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"WHAT WERE YOU LAUGHING AT?" QUESTIONED PRUE.—*Page 44.*

The Prue Books

PRUE'S PLAYMATES

BY

AMY BROOKS

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

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PRUE'S PLAYMATES

CHAPTER I

WHAT THEY SAW

"I'LL make a new suit for Gloriana, and it'll be the finest she's ever had. I'll have it trimmed with white fur. I don't care if it *is* summer, she'll have to wear it if she *melts!*"

The big doll smiled quite as brightly as if she understood all that Prue was saying, while the kitten, sitting on the grass beside her, watched the flaxen curls as they fluttered in the breeze.

"Oh, my pieces are blowing away, and there goes the cotton wool that I was going to use for fur!"

Prue scrambled to her feet, and chased her treasures, and captured them.

She sat down again upon the grass, placed her pieces beside her, and laid two spools upon them that they might not again blow away.

Once more the breeze tossed Gloriana's curls, and the kitten, thinking them just the thing to play with, sprang at the big doll, fastening her claws in the soft flaxen ringlets.

"Oh, pussy! You mustn't pull her curls. Why, you naughty kitten! You're *chewing* them!"

Very gently she loosened the curls from the kitten's sharp little claws, gave her a bit of string to play with, and then, spreading her cloth upon her lap, commenced to cut a skirt for Gloriana, using the doll's old dress for a pattern.

Her own curls shone in the sunlight, and her brown eyes were bright with excitement. The light blue cloth had just been given her by Philury, the maid-of-all-work at the farm. It was like Philury's own new dress, and Prue knew that there was quite enough for a dress and a coat besides.

"Now let me measure you," said Prue.

"Who?" asked a merry voice.

"Gloriana," Prue replied, without looking up.

The small boy who had asked the question moved nearer. He was Johnny Buffum, one of Prue's little playmates.

"Say! What makes ye make doll's clothes? Come an' play tag, er hop-scotch. *Anything's* better'n fussin' with old doll's things," said Johnny.

"She's *almost* new, Johnny Buffum, and I'm making this suit because I want to.

Hitty is coming up here, and we're both going to sew," said Prue.

Prue Weston was a dear little girl, and she was usually willing to do anything to please a playmate; but Johnny had spoken of the beautiful Gloriana as "an old doll," and Prue thought he deserved to have to hunt for some one to play with.

She turned toward the road.

"There's Hitty, now," she said, "and she's got all her sewing things in her apron, so I'll *have* to sew!"

"I'd like ter know why?" said Johnny in disgust, "an' if ye *do* sit here an' make them doll's duds, who'm I ter play with?"

"Oh, any of the boys," Prue replied carelessly, at the same time holding a piece of the blue cloth up to Gloriana's face, and tipping her head to one side to decide if it were becoming.

"The other fellers are all gone off somewheres," said Johnny.

"Then we'll let you sit here and see us sew," said Prue.

"P'raps ye think that's fun!" returned Johnny.

"*Some* boys I know would be glad to stay," Prue said, slyly peeping at Johnny's face.

"I'll stay," he answered quickly.

Prue had said that Hitty's apron held "all her sewing things," but when Hitty commenced to take out its contents, it looked as if she had brought every scrap of cloth and ribbon that the Buffum house had held.

"That pink calico is lovely," said Hitty, spreading it for Prue to see, "and this bright green braid is what I'm going to trim it with."

"Will green look nice on it?" asked Prue.

"Of *course* it will," said Hitty, "and that's what I'll trim it with."

"I wonder ye don't sew somethin' yaller on to it, too," grumbled Johnny in disgust.

"I *will*, if I want to," said Hitty sweetly.

"And this plaid cloth is for a lining to a cape I'm going to make," she continued.

"Does ma know ye've got that?" asked Johnny, at the same time nodding his head as if he had caught Hitty in mischief.

"Ma knows *everything!*" Hitty declared.

"No, she don't," Johnny replied, "for she don't know ye've got that 'ere plaid stuff; I *know* she don't, an' she don't know where Mrs. Hodgkins's red cow is, but *I* do. She's into Josiah Boyden's turnip patch, eatin' all the tops off'n 'em, 'n' I sha'n't tell. Josiah is the meanest man in these

parts, an' he hates boys. That's some of the reason we hates him."

Hitty usually felt obliged to correct Johnny, but the boys were not the only ones who disliked Josiah Boyden. She even laughed, as she thought how angry he would be when he saw the cow munching the turnip tops.

"I'd like to hear what he'll say when he finds the cow there," said Hitty.

"And what he'll say to Mrs. Hodgkins, too," ventured Prue.

"I'd 'nough rather hear what Mrs. Hodgkins says. Ye know, after he's said everything he kin think of, she always thinks of somethin' ever so much smarter'n anything he's said, and then she just says it, in a way that makes him shout," said Johnny.

"Now, Johnny, you be still a minute

while I measure this doll for a cape. I've just 'nough cloth if I'm careful, but if you keep talking I may get it wrong," said Hitty, " and I haven't any more cloth like it."

Johnny felt that he was nearly as unhappy as if he were alone.

" What's the good of bein' here with you 'n' Prue, if ye won't play anything? " he grumbled.

Prue tried to comfort him.

" We *must* sew," she said, " but you can sew, too, for I'll let you play that Gloriana is a boy, and you can make her a pair of pants! "

" Ketch me sewin' *anything!* " Johnny replied.

His little face was usually smiling, but now a frown darkened his eyes, and he stood digging his toe into the dirt, and scattering

small pebbles in every direction. He was wondering if there was anything that could so interest Prue that she would willingly leave her sewing.

He was still digging up the gravel when a bright thought made his roguish eyes twinkle.

"That old red cow is in the turnip patch *now*, but she won't be all day. 'Fore ye know it, Josiah'll be drivin' her out; an' if Mrs. Hodgkins sees him, it'll be reel excitin'! I wouldn't be s'prised if she took an' driv Josiah with a broom!"

As Johnny said this, he glanced at Prue.

"Do you b'lieve all that would happen? Do you *truly?*" she asked.

"I shouldn't wonder," Johnny replied, "an' if we start *now*, we may be in time ter see the fun. Of course we can set here, an' not see anything. If this crowd was all

boys, we'd scoot right off ter see the doin's, but gals ain't got no more go than ter set an' make doll's duds."

Prue looked at Hitty.

"*Would* you?" she asked.

Johnny felt sure that he would have his way, so he said, with a saucy smile,

"Ye needn't bother 'baout goin'. Ye kin keep on makin' doll's clothes. I kin see the fun alone!"

"We're *going!*" declared Prue, at the same time making a bundle of the beautiful Gloriana and all the pieces, and tucking it in under an old wooden box that she turned upside down.

"Gloriana is safe enough there. Come on!" she cried, running on ahead, with Hitty and Johnny following.

"Wait for me!" called Hitty, "I've got to stop an' tie my shoe!"

"Never mind yer shoe," was Johnny's unfeeling reply, as he caught Prue's hand and hurried onward.

"But if I don't tie it, I'll lose it off!" wailed Hitty.

"Take it in yer hand!" shouted Johnny, "ye can't stop for an ol' shoe when ye want ter see a cow!"

"Anybody'd think we never saw one," grumbled Hitty, but she did not stop to tie the dangling string.

"Where ye goin'?" asked one of the Butley twins, as he leaned from the barn window to watch the three children racing along the road.

"Goin' ter see a — cow!" gasped Johnny, all out of breath.

"Jiminy! Ain't ye never seen one before?" came the answer with a giggle.

"We don't care whether we have or not,

but we're *bound* to see one now!" called Prue.

"Good land alive! They's *five* in this barn; ye might as well stop here," yelled Joe Butley, but they did not hear him, and ran even faster than before.

And when, at last, they reached the turnip patch, there stood the red cow contentedly munching; but there surely was nothing exciting in that. Prue was disgusted.

"The idea of running way down here to look at *that!*" she cried, pointing her forefinger at the cow. "Josiah isn't here, and Mrs. Hodgkins isn't here, and you said, — "

"I *said* p'raps they'd both be here, but ye know, of course, I couldn't be *sure*, could I, now?"

"Well, we thought you were *'most* sure," said Hitty.

"If we'd kept right on sewing, I'd have

finished Gloriana's skirt by this time, and her coat would have been almost — "

"Oh, look *there!*" said Johnny in a very loud whisper.

"Oh—o—!" gasped Prue, and

"Oo—oo!" gurgled Hitty, as their eyes followed Johnny's pointing finger.

It was, indeed, an odd sight. Josiah Boyden, a long switch in his hand, was approaching the cow, while Mrs. Hodgkins, determined to protect her property, was following him as fast as her huge weight would permit. She, too, carried a weapon, but it was far stronger than a switch, — it was a hoe.

For a few steps she would drag it along the ground, and then, as if a fit of anger seized her, she would lift it high above her head.

"What's he goin' to do?" whispered

Prue, forgetting that they were too far away from the people whom they were watching to be heard.

"What's *she* goin' ter do?" said Johnny.

"She looks as if she meant to hoe his head off like you chop the tops off'n weeds," said Hitty.

And while the children almost held their breath to watch them, Josiah was getting nearer to the cow; fat Mrs. Hodgkins, in spite of her mighty effort to overtake him, was really being left behind.

"She can't catch him!" whispered Hitty.

"Oh, yes, she *will!*" said Prue; and just at that moment, Josiah shouted so loudly that the three children actually jumped.

"Gee, *whish!*" he yelled, "get out'n my tarnip patch!" but, like her owner, Moolly was not easily driven, so she eyed him a second, and then continued to eat.

"Git, will ye, 'fore I thrash ye!" he howled.

"No ye don't, Josiah!" said Mrs. Hodgkins.

"Ye follerin' me raound, Sophrony?" he snarled.

"I be when my caow is in question," was the pert answer.

"Wal, ye needn't; fer I don't like yer comp'ny," Josiah said.

"I don't like your'n; I'd 'nough rather 'sociate with that caow," snapped Mrs. Hodgkins. "I do hate ter own ye fer a rel'tive."

"I'll use this switch on her ef she don't quit my tarnips."

"Ef ye do, I'll use this hoe on ye, ye old—!" she paused because she could not think of any fitting name to call him.

"D'ye know who I be?" roared Josiah;

"I'm an ex-*see*lectman, an' a *piece* of the school committee."

"An' *I'm* the spunkiest woman ye ever see!" declared Mrs. Hodgkins.

Just here, Johnny forgot himself.

"Good fer you, Mrs. Hodgkins!" he shouted.

The astonished pair turned, and saw the three children staring at them.

"Thank ye," laughed Mrs. Hodgkins, while Josiah Boyden slunk away, only turning to say:

"May be ye better git yer caow home," to which Mrs. Hodgkins replied coolly:

"I would have, before, ef ye'd let her alone."

After Josiah had disappeared, she led the cow along to the edge of the turnip patch, then, beckoning to the children, she called with a jolly laugh:

"Ye seen the performance, naow ye'd oughter hev a treat. Come over ter the house, an' I'll give ye some cookies!"

They did not wait to be urged, but trudged along beside her, sometimes waiting because Moolly insisted upon getting a bite on the way.

Oh, how they enjoyed those cookies! They did not mind answering Mrs. Hodgkins's questions, because it was really worth while to reply to all her queries so long as she continued to pass the little cakes.

"Is yer ma cookin' ter-day?" she asked Johnny.

With his mouth full of cake, he replied:

"No, she ain't; she's washin'."

"Why, that's odd," said Mrs. Hodgkins, "fer this is Wednesday. I wash Mondays. I shouldn't think I'd git my work done

right ter do it any day but Monday. I'd think the week wouldn't come aout straight."

"I s'pose yer sister Randy is all settled in her new home, isn't she, Prue?"

"Oh, yes," said Prue, "'cause she's been married a long time, and all her closets are full."

"All her closets are *full!*" repeated Mrs. Hodgkins; "full of what?"

"Full of *everything!*" declared Prue, looking up at her with very round eyes.

Mrs. Hodgkins was puzzled.

"What does she mean, Hitty?" she asked.

"I don't know," said Hitty, "but that's what Ma says."

Mrs. Hodgkins decided to travel all over the town, if necessary, to find out what Randy's closets were filled with.

As they trudged along home, Prue and Hitty talked of the treat that they had enjoyed, until Johnny felt that they ought to say that he was the means of all the pleasure.

"It's all because of *me* that ye had a fine time," he remarked. "If I hadn't teased ye, you an' Prue would have been jest settin' an' sewin'. 'Stead of that, ye seen a regular sight, an' had a fine treat."

"Well, you *did* just *make* us come over here," said Prue, "and we can make doll's clothes any time."

"Joe Butley laughed at us 'cause we told him we was running ter see a cow, but if Joe knew what we *seen*, and what Mrs. Hodgkins *gin* us, he'd wish he'd been there; fer Joe likes ter eat, most as well as I do," Johnny said.

CHAPTER II

A FIRM LITTLE FRIEND

PHILURY, on her way to the Centre, heard some one hurrying after her. She turned, and was surprised to see Prue flying along the road.

"Where ye goin', Prue?" she asked.

"Going with you, to the post-office and Barnes's store," said Prue. She had left her hat at home, but in her dimpled hand she clutched a handkerchief, held tightly by one of its corners.

"I thought you were holding the yarn for Aunt Prudence to wind?" Philury said.

"I *was* holding it, but soon as I saw you going down the path, I let it drop on the

floor, and ran after you,'' said Prue, still very much out of breath.

" Well, I guess Aunt Prudence will be consid'able riled,'' Philury replied. " Just think what a snarl that yarn will be in, an' her a-plannin' ter knit a shawl fer her first cousin's uncle's step-daughter! ''

" I told Aunt Prudence I'd hold that yarn for her this afternoon,'' said Prue, " but I most think I can't.''

" Why? '' asked Philury.

" 'Cause I caught my toe in it, and dragged it half across the floor before I could get my foot out of it. Wasn't it funny yarn to act like that? ''

" Funny yarn, an' funny youngster,'' said Philury, laughing because she could not help it. " What was yer rush ter git daown taown? ''

" I want to get a ball, and there's some in

Barnes's store, and they're just what I want. They cost three cents, and I've got *two* tied in the corner of my handkerchief," chirped Prue.

"What'll ye do 'baout the other cent?" questioned Philury.

Prue looked up quickly at the question.

"Why you'll give it to me, so I'll have three, 'cause I love you, Philury."

The girl's honest face shone with pleasure.

"Of course I will, ye little coaxer," she said, "I can't ever say 'no' when ye ax fer a thing, no matter what 'tis."

Arrived at the store, Philury made her purchases, gave the cent to Prue, and turned to look at a piece of calico that Silas Barnes had just unwrapped.

"Better hev a dress off'n this," he said, "fer it's 'mazin' pooty, an' it'll sell quick,

I tell ye. I'm goin' ter send a pattern off'n it ter Deacon Lawton's wife, an' one ter Mis' Meeks, an' a few others. It might be all of it gone ef ye wait ter think 'baout it, so ye'd hev ter take suthin' else."

Philury hesitated.

"The color is fast," he urged, "it's ile-biled!"

"I guess I'll hev ten yards," said Philury.

"Think that'll be 'nough?" Barnes asked.

"Land, yes!" said Philury. "Haow big do ye think I be? Twelve yards goes 'raound Mis' Hodgkins, an' she's 'most as big raound as a tub. Ten yards'll give me 'nough calico ter make a dress, an' an over-coat!"

And while her parcels were being securely wrapped, she laughed and joked with

Joel Simpkins, the clerk. She picked up her bundles, and then, for the first time, missed Prue.

"Lookin' fer Prue?" Joel asked.

"Why, yes," said Philury, "where on airth is she?"

"She bought a ball, an' a minute after, she ran out the door an' up the road," said Joel.

"She's run on ahead jest ter git home fust," Philury said. "She often does that. She'll watch fer me, and jump aout from behind a bush, or a tree, and laugh. She knows I always like ter see her do it."

She left the store, and as she walked along the shady road, she glanced toward each sturdy trunk, or peeped around the bushes that grew by the low stone walls, but little Prue was not in sight.

"Got tired of waitin' while I bargained

for the calico," thought Philury, believing that Prue would be waiting for her in the door-way when she reached home.

But Prue was not at home, nor was she anywhere in the neighborhood.

She had, indeed, become tired of waiting for Philury, and ran out to play on the road with the new ball. It bounced beautifully, and many times she caught it.

Then it flew down the road, rolled to one side on to the short grass, and then down to the shallow brook which ran under the road. It stopped at the water's edge, and Prue snatched at it, picked it up, found that it was not wet, and put it in her pocket.

" I guess I'll wait till I get back home to play with it," she said, " then I won't lose it."

She looked toward the store. Philury was not in sight.

"She's buying more calico, I do just believe she is!" said Prue.

She took the pretty ball from her pocket, and once more tossed it into the air, although she feared the chance of losing it. She thought she must play with something, that the waiting need not seem so long.

She did not catch it, and it landed on the dusty road, rolling as if it never intended to stop.

She ran after it, picked it up, put it once more in her pocket, and was about to run back, when something farther down the road made her stop.

It was a heap of something, — but what was it? She ran a few steps toward it, and pausing, looked again. It moved!

"Why, it's a boy!" she whispered, "but how funny he looks."

His back was toward her, and he was sit-

ting upon the ground. He had clasped his arms around his knees, and dropped his head upon them.

From where Prue stood, he looked like a bundle of clothing, and any one far less curious than little Prue, would have wondered why he sat huddled in a heap, by the side of the road.

And while she stood watching him, he lifted his head.

It was Joe Butley!

Quickly she ran toward him. He heard her footsteps and looked up, then hid his face again, but not quickly enough to hide the trace of tears.

"Joe Butley *crying!*" said Prue, under her breath.

She would not have believed that anything could force tears from Joe's bold eyes.

She could not bear to see those tears.

Naughty, merry, mischievous Joe! What *could* it be that made him feel so badly? Her kind little heart was full of pity.

"Oh, Joe!" she cried, running until she stood close beside him. "Look up, Joe, and tell me what plagues you."

He felt her small hand upon his shoulder, and the sob that his boyish pride had tried to stifle broke from his lips, and frightened little Prue.

"Tell me, Joe, *tell* me!" she urged; "and I'll help you if I can!" she added sweetly, but the boy did not reply.

"Don't you know that I'm sorry?" she asked, in gentle pleading.

He muttered something in a snuffling voice, but she could not tell what he was saying.

"P'raps I can help you, Joe, if you'll just *let* me," she urged again, at the same time

patting his shoulder and trying to get a peep at his face.

She stooped, and tried to peer up under his arms.

"Joe!" she whispered.

"What?"

"Oh, *now* you answer me," she said, a glad little ring in her voice, "*now* you'll let me help you."

"Ye *can't!*" wailed Joe.

"Tell me this minute!" demanded Prue, "and then I'll *know* if I can help."

"What could ye do?" cried the boy; "the constable's bigger'n you or I be, an' he's took an' lugged Job off! Ain't that enough ter make a feller bawl?"

Prue gasped; her eyes were staring at Joe, and her red lips were parted.

The constable! Every child in the village knew and feared him.

"Is he in — in — *jail?*" she asked, so frightened that she could scarcely say the word.

"Not yet," whimpered Joe, "but they's no tellin' haow soon he will be. The constable took him, 'cause some er the winders in the school-haouse is smashed, an' he just *guessed* that Job done it; but he didn't. He was pickin' some blueberries, over behind the schoolhaouse, an' he'd got his pail 'most full, when ol' what-yer-call-him come an' grabbed him by the collar, an' said Job had been firin' stones, an' smashin' the glass. Job hadn't done it, an' he said so, but he wouldn't listen, an' jest yanked him off, over ter Lawyer Everton's."

"But Lawyer Everton is good, just *awful* good; Randy says so. He won't hurt Job!" said Prue.

"The constable said he'd make him say,

right before Lawyer Everton, that he *did* bust the winders, and he'd say right off, 'Take him ter jail!' "

Joe's sobs burst forth afresh. Prue's brown eyes flashed.

