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**Blundell, Mary E. (née Sweetman)**  
**(1855-1930)**

***Town Mice in the Country:***  
***A Story of Holiday Adventure***  
**(1894)**

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## CHAPTER I

### THREE TOWN MICE

IT was a blazing, broiling, airless July day; just the day for little people to lie at full stretch on the sands, with shady hats tilted over their faces—screening them from the sun, but allowing their eyes to wander over the blue waves as they come lapping up almost noiselessly on the yellow beach, or to peer upwards into that other deep blue ocean overhead.

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Molly Burton, standing behind the window curtains in the small, close, sitting-room, looked disconsolately down at the glaring London pavement, and the crowd of hot, busy, shabby-looking people hurrying along it, then up at the sooty roofs and chimney-pots, and then squeezing herself quite into the corner, found she could just

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see a little bit of sky. It was blue, too, but oh what a different blue to the blue of the sky at the sea-side! Molly put out both her hands, pushing them slowly before her into an imaginary sand-heap, and then opening and shutting her fingers as though to let the grains fall through. All at once she sighed.

"I wish you wouldn't," said her ten-year-old brother Dick, who was lying face downwards on the ground, waving his heels in the air and clicking them at regular intervals, while his hands were occupied in spinning a footstool round and round, bringing it down every now and then with a fine crash.

"You wish I wouldn't what?" asked Molly, without turning round.

"Sigh so. Don't you know, every time you sigh—a great deep one like that—it's a nail in your coffin?"

"Who is talking about coffins?" put in Mrs. Burton, looking round from her sewing-machine with rather a startled face.

"It's me," said Dick, who was not particular about grammar. "Molly will go on sighing so—that's the fifth—and old Nurse always said a deep sigh was a nail in your coffin—and I expect she was right, for she was always sighing, and she's

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dead now. So when her coffin was ready she had to get into it."

"It isn't true, is it, Mama?" asked Molly, turning round now, and looking much perturbed. "It *couldn't* put nails in my coffin when I sigh, could it?"

"No, darling. It is only rather a foolish way of saying that it is bad for people to give

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way to sadness. But why is my little Molly sighing?"

Molly ran over, and squeezed her small, dark, curly head under her mother's arm.

"Mammie, I was only thinking of what fun we had at Brighton last year, and wondering if we should ever, ever go to the sea again."

"Do you think we ever shall, Mama?" cried Dick, banging down the footstool and jumping up.

"My poor chicks, I don't know. Perhaps Papa will be able to make more money in a year or two, and then we shall go. Poor Papa! he is working so hard for his little children, and would be so glad to make them happy."

"I think it's an awful shame not to give him more money, now," observed Dick. "And Papa's a gentleman too—it isn't as if he was just one of those chaps that have been used to work all their lives."

"I daresay he would get on better if he were,"

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said Mama with a sigh. "The fact of being a gentleman doesn't help one to make money, my poor Dick."

"Then I'd better begin to leave off being a gentleman, now, hadn't I?" returned the boy. "Because I'll have to work too when I grow up, and I mean to make a lot of money."

"Oh, Dick, you'll hate it!" cried Molly. "Poor Papa does so hate it—I know he does. He can't bear being stuck on a stool all day in a stuffy office."

Mrs. Burton looked from one to the other of the curly heads squeezed under her arms, and then she smiled a little sadly.

"This doesn't help Mama with her sewing, does it?" she said. "Try and amuse yourselves just for one hour more, children. I shall take you out after tea; it will be cooler then, I hope."

"Yes; isn't it stuffy in this horrid little room!" said the owner of the right-hand head, the one with the short locks. "I say, Molly, let's pretend we're at the sea-side, anyway."

May we play with the soft cushions, and things, Mama? We won't hurt them."

But Mama was already "grinding away," as the children called it, at her machine again, and did not hear them; and they, receiving no answer,

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after a full moment's patient waiting, resolved to take silence for consent.

"Now," said Dick, making a pile of cushions on the floor and possessing himself of the fireshovel, "we're two boys who live at the sea-side. I'll call you 'Jack.' Now, Jack, here's a splendid castle we've made. (Put that old knitted antimacassar on top; it's just the colour of sand.) This is my spade, and you can be patting it with your hands, you know."

"Yes, only I don't want to be a boy, Dick. Pretend I was a little girl and my name was Mary; it's more natural. And we didn't live at the sea-side. We were there for change of air because we've had whooping-cough."

It was a peculiarity of Molly's "makings up" that they were always related in the past tense. She, being the most inventive spirit of the family, generally initiated the games and did most of the talking; the other children following suit, and accompanying the narrative with appropriate gestures.

"You see," explained Molly presently, "we really have had whooping-cough, so that makes it quite like real, and when Bee comes in she's sure to whoop now and then, and it'll be lovely. Now the castle was made, and the little girl

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Mary—she was nine years old, just like me—climbed to the top and danced on it."

Suiting the action to the word, Molly pranced up and down on the pile of cushions, which to her great delight emitted a cloud of dust under this treatment. "Like sand flying about on a windy day," she exclaimed ecstatically. Meanwhile Dick scraped away vigorously at the carpet with his shovel—the result being more dust—and Mrs. Burton,



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with her back turned to them, worked away at her sewing-machine as if for dear life.

These were the sounds and sights which greeted the children's father as he opened the door, after a weary walk along the hot streets and a weary climb up the steep lodging-house stairs.

"What a row!" he exclaimed, dropping into the nearest chair, "what a pandemonium!"

There was a shriek of delight from the two grimy little figures in the corner, and a sudden cessation of the click-click-click-click of the machine, as Mrs. Burton hastily rose.

"We didn't expect you back so soon," cried all simultaneously. Then the two small people flew across the room, thrusting their little dusty hands into their father's, and inflicting on him sundry sticky caresses.

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He was a very youthful-looking papa, and now his voice and usually bright face wore an expression of almost boyish discomfiture. Mr. and Mrs. Burton had been married very young indeed, and no prospects could have appeared fairer than theirs when they started in life. But a little less than a year ago great trouble had come upon them. The bank in which all Mr. Burton's money was invested, broke, and he who had hitherto led a careless, easy-going life, painting a good deal and collecting books and pretty things, and entertaining his friends, was now obliged to work hard for his daily bread, and that of his wife and children.

He had obtained with difficulty a post in some office in the city, where the hours were long and the pay small enough; and, as Molly said, "Poor Papa, I hate it." But he was very brave about it, and for a man who previously had known nothing about business got on very well; some people said he was sure to rise in the world one day, but meanwhile it was very dreary work.

The nice house in Kensington had to be given up, and the carriage sold, and all the pretty things: the furniture, the pictures, the curtains, everything except a few books that

Papa couldn't part with, the nursery sewing-machine, and the

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children's clothes. And the worst of it all was that Mrs. Burton's relations were not a bit nice, and blamed her husband, and said he needn't have lost his money if he had not been so unbusiness-like, and that they wouldn't have anything more to say to him.

Mr. Burton had been an only child, and most of *his* relations were dead, so there was no one on his side of the house either to help or trouble him. However, they were all together, as Mrs. Burton said, and Papa was not obliged to go away to earn money in a distant country as some papas were, and that should make them feel happy and thankful even in the pokey lodgings which became their home.

They had not even a nurse now; but, of course, Dick and Molly could dress themselves, and Molly helped Mama to dress Bee sometimes. Mama made all their clothes, and was very busy most of the day, but she generally took them for a walk in the afternoon; and when Papa came home he always found the room nice and bright, and tea prepared, and the children quietly expecting him with clean faces and pinafores. But to-day he had come home an hour earlier than usual.

"Does this sort of thing go on often?" he in-

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quired, glancing round the untidy room, the cushions and the antimacassars strewn about, the fire-shovel in the middle of the floor, the chairs pushed together. Then, holding the children at arm's length, he surveyed them critically, and finally looked at his wife's pale, tired face. "My dear Nelly," he said, in an altered tone, "do you go through this every day?"

At this moment the door opened, and Bee, the youngest of the family, came in with a blue shawl over her head, one corner of which trailed behind her, and standing in front of her father began to cough, and to choke, and to "whoop" till the tears ran down her

cheeks.

"Why does she do that?" asked Papa faintly. "Oh, she always does that when she goes up or down stairs," answered the other children. "She has never properly left off whooping yet, you know."

"No, I haven't," acquiesced Bee composedly, wiping her eyes, and then folding up her shawl and depositing it on the sofa. "I don't believe I ever will," she added emphatically.

This Mr. Burton felt to be the last straw: he leaned back in his chair, looking, as the children afterwards said, "as if he were going to cry."

"Do you mind our playing with the cushions?"

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asked Dick, quick to notice something wrong. "It was only because we were so hot and so tired, and we wanted some exercise dreadfully. You know we never can run about now, Papa, and it makes one feel so horribly stiff."

"Yes, I'm sure my legs quite ache with always being in tiny rooms and having only prim walks," said Molly.

"And *my* legs ache, and I can't keep them quiet," put in Bee.

Her father looked at her with a queer rueful sort of smile. She was a good deal younger than the others—not yet six—and had struck out a line of her own in her appearance, being fair and tiny and pale—very pale now. Indeed, as she stood opposite her father with her blue eyes looking so big, and with such deep shadows under them, he felt an unpleasant sort of shock.

"How long has this child had the whooping-cough?" he asked, drawing her towards him, and looking anxiously at his wife. "Isn't it time for her to be well?"

"Jane says she never will be well unless she has change of air," observed irrepressible Dick. (Jane was the lodging-house servant.) "She says as Bee didn't get rid of it in May, she'll very likely go on till next May now."

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"Next May!" cried Mr. Burton, appalled at the prospect.

"Don't you think we could go somewhere for change of air?" pursued Dick. "We really all do want some fresh air dreadfully. Jane says it's that that makes me grow too quick—like a weed, she says—all my things are getting too small for me. Couldn't we go somewhere—not to the sea-side, of course; that would cost too much money, but somewhere?"

"Dick!" said his mother warningly, and Molly broke out indignantly:

"How can you talk like that, Dick, when you know Papa's so poor? How can he give us fresh air? He isn't made of air."

"I only wish I was," groaned Mr. Burton; "at least I wish I could live on air, and then there'd be more money to spare for you."

The children were so touched at this remark that they one and all fell upon his neck, nearly smothering him with kisses, from which he presently withdrew himself in a limp and dishevelled condition.

Meanwhile Mrs. Burton had been going round the room, picking up the cushions, restoring the shovel and antimacassars to their places, and making everything tidy. Now she sent the chil-

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dren upstairs to get ready for tea, and as they left the room they could hear her talking to Papa in what Molly called her "soothe" voice.

"I wonder why Papa seemed to mind so much us making a little mess," remarked Dick presently.

"We *were* very dirty and untidy," returned Molly meditatively, "and he's such a particular Papa. Bee shouldn't have started whooping like that when he was there. You should have waited outside till you had finished, Bee."

"I didn't know he was there," cried poor little Bee. "Mama never minds, and Papa

wasn't angry. He kissed me. And if I'd been sick it would have been worse."

"Yes, that would have been worse," assented Molly. "Never mind, dear. Let's make ourselves very clean and nice now. I'll wash your face in cold water, and perhaps that will give you a colour."

"And scrub it well with the towel," suggested Bee. "Or, I'll tell you what, hammer my cheeks with the hair-brush—the prickly side, you know; it makes them lovely and red."

"But I don't think Mama would like your poor little cheeks to be hammered with the brush," said Molly. "No, let's try the cold water; and

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mind you eat all you can for tea. Then they won't be so anxious about you."

Bee was very quiet while her sister changed her pinafore for her, washed her hands and face, and brushed her hair as well as any nurse could have done.

"Molly, I think I'd better not eat too much tea," she remarked, as they were descending the stairs again; "not if Papa's so poor. Bread and butter costs such a lot, and milk too."

Mr. Burton, who had just opened the sitting-room door, caught this remark, and his face, which had looked a little more like itself, clouded over again. He snatched up Bee in his arms and kissed her little white cheek.

"For goodness sake, you poor little mite, eat all you can!" he said, with a queer shaky laugh. "Papa can pay for bread and milk still."

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## CHAPTER II

### PAPA'S IDEA

MR. BURTON was more silent than usual over his tea, and scanned the faces of his three children every now and then rather anxiously. Dick certainly had grown very thin,

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and Molly had lost her pretty colour, while Bee picked at her food in a spiritless way, which showed she had no appetite." After tea the mother took out the two oldest ones, and Bee remained in her father's care.

She played with her doll for a time, and looked at pictures, and presently went up to Mr. Burton with a puzzled little face.

"Why are you so quiet, Papa?" she said in her old-fashioned way. "I think you can't be well. Mamma always says we're not well when we're quiet."

He took her on his knee, laughing. "I am quite well, Bee dear; I've only been thinking."

He got up with the child in his arms, and

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crossed the room to the corner where hung the little book-shelf in which he kept his few precious books. He looked at them for a moment or two blankly.

"It's a shame to keep them," he said, half to himself, "when any one of them might be turned into fresh air and rosy cheeks. But—which?"

After a pause he told Bee to choose one and pull it out. The child had been much astonished at the foregoing remark; but dimly understood that her father was sorry about something in connection with these books. She knew they were very, very precious to him, and had some vague idea he meant to give her one "to make her well," as their nurse used sometimes to say when they had had presents of toys during their various illnesses. Poor Papa had no money to buy toys now, and so he was going to give her one of his books.

"Papa," she said, throwing her arms round his neck, "I'll get well without your books."

"You little witch!" said Papa, kissing her very fondly. "Come, choose quickly."

Bee looked regretfully up and down the row, and finally thinking she had better select the oldest, as Papa wouldn't mind parting with that so much, pulled out a funny, shabby-looking

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volume, bound in leather, with yellowy leaves and big black "reading"—not like English reading—even Bee could see that. But her father gave a little gasp.

"Oh, Bee! That one—are you sure?"

"It's the oldest," said Bee diffidently.

"Yes it is the oldest," replied Mr. Burton ruefully. "I daresay it is the beat. Now let us make it into a parcel quickly, so that we may not be tempted to change our minds."

Bee watched her father while he wrapped up the volume in brown paper. It was almost like a birthday parcel, she thought,—what a pity there should only be that shabby old book inside. Altogether she was as much relieved as puzzled when her father put the packet on one side. He was not going to give it to her as a present then. Well that was a good thing, for she would not have known what to do with it.

"This is our secret, Bee," he said. "You musn't tell anyone, not even Mama."

"Oh!" exclaimed Bee, much mystified, and a little overwhelmed. She had never kept a secret from Mama before. Luckily for her it was her bed-time when the others came in, for I doubt if she could have kept the mystery to herself for long. Mr. Burton informed his wife that he was

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going out for a turn, and left the room rather hastily, carrying, as Bee saw, the parcel.

"Mama," she whispered as her mother "tucked her up" for the night. "Mama, Papa and me have got a *secler*. He said I wasn't to tell you—you don't mind, do you? I don't know what it's about," she added thoughtfully, "but it's wrapped up in brown paper."

Mrs. Burton assured her she did not mind in the least, and Bee snuggled down on her pillow quite happy.

It was some little time before Mr. Burton returned, which he did with a beaming face.

"Put out your hands and shut your eyes," he said playfully to his wife, who was now



alone.

She obeyed, and he laid something that rustled in her outstretched palms. When she looked she saw three beautiful, clean, new, crackling five-pound notes.

"There!" cried Mr. Burton chuckling. "You take those three little scarecrows of yours into the country with that, and see if you can't get some colour into their whitey-brown faces."

"Oh, my dear Louis!" exclaimed she, "how did you get it?"

"That's my secret!" he answered, laughing.

"Bee told me you had a secret, wrapped in

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brown paper!" said Mrs. Burton, laughing too; and then a sudden thought struck her, and she glanced towards the book-case."

"Oh, Louis!" she cried, as she saw the gap among the volumes, "you've been selling one of your books! Oh, my poor dear old man! Your Don Quixote—your greatest treasure of all!"

"No, it wasn't, I've greater treasures than that," answered he, quite gaily. "I'm only sorry I didn't think of it before; but never mind. The charm is broken now, and the others can wait for the next rainy day."

He really did not look at all depressed, and so Mrs. Burton turned her eyes and her thoughts once more to the five-pound notes.

"All that money for one old book!" she exclaimed; but this her husband could not stand.

"My dear, it was worth five times as much," he cried eagerly. "In the Spanish remember,—the edition of—well, never mind. Let us settle about the children. How soon can you get off?"

"We?" said his wife. "You don't suppose I could go—and leave you all alone in this dreary place. Certainly not; we must think of a better plan than that. If I knew some trustworthy person who would take charge of them, now. It is a pity old Nurse is dead—



I should not like to

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send them away with an utter stranger, and it would make a hole in our little purse, too, to engage a nurse for them. I know!" clapping her hands together. "There's dear old Mrs. Dickenson, she was my nurse once, you know, and she married a farmer up in the North. What is the name of the place?—Woodham! I remember now—and her farm is called The Withies. It is a charming place, Louis, the very thing for the children. She would take them for the money, I know, and look after them just as if they were her own. She is the kindest, most good-natured creature, and devoted to children. She lost her only son, poor thing, but has two nice daughters, and between them they would look after our chicks thoroughly."

Mr. Burton was delighted, particularly when his wife, who once before her marriage had visited her former nurse, entered into a more minute description of "The Withies" the old-fashioned, roomy farm-house, and the rambling old garden, and the beautifully-kept "shippons" (as cow-houses are called in the North), and the animals of all kinds which dwelt there. "It will be a very paradise for the children," she said.

A letter to Mrs. Dickenson was written and despatched that very night, and the answer came

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by return of post. The good woman was delighted at the idea, and hoped the little darlings would come at once. She would do everything in her power to make them happy, and she and her daughters would look after them carefully.

"Molly is such a good little thing, too," said Mrs. Burton. "I know she will take care of Bee. And Dick has grown so much more thoughtful and sensible this last year, he can be trusted anywhere."

