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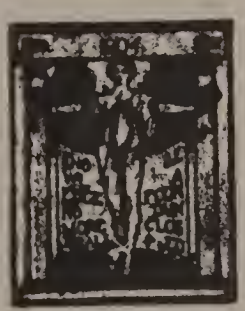

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CHAPTER I

A SURPRISE

THE great gardens at the Stone House had always been fine and stately, but their beauty had been enhanced, and now they stood flooded with sunlight, the finest gardens in that part of the country. There was a lovely new fountain, the great basin of which, sunk in the velvet lawn, was large enough to float a small boat.

A section of wall, vine-covered, having three arch-shaped openings through which one could see masses of flowers, a glimpse of

a fountain, beautiful flowering shrubs, and the swaying tree-tops, had been built during the summer, and this bit especially delighted Dorothy and her playmates.

It was great sport to play "Tag," and it was almost impossible to catch a playmate who continually "dodged" in through one arch, and out through another.

On a broad terrace a tiled flooring had been laid, its edge bordered by a little fence, and at the end of the fence stood a huge marble vase.

This little tiled terrace formed a fine place on which to stand and enjoy the beauty of the garden, and Dorothy often ran out to this lovely spot to look down upon the bright masses of color below.

One day, when Fluff had followed her, she picked him up so that he, too, might see the lovely colors. There was a broad

border of lawn outside the fence, and Dorothy, thinking herself alone, was startled when Arabella appeared, walking along on the other side of the fence.

"My! How you jumped!" she said, "You'd have jumped even higher if I'd shouted what my father said last night," she continued. "I didn't hear him, but my aunt did, and she *knows*. My father says this town is full of *pirates!* M-m!"

Arabella was delighted. She thought that, for once, she had been the first to tell a bit of news, but Dorothy's answer was not quite what she had expected.

"Oh, your father was joking," Dorothy said, but Arabella stoutly denied that.

"You may think he was joking if you like," she said, "but what I said was *true*."

She ran along the terrace, but when she reached the driveway, she turned and

looked up at Dorothy. "I guess you'd believe it if you knew what I know. Aunt Matilda is having big brass bolts put on every door, just because of what Father said," she shouted, and then she hurried up the avenue toward home.

Arabella Correyville was a strange child who seemed to delight in startling her playmates. She had told her "pirate yarn" to every one whom she had met.

"Arabella always makes us *so* uncomfortable," Dorothy whispered to little Fluff, "and Nancy is up at the house, to be sure, but Mother, and Father, and Aunt Charlotte will not be home until six o'clock tonight." She set Fluff down, and raced with him to the porch.

Indoors she found the butler, but his knowledge was limited.

"Sure, Miss Dorothy, all I knows 'bout

pirates, is wot I seen on the stage one time, an' all I remember is their red trousers like no gentleman would wear, a bandanna tied 'round their heads, and a knife betwixt their teeth.''

''Oh, they must have looked very horrid,'' Dorothy said in a voice a little louder than a wee whisper.

''They looked turrible, but their singing was *turribler!*'' said the butler.

Dorothy ran through the house, calling all the way for Nancy.

She found her in the library, bending over a big book, and oddly enough, the picture that held her attention, represented a ship of the olden time, attacked by pirates.

''Come away from that book!'' cried Dorothy, ''and we'll sit on the low seat by the window, while I tell you what I've just heard.''

Nancy listened.

"But we're not going to sea, and we're not living anywhere near the sea," she objected, "and I don't care what the butler means. If it *is* true that just '*once upon a time*' there were perfectly horrid pirates prowling around, I don't believe there are any *now*. Oh, I wish Arabella wouldn't come over here every time she hears or thinks of something that is disagreeable to tell!"

"So do I," said Dorothy, "and I do wish James could have *truly* told me that pirates were never real, and that they were just fairy-tale people. If what Arabella said is true, that this town is full of them, why are they here, and what are they doing?"

"That's what I'd like to know," Nancy said slowly, her eyes very wide-open, as if she, too, were becoming anxious.

It happened that just at that moment, Uncle Harry was passing, and catching a glimpse of him from the window, they rushed out on the driveway, shouting to him as they ran.

"Uncle Harry! Oh, please wait a minute!" they called, and quickly he turned, and opened the great gate.

"Why, what's up, little friends?" he asked, in real concern.

He had thought that a mischievous prank was being planned, but he now saw that Dorothy was really frightened, while Nancy was surely far from calm.

"We're alone to-day, just we two and the servants, and Arabella—"

"Has been telling her pirate yarn?" Uncle Harry said, to complete Dorothy's statement, and he laughed merrily at her surprise.

"How *did* you know what I was going to say?" she asked.

"I know, because she called at our house first, and then at Molly Merton's, and succeeded in frightening Molly and Flossie so that they're afraid to leave the house lest a pirate be lurking behind every gate-post. Here's Correyville now. Let's see what he has to say about this wild pirate yarn," Uncle Harry said, as he turned to greet his neighbor.

Mr. Correyville stared in amazement when Uncle Harry told of Arabella's alarm, and of the actual terror that she was spreading.

"Where did the child get such a wild yarn as that?" he exclaimed, his surprise too genuine to be doubted.

"Oh, Mr. Correyville, Arabella said that her Aunt Matilda heard you say that this

town was filled with pirates!" cried Nancy.

For a moment, Robert Correyville stared at Nancy, and then, a light, a twinkling light, came into his eyes, and how he laughed! Laughed until he nearly lost his breath.

"Well, well, that *is* a joke!" he said when he could stop laughing long enough to speak. "That surely *is* a joke! Bless me, but I must explain to Arabella. I recall what I said, but I never dreamed that my words could be twisted into anything that could terrify. I was talking with Mrs. Correyville, and I said that several of the storekeepers here in town were regular pirates, charging unreasonable prices for their goods. They are all pirates, I believe, although I suppose we must try to think that a few are honorable."

After Mr. Correyville had left them,

Uncle Harry stood for a few moments talking to them until they felt wholly assured that there was not a pirate in the town, and no likelihood that there ever would be. Pirates were out of date, he had said.

"We were afraid, but I think Arabella will be disappointed," Nancy said slowly.

"Why do you think that?" Dorothy asked.

"Because," said Nancy, "she told that pirate story to you to frighten you, and I'm sure she'd rather you'd *stay* scared."

"Well, I'm not the least bit frightened now," Dorothy said, and with a gay laugh she stooped, and caught little Fluff to her breast.

"You darling Fluff!" she cried, "are you afraid of pirates?"

He looked at her.

"Wow-woof!" he answered.

"That's two words," said Nancy. "I wonder if he means to say, 'I am,' when he says 'Wow-woof'!"

"Well, he needn't be afraid," said Dorothy, "for we love him too much to let any one hurt or frighten him."

The evening was cool, and after dinner they all turned, as with one accord, to the great fireplace in the living-room, where Dorothy and Nancy crouched upon cushions on the floor before the fire, the older people preferring their comfortable chairs.

"Tell us a story," Dorothy coaxed, to which Nancy added: "*Please* tell us a story. You know so many stories about lords and ladies of long ago. Tell one of those, please." So Mr. Dainty told an old romance, beginning with an ancient castle from which the lords and their fair ladies, richly dressed, and all mounted upon fine

horses, rode forth one day, bent upon falconry.

They were laughing and talking as they rode through the forest, and out on a sunny plain beyond. They bagged but few birds, but they had enjoyed the day.

On the homeward way, some one began to sing a jolly hunting song, and soon the whole party joined in the chorus.

They were near the castle when one of the ladies noticed that two of their party were missing.

"Ah, but here they come now!" she cried a moment later. "See them off there in the distance?"

"They were with us when we spread our feast by the brook, but they lingered after we started for the castle," said another.

"Why, look you! It is young Ardwell and Lady Erline, and who is that who pur-

sues them?" cried a cavalier. "Let us hurry on and let them follow us over our drawbridge to the safety and shelter of Castle Conwell."

It was agreed, and the horses plunged forward, the man on the lookout tower gave the signal, the drawbridge was promptly lowered, and the party rode into the shelter of those massive stone walls, their swords and spurs clanking, the Lady Erline, and her escort closely following.

"Safe!" cried the girl, the color coming back to her cheeks.

Suddenly outside arose a great shout, and much commotion.

"Oh, what has happened?" cried Lady Erline, turning to young Ardwell. "You know, he shouted for us to stop, but we raced over the drawbridge, and into the castle!"

A servant peeped through a loophole, and there, sure enough, were horse and rider struggling in the moat.

The rival cavalier, blind with anger, had attempted to drive his horse on to the drawbridge, that he, too, might be admitted to the castle, but immediately the girl and her lover had entered, the drawbridge had been lifted, and he who strove to cross it, had landed, horse and rider, in the moat.

He was not badly hurt, but he was angrier than before, and the pain from many bruises did not lessen his wrath.

He was a bold, lawless fellow, and you may be sure, after the servants had helped him out, and the horse had been, with much difficulty, gotten out as well, he was told to go his way, and go quickly, unless he wished to be assisted vigorously.

With much help, he mounted his horse,

and rode away muttering that he would return and force the beautiful Lady Erline to be his bride.

"Oh, *did* he, Father?" Dorothy asked eagerly.

"He intended to keep his vow," Mr. Dainty said, "but when, a few weeks later, he came to the castle and demanded admission he was refused.

" 'Stand aside!' he shouted to the servant. "I will not let any manservant stand in my way. I have long admired the beautiful Lady Erline, and I have come now to make her my bride!'

" 'I fear me, you are too late,' said the manservant.

" 'Too late! Too late! What mean you, lout?'

" 'I mean that the Lady Erline, a month ago, became the bride of young Andreas

Ardwell, who since his older brother was lost at sea, has assumed the title and vast estates, and the couple are now known as Lord and Lady Glenmore, of Castle Glenmore.'

"There appeared to be nothing more to be said or done, so the cavalier mounted his horse, and rode away at top speed."

"And they lived happily ever after? *Did* they, as the fairy tales always say, 'live happily ever after?'" Dorothy asked eagerly.

"It is said that they were an exceedingly happy couple, and that the bad cavalier was never seen nor heard from after the day that the servant saw him ride swiftly away from the castle," Mr. Dainty said, smiling to see the look of quick relief in Dorothy's blue eyes.

"I like to have stories end happily," she said, "and I was glad to know that the bad

cavalier didn't come back with a band of horrid armed men to attack the castle."

"Or sneak back and hide in the woods until he saw them again riding out for a gay time, and then spring out and attack them," said Nancy.

"Father always tells cheerful stories after dinner," Dorothy said.

"I don't believe in reading or recounting tragic stories just before bedtime," Mr. Dainty said, "for fear that our dreams may be disturbed. I'm sure you would have been surprised if I had told a tale with a grim, unpleasant ending."

"We like surprises," Dorothy said, "but not that kind."

"I think you and Nancy are to have a delightful surprise to-morrow," Mrs. Dainty said.

"Oh, tell us now!" they cried, springing

from their cushions upon the floor, and taking a coaxing position, one on either side of Mrs. Dainty's chair.

"Oh, surely not," Mrs. Dainty said, laughing, "for then, when it actually happens to-morrow, it will be no surprise at all."

"It would be a surprise *now,*" Nancy urged, but Mrs. Dainty was firm, and refused to tell. "Not a word to-night," she said. "Wait until to-morrow, and then, I promise you, it will be a great surprise and delight. You will both be glad that you waited."

They talked of it before going to sleep, they woke early, and talked of it then, and in a pause in the conversation at the breakfast-table, Dorothy looked up to say, "The surprise hasn't happened yet."

"Is it likely to happen any minute?" Nancy asked.

"You may get so excited waiting that you will find it difficult to be patient, and so I will tell you that the delightful little happening will occur shortly before noon, so what do you say to a long drive, if we are sure of returning in time?" Mrs. Dainty said.

It was a lovely morning and Dorothy and Nancy thought it surely would be easier to wait while speeding over the road, than to sit, as Dorothy said, "Just waiting." Mrs. Dainty laughed softly.

"Couldn't you do anything for amusement, while you waited?" she asked, her eyes twinkling.

"It would be hard to feel interested in anything, while I was watching the clock," Dorothy said.

The ride proved delightful, and the time surely sped faster than if the two had sat watching the clock, and wondering why the time went so slowly.

They had spent three hours out on the sunny avenues, and were turning in at the driveway, when Mrs. Dainty glanced at her watch.

"I think we shall find the surprise waiting for us," she said, and when they reached the house, little Fluff came racing out to meet them, so excited that he could not keep all four of his little white paws on the ground at the same time, but hopped from one to the other, uttering little yelps of excitement and delight.

"He knows something nice has happened, and he's trying to tell us," said Dorothy.

He raced in before them, turning to learn if they were following him, and then duck-

ing his head, rushed into the living-room, barking all the way.

Dorothy and Nancy ran after him, and there on a low divan sat—Vera Vane!

"Oh, Vera, *dear!*" cried Dorothy. "What a lovely surprise!"

"I'm just as glad to see you, as Dorothy is," cried Nancy, and then, from sheer excitement, the three little friends clasped hands and danced wildly around in a ring.

"How long can you stay, Vera?" Dorothy asked.

Vera laughed and whirled around like a top.

"I'll be here to-day, and all day to-morrow, but I go back to New York the next morning."

"Oh, *Vera—!*" cried Dorothy and Nancy, as if with one breath.

"Oh, but Mother will come for me, and

we are to take you two home with us for a lovely visit. *Now,* aren't you surprised?

"Mother came part way with me," she explained, "and one of Father's friends was coming to Merrivale on business, and he finished the trip with me."

CHAPTER II

WHAT VERA HEARD

AFTER lunch, they showed Vera the beautiful little Treasure Chest, and Vera declared that she had never seen any Treasure Chest so lovely as this one that Dorothy so truly prized.

"Mother has one that my father brought home from abroad, and it would hold more than yours would, Dorothy, but it isn't nearly so handsome," said Vera, "and I'm going to send you a lovely little gift to be one of the things that you keep in it."

"Oh, Vera, you are dear!" cried Dorothy, drawing her closer.

"It's no use to ask what the gift will be, because *I* don't know yet. It will be the

first lovely thing that I see that I am sure you will like to have," Vera said.

"Then it will be a surprise, and oh, I do *so* love surprises!"

Vera was delighted with the new beauties that had been added to the great garden, and the three little friends spent the afternoon, in one part or another, of the grounds. There were so many winding paths leading in so many directions. One sunny path led directly to the rose arbor, another to the new fountain, which was really an artificial lake with a fountain in the center, while a third led to a little stone pool, or basin for the birds, and, like a background for the little pool, tall lilies in full bloom swayed in the soft breeze.

"In this wonderful garden I'm not sure which path I like best, because they all lead to something lovely to look at," Vera said,

"but I *believe* I like the fountain path best."

They followed that path, and came out at the far end of the garden, where a low seat looked as if waiting for them.

For a time they sat talking of the trip to New York, and the pleasures that Mrs. Vane was planning for them.

A moment after, Vera, without a word, darted away toward the house, and Dorothy looked at Nancy, as if too surprised to speak, while Nancy turned as if to watch a butterfly, but really to hide the fact that she was a bit annoyed.

Vera was bright and full of life, usually good-tempered, and pleasant to be with, but she had a habit of being vexed over a small matter, and, as she was always darting here and there, one could never know whether she had raced off, hoping to be chased, or

whether she was angry at some trifling thing.

She came running back to them with a big box of bonbons that she had brought with her as a little gift, and her eyes were so bright, her smile so cheery, that Dorothy breathed a sigh of relief.

"Vera wasn't provoked that time," she thought.

"Let's play 'Hide-and-Seek,' " she said, "and have this seat for the goal, and the box of bonbons will help the one who is 'it' to be patient, while the others are hiding."

The garden had countless places to hide in, and Nancy insisted on being "it" first. Dorothy took the next turn, and then Vera perched upon the seat, while Dorothy and Nancy raced off toward a fine little nook in the forward part of the garden. Vera was to count five hundred, counting it "five-ten-

fifteen-twenty—,'' without stopping until the five hundred was completed, but she stopped so often to nibble bonbons, that her counting did not progress rapidly.

In their hiding-place, Dorothy and Nancy wondered why she did not come.

''Twenty-five—thirty, thirty-five—forty, forty-five—fif'—oh, but that is a lovely bonbon. I'll just eat that,'' Vera said, softly, ''and then I'll— Why, who's that talking?'' She spoke in a whisper.

She dropped the bonbons as she sprang to her feet. Tall flowering plants and shrubs hid the stone wall, but she knew it was there, and from the other side of that hidden wall came the sound of angry voices.

At first she could not catch a word that was being said, and then suddenly she heard angry words clearly.

''Do as I tell yer!'' the voice commanded,

"an' be quick about understandin' what I'm sayin'. You're ter stay around here till you see R. D. comin', and do ye lay hands on him. Ketch him, I tell ye, an' if ye *must,* don't be afraid ter use the whip!"

"R. D.! Why, that's Dorothy's father! His name is Rudolph! Oh, I must hurry and find Dorothy, and we'll go up to the house and tell them, so the butler, the gardener, the groom, and the chauffeur can watch for him, and be on hand when he comes home, and not let those horrid old tramps do—"

Up one path and down another she raced, calling; "Dorothy! Dorothy! *Please* come! Don't wait for me to find you!" Of course Dorothy and Nancy came running to meet her. Vera often tired of one game, and coaxed them to play another, but as soon as they saw her, they knew that it was no

FROM THE OTHER SIDE OF THAT HIDDEN WALL CAME THE SOUND OF ANGRY VOICES.—*Page 33.*

slight whim that had caused her to call them from their hiding-place.

"Oh, don't stop a minute! Come right up to the house. Some horrid men, just behind that high wall are hiding there, and they mean to do something just awful. They *do!* Oh, if you had heard them!

"They said they would wait there until they saw 'R. D.' coming, and when they *do* catch him, they're going to use the whip! And why do they want to do that to your father, I'd like to know!"

Dorothy was staring at Vera, with a puzzled look, and Nancy gazed at Vera as if she believed her to be crazy.

"Oh, *why* don't you see?" cried Vera, "Your father is 'R. D.,' isn't he? He is Rudolph Dainty!"

Then she fairly gasped, for Dorothy and Nancy had dropped upon the grass, and

there they sat, rocking back and forth, laughing so hard that they could not say a word.

