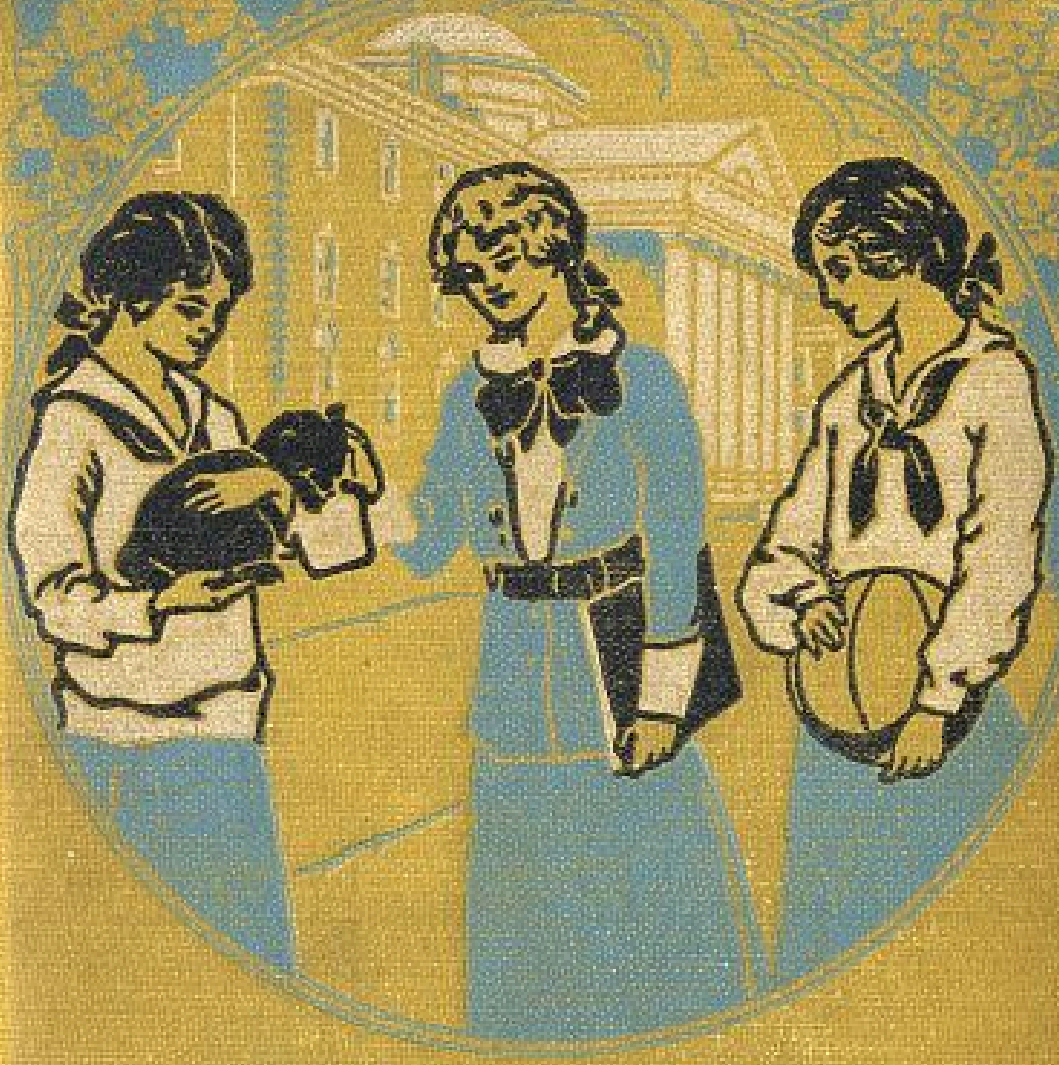
At BOARDING SCHOOL *with the* TUCKER TWINS

NELL SPEED



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"Do you know, Miss Dum, you looked like Diana when you stood on that rock?"—Page 230.

AT BOARDING SCHOOL

WITH THE TUCKER TWINS

By
NELL SPEED
AUTHOR OF "THE MOLLY BROWN SERIES," ETC.

WITH FOUR HALF-TONE ILLUSTRATIONS
BY ARTHUR O. SCOTT

NEW YORK
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At Boarding School
with the Tucker Twins.

CHAPTER I.

LEAVING HOME.

Leaving home to go to boarding school was bad enough, but leaving on a damp, cold morning before dawn seemed to be about the worst thing that could befall a girl of fifteen. I have noticed that whatever age you happen to be seems to be the age in which hardships are the most difficult to bear.

Anyhow, there I was, only fifteen, facing the necessity of saying early morning farewells, the first one of all to my comfortable bed, where I had slept off and on, principally on, for those fifteen years. And now I and my bed must part.

"Day done bus'ed, Miss Page. The doctor is stirrin' an' you'd better rise an' shine," and kind old Mammy Susan leaned yearningly over me. "I hate to wake up my lamb. I knowd dis day would come when dey'd take you 'way from me, but I nebber did think 'twould be 'fo' dawn wif all de long day 'head er me to be studyin' 'bout you. What yo' mammy goin' ter do 'thout you, chile?"

"Well, Mammy, we'll have to grin and bear it. I'll be home Christmas, and that isn't so far off." I jumped out of bed and pulled my hat-tub into the middle of the floor, ready for my daily cold sponge bath. Probably I had inherited the habit of the cold bath from my English grandfather along with the big hat-tub.

"Law, chile, can't you leave off punishin' yo'self jes' dis onct? You can't be to say dirty, an' dis here water is pow'ful cold."

Mammy and I had had this discussion about my cold bath every morning since I had been old enough to bathe myself. It was only after many battles that she had stopped sneaking warm water into my big can. That morning I let it pass, although the water was lukewarm.

"Y'ain't mad wif yo' ole Mammy, is yer, honey chile? Looks like I didn't have de heart to plunge my baby lamb into sho'nuf cold water on sech a dark chilly day, wif her a-leavin' an' all. 'Tain't ter say warm now. I jes' tempered it a leetle."

"That's all right, Mammy. 'God tempers the wind to the shorn lamb' and you, it seems, temper the water. They say there are lots of bathrooms at Gresham, and I can have the water as deep and cold as I want it."

"Well, don't you go drown yo'self in any er dem new-fashioned plumbin' tubs, an' fer de lan's sake, Miss Page, don't you let yo'self be drawed down inter none er dem was'e pipes," and Mammy Susan hurried off to bring in the all too early breakfast.

I dressed in my usual haste, putting on my nice blue traveling suit, ordered by mail from New York. It was quite long, well down to my shoe tops, and I felt very stylish and grown-up. I had never given any thought to my appearance, and no one else in my life seemed to have except Cousin Sue Lee and Mammy. I don't know just what Cousin Sue thought about me, but Mammy thought I was the most beautiful creature in the world and freely told me so. That morning as I put on the little black velvet toque, also purchased by mail, I looked at myself very critically in the mirror.

"Page Allison, are you pretty or not? I, for one, think not. You've got freckles on your nose and your mouth is simply huge. I'd like to say something about your eyes to take the conceit out of you, but they look so like Father's that I'd feel just like I was sassing him if I did. Anyhow, I'm glad your hair curls."

I had intended to sentimentalize over leaving my room and going out into the world, but I forgot all about it, and grabbing my ready-packed suitcase, also a mail order, I raced downstairs as Mammy Susan rang the breakfast bell.

Father was already in the dining-room, standing with his back to the little wood fire that Mammy had kindled to cheer us up with. Mammy always seemed to feel that when we were in any distress she must warm us and feed us whether we were cold and hungry or not. That morning we were neither, but we warmed by her fire and tried to choke down a great

deal of her batter bread and roe herring to show her we appreciated her efforts.

Father looked up as I came in and for a moment regarded me in speechless amazement.

"Why, honey, you almost took my breath away! You look so grown-up in the new dress and hat. I didn't know you were so like your Mother, child," and he drew me to him and kissed me.

Father and I were as a rule not very demonstrative, but I clung to him for a moment and he held me close with his long, wiry arm.

"I wish I could take you to Gresham, honey, but old Mrs. Purdy is very low and she expects me to be with her at the end."

"That's all right, Father, don't you worry. There are certain to be other girls on the train who are going to Gresham and I'll butt in on them," I answered much more bravely than I felt. It did seem terribly lonely and forlorn to be going off and installing myself in boarding school. "I think it's fine that you can drive me over to Milton and put me on the train. Last night when I heard such a knocking at the door I was afraid I wouldn't see you in the morning because you'd be off on some life or death mission. What was the matter?"

"Oh, just Sally Winn's bread pills had given out and she was afraid she would not last through the night without them." Father always took me into his confidence about the bread pills he administered to the hypochondriacs.

"Do you know, Father, I believe if you charged midnight fees for those bread-pill and pink-well-water prescriptions, that Sally Winn and some more just like her would at least wait until morning to die."

"Oh, well, little daughter, Sally's got lots of good in her, and trying to die is the only excitement she has ever had in her whole life."

"Well, I won't begrudge it to her but I do hate to have your rest broken. Mammy," I said to Mammy Susan as she came in bearing a plate of red-hot flannel cakes, "don't you let Father be too late getting into his heavy underwear; and make a row every time he drives the colt until he will stop it

from sheer weariness. And, Father, you make Mammy take her tonic; and don't let her go out in the wet dew waddling around after her ducks. She will catch her death."

"Susan, you hear Miss Page? Don't dare go in anything but dry dew. A few inches on her skirt and her curls tucked up under her bonnet make her think she's been taking care of us all these years instead of our taking care of her."

"Law, ain't she the spit of her Ma, Doc Allison? 'Cep fer yo' eyes. Ain't quite so tall; but she's young yit in spite er sich a long trailin' skirt. I's sorry to be de one to break de news, but de colt is out dere a-prancin' an' pawin', an' ef you's a-goin' you'd better go."

I had often pictured my going away and had always seen myself with difficulty restraining my tears; but now the time had come and the colt was cutting up, so I forgot to cry even when I told the dogs good-by; and just as I was giving Mammy Susan a last hug, and if tears were ever to come they must hurry, Father called to me to jump in, for he couldn't hold the colt another minute. And in I was and away and not crying at all but laughing, as we turned around on one wheel and went skimming down the drive.

The sun was all the way up at last and it wasn't a cold, damp day at all, but promised to be fair and clear. We had a six-mile drive to the station at Milton and the colt saw to it that we got there in plenty of time.

"Now, Page, be certain when you make the change at Richmond, if you have to ask any questions to ask them of a man in brass buttons."

"Yes, Father," and I smiled demurely, remembering how I always acted as courier when we went on our trips. Father, being the most absent-minded of men except where his profession was concerned, was not to be trusted with a railroad ticket.

Moving away on the train at last and waving good-by to his long, sad face, made me realize that the knot was cut. What a good father he was! How had we ever been able to make up our minds to this boarding school scheme? Nothing but the certainty that my education was a very one-sided affair and that I must broaden out a bit had determined Father; and as for me, I longed to know some girls.