The children's delight knew no bounds. The only drawback was the being without

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Papa and Mama—leaving them behind in "stuffy" London. But they both looked so pleased at the thought of the little ones' treat, and said they would write so often, and promised "so faithfully" not to be lonely, that the children ended by consoling themselves.

"And then," said Dick, "Mama will have much less to do when we're all gone, so she won't tire herself so much."

"And she can go for nice walks with Papa in the evenings, without any troublesome children to put to bed," said Molly.

"And she is coming with us for one night," cried Bee, "so she'll get a little teeny-weeny peep at the country."

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Mrs. Burton was very busy indeed during the next three days, finishing off new clothes and mending old ones; and then came the packing. At last the eventful morning dawned, and the children "booted and spurred" clung round their father to say good-bye.

"Poor Papa will be all alone to-night!" said Molly, and she gave a little sob. "I wish you were coming too, Papa."

"Couldn't you turn another book into fresh air?" cried Bee.

Dick came forward with a funny little important face, and fumbling in his pocket, "Look here, Papa!" he said, producing at last a small leather purse. "Here's the jubilee shilling you gave me for my birthday. Do take it and go to an exhibition or a concert, or a theatre or something. Then you won't feel so dull. See, I've got lots of money left."

Mr. Burton looked into the little boy's purse, which still contained two sixpences, a three-penny bit, and two penny pieces; then he took the shilling and put it in his waistcoat pocket.

"Thank you, my man," he said. "It's very kind and thoughtful of you. I'll go to the German Exhibition, I think."

And yet, oddly enough, long afterwards Dick

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one day discovered an ornament hanging among the seals and things on Papa's watch-chain which looked uncommonly like his special jubilee shilling with a hole pierced through it.

But now it was time to part, and there was a great hugging and kissing, and finally Papa almost ran away, and the children and their mother got into their cab.

They did not think the train which carried them northwards half so nice and comfortable as the trains in which they had hitherto travelled; but presently Dick discovered that they were in a third-class carriage, which he thought might possibly account for it. He imparted this fact in a low voice to Molly, and they decided to pretend not to notice any difference, as it might hurt poor Mama, who was doing everything she could for them.

At last the train steamed out of the station, and they really were off. How delighted they were to find themselves rushing through the green fields, and seeing the woods and little quiet streams, with sometimes cattle standing in them. There were sheep and lambs in some of the fields, nice plump, well-grown little lambs, that frisked and skipped, and scampered away very fast as the train flew by. Once they went between two

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banks with poppies and ox-eyed daisies growing thickly among the long grass.

"I don't think the country ever, ever looked so nice before," said Molly ecstatically.

They had luncheon presently. Luncheon in the train, which little people think so nice and big people think so dreadful.

"We had chicken when we went to B'ighton," said Bee incidentally, and she couldn't make out why Molly frowned at her, and why Dick immediately said that beef was ever so much nicer, and that only babies liked chicken. Mrs. Burton, though she adroitly turned the conversation, and soothed Bee's feelings, which had been somewhat ruffled by this remark, appreciated the thoughtfulness which had called it forth.

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The hours wore on, and just as Molly began to have a headache, and little Bee to feel very tired and languid, and Dick to fidget even more than usual, they reached the great junction where they were to change carriages. They knew that in half an hour after this they would have reached their destination, so they all got quite lively again, and looked out with renewed interest from the windows of their new carriage at the country through which they were passing. Sand-hills first, with a glimpse of the sea between, and then

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flat wide fields with the sunshine glancing on them; bluey-green turnip fields, and corn turning yellow already; meadows smelling sweet with clover; and then woods. And at last the train stopped at a tiny little station, and a funny old porter called "Woodham" in a cracked voice.

"Oh, Mammie, here we are!" cried Dick, and then there was a fuss and a bustle, and a tumbling over each other if you like. But finally the children and all their belongings were landed safely on the platform, and Mama was talking to a fat, jolly-looking man, with a very shiny-red face, and very shiny-black clothes. This was Mr. Dickenson, who had come, all in his Sunday best, to meet them.

"I've got the trap here," he said, after he had shaken all the outstretched little hands, as if they were so many pump-handles, "an' theer's the cart as 'll take the luggage—Jack!"

The children quite jumped as he called out this last name, for his voice, which had sounded rather husky before, now rose to a perfect bellow.

"Sir?" roared back somebody from the other side of the station.

"Come along an' fetch out these here traps."

"Mama," whispered Bee in astonishment, "what traps?"

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"Mr. Dickenson means our luggage, dear."

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"But he said he'd got one here."

"Come, little lass, I'll carry ye to th' trap," said the farmer cheerily, hoisting Bee up in his arms, and bearing her off in a state of utter bewilderment, not unmixed with alarm.

However, when she was seated between her mother and Mr. Dickenson, and looked down on the nice fat old white horse, her spirits rose; and when they went jogging along the road presently, she informed Mrs. Burton that this was the very nicest carriage she had ever been in. Dick and Molly were perched on the back seat, and had to hold on very tight, as their short legs were a long way from the foot-board.

It was a lovely afternoon, and the children enjoyed their drive thoroughly after their long day in the train. After about twenty minutes they came in sight of a cluster of red roofs, with golden stacks and great hay-ricks between them, peeping out from the shelter of a long line of woods. Farmer Dickenson pointed at these with his whip:

"Woodham village," he remarked.

Then he jerked his whip in the direction of the woods.

"Yonder's Woodham Park," he said "Look

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over th' trees, little missy. Can ye see flag flyin'?"

"Yes," answered Bee, while Dick and Molly nearly dislocated their necks in the endeavour to see it too.

"Yon's to show as Squire's at home," pursued Mr. Dickenson; and presently the whip went forward again, and the slow grin which generally preceded a remark began to creep over his face.

"Woodham Church," he said, as, at a turn in the road, a fairy-like spire came in view.

They were clattering through the village now, such a pretty, clean, cosy-looking village, with rosy-cheeked children playing in the road, and one or two nice old women standing at their doors. At last they turned up a narrow lane, along which they had to go rather slowly, as some stately cows were trooping in front of them. Then they turned abruptly in at a white gate, leading into a large paved farmyard, on the other side of

which stood a long, low, ivy-grown house.

Farmer Dickenson pointed with his whip for the last time.

"The Withies!" he said.

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### CHAPTER III

#### THE WITHIES

MRS. DICKENSON was standing at the open door on the look-out for them, and ran forward as the children were lifted down from the cart, uniting curtsies and kisses in her greetings. But when it came to Bee's turn her warm motherly heart carried the day, and she fairly hugged the mite to her ample bosom.

Then they had to come in, not through the nearest door which opened into the farmyard; that would never have done. They had to be marshalled round to the other side, which looked on to a delightful old-fashioned garden, and to enter the house through another door, which was evidently seldom opened, as the paint stuck, and which was adorned by a funny little knocker.

On one side of the flagged passage within was a "great big lovely kitchen," as Molly called it, with a raddled floor and shining coppers on the walls, and geraniums in the windows, and hams

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and fitches hanging from the ceiling. A girl in a striped petticoat and neat print jacket, and with a sun-bonnet cocked over her face, was stirring a huge pot over the fire; she nodded and smiled as they peeped in, but they could not stop to talk to her, for at that moment Mrs. Dickenson flung open the opposite door, and ushered them into the parlour.

It was a low room, and smelt a little musty, on account of being too grand to be much used; but the children thought it beautiful. There were white muslin curtains to the

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windows, and a white dimity cover to the carpet, and the chairs and sofa were also in pinafores; but everything was as clean as clean could be; and there were lovely flowers in all the vases, the shelves and chimney-piece were adorned with a variety of queer little china images. Also there were preparations for such a tea spread out on the spotless cloth that the little folk danced about and clapped their hands, and said it was the nicest room they had ever been in.

Mrs. Dickenson was charmed, and stood beaming on them as they ran about examining everything. She was a tall, stout woman, with a kind face, rosy and unwrinkled—though she must have been rather old, having been Mama's nurse,—and

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smooth, shining dark hair. She had a striped petticoat on, a lilac print jacket, and a big white apron that seemed to cover her up altogether.

Presently she suggested that Mrs. Burton should go upstairs to see the bed-rooms, and that the children should get ready for their tea, which she was sure they wanted—bless their little hearts! So up they went, and were even more charmed with their sleeping quarters than with their sitting-room. Molly and Bee had a largish room looking into the garden, and Dick a little one opening off it. There was a cot for Bee, and Molly and her mother were to sleep together for this night, after which Molly was to have the great bed all to herself. There was a patchwork quilt on this bed, and tiny roses on the wall-paper, and the queer old chintz curtains and the sheets smelt of lavender—it was altogether a delicious room, and Dick screamed to them in the intervals of "sousing" his face and hands, that his was equally delightful.

They all came down much refreshed after a plentiful application of cold water, and prepared to do justice to the meal which was now ready. Tea, hot and strong, in a nice black pot, pitchers of milk, cream so thick it would hardly pour out, home-made brown bread, butter looking



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delightfully cool and yellow on a cabbage leaf, a glass dish full of golden honey, and another piled high with strawberries—no wonder the little London children rejoiced over such fare! There was also a cold roast fowl, at which Bee looked doubtfully, remembering Dick's remark in the train; however, finding on glancing at that young gentleman that he was "tucking in" with every appearance of satisfaction, she decided that she also might venture to eat some without loss of dignity.

After tea, Mrs. Burton said they might have just a tiny walk in the garden before going to bed. Susan and Clara, Mrs. Dickenson's two daughters came with them. Susan they had already seen in the kitchen: she was a big good-humoured girl, very like her mother, and very clever at all farm-work. Clara was prettier and more refined-looking, gentle in her manner, and fond of sewing and reading, though, as she told Molly, she did not get much time to read except "of an evening" and on Sundays. "Mother" did not care to see her with a book in her hand.

"Nay," said Mrs. Dickenson, who overheard this remark, "I've no patience with books once schoolin' days are over. I like to see my girls sewin' or washin' up better."

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The garden smelt so sweet this evening, and looked so pretty, that the children were quite in love with it. Molly was very much amused at the cabbage roses, never having seen anything of the kind before, and Bee liked the little starry white pinks best. Dick was delighted with everything—the sweet-williams, and stocks, and mignonette, and rows and rows of peas and beans and baby-cabbages; he found the strawberry-beds very interesting too, and also discovered some cherry-trees laden with "white-hearts," almost ripe.

At last it was time to go to bed, and the little tired travellers had not been long between the lavender-scented sheets before they were sleeping soundly.

Next morning Bee woke up first. The sunshine was pouring into the room, even



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through the chintz curtains, and turning their shiny yellow lining to gold. These curtains made a gentle little flapping sound, for Mama had left the window open at the top, and the morning breeze had found its way in. Other sweet country things came in too—the song of a blackbird, which brought tears to little Bee's eyes, because it was so "beau'ful," and a lovely perfume, which was hardly a perfume, but an indescribable mixture of all sorts of freshness and sweetness—the

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"smell of the country" the children called it later on.

Bee sat up and looked at the big bed where her mother and Molly lay still fast asleep. Both looked very pretty; Mama was fair and generally pale—much like Bee herself in complexion—but there was a flush on her face now. As for Molly's little plump cheeks, they positively glowed, and her dark curls mingled on the pillow with Mrs. Burton's long silky fair hair in a way which Bee thought very sweet. It was a great treat to sleep with Mama, and the little girl began to feel a tiny bit envious of her sister. Presently Mrs. Burton was awakened by a pitter-patter of bare feet across the floor, and opening her eyes beheld a rumped yellow head just on a level with her pillow.

"Please, Mammie, mayn't I come into your bed?"

So Mama turned over very gently and lifted the coverings, and another little nestling crept quietly into the warm nest.

"I'm under Mama's wing now," whispered Bee, cuddling up as her mother drew her closely into her arms.

Poor Mrs. Burton felt just a little heartache as she thought of how to-morrow, and for many

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days, there would be no birdies to creep under her wing.

"Mama," said Bee seriously, after a moment, "I'm just t'inking—s'pose we always

lived here, all of us."

"Darling, you know we couldn't."

"No; but Mama, just let's suppose. If we always lived here, Papa and all,—or if we had a house like this with trees and flowers, and—and hens, and strawberries, I don't think we'd ever want to go to heaven."

"My pet," said Mama, half amused and half startled, "what put that in your head?"

"I don't know—it came there of itself. I was just t'inking, you know, Mama. And it would be naughty of us not to want to go to heaven, wouldn't it?"

At this point Molly suddenly opened her eyes, and sat up broad awake after the manner of children.

"Why, Mama!" she cried, "it's morning! Look at the sun!"

"Of course it's morning," said Bee importantly; "it has been morning for ever so long. I've been awake such a time, and so has Mama—haven't we, Mama? Oh, Molly, do you hear that lovely, lovely bird?"

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"Yes, isn't it delicious?" said Molly. "Mama what's that scrape, scraping sound we hear?"

"They must be mowing somewhere near the house," replied her mother, "that noise you hear is the sound of sharpening the scythe, and—yes, I smell the newly-cut grass."

"Oh, how beautiful!" cried Molly. "We'll make a hay-house, Bee, you know, like Mama used to when she was a little girl!"

"Tap-tap," came at the door just then; it was Susan with a large can of hot water. The two little birds had to cuddle down in the nest now while Mama dressed, and then to their great joy they were allowed to get up, and Dick was heard singing and splashing next door. When they were nearly ready Mrs. Burton opened the window wide, and what do you think popped in to say "Good-morning?" A little blush rose! The breeze helped it, of course; it just bobbed its head in at the window, and nodded, and then went on with its dance outside.

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Presently Dick shouted out that he could see a bird's nest from his window, and Molly, putting out her head, saw in the garden underneath a big fluffy, motherly old hen followed by a whole tribe of downy yellow ducklings. No wonder they were a happy and excited little party when they

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met in the parlour for breakfast. Mama was not going till the afternoon train, so they had five or six hours of unmixed delight before them.

Well, now, shall I tell you what they had for breakfast? I know that generally children like to know what other children have to eat; but it would take rather long to describe all the meals, so after this I will leave them to your imagination, merely mentioning that everything at The Withies was good and wholesome of its kind. This was a special occasion, as Mama was with them, so the little Burtons were not obliged to eat either porridge or bread-and-milk; but regaled themselves with fresh eggs and home-made scones, and a kind of jam made of white-heart cherries, a golden transparent compound of which Mrs. Dickenson had a few pots remaining from last year, and which was, of course, more delicious than anything they had ever tasted before.

Then on went hats and boots, and out they went, Mama and an, to see everything that was to be seen about the place. The farmyard first, with its pig and calves—the cows were in an adjacent field standing under the shade of the trees, swishing their tails and chewing their cud—then the poultry: hens and ducks—and geese which the children did not admire, especially an

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old gander which ran after Dick. But the little chickens were delightful, and the goslings very engaging, nearly as nice as the little ducks, which indeed they closely resembled. Bee wanted to know when ducks grew into geese, and was much puzzled on being told

that this transition never took place.

After running about the stack-yard and making themselves rather hot, the children were glad to sit down in the orchard, which was a little to the rear of the house. It was cool and shady here, the sun flickering down through the gnarled moss-grown branches of the fruit trees. Of course, Dick chose an extremely uncomfortable forked bough as his "resting"-place; but the little girls were glad to collect some of the grass which lay in long cool swathes on the ground, to make a seat for their mother and themselves. It had only been mown that morning—in fact it was here that the scythe had been at work, the sharpening of which had sounded so pleasantly in their ears,—and was still fresh and soft to the touch.

The children sat quite still for some time, watching the sunbeams play hide-and-seek on the ground, and the birds hop about in the boughs overhead; when they looked upwards they could

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get glimpses of blue sky above the lovely tracery of green, and when they looked through the long vista of gray and green and brown trunks, they saw the fields glowing almost like gold in the brilliant sunshine.

Mama told them a story and sang them a little song, and then they could not help feeling a tiny bit sad, for the golden hours were flying, flying, and very soon the time for parting would come. But as soon as Mama saw the little faces begin to grow long, and the little eyes begin to cloud over, she stopped singing and jumped up, proposing that they should go and see the old dog in the yard, and the mare and foal in the field, which they had not yet inspected.

The dog was a retriever, with a funny gray muzzle on account of his age, and a fine curly black coat. He was rather a solemn old dog; but condescended to allow the children to stroke his silky head, and even treated them to a few slow and lazy flaps of his tail.

"Oh, Mama, I do so love him!" cried Bee. "I do love him—I should like him to be

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my dog, and sleep on the end of my bed like Snowball."

Snowball was a white curly monster from the toy-shop, the most beloved of all her treasures.

There was a shout of laughter at this remark,

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for Bee's cot would have been an uncommonly tight fit for "Darkie," even if he had had entire possession of it. As for her own small person, where that could have been stowed under such circumstances, was a conundrum which even Bee could not answer.

She began to laugh instead, at first a little doubtfully and afterwards merrily; and the whole party cheered up, and went joyfully to feed the sleek old mare with bread. She was a great, fat, old thing, more like a brown elephant than anything else; but she looked kind and placid, and accepted the bread graciously. As for the funny little foal with his "frizzy" tail, very long legs, and little white star on his forehead, he quite won the children's hearts.

Then came dinner; and then poor Mama had to start. They had all been very merry during dinner, and were delighted to remember that there would, of course, be no lessons during their stay at the farm; and Dick promised to be steady and not to go into dangerous places, and Molly said she would help Mrs. Dickenson as much as she could with Bee, and Bee said she would give no trouble. Yet when the "trap" actually came to the door, they began to feel very queer. Mama's eyes looked funny, though she had a smile on her

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lips, as she hugged and kissed them over and over again, and they all felt rather inclined to cry. But just as they were thinking about it, in came Mrs. Dickenson with a large basket, out of which peeped roses, sweet-williams, pinks, mignonette, and all sorts of sweet flowers.

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"I've put in a few lettuces an' strawberries, an' that, for the master," said Mrs. Dickenson. "Poor gentleman! he shall have a taste o' the country anyway."

