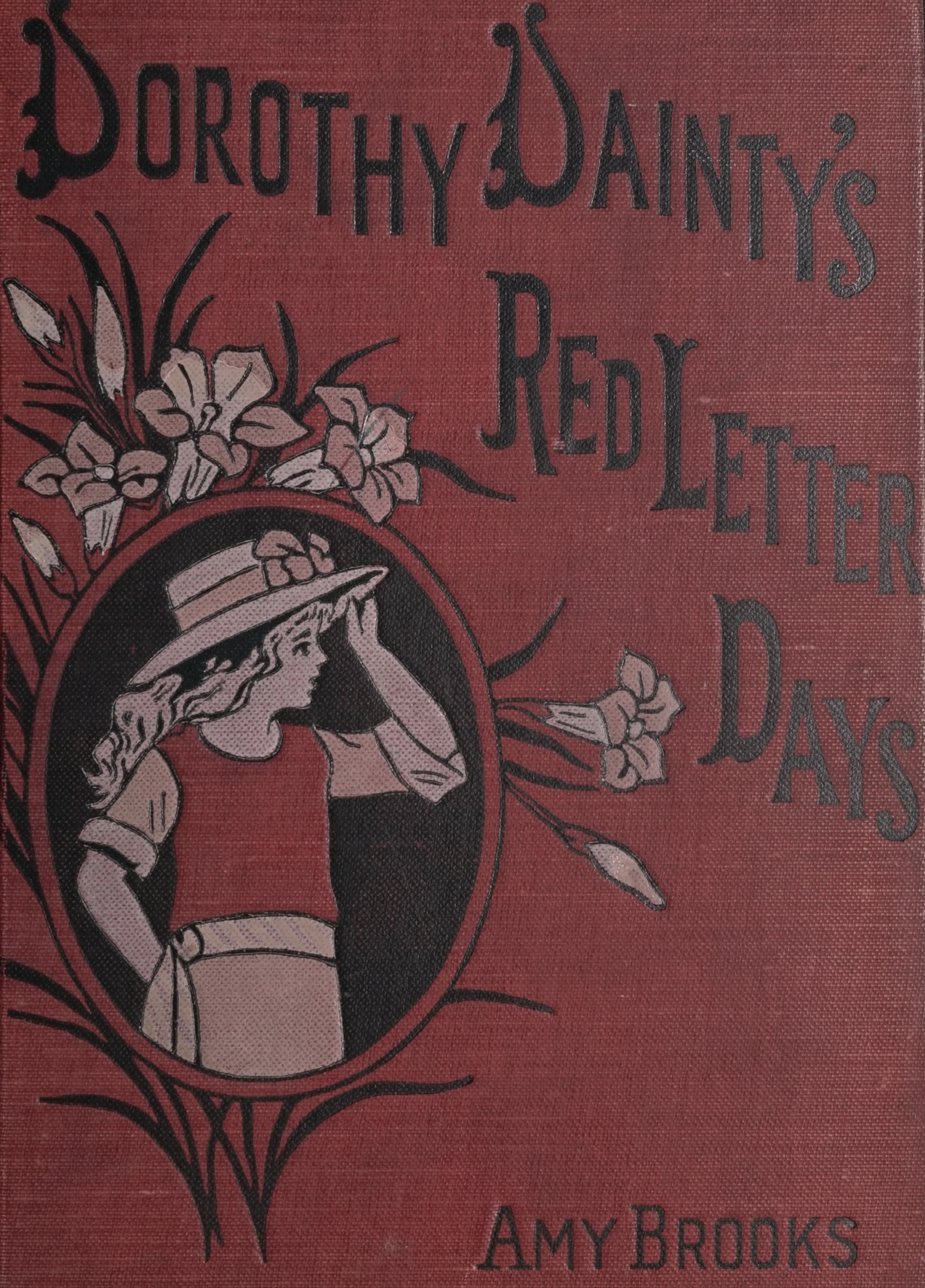
Dorothy Dainty's Red Letter Days



Amy Brooks

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DOROTHY DAINTY'S RED LETTER DAYS

BY

AMY BROOKS

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY THE AUTHOR

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DOROTHY DAINTY'S RED LETTER DAYS

CHAPTER I

IN THE GARDEN

THE great garden at the Stone House was a wonderful garden. There were tall trees making cool, shady places; there were sunny spots that fairly blazed with great masses of brilliant flowers; there was a fountain forever dancing in the sunlight, and at the far end of the garden an old sun-dial stood surrounded by tall flowering plants. Near the dial was a drinking-pool for birds. Butterflies flew here and there, at play in the sunshine, and if by chance one

flew over the wall, he would quickly return to the lovely flower-beds, the dial, and the fountain, for in all Merrivale, no other garden was so fair.

Dorothy Dainty would not have said she cared for one part of the garden more than another, but there was one spot where she dearly loved to sit, and Nancy, her dearest friend, loved it too. It was a cozy spot, where they often went to talk of pleasures that they had enjoyed, or of new delights that they were anticipating.

One sunny morning they sat talking of the weeks that they had spent on Gem Island, of the fun and frolic during their stay.

Little Fluff had been sitting very still, looking from one face to the other as if he were trying, with all his might, to understand what they were talking about.

An instant later he sprang up, barking,

and keeping his bright eyes upon a shadowy spot under the rosevines that overhung the pretty fence that capped the wall. It was at the rear of the house, and while the top of the wall was level with the road, the garden was a bit lower. At first they paid no attention to little Fluff's excitement, because he often barked at the bees that hummed among the roses, but when he began to bark louder, and to jump with each bark, they wondered what caused his antics.

"Fluff! Fluff! Come here!" cried Dorothy, but the little dog raced toward the mass of shrubbery, and then came back, barking even louder than before.

"Do you see anything moving there among those roses?" Dorothy asked.

" Not a thing," Nancy said, then; "Yes, it does look as if something were pushing the bushes this way and that."

"But what could be up there?" It was a mystery.

For a time they watched the spot that Fluff was watching, their eyes so fascinated by the vines that now were not only swaying, but were being pushed by some one, or something, so that petals fell from some of the larger blooms.

There was a pause, and then the vines were pushed aside, and a comical-looking dog sprang through the opening that he had made, landing on the grass close to where Fluff was standing.

He was a clumsy puppy, and Fluff drew closer to Dorothy, looking at the visitor with marked dislike.

"Isn't that Patricia Levine's dog?" said Dorothy, and before Nancy could answer a sharp-voiced reply came from over the wall.

"Yes, it's my dog, and I'm coming after him."

Patricia peeped over the low fence, and looked down at them.

"Well, what a place to jump down to," she said, sharply. "I'll not do it. I'll come around by the gateway, and get Algernon."

Patricia was always very glad of an excuse to go to the Stone House, yet she always spoke as if she saw no beauty in house or garden. She had an unpleasant habit of boasting of her own belongings, and speaking slightingly of anything that another possessed.

Algernon, in clumsy fashion, was now trying to coax Fluff into a frolic by bracing his forepaws for a moment, and then rushing at the little spaniel, but Fluff could not be coaxed to play.

It was easy to see that he did not admire his visitor.

"Oh, such a walk, 'way around to the gate, and along the driveway, but here I am. Who'd ever thought that Algernon would squeeze through that fence and the vines, and then jump down here? He certainly is the cutest dog, and it's wonderful to see him mind me. Come here, Algernon. Come here, I say!"

To show not obedience, but utter independence, Algernon at once rolled over and over on the grass.

"Come *here!*" cried Patricia, stamping her foot, and Algernon stopped rolling, looking at Patricia with a comical leer, one ear standing erect, the other lying flat.

A shout, followed by a rollicking laugh, made the three little girls look again toward

the wall, where Jack Tiverton was peeping over.

"I heard you, Patricia, when you said that it was wonderful to see him mind you, and I'm sure that's true. I guess he so seldom minds that it surely *is* a wonderful sight when he happens to."

"Jack Tiverton, you're the most provoking boy in this town!" cried Patricia, "and I just simply wish—"

"Don't say too much, Patricia," Jack said, with a tormenting laugh as he turned and walked down the avenue.

Jack Tiverton was a favorite with both boys and girls, and it was not often that he teased his friends, but Patricia's silly boasting disgusted every one, and Jack seldom lost a chance to vex her. Patricia turned to Dorothy.

"Did you like staying all those weeks on Gem Island? Wasn't it rather dull?"

"We surely did not find it dull," Dorothy said. "It was lovely there."

"Betty Chase was at Foam Ridge," said Nancy, "and she came often to spend the day with us, and we went over to visit her. We had good times while we were there. I'm sure you would have thought Gem Island fine if you had been staying there."

"Oh, I don't know," Patricia said, coolly. "I've had a *wonderful* time right here at Merrivale. You see, I didn't have time to go away this summer, because I'm studying for a very grand *career*. Well, come, Algernon, I'll run along."

She reached for his leash, but Algernon had decided that he would "run along," too, and dodging between her feet, he fled down the driveway, Patricia in hot pursuit.

"What did Patricia mean?" Dorothy asked, turning toward Nancy, and looking up at her with puzzled eyes. Nancy laughed.

"I've not the least idea," she said, "and I'm not sure that Patricia knows, either."

Patricia, with Algernon tugging at his leash, turned toward home, and surely no one ever sped along the avenue at a more peculiar pace.

At first the puppy thought he'd like to run, and he galloped ahead at a speed that made Patricia "step lively." Then he decided to explore a hole at the base of a tree, and he commenced to make the dirt fly.

"Oh, you little torment! Come along!" she cried pulling hard upon the leash.

Algernon paid no heed to Patricia but continued to dig until a big cat crossed his path. She spit at him, and he bounced toward her, barking. After the cat had gone, he de-

cided to curl up on the grass at the edge of the sidewalk, and enjoy a nap. Surely he was provoking.

"Oh, *how* you act!" cried Patricia. "Now let me tell you you're going home if I have to carry you." She picked him up, but he wiggled from her grasp, and darted down the avenue. She could not get near enough to grasp the leash.

The breeze caught at her hat, and she snatched it off, and ran down the avenue after the racing puppy.

Molly and Flossie ran across the lawn, and out to the sidewalk to watch the flying figure.

"Why does Patricia hurry so?" questioned Flossie.

Molly Merton looked at her in surprise.

"Why, Flossie Barnet! She *has* to hurry," said Molly, "the puppy makes her rush."

They turned toward the house, each with her arm about the other's waist.

"Dosn't it seem fine to have Dorothy and Nancy at home again?" said Mollie. They had already forgotten Patricia.

"Oh, yes," Flossie said quickly, "because we always have such good times whenever we're together. And Molly," she continued, "much as we missed them, if Arabella and Patricia had been away instead—"

She paused and looked up at Molly.

"O dear, what I was going to say wasn't very pleasant so I guess I won't say it," she said in an odd little voice.

"Well, I know what you meant," said Mollie, "and I'll say it right out loud. If Arabella and Patricia had been away all summer, we'd not have missed them. Why, Flossie Barnet! You just look at me because I said that. There's no harm in that,

but I know one thing. If I'd said I'd have missed them, that would have been naughty, because it wouldn't have been true."

"Hurrah! I mean 'Hur-*ray!*'" called a laughing voice, and Reginald Dean vaulted over the hedge, and joined them.

"Guess what I've just heard. Oh, but you'd never guess, so I'll tell you. There's just no such thing as saying when school will begin. The repairs they're making aren't nearly half done, and the workmen are waiting for material to work with. The head man has gone on a strike, and I heard Mr. Tiverton telling another man that he believed that school would open at least a month later than usual. He said he thought some one was greatly at fault that the work had not been begun earlier, but *I* think he's a fine fellow, whoever he is. Jack and I are already planning enough fun for that month

to fill the days full. Wonder if we could coax 'em to work a bit slower than usual, so as to stretch the time over into a month and a half."

"Wouldn't you be better pleased if it didn't open at all?" cried Jack Tiverton as he joined them.

"Oh, I like school well enough when I get back, and at work, but when it is still summer, and we're out of doors all day, the schoolhouse doesn't look tempting to me," Reginald replied.

"Works just opposite with me," Jack replied. "I'm always eager to get back to school, and I enjoy it until long toward the last of the season, when I begin to wish school closed earlier."

"Oh, you two will work like fun the minute you get inside the schoolroom. You talked just like this last season, and every

one knows how you both worked," Molly said.

"Come on!" cried Jack. "If you and I are going fishing to-day, we'll have to be thinking of starting."

"I'm with you!" said Reginald, and the two hurried away to enjoy what they believed would be an exciting fishing trip.

"I'd like to have gone with them," Mollie said, "but I wouldn't ask them to let me go fishing."

"Why?" Flossie asked, her blue eyes round with surprise. "I just *know* that they would have said 'yes,' if you'd asked them."

"They might have said, 'yes,' but all the same I wouldn't ask them, because the last time I asked Jack if he'd show me how to catch a fine string of fish, he laughed and said it wouldn't be any use for me to go on a

fishing trip, because I couldn't catch anything."

"Well, I don't see why you couldn't," Flossie said.

"Did he say why?"

"Yes, and that was what made me angry," Mollie replied, "for Jack laughed, and said I couldn't keep still long enough to catch anything. He says you can't talk when you're waiting for a bite. As if I couldn't keep still!"

They were walking toward the red hammock that swung lightly in the breeze. Molly was thinking of Jack's provoking words, and Flossie was wishing that he had not said them.

They seated themselves in the big hammock, and for a time neither spoke. Flossie had just thought of something that she wanted to say, when the sound of a wee voice

speaking came from behind a big clump of shrubbery.

They left the hammock and crept softly across the grass to a point where they could peep over the bushes.

Mollie laid her hand upon Flossie's arm, and softly whispered: "Hush!" It was a pretty sight that the sunlight beautified, as its warm rays fell upon the sunny curls of little Elfin, upon her white dress, and upon the two plump, white rabbits that seemed listening to what she was saying.

The little girl sat on a low stool, shaking her curly head, and with a wee forefinger uplifted, appeared to be giving them some good advice.

"You is greedy, yes, *greedy!*" she was saying, "an' it's 'gusting to see you eat ev'y minute, an' not stop 't all. No wonder you's fat, when you's eatin' all a time! There's

'nother thing I *mus'* tell you an' that is this; It isn't p'lite to wiggle your noses when I'm talking to you. You mustn't do it. Oh, what's the use of tellin' you when you don't listen, but keep right on eatin', an' your noses wigglin' jus' same as before."

She picked up the smaller of the two, and held her close.

"Ellen Mary, I love you, even when you don't mind, and you, too, Harry Jack, I love you just as much.

"Oh, I see you!" she said, and dropped the rabbit to run to Flossie. "I named them both this morning," she said.

Mollie and Flossie could hardly keep from laughing, but little Elfin saw nothing funny enough for any one to laugh at in her efforts to train her pets, or name the rabbits.

"Don't you like their names?" she asked. "I do."

"But why did you give them each two names?" Mollie asked.

"So I could name 'em for two *peoples,*" she said. "'Ellen Mary' is for our two maids, an' 'Harry Jack' is for—oh, you know who those names b'long to."

"Uncle Harry and Jack Tiverton?" said Flossie.

"Yes," agreed Elfin, "an' I think those names are lovely. The bunnies like their names, I know."

"Oh, you funny baby!" said Mollie, "how do you know?"

" 'Cause the minute I told them, they began to hop, an' that's what I do when new things are gived to me."

Mollie and Flossie ran back to the hammock, and when they were seated in it, little Elfin, who had followed them, squeezed in between them.

"Room for all *free* of us. All aboard for somewhere!" she cried. "All aboard for somewhere and we'll *dit* there quick!"

Of all the children who lived near the stone house, Arabella Correyville was surely the only one that was odd or strange, and a strange child she surely was.

Her father, Robert Correyville, had allowed his sister to train Arabella, believing that thus he was making things easier for his wife, who was not strong.

Arabella was wholly in the care of the elderly Aunt Matilda, and she seemed like a little old woman, instead of a little girl.

She had not been over to the Stone House since Dorothy and Nancy had returned, nor had she been over to play with Molly or Flossie. Patricia Levine was her dearest friend, but for weeks Patricia had spent so much time with Madam Gazooks, who lived near

the square, that she had not been over to see Arabella.

Arabella had heard a great deal about Madam, because, when they had met, Patricia had talked of little else. As Patricia told it, the Madam could make any one beautiful. Arabella now stood beside the little hut that her cousin, Leander had built for Aunt Matilda's geese. There was a little space around the hut enclosed in wire, and the great white geese roamed about their little yard.

They came over to where Arabella was standing, and stared at her as if they had never seen her before.

"Patricia says that Madam can make the awkwardest person graceful. Well, I wish she would make you graceful, you big gawky things, for if she did, then I'd certainly let her try to see what she could do with me."

CHAPTER II

RED LETTER DAYS

THERE was one room at the Stone House that was the favorite room on rainy days, because it was so light and cheery. There were no large trees near either of its windows, it was on the second floor, its walls were rich red, and the gray reed chairs had red cushions.

The great Persian rug had a crimson center, and the room, as a whole, seemed aglow with cheer.

"We'll get our water-colors, and paint while we wait for the sun to come out," Dorothy said.

"And it is lucky we have pictures to color, because we can't draw very well."

There was a little table near the window, and Aunt Charlotte as she passed through the room, placed two books upon it.

"There are some very old books that I brought for you and Nancy to enjoy. They are fashion-books of long ago, and I fancy you will think it great fun to color the pictures. Old Mrs. Pendleton has many very old and valuable books, but these, she said, were of no especial value, and she thought that Dorothy and Nancy might like to color the quaint old fashion-plates."

"Oh, what fun for a rainy day!" cried Dorothy, and soon they were seated at the little table, coloring dresses, bonnets, and cloaks with the gayest of colors.

"Here's a lady in my book wearing a ball-gown with ruffles and ruffles all over the

skirt, and she has roses, a big one over each ear," Dorothy said. "My! But she looks funny! I think I'll paint her dress pink and make the roses pink, too."

"And I've found a lady on horseback," said Nancy, "and such a costume for riding, I never heard of!"

"Let's see it," Dorothy said, leaning toward her.

"Do you suppose people ever went out riding dressed like that?" Dorothy said, her eyes wide with wonder at the funny figure.

"Well, this is a fashion-book," Nancy said, "so it must be that they did." A moment she was silent while she read the description of the droll riding-habit.

"Just listen," she said. "'The habit is dark green, as is also the hat, whose only trimming consists of two large pink plumes with crimson tips.' Well, Miss Lady, I'll

paint your habit the colors that this book describes, but it surely is a funny riding-habit," Nancy concluded, and she began tinting the plumes.

"There, I've made this lady's face too red," declared Dorothy a moment later. "I meant to have just a lovely rose tint on her cheeks, and I've made her look as if she had a fever."

"Put some clean water on her cheeks and use the blotter. That might take off some of the color," Nancy said.

Dorothy tried that, but she could not remove a bit of the color from the lady's flushed cheeks.

"Never mind," she said, "that just proves it was her own natural color because it simply *won't* come off with water."

"Oh-oo! Here's a winter scene, and just look! The first lady is wearing a skating-

costume of white velvet, and white furs. White velvet for skating! Let's hope she's a good skater, and so not likely to sit down on that rather dirty-looking ice."

Nancy leaned to look at the picture. "The lady looks so thin and tired, I'd say she'd rather sit down anywhere than try to skate," she said.

"She's smiling," said Dorothy.

"See her *teenty* waist! It's not more than half as big as mine, and she's a grown-up lady," Nancy said, "and that tall lady behind her is dressed in velvet, but it isn't white. Let's see what it says under the picture."

"This beautiful skating-costume is made from red velvet, the coat lined with brocade of the same color," read Dorothy.

"Well, who ever heard of dressing like that to go skating?" cried Nancy. "Aunt

Charlotte, do come and look at these funny fashion-plates."

Aunt Charlotte, looking over the shoulders of the two little painters, agreed with them that the ladies were too richly dressed for skating, but she added, "It may be that they thought that they could skate with more zeal if they wore fine garments."

"Oh, what a funny idea!" cried Nancy.

"Droll, surely," Aunt Charlotte said, "yet there was once a great painter who had the same idea. Dorothy, do you remember how often your father has said that he would not sell that tiny painting that hangs near a group of larger pictures in the living-room? That no matter how large a sum of money was offered for it, it would not tempt him?"

