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THE TURNED-ABOUT GIRLS

Blithe McBride
Hands Off!
Hugh Gwyeth: A Roundhead Cavalier
Soldier Rigdale, Ill. by R. Birch
The Making of Christopher Ferringham
A Little Captive Lad, Ill. by Will Grefe
Merrylips, Ill. by F. Merrill
The Turned-about Girls, Ill. by Blanche Greer

But just as she reached the gap Caroline came pattering out of the dark and clutched her—

THE TURNED-ABOUT GIRLS

BY

BEULAH MARIE DIX

AUTHOR OF “MERRYLIPS,” “BLITHE MCBRIDE,” ETC.

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PRINTING COMPANY
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To
MY TRUSTY AND WELL-BELOVED DAUGHTER
EVELYN GREENLEAF FLEBBE

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THE TURNED-ABOUT GIRLS

CHAPTER I

STRANGERS ON THE LIMITED

At Chicago, on a hot afternoon in early summer, two little girls got aboard the car on the Limited that was bound through to Boston. Both little girls had bobbed brown hair and brown eyes and both were going on eleven, but there all likeness between them ended.

The larger of the two little girls wore a black silk frock embroidered with amber-colored butterflies and curlicues, and black silk knickerbockers. The socks that stopped just below her sturdy brown knees were of black silk, and her black sandals had tiny buckles of onyx. She wore a hat of fine black straw, and in her arms she carried a little black vanity bag, two big books with colored pictures on their jackets, and a box tied up in white paper and gilt cord that screamed—and smelled—of chocolates.

Before her walked a solemn brown porter, laden with suitcases and handbags and hatboxes. Behind her walked a worried young woman, in a fresh blue linen suit. Thus attended the little girl passed along the aisle, with the air of a good-natured young princess, and vanished into the drawing-room at the end of the car. When the solemn-looking porter came out of the drawing-room, he was no longer solemn but smiling, and the piece of silver that he pocketed was large and round.

The smaller of the little girls had watched this progress admiringly, but without envy. She was a serious little girl, and this was her first long journey in the world. She sat very still in her seat, which was back to the engine, and she clasped a doll tight in her arms. The doll wore a neat print dress and frilled underclothes, and though the day was hot, a crocheted sweater and a cunningly made hood. The little girl herself wore a dress of pink and white checked gingham which was a little faded and a little short for her. Her hat was of white straw with a wreath of pink flowers, and her socks were white, and so were her buttoned boots. Over her arm she carried a knitted sweater coat of red, and at her feet stood a large suitcase which had seen much travel.

“Did you see the little girl in black?” she whispered to the doll, whose name was Mildred. “Do you s’pose she’s in mourning for somebody? Well, people can be just as sorry inside—we know it, don’t we, Mildred?—even if they have to wear last summer’s clothes, and they happen to be pink.”

Mildred was a very intelligent doll. She had steady blue eyes, a sweet smile, and a shock of flaxen curls. She showed her intelligence by always listening sympathetically and never speaking. So she did not let on now that she saw tears in her young mother’s eyes.

Meantime in the drawing-room the little girl in black silk had put down her books and her bag, and hung up her hat, and rung for the porter.

“I want a pillow,” she told the worried young lady who accompanied her, “and a table so I can play Canfield and—oh, yes! I want a big long drink of lemonade.”

“I’m afraid the porter won’t come till the train has started,” the young lady told her. “Can’t you read your books until then? What are they?”

The little girl resigned herself quite sweetly to going without her pillow and her table, and even her lemonade. She sat down beside her companion and showed her the books.

“This one is about Robin Hood,” she said, “but I’ve heard of him before. This other one is some book!”

“My dear!” the lady murmured in rebuke.

“I’ll say it is!” the little girl affirmed. “I read it nights in my berth till Auntie Blair switched off my light. Some book, I’ll tell the world! It’s called ‘The Prince and the Pauper.’”

And if a kind old guardian hadn’t happened to give that little girl a gorgeous copy of the beloved romance, when she left Los Angeles, and if the little girl hadn’t “eaten it up,” and dreamed of it, and lived herself into it on the long railway journey, this story, as you soon will see, would never have been written.

CHAPTER II

MILDRED, MISTRESS OF CEREMONIES

At the first call for dinner the little girl in the drawing-room left her pillow, which had grown hot, and her crayola outfit, which had long since displaced the game of Canfield in her favor. Very glad of the change, she went with her companion into the dining car. They sat at a little table, just big enough for two, with shining plated ware and a starched white cloth, and a water bottle plugged with a fresh napkin. The little girl ate soup, and roast beef, and baked potatoes, and asparagus, and vanilla ice-cream with lady fingers, and some preserved strawberries besides.

Back in the sleeping car the little girl in the checked gingham had waited anxiously to see what her neighbors would do when supper time came. There was no one of whom she could ask questions. She was in the conductor's care, to be sure, but he seemed to her a remote and very grand person.

Presently she saw that people about her, mothers of families and tired-looking gray women who traveled alone, were taking lunch boxes from their bags. Some of them made the porter set up tables for them, but the little girl would never have dared ask such a service from the lordly black man. She placed Mildred in a corner of her seat, and she heaved up the suitcase, which she found almost too heavy for her, and put it on the opposite seat, which the gentleman with the massive watch chain had left vacant some time ago, when he went (to her great relief) into the smoking car. She opened the suitcase. Inside it, neatly folded, were a fresh nightgown, a change of underwear, a clean dress, in case her trunk should go astray, a pair of knitted bed shoes, sadly worn, a comb and brush, a fairylike wardrobe which was all Mildred's, and lastly a pasteboard shoe box, full of lunch.

The little girl took out the shoe box and opened it with all sorts of precaution not to make crumbs on the floor, or on the beautiful plush seat. In the box were some peanut-butter sandwiches, a hard-boiled egg, two doughnuts, four raisin cookies, some soda crackers, an apple, and a piece of chocolate. She was to eat the sandwiches that night, the egg for breakfast, the crackers and chocolate for next day's lunch, and the sweets and the apple when she pleased. She was to get water in her own cup, there in the sleeper, and she was on no account to go into the dining car, for the prices that they charged were downright robbery, and like as not there were ptomaines (whatever they might be!) in the food. So the little girl ate her peanut-butter sandwiches, and her cookies, and drank her cup of water, and thought how wonderful it was to travel, and how nice that she was not homesick—not at all, scarcely!—and not the least bit afraid.

She had put away the lunch box very carefully, and she was undressing Mildred for the night, with Mildred's little nightgown, trimmed with Hamburg edging, laid ready on the arm of the seat beside her, when the little girl in black silk came strolling back from the dining car. The little girl in gingham knew that she was coming, but she had been taught that it was not pretty to stare, so she kept her eyes glued to the wee buttons on Mildred's waistband.

Nobody seemed to have taught the little girl in silk, or, if so, they had had their labor for their pains. She stopped short, very firmly planted in the swaying car, and she smiled at Mildred who smiled back.

"Jacqueline, please!" said the worried young lady in the blue linen suit, which was not so fresh as when she wore it first aboard the train.

"I'll come in a minute," the silken Jacqueline told her casually. "I want to talk to the doll."

At that the little girl in gingham looked up, as she had been dying to do.

"Hello!" said Jacqueline. She had a rebellious mouth, and a square boyish chin, and brown eyes as direct as a boy's, that could be merry when they chose—and just now chose.

The little girl in gingham smiled shyly. She had an oval face, pale olive in tint, not glowing with red through the brown tan like Jacqueline's. Her smile was timid, and her brown eyes were soft.

"She looks like a nice child," thought the young woman in linen, "and even if she isn't, if Jacqueline has made up her mind to know her, I'm helpless."

She washed her hands of her charge, as the saying is, and went into the drawing-room. Don't blame her too severely! She was young, she was worn out with a hard winter's teaching, and after all, Jacqueline, with her lordly ways, had been "wished upon her." She went into the drawing-room, and Jacqueline, like one accustomed to getting her way, sat down in the place that the little girl in gingham eagerly made for her in the seat at her side.

CHAPTER III

A BOND IN COMMON

"What's your name?" asked Jacqueline.

The little girl in gingham blushed and kept her eyes fixed on Mildred's buttons.

"Caroline," she said, in a small voice. "For my grandmother."

"My name's Jacqueline Gildersleeve," cut in her companion. "At school they call me Jackie. I'll let you."

Caroline smiled shyly.

"I like Jacqueline better," she said. "It's like trumpets and red sunsets."

Jacqueline turned in the plush seat and looked at her, much impressed.

"You're a funny kid," she said. "How can anybody's name be like a trumpet?"

"But names are all music and things," the little girl in gingham insisted. "That's why I don't care for Caroline. It's like a bushel of wheat. Muzzy always called me Carol. That's a nice name—like Christmas trees, and snow outside, and yellow candles."

"Is your mother with you?" asked Jacqueline.

"No," Caroline answered, and made herself very busy with Mildred's nightdress. "My mother is—dead."

"Oh!" said Jacqueline blankly, and seemed for a moment unable to think of anything else to say.

"She died last winter," Caroline went on, in her patient little voice. "That's why I'm going to my half-aunt Martha. Have you—lost somebody, too? I see you're wearing black."

"Oh, that's just not to show dirt," Jacqueline explained. "But I haven't any mother nor father. They died ages ago. Aunt Edie takes care of me, and Judge Blair is my guardian. Have you got a father?"

Caroline shook her head.

"Daddy died three years ago when everybody had the flu. He was on a newspaper. My mother gave music lessons. We had a room with the piano in it, and a gas flat we cooked breakfast on, and a couch that pulled out and made a bed for us both."

It was very clear that Caroline was talking against time. Equally clear that the brown eyes that she kept obstinately fixed on Mildred were filling fast with tears.

Jacqueline tumbled out of her seat, just missed a stout old lady as she caromed down the aisle, and vanished into the drawing-room. Before Caroline had dried her eyes—and Caroline was not slow about it, either!—Jacqueline was back, and in her hand was a big satin-covered box.

"Have some chocolates?" she urged, as she slid into the seat beside Caroline. "Those big whales are scrumptious, only they're full of goo. Hold your hanky under your chin when you bite into them! Here, I'll take your doll."

Jacqueline took Mildred on her lap, very carefully, to Caroline's great relief. She examined the trimming of her small, clean nightgown and tenderly slipped her into the little flowered crêpe kimono, while Caroline still struggled with the gooey chocolate.

"What cunning little ducky clothes!" cooed Jacqueline.

"My mother made 'em," Caroline spoke thickly because of the chocolate. "She could make most anything. She made my dress, too—it was for best last summer, but I've grown since then. She knitted my sweater, too."

Caroline bent her head and stroked the red sleeve dumbly.

"Have another chocolate," coaxed Jacqueline. "Have a lot! Try the one that's like a porcupine! Have a gummy one!"

"I dassen't," said Caroline. "I've got a hole in my tooth, and caramels always make it ache."

"That's too bad," agreed Jacqueline. "I've got braces in my mouth so I can't eat caramels at all. Oh, well, I'll give 'em to the Fish."

Caroline looked at her questioningly.

"I mean Miss Fisher," said naughty Jacqueline mincingly. "The piece of cheese I'm traveling with."

"You mean the lady in the blue dress?" asked Caroline.

Jacqueline nodded and cuddled Mildred to her. She looked quite gentle until she smiled, and then the imps of mischief crinkled in her eyes.

"Auntie Blair changed at Chicago for Montreal, and I'm to go East with Miss Fisher that she knew ages ago in college. She's a fuss. She didn't want me to speak to you. And she's not my aunt or anything. I shall talk to you as long as I want to."

Caroline longed to say: "Please do!" She was fascinated with this bold little girl, who used words her mother had never let her utter, and was afraid of nobody, not even the black porter or the august conductor. But she hardly dared say: "Please do!" She only smiled vaguely and picked a small chocolate-covered nut from the satin box.

"Do you go to school?" Jacqueline asked abruptly.

"Oh, yes," stammered Caroline. "I'll go into the sixth grade in September. That is, I would have gone into it. I don't know what school I'll be in, where I'm going."

"Do you like school?"

Caroline looked dubious.

"I like the reading lessons and the history," she said. "I can't do arithmetic. I'd rather play the piano."

"Play the piano!" Jacqueline repeated, as if she couldn't believe her ears. "You mean you *like* to practice?"

"Oh, yes!" said Caroline from her heart.

"Good *night*!" said Jacqueline.

"Don't—don't you?" faltered Caroline.

Jacqueline, like the skipper in “The Wreck of the Hesperus,” laughed a scornful laugh.

“But I’m going to get out of it this summer,” she boasted darkly. “I’ll tell my Great-aunt Eunice I’ve sprained my thumb, or something. She hasn’t seen me for years and years. I suppose she thinks I’m a little goody-goody. Well, she’s going to get the surprise of her life.”

Jacqueline tossed her head defiantly, and Caroline fairly glowed with admiration.

“You’re not a bit afraid of strangers, are you?” she quavered.

Jacqueline smiled in a superior way, as if to challenge: “Bring on your strangers!”

“I *am*,” admitted Caroline. “And I don’t know any of them. I never saw my half-aunt Martha, and I don’t know anything about my half-cousins, but I do hope they have a piano, and that there aren’t too many babies.”

“Don’t you like ’em?” queried Jacqueline.

“I—I’m kind of tired of them,” Caroline confessed shamefacedly. “I stayed with Cousin Delia after Muzzy died, and she had twins besides two odd ones, and when one fretted, the others always kept him company.”

“You ought to shake ’em,” counseled Jacqueline. “Shake ’em good and hard. I would! You’re too meek. Don’t you let your old half-aunt go and boss you.”

“But—but she’s giving me a home,” persisted Caroline. “That is, if we get along. If we don’t——”

“Well?” said Jacqueline, with shameless curiosity.

“I suppose I’ll go to an—an Institution,” whispered Caroline. “You know—orphan asylum.”

“Oh!” said Jacqueline, again blankly. There seemed nothing more to say. But she did have the inspiration to put Mildred into Caroline’s arms, and Caroline hugged her dumbly, with her dark little head bent low over Mildred’s sleek gold curls.

“You’d better keep the chocolates,” said Jacqueline, in a brisk little voice. “I always have lots, and the box will be nice to put your doll’s clothes in.”

“I—I oughtn’t to,” gasped Caroline, overcome with the glory of the gift.

“The box is mine,” snapped Jacqueline. “I can give it away if I want to, can’t I? I’d like to see the Fish stop me.”

Suddenly the hard little termagant softened. She put her arm round Caroline and Mildred.

“Of course your half-aunt will like you,” she said, “and you’ll stay with her, and maybe there’s a piano. Does she live in Boston?”

“No,” answered Caroline, nestling close to her new friend. “She lives on a farm in a place called Longmeadow.”

“Longmeadow?” parroted Jacqueline.

“And I get off at a place called Baring Junction.”

Jacqueline suddenly squeezed Caroline in a hug that really endangered Mildred.

“Can you beat it?” she cried. “I get off at Baring Junction, and I’m going to Longmeadow, just the same as you!”

CHAPTER IV

THE BIG IDEA

The fact that the two little girls were going to the same town was the finishing link in the chain of friendship that they had forged so rapidly. They talked that evening about their schools, and their games, and the books they had read until Miss Fisher and Caroline's own sense of propriety plucked them apart. In the morning they began where they had left off, while Miss Fisher, who was quite exhausted, after a car-sick night, remained aloof and shook her head in utter helplessness.

Now Miss Fisher's car-sickness has a great deal to do with the story. She was honestly feeling that she could not endure another hour in the train, when she received a telegram at Albany. Friends of hers, whom she had not seen in months, a nice girl and her even nicer brother (so Miss Fisher thought), wired that they would meet her at the train in Pittsfield and whisk her away for a blissful week-end in the Berkshires before she went on to her aunt's house in Boston. For an instant Miss Fisher thought of duty and the tiresome, unruly child she had agreed to chaperon. Then she thought of the deadly hours in the train, and the nice girl's even nicer brother.

Miss Fisher lurched out into the car and captured Jacqueline. To Jacqueline she explained that she had to leave the train at Pittsfield, and that Jacqueline would remain in the care of the conductor and the porter till she reached Baring Junction, where those officials would deliver her to her great-aunt. Jacqueline was of course to be a very good girl.

"Sure!" promised Jacqueline—too readily, a suspicious person might have thought.

But Miss Fisher was too fluttered with her own affairs to be suspicious. She tripped gayly off the train at Pittsfield, into the arms of her friends, and out of this story. Of course her conduct was quite blameworthy, and so Jacqueline's Aunt Edie and several other people said later. Just the same Jacqueline should not have called her a fish, and certainly not a piece of cheese.

The moment Miss Fisher's rumpled blue linen skirt had vanished from the car, Jacqueline laid hold of Caroline's suitcase and, like a valorous small ant with a huge crumb, tugged it into the drawing-room. Caroline snatched up her hat and her sweater, and with Mildred in her arms followed after protesting.

"You come along," Jacqueline over-rode her protests. "We can sprawl all we want to in here, and people won't stop to stare at Mildred, and ask us our names, and do we like to travel. Wouldn't they be peeved if *we* asked *them* questions like that, without being introduced?"

So Caroline and Jacqueline and Mildred settled down to enjoy the privacy and comfort of the drawing-room, without the disadvantages of Miss Fisher's presence. But somehow they didn't enjoy themselves much. For they couldn't forget—that is, Caroline and Jacqueline couldn't, for I don't know about Mildred—that the pretty little gold watch on Jacqueline's wrist, with its madly racing minute-hand, was tearing away the hours, so very few now, before the train reached Baring Junction.

"I'm going to have a rotten summer," complained Jacqueline. "Oh, I wish I'd made Aunt Edie let me go to a camp! Great-aunt Eunice is as old as the hills and Cousin Penelope is most as old. It will be poky at their house, and I can't do this, or Aunt Eunice will be scared, and I can't do that, or Cousin Penelope will scold. Oh, shivering chimpanzees! I wish I'd gone to camp!"

But poor little Caroline had no words for the misery that possessed her, as the minutes ran by and the hour came nearer that should deliver her into the hands of grudging strangers.

"I—I hope half-aunt Martha's boys aren't big," she confided to Jacqueline. "I—I'm afraid of boys."

"I'm not," said Jacqueline. "I'd rather face fifteen boys than one old piano."

"And I hope they don't make me pitch hay or drive cows—I'm scared of cows," quavered Caroline.

"I'd rather drive a million cows than have to be starched up and on my good behavior with a pack of tiresome aunts," Jacqueline returned gloomily.

"Oh!" Caroline was goaded into crying. "If only you were me, and I were you!"

Jacqueline snorted derision. What's the use of wishing? Then her gaze wandered to the helter-skelter heap of her belongings on the couch—hat-box, vanity bag, coat, suitcase, books!

Books! Her eyes fell on the gay jacket of "The Prince and the Pauper."

Suddenly she grasped Caroline's arm so hard that Caroline squeaked: "Ow!"

"Don't stop to *ow*!" bade Jacqueline. "Because if you've got your nerve with you, I've got the dandiest plan so you can have a piano this summer, and no babies to tend, and no boys, nor nothing."

Caroline merely stared and held Mildred tight. She really feared that the heat of the day had affected Jacqueline's head.

"Your bossy old half-aunt has never seen you," went on Jacqueline, "and my Gildersleeve relations haven't seen me since I was three years old."

"Yes," nodded Caroline. That much she thought it safe to grant.

"They're each of them expecting a little girl most eleven years old, with brown hair and eyes, and her hair bobbed."

"Yes," Caroline freely admitted.

"Well, then!" Jacqueline concluded triumphantly. "Suppose we go and change clothes, like Prince Edward and Tom Canty in 'The Prince and the Pauper,' and you say you're me, and I say I'm you,—and who's to know the difference?"

CHAPTER V

TURNED-ABOUT GIRLS

It was thoroughly wrong, the deception that Jacqueline had suggested. She knew it was wrong, but she didn't care. As for Caroline, her mind was such a jumble of cows and boys and fierce half-aunts (so much more ogreish in suggestion than whole aunts!) and an Institution, looming in the background, that she hardly knew right from wrong.

Only as she followed Jacqueline's example and began to unfasten her rumpled frock, she mustered the spirit to falter:

"But they'll find out right away——"

"No, they won't, unless you're a silly."

"But some day your Aunt Edith who knows you will come——"

"Not before September," said Jacqueline cheerily, "and by that time summer will be over, and we'll have had our fun. Think of the piano!"

"Oh, I don't know what to do!" wailed Caroline. She was a shivering little figure, barelegged, in her underclothes, with her soiled and mussed checked gingham in a heap at her feet.

"Now you do as I tell you," counseled Jacqueline in her most masterful manner. "Why, Caroline, it's nothing but a joke, and just the minute you want to, we'll change back. Be a good sport now! Come on!" When Jacqueline smiled she was irresistible. She smiled now. Caroline wavered.

"If you don't," said Jacqueline sweetly, "you're a quitter, and I'll never speak to you again."

To lose Jacqueline, the one friend she had in this new world into which she was being cast, was more than Caroline could bear.

"I'm not a quitter," she vowed. "I'll show you. Wait till I get out some clothes."

The big shabby much-traveled suitcase that was Caroline's, and the smart black leather case that was Jacqueline's, alike held fresh changes of clothes. In these the little girls dressed themselves from the skin out. Caroline gasped a little at the silk socks, the delicate undergarments, the knickers and the frock of henna-colored crêpe in which she rather guiltily encased herself. Jacqueline tumbled gleefully into cotton socks, much-mended plain cotton underwear, and a fresh frock of brown and white gingham, with a big patch in the back breadth.

"I'm bigger than you," she chuckled. "These clothes look awful skimpy on me. I'll tell your half-aunt that I shot up last winter. I did really, so it isn't a fib."

"Your clothes look—nice on me," said Caroline, as she caught a glimpse in the mirror of the strange child into which she had turned herself. "They fit me."

"That's because they're short for me," Jacqueline told her. "Aunt Edie has 'em made that way—it's the smartest thing, this year. She'd think you looked dowdy with your skirt way down to your knees, but probably Great-aunt Eunice won't mind."

In a businesslike way she restrapped the black leather suitcase.

"That's yours now, remember," she told Caroline, "and the hatbox, and the black hat, and the coat, and my watch here,—don't forget to wind it!—and those two books, and the vanity bag. Hang on to it! The check for my trunk—your trunk it will be now—and the key to it are there in the little purse."

"But there's money in it, too," protested Caroline. "Oh, Jackie, I can't take your money."

"You won't take much of it," Jacqueline assured her. "I shall slip three dollars to the porter, and tell him not to give us away."

Caroline looked at her admiringly. She hadn't thought of the porter. She felt quite sure that if ever a woman became president of the United States, as she had heard was now possible, Jacqueline would be that woman.

"Now sit down," bade Jacqueline, and poked Caroline into a seat. "We're only half an hour from Baring Junction——"

"Oh!" Caroline softly squeaked.

"Don't *oh*! We've got to get things straight because they may ask questions. Now your father was John Gildersleeve——"

"No, he wasn't!" protested Caroline.

"You ninny! Don't you see—you're me now—Jacqueline Gildersleeve. Your father was John Gildersleeve. He was born and brought up in Longmeadow, and he and Cousin Penelope went to school together. By and by he grew up, and his father and mother died, and he went out to California. He was in the oil business. My mother—I mean, she's your mother now—was Marion Delane. Her father had a big ranch, with horses and things, and Aunt Edith is her sister. And she died—not Aunt Edith, but my mother that you must call your mother—when my baby brother came, and he died, too, and my father was killed the next autumn in the oil fields. I've lived with Aunt Edith ever since, and our place is called Buena Vista—that's Spanish for Fair View—and first I had governesses, but last year I went to boarding school. Aunt Edith married my new uncle Jimmie Knowlton on the fifth day of June. He's Colonel Knowlton—he was in the air service—and he took me up twice in his plane, and we did a tailspin—oh, boy! He's some uncle. But they didn't want me on their honeymoon—they've gone to Alaska—that's why I'm going to Great-aunt Eunice. She's wanted me to spend a summer with her for years and years. I don't believe she likes Aunt Edith much."

Jacqueline paused at last for breath, and fixed her eyes on the trembling Caroline.

"Can you remember all that?" she asked sternly.

"I—I guess so," Caroline answered dubiously.

"You'll be all right," Jacqueline encouraged. "Aunt Edie hardly ever wrote letters to Great-aunt Eunice, so she doesn't really know much about us. Now see if I remember what I've got to know. I'm you now—Caroline Tait. My father was Henry Tait, and he was born in Longmeadow, and he came to Chicago years ago and was on a newspaper when he died. And he met my mother out there, and her

name was Frances Meade, and she was a music teacher, and none of the Longmeadow folks ever saw her. And I've been living with her cousin, Delia Meade, and I'm going to my father's half-sister, and her name is Martha Conway. Is that all right?"

"Yes," Caroline nodded, "but oh! I've just thought. Won't we have to write letters back to your Aunt Edith and my Cousin Delia—and they'll see that the handwriting isn't ours?"

For as much as half a second, Jacqueline hesitated. Then she rose to the occasion.

"I've got two post-cards shut up in my Robin Hood book. Quick! Write to your Cousin Delia on this one that you've got safe to Baring Junction, and your half-aunt met you and is very nice."

"But I don't know if she is!" protested truthful Caroline.

"You've got to take chances sometimes," Jacqueline silenced her. "Hurry up and write, and I'll write one, too, to my Aunt Edie."

Hastily and in pencil the post-cards were written. From a recess in the vanity bag Jacqueline dug out two stamps, the worse for wear but still stickable. These she fixed upon the cards.

"The porter'll post 'em," she said. "That'll satisfy your Cousin Delia and my Aunt Edie—and we've simply got to get out of writing them any more letters, somehow."

Then the black porter hammered at the door, and Jacqueline bade him enter, and in her lordly manner permitted him to brush her off.

"Ain' yo' done mix yo' clothes up, Missy?" he asked with interest.

Caroline quaked. Jacqueline merely dimpled.

"Of course we have," she said. "We're going to put something over on our relations. You see, I know her folks just like she knows mine."

(Which was true in the letter, but not in the spirit. Jacqueline might as well have told a fib and been done with it.)

The porter seemed to hesitate.

"It will be all right," Jacqueline told him loftily. "Here's something for you. Take off that young lady and her luggage as soon as the train stops. I'll look out for myself."

So sure of herself she was that the porter, like Caroline, was put to silence. He pocketed the money that she gave him, chuckled, muttered that she was "de beatermost," and went his way.

"We'll be there in five minutes now," said Jacqueline. "Put on this hat. Here, give me yours. Take the books. Give me the doll."

"Oh, no!" cried Caroline, and clasped Mildred to her.

"But look here," said Jacqueline, "I'm you and the doll is yours, so I've got to have her."

"Oh, I can't—I can't!" cried Caroline. "Not Mildred! Don't you see? Daddy gave her to me—the Christmas before he died—and Muzzy made all her clothes—I can't give her up, Jackie—not even to you—she'd be homesick."

"Now stop it!" commanded Jacqueline. "I don't want your silly old doll! Take her along with you. It won't give us away."

"But her clothes—they're in my suitcase—your suitcase—"

Already Jacqueline was tearing open the shabby suitcase.

"You shan't gum the show now," she panted. "We'd look like—like a couple of boobs. Here are the clothes. Take 'em, quick!"

"I can't get your suitcase open," chittered Caroline.

The train was slowing down for Baring Junction. Moments counted. Jacqueline seized the nearly emptied satin candy box and crammed its remaining contents into the pockets of the brown and white gingham that she wore.

"I told you her clothes would go into the candy box," she said as she hastily crushed Mildred's wardrobe into the satin receptacle. "Take it quick—here's the porter—I'll strap the suitcase."

"Oh, Jackie!" Caroline turned wildly to her friend, like a frightened kitten that doesn't know which way to run.

"Wipe your eyes, kid, and don't weaken!" bade Jacqueline stoutly. "Porter, take the books, too—her hands are full. Beat it now, Carol! Ask for Mrs. Eunice Gildersleeve and don't forget there's sure to be a piano!"

CHAPTER VI

CLAIMED AND CALLED FOR

In the wake of the grinning black porter, Caroline stumbled out of the drawing-room. She had only a few steps to take through the narrow passage to the vestibule, and in those few steps she hadn't time enough to reconsider, and call up her courage and run back to Jacqueline, with a refusal to go on with this naughty deception. She had time only to feel, in Jacqueline's finery, like the poor little old woman in the nursery-song:

Lawkamussy on me,
This can't be I!

Then she stood in the swaying, cinder-powdered vestibule. Through the open door she saw the dark red walls of a country station creeping by and people hurrying to be alongside the steps when the car should stop. Strange people—hundreds of people, they seemed to her. Oh, she wanted her half-aunt—she even wanted the cows! Jacqueline's Great-aunt Eunice would be terrible. She would know at once that Caroline was a little fraud. She would send her away to an Institution.

But now there was no turning back. The train had stopped. The porter had leaped nimbly off. A stout man in the vestibule behind Caroline was bumping her silken calves with his heavy bag, and fuming at her for blocking the way. Caroline clutched Mildred tight to the bosom of Jacqueline's henna-colored frock, and scrambled down the steep steps of the car. She was glad that the porter steadied her with a hand on her arm. She felt so sick and dizzy that she could scarcely see.

A tall lady was beside her instantly. In the strong sunlight of the station platform, so different from the stuffy dusk of the train, Caroline could not make out her features but she had an impression of white clothes and she caught the scent of violets.

"This is Jacqueline, isn't it?" the lady said, in a clear, low voice.

Caroline nodded, blinking between tears and sun-blindness.

"You're Great-aunt Eunice?" she faltered.

"No, my dear," said the low voice, with a ripple of laughter in it. "She's waiting over there in the car. Bring along her things, Frank. Come quickly, Jacqueline! Let's get out of this frightful press."

The stout man had bumped the lady with his clumsy bag, and his gruff "Beg pardon!" did not seem in the least to mollify her. She put her gloved hand on Caroline's shoulder and hurried her away across the wide platform, with its pillared red roof.

In the shade of the elm trees at the other side of the platform a stately limousine was parked among humbler touring cars and sedans. A stout elderly lady looked eagerly from the window.

One desperate glance Caroline cast behind her. She saw a self-assured small figure, in a scant brown and white gingham dress, propel itself down the car steps, behind a big shabby suitcase. She saw a squarely-built woman in an old straw hat hurrying toward the car steps, and she saw the little figure cast itself into her arms. Jacqueline had taken possession of half-aunt Martha.

Caroline had no chance to see more, for now she was at the side of the limousine.

"Mother, here's Jacqueline," said the lady in white, who was evidently Jacqueline's Cousin Penelope. "This is Aunt Eunice, Jacqueline."

The old lady, who wore gray clothes and had pretty white hair, nodded and smiled at Caroline from her cozy seat. But Caroline, all confusion and on the verge of tears, had no time to greet her, for Cousin Penelope asked just then for the trunk-check.

"It's here—in my bag," quavered Caroline, as she struggled with the unfamiliar clasp of Jacqueline's vanity bag.

"Do help her, Penelope. She's tired out, poor little mite," said Aunt Eunice.

Cousin Penelope took the bag in her brisk way, and opened it. She made a queer little face, as she saw the very grown-up small vials and powder-puff inside, but she said nothing. By instinct, probably, she opened the little purse and took out the trunk-check and gave it to her chauffeur, who came up at that moment with the hand-luggage.

"Tell them to send the trunk up by express," she bade him. "Jump in, Jacqueline. We'll be away from this wretched hot station in a couple of minutes now."

Caroline stepped gingerly into the limousine. With its cool gray upholstery, its little side-pockets full of bottles and notebooks, its hanging crystal vase of marguerites, it seemed to her a little palace on wheels. She sank upon the cushions with a sigh of relief.

"You *are* tired, you poor little thing," said Aunt Eunice. "Now just rest. We won't trouble you with questions about the journey. You're here safe—that's all that really matters."

Caroline nestled back in her seat and hugged Mildred to her. The train that had sheltered her had pulled out of the station. Jacqueline, her dear and dangerous friend of twenty-four hours, was gone. She had nothing left but Mildred.

Cousin Penelope stepped into the car in a regal manner. Her dress was of soft shimmery white, and she wore a sweater coat of mauve silk, and a white hat with a mauve silk scarf about the crown. A faint scent of violets breathed from her when she moved. Why, she wasn't old like Aunt Eunice, as Jacqueline had said she would be. She was young—not so young, perhaps, as Caroline's beloved Sunday School teacher, but still young, and such a pretty lady!

Frank, the well-trained chauffeur, came at a military gait across the sunny station platform. He closed the door of the car, then stepped to his seat. A moment later the great car glided—oh, so smoothly and softly!—away from the platform and under the elms of the station park into a wide street where two-story brick buildings cast long shadows in the late afternoon light.

"Where are we going?" Caroline wondered. "Oh, I hope it's ever so far. If I could only sit here with Mildred forever and ever."

Cousin Penelope pulled up a window.

"I *know* the air is too much for you, Mother," she said crisply.

Aunt Eunice seemed rather to sigh but she offered no protest.

"By the way, Jacqueline," Cousin Penelope turned to Caroline who sat between the two ladies, "I didn't see that Miss Fisher, who was to look after you from Chicago. I wished of course to thank her."

"She got off at Pittsfield," Caroline managed to find her tongue.

"Indeed!" said Cousin Penelope in an icy voice. What things she could evidently have said to Miss Fisher!

"And left you to travel by yourself?" cried Aunt Eunice. "No wonder she's tired and upset, Penelope, all alone like that."

"I—I played with a little girl," explained Caroline, "and I always have Mildred."

"Is that your dolly's name?" Aunt Eunice asked quickly.

Caroline nodded.

Aunt Eunice patted her hand with her soft plump palm.

"It's nice to see a little girl that loves dolls," she said. "Not many of them do, nowadays."

She smiled at Caroline, and Caroline, looking up at her, smiled back. It didn't matter whether she were Jacqueline or Caroline—she knew that she was going to like Aunt Eunice.

CHAPTER VII

LIKE A DREAM

Smoothly and softly the limousine glided out from among the brick buildings of Baring Junction—not a great many of them!—and along a country road which was edged sometimes with a rail fence, and sometimes with a stone wall, but always with a green wayside growth of blackberry and elderbush, alder, and in the low places, young shoots of willow. Pastures slipped by the windows of the car, and farm-yards, and meadows. Once they drove slowly over a wooden bridge, with a roof and sides that made a tunnel where their wheels echoed in a rumbling, hollow fashion; and Caroline wondered if Mildred were afraid.

Then they came to a wide street, with green lawns between the sidewalk and the road, and elms that almost met above them. The street was bordered with big comfortable houses, white or cream or red, which were set well apart in lawns and gardens, unlike the cramped suburban houses to which Caroline was accustomed.

"This is Longmeadow Street, dear," explained Aunt Eunice. "That brick house with the horse-chestnut trees before it, is the John Gildersleeve place, where your father was born, and his father before him. And here's the William Gildersleeve place—our place—and we've got home."

A smooth white driveway carried them behind a tall hedge of box. The color and fragrance of an old-fashioned garden were on the left hand, and on the right a plushy green lawn, and a white house, very square and big and substantial, with windows set with many panes of glass.

"It's such an e-normous house," thought Caroline, in a panic.

Would there be a butler? In the motion pictures to which Cousin Delia had sometimes taken Caroline, there were often butlers, and they were always very proud and fat. And would she find a lot of knives and forks at her place at table and not know which one to use first? And would she be found out at once and sent away in disgrace? She hoped not—at least not until to-morrow! She couldn't stand it to meet any more new people today, now that she had found Aunt Eunice so kind.

They went from the porch through a wide doorway with a paneled door and a big brass knocker, into a long hall with a curving staircase. The dark floor was as shiny as glass, and the white paint of the woodwork was as dazzling as snow. The furniture was of dark wood, with red winey gleams beneath its polished surface.

There was a tall case of drawers, which seemed by their weight to have bowed the slim legs on which they rested, and a table—no, half a table—against the wall. On the table were two brass candlesticks, and between them a dull blue bowl, which held some little, pale pink roses. Oh, if only Muzzy had not taught her that she simply must not stare! There was so much to see in this wonderful house!

At the top of the curved staircase was a long, cool hall, with cream white doors on either side. Aunt Eunice herself opened the third door on the right.

"This will be your room, my dear," she said, and motioned for Caroline to follow her across the threshold.

To Caroline it seemed as if she stepped suddenly into a quiet green pool, the room was so still and cool and goldeny green. There was a dull green border to the oyster white rug that covered the floor, and a pattern of wreathed leaves picked out in green upon the pale gray furniture. Green leaves where golden figures of canaries were half hidden, made a deep frieze above the cool, pale paper with which the walls were hung. The curtains at the windows and upon the low book-shelves, the cushions of the chairs, the covering upon the bed, all had the same pattern of green leaves and gold canaries. Outside the window that was opposite the door, were the green, sibilant leaves of an elm, and through them came the late sunshine in a powdery dust of gold.

Caroline said nothing. She just stared, in spite of all that her mother had taught her. Then she turned toward Aunt Eunice a quivering little face.

"*My* room?" she asked.

"Yes, darling."

"Doesn't anybody have to sleep with me?"

"Not in that narrow bed, child. You're not afraid to be alone?"

"Oh, no, no!" cried Caroline. "I like to be alone with my thoughts, and all last winter——"

She stopped. She could feel her heart beating fast with the terror of a narrow escape. For she had almost said that all last winter, in Cousin Delia's little house, she hadn't had a corner to call her own, no, nor a minute of time.

"Never mind, dear," said Aunt Eunice and patted her shoulder gently.

But there was a little pucker between Aunt Eunice's eyebrows. She was going to tell Penelope later just what she thought of this Aunt Edith (not on the Gildersleeve side of the family, thank goodness!) who had packed that shy little sensitive girl off to a boarding school!

"You'll want to rest a bit before dinner," Aunt Eunice filled up the awkward little pause, "and wash, too, after the train. There's the door to the bathroom, over by the dressing-table. Can you manage by yourself, or shall I send Sallie to help you?"

"I can manage, thank you!" Caroline assured her.

To her own ears her voice sounded dry, and oh! she didn't want to seem ungrateful, when her heart was just bursting with joy that was almost rapture. So, as Aunt Eunice turned away, Caroline slipped up to her side and laid a hand on her arm.

"Thank you!" she whispered shyly. "It's—it's like a dream room and I—I'll take awful good care of everything. I can make my own bed," she added proudly. "And I can sweep and dust as nice as anybody."

Aunt Eunice beamed approvingly.

“Why, what a sensible school your aunt must have sent you to,” she said. “But you needn’t do tasks in vacation, little girl. Sallie will take care of your room. Now wash your hands and brush your hair, and bring a good appetite with you to the dinner table.”

With a nod and a smile—and Aunt Eunice’s smile was the kind that you waited for eagerly, because it made her whole face brighten—Aunt Eunice left the room and closed the door behind her. Very carefully Caroline put her coat (Jacqueline’s coat that was!) and her hat and the satin candy box full of doll-clothes down upon a chair, and then, with Mildred in her arms, she walked slowly and almost a-tiptoe with reverence round the room.

There were pictures on the walls—lovely fairytale pictures, such as she had seen in windows of gorgeous shops, with cobalt blue seas and airy mountains, towered castles and dark thickets shot through with sunshine. There were pretty things on the dressing-table—little trays and boxes of thin china, patterned in green and gold, two slender perfume bottles of cool green glass, a lovely little lady in brocaded silk, with her hair piled high, whose skirts when lifted revealed a hidden pin-cushion. On the writing-desk by the window there was a green blotter with gold and green leather corners, and a brass owl, which was an inkwell, and a brass turtle which miraculously was a stamp box. On the little shelves of the desk were sheets of creamy paper, large and small, and engraved on each sheet was the legend: The Chimnies, Longmeadow, Massachusetts.

“Oh, dear,” thought Caroline, “if only I could write to somebody on this ducky paper, but I mustn’t ever, because my handwriting isn’t Jackie’s, and it would give us all away.”

With a little sigh, she turned from the desk and looked out at the windows. There were two of them. The western window looked into the elms. The northern window looked across some fields to a low mountain, a great heap of dark trees and raw red cliffs, which humped itself like a gigantic beast against the sky.

Caroline was gazing at the mountain, when there came a rap at the door, and a neat middle-aged maid, who must be Sallie, brought in her suitcase (Jacqueline’s suitcase!) and the hatbox. Sallie also offered to help Caroline wash her face. Dear me! If Sallie had known the little girl was Caroline, and not Jacqueline, she would have known that at Cousin Delia’s Caroline had not only washed her own face, but several other little faces besides.

After Sallie had gone, Caroline opened the door and went into the bathroom. It was not a bit like Cousin Delia’s bathroom, with its golden oak woodwork and its zinc tub which Caroline had so often scrubbed. This bathroom was all white tiles and shining nickel, and had a porcelain tub big enough for half a dozen Carolines. On the nickel rods were big towels and little towels and middle-sized towels, thick towels and thin towels, rough towels and smooth towels, all marked with a beautiful big G.

Caroline took off the henna-colored frock most particularly, and she washed her face with some very faintly scented white soap, not forgetting to wash behind her ears, and she washed her neck and her hands and her knees, too, but she decided to let her feet go until after dinner. Then she opened her suitcase (really Jacqueline’s!) and feeling a little apologetic, even though it was Jacqueline’s own plan that she was carrying out, she took Jacqueline’s pretty blue leather traveling-case, with its ivory implements, and she made her hair smooth and her hands tidy.

Caroline, you see, was a gentle little girl, and in the haphazard months at Cousin Delia’s she had not forgotten the careful teachings of her gentle little mother. If she had, her whole story might have turned out very differently. She made herself now as fresh and tidy as possible. Then she sat down in the low rocker beside the bookcase, and looked at the books—such a lot of books, not new ones, she could see, but new to her, bound volumes of St. Nicholas, and a whole set of Miss Alcott, books by Laura E. Richards, and Miss Molesworth, Kate Douglas Wiggin, and Juliana Ewing.

She was dipping into “We and the World” when she heard a knock at her door, and there on the threshold, not waiting to be asked in, stood Cousin Penelope. Now that her hat was off, Caroline saw that she had pretty, fair hair, but she had also a forehead so high and white that it gave her rather a forbidding look.

“Day-dreaming, Jacqueline?” said Cousin Penelope briskly.

“I—I was looking at the books,” Caroline explained, as she rose hastily. “I never saw so many.”

Penelope pursed her lips. To herself she said that she must mention to her mother that “Aunt Edie” was evidently an outdoor sort, without any claim to culture. Didn’t it prove the point, when Cousin Jack’s poor little daughter was so unused to books that she was quite excited over three shelves of old-fashioned, shabby juveniles?

But to Caroline, Penelope merely said:

“Those were my books, Jacqueline, when I was your age. Your father and I often read them together on rainy days. You’ll have plenty of time to read them this summer; but you must come now, for dinner will be waiting.”

Penelope spoke crisply, coolly, and her tone made something inside Caroline curl up tight, like a sea-anemone when you touch it.

“Cousin Penelope doesn’t like me,” she told herself.

CHAPTER VIII

MUSIC IN THE TWILIGHT

In Cousin Penelope's wake, for she did not quite dare to walk at her side, as she had walked with Aunt Eunice, Caroline went down to the dining room.

To feel as she felt on entering that cool, orderly room, with its white paint and dark paper, its old portraits and its severe, highly polished dark furniture, you would need to have lived for six months with Cousin Delia, whose dining room furniture was all of golden oak, carved in endless curves and curlicues, and who kept a piece of fly-paper on the golden oak sideboard, between the blue glass lemonade set and the plated silver cake dish.

With a sense almost of going to church, Caroline slipped into the place at the table to which Aunt Eunice smilingly motioned her. There was no cloth on the table, just drawn-work doilies of sheer white linen, and on the largest doily in the center was a crystal bowl with pale small roses. The glasses were almost as thin as soap-bubbles, and the silver was thin, and highly polished, and plain. All this Caroline had noted in the first instant, and in the second she noted with relief that there was no butler after all, only the good-humored maid, Sallie. Then she took courage, and decided that, even though there were several knives and forks and spoons at her place, she would be all right if she began at each end and worked inward.

Probably in all her life Caroline had never eaten a meal that tasted so good as that first dinner at The Chimnies. There was a clear, well-flavored soup, in a deep plate covered with Chinese figures in lettuce green and raspberry pink. With the soup were little golden-hued dice which were like glorified bread crumbs. Then there were slices of pink ham, with fat as white as marble, amber brown balls of potato, delicate small peas, a crisp salad of lettuce and ice cold cucumber, with pale, firm cheese and salty toasted crackers, and last of all little tarts of fresh strawberries, topped with whipped cream.

Caroline ate, silently and earnestly. She had eaten her last three meals, remember, out of a shoe box.

Very early, with the soup, Aunt Eunice asked her if she would like a glass of milk.

"Yes, please, thank you," said Caroline, "if it isn't too much trouble."

After that, conversation so far as concerned Caroline, ceased to exist. She ate, and was glad that no one noticed her, or so she thought. But someone must have noticed her, it seemed. For when Caroline was half through her little tart, eating in careful small bites, as her mother had taught her, and holding her fork nicely, Cousin Penelope spoke out of a clear sky.

"She really favors our side of the family, doesn't she, Mother?"

"Jacqueline?"

"Yes. The resemblance is striking. Just look at Great-aunt Joanna Gildersleeve."

For the life of her Caroline couldn't help looking round, in the direction in which Aunt Eunice and Cousin Penelope both were looking. She half expected to see another great-aunt standing right at her elbow. But instead she only saw, hanging upon the wall above the sideboard, the portrait of a rather forbidding lady in a cap, with a curtain parting on a landscape just behind her.

"I don't quite see the likeness," murmured Aunt Eunice.

"It's something in the inner curve of the eyebrow and the set of the nostrils," Cousin Penelope explained patiently. "It's almost indefinable but quite unmistakable."

Aunt Eunice did not dispute the point. Neither, you may be sure, did Caroline.

When dinner was over they went into a large, square room that opened off the dining room. All round the room were shelves of books in many-colored bindings, and there was a great writing-table across the western window. There was a fireplace, masked with an old-fashioned fire-screen on which a landscape was worked in faded silks, and above the fireplace was a marble mantel on which were a pair of bronze vases. But there was no piano!

Caroline sat down in a low chair, which Aunt Eunice recommended to her, and wished that she had Mildred in her arms. She began to feel very much alone, with these people who were really not her people, and a little bit frightened. Older folk than Caroline have felt that way, in a strange place, among strange faces, with the day ending, and no way of knowing what the next day may bring.

Sallie brought in a tray, with matches and a spirit-lamp, a canister that savored of rich coffee-berries, a little glass coffee machine, half filled with crystal clear hot water, two cups, thin as egg-shells, and small almost as eggs.

Aunt Eunice put the machine together, measured the coffee, as if she performed a religious ceremony, and set the lamp beneath the globe of water.

"Of course you don't take coffee, my dear," she spoke kindly to Caroline. "Go look in the drawer of the table over there. I think you'll find a box of candied ginger. Help yourself!"

Caroline took courage, as she saw Aunt Eunice smile.

"If you don't mind," she whispered, "I'd rather—*have* you a piano?"

She felt that Cousin Penelope, cool and aloof in her chair by the window, looked at her, surprised and not altogether pleased.

"Of course, dear," said Aunt Eunice readily. "Right across the hall in the long parlor. You can find your way?"

"Oh, yes," Caroline nodded hastily.