Bee ran away very quickly, and presently came back with a large bunch of ox-eyed daisies and buttercups.

"I picked these this morning," she said, "and put them in the jug to keep fresh—aren't they beau'ful? They're for you and Papa. Won't he be pleased?"

Bee's daisies and buttercups produced a diversion; Mama laughed quite gaily as she drove off, nodding and waving to the three little figures at the gate, all of whom shouted out various indistinct messages as long as she was in sight.

Molly and Dick went into the house rather solemnly then; but Bee remained standing at the gate.

"I wish f'owers didn't die so soon," she remarked presently to Mrs. Dickenson. "When those are

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dead Mama and Papa won't have any country left, not even a tiny bit, and we'll have it all."

"We'll send them some more flowers when those are gone," said Mrs. Dickenson. "There'll be more here nor we'll ever want—so you may pick her a big bunch yourself every week, and we'll pop 'em in a box and send 'em by post."

"Oh, Mrs. Dickenson!" cried Bee, clapping her hands, "you are kind. I don't think I ever met anyone so kind in all my life. But won't it cost a great lot of money?" she added, her radiant little face suddenly clouding over.

"Oh, deary me, no," said the good woman cheerfully. "There's a friend of mine at the post-office as 'll be glad to send 'em off for me for a few stamps," she added to herself, as the child darted off to impart the "lovely plan" to her brother and sister.

"Bless them all, they're dear children!" thought Mrs. Dickenson, following more leisurely. "All of 'em so nice and gentle. An' as for that dear Baby Bee, she's the very image of her mother—as like her as two peas, little old-fashioned ways and all. It would

be queer if I didn't do all I could for her children—her as was my own little lady once. Dear heart! it's hard to think of her so down in the world. However, 't won't be my fault

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if these here pretty lambs doesn't have roses in their cheeks when she comes to fetch 'em."

Lambs with rosy cheeks would have struck anybody else as a rather queer fancy; but as Mrs. Dickenson was only talking to herself, she did not need to be particular in her language; and she presently re-entered the house in her usual cheerful and contented frame of mind.

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#### CHAPTER IV

#### FARMER DICK AND FARMER DICKENSON.

CLARA took the children for a long walk that afternoon among the greenlanes and through beautiful flower-strewn fields. She told them stories as they went, and they came back clinging to her, one and all, with tender if slightly oppressive affection. Clara was evidently to be their special attendant, her sister Susan being, as she said, more used to look after cows and pigs than children.

But when it came to bed-time Mrs. Dickenson declared she would allow no one to undress them but herself.

"Oh, but please," cried Molly eagerly, "I can undress myself perfectly, and I can undress Bee too. Mama said we weren't to give more trouble than we could help. I've often put Bee to bed before."

"Except my hair, you know, Molly," put in

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Bee rather anxiously. "You won't do my hair, Molly, will you?"

"Yes, of course I can do your hair," said Molly, nodding and frowning at her little sister in a way which she knew meant she was to say no more.

"All right," she acquiesced meekly. And then in a whisper which Mrs. Dickenson overheard: "You won't pull quite so hard as last time, will you, Molly?"

"You are the best child I ever saw, Miss Molly," said Mrs. Dickenson; "but you must just let me have my way. It's no trouble at all, my dear, only a pleasure, and will remind me of old times. You must tell me, you know, if I do things right for it's a good many years since I used to put your mama to bed, and I haven't undressed any young ladies since."

"Oh, yes, we'll tell you," cried Bee, dancing round her. "Do tell us about Mama when she was a little girl. Oh, Molly, isn't it nice?"

They went out of the room hanging on to Mrs. Dickenson, in a way which rather impeded her progress up the narrow stairs; and Dick, left alone, decided he would go and have a talk with the farmer.

He found him in his shirt sleeves, sitting in a

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comfortable chintz-covered elbow chair in the family living-room, and smoking a short clay pipe. Susan and Clara were "washing-up" in the back premises, and the head of the house was all alone.

Dick was just as well pleased, as he thought it a favourable opportunity for discussing a certain project which had been forming itself in his mind during the afternoon.

"I've come to sit with you a little bit, Mr. Dickenson," he remarked pleasantly as he advanced.

"Have ye?" said the farmer, grinning at him through a cloud of smoke, and pushing a chair forward with his foot.

Dick sat down and smiled too, rather at a loss to know how to begin the



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conversation; for Mr. Dickenson was a man of few words, and now sat contentedly puffing at his pipe in perfect silence.

Presently, however, a jocular thought seemed to occur to him, and Dick saw his face begin to crease up, wrinkles coming about his eyes, and his mouth slowly stretching more and more in a way which betokened that he was thinking of making a remark.

All at once he removed his pipe, and said, holding it up before Dick:

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"I'm sorry I haven't one to offer ye, but ther isn't another i' the house."

Then he laughed amazingly, and Dick laughed too, feeling that they were getting on famously.

"I don't smoke yet," he observed modestly after a pause; "but I daresay I shall when I grow up. My papa does. He used to smoke cigars, but now he says they're too expensive, and so he smokes a pipe."

"Ah," said the farmer, and then there was another silence.

"Mr. Dickenson," said Dick, edging his chair a little nearer, "do you think farming pays?"

Mr. Dickenson took out his pipe and stared at him; then he put it in his mouth again and puffed away thoughtfully. Finally he answered cautiously:

"Well, sir, that's just accordin' to the way a person looks at it. Ther's things for it an' things again it. A deal depends on the way a farm is worked, ye know."

"Because," pursued Dick, crossing one leg over the other, and speaking carelessly, though his face wore a serious expression, "I've been thinking that I might perhaps be a farmer when I grow up."

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"Have ye?" said Mr. Dickenson, and his face began to wrinkle again in a way which Dick did not quite like. He uncrossed his legs and leaned forward in his chair, looking

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very much in earnest.

"You see," he went on, "I shall have to do something for my living when I grow up, and I might as well be a farmer as anything else, if it pays. But I should like to be quite sure that it pays before I make up my mind."

"Well, to be sure!" remarked Mr. Dickenson in rather a disconcerting tone, while the wrinkles increased in number till his eyes nearly disappeared.

"If you please, Mr. Dickenson," persisted the boy quietly but earnestly, "would you mind telling me if you think it pays?"

The farmer laid his pipe on the table and drew his chair forward, staring at Dick with renewed solemnity.

"Well,' he said, "if ye put it to me that way, sir, I must tell ye it's a thing as a person can't go for to say all in a minute. A deal depends on yourself, to begin with; an' a deal depends on your landlord if ye rent your farm; an' a deal depends on your land. A deal depends on your missus too—"

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"Your what?" interrupted Dick, who was listening most intently and seriously.

"Your missus, sir,"—here Mr. Dickenson was obliged to pause to chuckle a little. "Bless us, ye couldn't work a farm without a missus! Why, I reckon that my missus here—Mrs. Dickenson, ye know—makes more nor half the rent with her dairy and fowls an' that."

"Oh," said Dick, "I understand. That will be all right; because Molly'll be my missus. She is so clever—I know she'd manage hens beautifully, and cows too. Please go on, Mr. Dickenson; *you* make it pay, don't you?"

"Ye—es," was the answer, given rather grudgingly, for when was a farmer ever known to make such an admission willingly? "I think I may say that, on the whole, takin' one year with another, I haven't done so bad. But for all that I dunno as I'd go for to say as farmin' pays in the long run, Master Dick, nor I wouldn't advise you to take to it. I've no opinion o' gentleman farmers—no opinion at all."

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Here Mr. Dickenson paused and drew a deep breath, quite exhausted by his long speech.

"Oh, but I shouldn't mind about the gentleman part of it," cried Dick eagerly; "I don't want to be a gentleman at all: I'm going to leave off now.

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I want to be a real farmer, a proper farmer like you, you know. I want to plough and everything myself. You plough, don't you?"

"Aye," said the farmer, much amused, "I follow the plough, same as any o' th' men."

"And do you dig?"

"Why, no—not ezactly; I'm not ezactly the figure for diggin', ye see, Master Dick. I leave that to the men."

"Because I was going to say," observed Dick, with his face falling a little, "that I know how to dig quite well. I can dig for hours without being tired—I've had lots of practice at the seaside, you know. I thought it would be useful for a farmer."

"Ah, it'll come in, I dessay," returned Mr. Dickenson encouragingly.

"Well, what I've been thinking all the afternoon was, that p'raps when I've left school—I'm to go to school next year, you know,—I might come here and be one of your men. And then when I'd quite learnt all about farming, you know, I might have a farm of my own, and Molly and I would manage it, and Papa and Mama would come and live with us. I suppose they'd be quite old then, and it would be nice for Papa not to have to work any more. Bee needn't

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work either," he added as an afterthought. "She might do the sewing, like Clara—she's too delicate to do anything else. Don't you think that would be a good plan?" he asked shyly.

The farmer nodded, but he laughed too in rather a disheartening way as he surveyed

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his future assistant. Poor little Dick, with his slender limbs, his little thin wrists creeping out of the sleeves of his jacket, his pink and white face and dark curls, was not exactly the cut of a farm-labourer. But he was certainly very much in earnest about it.

"You needn't laugh, you know," he said in slightly offended tones. "I mean what I say, Mr. Dickenson."

Mr. Dickenson immediately became as grave as a mustard-pot.

"Well, sir, I'll be proud to have you for my man whenever ye like to come an' try it. Shake hands on it—theer! It's a bargain."

Dick shook hands with friendly dignity, as befitted a man and an embryo farmer; and then, bethinking him that it was bed-time, shook hands over again in his own natural and boyish fashion, and wished Mr. Dickenson "Good-night."

"Eh, yon's a rare plucky little chap," said the latter to his wife later on. "Goin' to be a farmer

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he is—not a gentleman farmer, but a proper un like me—an' goin' to keep his pa an' ma and the whole family. An' as soon as he's left school he's comin' here to be my man an' larn."

"Bless him!" returned his wife, using her favourite ejaculation. "Bless all their bonny little faces! Look ye at this stockin'. It's little Bee's, an' Miss Molly's been tryin' to mend it for her. Wouldn't let me touch it, for she said her mama said she was to do everything she could herself. Look how she's cobbled it up, the dear! Miss Bee could never get her little foot in, but she tried so hard, and was that anxious. 'Will it do, Mrs. Dickenson?' she says, looking up so pitiful. 'Aye, to be sure,' says I, 'it's done wonderful for a first attempt.' But I'll get our Clara to unpick it an' do it over again, without sayin' nothin' to the dear child."

Next morning Molly watched Bee rather nervously as she saw her clothe her legs in their customary gear.

"Is your stocking quite comfortable?" she asked.

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"Oh, yes, you've done it beau'ful," cried Bee, popping on her shoe, quite unconscious of the deception that she was aiding and abetting.

Molly drew a long breath of relief, and looked triumphantly at Mrs. Dickenson.

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"I'm so glad I tried," she said, "because Mama said I was to be useful—and this is being useful isn't it!"

Mrs. Dickenson, seeing how much in earnest she was, allowed her to try again the next time a garment required repairs, but with Clara's supervision and help, and though the job took a good deal longer under these conditions, it was much more satisfactory in the end. Soon, indeed, Molly became quite a clever little needle-woman, much to Dick's satisfaction.

"You can teach Bee, you know," he said. "Because she'll have to do all our mending when we're farmers."

He had told his sisters his plan, of which they highly approved, and the day after his conversation with Mr. Dickenson had written to impart it to his father.

This was the letter:—

"THE WITHIES,  
Wednesday.

"MY DEAR PAPA,

"I have been thinking seeriously since we came bere of choosing my perfeccion, and I want to be a farmer please if you will let me. Of course I know I shall have to go to school first; but if you think I might be a farmer, Mr. Dickenson could be teaching me things while I am here, and he says I can be his man later on. I want to be a real farmer, not the gentleman kind, as Mr.

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Dickenson says that sort is no good. And please, Papa, I should so like it, and I should hate sitting at a desk all day like you. We are awfly happy here, and we are going to make hay next week. I rode the old

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mare this morning. She has a nice fat back, but is rather greesy and made my trousers very shiney, so tell Mama I won't ride her again. There is a little red calf, awfly pretty. I do wish you and Mama were here, then we should be so happy we should not know what to do. Give her a kiss from me and from Molly and Bee. If I am a farmer I will work hard for you and her so that you won't have to go to the office. I will make lots of money.

"With love from  
"DICK."

A reply arrived in due course encouraging Dick by all means to learn all he could about farming while he had the chance, but mentioning that it would be time enough a few years thence to decide about a profession. The boy's spirits were not in the least damped by the fact of his father's not immediately seizing this opening.

"He doesn't say no, you see, Molly," he observed, "and when you don't say no it generally means yes. And he wants me to learn all I can. So now, Molly, you had better pick up everything you can get hold of about dairy work and hens, and I'll begin to study farming in earnest."

With this object in view Dick first cultivated a fine roll in his gait, keeping his legs rather

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wide apart, so as to convey the impression that he was accustomed to walk a good deal over ploughed fields, and lifting his feet as though they were incased in immensely heavy hob-nailed boots. (Ardently indeed did he long for such a pair of boots, and for a suit of corduroys like those of the farm lads, but as they were not attainable he tried to imagine himself possessed of them.) This particular style of walk was rather fatiguing, however, and he could only keep it up for a little while each day, but he hoped in time to become accustomed to it.

Then he tried to talk like Farmer Dickenson and his men, and after some practice succeeded in tuning his voice to a kind of husky growl, of which he was secretly very proud, though Molly and Bee laughed so much when he made use of it that he was

obliged to reserve it for his private conversations with the farmer. He also thought that letting his mouth hang open, half closing his eyes, and giving his head a jerk to one side when anyone spoke to him, made him look just like one of the village lads; however, Molly could not stand these tricks, and told him severely she would never "be missus" of his farm if he made himself look so ugly and so stupid.

So he relinquished these new-found accom-

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plishments unwillingly enough, and contented himself with talking very frequently about "ship-pons," and "middens," and heifers, and colts. Sometimes he also spoke of "turmits" and "wuts," and was charmed to find that neither of his sisters had an idea of what he meant.

It now became a regular practice of his to sit with Mr. Dickenson for half an hour or so every evening, and talk sagely of the crops or the weather. By dint of much perseverance he really did manage to extract a good deal of information from his taciturn host, who on his part thoroughly enjoyed these visits, and used to become quite fidgety if Dick were later than usual in making his appearance.

"What's gone wi' th' little chap?" he would say, glancing uneasily at the clock; and then he would grin almost from ear to ear when Dick at last came in with his finest slouch, and seating himself in the elbow-chair would remark in his deepest tones:

"Well, sir, I think things are looking up a bit. If the weather only holds up I think we ought to do well."

"Ah," the farmer would say, and then he would chuckle till he grew purple in the face.

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## CHAPTER V

"PATCH."



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MOLLY on her part was not behindhand in trying to learn all she could respecting such duties of farm-life as she anticipated would fall to her share in the future. She trotted about from "shippon" to dairy, and from dairy to poultry-yard, followed by her little shadow, Bee, who, though she did not enter into things in the same serious spirit as her sister, was quite as happy in their new life. Darkie and Bee were great allies, and she had also many friends among the chickens and ducks, and was even occasionally discovered making advances to the gander, of which—unlike her elders—she was not at all afraid.

Molly loved the animals too, particularly the little red calf mentioned by Dick in his letter to his father. She would stand contemplating it for half an hour at a time, shaking the latch of the gate which fastened it into its shed; and was charmed

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when it licked and sucked her hand, though its little rough mouth felt funny, and not altogether pleasant. It was a sad day for her when this red calf was sold, and she wept bitterly when she found out that the butcher was the purchaser. Mrs. Dickenson tried to console her by telling her that even if it had been allowed to grow up, it would probably have found its way to the butcher's shop in the end.

"I'm glad we don't ever have veal here anyway," said Molly sighing. "But I do miss my pet. I've no special pet now, you know, and it's so lonely without one. I was thinking of making a pet of the lamb that has no mother, and asking you to let me feed it instead of him—but what's the use? It will grow into a sheep in time, and be eaten up too—and that would be worse, because we do eat mutton. Is there no pet I can have that doesn't get eaten when it grows up? The foal won't let me come near it—besides it's too big. The chickens—well, you know they grow into—chickens."

"Except when they grow into hens," put in Bee.

"Nobody could love a hen," answered Molly, a little sharply. "Big, fluffy, stupid things! No, I won't have any pet at all."



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She was rather low-spirited all day, and an hour or two after she went to bed that night Clara, who was passing the door, heard smothered sobs, and on entering Molly's room discovered her in floods of tears.

"Oh, my pet, my pet! he'll never, never suck my hand again!"

Next morning when she came down to breakfast, still a little melancholy, she found Mrs. Dickenson standing at the foot of the stairs with a broad smile on her good-humoured face.

"Run round to the yard, Miss Molly, and see what Clara's got to show you."

Molly did not wait to be told twice, and scampered off, with Bee as usual at her heels. There stood Clara at the door of the calf's shed, holding by a string—not Molly's former little friend, as for a moment she had been tempted to hope—but a small hornless kid, with a silky white and gray coat, and the queerest, wisest, little face in the world.

"There, Miss Molly, is a new pet for you," said Clara, "and one that I'll engage no one will want to eat when it gets big. Mother bethought her that Mrs. Byrne had some o' these little kids as she wanted to dispose of, and she sent me round to fetch it first thing this morning. And

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she hopes you'll like it—it's her present to you, you know, miss."

"For my very own? Oh, Clara, how good of her! Isn't it sweet? Oh, oh, I'm so happy! I never, never had a pet really of my own before. Is it a boy or a girl-goat, Clara? And what is its name?"

"She's a nanny-goat, miss, and Mrs. Byrne calls her 'Patch,' because of those little brown marks on her coat. She's very tame, and will follow you like a dog, Mrs. Byrne says."

Patch was hugged, and kissed, and stroked, and petted till she began to feel rather

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bewildered, and butted her funny little hornless head at the children in a way which betokened that she had had enough of these caresses. Then Clara gently insinuated that breakfast would be getting cold, and that her mother would wish them to come in, upon which Molly reluctantly tore herself away, leaving Patch some cabbage leaves with which to while away the time during her absence.

