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LOUISA · M · ALCOTT

Part 3
Chapters 17-24

Chapter 17 – Down at Molly's

"Now, my dears, I've something very curious to tell you, so listen quietly and then I'll give you your dinners," said Molly, addressing the nine cats who came trooping after her as she went into the shed-chamber with a bowl of milk and a plate of scraps in her hands. She had taught them to behave well at meals, so, though their eyes glared and their tails quivered with impatience, they obeyed; and when she put the food on a high shelf and retired to the big basket, the four old cats sat demurely down before her, while the five kits scrambled after her and tumbled into her lap, as if hoping to hasten the desired feast by their innocent gambols.

Granny, Tobias, Mortification, and Molasses were the elders. Granny, a gray old puss, was the mother and grandmother of all the rest. Tobias was her eldest son, and Mortification his brother, so named because he had lost his tail, which affliction depressed his spirits and cast a blight over his young life. Molasses was a yellow cat, the mamma of four of the kits, the fifth being Granny's latest darling. Toddlekins, the little aunt, was the image of her mother, and very sedate even at that early age; Miss Muffet, so called from her dread of spiders, was a timid black and white kit; Beauty, a pretty Maltese, with a serene little face and pink nose; Ragbag, a funny thing, every color that a cat could be; and Scamp, who well deserved his name, for he was the plague of

Miss Bat's life, and Molly's especial pet.

He was now perched on her shoulder, and, as she talked, kept peeping into her face or biting her ear in the most impertinent way, while the others sprawled in her lap or promenaded round the basket rim.

"My friends, something very remarkable has happened: Miss Bat is cleaning house!" and, having made this announcement, Molly leaned back to see how the cats received it, for she insisted that they understood all she said to them.

Tobias stared, Mortification lay down as if it was too much for him, Molasses beat her tail on the floor as if whipping a dusty carpet, and Granny began to purr approvingly. The giddy kits paid no attention, as they did not know what house-cleaning meant, happy little dears!

"I thought you'd like it, Granny, for you are a decent cat, and know what is proper," continued Molly, leaning down to stroke the old puss, who blinked affectionately at her. "I can't imagine what put it into Miss Bat's head. I never said a word, and gave up groaning over the clutter, as I couldn't mend it. I just took care of Boo and myself, and left her to be as untidy as she pleased, and she is a regular old----"

Here Scamp put his paw on her lips because he saw them moving,

but it seemed as if it was to check the disrespectful word just coming out.

"Well, I won't call names; but what shall I do when I see everything in confusion, and she won't let me clear up?" asked Molly, looking round at Scamp, who promptly put the little paw on her eyelid, as if the roll of the blue ball underneath amused him.

"Shut my eyes to it, you mean? I do all I can, but it is hard, when I wish to be nice, and do try; don't I?" asked Molly. But Scamp was ready for her, and began to comb her hair with both paws as he stood on his hind legs to work so busily that Molly laughed and pulled him down, saying, as she cuddled the sly kit.

"You sharp little thing! I know my hair is not neat now, for I've been chasing Boo round the garden to wash him for school. Then Miss Bat threw the parlor carpet out of the window, and I was so surprised I had to run and tell you. Now, what had we better do about it?"

The cats all winked at her, but no one had any advice to offer, except Tobias, who walked to the shelf, and, looking up, uttered a deep, suggestive yowl, which said as plainly as words, "Dinner first and discussion afterward."

"Very well, don't scramble," said Molly, getting up to feed her

pets. First the kits, who rushed at the bowl and thrust their heads in, lapping as if for a wager; then the cats, who each went to one of the four piles of scraps laid round at intervals and placidly ate their meat; while Molly retired to the basket, to ponder over the phenomena taking place in the house.

She could not imagine what had started the old lady. It was not the example of her neighbors, who had beaten carpets and scrubbed paint every spring for years without exciting her to any greater exertion than cleaning a few windows and having a man to clear away the rubbish displayed when the snow melted. Molly never guessed that her own efforts were at the bottom of the change, or knew that a few words not meant for her ear had shamed Miss Bat into action. Coming home from prayer-meeting one dark night, she trotted along behind two old ladies who were gossiping in loud voices, as one was rather deaf, and Miss Bat was both pleased and troubled to hear herself unduly praised.

"I always said Sister Dawes meant well; but she's getting into years, and the care of two children is a good deal for her, with her cooking and her rheumatiz. I don't deny she did neglect 'em for a spell, but she does well by 'em now, and I wouldn't wish to see better-appearing children."

"You've no idee how improved Molly is. She came in to see my girls, and brought her sewing-work, shirts for the boy, and done it as neat and capable as you'd wish to see. She always was a smart child, but dreadful careless," said the other old lady,

evidently much impressed by the change in harum-scarum Molly Loo.

"Being over to Mis Minot's so much has been good for her, and up to Mis Grant's. Girls catch neat ways as quick as they'd o untidy ones, and them wild little tykes often turn out smart women."

"Sister Dawes has done well by them children, and I hope Mr. Bemis sees it. He ought to give her something comfortable to live on when she can't do for him any longer. He can well afford it."

"I haven't a doubt he will. He's a lavish man when he starts to do a thing, but dreadful unobserving, else he'd have seen to matters long ago. Them children was town-talk last fall, and I used to feel as if it was my bounden duty to speak to Miss Dawes. But I never did, fearing I might speak too plain, and hurt her feelings."

"You've spoken plain enough now, and I'm beholden to you, though you'll never know it," said Miss Bat to herself, as she slipped into her own gate, while the gossips trudged on quite unconscious of the listener behind them.

Miss Bat was a worthy old soul in the main, only, like so many of us, she needed rousing up to her duty. She had got the rousing now, and it did her good, for she could not bear to be praised when she had not deserved it. She had watched Molly's efforts with lazy interest, and when the girl gave up meddling with her

affairs, as she called the housekeeping, Miss Bat ceased to oppose her, and let her scrub Boo, mend clothes, and brush her hair as much as she liked. So Molly had worked along without any help from her, running in to Mrs. Pecq for advice, to Merry for comfort, or Mrs. Minot for the higher kind of help one often needs so much. Now Miss Bat found that she was getting the credit and the praise belonging to other people, and it stirred her up to try and deserve a part at least.

"Molly don't want any help about her work or the boy: it's too late for that; but if this house don't get a spring cleaning that will make it shine, my name ain't Bathsheba Dawes," said the old lady, as she put away her bonnet that night, and laid energetic plans for a grand revolution, inspired thereto not only by shame, but by the hint that "Mr. Bemis was a lavish man," as no one knew better than she.

Molly's amazement next day at seeing carpets fly out of window, ancient cobwebs come down, and long-undisturbed closets routed out to the great dismay of moths and mice, has been already confided to the cats, and as she sat there watching them lap and gnaw, she said to herself,

"I don't understand it, but as she never says much to me about my affairs, I won't take any notice till she gets through, then I'll admire everything all I can. It is so pleasant to be praised after you've been trying hard."

She might well say that, for she got very little herself, and her trials had been many, her efforts not always successful, and her reward seemed a long way off. Poor Boo could have sympathized with her, for he had suffered much persecution from his small schoolmates when he appeared with large gray patches on the little brown trousers, where he had worn them out coasting down those too fascinating steps. As he could not see the patches himself, he fancied them invisible, and came home much afflicted by the jeers of his friends. Then Molly tried to make him a new pair out of a sack of her own; but she cut both sides for the same leg, so one was wrong side out. Fondly hoping no one would observe it, she sewed bright buttons wherever they could be put, and sent confiding Boo away in a pair of blue trousers, which were absurdly hunchy behind and buttony before. He came home heart-broken and muddy, having been accidentally tipped into a mud-puddle by two bad boys who felt that such tailoring was an insult to mankind. That roused Molly's spirit, and she begged her father to take the boy and have him properly fitted out, as he was old enough now to be well-dressed, and she wouldn't have him tormented. His attention being called to the trousers, Mr. Bemis had a good laugh over them, and then got Boo a suit which caused him to be the admired of all observers, and to feel as proud as a little peacock.

Cheered by this success, Molly undertook a set of small shirts, and stitched away bravely, though her own summer clothes were in a sad state, and for the first time in her life she cared about what

she should wear.

"I must ask Merry, and maybe father will let me go with her and her mother when they do their shopping, instead of leaving it to Miss Bat, who dresses me like an old woman. Merry knows what is pretty and becoming: I don't," thought Molly, meditating in the bushel basket, with her eyes on her snuff-colored gown and the dark purple bow at the end of the long braid Muffet had been playing with.

Molly was beginning to see that even so small a matter as the choice of colors made a difference in one's appearance, and to wonder why Merry always took such pains to have a blue tie for the gray dress, a rosy one for the brown, and gloves that matched her bonnet ribbons. Merry never wore a locket outside her sack, a gay bow in her hair and soiled cuffs, a smart hat and the braid worn off her skirts. She was exquisitely neat and simple, yet always looked well-dressed and pretty; for her love of beauty taught her what all girls should learn as soon as they begin to care for appearances--that neatness and simplicity are their best ornaments, that good habits are better than fine clothes, and the most elegant manners are the kindest.

All these thoughts were dancing through Molly's head, and when she left her cats, after a general romp in which even decorous Granny allowed her family to play leap-frog over her respectable back, she had made up her mind not to have yellow ribbons on

her summer hat if she got a pink muslin as she had planned, but to finish off Boo's last shirt before she went shopping with Merry.

It rained that evening, and Mr. Bemis had a headache, so he threw himself down upon the lounge after tea for a nap, with his silk handkerchief spread over his face. He did get a nap, and when he waked he lay for a time drowsily listening to the patter of the rain, and another sound which was even more soothing. Putting back a corner of the handkerchief to learn what it was, he saw Molly sitting by the fire with Boo in her lap, rocking and humming as she warmed his little bare feet, having learned to guard against croup by attending to the damp shoes and socks before going to bed. Boo lay with his round face turned up to hers, stroking her cheek while the sleepy blue eyes blinked lovingly at her as she sang her lullaby with a motherly patience sweet to see. They made a pretty little picture, and Mr. Bemis looked at it with pleasure, having a leisure moment in which to discover, as all parents do sooner or later, that his children were growing up.

"Molly is getting to be quite a woman, and very like her mother," thought papa, wiping the eye that peeped, for he had been fond of the pretty wife who died when Boo was born. "Sad loss to them, poor things! But Miss Bat seems to have done well by them. Molly is much improved, and the boy looks finely. She's a good soul, after all"; and Mr. Bemis began to think he had been hasty when he half made up his mind to get a new housekeeper, feeling that burnt steak, weak coffee, and ragged wristbands were sure signs

that Miss Bat's days of usefulness were over.

Molly was singing the lullaby her mother used to sing to her, and her father listened to it silently till Boo was carried away too sleepy for anything but bed. When she came back she sat down to her work, fancying her father still asleep. She had a crimson bow at her throat and one on the newly braided hair, her cuffs were clean, and a white apron hid the shabbiness of the old dress. She looked like a thrifty little housewife as she sat with her basket beside her full of neat white rolls, her spools set forth, and a new pair of scissors shining on the table. There was a sort of charm in watching the busy needle flash to and fro, the anxious pucker of the forehead as she looked to see if the stitches were even, and the expression of intense relief upon her face as she surveyed the finished button-hole with girlish satisfaction. Her father was wide awake and looking at her, thinking, as he did so, "Really the old lady has worked well to change my tomboy into that nice little girl: I wonder how she did it." Then he gave a yawn, pulled off the handkerchief, and said aloud, "What are you making, Molly?" for it struck him that sewing was a new amusement.

"Shirts for Boo, sir. Four, and this is the last," she answered, with pardonable pride, as she held it up and nodded toward the pile in her basket.

"Isn't that a new notion? I thought Miss Bat did the sewing," said

Mr. Bemis, as he smiled at the funny little garment, it looked so like Boo himself.

"No, sir; only yours. I do mine and Boo's. At least, I'm learning how, and Mrs. Pecq says I get on nicely," answered Molly, threading her needle and making a knot in her most capable way.

"I suppose it is time you did learn, for you are getting to be a great girl, and all women should know how to make and mend. You must take a stitch for me now and then: Miss Bat's eyes are not what they were, I find"; and Mr. Bemis looked at his frayed wristband, as if he particularly felt the need of a stitch just then.

"I'd love to, and I guess I could. I can mend gloves; Merry taught me, so I'd better begin on them, if you have any," said Molly, much pleased at being able to do anything for her father, and still more so at being asked.

"There's something to start with"; and he threw her a pair, with nearly every finger ripped.

Molly shook her head over them, but got out her gray silk and fell to work, glad to show how well she could sew.

"What are you smiling about?" asked her father, after a little pause, for his head felt better, and it amused him to question Molly.

"I was thinking about my summer clothes. I must get them before

long, and I'd like to go with Mrs. Grant and learn how to shop, if you are willing."

I thought Miss Bat did that for you.

"She always has, but she gets ugly, cheap things that I don't like. I think I am old enough to choose myself, if there is someone to tell me about prices and the goodness of the stuff. Merry does; and she is only a few months older than I am."

"How old are you, child?" asked her father, feeling as if he had lost his reckoning.

"Fifteen in August"; and Molly looked very proud of the fact.

"So you are! Bless my heart, how the time goes! Well, get what you please; if I'm to have a young lady here, I'd like to have her prettily dressed. It won't offend Miss Bat, will it?"

Molly's eyes sparkled, but she gave a little shrug as she answered, "She won't care. She never troubles herself about me if I let her alone."

"Hey? what? Not trouble herself? If she doesn't, who does?" and Mr. Bemis sat up as if this discovery was more surprising than the other.

"I take care of myself and Boo, and she looks after you. The house goes anyway."

"I should think so! I nearly broke my neck over the parlor sofa in the hall to-night. What is it there for?"

Molly laughed. "That's the joke, sir, Miss Bat is cleaning house, and I'm sure it needs cleaning, for it is years since it was properly done. I thought you might have told her to."

"I've said nothing. Don't like house-cleaning well enough to suggest it. I did think the hall was rather dirty when I dropped my coat and took it up covered with lint. Is she going to upset the whole place?" asked Mr. Bemis, looking alarmed at the prospect.

"I hope so, for I really am ashamed when people come, to have them see the dust and cobwebs, and old carpets and dirty windows," said Molly, with a sigh, though she never had cared a bit till lately.

"Why don't you dust round a little, then? No time to spare from the books and play?"

"I tried, father, but Miss Bat didn't like it, and it was too hard for me alone. If things were once in nice order, I think I could keep them so; for I do want to be neat, and I'm learning as fast as I can."

"It is high time someone took hold, if matters are left as you say. I've just been thinking what a clever woman Miss Bat was, to make such a tidy little girl out of what I used to hear called the greatest tomboy in town, and wondering what I could give the old lady. Now I find you are the one to be thanked, and it is a very pleasant surprise to me."

"Give her the present, please; I'm satisfied, if you like what I've done. It isn't much, and I'd idn't know as you would ever observe any difference. But I'd id try, and now I guess I'm really getting on," said Molly, sewing away with a bright color in her cheeks, for she, too, found it a pleasant surprise to be praised after many failures and few successes.

"You certainly are, my dear. I'll wait till the house-cleaning is over, and then, if we are all alive, I'll see about Miss Bat's reward. Meantime, you go with Mrs. Grant and get whatever you and the boy need, and send the bills to me"; and Mr. Bemis lighted a cigar, as if that matter was settled.

"Oh, thank you, sir! That will be splendid. Merry always has pretty things, and I know you will like me when I get fixed," said Molly, smoothing down her apron, with a little air.

"Seems to me you look very well as you are. Isn't that a pretty enough frock?" asked Mr. Bemis, quite unconscious that his own

unusual interest in his daughter's affairs made her look so bright and winsome.

"This? Why, father, I've worn it all winter, and it's frightfully ugly, and almost in rags. I asked you for a new one a month ago, and you said you'd 'see about it'; but you didn't, so I patched this up as well as I could"; and Molly showed her elbows, feeling that such masculine blindness as this deserved a mild reproof.

"Too bad! Well, go and get half a dozen pretty muslin and gingham things, and be as gay as a butterfly, to make up for it," laughed her father, really touched by the patches and Molly's resignation to the unreliable "I'll see about it," which he recognized as a household word.

Molly clapped her hands, old gloves and all, exclaiming, with girlish delight, "How nice it will seem to have a plenty of new, neat dresses all at once, and be like other girls! Miss Bat always talks about economy, and has no more taste than a--caterpillar." Molly meant to say "cat," but remembering her pets, spared them the insult.

"I think I can afford to dress my girl as well as Grant does his. Get a new hat and coat, child, and any little notions you fancy. Miss Bat's economy isn't the sort I like"; and Mr. Bemis looked at his wristbands again, as if he could sympathize with Molly's elbows.

"At this rate, I shall have more clothes than I know what to do with, after being a rag-bag," thought the girl, in great glee, as she bravely stitched away at the worst glove, while her father smoked silently for a while, feeling that several little matters had escaped his eye which he really ought to "see about."

Presently he went to his desk, but not to bury himself in business papers, as usual, for, after rummaging in several drawers, he took out a small bunch of keys, and sat looking at them with an expression only seen on his face when he looked up at the portrait of a dark-eyed woman hanging in his room. He was a very busy man, but he had a tender place in his heart for his children; and when a look, a few words, a moment's reflection, called his attention to the fact that his little girl was growing up, he found both pride and pleasure in the thought that this young daughter was trying to fill her mother's place, and be a comfort to him, if he would let her.

"Molly, my dear, here is something for you," he said; and when she stood beside him, added, as he put the keys into her hand, keeping both in his own for a minute,

"Those are the keys to your mother's things. I always meant you to have them, when you were old enough to use or care for them. I think you'll fancy this better than any other present, for you are a good child, and very like her."

Something seemed to get into his throat there, and Molly put her

arm round his neck, saying, with a little choke in her own voice, "Thank you, father, I'd rather have this than anything else in the world, and I'll try to be more like her every day, for your sake. He kissed her, then said, as he began to stir his papers about, "I must write some letters. Run off to bed, child. Good-night, my dear, good-night."

