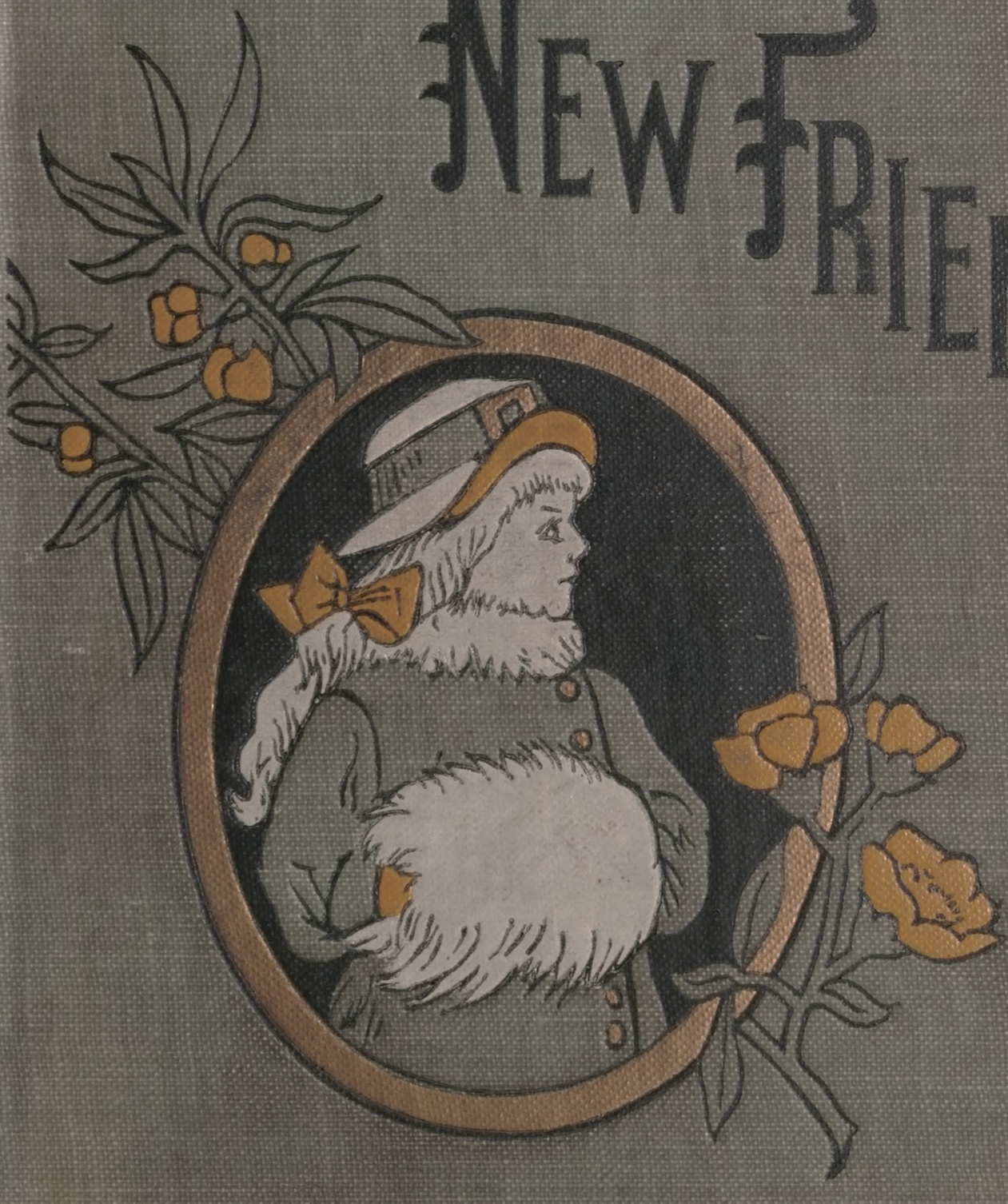
Dorothy Dainty's New Friends



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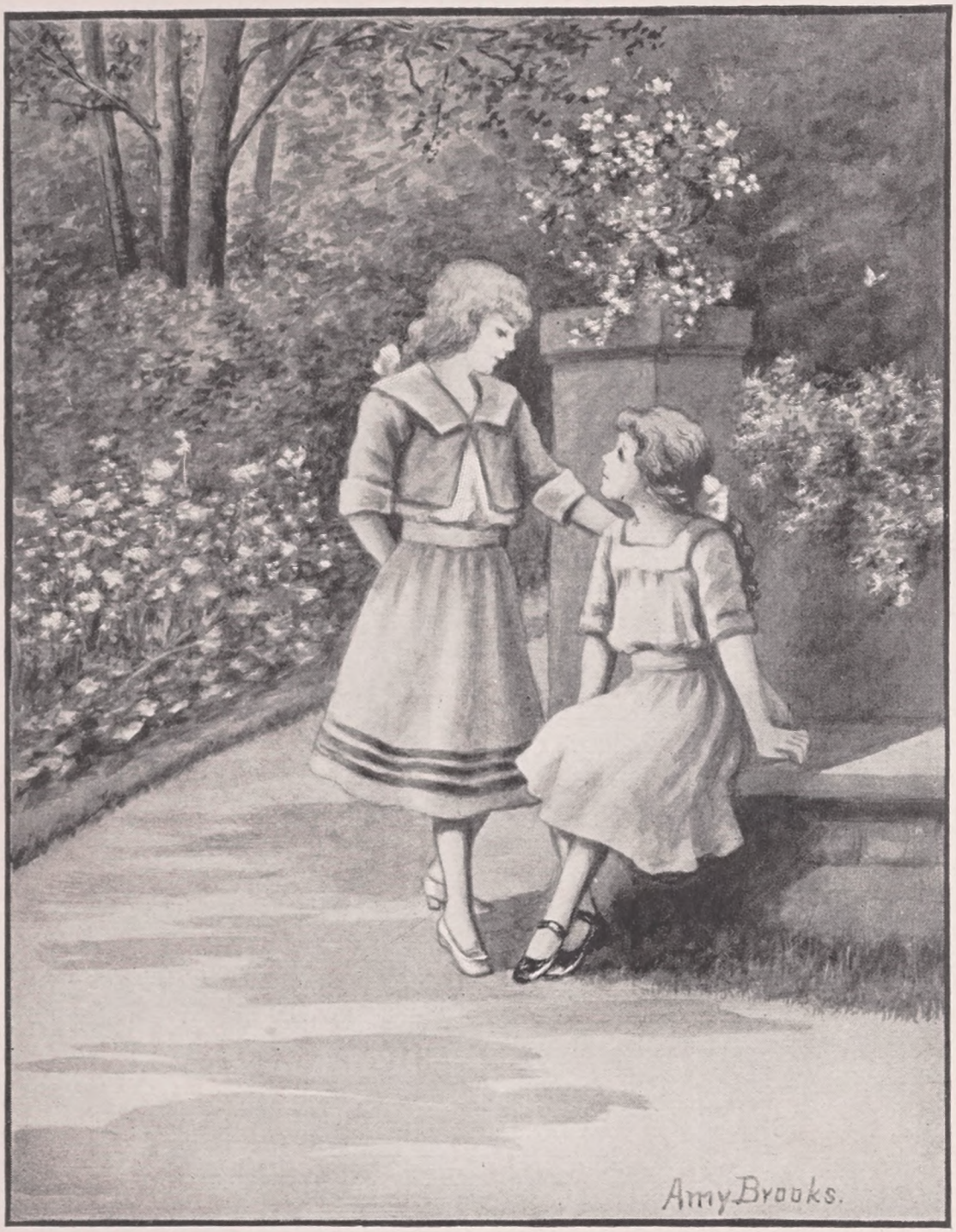

"DON'T YOU LONG FOR THE FIRST DAY?" NANCY ASKED.—*Page 2.*

DOROTHY DAINTY'S NEW FRIENDS

BY

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WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY THE AUTHOR

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DOROTHY DAINTY'S NEW FRIENDS

CHAPTER I

ARABELLA'S "NEWS"

THE great gateway with its stone posts and massive wall stood boldly out in the sunshine, and just over the wall brilliant autumn blossoms were nodding and swaying in the soft breeze.

Dorothy Dainty, and her dearest friend, Nancy Ferris, were talking of the pleasant friends that they already had, and the new faces that they would see when school opened.

Nancy sat upon a ledge at the base of the

wall, Dorothy stood looking down at her.

"Don't you long for the first day?" Nancy asked.

"No matter how many we meet at the new school, we shall love Mollie and Flossie and Reginald just the same," Dorothy said.

"Of course," agreed Nancy, "and we'll *try* to like Arabella."

"Yes, we'll *try,*" Dorothy said, in a way that plainly told that she knew that the task was not easy to accomplish.

"Arabella Correyville doesn't do the queer things that she used to do, and that may make it easier," she said.

Nancy laughed outright.

"She may do new things that will be queerer than anything she ever did before!" she said.

"Oh, she couldn't," Dorothy said firmly, as if the thought were comforting.

"Well, nothing could be much queerer than the time that she hid in the attic just to see how much of a stir it would make if the news went about Merrivale that she had disappeared!"

"Here she comes now!" Nancy said, "and she's walking just as she always does when she has something that she is just wild to tell."

It was true.

Arabella, prim, old-fashioned Arabella, was walking along at an odd, switching pace, her chin held very high, her eyes looking far ahead, as if she did not realize that two of her friends were so near.

She wished them to think that her mind was occupied with something of great importance. She hoped that they would call to her, ask her to stop, and question her. They did not, so she continued to walk until

she had barely passed them, when, as if with great surprise, she turned.

"Oh, you there?" she said. "I'm glad I saw you for I've something great to tell."

She hurried toward them, and seated herself beside Nancy, turning so that she could also see Dorothy, and know if she were surprised.

"My cousin Leander is coming to stay with us this winter, and he'll be here in time to go to school with me the first day.

"He's taller than I am, and he knows almost everything.

"They say there never was a boy as smart as he, in the town where he lives."

"How they will miss him!" cried a jolly voice, and Reginald Dean vaulted over the wall, landing squarely in front of Arabella, and staring at her with merry, laughing eyes.

"Who'll miss him?" she asked. "I'm sure I've no idea what you're laughing at, Reginald Dean."

"I don't suppose it is funny," the boy replied, "but really, Arabella, if your cousin knows almost everything, the town he comes from will miss him, won't it?"

"Well, I'm not the only one who thinks him smart," Arabella replied, "for Aunt Matilda heard Leander's father say, 'That boy will certainly be a great statesman,' and his mother is sure he'll be a college professor, at least."

"Well, school opens September first," said Reginald, "and then we'll all have a chance to show how brilliant we are."

"I'm going down-town," said Arabella, and she hurried off along the avenue.

One never knew if Arabella were offended, or whether, having told her bit of news, she

felt no further interest in those with whom she had been talking.

"Say, girls! I've a bit of news, too!" said Reginald, "and that is that Patricia Lavine wrote to one of the girls living over on the other side of Merrivale, and told her that she might come back here to school, but she rather thought she should go to Paris instead.

"Wasn't that just like Patricia? She'll be here, you see if she isn't, and she'll be busy telling us how it was that she happened not to go to Paris."

"Oh, I do wonder if we shall have to,—well,—be patient with Patricia this year?" Nancy said, "for really, it *is* hard to listen to—"

"The yarns that she tells," said Reginald, thus completing the sentence by saying what Nancy would not care to say.

"I suppose they are 'yarns,' " Nancy said, laughing.

"Perhaps she won't come," Dorothy said, as if trying to look on the cheerful side of the matter.

"She will if we don't want her to," declared Reginald, "for Patricia is contrary, and I guess she knows that we are not aching to see her."

"Don't you wonder what sort of boy Arabella's cousin will be?" Dorothy asked.

"I almost believe he'll be queer," said Nancy, "but I'm sure I ought not to say that. I haven't seen him."

"You've seen Arabella, and if he's a relative of hers, it's safe to say he'll be freakish," Reginald said.

"And he may be nice," said Dorothy, determined to say a pleasant word for the new schoolmate.

"Yes, Dorothy is right," Nancy said, "we may be glad to know him, and we'll try to like him."

Reginald had a kind heart, but he was a lively lad, full of fun, and often would tease another, while not intending to hurt, or grieve him.

As he turned toward home, he whistled a lively tune, then clearly they heard the improvised verse that he was singing:

"Le-ander, oh, Le-ander,
Down the street let us meander,
For I never saw a gander
Half so skinny as Leander."

"Reginald! Reginald!" called Dorothy. "You mustn't—I mean you oughtn't to sing that."

"And you might be mistaken, for he truly *might* be fat," cried Nancy, half laughing, yet trying to reprove.

"Oleander, oleander!
Pretty boy, you raise my dander,
Oh, no blossom could be grander
Than my darling oleander."

sang the roguish Reginald.

"If he tells those funny verses to the other boys, and they remember them, Arabella's cousin will hear them the moment he appears at school," said Nancy.

"And hear them more than once," Dorothy said, "but Reginald may forget them before school opens.

Nancy made no reply. Both knew that Reginald would be more than likely to remember the verses, and to sing them until every one else knew them, too.

CHAPTER II

THE "FIRST DAY"

MERRIVALE was a small place, possessing much natural beauty.

The park was a tract of land given for the purpose by a wealthy resident, and it had required but little time and effort to make it a beautiful spot.

The river running through the center of Merrivale was another of its charms, and on the farther side of the town stood a fine grove.

The Stone House claimed many other beautiful residences as neighbors, but on the opposite side of the town the houses were smaller, and the people who lived in them

were sturdy, industrious people who were obliged to be content with homes that were neat and comfortable, rather than elegant.

The children in that part of Merrivale had attended school in the next town, but those of the finer part of the town had had private instruction.

During the summer a fine, large schoolhouse had been built, and Mrs. Dainty had decided that it might be well for Dorothy and Nancy to try one season at the new school.

"Why not let them meet pupils of all classes, and learn what it means to come in contact with many people of as many minds?" she had said to Mr. Dainty, and he had laughed, and consented.

Molly Merton, Flossie Barnet, Reginald Dean, Katie Dean, Jack Tiverton, and indeed all the boys and girls who had always

been such good friends, and many new ones whom, already, they were curious to meet, were to attend the new school. The first day found the merry neighbors of the avenue early on the way to school.

Dorothy and Nancy hurried along, hoping to overtake Mollie and Flossie, but before they had reached Mollie's house, Arabella, accompanied by a lanky youth, joined them.

She introduced him as her cousin, Leander Correyville, and he glanced shyly at the girls, greeted them with a voice that was hardly above a whisper, and then walked beside Arabella, listening to the conversation, but saying never a word.

As they approached a vacant lot, a gayly dressed young girl passed down over the hillside.

She was not looking in the direction in which she was going, but instead turned her

head as if she were expecting some one to overtake her.

"That's Patricia Lavine!" cried Nancy, in surprise.

"I knew she was coming to school today," Arabella said. "I saw her yesterday, and she said that her folks had decided not to go to Paris. She told me why, but I've forgotten."

"Oh, never mind why," called a saucy voice, and Reginald hurried past them, laughing as he went.

Dorothy and Nancy wondered if he were laughing at Arabella's speech, or at the memory of the outrageous verses that he had sung on the day before.

Certain it was that he glanced toward Leander, and his eyes twinkled with a mischievous light.

"Oh-oo!" said Nancy, under her breath,

but much to her relief, Reginald ran on toward the corner of a street, where he joined a group of boys, and soon was talking as excitedly as they.

Patricia, hurrying as fast as her high heels would permit, now came eagerly toward them.

"Hello, everybody!" she cried, gayly. "Oh, here you are, Arabella, and your cousin, too. I looked all the way for you. You said that you'd call for me this morning. Did you oversleep?"

"I didn't, but Leander did, and I told him we'd have to rush if we were to have time to call for you, and Aunt Matilda said we had all we could do to get to school on time, without calling for any one.

"She said she had her views about—"

"Oh, botheration!" said Patricia. "Are

you going to listen to her Aunt Matilda's views, Leander?"

"I d'n' know," the boy said slowly.

"Good gracious! Why, I'm here boarding with my aunt, but I don't— My! That's the first bell! Come on!"

Every one knows what the first day in any school is like.

The forenoon was occupied with deciding in which class each pupil should be placed, and the afternoon was nearly gone before the task was completed.

There had been much more whispering than would be permitted on any other than the first day, and the boys and girls had hugely enjoyed that.

Dorothy and Nancy sat side by side.

Arabella was in front of Dorothy, and Katie Dean in front of Nancy.

Jack Tiverton sat just behind Dorothy and Reginald had the seat back of Nancy.

Two pupils proved very interesting to the others, and books were neglected. They were Patricia and Leander, side by side, in the front row.

Jack pointed to the two, then passed a slip of paper to Reginald.

"The front row is *usually* called the 'ninny row'; I guess Patricia and long-legs are well placed. What's his name?"

Reginald read the note and then laughed aloud.

The ruler rapped on the teacher's desk, caused both boys to assume an air of dignity, too intense to seem sincere.

Patricia turned around in her seat to glance at those who sat behind her.

A soft breeze came in at the open window.

It was a warm, sunny day, but Patricia

gave an exaggerated shiver. She thought it fine to appear delicate.

She raised her hand to ask if the window might be closed, but dropped it in her lap before the gesture was noticed.

It had occurred to her that the teacher might refuse to close the window, and, instead, tell her to change her seat for another that was farther from the window.

As that would take her farther from Leander, she decided to stop shivering, and remain where she was.

Not a boy of those whom she already knew liked her.

Who ever saw a boy who would be interested in a girl that talked of nothing but dress, or the very great things that her family had done, or were now doing?

The girls were wholly tired of her silly ways, while the boys made little effort to

conceal their amusement whenever she commenced to boast.

The new comer in the neighborhood, Leander Correyville, appeared to be neither pleased, nor displeased with Patricia.

The other pupils had a deal of fun watching her efforts to interest him.

Leander either did not, or *would* not see her antics.

He was rather a dull youth, and he appeared to be aware of the fact that greater things were expected of him, than he was capable of attaining. Parents, and grandparents, had, from the time of his birth, believed him to be a wonder, and Leander felt reasonably sure that they were right, but just what direction his meteoric career would take, or where he would land, was a puzzle to his slow mind.

He fully realized that he was to make a

name for himself, and dimly he dreamed that when he was a few years older it would be a simple matter to choose a profession, and at once, shoot to the top, where, without half trying, he would dazzle all beholders.

At recess, he seated himself on a ledge at the far end of the school yard, and appeared to be greatly interested in a book that he had brought from the schoolroom. The boys looked curiously at him, then resumed their game of ball. Evidently they thought him unsocial.

The girls were greatly interested in something that Flossie Barnet was telling, and they crowded around her to catch every word.

"And Uncle Harry says that at the holidays, Muriel will come for a visit," she was saying.

"And we'll coax her to tell us all about her

study with the sculptor, and the beautiful things that she is modeling," Dorothy said.

"Well, I declare!" cried Patricia. "If you want to hear about that, I'm sure I don't," and she walked away to where Leander was sitting.

The other girls looked the surprise that they felt. Patricia was always selfish, but this time, she seemed even more so than usual. Muriel Mordaunt had seemed so sweet-tempered when Dorothy and Nancy had first met her at Crestville where they were spending the summer, and so simple and unaffected when praised for the lovely figures that she had modeled in the damp sand, that both were delighted to learn that so soon they were to meet her again.

Patricia never could bear to hear another praised, so she left the group of girls who were talking of Muriel, and, crossing the

yard, seated herself on the ledge beside Leander.