"Yes, I know he prizes the picture, and I think it is beautiful. The little figures are so dainty, the ladies in their fine brocades,

and the men with their velvet coats, and satin waistcoats," replied Dorothy.

"The great artist, Fortuny, painted that picture, and it is said that he always dressed in silk and velvet when about to paint those textures. He said that only when thus dressed, could he do his finest work."

"I should say that he must have spoiled many nice waistcoats, and satin breeches if he wore them when he was painting," Dorothy said, "but if he painted better pictures, why then it surely was worth more than all the fine clothes that he daubed with his paints."

Aunt Charlotte laughed.

"I have read that once when a number of his acquaintances were at his studio, one of his friends said what you have just said, Dorothy. The great painter is said to have turned with much dignity, and replied:

"'Sir, I put my paint upon the canvas; not on myself.'"

"Well, I'm sure of one thing," said Nancy, "and that is that what I wear will make no difference with my painting. If I wore a satin dress, my pictures would look just as dauby."

"I think the pictures are neatly colored," Aunt Charlotte said, "and it is a fine way to spend a rainy day. Turn the page and try again."

"We will," Dorothy said, "and this time they'll look better."

"All right," agreed Nancy, cheerfully. "What's on your page?"

"A graceful lady wearing a handsome gown. Two little spaniels are in the picture, one on a cushion on which she's leaning, and the other on the rug at her feet. I'll do my best to make them look fine."

Nancy turned her page.

"Oh-oo! This is funnier than the skating-costume. The lady in this picture is picking pears from a little tree, and Nancy, her dress is trimmed with flowers and lace! The basket sits on the grass, and it's a fancy basket that wouldn't be strong enough to hold one of Arabella's bottles of pills.

"It says the dress is yellow and the lace deeper yellow, and the flowers on the draped skirt are nasturtiums.

"Well, that sounds fine, and I'll paint it, and see how it looks." The forenoon sped swiftly, and so interested were they in their painting that they had not noticed that it was no longer raining.

"Oh, look!" cried Dorothy, "There's a big patch of blue sky, and—yes, the sun is coming out!"

"Hello! Hello!" called a gay voice, under

the window, and they rushed to lift the sash and look out. It was Reginald Dean who had shouted to them, but Mollie and Flossie were with him, their faces as eager as his.

"Come out!" they cried, Mollie Merton adding; "It's cooler now, and just fine for a romp."

They raced down to the hall, and out on the piazza.

The gardener had run to the stable for shelter from the shower, leaving the heap of vines upon the lawn, together with his pruning shears. "If John has been trimming the vines, he means to throw these long pieces away," said Nancy, "so let's tie them together, and then I'll tell you what we'll do with them."

"All right," agreed Reginald, "but why not tell us now?"

"It's more fun to have you do as I ask you,

and when the vines are tied so that they are like one long vine, we'll,—oh, you'll see what we'll do," Nancy said.

"There!" she cried a moment later, "Now they are tied together, and we'll all take hold of it, and play, "Snap the whip."

"Will it *snap?*" Molly asked.

"S'pose it will hold together?" Flossie asked, cautiously.

"I don't believe it will," Reginald said, with a laugh, "so I'll be the 'snapper' on the end, and I'll be the one to 'come a cropper,' instead of either of you girls."

"Oh, we've tied them together so tightly that they're *bound* to hold. Come on!" Molly shouted, snatching at the stout vine, and with a will they grasped it, and how they laughed! Their efforts at tying the vines had been wasted, for the moment that their eager hands grasped it, the several knots

slipped, and each stood holding a short section of vine.

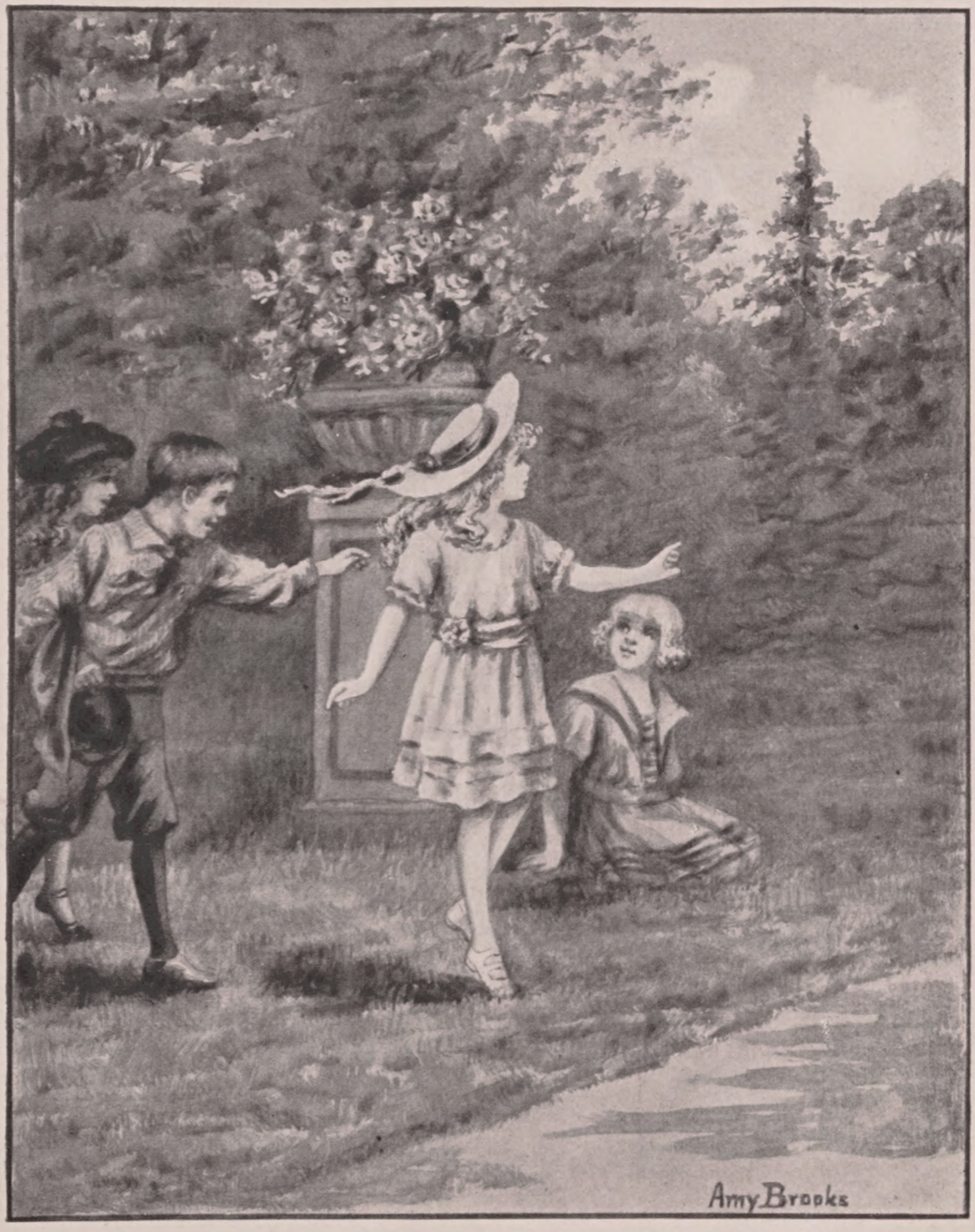
They tossed the vines in a heap just as John had left them, and spent an hour in playing lively games.

"Hide and Seek" was always a great favorite at the Stone House, because the garden offered so many fine hiding-places. Now when all the best places had been "used up," as Reginald expressed it, there was another game that they always enjoyed and Dorothy agreed to be "it."

She led the way to an open space near the great garden vase, and then turning her back to them she began to sing the first verse of the game:

"Follow, follow me!
Follow, if you dare!
For I shall quickly turn,
And catch you unaware.

Softly they crept after her.



"FOLLOW, FOLLOW ME!"—*Page 32.*

She paused, not looking back, then began again to walk, singing the second verse:

"Follow, follow me!
Follow, follow, *flit!*
The one that I shall catch,
Will surely next be *it.*"

A long way she led them, across the lawn, around the fountain, up one path and down another, and then, when they least expected it, she quickly turned, and tagged Reginald before he could get away.

Reginald knew that they would think that he, like Dorothy, would walk a long time before turning, so he repeated the first verse that Dorothy had sung, and, without walking a step, whirled about just in time to catch Nancy's outstretched hand. She had crept up close behind him, intending to twitch his sleeve.

"Not quite quick enough, Nancy," he said

with a laugh, as he tagged her. Nancy caught Mollie almost as soon as she had said the verse. Dorothy and Reginald were too clever at dodging to be easily caught, but Flossie was soon captured.

A long whistle made Reginald look toward the great gates, where Jack stood waiting for him.

"You're a great chap!" said Jack, "out here playing with the girls, and forgetting the fine errand you started out to do."

"Errand?" said Reginald, "What errand?"

"Oh, ho! That's a good one," cried Jack. "You don't even remember that there was an errand to be done? Well, your father just told me to tell you, that he is still waiting for the hinge that he sent you for."

"Oh, sure enough," said Reginald. "He told me to hurry, too. Well, see me hurry!"

and off he ran, followed by the laughter of the girls.

"I guess I'd better follow him to see that he doesn't forget that errand again," Jack said, as he darted down the avenue after him.

As usual, little Flossie Barnet, the youngest of the playmates, was ready with an excuse for Reginald. "Reginald really means to do things that he promises to do, only he just forgets all about them," she said.

"But, Flossie, you know he ought not to forget them," said Mollie.

"Well, he doesn't mean to," persisted Flossie, "I know he doesn't."

That evening, after dinner, the cheery living-room was most inviting with the logs blazing in the fireplace. The day had been warmer in the afternoon, but when evening came, a cool breeze came up, and Dorothy

and Nancy drew a low seat up toward the fire, and sat watching the dancing flames.

Aunt Charlotte sat near, busy with a bit of needlework, while Mrs. Dainty turned the pages of a new fashion magazine.

"See the red flashes in the fire," said Dorothy. "They are so very red that they make me think of something Jack said to-day. He said that when he got the highest mark for composition of any in his class last season, it was a 'red letter day' for him. I wonder what he meant?"

"I heard him say that," Nancy said, "Aunt Charlotte, do you know what he meant? What are 'red letter days'?"

"Supposed to be lucky days," Aunt Charlotte explained, "and doubtless that is what Jack meant, but I think hours of study must have had more to do with his high rank in his class than luck. But 'Red Letter' days have

a meaning of their own. The old monks who wrote their own prayer-books, carefully painted the letters that formed the words, and crudely shaped notes for music, with brushes, and colors, making all capital letters red. Some of those books we called missals.

"In our church calendars, Saints' days are painted in 'red letters'.

"To-day people speak of fortunate days, or especially happy days as 'red letter' days. Sometimes one day of a month on which something delightful happens will stand out strikingly apart from all other days of that month because whatever occurred on that day made us very happy."

"I mean to take a calendar, and paint all the best days red. The numbers will be black, but I'll make a red outline around the figures, and paint a red border around the

little square in which the number is printed," Dorothy said.

"We have good times every day," said Nancy, "will you paint every day on the calendar red?"

"Oh, no," Dorothy said, quickly, "because Aunt Charlotte said the 'red letter' days were 'special' days, so I'll paint the days that have something wonderful happen."

As they sat before the fire, Nancy's hand stole into Dorothy's, and as they watched the sparks, they were thinking much the same thoughts. They were wondering what fine thing would happen, and how soon.

"Don't you hope something will hurry up and happen?" Nancy asked, leaning eagerly forward, so as to look into Dorothy's face.

"Oh, yes, I do," agreed Dorothy, "so I can paint the first 'red-letter' day in my calendar."

CHAPTER III

ANTONY ARRIVES

"ANTONY'S here! Antony's here!" cried Nancy. "I just *know* it is Antony by the way he walks." She had climbed to the flat coping of the wall, and was hopping first on one foot, and then the other.

"Ah, now, Miss Nancy, have a t'ought about where ye're shtandin'," cried the old gardener, "Sure, an' it's mesilf as wouldn't thry ter do a jig loike that up atop av thot wall."

Nancy was too excited to heed John, for surely that lad whom she had seen walking along beside Uncle Harry must have been Antony Marx, the lad who had been such a

pleasant friend during the weeks that she and Dorothy had enjoyed on lovely little Gem Island.

Uncle Harry had invited the boy to come to Merrivale for a long visit, and now he had arrived. A moment she stood watching, then as Uncle Harry paused at his gate and pointed toward the Stone House, she saw the boy turn and look that way.

"Yes, yes, it is Antony!" she cried, and springing from the wall, she ran to the house to find Dorothy and tell her the news.

"Now, don't that bate all?" cried John. "Don't it bate all?" he repeated, "A young thing loike that kin jump around crazy loike, an' break niver a bone at all, an' a ol' chap loike me could bust twenty bones maybe, just shteppin' a bit careless loike, over a shtick, or a shtone that happened ter lay in me path.

"Well, when I was a wee lad, I could do the hop, skip, an' jump wid the besht av thim, an' I moind the toime whin I fell out'n a windy. Twinty feet I dhrapped ter the ground, an' landed on the top av me head, an' niver cracked me skull."

"All of which proves you had a thick skull, John," said the laughing groom who had overheard his remarks.

"Thick is it? Sure it's thick, lad. No Oirishman has a head loike an egg-shell. An Oirishman's head is made thick a-purpose, so if he gets into a bit' av a scrap wid anybody, an' gits the warsht av it, a rap on the head won't hurt him at all, at all. A good, hard thump wid a big cudgel wad only wake him up."

"Dorothy, where are you? Dorothy!" Nancy cried as she ran along the broad piazza, and in at the open door.

"Here!" said Dorothy, "Just looking at a picture and waiting for you."

Nancy found her in the living-room, before the painting of the Grand Canal, Venice.

"This is the picture that Antony Marx said he'd like to see," she said. "Don't you remember that day when he told us of his father's travels, and how he had always begged him to tell him more about Venice, its gondolas, and canals?"

"Yes, and you told him about this picture and he said he'd so like to see it, and he'll surely see it soon now, for Dorothy—he's here."

"Oh, Nancy, how do you know? Who told you?"

"Nobody told me. I *saw* him. He was walking with Uncle Harry. I thought he walked like Antony, and when Uncle Harry

turned, and pointed toward this house, as if telling him where we lived, and the boy turned to look, I saw his face, and it *was* Antony."

"I'm so glad he has come," said Dorothy. "I wasn't quite sure he would, because he seemed shy when he promised, and I wondered if after all, he might not come. We'll do all we can to make him glad he's here."

"Indeed we will," Nancy agreed, and Dorothy found her water-colors and painted a big, red letter A on her calendar, for the day of Antony's arrival.

"It's a day when we know we can begin to make him glad to be here," she said to herself, and gave the A another coat of red to make it brighter.

Over at Flossie Barnet's house Antony was, at that moment, receiving a hearty welcome.

The house was large and roomy, and Mr. and Mrs. Barnet and Flossie, Uncle Harry and his wife, and little Elfin found it delightful to have a home together.

After all had greeted him, Elfin, who had been out with the nursemaid, came running through the hall.

At the door of the living-room she paused an instant.

"Don't you remember me, little Elfin?" Antony said.

"Oh, I know now!" she cried. "First I fought I *didn't,* but now I *do!* You're the boy that kept all a time finding pretty shells for me and I love you," and she ran quickly to him.

"I'll love you now, Ant'ny, if you got some shells in your *pottets.*"

They all laughed at the small girl's attempt to "drive a bargain," but Antony saw

the little lips quiver and knew that she did not like the laughter.

"Come right here, Elfin, and see what I did bring you," he said, and she ran to him, saying; "I want what you bringed, but I'd love you if you didn't bring *nuffin.*"

"I know you would," he said, putting an arm around her, while with the other hand, he drew from his pocket a little box.

"Open it," he said, but she looked up at him with wide wondering eyes.

"Did you *truly* bring it for me?" she asked, before opening it.

"Truly for you," he said.

He untied the string that held the cover in place, and Elfin opened the little box.

"Oh! Oh! Ev'y one come see what he bringed me!" she cried. They crowded around Antony and little Elfin. There in the little box was a perfect starfish, some tiny

pearl shells, and a branch of red coral.

"The starfish and the shells come from the beach at Foam Ridge," said Antony, "but the bit of coral I begged father to give me for little Elfin. It is a piece that in some way got broken off from a large piece that father brought home from one of his long trips."

The pretty things were duly admired, and Elfin was very happy, and for hours she carried the little box around with her, humming softly to herself as she examined her treasures.

Antony was surprised to find himself feeling almost as if he had always lived at Merrivale, and in his room that night he wrote a letter.

"DEAR FATHER AND MOTHER:

"I arrived here, safe and sound, and I never had the least idea that all the folks here would be so glad to see me. They seem

to know just how to make a fellow feel at home. At Foam Ridge they're up late at night at the hotel, but folks like us go to bed by nine, and get up at four or five in the morning. Up here they are up until eleven or later, and not up until late in the morning. It is half past eleven now, so if I am intending to turn in before twelve I'll have to be getting ready now and finish this letter in the morning. I am sleepy now, so I'll probably go right to sleep, even although I'll miss the lapsing of the waves that sing me to sleep at home."

True to his promise, Antony was up early the next morning, and in his letter he told of meeting Flossie, and Mollie Merton, of Jack Tiverton who had rushed over to greet him, of Reginald, adding:

"They are all so kind, so genuinely glad I'm here, that I am more than glad myself. I'm going up to the Stone House to see Dorothy Dainty and Nancy Ferris, and if the others were so glad to see me, I know those two will be."

The letter went swiftly to the little post-

office at Foam Ridge, and the genial captain, waiting for the mail to be sorted, almost snatched it, and hurried off with it. He wasted no time on the way, and when he reached home, he insisted that his wife stop ironing, and listen while he read it aloud.

When he had finished reading the letter he peered over his glasses at his wife.

"Well, Ma, I guess our boy got a warm welcome up there," he said.

"He'd orter," responded his wife, "for he's a extry fine boy, our Antony is."

"Sho! Ye're biased in his favor, Ma," the captain said, with a chuckle.

"So be you, if you'd only own up to it," replied his wife.

"I *do* own up to it," the captain said, "and I don't care who knows that I think well of my son."

Antony soon felt as much at home as if he

had been a long time at Merrivale, instead of a few days.

Jack and he were fast friends at once, the other boys found him a fine comrade, and a good friend, and he joined in all their sports with a will.

Arabella and Patricia were very amusing to him, and he watched them closely as if wondering what new freak would move them to do funnier things than ever before.

"They certainly are droll," he said one day to Jack, "and the oddest thing to me is that two girls can manage to be so funny without trying to be, or even knowing that they are."

"They couldn't be anything but funny if they tried," Jack said.

Patricia tried to be very friendly with Antony, and she confided to Arabella that she thought him *almost* as fine-looking as the pic-

ture of a circus rider on the bill-board down near the square.

"Of course, no real person ever did look *quite* so fine as the man on the poster, but Antony looks *almost* as handsome," she said.

"Are you talking about that new boy that is staying at Flossie Barnet's?" Arabella asked.

"Yes, and his name is Antony Marx. I think Antony is a fine name, and I almost wish I'd waited to name one of my two dogs until now, and I'd have named him Antony," Patricia said.

Arabella made no reply to that, but after a second she said:

"That boy stares at me as if I was actually queer."

"Well," said Patricia, "I sometimes *think* you're queer, and sometimes I am *sure* of it."

However, if Arabella did not take kindly to the newcomer, her cousin, Leander Correyville did, and one day when Antony declared himself eager to excel in arithmetic, and expressed the hope that he might at least do work that might compare well with his classmates when school should begin, Leander hastened to say that he would gladly help him with his problems at any time. Leander was glad to be helped.

"I do better work in arithmetic than in any other of my studies, so if I help you with your arithmetic, perhaps you can help me with some other subject." That was a kind way of offering to aid Antony, and Antony thanked him, and agreed to give him any aid of which he was capable. "I am an *outrageous* speller," confessed Leander. "I tell you, Antony, I spell words the worst way that they could be spelled, but I can do my

problems in arithmetic correctly every time."

"Then if you drill me in arithmetic and I drill you in spelling, we shall both stand a chance of becoming absolute wonders!" said Antony, laughing.

"*'Chance,'* is just the word. We'll both stand just about a chance," said Leander, but each felt stronger because of the other's proffered help, and each resolved to do his best.