Seeing that he wanted to be alone, Molly slipped away, feeling that she had received a very precious gift; for she remembered the dear, dead mother, and had often longed to possess the relics laid away in the one room where order reigned and Miss Bat had no power to meddle. As she slowly undressed, she was not thinking of the pretty new gowns in which she was to be "as gay as a butterfly," but of the half-worn garments waiting for her hands to unfold with a tender touch; and when she fell asleep, with the keys under her pillow and her arms round Boo, a few happy tears on her cheeks seemed to show that, in trying to do the duty which lay nearest her, she had earned a very sweet reward.

So the little missionaries succeeded better in their second attempt than in their first; for, though still very far from being perfect girls, each was slowly learning, in her own way, one of the three lessons all are the better for knowing--that cheerfulness can change misfortune into love and friends; that in ordering one's self aright one helps others to do the same; and that the power of finding beauty in the humblest things makes home happy and life lovely.

Chapter 18 - May Baskets

Spring was late that year, but to Jill it seemed the loveliest she had ever known, for hope was growing green and strong in her own little heart, and all the world looked beautiful. With the help of the brace she could sit up for a short time every day, and when the air was mild enough she was warmly wrapped and allowed to look out at the open window into the garden, where the gold and purple crocuses were coming bravely up, and the snowdrops nodded their delicate heads as if calling to her, "Good day, little sister, come out and play with us, for winter is over and spring is here."

"I wish I could!" thought Jill, as the soft wind kissed a tinge of color into her pale cheeks. "Never mind, they have been shut up in a darker place than I for months, and had no fun at all; I won't fret, but think about July and the seashore while I work."

The job now in hand was May baskets, for it was the custom of the children to hang them on the doors of their friends the night before May-day; and the girls had agreed to supply baskets if the boys would hunt for flowers, much the harder task of the two. Jill had more leisure as well as taste and skill than the other girls, so she amused herself with making a goodly store of pretty baskets of all shapes, sizes, and colors, quite confident that they would be filled, though not a flower had shown its head except a few hardy

dandelions, and here and there a small cluster of saxifrage.

The violets would not open their blue eyes till the sunshine was warmer, the columbines refused to dance with the boisterous east wind, the ferns kept themselves rolled up in their brown flannel jackets, and little Hepatica, with many another spring beauty, hid away in the woods, afraid to venture out, in spite of the eager welcome awaiting them. But the birds had come, punctual as ever, and the bluejays were screaming in the orchard, robins were perking up their heads and tails as they went house-hunting, purple finches in their little red hoods were feasting on the spruce buds, and the faithful chip birds chirped gayly on the grapevine trellis where they had lived all winter, warming their little gray breasts against the southern side of the house when the sun shone, and hiding under the evergreen boughs when the snow fell.

"That tree is a sort of bird's hotel," said Jill, looking out at the tall spruce before her window, every spray now tipped with a soft green. "They all go there to sleep and eat, and it has room for everyone, It is green when other trees die, the wind can't break it, and the snow only makes it look prettier. It sings to me, and nods as if it knew I loved it."

"We might call it 'The Holly Tree Inn,' as some of the cheap eating-houses for poor people are called in the city, as my holly bush grows at its foot for a sign. You can be the landlady, and feed

your feathery customers every day, till the hard times are over," said Mrs. Minot, glad to see the child's enjoyment of the outer world from which she had been shut so long.

Jill liked the fancy, and gladly strewed crumbs on the window ledge for the chippies, who came confidently to eat almost from her hand. She threw out grain for the handsome jays, the jaunty robins, and the neighbors' doves, who came with soft flight to trip about on their pink feet, arching their shining necks as they cooed and pecked. Carrots and cabbage-leaves also flew out of the window for the marauding gray rabbit, last of all Jack's half-dozen, who led him a weary life of it because they would not stay in the Bunny-house, but undermined the garden with their burrows, ate the neighbors' plants, and refused to be caught till all but one ran away, to Jack's great relief. This old fellow camped out for the winter, and seemed to get on very well among the cats and the hens, who shared their stores with him, and he might be seen at all hours of the day and night scampering about the place, or kicking up his heels by moonlight, for he was a desperate poacher.

Jill took great delight in her pretty pensioners, who soon learned to love "The Holly Tree Inn," and to feel that the Bird Room held a caged comrade; for, when it was too cold or wet to open the windows, the doves came and tapped at the pane, the chippies sat on the ledge in plump little bunches as if she were their sunshine, the jays called her in their shrill voices to ring the dinner-bell,

and the robins tilted on the spruce boughs where lunch was always to be had.

The first of May came on Sunday, so all the celebrating must be done on Saturday, which happily proved fair, though too chilly for muslin gowns, paper garlands, and picnics on damp grass. Being a holiday, the boys decided to devote the morning to ball and the afternoon to the flower hunt, while the girls finished the baskets; and in the evening our particular seven were to meet at the Minots to fill them, ready for the closing frolic of hanging on door-handles, ringing bells, and running away.

"Now I must do my Maying, for there will be no more sunshine, and I want to pick my flowers before it is dark. Come, Mammy, you go too," said Jill, as the last sunbeams shone in at the western window where her hyacinths stood that no fostering ray might be lost.

It was rather pathetic to see the once merry girl who used to be the life of the wood-parties now carefully lifting herself from the couch, and, leaning on her mother's strong arm, slowly take the half-dozen steps that made up her little expedition. But she was happy, and stood smiling out at old Bun skipping down the walk, the gold-edged clouds that drew apart so that a sunbeam might give her a good-night kiss as she gathered her long-cherished daisies, primroses, and hyacinths to fill the pretty basket in her hand.

"Who is it for, my deane?" asked her mother, standing behind her as a prop, while the thin fingers did their work so willingly that not~a flower was left.

"For My Lady, of course. Who else would I give my posies to, when I love them so well?" answered Jill, who thought no name too fine for their best friend.

"I fancied it would be for Master Jack," said her mother, wishing the excursion to be a cheerful one.

"I've another for him, but she must have the prettiest. He is going to hang it for me, and ring and run away, and she won't know who it's from till she sees this. She will remember it, for I've been turning and tending it ever so long, to make it bloom to-day. Isn't it a beauty?" and Jill held up her finest hyacinth, which seemed to ring its pale pink bells as if glad to carry its sweet message from a grateful little heart.

"Indeed it is; and you are right to give your best to her. Come away now, you must not stand any longer. Come and rest while I fetch a dish to put the flowers in till you want them"; and Mrs. Pecq turned her round with her small Maying safely done.

"I didn't think I'd ever be able to do even so much, and here I am walking and sitting up, and going to drive some day. Isn't it nice that I'm not to be a poor Lucinda after all?" and Jill drew a long

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sigh of relief that six months instead of twenty years would probably be the end of her captivity.

"Yes, thank Heaven! I don't think I could have borne that"; and the mother took Jill in her arms as if she were a baby, holding her close for a minute, and laying her down with a tender kiss that made the arms cling about her neck as her little girl returned it heartily, for all sorts of new, sweet feelings seemed to be budding in both, born of great joy and thankfulness.

Then Mrs. Pecq hurried away to see about tea for the hungry boys, and Jill watched the pleasant twilight deepen as she lay singing to herself one of the songs her friend taught her because it fitted her so well.

"A little bird I am,
Shut from the fields of air,
And in my cage I sit and sing
To Him who placed me there:
Well pleased a prisoner to be,
Because, my God, it pleases Thee!
"Naught have I else to do;
I sing the whole day long;
And He whom most I love to please
Doth listen to my song,
He caught and bound my wandering wing,
But still He bends to hear me sing."

"Now we are ready for you, so bring on your flowers," said Molly to the boys, as she and Merry added their store of baskets to the gay show Jill had set forth on the long table ready for the evening's work.

"They wouldn't let me see one, but I guess they have had good luck, they look so jolly," answered Jill, looking at Gus, Frank, and Jack, who stood laughing, each with a large basket in his hands.

"Fair to middling. Just look in and see"; with which cheerful remark Gus tipped up his basket and displayed a few bits of green at the bottom.

"I'd id better. Now, don't all scream at once over these beauties"; and Frank shook out some evergreen sprigs, half a dozen saxifrages, and two or three forlorn violets with hardly any stems.

"I don't brag, but here's the best of all the three," chuckled Jack, producing a bunch of feathery carrot-tops, with a few half-shut dandelions trying to look brave and gay.

"Oh, boys, is that all?"

"What shall we do?"

"We've only a few house-flowers, and all those baskets to fill," cried the girls, in despair; for Merry's contribution had been small, and Molly had only a handful of artificial flowers "to fill up," she said.

"It isn't our fault: it is the late spring. We can't make flowers, can we?" asked Frank, in a tone of calm resignation.

"Couldn't you buy some, then?" said Molly, smoothing her crumpled morning-glories, with a sigh.

'Who ever heard of a fellow having any money left the last day of the month?' demanded Gus, severely.

"Or girls either. I spent all mine in ribbon and paper for my baskets, and now they are of no use. It's a shame!" lamented Jill, while Merry began to thin out her full baskets to fill the empty ones.

"Hold on!" cried Frank, relenting. "Now, Jack, make their minds easy before they begin to weep and wail."

"Left the box outside. You tell while I go for it"; and Jack bolted, as if afraid the young ladies might be too demonstrative when the tale was told.

"Tell away," said Frank, modestly passing the story along to Gus, who made short work of it.

"We rampaged all over the country, and got only that small mess of greens. Knew you'd be disgusted, and sat down to see what we could do. Then Jack piped up, and said he'd show us a place where

we could get a plenty. 'Come on,' said we, and after leading us a nice tramp, he brought us out at Morse's greenhouse.

So we got a few on tick, as we had but four cents among us, and there you are. Pretty clever of the little chap, wasn't it?"

A chorus of delight greeted Jack as he popped his head in, was promptly seized by his elders and walked up to the table, where the box was opened, displaying gay posies enough to fill most of the baskets if distributed with great economy and much green.

"You are the dearest boy that ever was!" began Jill, with her nose luxuriously buried in the box, though the flowers were more remarkable for color than perfume.

"No, I'm not; there's a much dearer one coming upstairs now, and he's got something that will make you howl for joy," said Jack, ignoring his own prowess as Ed came in with a bigger box, looking as if he had done nothing but go a Maying all his days.

"Don't believe it!" cried Jill, hugging her own treasure jealously.

"It's only another joke. I won't look," said Molly, still struggling to make her cambric roses bloom again.

"I know what it is! Oh, how sweet!" added Merry, sniffing, as Ed set the box before her, saying pleasantly,

"You shall see first, because you had faith."

Up went the cover, and a whiff of the freshest fragrance regaled the seven eager noses bent to inhale it, as a general murmur of

pleasure greeted the nest of great, rosy mayflowers that lay before them.

"The dear things, how lovely they are!" and Merry looked as if greeting her cousins, so blooming and sweet was her own face.

Molly pushed her dingy garlands away, ashamed of such poor attempts beside these perfect works of nature, and Jill stretched out her hand involuntarily, as she said, forgetting her exotics, "Give me just one to smell of, it is so woodsy and delicious."

"Here you are, plenty for all. Real Pilgrim Fathers, right from Plymouth. One of our fellows lives there, and I told him to bring me a good lot; so he did, and you can do what you like with them," explained Ed, passing round bunches and shaking the rest in a mossy pile upon the table.

"Ed always gets ahead of us in doing the right thing at the right time. Hope you've got some first-class baskets ready for him," said Gus, refreshing the Washingtonian nose with a pink blossom or two.

"Not much danger of his being forgotten," answered Molly; and everyone laughed, for Ed was much beloved by all the girls, and his door-steps always bloomed like a flower-bed on May eve.

"Now we must fly round and fill up. Come, boys, sort out the green and hand us the flowers as we want them. Then we must

direct them, and, by the time that is done, you can go and leave them," said Jill, setting all to work.

"Ed must choose his baskets first. These are ours; but any of those you can have"; and Molly pointed to a detachment of gay baskets, set apart from those already partly filled.

Ed chose a blue one, and Merry filled it with the rosiest may-flowers, knowing that it was to hang on Mabel's door-handle. The others did the same, and the pretty work went on, with much fun, till all were filled, and ready for the names or notes.

"Let us have poetry, as we can't get wild flowers. That will be rather fine," proposed Jill, who liked jingles.

All had had some practice at the game parties, and pencils went briskly for a few minutes, while silence reigned, as the poets racked their brains for rhymes, and stared at the blooming array before them for inspiration.

"Oh, dear! I can't find a word to rhyme to 'geranium,'" sighed Molly, pulling her braid, as if to pump the well of her fancy dry. "Cranium," said Frank, who was getting on bravely with "Annette" and "violet."

"That is elegant!" and Molly scribbled away in great glee, for her poems were always funny ones.

"How do you spell anemoly--the wild flower, I mean?" asked Jill, who was trying to compose a very appropriate piece for her best basket, and found it easier to feel love and gratitude than to put them into verse.

"Anemone; do spell it properly, or you'll get laughed at," answered Gus, wildly struggling to make his lines express great ardor, without being "too spoony," as he expressed it.

"No, I shouldn't. This person never laughs at other persons' mistakes, as some persons do," replied Jill, with dignity.

Jack was desperately chewing his pencil, for he could not get on at all; but Ed had evidently prepared his poem, for his paper was half full already, and Merry was smiling as she wrote a friendly line or two for Ralph's basket, as she feared he would be forgotten, and knew he loved kindness even more than he did beauty.

"Now let's read them," proposed Molly, who loved to laugh even at herself.

The boys politely declined, and scrambled their notes into the chosen baskets in great haste; but the girls were less bashful. Jill was invited to begin, and gave her little piece, with the pink hyacinth basket before her, to illustrate her poem.

"TO MY LADY

"There are no flowers in the fields,

No green leaves on the tree,

No columbines, no violets,

No sweet anemone.

So I have gathered from my pots

All that I have to fill

The basket that I hang to-night,

With heaps of love from Jill."

"That's perfectly sweet! Mine isn't; but I meant it to be funny,"
said Molly, as if there could be any doubt about the following
ditty:

"Dear Grif,

Here is a whiff

Of beautiful spring flowers;

The big red rose

Is for your nose,

As toward the sky it towers.

"Oh, do noi frown

Upon this crown

Of green pinks and blue geranium

But think of me

When this you see,

And put it on your cranium."

"O Molly, you will never hear the last of that if Grif gets it," said Jill, as the applause subsided, for the boys pronounced it "tip-top."

"Don't care, he gets the worst of it anyway, for there is a pin in that rose, and if he goes to smell the mayflowers underneath he will find a thorn to pay for the tack he put in my rubber boot. I know he will play me some joke to-night, and I mean to be first if I can," answered Molly, settling the artificial wreath round the orange-colored canoe which held her effusion.

"Now, Merry, read yours: you always have sweet poems"; and Jill folded her hands to listen with pleasure to something sentimental.

"I can't read the poems in some of mine, because they are for you; but this little verse you can hear, if you like: I'm going to give that basket to Ralph. He said he should hang one for his grandmother, and I thought that was so nice of him, I'd love to surprise him with one all to himself. He's always so good to us"; and Merry looked so innocently earnest that no one smiled at her kind thought or the unconscious paraphrase she had made of a famous stanza in her own "little verse."

"To one who teaches me
The sweetness and the beauty
Of doing faithfully
And cheerfully my duty."

"He will like that, and know who sent it, for none of us have pretty pink paper but you, or write such an elegant hand," said Molly, admiring the delicate white basket shaped like a lily, with the flowers inside and the note hidden among them, all daintily tied up with the palest blush-colored ribbon.

"Well, that's no harm. He likes pretty things as much as I'd o, and I made my basket like a flower because I gave him one of my callas, he admired the shape so much"; and Merry smiled as she remembered how pleased Ralph looked as he went away carrying the lovely thing.

"I think it would be a good plan to hang some baskets on the doors of other people who don't expect or often have any. I'll do it if you can spare some of these, we have so many. Give me only one, and let the others go to old Mrs. Tucker, and the little Irish girl who has been sick so long, and lame Neddy, and Daddy Munson. It would please and surprise them so. Will we?" asked Ed, in that persuasive voice of his.

All agreed at once, and several people were made very happy by a bit of spring left at their doors by the May elves who haunted the

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town that night playing all sorts of pranks. Such a twanging of bells and rapping of knockers; such a scampering of feet in the dark; such droll collisions as boys came racing round corners, or girls ran into one another's arms as they crept up and down steps on the sly; such laughing, whistling, flying about of flowers and friendly feeling--it was almost a pity that May-day did not come oftener.

Molly got home late, and found that Grif had been before her, after all; for she stumbled over a market-basket at her door, and on taking it in found a mammoth nosegay of purple and white cabbages, her favorite vegetable. Even Miss Bat laughed at the funny sight, and Molly resolved to get Ralph to carve her a bouquet out of carrots, beets, and turnips for next time, as Grif would never think of that.

Merry ran up the garden-walk alone, for Frank left her at the gate, and was fumbling for the latch when she felt something hanging there. Opening the door carefully, she found it gay with offerings from her mates; and among them was one long quiver-shaped basket of birch bark, with something heavy under the green leaves that lay at the top. Lifting these, a slender has-relief of a calla lily in plaster appeared, with this couplet slipped into the blue cord by which it was to hang:

"That mercy you to others show
That Mercy Grant to me."

"How lovely! and this one will never fade, but always be a pleasure hanging there. Now, I really have something beautiful all my own," said Merry to herself as she ran up to hang the pretty thing on the dark wainscot of her room, where the graceful curve of its pointed leaves and the depth of its white cup would be a joy to her eyes as long as they lasted.

"I wonder what that means," and Merry read over the lines again, while a soft color came into her cheeks and a little smile of girlish pleasure began to dimple round her lips; for she was so romantic, this touch of sentiment showed her that her friendship was more valued than she dreamed. But she only said, "How glad I am I remembered him, and how surprised he will be to see mayflowers in return for the lily."

He was, and worked away more happily and bravely for the thought of the little friend whose eyes would daily fall on the white flower which always reminded him of her.

Chapter 19 – Good Templars

"Hi there! Bell's rung! Get up, lazy-bones!" called Frank from his room as the clock struck six one bright morning, and a great creaking and stamping proclaimed that he was astir.