The boy seemed not to have noticed her arrival, and continued reading. Patricia did everything that she could think of to attract his attention. She took her hat off and put it on again; she tied and untied the ribbon at her belt.

"Ahem! Are you reading?" she asked at last.

Leander slowly looked up from the page.

"I can't see why you asked that question," he said slowly.

"Well, I didn't know but you had gone to sleep," Patricia said pertly, at the same time crowding a bit closer to Leander, and trying to look at the book that lay upon his knees.

"Goodness!" she exclaimed, as she saw the title. "Do you understand *that?*"

"Do I understand what? Wireless?" he

asked slowly. "No, I don't, but I'm trying to. I was just beginning to get an idea when you came along."

"You're not very polite," Patricia said, rising.

Leander made no reply, but he thought that she was not polite, when she interrupted his reading.

Patricia hurried over to where Arabella was standing.

"Arabella Correyville, you told me your cousin was nice, and I think he's horrid, but I mean to know him. P'raps when I do, I'll like him."

Arabella stared at her stupidly for a moment, then she said:

"I guess you'll have to get acquainted with him now, if you really want to know him, for Aunt Matilda has her views about him, and she says he's bound to be great.

He might not want to know any of us then."

Patricia looked over her shoulder at the awkward figure bending over the big book.

"He doesn't look much like it now," she said, "but," she added hopefully, "of course you never can tell."

The second week at school, and things were running smoothly. Dorothy and Nancy, Mollie and Flossie, Patricia and Arabella, not to mention Leander, the "queer youth," were all well acquainted, and all, thus early in the term, had acquired new friends.

Of the new faces, one stood out more clearly than that of any of her mates.

It might have been her curling hair, or was it the twinkling eyes? Both, perhaps, but certain it was that there was a look in those eyes that made one glance again to

learn if the girl really meant what she said, or if she were only joking.

Her name was Therese Haughton, but "Tess" was what they called her.

All the pupils liked her, but she seemed to prefer Dorothy and Nancy, and often after school, and on Saturdays she was a guest at the Stone House. She was full of fun, a lively friend, and she seemed always willing to play whatever game was chosen.

"Does Tess Haughton invite you girls over to her house?" Patricia asked, as they were on the way to school one afternoon.

"Why,—no," Nancy said, to which Dorothy quickly added:

"Nancy meant to say she hasn't yet."

"Hasn't *yet!*" Patricia repeated, with an air of disgust.

"This is the second week of school, and if she's been to your house once, she has half a

dozen times, counting after school and Saturday. My! Here she comes now, and this is *another* time!"

Dorothy looked down the avenue, where Tess, with a smile parting her lips, was hurrying toward them, and she wished that Patricia had not spoken so unpleasantly.

Indeed, she wished that Patricia had not happened to be there, and then the odd thing occurred.

"Oh, Dorothy, I came to tell you that I want you and Nancy to come over to my house Saturday. Will you come? I so want you to," she said eagerly.

"Grandmother is to visit one of her friends that day, and she said we girls would have a fine time 'keeping house together.' "

"I know it would be great fun," Dorothy said, "and we'll surely come if Mother has no other plans for Saturday."

"I do hope you can come," Tess said, "and now I'll run along because I've an errand to do. I just stopped on my way to invite you."

Saturday came, and Dorothy found it impossible to go with Nancy, because Mrs. Dainty had engaged a dressmaker for that day, and Dorothy must remain at home to be fitted.

"O dear, I don't care to go over to Tess Haughton's house unless you go with me," Nancy said, for she felt that the invitation was mostly for Dorothy.

Aunt Charlotte, when she was appealed to, said that she thought it too bad for Tess to remain at home waiting to receive two friends, and have neither appear. She thought, as they had accepted the invitation, and Dorothy must remain at home, that

Nancy should go, and help to make the afternoon as pleasant as possible.

Nancy thought so, too, so she set off at a rapid pace, and soon was nearing the house that Tess had pointed out as the one where she lived.

She had been quite willing to go when she thought that Dorothy was to be her companion on the way, but the walk alone had been tedious, and she had realized that half the fun had been in having Dorothy with her. The afternoon alone with Tess was not so tempting.

She liked Tess, but if the three were not to have the fun together, then she would have preferred spending the afternoon at home with Dorothy. She never tired of Dorothy.

Would the afternoon with Tess seem long?

As she neared the house, the door opened,

and Tess ran down the walk to meet her.

"Oh, I'm glad you've come!" she said; then, "Where is Dorothy?"

"She couldn't come," Nancy replied, and told the reason.

It was evident that Tess was greatly disappointed.

She was pleasant, surely, and she said that she was glad that Nancy had come, but she seemed quiet, and Nancy heartily wished that Aunt Charlotte had let her remain at home.

The truth of the matter was that while Tess Haughton liked Dorothy and Nancy equally well, it was Dorothy, whose friendship she sought.

Jack Tiverton had called her "foxy," and Dorothy and Nancy had wondered why he had said it.

"I asked Grandmother if we might make

fudge, and she said we might, so let's begin the afternoon with that," Tess said, but she said it as if she were little interested in the task.

"I don't know how to make it," Nancy said, "but I'll help you make it, if you'll tell me how."

Tess looked at her curiously, then going to the closet, put the material for fudge on a tray, and brought it out to the table.

Nancy wished that she could think of some way in which she could politely tell Tess not to bother with fudge.

She felt, for some reason that she could not explain, that Tess had thought that candy-making for three would be great fun, but that she saw no pleasure in making it for two.

"If I tell her not to do it, she will be offended," Nancy thought, "and yet I feel that

she is just doing it because she thinks she must."

Together they worked, Nancy doing as Tess directed, and heartily wishing that she was at home. It was not that Tess was not pleasant, for that was not true, but she talked little, and Nancy knew that it was natural for her to be lively.

When the fudge was done, and set away to cool, they went to the sitting-room, and Tess took some large volumes from the bookcase, and placing them upon the table, suggested that they look at the pictures.

Nancy agreed, and they seated themselves, commencing at once to turn the pages.

Soon Nancy realized that Tess was leaning back in her chair, as if she had grown tired of the books.

"You look at them, if you want to," she said, "I've seen them all."

It was the manner rather than the words that was rude.

Nancy turned a few pages, glancing at the pictures while she tried to think of an excuse for going back to the Stone House and Dorothy.

It was far from pleasant to remain with Tess while she was in her present mood.

Something that Jack Tiverton had said recurred to Nancy.

"Tess is fond of those who are likely to give her an invitation," he had said.

What did he mean?

Nancy looked up from the book that lay before her on the table, and saw that Tess was leaning upon the window-seat, and looking out, as if wholly unaware that she had a guest. She turned a few pages, glanced at the pictures, and then said that she must go.

As she walked along the avenue, she tried

to think just what it was that had made the afternoon not only dull, but really unpleasant.

"Perhaps Jack Tiverton was right," she said.

"It's true that she plays with both Dorothy and me, but—it is Dorothy who has the parties at the Stone House.

"If that is it, then she really invited Dorothy, and *let* me come, too, if I wished."

Aunt Charlotte tried to comfort her, but Nancy felt sure that she knew the reason for Tess Haughton's indifference.

CHAPTER III

CHEATING

WHEN Monday came, Tess divided her attention between Patricia and Arabella, with a few odd moments for shy Leander.

One might have thought that she had forgotten that she ever had known Dorothy Dainty or Nancy Ferris.

She hardly believed that the excuse for Dorothy's non-appearance on Saturday afternoon was true. She thought that Dorothy might have come with Nancy had she wished to. Tess preferred not to show that she was vexed, however, and with Patricia and Arabella, she was the gayest of the gay.

The boys and girls were greatly excited over the examinations, now but a week distant.

Huge statements as to the amount of study required to "pass," were freely circulated, and "Shorty" Marston (no one seemed to know his proper given name) remarked that he expected to have to wear a bandage around his head to keep it from getting "cracked" with overwork, whereupon Jack Tiverton coolly remarked that he had never seen his head in any other condition.

Shorty took the remark good-naturedly, saying that he would enough rather have his head "cracked," than "soft."

"Whose head is soft?" Jack asked sharply.

"Oh, I'm too polite to make personal remarks," Shorty said, and dodged to make his escape, laughing as he ran.

"I don't see how Tess Haughton can expect to stand well in the class when she won't study," Molly Merton said, "but she told me this morning that she meant to get ninety at least this month."

"Ninety!" cried Reginald. "Well, I'd like to see her get ninety per cent. on her examination-papers when she's never prepared with her lessons."

"Maybe she can think of right answers to questions better when she has time to write them than when she's asked to answer at once," said Flossie Barnet.

Dear little girl! It was always Flossie who searched for an excuse for any one who was criticised.

"And maybe she can think of smart answers even quicker if she peeps over some one's shoulder, and copies what he is writing," said Jack Tiverton.

"Oh, Jack!" Dorothy said, and the tone of her sweet voice held reproof.

"Well, I don't care," Jack said, but his flushed cheeks told that he did. Indeed, he cared a *great deal* for Dorothy's approval.

"See what she did Wednesday!" he went on to say. "I guess every one who sat near her could see that. She copied every one of her problems from Dorothy's paper, and then when Teacher asked how many had solved all of them, up went her hand, as big as life.

"She had them all nicely copied on her paper, but she hadn't solved one of them! What's that but cheating, I'd like to know? She's not fair, and she's not truthful. Why, girls, you look at me as if I'd said something fearful, but my father thinks a cheat or a liar is a fearful thing, and he always says: 'Jack, my son, get all that you can get hon-

estly, but let the rest go, and tell the truth, boy. Bravely tell the truth,' and I'm going to."

"You're a trump!" cried Reginald, "and some day I'll vote for you for mayor of Merrivale!"

"I'll have to know a lot more than I do now to fill the place," Jack said, with a laugh, "but if I'm ever in a place like that, I'll be 'fair and square,' and any fellow that works for me will have to be the same."

"Three cheers for Mayor Tiverton!" shouted Reginald, "and say! Put me in some place where I can spend money for lovely parks, and a big fountain in the square, will you? I'll vote for you, you know."

"Here, here! This sounds like politics, and graft."

It was Mr. Tiverton, his eyes twinkling.

"Oh, we'll be honest when the time comes, only just now we got excited 'bout being 'lected," Reginald explained.

"And it's quite a while before we'll be voting," said Jack.

"And Jack would make such a *dear* mayor," cried Flossie, "and Reginald knows just how to spend money and get the *most* for it. I've seen him do it at the fair."

"Dear little loyal friend," Mr. Tiverton said, laying his hand on Flossie's bright hair. "I advise you two young men, when you are old enough to run for office, to engage Miss Flossie as a campaign-worker to secure votes for you."

"We will, for Flossie is a regular *brick,* Father," Jack said. "She always does just as she promises. If she said she'd win people to vote for us, she'd do it if she had to walk, and talk for a month."

"Well, of course I would," said Flossie. "Wouldn't any girl who was any sort of friend?"

"Oh, yes, yes!" cried Dorothy, and Nancy, as if with one voice.

Again and again after Mr. Tiverton had left them, the thought of their eager friendship for each other, and the clear, honest light in their eyes, of Flossie's earnestness, came back to him, and once he said softly to himself: "May they always remain as loyal and true."

When school opened on the following Monday, Dorothy and Nancy, Jack, Reginald, Katie, and Flossie were, for the first time, too closely occupied to notice what was going on about them.

Reginald was the first to see that something was "happening." He promptly touched Jack's shoulder.

Jack looked up, laughed softly, and attracted Dorothy's attention.

Nancy heard Jack's whispered words: "Look! Just *look* at them!"

By this time all were looking, including the instructor.

She saw, as they did, that Tess was copying directly from Leander's paper, while Patricia, who sat on the other side of Leander, was doing the same.

Judging from appearances, Arabella was copying from no one's paper, but she was obtaining help, however, from a printed key which lay upon her lap just under the desk.

From time to time she glanced at it, then resumed writing.

Miss Holton stood for a moment watching, then she said:

"Therese Haughton, Patricia Lavine,

Arabella Correyville! I will see you after school, and in the meantime, please attend strictly to your own papers."

"I'm not copying from any one's paper," said Arabella.

"Possibly not," Miss Holton said, "but you might lay aside the book that you are reading from."

"I don't see how I can stay after school," Arabella said, adding: "My Aunt Matilda said I must come home—"

"Your Aunt Matilda isn't conducting this school, so you must remain with the others."

Arabella looked as if she thought she was being unfairly treated, Patricia was angry, Therese tried to look innocent, and failed. The three looked at the pupils who were dismissed at four o'clock, and each viewed her detention from a different angle.

Arabella's mind was occupied with plan-

ning an explanation of her late return home; Therese was wondering if there was anything that she could do that would make Miss Holton very sorry that she had accused her of "cheating," while Patricia was rebellious at having been detected.

When Miss Holton closed the door, she returned to her desk, and then, very gently she spoke to the three girls before her.

She called their attention to the fact that that which they had copied from another's work, represented *borrowed goods.* That no knowledge had been gained by the act, that the act was dishonest, and that attempting to do it slyly, was practicing deceit.

It was a kindly little talk, and one would have thought that the girls would have felt abashed, and that each would have determined to work so diligently during the next month, that she might be able to pass the

next examination with knowledge that she had made her own.

That was not the case, however.

Therese listened intently to all that Miss Holton said, but if the words impressed her, the expression on her pretty face did not show it.

Arabella glared through her spectacles at her desk-top, and one might have thought that she was trying to decide what sort of varnish had been used upon it.

Patricia watched the clock.

Apparently her only thought was as to how long Miss Holton would talk.

And when at last, after what seemed to be a very long half-hour, the three walked out of the school-yard together, it was Patricia who first spoke.

"I thought she'd *never* stop talking!" she said, crossly.

"I wonder if we'll have to stay after school every time she sees fit to keep us?" Therese said, in much the same tone.

"I don't know what Aunt Matilda will say about it," chimed in Arabella. "She always says, 'You must come right home from school, Arabella,' and how *can* I, I'd like to know, when Miss Holton keeps us forever? Aunt Matilda says she has her views about—"

"Oh, *bother* her views!" cried Patricia, her eyes flashing.

"Well, I *can't!*" declared Arabella. "It's her 'views' that bother *me.*"

Patricia looked at her for a moment, then burst into peals of laughter.

"You certainly are the most old-fashioned thing I ever saw!" she said, as soon as she could speak.

A lanky youth came sauntering along just

at this point, and Patricia turned her attention toward him. He was looking down as if watching his awkward feet, and whistling a tune so slowly that one might have thought that he was going to sleep. He was not at all fond of girls, and was about to pass the group, but Patricia stopped him.

"Oh, Leander!" she cried. "Aren't you sorry we had to stay after school?" She was trying to look very winning.

"Do 'no'," he said dully, then: "What'd she keep you for?"

"Oh, Leander!" Patricia said, and from behind a clum of shrubbery came a teasing voice, singing:

> "Oh, Leander! Oh, Leander!
> Down the street let us meander.
> Oh, I never saw a gander
> Half so skinny as Leander."

"Say, quit that!"

Leander was anything but sleepy now!

"Can't a fellow sing?" replied a teasing voice.

"You can't sing *that!* I'll tell you why. Because I've heard enough of it!"

There was no reply to this. Evidently Reginald realized that Leander had sufficient snap to resent teasing, and also that he was much the bigger boy of the two.

For a moment he stood listening, his eyes upon the big bushes from behind which the teasing voice had sung, then he turned to resume his walk. He was annoyed by the tormenting song of Reginald, and so was in no mood for talking.

Imagine his disgust when Patricia came tripping along beside him, peeping up into his face, and chattering so fast that his slow mind could not grasp what she said.

Therese and Arabella looked after the two.

"Well, if she isn't queer to go off like that!" cried Therese.

"Aunt Matilda says—"

"I know what I'll do," Therese interrupted. "I'll go home with you for a little while. I'm just wild to see your Aunt Matilda you talk so much about!"

Arabella knew that Aunt Matilda would not be at all pleased to see Therese, or indeed any one of the schoolmates at that hour. They had remained at school until half-past four, and so long had they talked after leaving the schoolroom that it must be after five.

"You might come over Saturday," Arabella ventured.

"*Saturday?*" cried Therese. "I didn't say anything about Saturday, besides, I've something else for that day. No, I'll come over now, for a while, of course I mean if you'd like to have me?"

"Oh, Therese, you know I'd like you to come," Arabella said quickly.

"Then I'll come now," said Therese. "Come on!"

Arabella was in an uncomfortable position. She liked Therese Haughton, and wished to hold her friendship, so she felt that she must trust to luck that Aunt Matilda would be in an agreeable mood when they arrived. She feared if Therese were not permitted to come when she chose, she might be vexed, and refuse to come at all.

On the other hand, if Aunt Matilda should happen to be in one of her—well, unpleasant moods, Therese might very reasonably refuse to venture inside the Correyville house again.

It happened that Aunt Matilda had had an unusually busy day, the maid who assisted her, had done everything wrong, the

fruit-dealer had left the wrong parcel at the house, and the grocer had forgotten to call at all. She had told Arabella that a few tasks would be left for her to do after school, and Arabella had forgotten all about them.

As Therese, with Arabella, was entering the gateway, they barely missed colliding with the belated grocer's boy.

Aunt Matilda stood on the porch, berating him, when she espied the two girls coming in at the driveway gate.

"Good gracious, Arabella! Where have you been since school was out at four? Who's that girl? I'll have to remind you, Arabella, that it's not worth while for you to bring your schoolmates home with you on a day when you know that there are tasks left for you to do. You bring them thinking I'll excuse you from doing things be-

cause you've company, but that won't work."

"Good-by, Arabella. I guess you won't have time to play before dark, so I'll run along," cried Therese.

"I don't want to be rude, sissy, but Arabella—"

Therese ran around the bend of the road, and Aunt Matilda stared for a moment at the place where the clump of trees hid her receding figure, then, taking Arabella by the arm, she turned toward the house.

Wrath filled Arabella's heart.

Therese had gone away vexed, and no wonder! Why *did* Aunt Matilda speak so bluntly?

Meanwhile Therese hurried on toward the other side of Merrivale, feeling more and more annoyed with every step.

As she neared home, the frown left her face, chased away by a new thought.

Why should she care because Arabella's aunt had been blunt?

She would not think about it. She would try once more to become intimate with Dorothy Dainty, oh, and of course Nancy, because Nancy was always with Dorothy, but the Stone House was Dorothy's home, and it was Mrs. Dainty, surely, who gave the delightful parties. Oh, really, the wisest thing to do, was to win Dorothy for an intimate friend.

A pretty girl, and a pleasant-appearing girl, Therese Haughton might have been charming, had she been sincere.

As it was, she seemed to value the friendship of this girl, or that, only for any pleasure that that friendship might bring.

As she trudged along, she wondered what excuse she might invent for going over to the Stone House some other day, after school.

She had heard some one say that a surprise-party was to be given one of the girls whom Dorothy valued as a friend.

Therese wondered if she could obtain an invitation. She surely wished to be one of the guests. Yes, indeed, she *must* enjoy that party!

The next afternoon Dorothy drove Romeo down to the Center.

School had closed an hour earlier because of a meeting that the teachers were to attend, and Dorothy having written a long-delayed reply to a letter to Vera Vane, decided to take it to the post-office, instead of dropping it into a letter-box.

Therese was leaving a store just as Dorothy entered the post-office.

The pretty phaeton attracted the attention of the designing girl. "The very thing!" she whispered.

She sauntered along, and then quickened her steps when Dorothy appeared.

"Oh, are you going home now?" she asked.

"Why, yes," Dorothy said, "but I'll drive around to your house with you, if you like."

"You're nice to say that," Therese replied, "but there's no need of doing that, because I was going over to your house, so I can ride with you now, and go home later."