"Well, I'll tell you one thing!" cried Vera, "I'd not waste a moment if it was *my* father, and I guess— Well, I never! I just *surely* never—"

Vera was too disgusted to say another word, and while she stood looking at the two wildly laughing children, Jack Tiverton came up the driveway. "Hello! Vera. Here for a visit? Well, what's the great joke, and why aren't you laughing, too, or don't you see the joke?"

"I don't *see* it, and they can't stop laughing long enough to tell me," Vera said.

"Jack, did you see any men just outside the wall, when you came along?" Nancy said, between little hoots of laughter.

"I saw big Tim Dolan, the huckster, and

a crony of his, and, as usual they're out hunting for 'R. D.,' as they call that stubborn old donkey that they drive, and they're promising to use the whip pretty freely when they catch him, but Tim Dolan just talks that way. He never touches him with a whip, although he is always vowing that he will. He really thinks the world of that donkey.

"Well, Vera, *you* are laughing, now! Now, please tell me, girls, what the great joke is."

"I was *so* frightened," cried Vera, "and I wondered that Dorothy and Nancy could laugh, for I had heard what those men were saying, and truly I thought they meant to lie in wait for Dorothy's father."

It was Jack's turn to look puzzled.

"Why, how is that?" he asked.

"They were talking about 'R. D.,' and

Mr. Dainty's first name is Rudolph."

"Well, that *was* funny," Jack said. "No wonder you were startled for, as usual, they were talking as if they meant to punish the donkey for running away, but I can give you all a surprise, for to-day I found out what the donkey's name really is. His name is Roderick Dhu, and big Tim shortened it to R. D. to save time when he's calling him."

It was Mr. Dainty's turn to laugh when at dinner, Vera told him of her fright.

"Well, well, Vera!" he said, "You're Dorothy's firm friend, and Nancy's friend, too, but now I know that you are my little friend, as well."

"I surely am," Vera replied, in a low tone, hardly more than a whisper, and they knew that she did not say it lightly.

They were up early the next morning.

"We'll have a long, long day to enjoy," Dorothy said, and they crowded a lot of pleasure into that day.

Mrs. Vane was to arrive early in the evening, and after dinner they sat swinging in the hammock, Vera recounting the "delights," as she called the day's happenings. "I want to tell Mother all about it, so I'm going to tell it this way:

" 'Surprised Dorothy and Nancy by being at the Stone House when they came in from a ride.

" '*Lived* in the lovely garden, just simply *lived* in it, got scared over a big, *big* mystery, and being scared was fun!'

"Next day:

" 'Up early enough to hear the birds sing, and to see little Fluff racing around after them, and barking to stop them.

"'Went over to Flossie Barnet's to lunch, had a fine time.

"'Raced back to the Stone House, and sailed toy boats on the new pond that has a fountain in the center. We had a boat-race and Jack Tiverton's boat beat mine, but it wasn't showing any signs of beating until he went up to the house, and came back with the bellows from the fireplace, and actually *blew* his boat ahead. Who couldn't beat that way?'

"That's the way I'll tell her," Vera said laughing, a roguish twinkle in her eyes.

"I'll tell her, too, that I like Jack so much that I didn't mind when his boat won the race, and I'll tell her,—oh, hark! No, don't stop to *hark,* just look! There's your car coming up the avenue, and Mother is waving her handkerchief!"

Mrs. Vane had taken an earlier train

than the one on which she had promised to arrive, and Mrs. Dainty was delighted, because there would be a fine evening in which to talk of all sorts of happenings that had filled the months since they were last together.

The three little friends grew so sleepy listening to the "grown-ups" that, after a time, they ran off to bed, where they tried to talk of the fine trip of the morrow, but fell asleep before Vera had nearly finished telling half of the good times that she had planned for them.

The next day dawned bright and sunny, and the three awoke early. Vera proposed making a tent of the sheet, and playing that they were camping.

"What will keep your tent up, so it will stand?" Nancy asked.

"Oh, that's easy," Vera replied, "I can

put my foot 'way up and keep the sheet up—"

The maid entered just then, and down came the wonderful tent.

"I was sent to call you, and indeed you must hurry, for you three are to be ready to take the early train for New York."

"Oh, Sue!" cried Nancy, "Stay and help us find some of our things, will you?"

"*Please,* Sue!" pleaded Dorothy.

"I'd help you gladly, but I've twenty things that I must do to make sure you get off in time, and I'll have to run along now," and off she went.

They soon were chasing each other down the broad stairway, and they could hardly be coaxed to more than taste breakfast, so excited were they.

CHAPTER III

AN ODD HUNTING PARTY

EVERY one was helping, every one was hustling, but with all the loving assistance, they reached the station in time to board the train, and with just *one minute* to spare!

It was an express train, and it raced over the rails at such a rate of speed that the trip, a short one at any time, seemed brief indeed. All out-of-doors had appeared to be flying past the windows, so blurred that not a single object could be clearly seen. Usually it was fun to look from the windows, but that was when they could really see the trees and flowers, the lakes and rivers that they passed. They were glad

when they left the train, and yet more glad when they arrived at Vera's home.

It was not their first visit, but there were many new things to enjoy. There were paintings, recently purchased, there was a newly furnished music-room, and Vera had some new games, to be played indoors, games that were "no end of fun," she said. They were a bit tired with their little journey, and they enjoyed the pictures and the games, well knowing that if they were content to spend the afternoon of the first day quietly they would have plenty of pleasures planned for the remainder of their visit.

In the late afternoon they drove through Central Park, and Dorothy and Nancy thought it more beautiful than ever. So many delightful things they saw, that they began to wonder how much of all that they had seen, would remain so clearly in their

minds that they could describe it when they returned to Merrivale.

"The Park was lovely," Dorothy said, "I'd like to see it again."

"You surely will," said Vera.

"And wasn't Riverside Drive very grand?" said Nancy.

"And the Museum," said Vera, "isn't the Metropolitan Museum a handsome building?"

"Oh, yes," agreed Dorothy, "and isn't that near your house?"

"So near home," Mrs. Vane said, "that you and Nancy and Vera may go over there to-morrow and see the pictures, while I am busy writing some letters that have long been neglected, and for the evening, I have invited some boys and girls over for a general good time."

"And my brother is coming back from a

camping trip, and he'll be wild to see you and Nancy. He'll be here to-night, and he'll tell us all about the long hikes he's been taking. Will you and Nancy like to hear that? Oh, I know *you* will, Dorothy, because Bob likes you. Oho! You're blushing, but, Dorothy, don't think I've forgotten how Rob used to tell you all about his fishing trips, and you used to try to be interested."

"I didn't have to try, because I truly *was* interested," Dorothy said, blushing.

"Rob has a new chum, now," Vera remarked. "The one he had last year went home to a little Western town, and now Rob doesn't care to go anywhere, do anything, or I might almost say, turn around unless Ned Brewster is with him."

"Do you like Ned Brewster?" Nancy asked.

"I don't know, because he's a boy that Rob met while he was camping, and he's going to bring him home with him to-night," Vera replied.

There was a surprise awaiting them when they reached home, for as they drew up at the curb, the door opened and out rushed Rob, a very darkly tanned Rob, followed by a quiet, blue-eyed lad, who hesitated, as if to let Rob greet his mother, before presenting his new friend.

"It's good to be home again, Mother, to have home and you, after the fine summer at the camp. How's Dad? Aha! Thistledown! So you didn't blow away before reaching the Stone House, as I so cleverly predicted. And Dorothy, sitting 'way back in a shadowy corner! Lean forward and let me see you, and Nancy, too. Surely you've not forgotten me?"

"We couldn't forget you, Rob," Dorothy said, "for you were always nice to us, as nice as if we were boys."

"Oh, finer than that," said Nancy.

Rob blushed a bit under his tan. He had helped Vera to entertain Dorothy and Nancy on previous visits and it was good to know that they had remembered.

"Come on, Ned, and begin to be one of the family. Mother, this is my chum, Ned Brewster. Ned, I insist that you and Mother become firm friends."

"We are, already," Mrs. Vane said, taking Ned's hand that he shyly offered.

"And this is my sister, Vera, or Thistledown. I use both names, and you can do the same."

"I'll give you both my hands," Vera said, "because Rob is so fond of you."

"These are two of the *best* girls, Dorothy

Dainty, and her chum, Nancy Ferris. Girls, this is Ned Brewster, the best chum I ever had.''

Ned appeared quite overcome at being introduced to so many new friends. He was friendly at heart, but very shy with girls, but at dinner Mr. Vane was so jolly that they soon were laughing and talking together.

Rob told of some droll happenings at camp, and before he knew it, Ned had been drawn into the general chatter, and told some tales quite as comical as any that Rob had told.

After dinner they played games and it was odd how it always happened that Rob played with Dorothy for partner, while shy Ned Brewster seemed to get on wonderfully in the game if Nancy played on his side.

And while the game progressed, Vera, at

the piano, played one flighty, lilting melody after another.

"I'll keep right on playing until there's a big victory," she said.

Thus far the couples had come out about even, but after a time Vera heard Rob say:

"We ought to have the prize, Dorothy, for this time we've beaten Ned and Nancy ten to one. Say, Vera! Play something that will sound victorious."

"Play the 'Triumphant March,'" said Mr. Vane, "and we'll march to the dining-room, for your mother tells me there's something cool out there that we'll all enjoy."

"All right, Father, and then you can escort me out to join them. Just now I'm the orchestra."

The little group about the table enjoyed the ices that awaited them, and Ned Brewster for the first time felt absolutely "at

home'' with these bright, cheery new friends who had given him so warm a welcome. They already seemed like old acquaintances.

The next morning Rob took Ned over to Central Park to see the Zoo, and then went with him to the great aquarium, two places that Ned had said he greatly wished to see.

Vera, Dorothy, and Nancy went over to the Metropolitan Museum, and for a time they kept together. They were very fond of pictures, and saw so many that they admired that they could not decide if there were any single picture that they preferred to all the others.

Wandering about, they came to a room in which were displayed many kinds of quaint musical instruments, and especially they liked a fine old spindle-legged spinet.

Vera ventured to touch the yellowed keys,

but its tinkling tones echoed through the room, and the three ran to the hall, fearing that a custodian would hurry after them and reprove them.

"I know one picture that I always like to see, but I've not noticed it to-day, although it seems to me that we've been through all the rooms. Where *did* I see that little painting?"

Vera stood a moment thinking.

"And I'm trying to think just where I saw a lovely statue," said Dorothy. "It wasn't one of the large ones, but I don't remember its name, so I've no idea which way to go to find it."

"There's a stairway I want to see again," Nancy said, "it was grand."

"I'll tell you what we'll do," said Vera. "I'll go back and look for the little picture;

you go through the rooms where the statuary is, Dorothy, and find the lovely statue; and Nancy can have a hunt for the stairway, and then we'll meet, and run home together."

So each started off to find an object that she wished again to see, and then, after a time, each one of the girls was wildly searching for the other two.

From one gallery to another, from one end of the great building to the other, in haste they sped, each one searching for the other two, the three never meeting.

At last, becoming vexed, Vera finding herself near the main entrance, left the building, and hurried home.

"Where's Mother?" she asked when the man let her in.

"Up-stairs, Miss Vera," he replied.

Rushing up to Mrs. Vane's room, she flew in at the door, and tossed her hat on the bed, saying:

"I never knew Dorothy or Nancy to do anything to tease me, but this time they've done just that. They've hidden from me somewhere in the Museum. I shouldn't wonder if they were peeping from behind some big statue, and giggling when they saw me leave!"

"I don't think Dorothy Dainty or Nancy Ferris ever did a mean little thing like that," said Mrs. Vane.

She was a pretty, weak-willed woman, who did her best to spoil Vera, and usually sided with her, but this time she knew that Vera was vexed and hasty and wrong.

Vera was really annoyed, and she sat very still for several minutes, a most unusual thing for her to do.

There was no such thing as guessing how long she might have sat there, her mind filled with most unpleasant thoughts, but just at that moment some one was admitted who raced along the great hall toward the stairway.

Mrs. Vane went out into the upper hall just in time to see Dorothy rushing up the stairs.

"Oh, Mrs. Vane!" she cried, "I've hunted and hunted through the galleries, and I can't find either Nancy or Vera! What can have happened to them? They'd not go off and leave me, so where can they be?"

Her eyes were filled with tears, as she clung to Mrs. Vane, in nervous terror.

"Why, Dorothy, dear, you are really frightened, but Vera is here. She searched for you and Nancy, and came home vexed, because she could not find you, and she

mistakenly thought that you two were hiding from her. I told her she was wrong."

"Oh, truly, we never for a moment hid," said Dorothy, "but where *is* my Nancy! Just where is she?" she repeated, her eyes wide with terror.

"Oh, Mrs. Vane, I wouldn't be so frightened, only we never let her go anywhere alone, since the time that she was stolen from us by her old Uncle Steve, and made to dance on the stage. We three started out together, and here am I, and Vera is here, but *where* is my Nancy? Something must be—"

"I'll go at once, and see if she still is looking for you two."

She saw that while Dorothy's fear was probably groundless, she was really suffering with anxiety for Nancy's safety. As she stood before her mirror, pinning her

hat, something of Dorothy's fear came to her, and snatching her gloves, she hurried down-stairs.

They were in her care during their visit, and she was earnestly wishing that she had gone to the Museum with them, when, as she reached the lower hall, she heard swift footsteps just outside the door.

Was it Nancy?

She opened the door, and in rushed Nancy, her brown eyes wide, her hat clutched tightly in her hand.

"I can't find either Dorothy or Vera!" she cried, "and I've hunted till I'm nearly wild! Please, *please* Mrs. Vane, come and help me find them."

"There, there, Nancy, they're both here, as worried about you, as you are about them. Come up and let them see that you are safe and sound. Dorothy really thinks—"

"Oh, Nancy, Nancy!" cried Dorothy, who had heard her voice, and raced to the stairway to meet her. "You *weren't* lost after all!"

"No, and neither were you," gasped Nancy, now all joy and gladness.

"Come to the living-room, and tell me all about the wonderful 'Hunting Party,'" said Mrs. Vane.

"What did you call it, Mother?" Vera asked. "Did you say we had a 'Hunting Party'? I don't see why you call it that, for we were over in the Museum all the time, and in the picture Father values so, the hunters are wearing red coats, and they are mounted on fine horses, and riding across fields, and over walls and fences."

"But wasn't it a nice hunting party?" Mrs. Vane asked, laughing. "You, Vera

were hunting for Dorothy and Nancy. Dorothy was hunting for you and Nancy, while Nancy was hunting for you and Dorothy! What was it, really, but a droll hunting party?"

"We didn't begin hunting for each other," Vera explained. "I wanted to find a little painting that I think is lovely, and Dorothy saw a fine statue soon after we went in, and after we'd been in several rooms, she tried again to find it."

"And I saw stairways," said Nancy, "but not the one I was looking for. The one I wanted to find was one I saw when I was here before, and oh, it was wonderful. It was carved in stone or marble, I don't remember which, but I *do* know it had all sorts of lovely flowers on its fine baluster, and on great pillars were flowers and vines, and

birds and butterflies, and little animals running in and out among the carved foliage. I don't see why I couldn't find it."

"I know the beauty of that stairway, Nancy," said Mrs. Vane, "but I am not surprised that you couldn't find it."

"Why?" questioned Nancy.

"Because," Mrs. Vane said, "you were looking for it in the Metropolitan Museum in New York, and the wonderful stairway that you so clearly remember, you saw when we took you to Albany. That grand stairway is in the Capitol."

"Well, no wonder I couldn't find it," said Nancy, joining in the laughter at her expense.

CHAPTER IV

A QUEER SCHOOL

WHILE Dorothy and Nancy were enjoying their visit at Vera's home, a new, self-styled "Academy" had hung out its sign in Merrivale. On the day after it first appeared in the window, Patricia Levine stood leaning over the low fence at the rear of her home. She lived at the far end of the town, in a dingy old house, on the corner of a dingy old street.

Patricia's aunt owned the house, and Patricia lived with her.

She would have lived in a better house and on a better street if she had been contented to remain at home, but her father insisted that she attend school. Patricia

dreaded to have school begin. She was lazy, and because nothing could be learned without trying, she decided that she would spend no more time trying. She thought it would be charming if she might attend school when she chose, study only what she could easily learn, and also choose her hours for coming and going.

The hens were cackling in the coop, and her two dogs, Algernon and Lionel, were romping around her, inviting her to play with them.

She was wondering how she would spend the afternoon, and where she would spend it, and with which one of the girls that she knew. She paid no heed to the barking dogs. Her mind was full of the new pink dress that lay spread out upon her bed.

"I think I'll go over to Arabella's. If Dorothy was at home now I'd stop there just

a minute, on my way. Arabella is dull for a whole afternoon, so I'll— Now who in this *world* is that?"

A tall, thin man had opened the front gate, and was walking up the path toward the front door. He had neither bag nor parcel, so Patricia decided that he was not a book-agent.

"I'll go in softly, and find out what he wants, or what he is trying to sell. Gee! He'd have a hard time selling anything to Auntie!" she whispered as she crept along the little dining-room, keeping close to the wall, that she might not be seen, for the parlor door stood ajar.

She giggled softly at the thought of the man in there, who she believed was trying to coax her aunt to purchase something, but the first thing that she heard stopped all desire to laugh!

"Yes, madam, I understand your position, and I realize that the little girl is wilful, and thinks, because you are not her mother, she can do as she pleases, but,—"

"Oh, that don't make no odds," was the hasty interruption, "she don't mind her ma no better nor she does me!"

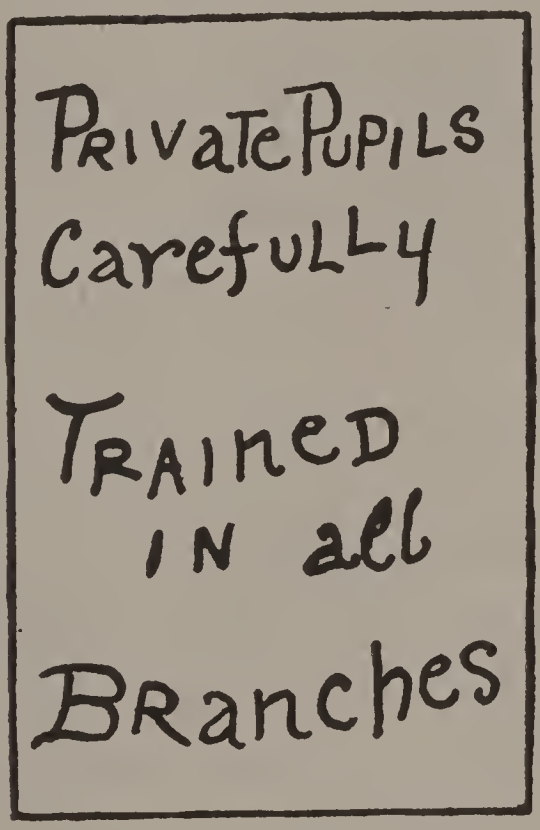
"And I can only repeat that this year she *must* attend school, by order of the *Chairman* of the *School Board.*"

"An' I kin also repeat wot I said that I can't *make* her go to school. If I *send* her, I ain't sure she 'rives at school, an' I've got *on*tirely too much ter do ter foller her. If the *char*-man kin take a *board* or a *stick* to her, an *make* her go ter school, he's welcome ter do so."