"All right, I'm coming," responded a drowsy voice, and Jack turned over as if to obey; but there the effort ended, and he was off again, for growing lads are hard to rouse, as many a mother knows to her sorrow.

Frank made a beginning on his own toilet, and then took a look at his brother, for the stillness was suspicious.

"I thought so! He told me to wake him, and I guess this will do it"; and, filling his great sponge with water, Frank stalked into the next room and stood over the unconscious victim like a stern executioner, glad to unite business with pleasure in this agreeable manner.

A woman would have relented and tried some milder means, for when his broad shoulders and stout limbs were hidden, Jack looked very young and innocent in his sleep. Even Frank paused a moment to look at the round, rosy face, the curly eyelashes, half-open mouth, and the peaceful expression of a dreaming baby. "I must do it, or he won't be ready for breakfast," said the Spartan

brother, and down came the sponge, cold, wet, and choky, as it was briskly rubbed to and fro regardless of every obstacle.

"Come, I say! That's not fair! Leave me alone!" sputtered Jack, hitting out so vigorously that the sponge flew across the room, and Frank fell back to laugh at the indignant sufferer.

"I promised to wake you, and you believe in keeping promises, so I'm doing my best to get you up."

"Well, you needn't pour a quart of water down a fellow's neck, and rub his nose off, need you? I'm awake, so take your old sponge and go along," growled Jack, with one eye open and a mighty gape.

"See that you keep so, then, or I'll come and give you another sort of a rouser," said Frank, retiring well-pleased with his success.

"I shall have one good stretch, if I like. It is strengthening to the muscles, and I'm as stiff as a board with all that football yesterday," murmured Jack, lying down for one delicious moment. He shut the open eye to enjoy it thoroughly, and forgot the stretch altogether, for the bed was warm, the pillow soft, and a half-finished dream still hung about his drowsy brain. Who does not know the fatal charm of that stolen moment--for once yield to it, and one is lost.

Jack was miles away "in the twinkling of a bedpost," and the pleasing dream seemed about to return, when a ruthless hand tore off the clothes, swept him out of bed, and he really did awake to find himself standing in the middle of his bath-pan with both windows open, and Frank about to pour a pail of water over him.

"Hold on! Yah, how cold the water is! Why, I thought I was up"; and, hopping out, Jack rubbed his eyes and looked about with such a genuine surprise that Frank put down the pail, feeling that the deluge would not be needed this time.

"You are now, and I'll see that you keep so," he said, as he stripped the bed and carried off the pillows.

"I don't care. What a jolly day!" and Jack took a little promenade to finish the rousing process.

"You'd better hurry up, or you won't get your chores done before breakfast. No time for a go as you please now, said Frank; and both boys laughed, for it was an old joke of theirs, and rather funny.

Going up to bed one night expecting to find Jack asleep, Frank discovered him tramping round and round the room airily attired in a towel, and so dizzy with his brisk revolutions that as his brother looked he tumbled over and lay panting like a fallen gladiator.

"What on earth are you about?"

"Playing Rowell. Walking for the belt, and I've got it too," laughed Jack, pointing to an old gilt chandelier chain hanging on the bedpost.

"You little noodle, you'd better revolve into bed before you lose your head entirely. I never saw such a fellow for taking himself off his legs."

"Well, if I didn't exercise, do you suppose I should be able to do that--or that?" cried Jack, turning a somersault and striking a fine attitude as he came up, flattering himself that he was the model of a youthful athlete.

"You look more like a clothes-pin than a Hercules," was the crushing reply of this unsympathetic brother, and Jack meekly retired with a bad headache.

"I don't do such silly things now: I'm as broad across the shoulders as you are, and twice as strong on my pins, thanks to my gymnastics. Bet you a cent I'll be dressed first, though you have got the start," said Jack, knowing that Frank always had a protracted wrestle with his collar-buttons, which gave his adversary a great advantage over him.

"Done!" answered Frank, and at it they went. A wild scramble was

heard in Jack's room, and a steady tramp in the other as Frank worked away at the stiff collar and the unaccommodating button till every finger ached. A clashing of boots followed, while Jack whistled "Polly Hopkins," and Frank declaimed in his deepest voice,

"Arma virumque cano, Trojae qui primus ab oris Italiam, fato profugus, Laviniaque venit litora."

Hair-brushes came next, and here Frank got ahead, for Jack's thick crop would stand straight up on the crown, and only a good wetting and a steady brush would make it lie down.

"Play away, No. 2 called out Frank as he put on his vest, while Jack was still at it with a pair of the stiffest brushes procurable for money.

"Hold hard, No. 11, and don't forget your teeth," answered Jack, who had done his.

Frank took a hasty rub and whisked on his coat, while Jack was picking up the various treasures which had flown out of his pockets as he caught up his roundabout.

"Ready! I'll trouble you for a cent, sonny"; and Frank held out his hand as he appeared equipped for the day.

"You haven't hung up your night-gown, nor aired the bed, nor

opened the windows. That's part of the dressing; mother said so. I've got you there, for you did all that for me, except this," and Jack threw his gown over a chair with a triumphant flourish as Frank turned back to leave his room in the order which they had been taught was one of the signs of a good bringing-up in boys as well as girls.

"Ready! I'll trouble you for a cent, old man"; and Jack held out his hand, with a chuckle.

He got the money and a good clap beside; then they retired to the shed to black their boots, after which Frank filled the woodboxes and Jack split kindlings, till the daily allowance was ready. Both went at their lessons for half an hour, Jack scowling over his algebra in the sofa corner, while Frank, with his elbows on and his legs round the little stand which held his books, seemed to be having a wrestling-match with Herodotus.

When the bell rang they were glad to drop the lessons and fall upon their breakfast with the appetite of wolves, especially Jack, who sequestered oatmeal and milk with such rapidity that one would have thought he had a leathern bag hidden somewhere to slip it into, like his famous namesake when he breakfasted with the giant.

"I declare I don't see what he does with it! He really ought not to 'gobble' so, mother," said Frank, who was eating with great

deliberation and propriety.

"Never you mind, old quiddle. I'm so hungry I could tuck away a bushel," answered Jack, emptying a glass of milk and holding out his plate for more mush, regardless of his white moustache.

"Temperance in all things is wise, in speech as well as eating and drinking--remember that, boys," said Mamma from behind the urn.

"That reminds me! We promised to do the 'Observer' this week, and here it is Tuesday and I haven't done a thing: have you?" asked Frank.

"Never thought of it. We must look up some bits at noon instead of playing. Dare say Jill has got some: she always saves all she finds for me."

"I have one or two good items, and can do any copying there may be. But I think if you undertake the paper you should give some time and labor to make it good," said Mamma, who was used to this state of affairs, and often edited the little sheet read every week at the Lodge. The boys seldom missed going, but the busy lady was often unable to be there, so helped with the paper as her share of the labor.

"Yes, we ought, but somehow we don't seem to get up much steam about it lately. If more people belonged, and we could have

a grand time now and then, it would be jolly"; and Jack sighed at the lack of interest felt by outsiders in the loyal little Lodge which went on year after year kept up by the faithful few.

"I remember when in this very town we used to have a Cold Water Army, and in the summer turn out with processions, banners, and bands of music to march about, and end with a picnic, songs, and speeches in some grove or hall. Nearly all the children belonged to it, and the parents also, and we had fine times here twenty-five or thirty years ago."

"It didn't do much good, seems to me, for people still drink, and we haven't a decent hotel in the place," said Frank, as his mother sat looking out of the window as if she saw again the pleasant sight of old and young working together against the great enemy of home peace and safety.

"Oh yes, it did, my dear; for to this day many of those children are true to their pledge. One little girl was, I am sure, and now has two big boys to fight for the reform she has upheld all her life. The town is better than it was in those days, and if we each do our part faithfully, it will improve yet more. Every boy and girl who joins is one gained, perhaps, and your example is the best temperance lecture you can give. Hold fast, and don't mind if it isn't 'jolly': it is right, and that should be enough for us."

Mamma spoke warmly, for she heartily believed in young people's

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guarding against this dangerous vice before it became a temptation, and hoped her boys would never break the pledge they had taken; for, young as they were, they were old enough to see its worth, feel its wisdom, and pride themselves on the promise which was fast growing into a principle. Jack's face brightened as he listened, and Frank said, with the steady look which made his face manly,

"It shall be. Now I'll tell you what I was going to keep as a surprise till to-night, for I wanted to have my secret as well as other folks. Ed and I went up to see Bob, Sunday, and he said he'd join the Lodge, if they'd have him. I'm going to propose him to-night."

"Good! good!" cried Jack, joyfully, and Mrs. Minot clapped her hands, for every new member was rejoiced over by the good people, who were not discouraged by ridicule, indifference, or opposition.

"We've got him now, for no one will object, and it is just the thing for him. He wants to belong somewhere, he says, and he'll enjoy the fun, and the good things will help him, and we will look after him, The Captain was so pleased, and you ought to have seen Ed's face when Bob said, 'I'm ready, if you'll have me.'"

Frank's own face was beaming, and Jack forgot to "gobble," he was so interested in the new Convert, while Mamma said, as she threw down her napkin and took up the newspaper,

"We must not forget our 'Observer,' but have a good one tonight in honor of the occasion. There may be something here. Come home early at noon, and I'll help you get your paper ready."

"I'll be here, but if you want Frank, you'd better tell him not to dawdle over Annette's gate half an hour," began Jack, who could not resist teasing his dignified brother about one of the few foolish things he was fond of doing.

"Do you want your nose pulled?" demanded Frank, who never would stand joking on that tender point from his brother.

"No, I don't; and if I did, you couldn't do it"; with which taunt he was off and Frank after him, having made a futile dive at the impertinent little nose which was turned up at him and his sweetheart.

"Boys, boys, not through the parlor!" implored Mamma, resigned to skirmishes, but trembling for her piano legs as the four stout boots pranced about the table and then went thundering down the hail, through the kitchen where the fat cook cheered them on, and Mary, the maid, tried to head off Frank as Jack rushed out into the garden. But the pursuer ducked under her arm and gave chase with all speed. Then there was a glorious race all over the place; for both were good runners, and, being as full of spring vigor as frisky calves, they did astonishing things in the way of leaping fences, dodging round corners, and making good time down the

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wide walks.

But Jack's leg was not quite strong yet, and he felt that his round nose was in danger of a vengeful tweak as his breath began to give out and Frank's long arms drew nearer and nearer to the threatened feature. Just when he was about to give up and meet his fate like a man, old Bunny, who had been much excited by the race, came scampering across the path with such a droll skip into the air and shake of the hind legs that Frank had to dodge to avoid stepping on him, and to laugh in spite of himself. This momentary check gave Jack a chance to bolt up the back stairs and take refuge in the Bird Room, from the window of which Jill had been watching the race with great interest.

No romping was allowed there, so a truce was made by locking little fingers, and both sat down to get their breath.

"I am to go on the piazza, for an hour, by and by, Doctor said. Would you mind carrying me down before you go to school, you do it so nicely, I'm not a bit afraid," said Jill, as eager for the little change as if it had been a long and varied journey.

"Yes, indeed! Come on, Princess," answered Jack, glad to see her so well and happy.

The boys made an arm-chair, and away she went, for a pleasant day downstairs. She thanked Frank with a posy for his buttonhole,

well knowing that it would soon pass into other hands, and he departed to join Annette. Having told Jill about Bob, and set her to work on the "Observer," Jack kissed his mother, and went whistling down the street, a gay little bachelor, with a nod and smile for all he met, and no turned-up hat or jaunty turban bobbing along beside him to delay his steps or trouble his peace of mind.

At noon they worked on their paper, which was a collection of items, cut from other papers, concerning temperance, a few anecdotes, a bit of poetry, a story, and, if possible, an original article by the editor. Many hands make light work, and nothing remained but a little copying, which Jill promised to do before night. So the boys had time for a game of football after school in the afternoon, which they much enjoyed. As they sat resting on the posts, Gus said,

"Uncle Fred says he will give us a hay-cart ride to-night, as it is moony, and after it you are all to come to our house and have games.

"Can't do it," answered Frank, sadly.

"Lodge," groaned Jack, for both considered a drive in the cart, where they all sat in a merry bunch among the hay, one of the joys of life, and much regretted that a prior engagement would prevent their sharing in it.

That s a pity! I forgot it was Tuesday, and can'tput it off, as I've asked all the rest. Give up your old Lodge and come along," said Gus, who had not joined yet.

"We might for once, perhaps, but I don't like to"--began Jack, hesitating.

"I won't. Who's to propose Bob if we don't? I want to go awfully; but I wouldn't disappoint Bob for a good deal, now he is willing to come." And Frank sprang off his post as if anxious to flee temptation, for it was very pleasant to go singing, up hill and down dale, in the spring moonlight, with--well, the fellows of his set.

"Nor Ed, I forgot that. No, we can't go. We want to be Good Templars, and we mustn't shirk," added Jack, following his brother.

"Better come. Can't put it off. Lots of fun," called Gus, disappointed at losing two of his favorite mates.

But the boys did not turn back, and as they went steadily away they felt that they were doing their little part in the good work, and making their small sacrifices, like faithful members. They got their reward, however, for at home they found Mr. Chauncey, a good and great man, from England, who had known their grandfather, and was an honored friend of the family. The

boys loved to hear him talk, and all tea-time listened with interest to the conversation, for Mr. Chauncey was a reformer as well as a famous clergyman, and it was like inspiring music to hear him tell about the world's work, and the brave men and women who were carrying it on. Eager to show that they had, at least, begun, the boys told him about their Lodge, and were immensely pleased when their guest took from his pocket-book a worn paper, proving that he too was a Good Templar, and belonged to the same army as they did. Nor was that all, for when they reluctantly excused themselves, Mr. Chauncey gave each a hearty "grip," and said, holding their hands in his, as he smiled at the young faces looking up at him with so much love and honor in them,

"Tell the brothers and Sisters that if I can serve them in anyway while here, to command me. I will give them a lecture at their Lodge or in public, whichever they like; and I wish you God-speed, dear boys."

Two prouder lads never walked the streets than Frank and Jack as they hurried away, nearly forgetting the poor little paper in their haste to tell the good news; for it was seldom that such an offer was made the Lodge, and they felt the honor done them as bearers of it.

As the secrets of the association cannot be divulged to the uninitiated, we can only say that there was great rejoicing over the new member, for Bob was unanimously welcomed, and much

gratitude both felt and expressed for Mr. Chauncey's interest in this small division of the grand army; for these good folk met with little sympathy from the great people of the town, and it was very cheering to have a well-known and much-beloved man say a word for them. All agreed that the lecture should be public, that others might share the pleasure with them, and perhaps be converted by a higher eloquence than any they possessed.

So the services that night were unusually full of spirit and good cheer; for all felt the influence of a friendly word, the beauty of a fine example. The paper was much applauded, the songs were very hearty, and when Frank, whose turn it was to be chaplain, read the closing prayer, everyone felt that they had much to give thanks for, since one more had joined them, and the work was slowly getting on with unexpected helpers sent to lend a hand. The lights shone out from the little hall across the street, the music reached the ears of passers-by, and the busy hum of voices up there told how faithfully some, at least, of the villagers tried to make the town a safer place for their boys to grow up in, though the tavern still had its private bar and the saloon-door stood open to invite them in.

There are many such quiet lodges, and in them many young people learning as these lads were learning something of the duty they owed their neighbors as well as themselves, and being fitted to become good men and sober citizens by practising and preaching the law and gospel of temperance.

The next night Mr. Chauncey lectured, and the town turned out to hear the distinguished man, who not only told them of the crime and misery produced by this terrible vice which afflicted both England and America, but of the great crusade against it going on everywhere, and the need of courage, patience, hard work, and much faith, that in time it might be overcome. Strong and cheerful words that all liked to hear and many heartily believed, especially the young Templars, whose boyish fancies were won by the idea of fighting as knights of old did in the famous crusades they read about in their splendid new young folks' edition of Froissart.

"We can't pitch into people as the Red Cross fellows did, but we can smash rum-jugs when we get the chance, and stand by our flag as our men did in the war," said Frank, with sparkling eyes, as they went home in the moonlight arm in arm, keeping step behind Mr. Chauncey, who led the way with their mother on his arm, a martial figure though a minister, and a good captain to follow, as the boys felt after hearing his stirring words.

"Let's try and get up a company of boys like those mother told us about, and show people that we mean what we say. I'll be color-bearer, and you may drill us as much as you like. A real Cold Water Army, with flags flying, and drums, and all sorts of larks," said Jack, much excited, and taking a dramatic view of the matter. "We'll see about it. Something ought to be done, and perhaps we shall be the men to do it when the time comes," answered Frank,

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feeling ready to shoulder a musket or be a minute-man in good earnest.

Boyish talk and enthusiasm, but it was of the right sort; and when time and training had fitted them to bear arms, these young knights would be worthy to put on the red cross and ride away to help right the wrongs and slay the dragons that afflict the world.

Chapter 20 – A Sweet Memory

Now the lovely June days had come, everything began to look really summer-like; school would soon be over, and the young people were joyfully preparing for the long vacation.

"We are all going up to Bethlehem. We take the seashore one year and the mountains the next. Better come along," said Gus, as the boys lay on the grass after beating the Lincolns at one of the first matches of the season.

"Can't; we are off to Pebbly Beach the second week in July. Our invalids need sea air. That one looks delicate, doesn't he?" asked Frank, giving Jack a slight rap with his bat as that young gentleman lay in his usual attitude admiring the blue hose and russet shoes which adorned his sturdy limbs.

"Stop that, Captain! You needn't talk about invalids, when you know mother says you are not to look at a book for a month because you have studied yourself thin and headachy. I'm all right"; and Jack gave himself a sounding slap on the chest, where shone the white star of the H. B. B. C.

"Hear the little cockerel crow! you just wait till you get into the college class, and see if you don't have to study like fun," said Gus, with unruffled composure, for he was going to Harvard next

year, and felt himself already a Senior.