"Then get right in," Dorothy said, and soon Romeo was taking them swiftly over the road.

Long before they reached the Stone House, Therese had been assured that she should be included in the list of guests for the surprise-party, and her delight was boundless.

CHAPTER IV

A GENUINE SURPRISE

MOLLIE MERTON was always delighted with an unexpected pleasure, and she often said that the joy of anything was *doubled* if it were a surprise.

When her friends decided to give her a surprise-party, they knew that she would be greatly pleased. Flossie Barnet at once told her Uncle Harry, because he was sure to think of something novel that would help to make it a success, and he agreed to meet the boys and girls after school, and help plan the event.

"But what shall we do with Mollie?" he asked, his eyes twinkling.

"She would surely feel hurt if we were unwilling to have her with us, while we were planning a good time, yet this event is intended for a surprise for her. We can't talk it over unless she is somewhere else."

When the afternoon arrived, matters had arranged themselves, for Mrs. Merton called for Mollie after school, and the two drove off, Mollie looking back to call to her friends:

"See you to-morrow."

For an hour after, the schemers talked, and planned.

Uncle Harry offered some fine suggestions, and when they parted, the boys and girls were sure that the party would be a success.

Next day Mrs. Merton was taken into the secret, and she promised to keep Mollie at home, and away from the windows until the

"fanfare of the trumpet" should sound at the door.

Saturday was the chosen day, and it seemed to the eager boys and girls, as if Saturday would never come, but it did.

At half-past one, Dorothy, on Romeo, waited for the guests to arrive. She wondered why they were not yet in sight.

Five, ten, fifteen minutes went by, and then the sound of merry voices told that the playmates were on the way.

Soon they rushed in at the driveway, and then they crowded around Romeo and his rider, all talking at once in an effort to describe the fine surprises that were to be "sprung" for Mollie. Uncle Harry now joined them.

"I think we will start now," he said, and all agreed.

Jack Tiverton handed Dorothy a trumpet

DOROTHY, ON ROMEO, WAITED FOR THE GUESTS TO ARRIVE.—*Page 56.*

and she rode along the avenue, followed by a troop of laughing girls and boys.

Mrs. Merton, at half-past one, had asked Mollie to try on a new dress that she had already seen.

"Why, I truly thought you decided that that one pleased you," Mollie said.

"I believe I did say so; however, I'd like to look it over again."

Mollie slipped into the new dress, and Mrs. Merton made a pretense of looking very closely at its trimmings, then to use a bit more time she said:

"You never would wear those shoes with it, Mollie. Go and get your bronze shoes, and let me see how they will look with it."

Mollie soon returned with the bronze shoes, but Mrs. Merton, glancing at the clock, saw that a little more time must be used.

"I believe, after all, I'd like the light-colored shoes with that dress, Mollie," she said, "take out the ivory-colored pair, and put them on. I am sure I prefer them."

Mollie wondered why. Her mother was usually willing that she should choose for herself the shoes that she wished to wear.

She sat down and put them on. Then she walked over to look in the mirror, but before she reached it, a long sweet note from a trumpet, followed by tinkling bells and noisy clappers, made her turn toward the window.

"Why—ee!" she cried. "There's Dorothy on Romeo, and all the boys and girls, and Uncle Harry, and—oh, now I know why you made me try on this dress!" she cried, a new light coming into her eyes.

"You *knew* they were coming and you wanted me to look nice. Oh, of all things!

It's the *dearest* thing! It's a surprise-party for me."

She flew down the stairs to greet them, where another surprise awaited her.

She ran out into the porch, "Oh, I'm so glad you've come!" she cried.

"Oh, surely," Uncle Harry said with mock gravity, "but you don't have to welcome *us,* because,—we have come to welcome *you* to your own party, Miss Mollie."

"Oh, how funny!" cried Mollie, laughing as they entered and took possession of the parlor.

"It's a shame that Romeo had to be left out," she said.

"Oh, he has an especial invitation to spend the afternoon with the groom," said Uncle Harry, "and I believe he is to have, as an extra treat, a handful of sugar cubes, so he'll not miss us at all.

"And now, Miss Mollie, we are each burdened with a parcel addressed to you, so here on this table that seems just the right size, we'll place our offerings. You see no one cared to arrive empty-handed."

Gayly they placed their gifts upon the table, and Mollie's eyes were bright with pleasure, although her voice shook just a bit as she said:

"Oh, how dear you are, every one of you. Just *see* the lovely things!"

There were boxes of bonbons, a lovely fan, a bottle of rare perfume, some books, a pair of pretty slippers, a pair of dainty gloves, a lace handkerchief.

"Oh, how dear, how *dear!*" Mollie said again, "and I thank you all for such lovely remembrances."

Meanwhile Uncle Harry was having a great time, searching in first one pocket, and

then another. Assuming an air of great annoyance he looked from one to the other.

"I certainly thought I had a gift for Mollie," he said, vainly trying to look greatly puzzled.

"Oh, Uncle Harry, you *know* you have, so you needn't pretend you haven't. You showed it to me, and it's in your coat-pocket now, for I saw you put it there just before we started," Flossie said, laughing as she tried to extract from his pocket, the pretty case that she had seen him place there.

"Who'd ever believe that Flossie would give me away like that?" he asked, then, "Well, I declare, I've found it myself!" he said, drawing it forth with a fine air of surprise.

"Miss Mollie, come at once to me and let me see if my gift fits," he said.

As he spoke he opened a small blue velvet

case, and there on its satin lining lay a little gold bangle.

"Oh, how lovely!" cried Mollie.

The boys and girls crowded around her, when Uncle Harry clasped it upon her wrist, and all admired the pretty gift.

"I can't begin to tell you how pleased I am with my new bangle," Mollie said.

"If I often see you wearing it, I shall know," Uncle Harry replied.

"Your party is a surprise, and your gifts are surprises," said Flossie Barnet, "and I shouldn't wonder if there were some *other* surprises, too."

"Here comes one now," cried Jack Tiverton, with a laugh.

They looked toward the door.

Sure enough, a surprise was coming, or rather, had arrived, for at that moment Patricia Lavine entered.

"Well, I'm here," she announced, "and I know you must have intended to invite me, for Dorothy's mother always asks me to the parties at the Stone House, so of course I could come here."

How bold she was!

Flossie, the youngest of the party, tried to ease the awkward situation.

"You said you were to be away on a visit for a few days," she said.

"Well, I changed my mind," Patricia replied, "and what makes you all stare so? What were you playing when I came in? You needn't have stopped for me."

She really believed that her arrival was of so great importance, although she had come uninvited, that the guests had paused in the midst of a lively game to look at her bold little self.

"We'd not commenced to play any games

yet," Dorothy said, "for each of us brought a gift for Mollie, and we were watching her surprise when she opened the numerous packages."

"H'm!" said Patricia. "Well, I can give her something as well as any of you."

She unclasped a huge pin from the front of her waist, and offered it to Mollie.

"You can have that, if you want it," she said, coarsely.

Mollie's cheeks flushed.

"You'd better keep it," she said, not attempting to take it.

"All right," Patricia said, hastily replacing the pin. "I *did* hate to give it up. My aunt in N'York gave it to me, and it cost ever so much."

Patricia had surely shown her lack of good-breeding, and the others of the party were disgusted.

They felt ill at ease, and heartily wished that she had remained away.

Jack Tiverton and Reginald were not at all disconcerted.

At the end of the parlor they stood laughing and talking in an undertone, and Dorothy whispered to Nancy:

"I do hope that Reginald and Jack aren't planning some outrageous joke on Patricia."

That happened to be exactly what they were doing.

Neither of the boys would for a moment think of doing anything to mar the pleasure of the party.

There would be plenty of time to joke Patricia, and they would watch for the chance.

When all had admired Mollie's gifts, and Patricia had, for the time, decided to be more agreeable, there was a momentary lull in the conversation.

That was what Arabella had been waiting for.

"Why don't you dance?" she suddenly asked, at the same time looking from one face to the other to learn the effect of her question.

It was not that she wished to dance. Aunt Matilda had never permitted that. Aunt Matilda had her "views" about most things, and dancing she sternly disapproved.

It was for the sake of suggesting a change, and also because she believed that there were no musicians present, that made Arabella ask the question.

"That's a fine idea, Arabella," said Uncle Harry. "I second the motion, for I am sure I heard something like the tweaking of strings, just a moment ago."

"Well, *I* didn't!" declared Arabella.

"It may be that you hear them now," Un-

cle Harry said, for at that moment a jolly one-step rang out merrily from the hall.

Arabella gasped with astonishment, but the others laughed gayly, and Mollie was as much surprised as any of the guests.

The fine phonograph was another gift, that, delayed in arriving, was just in place in the hall when Arabella had fretfully said:

"Why don't you dance?"

Lightly they skipped to the lively music, their eyes bright, their cheeks glowing. Some one changed the disc for one on which was a dreamy waltz. After that a fox-trot made things gay, and Arabella began to think that suggesting dancing made it rather dull for herself.

"I wonder why I set them dancing?" she said softly, but Patricia, who now stood beside her, had heard.

"I can't think why, unless you wanted to

see Jack Tiverton dance every minute with Dorothy Dainty!" she said.

"Pooh! Who cares who he dances with?" Arabella said, to which Patricia replied: "Why, Arabella! *You* do."

There's no knowing what Arabella might have said, but just at that moment Mrs. Merton asked them to come to the dining-room, suggesting that each boy escort a girl friend out to enjoy the spread. Of course Jack invited Dorothy, Reginald chose Flossie, Uncle Harry asked Mollie to be his companion at the "feast," making them all laugh by calling her "Miss Merton."

How they enjoyed the good things! How they laughed and joked as the feast progressed!

"What fun it is to have a party that was all planned before I dreamed I was to have it!" said Mollie.

"Talk about dreaming," said Jack Tiverton. "Why, Mollie, we were *here* before you knew it!"

"I know it," cried Mollie, "and when I heard the trumpet, I thought a circus had come to Merrivale, and was parading along the avenue."

"If you'd seen Reginald vaulting the walls to get here, you'd have thought something was chasing him!" Jack said, in a bantering tone.

"I wanted to be on time and see Mollie's look of surprise," Reginald said, "and I knew I'd have to run to do that. I meant to know if Patricia was present, or if she had really gone off on that trip she had been telling every one about, and I was bound to know if Jack Tiverton would let any one but himself have a chance to talk or dance with Dorothy, and—"

"Here, here!" cried Jack, "that's enough for now."

"Oh, is it?" Reginald said, with a chuckle. "There's quite a bit more that I thought of saying."

"Well, you needn't!" Jack said shortly.

"I wish you'd let him say all he wants to," drawled Arabella.

"'*All* he wants to,' might keep us here listening for *weeks*," cried Jack.

Some one found a disc with a bewitching waltz, and soon they were swaying to its graceful measure, and Arabella, as she watched the dancers, wondered if she could think of any new method of coaxing that would force Aunt Matilda to relent, and permit her to learn to dance.

"Father would let me, if only she would stop objecting. I wonder if she ever danced?" she thought.

No, the idea was absurd. Aunt Matilda! Why, almost any one in Merrivale looked more probable, or possible, for a dancer.

Small, thin, and stern-faced, one might know at a glance that she would never have done anything so flighty.

Patricia, determined to dance with Jack Tiverton, had roughly caught hold of his sleeve, and begun to dance with him, or perhaps dance *around* him would be more truthful, before he had actually realized what she was about. The waltz finished, Patricia dropped on a chair beside Arabella, and began to wield her fan.

"You ought to be thankful, Arabella," she said, "that you don't dance, because no one can coax you for a waltz, or a one-step when you're really too tired to dance."

"Why, Patricia!" cried Arabella, "you snatched at Jack just now, and *made* him

dance with you, just as he was going to ask Dorothy to waltz with him. He was almost beside her when you just *pulled* him toward you, and commenced to hop and jump around him."

Patricia's eyes were blazing, and there's no knowing what she might have said, but before she could say a word, Uncle Harry reminded the guests that it was time to be forming for the march home. The afternoon had sped more swiftly than they had realized, and they said "Good-by."

Mollie's grateful words rewarded them for having planned the surprise-party for her.

Mollie had been delighted. Dorothy, Nancy, Flossie and Jack, Reginald and Katie Dean all declared the party a success.

Uncle Harry said that he had enjoyed it, and as she rode along, Dorothy blew soft

little notes on the bugle, as she listened to the happy chatter of her friends. At last she spoke, when the others paused.

"I wonder what Patricia and Arabella were talking about," she said. "Whenever Patricia wasn't dancing, they talked, and talked."

"You never can guess what those two are planning to do," Reginald said, to which Jack gave hearty assent.

"Therese Haughton is with them most of the time now," he added, "and I know she's pleasanter than the other two, but I can't help thinking when I see those three together of the old saying: 'Birds of a feather, flock together.'"

"Here, here! No gossip!" cried Uncle Harry, shaking a finger, although his eyes were dancing.

"Why, it isn't 'gossip' to tell what every one knows, is it, Uncle Harry?" Flossie asked.

"They *are* together," she added, "but I think Therese seems pleasant. Why didn't she come?"

It was then, for the first time that they realized that Therese had not been invited! They had intended asking her to be present, but each had left it for another to do, and so no one had done it, and Therese wondered why.

The next day after school Patricia noticing that she was rather quiet, asked her why she was not at the party, and Therese told her that she had not been invited.

"Pooh!" cried Patricia, "neither was I, but I went!"

"You must like to go where you are not invited!" Therese replied.

"Well, I'd rather than stay at home," Patricia coolly declared, which was at least frank, and it was the truth.

Patricia would use any means to be present at a party.

CHAPTER V

A STOLEN HOLIDAY

"A LETTER from Muriel, and one from Vera!" cried Dorothy, one day as she recognized the handwriting upon the envelopes. Let's sit here in the window and read them together."

Nancy shared the low cushioned seat with her, saying as she took her place: "Read them aloud, Dorothy."

"I'll drop them into my lap, and the one that is address-side up, I'll read first."

"Vera's came right side up," said Nancy, "so read that one first. It is always great fun to have a letter from Vera."

"That is because Vera herself is full of fun, and the fun gets into her letters."

"DEAR DOROTHY, AND NANCY:

"I've waited to write to you, because I wanted to have you say when you received my letter, 'What a jolly letter Vera writes!'

"Nothing seemed to be happening, and twice I commenced a letter to you, and my brother Rob said, 'It reads like the dull diary of the day's doings.'

"I thought so, too, although I told him he needn't have said so. He had been teasing me all the week, and to even things up, he went out and bought a new collar for my poodle.

"Well, things enough have happened now, so that I must commence to write about them, before I forget them.

"First of all, the poodle objected to his new collar, and twisted himself almost in two, trying to back out of it. Then he tried to scratch it off, and after that he tried to roll it off on the grass. He's used to it now, and doesn't seem to mind it.

"Rob took first prize in Latin this month, and Father says that he hopes he will *continue* to do good work.

"Rob played all last season, and so, of course did not hold as good a place in his class as he was able to.

"Now that he has taken one prize, Father will expect him to keep taking them, and Rob is working 'like a beaver,' he says.

"He laughs and says, 'Why did I take that prize? It has actually compelled me to work all the year to keep up the pace.' Let me tell you, Dorothy, I'm almost sure that something I said to Rob set him going!

"Rob thinks you're something wonderful, and he blushes when I tell him so, but he doesn't deny it, so when I heard Father say, 'I wish Rob was more studious. I'd like to have him stand higher in his class,' I thought of the finest way to make Rob work. I'd ask you to guess what I said, but you couldn't, so I'll have to tell you.

"I said, 'Do you remember hearing Dorothy Dainty talking about Jack Tiverton?'

" 'M-m,' he said, and pretended to be interested in the book that he was reading.

"After a while he looked up.

" 'Well, go on, Vera. What about him?' he said.

" 'Oh, nothing special,' I said, 'only I was thinking how much she said about the high average he got on his examination papers at

school. She is fond of study, so it's only natural that she should think well of a boy who never gets *less* than ninety for an average each month. She told me Jack usually'—but I didn't get any farther, because he interrupted me.

"'Never mind about that Merrivale chap,' he said. 'Ninety isn't such a great thing, and I'll prove it for I'll get higher than that. See if I don't.'

"My cousin Lola is away at school this season, and tells me, in her letters all about the fun she's having. I wish I could go to a fine school for girls, 'specially if it was away from the city. I have nice times here at home in New York, but I think it would be great fun to be with a crowd, just a jolly crowd of nice girls, because I'd feel so smart and independent, doing just as I thought best, and never having to ask any one if I could. I told Rob that, and he said: 'Why, Vera, you do about as you like now, and you'd be homesick before you'd been away a week.'

"I wouldn't. I just know I wouldn't, and I'll coax and coax to go off to school next season. Dick is shouting to me to come downstairs, and go for a ride. Wilbert Gaines is with him, so I guess I'll go.

"Rob said that Wilbert and I are the greatest talkers he ever knew, and that he didn't believe that I could get a chance to say a single word if Wilbert got started first.

"We'll see. I'll run off with the boys now, and I'll write again soon, because I've ever so much more to tell you.

"Lovingly,

"VERA."

Dorothy and Nancy laughed.

"Isn't that letter just like Vera?" said Nancy.

"So much like her that we can almost see her flying down over the stairs."

Muriel's letter was like her little self. In her quiet way she told them of her school and her work at the great studio, where under her master's guidance, she was studying modeling. She closed, sending her love to them both, and coaxing for an early answer to her letter.

"I wish Vera and Muriel could come here for a little visit this winter," Dorothy said. "I mean to ask Mamma if they may come at the Holidays."

Mrs. Dainty happening in at that moment, readily gave her consent, and Dorothy flew to her desk, and soon was writing the invitation, sending it thus early that it might reach her friends before they had made other plans for the Holidays.

There was great excitement the following week at school.

Articles were missing, and it was evident that some one had been through the school-rooms after school hours.

The master, Mr. Wardwell, had been so stern, and so strict that he was disliked by nearly all the pupils.

After closely questioning both pupils and

teachers, he announced that all the assistant teachers must, for a time, leave their keys with him, during which time, he would try to clear the mystery.

One afternoon, Patricia strolling along the avenue after school, saw Mr. Wardwell just ahead of her. He was nearing the entrance to the park, his head erect, his bearing more stern than ever.

"Now, where is he going?" she thought. "His home is 'way over on the other side of Merrivale.

"I'll follow him," she whispered.

"He said this afternoon that he thought he *knew* who had been getting into the schoolhouse, and that when he was *sure,* he should call upon the pupils' parents. My! I wouldn't wonder if he's up to that *now!* I truly must see where he's going!"

Mr. Wardwell was so deeply thinking that

he did not look up when a party of laborers approached.

The path was narrow, and one of the men, regardless of the schoolmaster's dignity, jostled against him.

"Where are your manners?" he asked harshly, whereat the man replied:

"An' where be yours, sir, ter speak loike thot? Ye've not the excuse that ye're not *eddicated.*"

"Silence!" roared the angry man.

"Sure. I've no wish ter talk ter ye," responded the laborer.

Mr. Wardwell was fairly choking with wrath, and Patricia, peeping from behind a tree, saw that his face was flushed, and that he frowned at the sturdy workmen as they tramped along without so much as a backward look at his important self.

When he resumed his walk she crept out

from behind the tree, and again followed him.

She was looking down at her shoes, partly to admire them, but really to convince the teacher, if he chanced to look back, that the fact that she was walking in the same direction that he was, meant nothing. That it was only a happening that they both had turned into the little path.

Just as she reached the spot where Mr. Wardwell had so harshly spoken to the workman, something glittering in the grass attracted her attention. It looked very interesting. What could it be?

