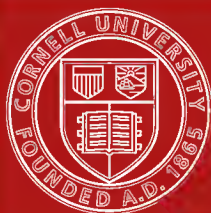


The
**BLUE
AUNT**

+

**ELIZA
ORNE
WHITE**



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The blue aunt,



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By *Eliza Orne White*

NOVELS

THE FIRST STEP.
THE WARES OF EDGEFIELD.
JOHN FORSYTH'S AUNTS.
LESLEY CHILTON.
WINTERBOROUGH.
THE COMING OF THEODORA.
MISS BROOKS.
A LOVER OF TRUTH.
A BROWNING COURTSHIP, AND OTHER STORIES.

BOOKS FOR CHILDREN

THE BLUE AUNT.
THE ENCHANTED MOUNTAIN.
BROTHERS IN FUR.
A BORROWED SISTER.
AN ONLY CHILD.
WHEN MOLLY WAS SIX.
A LITTLE GIRL OF LONG AGO.
EDNAH AND HER BROTHERS.

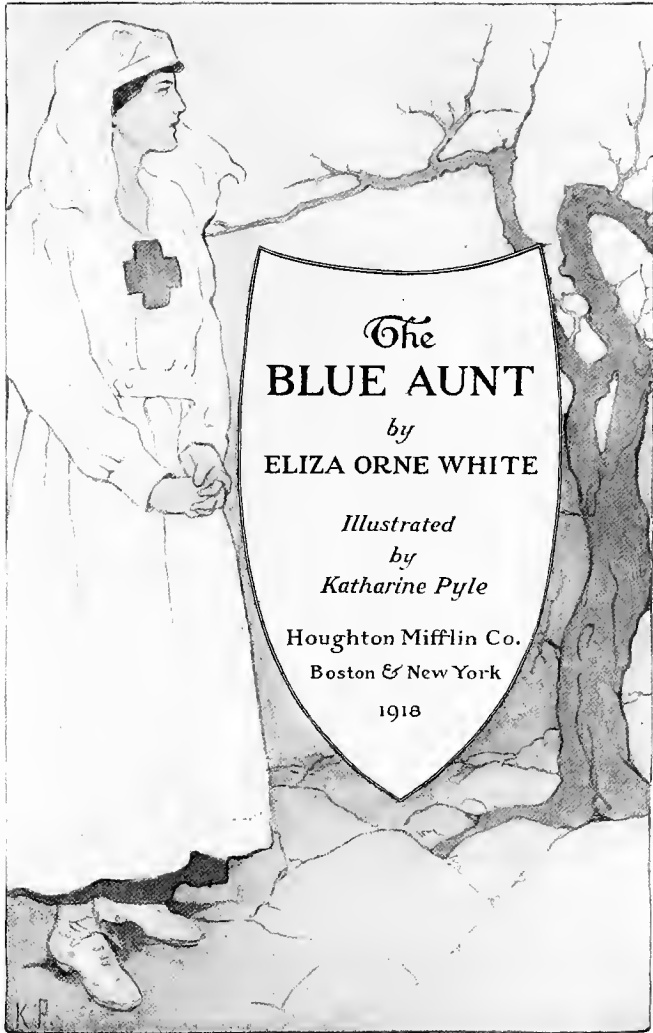
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY
BOSTON AND NEW YORK

THE BLUE AUNT



(page 18)

SHE HAS N'T ANY DRESSES BUT THE ONE SHE HAS ON



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Published September 1918

To Four Little Sisters
MARY, EDITH, ELEANOR, AND MARGARET
this book
is affectionately dedicated

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THE BLUE AUNT

I

The Letter

JIM was the first of the family to see the outside of the letter, and it happened in this way. His mother did not go down to breakfast that morning, and when Ann, the housemaid, called him, he turned over and went to sleep again. When he came down to breakfast his father and his small sister Evelyn had finished their meal, and Ann was clearing off the table. Ann wore spectacles, and Jim thought this was why she always looked so severe.

“Little boys who are late and don’t get up when they are called don’t deserve any breakfast,” said Ann.

Jim never liked to argue with Ann, so he slipped out into the kitchen, where cheerful Catherine, the cook, was just finishing her breakfast. Jim thought the kitchen was the pleasantest room in the house. He liked the warm color of the red bricks behind the stove, and the dresser with the blue china dishes on it, and the shining row of pots and pans. He liked the bare floor where one could spill milk or cooky

crumbs without having any one say, "Be careful, or you'll spoil the rug." But best of all he liked the delicious things to eat that came out of the oven.

"I've saved some buckwheat cakes for you," said Catherine, and she took a yellow bowl out of the oven. She always gave him a great deal more syrup than his mother did, and next to his mother he thought Catherine the most charming grown-up person he had ever known. The postman seemed to like her, too, for he always came past the kitchen window and often stopped for a little chat.

"There's a letter from Virginia for Mr. West this morning," said the postman, "and it has a black edge all around the envelope, so I'm afraid there is bad news."

"I'll take the letter up to father," said Jim; and the postman slipped the mail in at the window.

It was a sunshiny morning in early spring, and there was a lilac bush just behind the postman with wee, wee bits of green coming out all over it that would be leaves later on.

Jim rushed upstairs and burst into his mother's bedroom, where his father sat reading aloud scraps to her from the newspaper. Jim was sure that his mother was the prettiest, sweetest person in the whole world. Her dark hair was rumped up around her forehead, and was braided in a big braid just as if she were a little girl. She was propped up in bed with pillows and had on the prettiest pink kimono he

had ever seen. There was a tray in front of her with a cup of coffee on it and some bread and butter.

“Mother, did n’t Ann bring you up any buckwheat cakes?” Jim asked. “I’ll get some for you right off now.”

“Your mother is having a bad headache. She does n’t want any buckwheat cakes,” said his father. “Run down and don’t interrupt us.”

“But, father, I’ve got to interrupt; it’s something very important; it’s a letter with bad news in it from Virginia with a wide black border all round it.”

“I’m afraid your stepfather has died,” said Mrs. West. “Poor Matilda. Of course we must ask her to come to us at once.”

“Of course nothing of the kind,” said her husband. “You are in no state to have a visitor. It’s a great many years since I’ve seen Matilda. She’s nothing to me.”

“Nothing but your half-sister,” said Mrs. West.

Jim was sure that his Aunt Matilda must be a disagreeable person, or his father would not have spoken of her in this way. He thought Matilda was the ugliest name he had ever heard. His mother’s name, Sadie, was the prettiest of all, and he liked his sister’s name next best.

Little Evelyn was curled up on the foot of her mother’s bed; he had not seen her at first, for the footboard was a solid piece of mahogany that had hidden her from view. Evelyn had dark eyes like her mother,

but her hair was light, and in the sunshine Jim thought it looked as if it were made of gold. Evelyn had some tiny cups and saucers scattered about on the bed, and she began putting them on the edge of her mother's tray.

"Can Sarah and Matilda have their breakfast now?" asked Evelyn, as she held up her two dolls. Then she looked up and saw that her mother was very sober.

"Poor, poor Matilda," Mrs. West said.

Mr. West was reading the letter and giving little grunts as he did so.

"I don't see why she wants to come to us this summer," he said. "I tell you, you are not well enough to have a visitor. Why can't she stay where she's made her home for the last ten years?"

"But, dearest, of course she stayed with her father; how could she do anything else?"

"She had certainly better stay on in Virginia, where every one knows her," he said.

"Yes," said Jim, "she had better stay in Virginia, where every one knows her."

"You little pitcher, go downstairs where you belong. What do you know about it? Your aunt has lived in Virginia since before you were born."

Little Evelyn was explaining to her child Matilda, that her great-aunt, who was also named Matilda, had lost her father. She was very fond of her own father, and she got down from the bed and climbed

up into his lap. Child as she was she knew that her father was worried about her mother, and that was why he seemed so cross.

“My little pigeon,” said her father, and he stroked her yellow hair: “my little comfort.”

Evelyn put one of her chubby arms around his neck.

He finished reading the letter and handed it to his wife. “If you are not strong enough to have her here, Sadie, we can perfectly well find her a boarding-place. You see, she suggests that herself. She’ll be as blue as indigo, poor thing, and it’ll be too hard for you and the children.”

Evelyn had never seen a blue person. She had seen several black people, and she remembered how yellow her mother had looked when she had the jaundice. She wondered if her aunt had some strange disease. If so, she must be very, very good to her so as to make up for it.

Mrs. West was crying over the letter. “It is very pathetic what she says about wanting to be near some of her own people,” she said. “I’ll write as well as you, and we’ll ask her to come to us at once for the summer. It would n’t be such a very long visit, for she says she has other plans for the autumn.”

“Sadie, you are always too impulsive. I’ve seen so little of her since she grew up, and I don’t know at all how you’d get on. We’ll ask her to come to us for a fortnight. She does n’t suggest coming for more than a fortnight.”

"That would n't be decent, James. We must at least ask her for a month."

"What color is indigo blue?" Evelyn asked Jim.

It was the afternoon of the day on which the letter came, and the two children were building a block house in the nursery.

"It is a dark, ugly shade of blue."

"Poor Aunt Matilda!" said Evelyn.

"I guess she's a perfectly horrid person," said Jim, "for father seems to hate her, and you don't hate your sister if she's nice."

"I should think anybody would be hateful if they had a disease that made them an ugly shade of blue," said Evelyn.

"What are you talking about, you little goose?"

"Father said Aunt Matilda was as blue as indigo, and that it would make it very hard for us."

Jim threw back his head and chuckled. "Well, you do beat the Dutch," he said.

"We'll have to be very, very good to her," said Evelyn.

"Their heads were green and their hands were blue, and they went to sea in a sieve," quoted Jim. "Look out, Evvy, don't put any more blocks on that tower; it'll tumble down if you do."

Evelyn continued to put blocks on, as if she had not heard.

"Are you deaf?" asked her brother.

"Sometimes I am," said Evelyn sweetly. "When I want to put on blocks, I want to put on blocks."

"There, what did I tell you? Now see what you've done!"

Evelyn looked at the wrecked tower with concern. "I did n't think it would tumble down, and it has n't all tumbled down, and we'll build it up again."

"You are a perfectly aggravating child, and you always think you know best, and you never get anything right."

"If I were indigo blue should you hate me?" Evelyn asked, unexpectedly.

"I hate you now."

"Oh, you don't hate me," said Evelyn, looking at him reproachfully with her brown eyes.

"Of course I don't hate you. But you are sometimes enough to try the patience of Job."

"Who was Job?" Evelyn asked.

"Confound it! I don't know who Job was. What questions you do ask! I think he was a Bible chap. Anyway, it's an expression father uses a lot."

"I'm going to build a house of my own this time," said Evelyn. "I can build it any way I like, then. I'm going to make a house big enough for my children and me to live in. There'll be one room for Sarah and Matilda and me, and another for the Blue Aunt when she comes, and we won't let you come into it at all."

“I don’t want to come into your old house, and I think your daughter Sarah is a perfect fright. Matilda is very sweet with her light, fluffy hair, but you’d better keep her away from the Blue Aunt or she may catch the disease.”

II

The Blue Aunt Comes

IT was some weeks later, and as it had been a backward spring, everything was coming out with a rush. The bush of purple lilacs was in blossom by the kitchen window, and the snowballs looked white and fluffy on what the children called the snowball tree, while the scarlet tulips made the edge of the garden paths gay, and the yellow forsythia was like a brilliant patch of sunshine in front of the house; it seemed as if all the flowers were blossoming together, as if to welcome the coming of the Blue Aunt.

The children had gone out to play in the yard, so as to be able to catch the first sight of her when she came. Their father had gone to Boston to meet her. Their mother sat in the parlor with her knitting. She was knitting a sweater for the Navy League. It was of an ugly shade of gray, and she had been ill so much that she had not got on with it very fast. She had nearly got to the neck, and how she was going to make the hole she did not know, and just now there was no one at hand to advise and she had lost the directions. She would have liked much better to go on with her bright-colored embroidery, but now the country was at war she wanted to do her bit.

Even Jim had begun to knit a washcloth. It had strange little holes in it every now and then, but he was sure a soldier would not mind that.

Mrs. West glanced at the clock and began to feel very nervous. She dropped a stitch in the middle of the row, off the end of her slippery yellow needle, and it ran down two or three rows.

"I do hope she won't object to children," she thought. "Mine are sometimes so noisy and quarrelsome, and yet they are such dears, I could n't bear it if she were always hushing them up."

"Here they come!" said Jim to Evelyn. "Oh, dear, I thought that was the motor from the station."

Mrs. West in her confusion had dropped some more stitches. She hastily pulled the needle out and folded up the knitting. She could pick up the stitches later. She counted them first to make sure they were all right. There were eighty-three of them, and there should have been only eighty. How did she get those extra three stitches?

Here Aunt Matilda was at last; there was no mistake this time, for the motor was coming up to the front gate. The children were stationed one behind each gate-post, so as to get a good look at her before she saw them. She sprang lightly out of the automobile before their father could help her, and Evelyn saw that she was all in black. Her shoes were black and comfortable-looking rather than pretty, this was what Evelyn saw first, and her stockings were

black and showed below her short skirt. It was black, too, and so was her silk blouse and the jacket she carried over her arm. Her hat was black and so was the veil tied around it, and the only thing that was not black was the wide white sailor collar on her blouse. Then Evelyn gathered courage to look at her face. There was nothing blue about it except her eyes, and these were the very bluest eyes Evelyn had ever seen. They were dark blue, not indigo blue she was sure, for they were a lovely color. Her lashes were long and nearly black, and so was her hair that showed in a coil below her hat.

"There's Sadie at the window," said Matilda. "But where are the children?"

"Come, Jim, and shake hands with your Aunt Matilda," said his father.

Jim scowled and put his hands behind his back. He had a resentful feeling when he found his aunt was so different from what he had expected. It seemed as if his father somehow had n't played fair.

Evelyn came out from behind the post.

"This is Evelyn, is n't it?" said her Aunt Matilda.

She did not try to kiss the little girl or even to shake hands with her, and apparently she did not see Jim. This made him dislike her all the more. He would have hated it if she had spoken to him, but he hated it still more when she did not speak to him.

A minute later Matilda was sitting in the parlor by Sadie, talking about her journey from the South.

“It was so strange to see all the bridges guarded by soldiers,” she said. “And most of the men at the University are drilling.”

Jim longed to ask a question at this point, but decided not to give her this satisfaction. She was so beautiful and so young it made him angry. No one had a right to be as beautiful as his mother.

“Is that a sweater?” Matilda asked, as she looked at Mrs. West’s knitting on the table.

“It’s a sweater for a sailor,” said Evelyn proudly. “Mother makes such beautiful things, and Jim is knitting a wash-rag, and it’s got holes in it that ought n’t to be there, but Jim says —”

“Oh shut up!” said Jim, growing very red.

“I’m making a sweater too,” said Matilda.

“For the army or the navy?” asked Mrs. West.

“For the army.”

“That is a much prettier color.”

Jim could no longer bear being left out of the conversation. “I wish I was big enough to go and fight,” he said.

“In the army or navy?” his aunt asked.

“Army, of course.”

“Artillery, or cavalry, or infantry?”

“Cavalry, of course, because of the horses.”

“I hope by the time you grow up, dear, there will be no such thing as war on this earth,” said his aunt.

She had called him “dear,” and he had a pleasant warm feeling down the back of his spine. He liked

her to call him "dear." After all, it would not be so bad to have two handsome people in the house. She looked even younger than his mother, and he had thought she was going to be old. Matilda sounded like an old name.

"I don't like your name at all," Jim said to her.

"I am glad you don't, for I don't either, and I should hardly believe you if you said you did. You can call me 'Aunt Hilda' if you like, as the little Gays do."

"Who are the little Gays?" asked Evelyn, who always liked to have things explained as she went along.

"They are the children of my best friend."

"How many are there?"

"Four."

"What are their names?"

"Patience and Ralph and Elizabeth and Rodman. The girls are called Patty and Lily."

"How old are they?"

"My dear child, you've asked questions enough," said Mrs. West. "I am sure your aunt wants to rest after her journey. I'll take you upstairs — Hilda." She hesitated over the name. "May I call you Hilda?" she asked. "It sounds so much more friendly than Matilda, and Matilda is the name of James's aunt. I like to keep a separate name for each person."

"My youngest doll is named Matilda," said Evelyn.

"I should love to have you call me Hilda." And

they smiled at each other as people do when they are sure they are going to be good friends. Mrs. West took Hilda up into a pleasant room that had a wide window-seat in front of two windows that overlooked the garden. There was a wistaria vine that climbed around the outside of the window, and great bunches of its lilac blossoms hung down almost like a curtain.

"How old are the little Gays?" persisted Evelyn, who had followed them into the room.

"Never mind about the little Gays. Run downstairs and let us have a little peace."

"I'd rather stay here."

"Your mother has told you to run away," said the Blue Aunt. "I like little girls who mind their mothers, but I am not sure I shall like little girls who don't. I'll call you by and by, for there is something in my trunk I want to show you."

Evelyn slowly made her way to the door.

"Do the little Gays always mind their mother?" she asked, as she turned the handle of the door.

"I'll answer that question when I see you next," said the Blue Aunt.

"I hope you'll be comfortable," said Mrs. West. "I am sorry to say I am under the doctor's orders, and I have to rest for two hours every afternoon."

"That is all right. I shall be glad to rest, and I can get my trunks unpacked."

"Dear me, that tiresome expressman did not unstrap your trunks." Mrs. West leaned over and tried

to unstrap the smaller one. "I can't do it. I'll call Catherine; she is so strong."

Hilda went over to the trunks and after pulling and tugging she undid first one strap and then the other.

"How strong you are!" said Mrs. West, with a little sigh.

Downstairs Evelyn was saying to Jim: "I don't see why father said she was blue. There's nothing blue about her but her eyes."

"He meant she was going to be blue in her mind. It's just an expression," he said loftily.

"You might have told me that before."

"Gee! If I spent all my time telling you the things you don't know, I'd never have time for anything else. When you are my age and know how to read —"

"You might teach me to read."

"Father and mother don't believe in kids learning young. They say it ruins the eyes."

Jim thought there was no little girl in the whole world so bright and charming as his small sister, but he would on no account give her the satisfaction of telling her so.

Evelyn soon got interested in building block houses with Jim, and for an hour she forgot all about the Blue Aunt; but when his friend, Charley Norcross, called for Jim to go out and play, she wondered if Aunt Hilda had finished her unpacking. She liked to see people unpack. Almost every one had such interesting things in trunks.

Aunt Hilda had taken some of her black frocks out of her trunk and had piled them on the window-seat. She had felt very brave all through her journey, and she knew she was going to be happy in her brother's house during her visit, but the sight of her black frocks brought back her recent loss, and she felt very much alone in this house where everybody was going on just as if she were not there.

She heard the knob turn softly and a little voice called out, "Please, Aunt Hilda, can I come in and see you unpack?"

