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By AMY BROOKS

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“HOW CAN THEY DANCE SO PRETTILY?” SHE SAID.—Page 5.



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# PRUE'S MERRY TIMES

BY

AMY BROOKS

Author of "Dorothy Dainty Series," "The Randy Books,"  
"A Jolly Cat Tale" and "The Prue Books"

*ILLUSTRATED BY THE AUTHOR*



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# PRUE'S MERRY TIMES

## CHAPTER I

### FUN IN PROSPECT

**T**HERE was great excitement in the village. The wild flowers nodded their heads as if they were whispering about something that was too great a secret to be shared with the breeze.

The leaves rustled overhead as if they, too, were talking about it. There was not a child in the village who had not heard the wonderful bit of news, and of them all, none was more wild with delight than little Prue Weston.

The moment she had heard it, she had hastened to tell her little neighbors, Hitty,

Sophy, and Johnny Buffum, and ever since that day, they had been "practising."

She had found her playmates in the midst of a game of "Hop-sotch."

"Oh, Hitty, Sophy, Johnny, listen! We're to have a fine dancing school, right here in town! Just think of it, and every one is going. It's only to be ten cents a lesson for children, Saturday afternoons, and the big boys and girls will have their lessons in the evening."

Hitty and Sophy were as excited as Prue could wish, and at once began to ask more questions than could be answered in a week.

"Where will it be?"

"How soon will the lessons begin?"

"Who's going?"

"Who'll be the teacher?"

These questions and many more Hitty



and Sophy asked, and Prue answered them as well as she could, but while replying to their queries, she could not help seeing that Johnny was very quiet, and seemed little interested.

“ Why, Johnny,” said Prue, when Hitty ceased questioning to regain her breath, “ aren’t *you* glad we’re to learn to dance? ”

“ It’s fine ’nough to have the school,” said Johnny, “ but I’m ’fraid I couldn’t learn.”

“ Oh, yes you could,” said Prue, “ and my Randy has promised to show us some of the steps, and teach us ever so much before the school begins. You can come over to Randy’s house with Hitty, and Sophy, and me, and you’ll *see* how you’ll learn when Randy teaches us.”

“ I’d love ter dance, but I’m ’fraid I couldn’t do it graceful,” objected Johnny.

“*Gracefully,*” corrected Prue. “Well, my Randy dances beautifully; she learned in Boston, where they know *everything,*” she continued, “and we’ll learn all we can, and when we go to take our first lesson, we’ll be able to show the teacher that we know something!”

True to her promise, Randy taught her four little pupils, and derived as much amusement from the lessons as the children did.

Prue was an apt pupil, Hitty did fairly well, but Sophy and Johnny were surely never intended for dancers.

“You must practise what I have taught you,” Randy said, “and you four little friends will be surprised to see how much improvement there will be.”

Hitty and Sophy seemed able to think of nothing but the steps that Randy had

taught them, and early and late they practised, and with Prue, who was equally interested, they formed a merry trio. Sophy watched the others eagerly.

“How can they dance so prettily?” she said.

Prue and Hitty would try to dance together, then Prue and Sophy, and then Hitty and Sophy, but Johnny preferred to practise alone.

Sophy's efforts were exceedingly clumsy, but she laughed at her blunders and tried again and again, not caring a bit if Hitty laughed, too.

It was Johnny who could not bear their laughter, and after once being a target for their merriment, he resolved to practise alone. It was in vain that they insisted that he could not dance without a partner.

Even Prue's pleading was unavailing,

and Johnny ran off to the barn to struggle with his awkwardness, and to strive to train his clumsy little feet to dance with elegance and grace.

When he reached the barn, he ran to the middle of the floor, and tried to remember how Randy had said the steps should be taken.

“That polka was pretty when she done it,” he muttered, “but which foot does a fellow start with?”

There was no sound in reply, but Johnny had not expected an answer, and he again tried to remember what Randy had said, and endeavored to polka.

“I b’lieve I’ve forgotten every word she said!” he declared in disgust. “I guess I’ll see ’f I can bow like she told me to.”

Alas! The bowing was no easier than the dancing had been.

Johnny paused to wipe the perspiration from his brow.

“ Oh, *ain't* it hard work? ” he cried.

He thrust his handkerchief into his pocket, tossed back the lock of hair that hung over his forehead, and again attempted to make a very fine bow.

“ She said: ‘ draw yer heels together, and hold yer arms,’ — O dear, I’ve forgotten what she said to do with yer arms, and anyhow, my feet are bother enough! ”

For a few moments he struggled to make his feet do his bidding, then his anger broke forth.

“ I never *see* such feet! ” he cried.

“ Ef I draw my left foot forward fust, my right don’t get there on time, an’ ef I draw my right foot forward fust, my left foot gets in my way, an’ when I try ter draw ’em both forward to *oncet*, I almost

fall on my nose! What's a feller ter do, that wants ter dance, ef his feet won't let him? ”

While Johnny struggled to do the steps, and to make the bow that Randy had taught him, the three little girls were doing the same thing, only they were together, and were laughing merrily over their mistakes.

They were in earnest, however, and Hitty and Sophy watched with delight while Prue explained what Randy had said.

“ Hold your skirts, so, ” she was saying, “ and then move your feet so, and bow! ”

Daintily she held her skirts, and bowed.

“ Oh, that's fine, ” said Hitty.

“ Let's try again, ” said Sophy, and again they attempted to do as Prue had done.

“ Why, Hitty! ” cried Sophy, “ when you bow you look as if you had a ‘ crick ’ in

your back like Grandma Babson has," and she laughed until Hitty was vexed.

"Well, how do *you* look when you bow?" she retorted.

"I don't know, for I can't see myself," said Sophy, still laughing.

"It's lucky you can't," said Hitty, curtly, "for you're a sight! When you take hold of your skirts and bow, you look as if you had crumbs for the chickens in your apron, and was trying ter ketch a mouthful."

Sophy was good-tempered.

"We're both funny enough," she said, "and after all our practising, I hope ma'll let us go to the dancing school when it begins."

"Oh, she will," said Hitty; "she wouldn't have every one else go, and not let us."

It was amusing to hear the comments of the children of the neighborhood, and the remarks of the older boys and girls were almost as droll.

“ We’re goin’, we be! ” declared Joe Butley.

“ An’ we’ll be star dancers, ” cried Job; “ you see what we’ll do! ”

“ Think ye’re some *punkins*, don’t ye? ” said Jim Simpson, who was not at all fond of the Butley twins.

“ You will when you see us dance. My, but we kin cut capers, ” said Job.

“ Ye’d think they was ’lectric’ty in our feet! ” added Joe.

“ Where’d ye learn so much? ” questioned Jim, who, while he disliked Joe and Job, could not but feel curious as to their ability.



“ Oh, we ain't tellin', ” Job replied, with fine disregard of grammar.

“ Well, ye're little chaps, ” remarked Jim, “ so ye won't make much show, whatever ye do. Now, if I do some fine steps, I'll be big 'nough fer folks ter see! ”

“ Ye'll be big 'nough ter be called ' Fatty, ' ” agreed Joe.

“ Oh, I'm not fat, ” said Jim; “ I'm only fair size. ”

“ Ye're *huge!* ” declared Job; “ and ye needn't think we little fellers ain't anybody. ”

While Jim Simpson was made a bit uncomfortable because of his bulky form, Jeremy Gifford was equally miserable because of his small stature. Jeremy was fifteen, yet he was no taller than the Butley boys, and his wiry form and shrewd little

face made him seem much smaller than he really was.

“ I’m goin’ ter the evening class,” he said to Tom Thompson, who was a year younger than Jeremy, but a head taller.

“ Guess *not*,” Tom said curtly; “ you belong in the children’s class for Saturday afternoon.”

“ I’m no small boy, I’ll let ye know!” cried Jeremy; “ I’m a whole year older’n you be.”

“ Ye’re a whole head shorter, and it’s size that’ll count!” Tom retorted. “ The teacher’ll sort us out, an’ then you’ll see which class you’ll be in.”

Bob Rushton was puzzled as to where he should be placed. He was as young as little Johnny Buffum, but he had grown so fast during the summer that he believed that he

would surely be classed with the big girls and boys.

“What ever made me grow so fast this summer?” he said. “I’d rather dance with Prue Weston, and Hitty Buffum, and anybody their size; and here I’ve gone and run up like a bean-pole. The small girls will think I’m too big, and the big girls will think I’m too small! Was any boy ever in such a fix?”

Merilla Burton was absolutely contented. She was fourteen, and rather tall, and she felt sure that she could not be expected to attend any class save that intended for the older pupils.

Phonie Jenks ran over to the Buffum house to ask Hitty and Sophy if they were going.

“I’ll hev ter let ’em,” said good Mrs. Buffum, “although Ann and Tommy can’t

see why they can't go, too. I've told them ter be good and not fuss about it. Hitty, and Sophy, and Johnny can go this year, and Ann and Tommy when they're some bigger. I've promised ter let them stay home and help me make patchwork."

"Will they *like* to?" asked Phonie, with surprise.

"They ain't what ye'd call 'tickled ter pieces,' " Mrs. Buffum replied, "but they understand how 'tis."

"We'll tell you all about the lesson every time we come home," said Hitty.

Ann made no reply, but Tommy did.

"I guess ye needn't bother," he said.

It was the leader of the village band that had sent forth the announcement that he intended to fill the very important position of dancing teacher to the youth of the village.

“ I’ve got a fine ear fer music,” he declared, “ and my fingers is nimble handling the cornet.

“ Naow, if my ears and my fingers is musical, why shouldn’t my *toes* be musical, and if they *be*, then why can’t I learn ter dance? And if I can *learn* ter dance, don’t it stand ter reason that I can *teach* what I *learnt*? ”

No one objected to his statement, or questioned his ability.

His argument was ungrammatical, but it was forcible. He had abundant faith in himself, and he impressed his friends.

“ I do’no’ as he’ll be actooally graceful,” said old Nate Burnham, “ but he’ll fetch it, I’ll bet ye! ”

“ Fetch what? ” queried a young farmer, who happened to be sitting beside Nate in Barnes’s store.

“Fetch the nimbleness inter them feet of his’n,” snapped Nate.

“All yer have ter do ter learn anything is ter try, and then keep on trying. He’s mastered music, ain’t he? Well, what’s harder’n that?”

“Makin’ both ends meet,” said Joel Simpkins, “and he don’t earn ’nough out’n music ter do that.”

“Wal, he does his music with his fingers, and says he gits ’bout half a living out’n it. Naow, if he kin make his feet earn the other half, he’s done the stunt!”

Nate looked at the group with an air of triumph.

“Guess that argument beat ye all holler!” he chuckled, and no one cared to reply.

Through the spring and summer, the little band director had struggled to master the art of dancing.

He visited the city once each fortnight to take a private lesson, and practised every day and *all* day to perfect the bit of skill that he had gained.

“Ye’re wearing out more shoes than ye can afford ter spile,” said his wife one day, “and I want ye ter quit dancing up in the chamber. Ye kin practise in the kitchen, but ye must stop a-doin’ it up stairs.”

“But I couldn’t hurt that old attic floor!” he said in surprise.

“’Tain’t the floor I’m afeared of,” was the quick reply, “but ye’re bustin’ the ceiling in the settin’-room. No feller as hefty as you be could jump up and down on the attic floor and not smash the ceiling in the room below.”

“The teacher says I dance very light,” said the little man, with an injured air.

“*Light!*” was the disgusted reply.

“ Why, yesterday, when ye actooally got going, I thought any minute ye’d come through and land plunk in the middle of the floor.”

“ Why, Statiry, how you talk! ” he cried.

“ Well, ye made such a racket that Mr. Jenks heard ye as he was driving by, and stopped ter ask if ye wanted any help. I says, ‘ Land, no! Ef James Henry Bowers can make all that racket *without* help, fer massy sakes what would he do if ye helped him? ’

“ ‘ Guess the house would tumble down round yer ears,’ says he, and with that he druv on.”

July and August were torrid. The days were scorching, and the nights were not much cooler. Every one complained of the heat, every one but stout little James Henry Bowers.



From daylight until dusk he pranced and capered, and when September came, he had lost no weight, but he had gained much ability.

“ I’ve got a bright idee! ” he said one morning. “ A *fine* idee, I tell ye! ”

“ Well? ” his wife said, patiently.

“ I’ll open my dancing school in October,” he said, “ but next week, when I give a band concert at the Four Corners, I’m going to ’nounce from the band-stand that I’m ready ter teach, and what the terms will be, and where we’ll have it.”

“ My mind’s some relieved,” said Statura. “ I ’most expected ter hear ye say ye was going ter do a dancing stunt on the band-stand, before all them people.”

He chose to ignore what she had said.

“ Ye’ll think well of dancing when ye see all the money I’ll earn out’n teaching,” he

said. "If I don't earn a fortune, I'll get a good pile toward it, and when my classes is going ye wouldn't care if I'd cracked two ceilings."

"I'm sure I hope ye'll succeed in getting good classes," she said more kindly than usual, "ye've worked hard 'nough ter hev luck. I *do* hope ye will."

She wondered if the youth of their own town, and the neighboring villages would be able to find enough money with which to pay the small fee that her husband had decided to ask.

It was not strange that she had become very weary of the incessant practising that had made the summer all but unbearable.

Now she wondered if it had been worth while.

## CHAPTER II

### NAMING THE KITTEN

**P**RUE sat on the doorstep, with Tabby snuggled close beside her, while the kitten scampered about on the little path.

She had been christened by Prue a few moments before, and seemed to have lost none of her friskiness because of her ponderous name.

Her soft fur was still wet with the sprinkling that Prue had given her, but her gay spirits were not dampened, and she seemed rejoicing in her name, Dahlia Keziah.

“ I’ve named her Dahlia, because, Tabby, you know Dahlias are handsome, and her

other name is Keziah, because,—oh, because it *is*. I think Dahlia Keziah sounds *grand!* ”

Tabby made no objection. Being a patient and rather meek cat, she probably would not have complained if little Prue had given the kitten any other outrageous name.

Philury, the maid of all work, had expressed her opinion quite forcibly.

“ My land! What a name fer the little critter! ” she had said. “ I wonder what kept ye from calling her Kerosene Oil-tank? ”

“ Well, that *does* sound fine,” said Prue, “ only kerosene smells horrid, and you couldn't help thinking of it. ”

“ Well, Dahlias ain't the sweetest blossoms I ever smelt. They don't make ye think of pinks or mignonette,” said Phi-

lury. Then seeing that Prue looked hurt, she said:

“ Naow, Prue, ye mustn’t mind my laughing. I hadn’t got used ter that kitten’s name, and it seemed odd ter me. I’ll bake some cookies, an’ ye kin set yer little teatable, an’ invite Tabby an’ the kitten ter the spread. It’ll be a christening party.”

“ Oh, that will be *fine!* ” cried Prue. “ And, Philury, we’ll make the kitten drink her milk out of my dolly’s washbowl.”

“ I guess she’ll drink out’n ’most anything,” said Philury, “ if there’s ’nough cream in it! ”

She returned to the kitchen to make the promised cookies, and Prue looked lovingly at Tabby.

“ You and the kitten are to have a party,

Tabby dear," she said, "and I mean to have that baby cat called by her whole name whenever any one speaks to her."

The spread was a great success. The guests enjoyed the treat, and the little hostess was very happy.

To be sure, Tabby forgot her table manners, if she ever had any, and stretching her gray paw across the little doll's table, snatched a big piece of cookie.

"Oh, *Tabby!*" cried Prue, and Tabby laid her ears back, as if expecting punishment.

"There, there!" cooed Prue, "eat your cookie. You didn't know it was naughty to just grab things."

The kitten climbed up on to the tiny table, and began to play with the spoons. The little glass spoon-holder tipped over, and of course the baby cat was frightened



“YOU AND THE KITTEN ARE TO HAVE A PARTY, TABBY DEAR.”  
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by the clatter that it made. Prue picked her up and petted her.

“ You mustn’t be scared,” she said; “ you really *mustn’t*, Dahlia Keziah. Those little spoons made a noise, but they didn’t hurt you, now *did* they? ”

“ Mew! ” squeaked the kitten.

“ Well, then, sit down here, and I’ll fill this dolly’s wash-bowl with milk for you.”

Dahlia Keziah was not quite used to dishes, and she promptly put her paw into the milk, and then lapped it off.

“ Oh, you don’t drink *that* way, dear! ” cried Prue. “ You can’t take the milk up in your *hands*,—I mean your paws. Here, I’ll show you how.”

Very gently, but firmly, she pressed the kitten’s head down toward the milk, and she at once began to drink it as if she had

never thought of taking it in any other manner.

“ I’m glad school doesn’t begin till next week,” said Prue; “ you need me at home, and there’s five more days for you and the kitten to learn in. We’ll have a party every day, and, Tabby, you and Dahlia Keziah ought to know how to eat beautifully by that time.”

“ Hello, Prue! Who be ye talkin’ ter? ” questioned a voice that sounded like a wheezy cornet or a penny trumpet, one could hardly say which.

The owner of the voice appeared from behind a clump of lilac bushes that, at one point, hid the path.

“ My! That hill ’most takes my breath away every time I come up here. The last time I *clumb* it, I vaowed I never’d do it agin.”

“ Why don’t you go ’round? ” asked Prue.

“ *’Raound!* ” gasped Mrs. Hodgkins. “ Why it’s ’bout two mile, or so, farther ter travel ’raound it. If I’m tuckered aout with comin’ straight up here, where’d I be ter go the longest way? ”

She did not wait for Prue to answer her, but went in at the open door and at once sat down in the big rocker.

Prue, bending lovingly over Tabby, whispered softly in her ear.

“ You’ll *have* to take care of the kitten, ” she said, “ because I’m going in to hear Mrs. Hodgkins talk. She always knows what every one in town is doing, and what they’re *going* to do, and I want to know, too. I promise to tell you if she says anything ’bout you, dear. ”

Mrs. Hodgkins always declared it difficult

to breathe after having ascended the long hill to the Weston farm, but she regained her breath very quickly, perhaps because she never could long remain silent.

“ Joel Simpkins’s wife has got a new gown, an’ it’s off’n the same piece er goods as is the gown that Barnes’s wife has just made. When ye reelize that Joel is jest a clerk in Barnes’s store, it don’t seem quite right fer that wife er his’n ter hev a rig like what his employer’s wife is peradin’ ’round in. Does it? ”

As usual, she waited for no reply, and continued:

“ An’ James Henry Bowers! *Ain’t* he prancin’ up an’ daown the length an’ breadth er the town? Since he’s naow the dancin’ teacher, he walks as if he had wire springs in his boots. My! But it’s a sight ter see him when his wife is with him. He

skips an' bounces along as if he was keepin' time to a fiddle, an' Statiry can't keep step with him, but every time she ketches up she grabs his coat tails, as if she was holdin' him daown fer fear he'd fly. Oh, they're a sight, I tell ye!"

"I do hope he'll have good luck with his classes," Mrs. Weston said, kindly.

"Wal, I s'pose I do, too, but I can't help laughin' ter see the queer figger he cuts, a-prancin' 'raound the square," Mrs. Hodgkins replied.

"An' speakin' of 'pearances, I guess 'twould be hard ter find a child that will look much funnier than Sophy Buffum will when she gits the new gown on that her ma is makin' fer her."