"I'm going right straight off to get Job for you. He *sha'n't* go to jail!" she cried.

"Oh, ye can't," said Joe.

"I *will!*" said Prue, with a stamp of her little foot.

Joe glanced at her.

"Well, whatever ye do, don't ye dare tell ye seen me cry!" he said, with flushing cheeks.

"No, I won't *ever* tell," she promised, and set off at top speed up the mill road.

Her heart beat quicker at the thought that she might be late, and that Job might, even then, be on his way to the jail!

How she ran! Her pink cheeks grew

pinker as she rushed along. A trailing vine reached out across the dusty road as if to trip her, but she saw it and skipped over it, but a second later she was forced to stop.

"There *must* be gravel in my shoe," she said, sitting down to take it off.

"That's it!" she cried, shaking the offending pebbles out.

"Weren't you mean to make me stop!"

It was a little slipper that she wore, although she always spoke of them as shoes.

Quickly she thrust her foot into the slipper, buttoned the strap at the ankle, and was off again, running even more swiftly than before.

"When I get past those big trees," she panted, "I'm *almost* at his door-yard."

She walked a few steps to catch her breath, then again she commenced to run.

Now she was in the gateway, now run-

HER HEART BEAT QUICKER AT THE THOUGHT THAT SHE MIGHT BE LATE.—*Page 31.*

ning up the path, and then,—the door stood open, and there was Job! Oh, he was not yet in jail!

No fear had she of the grave, wise old lawyer. Had he not always a smile for her?

She flew in at the doorway, ran across the room and straight to Lawyer Everton, who sat in his great chair with the frightened boy standing at his knee.

"Oh, don't you do it! Don't you do it!" she cried, at the same time clasping his broad, strong hand with her two dimpled ones.

"Why, Prue, little girl, what is it?" he asked, his kind eyes peering anxiously at her.

She was breathless and excited.

"It's him, *him!*" she cried, her eyes wide, and her red lips quivering. "And his pail was 'most full of blueberries, so he

couldn't have smashed the windows, and you won't say he's got to go to jail, will you?"

"Dear little friend," the lawyer said, "I would do almost anything for you, but do you know that Job is often a very naughty boy? Don't you think that he ought to be punished?"

As he spoke, he smiled down into her earnest little face, and admired its beauty.

"He ought to be punished on the days that he's naughty," she said, "but this *truly wasn't* one of the days. Job had been good, to-day, and the time that the windows were smashed was just the time Job *couldn't* have smashed them!"

"Why, my dear, could you prove that?" Lawyer Everton asked, looking sharply at Job, and then at Prue who was pleading so eagerly for him.

"Oh, I *can!*" cried Prue, "I *can*, for he'd filled his pail almost full of berries, and he couldn't fire stones with a pail full of berries, without *spilling* them, and he *didn't* spill 'em, for I've seen the pail. Joe's got it!"

"Well, well, but that's an argument!" said Lawyer Everton. "Don't you think Job might have set his pail down so that he could throw the stones?"

Prue stared for a moment at the wise old eyes that looked so steadfastly into hers. Then she turned and sprang toward Job, who stood looking sullenly down at his toes, and frowning darkly.

"Oh, Job, Job!" she cried, "tell him you didn't set that pail down, can't you? I've run just *miles* to help you. Try to think, Job. Didn't you hold on to that pail every minute?"

"I *did*," said Job, "I never sot it daown once!"

"And *Job*," she pleaded, "you don't ever mean to be a naughty boy, do you? Don't it just *happen?*"

Job nodded.

"Well, he's a big, *big* lawyer man, and he can put *anybody* in jail if he wants to, Parson Spooner, or me, or you, or any one; but you mean to be good, and you *would* be, if he'd just let you go this time, wouldn't you, Job?"

"Prue, Prue," said Lawyer Everton, gently, "you mustn't coax him against his will."

"Oh, yes, I *must*," insisted Prue, "I just *simply must!*"

"Now, Job, you listen," she continued; "if you'll promise him you'll be good,—really *truly* good,—I'll let you sit side of me

in Sunday school every Sunday for ever so long, and then perhaps, he'll let you go."

"I *will!*" said Job. "I didn't fire them stones, an' I didn't bust them winders, an' I'll be good, if ye'll let me go; I'll be *real* good,—as long as I can hold out!"

"He *will*, I'm *sure* he will!" cried Prue, holding fast to Job's sleeve, and looking up into the old lawyer's face; "and *may* he go now? I'll walk home with him, and hold on to him so he can't get into mischief on the way."

"I think I shall have to let him off this time," said Lawyer Everton, "but, Job," he continued, "Prue has been a good friend to you. Just think, lad, what a long way she ran to see me, and plead for you! If you are any kind of a boy, you'll behave yourself for her sake."

"Yes, sir," said Job.

"Do you realize what a good little friend she has been to you?" was the next question, earnestly asked.

"Guess I do," said Job, drawing his knuckles across his eyes, at the same time edging nearer to Prue.

"You may go, now," said Lawyer Everton.

"Thank you," chirped Prue, and

"Thank ye," said Job, in almost a whisper.

"Come!" said Prue, "give me your hand, and all the way you'll be good."

Without a word, Job, the boldest boy in the village, placed his rough hand in the soft one that Prue extended, and together they went down the garden path, Prue chattering words of comfort and cheer, while Job made a mighty effort to keep back the tears.

Tears of joy they were, for he had believed that the doors of the jail were yawning wide to receive him; for little Prue, his heart was very warm.

Lawyer Everton stood in his doorway looking after them as they trudged down the road.

The sunshine was very bright, but he shaded his kind, gray eyes with his hand and continued to watch them until they were out of sight.

"If Job Butley could always have a little angel like that to guard his footsteps, he might some day become a noble man," he murmured, as if he were thinking aloud.

Out on the road, the two children skipped along, kicking up the dust in sheer delight because it seemed so fine a thing that Job was really free.

On, on they hurried, and now they were

running, for there, far ahead, sat disconsolate Joe, looking as if he had not a friend in the world.

"Joe, Joe!" shouted Prue, "I've brought him. I said I would!"

Joe's face showed wild delight. He sprang to his feet and ran to meet them. He grasped their hands, and forced them to dance around in a little ring. When they paused to regain their breath, Job told how Prue had plead for him, and finished by saying:

"She's the best gal I know, an' she's promised to let me sit beside her in Sunday school fer ever and ever so long, 'cause I promised ter be good."

"Then I must sit 'side of her, 'cause I mean ter see that ye keep yer promise," declared Joe.

"I've only *two* sides," remarked Prue,

" and Johnny Buffum thinks he has to sit *one* side."

" Then Johnny kin stop thinkin'," said Job, " fer ye said *I* could sit side of ye, ter help me ter be good, and Joe has jest got ter be near us, so as ter help keep me out'n scrapes, or mischief. Johnny kin take care of hisself! "

Prue did not know what to say, so she wisely said nothing; but she wondered if the Butley boys and Johnny Buffum would try to settle the question in Sunday school!

CHAPTER III

A LITTLE SCARECROW

THE long road that passed Squire Weston's door led straight to the Centre; to Silas Barnes's store, and to the great stone drinking trough. The children thought the trough the most important of the three, and the small boys watched for chances to sail tiny boats upon its calm surface.

Horses drank their fill while their owners gossiped in the store; and the birds, perching upon its edge, drank little drafts of the cool water, pausing to tip their tiny heads heavenward, as if giving thanks for the treat.

A flock of geese wandered out from the squire's gateway, and, following their leader, waddled across the road and down into the meadow, where tiny pools glistened in the sunlight.

They quacked loudly as they ambled along, as if exulting that water could be found near at hand, without travelling so far as the Centre.

"Hear them, Philury!" shouted Prue, "hear them laugh!"

"My, what an idea!" said Philury, as she paused to listen. "Why, Prue, they're only quacking same as they always do."

"Hear 'em *now!*" insisted Prue.

"They say: 'Ha—ha, ha, ha ha!' and I tell you they're *laughing*, and I'd like to know what for."

"Go ask 'em!" said Philury.

"I will," said Prue, and she ran after

them, reaching the meadow just as the leader set his web foot in the soft mud of a little pool.

The big white bird stood as still as if he had been told to do so.

"What were you laughing at?" questioned Prue, shaking her finger at him, and trying very hard not to laugh.

He tipped his head, and looked at her with one round eye.

"If you were laughing at *something*, I'd like to know what it is," said Prue.

"Qua—a—ack!" remarked the bird.

"Well, if you were just laughing at *nothing*, you *were* an old silly!" she said.

Carlie Shelton, hurrying along the road, looked nervously about as if afraid of something that might follow her.

Once she turned and looked behind her, then hurried on again.

She was a little city girl who for a time had been living in the village; and while she loved the country for its beauty, and because her dear mother was growing stronger in its fresh, bracing air, there were some things which she could not become accustomed to.

"I *do* hope I sha'n't meet those big geese," she said, as she peeped over her shoulder again.

"The last time I came up here, they waddled along after me, making such a racket, and the big old leader made a horrid face at me and hissed like a cat."

She began to run, then doubled her speed, and soon had passed the squire's house.

"I'd have liked to stop to play with Prue," thought Carlie, "but I promised to hurry, and I've a long way to go, now."

Mrs. Shelton had given Carlie a note, and

had told her to take it to a lady who was boarding at Deacon Spilkins's farm.

"She is a dear friend of mine, and I am eager to have this note reach her early to-day, so do not play on the way, Carlie," she had said, and Carlie had promised to go, and return promptly.

"I guess I'm safe from those geese," Carlie murmured under her breath, "and there was no sense in Bob Rushton's laughing at me when I said they opened their mouths so wide that they scared me. He said they weren't *mouths*, but *bills;* but the hole between their bills is what they eat with, and if they eat with them, then why can't I call them 'mouths'?"

There was no one near to answer Carlie's question.

"Bob can laugh if he wants to, but *I'm* not sure that those geese can't bite. He

says they can't, but perhaps he doesn't know. I know one thing," she continued, "when those creatures chased me, they waddled after me toeing in so that I wonder they didn't tumble over their own feet, and every goose had its mouth, I mean its bill, wide open. I climbed the wall, tripped, and fell in a heap on the other side, and I could hear the horrid things just screaming after me, all the way across the field."

Carlie was thinking aloud, and she began to run for fear that the geese might suddenly appear at some point along the roadside.

She remembered their wide, yawning bills, their angry hissing, and as she stepped up on to the lowest stone of the wall that bordered Deacon Spilkins's pasture, she drew a long breath, for now, surely, she thought she was safe.

"Not a cow in the pasture," she whispered, "and I'm glad, for cows are twice as frightful as geese."

She paused on the top of the wall, looked around for a second, and then jumped down on the other side.

The pasture lay all in sunlight, and beyond, Carlie could see the apple orchard with its quaint, crooked old apple-trees, and between them, the farm buildings.

She was skipping along, and humming a gay little tune, when—what was that? Something was moving over in some low bushes near the wall!

She stopped, and stared at the spot where she felt sure that she had seen something or some one moving.

She could not have told what she expected to see.

There,—it *was* something behind those

bushes, and there was a long rope being dragged along the grass!

"It *can't* be a goose," thought Carlie, "for nobody would tie a rope to a goose,—or *would* they? Do folks ever?"

She could not answer the question for herself, and just at that moment the long tether was smartly twitched, and then,—a calf walked out from behind the bushes, and stared in amazement at the flying figure.

Every child in the neighborhood admired the pretty creature, and perhaps Carlie Shelton would have seen much beauty in it if only there had been a wall or fence between the calf and her frightened little self.

To have seen Carlie running, one might have thought that some wild animal had suddenly appeared, and was about to chase her.

"Go 'way! Go 'way!" she shouted, still running, and not daring to look over her shoulder.

At last, breathless, she was obliged to stop, and she was amazed to find that the calf was not chasing her.

Indeed, it was quite as much surprised as she, and looked in mild wonder at the only child it had ever seen that did not stop to admire it.

"Oh, it's turning its head, and looking right at me!" she said, under her breath.

"Bob says cows hook you; I wonder what calves do. Oh, why doesn't some one come along?"

As if in answer to her question, a merry whistle told that some one was near.

"Hello, Carlie!"

Carlie turned, and flew toward the boy that had shouted so cheerily.

"Oh, Johnny Buffum!" she cried, "are you afraid of *that?*"

Johnny looked at her pointing finger, and then across the pasture.

"'Fraid o' *what?* That little critter?" he asked.

"That calf is bigger than you are, and it looks real wild!"

"So does aour old cat!" Johnny declared in fine disgust.

Carlie was too frightened to notice his actual words, or care what they were. She only felt that he might, if he chose, be a brave protector.

"Well, I'm awfully afraid of that calf, and if you *aren't*, you can walk across the pasture with me to Deacon Spilkins's house, where I must take this note," said Carlie.

Johnny's pride was touched. He knew that Carlie's fear was absurd, but she had

asked him to *protect* her, and he felt very brave and manly.

He pushed his big straw hat still farther back upon his head, and swelled out his chest. Here was one girl that did not think him a *little* boy!

"Ye jest come right along with me, an' the calf won't hurt ye!" he said grandly.

He did not think it necessary to say that it would not have molested her if she had been alone.

Instead, he strutted along beside her in a manner that he thought must seem very brave, his little face puckered into a black frown, and his fists clenched as if he would gladly fight the calf, or the whole world if need be.

Carlie glanced nervously over her shoulder.

"Don't look behind ye!" he commanded;

"if the critter follers us, don't ye be skeered, for I'll—they's no *tellin'* what I'll do!"

When, at last, after many a backward peep, they reached the deacon's door, Carlie could hardly find words with which to thank him.

Johnny was delighted with her praise, but he seemed to have suddenly become very bashful.

"Do wait just a moment," Carlie said, "for I want to tell Deacon Spilkins how brave you were."

"Oh, I'd rather ye *wouldn't*," said Johnny, edging away; but Carlie caught hold of his sleeve, and the door opened just then, and Deacon Spilkins smiled down upon the two children.

"Oh, Deacon Spilkins!" cried Carlie, "Johnny doesn't want me to tell you how

brave he is, but I *will!* I might have been hooked, or something, if Johnny hadn't come right along and walked beside me, just like a soldier, and kept the horrid thing from chasing me, and he wasn't scared at all,—oh, I almost forgot. Here is a note that mamma wishes you to give to her friend who is boarding with you."

The good deacon peered at her a second, then he said:

"What's all this about Johnny's bein' so brave? I didn't know they was any wild critters in my pasture."

"'Twas a calf, and its eyes were so round when it stared at me—" began Carlie, but she could not say more, for the deacon's hearty laughter forced her to stop, while Johnny's face became decidedly red.

Indeed, Deacon Spilkins laughed until his twinkling eyes were full of tears.

"So Johnny Buffum saved ye from that wild and fearful calf, did he?" he asked, when at last he could speak.

"Well, I must say Johnny's a brave lad. He knows that calves is sometimes reel ferocious!"

"Ye needn't roar at me because I'm littler'n you be! When I'm as big as you, I'll chase *el'phants!*" roared Johnny, choking with rage, and forgetting that he should not speak thus to one so much older than himself.

"There, there, little man!" said the deacon, kindly, "ye're a spunky little chap, and I wouldn't wonder ef ye become a big man some day."

"I *will*," said Johnny, with what sounded much like a sob, for his pride had been rudely hurt.

"I'll be the postmaster, if I want ter!"

he snapped, "unless I change my mind and go on the trains ter be a paper boy like I seen daown ter the Centre!"

"Good fer yer spunk!" said the deacon, "an' I'll wish ye luck, whichever job ye tackle."

As a peace offering, he gave Johnny two big sweet apples, saying:

"There, Johnny, ye kin treat yer little lady; an' fergive me fer laughin'."

"I'll do *both*," said Johnny, and he promptly gave Carlie the larger apple.

"Johnny," said the deacon, "yer a manly little chap, an' I can't say that of *every* boy in the village. Fer one thing, yer generous, and yer quick ter fergive. Them two things will make ye a man we'll be proud ter know."

"Thank ye," said Johnny, blushing with pleasure.

As they walked along the road, eating their apples, Carlie was the first to speak.

"Deacon Spilkins thinks I needn't have been afraid of that calf, but all the same, I'm glad we started home down this road, instead of crossing the pasture," she said.

"Well, ye knew I wasn't afraid of the calf; that's why I walked beside ye, so it couldn't skeer ye," Johnny replied.

"Well, you were good!" said Carlie, "and your sister Hitty said nobody ever had a brother half as good as you."

"When did Hitty say that?" Johnny asked, his blue eyes showing his delight.

"Yesterday," said Carlie.

"Ma says I must be as nice to my sisters as to anybody else's sisters, and I do try to be," Johnny replied, "but I didn't know Hitty would say that."

"Well, she did," declared Carlie, "and

she said we couldn't say it wasn't so, and of course we couldn't."

"Ye're a nice girl," declared Johnny, "almost as nice as Prue Weston!"

Carlie thought the comparison spoiled the compliment, but was far too polite to say so.

As they passed the Weston house, they saw Philury standing by the well.

"Come on up!" said Johnny. "Let's ask her ter sing for us. She knows lots of funny tunes, an' most of 'em she makes up out of her head!"

"Why, how could she?" questioned Carlie.

"She did. Come! Oh, wait for us, Philury. Philury Flanders! Wait!" Johnny shouted as if he thought the girl might be deaf.

Philury turned, saw the children running toward her, and stood waiting.

"Land, but ye're in a hurry!" she said.

"I wanted to speak to ye before ye went in," said Johnny. "This is Carlie Shelton, and she hasn't ever heard ye sing, and that's what we're here for. We want ye ter sing us a tune."

Philury was flattered.

"I donno what ter sing fer ye, an' I've got a batch of work ter do, but I'll sing ye a little song, an' then I'll hev ter go in," she said.

"Sing one ye hev to act aout," Johnny demanded.

"All right," she agreed, and this was the song that she chose to sing:

"The woodchuck is chuckin';
The hop-toad is hoppin',
Look aout fer yer heads,
Lest the sky should be droppin'.

"The billy-goat is billin',
The jay-bird is a-jayin',

'Tis best, boys an' gals,
Ter look aout what yer sayin'.

"Fer birds kin be sassy,
An' brutes kin be cranky,
But this is the land
Of the bright, honest Yankee.

"So while they're a-screechin',
A-hoppin', a-brayin',
We'll be reel perlite,
An' we'll mind what we're sayin'."

"That's great!" declared Johnny, while Carlie could not remember ever having heard anything so droll.

"Ye hopped jest like a hop-toad when ye sung that, an' when ye looked up an' clawed the air, I expected *somethin'* would drop, if the sky didn't!" said Johnny.

"So did I," declared Carlie, "and *will* you sing for us again, some day?"

"Indeed I will," agreed Philury, well pleased that the children had so enjoyed her singing.

"An' the tune was as funny as the words," said Johnny, as they turned toward home.

"It *was* a queer tune," said Carlie.

"She makes up all the tunes she sings, and that one sounded jest like critters a-screechin' an' hootin' like all time," said Johnny, "an' ain't she got *lungs?* My, but I'd like ter hear her an' Jim Bullson singin' together!"

"Who is Jim Bullson?" Carlie asked.

"Is he the Mr. Bullson that sings in the choir?"

"That's the one," said Johnny, "an' he's an awful smart singer. Why, when he does his best, ye can't hardly hear anybody else singing, he makes such a racket! I tell ye if Jim an' Philury was to sing in the meetin' haouse, they'd h'ist the roof off, I bet ye!"

CHAPTER IV

THE BIG FIDDLE

A LITTLE group stood near the great willow tree that shaded the drinking trough, talking excitedly over what they seemed to think a matter of great importance.

" Naow I say, his name is Alphonse Mifkins, an' ye should see him saw a fiddle! " said Jeremy Gifford.

Jeremy was small, but he was fifteen, and he felt that his opinion was important.