"Come in, dear," said Aunt Hilda, hastily brushing aside her tears.

"How old are the little Gays?" Evelyn asked, and then she saw that her aunt had been crying.

She ran across the room and put a soft little arm around Aunt Hilda's neck. She felt very sorry for her poor Blue Aunt. And then a strange thing happened. Aunt Hilda stroked her yellow hair, and said, just as her father had done, "You are my little comfort."

"Now we'll decide on which pegs to put my things," said her Aunt Hilda, a little later, as she opened the closet door. "Oh, what nice hangers! You can bring me that blouse."

It was soft and fluffy with pleatings on it, and Evelyn thought it was very pretty, although it was black. All the frocks were black, but there was a blue dressing-gown which was so dainty and pretty that

Evelyn admired it very much. She thought it just the thing for a Blue Aunt to wear. She liked her aunt's soft white shirt-waists and the snowy pile of underwear that she let her arrange as she pleased in the bureau drawers. Her aunt let her open all the interesting boxes that contained gloves and handkerchiefs and belts, and there was one especial box that was Evelyn's delight, for it had silver breast-pins in it, and a pearl pin and a gold pin and a silver chain.

When the smaller trunk was all unpacked, her aunt said, "You have been a great help to me, and now we'll take some things out of the other trunk that I am going to give you for yourself."

"These things are not for you," said Aunt Hilda. And she took out a blanket with gay Roman stripes, and a soft pillow covered with bright cretonne. When her aunt had put them on the window-seat they made it look very cozy.

"Is that box for me?" Evelyn asked.

"Yes; it is heavy. Wait until I lift it out for you."

Her aunt took the cover off the box, and Evelyn saw there was something inside that was done up very carefully with some underclothes stuffed in to make it firm. She took these out, and underneath was a parcel carefully done up in tissue paper.

"It's a doll! It's the shape and size of a doll!" Evelyn cried.

She began skipping about the room at such a rate that her aunt said, —

“Be careful that you don’t drop her.”

Evelyn sat down on the floor and began to take off the wrappings.

“It is a doll!” she cried in delight. “And she’s got brown hair! I never had a brown-haired child. She’s asleep, poor dear; it’s too bad to wake her up, but I must find out what color her eyes are. Brown! How wonderful! I hoped they would be, but I never had a doll with brown eyes. She’s as pretty as Nancy’s Marion. What is her name, Aunt Hilda?”

“I think we’ll call her Virginia, for the State where I’ve been so happy.”

“Virginia is a pretty name. It’s prettier for a doll than Massachusetts would be; don’t you think so?”

“She has n’t any dresses, poor thing, but the one she has on, because I did not have time to make them for her, but you see she has a little bureau all ready for the clothes when I can make them. I used to have that mahogany bureau when I was a little girl.”

Evelyn had never seen such a dear little bureau. It had brass handles just like the big ones, and there were three long drawers in it with two small ones on the top. The doll was dressed in a brown skirt and coat, and she had a white sailor collar on the coat. She wore a white silk shirt-waist and a tiny string tie of brown velvet. Her hat was white straw with a white scarf around it.

“Dear Virginia,” cried the little girl, “I love you

just as much as I love any of my children, although I have had you such a little while.”

“Mothers should always love all their children alike,” said her aunt.

There was also a mahogany bedstead, which had belonged to Aunt Hilda when she was a little girl, and it had sheets and pillows and pillow-cases and a patchwork quilt that the Blue Aunt had made herself when she was a child; but almost the best of all, there was a wing chair made on the same model as the large one that was in the nursery at Nancy’s house. The large one had a white slip cover over it, and the small one was covered with chintz with a pattern of roses and green leaves. When Virginia West was seated in the small wing chair she looked as happy as it was possible for a brown-haired, brown-eyed doll to look.

“I must have you meet your sisters,” said Evelyn. She ran off and presently came back with Sarah and Matilda.

Sarah was a rag doll that Evelyn’s mother had given her when she was only a baby girl, but Matilda was as pretty as Virginia in a different way. She had blue eyes and golden hair, and had been given Evelyn by her father’s Aunt Matilda, “Aunt Mattie,” as they all called her. By squeezing them together Evelyn was able to put both Matilda and Virginia into the wing chair.

Evelyn’s mother always came to put her to bed

and to hear her say her prayers, except once in a great while when she was feeling too ill, and at these times it was Ann who came.

To-night it was Evelyn's mother, and as she tucked her up Evelyn said, "Mother, have n't we had a happy day?"

"Yes, dear. We are all going to love Aunt Hilda."

"Mother, will you ask her if she'll come and say good-night to me?"

"I don't want to interrupt her, dear. She's having such a good talk with your father."

"But there's a question I must ask her."

"It will keep until the morning."

"But I can't go to sleep until I know."

"What is it? If it is very important I can ask her and come back and tell you."

"It is very important. I must find out how old the little Gays are."

III

Nancy Merrifield and the Stranger

EVELYN was very anxious the next morning to go to see Nancy Merrifield, her best friend. She wanted to show Virginia to her, and to tell her all about her new aunt; but Nancy had been having a cold for some days, and when Nancy had even a little cold her mother always put her to bed, for Nancy was all the child she had, so she was anxious about her whenever anything was the matter with her. Evelyn had run down to Nancy's house every morning to see how she was, and every morning she had been disappointed, but to-day Mrs. Merrifield telephoned soon after breakfast to say that Nancy was well enough to see her.

Evelyn put on Virginia's hat and coat and started down the road very cheerfully. Hector, the gentle family dog, wanted to go with her. He wanted to go so very much that it was hard to refuse him, but there were reasons why it was best not; for although Hector was so gentle he never hurt any animal unless he was first attacked, unfortunately Ginger, the Merrifields' yellow cat, did not know this, and he always hunched up his back and spit at poor Hector, and then he scratched him with his sharp claws. It

seemed odd, but Mrs. Merrifield felt it was Hector's fault, and she told Evelyn not to bring him any more.

Evelyn caressed the shaggy brown coat of her favorite.

"Hector, it's too bad. Ginger is a darling, and so are you; I don't see why he won't let you alone."

Mrs. Merrifield opened the door for Evelyn. She was not pretty like her own darling mother, and she always had a worried look. Evelyn was very fond of her, however, in spite of the misunderstanding about Hector.

"Good-morning, Evelyn," said Mrs. Merrifield, and she puckered up her forehead and looked anxiously down the road to see if Hector were coming. "Did you bring the dog?" she asked.

Evelyn did not like her not calling him by his name. It seemed as impolite as if she had said, "Did you bring the woman?" when she meant Evelyn's mother.

"I did n't bring him. You told me not to."

Mrs. Merrifield flung up her hands in a way she had of doing at moments, and said, "You look as if you had always been a little saint and never disobeyed in your life."

"He teased so hard the last time," said Evelyn, "and I thought Ginger would be in the kitchen. And it was n't Hector's fault, truly it was n't," she said earnestly.

"We won't go into that again," said Mrs. Merri-

field. "Is n't that a new doll?" she asked as she caught sight of Virginia.

"Yes, it's my oldest child, Virginia. She's been at boarding-school in the South."

"Has she?" said Mrs. Merrifield. "She looks as if the climate had agreed with her. I suppose she traveled with your aunt."

"Yes, she did, and she brought her bureau and a wing chair and a bed and bedclothes with her."

"Did she, indeed? What a thoughtful child!"

Mrs. Merrifield laughed and Evelyn laughed, and she thought how kind Mrs. Merrifield looked when she laughed.

"Do come upstairs," called a plaintive little voice.

"Nancy is over her cold, you need n't be afraid of catching it. She came downstairs to breakfast this morning, but I think you children had better play in the nursery. If you are downstairs you might forget and go outdoors."

Nancy was sitting in the big wing chair that was drawn up before the fire. There was a table full of playthings beside her. Evelyn liked to play with Nancy, because she always let her have all the best of the playthings and choose the games; and Mrs. West liked to have Evelyn play with Nancy, because Nancy was such a gentle, obedient little girl; and Mrs. Merrifield liked to have Nancy play with Evelyn, because it kept her from being selfish, as an only child is apt to be; and Nancy liked to play with

Evelyn, because she was so spirited and dear; so every one was satisfied.

Nancy looked pale and there were dark lines under her gray eyes. She was reading a book. Although she was only eight months older than Evelyn she could read almost as well as a grown person.

“What a beautiful doll!” said Nancy.

“Yes, she’s a present from my aunt. And she’s such a darling aunt! Her name is Virginia, — my child’s name, I mean, — and I’ll let you play with her, Nancy. And I want you to see Aunt Hilda.”

“We’ve got a stranger at our house, too,” said Nancy. “He came yesterday.”

“Is he your uncle?”

Nancy threw back her head and laughed. “No, I don’t know very much about him, but I know he is n’t my uncle. We’ll play twenty questions about him.”

“Did he come a long way?” asked Evelyn.

“He could n’t have come very far, for he’s an invalid. When Tim came to bring up the coal he said, ‘There’s a stranger at the back door with a bum leg.’”

“Poor man, he’s a kind of a tramp, I suppose.”

“Yes, he’s a kind of a tramp,” said Nancy, and again she crinkled up her eyes and laughed. “Guess what sort of clothes he wears,” she said.

“Shabby old ones, I s’pose. Perhaps father has some that would fit him.”

At this Nancy laughed hysterically. “His own

clothes fit him all right," she said. "Only I should think they might be a little warm for this time of year. He has a fur overcoat and fur trousers."

"Fur trousers! I never heard of such a thing." And then Evelyn began to laugh. "He's some sort of an animal," she said.

"He's a kitten," Nancy said. "The teentiest, tiniest kitten, hardly big enough to go out alone, and his leg is broken. Ginger is very fierce with him, so mother and father say we can't keep him, but, oh, I wish we could, for he is so cunning! Mother says he's got to be disposed of. She says she's no doubt he's in pain, but he does n't look as if he were, and he keeps licking his leg."

"I'll go down and get him and we'll have him up here to play with."

"I'm afraid mother would n't like it," said Nancy doubtfully. "We don't know where he came from, and he might have germs."

Germs were the bane of poor Nancy's life.

"I'm going down to get him," said Evelyn, with the decision that was such a comfort to her friend. "You need n't touch him. You can play with Virginia and I'll play with him."

She came back after a time with the kitten curled up in her arms. It was a tiny tiger kitten with beautiful brown and black stripes.

"Did you ask mother if you might bring him up?" said Nancy.

"She was busy making Red Cross bandages, and I thought I would n't interrupt her; so I just found him and took him. He was in the cunningest box all full of hay. What's his name?"

"I don't know. Tim found him."

"Let's call him Tim," said Evelyn.

The children had a very happy morning, for Nancy played with Virginia to her heart's content, and Evelyn played with Tim. They played that he was a tiger in a jungle, who was going to kill Virginia, only he broke his leg just in time for her to escape; and they played he was a great hunter who lived where it was so cold he had to wear fur all the year; but best of all they played he was just what he was, a tiny kitten looking for a home.

"I'm going to take him home with me," said Evelyn, when it was time for her to go.

"But your father does n't like cats," Nancy objected.

"This is a kitten."

"But it will grow into a cat," said conscientious Nancy.

"He's got to like it," said Evelyn, "because I am going to keep it."

"Hector does n't like cats," said Nancy.

"Hector likes cats. It's cats that don't like Hector, and this is a kitten. I can't take them both home at once," said Evelyn, as Tim scratched her through her frock, "so I'll have to leave Virginia with you and come back for her this afternoon."

The first person Evelyn met as she came near the house was her brother Jim. He and Charley Norcross were playing with some beautiful marbles that the Blue Aunt had given him.

"What on earth have you got there?" asked Jim.

"I should think you could see what I've got. Don't touch it; the poor dear has broken its paw."

"What on earth are you bringing him home for when you know how father feels about cats?"

"This is a kitten."

"I can see it's a kitten. I'm not blind."

"But you asked me what it was," Evelyn said in her gentlest tones.

"Gee! If you don't beat the Dutch!"

Evelyn passed him and went around to the back door. She knew Catherine had a soft spot in her heart for all animals. Unluckily Catherine was in the laundry and Ann was in the kitchen.

"For goodness sake, don't bring that kitten in here!" said Ann. "You know how your father feels about cats. Take him back where you found him," she commanded.

"He's broken his leg," said Evelyn.

"Poor little pussy," said Ann unexpectedly. "Put him down. I'll give him some milk before we send him off."

The kitten lapped the milk as if he were very hungry.

Hector was lying on the kitchen floor. He came over and sniffed at the kitten, but did not touch it.

"They are going to be friends," said Evelyn. "It won't be so lonely for poor Hector. I'm going to show the kitten to mother and Aunt Hilda."

"You'd better wait till after dinner," Ann advised.

"No, I want to show it to them right off now."

Her mother and her aunt were sitting cozily together in Aunt Hilda's pleasant room. Her mother was lying on the window-seat with Aunt Hilda's cushion behind her and the pretty blanket over her, and Aunt Hilda was making the place for the neck in her mother's sweater.

"Did you have a happy morning, dear?" asked her mother.

"Yes, mother, a very happy morning, and see this darling kitten Nancy gave me."

"A darling kitten! How did Nancy have a kitten to give you?"

"She did n't exactly give it to me, only they could n't keep it, so I just took it home."

"Oh, what a pretty kitten!" said Aunt Hilda. "That is all this house needs to make me feel completely at home."

"James does n't like cats," Mrs. West said. "He thinks them treacherous, and he says they catch birds. He has never wanted a cat."

"Has n't he? Poor James! He is getting a great deal of discipline."

When Evelyn first showed the kitten to her father she said: "Father, is n't this a pretty kitten? His name is Tim, and he and Hector are such good friends. It was lonely for poor Hector without any other animal."

"A kitten!" cried Mr. West. "We don't want a kitten. Where on earth did you get it?"

Evelyn gave a long explanation.

"Father, it is such a lovely kitten," she ended, "and I want it so much!"

"It will catch birds and squirrels."

"It can't, father, because of its broken leg."

"Its paw will probably get well."

"See what beautiful tiger stripes he has, father, and look at his dear little black and brown paws."

The kitten looked at Mr. West with his bright eyes. He was a friendly pussy who liked every one. And then to Evelyn's surprise the kitten put out his right paw, the one that was not hurt, to give to Mr. West.

"Oh, father!" Evelyn cried in delight, "he wants to shake hands with you!"

Mr. West gravely shook the kitten's paw. "How do you do, sir? I hope you've had a good dinner. I'll try to find a good home for you, but not here."

"Oh, father, he's got the best home he could have, and he and I love each other so! How would you like it, father, if you and I had just begun to love each other and a big giant came along and told you, you must get out and find another home?"

“I should n’t like it at all, Evelyn, but you see I don’t catch birds and squirrels.”

Evelyn put the kitten’s face up close against hers, and her yellow hair was close to his black and brown fur. “Father, it would be much harder for you if you were a small furry person, instead of a big man, and if you had broken your paw. Look at the poor little paw. He could n’t catch birds and squirrels any more than you can.”

Once more the friendly pussy put out his paw to Mr. West. He stroked the kitten’s soft back, and pussy in an ecstasy of delight scrambled out of Evelyn’s arms, and running along Mr. West’s arm as if it were the branch of a tree climbed up on his shoulder. Tim purred as loudly as if he were a full-grown cat.

“Father, he loves you!” cried Evelyn.

“I can see,” said Mr. West, “that it would be a hardship to put a poor little creature like this out into the cold world; but just as soon as he’s well enough and old enough to catch birds he’ll have to go. Yes, you are a pretty kitten,” — for pussy was rubbing his furry head against Mr. West’s face. “I think Tim is rather a foolish name. I shall call you Timothy, and, Timothy, you are welcome to the hospitality of my house until your broken leg gets well.”

IV

The Plaid Dress

AUNT MATTIE had come down from the farm to do some shopping for the household up there. Aunt Mattie was the aunt of Evelyn's father. Her full name was Matilda, and she was the person for whom both Aunt Hilda and Matilda, the doll, were named, for last Christmas she had given Matilda to Evelyn.

It was Aunt Mattie and her sister Aunt Charlotte with whom Evelyn's father spent all his vacations after his mother married again and went abroad for some years. Evelyn's father had always felt that the house of Aunt Charlotte and Aunt Mattie was home.

Aunt Charlotte was a gentle, motherly soul, and when her son Henry and his wife died she took his children back to the farm where her sister Mattie had always spent her summers, and now they lived there all the year round. Aunt Mattie was very efficient. She could do all sorts of useful things, from every kind of cooking and preserving and sewing to all sorts of housework and knitting.

It was as good for the house to have a visit from Aunt Mattie as to have a spring cleaning, and as good for the people in the house as to take a spring tonic.

Aunt Mattie always knew the best way of doing everything, and she did not like new ways. She was sure she knew better about all sorts of things than her nephew's wife did, but there was one thing she felt Sadie knew more about and that was children's clothes. "Not that it matters very much," she said to Mrs. West, "for we live so out of the world, but Evelyn has such pretty clothes, and I should like the benefit of your taste."

So Evelyn's mother and Aunt Mattie went shopping together one morning.

Mrs. West always found it hard to go shopping with Aunt Mattie, for they never liked the same things, and when Aunt Mattie said, "Oh, what a pretty gingham; don't you think that is a beauty?" it seemed rude to say, "No, I don't," over and over again. She was a very polite person, and she was afraid of hurting Aunt Mattie's feelings, but she hated still more to think of her little cousins as dressed in ugly clothes.

Aunt Mattie was looking for plaid ginghams of bright colors to please the children, and well covered so they would not show the dirt, and Mrs. West thought all the plaids were hideous. She finally persuaded her to get some plain blue chambray for one child and pink for the other.

"They will not be at all useful," said Aunt Mattie doubtfully.

"Nothing is really serviceable, unless you are will-

ing to put the children into rompers, and of course Lottie is too old for that."

"Indeed, no nieces of mine ever go into trousers like boys," said Aunt Mattie firmly. "I may be mid-Victorian, as James says, but at least Lottie and Prue will never be taken for boys. Oh, there is a beautiful plaid over there. I always did like a mixture of colors. How much is that a yard?"

Fortunately it was too high, and Mrs. West suggested that perhaps they could find something ready-made for Lottie and Prue.

The ready-made frocks for children were many of them cheap and most of them pretty; and Mrs. West felt they could not go far wrong. They had bought attractive ones for both Lottie and Prue, and were leaving the store, when Aunt Mattie saw some plaid dresses that were just what she had been looking for.

"What beauties, and how cheap!" she said. "How I wish I had seen these before! Do you suppose they would mind exchanging the other dresses for these?"

"I would not give them that trouble," said Mrs. West, "and the others are so pretty."

"This is my ideal of what a dress should be for a young child," said Aunt Mattie, as she fingered the frock. "It is well covered and yet gay. Don't you think it is a beauty?"

"It is certainly well covered and gay, and would be most useful," said Mrs. West heartily.