I, who yearned for friends, was growing up without any. Fifteen years old and I had never had a real chum! I couldn't remember my mother, but I am sure she would have been my chum if she had lived. Mammy Susan did her best and so did Father, but a little girl wants another little girl. We had neighbors in plenty, but our county seemed to be composed of old maids and childless widows with a sparse sprinkling of gray-bearded men.

My mother's people were English and she had no relatives on this side of the water. Father belonged to a huge family, all of them great visitors, but so far as I knew, no children among them. All kinds of old maids: rich and poor, gentle and stern, soft and hard, big and little, they all managed once a year to pay their dear cousin, Dr. Allison, a visit at Bracken. I did not mind their coming. The soft ones seemed to have been little girls once, which was something. I used to think when I was quite a little thing that the hard ones must have been little boys, because of the statement in my Mother Goose that little boys were made of "Snaps and snails and puppy dog tails,"—not nice soft collie pups' tails, either, but the tight, hard kind that grew on Cousin Park Garnett's pug.

Cousin Park Garnett was the rich, hard one whom I visited in Richmond the winter before. On her annual visitation to us she had remarked to my father:

"Cousin James, are Page's teeth sound? White teeth like that are, as a rule, not very strong. Her mouth is so enormous you had better look to it that her teeth are preserved," and she pursed up her own thin lips and put on her green persimmon expression.

"Perfectly sound, I think, Cousin Park. Of course her teeth must be preserved. As for her mouth being big, she'll grow up to it." But the outcome of the conversation was that I had to visit Cousin Park and take in the dentist. Think of the combination! Cousin Park took me to the Woman's Club in the afternoon where we listened to a lecture on "The Influence of Slavic Literature on the Culture of the Day." I was longing for the movies but managed to keep my big mouth shut and listen to the lecture, so I could tell Father about it and make him laugh. I stayed in Richmond three days and did not speak to one single soul under fifty. Even the dentist was old and tottering, so shaky that I was afraid he would fall into my mouth.

I saw loads of nice girls my own age skating on the sidewalk or walking arm-in-arm chattering away very happily, but Cousin Park didn't know who they were or did know and knew nothing to their credit. I was glad to get back to Bracken where there were no girls to know. There were at least the dogs at Bracken that I could talk to and race over the hills with. Even Cousin Park could not doubt their royal pedigrees.

It was dear little Cousin Sue Lee who persuaded Father and me both that I ought to go to boarding school. Cousin Sue was the best of all Father's female relatives. She was gentle and poor and had a job in the Congressional Library in Washington. With all her gentleness, she was sprightly and had plenty of what Father called "Lee spunk"; and with all her poverty, she wore the sweetest clothes and always brought me a lovely present every year and a nice shawl for Mammy or a black silk waist or something or other to delight the old woman's heart. Cousin Park never gave me anything,—not that I wanted her to. She would visit us two weeks and then present Mammy with a dime, using all the pomp and ceremony that a twenty-dollar gold piece would have warranted.

"Jimmy," Cousin Sue had said one day (she was the only one of all the cousins who called Father Jimmy), "I know you and Page will think I am an interfering old cat, but that child ought to go to school. I am not going to say a word about her education. She has an excellent education in some things. I have never seen a better read girl of her age. But the time may come when she will regret knowing no French, and she tells me she stopped arithmetic last year and never started algebra."

"Well, what good did algebra ever do you or me?" quizzed Father.

"Now, Jimmy, don't ask such foolish questions. It's just something all of us have to have. What good does your cravat do you? None; it's not even a thing of beauty, but you have to have one all the same."

"Oh, you women," laughed Father, "there's no downing you with argument."

"But as I was saying," continued Cousin Sue, "it is not dear little Page's education I am thinking of. It's something much more important. I want her

to know a whole lot of girls and make a million friends. Why, I'm the only young friend the child has, and I am getting to be nearer fifty than forty."

And so we wrote for catalogues of schools and settled on Gresham. And Cousin Sue sent for a bolt of nainsook and yards and yards of lace and insertion and made up a whole lot of pretty underclothes for me.

"Girls need a lot of things in this day and generation," I heard her say to Father. "A great deal more than they used to when I was young. I am determined Page shall not go off to school looking like an 'Orphan Annie.'"

"But, Sue, your holiday won't do you any good if you spend it all sewing on the machine for my child," objected Father.

"We'll get in Miss Pinky Davis to help and in a week's time Page will have enough clothes to last her until she gets married,—that is, if she does not follow the traditions of the family and be an old maid."

It was a pretty well known fact that Cousin Sue had been a belle in her day, and even now when she came back to visit in the County several weather-beaten bachelor farmers would manage to have business at Bracken. I have always noticed that an old maid who is so from choice does not mind joking about it, but the others do.

A country doctor is seldom a bloated bond-holder; so Cousin Sue and I ordered, with great care and economy, the necessary things from New York: suit, hat, gloves, shoes, up-to-date shirt waists and plenty of middies, a raincoat, umbrella, etc.

"Now, my dear," said my sweet cousin, "you can be perfectly sure that your outfit is appropriate at least. Your clothes are stylish, well-made and suitable to your age. I have always felt that young people's clothes should be so right that they do not have to think about them."

As I sped away on the train to Richmond, I remembered what Cousin Sue had said before she went back to the grind in Washington, and had a feeling of intense satisfaction that my little trunk in the baggage car held such a complete wardrobe that I would not have to bother my head about it any more. Up to this summer, clothes had been my abomination, but I had

at last waked up to the fact that it made some difference how I looked; and now I was going to look all right without any trouble to myself.

Train pulling into Richmond and still not a tear! "What is the matter with you, Page Allison? When girls leave their childhood's home in books they always weep suds. Don't you love your home as much as a stick of a heroine in a book?" I knew I loved my home, but somehow it was so delightful to be going somewhere and maybe getting to know a million people, as Cousin Sue said I must.

An hour's wait in Richmond! I rechecked my trunk, having purchased a ticket to Gresham; then I seated myself to possess my soul in patience until the 10.20 train should be called. The station in Richmond was familiar enough to me, as Father and I took some kind of a trip every year and always had to come through Richmond. As I have said before, I attended to tickets and baggage when I traveled with Father, so I was not in the least nervous over doing it now.

"I must keep my eye open for girls who are likely to be going to Gresham," I thought. "They'll all have on dark blue suits." That was a rule of the school, the dark blue suit. "There's one now! But can she be going?" And I thought of what Cousin Sue had said of "Orphan Annie."

The girl was seated opposite me in the waiting room. She had just come up the steps lugging a huge telescope, stretched to its greatest capacity, and looking nervously around had sunk on a bench. She searched feverishly through a shabby little hand-bag she was carrying and having satisfied herself that the ticket she had just purchased was safe she seemed to be trying to compose herself; but one could see with half an eye that she was nervous and frightened. She glanced uneasily at the clock every few minutes and constantly compared with it an Ingersoll watch which each time she had to search for in her bag. Several trains were called and every time she got up and made a rush for the gates, but each time came back to her seat opposite me.

Her blue dress was evidently homemade. The skirt dragged in the back and the jacket was too short for the prevailing fashion. Her hat had been worn as mourning and still had a little fold of crêpe around the edge, making a suitable setting for that tear-stained face. I couldn't tell whether

she was pretty or not, her features were so swollen with weeping. Helen of Troy herself looked homely crying, I am sure. I noticed that her throat was milk white and that the thick plait of hair that hung down her back, mercifully concealing somewhat the crooked seams of the ill-made jacket, was as yellow as ripe wheat.

"Poor thing," I thought, "I believe I'll speak to her and see if I can cheer her up some." But my philanthropic resolution was forgotten because of the entrance into the waiting room and into my life, I am glad to add, of the three most delightful and original persons I have ever seen or known.

CHAPTER II.

ENTER THE TUCKERS.

Two girls about my age and a youngish man were the arrivals. The girls were dressed in blue serge, and I felt in my bones that they were going to Gresham. They had an independent, easy way with them, and evidently considered the youngish man a person whom they had a right to boss.

"Let's sit here, Zebedee, and you go get the milk chocolate for me," exclaimed one of the girls.

"Don't forget my salted peanuts and a copy of 'Life,'" called the other, as Zebedee hurried off to make the purchases at the newsstand in a corner of the waiting room.

"Elder brother," thought I, "and pretty good-natured to wait on those girls so much." What nice looking girls they were, though. At the first glance, they looked singularly alike, but as I examined them more closely while Zebedee was gone, I saw points of dissimilarity. "They are twins, for sure," I said to myself, "but I believe I am going to be able to tell them apart." The one whom her sister called Dum had red lights in her almost black hair and her eyes were hazel, while the one who answered to the name of Dee had blue lights in her coal black hair and her eyes were gray. Both of them had sharply defined brows, straight noses, and broad, laughing mouths. Dum's chin was square and determined, but in Dee's there lurked a dimple. They were exactly the same height and both of them had fine athletic figures.

"There you are, Tweedles," said the youngish man, addressing them both as he pitched his purchases into their laps. "Who's going to wait on you at boarding school, I'd like to know?"

"Well, if you will make us have a roommate, I reckon she'll have to," laughed Dee.

"By the way, Zebedee, that is something I want to discuss with you," and Dum squared her chin. "You make a great mistake in forcing a roommate on Dee and me. We are not used to it, and we are not going to stand it."

Zebedee squared his chin, too, and his blue eyes took on a stern expression. "Not going to stand it, eh? Well, I say you are going to stand it. We have discussed the matter threadbare already, and you must trust me to know what is best for you sometimes."

The stern light went out of his eyes and into them came a look of infinite tenderness as he put an arm around Dum and held her close to him. I certainly liked the looks of Zebedee, but what a name! He, too, had an athletic figure, but not very tall, not much taller than the girls, who were very well grown for fifteen. He had Dum's red black hair, also her square chin, but Dee's dimple had found a place in the middle of that determined chin. The three mouths were so alike that they might have belonged to triplets, but his eyes were his own; ice blue they were in color but there was nothing cold about them. They were the kindest, merriest eyes; they seemed to see everything and feel everything. Just now they were feeling very sorry for Dum, and as he hugged her, big tears gathered in them.

"Oh, Dum," exclaimed Dee, "now you have made him cry!"

"No such thing. I'm not crying," and he shamelessly blew his nose.

I afterwards learned that one of the characteristics of this delightful trio was that they thought there was no more shame in crying than laughing. They laughed in church if there was anything to laugh at, and cried at a picnic or farce-comedy if anything turned up to move them to tears. "We don't bawl," Dee said to me once, "we just leak. It is all a matter of tear ducts. We can't help it any more than you could help sneezing if someone shook pepper in your face."

A train was called. It was not ours, but "Orphan Annie" jumped nervously from her seat. She dropped her shabby little hand-bag, which she had just opened for the hundredth time to make sure her ticket was safe or to compare her Ingersoll watch with the clock in the station, and the contents of the bag rolled to the floor. I dived to assist her and the person called Zebedee did the same. Of course we bumped heads, and while we

were apologizing, Dum and Dee picked up the scattered belongings and returned them to the poor, abashed girl.

"I just knew you were going to Gresham," said Dee, handing her the much-thumbed ticket, "and wondered how long it would take us to get to the point of speaking to you."