"Well, madam,—"

Patricia waited to hear no more. She crept softly but quickly from the house,

raced through the open gateway, out on to the street, and up the main road, never stopping until she stood before an old brick



house in whose front window was a card that she had read many times, always wondering just what it meant.

The clumsy, uneven lettering proclaimed the sign "home-made," but Patricia did not

think of that, and running up the steps in frantic haste, she rang the bell.

A colored maid-of-all-work opened the door.

"Who does yer want ter see?" she asked, none too well pleased to be called from her work to answer the bell.

"Oh, *please* let me come in!" cried Patricia.

"Not till I knows what you wants, Sissy," the maid declared firmly.

"Why, how can I know who to ask for, when I don't know their names? All I know is that I want to come here for lessons, instead of going to school."

"Well, that *do* sure make a diff'ence, an' I'll speak to de ladies," said the maid, and she let Patricia enter, leaving her in the cool little parlor, while she shuffled through the narrow hall to a back room.

"OH, *PLEASE* LET ME COME IN!" CRIED PATRICIA.—*Page 66.*

A few moments later she returned, and peeped in at the door.

"De ladies will be *widjer* in a minute, an' dey'll be glad ter give yer all de *inflamation* yer wants!"

Any other child would have longed to laugh, but Patricia so often used words incorrectly that she did not notice anything droll in what the maid had said.

Patricia sat on the edge of the seat of a chair much too high for her, and she was just beginning to wonder how much longer she would have to wait, when along the hall came a very short woman and a very tall woman. Both were very thin, very prim, and very sober-faced.

They seated themselves on the edge of the sofa, and stared at Patricia, until she began to be nervous.

Then the tall, thin woman spoke:

"We teach *every*thing," was her bold statement.

"What do you wish to learn?" the short, thin woman asked.

"I don't know. It's hard to choose," Patricia faltered.

"We combine the Arts, Science, Languages, and a knowledge of housekeeping such as few schools offer. Here is a list, a portion of the things that we teach," said the tall one, rising and turning a big card that had a colored map upon it.

Its reverse side displayed a most peculiar list, and from it they read in turn, as if they believed that Patricia could not read for herself.

"Listen to this:

"'Music, *Multiplication, and* Mopping.'"

"And this," said the short woman,

"'Drawing, *Division, and* Dusting.'"

"'Art, *Addition, and* Aesthetics.'"

"'French, *Fractions, and* Fancy-Work.'"

"'German, *Geometry, and* Grace.'"

"'Spanish, *Science, and* Scrubbing.'"

They read in turn, accenting the "and" that joined a branch of housework to the more interesting themes.

Being very lazy, this did not please Patricia.

"I don't want to study all those poky old things, 'specially the mopping and dusting and the scrubbing. I *know* how to do those things, so I'll not do any of them. S'pose I take Music, and,—well,—Addition,—and—er—French to begin with, what will that cost me?"

The two women whispered together for a moment and then concluded that four dollars a week would be right.

"That's only three things you'll have to teach me, and we can get 'Rithm'tic, Reading, Writing, Spelling, Geog'erphy, and History for *nothing* at the regular school. I wouldn't pay four dollars a week to come here. P'raps you meant four dollars a *month*. *Did* you?" Patricia asked pertly.

Again they whispered, and then decided that four dollars a month must have been what they meant.

"Then I'll be here Monday morning at nine o'clock," said Patricia.

Again the tall woman bent her spare frame, and the two whispered.

"We think *ten* o'clock is early enough to begin study," declared the short woman.

"Well, *I* don't!" Patricia said, stoutly.

"They're trying to make me go to public school where I have to learn a batch of stuff I hate, and I'm *bound* I'll not go there, but if I'm not on my way to school in time on the first day, the *char*-man of the something-or-other, will be over after me. I'm sure of that, so I'll have to come at nine."

The two women, eager to secure a pupil, agreed that nine o'clock was the exact time for Patricia.

"Good-by," she said, as she ran down the steps, "I'll be here Monday at nine."

She need not hurry now. She was going to school, where she knew that she could arrange hours to suit herself.

"I don't want to study at all, but if I *must,* then I'm glad I've found a place where I can do as I like. I told them *nine* instead of ten, and they said that was all right, so I just know I can leave there any

time I choose, 'leven o'clock, if I want to."

She laughed softly, believing that she had done a clever thing. Foolish little Patricia! Glad to evade study, and thus make sure of being ignorant!

She strolled along chuckling to think how smart she had been, when a thought came to her that made her stop. The place that she was to talk of as a "School" had no name, and her aunt would surely ask the name of the school that she had chosen to attend.

"She won't believe me if I tell her it hasn't a name, and p'r'aps it *has*. O dear! What a nuisance, but I'll have to go back."

She turned about, and ran back to the little house. There was a seat by the door. Hearing footsteps in the little hall, Patricia waited.

The tall woman peeped out.

"Did you leave something?" she asked, looking through her spectacles, and then over them.

"Oh, no, but what is the name of your school? My aunt will surely ask me," said Patricia.

"My dear, you have enrolled as a pupil at the Art-o-Lang Academy. Art-o-Lang, because we teach Art and Languages," the lady said, pompously.

"That's a pretty name, and I'm glad you didn't put 'mop' in the name, or 'scrub,' for that would have just spoiled it."

The tall woman looked sharply at Patricia to see if she were trying to be "funny," but Patricia did not look as if she were amused, so the tall lady said nothing, and once more Patricia strolled toward home.

As she turned the corner, Patricia saw

that her aunt was standing in the doorway, shielding her eyes with her hand.

"Oo-hoo!" hooted Patricia.

"You come right home without stoppin' ter hoot!" was the tart reply, "an' when I've told ye who called here this morning I guess ye'll conclude ter go ter school, an' I mean ye shall, as sure as my name is Mary Ann Boggins!"

"I wish it *wasn't!*" declared Patricia. "I never tell any one. I just say, 'My aunt.' "

"Well, of all the notions! Why, Patricia, your middle name is Boggins!"

"I wish you wouldn't say it so loud," said Patricia. "Did you ever see me write that horrid old name? I guess you never did. 'Patricia Boggins Levine' sounds great, doesn't it!"

"Never mind about the name. You come

right in, an' le'me tell you, you'll go to school Monday!"

"Sure, I will," Patricia replied, cheerfully. "I'm a pupil at the *'Orter-Long-'Cad'my,'* and I'll be going there *every day!"*

Mrs. Boggins sat down on a low stool, and stared at her niece.

"How long have you b'longed to the *Auto-Lung* What-you-call-it, an' where is it? I never heard of it."

"It's near the square, on a little short street, and they teach all sorts of things. That's one reason I'm going there, and the other is that I want to."

"That's your reason for doing most things," said Mrs. Boggins. "What does it cost?"

"Four dollars a month, and that's reasonable for a el'gant new private school."

"It's a grand bargain if it will keep you off the streets," said Mrs. Boggins, "a *grand* bargain!"

She sighed with relief for she had expected to hear Patricia refuse to go to school.

"Thank goodness I won't have to either *push* or *drag* her to school," she whispered on her way to the little kitchen, adding, a moment later, "that is, I won't have to as long as this latest notion lasts, an' no one could tell how long that would be. She might like the new school well 'nough ter go there ten weeks, an' then again, she might get 'nough of it in ten days,—yes, or even in ten *minutes,* if things didn't go to suit her. Land sakes! The soup has boiled over whilst I've been talkin'. Patricia! Patricia! Off again, jest when I want her."

At that moment Patricia had caught

sight of a pup, a trifle less attractive than the two she already owned, and was trying to coax him inside the gateway.

Neither Algernon nor Lionel had enough spunk to object to the newcomer, but they *looked* disapproval, and the pup felt shy.

"Come in, you lovely puppy. Oh, if Auntie will let me keep you I'll call you 'Fairy,' you're so very cute! I wonder if I'd better *ask* her if I can keep you, or just *keep* you?"

The puppy, delighted with her caresses, jumped at her as she knelt on the grass, and licked her hands, all the time uttering little yelps of delight. He felt that she admired him, and he at once decided that here was the home for which he had been looking.

"If I *ask* her, prob'ly she'll say 'no,' but

if I just *keep* you, maybe she'll fuss a while, and then 'give in'!"

Patricia knew that the two dogs that she already had, annoyed her aunt, but she did not care. She was wholly selfish, and thought only of pleasing herself. Patricia caught the fat little pup, and holding him so that he stood on his stubby hind legs, she gave him much-needed advice, good advice, but he only listened because he could not get away. His wee eyes twinkled. His little red tongue hung out and he looked as if the whole thing were already decided, and he was laughing to think how lucky he was.

"Fairy!" cried Patricia.

"Wow!" he replied.

"Oh, you cunning pet!" she whispered in his ear.

"Wow! Yi, yi! Wow! Wow!" he re-

sponded, and Lionel and Algernon yelped in chorus.

"Patricia! Pa-tri-cia! Come in and help me!" shouted her aunt, rushing to the back door.

"What's all this racket, and where on *airth* did that pup come from?"

"He came here to me, and he's going to *stay!*" Patricia said.

"Now, look-a-here! I can't stand another critter on the place, 'specially a dog."

"You've *thirty* old hens a cacklin' their heads off, an' I've only *three* dogs. I'm sure that's not much!"

"But Patricia!" whined Mrs. Boggins.

"I'm *goin'* ter keep him!" shouted Patricia, "and let him sleep on my bed. I've named him already, so he's mine."

"Oh, such a child! I do declare, I wish your mother'd keep you with her. Does it

occur to ye, that yer ma, livin' in a flat in New York, wouldn't let ye lug in every stray dog ye chance ter see?"

"I know that, and that's one of the reasons why I'd rather stay here. If you want to call him any time, I'll tell you now, his name is, 'Fairy.' "

"The name fits him 'bout as well as 'twould fit a cow. *Fairy!* That fat little critter would answer ter 'Dumplin',' an' the name would fit. Well, come in an' help me now," she concluded, and returned to the kitchen. She said no more about the puppy, for she believed that when Patricia went in, he would run out of the yard as quickly as he had come in, and that would end the matter.

Patricia had no intention of being so careless. The hens were roaming about the yard, and hastily Patricia shut him into the empty coop.

CHAPTER V

FIRST DAY OF SCHOOL

"THE days are just flying!" Vera said one afternoon. "You've been here nearly two weeks, and it doesn't seem much more than *two days.*"

Vera dreaded to have them go.

"It has gone swiftly for us, because we've been having such a wonderful time," said Dorothy.

"There's never a dull minute if Vera is around," Nancy said, laughing.

"That's because I don't like dull minutes," Vera said. "What's the use of dullness?"

She whirled about on her toes like a little human top.

"That's right, Thistledown," cried Rob, who had just come in, "keep things stirring. Whew, but you have a lively pace!"

"Well, who'd care to be poky!" cried Vera, and then after another whirl, she paused before Dorothy.

"Dorothy dear," she said, "you told me last night that you and Nancy must go back to the Stone House this week, but couldn't you, *please,* stay longer?"

"We couldn't, Vera, truly we couldn't," Dorothy replied, "for school opens on Monday and we must leave here on Saturday."

"O dear! I detest dates for doing anything!" declared Vera. "I never can remember dates in history. I know in that last history lesson we had the day before school closed last June, the date I couldn't remember about was 1607.

"Well, you may laugh, but all I know about 1607 is that it's either the year America was discovered, or else it's the year that old Peter Stuyvesant was governor, but I'm not a *bit* sure which."

Dorothy and Nancy were laughing—how could they help it—and Rob, who, although he had been reading, had heard Vera's statement, looked up to say:

"That's pretty good, Vera, but are you sure that 1607 isn't the year of the signing of the Declaration of Independence?"

"I don't *think* that's right, but I'm not sure," she said doubtfully.

"Why aren't you sure?" Rob asked in a teasing tone, his eyes twinkling.

"*Because,*" Vera said sharply, "I don't even remember if we ever had a history lesson about that."

"About what?" Rob teased.

"The *decoration* of a *sixpence!*" cried Vera.

"Vera! Vera! What is all this about?" asked Mrs. Vane who had just entered.

"Rob always remembers every old thing in history, and he laughs at me because I don't."

"*Robert,*" Mrs. Vane said.

"But, Mother, Vera needs a private tutor. She thinks our National holiday is a grand celebration in honor of the *Decoration* of a *Sixpence!*"

"Don't be absurd, Robert," his mother said, to which Rob slipped an arm around his mother's shoulder, as he said:

"Now, Mother, truly, *am* I more absurd than Vera?"

"He ought to know more than I do; he's three years older than I am," said Vera.

"Think you'll know your history then as well as I do now?" Rob asked.

"Oh, I might, if I cared to bother with it," she said, coolly.

"What started this discussion?" Mrs. Vane asked.

"I don't remember how it started, but I *do* know I'm back again to where I started, when I said I detested dates. I thought we could keep Dorothy and Nancy for weeks and weeks, and Dorothy says they have to go Saturday."

"I am sorry to have them leave," Mrs. Vane said, "but Mrs. Dainty has written to remind me so to arrange our pleasures that Dorothy and Nancy will leave here on a train that will take them to Merrivale, arriving at about five in the afternoon."

"Why—ee! Then they'll *have* to go," cried Vera, now wholly convinced. "Well,

then, instead of fretting because they cannot stay longer, we must have the *best* time we know how to have, every minute before Saturday."

"That's right, Miss Thistledown," said Rob. "Come on! I'll help you! I'll take you three out in the car, and I know a fine place where we'll have a great dinner."

They did not wait to be urged.

"Be sure to be home in time for the concert to-night," Mrs. Vane reminded, and the three nodded assent, and waved to assure her that they heard.

"It doesn't seem as if to-morrow could be Friday," said Vera.

"Again your dates are mixed," said Rob, "for let me tell you that to-morrow will be Saturday."

"What? Oh, Rob, do you mean it?" cried Vera.

She was convinced, after much time had been spent in proving it to her, and she was somewhat comforted when Mrs. Vane promised that she and Vera would accompany Dorothy and Nancy part way on the trip, to a station where they would find Aunt Charlotte waiting to complete the little journey with them.

They enjoyed the car ride, and, of course, Mrs. Vane and Aunt Charlotte were delightful to be with, but they thought it would have seemed more of an adventure if, on their return, they could have told the boys and girls, on that first day of school, that they had traveled quite alone.

Home once more, and on the way to school they met Jack Tiverton, who insisted upon hearing all about their stay in New York, and what they saw while there.

They did not, however, have time to tell even *half* of the good times that Mrs. Vane had planned for them, because Molly Merton and Flossie Barnet now joined them; a bit farther along, they met Katie Dean with her cousin, Reginald, then Leander Correyville and Arabella came along, and just as they reached the schoolhouse, Tess Haughton rushed from the yard to meet them.

When Patricia Levine happened along, she paused to listen a moment to the rapid questioning of the others.

"When I go to New York, I go alone, and I come home alone. I wouldn't be bothered with any one for company on the trip," she said.

"Why, Patricia Levine!" cried Molly, "I don't believe you'd really like a long car-ride alone."

"Oh, well, it's different with me," Patricia said boastfully, "because I've traveled so much, I'm really quite used to it."

"Ahem!" coughed one of the boys, at the same time swelling out his chest and staring about, as he strutted off.

"Tell Patricia about our funny trip to the Metropolitan Museum," Nancy said, but Patricia drew a soft scarf about her neck, straightened her hat, and said, "Well, yes, you might tell me about it some other time, but I'm in *such* a rush this morning. You see I am to attend the Auto Limb 'Cad'my, and I must run along so as not to be a minute late," and she hurried off leaving her astonished playmates staring after her.

"What did she say?" drawled Arabella. "I never heard of the school. She's said nothing to me about it."

"Let's call it 'The Short-o'-Long Academy,'" Jack Tiverton suggested. "The two women who keep school there are short and long, so the name will fit."

"There's a sign in the window," Reginald said, "and the house is on a side street that leads out of the square. It is a brick house that looks sort of dingy. I wonder Patricia would think of going to a school that was in anything but a handsome building. She thinks more of how a thing looks, than what it is worth."

"You're right," said Jack. "Patricia chooses her friends for what they have to wear, or for the sort of houses they live in."

"Aunt Matilda used to make me wear things that were plain and old-fashioned," said Arabella, peering over her spectacles at the group of boys and girls, "but she seems to stick to me."

"But you live in a big house," said a small girl, and Arabella could not deny that.

"I love my friends just for themselves," said Dorothy.

"And that is why we love you," said Flossie Barnet, "and oh, we've missed you so while you've been away!"

"Flossie was saying yesterday that she hoped you'd surely be home on the first day of school," Molly said, "and Jack said he knew something fine that was being planned for Friday afternoons, but he wouldn't tell what."

"I wouldn't tell yesterday, because yesterday I wasn't sure, but now I know. We're to have speaking and compositions, same as we had last year, but on the first Friday of each month we're to give a little play. Next month would have to be the first one, because as school opens to-day, we would

have no time to learn our parts, to say nothing of rehearsals."

"Jack told us something else that he isn't saying a word about now," said Reginald, with a very wise glance at Jack.

"Oh, *that!*" said Jack, "I was waiting for Dorothy to tell us all about it. I only had a *hint* of it."

"What am I to tell?" Dorothy said, feeling wholly puzzled.

"It's one of Jack Tiverton's jokes," declared Molly.

"It's no joke at all!" said Reginald.

"Don't you want to tell?" Jack said, with an impish chuckle.

"Haven't you and Nancy seen anything new? I mean up at the Stone House, something being made for you and Nancy? Something any of us, if we're up there at play, can enjoy."

"We've not seen a thing, and can't guess what you're talking about," said Nancy. "We only came home Saturday."

"And you're wild to let it out," said Molly, "so why don't you tell it?"

