

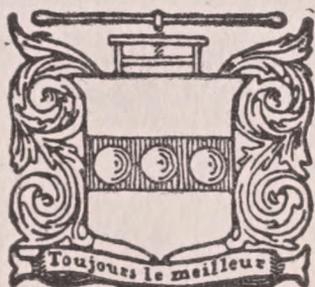
"I THOUGHT YOU MIGHT LIKE SOME CHOCOLATES"

Letty and the Twins

BY HELEN SHERMAN GRIFFITH

AUTHOR OF

“LETTY OF THE CIRCUS”



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Letty and the Twins

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Introduction

THOSE who have read "Letty of the Circus" will remember that Letty Grey was a little city girl whose brother was a member of a troupe of acrobats. When it became necessary to help her mother who was ill Letty herself became a member of the troupe and joined them in their performances at a summer resort. One day she bravely saved the lives of two little children, Jane and Christopher, who were threatened by an angry bear. This was the beginning of a warm friendship which is seen ripening in the present book. Letty leaves the circus and finds a new mother, and her sunny nature wins for her many friends. Something more about her will be found in "Letty's New Home."

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Letty and the Twins

CHAPTER I

ARRIVING AT THE FARM

“Oh, Kit, isn't it just fun!” cried Jane, her rosy, chubby face beaming. “How fast we are going!”

“Ho,” exclaimed Christopher, “it's not so fast. Not so awfully fast, is it, grandfather? I'd like to go about sixty miles an hour. That would be going for you.”

“Oh, Kit!” breathed Jane in mingled awe and admiration.

Jane and Christopher—or Kit as he was generally called to distinguish him from his father, whose name also was Christopher—were twins, and so far along the course of their short lives had shared everything, from peppermint drops to ideas. The stern fact that Christopher was a boy and Jane a girl was just beginning faintly to dawn upon

them—a state demonstrated by Jane's unqualified admiration of everything her brother said and did, and by his occasional condescension of manner toward her.

Jane leaned back in her parlor car seat hugging her doll—a wonderful new one with flaxen hair turned up with a comb and dressed “like a lady”—quite content with the rate at which the train was speeding through the green fields and villages; while Christopher bobbed about from seat to seat, trying the view from each side of the train in turn and wishing he could look out on both sides at once.

There were very few passengers in the parlor car, for it was early in the season for summer visitors to go to the country. Besides the twins and their grandparents there were only three other passengers: two gentlemen who were very busy talking and paid no attention to any one else, and a sweet-faced lady with gray hair who sat at the other end of the car and who watched the children with great interest. She looked as if she would like to make friends with them.

After a while she took a candy box out of

her satchel and catching the twins' eyes, beckoned to them, holding out the open box. Christopher was for bolting down the car aisle at once, but Jane caught him back and whispered something to her grandmother, who looked up from her book, exchanged smiles with the sweet-faced stranger, bowed and said "yes" to Jane.

"I thought you might like some chocolates," said the lady as the children approached. "Won't you sit down there opposite me?"

"Thank you," said Jane politely, and the twins tucked themselves side by side into the big chair. The lady's sweet, interested manner and the chocolates quickly put matters upon a friendly footing, and in two minutes the children were prattling away as if they had known Mrs. Hartwell-Jones (for that, she told them, was her name, watching out of the corner of her eye as she pronounced it to see if it sounded familiar to them) as if they had known her all their lives. Their own names, age and family history were soon told.

"Our mother and father have gone to Europe for four months," announced Christo-

pher importantly. "Father had to go on business and mother wanted to go with him and so ——"

"She did not want to go, Kit," corrected Jane. "The doctor thought she ought to."

"Well, she did want to go. How could she help wanting to go to Europe?" demanded Christopher triumphantly. "So she and father went, and we are to spend the whole summer on the farm."

"The whole summer," repeated Jane, happily. But she swallowed hard as she thought of her father and mother off in the middle of the ocean on a big ship.

"It's a real farm," went on Christopher, "with cows and chickens and pigs."

"And horses and dogs and cats," added Jane, the lump in her throat already gone.

"Oh, they don't count. You could have horses and dogs and cats without having a farm," said Christopher. "There are big fields where the men plough and cut hay, and there must be dozens of cows," he explained to Mrs. Hartwell-Jones.

"And where is this wonderful farm?"

“It’s near Hammersmith. We drive there; miles and miles!”

“The farm is called ‘Sunnycrest,’” put in Jane eagerly, “because the house—grandfather’s house—stands up on a hill. The farmhouse and stables are down the hill across the dearest little creek, where they have a dairy and make butter. Huldah lets me help sometimes. Huldah cooks for grandmother but she lives at the farm, she and Josh.”

“Josh is grandfather’s ‘right-hand man,’ grandfather calls him. He bosses the whole farm and he’s awfully nice.”

“It all sounds ‘awfully nice,’” said the gray-haired lady a little wistfully. “I am going to Hammersmith, too, only I have to stay in the village. Perhaps you will come to see me some time?”

“Yes’m,” said Jane politely. “If grandmother will let us.”

Grandmother herself joined them just then. She was afraid that the children might be tiring their new friend. She and Mrs. Hartwell-Jones introduced themselves to each other and grandmother sat down in the chair

out of which the children, mindful of their manners, had tumbled. They stood quietly in the aisle for a moment or two, but as grandmother would not allow them to have any more chocolates and the conversation promised to be quite "grown up," they ran back to their own seats.

Presently the train slowed down and finally came to a stop beside a long, dilapidated platform with a small, low wooden house. There were several sets of tracks branching out from this platform in different directions and on the platform was a group of people, standing about as if waiting for a train.

"What's the matter, grandfather?" asked Christopher a little impatiently. "I thought this train wasn't going to stop again until we got to Hammersmith."

The conductor, who was passing through the train, heard Christopher's question and stopped obligingly to explain.

"We have to wait for the Mount Pleasant train here at the Junction, sonny," he said. "It's a bit late, but we won't be delayed long. Them people," he added to grandfather, pointing through the window to the group on

the platform, "have been waiting for it 'most four hours. They're a circus troupe."

A circus troupe! A traveling circus—how interesting! Jane and Christopher pressed eagerly to the window and stared out at the small knot of people. There was nothing remarkable about them except that they all looked tired and a little anxious. Jane surveyed them thoughtfully.

"Poor people," she said. "I'm sorry they have to stand there so long, waiting. They look tired. And there's a baby—oh, Kit!" She grasped her brother suddenly by the sleeve, still peering out through the window. "Oh, Kit, it is, it is!" she exclaimed excitedly. "It's Letty!"

"Who, the baby is?" asked Christopher contemptuously. "Do stop clawing me, Jane."

"No, no, the girl holding the baby. Do look, Kit. Don't you see her?"

Jane loosened her hold of Christopher's sleeve to point out a child standing a little apart from the waiting group. The girl was dressed in a faded, clean frock of pink gingham and her glossy brown hair was smoothly

brushed and braided. Her face was turned away from the children, but what they could see of it looked thin and sad. She carried a jolly, restless, heavy baby in her arms who was crowing and holding out its arms toward the locomotive. Christopher looked at the girl a moment in hesitation.

"I don't believe it's Letty. But it does look some like her," he added doubtfully. "I wish she would turn around more so I could see her face better."

As if in answer to his wish the little girl did turn just then and looked directly at the children. Perhaps she had felt the intentness of Jane's earnest gaze. At sight of the twins her face suddenly brightened and she walked slowly down the platform toward the car in which they were sitting.

"It is Letty!" exclaimed the twins together in great excitement, and they commenced to nod and smile with all their might.

"Oh, grandfather, mayn't we go to the platform to speak to her? We haven't seen her in three whole years!" cried Jane eagerly. "We thought she was lost."

"Speak to whom?" asked grandfather in

great surprise, looking out of the window over the children's shoulders.

"Why, to Letty. See, there she is. She's the little girl who saved our lives from the bear. Hurry, before the train starts," explained Christopher, jumping up from his seat.

He and Jane rushed pell-mell down the aisle to the door, followed by Mr. Baker.

"What is it? What has happened?" asked grandmother in some alarm, looking up from her conversation with Mrs. Hartwell-Jones. "What are they going to see?"

"They say that the little girl is outside who saved their lives from the attack of the mad bear that time at Willow Grove Park."

"Really?" exclaimed grandmother much interested. "Then I should like to talk to her, too."

She rose from her seat, but paused to tell the story to Mrs. Hartwell-Jones.

"It happened three years ago. My daughter-in-law had taken the children to some sort of entertainment out at Willow Grove. A trained bear, driven mad by the heat, they supposed, broke loose from its keeper and

charged the audience. Jane and Christopher were sitting in the very front row and the bear was almost upon them when this little girl—one of the performers, an acrobat, I think—jumped down from the stage and threw a cover over the bear's head so that he was blinded and his trainer captured him easily enough."

"What great presence of mind," said Mrs. Hartwell-Jones. "I should like to see the little girl, too."

"Then let us step outside. My daughter did go to see them at once. The child's mother was quite a lady but in most reduced circumstances; and she went again later, meaning to help them, but learned that the mother had died and the little girl had been taken away by friends, she was never able to find out where. If this is the child, I should like to do something for her."

In the meantime, Jane and Christopher had rushed to the door of the car, their faces beaming with excitement and delight. The girl had transferred the baby she was carrying hurriedly to its mother and stood watching the door with an air of shy expectancy.

“Oh, Letty, Letty, to think that we have found you again!” exclaimed Jane, kissing her heartily, while Christopher capered about them in glee.

“Find me? Did you ever look for me?” asked the little girl, her face lighting up with pleasure.

“Why, of course we did,” answered Christopher. “Didn’t we say we’d come again? We got your address from the boarding-house at Willow Grove and we went to see you—but you had gone away.”

“We were so sorry for you,” whispered Jane, slipping her hand into Letty’s.

Poor Letty turned away to hide the tears that sprang to her eyes. She was greatly changed, poor child, in those three years. Her face had lost all its pretty roundness and her eyes seemed too large for the rest of her face, they were so wide and sad.

“Have you been with the circus all this time?” asked Christopher with great interest.

“Yes,” she answered sadly. “There hasn’t seemed anything else to do. My—my brother Ben died too, last year,” she added with a little sob.

“Oh, I am so sorry—so, so sorry!” repeated Jane softly. “Poor Letty, I wish you could come with us.”

“We’re going to the farm to spend the summer,” explained Christopher. “Our grandfather’s farm. Don’t you remember we told you about it?”

“Indeed I do remember. How happy you both must be.”

“We are. And wouldn’t you like to come too?” asked Jane impulsively.

“Of course I should like it, if I could,” and Letty’s voice grew very wistful.

Just then a long train, with bell jangling and escaping steam hissing, rolled up to the opposite platform with a loud rumble. The waiting group of people hastened to get on it.

“Letty, Letty!” called some one sharply. “Come at once.”

“Oh, Letty,” cried Jane, “must you go? Please don’t. We don’t want to lose you again!”

“Letty, you’ll miss the train,” called a gruff masculine voice, and added, “Hurry up, now,” in a tone not to be disobeyed.

The conductor of the waiting train, his eye

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on his watch, emphasized the need of haste by shouting "All aboard" very peremptorily.

Letty stopped and kissed Jane and then bounded across the platform with all her old grace and agility.

"Write to me. Please write to me!" shrieked Jane after her.

The twins waved their hands frantically as Letty turned for a farewell nod, and watched the train pull out.

"We don't even know where she's gone," wailed Jane. "We'll never see her again!"

Mrs. Baker stepped from the doorway of the parlor car, with Mrs. Hartwell-Jones behind her.

"Has the little girl gone?" she asked regretfully. "I wanted to see her."

"She's gone," Jane replied disconsolately. "And we don't even know where."

"Dear me, how very unsatisfactory," sighed grandmother. "I should have liked so much to do something for her."

Then they all went back into the car again as their own train began to move.

"From the fleeting glimpse I had of her, I should say that the child had a rather unusual

face," remarked Mrs. Hartwell-Jones thoughtfully, as the two ladies seated themselves again. "Can you tell me anything more about her, Mrs. Baker?"

"Janey," said grandmother later, when they were all making ready to leave the train, "can't you guess who Mrs. Hartwell-Jones really is? Don't you remember her name?"

Jane shook her head.

"Why, she is the lady who wrote that lovely book you got last Christmas, of which you are so fond."

"The 'Jimmie-Boy' book?" asked Jane in an awestruck voice. "But that is by ——" Opening her own miniature dress-suit case, of which she was immensely proud, Jane got out the book in question and spelled out the author's name: "Mary C. Hartwell-Jones."

"Exactly," said grandmother with great satisfaction. "That is her whole name, 'Mary C. Hartwell-Jones.' She has taken rooms in Mrs. Parsons' house at Hammersmith for the whole summer, and she expects to write another book!"

"Oh!" exclaimed Jane, much impressed.

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“And she asked us to come and see her, grandmother.”

Jane stared hard at the lady with whom she had chattered so freely and familiarly a short time before and whom she now regarded with the greatest possible awe. Then, crossing to Christopher, she told him the wonderful news. And from that time on Mrs. Hartwell-Jones was known to the two children as “The lady who wrote books.”

CHAPTER II

SUNNYCREST

AT Hammersmith a big, old-fashioned carryall stood beside the station platform and behind it a light spring wagon, the two drivers standing side by side on the platform, watching the descending passengers anxiously. The older man was Joshua Adams, the head man on grandfather's farm. Grandmother always called him Joshua, but to every one else he was Josh. His companion, Jo Perkins, a young stable boy familiarly known as "Perk," was new on the place since the twins' last visit, and they did not know him. They eyed him curiously as they shook hands heartily with Joshua, who was an old and long-trying friend.

"My, my, you've growed sence I see ye," exclaimed Joshua, standing the children off and looking at them in mock amazement. "Most big enough to be giants in a side-show."

“Oh, shucks,” said Christopher, squirming with embarrassment. “Has Juno got any new pups?”

“Well, you have growed, 'pon my word. Now I leave it to Miss Jane if you haven't. Hain't you, Miss Jane? And you're both of you dressed different now, so 't I can tell ye apart,” he added teasingly.

Of course Joshua had seen the children many times since the day Christopher had been promoted to trousers, but he never lost a chance of reminding the boy that he had passed through a petticoat period.

Perk felt a little bit out of this intimate party. He stood awkwardly in the background, fingering his hat and winking gravely at Christopher whenever he caught his eye. Grandfather bustled up presently, followed by the station agent wheeling the trunks on a truck, which Perk proceeded to pile on the wagon. Joshua untied the team and mounted to the front seat of the big carriage.

“Where's Nelly Gray?” asked Jane, missing the gray mare with the white star on her forehead.

“Why, Nelly, she’s out to pastur’ for a while. Got a nail in her foot.”

“Oh, poor horsey! How it must have hurt! Did you get it out?”

“Why of course, greeney,” interposed Christopher knowingly, “else the horse would have died, wouldn’t it, Josh?”

Jane climbed into the carriage and sat down opposite her grandparents, but Christopher hung back.

“I want to go on the wagon. Mayn’t I, please?”

“Oh, yes,” consented grandfather good-naturedly, “if you promise to sit still and not ask to drive.”

Christopher avoided Jane’s reproachful look and capered off joyfully. Jane felt hurt at being deserted by her twin so soon, but she knew that Christopher was anxious to make Perk’s acquaintance.

“I s’pose boys can’t help likin’ other boys a little,” she reflected philosophically, and hugged her doll comfortably.

In spite of her nine years and her brother’s teasing, Jane persisted in playing with dolls and had a large, well-beloved family.

"Say, I'm going to ride home with you," announced Christopher, climbing up on the high wagon seat. "Shall I hold the horse for you while you strap on the trunks?"

"He's hitched," drawled Perk with a twinkle in his eye. "But I guess 'twon't hurt if you want to hold the lines."

"Oh, I didn't notice that he was tied," said Christopher, a bit crestfallen, and feeling his youth. "I'd like to drive," he added with reviving spirit as Perk strapped on the last trunk and mounted to his seat (swinging up over the wheel after the horse had started, to Christopher's keen envy), "but grandfather said I mustn't ask. But I could. A friend of my father's has an automobile and he let me steer it one day, oh, a long way."

Perk was distinctly impressed by this statement and dropped some of the patronage from his manner. Perk had never even seen an automobile.

As they drove down the length of the village street, Christopher was on the lookout for changes. It was two years since he had visited in Hammersmith, which left plenty of time for improvements. Each new build-

ing or alteration had to be remarked upon to Perk, for Christopher's tongue would never stay quiet. Jane declared once that it wagged in his sleep.

"I see somebody else has got the blacksmith's forge. Mr. Parsons used to run it."

"Yes, but Mr. Parsons is too tony now to shoe horses. He makes wagons an' keeps summer boarders."

"Hello, Jones has got a partner. My, but they used to have good sarsaparilla there," exclaimed Christopher, smacking his lips.

"They do still," answered Perk, smacking his.

"I'll treat you some time. I'm to have fifteen cents a week pocket money all summer, an' so's Jane. Hi, there's a new store. Say, it's a dandy."

"It's a newspaper office up-stairs. Downstairs they have a store where nothin' costs more'n ten cents; and lots of things cost only five. Ain't that a queer sort of store?"

"Not so queer as I've seen. Why, they've got a store in the city where everything costs ninety-nine cents. My mother'd never let me buy there, but they had mighty pretty

things in the windows. Painted plates and things. Lots of people go there because they think it's so much cheaper than a dollar. Aren't some people silly?"

They had turned out of the village by this time into the country road which led to Sunnycrest.

"Do you play marbles?" asked Christopher, patting a bag of beloved alleys in his trousers pocket.

"Naw—that's a kid's game," said Perk contemptuously. He was feeling a trifle sore over the fact that this boy, so much younger than he, had ridden in an automobile and had seen a ninety-nine-cent store.

Christopher withdrew his hand suddenly from his pocket.

"Yes, isn't it?" he agreed quickly. Then, lest Perk should have heard the rattle of the marbles he said carelessly: "I play with Jane sometimes—to amuse her. And there's a boy lives in our street that coaxes me to have a game with him once in a while. I do it to please him 'cause he's lame, but it never seems fair to play for keeps with him. He's only eight and a half."

Christopher hauled the bag of marbles out of his pocket and displayed them indifferently, as if they were spoils. But all the time his heart thumped guiltily at the white lie he was acting, for up to the present moment he had loved the game of marbles and had looked upon it as a manly sport.

"Gee, did you win all them? They're beauties," exclaimed Perk in admiration, transferring the reins to one hand in order to examine the different marbles.

"No, not exactly all," admitted Christopher, "some I had. And some I traded," he added, thrusting the bag back into his pocket.

"Hum. Want to swap knives?"

Christopher's heart sank. His father had presented him with a very wonderful, five-bladed knife as a farewell gift. Christopher had not even whittled with it yet. The idea of parting with it hurt. He drew it from his pocket with mingled pride and concern. He did not want to appear unmanly, but he was quite sure that Perk could have nothing half so good to trade.

But Perk saw the value of the knife and was square enough to refuse to take any ad-

vantages. He admired it even more extravagantly than he had done the marbles.

"Of course you don't want to swap something that was a present," he said. "'Twouldn't be treating your daddy right."

"You can borrow it whenever you want," replied Christopher gratefully.

Presently Perk called Christopher's attention to several flaming posters that decorated the rail fences on either side of the road.

"There's a circus comin' to town next week," he said. "Guess it's going to be a pretty good show."

"Oh, what bully fun!" cried Christopher. "We know a little circus girl," and he told the story of Letty and the bear. Together they studied the bills as they passed, comparing notes as to their opinion of the different feats advertised and choosing which side-shows they would like best to see.

This amiable conversation occupied them all the rest of the drive.

Sunnycrest was a big white house on the top of a ridge. In front, except for a wide square of green lawn just before the house, the grounds sloped so steeply that terraces

had been made every few yards, and at the bottom ran a delightful little brook. At the bottom of the hill were the farmhouse, barn, chicken and cow-houses and, where the brook curved and ran through a shallow, cemented basin, the spring-house and dairy. Behind the house was a big orchard and beyond stretched fields of grain and hay.

Christopher jumped down from the wagon almost before it stopped and rushed into the kitchen where Jane's bobbed head could be seen, topped with a big pink bow. Huldah the cook was another old and very dear friend of the children's.

"Hullo, Huldah. Got any ginger cakes?" shouted Christopher. "My stomach just aches for one of your spiced ginger cakes. Haven't had one for two years, you know."

"I'm afraid your stomach will ache still more before you are through," mildly observed grandmother, who had followed him in.

But she did not forbid his eating the cakes, even though supper was almost ready. That is one of the privileges of growing old enough to be a grandmother.

The two horses had brought the carriage

home at a much quicker rate than the heavily loaded wagon could travel and Jane had already explored the whole place in her quiet, energetic way. She had learned all the news regarding live stock new and old and had petted all her favorites. Dora the cat was specially friendly and Jane was convinced that the little animal remembered her from her former visit, two years before.

“I think that’s quite remarkable in a cat, don’t you, grandmother?” she said. “Now, if it was Juno, I shouldn’t be so surprised. Dogs always remember people. But with cats, it’s different.”

There were no kittens at present, but Huldah described past families with much detail. She had kept a written account of the color and name of each kitten and its fate. Most of the kittens had been given away or disposed of in their early infancy. Some, grown to cat-hood, disported themselves about the stables with a serene indifference to the house privileges of their mamma, and with a keen taste for rats—certainly not inherited from her. Dora was far too aristocratic to care for any food less appetizing than fresh

milk and bits of cooked meat, cut into dainty morsels.

Juno had four new puppies, dear little fuzzy balls of fur; and there were two new calves—with such thin wobbly legs and big, scared eyes—in the barnyard. Six patiently setting hens promised dozens of fluffy chicks before long, and a brood of ducklings swam in the stable pond.

Jane had taken in all these marvels and her little brain was busy choosing names for the new puppies while grandmother washed her face and tidied her hair for supper.

She gave Christopher the news as they munched ginger cakes together. Jane had not thought to ask for the cakes but when they came she ate almost as many as Christopher.

“The pups are awfully cunning,” she said patronizingly. “And I know just where Juno keeps them. I’ll take you to see them in the morning.”

“Huh, I can find them myself. I’m going now. And I choose to name two of ’em.”

“They’re all named; every single one. And you can’t go to see them now, ’cause supper’s ready.”

“Who named them, I’d like to know? If you did it don’t count, ’cause it’s not fair to go and name all four, without asking me.”

“If you choose to go off with a strange boy, how can I ask you? Those pups are three weeks old and they just had to be named. They’re real nice names,” she added hastily, as Christopher made for the door. “They ——”

“Kit, Kit,” called his grandmother, “go up-stairs and wash your hands. Supper is ready.”

“And waffles are no good when they have to stand,” added Huldah meaningly.

This hint was enough to send Christopher at a flying leap up the front stairs.

“I’ll show you the pups in the morning,” repeated Jane with exasperating calmness, following and watching his hasty ablutions from the bath-room door.

“Humph!” answered Christopher with ingratitude, as he splashed the water resentfully. “I guess I can find the pups easy enough—if I want to see ’em. And I know something you don’t know. A circus is coming to town next week, so there!”

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“ I did know it, but it’s not coming for two weeks. There’s a lovely horseback rider in it and grandfather said perhaps he’d take us,” replied Jane.

Then, carried away by the remembered charms of the circus posters, the twins linked arms and ran down to supper, their slight disagreement already forgotten.

Thus life settled down at Sunnycrest, happy and peaceful for the most part; always interesting but with now and then a little cloud of disappointment or regret overshadowing the sky of their sunny content—which, alas, is apt to be the way in life at every age.

Jane was rather sorry that Jo Perkins had come to work on the farm. He took Christopher away from her so often. To be sure there were a great many things that they could do all together; hunt for eggs, feed the chickens, milk the cows (for Jane and Christopher both learned to milk). But when Perk took Christopher fishing, Jane was not invited to go. Christopher soon developed into quite a sportsman, and begged his grandfather for a gun—Jane turned pale when she heard the request—to shoot some of the rab-

bits that ran so thick in the woods. But this grandfather positively refused to allow, nor would he permit Perk to carry a gun when Christopher was with him. So the two boys were obliged to content their sporting taste with fishing-rods and angleworms.

Whenever she thought about it, Jane felt surprised and a bit hurt at this ready abandonment of her by Christopher, but her own time was so filled up before long that at times she hardly missed him. Her little woman's soul took as thriftily to household duties as the boy's instinct turned to sport. Huldah found her nimble fingers of real use in shelling peas, beating eggs and sifting flour. Indeed, seldom had Huldah's cake been so light, for in her zeal Jane sifted and resifted the flour and beat the eggs to such a stiffness that it seemed as if they would have to be broken up to stir into the batter, Huldah said.

But grandmother did not encourage indoor work to any great extent, and Jane spent many blissful hours in the orchard with her family of dolls, always in sight of either grandmother's or Huldah's watchful eye. For although the twins had reached the

dignity of nine years, they were seldom left to their own devices for long at a time. Grandfather and grandmother felt their responsibility too strongly to take any risks, for had they not promised the anxious parents across the sea to take the best of care of these precious children?

Jane was a motherly little body and extended her care of the doll family to Juno's family as well and Juno got into the habit of carrying the four fluffy balls of fur out to the orchard, where they all had merry romps, rolling about together in the sun and shade.

But even with these diversions Jane might have grown lonely at times during Christopher's more frequent and longer absences with Perk and Bill Carpenter, a village boy, had not a new game been suggested to her by Mrs. Hartwell-Jones. Grandmother had called very promptly upon Mrs. Hartwell-Jones at her boarding-place in the village. The "lady who wrote books" had been so honestly disappointed that grandmother had not brought the children too that Mrs. Baker promised to return with them the very next day.

Jane was silent and a little awed, but Christopher was his usual cheerful, talkative self—with secret anticipations of another candy box. His hopes were not disappointed, for Mrs. Hartwell-Jones had planned for their visit and a regular “party” was spread forth, ice-cream, lady-fingers and chocolate drops all complete. Afterward she questioned them about what they did all day, every day.

“I milk the cows,” said Christopher boastfully.

“I can milk too,” interposed Jane.

“And I go off in the fields with Perk. When grandfather can spare him from the work we go fishing.”

“How splendid! And what do you do, Janey dear, when Kit is off with his rod?”

“Oh, I help Huldah make cake, and play in the orchard.”

“The orchard! What a fairy-land! May I play with you there some day when I come to Sunnycrest?”

“Oh, would you like to?” asked Jane with big eyes. “It would be splendid!”

“We shall have a fairies’ ball and you shall be queen.”

“Oh, oh! And the grape-vine swing will do for a throne. But perhaps you would rather be queen,” added Jane politely.

“No, I’ll be master of ceremonies.”

They had the game before many more days, and it opened up a new world to Jane who thereafter queened it royally in fairy-land, with the dolls for ladies of honor and the birds and butterflies her royal messengers. Her faith in the real fairies was firm and deep-rooted, the most ardent desire of her life being to see one. She never confided this hope to Christopher and the new game was kept for her lonely hours when Christopher was away with Jo Perkins or Bill Carpenter, with which latter boy his intimacy was growing.

CHAPTER III

A SPRAINED ANKLE

MRS. HARTWELL-JONES was a great walker and took many long, long tramps around the countryside. The villagers had got quite used to the spectacle of the white-haired lady clad in a short skirt of stout tweed and heavy laced boots. White hair is not always the accompaniment of trembling fingers, black silk gowns and knitting.

But her habit of taking lonely walks brought about an accident that might have been serious if it had not been for the twins' love of exploring.

Branching off the main road that led from Sunnycrest to the village was a winding lane known as Birch Lane, which had a little story attached to it. The road had been built long ago by a very rich man as the avenue leading to his big country house. It was built below the level of the ground with grassy terraces sloping up on each side, along the base of

which beautiful birch trees had been planted. But the rich man lost all his money and became too poor to build his house. The lane was left deserted and uncared-for, the graceful trees grew bent and gnarled and some of them died; the grass terraces slipped and caved in until they became only clay banks.

Jane and Christopher had often looked up the gloomy little roadway, now no more than a mere cow-path, and asked many questions concerning it. They both had a great longing to "explore" its depths, each for a different reason. Jane was sure that the fairies danced there and felt a breathless hope of one day catching them at it. Christopher, on the other hand, thought it not unlikely that a stray wolf or even a bear might be prowling around the tiny wilderness.

As the lane was only a mile distant from Sunnycrest, grandmother said they might go on a voyage of discovery—"only you go on voyages in a boat," Christopher had corrected her—whenever Joshua could spare Jo Perkins to go with them. Jane rebelled at this, for she was sure the fairies would never appear before a great big boy of four-

teen. But grandmother was firm on this point; so the trio started off one sunny afternoon, Jo Perkins carrying a basket containing quite a day's provisions "in case they might get hungry before supper-time," Huldah explained.

Christopher and Perk discussed fishing, rabbit-shooting and other manly topics while Jane skipped along in silence, her big eyes shining and her little mouth smiling at her thoughts.

"I shouldn't be a single bit surprised to see some, even with Perk along," she whispered to herself. "The books say they dance at night in the moonlight; but I am sure fairies must love the sunshine, it is so bright and goldy—just like themselves. And I should think they'd feel perfectly safe to dance in such an out-of-the-waysy place when most people are taking naps."

The lane was very quiet and very beautiful. The sun shone down through the dancing leaves of the birch trees in flickering rays that might well have been the gleam of a fleeing fairy; the white tree trunks glimmered like pillars of silver. The silence was so great

that to have it broken by the growl of a bear or, indeed, the snarl of a tiger, would not have been in the least astonishing or out of the way. But no such sound broke the summer stillness.

Indeed, it looked as if the children were to have the whole length of the deserted lane to themselves. They walked along the top of the bank, alert and watchful for any adventure, Christopher chattering as usual, Jane quiet and content.

"There ain't much use in goin' any farther," said Jo Perkins at last. "There's only one more turnin', an' that comes out into Pete Hull's cow pasture. An' this basket's powerful heavy to lug so far. I say we help make it a bit lighter by disposin' of some of the contents," he added in a suggestive tone.

"Oh, Perk, please let us go just to the last turn, and then we'll eat our lunch," coaxed Jane.

So they walked on for another three minutes until a sudden sweep of the road showed them a broad space of golden sunshine and green grass. It was there that the poor rich man's house was to have stood, tall and

stately, with white columns and terraced gardens; alas, it was now only a pasture for cows.

The wide field with the cows lazily browsing gave the children a homely, comfortable sense of security. They felt that they had penetrated a mysterious wild and were back again in civilization. Jo Perkins had already begun to unpack the basket and Christopher was watching him with his soul—or more literally his stomach—in his eyes, when Jane's attention was suddenly attracted by the flutter of something white down in the lane below them. She knelt on the edge of the bank and peered over, in breathless excitement. Was she to see a really-truly fairy at last?

What she did see surprised her so that she almost lost her balance and tumbled over the edge of the bank. Mrs. Hartwell-Jones was seated on the roots of an old birch tree, her back against the clay bank, the yellow clay of which clung to her jacket when she leaned forward to catch Jane's eye. But she did not get up.

“Oh, you blessed child!” she called. “Never was I so thankful to see any one in

the whole of my life! I have sprained my ankle and cannot move a step. The fairies must have sent you! I began to think I should have to sit here forever and forever."