"Why will Sophy look funny?" questioned Prue. "I thought *new* dresses always looked nice."

“ You ain’t seen Sophy’s gown yet,” said Mrs. Hodgkins, “ so I’ll tell ye ’bout it. Her ma took a old plaid gown that Hitty had outgrown, an’ ripped it an’ washed it. When she come ter look at it, the places that was only *thin*, had gone clean through ter *holes* in the washin’ of it, an’ so the sleeves couldn’t be used, an’ the back breadth of the skirt was gone, too. She’d vowed she’d make a dress out’n it fer Sophy, so she went down ter Barnes’s store, an’ tried ter match it, but there wasn’t a yard of it left! ”

“ Then, after all that work, she had ter give it up! ” Mrs. Weston said.

“ I shouldn’t think ye knew Mis’ Buffum, er ye wouldn’t say that! ” exclaimed Mrs. Hodgkins. “ Barnes was baound ter sell some goods, an’ he said while he hadn’t any

more of the plaid, he had some dress goods that was the same color that she could use with it. With that he up an' showed her some bright green cloth with red figgers on it, an' actooally advised her ter use it, because 'twas the same colors as the plaid dress! Think of it, Mis' Weston! Sleeves an' a back breadth of the skirt of green woollen with red figgers on it, and the rest of the skirt an' the waist of red an' green plaid!"

"Seems most too bad ter let her look like that," said Mrs. Weston, "an' I guess I'll run down there this afternoon. P'raps Mis' Buffum and I can plan it some way so it will look better."

"Ye couldn't do it," said the gossip, with what sounded like a chuckle, "fer the pieces er plaid what she's got left is full er holes."

“What *will* you do, ma?” Prue asked, eagerly.

“I’ll see later,” Mrs. Weston replied, and little Prue thought her eyes twinkled.

Mrs. Hodgkins felt that she had told all the news that she could think of, and as she was anxious to gather other items of interest, she said “Good morning,” and hurried away.

Philury, from the kitchen window, watched her, as she waddled down the path.

“The ducks cry ‘Quack! Quack!’  
An’ the crows scream ‘Caw! Caw!’  
But there never was such an  
Old gossip before.  
Fer the birds cry fer fun,  
An’ they’re only at play,  
But Mis’ Hodgkins talks gossip  
The hull of the day.”

Philury’s voice rose higher and higher as she sang this ridiculous verse of her own



composition, the last word pronounced in a shrill voice that was absolutely deafening.

“*Phi-lu-ry!*”

Mrs. Weston’s voice seemed to reprove, as she called her.

“Yes, ma’am, I know I oughtn’t,” said the girl, “but she talks ’bout the town’s best people just as free as if she’d a right ter, and she tells of hard luck as if she really enjoyed it. ’Taint kind, an’ I don’t think well of her fer doin’ it.”

“Ye’re right ’bout that, *Philury*,” said Mrs. Weston, kindly, as she laid her hand on the girl’s arm, “but yer song was sorter pokin’ fun, wasn’t it?”

“I sung that ter pay her fer talkin’ so, but p’raps I done wrong. I’ll make most er the chunes I sing fer little Prue, hereafter,” said *Philury*.

“ Make one now, 'bout Tabby,” cried Prue.

“ All right,” cried Philury, “ gi'me jest a minute ter think.”

“ Oh, but don't be long thinking,” cried Prue, “ 'cause I'm wild to hear it!”

“ Well, here ye be!” said Philury, and to Prue's great delight she sang this new composition:

“ The kitten is dancin' a jolly ol' jig,  
An' Tabby is wearin' a han'some new wig.  
She made her head bald scratchin' hard fer a flea,  
But she gained by the effort a brand new idee.

“ She naow is the wisest ol' cat in the town,  
Her wig is becomin', she wears a new gown,  
She's proud of her kitten, so frisky, they say,  
Named Dahlia Keziah! Naow isn't that gay?”

Prue clapped her hands, and danced about, laughing with delight.

“ Oh, that's fine, *fine!* ” she cried, “ and

Philury, don't you wish Tabby *truly* had a wig? ”

“ Good land, yes, ” agreed Philury, “ an' I wish it was red. Tabby's kind o' brindle-gray, an' seems ter me her face with its green eyes would look *grand* peepin' out'n a red, curly wig! ”

And while Prue was laughing with Philury, she quite forgot her anxiety regarding Sophy Buffum's new dress.

Sophy could not forget it, however, because she was very closely watching Mrs. Buffum, as she tried the effect of the new goods, when compared with the old plaid frock.

“ It'll look funny, ” declared Hitty, “ an' I'm glad I outgrewed it so I won't wear it. ”

“ Better wait 'fore ye crow! ” said Mrs. Buffum, “ fer I meant ter make it fer Sophy, but with the new goods I guess I

kin make it big 'nough fer you. It's more of er savin' ter make the ol' dress do fer the *big* girl, an' whilst yer little, yer bigger'n Sophy. I'll know pooty soon which er ye'll wear it."

The two children looked at each other. Each knew that the dress, when done, would be anything but tasteful, and each hoped that the other would have to wear it.

"Oh, ma!" cried Hitty, "don't cut that new cloth up for sleeves. If it's the size for me I just *can't* wear it, and if it's Sophy that's got ter wear it, I know by the way she looks she *won't*. Everyone at school would laugh ter see that dress coming in!"

"H'ity, t'ity!" cried Mrs. Buffum, pausing to look at the two small girls, her shears held in air, as if she were too amazed to lay them down.

"H'ity, t'ity, wal I declare! Has it

come ter this, that two little slips like you must choose their own clothes? I tell ye, one er t'other of ye'll wear this gown; an'— ”

A tap at the door interrupted this determined threat, and a moment later Mrs. Weston entered.

“ I heard, from Mis' Hodgkins, that ye was havin' quite a time trying to make over the plaid dress, so I come ter bring this bundle. Prue had a frock like Hitty's, an' I guess there's 'nough in these pieces ter make some sleeves, an' a back breadth.”

“ I do declare! Ye're a neighbor wuth havin'. I do thank ye,” said Mrs. Buffum, while Hitty and Sophy looked into each other's eyes, and thought that they had had a merciful escape.

“ I do'no' what I can do with that green figgered cloth, unless I risk it ter make a

vest out'n it fer yer pa, an' I do'no's he'd stand it," said Mrs. Buffum.

"I wouldn't blame pa if he jest *hol-lered!*" whispered Hitty, and Sophy laughed softly at the thought of her father's disgust, if he was asked to go to church with his portly figure decked out in a bright red and green vest.

They ran out into the dooryard, and drew long breaths of the fresh air. They were gay at the thought that neither would be asked to wear a hideous dress to school. It was very easy for Mrs. Buffum to think that they should not mind the slurs and laughter of their schoolmates.

It is unhappily true that little classmates are sometimes thoughtless, even cruel, and their taunts and jeering can make one who is less fortunate than themselves, and poorer dressed, so wretchedly uncomforta-

ble that she would gladly remain away from school. There was one dear little friend who they knew never teased or vexed them. Full of fun and very bright was she, and her loving little heart always prompted her to be kind. It was little Prue.

## CHAPTER III

### SCHOOL BEGINS

**J**OHNNY BUFFUM was greatly puzzled over the question as to which of two things he ought to do.

“I’ve got some money, and I’d like ter make it last till Prue goes ter Boston for a visit,” he thought. He jingled the loose pennies in his pocket, and frowned as if thinking deeply.

He thought Prue the nicest little girl in the world, and *wished* that she had not been invited to visit Boston.

“She’ll think this little old town, and the folks in it are just nothing at all, when she comes back.



“ I mean she shall think I’m a nice sort of boy,” he whispered to himself, “ I *think* she does, but I’m going to be sure of it.

“ I meant to treat her every Saturday,” he continued, “ but if I want my pennies to last, I’ll have to spread them out.”

Then a bright smile lighted his little, round face.

“ I know what I’ll do! ” he said, “ I’ll dance with her every Saturday afternoon, and I’ll buy her some candy every Wednesday after school, and *p’raps* she won’t forget me when she’s in Boston.”

Clever little Johnny! Older boys than he plan in like manner to fasten the thoughts of their sweethearts upon themselves.

He was in his tiny bedroom, brushing his flaxen hair with unusual care. It was the first day of school, and he wished to look as well as possible.

Downstairs the two small girls, Hitty and Sophy, were greatly excited.

Mrs. Buffum was almost distracted because neither would stand still long enough to have her dress buttoned.

The frock that Hitty wore was the bright plaid, now fresh, and looking almost as fine as when it was new, while Sophy was rejoicing in a dress that no one of the family had ever worn.

She was tired of wearing Hitty's old dresses. Here was one that never had belonged to Hitty.

It was an old gown that Great-aunt Blifkins had tired of, and had sent to Mrs. Buffum to make over for one of the girls.

As it was dark brown, with large white figures upon it, it was certainly anything but youthful. Mrs. Buffum had attempted

to make it gorgeous by trimming it with red braid.

A fine dressmaker would not have called the effect a success, but Sophy viewed herself, or as much as she could see of herself in the little mirror, and felt that she was elegantly dressed.

“Johnny! John-*ne*!” shouted Mrs. Buffum.

“I’m coming, ma,” cried Johnny, “I’m *almost* ready.”

“Seems ter me he’s gettin’ partic’lar, fussin’ fer a full half hour, ’fore he’s ready fer school. Land knows what I’ll do when *all* on ’em is gettin’ ready fer school!

“Why, come ter think on’t, they *be* goin’ ter school,” added Mrs. Buffum.

“Here, you Tommy an’ Ann! What on *airth* are ye thinkin’ of out there makin’

mud pies. Come in an' git ready fer school!"

Ann was a willing pupil, but small Tommy was full of wrath, and howled as she dragged him into the house.

He alternately wailed and shouted while his face, hands, and hair were being put in order; and at last the children started to school, little Tommy bringing up the rear of the procession in anything but a happy manner.

Mrs. Buffum, determined that he should on that first day of school, begin his life as a schoolboy, firmly grasped his hand, and ruthlessly dragged him along, while Tommy, to show his true feeling in the matter, shouted with all his might:

"I don't want to go to school! I don't *want to go* to SCHOOL!"

He might have screamed until he reached

the schoolhouse but for something that occurred that stopped him with a suddenness that was startling.

He was still screaming when Tom Thompson jumped over the stone wall at the side of the road, and for a second stared at little Tommy's open mouth.

"Want ter git him ter school?" he asked.

"Ain't I jest *luggin'* him?" snapped Mrs. Buffum, whose patience was almost exhausted.

"I'll help ye," said Tom.

"No, ye *sha'n't!*" howled Tommy, believing that the big boy intended to carry him.

"Of course not," said Tom Thompson, quickly, "ye're only a *baby*, a big *cry-baby*, at that! They wouldn't let such a noisy critter inter the schoolhouse. School's no place fer *babies!*"

“ I *ain't* a *baby!* I'm a *boy*, an' I *can* go to school as much as you can! ” cried Tommy, and, dropping his mother's hand, he ran to join Hitty and Sophy.

“ I'll go now! ” he cried, looking back at his mother, “ I *ain't* a *baby now!* ”

“ Wal, I *am* tired,” said Mrs. Buffum, “ a-gittin' the hull batch ready, an' draggin' Tommy, an' him hangin' back all the way, was almost like pullin' a load er hay. My! But he give in quick when they called him a *baby!* I wouldn't b'lieved it would have worked so. That Thompson boy would take the prize as a truant officer.”

It was fun for the other pupils when small Tommy entered. They knew that he had declared that he would not go to school, and Tom Thompson had told how quickly he had changed his mind.

“ Wait till the teacher questions him! ”

said Tom; "ye couldn't guess what the little feller'd say."

There was a new teacher every year, because few could be induced to return a second season for the small salary that the town was willing to pay.

This year the new teacher was young and pretty, and the pupils looked at her with evident admiration.

"Han'some as a picture, ain't she?" said one of the older boys.

"'Most as pretty as Prue," thought Johnny Buffum, "but not *quite!*"

She arranged her classes, and found places for the little ones who had come for the first time, and at last it came Tommy's turn to be questioned.

Hitty, believing that Tommy would sulk and refuse to answer, spoke for him, and regretted it.

“ He’s my little brother,” she said, “ and he wants to sit next to me.”

Before Miss Penfield could reply, young Tommy spoke for himself.

“ I *don't* want ter sit side of *anybody*. I’d rather be out to play. I only come ’cause I *had* ter.”

“ What’s that, Tommy? ” queried Tom Thompson, as he entered with an armful of wood.

The small boy glanced at him, and as quickly as he had changed his mind when on the way to school, he changed it again.

“ I mean I’m *here*, an’ I want ter *stay!* ” he said.

“ That’s the *talk*,” whispered big Tom, “ Ye keep on feelin’ that way, an’ they’ll have ter let ye lead the football team ’fore long! ”

Tommy knew better than to think that



Tom meant that, but he felt that the big boy approved of him, and that was flattering.

There was one thing that troubled the new teacher, the more, perhaps, because she could not understand it. She noticed that there was much excitement, and she wondered what it was all about.

She saw Jeremy Gifford making signs to Jim Simpson, and that the signals stopped when she turned her eyes that way.

A moment later Bob Rushton and the Butley twins were talking with their fingers, and nodding, and shaking their heads to enforce their meaning.

“Boys, boys! This must stop. You must wait until recess to talk. Let me see you busy with your books!”

Miss Penfield looked as if she meant what she said, and soon the boys were occu-

pieced with their lessons. The matter that so interested them seemed to hold their attention, however, and soon they were again, in dumb show, talking as busily as before. Thinking the boys were studying, the new teacher turned her attention toward the girls.

They were behaving quite as badly. Carlie Shelton was tossing a note that she had written, across the aisle to Agatha Ware, while Hitty Buffum was actually standing up in her seat, in an effort to force her brother, Johnny, to look at her, and hear what she was about to say to him.

Miss Penfield saw that something must be done. A firm hand must hold the reins, or the power to control them would be lost.

She struck the tiny bell upon her desk. At once many pairs of eyes were turned toward her.

Quietly but firmly, she told them that they must be orderly, must keep their minds upon their lessons, and that she intended that the classes under her care, should, at the end of the year, show that fine work had been done, and much accomplished.

“And now,” she continued, “I believe it is one and the same thing that you are all talking about. Am I right?”

She smiled, and little Prue piped up, in her sweet little treble:

“We’re going to dancing school, *we* are, and it begins Saturday.”

Miss Penfield laughed, and a feeling of relief spread through the class-room.

“I am not surprised that you are all very eager for Saturday to come,” she said; “but now I wish you to look at *this* side of the question.

“I am here for the first time, and I want

to show what I can do. I cannot do myself credit, unless you help me, but if we work *together*, we can do wonders. I am glad that the Saturdays of this winter term are to be so pleasantly spent, but I want you to show that you can do more than one thing, and do it well.

“ Show me and the school committee, for I have heard that they do not approve of the dancing school, that you can learn to dance without neglecting your study.”

The committee did not approve of the dancing school!

The children had not known that. If lessons were neglected, could the dancing school be stopped?

The thought caused them to bend at once over their books, and Miss Penfield knew that she had done well in telling them that the town fathers were not favoring Mr.

James Henry Bowers, in his scheme to teach them the art of graceful movement.

There were several stern old farmers who thought the little band-master very frivolous, and they had told the young teacher that James Henry Bowers was a menace to the school.

“The youngsters’ll git so full er prancin’ ’raound that they’ll go ter school, an’ won’t l’arn nothin’!”

Such was the statement that Josiah Boyden made to the crowd that sat around the rusty old stove in Barnes’s store.

“Ye can’t tell me nothin’,” he continued; “I know boys an’ gals *well*, an’ I tell ye, ye’d ought ter walked past James Henry Bowers’s house this ’ere summer when he was a-practisin’.

“Actooally, ye could hear him hoppin’

up, an' daown, an' stampin', caperin', an' kickin', while he caounted, at the top er his lungs, 'One, two, *three!* one, two, *three!*'

“Don't every one er ye know that when children git goin' on a thing there ain't no such thing as stoppin' of 'em? I tell ye, they never know when ter stop, an' I'll bet ye five cents that every one that l'arns ter dance, won't know haow much two an' two makes!”

He paused, his face flushed and his eyes flashing, as he glared at the group before him.

“Oh, don't ye git excited, Josiah!” said a young farmer; “you ain't got a small fam'ly that wants ter go. Now, I've got two gawky small boys that's goin' if I have ter pinch on somethin' else ter git the money ter pay Bowers with.

“Bowers says it’ll make ’em easy an’ graceful! Land knows he’s tacklin’ a job, but I’m willin’ he sh’d *try*.”

“Made me laugh ter see little Johnny Buffum this morning,” said a sandy haired farmer who had just entered.

“He had his books under his arm an’ was trudgin’ along toward school, when all ter once he stopped as quick as if a bee had bit him, an’ layin’ his books on the grass he commenced ter point his toes this way an’ that, then he whirled ’raound twice, an’ then bowed low ter the big maple, as a wind-up ter his antics. Then he picked up his books, an’ walked off up the road toward the schoolhouse.”

“He’s a fine leetle chap,” said Jabez Brimblecom, “an’ I, fer one, am glad the young folks is goin’ ter have some good times this winter. This place is apt ter be

a leetle dull, an' Bowers will manage ter liven it up some."

"I do 'no' what ter think er ye, Jabez!" said Josiah Boyden, adjusting his spectacles, and then peering over them at his neighbor.

"Ain't our friend here jest tellin' ye haow young Johnny Buffum is cavortin' 'raound jest redic'lous?"

"Oh, don't ye be sot in yer ways, Josiah," said Jabez; "children has got ter hev their day."

"I didn't hev no foolish gaiety when I was leetle," Josiah responded. "Why, when I was five year old my greatest pleasure was in meditatatin' on the fact that more money was wasted any year than was saved, and in detarminin' ter save all I could get so's I could hev wealth!"

"I'm sorry ye was 'lowed ter set 'raound



the house an' med'tate on such thoughts as them, when ye was a leetle feller. Seems like ye was old an' cranky when ye was born!" said Jabez.

"I still say I don't approve on't!" declared Josiah, as he angrily left the store, followed by the laughter of the crowd.

"I guess James Henery Bowers's dancin' school will flourish some, fer all er him," said Jabez Brimblecom. "He fairly makes me sick tellin' us what he med'tated on when he was five years old! I wa'n't a ninny, but I know what little med'tatin' I done, was as ter haow much punkin' pie ma'd let me hev at table, an' haow much I could hook 'thout bein' ketched, *between* times!"

Truly the new teacher had done well to urge the pupils to their best endeavor that they might prove that they were doing

work *in* school, whatever their pleasures might be outside the building.

On the way home from school, Hitty told Prue that she thought those '*mitty*' men were just horrid to say anything against the new pleasure that seemed to the children such a great delight.

“It's Saturday, and when next Saturday has come an' gone, and we've had our first lesson from Mr. Bowers, *won't* it seem *ever* so long to wait for the next Saturday after that?” Hitty said.

“Mm,” crooned Prue, who answered thus because Johnny had just given her a huge candy ball, and she was obliged to speak around it.

“And *I'll* tell you something,” said Johnny, “and I didn't know it till just before recess. Tom Thompson says Mr. Bowers told him that there's ten boys and girls

comin' over from the Four Corners, and ten from the town just beyond there, I've forgot its name, and his classes will all be jammed full!"