"You are for Gresham, too," said Dum, turning to me. "I have been longing to know you. I might have known that old Zebedee would end by butting in."

Here Zebedee took off his hat and bowed to "Orphan Annie" and me as though we were of the blood royal, and said with a most engaging manner:

"We had best introduce ourselves and then all the conventionalities will be observed. Conventionality is a mighty important thing for boarding school girls to observe. These are the Tucker twins, called Tweedles when you want both of them or aren't particular which one answers. This red-headed one is Dum; this blue-headed one, Dee. They have other official names, but somehow I can't remember them to-day. I am Jeffry Tucker, at your service, the father of the Heavenly Twins."

"Father! You, their father!" I gasped.

"Certainly. Whose father did you think I was?"

"James' and John's," I answered flippantly.

"That's the reason we called him Zebedee," chorused the twins. "You know the old gag: 'Who is the father of Zebedee's children?' No one ever believes he is really a parent."

I burst out laughing and so did "Orphan Annie." I was certainly glad to see that she could laugh. Already the genial atmosphere that surrounded the Tuckers had had its effect on her. The drawn expression was leaving her countenance and the hearty laugh dispelled the mist in her eyes. The knowledge that there were two other passengers for Gresham set her mind at rest, and she evidently felt relieved.

"My name is Page Allison."

"Daughter of Dr. James Allison of Milton, I bet anything," ventured Mr. Tucker. "Oh, do you know my father?" I asked joyfully.

"Of course I do. We are of the same fraternity. Your eyes are so like his, I came mighty near slipping you the grip. He was in the class of '85 and I was in that of '99, but we have met at many fraternity conventions. I am certainly glad to know his daughter." And while he did not give me the fraternity grip, he gave me some kind of a grip that tingled all the way up to my heart.

"And won't you tell us your name?" said Dee kindly to the other stranger.

"Annie Pore," said the girl in a voice singularly full and rich. "I have never been anywhere alone and I am so afraid I'll miss my train. That is the reason I dropped my bag. I am so much obliged to all of you for picking up my things."

Her timidity seemed to disappear as she realized she was making friends. As for me, I have never known what it was to be timid, and I felt at home with the three Tuckers from the moment they entered the waiting room; and from the time that Mr. Tucker and I bumped heads, I counted them as the first three on the list of the million friends that Cousin Sue said I must make.

"Well, since we are all going to Gresham, suppose you young ladies hand over your tickets to me and I will be courier for the crowd," said Mr. Tucker.

I gave him my ticket, also my reservation in the parlor car. It made no difference how poor payments were, Father and I always traveled in comfort. "It saves in the end to ride in a clean, comfortable coach," Father declared. "Saves wear and tear on clothes and nerves."

Annie Pore handed him her rumpled ticket.

"This is all you have?" he asked.

"Oh, yes, isn't that all right?" she entreated. "The man at the ticket window assured me it was right."

"Of course it is all right. Now there are five minutes before the train will be called, so if you young ladies will excuse me, I'll run downstairs to see that Tweedles' trunks are safe. By the way, have you attended to your luggage?" he asked me. "And you?" turning to Annie Pore.

"Thank you, yes," I answered; but the other girl looked piteously at her bursting telescope. "I haven't a trunk," she said simply.

I felt mighty sorry for Annie. The Tucker twins did, too. I could tell by their eyes. Dee's filled and Dum turned and walked to the steps with her father.

Dee whispered to me as she pretended to show me a picture in "Life":

"He's gone to get her a ticket in the parlor car. Just like him! Such a thoughtful Zebedee as he is! We mustn't let him know we are on. That would make him raging. He will carry it off perfectly naturally, and he is fully capable of any deceit to keep Annie Pore from finding it out."

He had done exactly as Dee said he would do: got a chair in the parlor car for "Orphan Annie." Right there I took myself to task for thinking of the poor girl as "Orphan Annie," and I determined to control my thoughts if possible and give her her proper name in my mind. Not that Annie Pore sounded much more cheerful than the name I had given her.

Our train was called and our kind courier bundled up bag and baggage and hustled us through the gates and into the chair car before Annie Pore had time to ask about it; and then he gave the Pullman conductor our tickets and settled us and the train started, and the girl never did know she was being treated to a privilege her ticket did not give her.

We had a jolly trip and before it was over I knew a great deal about the Tuckers, and they, in turn, a great deal about me, in fact, about all there was to know. It was many a day, however, before we broke through Annie Pore's reserve and learned that she was of English parentage, that her mother had recently died and her father had a country store in a lonesome little settlement on the river. No wonder the girl was so scary. This was actually her first railroad journey. What traveling she had done had been by boat, an occasional trip to Norfolk or Richmond when her father went to town to buy his stock.

There was an unmistakable air of breeding about her. Her accent was pure and her English without flaw. In spite of her timidity, she had a certain *savoir faire*. For instance, when Mr. Tucker announced that we were to have lunch with him and ordered the porter to bring two tables and put them up, Annie accepted the invitation with a quiet grace that many a society woman could not have equaled. When she took off her ugly hat, disclosing to view a calm white forehead with heavy, ripe-wheat hair rippling from a part, I had no doubt of the fact that Annie Pore, if not already a beauty, was going to be one when she grew up.

It was only a buffet luncheon and there was not much on the menu to choose from: baked beans, canned soup, potted meats, etc.

"Not much to eat here," grumbled Mr. Tucker.

"Eat what's put before you, Zebedee, and stop grouching," admonished Dum.

"Well, it's a pretty hard state of affairs when a fellow wants to give a party and there is nothing to eat but these canned abominations."

"I have a lunch box in my grip," I ventured; "maybe that would help out some."

"Trot it out, do!" cried Dee.

And then Annie had the hardihood to untie the rope around her telescope and bring out a bag of the very best and rosiest wine-sap apples I ever tasted. She also produced a box of doughnuts she had made herself which were greeted with enthusiasm. My lunch had been put up by kind old Mammy Susan, and in her tenderness she had packed in enough to feed a regiment.

"Fried chicken!" exclaimed Dee, clapping her hands.

"Columbus eggs!" shouted Dum.

"Not really country ham?" questioned Mr. Tucker. "That is too good to be true. You must excuse Tweedles and me, but we have been living in an apartment and eating in the café, and some real home food has just about

got us going. When I asked you young ladies to lunch, I did not dream that I would be able to treat you so royally."

"Look, Zebedee, look! Clover-leaf rolls!" chorused the twins.

"Stop tweedling and look over the menu and see what we shall order to supplement with." Mr. Tucker called it tweedling when the girls spoke in chorus as was their habit.

We decided on cream of tomato soup, iced tea and butter, with Neopolitan ice cream to top off with. I was certainly glad that, as usual, Mammy Susan had paid no attention to my commands, and had done her own sweet will in giving me enough lunch for half a dozen girls.

"It's bes' to err on de side er plenty, honey baby," the old woman had said when I demurred at the size of the lunch boxes. "Even ef you is goin' to a land flowin' wif milk an' honey, a few rolls to sop in de honey won't go amiss an' some chicken an' ham to wash down wif de milk won't hurt none."

CHAPTER III.

GRESHAM.

Gresham at last after a very pleasant trip! We had picked up blue-coated girls all along the road, and by the time we reached the little town on the outskirts of which our school was situated, the train seemed to be running over with girls.

"There must be a million of them," I thought; but as Gresham could only accommodate one hundred and twenty-five, I was wrong. Some of them had mothers or fathers with them, and some of them big brothers or sisters. Most of them had some one; at least, most of the new girls.

The old pupils hugged and kissed one another and all seemed to be glad to get back to school. The new girls looked sad and miserable, even the ones who had their mothers with them. And a few lonesome ones who had brought themselves, like "Orphan Annie" (there, I slipped again and called Annie Pore by that obnoxious name!) or me, looked like scared rabbits. I wasn't scared a bit, and when I saw the old girls hugging and loving one another, flaunting their intimacies, as it were, I said:

"Don't you mind, Page Allison. You are going to know all of those girls and like a lot of them, and a lot of them are going to like you; and they are just a few of the million friends you are going to make."

In the crowded confusion at the little station, I was separated from the Tuckers and noticed that poor Annie was put in a bus filled with Seniors, who looked at her rather askance. Her ungainly telescope was piled up with the natty suitcases by the driver's seat, and I saw him point at it and wink at the driver of the bus where I had found a seat.

The girls in the bus with me were very kind and friendly. There were several mothers along and they looked at me cordially, and in a few minutes I knew the names of all the passengers and they knew mine. By the time the

straining horses had pulled the heavy bus through the crooked streets of the quaint little town, up and down the many hills and finally up the last long hill to Gresham School, the whole load of girls and mothers had been jolted into an enforced intimacy.

Bracken, my home, was situated in what persons from the mountains call a flat country but which we call rolling, as it is when compared to the tidewater counties. So the hills of Gresham seemed wonderfully steep to me, and as we pulled to the top and stopped in front of the school, and I realized we could actually see the mountains, I gave voice to a long-drawn "O—h!" of delight.

We piled out of the bus, and for a moment I stood looking at the wonderful view before I even noticed the school building.

"I am so glad you like it," said a soft voice at my side. It belonged to a quiet-looking girl who had come up with us. She looked a little older than the rest of the girls and certainly was much more dignified. "I find if a new pupil notices the mountains first, she is pretty apt not to kick because they have dessert only twice a week. One can't have everything in this world, and a mountain view is more filling in the big end than dessert."

"It is splendid! You have been here a long time?" I asked.

"Yes, many years; and now I am a pupil teacher. This place seems more like home than any other in the world to me," and she took me by the arm. "Come on with me, Page. I am going to call you Page and I do wish you could call me Margaret, but now that I am a near teacher I have to be called Miss Sayre. I am going to introduce you to Miss Peyton, the principal."

"Oh, you are kind to me and I am so much obliged!"

"Give the bus driver your trunk check and in his good time he will deliver your trunk. Come on, so you can get into the office before the rush of Seniors."

Just then the vehicle with Annie Pore in it, looking too forlorn for words, came rattling up. Her hat was knocked over one eye and she had lost all of the cheerfulness that she had gained on the train with the delightful Tuckers. No one had paid any attention to her on the ride, except to look her up and

down and make whispered jokes at her expense. I have found out that girls can be the most cruel creatures in the world, just from pure thoughtlessness and lack of imagination. They don't know how to "Put yourself in his place." They don't mean to hurt, but they do hurt all the same. I found during the ensuing year that that same busload of Seniors included many a fine character, but not one of them seemed to have imagination enough to know what Annie Pore was suffering.

"Miss Sayre," I said impulsively, "please take this girl with you. I met her on the train and she seems so forlorn."

"We'll miss our chance to reach Miss Peyton ahead of the others, unless we hurry," she said, looking a little impatient at my request.

"I'm sorry. I think I ought to wait for her, but don't let me detain you," and I went forward to meet poor Annie.

Of course, Miss Sayre came, too. "I might have known that a girl who noticed the mountains first thing would have character enough to do what she thought was right," she whispered as she followed me.