At once there was a grand excitement. The three children, basket and all, came tumbling down the bank to Mrs. Hartwell-Jones's side, every one talking and suggesting aid at once. After the first moment of flurry Perk pocketed half a dozen doughnuts, to fortify him on the way, and bolted for home at top speed to fetch help. Jane and Christopher busied themselves in trying to make Mrs. Hartwell-Jones more comfortable. By leaning on Christopher's stalwart little shoulder she managed to get upon one foot and move to a drier, sunnier spot where she sat upon Jane's jacket and leaned against Christopher's—which arrangement the twins insisted upon in spite of her protests.

"For you see you might get inframation or something dreadful if you catch cold in your hurt foot," Jane explained in her most motherly manner.

To beguile the time of waiting for Jo Perkins's return they lunched out of Huldah's

generous basket and Mrs. Hartwell-Jones explained every detail of her accident, in answer to Christopher's rapid questions, trying to identify for his satisfaction the exact root which had twisted her foot, and even what she had been thinking about not to have noticed the rough place. Jane listened with interest and sympathy but she said nothing. Mrs. Hartwell-Jones's impulsive words: "I believe the fairies must have sent you" still rang in her ears. Had the fairies guided her to that last turn? She shuddered as she thought that if Jo Perkins had had his way they would have stopped short of that final bend and then perhaps Mrs. Hartwell-Jones would have had to sit on and on through the chilly evening and perhaps the night. Blessed fairies!

"If Letty had been with us to-day, she would have helped me watch for the fairies," she broke out suddenly.

"Did Letty believe in fairies?"

"Yes, she told me so. She said she loved fairy stories. I wish ——" Jane paused and her eyes grew wistful. "I wish Letty hadn't had to go off in such a hurry the other day.

She looked so sad. You know her mother died and she told me on the train platform that day that her brother had died too. I don't believe she has anybody now. And she didn't even have time to tell me where she was going."

"Oh, she'll turn up again; people always do," declared Christopher cheerfully. "I don't see why you need be so sorry for Letty. It must be jolly fun, belonging to a circus."

"I wonder if she still has Punch and Judy. They were such cunning ponies, Mrs. Hartwell-Jones."

"I see that a circus is to visit Hammer-smith before very long," replied Mrs. Hartwell-Jones. "Do you suppose it could possibly be the one to which your little friend belongs?"

"Oh, I wonder if it is! I hadn't thought of that!" exclaimed Jane in great excitement. "Oh, I wish—I hope it will be!"

When the carriage arrived—the big family carryall it was, with Joshua driving, grandmother was in it. She would not hear of Mrs. Hartwell-Jones's taking the long, jolty drive to the village. She was to come di-

rectly to Sunnycrest and there be nursed and cared for until her foot was well again. By the most wonderful good luck Dr. Greene had driven past the gate of Sunnycrest just as Jo Perkins delivered his message, had been hailed, brought back and was at that moment waiting to see the patient.

Joshua assisted Mrs. Hartwell-Jones carefully into the carriage, the children tucked themselves and the hamper in, and they drove rapidly away from the deserted lane, looking more mysterious than ever under the lengthening shadows of the afternoon sun; left it to the bees and the rabbits and—perhaps—to the fairies. Who knows?

CHAPTER IV

GREEN APPLES

“ I HAVE a piece of good news,” announced grandfather one afternoon a few days later, as he came up on the front veranda. He had driven into the village directly after the noon-day dinner and had just returned. “ Where is your grandmother ? ”

Then he stopped short and eyed the children keenly. They were each sitting in a big chair, in attitudes too much doubled up for mere cozy comfort, and they were neither of them talking—a fact sufficient in itself to make one suspect that everything was not just as it should be. They sprang up with assumed spryness at sound of grandfather’s voice.

“ What’s the news? Tell us ! ” cried Christopher.

“ Yes, do, please,” echoed Jane.

Grandfather thought they looked pale.

“Where is your grandmother?” he repeated.

“She is sitting with Mrs. Hartwell-Jones. Mrs. Hartwell-Jones has a headache.”

“Hum. And what have you two been doing, without any one to look after you?”

“Playing, sir.”

“Playing where?”

A spasm crossed Jane’s face. She swallowed hard and began to talk very fast.

“We’ve just been playing out in the orchard with my dolls—where I play most every afternoon, grandfather. Juno brings her pups out there and ——” She swallowed hard again.

Christopher collapsed suddenly into the nearest chair and bent double with a howl of pain. Jane began to cry.

“Playing in the orchard,” repeated grandfather gravely, looking at them each in turn. “Oh, why didn’t I have Perk stay in from the fields to look after you! Kit, how many green apples did you eat?”

“I don’t exactly know, sir,” came a small voice from the depths of a big chair. “I lost count after the eighth but it wasn’t many more.”

“More than eight!”

It was grandfather's turn to drop into a chair. The chair was not very near so that he almost dropped on to the floor. But the twins were too miserable to laugh.

“They weren't very big,” moaned Christopher.

“That made them all the greener,” replied his grandfather grimly.

“I only ate six, grandfather,” put in Jane consolingly. “I felt as if I'd had enough after three, but I couldn't stop there, you know.”

In spite of his anxiety grandfather laughed. Then he got up to go in search of grandmother. She appeared in the doorway just then, looking very comfortable and cool in a fresh white dress.

“Mrs. Hartwell-Jones's head is better, children, and she would like to see you up in her ——” she began and stopped short.

“What is the matter with the children?” she cried, looking at them in great alarm.

“Jane ate six green apples and Kit lost count after the eighth. Is there anybody handy to send for the doctor?”

Grandmother looked dismayed, but faced the situation bravely.

“A drink of hot peppermint water will fix them, I think,” she said. “And if that doesn’t castor oil will. Dr. Greene has been called to Westside to take charge of a typhoid fever case and won’t be back to-night.”

After the children had been put to bed with warm, soothing drinks, and had had hot milk toast for supper, sitting up in bed with their wrappers on to eat it, Christopher suddenly bethought himself of grandfather’s good news.

“He never told us what it was!” he wailed to Jane.

“I wonder how he guessed about the apples so soon?” speculated Jane in reply. “I’ve played in the orchard ’most every day. I guess it was because you were playing with me.”

“Mean-y! Trying to put the blame on me! It was because you looked so queer and yellow, like biscuit dough.”

“I didn’t look any yellower than you. And I didn’t double up and howl, so there,” retorted Jane, indignantly.

Christopher was silenced for a moment by this home-thrust. Then he called triumphantly :

“ I had a right to look yellower than you, 'cause I ate more apples. And I think I know what the good news is. The circus is comin' day after to-morrow. I heard grandfather tell Mrs. Hartwell-Jones so.”

“ Oh, Kit, how fine! Wouldn't you just love to go ? ”

“ We are going. Grandfather said we might when I first asked him.”

“ Yes, I know, but perhaps he'll change his mind now and not let us go, to punish us for being naughty about the apples.”

“ But he promised! He'll have to keep his word.”

“ He didn't really promise. He just said he'd see.”

“ Well, that means the same. He meant yes.”

“ Then I wonder what he will do to punish us ? ”

“ Nothing. He'll forgive us. Grandfathers are different from fathers about that.”

“ But we've been naughty and deserve to be punished.”

“Well, isn’t it punishment enough, I’d like to know, to be put to bed in broad daylight?” demanded Christopher, tossing impatiently.

Just then Huldah came up for the milk toast bowls. She stood in the doorway between the children’s rooms and shook her head slowly as she looked from one bed to the other.

“I’m disapp’inted in you,” she said coldly.

“Oh, come now, Huldah, don’t rub it in,” pleaded Christopher.

“And we are as sorry as we can be,” added Jane.

“Well, you’ll lose some good apple pies by it,” remarked Huldah severely, picking up her tray. “Your grandfather was planning to have a picnic on circus day, an’ I was makin’ out to bake some apple pies for it—pies with lots of cinnamon—but apples ’ll be scarce now, and we’ll have to be savin’ of ’em.”

“Oh, Huldah, we didn’t eat as many as that!” cried Jane, her pain coming back at the very idea.

“You must have eat ’most half a bushel between you.”

“My! Well, can’t you begin to be saving

of them a little later in the summer, when there's other things to make pie out of?" wheedled Christopher.

But Huldah shook her head and went away to her kitchen.

Jane lay thinking, soberly. She still felt weak and shaken after the sharp pain she had suffered, and found her bed very comfortable. Therefore she could not regard being put to bed so early as a punishment. Neither did she think it right that naughty children should go without punishment of some kind. It was not natural. It had never happened in any of her story-books, nor had it occurred in her own small experience, notwithstanding Christopher's ideas about forgiving grandfathers. It stood to reason then that she and Christopher, having been naughty, must be punished. The most obvious punishment would be to keep them home from the circus. Grandfather had not actually promised to take them—nothing so solemn as "honest Injun" or "Cross my heart." So perhaps he would not think he was breaking his word by keeping them at home.

Perhaps, if she and Christopher did some-

thing to show how sorry they were, deprived themselves of something, grandfather would think that was punishment enough. Soon the idea came to her.

“Kit,” she called, sitting up in bed, “are you asleep?”

“No, what you want?”

“Why, I think we ought—it seems to me—Huldah said we ate 'most half a bushel of apples, Kit. That's an awful lot.”

“It's not so many when you think of all there are left on the trees. It's rubbish about Huldah's having to save 'em. I know better 'n that. She just said that to make us uncomfortable, the mean thing.”

“Well, it was a lot, anyhow, and I think we ought to give 'em back.”

“Give 'em back! How could we? What do you mean?”

Christopher tumbled out of bed, his curiosity roused and coming in, huddled himself up on the foot of Jane's cot.

“Why, don't you think that your 'lowance an' mine together 'd buy half a bushel of apples?” asked Jane eagerly, quite carried away by her heroic resolve.

“But I want my ’lowance to buy lemonade and peanuts with at the circus.”

“But maybe we can’t go to the circus.”

“Yes, we can. Grandfather promised.”

“No, he didn’t promise. He said ‘I’ll see.’ And now I guess he’ll keep us home, ’less we do something to show him we’re sorry. If we buy half a bushel of apples and give ’em to him in place of all those we ate, why, don’t you see? Maybe he’ll think that, and the stomach ache we’ve had, ’ll be punishment enough, without giving up the circus.”

“The stomach ache was enough punishment for me. I promised him I’d never eat any more green apples, and I won’t. But I want money to spend for lemonade at the circus.”

“I guess I like lemonade as well as you do, greedy, but I’d rather go to the circus without having it, than to miss the whole thing.”

“Well, so would I, silly. But do you honestly think grandfather would be so mean?”

“It wouldn’t be mean. It would be only fair,” declared Jane stoutly.

“Well, we’ll see about it in the morning,” answered Christopher, scuttling back to bed.

And that was all that Jane could get out of him, so that she went to sleep with her conscience only half clear. Because of course her fifteen cents would not do any good without Christopher's. She knew enough about the prices of things to be sure of that.

Grandfather and grandmother were so cold and formal at breakfast the next morning, and avoided all mention of the circus so carefully that Christopher was forced to decide that for once Jane was right and they would better buy the half bushel of apples to show their repentance. They longed to consult Mrs. Hartwell-Jones, but that would mean telling the whole story, which they did not wish to do. Of course they did not know that "the lady who wrote books" had already heard the story from grandmother and had laughed over it until she cried.

After breakfast they held a hurried counsel and then ran out to the barn to find out who was going to the village that day. It turned out that Joshua himself was going, to have one of the horses shod. At first he refused to take the twins with him, saying that they were in disgrace and must remain quietly at

home. It was only after they had explained their errand (under the most binding promises of secrecy) that he consented.

The ride into the village was interesting at all times, and now the whole countryside, ablaze with red and yellow circus posters, made driving between the decorated rail-fences most entertaining and lively. Joshua stopped in front of each pictorial long enough for the children to spell out the account of the wonders foretold and admire the gorgeous pictures, and then took away most of the charm by saying regretfully, each time they drove on :

“Just to think, you young 'uns might have seen all them things—if you hadn't stole an' eat up your gran'pa's apples.”

“Suppose it should be Letty's circus!” exclaimed Jane. “See, Kit, in that picture over there there are Shetland ponies. Oh, Kit, just suppose it should be!”

“Well, you needn't count on it,” replied Christopher practically. “There are lots of trained Shetland ponies in the world beside Punch and Judy, and we don't know if Letty is with the circus that have Punch and Judy,

anyway. She may be jumping and tumbling again, like she was doing the first time we saw her."

The village reached at length, Joshua bundled the twins out unceremoniously in front of the chief provision shop and bade them wait there for his return. Christopher was disappointed. He had hoped for the treat of watching the blacksmith at work. But Joshua had given him plainly to understand from the first that this expedition was one of business and not of pleasure, and he dared not complain.

The provision man was new in the village and did not know the twins. He did not think such small children worth much attention and went on arranging his baskets.

"Please, sir, how much are apples?" asked Christopher politely.

The man turned around, surprised by such a practical question and answered:

"Forty cents a basket."

"Oh," cried Jane and Christopher together, "that's too much!"

"It's the market price," said the man crossly.

"Oh, sir, we mean it's too much for us to pay," explained Jane hurriedly.

"I dare say it is," replied the man coolly and turned away to wait on another customer.

The children stood listlessly at the corner, waiting for Joshua. Their hearts were heavy with disappointment at the failure of their plan. Even the thought that he would now have his money for peanuts at the circus failed to console Christopher, who had screwed himself up to the heroic point of self-denial.

Jane watched the people buying at the provision shop. They got all sorts of things: some bought several kinds of vegetables and meat, which they carried away in a basket; others bought small quantities, wrapped in paper bags. Presently a woman bought a small bag of apples which suggested to Jane that they might be able to do the same thing.

"Kit," she said, "I think by a basket the man meant one of those great big baskets. Surely they hold more than half a bushel?"

"Don't know how much half a bushel is," replied Christopher, toeing the path with his boot.

"Well, I'm sure we didn't eat as many as

one of those basketfuls, anyhow. Just look at the size of it."

"We stuffed a lot of 'em."

"Well, anyway, let's get as many as our money 'll buy," proposed Jane. "We can buy any number 'cause I just saw a woman get some in a paper bag. It 'll show grandfather we are sorry and want to pay back, and perhaps Huldah was wrong about the half bushel."

"Well, you'll have to do the asking then," said Christopher ungallantly. "That man is horrid. He thinks we're nothing but kids."

They approached the provision man again, who happened at that moment not to be occupied.

"How much—I mean, how many apples will thirty cents buy, please, sir?" asked Jane.

"Half a bushel."

The twins looked at each other in delight.

"We'll take 'em," they cried together, and Christopher drew the thirty cents—two ten and two five cent pieces—from his trousers pocket.

They were very proud and excited all the way home. They hardly glanced at the circus

posters, so eager were they to reach Sunnycrest and complete their sacrifice, and they kept urging Joshua to drive faster. They took turns sitting on the basket of fruit, they were so afraid that an apple might jostle out and be lost.

Grandfather, grandmother and Mrs. Hartwell-Jones were all sitting on the veranda. Mrs. Hartwell-Jones was able to limp downstairs once a day, by the aid of one of grandfather's canes. Jane and Christopher carried the basket between them, up to the top of the steps. Christopher felt suddenly sheepish and hung his head, but Jane, brave in the consciousness of having done right, spoke up boldly :

"Grandfather, Huldah said we must have eaten 'most half a bushel of apples yesterday, and she couldn't make so many apple pies as she could if we hadn't eaten them, and we thought we ought to be punished for taking the apples without leave, didn't we, Kit, and we didn't want to be kept home from the circus, so we went to town with Josh and buyed—I mean bought, these to make up."

"And it took all of both our 'lowances," added Christopher virtuously.

How the grown-ups laughed! But there were tears in grandmother's eyes as she thanked the twins and called Huldah to come and take the basket.

Later in the day, grandmother called Jane and Christopher into her own room and gave them each fifteen cents.

"I want you to understand that I am not doing it because I think you did not deserve the punishment of losing it," she said seriously, "for it was wrong to have eaten the apples, both because it endangered your health to eat unripe fruit and because it is always a sin to take what does not belong to one without asking. But I wish to reward, and so encourage, the spirit you have both shown today of desiring to make atonement for wrong. God bless you, my dears."

CHAPTER V

THE CIRCUS

ALL was pleasant confusion and excitement at Sunnycrest, for it was circus day! A wee cloud of disappointment dimmed the horizon of Jane's bliss when she learned that Mrs. Hartwell-Jones did not feel equal to the effort of going. She was afraid she might tire or injure her lame foot; and Jane was sorry, for she would have enjoyed sharing her impressions with the sympathetic and understanding "lady who wrote books." Still, there would be the happiness of telling her all about it afterward.

Grandmother offered to remain at home with Mrs. Hartwell-Jones. But on the other hand, she thought that she ought to go, in order to look after the children. First, they were to watch the parade from the parlor windows of the village hotel, by the invitation of the hotel proprietor, Mr. Grubbs. Afterward there was to be a picnic dinner and

then—the circus! Grandmother really could not have stood the strain of remaining at home and wondering whether the children had drunk too much lemonade or fallen into a wild animal's cage, and Mrs. Hartwell-Jones knew this when she refused to let grandmother stay with her, or to change in any way the household arrangements for her sake.

Joshua was to drive the big, three-seated wagon and Huldah went too, to superintend the luncheon. Jo Perkins, having had permission to take a day off (as indeed had all the farm-hands, for grandfather firmly believed in the old saying that "all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy") had vanished with the dawn. Mrs. Hartwell-Jones was left, together with many instructions from grandmother, to the care of Mary the housemaid, who said she didn't care much for circuses anyway.

Christopher appropriated the seat of honor in front, beside Joshua, but Jane did not mind. Tucked in contentedly between grandfather and grandmother she was lost in a wonderful dream of the delights to come. Huldah and the baskets had the back seat to

themselves and there was only just room for Huldah to squeeze in upon one corner of the seat after everything had been stowed away, for Huldah, as has perhaps been hinted before, was a "generous provider."

The little town of Hammersmith presented a very different appearance from its every-day sleepiness. The narrow sidewalks for its whole mile length were packed with squirming, excited children and their no less excited if quieter elders. The reason that children are so restless is because they have not yet learned to soothe their nerves by wagging their tongues instead of their arms and legs.

Farmers had come in from all the neighboring districts with their families. A good many had given their workmen, too, a holiday, as Grandfather Baker had his. Circuses did not come to Hammersmith very often.

Grandfather, in spite of frowns and headshakings from grandmother, bought Jane and Christopher each a bag of roasted peanuts and another of sticky pop-corn. Then he placed them side by side in an open window, with due caution not to fall out. The children were absolutely happy.

“Oh, Kit, I’m so glad I’m alive!” half whispered Jane. “I don’t think that even the sorts of things that happen in story-books could be nicer than this. Aren’t you glad we bought the apples?”

“Oh, I guess so. But we’d have got to the circus anyhow. Grandfather never would have kept us home.”

“No, I don’t believe he would,” acknowledged Jane. “He’d be too generous. But we’d have deserved it, Kit, and I’d much rather be here with things the way they are now. It’s comfortable to my insides somewhere. Do you suppose the lady in the pink tights will be in the percession?”

“She may be in the percession, but she won’t have on the pink tights. She has to save them for the tent, where it’s nice and clean. Outdoors they’d fade or get dusty, or she might fall off her horse into a puddle and spoil ’em.”

“Oh, Kit, she’d never fall off her horse! She can ride too well. Just think of the things she does in the pictures!”

“Huh! I know a boy at school that saw a lady fall off her horse—right in the circus

ring, too. It hurt her awfully. Broke her back or something. Wish I'd seen it."

"Oh, dear, I'm glad I wasn't there," exclaimed Jane, who had no thirst for the horrible.

"Hullo, I guess they're comin'," cried Christopher. "See how the people are yelling and clapping down by the post-office. I say, grandfather, they're coming, they're coming! Hooray!"

Christopher tried to see his grandfather, not by turning around but by looking out of his window, across the space of wall and in at the next window where grandfather and grandmother were sitting. He lost his balance, of course, and nothing but Jane's sudden grasp at the loosest part of his trousers, and the special providence that protects small boys, saved him from tumbling down upon the crowd below. He lost both his bags in a wild clutch at the window ledge and drew himself back, sputtering and red-faced with disappointment. He looked down to watch a group of small street urchins scrambling for their contents.

"Pshaw, Jane, why didn't you catch the bags?" he exclaimed in disgust.

Then he straddled the window sill and forgot all about his lost goodies in excitement, for the procession was really coming. It was not a very wonderful display. Indeed, the grown-ups thought it rather melancholy. There were half a dozen tired looking men on tired looking horses, half a dozen others dressed up as Indians, also on horseback, several cages of wild animals and a brassy brass band in a gilded chariot drawn by four horses. This band headed the procession and was the grandest thing in it except one other gilt chariot upon which a plump, pretty young woman in a Diana sort of costume sat enthroned. She rode just behind the wild-animal cages and Jane gazed after her enthralled until she passed out of sight.

“I am sure she is the lady who wears the pink tights and does such wonders on horseback,” she confided to Christopher. “Wasn’t she lovely?”

Then followed a long line of animal cages with closed sides. A man who rode beside the driver on the first of these called out to the people that the beasts within were too fierce and wild to stand the excitement of

having their cages opened on the sides so that people could see them. The spectators had to guess as to what kind of animals were shut up in these cages; the pictures painted on the outside were no guides, as each represented a whole menagerie. An elephant followed, tired looking and dejected, led by two men, and after them appeared a young girl, dressed in a purple Roman toga, driving a pair of piebald Shetland ponies.

At sight of these ponies it was Jane's turn almost to fall out of the window in her excitement.

"Oh, Kit, grandmother, grandfather, it is Letty! It is, it is! And she's driving Punch and Judy. Mayn't I call to her? Oh, mayn't I?"

"Hush, Janey, not now," replied Mrs. Baker, clutching the squirming, excited child firmly around the waist. "We'll arrange about it later. Grandfather will see the manager of the circus."

"Punch and Judy look as nice as ever," commented Christopher with a condescending air. "And Letty drives 'em well, too, you bet. But why is she rigged up in that queer

way? All that purple stuff slung over her shoulder. I should think it would be in her way."

"That's the way people used to dress hundreds and hundreds of years ago. Don't you remember the picture of Ben Hur in the chariot race? Letty's dressed like that and she's driving a sort of chariot, too."

"Poor kind of a thing to ride in, I think. You can't sit down," commented Christopher. "I like the little carriage better that she used to drive."

The heavy, closed wagons, painted red and gold, that are used to carry the tents and luggage of a circus, now appeared in line. Upon the top of every third or fourth wagon stood comic figures, men dressed in false heads of exaggerated size, who nodded and danced and performed antics to make the crowds laugh. A painted clown in a donkey cart, and a calliope (so necessary to every circus parade) brought up the rear of the procession. The calliope was playing "Wait till the Clouds Roll by, Jennie" in a loud squawk, and the people along the street whistled the tune as they shouted and exchanged jokes

with the clown. It was not at all an appropriate tune, for there was not a cloud in the sky. Indeed, the light was almost too bright, for it revealed mercilessly all the bare spots on the wagons where the scarlet paint and gilt had peeled off; and it shone pitilessly upon the shabby trappings of the horses and upon the anxious, tired faces of the performers. But the crowd was neither particular nor critical and after cheering and whistling the procession out of sight, it scattered gayly to hunt up families and lunch baskets.

"Now then," exclaimed Jane with great satisfaction, "we shall see Letty again," and she tucked her hand into her grandmother's.

The circus tents were pitched in a wide field just outside the town and grandfather selected the adjoining field, under a clump of trees and beside a brook, for the picnic dinner. While Josh and Huldah were unpacking the hampers Mr. and Mrs. Baker, with the twins, crossed to where the circus people were grouped. The troupe had reached Hammersmith rather late in the morning, only just in time to form for their parade, so that the tents were just now being put up.

While grandfather went in search of the manager, grandmother and the children stood watching this ceremony of tent pitching with absorbed interest. Men ran here and there with coils of rope and long stakes which they drove into the ground and then stood in a circle around a broad sheet of canvas that lay spread on the ground. At a given word the men tugged at their ropes and slowly a mountain of dingy yellow white rose in their midst. It swelled and swayed and flapped and then took shape. More tugging of ropes, more shouting, the last securing hammer on a stake or two and lo, the circus tent was raised!

A second tent was erected over the animal wagons and vans which had been arranged in a half circle and the horses removed. Then smaller tents were put up and painted signs hung out to advertise different side-shows.

“Where do you suppose all the queer people of the side-shows were while the procession was going on? The bearded woman, the armless man and all those?” whispered Jane to her brother.

“I don’t know. Maybe they were shut up inside of some of those closed wagons.”

"Oh, I should think that would be lots of fun," laughed Jane. "Making people think you were some kind of a wild animal when really you were something lots more wonderful."

Presently grandfather reappeared, followed by Mr. Drake and Letty. Mrs. Drake joined them, carrying her baby, who insisted upon Letty's taking him at once, and chuckling with delight in her arms.

"So you are the little girl who saved my precious grandchildren from the dreadful bear?" said grandmother kindly, holding out her hand to Letty. "I am very glad to see you at last, to thank you for your brave act."

"Oh," replied Letty, with a catch in her voice, "it seems like another life when I did that. It happened so long ago and so much else has happened since. I was very happy then," and the tears she could not control filled her sad brown eyes.

Jane looked at her in distress.

"Don't cry, Letty," she whispered, drawing her aside. "You never used to cry. Aren't they kind to you?"

"Oh, yes," exclaimed Letty, drying her eyes

quickly, as she saw Mrs. Drake approaching, "they are very kind to me. But I—I don't like being in a circus."

"Poor little girl," murmured grandmother sympathetically.

Then Mrs. Drake joined them and grandfather went away with the manager to buy tickets for the performance and then to look at a group of work horses tied to stakes at the back of one of the smaller tents.

"May we see Punch and Judy?" asked Jane.

"Would I have time before dinner?" Letty inquired wistfully of Mrs. Drake.

Mrs. Drake saw how eager Letty was to go with the children and good-naturedly gave her consent, taking the heavy, unwilling baby again into her own arms. The children ran off, leaving the two women standing talking together.

"Tell me what you can about Letty, Mrs. Drake. We are very much interested," said grandmother and she explained who she was and why she was so much interested in the little circus girl.

"I am very sorry for Letty, mem," replied

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Mrs. Drake sadly. "Her mother's death was very hard on her, poor little thing, and then when her brother was killed last year she could scarcely get over the shock."

"Poor, poor child! But you have been very good to her, Mrs. Drake. She spoke very affectionately of you just now."

"She has been with us ever since her mother's death, but I don't know what's to become of her now," and the good woman sighed. "I promised her mother she should be to us like our own child, and so she has, up to now."

"And what is to happen now?" asked Mrs. Baker with sympathy.

"Oh, didn't my husband tell you that we are giving up the circus? This will be our last appearance; the circus breaks up to-night. Mr. Drake has sold the menagerie and most of the troupe have got other positions. We shall stay here two or three days, I think, until Mr. Drake sells some of the work horses."

"Have the Shetland ponies been sold?"

"Not yet. They'd be very nice for children to have as pets," replied Mrs. Drake quickly, with an eye to business.

Mrs. Baker smiled understandingly.

"I was not thinking of ourselves, but of a friend of mine," she said quietly. "But, Mrs. Drake, I want to ask you please to keep me posted about Letty's whereabouts. Here is my card with the address on it. In the autumn I think I should like to place her in some good school where she can study and be equipped for making her way in the world. I am sure my daughter-in-law would be glad to have me do it in return for Letty's act of heroism in saving the children's lives. My daughter did try to find the child that same autumn after her mother's death."

"She was living with us, quite in the neighborhood. But I never thought of leaving an address," exclaimed Mrs. Drake in some dismay. "I should hate to think I had stood in Letty's way of getting settled in life. Indeed, Mrs. Baker, she would repay any kindness shown her, no matter for what reason," she continued earnestly. "Her mother was a real lady and always hoped her little girl could be properly brought up. She's far above such folk as us, mem," she added humbly.

Indeed, Mrs. Baker's idea was to begin do-

ing something for Letty's good before the autumn, but this plan must be considered very seriously before it could be carried out.

Letty and the twins came running back to them. Letty's eyes were shining and there was a pink glow in her thin cheeks. She looked more like her old, bright, cheerful self than she had since her mother's death. The children were greatly excited.

"Oh, grandmother," exclaimed Jane, "Letty says the Shetland ponies are for sale and we thought ——"

"We thought Mrs. Hartwell-Jones might want to buy 'em," put in Christopher.

"Don't you remember, grandmother," went on Jane, "how Mrs. Hartwell-Jones said after she had sprained her ankle that she wished she had a Bath chair and when Kit asked what that was she said it was a big chair with wheels that they harnessed a pony to, to drive sick people about. So I thought ——"

"We thought Mrs. Hartwell-Jones might like to buy Punch and Judy," finished Christopher, taking advantage of Jane's breathlessness to put the climax to her tale.

Mrs. Baker smiled.

“Bless your hearts, children, I had thought of the very same thing. We must talk it over with Mrs. Hartwell-Jones. There is plenty of time.”

“And, grandmother, Josh came to tell us dinner is ready. Please, can't Letty come to the picnic with us?”

“There's apple pie,” added Christopher.

Of course Huldah had made apple pie for the picnic. She would have felt obliged to make those pies—with quantities of cinnamon—if she had had to neglect her whole week's baking to do it!

Mrs. Drake glanced at Letty's eager, wistful face.

“You want to go, don't you?” she said aside to her.

“Oh, yes, I would like to go, so much—if you can spare me, Mrs. Drake,” replied Letty, trying to think of some one else before herself.

Grandmother overheard this unselfish little speech and it helped to strengthen the resolve that was forming in her mind.

The picnic was a very jolly affair, and Letty felt that she had not enjoyed herself so much

since that happy summer, three long years before—which she and her mother had spent out in the country near Willow Grove. When everybody had eaten as much as he or she could possibly hold (and Christopher a wee bit more) Letty won Huldah's heart by insisting upon helping with the tidying up.

“I always help Mrs. Drake, so please let me,” she said.

The twins asked leave to help too, and found it great fun to wash dishes in the brook. The time passed by much more rapidly than any one realized and Letty had to run off very hastily at length, in order to be ready in time to take her place in the grand march at the opening of the circus performance. It was agreed before she left that Mr. Baker should return in the morning to see about Punch and Judy and he promised the twins to bring them with him, that they might have another visit with Letty.

Soon it was time for every one who was to attend the circus to go inside the tent. Grandfather gave Joshua tickets for Huldah and himself, and then he and grandmother and the twins crossed the wide field again.

There was a great hubbub about the group of tents; men were calling out the attractions of the side-shows, a band was playing and boys moved about through the crowd with trays of peanuts and lemonade, shouting their wares in shrill, loud voices.

All boys and girls who have been to a circus know exactly how Jane and Christopher felt when they got inside that tent. It was not the first circus they had been to, by any means, but that does not make any difference; one always has that same furry creepiness in the back of one's neck, and the same swelled-up, lost breath, wish-to-laugh-without-being-heard feeling.