Patricia had agreed to meet Arabella at a place on the avenue that was nearly opposite Flossie's home. There were two reasons for not going straight to the Correyville home to call for Arabella.

One was that Aunt Matilda did not like Patricia, and did not wish Arabella to be with her. The other was that by waiting on

the low wall nearly opposite the house where Antony was staying made it possible that she *might* see Antony, and that would be delightful.

She hoped that Arabella would be as slow as usual, and keep her waiting there on the wall, and while she waited, Antony might come home from a walk, or be just starting out, and either way he, perhaps, would stop to chat.

That would be delightful.

Arabella was not only late, but very late, and just when Patricia had decided that Antony must have gone off for the day, he came up the Avenue, whistling. He nodded to Patricia, and was turning to enter the driveway when she called to him.

She certainly saw that he did not intend to stop, but she was too bold to be easily offended.

"What's your hurry?" she said as he came toward her.

She peeped out from beneath the brim of her big hat in a wild attempt to be charming. Antony thought she looked silly. "Are you having a good time here at Merrivale?" she asked.

Antony assured her that he was.

"I wonder you like it here," Patricia replied. "I don't, but I'm used to living in N' York and it's *so* gay there that Merrivale makes me nearly wild, it's so *awfully* dull here."

"Could you stay in New York if you chose?" Antony asked.

"Well, I should say I could!" said Patricia. "My home is there."

"Well, why don't you stay there?" Antony said, carelessly.

"Oh, I'm staying here while I'm being

trained for a great career," Patricia said, with a toss of her silly head. "A *very* great career."

"H'm," said Antony, "I've often heard of people who followed some sort of careers in New York. Foam Ridge isn't too far away for newspapers to reach there. I read last week of a singer who has a wondertul voice and is admired greatly, who had all her instruction and training in New York."

"Oh, merely a singer!" cried Patricia, with a wave of her hand, and a look in her eyes that gave the idea that a singer was to be pitied rather than admired.

Antony did not ask what she intended to be. He though her so silly that he really did not care, and Patricia was just ready to tell him, whether he cared to hear, or not, when Arabella appeared, staring at them over her spectacles. Patricia had seen her

coming, and had tried to tell Antony all that she wished to tell, before Arabella joined them.

As usual, she had a bottle of pills in her hand, and before she spoke, she counted out four, and swallowed the big round things, one at a time.

Patricia was giggling.

The fourth one seemed harder to swallow than the others, and Antony watched her curiously, as she swallowed, and swallowed, and stretched her neck, until Antony wondered if it worked like a telescope.

"Her Aunt Matilda makes her take them," Patricia explained with a laugh.

"What does she take them *for?*" Antony asked.

"For her—for—oh, I don't know," Patricia said. "You might ask her, although I'm not sure that she knows, either."

"Of course I know," said Arabella. "The pink pills are for my skin, the green ones are for nerves, and the white ones are for my nerves and my disposition."

"My! Which do you take the most of?" Antony asked, but as Arabella did not reply, he turned toward the house. "They are certainly the funniest girls I ever saw," he said.

CHAPTER IV

THE HOUSE IN THE SQUARE

THE day was hot and sultry. The awnings flapped lazily in the bit of air that fanned them, and those who came into the little square paused before the shop windows, not so much to admire the goods there displayed, as to gain a few moments' shelter from the sun.

A chubby boy crouched in the gutter, at the far side of the square, and seemed to be searching for something.

"Wot yer hunting for, sonny?" asked a big boy who was passing.

"Oh, suffin," was the answer. He did not look up at his questioner.

His huge straw hat hid his face and through a hole in the crown, a tuft of tawny hair waved.

The big boy twitched the lock of hair, and fled when the small boy yelled. The small boy appeared to be playing with the pebbles, but often he peeped from under the brim of his big hat, and once he muttered:

"I wonder if the'll make me thtay here all day. Mandy knowth ith hot."

As if in answer to his whispered complaint, a scrawny girl peeped out from the doorway of one of the stores.

"That's right, Chub. You stay right there till she comes out, 'n' I'll give ye a candy ball," she said.

"Give it to me *now,*" shouted Chub.

"No, not till ye find out what it's all 'bout," was the firm answer, and the girl disappeared inside the store, the small boy

bending once more over the pebbles.

Through a gaping hole in the hat-brim he peeped. There was no one in sight. The breeze was hot, but the great clump of lilac bushes seemed to like it, and nodded and dipped whenever it fanned them.

A heavy vine overhung the doorway, and there was a border of flowering plants each side the rough path that led from the gate to the door, but neither the lilacs nor the vine were ever pruned, and the flowers were such as come up of their own sweet will each season.

Madam Gazooks took no care of them, and garden plants and weeds were close neighbors. Indeed the big woman could not tell a geranium from a burdock, and cared no more for one than the other.

"Why don't the come out?" whispered Chub. "Maybe Patrithia has gone to

bed," he added, "an' if the hath, whatth the uthe of me thtaying here, an' juth 'bout meltin'?"

He tossed a pebble and caught it.

"She'th a funny girl, anyway," he said. "Goin' to that houthe every day. You wouldn't catch me going to thee that ol' fat woman!"

He was becoming more impatient.

"I'll not thtay here all day!" he muttered, but at that moment the door that he had been watching, opened.

It was some distance from the spot where he was sitting, and Patricia, as she came out, was so excited that she did not notice Chub.

"Oh, yes 'ndeed!" she cried. "I just simply *know* that every word you say is true, and I'll be here again to-morrow at the same time."

The big woman who had stood in the door-

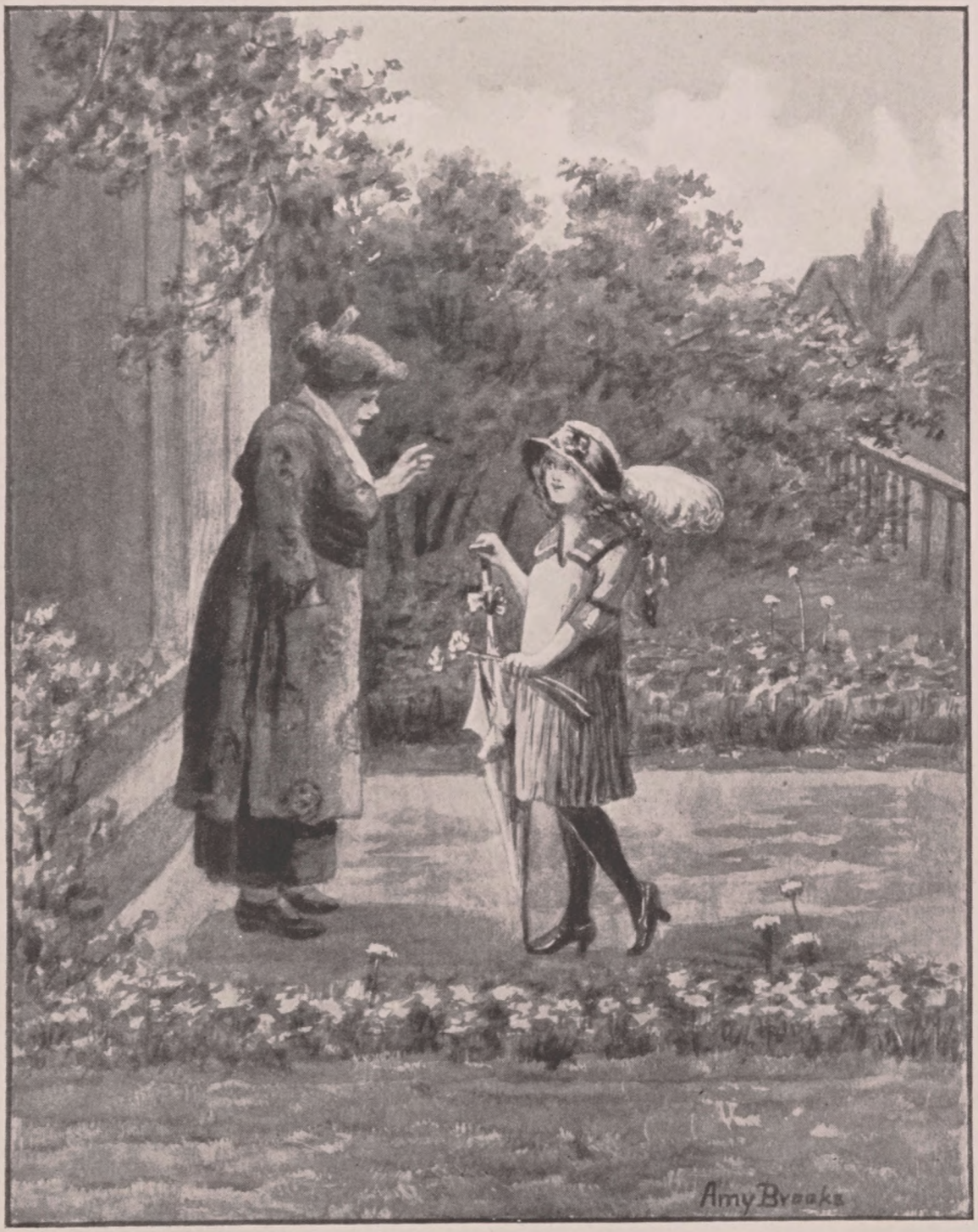
way, waddled down the three low steps, and along the walk.

"Jest one word more, Sissy," she said, and Patricia turned. The big woman laid a pudgy hand upon Patricia's shoulder.

"I was jest goin' ter say this. Don't you let any one argify you outer the fact that you've got reel talent. There ain't no question 'bout it. If they don't think so, it's jest that they ain't able to 'preciate you."

"Oh, you're just fine!" cried Patricia, "and I'll be here again to-morrow, *sure,*" then she added, "unless my aunt plans something that keeps me home, but I guess she won't. She doesn't often." Patricia's eyes were bright, and her cheeks were burning, not with the sultry heat, but with delight at the flattering things that the big woman had said to her.

It was not the first time that Patricia had



"JEST ONE WORD MORE, SISSY."—*Page 62.*

been there. Indeed, she had spent many a dollar there, for Madam Gazooks charged a dollar for each call that her patrons made. She pretended to teach any number of accomplishments.

She claimed to be competent to train one's voice for singing or for reading. Dramatic art, dancing, to make the most awkward person graceful, and above all else, to study each aspirant for fame, and advise her which profession to choose.

Her appearance was gross, and far from graceful, her voice was high-pitched, and anything but musical, and the few people who had called for advice had at once wondered why she had not spent a little time in improving herself, and they had not called again.

She had at once seen that Patricia would listen to any amount of flattery, and that she

would believe anything that was told her.

She also saw that Patricia had more money to spend than most children have, and she longed to have her call as often as possible. She was dishonest, and cared not the least how she obtained money. Her only thought was to get it. Patricia hurried along toward home, her mind filled with thoughts of what the woman had said.

When she was out of sight, Mandy came out of the store, and grasped Chub by the hand.

"Here's your candy ball," she said, and Chub snatched it and put it in his mouth.

"Now, tell me what Patricia and that *Ma'm Gas Hooks* was sayin'."

Chub tried but he had not quite understood what he had heard. "The big fat woman thaid Patrithia could do anything the wanted to, an' Patrithia ith goin' there ter-

morrer. Thath's all I know. Oh, yeth, the'th goin' there at the thame time."

"Wal, I guess I'll be somewhere near there myself," said Mandy, "fer land knows I'd like tu know if she could make me good-lookin', and what it would cost. I guess it would likely cost me consid'able, fer it would be a big job."

"What would?" Chub asked, but Mandy didn't care to tell. Ever since he could remember, Mandy had kept a sharp watch over Chub, but one afternoon each week he roamed the town, free from her sharp eyes, and governing hand. On Saturdays Mandy stood behind the counter in the small bakery near her home, and helped serve customers, for which she received a pot of hot baked beans to take home, and a half-dollar for herself. As she walked along, dragging Chub by the hand, she was wondering how

long a time would be required to make her lovely, and how many half-dollars would pay the bill. She wondered why Patricia went there often, or why, in fact, she went at all.

" 'F I looked as well as Patricia does, I'd not give that fat woman a cent of my money," she said, under her breath.

Give *who* a thent of *what?"* Chub asked with his lisping tongue, but again Mandy chose not to answer.

"Come along," she said, "let's hurry and get onto the part of the road where the trees make it shady."

"Ith's only thady in spoths," said Chub, but Mandy had fast hold of his hand, and his stubby little legs worked hard to keep up with Mandy's strides.

It was remarkable that Patricia told no one of her visits to the big woman. Usually she told, not once, but many times, all about

anything that she did, but regarding her frequent calls at the house where Mme. Gazooks lived, she told never a word.

"Don't yer tell a word 'bout this," the woman had said, so sternly that Patricia, bold as she was, had gasped. "Do yer hear? " said the woman, then as she saw that the little girl was startled, she added more kindly:

"I want yer to keep still, so's when yer ready ter make yer *de-boo,* ye'll 'stonish the natives!"

"Yes'm," said Patricia, "I mean 'No'm,' or else I mean, why I mean I won't tell."

"Well, ye'd better not! " said the woman, "fer I'm int'rested in yer, an' I can do wonders for yer *if*—ye keep still, but if I hear of ye tellin', then I'll do some different than what I was a-goin' ter."

Patricia promised again, and again, and

the big woman seemed satisfied, but she watched Patricia until a bend of the road hid her from sight.

"If she can keep her tongue still, I guess we'll manage it all right," she said as she went up the steps.

Mandy and Chub lived very near the old house where Patricia lived with her aunt. The street, unattractive in itself, was not beautified by the swarm of dirty children who were always at play there, or by the slatternly women who often stood gossiping over their garden gates.

At one time her parents had lived at Merrivale, but when they moved to New York, Patricia had begged to return and live with her aunt.

Patricia's greatest delight seemed to be in spending money.

Love had no part in her nature, and in its

place were vanity, and greed. If she were at home her mother would know how, and for what, she spent the money for which she was forever coaxing, and that did not please Patricia.

Now that she lived with her aunt she was always writing letters in which she asked for money for shoes, for a new hat, a coat or a dress, saying that she needed them. Sometimes she bought the article that she had mentioned, but quite as often she spent it foolishly, just to show the girls and boys that she knew, how freely she could spend.

She seemed to have no conscience. Mrs. Levine was as vain as her little daughter, and Patricia knew just how to obtain money from her. If Mrs. Levine replied to a coaxing letter from Patricia, and said that she could not send more money before another month, Patricia had only to say that she did

not look as finely dressed as the other girls, and Mrs. Levine would send whatever Patricia asked for, in the next mail.

Mandy longed to tell Patricia's aunt all about the big woman who received so many calls from Patricia, but she dared not do so. She intended calling there herself. She had saved four half-dollars, and she meant to call at the door, and ask Mme. Gazooks how much beauty could be purchased for two dollars. If the woman was so encouraging that it looked like a bargain, she meant to put the four half-dollars in her big, fat hand, and step inside.

"I'll know whether I look two-dollars'-worth better than I do now," Mandy said to herself, "and there's one thing sure. I *couldn't* look worse."

Now while Patricia had told no one about her calls at the house near the square, there

were many who knew without being told.

She went there so often that some one was bound to notice it, and the small boys who idled around the square had seen her there so often, that they made remarks about it. The sign had first attracted their attention, then they saw the big woman, and they wondered why a little girl cared to go there. "There's no girls in that house for her to play with," said one, on a hot day when they had just seen Patricia go in.

"I wonder why she goes there?"

They were not there when she came out, but after that whenever they saw her coming, they would shout:

"Patricia! Patricia! Are yer goin' to call on Madam Gas Hooks?"

Patricia would look angry, and that delighted the small boys.

A few days later they made a jingle that

was certainly provoking, and in chorus they sang it in front of the house.

"Madam Gas Hooks,
She sells good looks."

This pleased them so that they sang it again and again, until the Madam came to the door, broom in hand, and drove them away, saying that she would surely spoil their "good looks" if she ever caught them. After that they dared not tease the big woman, and only teased Patricia when she was not near the square.

There was one person to whom she told a wee bit, and that was Arabella.

Arabella had heard that Patricia was often there, and one day she questioned her.

"Oh, I'll tell you just one thing," she said rather grandly. "It's no use to tell you all about it, but I'll tell you this. I'm studying for a *career!*"

"A what?" drawled Arabella.

"A *career!*" Patricia repeated as loudly as if she thought Arabella deaf.

"My Cousin Leander said a horse down in the square careered round when the cars scared him," replied Arabella, "so I don't know what you mean."

"I didn't s'pose you would," Patricia said, rudely, and she would not explain.

It was not long before Patricia's aunt began to question her.

"What's this I hear 'bout you a-goin' ter call at a house somewheres near the post-office, an' goin' so often that folks speak 'bout it. Who is it ye go to see?"

"It's a lady that has took such a fancy to me that she keeps inviting me in, and sometimes if it's in the forenoon she makes me stay to lunch."

"Well, I guess I'll call with ye some day.

I'd like ter see the pusson what can *make* ye do anything," said her aunt, "an' if she's got a recipe fer making ye mind, I'd like ter borry it, an' see 'f I could make it work.

"Here! Make that pup take that bone outdoors," and Patricia, for once was quick to obey, for she was glad to avoid further questioning.

They had been eating their lunch, and Patricia had tossed a bone to the pup. He had promptly seized it with a growl, and held it down with a stubby paw while he proceeded to gnaw it.

Patricia picked him up, his jaws firmly holding the bone that he had no idea of losing. She landed him in the back-yard, where Lionel, in sulky disgust, watched his efforts at obtaining what meat and gristle still clung to the bone.

Patricia was standing with her back toward the street, so that she did not see Jack Tiverton, who peeped over the fence, and nudged the elbow of Leander Correyville.

They turned to watch her.

"Wonder where she got those freak dogs?" Jack whispered.

"I'd like better still to know why she's doing so much telephoning," said Leander.

"Telephoning?" said Jack. "Who is she telephoning to?"

"I don't know," Leander said, "but she uses the telephone wherever she goes. She came over to see Arabella this forenoon, and first thing she did was to rush to the telephone, and such a string of questions and answers I never heard. Reginald Dean says she runs into the drug-stores and does the same thing, and she stays in the booth so

long that folks that are waiting, get out of patience."

"She's always 'showing off,' but about this new notion, really I don't see what fun there is in it," Jack said.

"Well, I was out when she came over to our house, and Arabella tried to tell me what Patricia had said at the telephone, but Arabella always gets things mixed, so when she said she couldn't make sense out of what Patricia was saying I said I couldn't either, from the way that she was repeating it. Arabella declared that she told it just as Patricia had said it.

"The girls say she doesn't do it unless there's some one whom she knows near enough to notice what she is doing.

"Mollie Merton said Patricia was walking along the street ahead of her, and when she turned, she saw Mollie, and the first thing

she said was, 'Hello, Mollie! Oh, I must run in and telephone this very minute,' and into a store she rushed."

"Well, that certainly is a funny notion," said Jack.

CHAPTER V

THE CIRCUS GIRL

WITH the beginning of school days Antony found himself in good company. The school at home, the Foam Ridge Academy, had been a good one, and to his great delight, he found that he stood as well in his class as any of the other pupils of his age.

At recess, on the first day, the yard held three excited groups, each talking about different things in which all were equally interested. A half-dozen boys and girls in a group nearest the schoolhouse were talking of the great circus posters, and wondering if the show were nearly as good as the boastful posters proclaimed.

"If there *is* a girl who truly ties herself up in a knot like that picture of the India-rubber girl, I'd not like to see her," said Dorothy.

"Why not?" Mollie Merton asked.

"Because it's awful to look at," Dorothy said, "and it would make me shiver. I don't believe I could watch her while she did it."

"I could," cried Reginald, "but I think it would be even finer if she tied herself in *two* knots."

"I wonder you don't say *three,*" said Jack Tiverton. You know there's luck in odd numbers, Reginald."

"There may be luck," said Reginald, "but there's no sense in wishing she would tie herself in three knots, because she wouldn't be long enough to tie more than two."

"I like the picture that shows 'Thirty milk-white steeds,' all prancing, and holding

their heads so proudly," said Flossie, "but why does it say 'steeds'? Is that just another name for horses, Jack?"

"Sure thing," Jack replied, "and on another line it calls them 'palfries,' meaning horses, again."

"Well, it doesn't matter what they call them," Flossie said, "they're handsome, and I'd like to see them."

