The Project Gutenberg eBook of Six Girls and Bob: A Story of Patty-Pans and Green Fields, by Marion Ames Taggart

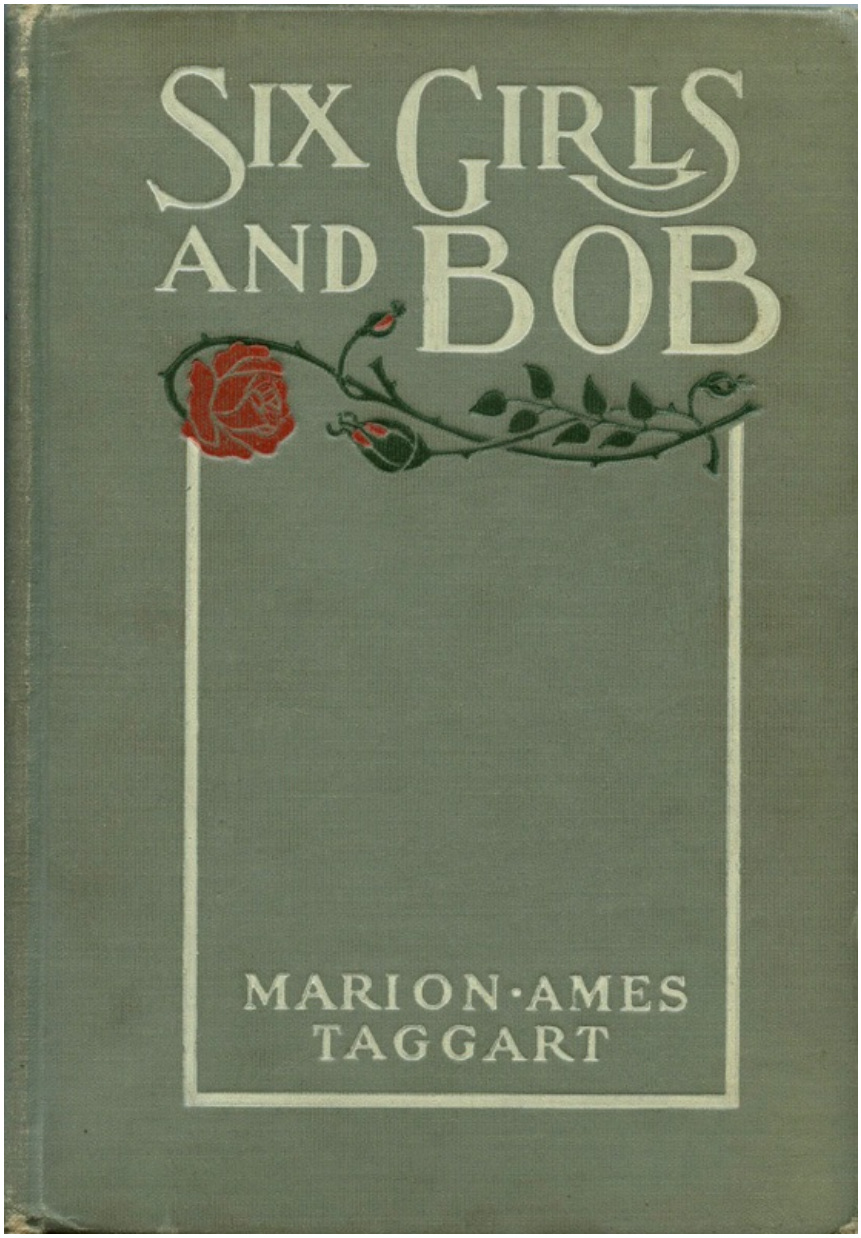
Title: Six Girls and Bob: A Story of Patty-Pans and Green Fields

Author: Marion Ames Taggart
Illustrator: William F. Stecher

Release date: December 13, 2014 [EBook #47655]

Language: English

E-text prepared by Beth Baran
and the Online Distributed Proofreading Team
(http://www.pgdp.net)



SIX GIRLS AND BOB

"THIS SUNNY LITTLE MAIDEN WAS BENDING ABSORBED OVER THE GAS RANGE"

SIX GIRLS AND BOB

A STORY OF PATTY-PANS AND GREEN FIELDS

BY

MARION AMES TAGGART

Author of "The Little Grey House," "The Wyndham Girls," "Miss Lochinvar," etc.

ILLUSTRATED BY

WILLIAM F. STECHER

W. A. WILDE COMPANY
BOSTON CHICAGO

—

Six Girls and Bob

To Gertrude
In Loving Remembrance

CONTENTS

ILLUSTRATIONS

SIX GIRLS AND BOB

CHAPTER I
THE FOURTH FLOOR, EAST

"How can you get twelve feet into eight feet, no matter how good you are in arithmetic?" asked Happie Scollard, a trifle impatiently.

"You'd have to be pretty poor in arithmetic to try it. Even home-taught children ought to know something about putting greater into lesser," observed Bob. "Would you mind telling us what you're driving at, Keren-happuch, my dear?"

Happie groaned. "This room is quite squeedged enough with us six Scollards in it, without crowding in my dreadful name, Robert, my dear," she retorted. "What I was driving at was a harmless little *humorous* joke. This kitchen is eight feet wide, and we have twelve feet, we six, haven't we? I was wishing we had more space to stand on; that's all."

"That's right; always make *humorous* jokes," approved Bob. "I've heard lots of jokes that hadn't a touch of humor. Yours isn't so very—but never mind! You know we needn't put all the twelve feet into the eight. This room is nine feet long. What's the matter with putting a few of our feet down [12] the length of it? Say seven of the twelve, for instance?"

Happie laughed. "I hadn't thought of dividing them that way," she said. "But the worst of standing any of your feet lengthwise of the room is that it brings some of you in between the range and the sink, and then I can't stir the fudge. Though to be sure if you all stand widthwise I can't get to the closet."

"How could you put seven one way and five the other? They'd have to go in twos, because we've each got two feet, don't you see?" asked Polly suddenly. She had been turning Bob's suggestion over in her mind and had announced her discovery with her usual serious manner. In all her nine years of life with her nonsense-loving elder brother and sisters, Polly had not learned that they were not always to be taken literally.

"Good for you, pretty Polly!" exclaimed Bob. "I believe you're right! And you know how many are left when you take seven from twelve, don't you? What's the matter with Happie? Isn't she all right?"

"This is a dear little kitchen, Happie. We all said so when we came to look at the flat! And we were so glad it was sunny!" said Margery, the sweet seventeen years-old sister who mothered the little band during their mother's daily absence.

"I'm still glad, sweet Peggy," said Happie. "But when we looked at the flat, we didn't realize how very tiny this kitchen was—we hadn't put the saucepans and things into the cupboard, you see! [13] But I'm not breaking my vows. I'm still thankful that we have our funny, cozy little drawn-out fourth floor home. But it is a little kitchen for six, and everybody always packs into it when I make fudge."

"You ought to be flattered," said Bob. "How is it coming on this time?"

"Not as fast as usual; there isn't much pressure on the gas," replied Happie, lifting her pan to peer anxiously at the fragrant brown mass it held.

She was a pretty creature, not with a regular and easily defined prettiness, but with a charm of feature, coloring and expression that was more potent than orthodox beauty. She had brown hair, that in the shade looked the color of a ripe chestnut. In the sun it turned a splendid copper color, as if the chestnut had blazed up in the brazier. It was hair all crinkles and wrinkles, trying to curl as nature meant it to, and as its owner distinctly meant it not to curl. It waved around rosy cheeks in which the dimples came and went so fast that they looked as if they too were curly, like the hair, and it shaded brown eyes that could laugh and flash and cloud sorrowfully, but which ordinarily shone with a warm, steady light that put one in mind of a glowing hearth fire. Happie could not have had a more appropriate name than her nickname, for she was a veritable ray of sunshine, brave and cheerful and unselfish, good with that natural tendency to noble aims and [14] thoughts that seems in rare natures to be at one with the tendency of flowers to clothe themselves in fragrance and beauty. She could get angry, and sometimes did, but she never could do unkind or mean things; she was a loyal, pure-hearted, clever little woman of fourteen, with so many talents that she had no special one, and her mother felt that when the time came for her to earn her bread, as all the Scollards must do, it might be hard to decide for what too-versatile Happie was best fitted.

Just now this sunny little maiden was bending absorbed over the gas range, her face decidedly red, her sweet lips deserving the epithet for purely external reasons, as well as for their pleasant curves, while her right hand stirred the mixture in a pan which her left hand slightly lifted above the circular blue flame.

Margery—Margaret—reclined against the drop shelf which was the space-economizing substitute for a kitchen table. She was a graceful young creature, with a serious look on her madonna-like face, brought there by her early acquaintance with responsibility and anxiety.

Bob, next to Margery in seniority, sat astride of the only chair the tiny kitchen admitted. A fine, square-shouldered specimen of a boy nearing sixteen he was; open-browed, bright-eyed, overflowing with fun, yet with a certain steadiness of manner that spoke him trustworthy, as

became a boy who had been left the head of a family by his father's death four years before. [15]

Laura, Happie's successor in the birth record of the family Bible, toyed elegantly with a fork, but cast rapid, furtive glances at the fudge, betraying the shallowness of the indifference which an over-weening sense of the dignity of her twelve years impelled her to assume. She was a pale, thin girl, with a discontented and sensitive mouth, and an abundance of foolish affectations that made her seem like an alien among the cheerful, sensible young Scollards.

Mary—Polly, as she was always called, was the most stolidly sensible little creature of the family. A round-faced, broad-browed, sweet-tempered, plump little body was Polly, never in anybody's way, always to be relied upon for an errand, very fond of housewifely tasks of which she assumed her full share in the household, though she boasted but nine years of age.

Penelope, baby Penny, ended the Scollard list, winding up the ranks at four years, an imaginative, lively little person, not prone to scrapes, but fond of mischief, and with an ability to amuse and to take care of herself remarkable, considering there were five older children ready and glad to spoil her with petting.

The sensitive, delicate mother of this flock had been left a widow when Penny was a wee baby. There had been nothing for her gifted, impractical husband to leave her but the memory of a perfect love and a beautiful life, spent rather in the pursuit of ideals than of money. Without a [16] murmur this woman, strong of soul, though weak of body, had taken up the burden of her profound grief and the support of her children. She had many accomplishments, and her knowledge of languages stood her in good stead. Every day she journeyed down the subway from her fourth floor nest in an up-town apartment house, and earned her own and her children's bread as the foreign correspondent of a large firm, coming back weary every night during the hardest hours of the crowded subway travel to her flat, where, after the dinner which her children had prepared, she spent each evening giving them the lessons for which she could no longer afford teachers. It was not strange that the Scollards worshiped their mother with the love she so richly deserved, the love of recognition of a noble woman, as well as the natural love of children for their mother.

Happie's fudge boiled up suddenly, and suddenly Laura spoke, breaking a silence that had lasted for several minutes.

"I think I should like to be called Laure," she said.

"Law! What for?" cried Happie, promptly, blowing away vigorously on the spoonful of fudge which she had taken out to test.

"It's less common than Laura and more musical," said Laura pensively. "Laure sounds elegant."

"It sounds silly," said Polly instantly.

"It sounds as if you could put your finger through it anywhere; I don't like French names for [17] American and English girls," added Happie.

"I like names that sound like beautiful music," said Laura, who really was talented musically, but who was pitiably conscious of the fact. "I was making up the loveliest little song—the sweetest air!—and I was writing the words too. I said:

> 'She shone afar,
> Like a golden star,
> My angel Laure.'

And then I had to stop, because it ought to have been Laura, and Laure wouldn't have rhymed. If only it was Laure now——"

"It wouldn't have rhymed, even if it had been," interrupted Happie, not too patiently. "Can't you hear that *afar* and *star* don't rhyme with *Laure*?"

"And what's the matter with writing songs and poems to some other girl beside yourself?" suggested Bob. "You might have said: 'My angel Bar,' for instance, and pretended the angel's name was Barbara. For goodness' sake, don't be a goose, Laura! You're nearly in your 'teens, as you so often remind us, and you ought to stop being so sentimental."

"You're not musical, Bob," said Laura, so pityingly, and with such an air of shedding light on the whole question that they all shouted.

"Fudge's done!" announced Happie triumphantly, giving a few last, furious beats to the mixture turning delightfully thick and sugary in the pan. "Bring on the pans, Polly, and, Bob, will you put [18] it out on the fire escape till it gets cool enough to go on the ice without melting our entire stock? I've got to rest and cool my face."

Her lieutenants meekly obeyed, and Happie dropped on the chair which Bob vacated, fanning herself vigorously with a paper.

"I hope you haven't harmed your complexion, child," said Margery with her elder sisterly air, as she surveyed Happie's flaming cheeks.

"Fireproof!" Happie replied carelessly. "Sunproof and freckleproof too; you know I never burn or freckle as you do, Margery. That comes of having golden hair and peach blossom tints. I'm betwixt and between—coloring, age, height, cleverness, looks, everything, so I just slip through, and nothing touches me. I don't care! I like being fourteen and not having to think of skin or anything! I'd rather change places with Penny than with you, Peggy, but the worst of it is in three

years I'll be as old as you are now."

"I like to feel that I am almost a young lady," said Margery placidly, surveying with entire satisfaction the hem of her dress resting on the floor as she leaned against the shelf. "I believe it is interesting to be grown-up. At least I ought to be of more use to motherkins then. And I should like to have a pretty house and entertain people beautifully, so they'd be perfectly happy visiting me." And pretty Margery sighed involuntarily, remembering the small flat which was her home, [19] and which promised no gratification of her hospitable instincts.

"I shouldn't care for that," said Laura, taking up the theme with the readiness to discuss grown-up plans all little girls feel. "It doesn't mean much, just to entertain! What I should want would be to give people something better than dinners and visits. I mean to sing to people, my own songs, and play to them my own music and all the other composers'——"

"Why so modest, Laura? Why don't you say all the other *great* composers?" inquired Bob blandly, withdrawing his head from the window, having deposited the pans of fudge on the fire escape. "If it comes to swapping ambitions, mine is to go to college, and it looks as if I could go, now doesn't it? So Robert the Impatient, must make the best of it."

"And of himself," added Margaret with her gentle smile, and the half motherly look that made her grown-up air and elder sisterly manner very attractive.

"I'm going to have a hospital for hurt cats and dogs," announced Polly.

"I believe you will," laughed Happie. "I have so many dreams I couldn't possibly say which was my pet one, but I suppose I'll just amount to nothing, but keep house for all of you when you want to come home between doing great deeds."

"Oh, you!" said Bob decidedly. "You don't have to do great things; you're all right just being Happie! I guess you're sure to do great things and never find it out." [20]

"Yes," added Margery, lovingly. "You are not only Happie yourself, you know, but you are our happiness—that's what mother says, and I wish it could be said of me."

"Base flattery!" said Happie shaking her shining head. "It doesn't have to be said of you, dear, because it's plain to be seen. I believe I'd like a chicken farm when I grow up."

"Yes, and grow broilers for the market, and take to your bed every time one had its head cut off—I think I see you!" cried Bob. "No country, nor farming for me anyway. I want college, and then business among people. Wouldn't I hate to live where I drove down once a day to get the mail and to 'see the flyer go through,' as they used to up at Pennyroyal last year? Do you remember how they used to talk about that express train? And how they would talk horse while they waited for it? No, sir; no country for me. I'd rather go to sea."

"The country is beautiful, but I should hate to give up all the city advantages," said Margery thoughtfully.

"Why there wouldn't be any concerts, nor anything in the country!" exclaimed Laura. "And who could you play and sing to? They would rather hear that awful tune the man sings to the trained bears, and plays on that horrid little pipe the poor things dance to! Why, I'd die if I lived in the country!" [21]

"I never knew, the Scollards had Irish blood, 'my angel Laure,' but that was a bull all right," said Bob.

"Well, I *should* die after I'd lived there long enough for it to kill me," maintained Laura stoutly. And she could not see why her brother and sisters laughed.

"I think mother looks as if she would be better if we could live in the country," said Margery, her face clouding with anxiety. "She looks so tired lately it worries me dreadfully."

"She couldn't support us in the country, she says, and a suburb costs more than a flat, adding fare and coal to the rent," said Bob. "I too think the blessed woman is not up to the mark, Margery."

"Ah, don't!" cried Happie sharply. "Where is Penny? I just missed her."

"'Way in the front with Dorée," said Polly. "She's watching somebody moving in. There is a van at the door. I guess she couldn't have smelled the fudge."

"I think so, too, Polly," laughed Happie. "My goodness, that clock's stopped! It must be time we were getting dinner! Go see what time it is, Polly, please."

"Quarter to six!" Polly called back from the middle of the flat. "They're taking in a basket that looks as if it had a cat in it; I wonder if it's yellow, too?"

The "too" of Polly's remark referred to the Scollards' own beloved kitten, as yellow as a golden [22] nugget, and named Jeunesse Dorée, obviously from his color.

Margery and Happie did not stop to bestow a passing thought upon the new inmates of the house, their fellow flat-dwellers, nor their cat, but sprang to get out the agate saucepans for their cooking, and to hurry away the implements of fudge-making, for it was fifteen minutes past their time for beginning to get dinner, and they prided themselves on not keeping their mother waiting when she came home at night from her hard day's work.

Happie enveloped herself in an ample apron and fell to peeling potatoes as if her life depended on getting them out of their jackets in a twinkling. Margery quietly, but speedily, put the meat in its pan and floured it delicately, then knelt before the oven, lighted its burners and slid the pan

into place, devoutly hoping that the tenants on the lower floors would not require so much gas for their dinners that night as to lower the pressure and retard further the Scollards' tardy roasting.

Just behind her was the door of the dumb waiter, with the mouth-piece of its whistle beside it. From this whistle there suddenly issued a blood-curdling shriek, and Margery tumbled over backward, while Happie jumped to her feet, upsetting potatoes, peelings, pan of water and all on the spotless floor.

"Oh, that fearful whistle!" Happie cried, crimson with anger and the reaction from her fright. "If I [23]
lived here nine hundred and ninety-nine years, I never should get used to it!"

"Nor I," murmured Margery feebly, scraping up Happie's scattered peelings with the knife she had dropped, not rising, but turning her discomfiture to profit as she sat. "It's so sharp and so sudden!"

"They ought to blow softly to announce that they are going to blow hard," suggested Bob, as he opened the door to answer the summons. But he had jumped himself.

"It may be a waiter, but it's certainly not a *dumb* waiter," observed Happie, pursuing a truant potato to the corner by the ice box.

"It makes me perfectly blasé," sighed Laura, holding her side as she took the napkins from their drawer.

"Blasé! Oh, Laura, when will you learn to use words right, or to use only those you understand?" laughed Margery pulling herself up by the back of the chair.

Bob was leaning down the dumb waiter shaft, and a voice arose from its depths.

"Groc'ries fer you!" it called in the unspellable accent of New York's east side.

"I guess not," Bob called back. "Wrong whistle."

"From Lichtenzeit's," insisted the voice.

"No," called Bob.

"Top floor. Gordon," the voice shouted angrily. And as Bob leaned down further to explain that he [24]
was a Scollard, the dumb waiter began to ascend with rapid clatter, and further parley was impossible.

"It's not only not dumb, Happie, but it's not even a waiter," said Bob turning away with a disgusted expression. "You see it's coming up without waiting to find out where it's going. There isn't any one in the house named Gordon."

The waiter stopped with a rattle of its ropes, and the voice below called up: "Take 'em off; they're fer you."

"Look here, you chump," called Bob. "They're not mine. There isn't a Gordon in this whole house." But as he spoke the door across from the Scollards opened, and a boy appeared, grinning cheerfully at his neighbor.

"You're not quite right there, old man," he said. "There is a Gordon in the house, and I'm he. I'm one of him, at least—there's another, and their mother. All right; I've got the stuff. Go ahead. Farewell, vale, ta ta. Blow the left hand whistle next time."

The new boy straightened himself from delivering these last remarks down the waiter-shaft and smiled anew at Bob. "We've just moved in. The last of our household effects are even now bumping the paper off the front hall—the van men find them bulky. Hope we'll meet again." He cast his eye beyond Bob into the sunny kitchen where pretty Margery and Happie were working like stingless bees. [25]

"All right. Hope so, too," said Bob. And the doors shut simultaneously on both sides of the dumb waiter.

"He looks the right sort," observed Bob.

"I'm sorry the flat across is let, though. It has been such a rest not having the men blow our whistle for the one over there," sighed Margery.

Happie had beaten up a cake to be eaten with her blanc mange of the morning's making. She was pouring the mixture into her sheet of cup-shaped tins, and was not interested in the subject of new neighbors. She paused with her bowl held sidewise in the air, and with her spoon resting on its side as she guided the yellow mixture into its destination. "I've got it!" she exclaimed jubilantly.

"Eureka, Keren-happuch, my dear," corrected Bob. "What have you got?"

"The name for our flat," said Happie. The Scollards had been trying ever since they had taken possession of it to find a name for their habitation, "because," Happie explained, "all residences of any account had names, and she wanted her estate to be no exception."

"What is it?" asked Margery, and Laura paused in the doorway with the bread plate in her hand to hear the answer.

"Patty-pans!" cried Happie triumphantly. "Don't you see that it is exactly what the flat is like?" She held up her baking tins to illustrate. "See," she went on, "how the rooms come along, one [26]
after the other, just precisely like these patty-pan cups? This is The Patty-Pans, or Patty-Pans-on-the-Hudson—only a few blocks off, at any rate, and that doesn't matter!"

"It's the very thing!" cried Bob appreciatively, and Margery laughed and agreed.

"It's not at all pretty," said Laura, whose sense of humor was defective. But she got no further with her objection. The little electric bell on the wall rang thrice, and all the Scollards in the rear rushed through the narrow hall, and were met at the door by Polly from the front, and Penny with Dorée in her arms.

This triple ring meant that the children's real day, the only part of the day in which the sun fully shone for them, although it began after sunset, had dawned, for it announced their mother's home-coming at night.

CHAPTER II [27]

FIRE, AND OTHER ESCAPES

One's mother never has the appearance of any particular age. She does not look precisely young, because hers is the face to which our baby eyes are raised for comfort and guidance, it is from her that we receive and hope for all things. So it is impossible to realize that she is quite young. On the other hand the familiar, beloved face never wears the look of age, no matter how wrinkled it be, nor how far we have traveled from childhood. It is too dear, too perfectly the spring that quenches our thirst for unfailing love ever to look to us withered and age-stricken as it must to strangers. The young Scollards had never stopped to consider whether their mother was quite elderly, or very youthful—her age was swallowed up in the fact of her motherhood. In reality Charlotte Scollard was but just approaching the milestone of the fourth decade. She was a pale, slenderly built woman, with a worn, sweet face, like Margery's, but older and saddened. It wore a look of ill-health which her children saw too frequently to recognize fully, though the three eldest half perceived it at times, with a tightening of fear around their hearts. [28]

Polly and Penny clung around their mother's waist as she entered, Bob and Margery encircled her from each side with their loving arms, while Happie hugged her breathless, and Laura vainly strove for an opening for her own welcome.

"Such a dear little home! Such joy to get home to you, my blessings!" said the mother, as she said each night. "Have you been good and happy all this day?"

She went into the front room which was that nondescript allowed by flat life, neither drawing-room, library nor living-room, but a little of each. It was a pretty room, made so by its furnishing of books and pictures, and the mother looked about her, feeling anew that it was well worth the effort that taxed her slender strength to the utmost to maintain this nest and her nestlings within it.

"We've found a name for the flat at last, motherkins!" cried Happie, as she removed her mother's hat pins, while Laura and Margery unbuttoned her coat, and the two least girls pulled off a glove from each hand.

"Happie has," corrected Margery. "It's a nice, cozy, funny little name, just like this family."

"Tell me," smiled Mrs. Scollard.

"Patty-Pans!" announced Happie triumphantly. "I thought of it when I was pouring my cake into the cup pans. Don't you know that these flats are precisely like a patty-pan, every room following after and joining on to the next one the way the cups do in those sheets?" [29]

"I see the resemblance." Mrs. Scollard laughed, and the weariness went out of her face for the moment as her eyes danced. "Shall we have a die cut for our letter paper: 'Patty-Pans,' and printed in bright silver like new tins? Only I'm afraid our correspondents might think that all our letters should be dated April first!"

"And the flat across is rented; the family came in to-day," Bob said, adding his information to the small fund of entertainment which it was the children's custom to amass daily for their mother's return.

"Oh, me! I hope they are not people who will play the piano all the evening when we are at our lessons!" Mrs. Scollard sighed, remembering past troubles.

"Two big boys and their mother; I guess not," said Bob succinctly. "The one we saw across the dumb waiter looked a good sort, and full of fun. I got home to-day earlier, mother. Mr. Felton told me that if you would agree to letting me come for all day he would make it worth our while."

"I am glad to hear that, Bob; it shows that he likes you. But I will never consent to giving you up for all day to earning, leaving no time for your studies, until we are absolutely driven to it. As long as I can earn enough to support us all—with strict economy, to be sure, but enough—I will not let my only son lose his chance for an education. Half a day is all that I will let you spend at [30] the office, dear Bob. But thank Mr. Felton for me; tell him I am glad indeed that he thinks you worth having all day. Now, I must get ready for dinner. I hope it is very good and abundant, lassies, for I am pitiably hungry." Mrs. Scollard rose as she spoke, and pulled aside the sliding-door at the end of the room. It led into her own chamber, lighted by the glass in this door, the second room of the series of seven, arranged, as Happie had discovered, in true patty-pan order.

The girls ran through to the kitchen to serve the dinner, while Penny and Dorée lingered with the mother, waiting for the special petting to which, as the baby, Penny was entitled.

"I always think of how the girls in Little Women got ready for their mother to come home, don't you? When we are waiting for our marmee, I mean," said Happie, arranging her little cakes on the delicate Limoges plate. "They swept up the hearth and put their mother's slippers down to warm. I don't think flats are really homes; you can't do that kind of comfy, homey things in a flat."

"But our mother can come home just as truly, and that is the only important thing. We are fortunate to have a home," said Margery, with a suggestion of reproach in her voice.

"Mercy! Don't I know it," retorted Happie. "But won't you be glad when we are able to make a [31] home for mother instead of her making one for us?"

"Next winter I shall do something towards it," said Margery in a tone of quiet conviction. "You will be old enough to keep house then without my help."

"I'd rather be the one to go out; I'm better fitted for it," said Happie. "Dinner is served, Mrs. Scollard, mum," she added, putting her head out of the dining-room door, and calling down the three-foot hall which carried sound like a tunnel.

Mrs. Scollard did not prove her own assertion as to her appetite. The children, anxiously watching her, saw her taste her food, and push it away uneaten, telegraphing their uneasiness to one another as she did so.

"You said you were hungry, dear Deceiver," Happie reproached her at last.

"I was, dear; I felt as if I could not wait for my dear girls' good things, but when I see them I cannot eat, although I appreciate the perfect seasoning, and how fortunate I am in my cooks." Mrs. Scollard laughed a little as she spoke, and her eyes rested lovingly on Margery and Happie, but she only broke a corner of one of the golden patty-pan cakes, and took bird-like tastes of the delicate blanc mange. It seemed to the older girls and Bob that the pallor of her face, the shadows under her eyes, the droop of her lips had never been so apparent.

Before they had time to dwell on the thought and what it might portend, there came a great [32] clatter from the kitchen, and Dorée flew into the dining-room with his golden fur so electrified that he looked like a four-legged sunflower, with very little difference in his size and shape at any point.

"What under the canopy——" Bob began, jumping up from the table and running out, followed by his sisters.

Somebody was hammering madly on the dumb waiter door with a competent stick. Bob opened the door emphatically, and there, in the opposite doorway, stood the boy whom they had seen in the afternoon, his stick raised for further pounding, but with a broad smile on his face that did not suggest anything in the least malicious.

"Say, what's the matter with you?" demanded Bob.

"Would you be so very kind as to return our cat?" asked the boy with exaggerated mildness.

"We haven't got your cat; that's ours," said Bob, pointing over his shoulder to where Jeunesse Dorée was standing sniffing the situation with greatly elongated body, having returned to investigate what had frightened him, with true feline nervous courage and curiosity.

"'Tis true, my lord, and pity 'tis 'tis true,'" returned the boy. "For that's a beauty cat. Ours is merely a cat of many colors, but we are fond of him. He is on your fire escape, having leaped across from this one. From the sounds I have heard, I think he has upset a pan of something, [33] though it's too dark for me to see."

"Oh, my fudge!" cried Happie, and threw up the window.

A tiger cat immediately jumped into the kitchen, to Dorée's intense disapproval, and Happie fished her pan of fudge from between the slats of the fire escape floor, where it had lodged, caught by the transverse slats on its way down to the ground. The candy bore the unmistakable imprint of the tiger cat's "paddy-paw" feet, and Happie surveyed it with chagrin, while Polly stroked the interloper, and Penny clasped struggling Dorée to her breast, to prevent his manifest intention to punish his neighbor.

"Was it your fudge? I'm awfully sorry," said the boy across. "I guess Whoop-la sat in it."

"I guess so too," returned Happie with a laugh. "It's hard luck after broiling one's face to make it. Hard luck for you, too, because we'd have offered you some if it hadn't been spoiled."

"That's noble of you, but I'm afraid you wouldn't, because I shouldn't have knocked on your dumb waiter door, and so we wouldn't have met if Whoop-la hadn't gone over. That is, we shouldn't have met till after you had eaten up all the fudge. Of course we were bound to scrape acquaintance. Would you mind handing me Whoop-la?" The boy bowed as he spoke, and his eyes laughed in spite of his preternaturally solemn manner. [34]

"Such a name for a cat!" exclaimed Bob. He picked up the tiger cat and passed him across to his master, leaning well over the ledge of the dumb waiter to do so. "Suppose you come around to see us tonight," Bob suggested. "We generally study and recite evenings, but to-night is Saturday, and a holiday. Won't you come?"

"I suppose the correct thing is for you to call on me first, you being the oldest—no, the older inhabitant, but I'll waive ceremony. I'd better waive it, because there isn't anything in this flat but bedlam—boxes and chairs you can't tell apart, burlap, and excelsior. I couldn't very well ask you over. My mother and younger brother haven't come yet, so I'm a little lonely. I will come around, if you don't mind, and thank you for asking me." The boy received his cat with hands so

considerate of cat-nerves that the Scollard girls, noting, approved of him at once.

"Just give us time to scurry the dishes away," laughed Happie. "We're are own servants, and we couldn't entertain you while we were at work. Give us half an hour for finishing up, and then come."

"It would entertain me very much to watch you work," said this queer boy, "but I'll wait. Good-bye for thirty harrowing minutes. My watch goes fast; you won't mind?"

The Scollards laughed as Bob shut the dumb waiter door. [35]

"He's a character," cried Bob, elated at the prospect of his visitor.

Mrs. Scollard bore off Penny to bed, which she shared with her mother, and lying down beside the baby for her nightly story-telling, fell asleep beside her from sheer exhaustion.

Margery, Happie and Laura washed and wiped the dishes, and Polly put them away, with Bob's help for the higher closet shelves. They worked so fast that only twenty of the thirty minutes were consumed by the task. They were rather excited by the coming of a caller of their own age. Their mother discouraged them from making acquaintances lightly. Living, as they did, in a neighborhood of low rents and crowded apartment-houses, she feared for them contact with young minds less carefully shielded from the knowledge of evil than their own, dreaded their possible contact with manners and morals such as she would not have had them imitate.

Happie's bright hair was curly and moist around her temples from the hasty dash of water which she had thrown over her face, and Margery was daintily drying her fingers one by one when the bell rang, so prompt was the new boy in keeping his appointment to the moment. Polly opened the door for him, and in he walked, hailed by a shout of laughter from Bob which brought the girls in at once, although Margery was conscious of lingering dampness around her little finger. [36]

The new boy had made a label for himself of a box cover, and on it he had written his name, "Ralph Gordon," in very bold letters for all who ran to read. This improvement upon a visiting card he had hung around his neck, so that there could not be an instant's doubt as to whom the Scollards were entertaining.

"Now if you'd only stand by the dumb waiter whistles in the cellar with that thing on, we'd never be troubled with your groceries as we were to-day," said Bob, shaking hands with the arrival. "Wait a minute. You've set the example of labor-saving introductions; I'll follow it. Here, girls, draw up in line, oldest first, and so on. Now, this, Mr.—let's see, oh, yes! Mr. Ralph Gordon——" Bob pretended to be near-sighted, and to consult Ralph's card at short range. "This, Mr. Ralph Gordon, is my oldest and elder sister, Margery, christened Margaret. This is Keren-happuch, next younger than I. This is Laura, musical at twelve. This is pretty Polly, Polly-put-the-kettle on, my sensible, reliable sister of nine. Penny, you can't see because she is in bed. She's the baby, and we consider her a bright Penny, a fairly new one, for she's only four years old, and we wouldn't give her for a five dollar gold piece, as some people do bright new pennies. I am Robert, 'Robert toi qui j'aime'—you know the air? I have only to mention that the last named Scollard is the flower of the family, and my duty's done."

"Fully," commented Margery, with her gentle smile. "We would not say that he is not *a* flower, [37] but *the* flower—well, that's another matter."

"Yes," said Ralph with a little look at Margery that held the value of a compliment.

"Quite another matter. He's not a violet, anyway, because that's a modest flower. But what did he call you?" he added turning to Happie.

Happie laughed. "Did you ever hear such a name?" she cried. "Keren-happuch. But they mercifully call me Happie. I was named after an old lady, a friend of mother's mother, and she was named after her grandmother. I think they might as well have stopped with her, and not gone on handing down such a fearful name!"

"Well, it is rather a heavy weight," admitted Ralph. "But Happie is enough to make up for it. I suppose it's a case of 'What's the odds as long as you're Happie.' It ought to be a kind of fairy godmother for whom you're named! Sounds like an old lady who was the only one of her pattern, and who showered gifts on mere mortals."

"Miss Keren-happuch Bradbury is the only one of her pattern; you're right there," Bob answered for Happie. "But she's not a fairy godmother. She's as eccentric as she can be, most interesting, and as independent as the Thirteen Colonies on July, 1776; rather mannish in her ways, but very thoroughly a gentlewoman. However, she's not rich, or we suppose she's not, so she can't play fairy godmother very well." [38]

"And we need fairy godmothers," added Happie. "Our dear father didn't know how to get rich, and when he died, four years ago, poor little mother had to take his place. She's such a frail, delicate little Charlotte-mother! It's not easy. We are all pining for the day when she won't have to work for us, but we can work for her. How she goes down in town every morning to an office. We keep house alone. Bob is in a real estate office in the forenoon, but mother insists on his staying at home to study in the afternoon; she is such a learned darling that she gives us all a good education by teaching us at night, though she is tired to death. Isn't she blessed? That's all of us; our history."

Ralph Gordon's humorous face grew grave, and a look of admiration and respect dawned in his laughing eyes. "It's great," he said in boyish commendation of true heroism. "I have a good mother, too," he added. "My father died when Snigs—that's my brother; he's thirteen, and I guess

his name's Charley, but of course Snigs is much better—well, when Snigs was three years old and I was five, father died. Mother didn't have much either. She has kept us at school, and managed pretty well—you see she came of good old fighting, revolutionary stock, and she never dipped her colors once, though she had enough to discourage her. She means me to go to college—she has gone without everything she could give up to save enough to start me, and for the rest I am to help myself through. She has moved up here thinking she could rent a room or so in this flat to [39] some of the boys up there at Columbia, and so get on better until I start, which can't be for two years more. I guess my mother is stronger, more able to bear her burdens than yours is, from what you say, but I've got my hat off to my mother, too, every time. Talk about women's rights! They're about as near right as they can be, rights or not, and when there's anything to be done they don't fall far behind men in pluck and stick-to-it-iveness, I notice."

"Hear, hear!" cried Margery and Happie. "We're much obliged."

"Don't mention it," said Ralph generously. "I hope you will live up to my high opinion."

"I wonder if your cat—Whoop-la, isn't it?—got into both pans of fudge, Happie?" suggested Margery.

"Sure enough!" cried Happie departing on this hint, as Ralph exclaimed: "Thank goodness, you are beginning to prove yourself worthy of my confidence in your sex!"

Happie returned with a pan of fudge, which she examined carefully under the gaslight, turning it at different angles to make sure that Whoop-la's paws had not touched it.

"I think it's all right," she announced at last. "It would surely show if he had stepped into it."

"Certainly," assented Ralph promptly. "And departing leave behind him, footprints in the bands of line. I see you've marked it off into squares. But if he had stepped on it, N'importe! as we said [40] when I was Minister to Paris. Whoop-la is the cleanest cat on Manhattan Island. He licks each snowy paw till it's free from fleck or flaw."

"Ugh!" shuddered Laura. "How disgusting! Think of eating candy he'd touched with licked paws!"

"Oh, he didn't, Laura!" cried Margery. "He got into one pan, but he missed the other."

"I believe you like nonsense as well as a Scollard—better than Laura and Polly, who worry because it doesn't seem quite sensible," said Happie approving the new boy more and more.

He shook his head reproachfully at Laura and Polly. "Do you not know the full title of this highest form of philosophy, my sisters?" he asked. "It is called: *Non sensus sed*, defense—us. That means it is not sense but a defense, because it defends us from the horrible fate of being dull. This has been contracted into one English word—nonsense. But the whole title fits better."

Laura stared doubtfully at the lecturer, and Polly gazed at him with round-eyed admiration, while Margery, Bob and Happie chuckled over his fooling, beginning to suspect that this merry-looking boy with the queer ways was decidedly clever.

"Pretty good fudge, Sister Keren-happuch; just a suspicion too sugary, but I can use it," said Bob, helping himself to a corner piece, and devouring it with the same relish he had shown for its [41] three predecessors.

"Same here!" remarked Ralph, following Bob's example. "It will go."

"So it seems," laughed Happie. "Much obliged."

"And I must do in like manner," Ralph supplemented his preceding remark, rising. "I am tired with the effort of superintending the van men and moving things around after they had gone. I felt tired enough to dread the evening all alone in the lunatic asylum our place looks like to-night. So I'm no end grateful to you for taking me off my own hands. Hope you'll all come to see me. Next time maybe we'll get at music—I play the violin and the mandolin a little, and I see some one fiddles and pianos here."

"Bob plays the violin, but Laura is our musical girl; we all sing more or less, and better or worse," said Happie. "Please come again. I'm sorry you couldn't see mother for she is—well, you will see her by and by."

She held out her honorably burnt little right hand, which had been scalded that night by the gravy, and Ralph took it with a look of hearty liking and respect.

"You're all my sort," he said. "I'm mighty glad we're neighbors. You'll like my mother, too, though I say it who should, for I know her better than any one else ever can." [42]

Margery laughed, and shook hands so cordially that Bob and Happie knew that Ralph had accomplished the difficult feat of winning reserved Margery's approval in his first visit.

"We've had cat escapes, fudge escapes, loneliness escapes, formality escapes, all turning on Whoop-la on your fire escape," said Ralph. "We ought to sing, 'For We Are Jolly Good Fellows,' in parting, but I'm afraid we should disturb your mother and wake up your Penny. Good-bye, and heaps of thanks."

"Hold on; I'll get my top coat and glasses, and take you home in my automobile," said Bob, opening the door, and shaking hands with his new friend across the narrow hall as Ralph fitted his key into the door opposite. "You won't wait? Good-night, then, and drop over as often as you can, unceremoniously, like your intelligent Whoop-la."

"He's all right," he added to the girls as he closed the door of Patty-Pans.

CHAPTER III [43]

KEREN-HAPPUCH, THE FIRST

"Not any more coffee, dear," Mrs. Scollard said, pushing back her chair from the breakfast table.

"You have hardly eaten a thing, motherkins," protested Happie in a worried voice.

"One cannot always be a credit to one's family cook, Hapsie," returned her mother. "My appetite has been mislaid somewhere between here and the city hall, in the subway, I fancy."

"I think it must have gone over to the Gordons' flat, blown the wrong whistle, the way the grocers do," said Happie. "You never in all your life saw any one so hungry as those two boys were last night when we came home from the park."

"You had a good time, didn't you, dear?" Mrs. Scollard smiled at her second daughter, who was smiling over her recollection of the previous afternoon when she and Margery and Laura had been to the Metropolitan Museum with Bob and the two Gordon boys, and to tea afterwards in the Gordon flat, and had laughed every three minutes of the six hours.

"What are you going to do to-day, my house-keepers?" [44]

"Scour our pans, our Patty-Pans," said Happie promptly, before Margery could speak.

"My dear, this little flat will be washed away!" protested her mother, submitting her glove to Polly for buttoning.

"Mother, it truly does need cleaning," said Margery. "You don't see it in real daylight, except on Sunday, but we know! What's the matter?"

Her mother had caught the back of a chair and swayed slightly forward, but stood erect and smiling in an instant, though her face was a shade paler than usual.

"Nothing, dearies; don't look so frightened! There is a shadow that comes over my eyes of late, and for a second I am wiped out of existence, but you see how quickly I come back! Indigestion, probably; it really is nothing."

"How can you have indigestion when you don't eat?" demanded Margery, not at all reassured by her mother's explanation.

"And how could there be digestion when one ate nothing?" retorted her mother. "Now, Margery, don't look like my worried little seventeen-years-old grandmother! I am not ill. Bob! Come, Bob! I am ready for my escort."

Bob appeared struggling with the over-starched buttonhole in his collar, through which his button refused to pass, and with his tie dangling in one hand.

"Oh, say, Margery, come on, like a good sister!" he implored. And Margery "came on," rightly interpreting this as an appeal for aid. [45]

Her soft fingers deftly coaxed the stiff linen over the stud, and tied the four-in-hand into the perfection of knots. Bob picked up his hat, got into the coat which Margery held for him, and offered his mother his arm to escort her as far as the subway station, according to his daily custom, with as fine an air as if the narrowness of the exit did not necessitate her immediately dropping the arm as soon as it was accepted.

Together this mother and son started out every morning, and the pressure of his mother's hand in parting, and the blessing in her sweet eyes as she went bravely away to labor for him and his sisters would have kept Bob safe through whatever temptations might assail him during the day, just as her honest boy's tight hand squeeze sustained the mother through her weary hours.

"We mustn't think about it, Margery," said Happie visibly giving herself a mental shake, as if she were a dog shaking off troubled waters, and answering the unspoken anxiety in her sister's eyes. "We've got to do our part anyway. And it can't be bad—it would be so very bad, so dreadful, if it were bad that it can't be bad at all."

Margery shook her head, and turned away to hide the gathering tears.

"Don't shake your head," protested Happie impatiently. "I can't bear to have people shake their heads! It's worse than saying the most awful thing! Of course she isn't ill, nor going to be! Do you suppose we could live if motherkins were ill? Well, then! That proves she isn't going to be, because it stands to reason we've got to live. Now, let's hurry these dishes away, and clean those rooms, and make motherkins' room particularly spick-and-span, and then we shall feel better." [46]

"You're a comfort, Happie!" said Margery warmly, laying her face for an instant on the girl's bright hair. "No wonder mother says you are Happie, our happiness! You are a perfect tonic. You would be the very one to lead a forlorn hope."

"I'd rather lead a hope that wasn't forlorn," laughed Happie, well satisfied with the result of her effort at cheering Margery. "Just a plain, every-day hopeful hope. Come on, Margery! Polly and Penny, it's dusting time, but you needn't dust, because we're going to sweep, and sweeping one room in a little flat means dust in all. Perhaps Polly can help Laura make beds and get things ready for sweeping."

This busy household of children had each her appointed tasks and even baby Penelope was supposed to be useful.

"I've got to finish a waltz I was composing; I can't do anything till that's done," said Laura. It was not a little trying to find Laura's genius in the way of her fair share of commonplace tasks, but Margery and Happie were used to it, and when Laura would not, why, Laura would not, and there was less than no use in trying to make her see justice. [47]

"I'll sweep one room, while you dust it, and you can sweep the next one, and I'll dust it; that's fair," said Margery watching Laura depart piano-ward with her troubled look of elder-sisterly responsibility, wishing that she could coax Laura into playing fair.

"And begin in mother's," added Happie, tying up her head so tight that her eyebrows mounted a quarter of an inch, the left higher than the right.

Margery's broom flew, and Happie dusted briskly the chairs set out in the parlor; it was something like the old-fashioned game of solitaire with marbles to clean in the Patty-Pan; one had to move pieces about many times before they could be restored to their appointed place. Dorée considered cleaning done solely for his entertainment, and flew after Happie's duster till she and Polly and Penny were in a gale of a frolic with him, and Margery had to come out to hug the little cat, who looked like a dandelion in a high wind, as he raced over the floor.

The two active housewives worked their way into the third little bedroom rapidly, leaving the first two of the Patty-Pan chambers guiltless of dust. Laura tired of her waltz at last, and consented to go out to do the errands for the day, taking pains with her toilet, though her calls were to be limited to the grocer, the butcher and the German delicatessen shop, to fill out Margery's neat list of necessities. [48]

"Wonder where Penny is!" Polly called to the older girls after Laura had been gone ten minutes, and the silence of the Patty-Pans had been broken only by the lively broom and duster.

"Laura didn't take her," Margery called back. "I saw her start alone. She's in there, isn't she?"

"Not one bit," cried Polly, as if her little sister were made up of fragments.

"Why, how queer!" Happie said, emerging from Bob's room with dangling duster. "She couldn't have gone out."

"No; here's her hat," Polly began, but a little crow of a laugh interrupted her.

Looking up, Happie and Polly saw Penny's dusty head appearing over the edge of the wardrobe in her mother's room, Jeunesse Dorée beside it.

The step-ladder leaned against the wardrobe, explaining the ascent.

"Oh, Penny, what made you go up there in all that dust? We couldn't sweep it off to-day and I know it's dusty up there," said Margery. "Come down, dear."

"Dorée ranned up," said Penny, whose verbs were subject to eccentricities in their past tense. "I wanted to be up too, so I climbed. But I can't come down, not ever. You'll have to come up after me."

"I don't believe she can," sighed Happie. The space between the top of the wardrobe and the ceiling was so small that the child could not sit up, and it would have been impossible for her to slide down to the top step of the ladder without falling. [49]

"I'll go up, Margery; let me go," said Happie, and mounted the step-ladder.