She snatched it from the grass. A look of disappointment swept over her face.

"*Keys!*" she whispered in disgust. "I thought it was jewelry!"

Then, it flashed through her mind that Mr. Wardwell must have dropped them, and

that they must be the keys to the schoolhouse, and its many rooms.

In haste she turned, and walked away in an opposite direction.

"If it truly *is* the set of schoolhouse keys," she said, half aloud, "there's a chance of a wee vacation. I'll *keep* them, for a while. Who knows that I found them?"

Bold as she was, she felt a bit eager to know if any one had seen her.

She peered cautiously about her. No one was in sight.

The laborers had vanished, having taken a short cut across the meadows, Mr. Wardwell had walked through the park, and stopped to call upon a neighbor before returning home, and no one else appeared either walking or riding.

Yet a moment longer Patricia stood near the entrance to the park, as if undecided.

She was not for a moment thinking of giving up the keys. No, indeed! She was, instead, wondering whether she would keep the secret, or share it with Arabella.

After a few moments, she turned squarely about, and with a walk that almost amounted to a run, rushed up the avenue toward Arabella's house.

As luck would have it, Arabella was standing in the gateway, and Patricia flew at her, startling her out of her stolid mood, and knocking her spectacles off.

"Gracious!" cried Arabella, "you jostled me so, you've made my glasses drop off, and you broke them."

"I did not!" cried Patricia.

"You certainly did!" insisted Arabella.

"I knocked them off," agreed Patricia, "but you stepped on them yourself, so 'twas you that broke them."

"Why, I couldn't have stepped on them if they'd been on my face, could I?" Arabella drawled.

"Well, I don't see how you could," said Patricia, "but of course I never saw you try."

"Why, of course you never saw—"

"Oh, never mind about that," Patricia said, "because I didn't run all the way over here to talk about your glasses. What I came for was to tell you that there'll be no school to-morrow, so let's you 'n' me go off for a good time, oh, somewhere, I don't know just where now, but we can plan that to-morrow. Will you come?"

"I'll ask Aunt Matilda. If Pa was at home I'd ask him, but I'll ask Aunt—"

"Oh, botheration, don't ask any one, and don't tell any one about there being no school, for they'll find out for themselves

to-morrow. Just come along over and meet me. Start the same time you always start for school, and then no one can stop you from having a fine time.

"If you've got to tell any one in your house about it, I won't let you go with me, and I'll ask some one else!"

"Oh, I'll keep still!" Arabella hastened to say, "and I'll meet you, but why isn't there to be any school?"

"Because there *isn't!*" declared Patricia, "and to-morrow I'll tell you *why* there isn't, and how I know. There! Will you come?"

"Yes, oh, yes!" agreed Arabella, and where shall I meet you?"

Patricia thought for a moment. "Know where that little street is that leads off from this avenue just before you get to the schoolhouse? I'll meet you at that corner at half-past eight, that is, I'll wait there a few min-

utes, but you'd better not 'poke,' for I sha'n't stand there all day!"

"I'll be prompt," Arabella said, "and I guess I'll go in now, for Aunt Matilda may see me talking with you, and if she does, she'll want to know what we were talking about."

"Well, you don't have to tell her," said Patricia. "You just shut your lips tight, and say nothing."

Arabella backed toward the house. The prospect of stubborn silence, and its probable effect upon Aunt Matilda was not cheerful, and she thought it best to go in before that peculiar woman could have seen her niece talking with Patricia.

"I'll be on time," she said, and hastened in.

Patricia thought possibly a little haste upon her part might be a good thing.

She wanted to count over her dimes and nickels, and see how much money she had with which she could "treat."

Arabella had a little "allowance," but as Aunt Matilda always told her how to spend it, there was no chance to "treat," even had she felt inclined. Arabella was not generous toward others, nor even to herself, but Aunt Matilda was penurious to an almost unbelievable degree.

Mr. Correyville was away from home on a long business trip, and Aunt Matilda reveled in the joy of "running" the family during his absence.

Only the day before she had talked for a half-hour because the change in Arabella's little pocket-book did not tally with the account that she had kept.

"It's a cent short!" she declared, with as much vehemence as if the Merrivale Bank

had been looted, "and I *must* know, Arabella, where it has gone. You're so slow, I do believe that some one has taken it from you, right from under your nose. You'd never know the difference."

That roused Arabella.

"Nobody took it!" she cried. "I spent it for gum."

Aunt Matilda lifted her hands, and let them drop in her lap.

"*Gum!*" she shrieked. "Who ever heard of a Correyville chewing gum?"

Then ensued a long dissertation upon the great name of Correyville, its worthy members, who had been men of mark, and women of distinction, and who, as Aunt Matilda told it, had never done anything so "outrageously common" as to chew gum!

Arabella wriggled on her chair, and wished that her aunt possessed a less reten-

tive memory; wondered how many times she had listened to the tedious discourse, and concluded that the old portraits in the hall looked as if the men and women that had sat for them, had surely been too prim to even think of gum. Indeed they did not look sufficiently lifelike ever to have moved their jaws at all.

She thought of her great-great-great aunt, Arabella Mehitable Correyville, whose marriage to an elderly man was regarded as surprising until it became known that he was very wealthy, and wondered who had ever dared to ask her how she spent her money.

The thin face with its sharp features looked capable of refusing to answer any questions that it did not relish.

"You may go, Arabella," Aunt Matilda said. "You've sat still while I've been talking, but I'm not sure that you've taken in a

word I've said. You've looked as if you were dreaming."

On the next morning, Patricia stood waiting, impatiently waiting for Arabella.

"O dear! She's such a slow-coach, I s'pose it'll be a half hour longer before she'll come in sight. My toes are just 'nipping,' and it isn't more than quarter-past eight now."

She hopped about, first on one foot, and then the other, but happening to see a woman peeping from a window in a house opposite, she instantly stopped dancing, and moved along to where a clump of shrubbery, although leafless, would act as a screen between her and the shrewd eyes that peeped over the sash curtain.

The old saying that "a guilty conscience needs no accuser" proved true in Patricia's

case, for knowing that she was stealing a holiday, and that having found the keys, she had retained them instead of returning them as she should, she felt that every one who passed her, guessed her secret, she was almost certain that the woman at that window was still watching, although the tall shrubs intervened.

"Good gracious! I wish I'd told Arabella twenty-minutes past eight, instead of half-past. I've got the fidgets now, and there's no knowing how much longer I'll have to wait. She's fun to go with, because you can tell her anything, and she'll believe it, but I wish she wasn't so *pokey!*"

CHAPTER VI

EAVESDROPPING

AFTER ten minutes more had slipped by (Patricia would have said: "*crawled*"), a lanky figure came in sight, and Patricia whispered:

"I do declare, she's really coming!"

Arabella was hurrying along the avenue at a pace that she felt to be almost headlong. She would run five steps, then walk ten, then run again, making little haste, but giving the appearance of desperate effort.

She reached Patricia with hardly breath enough to speak. Patricia knew no mercy.

"What made you so late?" she demanded. " 'Tisn't much fun waiting here, and that

woman in that yellow house there, is all eyes, watching to see why I'm standing on this corner. I do believe she thinks I'm playing hookey. I don't care what she thinks, though. Say! Arabella. Why are you late? What kept you? You *knew* I said to hurry!"

"You haven't given me a chance to speak," Arabella said, for once resenting. "It's a wonder I got here at all, for I lost my glasses, and Aunt Matilda was wild because she thought I couldn't read, or study without them, and she kept telling me that they'd just had new lenses in them, and that now I'd carelessly lost them, and like as not they were broken again. She made me wait while she hunted for them, and then I had to run.

" 'Your eyes will be 'bout used up studying all this forenoon without your glasses,'

she called after me, but I kept on running."

"Well, now you're here, we'd better start off."

"You haven't said where we are going," said Arabella, to which Patricia coolly replied:

"I didn't say, because I didn't know," and with a teasing laugh she added: "I'm not *sure* now."

She turned, and led the way toward a little store on the narrow street, and Arabella followed, not daring to question her.

The tiny store held a varied stock, and Patricia stared about her, as if trying to determine whether to purchase the entire stock, or only a part of it.

The little old woman behind the counter peeped first through her glasses, then over them.

Patricia, in her bright green suit, yellow

fur collar, and red hat was rather unusual-looking. One could not otherwise describe her.

"We'll have two of those bangles. No, don't do them up. We want to wear them.

" 'N' I want a yard of that pink ribbon with the green plaids on it.

"Here, Arabella. Take off that plain ribbon, and tie this onto your braid. You don't need to look so stupid."

Arabella had become so used to obeying Patricia that she never thought of rebelling, but she tucked the brown ribbon into her pocket, for well she knew that Aunt Matilda would never approve of the gaudy plaid that now bobbed on the end of her meager braid.

"I'll have two of those sandwiches, and four of those tarts, and six of those cocoanut squares, and,—oh, yes, I want a pack of playing cards,—let me see what else? I'll

put the cards in my pocket. I'll have a pound of chocolate fudge, and four pickled limes."

She gave one of the brass bangles to Arabella, slipped the other upon her own wrist, put the pack of cards into her own pocket, picked up the parcels of candy, and pastry, and followed by Arabella, left the store.

The little shop with its store in the middle of the floor-space, and its lack of ventilation had been hot and stuffy, and as they stepped out into the street, Arabella shivered. The frosty air seemed colder by contrast.

Patricia Lavine appeared always ready to eat, Arabella never strong, and constantly "dosed" by Aunt Matilda, had a small appetite, and on that especial morning she had been so anxious to get away from the house, so nervous lest her aunt question her, that she had eaten no breakfast, and the loss of

the glasses had so completely filled Aunt Matilda's mind, that she had not noticed that Arabella had left her food untasted.

So when Patricia said, "Let's go somewhere and eat our lunch," she gladly assented.

"We'll have to keep out of sight," Patricia said, "and I guess the summer-house in the park would be a good place. Nobody'd be sitting there a cold day like this."

Arabella thought not, unless they were absolutely crazy, but she said nothing, and followed Patricia.

The summer-house, cool in warm weather, was decidedly airy, the breeze blowing through it was cold, and crisp, and Arabella knew that when she removed her gloves, her hands would be actually blue, and Patricia would laugh, and call her a "frozen rat." She decided to keep her gloves on. Every

one has some good points, and Patricia surely had one.

If she obtained her money by teasing her parents for it, spent it foolishly, and was rude and ill-bred, she was, to say the least, generous.

They were in the midst of their lunch, having eaten nearly half of their oddly chosen menu, when Patricia noticed the gloves, and laughed.

"Do you know you're eating with your gloves on?" she cried.

"My hands are cold," Arabella said, and at that moment a merry whistle made them both turn to learn who it might be.

"Hello!" he called. "Won't you two catch it for playing hookey?"

"How is it 'hookey' when there's no school?" snapped Patricia.

"No school?" retorted Jack. "Why

would there be no school? It's not a holiday, and they don't give us a day off for no reason at all."

"Why aren't you in school then?" drawled Arabella.

"Because Mr. Wardwell sent me on an errand," Jack replied, with a laugh. "Who sent you?"

"We thought there was no school to-day, and, Jack, don't tell you saw us."

Jack Tiverton looked over his shoulder as he set off.

"I'm no tell-tale," he said.

When he had gone, Arabella turned to Patricia.

"Who told you school would be closed?" she asked.

"I'm not going to tell you," she said, "but I certainly *understood* that school would be closed to-day."

"We might as well go to school this afternoon," Arabella said. "I wouldn't dare stay out, and it's too cold, anyway. I'll not tell Aunt Matilda I stayed out this morning."

"Say, girls! There's one thing I forgot to tell you, and that is that Arabella's aunt sent a little parcel over to school this morning. It was about the size of an eye-glass case, and I guess that's what it was, for I see you're not wearing yours, Arabella. Mr. Wardwell told the boy that you were not at school, but said he'd keep them for you. Wonder what your aunt will say?"

He laughed, and hurried off along the path.

Arabella wondered, too.

Patricia could simply refuse to explain, but no one could safely defy Aunt Matilda Correyville.

Arabella already felt decidedly "queer."

Ham sandwiches and cocoanut candy, pickled limes and chocolate fudge made an upsetting combination.

"You look pale, and sort of greenish-gray," Patricia remarked, and believing that she was cold, she took Arabella's arm, and literally walked her out of the park, and over to a little drug store.

She stopped before the soda fountain.

"Two hot lemon sodas," she ordered of the red-haired youth who was wiping the counter.

The youth squinted until his little green eyes could hardly be seen.

"I'll make ye somethin' fine, I will. I'm some mixer, I am," he said.

He forthwith put a little of everything into the tumblers, added a bit of cream, some tomato bouillon, shook in salt, added

plain soda, and with a flourish, set the glasses into the silver holders.

Patricia tasted it, said it was *different* from any soda that she had ever tasted, and drank it.

Arabella tried to drink hers, but the combined ingredients gave an outrageous flavor, and made her feel worse than before.

"I can't drink it," she said, and Patricia looking at her, at last realized that Arabella felt really ill.

"I do believe you ought to go home," she said, but Arabella shook her head.

"Then come over to my house," said Patricia, "and we can go from there to school this afternoon."

That seemed to be a good idea, and soon the two were walking toward the dingy house, on the dingier street where Patricia lived.

She might have lived in greater comfort, and a better home with her mother who, some time ago had moved from Merrivale to New York. Instead, she preferred to remain with her aunt, for the sole reason that she could, by letter, coax money that she represented that she needed, and then when it arrived, spend it as she chose.

Arabella, closely guarded as she was, found the freedom with which Patricia spent both time and money, very attractive. Patricia's strongest points were her silly vanity, her boasting, and her absolute lack of honor.

She was not charmed with Arabella, but she enjoyed bragging to her, because Arabella was just simple enough to believe her. Who else would listen to her silly yarns?

"My aunt is away for a day's shopping, so we'll have a lunch, and rest a while, and

then go to school," Patricia said, "and I think it's mean we have to go this afternoon. I certainly *understood* that there'd be no school to-day."

At the beginning of the afternoon session, Mr. Wardwell called Arabella to the desk, gave her her glasses and sharply questioned her regarding her forenoon's absence.

Arabella's answer sounded shrewd, but it was not. She was too dull to be shrewd, so that it was a happening that she replied as she did.

"I didn't eat any breakfast, and I felt queer when I started out, and after I had a lunch I felt queerer than that, and I feel even—"

Arabella reeled, and caught at the desk.

Mr. Wardwell led her to a seat.

"I will let some one go home with you," he said, "but I believe you should sit still

for a few moments before starting out. As soon as the dizzy feeling passes off, you may go. Some one should go with you."

"I will," chirped Patricia, so eagerly that the teacher, a forgetful man, was reminded that she, too, had been absent."

"Why were you absent this morning?" he asked.

"We met at half-past eight, and Arabella looked so ill that I thought I ought to stay," she said.

Mr. Wardwell wondered if another pupil had happened along, if she, too, would have let sympathy keep her from school.

Patricia, as she sat beside Arabella, waiting until she should feel like starting for home, worried her small mind as to how the schoolhouse doors had been opened that morning. The keys, at that moment, were in her pocket.

She slipped her hand into her pocket. The keys were gone!

Hark! What was Mr. Wardwell saying?

"Some workmen have reported that one of their number has lost some keys, and have asked me to tell the pupils, so that any boy or girl who finds them may return them to me. The man who lost the keys states that he missed them soon after leaving the park through which, with a number of fellow laborers, he had been walking.

"These men have been at work upon a fine residence, and the keys are those that have recently been fitted to locks on the doors.

"The loss was accidental, yet he has been accused of carelessness. I wish that those who pass through the park on the way to school would devote a few moments each day to a search, thus giving a bit of assistance to the man who is anxious regarding them,

and eager to return them to the owner of the house at the earliest possible date."

He paused a moment, then:

"Is there any one in this room who has known of the finding of some keys?"

No one answered, and every pupil, save two, closely scanned the teacher's face.

Those two were Patricia Lavine, and Tess Haughton.

Patricia's hands were tightly clasped upon her desk, her cheeks were red, her eyes downcast.

At that moment, had those keys been in her possession, she would gladly have taken them to the desk. As it was, she dared not admit that she had had them.

She had found them just after she had seen the workmen talking to Mr. Wardwell. Now she knew why the fact that she had kept the keys had not closed the school.

And she had lost them!

She knew that the schoolmaster was a shrewd and persistent questioner.

If she confessed that she had found them, he would ask her where, and when she had picked them up, if there had been no one in sight to whom they might have belonged, why she had kept them, and then—could she make him believe that they had, in some unknown way, slipped from her pocket?

No one seemed to notice Patricia, yet one there was who watched her closely, and that one was Tess Haughton.

"How queer Patricia Lavine looks," she thought.

"I can't imagine what it is, but I'll find out what makes her look as if she was more than half afraid to breathe!"

Tess Haughton longed to be a frequent

visitor at the Stone House, to be an intimate friend of Dorothy's, and nearly as dear to her as was Nancy Ferris.

She was really very fond of Dorothy, but beside her genuine regard she felt a great desire to have it said that she was a welcome visitor at the Stone House.

There is a difference between pride and vanity. Pride is often a good thing, for it makes its possessor ashamed to do anything that is small or unworthy.

Vanity is an attribute with little to commend it, and a person who is vain will often go to great lengths in an effort at display.

Tess was not especially vain of her personal appearance, but she was eager to have others think that wealthy people sought her for a friend.

She chose her friends for what they wore, rather than for what they were.

One Saturday afternoon she hurried up the avenue toward the Stone House.

She had heard Mollie Merton say:

"I'll be over Saturday afternoon."

"Come early," Dorothy had replied.

"Oh, yes," had been Mollie's eager answer. "About quarter of two."

Tess timed it to reach the Stone House at about a quarter-past two.

She wished it would appear as if she were passing and happened in.

The maid admitted her.

"Miss Dorothy is in the living-room, with some of her friends," she said.

Tess stood for a second where the maid had left her.

She busied herself removing her coat and hat. It was singular how long a task it seemed to unbutton the six buttons that fastened the coat. Her eyes were bright, and

her lips parted. She was listening to two voices in the room across the great hall.

She heard Patricia's name mentioned, and she was purposely slow, fussing with the coat as if it were a difficult task to unfasten it.

"That's Mollie speaking," she whispered, "but who is the other? That other voice is not Dorothy's."

Still she waited, her coat making her uncomfortably warm.

The boys had called her foxy, and possibly they were right. She thought if the maid should pass through the hall and see her standing idly there, she would wonder why she had not joined her friends. Could she make her believe that it was *impossible* for her to rid herself of the coat? That that alone had detained her in the hall? What was that other voice saying?

"Well, *'tis* true, Mollie, for Dick Winston

told me so. He said he saw Patricia do it."

"How did he happen to see her? Where was he? Why, Katie, do you suppose that is really true?"

"Dick said so, and he was not joking," was the quick reply.

"So that's Katie Dean in there," whispered Tess.

She had removed her coat and laid it quickly upon the hall chair, then hurried, with light footsteps, across the great rug.

She listened intently, her hand grasping the portière.

"You look as if you couldn't believe Patricia would do such a thing, but I'm not surprised. That isn't the first queer thing that she ever did."

"But if it is true that she found the keys, why would she keep them? What would Patricia, or any other girl want of a set of

keys that would lock or unlock nothing of her own?" Mollie said.

