They must be terribly poor, though she's so proud you'd never guess it from her manner. I gave it to Corny hot and heavy, the other night, and at the time I felt every word I said. I don't know. He's no more capable of doing a man's part in the world than that young pickaninny yonder," pointing to Metty on the ground, fascinated by the jabbering monkeys in their cage near-by.

The doctor had said this to Mrs. Calvert very soon after Gerald was stricken, and had added a parting injunction:

"Don't over-feed the sick boy and don't begin too soon."

Then he had ridden away and promptly forgot all about the case. So Mrs. Calvert delayed the shipment of food for several days, during which Jim had ample time to grow mortally sick of hasty-pudding, on his own account, and anxious on that of Lucetta. But gradually he had won her to speak more freely of her affairs.

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"Yes, I do considerable of the work myself. You see it doesn't come natural to Corny dear. He's more a child than Saint Augustine, even, in some things."

"Why, his brother said—Shucks!"

"What did his brother say, please?"

"Oh! nothin'. I didn't mean——"

Lucetta laughed in her gentle, patient way:

"Of course you didn't mean and you don't need. I know Wicky Stillwell and his wife, Lizzie, from A to Izzard. Good people, the best in the world and the smartest. But they can't see a fault in Corny—not that I can either, understand! Only they don't see why it is our farm—it's his, really—doesn't pay better. But we can't afford to hire and a woman's not so strong as a man. Yet we're happy. Just as happy as the days are long and we've never starved yet. It's my faith that there's bread in the world enough for every mouth which needs it. God wouldn't be a Father and not so order it. That's one compensation of this life of mine, that you fancied might be lonely. I can't go to church, I'm too far away, so I just pretend that all this—around me—is one church and that He's in it all the time. I named each of the children after some holy person and I hope each will grow like his namesake—in time."

"Did you plant this celery?"

"Yes. There was a man rode around, distributing government seeds, came from some 'Farmer's Institute,' I reckon, and he gave them. Corny said it was hardly worth while,

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celery's such a trouble; but I did it on the sly. Corny loves celery, just loves it; when he's been lucky with his gun and brings home some game. Then! Won't it be grand to have it for a surprise? Makes me think, it ought to be hoed right now. I'll fetch the hoe."

"You'll do nothin' of the sort while I'm loafin' around, idle. Gerry doesn't need me only now and again and I'm pinin' for a job. You sit an' rest, or teach the kids. Let me just work for my board. If you'll tell me where the hoe is, please?"

When found Jim looked at it with dismay. The handle was fairly good but the steel part was broken in half and practically worthless.

"Reckon Wesley, my eldest son, must have been using it. He's always trying to 'make something.' I think he'll be a great inventor by and by. But really, it doesn't seem hospitable—it *isn't*, to let you or any other guest work. I can manage very well, very well, indeed. You can sit and read. We have a Shakespeare—what the children haven't destroyed—a Bible, and two volumes of Scott. We're real proud of our library and I keep it in my wedding chest. I have to, the children are so bright and inquiring."

"Too inquiring I think! 'Tain't healthy for 'em to be quite so smart!"

Jim laughed, shouldered his hoe, and marched away across the little strip of grass between the house and garden—so-called. The ground for this Lucetta's feeble hands had dug with a spade that matched in condition the hoe Jim had found. Melon seeds had been sown there and had duly sprouted. But the "inquiring" minds of the children had daily pulled them up to see if there were any melons at the root. The potatoes had received the same treatment, the corn ditto, and the wonder was that even a few plants had survived their efforts to "make 'em grow faster."

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Now here was Saint Augustine "helping" to transplant the celery which had until now escaped culture at their hands.

Jim worked as he had never done even in all his active young life. His heart ached with pity for the little woman who faced her hard life so bravely and so happily, and he was revolving many plans to help her, and to a greater extent than a few days of farm labor could do.

"'Cause I say, I know somethin'."

"Well, what is it, Sainty?"

"Ain't 'Sainty', but 'Au—gus—tine'. Say it nice, like Mamma does. She cried last night."

"Never!"

"Yep, she did! She cried an' she talked to herself right outside the winder where I sleep. She kep' callin' 'Corny! Corny! come home!' Just that way she said it and he didn't answer a word. Corny's my papa, don't you know? He goes off times and stays an' Wesley says my mamma gets scared he will be killed with his gun. Say, I'm goin' to run away and find him. I am so. Don't you tell. But I am. I'm goin' to find that monkey cage and I'm going to travel all around the world and show 'em to folks for money. That's what my papa said, that morning when we let 'em out and he went away. He said, my papa said: 'Suppose younkners we start a circus of our own?' He said he'd always wanted to do it and he knows the best things they is. He's terrible smart, my papa is. My mamma says so, and she knows. My mamma and my papa know every single thing there is. My papa he knows a place where a man that lived hunderds and millions years ago dug a hole an' put something in it, I reckon money; and my papa says if he'd a mind to he could go and dig it right square up, out the ground, and buy my mamma a silk dress an' me a little cart all red an'—"

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"There, chatterbox! Get out the way! If you want to help, take that little bucket to the spring and bring it full of water, to sprinkle these plants."

"All right," cheerfully answered Saint Augustine, and ran swiftly away.

Alas! he did not run swiftly back! Jim forgot all about him but toiled faithfully on till little Saint Anne came out to call him to dinner. She was his favorite of all the children, a tender-hearted little maid with her mother's face and her mother's serene gentleness of manner.

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"Your dinner's ready, Mister Jim, and it's a mighty nice one, too. My mamma said they was more that chicken than any sick boy could eat and you was to have some. Wesley said couldn't we all have some but mamma said no, 'twasn't ours. Chicken's nice, ain't it, with gravy? Sometimes, don't you know? we have *possum*, or *rabbit*, or something *fine*. Sometimes, too, if papa's been to Uncle Wicky's he fetches home a pie! Think o' that! Yes, sir, a *pie*! My Aunt Lizzie makes 'em. Mamma never does. I guess—I guess, maybe, she thinks they isn't healthy. Mamma's mighty partic'lar 't we shan't have 'rich food;' that's what she calls Aunt Lizzie's pies, and maybe your chicken, and the sick boy's cream. My

mamma dassent let us use any cream, ourselves. She has to keep it for papa's butter. *She* don't eat any butter. It doesn't agree with her stummy. I guess she thinks it don't with mine. I never have any. The sick boy has all he wants, don't he? But Daisy cow don't make such a terrible lot, Daisy don't. Papa says she ought to have more eatings and 't our pasture's poor. Mamma says Daisy's a real good cow. She don't really know what we childern would do without her. Daisy gives us our dinners. Sometimes, on Sundays, mamma gives us a little milk just fresh milked, before she churns it into papa's butter. It's nicer 'an buttermilk, ain't it? And I shall never forget what Sunday's like, with the sweet, doo-licious milk, an' our other clo'es on. Each of us has other clo'es—think of that! You have 'em, too, don't you? what your folks sent you from that boat where you used to live."

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"The boat where he used to live!" Little Saint Anne's words spoke the thought of his own heart. The ten days since he had left it made the Water Lily seem far back in his life and gave him a wild desire to run off and find it again. Why should he, whom Gerald had openly despised, be chained to that boy's bedside? Why should his own holiday be spoiled for a stranger, an interloper? There had been times, many of them, when he had almost hated Gerald, who was by no means a patient invalid. But whenever this feeling arose Jim had but to look at patient Lucetta and remember that, but for him, she would be alone in her care for her sick guest.

Now he was growing homesick again for the sight of dear faces and the pretty Water Lily, and to put that longing aside, he asked:

"Saint Anne, do you think you could carry a dish very carefully? If it had chicken on it could you hold it right side up and not lose a single bit? Because if you could, or can, I 'low the best thing you could do would be to ask mamma to send that nice dinner out here. Then we two would go down by the spring and sit under the persimmon tree and eat it. Just you and I together. Think of that!"

Saint Anne's face lighted brilliantly, then instantly clouded. "None the rest? Not Wesley, nor Saint Augustine, nor Dorcas, nor Sheba, nor teeny-tiny David boy? Just me alone? I—I couldn't. Mamma says it's mean to be stingy of our things, so when I have two 'simmonses I always give one to who's nearest. Not to give chicken would be meaner—'meaner 'n pussley!' I don't mind being hungry—not much I don't mind it—but when any of us is selfish all papa has to do is say 'Pussley, pussley!' quick, just like that, an' we stop right away. But—but I'll bring yours, if mamma'll let me, and I'll turn my face right the other way while you eat it, so I shan't be tempted to 'covet my neighbor's—anything that is his.' That's in my kittenchasm that we childern say to mamma every Sunday, after we've had our milk. I'll run right away now."

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Quite sure that his request would be granted and hoping that the surplus of Gerald's dinner would be plentiful, Jim went to the spring and filled the rusty bucket always waiting there. Then he plucked six big burdock leaves and arranged them on a boulder. The little maid of the sweet, serious eyes had taught him a lesson in unselfishness; and whether the portion coming to him were much or little, each child should have its share.

Then he looked up and saw Saint Anne returning. Upon her outstretched arms she balanced the pewter platter, and upon this was set—Oh! glory! one whole, small chicken delicately roasted, as only Chloe could have prepared it. A half dozen biscuits flanked it and a big bunch of grapes. A tin cup fairly shone in its high state of polish, but its brilliancy was nothing as compared with the shining face of Saint Anne.

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Behind her trailed four brothers and sisters, each stepping very softly as if in awe of the unexpected feast before them. The fifth child was missing, Saint Augustine, the mischief of the household, who was oftener under foot than out of sight.

"Where's other brother, Saint Anne? Shall we wait for him? Did your mother save any for herself? Did Gerald need me?"

It was a long string of questions to be answered and the little girl counted them off upon her fingers.

"I don't know where Saint Augustine is. Likely he'll be 'round real soon. I guess we won't wait—I mean the others needn't—they look so watery around the mouth. No, mamma didn't save any. She said she didn't care for it. Funny, wasn't that? As if anybody, even a grown-up mamma, could help caring! And the Gerald boy was asleep. I most wish he would be all the time, he—he speaks so sort of sharp like. Mamma says that's cause he's gettin' well. Gettin'-well-folks are gen'ally cross and it's a good sign. What you doing?"

Jim had pulled another burdock leaf and spread a bit of sweet fern upon it. He had an idea that Dorothy would have objected to the odor of burdock as mingled with a dinner. Then he carefully sliced with his pocket knife the daintiest portions of the little fowl and some of the

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bread. He added the finest of the grapes and turning to Dorcas and Sheba, said:

“Now, girlies, Saint Anne brought the dinner away out here, but it’s your job to take this much back to your mother. You are to tell her that this is a picnic and nobody would enjoy it unless she picnics, too. Will you tell her? Will you be real careful? If you will I promise you we others won’t eat a mouthful till you get back.”

They consented, but not too eagerly. They loved mamma, course; but they loved chicken, too. It required considerable faith on their part to go way back to the cabin and leave their dinners behind them, expecting to find them just as now.

However they started. Dorcas held the stem of the burdock leaf and Sheba its tip. Being somewhat shorter than her sister, Sheba’s end of the burden slanted downwards. The grass was hummocky. Their steps did not keep time very well. A fragment of Chloe’s well-flavored “stuffin’” slipped down upon Sheba’s fat fingers and—right before she knew it was in her mouth, yes, sir! Right before!