There was a loud report, the support broke on one side of the ladder, and down came poor Happie, "ladder and all," like Rock-a-bye Baby.

"Oh, Hapsie, dearest, are you hurt?" cried Margery, flying to her rescue.

"Well, I am—surprised," replied Happie, slowly rising. "I don't think I'm hurt beyond a few scratches, and my feelings."

"Now, how'll we get the baby down?" asked practical Polly, satisfied that Happie was not harmed seriously, and at once turning to something that needed doing.

"We'll have to borrow a step-ladder from the Gordons," said Margery. "I'll go, though I am not fit to be seen! Do I look a perfect pig?"

"You couldn't look like a pig, Peggy; you were made so you'd look clean if you were covered with muddy stove blacking," said Happie. And Margery departed on her errand.

She came back with both Ralph and "Snigs" Gordon, and their step-ladder. Snigs chuckled at the sight of Penny's smutty little face on which the tears which she had shed at Happie's downfall had made an effective paste. Ralph placed his step-ladder and climbed up to rescue the damsel in distress and the yellow kitten. [50]

Just then the bell rang, a sharp, decided peal and Polly ran to press the button in the kitchen which unfastened the outer door to admit visitors.

"Now, who could that be?" cried Margery, dismayed.

"It could be a postman, a peddler, a life insurance agent, a bill, a friend, a foe, the landlord, company, country cousins—shall I go on?" said Snigs.

"Never mind," said Happie. "We never have company in daytime, because all the girls we know are in school, and mother's friends understand that they can't find her here except at night.

Mercy, there are all the things from Bob's room in the hall! Nobody can get in."

"Margery and we came in—and the step-ladder. You shouldn't expect, nor admit, any bigger company in this little flat, Happie. Here is Penny; please take her—eke the kitten. I'll stay up here aloft till you find out what's coming up-stairs, and whether there's room for me and your guest both." And Ralph handed down Penny to Margery, and seated himself on the top step of the ladder, folding his arms with a perfectly idiotic expression on his face.

The girls could not help laughing, and then the bell at their upper door rang smartly, and Margery squeezed through the narrow passage to answer the summons.

[51]

"'HOW DO YOU DO, MARGERY?'"

"How do you do, Margery?" said a voice, strong, insistent, crisp, but decidedly well-bred. "I have come to spend the night. There is room; there's a couch in the dining-room."

"My goodness me! It's Keren-happuch, the first," whispered Happie in comical dismay. "She's as nice as she can be, but I don't know how to take her—I believe I'm afraid of her. She pays lots of attention to me, too, because I'm her namesake."

"Had I better come down?" Ralph whispered back. "Or shall Snigs come up?"

Before Happie could answer this important question, Margery and her guest came down the hall; the boys and Happie heard Miss Bradbury set a chair on another to make more space for their passage.

"Happie, I have come to make a short visit," announced that vigorous lady entering the little bedroom. "What in the world are you doing with two boys here when you're sweeping? And why do you keep one on a step-ladder?"

"We don't, Aunt Keren," said Happie presenting her flushed cheek for Miss Bradbury's kiss, which was more hearty than the girl realized. "Penny had climbed on top of the wardrobe, and our step-ladder broke when I tried to get her down. So Ralph brought his over and rescued her. This is Charles Gordon, Miss Bradbury, and that up there is Ralph, his brother; they are the boys in the next flat."

"Yes. I hope then that they are more quiet than most boys," remarked Miss Bradbury. "I shall put [52]
my bonnet here, and my coat over the back of that chair. It is not so cold. I wore my medium weight coat; there are signs of spring—time for it, middle of March!" She spoke in crisp, curt sentences as if not to waste a word. The boys looked at her, and wondered that Happie had said she half feared her. They saw a tall woman, perhaps two or three years past sixty. Her eyes were keen, but humorous, her ample mouth was decidedly firm, but not unamiable. Her nose was the nose of an aristocrat, and her garments, though remote from so much as an approach to fashion, were of the best materials, worn with a carelessness that betokened them interesting only for their usefulness to the wearer. Eccentric Miss Bradbury was stern, perhaps, but kind, and rather a fine lady in her queer way.

"Do you know why I came?" asked the visitor turning from the bed where she had laid her bonnet, and giving two rapid strokes to her hair without a glance at the mirror.

"Because you wanted to see us, we hope?" suggested Margery with her gentle smile.

"Obviously. Never make smooth, meaningless speeches, Margaret," said Miss Bradbury. "I came, however, rather more because I felt that you wanted to see me. When I feel a drawing to certain people, as if I were being called to them across the space dividing us, I know those people need me. It has happened to me at various times in my life, and never has led me wrong. Last night I [53] felt that I was called here; here I am. That may sound to you young people like great nonsense, but Keren-happuch Bradbury is not given to nonsense, and she is convinced that she is right in this matter."

"I don't see why not, since we know that there is such a thing as wireless telegraphy," observed Ralph from his perch, whence he had been too much interested to remember to descend.

"That's a very sensible remark, my boy, though you look anything but sensible roosting on that step-ladder in that anthropological manner," said Miss Bradbury with a twinkle.

"You don't mean that we are going to need you for—well, that there is any trouble coming, Aunt Keren?" said Happie, her mind reverting to her mother's tired face.

"I am not prophesying; I am visiting, Happie," retorted Miss Bradbury. "I have no idea why I am here, but here I am, and that because I felt sure that you needed me. Better let me get luncheon, and send these boys home while you finish your work, children. If you came to rescue Penelope from the top of the wardrobe, there is no reason why you should wait for her to crawl up again, Master Ralph Gordon."

Ralph unwound himself and began to come down on this strong hint, but he was not offended; on the contrary he liked this queer person who would guard his young girl neighbors like a dragon, [54] as he plainly saw.

As Ralph stood erect and folded his step-ladder the bell rang once more, this time with a startling peal, and, as Margery ran to the speaking-tube and to press the button in the kitchen, Laura's voice was heard screaming in the outer hall: "Oh, open the door, open the door quick!" and she rattled the knob frantically.

"What is it, what has happened?" cried Happie, catching the little girl as she half fell over the threshold when she opened the door.

"Mama, oh, poor, poor mama!" wailed Laura, clutching at Happie.

"What?" gasped Happie, turning so white that Ralph sprang to help her.

"She has been sent home in a carriage. Oh, oh, I came along just in time to see her. I ran up when the man rang the bell," moaned Laura.

Miss Bradbury came forward with a kind of collected haste. "Laura," she said sternly, "stop your hysterics. I have no patience with hysterics. As though there were anything dreadful about being sent home in a carriage! Ralph, come with me. We will go down and help Mrs. Scollard up-stairs."

Ralph Gordon brushed past the frightened Scollard girls, and followed Miss Bradbury instantly. When they returned it was very slowly, and the janitor of the house, with a stranger who had been passing, was helping them. They were carrying Mrs. Scollard, and Margery and Happie [55] clutched each other, and Laura ran away to hide, fearing to look.

Their mother's face was ashen, and her eyes were closed. Polly began to cry, and Penny fled to Snigs for comfort; for the first time in her life her sisters were not equal to giving it.

"This way," said Miss Bradbury leading. The men laid Mrs. Scollard on her own bed, and withdrew.

Her eyes fluttered and opened. "Don't be frightened, children," she said. "I'm only tired."

"What doctor shall I fetch?" asked Ralph. "And isn't there something Snigs could get from the drug store in the meantime?"

"Yes. Go for—who, Margery?" asked Miss Bradbury.

"Doctor Revel on the corner is the nearest," said Margery, so frightened her lips would hardly form the words.

"Happie, heat milk," ordered Miss Bradbury. "Yes, go for that doctor, boy; hasten. I suppose we must not prescribe, but I think it's pure exhaustion."

"Mother put away some of that old wine which you sent her for Christmas, Aunt Keren. She said it must be kept for sickness. Isn't that best now?" asked Happie.

"Old port! The very thing! Get it. I'm glad to see you have self-control, Happie," her godmother smiled at her approvingly as she spoke. "I am going to make Laura behave herself and look after [56] Polly and Penny. Then we will undress your mother and make her comfortable."

She stalked grimly away with a look that promised scant allowance for Laura's twelve years. Miss Bradbury was the sort of woman that expected every child, as well as "every man to do his duty," thus outstripping England as interpreted by Nelson.

By some means she succeeded in dominating Laura, and the two younger children's voices hushed, as Laura took them in hand.

Then this efficient woman who had come so opportunely to the frightened tenants of the Patty-Pans, returned to get Mrs. Scollard comfortably in bed, where she lay with closed eyes when Ralph returned with the doctor.

"You've been a good and useful boy; I thoroughly approve of you," said Miss Bradbury, and somehow Ralph felt as if he had been brevetted. Miss Keren-happuch was such a strong character that her commendation carried with it the conviction of a genuine gain.

The Gordon boys slipped away to their own apartment across the hall. Margery and Happie waited anxiously, holding each other fast, while the doctor examined his patient.

"No disease; pure exhaustion, but that is quite enough," he said, coming out through the sliding door to the waiting girls. "She has been spurring herself on for months; the worn nerves can go [57] no further. She must have complete rest and good nursing for a year, perhaps; certainly for a long time. Then I can promise that she will be perfectly restored. It is nothing serious, nothing to be alarmed about, I assure you."

The doctor bowed himself out, and Miss Bradbury attended him to the door.

Margery and Happie stood silently watching him go, each occupied with the same thought. Nothing serious? When the promise that their mother should be restored *if* she took the needed rest held the implication that she would never be well without it! And when there was no money but what she had earned, earned at the price of this breakdown! Nothing serious! Why, nothing could be more serious, as this beloved mother's young daughters realized with the hand of this, their first acquaintance with real sorrow, heavily gripping their hearts.

CHAPTER IV [58]

AN ANGEL IN DISGUISE

"IT'S rather worse to be ill with nothing the matter than to be sensibly ill of a disease," said poor Mrs. Scollard speaking feebly, but with an attempt at her own cheerfulness.

She had been ill for three weeks, and had not improved perceptibly over her condition in the beginning. "Only a nervous collapse," the doctor repeated. It had been so long coming on that the recovery must be proportionately long. And how could she get better with the thought that when her strength had given out, the family income had ceased sitting like a vulture at her bedside? Small as was the rent of the "Patty-Pans," still it must be paid. A month was as long as she could be idle, yet that month was nearly past, and she was no better.

Margery, Bob and Happie for the first time realized what a vitally real thing money is, and vainly strove to find a way to take their mother's place as the bread-winners. They understood only too clearly that there was no chance for that dear mother to get well while she lay in the second Patty-Pan room with anxiety tearing at her heart-strings.

Ralph and Snigs and their fine mother were comforts in those black days, but it was on Miss [59] Bradbury that the Scollards found themselves relying with hourly increasing appreciation of her strength. That remarkable woman had not suggested returning to her home, but nightly occupied the parlor couch in the Patty-Pans, and daily took charge of its sorrowful tenants. Delicacies such as Margery would not have dared to buy found their way to Mrs. Scollard, and Margery discovered when she went to market that there were no out-standing accounts such as she had been dreading with the neighboring tradesmen; Miss Keren-happuch paid as she went out of her own purse, which the Scollard girls had always believed to be not over-abounding.

"Over-doing in work is not likely to lead to under-doing a breakdown," Miss Bradbury replied to Mrs. Scollard's remark. "Nature is an excellent accountant, and knows how to collect her dues. I think I should be satisfied with what ails you, if I were you, Charlotte."

She altered the position of Mrs. Scollard's pillows and smoothed them with a touch singularly gentle in such an energetic person, and beckoned Margery to follow her into the dining-room. Laura sat here in an attitude of despair, her feet stuck straight out before her indifferently to the size of the room, her arms hanging over the back of her chair. Bob and Happie were trying to occupy themselves with the lessons which their mother would have required had she been well, [60] and serene little Polly sat rocking her doll, she the more sleepy of the two, though the doll's eyes did droop with the motion of the rocking-chair.

Miss Bradbury took the chair which Polly had occupied when the little girl yielded it up on her entrance, and gathered Polly into her lap, who in turn still held Phyllis Lovelocks tight.

"Now, my dears," began Miss Keren-happuch in her businesslike way that covered so much tenderness, "you all look dreadfully worried. You must not; your mother will get well after she gets to the country."

"Why, Aunt Keren!" exclaimed Happie reproachfully. "When you know she can't even afford to stay in the city!"

"Which is the reason that she is going to my farm, that, and the fact that she must have fresh air and quiet," said Miss Keren-happuch.

"Your farm!" exclaimed all the children together.

"Yes; in Pennsylvania," said Miss Bradbury calmly. "I have never seen it, and I doubt strongly that I shall be particularly pleased with the sight. But a farm it is, of some seventy acres, up in the mountains, and there is where we are going in two weeks."

"We don't understand," cried Bob, after he had exchanged excited and bewildered glances with the others.

"There is nothing more to understand," declared Miss Bradbury. "Polly, your doll's arm will break [61]
off if you don't turn it around. Your mother must rest, there is no money to provide that rest, I must go to the country somewhere, so instead of boarding this summer, I am going to open that house of mine, which I have never seen, and you children are going to keep house for your mother and me indefinitely. It's not in the least difficult nor mysterious."

"You trump!" cried Bob with an enthusiasm that prevented any suspicion of disrespect.

"I heard a boy say lately that he would not live in the country for anything," observed Miss Bradbury with her twinkle.

"But to save his mother, and when he didn't know how he could live anywhere!" cried Bob.

"You dear, dear, blessed Aunt Keren!" cried Happie, throwing herself upon her adopted relative with an abandon which, under ordinary circumstances that lady would have disapproved.

"There, there! I suppose it is a relief," she said patting Happie's back. "But I warn you that it will not be at all attractive, probably. I took it for a debt, and my debtor said afterwards, so I am told, that it was cheaper to give it to me than to keep it. I suspect that he pretended not to be able to pay me in money in order to get rid of this farm. So you may be prepared for going into the wilderness. However, it will be a wilderness of pure air and great altitude, and we can exist somehow. It will undoubtedly build up poor Charlotte." [62]

"I am going to like it," Happie declared. "I learned to like tomatoes, and I thought that in all this world I could never taste them a second time. And I love olives now, but when I first tried one, I really had to rush away from the table. So I am going to love that farm no matter what it is. How could we help loving a place that cured motherkins?"

"Aunt Keren, you are an angel in disguise," announced Laura solemnly.

"I must admit the disguise," retorted Miss Bradbury. "Now, children, I want you to get ready to go out of town in two weeks from now. Can you do it?"

"Yes, but we have a lease of the Patty-Pans; we shall have to sub-let it," said Margery, with the tiny anxious line appearing in her forehead.

"Furnished," supplemented Miss Bradbury. "I shall send up all the furniture necessary. There is some furniture there; I don't know how much, nor how good."

"Nobody has told you what we think of your giving up your comfortable summer in the White Mountains and down in Maine, without a care, and going up to this farm in order to cure dear mother, and to help us," said Margery, with a quiver in her voice.

"Nonsense!" cried Miss Keren-happuch briskly. "Every landed proprietor should look after his estate. It is high time that I saw mine. I shall enjoy the novelty of the situation. For the rest, Margaret, I have a very real affection for your mother, and a profound respect for the way that [63]
she has fought her good fight for you orphaned children. There is more than you know in my feeling for Charlotte; your grandmother and I were not ordinary friends. I should not do less than my best for her daughter, even if I were not as fond of her as I am. So there is nothing more to be said on that head."

"We will call the farm 'the Ark,'" said Happie. "It will be our refuge in this flood of affliction."

"It's not a particularly original name, Hapsie," remarked Bob. "I think lots of houses have been called the Ark, but it fits this case to a T. I don't suppose there's any doubt that we should not have had a place in which to lay our heads if it had not been for Aunt Keren and her farm."

A knocking at the dumb waiter door warned the Scollards that Ralph and Snigs wanted to be admitted; they had adopted this substitute for the bell not to disturb Mrs. Scollard. Polly slipped down from Miss Bradbury's lap and ran to open the door to them.

"Boys, what do you think?" cried Happie the moment they entered. "We are going away!"

The Gordons had known all the troubles, the anxieties that threatened to engulf their neighbors, and had shared their despondency over a prospect that held no hope. They stopped short, looking hardly less excited than the family group. [64]

"What do you mean?" Ralph cried.

"Going away with blessed Aunt Keren to a farm she owns in Pennsylvania," Happie said. "It will save mother's life—and you know what else it will do, Ralph. We are going to try to sub-let the Patty-Pans furnished, so it won't be good-bye forever to you."

"And my mother wants to find another flat!" cried Snigs, getting very red in the effort to speak fast enough. "There are some college boys from the South want to stay in New York all summer. She wants to rent another flat and take them with her. She was saying to-night she might move if she could not get one in this house. Mayn't we have yours?"

"Now, did you ever in all your life?" demanded Happie of the world at large. And the world at large, in the person of Margery, Bob and Laura, replied that it never did! Even Miss Bradbury seemed elated over this remarkable coincidence of need and supply on both sides.

"Come on over and tell mother about it!" said Snigs, seizing Bob's arm, and gesticulating wildly to Margery and Happie, while plunging towards the door as if he feared the escape of the Patty-Pans or of his mother, unless they were at once permanently secured to each other.

"Go, if you like," Miss Bradbury supplemented. "I think I will unfold my plan to your mother this moment. The rule is not to talk to a nervous invalid at night, but I suspect that she is more sleepless now from worry than she will be from excitement over a prospect which, though not [65] brilliant, at least holds a solution of her troubles."

The oldest Scollards having departed with and to their neighbors, Miss Keren-happuch went into their mother's room, and seated herself on the edge of the bed with an air of such resolution that the sick woman humorously wondered whether she had come to amputate or to execute.

"You are to be deported, Charlotte," she announced decidedly.

"Deported? Why and whence?" asked Mrs. Scollard.

"For precisely the same reason that the authorities always deport—because you are not fit to stay," replied Miss Bradbury. "We are going to spend the summer on my Pennsylvania farm, your family and myself."

"I didn't know you had a farm," gasped Mrs. Scollard, catching at the first thing that occurred to her to say, overwhelmed with the magnitude of the announcement.

"Neither did I, fully, until to-day," said Miss Bradbury. "I have never seen it, but I believe it will shelter us. As soon as you are able to move we are going, and our return is most indefinite. You are going to sub-let the Patty-Pans, furnished, and the girls are to keep house for us while we enjoy ourselves without a care upon our minds." [66]

"Dear, dear Miss Keren!" sobbed Mrs. Scollard with the ready tears of nervous prostration. "How good you are! But do you think I could let you take my place, and support all my family for several months?"

"Nonsense, Charlotte! I shall save money. My summers cost me not less than three hundred dollars always, junketing around from hotel to hotel, from the seashore to the mountains. We won't spend three hundred dollars up there, not all of us put together, if I know anything about an isolated farm. And I really ought to look after my property. What do I get out of the sort of summers I usually spend? Weariness and vexation of spirit! Dress three times a day, not a solitary spot that isn't humming with summer voices! When I want to sit down and hear the waves, or to read, I have to hear a lot of empty-headed women telling one another about their servants' misdeeds, or how the tailor spoiled a coat, or—worst of all—how seriously they doubt the wisdom of speaking to some of the other women, one of whom is too quiet to be a desirable acquaintance, and the other too gay to know! And all the long golden summer days they sit on the piazza and make hideous, useless things out of pretty materials! It is nothing to regret that I may spend one summer on my own probably worthless estate, in dignified seclusion. Whether or not, we are going. I did not come to consult you, but to announce it. So go to sleep. For half a year you are to have a vacation where, at the worst, you will be two thousand feet above tide water, [67] and must get strong, knowing the children are safe, and you are secure, breathing good air, even if there is little else to live on. Go to sleep, Charlotte, and stop worrying, because I want you to get strong enough to go at once. Since I have remembered my farm, I am all youthful impatience to see it."

Good Miss Keren-happuch arose with a jerk, intending to stalk out of the room, but Mrs. Scollard sprang up and caught her around the neck. "You dear, you dear! I can't thank you!" she sobbed.

"I don't remember suggesting that you should," said Miss Keren gruffly. But the kiss with which she laid her old friend's daughter back upon the pillow was very tender.

Mrs. Gordon was delighted with the opportunity to take the Patty-Pans and its furniture; it fitted her plans to obtain it quite as well as it worked for the Scollards to have her assume it. Before any one had time to realize what had happened, energetic Miss Bradbury had set Margery and Happie at their preparations for departure, and going away had become a definite fact.

It seemed a little formidable to the three eldest children, now that the plan had taken on definiteness. Mrs. Scollard was about again, proving that if one can find the way to minister to a mind diseased, strength attends on such ministration, but she was still so weak and pale that [68] Margery could hardly look at her without tears. She tried hard to be brave, but she dreaded leaving behind her the only life that she had known, to go away into an untried life among new surroundings.

More than any of the other children, Happie had a cat-like love of place, and to her it was very hard to go away from New York with uncertainty in her mind as to how or when she could return to it.

"I suppose I shall go around wailing and gnashing my teeth, Bob," she confided to her brother. But Bob knew her, and her ability to make the best of something that was not merely a bad bargain, but no bargain at all.

"Not you, Hapsie!" he said. "You will find a dozen good reasons for preferring that farm to any other spot on earth, no matter if it turns out as bad as Martin Chuzzlewit's Eden."

"That's not a bad testimony to the fitness of your nickname, Happie," smiled Margery.

Laura openly gave way to grief, which she carefully fostered in herself, for Laura loved the rôle of martyr as well as Happie loved to be sunny.

It troubled Mrs. Scollard sorely to see Laura's sorrow until she took to singing Schubert's "Adieu," as a suitable expression of her woe, then her mother smiled at the sentimental little girl, justly concluding that sentimental grief was not dangerously deep. [69]

Jeunesse Dorée was to accompany his family as a matter of course, though the old colored woman who came to clean for them held up her hands in horror at the suggestion.

"You sholy won't have luck if you takes him," she groaned. "'Twan't never reckoned right where I come fum to move a cat, and I just begs an' prays you let him run. It's bad nuff ter see you goin', let 'lone wif a cat."

"We think it would be very bad luck to be deprived of Dorée," smiled Mrs. Scollard. "And surely, Amanda, some sort of punishment ought to fall on those who would turn a petted creature into the street to starvation and ill-treatment! I think I'd rather risk the effect of taking him."

"Bob has bought a beautiful strong basket for him," said Happie applauding her mother's sentiments with a bright smile as she went through the Patty-Pans parlor.

She found Laura with Polly in the chamber which they shared, Polly watching her elder with a face expressive of puzzled awe, tempered by amusement. Penny was lost in the labor of packing the animals into a large Noah's ark, and losing her patience with the bulk of elephants and flies—which really did not differ materially—and with unruly legs and horns which got continually entangled.

"Bob says," the mite was remarking, "we's all going to live in a nark, an' for me to get you nanimals all back 'gain 'fore ve flood. If you don't swallow you' horns, you foolsish mooly cow, [70] you, I'll make you sail on ve roof, and vhen you'll see!"

"Leave the ducks and geese out to swim, Penny mine, and you'll have more room," suggested Happie. "Let Happie coax the cow to draw in her horns. There, you see what good it does to pat her and to speak to her gently? She's in. What are you doing, Laura?"

Laura looked up, raised her eyebrows, and sighed with her grown-up air, but she did not answer.

"She says she's going to put all her pretty things in a box and mark it for me when I'm twelve, going on thirteen," said Polly answering for her. "She says she's sure she'll never live to use 'em. Now, isn't that silly? Because farms are healthy, I thought!"

Happie laughed. "Oh, Laura," she cried, "how can you be such a goose? I wouldn't count on getting those treasures if I were you, Polly. I think Laura may live to use them."

Laura regarded Happie with serene superiority. "Grief often kills," she said with the brevity of a tragic poet. "I'm sure I shall pine away. Do you know what nostalgia means?"

Again Happie laughed out merrily. "No; do you?" she said.

"It means homesickness," replied Laura with crushing dignity. "I found the word in a book of poetry and I looked it up, because I knew it must mean something lovely and sad. I made a song [71] without words about it; it goes this way." And Laura hummed a line of music that was more minor than any known key seemed able to represent.

"Isn't that perfectly be-au-ti-ful?" she demanded. "Doesn't that sound just like nostalgia? That may be my last composition; it will be if this move kills me, as I 'most know it will. Wouldn't you feel sure that meant some one dying of homesickness if you heard it, and no one told you?"

"What a queer thing you are, Laura!" exclaimed Happie, half impressed, though she could never keep a respectfully straight face over Laura's performances. "I can't tell whether it sounds like nos—what-you-call-it or not, because I never heard the word before, so I haven't had time to know it set to music, but I don't think I should know that tune meant homesickness. It sounds to me like the wail of the washerwoman who got too much blueing in the clothes—it's the bluest thing I ever heard."

"You haven't one bit of—of anything in you, Happie," said Laura turning away pettishly.

Bob came in, his arms full of half-discarded boyish treasures. "Say, what do you think, Hap; will there be room for this stuff?" he demanded. "I could give it up, but I'd just as lief keep it. You see it won't be our house."

"Still there must be room for everything, since it's a farm, and we have a freight car to ourselves. I'd keep it," said Happie with the understanding she could not give Laura. [72]

"I guess I asked you instead of Margery because I wanted that advice, and I knew you'd give it—she thinks I clutter," said Bob. "Are you going to take all your own Lares and Penates?"

"What it is to have a classical education!" exclaimed Happie in mock admiration. "No; we are only going to take our Laura and Penelope." And she swooped down to snatch a refreshing kiss from the pink and white baby, and to rescue a particularly spotted dog from having his exceedingly curled-up tail shut in the cover of the Noah's ark.

At last all the preparations were completed, the Patty-Pans flat was shining and fleckless, everything in apple-pie order to be relinquished to Mrs. Gordon's care. Ralph and Snigs were inconsolable over the approaching parting until Miss Bradbury hinted her intention of asking them to follow the exiles sometime during the summer, when they plucked up heart and began to

plan for meeting on the farm.

It was a cold, raw day in April, a day left over from March getting used up in April, a most dreary and uncomfortable day on which to set forth upon a journey with an invalid to migrate from the city to the country, and to a house the comfort of which there was good reason to doubt.

The Gordon boys went to the station and pressed upon their friends, in parting, bulky packages of [73] almost any possibilities. They shook hands with emotion, and the Scollard party sank into its seats silently with a suspicious redness about other lashes than Laura's, though everybody made heroic efforts to appear cheerful, and not ungrateful for Miss Bradbury's kindness. The only way to succeed in this effort was to keep constantly in view the good that was to be done the dear mother.

The warmth of the train was welcome. Poor Mrs. Scollard sank into the corner of her chair hardly able to endure the neuralgia which had added itself to her weakness, glad of the friendly steam pipes.

The train pulled slowly out of the station, and steamed, with increasing speed across the plains of Jersey towards the distant hills.

No one spoke for some time. Then Happie aroused herself. "I wonder if the farm has good cherry-trees," she said.

Bob laughed. "Already, Happie?" he said. "I thought it would take longer than this for even your barometer to indicate clearing."

Happie smiled a feeble smile. "I'm afraid I don't much care whether it has or not," she said. "I just happened to think of it."

"Don't apologize," returned Bob. "It's a comfort to have you beginning to sit up and take notice."

Jeunesse Dorée purred when one of the children peeped into his basket, according to his cheerful [74] habit of responding with a song to any notice.

After a time the landscape arose from the dull level of its beginnings and began to put on beauty. The hills were showing their heads in the distance, with blue vaporous lights playing over them in the pale sunshine of the chill afternoon.

On they steamed, the grade perceptibly higher, until all the young folk were looking out of the windows, enjoying the barren beauty of the mountains in the early spring. Mrs. Scollard felt the benediction of space and quiet, her throbbing nerves grew more still as her eyes sought the horizon with the delight this beauty-loving woman always found in nature.

Miss Bradbury sat preternaturally stiff and straight looking at the scene, which was as new to her as to any of the others, with the approval of a proprietor.

"It's pretty here!" cried Polly, as the train rounded a curve. As she spoke the travelers felt its motion retard. It stopped, and the guard called out: "Crestville!" They had arrived.

CHAPTER V [75]

TAKING POSSESSION

Crestville had no public carriages, or "if it had," Happie said, "it kept them very private." Miss Bradbury, and what Bob called "her personally conducted party," walked around the platform of the little red station, discovering nothing but an open wagon to which were attached two sorry-looking horses with drooping heads and tails, a wagon which could not possibly be construed as intended to carry passengers.

A road ran past the station, crossing the track and continuing its muddy way up the hill, losing itself under the bare trees. The mud was disheartening, the silence oppressive. Mrs. Scollard, weak and tired, caught her breath in an arrested sob, feeling that with the dying echoes of the train had died away also the last echoes of civilization.

"Is there any one here who will take us to the Bittenbender farm?" Miss Bradbury asked the station-master.

"That's owned by a city woman now," remarked that worthy reflectively.

"Yes, I own it. How shall I get there?" said Miss Bradbury. [76]

"I heard she'd got some one here to open it up for her," said the station-master.

"Yes; I wrote Mrs. Shafer to see that the place was aired and cleaned; we've come up for the summer. Can you tell me how to get my friends over there?" insisted Miss Bradbury, divided in mind between annoyance and amusement.

"The widow Shafer's got rheumatism too bad to clean anything, her own house even, leave alone yours," said the station-master. "She couldn't open up."

"What did she do then? Why didn't she write me that she couldn't attend to it?" demanded Miss Bradbury, aghast at the prospect of taking her flock into a damp, chilly, uncleaned house.

"Left it go," replied the station-master to her first question. "I guess she was talking of writing, but her hands hain't much good—they're stiff."

"Well, you haven't told me who I can get to take us over," Miss Bradbury reminded him, abandoning the subject of the widow.

"There hain't nobody," replied the station-master succinctly.

The owner of the wagon and the discouraged horses had come forth from the freight end of the station at the beginning of this conversation to which he had attended with rapt attention, his jaws slowly moving up and down as he leaned forward, elbows on knees on the cart seat which he had ascended. [77]

"You couldn't come back after her, Jake?" suggested the station-master turning to him.

The man shook his head. "Goin' after a load," he said, not specifying of what. "Mebbe I could send Pete Kuntz back after her; his hosses hain't haulin'."

"Pete couldn't take 'em all—two, four, eight of 'em," said the station-master reflectively. "He couldn't come back after another load, neither; 'twould make it too late. That's a bad road up along past Eli's, before you come to the Bittenbender place. If I was you, livin' up that way, I'd see if I couldn't git the road overseer to work that road. I declare I'd ruther come down with my team and work it myself, if I wuz you, even if 'twan't part of my reg'lar road tax, before I'd ride it as 'tis."

"That overseer hain't worth nothin'," declared the driver. "I wisht George Lieder had got it—I'd er voted fer him, I would, if they'd er put him up."

"Don't you think there's any way that this Pete you spoke of could get us over?" interrupted Miss Bradbury. "And wouldn't it be better to decide on something soon? It grows dark early, and my friend is ill."

"Well, I guess!" said the man on the wagon. "There'd be nine of you with Pete. Say, I never thought! Pete might go up an' git my three seated hack wagon, an' take 'em all to oncet, usin' his team. Say, wouldn't that fix it, Jimmy?" [78]

"I guess," assented the station-master.

"And what about the trunks?" suggested Miss Bradbury, indicating the generous pile that adorned the platform. "We must have some of them to-night."

"Well, if you was to make it worth my while I'd do my haulin' to-morrer, an' take them there trunks up fer you," said the driver.

"What do you ask?" inquired Miss Bradbury, inwardly resolved to meet any demand.

"Guess I'd have to charge you a dollar and a-half," said the man, eyeing Miss Bradbury dubiously out of the shadow of his very long nose.

Miss Bradbury gave a soft chuckle, though her face remained grave. She glanced at the six trunks which had come with them and said: "That's a bargain."

"Couldn't Bob and I ride over with him, Aunt Keren?" asked Happie.

"I'm afraid it would prove a springless and tiresome drive, Happie," said Miss Keren. "But I've no other objection, if your friend here has none—Mr.—Mr.——"

"Shale, Jake Shale," supplemented the man. "I don't mind; I kinder like comp'ny."

He loaded the trunks on his wagon, and Happie clambered up beside him, while Bob adorned the top of the smallest trunk.

"I hope you will send this Pete after us soon," said Miss Bradbury as she saw Mrs. Scollard press her fingers into her throbbing temples. [79]

"Yes, ma'am; oh, my, yes, ma'am," responded Jake, gathering up the reins. "He'll be along quick. I'll hustle an' so'll he. Say, Jimmy, if you want any more of that there cider o' mine I've got a couple o' barrels you kin have's well's not. I'd like you to git it in your own kaigs, though."

"Well, if you could wait a little, I'd go up-stairs an' ask Hannah what she thought," said Jimmy. "Mebbe you'd better git along now, though," he added, seeing Miss Bradbury's objection to further delay getting ready to explode. "I'll let you know to-morrer night. It's lodge night, anyhow, an' you'll be comin' down, won't you?"

"I guess," said Jake, and actually drove away.

To Happie's and Bob's surprise, in spite of his declaration of a mild liking for companionship, Jake did not show any desire to enter into conversation during the long up-hill drive of three miles. They stopped on their way to start "Pete Kuntz" back after the rest of the exiles, and to the children's relief, he seemed several degrees less slow and indifferent than their driver, or than Jimmy at the station. There really seemed ground for hoping, as they watched him get out his horses and jump on one to go after Jake's "hack wagon," that their tired relatives left behind might get to their new home before nightfall.

The road ran through woods, light growth chiefly, the second yield after forest fires. Sometimes these scrub oaks, birch, maples and the rest, fell away, allowing glimpses of views that made these two exiles cry out with pleasure, and gave them a fleeting hope that there might be balm in their Gilead. But the mud was thick, the wagon wheels sank low, and the tired horses toiled till Happie and Bob, true animal lovers, ached sympathetically. [80]

It was a lonely road; they passed but one farm, and Happie's heart grew heavier and heavier with forebodings that this new home was going to tax severely her ability to live up to her nickname.

The desolation, the sense of being cut off from everything on the face of the earth except mud and trees, the remembrance of her mother's weakness, was bringing on a despair that the splendid views of distant hills and valleys, caught through the openings in the trees, soon lost their power to alleviate.

"Are there many tramps around here?" asked Bob suddenly, and Happie knew that he shared her thoughts and feelings.

"Never none," said Jake promptly. "Too far from the railroad track."

"Isn't that comfortable, Hapsie?" said Bob looking with pity at his courageous sister's pale face. "And did you ever see finer views? And don't forget how tired and hungry you are, Happie! Remember things look very different on a full stomach, and when you're rested." [81]

Happie nodded hard, not trusting herself to speak, and Bob gave up trying to point out the brighter side, invisible to himself, and contented himself with patting her hand.

At last they began to climb a hill that was far higher and steeper than any they had yet scaled, but on which, fortunately, the mud had completely dried. The ascent was beautifully wooded, with real forest growths, and bright wintergreen berries gleamed at the foot of the trees.

As they neared the top, the woods fell away, and at the summit they came out upon an open plain. On every side stretched a view that was more sublime than any upon which Bob and Happie's young eyes had ever rested. Happie forgot her weariness, hunger and despair as she straightened herself to drink it in, and Bob gave vent to a long whistle, exclaiming: "My soles and uppers!"

A little distance down the road they saw a dilapidated rail fence and what had once been a gate. Jake pointed to it with his boney hand. "That's Bittenbender's," he said. "That's your grandmother's place."

"The Ark, Hapsie, after such a long deluge!" exclaimed Bob. "But that's not our grandmother, Mr. Shale; that's Miss Bradbury, whom nobody will ever be lucky enough to have for a grandmother."

Happie had bubbled over into her infective laugh at the suggestion of Miss Keren-happuch as a grandmother, and both young people strained their eyes for the first glimpse of the house. [82]

They got it in a moment, disclosing a brown house, sadly in need of paint, two stories high and decidedly over-shadowed by a big, ramshackle barn, gray from weather, with its front door swinging on one hinge. This melancholy building was flanked by a chicken house and granary in worse repair than itself.

"It has every foot of this glorious view!" cried Happie, seeing the disgust on Bob's face, and sincerely able herself to rejoice in the thought.

"Well, it needs it!" said Bob, and Happie could not deny that he spoke truly.

Jake turned in at the gate; Bob ironically pointed out to Happie the advantages of a gate that did not require opening.

Jake paused at the steps of the house. "I guess I'll let the trunks here," he said. "We couldn't take 'em into the house till they come with the keys anyhow."

Bob and Happie assented, and the trunks were deposited at the foot of the steps, all three of which needed mending. But after Jake had driven away, they found that the assumption that keys were needed to enter this house was a mistake—the door was not fastened; it opened on slight pressure, and Bob and Happie entered.

The unattractive odors of an old house long closed saluted them as they came in, and they caught a glimpse of a scantily furnished sitting-room and dining-room. The stairs ran up straight before [83] them, beginning just beyond the casements of the two doors; they were not carpeted, but had once been painted a depressing drab, of which proof remained on the sides around the bannisters, though the middle of each step was worn quite bare.

Happie shrank with an irrepressible shudder; the whole aspect was so barren, so repulsive to her homesick soul.

"Let's wait for the others to see it for the first time with us," she said. "Let's sit outside on the steps till they come."

Bob smiled and drew her hand protectingly through his arm.

"You can wait to see more, you are not impatient for your new home, are you, Happie? And you like the view outside better than inside? Well, the house doesn't 'pretty much,' as old Mr. Frost used to say, but it certainly has the greatest view in Pennsylvania."

They sat down disconsolately on the steps, in the dampness of the declining day, and waited. The stillness was dreadful. Happie began to laugh, tearfully, and Bob turned to her with an anxiously inquiring look.

"No, I'm not getting crazy or hysterical," she replied to it. "I was thinking of that funny story of Ardelia in Arcady, and that the poor little street child was right when she said: 'Gee! N'Yawk's de [84] place!'"

"Now, Happie!" exclaimed Bob reproachfully.

"I'm sorry, Bob," said Happie contritely. "I'll never so much as hint it again."

In less time than they had expected, Bob and Happie saw the large covered wagon, with its three

wide seats "all filled with Scollards," Bob said, appearing at the top of the hill, and they ran down to the rickety gate to give their family a welcome which should in some sort make up for the inhospitality of their surroundings.

"Supper ready, Happie?" her mother called out cheerfully, seeing at a glance the effort that her girl was making to be blithe, and seconding it handsomely.

"Tsupper ready, Happie?" echoed Penelope sincerely.

"Not quite," Happie called back. "We waited to have you go through the house with us; we thought Aunt Keren had a right to the first inspection, so we couldn't get supper till you came."

"Where can we get supper?" asked Margery dismally.

"In our own kitchen," returned Miss Bradbury. "We have laid in quite enough provisions, and I shall not mind burning up the gate if there is no other fuel."

Bob marshaled the family up the three dilapidated steps, and threw open the door. [85]

"One at a time, if you please, gentlemen, as the parrot said when the crows began pulling out his feathers," he remarked. "You have to go in and turn at once to the right or to the left, because there's no room in the hall to assemble. But it's all right, Aunt Keren; it will be jolly after we have jollied it a little," he added hastily, remembering the kindness that had brought them there, and fearing Miss Bradbury might think him unappreciative.

"We are explorers together, Bob; I am but your pilot, so don't dread my being hurt by your 'jollying,'" said Miss Bradbury. "I don't feel responsible for this house. I am going up to lay off my bonnet; I don't like to inaugurate our summer by putting my bonnet down on the dining-room table." And Miss Bradbury rigidly stalked up the steep stairs to begin her life in the country according to her ideas of propriety.

Margery and Laura went into the living-room, while Mrs. Scollard with her two least girls turned towards the dining-room.

Laura dropped on a chair, which promptly gave way under her, and she fell on the floor in a heap that effectually prevented the remarks she was about to make.

"Go light on our furniture, Laura," said Bob gravely. "It is marked: Fragile."

"How was I to know that horrid chair's third leg was just stuck in?" demanded Laura, with tears in her eyes; she hated of all things to be made ridiculous. [86]

"How indeed?" echoed Bob. "How were you to know which was its third leg? I'm sure I couldn't tell."

"It's worse than I expected, Happie," said Laura indignantly, as if her sister were responsible for the fact.

"I didn't expect such a magnificent view," said Happie staunchly. "Now, if you're the poet you want to be you'll think of nothing but that one thing."

"Aunt Keren said it would be slenderly furnished," said Margery, "but I did not think any furnishing could be as slender as this is."

"This isn't slender furnishing—it's generous unfurnishing, Margery," said Happie. "Besides, what does it matter; Aunt Keren has sent up a whole carload of things! Let's go see mother and the kitchen."

Mrs. Scollard turned to meet them with a smile that was heroic, considering her shocked state of mind, and her neuralgia, and Miss Bradbury came down stairs with an expression of resolution on her face that would have befitted Jael, a likeness further carried out by Miss Keren-happuch's first remark.

"I must find some nails before I sleep and fasten something over the window in the room where I took off my bonnet; the glass is out," she remarked. "Lassies, you and I are to get supper. There are few chairs, and they are like Jenny Wren, their 'backs are bad and their legs are queer.' Fortunately there can't be less than one of a table, or we should have nothing to eat off of, and [87] we have one table—genuine old pine! Bob, suppose you try getting water, and then forage for wood; the pump looks able-bodied, if you are."

Bob was successful in his interview with the pump, and returned victorious from his forage for wood.

The stove was rusty, and "its draught was draughty," Happie remarked, as she vainly coaxed it to give the wood the warm welcome they felt it deserved.

At last a fire was dully burning, and the water in a saucepan, appropriated in lieu of the leaking teakettle, had begun to bubble around the edges, so that there was a cheering prospect of tea. Happie vigorously beat eggs to be scrambled in the frying-pan which Miss Bradbury was scouring, and Margery cut the bread which they had brought with them, while Laura mournfully set the table with such odds and ends of crockery, politely called china, which the place afforded.

When it was ready, it really was not a very bad supper, served with the best of sauces, to all but Mrs. Scollard, who was far too worn-out to do more than nibble a crust of bread with her tea.

No one had remembered kerosene oil, so the three glass lamps discovered in the cellar were "*hors de combat*," Laura said, priding herself on her French surviving her despair.

There was no choice but to go to bed early for lack of light by which to sit up. Everybody's spirits

were several notches higher for the comfort of food, and Penny grew quite hilarious playing trolley on a couch that had such bad springs that Bob remarked "there was no danger of a live wire on that trolley." [88]

Jeunesse Dorée contributed to the improved state of mind of the exiles by his funny antics, going on a voyage of discovery over his new quarters, backing and shying and swelling up at imaginary dangers, and at the singular forms of new shadows, and at last settling down with his nose at a mouse hole from which there seemed to be good ground for his excited expectancy of a mouse.

One of the trunks which Jake had brought up from the station held bed clothing, and Margery and Happie, with Polly to fetch and carry, fell to making beds by the short April twilight.

Laura tried to arrange the bureaux, but the dainty toilette accessories, which had been so pretty on the broad dressers at home, looked sadly out of place on the yellow pine, the gray with red roses, the high black walnut, and the brown bureau with the yellow and blue stripes around the edges of the drawers, which constituted the outfit of the Ark.

There were five bedrooms furnished, after their fashion, and two more under the slanting kitchen roof which were unfurnished. The bedsteads were painted pine and were old-time corded affairs, but none matched a bureau—the state of things justified Laura's artistic despair.

But Happie began to sing as she spread the heterogeneous collection of beds with their white, fine sheets and soft blankets, and this was what she sang, improvising as she went, not poetically, but with better results on the listeners than all poetry yields: [89]

"Now this is a lark;
For fear of the dark
We must all go to bed in a minute,
For we can't see to toil
Without any oil,
And no lamp has a drop of oil in it
But we're glad to embark
In our seedy old Ark—
If there's good to be had we will win it!"

"You're your mother's comforter, Happie, my sunshine!" cried Mrs. Scollard, leaning towards her second daughter to pat the tousled head bent as its owner stooped to tuck in a blanket.

"And your adopted aunt's reliance," added Miss Keren-happuch unexpectedly from the adjoining room. And Happie felt that life was not without promise.

Miss Bradbury tucked little Penny away with her until her mother should be well enough to take her into her room. Laura and Polly were roommates, as they had been in the Patty-Pans, and Margery and Happie slept together, as they had all their lives.

The two eldest girls whispered long after they had gone to bed, and silence had fallen upon the Ark. Happie was too excited to sleep, Margery too miserable. To the eldest girl it seemed as if the life upon which she had entered was going to prove unbearable, but to the younger there [90] appeared on the distant horizon gleams of hope. There was a certain charm in all this discomfort, and that view was really sublime. After Margery ceased to reply to her whispered remarks, Happie still lay awake, planning, speculating, beginning to hope, yet half crying too, as she remembered the dear Patty-Pans, and the only home she had ever known, the great, noisy, ugly, splendid city. But at last her mind settled down to contemplation of those glorious mountains stretching away before her window, waiting for her to see them in the morning, guarding her while she slept. In the thought of them she found comfort, and gazing upon them in imagination, she fell asleep.

CHAPTER VI [91]

MAKING THE BEST OF IT

HAPPIE was awakened "in her chamber towards the east" by the sun streaming in upon her, and with a vague impression that the house was on fire. Never had there been such a blaze of light at that hour in New York, never at any hour such a resplendent, rosy glare. In the girls' little chamber at home it had been at best but a lighter shade of gray light, chastened by the air shaft, that summoned them to a new day.

Happie sprang up to greet the dawn and to look out at her mountains—already it gave her a thrill of pleasure to feel that they were *her* mountains.

She awakened her sister with her cry of delight, Surely it was going to be worth suffering much discomfort and deprivation to waken every morning to such beauty as this. And when one remembered that the beauty was to restore their mother, what did exile and more or less furniture matter?

More beautiful than when clad in verdure the trees stood outlined against the eastern sky, their perfect symmetry of line and limb thrown into relief by the sunrise glow. Mists tinged with every exquisite tint of color flowed around the mountainsides like the soft draperies of Aurora. Quietly [92] brown at her feet lay the waiting fields, except where the rye of autumn's sowing was beginning

to hint of coming green. Pines and firs stood black against the sky, while the faintest tone of red showed to a keen eye that the maple buds were forming and the fresh sap running.