Then Mrs. Dickenson had to be hugged and kissed and thanked, and Dick, who had come down later than the others, and was rather astonished to find no one in the parlour, had to be told, and Susan had to hear all about it, and altogether it was a most exciting breakfast.

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Of course as soon as ever the children's porridge was disposed of they rushed out again, and found Miss Patch balancing herself on the top bar of the wooden gate, which was supposed to shut her in. As they approached she made a spring which nearly brought her down on the top of Molly's head, and then rushed off through the farmyard and out into the road, with all the three little people running after her.

Mr. Dickenson, who chanced to be walking along the road in the opposite direction, shouted and waved his arms as he saw the chase, and Patch turning sharp round ran—to Molly's huge delight—into her very arms. The farmer, who was much amused at the children's joy and excitement, found them an old dog-collar and a nice long piece of rope with which they could tether her in a field near the house, where she could do no damage, and where Molly could constantly visit her.

Soon Patch learned to love her little mistress very much, and would run up bleating when she heard her step—which she distinguished from that of either of the other children,—would feed from her hand, and when let loose follow her about like a dog, as Clara had foretold. As for Molly, it would be difficult to describe the affection which

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she lavished on the little animal. She saved up "treats" for her in the shape of bread, carrots, &c., she brushed and curried her most energetically every day, and never thought of going for a walk or otherwise amusing herself unless she made quite sure first that Patch had everything she wanted.

Sometimes Patch went out with the children, and then it would be hard to say whether she or her mistress was most happy. Scampering along the banks, nibbling the short grass by the wayside (with a mouthful of hedge occasionally just to vary her diet), stopping to drink at the little ditches, or even sometimes at the puddles in the road, Patch seemed to find these expeditions most exciting; and as for Molly, between running after the kid and calling to her, leading her by her collar, and playing hide-and-seek with her—a game which Patch understood quite well—she enjoyed herself thoroughly.

One day they took Patch to call on her mother and twin sister, who lived at the far end of Woodham village with their mistress, Mrs. Byrne. Now Mrs. Byrne was an old Irishwoman, who wore a big "flappy" white cap, and a little shawl crossed over in front, and looked just like the pictures of old Irishwomen that the children had

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seen in the *Graphic* and other newspapers, except that she wore boots and stockings, and was not ragged. The little Burtons liked her very much; she was o merry and funny, and winked with both eyes at once in such an engaging manner when she mad a joke, and had, as Molly said, "such a dear little ay of speaking." She called Bee her "Lameen Bawn," addressed the other children as "asthore" an "avick," respectively, and told them most amusing stories about "Connaught-men," who it seemed were in the habit of saying and doing very queer things.

There was one anecdote in particular which much took Dick's fancy. It was about a certain Connaught-man, who, for once in his life, having occasion to go to Dublin on business, was obliged to pass the night at an inn. The bed was one of the four-posters universally used at that time, and when the traveller sought his room he found the

curtains all tightly drawn, and no opening anywhere. He walked round and round the "housheen" (little house) as he called it, much surprised and perplexed at no door being visible, and at last, feeling very tired, made up his mind to sleep on the floor. Naturally the poor man woke up very cold and stiff next morning—for the bare boards were not so comfortable as his

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own warm pile of straw at home,—and could not make out why he felt as if he were bruised all over. But suddenly as he sat up, shivering and rubbing himself, his eyes fell on one small feather which had been underneath him where he lay on the floor.

"Bless us an' save us," said he, "I've often heard tell o' feather beds—but if I feel so bad afther sleepin' on wan, God help them that has to sleep on thousands o' yez!"

Mrs. Byrne was always delighted to see the children, and, on the day that they brought Patch, was equally delighted to see her. But though Molly was secretly rather pleased that the kid took no notice whatever of her former mistress, she could not help feeling a little bit shocked and distressed at her behaviour to her mother and sister. She snuffed and nibbled at Mrs. Byrne's hedge in a perfectly callous manner when they were led up to her, and seemed far more interested in that than in her relations. Indeed, after one indifferent glance at her sister, she turned her back on her completely, and when her mother came too close she actually put down her wicked little head, and butted at that respectable old lady.

"Oh, Molly!" cried Bee, much scandalized, "I

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didn't think Patch would be so rude to her own mother. It's horrid of her—it really is horrid!"

Poor Molly quite blushed; she could not find a word to say in defence of her favourite. She jerked at Patch's rope and led her away rather quickly, hoping that Mrs.

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Byrne had not noticed her unnatural conduct. Mrs. Byrne laughed and clapped her hands, and winked at Clara and shook her head, but made no remark; and presently the others came running after Molly, whom they found sitting on a bank lecturing the kid with a very serious face.

"Why did you go off so quick?" panted Bee; "I'm quite out of *breff* running after you. Here is a piece of griddle-cake Mrs. Byrne gave me for you. And oh, Molly, do you know she says Patch will be six months old to-morrow? I've such an idea! It's a sort of birthday, you know, so we'll ask Mrs. Dickenson to let us have a party."

Molly stopped short in the middle of her "griddle-cake—which was simply soda-bread, baked Irish fashion over the embers—and looked at Bee eagerly.

"What a lovely idea! Oh, yes, do let us ask her. You ask her, for you are her pet, I think. What shall we do for our party?"

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"It ought to be an animal-party, as it's for Patch," said Bee. "We'll have Darkie, and the little lamb—and p'raps Mrs. Byrne might let us have Patch's sister—"

"Oh, no, don't let's have her," cried Molly; "she's a stupid little thing!"

"I think Patch's own sister ought to come to her party," observed Dick; but Molly pretended not to hear him.

"We might have tea in the hay-field," she cried hastily, "with lots of cabbages and things for Patch, and milk for the lamb, and bones for Darkie—and p'raps Mrs. Dickenson will let us have a potato-cake for ourselves. Do you think we may have a party, Clara?"

Clara thought it very likely; and her mother entered into the plan with her usual good-nature when it was imparted to her on the return of the children.

That afternoon they made a "hay-house" in one corner of the newly-mown field, piling the hay high on three sides, and leaving the fourth open. Then while Dick was finishing off this edifice the little girls made garlands for the kid and the lamb.

"Patch can have my doll's sash to tie it on with," said Molly.

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"And lambie can have mine," said Bee. "Molly, isn't it a pity he's so black? He'd look lovely if he were only clean with the blue ribbon round his neck."

"I'll tell you what," cried Molly eagerly, "let's wash him!"

"Oh yes, yes, what fun!" shouted Bee, dancing round and round, and clapping her hands. "Dick, Dick! come here! Such a good idea! We're going to wash the lamb so as to make him nice and clean for the party."

"I say!" exclaimed Dick, a little doubtfully, "If Joe sees you you'll catch it." (Joe was the cow-man.)

"Oh, Joe's just like a dog in the manger with his animals," cried Molly scornfully. "He doesn't like anyone to do anything for them but himself. I know sheep are washed, so why shouldn't we wash the lamb?"

"Yes, that's true—it can't do any harm," said Dick reflectively. "Suppose we wash him in my room. I've got one of those flat baths, you know,—it will do splendidly, and Joe can't come bothering after us there."

This brilliant idea being approved of, the children immediately proceeded to put it into execution, and the unfortunate victim was carried

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upstairs with the utmost speed and secrecy. It happened that Mrs. Dickenson, who had had a hard morning's work in the dairy, had fallen into a sort of doze in the chimney-corner while waiting for "milking-time." Certain sounds, however, presently disturbed her repose, first mingling with her dreams, and finally waking her up altogether. A bumping and scrubbing and splashing; feet pattering overhead, and stifled shrieks sounding every now and then.

Mrs. Dickenson sat up in her chair, wondering if it were washing-day; but no, it was only Wednesday.

"Whatever's to do?" she muttered, looking rather startled.

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A tremendous bump and splash, accompanied by a scream in Dick's voice and shouts of laughter, seemed to answer her, and the poor woman hurried upstairs to the room whence the noise proceeded. What a sight met her eyes as she opened the door! In the middle of the room (which was swimming with soapy water) was Dick's bath, and in the middle of the bath sat Dick himself, combing his hair with a small comb, and singing under his breath. Close beside him stood the two little girls, dripping from head to foot, but shaking with laughter.

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They both held tightly 'a struggling gray animal, which—as much of it as could be seen beneath the masses of soap-suds which covered it—looked more like a monstrous drowned kitten than anything else.

Mrs. Dickenson paused for a moment, breathless with astonishment and indignation; but presently recovered herself enough to make a dart at Dick, lift him out of the bath, and give him a slight shake.

"Really, Master Dick, it's too bad of you," she cried. "Whatever would your mama say?"

Dick stopped singing and looked up penitently; he had never seen Mrs. Dickenson angry before.

"I didn't mean to fall in," he explained. "We were just washing the lamb, and he wriggled so, my foot slipped and I tumbled in. Then as I was wet I thought I might as well amuse myself a little. But I'm very sorry I vexed you—I really didn't mean to."

"Oh, Mrs. Dickenson, please don't be angry!" cried Bee, letting go her half of the poor lamb and rushing over to her friend. "We only wanted lambie to be white and nice for the party. Don't be vexed with Dick. He was only pretending he was a mermaid."

"Dear, dear!" ejaculated the farmer's wife.

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"You know what a mermaid is, don't you?" pursued the child. "It's a kind of sea-fairy, you know, that sings and combs its hair, and poor Dick was pretending he was one. You're not angry, are you?"

"Bless your little heart!" said Mrs. Dickenson, unable to resist the pleading face. She looked despairingly, however, at the disreputable little trio,—the grimy lamb, the dirty bath, the wet floor; but finally, to their immense surprise and relief, broke out into a cheery laugh.

"I never see such children!" she cried, wiping her eyes at last. "But you mustn't play these tricks no more, my dears. Joe will be wild when he sees yon poor little beast!—and it'll be lucky if you don't all catch your deaths o' cold. Now, Master Dick, for goodness' sake take off them wet things o' yours this minute, and you two little girls must come to your room and change every stitch too. Deary me, this is a piece of work! Never mind the floor, Master Dick—our Clara'll soon put it to rights; take off them wet clothes. Dear heart alive, you are soaked to the skin, I doubt!—eh, and yon poor lamb, it's well if it doesn't die of it!"

"Die!" cried Molly and Bee together, both on the point of tears.

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"There, there, don't cry, dears; maybe it'll be none the worse. Clara shall carry it out to the sun. Lord bless us, all's well as end's well. Ye don't need to take it to heart so. Ye'll think a bit more another time, that's all."

Mrs. Dickenson popped the little girls to bed for an hour, and dosed them all round with ginger cordial, which they would have liked very much if it had not been quite so strong. They kept carefully out of the way of Joe the cowman, and felt rather bashful when first brought face to face with the farmer; but when the latter began to make jokes about their management of live-stock, they recovered their spirits sufficiently to join in the laugh, though it was at their own expense.

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## CHAPTER VI THE PARTY

THE next morning dawned bright and sunny.

Nobody had a cold; even the lamb, with the exception of a certain spotty and matted appearance about his coat, was none the worse for his bath.

The children employed many hours in preparing for the party. They made garlands by the yard, and daisy-chains by the furlong, with which they decorated the hay-house and the adjacent hedge.

In a shady corner all the dolls were seated, dressed in their best, with their cups and saucers laid out on a pocket-handkerchief tablecloth, and real bread-and-butter on their plates. There was another little hay erection at the back of the house divided into compartments, one of which was destined for Patch, one for Darkie, and one for the lamb, the dainties reserved for each being neatly arranged in the middle. On the ground,

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inside the children's gigantic nest, was their own tablecloth—not a pocket-handkerchief—completely covered with good things, even to the potato cake, a luxury of which I am not sure that Mrs. Burton would have quite approved, but which we must hope "for once" did not disagree.

At last everything was ready, the animals were conducted into their respective stalls, the children squatted round their tablecloth, and Mrs. Dickenson, Clara, and Susan, after looking on at the festivity for some few minutes, retired to the house and left the little ones to their own devices.

"Isn't this jolly?" cried Dick, leaning back luxuriously against the wall of the hay-house. "Molly, when we're grown up we'll have a party like this every fine day."

"Don't talk about when we're grown up," said Bee. "It's much nicer now. Big people never have any fun. I don't want ever to grow up."

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"Ah, but you'll have to, whether you like it or not," retorted her brother. "So there's no use in saying you don't want to. You're growing up as fast as you can, and some day you'll find you're up, and you'll have to stop up."

"P'raps I sha'n't, though," cried Bee. "P'raps I'll die before I get big."

This was a favourite argument of Bee's when-

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ever she was threatened with anything which she thought unpleasant in the future.

Molly, good-humoured and peaceable always, came to the rescue now.

"You mus'n't talk about dying," she said; "you know we could none of us spare you."

"Couldn't you, Molly?" said Bee, with a funny condescending smile, which seemed to promise that she would think about living a little longer.

"Isn't it awfully jolly, though?" urged Dick, "and aren't the pets good? Just peep over, Molly, and see what they are doing."

Molly rose cautiously, and looked over the hay wall; but her face changed as she did so.

"Dick, they are not good at all—they are as bad as bad can be! The lamb is eating all our garlands, Darkie is drinking the lamb's milk, and naughty, naughty Patch has got her foot in the jam-pot, which Mrs. Dickenson put in the shade near the hedge!"

"Oh, but you mus'n't scold her," pleaded Bee, "'cause it's her birthday; you know people are never scolded on their birthdays. Poor Patch, p'raps she thought the jam-pot was a sort of puddle!"

Order was restored after a little time. Patch was tethered to a tree, the lamb was persuaded to

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drink some of the milk, and to upset a good deal more, and Darkie lay down peacefully beside his plate of bones. Then the children returned with renewed appetites to their

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interrupted repast. They were getting on very nicely indeed, and the viands were rapidly disappearing when the sound of a strange voice made them all start.

"I tell you I will," said the voice—it was a little voice—"I *will* go and see what they are doing."

And a small sunny vision suddenly appeared in the doorway of the hay-house. A little girl dressed all in white, with long golden hair hanging down nearly to the edge of her short embroidered skirt, and a sweet saucy face peeping out smilingly from under her "floppy" muslin hat. Everything about her, from the ribbon on this hat to her little bronze shoes, was neat and smart and dainty; the children thought they had never seen anything so lovely, and stared at her with all their eyes, quite dumb with surprise. Their own attire contrasted strongly with that of this trim little maiden. Dick and Molly were hatless, and the brim of Bee's head-covering was torn in one or two places. The new pinafores which Mama had taken such pains in making, and which had been quite clean that very morn-

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ing, were crushed now and not a little soiled. As for Dick's sailor-suit, you can imagine for yourself what a striped blue and white sailor-suit looks like when it has been worn for seven or eight hours by a boy who is fond of rolling on the grass and riding on a bare-backed donkey, and running in and out of stables and cow-houses, and who has just indulged in a "glorious romp" in the hayfield. The new-comer's fair locks were smooth and glossy as silk; the Burtons' three little tousled heads looked for the moment as if they had never known either comb or brush.

After gazing at them for some seconds, the stranger remarked placidly:

"You are little rustics, I suppose, and this is your frugal meal? I've often read about a frugal meal, but I never thought it was so good before."

"Oh, no," answered Molly politely, "this isn't a frugal meal; this is a tea-party."

"But rustics always have frugal meals," persisted the child. "I've read about them in my books, so I know."

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"Not quite like this, though," explained Molly. "Frugal means dried figs, I think, and dates, and—and onions. You remember, Dick, in *Sandford and Merton*, whenever they talked of frugal repasts, it was always that sort of thing?"

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Dick nodded. "Besides, we're not rustics, you know," he added.

"Then what are you, pray?" asked the visitor, smiling with a superior air.

"For shame, Miss Lily!" gasped another strange voice, as an excessively warm-looking nurse arrived on the scene. "I never knew such a naughty little girl, to run away from me like that, and to disturb these nice children so. I'm sure I don't know what they must think of you."

"I want to know who they are," observed Miss Lily quite calmly. "They say they're not rustics, but they look exactly like all the little rustics I've ever seen. Who are you, please?"

"Miss Lily, for shame!" cried the poor nurse again. "Wherever are your manners, and you a big girl of nearly seven?"

"They don't mind, Nana," urged Lily. "I don't mind telling them who I am. I am Lilian Flynte, and I live at Woodham Hall, and my papa's a squire. Now, please tell me who you are, if you don't mind."

"I am Dick Burton, and these are my sisters Molly and Bee. We come from London. Our papa's esquire too."

"Oh!" exclaimed Lily, looking at her nurse with a quizzical expression, and then turning to

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the children she remarked smilingly that she couldn't quite believe that.

"It's on his letters," cried Dick indignantly. "E—S—Q. I've seen it myself, and he told me it was short for esquire."

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"My papa sometimes has J. P. D. L. on his letters," observed Lily importantly.

"Well, Papa's got E. C. on his," retorted Dick, who was not to be outdone, "and when we lived in Kensington it used to be S. W. So there!"

"Wouldn't the little girl like some tea?" put in Molly at this juncture, "and won't you have some, please?" turning to the nurse. "You do look so hot and tired!"

The invitation was accepted after a moment's demur, much to Lily's delight, and presently both new arrivals were accommodated with portions of everything that was going. The Burtons were much pleased at this addition to their party. Lily proved to be a most amusing companion, and the nurse, as soon as she had recovered her breath and her good-humour, was both kind and entertaining. She told them that her little charge was an only child, and seldom had any playmates of her own age, which accounted for her rather decided manner and old-fashioned style of conversation.

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"She's so fond of long words," observed the nurse. "I don't know how she gets hold of them; she finds them in her books, I think."

Lily, who had been listening with a smile that was half-amused and half-anxious, now thought it time to change the conversation.

"Is that your lamb over there?" she asked Bee. "I should like to have it for a pet, it looks so sweet and gentle."