"You know your house looks like a castle, don't you, Dorothy?" Jack said.

"Sometimes Nancy and I call it our castle," Dorothy replied.

"And you haven't yet seen something new, that makes you think of the old days?" Jack asked.

"The days when there were knights who wore armor and carried spears?"

"I can't even guess what you two boys are talking about!" declared Dorothy, and just then the bell called them to the class-room. It was hard for Dorothy and Nancy to keep their minds upon their lessons. What had Jack seen that they had not seen?

"It must be just a joke," Dorothy said, "for if Jack could see it, whatever it is, surely we could."

They were walking home together after school.

"And why would every one in the house keep so still about it? They're always so quick to tell us, when there is something new or fine for us," said Nancy.

Now, it happened that a few days before Dorothy and Nancy went for a visit to Vera's home, Dorothy, Nancy, Reginald, and Jack were discussing the story that Mr. Dainty had told, of gallant knights, and fair ladies, of clanking spurs, and gleaming spears, of moats, and drawbridges, and Dorothy had said:

"Oh, wouldn't it be wonderful if our house had a drawbridge? Think of having

a man up on that tower marching back and forth, and James only letting the great drawbridge down when some one we loved rode in at the gateway."

"The drawbridge would be down about all the time," Nancy said, slowly, "because you love almost every one."

Dorothy laughed.

"Well, then wouldn't it be fine to have a drawbridge, just a *little* drawbridge to play with, I mean when the boys are with us. They're so afraid we'll play what they call 'Sissy' games, but a drawbridge! Oh, how they would enjoy that!"

On the morning that they left for New York, the old gardener wandered about the garden, looking at one plant after another, but without much interest.

"The garden sure looks different whin

Miss Dorothy's away," he said softly, and the groom who had come up behind him heard what he said, and agreed.

"I move we plan a sort of gift for Miss Dorothy when she comes home. I've taken care of Romeo, her pony, and many's the mile I've rode behind her, and always she's been a sweet little lass to do for. She's a bit of sunshine, ye might say. Don't ye know Miss Dorothy always has a nice gift for each of us at Christmas. What d'ye say we *make* a gift for her?"

The young groom looked straight into John's honest eyes.

"*Moike* a gift, is ut?" cried the good old gardener. "Sure Oid toil till me fingers was sore, but phwat could Oi moike thot Miss Dorothy wad want? Answer me thot, lad! Sure ye mane well, but ye're young an' foolish!"

"Not so foolish, either, John, when ye hear the notion."

He reminded the gardener how eagerly Dorothy and Nancy, Jack and Reginald had told, and re-told parts of the story that Mr. Dainty had related, and how each had thought that even a little drawbridge would be fine to play with, and, "I say—let's build one!" he concluded.

"I asked Mr. Dainty about it, and he laughed, and said he could not permit us to put a drawbridge on the house, for that would surely be a nuisance, but now that he has the big garage, he would not care what additions we made to the little stone stable that the pony occupies.

"He said we must not dig a moat around the stable, but that he did not object to the drawbridge on the pony's stable. He said he felt sure that the gentle little Romeo

would not object, and that if the pony did not mind, why should he?"

"Thrue fer himself!" said John.

"So I say, John, let's you, and myself, and the young chap that's helping with the gardening, get to work and build the drawbridge that she was talking about, yes, and maybe, dreaming about."

"Ye're a foine lad, an' a shmart man, too, an' Oill say thot if yez hov the brains ter plan it, we'll work loike beavers an' hov it done whin she's home from N'York. Sure, it don't bother no one a-hangin' on to the soide of the wee shtable, an' we'll enjoy the building of it, but tell me, ef ye can, whoy she do be wantin' it?"

"She told me a few days ago that stories of olden times that she had read, and others that her father has told her have filled her curly head full of notions about castles, and

all that belongs to them," said the groom. "She and Nancy have been 'making believe' that the Stone House is their castle, and they actually wanted a drawbridge on the front of the house, but Mrs. Dainty explained that it would be decidedly inconvenient."

"Well, thin, the wee shtable shall be a little castle with all the outlandish drawbridges she wants," said John, and promptly they set to work upon it.

It happened, however, that they could not get the materials as quickly as they thought, so it was not quite complete when Dorothy returned.

While school was in session on Monday the finishing touches were added, and on Tuesday the boys and girls went over after school to see it.

The "builders" were very proud of their

work, and happy to see Dorothy's shining eyes.

The little drawbridge, very light and easily managed, was raised and lowered many times to show "how it worked."

There was only one who did not admire it, and that was Romeo.

When led toward it, he pranced along with tiny steps and proudly arched neck, but he would not place one hoof upon it.

Instead, he would toss his head, and trot around to the door, and wait to be let out there.

To the little playmates it was a wonderful thing to have, and they devised games in order to use that little drawbridge.

In one of their games, Jack claimed the stable for his castle, and declared himself to be an ogre who dwelt there. Gentle little Romeo was his "giant steed," and great fun

had Jack, lowering his drawbridge to tempt guests to come, and then drawing it up before any one could set foot upon it.

The broad window on the side of the stable made a fine "door" when the drawbridge was lowered.

CHAPTER VI

THE NEW LITTLE GIRL

AT the end of the Avenue, where the town was bordered by woodland, and the houses were few and far apart, there stood one house known as the "Dyke" house.

Every one who passed the "Dyke" house admired its quaintness, and greater than the admiration it inspired, was the vast curiosity regarding its history. It was a very old house, and so long had it been vacant, that Merrivale had forgotten the name of its last tenant.

There was great excitement when around the town flew the startling news that some one had moved into the Dyke house.

The house had been built by a man named Dyke, but Merrivale people had long believed the name to have been chosen because of the ditches that had been dug on the land at the rear of the house.

To be sure, that would have been spelled with an i, instead of a y, but no one gave a thought to its spelling.

One morning Jack Tiverton shouted the news to Reginald Dean when he met him on the way to school. Reginald told it to every one he met, and at recess, the boys and girls plied Jack with all sorts of questions.

"All I know about the people at the old Dyke house, is what I've already told you," he said.

"There's a sweet-faced little girl living there. She looked up and smiled, when a tall man opened the gate, and the two went up the walk to the porch, where a lady, who

looked like the little girl, stood waiting for them. I don't know how long they've been living there, and I didn't ask their names."

"Well, who s'posed you would?" snapped Molly Merton, for it was Molly who had asked their names, and she was vexed at Jack's teasing. It was amusing to learn how many errands were invented as a reason for passing the Dyke house. The stores, the post office, the schools, were situated in the opposite direction, yet it seemed impossible for any child who had an errand to do, to go directly toward the center of the town.

Invariably a walk past the Dyke house was the way the little trip to the stores began, followed by a rapid walk down the Avenue to make up for lost time.

Reports from several boys and girls ran something like this:

'She had on a blue dress this time."

"The day I saw her, her dress was pink."

"If the tall man is her father, he looks as if he'd not like us boys hanging 'round there."

"The lady is her mother, sure enough, for they look just alike."

One evening, Uncle Harry and Mr. Dainty were in the library, smoking, and Dorothy, who was looking for Nancy, passed the doorway just in time to hear Uncle Harry say:

"I've just learned the name of the new owner of the Dyke house. His name is Trafton, and he and Correyville were classmates at college. He is an expert jeweler and the little daughter is named 'Jewel,' a name that I have heard fits her very well."

Dorothy ran up the stairway, and on the landing, met Nancy, who was coming down.

"Oh, Nancy! The little new girl is Jewel Trafton, Uncle Harry says so, and isn't 'Jewel' a lovely name?"

"Jewel? Did you say 'Jewel'?" Nancy asked.

She was knitting a sweater for Elfin's doll, and so busy counting stitches that she was not quite sure if she had heard the name correctly.

"Yes, Jewel," said Dorothy.

"That's a lovely name," agreed Nancy, "and Jack Tiverton thinks the little girl is very sweet-looking. He said so that day when Molly was so vexed with him."

"Why was Molly vexed? I don't remember," Dorothy said.

"Now I think of it, I don't think you heard the little 'fuss.' You know Molly likes Jack better than any of the other boys,

and I think she didn't like to hear him say the little girl looked sweet," said Nancy.

"How queer!" Dorothy said slowly.

"How queer for her to care enough to feel angry. Jack might think the little girl sweet-looking and not like Molly less."

"Oh, Molly is dear," Nancy replied, "but I've noticed when we were speaking of Vera or even of Flossie, and saying anything nice about them, Mollie has looked as if she didn't like to hear it. She hasn't said anything, but she has frowned so that I knew she was annoyed."

"She may feel different if she knows Jewel and likes her," Dorothy said.

"Well—*maybe,*" Nancy said, "but she's fond of Vera and Flossie. I'll put this sweater away and we'll go for a little walk." They looked into each other's eyes, and

softly laughed, because each knew that the other was planning to walk past the old Dyke house.

"*Which* way are you going?"

"Which way are *you?*"

They laughed, this time gayly, and running out on the Avenue, turned toward the Dyke house.

"I wonder if Mother would say we ought to 'make a call.' I don't feel like doing that, it seems so 'grown-up,'" Dorothy said, reflectively.

"We can walk over there, and when we come to the beginning of the stone wall, we can walk so slowly that she will have time to come out,—I mean if she sees us from the window."

"That's just the very thing to do," Nancy said, as usual agreeing with Dorothy.

When they were quite near the old Dyke

house, they saw the little girl, a basket on her arm, walking along the winding garden path, as if in search of something.

She turned, and when she saw the two smiling faces, her own face brightened, and she moved toward them.

"Oh, please, are you coming to get acquainted? Jack Tiverton said he was almost sure you would."

"Yes, oh yes!" cried Dorothy, and clasping Nancy's hand they hurried through the gateway.

"I know you are Dorothy Dainty and Nancy Ferris," the little girl said, "and I am Jewel Trafton, and oh, I'm so *glad* you've come. I only know Jack Tiverton, and I'm lonely because he is the only boy I know, and I didn't know any of the girls. Now I know *two* girls, and I begin to feel very rich."

"You'll soon know the others," Dorothy said.

"That will be lovely," Jewel said. "I promised to fill this basket, so Mother could arrange the flowers for the table. Come with me, and help me choose, and then I'll be free to play."

The basket was soon filled, and then the fun began. Jewel took them through the quaint old house, and showed them a fine old flax-wheel, a fireplace large enough to seat six persons, if six could be found who cared to sit there, a tiny antique piano or spinet, and some fine old costumes of a century ago.

There was a blue brocade with bouquets of pink roses tied with silver ribbons, and a wonderful red satin wrought in gold, and draped with heavy Spanish lace exactly the color of the satin.

"This is a good house for playing 'Hide-

and-Seek,' " said Jewel, "because it is just full of hiding-places."

"I know where I'll hide, sometime when I'm here again," said Dorothy.

"And I saw one place," Nancy said, "that would be a dear place to hide in, for you'd surely have to hunt and hunt before you could find me. It's a cute place you'd never dream a person would hide in."

Jewel laughed, a clear, rippling laugh.

"And I would hide in a place I know of, where you *couldn't* find me," she said.

A moment later she was no longer laughing, but with wide, thoughtful eyes, she stood looking at Dorothy.

"I showed you the old furniture and costumes, and you enjoyed them, but I'm wondering now why I took you through the garden? I wouldn't have done that if I'd remembered," she said.

Dorothy turned in surprise.

"If you'd remembered *what?*" she asked.

"That the gardens at your house are *miles* larger than ours. Wasn't I a funny girl to think you would enjoy mine?"

"That isn't the way to look at it," Dorothy said quietly, at the same time looking earnestly into Jewel's eyes, but Jewel was puzzled.

"Why isn't it?" she asked.

"It wasn't the *size* of the garden you showed me. You didn't say anything about its *size.* You showed me the flowers," Dorothy said, "and the flowers are lovely. Your geraniums are wonderful, and your dahlias are every bit as large as ours, and John says ours are giants. It is a dear garden, so dear, I'd like to come again."

"I'll surely have to come, too, for I go

wherever Dorothy goes," Nancy said, with a happy little laugh.

In a very short time, Jewel knew all the girls and boys whom Dorothy and Nancy knew, and she had at once become a favorite. She knew all the games that they knew, and a few that were new to them.

There came an afternoon, when the playmates had planned taking a long walk, but the day had proved to be cold and misty, and Dorothy proposed that they remain indoors where fires were blazing, and sending bright sparks up the chimney.

"Let's take turns telling stories," said Reginald Dean.

"Ho! I know Reginald!" cried Jack. "He knows a story that he is wild to tell. Well, so do I, and mine is full of pirates,

and hidden gold, but first I want to see the Treasure Chest."

"Why, Jack Tiverton!" cried Molly, "anybody'd think you'd never seen it!"

"I've seen it, but I was trying this morning to describe the carving on the front of the chest, and I didn't remember it well enough to describe it."

Dorothy led the way, followed by Nancy, Jack, Reginald, Molly, Flossie, and Jewel.

Jack dropped upon the rug to examine closely the carving, and while they were all watching Jack, Arabella arrived.

"Leander couldn't come," she drawled, "and he didn't say why."

"Well, then you can't tell us why," Reginald said laughing.

"Of course I can't," said Arabella, "but I don't see why you laugh."

Arabella glared through her big goggles

at him, and Nancy, to change the subject, turned to Dorothy and asked if her bangle had been repaired.

"Not yet," Dorothy replied, "Father has a friend, an Oriental, who will know just how to re-set the stones, and then it will be as lovely as when it first was made. The man is away now, but as soon as he returns, Father will take the bangle to him. I think he is to be away for some time."

The girls asked so many questions about it, that Dorothy took the bangle out and showed them that while no stones were missing, their settings were not holding them firmly.

When she had returned the bangle to its quaint case, and had placed the case in the chest, they returned to their seats before the fire, and took turns, as they had agreed, in telling stories.

Reginald's story was droll, just the sort of story that he always chose to read, but Jack's was, indeed, a pirate yarn, and so well did he tell it, that Reginald and Flossie were greatly excited, and although the others would not, for the world, have admitted it, they certainly felt timid.

Dorothy and Nancy, Jewel and little Flossie looked warily toward the shadows in the corners of the room, and when Arabella spoke, they actually "jumped," and then laughed at their own foolish fears.

"And now," Jack continued, "the pirate chief and his band, armed to the teeth, were just about to climb up the side of the ship and—"

"What do you mean by 'armed to the teeth'?" Molly asked.

"Oh, I know *that!*" Reginald hastened to say, "'cause once I saw a large painting in a

gallery, and the canvas was just *full* of pirates, whose belts were stuck full of knives, and every one of those fierce-looking men carried an extra knife between his teeth."

"That's it," Jack agreed, "and they swarmed over the side of that ship, and lashed the captain to the mast, and took all the members of the crew, and tied their arms behind their backs, and tied their feet together, and then they—"

"Now, Jack Tiverton!" cried Nancy, "if you're going to tell about a perfectly horrid massacre, you must stop now. Dorothy is so frightened she's pale, and I don't think I care to listen to tales that are frightful any more than she does."

"Whew! See Nancy's eyes blaze!" cried Jack, delighted with the excitement that he had caused, "but honestly, I didn't mean to frighten you girls, and besides, my story

isn't a massacre story, for when those pirates left the good ship, *Sea Queen,* both the captain and the crew were very much alive, and thoroughly mad, for those pirates took with them nearly everything of value."

Arabella made no comment, but mumbling something about having left her handkerchief in another room, she arose, and went out into the hall.

Once in the hall, she went a bit farther, and paused where she could see another room by peeping between the portières. She gasped with astonishment. On the floor trinkets were scattered, the Treasure Chest stood open, a gay tinted sash was falling softly over its side, and before it sat Jewel, the bangle in her hand. She was so interested in the bangle that she had not heard Arabella's footsteps, and so was unaware that she was being watched.

THE TREASURE CHEST STOOD OPEN, . . . AND BEFORE IT SAT JEWEL, THE BANGLE IN HER HAND.—*Page 118.*

There was an unpleasant gleam in Arabella's eyes. After watching Jewel for a few seconds, she turned slowly from the portières, and returned to her seat at the fireplace. Jack ended the story with a description of the pirates, each going over the side of the vessel, with a huge pack on his back.

"That's a great yarn!" said Reginald.

"It's a *big* yarn," said Arabella, "and do you expect us to believe it, Jack? *Do* you, Jack Tiverton?" she persisted.

"The old sailor who was telling it *said* it was true," Jack said with a laugh, "and it seemed real to me when I heard it."

"If it sounded any *real*-er than the way you tell it, Jack, I'd not dare to go home," said Flossie. She wondered why the others laughed.

"Why, where's Jewel?" Mollie asked, but

just at that moment Jewel appeared in the doorway, as if in answer to Molly's question.

Her eyes were unusually bright, and her cheeks were flushed.

"Ho! Jewel ran away when I began to tell about the pirates firing on the good ship, *Sea Queen,* and she didn't come back until the story was finished!" cried Jack.

"I did feel a bit afraid; it is almost twilight," she said.

Arabella stared over her goggles at Jewel, but she said nothing, and a few moments later, she left for home.

"If you'll wait just a moment I'll walk along with you," said Jewel, "I'd like your company, for it's a long walk to your house, and it is quite a bit farther to reach mine."

"Well, I guess I won't wait," Arabella said, coolly, and walked out without once looking back.

"Well, I never!" cried Molly. "I truly *never* saw any one so rude. Dorothy, you always try to make excuses for Arabella, but what excuse could you make for her *this* time?"

"I was thinking that I didn't believe she knew how rude it looked to speak as she did, and then turn right around, and start for home, not saying a word to either of us, or waiting a second for Jewel," Dorothy said.

"Oh, listen, every one of you! Did you hear the fine excuse Dorothy made for Arabella? Well, let me tell you, I mean to be as good a man as my father is, and that's being pretty good I think, but if I ever get into any sort of scrape, I'll surely call for Dorothy to defend me. She'll find some excuse for me, I know," said Jack.

Dorothy looked up, a wee bit of moisture on her lashes.

"I'd do my best to help you, Jack," she said, and he answered softly, "I know it," his head dropped to hide from the others that he had been deeply moved.

A maid came in with a tray, bringing hot chocolate and little cakes, and they forgot the terror of the pirate tale and Arabella's rudeness, while enjoying the little treat.

Later, when they walked along the avenue together, they drew lots to see which of the boys should walk home with Jewel.

It fell to Reginald, and he boldly turned toward the opposite end of the Avenue, with Jewel close beside him.