The glad bird chorus of later spring was wanting, but the blithe, brave bluebird uttered his cheering note, liquid as the brooks which taught it to him, and the robin defied possible frosts with his clarion whistle, sounds the more delightful that they were the only spring anthems yet audible.

Laura and Polly fluttered into the room as they heard Happie's exclamation. Happie turned towards them with a shining face.

"Oh, girls, oh, Margery, isn't it heavenly?" she cried in an ecstasy. "Really we must be happy here no matter how we hate it!"

A remark which her sisters hailed with such a shout of laughter that it cheered their mother's waking across the hall.

"The Lord is in His holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before Him," said Margery softly. "I never before realized what that meant."

Even Laura scrambled into her clothes with considerable cheerfulness after this auspicious beginning of the beginning, and the four girls got down-stairs in good time and in good spirits. [93]

But alas! for the weakness of human nature and the brief duration of its exalted moods! When they began to grapple with the problem of getting breakfast, and of persuading the stove to burn the wood which Bob had piled ready to hand the night before, as if he had long been a country boy used to gathering fuel, the benediction of the dawn began to lose effect.

"Maybe we'd better wait for mother and Aunt Keren to advise us," said Happie at last, sitting back on her heels with ashes on her hair and despair on her face, having vainly blown the fire through the draughts which did not draw.

"What's up?" inquired Bob entering in time to catch her suggestion. "Say, I have to wash at the pump like a farm hand! I hope that freight car will come to-day."

"We're up. So is mother—I heard her—but she isn't down," said Happie. "This fire is too much for me, Bob."

"Don't you mean it is too little for you?" suggested Bob. "I don't see how it possibly can be too much for you—there's none at all. I'll have a try at it; I learned a trick about it last night. You have to light the fire in the southeast corner of the grate—it's not cracked there."

Bob's knowledge of the geography of the cracked stove stood him in good stead, and when Miss Bradbury and Mrs. Scollard came down the fire was under way. [94]

Miss Keren-happuch cracked her egg with a decisive blow on the edge of a saucer—her establishment did not boast an egg cup.

"That Shale stratum which brought our trunks, and Bob and Happie, last night, is going to lend himself, with the aid of Peter Kuntz, our driver, to bringing up our household goods to-day, if the car gets here, as they think it will," she said. "I never realized how appropriately one's effects might be called *goods*—they will indeed be goods to us in this dearth of everything. And the first thing I shall do will be to find a woman to preside over our housework, for I suspect that will be the attitude these independent farmers' wives will take towards it. Bob, perhaps you had better look after the carting, and we two Keren-happuchs, Happie my dear, will look for the woman—as the proverb advises one to do whenever there is trouble."

"Why not ask Jake Shale if he knows of one? He is coming now," suggested Mrs. Scollard. Miss Bradbury hurried out to the steps.

"What is?" the family within heard him ask. "Some one to help you out? I guess. Mebbe she might help you a little first along."

"She?" repeated Miss Bradbury.

"Her, yes," said Jake. "We hain't got so much work now to our place, but she couldn't do it long."

"Oh, your wife!" exclaimed Miss Bradbury, enlightened. "If you will bring her here, I will not look [95] for any one else. You are sure she'll come?"

"I guess," affirmed Jake. And he drove away with Bob on the seat beside him.

The family hailed them with delight reappearing at noon, seated on familiar crates piled high on the wagon. Jake not only brought his wife when he came down in the afternoon, but his elongated son of eighteen, who opened boxes industriously, but who could not be persuaded to open his mouth.

As fast as Noah Shale pried open crates, his father and Bob carried their contents to their place, and the new stove, their own chairs, rugs, and the best beloved of the pictures, which were hurried into something like order that afternoon, gave the forlorn old Ark a very different aspect by the second night from that which it had worn on the family's arrival.

Miss Bradbury surveyed her house by lamp-light—for she had bought oil—with an amused criticism that held the germ of approval.

"Who can kalsomine?" she demanded suddenly of Mrs. Jake passing out of the room to get a few sticks of wood for the hearth which to the joy of all the exiles they found in the living-room, and with a perfect draught.

"What is?" said Mrs. Shale stopping short. "I kin, fer one, and he kin, and the boy could if he wanted, and you could—most anybody, I guess, that wants to. Why did you want to know?" [96]

"I'm going to make these walls clean, at least, upstairs and down," said Miss Bradbury, pointing to the blackened walls and ceilings which seemed to indicate that the wood-fire on the hearth had not always crackled and snapped as it was then doing.

"Make it look whiter," remarked Mrs. Shale, resuming her way with a slightly superfluous statement.

Not only did grass have no chance to grow under Miss Bradbury's feet; it could not so much as sprout. By the next day Jake Shale, young Noah Shale and Peter Kuntz were all wielding kalsomine brushes upstairs and down in the Ark, with Bob as an understudy learning with each stroke to make the next one better.

White and sweet with lime on the morning of the fifth day of life in it, the Ark reflected the sunshine on the wall of Happie's room when she opened her eyes and aroused Margery.

They found Miss Bradbury in the living-room, bending over a trunk that had not heretofore been opened. She turned to meet the girls' bright faces with a smile on her own, and held up her finger warningly.

"It's only five o'clock," she whispered. "Don't wake your mother. This comes of having such brilliant walls to make our eastward-looking chambers light in the morning, girls. I hurried to dress, thinking it was fully half-past six—my clock had stopped. This is the trunk of silkalines and other possibilities of beauty at ten cents the yard. Come and choose the color and pattern for the [97] curtains in your own room, Margery and Happie." She threw out several rolls of the prettiest materials, and the girls plunged into them ecstatically.

"Oh, Aunt Keren, do you think it would matter to any one else if we had this in our room?" cried Margery holding up a roll of silkaline, white with soft green maiden hair fern wandering over it.

"But only look at this yellow jasmine, Margery!" cried Happie, holding up a rival pattern.

"But green for our room with the morning sunshine to lighten it—would you mind, Aunt Keren?" persisted Margery.

"Why should I tell you to choose if I minded?" said Aunt Keren, but the pleasure in her eyes at their pleasure belied the gruffness of her manner.

That day the entire population of the Ark, excepting Penny and Dorée, but including Polly, worked on window curtains, hemming as fast as feminine fingers could fly, and tacking and hanging as fast as Bob could work.

When the sunset breeze wandered around the Ark, it found lovely wistaria blossoms in their green leaves to flutter in Mrs. Scollard's windows; the yellow jasmine responded to his fingers in Miss Keren-happuch's room; Bob offered him crimson roses, Laura and Polly's windows were hung with sweet pea blossoms, while the soft maiden hair fern blew into the two eldest girls' room, brushing lightly against the white counterpane on their bed. The newly kalsomined walls [98] looked fresh and restful, and the sash curtains transformed the exterior scene, still bleak and forbidding.

But the Ark was doomed to ride on troublous waters for a time. The next day Mrs. Jake announced that she must return to her bereft family, and Miss Bradbury vainly went abroad in search of her successor.

"There is nothing for it, Charlotte and other children," said Miss Bradbury, after two days of scouring the country in Jake Shale's open wagon, "but for me to go to town and find some one there. Though how I shall persuade a person accustomed to city improvements, or pretty summer cottages, to come to our primitive Ark, I can't imagine. However, I shall go down on Monday to try."

"Oh! And leave us alone!" cried Margery.

"Yes, *all* of you alone. How can one leave 'us' alone? It doesn't seem likely on the face of it that half a dozen Scollards could miss one ancient Bradbury, does it?" said Miss Keren-happuch.

"You are the Head of the House, and it is hard to be decapitated, Aunt Keren," said Bob. But decapitated they were on Monday, when the weather wept copiously over their bereavement.

The inmates of the Ark awakened to the swish of rain against the small window panes, and to the thought of Miss Bradbury's departure. They discovered that in the few weeks that had passed since Mrs. Scollard was taken ill, Miss Bradbury had come to seem as much and necessary a part [99] of their lives as their own heads and hands.

Happie and Bob met with dismal faces to offer their morning oblations of wood to the stove.

"If the violets would come, I could bear it better," remarked Happie suddenly.

"If the mud would dry up, and the roads get decent *I* could bear it better," retorted Bob. It was becoming a family joke, the number of things which they discovered would make life in the Ark bearable. For each of the family felt in the bottom of a courageous heart that the new conditions were hard to bear, and every night Happie lay down lonely and discouraged to wonder how she was going to face another day. Somehow, though, that other day never would seem dreadful to her when she opened her eyes upon it. It was always so beautiful, seen in the light of the sun mounting over the hills before her chamber window.

"I have engaged our friend Pete Kuntz to make the garden this week during my absence, and to put out our vegetables. Pete doesn't plant; he 'puts out' seeds. I shall expect Bob to keep it watered if nature fails us, as I should think she would have to after this flood—no wonder we call this house the Ark!" said Miss Bradbury, as she pulled on her gauntlets, and walked towards the door where Jake Shale was waiting with his drooping steeds to take her to the station. "And good-bye, my family. I shall return *with* my shield, and not upon it, for by fair means, if possible, but somehow in any case, I shall inveigle a woman up here to work for us." [100]

She nodded to each one, patted Mrs. Scollard on the shoulder as she passed her—Miss Bradbury was not given to kissing—went out the door into the drenching rain, mounted the dismal wagon and slowly drove away.

"Now, motherkins, and other girls," said Happie, wheeling towards the door to hide her eyes, and hoping that the rising inflection which she had forced into her voice might be mistaken for the ring of happiness, "now, let's go up attic! We youngsters have been aching to get at it. I'd like to see if rain on the old attic roof sounds as sweet as poetry says it does—it's a good day to test it."

Margery sighed and Laura groaned. "It's perfectly dreadful!" she said. "I don't see how you can help minding such weather! Think of living here in such storms as this!"

"Yet fancy moving every time the weather changed, Laura," Happie retorted. "We would have to leave an order with Pete Kuntz, Jake Shale and some other teamsters like this: When the sun shines, don't come. If it looks cloudy, keep your horses ready to start if it rains. Then when it rains, hook up, as you would say, and drive right over to the Ark, to move the Scollards, because the third Scollard girl can't live in that house in stormy weather. Don't you think it might be hard to make them understand, Laura? For instance, what would they do if it was cloudy and misting a little? Or how would they know what to do in a shower? No; it's better to live in a house and never mind the weather once you have moved in." [101]

Happie had rattled on, one eye on her mother's face, and was rewarded by her laughing a little when she stopped; her nonsense usually made her mother smile.

"Such a goose-girl, Happie!" she exclaimed. And Happie did not mind Laura's pouting at being made fun of, for she had accomplished what she had set out to do, and had tided her mother over the first consciousness of being left alone.

"I hope Aunt Keren will find a nice, clean, rosy-faced girl to help us, Margery," said Mrs. Scollard, as they mounted atticward.

"I wouldn't mind if she weren't young, and was as brown as a berry, if only she were nice and clean, mama," said Margery pensively.

"Poor daughter! I'm afraid you find exile harder than the rest of us," said her mother, laying her hand on pretty Margery's arm.

"Not a bit!" declared Margery quickly. "It isn't hard for any of us, for you are getting better!"

The steep attic stairs, intended apparently "for the use of flies," Happie remarked, issued into the single gabled room running the entire length and width of the house, dusty and musty, dark in the heavy storm, yet attractive with the charm no attic can escape. Happie plunged under the eaves, followed by Penny and Dorée, who had come up with them, the former singing in her crooning voice that sounded very like the latter's purring, which was loud, for the yellow kitten expected mice. [102]

"There's an old trunk in here, motherums, a little hair trunk that has gone quite bald in spots," Happie called in a muffled voice from under the eaves. "It's as shabby as a trunk can be, but there are things in it—it is heavy—and there's a B in brass nails on one end. The Bittenbenders must have left it here. May we open it? What has become of the Bittenbenders? What was a Bittenbender anyway? And why did they go off and leave Aunt Keren their house, furnished, too, after its way, and with their worn-off-horsehair trunk left behind?" And Happie emerged from her dusty exploration, rubbing her nose violently, and making up queer faces to keep from sneezing.

Her mother laughed. "I don't know what a Bittenbender was, Happie dear, any more than you do. We know it was—collectively—the family who owned this farm, and who owed Aunt Keren more money than this place was worth, which was all that she could get in payment. Though if this farm were taken care of, it could be made a good one. As to the trunk, I'm sure Aunt Keren did not insist on that as a part of her bargain—it must have been left because it was not worth taking." [103]

"Don't open the trunk to-day, Hapsie," protested Margery. "I don't like the rain on the roof nearly as well as I thought that I should. And it's leaking around that gable, and it is so dark and damp and dismal! Let's go down to the kitchen where it is warm and comparatively cheerful. At least the fire is red! Truly I can't stand this dank, dark, dreary, dusty, dismal hole and the beat of that rain."

"Poor Peggy! She's getting her adjectives high, and her spirits low!" cried Happie. "What is it about attic salt? Hers is lumpy from wet weather. Come on, you poor dear! We'll go down to the kitchen and boil eggs. Mother, when do you suppose we shall get anything to eat besides eggs? I asked Jake, and he said the butcher began coming through in June. Now what in the world does the butcher come through? And aren't we to have any meat till he has come through it? We cannot possibly live on eggs till June. We've cooked them in every way by this time, and they still come out eggs—more or less so, at least. For:

'You may boil, you may scramble the rest, if you will,
But the taste of the egglet will cling to it still.'

Laura, go first if you want to be noble, and be the cushion at the bottom of the heap of your family when we all tumble down these breakneck attic stairs!"

"Happie, what an absurd girl you are!" cried Margery. "Jake Shale meant that the butcher came through Crestville after June, carrying meat to the hotels beyond, and then we can get it easily [104] enough. But it is serious business getting it till then. Aunt Keren said she would bring meat when she came back, and if she buys a horse, as she means to, we can drive somewhere where it is to be had."

"Won't it be fun, jogging around the country picking up a roast here and a chop there?" cried incorrigible Happie. "I hope it will be a horse that we all can drive."

"Aunt Keren said she should buy a cheap horse, too tired to be dangerous, and we are to rest him while we drive," said Laura, unconscious of Miss Bradbury's humor, and repeating with entire gravity this statement at which the others all laughed. "For my part," she added, "I shall be mortified to drive such a horse."

"You can sit on the back seat and look like a guest; Margery and I will drive," said Happie. She danced ahead of the others towards the kitchen, swinging Penny to her shoulder as she ran. She stopped short in the doorway with a shocked little cry.

"What's the matter?" said Margery.

"We have no horse to blush for, but we must blush for ourselves; the bread has run over the pans, and down on the table! Only look! And we are all so hungry! It must be as sour as sour! I'm so scatter-brained!" And Happie pulled her own bright locks with a contrite face, offering Penny the ear nearest the shoulder on which she was seated to be boxed. But Penny kissed her sister's flushed cheek instead.

CHAPTER VII [105]

THE DOVE'S ALIGHTING

"It's all my fault," cried Margery repentantly, assuming the blame and the duty of repairing the damage to the snowy pine table at one and the same time. "I promised to look after the bread and put it into the oven, and between Aunt Keren's going and our trip to the attic, I never thought of it again. Bread is not such a simple thing; I wish we could buy our bread, as we did in town."

"No work is simple I find, dear," said her mother. "It takes all kinds of qualities to do anything well—which accounts for the prevalence of poor labor. Never mind the bread; it is beyond sweetening by any amount of soda. We will make more to-night, and subsist on biscuits and buckwheat cakes for dinner and supper."

"Buckwheat cakes are far from simple," Happie remarked, suggestively surveying a burn on her forefinger, the result of her recent failure with the delicacy in question.

"The cakes are simple; it's the griddle where the stick comes," said Margery.

"Literally, if you mean the sticking," smiled her mother. [106]

Laura, standing with her face pressed against the steaming glass of the window pane, sighed heavily. Mrs. Scollard turned and crossing over to her side, looked for a moment out upon the reeking scene. The rain poured down in torrents, swept sidewise across the fields by the roaring wind. The ground looked black at a little distance, the trees bent their bare boughs to the storm's fury; not a sound, not a human being lightened the desolation of the outlook.

The lonely woman felt her heart tighten under the grip of a fresh tide of homesickness. Miss Bradbury had been trying of late to encourage her by hinting that if she were not perfectly restored to health in the autumn, she could spend the winter in the Ark, so at the worst there was no reason for anxiety. But what a life to lead, to condemn her clever children to! How could she bear it? Then the courage that made her all that she was, the courage that Happie had inherited, rose to answer her own question. She could bear it because she must bear it; she would fight for her health, and be able once more to work and to live for her children.

"When this storm has spent itself," she said brightly, "we shall see the spring fairly leaping forward in all its loveliness. This is a sort of aftermath of all winter's fury. It can't last long with such a wind as this raging, and when it passes you girls will find arbutus and hepatica, anemones, and very soon violets. It is going to be a wonderful country for flowers, for all sorts of [107] beauty. I think we shall hear song birds in Crestville that we never heard before, and fancy what it will be to hunt for wild flowers at the foot of those glorious mountains! I think there could hardly be a more splendid view than ours."

Happie crept up and peeped slyly over her mother's shoulder. She saw a moisture on the long lashes that belied the blithe tone and the enthusiasm.

"It's just a trifle dim now, motherums," was all that Happie said, but the tone in which she said it made the words what they were meant to be—the salute of a good soldier to the courage of his

superior officer.

"Oh, by and by will be a sweeter by and by, of course," Margery chimed in. "I suppose we shall all feel better when it clears up."

The dinner that day did not promise to be precisely a success. Polly and Penny had risen superior to the weather in such a game of romps that the baby appeared upon the scene decidedly cross. Bob came in wet through and exhausted from a tussle with the barn door which had to be rehung upon its broken hinges to protect the books still lying in their packing cases, stored in the rickety building. He found it impossible to talk; his muscles ached, he had pounded his thumb black and blue in his efforts at carpentering, and creeping chills, the result of his wetting, chased one another down his spine. [108]

All that Happie had said of the preponderance of eggs in their limited bill of fare was strictly true. It was hard to consider a dinner satisfactory when its main dish was scrambled eggs, after one had had boiled eggs for breakfast, and was looking forward to fried eggs for supper. Dishes too had to be washed as they went along, for the supply of kitchen utensils was low until the mistress of the house should return with reinforcements.

"When we were in New York we turned a faucet, and took it for granted that hot water in the sink was a natural institution, like a hot spring. Now that we have to heat every drop we begin to realize it was a sort of phenomenon," sighed Margery, lifting the teakettle to the forward hole of the stove, and signaling Bob to put in another stick of wood before she set it down.

"We will hope that Aunt Keren may find the clean, rosy-cheeked young girl, or even the brown-faced-elderly-woman variation of the theme which Margery suggested," said Mrs. Scollard. "It is rather a struggle alone, without conveniences."

"There's a woman coming down the road, mama," said Polly, whose face, with Penny's, was pressed against the steaming window, looking out upon the universal wetness.

Laura dropped the towel, held ready for wiping dishes, though the water was not yet warm, and ran to look. [109]

"She's very wet, mama, and she's fearfully long," Laura announced.

"And she's heading for here!" cried Bob, as if that were the acme of wonders.

"Can she be a lost Bittenbender?" suggested Happie.

The tall woman came in, when bidden to do so, and set herself, marvelously erect, on the edge of a chair.

"It's a very severe rain," remarked Mrs. Scollard, somewhat at loss how to treat her unexpected visitor.

"I've seen worse rains than this already," retorted the angular one. "Do you like it here?"

"We shall grow to be very fond of the place," said Mrs. Scollard cautiously. "We are trying not to be homesick. You see we have always lived in New York."

"And you are doing your own work yet!" exclaimed the visitor. "I heard you wasn't use to doin' nothin'. It's bad enough to be strangers without takin' all the hard jobs to once, yet! I wouldn't care if I was to help you a while; I've got time."

"Do you mean that you would stay here?" cried Mrs. Scollard, eagerly.

"Yes; I don't care if I do," answered the woman. "You just say so once, and I'll stay."

"Are you a losted Bippenbender? Happie said so," Penny cried shrilly and unexpectedly.

"A Bittenbender? What do you know about the Bittenbenders? No, I hain't a Bittenbender. I'm poor enough in money without bein' poor truck yet. My name's Rosie Gruber," said the stranger with an air of forever setting at rest any possible doubt as to her desirability. [110]

Margery and Happie exchanged a sly glance of amusement; anything less like a rose than their caller would have been hard to find. But the important point was that she was willing to stay and do housework.

Mrs. Scollard, feeling that Miss Keren-happuch's quest was more than uncertain, and that almost any risk was better than their certain troubles, engaged her on the spot, and was as delighted as she was amused to see their new-bloomed Rose take off her wet hat, remove her long overshoes, produce from under the skirt of her own gown a blue checked gingham apron, and go down on her knees, instanter, to rake the ashes out from the stove.

"This fire's pretty near out," she remarked. "If you want to eat at twelve—you do, don't you?—you've got to get your potatoes over pretty soon, and this fire'll need an hour to get up. Your wood's almost all; hadn't you ought to git some?"

"Almost all what?" asked Bob. "Isn't it right; anything wrong with it?"

"It's almost all," repeated Rose firmly. "All—don't you know what that is? How many sticks do you see there? Isn't it almost all? Nothin' wrong with the wood if they was more of it. Say, there hain't nothin' wrong with the boy, is they? He looks so sorter dumb at a body yet!" [111]

"He didn't quite understand," said Mrs. Scollard gently, as Bob turned away to conceal the broad grin spreading over his face as he caught their new acquisition's meaning, and Happie bolted from the room.

Peculiarities of dialect did not affect the relish of the dinner which this hardy Rose served at thirteen minutes after twelve. Everything did taste so good to the hungry, weary and lonely Scollards! Margery and Happie renewed their duets of old Patty-Pan days as they dried Rosie's dishes, and their mother sat down to write Miss Bradbury of her coming, and to tell her that she might return at once to the bosom of a greatly cheered family, for the maid they wanted had found them, and search for her on their side was no longer necessary.

The storm cleared away in the night, and the glorious sunrise of the morning ushered in the spring. With it came soft brooding days in which the grass and leaves wakened to life, the birds dropped down from the warm sky in daily increasing kinds and numbers, and the flowers of early May lifted up their delicate little faces. Polly and Penny came home daily with wilting hepatica and anemones and violets in their warm little hands, while the older children sought and found on their rambles the arbutus whose sweetness the winds bore into the chambers of the Ark, past the dainty new curtains. [112]

Rosie proved a comfort in spite of angularity of form and peculiarities of speech. She was such a balm to perturbed minds and weary muscles that the children privately referred to her as "the Dove," for her coming had been the harbinger of peace to the Ark. She evidently regarded the entire family as helpless infants, needing her unceasing care and vigilance, and she gave them no less than she deemed they needed, piloting them through the waters of inexperience.

Miss Bradbury wrote that she was coming back. Margery and Happie speculated on the effect of Rosie and her employer on each other, but Happie felt sure that they would get on together, for each was in her way a character, and their sterling honesty was of much the same pattern.

Aunt Keren was going to bring them something that they would enjoy, "a species of toy," so she wrote, yet something that she hoped to make useful. They must get Jake to bring his three-seated wagon to the station if the young Scollards came to meet her, as she hoped they would.

They did, or at least Margery, Happie and Bob did, consumed with curiosity as to what they should find encumbering Miss Bradbury.

When she stepped briskly off the car on the steps which the grade of the track at Crestville compelled the porter to place for passengers, the Scollards saw her encumbrance, and hailed it with a shout. There, dismounting behind Miss Keren-happuch, so thoroughly laden that there [113] seemed no question that lady was already making him useful, his cheerful face one mass of smiles, came Ralph Gordon!

Happie and Bob dashed at him regardless of a man with a fishing-pole, come up for trout, and collided violently with the combination. The brief mishap, though it left the traveler furious, did not dampen Happie's ardor. She shook both Ralph's hands so hard, and exclaimed: "Well, I never did!" so emphatically, and so many times, that there was no doubt of her pleasure at seeing her former neighbor. Bob slapped him on the back with such abandon that Ralph swallowed whole the durable black licorice drop with which he had been beguiling the last moments of the journey, and choked over it so violently that he had no breath to reply to the questions his friends hurled at him in rapid succession.

"I thought that you might like a guest, a crumb from your Patty-Pans, so to speak," said Miss Bradbury, surveying the effect of her surprise with much satisfaction. "Ralph has had a cold, and has been working too hard," she explained. "I need a boy to help Bob, so I took this one. I shall expect you to keep him hard at work, allowing no time for talk or play. How's your Charlotte-mother?"

"Better for your return, Aunt Keren," said Margery sweetly, but truthfully.

"What about Snigs?" asked Happie. [114]

"At home with his mother," returned Aunt Keren. "But he will come up in the summer, by August, if not before."

"Is Ralph——" Happie began, but stopped herself before she had framed a question that might have been awkward to answer.

Miss Keren-happuch finished it for her. "Going to stay?" she said. "Yes, he is, or at least until something happens to call him home. Mrs. Gordon yielded to my arguments, and consented to lending him to us. I told her we needed him, especially Bob. So I captured him. Curious that I went to get a girl, and brought home a boy, an altogether unforeseen boy."

Jake Shale drove slowly up the hill. The young people talked incessantly, and all together. Miss Bradbury listened in a pleased silence that betrayed itself in her eyes, for her lips were unbending. She saw that already the effect of her transplanting the Scollards showed; they were blossoming out like the season under the warmth of freedom from anxiety.

Miss Bradbury found to her surprise that she herself was glad to get home, and thought of her coming in those terms. Down in the bottom of her staunch old heart, the good woman had not looked forward to a summer in the Ark with less than dread.

The children took Ralph out at once to display to him all the interesting points of Miss Bradbury's estate, leaving its owner to their mother, and to form the acquaintance of Rose Gruber, "the Dove," whose olive branch was waxing greener in the eyes of all the "Archeologists," as Bob [115] called the inmates of the Ark. Though Happie said that she thought they "were more like Architects, for the dictionary said they made, built, planned, contrived, and that was a full description of the Scollards."

"The creek is high," Rosie called after Bob and Happie, as they followed Margery and Ralph out the side door.

"We are going over to it on our way back," Happie answered over her shoulder. "It does seem to me a pity to call a beautiful trout brook 'a crick,' just as if it were a sort of rheumatism! Brooks sound like lovely things, but cricks!" She ended her supplementary remarks to her companions with a tiny shudder.

"Books are in running brooks; is that why you like them?" suggested Ralph. "Or is it because they chatter, chatter as they flow—fellow feeling, you know?" He glanced slyly at Happie. "Creeks ought to chatter even more than brooks, being an American variety."

There was an old grist mill half a mile away from the Ark, turned, when it did turn, by a beautiful stream, a trout brook made up of many mountain springs, rising far up in the hills, and rushing through Madison County to the river, which should bear them on to the sea. Clear and brown were the waters of this brook, its bottom paved with stones, its banks, rising steep on the one [116] side, and gently sloping on the other, grown with ferns, luxuriant with rhododendrons, and surmounted with pines, spruce and giant maples. It was an enchanted region to the Scollards, city bred, and "Patty-Pan" set hitherto. They were delighted to take Ralph to the brook and show him that if the Ark were shabby, the country was perfect—they discovered a strong sense of proud proprietorship in their breasts as they introduced Ralph to their haunts, and it dawned upon them that they must be beginning to feel at home.

The brook was indeed high that day; the falls over the mill-dam were yellow from the upstirring of recent rains, boiling and seething over the logs creditably to their exhibitors, and the foam-flecked waters ran swiftly down, under the bridge that crossed the road to their goal.

"Well, do you raise mermaids?" asked Ralph, pointing out into the middle of the stream. Then before the others could speak, his face and voice changed, and he cried out: "Good gracious, it's Penny!"

It was Penny, seated on a log which for the moment had lodged midstream, held by a rock which could not hold it long. In her arms the child held something yellow; Jeunesse Dorée, Happie saw at once. She looked wet, her soft hair hung heavy around her pale little face, but she held up her head valiantly, and clasped the kitten safe and dry to her breast. [117]

"Happie, oh, Happie!" she cried, as she saw the group on the bank, and held out a hand appealingly. It nearly cost her balance; she shook on her perilous seat, and Margery hid her face, while Happie caught her breath.

Then she raised her voice and called: "Hold on, hold on tight, darling. Bob's coming!" As she spoke the log swung loose, and floated a few feet farther down the stream. Bob dashed out into the water, and Ralph followed him. The brook was so high, the motion of the water so swift that there was danger for one alone, should he lose his footing, and Bob could not swim.

Steadying each other, the two boys waded out, keeping upright with difficulty, and watching the rigid little figure towards which they were struggling, fearing every moment that it would be jarred from its perch.

The rocks were slippery under their feet, the water rose well above their knees, logs and debris came against them, the log drifted ahead of them, always a little further out of reach. Suddenly it struck against the support of the bridge, and Penny's head disappeared under the water.

It was Ralph, who, letting go of Bob's shoulder, threw himself downward towards the spot where the child had disappeared. As he did so, he heard the cry of anguish from the girls on the bank. He remembered, with a prayer in his heart, that the little creature would drift far more swiftly [118] than the heavy log had done.

But in an instant she rose further down the stream, and Ralph struggled to his feet and threw himself towards her, instinctively realizing that he could reach her quicker by falling in her direction than by striving to walk or to swim in that seething water. Little Penny's devotion to her kitten was meeting its reward; clasping it tight to her breast, she could not throw up her arms, and her light body floated long enough for Ralph to seize it.

He pulled her towards him by her pink skirt, and Bob, seeing the rescue, darted to his aid, lost his footing, fell headlong into the water, but reached his friend nevertheless, and the two boys, with Penny and Dorée, clambered up under the bridge none the worse for their experience.

The terror-stricken girls ran, slipping and stumbling over rocks and roots, to join them, and nearly dismembered Penny in the effort to hug her simultaneously.

"We mustn't let mother see her like this; it would shock her too much even to think of the danger now it's over," said Margery. "We will take her to the barn and get Rosie to come there with water for a hot bath, and we'll put dry clothes on the darling, and mother shall not know of this till we are sure Penny's no worse for the scare. What were you doing, Pennypet? How did you get [119] on that dreadful log, out in the middle of the brook?"

"I sat on it up by the dam," said Penny cheerfully—she was the least frightened of the excited group. "The log was up there when I began to sit on it, and Dorée was playing with me. He was playing he was a goldfish and I was a pink water lily—'cause I've got on my pinkie chamray, don't you see?" Penny indicated her best beloved pink chambray frock as she spoke, looking ruefully at its wet folds. "Then the log wented off—oh, Dorée and I played the goldfish had crawled up into the pink water lily, and we were having the most fun! That's 'cause I was holding him, don't you see? He had crawled up into the pink water lily, truly. But the log wented down the brook, and

we didn't know it was going, but I wasn't much scared; I could hold Dorée, don't you see? And you came—I didn't know Ralphie had come to the Nark!" She reached over to pat Ralph's face. "I guess I could have sat on it ever so long—days 'n days!—only it bumped. I don't think Dorée's hurt." She peered anxiously at shivering Dorée, who was wrapped in her wet garments, making desperate efforts to get away and lick himself dry.

"I don't think he's at all hurt, you precious baby!" cried Happie. "Give me Dorée; I can keep him warmer than you can, because you're so wet. There! Now boys, hurry as fast as you can! You're both soaking, and I'm afraid Penny'll be sick, and I'm shaking with cold; I'm so nervous. Run!" [120]

They ran, and by the time they had reached the barn, both the boys were warmed up. Rosie came out and rubbed Penny into a glow, put her into dry garments, and sent her forth, apparently as good as new.

Margery and Happie told the story of their adventure to Aunt Keren, but not to their mother, who was not yet strong enough to be startled.

Miss Bradbury listened to it without a comment, but when it was finished, she laid a hand caressingly on Ralph's arm. "I said I needed a boy! But I didn't know I needed a coast guard," she remarked. "You have begun your career in the Ark appropriately, Ralph; pulling in people from the flood!"

CHAPTER VIII [121]
GRETTA

"Happie is beginning to be indeed happy, and without effort," said Miss Bradbury in high satisfaction as she watched her pretty namesake blossoming into increasing brightness every day. It was quite true that Happie was beginning to be happy without effort. The first symptom of her growing reconciliation with her new home was that the lively correspondence with the friends whom she had left behind was abating; she found the days too short for the delights that the farm had to offer her, and she had less and less time for letter writing.

Happie had found a new interest in life besides the many interests of her first country spring-time, and her growing intimacy with the wild creatures,—an interest not unlike the latter, but far more absorbing. And this is how it began.

One day she was walking alone down the roadside. The sun lay on her head as warm as if it were June, and the dust rose under her feet. Out of the tangled growth of the wayside came frequently the fluttering of wings, or a squirrel in vociferous haste, whisking his tail and scolding her. [122]

She came up at last to the furthest boundary of the Ark farm, far down on the margin of the brook, and to the house nearest to the Ark. It interested her, because she had heard that in it lived a girl of her own age, together with two women who had the reputation of being decidedly cross, and of leading this young girl a hard life. They were her cousins, without whose dubious shelter the girl would have been homeless.

As Happie came up she caught a glimpse of a brownish sunbonnet, and paused to peer at her unknown neighbor, herself hidden by a friendly chestnut tree. She saw a pair of shoulders, unmistakably youthful, covered by a faded but scrupulously clean gingham, and a plump brown hand skilfully wielding a paint brush with which it was renewing the storm-beaten red paint on the posts which upheld the wire fence forming the farm boundary.

The girl stopped her work, and, with an upward movement of her arm, threw off her sunbonnet with the back of her left hand, and drew her arm across her warm brow. She had dark brown eyes, darker hair, and her skin was as brown as a berry, but beautifully clear, and her cheeks wore a flush as red as the tint of her red lips. She was so pretty that Happie caught her breath with the pleasure almost all girls feel in another girl's beauty, no matter what sarcasms are pronounced by boys to the contrary. There was a warmth, a charm about this girl that warm-hearted Happie was quick to feel, and with it a look of patience that went to her heart. [123]

"She needs a friend," thought Happie, and went forward without a doubt in her mind that she could fill the want, not because she was conceited, but because her motives were too pure, and her impulse too kindly to allow a doubt of her reception.

"I think you must be Gretta Engel," she said, her sunny face wreathed in smiles, as she came up to the painter.

The girl started violently, and blushed to the dark hair lying in damp rings on her forehead. She quickly pulled her brown sunbonnet into place, and stared at Happie without speaking, like a frightened rabbit cowering beside the fence.

"I'm Happie Scollard, and I live—I'm living this summer—on the next farm, the one that used to be Bittenbenders'," Happie continued. "I've been anxious to know you; we're so near the same age, and such close neighbors."

She paused for the reply which did not come, and then, for lack of it, took up the conversation again.

"It's lovely here; those mountains are glorious. I was so lonely and homesick at first I did not know how to bear it, but I'm getting happier every day. It's a beautiful place, Crestville, isn't it?"

"Yes, it is," returned Gretta.

"Have you always lived here?" asked Happie.

"Yes, I have," replied Gretta. [124]

"And I used to live in a flat in New York; you can't imagine what a change this is!" said Happie cheerfully.

"I guess," said Gretta, looking at the tip of her brush as if hoping it might help her.

"Don't you get lonely here? I do, though there are so many of us," persisted Happie.

"Oh, I don't know; I don't get much time," said Gretta desperately, looking about as if meditating flight from this determined girl with whom she had not the slightest desire to make friends, and whose accent and little air of being accustomed to another world than that of the country girl embarrassed and annoyed her.

To her dismay, Happie seated herself on the grass at her side. "I don't believe there's any risk in sitting on the grass, if it is only May," she said. "It's as warm as June, and it must be dry. I think you need a friend, Gretta, and I want you to look at me hard and see if you don't think I could be she. The girls in New York rather liked me."

She thrust her head forward, inviting inspection as she applied for the position, and Gretta looked into the laughing eyes, and into the sweet, dimpling face bent towards her. Her own dark eyes lighted with pleasure in what she saw, and in spite of her shyness, she laughed a little.

"You don't want me for a friend; I'm different," she said. [125]

"You look nice," announced Happie emphatically, "and I'd like to have you try me. If you mean that I've lived in the city, and so had more chance than you to get at books, besides having a clever and learned duck of a mother to teach me, while you have been all your life motherless, and far from libraries and good schools, besides being as busy as a bee, I think that's more to your credit than mine. If we liked each other, I could give you what I got out of books, and you could teach me how to be useful—wouldn't that be a good bargain for us both?"

Gretchen Engel turned to Happie with full appreciation of the kindly tact that so delicately, yet firmly grappled with her unspoken sensitiveness, and put on a level with herself the sweet girl, whose advantages had been many, while hers had been none at all. Her eyes filled with tears; she had a nature that was profoundly loving, and she was starving for kindness. Something had set her apart from the other girls who gathered with her through the winter in the little schoolhouse, and she was scolded all day long for doing her patient best in her meagre and reluctant home. Happie had guessed right that she was desperately lonely; she had not begun to conjecture how lonely, nor how much despair was mingling in that loneliness, though Gretta was but a girl of fourteen. No one could have needed nor wanted a friend more than pretty Gretta.

Seeing the sincerity that shone upon her from Happie's face, feeling her lovableness as she felt [126] the warmth of the May sunshine, Gretta succumbed to her charm, forgetting to be shy.

"You're good," she said decidedly. "I'd like to be friends with you, if you could stand me, but I don't know when we'd ever get to see each other."

Happie gave a little hitch to her chin that meant determination.

"You must be outdoors a good deal to get that beautiful brown tint of yours; it will be queer if we can't get together. I never saw a pair of girls yet that couldn't outwit a pair of old cousins if they set out to do it," she said. "They are your cousins with whom you live, aren't they? Rosie Gruber is living with us, and she told me about you."

"I guess it didn't lose much in telling," said Gretta flushing. "I hate to have folks pitying me, and saying what hard times I have. Not but what it's true, though!" she added in a burst of self-pity and of confidence in the sympathy which she read in Happie's face. "I wouldn't care if I did work all the time, though girls that have mothers get a little time to themselves, even when they're poor. But no matter what I do, it's the wrong thing, and I get so sick of it that I 'most give up. Yes, they're my cousins that I live with, and they grudge me a living, though I earn one hard. I don't feel to owe them one thing; I guess they'd have put me on the township, only they'd have had that much bigger taxes, so they kept me. When I'm a year older I'm going off to work for strangers. I [127] believe I'd have asked your mother to have took me, only I heard them telling you had nice things, and had lived in New York, and I thought I wouldn't do for you."

"You poor Gretta!" exclaimed Happie patting the brown hand nearer to her. "I don't see how you live! Here am I loved to death, the loveliest mother a girl ever had, the best brother in all the world—Bob's a perfect trump!—and Margery's so pretty and sweet you couldn't help loving her—she's seventeen, and just bursting into young ladyhood. And Laura, well, Laura's all right, of course, and Polly's the most dependable, good little creature, and Penny—Penelope, the baby—is the dearest little four-year-old you ever saw. To think I have all these, and you have no one! It doesn't seem fair!"

"Yes, and you can go to school yet!" cried Gretta with a bitterness that she had not shown before in speaking of her cousins. "They won't let me go much, and we don't have good schools here anyway. That's why I hate to see folks; I don't know anything, and they'll laugh at my way of talking."

"Mercy, Gretta, that's nothing!" cried Happie energetically. "My mother says if a person has brains, nothing can crush them; they'll prove themselves in spite of obstacles, and if they haven't,

no amount of schooling can give them. Now that we're friends—for we are friends and that's settled—I can help you lots, so easily that neither you nor I will know it's done. You can speak just [128] as well as any other girl, if you won't mind a hint now and then, and I have loads of books to lend you. And you must teach me practical things, milking—Aunt Keren's going to get two cows—and churning and everything I don't know. Isn't that a large order to fill? Why, I begin to see why I came here, over and above mother's health!" Happie had grown brighter-eyed and more enthusiastic as she talked. "Mother says each soul has certain tasks set for it that no other soul can do, and that we are led along to places where our work is ready for us, and that we must be careful not to miss it when it comes to us. Maybe it was for your sake as well as mama's that dear Aunt Keren brought us all up here to her farm, which she had never seen, to spend this summer! Maybe it was because you were so lonely and needed friends so much. You've such a strong, beautiful face that I'm sure you are too fine not to get some slight chance to be happy and clever."

Gretta looked keenly and quickly at Happie, suspecting mockery in these compliments, for she mistrusted praise, having been carefully trained to consider herself far below meriting it. She saw nothing but perfect truth in the brown eyes gazing into her darker ones, eyes alight with overflowing love and the joy of the thought that their owner might do good to another who lacked so much.

"'CAN'T YOU EVER COME TO SEE ME?'"

All the repressed riches of the country girl's nature leaped up to meet the good offered her, [129] caring less for the material good than for the treasure of affection, inestimable to one to whom it had thus far been denied, and who had more than most the capacity for receiving and returning it.

Gretta struggled for adequate expression, and missed it; she could not have voiced or understood what she felt at that moment.

"You're good," was what she said.

Happie understood. "So are you," she retorted. "And very lovable. That makes us both good, so we will have good times. Now go on painting, or you may get scolded. If I had a brush I think I could help you."

Gretta shook her head. "I'm used to scolding," she said. "And you'd get red paint all over your dress."

She dipped her brush in the pot, carefully scraped it on the edge, and made a vigorous stroke down the side of the post next in order.

"Can't you ever come to see me?" Happie asked as she watched her. "You know our place, the Bittenbender farm?"

Gretta nodded. "Mrs. Bittenbender was my grandmother," she said.

"Not really!" cried Happie. "Why, I've been wondering about that family, and you must know all about them! It seemed so queer for them to go off and leave their furniture in the house. Of

course there isn't——" Happie stopped herself on the point of saying that there was not much furniture, fearing that Gretta might mind it, and said instead: "There isn't any reason why they shouldn't leave their furniture, only most people take it with them, or sell it when they move. And you are a Bittenbender!" [130]

"No, indeed, I'm not!" cried Gretta. "My grandmother married Mr. Bittenbender for her second husband. She was my father's mother, and so her name was Engel before that. I guess her second husband mortgaged the place, furniture and all, so he had to leave the furniture. But he didn't have to give up the place if he hadn't wanted to. He had plenty money; he was an old miser. That's why he liked better to keep his money than to pay your aunt, so he gave up the place. My grandmother died when I was a baby. I guess that old Isaac Bittenbender wasn't too honest. My grandmother was a good woman, and they say she had a hard life after she married him. He got too old to farm towards the last, so he left your aunt take the place."

"He *let* my aunt take the place," suggested Happie, fulfilling her promise of hint-giving for Gretta's improvement. "They left an old, worn-off horsehair trunk in the attic. Some day when you can, you must come and open it. You are the nearest to being a representative of the family whom we have found here, and I'm dying to investigate that trunk."

"If there'd been anything in it worth seeing he wouldn't have let—have left it," said Gretta. "They say he was the closest man in Madison County. I heard he made my grandmother——" She stopped suddenly to listen. "I hear Eunice calling; she's the crossest of my cousins, if there's a difference. I've got to go." [131]

She arose, and Happie was surprised to discover that her height overtopped her own by a full head, for she had thought of her as she sat as being rather short.

Gretta moved with a grace and dignity that also surprised her; there was a freedom in every motion, and a splendor of poise won from her intimacy with the mountains, which made Happie wish that she could see her clad in beautiful garments. But the faded reddish gingham gown, and the brown sunbonnet were far from unbecoming to the girl. Happie said to herself: "Why, I thought she was pretty, but I believe she is a beauty!"

Gretta stood for a moment dipping her brush uncertainly in and out of her paint pot, not knowing how to take her leave, once more self-conscious and embarrassed.

Happie solved the difficulty. "You won't mind if this Eunice does scold now, will you, Gretta? And you won't feel lonely? Because we are going to be friends forever and forever, amen." And she put her arm around the faded gingham-clad waist.

Gretta drew off and looked at her. "Oh, I guess you don't want me!" she said, But there was a ring of happiness in her voice, as if she were sure of contradiction. [132]

"You'll see!" laughed Happie, and kissed her new friend. "At any rate I *think* I want you. Good-bye till next time. Can you come to see me?"

"I don't know; I shall be painting this fence for the next few days," said Gretta suggestively, as she returned the kiss.

"All right," cried Happie triumphantly, and ran away waving her hand to Gretta, who walked backwards looking after her, leaving a slight trail of paint in her wake which threatened trouble for her when it should be discovered.

"I have made friends with Gretta Engel," she announced, coming into the dining-room where her family were busied with helping or waiting for the dinner which Rosie Gruber was "dishing up."

"She's so handsome I couldn't tell you how handsome she is, and there is something about her that draws you to her like a magnet! I'm going to lend her books and give her pleasure, and she's going to do lots for me. I shouldn't wonder if we came here for her sake—partly, at least."

Rosie surveyed Happie with high approval; of all the young Scollards, Happie was her favorite.

"Gretta's the prettiest and brightest girl in Crestville," she declared. "But she's awful shy. If you've got her to talk to you, you've done wonders. And if you make her friends with you, you'll be doin' the best thing you've ever done in your short life. If you was to know the whole of Gretta's story, you'd think she'd had pretty hard luck. I'm glad you hain't one of the sort of folks that can't see through a faded dress, nor yet under a sunbonnet, Happie." [133]

"If she's got Happie to take her up, she's had one piece of good luck," said Bob, who never hesitated to show publicly his appreciation of his sister. "Happie makes every one else happy—that's a well-wearing, well-worn family joke, Ralph—and she's not the sort to let them slip back again into unhappiness because she gets tired of her bargain, are you, Hapsie? Are you going to adopt your beauty?"

Margery, Laura and their mother laughed. The family had never exhausted the fun of the story of Happie's adoption of a colored girl of twelve when the young woman herself was at the suitable age of four. She had insisted on bringing big Cora Jackson home with her, and on opening her bank to take out her pennies to buy ice cream for her sustenance. She had been much grieved when her protégée had been found to have decamped, taking with her her little protector's gold shoulder pins, as well as Margery's new parasol.

Happie now joined in the laugh, but gave her decided little hitch of the chin.

