Dorothy Dainty at the Stone House

Amy Brooks

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AT THE STONE HOUSE

"THREE FOR LUCK!" CRIED DOROTHY.—*Page 3.*

DOROTHY DAINTY AT THE STONE HOUSE

BY

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WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY THE AUTHOR

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DOROTHY DAINTY AT THE STONE HOUSE

CHAPTER I

THREE FOR LUCK

AT the far end of the great garden stood a fine old sun-dial, surrounded by phlox and geraniums, because those sturdy plants liked the burning of the sun as well as did the dial.

In the center of the garden, the lovely fountain danced gayly upward, flinging its glittering spray broadcast, whenever the breeze passed that way.

The children liked to watch the shadow on the dial as it slowly moved along; they thought it great sport to sail tiny boats on the fountain basin, and they laughed when the mischievous breeze made them capsize; but best of all they loved the old stone pedestal, capped with a shallow bowl that always held a cool little pool of water for the tiny birds to drink.

Like the sun-dial, it stood in the center of a mass of flowers, and always there were birds hovering over it, now drinking, now bathing with a great fluttering of wings. One morning Dorothy and Nancy ran down to the drinking basin, Dorothy saying on the way, "Remember, I said, 'If there are three birds drinking, Betty is coming, but if there are only two, she isn't.' "

"O dear! I do hope there will be more than two," said Nancy. "Sometimes there are a dozen."

"That would be just as bad," said Dorothy. "If there are just three, I'll *know* she's coming. Why, there aren't *any!*"

"Oh, that's because they're just coming," Nancy said, "for I know they are on their way."

With a whir of wings, three twittering little sparrows perched upon the edge of the bowl.

"Three for luck!" cried Dorothy, pointing to the birds.

"And they stay there drinking, and just three of them!" Nancy said.

"I'm *sure* that Betty is coming!" declared Dorothy. She clasped Nancy's hand, and they skipped along the path, singing gayly: "She's coming! She's coming! Surely, surely coming!"

Little Fluff was greatly excited, and raced wildly after them, barking loudly, although he had no idea what it was all about.

At a turn of the path, a dapper lad came forward to meet them.

"Oh, Jimmy! Jimmy Harkins!" cried Nancy, "we're glad to see you."

"Indeed we are," said Dorothy, as she took the letter that he offered her.

"This came to the office, because it was addressed, 'Care of Mr. Rudolph Dainty,' and when your father saw it, he said, 'Dorothy is so eager to have letters from her friends that I'll not allow her to wait till four this afternoon, so, James,' he always calls me James, 'you may take it out to Merrivale now,' so here I am."

"I ought to remember to call you 'James,' " Nancy said, "but it doesn't sound as if we used to play together, and ever since that night when you took me safely back to the dear ones that loved me, I seem to have to say 'Jimmy.' "

There was a bit of moisture in the lad's honest eyes when he said, "I guess I'd rather you would, Nancy. 'James' sounds more grown-up at the office, and I'm working hard to help all I can, and get ahead, but the girls and boys I've always known can just go right on calling me 'Jimmy.' "

Then he turned to Dorothy.

"Just look and see if you have to answer right off, for if you do, I'll take it to the office, and mail it for you."

Eagerly she opened and read the first sentence:

"DEAR DOROTHY; DEAR NANCY:

"I shall be with you to-morrow. I don't know when the train reaches Merrivale, because I have to change twice on the way."

She turned the page, and Betty's autograph looked up at her.

"Oh, Jimmy! Hurry right back to my

father and ask him to telegraph to Betty and to say that we are expecting her. Here! I'll tear off the address from the bottom of the page, so you can give it to him," she said.

Jimmy took the slip of paper, and was off, calling, "Good-bye," as he ran.

Mrs. Dainty had urged Betty to come to the Stone House and make a little visit before school opened.

Betty was going back to the school at Glenmore, and when she learned that Dorothy and Nancy were to spend the winter in Merrivale, she was very eager to accept the invitation.

When Mrs. Dainty examined the timetable, she at once saw that Betty could not arrive at Merrivale before afternoon, and that it would be on a train that came in at four or six o'clock.

"And it's only ten o'clock, now!" said Dorothy, with as droll an expression as if she had declared that Betty could not arrive for a month.

Mollie Merton and Flossie Barnet were away, so they roamed through the gardens, talking of Betty, of Valerie Dare, who had been her chum; they planned more things to be done for Betty's pleasure than could possibly be enjoyed in so short a visit, and then just as they were thinking that longer waiting would be impossible, a handsome car sped up the driveway, and Betty, bright, laughing Betty, sprang out to greet them.

After a glad welcome, and much excited chatter during which neither had the least idea what the others were saying, it occurred to Betty that she had not dismissed the chauffeur.

"Oh, I forgot!" she said. "You need not

wait, Brayton. You must go right back, and tell Mother that I'm here, safe and sound, at the loveliest place in the world."

"All right, Miss Betty," he said, touching his cap, and off he spun, and soon was out of sight, hidden by the trees on the avenue.

"He'll have to come for you if you are longed-for at home, for we'll *never* let you leave here unless he does!" declared Dorothy.

"And wasn't it funny how I wrote that I was coming by train? You see I thought it would be fun to come that way, but Mother thought it more comfortable than changing cars, and so she put off a trip that she had planned for herself, and sent me over here in our car, and here I am."

"And here you are," repeated Dorothy, "and Nancy and I were hoping that nothing would happen at the last moment that would keep you from us, but we have you now, Betty dear, and we are *so* glad."

Mrs. Dainty and Aunt Charlotte gave her a loving greeting, and when she went up to her room to freshen up after the long trip, she found a charming room, all rose-color and white, reserved for her, and she sank into the low rocker to draw off her gloves, while she gazed about. It was a lovely room, and everything that could add to her comfort was there. She went over to the window and looked out. How beautiful was the great garden, with its giant trees, its wealth of flowers. The breeze that blew in was the hot breeze that August always gives.

Betty chose a cool green muslin frock, and having tied her hair with a ribbon that matched it, she ran down the stairway, and out on the porch.

"Over here!" called Dorothy, and Betty ran to join them.

It was cool out under the trees, and the big red hammock easily held three, while little Fluff sat on the path facing them, and looked from one face to the other as if trying to understand what they were saying.

"Tell us the news since we left Foam Ridge," said Dorothy; Nancy adding, "It's only a little while since we left there, but I suppose a few things have happened."

"Oh, ever so many things have happened, and I'd like to tell them all at once, but I can't, so I'll tell you first about Geraldine.

"You know she and her aunt went up to New York before you left. They wanted to know the earliest date when Geraldine could begin to study dancing with the man who taught Nancy.

"Mrs. Carrolton knew that Mrs. Dainty

told her that Bonfanti lived on a horrid street, and that she would not advise any one to go there. That Nancy studied with him only because her old Uncle Steve had stolen her and placed her there. She told her, besides, that Nancy's mother was a great dancer, so it was natural for Nancy to dance. You know that Geraldine was clumsy when she tried to do ordinary dances, so how must she have looked trying fancy dancing!

"Well, less than a week after you left, Mrs. Carrolton and Geraldine came back to Foam Ridge.

"They set out to see Bonfanti, but one look at the dark, dirty alley where he lived made them believe all that Mrs. Dainty had said.

"Then some one told them of another teacher, who charged a huge price for instruction, and whose name was well known. They went to him, and were more angry than before, for after looking sharply at Geraldine for a few moments, he turned to Mrs. Carrolton and said:

" 'Madam, it is of no use any. No girls wid dem feets and dose arm could dance. You know not dat? You should. You have only to look.

" 'It is enough. Good day.'

"You wouldn't have thought she would have told that," said Betty, "but she was so mad that she had to tell some one, and Geraldine went up and down the beach telling that she thought it odd that dancing-teachers were so dull. That three of them had told her that they did not think that she could do fancy dancing.

" 'Did they let you try?' Susannah Searles asked, and Geraldine said:

" 'Of course they did, and they told Aunty that I was naturally awkward, and that I had no idea of keeping time to the music. The idea! I'm *great* on time. I should think he might have seen that.' "

No wonder the three little friends laughed at the thought that Geraldine could surely dance, only no one was interested to teach her.

"Now let me tell you about Antony Marx. Last Sunday he passed the hotel on the way to Sunday School. He was all dressed up, and he looked just like a dark, handsome city boy.

"Archie St. Clair and Geraldine were on the big hotel piazza, and Archie did a mean thing. You know he is pale and sissy looking, and when he saw Antony, I suppose he was jealous because Antony looked so fine and strong, so he shouted at him:

" 'Say, haven't you forgot your fish basket?'

"Antony clenched his fists tighter, but he didn't answer Archie at all.

"A few days after that Archie got into an old boat that was high and dry on the sand, and after a while he fell asleep. Before he awoke the tide had come in and the old boat was just starting out to sea. It would rock and sway when the big wave struck it. Then it would dance a little way toward the sea when the wave ran back.

"He didn't dare to climb out when the waves retreated, for fear of wetting his feet, and yet every time the boat slid a bit he knew that he was floating a little farther toward the sea.

"It did look silly that a boy as big as he was would sit in that boat and just whimper, instead of jumping out while he had the chance."

"But he never acted as if he were at all brave,'' Dorothy said, ''but,'' with a kind thought she added, ''perhaps that was because he wasn't well.''

''Dorothy, you're a dear,'' said Betty, ''and you'd make an excuse for any boy or girl that you know, but one thing is sure, Antony wouldn't act like a sissy if he was sick.

''Well, to go on with the story. When the waves succeeded in getting the boat out into the surf, Archie simply shrieked. Just then Antony, rowing the *Shell,* came flying over the waves, singing gayly:

'' 'Oh, a sailor's life is the life for me,
Look, my lads, how the wind blows free,
Over the foam we gayly ride,
A sailor's lass is a sailor's pride.'

'' 'Hello! What's the matter? Got a crab down in the bottom of the boat a-nipping your toes?' shouted Antony, laughing.

"'Help me! Get me back to shore!' howled Archie.

"'Oh, is that all?' said Antony. 'If I get you back on land, how long will it be before you call me "Fishy" and poke fun at my clothes?'"

"That served him just right," said Nancy.

"And what did he say?" Dorothy asked.

"Say!" repeated Betty, laughing. "Why, he just wailed:

"'Hurry, hurry! I promise never to say those things again!'

"Antony rowed alongside, tied the other boat to the *Shell,* and then rowed ashore.

"When the boats were beached, Antony took hold of Archie St. Clair's collar, and lifted him out like a little dog.

"'Oh, thank you,' he began, but Antony just put out his hand as if to say: 'Stop that.'

" 'But I'm so grateful,' whined Archie.

" 'You can prove that by keeping your promise,' said Antony. He sprang into his own boat and rowed off toward the point, singing:

" 'Oh, a sailor's life is the life for me.' "

"Archie *ought* to keep his promise," said Dorothy.

"Don't worry about Archie," Betty said, with a laugh, "for already he's bending himself nearly double when he says 'Good morning' to Antony, if they happen to meet.

"There's other news," said Betty, "but I can't seem to think what it is now."

"Well, we'll have a lovely time while you're here, Betty, but right now I wish we had some smart news to tell. We've not seen many of the boys and girls since we came home, so if there's news, we haven't heard it," said Nancy.

"Oh, oo! We have a bit of news that we can tell!" cried Dorothy, springing from the hammock, and dancing around.

"What is it?" questioned Nancy, her eyes wide with surprise.

"Patricia Lavine has decided what kind of a dog her pet is, and she says it's a Pick-an-dish Spanrel!"

"Why, Dorothy Dainty, that funny-looking dog that she picked up at Glenmore wasn't any special kind of a dog. He was just 'dog,' that's all," Betty said.

"Well, that's what she calls him now, and the boys keep asking her to tell them just what kind he is, so she'll say it again, and then they simply roar. Jack Tiverton delights in teasing her. I do wish he wouldn't," Dorothy concluded.

"Oh, Dorothy, how I *do* wish that you and Nancy were coming back to Glenmore."

"I'd like to be with you, Betty, and there were ever so many nice girls there that we liked, and would be glad to see again, but we became homesick, and, truly, this year I'm glad we're to be at home."

"And a lovely home it is," said Betty.

CHAPTER II

A JOLLY AFTERNOON

"I HAVE a little surprise for you to-day," Mrs. Dainty said one morning. "It is too early to give a large party," she continued, "but not a bit too early to invite a few merry friends to meet Betty, and every invitation that I sent out has been promptly accepted."

"Oh, what a lovely surprise!" said Dorothy and Nancy as if with one voice.

"And I never dreamed —" Betty hesitated, but her eyes were bright.

"Of course you didn't dream, dear," Mrs. Dainty said, "so you will enjoy the gay party all the more. I rather think the lively guests will be prompt at five this afternoon, so you three little girls must be nicely dressed and ready to receive the first one that appears."

"To-day!" said Dorothy.

"This afternoon!" said Nancy.

"At five o'clock!" chimed in Betty.

Mrs. Dainty looked from one bright face to the other, enjoying their delight. She had meant to surprise them, and she had succeeded.

"It is to be an outdoor and indoor party," she said, "and I set the hour at five because it will be beginning to be cool by that time, and growing cooler all the time."

"There'll be music?" Dorothy asked.

"Music and flowers and a little feast, dear," Mrs. Dainty said. "All the important things are arranged, but some little matters need my attention, so I'll leave you to enjoy the morning together, while I make everything complete."

It was too sultry to enjoy lively games, so they strolled up one shady path and down another until they reached the fountain, where they sat down upon a long marble seat.

They felt cooler watching the spray, and Nancy proposed that they take turns telling fairy tales.

"I remember one that is all about a fountain, and it's called 'The Fountain of Life,' " said Nancy, "so I'll tell that."

She told the story well, and they enjoyed it.

"My turn next," said Dorothy, "and I'll tell about the Princess Flutterlocks, who was changed into a fountain."

It proved to be a lovely story, but when Betty's turn came, she stared at Dorothy, then at Nancy, then she shook her head. "I could listen for hours while you are telling them," she said, "but I never could tell a story so it would be interesting. I love to read, and I remember what I read, but I think I spoil it by the way I repeat it."

"Then we'll tell more stories if you enjoy hearing them," Dorothy said, but for a time they fell to wondering how many guests had been on the list that Mrs. Dainty had mailed, and in eagerly talking about the party the forenoon fled, so that just when Nancy remembered that they were to tell more fairy tales for Betty's delight, they were called in for lunch.

Much had happened while they had been out in the sunny garden.

The old gardener, under Mrs. Dainty's direction, brought potted plants of every sort, foliage plants, flowering plants and trailing vines, and placed them in the great hall, the dining-room, the living-room and drawing-room, making the house a bower of glowing color.

After lunch the time seemed to fly.

Sweet-scented flowers were needed for the table, and Dorothy gathered forget-me-nots, Nancy, the mignonette, while Betty brought verbenas of every hue, roses, and garden pinks, until the tall crystal center-piece looked like a fountain of flowers.

The three little friends were charming, when, as it neared five, they stood waiting to greet their guests.

Dorothy in rose-color, Betty in buff, and Nancy in light blue stood near the tall clock, and Mrs. Dainty smiled as she noticed that all three were eagerly watching its hands.

"Five minutes of five! Oh, dear, I *do* hope some of the girls and boys will be early, because — There! I hear voices now!" cried Dorothy.

Sure enough, Mollie Merton, Flossie Barnet, Katie Dean, her cousin Reginald, Jack Tiverton, and Sidney Merrington came trooping in, and so friendly were they, so well pleased with Betty, that she felt as if she had always known them. Mollie and Flossie kept close beside her.

"My cousin is late," said Reginald, "but he couldn't be prompt. It takes Harry an awful lot of time to get his tie to just suit him, and I didn't have the patience to wait for him."

"Like my brother," said Sidney Merrington. "I left him still brushing the tuft of hair that always stands on end. Here he comes now, and it looks just the same. I told him he was wasting time."

Tess Haughton came running up the

steps. "Come on, Arabella," she called, "you and Leander are late now."

Arabella never hurried.

She was at the far end of the driveway when Tess called to her, and it was surely fifteen minutes later before she arrived.

"There's one more girl than there are boys," some one remarked. One of the boys who was standing in the hall began to count.

"Just even," contradicted a jolly voice.

"That's Uncle Harry!" cried Flossie. "He said he was coming."

"Sure, I was coming," he declared. "Didn't you tell me last night that one of the boys invited had not yet returned from his vacation?" he asked of Mrs. Dainty.

"I certainly did," said Mrs. Dainty, "and you kindly agreed to take his place, and be 'one of the boys.'"

"I'll do my best," Uncle Harry said in such a comically meek tone that they all laughed.

"Well, it's no joke for a fellow my size to take the place of a small boy," he said.

"Oh, but you'll do beautifully," said Flossie, in such an encouraging voice that they all laughed, and just at that moment sweet music floated down the hall.

No one had seen the musicians arrive, but there they were on the carved gallery over the stairway, and sweetly they played with harp and violins. Now, with light drums and bells, they played a fox-trot, and the children found that a canvas had been stretched over the floor of the living-room that they might dance.

Jack Tiverton lost no time in asking Betty to dance, and down the room they spun, Reginald with Dorothy, Flossie with tall, handsome Uncle Harry. Katie Dean with her cousin, Reginald, Mollie with Sidney Merrington, his brother, Arthur, with Tess Haughton.

Arabella, staring through her spectacles, and her tall cousin, Leander, were the only ones who did not dance.

It was a pretty sight, but Arabella did not think so, and for that there were two very good reasons.

First, she did not care for music, and had not the least idea of time. The second reason was even stronger, and that was that she never could bear to see any one do anything that she herself could not do.

She looked up at Leander, sure that he would agree with whatever she said.

"Looks sort of silly, doesn't it, Leander, bobbing around to music?" she whispered, but Leander gave her a surprise.

"Looks nice to me," he said; "I guess I'll learn this winter."

"Why, *Le*–ander Correyville!" she said. "Are you crazy?"

"Yes," he drawled, "crazy to learn."

