

The entire cover is framed by a decorative border of stylized flowers and butterflies. At the top, a banner contains the title. Below the title, two young women are depicted in a garden. The woman on the left holds a large bouquet of roses. The woman on the right holds a book. At the bottom, another banner contains the author's name.

THE STRANGE  
YEAR

ELIZA ORNE WHITE





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**THE STRANGE YEAR**














"I'VE GOT TWELVE CLOCKS IN MY HOUSE, AND THEY'VE ALL  
GOT TO BE FIXED" (page 60)





THE  
STRANGE YEAR

BY ELIZA ORNE WHITE  
ILLUSTRATED BY ALICE B. PRESTON

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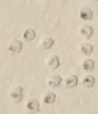
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TO  
MY YOUNG COUSIN  
AGNES  
THIS BOOK IS  
AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED







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# THE STRANGE YEAR

## I

### *The Little Girl in the Brick House*

THERE'S a little girl living in the brick house with the Miss Lanes," said Evelyn West to Nancy Merrifield, "and she's lame. I've seen her sitting at the window, with her crutches near the chair."

"Yes, I know, she's their niece. Her father's going to France to fight," Nancy explained. "He's their brother; and her mother wanted to be with him near some camp until he sailed, so she brought her little girl here. She's the only child she's got, and her name is Sophia."

"I should think she might have found a prettier name for her than that," said Evelyn.

"She's named for her grandmother," said Nancy. "Mother's going to let me go and play with her some day."

It was a cold December afternoon, and the two little girls were playing with their dolls in the nursery at Evelyn's house. There was a bright fire on the hearth, and the children looked very cozy indeed.

"I should think Sophia would want to cry, her



aunts all look so sad in their black frocks," said Evelyn. "I call them the crow ladies."

"The crow ladies!"

"Yes; I call them the crow ladies because they wear such long skirts and such flipperty, flapperty veils. They look just like the three sisters in the picture book your grandmother had when she was a little girl—the ones who turned into crows and flew away."

"They are in mourning for their mother," said Nancy reprovingly.

"Darling Aunt Hilda was in mourning for her father," said Evelyn, "but her black things were all so pretty."

The two little girls sighed. They missed Evelyn's Aunt Hilda, "The Blue Aunt," as they called her. It was not quite two weeks since she had gone away, the morning after Thanksgiving, to sail for France, where she was to help take care of French orphans. Evelyn had got out of bed and run to the window to watch her go down the path, with Evelyn's father on one side and her brother Jim on the other. It would be a long time before they could get a letter from her, and the silence made it seem as if the great sea had swallowed her up.

There was the sound of the banging of the front door and of voices all talking at once. "Lottie and Prue must have come back," said Evelyn, slipping out of her chair and hastily throwing her doll down on the table. "Let's go down and see them."



Evelyn's cousins, Lottie and her younger sister Prue, had been staying for a visit ever since Thanksgiving, but they were to go home to the farm in a few days. Lottie was a big girl who seemed almost like a young lady to Evelyn and Nancy, for she was thirteen years old and very dignified. Dr. Wainwright had taken the two girls on a sleigh-ride with his wife and his daughter Emily, who was about Lottie's age. So when Evelyn and Nancy got downstairs, they found a roomful of people looking very cold, with red cheeks and bright eyes. Mrs. Wainwright was talking to Mrs. West.

"I want to find some one to go every afternoon to help amuse poor little Sophia Lane," she said. "Can you think of any High-School girl who would be willing to read to her and play with her? They would pay well if they got the right girl."

Lottie, who was standing over the register stamping her feet to get them warm, suddenly had a bright idea. "If I could only stay here all winter and amuse Sophia Lane, I could go to High School with Emily, and it would be just too splendid for anything."

Lottie was fond of reading and she liked school. She knew she should have to earn her living when she grew up, and she meant to be a teacher. She did not like the life on the farm, especially in winter. She was not fond of animals, as Prue was, and she detested housework, and there was always a great deal of it to be done in the farmhouse.



“Oh, Mrs. Wainwright, do you suppose I could do it?” she asked.

Lottie was not a very easy visitor to have, and Mrs. West felt some dismay at the idea of having her spend the rest of the year with them.

“I could live with the Lanes and go to school, if it was n't convenient for you to have me here, Cousin Sadie,” said Lottie.

“Your Cousin James would never consent to that,” said hospitable Mrs. West. “We'll have to think it over. It might be a very good plan. I'll write to your grandmother about it.”

Although Lottie was often a trial to older people because she was hard to please and not always considerate, Mrs. West knew that she was very kind to younger children. She could read aloud to Sophia and invent games for the little lame girl.

It was decided that Lottie should take the children the next afternoon, to play with Sophia. This would give her and Sophia a chance to see how they liked each other.

Evelyn decided to take her oldest doll, Sarah, to call on Sophia. She was a rag doll and not very beautiful, but there were reasons why she was the best one to take. Evelyn's mother suggested that it was slippery walking, and the consequences of a fall might be more serious to the beautiful flaxen-haired Matilda, or the brown-haired Virginia. Mrs. West sent a bowl of orange jelly to Sophia. This Lottie carried.



Prue looked with envy at Evelyn's red coat, with the black fur collar, and at Lottie's new dark-blue suit. She herself was wearing a black coat, made out of one that had belonged to her grandmother, and trimmed with red to brighten it up.

"I just hate to always wear other people's clothes, cut down for me," said Prue.

"You always look so nice in everything, darling Prue," said Evelyn.

As they were passing the Merrifields' house, who should come down the steps but Nancy and her father. Evelyn was very fond of Nancy's father, he had such kind gray eyes that matched his hair; and he knew how to talk to little girls. So Evelyn ran and put out a small red-mittened hand into his big one with a fur glove on.

"You look like a flock of birds, children," he said. "Lottie is a bluebird and Evelyn is a redbird and Nancy is a little brown wren."

"And what am I?" asked Prue.

He looked at her bright cheeks and her dark hair, and at her quaint old-fashioned coat; "You are the best bird of all; you are a red-winged blackbird."

Prue felt so glad and proud when she heard this that she skipped along gayly over the icy sidewalk. Evelyn let go of Mr. Merrifield's hand and ran after her.

"Look out, or you'll tumble down," said cautious Nancy.



Evelyn only ran the faster. Presently she slipped and fell face downward on the ice while Sarah seemed to give a flying leap out of her arms and landed in the street. Evelyn picked herself up and rescued Sarah. How glad she was she had left Matilda and Virginia at home.

Presently Mr. Merrifield and Nancy turned down a side street. There was somebody else taking the walk with Evelyn and her cousins, and this was Hector, the friendly brown dog. When they came to the brick house, sure enough, there was Sophia at the second-story window at the right, with her crutches by the rocking-chair. Evelyn had never seen a little girl with such black hair, and it looked all the blacker because her face was so pale.

The three children waved to Sophia. She looked quite alarmed at seeing so many of them. Before Lottie could ring the doorbell a large Maltese cat, who looked as if she owned the place, came along in a disagreeable way and made remarks which nobody but Hector could understand. She hunched up her back and every hair seemed to bristle and she ran towards Hector, and Lottie called, "Hector! Hector!" and the tallest of the three sisters, Miss Gertrude Lane, came out of the door, in her black gown, but without her hat and veil, and she called, "Diana! Diana! Come right in. How rude you are!"

And all the time the little girl in the brick house was looking out of the window, and presently she



opened it and called, "Diana! Diana!" in a shrill, childish voice. The next minute the middle-sized sister, Miss Emily, shut the window down firmly.

The cat disappeared into the house, Hector ceased growling, and the tall, thin sister said, "Good-afternoon, children; I am sorry my cat has been so impolite."

"We've come to see Sophia," Lottie explained. "My cousin, Mrs. James West, has sent her some orange jelly."

Miss Gertrude looked at the children in an uncertain way, shading her eyes with her hand as if she found it hard to see in the bright sunshine on the snow. She seemed a good deal more afraid of the children than they were of her. Just then the green front door opened again, and Miss Emily appeared in the doorway. "Come right in, Gertrude, you'll take your death of cold," she said.

"I think you'd better go up to see Sophia, one at a time," said Miss Emily. "As you are the oldest," she said to Lottie, "you can go up first."

Evelyn and Prue could see Lottie sitting by the window with Sophia. How yellow her hair looked in contrast with the little girl's black hair! They longed to know what she was saying. But they soon forgot all about Lottie and Sophia, for they got so interested in some long icicles that were hanging down at one side of the porch. Evelyn pretended that it was candy, and Prue reached up and broke off a piece for the doll



Sarah. Then they went around the side of the house and found some ice to slide on; and when Lottie came out at last, they were so interested in playing that they were skating, that Prue did not want to take her turn in going up to see Sophia.

“Miss Emily says she’d better see only one more child this afternoon,” said Lottie.

So Evelyn, with Sarah in her arms, went up the front steps and in at the front door, which was opened for her by Miss Emily. It seemed very dark in the hall after the blinding sunlight on the snow. Evelyn followed Miss Emily up the broad staircase, with the twisted white banisters and the mahogany railing. In the dim light Miss Emily, in her black gown, looked more like a crow than ever. In the rocking-chair by the window, in the front room, Sophia was sitting. In her lap was a long row of girls clasping hands, cut out of white paper, and another row of boys, that Lottie had just made for her.

Evelyn ran up to Sophia and held out a friendly hand. “I’m Evelyn West, and this is my favorite child, Sarah. I brought her to call on you,” and she held up the rag doll.

Sophia fixed her large dark eyes on Sarah and said nothing. Evelyn felt that Sarah was not approved of.

“I’ve prettier ones at home,” said Evelyn, “but I could n’t bring them out because it’s so slippery.” Still Sophia said nothing.

“You’d better take off your coat, it’s so warm in



this room," said Miss Emily; and she took off Evelyn's coat and red cap.

Sophia looked hard and long at Evelyn's yellow hair. "Are you her sister?" Sophia asked, in her sad little voice.

"Whose sister? Lottie's sister? Lottie's my cousin. I've only got a brother, Jim. He's bigger than I am. He's gone skating with David Wainwright this afternoon." Evelyn was talking on, nervously. She felt somebody ought to talk, but Sophia's dark eyes were very disconcerting. "Why did you think Lottie was my sister?" she asked.

"Because you both have such yellow hair."

"Lottie's got a sister, Prue. Her hair's 'most as dark as yours. She thought she'd rather play outdoors than to come up to see you, so I came up. Have n't you any dolls?" Evelyn asked.

"Mother forgot to pack mine up," said Sophia. "She's going to bring them later, when she comes."

"How dreadful!" said Evelyn sympathetically. "My mother forgets things, too, but never anything so important as that. Have n't your aunts any dolls that they had when they were little girls?"

"Yes," she said, "there are six of them, but they are all too old and frail to be any good to play with."

Evelyn's warm heart was suddenly flooded with pity for this unfortunate little girl.

"Oh, you poor thing!" she said. "I'll let Sarah



make you a visit. You can bang her about all you like. I play she's very beautiful. You see, being a rag doll, you can play she's anything you like."

This idea seemed to please Sophia. She took Sarah and held her in her arms as if she were a baby.

"Anyway, you have a cat to play with," said Evelyn. "I've got a cat, too. His name is Tim. He began by being a kitten, just the teentiest size; and our furnace-man — his name was Tim, too — found him outside Nancy Merrifield's kitchen door, with a broken paw. Tim was their furnace-man, too, so she named the kitten for him; and her mother would n't let her keep him, because they had a cat already. So she gave him to me; and he was just too cunning for anything. Oh, dear, how I wish kittens would n't grow into cats so fast! He's a tiger-cat, and when he sits in my lap he seems 'most as big as a real tiger. Does Diana sit in your lap?"

The little girl shook her head. "Diana is a very cross cat," she said. "Her whole name is 'Diana of the Crossways,' but we call her 'Diana' for short."

Evelyn had been sorry to leave the make-believe skating outside to come in, but she was now so interested in Sophia that she did not want to go home; and when, a quarter of an hour later, Miss Emily came in to say that Lottie and Prue were waiting for her, she said, "Oh, dear! I'm not ready to go!"

And Sophia said, "Oh, please, Aunt Emily, let her stay a little longer."



“Not to-day,” said Miss Emily. “Perhaps she’ll come some other afternoon.”

Sophia sat at the window watching Lottie and the two younger children as they went out of the gate and along the slippery sidewalk. The three children waved to Sophia and she waved back to them. Miss Emily came over and picked up the rag doll, who was sitting primly in a chair.

“Why, the little girl has left her doll,” she said. “I’ll see if I can’t call her back,” and she ran to open the window.

“Oh, please, Aunt Emily!” said Sophia. “She left her on purpose for me to play with.”

“She left her for you to play with?” She looked at the battered features of the rag doll, and evidently she had her own opinion about her.

But Sophia and Evelyn shared a secret. It was one that it was impossible to make any older person understand. It was that Sarah was not only good and interesting, but very beautiful.



## II

### *The Feast*

**J**AMES," said Evelyn's mother, a few days later, as she looked across the breakfast table at her husband, "don't forget that this is the day of the fair for Hilda's French orphans. We are all going to lunch there."

"I'm sorry," said Mr. West; "I forgot all about it and I have an engagement out of town."

"You don't look very sorry," said Jim. "Gee, but this corn-cake is bum!"

"I've told you not to say 'bum,'" said his father.

"But it is bum; you just try it and see."

One of the strangest things of this strange year of the war was the food they had. Evelyn liked it all, it was so interesting. Mr. West tasted a piece of corn-cake and made a wry face.

"I am sorry you don't like it," said Mrs. West. "It is a rule Mrs. Merrifield gave me. She said her husband liked it, and it does n't take any sugar or eggs."

"I'm glad John Merrifield likes it. I don't. Look here, Sadie, what is this you've got instead of butter?"

"It is nut butter. Mrs. Wainwright told me the



doctor said it was much better to use than a poor grade of butter."

"But who wants a poor grade of butter?"

"Gee, but I'd like to go to France!" said Jim.

"Why?" asked Evelyn, who was contentedly munching her corn-cake.

"Because we've sent all the good food over there."

"We can help win the war by going without things so the soldiers can have them," said his Cousin Prue, as she took a second piece of corn-cake.

"I guess you like corn-meal," said Jim.

"Sadie, you have n't put sugar enough in my coffee," said Mr. West irritably.

"I put in one lump," said Mrs. West, who had been going without any sugar in her own coffee for the last few days. "We are just about out of sugar, and I don't know where I can get any."

"Is n't there any bacon with the eggs?" asked Mr. West. "Saturday is n't a meatless day."

"Oh, but we are only allowed meat once a day now," said Mrs. West, "and I thought you would rather have it at night."

"I guess you got out of bed the wrong side this morning, father," said Jim.

"My dear boy," said his mother, "you must n't speak like that to your father."

"It is what he said to me the other day."

"I know — but a little boy —"

She looked across the table, and to her relief she



saw that her husband was smiling. When he smiled Evelyn thought there was no one in the whole world who looked so nice as her father. Her darling mother was always pretty and sweet, whether she smiled or whether she was sober; but when her father smiled his whole face seemed to light up. His eyes smiled quite as much as his mouth, and now they beamed through the big, dark-rimmed spectacles he always wore.

"I guess you are right, Jim," he said. And before he left he gave Mrs. West a ten-dollar bill to spend at the fair, as he could not be there himself, and he handed each of the children half a dollar.

So it was a joyous procession that went to the fair, and Lottie found it hard to keep the younger ones in order; for Mrs. West was behind the fancy table, so she could not keep an eye on the children herself.

The grab-bag was what Prue and Evelyn liked the best. It fascinated them, for it was so different from any grab-bag they had ever seen. The head of a goose was sticking through a screen; it opened a large yellow bill wide; one put one's hand in and pulled out the grab; and a squawk came from somewhere as if there were another goose behind the screen.

"You try first, Prue," said Evelyn. So Prue put in her hand and pulled out a small, lumpy package. Then Evelyn put in hers, and she got a long, thin parcel. The two little girls ran over and sat down on a bench to open their grabs.



“Oh, dear!” said Prue in disgust, “I’ve got a china lamb that is just right for a baby child. I don’t want it.”

Evelyn was quickly undoing her box. “Oh, dear! It’s a hat-pin,” she said. “It is for a grown-up lady. Let’s try again.”

“I would n’t try again if I were you,” said Lottie. “There’s the collection of dolls you’ll want to see. That show is ten cents, and you know you meant to get Christmas presents. I’ll treat you to the dolls,” she said. Lottie was feeling very rich now she had begun to earn money by taking care of Sophia Lane in the afternoon.

The dolls were most interesting. They were chiefly old dolls which had belonged to the grandmothers and great-grandmothers of the little girls of the present day; and their clothes were as quaint as their faces.

When it was time for lunch, Mrs. Merrifield sat at one end of a table for ten, and Mrs. West at the other; and Jim, David, Nancy, and Prue sat on one side, and Mrs. Wainwright, Evelyn, Lottie, and Emily sat on the other. Everybody could choose whether she would have chicken salad or scalloped fish; and afterwards, she could have chocolate, vanilla, or strawberry ice-cream. And there was cake — real cake — but without any frosting.

Lottie chose strawberry ice-cream, and so did Nancy, Emily, and Evelyn; the two boys took choc-



olate; and when it came Prue's turn, she said: "A little of all three kinds, please."

"Prue!" said Lottie; "you can't have but one kind."

Prue looked up at the pretty young lady who was waiting on them. "Can't I have all three?" she asked, with her sweetest smile. "I'm going back to the farm to-morrow, and I shan't have any ice-cream for ever so long; I'd just like three little tastes. Please, may n't I have them all?"

"I think I can arrange it for you," said the pretty young lady.

Evelyn was sitting next to Mrs. Wainwright. She was very fond of her — even more fond than she was of Nancy's mother — for Mrs. Merrifield often had such a worried look, while Mrs. Wainwright seemed not to have a care in the world except to make people happy. It was strange, Evelyn thought, for Mrs. Merrifield had but the one child, and she seemed so afraid she would take cold or get sick; and Mrs. Wainwright had five children, and she did n't seem to worry about them at all. Ted and Richmond had gone to the war, and Ben was at Exeter Academy; so there were only Emily and David at home. Mrs. Wainwright was not so young nor so pretty as Evelyn's mother, but she had a fresh face with a bright color and dark hair, like her daughter Emily. She was tall, with a comfortable-looking figure. Her suit was dark green, and so was her hat, which was a little on one



side. Evelyn suddenly thought of her green hat-pin. As soon as lunch was over, she ran and got it. "Would you like my grab, Mrs. Wainwright?" she said.

"It is the very thing I want most in the whole world," and Mrs. Wainwright put it into her hat. "What a darling you were to give it to me. I got a grab that I could n't use; suppose I give it to you?" So Mrs. Wainwright went down into the depths of her capacious black bag, and she finally fished out a pair of doll's bronze shoes.

"They are too small for me, or even for Emily, we have such large feet," she said. "Do you think they would fit any of your family?"

"Oh!" cried Evelyn joyously, "I'm sure they would just fit Virginia, and they are just right for her brown dress."

"I want to get some cake before I go home," said Mrs. West. "It is Prue's last night, and I think it will be nice to have a little feast."