They giggled at everything the clown said and did, clapped their hands wildly when the trick elephant bowed and waltzed; and shut their eyes tight—at least Jane did—when the “human fly” walked upside down on a piece of boarding suspended from the top of the tent like a ceiling.

Christopher liked the Indians attacking the stage-coach best, and wriggled rapturously at each blood-curdling war-whoop. But Jane was faithful to her love of the lady in pink

tights and watched her with open eyes and open mouth as she stood jauntily upright upon a barebacked horse and sprang gracefully through paper-covered hoops.

"I wonder if Letty knows her," she whispered to Christopher. "I mean to ask tomorrow."

But it was the Shetland ponies and their little trainer that held grandmother's attention. She watched Letty long and carefully, and said something to grandfather in a voice too low for the children to hear.

That evening, after Jane and Christopher were tucked away in bed, the grown-ups, Mr. and Mrs. Baker and Mrs. Hartwell-Jones, had a long, long talk together. It was all about Letty, or most of it, for the Shetland ponies came in for a little share in the discussion.

Dear little Letty, if only she could have overheard that conversation she would not have spent such a wakeful, unhappy night. She had passed three very hard, sad years, but better days were in sight again. As her mother had said, the little girl had the faculty of making friends.

CHAPTER VI

LETTY

LETTY spent a restless night. At first she had been much excited by seeing the twins again and looked forward to their return in the morning with much impatience. Jane and Christopher had wanted her to go home with them that afternoon, to let Mrs. Hartwell-Jones see the ponies and settle the matter at once.

But Mr. Drake could not allow this for two reasons. To begin with, a long country trip would be too much for the ponies, together with their march in the procession and two performances. For there was to be another performance of the circus in the evening, and Mr. Drake's second reason was that Letty might not get back in time for it if she went out to Sunnycrest. Jane was disappointed, for she had not known about the second performance, and was hoping to keep Letty overnight. But it was settled that they should

all return very early in the morning and to that time Letty looked forward eagerly until all at once it came over her that she had no cause for rejoicing.

“Of course I shall be awfully glad to see Jane and Christopher again,” she told herself, lying wide awake and thoughtful on her cot in the small tent in which she slept as guardian of the fat Drake baby, “but after all what good will it do me? They will be here with me for a little while and then will go away again, and I shall probably never see them again. And they will probably take Punch and Judy, too. Oh, oh, I am to lose my dear little friends and what will become of me?” And she began to cry softly.

Poor little Letty! She had not had a happy life since her mother's death. It was not from lack of kindness, for Mrs. Drake in her quiet, dull way, had been as kind as possible. And dear Ben had been her splendid, good big brother, gay and kind and thoughtful to her always.

But everything had been so different. The winter after her mother's death had been a time of desolation to Letty.

Letty sat out on the front steps of the boarding-house where she lived with Mrs. Drake whenever the weather permitted, or walked drearily about the Square. She made no friends and had no pleasure except her Sunday attendance at church, where the soft music and wonderful stained glass windows never failed to soothe and comfort her. These stained glass windows represented the only paintings she had ever seen. But it was the music that comforted her most. She learned some of the hymns after a while and ventured to join sometimes in a voice that had a surprising quality in its untrained cadences.

The summer was easier to bear as the traveling about from place to place brought diversion; and she loved her work with the ponies. But long before the summer was over she had grown tired of the roving life and was glad to be back in winter quarters again.

She was happier that second winter, for she had grown more resigned to the loss of her mother and the dreadful, aching desire for her mercifully had lessened. But the restless, moving life of the circus grew more and

more distasteful and after her brother's death—by a frightful accident—she felt that she could endure the life no longer.

But the poor child had no other home, no other friends, and stayed on with the Drakes for want of another home. Her little friend, Emma Haines, lived over in a small town in New Jersey, but her family were too poor to take any outsider into their family. The rich Miss Reese who, together with her little cousin, Clara Markham, had been so kind to Letty one winter, had passed out of her life completely, and even Mrs. Goldberg, with the amusing parrot, had not been heard from since her removal to California.

So Letty lived on, a sad, dull, monotonous life. She attended school in the winters but was never happy there, as she was invariably behind her classes and was too shy and sad to try to make friends among the other scholars. Another baby came to Mrs. Drake, which proved a source of much comfort to Letty. He was a big, jolly, lusty baby—the same she had been holding in her arms when she had first caught sight of the twins at the railway junction. And her happiest, or rather her

least sad hours were those she spent at church and in nursing Mrs. Drake's baby.

And now, what did the future hold for her? Mr. Drake had met with losses and failure in his business and the circus was broken up. What was to become of her? Small wonder that Letty wept despairingly as she lay awake in her little canvas bedroom.

But Jane and Christopher were all gay excitement and happy anticipation.

"I am sure Mrs. Hartwell-Jones means to buy the ponies," Jane confided to Christopher, "and I'm so glad, because, you see, sometimes she may take us for rides."

"And let me drive," added Christopher.

And Mrs. Hartwell-Jones really did mean to buy the ponies. She asked grandfather to attend to the matter for her when he returned to the circus grounds to see about his own business; for grandfather had about decided to buy one or two of Mr. Drake's horses for work on the farm. But Mr. Baker was too businesslike to buy without being sure of the sort of horse he was getting, and arranged with Joshua to have Mr. Drake drive or ride out such horses as grandfather thought of

getting, together with the Shetland ponies, to Sunnycrest, for Joshua's inspection and judgment.

The twins were in a whirl to get started and gave grandfather no peace until the phaeton—a low, wide-seated vehicle with plenty of room for three on the seat when two of them were only nine—was brought round. There was an instant scramble for the outside place and a quarrel threatened; but grandfather settled the whole matter by saying quietly:

“Ladies first, Kit, my boy. Janey shall have the outside place for the first half of the way.”

They started off in high spirits, Jane quiet and absorbed, bending enough to watch the revolving wheel crunch the bits of dust and dry clay, lost in her own happy thoughts or listening to Christopher's chatter and storing up bits of knowledge. Christopher's tongue was not quiet a moment and he asked question after question.

It had always been like that with the twins from the time they had learned to talk. Jane seldom asked questions, but Christopher must know the meaning of everything that came to

his notice. Not that Jane was stupid because she did not ask questions. She generally listened to Christopher's continual "why" and learned from the answers given to him. And very often she would speak out unexpectedly some piece of information that surprised every one. Indeed, an uncle of the twins had once said :

"Kit talks the most, but Jane says the most."

"See that squirrel running across the road?" said grandfather. "Did you see him, Janey? A pretty red one."

"I could have shot him, if I'd had a gun," boasted Christopher.

"Oh, Kit, that would have been mean! He wasn't doing any one any harm."

"How do you know he wasn't? Perhaps he was doing something hateful to some other animal. Animals do that, you know; they're such beasts."

"Well, anyway, you couldn't have shot it; squirrels run so fast," replied Jane with satisfaction.

"I could have if I'd had any practice. When I get my gun I shall practice on the rabbits. They're no good, anyhow."

"They are some good. They're sweet, dear, gentle things and you just shan't hurt them."

"They haven't got as much sense as squirrels and they're lots greedier."

Then followed a discussion between the children concerning the habits of squirrels, rabbits and other creatures of the forest, in which each displayed a goodly stock of knowledge of natural history. Grandfather chuckled proudly as he listened, but made no comment.

"Well, well, well," he remarked, when the subject of red squirrels had been exhausted and he thought he saw another "why" trembling on the tip of Christopher's tongue, "here we are, half-way to town and nobody has yet offered to relieve me of the hard task of driving."

There was instant strife for possession of the reins.

"Tut, tut, play fair. Kit, my boy, remember your manners. Ladies first." And grandfather handed the reins to triumphant Jane.

"Aw, she's not a lady, she's only a girl," growled Christopher in chagrin. "Anyhow,

it's my turn to sit on the outside. I'm sure it is, and I'm going to have my turn. Move over, Jane, you needn't think you can have everything. She needn't be a pig, just because she's a lady," he added to his grandfather, who had laid a restraining hand upon his sleeve. "Move over, you!"

"Grandfather didn't say to. Don't push so, you rude boy. Ow! You'll make me drop the lines."

"Pig!"

"Rude-y!"

"Prude-y!"

"Grandfather, Kit——"

"Telltale!"

"I don't care. You're a rude, horrid boy," said Jane, beginning to cry.

"And you are a stingy, tattling cry-baby. I just wish——"

"Children!" cried grandfather sternly. "I'm astonished! Why, do you realize what you are saying to each other? Jane, give me those reins. Christopher, stay quiet. I should not allow you to sit on the outside now, for any consideration."

The children succumbed meekly. When

his grandfather called him "Christopher" the boy felt doubly crushed. Jane's tender little heart at once began to ache. She felt that it had all been her fault. It was Christopher's turn to sit on the outside and there was no real reason why she should have been given the privilege of driving first. She would have liked to tell Christopher that she was sorry, to whisper to him to make up. But she glanced at his face and saw that it would do no good to speak for the present. Christopher was in the sulks and she knew that if she apologized now he would only say "shucks" and shove her. Yet, if she waited until he was amiable again, he probably would have forgotten all about it and call her silly.

But she herself soon forgot the quarrel in the excitement of arriving at the field again. Letty was not in sight and grandfather was engaged with Mr. Drake, so the children went on a tour of investigation. They visited the menagerie and stared at the blinking, sleepy looking animals for a time and then went in search of the ponies, which they found stabled in a small tent placarded as containing

the marvelous fat lady and thinnest living skeleton.

As they stood feeding grass to the ponies and chattering, Letty joined them. She came up so softly over the thick turf that they did not know she was there until she spoke.

“Do you think your grandmother’s friend will take the ponies?” she asked slowly.

The twins turned, and stared. Letty’s eyes were swollen and red with weeping and her lip trembled as she spoke of the sale of Punch and Judy.

“I guess you hate to give ’em up,” observed Christopher sympathetically.

“Is that why you’ve been crying so, Letty?” asked Jane.

“Not altogether, though I shall miss the ponies. But I have to go away, and I haven’t anywhere to go.”

The sadness of this state of affairs touched the happy, well-cared for twins faintly.

“I guess you’ll find another circus to go with,” comforted Christopher cheerfully, after a little pause.

“Oh, I don’t want to go to another circus! I hate ’em!”

"Then why do you cry because you are leaving this one?" demanded matter-of-fact Christopher.

"Because I haven't any home. Oh, Jane, do you suppose your grandmother knows of any one who wants a maid? I'd be willing to do anything to help and have a home." And the tears rushed to her eyes again.

"Do you mean to say you'd give up a circus to do housework!" ejaculated Christopher in great astonishment.

"Oh, I should be so happy to! And maybe I should get time to study some."

Christopher stared. Here was a curiosity indeed; a girl who liked housework and study better than traveling around with a circus! He remembered that Letty's other name was Jones and wondered if she could be any relation to Mrs. Hartwell-Jones, who wrote books. He whispered this thought to Jane who, recollecting that it is not polite to whisper before people, said aloud to Letty:

"Do you suppose you could be any relation to our Mrs. Jones? Mrs. Hartwell-Jones. She writes books."

"But she's awfully nice," added Christo-

pher reassuringly. "Not a bit prosy or stuck up."

Two red spots came into Letty's cheeks.

"To think that you know somebody who writes books! Oh, how I wish I could see her!" she exclaimed impulsively.

Jane stared thoughtfully for a moment at the ponies and then said quickly:

"Oh, Kit, let's ask grandfather if Letty mayn't drive the ponies out to Sunnycrest herself. Then she can see Mrs. Hartwell-Jones."

"And we can show her the farm, too. That would be jolly," agreed Christopher. "I speak to ride with Letty in the chariot."

Letty burst out laughing. She was feeling very much excited over the children's plan.

"I shouldn't have to drive the chariot," she said. "Mr. Drake still has the little carriage I used to use at Willow Grove. Do you remember?"

"And I'll ask grandmother about getting you a place," said Jane confidentially to Letty, with a little air of importance. "Perhaps Huldah would like somebody to help

her in the kitchen. It would be nice if you could stay with us, wouldn't it?"

"Oh, that would be too good to be true!" cried Letty, bursting into tears again at the very thought of such happiness.

"Oh, shucks!" exclaimed Christopher, turning his back.

Crying always embarrassed him.

CHAPTER VII

MRS. HARTWELL-JONES SEES PART OF THE CIRCUS

MRS. HARTWELL-JONES had limped painfully down-stairs from her bright, chintz-hung bedroom at Sunnycrest, to be in readiness for the two o'clock dinner. She seated herself in one of the comfortable armchairs on the veranda to await the return of Mr. Baker and the twins.

Mrs. Hartwell-Jones had found these days of her unexpected visit at Sunnycrest very happy ones. She was often lonely, in spite of having her brain so full of people. Book friends, even when you make them up yourself, are not the same as real, living, loving people. If it were not that she felt a little in the way, because of her helplessness, she would have wished to stay longer. Her solitary two rooms in the village did not appear very inviting when compared to the busy farm with its constant movement of life and

industry, its cheerful master and mistress and above all, the sound of children's voices in the house.

When Mrs. Hartwell-Jones was much younger, many years before the beginning of this story, a very great sorrow had come into her life; her husband and dear baby were taken from her by a dreadful accident, and ever since her life had been sad and lonely, given up to trying to make others happy and in learning to bear her grief bravely and patiently. Since she no longer had a child of her own to care for, she set herself the task of making other children happy by writing stories for them. She was so successful in this that her readers were always begging for more, and some of Mrs. Hartwell-Jones's most precious possessions were the letters written to her by little children, to thank her for her stories.

Mrs. Hartwell-Jones was thinking of all these things as she sat on the vine-covered veranda in the soft summer air, and perhaps was planning another story, when she happened to look down the road. She looked hard for a moment, then she got up suddenly

and walking to the door as quickly as her lame foot would allow, called to grandmother to come and look, too.

A peculiar procession was turning in at the gate. First came grandfather, driving alone in the phaeton. Following was a man on horseback leading three other horses, splendid, strong looking animals; and last of all a girl in a pink cotton dress driving a pair of Shetland ponies harnessed to a tiny, low, old-fashioned basket-phaeton. Beside her on the seat sat Jane like an exalted mouse, while behind, perched on a miniature rumble, Christopher gyrated and squirmed ecstatically.

"It looks as if they had hired the circus to parade out here," exclaimed Mrs. Hartwell-Jones to grandmother, in great astonishment.

The cavalcade drew up at the front steps and grandfather handed the reins to Joshua, who had seen the procession from the stable and had come on a run, wondering if Mr. Baker had bought the whole circus.

"Now, children, 'I choose to tell,' as you say," said grandfather as Jane and Christopher began to babble in duet. "I thought it wiser, Mrs. Hartwell-Jones, to have you see the

ponies for yourself before buying them and also to have Joshua examine them to be sure they are sound."

"Oh!" exclaimed Mrs. Hartwell-Jones from the top of the steps, and looked more closely at the ponies.

She also looked at Letty without seeming to, and then turned and said something to grandmother in a low tone.

"This," said grandfather, getting out of the phaeton and going to the side of the pony carriage, "this is Miss Letty Jones, who knows all about the ponies."

"And isn't the carriage great!" exclaimed Christopher, who could not keep still another instant. "I thought Letty would have to drive her chariot, and wouldn't that have made a hullabaloo going through town! But Mr. Drake had this carriage that Letty used to use in the parade before they got the chariot. This is the one Letty used at Willow Grove."

Mrs. Hartwell-Jones continued to look at the ponies, evidently thinking deeply. Jane sat, still and eager, watching Mrs. Hartwell-Jones with bright eyes. How she hoped she

would buy the ponies, dear little Punch and Judy. Presently she slipped out of the carriage and mounted the veranda steps.

"They are so nice!" she whispered, tucking her hand into her grandmother's. "And Letty drove them because she wanted to see you, Mrs. Hartwell-Jones. She wanted to see you because you write books."

"Would you mind driving them up or down once or twice?" she asked Letty, who had been fidgeting the reins, overcome with shyness.

Grandfather had gone with Joshua and Mr. Drake to the farmyard, for the purpose of examining the other horses. Joshua was celebrated all over the countryside for his knowledge of horses.

"What a nice face that child has!" exclaimed Mrs. Hartwell-Jones to grandmother as Letty guided the ponies at a slow trot around the drive, Christopher still perched on the rumble. "Is she the little girl you spoke to me about?"

"Yes," replied grandmother. "She does not look like a circus girl, does she?"

"She doesn't want to be a circus girl any

more," spoke up Jane. "She wants to find some work to do. She hasn't any home. She wants to work. And I told her," she added importantly, "that I'd speak to you, grandmother, to ask if you knew of anybody who needed a maid."

"A maid!" echoed Mrs. Hartwell-Jones, as if she had been given a new thought. "A maid—and no home!" She turned to grandmother. "Why would I not be the better one to carry out your plan, Mrs. Baker?"

Just then Letty drove up and stopped again. Mrs. Hartwell-Jones began to ask her questions about the ponies; whether they were afraid of trains, motor cars, or things like that.

"No, ma'am, they are very gentle," replied Letty earnestly, overcoming her awe of the "author-lady" in her anxiety to do justice to the ponies. "They have so much sense and intelligence, from being taught things that they always listen to reason."

Mrs. Hartwell-Jones smiled kindly.

"Their intelligence certainly has been cultivated," she agreed, "but are they practical? I mean, will they be content to go

jogging peacefully about country roads with a quiet old lady? They might miss the spangle and sawdust of the circus, you know. Or if they heard a band play, they might stand up on their hind legs, carriage and all, and begin to waltz."

Jane and Christopher shouted with laughter at that suggestion. Even Letty laughed, and then reddened with embarrassment.

"I don't believe they would do that," she answered politely.

"If they're anything like Letty, they'll be glad to get away from the circus," added Christopher. "Isn't Letty funny, not to like the circus? I should think it would be bully—specially with such jolly little beasts as Punch and Judy to show off."

"Those are the ponies' names, you know," put in Jane. "They are twins, grandmother, twin brother and sister, the same as Kit and me."

It was grandmother's and Mrs. Hartwell-Jones's turn to laugh now. Then there were a great many more questions to be asked about the ponies, and everybody was so interested and excited that they forgot all about din-

ner—even Christopher—until Huldah came out the second time to say everything would be spoiled. Christopher was sent to the stable to fetch Jo Perkins to look after the ponies and grandmother invited Letty to stay for dinner.

“You must be very hungry,” said Jane, as she led Letty up-stairs to wash her hands. “I am always starved when I’ve been to the village. Huldah cooks awfully good dinners.”

It was impossible for any one to feel shy very long in that cheerful household, and Letty soon began to enjoy herself very much, although she was very quiet.

Mrs. Hartwell-Jones’s mind was still busy over that new idea that Jane’s speech had given her and she watched Letty very closely without seeming to do so.

“She is a very sweet-mannered child,” she reflected. “I find it hard to realize that she is only a little circus girl. She must have had a wonderfully good mother. I must manage to have a long talk with her.”

After dinner the real business began. Joshua examined the ponies carefully while

the twins looked on with bated breath. Suppose Joshua should find something wrong with those delightful, charming little animals!

“But he couldn’t, oh, he couldn’t!” whispered Jane to herself over and over.

And Joshua didn’t.

Then the price must be settled upon. As this subject did not interest the children, and as they were forbidden to drive the ponies again because they must be rested for the return trip to the circus field, they carried Letty off to show her Juno’s puppies, the orchard, and their treasures and playgrounds generally.

“If I’d a-thought the lady would surely take the ponies,” said Mr. Drake when the transaction was satisfactorily concluded, “I’d a-druv over with another horse, so’s Letty an’ me could of got back and I could of left the ponies right now. But I guess my wife ’ll be glad to have one more good sight of ’em. It’s strange how fond we all are of them ponies, mem; something like they was pet dogs. The little un,” pointing with his thumb in the direction in which Letty had disappeared,

“she’ll most cry her eyes out, I guess. Poor little un, I’m afraid there’s a good many troubles ahead o’ her.” And he shook his head regretfully. He had a kind heart under his rough jacket.

“I was given to understand that the girl is to leave you?” said Mrs. Hartwell-Jones thoughtfully. “Is she no relation at all to you or your wife?”

“No, mem, none at all. Her big brother Ben was our prize tight-rope walker. A wonder, he was. But he fell an’ broke his neck; dreadful accident, mem. It happened only last summer. The little un took on dreadful. She always lived with her big brother; all her folks are dead and she hasn’t any friends but us. Folk ain’t very cordial to circus folk and their kin, for some reason, though you couldn’t find a nicer spoken child than Miss Letty there. After the accident we kept her on with us. She’s most astonishin’ helpful. My wife she sets great store by her, but Letty don’t seem to care for the rovin’ life. I guess she won’t mind parting company, ’cept for bein’ sorry to leave my wife an’ the kid. But it’s powerful uncertain

what's to become of her. My wife 'll do the best she can for her when we get to the city."

"I was thinking," said Mrs. Hartwell-Jones slowly, "that perhaps I could find a position for the girl. But I should like to talk to your wife first."

"Yes'm?" replied the man hopefully. "I guess my wife could suit you all right about Letty's character, mem. We'd like first-rate to see Letty get a good place of some sort, where she was treated kind and not worked too hard."

"Mr. Baker," said Mrs. Hartwell-Jones, turning to grandfather, "I'd like to ask a favor of you. Might Joshua drive the phaeton into the village—to where Mr. Drake has his tents—to bring me home? I think I should like to take a drive behind my new ponies to see how I am going to like them and the little carriage." For the basket-phaeton had been bought, too.

Grandfather was only too delighted to put any carriage at all at Mrs. Hartwell-Jones's disposal, and word was sent to Joshua at once, while Mrs. Hartwell-Jones limped into the house to consult with grandmother.

When Jane and Christopher learned that Letty was to drive Mrs. Hartwell-Jones into the village in the pony carriage they were very eager to go too, of course, but grandmother said no, they might not go. They would make too big a load in the pony carriage for so long a drive, and would crowd Mrs. Hartwell-Jones too much in the phaeton coming back. Christopher had a dozen or more arguments and different arrangements by which he and Jane could dispose of themselves for the excursion.

“I could drive the ponies, Jane could sit in the rumble and Letty could squeeze in between Josh and Mr. Drake in the phaeton,” he exclaimed, in a positive tone, as if no possible fault or objection could be found to so excellent an arrangement.

But grandmother was firm. The fact was that Mrs. Hartwell-Jones had confided her plan to grandmother and in order to think of carrying it out that lady required to have a long talk alone with Letty and with Mrs. Drake, the wife of the circus manager.

The “lady who wrote books” felt very hard hearted as she was helped carefully into the

low pony carriage, at thus leaving Jane and Christopher behind. They took such a long, affectionate farewell of the ponies and Letty, and stared so wistfully at the little rumble! But she comforted herself with the thought that if her plan worked out properly, the children would have many opportunities during the summer for long drives and games.

CHAPTER VIII

JANE'S IDEA

MRS. HARTWELL-JONES and Letty were very silent at first as they drove along. Letty was quite overcome with shyness and Mrs. Hartwell-Jones was considering what it was best to say first. She was very anxious to have a long talk with Letty, which was the reason why she had not wished Jane and Christopher to come too. For Mrs. Hartwell-Jones's plan was nothing more nor less than to take Letty herself, to act as little errand girl and companion during the summer; then in the autumn when she returned to the city, to put the child in school and enable her to grow up well-taught and fitted to take her place in the working world. But there were a great many things to be thought about and talked over first.

“My dear, tell me something about yourself, will you?” she asked gently, after the

gate had been passed and the ponies were trotting sedately over the smooth country road toward the village.

"About myself!" exclaimed Letty in astonishment. "Why, there isn't anything to tell. I'm just Letty Jones."

"How long have you been with Mr. and Mrs. Drake?"

"Three years this fall. My brother——" She stopped a moment to swallow hard and then went bravely on: "My brother was with the circus. He performed on the tight rope. Then after he fell and—and died, Mrs. Drake said I might stay on and help round. I had nowhere else to go. I am fond of Punch and Judy, and Mrs. Drake was always kind to me, but——"

"But what, dear child?"

"I hate a circus!"

"You poor child! Tell me how you happened to join a circus in the first place. Tell me more about it all. When did your parents die and where was your home when they were living?"

"In Philadelphia. But my father died when I was a tiny baby. I don't remember

him at all. We were very poor and my mother was not strong. My brother Ben was only sixteen years old when father died—he was fourteen years older than I. He ran errands at a theatre, ‘call boy’ I think it was called, and mother took in sewing. After a while Ben learned how to do tumbling from a man who had an act at the theatre and taught me how to spring up and balance on his head. Mr. Goldberg engaged us for his little theatre at Willow Grove. He was a very kind manager and used to give me big boxes of candy. But mother never liked my doing it. She was glad when, about the middle of the summer, a trained bear that was performed in the theatre went mad or something from the heat and they had to take him away; then Mr. Drake brought Punch and Judy and offered to teach me how to put them through their tricks instead of the trained bear. Mother was much happier because I did not have to jump with Ben any more.

“It was a very happy summer!” And Letty sighed. “It was the last my mother ever lived,” she added in a low, choked voice.

“When did it happen, dear little child, and how old were you?” asked Mrs. Hartwell-Jones softly.

“It was that next fall. I—I was hardly ten years old. Mrs. Drake was with us. She lived in the neighborhood and—and afterward she took me with her. I have been with her ever since,” and Letty sighed again.

“You poor, forlorn child!” exclaimed Mrs. Hartwell-Jones tenderly. “What a melancholy life you have had!”

“Only since—since I lost my mother,” replied Letty quickly. “I was very happy before that.”

“Have you ever been to school?”

“Not very much. My mother taught me until she was not strong enough and then I went to school.”

“Did you like it?”

“No, ma’am. Not a bit. The other girls were horrid to me and wouldn’t make friends. At least the girls my own age wouldn’t. They said I was only a little circus girl. I wasn’t as far along in my lessons as they were, either, and had to go into a class with real little girls who thought I was stupid and

made fun of me until I read aloud to them. Then they liked me better.

“But that was before mother died. After that I couldn’t bear to go to school any more that winter.”

“You poor, motherless little girl!” cried Mrs. Hartwell-Jones again, with a catch in her own voice. “And was there no joy—no spot of color in all that dull, dreary time?”

“Ben was always good to me. He was very busy at the theatre all winter, but whenever he could spare the time he took me for walks. Once he took me to a concert. A lady sang, oh, so beautifully!

“And there was the church music, too. I loved it there; it was a very big church with beautiful stained glass windows. The organ hummed so grandly and little boys in white gowns and voices like angels sang. Oh, it was wonderful!”

“I see you are fond of music,” observed Mrs. Hartwell-Jones, glancing with pleased surprise at the little girl’s flushed cheeks and shining eyes.

“Oh, so fond!” replied Letty eagerly.

Then she stopped, seized with a new fit of

shyness. How had it come about that she should be chattering so freely all this time to the great lady of whom she had felt in such awe an hour before; the writer of books! Somehow she had forgotten all about her greatness and riches; she had felt only the loving kindness and sympathy of her manner.

Ever since her mother's death Letty had had an odd, tight feeling around her heart; as if it had been tucked into a case that was too small for it. When Ben died the case had grown smaller and tighter until it cut like a metal band. She had never been able to talk to any one of her grief until something in Mrs. Hartwell-Jones's manner had appealed to the trustfulness of the sensitive, lonely child. And her heart felt less swollen and sore after she had spoken.

Mrs. Hartwell-Jones asked no more questions for a time, and Letty went over in her mind her day's experience; the gay, happy children, the big, sunny farmhouse with its green lawns and orchard and last, but not least, the good dinner and general homey feeling.

Mrs. Hartwell-Jones's thoughts were busy

too, and all that Letty had told her made her the more decided to take the girl from her present surroundings. But she said nothing to Letty. She would wait until she had had her talk, as she had determined, with Mrs. Drake.

In the meantime the twins, left at home at Sunnycrest, felt a bit flat.

"I'm glad Mrs. Hartwell-Jones has bought the ponies," said Jane, idly swinging on the gate. "'Cause she'll take us driving with them lots of times, I think."

"It's lucky Josh found 'em all right," responded Christopher. "He knows a lot about horses, Josh does, and he might have found something wrong."

"Oh, he couldn't have been so mean as to say anything was wrong about 'em. He just couldn't help loving the cunning little things."

"It isn't a question of loving," retorted Christopher grandly. "It's a question of spavins or—or heaves, or heart disease. Those are horse's diseases, you know."

"They aren't all horse's diseases. People can have some of 'em. Leastways, nurse said

Norah Flannigan had heart disease and that was what made her eyes stick out, like a frog's."

"What did her eyes sticking out have to do with it?"

"Why, greeny, don't you know that when people have heart disease their eyes always bulge? It's a symptom. I asked mother and she said so. But who I'm sorry for is Letty," she went on hastily. She saw that Christopher was about to question further about this most interesting symptom of heart trouble and she did not wish to betray the fact that she had come to the end of her knowledge.

"What are you sorry for Letty for? Has she got heart disease?"

"No, but she hasn't any home."

"Well, but she's got a circus to belong to and that's lots more exciting."

"But she doesn't like a circus. She said so. She doesn't like traveling around and living in a tent. And now that Punch and Judy are gone from the circus she won't have anything to do. I wish grandmother had let her stay here to help Huldah."

"So do I," replied Christopher cruelly.

“'Cause then she'd be around to play dolls with you and I could get off more to go with the boys.”

“If you want to play with the boys, why don't you go?” said Jane loftily. “I'm sure I don't want your company if you don't want to stay.”

Just then she spied something enveloped in a cloud of dust coming up the road, and her tone changed.

“Kit Baker, who's that?”

“Huh?” asked Christopher, glancing at the approaching dust cloud with pretended surprise. “Oh, that's just Bill Carpenter coming out to see the pups. Grandfather said I might give him one. And we're going to talk baseball too a bit. The fellows want me on the nine. You needn't go away, though; there's no secret,” he added politely, as Jane climbed down off the gate.

The dust cloud had by this time revolved upon them and disclosed a small, freckled boy on a big bicycle. Jane gave her brother one hurt, angry look, turned her back and without a word ran into the house.

“What's the matter?” called grandmother,

catching sight of the red, scowling face as Jane passed the sitting-room door.

“Oh, nothing,” answered Jane carelessly, turning and entering the room. “Kit’s got a boy out there, so I thought I’d come in and see if Huldah wanted me to help her.”

Grandmother peered out the window at the backs of two boys disappearing around the corner of the house in the direction of the stable.

“I don’t believe Huldah is in the kitchen, dear,” she said, “but perhaps you would like to sit with me for a little while? I have some pretty bits of silk put away that I have been saving up for you to make a doll’s quilt. I thought they might come in useful when you and I were sitting together over a bit of sewing.”

This suggestion made Jane feel very grown up—almost like a lady come in to spend the afternoon. The sulky frown smoothed itself out at once. Grandmother directed her where to find the box of silks, threaded her needle and advised in a most interested way about the choice of colors.