She wanted to get to the piano quickly, before Cousin Penelope interfered. For she felt that Cousin Penelope was sitting up very straight and about to speak.

"Run along!" said Aunt Eunice. Did she, too, feel that Penelope was rising to remark?

Caroline "ran along." She went so fast that she was almost out of earshot when Penelope expressed herself:

"Mother! That child—strumming on my piano!"

“She won’t hurt the piano fatally, my dear,” said Aunt Eunice, placidly but with unexpected firmness. “Poor little shy thing! She’s lonely and homesick, as any one can see, and if the piano gives her pleasure to-night, who would begrudge it?”

No one, evidently, while Aunt Eunice was around. Penelope sank back in her chair, but there was a little crease, not at all becoming, in her high white forehead.

Meantime Caroline had “found her way,” easily enough, across the hall and into the long parlor, which was as long as the book room and the dining room put together. Such a big room, with pictures that frowned on her through the twilight that was deepening, here on the east side of the house. But neither the bigness of the room, nor the dimness of it could daunt Caroline, for at the farther end she saw the polished bulk of a grand piano.

She flew to it across the dark polished floor and the dusky rugs. There had been no piano at Cousin Delia’s, only a talking machine. Cousin Delia liked a fox trot or a coon song as well as the next one.

Caroline sat down on the piano bench. She poised her hands for a second over the white keys, almost afraid to touch them lest they melt away and vanish. Then very softly but firmly she struck a chord, and another, and another. How the piano sang in its deep, golden throat! Such a piano as her precious Muzzy had dreamed of having some time for their very own! Caroline struck more chords, and ran a scale to limber her little fingers, which had grown the least bit stiff with lack of exercise.

“The dear little thing!” cooed Aunt Eunice over her coffee machine. “If she isn’t practicing her scales.”

She cast an appealing look at Penelope, but Penelope in the window looked unplacated.

Caroline found the pedals with her feet. She could just reach them. She could make the piano talk, now loud, now low. She played very softly a lullaby that her mother had made up, just for her—a very simple thing—one of the first that she had ever learned. The stiffness was going from her fingers. She and this beautiful, wonder working, deep throated piano were friends. She began to play the last thing that her mother had taught her, a rhapsody of Brahms.

In the library Aunt Eunice paused in her placid sipping of her coffee, and looked amazed, for Penelope had sat up in her chair, with a quick, passionate movement that was not like Penelope.

“Mother!” There was something like awe in Penelope’s voice. “That child can play.”

“Quite so, dear.”

“But it isn’t parrot-playing, Mother—there’s more than her funny little bit of ragged technique—there’s feeling—listen now!”

They listened, while their coffee cooled. Full, round golden notes sang through the old dim house, now loud, now low. Night winds blew—bells tolled—echoes wakened in a vast cathedral aisle beneath a myriad jewel-like stained windows.

“Why, Penelope! Don’t!” Aunt Eunice soothed suddenly, as if the Penelope who swallowed her hard sobs was again a little child.

“I can’t help it, Mother. Don’t you see? There *is* something after all in the power of the soul. That Delane woman—that horsy, tangoing California girl——”

“Penelope!”

“She’s dead, I know. I shouldn’t speak like that. But she had no music in her, and Jack hadn’t a note of it. But I—I——”

“Yes, dear.”

“Jack was my favorite cousin,” Penelope whispered. “You know how much I cared for him. Even when that Delane girl took him away. And now Jack’s child—my music is in her—and by that much she’s mine, not hers,—she’s mine!”

CHAPTER IX

PENELOPE UNBENDS

Caroline went up to bed at half past eight in a happy daze. She had played for ever so long in the parlor that at last was quite dark, Liszt and Brahms, simple arrangements, of course, which her mother had selected for her and then she had improvised rapturously, enjoying that piano as a man who has gone thirsty for hours in the heat may enjoy (too weak a word!) a draft of cool water.

At last Aunt Eunice had come and turned on the lights and told her it was bed time. Was she afraid to go to bed alone?

Caroline smiled vaguely and said: “No!”

Then with Aunt Eunice’s kiss on her cheek, she went up the stairs to her wonderful room. She found a shaded electric light turned on, the bedcover folded, the bedclothes turned down. A fresh nightgown from the suitcase lay on the bed, and the blue leather traveling-case was on the dressing-table.

Caroline undressed Mildred and put her in the fresh white bed. Oh, such a contrast that bed was to the stuffy berth on the train, and the rumpled bed with the thin mattress, all in lumps, that she had shared with the oldest baby (fat and a terrible crowder!) at Cousin Delia’s.

Then she went into the spick and span bathroom, and drew her own bath—all the hot water she wanted. At Cousin Delia’s the hot water supply had had a bad trick of giving out after the four babies were bathed and before it came Caroline’s turn. But here there was hot water and cold water and three kinds of soap. Caroline bathed luxuriously, and dried herself on one of the huge soft towels and slipped on the fresh nightgown (Jacqueline’s nightgown!). Then she faced a problem that had worried her, off and on, for the last half hour.

Toothbrush!

Of course the one in the blue leather traveling-case was Jacqueline’s. But to go to bed without washing one’s teeth seemed to Caroline impossible. She decided to look in the medicine closet. Perhaps she would find in it some sort of mouth-wash that would help her through the night, and then next day, with the money that was left in Jacqueline’s purse, she would buy a toothbrush.

There were all sorts of things in that Mother Robinson’s bag of a medicine closet; several kinds of fresh smelling soap in paper wrappers, rolls of cotton, bottles of sweet oil and mouth-wash, boracic acid and toilet-water. There were rolls of adhesive and jars of cold cream, papers of pins and crystal clear eye cups. There were also a couple of toothbrushes sealed in transparent paper cases.

Caroline looked and longed. At last she took one of the sealed brushes in her hand and went to the door that was opposite the door into her own room. Sallie had said something about this door’s opening into some one’s else room, and she must always leave it unlocked, when she went out of the bathroom.

Caroline knocked at the door. She hoped that Aunt Eunice would open to her, but instead it was Cousin Penelope in a loose lacy gown, who appeared on the threshold.

“I’m sorry,” faltered Caroline.

“No matter,” said Penelope, coolly but not unkindly. “I was only reading a silly book. What is it?”

“Could I—could I have this toothbrush?” hesitated Caroline. She felt guiltily that she must make some explanation, so she added: “I don’t want to use the one—the one I brought off the train.”

“You’re like me,” said Penelope, as if she were pleased with the resemblance. “I always want to throw away everything that I’ve used in the dirty cars. Of course, take the toothbrush, Jacqueline. Take anything you wish from the medicine closet. My own personal things I keep on my dressing-table.”

“Thank you very much,” said Caroline.

She stood there, shy and solemn, in the little short-sleeved, square-necked nightgown. She hardly knew whether to turn away or to linger. Because Cousin Penelope did not turn away.

Cousin Penelope seemed trying to speak, and apparently she did not find it easy.

“Jacqueline,” she brought out the words suddenly, “how long have you—taken lessons on the piano?”

“Always,” said Caroline truthfully, “except last winter.”

“Of course,” the thought flashed through Penelope’s mind, “they neglected her music at that horrid school where Edith Delane sent her—to get rid of her.” But what she said aloud to Caroline was: “Who taught you?”

No doubt Caroline ought to have said, “My mother,” and betrayed the whole deception that Jacqueline had led her into practicing. But it takes courage to destroy a lovely world in which, however undeservedly, one is very happy, especially when the destruction of that world would leave one cowering, a guilty wretch, before such a judge as Cousin Penelope, with her serene, high forehead.

“A—a lady taught me,” Caroline told a half-truth.

“She must have been quite a good teacher.”

Caroline nodded. The tears were near her eyelids.

“Folks called her a very good teacher,” she whispered. “She’s dead now.”

“Loyal and affectionate,” thought Penelope. “That’s the Gildersleeve blood in her.” Aloud she went on, with a change of subject, to Caroline’s great relief: “There’s a Polish lady spending the summer here in Longmeadow. She’s a really exceptional pianist. I believe if I asked her——How would you like to have some lessons from her this summer?”

Caroline clasped her hands upon the toothbrush.

“Oh, I’d love it like anything—but I—I couldn’t—it—it would cost—lots.”

Penelope lifted her brows slightly, but she smiled.

“That sounds like Great-uncle Thaddeus Gildersleeve, who was the most cautious man in

Longmeadow," she said. "Don't fret about the bills! This will be my treat, Jacqueline, to my Cousin Jack's little daughter."

She did not offer to kiss Caroline, but she put her hand on her shoulder, and smiled down at her quite kindly.

"Run along to bed now," she said. "We'll go together and call on Madame Woleski to-morrow."

A little later, when Caroline was settled between the fresh, cool sheets in the green and golden room, she told it all to Mildred.

"I'm to take lessons from a Polish lady," she whispered. "Oh, I think Cousin Penelope likes me, or she wouldn't have offered. It's like Heaven here, isn't it, Mildred? If only we could stay forever!"

And while she whispered the words, Caroline was aware that she meant to stay just as long as ever she could. Any vague scruple of conscience which might have driven her to confess to the deluded Gildersleeves, was now quite done away with. Jacqueline, inventor of the deed, had told her to keep still, and as long as the reward of silence was to live in this wonderful house with a piano, and take lessons from an exceptional Polish lady, she would keep still. She only hoped and prayed that Jacqueline might not find it too terrible with the cows and half-aunt Martha, and so be moved to come at once and claim her rightful place.

CHAPTER X

THE CAPTURE OF A HALF-AUNT

When Caroline walked out of the drawing-room on the train, in the wake of the black porter, you will remember that she left Jacqueline in the patched brown and white gingham (Caroline's dress!) restrapping the shabby suitcase (Caroline's suitcase!).

Jacqueline was not in the least flustered. Through the open door of the drawing-room she could see that a stout man with a bag, and several other passengers were making their way toward the open vestibule. She had a couple of minutes to spare. And she fully meant to be the last person to leave the train at Baring Junction. She wasn't going to cloud the issue and spoil her little plot by having the groups of waiting relatives see two little brown-eyed girls, with bobbed brown hair, descend in a procession from the train.

Jacqueline felt pretty sure—and the event justified her—that when a nicely dressed little girl, with J. G. on her smart suitcase and her hatbox, came timidly down the steps of the car, the Gildersleeve relatives would pounce upon her and bear her away. Then later, when Caroline's shabby little substitute appeared, she would naturally fall to the share of half-aunt Martha.

So at the latest moment she dared to risk, Jacqueline took the red sweater over her arm and the big suitcase in her hand, and trailed along at the end of the line that was leaving the car. She felt very jubilant, for she loved to play-act—and this was the most perfect piece of play-acting that she had ever invented. She wasn't in the least afraid for, if she found half-aunt Martha horrid and her house impossible, she would simply go to her Gildersleeve relatives and explain who she was, and ask Caroline to back up her story, and then she would have back her own clothes and her own rightful place, and everything would be just as it was before.

A little hard on Caroline, perhaps, but still, she would be no worse off than she would have been, if she hadn't met Jacqueline in the first place. At least she would have had the society of the piano—why should any one yearn for a piano?—for several days.

You see, Jacqueline was a selfish little girl, and a thoughtless little girl. But perhaps young Aunt Edith Delane, who now was Edith Knowlton, hadn't been the wisest of foster-mothers. In some things she had indulged Jacqueline foolishly, and in others she had checked her with equal folly. Jacqueline had had lovely clothes and toys and all manner of semi grown-up pleasures, but she had not been allowed to make friends when and where she pleased, nor do the foolish "rowdy" things, as Aunt Edith called them, that she had seen other children do—such as riding their bicycles through the streets to public school or flying hazardously down hill on rollerskates. Of course Jacqueline had longed to do the very things that she was forbidden to do. And now she could. She was rid of Aunt Edith, and governesses, and teachers, and chaperons. She was just Caroline Tait, and she was going to have the free, untrammeled time of her young life—always with the Gildersleeves to shield her in the background!

Staggering under her suitcase, Jacqueline reached the head of the steps. In the distance she caught just a glimpse of Caroline in the henna-colored frock being hurried off to a tiresome old limousine by a prim-looking lady in a mauve silk sweater. Thank goodness, she wasn't Caroline! She knew just the sort of dull old poky house they'd take her to.

Then Jacqueline gave her attention to getting herself and the suitcase, with the porter's help, down the steps of the car. She landed in a little knot of people who were kissing their friends and sorting out their hand-luggage, and she saw a woman hurrying toward her, a solidly-built woman with a weather-beaten face, who wore an old black skirt and a white shirt-waist, and a black straw sailor-hat, a little askew. The woman began to smile as soon as her eyes met Jacqueline's.

Jacqueline play-acted all over the place. She dropped the suitcase and fairly flew to meet the stranger.

"Oh, half-aunt Martha," she cried loudly, and cast herself into the woman's arms.

"My goodness, child," said Mrs. Martha Conway. "Don't knock the breath out of a body!"

She kissed Jacqueline soundly on the cheek.

"I kind of suspect you're Caroline," she said, with a twinkle in her gray eyes. "Give me hold of that suitcase. I'd have had one of the boys here to help us—they were all crazy to come meet their cousin—but I wanted room in the car so as to get your trunk, and I just brought Nellie along."

All the while she talked, half-aunt Martha had been hurrying along the station platform, and hurrying Jacqueline and the suitcase with her, much as the Red Queen hurried Alice in the Looking Glass Country, you will remember. They now turned a corner of the station, and there in the shade opposite the open door of the baggage room stood a dingy-looking Ford. In the Ford was a sun-browned little girl of six in a stiffly starched gingham dress, who smiled and waved her hand to them.

"You keep on sitting, Nellie," called Aunt Martha. "Where's your trunk-check, Caroline?"

"Gee! I forgot all about it," said Jacqueline ruefully.

"You can't have," Aunt Martha told her, patiently but firmly. "Look in your pockets—in your sweater pocket."

"It isn't there," Jacqueline confessed. She hardly knew whether to laugh at herself or be annoyed. She looked at Aunt Martha's anxious face, and decided she wouldn't laugh.

"We'll unstrap the suitcase," said Aunt Martha, as she placed the suitcase on a packing-box. "Don't worry, Caroline. It must be somewhere. I knew a woman once that always kept her trunk-check in the toe of her bedshoe when she went on a long train trip. And even if we don't find it, we can prove property and claim your trunk. What kind of a trunk was it?"

"I—I don't know," said Jacqueline feebly. She could feel her cheeks burning, and the tears of vexation rising to her eyes. For she fully believed that everything was going to be spoiled right at the outset. And somehow, as she looked at Aunt Martha's weather-beaten anxious face and steady gray

eyes, she felt that it would not be what she would call a picnic to explain to Aunt Martha why she didn't know what her own trunk looked like, and how she came to stand here in the soiled white shoes of Caroline Tait.

But Martha Conway saw in Jacqueline's confusion only the natural distress of a child, who was tired with a long journey and frightened at the prospect of losing all her little possessions.

"Don't cry!" she bade briskly. "'Twon't help matters. Nothing's lost, if you know where 'tis, as the sea-cook said when he dropped the tea-kettle overboard, and that check must just be in this suitcase somewheres."

She had the straps unfastened by this time and the lid lifted.

"My, what a hoorah's nest!" she murmured, and indeed Jacqueline's hasty incursion into the suitcase, in search of Mildred's wardrobe, had utterly disarranged Caroline's neat garments.

Aunt Martha turned over the pink and white soiled gingham and the discarded underwear. She felt in the toe of each of the worn bedshoes, and looked disappointed at finding nothing in them. She shook out the nightgown. But though she looked more and more anxious, and though her silence made Jacqueline feel more and more what a real disaster to Caroline and to Caroline's people the loss of a mere trunk would be, she did not once scold.

At the bottom of the suitcase were Caroline's comb and brush, in a chintz case with the initials F. T. worked on it in cross-stitch, and a little chintz handkerchief-case, with the same initials. Aunt Martha opened the handkerchief-case and smiled with relief as she saw on top of the handkerchiefs the clumsy oblong of the pasteboard trunk-check.

"Well, now," she said, "you were a good girl to put it away so carefully, only next time don't go and forget where you put it. Now I'll go right and get the baggage man to put the trunk into the Ford. I suppose there'll be room. Or did you bring a Saratoga, Caroline?"

"The trunk isn't exactly what you might call big," murmured Jacqueline non-committally. She certainly hoped it wasn't. What mightn't it be like, this unknown trunk of Caroline's that was now her trunk?

While she waited for Aunt Martha to return with the trunk, Jacqueline started to restrap the suitcase, but before she did so, she cast a hurried glance about, in search of the trunk-key. She was pretty sure that Aunt Martha would be asking for that, next. To her great relief, she found underneath the comb and brush case a shabby little red purse (Caroline's purse!) and in it were the trunk-key, two pennies, and a fifty-cent piece. She pocketed the purse and its contents joyfully. Fair exchange was no robbery, and even after the porter had his fee, there were left a couple of dollars in the vanity bag (Jacqueline's bag!) that Caroline had carried away.

By the time the suitcase was strapped, Aunt Martha came back with a man in shirt-sleeves who carried a trunk on his shoulder. Not at all a large trunk, praise be! but a little battered steamer-trunk, which went quite easily between the back and front seats of the Ford, with room enough besides for the suitcase, and Jacqueline's red sweater, and some brown paper bundles and bags that were half-aunt Martha's. One didn't come to Baring Junction every day, it seemed, and one profited by the occasion to do a little shopping.

After the baggage was safely placed, Aunt Martha and Jacqueline settled themselves on the front seat, with the six-year-old girl between them.

"This is Nellie," said Aunt Martha, "and this is your Cousin Caroline, Nellie."

The little girl hung her head and smiled. She had a pointed chin and thick golden brown eyelashes. She seemed to Jacqueline rather a baby.

After a little rebellion on the part of the Ford, which Aunt Martha subdued in a capable manner, the car got under way. Jacqueline watched the process with interest. She knew a lot of funny stories about Fords, but she had never ridden in one before. Uncle Jimmie had a Locomobile, and Aunt Edie swore by her Marmon.

Rather spasmodically, as they got up speed, they rolled across the worn asphalt of the station park and into the one wide street of Baring Junction. Along the street were two-story buildings of brick, fruit shops and hardware shops and drygoods shops, as the wares that overflowed on the sidewalk bore witness, and drug shops. At sight of the large advertisements that shouted the joys of sundaes and cool drinks, Jacqueline remembered that she was thirsty. She remembered also the fifty cents in Caroline's shabby red purse. She never dreamed that the gift of fifty cents, because Caroline must not go on a journey penniless, meant real generosity on Cousin Delia's part.

"Let's stop and get a drink," begged Jacqueline. "My treat, of course. I've got fifty cents—enough for three fifteen-cent sodas."

Aunt Martha turned her head and looked at her.

"Forty-five cents just for drinks?" she said. "You hang on to that half-dollar, Caroline. You'll be needing it, like as not, for hair-ribbons."

Jacqueline started to say, very rudely: "It's my money!" But she recollected that it was really Caroline's. She also caught herself wondering if it were advisable to be rude to half-aunt Martha. A lady who could squelch a Ford might be able to squelch a supposed half-niece.

Then she was glad that she hadn't been rude, for Aunt Martha smiled. She seemed to guess what it was like to be ten years old, and just off the train on a hot June afternoon.

"I'll get you and Nellie each an ice-cream cone," she said.

Nellie smiled. She couldn't have looked more blissfully happy if somebody had promised her a beautiful fifty-cent special, with a plate of *petit fours*.

"There's a nice-looking place," suggested Jacqueline eagerly, "the big one with the little fountain of water in the window."

"Donovan's?" said Aunt Martha. "That's a big place, all right, and prices to match. They'll charge you fifteen cents for an ice-cream cone if you go in there. We'll stop at the little Greek place."

Just at the end of the street of brick buildings they stopped accordingly at a tiny shop, wedged in between two pompous neighbors. Aunt Martha bought two ice-cream cones for seven cents apiece. Only two cones. Perhaps she didn't like ice-cream herself.

“Eat ’em up before they melt, and don’t spill any more than you can help,” she advised.

Nellie’s little pink tongue was deep in the custardy contents of the pasteboard-like cone before Aunt Martha had regained her seat. Jacqueline clutched her cone and followed suit joyously. Never before had she been encouraged to eat dubious ice-cream, publicly, shamelessly, in a moving car, on an open road. She licked the cool drops that dribbled from the melting mound, and thought them delicious.

“Thank you, half-aunt Martha,” she said, with a sticky smile.

Aunt Martha chuckled.

“My land, child,” she said. “Don’t call me half-aunt. Makes me feel like I was cut in two.”

CHAPTER XI

ON THE ROAD TO LONGMEADOW

Along the country road, through pastures and farms and meadows, where the limousine had smoothly, swiftly glided, Aunt Martha's Ford bounced sturdily. Soon the ice-cream cones were demolished, even to the last gritty crumb of the cornucopias. Jacqueline wiped her hands and her face on her handkerchief (Caroline's handkerchief!).

"Wipe off your mouth, Nellie," bade Aunt Martha. "Let Caroline do it for you. I haven't a hand to spare."

Jacqueline scrubbed Nellie vigorously with Nellie's own pocket handkerchief which had a rabbit worked in one corner.

"That's my best hanky," said Nellie, and with the ice thus broken between them, began to ask Jacqueline questions.

Did she sleep in the train? Did she have a real bed? Was she scared all alone like that?

"Of course not," said Jacqueline, rather showily.

She stuffed her mussy handkerchief back into her pocket, and there were the chocolates, salvage of the satin box. She decided to share them with this new acquaintance.

"Here, Nellie," she said. "Don't you like chocolates?"

Nellie seized upon the proffered sweet.

"Only one, Nellie," struck in Aunt Martha, who seemed to know without looking what went on among the children round her.

"I've got a pocketful," Jacqueline urged generously.

"No need to be piggy on that account. Where did you get 'em, Caroline? I hope you don't spend money foolishly."

"There was a little girl on the train had a whole box of chocolates." Jacqueline spoke truthful words, but with untruthful intent. "These are some of them."

Aunt Martha looked at her disapprovingly.

"It's just as well not to pick up acquaintances on trains," she said. "But I don't need to lay down the law, for you won't be taking another such journey for one while."

"Not unless you send me to an Institution," thought Jacqueline. What would it be like to go to an Institution, she wondered? Perhaps she would be really bad, and let Aunt Martha send her there. The Gildersleeves could always come and get her out.

Nellie interrupted Jacqueline's train of thought. She had bitten into the plump chocolate she had chosen and found it not at all to her taste.

"This is a bad candy," she protested. "It ought to be white sugar inside and instead it's all gooey gum."

"It's nice jelly, you goop," said Jacqueline. "Throw it away, and have another."

"No!" Aunt Martha struck in. "You can't waste good candy like that, Nellie. If you don't like what Caroline gives you, leave it alone. But you can't have another. Caroline may want to save a piece for each of the boys."

It seemed to Jacqueline pathetic that mere candy should be so precious.

"Oh, let Nellie find one that she likes," she pleaded, and added, without thinking: "I'll get a whole box of candy to-morrow for the boys."

Aunt Martha smiled rather quizzically.

"Not a box of that sort of candy, Caroline. It must have cost at least a dollar a pound. Does seem sort of wicked to throw money about that way, when times are so hard."

Aunt Martha spoke seriously, and the gray eyes that she suddenly bent on Jacqueline were very grave, and even stern. Jacqueline suddenly reconsidered her plan to be naughty and get sent to an Institution. There might, she concluded, be unpleasantnesses before she got there. Not of course that she was afraid of Aunt Martha!

"I'll keep what's left of the chocolates for the boys," she said quite meekly. "How many of 'em are there—the boys, I mean, not the chocolates. I've kind of forgotten."

"No wonder, either," Aunt Martha answered heartily. "You can't have heard much about your Longmeadow relations. Your mother and I were only connected by marriage, and both of us busy women, so correspondence sort of languished after your father died. Can't say you favor him in looks. You must take after your mother's folks."

Jacqueline blushed with embarrassment. What fibs might she not yet be forced to tell?

"There now," said Aunt Martha. "I shouldn't be personal, setting a bad example to you and Nellie. Let's talk about the boys."

"Let's!" said Jacqueline, with heartfelt relief.

"Well, there's my big boy, Ralph. He's most sixteen, and he'll go to High School over to Baring Center next winter, if we can get conveyance." A worried look played for a moment on Aunt Martha's steady face, and was gone as quickly as it came. "Ralph is my right hand on the farm," she said with a little smile. "Like you must have been to your mother, Caroline."

Jacqueline blushed again. She had played several parts in her life, but she had never adopted the rôle of right hand to any one. Did grown folk speak always of children who were right hands with the sort of smile that was on Aunt Martha's firm lips, and that sort of shininess in the eyes?

"Then there's Dick," went on Aunt Martha. "He's twelve now, and Neil is ten next month. You come just between 'em. And here's Nellie. She's a great help to us, too. She sets the table and puts away the clean dishes, and plays with the babies."

Nellie smiled, and showed two engaging dimples.

"We've got nice babies," she said eagerly. "We haven't had 'em long, but they're going to stay with

us always, aren't they, Mother?"

Aunt Martha nodded.

"They're no blood-relation to you, Caroline," she explained. "It's on the other side of the family. My husband's sister Grace married a poor fellow named Pearsall that was dreadful sort of unlucky. She took sick and died right after little Annie was born, and he couldn't rightly seem to do for his children. So Mother and I—that's my husband's mother, Caroline—we just sent for the babies. Freddie's three years old now, and Annie is nineteen months."

"You'd ought to see her walk!" cried Nellie.

Aunt Martha smiled rather grimly.

"Next thing she'll be walking into everything just like Freddie does," she said. "Young ones and ducks are a good deal alike some ways."

Jacqueline looked at Aunt Martha for a moment, while she thought rapidly. At Buena Vista she had heard her Aunt Edith and her friends sing the praises of one of their number, who had adopted a little French orphan. To give a child a home was a serious undertaking, even for a lady who, like Aunt Edith's friend, had a great house and servants and cars and lovely gowns and jewels. But here was Aunt Martha, who had no car but a Ford, and wore tacky old clothes that Aunt Edith's chambermaid would have scorned, who scrimped on the price of an ice-cream cone and thought a dollar a pound for chocolates (Jacqueline's really had cost a dollar-fifty!) sinful waste. Aunt Martha was really *poor*—yet *she* was giving a home to two children—and now to a third.

"Aunt Martha," Jacqueline burst out, in the small-boy way that she had when she was excited. "I think you're awful good to give Caroline Tait a home."

Aunt Martha stared at her, then smiled.

"Don't talk about yourself as if you were in a legal document, you funny young one!" she said. "And as to giving you a home, why, there's always room for one more. Besides," she went on, and Jacqueline felt dimly the tact and kindness that impelled her, "we haven't any *big* girl to make our family circle complete, and I know you'll be a great help and comfort to us, Caroline."

I'm glad to say that at this moment Jacqueline felt horribly ashamed of the trick she had played on Martha Conway.

"I—I guess so," she mumbled blushingly. "I hope so. I'll try, Aunt Martha."

CHAPTER XII

NEW RELATIONS

Over the covered bridge and into Longmeadow Street the Ford panted, where the limousine some time before had silently and sumptuously rolled. But in Longmeadow Street Jacqueline's way parted from Caroline's. Before they reached the Gildersleeve place they turned to the left into a road of trodden dirt. Soon they had left the well-kept village houses, with their trim lawns and flower-beds, behind them. They drove now through vast level fields which were green with the tops of onions. In the distance were mountains, such as Caroline was studying from her north window. Overhead the blue sky was losing some of its hard brilliance, as the sun jogged downward toward the western hills.

Along the dirt road were strung a few farms, wide apart, with clusters of buildings, houses, barns, and sheds. Around each farmhouse grew trees, beeches and elms and nut-trees. But the road itself was shadeless, running straight as a builder's line between the green and pungent-smelling fields of onions.

"My, but it's hot!" panted Jacqueline.

"You just wait till winter," boasted Nellie. "The wind comes just a-whooping down from the north, and the snow is that high. Last winter I got in a drift up to my waist, going to school. Ralph, he hauls me on my sled but——"

"Tell Caroline about the blizzard later," Aunt Martha interrupted. "Here we are now, and she's got other things to think about."

They turned from the road into a dirt track. On the right was a square old white house, badly in need of paint, with huge bushes of lilac that hid its front door from the road, and elms that towered above the weather-worn dark roof. At the left was untidy grass where red hens scratched among rusty croquet wickets; poplar trees, with a shabby hammock hung between two of them; a swing that lacked a seat, drooping from a butternut tree. Then the car stopped in the irregular plot of trodden dirt at the side-door of the house. A great slab of granite was the doorstone, and round it grew bachelor's buttons and phlox, fenced high with wire to keep out the chickens.

Jacqueline noticed that if they drove on, they would land in a barn, with a wide open door, and beside the barn was a lane, which ran off toward the western mountains, and there was an orchard, and sheds, and a fenced, small cow-yard. She didn't have time for more than a fleeting glimpse.

"Here's Grandma, Caroline," Aunt Martha claimed her attention.

Jacqueline turned her head and saw an old lady come briskly out upon the doorstone. She was weather-brown and small and spry, as they say in New England. She had very dark eyes and a thin, delicate nose, and she was as neat as wax, in a gray alpaca dress, and a big white apron. A little tow-headed boy in blue overalls, who must be Freddie, came trotting at her side, but as soon as he saw Jacqueline, he clutched at Grandma's skirts and hid his head in their folds.

Jacqueline opened the door of the Ford and jumped out.

"How do you do, Mrs. Conway," she began.

"Guess you'd better say Grandma, and have it over with," the old lady said, and kissed her. "My, but you're a fine big girl for ten years old—not a bit spindle-legged like some city children. You come right in now and wash up while they're getting the things out of the car. I got some water hot on the oil stove."

At Grandma's side, with Freddie peeping at her round Grandma's skirts, Jacqueline went into the kitchen of the old Conway house. It was a long room, with many-paneled doors, and windows set with little lights of glass. On the well-scoured floor were mats of braided rags. At one side a huge fireplace had been bricked up, and projecting from what had been its hearth, stood a big cookstove, ornamented with polished nickel, which was quite cold. At the other side of the room, between the windows, was an iron sink with two pumps, and near it a big three-burner oil stove, on which a kettle gently simmered.

"Hard water in the right-hand pump," Grandma rapidly explained to Jacqueline. "Cistern water in the left-hand. Cistern water is good for the complexion—but that will interest you more a few years later. There's the hand basin—don't ever take the tin one—it's for the vegetables. Don't touch that yellow soap—leave it for the dishes and such like. Here's the white soap for your hands, and you'll find the clean roller towel on the closet door."

Why, this was roughing it, thought Jacqueline. She had known nothing like it since she went camping in the Yosemite. She washed her face and hands in a blue enamel basin, with a white lining—soft water from the left-hand pump, warm water from the kettle.

"Don't waste none of it!" warned Grandma. "Martha and Nellie and the boys will want a lick before supper."

She dried her face and hands on the clean, coarse roller towel, and then with great bumping and thumping her trunk (Caroline's trunk!) was brought into the kitchen, and she met Caroline's cousins, who had served as baggage smashers. Of course she knew them at once from their mother's description. The tallest one, with the direct gray eyes like Aunt Martha's and the cowlick, was Ralph, and the thin brown one with the big mouth was Dickie, and the red-head who grinned at her engagingly was Neil. Ralph wore long pants and shirt of khaki and heavy shoes and stockings, but Dickie and Neil were barelegged in sneakers, and their old shirts and knickers, like their hands, might have been cleaner. But they looked nice boys, and even if they hadn't been, Jacqueline wasn't in the least afraid of boys.

She shook hands all round, and then Nellie wished her to look at Annie, the wonderful baby. Off the kitchen was a little bedroom, which had been Grandma's for years and years, and here in a little crib beside Grandma's bed with its white dimity cover, sat Annie. She was a blue-eyed, serious person, in faded pink rompers, and she divided her attention between a string of empty spools and her own toes.

Jacqueline felt sorry for her. Poor baby, with so little to play with! She sat down beside her and dangled the spools before her eyes. Then the serious Annie suddenly gurgled and clutched at them and clapped her hands and laughed, with adorable dimplings. She was more fun than a kitten. No, she wasn't like a kitten. With her firm little body she was much more like a wriggling, happy, affectionate small puppy.

"Bring her along, Caroline," called Grandma, from the kitchen. "Supper's ready."

Jacqueline didn't know much about babies, but she wouldn't admit her ignorance, especially before Nellie. She picked Annie up in her arms, and holding her tight—for to drop her would be more dreadful even than to drop a puppy—she followed Nellie to the supper table.

Jacqueline had rather expected that the Conways, being poor people, would eat in the kitchen, but she found the table laid in the big square room off the kitchen that looked into both the side-yard and the lilac bushes at the front of the house. It was a shabby room, with faded brown wall-paper and a painted floor. There was a well-worn couch in one corner, a wicker armchair, and a couple of rockers, a sewing machine by the side-window, and a whatnot in the farthest corner, filled with school books and farm papers. The table was spread with a checkered red and white cloth, and the dishes were of three or four different patterns. The silver was plated, and the glasses were thick. But the table was neatly set, Jacqueline realized, and everything was spotlessly clean.

Annie sat in a highchair beside Aunt Martha, and Freddie sat on a hassock placed on a chair at Grandma's right hand. Jacqueline sat between Grandma and Dickie. It was Aunt Martha, of course, who brought in the supper. Such a supper Jacqueline had never heard tell of—a huge shortcake, made of two layers of biscuit-dough that must have been baked in the grandfather of all drip pans. Luscious red strawberries, crushed to a pulp and mixed with sugar, were between the layers and oozed their richness, as Aunt Martha cut great squares for her hungry family. Besides the shortcake there was milk for the children, and tea in thin white cups, adorned with jocund green dragons, for Grandma and Aunt Martha. That was all the supper.

Jacqueline looked questioningly round her. Was there nothing else to begin with—or to end with? But her cousins (Caroline's cousins!) were wading into the shortcake, as if it were all that they asked or expected. She took a bite—a large one. Oh, but she found it good!

She looked sidewise at Dickie, and Dickie, with his mouth full, looked at her. She nodded toward the juicy piece of shortcake on the platter that was all ready and waiting for the first child who should ask for a second helping.

"Bet you I'll beat you to it," murmured Jacqueline. Instinct told her that invasions of decorum had best not be shouted aloud in Aunt Martha's presence.

"G'on!" said Dickie softly.

CHAPTER XIII

“CALL ME JACKIE!”

Strawberry shortcake is a bond in common. By the time that supper was over Jacqueline was no longer a stranger to Caroline’s cousins, and when she had shared with them the rather squashy chocolates that still survived in her pockets, they were friends.

“I wish you’d call me Jackie,” she told them. “That’s what they always called me at school.”

“I don’t take much stock in nicknames,” said Aunt Martha. She had such an uncanny way of always being there, although you couldn’t say she snooped.

“I’d feel more at home if you called me Jackie,” Jacqueline suggested artfully.

To that plea Aunt Martha yielded, as Jacqueline had guessed she would.

“All right, then—Jackie. Now you can unpack your trunk. That’ll be chore enough for to-night.”

“But after this Jackie can do the dishes,” suggested Neil teazingly, “because she’s a girl.”

“No, sir,” said Aunt Martha promptly, “you can keep right on doing your share of dishes, because you’re a boy.”

Unpacking the trunk was really chore enough, Jacqueline decided, before she was through. To take even a steamer-trunk up the steep stairs that led from the kitchen was impossible. All Caroline’s possessions had to go in armsful (Jacqueline’s arms!) to the room that she was to share with Nellie.

It was a square room—Nellie thought it a large room—with a bricked up fireplace and a narrow white wood mantel, on which were a china dog, with a basket of matches in his mouth, and a little figure of a boy in a short tunic, kneeling at his prayers. On the walls was a paper strewn with baskets of roses. Unfortunately the paper had been hung upside down, which gave the room a somewhat rakish atmosphere. There were only two pictures, an engraving of a dog, after Landseer, and a resigned-looking Evangeline seated beside a grave. The floor was covered with matting, and there were rag rugs over the thinnest places where the boards showed through. The bed was high and old-fashioned, with a chintz valance. The bureau and the washstand were of black walnut, with marble tops. The chairs were of painted wood, with slatted backs.

Jacqueline could claim for her own two drawers of the bureau, and most of the hooks in the shallow closet, and as no one offered to arrange her things for her, she arranged them herself and took a certain pride in doing so. Only there were so few things in Caroline’s battered trunk; socks for summer and stockings for winter, faded and much darned; undergarments, thinned with frequent washing and set with neat patches; skimpy-looking gingham dresses; one dress of wool that had been dyed; a winter coat, with a collar of worn velvet.

“Try on that coat, Jackie,” bade Aunt Martha, as she turned from straining the milk.

Jacqueline tried it on, and felt that she looked indeed the part of poor child. Such a shabby, outgrown little coat it was. Wasn’t she glad that she was only playing at being Caroline?

“Tut, tut!” clucked Aunt Martha, and frowned. “You must have had that coat at least two seasons. Well, Nellie will grow to it in another year, and we’ve got to get you a new coat for winter, somehow. There’s an old ulster of mine perhaps I could dye and cut over for you. But winter’s some ways off, and we won’t go crossing bridges till we get to ’em.”

Near the bottom of the trunk Jacqueline discovered three pairs of Peggy Janes—overalls such as Aunt Edie would have shrieked aloud to see her wear. She made up her mind to wear them, here at the farm. Maybe she would go barefoot, too—or at least barelegged and in sneakers, like Dickie and Neil.

In the last armful that Jacqueline carried upstairs was a box of Japanese lacquer, tied with an old hair-ribbon. Jacqueline had the curiosity to open it when she was in her room and Nellie’s. Then she wished that she hadn’t. She felt as if she had walked into a room without knocking. There were in the box a few letters, tied up with a bit of worsted, and slipped upon the worsted, and secured with a knot, was a plain gold ring. There were two little pins—not a child’s pins—and a slender chain of gold beads. There was a little pair of scissors, and a bag of crocheted purple silk, which held two spools of fine cotton. There was a tiny fine handkerchief, with the letter C half finished in the corner, and the threaded needle stuck in the place, just as some one had left it. Last of all, wrapped in a piece of white tissue paper, was a small photograph of a lady with gentle eyes and a sweet mouth, like Caroline’s.

Very soberly Jacqueline put back everything as she had found it, and tied up the box, and hid it away in the back of the drawer.

“Those were Caroline’s mother’s things,” she thought, “and she’s dead. I won’t touch ’em again, ever.”

By now it was dusky in the little room, as the long June day came to an end. Aunt Martha trudged up the stair, with a well-trimmed oil lamp in her hand. Behind her lagged Freddie and Nellie.

“I’ll get ’em to bed,” she told Jacqueline. “Freddie sleeps in my room, just across the hall. You go sit in the hammock with the boys. By the time I’m through up here the water will be ready for you to have a bath, and I guess after that long hot journey, you’ll be ready for it.”

So Jacqueline sat out in the shabby hammock under the poplars, in the warm, sweet dusk, and saw the great June stars come out and the distant mountains subside into rims of inky blackness round the silent meadows. She and Neil and Dickie poked and crowded each other fraternally, and Dickie boasted about his hunting trips on the mountain with Ralph, and Jacqueline raged inwardly because, in her part of Caroline, she couldn’t cap his stories with her account of the Yosemite.

At last Aunt Martha called her into the kitchen. There were two kettles on the oil stove, and a big bath towel, worn rather thin, lay over the back of a chair.

“There’s the washroom,” Aunt Martha told Jacqueline, and nodded toward a door at the farther end of the kitchen.

Jacqueline went in. Here were no nickel faucets and no porcelain bath, but just a stationary tub of

shiny zinc, which drained into a pipe that led out of doors. A square, unglazed window, high in the wall, admitted the light from the kitchen, and the heat.

"Oh, what a funny bath!" cried Jacqueline.

"'Tisn't much like what you're used to in the city," said Aunt Martha, as she bustled in with a kettle of steaming water. "But I tell you it seems like Heaven not to have to lug water both ways. I guess if them that say 'cleanliness is next to godliness' had had to winter it once in New England with four young ones, they'd have said cleanliness was next thing to martyrdom."

Two kettles full of hot water went into the tub, and a bucket of cold water that Jacqueline pumped.

"By Saturday night I guess you can do for yourself, same as Neil," Aunt Martha told her approvingly.

Last of all, into the zinc tub one-third full of warm water, went Jacqueline, and soaped and splashed and chuckled and enjoyed herself. A funny bath, indeed! If she had to do it all her life, horrible! But just for two or three days—why, it was a lark.

It was not such a lark though, scrubbing that zinc tub afterward, with a rag and warm water and "Clean-o." She hadn't thought of doing it, till Aunt Martha came in and pointed out that cleaning the tub after you used it had something to do with the Golden Rule.

"I know you won't need to be told twice," said Aunt Martha.

"I guess I won't be here to be told twice," Jacqueline thought resentfully as she scrubbed.

She came out of the washroom, glowing and glowering, in Caroline's nightgown and faded kimono and worn bedshoes.

"You can brush your teeth upstairs," said Aunt Martha, who seemed to find endless last tasks to do in that kitchen, before she should join Grandma with the darning basket, under the big, hot lamp in the dining room. "The hard water for your teeth is in the little pitcher on the washstand."

"I—I——" Jacqueline faced the same difficulty that at about this hour presented itself to Caroline. "You see—I haven't got the toothbrush I had on the train. I must have—lost it."

"Tut, tut!" Aunt Martha clucked again. Then she took heart. "It might have been worse. Better lose your toothbrush than your sweater or your head, for that matter. You'll have to buy you a new one to-morrow. Lucky you didn't spend that half-dollar on foolishness. I'll mix some cooking salt and warm water, and you just rinse your mouth out good. It's the best we can do for now."

Left to herself, Jacqueline would probably have "forgotten" to use the tepid salt and water. But she was not left to herself. Aunt Martha went upstairs with her, and stood over her till the mouthwash was properly and thoroughly applied. Then she tucked her into bed beside Nellie, who grunted sleepily and grudgingly moved over to give the newcomer room.

Having tucked Jacqueline in, Aunt Martha kissed her in a businesslike and somewhat absent-minded way.

"Have a good sleep," she bade, and took the lamp, and went creaking down the stair.

Jacqueline lay in the dark, beneath the sheet, in the room that was warm and breathless. She thought of the zinc tub that she had had to scrub, and the dishes that she should have to wash, and of Aunt Martha, who seemed to have as many rules and standards as if she had dressed in silk and ridden in a limousine, like Great-aunt Eunice.

"I don't like it here," thought Jacqueline. "First thing in the morning I'll hunt up those Gildersleeves."

Nellie beside her turned sleepily and cooed:

"That you, Jackie?"

"Sure!"

"Nice Jackie—kiss me goo' night!"

Jacqueline did so. What a hot little thing Nellie was—but how cunning! That funny baby, too, was a darling, and Freddie, who gurgled when you tickled him. Neil had promised to show her a woodchuck's hole in the morning, and Dickie had boasted about his rabbits.

"It might be worse," Jacqueline reconsidered, "and if I back out, I'll never get another chance to wear Peggy Janes, and cut on behind carts, and be poor and rowdy. I guess now I'm in, I'd better stick it out for a day or two."

CHAPTER XIV

THE END OF A PERFECT DAY

When Caroline woke in the morning, she was surprised to find herself still in the green and golden room with the bookshelves. She had rather expected to find that the house with the dim, cool rooms, and the songful piano, the white and nickel bath and the ladies (not her relatives!) who were so kind and friendly, were all alike the fancies of a dream, and that she was back in Cousin Delia's close little stuffy house, with the smell of frizzled breakfast ham wafting up from the kitchen, and the eldest baby clamoring to be dressed at once.

But the room, she found, was real, and the bath was real. She could almost believe that she was *really* Jacqueline. She only wished she were!

She dressed herself in the henna-colored frock, and she dressed Mildred very carefully, in a little white muslin with pink sprays, most becoming to Mildred's blond beauty. Then she opened her bed to air, and sat down by the window, where she could watch the mountain. In the morning light it was quite different from the mountain of yesterday afternoon. The green of the trees and the red of the exposed sandstone were very sharp in the strong sunlight, and gave the huge pile a spick and span look, as if it had made itself fine for the summer day.

She had put on the little watch which was Jacqueline's, though it seemed almost too nice to wear every day, and the little watch said that it was half past eight, when there came a knock at the door. Caroline flew to open it, and there stood Aunt Eunice, in a cool gray and white lawn.

"Good morning, Aunt Eunice!" cried Caroline. "Oh, how nice you look!"

She reflected then that perhaps she shouldn't have said anything so personal, but Aunt Eunice didn't at all mind. Instead she smiled one of her shining smiles, and there even came a little fleck of pink into her soft old cheeks. She bent to kiss Caroline, and suddenly, because she just couldn't help it, Caroline put her arms round Aunt Eunice and hugged her, and Aunt Eunice hugged her back. You don't know how good that seemed to Caroline. There had been no one to hug her since her mother died. Cousin Delia was a very busy woman, and then, too, alongside the four babies, Caroline doubtless seemed to her quite grown up, and too old to need cuddling.

Hand in hand Aunt Eunice and Caroline went down the long curved stair and through the stately hall into the dining room. Cousin Penelope was already there and the glass coffee machine, which Caroline found as fascinating as any mechanical toy, was distilling an amber-hued, fragrant liquid. They sat down at once to another of those well-ordered meals that filled Caroline with amazement—almost with awe. She hadn't known that food could be so good.

There were great red strawberries, which still wore their green elf caps, and little glass dishes of powdered sugar, into which you dipped the berries daintily, after a swift glance to see how Cousin Penelope did it. Then there were bowls of crisp cereal, with rich cream, and bacon, so thin and so deftly cooked that it crumbled into savory slivers under your fork. There were thin slices of brown toast, piping hot, and there were wee muffins of bran, which came to the table in a silver dish, wrapped cozily in a fine white napkin. There were little balls of fresh butter, and in a bewitching jar, shaped like a beehive, there was strained honey. All the milk to drink, too, that one could want. And would Jacqueline like an egg for her breakfast?

"Thank you, no, please," murmured Jacqueline's understudy, and then, remembering the cold egg that she had lately eaten from the shoe box, she added: "I—I'm not extra fond of eggs."

"Neither am I," Cousin Penelope said heartily.

Funny, thought Caroline, that Cousin Penelope should be so pleased at every resemblance between them, but very nice of her. In time she thought she should like Cousin Penelope, though never so much as she *loved* Aunt Eunice.

After breakfast Aunt Eunice asked Caroline to come walk with her in the garden, and said, yes, she could bring Mildred. So Mildred, in her pink-sprayed frock and white bonnet, and Aunt Eunice and Caroline walked soberly in the shadiest parts of the garden. Aunt Eunice wore a broad hat, tied under her chin with wide streamers of lawn. She paused once to give directions to Frank, who was gardener as well as chauffeur, and much more human in khaki overalls than Caroline had thought him the day before in his imposing uniform.

Aunt Eunice showed Caroline all the special beauties of the garden—her new rosebushes and her old thrifty plot of perennials, the pear trees that later would furnish them fruit more delicious, Aunt Eunice believed, than any they could buy in the shops, and the row of gooseberry bushes, where the berries already were setting in tiny, reddish furry blobs.

At the farther side of the garden they sat down in a little rustic summer house, covered with woodbine. Caroline gazed with all her eyes at the scene before her—the garden with its bright flowers of early summer, blues and pinks and strong yellows, and its fruit trees, with gray-lined leaves of glossy green, its smooth white walks and dark edges of box, and beyond the garden the old white house, with its clustered chimnies, the elms that shaded it, the mountain far beyond, the blue sky over all. She thought it as breathlessly, chokingly lovely in its color and clear outline as the loveliest of the pictures in her room.