But everybody was so cake hungry that year that when she went to the food table there was not one piece of cake left. There was a loaf of oatmeal bread and some bran muffins, but one could not make a feast out of these. "I'm so disappointed," she said to Mrs. Wainwright. "We have n't sugar enough to make cake."

"That's too bad," said Mrs. Wainwright. "Perhaps I can help you out. I could n't get any cake either, but I got the last gingerbread there was — a



dozen individual ginger cakes; you are welcome to them." Again she opened her capacious bag.

"How much were they? I should be glad of them, if you really don't mind."

"They are a present. I am delighted to contribute that much towards the feast."

So Evelyn and her mother went home very happy, Evelyn with the doll's shoes, and Mrs. West with the ginger cakes. But, alas, when Evelyn tried the bronze shoes on Virginia, they were too small; and although she pulled and tugged, she could not get them on. They were much too small for Sarah and altogether too large for Matilda, who had a small foot. She put them on her, however, although they were so very large that they made her look awkward.

It was very sad to have it Prue's last night, but no one could stop to think of that because of the feast. Bananas and oranges mixed were almost as good as having three kinds of ice-cream. And then there were the ginger cakes. Everybody took one, except Lottie, whose nose gave a suspicious little sniff.

"No, thank you," she said primly.

"No gingerbread?" Evelyn asked in surprise.

"It's queer gingerbread," said Jim, who had bitten a large piece out of his cake. "Gee, but I'd like to go to France!"

"It is n't gingerbread," Prue said in disappointed tones. "It's a funny kind of brown bread."

"Oh, I'm so sorry," said Mrs. West, after tasting



her ginger cake. "It's evidently one of the new recipes for bread and got put on the wrong table."

They all left their cakes unfinished, except Evelyn and Prue; and Mrs. West said the remnants would make a fine feast for the birds. She was sure if one thought of them as brown bread, the untouched cakes would be very good for breakfast the next morning, toasted and buttered. But, alas, in the morning a spot of bright green appeared in the center of each cake, which the heat seemed to have brought out. Evelyn was contentedly beginning on hers, but her mother said, "Really, I don't know what this is made of; I don't feel that it is very safe to eat it. Catherine can give them to the birds."

The birds' party was such a very interesting affair that nobody felt sorry that the cakes could not be eaten inside. Catherine, the cook, always fed the birds every morning. She opened the kitchen window and she threw any scraps she had out on the white snow. She broke some of the cakes into large pieces and others into small pieces.

"The large pieces are for the crows," she said.

The children eagerly waited at the window, and presently some sparrows came hopping along and took some of the small pieces. Then some pigeons came, and two beautiful blue jays, and, last of all, the crows, who drove the other birds away. There were three of them, and they reminded Evelyn so much of the three Miss Lanes that she began to laugh.



“What are you laughing at?” asked Jim.

But Evelyn would not say. It was a joke which could only be shared by Nancy, and Nancy was not there.



### III

#### *Ellen*

EVELYN felt so badly when Prue left that she cried. This happened so seldom that her mother was distressed.

“Darling, you’ve got your father and me, and Jim and Lottie,” she said. “Just think of poor Nancy, who has n’t any other child at her house, and of Sophia, whose father and mother have gone away.”

At the mention of Sophia, the little girl’s sobs burst out afresh. “I wish I had n’t let her keep Sarah so long,” she said. “Sarah is always such a comfort.” For the rag doll was the first doll she had ever had and always helped her in times of trouble.

“We’ll go and make a call on Sophia and her aunts this very afternoon,” said Mrs. West, “and we’ll bring Sarah home. And we’ll get Nancy to come to supper and cheer you up, and Emily Wainwright, so that Lottie won’t miss Prue so much. But, dearest, if we take Sarah away from Sophia, we ought to give her another doll. Suppose we go to the store now and buy one for her. You children can dress her, and we older ones will help you; and we’ll give her to Sophia for a Christmas present.”



So the smiles quickly followed the tears, and Evelyn began to feel there was something to live for, after all.

Evelyn skipped along the street, holding her mother's hand tightly, for it was still very slippery. Neither she nor her mother had much money to spare, for they had sent Christmas boxes to soldiers in France, and they had sent Christmas presents by Aunt Hilda to the French orphans. The dolls were all very expensive that year. The young lady who waited on them said this was on account of the war. There were some with yellow hair and blue eyes that opened and shut, and one with brown hair. But these cost so much they were out of the question.

"Oh, mother, here's a doll with just a nice, cozy face," said Evelyn.

"There is a less expensive one over here," said Mrs. West.

"But she looks proud, mother. I don't want Sophia to have a proud child. If you've got only one child, you can't have her proud."

"I see," said Mrs. West. "I had n't thought of that." Mrs. West took up a smaller doll. "This one is n't proud, Evelyn."

"She's too sad, mother. You can't have a sad child for your only one. This is the only doll that is just right for Sophia," and Evelyn stopped in front of the one she had chosen, and refused to take anything else.



“But how am I going to pay for her?” said Mrs. West. “My December bill is too large already.”

“We need n’t have a tree this year, mother. To give up a tree is n’t so bad as for Sophia to have the wrong child.”

“All right,” said Mrs. West. “It is very important, I know. It does n’t seem so very long since I was a little girl and was choosing a doll for myself.”

“Mother, it does n’t seem to me that Sophia’s aunts were ever little girls, ’cept Miss Molly; she might have been one, just a little speck of a while.”

“They are all as dear and good as they can be,” said Evelyn’s mother, “but they have never had a little girl to take care of before.”

Everybody was interested in the doll — Emily Wainwright and Mrs. Wainwright, who came to supper also, and Lottie and Nancy.

“We’ve got to give her a name,” said Emily.

“We’ll take the first letter of each of your names and make one for her,” said Mrs. Wainwright. Mrs. West brought out a box of letters and she mixed an N and two E’s and an L together. NEEL did n’t make a very good name. LEEN was n’t very much better.

“I’ve got it,” cried Nancy, “ELEN — we’ll call her Ellen.”

“That’s the wrong way to spell Ellen,” said Jim scornfully. He could have no part in dressing the doll, but he had given fifteen cents towards her clothes, so he felt interested.



“Ellen is a very good name for her,” said Mrs. Wainwright; “and if you don’t mind including me, you can put in a second L.” As Mrs. Wainwright’s name was Louisa, this made it very complete.

“Only, mother and I don’t come in at all,” said Jim.

“She can have James for her middle name,” said Mrs. Wainwright. “That is sometimes a last name, and that will get in the S for your mother.” So the doll became Ellen James Lane.

Her clothes were given out to different people to make. “I’ll knit her a sleeveless sweater,” said Mrs. West, who had just finished her third for a soldier.

“And I have some pieces of Emily’s winter dress; I’ll make the dress,” said Mrs. Wainwright. “A dark-blue dress with a white guimpe will be very pretty.”

“I’ll knit her an undershirt and make her underclothes,” said Emily.

“I’d like to make her a petticoat, because it’s all I can make,” said Nancy.

“I want to make her a petticoat,” said Evelyn.

“You can each make her a petticoat; she might as well have two,” said Mrs. Wainwright, “and Emily and I will make her a dress and coat and a stocking cap.”

“Oh, is she going to have a stocking cap?” cried Evelyn, dancing about the room. “And who’ll make her some shoes?” she asked.



“I believe the bronze ones that are too big for Matilda would just fit her,” Nancy said.

Evelyn was not at all anxious to give away the shoes, even though they were a misfit for Matilda. But when she tried them on and found they exactly fitted Ellen, there seemed to be nothing to do but to let Ellen wear them.

When Ellen was dressed she was certainly the most satisfactory child that any little shut-in girl could have. Over her blue dress she wore a long red coat; and she had a red cap and a blue muffler with white stripes on the ends. So she was a true war doll, all in red, white, and blue. She also had a fuzzy white muff for best, and her red sleeveless sweater could be worn under her coat in cold weather. She had a tiny handkerchief, with an E.J.L. embroidered in one corner in red by Mrs. West.

Mrs. Wainwright gave her a trunk that held her extra petticoat and a blue-and-white checked gingham dress that Lottie had made her. It also held a wash-rag that Jim had knit, and a tiny brush and comb and mirror David Wainwright had bought, and a summer hat Lottie had trimmed with a scarf of blue. On the outside of the trunk, Lottie painted in black letters, E.J.L.

“Mother, darling, don’t you think it would be nice if Sophia could come and spend the night before Christmas with us?” Evelyn asked.

“But if Nancy comes —”



“We could sleep three in a bed the wide way, just as Prue and Nancy and I did at Thanksgiving.”

“I don’t believe her aunts would ever let her come.”

“We could ask Dr. Wainwright. They always let her do what he says. Oh, please telephone to Dr. Wainwright right off now this minute.”

“You can telephone yourself if you care so much about it.”

Mrs. West sat down at her little table where the telephone stood, with its long green cord that was long enough for her to have it by her bed.

Dr. Wainwright was at home, and Mrs. West said, “My little girl has something especial she wants to ask you.”

When Evelyn began to talk into the telephone she felt so embarrassed she could not think of what she wanted to say.

“Well, what is it?” said Dr. Wainwright in his cheery voice; “has your daughter Mehitable got the chicken-pox?”

“I have n’t any daughter Mehitable. Mine have nice names.”

“Perhaps it’s the smallpox,” said the doctor. “If so, you’ll all have to be quarantined.”

“It’s about Sophia Lane,” said Evelyn. “Can’t you tell her aunts you think it will do her good to spend Christmas Eve with Nancy and me and sleep three in a bed? We’d let her sleep in the middle,” she



said generously. "He's laughing, mother — what is he laughing at?"

"I should think three in a bed would be rather a tight squeeze," said the doctor. "I am afraid her aunts would n't approve."

"It's the wide way of the bed and there's lots of room."

"I'll do my best for you," said the doctor.

Evelyn began to dance about the room.

But alas! the best-laid plans of little girls are no more sure of going right than are those of mice and men. Both Miss Gertrude and Miss Molly came down with the grippe just before Christmas, Sophia herself had a cold, and Miss Emily had to take care of all three of them.

"I should think it would be nice to get Sophia out of the house," said Evelyn.

But the doctor was firm; he would not let a little girl with a cold sleep in a bed with two other little girls who did not have colds. Evelyn thought doctors were very tiresome. So the only thing to be done was to take the doll and her trunk up to Sophia's house on the afternoon before Christmas, and leave the parcels at the door, for they were not allowed to go into a house where they had the grippe. Mrs. West said they could wait outside the door, if Sophia was well enough to be at the window, and watch her undo the parcels. All six went — Lottie and Emily, Nancy and Evelyn, and David and Jim.



“We might as well go along,” said Jim, in his off-hand way. “We’ll take you and Nancy on our sleds.”

“Truly, Jim?”

Emily was the one to take the parcels to the front door of the Lanes’ house. She had been named for Miss Emily, who was her mother’s intimate friend. The other girls stood as near the house as they could get, while the boys waited at the gate as if they had no interest in the fate of Ellen.

Sophia was at the window, so her cold must be better. She brightened up when she saw them and waved to them all. Evelyn and Nancy threw kisses back to her. Jim threw a snowball that hit Lottie squarely in the back. It made her jump.

“Jim, you naughty boy!” she said. She looked up at the window and saw that Sophia was laughing. Although she had gone to her every afternoon until they had grippe at the house, she had never seen her laugh so hard before.

Emily handed the parcels in to the maid and came down the steps. Presently they saw Miss Emily hand Ellen to Sophia. Her fingers were clumsy and her aunt seemed to be offering to untie the red ribbon, but the little girl vigorously shook her head. First the ribbon came off, then the outer paper, and then the tissue paper inside of that. Evelyn had never seen any little girl look so happy as Sophia looked as she clasped Ellen in her arms. Even the boys were impressed.



But when Sophia opened the trunk and found all the things in it, her delight knew no bounds. She wiped Ellen's face with the wash-cloth; she made her look in the tiny mirror; and, finally, she made Ellen wave her tiny handkerchief.

Miss Emily put Ellen on the window-sill, and she made a patch of red, white, and blue.

"It's a real war Christmas," said Lottie, "for we are not going to have a tree."

"And we are patriotic with our red, white, and blue," said Emily.

"And Sophia is 'most as badly off as a French orphan," said Evelyn, "with her father and mother both away."



## IV

### *The Coal Famine*

THE food got stranger and stranger as the strange year went on. The Wests had grapefruit in the morning, sweetened with maple syrup, and barley bread with nut butter. Mr. West had got so he liked it; and everybody, except Lottie, felt that all these things were of small account if only the good food could be got across the water to help our soldiers win the war. Things looked very black, however, in these winter days; and to add to everybody's depression, there was no coal to be had. The Wests had put in their winter supply in the spring, so their house was warm and comfortable. But the Merrifields had got down to their last half-ton.

In the spring, Mr. West had said to Mr. Merrifield, "John, there'll be a big coal famine next winter. I am going to get in all my coal now. You'd better do the same."

"I should feel it were hoarding if I did," said Mr. Merrifield. "I'll take my chance with my neighbors."

To make matters worse it was bitter cold weather — the coldest that had been known for twenty-five years. The Miss Lanes were burning their last ton of coal and could not get any more, and Lottie



shivered in her sweater whenever she went to amuse Sophia. The farm began to look very pleasant, for they had great rousing wood fires all over the house, and they made their own butter. Lottie left the nut butter uneaten, and she had such a martyr-like expression that Mrs. West was troubled. The Germans were sinking all the ships they could, and one wondered how much of the food that was n't eaten here got safely across the water. Evelyn and Nancy had a very happy time, and the stranger things were the better they liked it.

"It's cold as cold at Nancy's house," Evelyn said one afternoon when she came home. "It's such fun wearing a sweater all the time."

"Have n't they any furnace fire?"

"Just a teenty-tinety one made of wood. And they are burning wood in the kitchen and using the gas stove. Mr. Merrifield has given away a lot of his coal, and he gave some the other day to a poor widow woman."

"Don't say 'widow woman,' dear."

"That's what Maria called her. She's the one who sometimes does extra washing for them. So when the widow lady came back with the washing —"

"It is enough to call her a widow."

"She said she could n't do any more because she could n't get any coal, and she wanted to buy some of Mr. Merrifield. So he gave her some and would n't let her pay for it; and Mrs. Merrifield said he and



Nancy would give the clothes off their backs. And he was afraid the widow was starving, too, so Mrs. Merrifield went round to find out, and she took Nancy and me with her. And what do you think, mother? Her room was hot as hot, and she had just made a big round frosted cake which she is going to send to her boy at Camp Devens."

"I'm glad somebody is going to have a cake," said Mrs. West.

"Oh, it was such a nice cake, mother!" and Evelyn's eyes shone at the recollection. "It was bigger and frostier than any we've had since before the war. She was so thankful to Mr. Merrifield for having sent her the coal. And what do you think, mother? There was a little of the cake left over, that was baked in something else, and she gave Nancy and me each a piece! and, oh, how good it was! And the widow said she was so glad to get the coal, because she'd been 'most freezing, and her boy would be so pleased with the cake. And, oh, mother, just think, there is only enough coal for us to have church one more Sunday!"

"Is it possible?"

"Mr. Carey has asked Mr. Merrifield to come to his church, and Nancy says it's got the dearest little doors to the pews, so each pew is like a little house; and I should think I could take a doll to church in a pew like that, and nobody would notice."

"My dear child, how many times shall I have to tell you you can never take a doll to church?"



“Mr. Carey will do some of the preaching and praying, and Mr. Merrifield will do some, and both choirs are going to sing; and we are all going to have Sunday School together after church instead of before. Won't it be fun?”

Mrs. West was not so much pleased with the prospect as Evelyn was. It seemed very unhomelike to her to go to another church and sit in a strange pew; and when the Sunday for the change came, her husband said he was so busy that he would have to stay at home. This was a disappointment.

The Miss Lanes went to Mr. Carey's church, so they asked the Wests to sit in their pew. Sophia never went because she was so lame; and the aunts took turns in staying at home with her. This Sunday it was Miss Emily's turn to stay behind. Mrs. West and the children followed the two Miss Lanes up the broad aisle of the church to a pew very far in front. They both wore their hats with their long black veils. Miss Gertrude was very tall and dignified, and Miss Molly was short and plump, and quite out of breath from having walked up the hill. Evelyn put her hand on Nancy, who was going up the aisle with her mother, and then she looked at the Miss Lanes and smiled; for she was thinking of how she had called them the crow ladies. But Nancy did not smile back, because she was in church, so she walked along primly, like the good little girl she was.

Evelyn was so pleased with the pew door that she



held on to it and swung it back and forth, as one after another of the older people went into the pew; and her mother had to tell her to come in and sit down. In the pew there was one seat facing the minister and another facing the choir; and the cushions were a shade of red she especially liked. She could not understand much of Mr. Merrifield's sermon, but the text was one she had learned at Sunday School, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." She looked at Jim and smiled, but he did not seem to see her; and then she looked at Lottie and smiled, but Lottie was sitting up very still and straight. Then she smiled at her mother, and her mother smiled back at her. There seemed to be a great deal about giving in the sermon, only Evelyn did not know what all the words meant. Mr. Merrifield said a good deal about the soldiers and how everybody must give, give, give, the best they had.

Evelyn thought of the widow and the frosted cake. Mr. Merrifield gave the coal to the widow, and she gave the frosted cake to her boy, and he probably gave some of it to his friends; so everybody was giving. And she had given the bronze shoes to Sophia's doll. She felt pleased to think she had given something. Only, it was not exactly the best she had, because the shoes had n't fitted any of her own dolls. Still, she had wanted to keep them, and she had given them away; that was something.

She wondered what else she could give. And then



she thought how warm their house was, and how cold it was at the Miss Lanes' house and at Nancy's house. So she made up her mind she would tell her father how Mr. Merrifield had given some coal to the widow, when he had only a little left himself; and how nice it would be to give him lots and lots of coal, and then lots and lots more to the Miss Lanes. Then all three houses would be warm instead of just one. So when she came home from church she ran into her father's library, where he was doing some writing. Her father did not like to be disturbed by most people when he was writing, but it was very seldom he minded being interrupted by his small daughter.

"Well, what is it, little pigeon?" he asked, putting down his pen and taking her on his knee. He stroked her yellow hair and begged for a kiss.

"It was such a nice sermon, father," she said. "And it was all about giving, and I thought it would be nice to give the Merrifields lots and lots of our coal, and the Lanes lots and lots more, and then we'd all be warm."

"But, Evelyn, there would n't be enough coal for us all to be warm all winter, and nobody knows when we are going to get any more."

"But, father, we could give them some," and she told him how Mr. Merrifield had shared his with the widow.

"I warned John Merrifield in the spring. It is



his own fault. He could have got it when I got mine."

"And the Miss Lanes?"

"They are like the 'foolish virgins,' in the Bible. I am sorry for them, but I can't supply the whole town with coal. I might just as well be expected to take them all into my house. That would be a great deal more practical, for the same amount of coal would do for all three families."