Jane seated herself in a low rocking-chair

beside an open window and felt very important indeed as she snipped squares of silk and sewed them together. She forgave her brother his preference for boys, she forgot to be curious as to which puppy Billy Carpenter might choose. She even forgot, in the general grown-upness of the occasion, that she did not like sewing. And crowning joy, when Huldah brought a tea tray in at five o'clock, grandmother poured her out a cup of tea—with plenty of hot water, to be sure—from her own teapot. Jane pretended that there were other guests present, taking tea, too. This game added to her dignity and it also accounted, most conveniently, for the rapid disappearance of the cakes and cookies.

“Grandmother,” said Jane, feeling quite grown up enough to discuss any subject, “I was so sorry for Letty.”

“Yes, poor little child. It is hard to be motherless.”

“She asked me if I thought there was any chance of her getting a place around here. I thought perhaps you might like to take her to help Huldah.”

Mrs. Baker did not answer for a few mo-

ments, but bent silently over her knitting. Then she said :

“ Janey, dear, Mrs. Hartwell-Jones did not wish anything said about it until the question was settled, one way or the other, but I am going to see if you can keep a secret.”

“ Oh, grandmother, dear, of course I can! Oh, what is it? ” cried Jane eagerly, jumping up and spilling the whole box of silk scraps out upon the floor.

“ She thinks of taking Letty—that is, if Mrs. Drake can answer satisfactorily all the questions that must be asked—to wait on her this summer; and then in the fall to put her at some good school where she will be taught how to earn her own living when she grows up.”

“ Oh, grandmother, how perfectly perfect! And can't Mrs. Hartwell-Jones stay here with us all summer, instead of going back to Mr. Parsons' house in the village? ”

“ I shall keep her, certainly, as long as she will stay, Janey dear. But do you see how wonderful all this is going to be for Letty? Now, she is a homeless little girl, with nowhere to go in the wide, wide world; but if

Mrs. Hartwell-Jones takes her she will be housed and cared for and protected. It is a fearful thing to be a little girl alone in the world, Janey."

"Yes, grandmother," replied Jane solemnly. "And wouldn't it be a surprise if Letty should turn out to be a relation of Mrs. Hartwell-Jones's? It would be like one of her own stories, wouldn't it?"

"Yes, it certainly would be wonderful. But there is not much likelihood of that, dear. There are a great many Joneses in the world."

"Yes, it seems to be a very popular name. But, grandmother, when shall we know surely, if Letty is coming back?"

"I think it is pretty certain," replied grandmother with a smile. "Mrs. Hartwell-Jones had about made up her mind before she started, and Mrs. Drake will not have very much to say against Letty, if we are to believe Mr. Drake's account. The child will be a great help to Mrs. Hartwell-Jones, with her lame ankle."

Jane was gathering up the scattered scraps of bright colored silk.

"I think I won't sew any more just now,

grandmother, if you will 'scuse me. I want to go out to the gate and watch for them to come back."

Outside the sitting-room door she met the boys. Her superiority in having been confided a secret made her very amiable, and when she saw that Billy Carpenter carried a puppy, she forgot her injury in examining the ball of fur to decide which puppy it was. But she kept one eye on the gate and presently tumbled the puppy back into Billy's arms and ran off toward the driveway with a shout.

Bill was not expecting the burden at that moment and the fat puppy fell yelping to the ground. But Jane did not turn round.

"What in the world!" ejaculated Christopher, who had never before seen Jane deaf to cries of distress.

"Perhaps she feels bad about your giving away the pup," suggested Billy, picking up the whining little beast.

The two boys bent over the puppy to see if its fall had injured it and neither of them noticed the approach of the pony carriage, again being driven, to Jane's unspeakable joy, by Letty.

CHAPTER IX

HAPPY DAYS

THE arrival of Letty at Sunnycrest was the herald of many happy days. Of course Mrs. Hartwell-Jones gave grandmother all the particulars of her interview with Mrs. Drake, but the mere fact that Letty was there satisfied the twins; they carried her off to the orchard, completely contented at the new turn events had taken.

“Here’s where we play fairies,” said Jane, leading the way to the orchard. This is Titania’s throne—this mound with the grapevine twisted into a seat. Kit made it for me. Isn’t he clever? He plays with me, too; sometimes he’s Oberon and sometimes he’s Puck. He’s funniest when he’s Puck.”

“I said something to Bill Carpenter about Puck to-day, and he thought I meant a funny paper,” exclaimed Christopher scornfully. “Just fancy not knowing about Puck!”

“I’m afraid I don’t know,” said Letty shyly,

her face getting very red at the thought of these children knowing so much more than she did. "Was he a fairy?"

"Oh, yes, and there's a play about him in the house. Will you read us the story?"

"Some time," replied Letty hesitatingly, doubtful if she could read well enough. She had not progressed very much in her lessons during these past three years.

"Do you know any stories?" asked Jane, settling herself comfortably upon Titania's throne.

"I—I make up stories sometimes to myself and—and songs."

"Oh, do you sing?" put in Christopher. "What sort of songs? Sing us one, that's a good girl."

"I only know two or three songs with tunes to them. I'll sing them for you some time, but not now. I must go see if Mrs. Hartwell-Jones needs me."

"Everything Mrs. Drake could tell me was satisfactory," Mrs. Hartwell-Jones was saying to grandmother. "Letty's mother, it seems, must have been a very unusual woman, a 'real lady' Mrs. Drake called her."

“I remember my daughter-in-law said the same thing,” put in grandmother.

“The son was fond of his little sister but careless of her and too fond of his own good times. The Drakes have kept her on with them since her brother’s death out of pure kindness of heart. Mrs. Drake said she thought of trying to get Letty a place as nursemaid when they went back to the city; she is so fond of children and so patient and good to Mrs. Drake’s baby. You should have seen how Letty cried and hugged that baby when we came away.”

“How sad it would have been,” said grandmother, “to have cast that poor child upon the world at her age.”

“What a mercy it is that your dear little Janey gave me my idea. In the past I have done what I could for charity, as every one does; that is, I have given sums of money to different hospitals and all that. But I have always wanted to have some personal work to do, and now I have it, in bringing up this poor orphaned child.”

“And you will grow fond of her, too,” added grandmother. “She has such

a sweet face and such nice, thoughtful ways."

"I think I am fond of her already; fond and interested."

"Have you any plans?"

"I suppose I shall send her to boarding-school in the autumn. But the poor child is wofully behind her years in knowledge. I shall write to the city for books and set her a daily task at once.

"And now about my visit to you, dear Mrs. Baker. It is very kind of you to take Letty in as well as me, and those great ponies too. But I must not impose upon your hospitality too long. As soon as arrangements can be made, Letty and I must return to the village. Now that I have a willing pair of little feet to wait upon me and run my errands I shall get on nicely. We stopped on the way home this afternoon at Mr. Parsons' and bespoke a room for Letty. Mr. Parsons thinks he can make room for the ponies in his stable."

"We shall be very sorry to see you go," replied Mrs. Baker regretfully, "but I dare say you will feel freer and more undisturbed in your own rooms. The children will miss you."

“I hope they will come in to see me often—every day, if they wish. We shall have little tea-parties in my sitting-room or down under the trees. And I trust you will come too, to drink tea with me.”

So matters were arranged; much to the children's disappointment at first, but when they understood the extent of Mrs. Hartwell-Jones's invitations to them, they were frankly delighted. They did not like the idea of losing Letty and the ponies, but the prospect of almost daily tea-parties made them look forward almost with eagerness to the time of Mrs. Hartwell-Jones's return to her own rooms in the village.

Jane was filled with rapture at the idea of more fairy plays, for Letty had entered into the game of dolls as eagerly and interestedly as Jane herself, her vivid imagination making the dainty waxen creatures seem all but alive. Christopher, for his part, rejoiced secretly over the chances these visits promised of going to the village and continuing his intimacy with Billy Carpenter.

Billy and half a dozen other village boys were trying to get up a baseball nine, and

Christopher and Jo Perkins had both been invited to join. Billy Carpenter came out to Sunnycrest nearly every afternoon on his bicycle, and he and Jo Perkins and Christopher had great times practicing pitching and batting down in the long meadow.

Grandmother looked on at this new friendship of Christopher's with some surprise and a little uneasiness. Until the present time, the twins had been inseparable, sharing their pleasures and enjoying the same games. Jane was hurt sometimes by Christopher's desertion, but she was too busy and happy to feel badly for long, and after Letty came she was quite reconciled to Christopher's new friends.

Letty was a delightful playfellow, always ready for whatever game Jane was pleased to suggest, and as Mrs. Hartwell-Jones demanded very little of her new companion's time, she was able to devote herself to Jane. Every morning Letty drove Mrs. Hartwell-Jones out in the pony carriage, Jane and Christopher taking turns in the little seat behind; then there was an hour's work over arithmetic and reading. After that the two little girls might amuse themselves as they pleased.

Huldah enjoyed having them in the kitchen. Letty soon proved to be more of a helper than Jane herself, and was so genuinely interested in the art of cooking that Huldah good-naturedly offered to give her a few practical lessons.

It was while these cooking lessons were going on that Jane generally wrote her letters to her mother. It was a positive rule that the twins were to write either to their father or mother at least once a week. It may sound hard to say that this had to be made a rule but if you, my dears, are like most children, you will understand how difficult it is to find time to write letters even to those you love best in the world. But Jane rather liked it when she got started—if there was some one at hand to help with the spelling and the letters need not be long. Before sailing on the big steamer, Mrs. Baker, Jr., had given each of her children a little writing-case containing paper, envelopes, a box for pens and pencils, a tiny compartment for stamps and an ink-bottle, all complete. It was the first time Jane had ever been allowed to write with ink, and that added

to the importance of her weekly letter-writing.

So while Huldah and Letty talked busily over recipes—"three cups of sifted flour; the whites of four eggs beaten stiff; two even teaspoonfuls of baking-powder" and other mysteries, Jane toiled away over her foreign correspondence. Jane loved her mother dearly and missed her—at times—more than any one guessed. As it was her joy when they were all at home to pour out into mother's sympathetic ears all the little details of each day's happiness, so now she told, in shorter form but with as faithful accuracy, the events of Sunnycrest. Mrs. Hartwell-Jones's accident, the finding of her by the twins and her coming to Sunnycrest, had all been told in a previous letter. Now there was the account of the circus and the finding of Letty to relate, and when the crooked, blotty little letter reached Mrs. Christopher Baker, Jr., in Berlin, I am sure she was touched by the story of the orphaned circus girl who had been given a home by a kind, generous woman. And, mother-like, her heart must have glowed with pride at the thought that her little girl's

sympathy and love for a fellow creature had spoken the word which brought Letty a reward for her act of heroism long ago.

Letty was supremely happy. She was hardly old enough to realize all that she had been saved from, but the joy of being well fed and cared for filled her cup of happiness to overflowing. This change in her circumstances did not make the child selfish and lazy, as it might have affected some natures, easily spoiled by comfort; but more eager and willing to serve those who had been so kind to her. Mrs. Hartwell-Jones and grandmother agreed that there was no fear of being disappointed in Letty's disposition, and the "lady who wrote books" found Mrs. Baker's prophecy already coming true. She was growing fond of Letty.

"I find myself looking forward quite eagerly to my return to the city in the autumn," she said to grandmother. "Letty will need some clothes before she goes to school, of course, and it will be such a pleasure to buy them. It has been so long since I have had any one to buy clothes for," she added, the tears coming to her eyes. "I



UNDER A LARGE TREE IN THE GARDEN

dare confess now, Mrs. Baker, how much I have envied you Janey and Kit this summer."

"They are dear children," agreed grandmother with a sigh, "but they are growing up so fast! Until this year they were always 'the children.' Now Jane is a girl and Kit a boy." Grandmother paused a moment as if she wished to say something more, but she was afraid of boring her visitor by discussing the children too much and changed the subject.

It happened that the afternoon of the day before that set for the return of Letty and Mrs. Hartwell-Jones to the village was very hot, and all the grown-ups had retired to their own rooms to lie down. The children were told to stay quietly in the shade until the sun was lower, and Letty agreed to tell them stories. So they settled themselves under a large tree in the garden close to the house and, as it happened, just underneath Mrs. Hartwell-Jones's window.

Letty began with "Jack the Giant Killer," which she had read in one of Jane's old books, but found that she was listened to with only polite interest.

"I think Jack ought to have saved the giant's wife before he cut down the beanstalk," said Christopher disgustedly, when the story was ended, "after she had treated him so kindly and all. It was a shame to leave her up there without any way of getting down."

"She was the fairy, you goose," exclaimed Jane, "who first told Jack that all the giant's treasure belonged to his mother, and so she could easily get down, because fairies can go anywhere."

"Don't you know any other stories, Letty?" asked Christopher. "New ones?"

"Make up one!" urged Jane. "You know you said you did sometimes."

"But they aren't really stories; I mean not long ones. They're just little thoughts about the birds and flowers and things talking. But I will try to tell you a story I read once, that I love dearly. It was a story in a magazine that a girl lent me at school, and I loved it so that I read it over and over again. I think I know it by heart and I'll tell it to you if you think it will interest you. It's not exactly a boy's story," she added apologetically, looking at Christopher.

"Oh, never mind, fire away," answered Christopher grandly.

Christopher was very comfortable, sprawled on his back in the shade, and was ready to be amused by anything except a nursery tale.

"Well, then, here is the story. It is called 'Thistledown.'"

"'Thistledown,'" repeated Christopher, "that's a funny name."

"Thistledown was the fairy's name, and you'll see what he got for being naughty and mischievous. Well——"

"Before you begin, Letty," broke in Jane, "please make Kit promise one thing—that he won't interrupt."

"Huh, I'd like to know who was the first to interrupt," mocked Christopher.

"I didn't interrupt. The story hadn't begun yet. Make him promise, Letty, do."

"I don't see why I have to promise."

"Because it spoils a story so, Kit. Please promise. Letty's going to recite the story, just as we do our poetry at school, and she might forget something if she had to stop in the middle. Besides, explanations cut up a story so. Come on, say you won't interrupt,

like a good boy. I know you won't if you only promise."

"Well, I'll not interrupt if you don't," conceded Christopher. "Go on, Letty, let's hear what happened to Thistledown."

CHAPTER X

THISTLEDOWN

“WELL,” commenced Letty cheerfully, “it began like this :

“Thistledown was a roguish elf and, I am afraid, rather a selfish little fellow. The sight of good examples did not make him want to be useful or helpful at all. Indeed, nothing could make him work except to threaten to take away his liberty. For Thistledown prized his liberty dearly. Not from the high, noble motives of honor and self-respect that are the reasons why most people insist upon having their rights, but because to Thistledown his liberty meant his happiness. It meant nice long, warm hours in which to float idly about the great sunshiny world with never a thought or care in his feather-brained head.

“He was not a bothersome elf, as idle folk are so apt to be. He was too lazy to tease—

except to give an occasional passing tickle to the long nose of some serious old gnome bent over his work, when Thistledown's merry laugh at the goblin's sneeze and start of surprise was so jolly that the gnome had to laugh too, and so no cross words were spoken.

"The breezes were Thistledown's best friends. They were as lazy and careless as himself, and the kindred spirits got on splendidly together. The breezes would carry him on long, swift rides astride their backs, or float with him lazily along over sweet-smelling fields of flowers. Sometimes they would dip him in the brook, but Thistledown did not mind that, for he shed water like a duck and the little plunge served finely to cool him off on hot summer days.

"But lazy folk are bound to be punished sooner or later, for it is not right to be lazy, and everything that is not right in the world is sure to be punished some time or other. And so it happened—but I am going to let Thistledown tell his story in his own way. (Yes, Kit, that is just the way it was in the magazine.)

"One day as Thistledown was floating over a

field of daisies, he spied a spot of yellow among the flowers that was very much larger than any of the daisy centres, and much shinier and softer. Too lazy to wonder what the new kind of blossom could be, but thinking that it looked like a snug, silky place for a nap, he dropped down upon it. Immediately his downy wings became mixed up in a soft tangle of long golden threads that curled and twined about in a distressfully confusing way, all around him.

“Thistledown became frightened, but the more he struggled to free himself the more tangled he became in the golden mesh. At last he saw approaching him what he knew to be a person’s hand and his little heart sank within him as he felt this new prison closing about him. The touch of the small hand was very gentle so that not one of Thistledown’s feathers was crushed. But he was very much frightened nevertheless, poor little fellow, and closed his eyes tight for a minute.

“When he dared to open them again he found himself being surveyed very seriously by a pair of big blue eyes.

“‘Now, sir.’ said the little girl (I am sure

you have guessed before now that Thistledown's golden prison was a little girl's curls), 'Now, sir,' she said, 'before I let you go, you must tell me a story, please.'

"She was a very polite little girl and although she knew that she held Thistledown in her power and that he simply had to do whatever she told him to, whether he wanted to or not, still she said 'sir' and 'please' when she asked for her story, for she was a very polite little girl.

"The politeness pleased Thistledown—as nice manners always do please every one—but his little wits could not think of anything like a story.

"'I'm afraid I don't know any story,' he replied, trying to be as polite as the little girl.

"'Oh, yes, you do. You're sure to,' she declared, with a grave little nod of her head. 'Tell me about your ad-ven-tures!'

"This was a very big word for such a little girl, but she got it out quite correctly. Besides, she knew very well what the word meant, because she had seen it so often on the back of a book on her sister's book-shelf. 'Alice's Adventures in Wonderland.'

“Thistledown squirmed and wriggled and began to grow warm and cross.

“‘I don’t know any stories. And I never had any adventures—except once,’ he added, remembering something all at once.

“‘Oh, please do tell me about it,’ coaxed the little girl.

“She looked so pretty, and besides, she held him so firmly, that Thistledown saw that the sooner he told his story the sooner he would be free, so he began at once :

“‘It happened so long ago that I may forget parts, but I’ll tell it the best I know how. I was flying home from a party one afternoon and as it was almost dark I was in a good deal of a hurry. Pretty soon, down at the edge of a field of tall grasses, I saw an old firefly poking about as if he were looking for something. I stopped to see what was the matter, for it was too dark to hope to find anything, and the old firefly’s lantern gave out hardly any light at all.

“‘I supposed his light was dim because the old fellow was too lazy to make it shine brighter. I had seen the gnomes blowing up their forge fires with a pair of bellows to

make them burn brighter and I supposed the firefly's lantern worked the same way. So I got behind the old fellow as he stooped to look under a clump of violet leaves, and I gave a quick, sharp little blow—pouf—like that, at his lantern. But what do you suppose happened? It went out!

““I was terribly surprised and a bit frightened, for that horrid old firefly thought that I had done it on purpose. He whirled around before I could spread my wings, and caught hold of me.

“““You wicked, wicked little sprite!” he exclaimed, almost squeezing the breath out of me. “How dared you, oh, how dared you!”

““I never dreamed he could move so fast and I was too surprised to get out of his way. If you have ever had a firefly on your hand you know how sticky their legs feel. Well, the old firefly held me by all his legs, squeezing me tight and mussing my party feathers. Lifting me off the ground, he flew away with me, scolding all the while.

“““You are a vicious little vagabond,” he said. I don't know what he meant, but those are the very words he used and I know they

meant something disagreeable. He thought I had blown out his light, just for mischief. "But you shall be punished for it," he went on. "I'll see to it. I shall take you to the King himself!"

"I grew more and more frightened. His voice was so very cross and he clutched me so tight. Then, too, we were flying along through the dark over fields I had never visited before. I have always been afraid in the dark' (here the little girl nodded her head understandingly and looked about her at the bright sunshine gratefully). 'And the grasses rustled so queerly. I began to be afraid that they, too, meant to do me harm.

"At last, after we had been flying for what seemed to me to be hours, we reached a sort of open place, all bare and cold looking, with high rocks all about it. There were thousands of fireflies inside this place, all with their lanterns brightly burning. On one side a great many flies were bunched together to light a kind of throne, and on this throne sat the King and Queen of the Fireflies. My heart was in my mouth as my captor carried me across to them, for the

King was ever so much bigger than any of the other fireflies and I did not know what he might do to punish me.

““ There were two or three other fireflies talking to the King, but they all stopped and moved aside when they saw the old firefly coming up with his lantern gone out, and carrying me.

““ “ Why, what’s this, what’s this?” asked the King in a surprised voice as the fly sank down, all out of breath, at the foot of the throne.

““ “ Oh, Your Majesty,” he gasped, as soon as he could get breath enough to speak, “ I was hunting for corn-flowers down in the big meadow, trying to find enough honey to finish my supper before it grew too dark, for you know I am growing old and my light was giving out.”

““ “ Yes, yes, I know,” replied the King kindly. “ We have all felt very sorry about it. And I am greatly shocked to see that it has now gone out altogether.”

““ “ Ah, but hear how that happened, Your Majesty. I was hunting about, very busy and never dreaming of the dreadful thing

that was to happen, when this little creature"—he did not call me a vicious little vagabond to the King, but his voice sounded as if he would like to—"stole up behind me and blew out my light!"

"Everybody exclaimed at this and crowded about the old firefly to tell him how sorry they were. I was sorry too, as sorry as I could be, for I had not known that the firefly's light was dim because he was growing old. I had not meant any harm, but rather to help him. I tried to explain this to the fireflies but no one would listen when I talked about the gnomes and their forge fires. I thought the Queen was listening, for she kept looking at me; but she did not say anything.

"The King ordered me off to prison, and appointed the old fly, whose light I had blown out, to be my keeper. There were two other guards to the prison too, and it was horrid. My prison was a long, narrow crack in one of the brown rocks and I don't know how long a time I spent there. It seemed like years. At the back, very cold and dark indeed, was my bed. The front looked down

on the open space which, I learned, was called the throne glade, and one could see everything that went on. But the two keepers always sat one on each side of the door, and the old fly in the middle so that I could not see out. If the King went by, or anything interesting happened, I would try to peep over their shoulders, but the guards scolded me so and made such unkind remarks that I was ready to cry.

“ ‘It was a dreadful time. I was getting thinner, for I was not used to living in the dark and I did not like the things they gave me to eat. My wings were getting so weak from not being used that I began to be afraid they would never hold me up again.

“ ‘The only thing that was at all pleasant was a visit from the Queen. She was very kind and said that she had heard what I said about not meaning to injure the old fly, but that I must understand that almost as much harm and sorrow happened in the world through “not meaning to” as from real naughtiness. She said that it is always dangerous to meddle with things we don’t know about and most dangerous of all to meddle

with fire. And I promised her that I would never do it again.

“ ‘The keepers were a little more kind to me after the Queen’s visit and I tried to show the old firefly, whose lamp I had blown out, that I was sorry. I was hoping that the Queen would send some one to set me free, but she did not and it was very lonely. I began to be afraid I should have to stay in that gloomy prison all the rest of my life.

“ ‘Then, one day, a young firefly came bustling up to the prison in great excitement. The King and Queen had been invited to a big party given by the June beetles, and all the fireflies were asked to go along to help light up the party. The June beetle’s country was pretty far off and the fireflies would have to start early in the afternoon to reach it before dark. Every single one of them was to go except my old keeper, who was left to guard me.

“ ‘ ‘Of course I would not be wanted anyhow,” I heard him say crossly. “I’m of no use without my lantern.”

“ ‘I was very sorry that the poor old fly had to stay behind and miss the party, but I

realized that my chance had come to escape. So, every day, while the three guards sat in the doorway, busy watching what went on below and talking about the party, I stayed in the dark corner beside my bed and exercised my wings by lifting myself up to the ceiling and down again on them, to bring back the strength.

“ ‘ At last the day of the party arrived and every single firefly had gone except my old keeper and me. We sat side by side in the doorway and watched the sun go down. I really think the old fly was as unhappy to have me sit in the doorway as he had been to miss the party. But he could not fill up the whole doorway by himself, although he crowded me a great deal, nor could he forbid me to stay there, so I sat and looked down at the throne glade and tried to see where the opening was that led back to the world.

“ ‘ It always got dark early in this place and as soon as the sun had set, the old fly got up and said I must go to bed. I got up without saying anything and he turned around and started back toward my bed, thinking that I was following right behind. You

remember that his light was out and he could not see.

“ ‘ But I did not lose a second of time. The instant his back was turned I spread my wings and flew down into the throne glade. My poor wings were so weak that I almost fell, but they soon got stronger as I skimmed through the fresh air. The old fly did not miss me at first, and I had time to get out through the narrow opening of the glade before he realized what had happened and started to follow me.

“ ‘ My wings grew stronger every minute, and I was oh, so happy to be free and on my way back to my own dear, sunshiny world again, that I did not feel a bit frightened when presently I heard the blind old fly coming after me. He was oh, so cross! He could not see me at all and could only tell where I was by the rustle of my wings. But although he was older than I he was stronger and could fly faster. I heard him coming closer and closer. What if I should be captured again! I should die, I knew!

“ ‘ On I flew, faster and faster, and at last I found myself again in the field of high grasses

near the edge of which I had first seen the old fly. The noises and darkness of the grasses had frightened me then, but now they seemed like home to me. I was too tired to fly another inch, so I just dropped down, right into the middle of a clump of grasses.

““ It was now much too dark to see anything and the grasses made such a rustle in the wind that the old firefly did not miss the sound of my wings at first and had flown quite some distance ahead before he realized that I was not in front of him any longer. Then, how angry he was! He knew that I must be hiding somewhere near by, and he went bumping back and forth over the field, hitting his poor head against stalks and getting crosser every minute. He flew quite close to me two or three times and I held my breath for fear he would pounce upon me. But after a long, long time he gave up hunting for me and flew angrily away.

““ And not any too soon, either, for the moon came out presently and shone so bright that he could have seen me down in the clump of grasses at once. I waited until I was quite sure that he was out of sight and

would not come back, then I sprang up and flew home as fast as my poor weak wings would carry me. And you may be sure that I have kept out of the way of fireflies ever since.'

"Thistledown stopped talking, quite out of breath and tired with his long story.

" 'It was a very interesting story,' said the little girl, 'and I thank you very much for telling it to me. And I'll remember, too, what the Queen of the Fireflies told you about not meddling,' she added thoughtfully.

"Then the little girl stood up, still holding Thistledown gently in her chubby hand.

" 'I am going to do what you did to the firefly—only I hope it won't hurt you,' she said. 'Get behind you and say pouf—like that,' and puffing out her rosy cheeks, she sent Thistledown sailing merrily away through the warm, sunshiny air."

Letty ended her story with a little laugh.

"I feel as out of breath as Thistledown did, when he had finished his adventure," she laughed.

"Ho!" ejaculated Christopher, who had nearly burst in his effort to keep his promise

not to interrupt. "He couldn't have blown out the old firefly's lamp. They're not made that way. They're a part of the firefly—the light they make, I mean. The person who wrote that story did not know very much about beetles and things."

The curtains parted in an up-stairs window and a smiling face looked down upon them.

"I know who wrote the story, Kit," called Mrs. Hartwell-Jones. "Can you guess?" she asked merrily.

Letty looked up with her face all aglow, enlightened by Mrs. Hartwell-Jones's expression.

"Oh, Mrs. Hartwell-Jones," she exclaimed, "you don't mean to say that you wrote it!"

"Yes," laughed the lady gayly. "I wrote it ever so many years ago. How wonderfully you remembered it, my dear."

"I loved it," replied Letty simply. "But I should never have believed it then if any one had told me that some day I should know the writer," and she sighed happily.

"I'll write another one some time—just for you and Janey," promised Mrs. Hartwell-Jones. "And now wouldn't you children

like to drive Punch and Judy into the village to carry some of my things to Mr. Parsons' house?"

The twins jumped up with a whoop. They were always delighted to go for a drive in the pony carriage.

CHAPTER XI

CHRISTOPHER GOES FOR THE MAIL

WHEN Mrs. Hartwell-Jones and Letty drove away from Sunnycrest in the pony carriage, amid a general waving of pocket handkerchiefs and shouts of farewell, everybody looked at everybody else rather blankly, as if something had happened and nobody was quite sure just what it was.

“Mrs. Hartwell-Jones said that we had done so much to brighten her life,” grandmother told grandfather, when they were talking it all over on the veranda that afternoon. “But it seems to be the other way on. It is she who has done us all good. We shall all miss her and Letty, each for different reasons. I enjoyed my talks with Mrs. Hartwell-Jones and the children were perfectly happy with Letty.”

“We shall all of us miss Letty,” agreed grandfather.

“Yes, Jane is disconsolate and Huldah de-

clares that her cake will never be so good again."

It really was wonderful how quickly Letty had filled a place in the simple home life, and how happy she had been. No word or look had ever reminded her that she was a poor little outcast; every one had welcomed her with loving kindness.

"Grandmother," Jane had said one evening when she was saying her prayers, very soon after Letty's arrival, "I think Letty must be 'our sister in heaven.' You know the Bible says that everybody is brother and sister in heaven and that is what Letty must be to us." And as such Jane had taken her into her loving child's heart.

Letty was sorry to leave Sunnycrest; it was so lovely, so quiet and peaceful. But she loved and admired Mrs. Hartwell-Jones so extremely that she would have been glad to go anywhere with her. There were lessons to be studied every day, to prepare for the glorious prospect of school in the autumn, and little drives to take about the countryside. Then it was understood, before Mrs. Hartwell-Jones left Sunnycrest, that the twins were to come

into the village nearly every afternoon for a tea-party, and grandmother was to come with them as often as she could.

And the very next day after Mrs. Hartwell-Jones's departure, Jane proposed a visit. Grandmother thought it too soon, but Jane and Christopher were urgent.

"I think we ought to go, to see if Mrs. Hartwell-Jones got home all right and how her lame foot is," remarked Jane in a grown-up tone. "Don't you think it would be polite, grandmother?"

"And maybe she'll have some jolly little apple turnovers, like she gave us once," added Christopher.

So grandmother gave her consent; Joshua brought round the comfortable big carryall and grandmother and the twins got in, Jane carrying Sally, dressed in her best. Christopher got on the front seat with Joshua, to discuss the prospect of Jo Perkins being allowed enough time off to join the baseball nine. Christopher had counted on seeing Billy Carpenter in the village. Billy lived next door to Mr. Parsons, but he was nowhere to be seen, nor answered Christopher's shrill whistle.

"I'm going on up to the post-office with Josh," said Christopher as his grandmother and Jane descended. "I'll be back before you get started on the party."

"You will have to walk back, Kit," replied his grandmother. "Joshua is going to have the horses shod."

"Oh, I don't mind a little walk like that," answered Christopher loftily. "Besides, if Bill's there he'll probably give me a lift back on the step of his bicycle."

Christopher thought it likely that Billy Carpenter was at the post-office helping his father with the letters, and that by going on there he would not only see his chum but would miss all the "how do you do's" and small talk at Mrs. Hartwell-Jones's, arriving in time for the real pleasure of the occasion—the tea-party.

Jane stood still a moment at the gate and watched the carriage drive off a bit regretfully. She knew that Christopher wanted to see Billy Carpenter and she felt a little forlorn.

"We won't have the party until you get back, Kit," she called after him. Then she turned to her grandmother, her lip quivering

a little. "Do you suppose Kit likes that Carpenter boy better than me, grandmother?"

"Of course not, Janey, dear, but—boys will be boys, you know, and girls girls."

"But Kit didn't use to care for boys."

"Well, he's getting older," replied grandmother vaguely.

Mrs. Hartwell-Jones must have been expecting company, for little Anna Parsons ran out of the front door to meet them, and led them around the corner of the house, where a wide, shady expanse of velvety lawn invited rest. Mrs. Hartwell-Jones sat in an easy chair placed on a rug, and other chairs were grouped near by, while the sight of a low, white-covered table would have done Christopher's heart good, it was so loaded down with goodies.