"And we'll have a fine chance to," said Mollie Merton, "for they have their parade on Saturday morning and they're coming right up the avenue past the Stone House."

"And I invite every one of you boys and girls to come over early and accept reserved seats on our stone wall," said Dorothy, laughing.

"Hurray for Dorothy Dainty and the invitation. I'll be the first to arrive," cried Jack.

"Not much," said Antony, "for I'm nearer the Stone House than you are, and I'll beat you by being there a good half-hour before you're even in sight."

"Oh, ho! Hear him, everybody. Well, I'll get there first if I have to sit up all night to do it."

Another group were excitedly talking of the bit of news that had appeared in the morning edition of the *Merrivale Post.* It had stated that a new teacher of music was coming to the Merrivale schools, and that special training would be given those pupils who were to take part in a musical play to be given at the holidays.

A third group, made up of the larger boys were eagerly discussing the one thing that every one talked of—the disappearance of goods from the Merrivale stores.

"The thieves, whoever they are, are get-

ting bolder," said a tall boy who stood with his hands thrust deep in his pockets.

"They began with taking small things, and taking them once in a while. Now they're grabbing everything that they can lay their hands on, and taking them *all* the time."

"Why don't the police get them?" asked a small boy who stood near, and who had been listening to what the big boy had been saying.

"The police say they've watched day and night," the larger boy replied, "but they've not yet found any of the stolen goods, or caught any of the thieves. They say there must be a number of them, because one man couldn't begin to get away with the amount that disappears nearly every day."

A lad, much larger than the one who had first spoken, stood leaning against the fence, and he turned now, and looking toward an-

other boy who was standing near him, whispered something in response to which the boy grinned, and nodded.

The big boy moved nearer, and was about to confide something further, when the bell rang, and muttering: "Never mind now. I'll tell you after school," he filed in with the others of his class.

Saturday morning dawned bright and sunny, and all the little neighbors who were anticipating the circus parade, were early on their way toward the Stone House.

The gardener had spread some heavy carriage robes along on the wall, and Mrs. Dainty had given him some small rugs to lay on top of the robes, so that the children would have very comfortable seats.

The procession was as late as circus processions usually are.

"Do you remember one time when Mother had the wall covered just like this, and we waited so long for them to appear that we really began to think they weren't coming at all?" said Dorothy.

"Yes, and just as we were about ready to go up to the house, we heard the band, and there they were, just coming up the street," Nancy said.

"I hope they'll come along pretty soon," Flossie said, "because I 'most can't wait much longer."

"I guess we'll be ready to go to *bed* before they arrive this time," grumbled Reginald's big brother. "I brought Carlo along, and even he is beginning to think he has waited about as long as he cares to."

Little Fluff nestled closer in Dorothy's arms, glancing often toward the big St. Bernard as he lay on the ground at his master's

feet. Carlo did not so much as look toward Fluff. Doubtless he thought so tiny a dog unworthy of notice.

The boys and girls were just beginning to think that they could not sit on the wall much longer.

"I don't believe the old procession is going to '*process*'!" declared Jack.

The big dog, Carlo, got up and just as he was enjoying a luxurious "stretch," there came a fanfare of trumpets, the deep bass of a big drum, and there, winding around the bend of the road was the much-longed-for parade, at which Carlo gazed for a moment, and then he threw up his head and howled.

"Stop it!" cried Reginald.

"You can't stop him, once he gets started, so you might as well let him keep on. Maybe he thinks he's helping with the music."

It was much like the average circus par-

ade, but the little audience upon the wall thought it fine, while Carlo continued to voice his disapproval.

Little Fluff seemed greatly interested, glancing often at the howling giant St. Bernard, as if he thought such conduct outrageous.

A clown riding a small donkey looked a bit nervous when Carlo lunged toward him.

The boys dragged him back.

"I don't like your dog!" shouted the clown.

"That's lucky!" cried Reginald, "we wouldn't sell him to you for any price."

"Wouldn't take him as a gift," the clown said, with a laugh.

"Bet you wouldn't!" yelled Jack, "we're not making presents to-day."

There were camels, elephants, tiny Shetland ponies, a great number of handsome

horses, their riders clad in spangled velvet.

Next came a single horse and rider, the horse, a dainty creature, prancing as if she knew her beauty, her saddle, and bridle, milk-white like herself. The girl rider, a bright, dark-eyed girl, peeped out from under her huge, white-plumed hat, at the row of eager children upon the wall.

Dorothy, Nancy and Mollie had slipped from the wall, and were much nearer the edge of the sidewalk than Mrs. Dainty would have wished. The girl rode gracefully, her white boot peeping from beneath her fine silken skirts.

"I'd like to ride like that," said Dorothy, catching her breath.

The girl leaned from the saddle, and quick as a flash, she whispered, "And I'd give all the world to be you."

She passed on, but not before Dorothy had

heard her give a sigh, and long after the parade had passed, Dorothy wondered just why the girl rider had spoken thus.

The cages of wild animals had delighted the boys.

They had thought it exciting to see the leopards in one cage, the tigers in another, pacing back and forth, their tails lashing, their eyes glaring, and in yet another cage, a tawny old lion with huge shaggy mane, lying on the floor of his cage as if he were bored with the whole proceeding. There was a zebra with a scarlet bridle, led by a groom in the costume of a Turk. There were men and women wearing costumes of many nations, but Jack Tiverton declared that the faces of the greater number looked decidedly unlike the nation they were representing.

"Did you see the Indian chief with his war-bonnet of eagle feathers?" said Mollie.

"I was glad when he had passed us, for he looked awfully ugly with all that warpaint."

"He was no Indian," declared Jack, "no Indian at all!"

"Why Jack Tiverton!" cried Mollie, "he certainly *was* an Indian."

"If that rigged-up Indian had spoken a word, you'd have heard a good Irish brogue," said Jack. "And those bold Spanish Cavaliers I'm pretty sure were Italians."

"Oh, Jack," said Flossie, "don't tell us any more things like that. We'd rather think they were just what their *customers* represented." The long word was almost too much for little Flossie.

"It's just as Flossie says," Nancy said. "We enjoyed looking at them and we'd rather think the Spaniards were Spaniards, and the Indians just regular Indians."

"Well, then I needn't bother to tell you

about that handsome girl that rode the white horse, and wore a white habit, and a big white plumed hat. You'd not care about listening to her story."

"Oh, tell us, Jack," cried Dorothy. "What do you know about her? The other riders were coarse-looking, but she was lovely."

"Yes, tell us, Jack. Tell us!" Nancy urged, and the others clamored quite as eagerly.

Jack sat down on the wall, and the others crowded around him, none more eager than Dorothy whose blue eyes were wide with excitement, as she waited for Jack to begin.

"Of course I don't know if the story is true, but one of the men that travels with the circus told one of the policemen that she ran away from home, and joined the circus when she was a girl of about fifteen. She was a

farmer's pretty daughter, and she was quite tall, so when she told the manager that she was eighteen he believed her, and thought if she was eighteen she had a right to do as she chose. She didn't enjoy it as well as she expected to. The work was hard, and she was homesick, but she hated to say so.

"Well, one year, the circus went to a town next to the one where she had always lived, and she couldn't keep away from the old home, she so longed to see her father and mother.

"Well, before she reached the house, she met an old neighbor, and the woman told Nina, that's the girl's name, that when she ran away, she really broke her mother's heart, and the mother didn't live long after the girl went. Then her father had no one left to work for, or to care for him, and he had never been very strong, so the neighbors

weren't much surprised when they found that he was gone.

"He says Nina came back to the circus. There seemed nothing else to do, but she is different now. She doesn't often smile, and she doesn't talk much.

"She used to be full of fun, laughing and chatting all the time, but now she's silent, and her eyes are sad.

"Dorothy, I've made you cry," said Jack, "and I surely didn't mean to do that."

"No, not really crying," Dorothy said, brushing away a tear, "but the story would nake any one feel sorry for the girl, although I don't see how she could run away and leave them."

"That's the part I can't understand," Nancy said, "for surely she knew that she was grieving them. How *could* she do it?"

"Serves her right," said Reginald.

Dorothy looked at him.

"I know it does," she said, "but I can't help being sorry for her."

"I know just why she feels so sad," little Flossie said. "It's 'cause what she's done, can't *ever* be *fixed.* If her father and mother were living, she could go back to them, but they're gone, and she can't ever *fix* it."

"That's just it, Flossie," Reginald said.

The little group was sobered by the story, but of them all, Dorothy felt it most keenly. The lovely girl had bent low to speak to her, and Dorothy now knew just what her whispered words had meant.

Nina had wished that she could once more be a little girl at home with her father and mother.

The girl rider doubtless thought that, if she could be a little girl again, she would never grieve them.

"I guess every one of us ought to try not to hurt or grieve any one, and then we won't have to feel sorry," said Nancy, and Dorothy's arm around her tightened.

"That's just as true as true can be," she said.

Dorothy did not tell of the rider's whispered words. She had a feeling that those words were said in confidence, and it did not seem quite right to repeat them.

It had happened that at the moment that the girl had leaned from the saddle, Dorothy's playmates had been so busy looking at other figures, that they had not seen the little act.

At lunch Dorothy and Nancy talked of the wonderful things that they had seen in the

circus parade, and Nancy told the story of the lovely girl rider.

Aunt Charlotte and Mrs. Dainty listened to their amusing comments regarding the animals, and their riders, but both noticed that the two little girls were very quiet after Nancy had told of the runaway girl.

"We saw the procession from the windows of the living-room, and being on the second floor, we had a fine view," Mrs. Dainty said.

The afternoon was well spent at Flossie's house, where Nancy and Dorothy, Flossie and Mollie talked of little else but the parade.

Flossie was just saying that she liked the ponies best, when little Elfin came out and joined them on the lawn.

"Want to know which am'ils I liked best?" she asked, "'cause anyway I'll tell you. I liked the hump-backed horses best."

"Oh, you funny baby!" cried Nancy. "Those weren't horses at all, dear, those were camels."

"Well, I don't care, I liked them best," Elfin said.

It was at twilight that Dorothy told of the girl's whispered words. Aunt Charlotte and Nancy were in the garden, and Dorothy sat on the broad upper step of the porch beside her mother.

"The boys say it serves her right that she is unhappy now," Dorothy finished, "but I am sorry for her."

"That is right," Mrs. Dainty said. "The girl is, of course, at fault but I believe any one with a kind heart would pity her."

"Mother," Dorothy whispered, clinging closer, "I'll *never* grieve you nor Father."

"I know it, darling," Mrs. Dainty whispered softly.

CHAPTER VI

THE SECRET CAVE

JACK was tramping through the wood one afternoon, on his way to keep his appointment with Antony.

They were to meet at the far edge of the strip of woodland, and then cross the brook on the tiny footbridge, when they would find themselves on the football field, ready to practice with the other fellows who had promised to be there.

Antony had become a prime favorite, for he was frank and honest, an altogether manly boy. He and Jack were firm friends, and they shared all their pleasures. Now, as Antony waited for Jack at the edge of the

wood, his hands thrust deep in his pockets, he was thinking what a lucky fellow he was to have found so many good friends. Surely the boys and girls of the lovely town of Merrivale were rare specimens, and he wondered if in any other town it would be possible for him to have found so many delightful people.

It never entered his mind that there was a reason for much of the kindness that had been shown him.

So honest, and kindly had he been, so full of fun, so wholly good-tempered, that the boys and girls were eager to know him, and when they began to feel really acquainted with him, they found him to be even more agreeable than they had thought, and they valued his friendship.

"I'm a lucky fellow!" he said softly, "a *very* lucky fellow."

Antony had gone over to the field a bit earlier, while Jack had finished a little task on which he had been helping his father, and then set out to keep his appointment with Antony and the other boys.

How still it was in the heart of the woods!

His footsteps made little sound save when he stepped upon a dry twig that cracked beneath his stout shoe.

"It is still on the beach, only the waves lapping on the sand to break the silence," he said under his breath as if fearing that some one might hear, "and here in the woods it is still until a twig cracks, or a wee catbird cries, and the shore, and the woods are—" he stopped.

What had he heard?

Voices, surely, but where?

Jack turned about, but no one was following him, no one was near.

He knew that he was not mistaken. Voices he had heard, and there had been something in their tones that spoke of slyness, so that while he had not caught a single word, he knew that the owners of those voices were planning something, probably mischief of some sort. The little path on which he stood had been level thus far, but now it began to rise, and Jack, stepping with care, avoiding any dry twigs, or loose stones that might cause him to take a hasty step, crept softly forward until he found himself on the top of a ledge, and there he paused, listening intently.

For a time there was no sound of voices, and then, when he had about decided to go on, the murmur of low-voiced, cautious talking made itself heard again. Jack dropped to the ground.

He believed that somewhere down below

the ledge, mischief was being planned.

He crawled to the edge of the ledge and peered over.

There was no one in sight, but the murmur of voices could now be plainly heard.

Where were they?

Jack grasped the trunk of a shrub that overhung the ledge, and pulled himself farther forward, the foliage making a complete screen behind which he could listen. Ah, now he understood.

Directly below where he lay was a natural cave whose opening was concealed by high bushes and underbrush, and from that cave came the sounds that he had been hearing.

Now, the voices sounded nearer. Were they coming out of the cave? The boy on the top of the ledge lay waiting, listening.

After a few moments, he saw a hulking figure crawl from the cave on his hands and

knees, then one by one they came forth, until five of them stood at the entrance.

The big boy, who appeared to be the leader of the ill-looking gang, looked cautiously around, and then addressed his mates:

"I tell you what 'tis, fellers, we've made a ev'lastin' big haul, an' we must get even more. Each one of us must get hold of a good lot of stuff, stack it here in this cave, where no one would ever think of lookin', an' later when we think it's safe to sell it, we'll divide the money we git fer it.

"Say! We're some pirates, eh? An' I'm yer chief, an' as yer chief, I'll *perteck* yer, whatever happens.

"Now, help me fix up, an' we'll 'get hence,' like the Pirate says in the book I was a-readin' ter yer."

They set to work, and soon had kicked such a mass of twigs and dry leaves across the

HE CRAWLED TO THE EDGE OF THE LEDGE AND PEERED OVER.
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narrow entrance that one could hardly believe that any one had entered the little cavern, which was really a cleft between the two great masses of rock that, leaning together at the top, formed a ledge whose crest was covered with thick, cushionlike moss.

Jack lay very still until the rough-looking gang had slouched along the woodland path, on their way to the open fields that lay beyond, and had disappeared behind a clump of trees that he remembered were near the border of the woods. Then he crawled back from the edge of the ledge and plunging into a thicket of underbrush, tore his way through it and came out on a roadway that he knew led up to the avenue, and the Stone House.

He was a fearless boy, and his first thought had been to let the boastful leader of the "Pirates" know that he had learned all

about their secret cave, and that stolen goods were hidden there. Then, like a flash, he had realized that these boys would clear all of their loot from the cave so that by the time that he could summon help, and return to show the way to the cave, there would not be a scrap left to prove his story true.

Before he reached the Stone House, he saw a man strolling toward him.

"Well, well, Jack! Where have you been? Your clothes look as if you had been roughly handled."

It was Uncle Harry, laughing as he spoke, but as he came nearer he noticed Jack's face, and knew that no ordinary happening could make him look like that.

"Why, Jack, lad, what is it? he asked, laying a hand on his shoulder.

As quickly as possible, Jack told him all that he had seen and heard.

"Come with me," Uncle Harry said; "we must waste no time."

Jack's coat was torn, and his hair rumpled. His hands were scratched by briers, and he knew that his appearance could certainly be improved, but there was no time for "cleaning up," and without a word, he climbed into Uncle Harry's car, and in almost less than no time, they were at the police station. Uncle Harry pushed Jack before him as he entered.

"Here is a young man who has solved the great mystery where goods have gone, when they have disappeared from our stores.

"Jack, tell the Sergeant what you saw, what you heard, and all about it."

Briefly Jack told of strolling through the woods, of hearing voices, of listening intently until he could locate the sounds, and then of all that he had heard while he lay on

top of the ledge, hidden by underbrush.

"Well, young chap, you've done a good job," said the big man, "and you'll surely get the prize."

"Has a prize been offered?" Jack asked, in an odd voice.

"Why yes, lad. There are ten stores here that have been losing goods for some time, and the ten proprietors have each offered ten dollars reward to any one who could locate the goods and name the thieves."

"Do you know who they were?" Uncle Harry asked.

"Why, yes," Jack said. "The boy who called himself the 'chief,' was a fellow named Davitt, Mike Davitt, and with him were Jan Olsen, Ned Carlin, and a little fellow that the others called 'Shorty,' and another that the little chap called 'Horny.'"

"That's the gang that we've been watch-

ing," said the big man, "and I'll see that you get the prize."

"I don't want a prize, sir," Jack said, quietly.

"Don't want the money, lad? For the land's sake, why not? Can't you think of any way to use it?" the astonished Sergeant asked.

"But I've no right to it," objected Jack. "It isn't as if I'd been out scouring the town to find those chaps. Just *happened to* find them. I didn't go a step out of my way. I missed the ball game, that's all."

"But you ran through a thicket at top speed to tell me about it," said Uncle Harry, "and look at your suit. You've torn it to tatters."

Jack looked down at his torn coat and trousers, and then he laughed.

"I'll certainly need a new suit," he said,

"but that won't cost as much as the prize they offer."

"You'll accept the prize, Jack," Uncle Harry said firmly.

Jack looked up at the strong, handsome face, and then after a moment he said:

"Very well, sir. I suppose you know best, but it seems odd to take it."

"It's 'a 'nough sight *odder* not ter take it," said the Sergeant, and Jack made no reply. On the way home Uncle Harry watched the boy for a time, then he said:

"Jack, was there any other reason than the one you gave, that made you unwilling to accept the prize?"

Jack looked down for a second, then up into the kindly eyes, and answered frankly:

"There was no other reason. I'd like the money. What boy wouldn't like to have it? But I felt that I hadn't earned it."

"Jack, for weeks the police of the town have been diligently searching for the thieves, and their efforts have availed nothing. The storekeepers were tired of waiting, while their goods were constantly disappearing, and in desperation, offered the reward."

Jack drew a long breath.

"Then the money is to be mine," he said softly. "I'll let Father keep it for me, until I decide what to spend it for. There's several ways to use it," he concluded with a laugh.

"I am glad the reward came to you," Uncle Harry said.

"Why?" Jack questioned.

"Because you're the boy that will use it sensibly. You'll take your time about deciding what to do with it, and so, when you spend it, you'll get your money's worth. The average boy would not wish any one to

keep it for him. He could not keep it for himself, because it would burn his fingers until it was all spent, and then, as likely as not, he would not care for what he had purchased."

"I'd not act like that with one dollar, much less with a hundred! With what money I have, I think twice before I spend it."

"That's right," Uncle Harry said. "You'll never be the sort of chap that Benjamin Franklin called 'penny wise, and pound foolish.' "

In saying that, he well described the sort of person who would be very careful as to how he spent one dollar, and the next day spend a hundred so foolishly that he really couldn't tell where it had gone.

"I'll never do that," Jack said quietly, and Uncle Harry, looking down at his dark, seri-

ous face, felt that the boy who spoke thus, would become a good, as well as a shrewd man. Jack hastened home, to tell the "news" to his father.

Later, Antony came up the avenue, and he and Uncle Harry talked of the prize and Jack. Flossie ran out to meet them.

"Hello! Hello!" she cried, and then she stopped directly in Antony's path.

"Oh, why do you look so sober?" she asked. "They haven't sent for you to come home, have they? Antony tell me, quick, do!"

Elfin, who had followed Flossie, added a cry that was a command.

"You s'a'n't go Ant'ny, for I won't let you!"

Antony would not let them see the moisture in his eyes, so he hastily caught little Elfin, holding her fast, while he assured her

that he was not going home for a long time.

"I know that's true, 'cause Ant'ny said it," she cried, clapping her hands, and laughing with delight.

"That's a big compliment," Antony said.

"What's a compliment?" Elfin asked.

"Oh, I don't know how to answer that," Antony said, laughing as he set her free.

"Wee little daughter, your questions are often hard to answer," Uncle Harry said, and Elfin laughed.

As they were all smiling, the long word must have had a pleasant meaning, and she was content.

In a few days the young rascals who had been stealing from the stores, were caught, and sent away to reform school.

At first they denied all knowledge of the thefts, but after continued questioning they admitted their guilt.