It was most surprising, because Leander had always looked and acted as if he were half asleep, and no one had ever known him to show the slightest interest in anything, yet here he was actually wishing that he could do so lively a thing as to dance.

"Well, if you go to dancing-school, Leander, you have to show me just a little about dancing," declared Arabella.

"Ain't crazy, are you?" drawled Leander.

"No," said Arabella, "but I'm sick of not taking part in things."

It was cool in the great garden now, and the little guests ran out to enjoy outdoor games.

It was a great place for hide-and-seek because there were so many delightful hiding-places.

Little Fluff, with a huge pink satin bow on his collar, raced ahead to hide behind a clump of shrubbery, in order to rush out and bark when they overtook him.

The musicians were now on the great piazza, and while the children enjoyed the merry games, the music gave them added pleasure.

Whatever the games had been, Jack Tiverton had kept as close as possible to Betty Chase.

She was so bright, so honestly friendly, so full of fun, that he found her a jolly playmate, and he heartily wished that she lived in Merrivale.

And now the musicians were playing a lively march, the signal for all to hasten to the dining-room and enjoy a little feast.

And a feast it was, indeed.

Dainty sandwiches, delicious ices and cakes, baskets heaped with all kinds of fruits, chocolates and bonbons, everything that could make the feast tempting.

Tess Haughton whispered to Arabella, who sat beside her:

"I wonder why Patricia isn't here? It would just suit her."

"What did you say?" replied Arabella so loudly that those who sat near her heard, and wondered what Tess had said.

Tess blushed and stammered, "Oh, never mind," and although Arabella nudged her persistently, she busied herself with her bonbons, and talked with those who sat near her, but never once did she give slightest heed to Arabella.

After the feast had been fully enjoyed, Mrs. Dainty proposed a new sort of game, and it proved to be a genuine fun-maker. It was called, "Hunting for the Princess."

"Sidney Merrington will be the first prince," Mrs. Dainty said, "and as this game will test your wits I have small blocks of paper, and pencils for each of you. Come and get them, and then the fun will begin."

She placed a gilded paper crown on his head, saying: "Here are pencil and paper, Sidney, and on it in rhyme you must state that you are in search of a princess."

They all laughed, because they thought that Sidney, quiet Sidney, who detested writing a composition, would surely say he could not make a rhyme.

Instead, he took the pencil, and after a moment, he laughed and read what he had written.

"I'm no poet, but I'll search the town
To find a girl to share my crown."

"Good," said Mrs. Dainty.

"Is it you, Mollie?" questioned Sidney. Mollie laughed, and bent over her paper, finally, with Mrs. Dainty's help, producing this very discouraging rhyme for Sidney:

"I won't cook, nor sew, nor mend,
So I'll only be your friend."

"Is it you, Betty?" questioned Sidney.

"I can answer without pencil or paper," said Betty.

"I want a taller prince than you,
So you may go to Timbuctoo."

Sidney joined in the laughter that the lines provoked.

"Here, Jack," he said, "you take the crown and see what luck you have in choosing a princess."

Jack put the crown on his head at a rakish angle, bit his pencil, frowning darkly, then began to scribble.

This is what he wrote:

"I'm hunting for a princess, too.
Say, Miss Flossie, is it you?"

"A bigger prince it sure must be,
Uncle Harry'll do for me,"

replied Flossie.

"Betty Chase, do take my part;
Will you share my crown and heart?"

wailed Jack, so comically that Betty had to wait until the laughter ceased before she could read her reply:

"It seems to me, of all the boys,
You really make the greatest noise,
I'll be your princess. With a will
I'll do my best to keep you still."

At last a princess had accepted, and forming a ring around Jack and Betty, they danced and skipped, singing:

"Round and round in a merry ring,
Jack is a prince who'll soon be king,
Good Queen Betty, his life to bless,
We wish them joy and happiness."

The game had been a fun-maker, and the one that followed awoke shouts of laughter.

"We will have a comic march next," Mrs. Dainty announced. "The girls may choose a boy, and the boys will choose a girl. Then the couple thus chosen will lead a grand march, doing any odd steps or figures that occur to them. The others who are marching must mimic the antics of the leading couple."

How they clapped and cheered!

"We've chosen Uncle Harry," Flossie said, a moment later.

"And we've chosen Tess Haughton," said Arthur Merrington.

"Come, Miss Tess," said Uncle Harry.

"We'll lead the march, and we'll show them a lively pace."

And a lively pace it proved to be. Through the drawing-room and hall, halfway up the stairs, and then down again, laughing as they went, led the gay couple. Again across the hall, out on the piazza, across the lawn, sometimes at the left of the walk, and sometimes at the right, but always doing the funniest figures, the others finding it a task to imitate their steps and gestures. Twice they circled the fountain, once through a tiny grove, over a low bit of wall and back again. A zigzag line to the house finished the march.

There was more dancing to sweet music, and the boys and girls were sincere when they said, as they were leaving, that it had been a jolly party.

"They were all so kind and friendly that

I did not feel a stranger among them,'' Betty said, when the last guest had departed.

''Part of it was you, Betty dear,'' said Mrs. Dainty. ''The boys and girls wanted to be nice to you, but you were very frank and friendly, too.''

''Oh,'' breathed Betty, with a flush of pleasure, ''I like to hear you say that, Mrs. Dainty, because I don't know how to do differently, yet one of the girls at Glenmore said that I ought to be more reserved. It didn't sound pleasant, and it made me uncomfortable, but when I told Mother, she said: 'Be just yourself, Betty, and be kind and friendly always.' ''

''Your mother is right,'' Mrs. Dainty said. ''Pay no heed to what some foolish girl may have said.''

''Mother said that, too,'' said Betty, with a laugh, ''and I'm sure she's right.''

The day after the party Betty, at the far end of the garden was walking slowly along beside the wall, looking intently under shrubbery, and in the grass as if searching for something.

"Here it is!" called a cheery voice, and Jack Tiverton looked over the wall, holding in his outstretched hand a ball.

"How do you know that's what I'm looking for?" laughed Betty.

"I'll give a girl's reason," Jack replied, teasingly. "I'll say I know just *because.*"

"All right, I'll keep the ball," said Betty, "but that's not what I was looking for."

"Well, then," said Jack, "tell me what the thing was that you were looking for, and I'll help you hunt for that."

"It's a pin that belongs to Aunt Charlotte," said Betty. "It disappeared yesterday, sometime during the party, or a bit earlier. She pinned her lace collar with it, and after every one had gone she missed it. She came down this path about a half-hour before any one had arrived, and she thinks it became unclasped, and fell off when she stooped to gather some flowers.''

''We'll have a great hunt for it,'' said Jack, ''but first I want to tell you something. I wish you were to stay here always, Betty. You're so honest, and such a playmate. You couldn't manage it, could you, to be our classmate here?''

The boy's voice was eager.

''Oh, I couldn't, Jack,'' was the quick reply, but the dark eyes showed that she was pleased.

''It's nice of you to like me, and I couldn't help thinking how friendly the boys and girls were. I enjoyed every minute of the party, and this surely is a lovely place to stay in, but home is home, Jack, and I have to go back. Father and Mother couldn't spare me, and — why, Jack, I couldn't spare them, either."

"I ought to know that," Jack said, "but I was only thinking of our end of it. As we were going home after the party yesterday, some one asked how long you were to stay with Dorothy, and no one seemed to know, but they all said they'd be glad if you were to stay always."

"Oh, they were good to say that," said Betty, "and now let's hunt for the pin. It is such a pretty thing, a little gold oval, framing an ivory miniature. It is the head of a lovely girl. Oh, I hope we find it! Dorothy and Nancy are hunting indoors, and I said I'd search here."

Along the walk came the gardener with wheelbarrow and hoe, at his daily task of

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keeping the great garden in order. A bit of rubbish attracted his attention and he paused to learn what it might be.

"Arrah! Now d'ye moind that!" he exclaimed. "It's not I nor you that arranges sich a nate pile as thot. Phat hov we here? Two shticks, two lamb-bones, a bit av rope, an empty shpool that once held thread, an' a lady's breast-pin. A foine collection, sure, an' Oi know who made it."

"Why, that is Aunt Charlotte's pin that we're all hunting for."

"Wal, ye don't hov ter hunt longer, but, whisht! Here he comes now, the wee, nimble imp. Now, thin, ye precious little rashcal! Who piled them things there? Answer me that. Who was it? Do ye know?"

"Look at Fluff!" cried Betty.

Erect on his stubby little hind legs he sat, whining as if asking for mercy.

"Don't that bate all?" said John. "How can ye punish a dog that's only a baby dog at thot, an' him lookin' so repintant? It's all roight, me foine pup. Ye hov me as aisy wid ye as Miss Dorothy is, an' that's sayin' some."

Fluff allowed John to pick up the pin, but he snatched the larger of the two bones and ran off up toward the house.

"That's a foine idee," shouted John, "kape a-runnin' till ye reach the dhrawin'-room, whin ye kin land the bone on the pian–y fer safe kapin'."

"Yesterday he was chasing butterflies, and barking when they flew away over the wall," said Betty.

"An' be the same token, 'twas nothin' so lovely as butterflies he was afther this mornin' early. No, indade, it was not. 'Twas an ould brindle cat, and the way she ran down the dhriveway ter git away fr'm him wad make ye laugh. Sure, if she once turned round the pup wad hov run ter me fer pertection. As it was, he chased her up an' down, an' had a foine time av it."

CHAPTER III

THE HUT ON THE MEADOW

BETTY stood in the gateway, looking off across the distant meadows to where a thin spiral of smoke curled from the chimney of a tiny cottage.

The morning sunlight filtered through the branches overhead, and she put up her hand to shade her eyes.

"What's the sight, Betty?" questioned Jack, who had seen her as he was walking along the avenue.

Reginald said it was wonderful to notice how often Jack "happened" to pass The Stone House.

"I was looking at that little house over there, and at the same time wishing that I could help Nancy," Betty said, so quietly that Jack turned to look at her.

"Why, Betty, any one would think that Nancy *lived* over in the hut. What has that place to do with Nancy, and why need you help her? I'm ready to do anything for Nancy or for you," he said, "but I don't see why —"

"Listen, Jack," said Betty, "while I tell you what happened at Foam Ridge."

Jack's eyes grew darker when he heard how old Bonfanti had shadowed Nancy, and he drew a long breath when he heard how Mr. Dainty had driven him out of town.

"But that cottage —" he interrupted.

"There's an old woman living there, who pretends to tell fortunes, and she told Nancy, or Dorothy, I've forgotten which, a lot of things that were true, and no wonder she could. The maid, Sue, knows her and really believes in her, and Sue is honest, but, oh, I do feel sure that that old woman learns things from Sue, and then tells them as if she were clever enough to tell them by magic power.''

''Does Nancy know the old woman?'' Jack asked in surprise.

''Only by what Sue has told her, and she just tells things for money, and I wish I could prove it,'' said Betty. ''Why, can't you see, Jack, that she's likely to tell Nancy that that horrid old Bonfanti is hanging around here, when it's not true at all, but it would frighten Nancy and Dorothy, if they heard that.''

For a moment they were silent. Then, like a flash, Jack saw a way in which to prove the old woman's ability, or lack of it.

''I'll tell you, Betty, I have it!'' he cried. ''Come on over to the little hut now. You know she's there, for you saw the smoke coming from the chimney. Get that long cape you saw Aunt Charlotte wearing yesterday, and don't tell where we're going. Hurry! Oh, but it's a big joke, and we'll have huge fun."

The long silk cape lay on the hall settle just where Aunt Charlotte had left it the night before, and Betty folded it, and tucked it under her arm. She felt a bit nervous lest the garment be missed, but she told herself that she would soon return with it. She wondered why Jack had wished her to bring it. Surely there was no need for a wrap on so warm a morning. She could hear Dorothy singing in an upper room, and Nancy was probably with her, and she slipped out, and across the lawn before they should miss her.

"Come on," said Jack, and together they

ran to the low wall that separated the great garden from the meadow land beyond, climbed over, and down on to the narrow footpath that led straight to the cottage.

For a time they trudged along in silence, then Betty said:

"It is so hot this morning, I can't think why you asked me to bring this long cape."

"I was just thinking we'd better stop here where this willow makes a little shade, and I'll tell you what we're to do. Just before you knock, you put the long cape on, and when she comes to the door, ask her to tell your fortune."

"But what has that to do with Nancy?" Betty asked.

"A whole lot if I prove that she can't tell fortunes," Jack said. "We're both dark, so we'll pass for brother and sister, and I'll stand just behind you, and look over your shoulder at her, just as if I was awfully interested to know what she was telling you.

"Now, here's the joke, and it's a fine way to test her.

"You keep your right arm and hand behind you under the cape, while I'll slip *my* right hand out from under the cape for her to read my palm. She'll think it's your hand, and, if we can keep from laughing, we'll surely trip her."

Betty's eyes twinkled. The trick was surely worth the trying.

Eagerly she slipped the cape over her shoulders, and together they hurried toward the cottage.

Their knock was promptly answered, and the old woman was willing to tell Betty's fortune, and invited them to enter.

"Can't you tell it just as well out here in the garden?" Betty asked.

"It's hot indoors," urged Jack.

"Yer sister'd be cooler with that wrap off," said the old woman.

"Oh, let her keep it on. She likes to wear it," said Jack.

"Well, children do have queer notions," was the tart reply. "Now let me see yer right hand."

Out from the silken folds of the cape Jack thrust his hand, and Betty had a task to keep from laughing when the old woman took it and peered through her glasses at it.

"Ye must play ball," she remarked.

"I do," said Betty, which was true.

"Do'no's I ever see such a strong hand on a girl. Wal, let's see what yer palm has ter tell."

For a long time she peeped and squinted at the hand that she believed was Betty's own, while Betty, under the long cape, could feel Jack's arm shaking, and she feared that at any moment, Jack would be unable to control the wild laughter that was shaking him.

His face was sober as that of a judge, however, as he peeped over Betty's shoulder.

One might have thought that all his hopes hung upon what the old woman might say.

"You're a lucky girl!" was the woman's first statement.

"You'll be very tall when you're grown up, like your mother's people."

She paused and looked up at Betty. "Seems ter me ye're tur'ble nervous. What makes yer hand shake so? There ain't nothin' ter be afeared of."

Betty's cheeks were flaming.

"Take yer cape off. Ye're too warm. Here, le'me help ye off with it."

Betty backed away from her.

"No, no!" she cried, "I'm to surely keep it on."

"She has to!" Jack added. "She don't *dare* to leave it off."

"Been sick?" queried the old woman.

"No," said Betty. "Please go on."

"Yer a queer one fer notions," said the old woman, "but let me see. Yes, ye'll be rich some day. Yer old grandmother, when she dies, will leave ye a big fortune, an' ye'll be either a artist or a fortune-teller, jest like me."

"Oo–oo!" exclaimed Betty.

"Better be a artist," the woman advised. "It means more money. I see by yer palm that ye'll sure marry a rich man. That's all there is ter tell. Fifty cents, please."

Jack withdrew his hand to get the money from his pocket, but Betty, forgetting that Jack's hand should offer it, thrust out her own slender hand and dropped the money in the woman's hand.

Instantly she saw her blunder, for the old woman's face went white with anger, and she reached out her bony fist to strike Betty, but Betty dodged and ran.

Jack faced her.

"Would you strike a little girl?" he asked, his dark eyes flashing.

"She's a cheat, an' ye're another! 'Twas a boy's hand, *your* hand she let me read!" shrieked the angry old woman. "I'll have her punished fer playin' a trick on me. Cheatin' like that!"

"Is that any worse than pretending to tell fortunes when you know you can't do it, and taking folks' money for it?" said Jack.

How sturdy he looked, never flinching when she lunged toward him.

"Look out!" he warned. "My father —"

"Who is yer father, lad?" she asked in a different voice.

"My father is John Tiverton."

The woman dropped to her knees, and began to whimper. She offered the money that Betty had given her, that Jack might return it. She feared Lawyer Tiverton, who was known to be able and resolute.

"You can keep that," Jack said, "but I don't believe you can keep on getting money that way. It's not fair," and he turned and ran to overtake Betty. Half-way across the meadow they were glad to stop for another taste of the cool shade of the big willow tree.

"My, but wasn't it provoking after we had heard all she had to say, that I could so stupidly forget and put my own hand out with the money?" said Betty. "But that is just like me. If I get into any scrape at school, I never can get out of it. I always am sure to let something out that gives me away."

"That's because you're so honest, Betty, that you don't know how to be sly," Jack said. And now they saw Dorothy and Nancy racing toward them.

"We've been hunting everywhere for you, Betty," Dorothy said.

"And I wouldn't wonder if Nancy had been hunting for Aunt Charlotte's cape," said Betty, "but wait until we find a cool place in the garden, and I'll tell you where I've been with it."

"They couldn't guess in a month," said Jack. "Whew! But we had a happening!"

Together they told how Jack had thrust his hand forward from the silken folds of the cape, and how the old woman, believing it to be Betty's hand, had pretended to read her fortune.

"And she said I'd be tall, like mother's people, when I'm grown up, and — well, the joke is that mother's people are all short."

"And she said your grandmother, when she died, would leave you a fortune," said Jack.

"But that was rather queer because both my grandmothers died before I was born. Oh, and I almost forgot to tell you, that I'm to be an artist, or a fortune-teller, just like her. I think I'd prefer to be an artist, but there's only one thing that makes that impossible. I've not the least scrap of talent for drawing or painting.

"And there's one thing more that she told, and that was that I am to marry a rich man."

"Well, you'll have to wait some time to prove that," said Jack, "but say, girls! What do you think of a woman who gets money that way?"

"Why, she's mean to do it," said Dorothy, "but I would have liked to see Jack's hand held out in place of yours, Betty."

Nancy laughed at the joke, but after a pause she said: "I'm glad I know that she isn't worth listening to."

CHAPTER IV

PATRICIA LAVINE

PATRICIA stood beside a low wall that stretched from the corner of the narrow street on which her aunt lived, to the pretty bridge that spanned the winding river. She was undecided as to what to do.

