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by Carolyn Wells**

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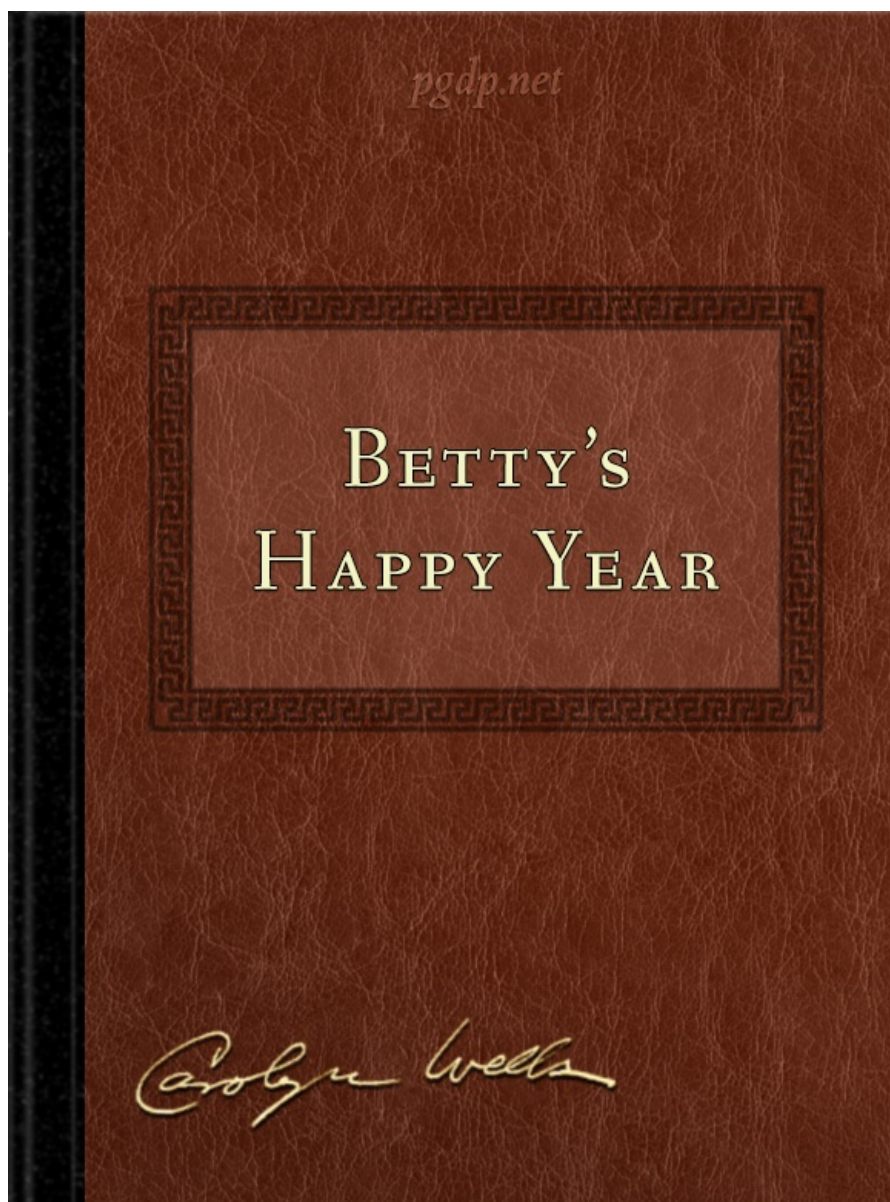
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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK BETTY'S HAPPY YEAR ***





BETTY DREW CLOSER TO HER MOTHER'S
SIDE AS SHE STOOD SPEECHLESS BEFORE
THE BEAUTIFUL TREE

BETTY'S HAPPY YEAR

BY
CAROLYN WELLS
Author of "The Story of Betty," etc.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY
REGINALD B. BIRCH



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BETTY'S HAPPY YEAR

I A THANKSGIVING GUEST

"What a gorgeous day for a sleigh-ride! Did you ever see such sunny, twinkling snow, and such crisp, crackly air? It fairly snaps off as you breathe it!"

Betty McGuire stood on the steps of the veranda as she spoke. Her mother, in the doorway, was smiling down at her, and her pony, Dixie, was jingling his bells and pawing at the snow and ice in the driveway below.

It was the first trial of the pretty new cutter, and the joyous excitement of the occasion made Betty's cheeks as red as her scarlet tam-o'-shanter cap, or her red cloth coat with its high fur collar. Betty drew on her driving-gloves, still talking to her mother.

"Isn't it a darling sleigh, Mother? Did you ever see such a pretty one? And Dixie is so proud of it."

"It's a beauty, Betty. I know you'll enjoy it. Are you taking Tilly for a ride?"

"No; I'm going for May Fordham to-day. We're planning for the party, you know. I'll take Tilly some other day."

"Very well; be home by sundown, won't you?"

"Yes; or very soon after. All right, Pete."

The face of the big Irishman beamed with pleasure as he assisted Betty into the new sleigh and tucked the fur robe round her.

"'Tis a foine turnout, Miss Betty," he said; "an'

mosht becomin' to Dixie,—the proud little baste!"

"He is proud of it," agreed Betty, as she gathered up the lines. "He's just vain enough to love those silver bells jingling about him. Good-by, Mother."

"Good-by, darling," said Mrs. McGuire, and after watching Betty disappear down the winding drive, she returned to the house.

Denniston Hall, though a beautiful summer place, was equally attractive in winter. Then the wide front veranda was inclosed with glass, and, heated by an arrangement of steam-pipes, made a delightful sun-parlor. The house was of the old-fashioned type that has two front doors opening into two large halls.

Large parlors between these halls and a wing on either side, provided numerous rooms, and several of these boasted wide fireplaces where crackling logs blazed gaily or smoldered comfortably, as occasion required.

The family at Denniston was a rather unusual one. The place belonged to Betty, the fifteen-year-old daughter, who had recently inherited a large fortune from her Grandfather McGuire.

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She had supposed herself an orphan, but after buying her home and establishing herself there, she had discovered that her mother was living, and, to their mutual delight, they were at last brought together. Mrs. McGuire had come to Denniston to live with Betty and was more than willing to accept also Betty's adopted brother, Jack, and the three-year-old baby, Polly.

And now, though Mrs. McGuire was nominally head of the household, yet, as the details of housekeeping were looked after by capable Mrs. Kinsey, Betty's mother had little to do except to enjoy the reunion with her long-lost child. As for Betty, now that her mother was restored to her, there seemed to be no flaw in her happiness, and the merry girl danced gaily through life, like a ray of glad sunshine.

Unused to advice or restraint of any sort, she could not at once accustom herself to asking her mother's permission for anything, but Mrs. McGuire appreciated the unusual circumstances, and wisely concluded to bide her time, and establish their rightful relationship by degrees.

Moreover, she was so happy herself, at the reunion with her idolized child, whom she had lost as a tiny baby, that she had no wish to dictate or to interfere with Betty's plans. Mrs. McGuire was a gentle little lady, with golden hair and blue eyes, and her amiability made her beloved by all the servants and adored by the three children. She had fitted into her niche at Denniston without disturbing any one else, and had supplied the one want of Betty's life, that of a real mother, who would love her with real mother-love. And happy in the knowledge and possession of this love, Betty felt that life had no further joys to offer her; and she was as contented as any girl of fifteen could wish to be.

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On this particular sunny afternoon, as she went skimming along the white roads in her new

sleigh, her mind was divided between the actual delights of the bracing winter atmosphere and gay jingle of her new sleigh-bells, and her busy imagination which was looking forward to some fine plans that she and May Fordham had in prospect. She drove in through the open gates of a large, well-kept place, and as she neared the house, May, who had watched from the window, came out, all ready for the sleigh-ride.

"Oh, Betty, what a beautiful cutter!" she exclaimed, as Dixie paused and stood in prancing attitude to be praised. "And it suits Dix perfectly, doesn't it?" she added, patting the pony, who showed by his actions that he fully appreciated the applause he was getting.

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"OH, BETTY, WHAT A BEAUTIFUL CUTTER!"
MAY EXCLAIMED

May jumped in beside Betty, and in another moment, away they went, flying along the firm, well-packed road. Betty turned away from the village, and toward the open country, where they might dash over long stretches without meeting much traffic, and thus have a better chance to chatter.

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"Thanksgiving's only just a week from to-day," said May; "will there be time, Betty, to get everything ready?"

"Well, we'll have to fly round, of course. But if we invite everybody to-day, they can all get to work on their costumes at once. And a week's time enough, I should think. I hope Tilly will like the idea, but I don't know about her,—she's such a fuss."

"We'll soon know," laughed May, as Dixie was gently drawn to a standstill in front of Tilly Fenn's home.

The well-trained little pony always stood without being tied, so the girls jumped from the sleigh and ran up the steps, moderating their gay laughter as they decorously pushed the door-bell.

"Come up to my room, girls," called Tilly, over the banister, as they were admitted.

So in a few moments the three chums were busily talking of Betty's project.

"A real old-fashioned Thanksgiving party," said Betty, enthusiastically; "everything Puritan, you know. We'll all wear plain gray dresses and white fichus and aprons, and dear little Puritan caps, and the boys must rig up the right kind of clothes. What did men wear then?"

"Oh, knee-breeches and long stockings, and bunches of bows at the knees," said May, who was a history lover.

"Yes, and broad white collars, and sort of Norfolk jackets, and broad-brimmed hats," added Tilly.

"With a feather?" suggested Betty.

"Oh, no; not a feather,—I think,—that isn't Puritanish. But a buckle,—I think,—well, anyway we can look up pictures, and see."

"Yes," agreed Betty, "and I'll fix up Jack's clothes. Mother'll help me. Then we'll have the feast of the real old-timey kind. Baked beans, you know,—and doughnuts, and cider,—"

"And pumpkin-pies,—"

"And nuts and gingerbread;—it will be lovely!"

"Well, I like it," said Tilly, a little hesitatingly, "but I don't know about a dress. Aunt won't help me,—I'm sure;—and I simply can't make one myself."

"I'll help you," said Betty, "and I'm sure Mother'll make you one, if you can't get one any other way. But perhaps you could borrow one. The old Adams ladies have lots of old-fashioned clothes."

"Yes, maybe I could," and Tilly's eyes brightened at this way out of her difficulty. "And I can make brown bread for the feast. That's old-fashioned."

"Oh, I'll provide all the supper," said Betty, "because it's my party. And afterward, we'll have old-fashioned dances, with a fiddler to call out the figures."

"I don't believe the Puritans danced," said Tilly.

Betty's face fell. "Well, I don't care to keep it too Puritanic," she said. "We'll just have it as old-fashioned as we like, and have the rest any way we want it."

"Yes, that's the best," said May.

"But your table must look old-fashioned,—with candles, you know; Aunt'll lend you her old brass candlesticks if you want them."

"Yes, I do; and I know where I can borrow some old blue dishes and pewter platters."

"Oh, it will be lovely fun!" sighed May. "How many are you going to ask?"

"About twenty. I don't believe Jack will care much about dressing up—he hates it; but I'll coax him to. Well, come on, May, we must go and invite the others. Don't worry about your dress, Tilly. If you can't borrow one, Mother and I will fit you out."

"Thanks. You're a dear, Betty; I wish you'd let me make brown bread for you, though. I can

make it to perfection.”

“I’ll tell you what, Betty,” said May, “why don’t you have a sort of ‘Harvest Home.’ They’re lovely and picturesque. You make a great big pile of things like cabbages and pumpkins and potatoes, and decorate it with corn husks and things; and then, don’t you see, we can all bring something for it, and afterward we can give the eatables to the poor people in ‘The Hollow.’ And Tilly can donate some brown bread to them, too.”

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“That’s a fine idea,” said Betty; “we’ll ask everybody to bring something for the Harvest Home, and then the next day we can all make the round of The Hollow in the big box-sleigh.”

“Yes, I know some families down there who would be more than glad to get things like that,” said Tilly.

“And well may anybody be glad to get the good bread you make,” said Betty. “I’m coming tomorrow, Tilly, to take you for a ride in my new sleigh, and then we can talk about your dress for the party and other things to be done.”

Gay good-bys were said, and the two girls went jingling away in the sleigh again.

Tilly was not so happily situated in life as Betty and May. She lived with an aunt who, though she took good care of her, was not very sympathetic in the matter of young people’s pleasures, and taught Tilly to sew and to make bread, because she considered such things the important part of a girl’s education. And she was right enough in that, if she had only realized that a girl of fifteen wants and needs her share of fun as well as of useful knowledge.

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“HELLO, GIRLS,” HE CALLED, AS HIS SMILING FACE APPEARED IN THE DOORWAY

Moreover, Mrs. Fenn was not wealthy, and though she had had sufficient means for comfort, she was economical by nature, and would have considered a purchase of a dress for Tilly to wear just for one occasion, a reckless extravagance.

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But in spite of her aunt’s restrictions, Tilly was a very gay and merry girl, and was always one of the half dozen that composed Betty’s little clan of friends.

“I don’t believe the boys will dress up,” said May, as they drove back to the village to deliver more invitations.

“Then they can stay home,” said Betty, promptly. “It’s going to be a lovely party if everybody takes interest in it, and those who don’t take an interest aren’t wanted. Now, we’ll go to Agnes Graham’s, and see what she and Stub say about it.”

Agnes said yes at once, and declared that she could fix up a dress as easily as anything. “Come in, Stub,” she called to her brother who was in the next room; “somebody wants to see you.”

Stub Graham was so nicknamed because he was the thinnest and scrawniest boy you ever saw. He was very tall for his age, and the name of Stub or Stubby was so comical that it pleased his friends to use it.

“Hello, girls,” he called, as his smiling face

appeared in the doorway. "What, Betty, a party? Will I come? Well, I should say so! When is it to be?"

Stub festooned his length along a sofa and gave a brotherly tweak to Agnes's long, thick pigtail.

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"On Thanksgiving night," said Betty, and then she told him what kind of a party it was to be.

"Gay!" exclaimed Stub. "Of course I'll get up a rig. Sweet little sister will help me, and I'll be a regular Miles Standish or somebody like that. May I wear a cloak, I mean a golfcapey thing? I think they wore those in Puritan days, with a dinky white collar, like Fauntleroy's only without lace on it."

"Good for you, Stub!" cried Betty. "You have just the right ideas! Can't you help the other boys,— if they need help?"

"Sure! I'll get them all together, and if they don't learn quickly enough, I'll be a dressmaker to 'em. And I'll help you fix your show, Betty. You ought to have strings of red peppers and onions hung across overhead."

"Oh, do help me, Stub! Won't you and Agnes come over in the morning, and help me do those things? Oh, *won't* we have fun!"

After that it was easy. Very few of the girls they invited made any objection to wearing the Puritan costume, and if the boys objected, as some did, they were referred to Stub Graham, who soon changed their minds for them.

"It's going to be perfectly beautiful, Mother!" said Betty, as, after dinner that evening, she sat on a low stool at her mother's side.

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This was Betty's favorite position, for, though a big girl, she loved to cuddle against her mother and caress her pretty hand, or play with the laces and ribbons of her dainty gown. And now, in their beautiful drawing-room at Denniston, they sat before the big open fire, while Betty told about the party.

Jack, who lounged in a big chair on the other side of the fireplace, was greatly interested. To Betty's surprise he was entirely willing to wear a Puritan costume, though he observed, incidentally, he'd rather dress as an Indian, and Indians were quite as appropriate to the period as Puritans.

"But they didn't attend the Thanksgiving feasts," said Betty; "they lurked in the ambushes; so if you want to do that, all right."

"Ho!" cried Jack, "I believe you think an ambush is a kind of a shrub!"

"It is, isn't it, Mother?" asked Betty, turning her big dark eyes confidingly to her mother's loving face.

"No, my girlie, that's one of your funny mistakes. But you're right about the Indians not joining with the Puritans at table; at least, they didn't often do so."

Both Betty and Jack had been deprived of early education, and though they were now studying very hard in a brave endeavor to "catch up" to

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other children of their own age, they frequently made errors which were quite funny enough to make any one smile.

So Jack good-naturedly explained to Betty about Indians in ambush, which was a subject he had quite thoroughly studied in his history lessons.

"And if I can't be an Indian," he went on, "I'll be a Puritan gentleman. Grandma Jean will make my toggery; I'll tell her just how, and I'll make you proud of me, Betty."

Grandma Jean was Mrs. Kinsey, the housekeeper and general assistant to the children, whenever they needed her capable aid.

"And what shall I wear, Mother?" asked Betty, draping the soft frills of her mother's trailing gown across her own slippered feet.

"I think you'll have to be the 'Puritan maiden, Priscilla,' though you're far from the right type. Your dark curls, dancing eyes, and red cheeks ought to be pale, fair hair in smooth bands, and a pale face with meek eyes."

"Ho!" laughed Jack, "you're not very Puritanic, are you, Betty? But you'll look all right in a cap, I'm sure."

"I think I'll make you a dress of gray silk," went on Mrs. McGuire; "with a soft mull fichu crossed on your breast, and a starched cap, turned back in Puritan fashion."

"I like red," observed Betty, looking down at her own red cashmere frock with black velvet bows on it.

"But not for Puritan attire," said her mother, smiling. "I'll fix your costume, Betty, and you must promise not to slip up-stairs and add a red sash at the last minute."

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Betty's fondness for bright colors, and especially red, was a household word, and Mrs. McGuire fancied that the novelty of plain dove-gray and white would not be unbecoming to rosy-cheeked Betty.

For the next few days nothing was talked of but the old-fashioned party.

Pete was consulted about the Harvest Home part of it, and he suggested that an old flower stand which was out in the tool house should be painted up, and put in one end of the dining-room to hold the donations of fruits and vegetables.

Then, by adding a few vines and flowers, it could be made an attractive decoration.

"Fine!" cried Betty. "That'll be just the thing! We can put pumpkins and cabbages down below, and apples and potatoes in the upper shelves, and trail vines over them all."

Ellen, the cook, was quite willing to make all sorts of goodies that were deemed appropriate, and to the lists of baked beans and gingerbread, were added such satisfactory dishes as roast turkey and pumpkin-pie.

But no ice-cream or dainty salads or bonbons were allowed, for Betty wanted to keep the real

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atmosphere of a plain old-fashioned Puritan Thanksgiving.

Preparations went busily on, until on Tuesday a letter came from Grandfather Irving.

He was the father of Mrs. McGuire, and lived in Boston. Both Mr. and Mrs. Irving had been invited long ago to spend Thanksgiving at Denniston, but had declined because of another engagement.

Now, Mr. Irving wrote, the other engagement had been canceled, and they were greatly pleased to say they could go to Denniston after all. Moreover, he announced, they would bring with them a charming young lady who was visiting them.

"She is an English girl," Mr. Irving wrote, "Miss Evangeline Maxwell. As she is sixteen years old, she will prove a delightful companion for Betty, and I am glad to show her such an attractive portion of our country, as I am sure Denniston must be. She has never visited America before, and though she finds some of our ways strange, she tries to adapt herself to them. We will arrive on Wednesday afternoon about four o'clock."

Betty read this letter with dismay. Mr. and Mrs. Irving were of an old and aristocratic Boston family, and Betty rather stood in awe of them. They had not yet been to Denniston, but Betty had made a brief visit to their Boston home.

The somewhat oppressive grandeur of the great house on Commonwealth Avenue made a strong impression on simple-minded Betty, and she had determined that when Mr. and Mrs. Irving should visit her at Denniston she would do all in her power to surround them with the careful formality they seemed to enjoy.

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So when she learned that on the very next day not only Mr. and Mrs. Irving would arrive, but also a strange young lady from England, Betty wished she had more time for preparation.

It was in vain that Mrs. McGuire told her that her grandparents were not at all exacting.

"Why, Betty," she said, "Mother and Father and I used to spend our summers down in that old country house of the Rosses', and do you suppose there was much form or ceremony there?"

But Betty was not to be turned aside from her purpose.

"I'd be ashamed not to do the right honor by my grandfather and grandmother," she said. "And it's not but what my home is good enough, and my ways of living, but I must not have the foolish party I was going to have. I must have a fine and bountiful Thanksgiving dinner, with soups and fancy ice-creams and things with French names to 'em. I'd not set before them the baked beans and pumpkin-pies, at all. And I'd not have a rollickin' crowd of boys and girls dressed up in the silly rags we're thinkin' of!"

It was only when Betty grew very much excited that she neglected her final g's and *almost* relapsed into her long-discarded Irish accent. But she was so earnest in this matter, that she

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lost control of her tongue.

"An' I'd think shame for the stylish English girl to see such cuttin's up, so I would! They're all right for us Greenborough girls as likes 'em; but the fine young lady shall find accommodations more to her taste, that I'm bound!"

And so what did impulsive Betty do but jump into her little sleigh, and fly round the village, recalling her invitations to a Puritan Thanksgiving feast, and asking the young people to come instead to a dance in the evening, and to wear their prettiest and most correct party frocks. Then she consulted with her mother and Ellen and Mrs. Kinsey, and among them they planned a dinner that would have pleased the most fastidious diners-out in any city. Betty did not herself know the names of the dishes she wanted served, but the services of a competent caterer were to be assisted by the skilled work of the home servants, and Betty felt that she had done the best she could to honor her relatives with a Thanksgiving feast.

Mrs. McGuire tried to persuade her not to give up the Puritan party, but Betty was firm.

"No," she said, with snapping eyes; "I'll not have the English young lady making fun of our country games. I'll give her as good as she has in her own country, and I'll do the best I can for my grandparents as well."

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"Well, I think it's a shame!" declared Jack. "Here I've the loveliest brown cloth rig you ever saw. Cloak and knickerbockers and buckled slippers! Why, Betty, your grand Miss Maxwell would like me a heap better in those togs than in my Tuxedo."

Betty faltered for an instant, then said:

"Maybe she would, Jack; but the girls and boys haven't all such fine costumes. Some are just fixed up out of cheese-cloth and waterproofs. No, sir, it isn't right by quality people to give 'em the kitcheny things we were going to have to eat at the feast, and if we leave out the old-fashioned dinner, there's no fun in the old-fashioned clothes."

"All right," said Jack, who always bowed to Betty's commands and never presumed to dictate.

And Betty was honest in her motives. It was not at all pride in her handsome home and its beautiful appointments that influenced her; it was the impulse to give of her very best to honor her dear grandparents and their young guest, and it was a more severe disappointment than any one knew, for her to give up the gay and jolly party she had planned for.

But Betty's determination was of the immovable kind, and every plan for the Puritan party was dropped, and every plan for the proper reception of the guests was pushed forward; and so ably was all this done, that, on Wednesday afternoon, the house was in readiness and the family, in holiday attire, awaited their guests.

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The Denniston carriage brought them from the station, and the reunion was a most happy one.

Mr. and Mrs. Irving may have seemed a bit punctilious as to the formal routine of their own house, but that in no way interfered with their hearty expressions of pleasure at finding themselves under their granddaughter's roof. And they soon showed both by joyous words and manner that they were genuinely glad to meet Jack and Baby Polly and Grandma Kinsey.

Miss Maxwell was not quite as Betty had pictured her. She was quiet and reserved, but she seemed shy rather than haughty.

Betty tried hard to draw her out, but the English girl replied in monosyllables, and though most courteous and polite, was bafflingly unresponsive to the cordial chatter of both Jack and Betty.

"Iceberg!" thought Jack, to himself; "I've a good notion to say Boo! and see if she'd jump."

But he didn't, for Jack was always on his good behavior when Betty wanted him to be.

Dinner passed off beautifully. Of course, this was not the grand feast,—that was for to-morrow; but the well-cooked and well-served family dinner was a credit to Betty's household. The evening was a little stiff. All sat primly on the brocaded chairs in the drawing-room and made polite conversation; but there was a certain restraint, which, however, Betty accepted as a necessary result of "having company."

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At last they all went to bed, and Betty lay awake, wondering whether it could be her fault that Miss Maxwell didn't seem to be enjoying herself. "No," said her mother, to whom Betty confided her anxiety in a little bedtime chat. "No, dearie, it isn't your fault, except that perhaps you're a little overanxious about it all. Perhaps if you'd take Miss Maxwell a little more simply,—a little more as you take May Fordham or Tilly Fenn,—"

"Oh, Mother, I couldn't talk to Miss Maxwell as—as jokingly as I talk to the other girls! Why, even her name is Evangeline!"

Mrs. McGuire smiled, as she kissed Betty good night. "It is an imposing name," she said, "but try not to be afraid of it."

Next morning, Betty did try. She took Miss Maxwell for a sleigh-ride, but they did not make much progress toward chumminess.

It was after luncheon, when the girls went up to Betty's room for a little chat, that Betty, more perplexed than ever, involuntarily blurted out her anxiety.

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"Are you like this at home?" she said, scarcely realizing that the question was extremely personal. "Do you never chum with people?" Miss Maxwell broke into a ringing laugh.

"I'm the chummiest thing in the world," she said; "I'd love to be chums with you, but I'm so—so afraid of you!"

"Afraid of *me!*" exclaimed Betty, opening her dark eyes wide in astonishment. "Why, it's scared to death I am of you!"

Then both girls went off into peals of laughter, for Betty's quick wit caught the real state of the

case, and Evangeline, too, saw the truth.

"But I thought you so grand I must be extra polite," said Betty, as they became calm again.

"And I thought because you were the owner of this big house, I must behave with great dignity! Please be chums. May I call you Betty?"

"I should hope so! I'm still too much afraid to say Evangeline, though."

"Call me Van, then; lots of my friends do, and I like it."

"I love it! It makes us friends at once. I think it was the 'Evangeline' part of you that scared me most. Why, when I heard that, I made the boys and girls give up our baked beans dinner, and have lobster pâtés and soufflée meringue."

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"A baked beans dinner! What do you mean? My! but that sounds jolly!"

So Betty told Evangeline of the Puritan party that had been set aside because of the unexpected guests.

"Oh, what a shame!" cried Van. "I should have *loved* it; can't you get it up again? I can scabble up a frock, I'm sure! It would be so *much* more fun than a grand dinner! oh, a thousand times more! Pumpkin-pie and cider and candle-light! Oh! Oh! *Can't* you get it back?"

"I don't see how I could, Van. It's after two now, and dinner's at seven. But let's try. Jack! Jack!"

Jack came at Betty's call, and he was informed of the wonderful discoveries the two girls had made concerning each other. He looked a little disgusted at Betty's lack of intuition in the matter, and said: "Whew! what queer things girls are!" but he accepted the new situation, and set his wits to work to help Betty out.

"Why, I should think we could manage it somehow," he said. "Give Pete and Ellen charge of the dinner part of it; send word to your gorgeous caterer man that the dinner is postponed; and you, Betty, hop into the cutter and fly round and tell those who haven't any telephone, while I stay here and call up all those who have. I'll wager they'll all come."

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Come they did, every one of them. They wore quaint Puritan costumes, which were delightful to look at, if they were made of such humble materials as cheese-cloth and silkoline. The boys were stunning in their picturesque suits, and the dining-room was truly old-fashioned with its onions and red peppers strung from the rafters. The homely viands were eaten with decided enjoyment, and afterward even old Mr. Irving joined in the Virginia Reel.

"I'm so glad," said Betty, as she and Van went to their rooms after the party was over, "that I learned of your ability to 'chum,' before it was too late."

"I'm glad, too," said her English guest; "I wouldn't have missed this experience for anything. I shall always remember what is probably the only Thanksgiving party I shall ever attend."

II A CHRISTMAS CELEBRATION

"Why, of course," said Betty, "Christmas will be fun, whatever we do; but I mean I'd like to do something specially exciting."

"Such as?" demanded Jack, her adopted brother.

"Oh, I don't know; I can't think of anything. But we can have a party here any time; I'd like to go somewhere else for the day—somewhere where there's something to see and do."

"Restless little Betty," said her mother, smiling. "Well, what do you think of going to Lakewood for a few days?"

Betty looked dubious.

"Lakewood is lovely," she said, "and I do want to go there again sometime; but it doesn't seem just right for Christmas. I want to do something more—more—"

"Rackety," suggested Jack.

"Yes, more gay and festive. I'd like to fly to the North Pole in an air-ship."

"With flags waving and bands playing?"

"Yes. Wouldn't it be fun? What could we do, Mother?"

Her mother caressed Betty's curly head and smiled indulgently at her, as she said:

"Let me think a minute. There must be plenty of places if you're bent on going away somewhere. How about New York?"

"Oh, that's just right!" cried Betty. "Let's all go to New York to spend Christmas, and see the beautiful things there. Oh, *wouldn't* we have fun!"

Betty's eyes fairly shone with delighted anticipation, and she threw a sofa-pillow at Jack to stir him to greater enthusiasm.

"Wake up, Sleepyhead!" she cried. "Come on, let's plan it all."

"If you choose," said her mother, "you might invite Agnes Graham and her brother to go with you."

"Oh, Mother! That will be grand! We'll have the greatest time anybody ever had!"

"Glorious!" said Jack, roused to enthusiasm at last. "It will be fine if Jamie, or 'Stub' as we call him, is along. When shall we start?"

"Christmas is next week, Thursday, Betty," said her mother. "Suppose we start about Tuesday and come home on Friday?"

"Just right!" said Betty. "And stay at a fine hotel and go to the shops—and the play? Oh, Mother, could we go to the play?"



BETTY THREW A SOFA-PILLOW AT JACK TO
STIR HIM TO GREATER ENTHUSIASM

"Yes, I think we'll go to a matinée," said her mother. "Do you think Mrs. Graham would spare both her children on Christmas day?"

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"I don't know," said Betty, a little doubtfully, "but I'll ask her, and I know Agnes and Stub will be crazy to go, so prob'ly we can coax her into it."

Wheedlesome Betty did "coax Mrs. Graham into it," though that lady was loath to be separated from her son and daughter at the Christmas season. But the proposed trip was so tempting that permission was finally given, and the four young people were radiant with happiness at the prospect.

"I shall take Lisette," said Mrs. McGuire, speaking of her own maid, "and if I get too tired to take you children around to all the places you want to go to, she can go with you; she is thoroughly reliable and capable."

So everything was arranged.

Tuesday proved to be a clear, cold day, and the party started off in high spirits. Of course the Grahams were Betty's guests for the whole trip.

Though Betty's large fortune, inherited from her paternal grandfather, was all her own, her mother had been appointed her guardian until she should come of age; and while conscientious

and prudent as to expenditures, she also was determined that Betty should be allowed a goodly number of the harmless pleasures that her large income justified her having.

So when the New York trip was decided upon, Mrs. McGuire made every effort to give the children the most enjoyable time possible.

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And it was for this reason she proposed taking the two Grahams as guests.

Lisette had been with her mistress a long time, and was well versed in looking after the luggage and all such details, so the party had nothing to do but enjoy every moment. But, noticing a tendency on Jack's part to make himself useful and attentive, Betty's mother wisely encouraged it, knowing it was for the boy's own good.

When they reached New York, the children, used to the quiet village life of Greenborough, were fascinated and almost bewildered by the noise and confusion. Jack had never been in New York before, and Betty only once, but the bustle and rush of the city appealed to them both, and many kindly people smiled as they noted the shining eyes and eager faces of the four friends.

"A taxicab will not hold us all," said Betty's mother, "so, Lisette, you take the young ladies and Master James in that one, and, Jack, will you kindly call that electric hansom for you and me?"

Proud to be of service, Jack beckoned to the hansom driver, and soon the two vehicles were whizzing away to the Plaza Hotel, where rooms had been engaged for the party.

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"Well, if this isn't great!" said Stub Graham, who, though addressed by Lisette as "Master James," was "Stub" to the others. "I say, Betty, you're the brickiest sort of a brick to ask us to this splendiferous treat!"

Betty smiled happily. She was looking out at the hurrying throngs of people, the tall buildings, the gay shop-windows, and the jam of traffic, with unspeakable delight in the novelty and excitement of the scene.

"And to think of three days of this gorgeousness! Three whole days!" said Agnes, squeezing Betty's arm in her glee.

They soon reached the hotel and found Betty's mother and Jack already there and waiting for them in the great entrance-hall.

Betty was a little awed by the splendor all about her, and Agnes and Stub were frankly delighted, and looked around with undisguised interest.

But Jack, feeling a new responsibility as the escort of Mrs. McGuire, had, quite unconsciously, acquired a manner as of one accustomed to elaborate hotels and in no way impressed by them. He seemed quite at home and he paid no attention to the surroundings, but in a simple, unaffected, but perfectly correct fashion, he stood by Betty's mother, carrying her wrap gracefully over his arm, and holding himself in readiness to obey her slightest wish.

"Where did Jack get that manner?" thought Betty, in amazement, and then she realized that he was acquiring it merely by association with

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her mother, and through a natural ability to adapt to himself her innate refinement and gracious ways.