Her father told her to run away, for he was busy; and Evelyn was much pleased with this new idea. She suspected her father was joking, but it seemed a very sensible plan to her. She could think of nothing nicer than having all three families living together. It was no more strange than all going to church together to save coal, and no more strange than all the other things that happened this strange year. So she told her mother what a nice plan she thought it would be.

"I don't know how we could stow away so many," said her mother; "and it would be a pretty big family for Ann and Catherine, if we were to take in seven more people."

"Sophia and Nancy and I could all sleep together, the wide way of the bed, and there's lots of room for the others."

"If you don't beat the Dutch!" said Jim, looking up from his book.

There came another cold snap, and Mrs. West



went over to see how the Merrifields were getting on.

“We have been able to get a load of wood,” said Mrs. Merrifield, “so we are all right for a few days.”

Evelyn had gone over with her mother, but Mrs. West said, “I think Nancy had better come to our house to play with Evelyn this afternoon, because it is so much colder here, I am afraid Evelyn might take cold.”

“I have been afraid for Nancy,” said Mrs. Merrifield, “but I believe what Dr. Wainwright says is right — that we all keep our houses a great deal too hot.”

A few days later Mr. West came home and said: “Sadie, I’ve asked the Merrifields to come and stay with us until they can get some coal. It’s a sin and shame the way John shares everything he has. He does n’t deserve to be helped out, he’s so unpractical; but if ever there was a Christian who lived up to what he preaches it’s John. I take off my hat to him.”

So Evelyn and Nancy had the fun of sleeping together; and, as the Miss Lanes’ coal gave out soon after, their great house was closed; and Miss Emily and Sophia went to stay for a few weeks with the Wainwrights, and Miss Gertrude and Miss Molly went to the Baxters’ for a time. It was quite like the game of stage-coach. Everybody’s plans were changed by the coal famine.



## V

### *Lottie*

**T**HE one person in the house who made things hard for Mrs. West, during this time, was Lottie. She had always been spoiled at the farm, for ever since she was a little girl she had known exactly what she wanted, and she had fussed so much if she did not get it that her grandmother and her Aunt Mattie found it easier to let her have her own way than not. She had golden hair and gray eyes, and a pleasant voice and gentle manner; so every one thought what a sweet girl Lottie was until they had known her for some time. Then they thought, "What a pity such a nice girl should be so selfish!" It was a pity; and everybody in the Wests' house had found this out, except Lottie herself. The longer she stayed, and the more at home she felt, the harder it was for the others.

As things became more and more uncomfortable, Lottie grew more and more homesick for the farm. She did not like any of the new war recipes, and she could not see why people with so much money as her Cousin James and Cousin Sadie should feel they must conform to the government regulations.

"But don't you see, Lottie," said Mrs. West, "how



we must all do our part to get food across to our men by going without ourselves?"

Lottie did not answer. She merely looked sulky. What she thought was: "I'm sure the soldiers will get all the sugar and bacon and meat that is good for them, and they ought to expect some hardships. And I don't see why the French must have all the white flour, just because they like it better. So do I, but nobody considers me."

When the Merrifields had come — at the time of the coal famine — Lottie had looked very much injured because she had to move out of her comfortable room. But when some out-of-town guests came for over Sunday, and she had to sleep on a sofa in the room with Evelyn and Nancy, she cleared out her bureau drawers to the sound of much grumbling.

"I don't see why, if people invite themselves like that, and it is so inconvenient to take them in, you can't tell them they can't come," she said. "And a whole family, too! I think it is outrageous."

Poor Mrs. West found it very hard to make things run smoothly, for the maids were overworked and tired, and everybody seemed upset.

"Well, Ann," Mrs. West said one day, "we shan't have such a big family much longer. They say there is going to be plenty of coal next week."

"I would n't mind having the Merrifields," said Ann. "Mrs. Merrifield is such a help around the house. There never was a better child than Nancy,



and Mr. Merrifield is a saint. It's worse having Miss Lottie than all three of them put together."

Mrs. West, for the moment, felt inclined to agree with her, but loyalty forbade her saying so. "Lottie means to be a help," she said; "she always makes her own bed, and she is very nice with the children. She likes to hear the reading aloud in the evening, and her music is a great pleasure to Mr. West and me."

"Maybe I should appreciate her better if I were musical," said Ann.

"I wonder, James," said Mrs. West to her husband that evening, "if we can't do something to prevent Lottie fussing so over her food. It's so discouraging to the maids."

He had not thought much about it. But the next morning he noticed how critical she was about her breakfast; and the morning after that, she was more trying than usual, for the oatmeal was scorched. Catherine was very much disturbed when she found she had scorched the oatmeal, but it was only slightly scorched; and she thought Jim and Evelyn would not notice it, and as for Miss Lottie, she seldom touched oatmeal. But this morning, she did not taste her banana because part of the skin looked so black, and she said, "I'll take a little oatmeal, please." Her nose went up and she gave a little sniff and pushed her saucer away.

"Is n't your oatmeal all right?" asked Mrs. West anxiously.



“No, it’s burned. Can I have an egg, please?”

Mrs. West rang for Ann, only to find there were no more eggs in the house. “Eggs are so expensive now,” said Mrs. West apologetically, “that I am trying to get along with a dozen less.”

“You don’t seem to realize, Lottie, that eggs are eighty-five cents a dozen,” said Mr. West, who had just paid his grocer’s bill.

“Gee, but I’d like to go to France!” said Jim. He had said this so often that everybody laughed, except Lottie. She looked very sulky.

“How should I know that eggs are eighty-five cents a dozen,” she was thinking, “when they are as fresh as can be at the farm, and we can have all we want?”

“Eat your breakfast, Lottie, and don’t make any more fuss,” her Cousin James commanded. “I wonder what you’d do if you were in the trenches?”

Lottie adored her Cousin James, and she felt so hurt at the way he spoke to her that it was all she could do not to burst into tears. She got up and quickly went out of the room.

“I’m afraid you’ve hurt her feelings,” said Mrs. West.

“I hope I have. Somebody ought to hurt them, or she’ll grow up an intolerable nuisance.”

“But that is n’t the way to help matters.”

Mrs. West was going up to see Lottie, before she went off to school, but Ann came to tell her there



was a bad leak in the plumbing, so she forgot all about Lottie. The poor child had locked herself into her room and was crying as if her heart would break. And all through school, that morning, the oftener she thought of what her Cousin James had said, the worse she felt. Then she made up her mind that when she went to amuse Sophia that afternoon, she would take a dress-suit-case with her and tell them she had come for a visit. Now that there was coal in town, once more, the Miss Lanes had gone home and opened the brick house, and they were all living there with Sophia. But the little girl was so homesick after having been in the Wainwrights' lively family, that Miss Emily had said to Lottie, only the day before, "I wish you could come and make us a long visit. It would do Sophia a great deal of good."

"I'm afraid Cousin James and Cousin Sadie could n't spare me," she had said. Now, she said to herself, drearily, "They'll be glad to get rid of me. Oh, dear, I wish I was at home at the farm!"

Lottie came back and ate her dinner without saying anything. Mr. and Mrs. West had gone to Boston for the day, and Jim and Evelyn talked so much they did not notice Lottie's silence.

As soon as dinner was over she went upstairs and put some underclothing and a dress into her suit-case. "I'll take enough things so I can stay a week, anyway," she said. "And I guess I'll stay until I go to the farm for Easter vacation."



She did not want to tell the children or the maids of her plan, but being a child who thought things out carefully, she decided it would be best to write a note and leave it behind, so her Cousin Sadie should not worry about her. This was what the heroine in a story always did. So she wrote in her round, childish hand:

*Dear Cousin Sadie,* After what happened this morning, and the things Cousin James said, you will not be surprised at my accepting an invitation from the Miss Lanes. I expect to stay a week.

Yours aff'ly

LOTTIE

She pinned this note on her Cousin Sadie's pin-cushion where she would see it the first thing when she came home. And she slipped out of the house without any one seeing her. She felt like a traveler starting on a great adventure. As she passed the Wainwrights' house, who should come out but David.

"Hullo, where are you going?" he asked.

"I'm going to the Lanes' for a little visit."

"Let me carry your suit-case for you."

David was small and the bag was large. Lottie was afraid it was too heavy for him, but he only smiled in his engaging way, and said cheerily, "Father says one must always carry things for girls."

"But I'm a lot older and bigger than you are. Let's both carry it."

"It does n't make any difference about your big-



ness," said David; "I always carry mother's things for her."

Miss Gertrude and Miss Emily Lane were in their best spare room when they saw Lottie coming up the path. David had left her just before she got to the gate, for he saw Charley Norcross coming down the street. The Miss Lanes were overseeing the cleaning of the best bedroom, for they were expecting Sophia's mother in a week or two.

"The curtains will have to come down and be done over," Miss Emily decided.

"Why, here comes some one with a dress-suit-case," said Miss Gertrude, who was very near-sighted. "I suppose it is one of those Armenian women with things to sell."

"It's Lottie West," said her sister. "I'm afraid she's come for a visit. I asked her if she could n't come, but I did n't expect her to arrive like a thunderbolt out of a clear sky. It's a most inconvenient time, with the spring cleaning and dressmaking at the house. Well, I suppose Sophia will be delighted."

Miss Gertrude could never pretend to be glad when she was n't. So Miss Emily tried to make up by being especially cordial, but it was n't easy for her either; and they both were so stiff that poor Lottie suspected she had come at the wrong time.

"You asked me to come and make you a visit," she faltered, "and I said I could n't, but I found I could, so I just came along."



“That is very nice,” said Miss Emily; “Sophia will be so glad.”

“If it is n’t convenient —”

“It is, only that we did n’t know you were coming, and we’ve got the best bedroom all upset. But we are so glad to have you, if you don’t mind sleeping in a small and rather cold room.”

Miss Emily showed Lottie into the small, cold room. “I am sorry, but the furnace heat does n’t come up from this register very well,” she said. “But you won’t sit here; you’ll only have to sleep here, and you can dress in the bathroom. Sophia will be so glad to see you,” she repeated.

The room seemed like a refrigerator to Lottie, who was used to the Wests’ warm rooms. She put down her suit-case and went in to see Sophia, who had seen her come up the path, for she was sitting at the window with her Aunt Molly, who was reading to her. Sophia had Ellen in her arms. She had never seen the little girl’s face light up as it lit up now.

“You’ve come to stay?” she asked.

“Yes.”

“And you are not going back to-night?”

“No.”

“Nor to-morrow night?”

“I don’t think so.”

“Nor the night after?”

“I don’t think so. It depends on how long your aunts want me to stay.”



“We hope you’ll stay at least a week,” said Miss Emily. “Sophia’s mother may come at the end of a week.”

“But there’s lots of room in this big house,” said Sophia. “Ellen,” — and she made the doll hold out her small hand to Lottie — “just think of it, your Aunt Lottie has come to make us a visit. Are n’t you glad?”

Then Sophia changed her voice and spoke in a squeaky little voice for Ellen. “I’m just delighted to see you, Aunt Lottie.”

“I’m glad somebody’s delighted,” thought Lottie.



## VI

### *The Long Week*

IT was almost supper-time when the Wests got home, and Evelyn's mother was so tired that she did not go upstairs to change her dress.

"Do lie down on the sofa," said Evelyn, who always noticed when her mother was tired.

Jim brought the afghan in from the other room, and he dumped it on his mother, boy-fashion, while his small sister smoothed out the wrinkles.

Nobody missed Lottie until they sat down to supper; and then Jim asked, "Where's Lottie?"

"She must have stayed at the Wainwrights' to supper. Did she telephone, Ann, or leave a message?"

"No, Mrs. West."

"She ought to have telephoned," said Mr. West. "This is the second time she has stayed without sending us word." He missed her music; and when it was time to read aloud, Mrs. West said, "Lottie is so interested in the story, let's wait for her."

"No," said Mr. West, "if she does n't come home or send any word, I'm not going to wait for her, she can read up." And he went on with the adventures of "Lorna Doone."

When it got to be half-past eight, Mr. West said:



“How is she going to get home? Had n’t I better go and call for her?”

“The doctor will see her home, if she is there, and I can’t think where else she can be.”

“I’ll telephone to make sure,” said he. The doctor may be called out. She’s a most inconsiderate child.”

“I’m going to bed, I’m so tired,” said his wife. And she dragged herself upstairs.

Mr. West took up the telephone and called the doctor’s number. He asked if Lottie was there, and when he was told she was not, he said, “What, not there! Where can she be?”

And just then his wife called down, “James, I’ve found a note from her, and she’s going to make the Lanes a visit.”

Mr. West ran upstairs. He read the note and gave a low whistle. “Upon my word, I did n’t think the little girl had so much spunk,” he said. “She’s her great-grandmother all over again — trying to live with, but a force in the town.”

“Evelyn and I will go around to-morrow afternoon,” said Mrs. West, “and we’ll persuade her to come back.”

“Indeed, you won’t do anything of the kind, Sadie, You’ve spoiled her too long. I’ll take a hand now. Let her carry out her plan and stay there until she’s ready to come home. I know the type. You never knew my Grandmother West.”



Meanwhile Lottie had had a forlorn time at the Lanes'. She was glad to make Sophia happy, but after she had put the little girl to bed and joined the three sisters in the parlor, she began to be extremely homesick. They did not have any piano, or even a Victrola. They sat around the student lamp, with one gas-jet lighted above them, and Lottie could not decide which one of them was having the most dreary time. Miss Molly was playing Patience with a small pack of cards, and Miss Emily was reading the newspaper to herself, occasionally reading a scrap aloud, while Miss Gertrude, whose eyes were not strong, was knitting a sweater for a soldier. Miss Emily took up her knitting, and Lottie was amazed to see her knit a soldier's sock and read at the same time.

"Did you bring your knitting?" she asked Lottie.

"No, I forgot to put it in."

"I've plenty of yarn. I'll start a sock for you."

"But I don't know how to make socks."

"Then it is time you learned. I'll teach you. There's a drive on at the Red Cross for socks. You might just as well be helping some poor soldier win the war."

Nobody had ever put it to Lottie in just that way before. Her Cousin Sadie had been quite content in letting her stick to the mufflers her grandmother had taught her to make.

"I've never made anything but mufflers before," said Lottie.



“How many mufflers have you made since we went into the war?” asked Miss Emily.

“Two and a half.”

“Only two and a half in almost a year!”

Miss Molly was pushing her cards together. “I never can make that game come out right,” she said.

“You’d better get out your knitting, and not waste any more time,” said Miss Emily.

Miss Molly took up her muffler with a little sigh.

“How many have you made, Miss Molly?” asked Lottie.

Miss Molly hesitated. “I am afraid this is only my fourth.”

“Sophia has knit two, since she came to us,” said Miss Emily.

Lottie thought of the reading aloud that was going on at the Wests’. She had expected that they would call her up and urge her to come back the next day. She had a faint hope that her Cousin James might call for her that night and say he was sorry he had hurt her feelings. But the evening passed and nothing of the kind happened. All that did happen was that Miss Emily persisted in teaching her how to knit and seam. She made several mistakes and finally she said: “I guess I won’t try to learn to make socks; it’s too hard. I’ll begin a muffler.”

“No,” said Miss Emily, “that would be deserting at your post. If you were a soldier you would n’t desert. Now, it’s much easier to knit socks for sol-



diers than it is to do the fighting. Your job is to make socks. Pull that out and begin over again. You want to have it just right."

Lottie had never been talked to in this way before. She felt very much injured, and yet she looked at the lady before her with much interest. Miss Emily was neither handsome nor young nor charming; she had nice eyes and a pleasant smile; and she was not old. This was the most Lottie could find at first. What gave her such power? Why did she do what she said?

"Oh, dear, I've made another mistake," said Lottie.

"I'll fix that for you. You are doing very well. I'm glad you don't like to do poor work."

"No," said Lottie, "if I've got to make a sock, I want to make it just right."

When bedtime came Miss Emily told Lottie to undress in the bathroom; and she came into her room, the last thing, with a warm comforter and a traveling clock. She put the clock down on a little table at the head of the bed.

"You'll know when it is time to get up in the morning if you have this," she said. "We have breakfast punctually at eight o'clock." The clock struck the half-hour.

Lottie was about to say she could never sleep in a room with a clock, but Miss Emily had gone over and shut the window partly down, and this distracted her mind.



"I always sleep with my window wide open," said Lottie.

"But it is a very cold night and this is a cold room. Good-night, sleep well." Miss Emily hesitated, as if she was not in the habit of praising, and then she said, "You are going to make a fine knitter; I like the way you stuck to the job."

Lottie glowed all over at the praise. After this she could not speak about the clock. It bothered her greatly, however, and so did the hall clock and the one in the dining-room, directly under her. The little traveling clock struck the hour after a while, in a faint, ladylike voice; and, five minutes later, the hall clock boomed away in a bass voice; and, later still, the dining-room clock began piercingly. When they had all stopped, the church clock, on the top of the hill, gave out its loud peal.

"What am I going to do?" thought Lottie, as she tossed and turned. The traveling clock was ticking away merrily at the head of her bed, and there was no kind Cousin Sadie to whom she could appeal to take it away. There had been a clock in her room at Cousin Sadie's, but it had not stayed there, even for the first night. The miserable little thing was ticking away.

"What am I going to do?" Her feet were as cold as ice. She had never thought to bring her hot-water bag with her. She got up and groped about the room. There were no convenient electric lights, as there were at Cousin Sadie's. She put on her stockings and



wrapped her petticoat around the clock, to dull the sound of the ticking, and carried it to the far end of the room, putting it on the mantelpiece. Pretty soon the clocks all began to strike again. This happened at intervals, until they struck small numbers instead of big ones; and then Lottie must have fallen asleep. For there was a skip between one o'clock and seven.

At breakfast time she expected Miss Emily would ask her if she had had a good night, but instead of that she helped her to oatmeal with milk on it instead of cream. Miss Gertrude said how fast it was snowing. And then Miss Molly said: "I hope you had a good night, Lottie. Did you remember your dreams? They all come true the first night you sleep in a strange room."

"I did n't sleep very much," said Lottie. "I'm not used to a clock in my bedroom, and so it kept me awake."

"That is too bad," said Miss Molly.

"She'll sleep all right after a night or two," said Miss Emily. "She's too young to let herself be mastered all her life by clocks."

And after the third night Lottie found to her surprise that she went to sleep and did not notice the clocks at all. It might be a useful week in her education, but it was not a short one, nor a happy one. She expected Cousin Sadie and Evelyn to come to see her sometime Saturday, but all that happened was



that Cousin Sadie telephoned to say she was so glad she was having such a pleasant change, and that on account of the snowstorm, they would not any of them come to see her. They would meet at church the next day. She had had quite a talk with Miss Emily before Lottie was called to the telephone.

Yes, it was a long week — the longest Lottie had ever known. But before it was over something strange happened: Lottie had learned why Emily Wainwright was so fond of her Aunt Emily, as she called her, although she was really no relation. Lottie respected herself a great deal more because she had learned how to make socks for soldiers, and because she was no longer troubled by the ticking and striking of clocks. And Miss Emily was somehow all mixed up with her self-respect. And yet, in spite of that, she was very happy indeed when the long week came to an end.

“Your Cousin James will call for you and bring you home Friday afternoon,” her Cousin Sadie telephoned.