"Ye kin stay out till I'm ready fer ye ter help me," her aunt had said, "an' don't go so fur off that ye can't hear me when I holler," she added, "fer ye well know that when I want ye, I *do* want ye!"

"I know it," Patricia had replied, and now she stood sullenly kicking pebbles into little heaps, and wondering if it would be safe to race up the street, before her aunt could stop her. She would not dare to return before nightfall. What would her aunt do when she returned? That part of it was not pleasant to think of. She decided to go back to the little yard, and while she waited to be called in, give the pup a little more training.

He surely needed it.

When Patricia told him to lie down he was usually seized with a lively desire to go somewhere, and would prance about her, barking shrilly all the time. He was always glad of an invitation to go for a walk until Patricia put on his leash, when he would sit down, and refuse to budge.

Patricia started toward the house, but the pup turned to race toward the bridge. The leash slipped from Patricia's hand, and Algernon was off at a mad gallop, his short legs fairly flying.

At the corner of the next street an empty keg lay in the gutter where it had fallen from a passing team. Algernon dodged around it, Patricia tripped over it, scrambled to her feet, and was off in pursuit, the pup gaining speed every moment.

A thin, angular woman leaned from an attic window, and shouted:

"Patricia! Pa–*tri*–cia! Now, don't that jest beat all? The louder I call, the faster she runs!"

She closed the window, and went down the narrow stairway to the back door, and looked out.

Patricia was not in sight.

"Didn't know but she might hev come back," said the woman, "but I ought ter have known better."

She shaded her eyes with her hand. "I must make her mind," she said.

Patricia had not once thought that her aunt might be calling to her, and continued chasing Algernon, until, nearly breathless, she sat down upon the wall, whereupon, the pup, having tired of the race, came running back, and crouched on the ground at her feet. His wide-open mouth made him look as if he considered the whole matter a fine joke, and was broadly grinning at it.

"You little tease!" said Patricia, "I'll make you wish you hadn't run away! I've a piece of our old clothes-line in my pocket, and I'll tie that to your collar and make you wear that home. I meant to lengthen the leash with it, but now I won't. I'll make you wear it!"

Patricia was not in a pleasant mood. She had thought Algernon quite fine until she had seen Dorothy's little dog, "Fluff," when she had at once become envious. She knew that she could not purchase a dog like that. That would cost too much.

She had wondered if a handsome collar would make the pup look finer. No, he'd be the same comical pup whatever his collar might be. Underneath the rope that she had thrust into her pocket, were a few cookies that she had snatched from the closet.

She broke off a bit and tossed it to the pup, who promptly swallowed it whole, and looked for more.

Another small dog that had been watching the feast from a distance, approached cautiously, and looked up at Patricia with eyes that begged for a bit. She tossed him a small piece of cookie, then another, and another bit, until Algernon began to whimper lest he was not getting his share.

The newcomer was only a pup, and when

he saw no more cookie coming his way, he licked his chops over the treat that he had enjoyed, and walked over to scrape acquaintance with Algernon, who edged away, a bit afraid of the stranger. He finally decided that he had nothing to fear, and soon the two were playing together.

Patricia watched their antics, laughing at their clumsy sport.

"Whose dog are you?" she asked, then.

"Why, you've no collar on!" she cried. "Well, then, I'll take you home and call you mine, and I'll walk through Merrivale with *two* dogs! I guess that's sweller than one dog, no matter how fine he is. Any one could have one dog, but there's not another girl in town that has two."

That was just like Patricia. She always thought quantity far more important than quality. A hat with a few fine flowers was not half so pleasing to her as a coarse straw loaded with cheap flowers. Now, the thought of parading through the town with two pups to accompany her filled her silly little heart with delight.

"I wonder what Aunty'll say when she sees us coming? Oh, I forgot! She certainly told me to stay *near* the house. I wonder if she has been calling me? Well, anyway, I didn't simply run away. I had to chase Algernon for fear I'd lose him, and I'm glad I did, for I found this other el'gant dog, so I now have two."

She drew the short length of clothes line from her pocket.

The pup looked as if he wondered what she intended to do, and edged away. She coaxed and petted him, and he allowed her to tie one end of the rope around his neck.

"I'm going to call you 'Lionel,' " she said, and the pup wagged his tail as if he did not care whether his name was to be Lionel or Ebenezer, so long as he had found some one who cared to own him.

The walk home was vexing, and it looked as if it would be some time before either pup would agree peaceably to wear the collar and leash.

Algernon yanked and pulled in an effort to slip his collar and escape, while Lionel sat down in the middle of the road, and with his hind paw tried to scratch off the offending rope.

"If we don't get home pretty soon, Aunty will be out after us," said Patricia.

Lionel wanted to go, while Algernon sat down in the road.

"O dear!" cried Patricia. "Will they *ever* learn to mind?"

It occurred to her that if her aunt were angry, it would not be a good time to appear with another pet, so she went around by a back street, and entered the yard by the rear gate. She could not have done worse, for as she turned to close the gate behind her, her aunt appeared in the back doorway, her sharp eyes fairly blazing.

"Well, if you ain't 'nough ter try the patience of a saint, Patricia! Here I've been callin' an' shoutin' ter ye the entire forenoon, an' when ye do at last appear, ye're luggin' home another cur with ye. D'ye think this house is a animal cage or a hotel fer dogs of all kinds?

"Well, it *ain't,* an' let me tell ye, I ain't goin' ter feed every stray cur ye choose ter lug home."

"You don't have to," Patricia said, sturdily. "You said you wouldn't feed Algernon, so I've bought food for him out

"O DEAR!" CRIED PATRICIA. "WILL THEY *EVER* LEARN TO MIND?"
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of my 'lowance that Pa sends me. I can feed Lionel, too.''

"Such names fer pups! My! Ef somebody giv ye a third one, ye couldn't dodge naming him 'Maximilian.' "

"I would if I *wanted* to,'' snapped Patricia.

"Well, le'me tell ye now, don't ye dare ter lug home 'nother pup, fer I won't stand it. Where d'ye mean ter keep this one?''

Patricia knew that that was the same as saying that Lionel might stay, so she answered, slowly:

"I thought the two pups could stay out in that little shed next your hen-coop.''

"That'll be rather cool in winter.''

"When it's cold I'll let them stay all night in my room.''

"Good land! What a plan! Well, the pups can stand it if you can.''

"Well, I can," cried Patricia, glad that her aunt had not refused to accept Lionel as a member of the family.

"I almost wish I'd named you 'Maximilian,'" she said as she untied the rope.

"I s'pose ye *could* change his name now," her aunt said with an odd smile.

"I guess I'll call him Lionel," Patricia said, "because Maximilian would be rather hard to call if I wanted him to come right in. I don't think I could say it quick if I tried."

"Well, put 'em in the little shed now, and come in and help me. I've been waitin' two hours fer ye."

Patricia dared not object. She was to have the fun of keeping both pups, and she went toward the house quite willingly.

That afternoon she bought a collar and leather leash for Lionel. With both pups thus equipped, she believed that training them would be easy.

The next morning they had their first taste of discipline, and they heartily disliked it.

Algernon seemed to take it as a joke, and would roll over on his back and kick, and chew the leash, but Lionel took an entirely different view of it. He was sulky and would crouch on the ground, lick his chops, and refuse to stir.

"You certainly are the most provoking creatures that I ever saw. I wonder if you know that you are acting silly? Well, you are!"

It happened that at that moment both pups sprang to their feet.

"I do believe you know what I said," she cried.

For a second they eyed her, their ears

erect, then out of the yard and up the street they bolted, Patricia after them at top speed.

Now that they chanced to feel like moving, it was just the time to overtake them, catch their leashes, and parade through the town with her two pets.

Algernon stumbled over a small, dry branch that had fallen from a tree, Lionel paused to examine it, and Patricia took the chance to grasp their leashes.

Off they bolted, Patricia screaming for them to stop.

It was just when they were nearing The Stone House that a droll thing happened.

Patricia was holding her chin very high, and trying to follow the galloping pups with dignity, when suddenly Algernon put on speed, while Lionel decided to hang back.

For a short distance she endured it, when — Was that a giggle? There was no one in sight. She looked this way and that, and thought she must have imagined it.

"Come, come!" she cried, stooping to give Lionel a push.

Algernon turned to learn what was the matter, and then the two comical-looking pups ducked their naughty heads and away they flew, Patricia finding it a task to keep up with them.

It was not a giggle that followed her. It was roars of laughter, and it was more than one voice that laughed.

She looked over her shoulder to make an outrageous face, but still there was no one in sight.

"I know where they are," she said. "They're up in those big maple-trees, and there's at least three boys laughing. I know one was Reginald Dean, and I'm sure one was Jack Tiverton. I wonder who the other one was? Well, whoever they were, I don't care. They're envious because I've two lovely dogs."

One would have thought the pups tireless, but after a half-hour's romp they became quiet, and to Patricia's delight, started toward home in a very tractable mood. As she was passing Flossie Barnet's house, she saw Jack Tiverton sitting on the stone wall whittling. His face was so sober that you would have wondered if he knew how to laugh.

"I see you have two dogs now," he said. "What kind are they?"

"I've told you a half-dozen times that Algernon is a *Pick-an-dish spanrel,* and I don't really know what Lionel is, but I think, when he grows up, he'll be some kind of a *poach dog.*"

Jack tried not to laugh, but gave up the effort, and simply roared. What bright boy could help it?

"Well, I never!" cried Patricia, and for a moment she stood looking at the shrieking boy, who held his sides, and rocked back and forth upon the wall.

Then she stamped her foot and walked on down the avenue.

The two pups were quite sober now, and Patricia was thankful for that. She was out of sight of the laughing boy, and near the corner of her own street, when Algernon stopped, glanced toward Lionel, then made pretense of biting him, and round and round Patricia they chased each other, winding the two leashes so tightly around her ankles that she could not step.

"Stop it!" she screamed. "Stop it this minute!" at the same time turning around and around in an effort to unwind the leashes that tied her ankles.

Up from the back yard of a dingy house ran a fat little boy.

"Oh, thee 'em! Thee 'em!" he cried in a thick lisp. "Go it! Go it! Thee 'em make the dirt fly!"

Turning toward the house, he yelled: "Mandy! come out here an' thee the thight. The pupth hath wound Patritha up juth like a clock, only she can't go, 'cauth her legth 'ith tied!"

Mandy, a tall, overgrown girl, came rushing out.

"Oh, *do* help me stop them, before they knock me down," wailed Patricia.

"Is my brother a dirty little pig?" demanded Mandy. "You called him that the other day. If ye still think so I won't help ye, but ef ye've changed yer mind, I will."

"Oh, no, no!" cried Patricia, regardless of the truth, "I ought not to have said it."

In a second Mandy's strong fingers had snatched the leashes, one in each hand, administered a smart slap on each pup, and they, too astonished to rebel, looked up at her as if they wondered why she had meddled in what was no affair of hers.

" 'F I was you I wouldn't go out on the street with those two rampageous pups. They might trip ye up sometime when there was no one 'round to help ye," Mandy said, but Patricia's courage had returned.

"Well, the next time I take them up town with me," she said, "I'll give them more training first."

"Wal, I mus' say, Patricia Lavine, ye do cut a figger, gal'vantin' long with two such lookin' pups. Why, ye don't lead them. They haul you. Don't ye know that?"

Patricia made no reply, nor did she thank Mandy for helping her. As she turned the corner of her street, she heard Chub, the dirty little boy, say:

"Them dogth ith horrid-lookin' dogths, ain't they, Mandy? I can't tell which ith horrider."

"I guess no one could. Why, land! I ain't got no style, but ye couldn't hire me ter go up-town with one of them critters, let alone two!"

Patricia hoped that her aunt had not seen their antics, but she had. She was at the gate, an odd expression on her face.

"Guess ye didn't enjoy yer walk much," she remarked.

"Well, I *did,*" Patricia said stubbornly. "They didn't act as well as they will when they get used to being taken out, but they'll behave better all the time."

"I should hope they would. My new neighbor was in one of the big houses up on the avenue, where she helps the maids when there's extra work, an' she said she seen ye, whirlin' 'round jest something redic-lous, 'n' she said ye couldn't help it with them pups on the rampage."

"Well, I don't know who she is, but I think she's horrid," said Patricia. "Every one's jealous because I've two lovely pups."

"Why, Patricia, ye sure do like 'em, but ye must see they're a funny-lookin' pair. I'm sure I can't tell which is the worst-lookin'. The fust one ye brung home from boardin'-school is a kind of a clown dog, but the new one is a reg'lar imp."

Patricia made no reply.

"Seems ter me ye've changed the fust one's name, ain't ye? Didn't ye call him 'Diogenes' when ye fust brung him home?"

"Why, yes," said Patricia. "I call him Algernon now, because I like it better."

"But he hadn't learned his other name," said her aunt.

"Well, I'd like to know if this isn't just the time to change it before he knows any name?"

"Sure," agreed her aunt, "and before he learns this one, ye may have time ter change it again. How would ye like 'Jehoshaphat'?"

CHAPTER V

WHAT NANCY SAID

"ISN'T it odd that Tess Haughton hasn't been over since the party?" Dorothy said one morning as, with Nancy, she was going down the stairway.

Nancy hesitated, then she said: "Haven't you noticed that Tess never likes to come when others are here?"

"How queer," said Dorothy, "but now you've said it, I seem to remember that she does stay away when others are with us. I wonder why. She surely is always welcome."

"I don't think it's that," Nancy said. "I think it is that she likes best to come when there's no one else here to interest us. I mean, I think she wants us to talk to, and listen to her. That's why she doesn't seem as happy at parties as the other girls do. It doesn't sound very pleasant to say, but I'd say it only to you, Dorothy."

It was as Nancy had said.

Tess had liked Betty Chase, as had all the boys and girls, but she was naturally selfish, and really wished to have all attention for herself.

Mollie and Flossie had been constantly at The Stone House, and even Katie, who lived the farthest away, had been over several times during Betty's visit.

Soon the delightful visit at The Stone House must end, for Betty had that morning received a loving letter from home, reminding her that she was to return to Glenmore, and that she must be at home that some plans might be made regarding her outfit for the school year.

The boys of the neighborhood were already enrolled at the school two stations beyond Merrivale, where they would remain as pupils until the fire damage at their own school had been repaired.

Aunt Charlotte's class-room was in readiness, and its low windows, banked with flowers, looked most inviting. Good taste was always present with Aunt Charlotte.

Betty, standing on the porch at the Stone House, looked over toward the stone cottage, with its windows full of flowers, and wished that she might be one of Aunt Charlotte's pupils.

"Even the birds are reminding us that school time is almost here," she said, as Dorothy joined her.

"Just hear those sparrows by the fountain. As plain as possible they are saying:

"'School–keeps! School–keeps!
Tweet! Tweet! Tweet!'

"They slant their cunning heads, and look at us, as if they wondered if we understood."

"Well, we do," said Dorothy, "and I wish you were to be with us, Betty. I don't want to go back to Glenmore. It was pleasant there, and there were such nice girls to know, but I can't help being glad that we are to be at home this year. For all the good times there, I was homesick."

"It's different, Dorothy, for you to be at home. Now, Mother is dear, when she is at home, but she belongs to so many clubs and societies that there would be days and days that I'd see her only at meal times if I were at home, and not always then, for you see there are luncheons at the clubs, and private dinner-parties, so that I often have to eat alone in the big dining-room. Really, it is jollier in the big dining-room at Glenmore, with lots of girls to chat with.''

Betty finished the little speech quite gayly, but Dorothy thought that there was just a bit of longing in Betty's brave heart for the loving, intimate home life as she saw it at the Stone House. It was true.

On the morning when Betty bid them all ''Good-bye'' she seemed her lighthearted self. Her eyes were bright when she told them how much she had enjoyed her visit, and she turned in her seat in the auto to wave her hand, and to give them her bright, cheery smile, but she was still on the drive-way when she leaned forward, and spoke to the chauffeur.

''Brayton, is Mother at home to-day? Did she send you for me?''

The man heard the eagerness in her voice, and he answered without turning: "Yes, Miss Betty, she sent me, and she told me to say that she expects to be at home when you get there, but she wasn't sure how long the club meeting would be. I think she said the members was voting to-day."

"Oh, yes," Betty said patiently, and to herself she whispered:

"Mother is sweet, and lovely, and dear, only she's *busier* than Mrs. Dainty."

Betty was a loyal little daughter, and what she whispered was true.

Mrs. Chase was a good mother, and surely she was sweet of disposition and lovely to look upon.

Betty was justly proud of her mother, whom every one admired, only she allowed herself to have so many, many interests that she had less time for her home.

"We have fine times in summer," thought Betty, "and maybe we can go to Foam Ridge again. There's no clubs at the shore."

At the Stone House Dorothy was still on the porch where Betty had last seen her. Nancy was helping Aunt Charlotte, so Dorothy was amusing herself with Fluff.

"Now, Fluff, sit up!" she was saying. "Sit up like a little man," but Fluff showed not the least interest in acting like a "little man." He thought it twice as amusing to tear around like a little dog.

A tiny girl now appeared on the driveway. Her hair was a mass of bright rings, and her eyes were the darkest blue. Her frock and shoes were white, but her socks were light blue. Dorothy sat with her back toward the driveway, so she did not see the little visitor approaching. The small girl said never a word. She had run away, and so was keeping very quiet lest some one hear her and overtake her.

It was Uncle Harry's wee daughter.

"There!" she cried. "I comed before they ketched me. I'm all a time bein' ketched."

"Oh, you cunning baby," cried Dorothy, "did you come to see me?"

"*Some* I did, and *some* to see him," she said, pointing to Fluff.

"What for you give him your candy?" she asked, as Dorothy tossed another bonbon to the dog.

"Because he likes them," Dorothy said, at the same time putting some candy in the little hand.

"Well, he don't eat 'em," declared the little mite.

"Yes, he does."

"No, he *don't*," was the decided answer.

"The candies fall into his mouf, and you don't see 'em any more. That's all."

It was only too true. Fluff greedily swallowed them whole.

The wee girl was trying to decide whether to share her candy with the dog, or keep it for herself, when a trim maid came up the walk.