It was learned that the boys came from families where crime was not unknown, and where it was thought "smart" rather than dishonest, to obtain money by *any* means, however doubtful.

They would remain at reform school, where for a few years, they would be under teachers who would strive to make them honest and upright.

Antony and Jack were of the same age, but Antony was so much taller, and so strongly built, that he looked to be at least two years older than Jack. They were firm friends, and they had already pledged that nothing should ever break that friendship.

CHAPTER VII

THE MUSICAL PLAY

IF Antony was popular in the lively town, he was certainly more so when it became known that he, unaided, had discovered an incendiary, and marched him to the station.

The police, with all their vigilance, had been unable to capture him. The boys frankly praised him, while the girls looked upon him as a hero, a defender of the town's welfare.

"I wish they wouldn't make such a fuss about it!" declared Antony, one morning to Uncle Harry who had just come out of the house to join him.

"Oh, let them have all the fun they can

get out of it," Uncle Harry said, laughing. "They're enjoying it, so all you have to do is to let them."

It surely was not any single act of Antony's that made him a favorite with all. Rather, it was, that he could adapt himself to all. He was a good player on the ball team, yet he did not feel that he was too large to be a comrade for little Elfin, who loved him dearly.

He defended a little lad from a bigger boy, a bully, who was frightening one much smaller than himself. Antony severely punished the big boy, took the smaller boy home, and then returned to the house where, on the porch, he seated himself, and whittled a boat for little Elfin, and then helped her float it on the water of the fountain basin. She could, of course, float it without aid, but Antony knew that she had a habit of getting

over into the basin, soaking her sleeves, and sometimes the whole front of her dress, when she felt it necessary to give the wee boat a shove.

He sat close to the fountain basin, and kept one arm around the little girl.

"I'll help you sail the boat," he said, "but I won't let you get into the water."

"Won't *let?*" said Elfin.

"Won't *let,*" Antony said.

"Let only the boat get wet?" she asked laughing, and shaking her curly head.

"Only the boat get wet," he repeated.

"All 'ight!" said Elfin, "Who-body wants get wet?

"*No*body wants get wet," and she laughed when he held her fast.

There were five people in Merrivale who had no love for Antony, and they were the five young thieves.

True, Jack had reported them to the police, but the two boys were chums. Sent to reform school, they vowed vengeance on Antony and Jack as soon they were set free, and both boys laughed when they heard of the threat.

They were to remain for five years at the school. Jack and Antony said they would not worry for five years ahead.

Antony proved himself adaptable in more ways than one.

The new musical instructor who had come to the Merrivale schools, had busied himself in "trying" the voices, and he soon found that there was good material for the musical play that he proposed giving at the holidays.

There were enough good voices among the girls for the principal parts, and a large

number of fairly good voices to be used in chorus work.

Jack and Reginald were cast for fine parts, and several of their classmates for lesser parts, and there would also be a fine chorus.

A fine, strong voice would be needed for a hunter, and Uncle Harry agreed to sing that part as it would require an adult voice for the music.

"You haven't tried Antony's voice yet," Jack said, to which Antony hastily said:

"Why, Jack, I'm no singer."

The director had been told that Antony was a visitor and supposed that he was to remain in town but a short time.

"I'm to be here all the season, sir," Antony said, "but I've had no training for singing. I'm no singer, as I said before."

"I wish you could hear him when he's out

on the water in his boat, I'm sure you'd call his voice fine," insisted Jack.

Contrary to Antony's ideas, the instructor having tried his voice, pronounced it fine, and asked him to play the boldest solo part.

"I'll do my best," Antony said, quietly, "but, really, sir, I've never tried acting."

"Nevertheless, I believe you will do well, under my training," was the prompt response.

The rehearsals soon began, for although it was early in the season, many rehearsals and much practising would be necessary if the play were to be creditably given.

Antony was really cast for two parts, for in the first act he appeared as a sailor, a part, the costume and manner of which came quite naturally to him, but in the remainder he was to impersonate an ogre, and he felt that he would need a deal of coaching for that.

Lessons were not neglected, but spare time was devoted to making the little play a success.

Leander Correyville had stoutly refused to take part in the play.

"The instructor said you had a good voice," Arabella said, one afternoon.

"Well, what if I have?" Leander said, "I know enough to know that I'm lean, and gawky, and I'm not going onto any stage to hear the audience laugh at me."

"You could sing in the chorus, and maybe no one would notice how gawky you are," Arabella said.

"Not notice!" cried Leander, "I'd be the first thing they'd see. No dramatics for me, please."

"Well, I haven't any voice," said Arabella, "so no one of this family will be in it."

"Well, that's a fine thing for the success of the play. If we two aren't in it, we surely can't spoil it, so we'll enjoy ourselves in the audience, and have none of the work."

"Well, I know one thing," said Arabella, "and that is that Patricia Levine won't be in the play, because she isn't a pupil at the school."

"It's a fine thing she isn't," said Leander, "for while she isn't gawky, she's precious silly, and that's enough worse."

"Why, Leander, she thinks she can act," said Arabella, "and she—"

"I know that she thinks that she can act, but what does that prove?"

"I was trying to tell you that she says Madam Gazooks says she's a wonder."

"Good gracious, Arabella!" cried Leander, peering at her over his spectacles, "do you believe all that Patricia tells you? And

do you think very well of the Madam?"

"I don't know what to think of her. I don't even know her."

"Well, there's one thing you do know, and that is that while she advertises to make any one beautiful, she certainly is far from beautiful herself," Leander replied, in disgust.

"Perhaps she hasn't tried to make a beauty of herself," Arabella said slowly, peeping over her own spectacles at her cousin.

They were a funny sight as they stood glaring at each other over their goggles.

"If she *could* make herself lovely, it would be the very best advertisement she could have," Leander said, and Arabella, after a second, drawled:

"I guess you're right, Leander."

The next week something happened that surprised every one.

Patricia begged permission to return to school. Every one wondered why. She had been so long absent that it was impossible for her to be placed in the class of which she had been a member. The pupils of that class had advanced, so if she were to return, she would have to be content with joining the next grade below, and the pupils were much younger than herself.

She gave the boys and girls who knew her another surprise. She joined the lower grade without showing a bit of displeasure, and seemed content, for a few days, and then she began to appear restless.

"What makes Patricia so fidgety?" whispered a small boy, to a girl in the next seat, to which the girl responded, "I don't know. Don't bother me."

They were soon to know, however, for when the musical instructor arrived on

Thursday, without asking permission to speak to him, she rushed from her seat, and snatching at his sleeve she cried:

"Oh, professor, you really *must* try my voice, because I've been trained for singing in opera, and I can sing the leading part, and Madam Gazooks says my singing is different from anything she has ever heard."

For a moment he stared at her in amazement, so bold was she.

"You wish to sing for me?" he asked. He was beginning to feel amused.

"Oh, yes, yes!" she cried. "I can't wait till after school to sing for you."

"Very well, come and stand beside me," he said, as he seated himself at the piano, and played a few chords, and in a kindly voice asked: "What will you sing?"

"I'd like to sing an old song that I've been singing this week. I've heard it sung. I

know it isn't new, but it's fashionable to sing old songs, so I'll sing that."

The man smiled, and began to play the accompaniment.

"Oh, many a time I am sad at heart,
And I haven't a word to say,
And I keep from the lassies and lads apart
In the meadows a-making hay."

So runs the first verse of the old song, but Patricia had never seen the song, and sang it as it had sounded to her, regardless of the fact that the words made no sense.

Patricia threw back her head, and with comical attempts at trills and flourishes she sang:

"Oh many a line I am mad at heart,
And I haven't a bird that's gay,
And I heap the masses and pads, and start
For the bellows awaking day."

The professor played the accompaniment and did his best not to show mirth, but his

eyes were twinkling, and his cheeks flushed with his effort to control a wild desire to laugh. The pupils did not try, and Patricia turned a scornful face toward them, and sneered at their wild laughter.

"People who can't do things always laugh at those who can," she said under her breath.

"I've nothing else that I've had time to practise, that I could sing for you," she said.

"I don't think I could bear another solo like that," thought the professor, but aloud he said:

"That will do."

"Can I have a fine part in the play?" she asked, looking up at him.

"The parts are already assigned," he said, "and the rehearsals are in progress."

"Then why did you try my voice?"

snapped Patricia, her anger flashing from her small, bright black eyes. "Well, thank goodness, I don't have to go to school," she said, adding as she looked up at the professor's face:

"I didn't care about being in your old play, anyway. I only came to have my voice tried, and to take part in the thing, just to help it along. It was no treat for me to sing and act for nothing, for *I'm* a *professional.*"

The teacher had left the room while the professor was "trying" Patricia's voice, and she was returning when she saw a child with several books under her arm, running at top speed along the hall toward the door.

"Wait until you are dismissed!" she called after the flying figure, and then, recognizing her, she called again:

"Patricia! Patricia Levine!"

Patricia heard, but she chose not to reply.

She had no idea of obeying. She had joined the school for but one reason—to be given a prominent part in the play. She did not know what the professor had thought of her voice, she did not dream that the words, as she had sung them, were idiotic.

The one thing that she did know was that the cast for the play had been made up without her.

Once out of sight of the school, she stopped running, and walked slowly toward home.

As she reached the corner of the street, and turned toward the house, she saw "Chub" sitting astride the gate, and swinging at a rate that threatened to wrench the gate from its hinges.

"Yer dogth wath dirty," said Chub, "tho I put them to thoak in the rain-water barrel, an' thoaked 'em good, too."

"Oh, you horrid boy, they're drowned!

My Algernon and Lionel!" shrieked Patricia, racing toward the barrel.

"They ain't drownded, thilly! I thoaked 'em, an' pulled 'em out again, an' they don't look any cleaner. They're juth ath dirty ath before."

"You let my dogs alone, you naughty boy. You've no right to torment them."

"I didn't torment 'em, I thoaked 'em, I tell you, an' nexth time I'll thoak 'em all night, an' I'll put thoap in the water."

"You'd better use the soap for yourself, you dirty little imp," said Patricia.

"No uthe for thoap," sang Chub, as he swung out on the old gate, "I liketh to be dirty, an' I been dirty tho long I'd feel queer to be clean. Dirt ith all right for boyth but not for dogth."

The two pups, wet and wriggling with a welcome for Patricia, raced out from the

house, shaking drops from their flapping ears, while their lashing tails swished against her legs.

Algernon danced wildly around her, while Lionel promptly ran between her feet, causing her to pitch forward upon the rickety steps, her hands and knees stinging with the sharp fall.

"Well, for massy sakes! Where did you come from?" cried her aunt, as she appeared in the doorway, just in time to see Patricia upon her knees on the lower step.

"From school, of course!" Patricia said crossly.

"Ye've been home long 'nough to get them two pups drippin' wet, an' then set 'em loose in my kitchen, when I'd just got it cleaned up. Ef that's your idea of fun, Patricia, I mus' say our idees is some different."

"I didn't do that," screamed Patricia.

"Chub is bragging that he 'thoaked' them, and they just tripped me up. Ugh! I got splinters in my hands from that rough step."

"Well, if ye didn't wet them pups, ye *didn't,* that's all," her aunt remarked wisely, "but tell me, Patricia, what kind of a part hev they give ye, in the play? Well, ye don't look exactly gay. Ain't it a good part?"

"I was too late in having my voice tried," Patricia said, "and all the parts are given out. I don't care. I don't have to keep going to rehearsals."

"Well, I couldn't imagine *any* kind of show ye wouldn't be wild ter get inter if it give ye a chance ter 'show off.' "

"Well, I did think I'd like to, and I went and joined the school just purpose to get a part in the play, but it has just come to me that all the weeks they're rehearsing for the

play, I'd have to keep going to school, and I'd not like that.

"I've brought my books home, and I'll get my fun by going to the performance, when they give it, and seeing how horridly they all sing their parts."

"There might be a few that *could* sing," her aunt ventured, smiling.

"Well, I guess not!" cried Patricia, angrily. "As if I hadn't heard every one of them boys and girls trying to sing, and a fine mess they'll make of it. Well, I shall go just for the chance to poke fun at them, and laugh at them. My! Won't I laugh?"

"I don't know much 'bout fine manners," her aunt said, "but I shouldn't say 'twould look very nice for you to go there just ter set an' laugh. They might think ye dis'greeable, Patricia."

"I don't care the least teenty bit what

they think," Patricia declared, and she told the truth.

If Patricia could have looked in at the rehearsal, and seen the happy faces of the boys and girls who were to take part, she would have known that the laughter of one silly, jealous child could not mar their pleasure.

When Dorothy and Nancy reached home, Dorothy put a red letter on another place on her calendar.

The first rehearsal promised success for the little play.

CHAPTER VIII

PATRICIA'S CAREER

ARABELLA sat on the low wall, waiting for Patricia. Arabella was never excited over anything, but as ten, fifteen, twenty minutes passed, she began to wonder if Patricia was ever to arrive.

"She told me to be prompt and I wonder if she thinks she's prompt keeping me waiting here," grumbled Arabella.

She began to kick the pebbles into little heaps, using her well-shod foot so roughly that Aunt Matilda would have been distracted if she had been there to see.

She had nearly decided to go home and leave Patricia, if she ever did arrive, to see how nice it was to wait for a friend who did

not keep an appointment. Then she changed her mind, and decided to walk a bit farther with the hope of meeting Patricia.

She became more impatient with every step she took.

"I'll turn 'round and go straight home!" she kept saying, while she continued to walk directly away from home, and in the direction in which she might meet Patricia, if Patricia were really coming.

"Must be much as an hour I've waited for her now. Seems 's if there was no sense in waiting any longer," she declared, and stopped to look ahead, shading her eyes with her hand.

For a few moments she stood thus, then, seeing no one approaching, she again sat down on the wall.

A moment later she rose slowly, and resumed her walk.

"I'll not wait much longer!" she said, yet she did not turn toward home. She dared not disappoint Patricia, for Patricia was the nearest like a chum that she had ever had. Arabella was not agreeable, and she was so slow, so sullen, that other little girls kept well away from her.

Patricia, unpleasant in quite a different way, was as little liked as was Arabella.

Patricia was full of silly vanity, and rarely talked of anything other than clothes that she possessed, or new dresses that she was about to buy. She constantly boasted of great things that she was to do, so the girls disliked her, and the boys laughed at her as if she were a joke.

Thus the two whom no one liked became friends, Patricia ruling, and Arabella usually obeying.

Arabella had now come to a place where

the road curved and thick shrubbery for a short space, hid the low wall.

She passed the clump of shrubs, and there on the wall sat Patricia.

Arabella actually gasped. Patricia giggled. Patricia was wearing a dress of some gauzy material, very much bespangled.

On her feet were satin slippers, their ribbons tied around her ankles, and on her head the largest hat that Arabella had ever seen.

Patricia could hardly see out from under its brim.

"Why, Patricia Levine!" cried Arabella, staring, yes, staring in amazement.

Patricia sat very still, so that Arabella might fully realize how wonderful was her costume.

"You don't look very glad to see me," Patricia cried. "You ought to be, and I began to think I wouldn't get here, but I'm

here now, and I couldn't help being late. Say! I've loads to tell you. Guess what I'm going to do?"

Arabella was still sullen.

"How could I guess that?" she said, in a surly voice.

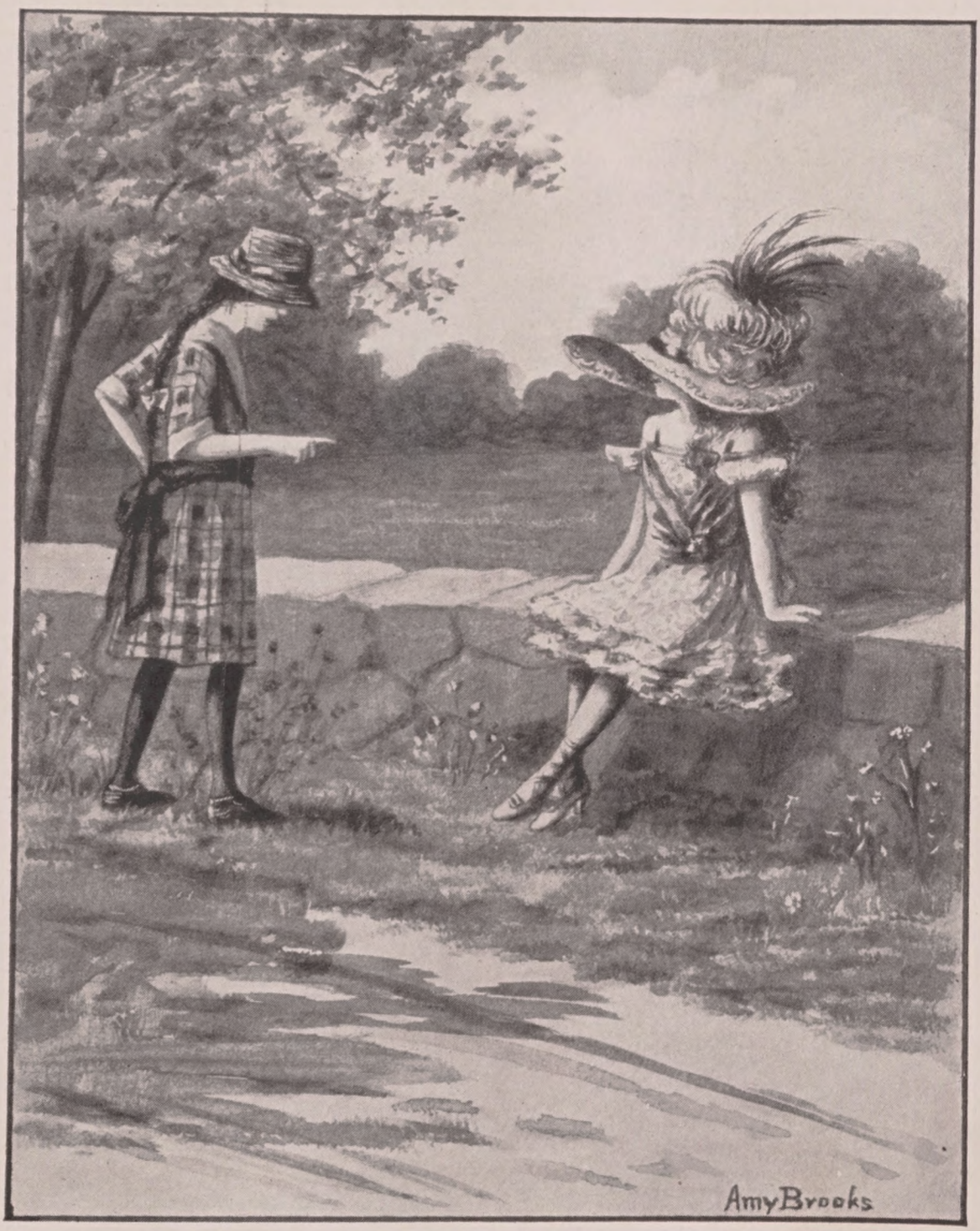
"Well, you couldn't," said Patricia, "so I'll tell you. Now just hold your breath for fear you lose it,—I'm going to be a *Movie Queen!*"

"Why, Patricia Levine! How silly. You couldn't," cried Arabella.

"Oh, is that so?" said Patricia.

"Well, that's what *you* think, but that's what Madam Gazooks has been training me for, and *she* says I'm just wonderful, and I guess she knows!"

"My goodness! Why, how funny you look in that rig!" said Arabella. "Why, that's a woman's hat!"



"WHY, HOW FUNNY YOU LOOK IN THAT RIG!" SAID ARABELLA.
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"It's *not* a woman's hat! It was made for me, and I guess you never saw anything like it."

"I guess I never did," Arabella said stoutly, "and I know I wouldn't want to."

"You're so old-fashioned you don't 'preciate it. You really don't see its beauty."

"Well, I'm sure I don't. Take it off Patricia before some one comes along and sees you."

"I'll not take it off, but I must hurry back to Madam Gazook's. I dressed there and came over here to let you see me. This costume wasn't meant for street wear."

"I should say not! Oh, did you hear that whistle? That's Jack Tiverton. You'd better hurry," said Arabella.

Patricia paused. Then both heard some one vault over the wall, and a moment after they saw Jack crossing the field, walking

swiftly away from them, and both drew long breaths of relief. He would have laughed uproariously.

"Now, Patricia," Arabella said, "You are only a little girl, and those people that are truly stars are grown-up ladies. You'd ought to know that Patricia," Arabella said.