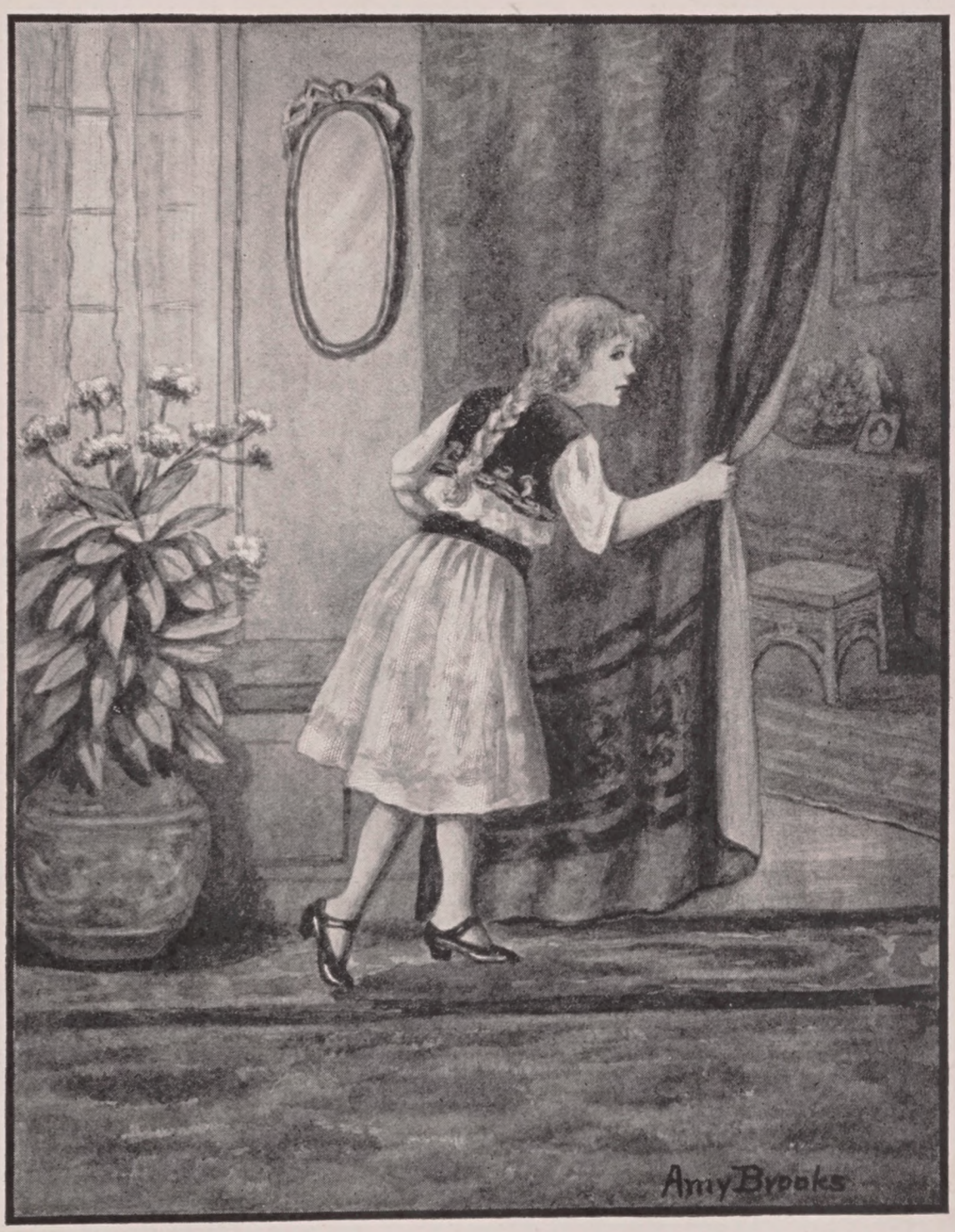
"I can't think why she wanted them," Katie said, then in a lower voice she continued:

"One thing we *do* know, and that is that when she found them, Mr. Wardwell was just ahead of her on the path, and if she didn't think that they were his, and so didn't give them to him that day, she certainly knew what was the right thing to do when he told the class about the men who had lost them," Katie said.

"That's true," agreed Mollie, "and it is odd what could have prompted her to keep them."

Dorothy had left the room to find a book that Mollie had wished to see, and been delayed because the book had been mislaid.

"Here it is," she said, with a laugh. "It's



SHE LISTENED INTENTLY, HER HAND GRASPING THE PORTIÈRE.
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a joke that I couldn't find it, because it was exactly where I left it."

Still grasping the folds of the portière, Tess waited, hoping to hear more about Patricia and the keys.

The maid, returning to the hall, stood in amazement, staring at the girl whom she had admitted twenty minutes earlier, and who was still in the hall, and—eavesdropping!

"Whoever she is, she can't be much to be hangin' round a-listening," she whispered, and at that moment Mollie noticed the tightly clutched folds of the portière.

Without a second's hesitation, she sprang to her feet, and reached the portière.

On the soft rug her footsteps had been noiseless, and as she peeped out into the hall, she looked straight into the eyes of Therese Haughton.

"Why—ee!" came from Mollie's lips.

"I, I,—why,—I've just come!" stammered Tess, and the maid so far forgot herself as to say:

"It's a good half-hour ago I let ye in."

Just for an instant Tess stood, then, in a sudden panic, she ran to the hall chair, thrust her arms into her coat sleeves, snatched her hat and rushed from the house.

Mollie turned, and Dorothy and Katie hastened toward her.

"What is it, Mollie?" Dorothy asked, at the same time peering out into the hall, and, of course, seeing nothing out there that could startle any one.

"Who went out?" Dorothy persisted.

"Tess Haughton," said Mollie, "and ran from the house because I caught her clutching this portière and *listening!*"

"*Listening!*" said Katie. "Oh, Mollie, are you *sure?*"

"*Sure?* Of course I'm sure. I saw the portière move, and then I noticed that some one was grasping the folds, and I went straight to it, and there stood Tess, clutching at it, her ear close against it, and the look in her eyes showed that she was wild over what she had heard us saying about Patricia having found and kept the keys. She looked as if she were wild with delight at hearing something so unpleasant."

"How could she be glad for such a thing as that?" Dorothy said.

"You wouldn't," said Katie, "but Tess isn't like you, Dorothy."

"Tess and Patricia were together almost all the time when school opened, but for about a week they've not been speaking. Tess, for some reason, is vexed with Patricia, so I guess that's why she was so pleased with what she learned by listening."

"She wasn't much pleased to be standing there when I looked out. She could think of no excuse, there seemed to be nothing to say, so she rushed from the house," added Mollie.

For a time the little group was silent. Katie spoke of an entertainment that was being planned at school, but she felt little interest in it at that moment, because while she was speaking of the part that had been assigned to her, she was thinking of Tess.

Dorothy had been standing near the piano, and she now sat down, and softly played a tender little melody, that seemed to breathe of love and kindness, and to banish all but gentle feelings.

CHAPTER VII

THE STAR OF THE EVENING

PATRICIA was now quite easy regarding the keys. Had they remained in her possession, she might have been a bit troubled as to whether it were best to give them to Mr. Wardwell, and risk his possible questioning, or to purposely lose them.

As it was the keys had "lost themselves," as she expressed it, and she gave no further thought to them. She believed that no one had seen her pick them up, "and if they are now lost, how could I return them?" she said to herself.

She was glad that they had slipped from her pocket, because there her responsibility had been shifted. Little cared she for the

inconvenience that their loss had caused, or for the unjust blame that would fall upon the workman.

Tess Haughton still kept secret all that she had heard at the Stone House. She avoided Dorothy and her friends. She could not face them, because she could not forget how she had been caught listening, and of course they remembered it, and her hasty flight had doubtless caused much merriment. She did not know how gently they had let the matter drop. She did not dream that they had not spoken of the happening since the day when it had occurred. Had the same thing happened in her own home, it would have afforded her a theme for conversation for weeks.

She was vexed with Patricia, and was eagerly waiting for a chance to tell what she had overheard at the Stone House.

Her pretty face gave no hint of her disposition. She had agreeable ways, and seemed to be a pleasant girl, but she had one grievous fault: she was unforgiving.

One afternoon during the history lesson, Patricia had her book open, just under her desk where she could prompt herself, and yet feel that the book was unseen.

Mr. Wardwell, passing along an aisle, looked across the room just in time to see the book on Patricia's lap, and he called out sharply:

"Patricia, books are laid aside at recitation. You will remain after school. I am surprised!"

Tess longed to tell about the keys, but dared not speak.

At four, Patricia attempted to file out with the others, with the chance that Mr. Wardwell had forgotten that she was to remain.

He had not forgotten. With a few steps he had reached her, laying his hand on her shoulder, as he said:

"I told you to remain after school. I wish to talk with you regarding your persistence in hiding an open book during recitation hours."

"Same as she hides the keys she found. Guess you haven't returned them, have you, Patricia?" said Tess, as she was passing along the aisle.

"You, too, may remain," said the teacher, and Tess was only too glad. If Mr. Wardwell questioned her, she could tell all she knew regarding the lost keys. That would not be tale-bearing. Answering questions was certainly not the same as being a tell-tale.

A half-hour later, when Patricia and Therese left the schoolhouse, they chose op-

posite sides of the street for their homeward walk.

Therese held her head very high as she trudged along, while Patricia's chin was held at no less an angle.

Both were angry, but each in a different way.

Patricia felt that, as the keys were lost, it was idle to fuss about them, and that Mr. Wardwell had been most unreasonable to speak so sternly to her about holding them for a number of days after she had found them.

Therese considered him ungrateful in accusing her of "spite" in giving the information that he seemed glad to use in accusing Patricia.

Plainly all instructors were unjust. This one flagrantly so!

The next day, clad in the gayest apparel

that her wardrobe afforded, she stood upon the platform at the station, bound for New York, and from her appearance one might truthfully say that she departed with flying colors.

No such loophole of escape lay open for Tess. She must return to school, and "face the music."

There were plenty who would tease her, but their hectoring was less annoying than the silent rebuke in the eyes of those whose friendship she longed to win. The next morning she awoke with an aching head, and her burning cheeks made it easy for her to gain her aunt's permission to remain at home. Tess thought that it would be a bit easier to return to school if a day had passed since the happening. She was actually glad of the headache, forming as it did, a valid excuse for her absence from school.

"They wouldn't make such a fuss about anything in N'York as they did about those old keys at Merrivale. They don't fuss about *anything* in N'York. I don't see what ever made me care to go to school at Merrivale. I'll stay in N'York this time, but I'll not go to school. I don't need to. No, I'll not go to just ord'nary school. I'll go to dancing-school, and learn to dance better than Nancy ever danced, and,—yes, that's the *very thing!* I'll go back, for a few days, when I've learned, and I'll just simply *astound* them! I'll dance so wonderfully that all Merrivale will *gasp!*"

These were the thoughts that cheered Patricia as she saw the distance widening between herself and Merrivale.

Every one in Merrivale knew Nancy's story. Deserted, first by a dissolute father, then by a stepmother, Nancy had been taken

into the household at the Stone House, and then, while her delight in her new-found home was fresh, she had been stolen by an old uncle, and trained as a child dancer, for the stage.

After unhappy months of incessant work, of weariness, and homesickness, Mrs. Dainty had traced her, and brought her back to the luxurious home where she had been happy ever since, dancing only for her friends, and that had been a pleasure.

Patricia had always envied her, and here was a chance to "outdo" her.

Yes, indeed! It would be simple to learn to dance, and what a surprise she would give them!

"I'll be the star of the evening!" she whispered.

Tess stayed at home for the remainder of

the week, and during her absence a number of new pupils arrived, so that little notice was taken of her return, attention being focused upon the new members of the class.

There is always interest, yes, and much curiosity regarding new members of a large class.

For the time, Patricia Lavine was forgotten, and Tess felt that her return made no stir, because the new pupils held the attention of the class.

It was a relief not to be stared at on the first day after she had been absent, but in a few days she began to feel injured. She noticed that the girls and boys showed a great interest in the new pupils. Had she chosen to be equally friendly toward them, she would have had her share of the fun and frolic, and thus would have held her position in the social side of the school life.

Instead, she kept herself aloof, imagined herself ignored, and finally renewed her friendship with Arabella Correyville.

This was not a wise thing to do, because Arabella had always made herself so very disagreeable, that no one liked her, and Tess, who, at the beginning of the term, had been popular now found herself in a position where she could be as intimate with Arabella as she liked, but less welcome with the others than before.

Mollie Merton voiced the general feeling when she said:

"If every time Tess comes with us, she must drag Arabella along, I wish she'd stay away."

It was two months since Patricia had left Merrivale.

She had said "good-by" to no one, and

she had not written to Arabella since her departure.

"N'York" had evidently satisfied her, and it looked as if already she had forgotten her Merrivale friends, when one day, a letter reached Jack Tiverton, that filled his rollicking heart with delight.

"New York City.

"DEAR JACK:

"I've been here two months now, and I've been learning to dance, and every one says I'm a wonder, and I surely am.

"Nancy Ferris danced pretty well, and she was on the stage, but I'm *'way* ahead of her. I'm to take a lesson this morning, so I can't stop to write much, but I wrote to say that I remember that our class was intending to give an entertainment some time this term, and you and Reginald were planning the programme when I left. If you'll let me know just when it is to be, I'll come and do a elegant dance for you.

"Your classmate,

"PATRICIA LAVINE.

"P.S. Be sure to let me know.

"P. L."

Jack read the letter, and laughed long and loudly. Laughed until his sides ached at its absurd vanity, its foolish self-praise.

In another instant he sprang to his feet, shouting, "The *very thing!* Just the thing! You shall surely come and dance for us. We wouldn't miss it for the world.

"My, my, but we're in for a treat!"

"What's the excitement?" queried Reginald. "Let a fellow share the joke. Say, it must be outrageously funny if you can't stop laughing long enough to tell it.

"Well, I'll sit on this wall 'til you can pull yourself together enough to let me into the joke, whatever it is."

"Come on over to the garage, and I'll tell you in there, and we'll both get some fun out of it, see 'f we don't!"

When Reginald had read the silly letter, he looked up at Jack.

"Well, where's the great fun?" he said. "Patricia's not here, so we'll not see her 'show-off.' "

"But we *shall* see her!" declared Jack, "and that's where the fun comes in. She says, 'Let me know when it is to be.' I'll *let her know*. I'll give our class some fun. Patricia shall come, and do some of her 'el'gant' dancing. I guess it'll be worth the price of admission. I know I'd pay *double* to see her antics."

When the two left the garage, their plans were completed.

There would be two entertainments instead of one.

The first should be, as already arranged, a programme made up of musical and dramatic numbers, the performers being members of the class.

The second entertainment should be musi-

cal numbers by the class orchestra, and fancy dances by Patricia Lavine!

The two young rascals felt that they could hardly wait for the evening of the second entertainment to come.

Reginald wondered if it were a bit mean to let Patricia make a laughing-stock of herself, but Jack felt no qualms of conscience about the matter.

Patricia had herself proposed it. Now let her come.

Jack received an immediate reply to his letter. Patricia would come on the evening he had named, she would do four dances, and wear a different costume for each, and best of all, the costumes would be of her own designing!

"She'll be a picture, a comic picture at that!" cried Jack.

It seemed as if the evening when Patricia would display her new accomplishment would never come, but it did, and with it an audience that filled the little hall.

The first entertainment had been fairly patronized, but the second evening when Patricia was to be the "star" found every seat sold, and even the aisles filled with those who had gladly paid admission, and agreed to stand, if only they might see the performance.

Patricia was a pretty girl, her form was rather graceful, and many of those present believed that, as she seemed always well provided with spending money, she doubtless had taken sufficient lessons to have thus early become an accomplished dancer. A few knew better.

Nancy Ferris, who had inherited her tal-

ent from the mother, once a famous theatrical dancer, had been trained for dancing by Professor Bonfanti.

The course of study had covered long months, during which time the teacher had seemed merciless. Practice had been daily, and under his sharp eyes, and Nancy had gone to bed many a night, tired, too tired to sleep.

Of all that audience Nancy, sweet Nancy, knew that in the few weeks since Patricia had left Merrivale, she could hardly have mastered even the rudiments of fancy dancing. Then, too, Patricia was a girl who never cared to make much effort. She had been too indolent to do at all well at school, and whatever she was asked to do, she invariably declared "not worth bothering with."

"Oh, I *do* hope Patricia will do well

enough so that those who've never studied dancing will think it fine, and I wish all the others would try to like it," Nancy whispered to Dorothy, but Dorothy, who was closely watching two who sat in the front row at the right of the stage, did not catch the whispered words.

"Just look at Jack and Reginald," she said. "You don't suppose they're planning some outrageous joke, do you?"

Nancy watched them for a moment.

"I do believe they are!" she said, under her breath, "for their heads are close together, and they're laughing, too."

"And they've a big parcel down in front of them. See it? What a thing to bring with them, and what could they possibly need so much that they must have it here at the hall?"

There was no chance to reply because at

that moment the orchestra struck the opening chords of the overture, and in listening to the music, for the time they forgot to watch the two schemers.

After the overture another selection was given, then there was a long wait. The audience became restless. Could it be possible that Patricia, bold Patricia, had been seized with stage fright?

Some one, in a loud whisper, remarked that she had probably left the hall by a doorway at the rear of the stage. Another believed that she was doing much unnecessary primping.

Just as patience was about exhausted, the musicians commenced to play an old Spanish melody, and then, mincing, prancing, switching her skirts, Patricia came down to the footlights, and smiled indulgently upon

her audience, as if she were doing a great favor to appear at all.

One would have thought that she had been upon the stage for at least ten years, had become popular, and a footlight favorite, and now had condescended to dance for her former friends and neighbors.

Then the dance commenced. She peeped over her huge yellow fan, she swung her pink skirts, then paused to look at her audience to note the effect.

The broad smiles upon the faces of those near the stage she took as signifying unbounded delight, and she pranced more vigorously than before.

"She's not doing any real steps," whispered Dorothy. "She's just moving round, that's all."

The dance, if it could in truth be called a

dance, was never designed by any one who had knowledge of dancing steps, or figures. The mantilla that should have fallen about her head and shoulders in soft folds, was made of some stiff material, evidently a coarse lace, and instead of clinging about her shoulders, it stood out in a wiry manner that, with its coarse, open mesh, suggested a cage for her head. A green waist, with long flowing sleeves was the climax of the ugly costume. Patricia was simply trying to imitate a vaudeville actress whom she had seen, and knowing none of the steps, the imitation was clumsily done, and the dance absurd.

She ogled, and simpered in a manner that she thought captivating, and when she left the stage, the spectators breathed a sigh of relief.

Dorothy turned and looked at Nancy, but neither spoke. Mrs. Dainty was with them,

and they knew that she would not wish them to say a word of criticism that others near them might hear. Each knew the other's thoughts, however, and they could talk over the evening's happenings when they reached home.

More music followed, and other numbers by Patricia in her so-called "dances," each as absurd as the first, but the fourth, which would conclude the entertainment, was the worst of all, except for the fact that the audience had been bored by the others, while the fourth proved to be extremely amusing. The first had been called Spanish, the second a siren, the third a flower girl, but the fourth was not named.

Evidently Patricia had not been able to name it.

Indeed, no one could have thought of a name that would fit it!

A skirt of red tarlatan with green ribbons sewed upon it for a border, a purple sash, plaided with every known color, yellow stockings, and pink slippers, a tinsel band about her head in which were feathers of all colors, beads of many kinds around her neck, and bangles without number upon her arms, she certainly was a singular-looking figure as she hopped and kicked her way across the stage.

The sound of stifled laughter did not reach Patricia, and she continued her wild cavorting. She was tired, but this was the last number in which she could display her skill, or lack of it, and the thought spurred her to greater effort. Higher and higher she sprang, kicking right and left.