" Guess ye mean ' see him *see* a fiddle,' don't ye? " questioned one of the group.

" No, I don't," Jeremy replied, " I mean ye should see him *saw* a fiddle, for I tell ye

he kin make that 'ere bow fly across them strings so fast that his hair almost stands on end. He played 'The Campbells Are Comin',' an' 'The Wearin' of the Green,' an' a whole string of tunes; an' they do say he's goin' ter play at church, come Sunday."

Jeremy paused, and looked at the faces of his friends to see how this bit of news impressed them.

"Parson Spooner wouldn't let him play such tunes as that in the meetin' haouse," objected Johnny Buffum.

Jeremy turned and stared at the small boy in disgust.

"'Tisn't likely he'll play them tunes," he said, "but he kin play jigs, an' ain't it likely that he kin play somethin' else?"

Johnny did not reply. He was just a bit afraid of the big boys, but he had opin-

ions of his own, and he confided them to Hitty as soon as he reached home.

"Why, Johnny Buffum! Who ever heard of a fiddle squeakin' in a meetin' haouse?" said Hitty. "Parson Spooner wouldn't let him bring that fiddle in, much less play on it!"

"That's what I said, but Jeremy Gifford says he *is* goin' to play that fiddle on Sunday, and everybody from Barnes's store to Four Corners will want to hear it!"

"An organ seems all right in church," Hitty said, after a moment's thought, "but a fiddle seems—well, just a little lively; still, I want awfully to hear it."

"I wonder ye do," said Johnny, "if ye truly think it's so awful wicked."

"I didn't say *wicked;* I said *lively*, an' that's not the same; and I want to hear it so, I'd go with this old dress on, an' bare-

foot, too, if I couldn't hear that fiddle any other way. It seems a long time to wait for Sunday?"

"Well, ye don't listen with yer feet, so ye kin wear yer new shoes, an' yer dress won't make any difference," Johnny replied.

"What bothers me Sunday mornings is that ma is in such a rush that when she washes my face she 'most always gets soap in my eyes. Then she can't wait for me ter get it aout, 'fore she slops a whole brush full of water on to my hair, an' some of it runs daown my neck."

"Your hair ain't long 'nough to run down your neck," interrupted Hitty, laughing.

"The *water* she uses is long enough, an' last Sunday when she slopped it on top of my head, it *did* run daown my neck, an'

some of it kept right on runnin' till it reached my boots."

"Why, Johnny Buffum! That can't be true!"

"Well, it is true, an' I wish I'd shown ye my wet stockin'. I tell ye, ma just *soaks* my hair!" said Johnny.

"But you look almost han'some when you're dressed up, but when you're not, you look 'bout like other boys!"

Johnny at once decided to submit to any amount of soap and water if it produced such wonderful results.

And while the little Buffums were talking of the possible joy of hearing a violin at church, Prue was quite as eagerly talking of the very same thing, but her views were quite different from Hitty's.

She had gone over to Randy's house soon after breakfast, to tell the news.

"Just think, Randy," she was saying; "a fiddle! A squeaky fiddle in church!"

"Call it a violin, Prue," Randy said, smiling.

"But the boys called it a '*fiddle*,' and Jeremy Gifford says the man that plays it is a great player," said Prue.

"If he is a fine musician, it will be a treat to hear him," Randy replied.

"Yes, indeed, and I want to be in the meetin' house early, because I mean to hear the very first note he plays."

Randy had been gathering some flowers, and was arranging them in jars and vases. She was very happy, and very proud of her new home, and she loved to deck the rooms with flowers, choosing always those that were most fragrant.

She was placing a low vase filled with geraniums and mignonette, upon the man-

tel, when an odd little solo caused her to pause and listen.

"Squeak, squeak, squeaky, squeak!
Hear my little fiddle speak!
Squeak, squeak, squeaky, squeak,
Squeaky, squeaky, *squawk!*"

Prue, sitting upon the low seat just outside the door, was using a huge burdock leaf for a violin, drawing a long flower stem across it for a bow, and singing in place of the music which the leaf violin could not produce.

Hearing Randy's footstep, she looked up.

"Squawk doesn't rhyme with squeak, does it?" she asked.

"It *isn't* what most people would call a rhyme," said Randy; and Prue saw that she was laughing.

"Do you think my green fiddle funny?" she asked.

PRUE WAS USING A HUGE BURDOCK LEAF FOR A VIOLIN.—*Page 68.*

"I certainly never saw one like it," Randy replied.

"I used this big leaf because I couldn't find anything else that was anywhere near the shape of a fiddle."

"And you look very nice playing upon it," said Randy, "but I've something to show you that will please you far more than your burdock fiddle. Come! It is a little gift from Jotham. You know he is your big brother now."

"I know he is, and I love him dearly. Oh, what did he buy for me?" cried Prue, dancing along beside Randy as they passed through the hall to the pretty dining room. Latticed windows were shaded from the hot sun by green vines which hung from the trellises that framed the windows.

"Oh, is it hidden in your china closet? *Is* it, Randy?"

Randy stooped to kiss the eager little face, then opened the glass doors.

"This is the gift," she said, as she placed a little tray upon the table.

"Oh, oh, what a dear, *dear* tea set!" cried Prue, wild with delight at the sight of the dainty dishes.

There were borders of turquoise-blue and gold on all the pieces, with tiny bouquets of pink roses scattered upon the dishes, the painted blossoms looking as perfect as if they were flowers that had just opened to the sunlight.

"Mine, Randy? Are they truly mine?" asked Prue.

"Truly yours, dear," Randy replied, "and you can play tea-party here as often as you choose. Jotham said that he purchased that tea set so that you might feel very sure that his home, and mine, is also

partly yours. You play tea-party at home with the dishes that you have always had, and here in my china closet will be a little tea set, waiting for you to come and play with it here."

"Oh, isn't Jotham just the nicest boy?" said Prue, exactly as she would have spoken of a boy of her own age.

However, Randy agreed that Jotham was nearly perfect, and Prue at once declared that no little girl ever had so nice a brother.

"Hitty has a brother, and he is really quite nice," chirped Prue, "but you *married* Jotham, and you wouldn't have married Johnny if he'd been big enough to ask you, would you?"

That was surely a comical question, but Randy was not obliged to answer it, for just at that moment Janie McLeod tapped at the door; and when she had told her errand,

Prue insisted upon showing the beautiful tea set, and she quite forgot that her question had received no reply.

Of course, Janie was delighted with it, and promised to take tea with Prue on a day when Mrs. McLeod could spare her.

Prue walked along toward home with Janie, and at the gate paused to talk with her.

"Can you sing as high as a fiddle can squeak, Janie?" asked Prue.

"Why, no one could," said Janie, with a merry laugh.

"But Johnny Buffum said that you could sing to high C," said Prue.

"And so I can," Janie replied, "but think how high the violin can run!"

"Run! Run, did you say?" cried Prue. "Why, who ever saw a fiddle running?"

How Janie laughed; and Hitty Buffum,

who had been hurrying after them, now joined them, and questioned them as she always questioned any one when she did not quite understand.

"Janie said fiddles could run, and I said 'who ever saw one running?'"

"Well, I guess the one I saw this morning down to the Centre could run if it had legs, for it was as big as Deacon Spilkins's calf!"

"Why, Hitty Buffum!"

Prue's eyes were round with surprise. She knew that Hitty was truthful, but was there *ever* a violin as huge as that?

Janie had gone into the house in response to a call from Sandy, and Prue could only ask Hitty again if she was *sure* of what she said.

"Of course I'm sure," declared Hitty, "didn't I *see* it? An' I tell you truly, Prue,

the fat man that had it lugged it on his *shoulders!*"

Prue actually gasped, and the two little girls stood staring at each other.

"Where was he going with it? The big fiddle, I mean," said Prue.

"I don't know where he was going this morning; I couldn't stop to watch him, for I had to do an arrant for Aunt Blifkins what's stayin' at our haouse, but I'll tell you what Bob Rushton told Johnny. I'm 'most afraid to tell it aloud, so I guess I'll whisper it," said Hitty.

There certainly was no one near to listen, but Hitty had said that she must whisper it, and that made Prue very eager to hear.

Hitty grasped Prue's curly head firmly in her chubby hands, and in a very loud whisper told what Bob had said.

"Why—ee!" cried Prue, "did Bob say

that big, fat man would dare to bring that big fiddle right into the church, and make loud music on it?"

"He's goin' to, an' Bob says he heard him tunin' it, an' it sounded just perfectly awful. He said the man got red in the face tightenin' up the strings, an' when he drew the bow across 'em, it sounded like the biggest bullfrog you ever heard!" said Hitty, "an' Johnny is wild to hear it, an' this is only Thursday, an' he'll *have* to wait 'til Sunday."

"P'raps it won't sound like bullfrogs Sunday," ventured Prue hopefully.

"Johnny'll be dis'pointed if it doesn't," said Hitty, "for he thinks it's going to jest hoot. He says so!"

The children were not more curious than their elders in regard to the music for Sun-

day, and although every one was early, and promptly seated, the two musicians were already in their places, and softly tuning their instruments.

It was an odd happening that the violinist was slender like his instrument, while the other man was short and exceedingly stout, and the proud possessor of a big bass viol.

"Don't he look han'some?" asked Johnny, who ardently admired the stout man.

"Which?" whispered Hitty.

"*Which?*" repeated Johnny in disgust, "Why, the fat man, of course. That other with the little fiddle is a regular skinny, but the big bull fiddle is el'gant shape, an' the fat man looks jest like it!"

Hitty giggled.

"What ye laughin' at?" whispered Johnny; "I tell ye I mean ter be a big man

when I grow up, an' I *will* if I hev ter eat a barrel full of stuff a day ter do it."

Instead of giggling this time, Hitty laughed outright; and Mrs. Buffum gave her a mild shake, and a look that assured her that she would stop laughing, or *perhaps* be told to go home!

Hitty made a desperate effort to behave properly, and for fear that Johnny might say something even funnier, she made Sophy sit between Johnny and herself.

Johnny saw nothing amusing in what he had said, and wondered why Hitty had laughed, and why she had changed places with Sophy.

"Girls are queer!" he whispered.

At last, when it seemed as if every member of the little parish had arrived, dear old Parson Spooner arose, his pleasant face wreathed with smiles, for he believed that

he had secured a musical treat with which all would be delighted.

After the prayer and reading, he announced that Janie McLeod, accompanied by violin and bass viol, would sing "Ave Maria."

Oh, was ever a voice more tender, more liquidly sweet?

Janie's fair hair seemed like a halo, as a slanting sunbeam touched it, and her eyes told that music was, indeed, her soul's delight.

How they listened! How they marvelled that, as with one accord, the strings and the human voice filled the little church with melody; sweet melody that touched their hearts.

All were impressed, but Johnny Buffum was astounded!

"Who'd ever b'lieve them fellers could

play jigs on them fiddles when they want ter, an' music that makes ye almost hold yer breath an' nearly cry, any time they choose!'' he whispered softly to Sophy.

Sophy, her eyes staring, and her lips parted, did not hear Johnny's whispered comment, and Johnny settled down in his seat to think over the wonder of that music.

The sermon was long, and the greater part of it the children could not understand. Carlie Shelton spent the hour tying and untying the ribbons at her belt, in an effort to make a finer bow; while Bob Rushton tried to keep her mind upon the sermon.

"Parson says 'love yer neighbor,'" he whispered, "an' Carlie, *I'm* yer neighbor," and he nudged her, at the same time blushing a fiery red.

"I've *ever* so many neighbors," was Carlie's whispered reply; and without a look

at Bob she continued playing with her ribbons.

Prue leaned against Randy, and drowsily whispered: "I love every one; most of all, you."

She had heard the theme of the sermon, and although she was very sleepy, it had found its way to her tender little heart.

Johnny Buffum was much moved, but not by sentiment.

He looked very thoughtful, and indeed he was pondering over a mighty question.

"I'll be a *big* man," he whispered softly, "but I wish I knew whether I'd rather toot on a horn, or saw on a bull fiddle."

CHAPTER V

THE NEWEST LITTLE GIRL

"CARLIE SHELTON has lived here a long time, now," said Prue, "and ever since she came here from the city, we've called her the 'new little girl.'"

"I know it," agreed Hitty, "an' she still seems kind of new."

"Well, she *is*," said Prue, "but there's to be somebody *newer* in this town next week!"

"My!" exclaimed Hitty, "who is it?"

"You know who Miss Helen Dayton is, don't you?"

No, Hitty didn't remember.

"Why, you *do*," insisted Prue; "she is

the *lovely* girl my Randy visited twice in Boston; and now she's married, and she's Mrs. Helen Dayton Marden, and she's just come to visit Randy and Jotham."

"Oh, I know," said Hitty, "she's the one that had a grand house, and gave a big party for Randy."

"Yes, that's just who she is," agreed Prue, "and she has brought a little girl with her."

"Whose little girl?" questioned Hitty.

"She's Mr. Marden's little niece, and her name is Clare Marden. Randy says she is very rich," concluded Prue.

"I didn't know that *little* girls were ever rich," said Hitty. "Where did she get her money?"

"I don't know," Prue replied, "but it *must* be true; Randy said it to Aunt Prudence, and she said that Jotham told her."

"If she's *very* rich," said Hitty, "she *may* have as much as three dollars and a half. S'pose she has?"

"*That* wouldn't be rich!" declared Prue.

"I don't know," said Hitty doubtfully. "Last week, Sophy an' Johnny an' me all needed boots, an' they cost three dollars, an' Ma said that was a good deal of money; so I said if the little girl was *very* rich, p'raps she had as much as three dollars an' a half, all to her own self."

Prue had but little idea of what wealth actually meant, but she knew that Hitty did not understand at all, and she would not try to explain.

Randy had not intended what she had said for childish ears, nor did she dream that Prue had heard it. She wished to have Prue and all her merry friends become acquainted with little Clare Marden, and,

oddly enough, not one of the silly stories that sped around the town reached Randy's ear.

Hitty repeated what Prue had said, and Johnny and Sophy listened with attention, but in some way the story became tangled.

So Johnny told it as he understood it, and Jeremy Gifford, when he repeated it, told it a little larger; Jeremy told it to Tom Thompson, who, in turn, told it to Merilla Burton.

This is the size of the story as Merilla told it to Mrs. Hodgkins, whom she happened to meet.

"They do say there's a little girl staying at Randy's house, some relation to Mrs. Helen Dayton Marden, that city girl, ye know, an' the child is so rich that they have to lug a big iron safe 'round with 'em to carry her money an' jewelry in!"

Merilla paused to regain breath.

"Land o' Goshen!" ejaculated Mrs. Hodgkins, "why, Merilla, be ye *sure* that's so?"

"Well, if you ain't sure, ask the fust child ye meet. They're full of it!"

That satisfied Mrs. Hodgkins, and she trudged off at high speed to find some one to whom she could tell the great tale.

Hitty Buffum told it to Sophy, and Sophy told it to Phonie Jenks. Phonie repeated it to Jim Simpson, and by the time Jim had told it to a half dozen others, it commenced something like the original story, and ended like an entirely new one.

"Wal, here's the yarn, as I heard it," said Joel Simpkins, as he was weighing a quarter of a pound of butter for a customer, and putting his finger on the scale lest the butter might seem to be light weight.

"Tell it!" said his customer.

"It's the little gal that's visitin' Randy, an' they say she's wealthy; not *some* wealthy, but *'mensely* wealthy, an' her ten trunks what she brung with her is full of rich clothes that an ord'nary child would be 'fraid ter wear, fer fear of spilin' of 'em."

A story told and retold many times in a country town, not only becomes stretched beyond its original size, but it influences those who listen, and often causes unpleasant feeling where none should have existed.

Not only the older people, but the children were much excited, and when Prue told Hitty that Randy was to give a little party for her little guest, Hitty actually gasped.

"A party! Why, what'll we wear?" she asked.

"Why, *clothes*," cried Prue, as if Hitty were losing her senses.

"Of course," said Hitty.

Hitty did not say what she thought, but when she reached home, she searched her tiny closet, and decided that she had nothing that *could* be worn to greet the rich little girl.

"Naow, Hitty," said Mrs. Buffum, "be the sensible little gal ye've always been; go ter the party in yer best frock, an' don't fret because ye ain't rich."

It was good advice and Hitty decided to abide by it, but she could not help wondering what the "newest" little girl would wear.

"It'll be something shiny, I know," she confided to Johnny, but Johnny's reply was not especially comforting.

"Girls are queer," he said, "'n I'm glad

boys are different. When I'm goin' to a party, I'm glad first that I've got the chance, an' next I wonder what the spread'll be, but I don't waste a minute thinkin' 'baout clothes."

Ann and Sophy were also invited, and, with Hitty, they talked of their scanty wardrobes.

Phonie Jenks was, perhaps, more excited than any of her playmates. She had no sisters with whom she could talk of the party that would occur just a week from that day.

In her little attic chamber, she looked again and again at her one best dress, turning it this way and that.

"It isn't very fine," she said, "but it looks as well as most of 'em will," which was, indeed, a wise conclusion.

She felt, however, that something unusual should be done. If the new little girl

was to be richly dressed, with costly silk, lace, and jewels, how *could* they meet her looking as they usually looked?

Phonie spent long hours before the glass, twisting, braiding, and even trying to curl her straight hair that stubbornly refused to kink, or curl, or even to stay braided, until she was almost in despair.

"What *shall* I do with it?" she cried one day, after having worked upon it until her arms ached.

"I b'lieve I'll put some molasses on it, and then do it up on papers. That ought to make it stay curled instead of hoppin' off the papers just as fast as I can twist it on."

"What ye after, Phonie?" called her aunt, as Phonie tipped the molasses jug over on its side.

Mrs. Jenks had followed her into the

closet, however, and saw what she was doing.

"What do ye want it for?" she asked.

"To put on my hair to make it curl!" said Phonie.

"Of all the notions! Well, I can't let ye do that. Don't ye know it would make a mess of yer dress? What on airth put such an idea into yer head?"

Phonie was desperate.

"Ain't I goin' to the party?" she asked, with flashing eyes.

"An' must ye gum yer hair with m'lasses 'til ye look like a wild Injine?" questioned Mrs. Jenks.

"I'm yer aunt, an' I'd like yer ter go ter the party lookin' civ'lized," she continued, "an' why ye think ye must make yer hair look like all time, I don't see."

"My hair looks outrageous *all* the time,"

wailed Phonie, "an' I thought I'd just *try* to make it a bit fine for the party. The rich little girl will look perfec'ly el'gant, of course."

"Phonie, you was named fer me, Euphony Ann Jenks, an' I hope some good sense came ter ye with the name. I'll do up yer Sunday-go-ter-meetin' dress, an' if ye *must* hev yer hair curled, I'll put some sugar an' water on it, an' tie it up in rags, an' I guess that'll kink it. I shouldn't wonder if it stuck aout in frizzles like the hair on them Fiji critters the missionaries tell us of!"

"Oh, I'm tickled to have it curled, and I don't care if I look perfectly wild! *Anything* is better than to go to a party looking just *every day!*"

Dear old Sandy McLeod had his little joke regarding the party.

Janie had told him of the children's excitement, and of their great anxiety lest they should be too plainly dressed.

When Hitty Buffum and Phonie Jenks passed him, as he stood in his gateway, he called to them to stop.

"What's a' this I hear aboot the fine party, an' the little lady it's given for?"

"Oh, Sandy," said Hitty, "we're going to look like little country girls, an' she's a city child, so, of course, she'll look grand!"

"To be sure, to be sure!" Sandy replied, gravely, "an' tho' I'm told they don't keep her in a gold cage, I'm nae sure but she'll wear her hair piled high on top o' her wee head, an' a satin train, wi' gold lace on it!"

Sandy raised his hands, and let them drop, as if overpowered with the thought of the little girl's magnificence, at the same time shaking his head wisely.

"Oh, Sandy! You don't s'pose *that*, do you?"

Sandy's kindly eyes twinkled.

"I said I was nae sure, as I'd nae seen her," he replied, "but I doubt not she's verra, verra grand!"