"Never shall; I don't want any of your old colleges. I'm going into business as soon as I can. Ed says I may be his book-keeper, if I am ready when he starts for himself. That is much jollier than grinding away for four years, and then having to grind ever so many more at a profession," said Jack, examining with interest the various knocks and bruises with which much ball-playing had adorned his hands.

"Much you know about it. Just as well you don't mean to try, for it would take a mighty long pull and strong pull to get you in. Business would suit you better, and you and Ed would make a capital partnership. Devlin, Minot, & Co. sounds well, hey, Gus?" "Very, but they are such good-natured chaps, they'd never get rich. By the way, Ed came home at noon today sick. I met him, and he looked regularly knocked up," answered Gus, in a sober tone.

"I told him he'd better not go down Monday, for he wasn't well Saturday, and couldn't come to sing Sunday evening, you remember. I must go right round and see what the matter is"; and Jack jumped up, with an anxious face.

"Let him alone till to-morrow. He won't want anyone fussing over him now. We are going for a pull; come along and steer," said Frank, for the sunset promised to be fine, and the boys liked

a brisk row in their newly painted boat, the "Rhodora."

"Go ahead and get ready, I'll just cut round and ask at the door, It will seem kind, and I must know how Ed is. Won't be long"; and Jack was off at his best pace.

The others were waiting impatiently when he came back with slower steps and a more anxious face.

"How is the old fellow?" called Frank from the boat, while Gus stood leaning on an oar in a nautical attitude.

"Pretty sick. Had the doctor. May have a fever. I didn't go in, but Ed Sent his love, and wanted to know who beat," answered Jack, stepping to his place, glad to rest and cool himself.

"Guess he'll be all right in a day or two"; and Gus pushed off, leaving all care behind.

"Hope he won't have typhoid--that's no joke, I tell you," said Frank, who knew all about it, and did not care to repeat the experience.

"He's worked too hard. He's so faithful he does more than his share, and gets tired out. Mother asked him to come down and see us when he has his vacation; we are going to have high old times fishing and boating. Up or down?" asked Jack, as they glided out

into the river.

Gus looked both ways, and seeing another boat with a glimpse of red in it just going round the bend, answered, with decision, "Up, of course. Don't we always pull to the bridge?"

"Not when the girls are going down," laughed Jack, who had recognized Juliet's scarlet boating-suit as he glanced over his shoulder.

"Mind what you are about, and don't gabble," commanded Captain Frank, as the crew bent to their oars and the slender boat cut through the water leaving a long furrow trembling behind.

"Oh, ah! I see! There is a blue jacket as well as a red one, so it's all right.

"Lady Queen Anne, she sits in the sun,
As white as a lily, as brown as a bun,"
sung Jack, recovering his spirits, and wishing Jill was there too.

"Do you want a ducking?" sternly demanded Gus, anxious to preserve discipline.

"Shouldn't mind, it's so warm."

But Jack said no more, and soon the "Rhodora" was alongside the

"Water Witch," exchanging greetings in the most amiable manner.

"Pity this boat won't hold four. We'd put Jack in yours, and take you girls a nice spin up to the Hemlocks," said Frank, whose idea of bliss was floating down the river with Annette as coxswain.

"You'd better come in here, this will hold four, and we are tired of rowing," returned the "Water Witch," so invitingly that Gus could not resist.

"I don't think it is safe to put four in there. You'd better change places with Annette, Gus, and then we shall be ship-shape," said Frank, answering a telegram from the eyes that matched the blue jacket.

"Wouldn't it be more ship-shape still if you put me ashore at Grif's landing? I can take his boat, or wait till you come back. Don't care what I'd o," said Jack, feeling himself sadly in the way. The good-natured offer being accepted with thanks, the changes were made, and, leaving him behind, the two boats went gayly up the river. He really did not care what he did, so sat in Grif's boat awhile watching the red sky, the shining stream, and the low green meadows, where the blackbirds were singing as if they too had met their little sweethearts and were happy.

Jack remembered that quiet half-hour long afterward, because

what followed seemed to impress it on his memory. As he sat enjoying the scene, he very naturally thought about Ed; for the face of the sister whom he saw was very anxious, and the word "fever" recalled the hard times when Frank was ill, particularly the night it was thought the boy would not live till dawn, and Jack cried himself to sleep, wondering how he ever could get on without his brother. Ed was almost as dear to him, and the thought that he was suffering destroyed Jack's pleasure for a little while. But, fortunately, young people do not know how to be anxious very long, so our boy soon cheered up, thinking about the late match between the Stars and the Lincolns, and after a good rest went whistling home, with a handful of mint for Mrs. Pecq, and played games with Jill as merrily as if there was no such thing as care in the world.

Next day Ed was worse, and for a week the answer was the same, when Jack crept to the back door with his eager question. Others came also, for the dear boy lying upstairs had friends everywhere, and older neighbors thought of him even more anxiously and tenderly than his mates. It was not fever, but some swifter trouble, for when Saturday night came, Ed had gone home to a longer and more peaceful Sabbath than any he had ever known in this world.

Jack had been there in the afternoon, and a kind message had come down to him that his friend was not suffering so much, and he had gone away, hoping, in his boyish ignorance, that all

danger was over. An hour later he was reading in the parlor, having no heart for play, when Frank came in with a look upon his face which would have prepared Jack for the news if he had seen it. But he did not look up, and Frank found it so hard to speak, that he lingered a moment at the piano, as he often did when he came home. It stood open, and on the rack was the "Jolly Brothers' Galop," which he had been learning to play with Ed. Big boy as he was, the sudden thought that never again would they sit shoulder to shoulder, thundering the marches or singing the songs both liked so well, made his eyes fill as he laid away the music, and shut the instrument, feeling as if he never wanted to touch it again. Then he went and sat down beside Jack with an arm round his neck, trying to steady his voice by a natural question before he told the heavy news.

"What are you reading, Jacky?"

The unusual caress, the very gentle tone, made Jack look up, and the minute he saw Frank's face he knew the truth.

"Is Ed----?" he could not say the hard word, and Frank could only answer by a nod as he winked fast, for the tears would come. Jack said no more, but as the book dropped from his knee he hid his face in the sofa-pillow and lay quite still, not crying, but trying to make it seem true that his dear Ed had gone away for ever. He could not do it, and presently turned his head a little to say, in a despairing tone,

"I don't see what I shall do without him!"

"I know it's hard for you. It is for all of us."

"You've got Gus, but now I haven't anybody. Ed was always so good to me!" and with the name so many tender recollections came, that poor Jack broke down in spite of his manful attempts to smother the sobs in the red pillow.

There was an unconscious reproach in the words, Frank thought; for he was not as gentle as Ed, and he did not wonder that Jack loved and mourned for the lost friend like a brother.

"You've got me. I'll be good to you; cry if you want to, I don't mind.

There was such a sympathetic choke in Frank's voice that Jack felt comforted at once, and when he had had his cry out, which was very soon, he let Frank pull him up with a bear-like but affectionate hug, and sat leaning on him as they talked about their loss, both feeling that there might have been a greater one, and resolving to love one another very much hereafter.

Mrs. Minot often called Frank the "father-boy," because he was now the head of the house, and a sober, reliable fellow for his years. Usually he did not show much affection except to her, for, as he once said, "I shall never be too old to kiss my mother," and

she often wished that he had a little sister, to bring out the softer side of his character. He domineered over Jack and laughed at his affectionate little ways, but now when trouble came, he was as kind and patient as a girl; and when Mamma came in, having heard the news, she found her "father-boy" comforting his brother so well that she slipped away without a word, leaving them to learn one of the sweet lessons sorrow teaches--to lean on one another, and let each trial bring them closer together.

It is often said that there should be no death or grief in children's stories. It is not wise to dwell on the dark and sad side of these things; but they have also a bright and lovely side, and since even the youngest, dearest, and most guarded child cannot escape some knowledge of the great mystery, is it not well to teach them in simple, cheerful ways that affection sweetens sorrow, and a lovely life can make death beautiful? I think so, therefore try to tell the last scene in the history of a boy who really lived and really left behind him a memory so precious that it will not be soon forgotten by those who knew and loved him. For the influence of this short life was felt by many, and even this brief record of it may do for other children what the reality did for those who still lay flowers on his grave, and try to be "as good as Eddy.

Few would have thought that the death of a quiet lad of seventeen would have been so widely felt, so sincerely mourned; but virtue, like sunshine, works its own sweet miracles, and when it was

known that never again would the bright face be seen in the village streets, the cheery voice heard, the loving heart felt in any of the little acts which so endeared Ed Devlin to those about him, it seemed as if young and old grieved alike for so much promise cut off in its spring-time. This was proved at the funeral, for, though it took place at the busy hour of a busy day, men left their affairs, women their households, young people their studies and their play, and gave an hour to show their affection, respect, and sympathy for those who had lost so much.

The girls had trimmed the church with all the sweetest flowers they could find, and garlands of lilies of the valley robbed the casket of its mournful look. The boys had brought fresh boughs to make the grave a green bed for their comrade's last sleep. Now they were all gathered together, and it was a touching sight to see the rows of young faces sobered and saddened by their first look at sorrow. The girls sobbed, and the boys set their lips tightly as their glances fell upon the lilies under which the familiar face lay full of solemn peace. Tears dimmed older eyes when the hymn the dead boy loved was sung, and the pastor told with how much pride and pleasure he had watched the gracious growth of this young parishioner since he first met the lad of twelve and was attracted by the shining face, the pleasant manners. Dutiful and loving; ready to help; patient to bear and forbear; eager to excel; faithful to the smallest task, yet full of high ambitions; and, better still, possessing the childlike piety that can trust and believe, wait and hope. Good and happy--the two things we all long for and so

few of us truly are. This he was, and this single fact was the best eulogy his pastor could pronounce over the beloved youth gone to a nobler manhood whose promise left so sweet a memory behind. As the young people looked, listened, and took in the scene, they felt as if some mysterious power had changed their playmate from a creature like themselves into a sort of saint or hero for them to look up to, and imitate if they could. 'What has he done, to be so loved, praised, and mourned?' they thought, with a tender sort of wonder; and the answer seemed to come to them as never before, for never had they been brought so near the solemn truth of life and death. "It was not what he did but what he was that made him so beloved. All that was sweet and noble in him still lives; for goodness is the only thing we can take with us when we die, the only thing that can comfort those we leave behind, and help us to meet again hereafter."

This feeling was in many hearts when they went away to lay him, with prayer and music, under the budding oak that leaned over his grave, a fit emblem of the young life just beginning its new spring. As the children did their part, the beauty of the summer day soothed their sorrow, and something of the soft brightness of the June sunshine seemed to gild their thoughts, as it gilded the flower-strewn mound they left behind. The true and touching words spoken cheered as well as impressed them, and made them feel that their friend was not lost but gone on into a higher class of the great school whose Master is eternal love and wisdom. So the tears soon dried, and the young faces looked up like flowers

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after rain. But the heaven-sent shower sank into the earth, and they were the stronger, Sweeter for it, more eager to make life brave and beautiful, because death had gently shown them what it should be.

When the boys came home they found their mother already returned, and Jill upon the parlor sofa listening to her account of the funeral with the same quiet, hopeful look which their own faces wore; for somehow the sadness seemed to have gone, and a sort of Sunday peace remained.

"I'm glad it was all so sweet and pleasant. Come and rest, you look so tired"; and Jill held out her hands to greet them--a crumpled handkerchief in one and a little bunch of fading lilies in the other.

Jack sat down in the low chair beside her and leaned his head against the arm of the sofa, for he was tired. But Frank walked slowly up and down the long rooms with a serious yet serene look on his face, for he felt as if he had learned something that day, and would always be the better for it. Presently he said, stopping before his mother, who leaned in the easy-chair looking up at the picture of her boys' father,

"I should should like to have just such things said about me when I die."

"So should I, if I deserved them as Ed did!" cried Jack, earnestly.

"You may if you try. I should be proud to hear them, and if they were true, they would comfort me more than anything else. I am glad you see the lovely side of sorrow, and are learning the lesson such losses teach us," answered their mother, who believed in teaching young people to face trouble bravely, and find the silver lining in the clouds that come to all of us.

"I never thought much about it before, but now dying doesn't seem dreadful at all--only solemn and beautiful. Somehow everybody seems to love everybody else more for it, and try to be kind and good and pious. I can't say what I mean, but you know, mother"; and Frank went pacing on again with the bright look his eyes always wore when he listened to music or read of some noble action.

"That's what Merry said when she and Molly came in on their way home. But Molly felt dreadfully, and so did Mabel. She brought me these flowers to press, for we are all going to keep some to remember dear Ed by," said Jill, carefully smoothing out the little bells as she laid the lilies in her hymn-book, for she too had had a thoughtful hour while she lay alone, imagining all that went on in the church, and shedding a few tender tears over the friend who was always so kind to her.

"I don't want anything to remember him by. I was so fond of him, I couldn't forget if I tried. I know I ought not to say it, but I don't see why God let him die," said Jack, with a quiver in his voice, for

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his loving heart could not help aching still.

"No, dear, we cannot see or know many things that grieve us very much, but we can trust that it is right, and try to believe that all is meant for our good. That is what faith means, and without it we are miserable. When you were little, you were afraid of the dark, but if I spoke or touched you, then you were sure all was well, and fell asleep holding my hand. God is wiser and stronger than any father or mother, so hold fast to Him, and you will have no doubt or fear, however dark it seems."

"As you do," said Jack, going to sit on the arm of Mamma's chair, with his cheek to hers, willing to trust as she bade him, but glad to hold fast the living hand that had led and comforted him all his life.

"Ed used to say to me when I fretted about getting well, and thought nobody cared for me, which was very naughty, 'Don't be troubled, God won't forget you; and if you must be lame, He will make you able to bear it,'" said Jill, softly, her quick little mind all alive with new thoughts and feelings.

"He believed it, and that's why he liked that hymn so much. I'm glad they sung it to-day," said Frank, bringing his heavy dictionary to lay on the book where the flowers were pressing.

"Oh, thank you! Could you play that tune for me? I'd didn't hear it, and I'd love to, if you are willing," asked Jill.

"I'd idn't think I ever should want to play again, but I'd o. Will you sing it for her, mother? I'm afraid I shall break down if I try alone.

"We will all sing, music is good for us now," said Mamma; and in rather broken voices they did sing Ed's favorite words:

"Not a sparrow falleth but its God cloth know,
Just as when his mandate lays a monarch low;
Not a leaflet moveth, but its God cloth see,
Think not, then, O mortal, God forgetteth thee.
Far more precious surely than the birds that fly
Is a Father's image to a Father's eye.
E'en thy hairs are numbered; trust Him full and free,
Cast thy cares before Him, He will comfort thee;
For the God that planted in thy breast a soul,
On his sacred tables dcth thy name enroll.
Cheer thine heart, then, niortal, never faithless be,
He that marks the sparrows will remember thee."

Chapter 21 – Pebbly Beach

"Now, Mr. Jack, it is a moral impossibility to get all those things into one trunk, and you mustn't ask it of me," said Mrs. Pecq, in a tone of despair, as she surveyed the heap of treasures she was expected to pack for the boys.

"Never mind the clothes, we only want a boating-suit apiece. Mamma can put a few collars in her trunk for us; but these necessary things must go," answered Jack, adding his target and air-pistol to the pile of bats, fishing-tackle, games, and a choice collection of shabby balls.

"Those are the necessaries and clothes the luxuries, are they? Why don't you add a velocipede, wheelbarrow, and printing-press, my dear?" asked Mrs. Pecq, while Jill turned up her nose at "boys' rubbish."

"Wish I could. Dare say we shall want them. Women don't know what fellows need, and always must put in a lot of stiff shirts and clean handkerchiefs and clothes-brushes and pots of cold cream. We are going to rough it, and don't want any fuss and feathers," said Jack, beginning to pack the precious balls in his rubber boots, and strap them up with the umbrellas, rods, and bats, seeing that there was no hope of a place in the trunk.

Here Frank came in with two big books, saying calmly, "Just slip these in somewhere, we shall need them."

"But you are not to study at all, so you won't want those great dictionaries," cried Jill, busily packing her new travelling-basket with all sorts of little rolls, bags, and boxes.

"They are not dics, but my Encyclopedia. We shall want to know heaps of things, and this tells about everything. With those books, and a microscope and a telescope, you could travel round the world, and learn all you wanted to. Can't possibly get on without them," said Frank, fondly patting his favorite work.

"My patience! What queer cattle boys are!" exclaimed Mrs. Pecq, while they all laughed. "It can't be done, Mr. Frank; all the boxes are brim full, and you'll have to leave those fat books behind, for there's no place anywhere."

"Then I'll carry them myself"; and Frank tucked one under each arm, with a determined air, which settled the matter.

"I suppose you'll study cockleology instead of boating, and read up on polywogs while we play tennis, or go poking round with your old spy-glass instead of having a jolly good time," said Jack, hauling away on the strap till all was taut and ship-shape with the bundle.

"Tadpoles don't live in salt water, my son, and if you mean conchology, you'd better say so. I shall play as much as I wish, and when I want to know about any new or curious thing, I shall consult my Cyclo, instead of bothering other people with questions, or giving it up like a dunce"; with which crushing reply Frank departed, leaving Jill to pack and unpack her treasures a dozen times, and Jack to dance jigs on the lids of the trunks till they would shut.

A very happy party set off the next day, leaving Mrs. Pecq waving her apron on the steps. Mrs. Minot carried the lunch, Jack his precious bundle with trifles dropping out by the way, and Jill felt very elegant bearing her new basket with red worsted cherries bobbing on the outside. Frank actually did take the Encyclopedia, done up in the roll of shawls, and whenever the others wondered about anything--tides, lighthouses, towns, or natural productions-- he brought forth one of the books and triumphantly read therefrom, to the great merriment, if not edification, of his party.

A very short trip by rail and the rest of the journey by boat, to Jill's great contentment, for she hated to be shut up; and while the lads roved here and there she sat under the awning, too happy to talk. But Mrs. Minot watched with real satisfaction how the fresh wind blew the color back into the pale cheeks, how the eyes shone and the heart filled with delight at seeing the lovely world again, and being able to take a share in its active pleasures.