"And if I did," she said, "it wouldn't be a bad plan. At least I wouldn't scold her all day and every day, as her cross old cousins do. And there's a great difference between the Cora Jackson of my [134]

childhood, and this pretty Gretta of my old age! You wait till you see her, Bob! She's far prettier than Allie Herford." Which was a home thrust, for Bob considered Allie Herford the prettiest girl of his acquaintance.

Ralph looked up quizzically. "Don't you mind 'em, Happie," he said. "I believe in your four-leaf-clover-of-the-fields, and that you will find her good luck. Besides, you must not let your young mind get embittered by these cynics. 'It's better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all.' So it's better to invest your trust, even though your bubbles—bust. Pardon the inelegance, Laura; I did not realize that 'burst' only rhymed with 'trust' when it was 'bust,' until I was too far embarked on my poem to tack—to carry on my metaphor with an unmixedness that I hope you appreciate. Never mind if your Gretta deceives you!"

"I never knew any other boy so imbued with the poets!" said Margery in mock admiration of Ralph's outburst.

But Rosie, flying in and out with steaming dishes, was impressed only by the matter, not the manner of his remarks.

"Don't you talk silly, Ralph Gordon," she said spiritedly. "Gretta Engel never will deceive nobody. She will do Happie good too, and she's made a good bargain yet. Your meat's fried most too much. Set up and eat awhile before it gits cold."

CHAPTER IX [135]

JUNE'S PERFECT DAYS

"Do you know we love the Ark?" said Happie to Margery, as they opened the back door to let in all the glorious outdoors June time, having at last succeeded in their ambition to get down one morning ahead of Rosie.

June had come softly, swiftly over the mountains, bringing all her wealth of beauty to the exiles from the lesser treasures of the city, a beautiful surprise in every hour. Robins were nesting in the gnarled apple trees; Happie looked into their homes every morning when she arose, sharing the happiness of the brooding mothers whose secrets she jealously guarded.

Grass and clover were beginning to blossom to be ready for harvesting on the fourth of July, cherries were reddening in the long sunshine of the perfect days, and nature generously seconded the efforts of the newcomers and of the carpenters in repairing and concealing damages to the neglected buildings of the new-old home.

Ralph and Bob were busy building chicken houses and tinkering on sheds. Miss Bradbury, in the innocence of her heart, had decided that it would be good to keep chickens, and they had been [136] added to the stock of the Ark.

Rosie was most competent, slightly cross as quick workers are apt to be, but she took the direction and care of the household upon her shoulders, and Miss Bradbury was glad to overlook a snappishness which was, as Margery said, "merely the snapping of the crust; not one bit from her heart." It was worth while for the sake of being steered through the waters of her inexperience of farm life. They all felt that Penny was justified in her gravely uttered opinion that Rosie was "a lovely lady."

The family had discovered that Rosie had had her share of sorrow, represented by five child graves in the Methodist churchyard, and a living husband who occasionally called upon her. This Mahlon was working on a farm seven miles distant. Bob asked if he were employed as a scarecrow, for a more limp, lazy, incompetent creature was never seen outside The Wizard of Oz. He had a trick of standing on one leg, and swinging the other in unison with the arm on the same side which was an inexhaustible amusement to the children when he came to the farm. He talked in a high, monotonous whine which gave his long thin face the effect of a penny whistle emitting the sound—altogether a sharper contrast to energetic Rosie that he was would have been hard to imagine. The Scollards gathered that her struggle for existence when her children were coming, and quickly going to fill those little graves, had been harder than she said. They were glad for her [137] sake, as well as their own, that she had closed her forlorn house, sent off her Mahlon to work in Zurich according to his ability, and had come to work for them according to her own, very different ability.

Competent as Rosie was, however, she was but one woman, and there was enough left for the girls to do to help her. Happie, on the whole and allowing for those days when the grasshopper is a burden, reveled in her tasks and sang about them all day long, getting brown and plump and prettier for her activity. Margery never reached the point of enjoying her share of the labor, which made it the more creditable that she quietly performed it each day, never complaining, still less shirking, for Margery had that fine conscientiousness which asks: "Should I?" and never: "Would I?"

Rosie came down in less than ten minutes after the girls, and altered the draughts of the stove instantly. Rosie always changed slightly anything done by another, being imbued with doubts of others' competency.

"What got you up so early?" she asked. "My alarm went off, but I laid a minute plannin' my work for the day."

"I couldn't sleep, I was so excited about that horse," said Happie. "I suppose I woke Margery, though I thought I was trying not to waken her. Just as soon as breakfast is over, and the work done I want to go over to tell Gretta about him." [138]

Happie had gone on since she had scraped acquaintance with Gretta, cultivating her all down the fence line as she painted. When the posts were all done, and the double line of wire connecting gorgeous fresh red posts, Happie had completely exorcized Gretta's shyness. She had even followed her up when duty called her to decorate the posts nearest to the house, and had braved the forbidding glare of Gretta's cousins' eyes with such beaming unconsciousness of the possibility of any one's objecting to Gretta's having a friend that she had escaped being ordered away, as Gretta had prophesied that she would be.

"I'd hate to have them say anything to you," Gretta had said anxiously.

And Happie had laughed with a pat on Gretta's arm that was meant to be reassuring, but which sent a great blob of red paint on the flagstone walk.

"They won't say anything to me, Gretta," she had declared. "No one ever does. I'll smile so sweetly, they can't reflect back a frown."

"I'll have to get that off with coal oil," Gretta remarked, regarding the spot on the walk ruefully. "You don't know my cousins; they're not very good looking-glasses. They frown anyway, and they don't reflect you, no matter how you smile."

It was true that they did not reflect Happie's smiles, but neither did they frown. They regarded her with icy impassivity, glad in their hearts of a chance to see near by "one of the new folks" about whom they felt so much curiosity, and reserving their right to prevent Gretta's enjoying her when they saw fit. [139]

Gretta was blossoming out under the new happiness and companionship; she was full of a quiet humor that delighted Happie, and she imitated her little niceties of speech with a quickness that rarely needed a second hint. But Happie had not thus far been able to overcome her shyness sufficiently to get her to meet any of the other inmates of the Ark, whom Gretta avoided under one head, as "the rest." She had begun to despair of ever making her one of their jolly little band when Don Dolor Bonaparte came to her aid.

"What is it to-day, Happie?" asked Miss Bradbury, noting the symptoms of haste in her namesake's breakfast preparations.

"I am going to trap Gretta with Don Dolor, Aunt Keren," laughed Happie. "I want to run over and tell her there is a horse coming, and I hope I shall be able to get her here to see him. You know Gretta is more than fond of horses, and they say she knows more about them than half the men around here; she can drive anything. I think I can coax her to the Ark by pretending we want her opinion of Don Dolor Bonaparte."

"I'm afraid, judging from Mr. Hewett's letter, that her opinion of him won't be high, and I'm certain she wouldn't have to be a horsewoman to drive him," said Miss Bradbury. "But by all means bait your trap with Don Dolor, and troll your woodland maiden to the Ark. I am curious to see the girl that attracts you so strongly." [140]

"I'm sure we shall love her if Happie does," added Mrs. Scollard. Her cheeks were gaining a June tint. Smiling back at her, Happie thought that it was not strange that they were all learning to love the farm that was restoring her to them.

Happie hurried through her morning tasks and raced over to see Gretta. She felt quite sure that at that hour she should find her carrying water to the young lettuce plants which her cousins, Eunice and Reba Neumann, were raising for the hotels five miles distant on the mountains, which in July and August would be thronged with guests.

"Gretta, Gretta!" cried Happie waving her hands as she leaped the garden fence. "Gretta, Aunt Keren has had a letter from Mr. Hewett, her agent in New York, and he has sent up a horse. Bob and Ralph are going down to the station this minute to bring him up. I think he must be pretty bad, because this Mr. Hewett wrote that we were not to judge him by our first impressions. He says he bought him for next to nothing, but if he survives the journey, and we feed him well, we'll see that it was not only a charity but an investment to buy him. He says he has blood, though at first sight we shall think he has only bones. He says his name is Don Dolor Bonaparte—only fancy! You've got to come back with me and receive him. We don't any of us know anything about horses, except Rosie, and you know a lot. So you come back with me, and tell me what you think of poor Don Dolor." And artful Happie smiled alluringly. [141]

Gretta looked up with a laugh in her dark eyes. "Maybe I don't see what you're after!" she said. "You want to get me started coming; I know! Truly, Happie, I don't like to see the rest. I don't know them, and if I did get over being afraid of them, still, I would never get time to visit. You bring the horse down the road and I'll see him there."

Happie folded her hands prayerfully. "Please, please, Gretta, come home with me and see the new old horse! Look at me; don't I look pleading? Have you the heart to say me nay, when I beg you with my paws folded, like a nice little dog, and say *please* so prettily?"

Gretta laughed. "You make folks do whatever you want," she said. "I'll come if you'll wait till I get these plants watered, and change my dress."

"I'll wait till the lettuce dresses itself for a salad and you for a visit, if you like!" cried Happie triumphantly. "Bob and Ralph have only just started for the station, and they won't get back for

nearly two hours anyway; Jake Shale took them down, and you know that is slower than walking. So we've plenty of time." [142]

"I've got to tell Eunice and Reba," said Gretta. "They may take a notion to make me stay home."

"I believe you hope that they will!" cried Happie reproachfully. "See here, Gretta, you'll find that the Scollards neither bark nor bite, because it is their nature to—not! They are the nicest things, every one of them! You'll like Margery better than me; that's my one fear in bringing you together."

"I guess not," said Gretta looking up at Happie from her knees as she weeded the lettuce with eyes full of dog-like devotion and admiration.

"You let me ask your cousins to let you go with me; they won't refuse you to me, for shame's sake. You've finished all your work for the morning," said Happie.

"Work's never finished," corrected Gretta out of her deeper experience. "And we haven't had dinner."

"Maybe it won't take long to look over Don Dolor; he may not be a large horse," suggested Happie. "Come along, Gretta."

Gretta ushered Happie into the fleckless kitchen. There were two gaunt women, looking past sixty, though neither could have been much past forty. One was stirring milk in a stone crock on the back of the stove, which was just thickening into perfection for schmier-kase, while her sister was tying on her sunbonnet with resolute jerks of the strings, and hunting for the basket to bring in more wood. Her movements were accompanied by a running fire of scolding about Gretta, to whose account she set down the absence of the basket, which all the time hung peacefully on a nail in full sight above the table. [143]

"What's wrong with you?" demanded Reba, lifting the crock from the stove and setting it down with the emphasis of its weight. "It's easier using the wheelbarrow anyhow, but if you want the basket, there 'tis. I guess you're getting near-sighted."

"I guess!" retorted Eunice derisively. "Why didn't you hang that there basket alongside the stove? Here I've been a-huntin' and a-huntin' for it," she added, catching sight of Gretta, and quite ignoring Happie.

"Good-morning, Miss Neumann," said that young lady, somewhat daunted by the difficulties of this beginning, but holding to her courage. "My aunt has a horse just arrived, and I'd like to have Gretta come over to see him, please. You'll let her go, for a little while, won't you?"

"A horse? From the city? What good does she expect a city horse to be on these mountains?" demanded Eunice. "She'd better bought one up here, and saved the express on him yet!"

"Oh, I think this horse was sent into the country for his health," laughed Happie. "You will let Gretta come over, won't you?"

"How do you make out with Rosie Gruber?" inquired Eunice. "She's got such a temper, folks say, Mahlon can't stay home. She hain't clean; not what we call clean." [144]

"Why, Miss Neumann!" cried Happie, shocked into undiplomatic defense of Rosie. "She hasn't a bad temper; she's only a little, wee bit snappish, and as to Mahlon, if it wasn't for Rosie he wouldn't have a home to stay in—but of course you know that even better than I do! And she's the cleanest woman! She's made our tumble-down old house as clean as wax. Rosie's a treasure."

"That house you seem to think so poor of hadn't ought to be yours anyhow," said the agreeable Eunice. "Old Bittenbender hadn't any right to give it over to your folks. There's cheatin' somewheres, but we couldn't never prove nothin'. 'Twan't his to give; we're certain of that. It ought to belong to Gretta here, and if she had it she could rent it out, or maybe take a couple of summer boarders after a year, or a couple of years more, instead of bein' a cost to us who need all we kin make for ourselves! Gretta, you git off that there bonnet and git up the potatoes. What you standin' round fer? Hain't there always work to do, I'd like to know?"

Gretta did not answer. She hung up her sunbonnet with quiet obedience, and took the tin basin in which to fetch potatoes. She seemed to recognize at once the uselessness of further pleas for her visit.

But Happie, seeing the clouding of the dark eyes and the look of shame on the pretty face of her new friend, cried out: "Oh, Miss Neumann, Gretta wouldn't be gone long! Won't you please, *please* let her come home with me? She hasn't been once! Are—you are going to let her come, aren't you?" [145]

"Well, I guess she hain't goin' visitin' before dinner!" said Eunice. "She'd better not go no time. I tell her she'll find out what she'll git, makin' friends with a city girl like you, that'll git tired of her 'soon's you've got used to her, and then where'll she be, with her head all filled up with foolish notions, and tryin' to talk fine, like you yet? I've got my eyes open; I see just what you're doin' with Gretta. She'd better stick to her own folks, that's what *she'd* better! She come into the world to work, and she's got to work all her life. You won't do her no good, makin' her discontented and then leavin' her. I've been warnin' her, but she's like all girls—thinks she knows more'n older folks! I'm glad I've got the chanct to tell you to your face you'd better leave Gretta stay where you found her. I bet you laugh at her now when you git home with the rest!"

Happie's eyes blazed. She took a step towards Eunice, drawing herself up to the woman's height in her righteous indignation. Gretta quailed, even while she rejoiced that this time Eunice had

met one who did not fear her.

"Miss Neumann," said Happie, trying to speak quietly, remembering that this woman was much her elder, and the imprudence of angering her further, for Gretta's sake. "Miss Neumann, I can't [146] allow you to accuse me of being double-faced. When I say I admire and like Gretta I mean it, and when I speak *of* her, I speak as I do *to* her. If I were so treacherous, so mean as to pretend to be her friend and then went home and laughed at her I should be severely punished; my mother would have no mercy on a hypocrite. But why should I laugh at Gretta? She is pretty, gentle, refined, good, and patient as I never could be. I like her very much, and she knows I do. I'm not going to drop her, and I won't forget her. I wish you would not try to teach her to mistrust me; it's not fair. And even if she did come into the world to work—I suppose she did, because everybody has to work, one way or another—she came into it for lots else, and I mean to help her find the rest. It almost seems as if you grudged her love and pleasure. Of course you don't, because you couldn't, but it almost seems so. Anyway you will please never speak of me again as you did just now, because I can't possibly be called double-faced."

Gretta's heart thrilled as she listened to her friend pouring out her words more rapidly than her cousins had ever heard any one speak, but clearly, and with a dignity that struck precisely the right note of outraged honor and of self-restraint.

Eunice turned away her eyes from the girl's glowing ones; she felt the force of Happie's justice and her own meanness. [147]

"I don't see what you're going to do about it whatever I say, and I hain't goin' to leave no one tell me what to talk about," she muttered. "I don't care what Gretta does. We took her because we had to, and she hain't never been grateful to us. If she wants to hang around you I won't stop her, but she can't let her work undone. Gretta, when are you goin' down cellar after them potatoes?"

"Now, Eunice," said Gretta. There was a new note in her quiet voice, and she immediately turned to Happie. "I've got to help with dinner now, Happie, and I may be busy a while after that, but I'll come over this afternoon to your house."

Reba looked up quickly from the cheese which she was straining through a cloth. "Yes, you go, Gretta," she said, and Happie went away wondering.

She was not sufficiently versed in human nature to know that Gretta's sudden accession of decision had come from two things. First, she was emboldened by Happie's encounter with her cousin, but still more was she forgetting herself, her dread of visiting, in the desire to prove to her champion that she held to her faith in her unshaken, and that she wished with all her loyal heart to make up to Happie for her cousin's hatefulness. In her desire to show her confidence in her friend and her gratitude to her, at last the fear of that vague "rest" of the Scollards had been lost.

Happie reached home so excited by her adventure with Eunice that she did not rush out to see the new horse as she had planned doing. Instead she regaled her family with the story, almost [148] forgetting to eat, she talked so fast.

"Well, dear; I hope you weren't impertinent, but from what you tell me I think you weren't," said her mother, when the long tale was finished. "For Gretta's sake as well as your own you were obliged to vindicate yourself from the charge of insincerity. And more years do not warrant imputations on another's honor."

Rosie Gruber, taking part as usual in the family councils, here interposed. "Of course she wasn't saucy; Happie's never saucy. The idea of telling her to her face she was two-faced yet! You send them Neumanns to me! I'll tell 'em how you're always talking about Gretta and planning to help her! Two-faced, you! That's a good hint you give her about grudging Gretta friends; you hit her there, and she knew it. There never was such a jealous-hearted woman as Eunice Neumann. She hates to see any one havin' a good time. When Reba was young she had a beau—Eunice never did; there wa'n't a man in the township would have darst to keep comp'ny with Eunice, but Reba had a beau. And if that woman—girl she was then, but just the same's now at heart—if she didn't hint round and fuss round till she got him to stop goin' with her sister, then my name isn't Rosie Heimgegen, Rosie Gruber now! Reba'd be different if she lived somewheres else. Eunice nags and nags till Reba gits to snappin' back—there hain't many things so ketchin' as snappin'. Eunice [149] grudges Gretta her board and keep, though she earns it good. She's mad to think Gretta's happier this summer. There is folks like that, all sour and clabbered like schmier-case——My days! That puts me in mind! I went off and let that pot too far front on the fire! I wanted to hurry it a while, but I guess it's hurried too much." And good Rosie rushed out to the rescue of her schmier-case, to which she was trying to convert the family, hurried so fast that Jeunesse Dorée fled to the windowsill for safety, a puff of nervousness.

Miss Bradbury looked at her namesake sternly, but there was a belying twinkle in her eye. "What do you mean by embroiling me with my neighbors, Keren-happuch?" she demanded.

"If the horse is Don Dolor, you are Donna Quixote, Happie," added Ralph before Happie could reply to the inquiry of the head of the house.

"Oh, well, Aunt Keren, Happie thinks you might as well be embroiled with this Eunice, I suppose, because she is making Gretta's life a roast," said Bob coming to his sister's rescue. "I am curious to see this field-flower—she must be a daisy!"

"She is," laughed Happie. "My goodness, she's coming now! She must have hurried off right after her dinner! I was afraid her courage would fail her when the time came. Bob and Ralph, slip out to the barn and don't show yourselves until you come around with the horse—then there'll be

something to talk about, and she won't be shy with you. Margery, you come out after me, soon, and speak to her without my introducing you—you know how. Smile at her and speak in your soft voice, and she'll never be frightened. I'll take Penny out with me; Gretta loves babies, and Polly is too little to mind, so she can do what she likes. And mama and Aunt Keren might slip out when we are in full swing with Don Dolor, and Gretta may not realize she's meeting you. I guess she won't be shy if we sort of leak out, and don't all face her at once. Oh, Laura! Well, I think you'd better follow me at first." [150]

"And what am I to do?" asked Rosie, amused, yet pleased with the pains Happie was taking to launch Gretta smoothly on social waters.

"Oh, you can do whatever you please, and help us out. You understand her, and she knows you. You make us laugh, Rosie. Come on with Happie, Penny-tot."

"Cabbages and kings!" cried Bob. "It's worse than snaring a timid fawn, or catch a dicky-bird with salt! I hope she's worth the trouble." And he departed stableward with Ralph to carry out their part of Happie's programme.

CHAPTER X [151]

HAPPIE'S TEMPTATION

When it was all over, and "the rest" had been met by easy and reassuring stages, Bob said that he believed Gretta *was* worth the trouble. Happie was satisfied with this concession; she expected no greater enthusiasm from Bob on the subject of a mere girl.

When Don Dolor was led out, Happie saw the force of his christening. Polly said, without intent to be funny, that "he was more like a clothes horse"; the framework of his anatomy was nearly as fully in evidence.

"Oh, the poor thing!" cried Happie, instantly loving him because of his unloveliness.

"My goodness, it's time he was sent into the country for his health!" cried Gretta, shocked into forgetfulness of her shyness. "But he isn't old, and he doesn't look sick; he's been starved and overworked. He'll come out all right."

This dictum was a great comfort, for Gretta was supposed to know more about horses than many of the Crestville men; she loved them, and had learned about them through that love.

"I don't think he ought to walk about," said Polly anxiously. "He looks as if he might go all to little bits. Can't you just rest him, Bob?" [152]

"We're going to let you ride him up and down in your doll carriage, Polly," said Ralph.

"It isn't big enough," said serious Polly, and Gretta laughed as heartily as the others.

Gentle Mrs. Scollard's greeting left the girl timid and awkward, while Miss Keren-happuch she answered without hesitation, and with a laugh in her eyes, to Happie's surprise, who had looked for the reverse effects.

Then Don Dolor was led back to his sore-needed rest, and as Gretta said she must not stay this first time, Margery and Happie walked down the road with her.

All down the road Margery laughed at Gretta's funny sayings, while Happie looked as proud as a cat with a kitten.

"Come soon again, come often after tea," said Margery, as they paused at the Neumann gate for the prolonged parting of girlhood.

"I shall," said Gretta with a prompt decisiveness that delighted Happie. "After I get my work done, my cousins haven't any right to keep me home, and I'm coming if you'll leave—let me."

"We'd be only too glad," said Margery heartily. "We haven't any girls up here to run in; all our friends are in New York, so come up to keep us from getting lonely, Gretta." [153]

Happie only squeezed Gretta's hand. She was delighted that Margery and her "treasure trove," as the boys called her, got on so well together, and bright visions of Gretta's future danced before the warm brown eyes which revealed to the world the love in Happie's generous heart.

A week later Miss Bradbury came down in the morning with the ravages of sleeplessness plainly visible on her face.

"I've heard noises all night," she said in reply to inquiries. "I don't know what they were, but I dislike them. Boys, I wish you would drive down to the store and buy that watchman's rattle we saw there, and stop at Peter Kuntz' and tell him I'll buy his dog."

"There wouldn't be much use in rattling, dear Miss Keren," laughed Mrs. Scollard. "Nobody could hear you."

"And don't you know you asked us to put those bean poles in the garden, and set the pea brush?" added Bob. "They really need doing, and we can't do that and go to the village too."

"Then Happie must get Gretta to drive down with her," said Miss Bradbury decidedly. "I haven't been free from nerves all my life to let them get the upper hand of me now without an effort to check them. I must have the rattle and the dog. Don Dolor is able to make the trip now." [154]

He was. If any one doubted the effect of plenty of food and care, Don Dolor Bonaparte, could he have met the sceptic, would have converted him by the most eloquent of preaching—personal example. In that one week he had become another horse. He had put on flesh, he had begun to get glossy, he held up his head as hope awoke in his equine breast, and he showed unmistakable symptoms of returning to the beauty that had once been his. Bob was devoted to him; he had hard work to tear himself from him long enough to perform his tasks on the farm, which were many and irksome, and took a great deal of time.

When they had leisure, Bob and Ralph took their books into the orchard where they allowed the don to graze while they read, prostrate in the long grass. Poor Don Dolor appreciated the kindness to which he was not accustomed. Sometimes when Bob was deep in his plot, the don would come up and nose him caressingly as one who would say: "You can't imagine how different all this is, nor how I thank you!"

So he was entirely able to go to the village in pursuit of his mistress' rattle and dog, and Happie was only too glad of the chance to borrow Gretta and take the drive. She had found the drive up from the station almost too much for her on that April night when she had first taken it, but how pleasant it was now to go slowly along the shaded road, hearing the quail whistling in the fields, and the catbird warbling his June ecstasy! [155]

"Somehow I feel as if I had never seen the country till this year," said Happie looking about her with ineffable content as she and Gretta wound carefully down the steep hill. "It's queer, because I used to go away every summer till the last two, but I feel as if something had awakened in me this year; it all seems different and lovelier."

"That's because you had a hard time before you came. It makes people see and feel to have a hard time—unless it's a hard enough time to dull them," said Gretta. "That's one reason, and the other is that you have a home here this year. I never was away from here, but I'm pretty sure no other place ever looks the way home does. You wouldn't see this road as you do if you didn't feel your home was at one end of it."

Happie turned in her seat to look at Gretta. She considered her clever, but she was perpetually surprised at the insight this girl betrayed, now that she dared reveal herself.

"I see that's true when you say it, Gretta," she cried. "But I don't believe I should have found it out for myself. How do you know things like that?"

"I've been alone 'most all the time," said Gretta. "That makes a body think; I always thought more than I talked. Then not having any real home of my own makes a difference. I always felt I'd love my own home, because I love Crestville so, even if I can't love Eunice's house much. I guess it's because I've had hard times myself that I know what hard times teaches people." [156]

"Teach, dear, when there are more than one thing of which you are speaking," said Happie, with a pat of apology for the correction.

But Gretta did not mind being corrected. "Teach, then," she said. "But it seems queer to take off an s on one word, when you put it on the other. I'll never learn."

"You learn wonderfully; it doesn't matter much anyway," said Happie with a new perception of essentials of which she would not have been capable a year before. "But it does matter that you have hard times! Cheer up, pretty Gretta! I'm certain they won't last much longer."

"They're half over already since you came," said Gretta with her adoring look.

"You love this place," Happie resumed, acknowledging this remark with a squeeze, "and you'd like to live here all your days—you'd be perfectly happy if you owned a house like the Ark, for instance. Yet here am I wondering if I can stand living in it, for unless mother gets decidedly better, Aunt Keren says we may stay on in the Ark all winter, and of course we should have to. Isn't life queer and mixy? By the way, what did your Cousin Eunice mean that day when she made me so hopping, by saying you ought to own that house?"

"Nothing; just nonsense; Eunice is always saying things," said Gretta hastily. Which was so true [157] that Happie accepted the answer without further thought.

They drew up at the little store, which was at once a miniature department store and the post-office. A rail ran along the upper side of the store for the convenience of customers whose horses would not stand without tying; here the girls fastened the don, who stood out quite beautiful in contrast to a dingy white horse on his right, a horse all speckled with black, as if some one had been doing spatterwork on him with an unsteady hand and too coarse a comb. On the don's left, to enhance his line lines, drooped Joel Lange's *café au lait* mule, and Happie suddenly felt proud of her well-built steed.

Happie took her mail and followed Gretta to the other side of the store. There were two letters for her mother, one for Margery and three for herself, besides Miss Bradbury's daily budget of letters and papers, and Ralph's equally reliable letter which came every day from his mother and Snigs.

It proved how far Happie had traveled on the road to contentment and interest in her new home that she no longer tore open her New York missives with trembling fingers and brimming eyes as she had done during her first six weeks of exile from her friends.

Gretta was buying blue and white checked gingham for aprons, thread, outing flannel of a despondent shade of gray to match Eunice's sample, stove blacking and a bread pan, bartering for a small portion of the cost of these, twenty-seven eggs which her cousins had confided to her [158] care for this end.

Happie bought only darning cotton, but she invested in fig paste and sour balls, the most attractive candy that she found in the boxes ranged side by side in the show-case. They had red-lettered labels on their ends of such misleading character that it was evident that they were boxes remaining from bygone days, whose original contents had long been purchased by youthful Crestvillians.

"I can't get the brown calico Reba wanted; it's all," said Gretta, and then blushed at her relapse into the vernacular and added hastily: "I'm ready if you are."

"I'm ready," said Happie, wrenching herself from the contemplation of the portraits on a poster of some incredibly corpulent hens and pigs, professing to have been nourished by a powder which the poster advertised.

"Wait here and I'll bring the horse to the steps," said Gretta, going with indifference between Don Dolor, the *café au lait* mule and the spatterwork horse.

Happie jumped into the buggy, smiling with pleasure. There was something cozy about a trip to the village store, doing everything for oneself, and watching life at close range. She had completely forgotten the original errand on which she had come.

Don Dolor trotted along briskly, head up and his black flanks shining in a way that reflected [159] credit on Bob's amateur grooming, for they shone enough to reflect anything else as well as credit.

"I'll read my letters if you don't mind, Gretta," said Happie. She had fallen into the habit of reading the girls' letters to this lonely girl at her side. Happie's friends belonged to the world into which her father and mother were born, a world of wealth and pleasure, and their letters gave Gretta insight into lives very different from her own, into which they brought new personal interests. She had grown to know Happie's friends through this introduction. Happie now read pages of merry-making at the seashore, whither Edith had gone early; of still gayer doings in New York, where Elsie Barker lingered, going to roof gardens and summer operas to her lively heart's content, and of the most delightful times of all which Eleanor Vernon was having traveling up the Hudson to Niagara, the St. Lawrence, Montreal and Quebec.

Happie drew a long breath as she laid down this last letter. "That's the trip I most want to take on this side the ocean," she said soberly.

Gretta looked at her anxiously. She was more than desirous that Happie should not miss her old friends, nor long for the pleasures of town, and her chief earthly hope just now was that Happie might become too attached to Crestville to be willing to go back. [160]

"I don't see how you stand it," she said, with the deep design of hearing what Happie would reply. "Don't you wish that one of the fairies you were reading me about would fly down and offer you the chance to get away from here, and have the kind of good times your friends are having?"

"It might frighten Don Dolor; I think from his appearance when he came that he isn't used to good fairies," laughed Happie. Then the smile faded and she looked gravely up the road ahead of her. It ascended steeply, and as they followed it the mountains began to come in sight over the hill crest. All along the way the huckleberries were in bloom, and the sheep laurel touched grayness of rocks, and brownness of ill-nourished brambles into brightness with its purpling pink.

Up the rough roads which opened at intervals through the woods on either side of the main road, one saw masses of pink and white beauty, announcing the perfection of the mountain laurel growing and blossoming aside from the thoroughfares. And the rhododendron buds of the previous autumn were swelling and showing pink along their cone-like edges, under the light brown of their sticky outer covering. Soon the roadside would be glorified by their splendor. Cleared fields made patches of vivid green against the serried trunks of the trees in the woods, and the breeze blew down, pure and vivifying from the mountains. [161]

Happie drew another long breath. She would like to join her friends, but this was beautiful. It seemed, even to her inexperience, a life of greater reality; of peace that was beyond estimate, and she was not sure that she would give it up if she could.

"I don't know, Gretta, whether I wish for that fairy or not," she said seriously. "I do begin to love my life here. Of course those letters set my feet twitching and my heart throbbing to go after those nice girls and their nice times, but I'm not sure. And when I think of you, and that you'd miss me and be more lonely for having had me, then I am sure! I am glad to stay here, Gretta," she added, remembering that this was what Gretta was longing to hear her say.

Gretta smiled, and then sighed. "You try to think so, but I wouldn't like to give you the chance to get away; I'm afraid Crestville couldn't hold you."

Gretta jumped down at the Neumann gate and Happie drove home alone, a task that would have been adventuresome, considering that she had never driven, had not Don Dolor a strong desire to get back to his stable and an accurate knowledge of where to find it.

"Hallo there, Icaria!" cried Bob coming around the corner to help his sister. "How did you get on driving the borrowed chariot?"

"I couldn't be as classical as you are, not if I were a Wingless Victory," said Happie, stubbing her

toe as she jumped from the buggy, and landing on one knee on the turf. [162]

"You're wingless all right," laughed Bob. "That comes of trying to wither your brother when he makes graceful allusions to Icarus—gets his genders right, too!"

"Pooh! You got Ralph to help you with that careless allusion; got out your Bulfinch's Age of Fable to find out who it was that drove his father's chariot, most likely, to be ready to impress me," said Happie rubbing her bruised knee. "We got on all right; I believe the don's going to turn out a fine horse."

"He's one already," said Bob. "Come to ride to the barn, Penny?" he asked as Penny appeared on the top step looking wistful. "And Laura, the dignified? Ralph is going to take the horse around. Any one else coming forth? You can ride in layers such a short distance."

"I don't mind if I come fourth," said Polly, misinterpreting Bob's meaning. "That'll be two for the seat, and another two in their laps."

"Twice two are four, problematical Polly," laughed Bob. "You are *forth* already in my sense, but you may be *fourth* in yours, if you want to be. Go ahead, Ralph. I'll be there on foot in a week or so to unharness."

Happie ran into the house. She found her mother sewing, and Margery, looking sweet and young ladyfied, bending over her Mexican work. [163]

"Six letters, motherums; two yours, one Margery's, three mine," Happie said, throwing herself down and fanning herself with her hat.

Mrs. Scollard read her first letter, which proved to be but a note, then opened the second one, read it, glanced at her two daughters with heightened color, and read it over. The elder girl was reading her letter from a girl friend, and trying not to show that it moved her, while the other munched a square of fig paste, looking absently out of the window, blissfully unconscious of what was in her mother's mind.

"This letter is from Auntie Cam, girls," Mrs. Scollard said at last.

"Yes, I thought so," said Happie. "She's a nice Auntie Cam, nicer than most own aunts; what does she say? I was wondering, motherums, if Aunt Keren would mind if we got a boulder and made a rockery out there on the side of the lawn? Only it isn't a lawn; it's just grass."

"Now, Happie, why don't you let mother tell us about Auntie Cam?" protested Margery. "As if you wanted to make a rockery this moment, right on top of your own question!"

"Somebody—two bodies, in a way—has an invitation from Auntie Cam that I rather dread to deliver," said their mother slowly.

Happie straightened her listless young figure and Margery dropped her letter, turning to her mother with parted lips, that asked the question they did not utter. [164]

"Auntie Cam says, my dear lassies, that she would like to have Happie"—Margery turned away to hide the tears that sprang into her eyes in spite of herself, and Happie caught her breath—"have Happie come to her in New York, where she has returned on business for a few days, and go back with her to spend the rest of the summer with her and Edith at Bar Harbor, coming home by way of the White Mountains in September."

"Oh, mother, mother!" cried Happie springing up and whirling about in a delirium of joy.

"And she says, furthermore, that Elsie Barker will be there next month," continued Mrs. Scollard.

"I know, I know; I got a letter from her to-day! Did you ever hear of such a magnificent, glorious, blissful thing in all your life?" Happie demanded of no one in particular.

"Auntie Cam says that she asks Happie because she is Edith and Elsie's friend, and because she regards her as especially her girl, but that if for any reason Happie would not care to go, or could not go, she will take Margery instead, and not quarrel with her good fortune, but consider herself very fortunate—so she says—to be allowed to borrow either of my girls," said Mrs. Scollard with a smile of pleasure in this appreciation of her girls. "Now the invitation is Happie's first, I gather from your showing no sort of reluctance when you heard of it, Hapsie dear, that you are willing to [165] accept Auntie Cam's invitation. There isn't much need of asking if you want to go! I didn't realize that you would hail the chance to get away with such boundless rapture; I really thought you were getting contented in Crestville. You have been a good child to hide your feelings so bravely, Hapsie-girl, and you deserve your good fortune. What's the matter?"

Happie's ecstasy was fading out, and in its place a troubled look was creeping into her eyes as she turned them upon Margery. Margery had risen, and was looking so hard out of the window that there was no possibility of thinking she was interested merely in the familiar apple trees and the long grass, fast ripening into Don Dolor's hay. It did not need the tear that splashed on the window sill to tell Happie that her sister was struggling to hide a disappointment too bitter to be borne without a struggle.

Happie spoke slowly, with an effort. "Why, I have been contented here lately, motherums," she said. "Of course I was glad at first when I thought of going to Bar Harbor, and with Auntie Cam. It would be a perfectly scrumptious time! But when I remember how long it would be—I'd have to be away from home so long—maybe I'd better—I don't have to decide this minute, do I, mother?" She stopped her hesitating suggestions, feeling that her voice was getting unreliable. It seemed to her that never in all her life had she been so tempted. [166]

Her mother saw her glance at Margery, and divined the truth.

"My dear, unselfish girl!" she thought. But all she said was: "Of course you do not have to decide at once, Hapsie. You ought to have at least one night in which to decide between the rival attractions of two such resorts as Bar Harbor and Crestville!"

Happie smiled dismally. "I'll go up-stairs to think; I can think better there. I'm afraid when I look out of our window at my mountains I'll decide to stay here," she said, and ran away with her brown paper bag of plebeian candies on which a tear of sacrifice fell as she ran.

CHAPTER XI [167]

HAPPIE'S CHOICE

WHEN she left the room Happie knew that her decision was already made; she had run away only to gain strength to announce it.

She closed the door behind her, tossed her bag and hat on the bed, and dropped into the willow rocking-chair by the window that looked towards the east and the mountains. Polly's big doll had to be dispossessed for her benefit, so Happie considerately took her bisque niece on her knee, in fair exchange for Phyllis Lovelock's seat, which she usurped.

"Margery wants to go," announced Happie, absentmindedly rearranging the doll's hair. "She thought at first that it was she who was to go, and when mother went on to say that I was Auntie Cam's first choice, she had to walk away to the window 'to hide her grief,' as novels say. She didn't hide it so very well; I saw that tear fall on the window sill! Of course I shan't go; that's settled." She pointed this announcement by a vigorous jerk of Phyllis' arm which sent it upward, giving the doll the effect of appealing to heaven to demand if this were not hard.

"No one will ever know how much I wanted to go—not if I can help it! Elsie and Edith both there, [168] and boating, and bathing, and dancing—oh, me! Margery hasn't a friend there, but then the rest will be good for her; she looks tired all the time, and of course she'll find nice girls whom she will like—Margery makes friends. She doesn't like living here, and I do—or at least I think I do when there isn't any chance to get away. No; that isn't honest: I do like it, very much! Didn't I tell Gretta this very afternoon that I was glad to stay here? She said she wouldn't like to give me a chance to get away. And there was the chance in my hand that very moment, and I did jump at it wildly the instant I heard of it! Gretta saw clearer than I did! Poor Gretta! What a mean thing I am to fly off and forget all about her the first time I am tempted—but this was a fearful temptation, Edith and Elsie and all!" She pushed down Phyllis' upraised arm, and stood her upright with one foot on her knee, the other at right angles to the doll's body as it had been bent in sitting.

"You look rakish, my dear," remarked mercurial Happie, straightening the misplaced member and smoothing her niece's gown. "Or are you hinting that I should not kick? I'm not kicking, miss, in the first place, and in the second place you should not use slang. Margery is older than I, and fonder of society; she isn't as happy as I am here—that is not intended as a pun on my name, Phyllis—and she has been so sweet and patient that she richly deserves her luck. I don't grudge it to her, not one bit, and I wouldn't go—now that I've had time to think about it—not for anything! I [169] couldn't enjoy one moment remembering I was there at Margery's cost. But I think, Miss Phyllis Lovelocks, that you might allow me one little natural pang, all by ourselves, because I'd have had fun without end all the time I was away. You might admit—since no one hears us—that dusting, bed-making, dish-washing palls on one occasionally, and even weeding a garden on a hot day is not pure bliss. I don't suppose there was a weed in the Garden of Eden, and anyway Eve's back didn't ache; it's only sinful backs that ache." Happie laughed again and wiped away a few tears that still betrayed her.

Then she arose, depositing Phyllis Lovelocks once more in her place in the rocking-chair. She stood for a moment looking out seriously on the mountains. Then she sighed, smiled and turned away.

"I really do love you, and I think I should miss you and be glad to get back to you. But it's lucky you're so big, because you've got to take the place of a big chance," she said, turning away as she heard her mother come up-stairs and go into her room across the narrow hall. Happie threw open her door and ran after her, hoping that there were no telltale stains on her cheeks.

"Mother, mama, motherums," she cried. "Let me come; I want to tell you. I'm not going."

Mrs. Scollard turned quickly and threw her arms around her girl with a movement entirely girlish. "You dear Happie!" she cried. "I knew you wouldn't, and I know why! You should have [170] done precisely as you chose, my darling, but I really think that Margery ought to go, and needs the pleasure more than you. Margery is drifting in young ladyhood, while Happie, I am thankful to say, is unadulterated girlishness still."

"Of course she's the one to go, motherums; she's ever so much lonelier here than I am," said Happie staunchly. "You see when I flew up so rapturously, I hadn't had time for second thought."

"Proverbially the best," supplemented her mother. "I am very glad that you reconsidered, Happie, but I'd like you to understand that I see clearly through your transparent little self, and realize what you are doing for Margery."

Happie blushed and turned away. "Oh, I want to stay," she said lightly.

"Of course you do," assented her mother. "There are many different ways of wanting a thing, my Hapsie. But I'll tell you in strictest confidence that I am selfishly glad that I am to keep you. I don't see really, how we could have borne up if Auntie Cam had carried off the Ark's sunshine."

Happie turned back to give her mother an emphatic and hasty kiss before she escaped; she was still perilously near to tears. Her mother's words had robbed her sacrifice of all sting, as Mrs. Scollard knew that they would, for Happie dearly loved to be a comfort. [171]

Margery received the decision that Happie was to stay and she to go with a solemn rapture, too deep for words. The next few days were given up to hurried preparations for her departure. The invitation had come on Wednesday, and Mrs. Charleford, whom the young Scollards had known all their lives as Auntie Cam, had arranged that her guest was to come to her on Monday.

It was short notice and rapid work; the Ark was submerged in the waters of confusion. Still, as Rosie Gruber sensibly observed: "There wasn't no use in worrying. What Margery had she had, and what she hadn't she hadn't, so what good did it do to git all dragged out fussin' over things yet?"

That good and efficient person ironed at night and arose an hour earlier than her four o'clock routine to lend her useful hands to preparing Margery's wardrobe.

"Fortunately you are still a young girl, dearie," said her mother folding the soft mull which Rosie had pressed. "You are still in the class which the fashion catalogues call: Misses. In another year you will be old enough to require more if you go into the great world, but simplicity is fitting and fairest for a young girl. This is your last year of slipping into the throng unheralded, Margery; make the most of its advantages, dearie. I really think you are sufficiently provided, without being obliged to add: 'Considering.' Your last year's gowns are so refreshed that I am satisfied [172] with your little wardrobe, at least for this season, while you are still little Margery."

The mother's voice was wistful. Margery was so sweet and gentle that her gentle mother clung to her passing hours of young girlhood, shrinking from the thought of life and its burdens which stood just on her threshold, stretching out siren hands to her eldest born.

Miss Bradbury came into the room with six handkerchiefs in one hand.

"This is my contribution to your outfit, Margaret," she said. "Dainty handkerchiefs and good shoes are my weakness. Don't shed a tear on one of these; that's all I ask."

Margery thanked her with her gentle smile. She did not know until later, when she shook the first of the pile out of its folds, that Miss Keren had laid two crisp ten dollar bills between them, guessing that Mrs. Scollard's slender store was too depleted to allow her to give the girl much money to use as young girls like to use it, for the candy and soda, and the small luxuries of the toilet dear to seventeen.

"You've been a perfect darling, Happie; a dear, unselfish, blessed old darling, all the way through!" cried Margery throwing her arms around her sister, although in one hand dangled four belts, and the other clutched a bunch of turnover collars. Happie had just brought Margery her two stick pins, and delicate neckchain of fine gold links, holding turquoises set in dull gold. [173]

"That's all right, Margery; you mean well, but your remarks are a trifle unjust to me. I am all of those things you mention, all of the time, yet you seem to be a trifle surprised. It would give a stranger a false idea of me, Margery; I am obliged to protest against your injustice," cried Happie with a mock frown.

"Isn't she nice?" exclaimed Polly from her vantage point at the foot of the bed where she was ensconced with her doll, watching the packing.

"I hope you will enjoy the orchestras and the music in the hotels, Margery," said Laura with an air that suggested its being extremely unlikely. "It's dreadful to never hear any music; there isn't a bit in Crestville."

"It's dreadful to split infinitives, Laura," said Bob, entering unexpectedly. "What's the wail about now? Still poor old Crestville? Besides, you're wrong about the music; I know of several melodeons in town. Ralph and I are going to the store; want anything from the emporium?"

"Yes, and two or three of the girls taking lessons by correspondence yet!" exclaimed Rosie indignantly from the depths of a Gladstone bag which she was sweeping clean of imaginary dust. "We're not so dumb here as Laura thinks. Don't you fergit my blueing, Bob, and I guess you might as well bring along some flour; ours is almost all, and I've got to bake to-morrow, with biscuits for tea Sunday—Miss Bradbury likes 'em so!" [174]

"Yes, and the rest like 'em more so," assented Bob. "Flour and blueing, mix carefully and take regularly to depress your spirits. All right, Rosie. 'Bye, mother." And Bob departed, leaving Rosie's gaunt shoulders shaking over his exquisite wit.

Monday morning came very quickly. The entire family dreaded the three months which should be spent without Margery, and to no one else in all the world than her girlhood friend did Mrs. Scollard feel that she could have borne to intrust her pretty daughter. She tasted in imagination the loneliness and motherly anxiety which she must feel before she got her back again.

Laura reveled in the opportunity for sentimental melancholy, composing a song entitled "Parting," according to her custom on all family events.

Happie found it hard to see Margery depart; her desire for the outing was swallowed up in the realization that for the first time in their lives she and Margery were to be separated.

The group of stay-at-homes gave Margery many last injunctions as to what she should do on arriving in the Jersey station at which Mrs. Charleford was to meet her, and they watched her skirt around the corner of the car door, and waved their good-byes to her from the platform, where they gathered to wave at her in the car window, until the train was lost to sight around the curve.

Then, true to their principles, Bob and Happie shook off their depression and bestirred themselves. [175]

"Got to haul hay to-day," drawled Bob, in accurate mimicry of Jake Shale's twang. "If you want to git that there hay in, Miss Bradbury, you'd might as well come along, fer they hain't much time these June days, 'n' the sun's hot."

"I was taught there was more time in June days than in any others, Mr. Shale," said Miss Bradbury, while his mother laughed in response to Bob's effort to cheer her. "However, I'm ready to go home if you're ready to drive me."

Happie and Laura walked home from the village, and Laura hummed her latest song, "Parting," as they walked, such a dismal air that Happie was not equal to sustained conversation to such an accompaniment.

At the Neumann gate Happie paused. "I see Gretta out there hanging up her clothes," she said. "I'm going to ask her if she can't steal off this afternoon when we are haying. We'll make a jollification of it. You can go on, Laura; I'll come in a few minutes; no one would dare linger at the Neumanns' on a Monday morning."

Happie ran over the grass and seized Gretta's shoulders, herself unseen. Gretta screamed and then hailed Happie joyfully.