It was a beautiful afternoon, clear and cold, with the crisp air that sets one’s blood tingling. Although it was March, the snow was still on the ground. Lottie felt very happy as her Cousin James helped her into the sleigh by his side.

“It’s such a fine afternoon we’ll go for a sleigh-ride first,” said he. The days were growing longer, but the sun was low and it would soon be twilight. They drove out into the country. It was the same direction in



which they had driven on Thanksgiving Day, only they did not go so far this afternoon.

Her Cousin James did not talk much at first, and Lottie settled back comfortably wrapped up in her Cousin Sadie's fur coat and the buffalo robe. She had a warm feeling of having got home. It was all so beautiful — the winter woods, with the snow lightly powdering the firs and pines, and the tracks of little animals which made the lonely woods seem like the home of so many wild creatures. Lottie had never been especially fond of animals, but the sight of a gray squirrel and some pheasants made her wonder what sort of homes they had. A home seemed to her the best thing in the world, just now. Beyond the patch of woods was a village with a church spire, and another spire a little farther down the street. Were the congregations in these two churches combining on account of the coal famine? She saw two girls, about her own age, at a window, winding yarn. She wondered if they were going to make socks or mufflers. She had never thought so much about other people before.

“Did you have a pleasant visit, Lottie?” her Cousin James asked.

“Yes, very,” she said primly.

“I'm glad of that, for we missed you.”

“Did you, really?” Lottie looked pleased.

“Easter vacation is coming very soon, and I'll take you back to the farm and spend Easter there. And



when you come back for the spring term Miss Emily says she would be very glad to have you live with them, you are such a help. She says even after Sophia's mother comes there'll be plenty of room for you."

Lottie said nothing.

"Of course if you want to do it, we have nothing to say."

And still Lottie did not speak.

"Of course we'd much rather have you come back to us, but it's for you to decide."

Still she said nothing.

Mr. West flicked the reins and the horse broke into a trot.

At last Lottie spoke. "I was just horrid that morning. I'm sorry," she said.

"So was I, Lottie," said Mr. West. "We've both of us got a streak of your Great-Grandmother West in us. Did your grandmother ever tell you about her?"

"No."

"You see two sisters married two brothers, so your father and I were double cousins; and, as we had no brothers, we were very fond of each other; and when he died —" Mr. West broke off suddenly. "Well, things have never been quite the same since," he said in a matter-of-fact voice. "Our Grandmother West got things done at home, and in the town. She knew what she wanted, and she always got it. She was a fine woman, only she had one fault; she was so par-



ticular, nobody liked to live in the same house with her. Now, Lottie, I've got a big streak of her in me, and I'm so old it's hard for me to change; but you're young, and you can be a comfort, or you can be a torment. Evidently, you were a comfort to the Lanes, or Miss Emily would n't have asked you to come back to them for the spring term. It's for you to say whether you will be a comfort to them or a comfort to us. Which would you rather do?"

"I'd rather come back to you."

"Good."

There was a yellow streak in the sky when they got home, and the twilight was settling down. The shades were still up in the parlor, and Lottie could see the bright fire on the hearth. Her Cousin Sadie was knitting in the firelight; and Tim, the tiger-cat, was curled up on the hearth-rug. Evelyn was on the hearth-rug, too, with her doll, Virginia, in her arms. It all looked so homelike and cheerful that Lottie thought what a fortunate girl she was.

At the sound of the sleigh-bells, Cousin Sadie turned on the electric light in the parlor, and came out into the hall. Evelyn ran down the steps and met Lottie as she was coming up the path. She flung her arms about her and kissed her again and again. "Darling Lottie," she said.

Her Cousin Sadie met her in the hall and kissed her warmly, and Jim appeared, looking rather offish.

"Did n't you miss me at all, Jim?" Lottie asked.



“I was too busy,” he said.

“Are n’t you going to give me one kiss, when Evelyn has given me so many?” and she put her hand on the little boy’s shoulder.

He looked up at his tall young cousin and wriggled away from her hand. “You make me tired,” he said. “Gee, I’d like to go to France!”



## VII

### *The Clocks that Misbehaved*

WHEN Mr. West started off with Lottie for the farm, the morning before Easter, he was full of directions to the household. He felt they were a very helpless family without him.

“Be sure you remember to put the clocks forward an hour to-night, Sadie,” he said to his wife; “if you don’t, you’ll be late to church to-morrow.”

“I’ll try not to forget.”

“You’ll try not to forget! You’ll lose the whole Easter service if you do.”

“Jim” — and Mr. West glanced at his small son, who was finishing his breakfast — “don’t be late to-morrow; and don’t let your mother forget the clocks. Come, Lottie, hurry up, or we’ll be late ourselves.”

And Lottie, who was never known to hurry for any one, followed him in a leisurely way, as he picked up the bags and plunged down the front steps.

Jim always missed his father, for he admired him more than he admired any one else in the whole world. He tried to be like him, and he felt very important now his father had gone. He reminded his mother all day long, at intervals, not to forget the clocks, until



finally she turned on him and said, in her gentle voice, "Gee, but I'd like to go to France!"

Jim began to laugh, and he did not say any more to her about the clocks.

After dinner he and Evelyn began to build block houses in the nursery; and their mother took in her mending-basket and sat with them, it was so much more sociable than to be alone. There were days when she felt hardly any older than they did, and this was one of the days. She longed to get down on the floor and build block houses herself, but she had let the mending go so long there was a great deal to be done.

"I've got twelve clocks in my house," Evelyn said to Jim, "and they've all got to be fixed." She took up a block and began to move its imaginary hands. "Jim," she said, "I don't see why the clocks have to be fixed. How does it help win the war?"

"It does n't, you goosie; it's just a plan so we can have more daylight," he said.

"But why do we want more daylight? Please tell me about it," said Evelyn, who always wanted to know the reason why.

"I'd be talking an hour, and I could n't make you understand," Jim said loftily.

His mother suspected he did not know a great deal about the matter himself. "Evelyn, you are right," she said; "putting the clocks forward is a war measure. If we don't have to light up until an hour later, we save in our electric-light bills; and if we save fifty



cents or a dollar a month, we have just that much more money to put into Thrift Stamps. And if we have an extra hour of daylight, we can work in the garden, and all the people can have more string beans and potatoes to eat themselves, or to sell."

"There, Jim, I knew it had something to do with the war, because it was so queer. This is my best hall clock," Evelyn said, taking up a block of the largest size and pretending to wind it.

"Funny you can hold it in your hand like that," said Jim. "I could n't carry around a hall clock that way."

"It's a nice make-believe 'normous clock, like the one on the stairs at Sophia's house, and it has a big, loud strike, like this: ONE, TWO, THREE," and she made her voice sound as much like the clock as she could. "And this is a teenty-tinety clock," and she took up one of the smallest-size blocks; "and it's got a wee, wee voice — one, two, three. Now I've changed the time; it's four o'clock — one, two, three, four."

"If it's four o'clock," said Jim, "I've got to go straight off to David's. I said I'd get there at four o'clock." And he got up and pretended to be going out of the room.

Evelyn ran and caught hold of his hand.

"It is n't really four o'clock," she said. "You can play with me lots longer."

"Mother," Jim said, "there's going to be a soldier



at the Town Hall to-night who was in the English army. He was in the trenches and he got wounded, and he's going to tell all about it. It's only fifty cents for children. I wish I could go. Could n't you take me? David's father is going to take him."

"I can't go," said Mrs. West, "because Mrs. Wainwright has asked me to go in to the Symphony Concert with her."

"But, mother, it would be a lot more exciting to hear a soldier talk, who's been in the trenches and gone 'over the top,' than to go to an old concert."

"It would be for you, but you see I have promised Mrs. Wainwright to go there to dinner to-night, and to the concert afterwards."

"I might go and hear the soldier with David and his father," Jim suggested, "and I could go there to dinner, too."

"Then Evelyn would have to have her supper all alone; and, besides, they did n't ask you to dinner. Perhaps they would n't mind stopping for you to go to the lecture with them. If I can arrange it I will."

"I'd like to go to the lecture, too," said Evelyn, "and hear the soldier talk about how he got on top."

"No, dear," said her mother, "it would be altogether too late for you to be up."

Mrs. West let the children have their supper before she went out, so that she could sit at the table with them. The tickets had all been sold for the lecture.



Jim was very much disappointed. It seemed very hard for a little boy to have to stay at home all alone, while all the other boys were going to hear about how a soldier went "over the top." After Evelyn went to bed he felt still worse. Even Catherine was out. There was only Ann in the house, and Ann was very cross indeed.

"Come, Evelyn, it's time for you to go to bed," said Ann.

Evelyn began to tease to stay up a little longer. "Jim will be so lonely if I go to bed," said she.

"Come right along this minute," said Ann. "You can't fool around with me as you do with your mother."

Evelyn quickly followed Ann upstairs. It was then that Jim began to think about the clocks.

"It would be great fun to put the clocks forward," thought Jim. "But father has said, 'Never touch the clocks.' But this is a 'special occasion,' and father said, 'Jim, don't let your mother forget the clocks'; and she will forget them, I know she will. She'll come home so late, she'll forget all about it, and we'll all lose the Easter service to-morrow; and I just know it's my duty to wind those clocks. I'm sure it is, and I can do it while Ann is upstairs, so she won't know a thing about it." He thought he would begin with the kitchen clock, while he was sure Ann was in Evelyn's room. He went into the kitchen and climbed up into a chair to reach the clock, which was on a shelf. Then he



opened the clock door, which opened so hard he nearly lost his balance. To save himself, he caught hold of the shelf and sent something flying to the floor. Alas, it was Catherine's little three-minute glass with sand in it by which she boiled the eggs. The shattered glass and the sand lay in a heap on the floor. He got the dustpan and brush and swept up the ruins, hastily putting them into the coal-hod. Then he climbed again, and took hold of the minute-hand. As he moved it around the circle and it reached the hour, it began to strike. He had forgotten it was going to strike. He hoped Ann would n't hear it, for she might think it odd to have eight o'clock come so quick, when it was only five minutes past seven. It was lucky Evelyn's room was so far away. Tim, the cat, was lying cozily on the bricks in front of the stove. Jim picked him up and carried him into the front part of the house.

"We'll have some fun together, old fellow," he said. "I guess I'll fix the parlor clock next."

He turned on the electric light, and Tim settled himself in the Morris chair, while Jim pulled forward the first chair he found and pushed it up to the mantelpiece, where the clock was. It was a small mahogany clock, with a pointed roof to it. Jim opened the door and moved the hand forward. He got down, and then the pale green seat of the chair caught his eye. There seemed to be a gray smooch on it. He was afraid his shoes were n't very clean; still, the smooch



might have been there before — he hoped so. But he was not quite so sure his mother would thank him for putting the clocks forward. However, as he had begun, he must go on; and there were two more — one in the front hall, and one in the dining-room. The dining-room clock was a little traveling clock and did not strike, which was lucky, as Evelyn's room was directly overhead. Jim put the hand around the dial, without any accidents, and now there was only the hall clock to do. He would wait until Ann went off into the back part of the house, because she would not be so likely to hear the clock strike. Still, it had such a loud strike one could hear it all over the house. Then he had a bright idea. Why should n't he push the hour-hand along from seven to eight? Then there would be no striking. He tried it and the hand moved along as easily as could be. There, it was twenty-five minutes past eight now, and there had been no tell-tale striking. Suddenly he wondered what hour it would strike next. Oh, dear, suppose he had upset the striking of the clock! What would his father say! Well, it was too late to think about that now.

Just then the telephone rang. Jim went to the downstairs one, only to find Ann was answering it upstairs. "He'll be ready when you call, sir," Ann was saying.

"Oh, Ann, what is it?" he cried. There was no other "he" in the house at present but himself.



Could it be that he was to go to the lecture, after all? "Ann, Ann, what is it?" he cried again.

Ann came to the head of the stairs. "Dr. Wainwright has had some extra tickets sent in for the lecture. Your mother says you can go. You are to spend the night with David. I'll get your bag ready."

So it was a very happy little boy who listened to the soldier that evening, and he was too much interested in hearing how he went "over the top" to think any more about the clocks. He did not know that his mother had said to Ann, just before she left the house, "I am so sorry to trouble you, Ann, but will you please set all the clocks forward the last thing before you go to bed to-night? It will be very late when I get home, and it would be so dreadful if I should forget about them."

Ann was busy all the evening trimming a hat and altering a jacket she wanted to wear the next day. For Mrs. West had given her the Sunday off, so she was going to the earlier of the two morning services at the Methodist Church, and then to the country to spend the day with her sister. Her room was just over the kitchen, and after a time she heard a knocking at the back door. She knew it was probably the Sunday dinner, and she went down feeling very cross at being interrupted. "I shall be glad to have Lent over, so that Catherine will be at home sometimes in the evening to attend to the back door." It was the dinner, and Ann told the boy he ought to have come



in the afternoon instead of bringing folks down in the evening to let him in. She turned on the electric light and glanced at the clock. "Five minutes of nine!" She had thought it was about eight. How fast time went when one was busy! She might as well put the clocks forward now, and then she would not have to come downstairs again.

When Mrs. West came back late from the concert, she crept upstairs, so as not to wake up Evelyn; and she did not turn on the light until she got to her own room. Then she looked at her watch and moved it forward an hour. She was very sleepy, and the first thing she knew the next morning was that Evelyn was standing all dressed beside her and pulling her braid of hair.

"Mother, dear, it's half-past eight," said Evelyn. "Breakfast's on the table, and Catherine's got to go to church, and Ann's afraid she'll be late herself."

"It can't be half-past eight," said Mrs. West, feeling for her watch.

"All the clocks say so, mother. Ann fixed them all last night."

"My watch says half-past seven. I am sure I moved it forward. Well, probably I did n't. I was so sleepy I don't know what I did. Tell Catherine to go along to church. Eat your breakfast and let Ann clear the table. I only want a cup of coffee and some bread and butter."

Mrs. West never scrambled into her clothes so



quickly as on this Easter morning, and she ate her breakfast in ten minutes. Ann flew around as if she were a young bird instead of a middle-aged woman. Evelyn's mother heard her say her Sunday School lesson in a great hurry; and, as Jim was not at home to go to Sunday School with her, she told her to stop and walk along with Nancy and her mother — for it was not safe for her to cross the streets alone. So a breathless little girl arrived at Nancy's house.

Mrs. Merrifield came to the door herself. "What brings you around so bright and early?" she asked.

"To go to Sunday School with you and Nancy, 'cause Jim's at David's. Mother said I was late."

"No, you are early. You can play with Nancy until it's time to go."

Mrs. West, meanwhile, was getting ready for church, and as all her clocks were an hour too fast she got there just after Sunday School had begun. She was surprised to find Sunday School was still in session, for she thought she was late to church. The children were singing "Onward, Christian Soldiers," as she came in, and when that was over, Emily Wainwright, who was in a class at the back of the church, made Mrs. West come and sit near her. "How nice you could come to our Easter Sunday School service," she said.

"You were n't late, were you, mother?" Jim said, as he was walking home from church with his mother and Evelyn.



"I should say not. I can't think what Ann did to our clocks. They were all about an hour too fast."

Jim, who was holding one of her hands, gave a suspicious wriggle. His face grew very red.

"Did she fix them?" he asked.

"Yes, I told her to," said Mrs. West, a light dawning upon her. "Did you put them forward, too, Jim?"

"Yes," he faltered.

"But no one told you to."

"Father said, 'Don't let your mother forget the clocks,' and I thought you had."

"I see. You did n't happen to remember he told you never to touch the clocks."

"I thought it was a 'special occasion.'"

"I guess you thought it would be fun to fix the clocks," said Evelyn.

"Oh, cut it out!" said Jim.

"I've no doubt you'd have done the same thing, Evelyn, if you'd had the chance," said his mother.

"Yes, I would," the honest little girl said.

It is not so easy undoing mischief as doing it. The clocks all had to be stopped for an hour, and the striking part of the hall clock was wrong, because Jim had moved the hour-hand instead of the minute-hand. And there was not another egg-glass with sand in it to be found. And the smooch would n't come off the chair, so it would have to be recovered. The cat had discovered Mrs. West's knitting on the table and had got hold of the ball and pulled it all over the



floor, getting the yarn tangled around the legs of the table. Ann, on account of the clocks, had got to church an hour too early, and finding the doors closed, she had to wait at the drug store around the corner. This made her so cross that she did n't half enjoy the day off that Mrs. West had given her.

Jim felt very much ashamed of himself when he found how much trouble he had made. He looked so unhappy that Catherine was very good-natured about the egg-glass. And when his mother saw how miserable he was she said the chair was faded and needed a new cover anyway, and that she ought to have put her knitting in her knitting-bag. They were both so generous that Jim felt sorrier than ever for the mischief he had done. But Ann was not kind. She said she could never see why there had to be boys at all in the world. "Men are not so bad," said Ann, "but boys are the most mischievous, annoying creatures on the face of this earth."



## VIII

### *The French Orphan*

THE first letter from the children's Aunt Hilda had come in February. How they had waited and watched every day for the postman! They had expected a letter long before it was time to get one, and finally Evelyn gave up asking, but Jim never forgot. If he was in the house he would hang around until the postman came, and then he would say, "Got any mail?" in an indifferent way, just as if he did n't care whether there was a letter from France or not.

The first letter was a great excitement, and after they once began to come, they would come in bunches, two or three together; then there would be silence for two or three weeks.

A few weeks after Easter, Jim had a long, beautiful letter from Aunt Hilda, all to himself. He took it as if he did n't care about it at all. There was one for each of the family, for she had hoped the letters would reach them for Easter.

Evelyn skipped about the room with her letter. "Have you got one, too, Jim?" she asked.

"Yes, I've got one."

The letters were all very different, but Evelyn



thought hers was the best of all, because it told about the French orphan whom the children were helping support with the money they had given Aunt Hilda before she went away.

“Such a dear little girl as she is,” she wrote. “Her name is Élise, and she is eleven years old. She has a little sister Marie, who is only five. I must tell you how, when Marie got the paper dolls and the paper doll furniture you sent me to give to some little girl, she skipped about the room, just as you would do; and I think the hearts of little girls are not so very different, whether they are French or American. They may wear different clothes and speak a different tongue, but they, too, are little mothers. It is sad that their father was killed, but their mother is brave, and the money you have sent helps her very much.”

In Jim’s letter she said, “I have often thought of that last talk we had the night before I came away, and I feel sure you are doing your bit, far back of the firing line, by trying to be a boy that I shall be proud of when I come home. They feel America is a great nation over here, because we came to their help; and I want the boys who are young now, and who I hope will find peace in the world, and not war, when they grow up, to learn to take their part and help the world in peaceful ways.”

Jim thought about the clocks, and again he felt thoroughly ashamed of himself.



In his mother's letter, Aunt Hilda had enclosed a letter all in French from the elder of the two orphans, Élise.