They knew that the jolly old Scotchman was only teasing them, yet his words had strengthened their first thought that whoever might joke about it, the fact remained that the little Boston girl was, without doubt, a very dainty person.

"Ye're a set o' bonny little lassies," he called after them, "an' braw an' rosy ye'll look beside any city child."

"Sandy's real kind, and he likes us just as we are, but *I* think we look anything but fine. Somebody said city folks aren't ever fat, an' see how round we are!" said Phonie. "My waist is pretty big, an' I'm

'most sure yours is bigger. Let's measure!"

"I don't want to," objected Hitty; "what's the use in measurin'? I'm just as big as I *am*, an' I can't make myself any skinnier, but what I *do* wish is that I could get something lovely to wear."

It was fortunate that the party was not postponed. Not one of the little invited guests could have endured one day more of hoping, fearing, and anticipating.

For in spite of the thought that they were to be plainly dressed, they really longed for that party!

Small wonder that they were eager for it, —it was the first party that any child in the village had ever attended!

The day dawned bright and sunny, and the forenoon was almost endless, for the hour named in the invitation was three;

and all those hours between sunrise and three must be endured before the joy of the party might be tasted.

Phonie Jenks, her head covered with countless little knobs tied with cotton rags, was in almost a fever to know just how her usually straight hair would look when those rags were untied.

"Do you s'pose it'll curl?" she had asked at least twenty times that morning.

"*Curl?*" said Mrs. Jenks, "I wouldn't be s'prised if it curled like all-possessed!"

"Oh, I *hope* so!" cried Phonie. "Can't I have it combed out now? It's almost half past one."

"I guess I might as well do it, fer fear ye hev a fit waitin'," was the quick reply.

Phonie ran for the comb, and her aunt began to untie the rags. How that hair did kink! It looked like corkscrews when the

rags were removed; but when the comb was passed through them, no words could describe the manner in which the woolly mass stood out.

"My senses! Why, Phonie, ye look actually wild!" said Mrs. Jenks; but Phonie could not see that it might, in any way, be improved.

"Oh, don't smooth it down," she cried, throwing up her arms to shield it.

"But ye can't go with it standin' every way of a Sunday!"

"Yes, I can, I *want* to!" screamed Phonie, in fear that her aunt might use water to calm her now *wildly* curling tresses.

"Wal, of all the notions!" said Mrs. Jenks; "at least hev a comb in it, or a ribbon ter tie it!" but Phonie refused to be thus ornamented.

She had always longed for curling hair, and now that it *had* been curled, nothing should smooth or quiet its kinks and crimps.

It was with great delight that she started for Randy's house to meet the "newest" little girl, and enjoy the party.

No guests were ever more prompt. As the clock hand touched three, every child who had been invited turned in at the driveway gate, and with timid eyes scanned the house, to catch just a glimpse of the wonderful city child.

Randy, with Prue, stood waiting to greet them, and to invite them into the cool, long parlor.

The house was fine and its furnishings tasteful, for Jotham and Randy now possessed a fortune, and the children looked around with staring eyes, and wondered at the beauty of all that they saw.

The girls' dresses were stiffly starched, and the small boys had the air of being "dressed up," and therefore rather uncomfortable. Johnny looked at Prue, in the same pretty frock that she had worn at Randy's wedding, and he believed that no one was ever so fair.

The Butley twins, Joe and Job, had chosen to sit on one chair, their small green eyes looking sharply at the other children, their stiff collars all but choking them.

Randy had at first intended to have little Clare in the parlor when the children arrived, but when she heard some of the silly stories that were being circulated, she decided to let the little guests find seats in the parlor, and then lead Clare in to greet them.

"You have come to meet my little guest, and she is very eager to see you all, so I will bring her to you, and then, when each of

you has spoken to her, we will enjoy some games.''

A buzz of whispering voices followed Randy as she left the room, and their eyes eagerly followed her.

Quickly she returned, leading by the hand a little girl whose gentle face at once charmed them all.

A frail little creature she seemed, her light flaxen hair framing her small, white face; her slender form, her small, white throat, her tiny hands and feet, all told how delicate a child she must be.

A pale-blue ribbon tied her hair, but it was her only ornament.

Her simple white frock was of finest texture, and its only trimming was the dainty lace that edged the neck and sleeves.

"You are already well acquainted with my little sister, Prue, but now you must

know her merry little playmates. Hitty, will you come and meet this little girl? ”

Hitty was all courage. *This* was the little girl of whom she had been afraid! She walked promptly to where Clare was standing.

“ This is Clare Marden; and this, Clare, is a new friend for you; she is Hitty Buffum.”

The white little hand grasped Hitty's tanned one, and the pale little face looked up into Hitty's dark eyes.

“ I'm glad to know you, Hitty,” she said; “ *truly* glad,” she added.

Hitty was delighted.

“ You're *dear*,” she replied, “ and I'm glad I came.”

CHAPTER VI

THE PARTY

JOHNNY BUFFUM, charmed with the greeting that his sister had received, waited for no invitation, but rushed boldly forward to offer his rough little hand.

"I'm jest as glad to know ye as Hitty is!" he said.

"You must be a nice boy to know," said Clare, and Randy smiled to see how ready was her reply.

Phonie Jenks and Sophy Buffum came next, and each received a sunny smile, and a sweet word that made them feel at ease.

The child that knew so well how to graciously receive her little city friends,

seemed quite as well to know how best to greet the little people of the country village. She wished to give pleasure.

The Butley twins thought that, as they were twins, they must on all occasions appear together.

Joe thrust his hand through Job's arm, together they slid from the chair to the floor, and then marched bravely up to the little girl. They did not wait to be introduced.

"One of us is Joe, an' one is Job," announced Joe, "guess which of us is *which?*"

"Oh, I could never guess," said Clare, "which are you?" and she gave a soft little laugh.

"I'll tell you, but I wouldn't tell anybody else. I'm Joe, an' he's Job. An' we'll play real nice with ye, but we won't be rough,

'cause ye look as if ye'd break easy, like Ma's best chiny."

Again the soft peal of silvery laughter rang out, and Helen and Randy were delighted to see Clare so happy.

Randy had told her that the children whom she would meet would be very different from her own little playmates at home, and that they would be plainly dressed, because the greater number of them could not have pretty frocks.

"Oh, let me wear my plainest frock," Clare had quickly said, "then they will feel happier, and so shall I."

Dear little girl! She had no wish to wear a showy dress if thus she might mar the pleasure of other, more plainly dressed children.

"A party is to make people happy, and those other little girls could not be quite as

cheerful, if I am dressed much finer than they."

It was the kind, thoughtful heart of a true little lady that caused Clare to choose her simplest costume.

She was delighted to find them all so glad to meet her. And when all the little guests had greeted her, Mrs. Marden and Randy helped them to play some lively games.

There was "post-office" with many letters for all, but an especially large number for Clare. Then, "on the green carpet," another country game; then "hunt the slipper;" "button, button;" "follow the gander;" until all were glad to rest for a time.

How eagerly the little city girl had entered into all the games! A faint pink tinged her cheeks, and her eyes grew bright with excitement.

It had been a pretty sight, the eager, romping children, the fair, frail-looking guest, and, prettiest of all, the care with which the big boys guarded her.

Even in the most exciting part of the games, Clare was not pushed about, and she felt and appreciated their kindness to her.

Randy and Helen had believed that the children would enjoy their spread out of doors; so while the merry games were in progress, they had slipped from the room, and with the aid of Randy's maid and Philury, who had loaned herself for the occasion, they soon had a long table set under shady trees.

How tempting it looked!

There was ice cream in plenty, huge plates of cake, platters of chicken sandwiches, and nuts and bonbons of every description.

"Call them, now," said Randy; and Philury ran up to the house.

"Come out ter the spread," she announced, "and come like little ladies an' gentlemen!"

"Clare's pretty tired," said Prue, "couldn't you and Job take her, as you sometimes take me?"

"Guess we *can!*" cried Joe, and before Clare could ask how that might be, the Butley twins had made a fine lady's-chair. Johnny helped her into it, and with her arms about their shoulders, she rode in style to the feast, the others filing behind them, singing and whistling "Hail, Columbia, Happy Land."

Across the lawn, along the path, over the brook they went, Clare riding like a little queen.

They placed her at the head of the table,

and took their places on either side of her. Then the feast began.

The good things vanished like magic. Johnny said he meant to eat all the ice cream he could before it melted.

Hitty thought that at the rate that he was eating it, there soon would be none to melt.

How cool and shady it seemed; the leaf-shadows flickering upon the white damask cloth, the faint murmuring of the brook, the liquid notes of the birds, the scent of flowers,—little Clare clasped her hands, and paused to listen, and look about her.

"Oh, it is so beautiful here!" she said, with a happy little sigh; "so beautiful that it seems like fairyland!"

"I never had a spread out of doors," she continued, "and the parties indoors in the city aren't half as nice as this."

"Then I am glad that you came up here

to enjoy a country party," Randy said smiling.

"And some of my little friends at home look as if they were tired of parties," said Clare.

"Why, how could they be?" asked Prue, "parties are such fun!"

"Oh, they are always going to them, and they are all alike," Clare replied.

"I wouldn't be tired of parties if I went to one every week," said Hitty.

"*I* wouldn't, if they were like this," said Clare.

Mrs. Marden was delighted to see her little niece so happy and interested in the pleasures of the afternoon.

She had been far from strong all winter, and this visit to Randy's home was for the change of scene, and for the fresh mountain air.

Already she looked brighter, and Helen felt encouraged.

A yellow butterfly flew across the table, hovered a second over the ice cream, flew toward Clare, then away over the sunlit fields.

"Wasn't he like a fairy?" exclaimed Clare.

"His wings were like those that you wore at the fancy dress party," said Helen.

"Oh! oh! *did* she wear wings?" asked Phonie Jenks; "do tell us about them."

"Oh, do, do!" chimed in all the other voices.

"Would you not rather see them than hear about them?" questioned Helen, with a smile at the eager faces. "I think Clare would willingly show them to you."

"Yes, yes!" they cried, "oh, let us see the wings!"

"You shall see them on Clare's shoulders," Helen replied, "and I think she will be quite willing to do the little fairy dance for you that she did at the party where she first wore the wings."

"Oh, will you?" Hitty asked.

"Indeed I will, if you'd like to have me," Clare replied, as simply as if she were speaking of a very small matter.

In truth, the little solo dance was one that she had learned at dancing school. It was really very pretty, although not difficult, and she hoped that the children would like it.

She did not know that they had never seen any dancing, and thus any graceful steps would delight them.

When, at last, the children had eaten their fill of the good things, the Butley boys looked shyly at Clare.

"Goin' ter let me an' Job take ye back?" queried Joe.

"I'm not tired now; I can walk," she said.

"But we're aching ter carry ye," urged Job.

"Oh, then you shall," agreed Clare with a sunny smile.

Back to the house in the "lady's-chair" she rode, the merry, laughing playmates following.

"Now run up stairs, dear, and I'll fasten your bells and your wings for you," said Helen; and the two disappeared up the broad stairway.

They could hear the buzzing voices of the children as they tried to guess what color her wings would be, and how she would look in them.

Mrs. Marden came down alone, and asked

the children to keep as close to the walls as possible, thus leaving the centre of the room free. Then she seated herself at the piano, and commenced to play a lively polka.

Down the stairway, and in at the open door ran a tiny, elfin figure, dressed in short skirts of yellow gauze; yellow wings were upon her shoulders, a band of tiny gilt bells fastened her flaxen hair.

Bells were upon the toes of her slippers, and their tinkling music followed her flying footsteps.

Up and down the length of the room she sped, seeming to fly, because she moved her arms so that the gauzy wings moved with them. Now she whirled like a top, now she bent low as if over a flower! Ah! she was off again, spinning, swaying, rocking as if tossed by the wind, then flying away with a tripping step and a graceful movement of

the arms, then out of the parlor and up the stairway.

Mrs. Marden played a few measures, finishing with a trill, and then she followed Clare to help remove her costume.

There was a moment's hush, then cries of admiration, and clapping of hands that told of their delight.

"Oh, how beautiful!"

"How *did* she learn to do it!"

"I wouldn't believe any one could do that!"

"No *boy* could do that!" said Phonie Jenks.

"No *gal* I ever see could!" replied Joe Butley.

"She looked like a *truly* fairy!" said Prue.

"She learned at dancing school," Helen said, in answer to their eager questions,

" and she is always very willing to please her friends."

" She's the dearest girl I ever saw, next to my Randy," said Prue.

That was great praise, truly, for *no one* could equal Randy, thought Prue, and to be *next* in loveliness to Randy was all that any mortal might expect.

" All of us children that play together are here," said Phonie Jenks. " Isn't it nice for no one to be left out? "

" All but one is here," said Prue, her brown eyes very thoughtful.

" Who's that? " asked Phonie.

" Tell us," said Hitty.

" I know," said Johnny Buffum, " she means Hi Babson."

" Well, he ran away before I came here, so I didn't know him, and wouldn't miss him," Phonie replied.

"*I* miss him," said Prue; "he was great fun to play with."

Johnny missed him, too, but he did not say so. He had always enjoyed Hi, whose merry pranks had made him a jolly playfellow, but he felt grieved that Prue should care so much for the absent playmate.

"Would ye be jest as sorry, Prue, if *I* wasn't here? " he asked.

"Yes," said Prue, "for I want *all* my friends."

Dear, loving little girl! Her heart was full of affection for all of her playmates; but the thought that Hi was lost, and that no one in all the village knew if he were dead or alive, distressed her. It is true that she played as gaily, and laughed, and sang her merry songs; but whenever she thought of Hi, her sweet eyes would grow sad and thoughtful, and if she was alone, she would

whisper softly: "I *do* wonder where Hi is."

And where was Hi on this sunny afternoon, when his little friends were talking of him?

Up at the Babson farm his mother grieved for him. She seldom cried now, but daily her face grew sadder and her eyes seemed ever to be looking far, far away beyond the distant hills.

Sometimes she forgot to reply when she was spoken to, and always she moved about the house as one in a dream.

"I can't think he's gone for *always*," she would say; "that something has happened to him, I feel sure; but he ain't dead, I know, and that thought is all that keeps me up."

Then Grandma Babson would look toward others who happened to be in the

room, and would shake her head and tap her forehead, as if she wished them to understand that Hi's mother must be crazy.

Mrs. Babson walked slowly to the open door, and leaning against the side of the doorway, gazed sadly at the horizon line where the sky and the mountains seem to meet.

"I wonder where he is," she whispered, just as little Prue had said it.

And where was the boy, and what was he doing while his mother and his friends were so earnestly thinking of him?

Foolish little fellow that he was, he had left home and friends behind, and had joined a circus troupe, believing that there he could be perfectly happy.

He had hated the tasks that Uncle Babson had set for him.

He thought that weeding the garden,

splitting kindling, bringing pails of water from the well, were what *should* be called hard work.

When the circus had come to town, he felt that under its canvas tent, joy reigned supreme! No work there! Tugging pails of water for the animals was interesting! Helping to clear the place after each performance would be fun! And if, later, he could learn to ride!

Hi felt that no words could describe such rapture as that!

CHAPTER VII

HI

HI BABSON missed his home, his playmates, his mother most of all; and quite as often as she thought of him, his wayward little heart longed for her.

At times he wished that he had never seen a circus!

That was on the days when Dick Pagington, the owner of the circus, was away; for those were the times when Mantelli, the bareback rider who was instructing him, was cross and surly, and very hard to please.

One thing had discouraged him. He had just begun to feel cheery, because he knew that he was rapidly learning. He had rid-

den a number of times around the ring without a mishap, when a pebble, thrown by a lad who was jealous of him, had caused Brown Betty to bolt, with the result that Hi had been thrown. His ankle was badly injured, and countless bruises had caused him a deal of misery.

Now, the bruises were healed, and the ankle was well and strong, but Mantelli's temper was in dreadful condition.

Small matters angered him, and it seemed to be impossible to please him. He frowned, and scolded, and stamped around the ring, finding fault and making every one in the company uncomfortable.

"There's more folks standing round here than I have any use for!" he shouted, "and if ye'll git out of this ring, I'll thank ye, and occupy my time with this boy."

Those who were afraid of Mantelli went

quickly; those who were not, took their time about it, walking with lagging steps, and making very uncomplimentary remarks about his temper.

He seemed not to hear them, waiting in frowning silence until they had left the tent.

Then he turned towards Hi.

How black he looked!

"Well, young chap! Woke up yet?"

"Ain't been asleep," answered Hi, sullenly.

"Goin' ter take yer lesson this morning, or do ye have ter have a printed invitation before ye'll come ter practice?"

Hi sprang to his feet, his black eyes flashing, his little fists tightly clenched.

"I'll practise, an' I'll do *fine* if ye'll be decent, but if ye're goin' to holler, an' get mad, an' tear round like ye've been doin', I'll *quit!*" he shouted.

He saw Mantelli's dark face change, and knew that he had an advantage over this man of whom he had long been afraid.

"Yes, I will," he continued, "for I won't stay here an' be banged around."

"I haven't ever laid my hand on ye, hev I?" Mantelli asked, a trifle less roughly than before.

"No, ye haven't slapped nor beaten me, but ye've done 'bout as bad. Ye've called me names, an' hollered at me jest as ye shout at the critters, an' I *ain't* a *critter;* I'm a boy, an' I'm a rider, now! I'll be a big rider if I have half a chance!"

Hi's courage was increasing.

"Don't I teach ye? Ef I don't, who does?" roared Mantelli.

"Of course ye teach me, but ye treat me mean, too. I tell ye, I don't have to stay here! I ran away from the farm, an' I can

run away from this old circus, an' I will, if ye ain't half decent," retorted little Hi.

How small he looked, defying the dark, swarthy man who glowered at him.

Mantelli was frightened.

Pagington had supported the boy, in the hope that he might become a rider. Now that his training was about completed, he would certainly wish to keep him, as Hi bade fair to be a fine performer, daring and graceful, with a face and form that would surely please an audience.

Mantelli knew that if Hi became so angry that he ran away, Pagington would say that it was all the fault of the riding-master; so he decided to make peace with the little lad.

"Come now," he said, "don't be stubborn. I got riled with all the good-for-nothin' folks, jest standing round here, but

I didn't mean ter be harsh with ye. Look up, boy! Who taught ye ter plant yer little feet on the saddle an' stick to it? 'Twas me, an' ye *ought* ter like me fer that. Say, boy, *wa'n't* it me? "

It sounded like pleading, and Hi, always fair, answered generously.

" *'Twas* you that taught me to ride, and I like ye for that! I like ye, anyway, when ye're some pleasant, but when ye look an ol' black pirate, like one I seen in a book, an' shout, an' stamp, then I don't want to stay where ye be."

Mantelli was amused at the boy's fearless speech, and his lips parted in a smile that showed two rows of white teeth.

" Plucky little imp! " he said, " I'd not like ye half as well as I do if ye was afraid of me. Come on! Let's see ye ride this morning! "

The boy rose slowly from the old box upon which, for the moment, he was sitting, walked over to where the brown mare was standing, and laid his head against her shoulder. She turned her head, and tried to caress him. He laughed, and moved nearer. Suddenly clasping her delicate muzzle with his little hands, he looked up into her eyes, and softly whispered:

"Help me to-day, Brown Betty, an' p'raps I can do wonders! Could ye go easy, lightly? *Could* ye?"

A soft whinny seemed a reply to the boy's whispered question.

Did she understand?

"Ye have a trick of talkin' to her, and she actually expects ye'll say a little something to her every time ye start ter ride."

"I know she does," said Hi, "an' *she* don't ever act cross."

"Come, come!" Mantelli replied, "I ain't cross now, an' I'm in a hurry ter see ye perform."

Hi gave Betty's neck an extra pat, whispered again to her, and then placed his foot in Mantelli's waiting hand. Up to the broad, flat saddle he sprang, where, with his legs firmly braced, he stood looking down at his teacher.