Betty was impulsive herself and now, though secretly moved to mirth by Jack's quiet elegance of manner, she resolved to try harder to improve her own demeanor.

They all went at once to the rooms reserved for them, a beautiful apartment overlooking Central Park.

It was quite a little home of itself, as there was a comfortable sitting-room, attractive dining-room, and four bedrooms with dressing-rooms and baths.

A large room with two beds was allotted to Betty and Agnes, and a similar one across the entrance-hall was for the two boys. Lisette had a small room opening from Mrs. McGuire's own which adjoined the girls' room. In a short time bags and trunks were unpacked and a few individual belongings scattered about, and the apartment seemed quite like a private home.

"Why do we have a dining-room?" asked Betty. "Can't we eat in the big restaurant down-stairs?"

"Sometimes, if you choose," said her mother. "But I think our Christmas dinner is a personal sort of feast, and I'd like it better here by ourselves."

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"So should I," agreed Jack. "Lots more fun, Betty."

"But we'll dine down-stairs to-night," went on Mrs. McGuire; "so skip away, girlies, and put on pretty frocks for the occasion."

"Isn't it larks!" said Betty, as she and Agnes went to their room to dress. "Look at the beautiful Park! To-morrow we'll take a ride in it. I wish we could go to-night."

"I don't want to go to-night," returned Agnes. "I'd rather stay here in this beautiful hotel. There's so much to see."

"So there is. Hurry and dress. What are you going to wear?"

"I brought my blue voile," said Agnes. "Mother thought that would be right."

"So it is; you look lovely in blue. I'm wearing this Dresden silk. They go nicely together."

Betty expeditiously arranged herself in the pretty light silk frock, and the girls hooked each other up and tied each other's hair-ribbons, so that when Lisette came to offer her services, they were quite unnecessary. The boys, too, had made good time with their dressing and awaited the girls in the sitting-room.

"Oh, I wish we were going to dance!" said Agnes. "But I suppose we couldn't in a hotel."

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"We can dance up here after dinner," said Jack. "Mother will play for us, I am sure; for see, there's a piano here!"

Though an adopted son, Mrs. McGuire had asked Jack to call her "Mother," and the boy had

been only too glad to do so.

"Play for you? Of course I will," said the lady herself, entering the sitting-room. "And now we will go down to dinner. Lisette will stay here in charge of everything."

Jack sprang to open the door.

He held it open till the last of his party went through it, and then he closed it and followed them. Somehow he was again in place to push the elevator bell, and Mrs. McGuire looked at him with pride as she noticed his quiet quickness and graceful ways.

Dinner was a delightful experience. Betty was a little bewildered by the array of silver and glass, and Stub frankly inquired which fork to use first, but Jack seemed to know by intuition.

"I'd like to live in a place like this always," said Stub, as he ate his ice-cream.

"So wouldn't I," said Jack. "A hotel is all very well for a few days, but it isn't a home."

"That's so," agreed Agnes; "I suppose we'd get tired of it if we had it all the time."

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"Well, it's good enough for me," returned Stub. "When I'm a man, I'm going to live in one. I don't see many boys here, though," he added, looking round.

"No," said Mrs. McGuire, smiling; "most boys prefer a home."

And then dinner was over, and they all strolled through the hotel corridor and bought some flowers at the flower-stand, and some illustrated papers at the news-stand, and then went up to their own apartment.

Mrs. McGuire played the piano for them, and they danced a little, and then, after some planning for the next day's entertainment, they all went to rest.

The next day was clear and pleasant, and when breakfast was served in their own dining-room, all the party were ready and eagerly awaiting it.

"Then it is decided," said Mrs. McGuire, "that we have our Christmas tree this evening?"

"Oh, yes," said Betty; "Christmas eve is the time for a tree, and to-morrow, on Christmas day, we'll have our feast, our real Christmas dinner. Don't you think so, Agnes?"

"Yes, indeed. And then the tree can stay here, can't it, all day to-morrow? I love to look at a Christmas tree."

"So do I," said Betty. "And as I never had one before, I'll keep this one as long as I can."

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It was less than a year since Betty had inherited her fortune, and before that she had been a poor little waif, without money and without a home.

Her mother's heart thrilled with gladness to think that Betty would have a tree this year, and she resolved to do everything in her power to make it a beautiful one.

Very soon after breakfast they started on a

shopping expedition.

Two taxicabs were engaged, and the two girls, with Lisette, occupied one, while Mrs. McGuire and the boys rode in the other.

Such fun as they had shopping! They fairly tumbled out of one shop into another. The tree had been ordered from the hotel, but they bought ornaments and candles and festoons of tinsel rope, and Mrs. McGuire bought some other things secretly, as she wanted to have some surprises for the young people. Then everybody bought presents for everybody else. Betty found lovely things for the dear ones who had remained at Denniston, and for the faithful servants there, as well.

She bought presents for her young friends in Greenborough, too, and all these things they had expressed directly home. But the fun was in buying presents for each other. These, of course, must be kept very secret, and Betty would urge Jack in a whisper to take Agnes to another counter and keep her there, while Stub helped Betty choose the present for his sister.

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And so with the whole four. Each must be safely removed from the scene of action while his or her gift was purchased.

Betty's mother cautioned the young folks that all gifts be simple and inexpensive.

So Agnes bought for Betty a pretty little white fan that she might carry to evening parties, and Betty bought for Agnes a slender gold bangle.

The boys bought knives for each other, which caused the girls much amusement, for neither Jack nor Stub knew that each had bought a knife, and the girls knew that the knives were exactly alike. Of course Betty wished to give more valuable gifts to Jack and her mother, so, under the guidance of Mrs. McGuire, she bought a beautiful little gold watch and fob for Jack. It was a beauty, and Betty knew it would give the boy the keenest pleasure.

For her mother she wanted to get something very nice indeed, but she had no one with whom to consult. Jack and the Grahams were no better able than herself to advise on such a subject, and Lisette could not be expected to know much about it.

But, by a fortunate occurrence, the way was made easy. Betty and her mother had gone to a great jewelry shop to buy Jack's watch, and, after the purchase was completed, they strolled about the shop looking at the beautiful things displayed in the cases.

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Suddenly Betty spied a lady whom she recognized. It was Mrs. Sanderson, at whose house in New York Betty had first met Grandma Kinsey.

"Mother," said Betty, speaking very quickly, "will you stay right here and not look around for a few minutes?"

"I can't let you go away from me alone, Betty," said her mother, smiling at the earnest little face.

"But, Mother, I'm only going to the very next

counter, and there's a lady that I know."

"Very well; I trust you not to go farther than the next counter; and I'll wait for you here."

"Don't turn round."

"No, but don't be too long."

Betty hurried to Mrs. Sanderson, who was looking at jewels at the next counter.

"How do you do, Mrs. Sanderson?" she said, speaking politely, but very rapidly. "Do you remember me? I'm Betty McGuire, and I was at your house last year with Mrs. Van Court, and I found Mrs. Kinsey there, and now she lives with me."

Mrs. Sanderson looked at the excited little girl, and at last she remembered her.

"Oh, yes," she said; "the little Irish girl who came into a fortune."

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"Yes'm," said Betty. "That's me, ma'am. And since then I've found my mother, and she's here with me. But I want to buy her a Christmas present unbeknownst to her, and I thought you'd be willing to help me a bit if I asked you."

"What a strange child!" said Mrs. Sanderson, putting up her lorgnette to look at Betty again.

"Yes, I am, ma'am. But will you help me buy the present, and then I'll introduce my mother; you'll love her, ma'am, she's that sweet!"

Always when Betty was embarrassed or excited she slipped back into her almost forgotten brogue. And perhaps it was that and the persuasive little voice that touched Mrs. Sanderson's sympathies, for she said kindly:

"Why, certainly, my dear; I'll help you with pleasure. What do you want to buy?"

"I want a small diamond brooch, please, and not too grand a one; my mother doesn't like things too grand. But a plainish one that she could wear every day, and yet a good one at that."

Mrs. Sanderson smiled, but she seemed to understand, and as the affable salesman showed them various styles, she selected one that seemed to fit accurately Betty's requirements.

"This, I think, is lovely," she said; "I'm sure your mother would like it."

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"I'm sure, too," said Betty, "and it's the very one I like best myself."

The purchase was completed, and, with the little box in her hand, Betty took Mrs. Sanderson to the next counter to meet her mother. The ladies seemed too pleased to know each other, and Betty was very happy.

Then good-by greetings were exchanged and, as it was luncheon-hour, Betty's mother marshaled her brood together.

"I think we won't go back to the hotel for luncheon," she said; "for it's after one o'clock, and we still have some errands to do. So we'll go over to the Waldorf and lunch there, which will give you hotel-loving children another glimpse of

a New York Christmas crowd."

This plan was carried out, and the young quartet watched with sparkling eyes the throngs of people on Christmas errands bent.

"Now to finish our errands, and then home," said Mrs. McGuire, after luncheon was over.

But when they reached the hotel again, about mid-afternoon, Betty didn't want to go in.

"Oh, Mother," she pleaded, "the streets are so gay, and the people are all going along with bundles and holly wreaths, and it's all so Christmas-evey, can't we stay out longer?"

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Her mother considered.

"I must go in," she said, "and I want Lisette to help me. But, if you wish, you four may go for a ride in the Park or along the Avenue. But you must promise not to get out of the cab. The chauffeur is entirely reliable, and if you stay in the cab, you cannot get lost. Be back here in one hour, please."

"We will," chorused the four, so Mrs. McGuire and Lisette went into the hotel, and the four delighted young folk went for a further ride.

Their course down the Avenue was slow, owing to the crowded traffic; they had ample opportunity for observing the people, an amusement of which Betty never tired. Then afterwards a short spin in the Park, where the lights had already begun to gleam through the early winter dusk.

"Now for home," said Jack decisively, when the hour had elapsed; and back they went to their hotel.

But when they entered their own sitting-room, nobody was there,—no tree, no presents, and no sign of any human being.

Betty opened the door of her mother's bedroom, but that, too, was unoccupied, as, indeed, were all the bedrooms.

Betty looked frightened, and said, in a half-whisper: "Oh, *do* you suppose anything has happened to Mother?"

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Then Jack laughed outright.

"Oh, Betty," he said; "can't you guess? I'll wager Mother and Lisette are in the dining-room, and they're fixing the tree in there!"

Sure enough, the dining-room door was closed, and when Betty flew to open it, she found it was locked as well.

"Let us in, Mother; let us in!" she cried.

"Not yet, my child," said Mrs. McGuire, opening the door a tiny crack and peeping out. "You must all amuse yourselves till dinner-time."

"Oh, can't we help fix it?" said Jack.

"No; I've plenty of help in here, and you must keep out and not bother."

Then the door was shut and locked again, and the young folks laughed to find themselves with

occupation gone.

"All right; let's get up a surprise for *her*," said Betty.

"Oh, yes!" cried Jack; "just the thing! What'll it be?"

"Wait. I'll have to think. Oh, I'll tell you, Jack; you go down to the flower place, and get a lot of white carnations—just heaps of 'em. And then get a lot of holly, and bring 'em all up, and I'll show you. Oh, wait—get the biggest holly wreath you can find, and a paper of pins!"

Obediently Jack went off, and as the big hotel was able to supply such demands, he brought back everything Betty asked for.

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"It won't be much," said Betty, as she tied a big towel over her pretty frock for an apron. "Come in my room, all of you, so she won't see it if she comes out."

The other three followed Betty, and she disclosed her plan. First she filled the center of the big wreath with white carnations, having first crisscrossed it closely with string, to keep the blossoms in place. Then she set the others to work picking off the red berries from the bunch of holly Jack had brought, sticking a pin through each. With these prepared berries Betty formed letters on the white background, and as she deftly did her task they saw the words grow under her fingers, "Merry Christmas to Mother."

"Fine!" cried Stub. "Betty, you're a real genius! I declare it's the prettiest wreath I ever saw!"

It was pretty, for the holly wreath framed the loving greeting spelled out on the white carnations, and Betty's true eye had spaced the letters admirably.

It was not quite finished when Mrs. McGuire emerged from the dining-room. But Betty hastily stuck in the remaining pins with their red berry heads, and Jack asked Mrs. McGuire not to peep into Betty's room.

"Indeed, I won't," was the reply. "I've only time to dress for dinner, and you young people had better scamper if you want to have any evening left for your tree."

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Scamper they did, and soon a very hungry but jolly party made its way down to the dining-room.

The girls were in festival dress because it was Christmas eve. Their white frocks of filmy mousseline were cut out a little at the throat, and red sashes and hair-ribbons gave an air of Christmas to their costumes. Each wore a holly spray in her hair, and Jack declared himself proud of the visions of loveliness that graced his party.

But notwithstanding the jolly time they were having, and the excitement of it all, there was no lingering after dinner.

Though the girls would have liked to stay downstairs and listen to the music and watch the people, yet the tree seemed to call loudly to them even through the closed door. So up they went, Betty's little face fairly aglow with the

happiness of her first real Christmas. She held her mother's hand tightly as, at last, Lisette threw open the door of the dining-room, and they all went in.

The tree was a marvel. Stalwart porters of the hotel had set it in place, and had assisted Mrs. McGuire to decorate it. It shimmered and glittered with tinsel ropes; it sparkled with shining ornaments; it trembled with tiny lighted candles, and it fairly blazed with hundreds of tiny electric lights of all colors. This was one of Mrs. McGuire's surprises. Even the Grahams had never seen a Christmas tree electrically lighted, and as for Stub—he fairly whistled in ecstasy.

"Oh, *what* a corker!" he exclaimed, for more grammatical language seemed inadequate.

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Betty drew closer to her mother's side and slipped her arm around her waist, as she stood speechless before the beautiful tree.

"For me!" she exclaimed, her eyes as bright as the electrics themselves.

"Yes," said her mother, bending to kiss the top of her child's head. "And for Jack," she added, holding out her other hand to the boy, who came, a bit shyly, to her embrace.

"And for all of us," shouted Stub gaily; "you can't leave us out, Mrs. McGuire, and though my small sister seems for the moment to be speechless, yet I can assure you she thinks it's a very nice tree."

"*Very nice tree!*" cried Agnes; "it's the gorgeousest, wonderfulest tree that ever was on the face of the earth! I know it is!"

After they had admired it over and over, Mrs. McGuire proposed that they take off the gifts, assuring them that such a proceeding would not mar the effect of the tree.

So the ever polite and ready Jack, aided by Stub when the gifts were flung high, took down the presents one by one, and delivered them to those whose names were written on them.

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Somehow there seemed to be lots of gifts. For five people, each giving to every one else, made a good many, and then there were a lot of extra ones that just seemed to come from Santa Claus himself.

Of course Lisette was not forgotten, and she stood in the background, delighted beyond words to see Betty's pleasure in her beautiful Christmas tree.

Mrs. McGuire's present to her daughter was a gold locket containing a miniature of her own lovely face. It hung from a slender gold chain, and no gift could have pleased Betty more.

"I shall always wear it," she said, as her mother clasped it round her throat; "and, Mother, you must always wear my gift."

Her mother was greatly surprised at the diamond brooch, and wondered how Betty had sufficient taste and judgment to select such a beauty. So Betty told how Mrs. Sanderson had helped her, and all admired the lovely jewel

when it was pinned at the top of its owner's delicate lace bodice.

The tables were filled with the various trinkets and knickknacks, and the floor was strewn with tissue-papers and narrow red ribbons. Then Jack and Stub brought in the big Christmas greeting Betty and the others had made, and her mother was delighted at the pretty attention.

It was late indeed when they sought their beds, for a refection of ices and cakes had to be attended to, and some Christmas carols sung, and a Christmas dance indulged in. But at last all the lights were out, and the stars twinkled down on one of the happiest girls in the great city, a girl who was restfully sleeping after the joys of her first real Christmas.

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III BETTY AT BOARDING- SCHOOL

It was New Year's eve, and Betty, with her mother and Jack, was spending a few days at the Irvings' in Boston. Betty was a great favorite with her grandfather, and the two spent delightful hours together as the old gentleman showed Betty the many places of interest in the city.

Mr. Irving was of somewhat eccentric nature, and he declared that he much preferred Betty's frank and sometimes blunt straightforwardness to what he called the "airs and graces" of more fashionably trained young girls.

But Mrs. Irving did not share her husband's views. She thought Betty decidedly lacking in many details of correct deportment, and she urged Mrs. McGuire to send Betty to a boarding-school for a year or two, that she might be properly trained to take her place in society later, with the demeanor becoming a well-bred young lady and an heiress.

"But Betty isn't a young lady yet," said Mrs. McGuire, looking troubled when these arguments were laid before her.

"Not exactly, perhaps," returned her mother. "But she will live in a city ere long, and, as our descendant, should be made familiar with the finer points of correct behavior. Jack seems to pick up such things immediately, but Betty, though a dear child, is crude in her manner."

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"Small wonder," said Mrs. McGuire, thinking of the lack of advantages in Betty's early life.

"True enough; and that's all the more reason why she should be placed in an atmosphere of correct deportment at once. She will learn much more by association with cultured young girls of her own age than by your individual tuition. You spoil her by letting her have her own way entirely too much, and you are blind to her faults. You know perfectly well, my dear, I have only Betty's good at heart in the matter."

Mrs. McGuire did know this, and yet she could not bear the idea of separation from her daughter, with whom she had been so lately reunited.

On New Year's eve the Irvings had made a party for Betty. They had invited young people from some of the best families they knew, and both Betty and Jack were greatly pleased when they learned of it.

It was a very civilized party, and quite unlike the merry gatherings of Greenborough children. The hours were from seven to ten, and the first part of the evening the guests sat round the rooms, in small gilt chairs that had been brought in for the occasion, and listened to the songs and stories of a professional entertainer.

It was a charming young woman who told the stories and sang the songs, and after each number the children clapped their hands sedately and waited for the next.

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Secretly Betty thought it rather tame, and would have preferred a rollicking game or a merry dance. But she applauded with the others and tried to appear politely pleased.

After the program all marched decorously to the dining-room, where a pleasant little supper was served. Then the guests took leave, each making a correct courtesy to the hostess, and expressing their pleasure as if by rote.

"Well, if that wasn't the *stiffest* party!" said Betty to her mother, when they were alone later. "Those children were just like wooden images."

Mrs. McGuire looked troubled.

"Betty dear," she said, "you don't see these things quite rightly. Your grandmother thinks those children act correctly, and that you don't. But, you see, city life is quite different from that of a small village. How would you like to move to live in a big city, Betty?"

"And give up Denniston? My beautiful home! Oh, Mother, I don't want to do that!"

"No, and I don't want you to. Well, we'll see what can be done."

The "seeing" resulted in long talks by the elders of the family, and these talks resulted in a decision to send Betty at once to a boarding-school at Hillside Manor, a fine country place about a hundred miles away.

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As the winter term was just beginning, she was to go directly, without returning to Greenborough.

The school was most highly recommended, and Mrs. McGuire was persuaded that it would give Betty the "finish" she needed.

But the plan did not please Betty at all. She did not rebel,—that was not her way,—but she expressed her feelings in the matter so clearly that there was no doubt as to her state of mind.

"I don't want to go, Mother," she said; "I hate to be with a lot of girls—I want my own family and my *home*. Oh, Mother, must I leave my home when I love it so?"

"Yes, Betty darling," said her mother, though strongly tempted to say "No"; "I see it is for your good to send you away, and I'm sure you ought to go. But I shall miss you dreadfully, and just count the days till your return."

"It's hard lines, Betty," said Jack; "but as long as they all think you ought to go, I should think you'd be glad to go and learn the right sort of thing, whatever it is. Old Tutor Nixon is wise and all that, but he can't fill the bill in other ways. At least that's what Grandma Irving thinks, and so do I, too."

In fact, there was no one who agreed with Betty's ideas except her grandfather.

"All bosh," he said. "My granddaughter is a natural, unaffected, unspoiled girl. You send her off to Madam Tippetwitch, or whoever she is, and she'll come back an artificial young miss, with no thought but for fashions and foolishness."

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But the old gentleman was entirely overruled by the determination of his wife, and Betty was sent away.

None of the family accompanied Betty to the school, as Mrs. Irving felt sure the child would be less homesick if she started off with a gay party of girls who were going back to their classes.

And so good-bys were said at the station in Boston, and Betty made the trip to Hillside in company with half a dozen school-girls, in charge of one of the teachers. It was a strange position in which Betty found herself. An heiress in her own right, she yet felt a sense of inferiority which she herself could not explain.

Her Irish ancestry revealed itself in her warm-hearted willingness to be friends with the girls, and her inherited New England nature made her reserved and sensitive to either real or apparent slights from them. The girls, notwithstanding their inborn good breeding and their past seasons at Hillside Manor, looked at Betty with ill-concealed curiosity. They knew she was an heiress, and that very fact made them hold aloof from her, lest they be suspected of a spirit of toadying to wealth.

But Betty did not appreciate this point, and assumed that the girls were not very cordial because they considered themselves her superiors. Each one spoke to her, politely enough, but in constrained, perfunctory fashion, and then, feeling their duty done, they resumed their own chatter about matters unknown to Betty. Miss Price, the teacher, was a pleasant-faced lady, but, after a few courteous words, she became absorbed in a book, looking up only now and then to glance at her young charges. After a time Betty's spirit of independence became aroused. She wondered if she were excluded from the girls' sociability because she herself was lacking in cordiality. Smiling pleasantly, she said to Ada Porter, who sat next to her: "Are you in my classes?"

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"I don't know, really," said Ada, not unkindly, but entirely uninterested. "What classes are you in?"

"I don't know," said Betty, smiling at the absurdity of the conversation.

But Ada didn't seem to think it humorous, and merely stared at Betty, as she said, "How queer!"

Betty colored. She felt awkward and tongue-tied, and yet, the more she realized her inability to impress these girls pleasantly, the more she determined to do so.

Then Betty bethought herself of a box of fine candies in her satchel, and taking it out, she passed it around to the other girls.

Murmuring conventional thanks, each accepted one bonbon, but declined a second one, and then Betty found herself with her box in her lap, gazing out of the window, as much alone as if there had been no one in the car.

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But at last the three hours' ride was over, and Betty's hopeful nature looked forward to finding some among the pupils who would be more friendly than her traveling associates.

Omnibuses from the school met them at the station, and by chance Betty was put in with a dozen girls none of whom had been with her in the car.

But conditions were no better than before. They nodded diffidently to Betty, and then began to chatter to each other with the gay freedom of old acquaintances.

One girl, however, who sat opposite Betty, was also a new pupil. She had coal-black hair and bright black eyes, that darted quickly about, seeming to take in everything.

"You're new, too, aren't you?" she said at last, leaning over to seize Betty's hand.

"Yes," replied Betty, grateful for the word spoken voluntarily to her.

"So am I. I think the other girls are hateful to ignore us so. But don't you mind; we'll show them!"

Though this was independence of spirit, Betty couldn't quite approve of the way it was expressed, nor of the belligerent wag of the head with which it was emphasized.

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But the girl's attitude was friendly toward her, if rather hostile toward the others, and lonely little Betty yearned for friendliness.

"Well, you see, they all know each other," she said, smiling at the black-eyed one; "that makes such a difference, and they've so much to tell."

"All right; let us know each other, then. My name's Madeleine Gorman; what's yours?"

"Betty McGuire," said Betty, smiling into the friendly eyes.

"Betty! My, you are new! You must call yourself Elizabeth up here. Nicknames don't go."

"Well, I'd just as lief be called Elizabeth; I don't mind. But I'm Betty at home."

"Yes; I'm Maddy at home, and Mad, and Mother

calls me Lina. But I'm sure Madeleine's the ticket in a fashionable boarding-school."

"Then you've been here before?"

"No, not here. But to three other grand schools. Mother's always changing about when she hears of a more 'select' one."

Betty was a bit bewildered. Surely the ambitions of Madeleine's mother were in line with those of Mrs. Irving, and yet Betty couldn't imagine her grandmother talking like that! She felt sure the Irvings *were* "select," but she felt equally sure they would never proclaim it in words.

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She gave up the problem as too difficult, but, greatly cheered by Madeleine's cordiality, she met her friendly advances half-way, and when they reached the school they felt really well acquainted. Together they went to the principal.

Miss Frelinghuysen was an imposing-looking lady with sharp features and sharp eyes. She welcomed them with effusion, called each "my dear child," and expressed hope that each would be happy and contented at the school.

"May we room together, Elizabeth and I?" Madeleine asked.

Miss Frelinghuysen appeared to hesitate.

"Do you wish it, my dear?" she asked of Betty.

"Yes," replied Betty, hastily, concluding that a girl she knew to be friendly was preferable to any utter stranger; "yes, I should like it."

"Very well, then you may, my dear."

"You're a trump," said Madeleine, squeezing Betty's arm as they went away; "I was so afraid you wouldn't room with me."

"Why not?"

"Oh, I don't know. You might feel too grand. You've just come into a lot of money, they tell me."

"But that doesn't make any difference to young girls," said Betty, simply.

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"Ho! doesn't it?" said Madeleine, at which Betty laughed outright. She felt sure it couldn't be true.

Hillside Manor was a large and rather magnificent house, yet when Betty and Madeleine reached their room, they found it small and cramped. There was only one window, and though the two beds were narrow, they left but little space to move about. There was only one wash-stand, and, accustomed of late to having nice things about her, Betty looked around in dismay.

It was not that she so much minded not having elaborate furnishings, but such close quarters to be shared with another made her feel hampered, and she thought longingly of her lovely big room at Denniston, with the dainty fittings all her own.

And yet she knew she would not like to room alone at the school. That was an awful loneliness

to look forward to.

So she began unpacking her things to dress for dinner. Madeleine chattered all the time, seeming not to care whether Betty answered or not.

"You may have the top drawer of the dresser, and I'll take the next," said Madeleine, good-naturedly; "and we'll divide the hooks in the wardrobe evenly. Which bed do you want?"

"I don't care," said Betty; "take your choice first."

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"All right; I'll take this one," and Madeleine flung two large hats on the bed she selected.

But as she immediately afterward piled a lot of her things on the other bed, it seemed to make little difference.

"Don't mind those clothes," she said apologetically. "Pile your own right on top of 'em. We'll get 'em put away somehow."

But there was no time then, as they must dress for dinner, and the gong would sound shortly.

Madeleine greatly admired Betty's pretty rose-colored voile trimmed with delicate lace, and she was loud in her praise of Betty's simple bits of jewelry.

"Oh, what a lovely locket!" she cried. "Let me wear it to-night, won't you? I'd love to!"

Betty hesitated; she disliked to refuse her friend's first request, but she couldn't let any one else wear her locket, with her mother's picture in it, too.

"I want to wear that myself," she said frankly; "I always wear it afternoons. But you may wear my bangle instead, if you like."

"Oh, yes, I'd love to," and Madeleine slipped the pretty gold bangle on her wrist. "Won't you lend me a hair-ribbon, Elizabeth, too? I see you've plenty of them, and mine are so old."

"Certainly," said Betty, willingly offering her box of new ribbons. Madeleine selected a pair of wide red ones, and gaily tied them on her black curls. As it happened, these were Betty's favorite ribbons, and she had no other red ones, but she was wearing white ones herself, and she said nothing.

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Madeleine helped herself to Betty's cologne-water, and made free with several of her toilet appurtenances, and at last, after saying, "Oh, my dear, please lend me a handkerchief; mine are full of holes!" they went down-stairs.

Dinner was an awful ordeal. The girls sat at long tables, each headed by a teacher, and were expected to converse on light topics. Betty rather envied the ease with which most of them uttered trivial commonplaces, but she couldn't help feeling that their accents and shrill little notes of laughter were artificial. Without even formulating her own thoughts, she felt that the girls were all self-conscious and critical of one another, and she conceived a sudden and violent antipathy to the whole atmosphere of the school that she knew she could never conquer.

Entirely unconscious of herself, Betty did not realize that she was not taking any part in the "light" conversation, and it was a shock when Miss Price said, in a somewhat mincing tone: "We want you to join in our chat, Miss McGuire. Suppose you tell us how you spent your Christmas day." Straightforwardly Betty said:

"We spent our Christmas day in New York, at the Plaza Hotel."

No sooner had she said this than she saw, by the expressions on the girls' faces, she had made a mistake.

"How interesting!" said Miss Price; but it suddenly flashed on Betty that they all thought her remark ostentatious, and that it was, in some way, inexcusable to spend Christmas day away from one's home.

She couldn't help looking distressed, for there was not a trace of ostentation in her whole nature, and her enjoyment of her wealth was merely in the simple pleasures that it brought her, without thought of vanity or pride in the possession of it.

Never before had she been accused of this, nor was she now, in words, but there was no doubting the meaning of the looks directed at her.

Miss Price tactfully changed the subject, but Betty made no more contributions to the "light" conversation of that dinner.

The hour in the drawing-room that followed was worse still. Had Betty only known it, her experience was not so very different from that of any new pupil at a strange school; for of course those who have known each other in previous terms naturally get together to talk over their vacation, and new-comers are left to be taken into favor later, if they qualify for it.

But Betty didn't know this, and she felt it a personal slight that nobody talked to her and nobody seemed responsive if she opened a conversation.

Madeleine stayed by her side, but the more Betty talked with her, the more she was convinced she didn't like her. "And it's most ungrateful of me," thought poor Betty to herself, "for she's the only one who has shown me decent friendliness, so she is."

At last it was bedtime, and the girls filed out of the room, saying good night to Miss Frelinghuysen as they passed.

"Hold your hand a little higher," she said to Betty, "and your head just a trifle to one side,—so."

Betty imitated the model, alas, only too well! So anxious was she to do as she was told, that her attitude was an exaggeration of the principal's; indeed, it seemed a mockery, though nothing was farther from Betty's intention.

The girls behind her giggled outright, which didn't speak very well for their innate good breeding.

Miss Frelinghuysen turned scarlet, and said:

"Report to me in my study to-morrow morning at ten, Miss McGuire. Good night."

"Good night," said Betty, all unaware of what she had done wrong.

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"Oh, Elizabeth, you were killing!" declared Madeleine, when they reached their room. "But how dared you do it?"

She went off in peals of subdued laughter, only pausing at Betty's amazed, "What *do* you mean?"

"Why, the way you mimicked the principal! It was great! You looked *so* ridiculous, and that made her seem silly. Oh, it was too good!"

"Why, I didn't mean to do any such thing!" said Betty, ready to cry at the idea of having added a misdemeanor to her other troubles.

"Well, you did! And she'll never believe you didn't mean to. I couldn't believe it myself if you didn't look so scared to death. Oh, you'll catch it to-morrow!"

Miserable indeed now, Betty began to prepare for bed. She could scarcely find room for her things, for Madeleine had appropriated far more than half of the cupboards and pegs; and the table and two chairs were strewn with her not very orderly wardrobe.

"Say, Elizabeth," she said, suddenly coming toward Betty as they were almost ready to put out the light, "I want to ask you something. I'm sure you won't mind, for of course it's nothing to you, but will you lend me a little money? Just till my allowance comes, you know."

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"Why, yes," said Betty, who, never having heard such a request before, supposed it was polite to grant it. "How much do you want?"

Encouraged by such prompt compliance, Madeleine doubled the amount she had meant to ask for.

"Could you—could you make it twenty dollars?" she said.

"Certainly; but what is there to spend money for here? I didn't bring so very much with me."

"Oh, I want to join a society to-morrow; I'm 'most sure I can get in, but you have to pay dues in advance."

Betty gave Madeleine the money without further remark, and the two girls went to bed.

But Betty could not sleep. She lay there in the dark, wondering how she could live in this awful school. Madeleine's mention of a society alarmed her. She would be glad to join a society if the girls would be nice to her; but to join one and have the members cool and unpleasant toward her would be awful.

And already she disliked Madeleine. Not because she had borrowed money, though somehow Betty felt that was not a right thing for a young girl to do, but because she was so careless with her things and so pushing and forward in her intimacy with Betty. Betty laughed to herself at this thought! Madeleine

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was *too* friendly, and the other girls were not friendly enough. Well, that was true. And Betty had looked at their faces carefully that evening. Not one had given her a glance of simple, kindly, girlish friendship. They had looked at her curiously, inquisitively, and even enviously, but for some reason she knew they didn't like her.

Poor little Betty knew nothing of class distinction, and little dreamed that her warm-hearted, generous nature could easily conquer these difficulties in a short time. She fell at last into a troubled sleep, only to awaken long before dawn, with a heavy heart and a feeling of despair.

She lay in her narrow bed, thinking over the experiences of the day before, and looking forward to the interview with the principal to which she was summoned at ten o'clock.

And as she thought of that, her spirit revolted. She had not mimicked the lady's manner. She had simply tried to do as she was told, and she would not be punished for it!

A great resolve came to her, so great that she could scarcely formulate it to herself.