The children were so pleased to hear from a real French orphan that they begged their mother to read the letter to them at once. She had to translate it, because Evelyn knew no French at all, and Jim knew only a few words. It began:

*Chère Bienfaitrice* — Jim was sure this meant "dear benefactress," and it did — I thank you very sincerely for the gift that has been sent me on your part. I shall never forget this benefaction, and I shall always be grateful to you for it. I am a little girl eleven years old. I live with my mamma and my little sister Marie, who is five years old, in a pretty town near Rouen. Rouen is, as you already know, one of the most beautiful towns in France. My papa fell on the field of honor at the beginning of the war. He was killed the 9th of October, 1914. He was thirty-five years old, and he was a blacksmith. He was a very good workman, and a good father, happy in working to bring up Marie and me. My little sister was so very little when the war began, she cannot have, like me, the happiness of having known our papa. We will teach her later, my mamma and I, to love him, when she will learn the glorious death he had, and she will be proud, also. I go regularly to a class, where I apply myself diligently on account of



the memory of my father, and, also, to give my mother pleasure, at the Benefaction of the Orphans of the War. It is there I have seen the American, Miss Hilda, your well beloved sister.

Receive, dear benefactress, the expression of my tenderest friendship, and thank all the children who have so generously remembered me and my little sister. I hope I may have letters from all who are old enough to hold the pen.

With profound gratitude

ÉLISE CHEVALIER

“I think you children had better each write a letter in English to Élise,” said Mrs. West, “and Aunt Hilda can translate them, and we’ll send the letter to the other children so they can answer it, too, if they like.”

Evelyn could not write very well, but she insisted on writing all her own self, and not dictating. This was what she wrote:

*Dear Littel French Orfan,*

I love you. I am so sorry your papa is dead. Mine is alive, and so is my mama. Our town is pretty, and is not so very far from Boston, of which you have heard. My school is nice, too, and I apply myself, because my father and mother wish it.

With profound gratitude

EVELYN WEST.



Tell Aunt Hilda I miss her very much and wish she would come home. Hector and Tim send her the expressions of their tenderest friendship. They are our cat and dog. Have you any annimuls?

“There! That is so much like her letter she’ll think I’m French, if you could only put it into French. Can’t you, mother?” asked Evelyn.

“I am not a very good French scholar. We won’t send the letter off until Sophia’s mother comes. They are expecting her this week. She went to a school in France, and she can put your letter into the best of French.”

Jim was so pleased with the letter he had written that he wanted to send it off at once. “How is this?” and he held up a sheet of paper with soldiers in khaki on it, as well as a khaki-colored dog.

“*My dear Alize,*” he had written.

“That is n’t the way to spell her name,” said Lottie. “It’s *Élise.*”

“Oh, bother! I can’t change it now. It’s my way of spelling. She’ll think it the American way.”

“The American name is Eliza,” said Lottie.

“Oh, cut it out! I won’t show you my letter.”

“Please do. She won’t mind how you spell her name.”

“That’s just what I said.”

*my dear Alize,* I’m sorry your father was killed in the war. Mine is too old to go. He wanted to most



orfully, when we went in, and so did I. But I'm very young. I could n't go, even if the war keeps on six years, as Mr. Merrifield says it may. He's our minister. The brown dog in the picture is the same kind of dog we have. His name is Hector. Our dog's name is, I mean. We have a cat, too. His name is Tim. Have you any animals? You only spoke of your sister. I'm glad you like Aunt Hilda. She is my favorite aunt. I have two others, but they are my father's aunts, and my great-aunts, so they are very old. I have a sister. She is younger than me, same as your sister is younger than you. Her name is Evelyn. She's going to write to you; and so is my Cousin Lottie, she's thirteen; and so is David going to write, he's my best friend; and Charley Norcross, he's my second best friend; and so is Nancy, she's my sister's best friend; and so is Sophia Lane, she's her second best friend. She's lame, not my sister — she's as spry as a cricket — it's Sophia who is lame. She lives with her three aunts, and her father has gone to France to fight. Maybe you'll see him. He's a loutenant. His name is Curtis B. Lane. We live in a fine town, and my father has just got a Dodge car, and he's lurning to drive. So is my mother, but they won't let me touch it. I'd like to lurn too. It looks easy.

Your friend, JIM (JAMES WEST, jr.):

Tell Aunt Hilda I want her to come home soon.  
We knead her. J. W.



“I don’t see what you’re laughing at,” said Jim, as his cousin handed him back the letter. “I think it’s a corker myself. I never wrote such a long one before.”

“You say you are going to knead Aunt Hilda, just as if she were bread,” said Lottie.



## IX

### *Cousin Sue*

COUSIN SUE is really coming here some day this week," said Emily Wainwright.

"Who on earth is 'Cousin Sue'?" asked Lottie.

"Sophia's mother."

"I don't see why you call her 'Cousin Sue,' when you call the others 'aunt.'"

"But she's so different. You just could n't call her 'aunt.' And anyway, as they are n't any of them my real relations, I can call them what I please."

Emily was walking home from school with Lottie. It was the day after Lottie had come back from the farm, and Emily was coming home with her to dinner. They were still talking about Sophia's mother when they came into the house.

"I know I shan't like her," said Lottie. "I can't like any mother who'd leave her little lame girl for four long months."

"But she is a wife as well as a mother," said Emily, with a grown-up air. "And it's war-times — that's what mother says. The camp is 'way, 'way down south, and she kept expecting he was going to sail and he did n't."

"I'm sure she is n't any good," said Evelyn.



“What do you know about it?” Jim asked.

“Because she forgot to pack up Sophia’s dolls. Any one who could forget a thing like that is a pretty poor kind of mother, I should say.”

“If you don’t beat the Dutch!” said Jim.

“She’s just splendid,” said Emily. “You wait and see. She’s been running a canteen at the camp and doing Red Cross work and taking sick soldiers out in an automobile. When it’s war-time, and you’ve got important things like that on hand, it’s no wonder you forget to pack up dolls.”

“Dolls are Sophia’s children,” Evelyn reasoned. “They are as important to her as you and David and Richmond and Ben and Ted are to your mother. What would you think of her if she forgot all about you?”

“That’s very different,” said Emily; “Sophia’s dolls are not Cousin Sue’s children.”

They were still talking about Cousin Sue when they went in to dinner. And when Lottie went up to amuse Sophia, that afternoon, her mind was full of the subject. “So your mother is coming?” she said to the little girl.

“Yes,” said the child. Her sad little face brightened up and her dark eyes were shining. Poor little Sophia had never got over missing her mother. And every week, when her Aunt Emily wound the clocks, on Sunday morning, she had thought, “Perhaps mother will come before she winds them again.” She



thought the war was terrible, because it took fathers and mothers away from little girls. But she felt so unhappy that she could not tell any one about it, not even Lottie. She had grown very fond of Lottie, and if she could have told any one, she could have told her.

When Lottie saw Sophia's face light up, she thought probably a poor mother was better than no mother at all. She could not remember her own mother.

Thursday afternoon, when Lottie went to Sophia, she saw two expressmen carrying a huge wardrobe trunk along the path that led to the Lanes' front door. So Mrs. Lane had come at last! Her heart gave a queer little jump, and she felt "scared to death," as she expressed it, at the idea of meeting her.

Miss Emily opened the front door and she said, "You can take that trunk upstairs to the room at the left."

"We've orders to leave these trunks on the first floor," said the man gruffly.

"But how perfectly preposterous!" said Miss Emily. "We've no place for it on the first floor."

"We've orders," said the man shortly. "I'll leave it on the porch if you like."

"Certainly not," said Miss Emily. "But it's unreasonable to refuse to take a trunk upstairs. I'll pay you an extra quarter."

"If you gave us each a Liberty Bond, we could n't



disobey orders," said the other man. "Ladies who travel in war-time can't expect a cinch."

"It'll have to stay here for to-night," said Miss Emily, opening the door into the parlor. It seemed strange that a war that was going on three thousand miles away should affect every detail of life in America.

The wardrobe trunk made Lottie all the more afraid of meeting Mrs. Lane. As she came in at the front door she saw somebody who looked like a young girl, coming to the head of the stairs. "Who is that?" thought Lottie. The girl's dresses were almost as short as her own. She was plump and trig, and her jacket fitted beautifully. Her hat was put on jauntily, and her black hair was pulled down over her ears. When Lottie came a little nearer she saw she was not as young as she first thought. Could this — could this young lady, with a face as frank as that of a smiling boy, be Sophia's mother? It must be so, for she had hair and eyes like Sophia.

"I'm terribly glad to see you," said the young lady, in a deep, cordial voice. "You must be Lottie West. I've heard all about you from Sophia. I'm her mother — and a pretty poor kind of mother, too, to neglect my little girl so long! But I've been looking out for other women's sons, and for my husband. Here's the money for the trunk, Emily."

When she saw her wardrobe trunk standing in the middle of her sister-in-law's stiff parlor, she laughed



and laughed. She cut short Miss Emily's apologies and her regret that they could n't get any men to move it until the next morning.

"Never mind; I'll carry all the important things upstairs — Sophia's dolls, for instance."

Lottie saw there was no need of her that afternoon, and she offered to go home; but Mrs. Lane said, genially: "I have n't come back to break up people's engagements. But, as I only came last night, we'll all play together, just this one time." She held Sophia in her arms, while Lottie read aloud from "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland," and she praised her reading. And all the time, Sophia's dark little head was pressed close against her mother, and her small hand was clinging tight to her mother's plump one, as if she feared she would escape if she let go.

Lottie asked Mrs. Lane if she would be willing to translate the children's letters to the orphan into French.

"That's a delightful plan," said Mrs. Lane. And she asked Lottie to bring Jim and Evelyn to see her Saturday afternoon.

Lottie asked if Emily, David, Charley, and Nancy could come too, for they had all given Cousin Hilda money for the orphans.

And she said: "Bless your dear heart, yes. The more the merrier."

"I'm afraid so many children will tire Sophia," said Miss Emily.



“Bless your dear heart, no,” said Sophia’s mother. “We’ll all go out on the upper side piazza, and then we won’t bother anybody.”

Saturday was a beautiful day, but on account of the east wind Miss Emily feared it would be too chilly on the upper piazza for Sophia.

“No, indeed,” said her mother briskly; “what she needs now the spring has come is plenty of fresh air. Hop along with your cane, Chicken Little. That is famous. You’ll soon be well again. You are a credit to the good doctor and your good aunts.”

“I think she’s most of all a credit to her good mother,” said Miss Gertrude shyly. “She’s brightened up amazingly since you came.”

The aunts were all greatly interested in making the afternoon a success. Miss Gertrude gave them some note-paper, with a colored picture at the head of each sheet, on which the letters were to be copied in French. Miss Emily had a prize ready for the child who wrote the best letter; and Miss Molly suggested a treat in the shape of gingerbread and lemonade. The only trouble was they were almost without sugar.

“I’ll get the sugar,” said Mrs. Lane; “I am sure I can get somebody to sell me some.”

It was a happy group of children who assembled on the piazza that Saturday afternoon. Mrs. Lane greeted Emily and David, whom she knew already, and then she said, “Now I’m going to see if I can



tell which is Evelyn and which is Nancy." She guessed right, and the little girls both smiled.

"Now, I'll see if I can tell which is Jim and which is Charley." She guessed wrong, and neither of the boys looked at all pleased, but Jim fairly scowled.

"Now, I'll tell you my name," she said. "It's a strange name, but I rather like it, because I don't know any one else who has it. My name is Susanna. It's rather long, so you can all call me 'Cousin Sue,' if you like, just as Emily and David do."

"That will be very nice," said Lottie.

"I don't want to," said Jim. "You are not my cousin."

"Oh, very well," she said, taken a little aback; "you can call me what you like."

"I'd like to call you 'Cousin Sue,'" said Charley.

"And you'll call me 'Cousin Sue,' won't you, dear?" and she looked at Nancy.

"Yes, I will."

"And how about you?" and she turned to Evelyn.

"I can't call you 'Cousin Sue' if Jim does n't, because we have the same relations. Can I call you 'Mrs. Sue'?"

"Bless your dear heart, yes."

Evelyn had brought her letter along to be translated, but as Jim had sent his, he wrote a new one; and each of the others wrote one.

When the letters were finished, Mrs. Lane said: "I'll read them all aloud, and you can each vote for



the one you think is the best. And the one who gets the most votes will have the prize."

She opened a small, long box that had been on the table all the time, and in it were three pencils. One was red, white, and blue, with a black lead; the other was red with a red lead; and the third blue with a blue lead. The younger children were all very anxious to get the prize. Each child had a piece of paper on which to write the name of the boy or girl who wrote the best letter. There was great excitement when she sorted out the votes. There was somebody who had three votes. Who could the lucky person be?

"Here is one vote for Jim," she said, "and one for Sophia and one for Evelyn and one for Charley and one for David; and one, two, three, for Nancy. Nancy has got the prize."

Nancy looked very much surprised. "But Evelyn's was better than mine," said she. Nancy saw with what longing eyes Evelyn was looking at the pencils. She could not let her choose which she would take because she was afraid she would take the red, white, and blue one; and she wanted that herself; for she had never had a red, white, and blue pencil in her life. But it seemed selfish to keep three when her letter had been so poor. She handed the blue pencil to Evelyn, who looked very much pleased. Then she saw Sophia's wistful little face, and there seemed nothing else to do but to hand the red one to her. "Your letter was so nice," she said.



This is the letter that took the prize.

*My dear little French older sister across the sea,*

My father says the French are our brothers and sisters. I have n't any real ones, for I am an only child. My name is Nancy Merrifield. My father is a preacher. He preached about how soldiers should give their lives for a great cause, and we should all give what we could, and he gave so much of his coal away that we all had to go and live with the Wests for a few weeks. I liked it because Evelyn West is my best friend.

Have you a garden? We have one, and it has crocuses in it and snow-drops, and by and by, there will be the pretty flowers with a French name, fleur-de-lis. I love the spring. My father is going to let people plant cabbages and potatoes in our yard. My mother thinks they will look very funny, but he says he wants to help all he can. He can't go to preach to soldiers in the trenches, because he has a weak heart. Sophia's father has gone to fight, but Evelyn's father is too old to go.

Little French older sister, I thought your letter was dear. I love France. I love England, too, and America the best of all.

Your loving little friend,

NANCY MERRIFIELD.

We have a cat and his name is Ginger. He is big and yellow. I hope you like the bluebird on my paper. When



I was at Evelyn's house we fed the birds every morning. And blue jays came and sparrows and chickadees and crows and pigeons and some squirrels.

At the end of the afternoon they had the feast of gingerbread and lemonade. Mrs. Lane told them how the grocer had said he had n't any sugar. "'I'm so sorry,' I said. Then I told him how my husband had gone to France to fight. 'I wanted to go over to do canteen work,' said I, 'but they would n't let me go because he was going.' And it did seem too bad that when I hated to stay behind I could n't have a teenty-tinety bit of sugar, just to flavor the lemonade for some children who had sent money to the French orphans. 'Maybe you have heard of my husband?' said I. 'He's Lieutenant Curtis B. Lane.' 'I used to go to grammar school with him,' said the man. So we had a grand talk, and he is going to get me a chance to do some war work. And when I left he said, 'Mrs. Lane, I'm proud to *give* you some sugar,' and he would n't let me pay for it. So if you come some other Saturday we can have lemonade again."

Then Mrs. Lane brought out tiny red, white, and blue metal flags, in the shape of pins. She pinned one on the frock of each of the girls and on the jackets of the boys. "We'll be the Red, White, and Blue Club," she said; "and we'll meet again next Saturday."



## X

### *The Red, White, and Blue Club*

I AM going to spend next week canvassing a district to get people to promise to buy Thrift Stamps and Thrift Certificates," said Mrs. Lane briskly to the children one Saturday afternoon.

It was a full meeting of the Red, White, and Blue Club; every child was there. It was such a warm afternoon that Mrs. Lane had taken them all out into the side yard. She had placed eight chairs in a ring, and one for herself in the center, in the little hollow where there had been ice some months before, when Evelyn and Prue had made believe skate. Now the grass was green and the sky was blue, and a squirrel was in the branches of one of the maple trees, cocking his saucy head and trailing along his tail like a plume. A robin redbreast hopped along over the grass, and some sparrows lighted on a fence rail. There were some red tulips in bud in the tulip bed, and two were in full blossom. So the red tulips and the white clouds and the blue sky made red, white, and blue. Everything seemed so joyous that the children could not keep still.

"I did the best work of any of the women in the Liberty Loan campaign," said Mrs. Lane, "so I should



think they might let me off from this Thrift Stamp business. But they did not see it in that light. And it is n't for Lieutenant Lane's wife to shirk. If he can go to the front, I guess I can sell Thrift Stamps. But I expect you children to help me out. Will you each of you promise to fill a Thrift Stamp card before January first? That will only mean earning fifty cents a month."

"But I've got one already," said Evelyn. "Mother gave me one the first of January, with one stamp on it; and I've only earned one more in all this time. I put it in upside down. Was n't that too bad? But mother said the President would n't mind. I earned some of it by —"

"Nobody cares how you earned it," said Jim. "I have a card too that mother gave me, and mine is most half full, and I put all of my stamps in straight as straight."

"Who cares how you put in your old stamps?" said Charley. He was not so lucky as to have had a Thrift Stamp card given him.

"Now, children, there is no need of your making disagreeable remarks to each other," said Cousin Sue. "I'm sure I for one am very glad Jim put in his stamps straight; and I am just crazy to know how Evelyn earned her twenty-five cents. But first we must find out what you will all promise to do. How many more of you have cards already?" It seemed they all had them, except Charley and Sophia.



“To think my own chick has n’t one, and I am trying to make other people’s children take them,” said Cousin Sue. “That’s a joke on me, is n’t it? Well, if most of you have them, I think the best thing we can do is to have a club card. We’ll have to get sixteen stamps before we can exchange it for one of those beautiful big Thrift Certificates.” She held one up as she spoke. “Now, as there are eight of you, and one of me, I’ll make this promise: As fast as you fill this card, I’ll fill a second, so at the end of the year we’ll have two of these big stamps that will belong to the Red, White, and Blue Club.”

She made it sound so interesting that the children readily promised to do their part.

“Now, ideas are in order,” said Cousin Sue. “It is quite enough for me to have sent my husband to the front. To be sure he would go; I did n’t exactly send him. Well, anyway, he’s gone, and I am at home selling Thrift Stamps; and that is enough for one poor woman to do. So now, you’ve got to furnish the ideas. How shall we earn the money?”

“Jim and I earned a lot of money for the French orphans last year by selling fruit,” said Charley.

At the mention of this business project, Jim grew very red, for his family had not approved of his picking all the grapes without leave.

“Let’s have an afternoon tea out here under the trees,” said Emily. “We can have Thrift Stamps for sale, as well as tea.”



“That will be lovely,” said Lottie; “and we’ll dress up in those old silk and satin dresses the Miss Lanes have up in the attic, where the dolls are; and we’ll wear those funny straw bonnets.”

“Good enough,” said Cousin Sue; “that is a grand idea. We’ll bring all the dolls down; and we’ll make a sign and put it up over the summer house door, ‘Do you love Liberty? Buy a Thrift Stamp. Do you love Tea? Buy a cup in memory of the famous Tea Party in Revolutionary days that brought us Liberty.’ Lottie can paint the sign.”

“I never could paint all that,” said Lottie.

“Well, you can make any kind of a sign you like.”