“Oh! Sheba! You’d oughtn’t not to have did that!” reproved Dorcas, severely. Then she stumbled over a brier. She had watched her sister too closely to see where her own feet fell, and one little cluster of grapes rolled to the ground. [Pg 192]

“I guess that was ‘cause I was lookin’ for ‘the mote in your eyes’ ‘t I got a ‘beam’ in mine so’s I couldn’t see right smart,” observed this Scripture-taught child, in keen self-reproach.

“Did you get a beam? I didn’t. I can see real good. Say, Dorcas, ‘twouldn’t not do to give mamma grapes what have fell into dirty grass, would it? Mamma hates dirt so much papa laughs hard about it. And—and it isn’t not nice to waste things. Mamma says ‘waste not want not.’ I ain’t wantin’ them grapes but I can’t waste ‘em, either. Mamma wouldn’t like that. These ain’t our kind of wild ones, we get in the woods. These are real ones what grew on a vine.”

They paused to regard the fallen fruit. How the sunlight tinted their golden skins. They *must* taste—Oh! how doo-licious they must taste! As the elder, and therefore in authority, Dorcas stooped to lift the amber fruit; and, losing hold of the burdock leaf sent the whole dinner to the ground.

Then did consternation seize them. This was something dreadful. If mamma hadn’t been so terrible neat! If she’d only been willing to “eat her peck of dirt,” like papa said everybody had to do sometime, they could pick it all up and squeeze it back, nice and tight on the big green leaf, and hurry to her with it. But— [Pg 193]

“Yes, sir! There is! A yellow wiggley kittenpillar just crawled out of the way. S’posing he left one his hairs on that chicken? Just suppose? Why, that might make mamma sick if she ate it! You wouldn’t want to make poor darling mamma sick, like the Gerald boy, would you, Sheba Stillwell? Would you?”

Poor little Sheba couldn’t answer. She was in the throes of a great temptation. She hadn’t the strength of character of Saint Anne. She didn’t at all like that suggestion of a “kittenpillar’s” hair and yet—what was one hair to such a wicked waste as it would be if they left all that fine food to spoil, or for the guinea-hen to gobble.

“The guinea-hen eats a lot. She eats kittenpillars right down whole;” pensively observed Sheba, when she had reached this stage of thought.

“She shan’t eat this, then!” declared Dorcas, promptly sitting down and dividing with great care all this delectable treat.

“Why, little ones, what are you doing? Why aren’t you back yonder with the rest? I don’t see Saint Augustine there, either. Do you know where he is?”

As this simple question interrupted them the conscience-stricken children began to cry. One glance into their mother’s troubled face had aroused all their love for her and a sense of their own selfishness. [Pg 194]

“Why, babies dear, what’s the matter? Have you hurt yourselves?”

“Yes, mamma, we have. We’ve hurted the very insides of us, in the place where mutton-taller can’t reach an’ you can’t kiss it well again. Your dinner was sent to you and—and—*we’ve et it up!*”

Dorcas delivered herself of this statement in a defiant attitude, her arms folded behind her, but her little breast heaving. And she could scarcely believe her own ears when the only reprimand she received was:

"Say 'eaten,' darling, not 'et.' I do wonder where my boy is! In some mischief, I fear, the precious little scamp!"

But she was still wondering when that day's sun went down.

CHAPTER XIII.

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WHAT LAY UNDER THE WALKING FERN.

For once Gerald was neglected, and for once he was glad of it. Mrs. Stillwell and Jim had both come in, on the afternoon before, in a high state of excitement. They had demanded of him if he had seen Saint Augustine, the mischievous child with the peculiar name. He had retorted, angrily, that of course he had seen nobody, neither child nor grown-up. He might lie there and die for all anybody would bother! He'd get up, he declared he would, dress and go away at once. Never before had he stayed in such a wretched place as this, and yes, he surely would get up and leave. If he could find his own clothes. Did anybody know where his clothes were?

Even in the midst of her terrible anxiety, his faithful nurse and hostess had smiled, encouragingly, saying:

"You couldn't do better. When a sick person gets to your state of mind and nerves, he's usually well enough to go out. All you brought with you is in that parcel under the bed. You can leave Corny's shirt—anywhere."

She caught her breath with a sob and went swiftly out of the cabin. He heard her calling her children and directing them:

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"Wesley and Saint Anne, little brother has run away. He's done that before, so don't be frightened. He's always been found—he will be now. But mamma may not be back by sundown and you, Wesley, must do the milking and lay the fire ready for lighting in the morning. Saint Anne, my precious little care-taker, see well after the others and give the sick boy his supper of cream and oatmeal which was sent. Don't feel lonely because both papa and mamma are away. The dear God is right here with you, you know, in your little bedroom and close outside the window. No harm can happen where God is, you know, and now good-bye."

She had kissed them all around and only Saint Anne noticed her lips trembled. Then she had gone swiftly away in one direction which they knew well. It was toward the little whirlpool in the woods, caused by the sudden meeting of two small streams and named Tony's Eddy, because a man named Tony had been drowned there.

It was a spot all the cabin children, except Saint Augustine, greatly feared. He liked it because "papa does," and was never happier than when Corny took him on a ramble thither. Lucetta had protested against these visits to the dangerous place, but her fear had been laughed down by her light-hearted husband.

"Fall into the Eddy? Why, woman dear, he will scarcely look into it when I try to make him. Just shivers in a silly way, and makes up all sorts of queer yarns about it. The Eddy fascinates him but scares him, too. He believes that bad fairies live in it and if he should go too near they'd come out and drag him down with them to destruction. Oh! you needn't worry about Tony's Eddy."

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Alas! for her peace of mind, now that Saint Augustine had disappeared, "The Eddy!" was her first and only thought.

Jim searched in an opposite direction.

"I believe he's gone to find the monkeys. He was talking of them almost the last thing. Horrid things! I wish they'd never been heard of. They've made more trouble than human beings could, try their best! Or, maybe, child like, he's gone to dig that wonderful 'treasure' out of the ground and to buy you the silk dress he'd heard about. Dear little kid! He was as earnest as a man, almost!" said Jim, trying to comfort the mother-heart that suffered so.

"You look. I'll look. He must be found. I can't meet Corny's eyes and tell him that our boy is lost," she had answered quietly enough, but with agony in her expression.

When they had gone Gerald got up and dressed. He was rather shaky in the knees but felt far better than when lying on the hard bed which had been given up to his use. How his

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hostess had managed he had not even thought, until that moment Jim had lain on the bench across the room, upon a bag of fern leaves he had gathered for himself in the woods nearby, with his rag-carpet blanket to cover him. He hadn't complained and Gerald had given no thought to his comfort, his own being his first concern as it had always been.

Now the house seemed desolate. Saint Anne came timidly in with his light supper and started back in affright. He looked like a stranger to her in his own clothes, having seen him only as "the sick one" in bed. But he called her and she dared not disobey her mother's command to give him his supper. Somehow, for the first time, the child's face appealed to him and he thanked her for her attention. This was more astonishing than to see him fully dressed in his white duck suit, that had been laundered by Lucetta on the day after his arrival.

In a flutter of excitement, Saint Anne retreated to the inner room and the safe presence of her family; and when, after a moment she regained courage enough to open the door between—the lad was gone.

"He was here and he isn't here. He was all in white, like mamma says the angels wear, and Dr. Jabb's little Eunice. She had on clothes all flyey-about and thin—looked like moonlight. She had a hump in her shoulders where mamma thinks maybe her wings are starting to grow. Mamma knows her mamma a right smart while, and she says Eunice is a perfectly angelic child. Mamma wouldn't say that if she didn't know. Maybe the sick boy's turned into a angel, too, or is turning! Just supposing! Maybe God sent him to stay with us, because papa and mamma had to go away. Maybe!"

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There was no radiance from the moonlight now upon the eager little face, and indoors was dark; but it was delightful to think of angels being about, until Wesley remarked, in his matter-of-fact way:

"If he was *sent* he ought to have *stayed*. I don't believe he was a truly angel. I guess he was just one them changelings, papa tells stories about, that the fairies over in the Ireland-country carries 'round with 'em. If a baby or a boy is terrible cross—like the sick one was, yesterday, the fairy just snatches him up and whisks him off somewhere and puts a good new one in his place. Peek and see, Saint Anne!"

"Peek yourself, Wesley. I'm—I'd rather have an angel than a changeling. Anyhow, I'm going to sleep. God's here, taking care, so it don't matter."

Happy in the faith that had been instilled into their minds from their earliest consciousness the deserted ones fell fast asleep, though not till Dorcas had slipped into Saint Augustine's place in the boys' bed a little willow whistle Jim had made for her and which she had refused to give her brother.

As for the angelic Gerald he was weakly trudging on his way toward the cross-cut lane, which he had seen from the cabin window and had been told led outward to the main road, running past Deer-Copse. How often he had wished to be upon it, and now he wondered why he hadn't started long before. Though it grew steadily dark, he kept as steadily on, though his strength was sorely tried and he wished he dared stop and rest. He was afraid to do this. He knew if he lay down on the ground, that looked so tempting a bed, he wouldn't have the energy to go on again. After a time his steps grew automatic. His feet lifted and fell with no volition of his own, it seemed, and a curious drowsiness came over him.

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"I believe I'm going to sleep, walking!" he thought, and wearily closed his eyes. But he opened them again with a start.

"What's that? What is it? Sounds like—I must be out of my head—I don't know where I am. I can't see. Ah! the lane! I'm there at last. Now I can lie right down and rest and somebody'll find me—sometime."

Yet once more into his drowsing ear fell a peculiar sound.

"Ah—umph! A-ah—oomph—ph—h—h—h!"

That prolonged bray so electrified him that he got up, to his knees, then to his swaying feet, a ghostly figure in his white suit, and with a last spurt of breath, cried:

"Billy! It's—*Billy!*"

Billy it was. Why then and there his mulish brain couldn't understand. He had come a tiresome way, through woods and along country roads and found it a painfully new experience. Of course, he had rested often and long. He had been bidden, innumerable times: "Billy, lie down!" and after an interval: "Billy, get up." Now, as he was wearily trudging through the night came this apparition in white, right in his path.

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Billy had heard the stumbling of human feet long before his rider had, and had announced the fact by mild remarks about it. But, sidewise upon Billy's broad back—his head pillowed on Billy's neck, the Colonel had known nothing of this until the mule's abrupt stop shocked him awake and to a sight of the ghostly apparition on the roadside.

"Hello, Spook!" exclaimed the Colonel, inclined to be friends with anybody or anything which would relieve the loneliness of his night ride.

"Hel—Hello, yourself! Ha, ha, ha!" returned Gerald, in great delight yet half-confused by fatigue and the surprise of this meeting. They were mutual "apparitions," arisen out of the earth to confront one another. "Where you come from? Where you going? I'm—I'm awful tired."

"So 'm I. Always tired. Always expect to be. I come from going to and fro upon the earth seekin' that I cayn't find. No, I cayn't. And of all the bad luck I've had this is the worst. Ah! hum."