"This is Annie Pore, Miss Sayre," I said, as I helped the cramped girl out of her uncomfortably small quarters. Miss Sayre shook her hand cordially and I hoped Annie did not hear the titter as one of the Seniors nudged another and said in an audible whisper: "Annie Pore, poor Orphan Annie." I hated myself for having had the same thought.

"Where is your trunk check, Annie? Give it to the bus driver," said Miss Sayre, kindly.

"I haven't a trunk," said Annie faintly, "just a telescope."

"By their luggage ye shall know them," said a stylish girl who was clambering out of the vehicle. She spoke in a rasping tone with a nasal touch.

Annie Pore made a ten strike right then and there with me and with all of the girls who heard what she said, and those girls who did not hear it soon heard about it. She drew herself up, no longer timid but with what Dum

Tucker afterwards called "Annie's stage presence," and in her singularly clear, full voice, that voice that we were all to be so proud of, said:

"Not by their luggage ye shall know them, but by their voices." And with a dignity that a sagging skirt and crooked-seamed jacket could not lessen, Annie Pore walked to the front of the carry-all and demanded from the grinning driver her bursting telescope.

A shout went up from the Seniors. "Annie, Annie, 'rah, 'rah, 'rah!"

"So, Mabel Binks, she got your goat that time," laughed a bright-looking, auburn-haired Senior.

"I don't know what you mean, Sally Coles. Orphan Annie's remark seemed to me to be without point," and Mabel Binks haughtily demanded a very swell new alligator bag from the front seat.

"Well, if you don't know that your voice needs greasing, it is not for me to break it to you, Mabel." Mabel flounced off, and all her stylish clothes, beautifully-hanging skirt, well-cut jacket, and jaunty velvet sailor hat, did not give dignity to her.

Pandemonium reigned as we entered the spacious hall of the main building. Girls, girls, girls! Little and big; fat and thin; pretty and plain; laughing and crying; alone and attended, they swarmed over everything.

"We have lost our chance to get first at the principal, but I wouldn't have missed seeing Annie Pore take down that common, purse-proud Mabel Binks for a million, as poor as I am," whispered Miss Sayre. "You girls sit here and wait for me, and as soon as there is an opening we'll slip in."

"Oh, how could I ever have made up my mind to leave my Father and come here?" wailed Annie, crumpling up into an ignominious heap, all her dignity gone.

"Now look here, Annie Pore," I scolded, "anyone who could jaw back at a Senior as you did just a moment ago has got backbone, and you have just got to get a brace on you and cheer up."

"Oh, but you are different. You make friends so readily. I am so easily embarrassed," and the poor thing wept anew.

"I don't make friends a bit more easily than you do. I just want to make them, that's the difference. Haven't you made friends with me?"

"Oh, have I really?"

"Of course you have. Would I be ragging you this way if I didn't consider myself your friend? Haven't you made friends with all three of the Tuckers, and now with Miss Sayre?"

Annie was somewhat consoled and tried to take a more cheerful view of life. We had completely lost sight of our traveling companions. They had evidently been admitted among the first to the principal's office. All of the girls who were accompanied by their parents or guardians were given preference in having their rooms assigned them, so that their loved ones could see where the daughters were to be placed and then take their departure on the outgoing trains.

We were so hidden by the swarming girls, we despaired of ever being found again by Miss Sayre; but I persuaded Annie that we would certainly be placed by bedtime as both of us had been registered during the summer; and in the meantime, it was rather fun to watch the girls and try to guess where they came from and if any of them were to be in our classes.

Mabel Binks backed up against us, talking to an overdressed girl of about nineteen. Both were dressed in the latest style. I knew what those styles were from the fashion books that Cousin Sue Lee had bought when we were planning my modest wardrobe.

"I am thankful to say this is my last year at Gresham," said Mabel. "The place has lost tone so. We came up in the bus with a most remarkable-looking person. I am sure Mamma would not permit me to remain if she knew Miss Peyton was allowing such ordinary girls to come here."

Annie Pore's face was crimson and she looked ready to burst into tears, but the overdressed girl, whose name, I afterwards learned, was Josephine Barr, and who was a thoroughly kindly person, remarked:

"Oh, yes, I heard about that girl. Sally Coles tells me she is wonderfully pretty and quite a lady, also that she got a yell from the Seniors for her quickness in responding to a sally from you."

I pinched Annie's arm and whispered: "What did I tell you? Two more new friends, Sally Coles and this big girl who has just punctured Mabel Binks' conceit."

"Come along, girls," and Miss Sayre pushed her way to our retreat. "I think we can get into the office now. How do you do, Josephine? I am glad to see you back," and she shook the big girl's hand cordially. "I want to introduce you to two new girls and ask you to see that they meet the crowd."

"All right, Margaret, what you say goes. I was a freshy myself once and know how it feels." She gave us a cordial grip and assured us we must call on her if we needed anything, friendly counsel or protection or even soothing syrup.

"Jo is a fine old girl," said Miss Sayre, as she hooked one arm in mine and the other in Annie Pore's and drew us into the office. (I noticed that she had completely ignored Mabel Binks.) "She would fight to the finish for her friends. Her clothes are impossible, but we mustn't judge the poor thing by her clothes. They've got so much money, they don't know what to do with it. I'm real sorry for her."

It seemed a queer cause for pity to Annie and me, but Miss Sayre was introducing us to Miss Peyton and we could not ask her why riches were to be pitied. I liked Miss Peyton from the minute I saw her and I believe she liked me. Her countenance was a noble one, her manner frank, and her voice sounded like music.

"I am going to put you into the room with some sisters, Page. I hope you will get along well together. If everything is not pleasant, come directly to me. You are No. 117 in Carter Hall. I will see all the girls to-morrow and classify them. Miss Sayre, will you please get someone to show Page her room? Now I will talk to Annie Pore and assign her her roommate." And Miss Peyton went on quietly with what might have been a confusing task, but which she managed as calmly as a Napoleon marshaling his troops.

I found my way to 117 Carter Hall with the help of an old girl. I was naturally quite interested to know what the sisters were to be like who were

to be my roommates for the year. The door to 117 was open and I heard sobbing.

CHAPTER IV.

MY ROOMMATES.

"Heavens, I'm tired of tears!" I thought as my conductor left me with a significant smile. "I'm actually damp from all of the weeping going on around me."

They made such a racket that a sad, crooked face was poked into the door.—Page 48.

A stormy voice was raised in the room that I was about to enter, and I stopped in the hall, not knowing just what to do.

"Now what did I tell you?" said the stormy, sobbing voice. "Didn't I tell you all along I was going to make myself just as disagreeable as I could if you would put someone in with us? Aren't we going to be miserable enough without you, without having some old stick-in-the-mud hoisted on us from the country, to sleep in the room with us; and just as like as not want the window shut at night; and rub her chapped face all over with mutton-suet? Paugh, I can smell it now, the horrid stuff."

"Now, Dum, cut it out. You don't even know that your roommate gets chapped," said a whimsical voice.

"The Tuckers!" I exclaimed, but naturally had a delicacy in entering, after what I had heard Dum say about a roommate from the country. "Could she know that I am the one?" I asked myself.

"Well, how are Dee and I to fight it out the way you have brought us up to do if we have got some old mutt in here with us? We might just as well have left our boxing gloves at home."

"Oh, Dum, you are making it hard for me," said poor Mr. Tucker.

"That's good, I want to make it hard," sobbed the wretched Dum.

"I have told you over and over that I think it best for you and Dee to have to control yourselves more, and the only way to do it is to realize how your tantrums affect other people. You are the best old Tweedles in the world, but you have no self-control. I am surely sorry for your roommate, whoever she may be."

"Well," broke in Dee, "I think it all depends on who she is. I must say it is some lottery. Roommates ought to be carefully chosen; one should not just trust to this grab-bag method."

"Well, how do you know Miss Peyton has not chosen someone she feels will be suitable? I wish it would turn out to be somebody like the little girl on the train. Don't you, Tweedles?"

"Yes, yes!" tweedled Tweedles. "But no such luck."

This reassured me and I knocked on the open door. There was perfect silence, broken only by the sound of Dum's blowing her nose and Mr. Tucker's clearing his throat; and then a faint little "Come in," from both girls.

"Oh, it's you! How good of you to come look us up!" exclaimed Mr. Tucker. "We were afraid it was the hated roommate. Tweedles are treating me so terribly because I insist on their having a roommate so they can broaden out a bit and learn to control themselves some, which they will never do so long as they stay together all the time. I'll leave it to you, Miss Page, don't you think it will be best?"

"Well, I have a delicacy in saying," laughed I. "You see, I am that poor unfortunate, despised roommate. This is 117 Carter Hall, isn't it?"

Then all the weeping was turned to laughter and the irrepressible Tuckers, father and all, grabbed hands and danced around me singing, "Gayly cheer the bride." They made such a racket that a sad, crooked face was poked into the door, evidently feeling a duty to admonish, but Zebedee in his most Zebedeeish humor, sang out in a friendly voice:

"Will you, won't you, will you, won't you, will you join the dance? Will you, won't you, will you, won't you, won't you join the dance?"

Then the strangest thing happened to that long, sad, crooked face. The plain features were illuminated by a smile, the person who owned the face came impulsively into the room, and after she had carefully shut the door, she caught hold of hands with the crazy trio and the dance went on; and all of us sang:

> "'Will you walk a little faster!' said a whiting to a snail,
> 'There's a porpoise close behind us and he's treading on my tail.
> See how eagerly the lobsters and the turtles all advance!
> They are waiting on the shingle—will you come and join the dance?'"

Then the chorus: "Will you, won't you, will you, won't you, will you join the dance?"

I refused to play "frog in the middle" any longer and broke into the dance, soon dropping into the unfamiliar tune but very familiar words of the Lobster Quadrille. We sang all four of the verses from that immortal nonsense.

> "'What matters it how far we go?' his scaly friend replied,
> 'There is another shore, you know, upon the other side.
> The farther off from England, the nearer is to France.

Then turn not pale, beloved snail, but come and join the dance.'"

The owner of the long, sad, crooked face was also owner of a singularly clear, true, well-trained voice, and Mr. Tucker's fresh baritone fitted in finely, while Dum and Dee and I did the best we could with what Nature had seen fit to endow us in the way of voices. Finally we girls sank exhausted on the bare, uncovered beds, but Mr. Tucker and the mysterious visitor stood clasping hands.

"Jeff Tucker, what in Heaven's name are you doing at a young ladies' boarding school?"

"Entering my girls: Tweedles. And you, Jinny Cox, what are you doing here?" And Mr. Tucker kept on shaking her hand.

"I teach singing here. Have been here for years. And to think of your girls being old enough to go to boarding school! It seems only yesterday that you and dear little Virginia were leading the germans at the University. I haven't seen you since you married. I meant to write you when Virginia died, but somehow I just couldn't."

"That was all right, Jinny. I knew how you felt without hearing from you. She only lived a year, you know. Tweedles were just a few weeks old when she died." And the dear man who a moment before had been so cheerily singing the Lobster Quadrille, now wiped his eyes and seemed given over to melancholy.