"You wouldn't think it gentle if you tried to wash it," put in Dick. "We did yesterday, and it knocked me down. Lambs are humbugs; they pretend they are meek, and they are not meek a bit."

"But it isn't a lamb's nature to like being washed," returned Lily seriously. "It's their instinct to object to water. Boys"—with a mischievous glance at the only member of the species present—" 'stinctively object to sitting still—I don't like boys as much as girls; they're too runny and jumpy—dogs 'stinctively run after rabbits and sheep. I told Papa so when he scolded Toby the other day. Poor Toby! he is to be given away; he's too fond of hunting."

"Who is Toby?" asked the children all together.

"Toby is a puppy—our pug's puppy. He's

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pretty big now, and awfully mischievous. We want to find a good home for him."

"And what sort of dog is he?—Oh, I forgot. Of course you said a pug."

"His mother is a pug," said Lily reflectively, "so of course Toby must be a pug too; but he isn't a bit like one. He's about five times as big as the biggest pug you ever saw, and he has got a long straight nose, and a very long tail that's sometimes straight and sometimes curly. He's lovely—much prettier than his stupid little snub-nosed mother."

"He must be sweet," said Dick eagerly. "I do wish I had a dog. I've always longed for a dog. Oh, I wonder—"He stopped short, reddening.

"Would you like to have this one?" asked the uurse, interpreting his thought. "I know Captain Flynte is very anxious to get rid of it. You are a kind little boy, I am sure, and would be good to it. We might ask your papa, Miss Lily, and if he says yes we could bring Toby here to-morrow.

"Oh!" cried Dick, scarlet with rapture. "Oh, I wonder if I might! I'll ask Mrs. Dickenson."

He tore off to the farmhouse, and promptly returned, breathless but beaming, to announce that Mrs. Dickenson had given him leave to keep

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the dog on condition that he did not bring it into the house. She also promised to take care of him when Dick returned to London. The boy's delight was indescribable, and his sisters rejoiced most heartily too, while Lily assumed a queer little air of innocent importance, as became one through whose means so great a favour was about to be conferred.

"I'm so glad, Nana," she remarked as she and her nurse were returning home; "I'm so



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glad we came across those children. They seem so nice, don't they? They looked rather like poor children, at least their clothes did; but they didn't speak like them did they?"

"That's because they are town children, I expect," returned nurse. "They'll be some relation of Mrs. Dickenson's, I daresay. They are well-behaved, good little things, I must say, and indeed their manners were an example to you, Miss Lily."

Nana never lost an opportunity of pointing a moral for the benefit of her nursling, whom nevertheless she privately considered a pearl and paragon among little girls. Lily was perfectly aware of the fact, and now smiled with an air of tranquil amusement, remarking that Nana really was a funny woman.

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Her father made no difficulty as to the disposal of Toby, and the next day Lily and nurse appeared once more at The Withies, leading the dog;—that is to say that Lily was being towed over the ground at an exceedingly rapid pace, and that poor Nana followed as best she could.

Toby, certainly, was a remarkable specimen of a pug. He had long legs, and a long nose and a long tail; his muzzle was black, to be sure, but there was also a good many black hairs in his coat. Farmer Dickenson was rude enough to call him a mongrel, but Dick thought he probably had a Japanese pug among his ancestors, and took after it. Of one fact there was no doubt, Toby was brimful of intelligence. After he had been in Dick's possession for some time, he played with him just as if he were another child, and really, as the little boy often asserted, appeared to understand every word he said.

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## CHAPTER VII

### BEE'S ADVENTURE

ONE very hot afternoon Clara proposed to take the two elder children for a good walk; while Bee, whose legs were neither long nor strong, was to stay with Mrs.

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Dickenson.

"I couldn't spare everyone at the same time, you know," observed the latter, as she saw a shade of disappointment creep over Bee's face. "You'll help me with the butter, won't you, lovey? Dear, dear! I'm that busy I don't know which way to turn."

Accordingly Bee, feeling quite consoled, followed her friend into the cool, sweet dairy, and watched her skim the cream and make up the beautiful yellow butter into rolls, for next day's market. The little girl was allowed to cover each of these with a cabbage leaf. Afterwards Mrs. Dickenson provided her with two flat grooved pieces of wood, with handles, and showed her how to make tiny rolls and pats

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of butter, and to put them, ready for use, in a wooden bowl full of water.

This was fun! Bee's pats were rather lopsided, and what she called "squozen" just at first, but she soon became quite expert, and the big bowl was rapidly filled with little floating trophies of her cleverness.

About four o'clock, when it was getting cooler, Mrs. Dickenson told her to put on her hat and play out-of-doors till tea-time. Bee trotted off contentedly, and after a passing salutation of Darkie, went to see how Patch was getting on. She found her running round and round in an excited and discontented manner, bleating, and tugging at her chain.

"You naughty Patch!" she cried, "I believe you're cross just because Molly didn't take you! But you know, dear," holding up her finger and imitating the tone in which her mama occasionally admonished her, "little people can't always have their own way. It wouldn't have been good for you, Patchey dear—you'd have been so hot and so tired if you had gone with them. You must learn to be *pa'sent*, you know."

"Ba-a-a-a!" said Patch, still apparently unconvinced, rushing off again and almost strang-

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ling herself as she came suddenly "to the end of her tether."

"I wonder if Molly would mind my taking Patch for a little tiny walk," thought Bee. "She must be so dull, poor little thing! I think I might."

She untied the knots which fastened the kid's rope to the post, and, passing her hand through the loop at the end as she had seen Molly do, invited Patch to come for a stroll. Patch paced along sedately for about two minutes; but all at once, being seized with a frantic desire to go in search of her mistress, set off at a tremendous pace across the field, dragging Bee after her.

This field was divided from the road by a wide and rather deep ditch; and the poor child was much alarmed as she found that Patch was making directly for it. She tugged at the rope with all her might, and screamed loudly, but no one heard her, and the kid ran on quite unchecked by her efforts. At last they were almost at the brink of the brown muddy ditch, and Bee was obliged to let go the rope to save herself from falling in; tumbling, however, flat on her face on the grass as she loosed her hold. When she had scrambled to her feet, Patch was

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nowhere to be seen! She had jumped over the ditch and—vanished!

What would Molly say? Bee could not waste time in thinking. She ran quickly to the further end of the field, where she knew there was a gate, and then, without stopping to call anyone, rushed along the path which she fancied Patch would be likely to have taken. No trace of the kid was to be seen; and tired, breathless, and miserable, the child halted at last, and burst into tears.

"Oh, what will Molly say? She'll be so unhappy! Oh, what shall I do? Patch, Patch, do come back!"

But no Patch came, and Bee looked round, frightened as well as miserable. She was now far away from The Withies, and the country seemed perfectly strange to her. At a little distance, however, was the plantation which bounded the squire's park, and as the child gazed disconsolately in that direction, she fancied she saw a whitish object among

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the trees, and heard something which sounded like Patch's familiar bleat.

Behold our poor little five-year-old trotting off again, drying her tears, and resolving to waste no more breath in sobs. She was soon

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close to the plantation, and, to her great joy, discovered a gate, through the bars of which she managed to squeeze herself. But now where was the white thing, and why didn't it bleat? She scrambled on through a great many brambles, which tore her frock and scratched her little legs unprotected above her short socks. She tumbled once or twice over the projecting roots of trees, and bumped her nose so badly, that if it had not been by nature more elastic than most people's noses, it would never have come into shape again.

At last she came close to the white thing which she had seen from the road, and what do you think it was? Just a big stone with moss growing over one side of it. As for the bleating, Bee could see through the trees into the park from this spot, and she caught sight of a number of sheep walking about, followed by their lambs. It was doubtless the voice of one of these latter which had misled her.

Poor little girl! The disappointment was too great to be endured patiently. She slapped the deceitful stone in her vexation so hard that it made her fingers tingle, and then she sat down on it and began to cry once more. Patch was gone, she herself was thoroughly tired out, Mrs.

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Dickenson would be looking for her everywhere, and Molly's heart would be quite broken.

"I'm sure my heart is b'oken top," sobbed Bee, "and I b'lieve I'm lost."

She looked round her. Trees, trees on all sides, and through them glimpses of a huge tract of park. Could she ever find her way home again—and if she did, what would they

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all say? On the whole it was better to be lost, for then someone would come and be so glad to find her that they would not think of being angry about the kid.

She sat quite still except for a big sob, which would lift up her pinafore every now and then and shake her from head to foot; one or two tears hung upon her eyelashes, and her little forefinger had found its way to her mouth. It is wonderful what an important thing a little forefinger is sometimes: a comforter in distress, a counsellor in difficulties, and sometimes, I am sorry to say, an accomplice in naughtiness. Bee found her finger distinctly soothing on this occasion. The minutes passed slowly, and no one came to look for her, except a robin, which hopped along a branch over her head and peered at her with its little bright eyes. Bee wondered if she were going to turn into a Babe in the

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Wood, and if the little robin was waiting to bury her.

Presently she heard a sudden tramp, tramp coming towards her, and felt very much frightened. Suppose it should be a robber, or a wizard, or a wild beast, or any of the dreadful things that the story-books say live "in the middle of a wood!"

Nearer came the tramp, tramp, and all at once the figure of a man appeared. A tall man in brown clothes, and with a soft cap on his head. He was certainly not a wild beast, and he did not look like either a wizard or a robber. Bee breathed more freely, and slid off the stone; she thought he might consider it naughty of her to be in the wood without leave.

"Hallo!" cried the man, as the little dishevelled head suddenly appeared above a rhododendron, which had hitherto screened it from his view. "What are you doing here, may I ask?"

He spoke with a kind of amused surprise, and not at all unkindly, and at the same time crossed over the rhododendrons and stood beside her.

Bee took her finger out of her mouth and gave another sob, and then she put it in again.

"Dear, dear, this is very sad!" said the squire, for it was he. He sat down on the big

stone

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and drew Bee between his knees, turning up her little face so as to have a good look at it. His hands were very gentle, and his eyes were very kind. He smiled at Bee, and she tried to smile back at him, but the corners of her mouth would go down instead of up.

"Let us hear all about it," said the squire. "Are you one of the village children?"

"No," said Bee, "I'm—I'm a little lady. At least, I used to be, but Dick has left off being a gentleman now, so I suppose I'm not a lady any more."

"Oh, indeed!" said Captain Flynte; "this is very interesting. And who is Dick?"

"Dick is my brother."

"I am sorry to hear he has left off being a gentlemen; but I don't think you need give up being a lady on that account. Tell me what is your name, and where you live."

"My name is Beatrice Mary Burton, and I live at The Withies now, but gener'ly with Papa and Mama in London."

"Oh yes, I remember, Lily told me about you. Mrs. Dickenson is your aunt, isn't she?"

"My aunt!" cried Bee, beginning to laugh; "that would be funny! No—she isn't even a cousin. She used to be Mama's nurse long ago."

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"Well now, tell me, how do you come to be all alone in this wood?"

The memory of her troubles returned to Bee at this question, and she could not help crying a little as she related them in her own fashion. The squire listened patiently, but could not quite make out what it was all about; however, he was very nice and comforting, for he was fond of little children, especially little girls (having a little girl of his own), and he got his handkerchief out of his pocket and wiped her eyes for her, assuring her that it would be all right.

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"And now I think I had better take you back to The Withies," he said. "Mrs. Dickenson will be tearing her hair if she does not find you soon."

"Oh, I don't think she would do that," answered Bee, a little shocked. "And it wouldn't be much use, would it?"

Captain Flynte laughed a little, and taking her in his arms carried her out of the wood.

"You gave Lily such a nice tea the other day," he said, "you must come and have tea with her some day."

"She hasn't invited us, though," remarked Bee.

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"Well, I invite you. I'm Lily's papa, you know."

"Are you?" cried Bee, raising his head to look at him, and then laying it down again on his shoulder. "I thought you must be some kind of papa, you carried me so comfortably. My papa often carries me upstairs—isn't it good of him? And he's so tired after sitting on a desk all day."

"*At* a desk, perhaps," suggested the squire.

"I think Dick said on a desk," returned the child, "but p'raps he didn't. Anyhow it's very tiring, and papa hates it, and that's why Dick says he's going to be a farmer when he grows up."

Captain Flynte found these scraps of family history rather perplexing, but he had no time to inquire into them further, for they were now near The Withies, and at the next turn of the road came in sight of Mrs. Dickenson and Molly, who were anxiously searching for Bee, the farmer and Dick having gone in the opposite direction.

"Well I never!" ejaculated Mrs. Dickenson, when she caught sight of the squire and his burden.

Bee slid down from his arms and ran towards her sister.

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"Oh, Molly, Molly!" she cried. "I've lost Patch! I know you'll never forgive me."

She flung her arms round Molly's neck, squeezing her so tightly that she could hardly breathe, and rubbing her little face against hers.

"It's all right, Bee, darling," began Molly.

"Oh, but it isn't all right, 'cause she's lost and I can't find her! I looked everywhere and—"

"But listen, Bee—"

"I know you'll break your heart, Molly, but you can have my doll and all my toys, and I'll give you my lucky sixpence to buy another Patch."

"I tell you, Bee—"

"Oh, don't cry, Molly,—I know you're crying. I'm so sorry. I didn't think she'd run away."

"I'm not crying—I'm laughing," shouted Molly, drawing down Bee's arms and holding her away a little so that she might see her face. "Patch is found! She came running back to the farm ages ago—and we've been in such a state about you!"

"My blessed lamb!" cried Mrs. Dickenson, looking towards her now. "To think you'd go for to play us such a trick I've been near out o' my mind with fright about you."

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"But you didn't tear you hair, Mrs. Dickenson, did you?" asked Bee anxious. "I hope you didn't tear your hair. Oh, no—it's quite *smoove*. You see she didn't!" turning round triumphantly to the squire, who looked a little sheepish as Mrs. Dickenson gazed at him in astonishment.

"All right—all right!" he said hastily. "Well, I must be off now. All you little people must come to tea some day when Lily comes home. She is away just now with her mama, but next week, I am sure, she will be delighted to see you."

He stooped and kissed Bee, and nodding kindly to Molly and Mrs. Dickenson, went away.

Mrs. Dickenson carried Bee back to the house, petting and scolding her alternately;

but the petting was very tender and the scolding not very severe, and Bee promised faithfully never on any account to go outside of the farm precincts again without telling someone.

"You might have been run over and killed, you know," said Mrs. Dickenson. "Or if the squire had not chanced to come across you, you might have been in that wood all night."

Poor Farmer Dickenson came in presently quite pale and "upset," with Dick, who was on

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the point of tears; and great was their delight to find that the tiny prodigal had returned. Bee was welcomed by everyone, and felt very happy in spite of all the lecturing which she received: she went to bed a wiser if not a sadder little girl, and woke up next morning as gay as a lark.

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## CHAPTER VIII

### VISITING THE SICK

MOLLY declared next morning that she must take Patch for a walk to console her for the lonely hours she had spent the day before, so, as Clara was busy, Dick and she obtained leave to go as far as Mrs. Byrne's by themselves, Bee remaining at home.

Mrs. Byrne's cottage stood in a little lane at some distance from the other houses in the village. The children thought it must be lonely for the old woman, but she always declared that she never had time to be lonely; besides, she would add, her goats, and her chickens, and her cat were "great company."

On this particular morning Dick and Molly were surprised to find Mrs. Byrne's door closed and fastened, and when they knocked there came no answer from within, though the goats set up a loud bleating in their little shed, and a flock of hens and chickens

came rushing round from the

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back of the cottage, evidently expecting to be fed.

What could have become of Mrs. Byrne herself? The children knocked again, and listened. They thought they heard a faint moaning coming from the inner room. Dick ran round to the little window of this room, and found that the bolt was unfastened, and that he could open it from outside. He popped in his head, screwing it round so that he was able to see the bed and Mrs. Byrne lying in it. She was all huddled up, and did not seem to notice that the window had been opened.

"Mrs. Byrne!" called out Dick. "What's the matter, Mrs. Byrne?"

"Oh, thank God! somewan's come at last," groaned the old woman. "I thought I was left here to die. Who are ye at all? I'm that bad I can't turn in the bed."

"I'm Dick Burton. Are you ill, Mrs. Byrne? I'm so sorry. Is there no one to look after you?"

"Ne'er a wan at all, dear. No wan knows I'm sick, an' the door's fast, an' I can't get up to open it."

"I'll soon open it," cried Dick, pushing up the little window as high as it would go, and squeez-

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ing himself through the aperture. It *was* a squeeze, and at one time Molly, who was assisting him from behind, thought he had stuck fast and could neither advance nor retreat; but with one more determined shove and wriggle, and one more wild flourish of his thin legs, he succeeded, and in another moment had unfastened the house door. Molly and he advanced on tiptoe to Mrs. Byrne's bedside. She was lying all in a heap in her everyday clothes; her eyes were shut and her mouth was open, and she was so white that, as Dick afterwards explained, she was green.

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In answer to the children's inquiries she opened her eyes for one moment, and remarked that she was dying, and then shut them again and went on groaning. This was dreadful! Dick and Molly looked at each other in dismay.

"We must call someone," said Dick, "and I am sure she ought to have the doctor. Where is your pain, Mrs. Byrne? Because I'd better explain, you know," he added to Molly.

"It's all over, dear—everywhere. I was bad all the week, and didn't let on to anyone, for I thought it 'ud go off of itself, 'yesterday it took me just like a knife and went through me like a corkscrew."

"Oh, poor Mrs. Byrne!" exclaimed Molly,

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opening big, tearful eyes in alarm at these fearful symptoms. "Run, Dick, for the doctor. And shall I go and call someone?"

"I don't think we ought to leave her quite alone," answered Dick. "Look here, Molly, I'll go first and see if I can't find somebody to look after her, and then I'll run for the doctor. I could just catch him, I think. You know we always meet him driving just at this time. Do you mind staying till somebody else comes?"

"N—no," said poor little Molly, with one rather doubtful glance at the figure in the bed. "No," she repeated more firmly. "It would be dreadful to leave her alone. But you'll ask someone to come soon, won't you, Dick?"