"I'm sorry," murmured Gerald, stumbling near enough Billy to lay his head on the animal's shoulder, where he immediately went to sleep. [Pg 202]

"Sho! That's odd! But everything is in this topsy-turvy world. I'll be glad to be out of it. I never had no luck, Billy, an' you know it. This yeah 's a piece with all the rest. To have this boy, or his spook, rise up this-a-way, an' go to sleep, standin'. Well, Billy, it cayn't be helped. The trouble is I was born with a heart, and it's always gettin' us into trouble. It's that old heart o' mine makes me feel I cayn't just shove this creatur' off an' leave him to his own deserts. Ah! hum."

In his mournful tones the Colonel thus addressed the intelligent beast, who responded with a sympathetic bray; but he stood rigidly still while his master loosened and slipped from his back the blanket strapped there and spread it on the grassy bank beside the road. Then, as if Gerald had been a little child, the Colonel carried him to the blanket, laid and covered him in it. He even took off his own coat and made a pillow of it for Gerald's head. Next, he ordered: "Billy, lie down!" and having been obeyed, calmly composed himself for another nap upon the back of "his only friend."

The night passed. Gerald slept as he had never done in all his life. The healthful fatigue of his tramp across lots and the pure outdoor air did more for him than all the medicine he'd swallowed. When he awoke the sun was shining in his eyes and Billy was braying an injunction to get up, while the Colonel sat on the roadside pensively reading out of his little brown book. [Pg 203]

"My! You're an early student!" cried Gerald, who had lain still for a moment after waking, trying to understand the situation. "Must be an interesting story, that!"

"Story? Life's too short—or too long—to waste on stories, young man. This is Marcus Aurelius, the sage of all the ages. Now, talk, tell, how come, et cetera. For me, I'm seekin' a lost wallet, and I don't expect to find it. I shan't. Course. But I'm on the road to that pickaninny and if I cayn't squeeze the wallet out of his clo'es I'll squeeze the truth out of his insides, what he done with it. The idee! 'T one measly little nigger could force me to break the vow of years an' come here, where I never meant to set foot 's long as I lived. Ah! hum."

"Eh, what? Lost wallet? Why, I know something about that. Jim Barlow had it. He picked it up."

"Where is he? Quick, young man! That wallet's mighty precious and it's mine—mine, I tell you! Mine by the right of findin' and preservin'. Where's he at, quick?"

The Colonel had never shown such excitement, nor such depths of depression as when Gerald answered:

"I don't know. I haven't the least idea."

"Ah! hum. Course you haven't. I didn't suppose you had. They couldn't be any such good luck in this world. 'Don't know'! Course not. Don't reckon you know anything." [Pg 204]

"Ah! yes I do! I know that I'm so hungry I could almost eat this grass. Where can we get a breakfast?"

The Colonel scanned the surrounding country. Had there been even a melon-patch in sight he wouldn't have troubled himself to answer. He was hungry himself, but he often was that and food always came his way sometime and of some kind. Why worry or hurry?

Fortunately, the rumble of approaching wheels was heard just then, and presently there came into sight around the bend in the road a mule-team, driven by a man in a blue smock.

Gerald recognized him at a glance—the same teamster who had brought him and his mates through the “gust” from the Landing. He had a sadly confused remembrance of how that ride had ended, and this was a good thing; for he was now able to hail the man in real pleasure and no anger.

“Hello, there, driver! Do you want a job?”

A startled expression came to the teamster’s face as his own mind returned to the hour when these two had last met. However, he braced himself for whatever was to come, and answered:

“That depends. What job?”

“To carry us two and lead the mule to wherever the Water Lily is now. That’s my boat—I mean, it was—and they’re my friends aboard. Do you know her and where she lies?”

The man knew perfectly well. On the morning after his ugly treatment of his four passengers, he had repaired to Deer-Copse on the Ottawotta and collected from Mrs. Calvert the sum of five dollars. This was more than double the price asked of the lads but none of them happened to be in sight, and he made a great matter of delivering the row-boat uninjured. Knowing no better she promptly paid him. Though he was sober now, he was just as greedy as ever for money and cautiously answered:

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“I might guess. But I’m off for the Landing and some hauling there. It would be with a couple dollars for me to turn about an’ hunt her up now.”

“All right, I’ll pay it. I mean, if I can’t my sister will. She’s on the Water Lily and would about give her head to see me back again. I’ve been sick. I’ve been—”

But the teamster had no sympathy for Gerald’s past ailments. He was busy getting his wagon turned about and in another moment Gerald was on the seat beside him, the Colonel riding at the back of the wagon, feet dangling, leading Billy. This last task was needless, for the mule would have followed his master anywhere and unguided.

The teamster “guessed” so accurately that he drove straight and swift along the road bordering the Ottawotta and to the beautiful spot where the Water Lily shone in all the glory of white paint and gilt, her brasses polished to the last degree by Ephraim, and all her little company pressing to the front at the rumble of wheels.

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Not many vehicles passed that way and the coming of each was an event in the quiet life of the house-boat. It was Dorothy who first recognized the newcomers and her cry of delight which brought Aurora around from the nook where she was busily embroidering a cushion for the Lily.

“Gerald! Oh! Gerald, my brother!”

The lad had never felt her so dear nor thought her so pretty as when her arms closed about him and her happy face looked into his. But the face clouded when he asked:

“Got any money, Sis?”

“Huh! Can’t you be glad to get home without begging for money? Popper gave you just as much as he did me when he started and—”

The stumping of crutches interrupted them. It was the old captain who had caught sight of the teamster, waiting for his money, and was hurrying forward in anger.

“Step aside, younkers! Lemme deal with him! *Lemme!* Oh! you old villain, here again be ye? Tryin’ to cheat widders an’ orphans outen their livin’ substance! Oh! I know. I’ve heered. I’ve been told. Two dollars was the price agreed—a quarter a-piece for us folks an’ fifty a-piece for the monks! The boat was throwed in. That was the bargain fixed an’ fast, an’ deny it, if ye can, with this here Melvin an’ me an’ this poor sick Gerry for witnesses. You haul in your sails an’ put for shore! Don’t ye come around here a-tryin’ to cheat no more. I’ve been layin’ for ye ever sence that night. I’ve ‘lowed I’d meet up with ye an’ get even. Pay? Not this side Davy Jones’s locker! Be off with ye an don’t ye dare to show your face here again till you’ve l’arnt common honesty, such as ary yuther Marylander knows. What would these here women an’ childern do if it wasn’t for Cap’n Jack Hurry a pertectin’ of ‘em? Tell me that, you ornery land-lubber, you!”

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But the teamster was already gone. He had not tarried the completion of the Captain’s tirade. He saw that there was little prospect of receiving pay for that morning’s ride except after much discussion and many hard words, and decided that if he were ever to secure further patronage from these silly people who lived on a boat he would better not quarrel with them now.

With his departure peace was restored and the welcomes bestowed upon Gerald made him very happy and roused a wish in his heart to become as good a fellow as they all seemed to imagine him to be. With some shame he remembered his often ungrateful treatment of Mrs. Lucetta and her children, and described the family so graphically that Dorothy clapped her hands, exclaiming:

"I'm going right away to know them! I am! What darlings they must be, those little 'Saints' and sinners, and what a charming woman the mother must be. Melvin has told us how she served them with that poor pudding and sour buttermilk, just as if they were the greatest luxuries."

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Mrs. Calvert nodded, smiling:

"Yes, dear, I shall be glad to have you know her. She is a born gentlewoman and a good one—which is better. But now, has everybody had all the breakfast wanted? If so, let's all go off to our arbor in the woods. 'The Grotto,' the girls named it, Gerald, and it's beautiful. But where is Jim? Why should he have gone away from the Stillwell cottage before you, in that sudden way you mentioned?"

"I reckon he went to search for a runaway kid. The one they called Saint Augustine. Fancy such a name as that for the wildest little tacker ever trod shoe-leather—or went barefoot, I mean. That youngster looked like an angel and acted like a little imp. I should think his folks'd be glad to lose him."

"No, Gerry, you don't think that. You don't want anybody to be unhappy now that we're all so glad you're well and back. I hope Jim will find the little Saint right soon and be back, too; but don't you think they'll be frightened about you? It just came to me—what can they think, when they come back and find you gone, except that you were out of your mind and wandered off? You that had been in bed till then!" asked Dorothy.

"Oh! they won't bother about me. Jim's been as good as gold and I've been pretty hateful, sometimes, I know. It'll be a relief to him and Mrs. Stillwell that I'm off their hands. Why, folks, do you know? That slender slip of a woman does almost all their farm work, herself? Her husband—I fancied from what I had sense enough to understand—hates work, that kind, anyway, and she adores him. I know Jim took a hand, soon's I was well enough, or good-natured enough, to let him off sticking inside with me. I never saw a fellow work so, I could see through the window by my bed. They hadn't any horse and he ploughed with a cow! Fact. He dug potatoes, hoed corn, cleared up brush-wood—did that with his jack-knife—carried water—Couldn't tell what he didn't do! Oh! Mrs. Stillwell will be glad enough to be rid of me but she'll hate to miss Jim. Hello, Elsa! What in the world!"

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Mabel laughed and clapped her hands.

"Isn't it the queerest thing? and isn't it just jolly?"

"She fell in love with them that morning when they came. Elsa, timid Elsa, is the only one of us not afraid of the monkeys! She's captivated them, some way, and is actually training them to do whatever she wants. She's taught them to walk, arm in arm, and to bow 'Thank you' for bits of Chloe's cake. She punishes them when they catch the birds and—lots of things. Are you taking them for their 'constitutional' now, Elsa dear?"

The shy girl, whose poverty and ungraceful manners had made Aurora and Mabel look down upon her at the beginning of the trip, had now become the very "heart of things," as Dolly said. Elsa was always ready to mend a rent, to hunt up lost articles, to sit quietly in the cabin when anybody had a headache and soothe the pain and loneliness, and to do the many little things needed and which none of the others noticed. It had come to be "Elsa, here!" or "Elsa, there!" almost continually; and the best of it was that the more she was called upon for service the happier and rosier she grew.

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"Indeed, Papa Carruthers will see a fine change in his little girl, when he gets her home again!" Aunt Betty had said, that very morning, drawing the slender little figure to her side. "We have all learned to love you dearly, Elsa. You are a daily blessing to us."

"*That's* because you love me—and let me love you. Love is the most beautiful thing in all the world, isn't it? It's your love has made me grow strong and oh! so happy!"

Indeed, it was love, even for such humble creatures as the monkeys, that had given her power over them. She had been the first, save Dorothy, to pity them for being caged; and she hadn't been afraid, as Dorothy was, to let them out to freedom. They had been very wild at first, springing into the trees and leaping about so far and fast that all except Elsa believed they were lost.

Then she would beg everyone to go away and putting the opened cage upon the ground

would sit quietly beside it, with their favorite food near, for a long, long time. The first time her patience was rewarded by their return to the cage, she still sat quiet and let them settle themselves to rest. After that the training was easier, and by common consent the little animals were left to her charge till they were soon called "Elsa's monks!" Hardest part of their training was the punishment they daily needed.

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"Elsa, your monks have torn Mabel's hat to ribbons!" "Elsa, the monkeys have ripped all the buttons off my uniform." "Elsa, Metty's heart is broken! They've chewed his 'libery' to bits!"