"Ye don't hev ter wear the harness now," said Mantelli. "Ain't ye proud of that?"

"Yes, I am," said Hi, "but wait 'til ye see me ride!"

"Now then! Don't ye get flighty!" warned Mantelli, "for if ye think ye can do it easy, and ye're careless, down ye'll come with a crack. Ye don't want 'nother twisted ankle, do ye?"

"Ain't goin' to fall!" declared Hi.

"All right, then, we'll say ye ain't goin' ter," agreed Mantelli, "but all the same, ye'll do well ter brace yer feet, look straight ahead, and lean a little toward the centre, as I always tell ye to. Ready?"

"Yep!" chirped Hi.

"Off ye go, then!" shouted Mantelli, as he tapped the mare's flank with his whip stock.

And off like the wind she sped, little Hi catching his breath, and bracing himself that he might keep his balance and make a graceful tour of the ring.

How his heart beat!

The color mounted to his cheeks, his eyes flashed, the breeze blew his dark hair back from his temples! He was nearing the place where the riding-master stood. Could he pass him, and again circle the ring?

Nearer, nearer,—

He had passed him! Mantelli cried "Bravo!" and the little heart beat faster, as again the mare flew around the circle.

He was fearless now! His lips parted in a happy smile, and his eyes showed the light of triumph! He had conquered the difficult task! He had gained the courage, the confidence that comes only with persistent practice.

Again he passed Mantelli; this time he made a graceful little salute, touching his hand to his temple and bowing ever so slightly.

"Good!" shouted Mantelli, "round once more, and then I'll teach ye some new tricks."

Again he flew around the sawdust ring, riding with even more daring than before.

"You done well, Hi," said Mantelli, "no *man* could have done better."

"Did I do it good enough to let the people see me?"

"Sure," was the quick reply, and the crowd that had been sent out of the tent was recalled.

"I didn't mean *them!*" said Hi in disgust, "I meant the crowd at the performance!"

He had slipped to a seat upon the saddle, and his dark little face wore a frown.

"Oh, *that's* it, is it?" laughed Mantelli.

"Wal, young chap, I thought I'd let ye ride fer this crowd, an' see if it rattled ye. If it don't, ye ride for the public a week from ter-day!"

"Hooray!" shouted Hi, springing to his feet and doing a little jig, to the amazement of Brown Betty.

He saw her prick up her pretty ears, and like a flash he dropped on his knees, crept

to her neck, and hiding his face in her silken mane, whispered so softly that no one else might hear:

"I'll ride for the public, next week, Betty dear; *next week*, do you hear?"

She arched her pretty neck as if her little master's triumph were also her own.

Hi was on his feet in an instant, his eyes bright with excitement.

"See me do it, the whole crowd of ye!" he shouted.

He bowed, gave a saucy laugh, and was off, his arms outstretched, his manner confident.

Three times he circled the sawdust ring, the members of the troupe stamping and clapping, shouting, whistling, and in every way showing that they were glad that Hi had gained his master's approval.

They knew the cost of learning. They

knew, as no others could know, of the disappointments, the bruises earned in heavy falls, the lame muscles, the tears and the homesickness and the heartaches that belong to the one who enters the ring.

Some of those who watched Hi were riders, some were only canvas men; but all were heartily glad for him, and willing to show their delight.

The brown mare stopped, and Mantelli lifted Hi down.

They grasped his hands, and praised him for his courage and his skill.

Hi began to feel that, after all, the hard work was worth while.

The week spent in continuous practice had sped as if on wings, and now the sunlight came peeping through slits in the canvas, and a straying sunbeam touched little

Hi's dark face, as if to wake and remind him that this was the day of his debut.

He lay, as usual, beside Jim, the big, flaxen-haired drummer, who, from the first, had been his firm friend. Jim was sound asleep; and Hi crept out of bed, taking great care not to waken him, dressed himself as quickly as possible, and slipped from the tent out into the light of early morning.

How still it was! Not a sound, save the soft note of some tiny bird that chirped as if but half awake.

They had pitched their tent in a field, and the dew lay like a silvery veil over the short grass, while the mountains in the distance seemed like dream mountains, so faintly blue against the sky.

Even the trees had a silvery hue, and the hush, the silence all around, awed Hi, and for a moment, he held his breath.

A faint tint of rose now touched the eastern sky, and without knowing why he did it, he stretched his arms out toward the dawning day.

His eyes were pleading.

Rough little scamp that he was, he had remembered to whisper the little prayer that his mother had taught him, each night before he went to sleep. Now his lips formed a prayer of his own.

A moment he stood, his lips parted, eagerly looking toward the faintly glowing sky. Then his lips moved.

"Oh, let me ride my best to-day!" he whispered, but it seemed like a cry from his heart.

"Let me, *make* me ride my best, for then I can earn, and I can send for ma, an' not be so lonesome. She hates to live with Uncle Babson, who just barely *lets* her stay

there 'cause he *has to*. Make me do fine, an' I'll be a good boy."

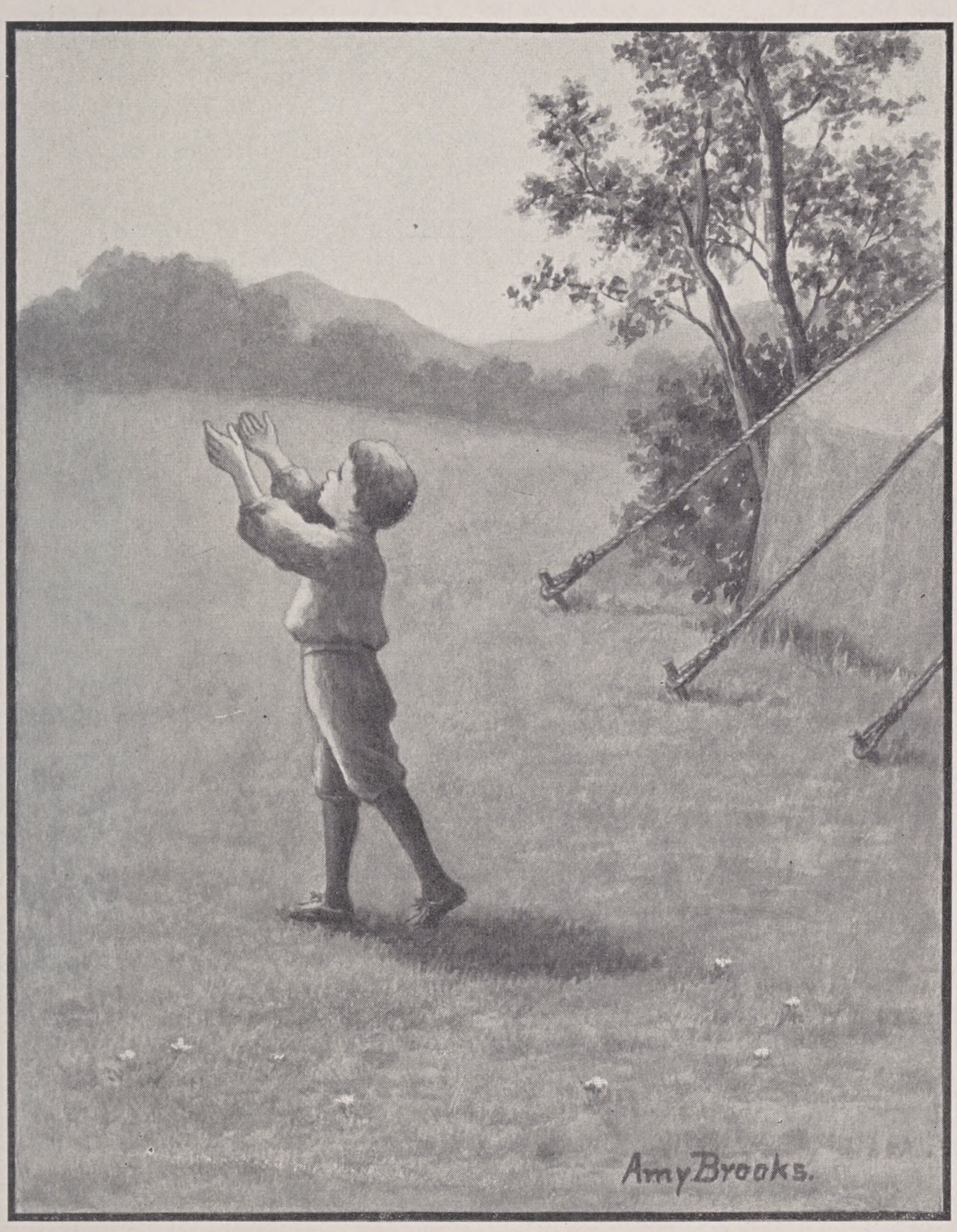
He dropped to the grass at the finish of the odd little prayer, and lay sobbing from sheer nervousness.

Meanwhile, big Jim had opened his eyes, reached out, as usual, to take little Hi on his arm for a few moments, and had been thoroughly frightened to find that Hi was not there.

Jim's first thought was that Hi had carried out his threat of the week before, and had left the circus.

He hurriedly dressed, and rushed from the tent, standing a moment at the entrance to look about him.

No little figure was in sight, and the big fellow brushed his rough hand across his eyes, and sallied forth to search for his child friend. He had not far to go, however, for



"OH, LET ME RIDE MY BEST TO-DAY!"—*Page 133.*

as he turned to follow a narrow foot-path, he saw Hi lying in a little heap upon the grass.

Jim hurried toward him, sure that the boy had been hurt.

"What is it, what is it, little feller? Who has hurt ye? Ye'll surely tell Jim!" he cried, terror in his voice that shook as he spoke.

"Tell me," he urged.

Hi felt a bit shy, and did not wish to tell even Jim of his little prayer, which he had so earnestly offered.

He hid his face, but thrust out his hand toward Jim.

"Nobody's hurt me," he said.

"Then what be ye layin' out here for?" questioned Jim.

"Just to think 'bout riding before all the tent-full to-day," said Hi.

"Couldn't ye think in the tent?" Jim asked, not wholly satisfied.

"I wanted to think alone," Hi replied, "and now I'm done thinking, I'll come in with you."

He sprang up from the grass, and Jim's big heart was relieved; for as he looked at the boy, his bright, happy face set all doubt aside.

There was much joking around the breakfast table—which, by the way, was formed from two long planks placed upon three barrels, one at each end, and one in the middle to keep the boards from sagging.

The clown asked the lady rider if the costume that she had been making for herself was done, to which she replied that it was well done, which was more than she could say of the steak that they were eating.

The jugglers called for the cook, and

while they were waiting for him, amused themselves by balancing their plates upon the tips of their fingers, whirling them around at a rapid rate but never letting them drop.

The old dog that had joined the circus without an invitation, now barked at the jugglers, as if he knew that such actions at the table did not look well.

Hi enjoyed the fun, eating his breakfast with a good appetite, talking with Jim, who sat beside him, and slyly giving the dog a treat, now and then.

Then some one noticed the small boy.

"Hello, Hi! I hear Pagington has a fine rig for you to wear," said one of the canvas men.

"I guess it's a fine one, but I haven't seen it yet," said Hi.

"He says he's goin' ter make a reg'lar

star of the little chap: put his name on the programs; an' dress him in great style," said a rough-looking man who sat beside Jim.

Jim nodded, but made no reply.

"Pagington thinks he's got a bargain," the man continued, "fer all the men an' women riders he has ter pay; but Hi is only a child, an' course he wouldn't pay a child, an' he ain't got no relatives to ask fer his wages."

Jim frowned, and leaned his elbows upon the table, his chin in his hands, and sat thinking. He liked fair play, and he knew that that, certainly, was neither fair nor honest.

"Not pay a *child!* And why not?" he muttered, but the clatter of dishes drowned his words; and before the man could ask what he had said, he had left the table.

He strode from the tent, and this time it was Jim that wanted to think alone.

He stood with his arms folded, a frown on his usually pleasant face.

"Not pay the little chap fer what he does? Not pay him fer riding as fine as Mantelli himself?" he muttered.

"If Pagington *is* as mean as that, I guess I'll see 'bout it; fer as true's my name is Jim, the little feller is ter be treated fair!"

CHAPTER VIII

HI MAKES HIS DÉBUT

THERE was excitement everywhere. Outside the tent, the ticket seller was shouting to the eager crowd of farmers and their wives, urging them to hurry and buy their tickets before they were all gone.

Big Jim stood beside the ticket seller, and whenever the man paused to take breath, Jim smote the drum with a whack that threatened to burst its head.

One cautious farmer asked where the best seats were, and the ticket seller, assisted by Jim, made this reply:

"Buy yer seats as quick as ye kin hand up yer money,—bang, bang, bang,—the

seats is all alike,—bang,—and they're selling like hot cakes,—bang, bang bang!—Want a ticket? If ye do, speak quick, an' take it now,—bang, bang,—bang, bang, BANG!!!"

The man offered a quarter with one hand and covered his ear with the other.

"I'll be lucky if I git out'n this 'thout gitting deef," he said.

"Come, now, step lively! Buy yer tickets ter Pagington's Circus an' Menagerie! Here ye be, sir! A ticket fer yerself an' wife, an' no extry charge fer yer dog!"

Old Towser, who sat beside the ticket seller, thought differently. Towser was a yellow dog, and the farmer's dog was black and white!

"No calico dog for me!" thought Towser, as he made a spring toward the black and white dog.

"Gr-r-r-r!" remarked Towser, and the farmer's dog jumped back. "Oh, well, leave yer dog outside. Our dog is a leetle partic'lar, an' he don't like the color of yourn. Come along! Hand up yer quarters! It wants only a half hour before the performance begins!"

"Bang! Bang! BANG!"

The drummer paused to mop his face with his huge, plaid handkerchief.

"I'm 'most roasted," he said.

"'Tis hot," said the ticket man, "but I guess you'll have ter whack the drum a spell longer. I see some people comin' down the road, an' I don't want 'em ter go by. The drum will fetch 'em. Git's 'em so excited they don'no where they be, till they've handed up their money an' are shoved inside the tent.

"Here ye are! This way! *This* way!"

he yelled, and Jim, with all his might, smote the drum, until it seemed a wonder that it did not cry for mercy.

The din was deafening!

"I guess ye won't need any more drumming," said Jim, as he dragged forth his big handkerchief and wiped his face and neck, "so I'll run in an' see how the youngster is getting along."

"This is a great day for him," the man replied, "an' it's likely he's some excited."

"I guess that's so," agreed Jim, "but he ain't any more excited than I be. He's my little friend, and I've banged the drum like all possessed to-day, ter git a big crowd ter see him."

"Biggest crowd we've ever had," the ticket seller replied, "fer I've sold all the tickets I had, and I've let twenty in since, with jest some slips of paper that I writ on

so Pagington will pass 'em. They's all the crowd the tent'll hold."

"I'm glad of it!" said Jim heartily, as he turned toward the tent, but not toward the wide opening where the crowd had entered. He passed that, after glancing in at the rows upon rows of eager faces, and sauntered around to the rear of the tent.

There, a little tent boasted the sign: "Dressing room," and here Jim knew that he would find the boy.

He lifted the flapping canvas, that hung in place of a door, and entered, looking around the place for the boy.

"Somebody tie my slippers on," cried a shrill little voice, from behind a pile of trunks, and Jim strode over to find the owner of the voice.

There sat Hi, a pair of pale yellow tights upon his sturdy legs, and gilded slippers on

his feet. Long ribbons hung from the slippers, that were to be tied sandal fashion around his legs, but try as he would, Hi could not manage them.

"Somebody help me!" he shouted again just as Jim reached him.

"Hello! What's up, Hi?" he asked.

"Pagington told me to get dressed, and I don't know how these ribbons are to go."

"Neither do I," declared Jim, "but I'll find some one that does."

He left Hi, and went to the rear of the little tent where two women in tarleton skirts and spangled tights sat talking together.

The dark one, whom every one called Lottie, returned with Jim. On the program she was "M'lle Carlotta," but in the circus family under the tents, she was simply Lottie, and she liked little Hi.

"Hello!" she cried, kneeling beside the boy. "Why didn't ye come to me? Don't me an' Jim always help ye?"

"I didn't know where you were," said Hi, "and Pagington said I must hurry and be ready, and I couldn't fasten these slippers. I can't ride with shoes that slip!"

"Guess not," said the woman, tying them firmly around the sturdy legs, and then giving the ribbons an extra twitch to make sure that they were secure.

"Now I may as well put on the rest of yer costume. I'm 'bout wild to see how ye look in it, an' so's Jim."

"You both are always good to me, and I like you an' Jim. Do you like Jim?" Hi asked, looking up into their faces.

Nothing escaped his sharp eyes. He saw Lottie's color deepen under the powder and rouge.

"She *does*, Jim!" he cried. "Ain't you glad?"

"I've been tryin' ter git her ter tell me," said Jim, awkwardly, "but she wouldn't say."

"But *look* at her!" insisted Hi; and Jim looked.

"Now, Jim," said the girl, "I'll give ye an answer that'll make ye happy if you'll wait till after the performance, but I can't be rattled now, if I'm going to ride."

"All right, Lottie," said Jim, "just that ye said has made me so happy that I kin knock the big drum higher than a kite this afternoon!"

"I don't advise ye to, Jim, for we'll need it again this evening," was Lottie's laughing answer as she turned toward Hi, who stood waiting to be dressed.

A yellow tunic, the same shade as his

tights, lay upon the trunk, and the girl slipped it over his head; he thrust his arms through the loose armholes, and she drew the tinsel belt around his waist.

"There's a gold band for my head," said Hi, very eager that all the glittering bits of his costume should be in place.

"Here it is, Hi," she said, and she fastened it securely over his dark hair.

Then, still upon her knees, she threw her arms around him, and looked, for a moment, into his little, dark face.

"Hi," she said, "ye're ready, and I want to say one thing to ye. I remember the first day I rode for the public! I was little, like you; and my heart beat fast and faster when I heard the band. I could see the faces of the folks a-waiting to see me, for the curtain blew in an' out, and so, every little while I'd get a peep at them.

"Now, Hi, you likely feel as I did. Ye want to do fine. Ye want to succeed, and hear the people clap; but one thing keep in yer mind: don't ye let yourself git too excited, for if ye do, ye won't do yerself any credit, an' ye may get a fall."

She paused, and again looked earnestly into his eyes.

"I'll keep cool!" said Hi, "an' I'll do my best for you 'n' Jim."

The girl swallowed a lump that rose in her throat.

"That's sweet," she said, "an' ye can do it for Jim an' me, jest as ye said, but there's 'nother thing to think of. A thing that I keep in my mind whenever I go in to ride.

"Over and over I keep saying: 'Lottie, the public has paid to see ye, and ye must be honest with 'em, and do yer best.'"

"I'll do that, too," said the boy, "I'll be honest and fair!"

She clasped him in her arms for a moment, and then, with a light kiss on his cheek, ran to her horse that stood waiting, mounted him, and rode through the opening, the clown holding the canvas aside for her to pass.

There were little cries of delight when she entered the ring, and then the noisy clamor of the band drowned all other sounds.

Hi could not see her, and it was the first time that he had missed a performance, but now that he was a rider, he must remain out of sight until it was his turn to appear.

He knew every movement of her act, and he stood almost holding his breath as he counted them off on his fingers.

"Now, she's bowing!" he whispered, "and now she's holding out her arms and

smiling. Now she's doing some pretty steps on the saddle."

Then, after a moment, he continued:

"Now she's sitting on the saddle and just riding round; now she's jumped up, and she's standing on one toe; now she's throwing a kiss to the crowd. Now,—she's coming out."

As he spoke, she rode in, sprang from her horse, and sat down upon the old trunk, smiling at the loud applause that had followed her.

Hi ran to her, and leaning upon her lap, looked up into her face.

"You did fine, I know you did! Just hear them clapping still!"

"I did my best," she said, looking down at him.

"That's what I'm going to do!" said Hi.

"You always do, dear," she answered.

"I didn't on the farm," said Hi. "I hated weeding; the old sorrel and pusley were nasty!"