"Well, that makes no difference," cried Patricia, "for Madam Gazooks says I'm to be a Movie Star right off, and on the billboards it's going to say:

" 'The Star wonder of the ages,' and I guess when you see that, you'll believe it!"

"Maybe I will—when I do see it," drawled Arabella.

For days Patricia had carried her belongings, one piece at a time, to the house in the square. Madam Gazooks had an oily tongue, and she had flattered the silly child

until she had gained complete control of her.

She had learned that Patricia had a good deal of spending money, and she wanted to obtain more of it than she was already getting.

She had also learned that Patricia was away from home, boarding with her aunt at Merrivale, and as she herself was rather in need of money, she decided that it would be a fine plan to have Patricia come to live with her, help her with the housework, pay her board, and pay even more money than she had been paying for her so-called "theatrical training."

The woman had no ability to train *any one* for *anything*. She was simply obtaining money, and was not at all particular as to how she obtained it.

Patricia did not risk taking a parcel with her when she went out, lest her aunt's sharp

eyes might see it, and ask her questions.

She surely thought of a queer way of carrying her things from one house to the other, and boasted of her cleverness to Arabella.

"If my aunt knew what I'm planning to do, she'd stop it, but I don't mean she shall know," she said, "and this is how I manage it. New things that I buy, I take right over to Madam Gazooks. Things that I already have I just wear over there."

"What *do* you mean?" Arabella asked.

"Oh it's easy enough," Patricia said, with a toss of her head.

"This morning when I went out I had one dress on over the other. I left one at Madam Gazooks, and wore the other home."

"But why don't you tell your aunt that you intend to go with Madam What's-her-name?" questioned Arabella.

"Well, what a question!" cried Patricia.

"I'd think you'd know better than to ask that."

"But your aunt has been pretty good to you, hasn't she?" Arabella said in a low voice. "She might feel bad if you went off and left her, just snea—"

"What's that you started to say?" Patrica asked sharply.

Arabella had meant to say "Just *sneaking* off," but did not quite dare. To Patricia's question she made no answer.

"Arabella, you just tell me what you meant to say!" cried Patricia.

Arabella looked straight into her angry eyes, and shut her lips tighter.

"*Won't* you answer?" said Patricia.

Arabella shook her head.

"Dummy!" shrilled Patricia, "I'll be glad when I'm off on my career, for I'm likely to meet some bright people, and oh, how they

will enjoy me! Madam Gazooks says I'll be the bright star of any company that I choose to join."

"Well," drawled Arabella, "I'll wish you good luck, but my cousin, Leander Correyville, said one time that it was hard to get into the 'Movies.'"

"It is for *most* people," Patricia said, grandly, "but Madam says I'm a natural-born genius, so I can do it easy 'nough."

"When do you expect to begin?" Arabella asked, to which Patricia replied:

"Oh, Madam attends to that."

"Well, I don't know if I'd care about being in the movies," drawled Arabella, "for my Aunt Matilda says those people work pretty hard, and beside she says she has her views 'bout movie folks."

"Oh, her *views!*" sneered Patricia, "I wonder you don't get tired of hearing your

Aunt Matilda's views. I'd not listen to them."

"You don't listen to any one now but Madam *Gas Hooks,*" said Arabella, "and I'm not so sure she is worth listening to."

"The idea!" cried Patricia, "I wonder if you know who she really is? Let me tell you she's a sister of a big man who *owns* a moving picture theater, and she's a very great beauty-maker, and she gets just *heaps* of money making homely folks beautiful so I guess she knows something!"

"Maybe she does," Arabella said, doubtfully, "but why don't she make herself better-looking. Seems to me she would if she knew how."

"Oh, she says she's so kind-hearted that she gives all her time to beautifying other folks, and just lets herself go," Patricia explained.

"Oh, is *that* it?" said Arabella, and Patricia wondered why she said it in such a queer voice.

"Well, I must run along," Patricia said, after a moment, "for I'm sure dear Madam Gazooks must be looking for me."

She rose from the wall, took a few mincing steps, the only ones she could take on her silly high heels, and Arabella stood watching her.

Then in a shrill voice she cried out: "Oh, Patricia! Jump over the wall, and run around behind the bushes."

"Why, what's the matter?" Patricia asked.

"There's ever so many boys coming, and they'll shriek if they see you in that rig."

"Rig! Do you call this el'gant costume a 'rig'?"

"Well, it certainly isn't a—well, a—a

street dress," faltered Arabella, "and, oh, look! The boys are running now. They'll be here in a minute, Patricia."

"Well, let them come," said Patricia, "who cares?"

"My senses!" whispered Arabella, but Patricia sat very still, her head held very high, and she certainly looked as if she were posing for her photograph.

As the boys came up, they stood still, staring at Patricia.

Patricia did not stir. She wanted them to have plenty of time to admire her.

Poor, silly little girl! She did not know how ridiculous a pose she had taken.

Jack Tiverton moved a few steps nearer, then, with his hands on his knees, went nearer, as if to learn what sort of person was perched upon the wall.

"Oh," he said, as he straightened up,

"Oh, so it is only Patricia. I thought it was one of those clothing-store dummies. Didn't you, Reginald?"

"No, I didn't think that," Reginald said slowly. "You see, I didn't quite know *what* it was."

Patricia bounced from the low wall, and turned to walk down the avenue.

"Of course you don't know what you're looking at. How could you know? Well, I'll tell you. You're looking at a girl who is soon to be a movie queen, and now I've told you that, I guess you feel a bit different. 'Tisn't every one who gets a chance to speak to a *real* Movie Star like what I'm going to be," and having said that she minced along the road, on her way to Madam, who would let her in at a rear door.

"Oh, ho! *That's* it, is it?" shouted Jack. "Send me some tickets for your first show."

"*Let* us know when you're getting ten thousand a week!" cried Reginald.

"Give me a seat in the front row, and I'll throw you a bushel of roses!" called Jack, his hands cupping his mouth.

"Send me a ticket, and I'll chuck a whole rosebush over the footlights."

"They don't have footlights for screen pictures, ninny!" screamed Patricia, and then she laughed.

"Oh, what do I care for their jokes?" Patricia said to herself. "A bushel of roses, indeed! Why, before they know it I'll be riding in a great, big gilded limousine, all dressed in velvet and furs, and bowing this side and that to the folks that will crowd the streets, just to see me pass!

"*Then,* I guess, those boys will think I am somebody. So will the girls, too," she added, a second later.

The big woman was not in sight when Patricia reached the rear of the house, but the door was ajar, and she entered, trying to make as little noise as possible. Madam had told Patricia not to tell any one about her plans, and Patricia knew that she had told quite a bit, and she also knew that if the woman did not wish her to talk of what she was intending to do, she surely would not approve of displaying her costume.

"I don't care," Patricia whispered, "I was just determined to let Arabella see it, and suppose I *did* let her see it? I don't believe she knows what it looked like. Oh, but Arabella is *so* slow!"

Patricia had intended to climb the narrow stairway that led to the little room where her belongings were stored, remove the fancy costume, put on her own dress, and street shoes, and then go home.

She had hung the spangled dress in the closet, removed her fancy slippers, and was slipping into her suit, when the sound of voices came up the stairway.

Patricia was very curious, and she never hesitated about listening, so she went softly out to the head of the stairs, and the first words that she heard made her hold her breath. There was no doubt about that voice. It was Mandy's voice speaking:

"Yes ma'm, that's my errand jest as I told it to ye! Patricia's aunt saw me goin' toward the Square, an' she asked me to stop here an' tell Patricia it's time fer her ter come home."

"Well, ye ain't got no chance ter tell her fer she ain't ter home. I see her come in, but I had a errand ter do at one of the stores, an' when I came back, she'd gone."

"All right," said Mandy, "but while I'm

here I'll ask ye a question. How much would it cost ter make me good-lookin'? Not han'some," she added hastily, "but jest sorter good-lookin'?"

"'Twould be a dif'cult job," the woman replied. "How much you got?"

"Two dollars!" said Mandy.

"Good land!" cried the woman, "that wouldn't be 'nough ter beautify the tip end of yer nose. Yer could give me the two dollars, and I could see how far 'twould go, if you want ter," the Madam hastened to add.

"Wal, I *don't* want ter," Mandy said, decidedly.

"Ef two dollars would do so little that yer couldn't see what it had done, I guess I'll keep the two dollars right in my little purse," and she marched out, whereat, Madam, angry that she had not been able to get hold of the money, closed the door after

her with a slam that shook the very walls.

Madam at once sat down to think, a thing that she seldom did.

She sat in her comfortable rocking-chair the greater part of the time, but she spent little of that time thinking. She considered it a waste of time to think, but just now she knew that she must think about leaving Merrivale, and she must surely set an early day for so doing. When she had first come to the town, curious people had noticed her sign, and paid good money to learn what the madam's business might be, and about how much beauty could be purchased for a few dollars, but now they had become more careful, and like Mandy, many who called asked numerous questions, and then went away, their money still in their pockets.

CHAPTER IX

THE SULTAN'S DAUGHTER

"MADAM GAZOOKS has left town," said Leander, as he dropped a parcel of schoolbooks on the table, and little old Aunt Matilda remarked that she was no loss to the town.

"But they say that she has taken Patricia with her," said Leander, and he laughed as he saw the effect of his words.

Arabella looked startled, while Aunt Matilda surely appeared greatly relieved.

"There's not much cause for any excitement," Leander said, "because Madam only left town two weeks ago, and Patricia is already back in Merrivale."

"Why, Leander Correyville, why would

Patricia come back? She was wild to go," Arabella said slowly.

"She certainly was wild when she went off with that woman. It seems we didn't even know her name. Her sign read, 'Madam Gazooks,' but Uncle Rob has just learned that her real name is 'O'Flaherty.' "

"How did Father find out?" Arabella asked, curiously.

"Well, she had been planning to go for some weeks, but had not said much about it to any one but Patricia, and she had told Patricia not to tell. She wanted Merrivale people to be sure to remember her, so she left the town owing money to all the store-keepers, and they're keeping her in mind. They have hired your father to *remind* her that those bills will have to be paid."

"How did he know where she went?" Arabella asked.

"He didn't know, but he soon found out, and he also learned that she had taken Patricia with her. Madam Gazooks, I mean O'Flaherty, had made the little simpleton believe that she would, at once, become a great movie star, but when they found her, Miss Patricia was washing dishes in a dark, dingy old kitchen, while the 'Madam' was sitting in the front room reading a novel. Patricia was to do housework, and take lessons of Madam for which she was paying a good price. Patricia was brought back to her aunt, and she was very willing to let it be known that she was disgusted with Madam.

"Once out of Merrivale, Madam's manner changed.

"She did not intend to do the housework, and she drove Patricia to do it.

"Madam no longer flattered and praised

her. She was cross, and surly, and once, on the train when questioned as to the time required to practise before making her first appearance in the movies, the woman turned around in her seat and faced Patricia.

"'For Mercy's sake, can't you think of anything to talk about but the stage? I'm tired, and don't you let me hear another word about the movies till I speak of it myself. You make me tired,' having said which, she lay back in her seat, and promptly went to sleep. Patricia begun to wonder if any of the woman's promises would be kept, and when she found that she was to be housework girl, she was angry enough.

"The woman did not care to have much housework done, but what little was done, would be done by Patricia."

"Well, Patricia isn't wondering much about her now," said Arabella.

"I rather think Patricia *knows* all she cares to know about her by this time," Leander said.

"I wondered why I hadn't seen Patricia," Arabella said.

Aunt Matilda had listened to all that Leander had been telling, and now she spoke.

"You needn't be in a hurry to hunt for Patricia Levine," she said, "for I don't think much of her. She's too silly for any sensible girl to enjoy."

"Am I what you call sensible, Aunt Matilda?" Arabella drawled.

"Well, yes—at times," was the curt reply.

The story of Patricia's runaway trip, with Madam Gazooks, and her speedy return went from one end of Merrivale to the other.

At the Stone House, Dorothy when she

heard of Patricia's safe return, painted another 'Red Letter' in her calendar.

The weeks had flown.

The holidays were now at hand, and with the holidays came the long-talked-of, long-rehearsed play, with its beautiful music, its costumes, scenery, and all that goes to make a play a success.

Dorothy, because her high soprano voice best fitted the music for that part, was to appear as Zuleika, the Sultan's daughter.

Nancy was to be Gulnare, a handsome dancing-girl, while Mollie, was Fatima, the friend and companion of the Sultan's lovely daughter. Flossie was a little page who ran about, carrying a tray of "goodies."

Jack Tiverton was Haroun, trying to win the Sultan's daughter.

Reginald was a bold young squire, possessed of a flighty heart.

There were other small parts, and a large chorus, and those who could not do much in the way of acting, were happy to be one of the chorus, and so be a part of the merry play.

There had been a heavy snowstorm, on the day before the opening night, but when the longed-for evening came, it was clear, and cold, and the stars were bright overhead. Merrivale was all ajingle with the music of sleighbells, as the sleighs sped over the roads toward the little theater.

A crowd waited at the door.

Walls and hedges were piled with snow, and the moonlight lay upon the open fields making them a dazzling white.

Inside the theater the audience waited none too patiently for the curtain to go up.

At last the musicians appeared, and took their places.

The overture was played with enthusiasm, the oriental music delighting every one. Up went the curtain. Then the music quickened, and grew faster, ever faster, until it had reached a presto movement, when it burst forth in a fanfare of trumpets, as four men carrying a palanquin crossed to the center of the stage, and paused, when Dorothy, as the Sultan's daughter, stepped out, and stepping forward to the footlights sang the opening solo.

"I am the Sultan's daughter,
Zuleika is my name,
Our palace grand and stately
Has long been known to fame."

There were two verses, and Dorothy received a wonderful encore, and willingly sang them again.

Following her Nancy, as Gulnare, the beautiful slave girl, ran on from the wings, the bangles on her wrists and ankles tinkling with every step.

The Sultan's daughter commanded her to dance.

"Dance for me, oh lovely slave girl! Dance for me, Gulnare, and let it be a new dance, a lively, flitting dance that shall amuse me."

Nancy bowed low before the lovely little Sultan's daughter, and then rising, she whirled upon her toes, her arms outstretched. Followed leaping figures, and dainty steps that were so rapid, and so difficult that many in the audience leaned forward in their seats, breathless with wonder at her skill.

Dorothy was as amazed as any who watched Nancy, for surely her Nancy was

doing new steps, wonderful steps and figures that she had never done at any of the rehearsals. Where had she learned them? When had she practiced them?

The lovely figures that Nancy was doing she had learned during the time that Bonfanti had been training her, and she determined to use them when the Sultan's daughter commanded her to do a dance that was new.

She enjoyed the look of surprise in Dorothy's eyes, and felt well repaid for the half-hours that she had stolen away to practise.

She had told Aunt Charlotte how she was planning to surprise Dorothy and Aunt Charlotte had suggested a small room in one of the towers, as a good place to practice, because it was a room that was seldom used, and so she would hardly be interrupted.

Nancy had interwoven these difficult steps,

so that her solo dance was really new to her friends.

Following Nancy's dance, came a fine duet by the Sultan's daughter, and Fatima, her chum.

Mollie, as Fatima, had just the voice for the part and it's alto tones blended well with Dorothy's sweet soprano.

Flossie, the little page, came running on with a tray of "goodies," and just as the two girls were eating "Turkish sweets," young Haroun strode in, followed by his retinue.

The little Sultan's daughter pretended fear, and clung to Fatima, but young Haroun soon calmed her fear, singing a song that tells the purpose of his presence in the Sultan's gardens.

"I am Haroun, the bold young Haroun,
The son of the Grand Vizier,

And I've won the Sultan's promise
That I might meet you here.
You, here in your lovely garden,
Zuleika, the beauty blest,
And until I have won your heart, dear,
My heart will never rest."

Zuleika looked up shyly at him, her hands tightly clasped.

Haroun drew his scimitar from his belt as he sang the next verse.

"My scimitar shall defend you,
My love shall you enfold,
My fond heart is thine, Zuleika,
Oh, tell me I'm not too bold."

Zuleika stepped toward him, singing:

"Only a brave heart could win me,
For a brave heart is such a boon,
But you are a stranger to me,
You are pleading too soon, too soon."

Haroun called his followers, and grasping his scimitar he strode off, vowing to do great deeds that should prove his bravery,

when he would return to boast his prowess to Zuleika and to learn if he had won her approval.

Reginald as the bold young squire, with the flighty heart, became greatly interested first in one little girl and then another, and they all laughed at him.

The little operetta was bright and winning. The children played their parts well, and when, at the end, the bold young Haroun returned, and won Zuleika, every one was well pleased.

Antony, first as a breezy sailor boy, and later as an ogre did full justice to each part. He was surely a rollicking sailor boy, and in the costume as an ogre he was so fierce that no one could believe that Antony, kind-hearted Antony, was really playing the part. He had surprised his friends with his ability

to act cleverly, but most of all had he surprised himself.

It was his first appearance, and he surely had played his parts well. He had often seen other boys and girls doing clever work in many entertainments at Foam Ridge, but he always felt that they were very greatly gifted, and often he had wished that he had possessed a bit of talent, never dreaming that he had much more than a "spark" of dramatic ability.

The little players were called before the curtain, and given great applause, then they vanished to change their oriental costumes for ordinary dress.

The "grown-ups" praised the efforts of the boys and girls, and many said that they had often been less cleverly entertained by companies of older actors.

The musical director had coached the children carefully, and the children had acted with spirit, and real enthusiasm. The tuneful little musical play had run smoothly; not a slip of any sort had marred the effect.

"Nancy, you've always danced wonderfully but you never did anything like your solo dance to-night," Dorothy said, when they entered the house, and stood before the blazing logs in the great fireplace in the hall.

"I never felt as I did to-night," Nancy said. "I felt as if I danced on air! It *seemed* as if I danced on air, and while I danced I felt so light, so bright, so happy, just as if,—as if,—oh, it was a strange thought!"

She paused, her eyes bright, and her cheeks burning.

"What was the thought, Nancy? Tell me, dear," Aunt Charlotte said, as she went

nearer the fireplace, and drew Nancy toward her.

"Oh, you know, you all know that my mother was a great dancer. Well, half-way through the dance I felt as if my mother were watching while I strove to do my best, and I felt that she approved because I was trying so hard to do it fine, fine,—finer than ever before."

She had been standing close in the clasp of Aunt Charlotte's arms, her head turned so that she looked eagerly toward the faces of the others, who were earnestly listening to what she was saying. And now she stretched her hands toward them, as she looked from one face to another, her eyes pleading as she said:

"I know you believe me, that what I've told you flitted through my mind while I danced, but tell me, *do* you think my mother

could have watched, could have been near me?"

There was a second of silence, and then Mrs. Dainty spoke, her voice very soft and low.

"That is something that no one, dear, could answer, but if the thought that she watches over you can keep you doing your best in all that you do, and helps you always to be the good girl that you are, then let the sweet thought comfort you."

"But what *made* me feel like that?" Nancy persisted.

"I could not say, but it may be that God sent that thought to help you," Mrs. Dainty said, her voice hardly above a whisper.

"And that, too, is a lovely thought," Aunt Charlotte said, and Dorothy, ran to Nancy, and threw her arms about her as she cried:

"I'll try to think that, too."

That night Nancy dreamed of dancing on rosy clouds of mist, bright butterflies trying to tempt her to chase them.

She seemed borne upon the breeze.

Only a week's vacation at the holidays was allowed, because the school had opened so late that the term had been a short one, and soon they were once more at their desks, and the weeks almost flying, as time always flies when one is busy.

The fall weather had lasted nearly up to the little week's vacation, and those who love coasting and sleighing did a deal of grumbling because of the mild weather.

Romeo, the pony had taken them for long drives over the roads, but it had been the pretty phaeton that they had enjoyed, instead of the sleigh, but one morning the wind shifted to the north, and it whistled around

the gables of the stone house, and set the fires roaring in the big fire-places.

"Isn't that a funny-looking sky?" said Dorothy. "Just look, Nancy! See 'way out there where the trees are just rocking in the wind. Do you believe we're to have a big snowstorm at last?"

Nancy peered out at the sky, and then said, "I never can tell what kind of weather we'll have. Let's ask Aunt Charlotte."

But Aunt Charlotte, as they peeped in at the door, was sitting at her desk, writing a letter.

"Let's not bother her," said Dorothy. "I'll ask John. He knows a lot about the weather."

"He *says* he does," Nancy said, laughing, as she followed Dorothy down the stairs.