But Aunt Eunice looked nearer home. She took up Mildred, and carefully examined her clothes.

"What delicate fine stitches!" she said. "Did you make this dress yourself, Jacqueline?"

"No, Aunt Eunice. I can't sew as well as that." Indeed, thought Caroline with pride, not many people could sew as nicely as her mother, who had made that precious wardrobe of Mildred's, every stitch.

"Do you like to sew?" went on Aunt Eunice, with a little, mysterious smile.

"Oh, yes," said Caroline, truthfully.

There had been long hours in her life, when school was over and Mother away giving music lessons, when she must either run the streets or amuse herself in their room. Mother had beguiled her with

handiwork to choose the room, and not the street. Caroline sewed really rather better than most little girls of her age, and she liked to sew. She wished that Aunt Eunice could see the pair of rompers she had made, all alone, for Cousin Delia's youngest baby.

"I'll tell you what," said Aunt Eunice. "I'll get out some pretty silk pieces, and you and I will make this dolly some new dresses. It's years and years since I've had a doll to sew for. Would you like that, Jacqueline?"

Caroline smiled and patted Aunt Eunice's plump white hand.

"I'd just love it, Aunt Eunice. Can we begin to-day? I don't want to lose any time."

Indeed she didn't, the poor little impostor! She wanted to squeeze all that she could into every moment that she passed in this dream-house. For the moments, as she knew, might already be numbered.

But there was no doll's dressmaking that morning, for just then Sallie came briskly through the garden with a message. Miss Jacqueline's trunk had been sent up, and Miss Penelope wished her to come at once and see about unpacking.

Up in the golden green room, all fresh and ordered for the day, Caroline looked helplessly at the big trunk that was Jacqueline's. When she had got the key from Jacqueline's vanity bag, and Sallie had opened the trunk, and she saw that it opened like a closet, and glimpsed the frocks all hung on frames, she looked more helpless still. She was thankful when Cousin Penelope took charge of things.

"Sit down, Jacqueline," Cousin Penelope bade with decision. "Sallie will unpack, and I'll look things over. It's the quickest way for me to find out what you have and what you haven't, and if you are like most children, I shall need to know."

So Caroline sat down in the rocker, with Mildred on her knee, and in an aloof, cool manner watched the taking out of what seemed to her the princess-like wardrobe that had been wished upon her. There were frocks of organdie and crêpe de chine, of muslin and fine gingham. There were jumpers of tricotine and of jersey, and delicate little frilled blouses of silk. (Privately Caroline wondered where the *everyday* frocks could be!) There were a dozen pairs of shoes and slippers and boots and sandals, all on nice little beribboned trees. There were little coats and sweaters of many colors and all sorts of texture. There were stacks of filmy undergarments, and lapsful of silken socks. There were garters and hair-ribbons and handkerchiefs and silk gloves. There was a lovely little blue leather writing-case, and a jewel-case, and a camera.

Everything in the trunk Caroline, sitting gravely silent, admired with all her heart, except the riding suit. When she saw the little white breeches and the sleeveless brown coat unfolded, her heart sank within her.

"Oh, Cousin Penelope!" she cried in despair. "Have I *got* to ride horseback?"

She was almost in tears. She had never been on a horse in her life. If they put her on one, they'd know in a minute she wasn't Jacqueline, and the piano and the Polish lady would be lost to her forever.

Cousin Penelope came to her side. For the first time Caroline saw her protective and almost tender. She understood it all, did Penelope. That horsy Amazon, Edith Delane, had forced that sensitive, timid little girl, who was *all* Gildersleeve, as any one could see, into riding horseback and doing the athletic feats to which the Delane woman had referred in her letters. Well, the Delane woman was hundreds of miles away, and Penelope was here in charge.

"We arranged for a saddle-horse, as your aunt wished," she told Caroline. "But you are *not* going to ride *at all*, my dear, unless you wish to."

So the horrid specter of a ramping steed was laid at rest, and Caroline went happily through the hours of the day that was brimful of wonders. She played for an hour on the piano. She ate a luncheon that seemed to her grander than most dinners. Then she sat with Aunt Eunice in Aunt Eunice's room, which was furnished with old dark pieces of polished wood, with glass knobs on the drawers. Aunt Eunice had the dearest of work tables, all unexpected drawers and cubbies, and she had a piecebox full of pretties that she could turn into trifles for bazaars—bits of silk and satin, velvet and brocade, quarter-yards of wide figured ribbon, bits of lace and silver tissue, flowers of silk.

Together Aunt Eunice and Caroline planned a sumptuous party frock for Mildred, and they even cut it out and gave her a first fitting, which Mildred endured with more patience than some young ladies display on such occasions.

They did not get beyond the fitting, though, for Cousin Penelope came strolling in, to say that Jacqueline had better dress now. They must be going along to Madame Woleski's.

"Just stop at Miss Crevey's, will you, and get me some thread," bade Aunt Eunice. "I shall need eighty cotton and a spool of sixty, if Jacqueline and I are going into the dressmaking business."

It seemed to Caroline hardly necessary to change her frock. She thought the henna-colored crêpe good enough for almost any occasion. But of course she did not argue with Cousin Penelope. She was terribly afraid lest she might make herself too fine, but she took Cousin Penelope as a guide, just as she did at the table, and she decided that if Cousin Penelope wore a cool muslin, she would wear muslin, too. So she put on a pretty muslin, with small yellow roses on a white ground and yellow flowers of organdie at the ribbon girdle. Her socks were of white silk and her sandals of white kid. From the hatbox she selected a white leghorn, with stalks of yellow wheat and some wee blue flowers round the crown.

She was in two minds about opening the jewel-case. She had the key in Jacqueline's vanity bag, tied fast to the trunk key, but it seemed rather horrid to make free with Jacqueline's jewelry. Still if she didn't wear any, people might suspect she wasn't Jacqueline. So she unlocked the leather case, and marveled at all the pretty pins and chains that she found laid in the little velvet lined drawers. She selected a chain of queer small beads, with flecks of yellow and blue and green in them that would go nicely with the colors in her dress and her hat.

It seemed that she had by chance selected very wisely, for when Cousin Penelope came to look her over, she fairly flushed with pleasure.

"So you put on the beads I sent you," she cried. "That's a very pretty tribute, Jacqueline."

“I—I like them,” stammered Caroline.

“So do I!” said Cousin Penelope, quite merrily. “How many things we have in common!”

This made Caroline feel at home with Cousin Penelope, and they chattered together, quite volubly for two people so shy and self-contained, while they drove through Longmeadow Street to Madame Woleski’s.

The house that the Polish lady had taken for the summer was quite at the farther end of the Street, right under the shadow of the mountain. It was a little, irregular house which had been an artist’s. The living room had a big window on the north side, and the piano was drawn across it. The furniture was old and dingy, and nothing matched with anything else, thought Caroline. There were dark, rich-looking small rugs on the floor, and on the walls were unframed sketches, which seemed to Caroline to look like not much of anything, unless it were the drawings that Cousin Delia’s eldest baby made. But Caroline didn’t know as much about pictures as she knew about music.

Madame Woleski was thin and dark, with an intense face and untidy hair, and long, nervous hands. She smiled at Caroline vaguely and sent her to play in the garden, while she talked with Cousin Penelope.

Caroline didn’t like the garden. She was afraid of hurting Jacqueline’s pretty clothes. But she found a clean bench where she could sit in safety, and then along came a great fluffy cat, the color of an orange, and he was friendly, after a condescending fashion, so she was able to get through the time until she was called into the house.

Madame Woleski wanted Caroline to play for her, and Caroline did so, quite simply. Mother had taught her long ago that when you were asked to play, you either declined with all courtesy, or you sat down and played. There was no excuse for shilly-shallying and waiting to be urged.

Caroline played, and Madame listened, and when the playing was over, a maid brought in a silver tea-service, and they had some crumbly dark fruit cookies, and fragrant strong tea, and tiny slim glasses of cordial. Caroline of course only had cookies. She said, no thanks! to the tea and the cordial, and Madame smiled at her, and offered her some crystallized fruit in a silver box.

“Next time you come, I have milk for you to drink, little one,” she said. “Because you come again. But before you come, you do every day two hours thees exercise.”

She went herself to the piano and showed what “thees exercise” should be, and she told Caroline she might come and play for her in the morning, three days later.

Then the call was ended, and Caroline and Cousin Penelope were rolling away in the limousine from the funny little house, while Madame Woleski, with the orange cat carelessly tucked under her arm, like a piece of fur, nodded them a good-by from her sunken doorstone.

“My dear!” said Cousin Penelope, with real enthusiasm. “Do you realize that you are now a pupil of Woleski’s?”

Caroline nodded solemnly. She was too happy to chatter as she had done on the way to the little house. But she was no happier than Cousin Penelope. For Penelope had loved her cousin, Jack Gildersleeve, and now she had his child, who in spite of everything was like her, here beside her in the car, and she was going to give her what her coarse and stupid Delane relatives, with all their wealth, had failed to give her—the music that she loved and craved!

So completely was Penelope carried away with her vision of Jacqueline some day a great musician, and turning to her—not to the Delanes!—for understanding and sympathy, that they had driven past the shops before she realized it. Then she smiled at her own preoccupation, and told Frank to turn back.

There were only four shops on Longmeadow Street. They stood in the very center of the village, in the shadow of the Orthodox church, and just across the street from the little inn. There was a general store, and the Post Office, where you bought hardware and sundries, and a meat market, which was open only twice a week, and Miss Crevey’s little shop, where you could buy talcum and tape, peppermints and pins, and altogether the funniest mixture of drygoods and druggist’s supplies, confectionery and notions that ever was seen outside the shop that the old sheep kept in the Looking Glass Country.

“Eighty cotton and sixty cotton,” said Cousin Penelope, as she and Caroline, in their cool pretty frocks, stepped out of the limousine. “I’ll get a cube of black pins, too, and some laces for my walking shoes. One ought to encourage the little local shops—they’re a great convenience.”

Caroline smiled, but not at Cousin Penelope’s words. She was smiling at the world. Because she had on a party frock, and was going home to dinner with dear Aunt Eunice, and she was a pupil of Woleski’s.

Smilingly, Caroline tripped up the steps at Cousin Penelope’s side, and into the little crowded shop, and then the smile left her face just the way figures leave a slate when you draw a wet sponge across it. For she saw two children standing at the counter, where the cheap candies were displayed. One was a boy in old knickers and a shabby shirt, the other was a girl in faded Peggy Janes, and Caroline had recognized those Peggy Janes and knew what was coming, even before the girl turned her bobbed brown head and showed the face of Jacqueline Gildersleeve.

CHAPTER XV

TWO PENNIES TO SPEND

Jacqueline waked early on her first morning at the Conway farm. With a rooster crowing under your window, you need no alarm clock, and with a cozy six-year-old at your side, inclined to snuggle on a warm morning, you have no inducements to lie abed.

So Jacqueline jumped up and dressed herself. She put on the Peggy Janes that she had marked with approval the night before, and she slipped her bare feet into Caroline's old sneakers. She washed her face and hands at the marble-topped washstand. The washbasin had a green landscape in the bottom, very pleasant to look at through the clear water, but the pitcher belonged to a different set and was ornamented with purple bands.

Nellie chattered in a lively manner all through the hasty dressing process, mostly about some new kittens and a rooster named General Pershing. She dressed herself very handily, but she didn't scorn Jacqueline's help when it came to the back buttons of her underwaist and overalls.

Early as the children were, they found, when they climbed down the funny steep stairs into the kitchen, that Grandma and Aunt Martha and the babies were up before them.

"That's a nice rig for the country, Jackie," Aunt Martha said approvingly, as she spied the Peggy Janes. "I'm glad you didn't bring any starched up city notions to the farm. There's time and place for everything, of course," she added tolerantly, "but high heeled shoes and frilly dresses don't go with the soil."

Freddie had remembered Jacqueline over night, perhaps because of the piece of shapeless chocolate that she had popped into his mouth. He threw himself upon her with gurgles of greeting.

"He takes to you all right," said Grandma, as she paused with a pan of biscuits in her hand, midway from stove to table. "I wonder now if a smart girl like you couldn't take it on herself to dress him mornings. Every minute counts this time o' day, and your Aunt Martha has her hands full."

"Sure I will," Jacqueline promised airily. She was promising only for a few days—just as few as she chose to make them. And she really did like Freddie. He was more fun than a puppy dog.

"Just pump that pitcher full of water, Jackie, and fill the glasses at the table," Aunt Martha struck in briskly. "Ring the bell, Nellie. Breakfast's about ready."

Nellie sprang on a chair, and took down a big dinner bell from the shelf above the stove. But she didn't ring it at the foot of the stairs to rouse her sleepy brothers—oh, no! She went out on the doorstone in the soft clear morning air, and she clanged that bell as if all Longmeadow Street were burning up.

Very quickly the three boys came scuffling in from the barn and sheds where they had been doing the first chores of the day. They washed hurriedly at the sink—so hurriedly that Aunt Martha sent Neil back to do it all over again. Then they sat down to breakfast in the shabby, homely dining room, that wasn't a bit like the rural interiors that Jacqueline had seen on the stage and in the movies.

There were no frills about that breakfast any more than there had been about the supper. On the table was a big plate of hot raised biscuits, fluffy and light, and a platter of freshly cooked hash, meat and potatoes (more potatoes than meat!) warmed on the stove in what Aunt Martha called a "spider," crisp and brown on the outside, soft and savory within. There was milk for the children, and coffee in a shiny tin pot for Aunt Martha and Grandma. Freddie and Annie had porridge. Aunt Martha fed Annie spoonsful with one hand, and ate her own breakfast with the other.

Both at Buena Vista and at school, fried things and hot breads had been considered unhygienic. Being forbidden, they had always seemed to Jacqueline desirable. She ate two helpings of hash and three biscuits and a half. She wanted to eat four, the same as Dickie did, but she had to give up, beaten. She could chew still, but she couldn't swallow.

"Now you and Nellie see how nice you can clear the table and wash the dishes, and then put the dining room to rights," said Aunt Martha, as if she asked the most natural thing in the world. "Grandma'll be here to oversee. I've got to go down to the ten acre, and see if that Polack is on the job, or just getting over the christening party they had last night at the Corners."

Aunt Martha tied on a straw hat, nodded to her family, and went her competent way. The boys went, too, quite like men of business. In these days of high wages, when Polish farm-hands expected fifty cents an hour, you either let your youngsters work in the fields, or closed up shop and went "on the town," Grandma told Jacqueline, as one who endured what could not be cured. Ralph was as good as a man on the place, she added proudly. He'd be weeding onions now until the sun got too hot. Dickie and Neil would be working in the vegetable garden, which supplied the family table and a few good paying customers on Longmeadow Street.

"They'll be hungry as horses by noon," said Grandma. "I guess I'll flax round and stir 'em up some gingerbread."

Grandma seemed chief cook of the establishment. Already she had baked a batch of bread since she got up, and had dried-apple pies to pop into the oven, and a piece of meat—to Jacqueline it looked mostly bone and gristle—simmering on the back of the stove, lest it spoil in the hot weather. She now mixed gingerbread, as spry as you please, and meantime gave directions about putting Annie outside in the baby pen, and taking the table-leavings to the hens, and setting another kettle of hot water to boil.

"You'll need some rinsing water or your dishes will be streaked," she told Jacqueline. "There's a right way and a wrong way to do everything, even dishes, and it's just as easy to do it right as wrong." Jacqueline didn't mind, for one day only. She thought dish washing rather a game. She and Nellie brought the things out from the dining room.

"Take the tray," said Grandma, "and bring a lot at a time. Always made your head save your heels."

Then they rinsed the milky glasses, and they scraped the plates. Jacqueline was going to add to the

scraps for the hens the bit of hash that was on the platter, but Grandma stopped her with a gesture of positive horror.

"Mercy, child! Don't throw away good clean victuals, even if the war *is* over. Put it in that clean little cracked dish. It'll warm up nice and tasty for somebody's supper. The butter goes in that stone jar. Let those biscuits cool before you put 'em into the bread box. Never shut up hot bread in a close box, or it'll spoil on you."

What a lot of things to remember, thought Jacqueline! This was more exciting than mental arithmetic.

She washed the dishes just as Grandma told her, and Nellie wiped them painstakingly. First they did the glasses, then "the silver"—poor plated ware that it was!

"Be sure to get the tines of the forks clean," cautioned Grandma. "And remember, when we have eggs, not to plump your silver and your dishes into hot water, or you'll cook the egg right to 'em. Wash eggy things first in cold water, always." After the silver, came the plates and the cups, and last of all "the calicoes," as Grandma called the cooking dishes. Then the dish pan must be scalded, and the dish towels set to boil upon the stove, and while they were boiling, Jacqueline brushed up the dining room, rather an amateurish job, but Grandma said she took hold handily. Then Jacqueline and Nellie, each with a big square of soft cloth, dusted the dining room furniture, and last of all, they hung their dish towels out in the warm sun to dry.

By that time Jacqueline had had enough of housework. She was ready to say so, and to quit right then and there. But Grandma said:

"You're a big help, Jackie. Your aunt's awful busy outside, and I'm not as quick on my feet as I was. Some days it seems like I'd never get through step-stepping."

Well, when a little old lady says a thing like that to you, of course you can't flop down on the dining-room couch with a story paper and leave her to work all alone. So while Nellie kept an eye on Freddie and Annie, Jacqueline went upstairs with Grandma and did the chamber work and had her first lesson in bed-making. As there were four beds, besides Freddie's crib, she had had quite a lot of practice by the time they finished.

"Make a handsome bed, you'll get a handsome husband, they used to tell me when I was a girl," chuckled Grandma. "You want to do your best, Jackie, unless you aim to be one o' these new women that get along without men folks."

After the beds were made, Jacqueline and Nellie each had a piece of gingerbread, and they took two big pieces for Dickie and Neil, and went out to them in the garden. It was quite a big garden, with poles of beans and rows of peas, trained up on dry bushes, tomato plants and cucumber vines, beets and lettuce, squash and pumpkins. But there were no onions. You got onions by the peck out of the great fields that spread all round the farm. For the Conways, like their neighbors, put all their land into onions, and on the price of onions their fortunes hung.

They dined at noon at the Conway farm, and dinner was all of cold things, so as not to heat the kitchen in the middle of the day. There was ready cooked cereal, and a pitcher of milk. There were great slices of home-made bread, with home-made plum jam. (Jacqueline had gone down with Grandma into the deep cold cellar where the food was kept, and she had seen the shelves where the jars of home-canned fruits and vegetables lived. Next time she could go down herself and save Grandma's old legs.) There was cottage cheese, and lettuce, and sliced tomatoes. There was gingerbread—all the gingerbread that any one could wish to eat.

After the dinner dishes were cleared away and left to be washed at night when it was cooler, Aunt Martha and Grandma sat down to sew and mend for their big family.

"We'll have to count on you to do your own mending," Aunt Martha told Jacqueline. "But you just run out to the barn now, and play."

Jacqueline went. She wanted to see those kittens. She also wanted to try some hazardous stunts that she had thought up, as soon as she had seen the beams and ladders in the barn. Neil and Nellie came with her, and Dickie presently joined them. Of course Dickie could do acrobatic feats that none of them could equal. But Jacqueline felt she did pretty well at balancing on her hands for the first time, and she could put her ankle behind her neck as well as any of them.

She thought they had been playing only the least little while, but really it was in the middle of the afternoon when the big bell rang. They scampered at once to the house. That was the law of the farm: always run when you hear the bell, or you may miss something you wouldn't like to miss.

Aunt Martha was on the doorstone, talking to a bearded man in a muddy Ford.

"Hurry up!" she called, as soon as the children came within earshot. "Here's Mr. Griswold driving up to town and he has room for two. Get your purse, Jackie. Here's a chance to buy you that toothbrush. Neil, you can go with her and show her the way home. You'll have to hoof it back, unless you find somebody coming down to the Meadows that will give you a lift."

Adventure beckoned! Jacqueline thought nothing of the walk through the dust in the heat. She flew upstairs and got Caroline's shabby purse, and flew down again. Perhaps where they were going, she could get a soda, one for herself and one, of course, for Neil.

Aunt Martha must have read her thoughts.

"Now don't you go wasting that money," she ordered. "You ought to get you a brush for fifteen cents at Miss Crevey's. You bring back thirty-five cents."

"Oh, Aunt Martha!" protested Jacqueline.

"Don't you forget what I say." Aunt Martha fixed Jacqueline with gray eyes that looked her through and through. "Jump in now. Mr. Griswold's waiting."

Jacqueline didn't stop to argue. She jumped in, and Neil jumped in beside her, and away they rattled with the friendly neighboring farmer, through the hot-smelling fields of green onions. As they rattled along, a heartening thought came to Jacqueline. She had fifty cents in her purse, and two pennies. Aunt Martha had said nothing about the pennies. She could spend them. She didn't quite know what you could get for two cents, that was good, but there must be something.

Mr. Griswold put down his little passengers at the Orthodox church in Longmeadow Street. He was

going on to Northford himself to get a young pig in a crate.

"Now show me the shop," Jacqueline bade Neil. She had taken command of him, much as she had taken command of Caroline. "And I've got two pennies to spend as I please."

"Gee!" said Neil. "That's great."

He meant it, too. Jacqueline looked at him in wonder. She counted her spending money usually, when she troubled herself to count it at all, in dimes and quarters, never in copper pennies.

They went into Miss Crevey's shop. A funny little shop Jacqueline thought it, and she thought Miss Crevey with her false front, and her ill-fitted false teeth, and her alpaca sleeves, was like a character in a story book. They got the toothbrush readily enough—that part of the shopping was simple and uninteresting. But to spend the precious two pennies was different. There was such a choice of things for a penny—a tiny glass measure of hard red and white candies—or a stick of gum—or two large white peppermints—or a stick of striped candy. Jacqueline wanted the gum very much, for at home she had never been allowed to chew it. But Neil, she could see, hungered for a dreadful confection of molasses, imperfectly covered with chocolate.

"We'll get both," suggested Jacqueline.

"Well—you see——" Neil hesitated. "If we get all those little jiggers for a penny, we'll have something to take home to the kids."

Jacqueline looked at him and slowly reddened. She hadn't thought of the kids. Indeed she had thought two pennies hardly big enough to divide between two children, let alone five. But Neil had thought of the younger ones.

"We'll have that chocolate stick, please," Jacqueline told Miss Crevey with sudden generous resolve, "and a glass dingus of the little jigs. After all, I don't care for gum."

And just as she said the words, she heard the door creak open behind her and she turned her head. There on the threshold stood a prim lady in a white summer frock, and with her a little girl in a posy-strewn muslin (Jacqueline's muslin!) who looked as scared as if she had seen a ghost, and the little girl, of course, was Caroline!

CHAPTER XVI

A FAIR ENCOUNTER

For poor little Caroline the moment was tragic.

Quite sincerely she expected Jacqueline to step up to her and say in a loud voice:

"*I* am Jacqueline, and you are Caroline. Take off that dress of mine, and go away with this horrid little staring red-haired boy. *I* shall go home with Cousin Penelope in the limousine."

What else could Caroline expect? Why *should* any living child continue to wear clumsy, hateful Peggy Janes, with patches, too, when she could have a beautiful muslin, with yellow roses? No, Jacqueline surely would never go on with the deception, now that she saw with her own eyes the glories of which she had deprived herself!

But to Jacqueline the encounter that to Caroline was tragic seemed downright funny. To think of her, standing there in Caroline's Peggy Janes, and Caroline in her muslin, and that prim-looking Cousin Penelope (whom Jacqueline disliked at sight!) innocently lavishing attention on the wrong child. So good a joke it was that Jacqueline wanted it to last a little longer, and she was afraid that Caroline, with her shocked face, was going to give it all away.

So the moment Cousin Penelope spoke to Miss Crevey—and she spoke to her almost instantly, for the two children had taken stock of each other in far less time than it has taken to tell—Jacqueline edged up alongside Caroline.

"Hello!" she spoke softly, like a child who wanted to scrape acquaintance.

Caroline stared at her dumbly. Her lips quivered. If she should begin to bawl, she certainly *would* spill the beans, thought Jacqueline, and acted with a wisdom that was almost inspired.

"My name is Caroline Tait," said Jacqueline, slowly and emphatically. Like the Ancient Mariner, she held Caroline with a glittering eye.

Caroline drew a fluttering breath—the first she had drawn since her eyes fell on the Peggy Janes. If Jacqueline said that, why, perhaps Jacqueline meant still to keep on being Caroline!

"I live at my aunt's farm, down to the Meadows," went on Jacqueline calmly. "What's your name?"

"C-C——" clucked Caroline helplessly, and quailed before Jacqueline's furious eye. "C—Jacqueline," she achieved the name with something like a sneeze.

Cousin Penelope suddenly became aware of the by-play going on at her elbow. She turned and looked coldly at the dusty little girl in the uncouth, shabby clothes, who had been so rude as to address her darling. Caroline trembled, just as she had trembled when she first saw Cousin Penelope. But Jacqueline looked up at Cousin Penelope coolly and without terror, and even with her chin slightly tilted.

"Hello!" she addressed the august lady.

Cousin Penelope's violet eyes looked through Jacqueline, quite as if she hadn't been there. Then she turned with a smile to Caroline.

"Come, Jacqueline," she addressed Jacqueline's substitute. "You must help me buy this thread."

Deliberately she turned her back on Jacqueline, and made Caroline turn with her, as if she snatched her little charge from contamination.

Jacqueline laughed outright. It was rude and horrid of her, although Cousin Penelope had herself been rude. But Jacqueline really hadn't meant to laugh. Only Cousin Penelope struck her as funny, and the whole situation, too, was funny.

A slight flush rose to Cousin Penelope's cheeks. Of course it was foolish to let one's self be annoyed by the bad manners of a country child.

"Who is that bold little girl?" she asked Miss Crevey.

Her voice was louder than she meant it to be, or Jacqueline's ears were sharper. Jacqueline overheard, and hugged herself for joy, the naughty thing!

"It's one of the Conway children from down in the Meadows," lisped Miss Crevey, as she tied up the little parcel of thread and pins. "Call again, Miss Gildersleeve. Sorry I didn't have no shoelaces, but people buy 'em off me so fast I jes' give up keepin' 'em."

Cousin Penelope nodded graciously, and with the parcel in one hand and Caroline's limp fingers clasped in the other, walked out of the shop. When they were once more shut in the limousine, away from the vulgar herd, she turned to Caroline and saw that she was quite pale and trembling.

"You don't like strangers, do you, any more than I," Cousin Penelope said sympathetically.

Caroline nodded. She really didn't know what else to do.

"That was a very rude, coarse, pushing little girl," Cousin Penelope spoke with more heat than she realized. "I don't want you to have anything to do with such people. She belongs to a quite ordinary family down in the Meadows—and blood, you know, will always tell."

She smiled as she said the words. How blood *had* told in this charming little quiet girl beside her, who was all Gildersleeve! Cousin Penelope smiled and was glad when she saw Caroline smile at last in answer.

"You know there are some nice little girls, here in town," said Cousin Penelope. "As soon as you feel at home with us, I'll give a little party for you and ask them to meet you."

"Oh-h!" cried Caroline softly, a real little trill of rapture. She had never had a party in her life, nor expected to have one. How good Cousin Penelope was to her, and Jacqueline, too, who was going to keep on with this precious play! The world was beautiful once more, as beautiful as it had been when she went into Miss Crevey's shop. All the way home she chattered again, almost volubly, with kind Cousin Penelope.

While Caroline was rolling homeward to The Chimnies in the limousine, Jacqueline was trudging along the same road on foot. She and Neil had made their purchases. The little red and white candies, in the bag that Jacqueline had insisted upon having, in spite of Miss Crevey's grumbling, were in the

breast pocket of the Peggy Janes. The stick of candy was in the stomachs of Jacqueline and Neil, all except that portion of the moist chocolate that was round their mouths. Neil went in manful silence, lost in pleasant memories of the departed sweet. But Jacqueline now and again chuckled to herself.

"What you snickering at?" Neil challenged at last.

"Aw, nothing," said Jacqueline.

"Only fools laugh at nothing."

"Well," said Jacqueline unabashed, "*I* was laughing at a fool. Where does she live?"

"Who?"

"That stuck up old thing, Miss Gildersleeve, that we saw in the shop. Gee! I'd hate to have her bossing me."

"She's an old hen," said Neil. "You'd ought to 'a' heard her bawl me out, time I run acrost her old lawn with the cream Mother forgot to leave. Mother won't like it though if you sass her."

"I will if I like," Jacqueline answered calmly. "Where does she hang out?"

"We're most there now," said Neil. "It's that big white house with the hedge."

"Shucks!" said Jacqueline. (She had added to her vocabulary already at the farm.) "That isn't half as big as Buena Vista."

"What's Boona Vister?"

To herself Jacqueline said: "You most put your foot in it that time!" Aloud she told Neil airily: "Oh, it's a place where I was once."

"Is it like the amusement park at the Pines with the puzzle-house?" Neil asked hopefully. "I was there once."

"Something like, I guess," Jacqueline answered vaguely.

She was busy staring at the Gildersleeve place, as they skirted the tall hedge. The sort of place where you mustn't step on the lawn or pick the flowers. The sort of house where there wouldn't be enough sunshine, and you must walk softly. She thought of Cousin Penelope, who had snubbed her, and she made the sort of face she was going to practice now for Cousin Penelope's benefit. Then she thought of Caroline, the dear little silly, and she chuckled again.

"Aw, say," said Neil, "you got bats in your belfry?"

"I'll say I have—not," Jacqueline threw off, with cheerful unconcern.

Wasn't it funny that Caroline should have put on the muslin with the yellow roses? Jacqueline hated that dress above all dresses. She had only brought it in her trunk because Aunt Edith, who had selected the dress, had made her. She hated the floppy hat, too, and those nasty old green and blue and yellow beads of Cousin Penelope's that it always made her feel seasick just to look at. If she had claimed her rightful place that Caroline was filling, she might have had to wear those odious clothes. Hateful clothes and bossy old Cousin Penelope, against dish washing and bed making. On the whole she preferred the latter—for a time.

"Hey! Hey!" Neil suddenly broke in upon her reverie with a mighty yell.

A bronzed raggedy man in a little truck, which was creeping past them on a flat tire in a scuff of dust, heard the call and checked his clumsy vehicle.

"Come on!" Neil cried to Jacqueline.

She didn't pause to ask any questions. She flew at his heels across the wide green sward that skirted the sidewalk, and into the dust of the road. She swarmed after him in the accommodating Peggy Janes, up into the body of the truck. Here was a heap of dusty sacks on which she dropped herself at his side.

"Gee! This is luck," Neil panted. "It's John Zabriski that used to work for Father. He's got the farm the other side of ours. He'll take us all the way home."

Jacqueline stretched herself upon the dirty sacks. The dust was rising round them in a golden cloud as the truck rolled down Longmeadow Street. The branches of the elms met overhead, and through them, as she lay on her back, she gazed into the unfathomable cobalt of the sky. There would be creamed codfish for supper, and Johnny-cake, and dried-apple pie. She had heard Grandma and Aunt Martha planning the meal. She could scuffle in the hammock with Neil and Dickie, in the warm, star-set evening, and tomorrow she meant to walk the highest beam in the barn. No one to forbid her—no one to remind her to be a lady—no starched and stuck up Cousin Penelope to give her orders.

"Gee!" murmured Jacqueline. "This sure is the life!"

CHAPTER XVII

OVER THE TEACUPS

Caroline and Aunt Eunice sat in the summer house, making doll clothes. The weather, like the Little Bear's porridge, was neither too hot nor too cold, but just right. A little breeze made the flowers in the garden curtsy like so many tall belles, arrayed in bright hues for a merrymaking at the court of the fairies. That was what Caroline told Aunt Eunice. She found it easy to tell Aunt Eunice all sorts of things.

Aunt Eunice sat in a cushioned wicker armchair, which Frank had brought out for her, and Caroline sat in a low rocker. Mildred sat on the bench at their elbow, lightly clad in a lace-edged camisole and snowy French drawers. She bore herself with the fine dignity and indifference that a queen of the ancient régime surrounded by her ladies in waiting would have shown in the like circumstances.

Aunt Eunice was frilling lace into a tiny sleeve. Caroline was setting her finest stitches in the hem of a silken skirt of peacock blue.

"When her new clothes are made, Aunt Eunice," said Caroline, in her sweet, serious little voice, "I think we should let her go on a long journey to wonderful places."

"I think so, too," Aunt Eunice assented.

"Where should you like to go, Mildred?" asked Caroline. "To the Snow Queen's palace in the cold, blue, frozen north? We are going to make you a cunning cape of black velvet with a white fur collar, and I'm sure it would be greatly admired by the snow elves. Only there are great silvery bears at the North Pole and they might fancy you for a tit-bit, my poor darling. I suppose, Aunt Eunice, they must get tired of eating just seals and Esquimaux and so on."

"I'm sure *I* shouldn't relish an Esquimau," said Aunt Eunice.

"Then you shall go south, Mildred," said Caroline. "After all, most of your clothes are of silk and muslin, and better for a warm climate. You can go to the Isles of Greece where burning Sappho loved and sang."

Aunt Eunice looked up from the tiny sleeve, and lifted her brows, never so slightly.

"Where did you ever hear of Sappho, child?"

"It was in my reader at school," Caroline explained, "and long before that, when I was little, I had a gray kitten and her name was Sappho. Were you ever in the Isles of Greece, Aunt Eunice?"

"No, dear."

"Oh!" said Caroline, disappointed. "You've been most everywhere else. Well, let's send Mildred to Italy, where the citrons are, and bandits, and beggars, and Pompeii. Oh, Aunt Eunice, won't you tell Mildred and me how you went to Pompeii on your wedding journey?"

The little smile brightened on Aunt Eunice's soft old face.

"Why, Jacqueline, dear, you must be sick of the story of my wedding journey. In the fortnight you've been here, you've heard it thirteen times at least."

"Fourteen times would be one for every day in the week," Caroline suggested, with a twinkle in her brown eyes that were usually so grave. "Oh, do tell me again, Aunt Eunice! I love to hear about strange, beautiful places. When I shut my eyes at night I see them just as you tell them, and I go to sleep and dream I am there."

Aunt Eunice looked at the glowing little face of her companion.

"You'd like to go to Italy, Jacqueline?"

Caroline nodded.

"I want to ride in a gondola on a blue lagoon," she said, "and see the Alpine glow, and a castle on the Rhine, and walk in those streets of old ancient houses in Paris where Notre Dame is that you tell about."

Aunt Eunice paid close attention to her stitches.

"Of course," she said, after a pause, "you'll go abroad some day soon with your Aunt Edith."

Caroline gave a quick little sigh. Oh, if only she need not be made to remember, every now and then, that she was not—could not be—Jacqueline!

"I suppose perhaps I shall," she said, since she must say something.

To herself Aunt Eunice said indignantly that it was clear enough that Edith Delane had starved the soul of this sensitive, beauty-loving child.

"If only I could show her Venice!" thought Aunt Eunice, and then, in her turn, she gave a quick little sigh. She had waited ten years to have Jack's little daughter with her for a summer. She might have to wait another ten years, before the boon was granted her a second time. In ten years more Aunt Eunice would be eighty-one. Too old for long journeys. No use for her to plan!

So Aunt Eunice and Caroline, each for good reasons of her own, lapsed into a silence as deep as Mildred's, and not so sunny. It was fortunate perhaps that just at that moment Cousin Penelope joined them. She carried a shallow, woven basket in which were three cups and saucers of egg-shell thinness, and silver spoons, worn smooth with age, a glass dish of wafer-like slices of lemon, stuck with whole cloves, and another dish of crystallized dates. Behind her came Sallie, with the teapot in its queer wadded Japanese basket, like an old lady church-ward borne in Colonial days, and a light wicker stand of three baskets, each with its own brand of goodies wrapped in a white napkin—crisp buttered toast, wee sandwiches of orange marmalade and of cream cheese, and tiny nut-cakes, coated with caramel frosting.

Caroline sprang up to help Sallie place the folding table, and spread the embroidered white cloth that she carried on her arm, and set out the tea. Aunt Eunice folded her work neatly. Cousin Penelope drew up a chair. Only Mildred was idle, but she wore her idleness like a grace, and no one ever thought of rebuking her.

In the oblique light that filtered through the leaves of woodbine into the summer house, Aunt Eunice

and Cousin Penelope and Caroline took their tea. It would have been just like every tea they had taken in the last fortnight, if Caroline had not ventured on a crystallized date. A moment later there rippled across her face a little wave of discomfort, which did not escape Cousin Penelope. Strange how quick Cousin Penelope was—even quicker than Aunt Eunice—to note any change in Caroline!

"What's the matter, Jacqueline?" she asked promptly.

"Nothing, Cousin Penelope."

"You surely don't make faces for the fun of it?"

"Don't tease the child, Penelope," struck in Aunt Eunice.

"Mother, please! I want to know. These involuntary twitchings in a child mean something, always. I've been reading Stanley Hall."

"Very recently, Penelope?"

"In the last week, Mother. Tell me, Jacqueline. There! Your face twitched again."

"It isn't anything really, Cousin Penelope," pleaded Caroline. "I didn't mean to—I'm sorry. It was the sugar on the date—and my tooth——"

"Which tooth?"

Caroline almost jumped, so peremptory was Cousin Penelope's voice.

"The one with the hole in it," she faltered, "but it's been there ever so long."

"Well!" said Cousin Penelope.

Further words failed her. She looked at Aunt Eunice. Aunt Eunice looked at her. Volumes of accusation of Edith Delane were in those looks. A woman, according to the Gildersleeve code, might as well neglect a child's immortal soul as neglect its teeth.

"We won't waste time with any of these local dentists," Cousin Penelope broke the silence in which Caroline sat quaking. "I shall take Jacqueline down to Boston early in the morning. It promises to be a fine day. We'll take the car. I'll have Dr. Stoddard look her over. If he won't take her himself, he can tell me of some dentist who makes a specialty of children."

But this was awful, thought Caroline. Dentistry was fearfully expensive. Cousin Delia had said so, when Caroline's tooth had first begun to trouble her. And now here was Caroline letting Jacqueline's relatives give her dentistry that was meant for Jacqueline. There were tears in the little girl's voice as she pleaded hopelessly:

"But I don't want to go to a dentist—don't make me, please! My tooth doesn't hurt much—I'm used to it and——"

"That means the nerve is dying," said Cousin Penelope, in a solemn voice. "Of all the criminal neglect!"

"Hush, hush!" warned Aunt Eunice.

Caroline took out her handkerchief (Jacqueline's handkerchief!) and wiped her eyes.

"Jacqueline, dear," said Cousin Penelope awkwardly. She moved closer to Caroline and actually put her hand on her shoulder. "I wasn't angry with you. I was thinking of something else, if I spoke sharply."

"*Must* I go to the dentist?" persisted Caroline.

"But we'll do more than go to the dentist," urged Cousin Penelope. "Listen, dear, we'll go shopping. We'll buy all the things for the party I promised you—invitations, and favors, and prizes. We'll select the candies and the ices. Why, we'll plan the whole party on this trip, and shop for it."

Caroline looked at her, with wet eyes. One word of the truth, and she would save herself from being dentistried under false pretenses. But she would say farewell to the piano, and Madame Woleski, and the party. Caroline was going on eleven, and she had never had a party.

"I d-don't mind the dentist," she assured Cousin Penelope, with a watery smile. "You're very good about the party. I shall love to go to Boston with you."

Cousin Penelope smiled at Aunt Eunice, who smiled back. They wouldn't have admitted, even to their own consciences, that they smiled a little for triumph over Edith Delane, as well as for pleasure at the pleasure they gave the supposed Jacqueline. And Caroline smiled to herself, as she dried her eyes, because she thought of her party. Mildred, you see, with her fixed, calm smile was the only one of the four who knew the situation upside down and inside out and roundabout, and who was able therefore to smile tolerantly and perhaps a little compassionately at them all.

CHAPTER XVIII

OVER THE DARNING BASKET

On that fine summer afternoon, neither too hot nor too cold but just right, when Caroline sewed her silken seam and dreamed of foreign lands, Jacqueline sat in the shabby hammock in the Conways' scuffed-up side-yard, and darned stockings.

"I know now," murmured Jacqueline, "why the worst thing you can say of anything is 'darn it!'"

There were not a great many stockings, for the little Conways, and Jacqueline, too, went barelegged as much as possible, but every stocking had at least one hole, and often the holes came in places that had been darned before. Then you must be most particularly careful not to do the dull work hurriedly and leave rough places that would blister tender heels and little toes.

"There's a right way and a wrong way to do everything," said Grandma Conway, as she pulled out the threads that Jacqueline in her haste had drawn all puckery. "It's as easy to do it right as wrong."

Jacqueline pouted a little as she took back the ugly brown stocking, with her work all undone, but none the less she wove her needle carefully in and out of the frayed threads, as Grandma expected her to do. For Jacqueline, you see, liked Grandma, as she had never liked the teachers or the governesses that she had always managed to "get round." You couldn't "get round" Grandma, any more than you could "get round" a bas-relief. And if she made you do your work just so, she treated the boys in the same fashion. There was no partiality at the Conway farm.

So Jacqueline darned stockings on that sunny afternoon, and Grandma, in the worn rocker that Jacqueline had dragged out for her, patched garments already so often patched that you had to hunt to find the original fabric. Great wafts of warm, odorous air came from the acres of onions. The bees were murmurous about their squat, white hives. A woodpecker tapped in the tree above Jacqueline's head. Then with a great clatter an ancient Ford came bounding along the dirt road and vanished ultimately in a cloud of silvery dust.

"My land," chuckled Grandma, and her old eyes twinkled behind her steel-bowed spectacles. "Wouldn't our great-grandfathers have had a conniption fit, if they'd seen a thing like that go rattlety-banging through the Meadows? They'd have jailed somebody for witchcraft, sure enough. 'Carriages without horses', same as old Mother Shipton prophesied."

"Weren't they cruel and stupid in those old times?" said Jacqueline, with her mind still full of the slaughterous doings and inhuman punishments of "The Prince and the Pauper." "Think of anybody being silly enough to think some poor old woman was a witch!"

"Well, perhaps we wouldn't have done much better, if we'd been living then," said Grandma tolerantly. "You've got to judge folks according to their circumstances. Now take those old, ancient folks, living here on the edge of what was then a howling wilderness, and not knowing what might pop out on 'em any minute—a catamount, maybe, or like as not a painted Indian, with a scalping knife. You can't blame 'em if their nerves got kind of raw, and they began to see things that weren't there and believe things that weren't so, and then raise the cry of 'Witch!' and go persecuting some poor neighbor."

"Were there really ever any Indians here in Longmeadow?" asked Jacqueline, round-eyed. That there should have been Indians in the wild California canyons and in the somber deserts she could easily believe, but this New England village, with its orderly meadows and its well-trained elms, seemed the last place where gruesome tragedy could ever have been staged.

"Well, I guess there was a few, off and on," said Grandma placidly. "Didn't your Pa, and he a Longmeadow boy, ever tell you 'bout old Aunt Hetty Tait, that was your ever so many times great-grandmother?"

With conviction Jacqueline shook her head. How should she ever have heard of Caroline's ancestresses?

"Well, now!" said Grandma pityingly, and wiped her spectacles.

"Tell me, please—please!" cried Jacqueline, bouncing up and down in the aged hammock.

"Land sakes, child, it's lucky that hammock is strung up good and strong, or you'd come down ker-flummocks! Just you go on with your darning, whilst I tell you what there is to tell. 'Taint much. Hetty Tait wasn't aunt to anybody then, nor was she old. She was a young, blooming girl from down river, born in Allingham, that Nathan Tait fetched here a bride, when first this settlement was made. Their farm was up to the north end of town, and the woods ran right down into their pasture land. One day Hetty was making soft soap at the big fireplace in the kitchen, with her two babies asleep in the cradle right at hand."

"Grandma! Don't say anything happened to the babies!" cried Jacqueline, with a swift thought of Annie's golden head.

Sphinx-like, Grandma went on:

"It was a balmy day in spring, and the door stood wide open. Nathan Tait had gone into town. Hetty was alone on the place. All at once, though she hadn't heard a sound, she sensed she wasn't alone. She whirled round quick as scat, and lo and behold you! there was a great big six-foot savage, with a scalp tied to his belt and a knife in his hand, just stepping cat-footed into her kitchen, and his eyes on her babies."

"Go on, Grandma! Go on, or I'll scream!"

"That's just what Hetty didn't waste time a-doing, Jackie. Quicker 'n you can say Jack Robinson, she scooped up the scalding hot soap in the great huge ladle she had in her hand, and let drive fair and square at the Indian's face. He didn't linger after that. He took out at the door, and Hetty bestowed another ladleful upon his naked back, to speed his footsteps. Then she double barred the door and took down her husband's fowling piece and kept watch till her husband's return, not knowing, of course, whether he would return, or whether he'd be ambushed on the road from town, as many a

man was in those old days. You can't blame those folks, Jackie, if they were sort of hard. Life wasn't what you might call soft with them."

"I'll play that game to-morrow," Jacqueline announced with snapping eyes. "I'll be Hetty, and Freddie and Annie can be the babies, and Neil shall be the Injun—only of course I'll throw cold water on him, not hot soap. It won't hurt him really, Grandma."

"I'll trust Neil to take care of himself," chuckled Grandma.

The peace of the hot afternoon, murmurous with bees, descended again upon the side-yard. Jacqueline's eyes were thoughtful.

"And did that all happen really right here in Longmeadow?"

"Just as sure as you're a-sitting in that hammock, Jackie."

"Tell me some more about those old times—ah, please do!"

"Not now, Jackie. Sun's getting low and I must mix up a batch of Johnny-cake for supper."

With a sigh Grandma began to fold away the little overalls that she had not yet finished patching.

"Let me make the Johnny-cake," Jacqueline offered suddenly. "I did it day before yesterday, and you telling me what to do. Let me try it alone! Please!"

Grandma considered for a second.

"The receipt is all written out in the brown book back of the clock," she said. "Mind you flour the pan after you've greased it, and don't be too lavish with the sugar."

"I will—I won't," Jacqueline made two promises almost in one breath.

In her worn sneakers (Caroline's sneakers!) she flashed away into the big, tidy kitchen. Corn-meal in the big tin, eggs and butter from the cool cellar. Milk in the blue and white pitcher. Sugar in the brown crock. She was going to cook! At school, in cooking class, in a neat ruffled apron, with aluminum and white-enamel bowls, and spoons of approved pattern, she had made apricot-whip and fudge. But now in the Conway kitchen, with a yellow mixing bowl and an iron spoon, she really made something that her family would like to eat, and she sang joyously as she measured and stirred.

She had two big pans of Johnny-cake in the oven that she had craftily heated, and she wasn't looking at them more than twice every five minutes, when the family began to gather. First came Nellie, leading Freddie, and asking if supper wasn't most ready, and Jacqueline, quite as if she ran the house, so important she now felt, told Nellie to wash her hands and Freddie's, too, before she thought of supper. Then came Grandma, to take up Annie and freshen her against mealtime, and then the family Ford came gallantly into the yard, and here were Aunt Martha and Neil, back from Baring Junction, with three sacks of grain.

"Oh, Aunt Martha!" Jacqueline bounded to meet her. "Supper's ready, and I made the Johnny-cake all alone, and fixed the oven by myself."