## CHAPTER IV

### THE DANCING SCHOOL

**S**ATURDAY came at last, and it proved to be a bright, sunny day.

James Henry Bowers had said that he should open his school on the first Saturday in October. The little man had supposed that it would be imperative that he wait some weeks in order that the frugal farming people might have time to decide the mighty question of raising ten cents per week for little pupils, and twenty cents for the members of the evening class.

He had been happily surprised, however, by a clamor for an earlier date, and thus the first term opened on the first Saturday in September. He had secured the little

town hall, and he was jubilant when he opened the door at quarter of two, to find a crowd of eager faces looking up at him.

“Come in, come in!” he cried; “an’ begin ter learn the art er graceful motion!”

He led the way up stairs, followed by an admiring crowd of small boys and girls, who, in loud whispers, praised his gorgeous apparel.

James Henry Bowers had spared no effort that might contribute toward improving his personal appearance, and the whispered compliments caused him to blush with pleasure.

He had parted his blonde hair nine times before he considered that it looked well enough to permit him to give his attention to some other details. He had literally soaked his head, and brushed it until not a single hair was awry.

He had polished his boots until they were fairly dazzling.

He wore a glossy shirt-front that spoke of hours that patient Mrs. Bowers had spent in an effort to assist in beautifying her husband's costume.

A very high collar, that threatened to choke him, a white tie, and a huge Rhinestone stud, made him fairly resplendent, but the suit that he wore was the thing that most impressed the children.

He had purchased it at a second hand clothing store in the city, and had been told by the proprietor, that it could be made to fit him to perfection. It had originally been made for a very large man, who must have towered over little James Henry Bowers, although in girth they would have measured about the same.

To make the suit come somewhere near

the right size, the fitter had cut the legs of the trowsers off at a point intended for the knees of the first owner. That rendered them just the right length for Mr. Bowers.

The coat, when he had tried it on, had almost given him a fit of another kind than tailors are supposed to supply.

“Them swaller-tails actooally trail on the floor!” he had cried in disgust, but the fitter had at once silenced him.

“That’s a good fault,” he had said, “for if those tails were too short, we couldn’t lengthen ’em, but as they’re too long we can chop ’em off!”

That sounded cheering, and Mr. Bowers smiled again.

So the dress-coat tails were cut off, and with fearful effect!

As the suit had been designed for a tall man, it was, of course, long-waisted for Mr. Bowers, in truth the waist-line seemed *trying* to reach his knees, so when enough of the tails had been cut off to make them reach the proper line on the trowsers, those tails were only *twelve inches long*, but oh, the breadth of them! They surely were twelve inches wide!

Fortunately the little man did not look at his back, and as he admired his expanse of shirt-front, he was sure that he made an elegant appearance!

The little pupils were impressed, and whispers of:

“ Ain't he *grand?* ”

“ Did ye ever see him look so handsome? ”

“ Isn't he showy? ” filled him with delight.



He had brought his cornet which he played in the village band, and when they reached the hall, he played a bugle call to summon them to order and attention.

Mrs. Bowers was seated at the piano, and noisily strummed a polka to increase their enthusiasm.

“ I can’t play fer them! ” she had said when her husband had first proposed it.

“ I never done much with music when I was a gal, only practising on a old melodeon when ma had me take a few lessons. Think er me playin’ fer dancin’ school! ” she had said in surprise.

“ Jest what I *be* thinkin’ of! ” her husband had said. “ Why, Statiry! I can’t afford ter pay some one ter play fer me. It’ll take a pile off’n my profits! ”

So meek Mrs. Bowers looked over her old music that she had not seen for years, prac-

tised at twilight, when the day's work was done, and received generous praise from her husband for her effort.

Now, in her place at the piano, she felt pleased to be assisting, and actually "dressy" in her old black silk skirt that had been made over for the tenth time, and her waist of scarlet flannel. Truly, they were an oddly dressed couple!

"We'll let the girls try first," said Mr. Bowers.

He formed them in a line, and showed them a few simple steps.

"Now, let's see ye do it!" he cried, and the line of small girls tried their best to imitate him.

Very patiently he took this one and that one from the line, correcting her, and again showing her how the steps should be done.

Then, he motioned to Mrs. Bowers, the music sounded, and this time the line of girls did the steps fairly well, and were quite elated that they had kept time to the music. They felt that, for the first time, they had *almost* danced!

Then it was the boys' turn.

With broad smiles and awkward feet, they ambled forward, aware that all those bright eyed girls were watching them. They were about equally happy and miserable. Happy in the thought that they were taking their first lesson in dancing, and miserable because they feared that the girls would laugh at them.

“Jeremy Gifford, turn your toes out!” commanded Mr. Bowers.

“I can't!” said Jeremy. “My gran'-ther turned his toes in, an' mine won't budge!”

A giggle from the line of girls made Jeremy's face very red.

“ I ain't training yer gran'ther's toes,” said the teacher; “ I'm training *yours*, an' they'll turn out *some* 'fore the winter's out! ”

“ Like ter see 'em do it! ” whispered Jeremy, with a grin.

“ Bob Rushton, step forward! Ye're doin' yer steps fine! Don't hang back where folks can't see ye! ”

“ I just *knew* Bob could dance! ” whispered Carlie Shelton to Prue.

“ And look at Johnny Buffum,” said Prue; “ he's working hard, and yet he looks funny. Why does he? ”

Carlie Shelton watched him for a moment.

“ I guess he looks funny because every time he moves his legs, he moves

his arms, too," she whispered excitedly.

"Yes, that's it," agreed Prue, "and his arms go as if he was sawing wood!"

Ah, now the girls were to try again, and the boys were very glad of the chance to watch them.

"Now, I want each of you little girls to take hold of your skirts, and make a courtesy. I'll show the right way ter do it!"

"How can he? Where's his skirts ter take hold of?" whispered Joe Butley.

"Look at him, an' ye won't ask that question!" whispered Job.

James Henry Bowers was indeed cutting capers!

In place of a skirt, he grasped a coat tail in each hand, and made a courtesy as he wished the little girls to do it.

The children were lost in admiration, all

save the naughty Butley twins. Joe Butley glanced at the little man, and giggled, while Job whispered:

“*Ain't* he cunning? Jest like a little gal! See him hold his little skirts!”

Job was disappointed. No one laughed at his speech. They liked the little man, and looked with disapproval at the Butley twins.

Prue shook her curly head at Joe, who at once stopped laughing. Joe wished Prue often to be his little partner, and resolved to be attentive. Job did not know that Joe had decided to keep quiet, and a moment later began to laugh, and turned to tell some funny thought to his brother. Imagine his surprise when Joe turned him roughly around, and told him to “keep still!”

Then the fun began.

The row of small girls advanced. Each grasped her skirt, some quite daintily, while others with the same wild grip that they would have given a swing rope. Out went each right foot, and then such a comical series of bows surely never were seen before! Little Agatha Ware courtesied as slowly, and as solemnly as if it were a state function, Prue did it with saucy grace, Carlie Shelton did it daintily, while Sophy Buffum, determined to bow low enough, lost her balance, and sat down on the floor!

She was not hurt, and she sprang up quickly, her cheeks very red, but her eyes laughing.

The boys clapped and cheered her, and she thought that really too much to be patiently endured.

“Wait till you boys try to bow, and see

who laughs *then!* ” she cried, her blue eyes flashing.

“ That’s it, Sophy! ” cried Mr. Bowers; “ we’ll let them show us how finely they can salute their partners.”

The boys felt that making a bow must be easy, so when it was their turn to try, they advanced boldly, and surely their efforts were droll.

Jeremy Gifford doubled up like a jointed doll; Johnny Buffum, not knowing what to do with his hands, thrust them down into his pockets, and nodded his head with a jerk, while little Jim Simpson, as chubby as a cherub, bowed slowly, his feet wide apart and braced, that he might not fall.

Joe Butley, unaware that Job was exactly behind him, slipped one foot forward, and for some unknown reason, his left foot slid on the waxed floor, and caught around



the right foot of Job, promptly tripping him up.

Over they rolled, and the twins, usually so "chummy," sat up and began to call each other names.

It was just here that the little dancing-master showed that he could manage boys.

"Ye done it purpose!" cried Job.

"I did *not*! Yer feet was big, an' got in my way," declared Joe.

"'Twas *your* feet that got in *my* way!"

"Now, boys, here's just yer chance ter show these little ladies that ye're not common boys, but real little gentlemen. Get up!"

They scrambled to their feet.

"Now, shake hands and be friends. Ye're hind'ring the lesson, an' that's rude. Come, shake hands, an' be quick 'bout it!"

They shook hands, not with any enthusiasm, it is true, but the lesson was resumed.

This time there were more blunders than before, but they laughed at their errors, and tried with renewed effort, to improve.

“ Oh, Mr. Bowers! ” wailed Johnny Buffum; “ that bow is awful hard to do. My feet get in my way, an’ I almost tumble over them. ”

“ Keep yer courage up, Johnny, ” was the prompt reply. “ Ye can’t cut yer feet off, so the best thing ter do is ter learn ter manage them! ”

Johnny saw the point, and tried again.

Again and again the sturdy little man drilled them, prancing about like a huge rubber ball, now at this end of the line, and then at the other.

“ Now, we’ll have the line of boys an’

the line of girls come forward an' salute! Mis' Bowers, start yer music! ”

Forward they tripped, keeping time to the old-fashioned march that tinkled forth from the rattling keys of the old piano.

Johnny Buffum, at the end of the line, saw that little Prue was midway in the line of girls, and at once decided to change his position. He left his place, and, running along to where the Butley boys stood, tried to step in between them.

“ Here! What ye doin'?” cried Joe, “ ye can't push in between us! ”

“ I'll *have* ter! ” insisted Johnny; “ I've *got* ter bow ter Prue! ”

“ Let Johnny in there, boys! ” said Mr. Bowers. “ Land knows he'll have ter bow ter *all* the girls 'fore the winter's out! ”

“ Smart, ain't ye? ” whispered Joe, but Johnny heard nothing, and saw nothing

but sweet little Prue, and he was so eager to make his bow to her, that he did it before any of the others had thought of saluting.

“ I wonder ye don't bow ter her before breakfast, so's ter be on hand! ” muttered Job, but Johnny did not even hear that.

They were very gay, in spite of the frequent blunders and correcting, and jolly little Mr. Bowers seemed to radiate cheer.

“ If ye learn as fast the next lesson, as ye did this first time, I'll be proud of ye, ” he said.

“ Nothing can be learned jest one time tryin', but keep at it, an' we're *bound* ter succeed, ” he said, and when Bob Rushton shouted: “ Three cheers fer Mr. Bowers! ” they were given with a will.

How they laughed, and chattered, as they ran down the stairway to the street!

“ I wonder if we’ll do the same things next Saturday? ” said Hitty Buffum.

“ I’d think we’d have to,” said Johnny; “ we didn’t do the steps, or the bow well ’nough ter stop practisin’.”

“ Oh, I didn’t really mean *that*,” said Hitty. “ I only wondered if we’d do what we did to-day an’ some new things, beside.”

“ P’raps so,” Johnny said, “ but I’d be willin’ ter spend one whole lesson bowing, if I could do it just el’gant.”

“ It’ll take more than one lesson to make me do it fine. I felt as if I ducked when I courtesied just like the way our old well-sweep goes down with the bucket,” said Sophy.

“ Well, ye did look like it,” said Joe Butley, “ only ye ain’t quite so long.”

“ I’ll tell ye who’ll look more like a well-sweep,” said Jeremy Gifford, “ an’ that’s

Tom Thompson. Him an' Merilla Burton are goin' ter the evening class, an' they feel big! ”

“ Well, they ought ter,” said Johnny Buffum, “ fer they *are* big. Tom's a reg'lar bean-pole, an' Merilla's just another.”

“ Won't it seem a long time to wait 'til next Saturday? ” said Sophy. “ I like to go, if I do make funny blunders,” she continued; “ and I mean to practise with Hitty between now and the next lesson.”

“ Ye don't do any funnier than I do,” said Johnny, “ and ye couldn't keep me from going.”

## CHAPTER V

### JOHNNY TRIES TO EARN

ONE morning, on the way to school, Hitty was talking with Sophy of Prue's promised trip to Boston.

"She isn't going till after Christmas," said Hitty, "but even that's too soon. I wish she wasn't going at all!"

"That's what Johnny says," said Sophy, "and he told me something this morning, and I'll tell you. He says he wants to earn some more pennies to buy treats for Prue, and he says he knows where he can get some this afternoon when school's out. He won't tell where."

"Why won't he?" questioned Hitty.

"'Cause he don't want me to tell, and

when I said I wouldn't, he said I was a girl, and couldn't help telling. I love Johnny, but he makes me mad when he says I do things because I'm a girl. I told him boys told things, too, but he only laughed, and said 'Not much!''

It was not strange that the little sisters were curious. In the country town, there are few chances for the small boy to earn, and it was Johnny's certainty that he *could* earn that made them wonder.

"Did he say he *would* earn some?" Hitty asked.

"Mm!" said Sophy.

"I'm going to ask him, and *make* him tell me!" declared Hitty.

"I think he ought to buy treats for us *sometimes*," said Sophy, "even if he gives most all he has to Prue."

"That's what *I* think," said Hitty, "for



we're his own sisters. Last Wednesday after school he bought three pickles down to Barnes's store, and gave 'em all to Prue. I like Prue. She's the nicest girl we know, but when Johnny bought *three*, I don't see why he couldn't give one to Prue, and one to you and me. I'm going to tell him to buy each of us *something* this time!"

Johnny, sitting on the stone wall near the schoolhouse, whistled merrily, and put extra force into his whittling, hoping thus to attract attention to the knife that he was using.

"Why, he's bought a new knife! *Don't* he spend money, though?" said Sophy.

A little later Jeremy Gifford joined the group.

"Where did ye git that knife?" he asked.

Johnny tipped his head to one side, as if

carefully viewing his work, and then continued his whittling.

“Where *did* ye? If ye don't tell, I'll think ye hooked it.”

Johnny's clear, blue eyes looked straight into Jeremy's little black eyes for a moment.

“Ye know better'n that!” he said.

“Don't be touchy, Johnny,” said Jeremy, “I was only teasin' ye. Tell a feller where ye did git it. D'ye pay a quarter fer it?”

Johnny shook his head.

“Twenty?” questioned Jeremy.

Again Johnny shook his head.

“Ye didn't get it fer fifteen!”

No, Johnny did not agree to that.

“Why don't you speak?” said Hitty.

Johnny looked at her, and laughed in a teasing manner.



“WHY, HE’S BOUGHT A NEW KNIFE!” SAID SOPHY.—Page 81.



“ Ten cents? ” ventured Jeremy; “ though I’m foolish ter ask ye. Nobody could get a knife like that for ten cents.”

“ I didn’t,” said Johnny, with a laugh. “ I didn’t pay ten, nor five, nor two, nor one cent for it, and I didn’t get it for nothing! There’s a riddle ’t isn’t easy ter guess.”

Jeremy’s face showed such blank amazement that Johnny laughed again, and, relenting, told how he obtained the bargain.

“ Deacon Stilkins drove over to the Centre yesterday, and when he stopped at Silas Barnes’s store, he opened some letters, and when he’d read one of ’em he said he’d ought ter take the train for the next town where he wanted ter see a man. He opened his letters with this knife, and it seemed to me I’d never seen one I wanted so much.

“ I said: ‘ Oh, Deacon Stilkins, what a handsome knife! ’ and he said: ‘ The handle is handsome, but it hasn’t but one blade now. The other is broke.’ ”

“ Then when he said he’d got ter go on the train ter the next town, and hadn’t time ter take his team back, I said I’d drive it home fer him, and tell Mrs. Stilkins where he’d gone.

“ ‘ Ye do that fer me, Johnny, an’ I’ll make ye the owner er the pocket knife.’ ”

“ He was looking fer me when I came along this morning, and he gave it to me. There, now ye know where I got it, so ye won’t have ter guess.”

“ All the bargains come your way,” said Jeremy, and Johnny felt that he was indeed fortunate.

He resolved to have perfect lessons, that he might not be kept after school, and as

soon as he was free, hurry to the place where he believed he could get some pennies.

Promptly at four o'clock, without a word to any one, he ran from school, and up the road to a fine looking farmhouse, where a family had just moved in. He did not know the new occupant, but already the place had an air of comfort, and prosperity. Near the house was a huge pile of wood lying in disorder, as if some one, of whom it had been purchased, had dumped it there.

Johnny tapped at the door.

A stout, resolute woman turned the latch, and Johnny felt that he was confronted by a giantess.

“ Would you like ter have me make all that wood into a woodpile? ”

“ Think ye're big 'nough ter do it? ” the woman asked.

“ Oh, yes,” Johnny replied, “ I can do it.”

“ What’s yer price? ”

“ I ’most always let folks pay what they want to,” said Johnny.

“ Well, go ahead,” said the woman.

Johnny worked with all his might, and began to wonder how much wood there was to handle! He must get it done before dark, and he was surprised when he had worked a half-hour to see how much remained to be piled. He worked until twilight, and then again knocking at the door, promised to be over early in the morning to finish the work before school. The woman assured him that she expected to see him at seven, and agreeing to be prompt, he hurried toward home.

“ Guess I’ll have ter begin at six, if I want ter get the pennies before school



time," he said, and then he thrust his hands into his pockets, and whistled as he trudged along.

The road was lonely, and the tall trees on either side, and the hedge of underbrush made the way so dark that even doughty Johnny felt the silence and the gloom, and shivered.

To keep his courage up, he began to whistle louder, but the cracking of a dry branch stopped him in the middle of "Yankee Doodle."

He looked over his shoulder, saw nothing; but the single note of a wee, lonely bird, called plaintively, and Johnny, without knowing why, felt impelled to run.

And how he *did* run!

His terror lent wings to his feet, and he raced over the road at a pace that was amazing, when one remembered what a

dumpy short-legged little fellow he was.

It seemed to Johnny that home had never been so hard to reach, and he tried to run even faster.

“Why, Johnny Buffum!” cried Hitty, when she opened the door and he stumbled in.

“Where *have* you been? Ma’s been calling you for ever so long, and I’ve hunted for you ’til I’m tired.”

“Been up the road making a woodpile fer a woman,” gasped Johnny, as he dropped on a chair.

“Ever since school?” Sophy asked.

“Ever since school,” Johnny repeated.

“I hope she paid ye well fer workin’ all that time,” said Mrs. Buffum, who was setting the table.

“I didn’t get it done,” said Johnny;

“ an’ I’ve got ter be up at six to-morrow morning, so I can finish that woodpile ’fore I go to school.”

“ What’s she goin’ ter pay you? ” Hitty asked. “ Did she say? ”

“ She asked me what my price would be, an’ I said I ’most always let folks pay me what they want ter,” said Johnny, adding: “ She may give me more than I’d dare ter ask for.”

“ ’Tain’t allus safe ter trust other folks ter make a price fer yer. Sometimes their idees is tur’ble small,” said Mr. Buffum, who had just come in from the barn.

Johnny made no reply, but suddenly the stern face of the woman seemed again to be looking at him, and he wondered if he had been foolish in thinking that a woman with a face like that could be generous.

When they were all seated at the table, enjoying a hot supper, Johnny again took a cheerful view of things and wondered how he could have been so frightened out there in the dark.