Now Reginald was much smaller than Jack, and Jack knew that when twilight came, Reginald, if he was out for a tramp with the boys, kept close to his friends, never, by any chance, wandering off into a

side-path, no matter how interesting it might look.

Jack laughed softly, but the girls could not coax him to tell them what so amused him.

Dorothy and Nancy, watching from the French window, saw Reginald going briskly up the Avenue with Jewel, saw Jack walk with Molly and Flossie till they were safely home, and then turn about and returning to the great gateway of the Stone House, mount the high wall, and seat himself on its coping.

"I thought he was coming back for something he might have left," Nancy said, "but he's just sitting there, swinging his legs and whistling."

"He's waiting for Reginald," said Dorothy.

For a long time he sat there, whistling to "keep his courage up," but becoming more restless as the moments passed, and then,—surely he heard footsteps approaching! He did indeed, and great was his disgust when down the Avenue came Reginald, brave enough surely, because close beside him was Leander Correyville, Arabella's cousin, a half-head taller than Jack.

"Well, I declare!" cried Jack, "I thought I'd be a good fellow and wait here to walk home with you, and seems to me you have a capable escort."

"Escort!" cried Reginald, "*Escort,* did you say? Do I look as if I'd be afraid to go home alone?"

"No, you don't look like that, but it is a long walk, and I—oh, I'm your chum, Reginald, and I waited to walk along with you, that's all."

"It's all right, Jack," Reginald said quickly, "and you're a chum worth having."

There was a greater difference in size, than in years. Reginald was nearly Jack's age, but he was nearly a half-head shorter, and far more slender.

Jack had no idea of belittling Reginald, but he always felt a desire to protect his chum because of his own greater strength.

Jack had a brave, loving heart, and the other boys said that in all things, he "played fair."

CHAPTER VII

WHAT BECAME OF ARABELLA'S GOGGLES

"I'M glad that Levine girl is home where she belongs," Aunt Matilda Correyville said, one afternoon, pausing near the window to look down the avenue, "Arabella comes home quite promptly now, though I will say she's late to-day."

"What were you saying about Patricia Levine?" Mrs. Correyville asked.

"I said I was glad she was home, for Arabella certainly behaves better when the Levine girl is in New York."

"That's a good one, Aunt Matilda!" declared Leander who had just entered.

"What do you mean, Leander?" Aunt Matilda asked sharply.

"Oh, that's a grand joke!" cried Leander, "for Patricia is right here in Merrivale, and has been all the time."

He could have told her that at that moment Arabella and Patricia were sitting on the stone wall, some distance from the house, so earnestly talking that it looked as if it might be quite a bit later before Arabella would reach home, but he said never a word. He was no "telltale," and it seemed to the boy that Aunt Matilda did quite enough fault-finding without any help from him.

Leander detested Aunt Matilda's sharp tongue, and he turned toward the window, wondering if he could in any way manage to screen Arabella from a lengthy scolding.

Aunt Matilda was said to possess a fortune, and feeling her importance, she strove to rule the household.

Mrs. Correyville, pretty and weak-

willed, allowed her to rule, because it required less effort than to combat her. For some time, Leander and Arabella had been using a signal code, and now Leander stood waiting for Arabella to come in sight.

"O dear, why didn't I think to tell Arabella to stop at the store and get that spool of thread for me! It would have been just a step, when she came out of school," wailed Aunt Matilda.

Now Aunt Matilda had forgotten that she had asked Leander to do the errand, and Leander had forgotten that the spool was in his pocket.

He opened his mouth to tell her that he had the thread, but before he spoke he thought of a way to save Arabella, and he remained silent.

Aunt Matilda went out to the kitchen, and began bustling about, and a moment later,

Arabella appeared around a bend of the road. Frantically the boy signaled and she, catching his meaning, waved that she understood.

Usually, Arabella came in at the side door, but Aunt Matilda would see her, and then the fun would begin.

"I'll let you in at the front door," was Leander's message, and to the front door Arabella went.

"I don't see what use it is to let me in this way," she said in a loud whisper. "I'm just as late at this door, as I'd be at the other!"

"Don't be a goose!" whispered Leander, as he thrust the little parcel into her hand. "She asked me to get this spool of thread, and she's forgotten that she asked me. She's been saying she *meant* to ask you to do the errand. She'll think she must have

asked you, so don't say a word. Just take off your hat up-stairs, and then come down and hand her the spool. I don't know if I'm doing wrong to help you, but I do hate to hear her fuss, so hurry right down."

Arabella was never known to move so quickly. She was down-stairs in no time.

"Here's your thread, Aunt Matilda," she said, and then she picked up a towel and, wonder of wonders, commenced to wipe the dishes that Aunt Matilda had just washed. She had been cooking, and mixing-bowls, cups, and big spoons, pans, and pitchers were piled in the drainer.

Aunt Matilda stood staring at the unusual sight.

Finally she spoke.

"Wal, ef you aren't the queerest child I ever see!" she said. "There's no tellin' when ye're likely to bu'st out in a new spot."

Leander, standing behind the door, and peeping through the crack, chuckled softly.

He knew that Arabella's dish-wiping was about the same as a plea for mercy. Aunt Matilda was more than pleased. She was delighted, and not a word did she say about Arabella's late return from school.

Arabella had a very good reason for trying to please Aunt Matilda.

After dinner she again helped with the dishes.

"I never see the beat of it!" declared Aunt Matilda, "for whenever I've asked her to help me, she just wouldn't, an' that's all there was to it. Now she's doing it 'thout being asked. Don't that beat all?"

When the dishes had been wiped and placed in the closet, they returned to the big living-room.

Aunt Matilda picked up her knitting.

Mrs. Correyville busied herself with a bit of embroidery, while Leander pretended to be reading, while attempting to catch Arabella's attention.

At last she looked toward him.

"*You* ask?" she said, moving her lips, but not making a sound.

Leander nodded that he fully understood, then, after a moment, he spoke.

"Mrs. Dainty is giving a party for Dorothy, three weeks from to-night," he said, "and Nancy says our invitations will be here to-morrow."

"Well, well, a party up at the big Stone House is always an event," said Aunt Matilda, "an' I guess I'll do up her white summer dress to-morrow. 'Tisn't a party dress, I know, but I guess it'll do."

"Well, I guess it *won't!*" declared Leander stoutly. "It's a fancy costume party,

and all the guests are to be dressed to represent something, or somebody. I'm willing enough to take Arabella if she looks *decent!*"

"Le-*an*-der Correyville!" cried Aunt Matilda.

"Yes, *ma'am!*" responded Leander. "And I meant what I said. Why, see here, Aunt Myra," as he turned toward Mrs. Correyville, "Arabella looks actually old-fashioned, and you let her wear things that look just about right for Aunt Matilda. She looks so everlasting queer that people think she *is* queer!"

Then the surprising thing happened.

Aunt Matilda gasped, then she said, "Why, Leander, I never thought of it till you said so, but Arabella's clothes do look like mine."

Arabella held her breath.

The next happening, was the greatest surprise of all.

For the first time in her life, Mrs. Correyville spoke firmly. "After this, *I* will select Arabella's clothes."

"Oh, Mother!" cried Arabella, dropping on the floor beside her, and leaning against her, and the look in her eyes told all that she felt, but could not express. She looked toward Leander, who had so bravely spoken for her.

He motioned for her to speak, but she shook her head and pointed at him. The big boy evidently thought that having won one battle, he might as well try his luck again, so, rising, he turned toward Mrs. Correyville.

He knew this second effort required more courage than the first, but he felt a bit brave and more determined even than before.

"Now, Aunt Myra, I've found out something that I think you don't know," he went on to say.

She said nothing, and he continued, "Arabella doesn't *need* glasses!"

"What are you saying?" cried Mrs. Correyville. "Do you mean to say, Leander, that you know more than the oculist who fitted her glasses?"

"Fitted *nothing!*" cried Leander. "That man that had a little store down in the Square, and pretended that he was an oculist, left town a few weeks ago, and people are saying that he told any one who came into his store, that he needed glasses. I'll bet anything that he said Arabella needed goggles, so, of course, Aunt Matilda bought them.

"Only this morning I caught Arabella reading without her glasses, and say! I be-

lieve those goggles have window-glass for lenses!"

"*Can* you read without them?" asked Mrs. Correyville, bending over Arabella.

"Of course I can," said Arabella, "and write, or sew."

"Why haven't you told me?" her mother asked.

"Because I thought Aunt Matilda would fuss, but oh, I do hate to wear them!"

"Let me take them," said Aunt Matilda.

"Let me take them first, please!" Mrs. Correyville said firmly.

"Window-glass is about right," she said, "for I am sure that any one might use them, and I am equally sure that they are of no use to any person who really needs glasses."

"And I paid that man eighteen dollars for the goggles, and five dollars for examining her eyes!" wailed Aunt Matilda.

"And I've seen my little girl needlessly disfigured with those goggles!" cried Mrs. Correyville. "I wonder what Robert will say when he comes home!"

"Mother, will you let me smash those glasses, before Aunt Matilda has time to coax you to let me wear them again?" said Arabella.

"She could never make me do that," Mrs. Correyville said with twinkling eyes, "but you are welcome to do whatever you choose with them. Perhaps Leander would like to share the fun of demolishing them. He surely deserves much. He was here just now."

"I'll find him," cried Arabella, rushing from the room, and out on to the lawn.

"Leander! Leander! Come here!" she cried. To which Leander responded;

"I'll be there in a minute!"

"Come now, Leander!" she insisted, "and bring a big rock."

"Bring a rock, or stone, for what?" said Leander as he sauntered toward her.

"Mother said I could *de-mol-ish* these old goggles, and I don't know what that means, so I think I'll just smash them to teeny bits."

Leander laughed, Arabella could not think why, and she was so happy that she did not care. She was to look like other little girls, and she was free from the hated goggles.

"There!" cried Leander, when hardly a fragment of them remained, "I guess they'd have a hard time trying to put those on your nose now!"

"I've never felt so happy, and, oh, I don't know how to say it—sort of *free!*" cried

Arabella. "No more goggles, and no more *funny* clothes! I do think you're the bravest boy, to face them for me! I certainly like you, Leander."

The big, overgrown boy blushed.

"Well, you're not half bad, Arabella, and I do believe you're going to act more like the other girls when you look more like—well more as *you ought to,*" he said.

For a few moments they said not a word. Each was thinking of new and happier days for Arabella.

It was not that she had longed for expensive clothes. She was not so silly as that. It was simply that she could not bear to have her garments make her look like nothing childlike. Like a little old lady she had appeared, and now, O joy! She was to look like other little girls.

"What are you going to wear to the party?" she asked, looking up at her cousin.

"I'll tell you, if you'll promise to do a little plain sewing for me," he said, with a chuckle.

"Why, Leander!" she cried, "see what you've done for me! I'll sew anything for you, if you think I can sew well enough."

"You won't have to sew very well, to do what I want done," said Leander. "I don't want a handsome costume. I want a funny one. I hear one of the boys is going as a cowboy, another as a clown, another as an Indian, another as a Viking, but I want a rig such as no one would think of wearing. You know I'm tall and skinny, and the boys call me 'Beanpole.' Well, I intend to live up to the name, and go as a beanpole!"

"Why, Leander Correyville, how could you?" cried Arabella.

"I've bought dark gray cambric, just the color of a weather-beaten beanpole, and I'm going to get one of Uncle Robert's old plug hats, to put on my head for the top of the pole. I'll take off the brim, and you can cover the crown with cambric.

"Down at the paper store they've some vines that are made of paper, but they look like bean-vines, and their blossoms look like bean blossoms. You can wind them round me, and I'll be stunning as a living bean-pole!"

"Why-ee! Think of me, walking in with a beanpole!" said Arabella, but she laughed, and said he had been so good to her, she would surely do anything for him. She promised even more.

"A beanpole is a country thing, and I think I'll wear a country costume. I'll ask Mother to make a little milkmaid dress for me. We'll look fine together."

Leander looked at her for a moment, then he said:

"I thought you were so near-sighted that you couldn't see without glasses."

"That's what the man said," Arabella replied. "I told him I could see without them, and things that I looked at through those spectacles looked just the same as when I looked with just my eyes, but he said I didn't know what I was talking about, and that I *must* wear goggles to save my sight, and Aunt Matilda believed him."

"One thing is sure, you'll not wear them again," said Leander, "and already you're a better-looking girl. I was sick of seeing you peeping over your 'specs.'"

"I was sick of looking through them," Arabella said, "and just as tired of wearing them.

"For the first time I'll truly enjoy a party, and tell me, do you know what any of the girls are going to be?"

"I know one," Leander said, "and that's Patricia, for she told me after school yesterday. Oo—but that girl is a scream! Say! She's to represent the very thing you'd know she'd choose. The Fairy Queen! Think of it. The most beautiful creature that has ever been described! I wonder she didn't pose for an angel. My, with her temper that would be a joke!"

"Hello!" called a clear voice, and Reginald came running toward them. "Guess who's invited to the party? Carlo is. The invitations aren't mailed yet, so Dorothy just gave one to Carlo, and he feels so big

you can't get it away from him. He won't let me take it to look at it. He's to be in a tableau, and so Dorothy said he must have an invitation. Isn't he funny? He won't lay it down."

Carlo had his own idea as to the value of the envelope that he now held in his teeth, and later, the children learned what that idea was.

"I tell you, Carlo knows—why, Arabella! How different you look without those glasses! I never saw you without them. Did you break them?"

"Oh, yes, and Leander helped me break them!" Arabella said, and then she told him how she had been forced to wear them, because the man who pretended to be an optician had said that she needed them.

"The *mean* fellow!" Reginald cried

sharply. "Say! When I'm a man, I'll never do anything like that! I'll be the sort of chap who gives a straight deal, and goods I sell will be worth what I charge!"

CHAPTER VIII

THE COSTUME PARTY

BRIGHT lights everywhere, soft music, and the gay laughter and chatter of childish voices borne on the breeze, so that late arrivals, as they rode up the driveway, realized that the wonderful party was at last a *real* party instead of a happy dream.

"These little friends look as if they had stepped right out from the pages of a book of charming fairy tales," said Mrs. Merton who was standing beside Mrs. Dainty.

"They surely do," Mrs. Dainty replied, "and I believe that 'grown-ups' enjoy watching the children very nearly as much as they enjoy their own parties."

"I'll speak for myself," said Uncle Harry, "and I can honestly agree with you, and also say that I know how to *double* my enjoyment, for beside the joy of watching them, I'm going right in to be *one* of them from now until the latest little guest starts for home."

"Oh, Harry, you are just a great, grown-up boy!" declared his sister, Mrs. Barnet, laughing.

"Well, what *are* men but grown-up boys?" he asked, turning to look over his shoulder and laugh as he hastened to join the children, who greeted him with shouts of delight.

"What think now, ladies? Which one of you dares dispute my popularity? Four *very* fair and charming young misses have each engaged me for a dance?"

"We wouldn't presume to dispute so evi-

dent a fact," his wife said, laughing as he walked away, a little girl clinging to either arm.

Dorothy wore a lovely oriental costume of scarlet and gold, with Nancy as her playmate in a similar costume of blue and gold. Flossie as "Little Snow White," and Molly as a "Skater," in a handsome white suit with white fur cap and collar, made two dainty figures. Patricia's costume was a very pretty one, and she would have made a very good-looking fairy if only she had not appeared to think herself wonderfully lovely. Her silly vanity made Patricia, although a pretty girl, appear absurd. The boys' costumes were as varied as were those of the girls, and the big drawing-room made a charming background for the brilliant colors that had been lavishly used in adorning the merry little guests.

DOROTHY WORE A LOVELY ORIENTAL COSTUME OF SCARLET AND GOLD.—*Page 148.*

Dorothy, looking eagerly for her friends, had just decided that all had arrived when for the first time she realized that Antony was not present.

She was about to ask Uncle Harry if he had seen Antony on the way over when a new guest entered in so amazing a costume that, at sight of him, every child stopped talking.

"Who *is* he?" they asked each other softly, and those nearest the strange figure, crowded back, closer to their friends.

"Whom have we here?" questioned Mr. Dainty.

A deep voice replied, "I am a *wild* pirate at sea, and a harmless one on shore."

"Then I bid you welcome," said Mr. Dainty, and the pirate bowed low, and, removing his hat, that almost hid his eyes, he laughed at his astonished friends. A false

mustache remained in place, but his wig of long, black hair, had come off with the hat. It was Antony!

Little Flossie was the first to speak.

"Oh, Antony!" she cried; "I wouldn't believe you could look so fearful."

"Now, I call that a fine compliment for your very original costume," Mr. Dainty said.

"And he designed it," said Reginald, "and I call that clever."

"It surely is," agreed Mr. Dainty, "and here are two late arrivals—the one, a little milkmaid, is Arabella, but *who* and *what* is her escort, but a huge beanpole, bean-vine and all."

"It's Leander," cried Arabella, "and I think he's every bit as clever as Antony."

"I'll agree with you," cried Antony,

heartily. "I had Father to question as to the appearance of *my* costume, but who would ever think of representing a 'living beanpole'? Shake hands, Beany."

Thrust through a wealth of vines Leander's hand appeared from under a cluster of leaves and blossoms, and the boys and girls cheered as the two shook hands.

A court-jester striking a triangle close to Flossie's head, made her cover her ears to shut out its metallic tones.

The court-jester proved to be Reginald's brother, and an odd pair they made, the little Indian, Reginald, looking up at the jester, unaware that Carlo stood just behind him, his invitation still firmly held in his teeth.

Reginald turned, and saw him, looking as dignified as a judge.

"Well, Carlo, what do you think you're doing?" said Reginald, and Carlo turned and walked over to Dorothy.

"Oh, now I know what he's up to!" said Reginald. "He has kept that invitation between his teeth ever since you gave it to him, putting it down only just long enough to eat. Don't you remember you said to him; 'Now mind, take care of it,' and he has thought you gave it to him, just to take care of it for you. He wouldn't give it up to us. Try him! I do believe he'll give it up to you."

"Give it to me, Carlo," said Dorothy, and the big dog laid it at her feet.

"Oh, you faithful old fellow!" cried Dorothy, and Carlo, sure that he was approved of, looked from one to another, greedy for more praise. When he had been petted and made much of, he lay on the rug before

the great fireplace, and watched the games.

Game after game they played, they danced with flying feet, they laughed and sang, and then more games were enjoyed. Carlo sat erect and dignified, watching the children, when, with a bold jump, a fat puppy with a big bone in his mouth landed right under the big dog's nose.