"Would you give it to her now?" whispered Jack.

"If you wait any longer she may run off

the stage, and then you'll lose the chance," was the whispered reply. "Be ready to hand it to her when she bows."

Jack unfastened the big paper, disclosing a bouquet of huge proportions.

A small head of hot-house lettuce was surrounded by big yellow paper roses, a row of radishes was next the paper flowers, and lettuce leaves formed the greenery for the outer edge of the bouquet.

With a stamp of her foot, Patricia finished the dance, and while the noisy applause drowned the music of the orchestra, Jack stepped forward and presented his bouquet.

Patricia accepted it with a bright smile, and ran back to her dressing-room.

Jack was surprised, and, yes, a bit chagrined.

He had expected to see Patricia as angry as a little demon. He believed that she

would throw the bouquet on the floor of the stage, and stamp upon it in a fit of rage.

The applause was long and loud. The fourth dance had been the funniest thing upon the programme, yes, the most comical attempt of all, and the mischief-loving boys were wild to know if Patricia could be induced to repeat it.

Again and again the laughing boys and girls resumed their clapping, but Patricia did not reappear.

"You might go out and bow to acknowledge their applause, even if you do not feel like repeating the dance," said the manager of the hall, as he paused at the dressing-room door.

The girl only shook her head.

Patricia, bold, haughty, boastful, was—crying and crying as if her heart would break.

"Why, you're crying, girl. You must be tired and upset," the man said, kindly.

"It ain't the dancin' nor the heat that's upset her," said her aunt, angrily. "It's that nasty vegetable bouquet that young monkey out there at the end of the stage, handed her. That's what's upset her, an' I think it's jest a burnin' shame, that's what I do. Merrivale manners is jist awful, I say."

A glance at the coarse bouquet, and the man left the room.

The boys had left the hall, and only a few of the vast audience remained, moving slowly toward the door as they talked of the evening's programme.

Tess Haughton looked up as the manager of the hall approached, and noticed his angry frown.

"Do you happen to know which young

chap it was who presented that bouquet?" he asked.

"Why, yes," said Tess. "It was Jack Tiverton. Why?"

"Well, if I was his pa, he'd get a thrashing for trying to be so funny, or so smart, I don't know which. It was an outrage, and the girl is crying as I never saw a girl cry before. If he didn't like the entertainment he needn't have been insulting. I declare, I thought Jack was a young gentleman, but I must have been mistaken."

CHAPTER VIII

VERA'S VISIT

AT ten o'clock on the following day, Patricia sat in her room, looking out across Merrivale with sad eyes, and pale cheeks.

Never before had she seemed downcast. Never had a blunt speech appeared to hurt or grieve her, but Jack's "hateful bouquet," as she called it, had cut far deeper than words.

She had always liked Jack, and had borne his teasing wonderfully well, when one considered her hasty temper.

She had accepted the huge bouquet, looking only at Jack's laughing face as she took

it, but at first glance at the enormous thing, she was hot with anger. She would gladly have flung it from her, but in an instant she realized that by running with it to the dressing-room, she might prevent others from knowing what a ridiculous bouquet it was. In running off the stage with it, she surely had been wise, for few got even so much as a glimpse of it, and Jack had had no fun at all at her expense.

Hark! Some one was knocking at the door. She peeped from the window. A very penitent-looking boy, with a big pasteboard box stood rapping for admittance.

"I'll not speak to him!" she said.

She heard the door opened and closed. Then her aunt came hurrying up the stairs.

"Say! Patricia! Stop cryin' an' open this box. That young chap that made ye so mad last night has jest left this fer ye."

"I don't want to open it," pouted Patricia. "It's probably some other horrid ol' thing."

"Wal, now, don't act foolish, Patricia. I never seen a lad look so sorry fer what he'd done, an' I b'lieve he's thought o' some way ter do the han'some thing by ye. Here! Gi' me the scissors, an' I'll open it. I'll bet it's somethin' that'll cheer ye."

She cut the strings, and lifted the cover. An exquisite bouquet was revealed, and in its center lay a note.

Patricia's eyes were bright, as she laid her cheek against the flowers, and then opened the note.

"DEAR PATRICIA:

"I am ashamed of the silly joke I played on you last night. Mother, when I told her, said, 'Jack, my boy, no gentleman would do anything like that. You must do something very nice for her to show her that you are sorry, as I know you surely are.'

"And truly I am sorry, so I send you the kind of bouquet that I know you'd like to have.

"Please forgive

"Your Classmate,

"JACK TIVERTON."

Patricia's wrath was appeased. The lovely bouquet of roses, pinks, violets, mignonette, and fine greenery delighted her, and smiles chased away the tears.

She believed that it was just possible that no one had had a clear view of the first bouquet, and she could tell them about this second one, and enlarge upon its beauty and its size. That was like Patricia.

A week later, Vera Vane wrote to say that she would gladly accept Mrs. Dainty's invitation, and would come for a week's visit to the Stone House, if she might bring with her, a friend, who was visiting her when the letter from Merrivale arrived.

Of course Vera and her friend were at once assured of a welcome, and in a few days they arrived. Vera was her own merry self, and in Elfreda Carleton they found Vera's counterpart. "Elf," they called her, and elfish she was, in face, form, and nature.

She was full of fun, and if, by any chance, Vera neglected to start a frolic, Elfreda immediately planned one. With Dorothy and Nancy they formed a lively quartette.

Owing to damage to the schoolhouse, caused by a severe storm, since which the roof had leaked, a week's holiday had been given the pupils.

It occurred at just the right time, the four merry friends thought, and every hour of the visit was filled with pleasure of one kind or another.

"I am going away to a girls' private school next season," Vera said one day, "and Elf

is going to the same school. I wish you and Nancy could come."

"I don't know how it would seem to be away from home so long a time," Dorothy said.

It seemed to her that she would be very homesick, but she did not say so. She thought Vera would laugh at the idea of being homesick, and she never could bear being laughed at, especially by Vera, who had an impish way of poking fun, even at those whom she loved best.

Elfreda Carleton opened her eyes very wide, then, after a second she said, "I've always wished I'd had a *real* home. I suppose most people would say I had, but my father and mother died when I was so little that I don't remember them, and Uncle Gerard has made me board with poky old people that are awfully good, I'm sure, but awfully dull

to live with. You see, if I go away to school, and have Vera for a room-mate, I won't be homesick for a moment. Instead, it will make me sick to think of going home, that is to the boarding-place that I call home."

Nancy, looking at the dark, elfish face, with its small, bright eyes, its tip-tilted nose, its pert, red mouth, wondered if Elfreda had not been a trial to the "poky" people with whom she had so disliked to live.

"And yet it must be dull," she thought, "for, only think, in my home, I have no parents, but dear Aunt Charlotte is so loving, and Mrs. Dainty so generous, and Dorothy so dear, that I love to be with them, and it's never dull."

"And the school we're going to is a fine school. The picture that they sent Mamma looks like an old castle, and there are lovely grounds around it, and fountains playing on

the lawn, and a forest behind it where we could enjoy ourselves. Oh, it will be delightful," Vera concluded, "and I do *so* wish that you and Nancy would come."

It did not seem at all probable that Dorothy or Nancy would ever go away from home to any school, however fine it might be, but Vera talked of it all that afternoon, and Elf told of girls whom she knew who had attended that very school, and had told of delightful months spent there, until the two who listened began to think that it would be a novel thing to attend school at such a delightful place.

Vera was a chatterbox, and during her week's visit to the Stone House, she told the boys and girls whom she met, that she was going to the private school, that Elf would be her room-mate, and that they were doing

their best to urge Mrs. Dainty to send Dorothy and Nancy to the same school.

Mollie Merton told Vera that she was wasting her effort, Flossie Barnet looked in wonder at Vera that she should dare to so much as think of such a thing, while Jack and Reginald laughed outright at what they thought a preposterous notion.

For some reason, Vera believed that when the time came to enter school, Dorothy and Nancy would be with Elfreda and herself.

The visit was delightful. Vera was in high spirits, Elf was quite as gay, and many a drive they enjoyed behind the pony, Romeo, out over the snow-covered roads of Merrivale.

There was a charming afternoon tea given in honor of the two guests, and the big living-room glowed with warmth and color, the

dancing light from the blazing logs in the fireplace touching the crimson portière, and making the jars of red roses a deeper hue.

Lively music, merry games, followed by a tempting treat of ices, frozen fruits, and delicious cakes, gave another delightful day to be remembered. Mollie entertained them another afternoon, and Uncle Harry, with the aid of his lovely wife, and his niece, Flossie Barnet, arranged a charming little theater-party, having engaged a box at the leading theater in a neighboring city.

On the morning of their departure, Vera and Elf stood in the spacious hall, drawing on their gloves, while waiting for the automobile to come to the door.

"I can't believe we've been here a week," said Vera.

"I shouldn't think you could," Elf responded, "for the time has flown, skipped

or raced away, I don't know which to call it."

As they rode to the station, Vera turned to Dorothy quickly, saying, "I don't know why I think it, but some way I feel as if you and Nancy would *surely* enter the new school with us when the fall term begins." She turned, on the platform and waved her hand.

Elf, who had rushed ahead to secure a seat, now peeped from the window, her eyes twinkling as she swung her handkerchief, and called, "Good-by."

"I'll tie a long string to Vera, so I won't lose her between here and home!" she shouted.

As the train started two heads peeped out to say a laughing adieu.

As they rode homeward, Dorothy turned to Nancy, and looked earnestly into her eyes for a second, then she said: "Nancy, I'd so

like to go to the large school with Vera and Elf, to be under the roof with so many pupils, to share their studies, and their fun, and yet, I'd not like to be away from Mamma so long a time."

"That's just the way I feel," Nancy said.

"I'd not like to be away from Aunt Charlotte, but the school life sounds so pleasant, as Vera described it," Nancy continued, "and while there has been much that was pleasant here at the Merrivale school, there has been quite as much that we didn't enjoy."

"I know what you mean," said Dorothy. "You are thinking of the rough boys and girls from the other side of the town."

"Yes," responded Nancy, "and yet we have to leave those we love to be with behind, if we go away to any of the large schools for girls."

"Well, we needn't bother our heads about it," Dorothy said, with a light laugh, "for I am very sure that, even if we greatly wished it, we would not be allowed to go."

Yet how quickly things can happen!

Three weeks after Vera's visit, a business deal made it necessary for Mr. Dainty to plan a trip West that would cover several months, leaving Merrivale in the early fall, and not returning until spring.

Mrs. Dainty was tired with the season, which had been very active in a social way, and her physician urged that she make the trip with him, declaring that the change of scene would make her quite herself once more.

"But the children," she objected. "I cannot have their studies thus interrupted."

"They are not little children now," the good old doctor said, with a twinkle in his

kindly eyes, "and it is an easy matter to select a fine school for girls, and let them spend the winter there. In all such schools there is a matron who looks out for the welfare of the girls under her care, and, really, Mrs. Dainty, the experience would be fine for them. They would learn self-reliance, and would, if the school were well chosen, meet other girls whose companionship they would enjoy. Think it over, Mrs. Dainty, and say if I am not right."

A week later, Mrs. Dainty had received from Mrs. Vane, a pamphlet describing the school which Vera and Elf were to attend, and she was delighted with its contents.

She read it twice over, arose, and crossed the room, but paused half way, leaning upon a slender pedestal, her head bent as if in deep thought.

After a moment she spoke.

"If the idea pleases Dorothy, then will I consider the trip that I truly covet, but if I see the least bit of reluctance in regard to going away to school, I shall give up the trip without a second's thought."

But Dorothy was delighted.

"If you were to be at home, Mamma, I'd not like to go, because I'd be homesick, but the lovely home isn't home when you are away, and Vera has told us so much about the school that Nancy and I have thought it would be fine if we could go there."

Dorothy lost no time in writing a gay little note to Vera, to tell her that, with Nancy, she would enter the school in the fall, and that she would look for Vera and Elf on the first day.

An hour later she met Katie Dean, and told her the news, but Katie could not share her enthusiasm.

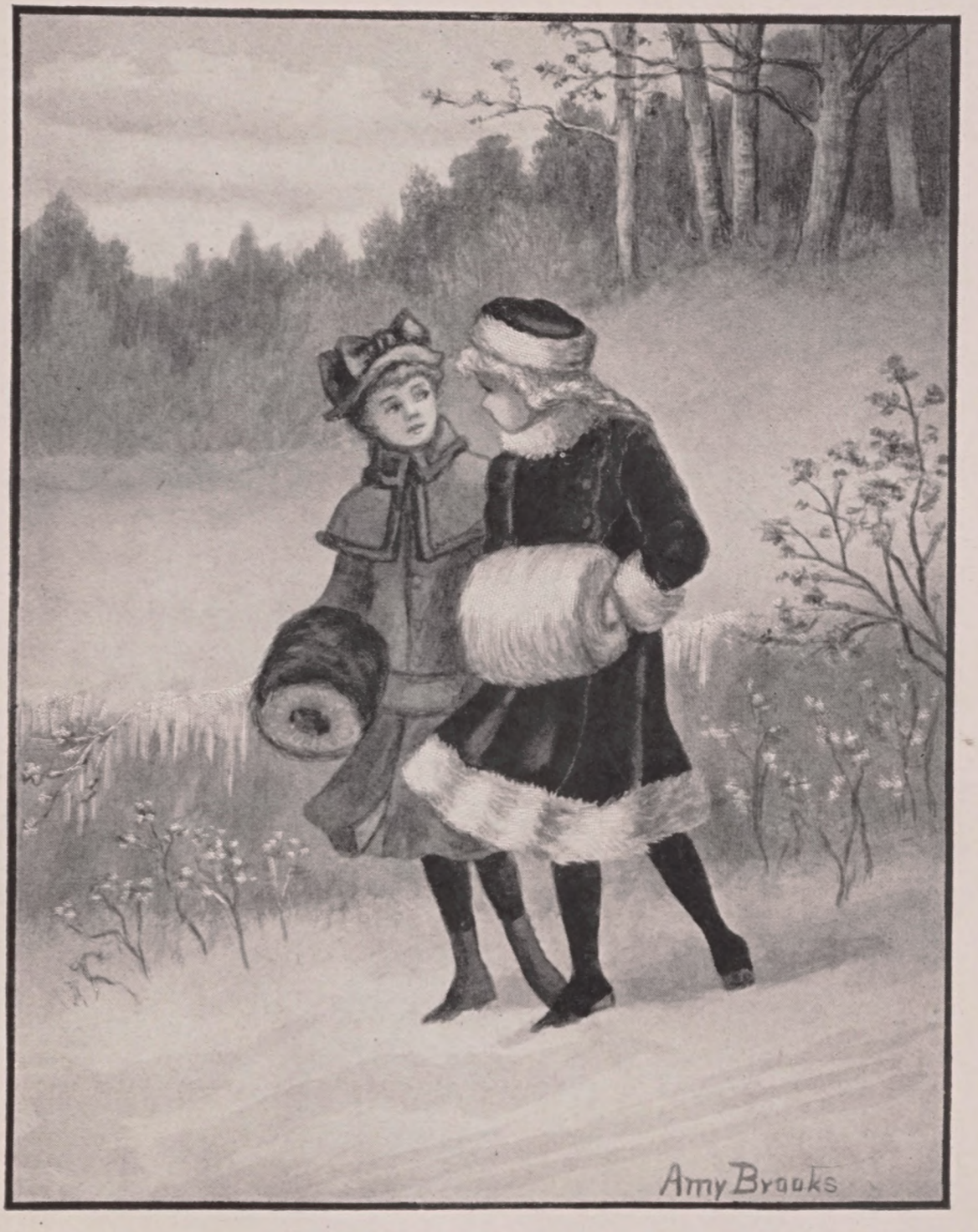
They were eagerly talking as they walked along.

"Just think," Katie said, "you and Nancy will be away at school, and your father and mother, and Aunt Charlotte out West! Why, the Stone House will seem almost deserted, and oh, we'll miss you so."

"The servants will be there to take care of it," Dorothy said, "so it won't be quite vacant."

"Of course it won't be really empty, but it won't be very *lively* to look at," Katie responded, "and I don't think I'll go by there very often, because it will make me feel lonesome to look at it, and know that you are such a long way from Merrivale."

Katie was only one of many that felt sorry to have the occupants of the Stone House away for so long a time. It was largely that they would be greatly missed for their own



"JUST THINK, YOU AND NANCY WILL BE AWAY AT SCHOOL!"
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sake, but beside that, the fact that they were generous entertainers was not easily forgotten, and young and old knew that they would miss the delightful times that have made the long winter months so cheery.

Katie walked home with Dorothy as far as the great gate, talked with her for a few moments, and then went on up the avenue.

Dorothy watched until a bend of the road hid her figure.

As she was about to turn, a hand laid upon her shoulder startled her.

"What are you 'fraid of?" Arabella asked rudely.

"I wasn't frightened," Dorothy said, quietly, "but I was thinking of what I had just told Katie, and I didn't know that you were near."

"What *did* you tell her?" persisted Arabella.

"You'll be surprised," Dorothy said, "for Nancy and I are going away to a fine school next fall, and we'll meet new friends but we'll miss our friends here."

"Did you say what school it was?" queried Arabella.

"I didn't say," Dorothy said, "but I'll tell you now."

At this moment, Nancy appeared, and Arabella lost no time, but at once asked:

"What's the name of the school where you and Dorothy are going next season?"

"It is 'Glenmore,'" Nancy replied, whereupon Arabella ejaculated:

"Gracious sakes! That's just the very school I'm going to. Well of all things! I thought you and Dorothy were going to some great school that none of us girls ever heard of, every one is making such a fuss about it. Some one sent a book that tells all about

'Glenmore' to Aunt Matilda, and she coaxed my father, until he agreed I should go next season. H'm!"

She turned and left Nancy and Dorothy looking after her.

They saw her turn in at her own gate-way, then they looked into each other's eyes.

Nancy was the first to speak.

"Oh, Dorothy!" she said. "We've been saying that everything was fine about the new school, and that it was nice that Vera and Elf were to be there, but who would have dreamed of Arabella?"

CHAPTER IX

WHOM THE SHOE FITS

TESS HAUGHTON was once more her cheery self.

Patricia had not returned at once to New York. She had remained with her aunt at the house on the outskirts of Merrivale, and few of her former schoolmates had seen her.

She had preferred that some time should elapse since the evening when her absurd dancing had been rewarded with the outrageous bouquet. Then she could describe the lovely one that Jack had sent on the day following, but perhaps if she simply described it, and refrained from saying *when* she received it, her friends might think that

the one that she described was the one which they saw passed up to her on the stage.

Then, too, Vera Vane, and her friend Elf Carleton had gone home.

Tess began to hope that she could claim a little attention from Dorothy and Nancy, and to feel, in every way, a bit more important.

Most delightful of all was the news that spread like thistledown upon the wind, flying from one to another, that there was to be a party at the Stone House, and, oh, delightful fact, Tess held her invitation in her hand!

She had heard that the party was to be a small one, given for Dorothy and Nancy, and their intimate friends, and she had immediately become an almost daily caller at the Stone House. She cared not how she obtained an invitation, provided that she did

actually receive one, hence, her frequent and persistent calls!

Now she *knew* that she was an invited guest, and a dress for the occasion was the next thing to be thought of.

There was little money to be wasted upon evening clothes, yet *something* in the shape of a party dress *must* be obtained.

"Auntie will tell me to wear my old white muslin, and I *can't*. I've worn that to every party, to church, and to every kind of place you could think of, and I can't go one place more with it."

Suddenly her eyes brightened, and she stood staring at herself in the mirror before which she chanced to be standing.