And do you know, Caroline with her party in prospect, felt no happier than Jacqueline felt, when tired, dusty Aunt Martha (who wasn't her aunt!) smiled at her and said:

"Well, of all things! You got the supper yourself? You spelled Grandma? I guess my bones were all right, Jackie, when they said you were the sort that would be a real little helper in the house."

CHAPTER XIX

THE PRICE OF TEMPER

But all the days at the Conway farm were not like the day that ended in a blaze of glory, with praises and hot Johnny-cake. No more than a week later there came a day when everything went crooked.

Perhaps Jacqueline got out of bed on the wrong foot. Perhaps she was thinking too much of a pile of story papers, which she had unearthed in the shed chamber, and too little of her work. Perhaps it was simply that she had grown tired of the rôle of Caroline—even of a virtuous Caroline, who was a help and comfort in the house, and bossed the younger children.

At any rate Jacqueline dawdled and shuffled through her work, and complained constantly of the heat. It was a hot day, true enough, but as Grandma said, talking about the weather only made a bad matter ten times worse. Let *it* alone, and likely it would let *you* alone!

But Jacqueline groaned and grumbled, and finally lay down on the dining room couch (with a story paper!) and gave herself up to being uncomfortable. Presently she fell to thinking of the Gildersleeve place, and the big, cool, dim rooms that she knew such a roof must cover, and the white porcelain tub, with lots of hot water, and a maid to wash the tub when you stepped out of it. She began to think that she had treated Caroline very generously, and treated herself very badly.

Dinner was a horrid meal—pickled codfish in white sauce, cold peas from last night's supper, slabs of home-made bread, molasses cookies, and cottage cheese. The room was hot, and the boys were sweaty and tired. Freddie upset a mug of milk, and Neil fussed about the heat, and said his head ached. Jacqueline was quite disgusted that he should be so babyish.

After dinner Aunt Martha insisted upon Grandma's lying down in her room. Grandma looked "tuckered out," and no wonder, for she had been step-stepping all the morning, while Jacqueline loafed. Of course, Jacqueline told her uneasy conscience, she would have helped, if Grandma had asked her. But you know, it is easier sometimes for a tired old woman to do things herself than to ask a sulky and unwilling little girl to do them for her.

Aunt Martha sent Nellie off into the barn with the babies. She was to be sure that they did not disturb Grandma. Ralph and Dickie went back to the fields, and Aunt Martha herself drove off to Northford, to see a man who owed her money that she very much needed. Jacqueline was left face to face with the dinner dishes.

"Come on, Neil," she said bossily. "I'm not going to wrassle these alone."

"I gotta headache," Neil answered, from the couch that Jacqueline coveted. "I don't have to work this afternoon. Mother said so."

"She meant work in the fields. She didn't mean the dishes."

"She did, too."

"She didn't, neither. Get up, you great, lazy boy, and help me. You ought to be ashamed of yourself, making such a fuss about the weather. You let *it* alone, and likely it'll let *you* alone. Come on now!"

"Won't!" said Neil.

Jacqueline's face flamed.

"Then the dishes will stay right there till Aunt Martha comes," she said. "I won't touch 'em."

"Don't!" mocked Neil, and settled himself more comfortably.

Well, Jacqueline didn't touch those dishes! If you'll believe it, she took her story papers and went out and read in the hammock for two mortal hours, while the dinner table stood just as the family had left it, and the stockings in Grandma's basket cried: "Come darn me!" and patient little Nellie struggled all alone to keep two hot and fussy babies amused and quiet.

In the old papers Jacqueline found a continued story of the sort she liked, about a girl who went to a boarding school, where most of the teachers were mean and malicious and incredibly stupid; about the pranks that she and her friends played, and the mystery of a buried treasure that she solved. Jacqueline was so deep in the mystery that she scarcely heeded when Aunt Martha drove into the yard. She came out of the treasure vault with a jump, only when she heard her name called. Then she looked, and saw Aunt Martha standing in the kitchen doorway.

Full of the spirit of her heroine, who put tyrannical teachers in their place, Jacqueline rose and went into the kitchen. She was almost eager for "a scene."

"Why aren't those dishes done?" Aunt Martha asked directly. Her shrewd gray eyes went right through Jacqueline.

This was drama with a vengeance. Jacqueline's heart began to beat fast.

"There were so many of 'em, and the day was so hot, and I had a headache, and Neil wouldn't help," she poured out all her reasons glibly.

"You leave Neil out. I'll attend to him. It was your job to clear up the dining room, and wash those dishes. Go about it now."

Jacqueline turned slowly toward the dining room door, but as she turned she said aloud, with a toss of her head:

"I don't *have* to!"

She looked round to make sure that Aunt Martha heard her, for Aunt Martha had a way of not always hearing saucy and hateful speeches.

"If you stay in this house," said Aunt Martha, as she unpinned her cheap hat, "you'll have to do your share, like all the rest of us."

"Well, maybe I won't stay in your old house," Jacqueline told her superbly. "There are better places I can go to."

"All right," said Aunt Martha easily. "Trot along—only get those dishes done before you start."

That was too bad of Aunt Martha, for in the rôle of tyrant, which Jacqueline had thoughtfully assigned her, she ought to have lost her temper at Jacqueline's threat, instead of turning it into a kind

of joke. Since Aunt Martha kept her temper, Jacqueline lost hers. She snatched the tray from its shelf with unnecessary clatter, and she went into the dining room, and banged it down hard on the table. She began to pile the soiled dishes upon it, helter-skelter, with as much noise as if she were a raw Polish girl, just out of the onion fields.

Neil turned a flushed face toward her, where he lay on the couch.

“Tell-tale!” he softly sang.

The justice of the taunt made it sting.

“You’re a slacker,” Jacqueline retorted promptly. “Everybody hates a slacker. I was going to give you a birthday present, and something perfectly scrumptious at Christmas, but I never will now—never—never!”

To emphasize the threat, she banged down the heavy milk pitcher on the tray, without noticing that the tray overhung the edge of the table perilously. There was a tilt—a sickening slide and crash—then plates, glasses, broken food, spilled milk lay all in a mess at Jacqueline’s feet, and among the débris, shattered to bits, were the two green-dragon cups and saucers of thin china.

Jacqueline felt the anger ooze out of her. She stared at the wreckage, conscience-smitten. Neil sat up and looked at her.

“You’ve done it now!” he said.

“I don’t care!” Jacqueline flung at him the first words that came. She had to say something, or she would have burst out crying.

“Caroline!” spoke Aunt Martha’s voice. She stood there in the room, with her tanned face really white round the lips. “Don’t tell me you’ve gone and broken Grandma’s cups!”

“Nothing but two old cups!” Jacqueline almost sobbed.

Aunt Martha did not seem to hear her. She went down on her knees and groped among the fragments for bits of the shattered green-dragon china. Her hands fairly shook as she gathered them up.

“They are all that was left of her wedding china,” she said, more to herself than to the startled children. “We ought not to have used them common—but she didn’t relish her tea in a thick cup—and she wouldn’t drink from china while I drank out of kitchen ware. No, I can’t mend ’em, ever. They’re smashed to smithereens.”

“I don’t care—I don’t care!” Jacqueline screamed across the awful lump in her throat that was choking her. “I hate this house—and I hate you all—and I’m never coming back again!”

She called back the last words from the kitchen doorway, and next moment she was out in the yard, headed for the road, and running, as if for her very life, to the Gildersleeve place, and the Gildersleeve relations, and the identity of Jacqueline that now, with all her heart, she wanted to get back again.

CHAPTER XX

ACCORDING TO AGREEMENT

By the time that Jacqueline had had her cry out, she was nearly a mile on her way to Longmeadow Street. Her eyes were smarting, and her nose was sore, and her throat felt hot like a furnace. When she came to the boundary brook between Kaplinsky's lease and Deacon Whitcomb's field, she was glad to stop and bathe her face and quiet the jumping pulses in her wrists with cool water. She smoothed her hair, too, with her wet fingers, and she even took off her shabby sneakers and washed her dusty feet and ankles. After all, she didn't want to arrive at the Gildersleeve place looking worse than she had to.

Now that she was refreshed, she trudged on more slowly. She realized that she was tired out with the wild pace at which she had run, and with the scene in Aunt Martha's dining room, which she winced to remember. Wasn't she thankful that she really wasn't Caroline, and that she needn't ever go back to the Conway farm? How could she have faced them—Aunt Martha, and Neil, and Grandma? Poor Grandma, whose precious cups she had broken!

Again the tears started to Jacqueline's eyes. She brushed them angrily away. She didn't need to cry. Wasn't she going to send Grandma some new cups—the thinnest cups she could buy in Boston—a dozen cups—a whole dinner set? That would make everything all right again.

By the time she came in sight of the first outlying houses of the village, she had added to the dinner set for Grandma an embroidered cap for Annie, a doll with real hair for Nellie, a belt with a silver buckle for Ralph, a camera for Dickie, and a choo-choo train for Freddie.

With great effort, as she entered the village, she finally added to the collection a big, soft, luscious rug for Aunt Martha's car, and a magic-lantern for Neil—not one of the little dinky toys that get out of order, but the real thing.

When the people at the farm got all those gifts, she rather guessed they'd change their minds about her. Perhaps they'd be sorry then that they hadn't been more considerate. How they would regret her—and admire her! Maybe she'd go out there once more—just once more—in her wine-colored jumper dress that she liked, and take a big box of sweets to the children. She fairly swelled out her chest, in her dusty Peggy Janes, as she pictured herself playing Lady Bountiful. But when she thought of Grandma, her chest flattened again, just like a toy balloon when you prick it and the air runs out. Oh, she did want to get that dinner set right away! Her eyes filled every time when she thought of Grandma, sitting down to supper, and drinking her tea patiently from the thick, ugly, crockery cup.

The sun had just dipped behind the western hills across the river, when Jacqueline came to a halt outside the box-hedge that enclosed the Gildersleeve place. She had thought all along that she would walk right up to the front door, and knock, and ask for Mrs. Gildersleeve, and simply say to her:

"Aunt Eunice, I am Jacqueline. Call the little girl who's staying here, and she'll tell you it's just so."

But now that the moment for action had come, she hesitated. To do it that way seemed not quite fair to Caroline. Like stealing a march on her. Really she must see Caroline, and tell her what was up, before she gave away the trick that they had played upon the Gildersleeves and the Conways.

"Not that Caroline won't be as glad as me to have it over with," Jacqueline tried to quiet an uneasy something within her. "She must be fed up by this time on that old piano."

A little path, as narrow as a cat track, ran between the Gildersleeve hedge and the rose tangle that bounded the Trowbridge lawn. Jacqueline knew all about that path, and a few others. She hadn't come into the village with that born rover, Neil, for nothing. She slipped up this path in the shadows that were cool and dark, and she quickly found the gap in the hedge for which she was looking. She wriggled through it, with some damage to the Peggy Janes (Caroline's Peggy Janes!) and there she was in the garden, among the flowers that were already half asleep. She peered about her eagerly. If only Caroline would come that way! Then she spied the summer house, and stole to the doorway that gaped beneath the over-hanging vines, and peered in.

The summer house was empty. The tea table was folded up, and the wicker chairs set trimly in place against another day. Under one of the chairs a bit of clear orange color caught Jacqueline's eye. She pounced upon it, and found it was a little doll-smock of orange, cross-stitched in dark blue. This must belong to Mildred, and no doubt Mildred's careful little mother ("fussy," Jacqueline called her) would find it missing and come to look for it. Why, things couldn't have fallen out better for her!

Jacqueline sat down on the bench that ran round the wall inside the summer house, and waited with what patience she could scare up. She could see a bit of the house through the elms that stood round it—a gleam of white clapboards, that caught the last light of the afterglow, a green shutter, a window like an anxious eye. She wondered if that were the window of the room that should be hers.

Then she saw a little girl in a leaf brown dress come from behind a clump of shrubbery and head toward the summer house, with eyes bent upon the path, as if she looked for something. Caroline, in the name of all that was lucky! Gurgling with mischief, Jacqueline drew back and waited in the shadows that now were quite thick in the summer house. She didn't have to wait long. Framed in the doorway, Caroline stood before her, dainty in Jacqueline's leaf brown smock with orange stitching, and Jacqueline's amber beads, and with a soft sparkle in her face, which came from thoughts of pleasant things that had happened and pleasant things to come.

"Boo!" cried Jacqueline.

Caroline gave a little squeak, and clutched the side of the door.

"Don't be scared, goose!" bade Jacqueline, stepping forward. "It's only me."

Caroline's pale little hands fluttered to her throat as if she wanted to push off something that choked her.

"Y-yes," she stammered. "H-hello, Jackie."

That was all Caroline said. She didn't help Jacqueline one bit, though she must have known that

Jacqueline hadn’t come there simply to say: “Hello!” She just clung to the side of the door and stared like somebody who expects to be hit.

“I’m not a ghost,” said Jacqueline, impatiently. “Don’t look at me like that. I just came over to say I’ve had enough of the farm, and if you don’t mind, we’ll swap back.”

Caroline nodded.

“Yes,” she agreed, in a dry little whisper. “All r-right, Jackie.” Then she slid into the seat by the door, just as if her legs had folded up under her, and she hid her face in her hands and began to cry.

CHAPTER XXI

AN HOUR TO TRY THE SOUL

What do you suppose Prince Edward would have done, if Tom Canty hadn't wished to be Tom Canty any more? Suppose that Tom, instead of being a well-mannered little English boy, willing to keep his proper station, had cried out at the mere thought of going back to the foulness and cruelty of Offal Court, and insisted, not unnaturally, perhaps, that he preferred to be comfortable in a palace?

Jacqueline had never thought of this possibility, when she read "The Prince and the Pauper," nor when she tried to translate the story into modern terms. But she faced it now in deep dismay, as she looked at Caroline, sobbing her heart out, there in the dusk of the summer house.

For a moment Jacqueline shifted her weight from one foot to the other, and hardly knew what to do. But she was not in the habit of being turned from a purpose, once her mind was made up, and her mind was very much made up to sleep that night at the Gildersleeve place. So down she sat beside the weeping Caroline, and laid a hard little sunburnt hand upon her shoulder.

"Don't be a baby, Carol," she said, quite fiercely, because she didn't want to let herself pity Caroline. "You know you *said* you'd change, the minute I wanted to."

Caroline nodded the little dark head that was bowed desolately upon her hands.

"Well, then!" said Jacqueline, in an injured tone. "What *are* you crying about?"

(What, indeed?)

Caroline lifted her face and smeared her eyes with her hands.

"When—when shall we—change?" she faltered.

"Now," said Jacqueline bluntly.

Then Jacqueline remembered something that all her life she had wanted to forget—the look in the eyes of Aunt Edie's little lap dog, when she had struck him. Of course Jacqueline had been just a tiny thing—only four years old. It was right after her father died. And she had been jealous of the wee dog, because he had sat on Aunt Edie's knee sometimes when she wanted that place herself. So one day when she found him alone and he turned to her for a caress, she had slapped him—hard. She gave him sugar afterward, and the cushions from her best doll-buggy, and velvet-soft caresses, and tears of penitence. But she had never forgotten the look in his eyes when she struck him, and she saw that look now in the tear-drenched eyes that Caroline turned upon her.

"Oh, Jackie! No! Not now!"

"Well, I'll be dished," said Jacqueline. The words don't do justice to the disgust in her tone. There was no doubt that she did hate a quitter!

But Caroline was past heeding even Jacqueline's scorn.

"Oh, Jackie!" she pleaded, and suddenly she caught Jacqueline's hands and clung to them. "Can't you wait just a little longer—only till to-morrow night? I won't ask anything more, Jackie—I won't even ask God for anything more—and I'll give up the piano—and your lovely clothes—I haven't hurt 'em, I've been awful careful—and I won't cry one little bit, even if there *are* cows at the farm—and I've been so happy here—I didn't know things could be so lovely—I didn't know people could be so happy—oh, it will be like a beautiful dream, all the rest of my life—only let me have to-morrow, Jackie—please, please let me have to-morrow!"

"Ouch!" said Jacqueline. "Stop digging your finger nails into my hands!"

Caroline didn't seem to hear her. She clung like a limpet.

"Only wait till to-morrow!" she sobbed.

"Now you needn't think," snapped Jacqueline, "that I'm going to hoof it three miles back to that nasty old farm, and sleep in that hot, stuffy room. What's the dif. anyway between to-night and to-morrow, I should like to know?"

"But it's my party," wailed Caroline. "To-morrow is my party."

Jacqueline snorted. Don't blame her too much! She had had a birthday party every year of her life, and a Hallowe'en party, and an Easter-egg rolling, and a Washington's Birthday party, besides always a group of children to eat ice-cream and see the fireworks at Buena Vista on the Fourth.

"What's a party?" she said, with contempt that was quite sincere. No party, she felt, could give Caroline sufficient pleasure to counterbalance the discomfort she herself must suffer, if she had to go back to the farm now—with her tail between her legs, as she put it!—and face Aunt Martha.

"There are seven girls coming," Caroline panted out the details between her sobs. "I almost know Eleanor Trowbridge next door—we smile at each other always—and the table is to be out here in the garden—and the ice-cream is coming from Boston on the train. Oh, Jackie, shapes of ice-cream like flowers—the sort you see sometimes in windows—red roses and green leaves and everything—I picked 'em out myself! And there are little cakes, like frogs and white m-mice—with almonds for ears! And we're going to have a peanut-hunt—and prizes—such scrumptious prizes—silver bangles, and the cunningest little bottles of perfume, and dear little carved Italian boxes with pictures in the covers. Oh, Jackie, it's like ten Christmases all come together—and I—I never had a party before in all my life."

She let go of Jacqueline then. She had to use her hands to hide her face.

Jacqueline sat quite still. She was very angry with Caroline for being such a baby. She was too angry to speak to her. At least she supposed that was the reason she kept silent.

"Muzzy and I used to plan how I'd have a party," Caroline quavered in the dusk that was now thickening fast in the summer house. "It's the next best fun to having things. I *almost* had a party once. But the Stetson twins' father lost his money and they didn't pay Muzzy for the music lessons—weeks and weeks of lessons—so she couldn't afford a party—and I said I didn't care, but oh! I did. And now I was going to have a party—like in a book—and I'll never have another chance the longest day I live. Oh, Jackie—Jackie! Couldn't you——"

She didn't finish the sentence. She just let it trail off hopelessly into the dusk.

Jacqueline felt a queer tingling in her palms, and a hot smarting behind her eyes. She was *mad*—mad at Caroline—mad at herself—mad at something in herself that was going to make her do what Caroline wanted, and hate herself afterward for doing it.

"Like taking candy off a kid!" That was her new Uncle Jimmie's phrase for something that was *too* contemptible for a regular fellow to do. That was what it would be to take Caroline's party away from her. Let her have her old party! But drat Caroline—and double-drat Prince Edward, whose silly story had let her in for this! Trouble! *He* didn't know the name of trouble!

Jacqueline drew a deep breath, which was rather like a sniffle.

"Aw shucks!" she said disgustedly. "Cut out the sob-stuff, Carol. One day is as good as another, far as *I'm* concerned. You can *have* your party."

Caroline, all moist and crumpled, fell upon her in the dusk.

"Oh, Jackie! You mean it—really? You are the dearest——"

"Oh, dumb-bells!" scoffed Jacqueline. "Stop bawling now. You'll look like a squashed egg. I tell you, it's all right, and you can have your party. So long, now! I've got to beat it home."

She rose, and with a lofty air, patterned on what she thought Uncle Jimmie would do in similar circumstances, she strode toward the gap in the hedge. Honestly she tried to whistle as she went. But just as she reached the gap, Caroline came pattering out of the dusk and clutched her.

"Now don't go and begin all over again!" Jacqueline scolded.

"Please, Jackie!" Caroline's teeth fairly chattered. "I shan't let you—it isn't fair—it's *your* party really—it's *you* Cousin Penelope meant it for—and I—I didn't tell you all about it. I was afraid you *couldn't* give it up—if I told you everything. There'll be little satin boxes of candy on the table, one for each of us—and darling little dolls, with baskets of nuts—one apiece—to keep—and birds that hold the place-cards—and oh, Jackie, a pie full of presents! You pull a string, each of you, and then——"

"Oh, g'on!" said Jacqueline. "A Jack Horner Pie. I'm fed up on 'em—had 'em since I was knee-high to a hopper toad."

"Oh!" gasped Caroline, softly, incredulously.

All in a minute, a self-revealing minute such as she had seldom known, there flooded over Jacqueline the realization of all that she had had and taken for granted—all that this other little girl had never known, and valued all the more. She was not angry with Caroline any longer. She felt that she was sorrier for her than she had ever been for anybody, and then suddenly she knew that she loved Caroline, poor, little, sobbing Caroline, whom she had it in her power to lift into a heaven of happiness.

"Don't go and eat too much at your old party," Jacqueline bade gruffly. "Now don't hang on to me like that. I gotta go. And I guess I won't come back for quite a while."

"But to-morrow——" Caroline hesitated. A hope that she was ashamed of trembled in her voice.

"I was fooling when I said we'd swap," snapped Jacqueline. "I'm not coming to-morrow. I'm not coming *near* this mean old place till I have to. You hear me? I *like* it at the farm. I'm going to *stay* there till Aunt Edie comes, if she doesn't come till next Christmas. And you can just *stay* here till you're dead sick of it—the old piano—and starched people—and prunes and prisms and——"

"Oh, oh! Do you *mean* that?" Caroline's cry was sheer rapture. "But I couldn't let——"

Perhaps her honest protest would have moved Jacqueline to recall the promise she had so rashly made. But just at that moment a clear, imperious voice called: "Jacqueline!" and when both little girls pivoted at that name, they saw a figure, in soft white summer clothes, come into the dusky garden. It was Cousin Penelope, and by the way in which she headed straight down the path toward the spot where they stood, they knew that she had spied them.

CHAPTER XXII

PENELOPE TAKES ALARM

Like the hero of the old music hall song, Jacqueline felt that “now was the time for disappearing.” I wish I could say to her credit that she fled, simply because she was afraid that if she came face to face with Cousin Penelope, she would be tempted beyond her strength and withdraw the promise she had so impulsively made to Caroline. As a matter of fact, I suspect that she ran away, because she had had enough drama with Aunt Martha and Caroline to satisfy even her drama-loving soul for at least one day. At any rate, she dove out of the garden through the narrow gap in the hedge, like a scared and nimble rabbit, and Caroline was left to face alone the onslaught of Cousin Penelope.

Of course Caroline ought to have been just as noble as Jacqueline. She ought to have called Jacqueline back, and presented her to Cousin Penelope as her really, truly little kinswoman, and then for her own part subsided gracefully into the company of the cows and the awful boy-cousins, just as Tom Canty was willing to go back to rags and dirt and misery.

But Caroline thought of the party, and the darling little doll-favors. Sweet little Watteau gowns they wore, of figured silk, with their powdered hair piled high and topped with wee, beribboned hats of straw that would have turned a fairy green with envy. Caroline thought, too, of the look that would come into Cousin Penelope’s pale, stern face, when she knew that it was upon a little cheat that she had wasted kindness, and music lessons, and dentistry! No, Caroline hadn’t the courage to tell the truth. She just stood there, dumb and trembling, while Cousin Penelope bore down upon her.

“Jacqueline!” Cousin Penelope’s voice, as she spoke to Caroline, was sharp with what an older person would have recognized as anxiety. “Who was that child you were talking with?”

Mercy, what a chance to tell the truth—the whole dramatic truth—in a dramatic manner! But Caroline, like Jacqueline on several occasions, told half a truth which, like many a half-truth, was as deceptive as a good, big whopper.

“A—a little girl,” she stammered. “She lives down in the Meadows.”

Through the dusk she could almost feel Cousin Penelope bristle, like a lady-dog when rough strangers come too near her precious young.

“That bold, forward Conway child? Of all the audacity! What brought her prowling into our garden?”

“She—she wanted to—see me,” faltered Caroline.

“To see you!” echoed Cousin Penelope. “Why should she *dream* of associating with you, Jacqueline?”

Bewildered and badgered, Caroline knew that she must say *something*.

“We—we were on the train—coming from Chicago,” she said in a voice that see-sawed, though she tried hard to keep it steady. “We played together—with Mildred. Oh, she’s a nice little girl, Cousin Penelope, honest, she is—you’d like her—she’s nicer than me—ever so much so!”

She had thought she hadn’t a tear left in her, but now she began to cry again, not noisily, but in soft little tired gasps. Oh, how was it that clinging heroines in books always managed to swoon? She wished that *she* could swoon, then and there, and so escape from everything. She couldn’t bear to have Cousin Penelope ask her even one more question.

But Cousin Penelope stopped questioning. Amazingly she put her arm round Caroline’s tense little shoulders, and dabbed her eyes gently with her filmy handkerchief, which smelt like a breeze over beds of violets.

“There, there!” she said. “You mustn’t make your eyes red, on the night before your party. You must have forgotten the party.”

Forgotten the party! If only Cousin Penelope guessed!

They went back together through the dusky, fragrant garden. Cousin Penelope urged Caroline to look at the little pale stars, which were coming out now almost as fast as you could count them in the sky, that was the color of tarnished old silver.

“It will be a fine day to-morrow,” Penelope told Caroline. “You don’t realize, you little Californian, how we have to study the sky, here in New England, when we plan to give a garden-party.”

Then she talked about the dress that Caroline should wear at the party, and the way in which the flowers should be arranged on the table. She was talking to take Caroline’s mind off the scene with the rude little girl from the Conway farm. Caroline saw through her strategy, but she was grateful to her, just the same. She only hoped that Aunt Eunice wouldn’t see her red eyes, and have to be told about what had happened in the garden.

Better than Caroline had dared to hope, they found Aunt Eunice seated on the wide, cool porch, where it was now too dark for features to be distinguished.

“This little girl is running up to bed,” said Cousin Penelope blithely. “We must get our beauty sleep before the party.”

Thankful for this way of escape, Caroline kissed Aunt Eunice good-night and trotted upstairs, to bathe her face and her smarting eyes. How good it was that Aunt Eunice didn’t suspect!

At that moment Aunt Eunice, on the dim, cool porch, was saying in a troubled voice:

“What’s wrong, Penelope? The little thing had been crying. Her cheeks were quite wet. She isn’t—homesick?”

“Not in the least!” replied Penelope, in a crisp voice that defied the whole tribe of Delanes and the entire state of California. “Why should she be homesick, here with *us*?”

“What was she crying about?”

“Such an annoying little incident, Mother. A child that is staying at the Conways’ scraped acquaintance with Jacqueline on the train and has been trying to force herself upon her ever since. I found her just now with Jacqueline in the garden. She ran away, you may be sure, as soon as I appeared.”

“A child from the Meadows?” exclaimed Aunt Eunice. “Why, she is ever so far from home, and it’s

dark.”

Penelope didn’t seem to think that fact of any importance.

“Poor little Jacqueline is too young to know how to handle such an awkward situation,” she went on. “She’s Gildersleeve through and through, Mother. Loyal and affectionate. You should have heard her stand up for the horrid little pushing creature, because she thought her a friend. I must find some way myself to put a stop to such intrusions. I wonder if I’d better speak to the Conway woman? She seems very sensible.”

“Martha Conway is the salt of the earth,” said Aunt Eunice, with conviction. “You ought to know, Penelope. You went to public school with her once upon a time. After all, why shouldn’t this child come play with Jacqueline?”

Penelope spoke loftily, as she occasionally did speak to her mother.

“Now, Mother dearest, just for the sake of your democratic theories we can’t let Jack’s daughter associate with every common child that pushes itself forward. Blood will tell, you know.”

“Yes,” said Aunt Eunice, with mild persistence, “but what’s wrong with the Conway blood, Penelope? Conways and Gildersleeves and Holdens and Taits and Trowbridges, they all came here together in the old days—God-fearing farmer-folk, the lot of them, and not much to choose among them, though some have prospered lately more than others.”

Penelope became indulgent. There wasn’t much else for her to do, if she was to retire gracefully from the argument.

“You’re a darling old radical, Mother,” she said. “It’s fortunate that *I* am here to protect Jacqueline.”

Aunt Eunice sighed. She frequently did sigh at the end of one of her conversations with Penelope that never seemed to get them anywhere. She rose to her feet and gathered up her thin scarf of silk.

“I think I’ll go up to my room,” she said. “I’ve a telephone call to send.”

So Penelope was left alone, victorious, if you please to call it so. She wasn’t quite sure. Indeed, to herself she said:

“Mother is provoking. If she really is going to take that view of the case, I must act with decision. For, mother or no mother, I’m going to head off any acquaintance between Jacqueline and that rough child from the Meadows, even if I have to alter all our summer plans to do it.”

CHAPTER XXIII

THROUGH THE DARKNESS

All unconscious of Cousin Penelope's musings, Caroline stretched herself in the fresh cool bed, in her pretty room. She thought of the party next day, and all the lovely days, brimful of music and happiness, that were to follow. For Jackie had promised that she should stay there undisturbed at The Chimnies, until Aunt Edie came at the end of summer.

How kind Jackie was, and how good, and how brave! She wasn't afraid of cows, or Cousin Penelope, or boys, or the dark. Caroline, for instance, would have been frightened to death to go the three miles in the black night down into the Meadows. But Jackie had just whistled and walked away, as unconcerned as anything. No, there was no one in the world so good or so brave as Jackie. With that worshiping thought uppermost in her mind, Caroline fell asleep, as safe and sheltered as care and love could make her.

Meantime the brave Jackie, with her heart in her throat, was making the best of her way through the vast blackness of the onion fields, back to the Conway farm.

The first of the walk wasn't so bad. On Longmeadow Street she met people, by ones and twos and threes, on their way to prayer meeting or to the Post Office. She could see, too, the light from house windows that streamed across the broad, well-tended lawns. She enjoyed the luxury of pitying herself, all alone in the dark, with no one to care, while other children, in those lighted houses, were being tucked up in bed.

But after she left the last houses of the village, Jacqueline stopped enjoying the drama of the situation which she had chosen. The fields stretched round her endlessly. The sky was black as despair, and all stuck with stars that were sharp as screams of rage. The edges of the sky were tucked in behind the coal black mountains, from which the Indians in old days used to swoop down upon the settlement.

Jacqueline caught her breath, and looked hurriedly over her shoulder. Of course there were no Indians nowadays. They couldn't be lurking that moment in the fields. The onions grew too low to hide an ambuscade. It was only the wind that made their tops rustle in a queer way that pumped the blood out of her heart and set it throbbing against her ear-drums.

No one could hide in the onion fields, she knew. But in the little gullies where the brooks flowed that drained the fields—that was a different matter. Every time she drew near a culvert, she ran as fast as she could upon her tired legs, through the heavy dust, until the danger point was passed. Even if there weren't any Indians, there were Polish field-hands. Good, honest men, most of them, Aunt Martha maintained. But some of them were worthless and drunken. There was a half-witted Kaplinsky boy, too, who sometimes chased younger children, with horrid, half-articulate threats.

Jacqueline sheered into the middle of the dark gray road to avoid the patch of inky shadow that a solitary elm tree threw halfway across it. She wasn't crying, as Caroline would have cried. Jacqueline cried, as you may have discovered, only when she was angry. Now her breath came thick and strangling, and her legs felt weak, and there were hot prickles of sweat on her temples, and cold prickles on the back of her neck. But she didn't cry!

Some one was coming along the road behind her. No mistake! She could hear voices—men's voices. On instinct she did what a moment before she couldn't have been hired to do. She scuttled off the road and hid in the damp bed of the brook that bounded the Whitcomb acres. There she crouched with her head on her knees, until she heard steps shuffle along the culvert. She peeped up fearfully. Three figures of men were silhouetted against the sky. They paused on the side of the culvert (fortunately!) that was farthest from her, and spat into the brook, and spoke to one another in a foreign tongue, and laughed—ogreishly, as it seemed to Jacqueline—and then walked on.

They had actually gone. She could breathe again. But she wouldn't dare walk on for hours and hours. They might loiter. She might overtake them.

For what seemed to her half the night, she crouched in the clammy bed of the brook. Oh, she thought to herself in those long, dreary minutes, what a silly she had been! Why hadn't she stepped right up and told Cousin Penelope who she was? Well, she couldn't, because she had gone and promised Caroline—a crazy promise—she hated herself because she had made it—she knew she was going to hate herself when she made it—just the same a promise was a promise, and you kept it, even though the sky fell.

But why had she ever promised? It would be dreadful at the farm now—but there wasn't anywhere else to go. Perhaps Aunt Martha would send her to an Institution. She didn't think any longer that an Institution would be fun. She thought of the workhouse boys in "Oliver Twist," who never had enough to eat—and she hadn't eaten herself now for ages and ages. She knew what hunger was! Oh, she didn't want to go to an Institution—and she didn't want to go to the farm—and she couldn't go to the Gildersleeves', because she had promised Caroline! Perhaps she'd better stay right there in the ditch and die—and then wouldn't everybody be sorry!

Just then she heard something rustling near her. She didn't stop to find out whether it was a harmless field mouse, or a snake, equally harmless, though perhaps less attractive. She didn't stop for anything. She scrambled out of that ditch and started on a sore-footed run for the Conway farm. Aunt Martha—Neil—*anything* rather than the loneliness of the ditch upon a pitiless, black, Pole-infested night!

She was stumbling along the road, as she felt that she had been stumbling for a lifetime, panting and coughing as the dust that she kicked up got into her nose, when she heard from before her the chug and chatter of a laboring Ford. Nearer and clearer, she caught the gleam of headlights that lit up a fan-shaped space of dust and dark green onion tops.

For a second she halted in her tracks. Then she reflected that people in cars can be as undesirable

as people on foot, and once more she plunged off the road. This time she found no friendly ditch to hide her. She just plumped down flat among the onion tops and lay gasping.

The Ford trundled past the spot where she had left the road—stopped—began to back. Jacqueline "froze," like a scared little animal. Oh, *why* couldn't she wake up, and find that this was just a horrible nightmare?

Some one leaned out of the Ford.

"Jackie!" a voice called clearly and firmly. "Is that you? Jackie!"

Jacqueline found her feet, though a second before she would have vowed she hadn't enough strength left ever to stand again. She flew, stiff-legged, through the crumbly dust and the strong-smelling onion tops, into the road. She cast herself upon the running board, she flung herself into the seat of the car, and hung about the neck of the woman at the steering wheel.

"Oh, Aunt Martha!" she cried. "Aunt Martha!"

And Martha Conway, if you'll believe it, grabbed that bad Jacqueline and hugged her just as tight as if she were clean and sweet, instead of the dirtiest, sweatiest, tiredest ragamuffin that ever crawled penitently out of an onion bed.

CHAPTER XXIV

NEVER AGAIN

Perhaps blood doesn't tell quite as much as Cousin Penelope believed it did. Certainly Jacqueline and Aunt Martha, who were no relation to each other, were more alike than Caroline and Aunt Martha could ever have been. So much alike they were that almost instantly each drew back into her own corner of the seat, as if they were ashamed of the way in which they had clutched each other.

Aunt Martha gave her attention to backing and turning the Ford, with the least possible damage to the lawless onions that overflowed into the highway. Jacqueline leaned back in her seat and stretched her tired legs and sighed with blissful relief. Neither spoke till the car was safely headed homeward. Then Jacqueline found her voice—such a meek voice!

"Were you—looking for me, Aunt Martha?"

"Didn't think I'd be driving to the village at this time of evening just for the fun of it, did you?"

Such a cool, clipped, everyday voice Aunt Martha spoke in! Who would have dreamed to hear it that she had hugged Jacqueline two minutes before?

"How did you know—I'd gone to the village? I might have been most anywhere."

"I shouldn't have known where to look for you, more'n if you'd been a needle in a haystack. I *didn't* look for you," said Aunt Martha defensively. "But when old Mrs. Gildersleeve called me up and said you'd been seen up in the village——"

"Mrs. Gildersleeve called up—about me?" Jacqueline repeated stupidly. Aunt Eunice had telephoned to Aunt Martha! Of all people! How did she know? Why should she care?

"She's an awful nice woman," Aunt Martha said warmly. "She's the kind that'll bow just as friendly to old Si Whitcomb on his hay-rack as she does to Judge Holden in his wire-wheeled car. She had to call twice before she got me, 'cause that feather-headed Williams girl on our party line was planning with the minister's youngest daughter how she'd dye and turn and cut her last winter's suit. I think they made a batch of devil's food, too, and settled the reputations of half their neighbors before they got off that line. I know, 'cause I was trying to put in a call myself."

Was it about her, Jacqueline wondered? But she decided it was best to ask no questions.

"Soon's Mrs. Gildersleeve got me," Aunt Martha went on, "I thought I'd best start out on the chance of meeting with you."

"Thank you very much," Jacqueline murmured, oh, so meekly.

Was Aunt Martha going to scold her now, she wondered? Well, perhaps it would be over before they reached the farm. She waited in the silence that grew worse and worse every minute, for every minute she realized, with a deeper sense of guilt, what a lot of trouble and anxiety she had given the Conways. At last she just couldn't stand it any longer.

"Aunt Martha," she burst out, "*are* you going to send me to an Institution?"

Aunt Martha turned and stared at her through the darkness. Jacqueline could see the whites of her eyes under the brim of her ugly, cheap hat.

"A—what?" Aunt Martha asked sharply.

"Institution," babbled Jacqueline.

"Well, of all the—Whoever put such an idea into your head?"

Jacqueline came pretty near saying: "Caroline!" She remembered just in time that *she* was Caroline.

"Cousin Delia said it," she faltered. "She seemed to think I'd go to an Institution—if you didn't want me—if I was a trouble."

"Delia Meade said that?" Aunt Martha's voice was positively fierce.

"Um-m," Jacqueline almost whimpered.

"Well!" said Aunt Martha. "I must say! I have my opinion."

Evidently it was of Delia Meade that she had the opinion. From the tone of her voice Jacqueline hoped that Aunt Martha would never have that sort of opinion of *her*.

"I'm not a heathen, *I hope*!" said Aunt Martha.

Jacqueline thought of a picture in one of her travel books at home. In the picture some young women with bushy hair, and bone earrings, and wreaths of flowers round their necks, and not much else in the way of covering, were dancing round a huge stone image. Those were heathen, if you please! Aunt Martha couldn't be like them if she tried for a hundred years. The mere thought of Aunt Martha looking like that made Jacqueline want to laugh. But she decided that she'd better keep the joke to herself.

They turned in presently at the Conway farm. How quickly they had come, and what an endless time it would have taken Jacqueline to cover the distance on her smarting feet! Aunt Martha ran the Ford into the barn, and with Jacqueline's help closed and padlocked the great clumsy doors. None of the boys were there to help her. Why, it must be ever so late!

When they came into the kitchen, where a dim lamp burned, Jacqueline saw by the hands of the steeple-roofed kitchen clock that it was going on eleven—a desperate hour for the Conway farm! They had come in softly, but Grandma must have been lying awake and listening for she called instantly from her dark bedroom:

"That you, Martha? Did you find her safe?"

"All right, Mother Conway," Aunt Martha spoke guardedly, so as not to waken Annie. Then she whispered to Jacqueline! "Go in and say goodnight to Grandma. It'll be a load off her mind to see you're all right."

Jacqueline didn't feel the least bit like laughing, as she went a-tiptoe into the little bedroom off the kitchen. She had been horrid, she realized. She almost wished that Aunt Martha and Grandma had been horrid and hateful and scolded her—yes, and let her find her way home, all alone, in the awful dark. If they had, she wouldn't have needed to feel so hot and ashamed as she felt now.

She stole round Annie's crib and paused at the bedside. Grandma put out her hard old hand, with its twisted knuckles, and caught at Jacqueline's hand.

"Ye ain't come to no harm, Jackie?"

"No, Grandma," whispered Jacqueline.

"'Tain't like it used to be when I was young. The Meadows ain't the best place for little folks to run about in after dark. Don't ye do it again, Jackie, ever!"

The old voice was tremulous.

Jacqueline dumbly stroked the hand that held hers. She couldn't seem to speak, yet she did so want to say: "I'm sorry!" Wasn't it odd that in all her life she had never once been able to say those two words? She couldn't say them now, though her throat was dry and her eyes were aching with tears that she didn't mean to shed. She pressed Grandma's hand hard.

"I'm going to get you some new cups." That was what she said at last. "Thin as egg-shells. I didn't mean to break yours. I—I won't let you work so hard to-morrow, Grandma."

"There, there, child! 'Course you didn't mean to break 'em."

Their hands fell apart. Folks didn't kiss and cuddle much in the Conway household.

"Get yourself something to eat before you go to bed, Jackie. I put some top-milk in the blue pitcher for you, and left it in the cellar-way."

"Thank you, Grandma."

"There's fresh raisin cookies, too, in the tin. Good-night, Jackie."

"Good-night, Grandma."

Very softly Jackie stole back into the kitchen. She found Aunt Martha lighting the burner beneath the big kettle.

"The water'll be more than blood warm by the time you've eaten," said Aunt Martha. "Take a pitcher full upstairs and wash your feet before you get between the sheets. You'll have to wash your hair to-morrow. You look as if you'd burrowed head first into a sand bank."

Jacqueline blushed, and wondered if Aunt Martha would make any more near guesses at the truth. But Aunt Martha made no further comments. She busied herself in putting the cat outside, and locking doors, and bolting windows. Meantime Jacqueline fetched her cookies and her pitcher of milk, and sat down at the kitchen table, in the dim light of the one oil lamp, and ate and drank, hungrily and thirstily. To look at her, you wouldn't have guessed that she wanted to say, "I'm sorry!" But she did, and the dryness in her throat took half the good taste out of the milk and the cookies.

"Aunt Martha!" she spoke suddenly.

Aunt Martha paused in winding the clock, and looked over her shoulder at Jacqueline.

"I'm going to get Grandma some new cups," said Jacqueline.

A smile that was quizzical and a little bit pitying played round Aunt Martha's lips. But all she said was:

"That's the right idea. Get a box to-morrow and put your pennies in it till you've saved enough. It'll take some time, but it's no more than fair. Now trot along and get some sleep while it's cool. It'll be a clear, hot day to-morrow, or I miss my guess."

And to-morrow was Caroline's party! Suddenly Jacqueline felt her crushed spirits revive, and her dampened pride rekindle within her. If Aunt Martha, and Grandma, and Aunt Eunice, too, had all most unexpectedly been good to her, she at least had evened up things a little by being good to Caroline.

"I'm glad I didn't quit," Jacqueline told herself, as she toiled up the stairs, dead tired, with her pitcher of lukewarm water. "I'm glad I told Caroline I'd stick it out here, and oh! I'm going to be glad for all my life that I let the kid have her old party."

CHAPTER XXV

ON A NIGHT OF TEMPEST

The party was almost as wonderful as Caroline expected it to be, so you may judge for yourself that it was a very wonderful party indeed. The caterer way down in Boston didn't forget to send the ices and the cakes, as Caroline in a private agony had feared that he might, and Frank didn't puncture a tire or run into a ditch when he fetched them from the train at Baring Junction. Eleanor Trowbridge, the little girl next door, didn't come down with rash, as a subterranean rumor said that she was coming, and Judge Holden's youngest granddaughter didn't go into a tantrum and throw things, as she did (according to gossipy Sallie) to the serious disturbance of little Patty Wheeler's Fourth of July party.

Caroline wore a frock (Jacqueline's frock!) the color of creamy honeysuckle, hand-made and hem-stitched, with two rosettes of narrow black velvet ribbon and gold tissue at the high waist line. Her guests fluttered crisply in lavender and pale blue, shell pink and lemon yellow. It was as if the posy bed had come alive and found sweet, shrill voices in which to talk and laugh and call across the scented spaces.

They hunted peanuts, and they played at grace-hoops and ring-toss on the lawn, where the shadows grew longer with the passing hours. Everybody won a prize at something. They sat at the flower-decked table, and ate the tiniest buttered rolls and creamed chicken in little shells of pastry, ices that were so lovely Caroline wished she could keep hers forever, and cakes so good to the eye and the taste that they just bewitched you into taking another and another.

Then they played again among the shrubbery, hide and seek, and run, sheep, run! You see, they all felt very well acquainted now. They were much noisier than they had been before the refreshments, and the youngest Holden began to show off and turn cart wheels.

"Our little girl has really the sweetest manners of them all," said Aunt Eunice, as she looked down on the games from the shaded porch.

"She has more than manners," Cousin Penelope answered. "She has *manner*. But of course," she added proudly, "blood will always tell."

The nicest party that ever was, the seven little girls said, when they bade Aunt Eunice and Cousin Penelope and Caroline good-night and asked Caroline to come soon and play with them. But in Longmeadow annals that red-letter day of Caroline's life was to be remembered, not as the date of Mrs. William Gildersleeve's grandniece's party, but as the date of the worst tempest that had swept through the township in years.

"Jacqueline! It's I. Cousin Penelope. Don't be frightened."

Caroline waked in her bed just as a great cart-load of rocks—or so it seemed to her—was dumped upon the roof. She could see the furniture, the hangings, the very pictures on the walls ghastly and unfamiliar in the glare of what must be a gigantic searchlight, which was shut off suddenly and left the room in smothery, thick blackness.

Caroline ducked beneath the coverings and hugged Mildred tight in her arms. A second crash shook the bed beneath her—a second burst of flaming light searched her out, even beneath the sheet and

the soft blanket. She thought she was going to die with terror, when she heard a little faint click, and a voice spoke right above her:

"Jacqueline! It's I—Cousin Penelope. Don't be frightened!"

Hesitatingly, Caroline put aside the coverings and sat up. The light on the little table at her bedside had been switched on, and in the shaded brightness stood Cousin Penelope. She wore a silk dressing-gown of pale lavender, embroidered with clusters of purple wistaria. Her hair hung in a long braid at either side of her pale face. She looked gentler than ever Caroline had known her or dreamed that she could be. When she smiled, Caroline smiled back.

"Mildred was a little frightened," said Caroline. "I'm glad you came in, Cousin Penelope. Will you stay—or does Aunt Eunice want you?"

"Mother has lived through so many tempests that she doesn't mind them now," said Cousin Penelope. She drew up the low rocker and sat down. "I don't think they can be worse than your California earthquakes."

My conscience! How Jacqueline would have resented the suggestion that there were ever earthquakes in California! But Caroline was too ignorant of the proper attitude of a Native Daughter to be indignant. She only held Mildred tighter and gasped a little, as the room once more was irradiated with white and awesome light. She looked gratefully at Cousin Penelope.

"I don't mind it much," she quavered, "now that you are here. It—it does make you think of poetry, doesn't it?

"'The heavens are veined with fire,
And the thunder—how it rolls!
In the lulling of the storm——'"

Down came another cartload on the roof, only this time it didn't sound like mere rocks, but like metal rails.

"Ow!" squeaked Caroline. "Do you think that hit anything? Of course I'm not frightened, but Mildred is downright hectic."

Cousin Penelope rose and pulled down the blinds, and drew the chintz curtains across the windows. The fearsome glare of the lightning was shut out, but the thunder still thumped and thudded overhead. Caroline was glad that when Cousin Penelope sat down again, she drew the chair quite close to the bedside.

"It's very comforting to have you here, Cousin Penelope," she murmured.

"We're company for each other, Jacqueline. Now lie down and go to sleep again. I won't leave you till the storm is over."

So Caroline nestled down in her bed and closed her eyes, and thought of her party. She opened her eyes again, as the thunder crashed angrily, and saw Cousin Penelope sitting in the soft lamplight, so different from Cousin Penelope by day.

"I like you with your hair down, Cousin Penelope," Caroline said sleepily. "I wish you wore it always that way. You are so pretty with your hair down."