“A lamp does make *some* difference,” he thought, and he was glad that he was safe at home.

Promptly at six on the following day, Johnny ran up the path to the dooryard, and resumed his work on the woodpile. It did not seem quite as huge as it had the night before, and he worked with furious zeal until the last bit was in place.

He looked at the woodpile, drew a long breath, rubbed his hands together briskly, finishing the task with his little handkerchief, then he knocked at the door.

It was quickly opened, and the woman looked at the woodpile.

“Made a good job of it,” she said; “jest wait a minute.”

Johnny waited. He thought that she had gone to get her pocketbook. He looked off across the sunny fields, and wondered if there was any especially tempting candy down at Barnes’s store, and whether there would be time to buy it at noon, or if he would have to wait until after school.

Again the door opened, only a few inches, and a big arm and hand thrust out, — a slice of bread and butter!

Johnny looked at it, and gasped!

“Take it, bub!” said the woman, “yer can’t pile wood fer nothin’.”

In sudden wrath, Johnny pushed it from him.

“Keep yer ol’ bread!” he cried; “ye may need it. I kin get ’nough er *that* at home!”

With his eyes blinded with tears, and his little heart filled with bitter disappointment, Johnny ran down the path, followed by the slice of bread that the angry woman had flung after him.

It had been a sharp trick that had induced him to do so much hard work, hoping for a payment he was not to receive.

The woman well knew that he had expected money, and she had taken advantage of him. He had said that he let people pay him what they chose, and she had chosen to part with no money.

Poor little Johnny! He had not noticed which way he was going, until he stumbled over a stone at the side of the road, rolled over, and then sitting up, looked in amazement at the guide board, that stood at the bend of the road. "Four Corners, one mile," it said.

Blinded with his tears, he had not noticed which way he went when he had rushed from the door, and he had gone in the opposite direction from the road that led to the schoolhouse.

“ I’m acting like a baby,” he said, in disgust, as with a rather grimy handkerchief he wiped the hot tears that would come.

“ *She* was mean, but *everybody* isn’t. I’ll not cry, she sha’n’t make me! She cheated, and I wouldn’t cheat.

“ I’m bigger’n she is, that way, for *I* wouldn’t be mean to any one.”

He picked himself up, and strode up the road toward school.

“ I won’t work for her again. I’ll work for folks that’ll *pay!* ”

By the time that he had retraced his steps, and reached the schoolhouse yard not a trace of his anger was on his jolly little

face, and he joined in the games, and seemed as gay as any of the boys.

He had not forgotten the woman, nor her meanness toward him, but he had no idea of telling his schoolmates about it. He knew that while some would be sorry for him, others would be amused, and he could not bear their laughter. He had been deeply hurt.

He kept closely with the boys until the bell rang. He knew that Hitty would be wild to question him, and he was not eager to tell her what the payment had been.

She did not think to ask him on the way home from school at noon, but when they were all seated at the table, she turned, and looked at him.

“What did the woman pay?” she asked.

Johnny put down his knife and fork, and returned her gaze.



He could not answer, because of the ache in his throat. Indeed, he looked so strangely that Hitty slipped from her chair, and laid her hand on his shoulder.

“ Oh, Johnny, what *did* she do? ” she asked. “ Didn’t she pay you after you did the work? ”

Then Johnny, who had bravely said that he *would* not cry, broke down completely, and Mrs. Buffum, now really alarmed, began to question him.

At last the whole story came out, and Johnny’s heart felt lighter for the telling.

“ Wal, now, Johnny, ” said Mr. Buffum, “ I’m sorry fer yer, an’ I see jist haow ye feel, but much as I hate ter have ye cheated, I rather ’twould be that, than ter have ye tell me *you* done the cheatin’. Ye did honest work when ye made the woodpile, an’ it’s a pooty mean woman that would cheat

ye like that. I'd be ashamed of her if she b'longed in my fam'ly, but I ain't never ashamed er my little son!"

"Oh, pa, ye do comfort!" cried Johnny.

"I'm goin' ter give ye five cents ter help ye over the dis'pintment, and as some er the pennies was likely 'nough ter treat little Prue, I guess ma kin help ye out some."

As he spoke, good Mr. Buffum laid the five pennies beside Johnny's plate.

"I'll make ye some fine tarts," said Mrs. Buffum, "an' ye shall invite Prue down here ter tea to-night."

"O dear," said Johnny, with a happy sigh, "my own folks are just *awful* good!"

"I ain't goin' ter be left out," said Hitty. "I was goin' to ask you to treat Sophy an' me, but you didn't get anything from the mean woman. Now Sophy an' me has each got a penny, an' we'll put that with the five

that pa gave yer. You *sha'n't* work for nothing! ”

Johnny thought he ought not to take it, but Mr. Buffum insisted.

“ Let 'em do it, Johnny. They're yer sisters, an' they're showin' the right feelin'. Some time ye can do something nice fer them. ”

“ I will, ” said Johnny, and he now felt very happy.

## CHAPTER VI

### HI BABSON

**O**F course Prue accepted Johnny's invitation to tea, and after school went home with all the little Buffums.

They played games until twilight, when Mrs. Buffum called them in.

Such a chattering of merry voices! Around the table they formed quite a little party, Prue sitting between Johnny and Hitty, while Sophy, and Tommy, and Ann were opposite.

The dish of apple-jelly tarts graced the centre of the table, and they vanished as soon as they were passed to the eager children.

“Hi Babson used to eat the middle of his tart, and then peep through the ring just as if it was an eyeglass,” said Johnny.

“Look! This is the way he did it.”

He had eaten the centre of his tart, and now held up the ring of crust, as if it were a monocle.

“I wish he was at school with us now,” said Hitty, “for he was always full of fun.”

“And his ma used to be real cheerful,” said Mrs. Buffum, “but since Hi run away from home, she don’t feel interested in anything.”

“I shouldn’t think she would,” said Mr. Buffum; “just think haow ’twould seem if our Johnny had taken a notion ter run off like Hi Babson did. S’pose we’d care fer much?”

“Oh, don’t ye mention it!” cried Mrs. Buffum.

“Ye needn’t think ’bout it,” said Johnny, “fer I wouldn’t ever do it. I love this house an’ all the folks in it, an’ as you’re in it now, Prue, ye know I mean you, too.”

“And I love you all,” said Prue.

And while the happy children enjoyed their tarts, and talked so lovingly together, remembering their little absent playmate, Hi, the boy’s mother stood at the old gateway, looking down the road. The shadows lengthened, but she did not notice that.

It had been her habit, ever since her boy had left home, to stand there, looking earnestly down the road, as long as a ray of light remained in the western sky.

When the twilight deepened, and at last a single star appeared, she would watch that star for a moment, her lips repeating

the prayer that her sad heart prompted, then, half despairing, she would walk slowly up the path, and entering the house, close the door softly behind her.

Now, as on all other nights, she stood at the old gateway, leaning heavily on one of its posts.

The evening breeze stirred the great trees, and down in the grass the crickets sang their little, droning chant.

The woman seemed not to hear the voices of the night, and the breeze and the crickets sang on, unnoticed.

“Somewhere he is safe, I’m sure, and if only I knew *where*, how soon I’d run to him,” she whispered.

At the very time that his mother was looking out into the night, and thinking so earnestly of him, little Hi Babson lay close

beside big Jim under the canvas of the circus tent, unable to go to sleep.

A slit in the canvas showed the star, the same star that had shone down upon his mother as she stood in the gateway.

He was thinking of that early morning when he had gone away to join the circus.

Was he sorry? Did he wish that he had remained on the old farm? A sob shook his slender form, and big Jim, with whom he always slept, turned and took him on his arm.

“What is it, little feller?” he whispered.  
“Tell Jim, can’t yer?”

Hi nestled close to the big, kind-hearted fellow who had been a friend, indeed, since the day that they had first met. Jim was the drummer of the circus band, and he and little Hi made an odd pair.

“Chums,” the members of the troupe



called them, and the term fitted. Big, flaxen-haired Jim was happiest when the boy was close beside him, while Hi cared for nothing that he could not share with Jim.

“Ye’ve always helped me, Jim,” he whispered, again nestling closer.

“I always will,” Jim said, close to the boy’s ear.

“I had a hard time learning ter ride, but I can do it now,” said Hi.

“Mantelli is our best rider, an’ he trained ye,” said Jim, “an’ he says ye ride as fine as any man could. That’s why I made Pagington pay ye. He said ye was only a child, an’ I said that didn’t make no difference. ‘He’s a star performer,’ says I, ‘an’ he’s ter have a decent sal’ry.’ I reminded him we’d always been good friends, him an’ me, but says I: ‘Ye’ll give

little Hi the wages he earns, or I'll fight with ye till I convince ye.' When I said that he give in, an' he's paid ye ever since. D'ye know how much ye've got, little feller? I've took care of yer money fer ye, an' I know."

"How much?" whispered Hi.

Jim whispered the amount softly, that only the boy might hear.

"Oh-o!" gasped Hi. "I didn't know I had so much!"

"Ye have," whispered Jim, "an' ye'll add to it all the time."

Hi lay very still. He was thinking of the money, and wondering what it would do. He had never handled money, and he knew nothing of the cost of living.

"What set ye thinking, Hi?"

"This is the first chance I've had ter think," the boy replied. "We've been

having a show every afternoon and evening for a long time, and I've been so tired at night that I dropped sound asleep the minute I laid down."

"We couldn't reach the next town in time ter have the show this evening, an' p'raps it's jest as well. The whole troupe is tired, 'specially you, little feller," whispered Jim.

"I'm worse'n tired," murmured Hi, and Jim felt a strange fear.

"Ye ain't sick, Hi, be ye?" he asked, in a whisper that was hoarse with anxiety and fear. "Say, lad, ye *ain't*, are ye?"

"I'm *homesick*; that's all the kind of sick I am," whispered Hi, "but I don't want to go home. I haven't any home to go to. Uncle Babson's house where ma an' I stayed wasn't any home. He was pa's brother, an' he's a deacon. He's a awful

good man every one says, an' I guess he is, but he ain't pleasant ter live with.

“ He let us live there, 'cause he *had* ter, but he showed all the time that he didn't want ter.”

“ But if ye're homesick, an' don't want ter go home, what'll cure ye? ” questioned Jim.

“ I'll tell ye what! ” whispered Hi, in great excitement. “ I said, a long time ago, that I'd stand it till I'd learned ter ride, an' then I'd send fer ma. If I'd let her come before I could ride, *maybe* she'd made me go back ter the ol' farm. Now if she sees me ride, an' ye tell her what I'm earning, she'll want me ter stay, but oh, Jim! If I could have her near me *always!* ”

A sob choked his whispering, and Jim listened a moment to learn if that sob had been heard.

Then folding the boy closer, he whispered softly in his ear:

“Try ter sleep now, Hi, an’ bright an’ early ter-morrer morning we’ll plan it all.”

“To-morrow, to-morrow! Oh, Jim!” murmured Hi, and with his head on Jim’s faithful breast, he went to sleep.

He was the first to wake when day dawned, and turning he gently pushed the waving flaxen hair back from Jim’s forehead.

“Jim! Jim! I’m ready to talk now!” he whispered.

“Well, this is what I had ter say,” said Jim. “Ye know little Henrique, when he rode in this circus, always had his ma with him. He ain’t going ter ride fer a year, ’cause he ain’t well. Naow, boy, as ye’re earning ’nough ter pervide fer her, I mean

Pagington shall let her travel with us. What d'ye say? ”

Hi threw his arms around the drummer.

“ Oh, will he *let* me have her? How would he find her? ” Hi asked.

“ If ye say so, I'll *make* him let ye have her, an' be pleasant 'bout it, too.”

“ Oh, I *do* say it! ” said Hi, his eyes bright with excitement.

“ Then leave it ter me,” Jim replied, “ an' I'll fix it all right.

“ Ye better not ask me 'bout it fer a day er two,” he continued, “ for I'll have ter work careful, and ask him jest right, but I'll *fetch* it, ye may trust me.”

“ An', Jim, I've been proud ter ride fine, and I've liked it when the folks clapped, but when *ma* sees me ride, oh, Jim, I can't tell ye how gay, how sort o' *wild* happy I'll be, fer I'm her own, an' she'll be proud an'

glad, oh, I *know* she'll be glad ter be with me!"

There was the banging of a gong, that summoned them to a hasty breakfast, and then all were kept busy getting ready to go over the road to the next large town.

Jim, in addition to his task as drummer in the circus band, was entrusted with the showy posters that told when the troupe would appear.

Lottie, the lady rider, kept a watchful eye upon Hi, while Jim was gone, and thus it was that Hi could not talk with his friend until after the evening performance.

He did not question him then. He had promised not to, and, indeed, when night came, Hi was often too tired to talk, falling asleep as soon as his head touched the pillow. Jim, faithful to his promise, had had a long talk with Pagington, a talk that

lasted an hour, and when they had finished, Jim had secured the agreement that Hi's mother should travel with them, the price of her board being deducted from the money paid to Hi.

“How'll ye find her?” Pagington asked.

“I know how, an' I'll do it!” said Jim.

One morning when Hi awoke, he found Jim missing. He had snuggled close to him the night before. Where was he now?

“Gone off on important business,” said Pagington, when Hi questioned him, and Hi believed that Jim was distributing posters.

Jim knew very well where to find the little town where Hi had lived, and he possessed more tact than any one would have believed possible. His kindly face made friends for him everywhere, and as he



strolled up the road toward the "square," he noticed the big willow tree, the stone drinking-trough, and then, Barnes's store.

"Guess that's where I'll find out," he said, and he sauntered across the road, and entered the store.

He found a group sitting around the stove, exchanging gossip and spinning yarns. Indeed, the same crowd circled the stove in winter to keep warm, and in summer, from force of habit, they occupied the same place.

They looked up to greet the stranger, and were won by his pleasant smile.

"Howdy," remarked old Nate Burnham, "comin' here ter locate?"

"No," Jim replied, "I'm a sort of an agent."

"Peddlin' lightnin' rods?" queried a farmer, who had become curious.

“No,” said Jim, “but I’m some interested in the place, an’ I’m jest lookin’ ’round.”

“Goin’ ter buy a farm?” queried Joel Simpkins.

“Not ter-day,” said Jim. “Go on with the yarn ye was tellin’ when I come in.”

“Oh, we was talkin’ ’bout a hoss trade that Joel Simpkins made, an’ he says he’s got a bargain, but none of us can see haow.”

“Wal, I did!” declared Joel, “an’ if you’d seen that ’ere hoss go up the road yesterday afternoon, ye’d have said she was a team. Why, when we was half-way up the hill, she let aout a spurt of speed, an’ shot past the old Babson farm like greased lightning, an’ Mis’ Babson, standin’ in the gateway, looked actooally scaret when we raced by!”

The Babson farm! Jim knew it would arouse curiosity if he asked where the farm was, but he waited.

“Ye know the Babson farm is quite a run from here!” said Nate Burnham.

“I know ’tis, an’ I tell ye we done it in two-ten,” declared Joel. Shouts of laughter greeted his statement.

“Ye’re jealous, every one of ye, ’cause I got that hoss. If this feller wasn’t a stranger, I’d make him say if that wasn’t a good clip fer any critter ter run,” said Joel.

“I’ll tell ye what ter do,” said Jim, who saw the chance that he wanted, and took it, “I’ll tell ye *jēst* what ter do. Walk over ter the Babson farm, so’s ter show me where ’tis, an’ I can tell whether ’twas much of a run or not. I understand horses, an’ I know what they kin do.”

“Let him see the hoss, fust, Joel, an’

then show him where he raced to!" cried Nate Burnham.

"All right!" said Joel, and he showed the horse to Jim.

"'Tain't a showy critter," said Jim, "but sometimes the ones ye least expect it of, are great for running. Let's see where she went."

Up the road they tramped, Jim delighted to think how much quicker he would reach the Babson farm than if he had depended upon a description of the place and its location.

"There!" cried Joel, "here we be! That's the Babson farm, an' naow don't ye call this quite a stretch ter run in two ten?"

"I'd call that a fast trip fer *any* critter!" said Jim, thus telling the truth, and winning Joel's admiration.

“Wal, stranger, ye know a fine hoss when ye see it. I’ll walk farther with ye if ye need company, but if ye don’t, I’ll go back an’ tell them fellers at the store what ye say.”

“Oh, don’t ye wait fer me,” said Jim, “I’m enjoying looking ’round.”

They shook hands, and Joel hurried back toward the store.

Jim watched until he disappeared behind a clump of trees. Then he turned and strode up the path to the door of the Babson house.

He knocked, and in a few moments he heard quick footsteps along the hall.

The door opened, and a smart, black-eyed woman looked curiously at him.

“I’ve called ter see Mis’ Babson,” said Jim, lifting his hat and bowing.

“ I’m Mis’ Babson, the deacon’s wife,” said the woman.

“ The one I need ter see is a widow,” said Jim, “ an’ I’d like ter see her if she’s to home.”

“ She’s out in the grove, a-dreaming, I call it,” said the deacon’s wife, “ but if ye’ll come in, I’ll call her.”

Jim walked in, and looked around the little front parlor. He wondered how any one could like to live in a house, when a canvas tent was so much nicer. He was a tall, broad-shouldered fellow, and he actually felt cramped in the Babsons’ parlor.

## CHAPTER VII

### JIM MAKES A CALL

JIM was looking out of the tiny window, when the door opened, and a tall, slender woman entered, a woman whose sad face touched his honest heart.

“Ye came ter see me?” she said, and the low voice seemed full of unshed tears.

Jim looked down at his hat that he held in his hands, and then, looking up at her, he said: “I come ter see ye, because I *had* ter. I wish ye’d sit down, while I talk ter ye. I’ve got some things ter *tell* ye, an’ one favor ter ask.”

“That’s odd,” said the woman, “fer

ye're a stranger, though I'd help a stranger if I could."

"Ahem!" said Jim, clearing his throat as if thus it might be easier to tell his errand.

"I've come ter see ye in the interest of a friend er mine. In fact he's my chum," he said, "an' he's got a notion that he *must*, — yes, ma'am, — that he jest *must* see ye. If 'tain't askin' too much of ye, I'd like ter ask ye ter let me take ye to him."

"But ye're a stranger ter me, an' so, of course, is yer chum," said the bewildered woman, "so why should he want ter see me?"

She questioned if the man was responsible. He surely looked kind, and absolutely sane, yet she wondered.

"Wal," said Jim, slowly, and he rose to face the woman who had remained stand-



ing, " he *ain't* a stranger ter ye, although he ain't seen ye fer some time, an' bein's he's pooty young he jest *needs* ter see ye."

" He's *young*, ye say, *young*, an' he needs ter see me? Why, who — "

Then a quick light flew into her eyes.

" Hi! Is it, oh, *is* it my boy? " she cried, and she put out her hands to grasp his, tottered, and would have fallen but for Jim.

" Steady, now, steady! " he said gently, as he led her to a chair. " Sit still a minute, an' git some calmer, an' used ter the idee that ye can be with him soon."

She looked at him, as if she but dimly understood, and for a moment neither spoke.

Jim pitied her. He saw that the absence of little Hi had worn upon her, so that now she hardly realized that what he had told her had been true.

She leaned forward and looked into Jim's kindly eyes.