"Where is Kit?" was Mrs. Hartwell-Jones's first question, echoed by Letty.

Grandmother explained that he had gone for the mail and would be back directly. Then she sat down beside Mrs. Hartwell-Jones and discussed the question of boys in general and Kit in particular, while Letty told the story of "Thistledown" over again for Anna Parsons' benefit, the children taking frequent

peeps at Mrs. Hartwell-Jones in the meantime and wondering how she could have thought it all out. After which she told parts of "Prince Pietro," a story she and her little neighbor Emma Haines had been very fond of, and she wondered if Mrs. Hartwell-Jones had written that, too.

In the meanwhile Christopher drove merrily on with Joshua to the post-office, at the other end of the village, his tongue wagging at its usual nimble rate. As they reached the post-office he gave a sudden shrill whistle that made Joshua put his hand over the ear nearest to Christopher's mouth.

"For the land's sake!" he exclaimed. "Do you want to make me plumb deaf, boy?"

An answering whistle, followed by a whoop, sounded from inside the building and Billy Carpenter darted out.

"Hi, Bill, bring the mail with you," called Joshua. "Here you, Kit, you go in and get it, and get Mrs. Hartwell-Jones's too. You might as well take hers to her, as you're going right back there."

"Not right back," objected Christopher, scrambling down over the front wheel.

“Yes, right back,” repeated Joshua sternly, as the horses started to go on. “Mind you go directly back to your grandma and the girls,” he called over his shoulder, right into the listening ear of Billy Carpenter.

“Huh!” jeered that youth, “here comes the boy that’s tied to a girl’s apron-strings! Howdy, Miss Kitty.”

Christopher was ready to cry with mortification, but his pride held him steady.

“They’re going to have a tea-party at the author-lady’s, and they’re waitin’ for me,” he announced grandly. “You know in the city we fellows have to be polite to the ladies.”

“We’re polite to the ladies too,” answered Billy sullenly. It always made him angry when Christopher made remarks which suggested that city ways were superior to those of the country.

“Oh, I dare say you are,” admitted Christopher graciously, “but it’s different in the city, you know. Say, are you going home? Let’s walk back together. Wait till I get the mail and I’ll treat to sour balls.”

In addition to his light duties as postmaster of the little village, Mr. Carpenter

sold knitting worsted and sweeties kept in glass jars. Christopher, with the manner of a millionaire, pulled the last five-cent piece of his week's "allowance" out of his pocket, handed it over the counter and received in return ten large, semi-transparent yellow sugar balls, striped in red, and done up in a paper bag.

"Here's another of those pesky special delivery letters for the author-lady at Mr. Parsons', Bill," said Mr. Carpenter as he handed out a thick budget; "you'd better take it along with the others. Now run along, both of you, for I'm busy."

"The author-lady must be awful rich, by the way she spends money on postage stamps," observed Billy, as the boys strolled along the village street, each with one of the big red and yellow balls of sweet stuff tucked comfortably in his cheek. "She buys dad out sometimes. And she gets stacks and stacks of letters. I wonder what they're all about?"

He surveyed the bundle he carried with a good deal of curiosity.

"Oh, people who write books always get

lots of letters ; from magazine editors, asking for stories and all that sort of thing," replied Christopher airily. "And they pay big prices for stories, so of course Mrs. Hartwell-Jones is rich. Say, Letty was telling us a story the other day—it was an awfully hot day and there wasn't anything else to do so I lay on the grass and couldn't help hearing what the girls were talking about—well, Letty told this story that she had read once years before at school and what do you suppose? Mrs. Hartwell-Jones had written it. She hollered down to us about it out of her bedroom window when Letty'd got through. Funny, wasn't it? And she said she'd write another story some time, just for the girls. They were immensely tickled."

"You have pretty good times, don't you?" said Billy enviously. "I guess you won't care to play with us boys much."

"Oh, yes, I do," exclaimed Christopher hastily. "I've got a fine scheme that I wanted to talk to you about to-day. Let's you and Perk and me go off on a lark some time together. We'll go into the woods. Grandmother'll give us a lunch and we'll

build a fire to cook potatoes. Maybe we can catch some fish to fry."

"Oh, say, that would be great!" exclaimed Billy enthusiastically. "Let's go to-morrow!"

"Well, I don't know about to-morrow. I was going to ask grandfather to let us have a horse and wagon, and we'll have to wait till one can be spared from the farm work. But we'll go soon."

"Can you swim?" asked Billy suddenly.

"No, not exactly," confessed Christopher reluctantly. "I had some lessons at a swimming school in town, but somehow I couldn't seem to get just the hang of it by myself."

"Oh, well, if you've got a start Perk an' I'll soon teach you," Billy promised patronizingly. "I know of a bully swimming hole, safe as anything."

"I don't know whether grandfather would let me go in swimming," said Christopher slowly, feeling that the expedition was growing more serious than he had intended. Yet he found it unbearable to have Billy think him lacking in any manly sport. "But if it's a perfectly safe place I guess he'll say ——"

“Oh, pshaw, what do you want to tell him for? I guess your grandfather doesn't want you to be a sissy-boy, does he?”

“Of course not!” answered Christopher indignantly.

“Well, then, he must want you to learn to swim. If you should just go home some fine afternoon and say, ‘Gran’pa, I know how to swim,’ why, he’d be as pleased as—as a pup.”

“But I do know how—almost—already,” boasted Christopher.

They discussed the new plan with great gusto. Billy was for making a huge mystery out of it all, like the meeting of some secret society. He proposed smuggling a luncheon out of the Carpenter and Baker pantries and to keep the spot they were to visit a secret. But Christopher did not see the charm of this. He preferred to tell straight out that the three boys wished to go on a picnic. He knew that he would have a much better time if he “had it out” plainly with Jane, instead of slipping away from her, and that Huldah would certainly put up a much better lunch—if she were asked politely—than he and Billy could ever get together by stealth. The swimming

was the only part of the programme he did not care to discuss openly.

“Well, we’ll do it as soon as we can,” he concluded, as they reached Mr. Parsons’ gate. “I’ll send you word by Perk when he comes in for the mail, or mebbe you’d better ride out to the farm on your bike and we’ll talk it over.”

“All right,” replied Billy, lingering a moment as Christopher walked up the path. “I can go any time. I don’t have to scheme to get away from the girls.”

With which parting thrust he vaulted the fence into his own garden. He would have liked to be invited to the tea-party, too, but Christopher never dreamed of suggesting such a thing. He believed that Billy was laughing at him for joining the girls and his cheeks grew very red. He stopped and for a moment was tempted to turn back and sit on the fence with Bill, and talk of swimming, baseball and other manly topics until his grandmother was ready to go home. But just then he looked around—he had reached the corner of the house—and caught sight of the white-covered table, loaded with goodies. He went on.

CHAPTER XII

LETTY SINGS A LULLABY

AFTER the lemonade had all been drunk and most of the cakes eaten—for not even Christopher's best efforts could quite empty the many plates—Letty offered to go back to her storytelling. She sat down on the grass with her back against a tree trunk and the twins curled themselves up contentedly on each side. Little Anna Parsons sat silent at her feet.

“Why are your stories always about people or fairies who sing beautifully?” asked Christopher unexpectedly, after Letty had related two or three tales of her own invention. “Do you sing, Letty?”

“I should like to. Oh, how I should like to!” sighed Letty, clasping her hands.

“Sing something to us now,” commanded Jane.

“I only know one or two songs,” replied Letty shyly, “and they are old songs. I think you children must know them already. I was never taught to sing,” she added quickly.

“Neither were we, except in Sunday-school, but we’ll sing for you, if you like,” said Christopher politely. “Sit up, Jane, and we’ll give her ‘Onward, Christian Soldiers.’”

“I think Letty’d like ‘There’s a Work for Me and a Work for You’ better,” objected Jane. “Her stories always have something about doing things in them.”

“Well, don’t the Christian Soldiers do things? They conquer the world and all that sort of thing. I like that song because you can make such a jolly lot of noise over it. It’s a regular shouter.”

“Boys always like to make a noise,” said Jane to Letty with an apologetic air. “But they are not the nicest kind of songs. I like lullabies and such things. Letty, don’t you know a lullaby? I guess you used to have to sing them to Mrs. Drake’s baby, didn’t you?”

Tears filled Letty’s eyes at the memory Jane’s words called up, of the cuddley, drowsy baby she had hushed to sleep so often.

“Yes, I used to sing Mrs. Drake’s baby to sleep. Shall I sing you that song?” she asked.

Once, on the memorable occasion of which

she had told Mrs. Hartwell-Jones, Letty's brother had taken her to a concert. One of the songs was DeKoven's "Winter Lullaby." The soft, crooning cadence of the song had thrilled Letty's heart and she had listened with rapture. The song had been repeated in response to an encore and so, by careful attention, she had managed to memorize the words of the two verses. She sang it now to the children and as she began, grandmother and Mrs. Hartwell-Jones suddenly ceased their talk and sat listening.

A WINTER LULLABY

"The valley is going to sleep, the birds in their nest
are still

And the maple branches bend and break, over the
leafless hill :

And the pitying sky looks down, and whispers to
the snow,

Let us cover the hills so bare and brown, where
the flowers used to grow ;

And she croons a lullaby, through the hush of the
storm—

Sleep, sleep in your cradle deep, sleep, sleep in
your cradle deep

And I will keep you warm, so sleep, sleep, sleep !

"The valley is going to wake, the birds in their nest
will sing

And the maple branches bud and break, into the
leaves of spring,

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And the gleaming vale shall hear another lullaby,
And zephyrs will whisper it into her ear, out of
the heart of the sky :

Another lullaby, tuned to the heart of the
stream,—

Wake, wake for your robin's sake, wake, wake
for your robin's sake ;

And tell the sky your dream, so wake, wake,
wake !”

When she had finished grandmother ex-
claimed in a low voice :

“ Why, Mrs. Hartwell-Jones, how charming.
What if you have discovered a genius !”

Tears came into Mrs. Hartwell-Jones's eyes.

“ So it seems to you, too, that she has a
good voice ?” she murmured eagerly. “ I
have wondered, and am most impatient to
take her to the city to have her voice tried.
I have heard her singing to herself now and
then and although I know nothing about voice
culture, I thought one or two notes appeared
to have an unusual quality. And, dear Mrs.
Baker, I shall never forget that it was really
Jane who discovered Letty for me ; her sweet
kindliness for a ‘ little sister in heaven.’ The
child's coming has made a great difference in
my life already.”

“ What is the song all about ?” demanded

Christopher of Letty, sitting upright in his curiosity. "What was the dream?"

"I don't know what the dream was, but——"

"Why don't you know? There must have been some sort of a dream, because the song says, 'and tell the sky your dream.' And who was talking, anyway?"

"Why, the sky was talking to the earth, I think."

"And did the whole earth dream? And why did the sky want the earth to wake up and tell its dream to the sky? Why didn't it say, 'and tell me your dream'? And why in the world don't they tell what the dream is? I think it's a silly song, anyhow."

"Kit Baker, you are a rude boy!" exclaimed his sister indignantly. "It isn't a story, it's a song. And songs don't have to mean much, do they, Letty, as long as they are pretty."

"Well, I think there ought to be another verse, telling the dream. Can't you make up another verse as you go along, Letty? Seems to me I just must know what that dream was."

“ I guess there were lots and lots of dreams,” said Jane musingly. “ All the flowers and birds dreamed. I could make up one dream ; that an ugly little flower dreamed it was a lovely pink tulip, all pale and wide-open and satiny.”

“ Huh, I’d rather be a red one, with yellow streaks down the middle. They’re lots showier and they live longer, too. The gardener that was putting our bulbs out last fall told me so.”

“ But they’re beastly ugly. People don’t dream about being something ugly, even if it is strong and healthy. I’d rather not live so long, if I could only be so beautiful that people just had to stop and look at me. Wouldn’t you, Letty ? ”

“ I don’t think looks matter so much,” said Letty practically, “ if you keep your soul all nice and clean inside you. Then it shines out through your eyes and your smiles and makes you beautiful that way. Even cripples are beautiful if their souls are clean. My Sunday-school teacher, dear Miss Reese, told me that once. She was beautiful—very beautiful, and until then I had thought it was because she had nice white skin, pink cheeks,

dimples and a pretty silk dress. But after she told me that, I knew it was just her angel soul looking out through her eyes."

"What color were her eyes?" asked Christopher. "And could cross-eyed people look beautiful? I don't see how they could on the outside, even if their souls were ever so clean."

Grandmother and Mrs. Hartwell-Jones, who could not help overhearing this conversation, smiled at each other. Just then Joshua drove up in the carriage and everybody knew that it was time to go home.

"I understand that Sally has a birthday day after to-morrow," said Mrs. Hartwell-Jones to Jane.

"Oh, yes, Mrs. Hartwell-Jones, she will be three years old," replied Jane, with all the pride of a doting mamma. "Uncle Gus gave her to me when I lost my first tooth. The fairies gave me a big silver dollar for the tooth, too. I wrapped it up in tissue-paper and put it under my pillow and they took it away in the night and left a shining silver dollar."

"The blessed fairies! Now suppose you let

me give Sally a birthday party? It would give Letty and me such pleasure to arrange it."

Jane glowed with delight and accepted in both Sally's name and her own, with alacrity. Christopher pricked up his ears. A doll's birthday party did not appeal to him, even with the inducement of the "party." Why would not that day be the very opportunity for his excursion with Billy and Jo Perkins?

"Please let the children come early, Mrs. Baker," Mrs. Hartwell-Jones said to grandmother, "so that we may have a long afternoon together. Or, if you wish, Letty could drive out after them in the pony carriage."

"Oh, thank you, I can send them quite easily. There is always some one driving into the village. But are you sure that you want them again so soon? You must not let them bother you."

Grandmother did not want the twins to become a nuisance to any one, although in her secret heart of grandmother-hearts, she did not see how any one could see too much of Jane or Christopher.

Christopher said his good-bye very politely but very briefly.

"Please, grandmother," he said, "will you wait for me a minute? I've got to speak to Bill Carpenter about some very important business."

He bolted around the corner of the house and Jane's lip quivered. She felt suddenly offended. What important business could Christopher have that he had not confided to her?

After their guests had gone, Mrs. Hartwell-Jones drew Letty down to a low stool beside her chair and said:

"My dear, has any one ever told you that you sing very well?"

Letty flushed crimson with surprise and delight.

"Oh, do I?" she cried. "I'd rather be able to sing than anything in this wide, wide world! It is so wonderful! But nobody ever told me I could sing. I have never had any lessons, you know."

"And did you never sing to any of your teachers, in school or Sunday-school?"

"There was never any singing at school, except among a few of the bigger girls who took private lessons. And at Sunday-school I did not care for the singing much. They

sang 'regular shouters' as Kit calls them," she laughed.

"But sometimes in church—the church I told you about, where the little boys sang—I used to join in a little, sometimes. Once they were singing such a beautiful hymn. It was in the afternoon when there were not very many people in the church and the music was so lovely, all high and sweet and soft! I forgot for a minute where I was and sang out quite loud. The organist turned right around and looked at me. It frightened me terribly for I thought perhaps it was against the rules for any one but the small boys to sing and that some one might come and put me out. Indeed, I was afraid to go to church again for three or four Sundays, and when I did I always kept at the back of the church and did not sing again. But it could not have been against the rule, for a great many people joined in the singing and the organist did not look at them at all."

Mrs. Hartwell-Jones did not tell her, what was so evident to herself, that the organist had been attracted, not by the child's loud singing, but by the quality of her voice.

“Would you like to take singing lessons when we go back to town?” she asked presently.

“Oh, Mrs. Hartwell-Jones, would it be possible?”

“Not only possible, but it could be done very easily, my child. We shall talk about it some other time. Now, I have some plans to suggest for Sally’s birthday party. We must invite Anna Parsons and there must be a cake.”

“With candles,” agreed Letty, bringing her mind away from the singing with difficulty.

“I should like to make Sally a present, too,” went on Mrs. Hartwell-Jones. “Do you suppose we could buy a toy bed at the ‘store’? It would be nice to make a pretty bed for Sally to rest in when she comes to spend the afternoon.”

“And I could make the bedclothes. I love to sew,” cried Letty. “My mother taught me; hemming, overcasting—a great many things.”

“You must have had a very good, sweet mother, Letty.”

“Oh, yes!” breathed the girl, and her

brown eyes filled suddenly with great tears.

The tears came to Mrs. Hartwell-Jones's eyes, too, and she caught Letty to her arms in a long, close embrace.

"You have no mother and I have no little girl!" she whispered brokenly.

That evening Mrs. Hartwell-Jones wrote a very long letter to the lawyer in the city who had always managed her business for her. She glanced often at Letty as she wrote, but the little girl, busy over a puzzling problem in arithmetic, did not even dream of the wonderful ways in which that letter would change her life.

CHAPTER XIII

THE TULIP'S DREAM

CHRISTOPHER'S request that Jo Perkins might have the use of a horse and wagon for the afternoon to take him and Billy Carpenter on a picnic was granted with some hesitation.

"Jane is going to the author-lady's to have a silly party for her old doll and I don't want to go," he said. "Perk'll look out for Bill and me all right. You've often let me go fishing with Perk, grandfather."

"Yes, but then there was no other boy along to suggest mischief."

Christopher looked a wee bit guilty, remembering the swimming project.

"We aren't going to get into mischief," he exclaimed hastily. "It's just to be a picnic and do the things boys do; roast potatoes in a fire and—and all sorts of things."

"Very well, then," replied grandfather a little absent-mindedly. "Only remember that we've got to hand you and Janey over,

whole and sound, to your father and mother in less than a month."

Mr. Baker gave his permission with a little less consideration than he usually gave to the twins' requests, perhaps because his mind was busy with his own affairs. One of the letters which Christopher had brought from the post-office had been from the city about some business which grandfather was afraid he would have to go into town to attend to himself.

"I can't bear to think of your tramping about those hot city pavements in this August weather," exclaimed grandmother in distress, when he told her about it. "Can't you possibly arrange it by letter?"

"No, I must see two or three men personally. If Kit were home" (he meant his own son, Christopher's father), "he could attend to it for me, but as it is, I can't see anything for it but to go myself. I shall start to-morrow and get back in three days."

Christopher was secretly glad that his grandfather was going away for a few days. When he returned and was told that Christopher had learned how to swim, he would be very glad, the boy felt sure.

Grandmother felt quite dismayed when she was told that the three boys were to go off on a picnic. It seemed like a very great responsibility for her to bear by herself; but as there was no real reason why she should ask Christopher to put off his excursion she said nothing about it.

The day of the party arrived and Jane was so impatient to start that she would have gone without even finishing her dessert if grandmother had permitted.

“But Mrs. Hartwell-Jones said to come early. Oh, dear!” she groaned as Christopher passed his plate for a second helping. “If you’re going to sit there and stuff all day, Kit Baker, we might as well not go at all. You won’t have any room in your tummy for your picnic, and Huldah has packed an awful big one.”

It had been arranged that Joshua was to drive the twins into the village. He had left a horse in the blacksmith’s stable overnight, while a certain special shoe was made, and he intended to ride it home. Jo Perkins had not quite finished his work at the stable, so he was to follow on his

bicycle and join the others at Billy Carpenter's house.

"Now, remember, Kit, you are to go back to Mrs. Hartwell-Jones's to get Janey, and be sure to be there promptly at half-past five; not a minute later," exclaimed grandmother for about the twentieth time; and she proceeded to give the same instructions and many more to Jo Perkins.

Joshua had harnessed the most reliable old horse in his stable to the wagon that was to be entrusted to Jo Perkins's care for a whole afternoon—a horse that had never been known to look twice at any object and which would have been perfectly content to sleep through the day as well as the night. He lumbered over the country road at an easy trot, and when they were only half-way to the village Christopher looked over his shoulder and spied Jo Perkins speedily overtaking them on his bicycle.

"Oh, I say, Josh, make him go, Perk's coming. Don't let him catch up," and he squirmed on his seat with excitement.

Joshua good-naturedly urged the horse into a swifter trot, then into a clumsy gallop as Jo Perkins bore down upon them over the level

road. Jane clasped Sally tight to her breast with one hand while she hung on with the other. The road was still level and Perk was gaining steadily. He was bent double over the handle bars, pedalling frantically. Soon a long, gently sloping hill gave the horse the advantage, for he kept up his easy gallop, while Perk dropped far behind, laboring hard. Christopher sent a derisive yell after him, but he rejoiced too soon. Jane had more foresight. She remembered the down slope on the other side of the ridge.

“Perk’s going to beat,” she declared calmly, “’cause Josh won’t let the horse trot down-hill.”

“Oh, Josh, do, just this once,” urged Christopher, almost falling off the seat in his excitement. “It won’t hurt his old knees just for once.”

But Joshua was firm.

“I’m not going to abuse your gran’pa’s horses,” he said severely, permitting the horse to slacken his pace to a walk. “An’ what’s more, you’ve got to promise me, honest Injun, that you an’ Perk won’t let him trot down any hills, nor run races.”

"We aren't going down any hills," answered Christopher sulkily.

He looked over his shoulder again and saw Perk appear at the top of the hill, red-faced and panting. With a hoot of triumph, the boy cocked his knees over the handle bars and whirled down the hill, letting the pedals take care of themselves.

"Yah!" wailed Christopher, "he's coasting! He'll pass us like greased lightning." And as he spoke, Perk flashed by them, an exultant grin on his face.

"Ah, you think you're smart!" jeered Christopher in a vexed tone.

But pride always has a fall. As Perk reached the bottom of the hill he glanced back to see how much of a gain he had made, and the wheel of his bicycle struck a large stone in the road. Over toppled Perk on his head, tumbling into a heap by the roadside. Jane screamed and even Joshua was startled. He urged the horse into a trot again.

"Oh, Perk's not hurt!" declared Christopher scornfully. "A fellow can stand lots worse croppers than that."

And Perk was not hurt. By the time they

reached him he had scrambled to his feet and was examining his bicycle to see if any harm had come to it. But he rode quietly behind the wagon all the rest of the way into the village.

Billy Carpenter was standing in front of his gate, watching for them, and the impatient Christopher could hardly wait while Perk stowed his bicycle in Mr. Carpenter's barn and Joshua escorted Jane to Mrs. Parsons' front door.

"You're in an awful hurry to have me go," Jane exclaimed to Christopher, a bit jealously.

For a moment she forgot Sally's birthday party, and wished she was going on the picnic too. It hurt to think that perhaps Christopher did not want her—was glad she was not going. He really acted as if he were!

But her disappointment soon vanished—vanished the moment she set foot in Mrs. Hartwell-Jones's sitting-room. The party planned was so perfect! In the first place, there was the present for Sally—a dainty little bed in which to take her rest when visiting the lady who wrote books. Mr. Carpenter had found the small wooden bedstead stowed away

in a loft over the post-office, left over from a stock of Christmas toys. Letty, with deft fingers, had painted the dingy, dust-grimed wood white with tiny pink rosebuds (difficult to recognize, perhaps, as rosebuds, but very pretty) and had made, with Mrs. Hartwell-Jones's help, a dainty white canopy, tied back with pink ribbons. There were sheets and pillow-cases and even a little kimono made of a scrap of white cashmere and edged with pink ribbon.

"Where is Christopher?" exclaimed Mrs. Hartwell-Jones as Jane mounted the stairs alone. "I had a surprise for you all."

"Kit has gone on a picnic with the boys. He didn't want to come to Sally's birthday," replied Jane with a catch in her voice.

"Never mind, dear. Boys seem to like to get off by themselves now and then, don't they, dear? We'll have a little dove party. But I have answered a question of Kit's, however, which now he will miss hearing," she added, glancing at a pile of closely written pages on her writing desk.

"Oh!" exclaimed Jane, looking from Mrs. Hartwell-Jones to Letty, her cheeks growing

crimson. "You've written the story you promised—just for us!"

"Yes," laughed Mrs. Hartwell-Jones, "just for you. I got my idea from Letty's song and Christopher's questions about it. Shall I read it now, while we are waiting until it is time for the party?"

"Oh, yes, please! And I can be putting Sally to bed."

Letty, who had been in a flutter of excitement all day as she watched those pages of story growing, flew over to the table for the manuscript, and bustled about, making Mrs. Hartwell-Jones more comfortable and arranging the light.

"Oh, perhaps Anna might like to hear the story, too! Might she come?" she asked impulsively.

Mrs. Hartwell-Jones said yes, graciously, feeling secretly proud of Letty's thoughtfulness.

"Now," she said, when shy little Anna Parsons had been brought up-stairs and everything was ready, "we must have Letty's song first, as a sort of introduction."

So Letty sang the "Winter Lullaby" again,

sweetly, simply, without any thought of herself or how she was doing it, but evidently enjoying the soft, plaintive melody. When she had finished Mrs. Hartwell-Jones took up her paper and read :

“THE TULIP'S DREAM

“Once upon a time a little tulip lived in a lovely big garden. It was the middle blossom of the front row of a bed of beautiful, pale yellow tulips, whose petals shone like the softest velvet. But alas for this poor little front tulip! It had broad red streaks running down the middle of each of its petals, making them seem bold and flaunting and common. And none of the other tulips in the bed would speak to it; they had not even a word of sympathy to offer.

“The lady who owned the garden had taken great pains to have this particular tulip bed planted with just the shade of flowers that she wanted, and it was such a disappointment to have had the very front blossom of all turn out to be so different and ordinary. She used to visit the garden every day with her little

daughter. Standing in front of the bed they would discuss the ugly little tulip.

“ ‘I have half a mind to pluck the flower,’ she said one day. ‘It looks so horrid that it quite spoils the effect of the bed. But all the other blossoms are out and if I took this one away it would leave such a gap.’

“ ‘The flower can’t help having red streaks in it, mother,’ replied the little girl. ‘P’rhaps it feels bad at being different from all the rest! But it is ugly,’ she added.

“The poor little tulip drooped its head and pined. It is very, very hard to be thought ugly and different; and harder still not to be wanted. So the tulip drooped and faded and dropped its petals long before any of the other flowers in the bed.

“And when the lady found the red and yellow petals lying on the ground she exclaimed:—‘Why, how odd that this tulip should have died first. I always thought that those common, hardy varieties lasted longest!’

“Her little girl picked up one of the scattered petals and stroked it.

“ ‘See, mother, it is really very pretty,’ she

said. 'I wonder if the flower was not nicer than we thought after all?'

"Although the lady had spoken of the tulip as dead, because the blossom was gone, of course we all know that it was not dead. But that down, down in its brown little root, or bulb, under the warm, moist earth, its life was throbbing as strong as ever. The tulip heard the little girl's words, therefore, and was somewhat comforted by them. But it still mourned over the red streaks down the middle of its petals, for it was quite sure that it had not meant to be that way, but soft, pale yellow like all the other tulips in the bed.

"'You ought not to take it so to heart,' whispered a gentle shower to the falling petals, and it bathed them in soft, warm drops. 'Your petals are red because the sun has kissed them.'

"But the tulip would not be comforted. It shed its satiny petals and crept down inside its bulb-nest to sleep away its sorrow and disappointment.

"After a time the tulip bulbs were dug up by the gardener and carried away to the cellar to make room for other flowers that

would bloom during the summer. In the autumn they were brought out and planted in their bed again, and as it happened, the little red and yellow tulip was put exactly where it had been before. The warm, dark earth snuggled it close to her fragrant bosom and whispered: 'Sleep well, little tulip, and dream that you are the most beautiful, pale yellow tulip in the world.'

"So the little tulip fell asleep and lo, at the first call of the spring robin it waked, feeling very, very happy.

"'Go, tell the sky your dream,' whispered Mother-Earth, and pushed the bulb upward. The tulip shot up a delicate, whity-green stalk through the dark clods,—up, up, until it saw the great, deep-blue sky far above it. The air was sweet and warm and a few early birds were singing. Becoming more and more happy and excited, the little tulip pushed upward and spread its petals to the smiling sky. And lo, they were of the loveliest pale yellow, and shone like the softest velvet!"

Mrs. Hartwell-Jones had ceased her reading

for quite a full minute before the children realized that the story was ended.

"Oh!" sighed Jane. "I am so glad that the tulip was happy at last!"

"But what do you suppose made the petals turn?" asked Mrs. Hartwell-Jones.

"Blossoms do change colors, different years. I've seen 'em in our own garden," said Anna Parsons practically.

"Oh, it was because the tulip wanted it so much!" exclaimed Letty.

"Yes, it was because the tulip wanted it; but there are different kinds of wants, Letty, dear. Some people want things selfishly, just because the things would give them pleasure. But the little tulip felt that it had disappointed some one by being the color it was—and so felt that it was not doing its real duty in the world. So, by wishing and hoping and waiting patiently, it got what it wanted. If it had been a person instead of a flower, of course just hoping and waiting would not have been enough. There would have been work to do, as well.

"But if whatever we want is right, and of

some benefit to the rest of the world, we are pretty sure to get it in the end."

"Oh, do you think so?" cried Letty eagerly; looking as if she had some particular thing in her mind.

Mrs. Hartwell-Jones smiled and patted her hand.

"Yes, I really think so, dear child. But it is time for the tea-party now," she said.

CHAPTER XIV

WHERE IS CHRISTOPHER ?

AFTER the tea-party was over, Jane dressed Sally again and she and Anna Parsons took their dolls for a walk down into the garden, while Letty carried the plates down-stairs to be washed, and made the room tidy again.

“What is it that you would like so much to do, Letty, dear?” asked Mrs. Hartwell-Jones presently. “There is something on your mind, I know.”

“Oh, there is, dear Mrs. Hartwell-Jones. If only I could learn to sing! Sing right, you know. It would be wonderful!” And Letty clasped her hands eagerly.

“Well, my dear, it will all depend on yourself.”

“How do you mean?” asked the girl breathlessly.

“I mean that when we go back to the city I am going to have your voice tried. That

is, I am going to have you sing before a certain good teacher of singing and if he thinks it worth while to give you lessons, you shall study with him. He is a wonderful master, and will take only pupils who have really good voices."

"Oh!" cried Letty, the sound being more a sigh than an exclamation. She was really breathless with joy at the thought of what happiness might be in store for her.

"But suppose he shouldn't be willing to give me lessons!" she cried in sudden dismay, her voice coming back with a little gasp.

"That remains to be seen," replied Mrs. Hartwell-Jones with a serene little smile that did not look as if she were very much worried.

Then they went back to the subject that always proved so deeply interesting to them both; the subject of Letty's studies in the fall, and so intent did they become that they forgot all about the time until Jane rushed suddenly into the room, crying:

"Where is Kit? It's much after half-past five, Letty. Oh, where is he!"

Letty sprang to her feet and Mrs. Hartwell-Jones looked anxiously out of the window at the lengthening shadows.

“I’ll look and see if he’s coming down the road,” said Letty, and ran quickly out of the room, followed by Jane.

Letty looked up and down the road, straining her eyes, but no horse and wagon was to be seen. Jane climbed on the gate and swung on it gloomily, back and forth.

“Do you suppose the horse has run away with them?” she asked with a catch in her voice. “I spoke crossly to Kit when he went away. I hope he isn’t—isn’t killed!” And she began to cry.