"Ah, now I've found ye, little Miss Elfin," she cried.

"Now, I'll have to go," said the small girl. "Soon's I get somewhere somebody comes for me."

Quite as if she were too used to it to object, she let the maid carry her off, laughing as she went. Hardly had she gone when Arabella Correyville came across the lawn. She sat down upon the step beside Dorothy and commenced to ask a list of questions.

"Betty Chase went home to-day," Dorothy said. "We miss her. She's such a jolly friend."

Arabella glared through her goggles, then she said: "How many pupils will there be in Aunt Charlotte's class?"

"I don't know yet," Dorothy said.

Arabella's rude habit of making no reply to what was said always annoyed Dorothy.

" 'Spose she'll have room if an extra one wanted to join it?" was the next question.

"I don't know," Dorothy said again.

"Well, I only thought I'd ask," Arabella said, "but it doesn't really make any difference, for Aunt Matilda wants me to go back to Glenmore."

After a pause she continued:

"She found out that Patricia was there with me last year and she was angry, but Patricia isn't going back this year, so that's just why Aunt Matilda is determined I shall go. Father says I don't have to unless I want to, so I think I'll go for half of the year and at Christmas vacation I'll come home and stay."

"And what is Patricia intending to do?" Dorothy asked.

Could it be possible that she was wishing to remain at Merrivale and ask to join Aunt Charlotte's class?

"Oh, Patricia is going to take music lessons this winter, and with no school sessions to bother her she expects to do wonders. You know how she talks."

There was a pause. Was Arabella unusually dull this morning, or was she trying to think of something unpleasant that she could say.

Little Fluff looked at her as if he wondered what sort of girl it was who did not admire or pet him.

"Why didn't you have a big dog?" she drawled. "That's such a little thing."

Arabella always criticised or objected.

"He's a dear," said Dorothy, "and I'd not want him to be one bit different from what he is."

"Well, he's awfully small," Arabella insisted.

"Arabella Correyville, why do you *never* like a thing the way it *is?*" cried Nancy, who, unseen by the others, had come from the hall on to the porch. It was the best thing that she could have said, for Arabella stared stupidly for a second, then the color flushed her pale cheeks.

"Is that what you think?" she asked slowly, her eyes searching Nancy's face.

"I certainly do," Nancy said firmly, "and so do all the girls and boys. Oh, dear, I know it doesn't sound pleasant, but truly, Arabella, that's the only thing that makes the girls keep away from you. They're afraid of what you'll say next. I'm sure you'd have lots of friends if *sometimes* you'd like things instead of objecting."

Arabella listened as if she were gaining a new idea.

"But s'pose I really don't like things the girls wear, or things they do," she said.

"Well, you could think as you pleased, but you needn't always *tell* what you think," said Nancy.

"I can't say I like things when I don't," Arabella said stoutly.

"You could keep *still*, and say *nothing!*" said Nancy, and to her amazement Arabella said, "I'll try that, and see how it works."

She rose slowly, and went down the driveway, without a word, or a glance toward Dorothy or Nancy, but she was not vexed.

She simply saw herself for the first time as her playmates saw her, and she was really thinking. Nancy, looking after the odd, little figure, had half a mind to run after her, throw an arm about her and ask her not to feel hurt, but she did not know whether Arabella would like that. She was one of those girls who would take a rebuke, and not seem offended, when pity would really cause anger.

"I meant what I said," Nancy said in a low voice, "but I didn't want to make her feel bad. I'd half a mind to tell her I was sorry I said it, and then I knew that would only make it worse."

"I wouldn't have dared to have said what you said to her," said Dorothy, "but she listened to you as if what you said must be true. It was true, and I wish she would try to like a few things. I do think the girls would be more friendly with her, and I'd like Arabella to have other friends than Patricia."

Arabella strolled up the avenue, thinking all the way of what Nancy had said, and in the most businesslike fashion she was wondering on whom she would first try the experiment.

"Try it on the first person I meet," she said under her breath.

Leander, having forgotten to take his books to school, asked to be excused, and was allowed to return home on the promise that he would do double work at home, and come the next morning wholly prepared.

He readily agreed, so it happened that he overtook Arabella before she reached home. He explained why he was not at school, adding:

"And I stopped in the square and bought

this new necktie. The red is a good shade to go with my suit."

"Why didn't you— It *is* pretty," said Arabella. She had started to ask why he had not made a different choice, when she thought of Nancy's words, and spoke differently.

Leander stared at her, and gasped. "Goodness! Arabella! That's the first thing I ever heard you say you liked. I'm glad I chose it."

Then even Leander, who seemed to heed nothing that was going on around him, had noticed her fault.

Arabella was rather enjoying it. It was amusing to see Leander stare in surprise, and she wondered how the next person would act when she failed to object. The next one happened to be Aunt Matilda.

"Oh, here you are, Arabella," she said.

"I wanted your help this morning, but I couldn't find you. Well, I've had so much to do you'll have to take a picked-up lunch to-day."

"Oh, dear, I — I'd *like* a picked-up lunch to-day," said Arabella. She had started to complain, but just to see if her aunt would notice it, she changed the sentence.

Aunt Matilda dropped the ladle that she held in her hand.

"For gracious sakes, why?" she said.

"Oh, for a change," said Arabella.

"You ain't sick, are you?" questioned Aunt Matilda, anxiously.

"No," said Arabella, "I feel fine."

Leander watched her closely, however, and later he slipped out to the kitchen.

"I say, Aunt Matilda, I'd watch Arabella, if I were you. She's certainly acting queer. You know she was queer at lunch, and when

I showed her the new tie I'd just bought, instead of objecting, she actually said she liked it."

"I'll keep an eye on her," Aunt Matilda replied, "and it won't do any harm if you watch her, too."

"I will," said Leander.

CHAPTER VI

TESS

WHAT if the wind blew chill? The sunlight streamed across the class-room at the stone cottage. Aunt Charlotte, at her desk, bent over an open book, in which she sought something that would be interesting to read aloud when the lesson hours were over.

The soft gray silk of her gown was wonderfully becoming, and she did not know that little Fluff had sneaked in at the half open door, and now sat on a fold of the silk that lay on the floor. He was looking eagerly up at her, as if wondering how any book could hold a reader's attention so completely that she could not notice him.

The pupils were writing, and the scratch, scratch of their pens made the only sound in the room. It was the first week, and they were writing answers to a long list of questions that Aunt Charlotte had placed on the board.

Dorothy and Nancy had been at Glenmore, while the other pupils had had very different training at the public school at Merrivale, and the questions, covering different subjects, had been chosen with a view to arranging the course of study for the few months that they would be in the cottage class-room.

Aunt Charlotte Grayson, in her younger days, had been principal and owner of a large academy for girls; later she had been governess and private instructor to Mrs. Dainty, and her former pupil held her in high esteem, and knew her skill.

The sunlight lay on the geranium clusters, rose-color, white, and red, then streaming farther, it touched Dorothy's bright hair, brought out the warm chestnut in Nancy's dark curls, and turned to bronze the crinkling locks that Tess impatiently pushed back as often as they fell forward, while she bent over her desk.

"Each one interesting, and each in a way all her own," Aunt Charlotte whispered.

"Wow!" answered Fluff.

Every one jumped, and then laughed to think that a tiny dog could so have startled them.

Having awakened the pupils to the fact that he was present, Fluff sprang upon a low stool beside the desk and soon was fast asleep.

Some of the girls smiled as they bent over the page upon which they were writing, as if secure in the knowledge that they could correctly answer the long list of questions upon the board; others frowned as if completely puzzled. The quaint little clock upon the wall chimed softly, as if it did not wish to disturb any one.

"Twenty minutes recess," sounded welcome to the little pupils, who had been writing since nine o'clock.

"An hour and a half!" said Mollie, "and my fingers are as cramped as if I'd been writing a week."

"My fingers aren't cramped," said Katie Dean, "but they're covered with ink. I do believe I put more ink on my fingers than I do on my paper. Even that isn't as bad as my cousin, Reginald, does. He says he *never* puts his pen in his mouth, but whenever he writes he manages to get ink on his lips."

"Don't you wonder how the boys like their new school?" said Nancy.

"I don't wonder, because I know," said Katie. "Reginald says the teacher is awfully cross, and whenever the boys from Merrivale are late, he fusses and scolds about it, and although the train is nearly always late he seems unwilling to believe that that is the reason that our boys are not on time."

"Well, they have the lovely long walk from the train that they thought would be so delightful," said Tess Haughton.

"And it truly is a lovely walk when the day is fine," said Flossie, "but after the last heavy rain we had, Reginald said that the path through the grove was under water, and they thought they'd never get through the grove because they were obliged to go such a roundabout way to find old logs, or tree-roots, to step on."

"It's really too bad to laugh, but Arabella's cousin, Leander, is awfully slow, and he is so near-sighted, that while he can see an object a bit distant, he can't tell what it is until he's almost on to it," said Tess. "That day that the walking was so sloppy, he was tramping through the grove with the other boys, when a funny thing happened. He was poking along 'way behind the others, when they heard a splash, and they turned around, and there was Leander in a big puddle, moving his arms and legs just as if he was trying to swim.

"'Good gracious, Leander! You can't swim in a puddle six inches deep,' shouted Sidney Merrington.

"'Go 'way!' howled Leander, 'who expects to swim? I stumbled over a tree-root that I didn't see, and here I am as helpless as a turtle, reaching out trying to get hold of something to help myself with, while you fellows stand there and roar.'

" 'We'll help you,' said Sidney, but Leander was too angry to accept help from any one at that moment, and he finally scrambled out, and tramped back home to change his clothes."

"I heard something just now that will surprise you all," said Dorothy, who had just joined the group. She said it so quietly that the chatterers all paused to listen.

"What is it, Dorothy?" said Nancy.

"Tell us," cried three voices at once.

"You all know Leander moves slowly, and most of you think he is slow to learn, but Aunt Charlotte just told me that the instructor at school in whose class Leander studies, sent a list of names to the *Merrivale Times*, of the new pupils who were examined for admission to his school, and Leander

Correyville was at the head of the list. His average was ninety-eight."

"We'll never call him slow again," said Mollie Merton.

Some one spoke of Betty Chase, and while they were talking of her, Tess quietly slipped out of the room. No one saw her go, so busy were they in talking of their friend, until Katie Dean went out into the hall to look for her handkerchief that she had either dropped or had left in her coat pocket. A large screen stood near the class-room door, and behind it stood Tess.

Was Tess listening? If so, what did she expect to hear?

It was a strange habit that made this girl often leave a group of friends to stand and listen, as if thus she might hear something not intended for her ears. She was such a pleasant girl, and so well liked

WAS TESS LISTENING?—*Page 104.*

that it seemed odd that she should have such a queer habit.

Katie, on her way back to the class-room, could not help thinking again of Tess Haughton as she had seen her, waiting behind the screen.

"I like her," thought Katie, "but I do wonder what makes her so often seem to be listening?"

Katie soon forgot the happening, because when she reached the class-room Tess was laughing and talking as gayly as the others, and soon they were again at their desks, as hard at work as before.

Nancy paused, looking up from the page that she was writing. She was trying to recall the correct spelling of a word that she wished to use.

Something moving attracted her attention and she turned just in time to see Tess

Haughton looking toward the open window, and making most peculiar gestures.

Across the street stood Patricia, and surely no one ever saw funnier motions than she was making. It was easy to see that Tess understood them, for she nodded to Patricia, and then raised her hand to Aunt Charlotte.

"May I go now?" she asked. "It's a bit early, but I've answered all the questions, and there's an errand I'd like to do."

"I can give you something to do that will occupy the remaining half-hour of the session," Aunt Charlotte said, "and you may take this seat away from the window. You cannot see Patricia from there, so you will not feel obliged to answer her signals."

Tess flushed and pretended to wipe her pen anxiously before putting it away. She had not dreamed that her finger-motions or

Patricia's antics had been seen. It was annoying to have been caught when she had thought herself unnoticed. Now Aunt Charlotte would watch her, and there would be no more chances for making signs to Patricia when she passed. Patricia enjoyed being with Arabella, because Arabella would do exactly as she was told, but sometimes she tired of her slow ways, and within a short time she had become very friendly with Tess. To be sure, Tess had a will of her own, but she was wide awake and ready for a frolic.

Patricia had left the two dogs at home, and had hurried to meet Tess.

"You can get out before school closes," she had said. "Just say you have an errand to do. Wait till you see me, and then ask."

"I have an errand to do on the way home from school," Tess replied, "but why can't you wait until we are dismissed?"

"My goodness! Why, it's twice the fun if you get out early, and—"

"Well, come on over," Tess had replied, "but don't be angry if you have to wait till after school."

"Oh, you can get out early if you're smart," Patricia had said.

They had made the plan on the day before, and they thought it a fine one. It proved to be like many schemes,—its only fault was,—that it didn't work.

Standing on the sidewalk, and looking toward the window where she had seen Tess, Patricia wondered why she was so slow to appear at the door. She had seen Tess rise from her seat, and thought that she had been given permission to leave.

Patricia shifted from one foot to the other, and finally stamped with impatience.

"Why *does* she poke so, just putting on her coat and hat? She might have put her hat on, and then come along with her coat on her arm,'' she muttered. ''Anyway, it's lucky that Aunt Charlotte didn't see me.''

Aunt Charlotte well knew that impatient, easily vexed Patricia would find a half-hour's waiting out there alone far from pleasant. She had at first thought of telling Patricia to go away, then she decided to let her remain if she chose. She would be less likely to repeat the offense.

At that very moment Patricia was saying in an undertone: ''You just wait, Tess Haughton, until I come 'way over here again!''

Patricia believed that of her own accord Tess had moved away from the window.

''I won't wait another minute!'' she said at least a dozen times, yet she did wait, and at last Dorothy and Nancy came out on to the porch and down the walk, then Katie Dean, then Mollie Merton and Flossie Barnet. Still no sign of Tess.

"Well, if I ever!" exclaimed Patricia. "I'd just like to know if she went out by a back door, or if she's hanging behind so as to tease me? Well, she'll not have the fun of finding me waiting!" She turned and hurried along the avenue, so swiftly that when the others had reached the cottage gate she was some distance from them.

When Tess had listened to what Aunt Charlotte had to say, had promised to attend to her lessons, to tell Patricia that she must not signal to her, and to be prompt in the class-room instead of persistently late, she snatched her hat and coat and fairly ran from the cottage.

Yes, Patricia was in sight, but a long way from the cottage. By the switch of her skirts Tess knew that she was very angry. Tess ran lightly along the avenue, and soon overtook Patricia.

"Here I am at last," she said, "and I thought I'd never get here."

"So did I," said Patricia.

"Well, you needn't speak like that!" cried Tess. "I couldn't come any sooner. Aunt Charlotte made me change my seat, when she saw me making signs to you. She saw you out there, and she placed me so I couldn't."

"Why didn't you ask her to let you go early so you could do your errand?" Patricia snapped.

"I did," said Tess, "but I told you she saw us motioning, so, of course, she wouldn't let me. I'd think you'd know that."

"You might have come out as soon as the others did," complained Patricia.

"I *might?*" repeated Tess. "Well, I wonder how I could? Aunt Charlotte kept me after the others were dismissed and talked and talked."

For a moment the two walked along in silence, then Tess spoke.

"See here, Patricia Lavine! If you want me to go with you this afternoon, you can just be pleasant. If you're going to be sulky, I'll run along home."

Patricia was astonished. Arabella was always afraid of her. Here was a girl who had a will of her own, and she knew that if she cared for Tess's friendship she must be agreeable. Like a flash she turned a smiling face as she said:

"Come on. We'll have a fine time. You'll see!"

Tess wondered if this pleasant mood would last, then slipping her hand through

Patricia's arm, she walked along beside her, Patricia describing the delightful afternoon that they were to enjoy together.

At the far end of the town, at the corner of two dingy streets, stood a little one-story building. It was an odd-looking little shop that showed its wares in a most unusual way that was intended to give the impression of magnificence. A loaf of bread was surrounded by large paper roses, surprising *blue* roses, at that! A rather pale squash-pie sat on a throne draped with green and orange paper moss, while a festoon of doughnuts, principally *holes* and very little doughnut, were strung on a beautiful length of red twine. Cookies in "hearts and rounds" vied with brightly colored candies, and in the center of all this display stood a cardboard sign, on which very crooked letters announced that "sqwach pye" could be enjoyed at "ten sents a helpin," and "do-nutts thre sents a peese," were meant for a bargain. "Bred an buter, ten sents," was another offering that pleased Patricia, and she mounted the two sagging steps.

"Did you *ever* see such spelling?" said Tess, to which Patricia answered sharply:

"Well, what of it? We won't have to *eat* the spelling."

Tess laughed, and whispered, "That's lucky," but Patricia pretended not to hear.

CHAPTER VII

A MYSTERY

PATRICIA opened the door and entered, Tess following. Immediately a big, frowsy woman appeared, turning sideways in order to get through the doorway.

"Lor' me! If it ain't you again. I ain't had this place but two days, an' you've been here both o' them days. Guess you'll be a good customer."

Patricia chose not to notice what the woman had said.

"What will you have?" she asked, turning toward Tess.

"Oh, you choose," Tess said.

"Well, then, we'll both have squash-pie, and two big pickles, a plate of doughnuts, and ten of those red and green candy balls."

If Arabella had been with Patricia she would not have dared to make any comment, but Tess looked at the pie and the pickles, the doughnuts and the awful color of the candy and gasped.

"I do believe we'll be sick if we eat all those things," she said.

"Well, I declare!" cried Patricia. "I don't think you're very nice to talk like that about what I ordered. You don't *have* to eat it!" she finished, rudely.

"I know that," Tess replied coolly, and rose to go.

Patricia had found some one who was not afraid of her, and she spoke more gently. "Do stay, Tess," she said, "and eat what you choose."

Tess ate her share of the pie, but could not be coaxed to taste any other part of the oddly chosen lunch. Patricia did not seem vexed. Indeed, she declared that she could not have anything wasted, and she devoured the two huge pickles, and the doughnuts. Gathering up the queer-looking candy balls, she began to drop them into her coat pocket, watching Tess all the while.