Down upon the handsome velvet rug the pup crouched, and began to gnaw the bone vigorously.

Carlo looked his disgust, and the children gasped at the pup's boldness.

"The dirty little imp!" cried Reginald, and he stooped to push the pup from his place on the rug, intending to drive him toward the door, when, like a flash, Patricia rushed toward Reginald.

Snatching at his arm, she shouted in his ear:

"Don't you touch my pet, you horrid boy! Don't you touch him, I say!"

She stamped her foot, and her flushed cheeks and angry frown made her look like anything but a sweet-tempered fairy!

There's no chance of guessing what Patricia might have done if Reginald had laid hands on the pup, but just at that moment the butler entered, a large cloth in his hands.

Throwing the cloth over the pup and his big, greasy bone, he bore them from the room, followed by Patricia, screaming with all her might;

"Put him down! Put him down this minute!"

"Now listen, Miss Patricia. He follered yer, an' the cook took him in an' give him a bone ter amuse him till you'd be just startin' fer home when he could go with yer."

The butler strode out into the hall carrying the wriggling puppy, followed by Patricia, loudly scolding.

It was not a pretty scene, and never had Patricia looked or acted worse. Not a thought had she of regret for the disturbance, or for the unsightly spot made on the valuable rug, by the greasy bone.

First Reginald, and then the butler, had treated her pet rudely she thought, and as she raced out into the hall, she became more angry with every step.

It happened that Mrs. Dainty had just taken her friends to the conservatories, to see some lovely flowering plants, and Mr. Dainty and Uncle Harry had followed the ladies, so that the "grown-ups" had not witnessed the disgraceful scene.

For a time the children stood looking after the tall butler and Patricia, and then,

believing that she was sulking somewhere, waiting, as usual, to be coaxed to return, they resumed their frolics, until, on Mrs. Dainty's return to the drawing-room, the banquet was announced.

It was a large party, sixty little guests being present. If there had been few guests, Patricia would surely have been missed, but as it was, each little guest believed that Patricia was somewhere in the throng, and without further thought, proceeded to enjoy the feast.

Carlo sat on the rug before the fire and looked toward the dining-room with longing eyes.

Now, Patricia was sulking, as the children thought, but not in the library or hall. No, indeed! She had resolved to make them all very sorry for her.

She did not once think that the pup had been a little nuisance.

She preferred to think both the pup and herself badly treated. The butler hurried the pup out to the kitchen, while Patricia slipped out on the side porch. Calling softly, she soon saw the pup rushing toward her. She clasped him in her arms, and raced toward the open door of Romeo's stable.

Some packing-boxes were piled in the far end of the little stable. Snatching hastily from a pile of carriage robes that lay on a box near by, she drew one about her, and crouched on the floor, still hugging the pup, who licked his greasy chops in memory of the *delicious* bone, and snuggled closer to enjoy the warmth of Patricia's clasping arms.

"I guess they'll be sorry when they hunt and hunt and can't find us," Patricia whispered.

She had been hiding there behind the piled-up boxes for what seemed a long time, but which was really twenty minutes, when suddenly the stable door shut with a slam that so frightened both Patricia and the pup that they huddled in their hiding-place, and made never a sound.

"Well, the wind blew that door so it shut, and now I guess they will hunt one while before they find me!" she whispered.

She laughed, and the pup cuddled closer, preparing to take a nap.

In the great drawing-room the lights glowed under the soft-toned shades, and the boys and girls wore the brilliant-hued caps that they had received as favors, and they

looked like little human flowers in the colors of the rainbow.

One would think that Arabella would have missed Patricia, but Arabella, for the first time, was truly enjoying a party. Her little Milkmaid costume was becoming, and far younger-looking than any dress that she had been wearing, and several of her friends had said, "What a pretty costume, and how fine you look!" and Arabella's eyes were glowing, while she blushed with delight at the first compliments that she had ever received.

It really was not strange that she forgot to look for Patricia. Where, at other parties, Patricia had been her only friend, she now found many. Becomingly dressed, she now had confidence, and now that she showed a desire to be friendly, she found her playmates quick to respond.

"I'm so happy to-night," she whispered to Leander, and the "beanpole" quickly replied, "I'm glad for you, Arabella, and I'm happy, too."

The tableaux were soon to be shown, and those who were to be posed, including Carlo, were called together, and led behind the great crimson velvet curtain at the end of the room.

The first represented sea fairies dancing, a pale green light looking like mist hanging over the sea. The next showed Flossie a Red-Riding-Hood in correct costume. Reginald made a fine Highland laddie. Molly appeared as a Spanish Gipsy, Dorothy and Nancy as Wood Nymphs, Tess Haughton as an Italian flower-girl. Antony, in a hunting costume, made a bold figure, and many more characters, all beautiful, were heartily applauded. The last was called "A

Valued Friend,'' and when the curtain swung aside, there stood Carlo looking out from the frame, ''a very broad smile on his face,'' the boys said, and Jack proposed ''Three cheers for our friend!'' and they were given with a will.

It was after the little guests were gone, that Dorothy looked at Nancy, with a start, as she said:

''Why, Patricia didn't say a word to us, and—why, now I think of it, I don't remember seeing her.

''You don't suppose she ran off home, when the butler took the puppy out, do you? I thought she was sulking in the hall, and I wanted to go and ask her to join the games, but I remembered that when she is sulky, she usually does better if we seem not to notice it.''

''I know;'' Nancy said, ''and there were

so many here that I forgot about her."

The children's wraps had been cared for by a maid, and it was not until the next day that it was learned that a coat and hat had been left by one of the guests.

It was early on the morning after the party, that the gardener noticed some loose branches hanging from the trees, and smaller ones on the ground where the wind had tossed them.

He had gathered them together and was about to carry them off, when he saw a large branch lying near the stable, and went over to get it.

He stooped to pick it up, when a strange cry from the stable made him pause, a look of absolute terror on his face.

Again it sounded.

Clapping his hands over his ears, the gardener hurried to the house, pushed past the

cook who stood in the doorway, and dropped on a chair in the kitchen.

"Och! Such sounds! Such noises in the little barn beyant! Didn't I say them tree-branches must of been *pulled* down by witches or imps? Them branches didn't come down widout help, an' what is ut I hears in the barn but witches, or the loike?"

"Now, now, me good man, just pull yerself together!" cried the butler. "Are ye *sure* ye heard any noise at all?"

"Am Oi *sure* Oi hov a pair of ears?" queried John, who disliked the butler at all times, but fairly despised him now.

"If, ye're not too scairt, whoy don't ye be goin' over ter the wee shtable, an' see can ye hear any such sounds as Oi'm tellin' ye Oi heard?"

"To be sure I will. I'll get the boy that

helps around the place to go with me," said the butler.

"Foine!" cried the gardener. "As long as ye're so brave, take a feller wid ye, jist fer company."

The butler pretended not to have heard, and strutted along the driveway until he had nearly reached the barn, when, just as the gardener had done, he took to his heels and raced to the house followed by the frightened boy who tried to "get there first."

"Well, well!" cried the gardener, "Whoy did ye run?"

"Because it's too cold to stand out there any length of time," said the butler with much dignity.

It was the young groom, who took especial care of Romeo, who proved himself to be the bravest man on the place, for while

they were still talking of the strange sounds in the stable, the kitchen door was pushed open, and in walked the groom, tugging a huge bundle that appeared to be trying to walk. Unwrapping the big carriage robe, he showed to the astonished group, a very cold and hungry girl and pup, for Patricia still hugged Fairy, as she had hugged him all night, partly for company, partly for warmth.

"If it ain't the Levine girl!" cried the cook. "Where did she come from?"

"From the pony's stable, where she hid last night. She hid—and when she wanted to go back to the house, she found herself locked in," said the groom.

"The stable door was open and I ran in, and then, after a while, some one, or maybe the wind, shut the door with a bang that scared me."

"'Twas I who shut the door," said the groom. "I don't know *who* left it open, *I*'d no idea of leaving it open all night. I never dreamed that any one was in there."

"I want my hat and coat, and I want to go home!" cried Patricia.

"Ki-yi!" remarked the pup, as he wriggled from her arms, and began greedily to eat from a plate that the cook had set on the floor before the range. With noisy gulps he swallowed the soup.

"Lave the plate, ye little baste!" said the gardener.

"The maid has gone up-stairs for your wraps, an' while ye wait for her I'll set out a warm breakfast for ye," the cook said kindly.

"I'd not be seen eating in the kitchen!" Patricia said rudely, with never a thought that the cook had meant kindly, thinking

only that the little girl was hungry and cold, and eager to prepare some food for her without delay.

"Would ye condescind to let us telephone yer aunt who, by this time, must be woild ter hear from ye?" queried the gardener.

"You needn't. We don't have a telephone. Telephones are *too common.* Everybody has one!" Patricia said grandly.

The maid now appeared.

"I've found your coat and hat, miss, but Mrs. Dainty says I'm to ask you to have breakfast with the family before you go, and then drive over home with her and Miss Dorothy."

Patricia hesitated. She thought of the old street at the far end of the town, she knew that more than likely, her aunt, when she came to the door, would be very far from presentable. Then a delightful

thought caused her to smile. The neighbors would see the fine car at her door. Ah, yes, she would be glad to drive over home with Mrs. Dainty.

CHAPTER IX

THE BANGLE

THE wonderful party was talked of for weeks, and all its charming happenings recounted.

The tableaux, the soft lights and lovely music, the lively games, the dancing, the banquet, oh, it was hard to say which had been most enjoyed.

One of the boys laughed about the absurd pup and his bone that he brought to the hearth-rug to enjoy, but little was said of Patricia, and soon her silly exhibition of temper was forgotten, which, surely was fortunate, for the scene was not pleasing to remember.

Next came a party at Molly's house, a

skating party on the little pond at the rear of her garden, with a feast of good things indoors when the boys and girls had skated until they were tired. There was a fair at the Center that every one enjoyed. Very swiftly sped the winter months, with interesting work at school, and good times out of school, and spring caught Merrivale unawares.

It was a warm, lovely spring, with April mild enough for May, and May warm enough for June.

On an especially warm, sunny afternoon, Dorothy and Nancy were walking home from school with Jewel, while Arabella and her cousin Leander followed close behind them.

When they reached the gates at the Stone House, Dorothy turned toward the others, saying:

"Come in for a little while," so they strolled up the driveway, and soon were in the big living-room, drawing lots as to which should be the first to tell a story. The afternoon session at school had been hot and tiring, and it seemed good to sit telling stories for amusement, the soft breeze from the open window fanning their cheeks. Leander had been telling them an oriental tale that had been very exciting, and they were discussing the hero and his valiant deeds.

Arabella had appeared as interested as the others while listening to the story, but at the first pause in their lively chatter, she turned toward Dorothy. She stared at her for a moment, then she said, "Leander said the Oriental girl wore bangles on her wrists and ankles."

"They do," Dorothy said, "and there's a

painting that Father has just bought that shows a Turkish girl wearing them."

"Well—you don't wear yours at all. Why don't you?"

Arabella was speaking to Dorothy, but she was *looking* at Jewel.

"*Arabella!*"

Leander spoke her name in a tone of rebuke.

"Don't you like your bangle now?" Jewel asked, her eyes wide-open as if with wonder.

"Why-ee! I saw you *take* Dorothy's bangle. I was peeping between the portières when you sat on the rug in front of the Treasure Chest, with the bangle in your hand, and—well, right after that, Dorothy couldn't find it."

"Jewel, Jewel! Don't mind what she says!" cried Dorothy clasping her arms

about Jewel, and holding her close as if to defend her.

"I *did* see her holding it!" cried Arabella.

"And I *did* take it," said Jewel, "and my father had it repaired so it is perfect. Oh, don't you like it, as it is now, so perfect, so lovely, Dorothy? It is just as perfect as when it was first made."

"Dorothy hasn't seen it, Jewel," Nancy said. "The little chest was locked weeks and weeks ago, and it hasn't been unlocked, because they're just treasures, things to be kept, not things she uses every day. Don't mind what Arabella says."

"But I took the bangle home to Father to have it fixed for you, and it wasn't long before the fine stones were reset, and one day when I was here, I watched my chance, and I dropped the perfect bangle into the chest.

It must have been there when you locked the other treasures in.

"Come! Let's unlock the chest, and then you'll see how fine it is, since my father's friend, the Oriental, re-set it."

Eagerly Dorothy ran to the little chest, Nancy and Jewel with her, Arabella slowly following.

"I don't wonder you lag behind, but I'll help you to go right along and see for yourself that the bangle is there," Leander said, under his breath, at the same time taking Arabella's arm, and pushing her forward.

"Tell Jewel you made a big mistake," he said firmly, and Arabella gave them a genuine surprise.

"I *was* mistaken," she said, "and as long as I live, I'll never believe anything is bad, until I *know* it is, and I'll try hard never to think anything mean about any one."

"Good for you, Arabella!" cried Leander. "*Now* I'm proud of you."

"You're dear, Arabella," cried Jewel, "and we'll be good friends, *true* friends, always."

Arabella stood, for a moment, silent, then she said, softly:

"You're the first girl, Jewel Trafton, that ever called me 'dear.' "

Her eyes were shining.

In a second Dorothy, Nancy, and Jewel had made a little ring around her.

"You *are* dear," said Nancy.

"And brave, too," said Dorothy, "for mother says it often takes real courage to say you've been wrong, so I, too, say you're dear."

"Come, Leander. Let's walk along up the Avenue. I'm so happy, 'fore I know it I'll be crying just for clear happiness."

"Then we'll run along," Leander agreed, and together they went out on the porch, Arabella turning, with shining eyes, to say, "I'll be over soon, and I'll keep my promise."

"We know you will!" they gayly cried, as they waved their hands. Arabella, happy because the girls that she had secretly admired, now showed a fondness for her, went often to the Stone House, and to the old Dyke House, where Jewel always seemed so glad to see her. Soon Patricia began to complain of being neglected.

She threw a note across the classroom one afternoon, and it landed at Arabella's feet.

She picked it up, and slipping it inside her book, slowly read it.

The teacher had seen the note sailing

across the room and guessed that Patricia had thrown it.

It was near closing time, and if Patricia had been a pupil, she would surely have been kept after school, but she was only a visitor, having "honored" the school with her presence, as she thought.

She had told several of the pupils that the schoolroom looked very small to her, now that she was going to the "'Cad'my," and the pupils had been amused, for the little old house was not one-quarter the size of the schoolhouse, and they knew that the rooms of the " 'Cad'my" must surely be much smaller than the classrooms at the school.

Arabella had read the note and looking toward Patricia, had shaken her head and continued studying her lesson.

After school, Patricia was waiting for her, ready to coax her to take a long walk with her, but Arabella had promised Leander that she would go on a long tramp with him, and Leander did not ask Patricia to "come, too." Leander was rather shy with girls, but Patricia he especially avoided.

"You think she's silly," Arabella said as she tramped along beside Leander.

"I don't *think* she's silly," the boy replied, "I *know* she's silly, but that's not the reason I keep away from her. Sometimes her silly ways are amusing, and make me laugh, but it is her habit of saying very disagreeable things that makes me think I'd rather see her at a distance."

For a time they walked in silence, Arabella thinking of what he had said, and Leander, watching her closely, and wondering what was in her mind.

When Arabella looked up, their eyes met, and Leander saw a brighter light in them than he had ever seen before.

"I used to say unpleasant things, I did that day at Dorothy's. I'm sorry," she said.

"But you made up for that, when you said what you did to Jewel, and said it before Dorothy, and Nancy, and me. You made a promise that made me proud of you, and already the girls are more friendly with you."

"I know they are," Arabella said, "and I'm happier than I ever was before. I used to wonder why the boys and girls didn't like to come over to my house, but now I know my sharp words kept them away. I truly mean to watch myself, and never again drive friends away." And while Arabella and Leander tramped along together, they

knew nothing of the excitement that was stirring their friends on the Avenue, from the Stone House to a spot two miles beyond it.

A band of Gipsies often camped on a field at the far end of the town, making trips from their tents to other parts of Merrivale, offering their bright-colored baskets for sale. Sometimes servants would pay them for telling fortunes, and it amused their employers when they learned that Mary or Bridget would pay little to be told that they were secure in their present positions, but could be induced to pay almost any amount if the wily Gipsy told them that they would marry noblemen, and live in great splendor.

There seemed to be a greater number of Gipsies encamped than ever before, and it was evident that they had made sure of visit-

ing the largest residences first, probably because there would be more servants kept on a large place.

An old Gipsy, with a number of baskets slung over her shoulder, called at the Stone House, or rather attempted to. Seeing the gardener at work, she strode over to him.

"Buy a basket?" she asked, staring at him, her black eyes studying his face.

"Guess not!" said John. "This old basket here is good enough for weeds, if it ain't fancy," and he continued pulling weeds from the edge of the beds.

"Then let me tell yer fortune?" she asked in a wheedling voice.

"Me fortoon? No, mum. I don't want to be tould an ould Oirishman loike me is goin' ter marry a beautiful young colleen. Them yarns is nonsense, an' could only plaze the young an' foolish."

"I was goin' ter tell yer ye'd soon marry the cook," said the Gipsy.

"An' wot luck is thot, Oi'll ax ye, an' her wid a timper loike red pepper, an' a face that wad scare a cow? Now, will yez promenade along, afore Oi hov ter help ye?"

The Gipsy went off grumbling.

The children watched for them, and never tired of relating tales that had been told them by maids who had seen and talked with the Gipsies at other seasons when they had encamped at Merrivale.

Arabella and Leander had taken a short cut through the woods, and now, as they neared the opening, they caught a glimpse of a young Gipsy woman talking to some one whom they could not at first see, but who proved to be Patricia. A thicket of underbrush had shown the head and shoulders of the Gipsy, but had completely hidden Pa-

tricia, until a bend of the path on which they were walking brought Arabella and Leander to a point where they could clearly see the girl and woman, while yet unseen by them.

"Tell me some more!" Patricia said, "Tell me more!"

"What else you gi'me?" questioned the Gipsy.

"I've given you ever so much now," Patricia replied, grudgingly, "but I want to hear other things beside what you've told me."

The young Gipsy looked her over, with keen, alert eyes.

"She vain, silly girl," she thought, but she did not say that to Patricia. No, indeed. She was too crafty to say anything like that.

"You got bracelet, you got ribbons, you

got pretty pin, you got locket!" she said, "an' for those I tell you much, *very* much."