“Ye're a stranger, but ye look honest an' good. Ye wasn't joking? I *will* see my little Hi soon?” she asked.

Jim took her trembling hands in his, and spoke as gently as if comforting a tired child.

“What I told ye was true. Ye shall see little Hi the first minute ye feel able ter. He ran away from this farm, not because he didn't love his ma, but so's ter dodge weedin' the garden an' all such chores as the deacon made him do. Now, don't ye be scaret at what I'm going ter tell ye. He left here, an' j'ined the circus comp'ny that was in town at that time, an' he's been with the circus ever since.

“He's well, an' strong, an' contented,” Jim continued, “but he says he needs you.

Will ye come? At first he didn't git no pay, but *now* he's earnin', an' he sent me ter git ye."

"Who are you?" she asked, anxiously.

"I'm his true friend, an' yours," said Jim. "I b'long in the band, an' since he didn't have no mother with him, I've tried ter be a father ter him."

"Bless ye fer that!" said Mrs. Babson, "he needed ye, I know, but he needs his mother, too."

"The girl what I'm engaged to is a rider in the circus. She's one er the best girls that ever lived, an' she's looked after him real careful, kept his clothes mended, and encouraged him right along. He waited ter send ter ye 'til he could tell ye he was earning."

"But what does he do? What *could* little Hi do in a circus?" she asked.

“ I guess Hi wants ter tell ye that,” said Jim; “ an’ now, what day shall I come fer ye, Mis’ Babson? ”

“ What *day*? Why, I’m goin’ with ye now! See how long I’ve waited ter see his face! Could I wait any longer? ” she asked, springing to her feet.

“ It made me weak when I first heard it, but *now*? Why, I’m *strong*, and I’ll jest get my bunnit an’ shawl, tell the folks I’m going, an’ I’ll hurry off with you.”

“ If ye feel able, I do tell ye, it’ll make the boy wild with delight to see ye so soon,” said Jim.

She rose, and hurried to the door.

“ I’ll not be long,” she said, and went out, closing the parlor door behind her.

A moment later Jim heard voices in the hall, in excited conversation. One was Hi’s mother who was speaking, the other

evidently the woman whom he had first seen.

“ A *circus!* My, but that’s awful! A member er the Babson family connected with a travellin’ circus company! I wonder ye think er goin’ to him, an’ him in such a place! ”

“ Goin’ ter little Hi! ” cried the other woman, “ an’ ye say that, an’ me his mother! Where could my little son be that I wouldn’t go to him? ”

“ But a circus! ” gasped the other voice.

“ Ye’re a mother, an’ have, or *ought* ter have, a mother’s heart. Tell me, could ye be parted from one er yer own children till ye’re wild ter see ’em, an’ stay away when ye learn where they are? If ye *could*, then we’re different, that’s all! ”

Jim heard firm steps approaching the

door, then a hand grasped the latch, when the other woman spoke again.

“ An’ ye’re goin’ off with a stranger? Wal, I call that jest wild! ”

“ I *must* go to Hi, and go now, with whoever will take me to him. I thank ye an’ the deacon fer all ye’ve done fer us, an’ ’specially fer yer patience with me these last few months when I know I’ve been dull company. But now, why, I’m glad an’ gay! I’m going ter see little Hi! ”

“ Well, ye know this roof’ll shelter ye, if ye come back with Hi.”

“ I know it, an’ I’m thankful, but I feel as if somehow we can manage. Hi is earning something, an’ maybe I can help, so I can stay by him.”

“ Why, ye’d have ter be in a circus, an’ ye well know the Babson family is—” but Hi’s mother would not stay to listen.

Pushing open the door, she hurried to where Jim stood.

“*Now* take me; I’ll go *now*, before they try to hinder me,” she said, and Jim, taking a firm hold on her arm, walked out with her, closed the door after them, and guided her down the path. He carried the leather bag that she had brought, and which contained all her worldly possessions.

“D’ye know when the stage goes down through the Centre,” Jim asked.

“It’ll pass us in a few minutes,” Mrs. Babson said.

“Then we’ll sit on this stone wall, an’ take it,” said Jim, “ye ain’t no ways fit ter walk, an’ it’ll save some time, too.”

They had not long to wait. The cracking of a long whip, a cloud of dust, and the rattling of wheels announced the arrival of the stage coach.

Jim signalled for it to stop, and the two were soon seated inside. Nervously she caught at Jim's sleeve.

“ I ain't been so happy fer one while! ” she said, with an odd catch in her voice.

Jim laid his big hand over hers, and patted it.

“ An' soon ye'll be 'nough happier, the boy'll be happy, an' as fer me an' Lottie, we'll feel as if we got a sight er pleasure a-watching you an' Hi. ”

The trip was a long one, and the old stage far from luxurious. Jim watched his companion closely, and was surprised to see that she seemed not to weary.

“ Is it much farther? ” she asked.

“ Quite a piece, ” Jim replied; “ are ye gettin' tired? ”

“ Oh, no! ” she cried, “ only wild ter see him. ”



“He’ll be some s’prised ter see ye ter-day,” Jim said, with a happy laugh, “fer I didn’t say *when* I’d go ter ye. I jest promised him I *would* go soon.”

Over the rough road the old stage rumbled, swaying from side to side as it rode over big stones, or slipped into deep ruts that heavy teams had made.

For a long time they rode in silence — the woman with eyes bright with anticipation, the man tenderly watching her, because she was the mother of his dear little friend.

After what seemed an almost endless journey, Jim saw what he had been looking for,—the canvas tents and flying pennants of the circus!

Mrs. Babson, looking straight ahead, saw only the sunny road and the blue sky overhead. Jim leaned toward her.

“ Look this way, ma'am, jest a little ter the right! ”

She turned, saw what Jim pointed at, and clasped her hands tightly.

“ Keep sort er calm! ” Jim urged. “ Ye don't want ter faint fer joy, an' so scare the little feller.”

“ I sha'n't do that,” she said, “ I never fainted, whatever happened. I jest hope he'll be in sight the minute we git out er this stage.”

“ We'll stop at the side er the road,” said Jim, “an' walk across the field ter the tents.”

A few moments later he had helped her from the stage, and although her hands had trembled when they clasped his, she walked with firm tread, across the open field.

“ The critters are fed an' watered early, that's why there ain't nobody 'round, but

the—” he never finished the sentence, for at that moment a little figure shot out from an opening in the tent, and rushing wildly across the field, flew into the wide-open arms of the woman who knelt upon the grass. Only a little, trembling cry from the mother, only a shrill cry from the boy, told of the wild joy that filled their hearts.

Big, tender-hearted Jim drew the back of his hand across his eyes.

“Sun’s pretty bright,” he said, “makes my eyes water.”

Suddenly, like ants from an ant-hill, the circus people rushed out and surrounded them, and began plying Jim with questions.

As suddenly, Pagington, the proprietor, stepped between the little group and the curious circus crowd.

“Git back inter the tent!” he cried.  
“This ain’t no time fer talkin’ nor spyin’.

Find something ter do, an' in good time I'll introjuce ye ter a new member er my circus fam'ly."

They knew that he meant what he said, and quickly returned to the tent, to watch from crack and crevice the group that had made them so curious.

"Make ye 'quainted with Mis' Babson," said Jim, when, a bit calmer, she stood beside him, with little Hi clinging to her hand.

"Pleased ter have ye with us," the man replied, "fer I guess the little lad will enjoy his work better if he has ye with him."

"I'll work hard ter pay my way if I can be with him," she said, eagerly.

"I'll deduct 'nough from his sal'ry ter pay yer board," said Pagington, "so all ye'll have ter do will be ter look out fer him, an' take a stitch now an' then in the costumes."

“ Why, what does my little Hi do ter earn 'nough fer that? ” she asked in astonishment.

“ Ain't ye told her? ” Pagington asked. Jim shook his head.

“ *You* tell, little feller,” he said.

“ Ma, oh, ma! ” cried Hi, “ I'm a rider, a *star* rider! ”

“ A *rider!* ” she gasped, raising her hands and letting them fall, “ a rider! Did ye say that, Hi? ”

“ One er the star performers, ma'am,” said Pagington, “ an' ye needn't fear, fer he never takes a tumble, an' the crowd is more interested in him, than any one else in the comp'ny.”

Thus were the mother and little son united, the boy delighted that she was with him, the mother glad to live even in a circus tent, if only to be with her boy.

So gentle, so kindly was she, that the circus people soon learned to love her, and she returned their regard when she found how truly they loved little Hi.

“There’s good in every one, Jim,” she said that night, “an’ I wish the deacon, my brother-in-law, could know what warm, kind hearts the circus people have. You an’ your Lottie has meant all the world ter Hi, while he was learnin’, an’ waitin’ ter send fer me.”

“She’s a rider, an’ I’m a drummer, an’ we’re ter be married in the spring, an’ you an’ Hi must stand up with us,” said Jim.

“We’ll stay with the circus,” he added, “an’ at the weddin’ Hi shall be my little best man, an’ you shall act as mother ter both on us.”

“I will,” she said, as she took his hand.

Great was her pride and wonder, when

at the first performance, she saw Hi, her little Hi, enter the ring on Brown Bess, and gracefully pose and ride with daring and skill!

She hardly dared breathe as she watched him, but she soon saw that, young though he was, he was both master of his horse, and himself.

It was a strange life for a woman born and reared on the New Hampshire hills, accustomed to life in a quiet country village, with its narrow prejudices and lack of excitement.

She was so glad to be with Hi, and to be independent, that she soon felt happy; and if not quite at home in her new surroundings, she was surely content.

She knew that she had been given a home at Deacon Babson's only because, as she was destitute, he feared the censure of his

neighbors. She had been keenly aware that her presence was unwelcome in the home.

Here, circus people though they were, they welcomed her, told her their little trials, asked her advice, gave her kind words, and cheered her always. She felt that she and Hi were members of a large family, and that they were truly welcome.

She was both cheerful and content. And when, after some weeks had passed, she wrote to Deacon Babson, telling him of herself and little Hi, the letter was read to every one who happened to call, and like wild-fire, the news spread through the village.

“ J’ined the circus! ” said Joel Simpkins. “ Wal, I do vaow! Ain’t that the greatest! ”

“ J’ined the circus! ” said Mrs. Hodgkins. “ Ef that ain’t the beater-ee! ”



Then each village gossip added a bit to the story, and in a week's time it had gained in size, until, if Hi and his mother could have heard it, they would have been astonished.

“He's the best rider in the hull troupe they say, an' he has a *tre-menjous* sal'ry!” declared a young farmer, in Barnes's store, to a group of idlers who eagerly listened, wide-eyed and open-mouthed.

“I want ter know!” said the man who stood beside him.

“His ma saves the money he earns, an' in time they'll be rich,” said old Nate Burnham, “an' if they *be*, they may come back here, an' buy a fine place that'll beat the *old* Babson place all hol-ler!”

“Guess they won't get as rich as that out'n a country circus!” said Silas Barnes,

“ but if they're just comfortable, I'm glad on't.”

“ Deacon Babson, an' his wife, an' daughter, Jemimy, is all stirred up about it,” said Jabez Brimblecom, “ but his other daughter Belindy is tur'ble tickled with the idee. She says Hi is a perfeshional naow, an' when her pa don't like that, Belinda says:

“ ‘ Oh, pshaw! What's the use er makin' such a fuss 'bout it. If I was a boy, 'stead of a gal, I know I'd rather j'ine a circus than be a farmer, any day.’ ”

## CHAPTER VIII

### WHAT AGATHA HEARD

PRUE hurried along the road to school one morning, her books under one arm, and an umbrella in her hand.

Often she looked up at the sky where gray clouds were floating.

“ I don't b'lieve it's going to rain,” she said, “ and if it doesn't, I've brought this umbrella for nothing. Why *did* Philury make me take it? ”

Carlie Shelton, running along the road, saw Prue just ahead of her.

“ Prue! Prue! Prue Weston! ” she cried, “ wait for me! ”

Prue knew the voice, and gladly turned to greet her.

She waved her hand to Carlie, and then sat down upon the wall to wait for her.

“ Let’s sit here a few minutes,” said Carlie, “ we’re early, and I want to tell you something. You know Hi Babson is in the circus now? ”

“ Why, of course I do,” said Prue, “ and everybody thinks it’s awful, but *I* think it must be lovely to have a handsome horse, and ride it, all dressed in spangles, and tinsel, and lace. Don’t you? ”

“ Oh, yes,” said Carlie, “ and that’s what makes me wonder why all the folks are fussing so about it. It’s the grown up people that say it’s so horrid to b’long to a circus. The children all think it is *fine!* Johnny Buffum says he wouldn’t want to be in a circus, because he says he’s ’fraid

it's hard work. Bob Rushton says he *knows* it is, and he won't ever run away to join one, but he says when he's a big man, he means to *own* a circus, so he can go to every performance, and not have to pay for his tickets. Mrs. Rushton and my mamma laughed when he said that, and Bob's cheeks got very red, but he told me he meant what he said. He's going to have lots of animals, much as twenty elephants, perhaps, and he's going to let all of us he went to school with in free! *Isn't* Bob fine to think of that? "

" Johnny Buffum says he means to be a fat man like Mr. Bowers, and he's going to be a dancing teacher. He doesn't dance as if he *ever* could teach it, but perhaps he'll do it beautifully before the whole winter is gone," said Prue, hopefully.

" Well, I s'pose we'll have to walk

along," said Carlie, picking up her books, "but I'll tell you one thing, and that is that you couldn't guess what Jeremy Gifford wants to be!"

"Oh, I couldn't guess," said Prue, "you tell me."

Carlie laughed, and who wouldn't have laughed at Jeremy's ambition? Carlie came closer, and looked into Prue's merry eyes.

"Jeremy wants to run an engine on the railroad. Guess why?" said Carlie, laughing.

Prue, thinking of Bob's reason for wishing to own a circus, thought possibly Jeremy had a similar idea.

"So he won't have to pay fares?" she asked.

"No, *no!*" said Carlie. "He wants to be an engineer, so he won't ever have to

wash his face and hands. He says he's noticed that they never have clean faces. Isn't he awful?"

"Horrid!" said Prue, "but maybe he was joking."

"No, he wasn't," said Carlie, "he meant it."

"Well, he did say the other day that the worst thing 'bout going to dancing school, was getting ready, and perhaps that's what he meant," said Prue.

Agatha Ware ran to meet them at the next corner, and the three walked along together.

"See the pretty bag Aunt Nabby made for me," said Agatha, "and see the red lining. It's to carry my books in."

Prue and Carlie admired the bag, and then, as they came in sight of the school-house, Agatha, in a whisper, said:

“Wait a minute while I tell you something!”

They stopped, and drew closer to Agatha, for they saw that she had something interesting to tell.

“You know the Butley twins?” said Agatha.

“I guess we *do*,” said Prue and Carlie, in one breath.

“Well, Joe and Job were sitting on the stone wall in front of our house last night, and Aunt Nabby said they made her nervous. She said that they weren't sitting there all that time, and talking about nothing. She said she b'lieved they were planning to rob her apple orchard, and for me to open the door softly, and see if I could hear what they were saying.”

“And *did* you?” Carlie asked.



“ Yes, and what do you think? They weren’t saying a word about Aunt Nabby’s orchard. They were talking about the schoolhouse,” said Agatha, and then, lowering her voice to a whisper, she said:

“ Don’t you tell if I tell you.”

“ We *never’ll* tell! ” they said.

“ They said that the schoolhouse was going to burn down, and that they were glad of it, because then they wouldn’t have to go to school! ”

“ Why-ee! ” gasped Prue, “ are you *sure* they said that? ”

“ They spoke low, but I heard them just as plain as plain could be,” said Agatha, “ and they did *truly* say it was going to *burn!* ”

“ Did they say *when?* ” asked Carlie.

“ I didn’t hear them say when,” said Agatha, “ because when I’d heard that,

Aunt Nabby called me in to ask if they were talking about her apple orchard.

“ I told her they were talking about the schoolhouse, but I didn't *dare* tell her they said it would burn, because she knows Mr. Butley, and he whips Joe and Job every time they're naughty,” Agatha said, “ and Aunt Nabby would surely tell Mr. Butley.”

“ But what's naughty 'bout knowing that it's going to burn? ” Prue asked.

“ *Knowing* it, isn't same's *burning* it,”

“ But how do they know 'bout it, if they aren't going to burn it? ” said Agatha, and Prue and Carlie looked at her in horror.

“ They *wouldn't* be as bad as that, would they? ” said Prue.

“ Why not? ” said Agatha. “ They untied Deacon Stilkins's horse, and chased



“DON'T YOU TELL IF I TELL YOU.”—Page 143.



her over to the Four Corners, didn't they?"

"Mm, and that *was* naughty," said Prue, "'specially as they tied an old broom to her tail, and scared her 'most out of her senses."

"Well, who was it that marched down the middle of the road to the 'Square,' and back at half-past 'leven one night, banging on a tin pan, and tooting on a fish horn, and knocking at every door they passed?" Agatha asked.

"Oh, *everybody* knows that was the Butley boys," said Prue, "but that wasn't burning things."

"*Somebody* set fire to Josiah Boyden's haystacks," said Carlie, "and Josiah *thinks* it was Joe and Job."

"'Tisn't fair to *say* they did it, unless he's sure," said Prue.

Dear little girl! She was always just.

“Well, here we are at the schoolhouse gate,” said Agatha, “and you remember that I didn’t *say* they’d do it, I only told you what I heard them say, and you *mustn’t* tell.”

Prue and Carlie promised to keep the secret, and just then the bell rang, and they hurried in.

The three little girls tried to keep their minds upon their lessons, but Agatha often realized that she was watching the Butley twins, while Prue and Carlie, who sat side by side, kept looking that way.

The twins seemed wholly unaware that they were being watched. They were unusually quiet.

Joe held his geography very close to his eyes, while Job, with slate and pencil,

seemed to be thinking of nothing but his arithmetic.

Indeed, it was surprising to see the Butley twins occupied with anything but mischief.

“What’s the matter with Joe and Job,” whispered Tom Thompson; “them fellers is awful quiet.”

Jeremy Gifford giggled.

“*Them fellers!*” he said. “Them fellers ain’t good grammar.”

“P’raps *ain’t* is good grammar,” Tom retorted, angrily, “but I don’t b’lieve it is.”

The morning passed quietly, and when recess time came, nothing unusual had happened.

The boys were having an exciting football game, while the girls played “London Bridge,” “Tag,” and “Snap the Whip.”

It was when they were "filing in" that Prue whispered to Agatha:

"Do you s'pose you didn't hear just right?"

"Oh, I truly heard what they said, but they didn't say *when* it would happen!"

Although it was early in the term, the breeze was cold, and as the windows had been open during recess, Miss Penfield asked Tom Thompson to close them.

Joe and Job exchanged glances, but seeing that Prue was looking at them, they resumed study.

Miss Penfield wondered why they were so strangely studious.

She decided to watch them, but they appeared not to notice that she did so, and continued to keep their eyes upon their books.

The schoolhouse was poorly built, and the



old-fashioned stove only half-heated the big, bare room. The windows had been closed but a few minutes when Miss Penfield left her desk to look at the drafts in the stove.

“Please, Miss Penfield, I fixed the drafts,” said Tom Thompson.

“They appear to be all right,” she replied, “but the room seems smoky.”

“Smoky!” whispered Prue, and her dimpled cheeks flushed, and then turned pale.