"They didn't mean it for *badness*. I'll fix the hat, Mrs. Bruce. I'll hunt up the buttons and sew them on, Cap'n Jack. I'll mend Metty's finery;" and the pleasure she seemed to get from doing all these things amazed the others.

Now, since all the others were engaged with Gerald and the Colonel, she slipped away into the woods which she had learned to visit alone and without fear. Melvin had found some small brass chains in a locker of the tender and the Captain had made some collars for the animals, so that she was able to lead them with her wherever she wished. Jocko, the larger of the pair, had developed a limp so like Elsa's own that it was ludicrous and Dorothy declared that he had done so "on purpose." He now hobbled after her while Joan, his mate ran ahead, pulled backward at her chain, and cut up so many "monkey shines" in general as kept her young mistress laughing so that she scarcely saw where she walked nor how far.

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But, at length, she looked up, surprised that she had taken a new direction from that she commonly followed. Here the trees were larger, and the undergrowth closer. Ferns which reached to her shoulder hid the ground from her sight and she stumbled over fallen limbs and unseen vines, but constantly urged onward by the discovery of some rare flower or shrub, which she might take home to Dorothy.

These two flower-lovers had daily studied the simple botany which Aunt Betty had brought on the trip, and the science opened to bookish Elsa a wonder-world of delight.

"Ah! there's a creeping fern! I mean a walking one. We read how rare they are and Dorothy will just be wild to come and see it for herself. Let me see. It was yesterday we studied about ferns. Be still, Joan. No, Jocko, I'll go no further, on account of your poor, lame foot. You may jump to my shoulder if you like. I think it was this way. Listen, dears! 'Order, Filices, Genera, Asplenium. Asplenium Rhizophyllum—Walking Fern!' There I said it, but the little common name suits me best. Heigho, beasties! What you jabbering about now? and what are you peering at with your bright eyes? Come on. There's nothing to be afraid of in the woods, though I was once so scared of them myself. Come on, do. I must get—My heart! What—*what—is this?*"

CHAPTER XIV.

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THE REDEMPTION OF A PROMISE.

Maybe the Colonel was more pleased to meet his Water Lily friends again than they were to see him. But Aunt Betty hid her disappointment under her usual courteous demeanor and was glad that the angry mood in which he had left them had not remained. Upon her, she knew would fall the task of entertaining him; and after breakfast was over and Billy been led to the deepest pasture available, she invited him to sit with her on the little deck that ran around the cabin, or saloon, and opened conversation with the remark:

"We've been very happy here in the Copse. Except, of course, we were worried about our sick guest, Gerald, till Dr. Jabb informed us he was out of danger. He seems a fine man, the doctor, and I'm thankful to have a physician so near. Why—what—are you ill, Colonel?"

At the mention of the practitioner her visitor had risen, his eyes ablaze with anger, his gaunt frame trembling with excitement.

"Madam! MADAM! Do you mention that hated name to me? Don't you know—Ah! hum. I suppose you don't but, if he—HE—poisons this atmosphere—I will bid you good morning."

He was turning away in a far more furious mood than had seemed possible to so easy-going a man, and his hostess hastily laid a detaining hand upon his arm.

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"My dear sir, what have I said? Do you know this doctor and dislike him? I'm sorry. Forget him, then, please and just enjoy this wonderful air which nobody could possibly 'poison.' It's perfect to-day, with just enough crispness in it to remind us it is really autumn and our picnicking days are numbered. The young folks have felt it dull, sometimes, lingering so

long in the Copse, but it's been a restful, happy time to me. One has to get away from home worries once in a while to keep things in their right proportion. And, after all, what does it matter where we live or what we have so long as there is peace and good will in one's heart? Not much, do you think?"

Aunt Betty was herself in happy mood and had talked on more to prevent the guest's departure than to "preach," as she called such little dissertations. She had gained her point. The Colonel settled back again in the familiar chair he had appropriated on his first visit and gradually the lines of anger left his face. An expression of intense sadness took their place, and after a moment he sighed:

"Ah! hum. I hadn't a right to get huffy. I reckon you don't know—some facts. You couldn't. Nobody could, without explainin' an' I cayn't explain. This much I'll say. I haven't set foot in this yeah region sence—in a right smart while. I never meant to again. But—I lost my wallet an' I came to seek it. I've cause to think, Madam, 't one your folks has it. If so, they must deliver real soon. To me it's vallyble. Also, it might concern Miss Dorothy. She an' me—an' you, of course, Mrs. Calvert, bein' a Calvert—Well, it's an old story an' I'll wait till after dinner, thank ye, ma'am. And if you don't mind, I'll just lean back an' take my 'forty winks.' I hain't rested none too well, lately. I've been *thinkin'*. Ah! hum. A man's no right to think. He cayn't an' be real comf'table. Beg pahdon."

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Aunt Betty watched him, smiling. He was a bore who, at times, was amusing. She knew that he had been well educated and had still a fondness for books, as was proved by his habitual use of "Marcus Aurelius;" but like many other cultured southern people he lapsed into the speech of the colored folks, with whom his life had been passed. His "yeah," and "cayn't," "right smart," and "soon" for early, were musical as he uttered them; and under all his laziness and carelessness he had the instincts of a gentleman.

"Poor old fellow! I wish I could do something for him, before we finally part company. I'm glad he didn't go away again in anger, though he doesn't 'stay mad,' as Dolly says. And I wonder what that scrip of paper in that old wallet does mean! My young folks are greatly excited over it, and Dolly told me some ridiculous story about her great-great-grandfather and his great-great-grandmother that seems to be the beginning of things. Anyway, though they found it, or Metty did, the Colonel claims it and I must see that it is returned."

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So reflected Mrs. Calvert, watching her guest's peaceful slumber; then, resuming her own book, forgot him and his affairs, at least for the time being.

"Where did Elsa take those monks? It's all well enough for her to train 'em, but they aren't hers and she needn't think so. I'd like to take a hand in that business, myself. Wouldn't you, Melvin? They belong to you and me, you know. And I say isn't this the beastliest slow-poke of a hole you ever saw? How on earth do you put in your time? All these days what have you done?" demanded Gerald, moving restlessly from tender to shore, and already heartily sick of the quiet Copse.

"Well, we fish, the Captain and I. We search the woods for berries and grapes. We go to the farmhouses nearest for supplies; and right here, Gerald Blank, let me warn you. Don't you go expecting fine living on the Lily. You see there wasn't much capital to start on, not for so many folks; and the other day what was left was lost."

"Lost? Lost! How could a fellow lose anything in this hole, even if he tried? What do you mean?"

"Exactly what I say. Mrs. Bruce has held the purse of the company and the other day she and Dorothy were counting up their money and—that's the last anybody has seen of it. They kept it in a little empty tin box, that marsh-mallows came in; and Chloe called Mrs. Bruce over to the galley to see about some cooking, and Mrs. Calvert called Dorothy for something else, don't you know? Well, sir, when they came back to finish their counting there wasn't a thing left but the tin box—empty as your hat."

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"Somebody stole it, course. Who do they suspect?"

"Look here, Gerry, that's a question comes pretty near home, I know that Mrs. Calvert and Dorothy suspect nobody. I can't say as much for Mrs. Bruce and the rest. The money was there—the money is gone. We're all in the same boat—literally, you know. There wasn't a peddler here that day, nobody around but just ourselves. You and Jim are out of it, course, because you were away; but—it might be me, it might be Mabel, it might be Metty—Ephraim—Chloe—no not her, for she wasn't out of Mrs. Bruce's sight—and it might be your own sister Aurora."

"What's that? How dare you?" angrily demanded Gerald.

But Melvin smiled, a little sadly, indeed, and shrugged his shoulders.

"Not so fast, Gerry. I'm not accusing her, nobody is accusing anybody. But the money's gone, and maybe it's just as well so much of it went for you."

"For me? What do you mean by that?"

"Cap'n Jack reckoned you'd cost the exchequer about fifty dollars. Dorothy had the very choicest things, poultry, cream, fruit and things, besides the doctor's bills. And the farmers down here aren't so low in their charges as nearer Jimpson's. Mrs. Bruce got furious against them, they took advantage so. But the doctor said you were a very sick boy, for only measles, and must be built up, so good-hearted little Dolly dipped into the marsh-mallow box for you. You——"

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"Hush! Don't say another word! I'm so mad I can't breathe. I wish I'd never come on this cruise. Cruise? It's nothing better 'n being buried alive. Thought we might get some fun out of it, hunting for that 'buried treasure' and now, up pops that old stick-in-the-mud and claims the whole business. Pshaw! I'll go home if I have to walk there."

"How? You couldn't. But I'll tell you what you could do. Hunt up Elsa and the monks. I want to see if this harness I've made out of a fur-rug they destroyed will fit either. Dolly proposes to make them some clothes and get up a little 'show.' Thinks she and Elsa could exhibit them for pennies, when the people come to sell stuff, and that would help pay for it."

Gerald considered. Many troubled thoughts passed through his mind, but the strongest feeling was anger. He had been so self-sufficient until this "beastly trip." Now he was learning the sometimes bitter lesson that nobody in the world can be actually independent. He had begun by lording it over his mates, and even his hostesses, and now here he was dependent upon them for the very food he ate and the medicine he had taken. He ceased to feel himself an invited guest but rather a burden and a debtor.

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"Of course, Popper'll pay everything back if we ever get home. But—Oh! dear! How I hate it all!"

For down in his heart he realized that no amount of money could cover his obligation to these friends, and he started off in a most unhappy frame of mind.

"I'll find that girl and teach her to mind her own business. The idea of her training those monkeys—my monkeys! Course, she's done it all wrong, and it's harder to unlearn a thing than learn it right first off. When they're trained they ought to be worth ten times as much as we paid for them. I might sell 'em to an organ-grinder, if Popper'd buy out Melvin's share."

But at this stage of thought it occurred to him that he couldn't picture his dandyish father dealing with organ-grinders. Indeed, the idea was so absurd that it made him laugh, and in that laughter his ill-temper vanished, or nearly so. After all, it was good to be alive! Even the freedom of the woods, after the stuffy cabin he had left, was delightful. He'd rather have had it the freedom of the city streets, but this was better than nothing.

He began to whistle, imitating the call of a bird in the tree overhead, and with such fair success that he was proud of himself. The bird ceased, startled, then flew onward. Gerald followed, still practicing that wild, sweet note, till suddenly his music was interrupted by another cry, which was neither bird nor joyous, but one of keen anxiety; then, as if it had come out of the ground, a girl begged:

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"Oh! whoever you are, come quick!"

"Why, Elsa! I was looking—Hello! Of all things!"

Almost hidden by the great ferns amid which she sat Elsa held, lying across her lap, a little figure in faded gingham.

"Saint Augustine! The boy I heard 'em say was lost! How did he get here? It must be a long way from his house."

Elsa pointed pityingly to the bare little feet and legs, cruelly scratched and with dark bruises.

"I don't know. I found him just this way."

"Sainty! Wake up! My! How sound he sleeps! And how red his face is!"

"He's sick. I'm sure. I found him all curled up, his little arms under his head. He moans, sometimes, but he doesn't know anything that I say."