"My, but you scared me!" she cried. "Margery gone?" [176]

Happie nodded. "And I want you to come up this afternoon and get in hay with us—we want to make it a frolic, and beside, you really do know how to load a wagon as well as any farmer, so Rosie says. But it's not for work I want you; you know that. Come over, Gretta, and help us be merry, for I'm afraid we miss Margery."

"I guess," assented Gretta. "I'll come, if I can get my clothes in, and folded to iron in the morning. And now Margery's gone I want to tell you that I know how you stayed here and let her go in your place—Rosie Gruber told us. You said you'd stay here, even if you got a chance to go, but I couldn't believe it. Still, I know how bad you wanted to go, so I guess I was half way right, after all. Never mind," she added hastily, as Happie showed symptoms of interrupting her. "That's all right; I don't blame you. All I wanted to try and tell you was that I guess you haven't an idea of how glad I am you stayed. I don't seem to know how to say it, so I haven't let you know how much good you're doing me. If it's any comfort to you, you can be sure of one thing—I'd have been miserable if you'd gone. I didn't know the difference you were making, not rightly know it, till I heard from Rosie that I might have lost you. It took my breath away. You like to make folks happy, so don't be sorry you let Margery go, Happie dear."

Happie had never before heard a speech of one third this length from Gretta; she saw that the girl was trying to break through her reticence to comfort her for the regret which she fancied Happie must feel. [177]

"Why, you dear Gretta!" she cried. "I do know you need me, and I do see you're happier and more girlish since I found you—found you in the paint pot, like 'the little husband no bigger than my thumb' of Mother Goose fame. You are quite, quite wrong if you think I am sorry that I could not go instead of Margery. At first I did want to go; that's true, not because I don't like Crestville, but because any girl would jump at such a chance as that—at first. But I'm delighted that it's Margery and not I, who is on the train, and I'm glad for my own sake, not for hers alone. So be satisfied that I am satisfied, and come over to help us be happy in this lovely country life."

"I'll come—unless I can't," said Gretta, and Happie ran homeward after Laura.

By three o'clock Gretta's fresh starched pink sunbonnet appeared down the road, bobbing up and down under the trees. The Scollards were all out in the field with Ralph, all save Happie, who had come in to watch for Gretta and to take her out with her. But Gretta did not seem to know that she was shy; her foot was on her native heath, she carried her own pitchfork, and in hay-making it was not she, but the city children who were at a disadvantage.

"You'd better let me load," she said, nodding at Peter Kuntz who had taken Jake Shale's place that afternoon. It always surprised the inmates of the Ark that there was, apparently, no inequality of age in Crestville. Everybody knew everybody else with the intimacy of first names and identical ages, even if one were eight and the other eighty. [178]

"Glad to git you to load, Gretta," responded Pete heartily. And Gretta swung herself up on the back of the hay wagon, taking her stand on the thin layer of hay already scattered over its floor, resting on her pitchfork like a youthful Bellona.

"Now, Laura, you and Polly get out with Penny, and leave—let—Happie and Ralph help me load. Bob will help Pete toss, and when we've loaded, you can all get up and ride in. We might stick somebody with the fork if there were too many on while we were loading," said Gretta, taking command of the work in the wagon like the experienced young farmer that she was. "You don't need a fork, Happie; it's just as well you haven't an extra one; you're not used to handling such things. You scatter with your hands, and I'll take the hay as Pete and Bob throw it up. You watch a minute, and you'll see what to do."

Laura obeyed Gretta reluctantly, and Happie began to think that the prettiest motions were not taught young girls, nor executed by them in calisthenic or dancing classes. Gretta made a picture as she stood, her handsome face flushing under her rose-colored sunbonnet, her dark eyes bright with concentrated attention, and proud pleasure in performing her task as well as any boy could have done. Her sleeves were turned back to her elbows, her brown arms were well-shaped, her [179] tall figure splendidly proportioned, and strong with the strength of trained muscles and a life spent in the sunshine and pure air. She caught the great bunches of hay which Pete and Bob threw up to her, wielding her fork surely and gracefully, judging accurately and quickly where to place each forkful to keep the load symmetrical and the balance true so that when the last wisp was on, the great wagon would roll down the hilly meadow, down into the barn, with no danger to itself, nor to its riders.

It was so fascinating to watch Gretta's movements, to stand among the delicious hay in the June sunshine, that Happie forgot to work, drinking in a new experience that seemed to her the most delightful she had ever tasted.

The laden wagon was piled higher rapidly. Bob and Pete pitched fast, trying to tire Gretta, but she received as fast as they pitched, and it was Ralph who first cried for mercy.

"Look here, do you think we're hoppers?" he asked pantingly.

"Yes, grasshoppers," said Bob, throwing a particularly large bunch of the fragrant timothy at his friend. But he stopped himself, and wiped his brow, leaving on it a design sketched in timothy seed. "Talk about gymnasium practice!" he gasped. "There isn't a girl in one of the gyms, I believe, who could hold out at this work the way you have, Gretta. I take off my hat to you; you [180] have beaten me." And Bob made a deep bow, sweeping the ground with the flapping hat which he wore like other farmers.

To Happie's surprise Gretta returned the bow with an equally low one, brushing the hay with her gingham skirt spread out in each hand. Her face dimpled with a mischievousness new in her.

"Every jack has a trade," she said. "I ought to beat you at hay-making; maybe you would beat me if we were loading up on Latin. You might hand up Penny now, Bob, and then Polly. I don't believe I'd use the fork for them. This wagon won't hold more than half a dozen more forkfuls, Pete."

"All right, Gretta; that's all right," said Pete. "You know when you've got enough."

"I believe you think *you* know when you've got enough, too, Pete," suggested Bob.

"Well," said Pete, pushing back his hat with the arm that dried his face, and shifting his tobacco into his other cheek, "well, Bob, I've been pitching hay for full—le's see—full forty-seven seasons, and I notice forks keeps gittin' heavier every one of the last ten of 'em."

"Gracious; mine is heavy enough for me now, in my first season!" exclaimed Bob. "Come up, Pennykins; Gretta's ready for the last of her load now."

He swung Penny up to the strong arms held out to receive her, followed Penny with Polly, and assisted Laura by vigorous "boosts," and no small effort, for Laura was not a good climber, and [181] the hay afforded but poor foothold. With Happie pulling on one arm, Gretta the other, and Bob shoving from below, dignified Laura was hoisted in a most undignified manner. Ralph slid down to help rake behind the wagon, Pete took up the reins, shouted to his patient beasts, and the wagon started, groaning and protesting under the heavy burden with which Gretta's skillful loading had heaped it.

The field lay upward of the slope of a hill; rocks abounded in it, the loose Pennsylvania rocks, as many and as troublesome as those with which New England struggles. There was a sort of cairn of them heaped at the foot of the slope where the Bittenbenders, or some other predecessors of the present tenants, had deposited the stones which they had picked from the field, intending, on a day which had never come, to haul them away to the rough stone wall which marked the field's northern boundary.

Just as the hay wagon, looking like a moving hillock itself, reached this high mound of rocks, Pete's hand guiding the horses, was thrown up to ward off a branch that threatened his eyes; the horses swerved, the wagon went up on two wheels, and the sudden motion sent Polly from her seat too near the edge, head downward and backward, over the top of the load.

It all happened in an instant. Happie saw Bob throw up his hands with a gesture of horror, saw Polly disappear, and saw Gretta spring up, at the same time throwing herself face downward on [182] the hay. Happie saw her catch one of Polly's ankles, and hold the child with her strong hand, suspended over the wagon. Pete jerked the reins sharply, the wagon righted itself, and Gretta's other hand crept cautiously after its mate, taking Polly's other ankle in its grasp. Then Happie aroused from the paralysis of mind that seemed to have fallen upon her. She crawled to the side of the wagon, and together she and Gretta drew Polly into safety.

It seemed an hour since she had seen the child lurch backward and fall—it had been seconds. She looked down. There stood Pete, blue under the tan of his skin. Bob and Ralph, one with hands upraised, the other crouched as if to dodge the sorrow, stood like statues, ashen gray. As Happie looked down, Bob moved, and turned away to hide the tears that streamed down his face. Pete gathered together the reins, shaking from head to foot. Ralph covered his face with his hands, and Happie heard him breathe: "Thank God!"

"She'll never be no nearer the aidge of eternity till she goes over it," remarked Pete. "Git ap, Jim! Come on, Lil!"

Polly lay hiding her face on Gretta's lap, who smoothed her hair silently, her own face grave and pale. Penny was crying with all her might, and Laura rocked her body to and fro, moaning hysterically: "Oh, those rocks! Those rocks!" [183]

Happie looked down at the pile for which Polly had headed. It was hardly possible that she could have struck them, backward as she was falling, and not have broken her neck. A sickening realization of the sorrow so narrowly escaped, was followed by a swift rush of love and gratitude for the strong, quiet girl, whose quick brain and steady hand had saved Polly.

Happie turned to Gretta with her whole heart in her face.

"It was death," she whispered; she could not summon her voice. "I can never thank you."

"I only held her up," said Gretta.

Then the color rushed up over her blanched face in a wave of joy.

"I'm glad if I can pay some of my debt," she said.

The great wagon, so heavily laden with its towering hay and grateful hearts, rolled slowly down the road. Thanks to Gretta, it was still carrying only glad young folk on a hay ride. But how nearly it had been dear little Polly's funeral car!

CHAPTER XII [184]

LAURA'S PHILANTHROPY

"I wish you and Gretta had not forgotten my pup," said Miss Bradbury coming into the dining-room the morning after the departure of Margery. "I still hear queer noises at night. I'm going to send down to town for a good dog. Jake Shale has offered me a beagle, and Peter Kuntz assures me the one thing on earth I need is his old dog, half shepherd and seven-eighths cur, but I'm not convinced."

"What a very fractional dog, Miss Keren!" laughed Mrs. Scollard.

"Let me send down to mother to get a dog a friend of mine has, Miss Bradbury," suggested Ralph. "He's about two years old, and thoroughbred, a fine watchdog. They want to get him into the country, or they'd never give him up; he is out of place in New York, they think."

"Everything is that wants to run and play," agreed Miss Bradbury. "Two-legged or four. What sort of dog is this one?"

"A beauty collie," said Ralph. "I'm sure he can be had for the asking. His owners won't sell him, because they want to be sure of the sort of hands he falls into. I'll write Snigs to go ask for him, if you'll take him." [185]

"I'll take him," said Miss Bradbury. "Tell Snigs to come up in time for the Fourth, and bring him."

Ralph colored with pleasure. "Thanks, Miss Bradbury; you're awfully good. Snigs would be delighted to come."

"And we to have him!" cried Happie. "You really are good, Aunt Keren!"

"At least that's better than being awful, as Ralph accuses me of being. Though you do seem to feel it necessary to affirm my goodness, which is not complimentary," said Miss Bradbury. "I shall be obliged to Snigs if he can get the dog; I don't intend to hear noises dogless any longer."

"I wish, Laura, you'd come fix my torn buttonhole," said Polly from the doorway. "Happie's going to do Margery's work and her own too, and I can't keep my skirt fastened."

"Indeed I can't," said Laura, leaving the room before her mother could interfere to stop her. "I've got to go out."

Far away as Laura had always been from practical, every-day matters, of late she had been miles above the heads of her family, "soaring down the milky way," Bob said, "when there were milk pails down below needing scalding." Bob had scant patience with Laura's nonsense at any time, and he was working rather hard that summer.

It was trying; for at neither work nor play was Laura any use. She had a secret. What it was nobody knew—which was not strange, considering that it is the nature of secrets not to be known [186] —but nobody could conjecture what it was.

If her mother and Miss Keren has guessed, it is highly probable that they would have interfered with her plan, but Laura, intent on proving to the world, and to her own family in particular, her entire competence to succeed in whatever she undertook, kept her own counsel and went her mysterious way.

Up on the edge of the extreme boundary of Crestville stood a little chapel served by a well-meaning, but illiterate young "preacher," as they called him in the village. He it was whom Laura had selected as the instrument of her plan, and to it the young man lent himself with an enthusiasm most refreshing to a lady of scarce thirteen, accustomed to the ridicule of a large and unappreciative home circle.

It was an extraordinary plan for a little girl to have laid, but then Laura never did anything that one would expect from a girl of her age, and she had sufficient self-confidence to have equipped

an Arctic exploring party.

The first requisite for her scheme was a place, a setting, and Laura pitched upon the little church on the edge of the woods as the best for her purpose.

So one day she had attired herself in her most becoming muslin, took a book under her arm, and a roll of music in her hand—not that she needed them, but for dramatic effect—and sallied forth [187] to win the young preacher to her way of thinking.

He lived not far from his church; when Laura knocked at the door his girl-wife opened it with her right hand, holding her baby in the hollow of that arm, while the left hand held a yellow bowl full of potatoes which she had just fetched from the cellar.

"See Mr. Buck?" she repeated after Laura, but with a strong Pennsylvania Dutch accent that rendered the name "Book." "Yes, I guess. He's in the room. You go in through if you want. Wait a little; I'll call him."

She disappeared, leaving Laura standing just across the threshold, and returned followed by a young man with beady black eyes, who looked as if he could not have been more than twenty-two years old.

He greeted Laura with respect most cheering to her soul, and invited her into "the room," which the little girl had already learned was short for "the best room," or "the sitting-room."

Laura placed herself with much dignity upon the figured lounge, which was arrayed in the brightest shades of all colors, deposited her roll and book beside her, crossed her feet, folded her hands and began with the utmost self-possession to unfold her errand. "Mr. Buck," she said. "I am the daughter of Mrs. Scollard, the lady from New York who is staying with her friend who owns the Bittenbender place."

"Yes, I know," said Mr. Buck. "I have seen you and your sisters and brothers already; we look in [188] when we go by, my wife and I. You have it good there yet."

"Oh, we don't like it!" returned Laura with a toss of her head. "It is better than it was, though. I came to talk to you about a plan I have for entertaining the people of the—the people all around here who want to improve themselves. I thought I would give an entertainment on the Fourth of July, and invite everybody; just let everybody know they can come if they want to."

"Free?" inquired the young preacher, as Laura paused for an instant for breath.

"Oh, of course!" exclaimed Laura impatiently. "You know there isn't anything here to improve people; you don't have any lectures, nor music, nor pictures, nor anything at all. I am—well, you see I write music and poetry, and I play and sing, and I want to do something for these poor people. I want to give an entertainment on the Fourth of July, and I want you to help me. Will you?"

"What a good girl you must be, and ain't you smart!" exclaimed the young man admiringly.

He was very simple, and it never occurred to him to question the ability of this girl who spoke so beautifully, and was so very easy in her manners, to do exactly what she said she could do, and he was honestly grateful for her desire to do something for his flock. "What should I do?" he asked. "Should I speak for you? I might make a speech after your songs; should I? I guess that [189] would go good."

"No, I don't think so," said Laura positively. Then, seeing the disappointment in the young man's face, and not being without tact when she had an end in view, she added: "In entertainments they don't have speeches; not in this kind of entertainment. What I want to do is improve people, don't you see?"

Laura herself did not see the suggestion latent in her remark that Mr. Buck's speech might not be improving. Nor did he, for he accepted her decision meekly, and asked: "What then should I do?"

"You can let me give the entertainment in your chapel, please," said Laura grandly. "And you can let me come here to practice every day, so they won't know at home that we are going to have this entertainment. You won't tell any one till just before the Fourth, will you?"

"No," said the little preacher. Then looking puzzled he inquired: "Don't they know at your house what you're doing? Ain't they going to help you yet?"

"No, indeed," cried Laura. "If they did I could give—no, I couldn't give the entertainment at home, because there wouldn't be room for all the people who would come, but I could practice at home. It is to be a secret, so I want you, please, to let me practice on the organ, or whatever you have in the church——" [190]

"It's an organ," interrupted the little preacher, looking hurt for the first time. "The ladies of my congregation bought it saving up egg money and doing washing for city boarders one summer. It cost thirty dollars; it's a regular parlor organ, a good one. It sounds 'most so good as a big organ; wait till you hear it once!"

"Yes," said Laura, a trifle impatiently, for she was not interested in the organ, except as it served her end. "I'm glad it is a good one. I'd like to practice every day till the Fourth, and I came up to ask you if you didn't think my plan a beautiful one, and if you wouldn't be kind enough to help me? I knew that a minister would want to do anything he could to improve people, and to make them happy," she added artfully.

"Of course," assented Mr. Buck heartily. "I'll give you the key to the church, and you can practice all the days you want. And you can give the entertainment here. You must be smart if you can do

it all alone, and sing, and make up poetry yet! And you are a kind young lady to want to amuse folks."

Laura tried to look modest, but succeeded only in dropping her eyes in the semblance of modesty; in her heart she felt that this praise was merited.

She arose to go with what she felt sure was a graceful, dignified and entirely grown-up manner.

"HE FOLLOWED LAURA TO THE FRONT DOOR"

"Oh," she said, "I am glad to give the poor people a chance to hear good music. And I am not smart to make up music and poetry; it is a talent of mine, that's all. Good-bye, Mr. Buck. Thank you for helping me, but of course I knew you would want to." [191]

She gathered up the music and book which she had carried with a vague intention of letting them prove her claim to music and poetry, and extended her hand with the air of an empress as she moved towards the door.

The honest little preacher grasped the hand heartily. "Good-bye," he said. "I am obliged to you for letting me help you out."

He followed Laura to the front door where he halted as a thought struck him.

"Will it be funny, your show on the Fourth?" he asked. "Our folks like funny things. Shall they laugh at it, say not?"

"Dear me, no," cried Laura, sincerely shocked. "They must learn to like something higher than funny things! Funny things are not improving."

Which statement proved how much she knew of human nature.

The little preacher looked wistful. "They gets pretty tired," he said doubtfully. "It's hard work farming, and these fields are stony yet! In my county we don't have to pick stones three days before we can plough one day."

Laura smiled in a superior way, and turned to go. "I shouldn't feel like doing funny things, Mr. Buck," she said. "Good music is the saddest thing! And all my poetry is very deep." With which statement she went out of the little gate. [192]

The awe-struck Bucks watched her depart. "How much would you give her, Anna?" asked the young husband. "She writes music and poetry, and she's going to give folks a free concert, or something, in the church on Fourth of July. For a little I thought she hadn't fourteen years."

"She ain't," said the nineteen-years-old wife positively.

"Do you guess she could do such a thing if she ain't?" queried her husband.

"I guess. In New York girls get smart early, maybe. I wish you could get a church there once, Alvah, when the baby's big enough. I'd like to have her grow up with such smartness."

The object of these flattering remarks went her homeward way rejoicing, and it had been from

that hour that her family had noticed that she was uplifted higher than ever above their heads. Every day she had gone up the road carrying a mysterious package, and had refused to explain the mystery when Happie had tried to investigate it.

"Yes, I have a secret," Laura said, in reply to her sister's question. "But that's the very reason I won't tell you; people generally don't tell secrets. If you can wait a while, you will know what it is, and you will find it was something worth waiting for."

"I don't know, motherums, but I imagine she carries her books and paper off into the dampest, darkest spot by the brook and composes poetry and music out of doors. It would be just like her, and her packages look like papers," said Happie, divided in her mind as usual between disgust, and sisterly pride in her talented junior. [193]

This was before Margery had gone away, and the secret had not leaked out on the morning when Miss Bradbury had again announced her longing for a dog. It was three days before the Fourth, and on that day, obedient to Laura's instructions, Mr. Buck began notifying the public which he met on his way to and from the post-office, that Miss Scollard was going to give an entertainment in the chapel on the evening of the Fourth, without money and without price, solely for the love of her fellow creatures, who were invited to gather in large numbers to share her bounty.

The first that her family knew of Laura's undertaking was when Bob returned from the post-office, fuming with rage, yet convulsed with the fun of it, burdened with the following announcement which he had found tacked up in the post-office:

> "Miss Laura Scollard announces to the people in Crestville that she will give an entertainment in Mr. Buck's chapel on Fourth of July at half-past seven P. M. She will sing and play and read and give them a chance to hear good things, so she hopes they will all come. FREE."

"The last word was in big letters," said Bob as he finished reading his copy of the impressive announcement, and Ralph took a header into the couch in fresh enjoyment of it. "And you can bet the very last thing that you have, or ever hope to have that they'll come all right!" [194]

"Come!" echoed Rosie. "Why, you couldn't keep 'em away! They'll think it's goin' to be something great, and that you all had a hand in it. What in creation do you s'pose she's a-goin' to do?"

"Sing and play, just as she says she is, and read to the audience—from her own poems, most likely. Oh, mother, isn't it awful?" cried Happie, her sense of humor so overwhelmed by her mortification that she was unable to get even as much as Bob's divided amusement out of the discovery of Laura's scheme.

"It is the most absurd thing!" cried Mrs. Scollard, flushed and annoyed, yet half laughing. "I feel that I ought not to let the absurd child go on; she is sure to make a little goose of herself, and the village people will take it all seriously, for they will certainly think that I have helped her! Yet Laura's conceit needs a sharp lesson, and she must be punished, in one way or another, for utterly ignoring her elders in this way. I feel confident that she will be punished if we leave her to her own destruction, for she is abnormally thin-skinned. I really don't know what to do!"

"Let her go, mother; we can stand it, and I think she deserves to be called down—the conceited little ninny!" said Bob vigorously. "And if she doesn't take a tumble this time, I'm no prophet." [195]

"Don't you boys help her to 'take a tumble.' If we let her alone to go on, we must also let her alone to succeed, if she can," interposed Mrs. Scollard, mistrusting the boys' strength to resist the temptation to tease, and dreading Laura's punishment, after all.

"Don't harbor misgivings, Charlotte," advised Miss Bradbury. "Let Laura learn by experience. Country people are not the dunces she evidently thinks them; if I'm not mistaken she will be both sadder and wiser on the fifth of July."

"Yes, let her alone," Rosie said decidedly. "I'll see to it the place knows you hadn't nothin' to do with this affair. Just see what she'll make of it. My days, what kind o' jedgment has Preacher Buck to leave her have the church?"

Ralph and Bob went down in the afternoon to bring up from the station Snigs and the dog. It was a jubilant trio—quartette—that entered the Ark in time for supper. Dundee, the collie, was nervous and tired, but he was a beauty beast, and Miss Bradbury actually hurried through her supper to make him a bed outside her door, "in case of further noises," she explained.

No one spoke of the entertainment to Laura, but at dinner on the Fourth, she officially announced it. "I suppose," she said graciously, "you have already heard of it, though we have not mentioned it. You will all come, won't you?" [196]

"You bet your life!" cried Bob irrepressibly. But with that one exception, the family received Laura's announcement as gravely as it was made.

It was a group struggling hard to preserve its gravity that issued from the Ark and wended its way to the chapel after tea. Laura's family seated themselves far enough back to be able to retreat if the ordeal proved too trying.

Mrs. Scollard and Happie sympathized with each other's uneasiness and mortification, Miss Bradbury sat erect with a blank countenance, but the three boys gave themselves up to unreserved glee, leaning on the big sticks with which they had provided themselves for applause.

Gretta came late, and joined Happie in the seat which the latter had saved for her.

"Don't you worry," whispered Gretta. "Maybe she won't be so bad when she is giving an entertainment; maybe folks won't think she is silly."

This was the first intimation that Happie had received that her friend had been privately regarding her gifted sister as foolish, when that young person herself had fondly believed that she was impressing the country girl.

Laura came before the audience with a most serious face, but looking her best, with her cheeks red from excitement, and her eyes shining.

"Ladies and gentlemen," she said with a little bow, "this is the Fourth of July. I think we ought to [197]
begin by singing 'My Country, 'Tis of Thee.'"

"That is a good beginning," whispered Mrs. Scollard, with a breath of temporary relief.

The audience arose and sang the first stanza of the national hymn with gusto, but in the second stanza very few were singing the words, and in the third they gave up humming the air, and only Laura and Mr. Buck, who had books, were left singing.

"It's like the Peterkins and the Declaration of Independence," whispered Ralph, and Bob nudged him joyfully.

"I will sing for you a hymn I wrote myself for this day," announced Laura, seating herself at the organ.

The air had seemed to her when she was practicing it, sublime; now, heard with the consciousness of less partial ears, it developed a lack of variety, and the accompaniment left much to be desired. More than that, in spite of her daily practice on that organ, now, in the excitement of giving her composition to the public, Laura sometimes forgot to pump, and what accompaniment there was went off into a feeble squeak.

The audience behaved beautifully; it sat solemnly listening, believing that the tenants of the Ark, through their youthful representative, were trying to entertain it, and it politely tried to look entertained.

But somehow, probably through Rose Gruber, it began to be whispered about that the elder Scollards had nothing to do with the present occasion, and the attitude of the audience became [198]
less respectful.

When Laura came forward and recited an original poem, however, her hearers veered again towards respect for her. They were not critical; the lines rhymed; it seemed to them very wonderful that a girl scarcely in her 'teens could write rhymes, and Laura was applauded heartily.

But when she returned to music, and especially when she prefaced her next number by the information that she had taken pity on Crestville's darkness, the village people altered their minds about Laura and were ready to poke fun at whatever she might do. There was no doubt that there was plenty of chance for ridicule. The foolish little girl began a song of Gottschalk's—and broke down. Then, nothing daunted, she essayed a solo on the organ, forgot to pump, lost her place, remembered to pump, but forgot her fingers, struck false notes, and ended by knocking her music off the rack with such force that a whole snarl of keys growled at once, and an irreverent boy in the audience cried: "Sic 'em! Catch 'em, Towse!" to the indecorous delight of all around him.

"I am not used to parlor organs," said Laura with tearful dignity and purpling face.

"Only to hand organs?" inquired someone in the audience, and a woman's voice said:

"Shame! Don't tease the little girl!" But several tittered. [199]

"I'm going to recite a great poem for you," said Laura rallying to her programme with what really was pluck, though misdirected. "Poetry is good for you to hear, because you all work so hard, and hear so little that is fine."

"How can she? How can a child of mine be so pompous and so foolish?" groaned her mother.

"It is only the artistic temperament, my dear," said Miss Bradbury philosophically, her keen eyes twinkling.

Then Laura began to recite Paul Revere's ride; she explained afterwards that she had selected that because it was patriotic for the Fourth of July, and that she thought she would throw in a smattering of historical teaching with the poetical training she was giving the Crestvillians.

What was her amazement to hear three voices join with hers in the recitation, and an additional voice occasionally shout out a word at the end of a line, as if some of her audience knew what rhyme to expect!

"It's in the Reader," whispered Gretta to Happie, and then Happie understood.

As Laura's voice faltered on the last syllable of the familiar poem, a big boy jumped up on the platform and bowed ironically to Laura.

"I am appointed by the residents of Crestville to thank you for improving them so much," he said. Then he turned to the audience, and added: "Ladies and gentlemen, considering you live so far from the city, and are a lot of hayseeds anyhow, I will recite for you a few poems, because [200]
poetry's good for you after haying. 'Hickory, dickory dock, the mouse ran up——'"

He could get no further. Instantly all the younger portion of the audience was on its feet shouting

Mother Goose rhyme after Mother Goose rhyme, sometimes in chorus, more often raggedly, each one, apparently, saying whatever rhyme presented itself, and young and old shouting with laughter the while.

"Now don't you mind 'em!" whispered a kindly old lady to the Scollards. "They don't mean nothin' hard—they're kinder making fun of your girl, but they don't mean nothin'!"

Mrs. Scollard smiled back, though a trifle tremulously. "It's hard on the child—she took it all so seriously—but she needs being laughed at; I'm glad they are laughing. And they are not unkind. She deserves a lesson for being so conceited with her elders! Please tell everybody the child did not consult us, we did not help her with this, and that we are grateful to Crestville for the way it is teaching her a few important facts."

For a few moments Laura stood facing her mocking audience, now turned entertainers in her stead. She could not grasp what had happened. At last the truth dawned upon her that she, Laura, the gifted, was being ridiculed, handled with no respect for her talents, nor for her social superiority. [201]

When she realized this painful fact, she turned as white as a little ghost, and fled from the church, the laughter of her audience following her down the road as she ran towards home.

CHAPTER XIII [202]

HUMILITY, CALVES AND GINGER POP

Mrs. Scollard lost no time in following Laura from her Waterloo. She and Happie hurried out of the chapel and down the road, leaving the Ark boys to carry out their hastily-laid plan of helping the Crestville boys to turn the occasion which Laura had meant should be so improving into an old-fashioned frolic, worthy the Day We Celebrate. But though Mrs. Scollard and Happie made their best pace down the road, Laura was nowhere in sight all the way, and when they reached the house there was still no trace of her. A window was open into the kitchen; if she were in the house, Laura must have climbed in that way, for her mother and Miss Bradbury had both keys.

Mrs. Scollard put hers into the lock with many misgivings. Her heart smote her for having let Laura go on to certain defeat; it might be—it would be—good for her in the end, but it was hard for the mother to give over the foolish child to discipline, and she yearned over her in her present mortification which must be cruelly hard to bear.

Inside the house everything was dark and quiet. Mrs. Scollard and Happie called Laura, but there [203] was no reply.

Striking a light they looked through the rooms on the lower floor, but found only Jeunesse Dorée, who came out stretching and purring, telling Happie that he had slept during his family's absence not to waste time, and was now entirely at her disposal for a romp.

There was no Laura, and when the search was continued up-stairs it was not more successful.

Miss Bradbury came home with Rosie and Penny, leaving Polly under the boys' protection to see the fun, and found mother and daughter much perturbed. Rosie took the situation calmly.

"She hain't lost," she said, removing Penny's hat and rather tight little coat, for Penny was growing fast. "She's hidin' somewheres; she's too sore to want to face a cat. She'll turn up. Looked in the cellar and on the attic? After that I'd hunt the barn. Many's the time I've hid in the hay, already, when I was little and my pap was after me; if we could keep out of the way long enough pap'd always fergit he meant to whip us. There hain't many places better to hide in than the hay-loft. I remember I was up there oncet hidin', and I come on a nest a hen had stole up there—had fourteen aiggs in it yet! I gathered all them there aiggs in my aprun—had to reach far to git 'em, so I put one foot over a bundle of straw there was layin' there—kinder stood astride of it yet—and I'll be switched if that there straw bundle didn't set out a-slidin'! I couldn't git offen it, [204] so I just dropped down as I stood, astride of it, and held up my aprun good, and I sez: Git ap! And I slid right down onto the barn floor 's much's ten foot below. My days, I thought the floor had come up through the top of my head when I struck! But I held up them aiggs in my aprun, and there wa'n't one of 'em broke. But I was that stunted I didn't git over it for good two hours."

Happie shouted; even Mrs. Scollard laughed, in spite of her growing anxiety, and Penny sighed admiringly: "Oh, Rosie dear, you *are* so funny!"

"Get a candle, Happie—I am afraid to carry a lighted lamp into the attic—and we'll look there first," said Mrs. Scollard. "Perhaps you had better stay here. I fancy Laura would rather not see you, nor Bob, till the first mortification is over."

Happie brought the candle, shading it with her hand from the strong breeze.

"Here it is, mother. I'll put Penny to bed in the meantime," she said.

Mrs. Scollard proceeded up the stairs, continuing her way to the attic, while Happy took Penny into her room.

There was nothing in sight when the mother reached the head of the narrow stairs, except a mouse which scuttled away to its hole as the light appeared, and just in time to escape Dorée,

who had followed his mistress in the hope of adventures of this nature, and with an expression of [205]
deep interest on his saucy, short-nosed face. The rafters loomed out in fantastic, wavering shapes before the exaggerating flame of the candle; everything was quiet and orderly, and Mrs. Scollard was about to turn towards the stairs, when Dorée remarked: "M-m-ummm?" in his pleasant little calling tone, and trotted over to the darkest corner, with his tail preternaturally straight, and his back slightly arched, as if ready for a caressing hand.

Mrs. Scollard took the cat's advice, and hurried in the same direction that he was going, holding her candle high above her head to throw the light into the gloom before her. There, prostrate behind the old Bittenbender trunk, lay the genius rejected by the ungrateful Crestvillians.

Mrs. Scollard set down her candle with mingled solicitude for Laura herself, and for Laura's best dress, and with a gleam of amusement, now that her anxiety was relieved.

"Laura dear, come out," she said gently. "Be wise enough not to brood over a mistake that you will not make again."

Laura lifted her head quickly. "Mistake, mamma!" she cried. "I made no mistake. But do you think I can help minding being treated so ungratefully, even insulted by those horrid, ignorant people?"

"Come here, Laura," said her mother, in the tone which her children always obeyed.

Laura came forth, dusty, tear-stained, a wreck of her usual self-satisfied and trim little self. Her [206]
mother drew her on her knee as she seated herself on a chest, and began to smooth the tumbled hair, and to stroke the hot cheeks with a gentle hand.

"Let me show you the mistake, my dear," she said. "Here is a little girl, barely thirteen, who first of all prepares an entertainment, and gives it, not only without consulting her elders, but without their permission. You certainly have no right, Laura, to undertake a public appearance without asking leave. It is for this that you are punished; I knew that you would receive your just dues if I refrained from interfering, and I am glad that your punishment has been quite severe enough without one from me. For—and this is the second part of your mistake, and a part that affects your every action—you take your small self much too seriously, my Laura. You have talents, which I hope to have cultivated into value, but in the meantime they are but a childish promise of what may be. And because of them you plume yourself, hold yourself superior to your brother and sisters, who are in their way quite as clever as you in yours, and more clever in not overrating themselves. It is very stupid to be conceited in a world full of truly great things, my Laura. Another mistake was to allow yourself to feel and to speak to our neighbors to-night as if you were their superior. They were older than you, my dear, and you have been taught that people with fewer advantages than yourself may be quite as quick-witted; a very wholesome lesson! The [207]
audience which you invited to come to be addressed condescendingly was perfectly sweet-tempered and patient with the little girl who tried to patronize it. I am grateful to the Crestville people for understanding, and being so kind. So you are not to harbor bitterness, nor to go on making the old mistake of thinking that what a child like you does matters too much. You are to come down with mother, go to bed and go to sleep, a wiser little girl, saying to yourself: 'I shall never again be a conceited little goose!' and nobody will think twice of what was merely a little girl's folly in forgetting that she *was* a little girl. But she's her mother's little girl, so give me a kiss, and forget all about this evening, except its lessons. I wonder if I can find a place not too dusty to kiss?"

Laura submitted to her mother's caress, but did not respond to it with an answering smile. She followed the wavering candle-light down the stairs with faltering steps; she was weak and ill from excessive crying, and the fall of her pride had bruised her mentally black and blue. Jeunesse Dorée, bringing up the rear, was the only cheerful person of the three.

In the morning Laura was feverish and not fit to get up. Mrs. Scollard left her in Rosie's care—she needed only rest,—and went for a drive with Miss Bradbury, who had of late summoned courage to brave automobiles with Don Dolor under her personal guidance. [208]

Gretta came up shortly after breakfast, bringing the fresh peas with which Miss Bradbury had asked her to supplement the crop of the Ark garden.

"You haven't any calves, have you?" Gretta said by way of salutation the moment she entered. "I saw some down by your gate; they must have just turned in from the road, but they looked as if they had just run out of your place."

"Cæsar's ghost! Of course we have calves; Aunt Keren got three two days ago, goodness knows what for!" cried Bob. "But they can't be ours, because I put them in the cow-yard, and looked after the bars myself."

"You don't know calves," said Rosie. "They beat the Dutch at getting out. I've seen 'em already get out when you wouldn't have believed anything could. Just you wait till apple time comes, and then try penning up your cows! They get clear crazy when they smell the ripe apples all over, and you can't keep 'em in to save you. I advise you to go right out and drive in them calves, Bob, and not wait a minute."

"Yes," said Gretta, "or they'll be, no one knows where! If you have any calves they must be yours I saw, for they were just inside your gate. There were three of them. We'll all go help you drive, but there ought to be more of us."

"Polly, you look after Laura if she wants something, while we chase up them calves," said Rosie. [209]
"Mortification's set in with Laura, Gretta; she's sick in bed after last night."

Gretta laughed, then looked pitying. "It's too bad; it was hard," she said.

"Come on, Snigs; come on, Ralph," called Happie. "We're going to enjoy the pleasures of the chase. Run up and tell Laura we'll be right back; she'll hear us, and worry," she added to Polly.

Now Snigs was just getting a bottle of ginger pop off the ice, intending to regale himself. The ice-box stood on the back stoop for lack of space in the kitchen, and when he heard the summons to chase calves, Snigs, nothing loathe to join in the sport, hastily shoved the bottle of ginger ale into his hip pocket, and ran around the side of the house to join the pursuing party.

There was no doubt that the calves were Bradburys—by adoption. Bob instantly recognized them as the three which, as he supposed, he had made fast in the cow-yard. Whether they recognized him or not was less certain. They all three faced the six bipeds with that peculiarly innocent gaze of calfhood, lowering their heads and spreading their feet, all three in a row, the ecru Jersey, the tan and brown part Jersey and the black and white Holstein.

"You just go around on that side, Snigs," said Bob, as he and Ralph prepared to dash forward. "Drive them right up. We'll head them off from around the house." [210]

This confident announcement proved how truly Rosie had spoken when she said that Bob did not know cows.

Drive them up, indeed! The moment Snigs came up somewhere near close enough to be of any use, the calves with one simultaneous, if not concerted, movement, lowered their heads a little further, kicked up their six hind legs and scuttled out into the road.

"There! That's the way they always act!" cried Gretta. "There's nothing on earth so hard to drive as calves, except pigs. Bob, run; head 'em off! Ralph, Snigs, get on up the road, or they'll go over into the next county. Come, Happie!" And Gretta herself followed Rosie down the road at top speed.

The calves paused, looking as who should say: "How strangely excited you all are!" Then they trotted quietly up the road, slipping past Rosie, Gretta and Happie by the simple device of dividing forces, one on one side, the other two on the other side of the road. Then they saw the boys, and stopped short, eyeing them blandly as they crept towards them, whirled suddenly, threw up their legs again, whisked their tails into an arch, and bolted for the boundary fence of the farm opposite the Ark.

"Keep 'em out of there!" shrieked Rosie. "That there field belongs to the crabbedest man in the township. My days, but it's hot!"

There was not the slightest objection to keeping them out of the field, save to the minds of the lively beasts themselves. They seemed to think it would be a good joke to go through a broken [211] paling and trample down their neighbor's clover—even calves are liable to have a different sense of humor from oneself.

The Holstein capered through—smiling, Happie declared—and the other two followed without the loss of a moment. Bob, Ralph and Snigs rushed after them, shouting like demented megaphones. The calves kept ahead of them without an effort.

"If they get over there by the woods that's the end of it!" cried Snigs despairingly. Suddenly the calves stopped, looked around inquiringly, wheeled right about face, and trotted easily up to the broken palings and out into the road, where they turned to gaze reproachfully at the irate boys whom they had left behind, plainly asking if they could not take their sport like gentlemen, and lose a race without losing their tempers.

"Now close up!" shouted Bob. "Head 'em off into our gate; they're bunched now." They were, but they immediately unbunched—if one may so express their sudden scattering.

Rosie and Gretta made a desperate lurch to stop this dispersion. Rosie stubbed her toe on a rock and fell headlong, her whole great length stretched out on the dusty road, and her arms extended; she looked like a fallen guide-post.

The boys uttered a war-whoop, and nearly fell over the fence they were climbing. Rosie was a wreck as Happie and Gretta raised her; dust—the red shale dust of the region reddening her [212] clean gingham; her sunbonnet flattened into a reddish mass, and her face crimson from heat, wrath and the shock of her fall.

"Mahlon hain't much of a man, but he's got the right to swear; I hain't," she remarked grimly, evidently regretting masculine rights and her own limitations.

Gretta wiped away the tears of laughter on her own dusty apron.

"Eunice will be furious because I'm gone so long," she said, "but this is worth a scolding. And do look once at those calves!"

Apparently the three young reprobates had taken Rosie's fall as a melancholy warning of what happened when people ran, for they had turned into their own gate as meekly as if that had been their intention from the first, and stood chewing and looking out at the heated group of their pursuers.

"They look as if they were going to sing: 'Speak gently, it is better far to rule by love than fear,'" said Happie, pulling herself together; she was weak from laughter.

"For mercy's sake, drive them in before they change their minds again!" cried Bob. "Here come mother and Aunt Keren back."

Rosie, Gretta and Happie ran up to the gate of the Ark just as the boys reached it from the other side, and just as Don Dolor, in the road, was nearly abreast of it. To every one's horror there

came a loud report, apparently a pistol shot. Snigs shot up into the air about a yard, and fell, [213]
screaming aloud. Don Dolor arose on his hind legs, danced a moment as Miss Bradbury vainly tried to get control of him, then bolted down the road in a cloud of dust.

It had all happened so quickly that for an instant the terrified group around Snigs stood petrified, gazing at the prostrate boy, and down the road after the flying horse. Then Ralph picked up Snigs with agony stamped on his face, and Rosie cried: "What in time has happened? Why," she added, feeling of Snigs, "you're all wet; are you bleeding?"

"I guess so," moaned Snigs. "It's the ginger—ginger ale."

"Ginger ale!" echoed Ralph with a darting thought that the wound was in his brother's head, and that he was wandering in his mind.

"What ginger ale?" demanded Rosie, more than ever mystified.

"Went off in my pock—pocket," sobbed Snigs, trying to control his unmanly emotion.

Bob, experienced in being a boy, plunged his hand into Snigs' hip pocket, and drew it out quicker than he had put it in, dripping with blood.

"Great Scott! His pocket's full of broken glass!" he cried. "Did you have a bottle of ginger pop in there, Snigs?"

"Yes," said Snigs, mastering the tears that flowed more from nervousness than from pain. "I was just getting one when you called me to catch those calves—plague take them! So I stuffed it into [214]
my pocket, because I was in too big a hurry to go into the house with it, and now it's bust!"

"It got hot and worked!" cried Bob. "Christopher Columbus, what a morning!" He couldn't help laughing, but he looked worried. "I wish I knew where mother was; Aunt Keren can't drive when a horse needs driving. They may be upset."

"I guess not; the road's straight," said Rosie. "Are you hurt, Snigs? Maybe that there glass blew somewhere into his flesh."

"Oh!" cried Happie, laughing and crying hysterically as she pictured glass blowing into flesh, and straining her eyes for a sight of Don Dolor.

"They're coming!" cried Gretta, who had the long vision of eyes accustomed to mountain reaches. "My, they must be worried! It sounded exactly like a shot."

"I'm going to help Ralph carry Snigs up-stairs," said Rosie, but Laura intercepted her, coming over the grass in a trailing wrapper of her mother's, with Polly and Penny clinging to her hands.

"Who did that pistol kill?" she demanded tragically, with no doubt that a case of not-knowing-that-it-was-loaded had occurred in her family.

"Snigs has been wounded by ginger pop," cried Happie over her shoulder, flying to meet the returning buggy. [215]

"Who is wounded; tell me quick who is wounded?" gasped Mrs. Scollard, leaning far out of the carriage, while at the same time Miss Bradbury demanded: "Where did you get it?"

"Snigs is wounded; he got it out of the ice box—it was a ginger pop bottle that exploded in his pocket. It's not serious, mother," shouted Bob.

Even Miss Bradbury's laugh rang out at this statement, and Mrs. Scollard fell back into her seat, sobbing and laughing at the relief.

Don Dolor looked ashamed of himself, yet glad that he had so quickly allowed himself to be brought under control by his inexperienced driver, hoping, probably, that his family would make due allowance for the fact that the explosion had sounded enough like a pistol to deceive them, and that he had not been expecting such a sound at his own gate.

"Such a morning, and all for those dreadful calves!" sighed Happie, as she and Gretta climbed into the buggy to go after the doctor, and Ralph and Bob bore Snigs into the house. "By the way, where are the abominable things?"

"Rosie has them," said Polly. "She drove them around the house."

"You'd better go in, Laura; you're not dressed for public—for being out of doors," said Happie, altering her sentence, fearing to allude to public appearances when Laura was emerging from her tragic frame of mind in relation to her recent experience in that line. [216]

Gretta and Happie looked back as they drove out of the yard. They saw Rosie putting up the cow-yard bars, while the three calves looked over them with gentle, peaceful faces. Even at that distance the girls could recognize the emphasis with which Rosie put the bars in the posts, and made them fast.

CHAPTER XIV [217]

AN ARK ADRIFT?

SNIGS' queer accident proved more serious than it had at first appeared. The glass had "blown into the flesh," as Rosie had suggested; it took seven stitches of sewing to repair the boy, and

he was ill in bed for ten days with high fever and considerable pain.

July was wearing away into August, and the thermometer mounted uncommonly high for an instrument hanging at such altitude above sea-level.

Mrs. Scollard drooped under the heat, and chafed with impatience to get well; the prospect of resuming her duties in town looked distant and dim.

Happie lost her fresh color and buoyancy under unaccustomed duties, and Bob grew grave also as each day piled up hard farm work, and September loomed in sight with its unsolved problems of school and business opportunities.

Polly and Penny were growing bigger and browner almost hour by hour, and Laura was an improved Laura, with her vanity much chastened and her self-confidence subdued by her misadventure. Margery's letters were overflowing with happiness, but her mother read in them subtle indications that her eldest girl was slipping over the boundary line of young girlhood, and [218]
was growing up.

Gretta's affairs were getting worse, while she was improving day by day. Miss Bradbury and Mrs. Scollard had grown very fond of the pretty girl, and hardly less interested than Happie in trying to solve the untangling of her life. In proportion as her new friends cared for her, and she blossomed out into the development her cousins had grudged her, the Neumanns became more unkind to her. It was plain that matters could not long continue as they were, and Miss Bradbury and Mrs. Scollard fruitlessly discussed Gretta's prospects, and wished it were within their power to brighten them.

The first of August brought summons of return to Ralph and Snigs. They went away sadly, for the prospect of the Scollards' following them was not bright, and the boys would not be able to come back to the Ark before school began.

These were the changes that August brought to the Ark. With them there was creeping into the air a feeling of waiting. Not of waiting for anything definite, but a vague feeling of unrest, as if "something were going to happen," a feeling very like the atmosphere on a still August afternoon when not a leaf is stirring, and great thunder heads pile up in the west.

"I only hope it will be something good when it happens," Happie said when her mother confessed to this uneasiness. "It really seems as if we could not stand anything bad." [219]

She did not mean to betray her weariness in well-doing; it slipped out in spite of herself.