Cousin Penelope actually flushed, cheek and throat, but she wasn't angry, for her eyes were smiling.

Then Caroline shifted Mildred in her arms, and closed her eyes once more. Presently she realized that there had been silence for a space that was long enough to be felt—silence except for the roar of rain upon the roof, and that was nothing to the anvil clang of the thunder that for so long had deafened them.

"Mildred is going to sleep," said Caroline, without opening her eyes. "She thinks the storm is most over."

The thunder rolled, but it was far away, like a noise in dreams, and presently it was only in dreams, for Caroline, that the thunder rolled. When she opened her eyes again, there was no light in the room, except the pale light that came from the rain-washed out-of-doors. Against the night Cousin Penelope's form was outlined, as she finished putting up the blinds and opening the windows. Then she came softly across the room, in the fresh, sweet air and bent and drew the coverlet over Caroline's shoulders.

"Good-night, Cousin Penelope," Caroline whispered sleepily. "Go back to bed now—or you'll take cold."

In the darkness Cousin Penelope bent suddenly, and the faint scent of violets came with her. She kissed Caroline's forehead, and Caroline put up her arms, and caught her round the neck, and kissed her cheek.

"You're so good, Cousin Penelope," she whispered. "I'm so glad you like me."

For a moment Cousin Penelope held her close.

"Of course I—like you, Jacqueline."

The naming of the name that was not hers made Caroline shrink in the arms that held her.

"I want you to like me always!" she cried from her very heart.

"Silly little girl!" Cousin Penelope whispered tenderly—think of Cousin Penelope being tender!—and kissed her again. Then she tucked her in snugly, and bade her sleep, for the storm was over, and went away.

But Caroline lay wide awake, until the rain had dwindled to the mere dribble of water from the roof, and when she slept at last, her dreams were troubled.

For Jacqueline at that hour, there were no dreams. All the first part of the night she had slept soundly. She was really tired, for she had worked hard all day, in an honest effort to make up for the naughtiness of the day before, and to show that she appreciated the way in which no one, not even Neil, alluded to it. (Neil had actually come forward, and offered to help wash the dinner dishes!)

But when the first crash of thunder reverberated from the eastern mountains to the hills across the river, Jacqueline sat right up in bed. Where was she? What was happening? A white blaze lit the topsy-turvy baskets of roses on the wall-paper, so that she clapped her hands to her eyes and thought she

was blind for life. Then she felt the clutch of frightened little arms flung round her, and heard Nellie sob:

"Oh, Jackie! I'm so scared!"

"Thunder can't hurt you, goosey!" quavered Jacqueline, with her arm pressed tight across her eyes. The roof would fall upon their heads next moment, she was sure. The whole house would go up in a blaze of fire. Oh, why didn't Aunt Martha come to rescue them?

But Aunt Martha didn't come. Nobody came! The thunder shook the roof beams. The lightning sheathed the room in molten flame. Nellie sobbed, and choked, and clung round Jacqueline's neck.

"Mammy! Mammy!" she gasped.

"Keep still!" Jacqueline scolded. "Your mother isn't coming—nobody's coming—and *I've* got to get up and shut those windows."

Yes, that was just what she must do. For the rain, driven by the wind, was drenching their bed, and doing nobody knew what damage besides. She must get up—and she did get up! It wouldn't do ever to let Nellie think that ten years old could be as scared as six years old.

Jacqueline struggled with the windows that stuck, while the rain soaked through her thin nightdress, clear to her skin, and the thunder boomed in her ears, and the lightning seemed aimed in all the universe at her one poor little head. She remembered every dreary story she had ever heard of people killed by lightning. She thought she *was* killed, half a dozen times at least. But she closed the windows and yanked down the blinds, to shut out the glare. Then she made one flying leap into the bed and clutched Nellie as tight as Nellie clutched her, and vowed to herself that nothing—nothing in the wide world!—should tear her from the protection of that bed, until the storm was over.

Just as she made that vow, there came from Aunt Martha's room a thin, high-pitched wail that made both little girls catch their breath.

"What's Freddie crying for?" asked Nellie.

"He'll stop in half a jiffy," said Jacqueline. "Aunt Martha'll wake up and take him. Why can't she hear him? He's crying loud enough."

He was indeed, strangling, gasping, screaming with fright, and as she listened to him, Jacqueline grew frightened, too. For if Aunt Martha were in her room, she would surely wake and go to Freddie, and if she were *not* in her room, oh, *where* could Aunt Martha be? The night that had been terrible before with ear-splitting noises and unearthly fires was doubly terrible now, with the fear of unknown, ghastly things. Jacqueline's breath came in uneven gasps, while she listened agonizedly to hear Aunt Martha moving about, and heard only Freddie's cries.

But she couldn't let him cry like that, she realized. She would have to go and get him—leave her snug bed—cross her room—the hall—Aunt Martha's room—in that dreadful light and darkness, with the thunder roaring round her, and the fear of unspoken things turning her blood to ice.

"I can't—I can't!" Jacqueline's spirit fairly chittered within her. But Freddie kept on crying—and he was just a baby. She couldn't let him suffer there alone in the storm.

"Be a sport!" she told herself, through chattering teeth, and: "Nellie, you shut up!" she said aloud, in a harsh, snappy voice.

Out of the bed she got, and she set her teeth tight, and she made herself run straight into the next room. By a flash of lightning she could see poor Freddie, with his face dark and convulsed, as he sat screaming in his crib, and she could see Aunt Martha's bed, with the coverings turned back, and Aunt Martha—gone. She didn't dare stop to ask questions. She just caught up Freddie, who clawed her neck as he clung like a terrified kitten, and she ran staggering with him back into her own room. She plumped him into the bed beside Nellie, and scuttled in beneath the coverings. She had thought confusedly that once she was safe back in bed, she would have a good old cry to relieve her feelings. But she couldn't cry. She had to quiet the two children.

"Hush up now!" she heard herself saying stoutly. "You're all safe—you're here with Jackie—*I'll* take care of you."

The thunder volleyed. The lightning flamed. The storm had lasted an eternity. It would last, she felt, forever. Then, without warning, there was Aunt Martha coming in at the door, a dark, indistinct figure, but with Aunt Martha's footsteps that made Jacqueline, at the first sound, cry out with relief.

"You've got Freddie?" Aunt Martha spoke in a strained, tired voice, not like hers at all. "I knew I could trust you, Jackie. Look out for him till morning. I've got to stay downstairs."

"What's happened?" whispered Jacqueline.

"I went down to close the windows," Aunt Martha went on, in that queer, deadened voice. "I'd left them open because of the heat. Grandma had got up to see to them. Somehow she must have lost her bearings, and slipped and fallen. The phone won't work. Maybe the wires are down. Ralph's going to get out the car and fetch the doctor right away."

"Oh, Aunt Martha!" Jacqueline cried aloud.

"Grandma isn't——"

"I'm afraid," said Aunt Martha brokenly, "I'm afraid she's hurt herself pretty bad."

CHAPTER XXVI

THE SERPENT OF REMORSE

The day that followed on the party and the storm was unlike any day that Jacqueline had known in her short life, and the week that followed was unlike any week that she had ever expected to live.

Grandma Conway was very, very ill. She had not been struck by lightning, as the younger children believed, nor had she slipped and fallen, as Aunt Martha had thought at first. She had had a stroke of apoplexy, so the old doctor said, when he came plowing through the mud to the farm, on that ghastly night. She would get well, he hoped, but she would never be so active again. And she might be ill for a long time.

Grandma's bed was set up in the parlor, across the hall from the dining room. It was a big room, almost square, with windows to the north and the east. In one corner was a little old square piano, with yellow keys, on which Freddie's and Annie's mother used to play, when she was a girl. There were horsehair armchairs, with white crocheted tidies on their backs, and a horsehair sofa, and a marble-topped table. All this furniture was pushed aside, to make place for Grandma's bed and the old couch from the dining room on which Aunt Martha slept so that she could be near her.

Upstairs, in Aunt Martha's room over the dining room, Annie's crib now stood beside Freddie's. Jacqueline and Nellie slept in Aunt Martha's bed, and it was their job to care for the younger children. Above all they had to see that the children did not cry in the night and disturb Grandma's fitful sleep.

Jacqueline saw these arrangements made, with honest bewilderment. She thought somewhat of her own discomfort, packed in a room with two babies, who woke at the first cock-crow, but to do her justice, she thought also of Aunt Martha, who worked hard all day long and was now planning to watch all night. She remembered, when Auntie Blair was ill with the flu at Buena Vista, how two stern young women, in crisp white clothes, had instantly appeared, and like the lesser and the greater lights in Genesis, had ruled the day and the night.

"But Aunt Martha," suggested Jacqueline, "aren't you going to hire a nurse?"

Aunt Martha's lips twisted into a smile that wasn't the least bit mirthful.

"I expect I am, Jackie," she answered, "'bout the time I swap the Lizzie for a seven-seated high class touring car, and shed my old sweater for a sealskin coat."

By this time Jacqueline had learned enough about Aunt Martha's funny way of talking, to understand that Aunt Martha meant she was too poor to hire a nurse. Jacqueline felt as if she had been slapped in the face by the hard hand of a creature called Poverty, that up to now she had looked upon as little more than an amusing playfellow.

"But Aunt Martha," she urged, "it's an awful stunt, nursing sick people. You've got the outdoor work to see to—and the cooking—and the children. You just can't do it, Aunt Martha."

Again Aunt Martha gave her little twisted smile.

"No such word in the dictionary, Jackie. Besides, as old Abe Lincoln said, this is a case of 'Root, hog, or die!'"

Then her twisty smile grew kind, and her anxious eyes softened.

"Lucky I've got you, Jackie," she said. "I just felt when I saw you at Baring Station you were going to be a help and a comfort some day, but I didn't dream 'twould be so soon."

It wasn't just empty praise, either. Jacqueline knew she was a great help—much more help, she told herself proudly, than little Caroline, afraid of boys and cows, could ever have been. With Nellie's assistance, Jacqueline washed and dressed the babies, and made the beds, and swept and tidied up the rooms. She saw to it that Nellie kept the little ones quite out of earshot through the long day. She cooked—no pretty-pretend cooking at all, but great pans of her famous Johnny-cake, and stacks of toast, and quarts of apple-sauce, platters of scrambled eggs, and mounds of mashed potato, crocks full of sugar cookies, and when Aunt Martha found her the place in the recipe book, big sheets of soft gingerbread. She couldn't make pie crust or white bread, but she stirred up Graham bread, after Aunt Martha had shown her how, and she had good luck with it.

"You're a born cook, Jackie," Aunt Martha told her.

Neil and Dickie were called upon to wash the dishes. That was their share of the extra work, caused by Grandma's illness, so Aunt Martha said. Ralph for his part had to take on many outdoor jobs and responsibilities which had been Aunt Martha's, and Aunt Martha meantime was doing night and day the work of two nurses, and half of her own outdoor work and of Grandma's indoor work besides.

Life at the farm in those days was strenuous, you may well believe. Jacqueline hadn't dreamed that any one could take in a day as many steps as she now took in Caroline's old sneakers, nor could be so tired at night. But she went about her tasks uncomplaining, with a subdued manner which all the young folk shared. For Grandma, dear little spry Grandma, who had worked so hard, as Jacqueline realized, now that Grandma's chores in part were hers, might never step-step it round the kitchen again. The doctor came twice a day, and Aunt Martha's face had not even a twisted smile.

At first Jacqueline hadn't time to think. She just did the things that had to be done. But as the days passed, and she grew tired and saw Aunt Martha growing tired, too, she asked herself: what's the use? Money to hire nurses would relieve them both, and she had money—quite a lot of money. At least she had heard people at the school say she was an heiress, and she knew she had always been given plenty of money when she asked for it. She could ask for it now. She would go to the Gildersleeves.

No, she couldn't go to the Gildersleeves, for there was her promise to Caroline. She wished she had never given it. She had known when she gave it, like a silly, that she was going to regret it. But just the same, a promise was a promise. It wouldn't be fair now, when things were so hard at the farm, to ask Caroline to give up the piano, and the cool rooms, and the pretty frocks that she so loved, and never would have again, poor kid! and come and take her rightful place with the Conways.

Well, she wouldn't go to the Gildersleeves, but she'd write home for money—a lot of money! She

couldn’t write to Uncle Jimmie and Aunt Edie, for they were honeymooning all over the surface of Alaska, nor to Auntie Blair, for she was somewhere on the shores of the Great Lakes. But she could write to Auntie Blair’s father, Judge Blair, who with Aunt Edie shared her guardianship. Only he would address his reply—and the money!—to Jacqueline Gildersleeve, and Caroline would get them, because in Longmeadow Caroline was Jacqueline. That wouldn’t do at all. He must address his letter to Caroline Tait and then Jacqueline would receive it. But in order to get him to do such an extraordinary thing, she would have to explain to him how she happened to have become Caroline. Oh, shivering chimpanzees, and also woolly rhinoceroses! For Jacqueline was afraid of Judge Blair, if she was afraid of anybody, and besides, like a blundering grown-up, he would probably write straight off to the Gildersleeves and tell them everything that she had told him.

At last she decided that whatever she did, she would see Caroline first. Perhaps they could arrange something between them. Why couldn’t Judge Blair send the money to Jacqueline (that is, to Caroline), and Caroline take it, and give it to the real Jacqueline? Why, of course, that was the way out of her difficulties, and she need only see Caroline right straight off, and tell her about it.

It took Jacqueline some time to think this all out. She hadn’t had to do a great deal of thinking for herself in her life, and this problem was what her new Uncle Jimmie would have called “intrikut.” Besides she had to give a great many of her thoughts just now to the children, and the cooking, and Aunt Martha, who kept forgetting to eat, and poor Grandma, who was always there in the back of her mind, and the depth of her heart.

But the day came, after a week of dragging days that seemed a year, when the doctor looked quite cheerful after his morning visit, and said he wouldn’t need to come again until to-morrow. Aunt Martha turned from seeing him out at the door, with a smile that wasn’t a bit twisted, and when Jacqueline saw that smile, her head began to swim for joy, and her eyes went misty.

“She’s going to get well! Grandma’s going to get well!” Jacqueline chanted under her breath, while she jumped up and down softly in her sneakers.

“Glad you’ve spunk enough left to hop,” said Aunt Martha.

“Hop?” beamed Jacqueline. “I could run a mile. Oh, Aunt Martha, can’t I go to the village this afternoon? I won’t be long. I’ll run most of the way——”

Then she stopped. For she saw, by Aunt Martha’s face, that she was no more going to Longmeadow that afternoon than she was going to Timbuctoo.

“I’d like to let you go right well, Jackie,” said Aunt Martha, “but I don’t see how I can spare you. I’ve got to get over to East Baring and see about selling the wood lot. It’s a piece of business Ralph can’t tend to. I was counting on leaving you to sit with Grandma.”

Jacqueline shivered a little. Honestly she was afraid of the strange, white, withered woman who lay helpless in Grandma’s bed. And for all their sakes she wanted to see Caroline and arrange about getting that money just as quickly as possible. But she had no choice in the matter. She couldn’t explain to Aunt Martha why she wanted to go to Longmeadow and she couldn’t expect Aunt Martha to alter business plans just on account of what must seem to her a child’s desire to take a holiday.

So Aunt Martha drove away that afternoon in the Ford, and took Freddie with her, to relieve Jacqueline of one care, and Jacqueline settled herself by the north window in the parlor, ready to be of service, if Grandma so much as whispered. Jacqueline might have read story papers while she sat there, but she hated even the thought of those story papers. If she hadn’t sat reading, all that hot day before the day of the party, and left the work to Grandma, perhaps Grandma wouldn’t have been taken ill. She didn’t dare ask Aunt Martha if this were so. She kept the thought to herself, and was tortured with it. She never wanted to see that pile of story papers again, as long as she lived. In their place she got out the big, overflowing mending basket (Grandma’s basket!) and darned stockings patiently through the long afternoon.

She had hoped that Aunt Martha would be home at four o’clock to give Grandma her cup of broth. But there was never a sign of Aunt Martha, when four o’clock struck. “Root, hog, or die!” as old Abe Lincoln said of a disagreeable job. Jacqueline went into the kitchen, and warmed the broth, and put it into a thick white cup, and carried it to Grandma.

The feeble old white head shifted itself on the pillow, as Jacqueline slipped an arm beneath it, as she had seen Aunt Martha do, and gently raised it. The pale old lips approached the thick edge of the coarse cup.

“No—no,” Grandma muttered, and turned away her head. “Not that. Cup.”

“Drink it, Grandma dear,” begged Jacqueline. “I warmed it up real nice. Do, please drink it and get well.”

“My cup,” whispered Grandma. “No—no.”

She shut her eyes and her lips, with the obstinacy of the very feeble, and turned her head away. Jacqueline looked down at her helplessly. From beneath the pale eyelids she saw two tears course slowly.

“Oh, Grandma! Don’t!” begged Jacqueline.

“Cup,” murmured Grandma. “Want—green cup.”

Then Jacqueline understood.

CHAPTER XXVII

AGAINST A CLOSED DOOR

Jacqueline laid Grandma down, very gently, and put away the rejected broth, which was too precious to be thrown out, and rinsed the thick cup. As she stood drying it, she found that she was softly crying.

Oh, it was too dreadful! Poor little old Grandma, who had never been able to relish tea drunk from thick crockery, was begging now in her illness for the delicate green cup that had been all that was left of her precious wedding china—and it was Jacqueline, in her moment of bad temper, who had broken it! Once more Jacqueline felt as she had felt long ago, when she had struck the little lap dog. Quite frankly she wept into the dish towel that she was using.

But now she *must* see Caroline right away. Whatever else they went without, there at the farm, Grandma must have the thin china for which she pined. Wildly Jacqueline thought of running away to Longmeadow that very night. But sober second thought showed her the folly of such a plan. Even if Aunt Martha were willing to let her go, she hadn't the courage, after her former experience, to trudge through the onion fields alone, in the dark.

A very subdued Jacqueline, she greeted Aunt Martha on her return.

"Grandma's been all right," she said. "Only I couldn't get her to take her broth."

Aunt Martha clicked her tongue against her teeth. Black smudges of weariness showed beneath her unsmiling eyes.

"It's that way, half the time," she told Jacqueline. "Sick folks get notions. I'll see if I can coax her to take it."

But when Aunt Martha came out of the parlor, Jacqueline knew, by the worried look she wore, that she hadn't been successful.

Jacqueline ran to her—she couldn't help it!—and threw her arms about her.

"Oh, Aunt Martha!" she whimpered. "It's all my fault. She wants her green-dragon cup—and I broke it. I've just *got* to go to the village to-morrow and get her another."

Aunt Martha held Jacqueline close.

"There, there," she said, and patted her. "No use crying over spilt milk, child. There isn't another of those old green-dragon cups to be had for love nor money."

"But I can get her a thin cup, I know I can," begged Jacqueline. "*Please* let me go try!"

"You haven't the money, Jackie."

The words were on Jacqueline's tongue: "I know how to get it!" She bit them back just in time.

"Grandma'll get over the notion," Aunt Martha comforted. "Just put the whole thing out of your mind, now."

But Jacqueline didn't. She dreamed all night of green dragons off the cup that were chasing her, and the green dragons turned into green banknotes, and she wheeled a barrowful of them home to Aunt Martha and Grandma.

She woke in the morning, quite determined.

"It's a pretty cool day," she told Aunt Martha. "I could walk to Longmeadow easy as not. Honest, it wouldn't tire me a bit, and I'll be back in time to get supper."

Aunt Martha smiled, as if in spite of herself. "If you aren't the most persistent young one!" she said.

"Can't I?" begged Jacqueline.

Aunt Martha hesitated.

"You've worked real faithful," she said at last. "I guess if it's any treat to go to Longmeadow, you ought to have it."

"Oh goody, Aunt Martha!"

"Don't crack my ribs, Jackie! You hug like a young bear."

"I'll start right after dinner——"

"No, you won't, child. Ralph's got to drive up to the north end of town. You can ride up with him 'bout two o'clock. He'll pick you up at the Post Office long 'bout five. The library's open to-day. You can sit in there when you get tired looking for cups in Miss Crevey's, and Cyrus Hatton's, and the Post Office. I suppose that's what you're calculating to do?"

"Y-yes," Jacqueline admitted.

Privately she assured herself that it was no lie that she told. She certainly would go and hunt for cups in the three Longmeadow shops, but she would go only *after* she had seen Caroline.

At half past one by the kitchen clock, Jacqueline cast a proud glance at the bowl of stewed gooseberries, cooling on the table by the window, at the well-brushed floor, and the well-scrubbed sink, all the work of her hands. Then she skipped happily up the narrow stair, but softly, not to disturb Grandma, and in her old room, over the parlor, made ready for her trip to Longmeadow. She felt that bare ankles and Peggy Janes did not quite fit with the importance of her mission. She put on a pair of Caroline's cotton socks, and the identical pink and white checked gingham in which she first had seen Caroline on the train.

As a last touch of elegance, she hunted for a hair-ribbon, and during the search in a top drawer, not so tidy as it might be, she came upon the box of Japanese lacquer, which she had half forgotten. Caroline's treasures were in that box—the trinkets, the letters, the photograph—but of far more interest to Jacqueline was the old pink hair-ribbon bound round the box. She slipped it off, smoothed it across her knee, and tied her hair with a rather lop-sided bow. She didn't altogether admire the effect, when she looked at herself in the mirror, but it was the best she could do, and as Grandma liked to say: "Angels could do no more."

The drive into Longmeadow was not the jolliest pleasure trip imaginable. The road was dusty, and the little old car wheezed till you pitied it almost as if it were human. Besides, Ralph let it be clearly

understood that he didn't see the need for a girl, who did nothing but putter round the house, to take an afternoon off, and leave his mother to do everything. If Dickie, or Neil, now, had wanted a holiday, that would be different. Ralph, you see, was quite on the way to being a man.

"You make me tired," Jacqueline told him loftily.

"Is that so?" retorted Ralph. "Then it's more than the work you do will ever make you."

After that, no more words passed between them. With chill dignity, for all the scantness of her faded skirts, Jacqueline descended from the car at the foot of Longmeadow Street.

"I'll be at the Post Office at five o'clock," she said, in the tone in which haughty society ladies are supposed to say: "Home, James!"

"You'd better be, for I shan't wait for you," Ralph called back, before he rattled away in a cloud of dust.

Well, maybe he'd behave a little more respectfully by and bye, Jacqueline told herself darkly, as she trudged up the street. When he saw her hiring two nurses—and having huge baskets of grapes sent up from Boston for Grandma—and a lovely silk dressing-gown—and a wheelchair—and a down coverlet—and a darling invalid's table, with egg-shell china!

Once more Jacqueline lost herself in gorgeous dreams of what she was going to do—dreams that blew up like a burst balloon, as she found herself actually within sight of the Gildersleeve place. She halted short. The house looked so big, above its surrounding elms, and she felt so little, all at once, in Caroline's skimpy gingham. Perhaps she had better not go in at the front gate. Perhaps she had better slip in through the gap in the hedge, as she had done that earlier time. Perhaps by great good luck she might find Caroline in the summer house.

But she found the summer house quite orderly and empty, and the garden was very still. Perhaps Aunt Eunice was taking a nap. She could see through the branches of the trees that the shutters were closed at the windows—all the windows at that side of the house. Or perhaps, better still, Aunt Eunice and Cousin Penelope had gone out to pay calls. If only they had gone out, and left Caroline at home!

Buoyed up with this hope, Jacqueline scurried along the neat path through the gay-colored, sweet-scented garden, threaded the shrubbery, crossed the lawn, and ran lightly up the steps of the cool, wide porch. The white paneled door, with its ancient fan-light, was firmly closed. She grasped the big shining brass knocker, and without waiting for her courage to ooze, rapped loudly.

She waited. She grew very conscious of her skimpy dress and her rumpled hair-ribbon. She wondered what she should say, if the maid, when she came, refused to call "Miss Jacqueline," and went and summoned Cousin Penelope.

She knocked again timidly.

No one came. The lawn and the garden were very still. She heard a pear fall ripely from a tree. A car drove by on the road. Moments passed. She felt her cheeks begin to burn. She was as angry as if she had known that people stood behind the door, deliberately letting her knock and knock, unanswered, because her dress was faded and scant. She grabbed that knocker, and she beat such a tattoo on the old door as surely it had seldom known in its venerable life.

Rat-tat-tat banged the knocker, with horrid brazen clangor, until Jacqueline had to stop for breath. She was now more white than red. Of course they must be there—the maids, at least. Off their job, because Aunt Eunice had gone out. She'd show 'em.

Rat-tat-tat went the knocker, and then Jacqueline's feet, in the scuffed sneakers, were kicking at the door, and Jacqueline's hands were thumping futilely upon the smooth white panels.

"Let me in!" cried Jacqueline, afraid, she hardly knew of what. "Let me in—in—IN!"

She stopped suddenly. She had heard footsteps on the walk below the porch. She turned, and there stood a stout, solemn little girl, with tow-colored hair, in a neat white frock and sandals.

"That won't do a bit of good," said the little girl.

"Smarty!" said Jacqueline. "How do you know?"

"Smarty yourself," answered the little girl. "I know 'cause I live next door. I'm Eleanor Trowbridge, and Jacqueline told me to come here and play in her summer house while they're gone."

"Gone?" Jacqueline echoed foolishly.

"Sure," said Eleanor. "Don't you suppose they'd come out and tell you to stop banging that knocker, if they were here? They all went off yesterday, and Jacqueline took Mildred with her. They've gone way off to the seashore, and they won't be back till it's time for school again."

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE UTTERLY IMPOSSIBLE

If Jacqueline had been given to quoting poetry, she might have said:

"'I feel chilly, and grown old!'"

Not being given that way, she confessed merely to what Grandma called "a gone feeling." She sat down suddenly on the steps of the porch, quite as if she had been hit a sudden hard clip in the stomach.

"What makes you look so funny?" Eleanor Trowbridge asked sociably. "Are you coming down with something? I went and nearly had rash but I didn't."

"Where have they gone?" Jacqueline interrupted Eleanor's flow of confidences.

"To the beach, I told you."

"For goodness' sake! *What* beach? I suppose there's more than *one* in your horrid old New England."

This insult to the land of her fathers provoked Eleanor, not without reason. She tossed her head and answered snappishly:

"Mother says I shouldn't tell all I know to every stranger."

She turned and started to walk away, but not very eagerly. Jacqueline mastered the desire to shake her, got up, and went after her.

"Now don't get peeved," she told Eleanor. "I've got a most special reason why I want to see—er—Jacqueline."

"Well, what of it?" Eleanor muttered ungraciously, but without walking on.

"It's a great secret," Jacqueline admitted. "Maybe some day I'll tell you." She smiled—and you may remember that she had a quite bewitching smile.

"Will you tell me? Honest and truly?" Eleanor asked.

"Cross my heart and hope to die if I don't," Jacqueline rattled off glibly. "There's a mystery—and I'll let you in on it some time—if you'll only tell me where she's gone."

"Oh, dear!" whined Eleanor. "But I don't know."

"Don't know?" repeated Jacqueline blankly, while once more the green world seemed to rock beneath her.

"She didn't tell me," Eleanor explained in an injured tone. "She cooey'd over the hedge, and said they were going off, so we couldn't play tea party in the afternoon, and they went in the limousine with the trunks in the carrier, and Sallie and Hannah—that's the cook—went on a vacation, and she said the beach, but she didn't say what beach, and Mildred was all dressed up in a sailor suit with such a ducky hat, and——"

"When did they go?" Jacqueline stemmed the torrent of words.

"Why, just yesterday."

Yesterday! Only yesterday! By such a narrow margin she had missed Caroline.

"Dumb-paste it!" cried Jacqueline, beside herself.

"That's a bad word," said Eleanor austerely.

"'Tisn't either," Jacqueline retorted. "Don't you ever paste things?"

"Not that way," insisted Eleanor.

"Well, I don't care," said Jacqueline morosely. "I suppose she isn't going to write you?" she caught at the last rag of fluttering hope.

Eleanor was eager with explanations:

"I asked her to, but she looked scared, and said she never wrote letters."

Oh, docile Caroline! Only too well had she remembered and carried out the instructions of her leader. The reward of her docility was that Jacqueline merely yearned to shake her.

"Well," Jacqueline controlled herself with effort. "It looks as if I couldn't get at her till she comes back."

"It looks that way," agreed Eleanor.

Jacqueline gazed hopelessly at the big house, her haven of refuge, shuttered, bolted, barred against her, by people who were gone, no one could tell her where.

"You're sure," she faltered, "that even the maids have gone? Perhaps they could tell me——"

"Sure they're gone," said Eleanor cheerfully. "They asked our Maggie to feed the gray cat that comes round their garage."

Jacqueline drew a long breath.

"Well," she said, like a game little echo of her Uncle Jimmie. "I guess I'd better be on my way." Eleanor tagged at her side through the fragrant garden.

"Couldn't you stay and play with me?" she suggested.

"Not to-day, kid," Jacqueline told her loftily. She felt herself older than Eleanor—immeasurably older. Wasn't she suddenly called upon to face a problem beyond Eleanor's grasping—a problem such as she had never expected to be called upon to face?

Out in Longmeadow Street, which was all a pleasant checker-board of light and shadow, Jacqueline lagged slowly toward the Post Office. What should she do, she asked herself, over and over again? She *must* get some money. But she couldn't reach Caroline, not for weeks and weeks. She would have to write directly to Judge Blair, and ask him to address the answer to her as Caroline Tait, and she would have to tell him why. Not that! For he would be sure to write the whole story to Aunt Eunice (he, no doubt, in the inscrutable wisdom of grown-ups, would know where to find her) and then——

Jacqueline might be mad enough at Caroline for letting herself be whisked away, no one knew where, without a word to her, but still she wasn't going to let her in for the sort of scolding she was

sure that pinch-faced Cousin Penelope was bound to give her, when she found her to be an impostor. No, she'd got to grin and bear it. No money—no chance to get money—and all the work to do—and Aunt Martha tired out—and Grandma crying in her feebleness for the thin china that no one could afford to buy her.

Oh, prancing camelopards, and bounding orang-outangs! Also chisel-toothed baboons! There were not beasts enough in the menagerie, nor words enough in the unabridged dictionary to express the feelings that surged in Jacqueline's bosom beneath the faded pink and white checked gingham! She felt the tears of hot anger and disappointment and pity, too, for little Grandma, well up into her eyes. To hide them from the curious gaze of two young girls, who came sauntering toward her along the graveled sidewalk, she stopped, and stared hard into a convenient shop window, which happened to be Miss Crevey's.

There were all sorts of things displayed in the window—cards of white ruching, edged with black, novels by Mary Jane Holmes, glass jars of wilted candy sticks, china boxes with the words "Souvenir of Longmeadow" painted in gilt upon them, sheets of dusty paper dolls in staring colors. Jacqueline's gaze passed over the queer assortment of articles, and rested on the little shelf against the wall, at one side of the window. On the shelf was a glove box of birch bark and cones and a bright-colored copy of "The Angelus," and between them——

She rubbed her eyes. She looked again. Yes, between them stood what Aunt Martha had vowed no longer could be had for love nor money—a cup of thin china—an ancient cup—with a pattern of green dragons.

CHAPTER XXIX

SO MUCH FOR SO MUCH

Inside Miss Crevey's stuffy little shop a woman customer kept insisting that she must have lilac ribbon two inches wide, although Miss Crevey told her that blue ribbon three inches wide, which Miss Crevey happened to have in stock, would be just as good, if not better. Jacqueline teetered impatiently from one foot to the other, while she waited for the end of the argument. The woman left at last in dudgeon, without buying so much as a paper of pins.

"Well, there's no suitin' some folks," Miss Crevey muttered waspishly, and turned to Jacqueline. "Come now, what d'ye want, little girl? Speak up! I won't have no young ones hangin' round in here, handlin' things and askin' questions. Ain't you got a tongue?"

Most certainly Jacqueline had, and she used it, the moment Miss Crevey stopped for breath and gave her half a chance.

"If you please," she said, "I want to know the price of the cup and saucer on the shelf in the window."

Miss Crevey fixed her eyes on a dinky little "Souvenir of Longmeadow" that might have graced a doll's tea table.

"Fifty cents," she said, "but you'd better buy the match box and get more for your money."

"I didn't mean that one," protested Jacqueline. "I meant the one with green dragons, there on the shelf."

"That old cup?"

"Yes, please. How much is it?"

Miss Crevey looked at her with hostile eyes.

"That's more 'n you can pay," she said flatly. "It's worth five dollars, Mrs. Enos Trowbridge told me—five dollars, if it's worth a cent. Run along now! I can't waste my time tellin' you the price of everything in the store."

"I haven't asked the price of *everything*," Jacqueline retorted. "I only asked about the green-dragon cup. Let me look at it, will you please?"

So loftily did she speak, and so sure did she seem of herself, that Miss Crevey took the cup and saucer from the shelf although she grumbled a little as she did so.

"There they be!" she said, as she set them on the counter. "Don't you go droppin' them now!"

Luckily at that moment a young girl from upstreet stepped in, to buy a piece of tape, and some white hooks and eyes (she had to be contented with black) and some orange twist, though she finally took yellow. While Miss Crevey was making these small sales, Jacqueline had time to examine the dragon cup and saucer at leisure. Yes, they were of identically the same pattern as Grandma's cups and saucers that were broken. Jacqueline couldn't be mistaken. She had washed and dried them too often. Aunt Martha had told her that such china couldn't be had now for love nor money, but here it was, the very cup she wanted—Grandma's cup!

The screen door slammed as the young girl went out, not too well pleased, it would seem, with her makeshift purchases.

"Well!" said Miss Crevey briskly. "If you're through playin' with that cup and saucer, I'll just set 'em up out o' harm's way."

"I—I want to buy them," faltered Jacqueline.

"Got five dollars handy?" challenged Miss Crevey.

Jacqueline swallowed and stared hard at the precious cup, so that she need not meet Miss Crevey's gimlet eyes. Oh, if only she had some of the money that she had spent so carelessly at home and at school! Why, she had often given a five-dollar bill for a box of candy, and got back with it only a few bits of silver—chicken-feed, she had liked to call them grandly. If only she had one of those bills now! If only she could go home proudly, with Grandma's cup!

"Make up your mind!" urged the implacable Miss Crevey. "Take it or leave it—I can't wait all day."

Jacqueline felt herself backed against the wall. She must do something, and do it quickly, or the precious cup and saucer would go back upon the shelf, and then as likely as not they would be snapped up next minute by some other customer and lost to Grandma forever. She could almost see the entire town of Longmeadow, charging into the shop to buy that cup, and nothing but that cup.

"Hold on!" she said, and she was thinking fast. "Couldn't you—trust me? I'll have the money in September, sure."

Of course she would! Even if Caroline and the Gildersleeves didn't get back in time for school, as Eleanor Trowbridge prophesied, Aunt Edie and Uncle Jimmie were due in September.

Miss Crevey looked at her coldly. Oh, how conscious Jacqueline grew of the scantiness and shabbiness of her faded gingham! She blushed, and was angry at herself for blushing, and so blushed all the harder.

"Where d'ye expect to get the money?" Miss Crevey shot the words from her thin lips.

"I'm eleven in September," Jacqueline said truthfully. "And I have a pretend-aunt that always gives me money on my birthday, and she will this time."

"Well, when you get the money," Miss Crevey spoke like one conferring a great favor, "I'll let you have the cup and saucer."

"Will you keep them for me till I get the money?" asked Jacqueline desperately.

"Why of course I will," cried Miss Crevey heartily, "unless somebody comes along that'll pay me spot cash for them."

The tears of disappointment rose to Jacqueline's eyes. She blinked them rapidly away. She must not let this hateful woman see her cry. But she was so sorry for Grandma—and so sorry for herself! She remembered how hopefully she had dressed for the little trip to Longmeadow, only an hour ago—how

she had made herself so extra neat, with a hair ribbon, too—the look of the upper drawer, as she tossed its contents over—handkerchiefs, stockings, underwear—a Japanese lacquer box.

Jacqueline caught her breath.

"Look here!" she spoke, as one inspired. "If I brought you something worth *more* than five dollars and let you keep it till September when I shall have some money—then would you let me have the cup and saucer and take them home—right now?"

Miss Crevey pursed her lips.

"What d'ye mean by *something*?" she asked stabbingly.

Jacqueline's heart was beating fast.

"There's a pin," she said, "and there's a pearl in it—or there's gold beads—a chain of them. I know gold beads are worth a lot more than five dollars. Oh, couldn't you take them?"

"How do I know till I see them?" snapped Miss Crevey. "You bring 'em in some day—then we'll talk business."

Jacqueline drew a long breath.

"I'm going to go and get them right straight off," she said, "and don't you sell that cup and saucer till I come back."

Strange though it may seem to you, it didn't enter Jacqueline's head that she was doing a dreadful thing in taking Caroline's precious keepsakes to use as a pledge. In a half-formed way she felt that Caroline, by going off to the seashore, had brought this trouble upon her, and so was bound to help her out, in any way she could. She felt, too, that the fact that Grandma was really a relation of Caroline's, not of hers, made the whole arrangement perfectly fair.

Still, Jacqueline might have seen her conduct in a different light, if she had taken time to sleep upon it. But she took no time. For luck played into her hand in a breathlessly amazing fashion. When she burst out of Miss Crevey's shop, with a crazy idea of running clear to the farm and back, before Ralph got to the Post Office at five o'clock, whom should she see, heading down the street toward his home in the Meadows, but friendly Mr. Griswold!

Shrieking like a lost soul, Jacqueline sprinted after him, and fortunately she made him hear. A moment later she was seated at his side in his ramshackle, blessed old car. A short half-hour later, with warnings to Nellie never to tell, she was creeping up the stairs to their old room, so paddy-pawed that Aunt Martha, busy changing Grandma's sheets, behind the closed doors of the parlor, never heard a sound.

Without pausing one moment to think, she opened the lacquer box and took out the string of gold beads. She knotted them safely in the corner of a clean pocket handkerchief, and quietly as she had entered, slipped out of the house again.

She ran part of the long, dusty road back to the village. Suppose she should come too late—suppose she should find the cup already sold—suppose oh! suppose Miss Crevey refused to keep to the bargain! But none of these dreadful things came to pass. When she panted into the close little shop, she found the dragon cup and saucer still in the window, and she found Miss Crevey mindful of the agreement.

Shrewdly Miss Crevey examined the beads.

"Be they yours?" she asked suspiciously.

"Heirlooms," stammered Jacqueline, and then dodged the subject. "I know they're worth more than five dollars."

"Hm!" sniffed Miss Crevey. She sounded noncommittal enough, but she put the beads into the drawer of an old secretary behind the counter, and turned the key upon them. Then she wrapped the cup and saucer carefully in old newspapers, and even, for greater safety, packed them in a large old button box.

"Don't ye break 'em now!" she cautioned.

Jacqueline didn't. She had broken enough dragon china, she felt, to last her for a lifetime. She climbed into the car beside Ralph, at five o'clock, as circumspectly as if it were a baby that she held in her arms. She clambered out again at the kitchen door of the farm, with equal care.

"Aunt Martha!" she cried gaspingly. "Aunt Martha! See what I've got. I told you I would. For Grandma!"

With hands that shook with eagerness, Jacqueline unwrapped the cup and saucer, and for once she saw Aunt Martha stand (in Grandma's phrase!) "flabbergasted."

"For the land sake, Jackie!" Aunt Martha finally got her breath. "Wherever in the world did you dig up that old china?"

"I found it—in Miss Crevey's shop."

"Jackie! You never got it for nothing!"

"My pretend-aunt will send me some money on my birthday." Jacqueline spoke fast. "I'll pay Miss Crevey then. It's all right, Aunt Martha. Honest, it is."

Aunt Martha handled the cup and saucer almost reverently.

"Seems like a miracle," she said, in a hushed voice. "I don't mind telling you now, Jackie, we were worried to death because Grandma wouldn't eat enough to keep up her strength, but now—why, when she sees her own old cup——"

She broke off, as if she couldn't make the words come, and patted Jacqueline's shoulder. From Aunt Martha that meant as much as a hug and a kiss from Aunt Edie.

"You've done a good day's work, Jackie," Aunt Martha found words again, as she turned away, and in the glow and triumph of the moment Jacqueline almost forgot that the gold beads that were Caroline's lay under lock and key in Miss Crevey's dusty secretary.

CHAPTER XXX

SLEEPY-HEAD

Really Caroline deserved none of the hard things that Jacqueline thought of her. She of course hadn't had the least suspicion that her sudden departure to unknown places would be a tragedy for Jacqueline. Just the same she would have sent Jacqueline some word about this change in the summer's plans, if only she had had the chance. But when you remember that Cousin Penelope had made up her mind to protect her darling from that pushing horrid little girl from the Meadows, (and when you remember Cousin Penelope!) you will realize that Caroline had about as much chance to send a message to Jacqueline as a nice little round snowball to survive in the middle of a red-hot furnace.

They were going away next morning, Cousin Penelope had announced one evening at dinner. They were going to the beach, because Cousin Marcia Vintner wasn't using her cottage, and Aunt Eunice needed change of air (Aunt Eunice had never looked better in her life!) and Jacqueline, so Cousin Penelope had decided, was dying to paddle in the waves and run on the sands.

Privately Jacqueline's little understudy was very well pleased where she was, but she would have been less than a human child, if she hadn't thrilled at the thought of a journey, especially in that smooth rolling, softly upholstered limousine, which still seemed to her a palace on wheels.

She spent a busy evening in helping Cousin Penelope select and pack in a little leather trunk the things that she would need at the beach. Fully half of Jacqueline's pretty wardrobe was to be left at The Chimnies and some of the most valuable of her trinkets.

"I'll put these pins and chains in the library safe," said Cousin Penelope. "The house will be closed, you know, while we are away, and though we've never had such a thing as a burglar in Longmeadow, it's better to be safe than sorry."

Caroline agreed. She was ready to agree to anything. She went to bed, full of happy thoughts of the journey before her, and then for the first time she remembered Jacqueline, and grew uneasy. Was it fair to stay in Jacqueline's place, even at Jacqueline's bidding, and enjoy this trip to the beach that Jacqueline had not foreseen? But she couldn't give away the secret that was one-half Jacqueline's and that Jacqueline had ordered her to keep, until she had consulted with Jacqueline.

And how was she to get at Jacqueline? She couldn't go herself to the Meadows, even if she had had the time to do so, and she couldn't telephone. She fairly quaked in her cozy bed as she thought of the stern, accusing face that Cousin Penelope would turn upon her, should she catch her actually telephoning to the house in the Meadows that sheltered the child she had denounced as rude and pushing. She would rather die than attempt to telephone Jacqueline from The Chimnies—but there were other telephones in Longmeadow!

What a ninny she had been not to think of that before! First thing in the morning she would run over to the Trowbridges'. She could venture it, for she and Eleanor were now quite intimate friends. She would telephone Jacqueline, and let her know that they were going away to the beach. Not that it would make any difference to Jackie, but she would feel better herself to have done what she felt was the fair thing to do.

Wasn't it strange that when so much depended on her waking early, Caroline should oversleep? Actually she waked only when Cousin Penelope, in her lavender dressing-gown, stood laughing over her.

"Hurry, little Sleepy-head!" cried Cousin Penelope. "I let you rest till the last minute, but breakfast will be on the table now before you can say Jack Robinson, and we must start right after breakfast, or we'll have to travel in the heat of the day."

You know yourself how it is when you rise late and dress in a hurry. Stubborn snarls in the brown locks that just wouldn't come out—button-holes in the freshly laundered garments that closed their mean lips and wouldn't admit the buttons—a hair-ribbon that peevishly had lost itself—finally a weakened clasp on the chain of tiny gold beads that she meant to wear, which let the whole string go slipping coldly down within her undergarments.

Caroline had just recovered the beads, when she heard the soft notes of the Chinese gongs that made always such a pleasant prelude to meals at The Chimnies. She dared not trust the shallow pockets of her mouse-colored smock, so she left the beads upon the dressing-table. Later she would put them into her little vanity bag (Jacqueline's vanity bag!) when she came back to her room for her hat and her coat and Mildred, who was all dressed and waiting. But she couldn't stop now, not even to open the vanity bag. One must never be late to meals.

Such a hurried breakfast, thrilled with the pleasant sense of a journey to follow! Cousin Penelope was already hatted, with her veil of palest mauve pushed back from her eager face. Sallie, as she waited at table, was all smiles and good cheer. She, too, was happy at the thought of a long holiday. Aunt Eunice's old cheeks were delicately flushed. Perhaps after all she really needed sea air, as Cousin Penelope so generously had suggested.

"You must eat more than a humming-bird, Jacqueline," Aunt Eunice urged. "It will be a long time to luncheon time."

"We'll lunch in Boston," said Cousin Penelope, in her masterful manner. "I wrote Dr. Stoddard for an appointment. He'll put in another hour on Jacqueline's teeth."

"Oh, misery!" thought Caroline.

"And we must get Jacqueline a bathing suit," added Cousin Penelope.

"And some sand toys," supplemented Aunt Eunice. "You and Mildred aren't too old to make me some sand pies, are you, dear?"

Caroline smiled, and do you know, though her smile came less frequently than Jacqueline's, it was just as sweet?

“Come, Jacqueline!” Cousin Penelope was calling next moment from down the hall. Such an energetic Cousin Penelope as she was that early morning! “We must select some music to take along.”

“Oh!” cried Caroline, swooping after her. “Will there be a piano?”

“Did you think we could live without one? I’m urging Madame Woleski to spend at least a week with us.”

A week under the same roof with Madame Woleski! Carried away with the prospect of such happiness, Caroline forgot everything but the music that she sorted—music that she might some time play for Madame Woleski’s criticism. She actually forgot that Jacqueline existed, until she heard the cushioned wheels of the great limousine roll singingly across the gravel of the drive.

“Oh!” cried Caroline, in dismay. “And I’ve got to say good-by to Eleanor Trowbridge!”

“There’s no time now, dear,” warned Cousin Penelope.

“But I must,” cried Caroline desperately. “I must—show her Mildred—in her sailor suit.”

She flew up the stairs to her room. She snatched up the doll and fairly flew down again. She rushed out of the house and tore across the garden. To her joy she saw Eleanor Trowbridge there at the other side of the hedge and the rose tangle, in the swing that hung from a branch of the big elm.

“Cooey!” cried Caroline.

Eleanor came hurrying on her sturdy legs, and when Eleanor stood before her, a very solid person, Caroline lost her courage. She couldn’t say right out plump: “Let me into your house to use your telephone, quick!” as she had meant to say. She stammered and hesitated and talked about the journey. She was leading the subject round to the telephone. Presently she would get there! Oh, how her heart was beating, and Eleanor, the solid and stolid, didn’t give her a bit of help.

“You can play in our summer house while I’m gone,” said Caroline, and she meant to add, “if you’ll let me use your telephone now,” but she never said the words, for just then Cousin Penelope came tripping across the garden.

“Last call for the Boston train!” Cousin Penelope cried gayly. “Hurry, Jacqueline! We’ve got to stop in the village for gas and oil, and we’re half an hour behind schedule already.”

So Caroline, quite helpless, was hurried away to the car, beneath the envious eyes of Eleanor Trowbridge. Already the luggage was strapped on the carrier, and Aunt Eunice was cozily seated in the car. Beside her were the little vanity bag, the straw hat, with its flame-colored band, and the little leaf brown cape coat that Caroline should wear upon the journey.

“Sallie fetched down your things,” smiled Aunt Eunice. “Jump in, my dear, and off we go!”