“Smoky!” whispered Agatha. “Didn’t I *tell* you?”

“Open the windows,” said the teacher, to Tom Thompson, “and any pupils who wish may get their wraps. It is a cold wind that blows in.”

She took her long cloak from its peg, and wrapped it about her. The boys declared

that they were warm enough, but several of the girls had left their seats, intending to get garments to protect them from the shrill breeze, when a shriek made them turn, and look back.

“Teacher! teacher! There’s smoke comin’ up through the cracks in the floor!” cried Jeremy Gifford.

Then all was excitement.

It was in vain that Miss Penfield endeavored to calm them, that they might leave the building in an orderly manner.

They pushed and crowded through the narrow doorway, each determined to be the first one out.

There were hoarse cries from the boys, and frightened shrieks from the girls, and just when the excitement was greatest, Johnny Buffum, although one of the small-

est boys, showed himself to be the most manly of them all.

Running to a window, he looked out. Hurrying back to where Prue was vainly trying to get out, he caught hold of her hand, and dragged her back with him.

“ Oh, Johnny! *Let* me get out!” she cried, her white lips trembling.

“ I’m goin’ ter, but I know a quicker way. Come over ter this window. I’ll get out first, and then you hand me a chair. I’ll hold the chair firm, till you step on to it,” he said.

“ Oh, I’m ’fraid; it’s so far to the ground!” she cried.

“ It’ll be only half as far ter the chair,” said Johnny, “ and I’ll help you. Come! The smoke’s gettin’ thicker!”

She looked back. She could not see

across the room, and she grasped Johnny's hand.

“ I'll go! ” she said. “ Oh, hurry! ”

Johnny climbed out of the window, and then took the chair that Prue handed him. It took all her strength, aided by her terror, to enable her to lift it to the window sill.

“ Pitch it out! ” cried Johnny, and Prue did as he directed.

In a moment he had helped her out, and down to the ground.

“ Oh, Johnny, you were *dear!* ” she said, and he felt truly rewarded.

“ Say! ” squealed a voice from the window, “ you just hold that chair for Sophy, and Tommy, and me. We're your own sisters! ”

“ Tommy ain't my sister, ” said Johnny, as he helped Hitty down.

“ Well, he’s your brother, and that’s just the same,” said little Ann.

They did not stop to talk, but ran wildly out into the road and across into a field, that they might be far enough from the building, and yet watch the fire. The smoke was pouring from the windows, but they were all out of the building now.

“ Don’t venture any nearer,” cried Miss Penfield, “ I’m going over to Mr. Boyden’s,” and they saw her run down the road.

“ I’ll go down ter Barnes’s, an’ tell him ter git the fire injine out!” cried Tom Thompson, and he sped in the opposite direction, taking a short cut across the fields.

It was very exciting to see the old-fashioned engine coming up the road, followed by the hook and ladder!

Johnny Buffum wondered if, after all, a big fireman were not mightier than a dancing-master.

The boys crowded around the engine, and were driven back and obliged to watch from a distance, the quenching of the fire, or rather smoke, for no flames had yet appeared.

Smoke still poured from door and windows, and many were the wild guesses as to where, and how it started.

Agatha, Prue, and Carlie did not wonder. They felt that they knew! It was quick work, and when the firemen left, the boys, regardless of the dripping woodwork, went into the old schoolhouse to see how it looked after its drenching.

“ I’ll bet we can’t go ter school fer half the winter! ” said Jeremy Gifford, and he danced a wild jig to show his delight.

“No such luck!” cried Bob Rush-ton.

“They’ll fix it up in a week, you see ’f they don’t,” said Tom Thompson.

“Old Josiah Boyden hates boys so, he’d *give* the money, stingy as he is, if he could hustle us back ter school.”

“I like to go to school,” cried little Prue, “and I don’t care how soon they fix the schoolhouse.”

“I like to go ’cause Prue does!” said Johnny, and the big boys laughed at him.

“Pretty sweet on Prue,” said Tom Thompson, not dreaming that Johnny would dare to reply.

“’Most as sweet on Prue as you are on Merilla,” snapped Johnny, and then, as the whole crowd laughed at him, Tom’s cheeks became very red.

“ Well, we might as well go home now the fire’s out,” said Hitty, and the boys and girls, as with one accord, walked, skipped, or ran along the road.



## CHAPTER IX

### THE LITTLE TRAVELLER

**T**HE next morning a notice was put up on the schoolhouse door, and another on the trunk of the old willow tree in the square.

They stated that there would be no school until money could be raised, and the building put in order, and that another notice would be posted when the lessons would be resumed.

The children crowded around the old willow tree, and read and re-read the notice.

“ I hope they won't hurry,” said Jeremy Gifford; “ they needn't on my account.”

“Ye’re a lucky crowd over here,” said a small boy who had been coming from the Four Corners to school. “Ye’re lucky!”

“No luckier than you,” cried Bob Rush-ton.

“No luckier than *me!*” said the other boy in disgust. “Well, jest wait ’til I tell ye! The minute the schoolhouse got burnt, the school committee over ter the Four Corners took an’ hired the little hall where folks have concerts in the winter, and we’ve got ter go ter school over there till your old schoolhouse is ready!”

“Oh, d’ye s’pose they’ll be doing that over here?” Jeremy asked.

“Of course not, goosey! Can’t ye read the notice? Don’t it say we can’t go till the building is repaired?” questioned Tom Thompson.

“Oh, but if they should change their

minds, they might make us go to the engine house, if they couldn't find any other place!" wailed Jeremy.

Nothing of the sort happened, however, and the children were delighted with their vacation that commenced so soon after school had opened.

There was no urging necessary to insure a full class at the dancing school.

Little Mr. Bowers was very happy. He had worked hard to learn the art, had given hours of practising to perfect his manner of dancing, and now he was receiving reward for his effort.

All his pupils liked him, and strove to dance with elegance and grace.

They followed his instruction to the letter, and believed that he knew all that there was to know about dancing.

On the Saturday following the closing of

the schoolhouse, the pupils arrived at the hall very early.

Prue, looking very sweet in a simple white frock, with blue ribbons, stood talking with Carlie Shelton and Bob Rushton.

Hitty Buffum and Agatha Ware stood near them, and Johnny, who was a bit later, came running to join the group.

He listened to what they had to say, but tried, at the same time, to hear what Prue was talking about. He wished that he could have been near her, but there was not room enough to crowd in.

There was a lull in Hitty's chatter, and a part of a sentence came clearly to Johnny's ears.

“And so, as there's to be no school, Randy and Ma think I'd better go to Boston for the visit, instead of going later, after school has begun again. Randy says

it's a lovely time to see Boston, and I'm wild to go, because, — ”

Some one near Prue commenced to talk, and Johnny could not hear why little Prue was wild to go.

He thrust his hands into his pockets, and swallowed hard. It had been bad enough to know that she was *ever* to go away for a visit, but it was, indeed, hard to hear that she was going even sooner than had been planned.

Bob Rushton had asked her for the first dance, and Jeremy Gifford had demanded the next two, so it was not until the fourth number that Johnny could speak to her. He felt that he *must* ask her.

“ *Are* ye going ter Boston soon? ” he asked anxiously.

“ Next week! ” said Prue, her brown eyes shining with excitement, “ and this is

Saturday. We're going Wednesday, and don't it seem a long time till then? "

"It's so soon it 'most takes my breath away," said Johnny.

At that moment Jeremy Gifford, who was dancing with Hitty, collided with Johnny and Prue.

"S'cuse *me*," said Jeremy, "I didn't see ye coming," and with greater speed he flew with Hitty down the hall.

"He's put me out," declared Johnny. "I always have ter count every minute, and when he run into us, I was counting for dear life. Now, we'll have ter start again."

The music ceased, and the boys led their partners to seats.

"Hitty made me give the next dance to her, but I'll sit here, and talk to you until then," said Johnny, but he could not even have that pleasure, because Bob Rushton

and Carlie Shelton stood near her, and kept her busy answering questions about her trip to Boston.

“ I’ll walk home with yer, Prue,” he said, as he left her to go to Hitty, “ and will ye go the long way across the brook? ”

She nodded, and soon they were again dancing.

It was a merry afternoon for all save Johnny.

Mr. Bowers was even more cheery than usual, and often the sound of rippling laughter made itself heard over the tinkle of the old piano. Johnny tried to be as gay as the others. He had a kind little heart, and he did not wish to seem dull, or to mar their pleasure, but he could not feel very cheery with the thought of Prue away.

It was not that he could not bear the three weeks that she would spend in Bos-

ton. It was the fear that those city boys and girls would make her playmates in the village seem woefully commonplace.

He was not a success as a dancer, and he had little idea of time, but to-day he did worse than usual.

“Your feet keep tripping me up,” said Hitty, “or else they step on my toes.”

“Oh, Hitty, I’m doing the best I can!” cried Johnny, who felt as if everything went wrong.

“Well, I didn’t mean to scold, only my new shoes are tight, and I ’most can’t bear to have my toes touched,” said Hitty.

And when the little pupils left the hall, Johnny was slow to find Prue’s coat, and hunted for his cap until it seemed as if he never would find it.

When at last they were ready, and ran down the steps to the street, the other chil-



dren were out of sight. That was just what Johnny had hoped for.

“Come across to Barnes’s,” he said, “and we’ll get some candy.”

He allowed her to choose, and what a funny choice she made.

Johnny gave her a dime, and she thanked him, sweetly.

She chose three pink peppermints, three white ones, a big candy ball, a chocolate mouse, and two big green pickles.

“Now,” said Johnny, “we’ll go across the brook and down the little path to the road.”

Prue made no reply. She was very busy eating the head of the chocolate mouse.

“When ye’re in Boston, Prue, ye mustn’t forget us here in the village,” he said.

“Of course not,” said Prue, “*now* the

mouse hasn't any head. I guess I'll eat his tail next, then there'll still be 'most all of him left."

"Is it true there's ter be a party while ye're there?" Johnny asked, anxiously.

"Yes, and it's to be given for *me*," said Prue. "Don't you remember the little girl, Clare Marden, who came up here last summer?"

Yes, Johnny remembered.

"Well, you know, my sister Randy gave a party for her when she was here, and now Mrs. Helen Dayton Marden is to give one for me," said Prue.

"I *do* wish I was going to be there," said Johnny, "do you?"

Prue took a dainty bite from the tip of the chocolate mouse's tail, and then she answered.

"Now, Johnny," she said, "I'm going

to the city to see things that are *new*. I mean things I haven't seen before. Now if you were to be there, you wouldn't be *new*, 'cause I've *always* played with you. I guess it'll be nice to see boys and girls I haven't always seen."

"Why, Prue!" cried Johnny, and his voice told that he was grieved.

"Now, Johnny," said Prue, "don't you feel badly. I like every one of my playmates here, but it's just the *change*, don't you see?"

Johnny didn't see it that way at all.

"But *I* don't wish I could be at the party ter see the little city girls," he said, "for I know I'd rather see you than any of them."

"Well, that's *different*," said Prue. They had reached the brook, and Johnny insisted upon helping her across.

It was a shallow stream, and Prue, when alone, skipped across it very easily, stepping upon the stones that rise above its surface. Johnny liked to help her, however, and Prue accepted his attention as if she had been a little queen, and he a loyal courtier.

Across the meadows, and up the road they trudged, Prue enjoying the treat, and Johnny happy in watching her.

She had urged him to share it, but he had stoutly refused.

“ I bought it all for you,” he said, “ and I like to see ye eating it.”

At the gate he asked a question.

“ Ye’ll go if it’s pleasant,” he said, “ but ye won’t go if it rains, will ye? ”

“ Oh, yes,” said Prue, cheerfully, “ I asked Randy that, and she said we should

go rain or shine, because the day is set and Mrs. Marden is expecting us.”

“O dear!” sighed Johnny, “I’ve been praying for rain every night, but as long as you’ll go *anyway*, I might as well stop.”

“You can’t go with us,” Prue said, with a sunny smile, “but I’ll let you come down, and see us off.”

Johnny felt that to be a doubtful joy, but he promised to be there, and turned toward home, wondering what he could give her that would add pleasure to the long ride in the cars. The days flew by, and Wednesday dawned, bright and sunny.

Randy, looking very lovely in a suit of dark blue, and a gray hat with heavy plumes, stood with Prue upon the platform, awaiting the train.

Prue in a soft gray cloak, and white felt hat with white feathers, looked very fair,

and her little feet tapped the platform impatiently as she wondered if the train would ever come.

Jotham laughed at her excitement, and tweaked one of her curls. He was Randy's husband, but he always felt as if Prue were his own little sister. Mr. Weston, with his wife, had driven over to the station to bring Prue, and now remained with them, so that it seemed quite like a family party. In her delight, Prue had forgotten Johnny, but he had not forgotten her. Just before the train arrived, he rushed up to Prue, appearing from somewhere up the road, and landing on the platform in breathless haste.

"Here's something purpose fer you," he said, "and don't look at it till ye're in the cars."

"Oh, Johnny," she cried, "you *are* good!"

Before Johnny could reply the engine appeared around the bend, and drew up at the station, and the long line of cars looked to Johnny as if they were each waiting for little Prue.

“ Good-bye! Good-bye! ” she cried, as she ran up the steps, and flew into the first car.

Climbing into a seat she peeped out of the window, holding up the parcel that Johnny might see that she had it. She waved her hand to him, the train started, and then— but Johnny, seeing Jeremy Gifford approaching, rushed from the platform, and around behind the station, where, if he wiped his eyes there was no one to question, or tease him. Jeremy wondered at his hasty disappearance, but he did not follow him.

And Prue? It was her first long ride in

the cars, and the novelty delighted her. She watched the flying scenery, and Johnny's parcel slipped from her lap to the floor. She recovered it, and climbed back on the seat, and untied the string that fastened it.

"Oh, see what it says on it," she cried, holding it for Randy to see.

In huge letters, Johnny had boldly written:

"When this you see,  
Remember me."

She opened the package, and found a book with gaudily colored pictures. "The Fair One with Golden Locks."

"That must be a nice story," she said. "See the lovely girl with a red gown, and yellow curls almost down to her knees!"

Randy duly admired the young woman with the abundant buttercup-colored hair.



The long ride tired Randy, but Prue enjoyed every hour of it, and she could not understand why Randy lay back, and for a few moments closed her eyes.

“Are you going to sleep?” she asked.

“Oh, no, only I’m a bit tired of looking at the objects that seem flying past the window,” Randy replied.

“Why, I love to see ’em fly!” cried Prue. “It wouldn’t be half the fun if they went slower.”

She was exceedingly busy during the long trip to the city.

She read the book that Johnny had given her, five times, and then opened it again to look at the pictures. She could not have told how many times she took off her coat and hat, and put them on again.

She ate all the candy in the lovely box that Jotham had given her, and tired Randy

began to wonder if there was anything that she did *not* do, before they reached Boston.

Mrs. Marden had promised to send her carriage for them, but she did more. She rode to the station to meet them, saying that she could not wait at home quietly, to greet them when they arrived.

Prue was the first to see the handsome face looking from the carriage window.

“ We’ve come! We’ve come! ” she cried, as she flew in at the open door, astonishing the footman who stood like a statue beside it.

“ You have, indeed come, dear little Prue,” said Mrs. Marden, “ and here is sweet Randy! Oh, how glad I am to have you with me! ”

The footman closed the carriage door, climbed up beside the coachman, and the merry party were off through the city

streets where the store windows were ablaze with light.

Randy had spent a winter in Boston, but it was all new to little Prue.

Her eyes grew very round as she saw the people flitting this way and that, and at last she spoke.

“Where *are* they all going?” she asked. “And why are they in such a hurry? Is the circus just coming, or are they all going to dancing school?”

They found it difficult to convince her that the streets of a great city are always thus filled with hurrying throngs.

## CHAPTER X

### THE VISIT

PRUE had been away from the village a week, and her little friends felt as if it must be much longer since they had seen her.

Of all her playmates, the little Buffums felt most lonely without her. Hitty felt absolutely deserted!

“Just think,” she wailed one morning, “Prue’s gone ’way off to Boston, and I haven’t any one to play with!”

“Where’s Sophy and Ann?” Mrs. Buffum asked, “I shouldn’t think with two little sisters and a brother, ye was *reelley* alone.”

“ Johnny’s whittling down behind the barn, and he won’t talk at all. He don’t seem like my brother Johnny. Sophy don’t want to play with the dolls, and Ann is making pictures on her slate, and won’t stop, so I’ve no one to play with. I want to make doll’s clothes.”

“ Then, fer mercy’s sake, why don’t ye make ’em? ” questioned Mrs. Buffum in surprise.

“ If Prue was here, we’d sit and sew together,” said Hitty. “ ’Tisn’t any fun to sew alone.”

“ Wal, wal, has the hull neighborhood gone ter pieces because little Prue Weston’s away on a visit? When I went out ter the well this morning ter draw some water, there stood Phonie Jenks, looking as if she thought er jumpin’ in. When I asked her what made her look so glum, she said:

“ ‘ Nothin’ much, but I’d like ter know when Prue’s comin’ back.’ ”

“ Well, ’tis horrid without her,” said Hitty, “ and only one week is gone, and she going to stay three.”

Mrs. Buffum found some bright pieces of flowered calico, and Hitty, because she must in some way be amused, sat down in her little chair by the window, and began to sew.

She decided to make a party gown for her little doll, Floribel, but she felt sure that calico was not fine enough for the purpose.

She thought a white gown would be pretty, so she made the frock from white cotton cloth, and cutting the pink roses from the calico, sewed them around the bottom of the skirt for a flower border.

She felt more cheerful with her little hands occupied, and the new frock was almost completed when a loud "Whaow!" made her look up. Deacon Stilkins was climbing down from his wagon.

All the boys and girls liked Deacon Stilkins. To be sure he did not approve of Mr. Bowers and the dancing school, but he was a dear, kindly old man, who took an interest in their sports, and seemed like "one of us fellers," Johnny often said.

Hitty ran to the door, opening it wide, and smiling a welcome.

"I can't stop to come in," he said, "but I was down ter the Centre, an' I took my letters, an' brought along a batch fer your folks. There's one fer you, Hitty, 'mongst them."

"One for me!" cried Hitty. "Oh, where is it? Which is it?"

The deacon laughed at her excitement.

“There 'tis,” he said, pointing to a little pink envelope, “an' I hope it's a good one.”

“It's the first letter I ever had,” said Hitty, “and I can't think who wrote it.”

“The postmark says 'Boston,' *naow* can ye guess?” the deacon asked, with twinkling eyes.

“Do you s'pose it's from Prue?” said Hitty.

“Shouldn't wonder if 'twas,” said the deacon, and he went down the walk, smiling as he thought of Hitty's pleasure, and glad to have been the one to bring the little letter.

Hitty seated herself again at the window, and opened the envelope.



“DEAR HITTY:—

“I must tell you 'bout Boston. This house is big and hansum. The floors dont have any carpets, only *mats*, but they are so big they almost cover the floors. There's pictures as big as the side of our woodshed hanging on to the walls, an big tall images, no, status, Randy says, an the chairs are yellow satin, an everybody's dressed up all the time.

“The butler wares a hi collar an brass buttons. He holds his chin up. I ran down to the door this morning, and he opend it. I askt him if his neck wouldn't let him look down, he sed his dignty wudn't. I dono what he ment.