"Tess Haughton!" she cried, "you've more sense than I thought. I'll do it to-morrow when Auntie is over visiting Aunt

Therese. Yes, and she's to be away all day to-morrow. Oh, I can hardly wait to try my hand with coloring it. If I have good luck with it, it will be fine, for it's made pretty, and besides, no one would know that it was colored."

Very early the next morning, Tess was up and dressed. There was a bit of mending to be done to the old muslin before she could try her hand at coloring it.

As luck would have it Auntie was leisurely about starting, and it was after nine before Tess could begin the task for which her fingers tingled.

"Good-by," she called. "Don't hurry back, because I can amuse myself all day, and you've not seen Aunt Therese for a week."

She stood by the window, saw her aunt go

down the walk, and out onto the street. Once she hesitated, and looked back at the house, then turned and went on.

The muslin was absolutely clean, and it had been skillfully ironed.

If only she might have been content to wear it as it was, fresh and white, its lace edgings picked out to show the pattern!

She stood a moment irresolute.

"I can wear it as it is, and be sure of going to the party. If I try coloring it, and spoil it, I'll have the pleasure of staying at home. Pshaw! How silly I am! The piece in the paper said it was easy, the only thing to assure success being plenty of salt in the water to set the color, and that the dress to be colored must first be washed.

"Well, there's plenty of salt, and I'll use it, and the dress is clean,—so—here's for coloring it!"

She wished that there had been some one whom she could question as to the amount of bluing to be used. The printed directions had been so indefinite. "Enough blueing used to give the desired shade," it said. Well, she must guess at it, that was evident, so she filled a large pan with water, tinged it a delicate blue, and plunged the dress well under water, then lifted a fold, and was astonished to find that it looked as white as before.

"Why, isn't that queer?" she cried.

"Well, I'll put in enough this time," and she emptied the contents of the bottle into the pan, then dropped the dress into it, making sure that it was thoroughly soaked.

And now it looked so deeply blue that she was sure that it was far too dark for a party frock.

"O dear," she cried, "I wish I hadn't

touched it. It looks perfectly horrid, and I've nothing to wear to the party."

She was nearly in tears when it occurred to her that it might look lighter when it was wrung out.

It did, indeed, look lighter, and rather a pretty shade of blue.

"And it will be lighter still when it is dried and ironed," she thought, hopefully.

It should have hung out of doors, but Tess thought that something might occur that would cause her aunt to return earlier than she had planned, and what would she say if she saw the dress, in its present state, hanging upon the line?

Instead she stretched a line across her own little chamber, from a hook on the closet door, to the bracket that held the mantel.

The line was much higher on one end than

it was on the other, so that the dress, when hung upon it, lay fold upon fold.

Tess hung and re-hung it, but it seemed determined to foil her efforts, and stuck almost as close together as if that were exactly what it was expected to do.

The muslin was very sheer, and the house unusually warm, so that the dress was soon dry save in those places where the folds had hung closely.

Tess decided that, as she was anxious to iron it before her aunt should return, it would be best to commence at once. She would not sprinkle the dress, and wait until it was evenly damp before ironing it. That would take too long.

She decided to iron the damp places, and sponge the portions that were dry. That might not be the correct way to do it, but it

would be a quick way, she thought, but soon found herself mistaken.

The damp places stuck to the iron, the dry places that she sponged did not behave much better, and to add to her disgust, the bluing had made parts of the dress light blue, and, as if to add variety, had left long streaks of darker blue at intervals.

She paused to look at the dress.

"It isn't fit to wear!" she cried, and as she spoke, the door opened.

"Oh, Auntie!" gasped Tess.

"I came back a little early. I thought you might be lonesome. Why, what are you doing?" as she noticed the dress on the ironing board.

"Why, Tess! Is it possible that you still get into mischief, as you did when you were little? What tempted you to wash that dress? It was freshly laundered. I don't

understand what possessed you to do this. And the bluing! Why, I should never dream that it had ever been a white dress."

"Well, that was just what I was trying to do," Tess responded. "I didn't want to go anywhere again with that same white dress, so I tried to color it, and it's all streaked, and it's stuck to the iron 'til I'm about ready to fly. Oh, Auntie, can't you fix it? I *so* want to go to Dorothy's party, and I can't unless you can make the dress look better than it does now."

"I'll see what I can do with it," was the unexpected reply, for at first she had seemed really angry, and surely her vexation was not unreasonable.

She had left the house that morning, feeling that she could spend the day with her sister, and easily spare the time.

"The house is in order," she said to her-

self, "and the white dress that Tess is to wear to the party is freshly laundered."

To find that, in her absence, Tess had probably ruined the dress was certainly discouraging, but the look of distress in Tess's eyes had moved her to promise to repair the gown if possible.

The evening for the party was perfect. A myriad stars twinkled in the blue sky, and the air was crisp and cold.

Every invitation was accepted, and the sound of gay voices poured from the open doorway as Tess entered. A neighbor had agreed to take her over to the Stone House, and to call for her as well.

Her cloak, and hood were soon removed, and in her heart she thanked herself for having attempted to color the muslin dress.

Not a thought had she in her selfish little heart of all the extra work that her aunt had been forced to do. The muslin now appeared to be a delicate shade of blue, with lace edgings to match its tint.

Light blue ribbons had been added, and tiny pink moss buds made the entire effect charming.

Tess had hinted for new blue slippers, but her aunt thought that her patent leather pumps with blue hose would do very nicely, so Tess was obliged to be content.

The large parties given at the Stone House were always brilliant affairs, with everything in the way of novel entertainment, but the small parties were equally enjoyable, and the boys and girls coveted invitations to be present.

As Tess entered the living-room, they were

playing the "Magic Slipper," a childish game, to be sure, but one that big girls and bigger boys enjoy.

A very large slipper is purchased, and given to the lad who is to be the prince. He is also provided with wads of tissue-paper crushed into masses of varying sizes, with large pieces of cork, and loose masses of cotton-wool. These he carries in a basket that hangs from his arm, and from girl to girl he goes, trying to fit the big slipper. To do this, he is allowed to reach into his basket, and, without looking, take the first thing that comes to hand.

He kneels before the girl whom he chooses, slips the huge slipper onto her foot, pushing her foot, shoe and all, up into the toe of the big slipper. Snatching *something* from his basket, he thrusts it into the space left at the heel. If it fits, she is Cinderella, if it does

not fit, she is not the one who danced at the prince's ball.

Reginald was the prince, and he had made the round of the room without having fitted the slipper, when Tess appeared in the doorway.

"Hello, Tess!" he cried. "Come and let me see if this slipper fits you. If it does, you are Cinderella. Lift your foot, please, while I see if this dainty slipper will fit."

Tess laughed, and tossed her head.

"Pooh! That great thing! That slipper wouldn't fit anything but a giant foot!"

Reginald took advantage of her. He looked as he put his hand into his basket, and snatched two big wads of the crushed paper.

Shouts of laughter pealed forth as the others beheld the number-nine slipper perched upon Tess Haughton's foot, the huge mass of cotton holding it fast.

Her cheeks burned with quick anger. She saw no joke in the game. She was furious, and she kicked the slipper from her foot.

"It would fit *any* foot, with all that cotton in it," snapped Tess. Her vanity was injured.

Her foot was rather large for her size, and gladly would she have squeezed it into a wee shoe, had it been possible to do so.

The big *number-nine* slipper was as provoking as if it had been an animate object.

"Why did it stay on at all?" she thought.

She did not know that Reginald had snatched two portions of cotton, and for that reason, the big slipper had remained on her foot.

"It's your turn to say who the prince shall be next time," said Dorothy, hoping that Tess might at least enjoy that part of the game, but Tess was still angry.

"Oh, I don't at all care to choose," she said. "The game is too silly."

A faint pink touched Dorothy's cheek. She knew that she could not stop the game and start another to please Tess, because that would spoil the pleasure of the others who were enjoying the fun.

"Nancy, will you choose the prince?" she said, and while she did the best thing possible, Tess was more angry than before.

She had wished the game stopped because she, of all the guests, did not care for it.

She had been unpardonably rude, but she did not know that.

"Choose me!" whispered Reginald, but Nancy shook her head. She believed that he wanted a chance to tease Tess, and Tess, already angry and sullen, was in no mood for being teased.

She could never take a joke, and foolish

girl that she was, she now sat apart from her classmates, taking no part in the game, and "looking her worst, instead of her best," as Reginald whispered to Jack Tiverton.

Turning from Reginald, Nancy looked from one to another, and found it hard to choose. She wanted to be sure of some one who would not tease Tess, for Tess now looked as if a very slight annoyance would be sufficient to render her even more disagreeable, and that surely was unnecessary.

She had already marred the pleasure a bit, and Nancy, for Dorothy's sake, was trying to restore the gayety that had prevailed before Tess had arrived.

She turned her head and saw the laughing eyes of Byron Trent, familiarly known among his chums as "Lord Byron," because of his bearing that the boys chose to call "lordly."

"I choose you, Byron," Nancy said.

"And I'll make the slipper fit you, Nancy," was the quick reply, but he did not, and shouts of laughter greeted his failure to do so.

After many princes had been chosen, and the girls had tried to wear the big slipper, some one proposed playing "The Story-Teller," and that was even more fun.

Jack Tiverton agreed to tell the story, if all of those present would supply a word, each time that he seemed to be at loss for one.

CHAPTER X

NANCY'S DREAM

TESS had tested her skill in coloring, and had proved her lack of it. She was now testing the friendship of her mates, to learn if she were more valued than the others.

She longed to be assured that her wishes, and her will were of greater importance than those of other girls, and she had already learned that there were others, besides herself, to be considered.

She was also testing the patience of those about her, but she did not know that.

Dorothy looked toward her, and Tess yawned, to show that the game bored her.

Dorothy, of course, did not at once order the game stopped, and another substituted, and Tess felt more injured than before.

The story that Jack told, was a highly imaginative tale of a lion hunt.

According to the rules of the game, one is appointed Story-Teller, and before he begins to relate his adventures, each guest decides upon a word that he will offer to fill a space in the story.

The guests are numbered, and they supply words in regular order. They must not change the word that they first think of, but offer it as gravely as if it exactly fitted. Of course it reads like nonsense, but the game is a fun-maker, and the more absurd the story is rendered by the added words, the better.

Twice, in spite of her sulky mood, Tess laughed outright, and as the story grew more

exciting, and the supplied words more ludicrously inapt, she fell in with the merry mood of the others, and began really to enjoy herself.

Patricia was not present. Mrs. Dainty had sent her an invitation, hoping thus to give her a pleasure that would help her forget the happening that had made her grieve.

But Patricia had been too deeply hurt. She did not care to meet her former mates, nor did she wish to risk seeing them look first at her face, and then at Jack's to learn if either felt the least embarrassment.

She would rather forego the pleasure of the party, and keenly she must have felt it, because always before, she had been as anxious as Tess Haughton had been, to secure an invitation to any party in Merrivale, especially those given by Mrs. Dainty for Dorothy.

There were more games, and then dancing, a violin and piano giving fine music for the little party.

Arabella was another whose absence really improved the party, because she usually sat glum and uninterested during the games, and when dancing was enjoyed, was sure to remark that her Aunt Matilda didn't approve of dancing. To be sure, the girls and boys were not eager to hear what her Aunt Matilda thought about dancing, but that made it the more irritating. Arabella could not dance, so she usually stared at the dancers, and when she did not comment upon their lack of grace, she aired her aunt's "views" regarding frivolity in general, and the pastime of dancing in particular.

Reginald told Mollie Merton that he believed that Arabella's aunt had kept her away that she need not even see the dancing,

to which Mollie replied that she might as well do that as to talk about it.

Mollie had little patience with either Arabella, or her aunt.

After the dancing, a delicious little banquet was served, and the salads and ices were greatly enjoyed, and when "good-nights" were said, every one was able truthfully to say that the evening had been delightful. Even Tess had enjoyed the party, and earnestly she said so.

The little party had been given just before the first of March.

A few weeks had passed, and now, early in May, the warm days made it seem almost as if summer, rather than spring had come.

Early blossoms were making the gardens gay, and even the wild flowers were out-

doing themselves, in their effort to be as showy as the cultivated blooms.

Across the field a slender figure made its way, a graceful figure in its trim outing-suit of light-gray serge.

The hat, with its bright Roman scarf twisted about the crown, made a gay note of color, and from beneath its softly drooping brim hung a braid of glistening yellow hair. The waving ends, unbraided, needed no ribbon to confine them, for so tightly did they curl, that they clung together, making any sort of fastening unnecessary.

It was Dorothy, and no one was in sight to wonder why Nancy was not with her. It was for Nancy's sake that she had set forth, and it was also because of Nancy that she was hastening along at top speed. The night before, Nancy had cried out in her

sleep, that some one was chasing her, and so great had been her terror that she could not sleep again, but lay listening to every sound, and when morning came, she was pale, and feeling far from well.

Mrs. Dainty tried to reassure her, and Nancy listened patiently, but she seemed no less nervous than when she had first awakened.

Aunt Charlotte, sitting beside her, noticed her pale cheeks, and wondered that the effect of a dream could be so lasting.

"You have not yet told me what the dream was that so frightened you," she said.

For a moment neither spoke, then Nancy said:

"I dreamed that some one was going to take me from here, and make me dance on the stage again, just as my old uncle and aunt did. That is a good while ago, but I

haven't forgotten how it felt to be stolen, and it seemed so real,—so *real!*"

"But, Nancy dear, your old Uncle Steve is dead, and your aunt, the last time you heard from her, was not at all likely to live. Don't you know that, Nancy? Don't you remember, dear?" Mrs. Dainty said.

"Yes, I remember," Nancy replied; "but Sue was working for her, and she was then sick in bed, but just as soon as she improved, she was up and off somewhere, and Sue left alone in the house. She wrote to tell me, and you took her here, to be a maid, and she's been here ever since.

"But the voice I heard last night was not Uncle Steve's; 'twas not my aunt's voice. It was Signor Bonfanti's voice, and he was driving me before him, on the way to the theater!"

Dorothy left the room.

Her mother and Aunt Charlotte were saying all that could be said to comfort Nancy, and she slipped away to find Sue, and to question her regarding Nancy's aunt.

The maid was dusting the hall, and looked up, as Dorothy approached.

She listened to all that Dorothy had to tell about the dream, agreeing, with a nod when she remarked that Nancy's Uncle Steve was dead.

"Her aunt seemed 'bout used up, till the day she up an' left me. I was never more s'prised in my life than when I found she'd gone an' went," remarked Sue.

"But she says it was Bonfanti's voice that frightened her," said Dorothy. "Oh, I wish there was some one I could question, who could tell me if either of those horrid people would ever try again to get Nancy!"

"They *is*," said Sue, in a voice hardly

above a whisper, "but I do' 'no's you care to go 'n' ask her, but if ye *would* go, she'd tell yer, 'n' tell ye straight, too."

"I'll go this minute if it's any one that's in this town. Who is she? Where is she? Where'll I find her?"

"Come here ter the door, an' I'll show ye jest where," said Sue, in a whisper, and she opened the great door.

"There!" she said, pointing a slender finger. "See that big piece er land beyond this garden wall? See 'way off there on its farthest end a sort of wood-patch, and between them two tallest trees jest where I'm pointing, a bit of smoke curling up, an' blowin' off toward them other trees?"

"Yes, oh, yes," cried Dorothy, catching her breath, "and in the house that chimney belongs to I'll find the woman that will tell what I want to know. What is her name?"

"I do' no'," said Sue, and Dorothy caught her sleeve, and shook it nervously.

"But, Sue, try to remember her name. I have to know who to ask for."

"Oh, you don't have to ask for her. There's no one in the house but her, and she'll let you in. She looks a little queer, but you needn't be afraid, for she's all right, only she don't look like any one you ever saw before."

And when she stood before the tiny cottage, Dorothy, for the first time, wondered what sort of face a woman could have, who could look like no one whom one had ever seen before. She had not long to wonder, for at that moment a little old woman opened the door, and bade her enter.

"I saw ye comin'," she said in a thin, creaking voice, "and I knew by the look er yer face that ye was mighty anxious ter

know the answer ter some question that's puzzlin' ye. What is it? What d'ye want ter know? I'm no witch, though they call me so. Speak!"

Dorothy shivered, but it was anxiety for Nancy, not fear that shook her slender frame, and she told the story of Nancy's early experiences in a steady voice, that, however, betrayed her regard for her.

While listening, the old woman took from a drawer in the little table before her, a pack of rather grimy playing-cards, shuffled them, then dealt them, in such a way that they lay in nine little piles before her.

Taking the first pack, and spreading it like a fan, she muttered something, then to Dorothy she said:

"Your girl friend is born lucky. She is well and strong. She is with those who love her."

"Yes, oh, yes," Dorothy cried eagerly, "but the *dream,* tell me about that."

"Patience, girl. I tell things in the order that I see them in the cards.

"This next pile tells of her beauty, and this,"—taking the third pack,—"tells that she makes friends wherever she goes."

Dorothy tried to hide her annoyance, but the toe of her shoe tapped the floor!

It was hard to listen to facts that she already knew, when her heart was aching for assurance of Nancy's safety. It was for Nancy that she had come. She would have paid no heed to the dream if it had not so frightened Nancy.

The old woman kept straight on, until the last two piles of cards were left.

In the next to the last pack, she told of the stealing of Nancy, when she was little,

of her life on the stage, of her wonderful dancing, and of her return.

As she picked up the last pack, Dorothy leaned forward, her cheeks pale, and her hands nervously clasped.

"Her uncle and aunt are both dead, and it was them as stole her, but I see in the cards, a dark man. I don't think he'll get her, but he'll try. I see her safe with a light girl, and that's you. This is where he'd look for her. Ef he don't ketch her *here,* he won't ketch her at all, fer he won't try 'fore 'nother season, an' when he comes here ter Merrivale, you 'n' this Nancy girl'll be away ter school, so't he wouldn't know where ter look fer her. This plan fer you two ter go away fer a year's schoolin' is the best thing ye could do."

With this comforting thought in her mind,

Dorothy turned homeward, and so eager was she to tell Nancy what she had heard, that she raced across the field at top speed, reaching the great gate, flushed and breathless.

She rushed into the hall, removed coat and hat, and turned to mount the stairs, when she saw Nancy, just coming down to meet her.

The message from the strange old woman charmed Nancy, and a happy light shone in her fine dark eyes.

For a moment she looked steadily at Dorothy, then she said:

"Where did Sue tell you to find the old woman, Dorothy? Did you have to hunt her up in any part of this town that was lonely?"

"Why, no—yes, oh, really, Nancy, I don't know. I guess it was a bit lonely there, but I was so eager to get a few words of comfort

for you, that I believe I forgot to be afraid," Dorothy said. "The walk from here to the house wasn't lonely, but the old woman was queer. Come out and I'll show you where the cottage is!"

Together they ran out into the sunlight, and Dorothy pointed to where, in the distance, a tiny spiral of smoke curled up from among the trees.

"Look there!" she cried.

Nancy looked. "I see the smoke," she said; "is that where you went? To a house where the smoke shows among the trees?"

"Yes, and wasn't it strange that she could read so much from just looking at some playing-cards?"

Dorothy's eyes were full of wonder as she marveled that the old woman was so clever.

It certainly did seem strange, and almost like witchcraft that she could, by gazing at

the playing-cards, tell, not only what *would* happen, but also what *had* happened.

Those things of which she spoke that had happened, were absolutely true, therefore it was not strange that the two girls should have strong faith that those things which she predicted for the next season would surely come true.

What would they have thought if they could have peeped into the little garden, and have watched the little old woman and listened to what she was saying to herself?