Her brother promised and flew off. The first house he came to was locked up, the owner having gone out "charring." In the second the woman was attending a sick child and could not leave it. In the third there were only some children, who told Dick their mother had just gone down the village to the shop and would be back immediately.

"Will you ask her to go to Mrs. Byrne's when she comes home?" said Dick. "Mrs. Byrne is very ill, and there's no one to look after her. Will you tell her?"

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The eldest child nodded. "I'll tell her when she comes back," she said. "She won't be a minute."

"Be sure to ask her to go at once," urged Dick, and then he sped on to find the doctor.

But it happened that the woman in question was not back by any means in a minute, nor in several minutes. She met, by an unlucky chance, on that particular day, an old friend whom she had not seen for years, and who had returned unexpectedly to the village. They found so much to say to each other in consequence that quite an hour passed before they each went their respective ways.

Meanwhile Molly, left in charge, watched her patient for some moments with a beating heart. What an awful thing it would be if Mrs. Byrne was really going to die, and did die while Molly was alone with her! The very idea made her shudder: but being brave as well as unselfish, she presently put the tormenting thought away, and resolved to do what she could to make the poor old woman more comfortable.

"Mrs. Byrne," she said gently, "would you like anything to drink?"

"Aye," was the feeble answer. "I would, alanna. I'd give the world for a cup o' tea."

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"I'll make you some tea," cried Molly joyfully. She was delighted to find there was something she could do, and also thought it a good sign that Mrs. Byrne was able to take a cup of tea.

She ran into the kitchen, which she found in fearful disorder, for the old woman had been too unwell for some days to attend to her ordinary duties. The grate and fender overflowed with cinders, every cup and plate on the dresser was either dirty or had something in it, there was no water in the kettle, no wood for lighting the fire.

Molly gave a sigh of despair as she looked round; but she could not waste time in lamenting, and went peering about until she discovered everything she wanted. There was a tub in one corner full of clean water, some chips and coal in an old box behind the

door, and a box of matches on the chimney-piece. Molly scraped out the cinders with a stick—for she could not find the poker—and after one or two attempts succeeded in lighting a nice little fire. Then she filled the kettle, and while it was boiling washed a cup and saucer, cleaned the tea-pot—which was filled almost to the brim with tea leaves—and found some sugar, and—joy! in one of the jugs a little milk which was not sour.

In due time a very nice cup of tea was pre-

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pared and brought to Mrs. Byrne; but a dreadful disappointment awaited them both—the poor woman could not raise her head to drink it. Molly could not lift her, and though she tried to feed her with a spoon, very little tea went down Mrs. Byrne's throat, and a great deal was spilt about the bed.

The old woman began to groan again almost more loudly than before, partly with disappointment and partly because her efforts to move had increased her pain. Molly stood by, with difficulty preventing herself from crying, while poor Mrs. Byrne moaned and murmured, sometimes prayers and sometimes lamentations.

"Isn't it the wicked old woman I am to be complainin' that way?" she gasped at last. "What call have I to be murmurin' when it's the Lord's will to chastise me? God forgive me! I'm a rale bad woman."

"Oh, Mrs. Byrne, God isn't like that," said Molly, almost sobbing. "God's so kind. He wouldn't be angry with you for moaning when your pain's so bad. He knows you can't help it."

"Bless you for that word, acushla! Will ye say a little weeny prayer for me? I can't pray right meself when the pain takes me that way."

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Molly knelt down and prayed, saying over and over again:

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*"Please, dear God, make Mrs. Byrne better. Please take away her bad pain and don't let her die."*

A sudden thought struck her as she rose to her feet again.

"I know what to do!" she cried. "I know how you'll be able to take your tea. I remember a way."

She ran into the next room, poured out the remainder of the tea in the tea-pot and carefully removed the leaves; then she put into it the cup of tea she had already prepared, which was now neither too hot nor too cold.

"See!" she exclaimed triumphantly, "you can suck the tea through the spout. When Mama was ill once she had a little cup with a spout like this, and used to drink soup and things without raising her head."

Mrs. Byrne gladly drank the tea, which she declared refreshed her very much, and then Molly considered what else she could do to make her more at ease. The poor old woman had, as we know, thrown herself on her bed on the preceding day all dressed as she was. Her feet stuck out from under the blankets now

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in thick laced boots. Molly proceeded to take these boots off, and managed to arrange the coverings more comfortably. Then she put a little warm water in a basin, and hunted about until she found a couple of large old handkerchiefs—Mrs. Byrne did not seem to have any towels,—with which she washed and wiped her patient's face and hands. She had finished feeding the hens and goats, and was thinking about sweeping out the kitchen, when at last the neighbour arrived, and after questioning Molly, and approving very much of all she had done, told the little girl she might run home.

Molly met Dick half-way between Mrs. Byrne's and The Withies. He had returned to the farm expecting to find her there after he had seen the doctor, who promised to call on Mrs. Byrne that morning as soon as he had attended to a particularly urgent case. Dick had had no idea that Molly would have been kept at her post so long, and was just sallying forth in search of her when they met.



Mrs. Byrne's illness turned out to be an acute attack of rheumatism, from which she presently recovered. Mrs. Dickenson was very good-natured in sending her food and going to see her. The children often went to see her too, and

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as the old woman grew stronger she looked forward to their visit as the pleasantest event of the day. Molly was her special darling, and she often declared she would never forget her kindness on the day when she was left in charge of her. Some of the village people heard the story too, and one or two of them praised Molly to her face in a way which made her feel bashful and a little annoyed.

"I wish they wouldn't make such a fuss," she observed to Dick. "Anyone else would have done just the same if they were big enough. One only has to think."

Now that was a very true remark of Molly's.

If children think, and keep their eyes open, they can be very useful in emergencies—quite as useful as anybody else. But they must use their wits, and must never attempt things which they are not quite certain of being able to do.

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## CHAPTER IX

### TOBY GETS INTO TROUBLE

THE days passed very quickly and very happily, and the Burtons had been nearly three weeks at the farm before they had fully realized that they were settled there.

One morning on coming downstairs after breakfast, Dick discovered that Toby was missing. He had left him seated on the doorstep, just for one moment, while he went to fetch his cap, and when he returned no Toby was to be seen. Poor Dick's anxiety was extreme. He imagined every kind of misfortune which could possibly have befallen his pet. Toby might have been stolen—could any unprincipled person indeed that saw him, resist the temptation of becoming possessed of such a handsome and uncommon specimen of a pug? Toby might have fallen down the well—he might have suddenly

gone mad, and be at that moment pursued by a band of ruffians thirsting for his

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blood—there was no end to the horrible fears which came to poor little Dick, and great was his relief when one of the farm lads informed him that he had seen Toby hunting about in Woodham Park.

"I shouted an' whistled, but it weren't no use," added the boy. "He went on snuffin' about with his tail cocked real knowin,' an' I couldn't leave th' 'orse, so I had to let him be. But if any o' th' keepers ketches him, they'll give it him 'ot."

Dick started off immediately in search of his favourite, tormented by a new dread; and feeling very nervous when he had scaled the low wall which bounded the demesne lest he too might be caught by one of the keepers and "get it hot" for trespassing.

There was a big black board staring him in the face in the very plantation which he had entered, which announced that "Trespassers would be *Persecuted*"—so Dick read it. He could really read very well, but sometimes got a long word a little twisted when he was in a hurry. This seemed an alarming sort of notice, and Dick felt shaky and queer at every sudden noise; his conscience was rather distressed too, and yet it could not be wrong to try and find Toby. He must get his pet back, and besides, the

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longer the dog remained hunting about, the more mischief he would probably do.

Mischief indeed! Would you like to know the little amusements in which Master Toby had been indulging on this particular morning? First of all he had chased the sheep till he was out of breath, and they, poor old things, were nearly in fits. He didn't mean to worry them, you know, but thought it great fun to see their flurry and alarm, so just ran at their heels, barking and snapping at them, till, as I say, he was exhausted.

Then, having got his wind again, he took to the woods and hunted about—as the farm boy had seen—till a poor innocent little bunny-rabbit crossed his path. Off went

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Toby and away flew the bunny with a whisk of his little white tail; and in and out of the bushes ran they, till Bunny popped down a hole and Toby was left to bark, and to sniff, and to scratch outside. After vainly endeavouring to squeeze himself into the hole, and—still more vainly—to dig the rabbit out, and covering his nose and his tongue and his eyes with earth till he made himself such an object that his own mother wouldn't have known him, Toby gave it up as a bad job.

He was just thinking of going home to see

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if it were dinner-time, when lo and behold! he chanced to spy some nice little slate-coloured pens all set out in rows in a sort of clearing in the wood, and some nice little brownish chicks running about in front of them. This *was* exciting! Toby thought he would like to see the little brown chicks nearer, and with a dash and a rush and a scamper found himself in the midst of them, and discovered to his great delight that they could not only run very fast but fly quite well. Inside the pens were some matronly old hens, which set up a loud cackling and screaming when Toby appeared; but Toby was not in the least troubled at that—the more noise they made the better pleased was he; and as luck would have it, it was about twelve o'clock and all the keepers were at dinner, so the outcry alarmed none of them.

Round and round flew Toby, with his dirty, little, earthy tongue hanging out of his mouth as far as it would go, and his wicked little eyes almost jumping out of his head, and his fine long tail sticking straight out till it looked less like a pug's tail than eye; and away darted the poor baby-pheasants into the wood and among the bushes, till it seemed as if it would be almost a miracle if they were ever collected together again.

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It was at this moment that Dick's pale, horrified face appeared on the scene; he had heard Toby's ecstatic bark and the commotion among the hens, and had run with all the

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speed he could muster to the spot.

He caught hold of Toby as quickly as he could and looked despairingly round. Fluttering hens there were in plenty, but of the hundreds of pretty little brown chicks which had been placidly pecking about a few moments before, scarcely a dozen now remained.

Poor Dick felt for a moment quite stunned. What would become of him? How could he ever make up for the damage that Toby had done? He had no idea of the value of pheasants at this stage, though he knew that at a more advanced one—when they had got as far as the poulterer's shops for instance—they were worth several shillings apiece. Dick's entire wealth consisted of one-and-eleven-pence—what was he to do?

He gave Toby one or two pats on his disreputable nose, and Toby blinked and shut his mouth for about a second, and then opened it again, letting his tongue hang out sideways, and screwing his head round to try if he could possibly catch sight of another pheasant. Clearly he was absolutely impenitent.

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"Oh, Toby, Toby!" said Dick, "how can you be such a bad dog?"

A mist came before his eyes and a queer lump rose in his throat, but he remembered that he was a boy, and so, of course, he couldn't cry. There was a look in his face, all the same, that evidently awakened a vague feeling of remorse in Toby's heart; he scrambled up in Dick's arms and tried to lick his chin.

"It's no use," said the boy; "it's too late to be sorry now, Toby. I shall have to shut you up when we go home, for a punishment, but first we must go and confess what you've done. Otherwise, there will be no chance of ever getting any of the pheasants again."

He left the plantation as quickly as he could made his way up to the Hall, still carrying Toby, and rang the bell with a shaking hand.

The servant who came to the door seemed rather surprised to see this shabbily-dressed small boy who came at this early hour to call on Captain Flynte.

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"Is it anything particular you've come about?" he asked, a trifle superciliously. "The captain is busy just now."

"Yes," said Dick, plucking up his courage. "I've come on business. It's important. I want to see him at once."

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"Oh, indeed!" said the man with exaggerated politeness. "Am I to announce a gentleman on business then, or what name shall I say?"

"You can say Master Burton," returned Dick, polishing his feet vigorously on the mat—"No, no—I was forgetting. You had better say 'Richard Burton' from The Withies."

He followed the man across a tiled hall, and into a "study," where there were guns, and stuffed birds, and deer's heads, and everything you can possibly think of except books.

The servant went up to Captain Flynte, who was sitting at a table reading the paper, and informed him that a boy called Richard Burton who came from The Withies wanted to see him very particularly.

"Come in, little man," said the squire, looking kindly towards Dick, who had paused in the doorway. "Oh, you've got Toby there, I see! You do well to carry him, to keep him out of mischief."

Dick went in and closed the door carefully. His face turned red and white as he faced the captain, and his heart beat so fast that it nearly suffocated him. But he pulled himself together and looked up bravely, like the honest, plucky little boy that he was.

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"I am sorry to say Toby has been in mischief. I came here to tell you about him."

"What has he been doing?" asked the captain smiling. "Hunting rabbits?"

"Worse than that," sighed poor Dick.

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"Chasing my sheep?" said Captain Flynte, looking grave all at once.

"Oh, *much* worse than that—though I daresay he did that too," answered Dick, remembering that the sheep in the park had looked very much huddled together when he passed them. "I—don't know how to tell you." He paused for a second to choke down the lump in his throat, and then blurted out "He's been at the pheasants—the little ones in the wood. I don't think he killed any, but he frightened them so they've all gone away. I thought I'd better tell you at once, so I came here as fast as I could—"

"Wait a bit," cried the squire, rushing out of the room, and in another minute Dick saw him pass the window, without a hat and at full speed.

The squire was an extremely kind and nice man, but pheasants were pheasants, and it was no joke to have them all destroyed just for Mr. Toby's amusement, so his face wore an expression of extreme annoyance just then.

Dick stood there with his little cap in his hand

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and Toby under his arm for a long time; and at last, feeling very tired and miserable, sat down on the corner of a chair. What would Captain Flynte do to him and Toby when he came back. He had looked very stern just now. He probably would give Dick a good scolding, and tell him he must pay for the damage his dog had done.

"And quite right too," the boy owned to himself. "I ought to pay if only I had the money—and if Papa knew he would pay every farthing though he is so poor. Oh, what shall I do if he is told!"

Visions of his father starving and slaving to pay his—or rather Toby's—debts rose before him now, and poor Dick sobbed, and wiped his eyes on his coat-cuffs, and presently was obliged to get out a certain object, which anyone who saw its inky, painty, earthy condition would at once recognize as a little boy's pocket handkerchief. He restored it to his pocket very quickly, and sat up very straight when he saw Captain Flynte at last coming back again at a more leisurely pace, and with a milder expression on his face.

"Well, young man," he observed as he ret entered the study, "you have led us a nice dance—you and your dog. However, I ought not to

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scold you, as I suppose it is my own fault for giving you the dog."

"Oh, no, no I it is my fault for not looking after him," said Dick. "But I promise you that I'll never, never let him get loose again unless I'm with him. Please let me keep him."

"All right I" said Captain Flynte good-naturedly. "Don't be so unhappy, little man. You look after your precious Toby, and keep him out of the keepers' way, though,—I won't answer for them. You were a good boy to come and tell me at once, otherwise we might have lost numbers of the young pheasants. As it was we have managed to get back most of them—there were not many missing when I left just now."

"Oh, I *am* so glad!" exclaimed Dick fervently. "Please—I was just thinking—would you would you let me pay for the pheasants that are lost, by degrees? I've only got one-and-eleven-pence just now—Papa can't afford to give us much pocket-money—but I thought I might work it out. There's a man at The Withies who owes Mr. Dickenson some money, and he's working it out, so please will you let me do the same? There are lots of things I could do about the garden, or I could do lightish farm work, you know—May I?"

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Captain Flynte leaned back in his chair looking at him with a half smile, without replying.

"You could trust me, I assure you," urged Dick a little tremulously. "You don't know me, of course, but still—"

"I beg your pardon," interrupted the other, "I do know you very well—you're the boy who has left off being a gentleman." He was smiling now, openly, and suddenly



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stretched out his hand.

"Come here, old fellow," he said; "shake hands. I shouldn't mind having a little boy like you, but Providence has only given me a little girl. I daresay your father doesn't object to you. We'll settle about those pheasants another time. Meanwhile, you can get upon my knee—put Toby down, he may lie on the hearth-rug—and we'll have a talk about your father. Let us see, what is his name to begin with?"

"Papa's name's Burton, of course. He's got rather a funny Christian name. It isn't really a Christian name at all. It's Godolphin—they used to call him the Dolphin at Eton."

Captain Flynte quite jumped.

"You don't mean to say you're the son of the old *Dolphin!*" he said. "Why, we were at Eton together—at the same house! I believe it was I

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who originally gave him his nickname. He was my greatest chum—I often regretted having lost sight of him—but we never met after I went to Sandhurst. So you are the Dolphin's boy! No wonder you are a jolly little chap."

Dick looked up, delighted and surprised at this discovery.

"How pleased Papa will be!" he cried. "I wonder he didn't know you were a friend of his."

"He would not recognize me under the name of Flynte," returned the squire. "My name was Davis when he knew me—it wasn't till I came into this property some years ago that I took the name of Flynte, which was the condition on which my cousin left it to me. I used to call myself Flynte-Davis for some time, but now I've dropped the Davis altogether—the compound name was such a mouthful. But what a queer thing life is, youngster, and how many ups and downs there are in it! I had hardly a sixpence when I knew your father, and we all thought him as rich as a Jew."

"And now you're rich, and he's poor," observed Dick.

"I want to hear about that," said Captain Flynte. "How did your father become poor?"

I can't understand it at all."

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Dick did not understand it thoroughly himself, but he explained it as well as he could, and gave such a graphic description of their "reduced circumstances" that the captain was sorely distressed and perturbed, though he did not show it.

He sent Dick away presently, with many kind words and a large piece of cake. "Lily's coming back to-day," he said as the boy was departing, "so I expect you all to come to tea to-morrow. Remember that. Come early and have a good romp."

Left to himself, Captain Flynte pursued his meditation on the "ups and downs" of life. "Poor old Burton! to think that he should have come to this. Grinding away his life in some poky office—and his wife and children in the slums! I must look him up, though, and see if we can't do something for him."

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## CHAPTER X

### "FAIRY BLUE WINGS."

THREE happy but very shy little people set out for Woodham Hall at three o'clock on the following afternoon. Their shyness vanished, however, when Lily came scampering across the grass to meet them, followed at a more leisurely pace by her mother.