The Willows was a long, low house close to the beach, and as full as a beehive of pleasant people, all intent on having a good time. A great many children were swarming about, and Jill found it impossible to sleep after her journey, there was such a lively clatter of tongues on the piazzas, and so many feet going to and fro in the halls, She lay down obediently while Mrs. Minot settled matters in the two airy rooms and gave her some dinner, but she kept popping up her head to look out of the window to see what she could see. Just opposite stood an artist's cottage and studio, with all manner of charming galleries, towers, steps, and even a sort of drawbridge to pull up when the painter wished to be left in peace. He was absent now, and the visitors took possession of this fine play-place. Children were racing up and down the galleries, ladies sitting in the tower, boys disporting themselves on the roof, and young gentlemen preparing for theatricals in the large studio.

"What fun I'll have over there," thought Jill, watching the merry scene with intense interest, and wondering if the little girls she saw were as nice as Molly and Merry.

Then there were glimpses of the sea beyond the green bank where a path wound along to the beach, whence came the cool dash of waves, and now and then the glimmer of a passing sail.

"Oh, when can I go out? It looks so lovely, I can't wait long," she said, looking as eager as a little gull shut up in a cage and pining

for its home on the wide ocean.

"As soon as it is a little cooler, dear, I'm getting ready for our trip, but we must be careful and not do too much at once. 'Slow and sure' is our motto," answered Mrs. Minot, busily collecting the camp-stools, the shawls, the air-cushions, and the big parasols.

"I'll be good, only do let me have my sailor-hat to wear, and my new suit. I'm not a bit tired, and I do want to be like other folks right off," said Jill, who had been improving rapidly of late, and felt much elated at being able to drive out nearly every day, to walk a little, and sit up some hours without any pain or fatigue. To gratify her, the blue flannel suit with its white trimming was put on, and Mamma was just buttoning the stout boots when Jack thundered at the door, and burst in with all sorts of glorious news.

"Do come out, mother, it's perfectly splendid on the beach! I've found a nice place for Jill to sit, and it's only a step. Lots of capital fellows here; one has a bicycle, and is going to teach us to ride. No end of fun up at the hotel, and everyone seems glad to see us. Two ladies asked about Jill, and one of the girls has got some shells all ready for her, Gerty Somebody, and her mother is so pretty and jolly, I like her ever so much. They sit at our table, and Wally is the boy, younger than I am, but very pleasant. Bacon is the fellow in knickerbockers; just wish you could see what stout legs he's got! Cox is the chap for me, though: we are going fishing to-

morrow. He's got a sweet-looking mother, and a sister for you, Jill. Now, then, do come on, I'll take the traps."

Off they went, and Jill thought that very short walk to the shore the most delightful she ever took; for people smiled at the little invalid as she went slowly by leaning on Mrs. Minot's arm, while Jack pranced in front, doing the honors, as if he owned the whole Atlantic. A new world opened to her eyes as they came out upon the pebbly beach full of people enjoying their afternoon promenade. Jill save one rapturous Oh. and then sat on her stool, forgetting everything but the beautiful blue ocean rolling away to meet the sky, with nothing to break the wide expanse but a sail here and there, a point of rocks on one hand, the little pier on the other, and white gulls skimming by on their wide wings.

While she sat enjoying herself, Jack showed his mother the place he had found, and a very nice one it was. Just under the green bank lay an old boat propped up with some big stones. A willow drooped over it, the tide rippled up within a few yards of it, and a fine view of the waves could be seen as they'd dashed over the rocks at the point.

"Isn't it a good cubby-house? Ben Cox and I fixed it for Jill, and she can have it for hers. Put her cushions and things there on the sand the children have thrown in--that will make it soft; then these seats will do for tables; and up in the bow I'm going to have that old rusty tin boiler full of salt-water, so she can put seaweed

and crabs and all sorts of chaps in here for an aquarium, you know," explained Jack, greatly interested in establishing his family comfortably before he left them.

"There couldn't be a nicer place, and it is very kind of you to get it ready. Spread the shawls and settle Jill, then you needn't think of us any more, but go and scramble with Frank. I see him over there with his spy-glass and some pleasant-looking boys," said Mamma, bustling about in great spirits.

So the red cushions were placed, the plaids laid, and the little work-basket set upon the seat, all ready for Jill, who was charmed with her nest, and cuddled down under the big parasol, declaring she would keep house there every day.

Even the old boiler pleased her, and Jack raced over the beach to begin his search for inhabitants for the new aquarium, leaving Jill to make friends with some pretty babies digging in the sand, while Mamma sat on the camp-stool and talked with a friend from Harmony Village.

It seemed as if there could not be anything more delightful than to lie there lulled by the sound of the sea, watching the sunset and listening to the pleasant babble of little voices close by. But when they went to tea in the great hall, with six tables full of merry people, and half a dozen maids flying about, Jill thought that was even better, because it was so new to her. Gerty and Wally nodded

to her, and their pretty mamma was so kind and so gay, that Jill could not feel bashful after the first few minutes, and soon looked about her, sure of seeing friendly faces everywhere. Frank and Jack ate as if the salt air had already improved their appetites, and talked about Bacon and Cox as if they had been bosom friends for years. Mamma was as happy as they for her friend, Mrs. Hammond, sat close by; and this rosy lady, who had been a physician, cheered her up by predicting that Jill would soon be running about as well as ever.

But the best of all was in the evening, when the elder people gathered in the parlors and played Twenty Questions, while the children looked on for an hour before going to bed, much amused at the sight of grown people laughing, squabbling, dodging, and joking as if they had all become young again; for, as everyone knows, it is impossible to help lively skirmishes when that game is played. Jill lay in the sofa corner enjoying it all immensely; for she never saw anything so droll, and found it capital fun to help guess the thing, or try to puzzle the opposite side. Her quick wits and bright face attracted people, and in the pauses of the sport she held quite a levee, for everybody was interested in the little invalid. The girls shyly made friends in their own way, the mammas told thrilling tales of the accidents their darlings had survived, several gentlemen kindly offered their boats, and the boys, with the best intentions in life, suggested strolls of two or three miles to Rafe's Chasm and Norman's Woe, or invited her to tennis and archery, as if violent exercise was the cure for all

human ills. She was very grateful, and reluctantly went away to bed, declaring, when she got upstairs, that these new friends were the dearest people she ever met, and the Willows the most delightful place in the whole world.

Next day a new life began for the young folks--a very healthy, happy life; and all threw themselves into it so heartily, that it was impossible to help getting great good from it, for these summer weeks, if well spent, work miracles in tired bodies and souls. Frank took a fancy to the bicycle boy, and, being able to hire one of the breakneck articles, soon learned to ride it; and the two might be seen wildly working their long legs on certain smooth stretches of road, or getting up their muscle rowing about the bay till they were almost as brown and nautical in appearance and language as the fishermen who lived in nooks and corners along the shore.

Jack struck up a great friendship with the sturdy Bacon and the agreeable Cox: the latter, being about his own age, was his especial favorite; and they soon were called Box and Cox by the other fellows, which did not annoy them a bit, as both had played parts in that immortal farce. They had capital times fishing, scrambling over the rocks, playing ball and tennis, and rainy days they took possession of the studio opposite, drew up the portcullis, and gallantly defended the castle, which some of the others besieged with old umbrellas for shields, bats for battering-rams, and bunches of burrs for cannon-balls. Great larks went on

over there, while the girls applauded from the piazza or chamber-windows, and made a gay flag for the victors to display from the tower when the fight was over.

But Jill had the best time of all, for each day brought increasing strength and spirits, and she improved so fast it was hard to believe that she was the same girl who lay so long almost helpless in the Bird Room at home. Such lively letters as she sent her W1o~he~, all about her new friends, her fine sails, drives, and little walks; the good times she had in the evening, the lovely things people gave her, and she was learning to make with shells and sea-weed, and what splendid fun it was to keep house in a boat.

This last amusement soon grew quite absorbing, and her "cubby," as she called it, rapidly became a pretty grotto, where she lived like a little mermaid, daily loving more and more the beauty of the wonderful sea, Finding the boat too sunny at times, the boys cut long willow boughs and arched them over the seats, laying hemlock branches across till a green roof made it cool and shady inside. There Jill sat or lay among her cushions reading, trying to sketch, sorting shells, drying gay sea-weeds, or watching her crabs, jelly-fish, and anemones in the old boiler, now buried in sand and edged about with moss from the woods.

Nobody disturbed her treasures, but kindly added to them, and often when she went to her nest she found fruit or flowers, books

or bon-bons, laid ready for her. Everyone pitied and liked the bright little girl who could not run and frisk with the rest, who was so patient and cheerful after her long confinement, ready to help others, and so grateful for any small favor. She found now that the weary months had not been wasted, and was very happy to discover in herself a new sort of strength and sweetness that was not only a comfort to her, but made those about her love and trust her. The songs she had learned attracted the babies, who would leave their play to peep at her and listen when she sung over her work. Passers-by paused to hear the blithe voice of the bird in the green cage, and other invalids, strolling on the beach, would take heart when they saw the child so happy in spite of her great trial.

The boys kept all their marine curiosities for her, and were always ready to take her a row or a sail, as the bay was safe and that sort of travelling suited her better than driving. But the girls had capital times together, and it did Jill good to see another sort from those she knew at home. She had been so much petted of late, that she was getting rather vain of her small accomplishments, and being with strangers richer, better bred and educated than herself, made her more humble in some things, while it showed her the worth of such virtues as she could honestly claim. Mamie Cox took her to drive in the fine carriage of her mamma, and Jill was much impressed by the fact that Mamie was not a bit proud about it, and did not put on any airs, though she had a maid to take care of her. Gerty wore pretty costumes, and came down with

pink and blue ribbons in her hair that Jill envied very much; yet Gerty liked her curls, and longed to have some, while her mother, "the lady from Philadelphia," as they called her, was so kind and gay that Jill quite adored her, and always felt as if sunshine had come into the room when she entered. Two little sisters were very interesting to her, and made her long for one of her own when she saw them going about together and heard them talk of their pleasant home, where the great silk factories were. But they invited her to come and see the wonderful cocoons, and taught her to knot pretty gray fringe on a cushion, which delighted her, being so new and easy. There were several other nice little lasses, and they all gathered about Jill with the sweet sympathy children are so quick to show toward those in pain or misfortune. She thought they would not care for a poor little girl like herself, yet here she was the queen of the troupe, and this discovery touched and pleased her very much.

In the morning they camped round the boat on the stones with books, gay work, and merry chatter, till bathing-time. Then the beach was full of life and fun, for everyone looked so droll in the flannel suits, it was hard to believe that the neat ladies and respectable gentlemen who went into the little houses could be the same persons as the queer, short-skirted women with old hats tied down, and bareheaded, barefooted men in old suits, who came skipping over the sand to disport themselves in the sea in the most undignified ways. The boys raced about, looking like

circus- tumblers, and the babies were regular little cupids, running away from the waves that tried to kiss their flying feet. Some of the young ladies and girls were famous swimmers, and looked very pretty in their bright red and blue costumes, with loose hair and gay stockings, as they'd anced into the water and floated away as fearlessly as real mermaidens. Jill had her quiet dip and good rubbing each fine day, and then lay upon the warm sand watching the pranks of the others, and longing to run and dive and shout and tumble with the rest. Now that she was among the well and active, it seemed harder to be patient than when shut up and unable to stir. She felt so much better, and had so little pain to remind her of past troubles, it was almost impossible to help forgetting the poor back and letting her recovered spirits run away with her. If Mrs. Minot had not kept good watch, she would have been off more than once, so eager was she to be "like other girls" again, so difficult was it to keep the restless feet quietly folded among the red cushions.

One day she did yield to temptation, and took a little voyage which might have been her last, owing to the carelessness of those whom she trusted. It was a good lesson, and made her as meek as a lamb during the rest of her stay. Mrs. Minot drove to Gloucester one afternoon, leaving Jill safely established after her nap in the boat, with Gerty and Mamie making lace beside her. "Don't try to walk or run about, my dear. Sit on the piazza if you get tired of this, and amuse yourself quietly till I come back. I'll not forget the worsted and the canvas," said Mamma, peeping

over the bank for a last word as she waited for the omnibus to come along.

"Oh, don't forget the Gibaltars!" cried Jill, popping her head out of the green roof.

"Nor the bananas, please!" added Gerty, looking round one end.

"Nor the pink and blue ribbon to tie our shell-baskets," called Mamie, nearly tumbling into the aquarium at the other end. Mrs. Minot laughed, and promised, and rumbled away, leaving Jill to an experience which she never forgot.

For half an hour the little girls worked busily, then the boys came for Gerty and Mamie to go to the Chasm with a party of friends who were to leave next day. Off they went, and Jill felt very lonely as the gay voices died away. Everyone had gone somewhere, and only little Harry Hammond and his maid were on the beach. Two or three sand-pipers ran about among the pebbles, and Jill envied them their nimble legs so much, that she could not resist getting up to take a few steps. She longed to run straight away over the firm, smooth sand, and feel again the delight of swift motion; but she dared not try it, and stood leaning on her tall parasol with her book in her hand, when Frank, Jack, and the bicycle boy came rowing lazily along and hailed her.

"Come for a sail, Jill? Take you anywhere you like," called Jack,

touched by the lonely figure on the beach.

"I'd love to go, if you will row. Mamma made me promise not to go sailing without a man to take care of me. Would it spoil your fun to have me?" answered Jill, eagerly.

"Not a bit; come out on the big stones and we'll take you aboard," said Frank, as they steered to the place where she could embark the easiest.

"All the rest are gone to the Chasm. I wanted to go, because I've never seen it; but, of course, I had to give it up, as I do most of the fun"; and Jill sat down with an impatient sigh.

"We'll row you round there. Can't land, but you can see the place and shout to the others, if that will be any comfort to you," proposed Frank, as they pulled away round the pier.

"Oh, yes, that would be lovely!" and Jill smiled at Jack, who was steering, for she found it impossible to be dismal now with the fresh wind blowing in her face, the blue waves slapping against the boat, and three good-natured lads ready to gratify her wishes. Away they went, laughing and talking gayly till they came to Goodwin's Rocks, where an unusual number of people were to be seen though the tide was going out, and no white spray was dashing high into the air to make a sight worth seeing.

'What do you suppose they are about? Never saw such a lot of folks at this time. Shouldn't wonder if something had happened. I say, put me ashore, and I'll cut up and see," said the bicycle boy, who was of an inquiring turn.

"I'll go with you," said Frank; "it won't take but a minute, and I'd like to discover what it is. Maybe something we ought to know about."

So the boys pulled round into a quiet nook, and the two elder ones scrambled up the rocks, to disappear in the crowd. Five, ten, fifteen minutes passed, and they did not return. Jack grew impatient, so did Jill, and bade him run up and bring them back. Glad to know what kept them, Jack departed, to be swallowed up in his turn, for not a sign of a boy did she see after that; and, having vainly strained her eyes to discover the attraction which held them, she gave it up, lay down on their jackets, and began to read.

Then the treacherous tide, as it ebbed lower and lower down the beach, began to lure the boat away; for it was not fastened, and when lightened of its load was an easy prize to the hungry sea, always ready to steal all it can. Jill knew nothing of this, for her story was dull, the gentle motion proved soothing, and before she knew it she was asleep. Little by little the runaway boat slid farther from the shore, and presently was floating out to sea with its drowsy freight, while the careless boys, unconscious of the

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time they were wasting, lingered to see group after group photographed by the enterprising man who had trundled his camera to the rocks.

In the midst of a dream about home, Jill was roused by a loud shout, and, starting up so suddenly that the sun-umbrella went overboard, she found herself sailing off alone, while the distracted lads roared and beckoned vainly from the cove. The oars lay at their feet, where they left them; and the poor child was quite helpless, for she could not manage the sail, and even the parasol, with which she might have paddled a little, had gone down with all sail set. For a minute, Jill was so frightened that she could only look about her with a scared face, and wonder if drowning was a very disagreeable thing. Then the sight of the bicycle boy struggling with Jack, who seemed inclined to swim after her, and Frank shouting wildly, "Hold on! Come back!" made her laugh in spite of her fear, it was so comical, and their distress so much greater than hers, since it was their own carelessness which caused the trouble.

"I can't come back! There's nothing to hold on to! You didn't fasten me, and now I don't know where I'm going!" cried Jill, looking from the shore to the treacherous sea that was gently carrying her away.

"Keep cool! We'll get a boat and come after you,~ roared Frank, before he followed Jack, who had collected his wits and was

tearing up the rocks like a chamois hunter.

The bicycle boy calmly sat down to keep his eye on the runaway, calling out from time to time such cheering remarks as "All aboard for Liverpool! Give my love to Victoria! Luff and bear away when you come to Halifax! If you are hard up for provisions, you'll find an apple and some bait in my coat-pocket," and other directions for a comfortable voyage, till his voice was lost in the distance as a stronger current bore her swiftly away and the big waves began to tumble and splash.

At first Jill had laughed at his efforts to keep up her spirits, but when the boat floated round a point of rock that shut in the cove, she felt all alone, and sat quite still, wondering what would become of her. She turned her back to the sea and looked at the dear, safe land, which never had seemed so green and beautiful before. Up on the hill rustled the wood through which the happy party were wandering to the Chasm. On the rocks she still saw the crowd all busy with their own affairs, unconscious of her danger. Here and there artists were sketching in picturesque spots, and in one place an old gentleman sat fishing peacefully. Jill called and waved her handkerchief, but he never looked up, and an ugly little dog barked at her in what seemed to her a most cruel way.

"Nobody sees or hears or cares, and those horrid boys will never catch up!" she cried in despair, as the boat began to rock more and more, and the loud swash of water dashing in and out of the

Chasm drew nearer and nearer. Holding on now with both hands she turned and looked straight before her, pale and shivering, while her eyes tried to see some sign of hope among the steep cliffs that rose up on the left. No one was there, though usually at this hour they were full of visitors, and it was time for the walkers to have arrived.

"I wonder if Gerty and Mamie will be sorry if I'm drowned," thought Jill, remembering the poor girl who had been lost in the Chasm not long ago. Her lively fancy pictured the grief of her friends at her loss; but that did not help or comfort her now, and as her anxious gaze wandered along the shore, she said aloud, in a pensive tone,

"Perhaps I shall be wrecked on Norman's Woe, and somebody will make poetry about me. It would be pretty to read, but I don't want to die that way. Oh, why did I come! Why didn't I stay safe and comfortable in my own boat?"