She was tired of criticizing, and now the frocks

were all bought, this much praise could do no harm. Besides, it was the truth. Now, she had been so hard to please all the morning that Aunt Mattie was delighted to find something she liked, for she meant to give Evelyn a present; so when Mrs. West went across to another part of the store to buy games to send up to the children, Aunt Mattie bought the plaid frock. She meant it for a great surprise for Sadie and her little girl. And she had her wish. It was a great surprise. She saved it to give as a present the night before she went home.

“Children, I am going away so early to-morrow morning that I’ll give you your presents to-night,” said Aunt Mattie. “I’ll give Jim his first because he is the oldest.”

Jim’s present was a sailor suit just like the one she had bought for his Cousin Harry, and as Mrs. West had chosen the one for Harry, it was all a boy could wish it to be.

“Thank you very much, Aunt Mattie. I like it. It’s a corker.”

“I know ‘a corker’ is all right,” said Aunt Mattie, “but it does sound terrible. Here, Evelyn, I know it is your bedtime, but I want you to have your present first.”

Evelyn eagerly took the dress out of its box. Her face fell when she saw it, for she did not like plaid frocks. She said nothing.

“Evelyn,” said Mrs. West, trying to hide her own

disappointment, "thank Aunt Mattie for giving you such a nice present."

Evelyn was still silent.

"Darling child," her mother persisted, "kiss Aunt Mattie good-night, for it is your bedtime, and say good-bye to her, for she is going home before you'll be up in the morning; and thank her for the nice dress."

"It is not a nice dress," said Evelyn. "I hate it."

"My dear child, you must not be so rude to Aunt Mattie. I can't let you go to bed until you have told her you are sorry you spoke so."

"I'm not sorry," said Evelyn. "I'll sit up all night if I have to, but I'm not sorry."

"It will be a most useful frock, Aunt Mattie," Mrs. West said soothingly; "it is just a matter of taste."

"Prue is always crazy over plaids. Evelyn will like it when she begins to wear it," said Aunt Mattie.

"I am not going to wear it, for I hate it. You can take it to Prue."

"My dear child," said her mother helplessly. "I can't think why you are so naughty. Kiss Aunt Mattie and tell her you are sorry you spoke so."

"I'll sit up all night if I have to, but I'm not sorry."

"What should you do to that child if she were yours?" Mrs. West asked Aunt Hilda.

But before Aunt Hilda could reply, Aunt Mattie said, "If she were mine, I should use the mid-Victo-

rian method of punishment and give her a good spanking."

Evelyn looked around the room at all the people. Nobody seemed to like her very much; even her dear Aunt Hilda seemed very grave. Her father was the most friendly of all. She went over to him and climbed up into his lap.

"No wonder she is such a willful child when you spoil her so, James," said Aunt Mattie.

"My little pigeon," said her father. "Run and tell Aunt Mattie you are sorry you were such a naughty girl."

"But, father," she pleaded, "I am not sorry; it would be a lie."

She felt her father could understand.

"Put her down, James," said her mother. "She has been a naughty little girl and she does not deserve to sit in your lap. She can sit in the corner in her own little chair and not speak until she is ready to say she is sorry."

They all went on with their evening occupations just as if she were not in the room. Nobody looked at her or spoke to her.

After a time her mother said, "Jim, it is your bedtime," and as if to show what a good boy he was he went over to bid Aunt Mattie good-bye and let her kiss him. This was a great deal for Jim to do, for he did not like to be kissed. But he felt sorry for Aunt Mattie. He stopped when he came to the corner

where Evelyn was sitting. She was trying very hard to keep her eyes open. Poor Jim had a fear that his little sister would sit up all night. He stooped and whispered to Evelyn, "Tell her you are sorry, there's a good kid," he advised. "She's an old lady and she meant to be so kind. You can do it in three words, 'I am sorry.'"

"But I am not sorry."

"Well, if you don't beat the Dutch," Jim said, as he went upstairs.

"Really, Sadie, I am sorry," said Aunt Mattie, a little later, "but I planned to go up early to-night, as I have not finished my packing."

"Do go up whenever you like, Aunt Mattie. Evelyn can see you in your room."

"Of course I don't mean to go just yet, it is only half-past eight."

Evelyn had always wanted to sit up late like the grown-up people, but now that she was doing it she found it very stupid.

Her mother was slowly knitting on the sweater, and her Aunt Mattie said, as she often did, how much quicker she could knit if she would only learn the Continental way, and her Aunt Hilda was making a helmet, while her father read aloud a very stupid book. Evelyn had never felt so sleepy in her whole life. She wondered what would happen if she went to sleep. Her father's voice seemed to grow farther and farther away, and then, the first thing she knew,

she found herself being taken upstairs by her father. Aunt Hilda was coming up too.

“Evelyn,” said Aunt Hilda, “your mother said I could put you to bed to-night.”

Aunt Hilda’s voice was so kind that the tired little girl threw her arms around her neck.

“Evelyn,” said Aunt Hilda, “I love you very much, even when you are naughty, and you were naughty to-night. Aunt Mattie wanted to do you a kindness, and she got what seemed to her the prettiest dress she could find. Suppose you wanted to make a little girl very happy and so you gave her your doll, Sarah.”

“I could n’t, because she is my favorite child.”

“I know, but we are just supposing. Suppose you did, and the little girl said, ‘I hate her, she is only an ugly rag doll,’ how would you feel?”

“I should feel horrid,” Evelyn confessed, “but Sarah is such a darling.”

“But as your mother said, ‘tastes differ.’ Now if you can like a rag doll even when she is old and careworn, don’t you think you could learn to like a fresh new dress, when Aunt Mattie was so good as to give it to you?”

“No, I don’t, Aunt Hilda.”

“Perhaps you could not think it pretty, but you could feel kindly to Aunt Mattie, who meant to be so kind. I know you are fond of Aunt Mattie.”

“Not fond of her the way I am of you and mother.”

“Dear Aunt Mattie is the salt of the earth,” said Hilda. “I am very fond of her, and I hate to see her unhappy.”

“Is she unhappy?”

“Yes, you made her feel very badly. Now, if I were a little girl and had had a frock given to me I did not like, and had made my aunt unhappy, I could not go to sleep until I had made things right. I could n’t think it right to say I liked the frock if I did n’t, but I should want to run right into her room and kiss her good-bye, and say, ‘Please forgive me for speaking the way I did.’ I’ll come with you if it will make it any easier.”

Evelyn shook her head. “I’d rather go all by my own self,” she said.

Aunt Mattie had put the last things into her trunk and was tugging and straining to get the cover down, for so many more things had gone into it than had come out. She looked heated and very tired. She had not pulled down the curtain that was on the window that overlooked the garden, for there was no one on that side of the house to look in. The night was still and very beautiful. The silver moon was far up in the sky and the leaves on the oak tree showed almost as plain as if it were day. They were always the last leaves to come out in the spring and they were almost full-grown now. There was something in the peace and beauty of the night and in Aunt Hilda’s words

that made the little girl feel as if she wanted to be a good child.

“Good-bye, Aunt Mattie,” she said; “I’m sorry I was such a naughty girl.”

“That is a good girl,” said Aunt Mattie, as she kissed her warmly. “I know you’ll like the pretty plaid dress when you begin to wear it.”

Evelyn shut her lips tight together until she got out of the room, and then she said to herself, “I shall always hate it.”

V

Evelyn's War Work

EVELYN always wanted to go to church on Sunday morning, and this was because she was not always allowed to go, so it was a great treat. Her mother said she could not keep two children in order, so unless her father went Evelyn stayed at home; but now that her Aunt Hilda had come, everything was different. Mrs. West could sit at one end of the pew with Evelyn between her and Aunt Hilda, and Jim could sit at the other end on days when his father stayed at home, but this morning all the family were going to church.

"I wish I could take Virginia with me," said Evelyn.

"My darling child," said her mother, "that can never be, and yet you keep on teasing every Sunday just as if you thought I might change my mind."

"You do change your mind about lots of things."

"Not about a thing like that. Just suppose every little girl who went to church were to take a doll, what would the minister say?"

"Of course you could n't take a doll to church," said Jim.

"You can take a book. I don't see why I can't take a doll."

“Jim does n’t take a bat and ball or marbles,” said Mrs. West. “If you come to church, Evelyn, I want you to try to sit as still as a mouse and listen to what Mr. Merrifield says. I am sure you can understand some of it.”

Evelyn was very fond of Nancy’s father, but she could not see why he preached such long sermons all about things she could not understand. She meant to ask him some day if he would mind if she took Virginia to church. He was kind and sensible, and she was sure he would see that if one did not know how to read, the time seemed long. And yet long as it seemed she never wanted to be left at home.

This morning Evelyn noticed that two flags were hanging from the gallery. One had the stars and stripes like the flag that hung from an upper window at their house, and the other was a strange one that she had never seen before. It was white with an Indian in the center. Evelyn was so curious about these flags that she asked her mother, in a whisper, why they were there and what the flag with the Indian was. It was such a loud whisper that Nancy turned around to look at her, and Mrs. West said, “Hush, dear.”

There was a good deal in the sermon that Evelyn could understand. It was all about preparing and doing something for the war.

“No one can be exempt from this service,” said Mr. Merrifield. “There is no age limit. Neither

can any physical disability exempt a man. If he is unable to fight, he can serve the State in some way."

Here Mr. West began to be interested, for it was a grief to him that, as he was forty-one years old and handicapped by near sight, taking an active part in the war was out of the question.

"Sex does not exempt one," the minister went on, and Mrs. West looked guilty, while Aunt Hilda decided to go and work at the War Relief meetings four times a week instead of twice.

"And the smallest child can find some work to do."

Evelyn began to wonder what she could do, and of all the family Jim was the only one who was satisfied with himself. He wished he were old enough to go and fight, but as he was n't, he had made a washcloth, so he had done his bit.

There was a great deal of talking after church, and every one said what a fine sermon it was; and some people went home and forgot all about it, but others tried to find some work to do. Mrs. West and Aunt Hilda got quantities of gayly colored chintz to make pillow-covers for the soldiers, and Mrs. West emptied out her piece-bag, and she and Aunt Hilda snipped up the pieces to make the inside of the pillows, and all the neighbors brought in pieces to be snipped up. Evelyn was greatly interested in the things they brought, for besides pieces there were old torn white petticoats and shirt-waists with darned places in them.

Everything had been carefully washed first, as Mrs. Merrifield was so particular about germs.

"I want to work for the war, too," said Evelyn, who longed to be allowed to snip.

"I am afraid you would cut your fingers instead of the cloth," said her mother.

"I know I could snip. I could snippity, snippity, snip all day long."

"I have some scissors that are round at the ends," said Aunt Hilda; "she could n't cut herself with those."

"Oh, goody, goody!" said Evelyn. "I can snip with you, mother, and the Blue Aunt."

"Why do you call her the Blue Aunt?" asked her mother.

Evelyn paused for a minute. "Because her eyes are so blue," she said.

"I think there must be some other reason back of that one," said Aunt Hilda; "but it is curious she should call me that, because blue has always been my color, and when I was a little girl my mother dressed me in blue frocks and called me her little Blue Bird."

"People always suggest colors to me," said Mrs. West. "Perhaps they do to Evelyn. A stanch, loyal, dependable person with charm is what I think of as a blue person. If she is reliable and does n't have charm, I think of her as a brown person. And then there are the pink people: they always seem to me very agreeable, but you can never be sure of them."

"What color am I, mother?" asked Evelyn.

"Sometimes you're blue and sometimes you're pink, like the little barometer lady who changes with the weather."

"And what color is Nancy?"

"A lovely, restful shade of sage green."

"And what color is Jim?"

"Oh, my dear child, we can't stop to decide about the color of everybody. Evelyn, the pieces you are snipping are too big. You want to do it right if you do it at all. You don't want to be a pink child, but a blue child."

Evelyn learned to snip very nicely. She snipped little pieces out of the waist with the darned sleeves, and she snipped up some white cotton, and she snipped a part of the torn petticoat. She liked to take little snips out of everything, instead of confining herself to one piece.

"I'm quite a help, mother, don't you think so?" she asked.

Tim, the kitten, was greatly interested in the snipping. He sat on the table in Aunt Hilda's room while the family were at work, and once he gave a flying leap and landed in the middle of the box cover with snippings in it that Aunt Hilda had in her lap.

"I think it might be a good idea if you and Tim were to go out and have a good play this sunshiny morning," said Mrs. West.

But Evelyn and the kitten liked better to stay just where they were.

Nancy got interested in snipping too, and one afternoon she came over to play with Evelyn and brought her blunt-pointed scissors with her, and a faded pink frock that she had torn very badly the last time she wore it. It was such a big barn-door of a tear in the front breadth that it would be impossible for any little girl to wear it, so Mrs. Merrifield said the children might snip it up.

It was the afternoon when the Alliance met at the parsonage, and Mrs. Merrifield was glad to have Nancy out of the house. Mrs. West and the Blue Aunt were going to the Alliance, and as it was Ann's afternoon out, Catherine was to take care of the children. It was a chilly afternoon and Mrs. Merrifield said that she did not want Nancy to play out of doors, so Catherine built a bright wood fire in the nursery and sat there with her sewing while the children did their war work. They were as good as it was possible for little girls to be, and they enjoyed snipping up the pink frock.

It never would have happened if the postman had not brought Catherine a letter from home that afternoon. When she heard his double ring at the door she went down to see if she had a letter. She did not mean to stay away so long, but the postman had come from the same town that Catherine came from, and so he waited to hear the news; the letter told

how Catherine's youngest brother had enlisted, so she had to telephone to her sister and read the letter to her. She knew Nancy was such a good child that she would keep Evelyn in order, and although she was surprised to see, when she looked at the clock, that she had been away from the children for more than half an hour, they seemed as quiet as possible when she went back to them. They had put the box of snippings away and were playing with their dolls when she came in. And yet something that was very naughty, indeed, had been done in that time.

"What a pretty dress yours was, Nancy, before it faded," said Evelyn. "I wish ugly dresses would fade. I've got a hideous plaid dress Aunt Mattie gave me. Do you want to see it?"

Evelyn got the plaid dress and brought it to show to Nancy.

"It is ugly," said Nancy.

"I wish I could snip it up," said Evelyn. "It would make a nice insides for a soldier's pillow."

"Of course you can't snip it up," said Nancy; "that would be very naughty. Oh, Evelyn!" she cried in horror. "Don't! Don't!"

She tried to snatch the scissors from Evelyn's hand, but it was too late. Evelyn had snipped a piece out of the dress. "I hate it! I hate it!" she said. "It will make a nice soft cushion for the soldiers."

It seemed to Nancy that she had never known any one to do such a naughty thing. She looked at

Evelyn with her reproachful gray eyes. "But Aunt Mattie is so dear, and she thought it was such a nice present."

"It is not a nice present," said Evelyn stubbornly, and she chopped another piece out of the skirt. "It's spoiled now," she said, "and you might just as well help me cut it up."

"I won't help you," said Nancy.

Evelyn was beginning to feel sorry for her rash deed, but it was too late now.

"It would have made a good dress for some little girl," said Nancy.

Evelyn snipped a piece out of a sleeve. "I'd like to get it all snipped up before Catherine comes back," she said. "I think you are horrid not to help me."

"I won't help you," said the usually gentle Nancy.

Evelyn snipped away until she heard Catherine's step on the stairs, then she put the dress and the box of snippings in the closet, and when Catherine came into the room she saw two little girls playing with their dolls.

"Did you get tired of your war work?" she asked, in her warm, deep-toned voice.

Nancy hung her head and looked as if she had been doing something very wrong, but Evelyn said, "Yes, we thought we would n't snip any more."

"I'll sweep up the pieces on the floor," said Catherine.

Evelyn got down hastily and began to pick up the

pieces, for there were some telltale bits of plaid among the snippings. "Don't bother, Catherine," she said.

"You are a good little girl to tidy up the room," said Catherine. She wondered why Nancy looked so troubled.

Evelyn was an honest child, and this undeserved praise made her feel very uncomfortable.

Unsuspecting Catherine was thinking about her home letter, and her eyes were on her own sewing.

Evelyn meant to tell her mother about the dress, but not to-night. She hoped her mother would not mind so very much, for she must think it an ugly dress, and she would see how hard it was for a little girl to wear a dress she hated, and how good it was for a soldier to have a comfortable pillow. And yet in the back of her mind she knew perfectly well that she had been a naughty girl. She also knew that, however her mother might feel, the Blue Aunt would feel very sorry, and she loved the Blue Aunt and wanted very much to please her. If she had only thought of Aunt Hilda and of those things she had said about not hurting Aunt Mattie's feelings, she would not have snipped up the dress, but she had not once thought of Aunt Hilda.

It was too late now. The dress was spoiled, and the more she thought about it the worse she felt. She saw now what a naughty girl she had been, and she wished it could be like a fairy story and another dress could grow out just where the old one used to be.

As Nancy said, it would have done some little girl good, and now it could never be of use to any child.

When her mother and her aunt came home from the Alliance they found a letter from Aunt Mattie. She invited Jim and Evelyn to come up to the farm for two weeks. "Evelyn had better bring along her plaid gingham," she said. "It will be just the thing for her up here. It is so strong, and it will not show the dirt."

Evelyn felt worse and worse. It did not seem as if she could tell them about the dress, and yet it would be worse if they found out about it without her telling it. Suppose her mother should go to the closet and find the box of snippings and the dress with the pieces snipped out?

Her mother was so tired after the Alliance that she went to bed soon after supper, and it was Aunt Hilda who put Evelyn to bed. She looked at dear Aunt Hilda and wondered if she could get up her courage to tell her what a bad girl she had been. Aunt Hilda was very sweet, but grave, and the little girl found it hard to begin.

Evelyn said her prayers to Aunt Hilda, and when she came to "Please make me a good girl," it was too much for her; when the prayer was finished she said, "Aunt Hilda, I've been the baddest kind of girl to-day."

"Tell me all about it," said Aunt Hilda. "Perhaps I can help you; that is what a Blue Aunt is for. If I

were just an ordinary aunt I might only help you when you are good, but as I am a Blue Aunt I hope I can be of use when you are not good."

And as she saw Aunt Hilda in her black gown with the white frill about the neck and looked into her kind blue eyes, she was no longer afraid. It was easy to tell her the whole story.

"I was very bad," she said. "I snippited up the plaid dress for the insides of a soldier's pillow."

"Yes, I know," said Aunt Hilda. "I went to the nursery closet to get some more of the brown worsted for my sweater, and I stopped to put the box of snippings in its place on the shelf, so I knew what had happened. I was sure the pussy could not have snipped it, and I knew Catherine would n't have, or Nancy."

"And mother knows?"

"I thought I would wait for you to tell us, and, dear, there is something I was going to propose. I know you are so sorry you don't need any punishment. It is very strange, but usually a sin brings its own punishment, for we feel so badly when we do wrong. I suppose you would give a great deal if the plaid dress were back in your closet."