But, prompted by her indomitable Irish will-power, and urged on by her outraged sense of justice, she rose slowly from her bed, and, moving softly about the room, began to dress herself. The first touches of dawn gave her just light enough to distinguish the larger objects in the room, and by the time she was fully dressed she could see almost clearly. She had put on the traveling-suit she had worn from Boston, and carried her small satchel, leaving her trunk partly unpacked.

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She could send for her clothes afterward, or she did not care if she never saw them again. What was the use of a fortune if it didn't enable one to run away from a terrible place without worrying about one's clothes?

She glanced at sleeping Madeleine, and then, on an impulse, she wrote a hurried note, which she pinned to her own pillow:

DEAR MADELEINE: I did not mimic the lady, and I do not wish to be punished for what I didn't do. Also, I do not like the school, and I am going home.

ELIZABETH MCGUIRE.

P. S. You may keep my bangle to remember me by.

It was the sight of the bangle still on Madeleine's wrist that prompted this postscript, and then, taking her satchel, Betty softly opened the door and closed it behind her.

The hall was almost dark, and Betty had no notion how she was to get out of the house, but at least she meant to try in every possible way.

The large front door was so firmly fastened with chains and heavy bolts that she didn't even attempt to open that, but she remembered the great window in the drawing-room. She easily unfastened one of those long French windows

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opening on the veranda, and in a moment was walking rapidly down the drive. It was a long walk to the railroad station, but the way was unmistakable, and Betty trudged on, her heart growing lighter at every step.

The sun was shining brightly when she reached the station, and the ticket-agent told her a train for Boston would stop there at a quarter before eight. It was nearly that then, and Betty bought her ticket, and hoped fervently she could get away before any one from the school should follow her. Not that she intended to return with them if they did. She had no thought of running away; she knew only that she could not live at Hillside Manor, so she had left it.

The ticket-agent scanned her curiously, but Betty looked perfectly unconcerned, and he saw no occasion to question her.

About eleven o'clock she reached Boston. On the journey she had been thinking over the situation, and, though she had no fear of her mother's displeasure at her return, she knew her Grandmother Irving would be extremely annoyed.

Not so, though, her grandfather.

And, with true Irish ingenuity, Betty concluded to go straight to him.

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"WHY, GRANDFATHER, I—I RAN AWAY!"

She took a cab at the Boston station, and her

calm dignity seemed to forbid any surprise on the part of the cabman, and she gave the address of Mr. Irving's business office.

Paying the cabman and dismissing him, she went straight to her grandfather's private room and walked in.

"Well, I've come home, Grandfather," she announced cheerfully.

"Bless my soul! Betty, is that you? What are *you* doing here? Are you ill?"

"No, indeed," and Betty's spirits rose at the sight of the dear, familiar face. She threw her arms around his neck, and said:

"Oh, Grandfather, *you'll* help me out, won't you? I *couldn't* stay there! Their manners are *awful!* And they thought I mocked at the lady, but I didn't. And I know Grandmother won't like my coming home, but I just *had* to! So you fix it up with her, won't you? And what do you think? I haven't had a scrap of breakfast, and I just couldn't eat my dinner last night, so I'm fearfully hungry."

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed Mr. Irving again. "Why, you poor child! Wouldn't they give you any breakfast?"

"Oh, you don't understand! I came away before anybody was up. I took the 7.45 from Hillside station, and, you see, coming off suddenly as I did, I—I couldn't stop for breakfast. Why, Grandfather, I—I *ran away!*"

"You little rascal! I haven't the heart to blame you. But, as you suspect, your grandmother won't be glad! Betty, you're a caution! Did you have any money with you?"

"Yes, but a girl borrowed twenty dollars last night, so I didn't have much to spare!"

Mr. Irving shook with laughter.

"Oh, Betty, to think of a young lady at a finishing-school borrowing from a little unfledged pigeon like you! Well, that ought to trouble your grandmother! But come on, you blessed baby; let's go and get some breakfast at the nearest restaurant, and then go home to break the news to your relatives! Yes, Betty, your old grandfather'll stand by you for a plucky little martyr."

"I thought you would," said Betty, tucking her little hand in his arm, as they started out together.

IV

AN ACCEPTABLE VALENTINE

The McGuires had lived for more than a month in their pleasant home on Commonwealth Avenue, and Betty had begun to feel at home there.

The house was only rented for the winter, and

Denniston Hall was temporarily closed until the summer-time, when they expected to go back there. The whole arrangement had been made in order that Betty might attend school in Boston, and she was a day-pupil in Miss Whittier's school for girls, which was quite near her home.

The school was very much to Betty's liking. She had started in under very pleasant auspices, as she had become acquainted with two or three of the girls before she went. She soon made friends with the others, and, as school hours lasted only from nine o'clock till one, she had the advantage of being most of the time in her own home.

The house, completely furnished, had been rented from some friends of Mrs. McGuire's who were traveling abroad, but Betty had had some of her favorite belongings sent up from Denniston.

Good-natured Pete had taken Betty's list and had carefully packed and forwarded every item on it, and then, after securely locking up the house, had followed the family to Boston, and was installed there as general utility-man, and a very valuable one at that.

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Grandma Jean and little Polly were also there, and Jack, who had entered the Institute of Technology, was delighted with his new opportunities for progress in his studies.

Mrs. McGuire had wisely concluded not to make very desperate efforts to improve Betty's "manners," but to trust to the general influences of a well-ordered school and well-bred companions.

And so Betty was happy in her new school life, and was rapidly making firm friends among the pupils there.

Indeed, given a fair start, she could not fail to be a general favorite, for her warm-hearted unselfishness and her cheerful good nature were unfailing, and she was always ready to do a favor or to enter into a plan with enthusiasm.

Though friendly with the others, Betty liked Jeanette Porter and Dorothy Bates best of all the girls, and this trio were often together, both in and out of school hours.

Jeanette was a slender, rather delicate, girl, with a sweet countenance and large, serious eyes. Dorothy was a gay, roly-poly sort of a being, who was always smiling, and irrepressibly inclined to mischief. But they both loved Betty, and she was fond of them, and never a cross word marred the happiness of their intimacy. Sometimes, if Jeanette seemed too sober-faced, the other two would tease her a bit or play a merry joke on her, but always in a spirit of harmless fun, and when their victim could no longer keep from smiling at their foolery, they declared themselves satisfied.

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But one day, as they walked home from school together, Jeanette was really troubled about something, and though she tried to conceal it, she was on the very verge of tears.

"What's the matter, Jeanie?" said Betty, tucking her arm through her friend's, while Dorothy walked on her other side.

"Nothing, Betty," said Jeanette, not crossly, but decidedly. "Please don't ask me about it."

"Indeed we will ask you about it!" declared Dorothy. "You just must tell us what's up, because we're your trusties and trues—aren't we, Betty?"

"Of course we are! What's up, Jeanette? Anybody been scolding you?"

"No, it isn't that. Oh, girls, I don't want to tell you!"

"Well, I like that!" exclaimed Dorothy. "Now, you just out with it, Miss Secret-Keeper, and pretty quick, too!"

"Oh, well, it's nothing, anyhow," said Jeanette, with a heightened color; "it's only that I can't go to the reception."

"Not go to the reception!" cried Betty and Dorothy together. "Why not?"

"Well, because—because I can't have a new dress."

"Oh, is that all?" said Betty. "Why, I'll give you a new dress."

To Betty's amazement, Jeanette turned to her with a look she never forgot.

"How *dare* you say such a thing, Betty McGuire? If you weren't one of my best friends, I'd never forgive you!"

"I didn't mean any harm," stammered Betty, quite crushed by Jeanette's offended look.

"Of course she didn't," chimed in Dorothy; "in fact, she didn't mean it at all."

Betty was about to speak, but Dorothy pinched her arm to be silent, and went on herself.

"You don't need a new dress, Jeanette. Your white muslin with the lace yoke is a very pretty dress?"

"It was; but it's just been done up, and it went all to pieces. It's so old, you know. Mother said she didn't believe it would stand washing again. So I can't go, and I told Miss Whittier to-day that I wouldn't select a piece."

"Oh, what a shame!" cried Betty; "and you recite so well, too. Can't you wear some other dress?"

"No, I have nothing fit for an evening affair, and Mother says I can't have a new one. So I'm not going."

At Miss Whittier's school a reception was given each winter, and always a very important event. The parents and friends of the pupils were invited, and elaborate preparations were made for the occasion. The girls wore their prettiest frocks, and a program of entertainment was given in which the pupils who excelled in singing or declamation took part.

Usually this reception was held on the date of some poet's birthday, and this year the 27th of February, Longfellow's birthday, had been chosen.

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It was now the 10th, but the intervening time was none too long in which to prepare for the great event.

Betty, Jeanette, and Dorothy were all among the ones chosen to recite from the poet's works, and a prize would be rewarded to the one who best deserved it.

Each contestant was allowed to make her own selection, and already Betty was practising on "The Wreck of the *Hesperus*," while Dorothy had chosen "The Skeleton in Armor."

These decisions were profound secrets among the school-girls, only Miss Whittier being supposed to know what each girl was to recite. But of course our three little friends told each other in the strictest confidence, and when Jeanette announced her intention of staying away from the reception, both Betty and Dorothy were astounded.

But arguing and coaxing were in vain, and when Jeanette turned in at her own gate, the other two said good-by and went on toward their homes.

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"Whatever made Jeanette so angry when I offered to give her a dress?" exclaimed Betty as soon as she and Dorothy were alone.

"Why, you goose, of course she wouldn't accept a dress from anybody! You ought to have known that the mere mention of such a thing would offend her!"

"But I don't see why. I'd love to give it to her."

"It would hurt her pride too much. Don't you see, the Porters are not at all well off,—I don't mean quite poor, but I mean they have to scrimp to get along,—but they're fearfully proud. Jeanette would be quite willing to say she couldn't afford a new frock, but she'd die before she'd let any one give her one."

"Well, I think that's silly. Just because I happen to have more money than she has, is the very reason I ought to give her a dress."

"It does seem so," admitted Dorothy, "but it isn't so, and don't you ever propose it to her again, for it won't be a bit of good, and it only makes her angry."

"Well, I won't, then, but won't it be horrid not to have Jeanette at the reception? It takes all the fun out of it for us, I think."

"Yes, I think so, too; and look here, Betty, don't you tell anybody the reason why Jeanette's not coming. She told us, of course, but she knew we wouldn't tell."

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"Didn't she tell Miss Whittier?"

"Of course not, silly. Though most likely Miss Whittier guessed."

"But you said Jeanette would just as lief tell it."

"Well, she might tell it to us, not to any one else. I declare, Betty, you don't seem to have any gumption about some things!"

"No," said Betty, rather meekly, for she was

often bothered by her lack of "gumption" about matters which were new to her experience.

On reaching her own home, she went straight to her mother with the story.

Mrs. McGuire sat reading in the pleasant library, and looked up with a loving smile as Betty entered rather abruptly.

"And will you tell me, Mother," she concluded, after she had poured out her indignation, "why Jeanette should get so angry at what I said?"

"You can't understand, deary," said her mother, smoothing Betty's tangled dark curls, "that peculiar pride which revolts at accepting anything of money value from anybody outside one's own family. It is, perhaps, especially a New England trait, and your own Irish heart is so big it leaves no room for the Puritan instincts which are also yours by inheritance. But Dorothy is right, dear, and you must not repeat your offer to Jeanette, though I, too, am sorry that it is not possible."

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"But, Mother, if I could think of some way to give her a dress without letting her know where it came from, wouldn't that do?"

"Hardly, dear. She would know at once that you had sent it, and would, of course, be offended."

"Oh, dear! I think people are just silly."

"That may be, but you can't make the world different in a moment. Come to luncheon now, and tell me all about your own plans for the reception."

"All right; but, Mother, I'm going to find some way for Jeanette to go to it, too. I don't know how yet, but you see if I can't fix it somehow!"

"Very well, Betty; but don't do anything without consulting me."

"No, I won't, and I haven't thought of anything yet, but I'm sure I shall."

All the rest of that day, Betty thought hard, but it was not until after she had gone to bed at night that an idea flashed upon her. Such a beautiful idea! She wondered that she hadn't thought of it sooner!

She felt she must discuss it with her mother at once, for if it wouldn't do, she wanted to think up something else. But surely it would do! Such a grand idea *must* be all right!

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She jumped up and put on her blue kimono, and poking her bare feet into little bedroom slippers of blue quilted satin, she ran out into the hall and called over the banister:

"Mother, are you alone? May I come down?"

In response to the "Yes, Betty dear; what is it?" she ran down-stairs, and, flinging a sofa-cushion on the floor, nestled against her mother's knee.

"Oh," she exclaimed, "I've thought of the beautifulest plan to give Jeanette a dress and not offend her! Oh, do approve of it, Mother, please do! It's such a good plan!"

"Tell me about it, Betty, so that I can enjoy it, too."

"Well, you see, Mother, to-day's the tenth. So next Saturday's the fourteenth—Valentine's Day, you know. Now, I want to get a lovely dress for Jeanette, and make it into a valentine, and send it to her! Don't you see, nobody could get angry at a valentine, and you can't put your name to it, and so she'd have to keep it!"

Betty looked so radiant over her plan that Mrs. McGuire hadn't the heart to disapprove of it, though she felt a little dubious about its wisdom.

"Let me think it over," she said quietly.

"But remember, Mother, I mean to make it like a real valentine. Put it in a box, you know, and lace paper around it, and sort of hearts and darts and things, and a verse, a lovely, loving verse. Wouldn't that be nice?"

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"Yes; that effect would greatly help it, for valentines nowadays often contain a lace handkerchief or bonbons or something by way of a gift. Your plan seems to grow on me, Betty."

"Oh, Mother, how lovely you are!" Betty jumped up from her low seat to give her mother a most enthusiastic squeeze, and then, big girl though she was, stayed cuddled in her arms while they continued the conversation.

"How can you get a dress to fit her, my child?"

"I thought about that. But if we just buy one all ready-made, you know, about my size, I'm sure it will be about right for her. And Mrs. Porter can take it in or let it out, or whatever it needs. A soft, white kind of a one, I mean."

"Chiffon?"

"Yes, with lace here and there, and cunning little ribbon bows, and knots of velvet, or something fancy-like for evening."

"Well, we'll go together to select it."

"To-morrow afternoon, after school?"

"Yes, or next day. Of course you won't send it until Saturday?"

"No; but we have to fix it up valentine-y, you know, so we'd better go to-morrow. Then we must write the verse. Mother, won't you make up the verse? I don't want a 'Roses red, violets blue' sort of a one."

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"Very well; skip back to bed, and I'll see what I can do in the poetry line."

"Oh, you dear Mother! You *are* so sweet!" And with a final, rather smothering embrace, Betty said good night, and ran back to her bed to dream of valentines and Longfellow and Jeanette, all in a grand jumble.

It was hard next day to say nothing of her plan to Dorothy, but Mrs. McGuire had decided if it were to be successful it must be kept absolutely secret. So not even Jack was told about it, and, after luncheon, Mrs. McGuire and Betty started off to buy the frock. Mrs. McGuire had slight misgivings about it all, but she determined to try

the experiment, for it was the only way that the thing could possibly be accomplished, and she felt very sorry for Jeanette. After looking at several pretty, girlish dresses, they decided upon a lovely one of cream-white chiffon, made over white silk. It had a soft lace bertha, bordered with a wreath of tiny pink rosebuds. It was a simple, dainty little gown, but very effective, and Betty agreed that it would suit Jeanette perfectly.

The saleswoman was asked to provide an especially nice box, and Betty examined it herself, to be sure that the corners were unbroken.

Then, with explicit directions about careful packing and wrapping and speedy sending of it home, they went away.

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"Of course, Mother, I must send Jeanette another valentine, too; a real one, you know, so she won't suspect about the dress. And, anyway, I want to buy at least twenty other valentines to send. Will you go with me?"

So they went to another shop, and Betty bought valentines for a few school-girls and other friends she had made in Boston; for Jack and Polly and Grandma Jean, and for some of her Greenborough friends.

Nor were Pete and Ellen forgotten, for Betty well knew how they would prize valentines from her. And so engrossing was the selection of all these that the afternoon slipped away, and when they reached home, to their great joy the new dress had already arrived.

Behind the locked doors of her mother's room, Betty carefully lifted the lovely thing from its tissue-papers, and exclaimed with delight at its beauty. It looked even prettier than it had in the shop, and Betty was sure her plan would be a fine success.

"I hope so," said Mrs. McGuire; "at any rate, we'll try it, and if it doesn't turn out as well as we hope, I'll take the matter in charge, and go and see Mrs. Porter about it."

The next afternoon Betty devoted to fixing what she called the "valentine-y" part of it.

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The big box was of fine white pasteboard, of a watered design, with gilt edges, and the firm's name in gilt letters on the cover.

Over this name Betty pasted a large valentine that completely covered it.

Then, with considerable cleverness, she cut up several other pretty valentines, and of the rose garlands and doves and cupids she obtained in this way, she contrived a sort of wreath, which, when pasted into place, made a border all round the box cover.

Inside the box were two large leaves of satin paper which closed like shutters over the dress when it was folded in place. These leaves Betty decorated in similar fashion to the cover, and replaced the white tapes with narrow blue ribbons. The leaves closed together and were fastened with a large red paper heart, garlanded with flowers, and pierced by a gilt arrow.

Fastened to the heart by the arrow was the verse Betty's mother had composed and had copied on the blank page of a real valentine. This was in an embossed envelop and was addressed "*To Jeanette from St. Valentine.*"

The verses which her mother wrote read thus:

On Cupid's Day
One may, they say,
Send tokens to a friend,
Of love most true,
As mine for you,
A love that ne'er shall end.

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Accept then, dear,
The token here,
That tells this love of mine;
Or else a dart
Will pierce the heart
Of your fond Valentine.

"Mother, it is perfectly lovely!" cried Betty, as she read the verses. "And, don't you see, saying 'from St. Valentine' is the same as saying 'from Santa Claus,' so I *don't* think she'll mind, do you?"

As this was about the fiftieth time Betty had asked the same question, Mrs. McGuire could only make the same reply:

"I don't know, dear, but don't worry about it. If she 'minds,' I will undertake to set the matter right again."

Then the box was carefully wrapped in white paper, and sealed up with gilt hearts. Mrs. McGuire addressed it, and she had also written the verses, for Jeanette would have recognized Betty's penmanship at once.

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ON SATURDAY A MESSENGER WAS SENT
WITH THE PRECIOUS BOX

It was hard to wait for Valentine's Day, but, as Betty had much to do getting ready her other valentines to be dispatched, the time flew quickly. Jack also had many to send, and as, except for the dress, Betty need make no secrets of hers, they spent the afternoon of the thirteenth together in the library, addressing the pretty missives.

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"This is a beauty!" said Jack, holding up a lovely affair of gilt latticework, which, if you pulled a cord, burst into a mass of flowers and birds. "I think I'll send this to Jeanette Porter. She's one of the nicest girls we know, don't you think so, Betty?"

"Yes, I do. She and Dorothy Bates are my dearest friends, and they're coming over this afternoon, so let's get theirs out of the way first."

"All right. I'll send this one to Dorothy. She's a jolly girl, but Jeanette's my choice. She's so quiet and pretty-mannered."

"I'm fond of Jeanette myself, Jack," said Betty; "and—oh, here they come! Slip theirs in here, quick!"

They whisked the valentines into a table drawer, just in time to escape the eyes of the girls as they came in.

"Hello!" said Betty, gaily. "We're addressing valentines. As there aren't any here for you two, you may look at them all you like. I hope you're not expecting us to send you any!"

"Oh, no!" said the visitors, laughing, for well they knew they would all send valentines to each other.

"Isn't it jolly that Valentine's Day comes on Saturday?" said Dorothy. "I shall sit on the lowest step of the staircase all day long to be ready to fly to the door every time the bell rings."

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"Oh, girls," cried Betty, "wouldn't it be fun if you'd all come over here to-morrow afternoon and bring your valentines! We can have a regular show of them!"

"All right, I'll come," said Dorothy, and "So will I," said Jeanette. "Oh, what a beauty this is! Betty, I don't see where you found such lovely ones."

"That's left over," said Betty, carelessly; "you may have it, if you care for it."

The thoughtless words were no sooner spoken than Betty's heart stood still with a sudden fear that Jeanette would be offended again.

But, to her amazement, she replied as carelessly:

"Don't you want it? Oh, thank you, I'd love to have it. I got mine at Morrison's, and they're not nearly so pretty as this one."

Betty was bewildered.

Why was Jeanette so ready to accept a valentine, and so angered at the offer of a dress? To be sure, the valentine cost but a trifle, and the frock considerably more, but that was a matter of degree, and if it was on account of principle, Betty thought the cases were the same. But Betty gave up trying to understand these fine distinctions, and awaited results of her enterprise.

On Saturday a messenger was sent with the precious box. He was given special directions, if any one should ask him where the box came from, not to give the slightest hint.

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"Trust me, ma'am!" said the boy, and taking the box carefully, he went on his errand. Then there was suspense indeed. Betty hovered near the telephone, though she had no real reason to think Jeanette would call her up. Had her mind not been distracted by the continuous arrival of valentines to herself, she could scarcely have kept from flying over to Jeanette's house.

But valentines of all sorts and styles came pouring into the house all day. Betty and Jack received them in every mail, and also between mails by messenger.

Polly had enough to make her baby heart overflow with glee, and though she ruined most of them with her affectionate pats and kisses, she liked them just as well in their shabby condition.

About four o'clock the young people arrived. Betty had invited a dozen or more, both girls and boys, and though valentines are particularly meant for the fair sex, yet the boys had a goodly number to exhibit also.

The young folk gathered in the drawing-room

and set their treasures around on tables, mantels, piano, and even on chairs, so many there were.

Eagerly Betty watched Jeanette to see what her demeanor might be.

To her amazement, Jeanette was positively gay! She seemed like one transformed. Her eyes danced, and her face fairly beamed, as if she were bubbling over with happiness.

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Jack admired her more than ever, and wondered if the receiving of a few valentines pleased her as much as all that. Betty didn't quite understand, but she saw that Jeanette was radiantly happy, and she felt sure that it *must* be because of the new dress.

"Oh, I know the valentine *you* sent me, Betty!" she cried soon after she came in.

"Which?" said Betty, her heart in her throat with excitement.

"This one!" cried Jeanette, triumphantly holding up the pretty paper valentine that Betty had sent.

"Right you are, Jeanette," she replied; "I did send you that, because I knew you'd love that landscape with the blue trees and green sky."

"It isn't that way!" cried Jeanette. "You needn't make fun of my prettiest valentine of all—or nearly," she added, with a funny little smile.

Betty was mystified, but said nothing, but after the others had gone and only Jeanette and Dorothy remained, she said, unable longer to restrain her curiosity:

"Whatever is the matter with you, Jeanette? I never saw you so gay and festive."

"Indeed, I should think I would be!" exclaimed Jeanette. "I waited till the others had gone, to tell you. Girls, I'm going to the reception!"

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"You are!" cried Dorothy. "How perfectly lovely!" And Betty said: "Oh, Jeanette, I'm so glad!"

"How did you happen to change your mind?" asked Dorothy.

"Oh, I had a dress for a valentine! The loveliest dress you ever saw! It's just a dream! All filmy chiffon, and the darlingest little pink rosebuds, and exquisite lace—oh!"

"A valentine!" cried Dorothy, and Betty said eagerly: "Who sent it?"

"I don't know," said Jeanette, turning her eyes on Betty, so honestly ignorant that Betty knew she didn't suspect in the least. "I've no idea. It came in the most beautiful box, all fixed up like a lovely big valentine, and the sweetest verse, all written out. I never saw the handwriting before, and I can't imagine—I haven't the least idea—who sent it to me."

"Are you glad?" said Betty.

"Glad? Well, I just guess I am. Now I can go to the reception, and I'm going to recite 'The

Famine' lines from 'Hiawatha.'"

"But haven't you any way to find out who sent it?" persisted Dorothy, thereby asking the very question Betty wanted to.

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"No, and I don't want to try. You see, you're not supposed to know who sends a valentine, and of course it would turn out to be Aunt Esther, or Grandmother Harrington, and that would take away all the beautiful mystery and romance. It's so lovely not to know where it came from. It's a true valentine."

"So it is," agreed Betty, her heart fairly bounding with joy at the complete success of her little plan.

"Come on home with me and see it," urged Jeanette; but Betty felt she must tell her mother about it at once, so she said, "No, it's too late. I'll run over to-morrow to see it."

"All right, then; be sure to come," and happy Jeanette went away with Dorothy, leaving an equally happy Betty behind her.

"And don't you mind if she *never* knows you gave it to her?" asked Mrs. McGuire after she had the story.

"Why, no, Mother. What a question! The whole trouble was for fear she *would* know that. And now she has the dress, and she's so happy about it, indeed I *don't* want her *ever* to know where it came from!"

Betty's own joy in the gift she had made was purely unselfish, and she felt amply rewarded in the pleasure she had given Jeanette.

So when the night of the reception came, Betty took quite as much satisfaction in seeing Jeanette in the lovely and becoming frock as she did in wearing her own beautiful new one.

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And when Jeanette received the prize for her wonderfully well-done recitation, Betty squeezed her mother's hand and looked up at her with eyes fairly beaming in triumph at the thought that she had made it possible for Jeanette to win.

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V

THE PALACE OF TIME

"I think the club ought to be for something that will improve our minds," said Constance Harper.

"Well, I don't!" declared Lena Carey; "we get our minds improved in school. I cram improvement every day, until my mind is fairly bursting with it. I think the club ought to be just for fun."

"I think so, too," agreed Betty. "At least, I don't vote for the improvement part. My mind needs improvement, goodness knows! But I don't believe we'd ever get much out of a club of our own.

"But I do think it ought to be for something

besides just fun," went on Betty.

"What do you mean?" demanded Lena. "If you don't study or have papers, what can you do but have fun?"

"Why, it might be for charity," suggested Jeanette Porter.

"Yes," said Betty; "that's what I mean. We can have lots of fun getting up things for charity, and do good besides."

"I'd like that, I think," Constance said; "you can have lovely fairs and garden-parties and all sorts of things for charity."

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"We won't have a garden-party just yet," said Lena, as she drew closer to the blazing fire.

"No," returned Constance, a little shortly; "I didn't mean to. But I suppose the club will last through the summer."

"Of course it will," said Betty, who always interrupted when Lena and Constance began their sharp little speeches. "And before summer comes we'll have an entertainment in the house."

It was now the first week in March, and, as the weather was raw and disagreeable, the girls were glad to gather in Betty's cozy library, and nestle in soft, cushioned chairs drawn up to the big fireplace, with its crackling logs.

The four girls had come over for the express purpose of forming a club of some sort, though the details of the plan were not yet thought out. Of course, Jack had been promptly excluded from the conference, as it was to be a girls' club.

"All right," he said, as he went unwillingly away; "we boys will get up a rival club, and it'll be so jolly you'll want to disband yours and join ours."

"All right; when that happens, we'll do it," sang out Lena, as the door closed behind the reluctant Jack.

But after it was decided to have the club a charitable one, no one could think of just the right form that it should take. "Mother went to a concert last night for the aid of the Orphan Asylum," suggested Constance, and Lena promptly responded:

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"Then they don't need our help. Let's think of something else."

"How about the Fresh Air Fund?" said Jeanette.

"Just the thing!" cried Dorothy. "I'd rather work for little children than anybody else."

"All right, then; our object is settled," said Constance; "now what shall we name the club?"

"Oh, wait," said Lena; "first we must elect officers and all that."

"First," said Betty, "we must decide on our members, We five, of course, and I'd like to ask Martha Taylor, too."

"Then you can leave me out," said Constance, promptly.

"Nothing of the sort!" said Betty. "You're perfectly silly, Constance. I don't see why you don't like Martha. And she'd feel slighted to be left out of a thing like this."

"Nobody likes Martha Taylor," observed Jeanette. "I don't think we need ask her, Betty."

"Well, I do! And if you don't, you may leave me out, too!"

"Oh, Betty! Betty! Of course we wouldn't leave you out! Why, there couldn't be a club without you."

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"All right, then. It's Martha Taylor, too."

It was not often that Betty asserted herself so strongly, but when she did the others generally yielded the point. Martha Taylor was not a favorite; although a member of the girls' class, none of them liked her, and she had no chum and almost no friend. There was no especial reason for this, for Martha was not ill-natured or disagreeable; but she was heavy and uninteresting, and never seemed to understand the others' jokes and fun.

But Betty felt sorry for her, and, seeing she was neglected by the other girls, she stood up for her and insisted on having her for a member of the club.

"Well, you'll have to look after her," said Lena. "I never know what to say to her. She only says 'Yes,' or 'No,' or 'I don't care,' when you ask her anything."

"Well, she won't make any trouble in the club, anyhow," observed Jeanette. "I don't see why Betty wants her, but if we have to have her, we have to, I suppose."

"Yes, we have to," said Betty; "and I'm going to telephone her now, and ask her if she wants to come."

Whatever they may have thought, no one objected outwardly, and Betty called up Martha on the telephone and invited her over.

Needless to say, the invitation was accepted, and soon Martha appeared, looking greatly pleased.

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"Hello, Martha," said Betty, most cordially, and made a place for the new-comer by her side.

The others spoke pleasantly enough, but without enthusiasm, and then the business meeting was begun.

After some discussion Betty was made president and Dorothy vice-president, Lena Carey was treasurer, and Constance was recording secretary, with Jeanette for corresponding secretary.

This gave each an office with the exception of Martha, and as soon as Betty saw how things were going, she calmly created an office for her friend.

"I nominate Martha Taylor for auditor," she said, in her most decided way.

"What's that?" asked Lena.

Now Betty wasn't quite sure herself what an auditor was, or whether it was a usual office in a club, but she didn't care. It made an official title for Martha, and so kept her from feeling slighted.

"An auditor?" responded Betty, airily. "Oh, that's the one who looks over the books and accounts of all of us, to see if we've added up right, and all that."

This wasn't a specially pleasing idea to the treasurer and the two secretaries, but they understood Betty's determined expression, and they submitted with good grace.

So matters went on pleasantly, and Martha was greatly elated at being chosen to fill what she considered a most important office.

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"But I don't always add right myself," she said conscientiously.

"Never mind; I'll help you," said Betty, smiling at her. "Now, girls, for a name. I don't like a high-sounding name. Let's have something plain and straightforward."

"The Fresh Air Fund Club," suggested Lena.

"The Fresh Air Club is shorter," said Constance.

"The Fresh Club is shorter yet," said Dorothy, laughing, "and the boys will call us that, anyhow, when they hear about it."

They decided on "The Fresh Air Club," and then, all business matters being settled, they proceeded to plan their first entertainment.

"Let's have something really nice," said Martha. "We can get Hetherton's Hall to hold it in, without paying anything. My uncle is one of the managers, and I know he'd let us have it for a charity."

This was a most advantageous offer, and, had it come from any one else, it would have been hailed with enthusiasm. As it was, nobody said much, except Betty, who exclaimed:

"Why, Martha, that will be fine! If we don't have to pay for the hall, we can make a lot of money, for that's generally the biggest item."

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"Yes," agreed Constance; "all the things to sell will be given to us, or we'll make them ourselves. You mean a sort of fair, don't you, Betty?"

"Yes; only a special kind, you know—a bazaar, or something like that."

"What is a bazaar?" asked Martha, with such an air of blank ignorance that Constance frowned at her.

"A bazaar," began Lena, "why, a bazaar is—it's just a bazaar. Anybody knows what a bazaar is."

"Oh," said Martha, not much enlightened, but realizing that she was supposed to be.

"Lena didn't explain it very clearly," said Betty laughing. "I'm not sure I know the difference myself between a bazaar and a fair."

"Neither do I," said Constance; "I think they're

about the same, only bazaar is the new-fashioned name."

"And a bazaar is bigger," said Dorothy, "more elaborate, you know, with booths and flags and things like that."

"And you dress up in costumes at a bazaar," added Jeanette.

"Good!" cried Betty. "I love dressing up in fancy costumes. What sort do they wear?"

"Oh, sometimes all sorts of costumes, and sometimes just flower-girl dresses and things like that."

"If you mean that sort of a fair, I read about one not very long ago that might be very nice, I think," suggested Martha, a little timidly.

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"What was it?" asked Betty, as no one else expressed any desire to know.

"Well, it was a bazaar of the months. Only you have to have boys in it—six girls and six boys, and each one has a table and sells things belonging to that month. Flowers for May, you know, and fans for August, and all sorts of things for Christmas, the December one."

"It sounds lovely," said Dorothy kindly; "but it would be funny to sell Christmas things and valentines and fans in March."

"Not at all," said Betty. "People could buy their valentines and Christmas presents, and hide them away till next year. I think it's a fine idea. Then each one of us could dress up in a costume to fit the month, such as the Queen of May or the April Fool."