Mrs. Flynte was a very pretty little lady, small and slender, with fair hair and dark eyes like Lily's. She had little dainty ways that were very like Lily's too, and her dress, though it was made of quite simple materials, was somehow as perfect as a dress could be.

She kissed the children and talked to them so kindly that they were soon altogether at ease, and then she sat down again in the easy-chair from which she had just risen, and the little people scampered hither and thither about the pleasure-grounds and

shrubberies.

The pleasure-grounds at Woodham were charm-

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ing: they might have been arranged on purpose to delight children. There were smooth green terraces, and closely-clipped yew hedges, and narrow borders winding in and out and glowing with flowers. There were bowers and statues and fountains—and in one or two of the fountains gold-fish swam about. Some lovely butterflies came and rested on the flowers a moment and then flew away, and the children ran after them with their hats in their hands, making believe they were going to catch them. They did not succeed—I don't think they really tried very hard, you know—which was all the better for the butterflies.

"I had a chrysalis once in a glass box," said Lily to Bee, as they paused for breath. "It turned into such a lovely butterfly in the end."

"What's a chrysalis?" asked Bee.

"Don't you know what a chrysalis is?" cried Lily, charmed at being able to impart knowledge. "No, no—let *me* tell—" as Dick and Molly were hastening to correct their sister's ignorance. "You know what a butterfly is, don't you?"—turning to Bee with a wise expression.

"Of course I know that," a little impatiently.

"Well, after a butterfly has been flying about

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a bit it lays eggs, and what do you think come out of the eggs?"

"Butterflies of course," cried Bee, still impatiently. "Of course I know that too."

"But it isn't 'of course,'" replied Lily with an ecstatic little caper. "I knew you'd say that—it's just what I said! No—guess again. It isn't butterflies."

"But it must be," urged Bee almost tearfully. "They must be butterflies if they came

out of butterflies' eggs. Birds come out of birds' eggs."

"Yes, but sometimes hens hatch out ducklings," said Dick mischievously. "How do you explain that?"

"You shouldn't laugh at me!" cried Bee, getting very red. "The hens don't lay the ducks' eggs—I know that very well. They only hatch them by mistake because they think they are their own."

"Well, I'll tell you," said Lily importantly. "Little caterpillars come out of the butterflies' eggs, and after they've lived a little time, crawling about and eating leaves and things, they roll themselves up and get hard and scaly, and seem just as if they were dead; then they are chrysalises. And after they have been like that for a

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bit, the scaly stuff all cracks and goes to pieces, and out come lovely butterflies."

Bee was astonished.

"I never knew that before!" she cried.

"I daresay," said Lily. "Even I didn't know till this year. It was when I found a chrysalis and thought it a queer little bit of stick that Mama 'splained. I remember, because it made her think of such a funny story after—a fairy story. Do you like fairy stories?"

The children one and all declared their passion for them, and Lily proposed asking her mother to relate this particular one, which she was sure they would all think "lovely."

Mrs. Flynte consented, being rather glad that they should be a little quiet before tea; and began her story straightway, after the manner of a person who is thoroughly accustomed to such exercises.

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"Once upon a time there was a little girl who had a great many good points, and one very bad one: and this bad point was forgetfulness.

"She was always in the moon. I don't mean to say that she lived there altogether, but her wits did. She did not do what she was told, because she generally forgot; she got into trouble

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with her lessons, because sometimes she forgot what it was she was supposed to learn, and sometimes she forgot what she did learn; she forgot to put her books and toys away, and got bad marks for being untidy; she forgot to shut the door after her when she came into a room, and was scolded when it banged. She forgot to give messages, she forgot to post letters, she forgot to wipe her feet on the mat—her governess sometimes said that if her head were loose she would forget *it*; but I think that must have been an exaggeration, for I am sure Lotty—that was the little girl's name—would have felt it so inconvenient to be without a head, that she would have remembered to put it on in the morning."

"Oh, Mama!" said Lily. "How horrid!"

"She'd die if she had no head," added Bee seriously.

"Well," pursued Mrs. Flynte, "one day Lotty was learning a punishment-lesson that had been given her for forgetting three days running to come in in time for tea. While she was sitting with her book in her hand her wits were in the moon as usual, and so she took five times as long, as she need have done over this task.

"'Dear me!' she sighed at last, 'what a mis-

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fortune it is to have such a bad memory! I think I know it now, but I'm sure I'll forget it before it's time to say it. I wish there were fairies to work for one and help one as they used to do. But there are no such things as fairies now. Heigho!' and she sighed again.

"Don't be too sure,' said a voice near her.

"Lotty started, and looked eagerly about the room. Nothing was to be seen but a little blue butterfly which was fluttering round and round over her head.

"What a goose I am!' exclaimed Lotty. 'Nothing wonderful ever happens now.'

"Don't be too sure, Lotty,' said the little voice again, and the blue butterfly darted down and perched on her finger. And lo and behold! It wasn't a butterfly at all: it was a fairy—the most beautiful delicate little creature you can imagine! She was about an inch high, with a lovely face and golden hair, and a shining gossamer robe, and a pair of wings that seemed to sparkle like diamonds and yet were as blue as the summer sky.

"Don't be too sure,' said the little fairy for the third time, 'that nothing wonderful happens now, or that there are no such things as fairies. What do you think of me, I wonder?'

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"I think you are lovely!' cried Lotty in an ecstasy of delight.

"The fairy was just going to make a little curtsy when a frown came over her face, and she gathered up her gauzy skirts in her tiny hands.

"Dear me, what a dirty finger you've got, child; it's hardly fit to stand on!"

"I forgot to wash my hands before tea,' muttered Lotty, much ashamed.

"So I should think,' said the fairy, walking slowly along Lotty's finger, still holding up her skirts and picking her steps as though it were a very muddy road. 'Here are ink stains and earth stains, and—actually marmalade! Why, you haven't had marmalade since breakfast, Lotty,—how do your fingers come to be smeared with it now?'

"I forgot to wash my hands before dinner,' returned Lotty, hanging her head.

"Oh, indeed?' said the fairy. 'Dirty girl!'

"Lotty was so much overcome at this reprimand that a great tear came rolling down her cheek and fell on her hand, splashing the fairy's robe. You should have seen how little Blue Wings jumped and fluttered and shook herself—like a canary-bird after its bath.

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"Pray don't do that!" she cried, 'you'll spoil my clothes, and we fairies don't like to look draggled-tailed. Where's your handkerchief?'

"Haven't got one,' murmured Lotty with a great sniff. 'I left it in my garden and forgot it.'

"There was a moment's silence while the fairy looked all round the room.

"In the middle of the table was Lotty's paintbox, wide open; and near it her painting-book. The pictures were very neatly coloured, but she had upset a glass of dirty, painty water all over them and forgotten to wipe it off, so that they were quite spoilt. Her brushes too were stiff with paint: she had forgotten to rinse them. All her lesson-books were scattered about, her doll lay half-undressed face downwards on the hearth-rug, the front of her dolls' house was wide open and the furniture was tumbled in a heap on the floor, so that the first person who came in would probably tread on and break half of it.

"The fairy sighed.

"My poor child!" she said seriously, 'it is well for you that there *are* fairies nowadays willing to work and help careless human beings. You want my help badly. Now look here, I'll undertake to do all your work for you, to tidy

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your rooms, to make you remember your lessons, to fold up your clothes, and to keep you quite free from any scoldings or punishments, on one condition.

"Oh, what is that?' cried Lotty. 'I'll give you anything! I'll do anything!'

"When we fairies live among mortals, we are obliged to eat ordinary food,' said Blue Wings. 'Nectar of course is what we naturally live on, but I fancy you would find it difficult to supply us with nectar, you poor gross creatures! Still we must have some kind of food, for if we are allowed to starve dreadful misfortune comes on us. Fairies can't die, you know, but we lose all our power for a hundred years. Now, if I agree to live with you and help you, you must promise faithfully to remember every day to put a



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little crumb of cake, a little lump of sugar, and a little cup of water in your dolls' house for me. If you forget this—if you are ungrateful enough to forget this—you will make me a miserable useless fairy for a hundred years.'

"Oh, dear Blue Wings,' cried Lotty, 'I promise faithfully that I will never, never, never forget! I couldn't forget such a little thing! I couldn't be so wicked.'

"Very well, Lotty,' said the fairy; 'remember

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I place myself in your power now. I run a great risk, but I trust you."

"Oh, she didn't forget, did she?" interrupted Bee, almost in tears. "Please don't make her forget!"

"Hush-sh-sh!" cried the other children, while Lily nodded in an encouraging way at her little friend, as much as to assure her that it would be all right.

"The first thing Blue Wings did," went on Mrs. Flynte, "was to tidy Lotty's school-room. She flew backwards and forwards over the table, and the books immediately arranged themselves in neat heaps; she hovered over the paint-box, waving her hands and making mysterious signs, and the lids closed and the brushes cleansed themselves, and the pictures became suddenly dry. Then she took the doll by the hand and turned her over her fairy power made her wonderfully strong and in two minutes she had dressed her and placed her in her little chair. There was a great deal of fluttering backwards and forwards between the dolls' house and the floor, but at last all the furniture was restored to its place, and the fairy sat down on one of the little chairs, fanning herself with her wings.

"I shall live in this hall,' she remarked after

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a pause, looking round it. 'It's the only room in your dolls' house that I can get in and out of comfortably, because it has a real door. I have put a bed here for myself, you see, and

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everything I want. And there is my little cup and plate. Whatever you do don't forget to keep them filled for me. Now, my dear, while I am resting you can just say your punishment-lesson to me to see if you know it.'

"Lotty began—once, twice, three times stumbled, and at last stopped.

"This won't do at all,' said Blue Wings.

"I knew I'd forget it,' sighed Lotty

"Let's see,' went on the fairy. 'What were you thinking of when you learned it?'

"My lesson, of course!' said Lotty.

"You think you were, but you were not,' returned Blue Wings severely. 'You were wondering half the time if you might have a ride on your donkey to-morrow; and then you imagined you were stroking his ears; and then you began to wonder whether roses or geraniums would look best in his bridle. Ha! you can't deceive me, you see! Now, just sit down and read that lesson over three times, and think of every word of it, and nothing else, and then come and repeat it to me.'

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'Lotty obeyed; this time her lesson was repeated without a mistake.

"Now,' said the fairy. 'It's time to get ready for tea. I shall always tell you in future when it's time to get ready, and remind you of the other things you forget.'

"She flew three times round Lotty's head, touching her ears gently each time she passed.

"Now, no matter where you may be you will always be able to hear my voice,' she said. 'There is only one thing I must not remind you of, and that you must remember yourself—to supply me with food. You will not often see me, you know,' she added. 'I generally prefer to be invisible; but you'll know I'm there, and you must never forget me.'

"Lotty ran quickly for the cake and sugar and water; and then she got ready for tea, after which her governess desired her to repeat her lesson. Good marks, words of praise, and rewards were given her for all she had to do that evening, and she went to bed the

happiest little girl in the world.

"Next morning she woke up, thinking it must all have been a dream; but no! There were her clothes neatly folded up on the chair beside her bed, instead of lying in an untidy heap on

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the floor—there were her handkerchief, ribbons, sash, and all the little odds and ends which she could never find as a rule, put ready for her on her dressing-table. In the school-room, books, slate, and copy-books were all prepared; ink-stand, pens, and paper in their places; toys laid tidily on one side. Lotty peeped into the dolls' house;—the cake and sugar were gone and the little cup empty. She ran off quickly for a fresh supply, and after she had placed it on the tiny table looked about eagerly for Blue Wings. No trace of her was to be seen, but presently a little voice sounded in Lotty's ear so sharply that she quite jumped.

"You'll be late for breakfast, Lotty,—you'll get a bad mark, make haste, make haste!"

"Oh, thank you, dear little Fairy!" cried Lotty, hurrying out of the room. But as she did so the little voice came again:

"Shut the door, Lotty. Lotty! Shut—the door!"

"Lotty shut the door obediently, and trotted down to the dining-room, to receive fresh smiles and more praise for her tidiness and punctuality. This was nice. She came in in good time for her lessons (reminded by Blue Wings), and got through all her tasks very creditably, the fairy's

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little voice recalling her whenever she was inclined to go into the moon.

"You are not thinking of what you are reading,' she would say. 'You are not attending to your sum. Don't say four and five are *seven*, you foolish child. Look here'—and two wee little hands suddenly appeared hovering in the air close to Lotty's eyes.

'How many fingers of this hand do I hold up?'

"Five,' answered Lotty out loud.

"What do you say, my dear?' said her governess, looking round in surprise.

"Lotty did not answer, and the fairy went on: 'Now how many fingers of this hand?'

"Four,' said Lotty, this time in a whisper.

"Count them all together then, goosey.

"The child obeyed, and then the little hands vigorously rubbed out her stupid 'seven,' and vanished as soon as Lotty had put down a nine. "

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## CHAPTER XI

### "FAIRY BLUE WINGS" (*continued*)

WELL, the compact was kept faithfully for some weeks; no one could understand the change in Lotty, and she herself was as happy as the day was long. No scoldings, no punishments—nothing but praise, caresses, and rewards. But now comes the sad part of the story—"

"Oh, she's going to be naughty!" cried Bee. "I know she's going to be naughty. I don't like it—I don't like it!" And she fell to shaking her head vigorously.

Mrs. Flynte smiled. "You must wait till the end of the story before you can tell if you like it or not," she said. "Well, one day Lotty received a beautiful doll for a present. It was a wax doll, nearly as big as a real baby, and it had real baby's clothes. Lotty dressed it and undressed it, and made believe to wash it, and carried it about almost from morning till night.

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She began to grumble at having to look after Fairy Blue Wings every day—it was such a bother to have to go and fill the little cup, and ask for a lump of sugar, and hunt up a bit of cake, just when she most wanted to play with dolly. One day she had what

she thought was a bright idea. She put a whole slice of cake and half a sugar-bowl full of sugar in the dolls' house, and filled the dolls' bath with water.

"Now I shall have a little peace!" she said.

"So she played away with her wax baby as much as she liked, and never looked near the dolls' house; and still poor little Blue Wings tidied her rooms, and got ready her books, and helped her with her lessons, and reminded her of her duties just as before.

"One day, however, to her great surprise, when she came in for lessons, she received a scolding.

"You are twenty minutes late, Lotty," said her governess severely.

"Nasty little Blue Wings, why didn't you call me?" grumbled Lotty.

"I could not make you hear my voice," murmured Blue Wings, very faintly.

'And, Lotty,' went on her governess, 'you

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have left all your books about, and the inkstand lying open, and your new pen is rusty with ink. I hope you are not going to fall back into your untidy ways.'

"Blue Wings," whispered Lotty, 'what were you about?'

"I was too weak," murmured the faint little voice. 'Oh, Lotty, Lotty, I am growing weaker and weaker. I can scarcely fly now!'

"As soon as lessons were over and the governess had left the room, Lotty ran to the dolls' house, and saw such a poor miserable-looking little fairy sitting at the table. Alas, and alas! Not a crumb of cake was left, not a scrap of sugar, not a drop of water; Blue Wings turned her head feebly, and looked at Lotty with reproachful eyes, eyes which looked large for her tiny face.

"Oh!" cried the child, bursting into tears. 'Oh, dear Fairy, do forgive me! How wicked and ungrateful I have been! Oh, Blue Wings, my little Blue Wings, I will never, never forget you again!'

"It is not too late yet," whispered the fairy; 'but it is very nearly too late. If you had left me one day more—'

"But Lotty had already flown to get some

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fresh provisions for her friend, and presently had the great delight of seeing her revive. She stretched her tiny limbs and flapped her delicate wings with graceful, dainty little movements, such as you may sometimes notice in a fly after it has been basking in the sunshine.

"Lotty,' she said, 'I wonder how you would like to be fed for a whole week on stale cake, bad water, and sugar at which the mice have been nibbling. I wonder how much work you would do! Yet as long as the wretched food you gave me lasted I worked for you. It was not till you left me to starve that my strength failed. You must be a very strange little girl when you think it too much trouble to find me a few crumbs to eat and a drop of water to drink every day.'

"Lotty cried again, and promised, and protested that she would never, never forget her dear Blue Wings again; and so Blue Wings forgave her, and all went happily once more."

"I am so glad," sighed Bee, drawing a long breath of relief. "Is that the end of the story?"

"No, there is more to come," said Mrs. Flynte; "but you need not listen, you know, unless you like, little woman"

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"May I stop my ears if it comes to the naughty part?" asked Bee, in spite of Molly's scandalized efforts to make her keep quiet.

"Certainly you may," returned Mrs. Flynte, laughing. "You had better begin now, for it is coming."

Bee immediately clapped her chubby hands to her ears, but it was noticeable that, as the story went on, they drooped more and more, and at last fell down altogether.

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"Lotty's good resolutions lasted for some time," went on Mrs. Flynte. "Indeed so good did she become, that not only did she look after the Fairy's comfort attentively, but even tried to please her and to lessen her labours by being less careless and untidy. But—there is a but, I am sorry to say—she soon found this too great a trouble. It was so tiring to put her books away, and so troublesome to fold up her clothes, and so unnecessary to wipe her pen when she would want it again in three or four hours; and, after all, the fairy had promised to do it for her, so why should she fatigue herself? It was fine summer weather now, and Lotty had holidays, so she was out almost from morning till night. She could not always manage, therefore,—or so she said—to give the fairy her food

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at the same time every day. Sometimes she brought it to her so early that the supply of the day before was still unfinished, and at other times so late that poor Blue Wings was almost famishing before it appeared.

At last things came to a climax. She brought the poor little fairy a very small scrap of cake early one morning, but it happened that there was no sugar at hand, and Lotty thought it would do to ask for some later on, and that she might as well put off getting the water for a little too. That day a little friend came to see her, and Lotty played about so much, and was so tired, that when evening came she thought of nothing but bed. Next day there was to be a picnic—how could Lotty remember her faithful little friend amid so much excitement and pleasure? That night too the fairy was forgotten, and on the following morning when Lotty opened her eyes, she saw her clothes lying in a heap on the floor.