“We went to some big stores, much as hundred times as big as Silas Barneses. Folks don't go up stares in stores. They get in elevators, like little cages, an then fly

up. We went to church Sunday. It was as big as the hol square at the Centre, an the orgun was as big as Barneses store.

“ The streets are so full that it seems as if every one was going to the circus, cause they are all in a hurry. You an Johnny ort to see Boston. Its all so lovly I don't no what I like best. Randy says come and let me dress you as were going sum where but Ive forgot where, so good-by.

“ Yor Little frend,

“ PRUE.”

“ Oh, what a fine time she's having! ” sighed Hitty. “ I'm glad she could go to Boston, but I can't help wishing I could go, too.”

She ran off to find Johnny, and share the letter with him.

She read it to Johnny, who enjoyed it,



Amy Brooks.

“OH, WHAT A FINE TIME SHE’S HAVING!” SIGHED HITTY.—Page 182.



but after listening to it twice, and reading it once for himself he said: "I'm glad she wrote ter yer, but I don't see why she hasn't wrote ter *me*."

Hitty read it to Sophy and Ann, and then she sat once more near the window, the letter in her hand.

She was thinking how fine it would be to take a long ride in the cars, and see all the wonders of the city.

She thought of the party that Prue had said would be given for her. She wondered if Prue would wear a prettier frock than the one that she had been making for her doll.

Prue was, indeed, having a delightful visit, and little Clare Marden was quite as happy.

It was a pleasure to watch Prue, and to

see her delight in every new thing that was brought to her notice.

For two days Clare and Prue had spent every spare moment in talking of the fine party that was to be given in a few days.

Prue had brought with her everything that she would need, except the little party frock.

Randy had preferred to purchase that in the city.

It had just come from one of the large stores, and Prue was delighted with it, and charmed with the pretty slippers that matched it.

It was a simple frock of pale blue muslin, trimmed with fine lace, ribbons, and clusters of tiny pink rosebuds.

The blue slippers had rosettes of lace, and a pink bud in the centre of each.

Clare was to wear white gauze, white ribbons, buff rosebuds, and white slippers.

The two pretty frocks were admired by the little girls who were to wear them, and they were sure that there never were prettier ones made.

And while Prue and Clare were talking of the frocks and the party, other little girls were doing the same, only they were wondering what Prue and Clare would wear.

It was Saturday afternoon, and Chrystal Ardsley and Marie Varney were spending an hour with Cecilia Dane.

They were always together, and each had a shorter name for their friends. They had so much to say that they could never spare the time for their full names.

They were wondering what the little girl would be like, in whose honor the party was to be given.

“ Now, Chrys Ardsley, you *know* she's from the country, and so of *course* she's likely to look countrified. How could she help it? ”

“ Why, Cecil, she doesn't *have* to, and she *may* look very nice, and *be* nice, too,” Chrys replied.

“ I don't s'pose Cecil thought she'd wear a sunbonnet or a gingham gown, but that her face would look countrified, and she'd be country shape, perhaps,” said the other little girl.

“ What do you mean? ” questioned Chrys, her dark eyes looking straight into the blue eyes of the speaker.

“ Oh, bright red cheeks as round as apples, and chunky,” Cecil replied.

“ I like you both,” said Chrys, “ you know I do, but I don't think what we're saying sounds kind. We love Clare, and



this little Prue Weston is her guest. I mean, for Clare's sake, to like her."

"Oh, well we didn't mean to be naughty, nor unkind," said Cecil, "it was only an idea we had."

The great hall at the Marden home was decorated with palms and bright flowers, and in the drawing-room the air was heavy with the perfume of roses and pinks.

The two little hostesses, Clare and Prue, stood waiting to receive their guests.

With them, as if to enhance their childish charm, stood sweet-faced Randy, in a pearl-colored gown with pink blossoms, handsome Helen Dayton Marden, in blue velvet and sapphires, and her stately Aunt Marcia in black velvet and diamonds.

And when the happy, chattering little guests arrived, and hastened to greet the

handsome group, they seemed only to see Clare and dear little Prue.

“ Oh, look! ” said gentle Chrys to the two friends who, a few days before, had talked of the “ little country girl.”

“ Look! ” she repeated, “ she’s sweeter, and prettier than any city child we know.”

They looked in wonder at the lovely little figure, and were eager to know her.

Small boys, and small girls, all were charmed with Prue.

When soft strains of music invited them to dance, she placed her hand in that of her partner, and like a fairy, lightly she flew down the room, with an airy grace that surprised the city children.

“ Who taught you to dance? ” Cecil asked, looking at Prue curiously.

“ Mr. James Henry Bowers; and he knows all about dancing,” she said.

“ I guess he does,” said Chrys, with a laugh, “ for our teacher has taught us two winters, and not one of us can dance like that! ”

There were many numbers to dance to merry music, there was a delicious spread, and a fine box of bonbons for each little guest.

And when at last the afternoon had passed, and they told Clare and Prue what a delightful party it had been, their words were sincere, and they went away with the feeling that it had been the finest party that they had ever attended, and that it was a joy to claim Prue Weston, “ the little country girl,” as a friend.

When the last little guest had gone, Prue turned to Mrs. Marden.

Clasping her slender hand in both her own dimpled ones she spoke the happy thoughts that filled her heart.

“This was the nicest party any little girl *ever* had,” she said, “and I never knew a house could be so grand as this, or that people had parties so fine. Everything in this house shines!”

“Even you, little Prue,” said Mrs. Marden. “You shone like a star this afternoon.”

“Me?” said Prue, in surprise, “why, I didn’t do anything. The men with the harp and the fiddles played, and you, and Aunt Marcia, and Randy talked, but all *I* did was dance, and have a lovely time.”

“You did more, dear. Beside dancing like a fairy, you made every one who met you happier than she was before.”

“Oh, *did* I?” said Prue, her brown eyes

shining. "I'd rather do that than anything."

"What *nice* girls and boys they were!" she said a moment later.

She did not know that her own sunny nature made them wish to be kind to her.

The little guests were indeed attractive children, it is true, but something else was also true,—they had been charmed with little Prue.

On the day after the party four letters came, two for Randy and two for Prue. Mrs. Weston and Jotham had written to Randy, while Philury and Johnny had each sent a letter to Prue.

She opened Philury's first.

"DEAR PRUE:—

"Ye may not be expectin ter heer from me, but knowin ye could stand a extry let-

ter, I'm writin of it. I'll begin by tellin all the news.

“ My Cousin, Peltiah fell offn the hay-mow, an broke his arm, so he cant do any farm work for sum time. As he dont like work very well, he aint worryin, but his pa is.

“ The new calf jumped over a barrel, an fell down in a heap, but wasnt hurt at all. Peltiah says that's jest the difference between the calf's luck an hisn. Tabby's took a notion ter be reel gay an antic. She romps with the kitten as if she was jest nother one. They's a little stray kitten come up here, and as the kitten, Dahlia Keziah, has took a fancy ter play with it, Tabby has adopted it. She washes it jest as much as she does her own kitten. Its most all white, with bright blue eyes. Guess Tabby liked her looks.

“ I went down ter Barneses store, an I bought a new cookie cutter. Its a sunflower. I bought it purpose fer you. I’ll bake a big batch of em ter be ready fer ye the day ye come home. I guess Ive made some blunders in my spellin, but ye can read it, and it tells ye how I love ye.

“ Yours truly,

“ PHILURY.”

“ Now that’s a nice letter,” said Prue, showing it to Aunt Marcia, “ and it’s just no matter if she doesn’t always spell right. You’d know she was good just to read it.”

Aunt Marcia adjusted her glasses, and read the letter, then she asked:

“ Will you let Helen read it, dear? ”

“ Oh, yes,” said Prue, “ I want her to. It’s such a nice letter. Well, I don’t mean

it's *fine*," she explained, "but it's good, like Philury."

"That is a very newsy letter, Prue," said Mrs. Marden, "and your Philury is a friend worth having. She has a kind, loving heart, and she is absolutely sincere. I wish we could say that of every one."

"I've another letter, and the envelope has a picture on it. See!"

She held up a very pink envelope. On one corner was the stamp, on the opposite corner a bright bouquet, cut from some colored picture and glued in place.

The address was in very large vertical writing, and Randy smiled when she saw it, for she guessed who had sent it.

Prue opened it.

"Why, it's from Johnny!" she cried. "I knew 'fore I saw his name, the spelling is so awful."



Mrs. Marden and Aunt Marcia were amused, but they did not let Prue know that.

“DEER PRUE:—

“Quite a pile of things have hapend while youve bin gone. Folks huntin’ in the skool house suller, found out how the fire what burnt it was made, an Jim Bullson, the blakmith (hes poliseman, too) says no boys done it. He says it was a tramp what past threw the village. The Butley twins herd the tramp tell a ruff lookin man that he ment to burn it. They was glad to hav it burn if sum one els would do it. They wouldnt darest too.

“Folks sez it’ll be three munths fore we kin go too skool. I wish it would be a yeer.

“I’m savin all my pennies to treet you with, when you come home. Mr. Bowers

showd us how to do a new danse last Saturday. Its awful pretty, but its hard. I cant do it. One er my feet mus be biggern the other, caus I keep tumbling over it.

“ When I danse, an when I bow it gets in my way. I danse better with you than I do with Hitty. Hopin you’ll come home soon Im

“ Yors trooly,

“ JOHNNY.”

## CHAPTER XI

### RETURN TO THE VILLAGE

CARLIE SHELTON ran down the road to where Phonie Jenks was leaning over the wall.

“Did you know Prue’s coming home next Wednesday?” she shouted as she ran.

“Are you *sure*?” Phonie asked.

“Bob Rushton just told me,” said Carlie, “and he says he heard it straight, ’cause Mrs. Hodgkins told him, and she’d just been up to Mrs. Weston’s to find out.”

“But Mrs. Hodgkins doesn’t always get things right,” objected Phonie. “I thought Prue was going to stay in Boston a long time.”

“Three weeks,” said Carlie, “it’ll be a few days more than three weeks if she comes back Wednesday.”

Carlie was on her way down to the store, and after chatting a few moments, she hurried away.

“I don’t b’lieve Hitty knows, an’ I’m going to ask her,” Phonie said to herself. She ran across the road and down a little way to the Buffum house. Hitty was going up the path to the house, her apron full of popping corn.

“Hello!” she cried, as she saw Phonie.

“Hello!” Phonie replied, hurrying toward her. Then she told the news.

“And she is *truly* coming Wednesday,” she said, “because Mrs. Hodgkins went up and asked Mrs. Weston, and then she told Bob Rushton, and Bob told Carlie Shelton, and Carlie told me, an’ I’m telling you.”

Hitty was a shrewd little girl. She thought that the news had travelled quite a distance before reaching her, but she did not say so.

“ I wish she was coming home sooner, don't you? ” Phonie asked.

“ Yes, I do, ” said Hitty, “ it's awful dull when she's away. Can't you stay and play with me? ”

“ Wait till I run back and get my doll, ” said Phonie.

“ Don't bring your doll! ” Hitty shouted after the flying figure, “ bring only her clothes. ”

“ Why? ” Phonie asked in surprise.

“ 'Cause we'll dress the kittens instead, ” said Hitty.

“ All right, ” cried Phonie, and she soon returned with her apron full of doll's clothes.

“Where’s the kittens?” she asked.

“In the woodshed,” Hitty replied.

“Come. Let’s call one Prue and the other Clare, and we’ll play they’re in Boston.”

“Oh, that’ll be fine,” said Phonie, “only we haven’t been to Boston, so how will we know what to have ’em do?”

“We won’t know *just* what, but we know some things Mrs. Weston told us, and the other things we’ll have to guess at,” said Hitty.

That sounded rather vague, but it also sounded as if it might be amusing, so Phonie agreed.

The two little kittens were sound asleep in a basket, and they mewed loudly when awakened from their cosy nap.

“Now don’t you cry,” said Hitty; “you’re going to Boston.”

The sleepy kittens cried louder than be-

fore, as if they did not like the idea of the visit to the city.

“ I’ll put this red cloak on this one, and you put your doll’s blue cloak on the other one,” said Hitty, “ and then we’ll take the train.”

The kittens seemed rather to like the woollen cloaks, probably because they were warm, and their wee faces looked very cunning, peeping out from their hoods.

“ Ma put this big old rocking-chair out here in this shed, ’cause Johnny stood up in it, and made a hole through the cane seat. We’ll call it a car, and we’ll get into it, and ride with kitty Clare, and kitty Prue, to Boston. I’ll put this board across the hole so we won’t tumble through,” said Hitty.

“ Oh, what fun! ” cried Phonie, and they clambered aboard, with the kittens in their arms.

“ You be the whistle and I’ll be the bell,” said Hitty, and immediately it seemed that a great deal of noise was required to start the train. The old chair rocked violently; and with many a jolt on the uneven floor, they sped on their way to Boston.

The trip seemed to be rather a long one, and a great number of stations were called, all of them names that never before had been heard, when at last Hitty shouted: “ Boston! Boston! ”

“ Now, what shall we do first? ” Phonie asked.

“ Oh, I know,” said Hitty, “ ’cause Mrs. Weston told me. Prue got into Mrs. Dayton’s el’gant carriage, and they rode and rode till they came to the house. We’ll have to stay in this chair, and play it’s the carriage,” said Hitty.

After a great deal of very hard rocking,



she announced that they had reached the house.

“Now, I don’t know what to do next,” said Hitty, frankly, “so we’ll play we’ve been in Boston a week, and we’ll dress Prue and Clare up, and let them go down Tremont Street.”

“Is that the street Mrs. Marden lives on?” Phonie asked.

“Oh, no,” Hitty replied. “Mrs. Weston said the street she lives on is—is,—oh, yes, now I remember. It is Commonwealth Avenue.”

“That sounds grand!” said Phonie. “S’pose it’s near Tremont Street?”

“I don’t know,” Hitty admitted, “but anyway, we’ll let them walk there.”

The sleepy kittens had enjoyed being rolled up in the cloaks, but they did not take kindly to the little frocks.

They mewed loudly when their paws were thrust through the armholes, and kicked and scratched wildly before the dresses were on.

“Their waists are so big we can't hook the belts. We'll have to tie sashes on them to hide where their dresses aren't fastened,” said Phonie. Then they took them out into the dooryard to walk from Commonwealth Avenue down Tremont Street.

“Now, kitty, you're Prue, and you must walk as if you like to,” said Hitty.

“And pussy Clare, you mustn't lay down and roll over! S'posen you were right on Tremont Street! Clare wouldn't act like that.”

The kitten did not in the least mind Phonie's disgust.

Not only did she continue to roll over and over, but lay *chewing* the hem of her frock.

“ They went to a concert one day,” said Hitty, “ and Mrs. Hodgkins said there were many as forty fiddles, and cymbals, and drums. Let’s have a concert next! ”

“ We haven’t anything to play on,” said Phonie, “ and I wish we had, because it would be fun.”

“ We have,” said Hitty, laughing; “ you just wait a minute.”

She ran into the house, and soon appeared with an old comb, and two tin saucepan covers.

An old tin pan lay near the watering-pot.

Hitty picked it up, and handing it to Phonie with a stout stick she told her to use it for a drum.

“ Pound it hard for a drum,” she cried, “ and sing ‘ Yankee Doodle ’ through this comb.”

“ How can I do both? ” Phonie asked.

“Why hold the comb in one hand, and bang the tin pan with the other,” said Hitty. “I’m going to smash these tin covers together for cymbals. That’s what Joel Simpkins does in our band!”

“The kittens won’t like it,” said Phonie.

“They’ll *have* to,” cried Hitty.

“They’re in Boston!”

So the kittens were seated in the old rocking-chair, and then the concert began.

Such a racket! Phonie sang with all her might, and beat and banged the old tin pan as if she were trying to make a hole in it, while Hitty clashed and slammed the tin covers together, making a tremendous din.

Johnny, running up the path heard the noise, and burst the door open.

“What *are* ye doin’?” he cried, and before Hitty could reply, the frightened

kittens rushed between his feet, and out into the yard.

Hitty and Phonie were laughing so hard that for a moment neither could answer.

“ We were having a concert,” said Hitty, when at last she could speak, “ and the kittens didn’t like it.”

“ ’Tain’t very queer,” said Johnny, “ fer I never heard such a awful noise. I wonder ma didn’t stop ye.”

“ She’s over to my house,” said Phonie, “ so she didn’t hear us.”

“ I’d think she could hear if she was down ter the Centre,” said Johnny, “ an’ let me tell ye. Ye know how deaf old Mr. Simpkins is? ” Oh, yes, they knew that.

“ Well, he was passin’, and he stopped an’ looked up here, an’ he said:

“ ‘ Any one blastin’ rocks up ter your house? ’ ”

“ I said no, an' ran up here ter see what was goin' on.”

“ It sounded better inside the shed,” said Hitty.

“ It couldn't have sounded *worse!* ” declared Johnny, “ an' I wouldn't b'lieve two girls could make such a awful racket! ”

“ Well, you help us catch those kittens,” said Phonie, “ for they're gone off with the dolls' dresses we dressed them up in.”

It was some time before the kittens were captured. They feared that they were to hear more of the noise that had so frightened them.

Prue awoke one morning, and whispered softly to Randy.

“ Are you awake? ” she asked.

“ I've been awake for some time,” said Randy; “ what is it, Prue? ”

“ I was thinking how queer it is to feel two ways all at once. We’ll start for home to-night, and I’m glad of that, and I know I’ll be sorry to say ‘ good-bye ’ here.”

“ That is not strange,” Randy replied, “ for these dear friends here have done everything in their power to make our stay with them delightful. We surely will feel sorry to leave them. We love our own dear ones even more, so how can it be singular that we long to be with them again? ”

“ Wouldn’t it be fine if we could be with *all* the people we love *all* the time? ”

Randy laughed.

“ If only we might! ” she said.

The day was filled with pleasure, and when at night “ good-bye ” had been said, and they found themselves in the cars, moving rapidly over the rails toward home, they thought of the beautiful home that

they had left, of lovely Helen Marden, of gracious Aunt Marcia, and of little Clare, who had cried so piteously because she must part with Prue.

Helen had comforted her by telling her that Prue and Randy would come again, and Randy had offered another bit of comfort.

“Time will pass swiftly,” she said, “and when summer comes, you must come for a longer stay with us. Would you like to spend the summer at my home, and have Prue to play with *all* the time?”

“Oh, yes, *yes!*” Clare had eagerly said, and she had smiled through her tears.

Little Prue seemed very thoughtful, and Randy thought her tired and sleepy. They had taken the night train that the greater part of the distance might be covered while they slept.



Very early in the morning, the scenery began to look familiar, and Prue, looking out, cried eagerly:—

“Look! Randy, look! Isn't that the church at the Four Corners?”

“Truly it is!” said Randy. “Are you glad?”

“Oh, yes, yes!” cried Prue. “And, Randy, isn't home *best*?”

“However lovely any other place may be, surely home is best,” Randy said.

“There's Jotham!” shouted Prue, as they drew up at the platform.

“There's Jotham!” echoed Randy's heart, and, regardless of Sandy McLeod and the station-master, he clasped her in his strong arms.

“Me too, for I love you!” cried Prue, and he caught her, and swung her up to

the level of his eyes, held her a moment, then gently kissing her cheek, he set her down.