"Yes," said Martha, "but you have to have boys for Fourth of July and April Fool and Santa Claus."

"Well, we will," declared Betty. "We'll ask six boys to be honorary members of the club and help us with the bazaar. Let's call Jack in now."

They all agreed to this, and Jack came in, much pleased to help with the great project.

As the young people talked it over, it seemed to assume grand proportions, and Betty proposed that they lay the whole plan before her mother before they should proceed further. Mrs. McGuire listened with great interest as the purpose of the Fresh Air Club was explained to her.

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"Excellent!" she said at last "I'm sure it will be a lovely bazaar, there's room for such pretty decorations and costumes. Have you chosen your parts?"

They hadn't, but, with Mrs. McGuire's assistance, they undertook the matter at once.

Everybody agreed that golden-haired Constance must be the May Queen. She was just right for it, with her blue eyes and fair, pretty face.

"Do I have a booth?" she said. "What shall I sell?"

"Not exactly a booth for you," said Mrs.

McGuire, "but a bower, a real May Queen's bower. And you must sell flowers, of course—not only nosegays, but potted plants and ferns and things like that."

"And wild flowers and pond-lilies! Oh, Constance, your booth will be the prettiest of all!" cried Dorothy, a little enviously.

"You won't find many wild flowers or pond-lilies in March," said Mrs. McGuire, smiling; "but the florist will help us out with many blossoms, and we may have to use paper flowers for the bower. Dorothy, you are just the one to be the Summer Girl; that's the one for August, you know."

"Oh, I will! And I know just how I'll fix my booth! I've just thought of it. I say, girls, suppose we don't tell all about our booths, but surprise each other! Just choose our parts, you know."

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"All right!" said Betty, "choose away. Jeanette, what month do you want?"

"I'll take June," said Jeanette, who already had a pretty plan in her wise little head.

"I want October," declared Lena, her eyes twinkling as she thought of Hallowe'en possibilities.

"September was represented by Diana in the bazaar I heard about," said Martha; "I think Betty ought to be that. She'd make a lovely Diana."

"So you would, Betty!" said Constance. "Do take that."

"Very well," agreed Betty. "What do I sell?"

"Grapes," said Lena; "but as you can't get grapes in March, you'll have to sell grape jelly!"

"I can get hothouse grapes," said Betty. "But this leaves only November for Martha. What can you be, Martha—a turkey?"

"November isn't much of anything," said Martha. "It's sort of uninteresting."

"Well," said Constance, tossing her head; "it's the only one left."

Betty's eyes flashed at this, but she only said:

"All right, Martha, you take November. I've a good idea for it; I'll tell you afterward. Now let's fix up the boys. What month do you want, Jack?"

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"Well, since you ask me, I'll take January. I'm great on January."

"All right; and we'll ask the other boys and let them choose. Oh, I hope they'll all do it! Won't it be fun?"

It was fun, but it also proved to be a great deal of work. Indeed, if the grown-ups hadn't helped them out, the young people could scarcely have carried the affair through. Grandpa Irving took a great interest in it from the beginning, and planned so many improvements and additions that the bazaar soon became a really large enterprise.

It was called "The Palace of Time," and Mr. Irving agreed to assume the character of old

Father Time and preside at the bazaar.

His principal aids were four ladies who represented the four seasons, and who were to wear appropriate costumes to designate Spring, Summer, Autumn, and Winter. Each of these ladies presided over the three booths which belonged to her season, and thus the success of the young people's booths was made more sure.

The other boys had proved quite as pleased as Jack to take part in the affair, and all of those who were to take part, as well as many of their friends, worked hard during the few weeks of preparation.

One thing Betty resolved, and that was that Martha must have an attractive booth and one that should somehow prove to be among the most popular. After she told her grandfather how the other girls felt toward Martha, Mr. Irving also declared that he, too, would look out for her.

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"Never you mind, Betty," said her grandfather; "we'll just fix it so that Martha's booth will be crowded with people all the evening."

And so, though nobody knew exactly what Martha was going to do, it was soon known that hers would be the supper booth.

Lemonade was to be served by July; ice-cream by August; flowers, of course, would be sold by May; and candy would be found in the February booth.

But November being the month of Thanksgiving and plenty, it was deemed appropriate to have the more substantial refreshments on sale there.

Martha was delighted with the plan Mr. Irving proposed, and, with the help of Miss Connington, the young lady who took the part of Autumn, she made ready for her November booth.

When the night of the bazaar came, everything was in readiness, and hundreds of people were waiting for the entrance-doors to open.

And when at last they were admitted, the beautiful scene was greeted with great applause.

At the end of the room was the throne of Father Time. This was on a raised platform, behind which was a large sheet painted with the figures of the zodiac.

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Time himself, who was, of course, Mr. Irving, was robed in long white garments, which fell in classic folds about his tall and stalwart frame. A white beard and "forelock" added to the effect, and he carried a scythe and hour-glass.

But his genial smile and cordial words of greeting were not much like the grim old gentleman who is represented as going about and cutting down all, both great and small. Not wishing to shirk his part of the real work of the evening, Mr. Irving had some small articles for sale on his "throne." There were hour-glasses and smaller sand-glasses; clocks and watches; diaries and calendars; and even a metronome, which, he said, he was particularly anxious to dispose of, because it beat Time! As all these

articles had been donated, and as they were quickly bought from the entertaining old gentleman, the funds of the Fresh Air Club were considerably added to, that night, by Father Time.

The young ladies who represented the four seasons were dressed as if they were models for the pretty modern picture calendars. They did not sell things, but hovered round the booths that were under their supervision, and took care that everything went right.

The booths themselves were marvels of elaborate ingenuity.

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January was what looked like a snow palace. It was really a little mosque-shaped house, built of a light framework covered with cotton-wool. This was sprinkled with diamond-dust, and scattered bits of tinsel frosting, and glass icicles. It was electric-lighted, and a more fairy-like palace could not be imagined. Jack presided over it in the guise of Jack Frost. His suit was white Canton flannel sprinkled with tinsel frost, and his peaked cap and roundabout jacket were trimmed with ermine—or what looked like it.

He had on sale anything and everything that had to do with January—skates, sleds, sleigh-bells, warm caps and mittens, New Year's cards, year-books, and even soap-stones and foot-warmers for sleighs. His booth was a gay and cheery place, with a bright fire of gas-logs blazing, and red-shaded lamps all about.

Mrs. McGuire had assisted, and many visitors thought Jack's booth the finest of all.

Harry Harper, as St. Valentine, presided over the February booth. He was dressed like the pictures of the old saint, and in his booth were many cupids and doves.

The decorations were garlands of paper roses tied with blue ribbons, and red hearts and gold darts of all sizes. He had a real little post-office established, and did a thriving business with the tender missives he had in stock. He also had the candies, as they were "sweets," and then Harry, with a view to making more money, had declared that he was entitled to use all the holidays that belonged to his month, so he added a small tableful of souvenirs appropriate to Washington's Birthday and Lincoln's Birthday. There were little hatchets, and bunches of cherries, and portraits of both Presidents, and these favors sold as well as his valentines.

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The next booth was March, and this was a funny one. It represented a lion's den, and was a sort of cave which was built partly of real rocks, and partly of huge boulders made of wood and covered with brown muslin and moss.

Bob Carey was the lion, and as he had procured a lion's "make-up" from a theatrical costumer's, he was a fine animal. He said that, as March, he had to be either a lion or a lamb, and he preferred the lion's part. It was not easy to find articles for sale appropriate to March, but he had succeeded in getting donations from the shopkeepers of garden implements, such as rakes and spades and hoes, which are useful in that month; also packets of flower and vegetable seeds, and (which made every one smile) a huge

pile of sheet music, consisting only of popular *marches*. He had, too, funny little souvenirs for St. Patrick's Day, and so humorous was Bob himself, in his character of the Cozy Lion, that he had many visitors.

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CONSTANCE IN THE MAY QUEEN'S BOWER

April was in charge of Elmer Ellis, and he was an "April Fool." His costume was that of a court jester, and the bells on his cap and on his bauble jingled merrily as he played pranks on all who came his way. He had no booth, but was under a huge umbrella, as, he explained, it might rain at any minute in April. He sold umbrellas, rubbers, rain-coats, sprinkling-cans, garden hose, and also he had a stock of what were known as "April Fool candies." These he sold readily, for they are harmless fun and cause great merriment. Also he sold bundles carefully tied up with contents unknown, which "fooled" the buyers.

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Constance Harper was the May Queen and held court under a beautiful arbor of vines and flowers. She wore a white frock with flower garlands, and a long white veil crowned with flowers.

She held a gilded scepter, and pages stood at either side to wait on her Royal Highness. Her little slippered feet rested on a satin cushion, and pretty Constance certainly was the most attractive picture in the hall that night.

She sold flowers of all sorts—lovely growing

plants and ferns, and dainty baskets of blossoms, as well as tiny nosegays and boutonnieres. Altogether, it was probably the most beautiful booth of all, and it received great admiration.

June was Jeanette Porter. She had not taken the idea of the "month of roses," but chose to represent a "Sweet Girl Graduate."

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Over her white frock she wore a black silk gown, and on her head a "mortar-board."

She looked like a fair, sweet Portia, and her wares were all books. She did a fine trade, for Jeanette was a general favorite, and the books found a ready sale.

July was in charge of Fred Brown, and he represented "Young America."

Although a big boy, he dressed himself in the garb of a little one, and blew his tin trumpet and waved his flag with all the boisterousness of a child of ten on Independence Day.

His booth was a mass of flags and bunting and fireworks, and he sold anything he could find that was patriotic, from copies of the Declaration of Independence to a package of torpedoes.

He also had the lemonade for sale, as that seemed to him to be a Fourth of July beverage. He had persuaded a few men, the best speakers he knew, to deliver occasional short orations, so, with these attractive novelties, it was no wonder that his booth was well attended all the time.

August was left to Dorothy Bates. She was one of the prettiest of all, though one of the simplest in her costume and manners.

She was a Summer Girl; and dressed in a white duck outing-suit, her sailor-like blouse turned in at the throat and turned back at the wrist, she was a charming picture.

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She had no booth, but sat in a hammock beneath a cleverly contrived shade-tree. About her, on what represented grass and sand, were camp-stools, and her visitors were served with ice-cream and little cakes. Also, she sold fans and parasols, and so gay and winsome was pretty Dorothy that the camp-stools were always occupied, while others stood waiting their turn.

September was Betty's month. She had had a beautiful Diana hunting-costume made for her, and in the dark-green cloth, with its black braid and gilt buttons, Betty's slim, straight young figure looked very picturesque. Her booth was a sort of tent, with the flap turned back, and she sold sporting goods of all sorts.

Some kind shopkeepers had donated fishing-rods and reels, trout flies, game-bags, bows and arrows, and many such wares. Betty was happy and gay, and her dark curls clustered round her merry, rosy face as she wheedled her patrons into making further purchases of all sorts of wares.

October was Lena Carey's choice. She used all the traditional features of Hallowe'en, and in a semi-darkened tent she told fortunes to gullible victims. Dressed as a witch in a red robe, a black cape, and a red peaked hat, she fondled her own pet black cat, though old Tabby would not look

weird and mysterious.

The interior of Lena's tent was scarefully decorated with bats and strange devices, and was adorned with lighted Jack-o'-lanterns.

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Lena was clever at fortune-telling, and, as her clients were not exacting as to methods, she managed to satisfy them all with most pleasant, even if most improbable, promises for the future.

Next came November, which was Martha's. At first it had not seemed easy to think of a character for Martha appropriate to November. But as Betty looked at the round, stolid face, full of wholesome good nature, but not piquant or fascinating, she exclaimed:

"Good gracious, Martha! You're just like your grandmother. Do chirk up and giggle sometimes!"

Then her own speech gave her an idea. "Martha," she cried, "that's just it! You shall be your own grandmother! November is the Thanksgiving month, and the very spirit of the Thanksgiving feast is the Grandmother."

So chubby-faced Martha was transformed into the dearest old lady you ever saw—white hair, cap, and spectacles; plain gray gown, with kerchief crossed on her bosom, and knitting work beside her; everything of old-fashioned style, even her reticule and black silk mitts.

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BOB CAREY, AS THE LION IN "MARCH,"
SELLING MARCHES

Mr. Irving, true to his word, assisted with Martha's booth. It was indeed a realistic old-fashioned New England kitchen, with its settings represented as faithfully as possible. And the homely old New England supper viands that were served there were so good and delectable that Martha's booth was crammed with people from opening to closing time.

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December, as you'd doubtless guess, was a Christmas tree.

Although it was really March, so splendid was the great tree, decorated, and lighted elaborately, and so jolly was Ralph Burnett, who stood by as Santa Claus, that it was difficult not to think it was Christmas eve.

On the tree everything was for sale. The wares first, and, when they were gone, the decorations, and even the electric lights and candles were sold.

Indeed, everything in the whole place was sold. As the evening wore on, all the supplies gave out, and the frantic "months" ran around to each other's booths trying to beg or borrow something to sell. The cash-boxes were full of

jingling coins, yet the buyers were unsatisfied. The Fresh Air Club had not expected such a large and generous audience, and they stood in their dismantled booths, resolved to have even a larger and finer bazaar, next winter.

"And, you see, Grandpa," said Betty to Mr. Irving, "Martha did have a successful part as November, and her full share of custom. Why, Martha's kitchen was full of people all the time. Constance was perfectly lovely, sitting in state on her throne, but, now and then, there weren't many people around her booth."

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"Well, Betty, sometimes people would rather eat than buy flowers."

"Yes; that's why I felt sure Martha's booth would be a success. But, of course, I sha'n't say anything to Constance about it."

And Constance never mentioned the subject, but Martha was never slighted by the girls again.

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VI BETTY'S PRACTICAL JOKE

One evening, soon after the bazaar, the McGuires were dining with the Irvings, and naturally were discussing the very successful entertainment.

"And I think," Mr. Irving remarked, "that the young chap who took the part of 'April Fool' was one of the hits of the evening. He was so merry and good-natured, and yet so full of quips and pranks, why, he nearly fooled me two or three times!"

"Oh, pshaw, Grandpa," said Betty, saucily, "it would be easy enough to fool you; you're so—so honest and good-natured, you know."

Mr. Irving looked at the roguish, smiling face with pretended severity.

"Indeed, Miss Curlyhead! So you think it easy to fool your simple-minded old grandfather, do you? Well, little lady, you're greatly mistaken! In fact, you're quite wrong! Fool me! Humph! Why, when I was in college, the boys said I was the only one they could never play a practical joke on!"

Mr. Irving looked very proud of his record for shrewdness, but his eyes twinkled as he saw Betty's incredulous smile.

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"All right, Miss Mischief," he went on, "if you doubt my word, try it. I'll wager you a hat you can't get off a joke upon your unsuspecting old grandfather that I don't see through before it reaches its climax. Fool me, indeed!"

"I don't want to fool you, Grandpa," said Betty, demurely, "only I think I could—that's all."

"You little rogue, you do, do you? Well, the burden of proof rests with you."

"You know you wagered a hat," said Betty,

smiling; "did you mean it?"

"Well, my child, I'll own up that I said 'wager a hat,' because that's a slang phrase—or at least it was in my youth—that doesn't mean anything in particular, and I said it without thinking. But I'll stand by it. You shall have the prettiest hat in Boston if you succeed in playing even the mildest little joke on your old grandfather."

"Now, Father," said Mrs. McGuire, "I don't think practical jokes are nice at all; and I don't think you ought to put Betty up to such nonsense."

"As a rule, my dear, I agree with you; and I don't want Betty to get the habit of doing such things. But this is an exceptional case. And, too, a good-natured joke does no harm, especially if the victim invites it himself."

"I think you're safe, Grandfather," said Jack. "I don't believe Betty or anybody else could fool you. You're too quick."

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"Thank you for that compliment, my boy," said Mr. Irving; "and then, too, remember that I am forewarned."

"Yes," said Mrs. Irving, laughing at the conversation; "I think your chances for a new hat from Grandfather are slim, Betty dear."

"I really don't need a new hat—just now," said Betty, thoughtfully, "but, all the same, I'd like to win that one, and I'm going to try."

Betty's dark head wagged in a determined fashion, and, after a little further chaff, the subject was dropped.

But the next day Betty took it up again with Jack.

"I want to play a perfectly splendid joke on Grandpa," she said, "one that he will remember all his life."

"Well," returned Jack, "you're modest in your desires, aren't you!"

"But I do want to, Jack. Think what fun it would be! Now, help me think of something, do!"

"Let me see; I can't think of things in a minute, you know. But here's one thing; next Friday is the first of April—you might play an April Fool Joke."

"Oh, yes," cried Betty, gleefully, "that's just the thing! Anything is allowable on April Fool's Day. Now, what shall it be?"

"Betty, if you want a really fine affair, we must give some thought to it. Neither do we want any simple joke that we'd make up ourselves. But let's try something classic. Now there's an old story called 'Trajan's Jest,' or somebody's, and I'll look it up, and perhaps we can adapt it to modern times."

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"Oh, Jack, I don't want any old Roman performance, with togas and sandals!"

"No, goosey, not that. But just wait till I think it all out. Oh, Betty, it'll be fine! Just you wait!"

So Betty waited while Jack looked into some reference books, and when he found what he

wanted, they soon had their heads together over the volume. After an hour of reading, chattering, laughing, and planning, Jack said:

"And so, you see, it's all clear sailing, if you girls can only carry it out in the right way."

"Oh, we can!" cried Betty. "Dorothy is so very dramatic, and Jeanette will be lovely in her part. Mine is the hardest."

"Of course it is; but it's your joke, you know. Shall we tell Mother about it?"

"I'd rather not—till it's over. It's all right, you know; she wouldn't disapprove, but she'd think we couldn't do it."

"It seems as if you ought to tell her."

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"THESE TWO YOUNG WOMEN SAT BEHIND ME IN THE STREET-CAR AND OVERHEARD MY CONVERSATION WITH A FRIEND"

"Oh, I'll tell her that we're going to play the joke. Here she comes now. Come in, Mother!"

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Mrs. McGuire came into the library where the children were. "What is it, dear?" she said.

"Why, we've planned the joke for Grandpa," said Betty, her eyes dancing with fun, "and it's going to take a lot of acting. And, Mother, I don't want to tell you about it till it's all over. You don't mind, do you?"

"No, child; that is—I suppose, of course, it's nothing wrong or impolite."

"Oh, no; it's all perfectly correct and proper. Dorothy and Jeanette and I are to do it, but Jack planned it all. And, Mother, we'll want the big carriage on Friday afternoon."

"All right, deary; now, mind, you are quite sure, aren't you, I wouldn't disapprove?"

"Yes, Mother," and Betty's honest eyes were clear and frank. "It's a jolly joke, but there's nothing wrong about it, is there, Jack?"

"Not a thing," said Jack, chuckling. "I'll look out for the girls, Mother. The whole affair won't take

an hour.”

“Very well, then; go on. Your grandfather will be as pleased as yourselves if it succeeds.”

There was much more planning, and then, when the whole affair was explained to Dorothy and Jeanette, they entered into the scheme with glee.

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“It’ll be just like amateur theatricals!” cried Dorothy, clapping her hands. “We must rehearse our parts. Oh, won’t it be fun?”

“Can you dress up to look like a young lady?” said Jack. “Not a disguise, you know, but just make yourself look as if you were eighteen or twenty years old?”

“Oh, yes,” declared Dorothy. “I’m almost sixteen, anyhow. And I’ll wear one of sister Ethel’s dresses, and do my hair up high. I’ll wear a hat of hers, too, one of her prettiest ones.”

“Oh, not too fancy, you know,” warned Jack. “You must dress plainly.”

“All right; I’ll wear a small hat and a dotted veil. Oh, I’ll look grown up; never fear.”

“Jeanette will, too,” said Betty; “she looks older than she is, anyhow. What’ll you wear, Jean?”

“I’ll wear one of Mother’s gowns,” said Jeanette, smiling. “She’s so small and slender, her things just about fit me. Black, I think, with white collar and cuffs.”

“I’ll wear a long cloak,” said Betty, “and a thick, dark veil, so Grandpa can scarcely see my face at all.”

“And glasses,” said Jack. “I’ll get you a pair of dark spectacles, so he won’t see your eyes at all. Now let’s write the letter.”

Then, all suggesting, but Jack doing most of it, the following letter was composed, and was copied by Jeanette:

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MR. WILLIAM IRVING,

Dear Sir: Although I have been in more fortunate circumstances, I am now quite poor. I desire a position as secretary, and I apply to you, because my great-uncle Roger Arundel used to be in your class at college, and I have often heard him speak of your kind heart and generous disposition. I will call at your office, to see you about the matter, this afternoon at three o’clock. Please let me speak to you, even if you cannot give me a position.

Yours truly,

FRANCES ARUNDEL.

“Was there a Roger Arundel in Grandpa’s class?” asked Betty, looking admiringly at the letter.

“I don’t know of any,” said Jack; “I made up the name.”

“Then of course there wasn’t,” said Betty. “Why didn’t you choose a name from his class list?”

"Oh, I didn't quite like to do that. It didn't seem right. But it won't matter. You girls will have to manage the Roger Arundel item. Now, are you sure you understand your parts? Come on, let's rehearse. I'll be Grandpa."

They rehearsed for an hour or more, and declared they understood their parts perfectly.

"But you must disguise your voice more, Betty," said Jack. "Talk as if you had a cold in your throat."

So Betty tried again and succeeded in achieving a hoarse, harsh whisper.

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"That'll do," said Jack, approvingly. "Talk like that and you'll be all right."

At last the first of April came, and the other girls came over to Betty's to start off together on their escapade.

Mrs. McGuire had been taken into the secret at the last moment, thus having had no chance inadvertently to give a hint to the unsuspecting victim.

She helped the three girls to make themselves look as much as possible like full-grown young ladies. And, indeed, the fact that they all wore long dresses and had their hair done up high so changed their appearance that little further disguise was necessary.

Dorothy wore a tailor-made suit of her sister's. It was of dark-blue cloth and somewhat worn, an old one having been chosen on purpose. A small blue straw hat, with a few roses, was very becoming, and the effect of it, with its carefully adjusted veil, was to make her look fully nineteen or twenty years old.

Jeanette, in a plain little black suit and white shirt-waist, looked a very demure young lady. Her trim black hat showed no touch of color, and her sad little face assumed a pathetic expression that made Jack laugh.

"You'll do, Jeanette!" he exclaimed; "you're just a picture of 'a young lady in reduced circumstances.'"

But Betty was the most disguised of all. This was necessary, for Mr. Irving scarcely knew the other two girls, anyhow, and the success of the scheme all depended on his not recognizing Betty.

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She wore a plain, dark dress borrowed from Dorothy's sister. Over this was a long coat, rather loose and full, of tan-colored cloth.

Her hair was drawn tightly back and done in a knot, and she wore large, dark spectacles. Already there was no resemblance left to Betty, but Mrs. McGuire added a thick, dark-brown veil, which was draped loosely over her face in old-fashioned style, and tied bunchily around her neck.

"He'll never know you in the world, Betty!" declared Jack. "You're just all right! Now let's hear your voice."

"Is this Mr. Irving?" said Betty, in such hoarse, raucous tones that they all shrieked with

laughter.

"That'll do," said Jack, critically; "but don't overdo it. Remember, you don't want Grandfather to suspect you. Now come on."

Jack and the three girls got into the carriage and were driven to Mr. Irving's office in the city.

It was half-past two when they reached the building. "Just right time to a dot," said Jack, looking at his watch. "Go on up, Dorothy; are you nervous?"

"Not a bit," returned Dorothy, smiling, as she left the carriage. "Be sure to send the others in time."

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"Trust me!" said Jack, and Dorothy entered the big building and went up in the elevator.

She went to Mr. Irving's offices, and was admitted by a clerk, who said Mr. Irving was in his private office, and asked the visitor's name.

"No name is necessary," said Dorothy, in very grown-up tones. "I am expected."

She walked past the clerk and into the inner office. Mr. Irving looked at her in perplexity as she entered.

"Miss Frances Arundel," said Dorothy, looking a little shy, as she approached the desk. "Didn't you get my note?"

"Oh—'m—yes," said Mr. Irving, hastily turning over some notes and letters before him.

"I am a bit early," went on Dorothy; "I wrote I would be here at three o'clock, but I was so anxious to secure a position, I came earlier. Can you employ me, sir?"

She looked imploringly at Mr. Irving, who, to tell the truth, had quite forgotten the note he had received an hour or so before. He had read it hastily and intended, when the writer came, to turn her over to his clerk; but Dorothy's earnest face arrested his attention, and he paused as he was about to ring the bell for his attendant.

"You speak of Roger Arundel," he said, glancing at the note he held in his hand. "I never knew any one by that name."

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"You didn't, sir?" Dorothy exclaimed, looking greatly surprised. "Why, wasn't he in your class at college?"

"No, he was not," said Mr. Irving, decidedly. "What college did he attend?"

"I don't know," faltered Dorothy, "but—it must have been some other William Irving, then. But, please, can't you find me some employment? I am greatly in need of it!"

Mr. Irving looked at the agitated girl, and felt sorry for her.

"What can you do?" he said, not unkindly. "Have you had any experience in clerical work?"

"Clerical work?" said Dorothy, opening her eyes. "Do you mean church work? I belong to the Sunday-school."

It chanced that Dorothy had never heard the word "clerical" used before, and she imagined it referred to the clergy.

Mr. Irving bit his lips to keep from smiling.

"I mean office work," he said; "have you ever been in an office?"

"Oh, no, sir; you see, we just lost our money lately. But I'm sure I could learn."

"Are you a stenographer? Can you type-write?"

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"No, not either. But I can write a good hand, and I'm quick at figures. Couldn't I copy letters for you? I'm very tidy about my papers."

"H'm, well, we don't have our letters copied by hand. I'm afraid, Miss Arundel, I can't give you a position."

"Oh, please, sir,"—Dorothy's lip quivered a little,—"we're quite poor. Mother tried to take in sewing, but she's ill now, and—and I'm the only support of the family. Do let me address envelopes or something!"

Mr. Irving was very much embarrassed. He had never had an experience just like this before. Clearly, the girl was a refined little gentlewoman, and all unused to the business world.

He judged her to be about eighteen or twenty, and wondered what he could do for her.

He looked over the letter again.

"You say your great-uncle spoke of me? Where is your uncle now?"

"He's—he's not living, sir," said Dorothy, looking down. "And I'm sure you're the Mr. Irving he meant, because he said you were so kind-hearted."

Naturally this touched the old gentleman's heart, and he truly wanted to help the girl. But in his office he employed only skilled workers, and there was no place for Dorothy.

"Bless my soul, child," he exclaimed, "I don't know what to do with you! Arundel—Roger Arundel. No, he was not in my class, but he may have been in the college while I was there. However, I'd be glad to help you if I could,—but I can't think of a thing for you to do."

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"No?" said Dorothy, but with a hopeful inflection in her tone, as if perhaps he might yet think of something.

"You see," she went on, "I simply *must* get work. So of course I came here first, I felt so sure you'd help me if you could."

"Yes—yes; of course. Now, let me see—let me see. You say you're good at figures?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, suppose you try adding up these columns."

Mr. Irving took down a book of accounts, and opened it at random.

"Here now, here now," he said, "don't put your figures on the page; they may be wrong. Add these columns on a separate sheet of paper—so—and let me think what I can do for you."

Dorothy took the pad of paper and the pencil he gave her, and going to a seat at a side-table, she began to add. So excited was she over the way the plan was working, she could scarcely see the figures at all, but she added away industriously, now and then peeping at Mr. Irving.

He was intently studying the note, and occasionally he would look off into space, as if trying to recall Mr. Roger Arundel!

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In a few moments the door opened, and the office boy said: "A lady to see you, sir."

"What name?" said Mr. Irving.

"Here it is, sir; she just wrote it on this paper."

Mr. Irving took the paper from the boy, and read on it, "Miss Frances Arundel." He gave a start and glanced at Dorothy. She was looking at him with horror-stricken face, and just then Jeanette came in at the door, closing it behind her, and leaving the office boy outside.

Jeanette looked quietly at Mr. Irving, and said:

"Did you get my letter?"

"I got a letter from Frances Arundel, yes," said the old gentleman, who was fast getting bewildered.

"I wrote it," said Jeanette, calmly. "I hope you can give me some work to do."

"You wrote it!" said Mr. Irving. "Then who is that lady there?"

Jeanette turned a casual glance at Dorothy.

"I don't understand you, sir," she said; "are you asking me who that lady is? Isn't she your secretary or something?"

"She says she's Frances Arundel," said Mr. Irving, grimly.

"What!" cried Jeanette; "what nonsense! *I* am Frances Arundel. I wrote that letter you hold in your hand, and I have called to see if you can give me a position."

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"You wrote this letter?"

"Of course I did. I also wrote on the paper which I just gave to your office boy. If you will compare the two, you'll find them the same penmanship."

This seemed sensible enough, and Mr. Irving looked at both papers, and as Jeanette had written the letter, a glance was sufficient to show that they were indeed by the same hand.

"What does this mean?" said Mr. Irving, looking sternly at Dorothy.

"Forgive me," pleaded the little rogue, looking very sad and remorseful; "I oughtn't to have done it, I know, but I overheard this lady in the street-car saying she was coming to see you to-day, to ask you for a position, so I thought I'd come ahead of her, and—and—maybe I could get

it. I need it more than she does."

Dorothy cast a beseeching glance at Jeanette, who returned it with a haughty look.

"I can't help what she needs," said Jeanette, turning away from Dorothy, who was pretending to be almost weeping. "I came to ask you for a position, not out of charity, but because my uncle was your chum at college, and—"

"Wait a minute," said Mr. Irving; "I never heard of Roger Arundel."

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"Oh, you must have forgotten him, then," said Jeanette, tossing her head, as if it were a matter of no moment. "But I'd like a position all the same. I'm a competent secretary, and can give satisfaction, I'm sure."

Mr. Irving was at his wits' end. He looked at the two young ladies—Dorothy crumpling her handkerchief into her eyes, and looking very forlorn and pathetic; Jeanette rather haughty and dignified, with an air of standing her ground in spite of the impostor who was trying to take her place.

"You are experienced, you say?" he said, turning to Jeanette, and thinking that, if she were indeed competent, he might find a place for her.

"Yes, sir," she replied, taking off her gloves; "shall I go right to work?"

"Oh, bless my soul, no!" cried the flurried old gentleman. "I haven't engaged you yet. I don't do things on the jump like that. Look here, Miss—you first one—what's your name?"

"Mary Crane," said Dorothy, saying the first name that came into her head, and feeling that she couldn't keep up the game much longer.

"Well, Miss Mary Crane, you go on with your adding, and I'll look into your case later. It seems to me you were pretty sharp to pick up information on a street-car and put it to use so quickly! Did you overhear all that Arundel business, too?"

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"Yes, sir," stammered Dorothy, who was, in truth, nearly choking with laughter.

"Well, you're a quick-witted young person, whatever else you may be. Now you go on and add. Miss Arundel, I'll talk with you. You say you've had experience. Where have you worked?"

Jeanette looked blank. This question had not been in her rehearsals, and she was not as quick at invention as Dorothy. While she hesitated, the door opened again, and Betty walked in unannounced. She closed the door behind her, and said, in a hoarse whisper:

"Mr. Irving, I am Miss Arundel. I called to see you in hopes you could give me employment of some sort."

"Three of 'em!" exclaimed Mr. Irving. "Bless my soul!" And he sat helplessly looking at the three girls.

He had no suspicion of Betty's identity, for her long garments and thick veil and dark glasses

were a complete disguise.

The other two he had seen but once or twice, and of course did not recognize them in grown-up attire.

Not a notion of a "joke" entered his mind, but he was mystified by what appeared to be a most extraordinary situation.

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"You are Miss Frances Arundel?" he said, looking directly at Betty.

"Yes, sir," she replied hoarsely, but steadily. "I came to see you about—"

"I have your note," said Mr. Irving, the paper being still in his hand.

"I didn't write you any note," said Betty, in well-feigned surprise. "I just came in now, hoping I'd find you in, because I wanted to ask you—"

"For employment, because I used to know your Uncle Roger!" Mr. Irving almost shouted.

"Yes," said Betty, seemingly pleased, "but how did you know about Uncle Roger?"

"I tell you I have your note."

"And I tell you I wrote no note. Let me see it, please."

Betty scanned the letter, and then said, very gravely:

"Mr. Irving, I didn't write that. Some impostor must have represented me."

"Two of them, in fact," said Mr. Irving; "here they are."

Betty looked at Dorothy and Jeanette, seeming to notice them for the first time.

"Oh, I understand," she said angrily; "these two young women sat behind me in the street-car, and they must have overheard my conversation with a friend to whom I confided my plan of coming to you. Did they claim to be Miss Arundel? Which of them did?"