"I want you to know our girls. This is Virginia," indicating Dum, "and this, Caroline," meaning Dee. I was rather amused at the fact that earlier in the day he could not remember their official names, as he called them. "I named this one Virginia, thinking she was going to have her mother's eyes, but the little monkey changed them on me and in a twinkling turned herself into a hazel-eyed monster," and poor Zebedee forgot to cry any more and began to laugh. "This is the much dreaded roommate, Miss Page Allison, of Milton, Virginia. The wild orgy which you so tactfully joined was in honor of the discovery that this young lady was the roommate."

"Well, girls, I am glad to see all of you and hope we can be great friends. My name is Jane Cox. I can't remember any one having the hardihood to

call me Jinny for some sixteen or seventeen years. I haven't danced for at least ten years. I don't know what the management or the girls would think or say if they knew I had cut up this way. I don't know what made me do it. I came to the door to stop the racket and when I saw Jeff Tucker whirling around with three girls singing, 'Will you, won't you, won't you, will you, will you join the dance?' my discretion flew to the four winds. I just did have sense enough left to shut the door. I forgot I was an old maid, teaching singing in a boarding school."

"It was simply splendid of you to come in and help us out," exclaimed Dee. Dee was usually the one who knew what to say and when to say it. Some persons call it tact, but I have always thought it was just a kind heart that made her know what people wanted her to say. Cousin Sue Lee was the same kind of natural-born social wonder. "I think your voice is beautiful, and how on earth did you happen to know our tune?"

"Why, child, your father and I made up that tune on a picnic once years before you were born. Do you remember, Jeff, when we went to Monticello, and how it rained? We composed the tune and improvised a Lobster Quadrille to cheer up the bedraggled crowd. How Virginia did laugh! I haven't thought of that tune for ages. Perhaps it is because I have not been with the kind of people who would enjoy 'Alice in Wonderland.'"

"Zebedee has put us to sleep with it ever since we were born," said Dum. "I mean the tune."

"And I have been reading Alice in Wonderland ever since I was born," I ventured.

"Well, I'm certainly glad to meet some kindred spirits at Gresham," said Miss Cox, "and now, girls, I'm going to ask a great favor of the three of you. I want you to keep to yourselves that I broke loose as I did. I have hard enough work as it is keeping order during study hour when that task falls to me, and if the girls ever found out that I was capable of such high-jinks, I'd lose all control of them." We promised, but I, for one, thought that the more human you find your pastors and masters to be, the more apt you are to want to make things easy for them. Miss Jane Cox was much older than I, but she had yet to learn that wisdom.

"We'll all promise," we declared in unison.

"But please break loose again, sometimes, Jinny," begged Mr. Tucker. "The idea of your calling yourself an old maid! I bet you are not thirty-five yet. I'm only thirty-six myself, and, goodness knows, I am nothing but a kid!"

"Teaching is a very aging occupation," sighed Miss Cox. "I don't mind the singing, but it's teaching mathematics to the backward pupils that adds ten years a season to my already full years. Do your girls sing, Jeffry?"

"Not so's you can notice it. Dum, here, is going to be a great sculptor; and Dee is uncertain whether she wants to be a trained nurse or a veterinary surgeon."

"Vet'rinary surgeon? Surely you wouldn't let her go into such a profession?" exclaimed Miss Cox with her twisted smile.

"Why not? I'll let my girls go into any profession that appeals to them. Dum loves to make mud pies and Dee loves to nurse sick puppies. Both of them rather dirty arts, but 'Every man to his taste.'"

Miss Cox had to leave us and go to attend to various duties, but before going she assured Mr. Tucker that she would take especial care of all three of his girls. You can fancy what it meant to me to be included. I almost called him Zebedee, but I was afraid it might make him feel like the father of triplets, so I refrained.

It was almost time for the train which Mr. Tucker was to catch, as he intended to take a sleeper back to Richmond that night. I felt the tactful thing for me to do would be to leave the girls alone with their father, so I told him good-by and went off to see how Annie Pore was faring.

I found her sitting in a forlorn heap in one of the neighboring rooms, her hat and jacket still on; her disreputable telescope in the middle of the room; and the expression on her face suited to the tragic muse.

"Who's your cellmate, Annie?" said I, bursting in on her.

"I don't know, but I know she will hate me."

"Hate you, indeed! No one could hate you. Why don't you unpack and get your things in order? I am going to stay with you until Mr. Tucker leaves, so Tweedles can get a chance to be alone with him for a while. I am rooming with them, you know. Our room is quite near you and we can all be real chummy."

The rooms were all perfectly bare and bleak-looking: white walls, white iron beds, curtainless windows and carpetless floors. The pupils were supposed to decorate their own rooms if they wanted them decorated. Annie Pore had been put into a two-girl room a bit smaller than the one assigned to the Tuckers and me, but otherwise exactly like it.

"I am dreading a roommate," sighed the girl. "I have never slept in the room with any one in my life."

"Neither have I, but I am crazy about it. Just think what fun it will be to have some one to talk to and giggle with."

I could not fancy giggling with Annie Pore in her present melancholy frame of mind, but I was sure that was a phase that would pass and she would end by being as girlish as the next. She had too keen a sense of humor to be lost in gloom forever.

CHAPTER V.

LETTERS.

From Caroline Tucker to her father, Jeffry Tucker.

Gresham, Sept. 18, 19—.

Dearest Zebedee:

You would have to be your own daughter to know how much you can be missed. After you left the other day, Dum and I cried so much we came mighty near getting sick, but Page Allison came back and was so ridiculous in her description of Annie Pore sitting up in the bus full of Seniors with her crêpe hat cocked on one side, that we got to laughing; and you know how easy it is to be cheerful if someone only starts the ball a-rolling. Page is splendid and takes the most interest in life of anybody I ever saw. She makes a lot of fun, but somehow it is never at anyone but always with them. She loves dogs, too, so I am sure to get on with her.

I do think it was wise in you, dearest Zebedee, to make us have a roommate, since that roommate happens to be Page, because she certainly does do us good; and already I find I am trying to "exert more self-control," as you say when you are trying to be Mr. Tuckerish. She hates blubbering and never cries except when the dogs die or her father reads poetry to her. I tell her that we don't usually cry, either, that is, we don't bawl, but just leak a bit. She says just leaking is rather fascinating and shows temperament, and she wishes she wasn't so dry-eyed and could express her emotions in such a graceful way.

Page has read a whole lot and knows reams and quires of history, but never has studied any French at all and has to go with the kids in mathematics. She is real spunky about it, though, and doesn't say a word about how humiliating it must be to have to sit in a class with children of twelve and even younger.

She can write Latin like a house afire, but when she translates we can hardly keep from giggling outright, as she uses the funny old pronunciation that Grandpa Tucker does. It seems she has learned Latin entirely from her father. Miss Sears, the Latin teacher, is trying to get her out of this pronunciation, but she compliments her very much on her knowledge of English derivatives. Page says that is the side of Latin that interested her father and he consequently taught it to her.

Dum and I have had only one serious set-to since you left us. I licked her. I wish you would send Dum a dollar box of plasticine. She is restless sometimes and I know she is itching to create, and if she had the mud she could do it. Dum is being awfully good about holding on to herself, and is just as nice and polite to Page as can be, although she did vow and declare that she was going to make it so hot for any roommate we got that the poor thing would have to leave. Of course that was before we knew it was going to be our luck to draw such a prize. There's the bell, so good-by, dear old Zebedeedlums.

Your own Tweedledeelums.

Virginia Tucker to her father, Jeffry Tucker.

Gresham, Sept. 19, 19—.

My darling Zebedee:

Dee wrote yesterday so I waited until to-day, although she declared she was not writing the kind of thing to you that I was going to. I don't see how she knew what I was going to write when I don't know myself.

There is one thing I want to say and that is: "the old man always knows best." A roommate is a great institution when she is as bully as Page Allison. I was awfully afraid Dee was going to be rude, but she hasn't been a bit. As for me, I have been a little tin angel. You can ask Dee if I haven't.

I am mighty sorry for Dee. She not only misses you just as much as I do, but she misses old Brindle almost as much as she does you. I don't see why they won't let a bulldog go to boarding school. I asked Dee if she gave you any more directions about how to take care of Brindle, and she said she hadn't even mentioned him she was so afraid of splashing on her letter.

Your friend Miss Cox has been in to see us and was just as jolly as could be, but when the other girls are around she treats us like perfect strangers. The truth of the matter is she is afraid of girls and does not understand them, nor do they understand her. I got that from Page, who is very analytical. Page says if she would let herself go she would be the most popular teacher in school, but as it is, while she is not unpopular, she is not regarded at all. She is awfully interesting but the girls don't know it. They know she has a good voice and teaches with good method but she might as well be a phonograph for all the human interest they have in her. She is coach for the backward and wayward in Math. I believe Page Allison will have to have her, and I bet on Page for drawing her out.

I tell you that girl has done wonders with Annie Pore. Every time she finds her crying she makes her laugh, and you know no one but old Zebedee can laugh and cry at the same time without going into hysterics. Right to her face she calls her "Melancholy Dane" and "Old Rain in the Face" and all kinds of ridiculous names, and Annie simply has to smile. There is one thing about Page: you can always know she is going to say what she's got to say right to your face. Usually when people are that way their conversation is "yea, yea, and nay, nay," but Page is not that way a bit.

Dee and I have had only one bout and then Dee knocked me out. It was a funny thing the way I let down my guard, but I got to thinking about Dee's dimple in her chin and how some day I was going to make a stunning bust of her. You see Dee looks mighty handsome when she boxes, with her head thrown back, her neck like a column. I had sure got her going that day and she had backed way up in the corner, when the idea of making the bust took possession of me—well, Dee made a stunning bust of me, that's all. She tapped me on the nose and drew the claret.

The row was all about you. Dee said you must be pretty near middle-aged and I said she was all the way a plumb idiot, you were no such thing and never would be. The fact that she tapped me does not prove that you are or ever will be any such thing. Page came in at the crucial moment and was somewhat shocked to see us boxing, and was broken up over the gore; but when she heard what the row was about, she sympathized with me and offered to put on the gloves and fight it out with Dee; but she decided in her amusing way to argue it out instead.

She said: "If the pen is mightier than the sword, surely the tongue is mightier than a pair of boxing gloves." She proved to Dee's perfect satisfaction that age was a matter of temperament and that yours was eternal youth. Dee was convinced and offered the *amende honorable*, confessing herself beaten in argument. I begin to think trial by combat not such a good way of settling things, after all. It seems to me a quiet debate is much the better way.

Write to us soon. I heard one of the Seniors say you were the most attractive-looking man she ever saw. She thought you were our big brother and meant for me to hear it and of course wanted me to repeat it to you. Good-by, my darling old Zebedeedidlums. I am sorry I made you cry twice on the day you brought us up here.

Your own,
Dumplingdeedledums.

Annie Pore to her Father, Mr. Arthur Pore, Price's Landing, Va.

Gresham, Sept. 19, 19—.

My dear Father:

I am writing to you at my earliest opportunity. I made the journey without any mishaps and in great comfort. I was astonished to find how luxurious traveling by rail is. I shall have to confess to you that I talked to some persons I met on the train. They were all of them going to Gresham and were very kind to me. I found myself conversing with them before I remembered your admonitions to be very careful about making acquaintances. I know in England it is very bad form, but I felt somehow it would have been much worse form to hold myself aloof when they were one and all so kind to me.