She laughed softly.

"And so you ran away and joined the circus to get away from weeding pusley, did you?" she said. "Well, I ran away to dodge washing dishes, so I guess we're 'bout even."

"Were you ever—homesick?" he faltered.

"Yes, Hi," she answered, gently, "but we won't talk about that now. We must talk of gay things when we're going to ride," and she attracted his attention to the clown, who, at that moment, was twirling his pointed hat on his wand.

Hi laughed with glee at the fellow's antics, and Lottie was delighted.

Jim had often spoken to her of Hi's home-

sickness, and she knew that he must not let his mind dwell upon anything so sad, when he was about to perform.

Light, glad, sure of success, he must be to skilfully do the act.

The jugglers ran in next, and the crowd cheered them to the echo.

The band played with all its might.

The wind instruments fairly screamed, the cymbals clashed, and Jim banged the big bass drum as if he were trying to see how much noise he could make.

Henrique, the other boy rider, had been ill for a week. Not violently sick, but far too ill to ride. He now lay on a mattress, his mother beside him, and in spite of her efforts to comfort him, he fumed and fretted, not only because he could not ride, but because Hi *could*.

Hi knew that Henrique was ill, but he

had not seen him since he had been forced to stay in bed.

Hi knew that Henrique hated him, and he took good care to keep out of his way.

Now the jugglers had finished their act, and Mantelli stood waiting to be called.

He was a very different Mantelli from the one who slouched around the tent in the morning, giving Hi his lesson, and caring not a whit how he looked.

Forenoons, he appeared with his dark hair tousled, an old blouse and a pair of coarse trousers forming his costume, to which he added shabby, dilapidated old slippers or shoes.

Now in his spangled tights, satin slippers, and velvet trunks, his fine figure showed to advantage, and his carefully groomed hair and smiling face made him almost a handsome fellow.

"Your act comes right after mine," he said to Hi.

"I know it!" Hi answered, an eager little catch in his voice.

"Will ye be ready?"

He need not have asked. The boy's face was bright with excitement, and his restless feet tapped the floor.

The other acts had seemed long to the excited child, and he had wondered if he would ever have his turn to perform, but now that the time approached, the moments flew on wings.

Before he dreamed it, Mantelli had returned, and was holding his hand for Hi to mount.

Ah,—he was upon the saddle, he had whispered to Brown Betty,—he was out through the opening,—he was circling the ring,—had ridden twice around it, smiling

at the crowd, had done the graceful posing that Mantelli had taught him,—had bowed, flourished his tiny whip, and was back in the little tent.

The crowd thundered its wild applause, louder, and yet louder than for any of the others. The tiny figure in its pale yellow costume had captured their hearts.

Louder, and yet louder they stamped, clapped, and whistled, and Mantelli, taking Hi by the hand, led him out through the opening to bow to the audience.

The boy looked even smaller than they had thought, beside Mantelli, and their cheering was renewed.

Again he bowed, and smiled.

Then he returned to Lottie.

She had thought that he would be so wild with excitement that it would be almost impossible to calm him. Instead, he sat

down upon the old trunk beside her, and leaned against her shoulder.

"This was my *first* time," he said, "my very first time!"

"Your first time, an' ye made a great hit," she said.

"I wish one thing more could have happened; I wish ma had been lookin' to see me ride like that."

He was crying softly, now. The nervous strain of preparing for this, the day of his début, together with the homesickness that was daily increasing, had left him tired; and the tears that he hated to have seen, ran down his cheeks, in spite of his effort to keep them back.

The woman knew him to be proud and independent, and she also knew that he would not wish any one to see his tears.

"Come over to this corner where there's

more room, an' I'll take these things off, and put yer old duds on," she said, thus taking Hi away from the curious members of the company.

That night, Hi dropped to sleep on Jim's arm, tired, happy in his success, but far more homesick than he would have been willing to admit.

CHAPTER IX

SUNDAY

IT was Sunday morning, and Prue, in a fresh, white frock, a broad-brimmed hat trimmed with daisies, and wee pink parasol, was out in the door-yard, waiting impatiently to start for church.

"Philury! Philury!" she cried, looking up toward the chamber windows. "Phi-*lu*-ry!"

A jolly face peeped from the window.

"Oh, there you are!" cried Prue. "I just wanted you to see my pink parasol that Randy gave me, and I couldn't wait for you to come down!"

She waved the little sunshade about frantically, as if it had been a flag.

"Do you see how rosy pink it is when the sun shines on it?" she asked.

"Ye couldn't get it anywhere where it wouldn't look fine," said Philury, "an' I'll be daown in a minute to see it closer."

"All right!" called Prue, but she did not think of waiting, because just at that moment she happened to remember that she had not seen the calf that morning.

"Oh, I can't go to church without saying good-bye to bossy,—no, I mean Philomena. I only named her yesterday, and I must call her that every day, or I'll forget what name I chose. Randy said that Philomena sounded odd for calf, but I like it. It sounds quite grand."

She hurried along, calling softly: "Philomena! Philomena!"

The pretty creature seemed very placid, and submitted to Prue's petting, and moved

"YOUR TRULY NAME IS PHILOMENA."—*Page 161.*

her ears as if listening to the sweet little voice, that called her endearing names.

"You *are* Philomena, but I can call you bossy, or Philly, or Meny, because those sound like pet names; but your truly name is Philomena. I keep saying it over, so you and I will remember it," she said.

Then, after several soft little pats, she turned, and hurried back to the house.

Then she perched upon the stone wall, to wait until the old carryall came down to the gateway.

Philury, who approved of anything that Prue did, whispered to Aunt Prudence:

"Look at her! Ain't she cute!"

"She's a pretty sight," agreed Aunt Prudence, "but don't you spoil her, Philury."

"It's hard ter say who tries hardest to spoil her; you or me," said Philury, and both laughed softly.

"Goin' ter git in, an' ride ter meetin'?" asked Squire Weston.

"Guess so," said Prue, "but 'twas fun sitting right here on the wall in the sun, just to see how much my parasol shades me."

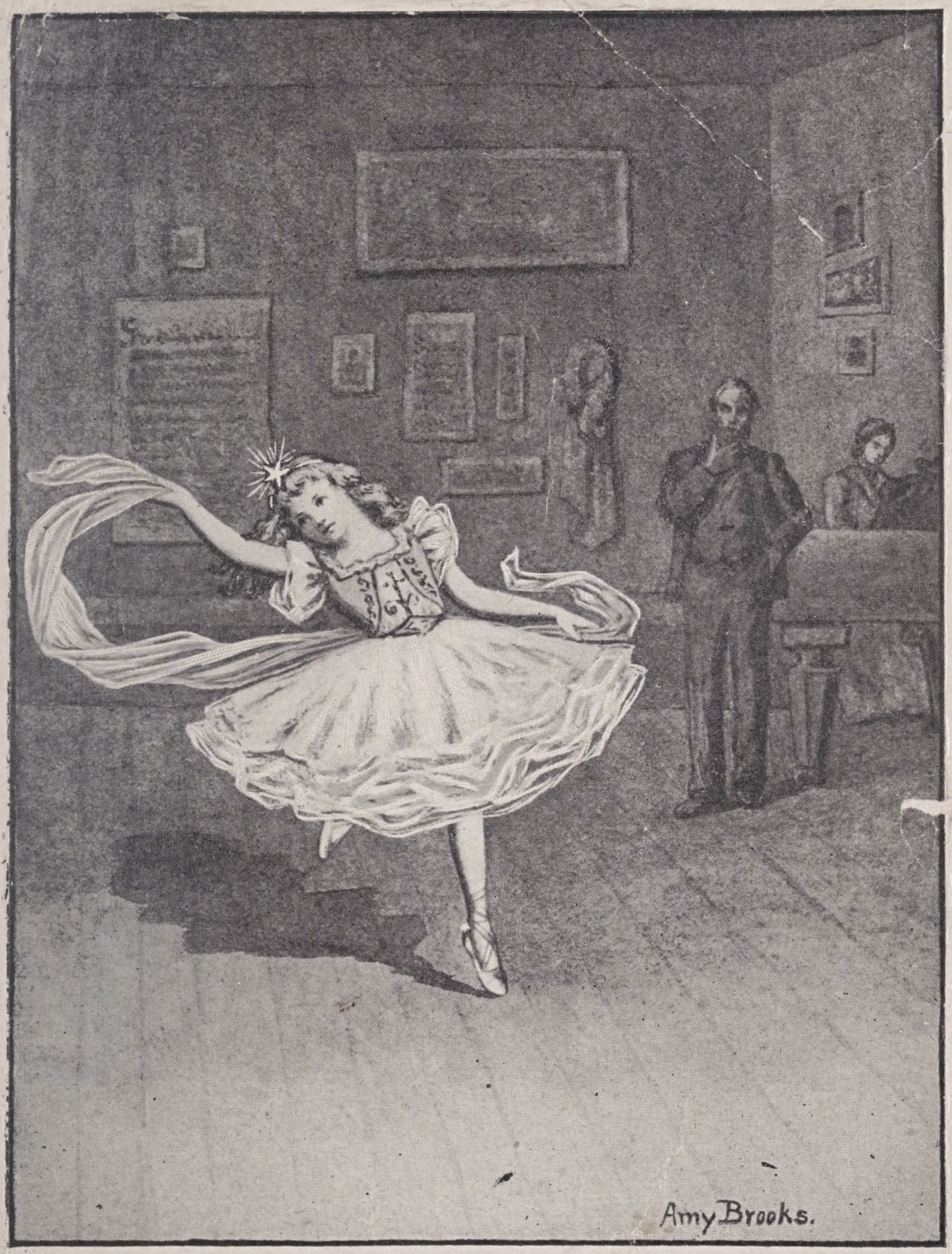
The ride to church was long and sunny, but Prue cared not at all for the heat. Was she not under a rose-colored parasol?

The little church was hot and close, and the sermon very long.

The children found it hard to be patient.

Prue closed her sunshade, and placed it in the book rack, where, while she could not use it, she could, at least, look at it. She soon became drowsy, however, and sprang to her feet in surprise when Parson Spooner said, loudly, "Amen."

Sunday school proved to be very interesting. Mrs. Meeks was Prue's teacher, and



DOWN THE LENGTH OF THE ROOM SHE SWEPT — A TINY WHIRLWIND OF ACTION AND COLOR — *Page 162*

her class was surely the liveliest in the school.

Mrs. Hodgkins, as she passed Mrs. Meeks, felt obliged to express her opinion.

"I guess, by the looks, ye'll have yer hands full ter-day, Almiry. Every one of them youngsters is ready ter wriggle, an' giggle, an' do anything but sit still. I'm yer aunt, an' I advise ye ter give up that class. It's too much fer ye."

Mrs. Meeks smiled, but made no reply.

She knew that her aunt was ever ready to give her opinion, never waiting until it was asked for. She liked children, but she never quite understood them; and they, in turn, liked her because she let them do as they pleased.

She tried faithfully to explain the lessons, but often the boys and girls asked questions that she could not answer.

The Butley boys were waiting at the door when Prue entered.

"I've got ter sit 'side of ye, 'cause I said I'd be good," said Job.

"Me, too," said Joe, "I sort of hanker ter be good, too."

The seats were already quite full, but with a little crowding, Joe squeezed in beside Prue.

"Here! You gimme your seat," cried Job.

"Guess not," said Joe stoutly.

"Teacher, you make Joe git up," said Job. "I've *got* ter sit next ter Prue, 'cause I want ter be good."

"Since *when?*" asked a small boy, in a teasing voice.

"Children, this is in Sunday school. Sit down an' be quiet."

The little girls squeezed each a trifle

nearer to the other, and Job was given a space to sit upon, where, if he was *very* careful, he could keep his balance and not land on the floor.

Johnny Buffum sat between Hitty and Phonie Jenks, and at first he felt very gloomy as he saw the joy of the Butley twins. Later, he decided to be very attentive to Phonie, and to his great delight, he saw that Prue was watching him.

"Now, children, what's the name of the man that this lesson is 'bout?"

"Lot!" they shouted.

That was the only question that they all could answer.

Mrs. Meeks turned toward Joe.

"Joe, what are the names of the places spoken of?"

"Sodom an' To-morrer?" shouted Joe confidently.

Shouts of laughter greeted his answer, and Joe was angry.

"Quit laughin' at a feller!" he said, and, as most of the pupils were afraid of him, the laughter ceased.

Mrs. Meeks read the verses that told the story, and tried to explain them.

"Now, who can tell what happened to Mrs. Lot?" she asked. "Can any of you tell?"

A number of hands were waved excitedly. They all wished to tell.

"I know, I know!" they whispered.

"Hitty, you can answer," said Mrs. Meeks.

"She was turned into a pillow of salt," said Hitty. "Well, what are they laughing at now?"

It was, truly, a most uneasy class, and yet the little pupils were not wilful.

They did not fully understand the lesson, and their teacher was unable to explain it to them, so it was not strange that she could not hold their interest.

Carlie Shelton asked if Prue might walk along with her for company on her way home. Prue was going over to Randy's after Sunday school, and Carlie's home was on the same road.

The two little girls trudged along together, and as they walked, they talked of the lesson.

"Why *did* they laugh at what Hitty Buffum said?" Carlie asked.

"'Cause she said Lot's wife was turned into a *pillow* of salt."

"Well, what if she did?" said Carlie.

"'Taint spelled that way," said Prue, "it's p-i-l-l-a-r, and Hitty oughtn't to have called it pil-low."

"Well, what's the difference?" Carlie insisted.

"I don't know," said Prue, "but I do know I wouldn't like to have been Mrs. Lot. I keep turning 'round all the time, so I'll see my sunshade, but I wouldn't if I was her, because then I'd be all salt."

"She needn't have turned round," said Carlie, "she didn't have a parasol to look at!"

"P'raps she did," said Prue.

"She *couldn't* have," declared Carlie.

"How do you know?" asked Prue.

"You've seen the men and women in the Noah's Arks, and you know they look just like churns, and they *never* have any parasols or umbrellas," Carlie replied, "so Mrs. Lot couldn't have had one."

"But, Carlie," said Prue, stopping in the middle of the road to look Carlie directly in

the face, "Lot and Mrs. Lot weren't in the ark!"

"I didn't say they were," said Carlie sharply, "but Noah lived in old times, and so did Lot, and don't you s'pose all those people we learn about at Sunday school looked just alike?"

Prue said she couldn't see why.

"But the wooden men and women in the Noah's Ark look just alike, and their clothes are alike, and *I* can't tell which is Ham, or Shem, or—O dear, no matter what that other name is, I've got to sit down on this log and take off my shoe. It pinches me, or there's something in it, I don't know which."

Carlie sat down, and took off the pretty shoe. There was nothing in it, and after a moment she replaced it, walking the remainder of the way with it unbuttoned.

They said "good-bye" at Randy's gate, and Prue ran up to the house, where Clare stood smiling and eagerly waiting to greet her.

"I'm so glad you came to-day," she said, "for I go back to Boston with Aunt Helen to-morrow."

"And I'm glad to be here," said Prue.

"I wanted you to come," continued Clare, "because I like to have you with me, but *most*, I wanted to tell you something!"

"Oh, I love to be told things!" cried Prue, "tell it quick, *quick!*"

Clare laughed at Prue's excitement, then, looking very wise, she leaned toward her.

"Guess what you're going to do?" she asked.

"*Me!*"

"Yes; and you couldn't guess, so I'll tell you. You're coming to Boston next winter

to stay at my house for a little visit, and go *everywhere*, and see *everything* with me!"

"To *Boston!* To *Boston*, did you say?" cried Prue, springing to her feet, and dancing about. "How ever will I wait 'til winter? Who'll go with me? When shall I start? My! My! What *will* Hitty Buffum say when I tell her? Does Randy know, yet?"

Clare was laughing with delight at Prue's excitement.

"Randy's coming, too," she said, "and you come all the way in the cars with her. *Now*, aren't you glad you came over here after Sunday school?"

"If I'd known what you had to tell me, I'd have run all the way!" said Prue.

Together they ran into the house, to have the joyful news confirmed.

Jotham sat near the window, reading,

while Helen and Randy were talking of the proposed visit.

"The visit to the city will be a wild delight to Prue," Randy was saying, as Prue rushed in, followed by Clare.

"Oh, it *is* true!" said Prue, "and I *am* going to Boston! Oh, Randy, don't you think we might begin getting ready, now?"

"Not *quite* yet," said Randy, with a merry laugh, "but it will be something fine for you to think of, and to dream of from now until we make the trip."

"And I can begin to *tell* it, just as soon as I see somebody to tell it to," said Prue.

True to her word, on Monday morning Prue ran down to tell the Buffums, and to enjoy their surprise.

She could not see Clare again, because the travellers were to take an early train, starting at daylight on the long ride to the city.

She had said " good-bye " on Sunday afternoon, and the two little girls had promised to write long letters. It would be the next thing to talking, they said.

As Prue approached the Buffum house, she saw Johnny filling a pail at the old wooden pump.

" Oh, Johnny, I'm going to *Boston!* " she shouted.

Johnny dropped his pail. His little round face could not have looked more horrified if Prue had said that she was going to Africa.

" Oh, *don't* go till I've kissed ye! " he shouted.

" I won't let you! " cried Prue.

" But I've got to, if ye're goin' way off! " wailed Johnny. " *Do* let me! "

She paused, a frown puckering her forehead; then a sunny smile drove away the

frown, and she looked up, shaking her curly head as she said:

"I guess I needn't hurry to let you, for I'm not going until next winter!"

Hitty was quite as much startled as Johnny had been.

"She's invited you, but will you go?" she asked, with staring eyes.

"What a thing to ask!" cried Prue. "I guess you'd go, without stopping a minute to think."

"But ain't you 'fraid? Deacon Lawton told Johnny that the city was a place to keep away from. He said the city was a wicked place."

"He didn't say Boston was wicked, did he?" Prue asked, anxiously.

"He didn't say Boston; he said city," said Hitty, who was very truthful, and Prue looked relieved.

"Oh, then he meant some other place," she said. "I *knew* he just couldn't have meant Boston, for Boston *couldn't* be wicked. My Randy went to school there all one winter, and she thought it was lovely."

"Well, I'd risk it an' go if I could," said Hitty, who felt that she had been just nowhere at all. To be sure, Prue had never been away from the village, but what a travelled person she would be after three whole weeks in Boston!

Hitty fairly gasped at the thought.

It was Johnny upon whom the blow fell hardest.

Prue had left them, that she might run over to Sandy McLeod's to tell the fine news, and Johnny, too disconsolate to play any games with Hitty, carried the pail of water to the house, and then ran down the

path and around behind the barn, where he sat down to think the matter over.

Prue to be away three weeks in the winter! How could he endure school without his sunny little companion?

With his elbows on his knees, and his chin in his hands, he seemed lost in gloomy thought.

After a time, he began to grumble softly to himself.

"She'll go down to Boston, an' see all the sights, an' get 'quainted with city boys, an' when she comes back, I won't be anybody at all!"

After this cheerful speech, he leaned back against a heap of rubbish, and lay thinking if there was anything that a small boy could do in such a desperate case.

"If I could make her think I'm just the best boy in the world before she goes, p'raps

she'll think some of me when she's away," he whispered.

Then a fine idea came into his little head; an idea so cheering that he decided at once that there was not a moment to lose. He would do it, and at once, too! He would open a store! Silas Barnes wasn't the only man that could keep a store! No, indeed!

He did not intend to keep a big store, but why should he? He had no idea of selling such uninteresting things as kerosene, soap, or salt pork! He would sell things that were *treats*, and a very little store would be quite large enough.

With the money he would thus earn, he could constantly treat Prue; and by the time she was ready to start for Boston, Johnny believed that he would be firm in her affection.

He sat up, and thrusting his hands in his

pockets, drew forth what cash he possessed.