Mrs. Carpenter came out of her house next door and called to Letty across the fence:

“Are you looking for those boys? Most likely they won’t get home before dark. Boys never know what time it is.”

“Kit’s got a watch,” wailed Jane, still swinging disconsolately on the gate.

“Don’t you worry, little girl. Watches don’t mean anything to boys when they’re off on a picnic. Nothing has happened with Jo Perkins to take care of them. When I get

my Billy home I shall spank him and put him to bed without any supper."

Jane's tears flowed faster than ever at the thought that a like punishment might be in store for Christopher. Sadness can come so very quickly on the heels of joy! She had been perfectly happy only a short half hour ago.

"Janey, dear," called Mrs. Hartwell-Jones from her up-stairs window, "Letty would better drive you home in the pony carriage, and then, if your grandmother thinks best, she can send Joshua out to hunt up the boys. Come up to me, little girl, and get comforted while Letty harnesses Punch and Judy."

In the meantime, where was Christopher?

The three boys were in the highest of spirits as they drove off into the woods. The swimming hole that Billy Carpenter had in mind was situated farther up the stream than Christopher had ever been. It was very, very pretty. Pine trees grew close to the water's edge, and the needles that had dropped into the pool made the water clear and brown and gave it a delicious, spicy smell.

Perk unharnessed the horse and tied him

by the reins to a neighboring tree. Then the boys undressed and Christopher, with mingled feelings, stepped into the water. He understood all the principles of swimming; it was only confidence he lacked, and the desire to appear well in the eyes of his companions gave him courage. The pool was shallow, nowhere was the water over the boys' heads; it was in reality as safe as a bath tub. In a very short time Christopher was paddling about in great glee, keeping his head nicely above water.

It was a grand frolic and after dressing again, they were all very ready for Huldah's nicely packed luncheon. Christopher insisted upon building a fire in a hole to roast the potatoes, in true camping out fashion. The potatoes were somewhat lumpy when done, and burned the mouth. Still, they were quite eatable with plenty of salt and butter.

It was nearly four o'clock when the picnic lunch was finished. But the August afternoon was close and sultry. The boys had got hot and grimy over the potatoes. They lay about on the ground, throwing pine-cones at

a family of chattering squirrels and trying to feel cool.

Christopher looked at the still clear brown pool and sat up exclaiming:

"Say, fellows, let's go in for another dip. Just enough to cool us off."

"No, you mustn't. It is bad to go into the water right after eatin'," said Perk.

"Oh, what are you givin' us?" chaffed Billy Carpenter, who had begun to undress at Christopher's first word. "I have been in hundreds of times, right after a big dinner."

"Besides, we've been through eating a long time," added Christopher. "'Most ten minutes, I guess."

"But you oughtn't, Kit. What will your grandfather say?"

"Grandfather 'll be glad I know how to swim."

"Are you quite sure you know how?" insinuated Billy. He thought he saw signs of weakening in Christopher's resolution and did not want to lose any fun.

"Of course I'm sure," retorted Christopher indignantly. "Just you hold on and I'll show you!"

“ Well, if you boys are set on doin’ it, I guess I’ll have to go in too, to keep you out of mischief,” drawled Jo Perkins, untying his cravat as he spoke. His remonstrances had not been very strong, but they had satisfied his conscience.

The second bath proved to be even more fun than the first. The water was delightfully cool and refreshing; Christopher soon lost the last bit of dread he had had of going under. He and Billy began to swim a race across the pond and back. They had crossed, had splashed into the shallow water to touch a certain pine branch that had been chosen as the half-way mark (like the first stake in croquet) and were starting back.

Billy was in the lead, but Christopher was gaining on him, when all at once he felt a queer sensation in his arm, as if some one had struck him a sudden blow. The pain was intense and increased every moment. Christopher doubled up his elbow involuntarily and stopped moving his other arm, forgetting in his sudden discomfort that he was not on solid ground. Naturally, he went under. His mouth being open at the time, he

swallowed quantities of water and did not find it pleasant. He gasped and spluttered and tried to call for help, but the water filled his mouth and nose and eyes. He could not breathe, much less speak. And all the while the pain in his arm increased. His struggles pushed him upward again and as his head appeared above the water he gave a wailing cry. If he had had presence of mind enough to stand upright on the sandy bottom, his head would have been almost entirely out of water. But he was in great pain and very badly frightened. Was he drowning, he wondered? And if so, would everybody be sorry? Would grandfather blame him for having gone to the swimming hole without permission? He hoped he would not be held up to other boys as a sad example of disobedience. Where in the world were Billy and Perk and why did they not come to his assistance? Oh! Oh! Another effort to shout and another nasty dose of water.

Drowning people were supposed to review their whole past life, he remembered. He could think of nothing except that he had learned in school that Socrates had met his

death by being compelled to drink hemlock. There was hemlock enough in this water to kill a horse, Christopher felt sure. If he escaped from drowning, therefore, he was sure to be poisoned. It was certain death however you looked at it, and he gave up struggling. The pain in his arm made him feel weak and numb.

Just then he was grabbed by rough but friendly hands, his head propped above water and his body propelled speedily to shore. It had been a very few seconds from the time Perk had seen him go under and had swum out and seized him by the hair. So short had the time been, indeed, that Billy Carpenter did not know that anything had gone amiss until he reached the goal of the race and turned to jeer his victory. Then he saw Perk wading swiftly through the shallow water, half carrying, half pushing Christopher before him. The boy was almost unconscious when they got him to shore, and he lay in a heap on the pine-needles, his cramped arm bent pitifully beneath his body. Perk threw a coat about him and went to work in a businesslike, capable way to revive the boy.

"He's swallowed an awful lot of water, and it has made him sick," Perk explained to Billy. "It's that right arm that's cramped. Haul it out straight, Bill, and pound it. Never mind if he hollers; it'll help bring him to. Keep poundin' and don't let him double it up again. We've got to get the muscles limbered up."

It took half an hour's hard work to restore Christopher to anything like his usual cheerful self. Then they all realized with a pang how late it was. The sun was so near setting that it had already darkened the woods. In a panic of alarm the boys harnessed the horse and drove as rapidly as they dared in the growing dusk, down the winding wood road.

"There is no use in going into the town," said Jo Perkins as they emerged from the gloom of the trees into the lighter twilight of the open road. "Jane will have got home somehow before this. Letty's taken her home, most likely. I shouldn't be surprised if they had searching parties out for us," he added, eyeing the reddening western sky.

"Oh, shucks," boasted Christopher, "I guess they know we can take care of our-

selves." But his voice had not quite so confident a ring as usual. "Besides, Perk, there's no other way to get home except by going through town."

"We can go along Birch Lane to the cross-roads. It is only half as far that way."

Both boys whistled under their breath. Birch Lane was a lonely road by night!

"But how about me?" asked Billy. "I guess I've got to get home."

"Yes," chimed in Christopher, "it wouldn't be polite not to take Bill home. He's our company."

"Besides, Perk, there's your bicycle that you left at our house."

"We can drop Bill at the turn. It's only two miles from there home, and I guess that's nothing of a walk for you, is it, Bill? I'll come in after the bicycle in the morning."

"I don't think it's treating Bill right, to dump him like that," argued Christopher. If he did not relish the drive along Birch Lane in Perk's companionship, Birch Lane with its ghostly, whispering white sentinels, the silver birch trees, how much less must Bill look forward to walking by himself along the de-

served wood road? Christopher was sincerely sympathetic. "Besides," he added, "I feel pretty sure that Jane will be waiting for us, Perk. I told her I'd come for her, and she knows that I always keep my word."

"Oh, pshaw! She knew long before this that you weren't coming for her, leastways, not at the time you said. And I guess your grandma's pretty nigh crazy by this time. No, we've got to get home as soon as ever we can and take our thrashings. Bill ain't afraid to walk, and here's the turn. Hop out, Bill."

"Who's afraid?" demanded Billy, in a boastful voice, jumping out over the wheel with affected alacrity. "And it's only girl-boys that get thrashed for staying out late. I've been out lots later than this. My, Jo Perkins, if I was as old as you I guess I wouldn't let anybody thrash me! Not much. Not for anything like that!"

With which parting taunt, Billy trotted off, whistling to keep up his spirits.

Christopher sat rather close to Jo Perkins and stared stolidly ahead. As each birch tree came in sight he eyed it roundly, even watch-

ing it over his shoulder in passing, as if to stare it out of countenance. Then he took to counting them off as they went by; it helped to keep his thoughts from the present homecoming and grandmother's face. It was growing darker and darker.

"I hope she won't cry," he said suddenly. "Women are such babies. I'd rather she'd thrash me than cry."

"I guess you won't get the thrashing until your grandpa gets home," Perk answered grimly. "But I tell you, Kit, this is a pretty bad scrape for me. I was put in charge of you two young ones, and I didn't do right to keep you out so late. I ought to have watched the time a bit closer. And I almost let you drown, too," he added soberly. "Gee whizz, I guess mebbe it 'll cost me my place! I'm powerful sorry about it all."

"Oh, Perk, did I really nearly drown?" asked Christopher in awe.

He shuddered as the recollection of his recent experience came over him.

CHAPTER XV

LETTY'S FUTURE

WHEN Letty and Jane reached Sunnycrest they found grandmother climbing into the carriage to drive to Hammersmith, fully convinced that the worst had happened. Gathering Jane, silent and frightened, into her arms, grandmother felt half comforted. But a cold dread still clutched at her heart. Where was Christopher?

“ Oh, why did we let him go off like that ! ” she cried. “ And your grandfather away. I did think Jo Perkins was to be trusted. What can have happened? Joshua, you must go in search of them. Oh, Janey, Janey, if only your grandfather were here ! ” and she burst into tears.

Jane's heart grew big and tight with all kinds of alarms. It was so very unusual for grandmother to be upset. She was generally calm in the face of any calamity, however

great. Why, even that time when the whole kettleful of raspberry jam fell off the kitchen range and splashed on the cat, grandmother had only said:—"Mercy me, it's lucky the kittens weren't there, too."

"Oh, Mrs. Baker," exclaimed Letty in distress, "I don't believe anything serious has happened. Mrs. Carpenter said she thought that they had just forgotten about the time; she said boys never could keep track of the time when they were off on a picnic; and she did not seem at all worried about Billy."

"She was just cross," added Jane. "She said she was going to spank him when he did get home. Shall you spank Kit, grandmother?"

"Bless the boy, he will have to be punished some way," replied Mrs. Baker, drying her tears. "If only he comes home safe and sound," she added mournfully, watching the carriage disappear down the road into the dusk. "Letty dear, don't you think you would better start back home? There is enough worry on hand without giving Mrs. Hartwell-Jones a fright about you."

"I don't believe she will worry, Mrs.

Baker. She said I might stay as long as I could be of any use here and I should like to wait until Kit gets back," answered Letty earnestly. "Is there anything I can do?"

"Just talk a bit, you and Jane," said grandmother, "if you think it all right to remain. It will keep my mind off imagining all sorts of horrors about that blessed boy. How did the party go off, Janey, dear? I haven't asked a single word about it."

Jane was in the middle of an elaborate account of the party when they were interrupted by the sound of wheels. Grandmother had been sitting on the veranda steps with Jane in her lap and Letty on another step close beside them.

"Can Joshua be coming back for something?" exclaimed grandmother, rising.

Jane had already climbed out of her lap and was running down the drive.

"It's Kit, it's Kit!" she cried joyfully.

Grandmother kissed Christopher first, and cried over him. Then she took him aside and gave him a long, serious lecture. Christopher knew that he had been disobedient, but he did not realize that he had also been

selfish until grandmother pointed out to him how much upset every one had been by his long absence.

"We did not mean any harm, grandmother," he said. "We only wanted to have a good time. Is it always wrong to have a good time?"

"Why no, dear, of course not. It is right to enjoy oneself and be happy, if one can do so without causing pain or discomfort to others. But it is wrong to do things that are sure to distress or worry other people."

"Bill Carpenter did not seem to think it was wrong. He said he had often been out later than this. I don't believe his folks will even scold him."

Grandmother repressed a smile as she remembered what Billy Carpenter's mother had said was in store for that boastful young gentleman.

"Billy Carpenter has been brought up differently, Kit ——" she began.

"Yes, without being tied to a girl's apron-strings," broke in Christopher bitterly.

He did not mean to be rude to his grandmother, but he was tired, hungry and a bit

conscience-stricken; all of which are apt to make any one feel a little out of temper.

Grandmother did not reprove him. A new and not very pleasant idea had been suggested by Christopher's words. Had they made too much of a girl-boy of him? Pampered him and watched him too closely? she asked herself.

She sent Christopher up-stairs to tidy himself while she saw Letty off for home and sent Joe Perkins on horseback to find Joshua and bring him back from his fruitless search. Joshua had taken the main road and so missed the truants on the short cut through Birch Lane.

Jane did not know how to treat her brother. She was so glad to have him safe at home that she longed to hug and kiss him and cling to him. But he had been naughty and she supposed she must not speak to him. She eyed him askance and when he was not looking, felt of his arms and legs gently, to assure herself that he was whole. Her brother rubbed the places she touched and said:—"Shucks!" without turning around.

Christopher himself was surprised at being

allowed to come to the supper table. He had fully expected to be sent to bed without any supper at all, but grandmother did not think it healthful to send growing children to bed without anything to eat. She allowed Christopher to have all the bread and butter and minced chicken that he wanted. It was only the sweets of which he was deprived.

Grandmother was very silent and thoughtful all evening and the twins were miserable. When bedtime came she kissed them both good-night very gravely and said :

“ You must consider yourself a sort of prisoner all day to-morrow, Kit. I shall trust you not to go off the place. Your grandfather will be home to-morrow night and I am leaving your punishment to him.”

Jo Perkins, too, suffered the tortures of suspended judgment all the next day. He fulfilled his usual daily tasks about the stable, but Joshua gave him no instructions and Perk found a great many idle hours hanging heavily on his hands. He felt sadly left out of the busy farm-life.

In the afternoon, Letty drove Mrs. Hartwell-Jones out to see grandmother and to find

out if Mrs. Baker were any the worse for her scare. Letty drove the ponies down to the stable and found Perk moping by himself in the harness room.

"Hello, what's the matter?" she asked sympathetically.

"I'm wondering what I'll do when I leave here," replied Perk bluntly.

"Why, Perk, are you going away? I hadn't heard that."

"I guess I'll get sent away—after yesterday's doings."

"Oh, no you won't. Of course you did not do as you should have done yesterday, but Mr. and Mrs. Baker will forgive you, I'm sure. They are not the kind to shunt a person off without more of a trial than that. You just go to Mr. Baker when he gets home and tell him straight out that you're sorry and will try to do better next time."

"I 'most let Kit drown, too," said Perk, and related the incident of the swimming pool, which Letty had not heard before.

"Well of course it was naughty to take Kit in swimming when you knew his grandfather did not allow it. But it was not really your

fault about his cramp. And besides, Kit had had some lessons in swimming, you say. It was not as if he did not know anything at all about it. Anyway, you make a clean breast of it all to Mr. Baker. That's the best way, always, and I'm pretty sure that he'll forgive you and let you stay."

But Perk could not be cheered so easily, and set about unharnessing the ponies in a glum fashion so different from his usual whistling gayety that even Punch and Judy felt the difference.

Letty went straight to Mrs. Baker and told her how badly Perk felt.

"I hope you and Mr. Baker won't send him away," she pleaded. "He's a good boy, but it will make him reckless and bitter if he should be turned off now. He'll think that if people make so much of a small matter, there won't be much punishment left for big wrongs, and that it isn't worth while to be good. Please, dear Mrs. Baker, don't think I'm trying to preach to you, but I heard my brother talk that way once—he had been dismissed from a situation for some little carelessness—and although I was very young at

the time, I've never forgotten how he felt about it. I hope you won't send Perk away?"

Letty's cheeks were very red and her voice trembled, half with eagerness in pleading Perk's cause, and half with fear at her own daring.

"Such a thing never entered my mind, Letty," replied grandmother earnestly. "Of course we should do nothing so severe. But Jo must be made to realize how serious his wrong-doing of yesterday was. For it is very wrong indeed to neglect or betray a trust, you know, however slight the consequences may prove. And Letty, dear, remember that it is the little things, after all, that count in life. The pennies go to make the dollars and the swift little seconds form years. Think of the infinitesimal animals at work in the sea, adding bit to bit through the centuries to make those wonderful coral islands we read about.

"And it is the same with the naughtinesses in the world. If a wee sin is committed here and another there, and pardoned or overlooked with the thought, 'oh, that did no harm—it was not really wrong,' why in time

the conscience will become hardened and the first thing one knows, one is in a condition to commit any wicked deed."

Letty looked up with a serious face, from Mrs. Baker to Mrs. Hartwell-Jones, who had sat quietly by during grandmother's little homily.

"I never thought before how very great the little things are, Mrs. Baker," she said. "I hope I can learn to be more careful after this."

"You are a good, faithful child, and my lecture was not meant for you, dear. I am glad you spoke for Jo Perkins. Of course we shall not dismiss him. It would be wrong to set him adrift for so slight an offense; we must make the punishment fit the wrong-doing. The offense this time is slight because it turned out all right, but it might have proven very serious. You know that Christopher tried to swim and was taken with a cramp in his arm?"

"Perk told me just now. He feels awfully about it."

"That is news to me," exclaimed Mrs. Hartwell-Jones. "No wonder you are feel-

ing nervous and upset over the 'might-have-beens.'"

"Yes," replied grandmother with a little shudder. "I don't know what to say about it because of course Christopher was not actually forbidden to swim. We did not think about such a question arising. But grandfather will be home to-night, and then everything will be all right."

"What a comfort to have a strong arm to lean upon," sighed Mrs. Hartwell-Jones wistfully. Then she turned to Letty. "Run off now and play, child. Jane is hopping her toes through her shoes with impatience."

Letty ran off and the two ladies discussed every detail of Christopher's mishap, and how seriously it might have turned out.

"Children can be the greatest sort of cares," Mrs. Hartwell-Jones said at length, half laughing but wholly in earnest, "almost nuisances sometimes; but they are a blessing for all that!" She paused a moment and then added: "Have you noticed what a fine nature Letty has, Mrs. Baker? What a splendid chance for the development of a noble character?"

“I think that what you have agreed to do for her is a wonderful opportunity for the child.”

“But I should like the tie to be still closer, Mrs. Baker,” exclaimed Mrs. Hartwell-Jones impulsively. “I am wondering—I desire something very much, and yet I am not sure that it is wise. I have no one to go to for advice except my lawyer. I have consulted him, but he is so cold and businesslike. Might I talk it over with you, Mrs. Baker?”

“Do you mean,” asked grandmother, a look of eager interest kindling in her eyes, “do you mean that you are considering the question of adopting Letty?”

“Just that,” replied Mrs. Hartwell-Jones solemnly. “I am thinking about it a great deal—all the time, in fact. You see, there are so many, many reasons why I should do it, and so few why I should not; that is, that I can see.”

“That is apt to be the way with things we want very much to do,” said grandmother mildly. “But as far as I understand the matter, I agree with you. Will you tell me all about it, please?”

And while Letty played out in the orchard with Jane at being Knights of the Round Table, her fairy godmother (as she secretly thought of Mrs. Hartwell-Jones) revealed to Grandmother Baker a plan which, if carried out, would bring to Letty a more wonderful future than any of which she had ever dreamed.

CHAPTER XVI

UNTYING THE APRON-STRINGS

WHEN grandfather got home he was acquainted promptly with the misdoings of Christopher and Jo Perkins. After the expected thrashing had been given—much against grandfather's tender heart—and Perk had had his stern lecture, without a word in it of dismissal—to his mingled astonishment and surprised relief—grandfather went into the sitting-room to talk events over with grandmother. Perk and Christopher both felt that great loads had been lifted off their minds. They had suffered penitence and had been punished for their wrong-doing, and they were free agents again.

“My dear,” said grandmother, after she had described minutely all her feelings during Christopher's prolonged absence the afternoon before, “My dear, I have been thinking.”

“Not really!” interjected grandfather with pretended great astonishment, and chuckled.

“Yes, I have, seriously, and I have come to the conclusion that we coddle Kit too much; treat him too much as we treat Jane—too much like a girl, in fact.”

Grandfather looked genuinely surprised this time.

“I begin to think that there is something in this ‘telepathy’ that the newspapers talk about,” he said, taking an envelope from his pocket. “Just read this letter from Kit’s father. I got it at the post-office on my way home this evening.”

Grandmother took her son’s letter and put on her glasses. Grandfather pointed out the page to which he wished to draw her special attention.

“That is the part I meant,” he said and grandmother read:

“‘I have been thinking a good deal lately about Kit’s and Jane’s comradeship. Doesn’t it strike you and mother that we make too little distinction? We are anxious that the children should be congenial, and in trying to keep their tastes alike and yet have Jane

gentle and ladylike, isn't there some danger of making Kit girly-girly?

" 'After all, Kit is a boy and Jane is a girl. They will have to draw apart some day and I am wondering if the time has not come to begin. Aren't there some nice village boys in or about Hammersmith? There used to be. Suppose you let Kit play with them a bit and rough it like other fellows do. Now that you have found Letty again and she is as nice a child as she was three years ago, she will make a nice playmate for Janey, who won't miss Kit so much. I really think it will do them both good.'

" Exactly the opinion I had reached," declared grandmother, dropping the letter. " We must untie the apron-strings."

Grandfather looked puzzled for a moment over this expression, then he laughed heartily.

" That's a very good way of putting it, my dear," he said, " only we must not untie them all at once. Too much freedom at one time is as bad as an overdose of anything else. Besides, if we begin all at once to give Kit full swing, it will set him to thinking of his old restrictions and in his new liberty he will

grow very sorry for himself and consider that he had been greatly abused.

“We must not let him think he’s been molly-coddled. We must be diplomatic. I shall tell him, in a day or two, that as long as he has got on so well with his swimming, he might as well go ahead with it. We’ll send him off with Perk, too, now and then, to show Perk that we still trust him; although I shall go along the first time or two to see how things are. I do trust Perk, my dear. He is a good lad, although like all boys, he’s fond of a lark.”

Grandmother sighed, but it was not at the thought of Jo Perkins enjoying a good time.

“Our baby Kit has gone,” she said dolefully, “and a big boy has come in his stead. I do hope Janey won’t miss him too much. She has seemed a little offended at times, when Kit goes off with Billy Carpenter, but just now her heart is so full of Mrs. Hartwell-Jones, Letty, and her dolly’s new bed, that she is happy even without Kit, bless her.”

“How different boys and girls are, from the very beginning,” said grandfather soberly, as if he had just made a great discovery.

"The girls love their dollies and the boys their swimming holes."

"Do you realize that you are quoting Tennyson, after a fashion?" smiled grandmother, and she recited:

"Man for the field and woman for the hearth;
Man for the sword and for the needle she."

"Something else has taken place while you were away. Mrs. Hartwell-Jones has taken a great fancy to Letty."

Grandfather and grandmother exchanged very knowing glances at this. They had often wondered, since the little circus girl had gone to live with Mrs. Hartwell-Jones, if something more would not come of the arrangement.

"It would be a great thing for Letty," said grandmother at last. "Mrs. Hartwell-Jones believes that the child has a good singing voice."

"Well, I am sure I should be thankful to see the little girl happy," said grandfather. "Letty is a good child and will repay any kindness Mrs. Hartwell-Jones does for her, I am sure. Have you finished with Kit's letter, my dear?"

Grandmother caught up the letter from her lap and turned to the beginning.

“Do they say anything about the date they are to sail?” She asked the question with mingled feelings. She would be very glad to see her son and daughter-in-law again, of course, but their return to America meant the departure of the twins from Sunnycrest and it really seemed too soon to end their happy visit. The summer had been very short.

Two or three days later, grandfather opened the new program of events which he had planned.

“Kit, my boy,” he said at dinner, “as long as you have started in with this swimming business, I suppose you might as well keep it up. It is a pity to let that one lesson go to waste.”

Christopher’s face beamed with astonishment and delight.

“You don’t mean to say that you’re going to let me go swimming?” he cried. “Oh, cricky, that’s bully!”

“Why, yes, it seems to me that I knew how to swim when I was your age,” went on grandfather. “Suppose we let Janey go into

the village with grandmother this afternoon while you and Perk and I go off on a little lark of our own. What do you say to the plan, Kit?"

"I think it would be—be perfectly bully, sir!" shouted Christopher in great excitement.

"All right, then. I'll have Perk harness the spring wagon. Grandmother, will you ask Huldah to put us up a bite of something? A pretty liberal bite, my dear. Learning to swim is hungry work. And I thought we might pick up Bill Carpenter on the way," he added to Christopher, "if we see him about anywhere."

"Are you going to swim, too, grandfather?" asked Jane, folding her napkin neatly. "I should think it would be horrid in the cold, weedy water. Please don't let Kit drown again."

"Huh!" sniffed Christopher in his most superior manner, "I just guess there's not any danger of me drownin'. I can swim. You just ask Perk if I can't."

"Well, that's nothing to be so smart about. I could swim, too, if I chose to learn. Girls

are just as clever as boys, every bit, only they don't like such silly things."

"The things a girl likes are heaps sillier," retorted Christopher. "Fairies and dolls! Ho! There aren't any such things as fairies, and who'd play with a doll? An old painted thing stuffed with sawdust!"

Jane's face grew red and her eyes filled with tears.

"You have always been glad enough to play with dolls and to talk about fairies when you hadn't got any horrid boys around," she said slowly.

Then her injured feelings overcame her and she ran to her grandmother and buried her face on her shoulder.

"Oh, grandmother," she sobbed, "Kit doesn't love me any more. He talks to me like other boys talk to girls. I always thought Kit and I would be just alike forever and ever, but we ain't—aren't, I mean—and it's all Billy Carpenter's fault!"

Grandmother whispered comforting words in the little girl's ear, and stroked her hair until Jane's storm of tears was over. Christopher stood by in awkward silence. He

felt sorry and a little taken aback, for he had not really meant to hurt his sister's feelings.

"I didn't mean to be a beast, Jane," he said. "I'm sorry I said that about your dolls. Stop crying, do, there's a good fellow. I'm sorry, honest Injun. I'll—I'll stay home!" he gulped heroically, "and play I'm Oberon or Puck all the afternoon; or I'll doctor Sally through the scarlet fever. Stop crying, I say."

Jane lifted a tear-stained face.

"I don't want you to stay home," she said cruelly. "I am glad you've got something to do, 'cause I was only staying home to keep you company. I've got another engagement for this afternoon," and lifting her little square chin loftily, she walked out of the room.

So occurred the first real break between the twins. Jane's tender little heart reproached her the minute she had closed the door.

"I was rude to him when he was trying to make up," she thought miserably. "I wish I hadn't. And he's going to be gone all

the whole afternoon! I hope it won't spoil his picnic with grandfather."

Just as grandmother and Jane were about to start, Letty appeared in the pony carriage to take them. Grandmother decided, therefore, to let Jane go back with Letty and she could follow later. But she remembered some jelly that she wished to send to Mrs. Hartwell-Jones and asked the children to wait while she had it packed. Jane was glad of the delay, for she wanted a chance to make up with Christopher if possible, and he had gone down to the stable to help Perk harness the horse. They drove up presently, Christopher looking so supremely happy that Jane was obliged to acknowledge that her unforgiving words had not altogether spoiled his afternoon.

"Good-bye, Kit, I hope you'll have a good time," she said a little wistfully.

"Thanks, Janey; wish you were going along," replied Christopher graciously. "But girls can't do everything that boys can, you know. Some day we'll have a picnic for the ladies, won't we, grandfather?" he added politely.

Grandfather kissed Jane and lifted her into the pony carriage beside Letty.

“Have a nice time at the author-lady’s, little Jane, and if you miss Kit very much, just let me know and I’ll make him go along next time to rock your baby to sleep. He’s not a man quite yet, you know.”

“He thinks he’s awful smart, though,” she replied to her grandfather, and stuck out her tongue resentfully at Christopher over Mr. Baker’s shoulder.

“Just the same, you’re not allowed to go alone,” she taunted.

Christopher refused to have his spirits damped.

“Grandfather is only going so that I can show him how well I know how to swim. And he’s not so bad as having girls tagging along,” he answered coolly.

And grandfather felt that the apron-strings were indeed untied!

CHAPTER XVII

GOOD NEWS

GRANDFATHER remembered Christopher's promise to Jane and did get up another picnic "for the ladies," but the ladies included only Jane and her grandmother. Mrs. Hartwell-Jones and Letty were not invited for several reasons, chiefly because grandmother had expressed the wish to have it strictly a family party. She realized that the end of Jane's and Christopher's visit at Sunnycrest was drawing near; that before very long their father and mother would return and carry the children back to their home in the city. And so she thought that one last party, all by themselves, would be very nice. Jane and Christopher thought so too. They were always happy and contented with their grandparents.

Of course they went to the woods—the only picnic grounds worth considering except on circus day. Grandfather drove past the

swimming pool, so that Jane might see the spot where Christopher had learned to swim and wherein he had almost drowned on that memorable afternoon. They went on farther yet into the woods. It was all deliciously green and brown; still and cool. Jane was quite confident that she would catch sight of a fairy before long.

Grandfather had brought some fishing-tackle, and after the picnic ground was chosen and the horse unharnessed and made comfortable, they all sat in a row on the bank of the stream and fished. At the end of half an hour Jane, to Christopher's secret envy, was the only one who had caught anything. It was a fat little perch that wriggled and shone in the sunlight.

"Oh, the poor little thing!" cried Jane, and covered her face with her hands while grandfather took it off the hook.

"Coward-y cat!" jeered Christopher. "Isn't that just like a girl! Afraid of a fish!"

Jane took up the cold, squirming thing and held it tight in both hands, looking her brother straight in the eyes.

"I am not a coward-y cat, Kit Baker," she said quietly. "I just couldn't bear to see the poor thing being hurt with that dreadful sharp hook."

Christopher felt subdued. It had not occurred to him to feel sorry for the fish.

"It's only a fish," he muttered. "They don't feel much."

"Janey is quite right," said grandfather. "A truly kind heart always sympathizes with any animal, however small, that is in pain."

They fished on patiently for another half hour, not talking much (Christopher could not keep absolutely silent) for fear of scaring away the fish, which, however, must have had either a bad fright or a warning, for they refused to bite or even nibble. Finally grandmother suggested that it was rather useless to try any longer.

"But one fish won't go very far," grumbled Christopher. "Let's try for just one more. It's hungry work, fishing."

"I think Huldah has packed enough in the basket to keep us from starving until supper time," laughed grandmother, "and as there is only one poor little fish for all of us,

suppose we just put him back into the water?"

"Oh, no," cried Christopher aggrieved.

"Oh, yes, let's," exclaimed Jane. "Poor little fish, we'll make him happy. He's my fish and I guess I have the right to say what shall be done with him," she added defiantly, seizing the basket as Christopher made a lunge for it. "If your stomach wasn't so greedy, Kit Baker, your heart would be kinder."

Jane let the wriggling pink fish slip back into the brook, where he darted out of sight in an instant among the rushes.