"I've given you two strings of beads, one that I was wearing, and the other that I took from my pocket."

"That's 'nough for what I told you, but I must have more, if I tell more," was the firm answer.

"Do you know much to tell?" questioned Patricia eagerly.

"*Heaps!*" declared the Gipsy.

"Here's the ribbon," said Patricia, as she twitched it from her hair, "and there's the bracelet. 'Tisn't worth much, and I've had it some time, and I'm tired of it," she added in a whisper.

"What you say?" questioned the Gipsy, suspiciously.

"Oh,—nothing much," said Patricia, "and now hurry up and tell something."

"Well—I 'spects you'll be a great lady, an' wear silks an' velvets, an' ride in yer *kerridge.*"

Leander stooped to whisper close to Arabella's ear;

"You stay here. I'm going to take a hand in this."

"What else?" teased Patricia, excited by what the Gipsy had told, and wild to hear more.

"'What else?' 'What else?' you say," snapped the Gipsy. "Well, what else you give?"

It was then that Leander strode out from behind the underbrush, and faced the startled Gipsy.

"Say! How much do you want for telling a girl a lot of stuff that hasn't a word of truth in it? Now, be off. She's silly to give things to you, in the first place, but that

doesn't make you look any better to take all creation, and then try to get more. Well, get along, will you, or there'll be trouble!"

It was then that Leander's vanity was tickled.

"I'll go, *Mister!*" she said, and started running, lest he ask her to give back what she had acquired. He was an unusually tall boy, but that was the first time that he had been addressed as "Mister," and although she was only an ignorant Gipsy, he was more pleased than he would have been willing to admit.

The boy stood very straight, just a bit straighter than usual, as he watched until the Gipsy was at a good distance, and still going, then he turned to Patricia.

"I didn't think you were silly enough to listen to what a woman like that had to say, and I wasn't very sorry for you, Patricia,

but I wouldn't stand there and let that woman get anything more from you."

"Well, you certainly were brave," said Patricia, "but I'll always wonder what she was going to say next?"

Leander looked at her with eyes that plainly showed his disgust, then he said:

"Come on, Arabella, and, Patricia, you'd better walk along with us, for if we leave you here, you'll probably go chasing after the Gipsy to give her a few more things, so you can listen to more of her foolish yarns."

"Now, Leander Correyville! She said I was to be a great lady and wear silks and velvets and—"

"If she'd told you you were to be something useful, you wouldn't have been interested," Leander replied. Patricia did not answer, for she knew that what he said was true.

CHAPTER X

PATRICIA GIVES A "TALK"

PATRICIA had been a pupil at the "Art-o-Lang Academy" for some time, and she had acquired a jumbled idea of a number of things, with but little real knowledge of any single subject. She, however, boasted much of what she had learned, and she tried to use big words with the hope of astonishing her friends.

She had been wondering how she could manage to display her stock of *wisdom,* when, like a flash, an idea came to her that filled her heart with delight.

The tall woman and her short sister, proprietors and instructors at the so-called

"Academy," had a great deal to say about culture, and they had many times declared that children should be trained in deportment, grace, and ability to talk interestingly to any one whom they chanced to meet, and they boldly stated that their school was the only one where such training could be obtained.

Patricia already felt herself to be a learned person.

The "Academy" consisted of but seven pupils, the youngest five, and the oldest fifteen.

One morning the little class was obliged to listen patiently while the short woman talked on art, grace, and beauty.

Patricia listened and was charmed, although she understood far less than half that the lady said.

Of the other six pupils, the three oldest

were bored, and the three youngest went fast asleep. Patricia raced home as if her feet had wings. She knew exactly what she wished to do.

She would give a "lecture"!

She had long felt that she would like to do something that would show the neighbors' children what a wonderful little person she really was.

Her aunt had refused to let her give a party, because she did not like to have a "lot of noisy children running through the house," she said.

Well, they needn't be *in* the house at all. She would give the lecture out-of-doors. That would be grand!

Beyond the old fence were rows of bean-poles, the bean-vines gayly clinging to them. The fence was decidedly irregular.

Patricia coaxed some empty boxes from

the grocer, and these she placed near the fence for seats.

"What *are* you doing, Patricia?" Mrs. Boggins shouted from the open chamber window.

"I'm going to give a *lec'shur,* and these boxes are for the folks to sit on, while they listen to me," Patricia replied.

"*Another* notion!" remarked her aunt.

"I guess I'll be some amused ter hear that lecture, but I think I'll stay in here, for sure's I go out there, there'll be small boys and small dogs under foot, and my head would ache fit to split, but I can hear from the winder. Patricia don't never save her lungs. Most likely she'll simply holler, so as ter look important."

When the boxes were all in place, Patricia thought of another matter. She raced up the back steps, and into the kitchen.

"I'm going to give my lec'shur on Saturday afternoon at two o'clock, and when Dorothy Dainty has little friends at the Stone House, they have hot chocolate and cakes and bonbons before they go home, so I want to have a treat of some sort after my lec-'shur."

"Patricia, how many'll be here?" Mrs. Boggins asked.

"I don't know," Patricia answered. "I've invited 'bout twenty, but some of 'em were horrid, and said right out that they didn't want to hear me lec'shur, but most of them said they'd come, after I said there'd be a treat."

"You've got five boxes. What will the rest of the twenty sit on?"

"They won't sit on *anything!*" cried Patricia, vexed at being questioned, "they'll have to stand, of course."

"Well, let me tell you if I'm ter offer a lunch ter twenty youngsters, I'll agree ter give 'em some crackers and water, an' that's all I will give."

"*Crackers* and *water!*" cried Patricia. "Well, I guess they wouldn't come again."

"That's just the idea! I don't hanker ter see this yard filled with children invited in just promiscuous."

"I've some money left from what Ma sent me last week, and I'll buy the treat and have a decent one," Patricia said to herself, as she hurried from the kitchen, and raced up the back stairs to the attic.

"Off in *another* d'rection! Now what is she after up-stairs?"

Mrs. Boggins listened, but hearing not a sound, concluded that Patricia was doubtless primping before her mirror, so she did not call her.

At that very moment, Patricia was in the attic, on her knees before an old trunk.

The air was heavy with camphor and the odor of moth-balls, but Patricia kept on opening bundle after bundle, that had been carefully wrapped to protect its contents from the moths.

As fast as she opened them she threw them aside until she at last found what she was looking for.

Without stopping to wrap the parcels that she had opened she lifted the cover of the trunk, and tossed them in, leaving the one that she had been searching for on top of the old trunk, where she could quickly get it.

Saturday proved to be a sunny day, and at half-past one the boys and girls of the neighborhood, some with a small brother or

sister tagging after, came strolling into the yard.

The last to arrive were Mandy Harkins, and her small brother, "Chub."

They had not been invited, for Patricia feared that they might prove annoying, but they had seen the other children going to Patricia's yard, and they followed.

Mrs. Boggins, from behind a sash-curtain, laughed softly when all filed out until but five remained.

"Rag, Tag, and Bobtail!" she whispered. "Well, there's music, such as it is, to greet them!"

It was hardly music, for more correctly speaking, it was noise. The hens were cackling in one coop, the two dogs, Lionel and Algernon, were howling in the other coop where Patricia had tied them, while the pup, "Fairy," was uttering little yelps, although

no one could catch a glimpse of him, or even guess, by the sound, where he was.

Patricia, having watched from her chamber window, saw five intending to remain, then drew her garments about her, in what she thought a very dignified manner, and went slowly down stairs.

On her head was a small hat with a very long feather, on her shoulders, an old fur wrap of her aunt's, from which tufts of fur loosened, where moths had eaten it, blew off, and floated on the breeze.

Patricia walked, or strode, down the hall and out into the yard, and stopped facing the group of boys and girls.

"I'm going to give a lec'shur that I heard at the 'Cad'my,' and it was all 'bout beauty, and kindness to animals. My teacher says you can only be *truly* beautiful, by having beautiful thoughts, and—"

"Pleathe thay that again!" shouted Chub, "tho I'll know what you mean."

Patricia repeated what she had said.

"Look at me, girlth!" shouted Chub. "Apple dumplinth are beautiful! I'm thinkin' of apple dumplinth! Do *I* look beautiful *yet?*"

"Guess you'll have to think a little longer," drawled a girl next to Mandy.

"Ten years of thinkin', at least, to do such a job as that!" said a boy who stood near.

"Will you stop talking and listen, please?" said Patricia.

At this moment, Mrs. Boggins, who had been busily watching the other children, for the first time noticed the fur wrap about the small shoulders of Patricia.

"Patricia Levine!" she shouted, "You come right in the house and take off my fur mantle!"

"I can't stop in the middle of my lec-'shur," Patricia declared with a stamp of her foot.

"Are your thoughts 'beautiful' when you stamp your foot, Patricia?" asked Mandy, who sat facing her, "fer le'me tell yer, yer face don't look any too sweet!"

"I finished all I had to say on beauty," Patricia said, "and I'm going to give the rest of my lec'shur on 'Kindness to Animals.'

"My teacher says we ought to be very kind to animals."

"Bow-wow! Wow-woof! Ki-yi, yi-yi!" came deafening barks that seemed like approval of what she had said.

"Gueth they like what you jutht thaid," remarked Chub.

Patricia, her chin very high, continued.

"You mustn't ever forget to feed them,

and you must try to think they are beautiful, whether they are, or not."

"I couldn't think that about *some* dogs I could mention," whispered a girl who stood near Mandy.

"Me, neither," remarked Mandy with fine disregard of grammar.

"You must never get angry, never forget to feed them, and *never* scold them!" continued Patricia.

"Well, look at that!" said one of the girls. "There goes our treat, so we may as well go home!"

Patricia turned, and there at the bucket of cookies was Fairy, fairly stuffing himself, while the other bucket that had held lemonade was overturned, and its contents trickling along under the coarse grass and pusley that covered the ground.

In her anger and disgust Patricia forgot

what she had been saying, and snatching up an old broom that lay on the grass, she chased Fairy, shouting:

"You little *pig!* You horrid little *pig!* I'd like to catch you!"

"Think beautiful thoughtth!" yelled Chub.

"Remember to feed them!" cried a lanky-looking girl.

"Never thcold them!" hooted Chub, "and think of the beautiful thingth, and you'll *be* beautiful. Oh, ratth! There'th no thenth in what Patricia thaid!"

"Come along, Chub," said Mandy. "They's no treat comin', and that lecture of Patricia's was a joke, still I wouldn't say there's no sense in it! She said, 'Think beautiful thoughts and you'll be beautiful!' Well, I guess Patricia put that a bit strong, but I do reelly ketch a thought in some of

"THERE GOES OUR TREAT!"—*Page 199.*

the stuff she said. I guess it's true ye're standin' a better chance of lookin' sweet if yer thoughts are pleasant an' sweet, than if yer thoughts are sour."

"Goin' ter try it?" asked a smaller girl, tauntingly, for Mandy was awkward, and ugly to look at.

"Shouldn't wonder!" said the lanky one. " 'Tisn't any harm ter try, an' see what 'twill do!"

Mrs. Boggins overheard some of these remarks, and was actually astonished.

"For the land's sake! Patricia really done some good with her lecture that I thought was silly. Maybe I'm too harsh with Patricia, an' make her extry stubborn. Well, we'll see!"

Even Mrs. Boggins was given a new line of thought, for when Patricia came in hot and angry from racing after fat little Fairy

who had taken refuge under the porch, she did not receive the scolding that she expected. She wondered why. She was ready to cry with vexation because of the teasing remarks made by her "audience" and waited stubbornly for her aunt to reprove her for wearing the fur without asking if she might.

Instead, her aunt said quietly:

"At first I was peeved at ye, Patricia, fer takin' my fur piece out from the *camphire,* but when I see the fur a flying all 'round where the moths have gnawed it, I don't see no use in keepin' it, so if you can stand wearin' it, yer welcome to. Yer lecture started out sorter com'cle, but afore ye finished it I thought there was some sense in it, and ye was so mad at Fairy that ye didn't hear Mandy standin' up fer ye."

The kind words, in place of the expected

scolding, and the offer of the furs, made Patricia smile through the tears that lay on her lashes.

A little later, Fairy, the naughty pup, came sidling in, glancing toward Patricia, but a bit afraid to bound toward her as usual.

But to his wild delight Patricia held out her hand, and called him.

"Come here, you little imp!" she cried. "You're only a baby dog, anyway, so perhaps you didn't know how naughty you were. You're cute and cunning, and some day, maybe, you'll learn that you musn't steal."

He didn't know what she was saying, but it sounded very pleasant, so he wagged his stubby little tail, and felt that once more she loved him.

Patricia was glad that she had given the

lecture, for beside the fact that Mandy had, at last, approved, her aunt had spoken kindly, and *joy of joys,* she now could wear the fur wrap! She decided to give it a good shaking, and thus free it from all loose fur, so that when she wore it, it need not shed the fur on every breeze.

Accordingly, she swung it over the clothesline, and shook and beat it, with the result that there were places as large as her hand where the bare pelt showed.

With needle and thread, she sewed the edges of the bare spots together so that much that was bare was hidden, but the wrap, thus tacked together in spots appeared to be all "humps and hollows."

However it was fur, and she wore it, hot days and cool days, it mattered not which. On a very sunny day she met Arabella, and Arabella, as blunt as usual, asked her if she

were not nearly "roasted," to which Patricia replied;

"Dear me, Arabella! If only you were used to wearing furs, you'd not ask such a question. I'm just comfortable."

Later, on a cool day, Arabella asked her if the fur felt nice and warm.

"The breeze is cold to-day so the fur must be comfortable," Arabella drawled.

"When you become *used* to furs as I am, furs will feel just delightful *any* time," Patricia said loftily.

Chub, as regards "beauty" was not convinced, and one day he confided his thoughts to a playmate.

There were mud-puddles in the street, and muddy water raced along the gutters.

Chub and his chum were busy, floating chips, lashing the water to make the chips rock on tiny waves.

"My sister Ellen has a funny notion," the boy said, pausing before launching his chip.

"What ith it?" Chub asked with some interest, for he thought all girls funny enough, but he was willing to hear of one that was funnier than any he had yet met.

"Well, she thinks that she'll get her hair to grow awful long if she clips it every time there's a new moon. Could you beat that, Chub?"

"Sure I can!" cried Chub. "My thithter, I mean the big one, Mandy, thinkth the'll be beautiful if the keepth thinking of beautiful thingth!"

"Is she going to keep her mind on *you?*" the boy asked, laughing.

"Well, I gueth not! You ought to know better'n that. I ain't beautiful. Boyth don't want to be beautiful but *girlth* do! O

my! Girlth would do jutht anything to be beautiful! Whatth the uthe?"

"Girls are silly," declared the other boy. "I'm glad I haven't any sisters."

"They're handy, thometimeth."

"When, I'd like to know?" the boy asked.

"When you want thomething mended," declared Chub.

CHAPTER XI

A SALTY BREEZE

"WHAT a lot of happenings there have been this season," Nancy said one day to Dorothy.

"Beginning with the time that you and I and Vera lost each other when we were in New York," said Dorothy, "When we hunted all over the Metropolitan Museum, and then after all the hunting, we came together again at Vera's house. Didn't we laugh?"

"Yes, and next the fine drawbridge," said Nancy, "and weren't we surprised when we saw it?"

"We surely were surprised," Dorothy said, "and the boys said our house had al-

ways seemed like a castle, and that with the drawbridge, it was about perfect. It is perfect, except that there is no moat around it, and I'm not sure that I care for a moat, do you?''

"I wouldn't like to have a moat, and surely we wouldn't want to have a dungeon, for dungeons must have been dreadful, and I'd not want to have anything added to our house that any one could call fearful,'' Nancy said.

"The flag that Father has flying up on the tower, looks lovely when the breeze is blowing it in the sunshine,'' said Dorothy, "and when we see pictures of old castles, they nearly always have flags on their towers.''

"Next, Jewel came here to live, and then there was the mystery about the bangle, but when it disappeared, I never dreamed that

Jewel had anything to do with it. I'm glad I didn't, for only think of the sweet reason that made her take it? And wasn't it wonderful how it all came out?"

"It was wonderful, and Jewel was dear," said Nancy, "and isn't Arabella nicer now than she ever was before! She hardly ever does or says anything mean now. Remember what happened to her, or rather to those goggles she used to wear?"

Dorothy joined in Nancy's laughter.

"I can imagine how she and Leander enjoyed smashing them."

"And next we had our costume party, and oh, such a good time we had! Such a good time *every one* had!" Dorothy said.

"Every one but Patricia," Nancy said, "and she could have enjoyed it if she'd tried to. It wasn't nice for the pup to race in with that greasy bone, but we were ready to

laugh at him, and not blame Patricia, for it wasn't her fault that he followed her in."

"She always goes out in the hall and sulks about something, but who ever dreamed that she went out into the stable?" Dorothy said.

"Well, I guess she wouldn't do that again. She probably thought that some one would come out there hunting for her and find her, but who would ever have looked there for her?" questioned Nancy, "and yesterday she gave a lecture in her yard, to some of the neighbors' children," she continued, "and that was all about thinking beautiful thoughts."

Mrs. Dainty, pausing to listen to their chatter, ventured a question.

"Did you hear what she said about the sort of thoughts one should think, or their effect?" she asked, smiling at the two eager faces.

"Oh, yes," Dorothy said. "Reginald said a boy told him that the lecture wasn't very long, but the one thing that she said over and over again was that people who wished to be beautiful must think beautiful thoughts, and he said that Chub kept interrupting her, and that after that she talked on kindness to animals."

"Those were good subjects, surely, and if Patricia will only keep very kind, lovely thoughts in her mind, she will certainly have a much pleasanter face," Mrs. Dainty said.

"And what made the boys and girls laugh was that right after saying that, she got so angry with the puppy, that she screamed, and scolded, and chased after him, while Chub reminded her to 'think beautiful thoughts.' "

"Well, that certainly was droll, but in regard to her statement that kindly thoughts,

loving thoughts, have an effect on one's personal appearance, Patricia was right," Mrs. Dainty said.

"Would a person who had homely features, become beautiful, just by thinking lovely thoughts?" Nancy asked in wonder.

"Not just as you mean it, Nancy," Mrs. Dainty replied. "Kindly thoughts would never straighten a crooked nose, or render straight hair curly, but gentle, loving thoughts can make a mouth curve into a friendly smile, and surely that mouth will look better than if its lips formed a sneer. Eyes that have no beauty of color or form, can shine with such a friendly, kindly light, that they will be far more charming than eyes of fine form and color, that show anger, or malice, for unkind thoughts can make a handsome face so unattractive that any one would turn from it in disgust."