At that moment a hoarse yell made Gerald look away from the boy and a leap of something to his shoulder made him yell in response.

"Jocko! Down! Behave! Oh! he'll hurt you. They've both been asleep in that spot where the sun shines through. Oh! Stop—stop!"

The monkey was attacking Gerald's face, snapping at his ears, pulling his hair, and almost frightening him into a fit. But Elsa laid Saint Augustine gently on the ground and went to the rescue. With sharp slaps of her thin hands she soon reduced Jocko to submission and, as if fearing punishment herself, Joan crouched behind a bush and peered cautiously out.

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"Pshaw! How'd you do it? I was coming after the monkeys, they're mine you know—or half mine, but—do they act that way often?"

"Yes, rather too often. That's what makes everybody afraid to handle them. They'll get better natured after a time, I hope. But no matter about them. They're nothing but animals while this darling little boy—I don't know as I can carry him. You've been sick and so can't either, I suppose. Yet we can't leave him here. Will you go back to the Lily and get more help? If you brought a hammock we might put him in that. He's awfully sick. I'm afraid—he'll die—and his mother—"

Gerald had stood looking upon the little lad while she said this, wondering what would best be done, and annoyed that he should be put to the bother of the matter. His decision was made rather suddenly as again Jocko leaped upon his back and resumed his angry chattering.

"Call him off! I'll carry the child. Which is the way home?"

"I don't—know. It all looks alike—but not like—I mean, I haven't the least idea where we are, except that it must be a good way from the boat. Don't you really know, either?"

For a moment Gerald looked about. Then answered frankly:

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"No. I was pretty cross when I came out, for Melvin had just told me about that lost money and about Dorothy's paying for me—So horrid, that! I heard a bird whistle and whistling's my gift, some folks think. I've whistled for entertainments at school and I like to learn new notes. Following that wretched bird I didn't notice."

"And looking for a walking-fern I didn't either. But we can't stop here. We must go on—some way."

"Let's try the children's way: 'My—mother—told—me—this!'"

Elsa laughed. She had known so little of childish things that each new one delighted her. Gerald had uttered the few words, turning from point to point with each, and now finishing with an outstretched forefinger in a direction where the trees were less thick and crowding than elsewhere.

Fortunately, "his—mother—had—told—him" the right one. This was almost the end of the forest behind Corny Stillwell's cabin; a short-cut to the long way around by which Gerald had gone to Deer-Copse. He didn't know that when he lifted Saint Augustine in his arms and started forward. The child was small and thin, else Gerald would have had to pause oftener than he did for rest; but even so it was a severe task he had set himself.

But somehow the burden in his arms seemed to lift the burden from his heart, as is always the case when one unselfishly helps another. Also, he feared that the illness of Saint Augustine was the result of his own; so that when Elsa once limped up to where he had paused to rest and asked:

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"What do you suppose it is that ails him?" he had promptly answered:

"Measles. Caught 'em from me. Ain't that the limit?"

But Elsa who knew no slang understood him literally, and said:

"No, it isn't, I had them once and the doctor scared my father dreadfully, telling him that folks could have them *four times*! Think of that! He said most people had them only once and the younger the lighter. So I guess Saint Augustine won't be very ill. But—my heart! Do you suppose the monkeys can catch it? Wouldn't that be awful!"

"I hope they will and die of them! Nasty little brutes! They keep my nerves on the jump all the time, hearing them chatter and yell right behind me so. You keep real far back, won't you? I don't know how you can stand them; but don't—please don't let them hop on me again. I know they're too heavy for you but I'm too nervous for words. I wish I'd never heard of 'em, the little gibbering idiots!"

Again Elsa laughed, this time so merrily that Gerald got angry.

"I don't see anything so very funny in this predicament! Not so very amusing! My arms ache fit to break and all a girl cares about a fellow is to giggle at him."

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And now, indeed, was the "giggle" so prolonged that its victim had to join in it, and had Mrs. Calvert been there to hear she would have rejoiced to see shy Elsa behaving just like any other happy girl. Yet, after a moment, she sobered and begged:

"Don't mind my doing that, but I couldn't help it. It seems so funny for a boy to have 'nerves' or to be afraid of monkeys. Papa has a song:

"The elephant now goes round and
round,
The band begins to play;
The little boys under the monkeys'
cage,
Had better get out of the way—
the way—
Would better get out of the way!"

Elsa had so far forgotten her self-consciousness that she sang her quotation in a sweet, clear treble which made Gerald turn around and stare at her in surprise.

"Why, I didn't know you could sing."

"I can't—much, only for Papa, sometimes. He's a fine singer. He belongs to the Oratorio Society. He's one of its best tenors, takes solos, you know. I'm very proud of Papa's voice. His being poor doesn't keep him out of *that* Society."

"Then he ought to get yours cultivated. You might make money that way."

"Maybe, but money isn't much. Anyway, he hasn't the money to pay for lessons."

"Look here. You're so smart with those detestable monks, suppose you go on training 'em and exhibit when you get back to town? I'd let you have 'em on trust till you could pay for them. What do you say?"

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Was this the poor, timid Elsa who now faced him with flashing eyes? Had this down-trodden "worm" actually "turned"?

"Say? What do I say? That you're the horridest boy in this whole world and I've a mind to fling your old monkeys straight at you! I—I—" then she sobbed, fatigue overcoming her and her wrath dying as swiftly as it had arisen. "I—I see a house over there. We better go to it and ask."

She was trembling now and her lame foot dragged painfully. She had made no complaint of the long distance and the troublesome little animals she sometimes led and sometimes carried, though Gerald had grumbled incessantly.

Now all the best of his nature came to the front, and he had never felt more bitterly ashamed of himself than when he realized that his thoughtless proposition had been an insult to the afflicted, shrinking girl. Warmed by the love and appreciation of her Water Lily friends she "had come out of her shell" of reserve and been most happy. Now this boy had forced her back again; to remembering that after all she was but a very poor girl, deformed, despised, and considered simply fit to make a mountebank of herself, going about the city streets with apes! Oh! it was very dimly that Elsa could see the outlines of a whitewashed cabin in the fields, because of the tears which filled her eyes.

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"Hold on, Elsa! Forgive me if you can. I'm ashamed of myself. I don't know what makes me such a cad, I don't! You know. Except I've been brought up to think I was a rich boy and that a rich boy can do no harm. I could kick myself from here to Halifax. Please don't mind. Why, you're the cleverest girl of the lot, you are, you know. Nobody else dared tackle—"

He caught himself up sharply. Not for his life would he again utter that hateful word "monkey" to her. But he added with real sincerity, "I'm so sorry I'll do anything in the world to prove it, that you ask me to do. I will, upon honor."

Elsa couldn't hold malice against anybody and in her heart had already forgiven him his hurt of her, with her habitual thought: "He didn't mean it." So she smiled again and accepted his statement as truth.

"Well I don't know as I shall ever want you to do anything to 'prove it', but if I do I'll tell you. Sure."

Little did Gerald dream how rash a promise he had made. The cabin in the fields was the one in which he had lain so helpless. As he recognized it he exclaimed:

“Good! I’ll try that childish ‘charm’ every time! ‘My—mother—told—me—right’. That’s home to this little shaver and I’m mighty glad we’re there.”

But it seemed a very different home from that which had sheltered him so well. The children were grouped about the door, only Wesley and Saint Anne daring to enter the room where poor Lucetta lay prone on the floor, looking so white and motionless that, for a moment, the newcomers believed that she was dead. [Pg 227]

Saint Anne lifted a quivering face toward them but could not speak, Wesley hid his face in his arm and blubbered audibly.

Then did all the little woman in Elsa’s nature respond to this sudden need.

“Lay Saint Augustine on that bench, where somebody must have slept. Help me to lift the lady to the bed. Don’t cry, little girl. She’ll soon be all right. It’s just a faint, I’m sure. I’ve fainted myself, often and often. I guess she’s overdone. Isn’t there a man here?”

“No, ma’am. Papa he comed home an’ Mamma she tol’ him how Sa—Saint Augustine had run away and he frew down his gun an’ all them games, an’—an’—just hollered out loud! ‘Oh! my God!’ an’ run off, too. Mamma was gone all night, lookin’ after little brother an’ when she heard papa say that she fell right down there and she don’t speak when we call her. Where’d you find him, our little brother? Was he down in Tony’s Eddy?”

Well, Gerald felt in that state when “anybody could knock him down with a feather.” He was obeying Elsa implicitly, already “proving” he had meant his promise. He felt such an access of manly strength that it was almost unaided he lifted Lucetta and laid her on the bed. In reality, she was already regaining consciousness, and slightly aided him herself. Then he ran to the spring and brought the “cold water—coldest you can find” which Elsa ordered, and lifted Mrs. Stillwell’s shoulders while the girl held the tin cup to her lips; and indeed did so many little things so deftly that he didn’t recognize himself. [Pg 228]

Even in her half-stupor Lucetta was her own sweet self, for when she had swallowed the water she smiled upon her nurse and tried to speak. Elsa anticipated what she knew would be the one great longing of that mother’s heart, and said with an answering smile:

“We’ve brought your little son safe home. If you can turn your head you’ll see. Right yonder on that bench. He’s tired out and, maybe, a little sick but he’s safe. Do you mean you want him right beside you?”

Lucetta made an effort to sit up and opened her arms.

“Lie right still. Don’t you fret for one moment. Here’s your baby. Now I’m going home and we’ll get a doctor some way and quick. But you won’t be alone. Gerald, whom you took care of when he was ill, is here. He’ll stay and take care of you in turn now. Good-bye. Don’t worry.”

She was gone before Gerald could even protest, calling the monkeys to follow her and limping away faster than anybody else, with two sound feet, could run. She had taken him at his word, indeed!

CHAPTER XV.

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IN THE HEART OF AN ANCIENT WOOD.

Deep in the heart of the September woods there was gathered one morning a little company of greatly excited people. Old Cap’n Jack was the wildest of the lot. Next him in point of eagerness was the Colonel. Corny Stillwell was there; so was his brother Wicky, who had come across country to see how now fared Lucetta, the “shiftless” wife of his “energetic” brother. Of late these terms had been exchanged in the minds of the Wickcliffe Stillwells, owing to various statements made them by their new friends, the “Water Lilies.” Being honest and warm-hearted they hadn’t hesitated to express their change of opinion; and it was a fact that though Lucetta Stillwell had never been so ill in her life she had never been so comfortable.

Lizzie, her sister-in-law, never allowed herself the extravagance of keeping “help;” but it was she who had hunted up a good old “Mammy” and established her in the lean-to of the

little cabin. She had bidden this good cook:

“See to it that Lucetty has nourishments continual, and do for mercy’s sake, feed them skinny childern till they get flesh on their bones! They’re a real disgrace to the neighborhood, the pinched way they look, and I shan’t set easy in meetin’ if I can’t think they’re fattened up right. You do the feedin’ and we-all’ll find you the stuff.”