The hamper that Huldah had packed certainly did promise to satisfy the appetite of even the hungriest people in the world. There were all sorts and conditions of sandwiches; thin and square with the crusts cut off. Some had slices of chicken inside, others pink boiled tongue. Still others had tender leaves of dressed lettuce—these were grandmother's favorites—and others with jelly. Then there were soft ginger cakes and crisp sugar wafers; apple pie—Huldah's famous apple pie with plenty of cinnamon—hard

boiled eggs that had the yolks beaten up with salad dressing; pears, plums and a whole chocolate layer cake. There were also bottles of milk and coffee which latter grandmother heated over a spirit lamp in a tiny saucepan put in for the purpose. Christopher wanted to build a fire out of sticks and bits of wood for the coffee, but grandfather said it was too hot for that.

After the luncheon was over, Jane and Christopher went off to gather moss and pine-needles. Jane had planned to make a pine pillow to take home to her mother, who declared that they always cured her headaches. Letty had promised to help her with the sewing, for Jane did not like to sew very well, not even to make doll's clothes, and it was only a labor of love (or the occasional desire to be thought grown-up) that could induce her to use a needle.

Fir trees were somewhat scarce in the grove and the children had to walk some distance. They left grandfather and grandmother discussing something in very low, serious tones.

"What are they talking about?" asked Christopher, pointing his thumb over his

shoulder in the direction of his grandparents. "They look like they sometimes do when we've been up to something."

"But we haven't—not for a long time," put in Jane defensively. "Not since the time you played hookey with Perk and drowned because you didn't know how to swim."

"I didn't play hookey. Grandfather let me go."

"He didn't say you might go in swimming."

"Well, he has since," returned Christopher triumphantly, as if that settled the matter. "But something is up," he added, returning to his subject. "Do you suppose they've found out about our putting that hard cider we found in the cellar into the pups' milk?"

"It was only some left-over stuff, and it didn't hurt the pups," said Jane hurriedly, for the idea had been hers. "And it did make them act funny."

They both laughed at the recollection.

"Well, then, maybe it's the green stripes I painted on the pig the day we pretended he was a zebra in the circus. Grandfather said green paint was very poisonous. I'd have

used brown paint if I could have found any ; it would have been lots more lifelike. Anyhow it didn't seem to hurt the pig any, although it did lick a lot off."

"I know what it is they're talking about," replied Jane with an air of importance. "It's not the pigs and it's not the pups. It's about Letty."

"Letty! What has she been doing?" demanded Christopher in astonishment. He had looked upon Letty as so far above naughtiness as to be considered almost a goody-goody.

"She hasn't done anything," explained Jane. "They are just talking about where Mrs. Hartwell-Jones is going to send her to school this fall. I heard Mrs. Hartwell-Jones say something about it to grandmother the last time we were there."

"Oh, is that all!" exclaimed Christopher indifferently, and lost his interest in the subject immediately.

But, if the twins had known it, Mr. and Mrs. Baker were discussing something much more interesting than Letty's school, and that was, Letty's whole future. Grandmother had

had a very short, very happy note from Mrs. Hartwell-Jones just before leaving for the picnic. It seemed that the "lady who wrote books," after a great deal of discussion with her lawyer, a long letter from Mrs. Baker, the twins' mother, some correspondence with Mrs. Drake (whose whereabouts Mrs. Hartwell-Jones had had a good deal of trouble to discover), and finally a personal visit from her lawyer, had resolved definitely upon the great step of making Letty her own little girl.

As soon as they were alone, grandmother gave Mrs. Hartwell-Jones's note to grandfather to read. It began with the announcement of the author-lady's decision, included an invitation for the picnickers to stop at her house on their way home for congratulations and supper, and wound up with the request that she be allowed to tell the twins the news herself.

"I want to see Janey's face," she wrote, "when she learns what a wonderful thing has come to me out of her little idea of being helpful to a fellow mortal. May the dear child grow up to be as tender and thought-

ful a woman as she is a little girl! She will undoubtedly be greatly and widely beloved."

"Isn't it beautiful the way she speaks of our Janey?" said grandmother with tears in her eyes, when grandfather had finished reading the note.

"Does Letty know yet?" he asked.

"She is to tell her this afternoon, and we are to stop in on our way home from the picnic to rejoice with them. You see she invites us all to supper."

"That will please Kit," smiled his grandfather. "You have not given Jane a suspicion of it?"

"Of course not. Don't you see that Mrs. Hartwell-Jones wants the pleasure of telling her herself, or let Letty do it. I wonder what Letty said and did when she was told, and what they are saying about it now?"

Letty's feelings at that moment were really too mixed up and bewildered to describe. She had had a very happy day, performing her customary tasks in the morning and driving as usual with Mrs. Hartwell-Jones in the pony carriage. She had not felt a

bit badly (as Jane had feared she might) at not being invited to the picnic. She loved the children and their good times dearly, but she was equally satisfied to be alone with Mrs. Hartwell-Jones.

That usually placid lady appeared extraordinarily excited and restless to-day.

“Oh!” Letty had exclaimed when she came into the sitting-room that morning with the breakfast tray, which she insisted upon preparing always herself. “How pretty you look! Your cheeks are as rosy as Jane’s!”

Mrs. Hartwell-Jones had laughed and kissed Letty, but she said nothing of what was on her mind until the afternoon. It was a warm, sunshiny day with a sort of hush over the earth. The air was still and full of sweet, clean country smells. Mrs. Hartwell-Jones and Letty sat alone together in the large, up-stairs sitting-room. A little later they were to have a tea-party of two, for Mrs. Hartwell-Jones always liked a cup of tea or chocolate in the afternoon.

“Letty, my dear,” said Mrs. Hartwell-Jones gently, trying to keep the excitement out of

her voice, "please sit here on the stool, close by me. I have something very important to talk to you about."

"Something important to talk to me about!" repeated Letty in astonishment. "Oh, what is it?"

"Sit there, dear child, facing me. Now look up at me so that I can watch your eyes. Tell me, Letty dear, have you ever thought about what you would do when you grew up?"

"Not very much; not at all since I have been with you. Before—when I was with the circus I used to wonder what I could do to get away from it all. I knew that I could never stand it to go on travelling about with a circus all my life. Mrs. Drake was very good to me and the baby was dear! But I hated the life; living in tents, always on the go; no school, no little girl friends, no home!"

She sat looking at the floor thoughtfully for a moment.

"I suppose I ought to have thought about it more," she said humbly. "I am afraid I have taken your kindness too much as a



"NOW LOOK UP AT ME"

matter of course, dear Mrs. Hartwell-Jones. I shall try to show you how truly grateful I am to you for giving me such a happy home! And you know how delighted I am about boarding-school," she added eagerly. "It seems just like—well, almost like heaven to be like other girls and go to school to learn things and be happy. I shall study hard and be good in school to show how grateful I am. And then, perhaps, when I am grown up, I can teach and pay you back for all you are going to do for me."

"You dear little girl!" cried Mrs. Hartwell-Jones with a sob in her voice, "I want no thanks but your happiness!

"But now, listen to what I have to say. How would you like being somebody's little girl in earnest? To have a real home to go to in holiday time, and—and some one to love you and be as nearly a mother to you as it is possible to be?"

Letty looked puzzled and a little frightened.

"Have you found some of my relatives? some one to claim me?" she asked. "Oh, Mrs. Hartwell-Jones, I don't want to leave you! I don't, I don't! You have taken as

great care of me as my mother could have. Please don't send me away!"

"No, no, dear, never. You don't understand, Letty darling. Do you know what adoption means?"

"No, I am afraid I don't," said Letty meekly. She hung her head and blushed, embarrassed as she always was at her ignorance, when asked the meaning of something she did not know.

"It means," said Mrs. Hartwell-Jones slowly, "that any one who wishes, and there are no reasons why one should not do so, can take a little girl or boy into one's home and make that child her very own, by law. And it means, Letty darling, that if you are willing, I intend to take you to my home and make you my own little daughter!"

Letty sat staring at her with wide eyes. She was too bewildered—too overwhelmed to speak. Two great tears welled up in Mrs. Hartwell-Jones's eyes and rolled down her cheeks. Then she gave an odd little cry and stretched out her arms.

"Oh, my little girl, my little girl!" she whispered.

Neither of them knew how long they sat there, wrapped in each other's arms, not talking except for a quick question and answer now and then. At last they were interrupted by a hesitating knock on the door, and Anna Parsons' voice was heard calling:

"Please, Mrs. Hartwell-Jones, mother says she is afraid the chocolate will spoil if it waits any longer."

Letty laughed and springing to the door, threw it wide open.

"Oh, Anna," she cried, "I am the happiest girl in the whole wide world! Bring in the chocolate and cakes, quick."

Anna turned up her nose a trifle. It seemed rather a greedy thing to say that one was the happiest girl in the world at sight of hot chocolate and cakes—even if they were Madeira cakes. But then, she did not know the wonderful thing that had happened to Letty.

CHAPTER XVIII

A CABLEGRAM

IN spite of Letty's appearing to be overjoyed at the arrival of the chocolate and cakes, she did not eat very much. For some reason which Anna did not understand she did not seem able to keep quiet for an instant. Every second she would jump up to fetch some trifle for Mrs. Hartwell-Jones, for which that lady had not felt the slightest need; or if she could think of nothing to do, would simply whirl about the room in an ecstasy of motion. Anna watched her with astonished curiosity.

These little afternoon tea-parties occurred every day now, and Anna Parsons was always included. Usually on the days when the twins and their grandmother were not present, Mrs. Hartwell-Jones did most of the talking, entertaining her little guests with descriptions of her travels across the seas or telling them bits of stories that she had read or written

herself. But to-day it was Letty who talked. Talked! She became a perfect chatterbox. Indeed, she seemed like a different person altogether, with her sparkling eyes, red cheeks and prattling tongue.

Presently Anna Parsons asked some question about the ponies, Punch and Judy, and that set Letty off on her recollections of the circus. Soon she had Anna and Mrs. Hartwell-Jones both laughing heartily over her tales; little Anna nearly fell off her chair in her merriment over the account of the trick elephant's puzzled behavior when they softened the clapper of his bell so that it would not sound when he rang it.

Then she told all the droll stories she could remember about Poll, Mrs. Goldberg's parrot; and about the wonderful day Emma Haines had spent with her at Willow Grove and how she had saved Jane and Christopher from the bear.

This mention of the twins and Willow Grove set Mrs. Hartwell-Jones thinking of the letter she had received from the children's mother. Both she and grandmother had written to Mrs. Baker, Jr., and the answer had

been most satisfactory, both earnest and enthusiastic. Mrs. Baker had described her visit to Mrs. Jones and told what a sweet, cultured, refined woman she had found her to be, and how carefully brought up and guarded Letty had been.

“Unless these three years with a traveling circus since her mother’s death have spoiled her, I am sure you could find no more lady-like child than Letty,” she had written. “Certainly she has sufficient birth and breeding to overcome any little bad habits she may have acquired, and in the proper surroundings I am sure she will grow into a charming, refined gentlewoman. Moreover, she may prove to have an inestimable gift. Her mother told me that she herself sang quite well when she was a younger woman, and that she had a strong conviction that Letty had inherited her voice.”

Mrs. Hartwell-Jones sat thinking over this letter and all the little incidents of the child’s past life that Letty had told her from time to time, and she breathed a little prayer of thanksgiving that a precious soul had been entrusted to her care.

“But I thought you didn’t like the circus,” exclaimed Anna at last, when she could laugh no more.

“I didn’t,” answered Letty positively, becoming grave all at once. “I didn’t like it at all!” She was silent for a moment and then said soberly: “Anna, did you ever get into a deep, dark wood with lots of low, thorny bushes and vines among the trees that caught your feet and tangled them and pricked you when you tried to walk through? And then, all at once you came out into the bright, bright sunshine? Then, if you looked back at the wood, while you were safe outside in the warm sunshine, it did not look so dreadful, but you found that it had some rather bright spots in it here and there. Well, that is how I feel about the circus.”

“Oh!” said Anna wonderingly.

“Oh, oh, it is so nice to be out in the sunshine again!” sighed Letty clasping her hands and looking across at Mrs. Hartwell-Jones with tears in her eyes. “So nice!”

Mrs. Hartwell-Jones opened her arms without a word, and Letty ran to them with a glad little cry. Anna stared at the pair in amaze-

ment, quite unable to account for this display of emotion. Then, with a sudden instinct that she was not wanted for the moment she rose, gathered the teacups softly together on the tray and tiptoed out of the room.

It was some time before Mrs. Hartwell-Jones and Letty were again interrupted. This time it was the sound of a horse's hoofs in the road below and then Grandfather Baker's voice calling "Whoa!"

"Our supper guests are arriving," exclaimed Mrs. Hartwell-Jones smiling.

"Oh!" cried Letty, jumping to her feet. "May I tell them?"

"Of course you may, my dear, that is, the children. The grown-ups already know. I could not keep my secret from Mrs. Baker."

Letty flew out of the room, and met the Baker family mounting the stairs. She looked so radiantly happy that Christopher felt sure that there was going to be something particularly good for supper.

When they had all gathered in the sitting-room, after the greetings were over, Letty announced her glorious news, and then, oh, what excitement prevailed! The old Parsons

house had never known anything like it. Every one talked at once, no one knew what any one else was saying, and no one answered questions. Indeed, nobody expected to be answered at first, nor said anything of any importance. They just "oh'd" and "ah'd" and kissed one another and laughed—and cried a little bit too, the feminine part. At this point Christopher drew his grandfather aside and said in a disgusted voice :

"There they go again! What makes women and girls cry so much, grandfather? They're as bad when they're pleased as when they're sorry."

Letty's cheeks grew redder and redder, and her eyes danced and sparkled until they were fit companions for the stars that were already beginning to peep through the darkening sky outside. For it was growing later and later. Christopher began to be afraid that nobody would remember about supper. He could not be the one to remind Mrs. Hartwell-Jones, since he was her guest, but the picnic in the woods seemed farther and farther in the past until at length he decided that it had happened the day before—or maybe years ago!

A fellow's stomach can't stay empty forever, you know, and he began to wonder what were the first symptoms of starvation.

Mrs. Hartwell-Jones came to herself and a realization of her duties as hostess in time, however, to save him from the actual pangs of starvation, and Mrs. Parsons, who had come up with Anna "to see what it was all about" bustled down-stairs again with the promise that she would have supper on the table "in a jiffy."

At table the grown-ups, who all sat together at one end of the table, seemed to have a good deal to say to each other that was serious, but the children were brimful of fun and nonsense, and Letty kept the twins in a gale of laughter, just as she had kept Anna Parsons and Mrs. Hartwell-Jones in the afternoon.

After supper the children went out-of-doors and sat on the steps in the sweet night air while Letty sang to them. They grew very quiet and sober in the soft, solemn darkness. Presently Christopher said briskly, by way of breaking what he thought was beginning to be an awkward silence :

"I guess you're some happy to-night, Letty.

How does it feel to be somebody's little girl after you haven't belonged to anybody for so long?"

Instead of answering Letty suddenly began to cry. She only now saw how very lonely she had been these past three dreary years.

"There now, you rude boy, you've hurt her feelings. I hope you're satisfied," exclaimed Jane indignantly. "How would you like to be told you didn't belong to any one?"

"But I do belong to some one, and I always have. But Letty didn't, until Mrs. Hartwell-Jones took her, and I don't see why she has to cry just because I spoke the truth," argued Christopher.

"Kit is right," said Letty, drying her tears. "I didn't belong to any one before and it makes me so happy now to think that I'm really going to be somebody's little girl again that—that I had to cry."

"Huh! Had to cry! Why don't you laugh if you're glad? Why, I'd laugh for a week if I was going to belong to somebody that had as many good things to eat as Mrs. Hartwell-Jones always has."

"Why, Kit, would you like to leave father and mother?" exclaimed Jane, much shocked.

“ I didn’t say that, but Mrs. Hartwell-Jones certainly does know how to feed a fellow,” and Christopher smacked his lips.

Letty saw the word “ greedy ” trembling on Jane’s tongue and to check it she began quickly to talk about her good fortune.

“ I am not to go to boarding-school, after all, because Mrs. Hartwell-Jones said she would be too lonely without me,” she said with a happy laugh. “ Oh, just think of having a home to go back to every day after school ! And the girls won’t snub me because of being a little circus girl ! ” she exclaimed, and, to Christopher’s vexation, began to cry again.

Jane grew very thoughtful all of a sudden. She thought of her own home-coming each day after school. She remembered that sometimes—quite often, indeed—she had not wanted to go home at all ; had thought it very stupid to sit in the house and study. She would much rather go to the house of a schoolmate, or bring a friend home to play with her. But mother did not approve of visiting on school-days, and Jane’s good times always had to be put off until Friday and Saturday during term-time. Mother was always at home to

welcome her, and to ask about her lessons, quite as much interested in everything that had happened as if she, too, were a little girl. Then Christopher would get home from his school and the twins would have a jolly romp together before study time. Still Jane had found it dull at home at times. She wondered why, when she thought of how much she loved her mother and when she saw how happy it made Letty to think of going home to a woman who was very dear and sweet but who wasn't her own mother after all—not really and truly her mother.

The children had not spoken for some time. Christopher was busying himself with trying how many stars he could count without changing his position. Suddenly a shadowy figure whirled toward them out of the darkness. Letty caught her breath and half rose to her feet. Christopher grasped the step with both hands and ejaculated:—“Oh, cricky!” He grew very pale for a moment but controlled his feelings bravely. But Jane screamed outright and threw both her arms around Letty's neck.

But the shadowy figure turned out to be

only Jo Perkins on his bicycle. He carried a small envelope which he handed to Christopher.

"It's a cablegram, Kit," he said. "Run up to your grandfather with it, quick. It came about supper time and Huldah said she didn't know but it might be something important and that I'd better ride in with it."

Perk propped his bicycle against the steps and waited while the twins rushed up-stairs.

"It's from father and mother," shouted Christopher, tumbling up the stairs in the lead. "What does it say, grandfather, oh, what does it say?"

Jane scrambled up behind her brother.

"They're coming home, they're coming home!" she sang blissfully. "When, grandfather? When?"

Grandfather looked a bit startled at this abrupt entrance. He fumbled for his spectacles, put them on and unfolded the cablegram carefully, while grandmother leaned over his shoulder, almost as impatient as the children.

"We sail 'Metric' Thursday. All well," read grandfather.

“I knew they were coming, I knew it!” cried Jane happily. “When will they get here, grandfather?”

Then grandfather, grandmother and Jane began talking all at once, while Christopher whistled “The Campbells are Coming” as the most appropriate tune he could think of and Mrs. Hartwell-Jones and Letty stood hand in hand, smiling upon them all happily. A few weeks ago this little scene of rejoicing would have made Letty very sorrowful, but now she had her own unspeakable joy.

Outside in the soft summer night Jo Perkins sat on the fence and waited in comfortable unconcern.

CHAPTER XIX

SYMPTOMS OF MEASLES

“JANE,” said Christopher to his sister three days later, “a week is an awfully short time.”

“What do you mean?” demanded Jane.

She knew that when Christopher began to speak in that tone he had something in particular to say.

“I mean that in a week mother and father will be here and ——”

“A week isn’t a short time to wait to see them when we haven’t seen them for a long, long summer,” interrupted Jane indignantly.

“Well, it’s a short time when it’s all we’ve got left of staying here, isn’t it?” retorted Christopher.

Jane’s face lengthened. She had not thought of that side of the question.

“Do you think they are going to take us right straight home?” she asked slowly.

“Why, of course. Father’s been away from

his business so long that he'll just have to get back to it. I know enough to know that," replied Christopher in his most exasperatingly superior tone.

But Jane was too deep in her own thoughts to be provoked. She was trying to understand the queer feeling that Christopher's words brought to her heart. Surely she was not sorry that her father and mother were coming home? Oh, no, the thump her heart gave told her that that was not the reason. But it would be hard to leave grandfather and grandmother, Huldah and the puppies!

"Don't you think they'll let us stay a little longer?" she repeated. "School doesn't begin for almost another month."

"I don't know. But if one of us was ill, we'd have to stay longer, wouldn't we?"

"Why, yes, of course. But then it wouldn't be any fun. Besides neither of us is ill or anything like it."

"It is fun to be ill if you're not so very bad," said Christopher, answering the first half of Jane's sentence. "Why, when Edward Hammond had the measles—do you remember?—he had lots of fun. He had to

stay in bed a few days, but he didn't mind that 'cause his mother read him stories and he got lots of presents."

"Did he? Well, I guess mother'll bring us a present."

"And nice things to eat," went on Christopher. "It was really great sport being ill."

Jane eyed her brother suspiciously.

"Kit Baker, what's the matter? What do you mean? Why are you talking such a lot about Edward Hammond having the measles? It all happened over a year ago anyhow, and he's as well as you or I, now."

"It wasn't Edward I was thinking so much about as the measles."

Jane turned.

"What about the measles? You don't think you're getting them, do you? Have you been exposed?"

"You don't have to be exposed to get the measles."

"Oh, but you do, I know. Else why is mother always so careful to keep us away from any one who has measles?"

"Oh, I suppose you can catch them from somebody else, but you can get them without

being exposed, too, because Edward's mother said he hadn't been exposed, so there."

"She said she couldn't find out that he'd been exposed," corrected Jane. "But I'd like to know what difference it makes now, Kit Baker. Do you feel as if you were getting the measles?"

"Not exactly, only—why, don't you see? If one of us was to get the measles, we couldn't go back to town so soon. And whichever one of us had 'em would have a bully time, with presents and sweetbreads and things," he added hastily, as if offering an inducement.

Jane considered. She felt sure that there was something behind Christopher's words—something he was trying to make her understand; but she could not make out what it was.

"Well, anyway," she announced finally, "I haven't the measles, nor anything else. I don't know about you, but if you are coming down with anything you'll have plenty of time to get over it before we go home."

Which practical speech ended the conversation for the present.

Whatever Christopher's deep-laid schemes were, he decided that the time was not yet ripe to unfold them. Then, too, there might be no necessity. He would wait and see.

But immediately after breakfast, two days before the steamship "Metric" was due to arrive in New York, he came upon his grandparents as they were ending a private consultation. Christopher overheard grandmother say:

"It will have to be Monday, then, two days after they get here."

The words set Christopher thinking. As usually happens when one overhears something intended for other ears, he misunderstood grandmother's meaning and jumped to the conclusion that the Monday to which grandmother referred was the day set for their return to the city. To leave Sunnycrest and all its joys, the freedom, the open air, country life! To leave on Monday and this was Thursday! Clearly there was no time to be lost. He rushed off to find Jane, carried her to the most remote corner of the orchard and there they sat a good hour or more, quite beyond the reach of ears, however sharp, but

showing, had any one been interested enough to watch, that the topic under discussion was very weighty—and with two sides to it, to judge from Jane's determined attitude and Christopher's of persuasion.

It had been arranged that grandfather and grandmother were to go to the city on Friday afternoon, sleep there overnight, meet the ship which was to dock very early in the morning and bring the twins' parents back with them to Sunnycrest on Saturday.

Grandmother, who believed in being punctual always, had already packed her bag and was in readiness for the journey quite soon after breakfast, although they did not have to start until after an earlier dinner than usual.

But shortly after eleven o'clock Jane came into the house looking very much flushed and complained of not feeling well. Even as she spoke, she turned white and became very ill. Christopher, who had followed her to the door of grandmother's room, looked on with deep concern.

"Why, Kit," exclaimed grandmother, "what have you and Janey been doing?"

"Playing," answered Christopher briefly.

He seemed to have lost his usual too-ready tongue. "We were just playing."

"Was Janey swinging in the hammock or anything that could have made her so sea-sick?"

"We weren't near the hammock," answered Christopher frankly. "Are you going to send for the doctor, grandmother?"

"I hope it won't be necessary," replied grandmother anxiously. "Please ask Huldah to come up-stairs, Kit. I'll get Janey to bed."

Jane appeared so limp and miserable that grandmother decided (greatly to her secret disappointment) to give up her journey to town and stay at home with her, letting grandfather go by himself.

"And it will be a melancholy meeting with such anxious news for the children's father and mother," she added regretfully.

"Oh, Jane's not as ill as that," expostulated Christopher. "She's—she's—it'll just keep us from going home so soon, perhaps, but that's all. You go ahead to town, grandmother. I'll take care of Janey—me and Huldah. And perhaps Letty'll come out and read to us."

“Oh, I should be afraid to let Letty come until I know what the matter is. Janey may be coming down with something. It is most distressing, and Dr. Greene is away up country and won't be back to-night.”

And grandmother, cheerful, serene grandmother, actually cried a little. But then you see, she was both worried about Jane's sudden, somewhat mysterious illness, and disappointed that she should have such distressing news to give the children's mother just at this last moment when everything had gone so beautifully all summer long.

“Don't you think you'd better go?” urged grandfather. He, too, was disappointed, for he and grandmother rarely traveled and always enjoyed their little excursions together. “Don't you think Janey's mother might worry more than she need if you stay behind? She will think it more serious than it really is.”

“It is serious enough to make me unwilling to leave Janey,” answered grandmother positively. “I should worry every single instant if I were away from her. I could not stand it, not knowing how she is every minute.

With her symptoms she might be coming down with almost anything."

"But I don't think she's very ill," put in Christopher again. "You just tell father and mother she'll be all right in a week or two if they ——"

"In a week or two!" exclaimed grandmother, looking ready to cry again. "I hope it is not going to be so long an illness as that!"

Christopher blushed and hung his head, while grandfather again urged the wisdom of going to town together as they had originally planned. But grandmother was firm. She changed her dress and went back to Jane's room. Jane set up a wail when she heard that grandmother was to remain at home.

"I am not ill, grandmother, not a bit!" she moaned. "I—I ——"

"Be careful, Jane," called Christopher from the doorway of his own room. "You'll—you'll get sick again."

Jane dropped back in bed and began to cry. Grandmother knelt down and did her best to comfort her, but Jane sobbed on quite heedlessly.

Grandfather and Christopher had to sit down to dinner alone, as grandmother would not leave Jane and grandfather could not wait or he would miss his train. It was rather a melancholy meal. Grandfather ate hardly anything and even Christopher's appetite failed. He watched his grandfather off and rode on the step of the carriage as far as the gate, but he did not ask permission to go all the way to Hammersmith, for the sake of the ride, as grandfather and Joshua had both expected him to do.

"The boy seems quite unlike himself," grandfather remarked to Joshua as they drove away. "He takes Janey's illness very much to heart."

"I always agreed there was a lot of character in that boy," replied Joshua heartily.

Christopher was told, when he got back to the house, that Jane was asleep and must on no account be disturbed, so he tiptoed disconsolately away and cast about for something to do. He began to be sorry he had not asked leave to ride into the village.

At about five o'clock grandmother called him. Jane was awake and feeling ever so

much better—almost like herself in fact. Would Christopher sit with her a short time while grandmother went to her own room?

Jane, who had been sitting up in bed playing quite happily with her paper dolls, dropped back on her pillow when Christopher came in and turning her back, refused to speak to him. Grandmother had already left the room.

“Sit up, Jane,” commanded Christopher, closing the door and drawing a small black lacquered box from his pocket.

“I won’t,” said Jane flatly. “You are a horrid, wicked boy and I don’t like you.”

“But you promised.”

“You spoiled grandmother’s trip to town and mother ’ll be scared ’most to death when she hears I’m too ill to let grandmother go.”

“I can’t help that. I didn’t know grandmother would stay home when it wasn’t necessary, and you promised ——”

“Grandmother is so disappointed she wants to cry all the time,” went on Jane, her lip quivering.

“You promised!” Christopher’s tone was

growing threatening. "Hurry up. There isn't much time."

"I don't care," said Jane defiantly.

"Jane Baker! Do you mean to say you are going to break your promise?"

This was attacking Jane's vulnerable spot, for she prided herself upon always keeping her word. She sat up in bed.

"But if it's a wrong promise?" she asserted weakly.

"It's the same promise as when you made it," announced Christopher with calm conviction, and he approached the bed with the small box in his hand.

Grandmother completed her afternoon toilet in something of a hurry, for she thought she heard sounds in Jane's room.

"What is it?" she asked a little anxiously, appearing in the doorway just as Christopher opened the door from within.

"Nothing," he answered. "I was just helping Janey get—get fixed."

Grandmother glanced at Jane, lying flat on her pillow, her face turned away.

"Don't you feel as well, Janey?" she asked tenderly, crossing to the bedside quickly.

Jane shook her head without speaking. She was white about the lips but her face looked red and blotched. Grandmother lifted one of the little hands; it felt hot and feverish. Huldah entered just then with a daintily arrayed supper tray but Jane pushed it aside with a shudder.

"I am afraid it is measles," grandmother said in a low tone aside to Huldah. "She is sick again and see how flushed and broken out her face looks. We'd best send Kit away somewhere."

"He can go down to the farmhouse," replied Huldah promptly. "Joshua will see to him. I'm going to stay up here nights until the child's better. Where could the precious lamb have caught the measles? I don't know of a case for miles around."

Mrs. Baker spent an anxious night for Jane tossed and moaned in her sleep in a distressful way. Several messages had been sent to the doctor and grandmother had also sent Jo Perkins into Hammersmith with a note to Mrs. Hartwell-Jones, to tell her of the sudden illness and to warn Letty against coming out to Sunnycrest for fear of contagion. Such a

dreary home-coming it promised to be for the returned travelers!

Christopher was decidedly taken aback by his banishment. He had not counted on anything of that sort and remonstrated vigorously.

“If it is measles, I don’t see the use in sending me away now,” he argued. “I guess the harm’s already done.”

But grandmother was determined to take no risks and sent Christopher off with a hand-bag.

Toward morning Jane became quieter and grandmother fell into an exhausted sleep. When Jane woke, she tiptoed softly into the bath-room, went through her morning bath and got back into bed again without disturbing her grandmother. The blotchy flush had entirely left her face and she looked and acted perfectly well. Indeed, she appeared quite like her usual self, except for a certain look of unhappiness which even the thought of her mother’s coming could not banish from her chubby face.

Grandmother was surprised to see this sudden change for the better, when she finally awoke, and she sent Jo Perkins speeding

again into the village with a telegram to grandfather. But she decided to take no chances until Dr. Greene had come and pronounced the danger of measles really past, so Christopher was still held in quarantine at the farmhouse at the foot of the hill.

The doctor was late and took his departure only just before the arrival of the travelers. He had been puzzled by Jane's symptoms.

"There were evidences of an upset stomach," he said, "but not enough to have caused fever and a breaking out."

She might get up and dress, he added as he left, and such a scramble Jane had to get into her clothes in time, with one eye on the clock! But she succeeded, and was the first to rush into her dear, dear mother's arms.

What a day of jubilation it was! What wonderful tales of travel! What wonderful presents! But through it all there was something not quite natural about the behavior of the children. Christopher's cheerfulness was a little overdone. The look of unhappiness still lurked in the depths of Jane's eyes and she very pointedly avoided her brother.

“If grandmother had not assured me to the contrary, I should say the children were suffering from a guilty conscience,” said Mr. Christopher Baker, Jr., to his wife.

“Yes,” she agreed. “And Janey appears on the eve of confession. I have noticed two or three times that she has been on the point of telling me something and Kit has stopped her. Do you suppose there can be something behind her illness?”

After supper the family were assembled on the veranda, and Mrs. Baker, Jr., or “Mrs. Kit” as she was generally called—asked about Letty.

“We know how interested you both must be in Mrs. Hartwell-Jones and Letty,” replied grandmother, “and so we have planned to invite them to Sunnycrest to spend a week. They are to come on Monday.”