Three coppers were in his right hand, and five in his left! He had earned those coppers picking blueberries for a woman who kept boarders, but he thought that that was a slow way of getting money. She had paid two cents a quart, and oh, how long it did take to fill a quart pail! He must get money quicker than that. Prue was always a dear little friend, but she was already full of the thought that she was to enjoy a trip to the city. Johnny felt that time was precious! He must show Prue that he, Johnny Buffum, had *wealth*, and that he believed that money was made to be *spent!*

CHAPTER X

JOHNNY OPENS A STORE

WITH Johnny, to think was to act. He thrust his coppers back into his pockets, and ran around to the barn.

Two nail kegs were the first things that he saw, and they were just what he wanted. He thought that four would have been still better, and after much searching he found two other kegs, and felt that his store was about half built.

Then he stood for a moment, thinking.

What could he find that he could use for a counter? There was nothing in the barn that seemed possible, and he ran to the wood-shed.

He pounced upon the first thing that he saw there.

Was there ever such luck?

It was the door of an old chicken-coop, and Johnny wondered if any storekeeper ever had a better counter than his would be when the chicken-coop door was placed on top of the four nail kegs.

"What you goin' to do?" Hitty asked, as she saw Johnny placing the door on the kegs.

"Goin' ter keep store," said Johnny stoutly.

"Me an' Sophy an' Ann 'll play store with you. It's more fun than dolls," said Hitty.

"*This ain't play!*" declared Johnny, in a way that made Hitty stare.

"If it ain't play, what *is* it?" was her astonished question.

"It's *bus'ness!*" said Johnny. "'N I'm goin' ter make money!"

"My!" exclaimed Hitty. "Let me help. I'd like to help you to make money."

Johnny melted.

Here was a sister worth having!

"Ye don't have ter, but ye can if ye want ter," he said.

"You an' Sophy an' Ann can help," he continued. "I want nails, new or old an' crooked an' rusty, no matter haow they look, for I'll sell 'em for old junk ter Martin Mudski, the old junk man over ter the Four Corners."

"But where'll we get 'em?" gasped Hitty, as much bewildered as if Johnny had asked for diamonds.

"Ye know when the mill was fixed over?" he asked.

Oh, yes, Hitty remembered that.

"Well, me an' some of the boys was over there last week, and there's nails layin' round everywhere. Ye kin pick 'em up faster'n ye kin pick blueberries. Ye better git yer pails, an' hurry over there, an' I'll pay ye for the nails, so ye better get all ye can!"

Johnny had an eye to business. He knew that his promise to pay would keep the girls hard at work.

He waited until Hitty and Sophy and little Ann had disappeared around the bend of the road, and then ran in to see if his mother would aid him in his business venture.

Good Mrs. Buffum was very busy when Johnny rushed into the kitchen.

"Ma, I'm goin' ter keep a store, 'cause I've got ter have money right off. What can ye give me ter sell?"

Mrs. Buffum jumped when Johnny shouted, dropped a doughnut into the hot fat, and then sank on a chair, saying that his screaming had made her feel faint.

Mrs. Buffum weighed nearly two hundred and fifty, and her face was very red, so she did not look at all faint, and Johnny tried again to enlist her interest.

"Can't I have some goodies to sell in my store?"

"Oh, Johnny, why do ye start ter play store when I'm the busiest?" wailed Mrs. Buffum, in a way that made Johnny think that, if he persisted, she would aid him.

"'Taint no play!" declared Johnny, "it's bus'ness. I got ter earn some money, an' I'm goin' ter keep a store an' sell things, an' haow can I sell things if I don't have 'em ter sell?"

That was a telling argument, and Mrs.

Buffum felt that Johnny should be encouraged.

"What ye goin' ter do?" she asked, and Johnny unfolded his plan.

He told of Prue's promised visit, and explained his need of money for treats until the time when she should leave for Boston.

Mrs. Buffum looked for a moment at Johnny's serious face and the worried frown that puckered it.

Then she laughed long and loudly.

"Oh, my, *my!*" she said, when she caught her breath, "what a boy it is! I think little Prue is yer fast friend, sure enough, but if a few treats will help ye ter keep her friendship, I'll see what I can do. I can't give ye money ter spend, but I kin fix yer store some."

"Oh, ma, ye're *prime!*" cried Johnny, "I knew ye'd help me!"

"I'm likely ter stand by ye, Johnny," she said, laying a loving hand on his shoulder.

She led the way toward the pantry, Johnny following.

"There's some stale cookies in that jar," she said, "but I guess hungry boys'll buy 'em; an' there's a few doughnuts in that crock. They're kind of old, but I guess boys'll eat 'em."

"Oh, they will!" cried Johnny, as he seized the crock and started toward the door.

"Haow do ye calc'late they'll pay ye?" asked Mrs. Buffum doubtfully; "the boys round these parts ain't over-stocked with money."

"I'll let those fellers that has got money pay with money, and them that *ain't* got money can pay with old junk. Then I'll sell

the old junk at the Four Corners. I've set Hitty an' Sophy an' little Ann ter picking up nails for me over at the old mill. I'll pay 'em, so I know they'll work. I'm *baound* I'll get money! "

" Johnny, ye've got spunk! I'm proud of ye. Go tell yer pa what ye're up ter, an' ask him if ye can have a few of the big pound sweetings. We've got the only tree here about, an' they would be sure ter sell."

" Oh, ma, ye're great! " cried Johnny, giving her a rough hug; and away he raced to the meadow where his father was at work.

" Well, well, well! Ef you don't beat all! " said Mr. Buffum, when he had heard Johnny's plan, and his reason for raising money.

" I can't help laughin' at ye, but I'll say this: ye show spunk, as yer ma always

says, an' I guess I kin give ye a peck of them sweet apples, an' wish ye good luck. When does yer store open?"

"Oh, pa, the apples *will* help, an' my store will be ready jest as soon as I let folks know 'bout it. I'm goin' ter take some old paper bags, cut 'em in two pieces, an' write on 'em that my store opens this afternoon prompt.

"Me an' Hitty an' Sophy an' Ann will go all over town, leavin' them at folks' houses; that is, where there's boys an' girls," Johnny concluded.

Promptly, in the afternoon, the hen-coop door was in place upon the kegs, and loaded with goodies that were on sale; and quite as promptly came the first customer.

The girls had returned with their small tin pails filled with nails, and now, with Johnny, were ready to serve Phonie Jenks,

who with one cent tied in the corner of her handkerchief, was trying to decide what that one copper should buy.

She finally decided that two cookies for a cent was the best bargain.

Johnny gave her two big ones, and pocketed the cent.

The Butley twins now strolled up the path. Their shrewd little eyes looked over Johnny's stock for five minutes. Then Joe drew Job aside, and they stood whispering.

"Keep yer eye on your end of the counter, Hitty," whispered Johnny, "they may be planning ter grab something!"

Just here, Joe drew from his pocket an old iron bolt, a handful of rusty nails, and a rusty door hinge.

"What can I get for them?" he asked.

"Four cookies, or two doughnuts, or one apple," said Johnny, promptly.

"'Taint 'nough!" said Job, stoutly.

"Then take yer junk home," was the quick reply.

The Butleys were astonished.

"D'ye mean it?" asked Joe.

Johnny nodded.

"Then I'll take two doughnuts," said Joe, promptly dumping his junk.

Johnny chose two huge doughnuts for him.

Job suddenly remembered that he had as much old iron as Joe had offered, and two big doughnuts were his choice.

It happened that Prue had gone, with Aunt Prudence, to spend the day over at North Village, so she knew nothing of the busy day at the Buffums'.

Phonie Jenks had gone home to find, if possible, some junk with which to purchase one of those huge sweet apples. The Butley

boys, after hanging around for twenty minutes, decided to hunt for more junk. They had learned that Johnny could not be teased into *giving* away any of his stock.

When they were gone, Johnny turned to Hitty.

"I've done pretty well, so far," he said, "but I wish more folks would come. I've got a heap of things ter sell."

Even as he spoke, a shrill whistle told that some one was coming.

"Oh, look! It's Bob and Carlie!" cried Hitty, and, indeed, they were at that moment coming up the walk together.

"Hello! Hello!" they called.

Carlie thought the store very "cute," bought a dozen cookies, and paid for them in coppers, then she told Bob that after he had bought what *he* wanted, he might buy a big sweet apple for her.

Bob, who was very fond of Carlie, bought the apple at once for her. He was afraid that if he waited until he had purchased *all* that he wanted, he might not have enough left to buy even an apple with!

Mrs. Buffum came trudging down the path with something that she was carrying very carefully.

"Here, Johnny," she said, as she placed her dish upon the little counter, "I've made some doughnut boys, an' I guess your customers will like them."

"Three cheers fer ma!" shouted Johnny, to which all quickly responded.

These doughnut-boys looked tempting.

Bob Rushton immediately remembered that he had a quarter in another pocket. In truth, he had not forgotten it, but had left it there as the price of a ball that he intended to buy.

But Bob had a big appetite, and the doughnut boys captured his quarter when Johnny offered to throw in three cookies.

Later, the Butley twins returned, tugging a parcel that appeared to be very heavy. They had thrust a stout stick under the rope that held it, and often, on the way, they stopped to " change hands."

When, at last, they set it down beside Johnny, and untied the rope, an odd collection of junk was spread out for him to examine.

An old flatiron without a handle, a rusty file, a piece of rusty chain, a quantity of nails and screws, some keys, an iron teakettle with a huge hole in the bottom, and a dozen old horseshoes.

" Bet we kin buy ye out with all that! " said Joe.

" Not quite! " shouted Jeremy Gifford,

who had just arrived with two cents and a pailful of nails, "I've got ter have something."

"I'll give ye five cookies and a big apple, Jeremy," said Johnny, "an' Joe an' Job can take all there is left!"

Jeremy grabbed his cookies and the biggest apple in the heap, and Joe and Job swept the remaining goodies into the old paper that had held the rusty junk.

"I don't see what ye're goin' ter do with all that old rubbish," said Jeremy, as plainly as he could with a mouth full of cookie.

"Neither do we," said Joe Butley.

"What *be* ye going ter do with it?" asked Job.

Hitty and Sophy and Ann looked at Johnny, and Johnny shook his head.

"Oh, ye needn't tell if ye don't want ter,"

said Jeremy, "but it's some stingy ter keep what ye know ter yerself."

Even this did not move Johnny.

He *would* not tell!

When, at last, they were gone, and Hitty was helping Johnny to put away the kegs and to gather up the junk, she asked the question that was puzzling her.

"Why didn't you want to tell what you were going to do with your old iron?" she asked. "I should have felt proud to tell that you were going to sell it and get money for it."

"That's 'cause ye don't know," said Johnny. "I'm the only boy that knows 'bout the junk shop. Pa an' me rode over ter the Four Corners yesterday, and the man was jest putting up his sign.

"'See that, Johnny!' said pa. 'That's the place where ye kin get good money for

rubbish!' That's what made me think ter start this store."

"But why didn't you tell?" persisted Hitty.

"If I had, the Butley boys would have waited till they'd eaten their doughnuts an' cookies, and then they'd have grabbed their junk an' gone off ter sell it?"

"Why, it belonged to you; you gave them cakes for it," said Hitty.

"The Butleys wouldn't stop ter think of *that!*" declared Johnny, and Hitty knew that he was right.

"You're awful smart, Johnny," she said. "I'm proud of you!"

"I'm smart 'nough ter want ter sell all that stuff quick!" he replied.

"Pa said he'd drive over with me first thing ter-morrer morning."

Then he thrust his hand in his pocket.

"Here's a cent fer each of ye," he said; "ye each got a pailful of nails, an' I said I'd pay ye. I'm going off now ter hunt fer more stuff ter sell."

"More junk?" asked Sophy.

"Yes, an' I know where there is some," said Johnny, as he hurried away.

Johnny was awake, and up early on the following morning. His old iron was packed into the back of the wagon, and he sat waiting for his father to come from the barn.

He was so excited that it seemed as if he never would reach the Four Corners, and when, at last, they did arrive, Martin Mudski was just opening his shop.

Johnny had found some old lead to add to the pile that lay in the wagon, and his father had contributed a handful of old door

hinges, three more ancient horse shoes, a broken crowbar, a number of useless iron tools, and an old musket.

Johnny preferred to have his father do the "trading;" and a long task it proved to be, for Martin Mudski was determined to buy the junk as cheaply as possible, while Mr. Buffum was equally determined to have all that it was worth. At last they agreed upon the price, and Johnny rode home the proud possessor of a dollar and a quarter, which he held in his little hot hand, while in his pocket lay sixty cents more. He decided to give Hitty and Sophy and Ann ten cents each, and then put all the remainder in his wee bank, to be taken out, a little at a time, for the pleasure of treating Prue.

CHAPTER XI

THE DONATION PARTY

OF course, Prue told every one that she met that she was going to Boston, and as every one of those whom she told immediately told everybody else, in a few days the whole village knew it and talked of it.

Some approved, others thought it a wild trip for a little girl; but every one loved little Prue, and all were glad that a fine holiday visit had been planned for her.

Johnny Buffum was the only one who did not truly rejoice, but he now felt that, with money in his pocket, he could be more attractive than Boston ever dared to be.

On his way to the Centre to purchase something for Prue, he met Mrs. Hodgkins.

"Hello, Johnny!" she said, stepping squarely in front of him, "what was yer ma doing when ye left home?"

"Washing," said Johnny, trying to pass her.

She dodged so that he could not get by, and commenced again to question him.

"Washing, did you say? Washing on a Wednesday! My, but I'd get all twisted up if I undertook ter wash Wednesday. Is that all she's going ter do ter-day?" she asked.

"I ain't been home since I just came out, so I don't know what she's doing now, but she *was* washing," said Johnny, impatiently.

"Tut, tut! Ye mustn't be so hasty. I only want ter know if she's going ter do any cooking. If she *is*, I'll go over ter see if she's using my cook book.

"There is a rule fer making cookies with —good land! He's half way down the road, and still running! Anybody'd think I meant ter eat him! Look at him! He ain't stopped yet! Wal, I only wanted ter ask a few questions, but as he didn't stay ter answer 'em, I guess I'll go over ter his ma's, and see what she's doing. There's a rule that'll make cookies with two eggs instead of three. I gave it ter nigh everybody in the neighborhood and now I'd like ter use it myself.

"I'd like ter know, too, if she's smart 'nough ter save an egg now an' then, or whether she'd just as lief use eggs as not. Yes, I'll have ter go over there; there's no other way ter find out."

Before she reached Mrs. Buffum's, she saw a little figure leaning against the stone wall at the side of the road.

It was Prue, and so busy was she, admiring a wild flower wreath that she had been making, that she did not notice Mrs. Hodgkins until she spoke.

"Hello, Prue! I hear ye're going ter Boston. Be ye?" she asked.

"Um—m!" purred Prue, adding yet another blossom to the wreath.

"Going right off?"

"No," said Prue, as she tied a wee fern among the flowers.

"Ye couldn't go alone!" Mrs. Hodgkins said.

"I wouldn't want to," said Prue.

"Who's going with ye?"

"My Randy is," said Prue, trying the dainty wreath upon her head, but not looking at her questioner.

"D'ye know how long ye'll stay?"

Prue shook her head.

"Well, ye've some *idee*, ain't ye?" persisted Mrs. Hodgkins.

Prue nodded.

"Ye don't seem as talkative as usual. Do ye know how many new clothes ye'll take with ye, and what ye're going ter do whilst ye're there, an' who ye'll see, an' all about it?"

Prue was confused by her numerous questions, and, besides, she had been told not to talk with Mrs. Hodgkins about her visit. What should she do?

"You know that she will repeat what you tell her, so be careful what you say," Randy had said.

"Look up, Prue!" said Mrs. Hodgkins.

Then Prue did a funny thing. She held up the wreath, and peeped through it.

Mrs. Hodgkins laughed.

"Wall, if you ain't the cutest child I ever

see!" she said, and she continued to laugh as she went on up the hill.

"I guess I didn't tell her *much*," Prue said to herself, with a soft little laugh.

The pretty wreath did not quite satisfy her, and she gathered a few more flowers to fill the little spaces, adding here and there a tiny fern or leaf.

A merry tune she hummed, and the wreath grew finer with every touch; with every added blossom.

Down the road, another voice was singing, and Prue paused to listen.

"That's Carlie Shelton, I know it is!" she said; and even as she spoke, Carlie came in sight.

"Hello!" she cried.

"Hello!" Prue called in answer.

Carlie hurried toward her.

"This is the second time I've been down

this old hill to-day," said Carlie, " and I'm tired."

She sprang to a place upon the wall, and, for a moment, watched Prue's busy fingers.

" That's a lovely wreath," she said, " and I love to watch you making it, but I want to tell you something. There's to be a sociable at Parson Spooner's house, and everybody is invited. Of course, every one will go, but the parsonage is a little house, and I don't see how we'll all get in! "

" Why, Carlie Shelton! We don't ever have sociables in the summer! " cried Prue.

" Well, it isn't really a sociable," said Carlie. " It's some kind of a celebration, 'cause they've been married, oh, I've forgotten whether it is thirty years or fifty years, but anyway, everybody will be there, and they are all going to carry nice things

for a spread. Bob Rushton says he's going early."

"When is it? Why didn't we know 'bout it? How soon is it?" questioned Prue, dancing around; the wreath, by luck, keeping its balance upon her head.

"Only a few people know it yet," Carlie replied, "and they haven't yet told Parson Spooner. Some of the church people planned it, and it's to be some day this week."

And while they were talking, Johnny Buffum came up the road and joined them. He heard the word "spread," and was at once interested.

"What ye talking 'bout?" he asked. "I heard ye say 'spread,' and wherever it is, I'm going!"

"It's to be at the parsonage," said Carlie.

"Oh, then I know what 'tis. Ma's bak-

ing cake for it to-day. It's to be ter-morrer night, and I told Hitty we'd better not eat much supper, for if we do, we won't be able to enjoy the spread. Hitty said 'twould take more than supper to spoil my ap'tite."

Carlie jumped from the wall.

"I wish I could stay and talk with you," she said, "but I went to the Centre to get some spools of silk for mamma. She is waiting to use them, so I'll have to run along."

"See you at the parsonage," she called over her shoulder, as she hurried up the road.

"I bought something purpose for you," said Johnny, "and *now* I'll give it to you. I like Carlie, but I got this just for you, so I waited for her to go before I showed it to ye."

For the first time, Prue noticed that he had kept his hands behind him.

"GUESS WHAT'S IN IT."—*Page 207.*

Now he held up a gaily striped bag.

"Guess what's in it," he said.

"Candy, I know," said Prue, "but I couldn't guess what kind."

She held out her hands, and he placed the parcel in them, watching eagerly to see if she were delighted.

"Four pink peppermints, four white sugared almonds, and a bar of peanut candy! Oh, Johnny, you *are* good! You have half."

Johnny swelled with pride and satisfaction.

"I don't want any," he said, "'cause I bought it all for you, and I'd rather see ye have it; but I'll ask ye one thing. Let me sit side of ye at the spread."

It was a jolly crowd that, intent upon doing the parson a good turn, and at the same

time having an evening's pleasure, met in the Square in front of Barnes's store, and from there set off up the road to the little parsonage.

"You ring the bell," said one, when they reached the door.

"No, you ring it."

After a whispered dispute, the young farmer who had first spoken rang for admittance, and nearly dropped the big sack of potatoes that he bore upon his shoulders.

The door opened wide, they saw the lamplight touch the dear old parson's soft, white hair, and a shout of greeting rang out on the evening air.

"Good luck to the parson and his wife!"

"Good health and long life to 'em!"

Cheer upon cheer echoed and reëchoed, and then the fun began.

"Welcome, welcome, friends," said Par-

son Spooner, " the house is small, but it is open way through to the shed, and I hope there's room for all."

" I'll go right round to the shed," shouted a voice from a wagon, " for my donation is a load of good, dry wood, an' me an' my boys will pile it up for ye! "

" That's a welcome gift," was the grateful answer, and the crowd laughed as they heard the wheels of the Butley wagon creaking their way toward the wood shed.

" Piling wood will keep the Butley twins out of mischief for a while," laughed somebody.