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So on this special morning Lizzie had despatched her husband with a small wagonload of vegetables and poultry; and having left his load at the cabin, the sociable man had driven on to the Copse, to meet and inquire for the “Lilies.” Arrived at the boat, Aunt Betty had eagerly greeted him, explaining:

“You’re a man of sense and mighty welcome just now. Our people have gone actually daft over a dirty piece of paper and a few French words scribbled on it. The precious document belongs to the Colonel—Oh! yes, he’s here. He has been sometime. I think he means to tarry developments—that will never be. He’s infected all my family with his crazy notions and they’re off now on this wild-goose search for ‘buried treasure.’ I wish you’d go and warn them that they mustn’t trespass on private property, for I believe they’ll stop at nothing in their folly.”

“I’ve heered about that there ‘treasure.’ I ‘low more time’s been spent by fools lookin’ for it ‘an would ha’, arn’t ‘em a livin’. Sure. Yes ma’am, they has so. How many’s at it now, Mrs. Calvert?”

She laughingly counted upon her fingers:

“The Colonel; the Captain; old Ephraim; James, Melvin, Gerald. Nor could Mabel, Aurora, Dorothy—Oh! by no means least, Dorothy!—resist the temptation to follow. And if I’m not greatly mistaken, I saw Chloe sneaking through the underbush a little while ago, with Metty in hand. I’ve heard nothing but ‘buried treasure’ ever since Gerald blundered upon a fancied trail, coming home from his second stay at your brother’s. Elsa, here, hasn’t caught the fever. She’s the only one among us, I believe *hasn’t* caught the money fever, for I confess even I am curious to hear the outcome—absurd as I know it to be. Mrs. Bruce says nothing. She’s a wise woman who knows enough to set a check upon her lips—which you’ll see I don’t. So, if you’ll be kind enough to ‘light,’ as they say here, and try to keep my people out of mischief, I’ll consider it another proof of your friendship.”

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Farmer Wicky was flattered by the confidence which she had always reposed in him, and sided with her entirely.

“If I had any rights to any hid treasures, which I haven’t; and I expected to find it, which I don’t; I wouldn’t be the feller to go publish it broadcast this way. I’d keep it to myself an’ do my own diggin’; onless, course, I’d tell Lizzie. Why, Ma’am, Mrs. Calvert, I ‘low ‘t the hull state o’ Maryland’s been dug over, ten foot deep, from Pennsylvania to old Virginny, with the hull Eastern Sho’ flung in, a-lookin’ for what hain’t never been put there—‘ceptin’ them same shovels. Maybe that’s what makes our sile so rich an’ gives us our wonderful crops! Ha, ha, ha!”

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Aunt Betty was “ha, ha, ha-ing,” too, inwardly; for despite himself, a great eagerness had lighted the farmer’s face at mention of this last digging-excursion. As soon as he could do so he rose and hastily struck off into the woods.

She made her mirth audible as the branches closed behind him, exclaiming to Mrs. Bruce:

“There’s another one! I’m afraid I’m responsible for this last crack-brain; and—and—the disease is catching. I declare I’d like to pin up my skirts and travel the road the rest have taken! But I’ll read a little in Don Quixote, instead. I wonder when they’ll be back!”

Meanwhile, the trail was growing “hot” in the depth of that old forest, or grove. It was, indeed, part of a great private park known as “Cecilia’s Manor,” and it was the pride of its owners to keep it intact as it had come down to them.

Captain Jack held the floor, so to speak, with the less talkative but more deeply interested—if not excited—Colonel, occasionally interrupting and correcting.

“Yes, siree! We’ve struck the gulf-stream ‘at leads *di*-rect and straight, to the spot! Woods, says you? Here they be. Stream o’ water? There she flows! Ford an’ deers feedin’? Course, they’s the very identical! Tracks an’ all——”

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“Them’s cow tracks,” corrected farmer Wicky, while Corny laughed and nudged his brother to let the farce proceed.

“Well, now, mate, how d’ye *know* them’s cows’ tracks? You don’t *see* cows around, do ye? No, I don’t see cows, nuther; so, ‘cordin’ to ship’s law what you don’t know you can’t prove.

Ahem. Path? If this here we've come ain't a crooked-zig-zag I never stumped one. Here's a tree, been struck by lightin', 'pears like; a-holdin' out its arms to keep the hangin' vines on 'em, exactly like a cross. Or nigh exactly."

"Hold on, Cap'n Jack! In the map the zig-zag line stops at the tree. This one goes ever so much beyond."

The Captain glared round upon the audacious Cornwallis, who dared gibe at his assertions. Then standing as upright as he could, he shouted:

"Now face that way—North, ain't it? Right about—South! Yonder's East, an' t'other side's West. I allows I knows the p'int of the compass if I don't know nothin' else. I tell you, *this is the spot*. Right below our feet lies—lies—"

"The treasures of Golconda!" suggested the irreverent Corny. In the past he had held faith in this same "buried treasure," but now to see so many other people so earnestly interested in it, changed the whole aspect for him.

But the doughty Captain, self-constituted master of ceremonies disdained to notice the "Ne'er-do-well" of the countryside and in stentorian tones, with his hands trumpet-wise before his mouth, he bellowed:

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"Now, my hearties, dig! DIG!"

Each was armed with something to use, Jim had brought some of the engineering tools from the "Pad" and had distributed these among the boys. Ephraim had borrowed an old hoe from a farmer near by, Wicky had caught up a pick-axe from his own wagon—he had meant to leave it at his brother's cabin but forgot; Chloe had seized a carving knife, and the others had spoons, table knives, or whatever came handiest. Only the Colonel and the Captain were without implements of some sort. Even the jesting Corny had seized the fallen branch of a tree and broken its end into the semblance of a tool. It was he who first observed the idleness of the two men most interested, and slapping Cap'n Jack upon the shoulder, ordered:

"Dig, my hearty! DIG!"

"I—I'm a—a cripple!" answered the sailor, with offended dignity; "and don't you know, you Simple Simon, 't they always has to be a head to everything? Well, I 'low as how I'm the head to this here v'yage, an' I'll spend my energy officerin' this trip!"

Corny laughed. Now that all was well at his home in the fields he found the world the jolliest sort of place, and the "Lilies" the most interesting people in it. Then he turned upon the Colonel, sitting upon a soft hummock of weeds as near in shape to Billy's restful back as possible.

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"But, Cunnel, how 'bout you? I thought the 'treasure' was yours—in part, anyway. Why aren't you up and at it? 'Findings are keepings', you know. Up, man, and dig!"

The Colonel lifted sorrowful eyes to the jester's face, and murmured in his tired voice:

"I cayn't. I never could. I shouldn't find it if I did. They ain't no use. I couldn't. They won't. Nobody will. Not nigh *her*; not on My Lady Cecilia's Manor. I've known that all along. But I *had* to come. Something made me, I don't know what. But I had to. Corny Stillwell, do you know what day this is? Or ain't you no memory left in that rattle-pate o' you-all's? I don't suppose they is. Nobody remembers nothin'. Ah! hum."

Corny's face had sobered and he held out his hand in sympathy.

"Shake, old fellow! and look-a-here, haven't you held on to your grudge long enough? The Doc's a fine man if he is a mite greedy for the almighty dollar. Land of love! Aren't we all? Else why are we acting like such a parcel of idiots this minute! Get up, Cunnel. Get some energy into your tired old body and see how 'twill feel. At present, you're about as inspiring as a galvanized squash, and first you know your willing helpers'll quit. Come on. Let's strike off a bit deeper into the woods. Too many banging around the roots of that one old tree. First they know it'll be tumblin' over on 'em. Come on out of harm's way. You and I've been good friends ever since I used to go to the Manor House and flirt with—"

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"Hold on! Don't you dare to say that name to me, Corny, you fool! you ain't wuth your salt but I'd ruther it had been you than him. You clear out my sight. I ain't got no thoughts, I ain't got no memories—I—I—ain't got no little girl no more!"

The man's emotion was real. Tears rose to his faded eyes and rolled down over his gaunt cheeks; leaving, it must be admitted, some clean streaks there. Big-hearted, idle Corny couldn't endure this sight and was now doubly glad he had wandered to this place that day.

The Colonel was a gentleman, sadly discouraged and, in reality, almost heart-broken. His merry friend could remember him as something very different from now; when his attire was less careless, his face clean-shaven, the melancholy droop of his countenance less pronounced. He had always talked much as he did still but he had been, despite this fact, a proud and happy man. These strangers mustn't see the old planter weeping!

"Come."

The touch of the jester's hand was as gentle as Lucetta's own, as he now adroitly guided his old friend to a sheltered spot where none could see his face. Except—Well, Dorothy was quite near; harmlessly prodding away at the earth with Aunt Betty's best paperknife. Her digging was aimless, for her thoughts were no longer on her present task. They were so absorbed that she didn't hear the approach of the two men—nor of one other, yet unseen. Suddenly, the little steel blade of her implement struck with a ringing sound upon something metallic, and she paused in astonishment. Then bent to her work excitedly, wondering:

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"Is it—can it be I've—found—it—IT! Oh!—"

An unfamiliar voice suddenly interrupted her task, demanding:

"Girl! Why are you despoiling my property, trampling my choicest ferns, trespassing upon my private park?"

The paperknife went one way, Dorothy's red Tam another, as she sprang up to confront the most masterful looking woman she had ever seen. Tall as an Amazon, yet handsome as she was forbidding, she towered above the astonished child as if she would annihilate her.

"I—I couldn't do very much—with a paperknife, could I? I didn't know—I'm sorry, I'll plant them right back—I only did what the others said—Nobody warned me—us—"

"Us? Are there others then? Where? This is outrageous! Can't you read? Didn't you see the signs 'No Trespassing' everywhere? Where are the rest? This must be put a stop to—I wouldn't have had it happen for anything. My park—Eunice's precious playground, where she is safe and—Oh! I am so sorry, so sorry."

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The lady was in riding habit. A little way off stood a horse and beside it a tiny pony with a child upon its back. A groom was at the pony's side, apparently holding its small rider safe. The child's face peered out from a mass of waving hair, frail and very lovely, though now frightened by her own mother's loud tones.

These tones had roused others also. Wheeling about the lady faced Corny and the Colonel, slowly rising from the log where they had been resting. A moment she stared as if doubting the evidence of her own eyes, then her whole expression changed and springing forward she threw her strong arms about the trembling Colonel and drew his tired face to her shoulder.

"Oh! Daddy, Daddy! You have come home—you have come home at last. And on my wedding day! To make it a glorious day, indeed! Ten years since I have had a chance to kiss your dear old face, ten years lost out of a lifetime just because I married—*Jabb!*"

But now her strong, yet cultured voice, rang out in mirth, and Dorothy looked at her in amazement, almost believing she had found a crazy woman in these woods. Then Mr. Corny, as she called him, came to where she stood, observing, and gently pushed her back again upon the heap of ferns.

"Best not to notice. Best keep right on diggin'. That's Josie—I mean Josephine—Dillingham—*Jabb!* Her father intended her to marry into one of our oldest Maryland 'families' and she rebelled. Took up with *Jabb*, a son of the poorest white trash in the county, not a cent to his name—that's bad enough!—but more brains 'an all the 'first families' put together ever had. Made his way right straight up the ladder. Has a reputation greater outside Annyrunnell than in it. Only fault—likes money. Says he'll make a fortune yet will beat the 'aristocrats' into being proud of him. Says if he does have to leave his daughter the humble name of *Jabb* he'll pile money enough on top of it to make the world forget what's underneath. Says when she marries she shall never discard that name but always be 'of J'. Poor little child! Her parents adore her but all her father's skill and pride is powerless to straighten her poor little body. She's a hunchback, and though she doesn't mind that for herself she grieves over it for them. Oh! but this is a grand day! The Colonel will just idolize little Eunice—I want to fling up my hat and hurra!"