So Caroline jumped in. What else could she do? And in the joy and excitement of setting out on a delightful journey, she almost forgot that she had thought it of prime importance, only last night, to telephone Jacqueline, and she quite forgot the string of beads (Jacqueline’s beads!) that she had left upon the dressing-table.

It was Sallie who found those beads later, when she went to “do” the room that was Caroline’s. Being neat and methodical, Sallie took the beads and dropped them into the Dresden china trinket box upon the dressing-table, and then in the excitement of hurrying off on her own holiday, she too forgot them—but not forever!

CHAPTER XXXI

A LETTER FROM ALASKA

Cousin Marcia Vintner, who was Aunt Eunice's cousin, and stood to Jacqueline in some obscure relationship that Caroline never was able to work out, had thoughtfully gone away for the summer to the Bosphorus. The cottage that she left at the disposal of her friends was what Caroline, only five weeks removed from Cousin Delia's crowded quarters, would have called a house, and a very nice one.

The cottage, since Cousin Marcia wished to call it so, was of gray, weathered shingles, with latticed casements and a craftily contrived sag in the ridgepole, and it stood in a little tangle of old-fashioned flowers, on the side of a hill that sloped down to the rocks and the sea. Inside there was a living room, with a great brick fireplace and walls sheathed in dark wood. The piano held the place of honor, with its gleaming keyboard turned toward the windows.

There was a wee dining room, with cottage furniture of black and yellow, and dishes black and yellow, too. In the kitchen, all white and blue tiles, was Cousin Marcia's Jenny, a black woman who went with the house and made beaten biscuit and sugar jumbles, such as Caroline had never tasted before. Upstairs were darling bedrooms, with casements that looked to the sea. Caroline's room was all in delft blue and orange, like the sea in some lights and the smooth western clouds when the sun has just set.

There were books in the house, and magazines, and there were pretty things to sew, which Aunt Eunice had brought along. Out of doors were the downs, where Caroline went walking with a Cousin Penelope who seemed younger and gayer and lovinger than she had been in Longmeadow. There were the rocks, with their treasure-pools of seaweed and shells and strange live things that stayed rooted or moved so sluggishly they barely seemed to move. There were the white sands, where Caroline played with a basket of new toys, fluted dishes, flower-shapes, fish-shapes that molded the moist sand into forms of beauty. There were the waves, where Caroline paddled or sometimes, with little gasps at the cold shock of them, ventured to bathe, and bathed most willingly, when Cousin Penelope was near.

People came and went. Children from the near-by cottages, all on the lordly scale of Cousin Marcia's dwelling, played with Caroline on the beach and among the rocks. Lovely ladies, mothers and sisters of the children, and all young alike, came to tea with Aunt Eunice and Cousin Penelope, and Caroline wore one of Jacqueline's pretty frocks, the corn-colored net or the hemstitched white crêpe de chine with the old rose pipings, and passed the Dresden plate of cakes or the silver dish of plump bonbons.

Madame Woleski came, not for a week, but for three full days of enchantment, and made music for them evenings in the soft light of the candles. She kissed Caroline when she went away, and told her she was mastering some of her faults of technique. Let her work hard and not be discouraged! From Madame Woleski that was much more than gushing praises from another, and so the music-loving soul in Caroline, that her mother had fostered, knew and understood.

Wonderful days by the sea—days in which Jacqueline in the Meadows was almost forgotten, as Jacqueline herself had told Caroline to forget—days indeed when Caroline almost believed that she was Jacqueline, and that all this happiness and love and the singing piano were to be hers forever.

There in Longmeadow, Jacqueline, helpless and little, hadn't known how to trace Caroline and the Gildersleeves. But the postmaster had their new address all the time! If Jacqueline had thought to ask him, no doubt he would have told it to her, but he would have told every one that she had asked him, for he was the greatest old gossip in all the village. No, she wouldn't have dared to ask him, because he was such a gossip, even if she had known that he had the address.

The William Gildersleeves, The Sheiling, Monk's Bay, Mass. That was the address, written in a crabbed hand on a page in the postmaster's notebook, and to The Sheiling, Cousin Marcia's cottage at Monk's Bay, came every now and then the letters that he forwarded.

One day there was a letter for Jacqueline Gildersleeve.

Cousin Penelope handed it to Caroline, when she came up from the beach to tea. Caroline was bare-legged, in her sandals, with her brown pongee knickerbockers, beneath her pongee smock, a little dampened at the edges where she had been wading, not wisely but too well. Under her broad-brimmed straw hat with its tawny orange ribbons that matched the orange stitching of her smock her face was glowing and her eyes were wells of tranquil joy.

"Here's a letter from your aunt," said Cousin Penelope, in a vexed tone. "I really believe it's the first letter she has written you in all these weeks."

Aunt Eunice, in her basket chair by the open casement, shook her head never so slightly.

"They've sent her a great many post-cards, Penelope," she said, like one who makes an effort to be just. "When you're traveling all the time from place to place, it isn't always easy to write regular letters, and besides you must remember that mail often goes astray."

"I—I didn't ask for letters," Caroline broke out, in a trembling voice. "Oh, dear! You read it for me, Aunt Eunice, please!"

She had worn Jacqueline's clothes, and borne Jacqueline's name, and taken Jacqueline's place, but there was something in her that she couldn't overcome—something that Mother and Father both had trained—that cried out at the mere thought of opening a sealed letter addressed to some one else.

But Aunt Eunice had apparently the same feeling.

"Certainly not, my dear," she said, gently enough, but in a tone that left no chance of appeal. "You must read your own letter. It is meant for you, and for nobody else."

The glow had all gone out of Caroline's face and her eyes had filled. Now frankly she began to cry.

It was Cousin Penelope who caught her in her arms.

"There, there, precious!" she soothed. Think of it! Cousin Penelope, of all people, soothing and understanding. "I know how it is. Letters from outside—they break things up——"

"Oh, it's been so lovely here with you," wept Caroline, "just too lovely to last."

Cousin Penelope held her tight—tight enough almost to hurt her. Cousin Penelope kissed her, almost passionately.

"Penelope!" That was Aunt Eunice speaking, but in a voice unlike her own voice—stern and hard. "It is tea time. Jacqueline must wash her face and hands. Jacqueline, my dear! Run upstairs and make yourself tidy. Take your aunt's letter with you, and read it before you come down to tea."

Caroline obeyed, and no wonder, but Penelope—that was the real wonder!—let her obey without a word of protest.

Up in her room Caroline washed her face and hands and feet, and brushed her hair. Then she opened the envelope, because she was afraid to disobey Aunt Eunice when she spoke in that stern voice. The letter inside the envelope was thick, but not very long, for Jacqueline's Aunt Edith wrote a big, sprawling hand. Caroline read it, and to her relief found that it wasn't so private as to make her feel absolutely a horrid Paul Pry. Aunt Edith wrote about some of the places she had seen, and spoke of some gifts she was bringing to Jacqueline, and hoped she had had a pleasant visit in Longmeadow, and was glad that she and Uncle Jimmie were to see her in another month, and that was all. Just all!

Caroline had been silly for nothing. She was to have another month of happiness in beautiful places with Cousin Penelope and Aunt Eunice, and if the future could be judged by the past, probably in all that blissful month Jacqueline's Aunt Edith wouldn't write again! Caroline began to hum to herself, like a drenched bee when the sun comes out, while she put on her sand-colored socks and chose a fresh ribbon for her hair.

But Caroline at that moment (if you except Jenny, who was buttering hot little tea-biscuits in the kitchen) was the only tranquil person in Cousin Marcia Vintner's cottage.

In the brown-sheathed living room Cousin Penelope and Aunt Eunice exchanged distressed glances, as soon as Caroline had fled from their presence.

"Penelope!" Aunt Eunice spoke as chidingly as if Cousin Penelope were just a little girl again.

"I can't help it, Mother," whispered Penelope. "Jack's child—the poor little thing—so happy with us—like a different being since she came to us. You can see it yourself."

"I know," Aunt Eunice sighed pitifully.

"What right has this Delane woman to take her away from us?" Penelope asked fiercely. "She's starved her all these years—oh, of course I don't mean food, though her diet hasn't been properly regulated, and her teeth are in shocking condition. But I mean the things a child needs more than food—books and pictures and the music that's more to that little thing than the air she breathes. That Delane woman doesn't understand her as we do—she doesn't love her as we do——"

"Hush, hush, Penelope!"

"And the child doesn't like her——"

"You've no right to say that."

"I'm going to say it, Mother. You've seen it yourself. Jacqueline never speaks of California or her mother's people. She wants to forget them. She's never written to them in all these weeks. She's barely glanced at the post-cards that woman has sent—and you saw her just now when she got that letter."

"What's the use of all this, Penelope? Edith is her aunt, and one of her guardians. And the child hasn't been abused. Don't conjure up horrors."

Penelope bowed her white forehead into her long slender hands.

"I can't bear it!" she whispered.

"We'll have to bear it," said Aunt Eunice in a steady, calm voice. There were no tears in her old eyes, but their patient look was very weary. "At least we'll get all the comfort we can out of the weeks that are left. Four weeks at least she'll be with us."

"No, we haven't even that," Penelope cried bitterly. "They've changed their plans. I had a letter from that woman in this same mail. They don't want to unsettle the child—as if they really cared! We're not to tell her. As if I would, under any circumstances. Their dates are uncertain—it's like their selfishness to leave us in such cruel doubt. They've cut their Alaskan trip short—fickle, stupid people!"

"Penelope! Don't!"

"I can't help it. I loathe them both. They'll wire us—oh, they're so considerate! And they may turn up in Longmeadow any day after next week—and then they'll take Jack's little girl away from us!"

CHAPTER XXXII

THE HORNS OF A DILEMMA

Here were no cool sea breezes in the Meadows. No sand toys, either, and even if there had been, a big girl, going on eleven, in a house where there was sickness, had no time to play.

Jacqueline cooked and scrubbed and swept and tended babies, and kept Neil and Dickie in their places, too.

"You're the bossiest girl," Neil protested with some reason, more than once. "I wish you'd go back to Chicago where you came from."

"Then you'd get no more cookies," Jacqueline told him. "Aunt Martha hasn't got time to make 'em for you."

There she had the whip-hand of them all. For if she chose, she could give a fellow a broken cooky hot from the pan, and if she didn't choose—My, you should have seen her the day she caught Neil sneaking a cooky! Smack, smack went her brown little hands, hardened in good outdoor exercise under the California sun, and schooled (to Aunt Edie's horror!) in certain boxing tricks by the new Uncle Jimmie. Neil sniffled with amazement and anger, perhaps, more than with pain. But he didn't tell tales. They fought out their battles, he and Jacqueline, and on the whole she gave him more cookies than smacks.

It was no joke, cooking in a hot kitchen, and sleeping in a room, warmed through with the sun. It was no picnic to be waked, just when the early morning hours were cool and refreshing, by the gurgling and cooing of Freddie and Annie, and to face another day of endless step-stepping and chores that never seemed done. But there were compensations. Suppers, picnic fashion, to save washing dishes, in the side-yard, or the orchard, or the knoll by the river, where you could watch the sunset, while you ate maple-sugar sandwiches and chunks of blueberry cake. Berrying expeditions to far pastures, with Ralph at the wheel of the Ford. A Sunday School party in Longmeadow, where Jacqueline felt as if she were at a masquerade in one of Caroline's faded, scanty ginghams and a freshly ironed hair-ribbon, but ate her ice-cream (three plates of it!) and two kinds of cake, as heartily as the uninvited young man in the limerick.

Of course what made the summer weeks, with their heat and hard work and meager pleasures, endurable was the fact that Grandma Conway was all the time getting better. Slowly, oh! very slowly, but surely. Ever since the day when she found her beloved old green-dragon cup at her lips once more, she had shown an interest in life, and so she had begun to live again. She sat up in bed now, and her patient smile was like her old smile, and her eyes twinkled and understood. You didn't talk with her long, for fear of tiring her, and the children still played far from the house, so that she should not be disturbed. But she was the least bit stronger every day, and she began even to talk of the time when she could leave her bed.

"Wish we had a wheelchair for her," Aunt Martha confided to Jacqueline over the peaches that they were preserving, in the cool of the morning. "But if wishes were horses, beggars might ride."

"They wouldn't want to ride to-day," Jacqueline replied. "They'd all want Lizzies, at the very least." To herself she made a promise: "I'll get a wheelchair for Grandma—the best wheelchair in all Boston—just as soon as Aunt Edie comes."

For Aunt Edie and Uncle Jimmie had promised to come in September. And if they didn't keep to their plans, well, at any rate Caroline would be coming back from the beach, and Jacqueline would be released from her promise, and have her clothes, and her pocket money, and be able to do things again in her old lordly way. She would do so many things then to make Grandma and Aunt Martha and the babies happy! She always dwelt upon their happiness, when she counted the days to September. She took great pains not to think about Caroline. She had more than a suspicion that poor Caroline was going to be anything but happy.

Naturally since she was Aunt Martha's right hand and mainstay and dependence, Jacqueline didn't go often to the village, in those August days. Once she rode to town with Ralph and Freddie, and at the general store saw the youngster fitted to a pair of new sneakers, a delicate task which she and Aunt Martha had agreed was beyond Ralph's masculine capacity. Again she went to the village with the four young Conways to the Sunday School party. Then quite unexpectedly came her third opportunity.

Aunt Martha was going to the north end of the town to see Mr. Asa Wheelock, who might perhaps lease a portion of her land next season. She meant to stop on the way and buy a lot of little things that were wanted at the house—cheesecloth, the coarse kind that you need when you strain the nice hot fruit juice that cools into jelly, bone buttons for the children's underwear, five yards of elastic to run into little rompers, a spool of black sewing silk and one of white cotton, and some boracic acid and a cake of good white soap for Grandma, and a box of talcum powder. Ralph never in the world would get them right.

But Aunt Martha's little trip was called off, for Mr. Asa Wheelock thoughtfully telephoned that he had to drive south that afternoon, so he'd stop in as he passed the Conway farm.

"That'll save just so much gas," Aunt Martha said in a pleased voice. You know the price of a gallon of gasoline is worth considering, when there is a long illness in a house where the income is nonelastic. "But I did want that cheesecloth right away."

"Let me go and get it," volunteered Jacqueline, eager for adventure. "Like as not I can beg a ride, and if I can't, why, I don't mind the walk one little bit."

Dickie was eager to go, too. The public library would be open that afternoon, and he wanted to return the Boy Scout book that he had finished, and get out another. In the end Aunt Martha consented, and off the two children started, as soon as the dinner dishes were cleared away. They had not walked half a mile, when they were overtaken by a friendly Polish neighbor, and perched

hazardously on his running board, they reached the village Post Office while the afternoon was still young.

Dickie vanished into the public library, not to be seen again till closing time, and Jacqueline went about her errands. She bought the boracic and soap and talc at Cyrus Hatton's general store, and the cheesecloth at the Post Office, but for the buttons and elastic and thread she went into Miss Crevey's shop. She had had no call to go there since the day when she pledged Caroline's gold beads for the precious dragon cup that had been such a life-bringer to Grandma. She darted a glance at the dusty secretary in the corner, and remembered how she had watched Miss Crevey lock up the beads in one of its drawers.

"Five yards of elastic," chanted Miss Crevey, as she measured off the commodity. "I'm all out o' white, but black's just as good, for it won't show anyhow. Can't give you bone buttons that size, but these smaller ones'll slip into the button-holes ever so much easier, and I won't charge you no more. Black silk? I'll have some in next week, maybe. But there's plenty of thirty cotton. Hadn't you better take two spools as long as I have it?"

Jacqueline thought not.

"Well, there's no suitin' some folks," muttered Miss Crevey as she bundled up the small wares. "By the way," she made a sudden pounce, and Jacqueline suspected that she had been making ready to pounce ever since she saw her enter the shop, "have you brought along the five dollars that you owe me for that old cup?"

"Brought the five dollars?" Jacqueline echoed blankly. Then she recovered from her amazement. "Why, no," she said sturdily. "I said I'd have the money in September, and you said all right, and it isn't September yet."

"I've got some bills to meet," said Miss Crevey, in a resentful voice. "I need the cash right now."

"But I haven't got it," Jacqueline repeated. "I told you it would be September, and that suited you all right, when you took the beads."

"The beads ain't no good to me," said Miss Crevey. Her sallow cheeks were reddened, and she spoke very fast. "Cash is what I want, and what I must have." She hesitated the merest second. "I've got a chance to sell them beads," she launched a thunderbolt.

Jacqueline stared at her. For a moment she could do nothing but stare.

"But you can't sell those beads," she said in a scared whisper.

"Now look here," Miss Crevey spoke on, in her rapid, nervous voice. "I wouldn't deceive you. I'll tell you just how 'tis. Mrs. Enos Trowbridge was in here day before yesterday, and her cousin was with her. They was looking at some old things I got laying round, and they spied them beads tucked away in the secretary. That cousin's just set on having 'em. Seems they're the identical same as some old ones of her mother's she lost in a fire."

"But she can't have those beads!" Jacqueline cried in a panic. "I won't have it! Don't you let her!"

"I wouldn't cheat you," Miss Crevey repeated shrilly. "She'll give me six dollars for 'em. I'll keep the five you owe me, and you shall have the dollar for yourself."

Her face was like flame as she snapped out the words. Those bills that she must meet, the wretched, driven, little old woman that she was! She must think only of those bills. She mustn't admit even to herself that she was cheating a child. For Mrs. Enos Trowbridge's cousin had offered her twenty-five dollars for those quaint old beads.

"You can get yourself a whole lot of candy for a dollar," wheedled Miss Crevey.

"No, I can't," said Jacqueline bluntly. "I couldn't get more than half a pound of decent candy. And I don't want candy, and I don't want your old dollar. I won't have those beads sold. I never said you could sell them. I won't let you."

"Oh, you won't, hey?" sneered Miss Crevey. "How are you going to stop me, Miss?"

"I'll tell Aunt Martha," said Jacqueline superbly. "And I'll tell the constable, maybe. You made me a promise, and you've got no right to break it. You can't sell those beads."

Miss Crevey's flushed face was white, like the white of a tallow candle. Jacqueline would never know in all her days how that allusion to the constable had struck terror to the very soul of the guilty, worried little old woman.

But Miss Crevey recovered herself quickly.

"I guess," she sniffed, "I've wasted 'bout all the time I mean to waste on a thankless, sassy young one. You can just take your cheap brass beads off my hands. I won't have 'em cluttering up my shop."

"All right," said Jacqueline indignantly. "I'll be glad to take 'em."

Miss Crevey leaned across the counter and spoke with a smile that parted her thin lips above her false teeth.

"And you can bring me back my cup," she said.

For a second the shop went spinning round Jacqueline. How was it, she asked herself, that people felt before they fainted dead away? At a great distance, as it seemed to her, she heard her own voice speaking:

"I—can't. Don't you *see*? Not that cup! Why, it would *kill* Grandma."

"Likely," sneered Miss Crevey. She turned her back elaborately and began to rearrange the articles on her untidy shelves.

Jacqueline clutched at the edge of the counter. She really felt as if she were going to fall.

"You didn't—mean that?" she implored.

Miss Crevey wheeled about and faced her.

"Mean it?" she cried. "Why shouldn't I mean it? What good are them beads doing me now? You bring me back that good cup I let ye take, or you let me sell them beads for what's offered me, or you bring me the five dollars, like you promised me. I don't care which ye do, but you got to do one or t'other and do it quick."

There were footfalls on the worn step outside the screen door, and the sound of women's chattering voices. No time to talk further, and no use in talking!

"You make up your mind before to-morrow night," bade Miss Crevey in a fierce whisper, "and don't

ye go bawling and crying in here!”

Fiercely Jacqueline blinked back the tears that had gathered in her eyes. Proudly she turned her back on Miss Crevey, and walked past the chattering customers, out into the street.

What was she going to do, she asked herself over and over again, as she headed blindly homeward? Take away Grandma’s cup? Ten thousand times, *no*! Let Caroline’s beads be sold? Why, that was to make herself a thief! Caroline’s precious beads that she had kept hidden away with her mother’s picture—Caroline’s mother’s beads—to let them be sold would be almost as dreadful as to take Grandma’s cup! And the only way to save the cup and the beads from the ogreish Miss Crevey was to find five dollars, somewhere, somehow before to-morrow night.

There was no time to write to Judge Blair for the money, even if Jacqueline had been willing at last, in her desperate need, to betray the secret that was one-half Caroline’s. There was no hope of reaching Caroline. Jacqueline could go to Aunt Martha, but Aunt Martha hadn’t any five dollars to spend even for cups, and Aunt Martha, with all her cares and troubles, mustn’t be worried. Only in the last extremity could she turn to Aunt Martha. Only to-morrow night, when every hope was surely gone.

But before to-morrow night, somehow, she herself must find the way out. How, she wondered desperately, how? And while she wondered, she had walked southward, like one in a daze, down Longmeadow Street, and now, when she came to herself, she realized that she was at the very gate of The Chimnies. She paused and looked through the iron grill work, and then, as if in answer to her unworded prayer for help, she saw that the shutters were open, and the windows flung wide, and life at last, and hope for her, had come into the silent house again.

CHAPTER XXXIII

IN THE HOUSE OF HER KINSFOLK

Jacqueline fairly ran up the steps to the porch of The Chimnies. She was laughing in queer little gasps which were very much like sobs. Oh, but this was too good to believe! Right in the nick of time, when she had to have help, and didn't know where on earth to find it!

Rat-tat-tat, the knocker clanged gayly under her hand. There were some bad minutes of explanation ahead, perhaps, but like a session at the dentist's, they would be over some time and she would run back with the money to that hateful shop, where after to-day she would never set foot again. She would thrust the money into Miss Crevey's claws and get back the beads. She would say something polite, but oh! so cutting to Miss Crevey, and——

The door opened before her into the dim hall with its white paint, and gilt-framed mirrors, and its staircase curving upward into cool distance. On the threshold stood Sallie (only Jacqueline didn't know it was Sallie!) in a blue gingham dress, with her sleeves tucked up.

"Well, what is it?" asked Sallie brusquely. She didn't waste her company voice and manners on a little girl in Peggy Janes and trodden sneakers, with an armful of packages done up in brown paper.

"I want to see Car—I mean Jacqueline," the real Jacqueline corrected herself just in time. "The little girl that lives here."

"She ain't here now," Sallie answered, with a carelessness that seemed to poor Jacqueline downright brutal. "She's off to the beach."

"But *you're* here!" Jacqueline cried despairingly.

"Nobody said I wasn't," retorted Sallie. "Me and Hannah Means got here to-day, to open up the house, but the folks won't be here till last of this week or maybe first of next."

She started to shut the door, but she wasn't able to. For Jacqueline, at this last cruel blow, simply slumped down on the threshold and let go the tears that she had held back so long.

"Oh, dumb it!" she wailed. You remember Jacqueline usually cried more for anger than for sorrow. "What'll I do? Oh, sniveling opossums, what'll I do now?"

"Well, you can't sit there crying," said Sallie.

"I can! I am!" howled Jacqueline.

"What's the matter?" boomed a deep voice from the hall behind them, and Hannah Means, the tried and trusty cook at The Chimnies, bore down upon them, with her head done up in a dust cloth. "What young one's that, Sallie? And whatever ails her?"

Jacqueline wept regardless. Sallie started to shake her, but changed her mind and patted her shoulder instead.

"Have you lost something?" asked Sallie.

"Have you got a stomach ache?" questioned Hannah, in the same breath.

"No, no!" sobbed Jacqueline.

"Did you get a licking?" pursued Sallie.

"Are you hungry?" Hannah demanded.

"No," said Jacqueline, cross and ashamed of herself. "I'm all right."

Sallie looked at her sharply.

"You're one of the Conway children, ain't you?" she asked.

Jacqueline nodded.

"Guess she got tuckered out walkin' up from the Meadows," Hannah suggested.

The two women exchanged glances.

"You better sit and rest a spell here on the porch," Sallie bade Jacqueline, as she rose from beside her.

"Come into the kitchen," Hannah bettered the invitation. "The grocery-boy's just been here with the things, and I can let you have a tumbler of milk."

Shyness descended upon Jacqueline. She scrambled to her feet, with a "No, thank you!" on the tip of her tongue. But she never uttered it. For once on her feet, she realized that she felt "all gone." Her knees were wobbly and there was a fluttering in her wrists. Rest and a drink of milk sounded good.

As the guest of Hannah and Sallie, she passed through the doorway of her great-aunt's house, and presently was seated in a rocker by the open window of the big kitchen, with its enameled sink and many cupboards. She slowly sipped the milk that Hannah had poured for her into a thick glass. She didn't want to hurry. How should she ever drag herself the hot miles home through the Meadows, burdened with the weight of cares that Miss Crevey's threat had laid upon her?

Other people had their troubles, too, she realized, as she listened to Hannah's grumbling.

"In one ear and out the other," Hannah muttered, as she unpacked the basket of groceries that stood on the kitchen table. "Ain't no use tellin' folks nothin' nowadays! I said saleratus, and they've went and sent me salt, and there ain't no bacon, and they've forgot the molasses."

"Where's my cleaning powder?" sang out Sallie, from the butler's pantry.

"Ain't I tellin' you?" cried Hannah. "They've went and left out half the things."

Sallie bustled out from the pantry and did a little inspecting on her own account.

"No scouring soap—no cleaning powder—and no scrubbing brush, like I ordered and you heard me," she said crossly. "Well, I can't do nothing without 'em. I'll phone and give 'em a piece of my mind, and tell 'em they can just hustle those things over—save 'em trouble if they'd done it in the first place."

"Lot o' good 'twill do you to phone the store," scoffed Hannah. "They won't send nothin' over till to-morrow. They're independent as hogs on ice.

"Then here's a whole afternoon wasted," snapped Sallie. "Goodness knows, *I* won't walk up to the store and fetch them things in this heat."

Jacqueline grabbed at opportunity with both hands.

“I don’t mind the heat,” she cried. “I’ll run up to the store and get your soap and things.”

“Well, I’ll say that’s real nice of you,” conceded Sallie.

“That is,” stammered Jacqueline, “if you want to pay me ten cents for going.”

She turned as red as fire as she said the words. She had never felt so awful in her life, and after drinking the milk that these women had been kind enough to give her. But she thought of Grandma, without her cup! and Caroline, without her beads! What was her own pride or even decency by comparison? She just *had* to get some money.

“Well, of all the nerve!” Hannah broke the silence that seemed to Jacqueline to have lasted an hour. “I’ll pay you ten cents to go—and you can pay *me* ten cents for the milk you’ve drunk.”

Jacqueline quailed. Grown-up people somehow always had one at a disadvantage.

“I’m going home now,” she quavered. “Good-by.”

“Hold on!” bade Sallie. “I’d rather pay a dime than walk to the store and back, and I can’t let this afternoon go wasted, when to-morrow like as not will be a scorcher. You scoot up to the store and fetch my things, and if you’re back in twenty minutes you shall have your ten cents.”

“I’ll run!” promised Jacqueline. She was all smiles again, and at her smile Hannah melted.

“Don’t let her run her legs off,” she boomed. “And she can get me the saleratus while she’s about it.”

In the well-worn Peggy Janes, Jacqueline went sprinting back up the street. Hope was in her heart. Ten cents wasn’t much, perhaps, but every little bit added to every little bit you’ve got—and she had until to-morrow night to make up the five dollars!

Promptly on the tick of ten minutes to three, she pattered once more into the kitchen of The Chimnies. In the basket that she tugged were scouring soap and cleaning powder, a new yellow scrubbing brush, a package of saleratus, a paper of bacon, and even a can of molasses.

“Well,” Sallie admitted, as she rocked in comfort, “I’ll say it’s worth ten cents.”

Jacqueline blushed and pocketed the dime.

“Crazy to earn money, ain’t ye?” said Hannah, as she unpacked the basket. “What’s it for? Circus coming to town?”

“I—I guess so.” Jacqueline answered vaguely.

Sallie gathered up her soap and cleaning powder but not with great enthusiasm.

“I’m killed with a crick in my back that takes me whenever I stoop,” she complained, and turned to Jacqueline. “Look here, sister, d’ye know how to scrub out a bathtub?”

Jacqueline laughed.

“I’ll say I do!” she answered.

“There’s two bathrooms upstairs,” Sallie told her. “I’ll give you another dime if you’ll go over ’em real good for me.”

Jacqueline stated her position, calmly and unashamed.

“That’s not enough. The Japs get fifty cents an hour for cleaning, and I guess I’m as good as any Jap.”

“What’s Japs got to do with it?” asked Hannah. She, you’ll note, was not a Californian.

“Fifty cents an *hour*,” gasped Sallie. “*Fifty cents!* Good-*night*!”

Jacqueline decided that this was a time for compromise.

“Well,” she admitted, “I’m not as big as a Jap, so maybe I ought to come down on my price to *you*. I’ll work for twenty-five cents an hour, not a cent less, and I’m an awful good worker.”

“You won’t work for *me*,” said Sallie, with decision. “What do you take me for? John D. Rockerfeller?”

Jacqueline hesitated. She was torn between pride and dire need.

“I’d get both bathrooms done in an hour,” she suggested. “I’m pretty spry.”

“Ah, now, let her!” Hannah struck in unexpectedly. “If you break your back over them tubs, you’ll be groaning all night and spoiling my rest.”

“Well, if you’re sure you can do ’em in an hour,” Sallie hesitated.

“Surest thing I do!” cried Jacqueline, all smiles. “Let me get at ’em right away.”

Eagerly she capered at Sallie’s heels up the back stairs. Above was a long hall with doors at either side, just the sort of hall that Jacqueline had expected to find in Aunt Eunice’s house. Sallie pushed open one of the doors, and led the way into a room that was all cool gray and leaf-green with here and there, in hangings and in wall-paper, a flash of canary yellow.

“This is the little girl’s room you was askin’ for,” said Sallie. “Don’t you touch nothin’ now. Here’s the bathroom, and t’other one is cross the hall.”

“All right,” Jacqueline answered stiffly. She didn’t at all like the insinuation that she would touch things. “Give me the cleaning rags, and I’ll go to it.”

For a moment Sallie lingered, until she was sure that Jacqueline was attacking the nickel and enamel in a professional manner. Then with a parting hint that Jacqueline would have to work fast, if she expected to finish in an hour, she went away downstairs, and Jacqueline was left in possession of the second story.

She had no time to feel lonely in those empty rooms. She was too busy to think. She scrubbed and she polished, while the perspiration ran down her face, and her fingers grew stiff and gritty from the soap and the coarse powder that she used. When she rose at last, and looked down at the shining tub and the clean tiling of the floor, she felt some sympathy with poor Sallie. She too, had a “crick in her back.”

Through the open door into the bedroom she glimpsed the green and gold of the chintz curtains, the dressing-table, with its lady pin-cushion and its dainty china boxes, the comfortable, low rocker beside the well-filled bookshelves. So that was Caroline’s room—the room that rightfully was hers!

Smiling somewhat ruefully, Jacqueline tiptoed across the threshold and, planted on the oyster white rug, stood gazing about her. This might all have been hers—this soon would be hers. She would sleep in that cozy, soft bed, with no fretful children to disturb her. She would rise in the morning and dress. Her clothes would hang, no doubt, behind that door, which was all one mirror.

She bowed to the reflection in the mirror—the sunburnt, rough-haired, little brown girl in Peggy Janes and venerable sneakers. Then she opened the door and peeped into the closet. Why, here were some of her dresses, of net, and organdie, and gingham, her riding clothes, her boots. She chuckled to herself. What faces Hannah and Sallie would wear, if she should put on her clothes—her own clothes! —and go down the stairs, and appear before them. Well, very soon she would!

But before that day came—oh, what might not happen! All her troubles thronged back upon her, and to think that she must suffer so much, for what always before in her life she had thought a little sum of money! If only she had now one of the five-dollar bills that she had often wasted! If she could open her little vanity bag, and find in it some money—her own money!

Fascinated with the thought, she stepped into the closet, and looked to see if one of her little bags were perhaps hanging from the hooks. Of course not! She might have known that fussy little Caroline would put them carefully into a drawer, as she herself had always been told to do. She came out of the closet, and softly closed the door, and hurried to the bureau. Without scruple—for weren't these things all her own, and the room meant for her?—she opened the drawers and hastily peeped in. She found only one of her bags, the gray one with beads, and it was quite empty.

Disappointed, she closed the drawer, and with a sigh turned away. Once more she saw her reflection in the mirror of the dressing-table, and hesitatingly she drew near. She hadn't been able half to see herself in the wavering looking glass at the farm. My, but she had put on a great coat of tan this summer!

From the reflection in the mirror, her eyes dropped to the pretties on the dressing-table. Little boxes and toys of Dresden china—delicate, dainty things. She touched them lightly—as Sallie had told her not to do. Sallie, indeed! She guessed she had the right. She lifted the cover of the little trinket box that she was fingering, and there, coiled in its white depths, a chain of gold beads—her own gold beads—twinkled up at her.

CHAPTER XXXIV

A BUSINESS TRANSACTION

At five minutes after four Jacqueline appeared in the kitchen. In her hand she carried the tin housemaid's assistant, with its soap and powder, rags and nickel polish.

"I've finished," she announced briefly.

Hannah looked down from the step-ladder, where she was standing to clean the cupboard shelves. Sallie poked her head out from the butler's pantry, where she seemed totally surrounded with hot soap-suds and china dishes.

"I bet you give 'em a lick and a promise," she said morosely. "I'm going up and see for myself."

Up the stairs she went, while Jacqueline stood pawing with impatience.

"Better sit down," boomed Hannah, from the step-ladder. "You must be plumb tuckered out."

"I can't," said Jacqueline. "I'm in an awful hurry."

She gathered up her brown paper parcels, with nervous, eager fingers. Why didn't Sallie hurry back? Could it be that she—suspected something? Oh, blithering kangaroos! She didn't want explanations now, and with Sallie, of all people.

But explanations were not needed. Down came Sallie in due season, with nothing worse to grumble over than the misery in her back.

"You ain't done such a bad job," she conceded, as she doled two dimes and a nickel into Jacqueline's hard little palm. "Say, don't you want to come round again to-morrow?"

"Oh, no, thanks," Jacqueline answered carelessly. "I've got all I can do at home."

"I told you so," chuckled Hannah. "Money enough for the circus, and then she quits."

Jacqueline barely heard her. Over her shoulder she called good-by, and in two jumps she was out at the back door, and down the steps. Almost running, she hurried across the garden toward the short-cut that would bring her most quickly into Longmeadow Street. She was heading for Miss Crevey's shop, and in the pocket of her Peggy Janes was a string of gold beads.

Of course she had a perfect right to them, for they were her very own. She would give them in exchange for Caroline's beads, and so the green-dragon cup would be safe, and Caroline's beads would be safe, and Miss Crevey would have *more* than the five dollars that had been promised her. For Jacqueline's beads were worth ten dollars. She knew, for she had bought them herself, Christmas before last, with the check that her mother's cousin had sent her from Honolulu.

But would that disagreeable Miss Crevey consent to the exchange? Jacqueline asked herself the question with a sinking heart, about the time she reached the gap in the hedge. For Miss Crevey wanted ready money, and Mrs. Enos Trowbridge's cousin, who had offered cash for Caroline's ancient beads, would not give it perhaps for beads that were modern.

"Oh, slithy alligators!" groaned Jacqueline, and paused disheartened in the short-cut, while she asked herself: what next!

Then from the swing that hung from a branch of the big elm in the Trowbridge garden, a shrill voice hailed her.

"Hello!" cried Eleanor Trowbridge.

Jacqueline turned and across the rose tangle surveyed the stout child with disfavor.

"'Lo yourself!" she cried.

Eleanor sprang from the swing and came up to the rose tangle, all ready to be entertained.

"Did you want to see Jacqueline?" she asked cheerily, "Well, she isn't home yet."

"Don't I know it, smarty?" Jacqueline answered crossly.

"Smarty yourself!" retorted Eleanor, and turned, but she didn't walk away.

All the afternoon she had been alone in the garden, forbidden to have playmates, because her grandmother was giving a bridge-party in the house, and mustn't be disturbed with the shouts of children, and now she was really dying for some one to talk to.

"My grandmother's having a party," she told Jacqueline, by way of resuming cordial relations.

"I won't stop her," Jacqueline answered rudely.

"*I* had a party yesterday." Eleanor turned to her eagerly. "I was ten years old. I don't suppose *you* ever had a party."

"Don't get fresh," cautioned Jacqueline. "I've had more parties than ever you've had. I've had dozens of them."

Perhaps the party hadn't improved Eleanor's temper. The day after, as we all know, is apt to be trying. At any rate she looked at Jacqueline's shabby clothes, and was so snobbish and ill-mannered as to sneer.

"Dozens of parties? I don't believe you."

"You don't have to," snapped Jacqueline. "And I don't have to believe you had a party yesterday, and I don't, so there!"

"I did, too," said Eleanor. "And I had lots of presents. I guess you'd believe me, if you saw them."

"If I saw 'em, maybe," Jacqueline tantalized. She didn't know why she should pause at that moment to tease Eleanor, but there was something about Eleanor's pink and white complacency that rubbed her the wrong way.

"You crawl through the gap here, and I'll show you." Eleanor accepted her challenge. "Come on—unless you're scared to."

That was a dare, so Jacqueline promptly scrambled through the rose tangle and found herself in the Trowbridge garden. In the moment of her arrival the paper bag that held her Crevey purchases broke, and the bone buttons, a size too small cascaded to the ground.

"You pick 'em up," bade Eleanor, "and I'll go get some of my things."

If it hadn't been for those fateful buttons, Jacqueline would very likely have posted off to Miss

Crevey's, and left Eleanor without regrets. But she had to recover the buttons, every one of them, and before she had picked up the last of them, Eleanor came panting back.

By this time Eleanor had forgotten that she and Jacqueline were on snappish terms. She was just a roly-poly child, eager to show her new treasures to another child.

"See here," she said, as she plumped down on the turf beside Jacqueline, and displayed the articles which she lugged in the slack of her skirt, "this is scent, real grown-up scent, and the bottle that it's in is cut glass. This cunning brush and comb and mirror set is for my doll—my biggest French doll. Have you got a doll?"

"I'm sick of dolls," yawned Jacqueline.

"You wouldn't be," Eleanor told her patronizingly, "if you had a doll with real hair, like my Gladys. I had a chair for her, too, and a bed, but they were too big to bring out here, and a parlor set for my doll-house. I had this ring—it's a scarab. And this seal for my envelopes, and some sealing-wax, all colors, and some teeny-weeny candles. And here's a handbag, with a purse and a mirror. Have you ever had a handbag?"

"Sure," Jacqueline told her languidly.

Eleanor opened the little red leather bag. Clearly enough, she was proud of the pretty gift. She took out the little mirror, and the wee brown handkerchief, sown with red rosebuds, and showed them to Jacqueline. Last of all, she took out the little red leather purse, and opened it, and disclosed a folded bill.

"That's my five dollars from Grandpa," she explained.

Jacqueline forgot to be languid. Distinctly she sat up and took notice.

"Five dollars!" she repeated enviously. "What you going to do with it?"

"I d' know," admitted Eleanor. "Buy me some silver bangles, I guess."

"You don't want bangles," Jacqueline declared with finality. "They slip down over your hand and get in your way all the time. I should think——" She hesitated, as one about to make a desperate plunge. "I should think you'd much rather buy a chain."

"Well, maybe I will," Eleanor said vaguely.

"A chain of gold beads would be nice, don't you think?" Jacqueline spoke in honeyed accents. "Have you got any gold beads?"

"No," confessed Eleanor.

"Everybody ought to have gold beads," Jacqueline laid down a law that she had invented on the spur of the moment. "Most all the girls I knew at school had gold beads—all the big ones, that is, of course, the little third and fourth graders didn't."

"I'm going into the fifth grade," Eleanor said quickly.

"If you have some gold beads when you go back to school," suggested Jacqueline, "the others will all be just green with envy."

Eleanor wavered.

"I guess perhaps I will get me beads," she said, and snapped the purse upon the precious five dollars.

"You haven't got much time before school opens," Jacqueline insinuated. "And you can't buy good beads in Longmeadow, or in Baring Junction, either."

"Maybe we'll go to Boston next week," Eleanor said hopefully.

Jacqueline dared all.

"I have some gold beads," she said, and took the golden strand from the pocket of the Peggy Janes, and dangled them before Eleanor's astonished eyes. "Say, aren't they crackerjacks?"

"Go on!" sniffed Eleanor. "They're brass from the ten-cent store."

"Much you know about beads!" scoffed Jacqueline. "Just you look at that clasp, with a real pearl in it. Fourteen carat gold those beads are, and they cost ten dollars. I got 'em Christmas before last."

Eleanor fingered the beads with a reverence that was tinged with envy.

"You can't buy beads like that for any measly five dollars," Jacqueline told her patronizingly.

"Well, who says I want to?" Eleanor told her, but with a half-heartedness that was not lost on Jacqueline.

"Look here!" said Jacqueline, like one conferring a favor. "Since you can't get to Boston to buy your beads before school opens, maybe I'll sell you mine."

"Don't want 'em!" muttered Eleanor, but she still kept the beads in her hand.

"They cost ten dollars," Jacqueline said honestly, "but you can have 'em for five, because I want the money, and look here, if you don't like 'em after all, I'll buy 'em back from you next week."

Eleanor began to sparkle with interest.

"Would you, really and honest?" she asked.

"Why, sure," said Jacqueline heartily. "You give me the five dollars, and you can keep the beads, and wear 'em all you like—they'll be yours, you know—and then if you get tired of 'em, and want your silly old bangles after all, why, you can have your money back. That's fair, isn't it?"

"Why, yes," admitted Eleanor, swept off her feet, as Caroline had been swept on an earlier occasion, as you'll remember, by Jacqueline's sheer force of will.

"All right," Jacqueline caught her up. "You've got the beads, now give me the money. I've got to beat it home."

She fairly took the bag from Eleanor's bewildered hands, and scooped the green bill from its resting place.

"Remember!" she said. "Next week, if you don't like the beads."

Then she scrambled to her feet, with the bill clutched in her hand, and before the dazed Eleanor had time to change her mind was off through the short-cut, and speeding toward Miss Crevey's shop, and Caroline's gold beads, and relief from all the cares and worries that beset her.

CHAPTER XXXV

ELEANOR JOINS THE PARTY

Half an hour later Jacqueline was trudging stoutly through the powdery dust of the Meadows road. She was hardly conscious of the dust or the heat. She forgot that she was tired, and likely to be tireder before she reached the farm. For safe in her pocket she carried the precious gold beads that were Caroline's, redeemed from Miss Crevey's pokerish black drawer. She could chuckle to herself, as she remembered the cold, polite fashion in which she had laid down the five-dollar bill, and asked to have them back, and the chagrin in Miss Crevey's sallow face as she complied—what else could she do?—and handed them over.

"All's well that ends well," Jacqueline told herself happily.

Right at that same hour, five by the clocks of Longmeadow, Eleanor Trowbridge walked into her grandmother's long parlor, where the eight ladies who had made up the bridge-party were eating macaroon ice-cream and frosted cakes, and talking excitedly of doubles and slams. Eleanor was sniffling, with the very evident desire to attract attention and sympathy.

"Why, darling, what's the matter?" cried young Mrs. Wheeler Trowbridge, who was Eleanor's mother.

"Use your handkerchief!" bade Mrs. Enos Trowbridge, who was Eleanor's grandmother.

"They're—broken," whined Eleanor.

"What's broken? Let me look, sweet pettie," coaxed Mrs. Wheeler Trowbridge.

"She said they were nice beads," Eleanor declared her wrongs, "but they aren't a bit nice. They're horrid old ten-cent brass beads, and the clasp is broken."

Mrs. Wheeler Trowbridge took Jacqueline's string of beads from Eleanor's grubby hands.

"Why, honey-bird," she said, "these beads can't be brass, with a clasp like this. They're beautiful gold beads. Where did you get them?"

"It was the little girl from down in the Meadows," said Eleanor, delighted to find that all the ladies were listening to her, at last. "She was over at The Chimnies. She's always hanging round there, looking for Jacqueline, and she said the beads were worth ten dollars, but she'd let me have 'em for five, and I gave her my five dollars that Grandpa gave me, and she ran right off, and now I want my money back."

She began to sniffle again. But she had lost the center of the stage. The ladies, in their crisp summer silks and organdies, were chattering all at once like magpies, and it was not about Eleanor that they chattered.

"One of those shabby Meadows children, with gold beads to dispose of?" cried Mrs. Judge Holden. "Well, I never!"

"They are really good beads," said Mrs. Enos Trowbridge's Boston cousin, with the air of one who knew beads intimately.

"Where could the child have got them?" asked Mrs. Wheeler Trowbridge.

"And she wanted to get rid of them in a hurry," darkly hinted Miss Selina Fanning, who was a great reader of detective stories.

"If you want to know what I think," said Mrs. Enos Trowbridge, in her positive manner, "I call it suspicious—very suspicious."

Just then, when they were all a-flutter with excitement, Mrs. Enos Trowbridge's "second girl," whose name was Angeline, came hurrying into the long parlor.

"I hope you'll excuse the liberty, Mis' Trowbridge," she said, as excited as the bridge ladies themselves, and as pleased to be excited, "but Sallie Macumber from Mis' Gildersleeve's wants to phone here, 'cause their phone is out of order, and it's awful important."

"Why, of course," said Mrs. Enos Trowbridge, not too graciously. "Tell her she can come in. I suppose it's a case of sickness," she told her guests apologetically.

Sallie, all red with excitement, fluttered into the long room, and fluttered toward the desk where the telephone stood.

"Excuse me, ladies," she spoke shrilly. "I'm sorry to disturb you, I'm sure, but our phone won't work, and I've got to get the constable right away this minute."

"Constable?" repeated Mrs. Enos Trowbridge, and lost her frigid dignity. "Why, Sallie, what's the matter?"

"Oh, Mis' Trowbridge!" cried Sallie, delighted to unburden herself. "Me and Hannah are so upset! There's been thieves in our house, sure as you're sitting there. I didn't get round to the side-board drawers till just a little while ago—and there was a dozen silver teaspoons I tucked in under some napkins, the day we shut up the house, and they're *gone*!"

"Oh, my soul!" gasped Mrs. Wheeler Trowbridge, and clutched Eleanor, as if she thought she, too, might go the way of the vanished spoons.

"Then we just glanced an eye round the place," Sallie went on, in a voice that grew shriller with every word she uttered, "and a lot of little silver things are gone from Miss Penelope's desk, and the snuff-box from the parlor table, and all the little hand-painted knick-knacks Miss Penelope kept in her glass cabinet, and there was some beads of Jacqueline's I put away myself in a box, the day she left, and they're gone, too."

"What sort of beads?" said Miss Selina Fanning.

You could feel the silence in the room, while the ladies, who no longer rustled, waited for her answer.

"Gold beads," Sallie answered, and I'm afraid that that was what they secretly were hoping she would answer!

"Would you know them if you saw them again?" Miss Selina pursued.

The others looked at her in admiration. Why, she was just as good as a man, and a lawyer!

"You better believe I'd know them beads," cried Sallie. "I've seen Jacqueline wear 'em many a time. One big long bead, and then a little round bead, and a real pearl set in the clasp."

Dramatically Miss Selina took the beads from the Boston cousin, and waved them under Sallie's eyes, which grew as round as saucers.

"Are these the beads?" asked Miss Selina, in a hollow whisper.

Sallie glanced at them, clutched them, then looked round awestricken at the intent faces of the ladies.

"They're Jacqueline's beads, as sure as apples grow on trees," she said. "However did they get here?"