"Yes, I wish you were a fairy and could make it whole again!"

"I'd a great deal rather be a Blue Aunt. I am pretty sure there are other frocks in the store just like your plaid one, for I saw some yesterday when

I went to get my khaki yarn. Now, if you like, I'll buy you another like the one you snipped up, and so, when you go to stay with Aunt Mattie, you won't have to tell her what you did. I don't think she could understand, and it would just make her unhappy. We'll tell your mother all about it as soon as we have bought the new plaid frock, for she will understand, and one does n't want secrets from one's mother; and every time you are tempted to do something naughty you can think of the plaid dress, and remember how hard it is after one has done wrong. Some bad things I did when I was a little girl I have never forgotten. They make me hot and ashamed every time I think of them even now."

"What bad things did you do?" Evelyn asked.

"Perhaps I'll tell you some time, but I'm tired to-night."

"You never tell me things unless you tell me right off. You've never told me how old the little Gays are."

VI

The Blue Aunt's Plan

AUNT HILDA really loved children. Many people say they do, but they only love them when they are good and tidy and clean and quiet. But Aunt Hilda loved them when they were good and bad and clean and dirty and quiet and noisy. She loved them best when they were good, and this made them want to be good; but she never once said, "Go away, children, I am busy."

The door of her room was usually wide open, and everybody wandered in: her brother and her sister-in-law and the children, and even Tim, the kitten, who soon found that no remarks were made when he curled up in the middle of her white bedspread. Ann was the only person in the house who found fault with Hilda, but Ann always found fault with every one. She said Miss Hilda never seemed to think that clean spreads should be treated with consideration, and that the floor of her room, after they had been snipping, looked as if there had been a snowstorm.

Hilda liked every one, even Ann. But the month for which she had been invited was coming to an end.

"I am so glad you are going to spend the summer with us," said her brother, "for this food conservation

work is going to take me away from home a great deal, and I shall feel so easy about Sadie and the children, leaving them with you."

"But I am going next week."

"Nonsense. Of course you are going to live with us always. We can't give you up."

"We can't give you up," echoed Jim.

At this point Tim, the kitten, jumped up in Aunt Hilda's lap, as if he knew what was being said. He put his furry paws around her neck and purred and purred. She said, "Dear pussy," and stroked his soft fur until Evelyn was so envious she came and climbed into her aunt's lap too.

"Does anybody else want to come?" Hilda asked. "I have room in my lap for several more."

"Of course you are going to stay all summer," said Mr. West.

"I can't, for my plans are all made to go down on the Cape with the Gays. You see you only asked me to stay for a month."

"I did n't mean —" began her brother.

"Yes, you did, father," put in Jim; "you said a month would be enough. I heard you."

"I heard you, too," said Evelyn.

"That was before I really knew you, Hilda, and I did n't know how you and Sadie would get on; she's taken a new lease of life since you came. So just write to the Gays and tell them we need you, and you've changed your plans."

"I can't, James. Mrs. Gay is depending on me to share both the work and the expenses."

"Nonsense! Of course you must stay with us. The work would be altogether too hard for you."

"Katharine Gay is my best friend, and the children are just like real nephews and nieces."

The more firm his sister was the more urgent he became. But it was of no use, the Blue Aunt had a will of her own. The more he argued the firmer she became.

"Don't you like living with us?" he asked.

"Of course I do. It is like a real home, but I feel that way about the Gays, too; and besides, a promise is a promise. I can't bear not to be with Sadie and the children. There is one thing you might do. There is a cottage close by the Gays' cottage. If it has n't been rented, you might rent that for the summer. If Sadie took Catherine down and left Ann in charge here, I would promise to look after them just as much as if we were under the same roof. I dare say it is the last thing you want to do."

Mr. West was about to make some objection. It always took him some time to get used to a new plan, but as soon as she said it might be the last thing he wanted to do, he began to think how many things could be said in its favor.

"Oh, what fun it would be to go to the seashore!" said Evelyn.

"I could teach the children to swim," said Hilda.

"Are there boats there?" asked Jim.

"The Gays don't have a boat of their own, but there are fishermen who will take us out sailing."

"Are there golf links?" asked Mr. West.

"No; it is completely out of the world. You would n't like it at all, James. It is only because you say you will be away so much that I suggested Sadie and the children going there."

"I don't know why I might n't like it very much," said Mr. West. "The bathing must be good."

"Yes, and we sometimes go clam-digging, but there are no good roads, there are just scrambles over and under fences and across the moors, and a sweep of blue sky and sea and yellow sand, and a breeze all the time, so it is never hot. It is more than ten years since I have been there, but they say it has n't changed. I should n't expect a man to like it, but it is fine for women and children. Mr. Gay is going to Plattsburg, and he said he would n't feel easy about his family unless I was down there with them."

"I believe you are everybody's care-taker," said her brother.

"No. It is only that I was father's care-taker so long that there's a big void in my life I've got to fill up somehow."

Everybody had grown to depend on Aunt Hilda, and so it was arranged that she should take the children up to Aunt Mattie's and spend a few days there herself, and then come back to help Mrs. West get

ready to go away. She would then go down to the Cape and help the Gays get settled.

The children could think and talk of nothing but the summer at the seashore. They were almost sorry they were to go to the farm first, and yet they loved the farm and were fond of their cousins, and when they once got there they liked it so much they did not want to come away.

It was twice as pleasant because the Blue Aunt was with them, for she enjoyed everything so much. She waded in the brook with them and they took long walks together, and picked wild strawberries, and went to the woods; in fact, they did everything that could be crowded into the four days she stayed. They would have done more, only it rained the last day. They had planned to go up to the shack on Pine Hill and take their lunch with them, but that had to be put off.

It was hard to bid the Blue Aunt good-bye, but it was only for a little time. It was harder for Lottie and Harry and Prue, for they were not expecting to see her again for a long time. It was hardest for Aunt Charlotte and Aunt Mattie, for they were not as young as they used to be, especially Aunt Charlotte, who was seven years older than Aunt Mattie and not strong.

“Good-bye, everybody; I’ve had a delightful visit,” said Hilda, waving her handkerchief to them as she was driven down the road.

“It is a great thing to be young and strong and charming,” said Aunt Charlotte, as she wiped her eyes. “I don’t believe she minds leaving us a speck. For wherever she goes there’s somebody eager to see her.”

“Yes, Hector and Tim will be glad to get her back,” said Evelyn.

“Hector and Tim?” asked Aunt Charlotte.

“They are just a dog and a cat, Charlotte,” Aunt Mattie explained. “The children have given them those ridiculous names. And they talk about them as if they were as important as people.”

“The pussy cat is named for the chore-man, but I like the pussy much the best,” said Evelyn.

VII

A Safe and Sane Fourth of July

IT was the evening before the Fourth, and Aunt Mattie was telling the children about the good times she had when she was a little girl and fire-crackers and torpedoes were plentiful and fireworks were the feature of the evening.

“A safe and sane Fourth is all very well for us grown folks,” she said, “but I am sorry for you children.”

“There are lots of things we can do,” said Prue. “There’s the Procession and the Band Concert and the tent on the Common where they sell red balloons and popcorn and doughnuts and pink lemonade for the benefit of the Red Cross.”

“These affairs are very tiring for old ladies to go to, my dear!”

“But we are not old ladies,” said Jim.

“You children are too young to go to those places by yourselves. I wish Hilda could have stayed.”

Aunt Charlotte saw the disappointed faces of the children, and she said: “I’ll get Griffith Newcomb to drive us all down to the Common, and we’ll see the procession go by and get some red balloons and doughnuts and popcorn and pink lemonade, and

then we'll be driven up to the shack on Pine Hill and have a picnic there, and he can come for us at the end of the day. How is that for a safe and sane Fourth?"

Everybody liked the idea, and in the morning everybody was glad to find it was a sunshiny day; a little too hot, perhaps, but one can't expect everything, considering Fourth of July is not Christmas.

"I'll put on your plaid dress, Evelyn," said Aunt Mattie. "It is the gayest dress you have and looks very festive, and there is some red, white, and blue in it."

As she fastened it up, Aunt Mattie was surprised to find it was so large. "It is a size too big for you," she said. "It would just fit Prue. I did not realize I was getting such a large size."

She had not, but when Aunt Hilda and Evelyn went to the store there was only this bigger frock left.

"Your mother ought to have shortened this dress; you look like a candle with an extinguisher on it."

"What's an extinguisher, Aunt Mattie?"

"Bless my soul! To think of the modern child brought up with electric lights and not knowing about extinguishers."

Aunt Mattie was very busy getting the luncheon ready for the picnic, and she said she did not care to see the procession; they could stop for her on their way home. The children were very fond of dear Aunt Charlotte, who was the grandmother of Lottie

and Harry and Prue. The girls all wanted to sit next Aunt Charlotte on the back seat, and the boys wanted to sit on the front seat and help drive. But the carriage was not large enough to hold all, so the boys were told they could walk down to the village. The girls had quite a quarrel as to who was to sit on the back seat, but finally Lottie sat in front and the two little girls behind. Lottie was a good deal older than the others. She would soon be in her 'teens, and she was beginning to seem quite grown up.

Oh! That procession! The children will never forget it, for there were soldiers in it, live soldiers in khaki, who had enlisted, and there were flags of all kinds: red, white, and blue ones with the stars and stripes, and gay, unfamiliar ones that belonged to the Allies. There were floats, too, and in one of these wagons sat a girl with a red, white, and blue flag draped over her and a gold helmet on her head, and on the back of the wagon was a sign, "The Goddess of Liberty." There were groups representing the different nations, and jokes about food conservation and many other funny things, and last of all came Uncle Sam. He was in khaki, and looked very fierce with a musket. On his back was a placard that said, "Late, but, oh, my!"

Evelyn wondered why everybody laughed and cheered when he went by, but she never knew, for before she could ask, the band struck up "The Star-

Spangled Banner," and this put it entirely out of her head; Jim had said that as everybody must rise when it was played he was going to climb a tree, and she was anxious to see if he really did. And he did. There was a branch of a tree quite handy to the fence he was on, and he climbed up as far as he could go, with Harry after him. Aunt Charlotte called out, "Boys, boys!" And Jim shouted back, "We had to rise! It's 'The Star-Spangled Banner'!"

Gentle Aunt Charlotte got so excited herself that she rose in the carriage and waved her handkerchief. It had been a safe enough Fourth so far, but Aunt Charlotte was not sure it had been very sane.

The tent part was very exciting, for Aunt Charlotte bought each of the younger children a red balloon. Lottie refused to have one, neither did she care for popcorn or doughnuts, but she condescended to have a glass of pink lemonade. It was so hot in the tent that she said she could n't stand it, so the others had to leave before they were ready, but not before they had had a lot of fun.

The picnic came next. This was the part that was not safe, at least not for every one. But no one knew this beforehand, and everybody went off in high spirits. Even Aunt Mattie was overflowing with good cheer. She and the boys walked most of the way up, and Prue and Evelyn part of the way. But Lottie and her grandmother rode all the way.

It was so beautiful in the woods that Prue and Eve-

lyn were fairly crazy with delight. And there were so many things to do. They found some ladies'-slippers and pine cones and such soft green moss. The wind made the pine branches move slowly and the birches rustled. All the trees seemed whispering together, and the sky was so blue, with white, fleecy clouds floating in it, and Prue had on a red cotton crêpe dress, so that made red, white, and blue. The bacon that Aunt Mattie fried was delicious, and so were the potatoes that the boys baked. It did not matter at all that an ant crawled on one of Evelyn's sandwiches, or that she had more mosquito bites than she liked.

After lunch they all scattered, and Lottie was supposed to have charge of Prue and Evelyn, but she got interested in a book she had brought along, and the little girls wandered off into the woods.

"Let's play we are lost," suggested Prue. "Let's hide somewhere and frighten Lottie. She ought to take care of us, and she is n't, and it would be fun to give her a good scare."

Now, although Evelyn had on the plaid frock that Aunt Hilda had hoped would act like a talisman and keep her from doing naughty things, she never once thought of that; she thought what fun it would be to pretend to be lost. Prue was just enough older to have everything she did seem very wonderful, and Evelyn went gayly along the wood path behind her. There were many things in the path that they had to

stop to look at, such as red toadstools, and ground pine, and flowers they had to pick, so they wandered farther and farther away before they remembered they were going to pretend to be lost, and by the time they did remember they were really lost. They could not find the path back, but took another that looked like it, but that had no red toadstools on it.

“I guess we are really lost,” said Prue. “Oh, my! I guess I turned my ankle hopping off that rock. It hurts like fury.”

Prue limped along to the edge of the wood, and Evelyn tagged on behind her. Below them in the valley they could see their own farmhouse, with the great barns behind it and the wide piazza at the side. There was no mistake about it.

“There is no other red house near; I know it’s our house,” said Prue. “We’d just better climb down the hill and walk home.”

There was no path in that direction, and they would have to scramble down as best they could, over the rocks and through the bushes. Evelyn was not at all frightened, for she had entire confidence in Prue, but Prue was worried because she was afraid Evelyn might slip and fall, and although she had not hurt herself much, her foot was still paining her. Evelyn had run on ahead, and at last she did slip. Prue was frightened when she saw her trying to slide off a high rock.

“Don’t, Evvy, don’t; wait for me and I’ll help you.”

For a moment it seemed to the terrified Prue that Evelyn would have a bad fall; she was slipping and could not save herself; and then the long skirt of her plaid gingham saved her, for it caught on the rock.

“Hold on till I get to you,” said Prue, and she pulled Evelyn up to firm ground. “Don’t you slip away from me again,” she said. “You might have been killed.”

“Oh, no, I could n’t,” said Evelyn.

When the two children had scrambled down the worst part of the hill, they sat down to rest. It seemed hours since they had left Lottie.

“Well, I guess we’ve given them a good scare, anyway,” said Prue. “I did n’t mean to scare grandmother. I don’t mind about the others.”

The two little girls were tired out, and Prue felt she could not go a step farther until she had had a long rest. They were not the only people who were tired. Aunt Charlotte and Aunt Mattie had stretched themselves comfortably out after they had packed up the lunch-basket, and they had both taken naps; and as the boys had gone over to play with a friend who lived in a farmhouse near by, it was a long time before any one missed the children. In fact when Griffith Newcomb came up for them at five o’clock, the only person he saw at first was Lottie, who was just reading the last chapter of her book.

Lottie looked up in a dazed way; for the moment, the forest she was reading about was more real than the wood she was in.

“The boys have gone down to the Wellingtons. We’re to stop for them. Aunt Mattie said everybody’d be so tired we’d all have to squeeze in somehow. But I have n’t walked any. I’d rather walk home than be squeezed in.”

The aunts waked at the sound of voices, and Aunt Mattie said: “You’ve been sleeping all the afternoon, Charlotte. I thought I would n’t wake you.”

And Aunt Charlotte said, “Just forty winks, perhaps, but as for you, Mattie, you were audibly sleeping.”

“I lost myself for a moment,” Aunt Mattie acknowledged. “Bless my soul, it must be five o’clock, for here is Griffith. Come, children!”

“Where are Prue and Evelyn?” Lottie asked anxiously.

“Where are they? Have n’t you been taking care of them?”

“No,” Lottie stammered. “I thought they were just around the corner.”

“You did n’t think anything about them,” said Aunt Mattie severely. “When you get a book you are deaf, dumb, and blind!”

Her grandmother saw how badly Lottie was feeling, and she gently put her hand on her head. “This child

is going to be a very useful person when she grows up, for she has concentration," she said.

"Concentration!" said Aunt Mattie. "Meanwhile, before she grows up all her family and friends may be smashed up."

Fortunately it was not a long fright, but it was a bad one while it lasted, and what made it worse was that every one felt so guilty. Of course, Lottie was broken-hearted, but her grandmother felt almost as badly.

"I ought not to have let those children out of my sight for a moment," she said. "How could I go to sleep! But I was so very tired with the sane Fourth, and it was so heavenly to get out of the sun and under the trees."

"It was all my fault," said generous Aunt Mattie, "for while you were having your sane Fourth I was having a safe one at home, and I was n't tired at all. I don't know why I went to sleep. We forget what a child Lottie is."

It was Griffith who found the children at last after an anxious half-hour, and he carried first one of the tired little girls and then the other back to the carriage. He carried Evelyn first, and she was so tired she kept opening and shutting her eyes, just as Virginia, her brown-eyed doll, might have done. When he carried Prue back she was talking as fast as she could all the way to the carriage, and when every-

body found that the little girls were unharmed they no longer felt so guilty.

“Why did you children run off like that?” Aunt Mattie asked severely. “Did n’t you know it was naughty?”

“Yes, I did,” said Prue, “but I wanted to scare Lottie and make her think we were lost. I did n’t really mean to get lost, or to frighten any one but Lottie.”

“I am glad there is n’t another holiday until Thanksgiving,” said Aunt Mattie that evening as she cleared off the supper table.

“There’s two holidays,” said Harry, — “Labor Day and Columbus Day.”

“So there are. These new holidays always escape me.”

“They say they are going to have a big bang-up pageant on Columbus Day, and all the children in town are to take part in it,” said Prue.

“I am glad the pageant is n’t coming for some months,” said Aunt Mattie. “A sane and safe Fourth is quite enough for me.”

VIII

The Journey

THEIR father came up for Sunday and to take the children home, and a day or two later he would take the family to the Cape, where Aunt Hilda was already settled with the Gays.

Mr. West ran up to see his aunts once or twice every year. He never stayed long, and he wanted to be doing something every single minute whenever he came. This time he got an automobile and took his aunts and the children on such a very long ride that both grown-ups and children were completely tired out, although they enjoyed it intensely. He knew a good deal about farming, and he told his Aunt Mattie that she ought to plant more beans, and where corn would grow, and how many wild strawberries were going to waste, and how she should preserve them: she finally said: "Look here, James, which would you rather preserve, me or the strawberries? If you'll pick the strawberries for me and plant the beans and corn, take care of them and pick them, I'll do the rest; but it's impossible to get any one to work up here. All the men have enlisted, and the women are getting big wages in munition factories. Now you are in this conservation business, James, I wish you'd tell me

what two old ladies on a farm can do. If we save the sugar, we can't preserve the fruit, and if we preserve, we can't save sugar. If the men all go to the war, they can't farm, and if they farm, they can't go to the war. So there you are. Charlotte says we ought to kill our chickens and turkeys now grain is so high; but she does n't know them individually, as I do. It would seem to me like offering up Prue or Harry as a victim to the high cost of living. Thank goodness, I'm not a man of fighting age. It is against my principles to kill even a mouse. I have the traps that catch them alive, and I take the trap and go over to the other side of the brook. Then I let the mouse out."

Her nephew laughed. "I am glad you're not at the front, Aunt Mattie. I suppose that's the way you'd treat the prisoners you took."

"Of course I want the Germans to be beaten. We're in this war to fight to a finish. I am not a pacifist. But I just don't want any one on either side to be killed."