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All this information had been given in a whisper while Dorothy snuggled in the great fronds, and Mr. Stillwell crouched beside her, idly digging with the paperknife he had picked up, and trying to keep his presence hidden from these two chief actors in this

unexpected scene.

“Do you suppose it was really to find the ‘buried treasure’ the Colonel came? Or to—to make up friends with his daughter?” asked Dolly, softly. [Pg 240]

“Well—both, maybe. No matter why nor how—he’s here. They’ve met, and at heart are just as loving as they always were. It is a good day, the best anniversary Josie Dillingham ever had. Hark! What’s doing? Peep and see.”

“The lady has motioned that groom to lead the horses this way. Ah! isn’t that sweet? The little thing is holding out her arms to the Colonel as if she knew him and loved him already!”

“Reckon Josie’s taught her that. Joe always was a brick! Liked to rule the roost but with a heart as big as her body. She told my Lucetty ‘t she should teach little Eunice to know she had a grandpa somewhere and that he was the very best, dearest man alive; so that when they met, if they ever did, she wouldn’t be afraid but would take to him right away. Reckon her plan’s succeeded. Won’t Lucetty be glad about this!”

The groom was now leading the two horses through the woods, toward the Copse and the Water Lily. Both saddles were empty for little Eunice was in her grandfather’s arms and he stepping as proudly, almost as firmly, as the woman walking beside him.

“They—why—why—what have you done? Broken Aunt Betty’s paperknife of real Damascus steel! She says she knows it’s that because she bought it there herself, once when she went on a ‘round the world’ tour. She says it mayn’t be any better than other steel—reckon it isn’t, or it wouldn’t have broken that way. I ought not to have taken it but I was so excited, everybody was, I didn’t stop to think. What makes you look so queer, Mr. Corny? Aunt Betty won’t care, or she’ll blame me only. You—you most scare me!” [Pg 241]

Indeed, her companion was looking very “queer,” as she said. His eyes were glittering, his face was pale, his lips nervously working, and he was rapidly enlarging the hole her knife had made by using his bare hands.

Dorothy sprang to a little distance and then watched, fascinated. A suspicion of the truth set her own eyes shining and now she was scarcely surprised when the man stood up, holding a muddy box in his hand, and shouting in hilarious delight:

“Found! Found! After all, that old yarn was true! It’s the ‘buried treasure’, as sure as I’m alive! Hurra!”

Away he sped carrying the big box above his head and summoning all his fellow searchers to join him at the house-boat and behold.

Half-dazed by this success Dorothy picked up the discarded fragments of the paper cutter, and followed him. But even as she did so she wondered:

“Odd! That he can carry it so, on the very tips of his fingers, and so high up! I thought ‘buried treasure’ was always gold, and a box full of gold would be terrible heavy. Even two, three hundred dollars that Mr. Ford let me lift, out in California, weighed a lot!” [Pg 242]

But she shared to the full the excitement of all the company who now threw down their own tools to follow Corny with his joyous shouts:

“Come on! Come on, all! The ‘treasure’ is found!”

CHAPTER XVI.

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WHEN THE MONKEYS’ CAGE WAS CLEANED.

It was an eager company gathered in the big saloon of the Water Lily. No time had been lost by all these seekers after the “buried treasure” in obeying Farmer Corny’s summons to follow him; and having arrived at the boat, found the Colonel, his daughter, and grandchild already there.

The Colonel’s proud introduction of his newly restored family found a warm welcome at Aunt Betty’s hands, and she and the younger matron, members both of “first families,” were friends at once. As for little Eunice, who had always shrunk from the presence of strangers, there was no shrinking now. Her grandfather had set her down upon the floor, while he presented Mrs. Jabb—even deigning to call her by that name—and the little one had looked

about her in great curiosity.

Then she perceived Elsa, holding out entreating hands, and promptly ran to throw herself into the welcoming arms. Instantly there was sympathy between these two afflicted young things and, as a new sound fell upon the little one's ear, the elder girl explained:

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"The monkeys! Would you like to see the monkeys? Or would you be afraid?"

"Eunice never saw monkeys. What are monkeys? Are they people or just dear, dear animals?"

"They're not people, darling, though oddly like them. Come and see." Elsa was herself so shy in the presence of strangers, especially so majestic a person as the mistress of Lady Cecilia's Manor, that she was glad to escape to the tender where her charges were in their cage; and for once the little animals were docile while on exhibition, so that Eunice's delight was perfect. Indeed, she was so fascinated by them that she could scarcely be induced to leave them, and when she was compelled to do so by her mother's voice, she walked backward, keeping her eyes fixed upon those delectable creatures till the last instant.

Meanwhile those in the cabin of the Lily were merrily disputing over who should open the "find," and finally drew lots upon it. Careful Mrs. Bruce had brought a tray to put under the muddy box and brushed the dirt from it, till she was prevented by the hubbub of voices, in which that of the newcomer, Mrs. Jabb, was uppermost. She was exclaiming:

"The lot is Corny's! Oh! I'm glad of that, and I say right here and now that if I have any share in the 'treasure' I pass it onto him 'unsight, unseen,' as we used to say when, boy and girl together, we exchanged our small belongings."

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"Pooh! Joe, I don't half like it! But—shall I, folks? Looks as if the box would come to pieces at a breath."

"Yes, yes, you—you do it! And we ratify what Mrs. Jabb has said. Anyone of us who has a right to any of the contents of the 'treasure' he has found will pass it on to Mr. Cornwallis Stillwell," said Aunt Betty. "Dolly, hand him this little silver ice-hammer, to strike the chest with."

Laughingly, he received it and struck:

"The fatal blow! Be kind, oh! fate! to a frightened meddler in this mystery!"

The wooden box did fall apart, almost at that first stroke of the tiny hammer. It was extremely old and much decayed by its long burial in the ground, and had been held together only by the metallic bands which Dorothy's paperknife struck when she was digging among the ferns.

But there was a box within a box! The second one of brass and fastened by a hasp. A feeling of intense awe fell on all the company. This did look as if there had certainly been buried something of great value, and the impression was deepened when Corny lifted the inner receptacle with reverence, remarking:

"It's very light—not very large—it might contain precious stones—diamonds, do you think? I declare, I'd rather somebody else would do it. You, Colonel, please."

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"No, no. Ah! hum. I've something far more precious 'an any diamond in my arms this minute. I don't give that up for any old box!" and so declining he rubbed his face against Eunice's soft cheek and laughed when she protested against its roughness.

Every head was bent to see and all were urging haste, so that no further time was wasted. Undoing the fastening and lifting the lid of this inner "shrine" there lay revealed—What?

Nobody comprehended just what until the man held up the half-bright, half-tarnished metal image of a "Fool's Head," as pictured in old prints.

Then the laughter burst forth at this ancient jest coming home so aptly to the modern jester who had unearthed it.

"Maybe there's something inside! Maybe that's only an odd-shaped box to deceive folks. Maybe—do, do, look inside!"

"Do that yourself, Miss Dolly. Remember it was you who first found the 'treasure!'" returned Mr. Stillwell and merrily passed it on to her.

She didn't hesitate. In a twinkling her fingers had discovered where a lid was fitted on and had lifted it. There was something in the box after all! A closely folded bit of paper—No,

parchment—on which was writing. This wasn't in French as the map had been inscribed, but in quaintly formed, old-fashioned characters, and the legend was this:

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“Who hides his money in the earth
Is but a fool, whate'er his birth;
And he who tries to dig it thence
Expecting pounds, should find but
pence.
The hider is but half a wit,
The seeker's brains are smaller
yet,
For who to chance his labor sells
Is only fit for cap and bells.”

“Take my share of this wonderful ‘treasure’,” cried Mrs. Jabb, when the momentary silence following the reading of this rhyme had been broken by Corny's laughter.

“And mine!” “And mine!” “And mine, for my great-great-grandfather's sister was—How was that, dear Colonel? About our great-great-grandmother's—father's—relationship? Well, I know one thing, I'll never believe in any such foolishness again! *I* never did really, you know, I only—”

“Oh! nonsense, Dolly! A girl who is so interested she catches up a paperknife—” reproved Aurora, who had herself ruined a table knife.

“Aunt Betty, that's true! I did break it—I mean—”

“I did that, Madam, and I fear I can never travel to Damascus to fetch you another; but what I can do I will do. Vote of the company! Attention, please! Does not this quaint old ‘cap and bells’ belong of right to Mrs. Calvert?” demanded and explained Cornwallis Stillwell holding the little metal head in the air.

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“No, no, to you! to you!”

To Dorothy, the most amusing feature of the whole affair was the earnestness with which each and every one of them denied that they had ever had any faith in the old tradition.

“*I* only went along to—for fun!” stoutly declared Gerald; and so calmly stated all the rest. Even the old Captain rubbed his bald spot till it shone, while tears of laughter sparkled behind his “specs;” and some were there, looking upon this “nigh useless old hull,” as he called himself, who felt that the expedition had not failed since he could find so much enjoyment from it.

As for Mrs. Josephine, her face was transformed with the happiness of that morning's reunion with her father and it needed but one thing to make her joy perfect.

“Oh! Daddy, if only the Doctor were here! But it's only a little delay, for of course, you're going home with me to the Manor House now, to stay forever and a day. Say, Daddy dear? How's farming? And oh! where, how is Billy?”

The Colonel was actually smiling. Nay, more, was laughing! for as if he had heard himself inquired for, old Billy answered in his loudest bray—“Ah! umph! A-a-a-ao-o-m-p-h!”

Then into that merry company came running again little Eunice, who had for a moment slipped away with Elsa. In her little hand she held Joan's chain, while with a saucy glance around Jocko sat grinning upon Elsa's shoulder.

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“I beg pardon, but she will not leave them, lady. I never saw anybody so pleased with monkeys as she is, and not one mite afraid. That's more than some of us can say:” sweetly apologized Elsa, with a mischievous glance toward Aurora who had gathered up her skirts and mounted a chair.

“Mamma! I want the monkeys! The lovely monkeys! I do, I do! Don't you know? Don't you 'member? Always you told me I should have anything I wanted that day when Grandpa comes, anything—any single thing. You wouldn't like to tell a wrong story, would you, Mamma dear? Because he's comed—this is the day—and what Eunice wants is the lovely, lovely monkeys! Buy 'em for me, Mamma darling! Grandpa, make her!” pleaded the child, for once wholly forgetful that she was displaying her deformity to all these people, and running from her mother back to the Colonel.

With a return of his usual sadness, he lifted her and kissed her, then set her gently down, saying:

“Honey, I cayn't. I never could. Ah! hum, she was a deal younger 'n you when she took the

reins into her hands an' begun drivin' for herself. I cayn't help ye, sweetheart, but I'd give— [Pg 250]
give—even Billy if she'd do what you want.”