"Oh, but he nearly always guesses right," said Dorothy, "and if it *is* a snowstorm com-

ing, we'll get a sleighride. John, oh, John!" she cried as she saw him going around the corner just as she opened the door. The old gardener touched his cap and hastened up the steps.

"Ah, now, Miss Dorothy, get in out'n the wind while I learn is it the house on fire, or has a new sthray kitten been taken in ter be fed on roast turkey an' crame."

"It isn't either of those things," Dorothy said, "and besides, that last cat I found, caught her first mouse this morning, so she's smart if she isn't a beautiful cat, and the cook says she's glad I found her."

"Arrah! An' we plase the cook we're lucky. Oi *dis*-plased her yisterday, an' not a piece av mince-poy did Oi git wid me lunch, niver a bit the soize av a postage-stomp," John said, with a twinkle in his eye.

"Oh, John! That was too bad. Well,

I'll tell her to give you two big pieces to-day to make up, and she *will,* John, if I tell her," Dorothy said, her blue eyes earnest as they looked out from beneath the bright curling hair.

"Ah, thot she will, ye little fairy!" cried John. "Sure if ye tould her ter walk on the ceiling loike a floy, she'd be afther thryin', though it wad be some job, an' her weighin' a little short av a ton."

"Now, John, you mustn't make fun of Mary. Now tell me, does that funny sky mean a snowstorm is coming?"

"Sure it does," John replied, "an' put out yer hand, an' aven now, ye will catch a wee flake or two."

CHAPTER X

BY THE FOUNTAIN

ALL day the snow fell, and all night the wind blew the swirling flakes so that when morning came the drifts were in most inconvenient places.

The marble figure of Diana wore a tall helmet of snow, while Venus, who stood near the fountain, was wearing a thick white mantle on her lovely shoulders.

The fountain held its share of snow and Dorothy said it looked like a big dish of ice-cream, about as much as one would think of offering to a giant.

How they laughed when they heard the whistle blowing to announce that there would be no school.

The signal seemed absurd, in view of the fact that no one could possibly reach the schoolhouse.

The high wall around the gardens at the Stone House was completely hidden, and a monster drift covered the lower portion of the stable doors, so that the grooms were obliged to do a good bit of shoveling before they could get in to care for the horses.

Already gangs of men with snow-plows were at work upon the roads and avenues, but it would be days before traveling on foot, or by vehicles of any sort would be possible.

"The young folks has been frettin' fer the lack av snow," John said, leaning on the handle of his shovel, to rest and regain his breath, "but they sure hov enough av it now, an' by the look o' thot sky, I think there's more a-comin'."

"Oh, have a heart!" cried the groom, "and wait until we've finished shoveling this load, before you predict another." John removed his cap, scratched his head as he stared up at the sky.

"Well, lad, Oi'd loike ter plase ye, but it's truthful Oi am, an' Oi believe we'll hov more snow then we've hod yet, an' I think we'll see it comin' afore the day's out."

"I say John! Don't tell me that again until we've got this bit of shoveling done."

"The new snowstorm will be here afore we git cleared up," John persisted, and sure enough, before they had cleared the driveway, light, feathery flakes were swirling through the air.

Antony Marx declared that he had never had so much fun. It was all so different from the winters at the shore.

He had seen the flakes falling into the sea,

the vessels with their rigging covered with ice and snow, and the snow, like a carpet upon the shore, but here at Merrivale, there were so many objects for it to cling to, that the snowstorm took on a new beauty for him. It looked like a fairy village.

"Let's go up to the Stone House, and help get the inmates out from seclusion," he said to Jack, who had waded over to see him.

"All right," agreed Jack, and armed with big snow-shovels, they set out.

The center of the town was cleared enough, so that on this, the day after the second storm, it was possible to get about on the main avenues. The side streets, and those on the outskirts of the town were still blocked.

The two boys found it harder traveling than they had dreamed. The plows had

reached the Barnet house, but had not nearly reached the Stone House.

As the boys neared the gateway they saw John and the grooms at work in the driveway, and shouted to them.

"Hello! Say! We'll dig on the outside while you dig on the inside, and see how soon we'll meet."

"It's glad we'll be av yer help, lads. I was jist wondherin' ef we'd be able ter open the great gates before the Fourt' av July."

How they laughed when they met, exactly in the center of the gateway! There was a huge drift over by the sun-dial, and an open place in front of the drift, from which the gale had blown nearly all of the snow.

"I say, Antony!" cried Jack, "Let's hollow that big pile of snow, so that it will make a fine snow house, and then call the girls out to see it."

"Fine," said Antony, and they worked with a will.

It would have taken a long time, and a lot of hard work to make a pile of snow as large as that, but it was an easy task to hollow out the pile that the wind had heaped there.

When it was ready for inspection, they looked toward the house, and there, at an upper window were Dorothy and Nancy already viewing their work. The boys beckoned, and the two pretty heads nodded.

"We've just been building a new house, ladies, and we'd like to show it to you," Jack said, when the two girls in heavy coats and tams appeared coming along the path that had just been cleared.

"It's a fine-looking house," said Dorothy. "What is its price?"

"Twelve thousand dollars if you buy it, or

a thousand a month if you hire it," Antony said, trying to look very business-like, while almost laughing.

"Isn't that a big price?" Dorothy questioned. "I see there's only one room."

"Oh, that's new style," said Jack. "You all sleep at a hotel at night, and come back to your house to eat, or dance."

"Is it a warm house?" Dorothy asked, laughing because she thought the boys could find no ready answer to that.

"If you and Nancy hire it, Nancy will keep her arms around you so you are *sure* to be warm, and Nancy is so fond of you that she won't realize that she is cold," Jack replied, to which Antony added:

"And long before summer time, the whole roof will be melted off, and then the sun will keep you warm."

"You are such smart agents that I think

I'll hire your house, but I didn't bring my money, so I'd have to run up to the house to get it," said Dorothy.

"Oh, we'd trust you," said Jack, grandly, "so we'll say that the house is yours to-day."

"We ought to give a lunch to celebrate the first day in our fine new house," Dorothy said, "but I think our goodies would freeze before we could eat them."

Just at that moment the groom came hurrying along the path.

"Miss Dorothy, I'm to tell you that lunch is served up at the house, and Mrs. Dainty wishes the lads to stay and have lunch with you. She says all that hard work must have made them hungry. She says not to mind about being dressed for lunch, but to come right up, just as you are."

"I was wondering why I was so hungry.

I'd no idea it was really one o'clock," Jack said.

The next day school opened once more, and every one was present, with two extra, the extra pupils being Arabella Correyville, and Tess Haughton, who had been away for some months. They were all glad to welcome Tess, for with all her faults, she was full of life, truly a merry playmate. Arabella was as blunt as usual. Strolling up to the teacher's desk, just before school opened, she said:

"Are you Miss Merling?"

"That is my name."

"Well, my Aunt Matilda sent me. She says she don't think much of their taste in choosing teachers, but this is the only school n this district, so she'll have to let me come."

"You doubtless could go away to private school," the amused teacher said.

"That's what I wanted to do, but she wouldn't let me, so here I am," drawled Arabella.

"And here you are!" thought the new teacher, who wondered if she would be trying.

Tess and Arabella had a disagreement the first day, and declared that they would not speak to each other. Miss Merling at first decided to check them, and then it seemed best to let them tire of sulking, and make up when they chose.

She proved to be a fine instructor, and the pupils became very fond of her, for while order and discipline were insisted upon, she controlled them so gently, yet so firmly, that even the most wilful pupil could not complain.

The weeks had flown, well filled with study

that was made interesting. Miss Merling knew how to make their work pleasing, and they had striven to excel.

Even the lazy ones had done more work under her care than they had ever been known to do before.

It seemed impossible that the spring vacation was near at hand, yet it was true.

There would be two whole weeks in which they could play!

"I do hope we'll have sunny days, I'd like every one of the days bright and warm, and, oh, so gay!" Dorothy said, "and we'll *make* them gay."

"We will, we surely will!" agreed Nancy, slipping her arm around Dorothy as they walked along the avenue toward home on Friday after school.

Sunny? There never was a fairer day than Monday, the first day of the spring va-

:ation, and Dorothy had thrown herself upon the grass, was calling Fluff, but Fluff was too busy to listen.

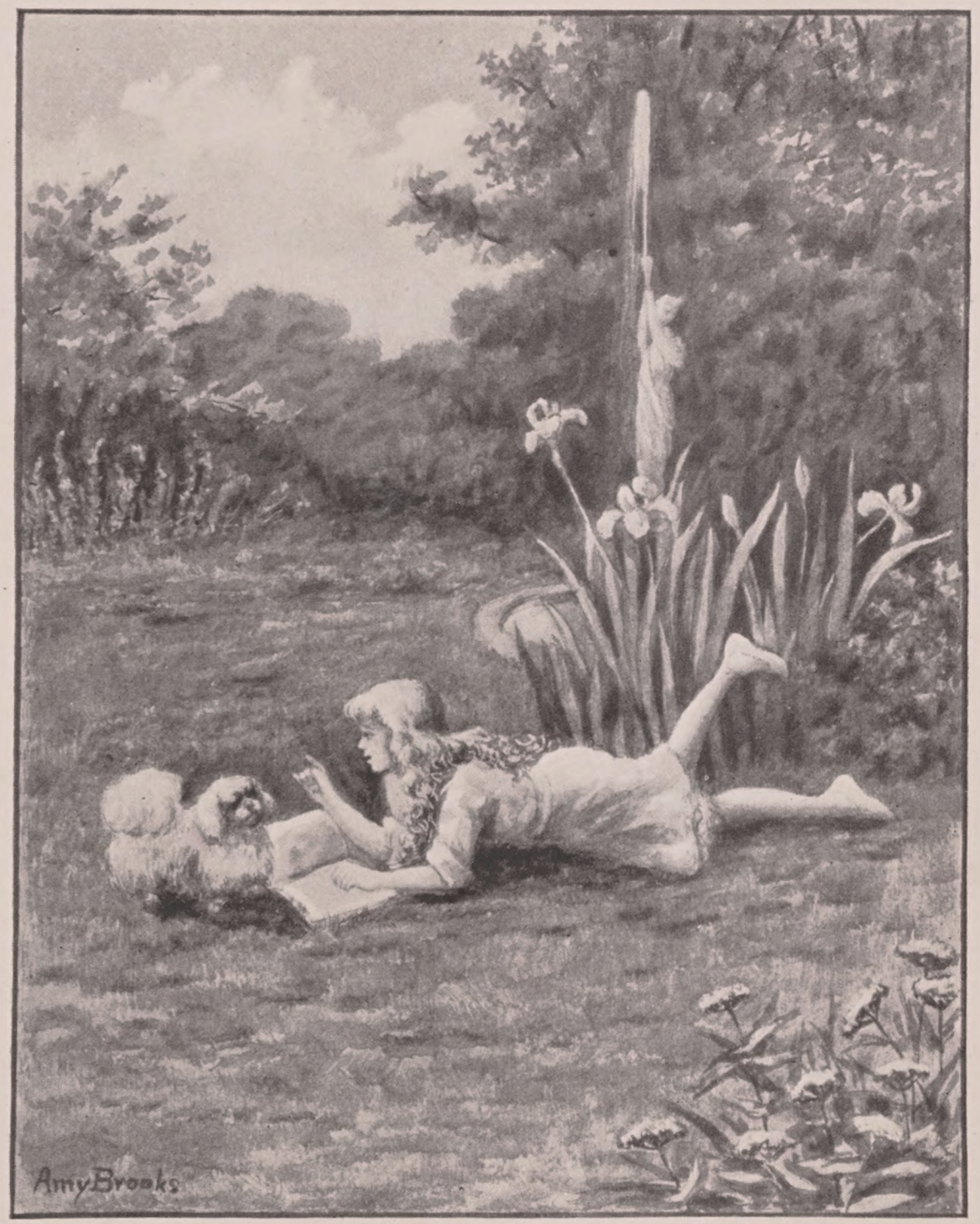
He was barking at the fountain, and greatly disgusted because it would not stop playing.

He would bounce toward it barking for it to stop, and then, retreat, barking louder because the spray had touched his nose.

His nose, indeed! And whose nose was as important as his? He really could not understand why the saucy dancing fountain paid no attention to the racket that he was making.

"Come here, Fluff, or must I come and get you?" cried Dorothy. As if he understood, he came trotting toward her, where she lay, her arms resting upon a book that lay open before her.

"Now, Fluff, listen to me," she said.



"YOU CAN'T STOP THAT FOUNTAIN IF YOU BARK ALL DAY."
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"You can't stop that fountain if you bark all day."

"Wow!" remarked Fluff, bouncing as if to give added force to what he had said.

"Oh, you funny little fellow! Do you mean to say that you think you *can* stop it?" Dorothy asked with a laugh, "because if you think that, you're mistaken, that's all."

She held up a forefinger, and the little dog looked at it as if he wondered what Dorothy's finger had to do with his noisy barking.

"Now Fluff, I'm going to tell you something, and you must be very polite and listen," Dorothy said.

The little dog tipped his head to one side, and pricked up one ear.

"Oh, Fluff, dear, you must have *both* ears up, or else you're only *half* listening."

Up went two silky ears.

"Oh, you darling Fluff!" cried Dorothy

drawing him to her, and holding him close.

He was a great pet, so he did not try to get free, but, instead snuggled closer.

"I do believe you know what I said to you," she said laying her cheek against his glossy head. Nancy ran toward them, around a winding path.

"He does," she cried, "for only a few minutes ago, I was dancing a few pretty steps of the dance that I did in the musical play, and he came running toward me.

" 'Up! Up!' I said, just as we say it when we want him to sit up, and he got right up on his hind legs.

" 'Now, come on!' I said, and he did truly take a few little short steps, then down on the grass again. Every time I called 'Up! Up!' he got up, and did two or three jerky little steps."

"Try him now, Nancy!" cried Dorothy,

"then we'll know if he did it just on purpose, or if he just happened to."

Nancy tried, but Fluff refused to "show off."

Instead, he stood watching her as she danced, and called him, his pink tongue hanging out, and his round eyes twinkling, just as if he knew very well what was expected of him, but didn't intend to do it.

Not once did he try to do the trick while she repeatedly cried, "Up! Up, Fluff!"

"Well, you little tease, you *needn't* do it!" she cried, at last out of patience, when as she danced away, he suddenly rose on his little hind legs, and took a few little trotting steps, looking for all the world as if he were trying to dance.

"Oh, you cunning thing!" cried Dorothy, petting and praising him, at which, as if he knew that he had really done something

smart, he leaped from her arms, and again tripped a few steps, at which he received more petting, much to his delight.

"I'll tell you what we'll do," Nancy said. "I'll give him a lesson every day, and you'll be with me, and every time he does it, you must hug him and tell him how fine he did his steps, and maybe he'll do it so well, we can let him take part in an entertainment some time."

"Wouldn't it be fun if you could do a lovely dance, and he could run on when your dance was nearly finished, and trot after you just as he did it out here in the grass?" Dorothy asked eagerly.

Nancy laughed.

"If he would *surely* do it, it would be fine, but he might take a notion to race after me, just barking," she said.

"Oh, yes," agreed Dorothy, "and he *might* do it *wonderfully!*"

"Well, Fluff, we'll try you," said Nancy.

"We know he couldn't learn any *real* steps," Nancy added, "but he'd look dear if he only trotted along on his hind legs. A little dog looks cunning doing anything."

"Fluff does," agreed Dorothy, "and he looks so straight in my eyes when I'm talking to him, that I wonder how much he really understands."

"He understands more thin ye think, Miss Dorothy. Oh, but he's a woise wan, thot he is," said John, who had came along just in time to hear what Dorothy had said. "Didn't Oi foind him shtandin' atop av a wee pile o' dirt an sich, thot Oi hod shcraped together, an' sez Oi, 'Phwat hov ye there, me foine little fellow, that ye hov ter shtand

guard over. Phwat is ut, now. Shpake out!' an' wid that he barks quite imperdent loike.

"'An' will yez *show* me?' sez Oi, an' thin wot does he do but make the dirt fly siven ways av a Sunday, an' there in plain soight was a bone he'd hid.

"'Sure, thot's a foine thing ter be put in the middle av the walk,' sez Oi, an' if ye'll belave me, the wee shcamp looked at ut, an' thin he picks it up, an put ut under a rose-bush, an' comes runnin' back ter me, a-lookin' me in the face as if he wanted ter ax me, did it look any bether there? Oh, lave him alone fer understhandin' wot ye *say!* Oi'm not sure he don't know what ye *think!* Sure he's a wee, woise crathure." The old gardener walked across the lawn, shaking his head, saying:

"He's a woise wan, thot he is."

That afternoon Jack Tiverton was trying to show Reginald how a gymnast that he had seen the night before, had walked upon his hands. It surely had looked easy. Reginald, leaning against the stone wall near the great gates, was just urging Jack to try again, when he saw Dorothy and Nancy looking over the wall, also waiting to see the trick done.

"I couldn't expect to do it in the fine style that he did it, but it's funny I can't do it at all!" Jack said, in disgust. "You see a thing like that done so easy that, for a moment, it seems as if you could jump down there, and do it just as he did it.

"How can those fellows do such 'stunts,' and do them with such ease?"

"You might as well ask how Nancy can dance with such ease?" said Reginald. "I tried whirling on my toes as she does, and

fell over first thing, getting up as quick as I could, and looking 'round to learn if any one had seen me."

"Well, here goes!" cried Jack, and to his great delight, he walked a few steps on his hands before losing his balance.

"You are going to realize, after this, Jack, that the knowledge that permits us to do *big* things of *any* sort, is earned by long, and earnest effort. By being determined to succeed, no matter how hard we must work to win that success." It was Uncle Harry who had spoken.

He had watched Jack's effort at a distance and then quietly walked over to join the little group.

"I know it," said Jack, "but tell us,—did you study and practise long before you could sing, as you sing now?"

"Surely I did," Uncle Harry replied.

Fluff rushed out of the gateway, and rushing to Uncle Harry, sat up on his hind legs.

"Well, young chap! Are you trying to show what you can do?" Uncle Harry asked, at which Fluff repeated the trick.

CHAPTER XI

"HASTY HAL"

THE clock hands pointed to a quarter after eleven.

The pupils were hard at work on some puzzling problems.

Miss Merling, correcting some grammar exercises, paused to look for a few missing papers, that she had laid aside.

A violently waving hand attracted her attention.

"What is it, Hal?" she asked.

The boy, a new pupil, sprang to his feet.

His hair was rumpled, and his face flushed.

"Some one has taken my new eraser, and

I want you to make them give it back!" he shouted.

"Is that a nice way to speak?" Miss Merling asked quietly.

"Well, it's just what I mean," said the angry boy.

"You should have said: 'I can't find my eraser,' and I would have asked another pupil to help you search for it," was the quiet reply.

"But I *didn't* lose it!" cried Hal, "Some one has *tooken*, I mean taken it, right off from my desk."

Miss Merling rose, moving toward the excited boy.

"I cannot allow you to make such an accusation as that," she said, firmly, her eyes looking straight into his.

He clenched his right fist, and struck his desk.

"Some one *has*—"

"Stop!" cried the teacher. "Now tell me, have you looked carefully for the eraser?"

"I've looked everywhere," Hal said sullenly.

"There's one place that you didn't think of," she said. "Now, step out here. Right here, beside me."

Hal Stanton stepped out, when he faced his class.

"And now," said Miss Merling, "I'll convince you that you are wrong, and also that you did not look *everywhere*. Open your tightly clenched left hand."

He opened it, and there lay the rubber eraser.

His face was a study of shame, and surprise.

In his hasty search among the articles in his desk, he had fumbled about with his right

hand, and all the time he had been clutching the "lost" article in his left hand.

"Another time, Hal, think twice before accusing any one," Miss Merling said.

"I didn't say any name," Hal said, in a very low tone.

"Worse than that," said the teacher, "for in saying, 'some one' you were practically accusing all."

"I don't see that," Hal said, doggedly.

"Remain after school, and I'll try to make it clear," was the quiet answer.

Long and patiently she talked with him, after the other pupils were gone, showing him that in saying that *some one* had taken an article, he had not left one of the pupils out, as being possibly innocent.

Hal saw that she was right, but he was too sullen to admit it. Most of all, was he angry with himself. Why had he not loosened his

grasp, and so let the eraser drop, before he had so hastily sprung to his feet, and shouted his angry accusation?