“I think I’ll make one big T,” said Lottie, “and have it do for both:

## TEA and THRIFT STAMPS

“Can’t we have things to sell?” said Evelyn.

“Bless your dear heart, yes.”

“Let’s have it a dolls’ fair,” said Nancy, “with dolls’ hats and dolls’ sweaters and dolls’ mufflers for sale. I’ll make some dolls’ mufflers.”

“A dolls’ fair would n’t be any fun at all,” said Jim.

“Now, you boys need n’t come to our fair,” said Cousin Sue. “You can earn your money some other way if you choose. We’ve all got to do what we can. Nancy and Evelyn and Sophia can knit dolls’ mufflers, Emily will knit some dolls’ sweaters, and Lottie can



trim some dolls' hats. I'll make the tea and lemonade and take charge of the tea-table and you boys need n't come near the place. We can get along without you perfectly well. Indeed, I don't see what there is for you to do, anyhow."

"We might have ice-cream," Charley suggested. "I'll turn the freezer."

"Ice-cream would be too expensive and too much trouble."

"We can sweep out the summer house and bring out chairs and run errands," said David, who had no idea of losing the fun.

"That is true. And I could make you business manager and give you the Thrift Stamps to sell. We don't really need more than one boy. Jim and Charley can be free to do something else."

"Oh, mother, they want to come," said Sophia.

"If they want to come, that is all very well. It would be a pity not to have all of the Red, White, and Blue Club take part."

The children had never been so busy as they were in the next two weeks. Evelyn and Nancy sat with their knitting whenever they met, like two old women instead of two very small girls. Sophia, who was the most practiced knitter of the three, worked so hard that her mother finally said: "Chicken Little, if you make so many more mufflers than Nancy and Evelyn do, what will they say to you? Your poor little hands will get tired out,"



One afternoon Nancy and Evelyn brought their knitting down to Sophia's house. Evelyn was making a blue doll's muffler and Nancy a pink one and Sophia a red one.

"Let's play we are grown-up ladies," said Evelyn.

"That will be splendid," said Sophia.

"I'll just have to buy that pink muffler for my Matilda, Mrs. Nancy Merrifield," Evelyn said. "Will it be very 'sensive?"

"Very, Mrs. Evelyn West," said Nancy; "it is to be sold at a grand big fair. I think it will be seventy-nine cents, for the materials cost a lot."

"Seventy-nine cents! You don't mean it, Mrs. Nancy Merrifield. That is too much for me to pay. I am a poor woman."

"Are you a widow woman — a widow? I mean," Nancy asked with interest.

"No, not a widow. I'm an army lady. My husband's gone to fly. Don't you think flying is the nicest thing a man can do, Mrs. Nancy Merrifield?"

"I like boats better," said Nancy. "My husband is in the Navy. He's on a big, big boat. I guess it's a submarine, but I'm not sure."

"I'm a widow," Sophia announced, "but I've got a father, and he's gone to the front in France."

"My father made the Liberty Loan go over the top in this town," said Evelyn proudly.

"And mine has preached that everybody is to do what he can," said Nancy.



“My mother has done a lot,” said Sophia. “She was the best Liberty Loan lady, and she fed soldiers at camp, and drove them out.”

“My mother does Red Cross work all the time,” said Nancy. “She works and works and stitches and stitches and tells other people how to do it, and works and works again, till the dark night comes.”

“What does your mother do, Mrs. Evelyn West?” Sophia asked.

Evelyn paused to think. “She’s the dearest mother, and she’s always there when you want her.”

“Did she sell Liberty Bonds?” Sophia asked with interest.

“No; father did that. He said it was a man’s work.”

“Does she do Red Cross work?” asked Sophia.

Evelyn felt as if the honor of the family were at stake. “Yes, she goes away one morning a week while I am at school. She makes lovely sweaters for the soldiers,” Evelyn recollected, “and she’s just too dear for anything; is n’t she, Nancy?”

“I think she’s very dear,” said Sophia. “But mother says she ought to take a district and sell Thrift Stamps.”

Unfortunately the Miss Lanes could not be persuaded to let the children wear the old brocade and satin dresses that were in the trunk in the attic. Mrs. Lane suggested that they should wear costumes made out of crêpe paper. “You girls can be red, white, and blue flowers,” she said. So Sophia was a



scarlet poppy, and the dress and cap were very becoming to her dark hair and eyes. Nancy was all in white, like a lily; and Evelyn was a blue corn-flower, Emily was a red tulip, and Lottie a white chrysanthemum.

When the day of the Thrift Stamp Sale came it was a blue and cloudless one. Although Mrs. West refused to go about the town asking people to promise to take Thrift Stamps, she was quite ready to help out at the Sale; and she sat at a little table in the Lanes' summer house, with a big box of Thrift Stamps by her side, and a smaller one with a few Thrift Certificates in it, and a box for the money. Evelyn thought her mother was the prettiest person in the whole world, in her dainty spring frock and her shady hat with ostrich plumes. Other people seemed to like her looks too, for all the grown people went into the summer house to talk to her. And nobody came out without buying at least one Thrift Stamp.

David looked very grand as George Washington, in a blue coat and white knee-breeches; and Charley frisked about as Uncle Sam, dressed in a blue coat, and red-and-white striped trousers. A Thrift Stamp decorated the left-hand side of his coat; and he came up to each person who arrived and said, "Buy a Thrift Stamp; buy two, three, or four Thrift Stamps, so as to help out your poor old Uncle Sam."

Jim was very envious of David and Charley, but



he had hung back so, that he had to be content with taking the part of Lafayette, which was given him because of his longing to go to France. He had the red, white, and blue tricolor in his cocked hat, and he rejoiced in a scarlet waistcoat, a blue coat, and white knee-breeches.

“I won’t vouch for the costumes being historically correct,” said Mrs. Lane, “but they are patriotic and carry out the idea of the Red, White, and Blue Club.”

Evelyn had persuaded her father to come to the Sale and when he appeared she seized him by the hand and took him to the dolls’ table.

“Father, I’m a blue corn-flower,” said Evelyn, “and Nancy’s a lily. Does n’t she look sweet? And is n’t Sophia too dear for anything? She’s a poppy.”

Emily Wainwright was selling the articles at the dolls’ table with Nancy’s help, while Miss Emily Lane took charge of the money.

“Father,” said Evelyn, “see that lovely pink muffler that Nancy knit; I want it for Matilda. Would n’t you like to buy it for a birthday present for her?”

“When is her birthday?”

Evelyn hesitated. “To-morrow.”

“I thought she had a birthday last week.”

“I dare say she did,” said Evelyn; “my children’s birthdays come so often I can never keep track of them.”

The mufflers were fifteen cents apiece or two for a



quarter, but Mr. West handed the little saleswoman half a dollar, and he refused to let Miss Lane give him any change.

“Come over here, Cousin James, and have a cup of tea,” Lottie called out. “I’m sure you want a cup of tea with two lumps of sugar in it.”

“Father wants to buy a doll’s hat first. Sophia’s child, Amy, is very much in need of a hat. Her grandmother has been so busy about war things she has n’t had time to make her any decent clothes.”

Mr. West stood with two tiny hats under consideration; one was trimmed with a red scarf, the other with a wreath of violets.

“Get the one with the red scarf,” Evelyn advised. “Sophia loves red.”

Mr. West had thought it would be a great bore to come to the children’s Sale, but he changed his mind when he saw how much bliss a doll’s hat could give a little girl. Sophia was sitting at the tea-table with her mother and Lottie. She had charge of the plates of oatmeal wafers and crackers. When Mr. West handed the hat to Sophia, in her scarlet poppy costume, she looked up in delight.

“For me?” she asked.

“It is for a person named Amy. Perhaps you don’t know any such person.”

“Oh, thank you, yes, I do.”

“How much are your oatmeal wafers?” he asked the child.



“They are two cents apiece for children,” she said shyly, “and anything grown-up people like to pay. You can have them for two cents apiece,” she hastened to add.

“I’m glad you consider me a child,” he said. “I’ll take five, and I’ll give you a quarter for them.”

“You can’t have so many, Cousin James,” said Lottie. “We have hardly enough to go round. We did n’t know so many people were coming. You can have all the crackers you like; we’ve got boxes and boxes of them.”

“I can get all the crackers I like at home,” he said. “I’m bored to death with crackers. Give me a cup of tea, Lottie. I’m going to have at least three of these wafers if the skies fall. The other people should have come sooner.”

He sipped his cup of tea slowly and ate his oatmeal wafers with satisfaction.

“I’m glad you like them,” said Lottie, “for I made them — at least, I made one batch, and Miss Molly another.”

He handed her a dollar.

“Mrs. Lane will give you the change,” she said.

“I don’t want any change. Do you suppose I came to this Sale to bother waiting round for change?”

“Buy a Thrift Stamp, buy a Thrift Stamp,” Charley said, dancing up to him. “Are n’t you Mr. West, the great lawyer?” Uncle Sam asked in an affected voice. “I’ve heard of you in Washington as



a great one to hand out the cash. Perhaps you'll buy a few Thrift Certificates. Mrs. West has them in charge."

Then Jim came up to him solemnly. "I'm the Marquis de Lafayette," he stated.

"I'm glad to meet you, sir," said Mr. West, holding out his hand. "How do you like this country, Marquis?"

"Gee!" Jim said with a grin, "I'd like to be in France."

Mr. West went into the summer house to get some Thrift Stamps and have a talk with his wife. She was surrounded by a group of people; Judge Baxter, Mr. Merrifield, Dr. and Mrs. Wainwright were all there.

"I'm not going to ask you to buy a single Thrift Stamp, much less a Certificate, James," she said. "Judge Baxter has been kind enough to buy two of my Thrift Certificates."

"I'm glad he has. My funds are very low. I've just bought a muffler and a hat."

Nevertheless, he had money enough left to make a great hole in her supply of Thrift Stamps. He gave one to each of the eight children in the Red, White, and Blue Club, and he kept some for the home cards of his own family. Other people were generous, too, and when the money was counted up and expenses taken out, they found that, without counting the large number of Thrift Stamps and Certificates that Mrs. West had sold, they themselves, by the sale of



the fancy articles and the tea, lemonade, and crackers, had cleared the large sum of sixteen dollars and seventy-two cents. So the Red, White, and Blue Club was the proud possessor of four Thrift Certificates, with eight cents in the treasury, and another card half filled with the stamps Mr. West had given them.

“I propose three cheers for the Red, White, and Blue,” said Uncle Sam. The cheers were given lustily.

“How do you feel about going back to France, Marquis?” Mrs. Lane asked.

“George Washington, Uncle Sam, and I are all great pals now,” said the Marquis. “America is the land for me.”



## XI

### *Doing One's Bit*

IT was a week later, and the lilac by the Wests' kitchen window had lost most of its blossoms, and there were blue jays, chickadees, sparrows, and robins for the feast that Catherine never failed to give them. Mrs. West went into the kitchen to give her orders for the day, and when she came out her face looked very troubled.

"What's the matter, mother?" asked Evelyn.

"Catherine has made up her mind to leave us and go to work in a munition factory, where her cousin is getting very high wages," said Mrs. West.

"She won't be such a fool," said Mr. West.

"I've talked to her and talked to her, for the last half-hour," said Mrs. West, "but all she says is that her brother is fighting for his country and she wants to do her bit. If she feels it is her duty, I have n't any right to try to hold her back, have I?"

"Her duty!" cried Mr. West. "Her duty is to stay right here." He strode out into the kitchen, slamming the door behind him, but when he came back, he, too, looked very sober.

Then Jim went out and tried his hand at persuasion. "You are not really going, are you, Catherine?" he asked.



“Yes, I’ve promised to go.” The little boy felt as if his comfortable world were crumbling to pieces.

“Who will save griddle cakes for me when I am late to breakfast?” he asked mournfully. “I don’t see how we’ll have anything to eat.”

“I’ll never forget you, that’s one sure thing,” said Catherine. “But would n’t you like to do something for your country, if you could? I’m tired of the four walls of this old kitchen.”

And then Evelyn ran out to see Catherine, and she flung her small arms around her. “Oh, Catherine, dearest, I can’t spare you; I can’t!” said Evelyn.

Catherine hastily wiped her eyes, and at the sight of her tears, Jim fled. Evelyn was crying too. “It was bad enough to have Aunt Hilda go,” she said. “Why are you going, Catherine? Don’t you want to stay with me?”

“If it was only you; but there’s always a houseful of company. I’m very tired; and I’m just worried to death about my brother. He’s on the firing line now; he may get killed any time. It’s lonesome now everybody’s gone to the war. I just can’t stick it out any longer; and I’ll get big wages and do my bit at the same time.”

“But, Catherine, how can you leave me?”

“This war is just dreadful, breaking up families the way it does!” said Catherine, whose mind had gone back to her brother.

But Evelyn was thinking of herself. She gave her



yellow head a little shake. "Wars are bad things," she said wisely.

Three days after the coming of the new cook, Ann came to Mrs. West and told her that she would have to go to her sister for the summer and help her run the farm. Poor Mrs. West felt as if the bottom were dropping out of everything, for Ann had been with her ever since Jim was a baby. She was not so agreeable as Catherine, but she was a tower of strength.

"I just can't let you go, Ann," said Mrs. West. "Your sister has got along without you other summers."

"Her son has gone into the army, and she'll have to get help about the crops. Her husband is ailing most of the time, and she has boarders coming the middle of June. One of her daughters has gone to France as a Red Cross nurse, and the other is in a munition factory. I suppose it is natural they should want to do their bit."

"I am tired of hearing people talk about doing their bit," said Mrs. West. "It was the plain duty of one of those girls to stay at home to help her mother. You will get worn out by the end of the summer. Of course, it won't be so bad because you will be coming back in the autumn. But I don't see what I'm going to do without you all summer."

"I would n't have left you without anybody, but Norah is young and strong. And she says she can do all the work until you get another second maid."



So Ann went, and it seemed just like the falling of a house of cards such as the children built sometimes, for when one person went, another quickly followed. A few days after Ann's departure, Norah came and said she must leave, as she had a chance to go to the seashore with a Boston family where a friend worked. As they would give her fifteen dollars a week she could not afford to lose the chance.

Then came a few days when Mr. West got up early and made the kitchen fire, and Mrs. West came down later to make the toast and coffee and boil the eggs. The widow to whom Mr. Merrifield gave the coal came at nine o'clock in the morning, whenever she had a spare day, and stayed to put supper on the table; and Mrs. West and Lottie washed the dishes. But she could never come on Monday, Tuesday, or Friday, for she had permanent places for those days.

It was an uncomfortable household, and Lottie began to long for school to be over so she could go home to the farm. True, they were without any one to help them there, but the work was planned so carefully and every one did what she had to do so well that the house was in perfect order. Her grandmother and her Aunt Mattie were wonderful cooks, and Lottie herself had learned to cook a great many things, for she could go out into the kitchen there whenever she liked; and here none of the cooks seemed to like to have her come out. Indeed, Catherine had seemed quite put out when she had made the oatmeal wafers



for the Sale. The house began to look uncared-for. Lottie felt that she was helping her Cousin Sadie a great deal, considering that she was going to school. And then, one day, when she was reading and no one knew she had come in, she heard her Cousin Sadie say to her Cousin James, in the next room: "Lottie seems to have the gift of stirring up all the maids. I am sure she does n't mean to be inconsiderate, but they don't any of them seem to like her."

"She'll be going home pretty soon," he said.

Lottie's cheeks burned and she slipped out noiselessly so that they should never know she had overheard them, and she ran up to her own room. So this was the way they felt about her! And they had seemed so glad to get her back. Her mind was made up. She would not stay another night in a house where she was not wanted. Let them get their maids and keep them if they could. Let them find out after she left how much help she had been. She would go to the Lanes' for the rest of the time that was left before vacation came. Miss Emily had asked her to come and live with them.

Once more, she got her dress-suit-case, and then she paused. It had not seemed quite the right time when she had gone there for the other visit. Suppose it was not the right time now. She put her bag back into the closet and decided that when she went to amuse Sophia that afternoon, she would tell the whole story to Miss Emily and ask her advice. School



would be over in less than a month. Perhaps it would be better to go home now.

After her time with Sophia was over, she sat with Miss Emily, in the prim parlor that was so spotless and speckless it filled her order-loving soul with delight, and she poured out her whole story. As she looked into Miss Emily's kind eyes she no longer thought her plain. She wished Miss Emily was her aunt. There was silence for a long minute, when Lottie finished her confession.

"I am thinking things out," said Miss Emily. It was so still that the clock on the mantelpiece seemed noisy. Lottie remembered how the ticking of the traveling clock had troubled her that other time.

"You see, I don't see any use staying where I am not wanted," Lottie faltered. "I think they'll get on better without me."

"Of course you can come here," said Miss Emily. "We'll gladly take you in, but that would be running away from a chance to do your bit."

"To do my bit?" Lottie stammered.

"To do your bit," Miss Emily repeated. "Perhaps they would find it easier if you came here" — Lottie winced at this — "unless you do your best to help them out and make it as easy for them as you can. It is not probable that they can get capable maids at once. They are very scarce just now; and while they are without a maid, you can be of great use. You can get the breakfast every morning."



"Get the breakfast!" cried Lottie in dismay. She was not fond of early rising.

"Yes, get the breakfast," Miss Emily repeated firmly. "You are a capable child; the trouble with you is that you are indolent. You know how to manage a stove, don't you?"

"Yes, I know all about stoves."

"Then there is no reason why you should not get up and get breakfast every morning. Your Cousin Sadie is n't strong. If you got breakfast every morning, and tidied up the house before you went to school, you would find that your cousins would be glad enough to have you with them."

"It seems a good deal to do when I'm going to school."

"Does it?" said Miss Emily dryly. "I know a child who is younger than you; her mother has died, and they are too poor to have a servant; she does all the cooking and takes care of four younger children, besides taking care of the house."

Lottie gave a sigh. "How terrible!" she said.

"Yes, it is hard for a child who is only just thirteen, but she does n't have any time to stop and worry as to whether she is appreciated or not. This world is not just a place for a good time," said Miss Emily, "especially, in these days, when our men have gone across the water to fight so as to make other nations free, and our women are nursing soldiers. I've no doubt you'd like to try your hand at it if you were old



enough; most girls would. You are not old enough to do that, and you never will be old enough to do anything useful, unless you pitch right in now and do all the grubby, unexciting jobs you dislike most to do."

Lottie gave a long sigh.

"Your cousins have been very good in taking you in for the winter," said Miss Emily. "Now is your chance to pay back a little of what they have done for you. If you let it slip it may never come again. Most chances only come once."

There was another long pause when the clock on the mantelpiece became noisy again. At last Lottie put out her hand and seized Miss Emily's. "I wish you were my aunt," she said.

"I'd like you for a niece. Perhaps you'd like to call me Aunt Emily as Emily does. There is one thing that helps make up for having only one niece of my own. One can choose one's nieces for one's self."

"I'll go back to please you, and I'll try to do my bit, Aunt Emily," said Lottie.