“Oh! Colonel, you can't give again what you've already given! Billy—”

“No, Miss Dorothy, there you're mistook! Billy wouldn't be give, he wasn't accepted, he—
Honey sweetness, Grandpa cayn't!”

“Are those monkeys for sale?” asked Mrs. Jabb.

Aurora looked at Gerald and Gerald nudged Melvin. Here was a solution to their own dilemma—“what shall we do with the monks?” So being thus urged, as he supposed, by his partner in trade, Melvin promptly answered:

“No, Mrs. Jabb, they aren't for sale. But if this little girl would like to have them we are delighted to make her a present of them, don't you know? Just—*delighted.*”

The lady was going to say she couldn't accept so valuable a gift and would prefer to buy them, but just then a groan he couldn't subdue escaped the disappointed Gerald and she felt that he was selfish and should be punished. Of course, anybody rich enough to idle away a whole autumn, house-boating, could afford to give a half-share in a pair of monkeys to a crippled child. But in her judgment she did poor Gerry an injustice. His groan would have been a cry of rejoicing that his deal in monkeys was to be taken off his hands had not Jim, at that instant, given him a kick under the table with a too forcible sympathy. [Pg 251]

“Very well. But how does a person transport monkeys?” asked the doctor's wife, while Eunice danced about the cabin in great glee.

“Oh! they have a cage. A real nice cage, but I'd like to give it a good cleaning before it's taken away,” said Elsa.

“Would that take long? I'd like to send for it as soon as we get home. Eunice so seldom cares about any new toy I'm anxious to please her while the idea *is* new.”

“Not long, I'll be real quick. Would you like to come and see it done, Eunice?”

“Oh! yes, I want, I want!”

Then it suddenly developed that all the young folks “wanted,” even Aurora. Now that they were to part company with the simians the curious creatures became at once more interesting than ever before. So they gathered about the wooden cage, some helping, some suggesting, and Dorothy seconding Elsa in the statement:

“If they're to belong to this lovely child not a speck of dirt must be left. I've not taken out that sliding bottom of the cage but once, it fits too tight, and you'd have laughed to see how the dear pets watched me. Ugh! It *does* stick—dreadfully!” said Elsa, wrestling with the wooden slide.

“Here, girlie! Let me! You just keep the wretched beasts out of reach of me. I ought to help [Pg 252]
in this and you'll hurt your hands. Let me, Elsa!”

As Gerald spoke he gave a strong pull on the false bottom and it yielded with a suddenness that sent him sprawling. But it wasn't his mishap that caused that surprised cry from Elsa, nor the angry, answering one of the now excited monkeys. It was all she could do to prevent their springing upon Gerald who had so interfered with their belongings. For between the false and real bottoms of their cage was a considerable space; and in some ingenious fashion they had stored there all their cherished possessions—as well as those of their human neighbors. Missing thimbles, a plume from Chloe's hat, Metty's pen knife, thread, nails, buttons—anything and everything that had been missed and had captivated their apish fancy.

Elsa and Dorothy made a thorough search, compelling by their ridicule the “timid boys” to keep the animals off while they did so; and it was then that one more “mystery” was solved, one more miserable anxiety and suspicion laid to rest.

“Our money! Our money! It was they who 'stole' it, and gave us all our trouble! Oh! Mrs. Bruce, this is the most wonderful day ever was! I'm so excited I can hardly breathe—the money's found—the money's found!”

“My! But I'm glad! Does seem as if some wonderful things has happened this day, just as you say. So many 't I'm getting real nervous. I hope nothing more will till I get over this. We said 'twas to be a 'rest,' this trip, and I haven't never had so many upsets in the same length o' time before. Land of love! What next? There's wheels coming down the road and nobody's been to get in provision, if it happens to be company to dinner. Mrs. Calvert hasn't [Pg 253]

much sense that way. Seems sometimes as if she'd like to ask all creation to meals without regard to victuals. Peek under that tree. Can you see? Don't it appear like the doctor's rig? It is! And there's a man with him—*two men!* As sure as preaching I'll warrant you your Aunt Betty'll ask these folks to dinner!"

Dorothy obediently "peeked." Then stood up and rubbed her eyes. Then peeked once more and with a wild cry of delight bounded over the gang-plank to the bank beyond, straight into the arms of a gray, vigorous old man, whose coming was the most wonderful event of all that day's strange happenings.

CHAPTER XVII.

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CONCLUSION.

"Uncle Seth! Oh! is it you—truly—really—you darling Uncle Seth? Now, indeed, this is the most wonderful day in all my life! I am so glad—so glad!"

"Same little, dear, enthusiastic Dorothy! Well, my child, I reckon I'm as glad as you. But have you no greeting for your old acquaintance, Mr. Stinson? or a 'Howdy' for the doctor? He and I are old friends, let me tell you. I've known him since he was a mighty small boy."

Dorothy released Mr. Winters and made her pretty obeisance to the gentlemen with him, while the good doctor added to his friend's statement:

"Yes, indeed, since I was big enough to walk alone. It was he who taught me my letters, sent me to school at his own expense, gave me my start in life. What I don't owe your grand 'Uncle Seth' couldn't be told. But, hello! What's up? Josephine? Eunice? So they've at last called upon my house-boat friends, have they? And—my eyes!"

As the three newcomers stepped to the ground and started across the gang-plank, the doctor did, indeed, rub his eyes and stare. He had not forgotten that this was the tenth anniversary of his wedding and knew that his wife would prepare some pleasant surprise for him, after her custom of celebrating, but he was more than surprised this time to see his father-in-law standing on the little deck, holding Eunice in his arms and—yes, actually smiling! But the physician was a man of few words. Shaking the Colonel's hand in the most ordinary fashion he said: "Good morning, father;" and in that brief salutation the alienation of ten years was bridged, and was never referred to again by either side.

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"Well, Cousin Seth. Better late than never;" was Aunt Betty's characteristic greeting of her most trusted friend. But the light of relief that spread over her lovely old face was more eloquent than words.

Five minutes later, the doctor's party had gone. Mrs. Calvert did just what Mrs. Bruce had prophesied she would—invited them all to dinner, but the invitation was declined.

"Our anniversary, you know. Cook has a grand dinner waiting for us at home and it wouldn't do to disappoint her. Father, you get in with the doctor. Eunice and I will ride close behind. And look here, Wicky Stillwell! What's to hinder you two boys, you and Corny, following along in your wagon yonder with the monkeys' cage? You can share our fine fixings, just as we used when we were little and you ran away from home to 'Joe's,' whenever there were 'doings' at the Manor House. Oh! I'm so happy! I feel like a little girl again and just be dear good little boys and come. Will you?"

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Of course they went. Mrs. Josephine had a way of getting her will of other people, and this time it was a relief even to hospitable Aunt Betty to have only her own family about her. When the rumble of wheels had died away she called Mr. Winters from his inspection of the Water Lily and bade him:

"Give an account of yourself, please. Why haven't you come before and why have you come now? Come everybody, come and listen. Let dinner wait till we learn what news this man has in his budget."

So they gathered about him while he explained:

"I wanted to come at the very beginning of the trip but, also, I wanted to see what my Dorothy would do with her 'elephant' of a house-boat. Engineer Stinson, here, wrote me about the breaking of the engine and your plans for a simpler outing because of it. I tried to get him to come back to you and take the job in hand but he had other engagements and couldn't then. So I reasoned that it wouldn't do any of you a bit of harm to live thus quietly

for a few weeks, till he was at liberty. He is now and has come, bringing all the necessary stuff to work with as far as Jimpson's. [Pg 257]

"To make a long story short: I propose; 'everybody willing and nobody saying no,' as Dolly used to premise in making her plans, to pole back there; to get the engine into first-class order; and then to take a real cruise in this beautiful Water Lily all down this side the Bay and up along the Eastern Sho'. Cousin Betty shall visit her beloved Severn; we'll see the middies at Annapolis; touch here and there at the historic points; do anything, in fact, that anybody most desires. For, by and by, these idle days must give place to days of discipline, when our small hostess, here, will resume her education in the faraway northland of Canada. What will befall her there? Ah! well. That we must wait to learn from time, and from the forthcoming story of ['Dorothy at Oak Knowe.'](#)

"Meanwhile, the autumn is at its best. October on the old Chesapeake is just glorious, with occasional storms thrown in to make us grateful for this safe, snug little craft. Mr. Stinson says he wouldn't be afraid to trust it on the Atlantic, even, but we'll not do that. We'll just simply fill these remaining days of Dorothy's vacation with the—time of our lives! All in favor, say Aye. Contrary—no."

As he finished the "Learned Blacksmith" drew his beloved ward to his side and looked into her sparkling eyes, asking:

"Well, Dolly Doodles, what say?"

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"Aye, aye, aye!"

"Aye, aye, aye!" rose almost deafening from every throat.

"Then, Mrs. Bruce, since all that is settled bid Chloe get to work and give these travelers the very best dinner ever cooked in our little galley," said Mrs. Calvert, in her gayest manner.

Yet as she spoke, her eyes rested lovingly upon the beautiful Copse and the sadness which any parting brings to the old fell upon her. Till cheerful old Seth, her lifelong friend, sat down beside her, with Dorothy snuggling to him and talked as only he could talk—always of the future, rarely of the past.

"Look ahead—lend a hand."

They were to do that still. And in this "look ahead" Dorothy was asked:

"What shall you do with the Water Lily, when this year's cruise is over?"

"Is it really, truly mine, to do with exactly as I want?"

"Surely, child, your Uncle Seth isn't an 'Injun giver'!" he answered, smiling.

"Then I want to make it over to somebody, whoever's best, for the use of poor, or crippled, or unhappy children and folks. Darling Elsa said in the beginning it would be 'a cruise of loving kindness' and seems if it had been. I don't mean me—not anything I've had a chance to do—only the way you've always showed me about 'leadings' and 'links in the chain of life' you know. So many such beautiful things have happened beside all the funny ones. The Stillwells finding out about each other, and Mr. Corny 'turning over a new leaf' to take better care of his folks; Gerald and Aurora learning to be gentle to everybody; those Manor House people making up; and darling Elsa growing happy, just like other girls. None of these things would have happened if the dear old Water Lily hadn't brought them all together. I'd like Elsa and her father to be the real heads of it, with that sweet Lucetta and her babies next. They should keep it just for charity, or goodness—to whoever needs that! What do you say? Aunt Betty, Uncle Seth?"

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What could they say but most heartily commend this unselfish wish. This approval made Dorothy so glad and gave her so much to think about that she almost forgot to be sorry when she took her last glance at beloved Deer-Copse upon the Ottawotta.

"Look ahead."

It was all still to come; the fine trip which Mr. Seth had planned and the joyful return home; the bestowal of the house-boat for its winter's rest; a little time of preparation; and then the new life at Oak Knowe, the great school in the north which was to mark the next change in Dorothy's happy life.

Swiftly the future becomes the present, then the past; and it seemed to all the voyagers upon the Water Lily that they had hardly sailed away from Halcyon Point, to begin their eventful trip, than they were sailing up to it again, whistle blowing, flags flying, and every

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soul on board, from Aunt Betty down to little Metty, singing with all fervor:

“Home, sweet, sweet Home!
Be it ever so humble—there’s no
place like
home.”

THE END.

TRANSCRIBER’S NOTE:

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