Evelyn hated to say good-bye to Prue, for she loved Prue better than any other little girl except Nancy. Just before Aunt Charlotte came in to pack Evelyn's small trunk, Prue said, "Did you ever want something very, very much?"

"Lots of things," said Evelyn.

"Do you usually get what you want?"

"Sometimes. I wanted a pussy cat, — I longed and longed for a pussy cat, — and he came to Nancy's house, and she had a cat, so she gave him to me."

“There is something of yours I want dreadfully,” said Prue. “But I can’t ask you for it, because grandmother said I could n’t, so I can only just say I want it awfully.”

“What is it?” asked Evelyn.

“It’s your plaid dress. It is too big for you and would just fit me, and I’ve always been crazy about plaids. But I can’t ask you for it, and it was a present to you, so I suppose you would n’t want to give it to me.”

“I’ll give it to you right straight off now this minute, darling Prue,” said Evelyn.

“Dear, generous child!” said Aunt Charlotte, when she was told about it. Evelyn felt guilty at having this undeserved praise. But there are some things that can never be explained.

The children were greatly excited when they got home, and they hardly knew whether they were most glad to see their mother or Hector or Tim. Hector was crazy with delight when he saw Jim and Evelyn. He jumped on Evelyn and put his paws around the little girl’s neck and licked her face; and then he did the same to Jim. The kitten came and jumped into Evelyn’s lap and put his furry paws around her neck, licking her just as the dog had done; while Mrs. West hugged and kissed her children and said how much she had missed them; so they were a very happy family.

It seemed too cruel to leave the animals behind with Ann, for Catherine was the one who always fed them, and while Ann would do her duty faithfully by them she did not love them. Finally it was decided to take Hector to the seashore, too.

"We'll have to leave the kitten at home," said Mrs. West, "for it would be too inconvenient to take him."

"But, mother dear, I'll carry him," said Evelyn. "He's such a good pussy, I brought him all the way home from Nancy's."

"But he had a lame paw then. He's so lively you'd lose your kitten the first thing. We'd have to take him in a basket, and that would make him very unhappy. Don't tease any more, dear; I've decided."

"But, mother, he might grow big enough to catch a bird while we were gone, and then father might give him away."

"Nonsense, child; you know perfectly well that your father is as daft over the kitten as you are."

When Evelyn went to bid Nancy good-bye she told her trials to her.

"I do so want to take Tim down, he's such a darling pussy," she said, "and he'll be so lonely at home, but mother says it'll be too much bother, and, anyway, we have n't the right kind of basket."

"I'll lend you our cat-basket," said Nancy. "Ginger always travels that way, but this year we are going to keep the house open. I'm sure mother would n't mind."

The two little girls took a mournful farewell of each other, for it would be so long before they saw each other again; and then Nancy thrust the cat-basket into Evelyn's hands and she went home very proud and happy.

She thought it was best to show it to her father first, and she said, "See, father, what a nice house I have for Tim to travel in."

"So you are expecting to take Tim, little pigeon," he said, pinching her ear. "What does your mother say to that?"

Evelyn hesitated. "Father, you'll help me carry the basket, won't you?" she asked. "Because I can't carry Virginia too."

The night before the journey the children were so excited they were sure they could never go to sleep, but they both slept so well that when Ann came to wake Jim in the early morning she had to knock three times, and Evelyn's mother had to shake her little girl gently before she opened her drowsy eyes. Then such a scramble as there was to get ready!

Mr. West had got a motor to take them into Boston for the half-past seven train, and they had to leave the house at six o'clock. First Mrs. West got into the motor; she let Evelyn and Jim sit on the seat with her. Jim carried his mother's umbrella and sunshade strapped together, and Evelyn carried Virginia. Catherine got in next, with her dress-suit case and the cat-basket with a surprised and mournful pussy

in it: then Mr. West put in his own dress-suit case, and another one that had in it the luncheon and extra wraps. He also had Hector on a leash, and Hector sat up in the motor quite like a person. But of all the people Evelyn was the busiest, for she had to talk to Hector and Tim to keep them contented, to say nothing of Virginia. When they were all safe in the train for the Cape, Mr. and Mrs. West gave a sigh of relief, but for the children the fun was just beginning.

It was sad that Hector had to travel in the baggage car. Mr. West and Jim immediately made a trip to see how he was getting on, and then Evelyn slipped out of her seat to go with them, but her mother said, "Darling, you must stay with me; the baggage car is no place for us."

And Evelyn said to Virginia, "I am so sorry, dear, but the baggage car is no place for you."

Pretty soon Evelyn went across to the other side of the car to visit Catherine and the kitten. Evelyn was so sociable that she made friends with a kind old man with white hair and spectacles, who sat in the seat behind Catherine.

Evelyn kneeled on the seat and said, "You can't guess what we've got in that basket."

And he said, "I guess it's a kangaroo."

And Evelyn said, "No; guess again."

And he said, "I guess it's a giraffe."

"No; guess again."

"I guess it's a gazelle."

And Evelyn said, "No; guess again, and then I'll tell you."

He took off his spectacles and looked very wise and said, "I guess it's a small-sized tiger."

And Evelyn said, "How did you know? It is a tiger kitten."

And the man said, "He is traveling in such a large basket, I thought at first he must be a very large animal."

And Evelyn said: "I don't believe you could ever guess his name. Oh, what have you got in that paper bag? Is it your luncheon?"

The old man took out a cocoanut cake and offered it to her, and Mrs. West came across the car and said, "Darling, you must n't talk so much; come back to your seat and settle down for a little while."

When Mr. West and Jim came back, Mr. West was kept busy, for Evelyn wanted a drink of water in one of those funny paper cups, and then she begged so hard to go to see Hector that he finally took her into the baggage car; then she was so hungry that he had to unstrap the dress-suit case and take out the luncheon, and before any one could stop her she dashed across the car with a sandwich for the old man.

"He only had cocoanut cakes for his luncheon," she explained. "I thought we'd exchange." And she had popped a cocoanut cake into her mouth before any one could stop her.

It was a grand journey! And the end of it was the most thrilling part of all.

"There's a wreck on the track," said Mr. West, when he came back from his last trip to the baggage car. "We'll all have to get out and walk to the station when we get to North Sandhurst. What a nuisance!"

The children's eyes danced; the wreck sounded so exciting. It was not a bad wreck, but just the kind Aunt Mattie would have liked, for no one had been killed on either side. One freight train had run into another, and a car was still on the track, all twisted and maimed. Everybody had to scramble off the train and walk a long distance over the railroad ties or in the sand. Evelyn clung to her mother's hand, and her mother carried Virginia for her. Mr. West got into the baggage car and returned with Hector, who was wild with delight at being free and jumped up on all his friends in turn. Besides Hector, Mr. West carried two dress-suit cases; and Catherine carried her own and the cat-basket, and firmly refused to give either to the persistent young brakeman who offered to help her. Jim dropped the umbrella and sunshade when Hector jumped up on him, and they got covered with sand. Just as the children were beginning to wonder when they were going to get to Sandhurst, they saw dear Aunt Hilda coming down the railroad track toward them, in a big shade hat and a white frock with a black ribbon around the waist. There was

a strange lady with her who was tall and slim, with a kind face. Evelyn knew it must be Mrs. Gay.

Aunt Hilda came forward, and Hector leaped up on her; she took his leash out of her brother's hand and made Catherine give her the cat-basket. The tall lady took the cat-basket from Aunt Hilda, and she said in her kind voice:—

“We'll all get into the caboose, and the engine will stop just in front of the house. Usually we have to walk from the station, but this wreck will make it like having a private car, for they'll stop just below the cottages so all we'll have to do is to scramble up the bank.”

They all climbed into the caboose with the other passengers, except Mr. West and Hector, and the children thought it great fun to have this ride in the funny little car back of the engine. Presently Aunt Hilda said, “There is your house,” and Evelyn looked out and saw two gray cottages standing side by side at the top of the bank. They were just alike except one house was a little larger than the other and had a wider piazza, and this was their house. Coming down the bank from the other house were four children, and Evelyn was sure they were the little Gays.

First there came a big boy a size bigger than Jim, and Evelyn knew he must be Ralph. Behind him was the dearest little girl she had ever seen, just her size and with yellow hair like hers, but with blue eyes instead of brown. That was Lily, she was sure. Behind

her was a middle-sized girl almost as big as Lottie, with a sweet, gentle face like the tall lady's, and clinging to her was a chubby, small boy. The girl must be Patty and the boy Rodman.

When Evelyn and her mother got out of the ca-
boose, the tall lady said, "These are my children,"
and Evelyn knew she was going to find out at last
just how old the little Gays were.

She did find out, and also when their birthdays
came. And what was strangest of all was that she
and Lily Gay were the same age, with birthdays in the
same week. She had never had a friend exactly her
own age, and she knew before she went to bed that
night that she was going to love Lily just as well as
she loved Nancy. She remembered she had felt the
same way about Virginia. She had loved her the
first minute she saw her, just as much as she loved
any of her doll children.

IX

The Little Gays

JIM and Evelyn had never had such a good time in all their lives as they had now. Just to be at the seashore was enough to make them very happy, but to have four children to play with greatly added to their pleasure. Patty and Ralph and Lily invented exciting new games, and little Rodman was a darling; "golden rod," the children called him, because he was so sunny. He was always ready to be a horse, or a child, or an automobile, or a private soldier, or anything else the others did not want to be.

There were so many things to do that the day was not half long enough. It began very early, indeed, for the little Gays, because Aunt Hilda, who always got breakfast, liked to have the work well out of the way before it was time to go in bathing. The little Gays all did some of the housework. Patty and Lily made the beds and helped with the dishes, and Ralph carried the water upstairs, and did many other things. Jim and Evelyn were so interested that they asked if they could not make their beds.

A high-school girl whose name was Florence came every morning to help Mrs. Gay get dinner, while Aunt Hilda went in bathing with the children. This

was the great treat of the day. Aunt Hilda was teaching the younger ones how to swim, with the help of Patty and Ralph, who were good swimmers for their age. After the bath the children played in the sand, while Mrs. West and Aunt Hilda sat and watched them or played with them. They were allowed to go barefoot, so it did not matter if they let the little waves come up over their feet. The two families separated for dinner and came together again for a wonderful afternoon.

If the tide were low sometimes Aunt Hilda would take the children and Hector for a walk along the shining yellow sands, far, far out to where they joined the blue sea, while the children waded into all the little pools along the way; and there were two great occasions when they went clam-digging. Always, before the two families separated for supper, Aunt Hilda had what she called "The Children's Half-Hour," when they gathered about her on the Gays' broad piazza if it were pleasant, or in the big living-room if it were stormy, while she told them stories.

One day Mrs. West had a bright idea. "Why should n't we all dine together?" she said. "It seems such a pity to separate. It would not be much more trouble for Catherine to cook for us all, and Florence could help her prepare the vegetables and wash the dishes."

Catherine and Florence thought this an excellent plan, and so did Mrs. Gay, because she would not

have to get dinner any more; and Aunt Hilda was pleased, because Mrs. Gay could now come down on the beach with them; and every single child cried, "Goody, goody goody, what fun!" or something that meant the same thing. So there were no two happier families in all the State than the Gays and Wests, on the day when they decided to have their dinners together.

But, alas! something unforeseen happened. It proved that to bring the little Gays and the little Wests together at dinner was like scratching matches on a match-scratcher. The matches are as quiet as mice so long as you leave them in a dish, but once you scratch them on the match-scratcher things become very lively, indeed.

And when the little Gays dined with the little Wests, things were very, very lively. It was like a conflagration. And no one seemed able to put out the fire. The older people could not hear themselves talk, for all six children seemed to think of so many things to say. Their voices grew louder and louder, and neither Mrs. Gay nor Mrs. West could make any impression on them.

Mrs. Gay would say, "Children, don't all talk at once." And Mrs. West would say, "Children, I am almost crazy with the noise." And Aunt Hilda, who was the only one who could have made them mind, did not feel it was her place to say anything when two mothers were present.

After this had been going on for a few days, Mrs. Gay said to her: "Hilda, I think your niece and nephew are dear children, and they are very spirited and interesting, but I should not have supposed that two extra children could make more noise than all of my four put together. What shall we do about it?"

And Mrs. West took Hilda aside and said: "Evelyn and Jim had such good table manners and were so quiet at meals. I don't know what their father will say when he comes down again. The Gays are delightful children, but they have a most demoralizing effect on my two. And yet I can't draw back when I've asked them to have dinner at my house. Can you make any suggestion?"

"If you will give me authority to make them mind, and tell the children this," said Aunt Hilda, "I am pretty sure I can have quiet dinners."

Mrs. West's brown eyes grew larger and larger, and she said, "What are you going to do?"

Aunt Hilda smiled and said, "That is my secret."

When Mrs. Gay heard that Hilda had some plan, she was so curious she could hardly wait for the next day's dinner-time to come.

The next morning it rained, and this made it hard for the children, for it was no ordinary rain; it poured, and the wind blew a gale and drove the rain all across the piazza where they had been having their dinners; and there were two bad leaks in the roof, so that Evelyn and her mother had to put a washbowl in the

middle of their bed to catch the water, and Catherine had to put another bowl on the top of her trunk.

"Anyway, we can go in bathing," said Evelyn hopefully.

"Not to-day, dear," said Aunt Hilda.

"But we can't get any wetter than the water gets us," said Evelyn.

But Aunt Hilda, who always went with them, said even she drew the line at going in bathing in such a fierce northeast storm with a flock of lively children.

"Do you know," she said, as she sat down in the Wests' living-room with a box full of colored advertisements and bits of bright-colored paper, "your mothers have given me authority to make you mind, and I am going to make my badge this morning, and you can all help me."

Evelyn and Lily brought up a little seat with arms, which they were fond of sitting in. There was just room for the two of them to squeeze in, and Ralph, who sat behind them, began to braid their hair together, so that they could not be separated. He took the hair on the left-hand side of Lily's head and braided it into the hair on the right-hand side of Evelyn's head, and Lily called out, "Stop, Ralph!" but he went on.

"You kids seem to want to be together all the time, and I'll fix it so you are like one person, just like the Siamese Twins. Your hair is so much the same color you look as if you belonged together."

"I don't like to be called a kid, I'm a child," said Lily; and Evelyn asked who the Siamese Twins were; but before any one could answer her she said, "What are you making, Aunt Hilda? Why are you cutting out those letters?"

"They are for my badge."

She had a white linen belt in her hand, and she began to paste on it some letters that she cut out of blue paper. The first letter she pasted on was a *P*.

"What does that stand for?" she asked.

"I don't know what letter it is," said Evelyn.

Lily looked at her with amazement, because she had known how to read for more than a year, and even little Rodman, who was not quite four, said, "I know; it is a *P*."

Evelyn looked at it very hard, so she should never forget it, and Lily said, "It stands for papa."

"And for peaches and pineapples," said Ralph.

"And peonies and poppies," said Patty.

"And it stands for Patty," said Jim. "Are you going to put all our initials on in a row?"

"You shall see," said the Blue Aunt, and she pasted a blue *O* next the *P*.

Even Evelyn knew that it was an *O*.

"*P O*, that's the beginning of postman," said Ralph.

And presently Aunt Hilda put an *L* next to it.

"That stands for Lily," the little girl cried. And she was so pleased she got up and began to dance

about the room, but Evelyn cried, "Ouch!" and Lily had to stop. She had quite forgotten that she and Evelyn were fastened together, and they hastily unbraided their hair.

Evelyn said, "Is n't there going to be an *E* for Evelyn?" for she knew a good many of her letters.

"Wait and see," said Aunt Hilda, and she cut out and pasted on an *I*.

"That stands for all of you," she said. "It is *I*, for *I*, myself."

Evelyn was so pleased at this that she said, over and over: "It is an *I*, and it stands for *I*, myself. *I* shall never forget it. It is tall and slim like a person, and it stands for *I*, myself."

"I know what it is going to be," said Ralph. "It is going to be 'Political Boss.' Aunt Hilda is going to be the boss and make us all mind."

Just by way of saying something Jim remarked, "She is n't your Aunt Hilda at all."

Ralph started to have a mock fight with him. Jim had often said this before, and with the same result.

"It is n't going to be 'Political Boss' after all," said Ralph, for Aunt Hilda was pasting on a *C*.

"That stands for Catherine," said Jim.

"No, it does n't," said Ralph. "Katharine begins with a *K*."

"It does not," said Jim. "It begins with a *C-a-t*, just like *cat*."

"It begins with a *K-a-t*," Ralph insisted. "I guess

I know how Katharine is spelled, because it is my mother's name."

"I can't help it," said Jim. "I guess I know how Catherine is spelled, because I've seen it on the outside of lots of letters for Catherine. Does n't Catherine begin with a *C-a-t*, Aunt Hilda?"

"It can begin either with a *C-a-t* or a *K-a-t*; you are both right," she said. "You can remember, Evelyn, that *C* stands for *crescent*, because it looks so much like the new moon."

When Evelyn had not wanted to take the trouble to learn to read, her father took her part and said: "I ruined my eyes by reading when I was four years old. I don't care if Evelyn does not learn until she is eight." And then, a year later, he had been surprised that she did not know all of her letters, for he was a busy man with important law cases on his mind, so he did not remember all the small family affairs.

Now Evelyn longed to read as she had never longed for anything except a pussy cat.

"Oh, it is 'Police,' it is 'Police'!" Jim cried in delight, as his Aunt Hilda pasted on an *E* for Evelyn.

"There is more to it than that," she said, as she left a space and began another word with a *W*.

"It is going to be 'Police Woman,' I know it is," cried Patty; and "Police Woman" was just what it was.

Aunt Hilda pinned the white belt with the blue letters on it around her waist and said, "Whenever

I wear this belt and tell you to do something, you must do it at once."

That day at dinner, which had to be in the living-room on account of the storm, the children were so quiet at first that neither Mrs. Gay nor Mrs. West could imagine what had happened. But as the meal went on, the children forgot about the Police Woman, and Jim and Ralph started a lively discussion as to the way to sail a boat. Ralph said Jim was entirely wrong. He guessed he knew about boats because he had watched his father sail one all last summer.

And Jim said, "I know I'm right."

"You are quite wrong," said Ralph. "You always think you know a lot more than you do, and for a boy of your age —"

"I guess if I were your age, I'd know more about boats than you do," said Jim.

Lily insisted that Ralph was right and Evelyn backed up Jim, although neither of the little girls knew one thing about it, and while all four were talking at once, Rodman said, "*B* stands for boat, *B* stands for boat," over and over again.

"Aunt Hilda, I'm right, ain't I?" said Ralph.

"You must n't say 'ain't,'" said Patty.

"I can't say 'are n't I.'"

"You can say 'am I not.'"

"All right. I am right, am I not, Aunt Hilda?"

"She is n't your Aunt Hilda," began Jim.

"I don't care if she is n't. She has known me a lot

longer than she has known you, and she loves me a lot better."