On her way home that afternoon, Lottie rehearsed a little scene in which she told the family she would get the breakfast every morning, and they were all so grateful and so warm in their praise that it was a pleasure to do the work. What really happened when she told them her plan was that her Cousin Sadie said, "Thank you, dear, but I think I had better get



breakfast." And Jim exclaimed, "Gee, mother, I guess you had. I don't believe Lottie knows how to cook a thing."

"I made the oatmeal wafers," she reminded him.

"I guess that was easy," said Jim.

And then her Cousin James came to her rescue. "Lottie is right," he said. "She ought n't to let you get breakfast, Sadie. Let her try getting breakfast to-morrow morning."

He made the fire for her that first morning, and the toast and eggs and coffee were all so good that even Jim had not one unflattering remark to make. As time went on she grew ambitious and varied the meal with bacon or corn-cake. She had always liked cooking, for somewhat the same reason that she liked reading — because it was so interesting to see how things turned out. After a few mornings she begged to be allowed to make the fire herself. Her Cousin James agreed readily to this, for he was not keen on getting up early himself. Indeed, the one bright spot in this household trial was, that he said he would get a gas stove at once. Mrs. West and Catherine had longed for a gas stove for many summers.

— "Don't you think we'd better get a fireless cooker, too, Sadie?" he asked. "With a gas stove and a fireless cooker, we can be quite independent of cooks."

And then it was that Lottie's dream came true — her dream of being appreciated by the family; for it was Jim, of all people, Jim who had doubted her



ability to cook, who said: "I don't see what you want of a gas stove or a fireless cooker while Lottie's here. She's better than a fireless cooker."

And although, in her heart of hearts, Lottie knew this praise was awarded her simply because she had made some doughnuts the night before, it was very sweet.

"Lottie's going home in a week," his father reminded him.

"Oh, dear, what shall we have to eat then!" Jim cried. "Gee, I'd like to go to France!"



## XII

### *The Farm*

THINGS went very badly after Lottie left, so badly that Jim wrote a letter to his Aunt Hilda. He was not sure his father and mother would approve of his sending it, so he took it to the post-office himself. It had some misspelled words, as he wrote it without help.

“*Dear Aunt Hilda,*” he said, “I am sure it is your dooty to come home. Father says we are lots worse off than any orphans; for all the cooks in America have stopped cooking and are doing their bit to win the war. Lottie cooked fine doughnuts, but she has gone home now; and mother gets dinner, and she gets orful headaches, and its orful hot weather. I have to wipe dishes and I hate it. The hot weather makes Evelyn cross, and she has disputes with me.

“Father thought we ort to take our dinners at the hotel. We went there the other day, and what do you think? I fished two flies out of my milk. ‘What do you think, mother,’ said I, ‘there are flies in my milk.’ Mother did n’t seem to hear, so I spoke louder, ‘flies mother, flies,’ I said.

“‘I’ve found one, too,’ said Evelyn.

“‘Hush, children,’ said mother.



“The food was quite cold before Evelyn and I got it, for we were the youngest. There were a lot of people to wait on, and just one girl to do it, and she forgot and mixed up father’s order, and brought him kusterd pie, which he hates. I had the kusterd pie, so it was not waisted. Mother said afterwards, if she lived to be a hundred years old, she should never forget the day, and she’d rather get dinner for us the rest of her life than go threw it again.

“Father gets breakfast now. I help him some, and mother gets dinner and these orful headaches. I remember the good things you used to cook last summer when Catherine had her vacation. Speshially the blueberry muffins, only there were not always enuff.

“Dear Aunt Hilda, do come home. We all need you, and miss you, speshially your loving nephew. JIM.”

Jim knew it would be a long time before he got an answer to his letter, and after he mailed it he thought very little about it; for a few days later there came such a wonderful letter from Lottie’s grandmother that both Jim and Evelyn jumped up and down with delight; for the letter had an invitation to spend the next two months at the farm.

“I never could have the face to stay two months with my two rampageous children,” said Mrs. West.

“But we are not rampageous, mother,” said Jim. “Aunt Charlotte said she never had seen such good



children when we were there last year with Aunt Hilda.”

Mrs. West sighed. “Your Aunt Hilda had a wonderful way of keeping you interested, and making you behave,” she said. “But if you were to go on as you did at the hotel the other day, I should simply die of mortification.”

“But there were flies in the milk, mother,” Jim protested, “and you did n’t seem to hear, so I had to speak loud.”

“Jim, you know I am not deaf, and when I don’t hear it is because I don’t want to hear. You made everybody in the room turn and look at us.”

“Father was just as bad about the custard pie.”

“He did not say so much.”

“He made up an awful face.” Jim gave such a lifelike representation of it that Mrs. West could not help laughing.

Mr. and Mrs. West talked the matter over that evening, and they decided that they would accept the delightful invitation, if only they might be allowed to be paying guests. It was Mr. West who wrote the letter.

*Dear Aunt Charlotte and Aunt Mattie,*

Your letter with its welcome invitation is like a mountain breeze to a traveler in the desert; for it was ninety-six on our shaded piazza yesterday. So we’ll all come, bag and baggage, even to the cat and dog



as you suggest. And the fact that we have our own car now, and I can drive it, makes the journey easy. I can only take a week off now, but I'll often come for Sundays.

We'll come, but on one condition, that you will let us contribute the amount of our own expenses. Now that eggs are seventy-five cents a dozen, and you could be getting that price for them, if we did not eat them, and broilers cost such a fortune we only have them as birthday treats, you surely must charge us a good round sum.

Aff'ly your nephew, JAMES.

This was the answer to the letter, written by Mr. West's Aunt Mattie:

*Dear James,*

This is a strange year, indeed, when everything is turned topsy-turvy; and one of the strange things is that those of us who have formerly been thought poor are rich now. Think how much better off we are than you, for, as we have not had any maid for several years, we are now perfectly independent. Also, we have all the fresh eggs and butter and vegetables we want, and our lively little broilers are so numerous that a few will never be missed. And when we do sell our produce, we get such prices we feel like multimillionaires. Don't speak of paying anything. Are you not our own flesh and blood? And did you not keep Lottie for all these months? By the way, she



has improved enormously; and is a great help about the cooking, although she is n't as fond of house-work as I could wish.

I am glad you are planning to bring Hector and Tim. Tell Hector he will have a hundred acres to run around in, and whisper in Tim's ear, that in the autumn the hunting is exceptionally good.

So do your bit by pocketing your pride and owning that there are some things in this world that can't be paid for in money. And let us show you what a superior place a farm is to live on in these troubled times.

Your affectionate AUNT MATTIE.

So one morning, soon after breakfast, the Wests started in their automobile on their long journey. And such a scramble as there was to leave the house in order! Mrs. Merrifield and Nancy came to help them to get off; and Mrs. Merrifield took the keys home, and she begged Mr. West to take his meals with them when he came home.

Every one enjoyed the journey, with the exception of Tim, who did not like the confinement of the cat basket. Jim sat in front with his father, proud and happy, and feeling important. And Mrs. West sat behind with Evelyn and Hector, who sat up between them, like a person. But glad as they were to start, everybody was just as glad to have the journey end. Tim was most glad of all, for he had never



wanted to start. The hunting had been good enough where he was, and a bird in the paw is always worth two in the bush. Next to Tim, Mrs. West was the most glad, for she was not strong, and she was tired out with the long ride. Evelyn was so tired that she could hardly keep her eyes open. Mr. West was glad the journey was safely over, and Hector and Jim had had just enough of it.

So when the friendly red farmhouse came in view, with its shaded piazza, everybody felt as if he had got home.

Harry and Prue came dashing out to meet them, and Lottie followed, in her leisurely way. She had on a white dress and she looked prettier than ever, for the out-of-door life had brought such a color into her cheeks.

Aunt Charlotte and Aunt Mattie stood on the front porch. But after greeting them, Aunt Mattie soon turned to watch a family of young sparrows who had their nest on the window-sill behind a blind. Mr. West put his hand on her shoulder.

“There are no dull moments in the country, are there, Aunt Mattie?” he said.

“No, James, there is not one dull moment — never one.”

And there was n't one. Not for Mr. West, for he kept busy driving around the country exploring it, and feeling very useful, because he took his aunts to drive and gave them a chance to do the family



errands; nor for Mrs. West, who helped with the housework and arranged the flowers, and after coming back from a drive had delightful, restful hours reading in the hammock. And least of all for the children, who were so busy with their work and play that they had been there two whole weeks before they found time to write a letter to their Aunt Hilda. Jim began the letter and Evelyn finished it. She dictated her part because it was so much less trouble, and her mother was at hand.

Jim wrote:

*Dear Aunt Hilda,* When I grow up I mean to live on a farm in the summer. I'll be a lawyer in the winter like father, but I'll be so rich I'll only have to practice law in the winter. Dear me, but I never worked so hard in my life! Harry and I weed a lot and we pick vegetables and bring in wood for the open fires, and we helped the men when they came to make hay. And what do you think? There are some farmerettes here, and they wear trousers, like boys. They've made a swimming pool in the brook since you were here, by the big rock, you remember? And Aunt Mattie goes in bathing with us. For an old lady she's very spry — much more so than mother who is a lot younger. I've been fishing with father in Babson's pond once, but I did n't catch anything. Hector went along. He is having the time of his life, and so is Tim.



Evelyn continued:

*Dear Aunt Hilda,* Jim has gone off with Harry to see if they can find a woodchuck who is eating vegetables in the garden. It is a fine one — I mean the garden — the woodchuck is just horrid. He eats all the young nice vegetables, but perhaps he thinks they are as free to him as to us. Anyway, I hope he won't get caught, poor thing. We have peas, beans, and summer squash; and Prue and I shell them. We go swimming every day in the pool. It is small and no child could possibly get drowned. The garden here is lovely, and Prue and I help Lottie and mother pick the flowers and fix them. There are red rambler roses, and pink and white and red and yellow hollyhocks, but we don't pick these; and sweet peas — they take a long time to pick, and nasturtiums; and there are such lots of yellow butterflies flying about; and there are chickens to be fed — lots and lots of them. We all went raspberrying the other day. Prue got a lot, and I got enough for one person, and I got terrible scratches on my hands. I wonder if they have raspberries in France? We wish you were here. I must stop now for it is time to go swimming, and I'll be too busy to write any more for a few days, or maybe weeks.

Your loving niece, EVELYN.

“Children, don't be all day getting ready,” said Aunt Mattie. She was in her trim black mohair bath-



ing-dress, with a broad-brimmed straw hat on her head. "I'll wait for you in the garden," she said.

Out in the garden Aunt Mattie found some weeding to be done. She was surprised to find how free she felt with no long skirt to get in her way. One of the young farmerette girls who was working on the next farm came by.

"Good-morning, Miss Mattie," she said. "So you're in uniform, too."

"Oh, no. I'm just on my way to take a bath with the children," she said apologetically.

"I should think you'd always do the farm work in your bathing-suit."

"It is most comfortable," said Aunt Mattie, "but it hardly seems proper for a woman of my age."

"Anything is proper now that is comfortable," said the young girl.

Evelyn thought the bathing the best part of the day. It was a hot summer and a hot walk across the meadow to the brook. But the brook was in a most delightful wood, with tall, dark pine trees, and just a few white birch trees, with their slender trunks gleaming in the sunlight, like ladies in white summer dresses. The pool, near the big rock, was partly in the sunlight, and partly in the shadow. And it was such fun to slide down cautiously into the brook with a big splash. To-day Evelyn jumped up and down in the water, and she filled a cup there, kept to drink out of, and poured the water all over Prue's head;



and Prue tried to get Evelyn's head under water; and Aunt Mattie said, "Children, I shan't let either of you go in bathing to-morrow if you don't behave." It was surprising how they quieted down at once, for Aunt Mattie always meant what she said.

That night they had a picnic on top of the ridge of land behind the house. They all climbed up, even Aunt Charlotte and Mrs. West. It was a long, bright summer evening, on account of the extra hour of daylight; for it did not get dark until nine o'clock. And there was a beautiful sunset, with little fleecy clouds heaped up against the pink glow; and Lottie sang for them; and so did a song sparrow; and the moon was up before the sun went down. Prue and Evelyn were greatly pleased at being allowed to sit up so late, for it was such a hot night it was more comfortable on the hilltop, but they got so sleepy before they went down they were thankful to go to bed. And after all, it was n't really so very late. "It is really only nine o'clock," said Prue, as the clock struck ten.

August was just as delightful as July, and the cool September days were in some ways the best of all, for they could take such long walks. They still went in bathing every day, but sometimes the water was so cold they only took one icy plunge. The aunts easily persuaded them to stay until the first of October, as Ann did not want to come back until then. Ann had decided to try the cooking and she was to



bring a niece with her to do the housework, who was the daughter of one of her brothers.

The middle of September a frost came, and the trees began to turn red or yellow. Then came warm days again, and it was so beautiful and there was so much to do, that Evelyn could not bear to go home.

“But, darling, school will be beginning,” said her mother, “and you’ll want to get back to Nancy.”

“I can wait to see Nancy, mother. I don’t want to leave Prue and Lottie; and truly, mother, I don’t care anything about school.”

Evelyn decided she would pray every night that something would happen to prevent their going home before November. She was not sure her mother would think it a proper thing to pray about, for she had told her not to pray for a snowstorm last Thanksgiving; but the Lord must have known how much she wanted one, for a big snowstorm had come. So after she had finished praying aloud before her mother, she added a secret prayer, “Please, Lord, I want very much to stay here until November. Please fix it so I can.”

It was the 27th of September, and Mr. West was to come on the 30th. It was evident that nothing was going to happen. And then, on the morning of the 28th, came a letter from Mr. West, saying that he was ill with influenza and must postpone coming for them. Indeed, if the aunts would keep them for



another week or two, Dr. Wainwright thought it would be better; for the influenza had got such a hold in the town, in the last few days, they were going to close the schools. "You need not worry about me; I have a very mild case," he wrote.

But Mrs. West did worry, and when a letter came, the next day, saying the doctor had sent him to the hospital, where he would be well taken care of, she said she was going to take the first train home.

"But what could you do if you were there? The doctor could not let you see him and expose yourself to influenza," said her Aunt Mattie.

"I am going home to-morrow," she said firmly. "Aunt Charlotte knows just how I feel. I could n't be easy so far away from James. One never knows what may happen. It might turn into pneumonia."

"Well, if you insist on going — I suppose I should do the same in your place. I wish I could be spared to go with you," said Aunt Mattie. "You must leave the children, of course."

"I'll gladly do that."

"I'd like to go with you, Cousin Sadie," said Lottie. "Can't I go down with you? I can cook the things Cousin James likes, and play and sing to him when he gets back from the hospital."

But here the aunts were firm. They did not want Lottie to be exposed to the infection.

So Mrs. West started on her solitary journey in a drizzling rain, and Evelyn felt very forlorn with-



out her mother. Her prayer had been answered, but not at all in the way she wished.

And when they heard the next day that her father was worse, she felt so worried she could not enjoy anything. And when a letter from her mother came saying they were afraid of pneumonia, the poor little girl felt she could not bear it. Her Aunt Charlotte found her in tears when she went up to put her to bed.

“Don’t worry about your father, dear,” she said. “I don’t believe he is going to have pneumonia.”

“But he may get it, and mother says with pneumonia you never can tell what might happen,” said Evelyn. “I wish I’d never prayed we could stay here until November. I meant mother, too. I thought God would understand better.”

“Dear child, the Lord does understand. We’ll pray now that He will make your father well and strong if it is His will. We’ll try not to worry; and to-morrow I’ll let you come out into the garden and help pick the late string beans — the ones in the sheltered place; and we’ll can them for next winter.”

Evelyn brightened up, for dear Aunt Charlotte was such a lovely person, and her worn face had such a beautiful expression, that when she prayed that Evelyn’s father might get well if it were God’s will, the little girl had a comfortable feeling that all would be right. And all did come out right, in the end, although they had some anxious days first. And the



best thing was that the doctor wanted Mr. West to go up to the farm for a ten days' rest, just as soon as he was well enough to travel.

So one bright October day Mr. and Mrs. West came up by automobile.

Such a wonderful ten days as they had after that! They were all so glad that Mr. West was getting better that they were too happy for words. And when they started home on November 4th, Evelyn was so delighted to be going home with her father, that she did not mind leaving the farm. She wished Lottie and Prue were going back with them, but one can't have everything in this world, and the aunts promised that Lottie and Prue and Harry should come to them for their Christmas vacation.

So when Prue said, "Oh dear, Evelyn, what shall I do without you!" Evelyn said cheerfully, "You'll have to do the best you can of it."

"Are n't you going to miss me at all?" asked Prue.

"Yes, I'll miss you," said Evelyn, "but I'll be so glad to see Nancy."



## XIII

### *Celebrating Peace*

IS all the fighting really going to stop, father?" Jim asked in disappointed tones. It was Monday morning, the day the armistice was signed, and the bells and whistles were going at such a rate one could hardly hear one's self talk.

It was his mother who replied. "Yes, is n't it too good to be true?" she said with shining eyes.

"I don't like it at all," said Jim. "I wanted our army to give the Germans an awful licking, and then march on to Berlin."

Mr. West had something of the same feeling, but Evelyn and Mrs. West were only too happy to think that no more people were to be killed.

"Now Aunt Hilda will be sure to come home," said Evelyn. "You'll be glad of that, Jim."

Jim was in a contrary mood. He never liked to show his feelings to order.

"She's been gone so long I've got used to not having her," he said.

"We've got to celebrate the armistice in some way," Charley Norcross announced at school that morning; and, as usual, he had a plan. "What we'll do," Charley had suggested, "is to celebrate as the



New York people did when the false peace news came. My aunt wrote that all the scrap-baskets in the city were emptied out of the high buildings, and it was like a snowstorm in the streets. So we'll go to Jim's house, because it's got such a dandy yard, and there are scrap-baskets in all the rooms."

"Let's go to your house, Charley," said Jim, "because it's much higher."

"We've only one scrap-basket, and they are awful particular what you do in the yard of an apartment house; and it's such a poor yard, anyway."

"Father is particular about our yard," said Jim, "and the leaves have just been raked up."

"Your father is a true patriot," said Charley solemnly. "He can't be so mean as to mind our celebrating the wind-up of the biggest war in history."

Put in this way, it did seem as if his father would be unreasonable to object. And, anyway, he could not be asked because he and Jim's mother had gone off for the day and would not be back until night. This seemed fortunate, on the whole. So in the afternoon the three celebrators of peace met at Jim's house. Evelyn and Nancy were on the side piazza playing with their dolls.

"Look out, Jim, for the automobile," said Evelyn, as he stumbled against a cricket turned upside down and holding four dolls snugly fitted in.

"You ought n't to have your old automobile in the way of foot passengers. And they did n't sound their



horn," he said as he picked himself up and rubbed his leg. "I'll make you pay big damages."

"How big?" Evelyn asked with interest.

"Oh, come on," said Charley.

"How big?" Evelyn persisted.

But Jim and Charley had flung open the door, and were already inside the house. David, who had a heart for small girls, lingered.

"I'll be your lawyer," he said, "and I'll get you off as easy as I can. They did n't blow their horn, but, still, Jim had no need to run into an automobile, for where should it be but on the road? They don't run in buildings. I don't think you'll have to pay more than seventeen dollars and seventy-nine cents."