At the thought a sob rose, and poor Jill laid her head down on her lap to cry with all her heart, feeling very helpless, small, and forsaken alone there on the great sea. In the midst of her tears came the thought, "When people are in danger, they ask God to save them"; and, slipping down upon her knees, she said her prayer as she had never said it before, for when human help seems gone we turn to Him as naturally as lost children cry to their father, and feel sure that he will hear and answer them.

After that she felt better, and wiped away the drops that blinded her, to look out again like a shipwrecked mariner watching for a sail. And there it was! Close by, coming swiftly on with a man behind it, a sturdy brown fisher, busy with his lobster-pots, and quite unconscious how like an angel he looked to the helpless little girl in the rudderless boat.

"Hi! hi! Oh, please do stop and get me! I'm lost, no oars, nobody to fix the sail! Oh, oh! please come!" screamed Jill, waving her hat frantically as the other boat skimmed by and the man stared at her as if she really was a mermaid with a fishy tail.

"Keep still! I'll come about and fetch you!" he called out; and Jill obeyed, sitting like a little image of faith, till with a good deal of shifting and flapping of the sail, the other boat came alongside and took her in tow,

A few words told the story, and in five minutes she was sitting snugly tucked up watching that unpleasant mass of lobsters flap about dangerously near her toes, while the boat bounded over the waves with a delightful motion, and every instant brought her nearer borne. She did not say much, but felt a good deal; and when they met two boats coming to meet her, manned by very anxious crews of men and boys, she was so pale and quiet that Jack was quite bowed down with remorse, and Frank nearly pitched the bicycle boy overboard because he gayly asked Jill how she left her friends in England. There was great rejoicing over her, for the people on the rocks had heard of her loss, and ran about

like ants when their hill is disturbed. Of course half a dozen amiable souls posted off to the Willows to tell the family that the little girl was drowned, so that when the rescuers appeared quite a crowd was assembled on the beach to welcome her. But Jill felt so used up with her own share of the excitement that she was glad to be carried to the house by Frank and Jack, and laid upon her bed, where Mrs. Hammond soon restored her with sugar-coated pills, and words even sweeter and more soothing.

Other people, busied with their own pleasures, forgot all about it by the next day; but Jill remembered that hour long afterward, both awake and asleep, for her dreams were troubled, and she often started up imploring someone to save her. Then she would recall the moment when, feeling most helpless, she had asked for help, and it had come as quickly as if that tearful little cry had been heard and answered, though her voice had been drowned by the dash of the waves that seemed ready to devour her. This made a deep impression on her, and a sense of childlike faith in the Father of all began to grow up within her; for in that lonely voyage, short as it was, she had found a very precious treasure to keep for ever, to lean on, and to love during the longer voyage which all must take before we reach our home.

Chapter 22 - A Happy Day

"Oh dear! Only a week more, and then we must go back. Don't you hate the thoughts of it?" said Jack, as he was giving Jill her early walk on the beach one August morning.

"Yes, it will be dreadful to leave Gerty and Mamie and all the nice people. But I'm so much better I won't have to be shut up again, even if I don't go to school. How I long to see Merry and Molly. Dear things, if it wasn't for them I should hate going home more than you do," answered Jill, stepping along quite briskly, and finding it very hard to resist breaking into a skip or a run, she felt so well and gay.

"Wish they could be here to-day to see the fun," said Jack, for it was the anniversary of the founding of the place, and the people celebrated it by all sorts of festivity.

"I'd id want to ask Molly, but your mother is so good to me I couldn't find courage to do it. Mammy told me not to ask for a thing, and I'm sure I don't get a chance. I feel just as if I was your truly born sister, Jack."

"That's all right, I'm glad you do," answered Jack, comfortably, though his mind seemed a little absent and his eyes twinkled when she spoke of Molly. "Now, you sit in the cubby-house, and

keep quiet till the boat comes in. Then the fun will begin, and you must be fresh and ready to enjoy it. Don't run off, now, I shall want to know where to find you by and by."

"No more running off, thank you. I'll stay here till you come, and finish this box for Molly; she has a birthday this week, and I've written to ask what day, so I can send it right up and surprise her. Jack's eyes twinkled more than ever as he helped Jill settle herself in the boat, and then with a whoop he tore over the beach, as if practising for the race which was to come off in the afternoon.

Jill was so busy with her work that time went quickly, and the early boat came in just as the last pink shell was stuck in its place. Putting the box in the sun to dry, she leaned out of her nook to watch the gay parties land, and go streaming up the pier along the road that went behind the bank that sheltered her. Flocks of children were running about on the sand, and presently strangers appeared, eager to see and enjoy all the delights of this gala-day. "There's a fat little boy who looks ever so much like Boo," said Jill to herself, watching the people and hoping they would not come and find her, since she had promised to stay till Jack returned.

The fat little boy was staring about him in a blissful sort of maze, holding a wooden shovel in one hand and the skirts of a young girl with the other. Her back was turned to Jill, but something in the long brown braid with a fly-away blue bow hanging down her back looked very familiar to Jill. So did the gray suit and the

Japanese umbrella; but the hat was strange, and while she was thinking how natural the boots looked, the girl turned round.

"Why, how much she looks like Molly! It can't be--yes, it might, I do believe it is!" cried Jill, starting up and hardly daring to trust her own eyes.

As she came out of her nest and showed herself, there could be no doubt about the other girl, for she gave one shout and came racing over the beach with both arms out, while her hat blew off unheeded, and the gay umbrella flew away, to the great delight of all the little people except Boo, who was upset by his sister's impetuous rush, and lay upon his back howling. Molly did not do all the running, though, and Jill got her wish, for, never stopping to think of herself, she was off at once, and met her friend half-way with an answering cry. It was a pretty sight to see them run into one another's arms and hug and kiss and talk and skip in such a state of girlish joy they never cared who saw or laughed at their innocent raptures.

"You darling dear! where did you come from?" cried Jill, holding Molly by both shoulders, and shaking her a little to be sure she was real.

"Mrs. Minot sent for us to spend a week. You look so well, I can't believe my eyes!" answered Molly, patting Jill's cheeks and kissing them over and over, as if to make sure the bright color would not come off.

"A week? How splendid! Oh, I've such heaps to tell and show you; come right over to my cubby and see how lovely it is," said Jill, forgetting everybody else in her delight at getting Molly.

"I must get poor Boo, and my hat and umbrella, I left them all behind me when I saw you," laughed Molly, looking back.

But Mrs. Minot and Jack had consoled Boo and collected the scattered property, so the girls went on arm in arm, and had a fine time before anyone had the heart to disturb them. Molly was charmed with the boat, and Jill very glad the box was done in season. Both had so much to tell and hear and plan, that they would have sat there for ever if bathing-time had not come, and the beach suddenly looked like a bed of red and yellow tulips, for everyone took a dip, and the strangers added much to the fun. Molly could swim like a duck, and quite covered herself with glory by diving off the pier. Jack undertook to teach Boo, who was a promising pupil, being so plump that he could not sink if he tried. Jill was soon through, and lay on the sand enjoying the antics of the bathers till she was so faint with laughter she was glad to hear the dinner-horn and do the honors of the Willows to Molly, whose room was next hers.

Boat-races came first in the afternoon, and the girls watched them, sitting luxuriously in the nest, with the ladies and children close by. The sailing-matches were very pretty to see; but Molly and Jill were more interested in the rowing, for Frank and the

bicycle boy pulled one boat, and the friends felt that this one must win. It did, though the race was not very exciting nor the prize of great worth; but the boys and girls were satisfied, and Jack was much exalted, for he always told Frank he could do great things if he would only drop books and "go in on his muscle."

Foot-races followed, and, burning to distinguish himself also, Jack insisted on trying, though his mother warned him that the weak leg might be harmed, and he had his own doubts about it, as he was all out of practice. However, he took his place with a handkerchief tied round his head, red shirt and stockings, and his sleeves rolled up as if he meant business. Jill and Molly could not sit still during this race, and stood on the bank quite trembling with excitement as the half-dozen runners stood in a line at the starting-post waiting for the word "Go!"

Off they went at last over the smooth beach to the pole with the flag at the further end, and everyone watched them with mingled interest and merriment, for they were a droll set, and the running not at all scientific with most of them. One young fisherman with big boots over his trousers started off at a great pace, pounding along in the most dogged way, while a little chap in a tight bathing-suit with very thin legs skimmed by him, looking so like a sand-piper it was impossible to help laughing at both. Jack's former training stood him in good stead now; for he went to work in professional style, and kept a steady trot till the flagpole had been passed, then he put on his speed and shot ahead of all the

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rest, several of whom broke down and gave up. But Cox and Bacon held on gallantly; and soon it was evident that the sturdy legs in the knickerbockers were gaining fast, for Jack gave his ankle an ugly wrench on a round pebble, and the weak knee began to fail. He did his best, however, and quite a breeze of enthusiasm stirred the spectators as the three boys came down the course like mettlesome horses, panting, pale, or purple, but each bound to win at any cost.

Now, Bacon! "Go it, Minot! Hit him up, Cox! Jack's ahead!" "No, he isn't!" "Here they come!" "Bacon's done it!" shouted the other boys, and they were right; Bacon had won, for the gray legs came in just half a yard ahead of the red ones, and Minot tumbled into his brother's arms with hardly breath enough left to gasp out, good-humoredly, "All right, I'm glad he beat!"

Then the victor was congratulated and borne off by his friends to refresh himself, while the lookers-on scattered to see a game of tennis and the shooting of the Archery Club up at the hotel. Jack was soon rested, and, making light of his defeat, insisted on taking the girls to see the fun. So they'd rove up in the old omnibus, and enjoyed the pretty sight very much; for the young ladies were in uniform, and the broad green ribbons over the white dresses, the gay quivers, long bows, and big targets, made a lively scene. The shooting was good; a handsome damsel got the prize of a dozen arrows, and everyone clapped in the most enthusiastic manner.

Molly and Jill did not care about tennis, so they went home to rest and dress for the evening, because to their minds the dancing, the illumination, and the fireworks were the best fun of all. Jill's white bunting with cherry ribbons was very becoming, and the lively feet in the new slippers patted the floor impatiently as the sound of dance music came down to the Willows after tea, and the other girls waltzed on the wide piazza because they could not keep still.

"No dancing for me, but Molly must have a good time. You'll see that she does, won't you, boys?" said Jill, who knew that her share of the fun would be lying on a settee and watching the rest enjoy her favorite pastime.

Frank and Jack promised, and kept their word handsomely; for there was plenty of room in the great dancing-hall at the hotel, and the band in the pavilion played such inspiring music that, as the bicycle boy said, "Everyone who had a leg couldn't help shaking it." Molly was twirled about to her heart's content, and flew hither and thither like a blue butterfly; for all the lads liked her, and she kept running up to tell Jill the funny things they said and did.

As night darkened from all the houses in the valley, on the cliffs and along the shore lights shone and sparkled; for everyone decorated with gay lanterns, and several yachts in the bay strung colored lamps about the little vessels, making a pretty picture on

the quiet sea. Jill thought she had never seen anything so like fairy-land, and felt very like one in a dream as she drove slowly up and down with Mamie, Gerty, Molly, and Mrs. Cox in the carriage, so that she might see it all without too much fatigue. It was very lovely; and when rockets began to whizz, filling the air with golden rain, a shower of colored stars, fiery dragons, or glittering wheels, the girls could only shriek with delight, and beg to stay a little longer each time the prudent lady proposed going home.

It had to be at last; but Molly and Jill comforted themselves by a long talk in bed, for it was impossible to sleep with glares of light coming every few minutes, flocks of people talking and tramping by in the road, and bursts of music floating down to them ~s the oldcr but not wiser revellers kept up the merriment till a late hour. They'd ropped off at last; but Jill had the nightmare, and Molly was waked up by a violent jerking of her braid as Jill tried to tow her along, dreaming she was a boat.

They were too sleepy to laugh much then, but next morning they made merry over it, and went to breakfast with such happy faces that all the young folks pronounced Jill's friend a most delightful girl. What a good time Molly did have that week! Other people were going to leave also, and therefore much picnicking, boating, and driving was crowded into the last days. Clambakes on the shore, charades in the studio, sewing-parties at the boat, evening frolics in the big dining-room, farewell calls, gifts, and

Invitations, all Sorts of plans for next summer, and vows of eternal friendship exchanged between people who would soon forget each other. It was very pleasant, till poor Boo innocently added to the excitement by poisoning a few of his neighbors with a bad lobster.

The ambitious little soul pined to catch one of these mysterious but lovely red creatures, and spent days fishing on the beach, investigating holes and corners, and tagging after the old man who supplied the house. One day after a high wind he found several "lobs" washed up on the beach, and, though disappointed at their color, he picked out a big one, and set off to show his prize to Molly. Half-way home he met the old man on his way with a basket of fish, and being tired of lugging his contribution laid it with the others, meaning to explain later. No one saw him do it, as the old man was busy with his pipe; and Boo ran back to get more dear lobs, leaving his treasure to go into the kettle and appear at supper, by which time he had forgotten all about it. Fortunately none of the children ate any, but several older people were made ill, and quite a panic prevailed that night as one after the other called up the doctor, who was boarding close by; and good Mrs. Grey, the hostess, ran about with hot flannels, bottles of medicine, and distracted messages from room to room. All were comfortable by morning, but the friends of the sufferers lay in wait for the old fisherman, and gave him a good scolding for his carelessness. The poor man was protesting his innocence when Boo, who was passing by, looked into the basket, and asked

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what had become of his lob. A few questions brought the truth to light, and a general laugh put everyone in good humor, when poor Boo mildly said, by way of explanation,

"I fought I was helpin' Mrs. Dray, and I'd id want to see the dreem lob come out all red when she boiled him. But I fordot, and I don't fink I'll ever find such a nice big one any more."

"For our sakes, I hope you won't, my dear," said Mrs. Hammond, who had been nursing one of the sufferers.

"It's lucky we are going home to-morrow, or that child would be the death of himself and everybody else. He is perfectly crazy about fish, and I've pulled him out of that old lobster-pot on the beach a dozen times," groaned Molly, much afflicted by the mishaps of her young charge.

There was a great breaking up next day, and the old omnibus went off to the station with Bacon hanging on behind, the bicycle boy and his iron whirligig atop, and heads popping out of all the windows for last good-byes. Our party and the Hammonds were going by boat, and were all ready to start for the pier when Boo and little Harry were missing. Molly, the maid, and both boys ran different ways to find them; and all sorts of dreadful suggestions were being made when shouts of laughter were heard from the beach, and the truants appeared, proudly dragging in Harry's little wagon a dead devil-fish, as the natives call that ugly thing which looks like a magnified tadpole--all head and no body.

"We've dot him!" called the innocents, tugging up their prize with such solemn satisfaction it was impossible to help laughing.

"I always wanted to tatch a whale, and this is a baby one, I fink. A boy said, when they wanted to die they corned on the sand and did it, and we saw this one go dead just now. Ain't lie pretty?" asked Boo, displaying the immense mouth with fond pride, while his friend flapped the tail.

"What are you going to do with him?" said Mrs. Hammond, regarding her infant as if she often asked herself the same question about her boy.

"Wap him up in a paper and tate him home to pay wid," answered Harry, with such confidence in his big blue eyes that it was very hard to disappoint his hopes and tell him the treasure must be left behind.

Wails of despair burst from both children as the hard-hearted boys tipped out the little whale, and hustled the indignant fishermen on board the boat, which had been whistling for them impatiently. Boo recovered his spirits first, and gulping down a sob that nearly shook his hat off, consoled his companion in affliction and convulsed his friends by taking from his pocket several little crabs, the remains of a jelly-fish, and such a collection of pebbles that Frank understood why he found the fat boy such a burden when he shouldered him, kicking and howling,

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in the late run to the boat. These delicate toys healed the wounds of Boo and Harry, and they were soon happily walking the little "trabs" about inside a stone wall of their own building, while the others rested after their exertions, and laid plans for coming to the Willows another year, as people usually did who had once tasted the wholesome delights and cordial hospitality of this charming place.

Chapter 23 – Cattle Show

The children were not the only ones who had learned something at Pebbly Beach. Mrs. Minot had talked a good deal with some very superior persons, and received light upon various subjects which had much interested or perplexed her. While the ladies worked or walked together, they naturally spoke oftenest and most earnestly about their children, and each contributed her experience. Mrs. Hammond, who had been a physician for many years, was wise in the care of healthy little bodies, and the cure of sick ones. Mrs. Channing, who had read, travelled, and observed much in the cause of education, had many useful hints about the training of young minds and hearts. Several teachers reported their trials, and all the mothers were eager to know how to bring up their boys and girls to be healthy, happy, useful men and women.

As young people do not care for such discussions, we will not describe them, but as the impression they made upon one of the mammas affected our hero and heroine, we must mention the changes which took place in their life when they all got home again.

"School begins to-morrow. Oh, dear!" sighed Jack, as he looked up his books in the Bird Room, a day or two after their return.

"Don't you want to go? I long to, but don't believe I shall. I saw our mothers talking to the doctor last night, but I haven't dared to ask what they'd decided," said Jill, affectionately eying the long-unused books in her little library.

"I've had such a jolly good time, that I hate to be shut up all day worse than ever, Don't you, Frank?" asked Jack, with a vengeful slap at the arithmetic which was the torment of his life.

"Well, I confess I don't hanker for school as much as I expected. I'd rather take a spin on the old bicycle. Our roads are so good, it is a great temptation to hire a machine, and astonish the natives. That's what comes of idleness. So brace up, my boy, and go to work, for vacation is over," answered Frank, gravely regarding the tall pile of books before him, as if trying to welcome his old friends, or tyrants, rather, for they ruled him with a rod of iron when he once gave himself up to them.

"Ah, but vacation is not over, my dears," said Mrs. Minot, hearing the last words as she came in prepared to surprise her family.

"Glad of it. How much longer is it to be?" asked Jack, hoping for a week at least.