"You truly don't want any of them?" she asked.

"Oh, thank you, no," said Tess, "you have them," and Patricia seemed pleased. "I wasn't going to eat mine, anyway," she said cheerfully. "I was going to give mine to the dogs, so now I'll give them your share of them, too. It's fun to toss candy balls and see which dog will get them."

Tess said nothing, but she wondered if Patricia thought it polite to treat a friend to candy that she herself felt only good enough to toss to the dogs. As they left the place Tess spoke of the errand that she must surely do before going home.

"What did you say? You don't mean that you are going home now, do you?" said Patricia, stopping to look at Tess.

"Why, yes, as soon as I've done the errand," Tess replied.

"Well, I certainly thought you'd be with me all the afternoon. I thought we'd go over to the pond. The boys are going over there when they get back from school. They think there'll be good skating there soon, and they're going to build a sort of hut right on the edge of the pond for a little shelter from the wind when any of us are very cold. I wanted to see them begin it."

"But I left the cottage at a little after one, and the boys have two sessions at their school, and when they get out at four it's a half-hour later when they leave the car at the station. I guess it would be pretty cold, and surely lonesome waiting three hours and more to see the boys begin their hut. Why, Patricia, I wouldn't go over to the pond with only you with me."

"Pooh! Who's a 'fraidie cat?" said Patricia.

So Tess turned down a side street to do the little errand, and Patricia began to walk in the direction of the pond, but she walked rather slowly. She did not like school, but being out of school was beginning to seem rather dull, and often she found it hard to amuse herself.

When she had left the road and crossed the fields to where a glimpse of the little pond could be seen, she thought of what Tess had said. It certainly was a lonely spot. Not one of the boys had come. Indeed, it would be nearly two hours before they would arrive. How cold it was!

A dry twig cracked over her head, the wind whistled through the bare branches, and over in the grove she thought she saw some one moving. It might be one of the boys, — it wasn't. It came slowly through between the trees, and Patricia turned, stumbled and fell, picked herself up and stumbled again. She looked over her shoulder. The figure had come out from the grove, and stood looking toward her. It was an old woman, and in her nervous fear Patricia thought that the keen, black eyes were looking directly at her.

All Merrivale was stirred by the story that went from one to another that Patricia Lavine was lost. She had promised to come directly home from her walk, but she had not done so.

A dozen times that afternoon her aunt had gone down to the little gate to learn if she were coming. She was not really frightened, because Patricia often failed to come home at the time that she had been told to come, but twilight had always found her entering at the gate. On that night twilight came, and no Patricia. What could have happened to the wilful girl?

Evening came, dark and cloudy, and the woman at the gate called long and loudly, "Patricia! Patricia!" in the hope that an answering voice would cry: "I'm coming," before the small figure could be seen. Again, and again, the woman called. Suddenly a window was thrown up and the voice of 'Mandy shouted a disturbing question on the still evening air.

"Good land, Ma'am! Ain't Patricia been home since she'd went over ter the pond?"

"The *pond!* Don't tell me she went clean over ter the pond!" came the shrieking response.

"Wall, I ain't sayin' she *went,* but I heered her say she was *goin'* there," replied 'Mandy, "an' ef ye ain't—"

"The *did* went," cried Chub, who had thrust his tousled head out of the window that he might share the excitement.

"Patritha *did* went ter the pond, fer I heard her thay the wath goin', an' I theen her *thtart!*"

Then 'Mandy had closed the window. The woman left the gate, and went in to sit and listen for a footstep. All night she sat by the window, sometimes nodding from sheer weariness, but always waking with a start to peer out into the darkness, then leaning back in her chair with her nervous hands tightly clenched. She had never felt much love for wilful little Patricia, but she was her aunt, and was responsible for her, and well she knew that if any harm came to her she would be soundly blamed for it even if it were proven that the fault in the matter lay wholly with Patricia.

When daylight came, she knew that she must spend no more time in watching or waiting. A burly policeman was passing, and she ran down to the gate.

"Where's my niece?" she demanded. She seemed unaware that the man was a stranger.

"Where's my niece?" she repeated.

"Where's the town pump?" said the policeman.

"I've a mind to report you for being impudent," she snapped.

"Whisht, now!" was the answer, intended to calm her. "Oive jist got me job here, an' bein' a sthranger in town, yer question sounded a bit quare, so not knowin' how ter answer it, I made bowld to ax another. Now, ma'am, no offince, but how happened ye ter ax me?"

As soon as she explained to him that Patricia had been away all the day before, and all night, he was all interest and sympathy, and in a short time a number of men from the station were on their way to the pond and the woodland on its shore.

They found no trace of her. Then the bells were rung to arouse the townspeople, and a crowd of men gathered, who, when they heard of the missing girl, started with a will to search for her.

The news spread like wildfire, and every one was asking his neighbor when he had last seen the little girl, and where. There had been no such excitement in a long time.

And while men searched the woods, dragged the pond, and went up one street and down another, where *was* Patricia?

All day the search was kept up, and when night came they were no wiser than when they had started out at daybreak.

In a dingy back room whose windows looked out upon a narrow back street, a big woman stood earnestly talking to a little girl. "Ye see, sissy, ye ain't told me what yer name is, nor where ye live, nor how ye happen to come streakin' ter my door jest 'fore dark on Wednesday. Now, ye are a powerful eater, an' so fur ye've paid fer all ye've eat, but I don't b'lieve a little girl like you has got much left by now, an' if ye can't pay, ye'll have ter go, fer I couldn't no ways afford ter feed ye."

"I *can* pay; you needn't worry," said Patricia.

"But, sissy, what brung ye here? Ye come tearin' up the steps, an' pounded on the door, an' when I opened it ye stumbled in, an' ye ain't told me yet what brung ye."

"O dear! Well, if you *must* know, I'll tell you. I'd been over to the pond, and the boys who were *surely* going over there to build a hut, didn't come. It looked pretty lonesome, and just as I was thinking that I wished I hadn't come, I saw something moving among the tree-trunks over in the grove. I wasn't sure at first, but after a moment it began to come forward, and then I saw that the thing I'd seen moving among the trees was an old woman, a tall old woman as black as a gypsy.

"She had an awful face, and I *thought* she looked straight at me, but I didn't stop to find out. I just turned to run, and of course I stumbled and fell. I got up as quick as I could and began to run again."

Patricia paused to catch her breath, and just then the bells began to ring.

"Mercy! What's all that ringing fer? Must be a fire. I hope 'tain't near here," said the woman. "Well, go on with what ye was sayin', sissy."

"There's not much more to tell," Patricia said. "I stumbled again, that time over a dry branch that lay across the path. I hadn't noticed it, and I felt every second as if the old woman would put one of her long, bony hands on me. I didn't dare to even look over my shoulder. I got up and ran again, and because this was the nearest house I came right here."

"Well, I'm glad ye come, but why didn't you go home instead?" questioned the woman.

"I'm just staying with my aunt," Patricia replied, "and I knew she'd be provoked because I'd not been home all day, so I thought I'd stay long 'nough so she'd be scared, and then when I came home she'd be too glad to see me to scold."

"Well, of all the contrivin'! Say, where's yer ma?" cried the woman, who was wild with curiosity.

"How much do I owe you?" Patricia said, pretending not to have heard the question.

"Pretty nigh a dollar."

Patricia was too anxious to get away to be in any mood to drive a bargain. Without stopping to reckon, she thrust a dollar into the big, red hand, snatched her hat and coat, and, with one arm in its sleeve, bolted toward the door, intending to get out before more questions were asked.

“Here! Wait, can’t ye, ’til I unlock the door? What’s yer great hurry all to oncet? Say, ain’t ye got no pa-rents? Huh? Be ye a heiress?”

Up the street Patricia ran like the wind, without so much as saying “Good-bye.”

“Ain’t that the *queerest* youngster?” exclaimed the woman, but there was no one near to answer.

Usually Patricia was very glad to answer the question, so often asked, because it gave her a chance to boast of her home in “N’ York,” but she was tired of staying in the little room at the rear of the store, and having decided to go, she had no intention of answering any more questions.

When she had left the little store far behind, she stopped running and began to stroll along. She had decided that the best thing to do was to walk in at the gate as quietly as if she had just returned from a little walk, but her plan was upset, and her return was quite different from what she had wished it to be.

First of all, the two small dogs came running to meet her, barking and yelping with delight. She spoke to them, but tried to walk around them so as to enter the house. She assumed what she thought to be a very cold and lofty manner, and was about to mount the steps when a cry from the hen coop made her turn and look that way.

"Oh, *ow!* Why, Patricia Lavine! You *wasn't* drownded after all!"

"Drowned!" said Patricia. "What made you say that?"

"Because every one else is sayin' it," said her aunt, "an' look at them eggs! I'd jest got 'em from the coop, when I looked up an' seen ye comin' in at the gate, an' it scaret me so I let them drop right out'n my hands, an' they're all smashed. Well, fer the land sake, tell me where ye've been, an' what ever possessed ye to have *went?*"

Before Patricia could answer a shriek made them both turn toward the street.

"Thay! Thay now! Ye ain't drownded, though who thcooped ye out'n the pond?" Chub's fat face was pressed against the pickets of the fence, his round eyes staring at Patricia.

" 'Mandy!" he shouted. "Come, look at the girl whath been in the pond two dayth, an' ain't got no water on her!"

"Come in the house," said Patricia, "and I'll tell you all about it, in there, Auntie."

Patricia spoke gently. She was very happy. The whole town had thought her lost! She had made quite a stir in Merrivale! She had not thought of that. In her silly little heart she thought the stupid visit at the store, even the woman's tiresome questioning, was more than made up for. She longed to go out upon the street and have people ask her where she had been. She decided that she would not tell them. "Let them wonder," she said to herself.

In her foolish vanity, she could almost see herself walking proudly up the avenue, the two dogs on leashes, while in a scornful manner she replied to all who questioned her: "Oh, I've merely had a little vacation. Just a two-days' visit. Where have I been? Why, really, how impertinent."

Great was her disgust when she learned that the woman at the little shop had told the policemen, the firemen, the boys who passed her door, indeed every one who would listen, that Patricia had merely been lodging in the "little back kitchen what's jined ter my shop."

CHAPTER VIII

PLANNING A FAIR

PATRICIA was surprised. She had walked through the town, had seen a policeman who frowned at her, a fireman who never noticed her, and finally Reginald Dean.

"Oh, my! You tried to get lost," he cried, "but got no farther than the little old store on Margin Street!"

"You horrid boy!" cried Patricia.

"Well, I'm not a horrid *girl,*" declared Reginald.

It seemed impossible for the two to meet pleasantly. Reginald had no patience with Patricia's silly ways, and Patricia considered any one stupid who did not admire her. Just as she was trying to think of something very severe to say to Reginald, Arabella came running down the avenue, and in her surprise Patricia forgot all about Reginald. Forgot, even, that she had been vexed. It surely was a strange sight, for Arabella had the name of being "poky." She never ran, and so took no part in lively games. It was evident that something unusual had happened.

"Guess what I have to tell you?" she said, when she reached Patricia. "Guess? No, you needn't. I'll tell you. Aunt Matilda's going to visit her cousin, and she starts to-day, and will be gone a whole month!"

"Why, Arabella Correyville! I thought you were away at school," said Patricia. "You certainly told me you were going back to Glenmore."

"Well, what if I did?" Arabella cried. "I couldn't go back when the school opened, because I wasn't feeling well."

"And now you're well, you don't want to?" questioned Patricia, with a sly laugh.

"I don't want to, and I don't have to. Aunt Matilda said I ought to start in again at Glenmore on the beginning of the new term, and that would be next week, and my father said perhaps it would be well for me to do that, but Aunt Matilda is going away, and I mean to coax him to let me stay at home."

Reginald moved a step nearer. "You'd better not give up school," he said, "for if you do you'll be a regular ninny. That's true as the world, Arabella."

"A girl that doesn't go to school is a ninny?" Arabella asked; then after a pause she said, "Patricia doesn't go to school."

"Well, what does that prove?" he shouted, as he ran away, laughing.

Arabella was too slow to see the point, but Patricia saw it, and picked up a stone to throw at him, then changed her mind and dropped it. It would not be nice to make him more of an enemy than he already was.

It was Saturday, and the boys had planned a fine "tramp" for the afternoon. Snow that had covered the ground for weeks had disappeared, and the boys were eager to explore the ruins of an old house that had been destroyed by fire. A strange, dilapidated old place it had been, and it was rumored that the rough-looking men who had lived there had set fire to it before leaving town.

They had taken possession of the place, remaining there but a few months, and then leaving as suddenly as they had come. One of the boys proposed searching the ruins to see if, by chance, anything of value remained after the fire.

"They didn't look as if they ever owned anything very valuable," said Jack Tiverton, but while the other boys laughed, they all agreed that it would do no harm to search the smoking pile.

They had a fine tramp, but after careful search found nothing more valuable than an old brass button, a rusty tin plate, and an iron fork.

"Lucky we wasted no time in coming over here. If we'd been slow, some other fellows would have found these things," said Jack Tiverton.

"Who started this thing, anyway?" said Reginald. "I know I didn't."

"Sid Merrington, speak up!" cried Jack. "The bright idea was yours, wasn't it?"

"Oh, well, what if it was?" said Sidney, "you fellows didn't think it so silly but that you came along over to join me in the search."

"That's so," agreed Jack, "and say, fellows, what do you say to giving the beautiful old tin plate to Sid as a medal for having first thought of possible treasure here?"

But Sidney refused to be decorated with the huge "medal," and soon they were tramping homeward over the road by which they had come.

"I heard a funny thing this morning," Reginald said, as they turned toward the far end of the main avenue. "Leander Correyville said that when his Aunt Matilda started off on the trip she had long been planning, she left strict orders that Arabella must feed the geese. Leander says he reminded her that Arabella was afraid of the geese, and he said that he would be willing to care for them while she was away, but that would not do. Old Aunt Matilda declared that no one but Arabella should do it, and she wouldn't go a step until Arabella had promised. Arabella was quick enough to promise. She knows that she can do as she likes while Aunt Matilda is away, and she wanted to see her start.

"When she had gone, Arabella turned, and to Leander she said: 'Now I've promised I'll have to do it, but I'm scared to go near those geese!'

"Leander told her they wouldn't harm her, but she just said it was no use for him to talk, and that she was afraid of them just the same."

"Say, boys! Let's stop on the way home and ask Arabella to show us the geese," said

Jack Tiverton. "I'll bet she won't go near the coop. She'll tell us to go and look at them if we want to. It's no great sight, and I don't care about looking at them, but I do want to see what Arabella will do. I'll say, 'Come on over to the coop with us, Arabella.' "

They were to have a funnier sight than they dreamed. As they approached the Correyville place, shrill cries attracted their attention. On a bit of rising land, not far from the road, stood Arabella, and one might have thought it a summer day instead of a mild day in February, for on her head she wore a big, flapping sunbonnet.

Arabella was in trouble.

"Go *'way!* Go *'way!*" she shrieked, looking anxiously at the two big birds. The gander hissed at her, as if he knew that she feared him, and thought it a joke to increase her terror. The sunbonnet hid her face, but it could not stifle her cries.

The birds approached nearer, at which Arabella, in absolute panic, began to jump up and down in a frantic dance! The gander, thinking that she was threatening him with her wildly waving arms, stretched his neck and waddled nearer, hissing louder than before.

"Go *'way!* Go *'way!*" howled Arabella, her thin legs doing the wildest of jigs.

"His–s–s–s!" responded the gander, while the goose, as if agreeing with her mate, echoed his hissing, at which Arabella screamed louder than before.

"Come on in," said Jack, "it's mean not to help her, even if she is silly.

"Say, Arabella! Don't get crazy!" he shouted. "We'll get there before the big birds eat you!"

"Go *'way!* Go *'way!*" SHE SHRIEKED.—*Page 141.*

Help arrived, however, just as they were entering the gateway, for at that moment Leander came from the back porch with a tin basin in his hands. The geese saw him and left Arabella to follow him, waddling off in a clumsy race toward an expected treat.

"I don't care if you do laugh," Arabella said defiantly, "for those geese do look horrid when they come at you with their mouths wide open, and just hissing like everything, and I guess you'd —"

"Who's laughing?" said Jack Tiverton. "Weren't we fellows just coming to help you?"

"Were you?" Arabella asked, slowly.

"Weren't we, boys?" he said, turning to the broadly smiling group.

"Sure thing," said Reginald. "We were brave lads, who, seeing a lady in distress, rushed in to rescue her from the wild beasts, — no birds."

Arabella stared at him. "They're not birds," she drawled. "They're geese."

"Well, if geese aren't birds! Oh, come on, boys, let's beat it," said Reginald, and the brave would-be defenders turned and ran down the avenue.

When spring arrived the town of Merrivale was all excitement. Merrivale was to have a fair, and every one was to enjoy it.

The Merrivale Club had always held its meetings in the parish house, but now its members had decided that it must have a building of its own, and while large sums had been given by generous residents, there still remained quite a sum that must be raised before beginning to build.

The use of the hall had been given, and a vast stock of fine articles had been contributed for the sale, but the entertainment was what most interested the children.

Besides a little play, yet to be chosen, there were to be solo numbers, and it was safe to guess that any group of boys and girls that one might see busily chatting after school were talking about the fair.

"What are you going to do?"

"What is your part in the entertainment?"

"Who knows who's going to be in the play?"

When the news leaked out that the play was to be "Aladdin," and that forty boys and girls would be needed for its proper rendering, excitement increased.

Who was to be Aladdin? Who his lovely princess, and who the jinni? Then came the day when all the parts were assigned.

"Every one knows just who every one is to be," said Flossie, one morning, "and aren't you just *wild*, Uncle Harry, to see the fairy play?"

"Wild? Am I wild?" said Uncle Harry. "Why, Flossie, dear, I'm almost 'tearing my hair' because it is so hard to wait for the evening when 'Aladdin' is to be presented."