Squire Weston's party came next.

" I've brought ye a barrel of flour and a barrel of sugar," said the squire, " and Mrs. Weston has a caddy of store tea, and the prettiest tea-pot that Barnes could find in Boston."

"Friends, friends, I am too grateful for words," said the parson, while his gentle wife clung to his arm, smiling through happy tears.

It was sweet to know that all the members of the parish held them in such loving regard.

"Philury's done just as we told her to," continued the squire, "and she's baked all creation, and brought it along with her."

Philury laughed.

"I've got a bushel of doughnuts, twelve pies, an' six loaves of bread, an' if ye please, jest find a place ter put 'em, for me an' Pel'tiah is jest 'bout busted a luggin' 'em."

"And I brought my saucer pie for Mrs. Spooner, and I don't want anybody but her and Parson Spooner to eat it!" cried Prue, pushing forward, and placing the little pie in his hands.

She did not at all understand the laughter that followed her speech, and she looked eagerly for Randy and Jotham, who were approaching.

Randy looked up into the kindly old face, and smiling, placed a little envelope in his hand.

"My gift and Jotham's," she said gently, and then would have joined the merrymakers, but he stopped her.

"Let me thank and bless you two dear young friends for what I know is a generous gift," he said.

"We feel that we are so greatly blessed that we want to make cheer for others," Jotham said.

"Look inside and see what's in it. I don't know, and I'm wild to!" cried Prue.

Parson Spooner, to please the little girl, looked into the envelope, and started.

"My *dear* children!" he gasped, and his good wife, wondering at his surprise, looked over his shoulder.

"A hundred dollars!" she whispered. "Oh, may they indeed be blessed!"

Jotham laid a hand on his shoulder.

"Cheer up!" he said, "Mrs. Spooner will help you spend it!"

The parson laughed with actual excitement.

"I heared yer bean crop and turnips wa'n't much, so I've dumped a bushel of each in yer shed," said a hearty voice.

"An' me 'n' my son has jest put two barrels of prime pertaters in yer cellar," said another; while a third neighbor pushed forward, that *his* voice might be heard.

"I've gin ye two barrels of fine apples, parson, jest ter show ye that I keer a sight for ye!" he cried.

"Friends, friends! Your gifts are a wonderful help to me, and the love that prompts you to send them is priceless!" said Parson Spooner, his face showing his great happiness.

There were many smaller gifts from those whose hearts were full of love for the parson and his wife, and who had brought what their slender means would permit.

After the gifts had been carefully stowed away in shed and cellar, the games began, and young and old joined in them, and each seemed trying to make this the merriest party that the village had ever known.

Then some one started a game that might especially please the children, and round and round flew the jolly ring, as they gaily sang:

"On the green carpet,
Here we stand."

Philury was quite right in thinking that many of the guests were wishing that the treat might soon be enjoyed.

She hastened to the pantry, and soon was slicing cold meat, finding dishes for the cakes and fruit, cutting pies, and directing the girls who had offered to help her.

When all was ready, she appeared in the doorway and shouted this advice:

"Everybody stop playin' for a minute, an' listen ter me!"

The merry ring stopped its wild circling, and every one looked toward Philury.

Was the feast ready?

"There ain't a table in this haouse nor in this taown big 'nough ter seat ye all, so them as wants a spread take some cheers ter sit on, an' if ye can't find cheers, set on the floor. We're naow 'baout ter pass the goodies!"

How they laughed as they rushed for chairs, or good-naturedly found seats upon the floor as Philury had suggested.

"You stay right here beside me," said Mrs. Buffum, as Johnny wriggled from her firm grasp.

"Don't want ter," said Johnny, "I'd rather go without the treat if I can't have it 'side of Prue."

"Oh, let him go," said Mr. Buffum, with a chuckle, "he'll be very perlite if he's next ter Prue."

So Johnny crossed the room, and sat down close beside Prue, anxiously watching Philury, hoping that all the tarts upon the huge tray that she was passing would not be gone before she reached him.

Every one was eager for the tarts.

"Take an extry tart for me when ye help yerself, will ye, Prue?" he whispered. "If

ye will, I'll buy ye a pickle-lime to-morrer!"

"Why, Johnny Buffum! How I'd look! I wouldn't be seen taking two at a time!" cried Prue.

She wished Johnny were less greedy.

"Not even for a pickle-lime?" asked Johnny.

"No, I *wouldn't!*" said Prue stoutly.

"Then I'll grab three, an' I'll buy ye the lime, an' a big green pickle, too," said Johnny.

"*John!*" said Mr. Buffum.

"I'm *behavin'*," said Johnny.

He knew that his father had heard what he had said about the tarts, and whenever he was called "John," instead of "Johnny," he knew that he was being watched.

Philury was too smart to let Johnny do as

he wished, and when she reached the place where he sat, she took a tart from the tray, and placed it upon his plate.

Johnny was disgusted.

He had intended to have three, but was glad to get one!

How the good things disappeared!

Greedy little Johnny was not the only one who cared for pies and tarts. He was just taking a huge bite from his piece of pie, when he happened to look toward the Butley boys. He nudged Prue.

"See Joe Butley!" he whispered, "an' Job is doin' it, too!"

"Doing what?" Prue asked, without looking up from the sandwich that she was trying to cut with a spoon, because she had no knife.

"They've put all they had on their plates into their blouses, an' are passing up their

empty plates to have them filled again! I guess no one need ever even call me greedy!"

Johnny felt that he was badly treated. Joe and Job were not only *very* greedy, but they were getting twice as much as they ought to have.

CHAPTER XII

JOHNNY ENJOYS A FEAST

AFTER the good things had been enjoyed, old and young joined in more merry games, the parson and his good wife leading in the pleasures of the evening; and the gay throng seemed like one huge family, each member striving to add to the pleasure of the others.

And when, later, they turned toward home, with eyes as bright as the twinkling stars above them, with hearts as light as the soft, evening breeze, they took with them the good old parson's blessing, and the happy thought that each had given a por-

tion of the bounty that had gladdened his kindly heart.

"We had a lovely time," said Prue, "but I wouldn't wonder if Johnny was sick to-night, for I counted the tarts he ate, and Philury, I'm *sure* it was *twenty!*"

"Haow on *airth* could he get twenty?" questioned Philury, "when I only let him take one to a time, an' I only passed 'em *twicet!*"

"I tell you, Philury, he *did* get twenty, an' p'raps more; 'though I think I counted right."

"I only passed that tray *twicet!*" Philury insisted.

"But you set it down right side of Johnny when you picked up the plate of cookies that Joel Simpkins dropped, and while you were busy with Joel, Johnny just ate and ate without stopping!"

"My, but wasn't I careless! Well, Mis' Buffum will hev a job a dosing him with castor ile, an' ipecac, an'—"

"That last ain't a cure for over-eating," said Squire Weston, with a chuckle.

"That wouldn't make no difference ef he was *my* boy!" said Philury. "Ef any one b'longing ter me was such a little pig as Johnny Buffum is, I'd fill him up fer once, but not with *tarts!* No, I'd give him ginger tea, an' castor ile, an' saleratus, an' rhubarb, an' m'lasses an' sulphur, an' anything else that I had handy, an' I guess the way he'd feel would surprise him!"

"I guess that's so!" said Aunt Prudence, "an' likely he wouldn't ask fer a second helpin'!"

"He said he was still hungry when he went home!" said Prue, "and I *do* wish he wasn't so greedy, but anyway, he's going

to buy me a pickled lime, and a big green pickle to-morrow."

"Where does Johnny get so many pennies to spend?" Aunt Prudence asked. "Small boys ain't apt to find coppers on bushes."

"He made a store and sold things, just purpose to get money to treat me with; he said so," said Prue.

"Johnny has a head for business," laughed the squire, and Prue wondered why any one should be amused by Johnny's scheme for acquiring wealth.

Was he not very smart?

True to his promise, Johnny tramped to the Centre early the next morning, bought the biggest lime in the keg, and disgusted Silas Barnes by fishing for twenty minutes with the wooden ladle until he had secured the largest pickle in the barrel. Then up

the road he trudged, to present his gifts to Prue.

He found her out by the high blackberry vines, and her sunny smile made him very glad that he had come.

How very pretty she was!

She drew a cookie from her apron pocket, and offered it to him.

"You don't like pickles," she said, "but you do like this!"

"Guess I *do!*" he said, taking a big bite, "and didn't we have a fine time last night?"

"And you *weren't* sick this morning!" said Prue.

"Me? Guess *not!* Why should I be?"

Johnny's eyes were round with surprise as he asked the question.

"Philury said you would be, 'cause you ate so much," Prue answered.

"Oh, pshaw! Philury don't know boys! I could have stayed and kept right on eating till morning, and felt fine, too!"

"Why, Johnny Buffum!"

"I could, but I didn't get the chance, for ma took me by the arm and yanked me home, just as I was thinking of getting some more of the treat; an' pa said: '*John!*' an' when he says that, I step lively."

Then Johnny's jolly little face became very sober.

"Say, guess who I saw when I was comin' up here!" he said, as he drew nearer to Prue.

She shook her head.

"'Twas Hi Babson's ma, and she made me feel queer all over. She was standing at their gateway, an' jest lookin' down the road; an' when she saw me, she kind of jumped, and then she said she didn't know

'twas me till I was real near. She's near-sighted, and she said:

"'I'm always watchin' for Hi, an' every boy that comes up the road I think may be him, 'til I see 'tisn't, then I begin watchin' again. I'm sorry I made ye stop.'

"She wasn't cryin', but her voice sounded like it, an' all to once I was so sorry for her that a lump in my throat began to kind of ache. I didn't know what I'd *ought* ter say, but I went close to her, and I said:

"'I wisht it *had* been Hi that ye seen, an' I wisht I knew how ter find him for yer,' and she said:

"'Dear little man, ye know haow ter comfort me. Kind words *do* help!'

"Then she asked me ter come sometimes ter see her, an' I'm goin' ter. 'F I can't get Hi for her, I'll go talk to her myself. I won't know what ter say, but p'raps I'll

think when I get there, like I did ter-day. I'm sure I done right *this* time."

"You're just an awful good boy, Johnny Buffum," said Prue, and Johnny was twice glad.

"The Butleys have to sit 'side of me to be *sure* of being good," said Prue, "but you don't have to, 'cause *you* could be good anywhere!"

This time, Johnny wondered if it was all joy to be good. It looked *almost* as if the Butley twins had gained something by being bad! It had obliged them to sit next to sweet little Prue.

Was it all joy to be good?

"I wish ye had *three* sides," grumbled Johnny, "'cause then I'd be as near ye in Sunday school, as Joe an' Job."

"Oh, but you sit right opposite me, and you really *see* me more than they do; you

can look at my new hat and my pink sunshade all the time! " said Prue.

" They're awful pretty," Johnny replied, " but I'd rather look at you! "

Prue smiled upon him sweetly.

No prince could pay a finer compliment than that.

And while Johnny and Prue were gaily chattering, while Prue enjoyed her pickled lime and the big green pickle, and Johnny finished the last crumb of his cookie, the lonely woman stood in the gateway of the old Babson house, still shading her eyes with her hand, still looking down the long, sunny road.

A sigh escaped her lips.

Grandma Babson peered over her spectacles, and, for a moment, watched the tall figure waiting at the gate.

" 'Pears ter me she can't go on that way

'thout gettin' sick. Watchin' day after day fer a little feller that's gone no one knows where, ain't likely ter make her feel any more cheerful than she does naow. B'lindy, call her in!"

"It's no use, grandma," Belinda replied, "for I've often told her not ter watch fer him, but just wait instead. She says it sort o' comforts her ter watch; an' if, some day, he happens ter come home, she'll be the first ter see him, if she's waitin' at the gate."

And while his mother looked eagerly down the road, and longed for a sight of her boy, little Hi, at the entrance of the tent, looked out toward the distant hills, and wished that he could see her sweet eyes looking lovingly at him, or feel her gentle hand upon his shoulders.

Hi remembered that she had always made

excuses for him, had shielded him when Uncle Babson was angry; and he realized now, better than ever before, how truly she had loved him.

And there was something else that he remembered.

She had had little money. When his father had died, his brother, Uncle Babson, had offered a home to her and her son, little Hi.

How often she had talked to him, after an especially naughty day, telling him that he should try to be good for her sake.

That as Uncle Babson was giving them a home, they must try to make themselves welcome.

That she could help with the housework, while he must do all that a little boy could do to help Uncle Babson,—and had he?

Tears filled his eyes.

"I didn't ever help willingly," murmured Hi, "an' I grumbled every time he set me ter weedin'. If I didn't want ter help Uncle Babson, I'd ought ter done it for ma, just ter please her. Why didn't I? I would *now;* that is, I *think* I would."

He was not sure that he would be willing to do the hated weeding if he were again on the old farm. Day by day Hi longed for his mother, but always the thought of Uncle Babson, who had shown that he disliked boys, especially mischievous little Hi, made him feel that he could not go back to the farm.

He pushed aside the flapping canvas, and stepped out on to the short, stubby grass. The hot breeze fanned his cheek and ruffled his dark hair.

The tents were pitched in an open field, and Hi paused to look off at the distant hills.

He wondered in which direction the farm lay. How still he stood! He was thinking, and his dark eyes looked darker, his brows puckered in a puzzled frown, as if he were trying to find an answer for a mighty problem.

He had finished his practising for the morning, and for a time there would be no tasks for him to do.

He walked to where a moss-covered rock was shadowed by a clump of bushes, and sat down, clasping his hands about his knee.

The big drummer now appeared at the entrance, peeped out, looked around, and seeing Hi, hurried toward him.

"What's up, Hi?" he asked, sitting down beside the boy.

"Nothin' new," said Hi, "just homesick, an' wonderin' how I can fix it ter be where ma is, an' not be on that old farm."

Big Jim looked at him for a moment without speaking.

"I ain't goin' ter leave the circus yet," said Hi, "for I've just got ter where I can ride for the public, an' I want ma an' the folks ter see me; an' yet, if they *do*, maybe they'd make me go back ter the farm."

Again Jim sat as if thinking deeply.

"Yer folks ain't got much money, ye said?" he asked.

"I told ye ma an' me was just kept there by Uncle Babson," said Hi.

"It would be a big thing if a little feller like you could earn 'nough ter take care of yer mother, wouldn't it?" was Jim's next question, and it made Hi's eyes open wider.

"Oh, Jim, what *do* you mean?" he asked.

"Wait till ter-morrer, an' ye'll *know!*" Jim drawled, and he refused to say anything that would explain his meaning.

But Hi did not have to wait until the morrow. That night he knew, and what he heard filled his little heart to bursting with love for faithful Jim.

At the afternoon performance, the tent had been crowded; and when evening came, every seat was taken, and many paid admission, agreeing to stand, if only they might see the performance.

Little Hi had delighted all who had seen him. Mantelli had praised him, and Pagington, the owner of the circus, had told him that his act was one of the best on the bill.

Very proud of his success, but also very tired, the boy had asked that he might go to bed without waiting as usual for Jim.

He fell asleep as soon as his flushed cheek touched the pillow, but the sound of voices earnestly, then loudly talking, awakened

him, and he sat up, listening, listening,—what was it all about?

Ah, that was Jim's voice!

"I tell ye, Pagington, the little feller is a star rider, an' yet he ain't seen a cent yet for his work!"

"Ain't I had him taught, an' ain't I been feedin' an' clothin' him all this time?" Pagington replied.

"Sure," responded Jim, "an' I didn't ask ye ter pay wages when he was learning, did I? It's now that he's a reg'lar rider that he ought ter be paid!"

"Who ever heard of payin' a child?"

"Why not, just as much as payin' Mantelli?" cried Jim. "The crowd finds him jest as much worth seein'!"

"I'll not do it!" was the angry retort, "he's a child, an' I'm givin' him his livin', an' a chance ter make a name for himself!"

"Jack Pagington, you 'n' me has been good friends for years, an' this is the only mean, graspin' thing I ever knew ye ter do, an' I'll not let ye do it! Ye pay little Henrique; why not pay my little friend Hi?"

"Henrique's got a mother what insists on his bein' paid, so I hev ter."

"An' Hi's got a mother, what he's soon goin' ter see, an' she's poor, an' dependin' on rel'tives that ain't none too willin' ter give. I tell ye, Pagington, ye've got ter treat the boy fair, or answer ter me, yer friend.

"Ye know I'm honest. Pay his wages ter me, an' I'll save 'em for him till he sees his mother. Then I'll hand every cent of it over ter her!"

"Ye're a *detarmined* critter!" grumbled Pagington.

"I *be!*" assented Jim.

"I can't pay back pay," objected Pagington.

"Ye ought ter," said Jim, "but I'll let ye off on that, if ye'll promise ter give Hi his first week's wages ter-morrer!"

There was a hasty movement. Hi listened!

"Oh, well, if ye goin' ter make a fuss about it,—"

"I'll do jest this, Pagington!" said Jim, "I'm Hi's friend, an' I'm your friend, too. You act fair, an' I will. Refuse ter pay the little chap, and I find a way ter let his folks know where he is! Ye know what that'll mean,—they'll come after him mighty quick! Pay him fair, an' I'll keep the money safe for him, an' when he lets his folks come ter see him ride, I know I can make them see that he'd better stay with ye, an' support his ma."

"Looks like I'd hev ter, if ye've sot yer mind on it, so I'll agree, an' stick ter it!"

"All *right!*" said Jim, and then, although Hi listened, he heard not another word. Then the lights were turned out, and he heard Jim nearing his bed, knew that the big fellow was undressing, then felt him creeping softly into bed, intent upon not wakening his little friend.

"Oh, Jim! *Dear* old Jim!" whispered Hi, and Jim's throat suddenly troubled him.

"Did ye hear?" he whispered.

"Yes, *yes!*" whispered the boy, and softly his arm stole under Jim's neck; and while the boy cried for joy, the tears filled Jim's blue eyes, but in the darkness Hi could not see that.

Ah, happy dreams filled the dark hours of night, and in them Hi saw visions of little

Prue, rode for her delight around a huge ring, tossed handfuls of bonbons to her, gave bags of gold to his dear mother, and felt as rich as a prince!

He dreamed that the old farm was completely overrun with pusley, hateful, slippery old pusley! It grew in the fields, in the garden, in the dooryard, up the side of the house, on the roofs and the chimney!

And Uncle Babson, unaided, must clear the farm of the disgusting weed!

And while Hi was dreaming of all these impossible things, his memory turned again to little Prue. She was smiling, she was holding out her little, dimpled hands toward him!

It happened that at that very moment, Prue was dreaming of him. She thought that Hi was trying to speak to her.

"What is it?" she cried, and awoke to

find the sunlight streaming in at her window.

"I wonder where Hi is?" she said, as she had so often said before.

Of the many, many things that happened to Hi Babson, of the winter sports, of the exciting events at the "Centre," and of little Prue's visit to Boston, one may read in

"Prue's Merry Times."

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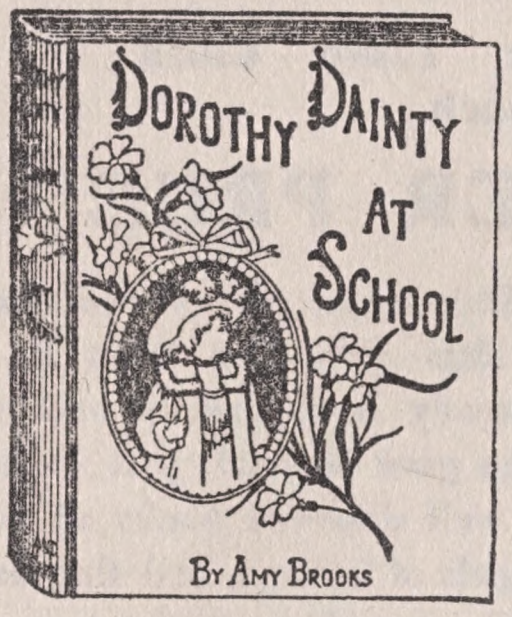

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