"Two or three years for some of you."

"What?" cried all three, in utter astonishment, as they stared at

Mamma, who could not help smiling, though she was very much in earnest.

"For the next two or three years I intend to cultivate my boys' bodies, and let their minds rest a good deal, from books at least. There is plenty to learn outside of school-houses, and I don't mean to shut you up just when you most need all the air and exercise you can get. Good health, good principles, and a good education are the three blessings I ask for you, and I am going to make sure of the first, as a firm foundation for the other two."

"But, mother, what becomes of college?" asked Frank, rather disturbed at this change of base.

"Put it off for a year, and see if you are not better fitted for it then than now."

"But I am already fitted: I've worked like a tiger all this year, and I'm sure I shall pass."

"Ready in one way, but not in another. That hard work is no preparation for four years of still harder study. It has cost you these round shoulders, many a headache, and consumed hours when you had far better have been on the river or in the fields. I cannot have you break down, as so many boys do, or pull through at the cost of ill-health afterward. Eighteen is young enough to begin the steady grind, if you have a strong constitution to keep

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pace with the eager mind. Sixteen is too young to send even my good boy out into the world, just when he most needs his mother's care to help him be the man she hopes to see him."

Mrs. Minot laid her hand on his shoulder as she spoke, looking so fond and proud that it was impossible to rebel, though some of his most cherished plans were spoilt.

"Other fellows go at my age, and I was rather pleased to be ready at sixteen," he began. But she added, quickly,

"They go, but how do they come out? Many lose health of body, and many what is more precious still, moral strength, because too young and ignorant to withstand temptations of all sorts. The best part of education does not come from books, and the good principles I value more than either of the other things are to be carefully watched over till firmly fixed; then you may face the world, and come to no real harm. Trust me, dear, I do it for your sake; so bear the disappointment bravely, and in the end I think you will say I'm right."

"I'll do my best; but I don't see what is to become of us if we don't go to school. You will get tired of it first," said Frank, trying to set a good example to the others, who were looking much impressed and interested.

"No danger of that, for I never sent my children to school to get rid of them, and now that they are old enough to be companions, I

want them at home more than ever. There are to be some lessons, however, for busy minds must be fed, but not crammed; so you boys will go and recite at certain hours such things as seem most important. But there is to be no studying at night, no shutting up all the best hours of the day, no hurry and fret of getting on fast, or skimming over the surface of many studies without learning any thoroughly."

"So I say!" cried Jack, pleased with the new idea, for he never did love books. "I do hate to be driven so I don't half understand, because there is no time to have things explained. School is good fun as far as play goes; but I don't see the sense of making a fellow learn eighty questions in geography one day, and forget them the next.

"What is to become of me, please?" asked Jill, meekly.

"You and Molly are to have lessons here. I was a teacher when I was young, you know, and liked it, so I shall be school-ma'am, and leave my house-keeping in better hands than mine. I always thought that mothers should teach their girls during these years, and vary their studies to suit the growing creatures as only mothers can.

"That will be splendid! Will Molly's father let her come?" cried Jill, feeling quite reconciled to staying at home, if her friend was to be with her.

"He likes the plan very much, for Molly is growing fast, and needs a sort of care that Miss Dawes cannot give her. I am not a hard mistress, and I hope you will find my school a pleasant one."

"I know I shall; and I'm not disappointed, because I was pretty sure I couldn't go to the old school again, when I heard the doctor say I must be very careful for a long time. I thought he meant months; but if it must be years, I can bear it, for I've been happy this last one though I was sick," said Jill, glad to show that it had not been wasted time by being cheerful and patient now.

"That's my good girl!" and Mrs. Minot stroked the curly black head as if it was her own little daughter's. "You have done so well, I want you to go on improving, for care now will save you pain and disappointment by and by. You all have got a capital start during these six weeks, so it is a good time to begin my experiment. If it does not work well, we will go back to school and college next spring."

"Hurrah for Mamma and the long vacation!" cried Jack, catching up two big books and whirling them round like clubs, as if to get his muscles in order at once.

"Now I shall have time to go to the Gymnasium and straighten out my back," said Frank, who was growing so tall he needed more breadth to make his height symmetrical.

"And to ride horsback. I am going to hire old Jane and get out the little phaeton, so we can all enjoy the fine weather while it lasts. Molly and I can drive Jill, and you can take turns in the saddle when you are tired of ball and boating. Exercise of all sorts is one of the lessons we are to learn," said Mrs. Minot, suggesting all the pleasant things she could to sweeten the pill for her pupils, two of whom did love their books, not being old enough to know that even an excellent thing may be overdone.

"Won't that be gay? I'll get down the saddle to-day, so we can begin right off. Lem rides, and we can go together. Hope old Jane will like it as well as I shall," said Jack, who had found a new friend in a pleasant lad lately come to town.

"You must see that she does, for you boys are to take care of her. We will put the barn in order, and you can decide which shall be hostler and which gardener, for I don't intend to hire labor on the place any more. Our estate is not a large one, and it will be excellent work for you, my men."

"All right! I'll see to Jane. I love horses," said Jack, well pleased with the prospect.

"My horse won't need much care. I prefer a bicycle to a beast, so I'll get in the squashes, pick the apples, and cover the strawberry bed when it is time," added Frank, who had enjoyed the free life at Pebbly Beach so much that he was willing to prolong it.

"You may put me in a hen-coop, and keep me there a year, if you like. I won't fret, for I'm sure you know what is best for me," said Jill, gayly, as she looked up at the good friend who had done so much for her.

"I'm not sure that I won't put you in a pretty cage and send you to Cattle Show, as a sample of what we can do in the way of taming a wild bird till it is nearly as meek as a dove," answered Mrs. Minot, much gratified at the amiability of her flock.

"I don't see why there should not be an exhibition of children, and prizes for the good and pretty ones, as well as for fat pigs, fine horses, or handsome fruit and flowers--I don't mean a baby show, but boys and girls, so people can see what the prospect is of a good crop for the next generation," said Frank, glancing toward the tower of the building where the yearly Agricultural Fair was soon to be held.

"Years ago, there was a pretty custom here of collecting all the schools together in the spring, and having a festival at the Town Hall. Each school showed its best pupils, and the parents looked on at the blooming flower show. It was a pity it was ever given up, for the schools have never been so good as then, nor the interest in them so great"; and Mrs. Minot wondered, as many people do, why farmers seem to care more for their cattle and crops than for their children, willingly spending large sums on big barns and costly experiments, while the school-houses are shabby and

inconvenient, and the cheapest teachers preferred.

"Ralph is going to send my bust. He asked if he might, and mother said Yes. Mr. German thinks it very good, and I hope other people will," said Jill, nodding toward the little plaster head that smiled down from its bracket with her own merry look.

"I could send my model; it is nearly done. Ralph told me it was a clever piece of work, and he knows," added Frank, quite taken with the idea of exhibiting his skill in mechanics.

"And I could send my star bedquilt! They always have things of that kind at Cattle Show"; and Jill began to rummage in the closet for the pride of her heart, burning to display it to an admiring world.

"I haven't got anything. Can't sew rags together; or make baby engines, and I have no live-stock--yes, I have too! There's old Bun. I'll send him, for the fun of it; he really is a curiosity, for he is the biggest one I ever saw, and hopping into the lime has made his fur such a queer color, he looks like a new sort of rabbit. I'll catch and shut him up before he gets wild again"; and off rushed Jack to lure unsuspecting old Bun, who had grown tame during their absence, into the cage which he detested.

They all laughed at his ardor, but the fancy pleased them; and as Mamma saw no reason why their little works of art should not be

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sent, Frank fell to work on his model, and Jill resolved to finish her quilt at once, while Mrs. Minot went off to see Mr. Acton about the hours and studies for the boys.

In a week or two, the young people were almost resigned to the loss of school, for they found themselves delightfully fresh for the few lessons they did have, and not weary of play, since it took many useful forms. Old Jane not only carried them all to ride, but gave Jack plenty of work keeping her premises in nice order.

Frank mourned privately over the delay of college, but found a solace in his whirligig and the Gymnasium, where he set himself to developing a chest to match the big head above, which head no longer ached with eight or ten hours of study. Harvesting beans and raking up leaves seemed to have a soothing effect upon his nerves, for now he fell asleep at once instead of thumping his pillow with vexation because his brain would go on working at difficult problems and passages when he wanted it to stop.

Jill and Molly drove away in the little phaeton every fair morning over the sunny hills and through the changing woods, filling their hands with asters and golden-rod, their lungs with the pure, invigorating air, and their heads with all manner of sweet and happy fancies and feelings born of the wholesome influences about them. People shook their heads, and said it was wasting time; but the rosy-faced girls were Content to trust those wiser than themselves, and found their new school very pleasant. They

read aloud a good deal, rapidly acquiring one of the rarest and most beautiful accomplishments; for they could stop and ask questions as they went along, so that they understood what they read, which is half the secret. A thousand things came up as they sewed together in the afternoon, and the eager minds received much general information in an easy and well-ordered way.

Physiology was one of the favorite studies, and Mrs. Hammond often came in to give them a little lecture, teaching them to understand the wonders of their own systems, and how to keep them in order-- a lesson of far more importance just then than Greek or Latin, for girls are the future mothers, nurses, teachers, of the race, and should feel how much depends on them. Merry could not resist the attractions of the friendly circle, and soon persuaded her mother to let her do as they did; so she got more exercise and less study, which was just what the delicate girl needed.

The first of the new ideas seemed to prosper, and the second, though suggested in joke, was carried out in earnest, for the other young people were seized with a strong desire to send something to the Fair. In fact, all sorts of queer articles were proposed, and much fun prevailed, especially among the boys, who ransacked their gardens for mammoth vegetables, sighed for five-legged calves, blue roses, or any other natural curiosity by means of which they might distinguish themselves. Ralph was the only one who had anything really worth sending; for though Franks model

seemed quite perfect, it obstinately refused to go, and at the last moment blew up with a report like a pop-gun. So it was laid away for repairs, and its disappointed maker devoted his energies to helping Jack keep Bun in order; for that indomitable animal got out of every prison they put him in, and led Jack a dreadful life during that last week. At all hours of the day and night that distracted boy would start up, crying, "There he is again!" and dart out to give chase and capture the villain now grown too fat to run as he once did.

The very night before the Fair, Frank was wakened by a chilly draught, and, getting up to see where it came from, found Jack's door open and bed empty, while the vision of a white ghost flitting about the garden suggested a midnight rush after old Bun.

Frank watched laughingly, till poor Jack came toward the house with the gentleman in gray kicking lustily in his arms, and then whispered in a sepulchral tone,

"Put him in the old refrigerator, he can't get out of that,"

Blessing him for the suggestion, the exhausted hunter shut up his victim in the new cell, and found it a safe one, for Bun could not burrow through a sheet of zinc, or climb up the smooth walls.

Jill's quilt was a very elaborate piece of work, being bright blue with little white stars all over it; this she finished nicely, and felt sure no patient old lady could outdo it. Merry decided to send butter, for she had been helping her mother in the dairy that

summer, and rather liked the light part of the labor. She knew it would please her very much if she chose that instead of wild Bowers, so she practised moulding the yellow pats into pretty shapes, that it might please both eye and taste.

Molly declared she would have a little pen, and put Boo in it, as the prize fat boy--a threat which so alarmed the innocent that he ran away, and was about two or three miles from home, asleep under the wall, with two seed-cakes and a pair of socks done up in a bundle. Being with difficulty convinced that it was a joke, he consented to return to his family, but was evidently suspicious, till Molly decided to send her cats, and set about preparing them for exhibition. The Minots' deserted Bunny-house was rather large; but as cats cannot be packed as closely as much-enduring sheep, Molly borrowed this desirable family mansion, and put her darlings into it, where they soon settled down, and appeared to enjoy their new residence. It had been scrubbed up and painted red, cushions and plates put in, and two American flags adorned the roof. Being barred all round, a fine view of the Happy Family could be had, now twelve in number, as Molasses had lately added three white kits to the varied collection.

The girls thought this would be the most interesting spectacle of all, and Grif proposed to give some of the cats extra tails, to increase their charms, especially poor Mortification, who would appreciate the honor of two, after having none for so long. But Molly declined, and Grif looked about him for some attractive

animal to exhibit, so that he too might go in free and come to honor, perhaps.

A young lady in the town owned a donkey, a small, gray beast, who insisted on tripping along the sidewalks and bumping her rider against the walls as she paused to browse at her own sweet will, regardless of blows or cries, till ready to move on. Expressing great admiration for this rare animal, Grif obtained leave to display the charms of Graciosa at the Fair. Little did she guess the dark designs entertained against her dignity, and happily she was not as sensitive to ridicule as a less humble-minded animal, so she went willingly with her new friend, and enjoyed the combing and trimming up which she received at his hands, while he prepared for the great occasion.

When the morning of September 28th arrived, the town was all astir, and the Fair ground a lively scene. The air was full of the lowing of cattle, the tramp of horses, squealing of indignant pigs, and clatter of tongues, as people and animals streamed in at the great gate and found their proper places. Our young folks were in a high state of excitement, as they rumbled away with their treasures in a hay-cart. The Bunny-house might have been a cage of tigers, so rampant were the cats at this new move. Old Bun, in a small box, brooded over the insult of the refrigerator, and looked as fierce as a rabbit could. Gus had a coop of rare fowls, who clucked wildly all the way, while Ralph, with the bust in his

arms, stood up in front, and Jill and Molly bore the precious bedquilt, as they sat behind.

These objects of interest were soon arranged, and the girls went to admire Merry's golden butter cups among the green leaves, under which lay the ice that kept the pretty flowers fresh. The boys were down below, where the cackling was very loud, but not loud enough to drown the sonorous bray which suddenly startled them as much as it did the horses outside. A shout of laughter followed, and away went the lads, to see what the fun was, while the girls ran out on the balcony, as someone said, "It's that rogue of a Grif with some new joke."

It certainly was, and, to judge from the peals of merriment, the joke was a good one. In at the gate came a two-headed donkey, ridden by Grif, in great spirits at his success, for the gate-keeper laughed so he never thought to ask for toll. A train of boys followed him across the ground, lost in admiration of the animal and the cleverness of her rider. Among the stage properties of the Dramatic Club was the old ass's head once used in some tableaux from "Midsummer Night's Dream." This Grif had mended up, and fastened by means of straps and a collar to poor Graciosa's neck, hiding ~ work with a red cloth over her back. One eye was gone, but the other still opened and shut, and the long ears wagged by means of strings, which he slyly managed with the bridle, so the artificial head looked almost as natural as the real one. The funniest thing of all was the innocent air of Graciosa, and the

mildly inquiring expression with which she now and then turned to look at or to smell of the new ornament as if she recognized a friend's face, yet was perplexed by its want of animation. She vented her feelings in a bray, which Grif imitated, convulsing all hearers by the sound as well as by the wink the one eye gave, and the droll waggle of one erect ear, while the other pointed straight forward.

The girls laughed so at the ridiculous sight that they nearly fell over the railing, and the boys were in ecstasies, especially when Grif, emboldened by his success, trotted briskly round the race-course, followed by the cheers of the crowd. Excited by the noise, Graciosa did her best, till the false head, loosened by the rapid motion, slipped round under her nose, causing her to stop so suddenly that Grif flew off, alighting on his own head with a violence which would have killed any other boy. Sobered by his downfall, he declined to mount again, but led his steed to repose in a shed, while he rejoined his friends, who were waiting impatiently to congratulate him on his latest and best prank. The Committee went their rounds soon after, and, when the doors were again opened, everyone hurried to see if their articles had received a premium. A card lay on the butter cups, and Mrs. Grant was full of pride because her butter always took a prize, and this proved that Merry was walking in her mother's steps, in this direction at least. Another card swung from the blue quilt, for the kindly judges knew who made it, and were glad to please the little girl, though several others as curious but not so pretty hung near

by. The cats were admired, but, as they were not among the animals usually exhibited, there was no prize awarded. Gus hoped his hens would get one; but somebody else outdid him, to the great indignation of Laura and Lotty, who had fed the white biddies faithfully for months. Jack was sure his rabbit was the biggest there, and went eagerly to look for his premium. But neither card nor Bun were to be seen, for the old rascal had escaped for the last time, and was never seen again; which was a great comfort to Jack, who was heartily tired of him.

Ralph's bust was the best of all, for not only did it get a prize, and was much admired, but a lady, who found Jill and Merry rejoicing over it, was so pleased with the truth and grace of the little head, that she asked about the artist, and whether he would do one of her own child, who was so delicate she feared he might not live long.

Merry gladly told the story of her ambitious friend, and went to find him, that he might secure the order. While she was gone, Jill took up the tale, gratefully telling how kind he had been to her, how patiently he worked and waited, and how much he longed to go abroad. Fortunately the lady was rich and generous, as well as fond of art, and being pleased with the bust, and interested in the young sculptor, gave him the order where he came, and filled his soul with joy by adding, that, if it suited her when done, it should be put into marble. She lived in the city, and Ralph soon arranged his work so that he could give up his noon hour, and go to model

the child; for every penny he could earn or save now was very precious, as he still hoped to go abroad.

The girls were so delighted with this good fortune, that they did not stay for the races, but went home to tell the happy news, leaving the boys to care for the cats, and enjoy the various matches to come off that day.

"I'm so glad I tried to look pleasant when I was lying on the board while Ralph did my head, for the pleasantness got into the clay face, and that made the lady like it," said Jill, as she lay resting on the sofa.

"I always thought it was a dear, bright little face, but now I love and admire it more than ever," cried Merry, kissing it gratefully, as she remembered the help and pleasure it had given Ralph.

Chapter 24 – Down the River

A fortnight later, the boys were picking apples one golden October afternoon, and the girls were hurrying to finish their work, that they might go and help the harvesters. It was six weeks now Since the new school began, and they had learned to like it very much, though they found that it was not all play, by any means. But lessons, exercise, and various sorts of housework made an agreeable change, and they felt that they were learning things which would be useful to them all their lives. They had been making underclothes for themselves, and each had several neatly finished garments cut, fitted, and sewed by herself, and trimmed with the pretty tatting Jill made in such quantities while she lay on her sofa.