"Now, Uncle Harry, you needn't make fun of us little actors," said Flossie, "for you'll surely be wild when you see us, only you won't have to 'tear your hair.' You can just look, and applaud."

"I have to have my little joke," he said, "but, Flossie, dear, I've not the least doubt that you will play your parts very nicely, and, now tell me, 'who is to be who' in the play."

"Jack Tiverton is to be Aladdin, and Arabella has agreed to be his mother. Dorothy

Dainty is to be the lovely princess, and Nancy is to be the jinni, and I'm to be an elfin page. Tess Haughton will be the girl friend of the princess, and ever so many boys and girls will be villagers, and Mollie is to be a handsome slave, and, oh, there's many parts besides these, but I've forgotten their names."

"What part am *I* to take?" Uncle Harry asked. "I've been notified that I am to be in the caste."

"Truly? Are you joking?" Flossie asked.

"I'm sober as a judge when I say that I am to be in the play," said Uncle Harry, "but I'm worried as to what my rôle will be. I hope the lady manager isn't planning to have me act the part of a clown, or a dancing bear."

"Oh, Uncle Harry! She wouldn't ask you to be any horrid thing. I'll ask her what you're to be,'' Flossie said, as if to comfort him, for she more than half believed that he was really anxious, whereas Uncle Harry, tall and handsome, and utterly good-tempered, would have taken any part, if by so doing he might help.

A half-hour later, on his way to the post-office, Uncle Harry met the genial manager, and the two laughed merrily as they talked of the costume that he must wear, and the "make-up."

The next morning Flossie heard a voice outside her chamber door, chanting:

"New lamps for old! New lamps for old! New lamps for old!"

"Oh, Uncle Harry!" she cried, opening the door, "*Are* you going to be the horrid man that got Aladdin's lamp away?"

"Don't you hear me practicing?" he asked.

"Oh, but the play will be twice as much fun if you are in it," said Flossie.

"Well, I wish the audience might think as you do," said Uncle Harry.

There were countless rehearsals, and the boys and girls tried to do their best, but a deal of "coaching" was necessary. However, when the day came for the dress rehearsal, every one was letter perfect, and the manager told them that if they would all do as well on the evening when the play was to be given the entertainment would be a success.

How eagerly they awaited that evening! The dress rehearsal was on Tuesday, after school, and the play would be given on Wednesday evening. Only one day to wait, but what a long day it seemed!

At recess, Dorothy and Nancy, Mollie and Flossie, stood talking of the evening that all were anticipating, when Tess Haughton joined them. She had always wished that she might be constantly with Dorothy, and envied Nancy her close companionship.

"Have either of you heard about Patricia?" she asked. "You know, Mrs. Melville is the manager, and Patricia went right to her and asked if she might be the princess in the play. Wasn't she bold? Well, when she was told that all the parts had been given out she was furious, and when Mrs. Melville told her that she could be an extra villager, she was so angry she could hardly speak.

" 'I'll not be in the play at all if I can't have a fine part!' she said.

"Mrs. Melville hasn't lived in Merrivale very long, and she didn't know Patricia, so when Patricia said her folks had intended buying ever so many tickets because they thought that she was to be in the play, that they had intended to be present with a number of friends, Mrs. Melville thought perhaps she was losing the sale of loads of tickets, so she told Patricia she could sing a solo in the concert part of the program. I asked Patricia what she was going to sing, but she wouldn't tell me," Tess concluded.

"I guess if Mrs. Melville had known how Patricia is likely to act, she wouldn't have told her to do a solo," said Mollie.

"It may be that she'll sing something that we'll enjoy," Flossie said, gently. Dear little Flossie always tried to say a pleasant word for every one.

"Now, Flossie Barnet!" cried Mollie, "you *know* how funny she acts, and, — well, you'll all think I'm horrid, but truly I do believe Patricia will do something so foolish every one will be laughing, and I say it's too bad to have our fine entertainment spoiled.

I wanted every one to think it fine. I am sure that we have all done our best, and it isn't very nice to think of the hall full of people just laughing at us."

"Oh, Mollie dear, they won't laugh at the lovely play, or at the pretty dance that Nancy is to do. I think they'll like the song that Mother has taught me to sing, and surely the duet that Flossie and Uncle Harry will sing is sure to please."

"I know Dorothy is right," Nancy said.

"She surely is," agreed Tess, "so I'll say, if Patricia must be absurd, we simply can't prevent it."

CHAPTER IX

ALADDIN'S LAMP

WEDNESDAY evening was starlit, and it certainly seemed as if every one in Merrivale was hastening toward the hall. Already purchasers were crowding around the brightly lighted booths, and the pretty girls showed their wares, and found no difficulty in disposing of them.

The flower booth, shaped like a little temple, was a mass of gorgeous color, and crisp bills were being exchanged for lovely pinks and roses. Even potted plants were sold, the purchasers leaving them to beautify the booth until after the entertainment, when they would call for them to take them home.

A little old lady stood eagerly looking at a handsome azalea. "I'd take that plant, miss, if I felt sure that I could carry it home. Is it very heavy?" The gentle old face was eager as she asked the question.

"It is quite heavy," the young girl replied. "It is a fine plant, and its pot is large."

Jack Tiverton had heard the conversation, and he moved nearer. "I'd take it home for you; I'd be glad to," he said.

"Oh, that would be most kind of you, but I'd not like to bother you."

Her eyes were bright as she spoke. The boy's kindly offer had pleased her.

"I'm going to stay to enjoy the play," she confided. "Are you?"

"Oh, yes," Jack said with a smile. He

was wondering if she would recognize him when he appeared as Aladdin.

"Then the lovely plant is mine," said the little old lady.

"And I'll call for it after the play and take it home for you. I know where you live. It's the cottage where there's a fine garden. I've seen you out among the flowers. I'll surely call for the plant."

He was off before she could thank him. Some one had beckoned to him and he knew that he must hasten behind the scenes to dress for his part.

The older people were greatly interested to see the play. They had heard much regarding the care that had been expended upon its production, but few knew how generously Uncle Harry had helped to make it a success.

The scenery at the hall was not correct

for the play. An English forest scene, a drawing-room, a third representing a bit of Broadway, New York, and a dining-room set was all that the manager could offer, and these were absurd for an Oriental play, so Uncle Harry sent to the city, and succeeded in hiring the proper setting for the lovely old fairy tale.

The children were more than eager. They were simply wild for the play to begin, and showed it plainly.

The orchestra was playing a lively medley, and fans were keeping time to its lilting music, when it began slowly to diminish, then, a note from the triangle, and then as the curtain rose the soft tones as of pagoda bells made the children hold their breath.

Ah, there was the first scene for which they had been waiting. The poor old woman, Aladdin's mother, was telling the boy how hungry she was, and that there was no food in the house.

Who would have dreamed that Arabella could play a part so well? Her disguise was complete, and she made her voice like that of a very old woman. Then how exciting was the moment when Aladdin, having rushed from the house, determined to find food, returned with the old lamp, and taking care that his mother did not see what he was doing, rubbed the lamp, and up through a trap in the stage floor sprang the jinni.

Nancy had never looked more lovely than in the rose-colored gauze, glittering with many spangles.

"What do you wish, my lad?" she said, in her soft, low voice.

"We are so hungry," said Aladdin.

Every one knows how the table appeared heaped with fruits and cakes, and how, whenever they wished for anything, Aladdin had only to rub the old lamp.

Then came the scene when the peddler came down the street, crying: "New lamps for old! New lamps for old!" Who would have dreamed that the wily peddler was handsome Uncle Harry? And how excited were the children when Aladdin's mother, knowing nothing of the magic power of the old lamp, gladly exchanged it for a new brass lamp, because it looked so much finer!

Then the wicked peddler and the elfin page sang a duet, "The Butterfly and the Rose," Flossie Barnet in her green gauze frock, and sparkling wings, was just sweet little Flossie, as every one knew her, but who would ever have dreamed that the horrid old peddler, who looked like an ogre, was her brave, kind-hearted, genial Uncle Harry, whom all the children loved? His disguise was perfect, but the wonderful baritone voice was his. That was not disguised.

The next scene was watched with the keenest interest by the adults and children alike. Would Aladdin be forced to live always in the poverty that he and his mother had found so hard to bear, or would the precious old lamp ever return to gladden his home? The play was so cleverly acted that it seemed very real, and the children held their breath. And what a sigh of relief the children gave when the old lamp was once more in Aladdin's home, the jinni, as before, appearing whenever he rubbed its brazen bowl.

Nancy did a dainty dance for him and begged him to guard the precious lamp.

Next came the wonderful moment when Aladdin first saw the lovely princess, and who could wonder that he instantly lost his heart, for Dorothy was a charming princess, and her blue and silver costume made her even fairer than usual. She lifted her hand and bade him approach, and it made a fine tableau when he bowed and knelt before her, with Flossie as an elfin page hovering near.

Tess Haughton's rôle was not very important, but she looked very pretty as the girl friend of the princess.

Mollie Merton, as a lovely slave, played her part well, and her song was well sung. There were many bangles on her wrists and ankles that jingled as she walked, and when she sang, "A Slave Girl Am I," she was applauded to the echo.

Sidney Merrington was a comical servant in the employ of Aladdin, who now, through the wonderful lamp, had become wealthy.

Jack Tiverton was a winning Aladdin, and the audience seemed to like the play.

Then the drop scene was lowered, that the scene might be shifted. At the end of the hall a tall, lanky girl stood, a small boy clinging to her hand.

"Where'th Patrithia? What'th the goin' ter do?" he whispered loudly.

"Hush! She's goin' ter sing. Leastways, that's what she said, but ye can't never tell nothin' by what Patricia says."

"The tellth awful whopperth," declared the small boy.

"Oh, there the ith now. Merthy! What a rig!"

"Hush, I tell ye!" said 'Mandy.

Patricia was indeed amazingly clad. She had promised to sing at the entertainment, but just what she was to sing she had refused to tell, and Mrs. Melville, thinking that any little song would do to amuse the audience while the scenes were being shifted, had simply placed the number on the program as:

"SONG. *Selected* . . PATRICIA LAVINE."

With her sheet of music in her hands, she stood waiting for the pianist to play the prelude.

Her frock of bright blue satin was draped with a green sash. Her stockings were red, and her shoes were white, with green bows on the toes. Her aunt had tried to persuade her to wear less colors, but Patricia had declared that she should wear as many colors as she chose, so one could only be glad that she had not selected a greater variety. She had told her playmates that she had had special training for her solo.

"My teacher says my pro-*nun*-tion is fine," she declared, and Flossie, looking puzzled, asked: "What is that?"

"Well, when you can hear every word I

sing, you'll *know* what I mean. That's pro-*nun*-tion,'' said Patricia, and little Flossie decided to listen attentively.

Who could describe her shrill rendering of the old ballad, ''Annie Laurie''? A soft ripple of laughter swept over the audience, but Patricia was so delighted with her performance that she did not notice that. She waved her sheet of music up and down as if beating time for the melody, and she swayed as if fairly overpowered by her vocal efforts. She tried to do a trill here and there, as she had heard a concert singer do, the while she sang:

''Max Swelton's bunks are boney,
Where ear–r–r–ly falls the *doo*,
And 'twas ther–r–re that Annie Laura,
Gave me her p–r–r–*omus* troo.''

She had succeeded in amusing the good people of Merrivale, for many were smiling broadly; one big man was absolutely purple in his effort to restrain his laughter, while the greater number laughed outright.

Patricia said afterwards that the people of Merrivale were stupid, and actually seemed not to understand the song, for they had positively laughed as if they had thought it a comic song. "N' Yorkers understand fine music," she said, "and after this I shall sing only in N' York."

Patricia, having bowed to the right and the left again and again, as she had seen older vocalists do, retired behind the scenes, and then the curtain went up, showing a gorgeous ball room in the palace, Aladdin dancing with his princess, and the nobles as gayly dancing with their lovely ladies.

The play was well given, and the audience fully enjoyed it. The chorus of boys and girls sang their numbers with a will, and, best of all, the children learned from the manager that they had added quite a sum toward the amount that the fair itself had netted.

The "grown-ups" had so enjoyed the play that they asked that it be repeated, and that was indeed great praise for their efforts. It was repeated on the following evening, gaining as much for admission tickets as on the first night.

Patricia announced that she would not sing for an audience that did not understand good music, but she said that she would "speak a piece." The lady manager had been amazed at Patricia's singing of the familiar ballad, and she could not imagine what she would choose to speak, or how she would render a selection.

Well, Patricia's "friends" must not be offended. Patricia had insisted that she had a trained voice, and the good lady, not wishing to offend, had given her a place on the program.

She wondered if her speaking would be as absurd as her singing had been, and was trying to decide if she should permit her to again appear, when the big man who had laughed so heartily approached.

"By all means give her a place on the program," he urged, adding, "Every one wishes to hear her again. She's certainly amusing."

So Patricia was again to appear.

If her singing of "Annie Laurie" had been absurd, what words could describe the reading of the famous old poem, "The Barefoot Boy."

The manager suggested that she ask some one to give her a little "coaching." "Mrs. Grayson is a fine reader, and the manner in which some of her pupils read their lines in the play prove that she is also a good instructor. I am sure that she would be willing to help you if you asked her,'' she said, but Patricia declared that she needed no ''coaching.''

That was Patricia's greatest fault. She was too sure that her own ideas were correct. Too stubborn to be taught. She was a pretty child, and bright enough to have learned quickly, if only she had been willing to learn.

She remembered that often at school the children were reproved for reading in a dull, uninteresting manner, and she decided to give her reading in a *vigorous* manner.

She read, and re-read the piece, shouting it as if she were a burly ''boss'' calling to a mob of lazy laborers. She made pauses where there were none, and in short read the lines in such a manner that they sounded senseless. One would hardly think that possible, but Patricia seemed possessed of special ability for "twisting" a song or poem until one would hardly know it as a familiar thing.

On the evening when the play was repeated, she appeared in the same peculiar costume as before, with a large cluster of red roses at her girdle. Curiosity was at highest pitch as to what she intended to do.

She came forward, bowing very low. When she once more stood erect, she announced:

"THE *Bare* — FOOT–BOY!"

She paused as a ripple swept over the audience, then, when she saw that fans had ceased waving, and that the people were leaning forward to catch her first words, she smiled upon them, bowed twice again, made a still lower bow, and began the recitation.

"*Blessings! On!* Thee little man barefoot!
Boy with *cheek!*
Of tan with thy turned!
Up! Pantaloons!
And thy mer- - -ry
Whist- -tled — *tunes!*"

If the audience laughed before, they shrieked this time, for surely Patricia had fairly outdone herself.

She was applauded to the echo, but she did not reappear. The manager decided that her performance was too ridiculous to be repeated, and Patricia snatched her hat and rushed from the hall, feeling sure that the manager had some spiteful reason for keeping her away from the footlights.

Really, her gestures had been as droll as her reading, for at "little man" she had pointed straight at a short, stout man in the orchestra, at the word "cheek" she had placed her hands on her hips, and at "pantaloons" she had thrown both of her arms upward, while at the word, "tunes," she had calmly folded her arms, and so on throughout the piece; her gestures had meant nothing, serving only to make the meaning of the lines more obscure.

The second evening, as a whole, was a success, however, and work upon the fine club building was soon to begin. The children had done their part, and they certainly had added a goodly sum to that collected by their elders.

Jack remembered his promise to call at the flower booth for the pot of azaleas, and when he reached the place the little old lady was waiting for him.

"Ah, you did remember," she said.

"I intended to remember," Jack replied, as he grasped the big flower-pot.

"I know you meant to keep your promise," she said with a smile, "but after being an Oriental lad for an hour and a half, it would not be strange if you forgot a few things that occurred before the play. You played your part well, and, indeed, I think the play was wonderfully well acted."

They walked along together in the moonlight, Jack carrying the azalea. He had wanted to tramp along the avenue with Sidney and Reginald, to talk over the evening's happenings, but to his surprise he was not missing it, for the old lady had travelled much, and in her earlier days had picked up many odd and curious things.

There were ancient costumes and quaint furnishings in the cottage, and these, together with historical relics, filled Jack with a wild desire.

Would she let him see those quaint, old curios that she described? He was just wondering if he dared ask permission, when they reached her garden gate.

"It is too late, my boy, to ask you in tonight," she said, "but some day when you are passing I'd like to have you come in and see the odd collection, and any time when you want a quaint costume come in and see if any that I have will fit you. I'd gladly loan you one at any time."

"Oh, thank you," Jack said heartily. "I'll surely come."

"There's an old cross-bow," she said, "and a genuine longbow. There's a shield, and a coat of mail."

"When can I see them? I mean, how soon?" he asked eagerly.

"To-morrow, if you like," she said; then, "I thank you, dear. Good-night," and the cottage door closed.

"I'm glad I took the plant home for her," he whispered to himself, as he opened the gate and walked out to the street. It was a lovely May night, so warm that one knew that summer was near.

CHAPTER X

JACK'S PAGEANT

JACK felt a bit shy about going to the cottage the very day after he had had the invitation. He thought that he had been bold to ask how soon he might call, but several times he passed the gate, thinking he might see the little old lady in the garden, when, doubtless, she would ask him to stop.

He thought of the coat of mail, of the bow-gun, and many other ancient things that she had described, and he was wild to see them, and to hear their history. The little garden was beginning to repay her for her toil, for there now were blossoms everywhere.

Then came a day when he saw her standing in the doorway, and she asked him to come in.

What a wonderful hour he spent, looking at the curious costumes, and listening eagerly to the story that clung to the quaint garments. History was Jack's favorite study, and historical objects held him spellbound.

When at last he thanked her, and turned to go, she renewed her offer to loan the costumes at any time to him, or to any of his friends — whom he believed would handle them carefully.

Jack thought of those costumes, talked of them, and then one night he dreamed of them. He dreamed that he and his playmates were dressed in the various costumes, and that they were marching along, laughing and talking as they went.

"Fine idea!" he cried when he woke. "That would be fun for all."

He lost no time in telling Mollie, who happened to be the first one that he met, then Sidney came along, and while they stood talking Dorothy and Nancy came running down the driveway to learn what it was all about.