"She does n't."

"She does."

Then all the children joined in and the older people were almost crazy with the noise.

When the uproar was the loudest the Blue Aunt rose. She was tall, but now she looked much taller than usual, for she was standing on the tips of her toes, and she said: "According to the authority conveyed to me by this badge I command that there shall be instant silence. Not one child is to say anything for ten minutes"; and she took out her watch.

The effect was like magic; all the children stopped talking, and if it had not been for the beating of the rain and the swish of the wind one could have heard a pin drop.

The two mothers were so surprised they could think of nothing to say, and Aunt Hilda told them how the widow Gray thought she could spare three eggs for them to-day, and if the rain held up Ralph and Jim could go for them that afternoon.

When the children's half-hour came, they all gathered around Aunt Hilda in the Wests' pleasant living-room. She sat on the broad window-seat, and Tim immediately jumped into her lap, while Hector lay down at her feet. Lily and Evelyn climbed up on the window-seat, one on each side of her and snuggled

up against her, while Patty sat in a low seat close by, and the boys flung themselves down at her feet.

“I am going to read you some verses I wrote this afternoon,” said the Blue Aunt. “They are a kind of parable, and they are called —

THE SUN

The little Wests and little Gays
Were closest friends, and yet
They argued at their games and plays
On stormy noons and sunny days
Whene'er these children met.

And when the sun sank in the West,
“Ha!” said the Wests' young son,
“You see he likes us much the best,
He's always setting in the West
When the long day is done.”

“Indeed you're wrong,” cried a young Gay,
“Ho! When the day is done
The sunset clouds are bright and Gay,
They're ours, not yours; I'm bound to say
Clouds glorify the sun.”

And so they argued all the night
And never stopped to think;
They had a long-continued fight,
And talked and talked from eve till light,
And did not sleep a wink.

And when the sun rose in the East
The Gays' son, Ralph, said, “Ho!
He does not like you in the least,
He loves the Gay and cheerful East,
He is your bitter foe.”

THE BLUE AUNT

And then young West in accents loud
Said, "Ha! he is not Gay,
He's rising in a murky cloud,
I hear a peal of thunder loud:
It is a dismal day."

Then spoke the sun: "At dawn of day,
Though 'neath an angry cloud,
I'm always bright and warm and Gay.
He's right, this talkative young Gay;
Pray don't dispute so loud.

"And when at night I go to bed,
'T is always in the West,
Exactly as young Jim has said.
You both are right," the good sun said,
"I love you both the best."

X

The Birthday Dinner

WHENEVER any member of the West family was so fortunate as to have a birthday, he or she always had the privilege of choosing the dinner. But as Mr. West's birthday was in early August and he was not coming down until the night before, the family had to choose it for him, for there was no butcher in Sandhurst, nor even a grocer, and so meals had to be planned some time ahead.

Mrs. West said she would choose the soup, Jim might choose the second course, and Evelyn the desert.

"I wish we had a family of ten or twelve children, and that every one had a birthday in a different month," said Evelyn. "Birthday dinners are so much nicer than other dinners."

Jim said he would choose roast chicken for his course, with potatoes and summer squash and preserved plums. He was wise enough to ask for the things that he knew could be got. Evelyn chose strawberry ice-cream and a birthday cake with frosting.

"My darling child," said Mrs. West, "it is perfectly impossible to make strawberry ice-cream. I

don't believe we can get the extra milk and cream, and we would have to have a different flavor. And as for eggs for the cake, — well, we'll see what we can do. We can have lemon water-ice and crackers, if worst comes to worst."

Aunt Hilda and the children set out on one of the scrambling walks that she loved as much as they did, across the moors and under the barbed-wire fences, in search of provisions. All the children went, except little Rodman; it was too far for him.

Both households had a great supply of canned food sent down to them, as well as the usual groceries; but the things one wants fresh, like yeast-cakes and fruit, could be had only once a week, when the grocer from the next large town sent his cart over. The butcher came only once a week, but fish could always be obtained from the local fishermen, if one were lucky enough to get down to the beach before they had put their catch in the cold-storage warehouse; and by engaging them ahead, one could get delicious chickens.

It was such a cloudless afternoon, and the sea and sky were both so blue, that there was only a misty horizon line where one melted into the other. Evelyn and Lily danced and skipped with joy as they started on their walk over the moors, where the paths were like winding yellow ribbons as they went through the coarse silvery green grass. Evelyn and Lily each seized one of Aunt Hilda's hands, while Patty walked as near her as she could get, and Hector frisked on

ahead with the boys. It was such a joyous afternoon that no one could help being happy.

First they went to the widow Gray's for eggs. She stood in the doorway of her house and talked and talked as if she were a machine wound up for the purpose; only a machine runs down after a time, and it did not seem as if she ever would. She gave them all the news of the town, before she got around to the subject of eggs, and then she told them that her eggs had all been engaged ahead, as she could only count on six a day now. Well, seeing as it was a birthday, she would save three for them and let the Westons go without for once.

"I don't want you to do that," said Hilda.

"It won't hurt 'em a mite to go without for once. Every one's conserving food just now, and there ain't no children in that family, only grown folks. You leave it to me. I'll manage; you don't need to have it on your conscience, Miss. Just you send for the eggs to-morrow."

"She said 'ain't,'" Ralph observed to Patty as they walked on. "She's a grown-up person and she says 'ain't.'"

Then they went to another house to see if they could get any squashes, and an old man who was bent over with rheumatism came hobbling out on his stick, and said he guessed he had "a plenty," but they'd have to go next door to Mrs. Caldwell's, as he and she were running the garden on shares. He gave the land

and she did most of the work. Evelyn got so much interested in him, and felt so sorry for his lameness, that she did not go on with the others to Mrs. Caldwell's. She stayed with him and advised him to put on sweet oil and 'monia, which Aunt Charlotte used.

"Bless my soul," said the old man. "What a wise little head it is! How much sweet oil and how much 'monia? The proportion would make some difference."

"I don't know how much, only it smells horrid and makes your eyes smart, if you get near the 'monia bottle when she's putting it in. Does it hurt so you can't stand up straight? Could you walk without a stick if you had to?"

"I might get a fall."

"I'm so sorry," said Evelyn. "They are coming back with the squashes now; I guess I'll have to go, but I'll come again some day and bring my Virginia with me. She's my newest doll, and she has brown hair and brown eyes and she opens and shuts them like a person. She's very beautiful, and I know you'd like to see her."

"Come along, Evvy, come along," said Jim, "we're going to the chicken-farm now."

They took a short cut and crawled under three barbed-wire fences that had been put up on account of the cattle. They found the chicken-man was expecting to kill off all his chickens on account of the

high cost of grain. Evelyn thought this a poor plan, and as usual she did not hesitate to say so.

“Could n’t all the chickens eat less, like people?” she asked. “Then the grain would n’t cost so much, and there’d be enough for all.”

“Oh, Evvy,” said Jim, “if you don’t beat the Dutch!”

They engaged a pair of chickens and stopped on the way back to get the candles for the cake; this meant a walk through the village with its quaint houses. They went to an old warehouse that was full of delightful jars of pickles and preserves that had been made on the Cape. They got some of the preserved beach plums and a jar of pickles, and then they went to the far side of the building where the bayberry candles were made. There were all sorts of them, ready to be packed in boxes; some were huge and meant for a church. These were very smooth; and some were rough and the right size for a candlestick, while others were very small. All, big and little, smooth or rough, were of the same shade of silvery green, like the bayberry leaves and the sedge grass; and Evelyn thought she had never seen anything so beautiful in her life as these candles.

“I would like to get one of those little ones to take home to Nancy,” she said to Aunt Hilda.

“Yes, that’s her color,” said her aunt; “gentle, faithful little Nancy is as restful and satisfactory as these silvery green candles.”

It was impossible to put forty-two of these candles on any cake, so Aunt Hilda suggested they should get seven, and put four in one group and two in another, and one in the center to grow on. She said she was going to get one of the large church candles to save to put in the window and burn at Christmas-time.

The candle-place, as the children called it, was so delightful they could not bear to leave it; but finally Aunt Hilda said it was time to go home. She said they would take a short cut along the railroad track, as there would be no train for some hours. They were never allowed on the railroad track unless an older person was with them. Jim and Ralph skipped along over the ties, and Hector followed them, while Aunt Hilda and the three little girls came more slowly. Suddenly, as they were walking along in a leisurely way they heard a whistle, and presently, above the sound of the wind, was the rush of a train coming rapidly toward them. Aunt Hilda's heart stood still. It was a freight train she did not know about. There were extra freight trains now, because they were moving so many supplies for the soldiers.

"Ralph! Jim!" she called out.

Ralph had already scrambled down the bank and was safe, but Jim, with Hector at his heels, was running toward them along the track.

"Climb down the bank and take Lily," Aunt Hilda said to Patty, and she was just about to swing Evelyn

down when Jim took his little sister roughly in his arms and half carried her down the embankment.

Hilda made a frantic grab at Hector, and soon all the party were clinging to the steeply sloping bank while the freight train thundered by with its long line of cars.

"You were a brave boy to come back for Evelyn," said Aunt Hilda.

"I did n't know as you could manage so many," said Jim.

"We'll never walk on the railroad track again," said Aunt Hilda. "No more short cuts for us."

Getting ready for the dinner was almost more fun than eating it, but that was very good fun, too, and it was such a joy to have their father come down. They were all so grateful to have frosted cake that they found no fault with lemon water-ice. Then, to celebrate the day, Mr. West was able to get a strange-looking carryall and a brown horse, and take the party for a drive across the Cape to the open sea, with its great waves, and the lighthouse, which the children had always longed to explore.

Aunt Hilda and Mrs. Gay walked all the way to the other side, but Mrs. West could not walk so far, so she rode, and little Rodman rode all the way, but the other children took turns in walking and riding.

They had a wonderful time watching the waves come in, and then they started to go to the lighthouse, but there was a soldier in khaki on guard, and he told

them no one was allowed to go into the lighthouse any more. Mr. West was quite tried when he heard this.

“Do we look like alien enemies?” he said. “Do you think it would do any harm to let us in?”

“James,” said Mrs. West, “the young man is only doing his duty. You are not so well known here as you are at home. We’ll go into that little shop and buy some postal cards.”

It was rather a come-down when they had expected to see the lighthouse, but the children were so thrilled by the sight they saw that they soon forgot their disappointment. Close by the door of the shop was a real khaki tent, the first Jim had ever seen, and just outside it was another soldier in khaki, and a girl in a pink dress was bringing him a saucer of pink ice-cream, so there must be pink ice-cream inside.

They went in and sat down at two little tables, and they all had strawberry ice-cream. As they ate it they watched a group of busy women who were knitting khaki-colored or gray sweaters. One younger woman was winding a ball of gray yarn, while a bronzed young sailor boy was holding the skein for her.

Everybody agreed that afternoon when they got home that the birthday had been a grand success; but there was more to come, for soon after sunset there was the most frightful thunderstorm that the younger children had ever known. They all had supper together at the Wests’ house, on account of

the birthday, and it was impossible for any one to go home, for the rain was pelting down in torrents, and the thunder was coming so close to the lightning that it seemed every minute as if the house would be struck. Then the rain changed to hail, which clattered against the windows. When the storm first broke, Aunt Hilda and Mr. West ran upstairs to shut the windows. There was a pool of water on Mrs. West's bed, and another on Catherine's trunk. It was very exciting! And all the time it was raining and hailing the moon was shining, red and angry, through the storm.

"I would not believe it if I had not seen it," said Mr. West.

The storm ceased almost as suddenly as it came, and Aunt Hilda said: "See how peaceful and serene the moon looks now! It is a good omen for your new year, James. It means whatever storms you are to have, everything will come out right for you in the end."

XI

The Story

THE children were very sorry to have their two months at the seashore come to an end, for they were so fond of the little Gays, but early in September they had to go home on account of Jim's school. And as soon as they were back again there was so much to do that they were usually as happy as the day was long.

Nancy was going to school for the first time. Her mother had always been afraid to send her for fear she would catch the contagious diseases from the other children, but a small private school was being started, and she thought the companionship with other children might be good for her. Evelyn begged very hard to be allowed to go, but no child was taken until she knew how to read. Evelyn had learned all her letters this summer, both the big ones and the little ones, and a few simple words, for she had begged Lily to teach them to her, and she now teased Nancy to teach her to read.

Every one in town, both older people and children, had become greatly interested in the Fatherless Children of France, and Jim and Evelyn and Nancy were eager to earn money to give them.

One afternoon the little teacher had a picture-book open in the Merrifields' nursery, where she was teaching Evelyn her lesson, when Mr. Merrifield came in.

"Father, Evelyn wants to spell *cat*, *k-a-t*; you can't, can you?"

"It sounds that way to me," said Evelyn with decision. "I said I was going to spell *my* cat that way —

I have a pussy *k-a-t*,
And he sometimes catches a 'normous rat," —

she went on.

"He does n't," said conscientious Nancy. "He can't, he's so small."

"He will when he gets big," said Evelyn confidently. "Mr. Merrifield, can't I spell *cat* with a *K*? Ralph Gay said his mother spelled her name with a *K*, and if *Katharine* can be, I should think a cat could."

"It can't," said Mr. Merrifield decidedly. "It is odd, but it can't be. Spelling is one of the things that is good discipline for little girls who like their own way. You see it is like this, Evelyn; there have to be rules about everything, so people can do good work. But you can spell your kitten with a *K*."

"I am glad of that," said Evelyn. "Oh, Mr. Merrifield, how can Nancy and I earn some money for the Fatherless Children of France?"

Her brown eyes looked so wistful and appealing

that Mr. Merrifield felt he must find some way at once.

“How much do you want to earn?” he asked.

“Oh, a lot of money. Aunt Hilda and mother are trying to get all the littlest children to give twenty-five cents, and children our size to give fifty cents, and the bigger-sized ones like Jim, seventy-five cents, and still older ones a dollar.”

“I’ll tell you what I’ll do,” said Mr. Merrifield. “I’ll pay Nancy fifty cents when she has taught you to read small sentences. It is unusual to pay a scholar for learning, but I’ll give you a prize of fifty cents when you have learned to read these little sentences.”

Evelyn was so pleased at this that she got up and hugged Mr. Merrifield, which Nancy would never have thought of doing.

“I’ll never spell *cat* with a *K*, as long as I live,” she told him, “even when Tim, my darling kitten, gets to be a cat. I thought I could spell my own cat the way I liked, but I see I can’t.”

“No,” said Mr. Merrifield; “it would be a bad example to other people. If the minister’s little girl let you spell *cat* with a *K*, soon every child in the parish would be spelling it that way, and that would make a great scandal.”

“I had n’t thought of that,” said Evelyn.

It was really surprising how fast Evelyn learned to read, and she learned to print at the same time,

for she was eager to make all the words she knew; and she drew little pictures to explain them. They were very strange little pictures, but you usually knew what she meant.

One day she said to Nancy: "I'd like to write a story about Tim. I mean the kitten, not the chore-man. Would you write it for me if I tell you what to say?"

"Yes," cried Nancy joyously. "You can dictate to me, the way father does to mother when his eyes are tired."

"All right," said Evelyn. "It is to be for a birthday present for Jim. And I'll make the pictures."

"I thought his birthday came in January," said Nancy.

"It does, but Jim and I have agreed to have monthly birthdays, so the thirteenth of every month I am to have one and he is to give me a present, and the twenty-ninth of every month he is to have one and I am to give him a present. He did n't have anything ready the thirteenth of September, for he forgot all about it, and spent all his money, so he just gave me a kiss, but that was very nice, because he does not kiss people generally. So he said to make it even I must not spend any money on his September birthday; and, anyway, we are both saving up for the Fatherless Children. So I thought I'd write a little story about Tim."

"A true story?" asked Nancy.

"A true story," said Evelyn firmly. "It is true, because he told it to me the other night when he was curled up in my lap."

"It can't be true," said Nancy severely, "for cats can't talk."

"He's a special kind of cat," said Evelyn. "Aunt Hilda says he's human, and when he sits in my lap his thoughts just skip out of his head and into mine."

"They can't," said Nancy. "It is n't possible."

"You don't know anything about it. He is n't your kitten."

"I know what can be and what can't be," said Nancy.

"Well, anyway, I can pretend anything I like, for it is a story."

"That is just what I said. It is a story, not a true story. Tell me what to say."

"It is called 'The Kitten's Dinner,'" said Evelyn.

It took Nancy some time to write it down, and Evelyn decorated the sheet, with a big round circle made with a yellow pencil, a smaller round circle above it and two dots for eyes, two black marks standing up straight for ears, and a black mark for a tail.

"It might be a rabbit," said Nancy doubtfully.

"It is a kitten," said Evelyn. "It would n't be called 'The Kitten's Dinner' if it was a rabbit."

"He might dine on a rabbit."

“Not my kitten,” said Evelyn. “He’s very ’ticular. Please don’t talk so much.”

“That’s what father says when mother makes suggestions. I’ll keep quiet,” said Nancy.

“Once there was a little kitten and his name was Tim. And every night he got into the lap of his little mistress, and her name was Evelyn, and he told her all the thoughts he thought.”

“Don’t talk so fast,” said Nancy. “I don’t know how to spell ‘mistress.’”

Just then Aunt Hilda came in. She had been helping Mrs. Merrifield with some War Relief work, and she said it was time for Evelyn to go home. When she heard about the story she said Evelyn could dictate the rest of it to her, and she would write some rhymes to go at the end of it, and Evelyn could make as many pictures as she liked with her box of colored crayons.

This was the way the story read when it was finished:—

“Once there was a little kitten and his name was Tim, and every night he got into the lap of his little mistress, and her name was Evelyn, and he told her all the thoughts he thought. And they were funny thoughts, for he was a very little kitten, and he thought a great deal about food. And he thought of all the things he liked to eat, because he was small and knew no better, and they were fish and lamb, and a few mice, but mostly fish, and he loved fish he told

me, just the way I loved oranges and grapes and bananas.

“And when I asked him which he liked best, the seashore or here, he said the seashore, because he ’most always had fish every day. And he tried eating other things like Aunt Hilda’s khaki yarn and strings, and they did not agree with him, and he said, ‘Give me fish every day and I’ll never eat khaki yarn any more.’

“And Mr. West, that was Evelyn’s father, said the fish bill would be just ’normous if we did, for his appetite was bigger than he was. I guess that’s all the story I’ll write this time, for I’m tired.”

When the pictures were added, of a lamb and a mouse and several fishes, it was a very grand story, indeed, and Aunt Hilda wrote her rhymes on a separate sheet.

A KITTEN’S VIEW OF FOOD CONTROL

The food controller of our State
Ordered two meatless days;
I’m sure the food controller’s great,
His name I’ll loudly praise. /

Two days of fish instead of one,
Oh, why not make it seven?
Seven days of fish would be such fun,
’T would be a kitten’s heaven.