Now they were completing new dressing sacks, and had enjoyed this job very much, as each chose her own material, and suited her own taste in the making. Jill's was white, with tiny scarlet leaves all over it, trimmed with red braid and buttons so like checkerberries she was tempted to eat them. Molly's was gay, with bouquets of every sort of flower, scalloped all round, and adorned with six buttons, each of a different color, which she thought the last touch of elegance. Merry's, though the simplest, was the daintiest of the three, being pale blue, trimmed with delicate edging, and beautifully made.

Mrs. Minot had been reading from Miss Strickland's "Queens of England" while the girls worked, and an illustrated Sliakspeare lay open on the table, as well as several fine photographs of historical places for them to look at as they went along. The hour was over now, the teacher gone, and the pupils setting the last stitches as they talked over the lesson, which had interested them exceedingly.

"I really believe I have got Henry's six wives into my head right at last. Two Annes, three Katherines, and one Jane. Now I've seen where they lived and heard their stories, I quite feel as if I knew them," said Merry, shaking the threads off her work before she folded it up to carry home.

"King Henry the Eighth to six spouses was wedded,
One died, one survived, two divorced, two beheaded,'
was all I knew about them before. Poor things, what a bad time they did have," added Jill, patting down the red braid, which would pucker a bit at the corners.

"Katherine Parr had the best of it, because she outlived the old tyrant and so kept her head on," said Molly, winding the thread round her last button, as if bound to fasten it on so firmly that nothing should decapitate that.

"I used to think I'd like to be a queen or a great lady, and wear velvet and jewels, and live in a palace, but now I don't care much

for that sort of splendor. I like to make things pretty at home, and know that they all depend on me, and love me very much. Queens are not happy, and I am," said Merry, pausing to look at Anne Hathaway's cottage as she put up the picture, and to wonder if it was very pleasant to have a famous man for one's husband.

"I guess your missionarying has done you good; mine has, and I'm getting to have things my own way more and more every day. Miss Bat is so amiable, I hardly know her, and father tells her to ask Miss Molly when she goes to him for orders. Isn't that fun?" laughed Molly, in high glee, at the agreeable change. "I like it ever so much, but I don't want to stay so all my days. I mean to travel, and just as soon as I can I shall take Boo and go all round the world, and see everything," she added, waving her gay sack, as if it were the flag she was about to nail to the masthead of her ship.

"Well, I should like to be famous in some way, and have people admire me very much. I'd like to act, or dance, or sing, or be what I heard the ladies at Pebbly Beach call a 'queen of society.' But I don't expect to be anything, and I'm not going to worry I shall not be a Lucinda, so I ought to be contented and happy all my life," said Jill, who was very ambitious in spite of the newly acquired meekness, which was all the more becoming because her natural liveliness often broke out like sunshine through a veil of light clouds.

If the three girls could have looked forward ten years they would

have been surprised to see how different a fate was theirs from the one each had chosen, and how happy each was in the place she was called to fill. Merry was not making the old farmhouse pretty, but living in Italy, with a young sculptor for her husband, and beauty such as she never dreamed of all about her. Molly was not travelling round the world, but contentedly keeping house for her father and still watching over Boo, who was becoming her pride and joy as well as care. Neither was Jill a famous woman, but a very happy and useful one, with the two mothers leaning on her as they grew old, the young men better for her influence over them, many friends to love and honor her, and a charming home, where she was queen by right of her cheery spirit, grateful heart, and unfailing devotion to those who had made her what she was. If any curious reader, not content with this peep into futurity, asks, "Did Molly and Jill ever marry?" we must reply, for the sake of peace--Molly remained a merry spinster all her days, one of the independent, brave, and busy creatures of whom there is such need in the world to help take care of other peoples' wives and children, and do the many useful jobs that the married folk have no time for. Jill certainly did wear a white veil on the day she was twenty-five and called her husband Jack. Further than that we cannot go, except to say that this leap did not end in a catastrophe, like the first one they took together.

That day, however, they never dreamed of what was in store for them, but chattered away as they cleared up the room, and then ran off ready for play, feeling that they had earned it by work well

done. They found the lads just finishing, with Boo to help by picking up the windfalls for the cider-heap, after he had amused himself by putting about a bushel down the various holes old Bun had left behind him. Jack was risking his neck climbing in the most dangerous places, while Frank, with a long-handled apple-picker, nipped off the finest fruit with care, both enjoying the pleasant task and feeling proud of the handsome red and yellow piles all about the little orchard. Merry and Molly caught up baskets and fell to work with all their might, leaving Jill to sit upon a stool and sort the early apples ready to use at once, looking up now and then to nod and smile at her mother who watched her from the window, rejoicing to see her lass so well and happy.

It was such a lovely day, they all felt its cheerful influence; for the sun shone bright and warm, the air was full of an invigorating freshness which soon made the girls' faces look like rosy apples, and their spirits as gay as if they had been stealing sips of new cider through a straw. Jack whistled like a blackbird as he swung and bumped about, Frank orated and joked, Merry and Molly ran races to see who would fill and empty fastest, and Jill sung to Boo, who reposed in a barrel, exhausted with his labors.

"These are the last of the pleasant days, and we ought to make the most of them. Let's have one more picnic before the frost spoils the leaves," said Merry, resting a minute at the gate to look down the street, which was a glorified sort of avenue, with

brilliant maples lining the way and carpeting the ground with crimson and gold.

"Oh, yes! Go down the river once more and have supper on the Island. I couldn't go to some of your picnics, and I do long for a last good time before winter shuts me up again," cried Jill, eager to harvest all the sunshine she could, for she was not yet quite her old self again.

"I'm your man, if the other fellows agree. We can't barrel these up for a while, so to-morrow will be a holiday for us. Better make sure of the day while you can, this weather can't last long"; and Frank shook his head like one on intimate terms with Old Prob.

"Don't worry about those high ones, Jack. Give a shake and come down and plan about the party," called Molly, throwing up a big Baldwin with what seemed a remarkably good aim, for a shower of apples followed, and a boy came tumbling earthward to catch on the lowest bough and swing down like a caterpillar, exclaiming, as he landed,

"I'm glad that job is done! I've rasped every knuckle I've got and worn out the knees of my pants. Nice little crop though, isn't it?"

"It will be nicer if this young man does not bite every apple he touches. Hi there! Stop it, Boo," commanded Frank, as he caught his young assistant putting his small teeth into the best ones, to see if they were sweet or sour.

Molly set the barrel up on end, and that took the boy out of the reach of mischief, so he retired from view and peeped through a crack as he ate his fifth pearmain, regardless of consequences.

"Gus will be at home to-morrow. He always comes up early on Saturday, you know. We can't get on without him," said Frank, who missed his mate very much, for Gus had entered college, and so far did not like it as much as he had expected.

"Or Ralph; he is very busy every spare minute on the little boy's bust, which is getting on nicely, he says; but he will be able to come home in time for supper, I think," added Merry, remembering the absent, as usual.

"I'll ask the girls on my way home, and all meet at two o'clock for a good row while it's warm. What shall I bring?" asked Molly, wondering if Miss Bat's amiability would extend to making goodies in the midst of her usual Saturday's baking.

"You bring coffee and the big pot and some buttered crackers. I'll see to the pie and cake, and the other girls can have anything else they like," answered Merry, glad and proud that she could provide the party with her own inviting handiwork.

"I'll take my zither, so we can have music as we sail, and Grif will bring his violin, and Ralph can imitate a banjo so that you'd be

sure he had one. I do hope it will be fine, it is so splendid to go round like other folks and enjoy myself," cried Jill, with a little bounce of satisfaction at the prospect of a row and ramble.

"Come along, then, and make sure of the girls," said Merry, catching up her roll of work, for the harvesting was done.

Molly put her sack on as the easiest way of carrying it, and, extricating Boo, they went off, accompanied by the boys, "to make sure of the fellows" also, leaving Jill to sit among the apples, singing and sorting like a thrifty little housewife.

Next day eleven young people met at the appointed place, basket in hand. Ralph could not come till later, for he was working now as he never worked before. They were a merry flock, for the mellow autumn day was even brighter and clearer than yesterday, and the river looked its loveliest, winding away under the sombre hemlocks, or through the fairyland the gay woods made on either side. Two large boats and two small ones held them all, and away they went, first up through the three bridges and round the bend, then, turning, they floated down to the green island, where a grove of oaks rustled their sere leaves and the squirrels were still gathering acorns. Here they often met to keep their summer revels, and here they now spread their feast on the flat rock which needed no cloth beside its own gray lichens. The girls trimmed each dish with bright leaves, and made the supper look like a banquet for the elves, while the boys built a fire in the nook where ashes and blackened stones told of many a rustic meal. The big tin

coffee-pot was not so romantic, but more successful than a kettle slung on three sticks, gypsy fashion; so they did not risk a downfall, but set the water boiling, and soon filled the air with the agreeable perfume associated in their minds with picnics, as most of them never tasted the fascinating stuff at any other time, being the worst children can drink.

Frank was cook, Gus helped cut bread and cake, Jack and Grif brought wood, while Bob Walker took Joe's place and made himself generally useful, as the other gentleman never did, and so was quite out of favor lately.

All was ready at last, and they were just deciding to sit down without Ralph, when a shout told them he was coming, and down the river skimmed a wherry at such a rate the boys wondered whom he had been racing with.

"Something has happened, and he is coming to tell us," said Jill, who sat where she could see his eager face.

"Nothing bad, or he wouldn't smile so. He is glad of a good row and a little fun after working so hard all the week"; and Merry shook a red napkin as a welcoming signal.

Something certainly had happened, and a very happy something it must be, they all thought, as Ralph came on with flashing oars, and leaping out as the boat touched the shore, ran up the slope,

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waving his hat, and calling in a glad voice, sure of sympathy in his delight,

"Good news! good news! Hurrah for Rome, next month!"

The young folks forgot their supper for a moment, to congratulate him on his happy prospect, and hear all about it, while the leaves rustled as if echoing the kind words, and the squirrels sat up aloft, wondering what all the pleasant clamor was about.

Yes, I'm really going in November. German asked me to go with him to-day, and if there is any little hitch in my getting off, he'll lend a hand, and I--I'll black his boots, wet his clay, and run his errands the rest of my life to pay for this!" cried Ralph, in a burst of gratitude; for, independent as he was, the kindness of this successful friend to a deserving comrade touched and won his heart.

"I call that a handsome thing to do!" said Frank, warmly, for noble actions always pleased him. "I heard my mother say that making good or useful men was the best sort of sculpture, so I think David German may be proud of this piece of work, whether the big statue succeeds or not."

"I'm very glad, old fellow, When I run over for my trip four years from now, I'll look you up, and see how you are getting on," said Gus, with a hearty shake of the hand; and the younger lads grinned cheerfully, even while they wondered where the fun was

in shaping clay and chipping marble.

"Shall you stay four years?" asked Merry's soft voice, while a wistful look came into her happy eyes.

"Ten, if I can," answered Ralph, decidedly, feeling as if a long lifetime would be all too short for the immortal work he meant to do. "I've got so much to learn, that I shall do whatever David thinks best for me at first, and when I can go alone, I shall just shut myself up and forget that there is any world outside my den."

"Do write and tell us how you get on now and then; I like to hear about other people's good times while I'm waiting for my own," said Molly, too much interested to observe that Grif was sticking burrs up and down her braids.

"Of course I shall write to some of you, but you mustn't expect any great things for years yet. People don't grow famous in a hurry, and it takes a deal of hard work even to earn your bread and butter, as you'll find if you ever try it," answered Ralph, sobering down a little as he remembered the long and steady effort it had taken to get even so far.

"Speaking of bread and butter reminds me that we'd better eat ours before the coffee gets quite cold," said Annette, for Merry seemed to have forgotten that she had been chosen to play

matron, as she was the oldest.

The boys seconded the motion, and for a few minutes supper was the all-absorbing topic, as the cups went round and the goodies vanished rapidly, accompanied by the usual mishaps which make picnic meals such fun. Ralph's health was drunk with all sorts of good wishes; and such splendid prophecies were made, that he would have far surpassed Michael Angelo, if they could have come true. Grif gave him an order on the spot for a full-length statue of himself, and stood up to show the imposing attitude in which he wished to be taken, but unfortunately slipped and fell forward with one hand in the custard pie, the other clutching wildly at the coffee-pot, which inhospitably burnt his fingers.

"I think I grasp the idea, and will be sure to remember not to make your hair blow one way and the tails of your coat another, as a certain sculptor made those of a famous man," laughed Ralph, as the fallen hero scrambled up, amidst general merriment.

"Will the little bust be done before you go?" asked Jill, anxiously, feeling a personal interest in the success of that order.

"Yes: I've been hard at it every spare minute I could get, and have a fortnight more. It suits Mrs. Lennox, and she will pay well for it, so I shall have something to start with, though I haven't been able to save much. I'm to thank you for that, and I shall send you the

first pretty thing I get hold of," answered Ralph, looking gratefully at the bright face, which grew still brighter as Jill exclaimed,

"I do feel so proud to know a real artist, and have my bust done by him. I only wish I could pay for it as Mrs. Lennox does; but I haven't any money, and you don't need the sort of things I can make," she added, shaking her head, as she thought over knit slippers, wall-pockets, and crochet in all its forms, as offerings to her departing friend.

"You can write often, and tell me all about everybody, for I shall want to know, and people will soon forget me when I'm gone," said Ralph, looking at Merry, who was making a garland of yellow leaves for Juliet's black hair.

Jill promised, and kept her word; but the longest letters went from the farm-house on the hill, though no one knew the fact till long afterward. Merry said nothing now, but she smiled, with a pretty color in her cheeks, and was very much absorbed in her work, while the talk went on.

"I wish I was twenty, and going to seek my fortune, as you are," said Jack; and the other boys agreed with him, for something in Ralph's new plans and purposes roused the manly spirit in all of them, reminding them that playtime would soon be over, and the great world before them, where to choose.

"It is easy enough to say what you'd like; but the trouble is, you have to take what you can get, and make the best of it," said Gus, whose own views were rather vague as yet.

"No you don't, always; you can make things go as you want them, if you only try hard enough, and walk right over whatever stands in the way. I don't mean to give up my plans for any man; but, if I live, I'll carry them out--you see if I don't"; and Frank gave the rock where he lay a blow with his fist, that sent the acorns flying all about.

One of them hit Jack, and he said, sorrowfully, as he held it in his hand so carefully it was evident he had some association with it, "Ed used to say that, and he had some splendid plans, but they didn't come to anything."

"Perhaps they did; who can tell? Do your best while you live, and I don't believe anything good is lost, whether we have it a long or a short time," said Ralph, who knew what a help and comfort high hopes were, and how they led to better things, if worthily cherished.

"A great many acorns are wasted, I suppose; but some of them sprout and grow, and make splendid trees," added Merry, feeling more than she knew how to express, as she looked up at the oaks overhead.

Only seven of the party were sitting on the knoll now, for the rest had gone to wash the dishes and pack the baskets down by the boats. Jack and Jill, with the three elder boys, were in a little group, and as Merry spoke, Gus said to Frank,

"Did you plant yours?"

"Yes, on the lawn, and I mean it shall come up if I can make it," answered Frank, gravely.

"I put mine where I can see it from the window, and not forget to water and take care of it," added Jack, still turning the pretty brown acorn to and fro as if he loved it.

"What do they mean?" whispered Merry to Jill, who was leaning against her knee to rest.

"The boys were walking in the Cemetery last Sunday, as they often do, and when they came to Ed's grave, the place was all covered with little acorns from the tree that grows on the bank. They each took up some as they stood talking, and Jack said he should plant his, for he loved Ed very much, you know. The others said they would, too; and I hope the trees will grow, though we don't need anything to remember him by," answered Jill, in a low tone, thinking of the pressed flowers the girls kept for his sake. The boys heard her, but no one spoke for a moment as they sat looking across the river toward the hill where the pines whispered their lullabies and pointed heavenward, steadfast and green, all

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the year round. None of them could express the thought that was in their minds as Jill told the little story; but the act and the feeling that prompted it were perhaps as beautiful an assurance as could have been given that the dear dead boy's example had not been wasted, for the planting of the acorns was a symbol of the desire budding in those young hearts to be what he might have been, and to make their lives nobler for the knowledge and the love of him.

"It seems as if a great deal had happened this year," said Merry, in a pensive tone, for this quiet talk just suited her mood.

"So I say, for there's been a Declaration of Independence and a Revolution in our house, and I'm commander-in-chief now; and don't I like it!" cried Molly, complacently surveying the neat new uniform she wore of her own choosing.

"I feel as if I never learned so much in my life as I have since last December, and yet I never did so little," added Jill, wondering why the months of weariness and pain did not seem more dreadful to her.

'Well, pitching on my head seems to have given me a good shaking up, somehow, and I mean to do great things next year in better ways than breaking my bones coasting," said Jack, with a manly air.

"I feel like a Siamese twin without his mate now you are gone, but I'm under orders for a while, and mean to do my best. Guess it won't be lost time"; and Frank nodded at Gus, who nodded back with the slightly superior expression all Freshmen wear.

"Hope you won't find it so. My work is all cut out for me, and I intend to go in and win, though it is more of a grind than you fellows know."

"I'm sure I have everything to be grateful for. It won't be plain sailing--I don't expect it; but, if I live, I'll do something to be proud of," said Ralph, squaring his shoulders as if to meet and conquer all obstacles as he looked into the glowing west, was not fairer than his ambitious dreams.

Here we will say good-bye to these girls and boys of ours as they sit together in the sunshine talking over a year that was to be for ever memorable to them, not because of any very remarkable events, but because they were just beginning to look about them as they stepped out of childhood into youth, and some of the experiences of the past months had set them to thinking, taught them to see the use and beauty of the small duties, joys, and sorrows which make up our lives, and inspired them to resolve that the coming year should be braver and brighter than the last. There are many such boys and girls, full of high hopes, lovely possibilities, and earnest plans, pausing a moment before they push their little boats from the safe shore. Let those who launch

them see to it that they have good health to man the oars, good education for ballast, and good principles as pilots to guide them as they voyage down an ever-widening river to the sea.