"Where will you have it?" Reginald asked. "Down the avenue to the square?"

"Of course not," cried Jack. "Who do you think would take part and march through Merrivale in such odd rigs?"

"I don't know who would," said Reginald, "but I know I'd like to."

"Why, Reginald Dean, you wouldn't," said Mollie in disgust.

"I certainly would," declared Reginald.

"Well, *I* wouldn't. Why, Chub, if he were out there with 'Mandy, would be hooting:

"'Hark! Hark! The dogth do bark,
The beggarth are coming to town.
Thome in ragth, an' thome in tagth,
An' thome in velvet gownth.'"

"Oh, I'd not mind that," laughed Reginald. "That would be part of the fun."

"We can have it in our garden, in that part that looks almost like wild land, where the trees and shrubs have such heavy foliage. There's a wide walk there, almost as broad as a road, and we can enjoy our pageant there," Dorothy offered eagerly.

"And there'll be no one following us," said Nancy.

"That's true enough," cried Reginald, "and it's just as true that no one will see us after we've bothered to dress up!"

"Oh, we'll have enough of an audience," said Dorothy, "for you all know that Mother and Aunt Charlotte will be interested, and we surely must invite the dear old lady who loans us the quaint, lovely things."

"I am sure that we shall all be greatly interested in this fine pageant," Mrs. Dainty said, as she joined them, "and I was thinking as I listened to your merry chatter, that a few little informal notes that I will write will ensure you an audience of nearly fifty. Would that please you?" she asked, looking from one eager face to another.

"Oh, that would be fine!" said Dorothy.

"That certainly will be great!" cried Reginald.

"It will be so great that we must be sure to make the pageant fine enough to repay Mrs. Dainty for her kindness," Jack said.

"Oh, not a word of thanks," said Mrs. Dainty, "for we 'grown-ups' are to be entertained by you boys and girls, and shall surely enjoy it. We must just 'make believe' that the garden is to be honored by a visit from warriors, and their fair ladies who have returned from past ages. Now, tell me, do you think the members of the pageant would consent to partaking of a nice little luncheon out under the trees?"

There were shouts of delight from the children, for what had been planned for an outdoor tableau, or pageant, had turned out to be pageant and picnic combined, and what could be more charming than that?

"And I have a wee secret regarding the spread, and I'll not tell it, but on the day of our event I'll enjoy your surprise," said Mrs. Dainty.

Excitement reigned. Every one was trying to tell his idea to the one who stood nearest, and in the midst of the chattering Uncle Harry arrived.

"Well, well, what a racket!" he cried, clapping his hands over his ears. "I'll surely be deafened if I'm not careful. I came up here because I'd something I wished to say, but I can't get a chance to say it."

"Oh, what was it?" cried Flossie. "We're all wild to know. Everybody keep still while Uncle Harry tells us something. Now, just see how still we are!"

"And now that you are still, I've forgotten what it was," declared Uncle Harry. "Dear me! What *could* it have been that I wanted to say?"

"He's just joking!" cried Flossie.

"Well, now, I think I'll pay you well for making me forget an important errand. Come, and come quick, every one of you, and get right into my auto. Come, boys! I'll have you all in front with me. Climb in, girls, and we'll have a great ride.

"Would you mind if we did not return for a month, Mrs. Dainty?" he asked, looking back.

"I think I should," she said, laughing, because he looked so serious.

"Oh, well, then, I'll bring them all back in an hour!" he declared, and off down the avenue they sped.

The boys and girls had been eager to make the pageant really fine, but now that they were to have a kindly interested audience, and after the grand procession were to enjoy a fine spread out under the great trees, their enthusiasm knew no bounds.

The little old lady, Mrs. Pendleton, had offered the use of her quaint costumes, and she gladly helped the children to select what seemed most becoming.

For the girls the quaint gowns fitted very well except the length of the skirts, but Mrs.

Pendleton turned up wide hems, or made a deep tuck so that they could be worn.

The suits of armor must have been designed for rather small men; at all events, the boys declared that they could wear them. There was a veritable medieval array. A quaint, dignified costume Sidney Merrington chose for himself, and very smart he looked as he peered out from under the odd brim of the hat with its single feather.

"What is that pretty gauze dress?" Dorothy asked. "Do you know who once wore that?"

"That is supposed to be the correct costume for Ariel, one of Shakespeare's characters. A famous dancer once wore that dress when she played the part," Mrs. Pendleton explained.

"May I wear it?" Nancy asked.

"Surely you may, dear," the old lady

said, "but you've not seen all the pretty dresses yet. You may see one that you will prefer."

"No," Nancy said firmly, "I don't know why I so wish to wear it, but it seems to me that I *must.*"

"Then you surely shall, Nancy," said Mrs. Pendleton. She wondered why the simple little white frock with its few spangles and gauzy wings had so attracted the little girl. Nancy wondered, too, but she only knew that she would rather wear it than any of the gayer-colored costumes.

Dorothy and Mollie chose velvet gowns that certainly looked as if designed for royal ladies of ancient times.

Flossie could find nothing small enough for her, and was looking very sober indeed, when the old lady noticed that she was very quiet.

"What is it, dear?" she asked. "Can't you find a costume that you'd like to wear?"

"Oh, there are ever so many lovely ones, only I'm too little for them," said Flossie. She thought it rude to find fault with the costumes so generously offered, so she claimed the fault herself. It was not that the costumes were too large for her. No, indeed! It was that she was too small!

"Oh, but I have one just your size," Mrs. Pendleton said. "It was worn by a little prince, when he acted as page at his cousin's wedding."

Flossie danced with delight when she saw it. It was indeed a lovely suit, and little Flossie, with her flaxen hair and sturdy figure would make a dear little page.

There was much planning after they left the cottage, but finally it was decided that Nancy, as the fairy, Ariel, should dance along the path, the first figure in the long line; that Reginald, with his banner, should surely come next; a fine lady in velvet was Dorothy, then Sidney, then Jack, in armor, and mounted upon a steed protected by armor as formidable as the complete suit of mail worn by his rider, and thus a place was chosen for each, and it certainly seemed as if a fine procession were assured. There were many rehearsals in ordinary dress, and Mrs. Dainty and Aunt Charlotte promised not to so much as peep from a window on that side of the Stone House, and, at last, all was in readiness.

"Saturday, at three in the afternoon," was the time set for the pageant, and a half-hour earlier the guests arrived and were directed to the far end of the garden, where seats had been placed for them.

A huge canvas had been hung from a rope stretched between two sturdy oaks, and from behind it came sounds of preparation.

"Where's my helmet?" cried one voice.

"I don't know, unless it's hiding in company with my shield," replied another.

"Somebody pin up this skirt, so I can step. The train isn't a bit too long, so don't shorten that. It's only in front that it bothers me," said a voice that was surely Dorothy's.

"It doesn't matter how long it is, because I'm the page who carries it," Flossie replied.

At that a wee voice from the audience made itself heard. "Dat's Flossie!" it cried, "I dess I'll go and find Flossie."

"Not now, dear," Uncle Harry said, as he held his small daughter closer. "They're busy in behind the curtain. The girls are putting long dresses right over their short ones, and the boys are gathering up their bows and spears."

"I like dose boys," the wee girl replied, "an' I'll do an' help dose boys."

"No, no, dear. Sit still, and pretty soon you'll see something fine. Be nice little lady, dear," coaxed Uncle Harry.

"Tired of bein' lil' lady," she responded, but a blare of trumpet made her sit very still, her eyes widened with wonder.

Arthur Merrington, Sidney's brother, had agreed to be trumpeter, and clarion notes he blew from his silver cornet.

Mrs. Dainty and Aunt Charlotte were talking with Mrs. Merton and Mrs. Barnet, when suddenly some one cried, "There they come!" and all turned toward where the flapping canvas hung.

Out from behind the heavy shrubbery came the procession, the sunlight gleaming upon their banners, their armor and the bright costumes of the girls.

Nancy, light of foot, danced ahead, as if she were a fairy herald, doing dainty steps and laughing as she went.

"Welcome! Welcome!" she cried, in her sweet, low voice, "and may our pageant please you!"

Reginald, Dorothy, Sidney; how fine they looked!

Jack found the fine suit of armor was rather large for him. Indeed, it had required a short step-ladder and much "boosting" from the groom to get him mounted, to say nothing of the fact that his horse had objected to an armor-clad rider, but finally stopped prancing and agreed to let him remain in the saddle.

Sidney Merrington, saucy in his doublet and hose, fairly glared as he strode with

OUT FROM BEHIND THE HEAVY SHRUBBERY CAME THE PROCESSION.
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dignity, and Reginald, with his banner, made a fine figure.

Dorothy, with her velvet gown, was indeed a lady fair, and it was impossible to say who, of all the train, was finest.

There were warriors in ancient garments, carrying crossbows, and others with spears. There were Roman girls, Spanish girls, and it was a lovely pageant, indeed, as they made their way along the winding paths, with flashing steel and glowing colors. It was a very unusual sight for Merrivale.

Again they were recalled, and once more they passed in review before their delighted friends. Then the knights and bowmen, squires and pages, led their ladies to where the feast was spread under the tall trees, and what a feast it was! And finest of all was the center-piece, a knight in armor made of sugar frosting, standing proudly in the center of a big, round cake. That was Mrs. Dainty's surprise!

"Oh–o–o! Who ever guessed we'd see so lovely a center-piece as that?" cried Flossie.

"See the fine figure!" cried Reginald.

"And the cake with frosting that looks like lace!" said Mollie.

"See the little banner he carries, and his shield," said Sidney.

"He's a dandy knight!" cried Jack.

"And we are as much surprised as you," said Dorothy, "for this is the first time that Nancy and I have seen it."

"Oh, we thought that you and Nancy had surely seen it," said Mollie.

"I thought Dorothy and Nancy would enjoy the surprise as much as any of their guests, so I did not tell them a word about it."

"Well, he certainly looks as if he felt

delighted with your praise of his fine appearance,'' said Mrs. Dainty.

It had been a beautiful spectacle, and now, as they sat enjoying the good things, the children felt that their efforts had been well expended. From all sides came words of praise and pleasure, and it was easy to see that the pageant had been appreciated. Indeed, it would have been hard to say which had most enjoyed it, the little performers or their parents and friends.

Uncle Harry told an interesting story about a brave knight who found his lovely princess in an enchanted castle, and the children held their breath as he told how he swung her up on his charger and rode away with her to safety.

''And did he wear a tin coat like Jack's, an' a tin bonnet, too?'' asked the wee girl.

''Jack's suit is iron, and what he wears upon his head is a helmet, dear,'' said Uncle Harry.

''A *he'met,''* she repeated, ''well, Jack's a pretty boy!''

The compliment made Jack blush, while the others laughed gayly.

''I think I'll take off my 'tin coat,' '' he said, ''because it's a bit awkward at the table.''

''I like my long, red velvet train,'' said Dorothy, ''so I'll wear it until we've finished our spread.''

''You little ladies in your quaint costumes certainly grace the banquet,'' said Mrs. Merton.

''I've so enjoyed the afternoon,'' said Mrs. Barnet, ''and I think we all were surprised to see what a fine procession these boys and girls prepared, without the assistance of older people.''

"Was it as good as you thought it would be?" Dorothy asked, looking up eagerly into her mother's face.

"I felt sure that it would be well worth seeing, and because I was so certain of its success, I invited our friends to enjoy it with us, but it surely exceeded my expectation. I am sure that we all were surprised, and also very proud of our young people.

"It seems to me that I never saw anything prettier than the brave boys in armor, and the girls in their regal gowns and quaint headdresses."

The ices and cakes disappeared as if by magic, and the glasses of orangeade were drained of their nectar.

It had, indeed, been a delightful little outdoor pageant.

CHAPTER XI

A GENUINE SURPRISE PARTY

"YOUR Uncle Harry didn't give the party he spoke of," Mollie said one day, as she sat beside Flossie in the hammock on the porch. "I wonder why. Oh, I guess it was because he has been away almost all winter."

"Yes; that's just why," Flossie replied, "but he'll surely make a lovely party for us, because he always does what he says he'll do, and the last time he spoke of it, he said it would be full of surprises."

"He's great fun, and he seems to know just how to be amusing," said Mollie, "and the boys are quite as fond of him as we are. I heard Sidney Merrington say that he'd like to be just like Uncle Harry when he's a man."

"Why, Mollie Merton, I heard Reginald Dean say that very thing this morning," said Flossie, "and look! There's Uncle Harry driving up the road."

"Well, who wouldn't look?" Mollie said, laughing. "He's driving one car, and his chauffeur is driving another!"

"Well, ladies, are you ready?" he asked, as he stepped from the car, and stood before them, as if waiting eagerly for the answer to his question.

"Ready?" Flossie questioned. "To ride with you? Oh, we'll go this very minute, but who is going in the other car? Where are we going, and who—?"

"I'm sure you remember that my party was to be a surprise party. Well, this is only the first surprise. Get right in, and we'll call for the others on the way. Each will be surprised to learn that this is the day for the party."

"Oh, what fun!" cried Mollie, "but we're not dressed for a party."

"Just another surprise," Uncle Harry said, coolly. "Any one, given time enough, can dress for a party, but my guests are going, *not* in 'party dress.' "

"That is true, too," agreed Flossie.

"I believe I can catch one girl, at least, wearing a sunbonnet!" Uncle Harry declared, and he was not simply guessing, for just ahead was the Correyville home, and on the low wall sat Arabella, wearing a sunbonnet.

"Good-morning, Arabella!" Uncle Harry called. "Please jump right in, and be one of the guests at my surprise party."

"I couldn't wear this dress," Arabella

said slowly, "but I could be ready in a half an hour."

" 'No time like the present.' Come right along. Your dress is all right, and I *adore* sunbonnets."

"Can't I even —"

"No, *indeed!*" said Uncle Harry. "We can't wait a minute. Jump right in."

Arabella rose slowly from the wall, and fairly *crawled* toward the car, where Mollie, completely out of patience, grasped her arm and rather forcibly helped her in.

Flossie looked at Mollie, and Mollie understood the look.

"Well, I didn't mean to be rough," she whispered, "but I *do* think that once in a while she might hurry just a bit! I hope I didn't hurt her."

They were now at the great gate of the Stone House. The old gardener, training a vine that overhung the wall, touched his hat and came out to greet them.

"Can I be of sarvice ter ye?" he asked.

"You surely can," Uncle Harry said. "Just get my two little friends for me."

"Ay, that I will," he said, adding, "they're out on the lawn, an' comin' toward ye, sir, this vera minute.

"Miss Dorothy!" he shouted. "Yerself an' Miss Nancy is wanted, most pertic'lar, this instant, an' roight here at the gate."

"Will you two little ladies sit very close together so that my niece, Flossie, whom you know to be *huge,* can sit on the seat, also?" Uncle Harry asked, as earnestly as if Flossie, the smallest of all the little friends, were really a giant.

Dorothy and Nancy assured him that they would not be at all crowded, as they took their places beside Flossie. He insisted that

Arabella sit close beside him, and Mollie next. He knew that he could keep Arabella from annoying the others, and just possibly make her enjoy the trip. She rarely appeared to enjoy anything, but to pick up the others on the way he was obliged to pass her house, and he was too kind to let her feel that she was "left out."

As they were about to start off, little Fluff raced out to the car and barked loudly, then whined.

"Well, well, little chap! Does it feel like that to be left at home? Get aboard, then, and come along. Can't wait for you to change your fur coat. You must come just as you are!"

With little yelps of delight, Fluff bounded into the car, and as the door closed he settled down in Dorothy's lap, content that he was one of the party.

Farther along the avenue Uncle Harry espied Reginald Dean. He was just returning from a private dancing-lesson, as his black velvet suit and patent leather pumps testified. Reginald had stopped to talk with Sidney Merrington. Sidney was helping Arthur, and both wore overalls. Arthur was pulling up the weeds that had sprung up in the driveway, and Sidney was raking them into little heaps.

"Come right along, boys!" called Uncle Harry. "We're off to enjoy my party, and we can't wait a minute."

"Reginald is decently dressed, but look at *us!* We won't be long fixing up a bit," pleaded Sidney.

"Time is precious. Can't wait a second!" declared Uncle Harry. "Get right into the second car, please," and in they climbed, laughing at the joke.

"We'll be a fine-looking pair," said Sidney, "but we're obeying our host, and what else could we do?"

"Nothing," said Arthur, "but I do wonder what the joke is."

At a bend of the road a girl was trying to persuade two small dogs to move along. Each was on leash, and both had sat down upon the sidewalk as if content to spend the day there.

"Good-morning, Patricia! We're off to enjoy my surprise party. Step right into the second car, please," Uncle Harry said.

"Don't hesitate," he added, as she seemed reluctant to come. "The boys won't mind the dogs. Take them right along."

"Oh, *do* let me have just time to dress," wailed Patricia.

"Can't do it," Uncle Harry said, firmly. "You can leave fussy dresses behind, but I don't intend to leave you behind, when we're off for such a lovely time. Will you come?"

A second she wavered, but catching a glimpse of Arabella's sunbonnet in the first car, and the overalls in the second, she laughed and waited for no more urging.

Of course the boys enjoyed the two comical pups. Who ever saw a boy who did not like dogs, large or small?

Soon they were flying over the road, and had left Merrivale far behind. The sun was hot, and Uncle Harry turned into a road that was bordered on either side by tall trees.

Patricia was pleased to have her pets made much of, and, for once, talked of something besides her hats and gowns. She could be very pleasant when she chose, and even Reginald decided that she was a better companion than he had thought.

"Hello! Jack Tiverton!" called Uncle Harry. "Jump in and join our party."

"I don't wait to be urged," cried Jack, and he clambered in beside Reginald.

"This surely is a very funny party, and I'll bet we haven't seen half the fun yet!"

Jack was right. Their host had used ingenuity in planning his party.

"That's Glenham Woods on the left," said Arthur. "Isn't it odd that a big, rocky ledge like that should be right here beside the road, when just beyond it is an open field without so much as a tiny stone in sight?"

Both machines stopped, as if with one accord, and Uncle Harry, the first one out, remarked casually:

"We might get out here and spend a little time looking for strawberries, or white grapes. I believe I prefer white grapes."