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"Both!" said Mr. Irving, who had grown deeply interested in the queer affair. "They must have deceived each other as well as yourself."

Dorothy and Jeanette were the personification of discovered culprits.

Dorothy's face was buried in her handkerchief, and she shook convulsively, apparently with sobs, but really with suppressed laughter. Jeanette looked crestfallen, but still haughty and independent. Her manner seemed to say that she had been discovered, but she was ready to face the consequences.

"I own up," she said, as Mr. Irving seemed to want an explanation. "This other young lady and myself overheard Miss Arundel, and we both tried to get the position ahead of her. I'm sorry we failed."

Jeanette's high and mighty air was almost too much for Betty, but, as a spasm of laughter seized her, she managed to turn it into a fit of coughing.

"I have a fearful cold," she said, still whispering hoarsely, "but it will be better soon. Did you say you had a position for me? I need money very much and I know you'll help me, won't you?"

"Bless my soul! I don't know!" exclaimed poor Mr. Irving, who was totally bewildered now by the trio of poverty-stricken girls. "I don't give out positions. My assistants do that. What do you want, anyhow?"

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A short pause followed this sentence, and then, throwing off her veil with one hand, and pulling off her glasses with the other, Betty cried:

"I want a hat, Grandpa! I want a hat!"

"Bless my soul!" gasped Mr. Irving, dropping back into his chair. "*Betty!* bless my soul!" and then, as the other girls took off their veils and broke into bursts of laughter, Betty snatched up the desk calendar, which stood at April 1, and held it before her grandfather's dazed eyes.

Rapidly, then, it dawned upon him. The laughing girls, the date of April 1, and Betty's demand for a hat, were the missing links to a full understanding of it all.

"A perfect success, Betty!" cried Jack, coming up to the jolly group when he heard the laughter.

"Was it!" cried Betty; "*was it, Grandpa?*"

"You scamp!" he cried; "you rogue! you mischief!" and seizing Betty, he kissed her rosy cheeks in hearty appreciation of her clever practical joke.

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BETTY SNATCHED UP THE DESK CALENDAR AND HELD IT BEFORE HER GRANDFATHER'S EYES

"Well, I should say it was!" exclaimed Mr. Irving, who was, as Mrs. McGuire had prophesied, quite as much pleased with the whole thing as were the jokers themselves. Then Dorothy and Jeanette were greatly complimented on their pretty acting; and Jack, as his share of the performance was explained, also received commendation from the old gentleman.

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"The very best joke ever!" Mr. Irving exclaimed, going off again and again in peals of laughter. "How did you get in, Betty? I've given orders to

admit no one when I'm busy."

"Oh, I just told them I was Betty," she replied. "The boy looked at me suspiciously at first, but when I spoke without my 'cold,' of course he knew me!"

"You little witch! Nobody ever tricked me before! Now, you, each of you, and Jack too, can get the very best hats you can find in Boston and send the bill to me."

"Oh, goody, Grandpa, that will be great fun!" cried Betty. "But you go with us, won't you, to pick them out?"

"Yes, I'll go right now."

"No; we can't go in these rigs. But we'll hurry home and put on our own frocks; then we'll come back here for you, and we'll all go hatting."

"Very well; don't be long."

"No, sir; we'll be back in half an hour."

And so they were.

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VII THE GREEN PAPER DOLL

"Oh, Betty, I'm so upset!" exclaimed Dorothy Bates, as she came into the McGuire library one afternoon in early May.

"What's the matter, Dotty?" asked Betty. "The party isn't off, is it?"

"No; we're to go, all right; but Jeanette can't go. She has such a cold, her mother won't let her go away from home. And I've just come from there. She really is ill; isn't it too bad?"

"Yes, indeed it is! We would have had such a lovely time, all together."

"Well, we'll go, anyhow. And, Betty, as Irene expects three of us, I think it would be nice to ask some one to go in Jeanette's place. I'd like to ask Constance Harper, but I know you don't like her very much."

"Oh, I like Constance well enough, but she doesn't like me."

"Well, whichever way it is, you two never seem to get along very well together. But who else is there?"

Betty hesitated a minute, then she said:

"I'd like to ask Martha Taylor."

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"Martha! Why, Betty, nobody likes Martha. And well—you know Martha, poor girl, has to count every penny, and—and she never seems quite at her ease—not that that's anything against her, but she wouldn't have pretty dresses and hats, and the people at Halstead House are often dressy and gay."

"I know it; but if Martha doesn't mind that, we needn't. And, Dorothy, you don't know Martha as well as I do. She never has any good times, and it's that that makes her shy and awkward. Oh, do ask her to go with us, if only for my sake."

"Betty, what a queer girl you are! I like Martha well enough, but I don't believe she'll go with us. I'll ask her, though, as you're so set upon it."

"What's this enthusiastic discussion all about?" asked Mrs. McGuire, pausing at the library door, as she was passing through the hall.

"Oh, Mother, come in!" cried Betty. "What do you think? Jeanette is quite ill and she can't go with us to the house-party at Irene Halstead's."

"That is too bad; I'm very sorry. Shall you ask any one in her place, Dorothy?"

"That's just what we're talking about, Mrs. McGuire. Betty thinks it would be nice to ask Martha Taylor, but I don't think she quite fits in."

"But think how she'd enjoy it! Martha almost never gets invited to a lovely outing like this one you have in prospect. Why, she'd be overjoyed to go."

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"Yes'm, I s'pose she would," admitted Dorothy; "but she's—she's so bashful, you know."

"That's mostly because you girls slight her. Now you've a fine opportunity to give her a pleasure, do it, and do it heartily and kindly. Let her feel that you really want her to go with you."

"Yes, do," said Betty; "and, truly, Dot, if you ask her as if you wanted her, and if you treat her cordially, you'll be surprised to see how gay and jolly Martha will be."

"All right," said Dorothy, agreeably; "I really do like her, and I'll do my best. Come on, Betty, let's go and ask her now."

Betty whisked away, and returned in a few minutes with her hat on, ready to start. It was but a short walk through the bright May sunshine to Martha's house, and they found her in the garden, watering some flower seeds she had just planted.

"Hello, Martha!" called the two girls, and she came running to meet them.

"Come, sit on the veranda," she said; "it's so pleasant there. I'm glad you came to see me."

"We've come to invite you to a party," said Dorothy, plunging into the subject at once.

"A party!" exclaimed Martha. "Where?"

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"Oh, Martha," cried Betty, "it's more than a party—it's a house-party! At a lovely country place,—Dorothy's cousin's,—and we're to stay from Wednesday till Saturday! Isn't that grand?"

It was so grand that Martha could scarcely realize it.

"I go?" she said. "For three whole days! Oh! what a party!"

"Yes, it's going to be lovely," said Dorothy. "A May party on Friday, and lots of picnics and things on the other days. Will you go with us, Martha?"

"Indeed, I will! I'm sure Mother'll let me. But, girls, I don't know if my clothes are good enough for such a grand place."

"Oh, pshaw!" said Betty. "Don't think about that. Just come on and have a good time, and never mind what you wear."

Mrs. Taylor was delighted to have Martha go with the other girls, and at once set about furbishing up her wardrobe as best she could.

And, indeed, when at last the day came to start, Martha, in her trim, neat traveling-suit, looked almost as well dressed as the other two. They were to travel in charge of Mr. Halstead, Dorothy's uncle, who was returning to his country home after a short business trip to Boston.

He was a genial, affable sort of man, but after a little kindly conversation he left the girls to entertain themselves, and became absorbed in his paper.

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Martha was as happy as a bird. The prospect of the good time coming seemed to transform her, and she was so gay and merry that Dorothy concluded she had misjudged her, and that Betty was right about her.

When they at last reached Halstead House, Irene was on the veranda to greet them.

She kissed her cousin Dorothy and greeted her warmly, and then welcomed the other two as Dorothy introduced them.

Neither Betty nor Martha had ever met Irene before, but Mrs. Halstead had written for Dorothy to bring two friends with her, and so the girls were at once made welcome.

Two other girls were visiting Irene, so the house-party numbered six young people, and a gay flock they were. Maude Miller and Ethel Caswell were from New York, and proved to be pleasant and kindly, so Martha was not shy or embarrassed, and soon the half-dozen were chatting away like old friends.

Halstead House was a large colonial mansion with innumerable rooms and wide porches and gardens.

Irene was the eldest child, and there were also a small boy and a baby girl of three. The little Daisy reminded Betty of Baby Polly, and she made friends with her at once.

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Friday was Irene's birthday, and in honor of it there was to be a May party, with a May-queen, May-pole, and all the traditional features. Of course this was the principal event of their visit, but the six girls managed to have a lot of fun besides. There was a lake on which to row, a pony-cart to drive, tennis-courts, croquet-grounds, and everything that could make country life pleasant.

On Thursday afternoon the girls decided to walk down to the village.

It was a pleasant walk along shady roads, and in a short time they found themselves in the tiny hamlet, with its little post-office and two or three small shops.

Martha had been in especially gay spirits all the way. She had laughed and joked until Dorothy began to feel she had reason to be proud of her merry friend instead of ashamed of her.

But Betty looked at Martha curiously. She couldn't quite understand her to-day. Several times Martha had started to say something to Betty, and then stopped, as if afraid the others would hear.

"What is it, Martha?" asked Betty, at last, dropping a little behind the others. "What are you trying to say?"

"Oh, nothing," said Martha, turning red and looking embarrassed. Then, as if with a sudden determined effort, she turned to the whole group and said:

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"Will you—won't you—all come in and have ice-cream with me?"

It was a pleasant invitation, but Martha stammered so and seemed so nervous about it that Irene hesitated before replying. Betty hesitated, too, for she knew that Martha had little, if any, spending-money, and she wondered at this unexpected hospitality.

But Martha turned pleading eyes upon her.

"Make them come, Betty!" she said. "I'd be so glad if they would."

"Come on, girls," said Betty. "Indeed, Martha, we're very glad to accept your invitation; it's so warm and dusty."

Dorothy, though mystified at Martha's sudden rôle of Lady Bountiful, took her cue from Betty and said:

"Oh, how lovely! I'm just famishing for ice-cream."

The others accepted gracefully, too, and they all went into the latticed inclosure where ice-cream was sold. There were many little tables and chairs, and pushing two tables together, the girls all sat round, and Martha asked each one to choose her favorite flavor.

Martha looked very happy and a little excited; her cheeks were red and her eyes bright, and Betty thought she had never seen her look so pretty.

"Aren't we having a good time?" said Ethel Caswell, as they slowly ate the refreshing dainty.

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"Yes, indeed," said Maude Miller. "It's my turn to treat next. Let's come down here again to-morrow morning, and I'll buy the ice-cream."

"All right," agreed the others, and Betty and Dorothy secretly resolved to find some pleasant way to do their share of the "treating." Martha beamed with pleasure to think she had been the one to start a round of merry times, and, as an additional touch to their present feast, she ordered some small cakes. Betty and Dorothy

looked frankly astonished, for it was an expensive little place, and they wondered if Martha knew how much her "spread" would cost.

But Martha smiled so gaily that they couldn't offer any remonstrance, and the pretty cakes were brought and enjoyed by all.

When at last the little feast was over, the check was brought and handed to Martha. Betty didn't see the amount, but she saw that again Martha turned scarlet and looked embarrassed. But, with an air of endeavoring to look unconcerned, she drew a crisp, new five-dollar bill from her purse, and then, receiving her change, she put it away with the same elaborate carelessness, not stopping to separate the notes from the silver.

"Whatever is the matter with Martha?" thought Betty. "She's trying to act a part, I think."

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Back walked the merry half-dozen girls to beautiful Halstead House, and grouped themselves on the veranda to wait for dinner-time.

"Let's build air-castles," said Irene. "What would yours be, Betty?"

"Do you mean that *could* be real, or *couldn't*?"

"Yes, that could be real, but aren't likely to be, you know."

"Yes, I know," said Betty, promptly. "Well, I'd be a princess, with golden hair all twined with pearls; and a long white satin train, with little page-boys holding it; and slaves fanning me with long peacock-feather fans."

"My, how fine!" said Dorothy, "but it's too story-booky for me. My air-castle is just to travel all over the world—not by any magic, but just travel in real cars and boats, and see all the countries there are."

"I think that's a nice air-castle," commented Irene. "What's yours, Ethel?"

"Oh, I'd like to be famous; a great celebrity, you know. I don't care whether it's in the musical or artistic or literary line. But I'd like to feel, and to have other people feel, that I'd done something grand."

"I don't believe you ever will," said Maude, laughing. "Now, my air-castle is awfully prosaic. I'd like to be a nurse."

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"Oh, what a funny air-castle!" exclaimed Martha. "How can you like to be mixed up with sickness and medicines and such things?"

"That's just what I should like. And then to feel that I was helping to make people well! Oh, I think that's fine!"

"Yes, I s'pose it is," said Martha. "Mine isn't so noble; I'd just like to be at the head of a big house—about like this—and have a lot of money. Not a great fortune, but just enough to entertain my friends and give them good times—just as Mrs. Halstead does."

"That's very pretty, my dear," said Mrs. Halstead herself, who had just stepped out on

the veranda to summon the young people to dinner. And again Martha became embarrassed and blushed rosy red, as Mrs. Halstead smiled at her kindly.

The next day was fair and beautiful, a perfect day for a May party.

"It's a few days past the first of May, which is the real May-day," said Mrs. Halstead, at breakfast, "but as it's Irene's birthday, we thought we'd celebrate it by a May party. So it's an afternoon affair, from four to seven, and we'll have a May-pole dance to wind up with."

"And a May-queen?" asked Betty. "Queen Irene, of course."

"Yes," said Mrs. Halstead, "Irene will be queen, as it's her party. And all you girls must be ladies-in-waiting. You may make wreaths for yourselves and trim your dresses with flowers or garlands any way you choose. Now, scamper, and don't bother me, for I've lots of things to attend to."

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"Mayn't we help you, Mrs. Halstead?" asked Betty.

"No, my dear. There's really nothing you could do to help. Indeed, you'll assist me most by entertaining yourselves."

"All right," said Ethel. "As Maude has invited us to go to town with her, we'll have that to entertain us this morning."

But as they walked out of the dining-room and through the broad hall, Maude said:

"I'll have to take back my invitation, girls. I'm not going to take you to get ice-cream this morning."

"Why not?" cried Ethel, impulsively, and then, as they all saw that Maude did not smile, they felt rather uncomfortable.

For a few moments nobody spoke, and then Betty, to change the subject, said:

"All right; let's play tennis, then."

But there was a constraint over them all, and no one knew exactly why.

To be sure, it was strange for Maude to invite them to go for ice-cream, and then to recall her invitation so suddenly. But they each felt there was more than that in the air, and Maude looked so disturbed that it seemed there must be something serious the matter.

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So strong was the conviction that it would prove embarrassing, that Betty repressed her inclination to invite the girls to take ice-cream with *her* instead of Maude.

Instinctively she felt she had better not do this, and so she proposed tennis instead.

Half-heartedly they went for their rackets, and as they went toward the courts, Irene and Maude fell behind and talked in whispers. Then they turned and went back to the house.

The other four went on, and had nearly finished a set of tennis when the two rejoined them.

Maude looked angry, and Irene looked as if she had been crying, but no questions were asked, and no information was offered as to the cause.

"Take my racket," said Betty to Maude, "and play a set with Martha. I'd just as lief sit and watch you."

"No, thank you," said Maude. "I don't care to play."

Betty looked up suddenly at this, and saw Maude give Martha a contemptuous glance and turn away.

Martha turned red and looked dismayed, as she well might at such a speech.

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Betty, ready to take up the cudgels for Martha, if need be.

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"Never you mind," said Maude. "Martha knows what I mean!"

"I don't!" stammered Martha, choking with mortification at being thus spoken to.

"Oh, yes, you do!" said Maude. "I'm very much obliged for your *ice-cream!*"

"Betty, what does she mean?" cried Martha, turning helplessly toward her friend.

"She doesn't mean anything," said Irene, looking angrily at Maude. "Mother told you to wait."

Maude turned sullen, and refused to say anything. Betty looked mystified, but wasn't sure whether she ought to insist on an explanation or not.

She had been responsible for bringing Martha, and if Maude didn't like her, it was unfortunate, but to discuss it might only make matters worse.

Dorothy, with her ready tact, came to the rescue. "You four play," she said, throwing down her racket, "and Maude and I will go for a row on the lake."

Maude brightened up at this, and Betty concluded that she had been merely ill-tempered over nothing, after all.

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"TAKE MY RACKET," SAID BETTY, "AND PLAY
A SET WITH MARTHA"

"I'm going to tell you," said Maude to Dorothy, as they pushed out on the lake, "but I promised Mrs. Halstead I wouldn't say anything to Martha about it. I've lost five dollars, and I can't help thinking she took it."

"Who? Mrs. Halstead?"

"Mercy, no! Martha."

"Never! I don't believe it!"

"Well, didn't you notice that new five-dollar bill she paid for the ice-cream with?"

"Yes."

"It was exactly like mine. You see, I had a new, crisp bill that Father gave me to spend while I was here. And when we went to town yesterday, I thought I wouldn't take it for fear I'd lose it. And Martha, or somebody, must have taken it, for when I got home it was gone."

"I don't believe Martha took it."

"Who else could have done it? Mrs. Halstead says she knows her servants didn't take it. She's had them for years, and they're perfectly honest. And you know how queerly Martha acted while she was paying for the ice-cream. She doesn't have much money, does she?"

"No," said Dorothy, reluctantly.

"Then how would she happen to have a new five-dollar bill just like mine, all of a sudden? And why would she act so embarrassed and queer about treating us to ice-cream?"

"Martha loves to treat," said Dorothy, a little lamely. "But I'm sure she never took it," she added doggedly. "I'm going to ask her."

"No, you mustn't. Mrs. Halstead said she'd make up the loss to me, but we must not speak to Martha about it. Of course I won't take five dollars from Mrs. Halstead, but I promised I wouldn't tell Martha that she took it."

"You were very 'uppish' to her, though!"

"Well, who wouldn't be? That bill was on the table in my bedroom, and Martha was in the room after I was. And when I came home, it was gone."

"You were very careless to leave it on the table."

"No, I wasn't. I didn't want to take it with me, so I stuck it behind a picture that stands on the table. Nobody would have seen it, but Martha knew it was there; she was in the room when I put it there."

"Maybe it blew off the table."

"It might have, but I've looked all over the room everywhere."

Dorothy sat silent. She hadn't wanted Martha to come, but Betty had coaxed her into it, and this was the result.

"Well," she said at last, "I'm going to tell Betty about it, anyway. I know she'll think as I do, that Martha couldn't have done such a thing."

"No, don't tell Betty."

"Yes, you will tell Betty, too!" said a voice, and looking up, the two girls saw Betty looking at them. The boat had drifted near shore, and Betty beckoned to them to come in.

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"Now, you tell me what it's all about," she said, as they landed. "I'm not going to be kept out of it any longer."

When Betty spoke like that, her comrades usually obeyed her.

Half scared at Betty's frowning face, Maude told her story.

"What foolishness!" said Betty, as she finished. "Martha could no more take a penny that didn't belong to her than I could!"

"Then what made her act so flustered when she invited us to have ice-cream and when she paid for it?" demanded Maude.

"I don't know," said Betty.

"And where would she get a new five-dollar bill all of a sudden?"

"I don't know," said Betty.

"And where is my bill?" wound up Maude, triumphantly, and again Betty was forced to reply, "I don't know."

"But all the same," she went on, "Martha didn't take it! And I'll prove it somehow!"

"You can't prove it unless you find my bill."

"Then I'll find your bill!"

"You can't; I've hunted everywhere for it."

"Well, I *will* find it, and I'll make you take back all you've said about Martha."

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"I'm sure I'd be glad to," said Maude, staring at Betty's angry face; "I've no wish to make her seem dishonest if she isn't."

"I'll clear this matter up!" exclaimed Betty, "and then you'll feel sorry for what you've said. And first I'll go and tell Martha, and let her speak for herself."

"No, you mustn't do that! Mrs. Halstead forbade us to mention it to Martha."

"All right; then I'll take Martha and go straight to Mrs. Halstead and let her tell her."

"But you can't now, for Mrs. Halstead is superintending the May-pole. The carpenters are putting it up, and she asked us to keep away."

"Well, I've got to do something! I can't rest till Martha is cleared. Poor Martha! I don't see how anybody could think such a thing of her!"

Betty put her arm through Dorothy's, and they went on ahead, leaving Maude to follow alone.

"Betty," said Dorothy, "we know Martha never has spending-money. And for that to be a new bill that she had yesterday does look queer. And she did act awfully funny about it all."

"I know it, Dorothy," said Betty, in a tone of despair; "I think it looks awfully queer. But I wouldn't own up to Maude that I thought so. And, even if it does look queer, I won't believe Martha took Maude's money unless she tells me so herself—so there, now!"

Betty had unconsciously raised her voice in her indignation, and as they turned a corner of the path, they came upon the other girls, sitting on a settee, waiting for them.

"What are you saying, Betty?" asked Martha, her face perfectly white.

There was no blushing embarrassment now; Martha looked horrified, and even incredulous, but she was calm and self-possessed. Betty quite forgot what Maude had said of Mrs. Halstead's orders, and spoke right out to Martha.

"Martha," she said, "did you see Maude take some money out of her purse and lay it on her table yesterday?"

"Yes, I did," said Martha.

"Did you take it from the table—to—to put it in a safer place—or anything?"

"No, of course I didn't! Why should I?"

"Well, it wasn't a very safe place," began Betty.

"I should say it wasn't!" exclaimed Maude.

"Well, I didn't touch it!" said Martha. "What are you talking about, Betty?"

"Then where did you get that new five-dollar bill you spent yesterday?" burst out Maude, unable to control her tongue.

Martha looked at her.

"Do you mean to say that you've been thinking that was *your* money?" she said, in a low, scared sort of voice.

"Yes, I do!" declared Maude.

"Oh, oh! I didn't, didn't! Betty, Betty, what *shall* I do!" and Martha burst into a fit of crying which nothing could stop.

"Now, you see," said Betty, as she caressed her weeping friend. "Please all leave her to me."

The others went away a little shamefacedly, while Betty remained with Martha. She waited until the first bursts of sobs were over, and then she said:

"Now, Martha, brace up. I know and you know you didn't take her old bill, but we've got to prove it."

"How can we prove it?" asked Martha, between her sobs, as she dabbed her eyes with her handkerchief. "Oh, Betty, I wish I hadn't come!"

"So shall I, if you act like this. Cheer up, I tell you, and help me, and we'll fix this matter right yet."

"How brave you are!" said Martha, looking up at Betty's determined face.

"Somebody's got to be, and you won't," said Betty, smiling. "Now tell me everything you know about Maude's money."

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BETTY FOUND BOBBY IN HIS NURSERY

"I don't know anything, except what she told you. I was sitting by the table when she stuck it behind the picture. I thought it was a funny place to put it, but I didn't say so. I wouldn't have been so careless with my bill."

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"Where did you get your bill, Martha?"

"Uncle Fred gave it to me on Christmas. He said to save it until I was sure I'd thought of the thing I'd like best to buy with it. And I was *sure* I'd rather treat you all to ice-cream than to buy anything for myself. Oh, Betty, I do love to be hospitable to people, and I never have a chance! And when the chance really came, I was so glad and so happy about it, that it made me rather fidgety and embarrassed."

"You dear thing!" cried Betty, kissing her. "And then to think of how they've spoiled your little ice-cream party! Well, go on; then did you stay in Maude's room after she left it?"

"Only a minute, to say good-by to little Bobby Halstead. He was playing around there, and he's such a cunning little chap."

"*Bobby!* I've an idea! Now you stay right here till I come back! Don't you move!"

Betty flew into the house and went in search of four-year-old Bobby. She found him in his nursery, mounted upon his black hobby-horse.

"Tell me, deary," she said, "when you were in Maude's room yesterday, did you see any money around?"

"Pennies?" asked Bobby.

"No, not pennies. Paper money. Green money."

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"Ess, green paper, but not moneys. I cutted out a paper dolly; see! It's not vewey good 'cause my sissiz was dull."

Bobby dived down into a box, and produced a queer-shaped paper doll which was surely cut from a five-dollar bill!

Betty's eyes danced, but she only said quietly:

"Where did you find the green paper, deary?"

"In ve was'e-bastick," said the child; "I can always have what's in ve was'e-basticks. Muvver said I could."

"Yes, of course you can. That's all right. But lend this dolly to Betty, won't you? Just for a little while?"

"Ess, I will," and the child gave it up willingly enough.

Back ran Betty with her prize.

"There!" she cried, triumphantly waving the five-dollar doll above her head. "I told you Martha didn't know anything about Maude's money. It must have blown from the table into the waste-basket, and Bobby picked it out."

"Oh—I do—remember!" said Maude, slowly, "the waste-basket was upset when I came home! So I looked through all the scraps carefully, but of course I didn't find it. I'm awfully sorry, Martha,—truly I am,—more sorry than I can say! I don't suppose you can ever forgive me."

"Oh, yes, I can," said Martha, smiling through her tears.

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"I'm going to forgive you, too, Maude," said Betty; "but it will take me a little while. I am afraid it will be half an hour before I can feel toward you as if you hadn't done this."

"I don't wonder," said Maude, contritely; "but, Betty, I didn't know Martha as you did, and it *did* look queer."

"Yes, that's so," conceded Betty. "I think I'll get over it in a *quarter* of an hour."

She did, and when it was time for the May party, the late unpleasantness was ignored by all, if not entirely forgotten.

Mr. Halstead gave Maude a five-dollar bill to replace the one his son had spoiled, and he then also presented her with the green paper doll, as a reminder not to trust too much to appearances.

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VIII THE CHAPLET OF HONOR

As soon as June had fairly dawned upon the calendar, the girls of Miss Whittier's school began to prepare for closing day.

It was customary to give an evening entertainment, in which all the pupils took part.

"This year," Miss Whittier announced to the class, "I have a very delightful plan, of which I will now tell you. It is not exactly a play, but a little staged allegory which I am sure you will all think very attractive."

Betty listened eagerly, for "staged allegory" sounded rather dry and poky, and yet it might turn out to be fun after all.

"Sounds like 'Pilgrim's Progress,'" whispered Dorothy, who sat next her, and Betty's imagination immediately saw all the girls with packs on their backs, climbing the Hill of Difficulty. But Miss Whittier went on to reveal her plan.

"It is called 'Honor Chaplet,'" she said, "and it represents all the women who have done praiseworthy deeds presenting their claims for the Chaplet of Honor, which is to be awarded to the one who best merits it. Of course the characters represent women of all time who have become famous for great deeds or noble efforts."

Betty's head gave a nod of satisfaction. The whole plan appealed to her, for it meant "dressing up," and she dearly loved to wear fancy costumes.

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"We will have a pretty stage," said Miss Whittier, who on occasions like this talked sociably with her pupils, "and I'm sure you will all be willing to help with the work of decorating it."

"Yes, indeed," and "We will," said the girls, and then Constance Harper asked:

"Who are the characters, Miss Whittier? Will you tell us now?"

Reading from some papers she held, Miss Whittier named about thirty celebrated women, including Cleopatra, Queen Elizabeth, Pocahontas, Grace Darling, Florence Nightingale, Isabella of Spain, Joan of Arc, Queen Victoria, Barbara Frietchie, Rosa Bonheur, and many others well known to history or tradition.

"I think," she went on, "you may each select the character you prefer. If, by chance, two choose the same one, we can easily adjust matters afterward. I will distribute papers, and you may each write your own name, followed by the character you choose."

"While we're doing that, won't you tell us a little more about the play, Miss Whittier?" said Dorothy Bates.

"The plot, if it can be called a plot, is simple. One girl must represent the Goddess of Honor. She will stand on a pedestal, and hear the claims of the various celebrities. She will wear a classic costume, and will have a chaplet of bay to bestow on the successful one. She will be attended by four allegorical figures,

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representing War and Peace, Art and Wisdom. These girls will also wear classic draperies, and look as much as possible like statues. The other characters will, of course, wear costumes suited to their personalities."

"And is there any dialogue?" asked another pupil.

"Yes; each character makes a short speech, setting forth her claims to honor and glory. This seems a little ostentatious," Miss Whittier smiled, "but that is the way the play is written. Then, finally, the Goddess awards the chaplet to the one she deems most worthy."

"And which one is that?" asked Betty.

"I won't tell that yet," said Miss Whittier, smiling; "I'll not divulge that secret until you have all chosen your parts, for, naturally, you would each desire the one who will receive this crown."

This seemed sensible to Betty, and she began to consider what part she would like to take.

Miss Whittier had a full list of names written on the blackboard, that all might see them, and Betty studied them with care.

The four allegorical figures did not appeal to her at all. It would be no fun to stand, perhaps on a pedestal, draped about with Greek togas, or whatever statues wore, and not even a red sash by way of coloring!

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The Goddess of Honor was, of course, the most desirable, and Betty almost decided to write that against her name. But, she reflected, it was doubtful if Miss Whittier would think her well suited for that. A goddess ought to be tall and fair and statuesque, and Betty was anything but that. Her round Irish face and somewhat tilted nose and rosy cheeks were far from classic in type. And, anyhow, probably some one else would choose that one who would be much better fitted for the part. So Betty carefully considered the other names. Pocahontas and Queen Elizabeth both attracted her. She did not look particularly like an Indian maiden, nor yet like an English queen, but as she glanced around the room, she saw no one that looked more so than she; at least, no one looked like Queen Elizabeth, though some of the slim, straight-haired girls might make a better Indian.

But, as she gazed, Betty decided that looks would not have much to do with it. The girls must depend on their costumes to represent the character they assumed.

And so Betty hesitated between the two she liked.

Queen Elizabeth would be grand! In fancy, she saw herself in a stiff, quilted satin petticoat, and long, heavy train of crimson velvet, edged with ermine; a huge ruff round her neck, and a gorgeous gilt crown! This would be fine. Yet there was something very attractive about the idea of Pocahontas; an Indian costume trimmed with gay fringes and beads; leather leggings, and tall quill-feathers sticking up round her head; a bow and arrow, perhaps, and a quiver slung from one shoulder! Yes, it was enticing,

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but the Queen's costume was grander and even more enticing in color and glitter. So Betty wrote her own name, and then wrote "Queen Elizabeth" below it, and the papers were all gathered up.

Miss Whittier dismissed the girls then, and said she would tell them definitely the next day what character each should have, and, moreover, she asked them not to tell any one about the entertainment, nor to tell each other what rôle they had chosen. So, as the girls were conscientious in these matters, they did not tell each other what parts they wished to take, but many and eager discussions were held about the details of the great occasion.

Betty told her mother of the choice she had made, as the pledge of secrecy did not include mothers.

Mrs. McGuire smiled at the idea of Betty robed as Queen Elizabeth, but she said:

"Well, at any rate, you look quite as much like Elizabeth as any of the other girls. And we'll fix up a fine costume for you. I'll find a picture of the Queen in her most gorgeous robes, and we'll have it copied as nearly as possible."

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BETTY WALKED ACROSS THE ROOM WITH
STIFF, STAGY STRIDES

"And I must have a lot of jewels!" said Betty, clasping her hands ecstatically at the thought of such grandeur.

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"Yes," said Mrs. McGuire; "you may wear my necklace, and perhaps Grandma will lend you some large old-fashioned brooches. I think we need not be so very particular as to their being really of the Elizabethan period."

"Oh, no; any glittery things will do. I think we ought to try some necklaces of big imitation

gems.”

“Perhaps we shall! At any rate, we’ll copy the picture as nearly as we can.”

“And it will be a gorgeous costume, won’t it? Oh, I’m glad now I didn’t choose Pocahontas!”

“What sort of speech do you have to make, Betty?”

“I don’t know, Mother. Miss Whittier has them, all type-written, and she will give them to us soon, she said. But I’ll not have any trouble to learn it. I can learn things to recite so easily.”

“Yes, your memory is wonderful. And I suppose one of the teachers will train you.”

“Yes, in gestures and expression. Oh, Mother, won’t it be fun?”

“Yes, girlie? I know it’s just the sort of fun you like.”

“Oh, I do; I’ll walk like this.” Catching up her slumber-robe from the couch, Betty held it from her shoulders like a court train, and walked across the room with stiff, stagy strides, holding her head very high.

“Hello, your Majesty, what are you doing?” said Jack, appearing at the door.

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“Good for you, Jack!” cried Betty; “I’m pleased that you should have recognized what was meant for a queenly gait. I’m Queen Elizabeth of England.”

“Pooh! You look more like the White Queen of Looking-Glass Land!”

“Well, maybe I do now; but just you wait till I get my velvet train and jeweled crown,—and, oh, Mother, shall I have a scepter?”

“Yes, I think that’s part of the costume.”