The Institute of Gresham is admirable in every particular. My instruction has been so thorough, thanks to your unceasing efforts, that I find I can take a very good stand. I have not divulged that an Oxford graduate has been my teacher. I am well up in Algebra, Latin and French, although my French accent is not all that it should be.

Miss Cox, the singing teacher, takes a great interest in my voice but evidently has no personal feeling for me. I am very grateful to you for the

sacrifices you have made to send me to boarding school, and am endeavoring to take advantage of every opportunity to perfect my education.

Very respectfully,
Annie de Vere Pore.

Page Allison to her father, Dr. James Allison, Milton, Va.

Gresham, Sept. 19, 19—.

My dear old Father:

I can hardly believe it is only a few days since I left Bracken. It seems ages and eons. I have a million things to tell you. I made friends with some delightful people on the train, Mr. Jeffry Tucker and his twin daughters, Dum and Dee. Mr. Tucker says he knows you; and my eyes were so like yours he came mighty near giving me the fraternity grip. He is the youngest man to be grown up and have almost grown-up daughters I ever saw. Their mother is dead, too. So many mothers seem to be dead.

We made friends with another girl on the train, Annie Pore from Price's Landing. She had never been on the train before, but although she seemed terribly shy and was dressed in a most pathetic get-up, still she had all the bearing a and carriage of a *grande dame*. She is a half-orphan, too, and I have a kind of idea that her father is not to say so intimate with his daughter as some other fathers who shall be nameless. She has been writing to her paternal parent for the last hour, and she actually copied the letter and seemed to be writing with as much care as though it had to be handed in. You don't want me to write that way to you, do you?

Gresham is splendid. It is a beautiful building, red brick with great white columns, giving it the look of a modern Parthenon. It is on top of a hill overlooking the little town and has a beautiful lawn with great chestnut trees and oaks. But best of all is the view of the mountains. When it is clear they seem quite close, almost as though we could walk to them, and at other times they disappear altogether.

The first day or two the girls seemed to think if they did not do a lot of bawling and blubbering some one might think they did not love their homes. Some of them cried because they could not help it, but some of

them, I verily believe, rubbed onions in their eyes like the heartless sisters in "Beauty and the Beast." I know no home could be more beautiful than Bracken and I'll wager anything that there isn't a dad in the world better or more beloved than mine. And was there ever a mammy like mine? I'm not even mentioning the dogs, although they are not the least of my blessings. And still, not a visible tear have I shed.

The first morning when I waked up in the strange room and stared at the blank bare wall, it seemed to me as though I simply could not stand it. I was dreaming about Mammy Susan. I thought she was pouring hot water into my tub again. My roommates were still asleep, having wept themselves into a state of coma. (I haven't told you that I am rooming with Dum and Dee Tucker and I like it a lot.) Well, I got up and went to the bathroom and had the coldest bath I ever had in my life and then I dressed in a hurry. I felt as though I must get out before any one saw me. If I could have a little run, maybe I could stave off the great wave of homesickness that was going to swallow me up in a minute. I raced along the corridor.

I got onto a covered walk connecting the dormitory with the main building, and there serene and beautiful were the mountains stretched before me. I didn't want to cry any more. A feeling of deep peace and happiness came to me. I chanted aloud: "I will look unto the hills from whence cometh my help," etc. You mustn't think I don't love you and Mammy Susan just as much as ever, for I do; but I am having a good time and am going to learn a few things, and am going to make loads and loads of friends.

My love to all the dear dogs and please give them an extra bone for me. And tell dear Mammy Susan that all of us on the train would have starved to death if she hadn't put up all that good lunch. I'll tell you about what I am studying in my next letter. Good-by,

Your own Page.

CHAPTER VI.

THE FOUNDLING.

"Well, Miss Peyton is some mobilizer," sighed Dee as she snuggled down in her bed after our first study hall had been lived through at Gresham. "Just to think, here we are hard at work when we have been here only two days."

"Well, I'm glad, for one," said Dum. "If they work us hard enough, we won't get Zebedee-sick. That's what Dee and I call homesick. Wherever Zebedee is, is home for us."

"My Father and Bracken and Mammy Susan and the dogs are so mixed up in my mind that I can't tell what or which or whom I miss most," and I scrambled into bed in a great hurry just as the bell rang to warn us that lights must be out in five minutes. I had not been twenty-four hours with other girls before I had learned many things that girls know. One of them was that the last one up has the chores to do, such as raising the window at the bottom and pulling it down at the top, a mighty chilly performance when clothed in nothing but a nightgown; also, the tardy one has the light to put out.

"Oh, you foxy creatures!" cried Dum. "I bet you haven't cleaned your teeth, you've been in such a hurry to beat me to bed."

"'Deed we have," we declared, "while you were calling on Annie Pore."

"You haven't said your prayers, then," persisted Dum.

"I have," I said. But Dee had neglected this means of grace and had to crawl out of her nice, warm bed; and she and Dum knelt together. There was silence for about three minutes; then Dum bounced into bed and pulled the covers up to her square chin. There she lay, with eyes closed.

"Dum Tucker, you skipped something. I don't believe you said a single thing but 'NowIlayme,'" and Dee stood over her sister like an avenging angel.

"What's it to you?" yawned Dum. "That's a matter between me and my conscience. Open the window; and turn out the light; and crawl into bed before our room gets reported."

"Well, it was a matter between my conscience and me whether I said my prayers at all; and you went and butt in on us. Now you take that toploftical stand about you and your conscience! Well, you and your conscience can just lie on the floor together." With which tirade, Dee yanked Dum and all her bed clothes out on the floor. She then whisked off the light and, quickly raising the window, jumped into bed.

I wondered what would be the outcome of this battle and if it would have to be settled according to the Tuckers' code of honor: a duel with boxing gloves. But just then there was a sharp rap on the door.

"Less noise, please," said a determined voice outside, "or I shall have to report 117 to the principal."

Dum lay on the floor convulsed with giggles. "Sh-h—." I warned. "Be careful, or we'll all have to write pages from the dictionary for two hours."

"You won't have to, surely, when Dum and I made all the racket," whispered Dee.

"The teacher said '117,' and that means me, too. Can you get back into bed? Is the foot untucked?"

"I believe I can if I don't start giggling again," and Dum began to squirm out of the covers.

"Let me help," said the penitent Dee, and Dum was soon back in her cot and silence reigned supreme. After a while I heard Dum whisper:

"Say, Dee, I did skip. Conscience bids me confess to thee."

"Well, Dum, I'll give it to you that you and your conscience are perfect gentlemen," said Dee admiringly.

"Thanks awfully," yawned Dum. "I know one thing, I'm a mighty sleepy gentleman;" and in a trice the quiet breathing from the disheveled bed told that Dum and her conscience were at rest.

There were constant surprises in store for one who shared a room with the Tucker twins. They certainly had the gift of infinite variety in the kind of scrapes they could get themselves into. They usually got out of scrapes as easily as they got into them by a certain frankness and directness that would disarm Miss Peyton herself. They didn't break rules, because they did things that nobody had ever thought of making rules about. The principal at Gresham was not so farseeing as the teacher in "Mary Had a Little Lamb," who seems to have made a rule about lambs in school:

> It followed her to school one day,
> Which was against the rule.
> It made the children laugh and play
> To see a lamb in school.

One day when we were taking a sedate walk, the school out in full force with two teachers to keep order along the blue-coated, black-hatted lines, we saw by the roadside a little kitten, so young its eyes were hardly open.

"Poor little foundling!" "I wonder where it came from!" "I'd like to pick him up!" ejaculated several of the girls, but Dee Tucker was the one who acted. She was bringing up the rear with Miss Sears, the Latin teacher. As they were passing the forlorn little feline, Miss Sears stepped forward to admonish a couple who were talking too loudly. Dee stooped and quickly scooped into her muff the poor pussy. No one saw her and kitty very considerately said nothing. He lay there warm and contented, dreaming he was back with his soft, loving mother, and forgetting the rude hand that had put him into a bag with his brothers and sisters. The bag had had a merciful hole, and he, being the runt of the family, had fallen through before the proposed drowning came off.

We marched on, all unconscious of the addition to our ranks. When we got back to school and went up to our room to take off our hats, etc., I noticed that Dee had very shining eyes and her dimple seemed to be deeper, but she did not divulge to Dum and me what she had up her sleeve, or rather her muff. I also noticed at supper that she swiped some bread and very

adroitly concealed it in her middy blouse. She also very cleverly called the attention of every one at our table to the autumn moon, that was peeping into the dining room window, and while they were looking the other way, she filled a little vial with milk from her glass.

Naturally I said nothing, but adopted the watchful, waiting attitude, certain that sooner or later I'd find out what Dee was up to. And I did, all right.

After supper we had an hour before study hall which we usually spent in the gymnasium dancing. Dum and Dee had undertaken to teach Annie Pore and me the new dances. All dances were new to poor Annie and me. I could cut the pigeon wing and dance "Goin' to Church," which is a negro classic (but the Tango and Maxixe with all of the intricate steps and side-stepping seemed very difficult). But I must learn, and learn I did. As for Annie, her sense of rhythm was so great that she took to dancing as a duck does to water. She had to get over a certain self-consciousness that was her ruling fault, but when the Victrola was started in one of the tunes that would make a dead darkey want to get up and pat, why, Annie would forget all about Annie and her ill-fitting clothes and would sway to the music with the utmost abandon.

I believe I have forgotten to tell whom Annie got for a roommate. It was none other than Josephine Barr, the good-natured, dressy Senior, for whom Miss Sayre felt so sorry because of her great wealth. I fancy Jo, as we soon called her, was not very well pleased at first at having to share a room with such a seemingly dismal person; but it was either Annie or Mabel Binks, as all the other rooms were filled and Jo had not registered in time to have much choice.

She couldn't bear Mabel Binks; and she did feel sorry for the poor little new girl who seemed so ready to dissolve into tears. Jo was the best old thing in the world, with a heart as big as all outdoors and an optimistic nature that was bound to influence Annie and make her more cheerful; at the same time, Annie's breeding and careful speech had its good effect on the husky Jo. Before the year was up, they were as intimate as a Senior and Sophomore could be.

On that famous evening which was afterward known as the "Kitten Evening," Dee kept disappearing between dances. She would come back, flushed and a little troubled-looking, but would go on with the dance with a do-or-die expression. Study hour in the assembly hall from eight to ten and then half an hour to get to bed before the bell rang for lights out: that was the order of procedure. As we studied, I noticed how Dee kept fidgeting and twisting. Dum noticed it, too, and the fidgets seemed to be catching. We were on our honor not to speak during study hour, and of course that settled the matter for the Tuckers and me. Dee could squirm herself into a bowknot and Dum and I could die of curiosity, and still honor forbade our making a sign to find out what was the matter.

I never spent such a long and unprofitable two hours in my life. I tried to concentrate my attention on my lessons, but it was impossible with Dee at the desk in front of me never still a minute.