"Oh, Mother, I know that is true, and see the difference in Arabella since she is pleasant to be with. Tess Haughton said that leaving off her goggles, and having her dresses chosen by her mother, instead of Aunt Matilda, had made the difference, but I know now that she would always have looked better if she had smiled as pleasantly as she does now, and never said the horrid things she used to say."

"That is the idea," Mrs. Dainty said, "and I think now that Arabella Correyville is a good-looking girl, with everything in her favor for a still more pleasing appearance, if she continues in her endeavor to think kind thoughts, and to refrain from making blunt, unpleasant remarks, and I believe she will."

"She will, I'm sure, and Nancy, maybe,

sometimes we can help her," Dorothy said, to which Nancy readily agreed.

Antony Marx had made a fine record at school, and he had been a great favorite with all.

He had an endless number of adventure tales of the sea that his father had told him, and the boys continually coaxed him to tell them, and now that he had returned to his home at the shore, they missed him.

On the day when he was saying "good-by" to his friends, some one spoke of Arabella's absence.

"She's up home helping about something that Aunt Matilda is doing," said Leander, "and she told me to say 'good-by' for her, and to tell you she's sorry you're going."

"Tell Arabella that she has been so pleas-

ant these last few weeks that she's one of the friends I'm sorry to leave," Antony said.

"And we wish you could stay longer," was the eager response.

They watched until he was out of sight.

"There's a new combination now," said Jack, one morning. "It used to be Arabella and Patricia. Now it's Tess Haughton and Patricia."

Reginald Dean laughed.

"That's funnier than the first, for Arabella would let Patricia be as 'bossy' as she liked, and there's no end to the amount of directing that Patricia can enjoy, but Tess won't let anybody tell her *anything,* so I can't imagine how they can get along together," Reginald said.

"Maybe Patricia will tell Tess what to do,

and Tess will do as she pleases," ventured Molly.

"Well, the biggest joke is yet to be told," said Jack.

"Tell us! Tell us!" they cried.

"You know the Gipsies were here for a few weeks, and they camped over in the section where Patricia lives. It seems that she made several visits to their camp, and now she's posing for a fortune-teller, and she and Tess have a little place in Tess's garden where they tell fortunes for the children of the neighborhood," Jack said.

"You mean, they did tell fortunes," Reginald said, "for Tess Haughton's aunt made them stop, because she said she wouldn't have such a rabble on the place. Next they went over to Patricia's house, but her aunt wouldn't even let them start there, so they're not telling fortunes, and Patricia says she

doesn't care. She thinks she likes lecturing better, and she and Tess are planning something but they won't tell what."

Jack laughed at Reginald's disgust. The boy disliked Patricia, but he had great curiosity, and the fact that Patricia would not tell what she was planning made him wild to find out.

There was another interesting thing that the boys and girls were wild about; a matter that puzzled them greatly.

They all clamored for Jack to tell them what was in the little envelope that Antony had given him, on the day when he left Merriville.

"I don't know yet what's in it," he said, "for Antony said, 'Open it later, some day when you boys are together.' "

From his pocket he took the envelope, opened it, glanced at the note, then, with

shining eyes, Jack turned toward the others.

"An invitation from Captain Marx for Jack Tiverton, Reginald Dean, his cousin Harry Dean, Leander Correyville, Arthur Merrington, and Sidney Merrington—six of us boys, think of it! to spend a week on shore, and sailing with him and Antony in his big fishing-smack. Oh, look! Here's a postscript:

"I forgot to mention another royal good fellow who will be with us, and that is your true friend, Uncle Harry.

"Say, boys! Doesn't that make you think you can almost smell the salt breeze from the sea? Three cheers for Captain Marx and the glorious week we'll have as his guests!" Jack shouted, and they were given with a will.

It happened that the boys were fond of the shore, so that they were enthusiastic

over the week's visit with Antony, and the promised pleasure of spending part of that time on the fishing-smack.

And next the great secret that Patricia and Tess were so mysterious about was told to "the public," as Patricia expressed it.

"We're going to N'York," Patricia said, grandly, "we're going to N'York. Mother wants me to come home for vacation, and I've written to tell her I'm coming, and she said I could bring a girl with me, so I chose Tess, because she hasn't ever been to N'York."

"Do you mean to say," said Molly, "that you and Tess are going to start off for New York alone?"

"Well, no, not exactly alone, because Auntie will go almost all the way with us, and Mother will meet us at the station when we reach N'York. There's no need of it,"

she said, "for Tess and I could get on all right, but Mother insisted that Auntie go with us, so she's going to."

"Auntie at first said I couldn't go," said Tess, "but when she found that Mrs. Boggins—"

"Tess Haughton!" cried Patricia.

"I mean Patricia's aunt," said Tess, "for I know Patricia can't bear the name of Boggins, and I forgot when I said it."

"Well, don't manage to say it again," Patricia said sharply.

"It's her middle name," said Tess, with dancing eyes.

"Tess Haughton!" cried Patricia, again.

"I didn't say the name again," said Tess, laughing.

"Well, I guess you'd better not," said Patricia, "not if you want to go to N'York with me!"

"My senses! I don't *have* to go, and maybe I won't," Tess said pertly, and at once Patricia saw that she had made a mistake. Tess was quite likely to take offense, and refuse to go, for Tess was stubborn. If it pleased her to do so, she would stay in Merrivale, and miss the promised trip, even if she really wished to go. Accordingly, Patricia did what she had never been known to do—she made an attempt at apology.

"I didn't mean that just as it sounded," she said, "for of course I want you to go with me. We've planned it, and I'd not half enjoy the trip if you didn't go with me. You will, won't you Tess?"

Tess saw her advantage, and she meant to keep it.

Patricia had been boastful, and in all of the plans that they had made, she had insisted on having her own way, regardless of

what Tess might wish. Arabella had been afraid of Patricia.

Tess was not, and she had now, for the first time, shown her courage.

She had considered herself as Patricia's guest, and had, from the first, intended to let their plans be made so as to please Patricia, while yet conforming to her own.

At every turn, Patricia had shown her selfishness, and she had spoken so sharply, that Tess decided to speak, so when Patricia had spoken as if she could take Tess with her, or not, as she chose, Tess literally "stood her ground," and said:

"Maybe I'll not go," and surely Patricia was astonished.

"Won't you, Tess? You know I so want you to," she said.

"Maybe I will," Tess said, her eyes twin-

kling, "if other things we're planning for the trip come out pleasantly."

Patricia made no reply. This was very different from anything that Tess had ever done before, and she was puzzled.

And Tess was puzzled, too.

What did Patricia mean by first making an apology, and then making no answer to what Tess had said about their plans? Tess earnestly longed to take the trip, and she hoped Patricia would not decide to take the trip without company, or, yet more provoking, invite some other girl to be her guest.

Tess resolved to be very careful of what she said to Patricia, and oddly enough, that was exactly what Patricia was thinking in regard to Tess.

So it happened that each was very kind and considerate of the other, with the result

that everything went smoothly, and when the day came for them to start, both were promptly on the platform, waiting for the train, with Patricia's aunt close beside them, lest the train come along, and one of them be left. The lady carried a suit-case in one hand, and a large bird-cage in the other, in which sat "Fairy" the fat little pup. Fastened to the cage, and on a leash was Algernon, who envied the pup, because he was being carried instead of kept on the end of a leash, while Fairy lounged on the floor of the cage, and wondered why he couldn't be out on the platform instead of in a cage.

CHAPTER XII

"MOTHER IS JUST RIGHT"

THEY were standing near the sun-dial in the garden at the Stone House, Dorothy and Nancy, Molly and Flossie, and they were wondering what their next game should be.

"There's a game we used ter play in th' ould counthry, thot moight plaze ye, little ladies," said the gardener.

"Oh, John, you always do come along with just the right thing," Dorothy said. "Please tell us how you played it."

"It was called 'The Bee-hoive,'" the gardener replied, "an' we called a haycock, or any object that come handy, our 'bee-

hoive.' Now, one of yez must be the foine queen bee."

"Make Dorothy our queen bee," said Flossie, and they agreed.

"Now, Miss Dorothy, do ye order yer bees out of the bee-hoive to fly around among the flowers and get busy gathering honey."

"Away, away! Get fine honey for me!" cried Dorothy.

Off they ran, up one path, and down another, chasing each other, then off again in different directions.

"Whin yez return ter yer foine queen bee, yez bring petals if ye want ter *riprisint* honey, but one of yez must be a lazy bee, known as a drone, an' thot wan will bring a piece o' grass, or jist a green leaf, an' the queen won't accept thot."

"I'll be the lazy drone bee," said Molly. So when Nancy came with rose petals, and

little Flossie with mignonette, these were accepted as fine honey, while laughing Molly offered a big plantain leaf, and was promptly dismissed to try again.

Again they were sent forth, and this time Flossie brought a large red rosebud, and Nancy a spray of honeysuckle, for which she was made queen bee, and Dorothy went hunting honey as one of the swarm.

Molly, always ready for a joke, produced, with a sober face, a thick old mullein leaf that she had found just over the wall at the rear of the garden.

"Well, well, do you think that would ever make honey?" Nancy asked, to which Molly answered that she was not quite sure, to which Nancy, as a haughty queen bee replied, "You'll have to know more than that to be any sort of bee."

Molly was laughing outright now, but she managed to stop long enough to say:

"I don't care how little I know, for the less I know, the less likely am I to have to make honey."

Arabella who had come along the driveway, unseen by the others, now asked to join the game, and soon they were racing away again, Dorothy laughing to see them rush from one point to another. Cute little Fluff chased first one and then the other, barking all the way, greatly excited, but wondering what it was all about.

The game was a simple one, but it sent them from one patch of blazing color to another, from a mass of sweet-scented flowers, to another mass of showy ones, and their cheeks glowed from the exercise.

Fluff, who had been watching to see

which way they would next run, now turned abruptly and raced down to the great gate, to greet Jewel, of whom he had grown to be very fond.

"Oh, you cunning little coaxer!" she cried, well knowing that when he stood upon his stubby little hind legs, he was begging to be picked up, and petted.

Up the driveway she went to join the others, Fluff held close in her arms.

Standing him on the sun-dial, she stepped back, laughing to see him prance up and down, barking to be placed on the ground.

Flossie tucked the long stem of a rose into the clasp of his collar, and then put him on the ground, when he scurried off to chase a butterfly.

A long time they played the game, and then they sat on the grass in the shade of a big tree to rest.

"I had a letter from Patricia this morning," said Arabella, "and some of it any one could understand, and some of it doesn't seem to make sense. I think one thing that makes it hard to understand is that she uses such big words."

"That's just like Patricia. She does that when she's talking with us," Molly said, " 'specially when she's describing some place where she has been, or something that she is wearing."

"I'll read some of the queer parts aloud, and you'll see what big words she uses."

As she spoke, Arabella drew the letter from her pocket. The paper was bright pink, and strongly scented.

"The first part of her letter reads all right until she comes to where she's trying to describe their long car ride to New York. She says:

"The colored porter said our bird-cage had too large a bird in it, and the cage must go to the baggage car. He said Auntie was *'nopolizing* a seat with the big cage, and Auntie said his manners was umbrageous.

"We rode for just hours and hours, and later in the day we came to a station that the brakeman called—'Who's sick, Colonel? Who's sick, Colonel?' and pretty soon the brakeman hollered—'Who's sick, Colonel?' and I looked around and I didn't see any man wearing a uniform. There were stations and stations, and after what seemed a long time, we reached New York, and there was Ma all dressed up, waiting to see us.

"She kissed me, and said 'My, how you've grown!' and then she looked at Auntie with the two dogs, and she gasped:

" 'Are there any more animals in the baggage car?' and she said it sort of tart.

"Auntie said if there had been she would have been crazy when she arrived, and pretty soon we all got into a Taxi, and a newsboy on the sidewalk saw the two dogs and hollered, 'What Circus Menagerie do you belong to?'

"Ma and Auntie just looked at him, and he ran off laughing to the corner, where he poked another boy, and pointed at us.

"'Them is circus ladies,' he said, and then they giggled.

"The breeze was *zillerating*—

"Now, what did she mean by that?" Arabella asked, looking up at the others.

"I don't know what she was trying to say," Molly said, "but I do wish Patricia would use words that we all know."

"So do I," agreed Arabella, "but I guess it isn't any use to wish that, because Patricia so likes big words."

"She speaks of Tess, and she says:

"Tess was tired with the long ride, and I told her it was because she wasn't used to traveling as I am. That if she traveled a great deal she wouldn't ever think of being tired. Tess didn't seem to like what I said. I've told Tess not to act green, but just to try to act as if she'd been living in the city, and she didn't like that either. She don't know how to act stylish like Ma and me do.

"Your friend,

"PATRICIA LEVINE."

"Mother, why do you think Patricia always speaks as if any girl that she happens to have with her, knows so much less than she does?" Dorothy asked, as Mrs. Dainty came toward the little group upon the lawn.

"Patricia does appear to think better of herself than of any one else, and that surely is very unwise. I do earnestly hope that she will outgrow many of her faults that now are so trying. It may be that she will.

"It is unwise for a child, or a grown person to acquire the idea that she knows much more than others do, for it often happens that she knows far less than the least of her friends, and is constantly displaying the fact. A correct use of simple words would make Patricia appear to far better advantage, than when she tries to astonish her friends with large words incorrectly used. Until Patricia learns this, she will always

be compared unfavorably with other young people of her acquaintance."

Mrs. Dainty spoke earnestly, and the girls sat silently thinking of her words after she had turned toward the house.

"Your mother is just right," said Molly. "Patricia doesn't have to act the way she does, so it isn't any harm to say she's silly. She'd be nice to play with if she didn't act so."

"Oh, well, there's no end to things like that, that you can say," said Leander, who had just sprung over the wall to join the group.

"A mule would be all right if he didn't kick, a burglar would be all right if he didn't steal, an apple would be fine if it had no core. We don't want to say anything mean, so we'll just say that perhaps she'll improve."

"There's room for improvement," said Jack Tiverton, whose laughing face peeped over the wall, and then suddenly "ducked" to dodge the ball that Leander had flung in his direction.

Jack bobbed up laughing.

"You're careless to use a fine ball like that for a missile," he said.

"I wouldn't, only you're the fine chap that is sure to throw it back," Leander said, laughing.

"Come on over to the baseball field, and have a game. The other fellows are over there, and I came over to find you," said Jack, and arm in arm they set off for the field.

"Ladies, ladies! Don't gossip while we're gone!" Jack turned to say, with an effort to make his round face look stern, and a chuckling laugh that would not be stilled.

"Pooh! Who ever heard us do anything like that?" cried Molly. "We'd not care to, and one thing you boys know—Dorothy wouldn't *let* us."

"Three cheers for Dorothy Dainty!" cried Leander. "Not 'Three cheers and a tiger,' but 'Three cheers and a Fluff'!"

The cheers were eagerly given, and when Fluff heard his name mentioned, he responded with a loud, "Wow!"

The postman entered the gateway, and seeing the little group on the lawn paused before Dorothy, smiling at her bright, eager eyes.

"I've a letter for you, Miss Dorothy," he said, sorting those that he held in his hand, and producing one addressed to her.

"Oh, thank you," she said, glanced at the writing, and turned quickly to Nancy, her blue eyes shining.

"That is Betty Chase's writing, I do believe. I know the way she makes her y's."

"Oh—oo! Hear this!" she cried, "hear this! It *is* from Betty and her mother wishes us to spend the third week of June at their cottage at the shore."

"That will be fine!" Nancy said.

"And she says that Vera Vane has accepted, and will be there, so when Molly, and Flossie, and you, Nancy, and I arrive, there'll be just six of us to have good times together. Won't we enjoy that week?"

"And won't we be glad when you come back to play with us?" said Jewel. "Then you can tell us all about your visit, and Arabella and I will plan some way of enjoying the week."

Arabella leaned toward Jewel, and put her arm around her. It was the first time

that she had shown affection for any of her friends.

Molly and Flossie stared with wide-open eyes, and Dorothy and Nancy were surely surprised.

Three days later, as Dorothy and Nancy were driving through the Center, Jack Tiverton came out of one of the stores, and when he saw them he stopped on the curb as if he wished to speak to them.

Dorothy drew rein, and Romeo promptly stopped.

"Reginald told me yesterday that Betty Chase had invited you, and Nancy, and Molly, and Flossie to spend a week at their cottage at the shore," he said. "Of course you'll go. You couldn't refuse a tempting invitation like that."

"Oh, surely we're going. We're to spend

the third week of June there," Dorothy said. "And Vera Vane is to be there, and you know, Jack, how full of fun Vera is."

"Full of *fun!*" cried Jack. "Full of fun! If you say that Vera is full of fun, you'll have to agree that the third week of June is full of fun! My! But that's luck!"

"Now, Jack Tiverton!" said Nancy, "just stop laughing long enough to tell us what the great joke is. What is it that makes you say, 'My! But that's luck!' What *do* you mean?"

"Say, girls! Do you remember that Captain Marx invited five of us boys to spend a week with Antony?"

"Of course we do," said Dorothy and Nancy, as if with one voice, "and you'll enjoy that."

"Well, girls, our invitation is for the *third week* of *June.* Now, *isn't* that luck?

All of us to be at the shore at the same time? I remember Betty Chase. She was a bright one."

"Betty is dear," said Dorothy, "and it is fine that we are to be at the shore for the same week that you boys are to be there. It will surely be a lively week."

Romeo was trying to learn if Jack had any candy in his pockets.

"Come, Romeo, you can't expect Jack to have sugar for you all the time," Dorothy said, as she gathered up the reins, and turned Romeo toward home. At lunch, Mrs. Dainty spoke of the visit to Betty's cottage, and then told them of plans for July and August.

"When you and Nancy return, we shall start on a trip to a quaint little country town, that will permit us to enjoy both sea-shore and country, because while it is on the

coast, with a wonderful beach, it also has a fine background of hills behind it. We have never spent the summer there, but Aunt Charlotte knows the place, and she thinks it charming."

After lunch, Dorothy and Nancy sat in the big red porch hammock, and talked of the Summer, the plans for which were delightful. Romeo and Fluff were to go with them. He sat at their feet looking eagerly from one to the other, as if he fully understood what they were saying.

It was great fun to sit and swing, and talk of the summer pleasures that they were looking forward to. It was like a lovely dream that they knew would come true.

THE END