“Oh, what fun!” and seizing Jack, Betty waltzed him about the room by way of expressing her glee.

“Hi, Betty, go slower!” he exclaimed breathlessly; “queens dance stately minuets—they don’t dance break-downs!”

“This queen does,” said Betty, calmly, but she let Jack go, on condition that he would help her hunt the library for books containing pictures of the Queen.

Next day no mention was made of the entertainment until after lessons were over. It was nearly time for dismissal when Miss Whittier summoned the pupils to her in the assembly-room.

She looked at them in a little perplexity, and then she smiled.

“I did not foresee the result,” she said, “when I asked you young ladies to choose your parts for our little play. I thought that if two or even three should choose the same character we could readily arrange matters by a little friendly discussion. But, to my surprise, when the papers were looked over, this was the result: twelve girls have chosen the Goddess of Honor; nine

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have selected Pocahontas; seven want Queen Elizabeth, and the others are scattering. Now, as you can readily see, this state of affairs requires arbitration. So I am obliged to tell you that we must disregard your wishes, and assign the parts as we, the teachers, think best."

The girls laughed heartily when they realized how many of their number had asked for the most desirable part, that of Goddess of Honor, and they agreed that, after all, the fairest way was for the teachers to assign the parts, and then there could be no preference.

"And so," went on Miss Whittier, "I have prepared full directions for each of you. Here are the envelopes for you all, and in your envelope you will each find the name of the character you are to take, with full description of costume, and a copy of the lines you are to learn to recite in the play. And please remember the appointments are final and unalterable." The envelopes were distributed, and each girl looked eagerly inside to see what her part might be.

"You are dismissed," said Miss Whittier. "There is no further occasion for secrecy, though I'm sure it will be better for the success of our entertainment not to tell your friends who will be in the audience much about it beforehand."

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"What's the matter, Betty?" said Dorothy, as, with Jeanette, they all started homeward. "You look as if you'd lost your last friend."

And truly Betty did look woebegone. Her cheeks were flushed with anger, her lips were drawn in a tight line, and her eyes already showed hints of flooding with tears.

"Look at that!" she exclaimed tragically, as she held out her paper toward the girls.

"Grace Darling!" read Dorothy. "Oh, Betty, you don't like your part, do you?"

"Like it!" cried Betty; "read what the costume is!"

"Simple sailor suit," read Dorothy, "'of dark-blue flannel, small yachting-cap, or no hat at all. Carry an oar.' Why, that's a sweet little costume, Betty."

"Sweet little nothing!" cried Betty, stormily. "I don't want to wear a common, every-day sailor suit! And carry an oar! Oh!"

"What did you want?" asked Jeanette.

"I wanted to be a goddess," said Betty, honestly. "But I didn't write that, 'cause I was 'most sure Miss Whittier would rather have a yellow-haired girl for that. So I chose Queen Elizabeth, but I'd have been satisfied with Pocahontas. But Grace Darling! Oh, I think it's mean!"

"Why, Grace Darling was very noble and heroic," said Jeanette.

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"Oh, of course. Grace Darling herself was wonderful. I just adore her! But I want to wear a pretty costume in the play—a grand one, you know, like a queen or something."

"Yes, I know," said Dorothy, sympathetically, for she well knew Betty's love of bright colors and

gay "dressing up." "I think it's a shame, too. Maybe Miss Whittier will let you change with me."

"No, she said we positively couldn't change our parts. And, anyhow, I wouldn't take yours if it's nicer than mine. What is yours, Dot?"

"Queen Elizabeth," said Dorothy, feeling as mean as if she had been caught in a wrong action.

Betty had to smile at Dorothy's contrite tone.

"Well," she said, "I'd rather you'd have it than any one else. Mother'll lend you her necklace, I know. What's yours, Jeanette?"

"Joan of Arc, and just the one I wanted."

"That's nice," said Betty. "I'm glad you got it. But, oh, girls, I wish I had a pretty one. If I'd only had Priscilla or Cleopatra, or anybody that wore pretty things! But 'a simple sailor suit!'"

"It's too mean for anything!" declared Dorothy; "it takes the fun out of the whole thing."

"Oh, no; it isn't so bad as that," said Betty, smiling through her gathering tears. "I s'pose I'll get over my disappointment. And I'm silly to care so much, anyhow. What's Constance?"

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"She's the Goddess," said Dorothy, reluctantly, for this seemed to add another straw to Betty's burden of woe.

"I'm glad of it," said Betty, generously. "She'll be a lovely goddess, she's so pretty and graceful. Well, let me help you girls with your costumes, as long as I haven't any of my own to fuss over. I can get an inexpensive, 'simple sailor suit' ready-made."

Betty turned in at her own gate, and after their good-bys the other girls went on.

"It's just horrid," said Dorothy; "I know how bad Betty feels about it, and I'm going to ask Miss Whittier to change it somehow."

"She won't do it," said Jeanette; "I wish she would, but I know she'll say if she changes one she'll have to change others, and it'll be a regular mix-up."

And that's just what Miss Whittier did say, though in different words.

"No, my dear," she said kindly, but decidedly, when Dorothy told her about it. "I'm sorry Betty is disappointed, but several of the girls have already asked to change their parts, and I've been obliged to say 'no' to each; so of course I can't make an exception in favor of Betty."

This settled it, and Betty accepted her fate, outwardly with a good grace, but secretly with a rebellious heart.

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"It's such a mistake," she said to her mother, "for girls like Kate Alden and May Jennings would *like* to have only simple costumes to prepare. And they have to rig up as Martha Washington and Mary, Queen of Scots! Either of them would rather have Grace Darling, and only have to get a 'simple sailor suit!'"

"It *is* too bad, Betty dear," said her mother; "I'm just as sorry as I can be. But I can't see any help for it, so we must submit."

"Yes; I know it, and I'm not going to growl about it any more. But it does make me mad!"

Betty kicked a footstool, as if to relieve her overburdened feelings, and then laughed at herself for her foolishness.

She learned her lines carefully, determined to do her part as well as she could, if her dress was plain and inconspicuous.

Her speech was full of brave and noble thoughts, and Betty practised it often, and observed conscientiously her teacher's instructions as to inflections and gestures. It was easy for Betty to learn by heart; so easy, indeed, that she unconsciously learned most of the other girls' speeches by merely hearing them at rehearsals.

Often she would amuse her mother and Jack by breaking forth into some of the stilted lines of the play.

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"I am Pocahontas," she would say, striking an attitude of what she considered Indian effect; "I claim the prize, Goddess, because I, in years that are past, rendered a service——"

"There, there, that will do, Betty!" Jack would cry. "You are a born actress, I know, but I'm studying my English history now, and Pocahontas doesn't belong with the Saxon kings."

"Oh, English history!" said Betty, mischievously.

Then, stalking grandly up to him, she held an umbrella for a scepter, and declaimed:

"Goddess of Honor! You see before you Elizabeth, the Virgin Queen. A noble monarch, not alone in power, but in majestic traits that won for her the loyalty and adoration of her loved and loving subjects. A queen who——"

"Off with her head!" cried Jack, throwing a sofa-pillow at Betty, who promptly threw it back at him, and then ran laughing from the room.

It was not Betty's way to mourn over what couldn't be helped, so she went cheerfully with her mother to purchase the despised sailor suit. They bought the prettiest one they could find—a blue serge with white collar and cuffs and a silk sailor tie. But though it was becoming and would have looked just right had Betty been starting on a yachting cruise, it was not to be compared with the elaborate costumes most of the girls were preparing. And, though it was cold comfort, Betty was true to her word, and helped the others all she could to make their gowns effective. She lent her Roman sash, her embroidered Japanese kimono, and her spangled Egyptian scarf to girls who could use them effectively. She helped Dorothy with her Elizabethan garb, and Jeanette with her Joan of Arc costume.

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As for the Goddess, Constance had a most resplendent robe. It was of soft white shimmering stuff dotted all over with gilt spangles. Billows of this material fell from her shoulders in long, graceful folds, and swept

away in a rippling train. A high crown of golden filigree-work was to be worn on her beautiful, fair hair, and while in one hand she was to hold a classic scroll, in the other she was to carry aloft a long, slender, gilt trumpet. The costume was superb, and almost took Betty's breath away when she first saw it.

"Oh, Constance," she said, "let me try it on, do! Just for a minute! I'll be awfully careful of it."

Constance agreed, of course, though she secretly feared that impetuous Betty might tear the gauzy stuff.

But Betty donned it almost reverently, and then, imitating Constance's pose, as she had seen her at rehearsal, she began:

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"The Goddess of Honor I! To those who seek me I am hard to win. To those who nobly and unflinchingly do their bravest and best, I come unsummoned! I am here to-night, bearing the Chaplet of Honor, the award of Fame. To whom shall I award it? Who best deserves the greatest guerdon, the highest honor Fame can bestow? Speak, noble women of all time, speak, and claim your due!"

So often had Betty heard Constance declaim these ringing lines at rehearsal that she knew them as well as her own, and so inspired was she by the beautiful raiment she had on that her oratory was quite in spirit with the character.

"Good gracious, Betty!" said Constance, "I didn't know you could recite so well. Try your own speech now; it's a good chance to rehearse. But get out of that gown first. I'm terribly afraid you'll catch it on something."

"No, I won't," said Betty, stepping gingerly out of the glistening mass as it fell about her feet. "Now listen to mine."

She recited the lines Grace Darling was supposed to speak, and so earnestly did she tell of the noble work she had done in saving life that it seemed as if the most stony-hearted of goddesses must be moved to award her the Chaplet of Honor.

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It was not known even yet who should receive the wreath. Each girl was expected to do her best, and after all had taken part, the Goddess would make the award. Of course it was arranged beforehand who should have it, but, as this was not known, each secretly hoped for it.

At last the day of the great event arrived.

The entertainment would begin at eight o'clock, but the girls were requested to be at the school at half-past seven.

Some of them dressed at home and came all ready for the stage, but those who had more elaborate or eccentric costumes brought them with them and dressed at the school. Betty dressed at home, for her sailor suit could easily be worn under a light coat. She went with a heavy heart, for, though she had scolded herself for being a silly, and had forced herself to make believe she didn't mind, yet when the evening arrived, and she saw many of the other girls in glittering, fanciful dresses, she felt again the

bitter disappointment of her plain little frock.

"Remember, Betty girl," said her mother, as they separated, Betty to go to the school-room and Mrs. McGuire to the audience-room, "you must make your success by your own work to-night. The others may have beautiful trappings, but you must win out by your really good work in declamation. Win the hearts of the audience by your pathetic story of Grace Darling's work, and you may represent the part better than those who have elaborate costumes do theirs."

Betty smiled, knowing her mother's advice was good, and yet unable to repress a little feeling of envy as she saw the resplendent figures all around her. But she could and did help showing it.

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She went about among the girls, helping one or another to adjust her adornments, or prompting some one who was frantically rehearsing her lines.

"I can prompt any of you, if you need it," said Betty, laughing, "for I do believe I know every line of this whole play. I didn't try to learn it, but I've heard it so often, it sticks in my head."

At eight o'clock Miss Whittier marshaled them in order to go on the stage. Of course the curtain was still down, as the Goddess had not yet taken her place, but after its rising the others were to enter one by one and address themselves to the arbiter of their fates. They waited, almost breathlessly, in the hush that always comes before the lifting of a curtain.

"Where is Constance Harper?" asked Miss Whittier, in a whisper, of another teacher.

"I don't know," was the reply. "I supposed, of course, she was here. She said she'd dress at home, as her robe is so frail, and that she'd be here, all ready to go on the stage, at quarter to eight."

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"Dear me," thought Betty, "Constance is nearly always late, but I thought she'd be on time to-night."

Of course, at such entertainments, no one is greatly surprised if the performance is a little delayed, but the absence of Constance seemed ominous to Miss Whittier.

"I think we'd better send for her," she began, when a man came in, in breathless haste. He carried a large white box, and, going straight to Miss Whittier, he said rapidly:

"Miss Constance, ma'am, she sprained her ankle—just now. She slipped coming down-stairs, and she can't walk nohow."

"Sprained her ankle!" cried Miss Whittier. "Can't she be here to-night? Who are you?"

"I'm Mrs. Harper's coachman, ma'am; and Miss Constance she was all dressed in her angel clothes and all, and jest goin' to get in the kerridge, when she slipped on the shiny stair, and her high-heeled slipper twisted somehow, and she jest sprained her ankle. So Mrs. Harper, soon's she could, she got the party clo'es offen her, and she's sent them to you, 'cause she says

somebody else'll have to do Miss Constance's piece to-night."

"Oh!" cried Miss Whittier, clasping her hands. "What can we do? But we must do something quickly. Lena Carey, you're about Constance's size; can't you take the part of Goddess?"

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"Oh, I'd love to, Miss Whittier," said Lena, looking longingly at the spangled white mass in the box, which had just been opened, "but I don't know a word of her lines. It's all I can do to remember my own."

"What shall I do!" cried Miss Whittier, in despair. "Does anybody know the Goddess's part? Oh, why didn't I think to have an understudy!"

Betty hesitated. It seemed presumptuous for her to offer, for she well knew she didn't look like Miss Whittier's idea of a Goddess of Honor. But no one else volunteered, so she said:

"Miss Whittier, I don't look right, I know, but I know every one of Constance's lines perfectly."

"You blessed child!" cried Miss Whittier; "do you really? Are you sure, Betty?"

For answer, Betty began rapidly, and with no attempt at dramatic effect:

"The Goddess of Honor I! To those who seek me I am hard to win. To those who nobly and unflinchingly——"

"That will do!" said Miss Whittier, smiling in spite of her anxiety. "Get out of that sailor suit, Betty, just as quick as you can, and get into Constance's things."

"Yes'm," said Betty, her voice thrilling with intense excitement, "yes, Miss Whittier. I've been in them before, and I know just how they go."

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Several deft pairs of hands gave assistance; Miss Whittier herself gathered up Betty's loose curls into a classic knot, and so well did she arrange it that, when the gilt crown was in place, the whole effect was harmonious, and Betty's sparkling eyes lit up a face that any goddess might be pleased to own.

Mindful of Constance's injunctions about tearing the delicate fabric, Betty gathered up her train and followed Miss Whittier to the stage.

As she passed, Dorothy took opportunity to whisper, "Oh, I am so glad"; and Jeanette gave her a loving pat as she went by.

The stage was draped entirely with white cheese-cloth, thickly sprinkled with gilt paper stars. A large pedestal stood ready for the Goddess, and on either side were two lower pedestals, occupied by her allegorical attendants, who, already in place, were wondering what had happened to the Goddess they were to serve.

Betty needed no instructions. She knew every pose Constance had been taught to take, as well as the lines themselves. Poising herself gracefully, she lifted her outstretched arm, with the long, slender trumpet, and placed the

mouthpiece to her lips.

"Beautiful!" whispered Miss Whittier, delighted at Betty's artistic, yet natural, pose.

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"Don't worry, Miss Whittier," Betty whispered back; "I'll do it all right!"

"You dear child! You've saved the day for us all. I know you'll do it with credit to us all."

Then Miss Whittier went in front of the curtain, and in a few words told of Constance's accident, and explained that her part would be taken by Miss Elizabeth McGuire, for whom she begged indulgence if not perfect in her part.

Betty, behind the curtain, heard the applause, and thinking how surprised Jack and her mother would be, she stood motionless as the curtain rose.

Another storm of applause broke forth at the beautiful picture, and when it subsided, Betty, with just the least tremor of excitement in her voice, began:

"The Goddess of Honor I! To those who seek me I am hard to win. To those who nobly and unflinchingly do their bravest and best, I come unsummoned!"

The speech was not of great literary value; those in amateur entertainments rarely are; but Betty was a good elocutionist and full of dramatic instinct. Moreover, her sudden change from an inconspicuous figure to the chief one of all put her on her mettle, and she fairly outdid herself in rendering the opening speech.

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THE GODDESS OF HONOR PLACED THE
CHAPLET ON THE BOWED HEAD OF
ISABELLA OF SPAIN

The play went on beautifully. Not once did Betty falter, or forget a line. The others, too, all did their parts well, and when, at last, the Goddess of Honor placed the chaplet on the bowed head of Isabella of Spain, the picture was a beautiful one, and the house fairly rose in applause.

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"It wasn't that I didn't feel sorry for Constance," said Betty, to her mother, as they drove home. "I did, and I do, feel *truly* sorry. But when she couldn't be there, and Miss Whittier *had* to have somebody, I was so glad I knew the part and could take it."

"You needn't tell me, dear," said her mother; "I know too well my Betty's generous heart to think for a moment that you rejoiced at Constance's accident. But I, too, am glad that, since poor Constance couldn't be there, my little girl could be of such help to Miss Whittier, and could, all unexpectedly, succeed so well in what was really a difficult part."

"You are a trump, Betty," said Jack, "and I'm glad you had the chance. I'm downright sorry for Connie, but I'm jolly glad for you!"

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IX AN INDEPENDENCE DAY RECEPTION

Toward the latter part of June the McGuire family migrated to Denniston for the summer. The beautiful country place, on the outskirts of the little town of Greenborough, was looking its prettiest as they arrived one lovely afternoon and took possession.

"In some ways I'm glad to be back here," said Betty, as they sat on the veranda after supper, "and in some ways I'm not."

"That's the way with 'most everything," commented Jack, philosophically; "there are always some good sides and some bad sides to whatever we do. I love Denniston, but there's more to do in Boston."

"And more people," said Betty.

"Yes," agreed Jack; "I've always noticed there *are* more people in a large city than in a small village."

Betty threw a hammock pillow at him, and went on: "I mean more people that I like to be with. I shall miss Dorothy and Jeanette awfully down here."

"You might invite them to visit you," suggested her mother.

"I would; but it's rather dull here. There's nothing special for them to do, you see; they usually go to watering-places in the summer, and I doubt if they'd want to come here."

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"Oh, pshaw, Betty!" said Jack. "They'd like to come, just to see you. And Denniston Hall is a lovely place. A flock of girls ought to be able to make fun for themselves here."

"That's so," said Betty; "anyhow, I'll ask them, and if they don't want to come, they can decline. I'll ask Constance too, and perhaps Lena—that is, if you are willing, Mother."

"Do," said her mother. "Make it a little house-party. With picnics and drives you can make it pleasant for them, I'm sure."

Just then Agnes Graham and her brother Stub came strolling up the driveway, and heartily welcomed the Denniston people back to their summer home.

"You're just in time," said Agnes, as the young people grouped themselves in the wicker chairs on the veranda or in the swinging settee; "have you heard about the Library Benefit?"

"No," said Betty; "what is it?"

"Oh, somebody's going to give a whole lot of money for a town library, if the town will raise another whole lot of money itself. And so everybody in Greenborough is planning to do something to help. And we thought, that is, we hoped, you'd join with the Dorcas Club, and help us."

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"I'd like to," said Betty, "but tell me more about it."

"Well, the truth is, Betty, the girls of the Dorcas Club haven't really made any definite plans, and they want you to suggest something—only they're afraid to ask you."

"Afraid to ask me!" exclaimed Betty. "Why?"

"Oh, they think you're so haughty and stuck-up since you've lived in Boston that they're afraid you won't want to work with us."

"Agnes Graham, you ought to be ashamed of yourself! Have you ever known me to act a bit haughty?"

"No, I haven't. But the other girls don't know you as well as I do, and they say that."

"Pooh! May Fordham and Tilly Fenn know me quite as well as you do; do they say I'm haughty?"

"No, May and Tilly don't—at least, I've never heard them."

"Well, who does, then? You may as well tell me."

"Oh, let's drop the subject!" said Stub, who hated a fuss. "What do you girls want to gossip for?"

"Betty's right," put in Jack; "if people say she's haughty, when she *isn't*, she ought to know who says it."

"Oh, it's nobody in particular," said Agnes, alarmed at the excitement she had caused. "If you're nice to them, Betty, they'll stop saying it."

"If she's nice to them!" exclaimed Jack, indignantly. "Betty's always nice to everybody, Agnes Graham!"

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"I can stand up for myself," said Betty, laughing at Jack's emphatic speech. "Go on, Agnes, and tell me what they want me to do."

"Well, what they want is for you to let them have a sort of a garden-party here at Denniston, and charge admission, you know, and let all the club take part."

Betty considered.

"I had thought of having a garden-party myself," she said; "a sort of home-coming to Denniston, you know. I don't see why we couldn't combine the two, and so make some money for your Library Fund."

"Oh, that would be fine!" said Agnes. "That's what they want,—to have the affair here, you know,—but they thought you wouldn't be willing."

"And I won't be willing unless you tell me who it is that says things about me."

"No, I won't do that, Betty; it isn't fair."

"Well, perhaps it isn't. Never mind; I shall soon find it out for myself. Now let's plan the garden-party. When shall we have it?"

"Let's have it on Fourth of July," suggested Jack. "Then we can combine patriotism and charity and fun and everything."

Mrs. McGuire approved the plan, and agreed to help in any way she could.

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So the very next day Betty went to a meeting of the Dorcas Club, and was made a member of it. The girls all seemed glad to welcome Betty, and were delighted at the prospect of a garden-party at Denniston on the Fourth of July. The club was a good-sized one, numbering about thirty girls in all, and they at once began to appoint committees, and so divide the work to be done.

"We'll have everything red, white, and blue," said May Fordham, "and flags everywhere. Oh, it will be beautiful!"

Susie Hale was president of the club, and it was only a short time before Betty discovered that it was Susie who was not entirely in sympathy with the plan proposed. Betty was amused rather than annoyed at Susie's attitude, for of course Susie had no real reason to dislike Betty, or to consider her proud or haughty.

It was really a sort of envy or jealousy that Susie felt, and this seemed to manifest itself in sly innuendoes or mean little acts, for which there is always opportunity in a girls' club.

At the second meeting Betty was made chairman of the general committee, and as this was practically giving her entire charge of the whole affair, it made Susie's position as president of the club a secondary office.

However, as the Fête was to be held at Betty's home, it was only right that she should be the principal in the management of it, and most of the girls were quite content to have it so.

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Betty had invited four girls from Boston, and Dorothy, Jeanette, Constance, and Lena arrived a few days before the Fourth, quite ready to take part in the festivities.

The Van Courts, too, who were one of the principal families of Greenborough, had agreed to lend all the assistance they could, and so the garden-party bade fair to be a great success. It was called an "Independence Day Reception," and the tickets were prettily printed in red and blue on white cards, and had tiny flags in the corner. They read thus:

COLUMBIA AND UNCLE SAM AT HOME AT DENNISTON HALL
--

Remembering Constance's disappointment in not being able to take her part at the school commencement, Betty resolved to make it up to her on this occasion.

So, though the club girls insisted that Betty herself should take the part of Columbia, she positively refused to do so, and proposed that Constance Harper should personate the Goddess of Liberty.

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This arrangement suited Susie Hale, who didn't want Betty to have the admiration and applause that would, of course, be given to Columbia as hostess of the entertainment.

Mr. Richard Van Court consented to take the part of Uncle Sam, and thus the principal figures were arranged.

The girls of the club were to wear whatever costumes they chose.

A grand march was to be made first, in which different countries were to be represented.

Betty chose Ireland, and had a lovely green costume made for the occasion. The boys of Greenborough were invited to participate also, and the characters of John Bull, a French marquis, a Spanish troubadour, a Swiss peasant, an Italian, a Chinaman, and other nationalities were chosen by some of the boys and girls. Others were to be in attendance at the various booths, or to act as waiters in the refreshment tent.

When the Fourth of July arrived, all of the Denniston household were astir at daybreak, for there was much to be done that could not be done until the day of the fair.

By midday, however, the place was nearly ready. Pat had worked steadily, and so had all the other servants, as well as the family and the guests. The beautiful grounds of Denniston were gay with decorations.

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Flags waved everywhere; bunting was draped, and Japanese lanterns swung from every available point. Big white transparencies, which would be illuminated in the evening, bore the national dates, or announced the goods for sale at the various booths.

The house, too, was decked with flags and lanterns, and the spacious veranda was filled with chairs, where guests might linger to listen to the music.

The band-stand was near by, and a fine orchestra had been engaged to play patriotic airs.

Booths were all about the grounds.

The largest was the main refreshment tent, where dainty little tables were set forth, with Japanese paper table-cloths and napkins all bearing our own national emblems.

The waitresses here were thirteen girls who

represented the thirteen original States. They wore white dresses and tricolor sashes and caps, with the name of their States in gilt letters. Another booth held all sorts of small articles for sale—fancy-work, from sofa-pillows to needle-books, all made of red, white, and blue silks; photograph frames made of silk flags; dolls dressed in red, white, and blue; scrap-books made of linen of the same colors, and filled with patriotic pictures and verses. Even such prosaic things as dusters and sweeping-caps were of the three colors and found a ready sale.

Another booth had flags, fire-works, and Fourth of July badges for sale. The lemonade, in accordance with time-honored tradition, was served by "Rebecca at the Well." The well had been prettily built by a carpenter in imitation of "The Old Oaken Bucket," and as Rebecca wore the American colors, the dramatic unities were somewhat lost, but nobody minded, as the lemonade was ice-cold and very good. An Indian wigwam was a gay feature. Jack had this in charge, and had superintended the building of it himself.

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A tribe of ferocious-looking Indian braves, much befeathered and painted, sold Indian curios, baskets, and beads.

The tennis-courts, bowling-alleys, and croquet-grounds were in order, and patrons could indulge in these games by payment of a small fee.

Inside the house, too, entertainment was provided.

Various indoor games were offered, and there was also a reading-room, with magazines and books for all. In another room was shown an "Historic Loan Collection." Many of the residents of Greenborough had relics of Revolutionary days, which they loaned for this occasion. As there were many really interesting and valuable specimens, the visitors were quite willing to pay the extra fee required to see them, and the room was well-filled with patrons much of the time. Opposite this room, in another room, was a "Burlesque Loan Collection," and this attracted quite as much attention.

Stub Graham had this in charge, and he deserved credit for the clever and humorous jokes he devised.

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Catalogues had been prepared, and as an inducement to buy them, a large placard outside the door announced that each purchaser of a catalogue would receive, free of charge, a steel-engraving of George Washington. When these premiums proved to be two-cent postage-stamps, and canceled ones at that, much merriment ensued.

Among the so-called Revolutionary relics were such jests as these:

"Early Home of George Washington," represented by an old-fashioned cradle.

"Vision of Washington's Old Age:" a pair of spectacles.

"Washington's Reflections" was a small portrait of Washington arranged so that it was reflected

in a triplicate mirror.

"The Most Brilliant Lights of the Washington Era" were a few lighted candles. "The Lone Picket" was a single fence-picket. "The Tax on Tea" showed a few carpet-tacks on some tea.

"A Little Indian" was a small portion of Indian meal.

"An Old-Time Fancy Ball" was a child's gay-colored worsted ball, much torn.

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"Washington at One Hundred Years of Age" was a bird's-eye map of the city of Washington.

"Away down on the Suwanee River" was a map of Georgia showing plainly the Suwanee River, on which was pasted a tiny bit of down.

"The Last of the Army" was simply the letter Y.

"A Member of Washington's Cabinet" was an old brass handle from a mahogany cabinet.

These and many other such quips made up an exhibition that amused people quite as much as the display of real relics edified them.

The preparation of all these features meant a great deal of hard work, but it was the sort of work made light by many hands, and so it was enjoyed by all who engaged in it.

And so, by midday on the Fourth of July, everything was in readiness, and the willing workers went to their homes, to return later, ready to reap the results of their labors.

The grand march was to take place at three o'clock, and Columbia and Uncle Sam were to review it from their stand on the veranda. This was to be followed by the singing of the "Star-Spangled Banner," accompanied by the orchestra.

It had been arranged that Betty should sing the verses as a solo, and that all the others, and indeed all the audience, should join in the chorus. Betty had not cared specially about singing, but had good-naturedly agreed to do so when the music committee asked her to.

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Her voice had improved by reason of her singing lessons in Boston, and after practising the national anthem with her mother, she felt that she could manage its high notes successfully.

It seemed a little incongruous for a girl in a green costume and carrying the harp of Erin to sing the American song, but Betty was of New England parentage as well as Irish, and she was glad to show her double patriotism. Constance was greatly pleased at her rôle of Columbia, and her costume was beautiful. Very becoming, as well, was the striped red and white skirt, and the blue bodice spangled with stars. A liberty-cap, and a large well-made shield on which to lean, added to the picturesque effect.

Mr. Dick Van Court was a humorous figure in his "Uncle Sam" suit. He looked just as the Uncle Sam of the cartoons always looks, and as he was a tall, thin young man, the character suited him well. A white beaver hat and the long, sparse locks of hair and white goatee were all in evidence, so that Mr. Dick's costume was

pronounced a success by all the visitors.

About two o'clock Betty went to her room to dress. She had been busy every minute of the day, had scarcely taken time to eat her luncheon, but now everything was in readiness, and she had only to dress and take her place in the grand march at three o'clock.

Slipping on a kimono, she threw herself down on a couch for a moment's rest before dressing. It was perhaps half an hour later when Constance presented herself at the door of Betty's room, ready for inspection of her pretty costume.

"May I come in?" she called, as she tapped at Betty's closed door.

Getting no reply, she tapped again, but after two or three unanswered calls she concluded Betty had gone down-stairs, and so she went down herself.

She didn't see Betty, but Mr. Van Court was there, in the full glory of his "regimentals," and the two, as it was not quite time to take their position, strolled about the veranda, looking out upon the grounds.

"It's just like fairy-land," said Constance, "and to-night, when the lanterns are lighted, it will be still more so. Oh, here comes the band."

The orchestra, in resplendent uniforms, took their places on the band-stand, and began their preliminary tuning of instruments.

Then the girls and boys began to arrive, and each costume was greeted with admiring applause.

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"WHERE'S BETTY?" SAID JACK, WRAPPED IN HIS INDIAN BLANKET

"Where's Betty?" said Dorothy, as she came down, dressed as a dear little Swiss peasant.

"I don't know," answered Constance; "she must be out in the grounds somewhere. She wasn't in her room when I came down."

"Well, it's time she appeared," said Dorothy. "It's ten minutes of three now."

"Where's Betty?" said Jack, as, wrapped in his Indian blanket, he came suddenly up to the girls,

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looking somewhat worried.

"I don't know," they replied at the same time. "She must be around somewhere."

"Maybe she is," said Jack, "but she isn't dressed for the grand march yet. I've just been to her room, and her green dress is all spread out on the bed, and she's nowhere to be found. Mother doesn't know where she is."

"Why, how strange!" said Constance. "Betty's never late, and it was about two when we both went up-stairs to dress. Where can she be?"

There didn't seem any real reason for alarm, but it was certainly strange that Betty should disappear so mysteriously. As Constance said, Betty was never late. She was always ready at the appointed time, and it seemed as if something must have happened to her.

"I can't find Betty anywhere," said Mrs. McGuire, as she joined the disturbed-looking group. "It's so strange, for I know she had nothing more to attend to. She stopped at my door about two o'clock, and said everything was ready and she was going to dress."

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It was beginning to look serious now, and Dorothy went back to Betty's room to make search.

As Jack had said, her pretty green dress was spread out in readiness. The little green slippers stood near by, and the green cap and gilt harp lay on the couch. Surely Betty had not begun to dress. She must have been called away by some one suddenly. Her kimono was flung across a chair as if hurriedly thrown there, and Dorothy looked in the dress-cupboard to see what Betty might be wearing. But there were many suits and dresses hanging there, and Dorothy couldn't tell which, if any, pretty summer costume was missing. It was very mysterious, and she went slowly down-stairs again, wondering what they should do.

"She's been kidnapped," Mrs. McGuire was saying; "I've always feared it!"

"Nonsense!" said Mrs. Van Court, an elderly lady, who was Mr. Dick's mother. "Of course she hasn't been kidnapped. I think she has fallen in the pond."

Jack laughed at this.

"Oh, no, Mrs. Van Court," he said; "Betty is too big a girl to tumble into the water. I think some one on some committee wanted her to look after some booth or something, and she's about the place somewhere."

"That's all very well," said Dick Van Court, "but if I know Betty, she'd attend to the matter and be back in time for the march at three o'clock."

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"It's after three now," said Dorothy. "Whatever can we do?"

Nobody knew just what to do. It didn't seem possible that anything unfortunate had occurred, and yet what else could be keeping Betty away, wherever she was?

Meanwhile what had become of Betty?

Well, it was just this:

While she was in her own room, just about to dress in her green suit, a note was brought to her by one of the servants.

The note read thus:

“DEER BETY: Susie isent going to the Forth a July Party atall. She’s mad at you.

“JENNIE HALE.”

Jennie Hale was Susie’s younger sister, and Betty saw at once that she had written this note without Susie’s knowledge.