At the very moment that Dorothy and Nancy were looking toward the spot where the cottage stood, hidden from sight by the trees and underbrush, the old woman stood at the rear of her house, twisting the dollar bill that Dorothy had given her, and chuckling in a manner that was not very pleasant.

"LOOK THERE!" SHE CRIED.—*Page 199.*

"Girls are queer, queer!" she muttered, "and even queerer'n that!" she added.

"The Dainty girl's a beauty. Even although she is petted and pampered, she's a reel little lady. Lor' me! How her blue eyes did stare when I told her what *had* happened ter Nancy Ferris!

"Guess 'twouldn't have seemed quite so wonderful ef she'd happened ter hev known that ol' Mrs. Ferris was in my house one time when she was watchin' for a chance ter hook Nancy!"

She bent to drive a bit deeper, a stake to which a plant was tied. She rose stiffly, and continued pacing up and down the walk, still handling the bill as it lay in her apron pocket.

"I wish I'd known how much money she had with her. Maybe I could had a dollar 'n' a half. Like as not could have had even

more than that if only I'd been sharp enough ter git it."

Up and down the little garden path she went muttering, and chuckling.

Chuckling because of the bit of money so quickly earned. Muttering because she had been so careless as to be, for the time, satisfied with less than she might have had.

After a time she laughed, shrilly, then again she spoke.

"How startled she looked when I spoke of the dark man that *might* try ter hook her. That was jest a guess, that's all. She actually hopped when I spoke of their plan ter go 'way ter school. Why, Sue told me that yesterday, when she got me ter read the cards, and see 'f her brother that she ain't seen fer years was livin'.

"I declare, Sue thinks the things I tell by them playin'-cards is jest wonderful. Ac-

tooally, I kin make her believe anything!

"I told her if she could get the butler an' the cook ter come 'n' have their fortune told, pretty often, I'd tell hers fer half-price!"

CHAPTER XI

THE FAIRY PLAY

THE air was sweet with the scent of blossoming shrubs, and high against the blue sky, the fruit trees waved their flower-laden branches.

It was Friday afternoon, the time devoted each week to speaking, and the reading of essays.

A sense of anticipation could be felt. Every boy and girl was waiting to enjoy the little play that was to be given. Even the little pupils of the lower grades were to see the pretty play given by the pupils of advanced classes, an honor seldom accorded the younger members of the school.

The play, simple as it was, had many points that made it interesting.

Its actors, seven in all, were given pleasing parts, with lines, that, well spoken, would hold the attention of the audience that now had become restless, and impatient for the opening speech.

The entire school had marched to the hall on the upper floor of the new schoolhouse. The school orchestra had rendered the overture, and now six of the girls, as the curtain went up, were found, talking over the happenings of the school year.

"Well, girls, the day of graduation is nearly here. To-morrow is the day when we take our diplomas, and then,—" So spoke Tess, who had the opening lines of the play.

"Why, then," said Mollie, "we shall look about us, take our bearings, and try to determine what we shall do to win a name."

"I wish some one could tell us what we had best attempt," said Flossie, the smallest, as well as youngest of the little actresses.

"And wouldn't it be fine if we could know if any one of us would be successful in attempting the thing upon which we've set our hearts," said Katie Dean.

"Some one left a very old book at our house, and it was so long ago that we've no idea to whom it belongs, but it tells of charms, and one that it describes is a magic verse which, when recited, summons a fairy who will answer questions, and make clear those things which puzzle and confuse," said Inez Kingston, a new pupil who had joined the class a month ago, and was already a favorite.

"Do you have to do anything besides recite the verse that calls the fairy?" Nancy asked, to which Inez replied:

"Oh, yes, one thing more. The girl who is to summon the fairy draws a circle with chalk upon the floor, then recites the verse, and the book says it has never been known to fail. The fairy *always* appears," Inez replied.

"Then let us try it," spoke Nancy.

"Yes, yes, let us try it!" they cried in chorus.

With a piece of chalk Inez drew a large circle, then she slowly sang:

"In this circle pure and white,
Fairy, fairy, show your light.
Tell us if we persevere
Luck will come our hearts to cheer."

A flutter in the shrubbery massed at the back of the stage, and Dorothy in white gauze, with spangled wings, a glistening star above her forehead, sprang into the chalk line circle, waving her bright wand, and

smiling as she looked from one eager face to another.

"You have summoned me to-day,
Tell me what you wish, I pray."

she said, as she stood in the center of the circle.

"Tell us, oh, tell us, what we should attempt, for what we are fitted, in what we should succeed," said Mollie.

"In that you love you will succeed,
But to my words you must give heed.
Do well the tasks that come to hand,
And first you'll follow, then, *command!*"

Then she questioned each as to her especial ambition.

"What wish lies nearest to your heart, dear child," she said to Flossie, to which dear Flossie replied:

"I've no talent save to bless
Those I love with tenderness."

To this the fairy replied:

"Cultivate your tender art;
You and love shall never part."

"And you? What is your wish?" questioned the fairy, laying her hand upon Tess Haughton's arm.

"I'd like to be the most admired girl in the world," declared Tess, and the lines so nearly expressed the wish of her own selfish heart that she blushed as she spoke them.

"Be always kind, be always true,
The world will love and honor you."

That was not exactly what the speaker of the lines had wished, but she had to be satisfied with the advice that the fairy gave.

"And you, dear one? What do you wish to do?
Be sure I'll answer your heart's question, too."

"Oh, I know what my wish is, in advance,
'Tis that I may professionally dance,"

were Nancy's lines.

"Dance for me, dear; I soon can tell,
If for the dance you're fitted well,"

responded the fairy, and Nancy did her best, to the wild delight of the pupils, who clapped their hands, and shouted with delight.

Mr. Wardwell instead of rebuking them for their noisy demonstration, joined in the wild applause that brought an encore. The parts had been assigned to those who could best fill them, and who could have so well impersonated the little dancer as Nancy?

The first number had been a simple little dance, and she had run from the stage at its finish, but the applause had continued, and she now returned with her toe-dancer's slippers on her feet. With grace and skill she did the lovely figures that Bonfanti had taught her, and when it was finished the

cheers of her audience were louder than before.

Mr. Wardwell touched the bell, and when the din had lulled so that he could make himself heard, he said:

"We have all enjoyed Nancy's fine dancing, and she generously gave, as an encore, another number, more elaborate, more difficult than the first. To ask, by continued applause for yet another would be presuming. Let the play go on."

Next the fairy learned that Mollie longed to excel in music, and Mollie admitted that she was unwilling to practice.

"Without effort naught is done,
You must work, and you alone
Can so struggle for the prize
That your hopes you will realize."

It was Inez's turn to be questioned.

"I'd like to be queen of society," she said.

" 'Tis a rôle that you can fill,
If you enter with a will.
But if social life you choose,
There are greater things you'll lose."

"Now, Katie, child, tell me your heart's desire
Believe me, I will help you to acquire."

"I've no especial gift. What shall I do?
I know not what to choose. Oh, help me to."

"Take every task that comes, and do it well,
And some day you will know where you excel."

Turning to the group, the fairy extended her hands.

"Now, I bless you, one and all,
I responded to your call,
And I wish you all success,
Joy, and peace and happiness."

The girls gazed at the place in the shrubbery where she had disappeared.

"I tell you, girls, the fairy spoke truly. If we wish to succeed in whatever we under-

take, we'll have to work with a will, and I, for one, intend to," said Mollie.

"Once more in the mystic ring,
Fairy, fairy, lightly spring.
Lead us as we march away,
On this, our graduation day."

At their call, Dorothy reappeared, springing into the center of the ring.

"Now follow me, and thou shalt see,
Success will ever follow thee."

The orchestra played a fine march, and led by Dorothy, the fairy queen, they marched from the hall.

It was a pretty play, and the girls had done creditably.

The audience was delighted, and as they left the school the pupils talked first of those who had taken part, and of their clever performance, and then of the play itself.

"Do you believe that *any one* who will strive for success will win it?" questioned one of the boys, as Mr. Wardwell overtook them on the way home.

"Let me ask it another way," said a slender youth who was nearest the teacher.

"Well, ask the question in your way?" was the ready response.

"I'll ask, sir, if *every one* of those who try is bound to win success?"

"Certainly not," the teacher replied, "but many who sincerely strive will win out. Now let me ask a question. How many of those who do not try will win a prize of any sort? Is there anything under the sun that is worth having that can be won without effort?"

They saw the point.

"The little play that the girls gave has set me thinking," said the laziest boy in the

class, "and I don't know if I'll always keep it up, but for a month I'm going to work at my studies, and see what I can do."

"Well spoken, Merrington, and I prophesy that if you will work for a month, you will be so astonished at the progress that you have made, that you will leave your idle days behind you, and continue to work," said the teacher.

The girls had been quite as favorably impressed, and more than one declared her intention of being a worker from that day forth.

Dorothy, with her costume in a suitcase, walked along the avenue between Nancy and Mollie, Flossie clinging to Mollie, and eagerly listening while the others talked.

"I'll have to practice now," said Mollie, "for after what the fairy said I'd be ashamed not to."

"And I'll try harder than ever to be kind," Flossie said, in an odd little voice.

"Why, you don't have to try to do that, because you're always just dear," said Mollie.

"I'm the one with the quick temper who has to try, and try, and try again to guard my tongue, for I love you all, and rarely mean any hasty thing I say."

"That's right, Miss Pussy," cried a teasing voice. It was Sidney Merrington who had twisted one of Mollie's curls in school, and Mollie had called him a "torment."

"Am I a torment, Mollie?" he asked, as he lingered at her gate when the other girls had gone.

Mollie hesitated.

"*Am* I? Mollie, I wish you'd take that back. I know I teased you, but the curl at the end of your braid looked so round and

shiny, I couldn't help twisting it, and then tweaking it a little.

"I don't do things that are really mean," he pleaded in self-defense, "and, Mollie, I'm going to be a good pupil after this. I'll not see you at the head of the class, and I at the foot. From now on, Mollie, I'm determined to be a worker."

"Well,—I'll not say you *weren't* a torment, but if you stop teasing me, I'll say you're not one now, and, Sidney, if at first the arithmetic puzzles you, I'll help you. There, Sidney Merrington, isn't that fair?"

"It's fair, Mollie, and you're a trump! I can work now like a Trojan. Watch me and see how I stick to the work, and win!"

CHAPTER XII

ANTICIPATION

NANCY was sitting upon the stone wall, dreaming of the new experience of going away to a fine, large school, and living under the roof with so many girls, some of them younger than herself, some older, many of them the same age as herself and Dorothy.

These latter would be her classmates, and as they would each be a representative of a fine family, each would doubtless be charming. It was a fine outlook, truly, and if only it would prove to be correct, the year at "Glenmore" would surely be delightful.

It was early in June, and all the world seemed singing.

Dorothy had been sitting beside her, but had gone up to the house for a book that both intended to read. Often they read together, and then later they would enjoy talking over the chapters that unfolded the story, and discuss the doings of hero and heroine, maid and page.

A butterfly fluttered over the wall, and to watch him, Nancy turned from the avenue, changing her position so as to admire the gorgeous wings as they waved, up and down, taking the slender body up, up, so high above the crimson rose that it could sail slowly down, to nestle among the scented petals.

"Hello!"

Nancy started, and a harsh, grating laugh told her before she turned, who had come.

"What a silly to jump like that!" cried Arabella. "Who d'you think I was? A tramp?"

"Of course not," Nancy replied, with spirit, "but any girl who did not know that any one was near, would be a bit surprised to hear a voice close to her ear."

"Well, perhaps so," Arabella admitted, because she did not wish so to offend Nancy that she would feel unfriendly toward her. She was dull and *slow* in many ways, but she knew quite enough of school life, to know that at the beginning of the school year, it would be exceedingly pleasant to have the friendship of Dorothy and Nancy.

She was slow to make friends, and in a large school she knew that there would be plenty of strangers.

Yes, surely it would be wise to be on good terms with Nancy and her dear Dorothy.

"I was thinking of the new school, Glenmore, and I was thinking, it would be easy

to get Patricia to go,—well, how funny you look. Don't you know you'd not care to go to Glenmore, well, I mean you'd not care near as much, if Dorothy wasn't with you? If there wasn't another girl there that you liked, you'd be happy because you had Dorothy."

"I know," responded Nancy.

"Well, then, why wouldn't I be glad if Patricia was there to be a chum for me? I can't get acquainted easily, and I'd like one girl there that I knew."

Nancy saw it clearly now. It was just as Arabella said, only that Arabella did not know the reason for her unpopularity.

She was naturally unsocial, almost unfriendly. She made free to criticise, she was quick to condemn, and rarely did she say a pleasant word of any one.

She was extremely selfish, and appeared more like a little old woman, than like the school-girl that she was.

What was there about Arabella Correyville that was winning?

Nancy, with her warm heart, her merry way, her winning smile, would have had a dozen friends during the first term, and any number of pleasant acquaintances, in other classes than her own.

Dorothy Dainty, well-born, and gently bred, had found it easy to learn the laws of gentleness, kindness, and love.

Nancy Ferris, reared in unlovely surroundings, had found the path more difficult, but her little heart was very warm, and when she left the old home behind her, and found herself a member of the household at the Stone House, she blossomed like a lovely flower that has been longing for love and

sunlight. Surrounded by love, invariable kindness, and courtesy, she longed to be like those whom she so loved and so ardently admired.

"I will be like these dear, new friends," she often whispered to herself, and she had kept the little vow.

Arabella still stood beside her, silently watching her face, and waiting for her to speak. Nancy, hoping that shallow, fickle Patricia, who so dearly loved to create discord, might not be a member of the class, made a cautious remark.

"She might not be able to join us at Glenmore, because her mother might wish her to stay in New York. She's been here with her aunt a long time."

"Oh, that's easy enough to manage," Arabella said. "Patricia will go to Glenmore if she wants to. She always does just as she

chooses. Know how she manages it? I do."

Without waiting for Nancy to reply, Arabella continued.

"First Patricia tells her mother what she wants to do, and coaxes if she has to. If that doesn't get permission, then she tells her mother that all the girls at Merrivale that are *anybody,* are going to do it, and that if she isn't allowed to do it, all Merrivale will think that the Lavines *couldn't afford it.* That last is sure to work."

"I wouldn't want to get what I wished for that way," Nancy said. "I'd want to have it because those that I loved were both willing, and able to let me have it. I'd not like forcing them to give it to me, and I'd not enjoy it after I got it."

Arabella was in one of her most disagree-

able moods, and her reply was just what one might have expected from her.

"Oh, you can easily say that, Nancy Ferris, because the Daintys are wealthy, and give you everything you think of, but if you were still living on the worst street in Merrivale, and lived in that horrid old house, and wore horrid old clothes, I guess you'd be pretty glad to get anything you wanted, and get it any way you could. Well, you needn't turn white, and look so hurt, for it's true!"

"I don't deny it," Nancy said bravely, although she could not keep her lips from trembling.

Arabella appeared to enjoy the pain that she was giving, and, as Nancy seemed unable to strike back, she continued.

"And when they taught you to dance, and put you on the stage, you had to live with

your horrid old uncle, and I guess you couldn't 'pick and choose' there."

Nancy quailed beneath the lashing of Arabella's tongue.

"And your mother was nothing but a stage-dancer. Your mother only—"

"*Stop!*" Nancy cried, springing to her feet, her dark eyes flashing.

"You can say any mean thing you like to me, but you *can't* say one word about my mother. She was beautiful, and graceful, and a wonderful dancer. I have seen her picture, and better than everything else, she was pure, and true, and good.

"It is said that she never said or did an unkind thing in her life, and that is more than any one could say of *you!*

"Oh, forgive me, Arabella," Nancy said, sinking upon the wall, from which, in anger,

she had sprung, "but,—you have been *so* unkind to me."

Then the most surprising thing happened.

"I'm sorry," Arabella said, and no one, not even Aunt Matilda, ever had heard her say that.

"Now, go, please do," Nancy said, "for I can't talk. I'm hurt, and tired." Turning, she lay down upon the wall, her face hidden on her arm.

She was crying softly.

Arabella, for once really sorry for what she had done, stood awkwardly looking at her. She was about to try to say something that might comfort, when footsteps approaching, made her turn.

Aunt Charlotte was coming toward them, but, for the moment, the trees and shrubbery screened the two girls so that she did not see them.

Arabella stole softly away through the flowering shrubs, out of the great gateway, and up the avenue toward home.

Aunt Charlotte was startled to find Nancy alone upon the wall, her face hidden on her arms, her slender form shaken with sobs.

It was some moments before Nancy was sufficiently calm to tell what had happened.

When the story was at last told, Nancy's eyes were sad, and the tears lay upon her dark lashes.

Aunt Charlotte drew her close.

"Nancy, my Nancy, I wish that I could shield you from every unkind word, but that may not be. But, darling," she continued, "much as this grieves you, and grieves me, for your sake, I would far rather that you should have been thus wounded, than that you should be guilty of so mean a thing as that which Arabella did.

"She could not demean you, dear, but she has demeaned herself, and I am ashamed for her.

"She told you that you once were poor, and taunted you regarding your old uncle who forced you to dance upon the stage, that you might earn for him, the living that he was too lazy to earn for himself.

"Those things meant misfortune, but misfortune is not disgrace.

"As to your beautiful mother, you did just right to defend her. She was a lovely, and lovable woman, talented and successful. Not every woman, in private life, is as sweet-tempered, upright, and God-fearing as she. You did right to defend her from a wicked tongue."

"I am proud of you, Nancy, and I am *ashamed* of Arabella!" cried Dorothy, rushing to Nancy, and clasping her in her arms.

"I am so happy here in this home, with the dearest friends in the world, that any one would wonder that I could shed a tear, but Arabella's words were so harsh that they were more than I could bear, and I hid my face, and asked her to go," Nancy said.

In the meantime, Arabella, on a little seat in her garden, was, in her slow fashion, thinking over what had happened. She had spoken truthfully when she had said that she was sorry for what she had said.

She was a *bit* sorry for Nancy's hurt feelings but far more regretful because she believed that Nancy would be less friendly at Glenmore because of the morning's happening.

It was decided that the summer should be spent at the Stone House. It was a beautiful, and luxurious home, where comfort

reigned, and during the middle and late summer preparations must be made for the trip to the West, and also for those things that would make comfort for Dorothy and Nancy in their new school life at Glenmore.

The Merrivale boys and girls were glad to know that the Stone House would be open for the summer. It was enough to know that Dorothy and Nancy were to be away at school all winter.

They would make much of them now!

Vera wrote racy letters telling how she and "Elf" were looking forward to the year at Glenmore, and what "barrels of fun" they were already planning.

Arabella felt rather ashamed of her harshness with Nancy, and kept apart from her, and from Dorothy, whose sympathy, she knew, would be entirely with Nancy, as even she acknowledged it should be.

From Tess Haughton they learned that Patricia's name was already on the list of new pupils at Glenmore, and Dorothy looked at Nancy with such a droll expression upon her pretty face that Nancy, with difficulty, kept from laughing. Afterward Dorothy said:

"If I looked queer, it was because, for the moment, it seemed as if Patricia was actually chasing after us."

Of the school at Merrivale, they had chosen Tess Haughton, and Sidney Merrington as new friends, and Sidney seemed the finer character of the two, although Tess had a charm that made people prone to overlook her faults. The greater number of pupils had come from undesirable neighborhoods, and for this reason, Mrs. Dainty had turned to Glenmore, as a fine school, with well-bred companions for the coming year.

Of the droll doings of Patricia, the strange notions of Arabella, of the new schoolmates, of the round of fun for which Vera and Elf were responsible, one may read in

"DOROTHY DAINTY AT GLENMORE"

THE END