"Poor little Happie!" sighed her mother, fluttering the sheets of her latest long letter from Margery. "I wonder if I should have insisted on your going to Bar Harbor?"

"Of course not, motherums!" cried Happie hastily. "Margery's letters sound as if she were as happy as the days are long, but they sound as if she had more Margery-things than Happie-things."

"So they do," assented her mother. "You too have noticed the older note, then? I suppose we must make up our minds to letting Margery grow up. But you would have found what you call 'Happie-things' if you had been there. We all find our own attractions throughout life, and wherever we may be. Like draws like, and we rise or sink to our own level; never forget that, my Happie."

"Mothers find little texts everywhere, don't they, motherums?" said Happie kissing her. "They are forever improving their children's minds and morals, and they don't have to wait to find sermons even in stones—though Bar Harbor must have rocks!"

"It is a great advantage to a preacher to have a congregation that must listen," retorted her mother. "Run away and make your cake for supper, you saucy Happie." [220]

"Saucy Happie" turned away laughing, but before she had time to obey Miss Bradbury came into the room with a step that combined stealth and haste.

"I haven't said a word," she whispered, so low that she could hardly be described as saying a word then, "because I did not want to frighten you, Charlotte, but Dundee has been growling fearfully for the past two nights. I don't see how you could have helped hearing him—though to be sure he has slept under my bed, with my door shut! He is out in the yard now, growling and crawling up towards the back door. I am certain that I saw a figure skulking along by the fence. Here is a revolver; I brought it up in case of need, but I can't let any one touch it. Where's Bob?"

"He's out in the barn looking after Don Dolor," said Mrs. Scollard. "I'm not at all frightened, Miss Keren. I'm sure there's nothing wrong. Suppose you stay here with the revolver, and let Happie go out in the kitchen to see if Rosie's there."

"You never can tell how nervous people are going to be nervous!" exclaimed Miss Bradbury, as if she were disappointed by Mrs. Scollard's calmness, even while dreading to disturb her. "Very well; creep out, Happie, but go carefully!"

Happie laughed, and obediently departed. She heard low voices as she neared the kitchen, and she opened the door to discover Rosie's Mahlon standing there on one leg, "like the goose he is," Happie thought, not feeling in the mood to be amused by Rosie's decidedly not better half. [221]

"Have you been around here nights lately?" asked Happie.

"Pretty much all summer," whined Mahlon. "Rosie didn't know it—she wouldn't have cared, no sir, not if she did know it. She hasn't any heart in her, and then you folks got a dog!"

Happie's laugh rang out, and she hurried back to the library. "Put away your revolver, Aunt

Keren; it's only Rosie's Mahlon, and the most you would need for him would be a wringing machine—he's very tearful!"

Then she rushed back to see the fun.

"Now you keep still!" she heard Rosie say in a fierce whisper as she entered. But it was much too hard a matter to Mahlon to get started talking for him to be easily silenced. He swung his right arm, and swung his right leg in unison with it. His voice arose into a tearful whine; he seemed to be on the point of breaking into tears, as he often did when excited.

"No, sir," he piped, "I couldn't do it! Nobody couldn't do it. He told me to go up once on the barn loft, on that there cracked ladder and throw down the old straw. And I told him I couldn't, and I wasn't goin' to break my neck, not for him nor nobody like him, and me with a wife dependent on me yet!"

Rosie glanced at Happie involuntarily, with a gleam of pure humor in her eyes, and in spite of herself Happie laughed aloud. [222]

This seemed to outrage Mahlon's already wounded feelings. His voice rose higher and more squeaky as he said: "Yes, sir, you may laugh, but I'm a man, and I've got a man's feelin's yet. I told him I wouldn't climb that there ladder, not if I died fer it, and he said I'd got to climb it, or quit. So I quit, and here I am. I'd like to know what your folks think I'm goin' to do if I hain't got no work, and my wife helpin' you, and my house shut up, lettin' me without no home?"

The arm-and-leg movement waxed furious, and the wailing voice broke altogether as the forlorn creature fell like a scarecrow in a gale, doubled up on a chair, his arms on the table, while he cried into them, face downwards.

Happie felt painfully embarrassed, not understanding the intention of this appeal, but Rosie proved herself equal to this, as to all other occasions.

She took her limp husband by the shoulder and shook him together like a feather bed, the same movement bringing him to his feet.

"Here, you git ap!" she said emphatically. "I hain't goin' to have them dirty coat sleeves that you wear 'round the pigs on my clean table where I'm goin' to make biscuits, and Happie's goin' to bake cake fer supper yet! And you cryin', like a I'd-know-what! I bet you what you dare they got tired already chasin' you round over there to make you work! I guess I know how you dig—take [223] out one shovelful, and then stand five minutes and admire the hole! Happie hain't goin' to be bothered with you. If you want her Aunt Keren to leave you work fer her, you've got to ask her yourself. My days, Mahlon, you look and act more like a roll of carpet rags when I hain't seen you fer a while than ever. You go out and see'f you can't do nothin' towards helpin' Bob a while. He's cleanin' the horse's stall and beddin' him down. You go out once and find out. Supper'll be ready till you come back. If you hain't got nothin' you *must* do, git up and do somethin' you *kin* do!"

Mahlon acted on this strong hint, and departed barnward. Happie hid her face by stooping down to get out the cake tins from the deepest recesses of the kitchen closet. Rosie sighed, then she laughed; she was an unconscious philosopher of the school that holds it best to smile at the misfortunes which cannot be cured, that being the one way in which they can be endured.

"If ever you git married, Happie," she said—"and if you take my advice you'll think it over hard before you set the day, and then set another day twenty years later, and think it over again till that one, and I guess till then you'll have seen enough to know you hadn't ought to be in no hurry —but if ever you do git married, for the goodness' sake git a man you don't have to order round! I never give Mahlon orders but I feel 'sif I'd ought ter be broomsticked! My days, I've thought [224] already I'd ruther have a man take a broomstick to *me* then lop 'round so! A woman hadn't orter give the orders, but when you've got to, you've got to. Don Dolor would look well drivin' you, now wouldn't he? That's the way 'tis: the one that's fit to drive's got to drive, if you want to git anywheres. But don't you never git that kind. I guess you've got to put that there bitter ammon in your cake; the vanilla's all."

Happie made her cake and Rosie made her biscuits, and Mahlon returned with Bob—who had learned to milk—in time to enjoy their steaming fragrance and more substantial qualities.

Miss Bradbury saw at a glance that Bob welcomed the assistance of even the dilapidated Mahlon, for Pete and Jake were uncertain, whereas the duties of each day were as certain as the rising of the sun. Miss Keren therefore engaged Mahlon "to paddle around the Ark," as Bob expressed it, to the ridiculous delight of that abject person, who fully appreciated the gain he had made in insinuating himself into the Ark. "Only," said Miss Bradbury whimsically, "if we could have known it was he who haunted the place by nights we could have dispensed with Dundee's services."

After tea the heavy clouds which had been gathering all the afternoon in white curled masses in the west, mounted higher with the sunset, and turned black and purple, emitting low growls, and occasionally parting to show long, jagged stripes of flame. [225]

"It will be a good one when it gits here," remarked Rosie, putting the remaining biscuits into the bread box. "It's goin' to come sudden, too. If you've let anything to do after supper, Bob, you'd better be about it."

"Everything is battened down and tight caulked for the gale, Captain Gruber," replied Bob in nautical, but indistinct terms, his mouth being occupied with a postscript to supper, in the form of a stolen piece of Happie's cake.

It was nine o'clock, however, before the storm burst with sudden fury out of a greenish-blackness

of sky and atmosphere that added to the horror of the vivid lightning.

Miss Bradbury sat erect on a straight chair with her feet on another, in rigid contempt of her own undeniable fear. Mrs. Scollard held Laura and Polly, one in each arm, and Bob and Happie tried to sing, but they missed Margery's sweet alto, and succeeded less well than usual in distracting the family attention from the storm. At its height a carriage dashed up the driveway, and a woman's voice cried: "Whoa!"

"Some one's got caught," observed Rosie, as the family looked at one another, the younger ones with a natural tendency to find something portentous in this arrival out of the wildness and blackness of the night.

"It's like Guy Mannering," whispered Happie to Bob.

Rosie opened the door. They heard her exclaim: "Well, for goodness' sake!"

Then she led the way into the library, as it had been decided to call what had been the parlor, [226]
and what Rosie still designated "the room."

She was followed by Miss Eunice Neumann, her sister, and an older woman; all three were very wet and looked as disgusted as mortals could look.

"We thought we'd git home ahead of it," remarked Eunice Neumann by way of greeting, not specifying what they had hoped to outstrip. "But it came up faster than what we thought it would, and when we got here Emmaline said she'd know it if she'd go further, so we come in here. Mahlon took the horse," she added to Rosie, as if she had the first claim to an explanation.

"I'm glad you did not try to go on," said Mrs. Scollard, rising. "Even the distance to your house is too great to travel in weather such as this is. Shall Bob make a fire, a wood-fire on the hearth, Miss Keren? And Rosie will take Miss Neumann up-stairs and lend you dry garments, while yours are hung in the kitchen."

"No, sir; I hain't goin' to bother changin'," said Eunice emphatically. "We'll sit on these wooden chairs. 'Twon't hurt them none to git wet." So saying she drew forth three cherished old chairs which had been Miss Bradbury's grandmother's, and established herself on the first one, setting her sister and her friend an example.

"Bob, please make a fire," said Miss Bradbury. "We do not know this third lady?" [227]

"That there one with 'em is Emmaline Gulick," said Rosie, supplying the deficiencies of introduction, as Eunice disregarded Miss Bradbury's reminder. She spoke, to Mrs. Scollard's embarrassment, in her usual tone, but the reason for this speedily developed.

"She's as deef as a whole row of posts," Rosie continued. "She used to live around here, but she moved down country; she's visitin' the Neumanns now."

"Yes," said Reba speaking unexpectedly. "We feel sorry fer her."

"Is Gretta at home alone?" asked Happie, shrinking from a particularly vivid flash of lightning as she looked out of the window.

"Yes, she is, and lucky to be there yet; I wisht I was," said Eunice. "You've got it nice here now. I wonder you hain't afraid, takin' what belongs to an orphan girl."

"Now, Eunice, you keep still!" interposed Rosie sharply. "They don't know nothin' about that there story, and no one knows if there's a word of truth in it."

Neither of her hostesses were paying very strict attention to the visitor's remarks, but Happie came forward at once from the window. "Aunt Keren," she said, "this is the second time Miss Neumann has hinted that this house is not rightfully yours, only the first time she did more than hint—she said straight out that it belonged to Gretta. I asked Gretta what it meant, but she said nothing at all. Now Rosie seems to have heard of it. Wouldn't you like to understand it?" [228]

"Of course," said Miss Bradbury sharply, forgetting to keep the current of electricity in safe directions, and endangering her life by letting her feet slip from the round of her second chair. "Tell us what you know, Miss Neumann—or Rosie."

"I know all there is to know, and it's all foolishness," said Rosie, forestalling Eunice. "Suppose I git Emmaline Gulick a cup of tea, she's that wet."

"By all means the tea, and for us all, please, but what is the story?" insisted Miss Bradbury, alert as she became convinced there really was a story.

"Gretta's grandmother owned this house," began Eunice, nothing loath to tell the tale which Rosie would gladly have suppressed. "She owned it before she went and married a second time, married old Bittenbender yet! Everybody knew what he was, they say. She found out her mistake, and it didn't take long neither, but 'tain't so easy cuttin' the hangman's rope as 'tis tyin' it. She had to make the best of what there wasn't no best to. She said often and often that she'd made a will leavin' everything she had to her son—that was Gretta's father. But when she come to die her son was dead and buried before her, and there wasn't no will nowheres. So old Bittenbender he took the house, and there wasn't nobody to stop him. We couldn't go to law about it; we hadn't the money nor the time to be on the court for dear knows how many years. Gretta hadn't no other [229]
relations to make a fuss, so it stood the way 'twas. If they'd found the will old Bittenbender couldn't have took it, but as 'twas, he did. Then when he'd had it as long's he wanted it, and he was goin' off to live with his folks in Northampton County—he'd had a stroke and couldn't live on alone—why, didn't he up and give over the place to you instead of payin' you what he owed you in money, and lettin' the place for Gretta, who'd ought to have had it by rights in the first place! The

Bittenbenders had plenty money, so there wasn't no reason why he couldn't have paid up if he'd had a mind to. He's dead now himself, and you've got the place, but you hadn't ought to have had it, and if 'twas me I shouldn't want it, knowin' how 'twas."

Miss Bradbury and Mrs. Scollard exchanged perturbed glances, while the children watched them anxiously.

"Miss Neumann," said Miss Bradbury at last, "this is a most amazing story. Of course you realize that it is based on mere rumor; there is no proof that Gretta's grandmother made a will, and it is possible that it was she who failed in her duty of providing for the child. It is possible that Mr. Bittenbender had a legal right to the place. Certainly I am guiltless of so much as a suspicion that any one was wronged by his holding it and relinquishing it to me. All that I can do is to try to discover the truth. You may rest assured that I shall deal entirely honestly, not merely according [230] to the letter of the law, but according to its spirit, and should do so were it a stranger who was affected by this issue, and not Gretta, of whom we are so fond."

"It don't do much good to talk," said Eunice defiantly. "I meant to come up and tell you about this, come a-purpose, but now the rain's drove me in here I thought I might as well leave you know what's on my mind when I'd got the chance. Gretta's less good than ever to us. She's all took up with you folks here, and she's gittin' more and more ungrateful to us, who's done all she's had done fer her since she was five years old."

"And that hain't much," Rosie burst forth. "You hadn't ought to talk, Eunice; you had ought to remember we was all lookin' on, and everybody in Crestville knews Gretta's more'n earned the interest on the time before she could do anything. You come out in the kitchen with me and I'll give you some tea. Then I guess, Miss Bradbury, they might as well go up-stairs and go to bed. It's ten o'clock already, and the storm's as fierce as ever, and it'll be late till it stops, if 'tain't morning. You make Emmaline understand, Eunice, and you and Reba kin go to bed in my room."

"I guess I won't drink tea at this hour!" exclaimed Eunice indignantly, "and I hain't a-goin' to bed. Emmaline's kind of feeble; if you want to take her up to your room and leave her lay till she's [231] called, I don't care, but I hain't goin' to bed, nor Reba hain't. I won't keep you folks up; you kin let us with Rosie, and go to bed if you want to. I wanted to tell you about this house, and now I'm satisfied."

"I'll take 'em out in the kitchen," whispered Rosie, rigid with indignant loyalty to Miss Bradbury. "Don't you worry about that story; nobody don't know the truth, anyhow."

Miss Bradbury nodded, quite unperturbed, and said aloud: "I shall make it my business to learn the truth, Rosie."

Poor old deaf Emmaline Gulick was taken up to Rosie's little room to rest, and soon fell comfortably asleep, unconscious of the roar of thunder.

Laura and Polly fell asleep with Jeunesse Dorée on the couch, and their mother, with Bob and Happie, discussed in all its bearings the exciting tale they had just heard, Miss Bradbury much less disturbed than any of them.

The children discovered that they had grown fonder of the Ark than they knew, and it was not wholly pleasant to find any one, even Gretta, its owner instead of themselves—for so thoroughly had Aunt Keren welded them into one family that the Ark seemed as much theirs as hers.

It was midnight when the storm finally broke away sufficiently to allow the refugees from its fury to continue the short remainder of their journey. [232]

Reba went up to awaken Emmaline Gulick. It was not an easy task. Deaf to all sounds, sunk in the first heavy sleep of weariness and increasing years, Reba's voice could not penetrate Emmaline's consciousness.

She laid her hand upon the sleeper's arm. "Emmaline, Emmaline, wake up!" she cried. "It hain't raining now and we're goin' home. Hurry up, Emmaline!"

Emmaline had one abiding dread, and that was fire. As she struggled to the surface of the waking world, that fear asserted itself. She could not hear a word that Reba said; she did not know where she was, but of one thing she was instantly certain. Wherever she was the place was on fire, and she must run for her life!

She snatched a blanket and threw it around her, although she had lain down completely dressed. Wrapped in this blanket, with its striped red border wandering fantastically around her thin, small figure, she ran down-stairs, followed by Reba vainly shouting to her to stop, and entirely at sea as to what ailed her elderly friend.

The family had gathered at the foot of the stairs waiting to see their guests depart; Eunice was already in the carriage at the door. They heard Reba calling frantically to Emmaline to stop, heard her say: "Oh, she's gone crazy! Stop her, Eunice!" They saw the little gray-haired creature, with the gorgeous blanket enveloping her, fly down the stairs and out of the front door, hotly pursued by Reba, and the walls echoed to the children's irrepressible whoop of delight. [233]

It was too dark outside to see clearly the violence with which Emmaline threw herself into the buggy, falling on her knees and getting wound up in the blanket in her haste, but the amazed inmates of the Ark heard Eunice cry: "Git ap!" as Emmaline pulled Reba in after her with the strength of terror and saw the horse start off, probably no less surprised than the human beings behind him. Then they saw Eunice's head thrust out of the side of the buggy, and heard her voice call back in profound disgust: "I'll send the blanket back to-morrer! She thinks the house's afire!"

With that the unexpected visitors made their hasty exit, and all the young Scollards fell in a heap on the lower steps of the stairs, rolling and rocking in agonies of laughter.

CHAPTER XV [234]

THE PROMISE OF THE GREEN BRANCH

When the family assembled at the breakfast table on the following morning, and had laughed their fill at the memory of the funny exit of the preceding evening, they discovered that the visitors had left a residuum of discomfort in the mind of each member of the family who was old enough to realize the full import of Eunice Neumann's story about the house.

It would be bad enough in any case to feel that their enjoyment of the Ark was the fruit of dishonesty, but when the person who suffered from that dishonesty was Gretta, Gretta of whom they had all grown so fond, and who so sorely needed justice done her, it was unbearable to feel that they might be innocently adding to her wrongs by depriving her of her property.

Therefore when they espied Gretta coming up the road with the blanket which Emmaline Gulick had carried off in her stampede from her fancied fire, Happie rushed to meet her with more than her usual eagerness, and dragged Gretta into the dining-room, completely bewildered by the flood of questions and incomprehensible explanations with which Happie was deluging her. [235]

Miss Bradbury greeted the young girl with a hint of tenderness unlike her usual manner, and Mrs. Scollard kissed her very gently. Gretta perched herself on a chair beside the latter, fanning herself with her sunbonnet and twisting a corner of the apron which she never discarded when she came on an errand, as she never wore it when making a social call, thereby marking the difference between the two.

"I'm sure I don't know what Happie is trying to tell me," she said with a whimsical twist of the lips. "She always talks so fast that I have to listen with every bit of me—I'm used to folks that talk slow, you know. But this time an automobile couldn't keep up with her! All I can make out is that Eunice told you something about this house being mine by rights, and that it worries you."

"You seem to have kept up pretty well, considering you haven't an automobile, Gretta," said Bob. "That's the story in a nutshell."

"I expect you to tell me all that you know of the matter, Gretta," said Miss Bradbury. "I have no particular desire to wrong any one, and I don't purpose beginning with you."

"I don't know one thing about it, Miss Bradbury, and that's the truth. All I have heard I have heard from Eunice, and you may be sure she didn't leave out much when she told you about it," said Gretta. "Everybody around here who knew her says my grandmother meant to have willed me this house, but there never was any will found, and that's all there is to it. There's no reason [236] why you should leave—let—it worry you. I didn't get the house, and it's a good thing for me that you did, instead of somebody else."

"I shall certainly look into the matter thoroughly, and if the house is yours you shall have it as soon as I can deliver it. Then I'll rent it from you, if you will lease it to me," said Miss Bradbury with such a briskly ready air that it suggested a pen already in her hand with which to sign a lease.

Gretta laughed carelessly as she arose to go. "There isn't a single thing to find out, nor to talk about," she declared. "Eunice has tried to find out, but she didn't get at anything more than she knew before, and she would if there was anything to find out. She'd do more than get a house for me, to get rid of me! I guess I'll have to ask you to find me a place of some sort in the city next winter; I don't believe I can stay here."

The pretty face clouded and the dark eyes filled with tears. More painful to Gretta than the hard fact that she was homeless and resourceless was the injustice of her cousins' treatment of her, and that, do what she would, she could win no love from them, but was considered a burden and a nuisance.

"It's all coming out some way, Gretta!" cried Happie, throwing her arms around the girl so impulsively that the sunbonnet which she was just tying on flew across the room. [237]

Bob picked up the bonnet and handed it to Gretta with a deep bow, hand on heart, in true colonial manner.

"Don't you worry, Gretta," he said. "We'll all go into business together in New York this winter. We've got so we feel you're one of the family—and I guess we feel as if we owned the Ark, instead of Aunt Keren! We wouldn't be willing to disembark from it, even to give it to you! This is a nice sort of place, after all."

"I don't know any other," said Gretta with a grateful smile of acknowledgment to Bob for his including her in family plans, "but this house looks perfectly beautiful to me. There isn't any other around here half so pretty as you have made this one. And I don't believe I could be happy long away from Crestville. No matter what fine things I looked at I'm sure my eyes would ache for a sight of those mountains."

She turned towards the window as she spoke, and her eyes brightened lovingly as they rested on the mountain peaks, just visible above the trees. Then she turned back to the friends who had

cheered her lonely life, and smiled brightly, brushing away a tear or two that glistened on her lashes.

"Don't you worry about me, dear folks," she said. "You have made me rich already, and the house doesn't matter." Then she fairly ran away, embarrassed by her unwonted betrayal of feeling. [238]

Miss Bradbury took Don Dolor and one of the Scollards and drove about cross-examining every old man or woman who might know something definite of Mrs. Bittenbender's will. But in every instance she failed in getting more than an unanimous testimony to the misfortune which Gretta's grandmother's second marriage had been, and to the fact that she had intended willing everything tight and fast to her son and his child, out of the reach of the Bittenbender grasping fingers. That she had done so nobody could prove, and it was certain that the son, Gretta's father, had died some months before his mother. To be sure, there were those who declared that they had heard Mrs. Bittenbender say, not that she *would* make this will, but that she *had* made it. Still, the will itself was not in evidence, and finally Miss Bradbury gave up the investigation, baffled, still uneasy in her mind, but unable to see that it was her duty to give up the farm.

For justice, to be wise and efficacious, must include justice to oneself. The farm had come to Miss Bradbury in payment of a debt; she could not prove that it had come to her from other than its legal owner. And her plans for the future made it well for all concerned that the Ark should belong to upright, big-hearted Keren-happuch Bradbury. The matter resolved itself into letting everything go on as it was, holding the farm in readiness to give it up, should proof arise that it was not Miss Bradbury's, except by the wrong-doing of the late Bittenbender, and in the [239] meantime trying more than ever to make up to Gretta for her hard fate.

While the question was under discussion, and was the uppermost interest in the Ark, the weeks of August slipped by into the first week of September, and the letter for which the Scollards were eagerly looking came from Margery, announcing her return.

A breath of fresh air seemed to blow through the Ark on the opening of that letter. All the inmates revived as they did when the strong September winds swept down the mountains, driving off the August heaviness.

Happie fell to garnishing her room for Margery to return to, re-covering chair cushions, washing and furbishing the lace of the pin cushion. Laura began at once the composition of a Song of Welcome, the first musical feat that she had essayed since the disastrous Fourth.

Polly began to sew for dear life on a new gown for Phyllis Lovelocks, that she might be suitably attired to greet her traveled aunt. Even little Penny cleaned her doll house, and weeded industriously the tiny garden which had been given her, and in which the weeds so far exceeded the flowers that the marigold which had survived the choking process fatal to Penny's other seeds, stood out, looking conspicuously out of place among its ragged comrades.

Bob went about whistling, putting fine touches on handsome Don Dolor's glossy coat and [240] harness, and getting the place into better condition than ever, though all summer the garden had been a credit to an inexperienced boy. Miss Bradbury did not say much, but she watched, and fully appreciated the manly lad who had shouldered his disagreeable and unaccustomed tasks without a murmur, and had performed them so well that the farm—"and the cows and calves and the horse," Happie said—blossomed like the tropics.

Rosie cleaned house with a fervor that was more like a fever, especially that no one save herself could see a speck in all her domain. But to Rosie's mind, house-cleaning was necessary before any event; it was to her a ceremonial, not unlike the ablutions of the Jews.

As to Margery's mother, she performed no unusual tasks, but went about the ordinary ones with such a happy, brooding look that it betrayed how much she had missed her eldest, and how ill a mother can spare one child, even from a large flock.

Every corner of the Ark was filled with glad expectancy, and the country was growing lovelier every moment. The summer boarders who had thronged into the mountains were daily crowding the little Crestville station platform, returning to the two great cities which poured their citizens into Pennsylvania for the summer.

The Scollards watched these crowds with a feeling of pity, to their own unbounded surprise, for they had not realized how entirely they were recovered from their first homesickness. It seemed [241] hard to be going back now that everything was at its best, and hourly growing better—if a paradox that seemed to be true might be permitted.

"Perfect weather for Margery," said Mrs. Scollard with profound satisfaction.

"Expressly for her," Miss Bradbury agreed with a smile, but she looked as pleased with the prospect of getting back their gentle girl as her mother could ask.

"We ought not to have called Rosie the dove; if we hadn't we could have said that Margery was the dove, returning after many days," suggested Laura.

"Yes; she's the dove-like one of this family," Bob agreed.

"I wonder what she may have found on the face of the waters, on her first flight without me. Of course she has written faithfully, but letters do not tell one much. I hope she will not return less our dove-like Margery," said her mother.

"No fear, motherums," cried Happie with conviction. "Only an anxious mother could imagine Margery changed. She is never anything but her quiet self; she never puts on—nor takes off"—Happie paused to chuckle a little over her logical new expression—"never puts on nor takes off

airs, nor does anything but just go on breathing and being the way she was meant to breathe and to be, and nothing on this earth could make her different. She's a gentle girl, but she's not one bit [242] easily influenced. Margery would be just the same Margery if she were made empress of the French as suddenly as Josephine was, or if she were put down in a tenement to make alpaca coats and eat limburger cheese all her days."

"Well, I wouldn't go as far as that, Hapsie," remarked Bob, departing to harness. "If limburger's influence is as strong as its odor, it ought to affect any one."

Bob profited this time by his labors and position of coachman, for he was secure of meeting Margery. The others had to debate which were to go; it ended in Laura's going with the two younger children, and Happie's staying at home with her mother to welcome the traveler in the role of Daughter of the House.

In the glorious September sunset, through the delicious odor of the ripened wild grapes, Don Dolor brought Margery up the hill home. Happie sprang down the steps to greet her, and then stood still, not only to allow her mother her right of the first embrace, but because it seemed to her that after all it was a different Margery from the one who had happily, yet tearfully, bidden them good-bye more than two months before, whose pretty face now smiled gladly at them over the children's shoulders.

The quick perception of the change held Happie's flying feet, bringing a pang with it, but only for the briefest of seconds. As soon as her mother released her from her clinging embrace, Happie [243] had Margery in her arms, and was crushing her dainty linen in a way that left no doubt of her joy in getting her sister back again.

Margery stood on the upper step of the Ark and looked around her, the sunset resting on her face. In her eyes there was a greater radiance of joy, and around her lips an expression of deeper sweetness than when she left them. Her voice thrilled with new music, though all that she said was: "Oh, it's good to be here again, and I am so glad to see you all!"

Miss Bradbury followed Mrs. Scollard's glance to Margery and nodded emphatically to her telegram, thus delivered, that she found her girl most good to look upon.

"I should be glad of a little, even the least notice from Happie; I should like to be considered some consequence in my own Ark," she said with deep pathos, as Happie tripped over her foot without knowing that she had done so.

Happie wheeled around with a laugh. "Oh, Aunt Keren," she cried, "you haven't blossomed into a lovely young lady since I last saw you, and I truly believe that Margery has!"

Margery had. Rosie saw it the instant that Margery entered the house, and put out her sea-browned hand to clasp faithful Rosie's hard one. Gretta saw it when she ran up after tea to add a word to the welcoming chorus, and even Mahlon—waxing something like alive since he had [244] benefited by his wife's cooking—even Mahlon said: "Guess Margery's been looking 'round. She's woke up someway since she was 'way off wherever 'twas."

After the children had been tucked away for the night, Margery and Happie crept to their room where they could be together alone once more, looking out at the mountains. The whole world was flooded with the radiance of the harvest moon, and the mountains rose up in its light with the heavy shadows of their own peaks touching the dimmed stars, dark amid the glory of the white night.

Happie curled herself up at Margery's feet. She felt unwontedly long and awkward, conscious of her immaturity and a trifle shy, as she gazed up at Margery, sitting in her white kimono in the chair above her, her soft, luxuriant hair falling around her shoulders, her elbow resting on the window-sill, and her eyes gazing, dreamily bright in the moonlight, at the mountains with a gaze that seemed to look beyond them.

"The ocean is glorious on these moonlight nights," said Margery softly. "But I am not sure that the mountains are not even more beautiful. The contrast of their shadows makes the light more splendid—and then one feels as if they were hiding all sorts of mysteries. Almost anything might be in those hills—or come out from them."

"What will you do, Margery, if we stay here all winter? You know mother is not strong enough yet [245] to take her position, and Aunt Keren says we are welcome to live in the Ark if we can make it go. Of course, we should go to town for visits—and you would have most of those visits," said Happie, remembering that this dawning young lady sister must have the benefit of New York, while she bided her time at home.

"Oh, I shall not mind at all," said Margery. "Indeed, I almost think I should prefer to stay. I am in my eighteenth year——"

"Yes, but how far in it?" interrupted Happie with a recurrence of her brief pang in the moment of meeting Margery, a vague jealousy of some unknown thing that was stealing her sister.

"Not far," smiled Margery. "But quite far enough to be slipping towards twenty so fast that it takes my breath away. I should be content to stay in the country all winter, reading and studying with mother, and learning all sorts of things. A woman ought to know all about cooking, mending, sewing—all those housewifely tasks—and I don't feel as if I knew anything, though I used to think I knew a great deal. Oh, yes; I should be very busy and quite happy if I stayed in the country all winter, and did not go to New York once."

"What has come over you?" demanded Happie, feeling certain, though she could not have told

why, that it was something that she did not like. "And a woman, you say! Do you consider yourself a woman at your age?" [246]

"No, but I shall be one very soon," said Margery placidly. "And I think I have changed my mind; I think I shall not care to be a society woman, only a thoroughly domestic one."

"Well, that's heaps better, but I don't see——" began Happie suspiciously. Then, interrupting herself, she said: "Tell me about the girls you met; you have not written much about them, and haven't said one word."

"I didn't make many acquaintances, Hapsie, dear," replied Margery. "Not as many as you would have done if you had not been such a dear, blessed, good girl as to let me go in your place. Oh, Happie, to think that I owe this lovely, lovely summer to you! I mean to be the best sister a girl ever had to pay you for it, or to pay you a little bit!"

"You needn't mind," said Happie rather ungraciously. "I was perfectly satisfied with you as you were. You seem away off, Margery. I don't know what it is, but I feel as if you were up on those mountain tops, where I couldn't touch you."

"You can touch me very well, you dear little Happie-goosie," said Margery, encircling her sister's head with her arms, and drawing it close to her as she bent over her. "It is the witchery of the sea that you feel, Hapsie; I haven't recovered from the effect of the mermaids' songs. I am glad our room looks towards those mountains," she added irrelevantly. "I shall sit here lots and lots to think, and to love them." [247]

"Think! To moon and build castles, you mean, if you are going to look at them like that! Oh, Margery, have you come to the mooning age?" cried Happie shaking herself free of the encircling arms, and sitting erect to look into Margery's face.

Their mother entered as Happie made her protest, and looked sharply from one to the other of the girls, Happie, rumpled, flushed and vaguely worried, Margery fair, serene, smiling to herself in the moonlight. She caught her breath quickly, but only said, as she seated herself on the edge of the bed: "I think you said at tea that you had not seen much of Happie's friends, not even of Auntie Cam's Edith, Margery. I suppose they drifted into a younger set and amusements than yours. But did you find any girls of your own age that you liked? You have not told us much of your new friends."

"There were several nice girls there, mother. Two I liked very much," said Margery slowly.

"The two of whom you wrote us?" asked her mother. "Yet I haven't precisely a clear impression of them."

"No, mother; I wanted to tell you all about it when I came," said Margery. "One was a Boston girl, and the other from Baltimore. They were both nice; I saw a good deal of them, and we are going to keep up our friendship. But—I was going to tell you—the girl from Baltimore had a brother, six years older than I. He had had typhoid fever, so his vacation lasted all summer. They had a cottage—Auntie Cam knows them, and likes them all, very much. I think, perhaps, I saw more—or rather I was—I think the Baltimore girl's brother and I were more friendly, more congenial, don't you see? than even those two girls and I." [248]

"It is pleasant to have a friend, older and wiser than oneself, little Margery," said her mother, feeling her way.

"Yes, that's just it!" cried Margery eagerly. "He was ever so much wiser than I, and so nice, mother! You will like him. We used to read together. Auntie Cam and his mother would sew, and it seemed as if he read to me chiefly—I don't mean that conceitedly, but it really did! And then he often took his mother, or Auntie Cam, or Mary, his sister, rowing, and I always was asked. He is nice, truly, mother. He has taught me a great deal. I feel sure you will like him."

"Am I likely to meet him, dear? Of course I should like any one deserving of such high praise, but Baltimore is not precisely in our neighborhood," suggested her mother.

"He will come to New York; he said he would not mind coming here, even in winter; he loves the country," cried Margery eagerly. Then stopped at a groan from Happie. "He asked if he might write to me—sometimes, you know, mother," Margery said slowly. [249]

"Certainly, dear, if I may know how and what he writes you. I shall have to satisfy myself as to any new friend, that he is trustworthy, and appreciates my little Margery," said her mother.

"Oh, he is trustworthy, mother, and he does appreciate me!" cried Margery, so eagerly that the mother's sigh turned into a half laugh.

"Ah, well, dear, you shall not lose a friend, and you shall have the benefit of this wise and discerning Baltimore boy's letters, if they are not too frequent, and maintain his reputation for wisdom," the mother said rising. "But remember that you are a young girl still, little Margery, and that I was never willing that my children should play with other children until I knew them for the sort that I would choose for their associates. I am not less careful now, so I must wait before I fully endorse this new acquaintance."

Margery sprang to her feet and ran after her mother to kiss her good-night. It was with a special tenderness that Mrs. Scollard folded her in her arms.

"He is good, mother, and brave, and handsome and clever," whispered Margery.

"Yes, dear, yes. Good-night, my Margery, my little daughter. Sleep well, and remember that there is no friend like your mother, and that she is glad to get you back, and to keep you close," said

Mrs. Scollard, whispering lest her voice might prove unsteady. [250]

She found Miss Bradbury waiting her in her own room as she came in and closed the door. "Oh, Miss Keren, Miss Keren, our dove has flown back to the Ark, but she has brought with her the green branch to show that spring-time and blossom-time are at hand," she said, trying to smile through the tears on her cheeks.

"Well, my dear Charlotte, you would not have her flight over barren waters, would you? The spring-time is part of every year, little mother," said that wise woman.

Across the narrow entry Happie crept to bed at her sister's side, drawing up the sheet over her head to stifle her moan as she returned Margery's good-night kiss. "Oh, dear, oh, dear," she murmured burying her head in the pillow. "It's growing up—and worse! Oh, dear, oh, dear!"

CHAPTER XVI [251]
A PRANK——

MARGERY resumed her place in the household, falling into her housewifely ways with only a brief time allowance for getting out of the holiday spirit and into domestic harness. Indeed, she was more care-taking and pervading than ever, which proved that the growing-up process, which was going on so fast as to dismay her mother and Happie, was going on in the right way.

Margery's coming left Happie more free to enjoy herself, and she threw herself into the outdoor life with all the zest of the season. Long walks in the glory of wind and color of early autumn, chestnutting, wild grape gathering, these were the pleasures offered by the mountains now, and the children were half wild with this first taste of them. Happie yielded herself to the delight of them, as if the mountain winds were sweeping her through the weeks on their strong pinions. Lessons at home were begun, but Mrs. Scollard did not insist on much yet, reflecting that if they were to spend the winter in the Ark, close housed by snow and cold, the children would have enough of being shut up.

Margery did not often join the others on their rambles; she preferred solitary walks, and loved to sit with her mother sewing and talking in that sweet intimacy which dawns between a good mother and her daughter when the latter is growing up into a friend. [252]

It somewhat reconciled Happie to the lack of Margery that Gretta had more time to go about with her than earlier in the season, when gardening and farming claimed her. Everything in her home was getting so unbearable to Gretta that she was thankful to escape to study and to roam with Happie. It was so apparent that her affairs were reaching a climax that was bound to end in a complete change, that there was less risk in taking comfort, since nothing could make her cousins more unkind to her.

"Eunice's cousin is going to teach the school this winter," said Gretta one afternoon. She spoke out of a long silence, and straightened herself painfully. She had been bending over a rock upon which she was cracking chestnuts with a smaller stone, she and Happie being alone out on the side of a hill upon which stood three noble chestnut trees, dropping their treasures lavishly for who would come to gather them.

"Eunice's cousin?" repeated Happie. Gretta and she always omitted Reba from allusions to home affairs, she being but Eunice's reflection. "What relation is she to you?"

"She isn't any relation to me; she's Eunice's second cousin on the other side—her mother's side," said Gretta. "Here are some big chestnuts! She's a young girl no older than we are, and if they don't have a poor school this winter it'll be queer! Why, she can't keep order any more!" [253]

"Is she graduated as a teacher?" asked Happie, wondering.

"Mercy, no! She went to the Normal for one term down at Schultzburg, and she got a certificate, but she was there only one term. Why, she yet wears dresses only down to her insteps!" said Gretta.

"Is that the way they make teachers?" cried Happie. "Why, I never heard of such a thing!"

"That's the way," said Gretta nodding. "Sometimes we have a good school—we had a fine teacher three winters while I went—but we're more than likely to get some one who can't teach. This is a real nice girl—Hattie Franz is her name—but she isn't fit to teach school. You see, when she applied, the directors hired her because her father lives around here, and they all know him. There was a young man applied at the same time who really was a normal graduate, but Hattie got it because the directors wanted to favor her father."

"Well, of all things!" cried Happie with the scorn of her age for anything like personal favors, or political "pulls." "I don't consider that fair; the directors ought to do their duty and get the very best teacher they can. As if the children's education wasn't more important than pleasing some man who happened to be a neighbor! What makes the people stand such directors?" [254]

"I guess because they're used to this way of doing things, partly, and partly because they want their children made teachers the same way when their turn comes," said Gretta, laughing at Happie's disgusted face. "You don't seem to know as much about meanness and folks' ways as I do; you must all be good and unselfish in New York."

"I suppose we aren't," began Happie slowly. And Gretta laughed again.

"But I'll tell you," Happie went on, rallying to her own defense. "We don't see the mean and wrong things as plainly as you do in the country. Our friends are nice and high-minded, and all that, and the other side doesn't get turned around. Here you know every single thing that people do wrong—almost what they think. Maybe this Hattie Franz will teach better than you think she will."

"Oh, I like her lots," said Gretta shaking her head positively, "but she won't do that. She's good-natured, and she's bright enough, but she's easy-going and sort of lazy-minded, and she couldn't make children behave, not one bit! They'll do just as they please; the little ones because she will hate to scold them, and the big ones because they are too much for her, and then the little ones will be worse than ever. I can see just how it will go!"

"What a pity——" began Happie, but Gretta interrupted her with an exclamation, turning to [255]
Happie with laughter flashing over all her face.

"Suppose we do see it, Happie!" she cried.

"See what? The school; visit it?" asked Happie.

Gretta nodded hard, and Happie began to protest that she would never dare do such a thing when Gretta cut her short.

"You don't know what I mean," she said. "I mean go just for fun, and all dressed up. We'll get the queerest clothes we can find, long skirts, bonnets, old-fashioned jackets, and thick veils. Then we'll go down to the schoolhouse and knock at the door. One of the children will open it, and we'll walk in. Hattie won't know you anyway, and I'll risk her finding out who I am till I'm ready to have her. I can imitate almost any voice I ever heard, and I'll talk Dutch so she won't ever guess who it is—you never heard me talk Dutch, did you? I can do it as well as any old woman in the county, and Hattie never'll guess until I slip out of the Pennsylvania Dutch into English and my own voice. I like Hattie and she likes me; she's full of fun, and she'll laugh herself nearly sick over us; she won't be one bit mad! Oh, come on, Happie; will you do it?"

"You don't think there would be any harm in it?" Happie hesitated, greatly tempted to say yes on the spot, for she dearly loved a frolic, and it had been long since she had had one.

"Of course it's no harm," said Gretta eagerly. "Nobody could object. Any one dare—no, any one [256]
may visit school; you say I must not say dare for may! We'll have a good laugh all around, and nobody be the worse for it. We'll go late, just before she closes, and I believe Hattie will be much obliged to us for cheering things up once! Why, what harm can a little frolic do?"

"I don't see, I'm sure," said Happie slowly. Then she dimpled and laughed, picturing to herself the funny effects she and Gretta would make in their costumes, sailing up the aisle of the little schoolhouse. "All right; I'll do it. When shall we go?" she added.

"Just as soon as we can get the things ready," cried Gretta gleefully. "The sooner the better. Eunice's attic is full of the queerest trash! You needn't bother to hunt up anything; I'll find enough for us both. To-morrow afternoon meet me over behind the mill at half-past two. You might bring some veils, and a looking-glass, but I know I can get everything else. Oh, say, Happie! Suppose we carry handbags, satchels, and fill them full of little bottles and jars, and tell Hattie we are selling stuff for the complexion! Paints and powders, and balm, and lotions, and hair dyes, and try to make her buy some! She's got about the reddest cheeks and nicest skin of any girl around here, and she isn't a minute over sixteen; don't you think it would be funny?"

"Perfectly beautiful!" cried Happie with a jump up and down, to and from the rock on which the [257]
chestnuts grew. "I'll bring the satchels, Gretta. It's going to be great!"

The two girls immediately set off for their homes full of this delightful plan. Happie poured forth the outlines of it the instant she got into the house. Bob petitioned to be allowed to see the girls after they were dressed, and Laura and Polly and Penny begged to accompany them. Mrs. Scollard was half afraid that they were going to make trouble, and she hesitated about letting Happie have the queer satchel which she meant to borrow from Rosie, but Happie assured her that Gretta knew, and Gretta said there could be no harm to the school in the visit, at the end of the day and that the young teacher would enjoy it as much as they did. Her mother was always in sympathy with innocent fun, so she consented to Happie's going, and having consented, looked as if she would like very much to join her.

"You see," Happie explained, "this is a girl of our own age, or about that, whom Gretta knows; it isn't like a stranger, or a full grown teacher! And won't it be funny to see us so solemn and dignified, and Gretta talking Dutch 'yet,' as they say up here, and the girl teacher not knowing her? And then to see her face when she finds us out?"

"It certainly will be very funny, and I really don't believe there can any harm come of it; it is only a prank," said Mrs. Scollard. [258]

"That's all, you clear-sighted motherums!" cried Happie joyously. "And I may ask Rosie for her satchel?"

"I have another for Gretta, a queer-shaped affair that looks as if it came out of the original ark," said Miss Bradbury, whose pleasure in this proposed visit was refreshing to behold.

The next day Happie and Gretta met at the appointed place, each laden with the fantastic fruits of their gleaning. They began to dress with ecstatic giggles, each helping the other to assume incongruous garments of various sizes and dates. It was not long before the giggles gave place to

peals of laughter until both girls got quite weak from mirth, and it was with the greatest difficulty that the toilets were completed.

Gretta wore a skirt of ante-bellum days. Its fulness hung many-folded around her tall figure, for lack of the hoops originally intended to set it out. Over this she wore a remarkably short bolero jacket of a not-much-more recent period; its rounding front and very abbreviated back revealed a striped waist of bulging fulness, fastened by black china buttons fully an inch and a half in diameter, decorated with bright pink roses and blue morning glories. Her thick dark hair Happie made into an immense knot half way up her head, twisted so tight that it stuck out "like a chopping block," Gretta herself said. This resolute-looking coiffure was surmounted by a broad-brimmed hat, trimmed with green ribbons and a band of black velvet, both much the worse for [259] wear, while a discouraged feather drooped, guiltless of curl, over the brim on the left side.

Happie's costume expressed a more chastened spirit than Gretta's. Her skirt was as scant as Gretta's was full, and went off in a long train with narrow ruffles curving themselves into waves around the bottom. Its color was a faded brown. Over this hung a coat, apparently intended to go with the immense fulness of Gretta's skirt. It went out into deep plaits from each seam, and its sleeves might almost have made a jacket as large as Gretta's; full at the top were they, standing out in great plaits after the fashion of the time of its present wearer's birth. It had been a dark blue; it was still blue, in spots, but yellowish streaks ran down the folds of its many plaited skirt and sleeves, and its velvet collar was white along its edges. Happie's hat was a bonnet. It was straw, broad in the crown and narrow in the brim. Its trimming was a ribbon originally black, but now greenish; however, its bows drooped in a manner more mournful than any mere blackness could have made them. A bunch of perfectly straight thin ostrich feathers adorned this bonnet's front, while on the left a bouquet of faded violets, ranging from soiled white to dubious purple in color hung disconsolately by their untwisted green cambric stems. As a last touch, and in case they should remove the thick brown and dark blue veils which were to disguise them, the girls [260] had wet red ribbon in ammonia and daubed their cheeks with it. The vivid crimson gave a lurid effect to their faces in spite of the fact that Happie's rippling hair had been forced into severe smoothness over each temple, and knotted low in her neck under her travesty of a bonnet, as near to the manner of a decorous old woman as such hair could be made to go.

As soon as they could tie the veils over their remarkable headgear, pull on their wrinkling gloves, and control their laughter sufficiently to walk straight, the girls started out across the fields and down the road towards the schoolhouse. It was encouraging that Jake Shale passed them with his slow team without recognizing them; they saw him turning around on his seat to look after them as long as they were in sight, wonder and speculation written on his usually impassive countenance—as well they might be.

Arrived at the schoolhouse they pulled themselves together, brought their satchels to the fore, and Gretta, saying with a sharp indrawing of her breath: "Now for it!" knocked on the door. It was opened by an exceedingly small boy in knickerbockers that had the effect of scallops, the legs were so short.