XII

Jim and the Orphans

JIM admired his father more than any other man in the whole world, and he was never so happy as when they went for a walk on Sunday afternoon, especially when they took what Jim called "a real man's walk," which was too long for his mother and Evelyn. Sometimes Aunt Hilda went with them, but much as he liked her, he preferred having his father all to himself.

He wanted to grow up just like his father, and he imitated many of his ways. He wished he had a pair of those big round spectacles his father wore, with the dark rims to them, but he had once tried them on and they made everything look so small that he found they would be of no use to him. It was because of his devotion to his father that Jim was so stirred up over the Fatherless Children of France.

"I'd like to go and kill all the people who killed the orphans' fathers," he said one day to his Aunt Hilda.

"If you did there would be another set of fatherless children," she said. "It is one of the sad facts of war that such things have to be."

"And the worst of it is," he went on gloomily,

“that even if the war lasts six years I sha’n’t be nearly of fighting age then. And I am so afraid this will be the last war, and I’ll never get a chance to fight.”

“We are fighting to make it the last war, dear. We want all the nations of the world to be like one big family, with the stronger ones looking out for the little ones, just as you took care of Evelyn that day on the railroad track. I’m so glad you want to help me with my orphans.”

“Can you speak French as well as you speak English?” he asked.

“Not quite as well. But you see I lived in France till I was seven, and my father was half French, so I love France as I love no other country except America.”

Jim was eager to earn money for the cause, but his father was too busy with food-control meetings and the Liberty Loan, in addition to his large law practice, to have time to make any suggestions, and his Aunt Hilda went off for a week’s visit just at this time.

Then one day a bright idea came to him. He thought of it one Friday in the middle of school, and he could hardly wait for his lessons to be over.

As they were walking home together he confided the plan to his friend, Charley Norcross. “I am going to pick some of our fruit and sell it for the benefit of the French orphans.”

“Gee! That’s great!” said Charley.

Charley lived in the third story of an apartment house, so the idea appealed to him strongly.

"I'm sure mother'd like to buy some of your grapes and peaches," he said. "She's just crazy about making jellies and preserves, and the fruit costs so much at the stores."

"But I'll have to charge a big price if it is for the orphans," Jim said, in his father's best manner.

"That's all right. Mother said she supposed she'd have to give something to the orphans, and in this way she'd have the fruit, too."

Jim's father and mother went off Friday afternoon to be gone until Monday morning. It was the anniversary of their wedding day, and they always celebrated it by doing something together without the children, and as their Aunt Hilda was still away there was no one to ask about the fruit.

"I won't mention it to Ann and Catherine," said Jim. "We'll just steal into the garden when they are not looking, just as if we were bad boys, and we'll get all we want before they see us. I am sure father and mother won't mind, they are so crazy over the orphans."

Charley was not at all sure of this, but the prospect of feasting on the delicious peaches and grapes was too much for him, and so early Saturday morning he appeared with a fruit-basket ready for the occasion. The boys stole down into the garden with Hector following at their heels. They had one narrow escape,

for the ash-man looked at them suspiciously when they were picking the peaches, but Jim called out cheerily, "It's just me, Jim West. Won't you have a peach?"

So the ash-man supposed it was all right.

"Please don't tell Ann and Catherine what we are doing," said Jim. "We are going to sell the fruit for the benefit of the Fatherless Children of France. Mother and father are keen about them, but Ann and Catherine might not understand."

"Mum is the word," said the ash-man, and Jim felt he could be depended on.

It was a beautiful basket of fruit, with grapes and peaches arranged by Charley, who had a good deal of taste.

"They are just samples," said Charley. "People can order more."

"I don't think we've made the grape jelly yet," said Jim doubtfully.

Mrs. Norcross was in the kitchen when the boys arrived. She did all her own work except the washing and ironing, and she cooked delicious things. There was a smell of something frying which appealed to Jim.

"Here's a doughnut for each of you," said Mrs. Norcross, as she took two from a pile that had just come hot off the stove.

"Gee! I'm glad I came here," said Jim, as he took a large bite out of the doughnut.

Mrs. Norcross had on a long blue-and-white-checked apron with sleeves that covered her up, and her pretty hair was almost as golden as Evelyn's. Jim had never seen a prettier grown person. It did seem a shame to make her pay for the fruit when she had been so kind about the doughnuts, and Mrs. Norcross was one of the friends to whom his mother sometimes sent fruit as a present.

"I've brought you 'round a little of our fruit," he said. "We thought maybe you'd like some."

Mrs. Norcross did not know that the older people were away, so she supposed Mrs. West had sent the basket of fruit.

"Thank your mother very much. How daintily she always arranges things," said Mrs. Norcross, as she handed Jim another doughnut.

"We are taking orders, mother, for the benefit of the French orphans," said Charley. "Do you care to order any grapes for jelly?"

"Yes, I should be very glad of a peck, if you can spare as many."

Jim's face fell, for he loved grape jelly. He had not intended to sell all the grapes.

"I'll give you a little something to start with," said Mrs. Norcross, as she handed half a dollar to Jim and another to Charley. Then she went into the next room and brought out a little notebook and a pencil. At the top of the first page she wrote, "For the Benefit of the French Orphans," and also Jim's

name and Charley's. Under each of their names she wrote her own and the amount she had given: "Madeline B. Norcross, 50 cents."

"If you write everything down you won't get mixed up about the money. You can keep the pencil," she said. "What a clever idea of your father's to let you earn money in this way."

Jim was about to say that the great idea was his own, but Charley made signs to him.

"Mother's awful particular," he said as they went down the steps of the apartment house. "Maybe she'd think there was something wrong, if she knew it was your plan."

He was very anxious to secure the grapes before any investigation was made.

The boys stopped at a grocer's, to find out what the market price of grapes was, and Charley borrowed a peck measure, for one of the grocer's children was in the same class with Jim and himself at the public school. Mrs. Norcross paid them the market price for the grapes, and a few cents over, and said she would make the jelly that very afternoon, for she had the good luck to have plenty of sugar and people said sugar was going to be scarce.

Jim was very much disappointed about the grapes, for they had had to take all there were to fill the order, except two bunches which they ate themselves, and he was not at all sure how the family would feel when they saw the bare vines.

There were not enough peaches to sell in any quantity, and the apples were not ripe yet, so after dinner Jim and Charley arranged a basket of peaches and Charley printed a sign on a piece of cardboard:—

Peaches for sail for the bennyfit of the French Orfans.
5 to 10 cents a peach. A good caws. Be Gennerous.

He was not sure about the spelling, but he thought it wiser not to ask either Ann or Catherine.

“I think if we go where nobody knows us it will be more fun,” he said, and they went down a side street.

Ann and Catherine thought Jim was at Charley’s house, and Mrs. Norcross was quite at ease about Charley, so no one was worried.

The side street was very pleasant, for it overlooked a small park, and there were many women and children sunning themselves on the benches in the park. Several of them were taking care of babies in baby carriages.

“Gee!” said Charley. “There’s our chance.”

Nobody seemed to have heard about the French orphans, but when Jim told them all he knew they seemed very much impressed. Most of the women had no money with them, but one of them left her baby carriage in charge of a friend and crossed over to her house. She came back with a quarter of a dollar and said she supposed she could have six peaches. Then she gave them to the different women and children she knew, keeping one for herself.

When Charley wanted to enter her contribution

in his book she said, "Oh, never mind about my name; say 'From a friend.'"

"Let's go and ask other people for fruit," said Charley when the last peach was sold. "Judge Baxter has a dandy garden. They would never miss some of their apples. They'd let us have a few, I know."

They were passing Nancy's house at the time, and who should be skipping up the steps but Evelyn in a pink cotton gown and a pink sweater. Jim thought he had never seen so sweet a picture.

"She's a peach," said Charley. And indeed she did look like one, with her pink cheeks and pink frock, against the background of the door, which was as green as the leaves of a peach.

"Come on, Evvy, and help us out," said Charley. "We are selling fruit for the orphans. If you go up to the Baxters' house and ask if you can have some apples, I'm sure nobody can resist you."

"I'll get Nancy to come with me."

"Oh, we don't want Nancy," the boys said hastily.

They had to go to the grocer's and borrow two large baskets, and the boys waited at the foot of the garden while Evelyn went to the Baxters' house.

She was a little frightened after she had pulled the doorbell.

A pleasant-looking maid in a black dress and a white apron came to the door.

“Could I see Mrs. Baxter?” asked Evelyn.

“Mrs. Baxter is out. Will you leave a message with me?”

Evelyn looked so sweet that the maid wanted to hug and kiss her, for she had little sisters at home.

“Is Judge Baxter in?” asked Evelyn.

“No, he is out too.”

“I guess you’ll do just as well. It’s about the orphans.”

“The orphans?”

“Yes, the French ones. My father, he’s Mr. West, the lawyer, is getting money for them, and my brother, James West, Jr., is helping him. He’d like just a little fruit to sell for them.”

“Why does n’t he come up and speak for himself instead of sending a baby like you?”

“I don’t know. He and Charley Norcross are down in the garden.”

The pleasant young maid went along the garden walk with Evelyn.

“I’m sure Judge Baxter would not mind your having a few of his early apples,” she said, “but not those great baskets full.”

She sat down on a bench to watch the boys.

“You can pick up all the windfalls you find on the ground,” she told them.

As they were walking home Charley said, “Let’s go right back and fill our baskets with the good apples from the trees.”

"That would n't be fair," said Jim. "She was so nice I'd hate to get her into trouble."

"She told us we could have some apples," said Charley. "It is for the good of the cause. We can never sell these old windfalls, except to the poor, and they can't give us much for them. I'm sure Judge Baxter would be glad to give them to us. He's such a great friend of your father's, and when my father was alive he was in his office."

They had wonderful luck in getting away without being caught. Jim felt very mean, but he comforted himself with thinking about the French orphans, and Evelyn enjoyed the adventure. Whatever Jim did was right in her eyes.

They sold all their apples and nobody asked too many questions; and when they counted up their money at the end of the day they had the big sum of five dollars and sixteen cents.

As they left the borrowed baskets at the grocer's, Charley said, "Let's go into the drug-store and get three sodas and a stick of candy with the sixteen cents, and then the money will come out just even."

"But it is n't our money," said Jim.

"We have got to pay ourselves for our time and work," said Charley. "Sixteen cents is very little to take for such a hard day's work."

This reasoning appealed to Evelyn, who had never had a glass of soda water. The children were hot and tired, and the soda water looked very delicious, as

they saw people sitting on stools and sipping glasses of it.

Jim still felt a little doubtful, but Charley, who was older than Jim and had charge of the money, went in and ordered three glasses of soda water.

“What flavors do you want?” he asked.

“Can I have strawberry?” said Evelyn, with shining eyes.

“I’ll take chocolate,” said Jim; and Charley chose pineapple.

The fizzy soda water made Evelyn cough, and she spilled a little on the white guimpe of her pink frock. She was sorry she had chosen strawberry, for it made such a bright stain that Ann would be sure to notice it.

They spent the other cent in buying a long stick of candy, which they divided in three pieces.

Jim and Evelyn were tired but happy when they got home. It had been a wonderful day.

“Evelyn West, where have you been?” Ann asked, as the two children came into the house. “You were so late I telephoned to Mrs. Merrifield’s and I found you were n’t there, and I’ve been telephoning all over the neighborhood about you.”

“She was safe with me,” said Jim, with dignity. “I guess I can look after my little sister.”

“You bad boy! I don’t know what you’ve been up to. I telephoned to Mrs. Norcross, thinking Evelyn might be there with you, and I found you were n’t

either of you there. Come, now, you may as well tell me. Where on earth have you been?"

Jim was a truthful boy, but this seemed one of the times when "silence was golden," to quote a favorite phrase of his father's. He did not answer.

"Evelyn West, what have you been up to?" Ann asked.

Evelyn did not want to get Jim into trouble. "Jim saw me going to Nancy's house," she said, "and so I went on a little walk with him."

"Where did you walk to?" Ann asked sternly, "and what is that pink spot on your guimpe?"

"A pink spot?" Evelyn asked, opening her brown eyes wide. "Why should there be a pink spot? How funny!"

Just then Catherine came in, and she said in distress: "What do you suppose has happened? Some of those bad village boys have got in and stolen all our grapes and the best of the peaches! I thought the grapes would not be ripe enough to use until next week, so I did n't pick them. Now I wish I had. The little rascals! They say they are going to make an example of some of them and take them into court. I am as sure as I can be of anything that it was those Mahoney twins."

Jim was feeling more and more uncomfortable. "I am sure it was n't the Mahoneys," he said.

"Well, I feel terribly! I ought to have gone down into the garden, but Hector was out there and I

thought he'd bark if any stranger came, and I was busy cleaning my room. I have n't had a chance to do it since I got home."

"Your father loves those grapes and peaches as he loves his eye-teeth," said Ann. "I just tremble to think what he'll say when he gets home."

XIII

The Home-Coming

IT was a little before supper-time when the Wests got home. They walked up from the station, so it was nearer to go the back way.

“What a wonderful trip we’ve had, James!” said Mrs. West, with shining eyes. “It was even nicer than our first wedding journey, because now we have the children to come home to.”

“Yes,” said Mr. West, and he kissed her, and as he was not much more given to kissing people than Jim was, it was a great event.

“Let’s go up through the garden and see how the peaches and grapes are getting on. Why, Sadie!” he cried sharply, “the best of the peaches are gone, and there is n’t a grape left, — not one, do you hear?” he thundered.

“James, I am so sorry, but really it is n’t my fault.”

“Of course not. But who can have taken them? I’ll bet you anything it is those Mahoney twins. They are pests! They are to be brought up before Judge Baxter the next time they are caught. Ann! Catherine!” he called out as he stamped into the house, “why did n’t you keep watch over the garden? I can’t be gone five minutes that something does n’t happen.”

Just then the telephone rang and Ann went to answer it.

“Judge Baxter wants to speak to you over the telephone, Mr. West,” she said. “He called you up Saturday evening, but I told him you were out of town.”

Jim felt very miserable. He could not hear what the judge was saying, but he could guess.

“The rascals! The impudent scoundrels!” said his father. “No doubt it is the Mahoney twins. What! My children? Mine? Impossible! Evelyn? Yes, I think you’re right. It must have been some one else. French orphans! I don’t know anything about it. I’ll ask him.” And he hung up the receiver and came hastily into the sitting-room.

“What is this about your stealing Judge Baxter’s apples?” he asked.

And Jim felt that the Judgment Day had come.

“I said I knew you could n’t have stolen them. I said it must have been the Mahoney twins. Now, tell me the truth.”

Jim grew very red. “It was n’t the Mahoney twins, father. It was me. It did n’t seem like stealing, because we sold them for the French orphans, and the girl told us we could have some, only we took a lot more after she’d gone. She only meant us to take the windfalls. And we made quite a lot of money on the fruit. First I sold our grapes and peaches —”

“It was you who took our grapes and peaches?”

"Yes, father," said Jim miserably. "I thought as it was for the orphans you would n't mind."

"You knew I would mind," said his father sternly. "You can go and get the grapes back and take the money back. Do you hear?"

"I can't, father. It was Mrs. Norcross, and she's got them all made into jelly by this time."

"Mrs. Norcross! So Charley had a hand in this. I might have known it. Well, it's bad enough to steal your father's fruit, my boy, but when it comes to my son robbing Judge Baxter's orchard, it is a little too much. And I have to try an important case before him next week. Don't you speak to me, you little savage! Go right upstairs to bed! You need n't wait for your supper."

Jim had never been so wretched in his life. His father had never been so angry with him before. His pleasant, cheerful world seemed crumbling to pieces. He had known all day that he had been doing wrong, but it had not seemed so very wrong to him because of the orphans, and his father did not seem to take them into account. And the worst of it was he was afraid his father would not let him give the five dollars to Aunt Hilda for the orphans. Dear Aunt Hilda, she was just coming in at the front door now.

"Why, what is the matter?" said Aunt Hilda, as she looked from her brother's excited face to Jim's miserable one. The poor child was trying to keep back his tears.

"The matter is that my son has been stealing all my fruit and some of Judge Baxter's."

Aunt Hilda's blue eyes looked very troubled. But instead of saying, "You bad boy," she went straight over to where Jim was standing, and putting her arm around him she said, "I am so sorry, dear; tell me all about it."

Jim felt a sense of passionate gratitude to her for standing by him when he was in disgrace. A lump came into his throat, and for a moment he could not speak.

"It was for the orphans," said Evelyn. "We got five dollars and sixteen cents for your orphans, Aunt Hilda, and we only kept sixteen cents ourselves."

"You kept sixteen cents of money you begged for the orphans?" said his father. "That is downright dishonest! It is getting money on false pretenses."

Jim said nothing. He had turned very white.

"That's the sort of thing, my boy, that lands a man in State's Prison later on. That's the way swindlers begin. I did not think my boy would spend money, given him for a cause, on himself."

"Charley said sixteen cents was very little for a day's pay," said Evelyn.

"So it was Charley's idea spending the money? Why did n't you tell me that before?"

"Because I had the soda water, too, and part of the stick of candy."

"You have a legal mind, Jim. I am sure you'll be

a lawyer later on. Well, I am glad you are not a tell-tale. That is a fault that is very hard to cure. And you can take sixteen cents out of your bank and give it to Aunt Hilda."

His father had calmed down. He did not understand just why.

"It is awkward about Judge Baxter's apples," Mr. West said. "For I suppose they were sold to different people, so there is no chance of getting them back."

"To lots of different ones," said Evelyn. "I guess they are mostly eaten by now. It was such fun to see the children beginning on them! And Ann can never say again I'm the dirtiest child in town, 'cause I'm not. There's lots as dirty as me."

"I suppose you ate a few yourselves," said Mr. West.

"We sampled them," Jim admitted, "and we ate two big bunches of our grapes and a few peaches."

He looked at his father with a "now do your worst" expression. He had made a full confession and pleaded "Guilty."

"Now, go right upstairs to bed," said his father, but he no longer spoke in that angry voice.

"I think the best way we can arrange with Judge Baxter," said his sister Hilda, "is for Jim and me to go over there to-morrow. I want to return Mrs. Baxter's call, and Jim owes Judge Baxter an apology, and while he is telling him how sorry and ashamed

he is, I will read Mrs. Baxter some of my letters from France about the work there. You can send the judge some of your apples, James, when they are ripe."

She went out into the entry to telephone to the Baxters' to make the appointment; and as Jim's door was open he could hear what she was saying.

"Yes, it really was Jim and Evelyn. They did very wrong to take fruit they knew they had no right to touch. But if you could see how sorry Jim is, and how he owned up like a man, I know you would forgive him. It was a great temptation, for they were so eager to earn money for my French orphans. And those children, with Charley Norcross's help, actually earned five dollars and sixteen cents. Could you and Mrs. Baxter see Jim and me for a few minutes to-morrow afternoon? Jim wants to make an apology to you, and I want to read Mrs. Baxter my last letters from France. Of course, my brother will be glad to make you any compensation for the apples that you like, or give you some of his when they are ripe. What? Oh, how good you are! That is too generous! How wonderful!"