The ladies rustled and whispered. Only Mrs. Enos Trowbridge spoke aloud, portentously.

"Some one sold them to my grand-daughter—sold them for a song—and mark my word, the person who was so eager to get rid of them, may know something about the other things that are missing from your house."

CHAPTER XXXVI

CORNERED

The next day was a scorcher, even as Sallie had foretold, but Jacqueline “flaxed round,” as Grandma called it, and had her baking done by nine o’clock. She found the work mere play, because she was light-hearted. What else should she be, with Caroline’s beads safe upstairs in the old lacquer box, and Great-aunt Eunice coming back the last of this week or the first of next, and everything about to end happily? She was going to have great fun, looking back on this strange summer. As to Caroline—oh, well, Caroline had had the time of her life, and she’d get used to the farm pretty soon. After all, in this world one can’t have everything—which is a comforting reflection, and especially so to those who have a great deal!

Aunt Martha came into the kitchen, about nine o’clock, with her hands all grimy, where she had been working in the garden.

“Just keep an eye on the babies, will you, Jackie?” she said, as she filled the blue enamel basin at the sink. “It’s too hot for them to run about in the sun and Nellie can’t always manage ’em.”

So Jacqueline took the mending basket and went out into the side-yard, where the trees cast a strong shadow, if one had the sense to stay in it, and there was a ripple of wind—hot but at least stirring—which came across the onion fields from the western mountains.

Jacqueline sat in the old weather-beaten hammock, and darned stockings, and sewed on buttons while Nellie and Freddie and Annie played at her feet with two cups that had lost their handles, seventeen spools, and a headless toy horse. Presently, as the sun rose higher and work in the garden grew out of the question, Dickie and Neil came and dropped in the shade, like panting puppies. Dickie had his Boy Scout book; but Neil had nothing to do but whittle with his single-bladed jackknife.

Last of all came Ralph, with the leather strap collar that he wanted to mend for the brown bossy. He sat on the ground, tailor fashion, and punched holes in the stiff leather with a stout awl, and made terrible faces over the work, but Jacqueline knew better than to laugh at him. He was a frightfully serious person, that Ralph.

They were all busy in the shade, with their work or their play, when a dusty roadster came chirring down the road from the village, and of all things, turned in at the Conway farm.

“Gee!” said Ralph. “If that isn’t Judge Holden.”

He uncoiled himself and rose from the ground, and hobbling, because one foot had gone to sleep, hurried over to the kitchen door where the roadster had come to a stop. Jacqueline saw him open the door of the car, and wait for its occupant to alight, and then she saw a tall old gentleman, clean shaven, in dusty gray clothes, step spryly out, and pat Ralph’s shoulder, as he greeted him.

Aunt Martha must have heard or seen the car turn into the yard, for she appeared now at the kitchen door, a little flurried, with her apron off. Judge Holden shook hands with her, and then they both went into the house, and Ralph came back into the shadow of the trees.

“What does the Judge want?” asked Neil.

“He said you’d got to come to his court in Baring,” Ralph answered, with a perfectly sober face, “’cause you cut cross Deacon Whitcomb’s field, after Mother said not to.”

“G’on,” Neil scoffed, but in an anxious voice. “The Judge never said any such thing.”

“Much you know what he said!” retorted Ralph, as he took up his strap and his awl, and fell to work once more.

“Say, did he say that—honest?” Neil began to whine. “Honest Injun?”

“’Course he didn’t, you big baby,” Dickie broke in. “Ralph’s just stringing you. I guess the Judge wants Mother to sign something about the wood lot or something.”

“Is he Aunt Martha’s lawyer?” Jacqueline asked innocently.

“Where’d you get that stuff?” said Dickie. “He isn’t anybody’s lawyer. He’s about the biggest man in town.”

“He’s a good scout,” Ralph interrupted. “He’s done lots of things for us since Father died.” He bit his lip with the effort of jabbing the awl through the tough leather, and then resumed: “Mother and Father both went to school to him, when he was a young fellow, working his way through college. Your father went to school to him, too, Jackie. Some day,” Ralph added, “I’m going to read law in his office.”

“I don’t want you to be a judge,” Nellie burst out. “I don’t want you to go putting folks in jail.”

“Well, you behave yourself,” Neil admonished, “and he won’t never put you there.”

At the implication that she might otherwise land some day in jail, Nellie began to whimper.

“Aw, you big cheese, stop teazing the kid!” cried Dickie.

Then he and Neil began to maul each other, regardless of the heat, and Nellie, quite forgetful of the fact that Dickie was her champion, went to help Neil who was getting the worst of it. She got hit on the nose, quite accidentally, but none the less she began at once to cry.

In the confusion of soothing Nellie and scolding the boys, Jacqueline and Ralph didn’t hear Aunt Martha call. But Freddie heard and cried:

“Look-it! Look-it! Auntie at the window!”

They looked, and there was Aunt Martha, at the open window of the dining room.

“Jackie!” she called clearly. “Come here, Jackie!”

“You’re the one that’s going to jail,” laughed Neil.

“Chase yourself!” Jacqueline laughed back at him, and put down her mending basket, and trotted off to the house.

Did he want to see her, this strange old gentleman, because he had taught the father of the little girl she was supposed to be? Or did he want to see her because—Oh, could Caroline have told Aunt Eunice, and could Aunt Eunice have written to this man, who was “the biggest man in town” to set

things straight?

With her heart quite thudding at the pleasurable thought, Jacqueline padded across the clean, familiar kitchen, and into the dining room. The table stood set for the simple dinner. The blinds were half drawn, and the light in the room, that came sifting through the leaves outside, was goldy green. Jacqueline blinked a second, and then made out the face of the Judge, grave, expressionless, all but the keen eyes that instantly sought her, from where he sat in the big rocker by the window.

"This is Henry's little girl," Aunt Martha spoke in a voice that was strangely flat, not like Aunt Martha's voice at all.

Jacqueline glanced at her curiously. How white and queer Aunt Martha looked, she thought to herself, but perhaps it was only because of the dim, queer light in the room.

"So you're Caroline Tait, are you?" said the Judge, with his steady eyes upon her.

Jacqueline bobbed a curtsy. That wasn't saying yes to his question, so she hadn't told a fib.

"Sit down," bade the Judge, just as if it were his house, instead of Aunt Martha's.

Jacqueline sat down in the spiral rocker opposite him, with her dusty sneakers swinging clear of the floor.

"You go to school, Caroline?"

"Yes, Judge," said Jacqueline. "I'm going into the seventh grade next month."

"And you go to Sunday School?"

"Yes, Judge."

"Then you've been taught to tell the truth, always?"

"Sure," said Jacqueline, in a steady voice, but as she spoke she locked together the hands that had been resting idly in her lap. What was he driving at, in his roundabout, grown-up way? Did he know about Caroline's gold beads? But she had put them back, safe in the box.

"Now, Caroline," the Judge spoke gravely, "I want you to take your time and tell your aunt and me just what you did yesterday afternoon."

Jacqueline darted a look about her.

"Don't be afraid, Jackie," Aunt Martha spoke up. "Tell us just what happened. I know you haven't any call to be afraid."

Jacqueline unclasped her hands on her lap, and clasped them tight again. She was ashamed to feel how they were trembling.

"I went up to the village with Dickie," she said, "in Mr. Zabriski's car, and I did some errands for Aunt Martha at Cyrus Hatton's, and the Post Office, and Miss Crevey's."

"Then you came straight home, didn't you?" Aunt Martha struck in eagerly. "Didn't you, Jackie?"

The Judge held up his hand, and frowned.

"If you please, Martha! Let her tell the story her own way. Where did you go then, Caroline?"

"I came down Longmeadow Street," Jacqueline went on cautiously. Whatever he was up to, this Judge, she wasn't going to give away the secret that she shared with Caroline! "I stopped at the William Gildersleeve place."

Aunt Martha drew a quick breath. The Judge gave her a warning glance.

"I knocked at the door," Jacqueline went on, "and I asked to see the little girl."

"Why?"

"I—I knew her on the train, coming from Chicago," Jacqueline answered, feeling her way. "She wasn't there, but the maids were real kind, because I was tired. They asked me in, and they gave me a drink of milk, and I ran an errand to the store, and Sallie gave me ten cents, and she had a crick in her back so I did up both the bathrooms for her, for twenty-five cents, and the money is upstairs in my pocket-book this very minute, Aunt Martha."

She looked hopefully at Aunt Martha, but Aunt Martha sat with her eyes cast down, and her hands on her lap pressed tight together.

"I—see!" said the Judge. He sat leaning on one elbow, with his chin in his hand and his deep-set eyes never once wavering from Jacqueline's face. "Well, when you left the house, what next?"

"I crawled through the hole in the hedge, and I saw the fat little girl next door, and she said hello."

"Was that all?"

"She showed me her birthday presents."

"And then——"

Was she going to reveal anything that would "give away" her transaction with Caroline's beads? Not Jacqueline!

"Then I went back to Miss Crevey's," she said calmly, "after something I'd forgotten."

"And you didn't see the fat little girl again?"

"No, Judge, I came right straight home from Miss Crevey's."

Judge Holden's gray eyebrows drew together in a frown. Jacqueline squirmed beneath his relentless scrutiny. She turned for relief to Aunt Martha, and was dismayed to see the misery in her white face.

"Why, what's it all about?" cried Jacqueline defensively.

"Look at me!" said the Judge. "You haven't told us everything, have you, Caroline? Think a little now."

"Oh, Jackie, tell us all about it!" Aunt Martha burst out with a sharp cry. "You found them, didn't you? And you didn't realize——"

"Tut, tut! Martha!" the Judge interposed sternly. "You know you promised. Now, Caroline, when this little fat girl showed you her presents, there was a handbag among them, wasn't there?"

Jacqueline nodded. She felt her face growing red. Not with fright or shame, and that old Judge needn't think it. She was just getting mad clear through, as she realized the treachery with which Eleanor had treated her.

"There was a five-dollar bill in the bag, wasn't there?" the Judge went on. "And she gave it to you?"

"I'll say she did!" cried Jacqueline. "The horrid little sneaking tell-tale!"

"Hm!" said the Judge. "Gave you a five-dollar bill, did she? What for?"

Jacqueline looked Judge Holden straight in the face.

“If that bawl-baby says I cheated her, it isn’t so,” she cried. “I gave her some gold beads, and they’re worth more than her nasty old five dollars.”

In the second that followed Jacqueline heard Aunt Martha draw a quick breath. But she couldn’t turn to look at her. She was watching the Judge, and wondering why he should put his hand into the pocket of his coat.

“I’m glad you told us this, Caroline,” he said. “You see, the little girl told her mother, and her mother told me all about it. Are these the beads you gave her for five dollars?”

It was the identical yellow strand—her own beads—that he drew from the pocket of his dusty gray coat. Jacqueline cast one careless glance at them.

“Sure,” she said.

The Judge’s voice was patient, and quite gentle:

“Where did you get them, Caroline?”

Jacqueline looked from the Judge to Aunt Martha, and caught Aunt Martha’s bloodless lips shaping the one word: “Found——”

“Martha, if you please!” the Judge fairly thundered.

“Well, I did find them, so there!” cried Jacqueline. “And you needn’t yell at Aunt Martha, even if you *are* a judge. They were in the china box in the bedroom next to the bathroom at the Gildersleeves’, you know, and I took them——”

“Took them?” Aunt Martha’s voice was no more than a gasp of pain and dismay. “Oh, no, Jackie! No!” She hid her face in her hands.

Jacqueline rose to her feet, bewildered.

“Aunt Martha! Don’t!” she quavered. “Aunt Martha!” She fairly whimpered the last words, as she flung her arms round Aunt Martha. In half a minute she knew she was going to cry and it was all that hateful Judge’s fault.

Aunt Martha put her arms round Jacqueline and held her close.

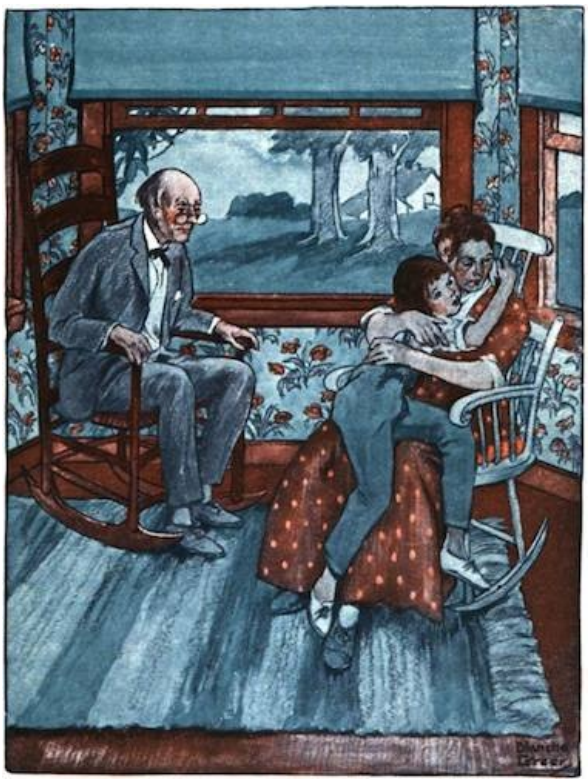
“Oh, Judge!” she said. “There’s some mistake—I can’t believe it even now. She’s coming down sick or something—she didn’t understand—she never took them wilfully. Jackie! Tell us everything! I can’t stand it to have folks calling you a thief.”

Jacqueline stiffened in Aunt Martha’s arms.

“Me—a thief?” she cried furiously. “They’d better not call me that. Why, Aunt Martha, don’t you ever dare think so! Don’t you let ’em make you think so!”

Aunt Martha was crying—actually crying! Aunt Martha! Oh, but that couldn’t be allowed. At any cost, even a broken promise to Caroline! What did Caroline matter now? It was Aunt Martha who counted.

“Don’t! Don’t!” wailed Jacqueline and clasped Aunt Martha tight. “Don’t you cry, Aunt Martha! There’s nothing to cry about. I didn’t steal those beads—they’re my *own* beads! I’ll tell you all about it, if you won’t cry. It’s all right, Aunt Martha—because I’m *not* Caroline Tait at all—I’m Jacqueline Gildersleeve.”



“Don’t! Don’t!” wailed Jacqueline and clasped Aunt Martha tight. “Don’t you cry.... There’s nothing to cry about.”

CHAPTER XXXVII

ONE WAY OUT

Shakespeare speaks in one of his plays of the disastrous position of the man who is blown up with the bomb he has himself touched off. Jacqueline was not nearly so well acquainted with Shakespeare as Caroline was. But one half-second after she made her startling announcement, she needed no poet to tell her how that poor man felt.

Aunt Martha stared for that one half-second, and then a look of actual triumph came flooding into her tear-stained face.

"There, Judge!" she cried, with her arms tight about Jacqueline. "Doesn't that prove what I kept telling you? It's the awful heat—and she's worked so hard and faithful, poor young one—and that long walk yesterday in the sun—it's gone to her head. You can see for yourself she doesn't know what she does—or what she says."

Jacqueline stood speechless, ("flabbergasted," Grandma would have called it!) while she looked from Aunt Martha's excited, anxious, yet beaming face, to the Judge who sat coldly, shrewdly watching. Crowding into her brain came memories she had laid aside, passages and chapters in the latter portion of that fateful volume, "The Prince and the Pauper."

"Oh, pluffy catamounts!" she almost shrieked in terror. "Don't you go acting like those silly boobs in that beastly old book—don't you go thinking I'm off my head, because I'm not—I'm not! I'm Jacqueline—and I never was anybody else! I'm Jacqueline Gildersleeve!"

She began to cry, tears of temper and terror combined. For this was drama, more than enough to satisfy her. If they didn't believe her—why, then they must think her either crazy or an awful liar and a thief! What did they do with crazy people—and with thieves? The Judge had a court and a jail—Neil had said so. And she had laughed, only a little while ago, at the mere idea of her being sent to jail, as Neil had said, to tease her. It was no laughing matter now.

"Oh, dear! Oh, dear!" choked Jacqueline. "I want my Aunt Edie—she'll know I'm me. And my Uncle Jimmie! Oh, oh!"

Aunt Martha was herself again. Nothing apparently could down her, except the dreadful fear that one of her children could be a thief and a liar. She drew Jacqueline down on her lap, and held her safe against her breast, and Jacqueline, for all she was eleven next month and so big she nearly overwhelmed Aunt Martha, clung tight to her and wept into the hollow of her sunburnt neck.

"There, there, you poor child!" soothed Aunt Martha. "Cry all you want to—cry it out!"

"I don't *want* to!" sniffled Jacqueline, and lifted her smeary face. "Lend me your hanky, Aunt Martha. Nellie's got mine."

She dried her eyes and felt a little better, but she didn't offer to leave Aunt Martha's lap, and she was thankful that Aunt Martha still kept hold of her, for the Judge was right there in the big rocker, and his steely eyes, under his drawn brows never wavered from her face.

"Well! Well!" said the Judge. "So you're Jacqueline, are you, and not Caroline Tait at all?"

"Now, Judge!" Aunt Martha begged. "Don't get her all upset again."

"But I'm *not* sick," insisted Jacqueline, "and I won't get upset unless you go calling me crazy like they did in the book."

"What book?" the Judge questioned.

"The silly old 'Prince and the Pauper,'" Jacqueline explained. "Judge Blair gave it to me to read on the train, but I never want to see it again as long as I live, because it was the book that did it."

The Judge leaned back in his chair, and fitted his finger tips together. Over them he watched Jacqueline.

"Go ahead," he bade, "and tell us all about it."

"Well, Caroline got on the train at Chicago," Jacqueline told her story in the intense silence, "and she was scared to death about going to the farm, because of the boys and the cows, and no piano—and I didn't want to go to Great-aunt Eunice's poky old house—and the two boys in the book changed round—and Caroline and I were both going on eleven, and had brown hair, and nobody in Longmeadow had ever seen either of us—and I thought it would be fun——"

Her voice began to falter, as she sensed the gravity of both her listeners. What she and Caroline had done, she realized now, was dangerous and dreadful. She dropped her eyes, thoroughly ashamed, but though she could not keep the quaver out of her voice, she spoke the words that it was only fair to speak.

"It was mostly me," she confessed. "Caroline wouldn't have done it, not even for the piano, but I said she was a quitter, and we changed clothes and things, only she kept Mildred, and when she got off the train at Baring Junction, the Gildersleeves just grabbed her—and I went in the Lizzie with Aunt Martha."

"Well, I—never!" gasped Aunt Martha. She was amazed, she was a little angry, perhaps. But she wasn't crying the way she cried when Jacqueline said she had taken the beads. "Did you mean to keep it up all summer, Jackie?"

"No, Aunt Martha," Jacqueline admitted. "The day I broke the cups, you know, when I went up to the village I was going to change back, but Caroline was having a party next day—they thought she was Jacqueline, you know—and she cried. She'd never had a party nor nothing. So I told her we'd let things go till Aunt Edie came in September, and I wouldn't have given the show away now, only I couldn't stand it, Aunt Martha, to have you think—what you thought about me."

Deplorably Aunt Martha hugged Jacqueline at this point, instead of shaking her, as really Jacqueline deserved to be shaken.

"There now, Judge!" Aunt Martha cried exultantly. "It's all true, that part about her running off to the village, the day the cups were broken." The Judge shook his grizzled head, above his finger tips.

“That may be true, Martha, but you’ll admit the rest of the story sounds pretty queer.”

“I don’t care how queer and far-fetched it sounds,” insisted Aunt Martha. “I’d believe *any* story before I’d believe this child isn’t honest. Why, Judge, whoever she is, she’s been round here with me, going on nine weeks now. I tell you, she *couldn’t* steal nor lie. ’Tisn’t in her.”

The Judge looked down a moment at his finger tips.

“Remember what day it was she got here, Martha?” he asked unexpectedly.

“Yes, Judge. The twenty-third of June. Her mother’s cousin wrote me the day and train I was to expect her, and ’twas the same day I had a bill to pay in Baring.”

“Hm!” said the Judge. “Yes, that was the day that Mrs. Gildersleeve’s little grandniece arrived from California. I remember because Mrs. Gildersleeve declined an invitation to dine with us that night—on my birthday. She’d counted a lot on seeing that child. The two girls came on the same train from Chicago, that much is sure. And you’d never seen this little niece of yours?”

“Judge, I wouldn’t have known her from a hole in the ground.”

“Did you ever notice anything in her behavior different from what you would naturally have expected in your brother’s child? I know you want to believe her story, Martha, but I trust you to be careful and exact.”

“Yes, there *were* some queer things, now I come to think of it,” Aunt Martha spoke eagerly, with her arms still round Jacqueline. “Why, Judge, this child didn’t know the look of her own trunk, nor where to find her trunk-key. I thought ’twas just because she was upset with the journey, but I see now how it came about. She had a pocketful of real expensive candy—she said it was given her by a little girl on the train.”

“I said a little girl on the train had a boxful,” murmured Jacqueline. “And the little girl was me!”

“And she hadn’t one single idea about the value of money,” Aunt Martha went on joyfully. “I thought ’twas just because they’d brought her up foolishly, but of course the Gildersleeves don’t have to count their pennies. Then she didn’t know how to do one blessed thing about the house, but she took hold nicely, and she’s been a real help to me all summer. Why, Judge,” Aunt Martha cried in sudden dismay, “if she’s Jacqueline Gildersleeve, she’ll be leaving us, and I don’t know how I’ll ever get along without her.”

Jacqueline hadn’t thought of that, when she planned her merry trick, there on the train. She was going to hurt Aunt Martha—Aunt Martha, who believed in her and stood up for her to the Judge. She began to sniffle, not for temper this time, and buried her face in Aunt Martha’s coarse, clean handkerchief.

“I didn’t think—’twould be like this,” she sobbed.

“Well, well!” crooned the Judge. “It doesn’t sound very probable, but I must admit it’s not impossible—no, not altogether impossible.”

Jacqueline lifted her face from the pocket handkerchief.

“Caroline will tell you it’s so, when she gets back from the beach,” she hiccoughed, “and Aunt Edie and Uncle Jimmie, when they come in September.”

“Yes, of course,” cried Aunt Martha eagerly.

“Hm!” boomed the Judge like a bee, but not a benevolent one. “But what shall we do until they come? This little girl is in a pretty awkward fix, because of these beads, if she can’t prove to us that she’s Jacqueline Gildersleeve.”

“Send for the other child,” bristled Aunt Martha, “the *real* Caroline. Guess I’ve got some say in the matter, if she’s my honest-to-goodness niece.”

The Judge shook his head.

“*This* one is your niece,” he said, with finality, “until there’s proof to the contrary, and I won’t send for the other child and have Eunice Gildersleeve upset for what may be a cock-and-bull story. Let’s see!” he mused. “Uncle Jimmie and Aunt Edie are our next hope. Where can we reach these relatives of yours?” He turned to Jacqueline.

“I don’t know where they are now,” Jacqueline confessed mournfully. “All their letters have gone to Caroline, of course, and they’re moving about all the time, and changing their address.”

“Well,” said the Judge, “you must think up somebody else who can identify you, and some way of making the identification by telegraph. A mere description isn’t enough. There must be some distinguishing feature. You haven’t a strawberry mark on your left arm, have you?”

Jacqueline laughed hysterically, and at sight of what her parted lips disclosed, Aunt Martha gave a cry of triumph.

“Those braces, Judge,” she cried. “The braces on her teeth! There just couldn’t be two children with the identical same dental work. In fact, I don’t believe my real niece has any such.”

The Judge looked at Aunt Martha with genuine approval.

“You always did have a good head on your shoulders, Martha,” he said. “Dental work, eh? Come to think of it, I know myself that the little girl at The Chimnies has had no dentistry done in several years. I rode into Boston one day with Penelope, when she was taking the child to the dentist, and she commented quite sharply on the way in which her teeth had been neglected. So now if this little girl will give us the address of her dentist——”

“It’s Dr. Graydon on the tenth floor of the Wouverman Building in Los Angeles,” Jacqueline answered readily. “Most all the girls I know go to him.”

The Judge wrote down the address methodically, in a little black note-book.

“I’ll wire him at once,” he said, more to Aunt Martha than to Jacqueline. “I shall have to retain these beads, as a matter of form, until the child’s story is proved or disproved. Meantime it will help to settle this affair if she returns the five dollars she got from the little Trowbridge girl.”

Oh, dear! Here were more storm clouds gathering, just as the sky seemed about to clear!

“I can’t return the money,” Jacqueline faltered. “I—I spent it.”

The Judge looked grave again, but his voice was patient, and Aunt Martha was encouraging, so Jacqueline managed to give a full account of the act that she now was so ashamed of—the taking of Caroline’s precious old beads, and the pledging them with Miss Crevey.

When Jacqueline had finished Aunt Martha started eagerly to confirm her story about bringing home a green-dragon cup, several weeks before, but the Judge cut her short.

"Get the lacquer box and show us the beads," he bade.

Jacqueline slipped from Aunt Martha's lap to obey, and as she left the room heard the Judge asking where the telephone was.

When Jacqueline came down with the box that held the beads, she found the Judge at the wall phone in the kitchen, and Aunt Martha by the table trying hard not to listen, but with her ears pricked up.

"Miss Crevey," her lips shaped the words for Jacqueline's comfort. She seemed to guess that Jacqueline might uneasily be thinking of the town constable.

The Judge turned from the telephone at last, with a flicker of a smile.

"Well," he nodded to Aunt Martha, "Lucretia Crevey was a most unwilling witness, but she did at last confirm as much of the child's story as pertains to her. And so these are the beads that made the trouble, eh?" He looked at the yellow coil that Jacqueline showed him in the lacquer box which she uncovered. "It might have been very serious trouble for you, little what's-your-name," he went on gravely. "You realize that, don't you?"

Jacqueline nodded, and drew a little nearer to Aunt Martha, who put her arm quickly round her.

"Other articles, besides the string of beads you call your own, are missing from The Chimnies," the Judge went on, "and you, having taken the beads and disposed of them to the child next door, were naturally suspected of taking them all."

Jacqueline pressed closer to Aunt Martha's side. She hadn't breath enough now even to say "Oh!"

"It was by the merest chance," the Judge rubbed it in, "that it wasn't the town constable who came here after you, instead of me, but luckily some ladies, who know Mrs. Conway here and wanted to spare her as much trouble as possible, heard about the beads, and put the case up to me. That's why I came to call this morning."

"I can't ever thank you enough, Judge," Aunt Martha said, with a wavering sort of smile.

They followed the Judge out into the sunshine of the side-yard, where the children still were grouped under the shade of the trees where Jacqueline had left them such ages ago, as it seemed to her, when she thought of all that had happened since that moment.

"You understand, Martha," the Judge said, as he settled himself in his roadster, "the little girl is still technically under suspicion. I'll suspend judgment about this hocus-pocus, switched identity business, till I hear from that Los Angeles dentist. Meantime she's remanded to your custody, and I'll trust you to produce her at my office, if she should be needed."

My, but that sounded as formal and dreadful as the clatter of prison bolts! Jacqueline shivered, in spite of the heat, and she was glad when she saw the Judge's car disappear in the white, powdery dust of the highway.

Then Jacqueline turned to Aunt Martha.

"Oh," she said and once more with weariness and excitement and remorse, she was half-crying. "I sure have got in awful wrong. I never thought, when I started things, there on the train! And now I've made you heaps and heaps of trouble, Aunt Martha—and you believed me—and stood up for me like all kinds of a brick—and you're not my Aunt Martha, either, and oh! I'm sorry that you aren't."

Aunt Martha put her arm round Jacqueline's shoulders.

"You're a naughty child, Jackie," she said tremulously, "to go and play such tricks on all of us—a very naughty child. Your folks will probably punish you." She hugged Jacqueline close. "But *I* don't have to, because you're not *my* niece—but oh, dear me! don't I just wish you were!"

CHAPTER XXXVIII

ALL ON A SUMMER AFTERNOON

Dr. Graydon in Los Angeles sent Judge Holden a telegram, brimful of dental technicalities, that convinced the Judge (Aunt Martha needed no convincing!) that it was indeed Jacqueline Gildersleeve who had posed all summer as Caroline Tait. So Jacqueline, secure in the thought that two people in Longmeadow knew that she was the little girl she claimed to be, waited at the Conway farm for the coming of Aunt Edith and Uncle Jimmie, who should set her entirely right in the eyes of all the rest of the whispering village. You can easily believe that she was now counting the days until the day, some time in September, when they should come.

Caroline, too, at Monk's Bay was counting the days, only where Jacqueline told herself joyously: "One day nearer!" Caroline was sighing: "One day less!"

She hardly knew whether to be glad or sorry when Cousin Penelope, in her sudden fashion, told her one afternoon that they were going back to Longmeadow day after to-morrow. Caroline hated to leave the downs, where she had had such walks and shy talks with Cousin Penelope, and the white beach, and the ocean that made music like cathedral organs. But it would be blissful to have a few days more at The Chimnies, to sit with Mildred and Aunt Eunice in the summer house, and play for Cousin Penelope on the singing piano, and sleep in her own lovely room—no, Jacqueline's room!—before she went away into the Meadows forever.

All the long ride home—no, it wasn't home to her, as it was to Cousin Penelope and Aunt Eunice!—Caroline sat silent in her corner of the cushioned limousine. She held Mildred in her arms and was sorry for her. Mildred was going to miss the limousine.

Much of the time they drove along country roads, and in the pastures on either side there were cattle grazing, black and white Holstein cows, and Jersey cows, and cows that were just plain old red mooley. When Caroline looked at them, for all that they were only mildly feeding, she held Mildred tighter, and wished that she dared to whisper her not to be afraid, for maybe the cows at half-aunt Martha's farm were kind cows.

And maybe the Conway cousins weren't like the fearsome boys they passed on the road: middle-sized boys with air rifles and fishing rods, intent on killing harmless things; big boys, clattering in home-made automobiles; little boys banging on drums and blowing tin trumpets with a racket that split the ears. Oh, boys were terrible beings, noisy, and full of mischief and strange cruelties! Some boys, just for the fun of it, liked to break and rend a little girl's dolls. Caroline held Mildred very close and almost fancied she could feel her tremble.

"But there'll be lots of days yet," Caroline told herself eagerly. "There'll be ten days at least—maybe twelve—before I have to go to the Meadows."

It was the middle of the afternoon when they rolled at last, almost as noiseless as a shadow, down the sunlight-checkered street of Longmeadow, and turned in at the iron gate of The Chimnies. How lovely the garden looked, with its rows of gladioli, like lances in rest, its tall sentinel hollyhocks, its masses of gillyflowers, and of bouncing zinnias! The pears were ripening on the trees, and a purple blush was on the plums. Caroline's tongue unloosed itself, and she was talking fast as she pattered up the porch steps at Aunt Eunice's side, but Cousin Penelope was moodily silent as she had been, Caroline now remembered, all through the long journey.

Sallie met them, beaming, at the door, and spoke at once of the tea that Hannah had all ready for them. Just a hasty freshening the travelers permitted themselves—time enough for Caroline to make sure that her green and golden room was as perfect as it was the day she left it—and then they were seated round the tea table by the open window in the long parlor that looked upon the garden.

Aunt Eunice poured the tea carefully into the shallow, fragile old china cups, and Sallie fetched in the mahogany curate's assistant, with a plate of fresh cinnamon toast, a plate of olive and cheese sandwiches, and a plate of small, rich, chocolate cakes with a frosting thick with nut-meats—cakes such as Hannah alone could make.

"This is like old times," Aunt Eunice sighed with content. "The old china, and the old silver!"

She looked fondly at the thin, old-fashioned spoon that she held.

"Oh, Mis' Gildersleeve," Sallie broke out, contrary to all decorum, but doesn't a home-coming justify a breaking of rules? "Such a scare as we had over them spoons!"

Cousin Penelope lifted her eyebrows never so slightly. She really was most unsocial to-day! But Aunt Eunice was all friendly interest.

"Why, Sallie," she said, "don't tell me you mislaid one of these spoons!"

"Oh, worse than that!" Sallie explained with relish. "I went and mislaid the whole kit an' bilin' of 'em. Mis' Gildersleeve, I'd taken my Bible-oath I put 'em under the dinner napkins in the back of the side-board drawer, but if you'll believe me, I went to get 'em, and I couldn't find hide nor hair of 'em. You could have knocked me down with a feather."

"But you found them, didn't you?" asked Aunt Eunice, a little anxiously, even though she held one of the precious spoons in her hand that very minute.

"I couldn't have looked you in the face otherwise," Sallie assured her. "I ran right over an' told Mis' Trowbridge, an' she told Mis' Holden, an' she told the Judge—and oh! Mis' Gildersleeve, he wants to call on you, soon's you get back—most particular."

Sallie bridled as she said the words, and looked mysterious. Why shouldn't she? Didn't she know—or think she knew!—the whole story of Jacqueline's gold beads, which she was not to mention to Aunt Eunice?

"But what about the spoons?" cried Aunt Eunice, not in the least surprised that her old friend, the Judge, should wish to bid her a prompt welcome home.

"Well, if you'll believe me," Sallie gave a sheepish giggle. "I found 'em that self-same night, tucked

away under the best towels in the linen closet, where I'd hid 'em for better safety. I knew I'd tucked them under something—somewheres!"

"Well, well," said Aunt Eunice, much relieved. "It's fortunate, Sallie, that the Judge hadn't called in the constable."

"Ah, but there's more to it than that," Sallie went on mysteriously. "There's a lot of things gone from this room and never been found yet. I wouldn't have called it to your mind, like the Judge told me not to, only you're bound to miss 'em. The silver things are gone from the desk, an' the old snuff-box, an'——"

"Don't worry, Mother," Cousin Penelope spoke, in the cool, aloof voice that no one knew better how to use. "I put a lot of knick-knacks away for safe keeping in that deep drawer in the hall closet. It was the morning we left, when the car was at the door. And Sallie never discovered they were missing, until the house was re-opened." Cousin Penelope smiled wintrily. "Really, Sallie, you must have done the parlor very hastily on the morning when we left for the beach."

What a way Cousin Penelope had of catching you in your own avowals and putting you in the wrong! And if she could look like judgment seats, just because poor Sallie had hurried her work on the day when she, too, was going on a vacation, what would she look like, when she found out, as so soon she must find out, that Caroline was really a little impostor? At the mere thought Caroline put down her strip of crumbly toast untasted.

She was glad that the knocker at the front door went clang that very minute—glad for Sallie, who could cover her flushed embarrassment by hurrying to the door—glad for herself, because her sudden loss of appetite went unnoticed in the excitement that the prospect of a visitor seemed most surprisingly to create.

"Oh," cried Aunt Eunice, in genuine agitation. "It can't possibly be—so soon!"

"Probably it's Judge Holden," Cousin Penelope spoke calmly. "A most unseasonable time to call."

"They're not coming in!" said Aunt Eunice, with marked relief. She actually had turned in her chair, and sat with her anxious face toward the wide doorway that led into the hall. "It was foolish of me to be startled—of course it couldn't be——"

"Perhaps it's Jackie!" Caroline's heart beat fast, and a little guiltily, as she said the words to herself. "Perhaps she's come to ask me to change—right now."

She didn't dare follow the thought to its conclusion. To lose the precious, hoarded days that she was counting, as a miser counts his treasure—oh, how could she bear it!

The outside door closed with unnecessary noise. After all, Sallie was human and must vent her feelings somehow! Cousin Penelope frowned. Was it with mere annoyance—or anxiety? For Sallie had come back into the room, and in her hand she carried a special delivery letter.

"It's for you, Miss Penelope," she said, rather grumpily.

"Wait a minute!" bade Cousin Penelope. She tore the bestamped envelope clumsily—and to be clumsy and in haste was not like Cousin Penelope. She gave one glance at the sheet that lay within. "We'll not dine to-night until seven o'clock, tell Hannah," she said, without lifting her eyes. "And you can lay two more places at table."

She tore the letter into four pieces, with a quick, angered movement, as if she would have liked to tear something that could feel.

Sallie went out of the room. Caroline watched her go, in a kind of daze. She didn't want to look at Aunt Eunice or Cousin Penelope. She didn't want to ask questions. She almost knew what was coming.

"I thought it better not to tell you, Jacqueline," said Cousin Penelope, in a voice of hard misery.

"There might have been some change of plans," Aunt Eunice interrupted, gently and rather wearily. "We didn't want you to be—disappointed. Of course you have looked forward to their coming."

Caroline looked from Aunt Eunice's distressed old face to Cousin Penelope's averted, angry face. She knew that one was as sorry as the other. And she herself—where had her voice gone to? Was it like this when people died?

"I suppose," she managed to whisper, after what seemed ages of heart-broken silence, "you mean—that they——"

"Your uncle and aunt," Cousin Penelope spoke in a crisp voice, "are motoring up from Connecticut. They've just written that they'll be with us—late this afternoon."

CHAPTER XXXIX

THE END OF A JOURNEY

Aunt Eunice said she would lie down for a bit before dinner. Really she felt the need of rest after the long ride from Monk's Bay. Cousin Penelope approved, but said that she would go herself to call on Madame Woleski. Would Jacqueline come with her?

Caroline shook her head. Please, she would like to rest, too, before dinner. She was tired out. And that last was no fib. She seemed to herself to be tired clear through to her very soul.

Up in the airy green and gold chamber that was Jacqueline's, Caroline sat down in the low rocker, and wondered why the tears didn't come. Tears would have brought relief but she couldn't wait for them. She had no time to waste, for she was going to be out of that house before Cousin Penelope came back. No doubt she was a coward and a quitter, just as Jackie had called her, for she couldn't—she simply couldn't—face the awful, unknown uncle and aunt that didn't belong to her, and even less could she face the amazement in Aunt Eunice's kind eyes, and the anger in Cousin Penelope's.

Of course, though, she must leave a word, so that they need not worry when they found her gone. She sat down at the pretty desk with the brass fittings that she had so longed to use, and for the first and only time she wrote a letter on the creamy thick paper with "The Chimnies, Longmeadow, Massachusetts" engraved upon it. This was the letter:

> DEAR MRS. GILDERSLEEVE:
>
> I can't say Aunt Eunice because you are not my aunt, and I am very sorry. And I have not hurt Jackie's things, only holes in some of the sox and the clasp of the gold beads is broken. I am sorry about the dentist's bill and the music lessons. I should not have let you but there are cows at the farm and so many babies at Cousin Delia's. I am taking Mildred's clothes you made because Jackie doesn't like dolls and maybe they wouldn't fit hers anyway and the satin box she gave me herself. I will send back Jackie's clothes I have on and I am sorry.
>
> Affectionately yours,
> CAROLINE TAIT, which is my name.
>
> Please tell Miss Penelope how sorry I am when she was so good to me and you were so good, and give my kindest regards to Sallie and Hannah.

She was crying a little now. How funny the round tears looked where they spattered on the creamy paper! She blotted the sheet hastily and slipped it into an envelope. In story books, when people left home, they always pinned their farewell notes to the pin-cushion, but that seemed to Caroline a foolish thing to do. How should Aunt Eunice see a little note on the pin-cushion, if she looked in at the door? And Aunt Eunice must see it at once, or she might be worried when there was no little girl in the house at dinner time.

After a moment's thought Caroline softly tipped the rocker forward ignominiously upon the floor. She placed a pillow from the bed upon the rocker, and pinned her note, addressed to "Mrs. Gildersleeve," upon the pillow. Certainly Aunt Eunice or Cousin Penelope or whoever came first into the room would be sufficiently struck with the oddity of its arrangement to look further and find the note. Then she put on her hat (Jacqueline's hat, but the plainest she could find!) and she took Mildred under one arm, and the satin box, full of little doll-clothes, under the other arm, and softly, on tiptoe, not daring to look back, she stole out of the darling room, and closed the door upon it.

If she happened to meet Sallie, she meant to tell her she was going to look for Eleanor Trowbridge. But she didn't meet Sallie. Unchallenged, she slipped out at the front door and across the fragrant garden, where she was never to play again. Through the gap in the hedge she reached the shortcut, and a moment later she was in Longmeadow Street, and heading south toward the road that she knew led into the Meadows.

A smart sedan came rolling toward her up the wide, shaded street. As it met her and passed by, she was aware of people who nodded to her pleasantly. That was Mrs. Francis Holden, the Judge's daughter-in-law, and Doris and Edith Holden, her two little girls with whom Caroline had played sometimes. They were bowing and smiling to Jacqueline Gildersleeve, in a kilted pongee skirt and an orange silk slip-over. They weren't bowing to Caroline Tait, in borrowed clothes. They would never know Caroline Tait.

For down in the Meadows, surely Caroline would be in a different school district, and as for Sunday School—she was never coming to Longmeadow again, not even for Sunday School—not even if she died a heathen! She would do anything half-aunt Martha asked her to do—why, she believed she would even milk the cows!—if only half-aunt Martha wouldn't make her go into Longmeadow for anything. She simply couldn't face the village and the people who had known her as Jacqueline, now that they must know her as a cheat. She would be too ashamed.

The shaded, wide street, with its picturesque old houses set in their colorful, scented gardens, opened in a little patch of sun and dust, where the treeless road to the Meadows branched off. Here Caroline turned her back on Longmeadow, and trudged heavily along the way that was marked out for her. The sun was sinking toward the western hills, but the air was hot and breathless, and the smell of the onion fields caught her by the throat and almost choked her. Now and then an automobile overtook and passed her—ramshackle cars, mostly, and in them swarthy men, who spoke a strange tongue. Once one of them called to her.

It was only friendly Mr. Zabriski, in his kindness offering a ride to a strange, white-faced child, who

looked too tired to walk, but to Caroline he seemed a dangerous character. She clutched Mildred and the box of clothes, and scuttled off among the onions, and Mr. Zabriski, justly offended, grunted his indignation and clattered on.

The powdery white dust hung in a cloud above the road after he had passed. Caroline breathed it, ate it. There was dust in her hair—dust in her shoes. She wondered if she could keep on setting one foot before the other until she reached her destination. How far was it to the Conway farm in the Meadows? Jackie had walked the distance and made light of it. But Jackie was afraid of nothing.

At the first house she came to on the sparsely settled road she saw a big dog, so she did not dare to stop and ask questions. At the second house, a long way farther on, were swarthy children, who shouted at her in their strange tongue, and in terror for Mildred she almost ran past the place without stopping. By the time she reached the third house, her mouth and throat were lined with dust and she was ready to cry with weariness and despair. She would have asked any one for directions now, even a Polish farm-hand or a jeering child. But when she reached the tumble-down gray house, she found it tenantless.

She sat for a little while on the doorstep and rested. The sun was sinking fast. More cars rattled by in the dust, as men went home from the fields. Soon it would be dinner time at The Chimnies. She must find Jackie quickly. In a panic she realized that her letter of explanation really hadn't explained things. Jackie was needed to set matters right and ease Aunt Eunice's mind. She got to her aching feet and plodded stiffly on through the powdery dust.

She thought that she would never reach the fourth house. It seemed always to recede, as she drew near it on her weary feet. It was a square house under some elms. It needed paint badly. There were lilac bushes by the sagging front door. In the side-yard an old hammock swung between two trees. In the trodden dirt beside the hammock two little children were playing—a girl at the toddling age, and a boy in overalls, who was a couple of years older. With joy she saw that they weren't foreign children. Hopefully she went up to them.

"Hello!" said the little boy, with a smeared and friendly smile.

"Hello!" said Caroline. "Who lives here?"

"I do," said the boy. He went on digging up dirt with an iron spoon and putting it into an old baking dish.

"What's your name?" Caroline pursued.

"Freddie," he told her. "She's Annie. She's my sister."

"But what's your other name?" begged Caroline. "What's your mother's name?"

"My mother's dead," Freddie told her nonchalantly. "Aunt Marfa's my mother now."

Aunt Martha! Then her search was over. This was the farm, and here were two of her cousins, and the cows were somewhere, ambushed, perhaps, in the big barn that was filling fast with shadows.

"Where you going?" Freddie looked up to question in his turn.

"Nowhere," Caroline told him, over a great lump in her dusty throat. Indeed there was no going farther. Least of all was it possible to turn back.

She left the children, and with dragging steps she walked across the side-yard to what must be the kitchen door of the farm-house. She stopped on the doorstep and looked through the screen door into an old-fashioned, low-ceiled kitchen. Pretty soon the room would be as familiar to her as Cousin Delia's kitchen, with its faded linoleum and mud-colored wood-work. But now she found it strange, and rather terrible in its strangeness. If she didn't knock quickly, she would lose courage and run away and hide—and there was no place to run to! She knocked quickly and loudly on the frame of the screen door.

In another moment a squarely-built woman, with a bibbed apron over her dark dress, came hurrying out from an inner room. She had keen gray eyes that in one second seemed to have taken in the whole of Caroline, from her dusty sandals (Jacqueline's sandals!) to her brown leghorn hat.

"Bobbed brown hair and going on eleven," the woman murmured, and then she threw the screen door wide open. "I guess I know who you are, this time," she said, with a dry chuckle. "Come right in here, Caroline Tait."

CHAPTER XL

TURN ABOUT AGAIN!

Jacqueline wasn't at the Conway farm, when Caroline, in frantic quest of her, came stumbling into the kitchen, on Aunt Martha's invitation. Instead she was down on the knoll by the river having a picnic with the young Conways.

It was a most unusually nice picnic. Dickie had gone early to the knoll, and with his Boy Scout lore had built a fire and set potatoes to roast in the hot embers. Some of them were a little underdone at supper time, and some were a little overdone, but smeared with butter, they tasted ever so much better than the baked potatoes that one ate off a plate at home in the dining room. Besides the potatoes there were apple turnovers, made with flaky pie crust, as a special treat. Aunt Martha had time to do some of the cooking herself, now that Grandma was able to sit up.

The picnickers left nothing for the birds but a very few crumbs, and they straggled home through the onion fields, just before sunset, fed-up and contented, so that even the thought of the good-night chores couldn't damp their happiness.

"I'll stir up a batch of Graham bread and set it to rise," Jacqueline murmured, "but first I'll give Annie and Freddie their baths. And you've got to take a bath, too—you hear me, Nellie? Not just your feet and a lick at your neck, but all over."

"I did yesterday," protested Nellie.

"You will to-day," said Jacqueline in her bossiest voice, "or else you won't sleep in the bed with me, and don't you forget it."

Quite as important as the mother of a large family, Jacqueline bustled into the kitchen, which was now growing dusky. Soft splashings from the washroom and gurgles from Freddie told her that Aunt Martha had forestalled her at part of her labors. She must already have bathed and bedded Annie, and now she was at work on Freddie.

Honestly Jacqueline was sorry to seem to have shirked.

"Oh, come now, Aunt Martha!" she spoke into the washroom. "You didn't need to do that. You knew I was coming."

Aunt Martha looked up from where she knelt in the lamp light to scrub Freddie.

"'Tisn't likely you'll have time for any chores to-night," she explained. "Your folks'll be sending for you any minute now."

"Oh!" said Jacqueline, with a squeak like the squeak of a rubber pig when you let the air out of it. "You mean—but they can't be! They haven't got back from the beach—not yet!"

"Everything's happened all in a heap," Aunt Martha told her. "They've come back from the beach, sure enough, to meet your aunt and uncle. They must be here by this time. Caroline turned up 'bout five o'clock with the news."

"Caroline is here?"

"Yes. She looked pretty well done out, poor young one. I just took time to call up the Judge and ask him to step right over to your Aunt Eunice's, and tell her the whole story and how both you children were here at the farm, waiting for them to send and get the one that really belongs to them. Then I packed Caroline off to bed. She's in your old room. Better kite upstairs and speak to her. You may not have much time."