"She sprang out of bed immediately, crying 'Blue Wings! dear Blue Wings!' for well she knew that Blue Wings would never have deserted her while she had strength to work. She flew to the dolls' house and flung open the door. There was the little empty plate, the empty cup,



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and on the bed which the fairy used to sleep in lay—a little pair of blue wings!

"Oh, Fairy, Fairy! my dear faithful Fairy! Where are you, where are you?" cried Lotty.

"But there was no answer, the fairy was gone—gone in grief and shame to begin her penance."

There was a sensation amongst all Mrs. Flynte's hearers. Bee drew down her little lip as if she were going to cry, and even Molly blinked very hard, and looked very solemn. But Lily smiled and drew herself up, glancing round complacently, as became one who knew all about it.

"Lotty called for Blue Wings over and over again," continued the story-teller, "and cried bitterly, and besought her forgiveness, but at last, finding that all her entreaties were useless, she sorrowfully took the little blue wings, and hid them away in a glass box where she kept her great treasures.

"Then she went back to her room half broken-hearted. After she was dressed she began to put things in order in her nursery, and returning to the school-room, set to work sadly to perform all the little duties that Blue Wings used to do for her.

"I know it would please you if you were

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here, sweet, dear little Fairy,' she sighed; 'and though you are not here, and will never, never be here again, I will always try to do what would please you.'

"Lotty had received a very severe lesson, and it made a great impression on her. She really did her best to improve herself, and to grow more careful and more thoughtful, and, like all people who try their best, she succeeded. After a little time, indeed, she found it quite easy, and her parents and governess were more pleased with her than ever. She would have been the happiest of children if it were not for the remembrance of all that Blue Wings was suffering through her fault. She could not forgive herself,

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and she could not forget her Fairy friend. Every day she would look at and kiss the little blue wings in her treasure-box, and each time she did so she felt fresh grief and a fresh determination to do better.

"It happened that one night Lotty had a very curious dream. She thought she held in her hand a bunch of apple-blossoms still in bud, and while she looked, the largest bud unfolded and disclosed a tiny, beautiful creature sitting in the middle. 'I am the Queen of the Fairies,' said this little personage, 'and you have been

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such a good child, Lotty, that I have come to ask you if I can grant you any favour.'

"Oh, please your majesty, give dear Blue Wings her fairy power back again!' cried Lotty.

"The little queen frowned.

"Fairy Blue Wings is in banishment,' said she. 'She is rightly punished for her folly in remaining with you after you had once shown that you were not to be trusted. We do not like powerless fairies about our royal court and, therefore, we cannot encourage those who run the risk of losing their rights. Ask me something else, child, something for yourself you have improved so much that I am anxious to reward you.'

"I only want this one thing,' wept Lotty. 'Dear Fairy Queen, do grant me this favour. It is my fault that Blue Wings is in disgrace—I told her she could trust me, and she believed me. Please, please, gracious majesty, forgive her!'

"The Fairy Queen appeared to reflect. After a long pause, she said:

"Well, my dear Lotty, I am willing to consider your petition. If you look in the hollow apple-tree beside the—'

"Miss Lotty, it's time to get up,' said another

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voice in the child's ear; and there was Nurse standing by her bed, and no apple-blossom,

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and no Fairy Queen to be seen anywhere—only the sunshine streaming in through the window, and Lotty's bath waiting for her in the middle of the room. It was nothing but a dream then! Yet Lotty could not get this dream out of her head. As soon as she was dressed she ran to the orchard and carefully examined all the apple-trees. Not one of them was hollow, and there was nothing in the least remarkable about any of them. Still Lotty could not forget the words of the dream-fairy:

"Look in the hollow apple-tree beside the—"

"Beside *what?*" groaned Lotty. 'Oh, dear! If I only knew, if I could only dream about it again!'

"But she couldn't. Every night she tried to think of fairies and apple-trees the last thing before she went to sleep, and she found herself dreaming of new boots, and going to the dentist's, and other uninteresting things.

"It happened that one day her governess asked her whether she would rather play quietly in the garden, or go with her to see a little sick child at the mill. It was very nice in the garden, and Lotty had a new book

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to read, and the road to the mill was very hot and dusty. She hesitated for a moment, and then she remembered the sick child's pleasure when last she had been to see her, and the grateful look of the big blue eyes.

"I'll come with you, please," she said, shutting up her book and getting off the grass.

"The poor little invalid's joy at seeing her rewarded her for the sacrifice.

" 'Eh, miss, it's a real treat to see you,' she said. 'It's so lonely lying here all day, when Mother's busy and can't sit with me. I have nothing to do but look out at the birds flying about in that old apple-tree outside my window.'

"Is it a very old apple-tree?" asked Lotty, with her heart beginning to beat.

"Oh yes, miss, awful old. It's quite hollow inside.'

"May I look at it before I go?" said Lotty eagerly. Could this be what the Fairy Queen had meant: 'The hollow apple-tree beside the mill—beside the sick child's

window?'

"Permission being given, she ran downstairs, and out into the green, old-fashioned mill garden. There stood the tree. It certainly was old. Lotty thrust her hand into the middle, and felt about the hollow place till she got

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hold of something, which she drew out tremblingly. Only a rather large, green chrysalis!"

"Like my chrysalis, you know," remarked Lily, in a loud whisper.

"Lotty was so disappointed that she was almost inclined to throw the thing away; however, after a moment's reflection, she resolved to keep it and see what would happen next. When she got home, therefore, she took down her treasure-box, removed the glass lid, and laid the chrysalis inside. What was her surprise when the little blue wings jumped up (as you may have seen needles jump round a magnet) and formed a kind of arch over it! And then what do you think happened? Something went pop! all at once, and the chrysalis began to crack, and to stretch, and to unfold, until at last it became a tiny green cradle, and who do you suppose lay fast asleep inside? Blue Wings herself!

"Imagine Lotty's joy! When she saw her dear little friend's sweet rosy face she could not contain herself, and screwing up her mouth till it was as small as possible, she dropped the lightest kiss in the world on the sleeping fairy. And then Blue Wings sat up and smiled, and pushed away the green coverings, and stepped

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out of her cradle, her wings falling on to her shoulders as she did so, and remaining there as naturally as if they had never come off, and—well I think that is the end. Lotty was so good now that she didn't want any more help, but the Fairy often came to see her, and—they were happy ever after."

The children wanted to know a great deal more about Lotty and the Fairy, but Mrs.

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Flynte was tired and quite hoarse with so much talking, so they had to imagine the rest for themselves.

Tea was soon announced, which they partook of in a pretty summer-house all overgrown with roses. Lily sat at the head of the table and poured out tea; some of it ran down her sleeve and some more found its way to the table-cloth, but nobody minded such small drawbacks, and as Lily said, she liked to look after "her guests" herself. She certainly did not stint them in the matter of sugar, and in this particular carried out the golden rule of doing as she would be done by.

After tea they all went into the house and explored Lily's nurseries, and were introduced to her lovely toys. There was a rocking-horse which Dick lost his heart to, and a large doll called Margaret, as big as a child of two years

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old, which Bee and Molly hugged alternately, its curly yellow head and goggling blue eyes filling them with admiration.

The day finished by Lily driving them back to the farm in her own donkey-carriage. Hers was a most good-tempered little donkey, but it had a very inquiring mind, and found it necessary to examine any object of interest that they passed by the way; calmly trotting off to right or to left whenever the fancy took it, in spite of Lily's remonstrances, and pausing till it had thoroughly completed its investigations. In spite of these occasional delays, however, they all arrived safe and sound at The Withies; and went to bed quite satisfied with their day.

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## CHAPTER XII

"THEY LIVED HAPPILY EVER AFTER."

NANA," observed Lily that night as her nurse was brushing her hair, "I do wish there was two of me."

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"What *do* you mean, Miss Lily?"

"Well, you see there's three of the little Burtons—two little girl Burtons, and there's only one me. It's very dull being only one. I can't think why Papa and Mama should have such a small family."

"I'm sure sometimes one of you is quite enough, Miss Lily," returned Nana, laughing a little. "I don't know whatever I should do if there were two of you, when you're in one of your wild moods."

"If I was twins, for instance," pursued Lily meditatively. "You know, Nana, I might have been twins—it's a great pity I wasn't. Wouldn't it be fun to have two little girls going to bed

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every night, and two little girls to wash and dress every morning, and two bowls of bread and milk to get ready, and—"

"I am sure, Miss Lily, if you jerk about your head so I shall be glad I haven't got two hairs to do."

"Two hairs!" exclaimed Lily, who was very quick to catch any one tripping. "That would be only one for each of us! Well you are a funny Nana! I should think I have about twenty thousand hairs in my head alone, and if there were two of us that would be forty thousand, and you talk as if we should only have one hair apiece!"

"You are a foolish little girl, Miss Lily," answered Nurse a trifle sharply. "You know quite well I meant two heads of hair. Stand still, please, or I shall never get you to bed to-night."

"Well but, Nana, just answer my question. Wouldn't it be nice if I had a little sister—like that dear little Bee?"

"Yes, indeed it would," said Nurse rather absently, beginning to plait the now smooth yellow locks.

"Wouldn't it be nice if Bee *was* my sister?"

"Yes, Miss Lily; but you see she isn't, so there's

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no use wishing. Now please get into bed—there's a good little girl."

"Nana," said Lily climbing into her cot, and then sitting down and hugging her knees beneath the clothes. "Nana, would you mind asking Mama to come here before she goes to dress for dinner? I've something very particular to say to her. Just tell her that please. Something most particular."

Nana complied after a little persuasion, and presently Mrs. Flynte came in. Lily was still hugging her knees, and her eyes looked very bright and wide awake.

"You are a very good Mama to come so soon,' she remarked. "Now please just sit down, and listen. Mama"—solemnly—"my birthday's coming on, isn't it?"

"I believe it is, darling."

"You know it is," corrected Lily. "Well, do you know what I want for a birthday present?"

"Indeed, my pet, I don't. It will be very hard to think of anything you have not got."

"If I tell you of something I haven't got, will you give it to me?"

"That depends—if it is a nice thing and would be good for you."

"Oh, it is a very nice thing and would be so

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good for me, Mama. It's a little sister—I do so want a little sister, Mama darling. Couldn't you get me one for my birthday?"

"My dear child!" said Mrs. Flynte laughing. "I'm afraid I can't manage that. Children can't have little brothers and sisters whenever they want them—they must wait till God gives them."

"Well but, Mama, I've thought of something. Couldn't you get Bee Burton for a little sister for me? I'm sure she'd like to come and live here; and you know Molly has got Dick, so she wouldn't mind, I daresay, and Bee could be my pair. She is such a duck, and she would be so happy here."



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"But, my dear child, do you really think Bee would like to leave her Mama?"

"Oh, you would be her Mama—she couldn't have any Mama so nice as you."

Mrs. Flynte laughed.

"You think so, my pet, but you may be sure that little Bee is quite as fond of her own mother as you are of me. And even if she were willing to stay here, do you suppose Mrs. Burton would give up her little girl?"

"But Bee's always ill in London," argued Lily. "They live in such a horrid street, Mama, and have no nice nurseries, and no—anything. They

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hardly ever go out for walks except in nasty, dusty streets, and they can never play or have any fun. I should think Mrs. Burton would be very glad to let her stay here. Oh, do please Mama! I should be so happy—I do so want a sister. I am so dull here without anyone."

And Lily, who was a little over-tired and a little over-excited, suddenly burst into a loud wail. Her mother comforted her as well as she could, and reasoned with her, and finally in a calmer frame of mind tucked her up for the night.

It happened that while Mrs. Flynte was dressing for dinner, a sudden thought struck her—an inspiration she called it. Now Mrs. Flynte was one of those little ladies who generally obey their inspirations immediately, so she buttoned her tea-gown very quickly and went downstairs and into the study, her little high-heeled shoes tap-tapping, and her silk skirt going swish-swish all the way.

"Boy-boy," said Mrs. Flynte to Captain Flynte (which was very funny of her, because of course he had left off being a boy years ago; but then, as you know, grown-up people are queer sometimes). "Boy—boy, I've had such a brilliant idea!"

"Let's hear it," said the captain.

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"Isn't dear old Mr. Jenkins going to retire into private life at Leamington or somewhere, as soon as you can find a new agent?"

"I believe he is, poor old fellow! He thinks the work is too much for him now. He's always asking me when I can do without him, but one can't find someone fit for such a responsible post all in a hurry."

"Well, boy, cheer up! I've got an agent for you. I found him just now when I was dressing for dinner."

"You?"

"Yes, I. Should you like to know who he is? He's a very old friend of yours."

"My dear child, what are you talking about?" said Captain Flynte in utter bewilderment.

"Listen, and you'll know all about it. First of all you must go to London to-morrow, and see Godolphin Burton, your old schoolfellow, and the father of the children that were here to-day. He's your new agent. You dear stupid old man, why didn't you think of it before? There is that poor man slaving in the city, and his wife and children starving—or nearly starving—in some horrid back street, and while you are groaning over them and longing to help them, here is an agency going abegging, and a beautiful

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little house all ready, and our poor little Lily crying her eyes out because she has no children to play with, and yet it never occurs to you to put two and two together! Aren't you ashamed of yourself?"

The squire smiled, though for a moment he felt as if his breath were taken away.

"You have only this instant thought of it yourself," he remarked good-humouredly. "And even now we mustn't go too fast. We are not quite sure that Burton would accept the post if it were offered to him."

"Try him!" observed Mrs. Flynte.

"He must be a capital fellow certainly; but still it seems rather funny to ask him to be our agent when he has had no training, and can know nothing about the work."

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"He can learn," cried Mrs. Flynte. "Besides, didn't you say he was brought up in the country? Now, do tell me what requirements are necessary for a land-agent in a place like this? To be an honest man, to know something of country life and country people, and to be able to keep accounts. He has all those qualifications already, and you can teach him anything else he ought to know. So now, please, like a nice old boy,—go and fetch him."

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Next day Captain Flynte went. He generally did whatever his wife asked him, and, besides, after he had got over his first amazement at the suddenness of the idea, he was quite as anxious to carry out the arrangement as she. The thought of the uncomfortable plight of his old friend had troubled him ever since he had heard of it, and he had been casting about in his mind for means to help him without wounding his self-respect. Mrs. Flynte's inspiration had solved the problem, and now there only remained the task to induce Mr. Burton to accept the post.

When the squire found himself in the poky lodging-house sitting-room, which looked so poor and so shabby an abode for the pretty graceful woman who rose to receive him, he felt as if he wanted to carry her off there and then to the pleasant home he designed for her. And when he introduced himself and unfolded his plan, and saw the astonished delight flash into her eyes, tears came into his own, and by the time Mr. Burton came in the two were already fast friends.

It did not take long to 'persuade the latter of the excellence of the project, though at first he felt and expressed some scruples. Captain Flynte overruled them all, and after a happy talk about old times and new, the former school-

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mates parted, more pleased with each other than ever.

How shall I describe the joy of Dick, Molly, and Bee when they heard what was

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going to happen? I don't think I can describe it, but I am sure you can picture it to yourselves.

Their new home was the prettiest home imaginable. An old-fashioned white house standing in the midst of a quaint garden—Mr. Jenkins, the former agent, had been very proud of his garden—and surrounded by fields.

The house was overgrown with roses and creepers, and had gables and funny little dormer windows; and inside there were wide windowseats and little steps up and down, and flowery papers on the walls and chintz-covered furniture. Mrs. Burton had arranged to take over the house, furnished as it was, everything being fresh and in good repair.

The weather was still warm when our friends took possession of it, and the sun was shining brightly on the three little figures who stood by the gate, awaiting the arrival of their parents.

They had walked over from The Withies with Clara, who was to be their servant for a little while till she had put Mrs. Burton "in the way of things;" the children hoped very much she

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would stay altogether, and she was so fond of them that I almost think they persuaded her to do so in the end. Besides Clara, there were a couple of rosy-cheeked girls, as cook and house-maid, who already looked quite at home in their new quarters.

Patch was tethered in one of the fields, with a nice little red cow and a fat pony to keep her company, and Toby stood with his tail well curled, beside his master at the gate.' There came now and then a clucking and quacking of hens and ducks from the adjacent poultry-yard, and Dick and Molly formed many useful projects as they stood side by side.

But when a distant rumble of wheels was heard all the plans and projects were forgotten, even the beautiful new home, and the bewildering happiness of the lire in store for them; they could think of nothing but the fact that Papa and Mama were coming—were here.

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Papa was the first to jump out of the open fly when it arrived. Poor Papa! the three children fell upon him all at once and hugged and kissed him till he was nearly stifled. His head was pulled this way and that, and his hat fell off, and his hair was rumped, and his collar was crushed beyond redemption—but he didn't seem

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to mind. He knew it was all done in the way of affection, and in fact rather liked it than otherwise. And then Mama had her turn, and for a few moments there was scarcely any Mama to be seen; but presently she emerged with very pink cheeks and smiling lips, and they all went into the house together.

There was a rather lop-sided triumphal arch over the door with "Welcome" written in white letters in the middle. These letters were made of daisies strung together, and really looked very pretty. This was Dick's work. In Mrs. Burton's room was a beautiful pin-cushion made by Molly's own little hands, and Bee had written a letter very carefully and put some dried flowers inside.

Perhaps the best of all was when everyone sat down to tea together, and Mr. and Mrs. Burton had time to notice how well the children looked and how much they had grown; and the children were obliged to reach across the table—because manners didn't really matter that evening—and stroke Papa's and Mama's hand, and sometimes even to run round and kiss them—just to make quite sure they were there.

But Mama's happiest moment was when she and Papa came quite late at night to look at the little people when they were all in bed. She

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had missed her children sorely—and so many nights had passed without her being able to kiss them, that her heart felt almost too full as she looked down at the sleeping faces.

"God bless them!" she said; and I think we could not choose a better moment for bidding our little friends farewell than this, when such loving eyes were bent upon



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them, and their mother's blessing mingled with their dreams.