"Thank you, so much," said Evelyn. "I'll give you all my law jobs, 'cept the ones I give father. I'll give you all the small jobs."

"Thank you, madam," David said, with a low bow, as he went into the house.

They hunted through all the rooms for scrap-baskets, but they did not find much in them until they came to Mr. West's study, and here they made a great haul; for they discovered two scrap-baskets crammed full of old letters, torn across. Mr. West had been reading over old letters while the family were at the farm, and he was saving them to kindle his fire with, as he did not like to put old family letters in the paper-barrel.

"We'll tear these into still smaller pieces," said



Charley, "and we'll tear up some old newspapers, and then we'll have a regular snowstorm."

They asked Evelyn and Nancy to help them tear up the papers. Evelyn was thrilled. It was almost as exciting as cutting up cloth for soldiers' pillows. Nancy was a little troubled by the idea of the mess they would make in the tidy front yard, but Jim said it would be all right; and he asked her if she were not a loyal member of the Red, White, and Blue Club.

"Of course I am," said Nancy.

"Then you've got to obey your superior officer," said Jim.

The children had a merry time tearing up the letters and some newspapers they found piled up in a closet. They took the papers out of the paper-barrel in the back yard; and when they had torn up everything they could find, each of them took a scrap-basket, full to the brim, and they went up into the third story. Here, in the spare room, there was a fine large window that overlooked the front yard. Charley suggested that they should each throw a handful in turn.

"I'm going to begin because it's my house," said Jim.

"It is n't any more your house than it is mine," said Evelyn. "Ladies always come first."

"You're no lady," said Jim.

Charley settled the dispute by having the first throw himself. He took up a big handful of paper and



made it into a ball and threw it with a mighty fling down into the yard. The ball broke into a shower of paper bits. The children were thrilled with excitement.

“That was great,” said Jim. “It was ’most as good as fireworks. Oh! there comes Tim,” he added, as the tiger-cat came into view. He took a handful of the paper scraps and threw them at Tim, but they just missed him.

A young robin hopping across the lawn was Evelyn’s mark, but she did not come anywhere near hitting him.

“He goes too fast,” she said.

Then David had a turn, and then Nancy, and the velvety green lawn was sprinkled over with scraps of paper.

“It looks as if there had been a Sunday School picnic here and we’d forgotten to pick up the scraps,” said Charley.

And then something very interesting happened — some callers turned in at the gate. They were two of Sophia’s aunts, in their flapping black veils — Miss Gertrude, the tall, thin one, and Miss Molly, her short, plump sister.

“Let’s see if we can hit them,” said Charley.

Each child took up a handful of paper, except Nancy. It seemed such a naughty thing to do that she hesitated until it was too late. Some of the scraps landed on Miss Gertrude’s unsuspecting head.



She looked up vaguely, in her near-sighted way, and Miss Molly looked up quickly with her keen, bird-like glance. All the children had ducked down below the window-sill except Nancy, who was deeply interested in watching the scene.

“I can’t see any one,” said Miss Molly. “Yes, I can. There is Nancy Merrifield at an upper window. Who would think she would be up to such mischief?”

The Miss Lanes had their card-cases in their hands, and as Jim heard the doorbell ring, it dawned on him that some one would answer it. He hoped it would be Mary, Ann’s niece, but it might be Ann.

“Quick, let’s empty all the paper before we get caught, and then we’ll hide,” said Jim.

So they all threw the rest of the paper out of the scrap-baskets, and the lawn looked more as if there had been a picnic there than ever. Nancy flung out her paper with a wild, free fling. She had never felt so naughty in all her young life.

It was Ann who went to the door, for Mary was out in the garden picking flowers to arrange on the supper table. Disaster was bound to come, but they would at least give Ann a good hunt; for there were plenty of closets to hide in. Jim climbed to an upper shelf in the spare-room closet and rolled himself up in a comforter. David hid in the tank closet, and Charley ran up the attic stairs, while Nancy and Evelyn took refuge in a large store closet, with a window in it.



Presently, Ann's step was heard on the stairs. "Children, come down this minute and pick up the mess you've made, before your father gets home," she commanded.

She found Nancy and Evelyn first, and then she found David; but she shrewdly guessed they were not the chief culprits.

She hunted a long time for Jim. She opened the door of the closet where he was, but as he was rolled up in a comforter she did not see him. She was about to close the door, when she heard a giggle from the upper shelf.

"You little rascal!" she said. "Get down, this minute. What possessed you to throw all that paper over the lawn?"

"You don't understand; we were celebrating peace, the way the people did in New York," said Jim with dignity.

"Much you care about peace!"

"We do care about it a lot. You're no patriot!" said Jim hotly.

"Well, you patriotic people can go right down with your waste-paper baskets and pick up every single scrap of paper — every single one — do you hear? Your father is going to have a dinner to-morrow night, and Judge Baxter is coming, and I can't have the yard in such a mess. Come, hurry, your father and mother will be back any minute."

She never found Charley, for she did not know he



was with the children. So, by and by, he stole downstairs and joined the others who were busily filling the scrap-baskets in the front yard.

“Come and help us, Charley,” said Jim.

“I’m so sorry,” said Charley, with a grin and a wave of the hand as he disappeared through the gate, “but I have an important engagement with a friend.”

It did not seem fair to the children that Charley, who was the ringleader, should be the only one to escape justice. Indeed, they were so indignant about it that they made up their minds to punish him themselves.

And so, the next morning, when Mr. West proposed taking a load of children to Boston to see the celebration and said that Evelyn and Jim could each ask a friend, Charley’s name was not mentioned.

“I’ll ask David,” said Jim.

“And I’ll ask Nancy,” said Evelyn.

“Why can’t we take two more children?” said Mrs. West. “There will be plenty of room. Suppose we ask the rest of the Red, White, and Blue Club? How about inviting Sophia Lane and Charley Norcross?”

“It would be great to ask Sophia because she is lame,” said Jim, “but I think it would be better to ask David’s sister Emily than to ask Charley. A boy can find some way to go in town, and Charley has lots of friends. Maybe he has an engagement with



one of them. What are you laughing at, Evelyn?" Jim demanded.

"You know what I am laughing at, Jim West," said Evelyn.

It was a merry party of children who rode into the city with Mr. and Mrs. West that morning. They each had a flag and a tin whistle, but they felt very calm and restrained when they saw the crowd. There were some extraordinary sights. There were people riding on a watering cart, beating tin pans with their fists, and others, with fire shovels, while inside the cart were tin pans that rattled as it rode along. Everybody had a flag, and many had whistles, and all seemed full of gayety and joy. One Italian was dancing along the street as he waved his flag.

And then, in contrast to all this noise, was the quiet church, where they went to hear a solemn service of praise and thanksgiving. The light streamed in through colored windows, and the street noises drifted in muffled by the thick walls. There was beautiful singing, and a short sermon about how we were all rejoicing together — French, English, and the other allies, as well as ourselves; and there was no thought of what one country could gain for itself, for we were all rejoicing in a world set free. And then the minister told how England had been guarding the sea for us with her great fleet.

"You'll never forget this day, I am sure, Jim," his father said that night.



“And neither shall I,” said Evelyn.

“I’m sorry about just one thing,” said Jim.

“What is that?” asked his father.

“I wish we’d taken in the fire shovel and the poker and some tin pans.”



## XIV

### *The Blue Aunt comes Home*

IN September Jim had had an answer from his Aunt Hilda to the letter he wrote her in July, and she said she hoped to get home by the first of November; and this news had made them all glad. But it is easier to make plans than it is to carry them out. Something besides peace had been spreading over the whole world, making it one nation in its suffering, and this was the influenza. While Mr. West was ill with it in America, the children's Aunt Hilda, "The Blue Aunt," as they called her, was nursing influenza patients in France; for she had offered her services when there was a great need of nurses. First she put off coming home until Thanksgiving, and then she said she would surely be back by the middle of December.

"I don't believe she'll get here for Christmas," said Jim disconsolately.

But the next letter said she would surely be with them a day or two before Christmas, for she had a touch of bronchitis, and the doctor said it was time she had a rest.

"It has been a wonderful experience working over here," she wrote, "and the memory will go with me



all my life, but you cannot imagine what it is to me to have a home to come to; for a home, in these troubled times, seems like a patch of light in the dark. I can see you all as plainly as if I were already with you, and I know how Evelyn will throw her arms around me, and how offish Jim will be, although he will be glad in his heart. I am sure Evelyn's dolls will all be arranged in a row to greet me. I beg her pardon, her children, I mean. Hector and Tim will be of the party, and not the least important will be you, dear Sadie and James. It is good to go away, but it is better still to come home, and all who are so fortunate as to have a home should celebrate Christmas this year of peace by making home a place full of 'peace on earth and good-will to men.' I hope, whatever day I come, you will light the big bayberry candle, the one we put in the window on Thanksgiving night. If I get back on the evening train how I shall like to see it shining in the window, a symbol of all the light and gladness and brightness there is inside the house. I hope there will be snow on the ground, and a full moon, making the tree-trunks silver; but I have not looked at the almanac. I suppose Christmas Eve there will be carols, and all the windows will be lighted by rows of candles, and perhaps you will have a Christmas tree."

"Let's have a Christmas tree — let's, mother," Evelyn begged when the letter was read. "We did not have one last year, and 'cause Lottie and Prue



and Harry are coming we ought to do something 'special.'

"A Christmas tree is a great deal of work for your mother," said Mr. West.

"We'll do all the work, if you'll let us have it," said Jim.

"I'll help all I can," said Mary, Ann's young niece. She was only seventeen and felt hardly more than a child herself.

"Of course we'll have a Christmas tree," said Mrs. West, "and we'll invite Nancy and Sophia and Emily and David to come to it."

"That's all of the Red, White, and Blue Club, mother, except Charley Norcross," said Jim. "I'm afraid he'll feel hurt if he's left out."

"But you wanted to punish him," Evelyn reminded Jim.

"He's been punished enough, and, besides, we've got to have 'peace on earth and good-will to men,'" said Jim.

But alas, when Christmas Eve came the Blue Aunt had not arrived. It had been a stormy crossing, and her boat was delayed. Lottie, Prue, and Harry had all come down from the farm, and the Christmas tree was ready, a marvel of glistening balls, and wreaths of make-believe snow, and candles all ready to light. And its green and symmetrical branches were hung with small gifts done up in colored tissue paper, while the larger presents were grouped around its base.



“She will surely be here by Christmas evening; let’s put off the celebration until she gets here,” said Mr. West.

At this a wail went up from the five children.

“Emily is going to have a party Christmas night, and I am invited,” said Lottie.

“Charley Norcross is going to have supper Christmas at his aunt’s,” said Jim.

“I just can’t wait to see what that big bundle is that has my name on it,” said Evelyn, “the one that looks like a sled.”

So they had the party on Christmas Eve; and, alas, a cold, drenching rain fell, and everybody arrived under umbrellas. The carol singers looked very forlorn as they went from house to house. And although the children dashed out to see the lighted windows in the neighbors’ houses, they were glad enough to get back to the warmth and cheer inside.

Evelyn’s present was a sled; and oh, joy of joys! it was painted bright red, as she hoped it would be. It was just the color of her winter coat.

“I don’t know how I could have stood it if it had been painted brown or black,” said Evelyn.

“You’d have had ‘to do the best you could of it,’” Prue quoted.

“I s’pose so, but it would have been a dreadful disappointment.”

Sophia’s eyes shone when she received a white sweater with sleeves, and a tiny red umbrella, for her



doll Ellen; and Nancy was made happy by getting a whole box of note-paper, with a colored picture on each sheet.

“I can write to our French orphan on this,” she said.

Everybody had just what she wanted, and everybody had just what he wanted; for Mrs. West had planned the presents, and she could not have known better what to get if she had been a child herself. There was candy for everybody, of the simple Christmas kind one is allowed to eat, with just a few chocolates in each bag. And all the children were sure they had never had such a happy Christmas Eve. The only thing that could have made it better was to have had the Blue Aunt there. But she would surely come before Christmas Day was over!

Christmas morning, while it was still dark, the children had the joy of opening their well-filled stockings.

While they were finishing their Christmas breakfast, which ended with griddle cakes, the telephone bell rang. As all telegrams were telephoned up, there was great excitement.

“I know it is from Aunt Hilda, saying her steamer has got in,” said Jim, as he ran to the telephone. “Oh, bother,” he said, as he came back, “it’s only Cousin Sue asking if Evelyn and Prue can go out with her and Sophia in her automobile this afternoon.”

“Of course we can, can’t we, mother?” said Evelyn with delight.



There was the sharp ring of the telephone again.

"Let me go this time," said Evelyn.

But Harry and Jim were having a race for the telephone. Harry got there first.

"It's David, Jim; he says his father has to go into the country this afternoon to see a patient, and he'll take us along with David if we like."

"That will be great," said Jim.

The telephone bell rang again. "I'm going to it; it's my turn," Evelyn insisted, as she brushed past Harry and Jim. Alas! it was only a message for her father to say that Judge Baxter was in New York and would not get home until late that night. And this was the way the telephone behaved until church time. It had never been busier; but there was no word from Aunt Hilda.

Evelyn always liked the Christmas service better than any in the whole year; for the carols were so joyous, and the church was so beautiful with its Christmas green. And when Mr. Merrifield said in his short sermon what a blessed Christmas it was, now that peace had come and our absent friends would soon return, the little girl felt so happy because dear Aunt Hilda was coming back, that she wanted to dance up and down; only, of course, she could not do anything of the kind because she was in a pew at church. All she could do was to look up at Mr. Merrifield with her brightest smile.

After all, it was Ann who was the lucky person to



get Aunt Hilda's message; and when the family came home from church she told them that the long-looked-for telegram had been telephoned up. Ann had written down the message so that there should be no mistake, and this was what it said: "Will come at seven or eleven to-night, unless I miss the last train. Then will spend the night with the Sargents."

Great was the excitement of the children. "Mother, dear, don't forget to put the big candle in the window," said Evelyn.

And all through their Christmas dinner of roast goose and plum pudding, the talk was of Aunt Hilda.

"I do hope she'll come before I go to the party," said Lottie.

They put off supper until half-past seven, and Mr. West, Jim, and Harry went around to the station. When the returning wheels of the automobile were heard, Prue and Evelyn almost tumbled down the steps in their eagerness.

"She did n't come," Harry and Jim called out.

"She can't get here until after eleven o'clock now. Let's have supper," said Mr. West.

So a subdued party sat down at the supper table. No one was very hungry because dinner had been late and very long. Lottie was the least hungry of all, for she was longing to be off to the party; and she could hardly wait for her Cousin James to finish his supper, and take her there. She looked so grand in



her new white dress and pink sash that the other children were quite envious.

"It's time you children were going to bed," Mr. West said, when supper was over, as he looked at Prue and Evelyn.

"Oh, please, mother, dear, let us sit up," Evelyn begged.

"I don't think I could let you sit up until after eleven."

"Be off to bed, children," said Mr. West. "She's not likely to come to-night."

"But if she does, please, mother, won't you promise to wake us up?" begged Evelyn. "It would be terrible to miss a thing like that."

Mrs. West promised. It did not seem so very long since she had been a little girl and had been heart-broken because her mother failed to wake her on a similar occasion.

So Prue and Evelyn went off to bed cheerfully, for it was long after their bedtime, and they were very sleepy. Harry and Jim went off too; and as Lottie was at the party, only Mr. and Mrs. West, with Hector and Tim, were left to enjoy the bright wood fire in the parlor.

Once more Mr. West went to the train, and this time it was Mrs. West who went down the front steps. She saw Mr. West helping a tall lady out of the automobile. But what a disappointment! It was only Lottie whom he had brought home from the party.



“Lottie, dear, I never was sorry to see you before,” said Mrs. West.

“I knew she could n’t get through to-night,” said Mr. West.

But Mrs. West had an unreasonable feeling that she was coming.

“If her New York train was late, and she missed our last train, she might come out by automobile,” she said.

“She never would do that. Well, I’m going to turn in. We’ll see her to-morrow.”

Hector and Tim were put in their quarters for the night, and the parlor was deserted, save for the lingering glow of the wood fire and the light of the Christmas candle in the window; for Mrs. West’s faith that Hilda would come made her leave it there.

And she did come! Judge Baxter and his wife happened to be on the same train she took from New York, and when they missed their connection he got a taxi and invited her to drive out with them.

So this was what she saw as she came along the quiet street — a row of silent houses with the lights out, and just this one house that seemed to be alive, with the curtains up and the glowing embers on the hearth, and that one candle with its welcoming patch of light.

Lottie flew down to answer the doorbell. Hector was already at the door, and the first to welcome the Blue Aunt. He jumped up on her with delight.



Lottie and Aunt Hilda flung their arms around each other, and then held each other at arm's length, for a long look.

"How tall you have grown! You are almost as tall as I am," said Aunt Hilda, as she looked at Lottie's slim figure in her pink kimono, with her yellow hair falling about her shoulders.

It seemed to Lottie that her aunt had never looked so sweet and so dear. Her blue eyes were sadder, however, as if they had seen sorrowful things.

"You have grown thin," said Lottie, as she noticed the lines in her Aunt Hilda's pale face.

Mrs. West was the next to come down, and then Mr. West, and such a talking as there was before the fire, while Lottie went off to the kitchen to make hot chocolate.

"How are the children?" Hilda asked.

"Very well. I promised to wake them up if you came."

Mrs. West took Hilda up to the room where Prue and Evelyn were sleeping. The two little girls were nestled close together, and Prue's dark hair was pressed against Evelyn's golden hair. They were sleeping so peacefully it seemed a shame to wake them up. But Mrs. West had promised, so she said, "Children, she has come," but still they did not wake up. So she shook each of them gently, and presently, two very sleepy little girls sat up in bed and rubbed their eyes. Then Evelyn flung her arms about Aunt



Hilda and gave her a hug. "She's come, Prue! The Blue Aunt has come!" she cried.

It was a little more than a year since their Aunt Hilda had said good-bye to them in this same room, and prayed that they might all be kept safe and brought together again. And now the prayer had been answered. The two little girls were very happy, but were too sleepy to talk and they dropped off to sleep again in the glad thought of to-morrow. Harry and Jim dressed quickly and ran downstairs so as not to miss any of the fun.

Mr. West put another log on the fire, and they all drank the hot chocolate and ate the good things which Lottie brought in while they listened to the tale Aunt Hilda told of her adventures across the sea. Tim slipped in when Lottie left the kitchen door open. He stood for a moment uncertainly and then made a spring and settled down comfortably in Hilda's lap.

"He knows you!" the children cried.

Aunt Hilda smoothed the folds of her blue serge gown and was afraid that the cat's preference for her lap was because she was the only person in the room with a woolen dress on.

Jim listened with deep interest to his aunt's sad stories of the orphans in France, and as she talked, America and his own home seemed to grow more and more desirable. Now that she was back again, he was not so anxious to cross the sea.



“Gee, I’m glad I’m not in France,” he said.

“You children must run off to bed now,” said Mr. West.

“We must all go up,” said Mrs. West.

“I meant to get here sooner, but I have at least kept my promise and got to you before Christmas was over,” said the Blue Aunt as the clock struck twelve.

THE END







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