"Dare we see the teacher?" asked Gretta with so good a Pennsylvania Dutch accent that Happie's shoulders shook under their manifold plaits, and she nearly betrayed herself by an audible giggle.

The diminutive boy was not equal to meeting this demand upon him. He held the door and his [261] mouth proportionately wide open and the two strange—and stranger—ladies stalked past him upon the startled vision of the girl teacher.

"Miss Franz, we come together to see your school once. This is my friend; I am myself. My friend, you dare sit down. Der teacher don't seem to know you dare, say not? But she is young yet; she will learn," said Gretta serenely, as she placed a chair for Happie, who dropped into it, while Gretta seated herself with much spreading of her voluminous skirts, and with many airs. The young teacher stood clutching her own chair by its back, turning fiery red and deadly pale by turns as her amazement and terror wrote themselves on her chubby face. It never occurred to her that she was the victim of a joke; she felt perfectly sure that these women were insane. She made up her mind on the spot that they had escaped from the distant insane asylum, and she found much comfort in remembering that her unruly eldest scholars were boys, and were far bigger and stronger than her callers.

"I sought you would like some zings for your face, teacher," said Gretta, opening her satchel. "We sells zings to make you pretty. Here is a bottle yet makes you lose all what sun does to you—freckles, und such a tan. Here is a little pot of stuff what makes you red in your cheeks; you like to be red und pretty, say not? What you want to buy, teacher?" [262]

"Nothing at all," said Hattie Franz, feebly.

"Nosing!" exclaimed Gretta. "You wait once und see how pretty the girls gits yet, und you'll be sorry, I guess. You know that girl down to Neumanns'? She takes all I give her. Down in the city, folks uses such a stuff, and you'd ought to look nice like them city girls. Say not? No? Well, then! You go on mit your school, my good girl, und we'll wait a little to sell you zings." Gretta smoothed her ridiculously long-fingered gloves complacently, and bridled. Happie had not looked for such clever acting from quiet Gretta. "Leave me hear what you teaches deze little folks," she added.

Hattie Franz faced her pupils. "The third reader class may read," she said faintly. Six children came forward reluctantly, eyeing fearfully the veiled figures before them. "Read up loud once!" commanded Gretta sternly to the wavering line. "My friend is deeve!"

The "deeve" lady seemed to be variously afflicted, it struck the poor little teacher. In addition to

her deafness she appeared to be subject to a nervous twitching; her shoulders shook, and the veil over her face trembled.

The third class in reading made a sorry showing. It is next to impossible to read when one is staring straight ahead, and this class could not get their eyes away from their visitors.

The visitor who did all the talking shook her head. "Does the directors know how bad they can't [263] read?" demanded Gretta, varying the dialect for her own amusement. "When we was to school we could read more good when we was littler, say not?" she called loudly to her supposedly deaf companion. "Can they read Dutch yet?"

Hattie Franz shook her head. "We teach only English in the schools," she said, her voice shaking. "I guess they're scared."

"I guess," assented Gretta emphatically. "Und you too, you seem scared too yet! What fur a person do you guess I am? We won't eat you, little teacher!"

Hattie seemed less sure of that than she would like to be. She went down the aisle and whispered to one of the older girls.

"Yes, I'll go right off," the visitors heard her reply, and they guessed that frightened Hattie was dispatching her for aid.

"Sing for us once, little dears," said Gretta, having no mind to allow the aid to come. "Und you, you big girl gitting up dere, you sit down und sing mit der littlest ones. School ain't out yet!"

The big girl obediently dropped back into her seat, and Hattie quaveringly began the air of "Bring Back My Bonnie to Me," though she could not remember a word. The children joined in a very slender chorus. The girls on the platform were so uncomfortable that they decided to reveal themselves; with the thick veils over their faces and their rising laughter, they felt nearly on the [264] verge of suffocation.

"Teacher, would you mind going down to the door once, and find my handkerchief for me? Maybe I dropped it coming up," said Gretta.

"Teacher" was only too glad of the chance to get away from the immediate neighborhood of her grotesque callers, of whose lunacy she became more convinced every moment. She hastened down the aisle, and nearly fainted as she heard the wild whoop which arose behind her, accompanied by thumpings and poundings on desks and floor. Apparently insanity was contagious, and the children were as mad as the visitors, from whom her one idea was to escape.

Seizing the last desk for support the little teacher forced herself to turn and face the danger, to discover the cause of this sudden pandemonium. Turning she rubbed her eyes to make sure that she saw aright. Or was it she, after all, who was crazy? There, still in their places on the platform, were the two women, still in their singular garb. But they had thrown back their veils, and poor little Hattie Franz saw, instead of the glaring eyes of the pair of lunatics which she felt sure had invaded her domain, the familiar dark eyes of Gretta Engel, flashing with mirth, and the laughing ones of the girl from New York, both dancing and sparkling at her above the crimson streaks which the ammonia-dipped ribbon had left upon their cheeks!

The older boys were shouting, pounding, cheering; the older girls shrieking with laughter, and [265] the little children were pulling and pounding one another, screaming at the tops of their voices in the general excitement.

The relief of the reaction from her fright, the irresistible fun of the situation was too much for the pedagogic dignity of the sixteen-years-old teacher. She ran up the aisle as fast as her feet would carry her, seized Gretta by the shoulders and shook her as hard as a girl of five feet one can shake a girl of five feet six.

"Gretta Engel, you mean, mean, dreadful girl!" she cried vehemently. "I thought, of course, you were a lunatic, and I think so now more than ever!"

Gretta caught her breath, half choked between laughter and her shaking, and the school applauded, highly appreciating their teacher's energy, as well as her being fooled. "To think that you hadn't the least idea! You hadn't any idea, had you?" gasped Gretta.

Hattie Franz gave limp Gretta a few parting shakes, herself weak from laughter. "How could I have an idea?" she demanded. "My, but I was frightened! I'll pay you back for this trick, Gretta, if I have to wait till we are ninety-nine years old! How shall I ever get the school dismissed and these children in order?" she sighed.

Gretta turned to the pupils. "Young ladies and gentlemen," she began, and the shouting ceased; the children waited to see what more fun was coming. "You will please sing 'Marching Through [266] Georgia,' and then all march yourselves home. Who locks up, Hattie?"

"Aaron Shale; he keeps the key and makes the fire," said Hattie.

"Then you let Aaron stay here, and slip away with us," said Gretta. "He'll close up." But she reckoned without her host—the host of children. The older ones stampeded after the teacher and her visitors, and formed into line, ready to escort them through the village. Up the road Gretta and Happie spied Bob and Laura, with Polly and Penny, waiting to see them pass.

The last thing that the girls wanted was to be turned into a sort of Antique and Horrible parade, like the children who masquerade in New York on Thanksgiving day. There was but one thing to be done, and that was to run for it, up the backwoods road, and across the fields. Hastily bidding Hattie good night, Gretta and Happie gathered their fantastic garb about them and fled with all

their might. The last vestige of that afternoon's frolic to be seen was two veiled ladies in marvelous costume, fleeing at top speed towards the old grist mill.

CHAPTER XVII [267]
AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

None of "the Archaics" saw Gretta during the day that followed the visit to the school. On the second morning Miss Bradbury dispatched Mahlon—if a word suggesting speed may be used in connection with Mahlon's movements—down to the Neumanns' to purchase eggs. He was gone so long that his active wife, requiring the eggs for her morning baking, lost all patience waiting for him, threw her sunbonnet on her head, tied it with a snap of its starched strings that boded ill for Mahlon when she should have found him, and started down the road to bring eggs and delinquent husband home together at a quickstep.

It was so long before Rosie returned that the family really began to fear there was some serious reason for this second delay, when Rosie appeared, striding along at a tremendous pace. Mahlon loped after her at the respectful distance of five feet, with his usual effect of being about to go to pieces at all points at once.

"Thought I wa'n't never comin' back, I guess," said Rosie as she entered, setting down her basket of eggs with one hand, and jerking off her sunbonnet with the other. "I don't believe I kin git that [268] there puddin' done fer dinner this day. But I had to stop and listen. There's great doin's down there to Neumanns'. Eunice's madder than I ever seen her. I guess she's makin' herself feel as mad as she kin; tryin' to make herself believe she's got an excuse fer puttin' Gretta out."

"Putting her out?" cried Happie. "You don't mean that literally?"

"Litterly or not," said Rosie, evidently in the dark as to the word, "I mean it fer the plain truth. I guess she's been plottin' some time back how to make a fuss over something and tell Gretta she won't keep her no longer. Now she's takin' your visit to the school, and your insult—so she calls it—to her teacher—her cousin, I mean the teacher—as a handle, and she says Gretta can't stay in her house after what she done."

"Why, Rosie!" cried Mrs. Scollard.

"It's jest as I say," Rosie asserted, as if her veracity were questioned. "Gretta feels dreadful, but it don't do no good fer her to tell 'em Hattie took it all right, and liked the fun, yet. Eunice says she's insulted her cousin and made a bad return fer all she's done fer her, and she won't keep her another day."

"But Rosie, there wasn't the slightest tinge of malice in it; it was only a girl's harmless prank played on—and at last with—another girl," protested Mrs. Scollard. Even Miss Bradbury sat erect in considerable excitement as she listened, while Margery and Happie looked aghast at this [269] unexpected result of harmless fun.

"Why, I guess I know that!" cried Rosie. "Hattie's even been up there herself yet, and told Eunice she wasn't insulted—thought it was fun, but it didn't do no good. I tell you what it is—and Gretta's said this herself to me this good while back—Eunice Neumann's so mad to think the girl's havin' better times that it makes her crazy to do something, she don't know what. She's made up her mind either you've got to take Gretta and keep her, or let her to the miserable, lonely times she was havin' when Happie took a fancy to her. She's threatened Gretta more'n once to drop her and leave her fine friends look after her, if they think so much of her! Gretta's been awful worried fer fear Eunice'd say something to you yet. Poor girl, she hain't got much of her cousins into her; she's took all her ways from the other side and a sensible thing she did when she done it! But now Eunice's goin' to put her out and leave her set by the roadside till somebody picks her up. I guess she thinks you'll do it, and Gretta's sick, she's so ashamed, and hurt, and angry, and all sorts of ways to oncet."

"Poor little girl!" exclaimed Miss Bradbury, as Happie turned to her in mute appeal. "And for such a trifling pretext as that playful visit to the school! We agreed before you went that there was no chance of offending any one. Happie came home and reported that the little teacher thought it as [270] good a joke as they did."

"Why, good gracious, hain't I said so?" cried Rosie. "And hain't Hattie herself said so, and to Eunice yet? It hain't nothin' in this world but an excuse; a poor excuse, says you, and I should say it was, and I guess Eunice knows it as well as either of us. She says 'twouldn't have been done if Hattie hadn't been her cousin—now did you ever hear tell of such nonsense? But nonsense or not, she says Gretta's got to go, and that's more'n nonsense. But you needn't worry about that, because it had got to come on some poor excuse or other, and I guess in the end she'll be better off without them cross women. Reba wouldn't be so bad, but she hain't got the backbone to stand up against Eunice; I guess she's about flaxed all the time herself, gettin' scolded."

"I suppose the only question is: What can be done about it?" suggested Margery timidly. For the first time she and Happie were painfully conscious that they were not in their own home. It would not do to ask Miss Bradbury to shelter another in the Ark; the suggestion must come from her.

At that moment Bob burst into the room. All the time that they had been listening to Rosie's tale, they had seen through the window Mahlon out in front talking to Bob with his usual

accompaniment of swaying arm and leg, talking with so much earnestness that Mrs. Scollard had found time in the midst of her interest in Rosie's news to wonder what could be the matter with Mahlon. [271]

"Mahlon's been telling me what's happened down at the Neumanns'," cried Bob excitedly. "Did you ever hear of such an outrageous piece of injustice? Say, shall I harness up, and go right down to fetch Gretta? Of course you're going to have her here, aren't you?"

Never before had Happie fully realized the inestimable advantage of being a boy who did not stop to consider delicate issues, but blurted out what he wanted to say, oblivious to consequences. And it was evidently not a case for hesitation, for Miss Bradbury promptly said: "Indeed I am!"

She got no further, for Happie hurled herself at her with such enthusiasm that though she was stoutly built, her Aunt Keren staggered backward under the onslaught, fell against Mrs. Scollard, standing close behind her, and all three, Miss Bradbury, Mrs. Scollard and Happie went down in a heap on the floor, to the consternation of Polly, looking on, and the unbounded joy of Penny, who jumped up and down on the sofa where she was playing, clapping her hands and shouting till Jeunesse Dorée leaped from his pleasant doze, swelling up to four times his natural size.

"Oh, Happie," gasped Miss Bradbury struggling to her feet. "Do be careful. You certainly are growing much bigger." [272]

"Say, Happie, you want to look out how you let yourself go," protested Bob, helping his adopted aunt to her feet, with a hand for his mother, who was laughing too heartily to rise unaided.

"Oh, I beg your pardon, dear Auntie Keren!" cried Happie with as much contrition as was compatible with amusement. "You're not hurt, are you? Nor motherums?"

"Only in my dignity," said philosophical Miss Bradbury getting up. "And I am less flexible than some years ago."

"I'm injured in the same way; in my dignity only. It is not seemly that the mother of six children should be bowled over like a nine-pin," said Mrs. Scollard, settling the hairpins which were starting out on all sides of her tumbled hair.

"I never saw any one so fitted to be the mother of sixty as you are!" cried Happie with conviction. "You keep us in order—we're the best children in the world, of course!—and yet you are just as young as we are, and you never misunderstand! And Aunt Keren is so dear! I didn't mean to bowl you over, you two blessed treasures, but Aunt Keren was such a darling to say: 'Indeed I am!' so promptly, as if there weren't the least possibility of doing anything else but take in Gretta that I couldn't help flying at her! And I really think, Aunt Keren, you must have been standing rather shakily!"

"I am willing to admit resting more weight on one foot than on the other," returned Miss Bradbury. "Do I gather from your words and your movements, your calm and deliberate movements, that you are willing to shelter Gretta, now that she is abandoned?" [273]

"Oh, Aunt Keren!" was all that Happie said, but it seemed a satisfactory reply, for Miss Bradbury warmly returned the kiss that Happie gave her, and went to her desk.

"I think the best way to arrange it is to accept Bob's offer to go after Gretta himself," she said. "If I go I shall subject myself to all sorts of disagreeable remarks. Margery cannot, and certainly her mother must not go to be railed at, while Happie might possibly be led to air her opinion of Miss Neumann's behavior, which would never do at all. So I'll write a note to Gretta, Bob, and you can take it, and if Rosie is right that matters are so bad with the poor child you will bring her home with you."

"Well, I guess!" ejaculated Rosie. "I hain't told you half of how bad they are. I hain't told you one word of what Eunice said."

"Better not. It would be disagreeable and useless hearing," said Miss Bradbury as she drew her paper towards her, glanced at the calendar, and dipped her pen in the ink to begin a note to Gretta.

In a few moments she blotted the note and turned to read it to the assembled family; Bob had already departed for the barn to make Don Dolor ready.

"My dear Gretta," Miss Bradbury read, "Rosie has come back with the story of your wrongs. I am sorry, my dear girl, that you should be unkindly and unjustly treated, for your sake. But for our own I am tempted to be glad of that which gives me the opportunity to say that you must come at once to us, to stay with us, either here or in town, until you have found somewhere else where you can be happier. But I am sure that you cannot soon find friends who will love you better than we do, nor be more glad of the chance to have you all to themselves, and all the time, than we are. The girls are beside themselves at the thought of your coming, not to go away again for nobody knows how long! Come back with Bob; do not keep us waiting. We have long wished that we might have you, so come at once to [274]

Your loving friends (represented by)
KEREN-HAPPUCH BRADBURY."

"Just the very sort of note to write Gretta, Aunt Keren!" cried Happie flying to hug her again in a rapture, while Margery said, with more quiet pleasure: "I am sure that will not only bring her, but set at rest any doubt she may have of being welcome."

"It is so simple and earnest that she can't fail to understand it, and be comforted," said Mrs.

Scollard, as Miss Keren-happuch went out to give the note to Bob, with a few last hints as to how to bear himself, and what to say and to leave unsaid at the seat of war. "I suppose we must get ready that little room, Miss Keren? Shall I see to it?" [275]

"Yes," Miss Keren called back, answering both questions at once.

"There never was, there never could be another such mother as ours!" cried Happie, as her mother followed Miss Keren-happuch from the room. "Even if that Baltimore creature you met at Bar Harbor"—Happie could not bring herself to speak respectfully of the new friend, whose interest in Margery she found hard to forgive—"even if he is nice you couldn't like him better than such a mother, now could you, Margery?"

"No, indeed!" cried Margery, so heartily that Happie was pacified. She knew from stories, as well as Scripture, that when there was danger of losing beloved sisters through the coming of charming young men, the interlopers were preferred to all else—evidently Margery was safe, at least for the present.

In great excitement the family watched Bob driving out of the gate on his errand. Although Gretta ran in and out of the house daily, it was another matter to expect her coming on an indefinite visit, in the rôle of a homeless girl coming to them for shelter and protection. It was this thought that sent Margery and Happie from the window and up-stairs with shining eyes and quickened breath to help make ready for Gretta's reception.

The Ark was not a large house; it was already severely taxed to shelter its inmates, and it was something of a problem to know where to put Gretta. [276]

Good Rosie postponed her dinner to combine it with her tea, and fell to cleaning a tiny room, which had been roughly finished, over the storage room back of the kitchen. It had never been plastered, but it was not an unpleasant little nook "when the dust of ages and of departed Bittenbenders had been cleaned away," Happie said, letting in the southern sunshine, which it faced.

There was an unused iron bedstead among the importations from town; this was brought forth for Gretta's use, and Margery and Happie went about gleaning here and there a table, a chair, a dresser, until they had rather more than the little room would hold, and no one the poorer to all appearances.

There was no more than time for Rosie to get the room swept, the floor scrubbed, and the windows cleared of their crust of dusty cobwebs before Don Dolor appeared trotting up the road, and Miss Bradbury and Mrs. Scollard headed the group of girls who ran down-stairs to be ready to welcome Gretta.

The poor girl needed a cheering greeting. She stepped out of the carriage, her face swollen out of all semblance to its pretty self, and broke into sobbing afresh as Miss Bradbury took her in her arms, with a tenderness none who did not know her well would have looked for in that brisk lady. Mrs. Scollard kissed the girl with her own motherliness, which was so beautiful to Gretta, who had never known a mother. Happie seized her next in one of the warmest of hugs, her bright [277] bronze hair getting mixed up with her kisses in a way it had, and which always made Gretta laugh. She smiled now, a watery smile, and received Margery's loving welcome as cordially as it was given; Gretta looked up to gentle Margery as to a superior being.

"If you knew how glad we all are to get you here, Gretta, my duck, you'd suspect us of bribing Eunice to treat you as she has. But really and truly we're not guilty of setting her up to this meanness, though it is such a lucky thing for us," said Happie, folding her arm around Gretta, and conducting her into the house. Gretta actually leaned on Happie for support; she was so spent with tempestuous crying that there was little of her own fine vigor left upon which to lean.

Happie led her into the dining-room, and set her in the rocking-chair by the window. Then she took off Gretta's hat, while Margery went to get the coffee which was waiting, ready and hot, on the stove. They were all shocked by the tragic expression of Gretta's face, and the mark of suffering which the past forty-eight hours had set upon it.

"Suppose I hadn't you?" whispered Gretta, leaning back upon Happie as if utterly weary.

"I can't suppose anything of the sort; you belong to us. I knew you were mine the moment I saw you painting that fence last spring," said Happie, stroking the dark hair with a warm, clinging hand.

Gretta drank her coffee and felt better for it, the first food that she had tasted that day. Then [278] Happie took her up to her own and Margery's room and got her to lie down beside her on the bed. There the view of the mountains which she loved would assure the girl so suddenly deprived of the only home which she had known, that not only her new friends, but the dearest of her old ones were left to guard her. For in her short life there had been nothing so dear to Gretta as the beautiful country in which she was born.

Wise Happie did not let Gretta talk. She lay beside her, still stroking her hair and crooning low a song that Gretta loved. And Gretta was too spent to try to talk, too hurt to have any desire to repeat the unkind things which had been said to her during that cruel day, and its preceding night. She held Happie's other hand tight in both of hers and laid her burning cheek upon it. And before long sleep came to begin the blessed work of Gretta's comforting and her establishment in a happier life.

The good friends who had taken Gretta into their hearts and home skilfully let her slip into the changed order of things as easily as possible. They learned from Bob what sort of an interview he

had had with Eunice Neumann when he came to carry off Gretta. Bob said that "Rosie's account of things was not a patch on the reality, because no white man could imagine a woman cutting up as Gretta's cousin had." So Gretta was not encouraged to give details of her expulsion; instead "the Archaics" cheerfully set their wits to work to devise means to help her forget what was, after [279] all, unforgettable. The furnishing of her little room proved to be the best distraction for Gretta. Bob drove her down, with Margery, Happie and Laura, to buy silkaline for her curtains, and they came back with "as pretty a pattern as they could have found in New York," Margery triumphantly announced on their return.

The girls made this silkaline into short curtains and ruffled chair cushions for Gretta's room, and flounced a packing-case with it for her dresser, it having been discovered that the dresser which they had selected for Gretta's use was Miss Bradbury's reserve storehouse, for special supplies.

Bob plastered the walls roughly, in which Gretta rendered so efficient help that once more Bob's opinion of her rose a notch. She could plaster better than he could! "And no wonder," Gretta declared, "after the plastering and kalsomining I've had to help with at Eunice's!"

When the walls were covered with the rough plaster, Bob and Gretta tinted them with colored kalsomine, a soft green that was really artistic. Against this wall the pretty green silkaline, with its brown chestnut burr pattern, swung so harmoniously that Gretta pranced up and down for joy as she fell back to see the effect, and Happie took a header into the snowy white little enameled bed to give vent to her satisfaction. [280]

"'He took the animals two by two,'" chanted Bob. "We'll have to make new verses for our Ark, Hapsie; we catch our animals singly."

"Am I an animal?" asked Gretta, opening her eyes at him in pretended offense.

"All human beings are animals, Miss Gretta," said Bob. "It rests solely with yourself whether you will be a beast."

"I think I like some beasts better than human beings," Gretta began, but got no further, for Happie sat up and began saying: "Gretta, better, debtor, getter—get her—letter, met her—oh, yes! Wetter! I've got it. Listen, Bob!"

Bob refused to listen. Instead he said: "For pity's sake, Happie, don't spring anything on us made of such rhymes as those samples! Only a Boston girl, with all her r's turned into h's, would rhyme better and letter and wetter with Gretta."

"I think it would be nice to write a real poem on Gretta's flying to the ark for refuge," said Laura, surveying the improvements in the room from the doorway with lofty approval.

Gretta turned a beaming face upon Margery, Bob and Happie. "I never had such a bright, pretty room before," she cried, "Eunice never did anything except for plain, horrid, sensible use. I sometimes felt as if I should go crazy if I couldn't have something that was no good but to be pretty. And now look at this room! Oh, you good, dear people! I'm so thankful, and I'm beginning [281] to be so happy! I never was happy in all my life, except for little minutes, out of doors. Do you suppose the animals were glad that there was a flood that drove them into the ark? For this animal is glad enough to be in this Ark!"

CHAPTER XVIII [282]

THE BITTENBENDER TRUNK

Miss Bradbury kept talking of returning to town, but still she lingered in the Ark. Mrs. Scollard was not well enough to resume her position in the city, and stayed on with her family at Crestville, her recovery retarded by her anxiety as to the next move, and by her unwillingness to continue to accept the kindness which Miss Bradbury truthfully assured her was for her hostess an economy over city expenditures. For though this were true, Miss Bradbury could not continue to carry an entire family on her shoulders, however broad they were, or however light their burden. In the meantime nothing changed in the arrangements at the Ark through the golden days of October, and, as if they had waited for Gretta to be safely harbored in her ark of refuge, the storms of winter set in prematurely in November, and with remarkable vigor.

The old house must have wondered at the way its new inmates set up stoves in every room where there was a chimney, and then drove them to their utmost. It had been accustomed only to a fire in the kitchen and in "the room." Gretta and Rosie seemed to have difficulty in adjusting their minds to this excess in the use of coal. [283]

In the middle of November the first snow-storm of the year arrived untimely. It drifted to the height of a man's knee, and the thermometer dropped down past the naught on its register, down four more degrees. Of course such weather could not last, so early in the season; it was followed by a swift ascent of the thermometer, and the snow melted away faster than it had come. But while it lasted, it was an excellent imitation of winter, and not a little dismaying to novices in the art of living in the country.

The storm began on Friday; Don Dolor came up from the post-office with his back white with snow, and his long mane and tail balled with it. On Saturday the drifting snow lay over the Ark and its grounds and out-buildings like a beautiful blanket, and it was still falling. There was no

denying that it was beautiful, but there was no denying either that it made the present world seem very solitary, and the outside world very distant and inaccessible.

The silence seemed like something tangible; as if one might take it by its corners and lift it up—only there was not precisely the right person to lift it. The licking of the little tongues of flame on the hearth fell curiously on Mrs. Scollard's ears, as if they should have been louder, but were muffled. The children's voices came down to her from above stairs loud and cheerful, but unreal, and through and above their ringing, she seemed to hear the silence of the snow-enveloped country. [284]

Happie wandered restlessly into the room and threw herself into a chair with a movement most unlike her cheery, quick self.

"I feel suffocated, motherums," she said. "It's so still, so *benumbed* still, that I can hear the distant planets roll—hear them better than this one, for that matter; this one seems to be motionless."

"Make your own sounds, Happie," suggested her mother, not admitting to sharing her feeling. "Sing and shout; get the others to help you. What you have just said has a note of loneliness."

"I'm not so much lonely as lost, queer, restless," returned Happie. "And as to making sounds for ourselves, it's of no use. We've been trying it, but the more we sing, and laugh, and chatter, the more we hear the stillness of the earth. Gretta doesn't mind, because she's used to it, but Margery and I, and Laura, and even Polly a wee bit, are ready to fly into inch pieces."

"I prefer you whole," said her mother. "We shall have to devise something pleasant to do. You don't make fudge as often as you used to make it in town; would fudge be a solution?"

Happie shook her head with unmistakable emphasis. "I shouldn't like a solution of fudge, motherums," she said. "And it wouldn't be a solution of our troubles. Especially that there isn't any trouble," added Happie, rallying in an attempt at her usual cheerfulness. "I'll go back to the others and see if we can't think up something so interesting that we can drown out that no- [285] sounding loud silence."

"Reading aloud?" suggested Mrs. Scollard, as Happie rose lazily and turned towards the door.

Happie turned back. "Now, motherums," she said reproachfully; "on such day as this we couldn't hear the most interesting story that was ever written; the silence would drown it. I wonder what can be the matter? I never noticed such a—such an audible silence, and it isn't like me to be so good-for-nothing, and restless."

"It is our first experience of a snow-storm in the country, and I suspect loneliness is at the bottom of your restlessness, dear Happie," said her mother. "I hope you'll find a weapon to rout your enemies, the silence and the loneliness, though you won't own up to the latter, my Happiness." And Mrs. Scollard waved a tiny farewell to her daughter, with more cheerfulness of manner than of heart.

"We're going to prowl, Hapsie," announced Bob, as Happie came back to her own room, where the clan of Scollard had assembled.

"To prowl? Where? We haven't any snow-shoes," said Happie.

"We don't need them in the attic, and that's where we're going to prowl. We thought we would go up there and see how it seems with the roof snow-padded," returned Bob.

"I imagine it will seem cold," said Happie. "However, I'm ready. There seems to be nothing better [286] to do this morning."

"Penny and I are going down to get mama to read to us," said Polly. "Penny'll get cold up there, and we're going to ask mama——"

"To read 'bout the kitten that went walking all by himself, waving his wild tail!" cried Penny, interrupting joyfully.

The two younger children went away, Polly carrying under her arm a very shabby copy of "The Just So Stories." The four elder ones, with Gretta, climbed the attic stairs, the chill of the snowy air striking sharp upon their faces as they ascended.

"I wish I had had this place while I was still young enough to play Robber Baron! We never had such a dandy lair as this would have made, did we, Happie?" said Bob looking about him with an interest that suggested that he might still have enjoyed childish things if the dignity of sixteen years had not forbidden them.

"We never had anything that was a patch on this attic," said Happie sympathetically. "The only mystery we could get into our lairs was imaginary. Do you remember how we used to pretend that the playroom was so dark we couldn't see to walk in it, Bob?"

"Yes, and how we used to hold up the yardstick and father's cane for torches when our men came back from their raids?" added Bob. [287]

"Of course, and how much we used to wish that we could get Margery to be the men, but she never would be, and we had to get on with imaginary followers. Though Margery could pretend she was the old witch woman that stayed in the cave and got the dinner, but Laura couldn't help one bit. She had to stop and argue that a chair was a chair, when we were pretending it was a turret of a castle," said Happie, brightening very much under these reminiscences.

"It was so stupid," said Laura decidedly. "I never could see anything in playing Robber Baron."

"Well, we did," sighed Happie. "This certainly would have made a perfectly lovely lair, Bob. It is too bad we didn't get it in time. No city child has an attic, and attics are made for children. In town houses there is nothing but an upper floor, with one room kept for a storeroom; in Patty-Pans flats there isn't so much as that!"

"We might turn the attic to another use to-day," said Margery. "We might each tell a story about it, and what we think may have happened in it during all the years that the house has stood. There is that Bittenbender trunk under the eaves; that would be a good subject for a story."

"Oh, that Bittenbender trunk!" cried Happie, starting into sudden animation. "I had forgotten all about it. We never have opened it. To-day would be the very day to see what is in it. Here is Gretta, living with us, and she is as near to being a representative of the Bittenbenders as [288] Crestville boasts. Let's open it, now, this minute, and solve the mystery, instead of weaving yarns about it. Maybe we'll find some dark secrets hidden in its depths."

"Some dark clothes, much moth-eaten, more likely," said Bob. "But I'm with you for the opening. The late Mr. Bittenbender announces his early winter opening—so does Crestville to-day, for that matter! Say, Gretta, he is 'the late,' isn't he?"

"What is?" asked Gretta, puzzled into a relapse into the vernacular.

"The late; he is dead, isn't he?" asked Bob.

"Oh, yes; of course he is," said Gretta. "He died three or four years ago somewhere down country where he came from in the first place."

"Well, from all accounts of him, that seems to be a good thing," said Bob cheerfully. "Wouldn't you like to open that trunk and see what your grandfather-in-law—no, your step-grandfather left behind in that venerable, partly bald receptacle?"

"I don't mind; yes, I should like to open it," said Gretta, "but I think we ought to speak to Miss Bradbury first."

"Aunt Keren won't object, but of course you're right; we should have to ask her," said Happie. "Bob, suppose you go down and get all the trunk keys there are in the house, and bring up the hammer and chisel in case none works, and at the same time ask Aunt Keren's permission to break and enter?" [289]

"Neat way of making sure you don't have to go yourself. I see through your dark wiles, Miss Keren-happuch," said Bob. "But I don't mind; I'm public spirited; ready to be butchered to make a Roman holiday."

And Bob departed, whistling in a way that declared that for him the loneliness of the morning had been dissipated. He came back bearing a quantity of keys, the hammer and chisel, and Miss Bradbury's permission to investigate the Bittenbender trunk. He and Gretta dragged it forth from its long established retreat under the eaves, into the light of one of the four gable windows. Here the poor thing looked even shabbier than in the shadow, and smaller.

"It seems to be shrinking from the garish light of day," suggested Happie.

"You can hardly blame it," said Bob. "It is a melancholy trunk. I never saw anything else so bald as it is in spots. It ought to have a skullcap, or we might throw a buffalo robe over it—it might think its own hair had grown out again."

"You're as silly as I am, Bobby," said Happie approvingly, as she tried first one, then another of the keys without any result. "I thought it would open like—like sesame! But it doesn't seem so easy, after all."

"It looks as if a door-key would be about the right thing," said Bob, kneeling to squint into the lock. "Let me try it. I don't like to force the poor old thing; time has been hard enough on it [290] without our being violent. I'll try this key, and if everything else fails, I believe wire will do the trick, for it is far from a Yale lock." Everything else did fail, so Bob twisted a wire and picked the lock, "in a manner worthy the Robber Baron," Happie said.

Bob threw back the lid impressively. "Behold the treasures of The Last of the Bittenbenders!" he cried melodramatically, stepping back a pace.

The girls crowded around to see what was revealed, Laura shivering with the combination of cold and excitement.

"Let Gretta take out the contents," said Happie. "We must do everything decently and in order, and we mustn't forget that she is the most in order of any of us. When it comes to Bittenbender things, she's the family representative."

"I won't be jealous of any one who wants that place," laughed Gretta, kneeling before the trunk nevertheless. "I'm not anxious to be mixed up with the Bittenbenders; they are not one bit relation to me, I'm proud to say."

"Never mind genealogy just now, Gretta; show us what's in the trunk. If Happie says you must, you must—her word is always law somehow," said Bob.

"Because her words are Happie-thought words," smiled Margery.

"THE GIRLS CROWDED AROUND TO SEE WHAT WAS REVEALED"

Gretta began to deposit on the floor the top layer of the contents of the trunk. There was nothing interesting to the eager on-lookers, and everything had a dusty, musty smell, "as if spiders had [291] wrapped them up in their webs instead of moth balls," Margery suggested. There were queer old garments, not valuable when they were new, and far from new when they were packed away. There were old account books which none but the accountant could have understood; some old newspapers, yellow and stained, and at the bottom more newspapers, but these bore dates several years subsequent to the papers on top, or the dates revealed by the garments.

"There isn't anything wildly exciting about this," said Bob wearily. "And I'm getting chilled to my marrow up here. Queer the newer papers are below; they must have repacked this thing. Why what's the matter, Gretta? What's up?"

He spoke sharply, and dropped on his knees beside the girl to look over her shoulder. Gretta was sitting back on her heels, holding a long, yellowed envelope in her hand at which she was gazing with all color fled from her frightened face.

"'The Last Will and Testament of Anna Bittenbender,'" read Bob, aloud. "Good gracious, Gretta, has it been found at last? And right here in the house? Open it, quick!"

"I can't," said Gretta, holding out the envelope to Happie as if it had been a dynamite bomb. "You read it, Happie."

Happie took the envelope eagerly, and drew forth from it a sheet of foolscap, covered with clear [292] writing, very different from the inscription on the envelope.

"'I, Anna Bittenbender, born Neumann, and subsequently wife to Herman Engel, now the wife of Isaac Bittenbender, being of sound mind——' Why, Gretta, is it—it is actually your grandmother's will!" cried Happie, breaking off short in her reading, greatly excited.

"No doubt of that!" cried Bob, not less excited, while Margery and Laura mounted the fateful trunk, the better to look over Happie's shoulder. "Hurry up, Hap! She gives and bequeaths, of course. What does she give and bequeath—to whom?"

"I can't tell, you fluster me so!" gasped Happie. "Here are some small items. Here is a hundred dollars to her husband—oh, my! That's only to bury her! And here—— Yes, it is! 'I give and bequeath to my son Rufus Engel the house and farm in and on which I now live, consisting of sixty acres of cleared and wooded land, situated on the main road running from Crestville to Sprucetown, in the county of Madison, in the state of Pennsylvania, together with all the live stock which may be on the farm, and all the tools, vehicles and furniture in the house and farm buildings at the time of my death. In the event of the death of my son, the farm with all its appointments, as above named, shall pass to my son's only child, his daughter Gretchen Elizabeth, for her use and behoof, and for her heirs after her, without restriction and forever.'" [293]

Happie ceased reading, and the will fluttered from her hand. She looked shocked; indeed all the young people gazed on one another blankly, utterly dazed. Gretta began to cry softly, and this

brought the Scollards to their senses.

"Then the Ark is yours, Gretta," said Bob. "It is fine! Instead of Aunt Keren's sheltering you, you are sheltering all of us. You will let us stay on a while, won't you?"

"Don't!" cried Gretta, hysterically.

"Come down to mother. We must tell mother," said Margery. "And we must find Aunt Keren. Pray don't cry, Gretta. It is the loveliest thing that could have happened to you; you will be perfectly happy when you have got used to it, and realize that you own a farm. And, though we have always supposed that Aunt Keren was not at all rich—only comfortably off, she didn't seem to dread giving up this place if she had found the will. Come down-stairs as quick as you can."

But in spite of her cheerful words, Margery's mind was divided between rejoicing for Gretta, and regret for kind Aunt Keren's loss.

Without a second thought for the contents of the shabby little trunk which had so long guarded its secret till this day of dramatic revelation, the Scollards escorted Gretta down-stairs, Laura's tears falling as fast as Gretta's had. Laura had never quite liked accepting the country girl on [294] equal terms with themselves, and she had been building air castles of succeeding summers spent at the Ark, with Aunt Keren. Laura was instinctively selfish; it always took much effort to get her up to the point of rejoicing in another's good.

"Aunt Keren, would you please come into the library where mother is?" said Margery looking in at Miss Bradbury busied with accounts at the dining-room table. "We have something wonderful to tell you."

Miss Bradbury looked up, with considerable doubt as to the importance of the communication that she was to hear. A glance at Margery's face convinced her that something serious had happened, and she followed the young people into the library at once. Mrs. Scollard lifted her face as the five entered, followed by Miss Bradbury. Polly sat on the arm of her mother's chair, Penny was curled within its embrace; it was a pretty and peaceful picture which they had come to break up.

Mrs. Scollard greeted them with her bright welcoming smile, but it faded instantly, her book fell from her hand, she set Penny on her feet and sprang to her own, crying: "My dears, what has happened?"

"We opened the trunk, Aunt Keren, mother," said Bob, making himself spokesman. "It had a lot of [295] trash in it, but it had something else besides. We have found Gretta's grandmother's will!"

"Her will!" cried Mrs. Scollard. And with an instant perception of the truth, Miss Bradbury added: "And she has left this farm to Gretta; her husband hid the will!"

"Well, of course we can't tell about that," said Bob. "But yet it must have been so. The will was under a lot of old account-books, clothes and stuff belonging to old Bittenbender. It gives this place to Mrs. Bittenbender's son, Rufus Engel, and if he died, to his daughter Gretta."

"Oh, I'm so sorry!" cried Gretta, throwing herself face downward on the couch. "After you've been so good to me! But maybe it won't matter. We won't tell any one we found the old will, and then you can keep the Ark!"

Miss Bradbury laughed. "My dear little girl, would you have me compound a felony?" she asked, going over to stroke Gretta's hair. "Look up, my dear Gretta, and let me see you as glad as you should be! No longer a homeless girl, dependent on the grudging kindness of distant kindred, but an heiress, as things go in the country; the owner of an excellent farm. As for me, you know how hard I tried to find this will, and how glad I am to have justice done you. Fancy hiding the will! Why, this old man your grandmother married was a rare old scamp, and would you have me as bad as he was? We'll hasten to prove the will, get it through probate, and establish our Gretta in [296] her rights just as fast as the law can move. Don't feel sorry, Gretta, my dear! I am very glad, and can get on perfectly well without the Ark. How much good has it done me since I took it until this summer? Isn't it a good joke on us all that the will was reposing quietly in our attic all the time that we were scouring the country for a trace of it?"

Gretta sat up flushed and purpling with excitement, her eyes burning, her breath coming short. "I'll never take the Ark, never, unless you don't want it!" she cried. "And I'll never take it then unless you will promise to own it with me and stay here all the time, and let me work for you. I won't touch the will, nor the place, unless you own it just as much as I do."

"My dear, grateful, generous Gretta," said Miss Bradbury, "did you ever hear that Shakespeare said that some people had greatness thrust upon them? You can't escape your good fortune in this world any more than your bad luck. I did not intend staying here all the time, you know, even when I owned the farm. But we'll promise that the Ark shall be our refuge when we need one, just as it was your refuge in time of trouble when I owned it. And who knows what good may be in store for us, as well as you? Good and bad happenings seem to run in schools, like mackerel, I have noticed."

"I feel exactly as if I were in a story-book," said Happie. "Hidden wills and tardy justice done the [297] heroine, who has been poor and oppressed—now isn't it a regular fairy-tale?"

"It is very interesting," said Laura, so pensively that they all laughed, even Gretta.

"It is the very best thing that could have happened," declared Mrs. Scollard heartily, with an eye on Gretta's still clouded face. "It will turn this dreary day into summer sunshine. Come, let us tell Rosie; she will be delighted too."

But the dear woman could not quite forget that, though she was impatient to remove her children from dependence on Miss Keren, for the time they had no other home than the Ark. And it was a good home, however forlorn it had appeared at first. This discovery would have a decided, though indirect effect on her family fortunes.

CHAPTER XIX [298]

DISPOSSESSION AND POSSESSION

"Well!" said Rosie when she heard the great news. "Well, if that hain't just like all I ever heard 'em tell of old Bittenbender! To go and hide the will, and then let it in a place where 'twould be sure to be found by whoever come here after him, so they'd have to stand the loss, or else be a big rascal like he was! I always heard 'em say old Bittenbender was the greatest scamp around here, but to hide the will, and then give the place he didn't own to pay his debt, and then let the will behind him, yet, where you'd be sure to find it, beats everything I ever heard."

"It looks as if the late unlamented Isaac Bittenbender enjoyed a joke of his own kind, though it isn't the sort to please all tastes in jokes," remarked Bob. "It is lucky for him that the will wasn't found while he still lived—it might have given him another sort of residence than the Ark."

"Well, it's a lucky thing for Gretta the farm come into honest hands, or the folks that found the will might have kept still about it and she'd never have been no wiser," remarked Rosie. "As 'tis, what you goin' to do about it?" [299]

"Not that," said Laura, unnecessarily. "Don't you know, Rosie, how hard Aunt Keren tried to find the will, so she could give the place over to Gretta?"

"Why, you don't suppose I thought your Aunt Keren was a-goin' to keep it?" Rosie expostulated.

"We are going to have the will proved, admitted to probate, and we shall install Gretta as mistress of the Ark just as soon as we can possibly do so," said Miss Bradbury, smiling into Gretta's perturbed face. "Then we shall see what arrangement we can make with the owner by which we can stay on here for a time, instead of her living with us, but otherwise with no change of conditions. Did you ever see a girl so cast down by good fortune? Gretta, girl, pray look cheerful! Gaze out of the window at your own broad, snow-clad fields. Look around you at your own walls, and consider what a happy change this makes in the fortunes of a girl who has had nothing in all her life to call her own, not even a father's house! And now she is an independent farmer who, with a little help, can subsist off of her own good acres!"

"I wish it could stay yours, and you would let me live with you; it is dreadful to take anything from you when you have given me so much," repeated Gretta, unable yet to take any view of the morning's events except as they affected her friends.

It was impossible, however, not to feel some little thrills of pleasure as the idea of ownership became more familiar. [300]

The snow of that Saturday went off like the mists of a July morning. On Monday the Scollards rejoiced in a premature sleigh-ride, though the drifts made some of the exposed points of the roads nearly impassable. On Tuesday the same roads were running with rivulets of water, and either sleighing or wheeling was nearly impossible.

Gretta's distress at being an heiress went through nearly the same process as the snow. Under the sunshine of Miss Bradbury and the Scollards' unselfish pleasure in her good, she began to brighten. Then she began to take pleasure in the thought that she could actually benefit them and shelter them under her roof, giving as well as receiving. It never occurred to any of them that they should separate, and in that case what did it matter, after all, in whose name the farm stood? It was and still should be, Gretta's home and that of its new inmates. It was a beautiful thing—provided no one else were the worse for it—that by her grandmother's will the old house had fallen to her grandchild, and that now Gretta Engel had a place, a holding in the county, and could take her position among her neighbors, no longer an object of charity. For even Miss Bradbury's, and the Scollards' charity—though it was of the sort meant by the strict meaning of the word—was a burden, lighten it as they would.

Mrs. Scollard was so much better that it was hard not to be quite as well as before she broke down, and to know that she was not equal to assuming the duties of her former clerkship. She [301] talked a great deal with her older children as to their next move. The Ark had been a rest; it had saved her, but obviously they could not live on in dependence forever; there must be some way found to resume their independent existence. Bob could go back at any moment to Mr. Felton, but the five dollars a week at which he must begin would not support six people—even youngsters' sanguine views of practical questions had to admit that fact.

Margery, Happie and Gretta had a plan; they spent hours discussing it, but nobody yet knew what it was. In the meantime Mrs. Scollard cudgeled her brains by day—and by night too, to her own harm—trying to think of some way out of her troubles.

So when Bob drove up from the post-office on a day a little past the middle of November with a letter among her mail from the firm for which she had so long been confidential correspondent, Mrs. Scollard tore it open eagerly, and gave a queer little sob of joy as she laid it down after

reading it.

"Oh, dear Miss Keren, do listen to this!" she said. "They ask me to come back if I am at all able, to take charge again of their foreign correspondence. And they say if I am not equal to resuming fully my old duties, at least to come to assume general supervision of that department at a smaller salary, if the work must be divided. They beg me to take my old position at fifty dollars a week, as before, or to take half the work at twenty-five dollars a week, until I am able to do more. [302] Thirteen hundred a year—we can't live on it, but perhaps we could manage? I don't believe I am equal to resuming everything—manage to add to it, I mean?" Mrs. Scollard looked vaguely at her hearers, thinking aloud.

"Now here is where we come in!" cried Happie, starting up in rapture. "We have the best plan, Margery, Gretta and I, but it never seemed to us enough to rely on. But it would help lots; you can't tell how much, till it gets under way. We want to open a tea room, and a circulating library, and we want to make it lovely, somewhere near the drive, or the speedway, or somewhere where people get tired and thirsty, and blown to pieces. We may have to dress up as geishas, because that's the way it's usually done, but we don't want to; it's so silly! The girls never look Japanese."

"Really, Keren-happuch, what are you talking about?" demanded Miss Bradbury.

"Happie is trying to tell you about something we have talked over of late—it was her idea in the first place," said Margery. "We thought that we might—No; that isn't the beginning either! We thought that we must earn money somehow. And we never were able to think of anything that we could do; we are all so very young. And mother would be miserable if we so much as suggested anything that was—well, public, or which threw us in with people or things that weren't very nice [303] indeed. And Happie said: A tea room! And it really does seem to be the very thing, only we couldn't see, much as we wanted to, how it would bring in a great deal of money after we had paid rent and all the other expenses. Even though we meant to add a circulating library to it."