"The bell at last!" exclaimed Dee.

"Well, your lessons have been Reeling and Writhing, Dee Tucker. I never saw such a wiggler in my life." But Dee was off like a whirlwind, without a word to Dum and me. She didn't even take her books with her or gather up the scattered papers that were strewn over her desk. We mercifully saved her some demerits by putting things in order for her.

"What do you reckon is up with Dee?" said Dum anxiously. "She is either brewing some mischief or is already in a scrape."

We found the door to 117 carefully closed and Dee already in bed. How she ever managed to get in so rapidly, I could not see, unless she followed the plan of "Diddle, diddle dumpling, my son, John."

"Now, Dee Tucker, what is the matter with you?" begged Dum anxiously.

"The matter with me?" said Dee with feigned coolness. "Nothing on earth, my dear sister. What should be the matter with me? I am simply sleepy and thought I would get into bed."

"How about your teeth and your prayers?"

"Cleaned 'em and said 'em," said Dee laconically, and she turned over rather gingerly, I noticed, and pretended to have fallen into a deep sleep.

"She won't be able to keep it to herself very long," whispered Dum to me. "If it is any fun, she can't be low enough not to share it; and if it is trouble of some sort, she is sure to let us in on it. I'll take the motto of Prosper le Gai: 'I bide my time.'"

Respecting Dee's evident desire for silence, Dum and I went very quietly to bed and had the light out long before it was time.

A knock at the door! "Come in," called Dum. It was Annie Pore, very apologetic at disturbing us.

"It is ten minutes before lights out bell. I had no idea you had all gone to bed. I was worried about Dee. Is she all right? She looked so feverish."

"Oh, yes, she's all right; just sleepy," said Dum politely. "Thank you all the same, Annie."

Annie softly closed the door. I heard strange sounds from Dee's bed but could not tell whether she was laughing or crying.

Another knock!

"Come in," a little wearily from Dum.

Miss Jane Cox this time!

"Oh, girls, excuse me! I did not know you were in bed, I was a little anxious about Dee." A snore from Dee's bed, rather melodramatic in tone. "She seemed so upset during study hour. I was on duty and I did not know whether she needed castor oil or a demerit." The snoring stopped. The snorer was evidently deliberating.

"I think she is all right now, Miss Cox," I ventured. "She went right off to bed as soon as study hour was over. Maybe she won't have to have either, demerit or oil. My private opinion is she had a flea down her back, but she says she was just tired and sleepy." A gratified snore from Dee and Miss Cox with a little snicker went to her room.

"Night, Sable Goddess, from her ebon throne,
Now stretches forth a leaden scepter o'er a slumbering world."

Lights out bell had rung, and the girls all along the corridors in Carter Hall had gone to bed and to sleep. I had a feeling of impending something, not necessarily evil, but excitement, at least. Dum was breathing gently and regularly like a sleeping infant. Dee stirred every now and then and occasionally muttered an unintelligible something. I dozed but waked with a start.

"Mieuw—mieuw—mieuw!" came in a heart-rending wail from Dee's bed.

"Shhhh-shhhh! Poor ittle titty puss! Don't you cwy, honey child! Shhh ____"

"Mieuw—mieuw-mieuw-mieuw!!!!" More subdued endearments from Dee. Dum slept on, but I heard a door open way down the hall! Some teacher, with sharp ears, no doubt.

"Dee," I whispered, "put your little finger in its mouth and let it suck until that busybody down the hall goes back into her room." There was the sound of a door closing.

"What is your advice, Page?"

"Have you anything for it to eat?"

"Bread and milk, but it won't eat."

"Of course not, it is too little. Did you warm the milk?" I inquired.

"No, how could I with no stove?" One of the rules of the institution was: no alcohol stoves.

"Wait a minute. I've got a candle that Mammy Susan put in my bag in case of accidents." How I blessed the kind old woman who had thought of everything. "Them newfangled lights may be mighty fine but if they 'cide not to wuck some night, a good ole tallow can'le 'll come in mighty handy, chile, also some saftest matches," she had said as she overrode all my

objections and tucked the life-saving candle and matches in my already overworked grip.

I got up, donned slippers and dressing gown, gently closed the window, as the night was decidedly frosty, and found the matches and candle. We did not dare to light the electric light because of the transom over the door. Pussy might at any moment let out another wail, and then the wakeful teacher, seeing the light, would make for our room. In feeling for the table, I touched Dum's foot and she waked with a start.

"What's the matter, Dee? Are you sick?" And Dum sat up in bed.

"Shhh—No, Dum, she's not sick but the little kitty is hungry," I whispered.

"The *what* is hungry?"

"Not so loud, Dum dear, please! It's just a poor, miserable little foundling of a kitty puss that I simply could not leave by the roadside. I've got it in bed with me here."

"Oh, Caroline Tucker! A nasty little cat in bed with you? What would Zebedee say?" and Dum sniffed the air disdainfully.

"He would say just what I say, Virginia Tucker, that it is a mighty funny thing that you, who were in line before me and must have seen the poor little wretched kitten first, didn't feel it your duty to rescue it from its misery. I am ashamed of you, belonging to the S. P. C. A., too," and Dee gave her little charge a brand new finger to suck.

Things were looking rather serious: Dum and Dee calling one another Virginia and Caroline and that in no modulated tones; and the candle making such a bright light that I expected every minute to hear a teacher rapping on our door.

"Now, look here, Tweedles, both of you stop your fussing and 'tend to the business in hand. You can fight it out to-morrow, but for Heaven's sake, put all of your surplus energy now on getting the kitten fed and quiet and 117 not in a deluge of demerits. Dum, get up and pin two middy ties over the transom."

Dum obediently carried out my instructions while I warmed the milk that Dee had purloined from the supper table over the blessed candle. I sweetened it a little and diluted it with water. I warmed it in Dee's silver pin-tray, as we had no pan of any sort.

"Dip your finger in here, Dee, and let the kitten taste it so it can realize succor is near. It is lots too young to lap and will have to suck a rag."

Dum tore up an old handkerchief for me and in a little while kitty was tugging away for dear life, one end of the bit of cambric in its pink flannel mouth and the other in the pin-tray of milk.

Dum was soon won over to the helpless little thing. "It is sweet, Dee, I declare; let me hold it a minute."

Dee magnanimously handed it over to her sister who held the pin-tray very carefully and let kitty feed as tenderly as any young mother. It soon got its fill and curled up and purred "just like a fairy buzz-saw," Dum declared.

"To think of a tiny cat like that knowing how to purr!" exclaimed Dee.

"To think of a tiny cat like that having such enormous fleas on it," shuddered Dum. "Here, take the beastie, I'm going back to bed before I get full of 'em."

"Yes, they are something awful," sighed Dee, "I am literally eaten alive."

"Poor old Dee! Change your nightgown and leave your bed to the pussy and come snuggle in with me," said Dum.

Pussy slept very well in Dee's bed, waking only about every two hours and mewing for nourishment. Dee and I would get wearily up, warm the milk and administer.

"Oh, who could be a cat with kittens?" sighed Dee.

Morning finally came and the problem of what to do with our adopted child had to be faced.

"Do you know what I'd do if I were you, Dee? I'd go right to Miss Peyton and tell her all about it. I'll go with you. She would sympathize with

you, I really believe, and help you find a home for pussy," I said.

"I'll go, too," cried Dum.

Miss Peyton was fine. She seemed to think Dee had merely been imprudent, not at all naughty. She agreed with Dee that it was a strange thing that the whole line of girls and teachers should have passed the little waif by.

"Girls, I am proud and happy that you should have felt I was the person to confide in. If all the school could only understand that I am their friend and not just the principal and dealer in demerits. Of course you can't keep the kitten in your room, but I will see that a good home is found for it with someone who will take the trouble to feed it until it can lap for itself. I think I know exactly the right person in the village."

We went from the principal's office in very happy and exalted states of mind.

"Isn't she wonderful?" exclaimed Dee. "Wasn't she splendid to us?"

"She was fine," enthused Dum. "I am certainly relieved."

I said to myself: "Miss Peyton was awfully nice, but it is plain to be seen she is fond of cats. I wonder how she would have felt if it had been an orphan snake or an abused Billy-goat!"

CHAPTER VII.

KITTY'S FOSTER-FATHER.

Tweedles and I were excused from the Gym exercises that afternoon with the request that we meet Miss Peyton in her office at three o'clock. We were there on time, you may be sure, and Dee had the kitty all done up in a shoe box ready for the trip. We had christened him Oliver Twist, because he kept on "hollering for more" all the weary night.

Miss Peyton laughed until the tears rolled down her cheeks over the description of our trials during the night. When we found out that she did not think it was so terribly wicked of Dee, we felt we could tell her everything, even the middy ties over the transom and the fleas in Dee's bed.

"You poor girls must be nearly dead, aren't you?" she asked kindly.

"Page and I feel right scrooch-eyed, but after the first feeding, Dum slept through it all," laughed Dee. "I have more sympathy than ever for poor Zebedee. That's what we call our Father, you know, Miss Peyton. He had to bring up Dum and me on bottles as our little Mother died when we were tiny babies. If one kitten could keep two girls awake most of the night heating milk for it, don't you fancy two twins, like Dum and me, could keep one man awake all the time?"

"Didn't you have a nurse?" I asked.

"Of course we did, all kinds and colors, but Dum and I wouldn't drink unless Zebedee gave us the bottles. He says he was afraid the nurse might not be sanitary and trusted no one but himself to fix the milk."

"Poor old Zebedee!" sighed Dum, her eyes filling. "I don't see how we could have been so mean to him."

We had started on our quest for a friend for kitty, Miss Peyton leading the way down toward the village. She seemed to be enjoying the little

outing as much as we were.

"Your Father must be very patient," she said, putting her arm in Dum's when she saw the hazel eyes filling at the thought of her Father.

"Well, the funny part of it is, he is not one bit patient except with Dee and me. Do you know, once he got dreadfully mad with the telephone girl who kept on cutting him off when he was in the midst of some most important business that could not wait, and every time he would try to get connection again, the operator would say 'Line busy.' Now he knew the line was not busy and the person on the other end was just as anxious to be got as he was to get him, and, as I was saying, he got so mad he pulled the telephone out by the roots."

"Well, that was, to say the least, impulsive," and Miss Peyton laughed like any schoolgirl.

"You mustn't think Zebedee is bad-tempered," put in Dee. "He's got the sweetest disposition in the world. He's just quick-tempered. He has learned to control himself wonderfully but you know he is real young yet."

"Yes, I know," said Miss Peyton solemnly.

"Tell us whom you are going to get to be kitty's foster father, Miss Peyton," I said, purposely changing the subject. Not that I did not take the keenest interest in everything pertaining to Mr. Tucker, but I could see that the twins were both getting leaky, and it did seem a pity to have a cloud cast over our delightful walk with Miss Peyton.

"Indeed, I will," she said, giving me an approving nod. "It is dear old Captain Pat Leahy. I hope you girls will like him as much as I do. He is sure to like you. Of course he may not be able to keep the little thing and then I don't know what we will do. Anyhow, let's not borrow trouble. I know the dear man will do it for me if he possibly can. When I first came to Gresham as a pupil——"

"Oh, were you a pupil here?" we exclaimed in one breath.