But for Susie, the president of the club, to stay away from the garden-party would be a catastrophe indeed! Betty would be censured for making trouble, and Susie’s friends would say all sorts of things. It was hard on Betty. She [218] had truly tried to make friends with Susie, and thought she had overcome the girl’s silly jealousy. What especial thing Susie was “mad at” now, Betty didn’t know. But she must find out, and make peace, if possible, before time for the garden-party to begin.

She looked at her watch. It was a quarter past two. If she went right over to Susie’s she might fix it up, and get back in time to dress.

She flung off her kimono, and quickly donned a linen suit, selecting the one she could get into most easily.

Then she ran down-stairs, and, without a hat or gloves, jumped into the pony-cart, to which Dixie had been harnessed all day, in case of errands, and drove rapidly down the road toward Susie’s.

It happened that no one noticed her going, but Betty did not think of this, so engrossed was she in the matter in hand.

She dashed up to Susie’s door and rang the bell. Mrs. Hale herself opened the door, and from the cold, hard expression on her face, Betty felt that she was unwelcome.

“I’ve come to see Susie, Mrs. Hale,” she said pleasantly. “Isn’t she ready for the party?”

“No, she isn’t!” snapped Mrs. Hale. “She isn’t going to your old party, so you can sing the solos yourself.”

Then Betty understood. Susie had wanted to sing the solos! Betty remembered now that Susie was the soprano of the village choir, and she probably resented Betty’s being asked to sing the solos instead of herself.

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“Oh, my gracious!” exclaimed Betty, annoyed at this foolishness, and yet relieved that it could still be set right, “she can sing the solos, of course! I’d much rather she would! Tell her so, won’t you, and ask her to hurry and come.”

Mrs. Hale looked mollified, but she said:

“She can’t come now. She’s gone to her grandma’s to spend the afternoon.”

“Oh, dear! what a goose she is! Why couldn’t she

tell me sooner what she wanted? Where is her grandmother's?"

Betty was looking at her watch and getting back into the cart, and gathering up the lines, preparatory to going after the truant.

"It's pretty late," said Mrs. Hale, glancing at the clock. "She'll have to come back here to dress, you know."

"Never mind that!" said Betty, a little impatiently, for she was upset over it all. "Where is her grandmother's?"

"Oh, out on the Pine Hill road. The third house after you pass the mill."

Betty groaned, for the place designated was a good two miles away, and Dixie was somewhat tired. But she touched him gently with the whip, and said:

"Dear old Dixie, you'll help me out, won't you?"
And then they went spinning away toward the Pine Hill road.

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Susie, from the window, saw Betty coming, and went out to meet her.

She didn't look very pleasant, but Betty had no time to waste in coaxing just then.

"Susie Hale," she said, "get right in this cart. Never mind your hat; just get in this very minute!"

Susie was fairly frightened at Betty's tones, and though she was unwilling, she couldn't help doing as she was told.

Silent and a little bewildered, she climbed in beside Betty, and turning quickly, they were soon flying back over the road Betty had come.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself," Betty began, for she was of no mind to spare Susie's feelings now. "You, the president of the club, to cut up such a childish caper! You can sing the solos, of course; I don't care a mite! But you should have told me you wanted to sing them, in the first place."

"Who told you I wanted to?" said Susie, weakly, now thoroughly ashamed of herself.

"Your mother did, and I'm glad she did, for I never should have guessed what foolish thing was the matter with you. I don't think anybody that would act like you have is fit to be president of a club!"

Betty's righteous indignation seemed to show Susie the despicableness of her own conduct, and she began to cry.

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THEY WENT SPINNING AWAY TOWARD THE
PINE HILL ROAD

"I'm sorry," she said; "truly I am. Can you ever forgive me?"

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"I can," said Betty, "if you'll do just as I tell you. First, stop crying. Second, jump out of this cart when we get to your house, and get into your costume like lightning! Third, come over to Denniston and take your place in the march and sing the solos, and act pleasantly and nicely about it. I'll drive home after I leave you, and I'll send the cart back for you. And you must be ready! Do you hear? You *must* be *ready*!"

Betty spoke almost savagely, and Susie still looked scared, as she said: "I don't want to sing your solos now."

"But you will sing them," said Betty. "You must sing them, and do your very best, too. You sing as well as I do, and to do as I tell you is the only way you can make up for the trouble you've stirred up. Now, here you are at home. Fly and dress. Don't waste a minute. The cart will be back for you in a quarter of an hour!"

Susie sprang out of the cart and ran into the house, and Betty drove rapidly away to Denniston. As she tore up the driveway among the decorated booths and lantern-hung trees, the funny side of it struck her, and smiling broadly, she reached the veranda, where a bewildered group awaited her.

"Where *have* you been?" cried Constance. "What's the matter?"

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"I've been on an errand of mercy," said Betty, smiling still; "and nothing's the matter. The grand march must be delayed a little, but I'll be ready in a jiffy. Come on, Dorothy, and help me dress. Pat, please take Dixie and go over to Mrs. Hale's and bring Miss Susie back with you."

And so the grand march was delayed only about half an hour. Susie arrived duly, and sang the solos very prettily. Afterward, when the whole story came out, much indignation was expressed that Betty should have been so bothered, but Betty herself didn't mind, for it had the result of making Susie her staunch friend forever after.

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X BETTY CRUSOE

It happened most conveniently that when Betty was invited to spend a day and a night at Lena Carey's, her mother was also just about to go for a short visit to a friend who lived only a few stations beyond, on the same railroad.

"So we can start together," said Betty, gleefully, "and then I can get off at Pleasant Hill, and you can go on to Mapleton."

"You're sure they'll meet you at the station?" said Mrs. McGuire.

"Oh, yes, indeed. Lena wrote that they would meet me in their new motor-car. I shall take only a suitcase,—that will hold enough clothes for such a short stay,—then I won't have to bother with a trunk."

So Betty packed a pretty organdie afternoon dress, a dainty chiffon evening frock, and her night things, and the two travelers started on an early morning train.

The Careys were in their summer home at Pleasant Hill, and, after spending the night there, Betty was to go on next day and join her mother at Mapleton.

The arrangement was satisfactory, as Betty would have to travel alone only the few miles that separated the two places.

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It was a lovely day, and in her neat blue traveling-suit and straw hat Betty was a very pretty and contented-looking little tourist. She chattered to her mother all the way, and when the train stopped at Pleasant Hill, she kissed Mrs. McGuire good-by, and followed the porter, who carried her suitcase from the car.

Betty watched the cars round the curve, and then turned to look for the Carey motor. She didn't see it at first, but, as the railroad station was set rather high, and there were steps nearby, she assumed the street was below the street-level and she must go down the stairs.

But it did seem as if Lena might have come down to welcome her, for a strange railroad station is always a bit confusing to a new-comer.

Not seeing a porter, or indeed any one, about, Betty picked up her suitcase and started down the stairs.

At the bottom she saw a pleasant shaded road, but very few signs of civilization. However, Lena had told her that Pleasant Hill was merely a "jumping-off place," but that their own cottage there was delightful.

Betty didn't mind the lack of people or buildings in general, but she did mind the absence of the Careys. She couldn't understand it, for she knew she was expected; but she concluded they must have been delayed for some reason, and she had nothing to do but wait.

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Just at that moment, she saw a man driving by in an old farm-wagon.

"Wait a minute!" she called, for he was nearly past.

"Hey! what do you want?" the man called back, but he stopped his team, and waited as Betty came down the steps.

"Excuse me," she said politely, "but have you seen a motor-car around the station?"

The man ruminated.

"Wal, no, miss, I hev'n't. Leastwise, not to-day."

"But I mean to-day—just now. I'm expecting the Careys to meet me. I just came on the train."

"Ye did, hey? Well, that 'ere train was a good half-hour late. So, if so be's them Careys was here, like as not they got tired o' waitin' an' went away again."

"Where is the Carey place, do you know?"

"Wal, yes'm, I do know. It's a matter o' three miles along the hill road. I'll take you out thar myself if ye like. It'll cost you a quarter, though—and I'm not very busy."

So she climbed up on the wagon-seat, and the old farmer turned his horse and off they went.

It was mostly uphill, and therefore slow going, but at last they came in sight of a white house nestling in a tangle of green shrubbery and bright flowers.

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"How pretty!" exclaimed Betty; "is that the Carey place?"

"It be," vouchsafed the taciturn one, and Betty asked no further questions.

They drove in at the green, arched entrance, and up a winding road to the house. It was a truly summery dwelling, with large windows, wide verandas, screens and awnings.

The farmer climbed slowly down from his seat, slowly took Betty's suitcase and set it on the porch.

Leaving her suitcase on the steps, she went up on the porch and rang the door-bell.

While awaiting an answer she let her gaze stray over the surrounding landscape.

It was wonderfully beautiful, and, as Betty had a passion for pure color, the clear cobalt sky, the various bright and deep greens of the trees, the smooth gray of a little lake, and the purple of the distant hills thrilled her color-loving soul.

"They couldn't have found a lovelier spot," thought Betty, "and," she added to herself, "if ever I find them, I'll tell them so."

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HE STOPPED HIS TEAM AND WAITED AS
BETTY CAME DOWN THE STEPS

Her ring at the bell had not been answered, and she turned back to the front door to find it as tightly closed as ever.

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"Well, I like the Careys' notions of hospitality," she said grimly, as she rang the bell again, this time somewhat more forcibly.

Still the door did not open, and Betty felt decidedly puzzled.

Again she rang the bell, and could hear for herself its long, buzzing ring. But nobody answered it, and though she felt sure everything would soon be all right, yet she began to feel a little queer.

"I know it's the right house," she thought, "for here's Lena's fan in the hammock. That's the fan I gave her, so she must have left the house lately."

Greatly puzzled, Betty went around to the back part of the house.

She knocked and banged on the kitchen door, but received no response of any sort. She tried the door, but it was evidently locked and would not open.

She peered in at a window, but all she could see was some dishes piled on the kitchen table.

"Well, I do declare!" she said aloud, "if this isn't a lovely way to receive an invited guest!"

Though unwilling to admit it, even to herself, Betty was feeling decidedly disturbed. There was a mistake somewhere, that was quite evident. She knew the mistake was not hers, for Lena had written careful directions about her journey, and had said the motor would meet the train.

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Resolving to ring the bell again, Betty went slowly back to the front door.

The landscape did not appear quite so attractive as it had at first, and Betty was conscious of a queer depression about her heart.

"I'm not scared!" she assured herself; "I won't be scared! They *must* be in the house. Perhaps they're—perhaps they're cleaning the attic!" Though not very probable, this seemed a

possibility, and Betty pushed the bell with force enough to summon even people busily absorbed in work. But nobody came, and in despair Betty gave up the attic theory.

Half involuntarily, for she had no thought of its being unlocked, she turned the knob of the front door. To her surprise, it opened readily, and she stepped inside.

"Well, for goodness' sake!" she exclaimed. "Now, they must be at home, or they would have locked the front door."

Then she called: "Lena! Lena, where are you?"

But no one answered, and her voice reverberated in what was unmistakably an empty house.

Betty gave a little shiver. There is something uncanny in being the only occupant of a strange house.

An undefined sense of fear took possession of her, and she stood hesitating in the hall, almost determined to go no farther.

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Had it been a dull, cloudy day, or nearing dusk, she would have scurried out, but in the bright, cheerful sunlight it seemed absurd to feel afraid.

Still, it was with a loudly beating heart that she stepped into a large room opening off the hall.

It was evidently the family living-room, and the familiar things about reassured her somewhat.

Several books which she looked into bore Lena's name on the fly-leaf, and a light shawl, which she recognized as Mrs. Carey's, was flung carelessly over a chair-back. Somehow these homelike touches comforted Betty, and she ventured further explorations.

The dining-room was in order, and Betty could not tell whether any one had eaten recently or not. But in the kitchen pantry she noted remnants of breakfasts, which were fresh enough to denote having been placed there that morning. The ice-box showed fresh milk and various cold viands, and when Betty discovered that the kitchen clock was ticking, she concluded that all was well.

"For it's one of those little tin clocks," she observed, "that have to be wound every day. So the Careys have just stepped out since breakfast, but why they took all the servants with them, I don't know. Family picnic, I suppose, with no thought of their arriving guest!"

Wandering back to the front rooms, Betty started to go up-stairs, and then stopped. Suppose something awful had happened!

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She paused with her foot on the lowest stair.

"Lena!" she called again, "Lena!"

But there was no answer, and, with a sudden impulse of bravery, Betty ran up-stairs and peeped into the first bedroom she came to. It was, without doubt, Lena's own room.

She recognised her kimono flung on the bed,

and her little Japanese slippers, which had evidently been kicked off across the room. Surely Lena had dressed in a hurry.

Cheered by these visible signs of her friend's recent presence here, Betty went on through the other rooms.

She found nothing unusual, merely the sleeping-rooms of the Carey family, fairly tidy, but by no means in spick-and-span order.

In fact, they looked as if the whole family had gone away in haste.

"To meet me at the station, I suppose," cogitated Betty. "Well, I'm here, and I can't help it, so I may as well make myself at home. I think I'll bring my suitcase up, and select a room, and put on a cooler dress."

She went down-stairs more blithely than she had come up. It was all very mysterious, to be sure, but there had been no tragedy, and the Careys must come back soon, wherever they might have gone.

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She paused again in the living-room, and sitting down at the open piano, she sang a few lively little songs.

Then, feeling quite merry over her strange experience, she went out to the front porch for her suitcase.

It was just where she had left it. Nobody was in sight. She gazed again over the lovely, serene landscape, and, taking the suitcase, she went, singing, up-stairs.

The guest-room was easily recognized and Betty felt at liberty to appropriate it for her own use. She was an invited guest, and if no hostess or servant was present to conduct her to her room, she must look after her own rights.

"I'm just like Robinson Crusoe," she chuckled to herself. "I'm stranded on a desert island, with not a human being near. But, luckily, there's food in the pantry, for really, with all these exciting experiences, I'm getting hungry."

She opened her suitcase and shook out her pretty dresses. Then she changed her traveling-frock for the light organdie, and having bathed, and brushed her hair, she felt rather better.

"Well, it's nearly noon," she said, looking at her watch, "and, as I've no one to consult but myself, I may as well have an early luncheon. If the Careys come in while I'm eating, I'll invite them to lunch with me."

So down-stairs Betty went, smiling to think of herself as Betty Crusoe.

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But as she passed the door of the living-room and glanced inside, her smile faded.

Her eyes grew big with amazement, her cheeks turned pale, and a shiver of fear shook her.

On the table lay a man's hat!

"It *couldn't* have been there when I was in here before," she thought, "for I looked into those books, and now the hat's on top of them!"

It was a forlorn old hat, of light-gray felt, but soiled and torn, and Betty's frightened heart told her that it was the hat of some marauder, and not of any member of the Carey family.

With a sudden scream, which she could not repress, she ran and hid behind a large Japanese screen in the corner of the room.

"Who's there?" called a man's voice from the hall. It was a loud, gruff voice, and poor Betty shook and shivered as she crouched behind the screen.

"Who's there?" repeated the voice, and Betty heard heavy footsteps coming in at the living-room door.

Then there was silence. The man was apparently awaiting Betty's next move. Then he said again: "Who screamed just now? Where are you?" and somehow this time his voice did not sound quite so ferocious. But Betty had no intention of answering, and she squeezed into her corner, hoping that he would go away.

Then suddenly the whimsical idea came to her that, as she was personating Robinson Crusoe, this was probably the Man Friday who had arrived. This amused her so much that she giggled in spite of her fear. The man heard the smothered sound, and going straight to the screen, he pulled it suddenly away.

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Betty, who was sitting on the floor, looked up to see a stalwart young man of a college type staring down at her. His costume of summer outing clothes was informal, but at once betokened he was no marauder. Also, his handsome, sunburnt face and frank blue eyes showed a kindly though surprised expression.

Betty was reassured at once, and, truly glad to see a human being of her own walk in life, her face broke into smiles and merry dimples, as she said:

"Hello, Man Friday!"

"Who are you?" was his bewildered response, and then remembering himself, he added: "I beg your pardon; may I assist you to rise?"

He took Betty's hand, and in a moment she had jumped up from her crouching position, and stood facing him.

"I'm Betty Crusoe," she said; "I'm stranded on a desert island, and if you're Man Friday, I hope you'll protect me from cannibals or bears or whatever wild beasts abound here."

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"Oh, I know you," said the young man, smiling. "You're Miss Betty McGuire."

"I am. I'm a guest of the Careys—only—the Careys don't seem to be here!"

"No, they're not. I'm Hal Pennington, at your service. I'm called Pen or Penny for short,—sometimes Bad Penny."

"I'm sure that's a libel," said Betty, smiling at his kind, honest face.

"It is, I assure you, for I'm good as gold. Well, I, too, am a guest of the Careys, and, as you so

cleverly observe, they don't seem to be here!"

"Where are they?"

"Well, you see it was this way. All the servants took it into their foolish heads to leave at once. They decamped last night. So this morning the Careys started off in the motor-car to bring home a lot of new ones."

"But why didn't they come to the station for me, as they arranged?"

"Oh, they telegraphed you last night not to come till next week."

"And I didn't get the telegram!"

"Thus that explains all! How did you get here?"

"In a rumbly old wagon of a kind farmer. The front door wasn't locked, so I walked in and made myself at home. Are you staying here?"

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"Yes, for a week. I'm sketching some bits of woodland, and I stayed at home to-day rather than go with them to stalk servants. Now, let me see,—this is rather a complicated situation. Shall I, by virtue of prior residence, be host and welcome you as my visitor, or would you rather appropriate the house as your own, and let me be your guest?"

His jolly, boyish face seemed to show that he thought the whole affair a great joke, and Betty fell into the spirit of it.

"When do the Careys return?" she asked.

"Mrs. Carey said they'd surely be home by three o'clock, and I could forage in the pantry to keep myself from starving."

"All right," said Betty; "I'll be hostess, then, until she comes. You've heard Lena speak of me?"

"Gracious, yes! I've heard you so highly lauded that I doubt if you can live up to the angelic reputation she gives you!"

"Oh, yes, I can," said Betty, laughing. "Now I'll be Betty Crusoe, and this house is my desert island. You're Man Friday, and you must do exactly as I say."

"I live but to obey your decrees," said young Pennington, with a deep bow.

"Good! Now, first of all, I'm starving. Are you?"

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"I even starve at your command. I am famished."

"I believe you are, really. Let's see what we can find."

Together they went to the pantry, and found cold chicken and peach-pie, a bowl of custard, and various odds and ends of tempting-looking dishes.

"Let's set the table first," cried Betty, gleefully. "Do you know where the dishes are?"

"I've never really set the table," Pennington said, "but I'm quite sure the dishes are in the sideboard or the glass cupboard."

"How clever you are!" said Betty, laughingly; "I

do believe you're right!"

They easily found linen, silver, and glass, and Betty set the table daintily for two.

"Now," she said, "I'll get the luncheon. A man's only a bother in the kitchen. You go and do your sketching until I call you."

But Hal Pennington was not so easily disposed of.

"No," he said; "I'll gather some flowers, and then I'll arrange them as a decoration for our feast."

"Do," said Betty, "that will be lovely!"

Hal went out to the garden, and returned with gay blossoms, which he arranged deftly and with good taste on the table.

"What are you doing?" he said a little later, as he drifted into the kitchen, where Betty, with her sleeves rolled back, was whisking away at something in a bowl.

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"Making a salad; don't you like it?"

"Love it! Let me help."

"You can't help, I tell you. Go away, Man Friday, until I call you."

"No, please let me help," coaxed Hal. "I just love to cook. Pooh, maybe you think I don't know how! See here, I'll make an omelet!"

Before Betty knew what he was about he had broken several eggs into a bowl.

"Oh, don't!" she cried, laughing at his misdirected energy. "We don't want an omelet! We've bushels of things to eat already!"

"Then I'll make coffee," said Hal, quite unabashed. "These eggs will do for coffee just as well."

"Not six of them, goose!" cried Betty.

"Why, yes, you always put eggs in coffee."

"Oh, just one, or part of one, to clear it!"

"Well, if one's good, more's better; anyway, I'm going to make coffee."

Taking a white apron from a nail, Hal tied it round himself, and proceeded to make what turned out to be really good coffee, though he used only a small portion of the eggs in it.

"You are a good cook," said Betty, as she watched his experienced movements.

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"Sure! I learned how in camp. All our fellows know how to cook."

The luncheon was daintily served. Betty had garnished the salad with nasturtium leaves and red blossoms, and edged the platter of cold chicken with a wreath of parsley.

They had taken out the Careys' best china and cut glass, and the table looked lovely indeed.

"My! What a spread!" said Hal, looking

admiringly at it. "I didn't suppose you could do things like that."

"Why not?" said Betty, turning wondering eyes on him. "What made you think I couldn't?"

Hal reddened a little, but said honestly:

"'Cause Lena said you're such a fearfully rich girl, and I sort of thought you'd be—oh, you know—above fussing in the kitchen."

Betty laughed merrily.

"I love fussing in the kitchen," she said, "and I think every girl ought to know how to cook. At least she ought to have sense enough to get together a cold luncheon like this when everything's provided."

"Yes, I know; but you've made everything look so pretty. I want to eat dishes and all!"

Betty dimpled with pleasure at his praise, and they sat down to the pretty feast, to which they did full justice.

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BETTY, WITH HER SLEEVES ROLLED BACK,
WAS WHISKING AWAY AT SOMETHING IN A
BOWL

"I wonder when the Careys will come," Betty remarked, as they lingered over the coffee.

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"I wish they'd never come," said Hal. "I think it would be fine if we were really castaways, and nobody ever came to rescue us. Just like Robinson Crusoe and his Man Friday."

"But we haven't any goat," said Betty, laughing. "The goat was one of the principal characters, you know."

"Well, likely a goat would wander in some day. I say, can you sing?"

"Yes," said Betty, smiling as she thought of how she had sung when she first entered the house; "I sing some songs pretty well."

"I wager you do. Let's go in by the piano and sing duets."

"Didn't you hear me singing this morning? I sat down at the piano when I first arrived."

"No; I was out sketching. I only came in the house a few minutes before I found you."

"Let me see your pictures, won't you?"

"Sometime, yes. Let's go and sing now."

"No, we must clear the table first. It's so untidy to leave it. But you needn't do it; I hate to see a boy doing girl's work."

"Oh, pshaw, it isn't girl's work exactly, if you play you're camping or picnicking or something like that. I'm going to help, and you can't stop me!"

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Hal had begun already to take out the dishes, and Betty gave him a mock sigh, as she said:

"I don't think my Man Friday obeys me as well as he promised to."

"'Cause I only obey when I want to," he responded, and in a short time the table was cleared and the food put away.

"We won't wash the dishes," said Betty, as she piled them neatly on the kitchen table. "If Mrs. Carey's going to bring a lot of servants at three o'clock, they'll want something to do."

So they went to the piano, and soon discovered that they knew a number of the same songs.

Hal had a good voice, and they sang away with all their youthful enthusiasm, making such a volume of sound that it could be heard above the chug-chugging of the approaching motor-car.

"Well, I declare!" exclaimed Lena, as they whizzed up to the house. "That's surely Betty McGuire's voice! No one else sings like that."

"And that's Hal singing with her," said Mrs. Carey, as a masculine voice blended with Betty's soprano.

Then Lena sprang from the car, and rushed to greet Betty, and all sorts of apologies and explanations followed.

"I'm not a bit sorry!" said Hal, as Mrs. Carey reiterated her regret at the misunderstanding; "I've had a jolly time, and now Lena's come I don't suppose I'll be able to get a word in edgewise with Betty Crusoe, all the evening!"

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"You will, if I have anything to say about it," said Betty, flashing one of her brightest smiles at her Man Friday.

XI A LABOR DAY LUNCHEON

Labor Day was, of course, on Monday, and the Saturday before Betty received this letter:

BOSTON, Friday.

DEAREST BETTY: The loveliest thing has happened! Aunt Evelyn has asked me to make her a little visit in New York (she lives at the Waldorf, you know), and she says I may ask you to go with us on a Labor Day excursion on Monday. So don't fail me; I'm crazy to see you! I'm so excited over it all, I can scarcely write. But this is the plan. I'm going to New York to-morrow. You're to come on Monday morning, and we'll meet you at the ferry—on the New York side, you know. And then, the boat—oh, I forgot to tell you, we're going to West Point—sails from somewhere near there. But never mind that; we'll meet you and show you the way. We're going to carry our luncheon, for Aunt Evelyn says you can't get anything fit to eat on an excursion-boat. So you can bring a contribution to the feast, or not, according to your convenience. But be sure to come. I've never been up the Hudson River, and we'll have loads of fun. Take that early train from Greenborough, and wait for us "under the clock."

Lovingly,

DOROTHY.

"Isn't it fine, Mother?" said Betty, as she read the letter aloud. "I've never been up the Hudson either, and it will be such fun to go with Dorothy."

"Yes, it will, deary. I'm sure you'll have a lovely trip. You'll have to scurry out early, though, if you're to take that seven-thirty train. You'll want to take some luncheon, won't you?"

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"Oh, yes; I think I ought to. Ellen will cook some of her lovely fried chicken for me. And I might take some stuffed eggs or some jelly tarts. I'll talk it over with Ellen."

Now, Ellen was by nature what is called "a good provider." And so it happened that when Betty came down-stairs at half-past six on Monday morning Ellen was already packing into a big box the good things which she had risen before daylight to prepare.

"For mercy's sake, Ellen!" cried Betty, "do you think I'm going to feed the whole excursion?"

"Arrah, Miss Betty," returned Ellen, placidly, "it's a fine appetite ye'll get on the water, and yer city folks'll be glad to eat yer country fixin's."

Ellen was wrapping delicious-looking bits of golden-brown fried chicken daintily in oiled paper, and tucking them into place in the big box.

Then in one corner she placed a smaller box of stuffed eggs, which, in their individual frills of fringed white paper, formed a pretty picture.

Another partition held jelly tarts, with flaky crusts and quivering red centers, and somehow Ellen found room for a few sandwiches, through whose thin bread showed the yellow of mayonnaise.

Everything was carefully protected with white paper napkins, and the whole box was a most appetizing display of skilled culinary art.

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"But it's so big, Ellen," repeated Betty, laughing. "I simply can't carry so much stuff."

"Niver you mind, Miss Betty," said the imperturbable cook, going on with her work of wrapping the big box in neat brown paper and tying it with stout twine. "You've not to walk at all, at all, and ye can get a porther to lift it off the thrain. An' sure Pat'll put it on safely fer ye."

So Betty submitted to the inevitable, realizing that she wouldn't have to carry the box at all, and proceeded to eat her breakfast.

"It is an awfully big box," said Mrs. McGuire, as the carriage came to the door; "but if your party can't eat all the things, you can give them to some children on the boat."

"Oh, it'll be all right," said Betty, and kissing her mother good-by, she jumped into the carriage, and Pat drove her to the train.

There were few passengers at that early hour, and so there was ample room for the box on the seat beside her. Though Betty went often to New York, she rarely went alone, but as Dorothy and her aunt's family were to meet her, she felt no responsibility as to traveling.

In Jersey City the conductor lifted the box out for her, and a convenient porter carried it to the ferry-boat.

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"Hold it level," Betty admonished him, and he touched his red cap and said "Yes'm," and then carried the box with greatest care. Betty went by the Twenty-third Street Ferry, and in the ferry-house on the New York side she was to meet Dorothy, "under the clock."

This tryst was a well-known one, for it made a definite place to meet in the crowded room.

Betty always enjoyed the long ferry, and she sat outside, with her precious box reposing on the seat beside her.

The morning was delightful, but it was growing warm and bade fair to be a very warm day.

Betty watched with interest the great steamer piers, and the traffic on the river, rejoicing to think that soon she would be sailing farther up the stream, where the banks were green and wooded, and the expanse of water unmarred by freight-boats and such unpicturesque craft.

The ferry-boat bumped into its dock at Twenty-third, Street, and Betty picked up her box and started off with it. A porter met her at the gangplank, and she gave it to him with an injunction to hold it quite level. For it would be a

pity to tumble the neat arrangement of Ellen's goodies into an unappetizing mass.

Down-stairs they went, and into the waiting-room, where Betty paused "under the clock."

Dorothy hadn't arrived, but Betty remembered, with a smile, that she was nearly always late, so, remunerating the porter, she sat down to wait, with her box beside her.

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She had on a suit of embroidered blue linen, and a broad-brimmed straw hat trimmed with brown roses.

The big hat suited Betty's round face and curly hair, and, all unconsciously, she made a pretty picture as she sat there waiting. Before she had time to feel anxious about Dorothy's non-appearance, a messenger-boy in uniform came toward her.

"Is this Miss McGuire?" he said, touching his cap respectfully.

"Yes," said Betty, wondering how he knew her.

"Then this is for you. The lady told me how you looked, and said I'd find you right here. No answer."

The boy turned away, and in a moment was lost in the crowd, leaving Betty in possession of a note addressed in Dorothy's handwriting.

She tore it open and read:

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WALDORF-ASTORIA.

DEAR BETTY: What do you think! Aunt Evelyn has a *fearful* sick headache, and can't raise her head from the pillow. So, of course, we can't go up the Hudson to-day, and she says for you to come right up here, and have luncheon here, and afterward Uncle Roger will take us to a *matinée*. She said this was the surest way to reach you, and for you not to be afraid, but just take a taxicab and come straight here. I told her I knew you wouldn't be afraid, but she said for you to telephone us as soon as you get this note, so she'll know it's all right. She's sort of nervous about you. So call us up right away, and I'll answer you.

In haste,

DOROTHY.

P. S. I told the messenger he'd know you because you were very pretty, except for your turn-up nose.

Betty smiled at Dorothy's postscript, and then she read the note over again. On the whole, she didn't much care that the plans were changed, for a luncheon at a fine hotel and a *matinée* afterward seemed quite as attractive on a hot day as a sail on a crowded excursion-boat.

Also, she was not at all afraid! She laughed at the idea. She would telephone Dorothy, and then she would really enjoy taking a taxicab and driving up to the hotel all alone. It made her feel decidedly grown-up.

So she went to the telephone booth and called up Dorothy.

"Indeed, I don't mind the change of plans a bit," she said, in answer to her friend's query. "I'm awfully sorry for your aunt, but I think we'll have a better time on land than on the water to-day. It's getting very warm."

"Is it?" said Dorothy. "It seems cool here."

"Well, it's hot out in the sun all right. I'll take a taxi, and I'll be with you in less than half an hour."

"Yes, come right here, and we'll be waiting for you. My cousins Fred and Tom want to see you, and Aunt Evelyn says perhaps we can go for a drive in the Park before luncheon."

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"Oh, that reminds me, Dorothy. I've a big box of luncheon with me. What shall I do with it? I can't walk into the Waldorf with that!"

"Gracious, Betty, I should say not! But it's a shame to throw it away. Just give it to some poor person, can't you?"

"Yes, that's a good idea; I will. Well, good-by, till I see you."

"Good-by. Hurry up here," said Dorothy, and Betty hung up the receiver.

As she picked up her box to start toward the taxicab rank, the thought occurred to her that it might be well to dispose of the box before she took the cab. Acting on this idea, she stepped out of the ferry-house and looked about her.

It was rapidly growing much warmer, and the glare on the hot paving-stones was unpleasant, but Betty determined to bestow the wholesome food on some grateful poor person before she started up-town.

"I want to find some one really worthy," she said to herself; "it would be too bad to waste all these good things on an ungrateful wretch."

She looked at the newsboys who were crying their papers, but it seemed impracticable to expect them to carry a large, heavy box in addition to their burden of papers. She wandered along the street until she saw a poor-looking old woman in a news-booth.

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The papers and magazines were piled up tidily and the old news-vender herself sat comfortably knitting, now and then looking out over her spectacles for a possible customer.

She was certainly thrifty, Betty thought, and would be greatly pleased with a present of good food.

"I'd like to give you this," said Betty, resting the box on a pile of morning papers; "it's some food—nice bits of cold chicken and eggs."

The old woman glared at her.

"Bits of food, is it?" she exclaimed. "Broken bits ye're offerin' to me! Well, ye may be takin' 'em back! Nobody need dole out food to Bridget Molloy! I takes nobody's charity! I earns me honest livin'! More shame to them as doesn't!"

"Oh, I didn't mean to offend you," cried Betty, greatly distressed at having hurt the old woman's feelings. "It's a very nice luncheon that I brought for myself and some friends."

But Mrs. Molloy would not listen.

"Take it away," she said; "take yer cold victuals to some one as is too lazy to work for a honest livin'! I asks no charity fer me or mine!"

Greatly chagrined and a little angry, Betty picked up her box and walked away.

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It had been an unfortunate occurrence, but surely it would be easy enough to find some one more reasonable than the old newswoman. Before she had gone a block Betty saw a ragged urchin who was, she decided, a worthy case. He was not selling papers; indeed, he was doing nothing, but leaning against a high board fence, digging his bare toes into the dust.