"We'll have quite a hunt!" said Sidney, with a laugh.

"Do you think so?" Uncle Harry said, anxiously. "Now that is odd. I've thought that this would be just the place to look for them. Well, we'll walk around that little field over there just to stretch ourselves a bit before riding farther. Come on!" he cried, leading the way.

What was the joke, for surely some sort of joke it must be. A peep around the big ledge displayed another surprise, for there they saw an inviting spread in readiness.

"Well, well, Flossie, if there isn't our butler, away out here, with all sorts of goodies set out, as if he were actually expecting guests. Sandwiches, cakes, ices, and, as I live! White grapes! Now, isn't that odd, when I was speaking of white grapes just a minute ago!"

"Oh, Uncle Harry! You just planned all this, and sent Marcus over here!" cried Flossie.

"Who did? *I* did? You really think *I* did? Well, well, what a notion, Flossie!

"Well, come, everybody. Don't wait a second. Dorothy can manage little Fluff. Patricia, you can keep one of your pets beside you, but you never could keep two in order. I want that comical fellow beside me. I'll enjoy studying his table manners. I've an idea that he is greedy."

Little Fluff behaved very nicely, and sat erect, each time that the big butler passed with a tray of good things, and he quietly ate whatever was given him, but Patricia was obliged constantly to watch Algernon lest he put his paws upon the cloth, and once he actually started to walk across it. Evidently he wished to take his choice of the good things so generously spread for the guests.

Uncle Harry fared better, for Lionel seemed content to sit quietly beside him, and accept gratefully whatever was offered him. Indeed, he blinked at Algernon as if he was amazed at his wretched manners, for Algernon swallowed a sandwich whole, and looked around for another.

What a treat it was to have such a delicious lunch at a time and place when they least expected it! There was every sort of sandwich, there were fine cakes and ices, and in the center a basket of the finest chocolates and bonbons.

How they talked and laughed. Uncle Harry told stories of his school days that were delightfully interesting, until he declared that he could not think of another to tell.

"Yes, I can," he said a moment later, "and it's a fish story, too, but I'll not tell it until Marcus has passed the fish."

"Fish!" cried Flossie. "Oh, Uncle Harry! You are not going to have fish after cake!"

"Oh, that is all right. It is a dainty kind of fish."

Marcus could not restrain a smile, for all his dignity. Around the jolly group of feasters he proceeded, his tray held high, so that they might not see the sort of fish that lay upon the platter.

"Oh–o–o!" they cried, when he placed it on the center of the cloth. The fish, a large one, was molded from strawberry ice-cream, and every one was eager for a "slice" of the big pink fish.

Even little Fluff had his share of it, and made fun for the company by taking a greedy mouthful, swallowing it, and then barking because it was colder than he thought it should be. Then he would look at it, think how sweet it was, snatch another mouthful, and bark again. Dorothy softened the remainder with a spoon, and he ate the melted cream as if he thought it much improved.

"He's a cute little dog," said Jack, "and funny, too, objecting to the ice-cream because it was cold, and yet liking it so well that he ate it all. Say, boys! We ought to have built a bonfire and toasted it for him."

"Oh, well, he would have liked that if you had held a dish under it to catch it as fast as it melted," said Sidney.

"You would have liked warmed cream, wouldn't you, little Fluff?" Dorothy said, putting her arm around him, to which he promptly answered, "Wow!"

It certainly had been a genuine surprise party, and they had enjoyed the fun of all the unexpected happenings.

"Boys and girls, we must be starting toward home. Shall we ride, or would you prefer to walk?" Uncle Harry asked, as coolly as if it were not a question of tramping for miles.

"Why, Uncle Harry, you know it's ever so far to walk," declared Flossie.

"So it is," he agreed, as if it had not occurred to him until Flossie had reminded him.

"I think we may as well ride, for really it would be rather hard on the dogs to make them walk."

"And how about us?" questioned Reginald, with a laugh.

"Well, we might as well ride, if the dogs do," he said.

When they were all seated, and Marcus had packed all the hampers in the second machine, Uncle Harry called to him:

"I say, Marcus! Which is the most direct road to Merrivale?"

"The one on your right, sir," said Marcus.

"Oh, then we must go the other way, straight ahead," said Uncle Harry.

"Why must we?" cried laughing voices.

"Because this party is to be different in every respect from what any one would expect," said Uncle Harry, "and so, because you are, by this time, sure that we shall continue straight ahead, I think I'll turn to the right."

Arabella, up to this time, had been very quiet, but she now leaned forward, and after staring at, first, one side of the road, and then the other, drawled a remark.

"I think I'd rather know where I'm

going," she said. She was always fond of objecting.

"Oh, Arabella!" cried Mollie. "It is surely fun to wonder which way we will drive next."

"I'm just *sure* I'd rather know —" Arabella started to repeat, but Tess interrupted.

"You *do* know, Arabella! You just surely know that you are going toward home."

Arabella settled back in her seat and made no reply. One never could tell if she were angry, or only dully surprised. Uncle Harry had said that he should take each of his guests directly home, saying that as Patricia lived at the greatest distance from the center, he would stop first at her door.

"Oh, please take me to Arabella's house. I'll stop there before I go home," Patricia hastened to say.

She would greatly have enjoyed the surprise of her neighbors when the fine car stopped at her door, and they peeped from their windows to see her alight, but there was another view of the matter. Dirty little "Chub" would probably be out at play in the puddles that were always on that street. He could be counted on for throwing mud at the party, or dropping a huge stone into the puddle just in time to splash the dirty water upon the handsome car and its occupants.

"Be *sure* you stop at Arabella's for me,—oh—of course, you'd take her home, but what I mean is, you needn't stop at *my* house."

The small dogs behaved wonderfully well. Little Fluff sat contentedly upon Dorothy's lap, and stared at the two comical pups as if he wondered where any one could have found such funny dogs.

CHAPTER XII

FLOSSIE'S WONDERFUL NEWS

DOROTHY and Nancy sat on an old stone seat near the fountain, their heads close together, reading a letter from Betty Chase, and a jolly letter it was.

The first and second pages told of the happenings among the pupils at Glenmore, and then Betty told of the iron rule of Miss Fenler, or "The *Fender*," as the pupils called her. She was a stern, cold, determined woman who strove to maintain discipline. Rarely did she show even slight interest in the pupils, and as a result she was detested.

"She hears things that we never meant for her to hear, and sees things that make us almost ready to believe that she has eyes that can see right through walls. You'd say so, too, if you were here, for no matter how careful we are about planning good times, she's always just in time to spoil our fun. I know she is a sort of monitor, and watch dog, all in one, but we girls think she truly enjoys her task, and so we dislike her.

"Something funny happened on April Fool's Day. We had been out for a walk after school, and came back over the main road. We had been playing jokes on each other all day, and we were laughing and talking as we walked along. Just as we reached the gate the postman gave me a small package for Miss Fenler. She happened to be out on the porch, and I ran up the driveway, just a bit ahead of the others to give it to her. 'Here is something that the postman asked me to give to you,' I said. You should have seen her! She threw up her hands and shrieked, 'Take it away! Take it away!'

" 'But it truly *is* for you, Miss Fenler,' I said. 'The postman left it.'

" 'You know that is just a contemptible joke!' she cried, and she wouldn't touch it, so I put it down on the porch and turned to go, when I suppose she noticed the address, and the stamps on it, because she called me back. She looked queer enough as she said, 'I see that the package is one that the postman *must* have left, and I thank you.' Then she turned and went in.

"I heard that one of the girls had bought a little toy mouse and put it in a small box and set it beside her plate at breakfast. We were late to breakfast, so we weren't down in the dining-room when it happened, but the girls that were there said she really had a fit. She must have thought that I was offering her another one, and perhaps she thought I'd caught a live one and put it in the parcel that I offered her. She has heard me say that I am not afraid of a mouse. I guess she wishes she hadn't let us see her jump and squeal, just because I handed her a little parcel.

"There's a big, fat boy who is a pupil over at the boys' school in the next town, and we don't know what his name is, so we call him 'Dumpling.' Well, he gave a box of candy to Valerie Dare, and because it came on April First, she didn't dare taste it.

" 'Who knows whether it is safe to eat, or whether it has been filled with pepper, or anything else that would make it anything but pleasant for the one who dared taste it?' Valerie said, and she left it on the table in our chamber.

"Valerie and I are lucky, and we found out about the candy. When we came back to our room after breakfast the maid was eating a piece of it. She was tidying our room when we went down to the dining-room and heard us say that we were afraid to taste the bonbons. We were glad to know that she had tested it, but Valerie says she needn't have eaten *half* of it to make sure that it was pure.

"Why–ee! The clock has raced ahead while I've been writing and I must stop now if my lessons are to be ready for to-morrow.

"Just room on this page to send my love to you and Nancy, and to all the jolly boys and girls that I met when I was at Merrivale.

"Oh, one thing more. We are going to Foam Ridge soon. Are you to be there? I do hope so, because you two girls are the dearest that I know, and if you are there, you'll make the summer *perfect* for

"Your loving friend,

"BETTY CHASE.

"P. S. Mother says I should sign my name 'Elizabeth,' but I think 'Betty' seems to fit me. I don't know how to be stately, and Elizabeth sounds so very dignified. (I spelled that right. I looked in the dictionary.)"

"Oh, I wish we were to be at the shore again this summer, and I'd like to be at 'Foam Ridge,' " said Dorothy. "Wouldn't you, Nancy?"

"Yes," Nancy said, slowly. Then she added, "It certainly was lovely there, and we had such fine times. I don't believe old Bonfanti would dare to go there again."

"Of course he wouldn't," said Dorothy. "He'd be arrested the moment he left the boat. My father said so."

"It was lovely at Foam Ridge," Nancy said, as if Dorothy's words had chased away her fear.

Aunt Charlotte, on a low seat near the gateway, had laid her book aside to watch the two whom she so dearly loved.

Mrs. Pendleton, on her way up the avenue, paused at the driveway to speak to Dorothy and Nancy, then, spying Aunt

Charlotte, she decided to stop for a little chat. There was a puzzling question that she longed to ask. For days she had been thinking of it, and here was a chance to ask for a possible solution.

"I have thought much of Nancy's wonderful dancing," she said, "for surely at the fair her part in 'Aladdin' was a striking feature, and the manner in which she led the procession was that of a professional."

"Well, Nancy, for a time, did professional work," Aunt Charlotte replied.

"And is her talent inherited? Were any of her people gifted dancers?"

"Her mother was famous for her grace and skill as a dancer, and it was always said that she was as pure and good as she was lovely. Indeed, there are those who declare that Madam Nannette Ferris was pure as a pearl."

"Nannette Ferris!" cried Mrs. Pendleton. "Nannette Ferris! Why, then Nancy led the procession in the dress that her own lovely mother once wore!"

Nancy had heard, and with pale cheeks she ran to Mrs. Pendleton and dropped upon her knees on the grass beside her.

"Oh, tell me, *did* my mother wear it, the very dress I wore?" she cried.

"Yes, Nancy; and on a bit of ribbon inside its belt is her name," said Mrs. Pendleton, placing her arm around the little shoulders that were trembling.

"I *told* you I felt that I *must* wear that dress and no other," said Nancy. "You showed me brighter-colored costumes, but somehow I could wear no other than that. And while I had it on I felt lighter to dance, and oh, so happy!"

"Nancy, dear, you shall own that costume, for I feel that it rightly belongs to you,'' Mrs. Pendleton said.

''I may have it to keep? *Always* to keep?'' Nancy asked, her eyes eager, and her little hands clasping and unclasping, so precious seemed the promised gift.

'' 'Always to keep,' dear,'' repeated Mrs. Pendleton.

''Oh, I don't know how to thank you, because the costume means so much to me. Aunt Charlotte so often tells me to try to be pure and good as my mother was, and I mean to, and now I think the dress my mother wore will help me. Do you know what I mean? Whenever I lay my hand softly on it, I know I'll feel almost as if she were near.''

There was a bright light in Nancy's eyes as she finished, and Mrs. Pendleton whispered softly: ''Bless the child of Nannette

Ferris,'' and the words were a devout prayer.

Aunt Charlotte walked down the driveway to the gate with Mrs. Pendleton, and Dorothy, her arm around Nancy, softly whispered: ''We'll both love the pretty costume, now we know who once wore it.''

A few days had passed, when ''My Uncle Harry has bought an island! A real, truly island!'' cried Flossie, as she came running up the path that led to the fountain.

Dorothy and Nancy dropped their skipping-ropes, and ran to meet her, and to hear the news that she was evidently wild to tell.

''There's a great, big house on it, and another big house close beside it, and the two are almost like one house, because there's a funny long thing that joins them, but what *did* he call it? Oh, I know. He calls it a covered gallery, and we're all going down there this summer to live in *one* house, and you are going there to live in the other, that is, Uncle Harry *wants* you to, so of course you *will*. People always do what Uncle Harry wants them to do. Aren't you glad you're going to be on that lovely island with us?" she asked eagerly.

Dear, loving little Flossie could think of nothing finer than that Dorothy and Nancy should be her neighbors on the little island that Uncle Harry had described so charmingly, and she felt sure that no one could refuse to spend the summer there if Uncle Harry wished it. What would he have thought had he known that Flossie was already telling Dorothy and Nancy that they were *surely* going there, before he had had an opportunity to invite Mrs. Dainty and Aunt Charlotte to spend the summer?

Flossie had eagerly listened while he had described the houses on the island, and when Mrs. Barnet had asked who was to occupy the other house, he had said, "We should enjoy Mrs. Dainty as a near neighbor, and Dorothy and Nancy are so fond of Flossie that they would have a happy summer together. I'll go over to the Stone House this evening and ask her to enjoy the place with us.

"She could take her own servants with her, and really be in a separate house, yet able to neighbor with us even on stormy days, because the covered gallery that joins the second-story of one house to the second-story of the other makes it possible for the two families to visit without going out of doors."

Flossie considered the matter wholly settled, and so flew up the avenue with the glad news.

"What is the name of the island?" Dorothy asked.

"Oh, I forgot to tell you," said Flossie, "but it has a lovely name. It's called 'Gem Island,' and Uncle Harry says there are tall trees back of the two houses, and in one place high cliffs are all along the water's edge, so that when you are on the shore of the mainland the island looks like cliffs coming right up out of the sea, and the big house with the towers and turrets looks like a castle on the cliffs.

"Round on the other side of the island there's a fine beach. Oh, won't we have lovely times, we three, on 'Gem Island'?"

"Oh, lovely, great!" cried Nancy, and Dorothy added: "If we *do really* go there, and, oh, I hope we shall."

"And where is the island?" Dorothy asked a moment later.

"I wonder I didn't tell you that first of all," said Flossie. "It's just a little way from Foam Ridge, and Uncle Harry has a cute motor-boat, so we can go over to Foam Ridge any time we wish."

"I don't remember seeing an island when we were down there; do you, Nancy?" Dorothy asked.

"I don't remember it," said Nancy.

"Well, it isn't where we could have seen it from the part of the beach where we were. Uncle Harry says it is a wee little trip from the island to the shore of Foam Ridge, but it is opposite the far end of the beach, away over toward the next town. We shall be all by ourselves on Gem Island, but we can go over to the mainland, and we —"

But while Flossie was speaking a drawling voice interrupted: "Going down to Maine?" it said.

It was tall, lanky Leander Correyville, who, with his hands in his pockets, came slouching toward them. He had crossed the lawn while they were so busily talking they had not heard his approach.

"Maine? Flossie didn't say anything about Maine," Nancy said.

They had already forgotten that Flossie had spoken of making the trip from Gem Island to the mainland. Those two words were what Leander had heard, and he still believed that they had been talking of the State of Maine, and that, for some reason, they would not tell him.

"Well, I'll tell you something that will surprise you. Arabella and I have decided that we'll take a course of study this summer, and we're not telling what it is, but we know one thing that is sure. When we've taken it we'll be real graceful."

Having told as much as he cared to tell, he turned and walked down the driveway. They looked after him, and then each turned to look at the other.

"Oh, my, we mustn't laugh," said Dorothy, but her blue eyes were dancing.

Really, Leander had said it in a manner that made it droll. He had looked at them as seriously as if he were asking them to believe the impossible, and, indeed, the little girls might well wonder what manner of study could give grace to Arabella and Leander.

They soon forgot Leander when Flossie began to tell more about the wonderful island.

"Uncle Harry says it has the finest places to hide in when we play 'hide-and-seek,' and the people who owned it before Uncle Harry bought it had loads and loads of fine loam shipped down there, so that up near the house the flowers grow and blossom, and the lawns are fine, and yet, so near those gardens is the broad, sandy beach.''

''We could play that the island was enchanted, and that we just *had* to stay on it, and that would be fun, because all the time we'd know that we could go out on the water, or to Foam Ridge if we chose,'' said Dorothy.

''It truly does sound great!'' said Nancy.

That very evening, Uncle Harry went over to the Stone House, and in less than no time it was settled that the neighbors who so enjoyed each other's company should spend summer days together at Gem Island. Uncle Harry's description of its beauty had charmed Mrs. Dainty and Aunt Charlotte, and Dorothy and Nancy had been so eager that it was agreed that in two weeks from that day they would take up their abode on the lovely little island.

Of the good times enjoyed there, of the exciting things that happened, of the fun and frolic, and the puzzling mystery, one may read in

"Dorothy Dainty at Gem Island."

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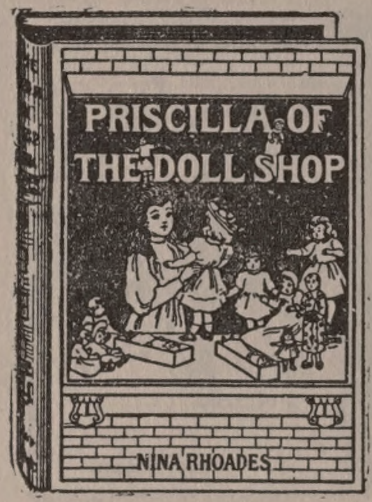

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