She came straight upstairs to Jim's room.

He was crying, and she pretended not to notice it.

"Jim, dear," she said, "there is one thing that can happen when we do wrong when we are very young. We need never do that wrong thing again. You have learned a lesson about stealing, and I am sure whoever else lands in prison it won't be you."

Jim longed to give her a good hug, but he did nothing of the sort.

“Your father gave you the best kind of punishment, for you will have a long time to think over what you did, because it is so early. But I want you to have one pleasant piece of news to think about, too. Judge Baxter says he forgives you for taking the apples, and he and Mrs. Baxter will be glad to see us to-morrow afternoon at four o’clock. But, Jim, this is the splendid bit of news. Judge Baxter has promised to give me fifty dollars for my French orphans!”

XIV

The Letter from France

JIM was the first of the family to see the outside of the letter that brought such disturbing news, just as he had been the first to see the one that had led to Aunt Hilda's coming to them. This time he met the postman at the front door one afternoon. It was not the delightful postman who used to go past the kitchen window and linger for a talk with Catherine, but a much older man, who went about his business in a grave, silent manner; for the war had brought many changes. The postman had enlisted, and so had Tim, the chore-man, so there was now no confusion between him and Tim, the kitten. There had been a fortnight without any chore-man, when Mr. West had to bring up coal and wood and make a furnace fire. This was a joyous period to Jim, for his father let him carry up a stick or two of wood at a time, or some kindlings. But now they had a new chore-man, who was so old they always called him "Mr. Ryan," although his first name was Thomas, for Jim asked him what it was.

The postman, without a word, handed Jim a letter in a thin envelope with a strange stamp.

"It is a letter from France!" cried Jim. But the

postman had already moved on, as if a letter from France was the same to him as one from Boston. And yet no letter had ever caused more consternation in the household than this one was to cause.

Jim was sure the letter was from the lady to whom Aunt Hilda had sent the money for the French orphans. So he ran upstairs to his aunt's room, where she and his mother and Evelyn were sitting, while the kitten was frisking about, trying to decide which lap he liked best. He settled down in Mrs. West's first. This was agreeable in some ways, for she was knitting a khaki sweater, and it was warm and soft, and it was great fun to play with the brown ball; but when he knocked it off on the floor and then bit off the worsted close to the sweater, Mrs. West rose suddenly.

"You bad, mischievous, objectionable pussy!" she said. "I can't work with you in the room." And she folded up the sweater and put it in her knitting-bag.

"But mother," said Evelyn, "darling pussy knows no better. Khaki yarn to him is just like molasses candy to us. Come, pussy, and sit in *my* lap."

He tried it, but there were drawbacks to this, too, for Evelyn never sat still more than two minutes at a time; and besides, her lap was very small. So he jumped down and had just settled himself comfortably in Aunt Hilda's lap when Jim came into the room.

"Here's a letter from France!" he cried.

Aunt Hilda was reading aloud, and she closed the book so suddenly that the kitten jumped down and went over to the window-seat. This was a tried friend that never disappointed him.

Aunt Hilda opened the letter, and looked very grave as she read it.

"What does the lady say about the money you sent?" asked Jim.

"There has n't been time for it to get there. This is about something else. This is from the same friend. She wants me to come over and help her with the work. She has a place for me at last."

"Oh, but we can't let you go," said Mrs. West. "James and I were talking it over last night. We both said we hoped you would live with us always. You are the dearest sister that ever was, and the sweetest aunt, and the most wonderful mother's helper and governess all in one. James and I said we thought it was too much to have all this for nothing, and we felt we should like to give you a salary so you could feel entirely independent."

The tears came into Hilda's eyes. She went over and put her arm around her sister-in-law.

"What a dear you are, Sadie!" she said. "I am sure nobody ever had an own sister more devoted and generous. If I had been choosing a sister out of the whole world, I could not have picked out any one more to my taste. But you see it is this way. You remember when I wrote to you last spring I told you

I had a plan for the autumn. This was it. I wanted to see my own people first, and then go over and work with my friends in the reconstruction work among the women and children in France. When my father died and my happy world went to pieces, I wanted to do some work for some one else, and now the chance has come."

"But you need n't take it," said Mrs. West. "Some one else could take your place over there, and no one in the wide world could take your place with us."

"Yes, I believe that is true," Hilda said slowly. "Life is a strange thing. We want something so much, and when we can have it, — I never thought I could have a happy, ready-made world just for the asking, like what you have given me. And yet — I know I could do the other work, and the chance has come."

"Think it over, dear; don't decide hastily. It seems to me as if your place is here."

Aunt Hilda was very grave all the evening, as if she were trying to make up her mind, and she kissed Evelyn twice when she went upstairs to bed with her mother, and when it was time for Jim to go she kissed him. This was unusual. He pretended not to like it, but he did.

Jim's room was over the sitting-room, and he was sure she was talking about her plan, for he could hear voices, first hers, and then his father's, getting louder and louder. His door was open a crack into the

entry, and presently he heard the sitting-room door open.

"I'll never think you are right, never, never!" his father said. "Our children have more claim on you than all the French orphans put together."

"But so few are wanted over there now, and it is such a wonderful chance; and I planned for it last spring before I came to you."

"That makes no difference. It is a crazy plan!"

She was coming up the stairs now, and Jim got out of bed and pattered along the entry in his bare feet to meet her.

"Aunt Hilda, are you going away?" he asked.

She told him to get back into bed, and then she sat down on the foot of his bed, and rolled herself up in the comforter.

"Dearest," she said, "I think you can understand, even if your father can't, for you would like to go to France and fight if you were old enough. Now, I want to help, too. And this chance has come. But I am so happy here with all of you that I almost wish it had not come. I almost think your father is right, and that it is my duty as well as my pleasure to stay with you."

"I don't know how we'd get on without you," said Jim. "And mother needs you so much, too."

"That is what your father said. And yet I was so eager last spring to get the chance, and now I have it. It seems to me that not to go to France now would

be like a soldier who was drafted claiming exemption for a reason that did not hold. To let some one go in my place would be to shirk. And so," said Aunt Hilda, in her sweet, grave voice, "I have decided to go, and I know you will understand."

A lump came into Jim's throat. His aunt took his hand in hers, and he gripped it. It seemed as if his heart were breaking.

"I — I guess I understand," he said.

Jim's mother understood, too, which was a great comfort to Hilda; but little Evelyn could not see why Aunt Hilda was going.

She cried bitterly when she heard the news, and Evelyn did not cry easily. "What did you come at all for, just to go away again?" she said reproachfully.

"Oh, but Aunt Hilda is coming back again, perhaps in six months. Darling child, don't you want her to go over and work with her friends to help the poor little children who have n't any fathers?"

"No, I don't," said Evelyn.

"But, dearest," her mother went on, "you know how much you like the French orphans."

"I hate the French orphans!" said Evelyn unexpectedly. "For they are taking Aunt Hilda away from us."

"But she is coming back again," said Jim. "She's only promising to go for six months. And the war may be over before that."

“It may last for six years,” said Evelyn. “You said it might.”

“And meanwhile,” said Aunt Hilda, “I am going to stay with you until the day after Thanksgiving, so we’ll have time to be as merry as possible for nearly a month. And if Aunt Charlotte and Aunt Mattie and the children come here for Thanksgiving, think what fun that will be!”

So Evelyn dried her eyes and began to look forward to Thanksgiving.

XV

The Thanksgiving Candle

GETTING ready for Thanksgiving was almost as much fun as the day itself, and Evelyn spent a great deal of time in the kitchen, both at her own house and at Nancy's, watching the delicious pies that were being made, and sometimes getting a taste of the interesting mixtures.

"They are having mock mince-meat at Nancy's house," she told Catherine. "It is made of green tomatoes, and it tastes just as nice as nice can be. Why don't you make yours of green tomatoes?"

"There are a few other things in it besides green tomatoes," said Catherine, "and I like my own way best. Look out! Your mother does n't want you eating mince-pie meat. Goodness gracious, the kitten is up on the table again! I'll have to put you both out of the kitchen."

"That is what Maria said at Nancy's house," said Evelyn, smacking her lips, "and I told her that you were always so good-natured and loved children and never minded what we did. It is nicer than mock mince pie, Catherine, it truly is. Catherine, don't you think Thanksgiving is the nicest day in the whole year, 'cept Christmas?"

"I might if I had anything to be thankful about."

"But, Catherine, everybody has something to be thankful about. Mother said so. And Aunt Hilda is going to light the green candle Thanksgiving night, the big fat one she got at North Sandhurst; and we are going to put it in the window, 'cause she won't be here Christmas Eve. Aunt Hilda says, —

'A Bayberry Candle
Burned to the Socket,
Brings Luck to the House,
Food to the Larder,
And Gold to the Pocket.'

Did you ever hear that, Catherine?"

"No, I never did."

"Well, I never did until Aunt Hilda taught it to me. She says on Thanksgiving Day we are all to think what we are thankful about, and I am thankful if any Tim had to go it was the chore-man and not the kitten, are n't you, Catherine?"

"Well, you see, Tim, the chore-man, was of more use to me," said Catherine. "He was an especially kind friend of mine, and so was the postman, and with both of them gone and my brother at the war it makes a sad Thanksgiving for me."

"Dear Catherine," said Evelyn, and she put her arm around Catherine's neck, "you've got me."

"Yes, bless your heart," said Catherine. "You are my little comfort. You bad kitten!" And she

took the pussy off the table again, and began gently stroking him. "I shall have to put you upstairs."

"There's another thing to be thankful for," said Evelyn. "When they come down from the farm they are going to bring a turkey with them. Are n't you thankful we are going to have a turkey for dinner, Catherine?"

"I shall be more thankful when I get it cooked."

"They are only to have chickens at Nancy's house," Evelyn went on, "'cause turkeys are so expensive, and being a minister Nancy's father thought he ought not to have a turkey. I am glad my father is not a minister, and if the turkey is a present it does not cost anything. Oh, Catherine, it seems as if I could n't wait for Thanksgiving Day to come! and I'm just crazy for a snowstorm. I'm just longing and longing for snow. Mother says that is n't the kind of a thing to pray about, 'cause God could n't make it snow to suit all the little children who want it, and yet not snow for all the people who want bare ground. But I long and long for a snowstorm, just as I longed and longed for a pussy cat, and he came, and perhaps the snowstorm will."

And it did. Just the day before Thanksgiving the snowy flakes began to come down, and they powdered the road thick and white, and they powdered the fir trees, and covered the lilac bush with white. Evelyn hopped and skipped for joy, and she said, "There'll be sleighing Thanksgiving Day!"

It was a very exciting time, for in the afternoon, while it was still snowing fast, the family from the farm arrived.

Mr. West met them at the station, and they all came up in a big covered sleigh. Aunt Mattie was the first to come into the house, and it was snowing so fast that she had to shake the white flakes off her cloak, although she had only walked from the gate to the front door. She carried a large basket, and when it was opened in the kitchen there was the turkey inside all ready to be cooked, and around the turkey were turnips and onions from the farm. Aunt Charlotte looked very dignified and proper as she carried a dress-suit case that she refused to hand over to any one else. It was full of jars of different kinds of preserves packed in hay so that they would not get broken. Next came Harry, staggering under a huge dress-suit case; when it was opened, Evelyn saw that there were squashes in it, cut in pieces so they would fit in, and also a cabbage and enough potatoes for a Thanksgiving dinner.

Lottie came next with another bag that held some delicious pats of butter from the farm, and Prue tried to carry a jug of cider that was waiting on the brick walk for some one to take.

"Why did n't you pack a box and send all these things down by express?" Mr. West asked, as he put the jug of cider on the kitchen table.

"James West!" said Aunt Mattie. "That shows

how little you know about country expresses in war-times! The things might not have arrived until next week and been frozen on the way. So we packed our clothes in trunks and carried our provisions by hand. It is bad enough not to have all of you with us at the farm as we first planned, but it would be ten times worse if we could not give you some of the products of the farm. And you are really going to France, Hilda? I admire your spirit. How I wish I were going with you!"

Evelyn had one of her bright ideas. "Could n't you go instead of Aunt Hilda?" she asked. "We need her so much."

But for some reason no one seemed to think this plan could be carried out.

It stopped snowing some time in the night, and the children waked to a white world on which the sun shone so brightly that there were myriads of glittering stars on trees and shrubs.

First, everybody went to church just as if it were Sunday, and as there were ten people they filled two pews; then came the Thanksgiving dinner, which was the best dinner Evelyn had ever eaten; and afterwards a big pung came around to the door with two horses, and the children and grown people piled in and went for a sleigh-ride into the country. Mrs. West stayed at home with Aunt Charlotte, who did not feel equal to the cold ride, so there was room for Nancy Merrifield and Charley Norcross. Evelyn was bliss-

fully happy as she curled down between her Aunt Hilda and Nancy. They drove through the pine and fir woods, where the green showed through the white, and they drove through little villages where children were out with their sleds. When they turned to come back it was beginning to grow dark, and there was a lovely pink light in the sky, and the towers and spires of churches stood out gray against it, and the street lamps were lighted, and it all seemed like a beautiful new world, familiar and yet strange.

As they drove up to the door on their return, there, in one of the front windows, was the large bayberry Thanksgiving candle, lighted and sending out its cheerful beams into a cold world. The room looked so pleasant as they glanced in, with a bright fire burning on the hearth, and Aunt Charlotte and Mrs. West sitting there with their knitting, that nobody minded that the sleigh-ride was over.

Nancy stayed to supper and was to spend the night, for she and Evelyn had always spent Thanksgiving night together ever since they were tiny tots.

After supper all the family, big and little, sat in the room where the Thanksgiving candle was burning, and Aunt Hilda said:—

“Now we will each say what has given us especial pleasure to-day. We’ll begin with Evelyn, because she is the youngest.”

“Have I got to say just one thing? ’Cause there are lots of them.”

“As you are the youngest you can be thankful for three things, but every one else must say only one thing.”

“I’m thankful for the snow and the lovely sleigh-ride and the turkey and —”

“That’s three things,” said Jim.

“Only two. The sleigh-ride and the snow are one; and I’m thankful Prue is here for Thanksgiving.”

“Are n’t you thankful I’m here?” asked Harry.

Evelyn stopped to think. “Yes, I’m thankful you all came, only I supposed I had to pick out one person. But there’s two here younger than me, Aunt Hilda,” Evelyn said, as she stroked the kitten’s back. He was curled up on the table under the lamp, and Hector was lying at Jim’s feet.

“It’s Tim’s first Thanksgiving Day,” said Evelyn, as she put her ear down close to the pussy. “He’s thinking things,” she said, “and I’m listening to what he thinks. He’s thankful he does n’t live at Ginger’s house.”

“Why?” asked Nancy.

“’Cause Ginger can’t lie on tables and skip round on mantelpieces. What’s Hector saying to you, Jim?”

“He says he’s thankful he did n’t have to go to church on Thanksgiving Day.”

“He missed a great deal,” said Mrs. West. “Mr. Merrifield gave us a very fine sermon.”

They all made merry over the different things they

were thankful for, which were most of them said to make the others laugh, for nobody wanted to be too serious on Aunt Hilda's last evening.

When it came to Aunt Charlotte, the oldest, she said, "I am thankful that in this year of fiery trial for the country, I have learned to know and love my dear niece, Hilda."

So everybody was serious just at the last; and then the three little girls had to go off to bed. They were to sleep together, width way, in the old-fashioned four-poster bed in the second-best spare room, which was the only bed in the house that was wide enough. All three of the children wanted to sleep in the middle, so Aunt Hilda finally drew lots, and it was Nancy who had the coveted place.

Aunt Hilda had brought up the green candle and put it in the window, and the cheerful light shone out into the dark night, and every one who passed outside thought what happy people lived in the house; and it was true, although now that the end of Aunt Hilda's visit had come every one was feeling sad.

She looked so sweet as she sat there in the candle-light that the children could not bear to think she was going to leave them the next day. She was to start so early the next morning that she said she would not go downstairs again, and she had slipped on her blue dressing-gown. Her dark hair was braided in one thick braid for the night, and was hanging down her back,

and her blue eyes looked full of sweetness and light. The children would always think of that picture of their dear Blue Aunt, until she came back to them from across the sea.

After they had said their prayers, Nancy said, "Won't you say a prayer too, Miss Hilda?"

She drew her chair up to the bed, and her short prayer was one that made them all want to be good and helpful while she was away.

After Jim and Harry came up to bed she went into their room. She knew Jim would miss her more than Evelyn would, for he was older, and, besides, he had not so many friends.

"I shall go so early in the morning that you boys won't be up," she said. "So I'll say good-bye tonight."

"I'll be up," Jim said in an odd voice, and she suspected that the tears were not far away.

"Jim," she said, "I have this blank book I'm going to give you, so you can paste in all the interesting things about the orphans, and I'll write to you very often."

"I wish I could go with you, Aunt Hilda. I wish I was a French orphan."

"Oh! no, dear, you could n't be spared. I depend on you to look after your mother and see she does n't do too much. I may not stay longer than six months; that will not be long in passing; but whether the time is longer or shorter, I hope you boys will both of you

do your best, so I shall be proud of you when I come back."

And before Aunt Hilda left them she said a short prayer: —

"We thank Thee, O Lord, for all the happiness we have had this year, in spite of the grief of nations. And even in black days there is the joy of the love of friends and the comfort of feeling we are trying to help each other. If it be Thy will, O Lord, we pray that this war may end before another Thanksgiving Day, and that Peace may come to all the nations and the world be a big, unselfish family. But whether the war is longer or shorter, we pray that in each household throughout the whole world, the older children may take thought for the younger and weaker ones, and the younger ones be kind to the older ones; for if all children try faithfully to do their best, when they grow to be men and women, love will prevail and there can be no such thing as War. Be with those who stay and those who go, and, if it be Thy will, bring us together again in Thy good time. Amen."

Evelyn had been sure she should wake early in the morning and say good-bye to her dear Blue Aunt, but she sat up so late she did not wake until she heard the front door shut with a bang. Then she scrambled out of bed and ran to the window.

"She's going! She's going!" she cried to Prue and Nancy.

They rubbed their eyes and tried to get up, but the bed was warm and comfortable, and the room was cold.

Aunt Hilda, in her new fur coat, was walking down the brick walk to the waiting sleigh. Evelyn's father was on one side of her and Jim on the other side, and he had hold of her hand. Jim's sturdy little figure was walking along with a stride as much like his father's as his small legs could make it.

Evelyn shed a few tears as she saw her aunt whirled away out of her sight.

"Come and get back into bed again; it is n't time to get up," said Prue, in her cheerful voice. "It's going to be a lovely day, and there'll be coasting. Are n't you glad I am going to stay two whole weeks?"

So Evelyn dried her eyes and thought how glad she was to have a visit from darling Prue.



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