Jane and Christopher exchanged sudden, startled looks.

“Aren’t we going home on Monday?” demanded Christopher.

“No, my boy. I have a ten days’ holiday and we are going to spend it here, all together,” answered his father.

Jane burst into tears.

"Shut up!" whispered Christopher fiercely, and reached out a hand to clutch Jane's skirts.

But she was too quick for him and sprang to the shelter of her mother's arms.

"Oh, we needn't have done it! We needn't have done it!" she wailed.

Everybody was unspeakably astonished except Christopher, who grew very red in the dusk, squirmed about on his chair, finally rose and muttering something about "girls being such softies," ran into the house.

"Oh, mother," sobbed Jane, "come over here."

She drew her mother apart and made her sit down. Then standing beside her, the dear mother-shoulder ready to hide a shamed face, she whispered her story:

"Kit and I thought you and father were going to take us right back home to the city, and we didn't want to go, and Kit said if one of us was ill or something, that we couldn't go so soon, so he—he made me promise and we—I ate a lot of mushy bread and milk and drank some warm water and Kit whirled me

till I was dizzy and—and grandmother put me to bed; then Kit came up and painted my face out of our water-color box and whirled me again and grandmother thought it was measles. She was scared and she cried because she had to give up her trip to the city with grandfather to meet you and mother—oh, mother, I'm so mis'erable! And I have broken my promise to Kit, too, 'cause I promised him not to tell!”

The halting, sobbing whisper ceased and Jane, in an agony of weeping, buried her head in her mother's breast.

“Why, Jane!” exclaimed her mother.
“Why, Janey!”

After the scolding, the sermon and the punishment were over and the children had been sent forgiven to bed, the four grown-ups went out onto the veranda again. It was a soft, balmy night, with no hint of the coming autumn in the air. The stars twinkled good-humoredly.

Grandmother, grandfather, mother and father all looked at one another for a moment; then—I am sorry to say that then they laughed; laughed until the tears rolled

down their cheeks and they had to sit down to keep from tipping over.

But of course Jane and Christopher never knew that.

CHAPTER XX

OLD SCENES AGAIN

MRS. HARTWELL-JONES and Letty came out to Sunnycrest on the following Monday, as they had been invited to do, and every one spent a happy week. Letty was radiant to meet again some one who had seen and known her mother, and urged Mrs. Baker, Jr., to tell Mrs. Hartwell-Jones everything she could remember about the sweet, sad-faced gentlewoman who had trained her little daughter so carefully and lovingly.

There were long, long talks among the grown-ups, and both grandmother and the mother of the twins were confident that Mrs. Hartwell-Jones had done wisely in making Letty her own little girl.

Letty had asked permission to renew only one tie of her past life.

"You have told Mrs. Drake already," she said to Mrs. Hartwell-Jones, "and I should

like all my other friends to know, if I could reach them. There was dear Miss Reese. She was so good to me and my mother one winter, and then I never heard from her again, nor her cousin, Clara Markham. Indeed, I've even forgotten what Miss Reese's married name is. I have always thought of her as Miss Reese.

"Then there was Mrs. Goldberg at Willow Grove. She was awfully good-hearted although she was so fat and homely and dressed so badly. But she and Mr. Goldberg went out to California just before—before my mother died. Mr. Goldberg wanted Ben to go out to California with him, but Ben couldn't leave mother and me. Perhaps if he had gone ——" Letty stopped and her eyes filled with tears. "Perhaps that horrible accident wouldn't have happened!"

"Hush, dear Letty—dear little girl," whispered Mrs. Hartwell-Jones tenderly. "An accident is always likely to happen in such a life—so filled with risks and dangers. And think how very much more terrible it would have been if it had happened far off—away from you."

Letty was soon comforted and dried her eyes with a little sigh.

“But there is one person I can tell my happiness to,” she said after rather a long silence, “if I may? It is Emma Haines, the little girl I told you about that lived next door when we had rooms in South Front Street. I should so like her to know! May I write to her? She lives in New Jersey now, she and her mother and Tottie. Such a cunning baby Tottie was.”

“By all means write to her at once,” consented Mrs. Hartwell-Jones cordially. “And when we get settled at home in town, you may invite her over to see you, if you like.”

Letty would have liked to take Mrs. Hartwell-Jones’s “at once” literally. Indeed, she had already jumped up from her stool and crossed to the writing-desk, when Christopher appeared at the open door and beckoned to her eagerly. The little conversation had taken place in Mrs. Hartwell-Jones’s room at Sunnycrest, and Christopher’s interruption was not a surprise, as the twins gave Letty very little time to herself.

After Letty had run off to join the children,

Mrs. Hartwell-Jones sat lost in thought, considering seriously an idea that had come to her that morning, suggested by the letter she had received from her lawyer. Presently she went to consult Grandmother Baker, as she generally did upon nearly all matters nowadays. She found her in her own room, going over the week's mending.

"Mrs. Baker, I am thinking of taking a short journey," she began. "But you are busy, I see. I am afraid I shall disturb you."

Grandmother hastened to assure her that she was not interrupting.

"Indeed, it will help me very much to be talked to," she replied. "It will help me to keep my mind off the terrific size of the holes in Kit's stockings. Just look at this!" And she held up a long brown stocking with a great gaping tear in the knee. "You say you think of taking a short journey," she exclaimed in surprise. "You don't think of leaving us before the end of your visit, I hope?" she added anxiously.

"Only for two days, if you will excuse us. I think of taking Letty with me. But I would like your opinion; whether you think it

would please and interest Letty, or only distress her with sad memories."

Mrs. Baker looked up curiously.

"I am thinking of going down to Philadelphia for a day," explained Mrs. Hartwell-Jones. "There are certain records that my lawyer wishes to look up, concerning Letty's baptism and the exact date of her father's death. I should like, too, to call on the minister, if we can find him, in whose parish Mrs. Grey lived at that time.

"And I thought possibly it might interest Letty to revisit some of the places where she used to live. Or do you think it might rouse sad memories in the child's heart and make her unhappy? Do you think it would be a hard experience?"

"It might sadden the dear child a bit for the moment," answered grandmother; "but the sadness cannot last long, remembering what the future holds for her, and I think it would be very good for her, Mrs. Hartwell-Jones, to go over the old scenes and impress them upon her mind, since her life from now on is to be so very different."

"I am glad you agree with me, Mrs. Baker.

Then, since that is settled, will it interfere with your plans in any way to have us go to-morrow?"

Mrs. Baker smiled.

"Not with me, dear Mrs. Hartwell-Jones. Choose your own time and convenience. But I am afraid the children will raise a very dreadful outcry."

Mrs. Hartwell-Jones smiled too, in recollection of all the mysterious whisperings and private interviews that had been going on among the children.

"I think they can spare Letty for two days," she laughed. "We shall be back the day after, you know."

Letty received the news of the proposed journey with mingled feelings. How odd it would seem to go back to Philadelphia, to revive the scenes and memories of the old life, which seemed gone forever.

Letty was afraid it might make her unhappy to visit again the places where she had lived with her dear, dear mother. She said nothing of all this to Mrs. Hartwell-Jones, and tried her best not to let her see that she felt it, but entered into plans very eagerly

and drove Punch and Judy into the village after the noonday dinner to get time-tables.

It was discovered that the only convenient train to Philadelphia passed through Hammersmith in the afternoon, not reaching Philadelphia until after dark. And the return trip must be taken even later in the day.

"Of course we can do nothing the evening we reach there," said Mrs. Hartwell-Jones, "but it will give us nearly a whole day before starting back, which is all the time I shall need.

"But we shall arrive at Hammersmith very late in the evening, Mr. Baker," she added. "Don't you think it would be better for Letty and me to stop overnight at our own rooms in the village? It will take Joshua and the horses out so late, to come to meet us."

"Indeed, no. Josh won't mind a little evening jaunt. We may all come, for the matter of that, for the sake of a moonlight ride."

And so Mrs. Hartwell-Jones and Letty started off. It was all very strange and odd to Letty. She could not get used to the parlor-car. She had traveled a good deal in her time, during her three years with Mr.

Drake's circus, but never, of course, in such comfort and luxury. It was like living in a different world.

Philadelphia, too, was like a completely different city. It was quite dark when they arrived and the confusion and brilliance of the big, busy station quite overwhelmed Letty. The streets were totally unfamiliar. She had been in that part of the city very seldom and never at night. The comfort and delightful motion of the taxicab charmed her and she became completely absorbed in watching the register, illumined by a tiny electric light.

"What does it make you think of, dear?" asked Mrs. Hartwell-Jones as the taxicab was steered smoothly and dexterously in and out of the stream of traffic.

"Oh, I don't know. It is all so mysterious, this going along and along without anything to take us," replied Letty. "But then, after all, it isn't so very different from a trolley-car, is it, except that there are no tracks. Ah, the thing has dropped again! What do you suppose makes it? You say the man does not push it," and she studied the metre with puzzled eyes.

The ride was very short and the hotel at which they stopped very magnificent. A meal was served to them in their own room, for it was too late to dress and go down-stairs to the restaurant; and after it was over, Letty spent the hour until bedtime at the open window, watching the rushing stream of people pour by below, in carriages or motors and on foot, ascending or descending from trolley-cars and entering or leaving the big hotel. All the while she asked herself over and over:

“Is this Philadelphia? Is this really Philadelphia where I used to live?”

Her sense of strangeness and bewilderment did not leave her next morning, for Mr. Shoemaker, Mrs. Hartwell-Jones's lawyer, having come over from New York by appointment to join them, the three took another taxicab and drove out to West Philadelphia. This part of the city was even stranger to Letty than the portion about the station, for she had been only a baby, too young to remember any impressions, when her mother, Ben and she had moved down-town; and she had never revisited that part of the city at all.

She did not understand exactly what was

the errand upon which Mrs. Hartwell-Jones and the lawyer were bent, and while they consulted huge books and parish registers, she wandered about the yard of the big college where her father had been a teacher, looking up at the high buildings with their rows and rows of windows, and thinking how jolly it must be to be a boy and go to college.

“But there are girls’ colleges, too,” she reflected. “Perhaps Mrs. Hartwell-Jones will let me go to one when I am old enough—or know enough. Oh, dear, I am sorry I am so far behind other girls in my classes. I mean to work terribly hard. Mrs. Hartwell-Jones has helped me a lot this summer and perhaps it won’t matter so much, my being behind, at a private school.”

When Mrs. Hartwell-Jones and Mr. Shoemaker joined Letty, a kind-faced old clergyman accompanied them, who patted Letty on the cheek and exclaimed:

“Bless me, is this the baby? How time does fly, to be sure. You are a fortunate little lady, Letitia. Good-morning, all of you.”

After luncheon at the hotel, Mr. Shoemaker

talked business with Mrs. Hartwell-Jones for half an hour or so, then departed again for New York. Mrs. Hartwell-Jones ordered still another taxicab.

“ We have over two hours before our train leaves, dear, and so suppose we drive about to the different places you know about. Would you like to? Do you remember the street and number where your Miss Reese used to live? ”

Letty gave the address, which was quite near by, and as they drove past the house she related again, with eager interest, the exciting tale of the fire. Then they were driven down Chestnut Street and Letty's eyes shone as they passed the shops she recollected having visited with Miss Reese on the memorable Christmas shopping expedition.

“ Is this where you had your first taste of ice-cream soda-water? ” asked Mrs. Hartwell-Jones as the cab stopped in front of a large candy shop. “ Then we must have some now, for old times' sake. And let us take a box of candy back to the twins. ”

They did a good deal of shopping, of one sort or another, and then Mrs. Hartwell-Jones

gave the chauffeur a direction that made him stare. It brought the tears to Letty's eyes suddenly and a great lump to her throat.

Far down-town they drove, out of the range of stylishly equipped carriages and motor cars; out of the range of big shops and smooth streets. The pavement grew rougher and dirtier, the houses and small shops that lined the street, shabbier and shabbier.

Letty leaned forward out of the carriage window, her eyes large, curious, almost frightened, fixed on each familiar spot as it was passed. She clasped her hands tightly together and drew her breath in short, audible inspirations.

"Ah, there is the house, there it is!" she exclaimed at length, and Mrs. Hartwell-Jones gave the signal to stop.

The cab came to a halt at the curb, the motor continuing to throb with an even, businesslike regularity.

The little motor inside Letty's small body was throbbing too, wildly, now fast and now slow, as she gazed at the shabby, dingy house that had been her home. It looked shabbier and dingier than ever, and there were neither

fresh muslin curtains nor blooming plants at the third-story front windows where her mother used to sit and sew.

No familiar faces were to be seen. Several people went in and out of the front door, turning to stare curiously at the lady and little girl sitting in the motor car. But Letty had never seen any of them before. There were children playing on the door-step next door, but they were not Emma Haines nor Tottie. It all seemed completely changed.

“Oh, dear!” sighed Letty.

Then she turned and threw herself into Mrs. Hartwell-Jones's outstretched arms.

“My mother, my mother!” she sobbed. “How I want my mother!”

Mrs. Hartwell-Jones soothed her as best she could, wondering the while if she had done wrong to bring back the old associations.

“I know it is hard, dear little girl,” she whispered, “but I think some day you will be glad we came. It will help to fix the picture in your mind. It keeps our memories fresher and more precious, you know, if we have the pictures of their surroundings clearly in our mind.

“Take one last look, dear, and then we shall go. I pray I may be able to keep you as good and happy as your dear mother did, my precious little Letty!”

The cab moved slowly, with increasing speed, away from the dingy street, back to the gay, prosperous part of the city; back to the life that was to be Letty's henceforth.

The child's sobs soon ceased and she drew back from the comforting shoulder. But she still clung to Mrs. Hartwell-Jones's hand for solace, and there were tears in the brown eyes that tried bravely to smile.

“You are so good to me!” she exclaimed. “My mother would be so grateful to you if she knew!”

“She does know, up in heaven. I am sure she does, Letty, dear. And we shall both do our best to keep good and happy, shall we not? for that would please her best.

“And Letty dear, while we are on the subject, may I speak about something else regarding you and me? What do you want to call me, child? Have you thought about it at all? You know you can't go on calling me Mrs. Hartwell-Jones,” she added with a little

laugh, to aid Letty's embarrassment. "How would 'Aunt Mary' do?"

Letty looked up shyly.

"I think that would be perfectly beautiful!" she ejaculated with a happy sigh. "If it is what you would like?" she added hastily.

Mrs. Hartwell-Jones would have liked a sweeter, more intimate title, but she guessed that Letty would find it too hard to confer the beloved name of mother upon any one else; so she accepted the other and they were both satisfied and contented.

"'Aunt Mary,'" whispered Letty again and again. "It is a beautiful name and just like yourself, Mrs. Hart—I mean Aunt Mary," she added tremulously.

CHAPTER XXI

CONCLUSION

THE twins greeted Letty's return tumultuously. They had been very indignant over her journey and had considered it most unnecessary and thoughtless of Mrs. Hartwell-Jones to take Letty away at such a critical time, thus threatening to upset all their plans. But two days were not so very long.

"You almost spoiled everything, but only almost, so it's all right," said Jane magnanimously.

"We did a lot of practicing," added Christopher with his mouth full of chocolate, "and this is bully candy, thank you."

"We've kept the secret splendidly and not a soul knows anything except those who are in it," went on Jane importantly.

In fact, the children were planning an immense surprise for the celebration of the last evening at Sunnycrest. The great scheme

was Christopher's idea, and he found some difficulty at first in persuading Letty to take her part in it. She consented at length, partly for the fun of it, partly because she was so happy that she wanted to do whatever any one asked her to do.

A great mystery pervaded the place—a mystery which the grown-ups had to be very careful at times not to see through, for the children found it hard, in their joy and excitement, not to betray secrets. Billy Carpenter was included in the affair, and he and Christopher spent hours every day in the hay-loft, rehearsing some private performance which resulted in a good deal of thumping and an occasional hard bump. They also did a great deal of hammering and sawing, which employment demanded frequent calls upon Jo Perkins's time and even upon Joshua's valuable moments.

Letty and Jane were busy, too, in Jane's room, snipping and sewing away at costumes. They made an unexplained trip into the village one morning in the pony carriage. Jane had her allowance and Letty was enjoying the unexpected, undreamed-of thrill of

possessing her own spending money. On their return they smuggled their packages up to Jane's room and confided their purchases to no one but Christopher.

It was evening of the last day of the delightful Sunnycrest house-party. By general request supper was an hour earlier than usual and none of the children—not even Christopher and Billy Carpenter—ate very much. They were in a constant fidget to have the meal come to an end. Indeed, the two boys excused themselves before it was over and rushed out to help Jo Perkins complete the final arrangements.

When the grown-ups went out to sit on the veranda as usual, they found a transformation. The front lawn had been turned into a circus ring by means of a low, rather wobbly circular railing. An inner railing was staked out with string so as to form a track. Although the autumn daylight still lingered, thanks to Huldah's promptness with the early supper, Joshua had stationed four large stable lanterns at intervals around the ring and Jo Perkins had strung festoons of gay Japanese lanterns, left over from the Fourth of July, along the

edge of the railing. The veranda chairs had been placed in a row on the driveway, facing this ring.

As the party seated themselves, Christopher's head could be seen every few seconds, bobbing around the corner of the house. Huldah and the two housemaids came out and stood on the veranda and Joshua joined them.

When every one had assembled Christopher, in rather an extraordinary costume composed of a long mackintosh, boots much too big for him and a silk hat of his grandfather's—with a false band inside to make it fit—strutted into the ring. The long whip he carried proclaimed his character as ring-master. He mounted on an inverted keg, evidently put there for the purpose.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he began in a loud voice, which he tried to make deep and impressive, "we hope you will all enjoy our circus, for we have worked very hard to get it ready." Great applause from the audience, which rather disconcerted the youthful manager. "We have decided not to have a procession," he went on in a more natural voice,

“because that would show all our—our acts, and we want to keep the different things we are going to do a secret until you see them. We hope you will enjoy it as—oh, I said that before. Ah—oh—thank you, ladies and gentlemen, for your attention. We’ll be ready in a minute,” and with an abrupt little bow Christopher jumped off the box and clumped away in his big boots at an awkward run.

After a very short interval of waiting he appeared again, this time airily attired in a striped bathing suit, in lieu of tights, followed by Billy Carpenter in like costume.

“Oh, I hope they won’t take cold. Fortunately it’s a warm night,” murmured Christopher’s mother.

The two boys capered into the ring and proceeded to show off the results of their week of practicing and labor. They turned hand-springs and stood on their heads ; Billy walked a short distance on his hands and Christopher turned a back somersault landing, a little to every one’s surprise, including his own, on his feet. Then they jumped and tumbled together, performing fantastic feats at leap-frog.

They were very quick and agile and really rather clever.

The audience was most appreciative and encored them again and again. When they had finally retired, with many bows and flourishes Jane appeared dressed in a long full skirt of flowered muslin—one of her grandmother's, shortened—a white kerchief crossed on her breast and a quaint little cap on her head. She carried her doll Sally in her arms.

“Letty's handiwork,” whispered Mrs. Hartwell-Jones proudly as she surveyed the costume.

In her sweet, piping voice Jane recited “Beautiful Grandma.” The audience clapped and clapped and called “encore” again and again but the piece was long and had taxed shy little Jane's powers. She shook her head as she gave her cunning little bob of a curtsey and finally called :

“I don't know anything else that would go with this costume and besides, I have to get dressed for ——” She stopped and ran off, laughing.

There was a slight pause and then Christo-

pher reappeared in his costume as ringmaster. Again he mounted the keg and made another speech, cracking his whip to secure attention.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” he shouted impressively, “we have made arrangements for a rare treat for you all this evening. I wish to announce the only and positively the last public performance of Punch and Judy! All right, bring 'em along, Perk.”

Jo Perkins appeared in sight around the corner of the house leading the Shetland ponies. They were literally covered with wreaths and festoons of goldenrod and wild asters. The little carriage to which they were harnessed was decorated in the same manner and Letty, sitting enthroned on the seat, was dressed, not in the imitation Roman toga she had worn under Mr. Drake's direction, but in a short white frock such as she had worn at Willow Grove when she had first exhibited the ponies for Mr. Goldberg. She had on long pink stockings and white tennis shoes—a result of the shopping trip—and carried a long wand wrapped in silver paper. A crown of silver paper, with a bunch of flowers at the sides, completed her costume.

“That is exactly the way she was dressed when I saw her at Willow Grove,” Mrs. Baker, Jr., whispered to Mrs. Hartwell-Jones.

“Poor child, do you suppose she will miss the old life, with its constant change and excitement?” asked Mrs. Hartwell-Jones a little wistfully.

“I am quite sure she will not. See how happy she has been this summer. And her blessed mother would be so thankful to know she had been saved from it. She did not like Letty’s occupation; she told me so herself, and always went to the theatre with her as long as she was able. Afterward she sent a maid. Dear little Letty, how she must have missed her mother’s care! But the lack of it has not harmed her, Mrs. Hartwell-Jones. She is as sweet and gentle-hearted as ever.”

They turned their attention to the little performer. Letty had unharnessed the ponies and in response to a hearty burst of applause led them forward, one on each side, and all three bowed in a most fascinating manner. Then Punch and Judy went through their simple tricks as accurately and docilely as if they had performed them regularly twice

every day all summer. Christopher, sitting on his keg which he had moved to one side, played "Listen to the Mocking-Bird" on a mouth-organ for an orchestra.

But, contrary to the expectations of the audience, the showing off of Punch and Judy did not complete the entertainment. Billy Carpenter took Christopher's place at the mouth-organ and Letty dropped down out of sight behind a little screen of bushes near by, while Jo Perkins reharnessed the ponies and drove them off.

Perk reappeared in a few moments pushing a wheelbarrow in which reposed a large crate. He was followed by Jane, who was dressed this time in Letty's Roman toga. She carried her two largest dolls, which she placed in two small chairs facing the ring. Then Jo Perkins, with some effort, lifted the crate from the wheelbarrow, and opening this improvised cage released a monster that leapt to the ground with a truly blood-curdling growl. The audience really looked a little startled. The strange animal was clothed in shaggy black fur and waved a pair of forelegs that ended in alarming looking claws.

“My best bearskin rug out of the camphor chest,” whispered grandmother in a voice choked with laughter. “Kit must have coaxed Huldah to lend it to him. How well he has fastened it on. How do you suppose he manages to hide his face so cleverly?”

Gravely, Jane proceeded to put the clumsy bear through his tricks. But the animal was unruly and growled and threatened his trainer in quite a fearsome way. At length he turned and shambled, growling fiercely all the while, straight toward the audience. He stopped as he perceived the two children (the dolls), stiff and immovable in their chairs, sniffed the air a moment and then charged them with a terrific roar. The trainer screamed, threw aside her toga and assuming the character of fond mamma rushed forward, clasped the dolls to her breast and shrieked for help. Up rose Letty, like a good fairy in her filmy white frock, and bounding across the ring flung a cover, which looked suspiciously like one of Huldah’s kitchen aprons, over the infuriated bear. After a long, exciting tussle (and some suppressed laughter) in which Jane and Billy Carpenter joined, the bear was subdued and

bundled into his cage, from which he popped out at once to respond with the others to the peal upon peal of applause from the highly amused audience.

Poor Mrs. Baker, Jr., did not know whether to laugh or cry, and eased her feelings by doing a little of each.

"It was so exactly like the real thing," she whispered to grandmother wiping her eyes. "My poor, precious little lambs!"

During the confusion that followed, audience and performers all talking together, grandmother saw Huldah and the maids disappear indoors. Huldah wore such an air of mystery and importance that grandmother immediately suspected that refreshments were to complete the programme.

It was quite dark by now and a little chilly as well, and the grown-ups suggested going indoors to talk over the grand affair. Whereupon Christopher bounded ahead to make sure a certain door was shut and ushered everybody into the parlor. Before many minutes had passed, however, every one was summoned to the dining-room. There the table (which it seemed to all the grown-ups

had only just been cleared from supper) was loaded down with every delicacy that the fertile minds of the twins could suggest and Huldah concoct.

"Kit had a voice in the planning of this menu, I'll be bound," said that young gentleman's father with a laugh.

"Surely," agreed his wife, "and I noticed that he did not eat quite as much supper as usual this evening. I felt anxious at the time, but now I understand; he was saving up."

"Of course I was," admitted Christopher frankly. "What fellow wouldn't save up when he knew what was coming?"

"Who, indeed? The only objection I have to make is that you didn't warn me, and give me a chance to save up, too," answered his father gravely.

"I am concerned about only one thing," said Mrs. Hartwell-Jones to grandfather, as they sat side by side at the table. "I don't know what to do with Punch and Judy during the winter. I can hardly take them to the city with me."

"Why not let me keep them out here?"

proposed grandfather promptly. "There is plenty of room and to spare. Then when you decide where to spend next summer I can have them shipped to you."

"But Letty and I are coming back to Hammersmith next summer," replied Mrs. Hartwell-Jones quickly. "We are so devoted to the dear place, and you all have been such kind friends to us, that we want to spend as many summers here as possible."

Every one looked pleased at this news and the twins set up a shout of joy.

"Then we'll see Punch and Judy again, and have some more jolly rides," they cried.

"And we'll have Letty again, too, and Mrs. Hartwell-Jones," added Jane. "Just think, Letty, if we hadn't seen the ponies that day after the circus, and thought about 'em for Mrs. Hartwell-Jones and her lame foot, you might never have known her."

"It is you, you dear, precious child, and your thoughtfulness that gave me Letty," exclaimed Mrs. Hartwell-Jones, catching Jane up in an ardent, unexpected embrace—rather disconcerting to the big piece of chocolate

cake which Jane was holding suspended between plate and mouth during her little speech.

“Dear Mrs. Baker,” went on “the lady who wrote books,” turning to Jane’s mother, “of course you have heard from all the family the story of Jane’s idea of having Letty drive the ponies out here so that she might gratify her desire of seeing a poor, modest writer of books; and afterward how Jane’s sweet desire to help Letty find suitable work to do gave me the opportunity of knowing and gaining possession of my daughter!”

Mrs. Hartwell-Jones spoke the words with great pride, and Letty ran across to her embrace. Then Mrs. Hartwell-Jones took a small parcel out of her work-bag.

“Will you give me permission to make Janey a small gift, Mrs. Baker, to show her how happy and grateful I am?”

She undid the parcel and revealed a small jeweler’s box. She opened this in turn and lifted out something small and glittering. Kneeling in front of the pleased, astonished Jane, she slipped a slender, shining chain of

gold over her head and kissed the smiling, rosy mouth.

“Oh, cricky!” ejaculated Christopher, his voice tingling with a faint note of envy.

His eyes were big with surprise and excitement.

Jane followed the direction of his gaze and looked down at what she supposed was a locket on the end of her chain. It was a tiny gold watch, ticking merrily. It had a pretty, open face and Jane’s initials engraved on the back.

“Oh, Mrs. Hartwell-Jones, dear Mrs. Hartwell-Jones, is it really for me!” she gasped. “Oh, how much you must love Letty!”

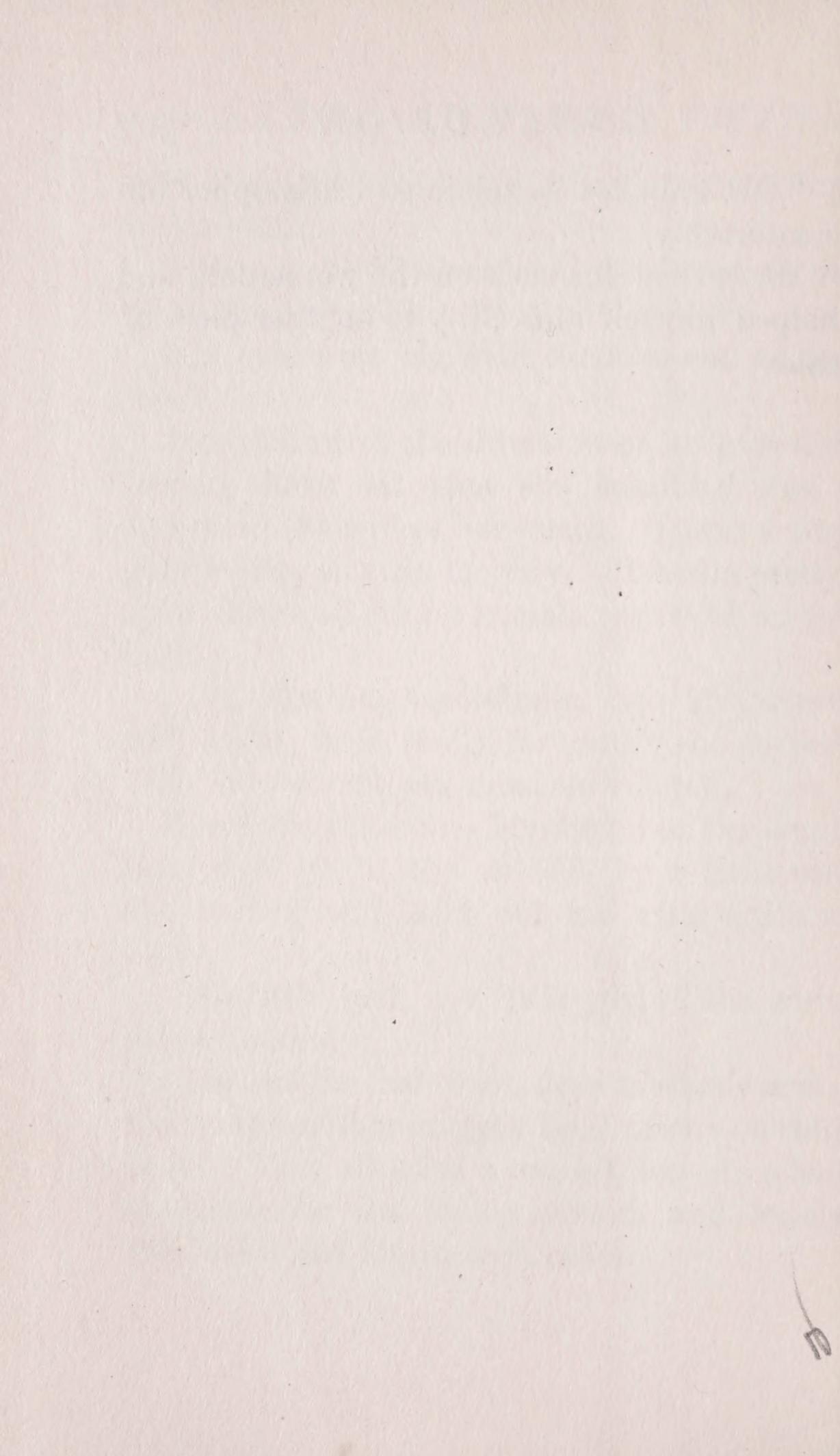
Mrs. Hartwell-Jones laughed, but the laugh was checked in the middle by a little sob. She turned and held out her arms again to Letty.

“My little girl, my little girl!” she whispered brokenly.

Jane ran to her own dear mother’s arms, and grandmother caught hold of one chubby hand. They all cried a wee bit, too—in silent sympathy for the lonely woman and lonely child who had found each other.

“Oh, shucks!” exclaimed Christopher uncomfortably.

He turned his back on the womenfolk and helped himself and Billy to another piece of cake.







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