“ And there’s Sandy! ” cried Prue, and she ran to the genial old Scotchman for the welcome that she knew he would gladly give her.

“ It’s a bonny sight tae see ye, ” he said, “ an’ glad I am ye’ve come hame. A’ the folks i’ the place hae missed ye. We canna get on wi’out ye, bairnie; d’ye ken that? ”

“ I’ll stay at home a long time, Sandy, ” said Prue, “ ’cause while it’s fine to go, it’s even nicer to get home. ”

“ Now hear the bairnie! ” said old Sandy, well pleased with her promise that she would not soon leave town for a visit. Mr. Weston drove up to the platform, and after a hearty greeting, Randy and Jotham took

the back seat, while Prue climbed to the front seat beside her father, the place that she always liked.

As they passed the Buffum farm, Johnny ran out, mounted the stone wall, danced a wild jig to show his joy at her return, lost his balance, and fell from the wall, rolling over and over on the dry grass after the team had passed.

Prue did not look back, so she did not know that, in the midst of his rejoicing, Johnny came down to earth! He was not injured. Indeed, he had tumbled from the wall, much as a feather bed would have done.

The fall had not even hurt his feelings. He was very happy.

Mrs. Weston and Philury stood in the doorway, waiting to greet them.

“ I’m so glad you’ve come,” said Mrs. Weston, to which Philury added:

“ Ef ye’d lost the train, an’ we’d had ter wait longer ter see ye, her an’ me would have had caniption fits! ”

They had but just removed their wraps, when some one tapped at the door, and then waiving ceremony, entered.

It was Mrs. Hodgkins, and she was evidently much excited.

“ I’ve been down ter the *deepot*, ter ask the station man if Randy an’ Prue got off’n the train, an’ he said ye did, but what makes that man grin so? Is it queer that I take such a interest in my neighbors? ”

“ ’Course not,” said Philury; “ it’s yer ev’lastin’ int’reest in things that keeps ye alive. Why, news is as the breath of yer nostrils! ”

Her eyes were twinkling, as she turned

toward the kitchen, and Mrs. Hodgkins looked after her, wondering if the girl were in earnest, or if she were really laughing at her for being a newsmonger. Before she could decide, there was another tap at the door, and Johnny and Hitty entered.

“ We’re just awful glad you’ve come home! ” they cried. “ An’ there’s a new notice on the willer tree! ” said Johnny.

“ An’ it’s ’bout the dancing school, an’ we come up to tell you what it says, ” said Hitty.

“ It says that two weeks from to-day there’ll be a ‘ grand *swow-ree*, ’ an’ we don’t know what that is, but we’re wild ter go to it, ” said Hitty.

“ ’Tain’t *swow-ree*, ” corrected Johnny, “ it’s *sewer-ree*; and I wish I knew what it is. ”

Randy laughed. Could any one hear such

wild efforts at pronouncing, and refrain from laughing?

“I think you mean *soirée*,” she said, “and that means an assembly, or party.”

“Well, anyway, we’d like ter go,” said Johnny, quite unabashed, “and all our folks are invited to come.”

“We’ll certainly go,” said Mrs. Weston, “and Randy and Jotham will be interested, I know.”

## CHAPTER XII

### THE DANCING PARTY

**T**HE hall was brilliantly lighted.

The parents and friends of the little pupils had arrived early, and were chatting together in neighborly fashion.

James Henry Bowers pranced about, speaking to this one, joking with that one, and making himself generally popular.

He was fairly resplendent. He felt that his "evening clothes" gave him a very elegant appearance, and he had added the finishing touch by placing a huge cluster of scarlet geraniums in his buttonhole.

Feverfew surrounded the geraniums, and the green leaves added, made it appear as

if his lapel were supporting a small flower garden.

Mrs. Hodgkins, having no children of her own, came to see her neighbors' children dance.

“ Naow, I tell ye what, Mis' Brimblecom, when I was little, there wasn't no such doins as this ter make fun fer us children,” she was saying, “ an' when I see little girls an' boys dressed up an' ready ter caper around, and lights a-burning, an' a pianny banging, I can't help sort er envyin' the children of ter-day.”

“ 'Tis so,” said Mrs. Brimblecom, “ an' I'm glad they do have a few gay times. This little village is so quiet, it needs a man like Mr. Bowers ter wake it up.”

“ There's Tom Thompson actooally puttin' on some white cotton gloves. Sorter swell, ain't he? ” queried Joel Simpkins.



“An’ Hitty an’ Sophy Buffum has got dresses alike, er flowered muslin,” said Mrs. Hodgkins, “an’ where’s Johnny? Has he got a suit off’n the same piece? If he has, he must look gay, with a pink flowered blouse an’ trousers!”

“Oh, don’t ye worry ’bout Johnny,” said Jabez Brimblecom, with a chuckle. “I seen him, when I came in, an’ he’s got on reel city clothes. He’s a-talkin’ ter little Prue Weston, a-beggin’ her ter give him ’most all the dances on her card.”

It was true that Johnny and his sisters were prettily dressed. The little muslin frocks had been purchased at the huge price of six cents a yard, and paid for in butter, the best that Mrs. Buffum could make.

Johnny’s suit had been bought in Boston

by Silas Barnes, and it had been paid for in more butter.

“He’s tur’ble anxious ter look like a city boy, an’ p’raps city clothes will do it,” said Mrs. Buffum, “so when ye go down ter Boston, get him a suit that will look well an’ won’t cost too much.”

Silas Barnes was too wise to select a party costume. That, he thought, would not be useful. Instead, he chose a pretty sailor suit, and Johnny was delighted.

Now, in the little ante-room, he stood, coaxing Prue for a compliment.

“Do I look like a city boy?” he asked, eagerly.

“You look *very* nice,” said Prue.

“But *do* I look like a city boy?” persisted Johnny.

Prue thought of the boys at Clare Mar-



“OH, JOHNNY, HOW YOU TEASE!” SAID PRUE.—*Page 221.*



den's party, remembered their velvet suits, silk hose, and patent leather pumps.

“No, I wouldn't ever think you were a city boy, Johnny,” she said, gently, but truthfully, “but you do *truly* look very nice.”

Johnny was disposed to be as happy as possible, and grateful for small favors.

“Well, then, promise me most of the dances on your card. Will you?” he asked.

“Now, Johnny, Randy says it's nice to give every little friend a dance, and I won't have enough to go 'round if I give you many,” said Prue.

“Can I have four?” he asked.

“Oh, Johnny, how you tease!” said Prue, but she smiled as she said it.

The flourish of the cornet, and opening chords on the piano put an end to Johnny's coaxing, and together they ran to the hall,

just in time for the march, the first number on the card.

It was a large class, and the audience was delighted when they marched and counter-marched, moving in pleasing figures.

“Ain't that gret?” questioned a young farmer, when the march was finished. “Ain't that gret?” he repeated. “Why, them two boys er mine was the most awkward children I ever seen, but they marched like fun, and they was as graceful as two young calves.”

“Jest about!” declared Joel Simpkins, in a whisper, “calves looks ter be all legs, an' so did his two boys.”

The first round dance, a waltz, made but small impression upon the audience, but the next number, the Lanciers, gave them great pleasure.

“ See ’em bowin’ an’ courtesyin’! Ain’t they slick? ” Joel Simpkins exclaimed.

“ Poottiest thing I ever see! ” responded Jabez Brimblecom, “ an’ I do wish Josiah Boyden was here ter see ’em caper. Seem’s if he’d *have* ter say it’s a pootty sight.”

“ Oh, Josiah wouldn’t say anything pleasant ’bout the little party, ef he was here,” Joel replied, with a laugh, “ fer he’s growled ’bout the dancin’ school ever since it started, an’ he’d think he wasn’t holdin’ his dignity ef he didn’t keep on growlin’.”

“ Oh, look at Jeremy Gifford! See his wes’kit. It’s got red buttons onto it. Ain’t he grand! ” cried a young farmer, who had just entered, and stood near the door.

“ See him bowin’ an’ scrapin’ ter Agatha Ware. He’s as lively as a green grasshopper an’ hops ’baout as high. Jiminy! See him go it! ”

Aunt Nabby, who sat near, laughed softly. She thought Jeremy's antics very amusing, but it was real pride that shone in her eyes when they rested upon Agatha.

She was a quiet, demure little girl, but she danced very prettily, and her frock of pale gray silk, with its tiny blue figures was most becoming.

It had been made from a gown of Aunt Nabby's, and little frills of lace around the low neck and in the short sleeves, had made it look quite dainty.

Aunt Nabby Ware had indulged in what seemed to her neighbors to be wild extravagance. She had ordered Silas Barnes to purchase some blue slippers for Agatha, and no child was ever happier than little Agatha when she opened the parcel and tried them on.

Now, between the figures of the dance,



she stole a glance at them, and then looked across to where Aunt Nabby sat, to smile at her.

“It’s wuth the price er them slippers ter see a child so happy,” softly whispered Aunt Nabby.

Prue’s pretty frock was the wonder and delight of all who saw it. Made in the city by skilled hands, it had a style, a character all its own, and the country children marvelled at its beauty.

“She’s jest like a fairy!” said Squire Weston. “Jest see her, ma, there ain’t another child that’s her equal.”

“Ye’re biased in her favor,” Mrs. Weston replied, “but I have ter admit I think ’baout the same.”

“Why, what’s she doin’ now?” she asked a moment later.

The Lanciers was finished, and the next

number was to be an old-fashioned dance, the Portland Fancy.

The other boys and girls had found seats along the sides of the hall, but in the centre stood Prue, one of the Butley twins on either side, and each evidently begging a favor.

The music suddenly ceased, and this is what every one heard:

“ Now, Joe and Job, I can't give *both* of you this dance, and yet you both keep teasing, so I won't give it to *either* of you. I'll give it to somebody else.”

Then she ran away, and soon Bob Rushton was placing his name on her card.

Mrs. Buffum's speech was droll, and caused Mrs. Hodgkins to laugh softly to herself.

“ Its plain ter see that Hitty is '*specialy*

improved, and Johnny *some* by this dancin', an' while Sophy is *some* gawky, there's no tellin' haow much *awkwarder* she would have been ef James *Hennery* Bowers hadn't have trained her feet."

Mrs. Buffum's remarks were usually forcible, if ungrammatical.

Some pretty, fancy dances followed, and when, an hour later, the little pupils were donning their wraps, Mr. Bowers was overwhelmed with praise for the care that he had expended in training his class.

"It's 'mazin' fine, I tell ye," said Jabez Brimblecom. "Why, all er the children looked an' acted their very best, an' ye could almost think the Butley twins was *giniwine* cherubs!"

"Ye might ef ye didn't know 'em," said Silas Barnes. "Me 'n' Joel has ter keep an eye on 'em every time they enter the

store, 'cause they're sure ter be up ter somethin', an' there's no guessin' what."

"Guess there ain't!" agreed Joel, who stood near his employer. "Why, one day last week we ketched 'em in the cellar, an' what d'ye think they was doin'? Joe was puttin' molasses onto his hair ter make it lie smooth, he said; whilst Job was shootin' beans at the bung-hole, an' hittin' it every time, an' fillin' the molasses with beans as fast as he could. He'd have used up all the beans if I hadn't ketched him, an' as fer Joe, he'd got his top hair gummed pooty flat."

A roar of laughter greeted his story.

"Oh, yes, it's funny, *reel* funny, ef it's some other feller's store that they play the pranks in," said Silas Barnes.

"There's the truth of it, mon," said Sandy McLeod, "an' wi' a' their faults,

they danced weel. The bairnies a' danced weel. I hae joyed tae see them."

"Aye, an' the lads an' the wee lassies were glad, an' blithe. It was rare pleasure tae watch them," said Mrs. McLeod.

"We had the loveliest time," said Prue, "and Randy says she wouldn't have missed seeing us for anything. Oh, I wish we could have another party to-morrow night."

"So do I!"

"So do we!" cried a chorus of eager voices.

Talking and laughing, they ran down the stairs, and out into the road, on which the moonlight lay, and they still were dancing, little Prue leading them along a slanting band of moonlight.

"We're fairies! We're fairies!" she

cried, as the laughing troop followed her flying figure.

“ I wonder if any of 'em kin keep still long 'nough ter sleep ter-night? ” said Joel Simpkins.

And while the children danced merrily along the road, their parents and neighbors talked of the evening's pleasure, and all agreed that the instruction that the children had received was well worth the small price that Mr. Bowers had asked.

“ What a crowd came over from the Four Corners, ” said Silas Barnes; “ as many as forty at least, an' p'raps more! ”

“ If there was forty from the Four Corners, there wasn't less'n fifty from this place! ” declared Joel Simpkins.

“ I didn't caount, ” Mrs. Hodgkins said, “ but I know I never see so many children

all to oncet before, an' land, wa'n't they lively! They hopped like fleas!"

"Speakin' er hoppin', reminds me er the time I ketched the Butley boys in my squash vines," said Jabez Brimblecom, "or rather, I mean the time I *didn't* ketch 'em!

"As fast as I'd try ter lay hands on one, he'd slide out'n my grasp, an' the other feller'd jump up in front of me. I'd reach fer him, an' off he'd scoot, whilst the fust boy would bob up grinnin' at me. They was just like jumpin'-jacks, an' might still have been hoppin' in amongst the squashes, if somethin' hadn't helped me. They got their feet ketched in them vines, an' over they went. I made a grab fer 'em, an' when they whined, of course I let 'em go. I oughtn't to, but I never could punish children."

"Ye'd be less soft-hearted, ef ye had a

store, and was always bein' pestered with their mischief," said Silas Barnes.

"P'raps," said Jabez, "but I ain't sure."

For days the children talked of little else save the dancing party that had given them so much pleasure.

Indeed, the older people of the village were equally interested, and neighbors chatted when they met in the lanes, or on the road to the Centre.

As the weeks flew by, the children who liked to go to school were very sorry that the old schoolhouse was not rebuilt, while those who did not like school were delighted to see the charred building undisturbed.

The selectmen had felt it impossible to rebuild before another season.

Little Prue Weston was always happy.



She liked study, and would have been a cheerful little pupil if school had again opened.

As a prolonged vacation was given the children, she intended to enjoy it, and she filled the happy days with merry games, with song and laughter.

And now the spring had come.

Over the hills in early morning, a soft mist hung, the sunshine seemed brighter, the little brooks rippled over the pebbles, as they rushed through the woods toward the open meadowland, where they glistened in the sunlight.

Prue and Hitty, Carlie Shelton and Bob Rushton, Johnny Buffum and the Butley twins sat on the stone wall at the side of the road, when Phonie Jenks and Agatha Ware came running across the fields.

“ Why, you’re all sitting in a row,” said Agatha; “ what’s the game? ”

“ ’Tain’t a game,” said Bob Rushton, “ we’re just talking. Come on! ”

“ On the wall? ” said Agatha, with a laugh, as she sprang up beside him, while Phonie promptly seated herself beside her.

“ What were you talking about? ” Agatha asked.

“ Oh, everything,” declared Johnny.

“ I was telling what ma said this morning, that we’re to have the same teacher next year, and we’re all glad, because she’s so sweet,” said Hitty.

“ And *I* was saying that I heard that we’re to have a better schoolhouse than the one that was burned,” said Bob.

“ And *I* was telling the nicest thing of all,” said Prue, “ and that is that Clare Marden is coming to spend the whole sum-

mer at Randy's house, and Randy is going to make ever so many nice times for her, sort of parties, I guess, and you'll all be invited! "

"Hooray! Hooray!" shouted the boys, and, "Oh, fine! How lovely!" cried the girls, their cheeks pink and their eyes shining.

They were looking forward to a summer filled with pleasant happenings.

Those who have learned to love little Prue, and would like to meet her again with her many playmates, to enjoy with them the summer pleasures, and to know what happened during their vacation days, may read of all this in

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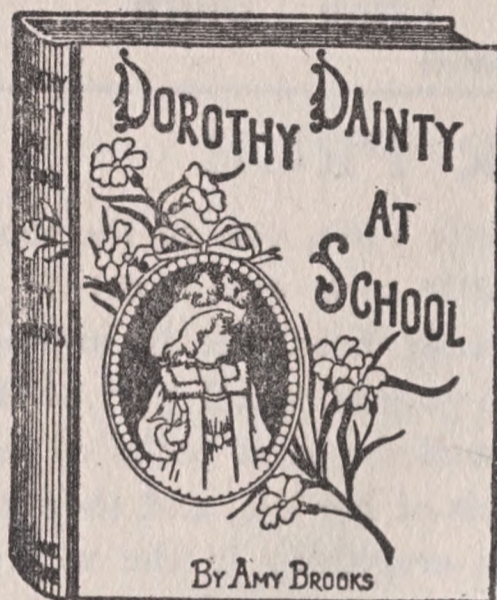
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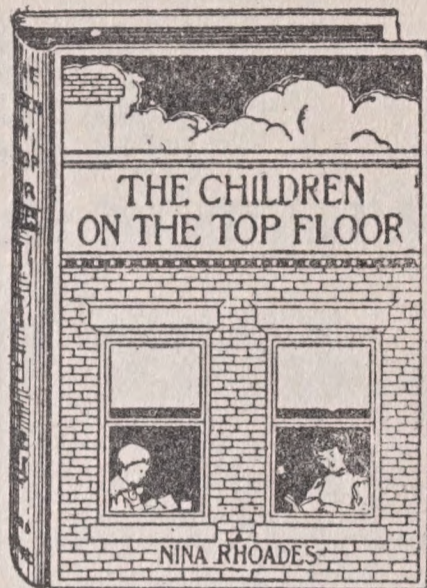
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**I**N this book little Winifred Hamilton, the child heroine of "Winifred's Neighbors," reappears, living in the second of the four stories of a New York apartment house. On the top floor are two very interesting children, Betty, a little older than Winifred, who is now ten, and Jack, a brave little cripple, who is a year younger. In the end comes a glad reunion, and also other good fortune for crippled Jack, and Winifred's kind little heart has once more indirectly caused great happiness to others.



## How Barbara Kept Her Promise

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## Little Miss Rosamond



By NINA RHOADES Illus-  
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**R**OSAMOND lives in Richmond, Va., with her big brother, who cannot give her all the comfort that she needs in the trying hot weather, and she goes to the seaside cottage of an uncle whose home is in New York. Here she meets Gladys and Joy, so well known in a previous book, "The Little Girl Next Door," and after some complications are straightened out, bringing Rosamond's honesty and kindness of heart into prominence, all are made very happy.

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# "Brick House Books"

By NINA RHOADES

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THE "Brick House Books," as they are called from their well-known cover designs, are eagerly sought by children all over the country. There are three good stories in this book, instead of one, and it is hard to say which little girls, and boys, too, for that matter, will like the best.



## Brave Little Peggy

PEGGY comes from California to New Jersey to live with a brother and sister whom she has not known since very early childhood. She is so democratic in her social ideas that many amusing scenes occur, and it is hard for her to understand many things that she must learn. But her good heart carries her through, and her conscientiousness and moral courage win affection and happiness.



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BY ANNIE M. BARNES

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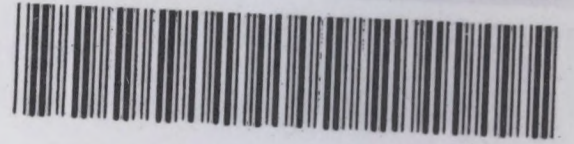
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