"Poor little thing," thought Betty; "I've no doubt he's hungry." Then she said:

"Good morning, little boy. Are you one of a large family?"

The boy looked suspiciously at Betty, then, in a whining voice, replied:

"Ten brudders an' ten sisters ma'am; an' me fadder is sick, an' me mudder is out o' work."

"Oh, you poor child!" exclaimed Betty, and as he held out a grimy little paw, as if for coin, she offered him the box.

"You're just the boy I'm looking for. Here is a quantity of nice food for you and your brothers and sisters."

Quickly the grimy little paw was withdrawn, and with both hands behind him, the boy winked rudely at Betty and said:

"Aw, g'wan! Quit yer kiddin'."

"I don't know what you mean," said Betty, who couldn't help laughing at the impudent little fellow. "I'm offering you some good food."

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"Good food nothin'!" said the strange child. "Take yer box away, lady; I wouldn't swap yer me college pin fer it!"

Betty had to laugh at this, but since the boy was so indifferent, she didn't care to give him the lunch anyhow; so she went on to find some one else.

"It does seem queer," she thought, "that there's nobody about who is just the right one to give this to. There are men working at the road, but I don't like to offer it to them, they look so—so untidy."

But at last she spied a little girl. Though somewhat gaudily dressed, the child was evidently poor, for her frock was faded and torn. She wore a string of bright beads round her neck, and a big bow on her black hair, and she walked with a mincing step.

But she was thin and looked ill nourished, so Betty thought that at last she had found just the

right beneficiary.

"Where do you live?" she said, by way of opening the conversation, as she paused in front of the little girl.

"You ain't a settlement teacher," said the child. "Comes a settlement teacher, and I tell my name. But you ain't one."

"No," said Betty, smiling kindly, "I'm not a settlement teacher, but I want to give you something—something very nice."

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"What is it nice you wants fer to give me?"

The child did not look receptively inclined, but Betty held out the big box toward her and said:

"It's this box of lovely luncheon, fried chicken and little pies! Take it home to your mama."

The girl turned on Betty like a little fury. Her black eyes snapped, and her whole little body shook with indignation as she cried:

"Think shame how you says! My mama wouldn't let me to take whole bunches of lunch from a lady! It ain't for ladies to give lunches off on the street!" With a flirt of her shabby little skirts, the child turned her back on Betty and walked haughtily away.

It was Betty's first experience with that peculiar type of dignity and self-respect, and she was bewildered at the sudden fury of the indignant child.

But the box was still to be disposed of, and Betty looked around for another opportunity. She was tempted to throw it away, but the thought of Ellen's dainty morsels being wasted was so disappointing that she resolved to try once more anyhow.

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THE GIRL TURNED ON BETTY LIKE A LITTLE FURY

"I didn't think it was so hard to give food away in town," she reflected, smiling grimly at her predicament. "Oh, I do believe it's going to rain!"

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The sky had suddenly clouded over, and there were portents of a coming shower. Betty looked at the clouds, and resolved to make one more attempt to bestow her charity, and if that failed she concluded she must throw away the box. As Dorothy had said, she couldn't very well walk into a large hotel carrying a box of luncheon. It would look ridiculous. And even if she did have to throw it away, she had the satisfaction of knowing she had tried to utilize it. The drops began to fall, but they were large and scattered, so Betty thought she had time for one more attempt at her good work before she ran for shelter.

A poor-looking man came toward her, and Betty stopped him. She had become timid about the box by this time, so, unconsciously, she spoke as if asking a favor.

"Wouldn't you like a box of nice food to take home?" she said, as she hesitatingly held the box out to him.

"Do you mean to give it to me?" he asked, in such a threatening tone that Betty recoiled a little. She thought quickly. Here was another who would take offense at being looked upon as

an object of charity. It flashed through her mind that if she asked him to pay a small price he would keep his self-respect and get far more than the value of his money.

"No," she stammered; "I mean to sell it to you—for ten cents."

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It seemed awful to ask money for it, but surely he could pay that much, and Betty felt instinctively that he would refuse it as a gift.

The man looked at her with a strange glance.

"Have you got a license to sell things in the street?" he asked.

"N-no!" gasped Betty, frightened now by his intent gaze at her.

"Well, you quit your foolishness, lady. You move on, you and your precious bundle, or I'll call a policeman and have you arrested!"

She almost *ran* back to the ferry-house, concluding, as she went, to throw away the luncheon and take a cab up to Dorothy's as quickly as she could.

Where to throw it away was the next question. Betty looked in vain for a refuse receptacle or ash-can. She knew it was not allowed to throw things in the street, and the cleanly swept pavement near the ferries showed no resting-place for the objectionable-box.

There were poor-looking people about, but Betty did not care to risk another impertinent refusal. Just as she was about to turn into the little office to engage a taxicab, she had a brilliant idea.

"I'll go back on the ferry-boat," she thought; "I'll get a ferry ticket and go through the slip and on to the boat. Then I can throw the old box into the water, and come off the boat again before it starts."

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This seemed a really good plan, and with rising spirit Betty paid her pennies and went on the boat. She had ample time, as the boat had just arrived and would not go out again for several minutes. On the upper deck Betty walked to the extreme end, and stood looking over into the water. It seemed an awful pity to waste that lovely luncheon, but it was getting late, and it was raining quite steadily, so there was really nothing else to do.

"Good-by, then, pretty little tarts and jolly good chicken!" said Betty, and she pushed the box over the rail.

Then she hurried back, and started again for the cab-stand.

"Yes, a taxicab, please," said Betty to the kind-faced official in charge, and then, "To the Waldorf," she said, as she got into the vehicle. She felt very capable and grown-up, as she settled herself in the broad seat, and noticed with satisfaction that the shower was almost over.

But, just as the driver was about to start, a voice called, "Hi! hold on there!" and running toward the cab came a deck-hand from the ferry-boat, carrying that box!

"I seen you!" he cried to Betty, in jubilant tones; "I seen you get on the boat, and then I seen you drop this box. I wuz on the lower deck, an' I jest caught it! It dropped out of my hand, and the corners is smashed some, but I saved it from goin' in the water, all the same! Here it is, ma'am!"

He looked so delighted at his feat that Betty couldn't help smiling back at him, though deeply exasperated to have the box on her hands again.

The young fellow clearly thought he had done Betty a great favor in restoring her property, and he stood smiling, and shifting from one foot to another, while the cab driver obligingly waited.

"Oh," thought Betty, "he expects a reward! Imagine paying a reward for getting that box back!"

But she realized that the deck-hand thought it was valuable property he had restored, so she took out her purse and gave him a coin that sent him away grinning with pleasure.

Then the cab started, and Betty sat looking at the horrid box which had grown such a burden to her. It was beginning to look disreputable, too. The paper was soiled and torn, for the rain-drops had wet it, and the jar as the box fell on the ferry-boat deck had broken the pasteboard. Also, to Betty's horror, she could see tiny drops of jelly and something yellow oozing out at the edges. The stuffed eggs must be upset, and the warm weather had softened the jelly tarts! It was simply impossible to carry the box into the hotel, and it would be also impossible to leave it in the cab.



JUST AS THE DRIVER WAS ABOUT TO START,
A VOICE CALLED, "HI! HOLD ON THERE!"

Betty was at her wits' end, and the street corners were flying by with annoying rapidity. Soon she would be at the Waldorf, and she *must* dispose of that box first.

Fortunately no drop from its edges had soiled her pretty dress, and if she could only rid of it, she could enter the hotel in serene forgetfulness of all her trouble. She was tempted simply to pitch it out of the window, but if she did, it

would break apart and scatter its contents all over the street, and—she *might* be arrested.

Betty didn't know much about the law, but she was almost certain it was against it, to scatter stuffed eggs and fruit tarts along the middle of Fifth Avenue! And yet something *must* be done!

She made a desperate resolve.

"Stop at a news-stand, please," she called to the driver. The man did so, and Betty bought four newspapers. "Go on slowly," she said; and the driver obeyed. Then Betty untied the string from the damaged box, wrapped it all in many thicknesses of newspaper, and tied it with the string, making a secure if very cumbersome bundle. Surveying it with satisfaction, she called to the driver, "Go as fast as you can!" and as he accelerated his speed, she pitched the bundle out of the window. Too frightened to look back, she huddled in a corner of the cab, scarcely daring to think she was free at last from that hated presence.

"It won't spill in the street," she thought, "unless something runs over it, and if it does, my! how the eggs will spatter!"

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It all appealed to Betty's sense of humor, and, though she was still a little scared, she couldn't help laughing at her ridiculous experiences of the morning.

She sat up very straight, and when the cab stopped at the hotel, she gravely alighted, paid the driver, and marched with a dignified air up the steps and in at the door.

Once inside, the first face she saw was Dorothy's.

"Where *have* you been?" she cried. "We've waited and waited! I couldn't telephone, 'cause I didn't know where to find you. Aunt Evelyn is *so* anxious about you. Oh, let me present my cousins, Tom and Fred Bates."

Two good-looking, merry-faced young men looked admiringly at pretty Betty and made polite bows. Still full of merriment at the remembrance of her funny morning, Betty's bright eyes were twinkling, and her cheeks rosy beneath her flower-trimmed hat.

"How do you do?" she said, smiling prettily at the boys, then turning to Dorothy, she said: "Yes, I was detained a little; I'll tell you about it some other time. But I came just now, from the ferry, in a taxicab."

"Yes, I saw you drive up," said Dorothy; "I was looking out of the window. But I've been there flattening my nose against the pane for half an hour. Where were you, Betty?"

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"Seeking my fortune," said Betty, teasingly; "or, rather, seeking to bestow fortune."

But her speech was not heard, because of a commotion behind her.

"That's the one!" said a childish voice, and, to Betty's horror, an employee of the hotel ushered a ragged small boy straight toward her. The boy held in his arms a large muddy, newspaper-covered bundle!

"I seen you drop it out o' yer cab, ma'am, an' I brung it to yer!"

His dirty little face gleamed with delight, and he held the awful-looking package out toward Betty.

She drew back, feeling that she could not take that box in charge again, and Fred Bates said sternly:

"What does this mean? Why are you annoying Miss McGuire?"

"This chap says it's the lady's property," explained the clerk who was looking after the boy. "Say the word, sir, and we'll put him out."

He laid a hand on the urchin's shoulder, but the boy spoke up insistently:

"It *is* hers, sir! I seen her lose it outen the cab winder, an' I picked it up, an' ran to catch 'er, an' I seen her jest as she came in the whirligig door, an' I got here as soon as they'd let me!"

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"That awful-looking bundle, Betty's!" cried Dorothy, in disgust. "Of course it isn't! What nonsense!"

At this the clerk made as if to eject the boy who had brought the bundle, and then Betty's sense of justice was aroused. It was awful to claim ownership of that disreputable piece of property, but it was worse, in her estimation, to have an innocent boy reprimanded for doing what he had believed to be right.

"It *is* mine," she said bravely, though her cheeks grew scarlet at the surprised glances cast upon her, not only by her friends, but by strangers who happened to be passing.

"It *is* mine," she repeated, turning to the boy, "and you did right to bring back to me what you thought I had lost. But I want to lose it, as it is of no use to me. So if you will please take it away and dispose of it properly, I will be much obliged to you, and I will give you this."

Betty took a two-dollar bill from her purse, and offered it to the boy, who still held the bundle.

"Sure, lady," he said, flashing a grateful glance at her. "You're a white one, you are! Thank you, lady!"

The clerk smiled and bowed, and ushered the small boy away. The urchin turned to give Betty one more admiring look, and she smiled pleasantly at him, and said:

"You'd better look in that box before you throw it away."

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"Sure!" he replied, grinning, and then he disappeared.

"Now, Dorothy," said Betty, restored to equanimity, now that the box was finally disposed of, "let us go and sit down quietly somewhere, and I'll tell you all about it."

"Do!" cried Fred Bates. "You're the most mysterious person I ever heard of, Miss McGuire! Come right up to our family sitting-room and relate to us the story of the Beautiful

Young Lady and her Strange Piece of Luggage!"

"Very well," said Betty, dimpling and smiling. "Come on, and the whole of the dramatic tale I will unfold!"

Which she did, to a most enthusiastic and hilarious audience.

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XII A LUCKY PENNY

"There's no doubt about it," said Jeanette, "Betty is the most popular girl in school."

"Not only in school," amended Dorothy; "she's the most popular girl in our whole set. The boys all adore her, too."

"Yes, they do," agreed Lena Carey. "My brother Bob thinks she's just about all right."

The three, on their way to school, had paused in front of Betty's house, and she came out and joined them.

It was late in October. The McGuires had been back in their city home for several weeks, and both Betty and Jack were in school again.

"Do your ears burn, Betty?" asked Dorothy; as they two fell behind the other couple; "for we've been throwing the biggest sort of bouquets at you!"

"They didn't hit my ears," said Betty, laughing. "What sort were they?"

"Oh, we just said you're a disagreeable old thing, and nobody loves you!"

"Nothing of the sort!" cried honest Jeanette, turning her head. "We all agreed that you're a general favorite and the boys like you better than they do any of the rest of us."

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"Spare me blushes!" cried Betty. "Which of the boys confided this startling news to you?"

"Of course we can see it," said Lena, "but, to make sure, I asked Brother Bob. I said, says I, 'Which girl do you like best of all our set?' and he said, 'Why, Betty, of course,—doesn't everybody?' and I said, 'Yes.'"

"Oh, Lena, you goose!" said Betty, but she was unable to repress a pleased smile at her friends' talk.

It was really true, Betty had become a prodigious favorite among the circle of Boston young people with whom she associated. She was so whole-souled and good-hearted, so ready to help everybody, so merry and full of fun, and withal so unostentatious and simple-mannered, that nobody could help liking her.

And though only a little over sixteen years old, an innate spirit of coquetry had begun to show itself, and her dark, roguish eyes and dimpling smile often captivated the boys who belonged to what the school-girls called "our set."

Not that Betty was really romantic. Her coquetry was more mischievous than sentimental, and, though she loved to tease, her warm, generous nature never allowed the teasing to hurt the feelings of another. It was an open secret that both Harry Harper and Ralph Burnett were especial admirers of Betty, and, in an amicable, good-natured way, were rivals for her favor.

But Betty was impartial, and at dancing-school or at the little "neighborhood parties" would accept attentions equally from both.

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However, Betty's popularity was only a matter of degree, and gay, laughing Dorothy, lovely, quiet Jeanette, and pretty Lena Carey were also favorites in school and out. As the quartet walked along, Lena said:

"I've a lovely secret to tell you, but as we're almost at school now, I think I'll leave it until recess."

"No, tell us now!" clamored the others.

"My! but you're curious!" teased Lena. "No, I won't tell you now, but I'll tell you part of it. Just enough to stir up your curiosity a little more. I'm going to have a party!"

This was indeed interesting, but not another word would Lena tell, and so all the morning the three eager girls could only wonder what sort of a party it was to be, and how big, and when, and a thousand other important questions.

But at recess the four gathered in a corner of the school-yard, and Lena expounded.

"It's a Hallowe'en party," she said, and then had to wait for their delighted exclamations to pause before she could proceed.

"Hallowe'en is a week from Friday," she went on, "and Mother said last night that I could have a party if I liked. So Bob and I talked it over, and we decided that a ghost party would be fun."

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"What is a ghost party?" "How do you mean?" "Oh, just a phantom party!" exclaimed the three listeners all at once.

"Well, I haven't planned it much," said Lena, "because I thought it would be more fun for us to plan it together."

"What a duck you are!" cried Betty. "I love to plan parties! Can we wear fancy costumes?"

"Oh, let's be witches," said Dorothy. "We ought to on Hallowe'en, you know."

"Witches or ghosts, either, would be all right," put in Jeanette. "I suppose you'll have all the old Hallowe'en tricks, Lena?"

"Well, Bob and I said we didn't want to have those foolish old games, like bobbing for apples and melting lead. They're so tiresome. But I thought we could make up some new fun."

"I think so, too," declared Betty. "Anything ghostly or witchy, or any sort of fortune-telling, you mean, I suppose."

"Yes. Do you know any new tricks of that sort?"

"I'm not sure that I do, but we can make some up."

They all knew Betty's cleverness in making up games, so they felt sure something could be done.

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"There's the school-bell," said Lena. "You all come to my house this afternoon, and we'll plan it all out."

The girls agreed to this, and then they returned to the school-room, where, I am sorry to say, their rebellious pencils persisted in drawing witches or broomsticks, instead of copying the plaster cast of a classic leaf form which was their task for the day.

Not only that afternoon but several others were spent in arranging the details of the Hallowe'en party.

Jeanette, who was inclined to the serious rather than the grotesque, favored the idea of the guests appearing as Druids, who, she said, were really the originators of Allhallowe'en.

But Dorothy declared that Druids were poky old things and that witches were lots more fun.

So, as Betty and Lena insisted on ghosts, the invitations were finally compiled to read like this:

DRUIDS, WITCHES, AND GHOSTS
ARE INVITED TO ASSEMBLE AT THE HOME OF
MISS LENA CAREY
AND
MR. ROBERT CAREY
ON ALL HALLOWE'EN OCTOBER THIRTY-FIRST
AT EIGHT O'CLOCK

This gave the guests ample choice of costume, and if they chose they could come simply draped in sheets and pillow-cases, as at the old-time phantom parties.

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Betty, after much deliberation, decided to wear a witch's costume.

And very becoming it proved. The skirt of scarlet silk was sprinkled with strange hieroglyphics and mystic signs which had been cut from black silk and pasted on. The pointed scarlet bodice was laced up over a soft white neckerchief, and over all was a long black cloak lined with red. Then she had a high, peaked hat, made after the most approved style for witches, and on her shoulder was perched a toy cat. This furry animal was of most lifelike effect, and his green eyeballs blared by reason of tiny electric lights concealed in his head. Betty carried a broomstick wound with red ribbons, and, with high-heeled red shoes, she made a complete picture of the traditional witch.

Jack was a ghost. But he disdained the idea of a ghost in white.

"No," he said, "I want a real ghost's robe. It must be made of thin, almost transparent, fluttery stuff—yards and yards of it—and of a sort of brownish smoke color."

Mrs. McGuire caught his idea, and herself fashioned a voluminous robe of smoke-colored chiffon. It was made something like a college

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gown, but there were several of them, and after donning a sort of ulster-shaped garment of dull brown muslin, Jack put on one after another of the floppy gauze robes. The effect was fine. The least breath of air sent the shimmering material into billowy waves, and the "ghost" almost seemed to disappear at times. A deep cowl-like hood nearly concealed his face, and made his features dim and indistinguishable, and when Jack stalked about with theatrical stride, and gave voice to fearful, hollow groans, he seemed as fine a ghost as one could wish.

Jeanette and Constance had chosen to wear Druid's costume, and, as several others had like taste, quite a number of shapes in flowing classic raiment lent their dignified effect to the party. There were many white ghosts, some weird and terrible ones, several witches and wizards, and many nondescript costumes.

The guests assembled on time, as all were anxious not to miss any of the fun.

When Betty and Jack arrived at the Carey house and rang the door-bell, the door swung slowly open, and though no one was in sight, a sepulchral groan greeted them. Then a strange-looking, cloaked figure, with a lighted Jack-o'-lantern for a head, ushered them into the drawing-room.

Betty herself had helped to arrange this room, but when the party began, it looked even more effective than when they had decorated it.



A STRANGE-LOOKING, CLOAKED FIGURE,
WITH A LIGHTED JACK-O'-LANTERN FOR A
HEAD, USHERED THEM INTO THE DRAWING-
ROOM

The room was very dimly lighted, and the walls had been hung with black muslin on which were painted grinning skulls and cross-bones in gleaming white. The big wood fire at one end of the room shone through a screen of red transparent stuff, which gave a crimson glow to the room.

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Jack-o'-lanterns were all about, and the candles inside them lit up the grotesque faces of the pumpkins.

Bob Carey, who announced that he was the ghost of Hamlet's father, introduced the other ghosts to each other.

"This," he would say, indicating a sheeted figure, "is the ghost of Banquo. We used to play together as boys. And here is the ghost of a man who died a-laughing. You will observe his laughter when I tickle him."

The ghost, when tickled, would give howls of demoniac laughter, in which the other guests involuntarily joined.

When all the weird-looking figures had assembled, the fun began.

Another room had been prepared as a fortune-telling room, and into this each guest was

invited to go, alone, to learn his or her fate.

Just who was the fortune-teller was a great secret. No one outside of the Carey family knew who it was who greeted the seekers for knowledge as they entered one by one.

But apparently the strange being knew his clients, for many jokes and secrets were exposed, and often the victim came out giggling, but looking a trifle sheepish.

Jack was really very fond of Dorothy. Indeed, she was his favorite of all the girls—after Betty, of course.

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So, when Dorothy went into the Room of the Fates to learn what future fortune might befall her, and came out holding a card in her hand, the others clamored to know what had been told her.

Dorothy looked mysterious and refused to tell, but when the boys and girls insisted on seeing what talisman had been given her, and she showed the card, a roar of laughter went up from all. It was a playing-card, the jack of hearts, and ghostly Jack himself seemed quite satisfied with the episode.

Every one who went into the Room of the Fates returned with a talisman indicative of their future career.

It might be a doctor's diploma or a fireman's badge. It might be a thimble, indicating spinsterhood, or a spray of orange-blossom, indicating matrimony. But in every case the souvenir bore sufficient meaning to prove that the fate-dispenser was some one who knew the individual traits of his auditors.

When it was Betty's turn, she entered the Fate Room, determined to guess, if possible, who the wizard was. All of the young people of their set were in evidence as guests, so the mysterious fortune-teller must be some older person or a stranger.

As Betty entered, she was met by three draped figures, representing the three Fates.

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These, she knew, were Harry Harper, Ralph Burnett, and Elmer Ellis, for she and Lena had invited these boys to act these parts.

They were robed in brown, flowing draperies, which they did not manage in classic fashion, but kicked about in derision. One carried a distaff, one a ball of cord, and one a pair of shears, in imitation of the traditional three. The room was draped with white sheets, and at the far end was a sort of throne on which sat the Master of the Fates. He was gorgeously robed in a scarlet satin suit and a purple velvet cape edged with ermine. A flowing white wig, bushy white beard and eyebrows, completely disguised his features, while a high, peaked hat added to his wizardly effect.

Grouped about him were a globe, a map of the stars, a divining-wand, a great Book of Fate, and all sorts of mysterious-looking instruments and paraphernalia.

Bats, cut out of paper, swung by invisible threads from the ceiling, and were set fluttering

by sly puffs from bellows by the three Fates, who scampered about, on mischief bent.

In the white room were several black cats also. These added greatly to the weird effect, and, as they were good-natured old tabbies that Lena had borrowed from neighbors, they just stalked about and lay dozing in the white-draped chairs.

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The three Fates ushered Betty with great pomp and ceremony to the chair facing the wizard, and begged her to be seated.

"What do you most want to know?" droned out the magician, as he gravely wagged his head at her.

"Who you are!" said Betty, so suddenly that he fairly jumped.

At this the three Fates doubled up in gleeful antics, but the wizard recovered himself, and continued in slow, deep tones:

"That you may know sometime, but not now. I will now foretell your fate."

"Do," said Betty, wondering where she had heard that full, deep voice before.

"You have strange adventures awaiting you. You will travel by land and sea, and great good fortune shall be ever yours. In the years to come, you will meet your destiny. The stars ordain that a fitting mate shall claim you, but it will be neither of the two Fates who are now dogging your footsteps."

At this Harry and Ralph gave forth despairing groans and pretended to pommel one another. Betty giggled, but the wizard remained grave.

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THE THREE FATES USHERED BETTY WITH GREAT POMP AND CEREMONY TO THE CHAIR FACING THE WIZARD

"That you may know your fate," he went on, "I give you this talisman."

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Now, Betty had no mind to be teased as Dorothy had been, and receiving the talisman from the wizard, she slipped it into her pocket.

Then, as the wizard dismissed her, she rose to take leave.

"Thou mayst not depart until thou shalt exhibit thy talisman," said Harry Harper, striking a dramatic attitude before the door.

"Oh, yes, I mayst," said Betty. "Avaunt thee, Fate, and let me pass, or I cast o'er thee my magic spell!"

"Already hast thou done that," said Harry, his tone exaggeratedly sentimental.

"Let the witch pass!" interrupted Elmer Ellis, and, amid the chuckling exclamations of the three, Betty departed.

"What did you get?" "What's your talisman?" cried those who awaited her. "Let's see your fate!"

But Betty laughingly showed her empty hands, and could not be persuaded to admit that she had received anything. But as soon as she could get a moment unobserved, she took out her talisman to examine it.

It was a bright new cent, dated the present year.

"Oh," said Betty to herself, "a penny! Hal Pennington! I *thought* I had heard that voice before! What a little witch Lena is, to keep it so secret! I never dreamed of his coming."

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Betty was glad he had come, for though they had met only a few times, they were good friends, and it was a compliment indeed that he had given her himself as a fate! Of course it was just for that evening, and Betty thought it was very jolly.

With shining eyes and rosy cheeks, she rejoined the others.

"Let's play a joke on Betty," said Dorothy to Jeanette, as it neared supper-time.

"How do you mean?"

"This way. Lena says we girls each have to select our partner for supper. She says she won't have the old-fashioned way of pairing off by matched nuts or flowers or things. Each girl has to ask a boy herself. Now, of course, nobody will ask the boy she really likes best. I wouldn't myself!"

"Well," asked Jeanette, "what's the joke on Betty, then? She won't ask either Harry or Ralph, and we know she likes them best."

"That's just it! Of course Lena will make her choice last, as she's hostess. Let's fix it so Betty will be next to last, and let's leave those two boys till the last. Then Betty will *have* to choose one or the other of them, and that will be a good joke on her."

"Yes, it will! And it isn't a mean joke, either. If there are only those two, she'll have to select one."

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"But how can we be sure nobody else chooses either Harry or Ralph?"

"Oh, nobody will. They'll know enough to leave them for Betty. But I'll whisper to Constance and a few of the girls to make sure."

The scheme worked well. Lena, in burlesque authority, ordered each fair damsel to choose the knight she most admired, to escort her to supper.

This made great fun, as each girl deliberately ignored the boy she liked best, and chose a brother or a comparative stranger. Betty had made up her mind to choose Jack, and thus evade an embarrassing decision between her two admirers.

But, as one girl after another was called, Betty began to surmise there was some joke in progress.

But Lena said to her, casually, "You and I will go last, Betty," and so she really suspected little.

But at last no boys were left but Ralph and Harry, and, as Lena announced with twinkling eyes that Betty must make her choice, she saw at once that the girls had pre-arranged this.

It was a difficult situation. Betty had no wish to offend either boy by choosing the other, and she was decidedly in a quandary. She stood looking at them and smiling.

"It's so hard to choose between you," she said, provokingly, but really to gain time. Suddenly she bethought herself of the penny in her pocket! Ah, here was a way to circumvent those mischievous girls!

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"I'm sorry," she said, with a little sigh, "that I can't choose either of you very gentlemanly appearing boys. But my Fate was foretold me, and the talisman that I have here bids me await the coming of the knight appointed for me by Destiny."

Betty held up her bright penny with a roguish look.

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Lena, who knew nothing of what Hal had said to Betty in the Room of the Fates.

"Ah, here he comes! Here's the Bad Penny, who always turns up when he's wanted!"

Hal was just entering the room, his first appearance except in his disguise as "Fate." He had removed the uncomfortable wig and whiskers, but still wore the gorgeous costume.

The smile with which Betty greeted him quite took away the sting of being called a Bad Penny, and he said gaily:

"A Lucky Penny, rather, to be chosen by such a merry witch!"

So the girls were foiled in their little plot, and Lena, accepting her defeat good-naturedly, declared she had to choose both the remaining knights, and taking an arm of each, she followed the procession to the dining-room.

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The feast was abundant and the guests very merry. More fortune-testing was provided in the mottoes and snapdragon, and at last the "fortune-cake" was cut.

This great confection was almost like a bride-cake, save that its frosting was red and chocolate instead of white.

It was decorated with tiny witches and black cats, which were, of course, confectionery, and candles were burning all round it.

In it had been baked a thimble, signifying spinsterhood; a gold ring, betokening matrimony; a penny, meaning wealth; a gold pen for literary fame; a button for a bachelor; and many other tiny emblems of fortune, which were arranged only one to a slice.

By dint of clever manœuvring Lena arranged that Betty should get the slice with the penny in it, and this caused a shout of laughter at Betty's expense.

But she didn't mind, and only glanced merrily at Hal, as she said:

"We seem to be irrevocably fated, don't we?"

"I'm satisfied to have it so," he replied gallantly, making a gesture like a real stage suitor; and Betty returned saucily:

"So am I—during supper-time!"

After supper they assembled in the "black room" for a fagot party.

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The screen was removed from the blazing wood fire, and all sat on the floor, or on cushions or ottomans clustered round the big fireplace.

Each was given a "fagot," a bundle of tiny sticks tied together with red and black ribbons, and each, in turn, threw the fagot into the fire. While the fagot burned, the thrower was to tell a ghost story, which must stop as soon as the sticks were entirely consumed.

This was a most exasperating performance, for in nearly every instance, just as the thrilling climax of the story was nearly reached, the sticks burned out, and the narrator was not allowed to proceed.

Hal Pennington's was one of the most interesting.

"Mine is a fearful tale," he said, as he threw his fagot on the fire, "and I will tell it rapidly that you may all hear the marvelous and almost incredible *dénouement*."

The others crowded closer to hear, for Hal spoke in low, mysterious tones.

"It was a house up on Cape Cod," he began, "an old-fashioned, rambling sort of house, that was said to be haunted. It had long borne this reputation, and one room in particular, a small room at the end of a long ball-room, was said to be the room where the ghost appeared. The people who told about it always shuddered, and refused to tell what horrible shapes the ghost assumed when it made itself visible."

Harry Harper gave a scared sort of gasping groan, and then the other boys groaned dismally, while the girls shivered and giggled both at once.

"A lot of us fellows," went on Hal, "didn't believe in this ghost, and we decided to spend a night in the old house and test it."

"Did no one live in the house?" asked Betty.

"Oh, no; it hadn't been occupied for years, because of the ghost. Well, eight of us went there one evening, and one, Phil Hardy, said he would go into the haunted room and lock himself in, and we others must keep watch in the ball-room."

"Why did he lock himself in?" asked Lena.

"Because he thought the ghost was some person playing a trick on us. He wasn't afraid of a ghost, but he was of a real marauder. So we other boys stayed in the big, dark, empty ball-room. That is, it was nearly empty—only a few chairs and sofas ranged against the wall. We hid behind these, having previously locked all the doors. You see, we were willing to receive the ghost, but we didn't care to have burglars coming in. The story was that the ghost came from the hall into the ball-room, traversed the full length of that, and then entered the little anteroom where Phil was keeping watch.

"For a long time we crouched silently behind our chairs, and then—then we heard the latch of the door click! We knew it was securely locked, but our hair rose on our heads as we heard it open and close again. Then footsteps——"

"Hollow footsteps!" interrupted Harry.

"Yes, hollow footsteps——"

"And clanking chains," put in Harry, again.

"Look here, who's telling this?" demanded Hal. "Well, hollow footsteps and clanking chains resounded on our ears, as we heard the ghost glide the full length of that long room!

"Half scared to death, we peeped out from behind our chairs, but could see nothing, though we all heard the footsteps.

"Then, though it didn't move, we heard the door open into the room where Phil was, and close again.

"We trembled and turned cold with a mysterious horror, when suddenly an awful shriek broke the silence!"

There was a breathless pause, and then Betty exclaimed: "Oh, what was it?"

"I can't tell you," said Hal; "my fagot has burned out!"

"Oh, you fraud!" cried Lena; "you timed it so on purpose!"

"Perhaps I did," said Hal, smiling; "anyhow, there isn't a word of truth in my yarn, and I confess I didn't know quite how to end it up myself!"

“Pooh! that’s no sort of a ghost story!” said Lena, but the others all agreed that it was the best one, and Hal must have the prize.

Then the party broke up, and the ghosts and witches went for their more prosaic hats and wraps.

“Thank you, no; Jack will take care of me,” said Betty, as Hal Pennington asked to escort her home.

“Then mayn’t I go to see you to-morrow?” he said. “Remember, you chose me to-night in preference to your two devoted swains.”

“That was to disguise my real preference,” said Betty, roguishly; “and, besides, I had to choose you, because it was so decreed by Fate!”

“There’s many a true word spoken in jest,” declared Hal, theatrically, and taking a couple of stagy strides across the hall with eyes rolled up to the ceiling; and then, after a chorus of general good nights, Betty and Jack went home.

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*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK BETTY'S HAPPY YEAR ***

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