"What does the tea room mean, precisely?" asked Miss Bradbury.

"It means some dark, rich paper—probably red—on the walls, and lots of little tables all around, and the sweetest little Japanese teapots—the kind you get at Mardine's for fifteen or twenty cents on the bargain tables—and dainty teacups, and sugar and cream jugs, and little plates of thin wafers and crackers and sweet cakes, and maybe sardines, because you have to have lemons anyway, for people that take it in their tea; and I say lettuce for sandwiches in the season when it's not too expensive, and, well, 'most anything dainty and good, such as you would get at a tea. And lanterns all around, and the windows darkened with pretty warm, dark Japanesey curtains, so you could have the lanterns lighted all the time. And Laura wants incense sticks, but I don't, because if any one burned those things where I was eating, I shouldn't be eating long. And then book shelves, and new novels in them, and let people help themselves, and charge ten cents a week, three books at a time twenty-five cents—oh, a regular duck of a place!" said Happie in a breath, forestalling Margery. [304]

"A regular poll parrot of a place, I should say, if you are going in for ornithological comparisons, Happie," protested Miss Bradbury. "How you do run on! I don't think I understand. Are you intending to rent a room, and furnish and carry it on in the way you describe—or rather in the way you sketchily outline?"

"We wanted to do it, Aunt Keren," Margery answered for her sister. "But we didn't see any chance of getting enough out of it to warrant trying it. Now, if mother were going to be sure of thirteen hundred a year—if she is strong enough to take half her old work—and Bob went to Mr. Felton at five dollars a week, then I think we girls could make up the rest that we need for expenses. Gretta, we thought, would come down with us for the winter, anyway, and help us in the tea room."

"I am better able to go to the office every day than I am to feel troubled," said Mrs. Scollard truly. "And really I am almost perfectly well again; the Ark and this mountain air have saved me. I certainly shall accept this offer."

"And I will back the girls in this plan to be useful which they have concocted," said Miss Bradbury. "It is really not a bad plan, and perfectly feasible. And being their own plot it would be far better to help them to carry it out, than to offer them a substitute for it. I'll tell you what I will do, Margery and Happie! I will make myself responsible for the rent of your tea room, and you [305] may repay me if I have to meet it, and that will leave the success wholly yours, if success it is to be. After the two first months it will have been tested sufficiently for us to judge."

"Aunt Keren, you are the very best namesake—named-after-sake—a girl could possibly have!" cried Happie in a rapture. "You don't know how we longed and burned to try this scheme, but we didn't see how we could do it without capital enough to pay the rent until we were on our feet. And now you say this! Bless you, bless you!" And Happie seized her financial sponsor, and name donor, around the neck in a hug that set the dignified Miss Bradbury awry in collar, tie, and hair combs.

Miss Bradbury adjusted these accessories with a protesting exclamation that her face belied. She was not only getting used to Happie's irruptiveness, but liking it. "Now I'll tell you something further," she said. "In going about among various degrees and kinds of poor people in New York, I often come upon some one who has a room to rent or a lease to get rid of—sometimes a whole house. In the spring, in the late winter, more correctly, I knew of a dear little, quiet widow who had undertaken more than she could carry on in the matter of rent. She had found a pretty shop, with two rooms above it which she had taken for her dancing school. When I last heard of her she

wanted to keep only the two rooms above stairs for the school, and to rent the shop. If she should happen to be offering her place still—she wouldn't rent it except to the right tenants—it would be [306] the very thing for you, a pretty room, precisely the right size, with large windows, and directly on the way to everywhere. More than that Mrs. Stewart would be there to look after you, and make your undertaking safe from any doubtful or unpleasant features—she would chaperon you children. Charlotte, we could not let them open their tea-library combination without an older person to take care of them, could we?"

"No, indeed; but you are all talking and planning so fast that I can't follow you. It is perfectly safe to say I agree with that last statement, but I'm not sure I agree to anything else," said Mrs. Scollard, looking as excited as her children, and far more bewildered.

"That's all that is necessary just now, my dear," said Miss Bradbury. "I think I will go to New York in the morning, see Mrs. Stewart, and get her prices for her shop, if she has it still."

"Oh, Aunt Keren, no!" Margery protested. "You must not go to town just for us. And how we are rushing on with our plan when we never really dreamed that we could carry it out, either!"

"I should not be going down just for that, Margaret," returned Miss Bradbury. "I intended going down in any case. I want to drum up guests for Thanksgiving Day—I thought I would bring Ralph and Snigs back with me." [307]

"Aunt Keren! And you say it so quietly!" cried Happie with her voice full of admiration points. "We're having a Thanksgiving Day this moment. It will be perfectly beyond-tellingly-glorious to have those two boys up here now—especially that it looks like more snow!"

"It will be delightful, dear Aunt Keren," said Margery, with her gentle smile.

"Delightful! Do hear how calmly she speaks, with that temperate, adult adjective!" cried Happie. "Don't leave off extravagant words, and speak like a perfect lady yet, Peggy! There's so much time to be calm and grown-up! Though I suppose you would rather Aunt Keren asked some one else than our Patty-Pan boys!" And Happie glanced significantly at a letter in Margery's hand; the fine, eccentric writing, and the Baltimore postmark had become familiar to the Ark. Through his letters Robert Gaston, Margery's Bar Harbor friend, was winning her mother's respect and liking.

Margery smiled unperturbed, though with heightened color. "I shall be very glad to see the boys, if they come," she said heartily.

"Well, I must go find Gretta and tell her the news of the last hour," said Happie rising with a sigh, for no other joy could assuage the pang this friendship of Margery's cost her whenever she remembered it "Robert Gaston is a telescope turned the wrong way," she declared, "He makes me see Peggy 'way off." [308]

"Just think," Happie added from the doorway. "An hour ago we were without prospects, and since then mother has had her letter, Aunt Keren has given us her blessing, and has promised to help us, and she is going down to-morrow to look up our room, and to bring up Ralph and Snigs! I never heard of such an eventful hour outside the theatre, and there of course you watch years pass at a matinée. Won't Gretta and Bob be dumbfounded? Don't you want to come with me, Margery, and hear the crash when I break the news?"

"Put that way I believe I must come," laughed Margery, as she followed her sister.

There was no "crash" audible in the library where Miss Bradbury and Mrs. Scollard lingered, but they heard a wild whoop from Bob, and then a clamor of voices as he and Gretta and Laura poured out questions, and Margery and Happie answered them as excitedly.

"Dear Miss Keren, you are so good to me and my children!" said Mrs. Scollard, as she saw that Miss Keren was listening to the babel in the room beyond in the highest satisfaction. "Think of all that we owe you already! And now you offer to be responsible for the girls financially, and to let them try this scheme of theirs! I can't bring myself to the point of feeling less than guilty to allow you to do so much."

"You may feel perfectly innocent, Charlotte, for I should do it in one form or another whether you [309] would or no," affirmed Miss Bradbury. And when she said a thing she left little room for doubt that she meant every word that she said. "I have certain plans tucked away in the back of my head in regard to your children," she continued, "and I shall certainly carry them out. Don't forget, Charlotte, that in all the world there is no one who has the claim of kindred upon me; no one with closer ties between us than bind me to you, my beloved friend's daughter, and to her grandchildren, your children. So I shall look after them as far as I can. So much for that part of it, and never let me hear you allude to obligations again! As to the rest, I am not, privately, especially sanguine about the success of the plan these girls have made, and yet it really is a good one, if their inexperience and youth do not defeat it. I thoroughly approve of helping people to carry out their own ideas, however, and not in trying to force one's own upon them. So—unless you had objected—I should like to be responsible for the beginnings of the attempt, and let the girls consider what I expend as a debt to be repaid. I shall back them, Charlotte; that's all."

"And enough," supplemented Mrs. Scollard. "A financial backer is styled an 'angel,' isn't he—in theatrical parlance? I begin to see why."

Miss Bradbury departed in the early frosty morning of the next day. She was gone a week before she wrote announcing her return on the day before Thanksgiving. Not a word did she say of her [310] errand, nor allude to the coming of the Gordon boys. But just when Happie and Bob—and the others of a lesser degree—were beginning to make up their minds that they were defrauded of all that would make the festival festal, and that their disappointment was too sharp to be borne,

there came a telegram of but two words. "Boys coming. Keren-happuch," was the burden of the dispatch. There was but one conclusion possible: Miss Keren-happuch was indulging in teasing.

"Youth must be catching," remarked Happie, flying about the room with a feather duster, for it was too late to use a cloth—there were a dozen things to be done, and train time drawing on apace. "Aunt Keren would never have played us a trick like this before she had had the benefit of living with five young Scollards."

"You are Ralph's hostess this time, Gretta," said Laura. "Since he was here you have got the Ark."

"That's so!" cried Bob. "Let's dress up Gretta and put her on a sort of throne in the corner, and bring Aunt Keren and both boys to pay homage to her as their hostess."

"Well, I guess you won't!" cried Gretta, flushing at the bare idea of such a thing.

"Let's all dress up," cried Polly. "Let's look just as funny as we can, and stand in a row all across the steps when Bob drives up." [311]

"Why, that's a great idea, pretty Poll!" Happie approved her. "There isn't time—yes, we'll make time! Hurry up, Gretta; don't stop to polish that glass another minute! Come on up-stairs, and let's whisk through our work there in a jiffy. Then we'll make sights of ourselves with all the old things we can find, and we'll put a big cambric collar on Dundee, and a white ribbon on Dorée, and we'll all sing—what on earth is the best thing to sing when they arrive?"

"Hail to the Chief," suggested Margery.

"Who knows the tune?" demanded Happie. "No, that won't do. What's the best tune? I'll make up words for it; there's no reason why Laura should have a family monopoly of Odes on Great Occasions."

"John Brown's Body—The Battle Hymn of the Republic—is the best tune I know when you want an awful noise, yet one that has a ring in it," said Bob.

"Right you are, my Bobby!" cried Happie. "There's nothing else has the swing and rush of that air. Let's see!" She began to hum the air rapidly as she switched the cover off the dresser in Bob's room, which both the Gordons were to share with him. "This will do!" she announced. "Give me something to write on; lend me your pencil, Bob!" She snatched up a box cover, scribbled hastily for a few moments, scratching out at intervals, but not much, and when she had finished read her effusion to the others. [312]

"You're all right, Happie!" said Bob with as much heartiness in his commendation as the Academie Française could have shown in crowning a poem, if with less elegance. "You sing that when we drive up, the whole crowd of you in a row, and you'll make a hit. Now I've got to hurry off and harness, or I'll keep them waiting."

An hour later the hit was made. Margery and Gretta were almost of equal height; they headed the line, Margery in a sheet and pillow case costume, like a ghost; Gretta attired in a bright blue wrapper, with a patchwork quilt worn as a shawl, and her pink sunbonnet on her head, hastily trimmed with all sorts of artificial flowers in various stages of nearly falling off. Happie was a bride, pinned into window curtains, and with an old lace curtain for an impressive veil that trailed two feet, at the least, behind her. Laura wore a long velvet skirt of her mother's, over which she had draped a diaphanous blue scarf, and this festive costume ended in a full evening dress waist, which bore a suspicious resemblance to an old shirt waist, with the neck and sleeves cut out. But Laura flattered herself that her costume, at least, was impressive; she was reluctant to appear grotesque, even for fun.

Polly's round and serious face was the only thing visible above a great coat of fur which had been discovered in Miss Bradbury's closet, and which enveloped plump Polly from head to heels. Penny wore one of Margery's discarded dancing gowns which had not survived the summer at Bar [313] Harbor. Over it Margery had pinned a Martha Washington kerchief, and without plan or seeking the result hoped for by Laura had been attained for Penelope—she was as picturesque as possible.

Don Dolor came up the driveway with a flourish. It proved him of a settled and sane mind that he did not rear or plunge as he faced this graduated line of funny figures, with beautiful Dundee in the front rank, waving his plume-like tail, and smiling with distended jaws as he barked wildly over a wide collar of white cambric, which he wore around his neck like a harlequin.

Miss Bradbury beamed at the group, evidently very glad to see her family again, from her collie up—or down, for Dundee had taken himself and his collar to the top step, whence he was barking more madly than before as Don Dolor stopped. Ralph and Snigs threw up their hats noiselessly; they would undoubtedly have cheered had not Bob warned them to be quiet, and to listen to their pæan of welcome. At the tops of their voices, but in harmony, for Gretta sang alto, and Laura was equal to sustaining a true tenor, the girls sang Happie's words to the air of The Battle Hymn of the Republic.

"Behold the glad Archaics in their Ararat array;
They have stolen Mrs. Japhet's clothes (and Shem's and Ham's) away;
They're glad to see their animals come back for holiday:
Hurrah, hurrah, hurrah!

"The solid ground beneath our feet is good—we've floated long. [314]
But Ararat is high and dry, and we have anchored strong;

We're grateful this Thanksgiving tide, and so we sing this song:
Hurrah, hurrah, hurrah!"

CHAPTER XX [315]

AT THE SUBSIDENCE OF THE WATERS

THANKSGIVING day was a white day. It had rained in the night, freezing as it rained, and in the morning the sun came up glorious behind the low-lying line of the most distant mountains, turning the world of ice-incrusted boughs and fields into a prismatic land of marvelous color and brilliancy.

Long before the sun came to work the transformation of an every day land into fairyland, Happie was restlessly awake, longing for rising time. Her thoughts flew to Rosie, who had taken the tidings of the night before with such gravity that Happie suspected that the return of her employers to town meant more serious trouble to that good woman than they had dreamed—indeed they had all expected her rather to rejoice in their good fortune as she had heretofore rejoiced and sympathized with whatever happened to them.

Happie had not lain long awake before she heard Rosie moving about in the kitchen, getting ready for the inevitable cleaning without which she could not have kept a feast, and for which she was undoubtedly going to get her baking out of the way before day had fairly begun. The last stars were still visible and the world was dark, but Happie crept out from sleeping Margery's side [316] to go down and join Rosie, with the intent to find out, if she could, why she had looked so troubled at the idea of "the Archaics" going away.

"My days, Happie, you scared me!" Rosie said, facing about with a jump as the girl came softly into the kitchen. "I sent Mahlon out to do his barn work; I thought I'd git him out from under foot, and I'd have his breakfast ready till he got through."

"How did you manage to wake up so early?" asked Happie. "I heard you down here, I believe while I was half awake and half asleep, and it's only five now."

"I've been awake since two," said Rosie. "I got to sleep, then I woke up and went to thinkin', and I hain't been able to git to sleep again."

"What is it, Rosie? You seem troubled," said Happie going close to the gaunt woman and lifting her pretty face coaxingly. "Won't you tell me—just me?"

Rosie looked at her favorite, and her hard, work-worn face softened; she was not used to wheedling, but she found it pleasant.

"My days, Happie," she said. "It's nothin' new! Only what you told me last night kinder showed it to' me over again."

"Please tell me, Rosie," coaxed Happie, catching a discouraged note in brisk Rosie's voice. She drew one arm over the bony shoulders as she spoke, and laid her blooming cheek close to Rosie's drab one. The lamplight fell on her hair, bringing out its reddish tints, and Rosie looked at her [317] uncertainly, and then looked away. It was most unnatural for Rosie to be uncertain, and Happie drew her a little closer. "Please, Rosie!" she whispered.

"Well, you see what Mahlon is!" Rosie said violently, as if something had given way within her and she must speak. "You kin see just what he is. I hain't never had no help keepin' things together, and it has bin sleddin' uphill on bare ground—with a good load on yet!—ever since I got married—like a ninny! I had to farm, and do housework, and do everything else, inside and out, and lose my children——"

She stopped with a sob, and Happie kissed her. "Don't, Rosie!" she begged. "You must be happy on Thanksgiving Day!"

"Yes, and I have been kinder takin' heart lately, thinkin' I was gittin' on good here, makin' money easier than I had to work when I was losin' it, yet! And here the other day I had an offer fer my place, good offer too. I was ready to jump at it, but it don't do to let folks know you're willin' to sell right off when they want to buy, or they'll think there's somethin' wrong. So I told the man I'd see once and let him know after I'd thought it over a good bit. This was 'most a month since, and I was thinkin' maybe I'd tell him I'd sell—he sent over to know if I hadn't about made up my mind, and of course I knew right off I'd be lucky to git eight hundred dollars fer that there place, which [318] was what he offered. I'd got it all planned how I'd put it out to interest somewheres and live on here with your folks, and when they got sick of keepin' Mahlon, he could go off somewheres else to work, but I'd stay with them as long's they'd have me. And I felt pretty sure that'd be quite a spell, because we git along good together. And now this has happened yet, and you're all goin' off next week!"

"I don't see why that makes you so discouraged," Happie began.

"You don't? Well, I do," said Rosie almost fiercely. "There hain't many places up here to be had to work out. I can't sell my place now; I've got to go back and work it. I hain't complainin' nor blamin' nobody; it's the same kinder luck I've had right along, and I mighter knowed it wasn't goin' to change so sudden."

Happie's face had brightened as she listened, while Rosie's had flushed and grown more cloudy.

She turned away as she ceased speaking, drew the back of her hand across her eyes and said snappishly: "I can't fool away any more time, Happie. What's the use of gittin' up by dark and foolin' away the whole mornin' yet?"

Happie paid no attention to these last remarks. She got both arms around poor discouraged Rosie and held her fast, forcing her to look in her face.

"Rosie, listen!" she cried. "After we left you last night, and Polly and Penny were asleep, all we [319] old folks sat around the fire rather late talking over our plans. Ralph and Snigs say that their mother would be glad to let us take back our apartment, if we would, for she doesn't need it any more, and Aunt Keren has found our room for the great experiment. So on the first of the month —no, that's Saturday,—but next week, the first week in December, we are all going back, we Scollards, to our Patty-Pans, and Aunt Keren to her house. It is really wonderful, when you think of it, that Gretta owns this farm, that we found the will, for though of course our plans would include her in any case, still having this she is able to do something in return for Aunt Keren—and through her for us—and that makes her a lot happier, and everything better all 'round. We all agreed last night that we had grown tremendously fond of the Ark, and that we should feel dreadfully not to come back to it. We've got to go back to New York, because, you see, we have to earn our living just as much as you have, but we are coming up here every summer, Aunt Keren and all of us—we Scollards. Aunt Keren says wild horses shouldn't drag her back to her hotel life summers since she has tasted the independence and privacy of her—or what was her—old farm. Of course we may not be able to come too, but that's the plan. We're going to open a tea-room—but you know all about that! We may not be able to leave town, but I guess we shall—in instalments, anyhow. Now don't you see, you dear, worrying Rosie you, that there will have to be [320] some one here to take care of the Ark, 'put out the garden,' as you say up here, and farm the place, not to mention having the house open and the dear Ark dry and sweet and clean when we all come home in the summer? Aunt Keren—and Gretta, because it is her house and she had to consent—that's a joke, Rosie, because Gretta's half crazy with joy over the whole thing!" Happie interrupted herself to say hastily, lest Rosie be hurt—"Aunt Keren is going to ask you if you would be willing to stay on here at the same pay as now, taking care of the place summers and winters, with and without us; you and Mahlon too, of course. Then, if you really can sell your place, why I know Aunt Keren will get her business man to invest your money for you at the best interest, and you'll be better off than if we had not gone away—though I really don't see what you'll do with no children to bother you, for you won't have any excuse for so much cleaning! I suppose I ought to have left this for Aunt Keren to tell you, but I couldn't let you fret one moment longer, when a word would stop it—though I have said more than one word, now haven't I? Kiss me, Rosie, and tell me that you think you have good reason to keep Thanksgiving Day in its full meaning after all!" Happie ended her long, breathless speech with a gay little laugh into Rosie's face, as she thrust her own forward insinuatingly.

"I guess!" said Rosie, and she kissed Happie with a warmth that nothing had called forth in the [321] lonely woman since the last little grave had been made in the Methodist churchyard. Then she turned away, unaccustomed to betrayal of feeling, and embarrassed by it.

"My days, Happie! look how light it's gittin'!" she said. "I don't hardly need that lamp. And if there don't come Mahlon back already! I told him I'd have his breakfast ready till he got through, and I hain't hardly started it. Why, you're all shiverin' cold, child! This kitchen hain't been as cold a mornin' this season as 'tis this one. You hain't used to bein' up so early. You go back to bed and take a nap; it wants two good hours till breakfast. Or would you rather go into the room and lie down? I'll make a fire there if you want me to."

"I couldn't go back to bed; I couldn't sleep much last night myself, but not because I was worrying like you; because I was so excited and happy," said Happie. "You needn't stop to make a fire for me; I'm so warm inside I don't feel the cold, even if I do shiver. So are you all warm and happy inside, aren't you, Rosie?" she added wishing to be fully assured of Rosie's holiday state of mind.

"I guess!" Rosie said again, but with a smile so cheerful that Happie was satisfied. "As to the fire," continued philosophic Rosie, "it's got to be made, so you might as well have the good of it as to wait around shiverin' for a particular time to be comfortable." [322]

Right after breakfast the Scollards bore off Ralph and Snigs to the small skating pond which had been made by damming the brook. Gretta, who could skate far better than the Scollard girls, begged to be allowed to stay at home to help with the preparation of dinner. "If it's my house, and the boys are my first guests I think I belong here," she argued. And nobody could gainsay her argument.

The skaters came home cold and glowing and ravenously hungry from their sport, and from a walk over roughened fields and roads, in which alternate thawing and freezing had made ruts that lifted one foot up on a ridge while its mate came down emphatically in a hole that gave its owner a jarring surprise. But the air was so bright, the long vistas of country revealed by the bare trees so splendid that it was well worth while "tramping on the bias," as Ralph said.

How pretty the low-ceiled library looked as the party came into it! The fire crackled on the hearth, warming one through the sense of sight almost as much as through the sense of feeling. Pictures, pretty casts, books—which seemed to follow the inmates of the Ark into every room, like faithful favorites, not relegated to one special place—all contributed to make this a totally different room from the dreary, musty one into which Bob and Happie had despondently peered on that night of their arrival, half a year ago.

And there by that cheery hearth sat Mrs. Scollard, safe and well! Polly and Penny beside her, plump as pigeons and hardily browned. And Dundee in holiday array of a big blue bow, and Jeunesse Dorée, by this time thoroughly reconciled to the collie, quite as magnificent in a grass green ribbon, setting off his yellow fur. [323]

"My, but it's nice here; better even than in summer!" cried Ralph, dropping down in the chair opposite Mrs. Scollard and stretching out his long legs in just the same sort of appreciation of the heat that the dog and the cat showed. "I don't believe I care about going back to town next week, and I don't see how you can look the Patty-Pan prospect calmly in the face. I believe I'll get Gretta to sell me her farm and turn gentleman farmer after I finish college—if ever I do!"

"More than doubtful," agreed Bob. "See here, Ralph, you can't bask! We've been informed on the reliable authority of our hostess that turkey's almost ready for the table, and our dressing isn't anything like done, though his is. You straighten up those long legs of yours and stand up on them, and steer them straight up-stairs to wash up!"

"I wonder," began Polly thoughtfully, as Ralph obeyed the first two of these four orders with a groan, "I wonder if your mother goes away to-day, and you boys are here, if Whoop-la will have any Thanksgiving."

"Were you going down on the afternoon train to feed him, little Lady Bountiful?" asked Ralph. Polly was his especial favorite of the lesser Scollards. "Be at rest; mother was not going until noon, and Whoop-la is provided for, amply. I think mother would not have any Thanksgiving herself, rather than neglect her cat." [324]

"I always liked your mother," said Polly seriously.

"You can bank on mother's taking care of the weak," assented Ralph, as he joined Snigs and Bob in the hall.

"Boys, boys!" called Gretta ten minutes later, making herself heard with difficulty above the shouts of laughter from Bob's room. "Boys!"

"M'am!" responded Bob leaning over the balustrade, his face scarlet from the sharp winds of the morning, supplemented by a brisk rubbing.

"They told me to call you; dinner's ready," said Gretta.

"Told you! Who told you? What makes you take orders; aren't you the Head of the House? We'll be down with the speed of three, Gretta," said Bob disappearing.

"Mr. Gordon," said Happie, "you will please take in Miss Bradbury. Mr. Charles Gordon will take in Mrs. Scollard. Mr. Scollard will be so good as to offer his arm to the Head of the House. Miss Scollard escorts Miss Penelope, Miss Laura Scollard takes in Miss Mary, while Miss Keren-happuch Scollard finds her way in as well as she can alone, following the trail. Mr. Gordon, Miss Bradbury, will please proceed." [325]

"Doesn't the Honorable Keren-happuch mean precede?" suggested Ralph blandly.

"She means both; they will proceed to precede," said Happie. Which they did at once.

Jake Shale's turkey, which nearly collided with the procession, borne aloft by Rosie, was a credit to the Keystone State. Its browned breast-bone arose from the snowy platter like a Pennsylvanian mountain ridge from the snow. Miss Keren spanned it with the tines of her carving fork, and laid off breast and side bone slices with a speed and skill that struck even the uncritical younger portion of her family as little less than marvellous.

"Gracious, Aunt Keren, how nice you can cut it up!" exclaimed Penny, in hungry appreciation.

"We call it carving, my dear," smiled Miss Keren. "My father had no sons, and he insisted that each of his daughters should learn to carve without a mistake. He taught us to carve the entire bird without once removing our fork, and when we were done there must not be any ragged places, nor torn joints. He considered carving, good whist playing, and a few other like accomplishments, part of the education of a gentlewoman."

"Then I can never be a gentlewoman," said Polly, sadly. "My arms wouldn't let me carve so well, and I'd be too fat to keep my fork in and reach all around it without moving it lots of times." [326]

The others laughed. "Never mind, Polly; maybe you can feed the turkeys, while somebody else carves them," suggested Happie consolingly.

"I'd much rather," said Polly with her unfailing seriousness.

Such a turkey as it proved to be, so succulent, so toothsome, with such a flavor! Then Rosie's vegetables were so very good, and so intemperately abundant! Mrs. Scollard had made the mince pies after a recipe which had come down to her from a long line of colonial dames, her ancestors, and their crusts flaked and flew in a way that spoke volumes for the amount of butter the farm cows allowed her to use. The nuts were hickory and chestnuts, grown and gathered on the farm—how could the best intentioned help overeating? And that sort of indulgence is more than excusable on the Day of Gratitude.

"I guess we're done for for the rest of the afternoon," observed Snigs at the end of the feast as he dropped his last nut shell, denuded of meat, on his plate. "I've got my watch out of my vest pocket—wanted to see how long we'd been here—and now I can't get it back again."

Bob and Ralph shouted, but Snigs had not meant to be funny, merely to state a fact proving how fully he had done his duty by the institutions of his country—turkey and Thanksgiving Day. [327]

Happie's lips were moving rapidly, and her face, already flushed, grew very red.

"Hapsie's in the throes," announced Bob. "Let's have it, Hap! She always looks like that when the Muse has grappled with her."

"Wait a minute! No, I didn't mean that! I wasn't going to repeat anything; I was only——"

"Improvising! We know, and you don't mind us, Happie," said Ralph. "Domesticated minor poets often put others in a less minor key—not that we are not reasonably cheerful! Let her go, Happie!"

Thus elegantly encouraged, and at an imploring touch on her foot from Gretta, who dearly loved to display Happie's talents, Happie favored the company with the following effusion:

"I'd rather dine with Barmecide,
Where food and drink were not supplied,
Than have my belt so very tight,
And black specks bobbing in my sight,
And feel I never more could care
For more than bread and water fare."

There was general applause for this humble poem, which Snigs feelingly and briefly endorsed by the words: "Same here!"

"That's rather an ungrateful ode for Thanksgiving Day, Happie," said Margery. "You ought to be thankful for all that you've received, and not openly announce your preference for Barmecide feasts."

"I am thankful for all that I have received, but not for all that I have taken, Peggy," said Happie [328]
quickly, with her mischievous flash of her eye.

"There certainly is a difference in that distinction," said Miss Keren, smiling affectionately at her namesake.

Dundee thrust his nose into Bob's hand, hitching up closer to the boy's side without rising, thumping the floor all the while with his beautiful tail.

"Dundee says he is ready to risk over-eating, just in honor of the day and custom," said Bob. "Old beauty! He'll miss us."

"Only to be the more glad to see us when we come back," said Miss Keren. "He and Don Dolor will be comfortable in Rosie's hands."

"But I'm glad we can take Jeunesse Dorée back with us," said Polly, giving the golden cat an especially tender bit of turkey breast in response to his dainty paw-pat on her arm.

"Well regulated families don't feed their animals at table, so my mother's aunt always says when we feed Whoop-la. I've always been glad I wasn't a well regulated family," said Ralph. "Here, Penny; I saved this piece for Dorée." He offered Penny a bit of meat, seeing her crestfallen expression that she had not saved anything for the kitten, as Polly had done.

"Ralph, you are a truly nice boy!" exclaimed Happie approvingly. Ralph had grown tall and manly during these six months; the responsibility of making his way through college, the plans for the future with which his mind was filled, were adding gravity and maturity to his manner, but he [329]
never forgot, nor failed to understand the feelings of the little children.

"A week from to-day we shall all be back in New York, each in our own Patty-Pan," said Ralph, acknowledging Happie's remark with a low bow, its mock deference not concealing the pleasure he felt.

"Not all of us," said Miss Keren, looking up at Rosie with a smile that conveyed her sense of that good woman's claim on remembrance.

Rosie swooped down on six plates which she gathered into a pile with an emphasis that meant emotion, but not disrespect.

"My days, it hain't worth talkin' about; you'll be back here in no time," she said. "Just see how quick the summer's went!"

With that she whisked herself out of the room; in reality the coming six months appeared tedious to Rosie. She thrust her head into the room again, through a very small opening of the door. "You needn't think I hain't goin' to miss you," she added. "But I guess I've got about the most to be thankful fer of any of you. Miss Bradbury, the coffee's almost all; I've only got enough fer breakfast, so don't you fergit it to-morrow mornin', if I do." With which Rosie again disappeared.

"We have enough to be thankful for, all of us," said Mrs. Scollard, looking lovingly at Miss Bradbury.

"Indeed we have!" said Margery softly, with that new expression on her face, as if she had a [330]
secret too sweet to share.

"Motherums' health would be enough, if there were nothing else," said Happie.

"But I have most of all!" said Gretta unexpectedly. "I have a home, and—best of all—I have Happie!"

"We all reckon her among our chief assets, Gretta," said Bob. "It will be a jolly crowd that goes back to old Gotham next week. Only think what a difference from the way we came here!"

"Well, Bob," said Miss Keren, "I don't think any one has done more than you have towards the success of our experiment, and I'm thoroughly appreciative of the fact."

"Patty-Pans and green fields!" cried Happie. "Take them alternately every six months; health, happiness and wisdom guaranteed."

"Right you are, Hapsie!" cried Bob, flushed by Miss Bradbury's praise.

Penny leaned over the table, resting her elbows on it unblushingly, and propping up her little brown dimpled face in her hands.

"I'm very, very glad," she said.

"What about, Pfennig?" asked Ralph, wondering.

"Everyfing," said Penny, in a true Thanksgiving spirit.

By Amy E. Blanchard

War of the Revolution Series

The books comprising this series have become well known among the girls and are alike chosen by readers themselves, by parents and by teachers on account of their value from the historical standpoint, their purity of style and their interest in general.

A Girl of '76

ABOUT COLONIAL BOSTON. 331 pp.

It is one of the best stories of old Boston and its vicinity which has ever been written. Its value as real history and as an incentive to further study can hardly be overestimated.

A Revolutionary Maid

A STORY OF THE MIDDLE PERIOD IN THE WAR FOR INDEPENDENCE, 312 pp.

No better material could be found for a story than the New Jersey campaign, the Battle of Germantown, and the winter at Valley Forge. Miss Blanchard has made the most of a large opportunity and produced a happy companion volume to "A Girl of '76."

A Daughter of Freedom

A STORY OF THE LATTER PERIOD OF THE WAR FOR INDEPENDENCE. 312 pp.

In this story the South supplies the scenery, and good use is made of the familiar fact that a family often was divided in its allegiance. It is romantic but not sensational, well-written and rich in entertainment.

War of 1812 Series

This period is divided into two historical volumes for girls, the one upon the early portion describing the causes, etc., of the war, the latter showing the strife along the Northern border.

A Heroine of 1812

A MARYLAND ROMANCE. 335 pp.

This Maryland romance is of the author's best; strong in historical accuracy and intimate knowledge of the locality. Its characters are of marked individuality, and there are no dull or weak spots in the story.

A Loyal Lass

A STORY OF THE NIAGARA CAMPAIGN OF 1814. 319 pp.

This volume shows the intense feeling that existed all along the border line between the

United States and Canada, and as was the case in our Civil War even divided families fought on opposite sides during this contest. It is a sweet and wholesome romance.

EACH VOLUME FULLY ILLUSTRATED. Price, $1.50

W. A. WILDE COMPANY,
Boston and Chicago

[333]

FAMOUS STORIES FOR GIRLS
By Charlotte M. Vaile

The Orcutt Girls

OR, ONE TERM AT THE ACADEMY.
316 pp.

Sue Orcutt

A SEQUEL TO "THE ORCUTT GIRLS."
335 pp.

These companion volumes are among the most popular books for girls which have ever been written concerning school life. In these books Mrs. Vaile depicts that old academic life which used to be so great a feature in the life of New England. Mrs. Vaile shows her intimate knowledge of the subject, and both books are full of incentive and inspiration.

Wheat and Huckleberries

OR, DR. NORTHMORE'S DAUGHTERS.
336 pp.

Another story for girls with the true ring of genuineness, and as the two girls around whom the story centers were born and brought up in the rich farm regions of the Middle West, and then spent their summers in the New England home of their grandfather, the author has been able to weave into her narrative the various peculiarities of both sections.

Each volume is fully illustrated. Price, $1.50

The M. M. C.

A STORY OF THE GREAT ROCKIES.
232 pp.

The experience of a New England girl in the Colorado mining camp. It shows the pluck of the little school teacher in holding for her friend a promising mining claim which he had secured after years of misfortune in other ventures.

Fully illustrated. Price, $1.00

[334]

BOOKS BY

Ellen Douglas Deland

Malvern; A Neighborhood Story

341 pp. 12mo. Cloth.

"Malvern" is a story of fine workmanship, sterling sentiments, and more than ordinary caliber. The author is one of the best writers for young people and this is certainly one of her best stories.—*The Interior.*

A Successful Venture

340 pp. 12mo. Cloth.

This book, primarily for girls, is lively and full of interest, pure in its tone and free from sensation, and full of many helpful suggestions. It is a story of a family of girls who found it necessary to make their own way in the world. This they did with success.—*Boston Transcript.*

Katrina

340 pp. 12mo. Cloth.

"Katrina" is a story which all girl readers would pronounce a capital good one. The heroine's desire to look beyond the horizon of her little village when opportunity presents itself takes her to New York, where she finds new pleasures and experiences. The book is certainly a most wholesome one.—*The Bookseller*, New York.

Three Girls of Hazelmere. A Story

360 pp. 12mo. Cloth.

To take a trip abroad with Miss Deland's "Three Girls of Hazelmere" is a treat for any reader, for the author's style is natural, yet remarkably effective, and the interest follows closely to the end of the book.—*Bookseller.*

The Friendship of Anne

342 pp. Cloth. 12mo.

This is a book which will appeal to girls and interest them throughout. It is founded on boarding-school life and is full of activity and enthusiasm.—*Herald and Presbyter.*

Each Volume Fully Illustrated. Price $1.50 Each.

Transcriber's Note

- page 313, Repulic changed to Republic (The Battle Hymn of the Republic).
- page 333, intimat changed to intimate (Mrs. Vaile shows her intimate knowledge of the subject).
- The spelling of Patty-Pan was made consistent.
- Punctuation was corrected without comment.
- Inconsistent hyphenation has been retained.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK SIX GIRLS AND BOB: A STORY OF PATTY-PANS AND GREEN FIELDS ***

1.E. Unless you have removed all references to Project Gutenberg:

1.E.1. The following sentence, with active links to, or other immediate access to, the full Project Gutenberg™ License must appear prominently whenever any copy of a Project Gutenberg™ work (any work on which the phrase “Project Gutenberg” appears, or with which the phrase “Project Gutenberg” is associated) is accessed, displayed, performed, viewed, copied or distributed:

> This eBook is for the use of anyone anywhere in the United States and most other parts of the world at no cost and with almost no restrictions whatsoever. You may copy it, give it away or re-use it under the terms of the Project Gutenberg License included with this eBook or online at www.gutenberg.org. If you are not located in the United States, you will have to check the laws of the country where you are located before using this eBook.

1.E.2. If an individual Project Gutenberg™ electronic work is derived from texts not protected by U.S. copyright law (does not contain a notice indicating that it is posted with permission of the copyright holder), the work can be copied and distributed to anyone in the United States without paying any fees or charges. If you are redistributing or providing access to a work with the phrase “Project Gutenberg” associated with or appearing on the work, you must comply either with the requirements of paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 or obtain permission for the use of the work and the Project Gutenberg™ trademark as set forth in paragraphs 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.3. If an individual Project Gutenberg™ electronic work is posted with the permission of the copyright holder, your use and distribution must comply with both paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 and any additional terms imposed by the copyright holder. Additional terms will be linked to the Project Gutenberg™ License for all works posted with the permission of the copyright holder found at the beginning of this work.

1.E.4. Do not unlink or detach or remove the full Project Gutenberg™ License terms from this work, or any files containing a part of this work or any other work associated with Project Gutenberg™.

1.E.5. Do not copy, display, perform, distribute or redistribute this electronic work, or any part of this electronic work, without prominently displaying the sentence set forth in paragraph 1.E.1 with active links or immediate access to the full terms of the Project Gutenberg™ License.

1.E.6. You may convert to and distribute this work in any binary, compressed, marked up, nonproprietary or proprietary form, including any word processing or hypertext form. However, if you provide access to or distribute copies of a Project Gutenberg™ work in a format other than “Plain Vanilla ASCII” or other format used in the official version posted on the official Project Gutenberg™ website (www.gutenberg.org), you must, at no additional cost, fee or expense to the user, provide a copy, a means of exporting a copy, or a means of obtaining a copy upon request, of the work in its original “Plain Vanilla ASCII” or other form. Any alternate format must include the full Project Gutenberg™ License as specified in paragraph 1.E.1.

1.E.7. Do not charge a fee for access to, viewing, displaying, performing, copying or distributing any Project Gutenberg™ works unless you comply with paragraph 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.8. You may charge a reasonable fee for copies of or providing access to or distributing Project Gutenberg™ electronic works provided that:

- You pay a royalty fee of 20% of the gross profits you derive from the use of Project Gutenberg™ works calculated using the method you already use to calculate your applicable taxes. The fee is owed to the owner of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark, but he has agreed to donate royalties under this paragraph to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation. Royalty payments must be paid within 60 days following each date on which you prepare (or are legally required to prepare) your periodic tax returns. Royalty payments should be clearly marked as such and sent to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation at the address specified in Section 4, “Information about donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation.”

- You provide a full refund of any money paid by a user who notifies you in writing (or by e-mail) within 30 days of receipt that s/he does not agree to the terms of the full Project Gutenberg™ License. You must require such a user to return or destroy all copies of the works possessed in a physical medium and discontinue all use of and all access to other copies of Project Gutenberg™ works.

- You provide, in accordance with paragraph 1.F.3, a full refund of any money paid for a work or a replacement copy, if a defect in the electronic work is discovered and reported to you within 90 days of receipt of the work.

- You comply with all other terms of this agreement for free distribution of Project Gutenberg™ works.

1.E.9. If you wish to charge a fee or distribute a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work or group of works on different terms than are set forth in this agreement, you must obtain permission in writing from the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the manager of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark. Contact the Foundation as set forth in Section 3 below.

1.F.

1.F.1. Project Gutenberg volunteers and employees expend considerable effort to identify, do copyright research on, transcribe and proofread works not protected by U.S. copyright law in creating the Project Gutenberg™ collection. Despite these efforts, Project Gutenberg™ electronic works, and the medium on which they may be stored, may contain “Defects,” such as, but not limited to, incomplete, inaccurate or corrupt data, transcription errors, a copyright or other intellectual property infringement, a defective or damaged disk or other medium, a computer virus, or computer codes that damage or cannot be read by your equipment.

1.F.2. LIMITED WARRANTY, DISCLAIMER OF DAMAGES - Except for the “Right of Replacement or Refund” described in paragraph 1.F.3, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the owner of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark, and any other party distributing a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work under this agreement, disclaim all liability to you for damages, costs and expenses, including legal fees. YOU AGREE THAT YOU HAVE NO REMEDIES FOR NEGLIGENCE, STRICT LIABILITY, BREACH OF WARRANTY OR BREACH OF CONTRACT EXCEPT THOSE PROVIDED IN PARAGRAPH 1.F.3. YOU AGREE THAT THE FOUNDATION, THE TRADEMARK OWNER, AND ANY DISTRIBUTOR UNDER THIS AGREEMENT WILL NOT BE LIABLE TO YOU FOR ACTUAL, DIRECT, INDIRECT, CONSEQUENTIAL, PUNITIVE OR INCIDENTAL DAMAGES EVEN IF YOU GIVE NOTICE OF THE POSSIBILITY OF SUCH DAMAGE.

1.F.3. LIMITED RIGHT OF REPLACEMENT OR REFUND - If you discover a defect in this electronic work within 90 days of receiving it, you can receive a refund of the money (if any) you paid for it by sending a written explanation to the person you received the work from. If you received the work on a physical medium, you must return the medium with your written explanation. The person or entity that provided you with the defective work may elect to provide a replacement copy in lieu of a refund. If you received the work electronically, the person or entity providing it to you may choose to give you a second opportunity to receive the work electronically in lieu of a refund. If the second copy is also defective, you may demand a refund in writing without further opportunities to fix the problem.

1.F.4. Except for the limited right of replacement or refund set forth in paragraph 1.F.3, this work is provided to you ‘AS-IS’, WITH NO OTHER WARRANTIES OF ANY KIND, EXPRESS OR IMPLIED, INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO WARRANTIES OF MERCHANTABILITY OR FITNESS FOR ANY PURPOSE.

1.F.5. Some states do not allow disclaimers of certain implied warranties or the exclusion or limitation of certain types of damages. If any disclaimer or limitation set forth in this agreement violates the law of the state applicable to this agreement, the agreement shall be interpreted to make the maximum disclaimer or limitation permitted by the applicable state law. The invalidity or unenforceability of any provision of this agreement shall not void the remaining provisions.

1.F.6. INDEMNITY - You agree to indemnify and hold the Foundation, the trademark owner, any agent or employee of the Foundation, anyone providing copies of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works in accordance with this agreement, and any volunteers associated with the production, promotion and distribution of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works, harmless from all liability, costs and expenses, including legal fees, that arise directly or indirectly from any of the following which you do or cause to occur: (a) distribution of this or any Project Gutenberg™ work, (b) alteration, modification, or additions or deletions to any Project Gutenberg™ work, and (c) any Defect you cause.

Section 2. Information about the Mission of Project Gutenberg™

Project Gutenberg™ is synonymous with the free distribution of electronic works in formats readable by the widest variety of computers including obsolete, old, middle-aged and new computers. It exists because of the efforts of hundreds of volunteers and donations from people in all walks of life.

Volunteers and financial support to provide volunteers with the assistance they need are critical to reaching Project Gutenberg™’s goals and ensuring that the Project Gutenberg™ collection will remain freely available for generations to come. In 2001, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation was created to provide a secure and permanent future for Project Gutenberg™ and future generations. To learn more about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation and how your efforts and donations can help, see Sections 3 and 4 and the Foundation information page at www.gutenberg.org.

Section 3. Information about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive

Foundation

The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation is a non-profit 501(c)(3) educational corporation organized under the laws of the state of Mississippi and granted tax exempt status by the Internal Revenue Service. The Foundation's EIN or federal tax identification number is 64-6221541. Contributions to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation are tax deductible to the full extent permitted by U.S. federal laws and your state's laws.

The Foundation's business office is located at 809 North 1500 West, Salt Lake City, UT 84116, (801) 596-1887. Email contact links and up to date contact information can be found at the Foundation's website and official page at www.gutenberg.org/contact

Section 4. Information about Donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

Project Gutenberg™ depends upon and cannot survive without widespread public support and donations to carry out its mission of increasing the number of public domain and licensed works that can be freely distributed in machine-readable form accessible by the widest array of equipment including outdated equipment. Many small donations ($1 to $5,000) are particularly important to maintaining tax exempt status with the IRS.

The Foundation is committed to complying with the laws regulating charities and charitable donations in all 50 states of the United States. Compliance requirements are not uniform and it takes a considerable effort, much paperwork and many fees to meet and keep up with these requirements. We do not solicit donations in locations where we have not received written confirmation of compliance. To SEND DONATIONS or determine the status of compliance for any particular state visit www.gutenberg.org/donate.

While we cannot and do not solicit contributions from states where we have not met the solicitation requirements, we know of no prohibition against accepting unsolicited donations from donors in such states who approach us with offers to donate.

International donations are gratefully accepted, but we cannot make any statements concerning tax treatment of donations received from outside the United States. U.S. laws alone swamp our small staff.

Please check the Project Gutenberg web pages for current donation methods and addresses. Donations are accepted in a number of other ways including checks, online payments and credit card donations. To donate, please visit: www.gutenberg.org/donate

Section 5. General Information About Project Gutenberg™ electronic works

Professor Michael S. Hart was the originator of the Project Gutenberg™ concept of a library of electronic works that could be freely shared with anyone. For forty years, he produced and distributed Project Gutenberg™ eBooks with only a loose network of volunteer support.

Project Gutenberg™ eBooks are often created from several printed editions, all of which are confirmed as not protected by copyright in the U.S. unless a copyright notice is included. Thus, we do not necessarily keep eBooks in compliance with any particular paper edition.

Most people start at our website which has the main PG search facility: www.gutenberg.org.

This website includes information about Project Gutenberg™, including how to make donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, how to help produce our new eBooks, and how to subscribe to our email newsletter to hear about new eBooks.