Why? Because he never thought himself at fault. He could never believe that he had, by any chance, mislaid an article. His first thought was that some one had watched until a moment came when his eyes were looking in another direction, and then had hastily snatched the article and hidden it.

He was a fine-looking lad, and very pleasant when everything went as he chose, but whenever anything chanced to displease him, his hasty temper led him to say and do things that made him far from attractive.

His father had purchased a house on the street where Tess Haughton lived, and the two often walked to school together, Hal carrying her books, and telling her wonderful

tales of the town where he had lived before coming to Merrivale.

One day when his stories seemed unusually "large," Tess remarked quietly that she didn't see why they ever left such a wonderful place.

"Well, sometimes we wish we hadn't," Hal said, unabashed.

"Why, Tess," he continued, "you may not believe it, but blackberries that grew in a field just behind the schoolhouse were as big as,—well, as big as—" He was trying to think what to say, when Tess helped him.

"Those blackberries no doubt were as large as *squashes,*" she said quietly.

"Oh, come, now!" cried Hal, "There's no sense in that, but they *were* large!"

"You told me yesterday of apples as large as the biggest turnip," said Tess, "so why

isn't it all right to say that the blackberries were as large as squashes, and have done with it?"

"Perhaps you don't believe me!" he cried, hotly, but Tess was not the least bit afraid of him.

"I surely do not when you talk as you've been talking the last week," she said.

"All right," he said, sharply, "I won't tell you what I was going to tell, about the little party I'm to have on my birthday. That will be two weeks from to-day. Mother gave me the invitations to mail this morning on the way to school.

"You'll find yours when you reach home, but I suppose you'll not come for fear of being bored. I was going to tell you about some things we'd planned, but never mind. Some of the others will tell you about them after the party."

He didn't say it in his usual sharp tone. There was something different in his eyes, a quaver in his voice. He was turning to leave her before reaching her gate, but Tess knew that this time he was not angry, but hurt.

"Stop, Hal!" she said, catching hold of his sleeve. "I won't let you race off like that. I didn't mean to hurt you, truly I didn't."

"All right," he said in a low voice, but it sounded sulky, as he asked:

"Will you quit saying my stories are large?"

"I'll stop *saying* it," said Tess, "but I can't help thinking so.

"Oh, Hal, you're such a *nice* boy! Why can't you make your stories just a bit more, —I mean a bit less,—" She stopped, looking up at him with eyes that were so serious

that Hal forgot how vexed he had been, and laughed, yes, really laughed.

Tess laughed too.

"Oh, I say, Tess! Let's be good friends, and I'll promise to cut down the size of my yarns a bit. When I start telling things, they're not so huge, but the more I tell, the bigger they become. Say! I'll promise to take some big seams in the next story before I tell it."

"All right," cried Tess, with a gay little laugh, "And I'll promise to *try* to believe it."

They were good friends once more, and when Hal turned toward home, he knew that Tess had done a good deed when she had checked his foolish boasting.

"I'll try," he said as he ran up the path to the door, "I'll surely try."

A few days later Antony and Jack were

walking along the broad avenue, talking of happenings at school.

"Did you notice Hal Stanton this afternoon when he stopped right in the middle of a story he was telling? Say, he looked toward Tess Haughton for a second, and then he said: 'Well, maybe I'm stretching the story a bit, but truly, those four leaved what-you-call-'ems, clovers, I mean, *were* large. Weren't they, Tess?' "

" 'Surely they were,' agreed Tess, and every one laughed. I thought it mean of them to laugh, but Hal really looked funny," Jack concluded.

"Did you notice that?"

"They'll soon stop laughing, if Hal continues telling his yarns somewhere near the truth, and describing the things that he has seen as being of a *possible* size," Antony replied, "for he's a pleasant chap, and a first-

rate fellow, all but his habit of telling ridiculous yarns."

For a time they walked along, Jack's arm linked in Antony's, falling into step with the lively tune that Jack was whistling. As they neared the square, they saw a girl coming toward them.

"Hello!" she cried, as she came up to them. "Oh, do excuse me. I was going to tell you something, but I've just remembered that I must go right into the next drug-store and telephone."

It was Patricia, and she raced into the store as if there were not a moment to lose.

"Can you beat that?" said Antony. "That's what she's doing all the time. Well, she must like spending money for nothing," Jack replied.

"Oh, I say, let's go in and see what she'll do."

The two boys, laughing softly, entered the store, and were surprised to find Patricia in the middle of the floor instead of in the telephone-booth. The moment she saw them, she rushed into the telephone-booth, and commenced to talk.

"Give me Central ten thousand and ten." She paused and then:

"Is this the manager? Well, I'm calling you to say I'll play for six thousand a week. What's that? Well, I might take off ten cents a week. All right. I'll surely be there."

Out tripped Patricia smiling, and eager to learn if the two boys had heard the silly conversation, when to her surprise, the head clerk laid a hand on her arm.

"I warn you to stop this nonsense," he said in no gentle voice, "for it is nonsense and nothing else. You don't pay any

money, nor take down the receiver, and your imaginary conversations take time that customers would like to use. Now, don't come in here again, unless you'd like to be put out.

"I don't like to speak so sharply to a little girl, but she has been making a nuisance of herself for the last six weeks," he said, turning to the two boys when Patricia had angrily rushed from the store.

"We wondered if she really used the 'phone?" Jack said.

"I don't think she ever really uses it, but she manages to make people wait for a chance to use it while she's in there talking nonsense to no one at all."

On her way home Patricia's silly heart was full of anger toward the man who had told her to refrain from visiting the store in order to pretend to use the telephone.

"I think he was just too mean for any-

thing," she said, "I guess I didn't hurt his old 'phone."

She knew, but would not admit that she had often kept busy people from using the telephone at times when they doubtless had important messages to send.

Reginald Dean heard of the happening, and he wasted no time in telling the other boys and girls all about it.

One would hardly have thought that the news of her silly actions would have reached the neighborhood where she lived, but it had, and when she turned the corner of the old street where she lived, she saw Chub at play in the gutter in front of the gateway.

Her aunt stood on the doorstep, shading her eyes with her hand, evidently looking for her. The moment he saw her, Chub sprang to his feet, and running to the nearest telephone pole put his hand up to his ear, while

he bent forward to speak as if the hole opposite his mouth were a transmitter.

"Hello, Thentral!" he shouted. "Patrithia hath juth come. Now, how thoon could you give her a plathe in your theater? I b'lieve you could get her for theven hundred dollarth a night. Juth hold the line while I call her."

"You little tease!" cried Patricia, and turning, she ran into the house.

Scampering up the steps behind her, Algernon and Lionel tried to reach the doorway as soon as she did, with the result that Algernon ran between her feet, nearly tripping her, while Lionel raced around her in the small hall until he became dizzy and sat down.

"For the land's sake, put those two little nuisances out," said her aunt, "for I want to talk to you."

Patricia put the puppies out, and then went back to the little room and sat down on a low stool and waited, wondering what her aunt had to say.

"Now, before I say a word, I'll ask a question, and ye'll do well to answer it. *Hev* ye been fooling with the store telephones down in the square, an' if so, why *hev* ye?"

"'Twasn't any harm," Patricia said, sullenly.

"Was you telephoning ter that Madam What's-her-name that lugged ye ter New York, and then was glad 'nough ter let ye come back?"

"I was *not,*" Patricia snapped, "and I never want to hear from her again! I've told you over and over again that she promised to make a movie star out of me, and instead just kept me in her kitchen working

for her. No wonder I was glad to come back."

"I s'pose if she'd promised to make ye Queen of England, ye'd hev gone with her ter let her try it."

"Maybe I would," said Patricia, "for she had a way of talking that would make you believe her."

"Well, she put ye in charge of the conductor, an' ye landed here, so we'll say no more about that, but the p'liceman stopped at the gate jist 'fore ye come home, an' he advised me ter keep an eye on ye, so I'm going ter. I tell ye, Patricia, keep away from them telephones, fer the storekeepers is reel mad about yer nonsense."

CHAPTER XII

AROUND THE MAY-POLE

IT was the middle of May, unusually warm and sunny, with a soft breeze swaying the flowers, and blowing the fountain spray this way and that.

Dorothy raced across the lawn to where Nancy stood playing with Fluff.

"We're to have a May party!" she cried. "Mother just told me, and the May-pole is already up. Come and see it."

Away they ran, Dorothy ahead to show the way.

Sure enough, there it stood, as important-looking as if it were May first, and the men who had placed it, stood looking up at it as

if they were well-pleased with their work.

"She's as straight as a birch-tree, and a good deal stouter," said the taller of the three men, "so pick up your tools, boys, and we'll run along."

The sun was shining, but a passing cloud let fall a few pattering drops. Dorothy and Nancy ran to the house believing that a shower was due, then laughed to find that the little cloud was but a joke. They raced back to where the new May-pole stood and skipped around it. Little Fluff, thinking himself as important as they, joined in the dance with little yelps of delight.

He had no idea what it was all about, but he knew that he was enjoying the fun.

"That's a foine dance," said John when they stopped to regain their breath, "an' wid the middle o' May here, we've quoite a foine show av blossoms in the garden fer yer

May party. It's thrue they're the sort thot gits busy an' comes up theirselfs. Good luck, to 'em! sez Oi, an' sure they're lovely, every wan av thim."

"Oh, John, they are lovely, and you work and work to make the gardens fine," said Dorothy.

"An' why wouldn't I, Miss Dorothy, whin I hov me foine little room in the servants' quarters, an' the best good luck a gardener iver had, a-working' for people thot's good to him, an' me ould heart a-lovin' yer little silf so I *hov* ter make a pretty place fer you an' yer little friends ter play in."

"And you'll enjoy seeing us dance around the May-pole, won't you?" Dorothy asked, looking up at him.

"Oi will, indade," he replied, "an' it'll make me think av some av the grand toimes me an' me frinds had, over in th' ol' country,

whin it was spring, an' our hearts, loike the birds were all aflutter."

Mollie and Flossie were away for the day, and several of the boys were off on a tramp through the woods with Uncle Harry, so the pole had been delivered at the garden, and erected before any of the little neighbors had heard a word about it.

"Come up to our own room, and I'll show you something," said Dorothy, laughing as she ran toward the house. "It's all about the red book that I've been putting red letters in."

"I wondered if you had forgotten all about that," Nancy said as together they mounted the stairs.

"I've not forgotten it," Dorothy said. "I've been marking each day that I thought fine enough to be made a red-letter day, and I thought I'd wait to paint them until I had

ever so many days marked. I mean to paint them all on the first rainy day, and Nancy, I think I'll make May-day one of the days. We've a fine, new May-pole, and we're to have a May party, too."

From the upper drawer of her dresser Dorothy drew forth a book that she had kept for the important days, and sitting on a low seat by the window she read the list to Nancy.

"Now, the first day I've marked is the day that Antony came. I knew he felt shy about coming for the visit, but I knew that he longed to come, so when he had really arrived, I marked that day for one of the fine days to be painted."

"That's fine," Nancy said. "I'd surely choose that for one of the days."

"And next, I marked the day that the circus parade passed along the avenue.

Don't you remember the sweet-faced girl that rode the finest horse?"

"Indeed I do remember her, and we've often talked of her since."

"Well, I couldn't forget her and I marked that day for her, and now, when I paint that place on the calendar red, I'll take my little pan of gold paint, and make a bright gold border around it, because of the fine news I've just heard. It was Jack Tiverton, you remember, who told us all about her."

"Oh, yes," said Nancy, "and he said she ran away from home, and I remember something else. She leaned from her saddle when you said you'd like to ride as she did, and she said she'd give the world to be you."

"Yes, oh, yes, and we all felt so sorry for her, and this morning Jack told me some more about her. She isn't with the circus now. Some one, good and true, saw her

and loved her, and now she's married, and has a lovely home, and she's happy now."

"Oh, I'm glad, so glad," Nancy said, "and isn't it splendid to hear this news that makes it so like the old fairy tales, 'and they lived happy ever after.' "

"And the next date that I marked was the day that Jack found the cave in the woods where the stolen goods were hidden, and he was given the prize."

"Well, you really had to mark that because that was just a wonderful day," Nancy said.

"I marked the first rehearsal for the musical play, because it went so smoothly for the professor, and I was glad, because he had worked so hard, and was so pleased. The next date marked is the day when Patricia came back to Merrivale."

"Why, Dorothy, you surely aren't so glad

to have her here that you'd mark the day when she returned?" Nancy gasped.

"I didn't mark it because I'd been longing to see her.

"I marked it because after hearing that she'd run away with that horrid Madam I've-forgotten-her-name, it was fine to know that she had come safely back to her aunt."

"The next day is the day when we gave our play, 'The Sultan's Daughter,' and every one had such a good time."

Nancy threw her arms around Dorothy, and at that moment Aunt Charlotte and Mrs. Dainty paused at the doorway and smiled as they saw the two clasped in each other's arms.

"Oh, Aunt Charlotte, see what Dorothy has done! Look, Mrs. Dainty! Dorothy has been marking the red letter days as fast as they have happened, and every one that

she has chosen has been a lucky day for—some one else. She's not marked a single day for herself."

"Oh, but it isn't as you think!" cried Dorothy. "I've had lovely days all my own to mark, and on some of them, more than one fine thing has happened, but the calendar wouldn't hold them *all,* and these that I've marked are the ones when I've been *so* glad for some one else that I simply had to mark it."

"Oh, now I know how you feel," Nancy said, her hand softly patting Dorothy's curls. "You feel just as I do when your father brings you some new gift, and my heart beats faster, and my throat feels odd and choky. He always brings me something nice, too, but he gives you your gift first, and when I see your eyes shining, I'm so glad that I forget to wonder what he's brought for me."

"Bless their loving hearts," reverently whispered Mrs. Dainty, "and keep them always as unselfish as they now are."

The day for the May-party was just the sort of day that the children had longed for. It was so warm and sunny that it seemed much more like June than May. The May-pole dance had been practiced until it was certain that the long ribbons would be correctly braided and then unbraided. The ribbons were pink and green, and crowning the May-pole was a huge wreath of bright flowers. It was to be a large party, and the great garden proved to be a veritable bit of wonder-land for many of those who were new pupils at the school, and who now for the first time were enjoying the grand old Stone House, and its lovely garden. There were two fountains in the garden, a large one near

the great gateway and a small one at the far end of the garden, and the children laughed when little Fluff raced from one fountain to the other, barking at each, as if hoping to stop the dancing spray.

He was snow-white from the bath the maid, Sue, had given him, and Dorothy had fastened a big bow of wide pink satin ribbon on his collar.

Of course he was petted by first one child and then another, and that was just what delighted him. And now a groom came out from the stable, leading Dorothy's pony, Romeo, his tail and mane had been tightly braided the night before and now combed out, hung in glossy waves. His forelock was tied with pink, and he had been groomed until he shone like satin.

Dorothy was a fine little rider, and the children clamored; "Ride for us, Dorothy,

ride for us!" She laughed as the groom held his hand for her, and placing her foot in his helping hand, she sprang up into the saddle, and was off at a lively pace, clearing first one great flowerbed, after another, the little guests gaily cheering.

She looked very lovely in her white frock, her cheeks pink with excitement, her bright hair flying, but she was not thinking of herself.

She was thinking of her pet, eager that her little friends should see his grace and beauty.

Then she sprang from the saddle, and the guests took turns riding around the garden, but the younger children insisted that the groom lead Romeo.

And now from the summer-house came the sounds of music. The musicians were to play one selection, and when that was fin-

ished, twelve boys and girls would dance in and out around the fine May-pole.

They were all in readiness, and when the orchestra began the May Song, each of the twelve grasped a ribbon, and in and out in graceful rhythmic motion, Dorothy and Jack, Nancy and Arthur Dean, Flossie and Reginald, Tess and Hal, Mollie and her cousin, Alec Merton, then Katie Dean and her cousin, Howell, danced until the ribbons were braided tight to the pole, then, turning, they repeated the dance until the ribbons were unbraided, and hung loosely fluttering in the breeze.

Little Fluff lay on the grass, quiet for once, because he had raced around the May-pole, inside the ring of dancers and very close to the pole, doing his best to excel their speed, and surely he had succeeded, for while they had danced in time to the music, he had

circled the pole at least *thirty* times.

Doubtless he thought himself much smarter than they. He was quite content to rest.

Arabella and Leander had really enjoyed the May-pole dance.

They had watched every step.

"I couldn't dance because I've never learned dancing. Aunt Matilda doesn't approve of dancing. Sometimes I wish she did," said Arabella.

"Well, I don't know," Leander said, "for if you don't try to dance, no one can say you're gawky, and they can't know how graceful you *might* have been if you had tried."

"That's smart, Leander," Arabella drawled. "I guess I won't try."

"There's one here who can dance, and that is Nancy Ferris," said Arthur Dean.

"You will dance for us, won't you, Nancy?" he asked eagerly.

"Come over to the rose garden and I'll dance for you on the tiled court. It is level, and easier to dance on than that lawn."

So, with her hand in Arthur's, she ran across the lawn to the pretty white marble tiled court, the guests closely following.

"Ask them to play a waltz," she said, and a bewitching waltz they played to which Nancy swayed and dipped, and whirled in fairy fashion.

There were no roses in bloom, but the bushes that surrounded three sides of the little marble court, were in full leafage, and there were spring flowers in abundance.

Around the court the little guests sat upon the grass, and how they did applaud when, with a sweeping courtesy, she finished the dance.

Patricia Levine did not clap her hands, indeed, she did not even smile, but she saw and envied Nancy's skill, and in her heart she at once determined to become a theatrical dancer. That, she thought, would be even finer than being a movie queen, as Madam had suggested.

"She *promised* enough," Patricia muttered, under her breath, "but I can learn to dance without any help from Madam Gazooks. It's easy enough. I almost believe I could do it without any teacher, but perhaps a *few* lessons would help."

Arabella leaned toward her.

"What are you saying to yourself?" she asked, but Patricia shook her head, and refused to reply.

Soon they were all playing lively games, the favorite, as usual, being; "Follow, follow me."

When they had played until they were glad to rest, Dorothy with Jack led the way to the dining-room, where a feast was spread.

And a great feast it was—!

How they talked and laughed as they enjoyed the good things!

To Antony it seemed like fairy-land, and to Jack he whispered; "Some day I mean to own a fine house, with a beautiful garden."

Under the table Jack grasped his hand, and held it for a moment. "I wish you luck," he whispered earnestly.

Dorothy leaned across to speak to Antony.

"You look so wise, Antony, that I wonder what is in your mind," she said.

"Two big questions were in my mind," he said, "and the first was: 'How shall I work, and what shall I do to enable me to own a lovely home and garden some day?' The other was; 'Will Dorothy and Nancy be at

either Gem Island, or Foam Ridge this summer?' "

"If my father were here I know he could answer the first one, and he may have decided where we are to spend the summer. If he has, he could answer that, too."

Those who would like to know where Dorothy and Nancy did spend a wonderful summer, to enjoy their fun and frolic, and to learn the answer to a bit of mystery, may do so by reading "Dorothy Dainty's Treasure Chest."

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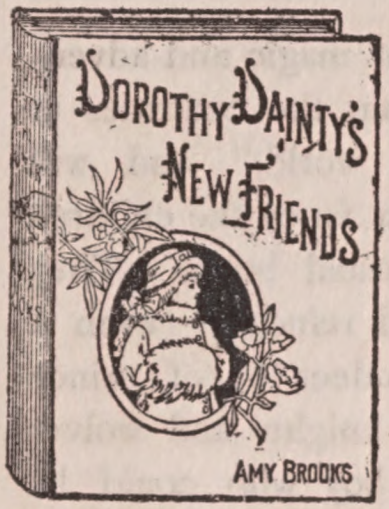

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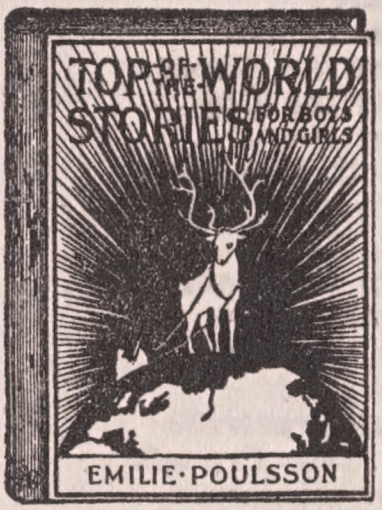

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