That was all Aunt Martha said. Matter of fact like that, and scrubbing Freddie's neck while she talked, so vigorously that he began to whine! Jacqueline herself had no choice but to take matters calmly, though she felt this to be a most exciting hour of her life. What would she say, that horrid old Cousin Penelope, when she found the little girl she had snubbed was really her cousin's child? Jacqueline chuckled a little to herself, as she scampered up the narrow stairs to the north chamber.

In the big bed in the corner Caroline rose on one elbow and looked at her—a white-faced Caroline with dark smudges under her eyes. She was wearing one of the scant, thin little gowns that Jacqueline had worn all summer, and she held Mildred in her tiny be-trimmed nightdress, close against her breast.

"Hello, Carol!" said Jacqueline. But her voice didn't sound so jaunty as she meant it to.

"Oh, Jackie!" Caroline cried at sight of her. "Did Aunt Martha tell you?"

"Sure," answered Jacqueline, and sat down in her dusty Peggy Janes, upon the edge of the bed.

"She's awful good," said Caroline, in a wavering voice. "She said not to worry about the cows—the boys look after them. And she wanted me to eat some supper but I couldn't. She didn't scold, not one bit. Oh, Jackie, I'm afraid Cousin Penelope will scold you—dreadfully."

"I should worry," said Jacqueline.

Caroline looked at her for a moment with all the old admiration, and then she shook her head woefully.

"We shouldn't have done it, Jackie—it was an awful thing to do."

"Well," said Jacqueline defensively, "you liked the piano, didn't you?"

"Y-yes," Caroline confessed, and then the tears began to drip down her cheeks, and she hid her head in the pillow.

"Oh, suffering chipmunks!" Jacqueline cried angrily. "Don't do that! Don't do that, I tell you! Would you rather we hadn't?"

"I-I don't know!" wept Caroline. "No, I guess not. Yes, I guess so—perhaps." She dried her eyes uncertainly with the front of her wrist. "There are your clothes, Jackie," she said in a voice that she tried vainly to keep steady. "All folded up on the chair. I put them on fresh this morning—down at Monk's Bay—in the beautiful Shieling." She bit her lip that trembled, and went on: "Don't you believe —you could wear them back?"

Jacqueline gave her a startled look.

“But I want to wear the Peggy Janes,” she said, “and knock ’em dead with surprise.”

Couldn’t she just see herself “making an entrance” at the Gildersleeves’ poky house—the dismay of that starched Cousin Penelope—the amazement of Aunt Edie and Uncle Jimmie?

“But they are my Peggy Janes,” said Caroline wistfully, “and I’ve got to have some clothes to wear.”

“You can have those duds of mine,” said Jacqueline, with an airy gesture toward the kilted pongee skirt, the orange silk slip-over, the leghorn hat, the ruffled underwear. “We’ll swap.”

“No, no!” Caroline cried in such a distressful voice that Jacqueline was amazed. “I don’t want ’em—I don’t want ever to see ’em again—take ’em away, Jackie, please—please!”

“Why, sure,” said Jacqueline, somewhat hurt, “if you feel it that way.”

Hastily, as she had changed on the train, weeks before, she shed the Peggy Janes and the sneakers, and put her dusty self into her own lawful, rather dusty clothes. While she changed, she let her tongue run on. Somehow she dreaded to have a silence fall in the room where Caroline crouched so white-faced in the big bed.

“You didn’t see my Aunt Edie and my Uncle Jimmie,” Jacqueline questioned, “did you?”

“No,” said Caroline. “I ran right away when I heard they were coming. It’s an awful long way from Longmeadow to the farm.”

“Pretty nice, though, when you get here,” said Jacqueline, as she wriggled into her own sand-colored silk socks.

Caroline drew a quivering breath.

“This is a bigger room than at Cousin Delia’s,” she said. “Nellie and I will have it together, Aunt Martha told me. I haven’t seen Nellie, but the babies are real cunning. I know I shall love them. Aunt Martha’s going to make me a winter coat out of an ulster of hers, and dye it blue. It’s cold here winters—and there’ll be lots of chances to slide—and there’s a pond where Ralph will teach me to skate. Aunt Martha’s awful good.”

“I’ll say she is,” assented Jacqueline, as she thrust herself into the slip-over. “Crazy elephants! I’ve gone and grown this summer.”

She stepped to the wavery looking-glass, and grinned at her own sunbrowned reflection. From the mirror her glance traveled to the window close by—the window that looked out on the road—and at sight of what was passing on the road, she gave a whoop that made Caroline sit up.

“Oh, jumping skeeters! It’s my Uncle Jimmie—and the Judge! They’ve come—they’ve really come! I’ve got to go.”

She caught up the leghorn hat. She was Jacqueline herself again, just as if the summer masquerade had never happened.

As if it had never happened—and Caroline’s black-smudged eyes fairly stabbing Jacqueline with their woefulness!

Jacqueline swooped down on the bed, and threw her arms round Caroline, and kissed her tumultuously.

“Don’t you care!” she said. “Think of the fun you had—and we’ll have some great times together yet. I’ll come back to-morrow—and you’ll come and see me at Aunt Eunice’s.”

Caroline said nothing, but it was only afterward that Jacqueline remembered that she had been silent. Jacqueline gave her a last hug—she couldn’t linger, with Uncle Jimmie at the door—and then she galloped down the narrow stair into the kitchen.

Aunt Martha was there, and Freddie, in his little Teddie sleeping suit. Nellie was minding him, and Nellie’s eyes were round with amazement.

“I was just going to call you,” said Aunt Martha. “They won’t come in—they’re in an awful hurry. Say good-by to Grandma. I’ve sort of prepared her.”

Jacqueline went quickly and quietly into the parlor that still was Grandma’s room. Grandma sat in her worn old wrapper in the big wooden rocker. An oil lamp burned on the table beside her and her knitting rested on her knees. Thank goodness, she often said, she could at least knit again. She didn’t have to sit round any longer like a bump on a log!

Grandma turned her head and looked at Jacqueline, and suddenly Jacqueline felt lumpy in the throat, and teary round the lashes. It wasn’t funny at all, what she had done and put Caroline up to doing. And she wasn’t going to enjoy this hour a little bit, even if she got a hundred rises out of stuck-up Cousin Penelope.

“So you ain’t our Jackie, after all,” said Grandma, in the trembly voice that was hers since her illness.

Jacqueline went to Grandma’s side and took the veined old hands tight in both hers.’

“I’m *your* Jackie,” she said painfully. “Oh, Grandma, I sure will miss you! I’ll run in to-morrow, and I’m coming back to visit next summer, if Aunt Martha’ll let me.”

Grandma smiled, the saddest sort of smile.

“To-morrow’s another day, child—and summer’s a long ways off. There, now, just you kiss me and run along to your own folks.”

Jacqueline bent and kissed the withered old cheek.

“Don’t ye cut up no more crazy didoes,” Grandma whispered with a queer little chuckle that might as well have been a sob.

“I won’t,” said Jacqueline, stifled.

She went out of the room very quickly. If she had stopped or looked back, she realized that she might have begun to cry. Oh, fuzzy caterpillars, what was the use of talking grandly to one’s self about wheelchairs for Grandma and china dishes? Some things you couldn’t make up for. Some things you couldn’t set right.

Aunt Martha didn’t aim to have prolonged leave-takings. She was out on the doorstep, with Freddie, beshawled, in her arms, and the children standing round her with perplexed faces, all of them; even Ralph. In the roadster sat Judge Holden, and Colonel Jimmie Knowlton stood by the running board with his cap in his hand, talking with Aunt Martha.

Jacqueline threw herself upon Uncle Jimmie and kissed him. She wanted to get through with

everything very quickly, and drive away. She kissed Nellie. She kissed Freddie. She dabbed at Aunt Martha's cheek.

"Oh!" cried Nellie suddenly. "Don't go, Jackie—don't go!"

"S'long," Jacqueline nodded to the boys. "I'm coming back to-morrow. I'll say you've shown me one grand time!"

They were looking at her with big eyes, as if she were a stranger. Oh, dumb-paste that skirt and slip-over! If only she could have kept the Peggy Janes.

"Jump in!" bade her Uncle Jimmie, in his military voice, which Jacqueline fancied only when he joked. She suspected that he was in no mood for joking now.

She scuttled into the wide seat of the roadster beside Judge Holden, who nodded to her gravely. Uncle Jimmie folded his long legs into the seat beside her.

"Good-night, Mrs. Conway, and many thanks," he said.

The car was turning. In a moment the top would shut away the sight of them, the dear friendly people who were not her own, standing there with surprised, reproachful faces, in the dusk that was about to swallow them up.

"Good-by, Aunt Martha," Jacqueline called. "I'll see you to-morrow."

The roadster had quite turned now, and was heading for the road.

"Jackie! Jackie!" That was Freddie's voice, lifted in a howl of anguish. "I want my Jackie—Jackie!"

Uncle Jimmie looked down at Jacqueline beside him. She could feel his eyes boring through her and she could feel herself shrinking smaller and smaller, till a crack would have held her.

"Well," said Uncle Jimmie in the tone, she felt, in which he sent men to be court-martialed—a tone that left you flat, crushed under tons of righteous disapproval. "I'll say that for a nickel-plated, triple-riveted Miss Mess-it you've broken the world's record this trip."

CHAPTER XLI

NIGHT OF JUDGMENT

They were all seated in the softly lighted parlor at The Chimnies—Cousin Penelope, stonily silent, Aunt Eunice, wiping her spectacles over and over, Aunt Edie, little and gray-eyed, with helpless, fluttery gestures—when Jacqueline, like a criminal in custody, walked in at Uncle Jimmie's side.

An entrance all right, and drama, but not the kind Jacqueline wanted!

"Oh, Jackie!" cried Aunt Edie, as soon as she set eyes on her. "You dreadful child! What *have* you done now? What *will* you do next? Come here and kiss me! I hope you didn't catch anything in that queer place. I'm so afraid of typhus in these gone-to-seed old townships."

Aunt Edie was insulting New England, just as Cousin Penelope had expected her to do, but Cousin Penelope hadn't the spirit left to do more than fling her a disdainful glance.

"Go say how-do-you-do to your Aunt Eunice," Aunt Edie bade Jacqueline, "and tell her you're sorry. You owe her all sorts of apologies. I shouldn't think she'd ask you inside her house, after the way you've behaved."

Jacqueline shrugged her shoulders. One had to put on indifference, if one didn't want to bawl. She went to Great-aunt Eunice, made her little curtsy, and offered a limp hand.

"Well, well, Jacqueline," said Aunt Eunice, being nice with an effort that did not escape Jacqueline, "we're very glad to see you here at last. Now we'd better have dinner."

"Jackie, you don't *deserve* any dinner," Aunt Edie spoke emphatically, and this time Cousin Penelope shot her a glance of heartiest approval.

"I don't *want* any dinner, thanks," said Jacqueline with her chin up. "I had my supper at Aunt Martha's, and it's a very clean, nice place, and no typhus at all, and I hope you didn't bring any germs and things back with *you* from your nasty old Alaska."

"Now don't get fresh," warned Uncle Jimmie.

Everybody hated her—everybody in the world—it was worse than Institutions—and Aunt Martha was way off in the Meadows! Jacqueline felt the belittling hot tears well into her eyes.

"Then don't you say things about the farm," she flared, "nor about Aunt Martha—she's a lovely aunt—and I never had a grandmother before—and oh, dear! Freddie cried when I left, and maybe he's crying for me now."

She felt her eyes brim over with tears, which she brushed angrily away. Aunt Edie made a little helpless movement, as if she might rise and go to her, but she met Uncle Jimmie's eye and sat still. Aunt Eunice, however, wasn't any relation to Uncle Jimmie by marriage or otherwise, and she didn't care *how* he looked at her. She just put her arm round Jacqueline and drew her close.

"Come, come, dear," she comforted. "Nobody meant to speak against Martha Conway. She's the salt of the earth, and I don't doubt but the summer with her has done you a lot of good."

"I'll say it has," Jacqueline sniffled while she felt forlornly for a handkerchief. "I can make gingerbread—and apple-sauce—and cook eggs five different ways. It was a corking farm—and I'm going down there to-morrow. I told the boys I would. I didn't say half the things I want to say to Carol. I'm going down there early and stay all day——"

"But there won't be any time to-morrow," Aunt Edie struck in. "Didn't Uncle Jimmie tell you?"

"We've not indulged in much conversation," Uncle Jimmie spoke dryly.

"We've got to be in New York to-morrow afternoon," explained Aunt Edie. "We'll have to start at crack of dawn, but don't bother about breakfast for us, Mrs. Gildersleeve. We can get something at the hotel in the next big town. We have to rush—we've booked passage on the *Crespic* that sails on Saturday—and there's rafts of things to do in New York. Jim has to see people. He's going over for the Government, you know."

She gazed at her Jim proudly. Jacqueline stood with Aunt Eunice's arm about her (Aunt Eunice who, she knew, would rather she were Caroline!) and felt chilly and out of things.

"Am I going, too, Aunt Edie?" she questioned falteringly.

"Oh, yes, doodle-bug," Aunt Edie unbent at last, in spite of Uncle Jimmie. "We can't leave you behind—no knowing what you'd get into next. We'll be trotting all over the Continent but we'll find a school for you in Switzerland——"

"A strict one," said Uncle Jimmie.

My, how grouchy he was! But he hadn't had a chance yet to wash off the dust of two hundred miles swift motoring and nobody seemed to think at all about his comfort.

"But I don't *want* to go away to-morrow," said Jacqueline painfully. "I've got to see Carol again—I *must* see Carol."

"I'm afraid Carol will have to wait," Aunt Edie dismissed the subject lightly. "Can we have ten minutes grace before dinner, Mrs. Gildersleeve? Jim wants to brush himself, I know."

That was all Caroline and her affairs meant to them, those grown folk who were settling things for Jacqueline. Aunt Edie rushed Uncle Jimmie off to the guest room. Cousin Penelope said something in a cold voice about having dinner served, if it weren't entirely spoiled by now. Secretly Jacqueline hoped it was spoiled, since Cousin Penelope would have to eat it.

Aunt Eunice was the only one who understood or cared. She said:

"I'll show you to your room now, Jacqueline."

"I can find it myself," said Jacqueline stiffly. "I was here in your house before. Didn't that Judge tell you about the beads—my *own* beads? But I'd like to have you show me, just the same, if it isn't too much trouble," she conceded, more graciously.

Side by side they went up the stairway just as Aunt Eunice and Caroline had gone, weeks before. The door was opened into the bedroom that Jacqueline remembered. Aunt Eunice fumbled with the electric button, and the light flooded the pale paper with its leafy frieze, the French gray furniture, the

oyster white rug—and in the middle of the rug was the rocking chair on its face, with a pillow laid upon its rockers, and a note pinned to the pillow. Jacqueline sprang and seized the note.

"It's for you, Aunt Eunice," she cried, "and I bet anything it's from Carol. Of course she wouldn't go away without a word. Oh, read it, do!"

Aunt Eunice read the little letter that was splashed with Caroline's tears.

"Oh, dear!" quavered Aunt Eunice, beneath her breath. "The poor little lamb! Oh, dear!"

For one second Aunt Eunice and Jacqueline looked at each other with eyes of complete understanding. Then Jacqueline threw her arms about Aunt Eunice, and burst out crying, as she had not once cried for her own distress.

"Oh, oh!" she wailed. "She'll hate it at the farm—I know she will. The piano is funny and old and out of tune—and if you don't sit on those boys, they get fresh. And Carol won't sit on 'em. She's a 'fraid cat. She wouldn't have changed round with me in the first place, if I hadn't made her."

"Don't, don't, my dear!" Aunt Eunice tried to soothe in a broken voice.

"But she never had a party," Jacqueline wept on, "not till you gave her one. That's why we didn't change back again before. We were going to—I was so sick of it at the farm—but she had to have her party—she just cried because she wanted it so—she said it was heaven here—and the nasty old music lessons—she *liked* 'em, can you beat it? I wanted to go see her to-morrow—she wouldn't keep these clothes—but I want her to have some of mine—and a winter coat—I'll make her take 'em—hers are funny and old and mended—and I've worn 'em out dreadfully—and she loves pretty clothes—and she won't have any more now ever—nor dentists nor music—and she was eating out of a shoe box on the train—and it wasn't her fault at all—I put her up to it, there on the train—and now—she's the one that has—to have—a horrid time—and c-cows!"

It was really dreadful, the way Jacqueline was crying now that she had let herself go. Cousin Penelope, coming up the stairs, heard the sobs and screams and hurried into the room.

"Mother!" she spoke frowningly. "Really, you mustn't make yourself ill—over this child."

Oh, the worlds of contempt in Cousin Penelope's tone, for all that "this child" was Jack Gildersleeve's truly daughter!

Aunt Edie came, too, from the guest room down the hall, more fluttery than ever, and Uncle Jimmie, who wasn't fluttery at all. It was he who took the situation sternly in hand.

"Cut it out now, Jack," he bade. "Don't be a rotten sport."

Obediently Jacqueline took her arms from about Aunt Eunice. She was frightened into complete silence, when she saw how pale and faint Aunt Eunice looked. Of course she would be a sport. Somehow she must make Uncle Jimmie stop frowning at her.

"I didn't mean——" she sniffled. "I'm—awful sorry, Aunt Eunice. Go on and get your old dinner, everybody. I'm not hungry, nor anything, and I'm going right straight off to bed."

Aunt Eunice didn't even kiss Jacqueline. She went away with Cousin Penelope, as if she had had all she could stand for one evening, and she took Caroline's letter, clasped tight in her hand. Uncle Jimmie, at a sign from Aunt Edie, followed them, but as he went he cast at Jacqueline, struggling with her tears, a look that was a shade less disgusted.

Aunt Edie lingered.

"Now don't you cry any more," she said kindly enough, and hugged Jacqueline. "It's all over, and you're sorry, and everybody knows it, and forgives you, so everything is all right again. We shall have a ripping trip, and of course your Uncle Jimmie was joking about the school. You won't be there all the time anyway—we'll take you to places with us—and you shall buy heaps of pretty things. Now smile to me, old doodle-bug!"

Jacqueline smiled—at least she supposed she did. She stretched her lips, and Aunt Edie appeared satisfied, for she kissed her, and urged her to come have a bite of dinner, just to please Aunt Eunice.

"But if you're going to cry again, never mind, lamb-baba!" she added hastily. "Get your bath and jump into bed, and I'll come later to tuck you up."

Then Aunt Edie was gone, and Jacqueline went to the bureau, to get herself a nightdress. She opened the drawers, full of snow-white, hand-made little undergarments, and many-colored socks, fine handkerchiefs and hair-ribbons, little bags and gloves and endless pretties. She shut the drawers noisily, and went to the closet for a kimono. All about her she found hanging little frocks, just as she remembered them, of net and organdie, crêpe and wool, slip-overs and coats, her precious unused riding suit.

For a second she glowed with the joy of having her own possessions once more. She cast a satisfied glance round the pretty room, with its pictures, and knick-knacks of china, its cozy bed, its shaded lights. But this was the room in which Carol had lived, all these weeks, and now Carol was lying in the north chamber at the farm, where the pictures were old and ugly, and the wall-paper covered with crazy rose baskets, upside down. Carol, who so loved pretty things and gentle ways!

All over, and everything all right again? That was what Aunt Edie thought, did she? Much she knew about it!

Jacqueline's gaze traveled to the bookshelves in the corner, where the light from the desk lamp fell strong. She saw lying on the wide top shelf a fat volume in a gay jacket that was familiar. She launched herself upon it.

"Oh, dumb-paste you!" she cried. "I wish I'd never seen you, you beastly mean old 'Prince and Pauper'!"

She dashed the book on the floor. She kicked it—yes, she actually kicked it. Then she ran and threw herself recklessly down on the beautifully made bed, and if Carol, in the lonely north chamber, cried to herself that night, Jacqueline, in the green and gold room at The Chimnies, was crying just as hard, and perhaps a little harder.

CHAPTER XLII

PRIDE AND PENELOPE

Aunt Edie and Uncle Jimmie and Jacqueline didn't leave The Chimnies quite at crack of dawn, but they did really sit down to breakfast at five minutes after seven.

Early as it was, Jacqueline had been up already for half an hour. She had dressed herself in a jumper of wood brown jersey, and a frilled blouse of white silk, with an orange colored tie. She had put some last things into her suitcase, which would go in Uncle Jimmie's car. Her trunk, which Aunt Edie and Sallie had packed the night before, would go by express straight to the steamer.

When her packing was done, she left her brown cape coat, with its buttons of pressed leather, and her little soft motor hat of brown, stitched with orange, lying on the bed with her precious vanity bag, and she slipped down the back-stairs into the kitchen. She had been there once before, you'll remember.

Hannah was mixing batter, and the waffle iron was steaming on the stove.

"So you're the young one that really belongs here, are you?" boomed Hannah. "Well, I never did, in all my born days!"

She didn't say what it was she never did, and Jacqueline thought it tactful not to ask her. She meant to be very tactful, all the rest of her life!

Just then Sallie came out from the dining room, on her way to get chilled water and unsalted butter from the ice-chest. At sight of Jacqueline she began to giggle.

"Say," cried Sallie, "if *you'd* been here all summer, I guess things wouldn't have gone fast, nor nothing."

Jacqueline grinned in acknowledgment of the compliment, but rather sheepishly.

"I want to give you back your dime," she said.

"Oh, shucks!" cried Sallie, reddening.

"Honest, I do," Jacqueline repeated earnestly. "I shouldn't have taken it, just for stepping up to the store to help you out, but I'll say I needed the money something awful."

"I'll say you must have!" chuckled Sallie.

"I'm keeping the twenty-five cents," Jacqueline went on. "My Aunt Edie says she's going to frame it, 'cause it's the first money I ever earned, and Uncle Jimmie says probably it'll be the last. But the dime's in this envelope for you—and here's an envelope for Hannah—and I was ever so much obliged for the milk."

She fairly mumbled the last words, as she put the two creamy envelopes, marked Sallie and Hannah, on the table, and then she fled. In each envelope there was a dollar bill, besides the dime in Sallie's envelope. Jacqueline had found two dollars in the purse in her vanity bag. All that summer Caroline must have scrupulously left the money untouched.

Breakfast at The Chimnies that morning was a rather hectic meal. Cousin Penelope was very silent. Once her eyes traveled from Jacqueline to the picture of Great-aunt Joanna that hung on the wall behind her. Great-aunt Joanna was the austere lady in the cap, you will remember, that Cousin Penelope had said Caroline looked like, when she believed that Caroline was Jacqueline. Now when Cousin Penelope looked at Great-aunt Joanna she positively choked over her soft roll, and had to leave the table.

Aunt Eunice saw that every one had plenty of coffee and waffles and scrambled eggs and crisp bacon. But she scarcely ate at all herself. As for Aunt Edie, she was worried for fear she had mislaid her trunk-key, and for fear that Jacqueline had hopelessly upset everybody, and she was more fluttery and helpless than ever. But Uncle Jimmie was calm and good-humored. He had said his say the night before. Now with him by-gones were by-gones, and he was friends all round, even with his troublesome niece-by-marriage.

When the good-bys at last were hurriedly and briefly said, Jacqueline hopped down the steps of the porch, holding to Uncle Jimmie's hand, and scrambled up in front beside the driver's seat. Aunt Edie was established in the tonneau, with rugs and cushions. She meant to sleep clear to New Haven, she said. Uncle Jimmie slipped his long legs under the steering wheel beside Jacqueline and as he put the car in gear, grinned at her, in his old comradely fashion.

It was a radiant little face, under the brown and orange hat, that Jacqueline showed to Aunt Eunice, as she waved farewell to The Chimnies and to Longmeadow, and it was with a little half-smile that Aunt Eunice, on the broad porch, turned to Cousin Penelope.

"I'm glad she's gone off happy," said Aunt Eunice. "She's a bright little thing, and you must admit it was plucky of her to stick it out at the farm, and let the other child have a happy summer here. Fine of her, too, with every one condemning, to take the whole blame on herself. That was so like her father!"

"I don't see it," Cousin Penelope spoke in a hard voice. "She's not one bit a Gildersleeve. She's a bold, forward, underbred child—Delane, every inch of her."

Aunt Eunice didn't retort, as well she might have:

"The Delanes, to judge by 'Aunt Edie,' are fair-haired and gray-eyed and small, while Jacqueline is brunette and big-boned, like all the Gildersleeves."

Old women are often wise women, so Aunt Eunice merely said:

"She's a pretty child, and I'm sure we should have come to like her, but I'm glad," she added, with a little catch in her voice, "that she happened to pick a dress that the other one had never worn here."

Cousin Penelope shivered.

"It's shockingly chilly on the porch," she spoke brusquely. "Let's go into the house."

They crossed the threshold, into the cool, dim hall.

"How quiet the house is!" Aunt Eunice exclaimed.

They looked at each other and quickly averted their eyes.

There is a good deal for people to do, when they come home after weeks of absence. Aunt Eunice and Cousin Penelope each had her own affairs to attend to, in the house and the garden. They managed to see no more of each other until they sat down to luncheon, just the two of them, in the big dining-room.

"I called up Martha Conway this morning," Aunt Eunice spoke, in one of the many pauses that fell between them. A little flush—was it shame or defiance?—was in her withered cheeks. "I wanted to know how the little girl was, after her long walk, and all the excitement."

Penelope's eyes traveled to the picture of Great-aunt Joanna. Her face flushed redder than Aunt Eunice's.

"Bad blood will always tell in the long run," she said bitterly. "To think of that child's deceiving us all summer, and then leaving us like that—after all we had done for her—and without a word!"

"She left a letter for me, remember, Penelope."

The red patches in Penelope's cheeks were throbbing. Actually if she had been a child, you might have thought she was going to cry.

"I don't want to *see* her letter," she snapped.

"It's on the desk in the library," Aunt Eunice told her placidly.

If you'll believe it, Aunt Eunice never went near the library all that afternoon. Whether or not Penelope went there, only Penelope herself knew, and she never told. Indeed there was little talk of any sort that night at dinner, and when Penelope spoke at last, this was what she said:

"I believe we'd better rehang these pictures. I'm really tired of looking at Great-aunt Joanna. I think she's badly painted, rather. Especially the nose and the eyebrows."

"Why not change your seat?" Aunt Eunice suggested gently.

It was very quiet in the house, as Penelope had said. All the quieter because Penelope did not touch the piano. She said she was sure it was out of tune. But the stillness of the house was broken next afternoon, when Mrs. Wheeler Trowbridge and Mrs. Francis Holden came to call.

They had heard the story of the turned-about girls. Hadn't all Longmeadow heard it in one form or another and nothing lost in the telling? They were very sympathetic with Aunt Eunice and Cousin Penelope, on whom two sly children had played such a disgraceful, downright wicked trick, and they gave them long accounts of how they themselves managed their children, who never were guilty of any naughtiness.

"Cats!" said Penelope after the callers had gone. She was not in the habit of so far losing control of herself as to call people names, but she had neither eaten nor slept as she should in the last hours. "I simply cannot stand these visits of condolence. I'm going to Boston to-morrow for a couple of days. Will you come with me, Mother?"

"I've just got home," Aunt Eunice answered, after a moment. "I don't think I'll go jaunting again so soon."

"You'll be rather—lonely here, won't you?" said Penelope. She hesitated a second, then she spoke quickly, and without looking at her mother. "Why don't you send for that child to make you a little visit? You know you're dying to see her again."

They looked at each other, and suddenly Aunt Eunice's old face, that seemed so soft, was a grim mask of obstinacy.

"No, Penelope," she said. "She's not coming into this house on any little visit. She's had the wrench of leaving here once—and once is enough. She's got to forget us, and forget The Chimnies. It's the kindest way."

"Yes, of course," Penelope agreed haughtily. "I spoke on impulse—a very foolish impulse."

Aunt Eunice smiled, but so fleetingly that Penelope, brooding on her own thoughts, never marked it.

Penelope went to the city and was gone a day, and a night, and most of another day. She came home with a lot of boxes. She had done a little shopping, she said. There was much to talk about that night at dinner—relatives that Penelope had seen in Boston, and new things in the shops. Penelope talked quite gayly, perhaps because her seat at table had been changed, and she no longer had to face the mocking eyes of Great-aunt Joanna, who like all Longmeadow, she felt, was laughing at her, and with reason!

Over the coffee in the library, by the soft light of the candles, Aunt Eunice at last began in her turn to tell what she had been doing. She had been to tea yesterday at the Holdens. She had attended a meeting of the Sewing Guild that afternoon.

"And last evening," she ended mildly, "I had Martha Conway here for a good long talk."

"Oh!" said Penelope, with a queer smile. "While the cat's away, Mother? Well—how's that niece of hers?"

Aunt Eunice stirred her coffee attentively.

"Little Caroline's mother seems to have been an exceptionally fine woman," she said at length. "One could see that from the child's pretty ways. Quite gifted musically, too. There are no near relatives on the mother's side. On the father's side Martha is the child's nearest of kin, and her guardian. Martha has all she can do to provide for her own children, and the two babies she's already taken. She's a good woman if ever there was one! She'll do the best she can for Caroline, but she wouldn't stand in the child's light, and indeed I think she'd be relieved if some one else——"

Penelope laughed outright, and there was something very like relief in her laughter.

"You blessed old schemer!" she said. "Why don't you do what you've been pining to do ever since the little girl went out of this house? Have her here to stay—indefinitely."

Aunt Eunice smiled, but she shook her head.

"Martha Conway is as set as I am against any idea of visits," she said. "It's not fair to the child to accustom her to our way of living, and then at seventeen or eighteen turn her off, untrained, to take care of herself."

There was silence—silence in which the very room seemed to wait for a decision on which lives depended. Then Penelope rose to her feet.

"If you'll excuse me," she said, in an aloof voice, "I'm going up to bed early. Really, this Boston trip

has quite fagged me out."

She went away to her room—the room next to the green and golden nest where Caroline had lain so many nights, and been so happy. Whether she read or wrote or merely sat with her own thoughts, nobody knows. At any rate she didn't sleep as she had said she should.

About eleven o'clock that same night when Aunt Eunice, in her soft dressing-sack of gray and golden crêpe, with a lacy cap on her white hair, sat propped up in her bed, reading (if you'll believe it!) "Alice in the Looking Glass," there came a knock at her door. When Aunt Eunice called: "Come in!" Penelope herself trailed into the room.

Penelope had on the lavender dressing-gown that Caroline loved her in. Her face was quite pale, and her eyes looked big, but rather starlike. She came and stood at the foot of the big mahogany bed, with its four pillars, and facing Aunt Eunice, spoke breathlessly:

"Mother, I wouldn't for the world stand in the way of what would give *you* happiness. After all, this little Caroline comes of good honest Longmeadow blood on her father's side, and her mother seems to have been more than all right. And the child is gifted—no doubt about that. You should hear Woleski rave over her. So you go ahead and adopt her, Mother! Don't mind *me*. I'm sure I shan't ever raise the slightest objection."

Aunt Eunice looked down at the passage she had been reading in her book. It was the place where Alice reaches the lovely garden, where she wishes to be, simply by walking away from it. Aunt Eunice thought very highly of "Alice in the Looking Glass." She called it the work of a philosopher, and an excellent rule of conduct. She closed the book carefully, over her finger that still kept the place.

"Adopting a child isn't like adopting a puppy or a kitten," she spoke musingly. "It's a responsibility, and one shouldn't undertake it, unless one is pretty sure of seeing it through. Now I'm seventy-one, and when I go, there's no way of my providing for Caroline. Our property is trusteed, as you know, and when I'm done with it, it's absolutely yours, to do with as you please."

They looked at each other, the two of them. Then Penelope cried passionately:

"But I *won't* adopt her, Mother. I *can't*! After what I've said of the Meadows children—after what every one has heard me say—all my life. My pride wouldn't *let* me!

"Oh, Penelope!" The words on Aunt Eunice's lips were just a breath of pain.

"Well, say it—say it!" Penelope cried, in a breaking voice. "Isn't it what I'm saying to myself? If it hadn't been for my pride, years ago—if I'd taken back some silly words I never meant—Jack would have stayed in Longmeadow—Jack would have married me."

"Penelope—my baby!" Aunt Eunice cried the words in amazement and in pity.

"Didn't you know—didn't you ever guess?" Penelope's voice was no more than a whisper. "That was why he went. I drove away the only man I loved—and if I could do that—for pride, and nothing else—I can put this wretched child out of my heart—and I'll do it, I tell you, I'll do it, even if it *kills* me!"

CHAPTER XLIII

IN THE MEADOWS

Caroline, all unaided, had baked a “toad in the hole” for dinner. Do you know what “toad in the hole” is? Scraps of meat baked in a deep dish, in a kind of custard batter. Caroline had learned from Cousin Delia how to make it. She was remembering now all sorts of things she had forgotten since she left Cousin Delia—all the things she had let herself forget at The Chimnies. She and Nellie had washed the dinner dishes, and then Caroline had scrubbed the kitchen floor and polished the stove, as a surprise for Aunt Martha. She did so want to show Aunt Martha that she could be as helpful as Jackie, even if she *was* a “scare batty” (as Neil called her) in regard to cows.

Now Caroline, in her Peggy Janes and sneakers, which Jacqueline had run down at the heels very badly, was out in the barn with Nellie and the babies. Nellie had brought along her cloth doll, a lumpy creature named Gertrude, and Caroline was making it a dress, out of some pieces of calico that Grandma had unearthed from her scrap-bag.

Mildred looked on in a stately, rather disapproving manner. Mildred wore a little dress of ruffled dimity, pink with a fine white stripe, and a pink sunbonnet. All Mildred’s silks and satins, which Aunt Eunice and Caroline had made in the summer house for Mildred to wear in foreign climes, were packed away in the satin box in the bureau drawer in the north chamber. Caroline had cried a little as she laid them away. She didn’t mean to look at them again for a long time—not till she was able to forget that life at The Chimnies had been real—not till she was able to think of it, as she hoped to think of it some day, as a lovely dream that she should always cherish.

The sunlight came through the big rear door of the barn, and crept farther and farther into the dusk that smelled of cows and new hay, as the sun moved nearer to the western hills. “To-night it is Saturday night,” Caroline remembered the first line of a little child-song that her mother sometimes used to sing to her. To-morrow would be Sunday, and then her second week at the farm would begin, and after it weeks and weeks, and months, and years would follow.

“But there’ll be lots of chances to slide,” Caroline kept repeating to herself, “and Ralph will teach me how to skate—he said so himself! And Grandma is going to show me how to knit. Maybe I can knit things for Christmas presents. If only I could crochet a sweater for poor Gertrude, like the one Muzzy made for Mildred.”

“Look-it! Look-it!” Freddie cried suddenly, and Nellie, all excited, raised her voice at the same moment: “It’s an automobile, comin’ into our yard—it’s a limousine!”

Caroline lifted her eyes from her sewing, and looked. She recognized the car in a single glance. It was the limousine that she had so enjoyed riding in—Aunt Eunice’s own car. It was stopping at the door of the farm. Oh, cried guilty conscience, here was Cousin Penelope—Jacqueline’s Cousin Penelope!—come accusingly, as Caroline had always feared she would come, to tell Caroline what she thought of people who pretended to be other people, and let you be good to them, with dentists and pianos, and all the time were deceiving you!

Caroline dropped Gertrude, so violently that it was well she was not made of anything more breakable than painted cloth and cotton. She caught up Mildred in a frantic clasp.

“You mind the babies, Nellie!” she bade. “I won’t come back till she’s gone, not even if she stays here ten thousand years!”

She scuttled out at the rear of the barn, just as the stately limousine came to rest alongside the kitchen door. She ran round to the south side of the barn, where there was a pile of old lumber, and a disused hen-house. She crawled into the hen-house—she wasn’t very big in the Peggy Janes!—through a hole that looked hardly large enough for a good-sized dog.

It was hot and rather stifling in the hen-house, but Caroline felt as safe as if she were in a diving-bell at the bottom of the sea. She cuddled in a corner and held Mildred tight and comforted her. She was just assuring Mildred that there was nothing to fear, for Cousin Penelope would go away very soon, and then they would crawl out where it was cooler, when she heard steps close at hand, and the rustle of garments among the tall weeds by the lumber pile, and voices.

One voice unmistakably belonged to Cousin Penelope.

“Where *can* she have vanished to?”

“I bet I know!” That shrill pipe was Nellie’s, the little traitor! “I bet she’s gone and hid in the old hen-house.”

“But she couldn’t possibly have got in there,” gasped Cousin Penelope.

“’Course she could,” insisted Nellie. “Want me to crawl in and show you how?”

There was a second of silence, in which Nellie evidently waited hopefully for Cousin Penelope to say she would follow her through the hole into the hen-house. But when Cousin Penelope did speak, what she said was:

“Run back to the house now, little girl.”

She spoke in the sort of tone that would make any little girl run away. Nellie ran, no question! But Cousin Penelope stayed. Caroline could almost hear her breathing while she held her own breath and listened.

“Caroline!” That was not a bit like the voice in which Cousin Penelope had spoken to Nellie and it came from a Cousin Penelope who must be kneeling on the ground (Cousin Penelope kneeling!) in order to throw the voice into the hen-house. “Are you in there, dear? Please come out! I understand—I’m not angry with you. We’ve all suffered enough—some of us deserved it.” (Could it be that Cousin Penelope was crying just a little?) “Come out, dear, please! We’ve come to see you, Aunt Eunice and I. You’re not afraid of Aunt Eunice, I know. Oh, don’t be afraid of me any more!”

And Caroline wasn’t afraid of this Cousin Penelope—the Cousin Penelope who had come to her room on the night when it thundered and lightened—the Cousin Penelope who had walked with her on the

downs. She crawled out of the hen-house, with a long new rip in the Peggy Janes, and before she could rise to her feet, she found herself and Mildred fast in Cousin Penelope's arms, and Cousin Penelope, in her lovely white and green summery things, was actually hugging a dusty Meadows child, and kissing her—yes, kissing her.

"You're coming home with us now, Caroline," Cousin Penelope whispered. Yes, she had been crying. Caroline could feel that the cheek pressed against her own was wet. And Caroline wanted to cry, too, but she couldn't.

"Oh, no!" she said achingly. "Oh, no! I want to like anything—but I couldn't! I couldn't bear to go away again—I thought last time I was going to die."

"But you're not going away again, ever," said Cousin Penelope. "You're coming home with us to stay—always. Don't you understand, dear? Aunt Eunice wants you—and I want you, too, Caroline—I want you to be my very own little girl."

CHAPTER XLIV

“HAPPY EVER AFTER!”

Not more than fifteen minutes later Caroline actually was riding away from the farm in the gray-lined, soft-cushioned limousine. She sat between Aunt Eunice and Cousin Penelope. She had Mildred on her knee, and her old suitcase rested on the rug at her feet. In the suitcase were her comb and brushes and nightdress, the satin candy box that held Mildred’s wardrobe, the old lacquer box, tied with a crumpled hair-ribbon, the little chintz cases, marked with the cross-stitched initials, F. T., which were her mother’s initials, and the worn bed-shoes that her mother had crocheted for her months ago. All her other worldly goods Caroline had bequeathed to an astonished Nellie.

Aunt Martha waved a good-by from the doorstep.

“Seeing folks off seems to be a habit of ours this summer,” she said to Nellie and Dickie and Neil, who stood looking after the departing limousine, too dumbfounded at the disappearance of yet another playmate to utter a single word.

Just then, at the very moment when it should have happened, something nice did happen to Aunt Martha and her brood. Ralph in the Ford came clattering down the road, up which the limousine, with the happiest little girl in the world inside, was rolling so smoothly. He stopped the car at the doorstep, and tumbled out in great excitement and took from the tonneau a box. It was quite a big box, addressed to Aunt Martha, and sent by parcel post from a New York store.

You had better believe there was an instant chorus:

“Open it, Mother, please! Right off! Please do!”

Aunt Martha had Ralph carry the box into Grandma’s room, and the children all crowded round, from little Annie, on Grandma’s knee, to Ralph, who was as eager as the youngest. Aunt Martha untied the nice stout string very carefully and gave it to Grandma to roll up and save, and she removed the strong wrapping paper and folded it, to be put away in the drawer of the old dresser.

“Candy!” cried Neil, as the corrugated paste-board (Aunt Martha saved that, too!) was removed from a stack of dazzling white boxes. “I can just smell it.”

“Yumy-yumy!” sniffed Nellie in ecstasy.

It certainly was candy, and sent in the most thoughtful way, a box for each member of the family, marked with his or her name. There were chocolate-coated peppermints and gum-drops, her favorite sweets (as Somebody knew!) in Grandma’s box, and caramels of all kinds in Neil’s. There were bon-bons of every luscious color in Nellie’s box, and crystallized fruit in the one marked Ralph. There were chocolates for Dickie and Caroline (who wouldn’t need her box!) and there were fruit-drops and chocolate-coated molasses chips for Freddie, and dear little striped sticks of all colors and flavors for Annie to suck. For Aunt Martha there was the most beautiful two-pound box of chocolates and bon-bons, and on top, among the candied leaves of violets, was a card that read:

> “I hope this will poison any kid who goes and eats it up on Aunt Martha.
>
> Jackie.“

“Why, of course it’s Jackie,” smiled Grandma. “Who else in the wide world would ever have thought out everything so nice?”

“She shouldn’t have!” gasped Aunt Martha.

“Oh, gee!” cried Ralph. “There’s a letter for you, and I guess it’s from her, and I was forgetting it.”

He took a letter from his pocket—a thick letter, written on the paper of a New York hotel. The writing left much to be desired in the way of beauty, but it was readable, and it was identical with the writing on the card in Aunt Martha’s box of candy.

“Of all the extravagant young ones!” Aunt Martha repeated, as she opened the envelope. “Her folks shouldn’t have let her.”

Then she read the letter, but mostly to herself, for she was so “flabbergasted” that her voice gave out completely. This was the letter Jackie had written:

> “Dear Aunt Martha:
>
> I am here in New York at a hotel with a roof garden with my Aunt Edie and Uncle Jimmie and we sail on Saterday but it is not a strick school I am going to. I have been shopping all day with Aunt Edie and I boght some things and she said I could and helped me sellect them and I hope you will take them and let the children take them. They are un-Christmas presents and if you do not take them I shall think you are mad at me for what I did and I shall be dretful unhappy if I think you are mad at me so I hope you will take them please and if I was there I could show Neil how the magic lantern goes.
>
> The things will be sent from the shops and they are all adressed to you but I will tell you which is for which. The wheel-chair is for Grandma of course and the red silk wadded gown is for her to. I got a cherful color and the long taled birds on it are not storks but cranes. The dishes are a present to the house and I tried to get green dragons but they do not seem populer any more so I got green leaves and pink rosebuds. The wooly rabbit is for Annie and when you press him he jumps and the bonnet is for her to because she will be so cunning with swans down round her face. The kiddy kar is for Freddie and the curly haired doll is for Nellie. The sutecase goes with the doll and there are three dresses and a coat and a hat and her shoes and stockings take off and she shuts her eyes. The magic lantern is for Neil and he doesn’t need any more slides because you can use postcards like the directions say and I will send him odles of postcards from Europe. The Boy Scout suit is for Dickie. I think he is average twelve years old but if it isnt right you can send it back to the shop and they will change it. The belt is for Ralph and his initials are on the buckle so of

course there could be no misstake and the fur gloves are for you in the car next winter if you will please accept them with my love. The little straw hat is for Mildred that is Carol's child and the winter coat with the fur collar is for Carol to and tell her please I will write her a long letter from the steamer. I can't write any more now because I have a crick in my hand and anyway it is prety near dinner time. I hope you are all very well and do not forget me and I remain as ever most respectfully

Your most affectionate
JACKIE GILDERSLEEVE."

"My land!" said Aunt Martha, when she had finished and found her breath. "They shouldn't have let her—big presents like that—and I ought not to let you children——"

"Has my doll real hair that I can brush?" Nellie interrupted, with shining eyes.

"A red silk gown with long-tailed birds on it!" Grandma shook with laughter. "I'll look like the Queen of Sheba. Lord bless the child! At my time o' life!"

She peered into her box of sweets, and chose herself a plump sugary gum-drop.

"I'm going to let you take 'em, just the same," said Aunt Martha, with decision. "There's no sense in standing on your pride to the hurt of other folks' feelings when it's kindly meant and the things a real Godsend. She must have taken a lot of thought and time—and that's more than money!—picking out presents for all of us, and just when she'd be full of her own plans and pleasures, too! She's a dear, good child." Aunt Martha blew her nose quite savagely. "Only you don't need to go imitating *all* her qualities, remember!"

"She's a crackerjack." Neil spoke as well as he could with his mouth full of caramels.

"Now put up that candy, every one of you, till morning!" Aunt Martha tucked away her handkerchief and was her brisk self again. "I can't have you all sick on my hands. And put Caroline's box to one side. It's hers and must go to her, whether she's here or at the Gildersleeves."

But what was a box of chocolates to Caroline in that hour? The limousine had rolled up to the porch, down which she had stumbled in heart-broken flight, not a week before. She stood again in the dim spacious hall, with its gleam of gilt-framed mirrors and its tall, flaming gladioli in dull green jars. She had gone up the stairs into the room with the pale gray furniture, the fairy-tale pictures, the canary shapes that glittered amid the green.

"It will always be your room now, dear," said Aunt Eunice, and patted Caroline's hand that she had kept fast in hers, ever since they found each other at the farm.

Cousin Penelope pulled open a drawer of the bureau. She took out things while Aunt Eunice gasped, as amazed and as delighted, too, as Caroline herself. There were white frilly underthings for a little girl of eleven, and socks of black silk, and shoes of black patent leather, with buckled straps. There was a frock of fine brown and white checked gingham, with flame-colored silk stitchings on the belt and cuffs and collar, and a little chemisette of sheer white lawn.

"I got these in the city," said Cousin Penelope, smiling and unashamed. "I was going to send them to you, Carol, as a present for Sunday wear. There's a little coat, too, in the closet and a fall hat. To-morrow we'll go to the city, and get you more things, and we'll go to the dentist's, too, and Madame Woleski will take you for a lesson the last of the week."

And when the sun went down on that Saturday night, in great splashes of color into the sea, Jacqueline was a happy little girl, as she stood with feet firmly apart on the deck of the great ocean liner, at her Uncle Jimmie's side, with new sights and new experiences in a new world before her. But she was not half so happy as was Caroline, all clean and fresh in clothes that were her very own, not Jacqueline's, as she sat at the table in the softly lighted dining room at The Chimnies and beamed at Aunt Eunice and Cousin Penelope. For Caroline was telling herself:

"They want me—really me myself—not Jackie. I'm theirs—and they love me, but oh! not more than I love them, and will love them all my days."

But if you'll believe it, Cousin Penelope was as happy as anybody. For she had changed back to her old place at the table, and she looked straight at Great-aunt Joanna's portrait. Blood will tell—once more she said it defiantly! Weren't the Taits and Conways and Gildersleeves and Holdens, all those sturdy pioneers who were her forbears, just as much the forbears of little Caroline?

"Do you know, Mother," said Cousin Penelope serenely, "Caroline really looks very much like Great-aunt Joanna?"

Caroline twisted round in her seat. She didn't feel afraid to look at Great-aunt Joanna, now that she wasn't pretending to be her great-grandniece.

"She looks fiercely proud, doesn't she, Cousin Penelope?" she said.

Cousin Penelope laughed. They were all three very quick to laugh that evening, perhaps because they could as easily have cried.

"Well, pride's a good thing," said Cousin Penelope, and the look that passed between her and Aunt Eunice was a look of new understanding. "That is, it's a good thing if you know when to use it—and when to lose it."

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