"Yes, indeed, I came here before I went to college. Gresham had not such a grand building then and accommodated only about fifty girls. It was

more like a home school. Captain Leahy was then conductor on the local train and took an especial interest in the Gresham girls. I shall never forget how good he was to me on my first trip. I was lonesome and shy——"

"You, shy! Oh, Miss Peyton, were you, really?"

"I should say I was. Why, Annie Pore is brazen beside what I was as a child. Captain Leahy sat by me between stations and with his ready Irish tongue cheered me up immensely. He treated me to peanuts and made me laugh and gave me a new outlook on life. The poor fellow lost a leg in a railroad accident about ten years ago, and ever since then has kept the gate where the track crosses the main street of Gresham."

"Does he like cats?" I asked.

"Oh, yes, he adores them. That is the great bond of sympathy between us. He loves cats and he loves flowers. He also has a great fondness for young people. Here we are," and Miss Peyton pointed out the gate-house where her old friend lived.

It was just an ordinary little square box of a house painted the pumpkin yellow that railroads are so partial to, but all around it were window boxes, some of them filled with geraniums, some with Norway spruces and English ivy. A moon flower had completely covered one side of the little house, but the frost had touched the big leaves and they were dropping off one by one.

A grizzled old man with a long red beard and a peg leg was digging around the geraniums as we approached. "Captain, I have brought some of my girls to meet you," said Miss Peyton, holding out her hand to the old man and introducing us.

"And I am that proud to meet all of yez; and so will me cats be. The poor critters long for some petticoats to cuddle oop to. A peg leg is but cold comfort to a pussy when she is hankering for some women folk," and with a hearty laugh the old fellow stumped to the door of his little gate-house and called to the cats. Out they came, seven in all and a motley crew. The Captain was very democratic and not particular about the pedigree of his friends.

"All cats are aristocratic if you just give 'em a chance," he would declare when some cat snob would suggest that he go in for pure breeds.

Six of the cats came to him and rubbed their backs against his good leg; but the seventh, a large gray one with a mournful look in her eyes, began to sharpen her claws on a long strip of sand paper he had tacked to his wooden leg. We burst out laughing. It was the most comical thing I had ever seen.

"A little invintion of me own. There are no trees handy for the poor critters to sharpen their claws on and I find this device saves me furniture many a scratch." He stooped and laid his hand lovingly on the mournful one, but she arched her back and moved over to the protection of Dee's skirts.

"What, schtill angry wid me, poor Bett? I had to have her kittens drowned, all but one, and she can't forgive me, not that I blame her. But what am I to do, Miss Peyton? Me house is schmall and Bett is that prolific she could furnish kittens for all the ould maids in Christendom in little or no toime."

"Well, it is a problem, Captain Leahy, but I am sorry for Bett. Aren't there enough old maids in Gresham to help you out some?" Miss Peyton stooped down and picked up the poor bereaved mother who nestled comfortably in her arms and began to purr loudly.

"The demand doesn't come oop to Bett's supply, niver in the world," laughed the old man. "But what am I thinking of keeping yez waiting out here so long? Come in, come in!" I have never heard such a rich, delicious voice as Captain Leahy's; and his brogue was as soft as the purr of his cats.

"Before we go in, I might as well tell you what has brought us to you especially, Captain," said Miss Peyton.

"What? You must schnatch me from me Fool's Paradise? I was after thinking all the time you had come to see the ould man himself," and his eyes twinkled mischievously.

"So we did, dear Captain. We have come to see you because you are you, and we need your help," answered Miss Peyton with her engaging smile that somehow made one feel that her way was the best way.

"Well, sitting is as cheap as standing and I want this peg leg to last as long as I do. It is astonishing how fast they wear out. Come in, come in, and tell me what it is you want me to help yez about," and he led the way into his little house.

It did not seem so small when you got in because it was so orderly. The lower berth from a wrecked Pullman served him as seat by day and bed by night. The very smallest cooking stove imaginable, almost a doll baby size, polished like the boots of a dandy, was at one side. Over it was a shelf with some blue and white china on it, and under the shelf a few cooking utensils and a dish pan and biscuit board.

"Sit down, sit down, and while the kittle is biling for tay, I can listen to your trroobles." We seated ourselves on the Pullman seat while the dear old man busied himself with the tea kettle. Bett, the bereaved mother, still nestled in Miss Peyton's arms, but after a moment she wriggled out and got into the box behind the stove. "You'd better look after your baby, you ould rip. I'm thinking these ladies are that fond of cats that they might be making off wid it."

"That's just it, Captain Leahy, these ladies are fond of cats, one of them especially," indicating Dee. "So fond of them that yesterday when the whole school was out on the Valley Road taking the dignified walk that is required, what should Miss Caroline Tucker do but rescue a poor little lost kitten, mewing by the roadside, carry it home in her muff without teacher or fellow pupil seeing her, and actually take it to bed with her. But, girls, you tell Captain Leahy about it yourselves," which we did at Miss Peyton's command.

He enjoyed the prank as much as Miss Peyton and laughed until the blue and white china danced on the little shelf.

"And now I know very well what ye have come for. Ye want me to take a boarder."

"Oh, will you, please?" implored Dee.

Bett, having nourished her lone offspring, now carried it in her mouth for Miss Peyton's inspection, and Dee, seeing her, jumped up in great excitement, dropping the box she had been holding so carefully and waking

up Oliver Twist in the fall. "Look, look! Bett's kitten looks just like Oliver! I thought it was him at first." Dee was excited and we all excused her English. Oliver began to cry aloud and Bett tore around like one demented.

"Well, Bett, old girl, your baby has been restored to yez. If this don't beat all! On the Valley Road, yesterday, you say? I told that boy to be careful of the hole in the bag, that the runt might fall through it, and so he did. You call him Oliver, you say? Well, that is a handsome name for such a poor mite, but maybe it will give him some ambition to grow oop to it. There's an ould saying: 'If you escape drowning, you'll live to be hanged.' I hope not, Oliver, I hope not."

Now Bett, having one of her babies back, forgave her master and rubbed herself against his good leg; and then such another washing as she did give Oliver before she considered him fit to get into the box that she called home!

The kettle was boiling and the tea soon steeping in the pretty teapot. The Captain put up a little table exactly like the ones on the train and we had the merriest kind of a party.

"Your cats are so fat, Captain, what do you feed them on?" asked Dee, in her element with two cats in her lap.

"An ould frind of mine, who is schteward on a diner saves me all the schraps and the cats live high, higher than their master, by a long shot. But do you know the windfall I have had lately, Miss Peyton?"

"No; do tell me. I am so glad of any good fortune that comes to you, Captain."

"Bless your schwate heart for thim words! Well, I have always had a hard toime about my shoes since I lost me limb. Such an accumulation of rights as you never saw wid no one wanting of thim and no place to put thim and feeling it was to say the least a sin to be throwing thim away, when no doubt there was somewhere in the worrld a man who had lost his lift leg who would give anything for thim. Well, I came on this advertisement in a Washington paper: 'A man who has lost his left leg would like to get into communication with one who has lost his right. 11½ E.' I knew soon as I clapped eyes on it that some poor fellow was in exactly

me own dilimma. I did get into communication wid him and now I am no longer trying to find a place for the right shoes I have no use for and on the other hand I have enough of the lifts to last me a lifetime. 11½ E's too, exactly my size."

"Well, that was a windfall surely," said Miss Peyton. ("More like a footfall," muttered Dum.) "But, Captain, I thought you were going to buy a fine jointed leg with a foot and then you would need your own right shoes."

"Oh, I have given oop the notion. You see my cats would miss the peg something awful, wid no place to sharpen their little claws; and thin I have found a poor widdy woman living down the track a piece and the right leg of me pants do come in so handy for the poor thing to make schuits for her little byes. It would seem a sin to use that warm cloth to cover cork, whin some poor little lamb is shivering in the cold."

"Ah, Captain, always thinking how you can be good to children and cats," said Miss Peyton.

Then with many thanks to the old Irishman for his hospitality and his kindness and the good time he had given us, we took our departure. I noticed that Dum, who had been very quiet and whose eyes had been misty several times, especially when the Captain told of the fate of his trouser legs, stepped back into the little house and I heard her whisper to the old man: "Please, Captain, take this half dollar and buy some toys for the little lambs who wear the pant legs." I happened to know it was the whole of her week's allowance, too.

CHAPTER VIII.

ABOUT MATHEMATICS AND ME.

I was a very difficult pupil to place, having been overeducated in some subjects and absolutely neglected in others. I might have gone with the seniors in English and History; was normal in Latin, that is, sophomore, where girls of my age were put; was just beginning French; and had to go with the kids in Mathematics. I had never played a game of tennis in my life nor even seen a game of basketball, but I was naturally athletic from the free country life I had led, and it was soon realized in athletic circles that I would be on the team with a little coaching.

I was glad to see that Miss Cox was to teach me Arithmetic. Miss Peyton hoped I could get into Algebra by Christmas and then, with hard study and earnest coaching, perhaps catch up with the class. I had a feeling that Miss Cox and I were going to pull together if she could just let herself go. Her manner in the class was rather wooden, but she was an excellent teacher and the girls were quick to recognize that, so while she was not popular, she was not disliked.

I was such a stupid in Mathematics that I was afraid she might put me down as a dunce and lose all interest in me, but the fact that I read "Alice in Wonderland" seemed to be in my favor.

"Page, I will not have you look upon yourself as hopeless in Arithmetic," she said to me one day when I despaired of ever understanding what seemed to me a very intricate problem. "Lewis Carroll was a great mathematician and still he wrote the delicious classic that you and I are so fond of. Now I think minds that appreciate the same things must be similar. I believe there is a corner of your brain that is absolutely unexplored and that corner corresponds to the great fertile area in Lewis Carroll's. All it needs in you is working, digging, cultivating to produce fruit."

"Oh, Miss Cox, how splendid of you to look at it that way! I am going to try awfully hard to work my poor, little, neglected, unused plot of brain with all my might. If I can't grow anything but green persimmons, that would be better than nothing."

"Ambition, Distraction, Uglification and Derision are the hard things. If you look at it right, one side of Mathematics is really romantic."

Father always said the way to control me was through my imagination and Miss Cox had surely hit on my weakness. The result was that Mathematics was no longer dry-as-dust to me. I found it had been a closed book because I had never been interested enough to open it. I soon outstripped the kids in my class and was put in a higher one. I had to read frequent chapters of "Alice in Wonderland" to cheer me on, and Miss Cox used to quote Lewis Carroll to me when she and I were alone. I found the other girls in the classes looked upon her as nothing but a teacher and she regarded them as mere pupils, to be taught conscientiously and then dismissed.

One day I sailed safely through a problem that was noted as a regular stumper. As soon as the class was dismissed, Miss Cox exclaimed:

"'Come to my arms, my beamish boy. You've slain the Jabberwock.' Page, I really believe you are going to end by being a pretty good mathematician."

I answered:

"'He thought he saw a Garden Door
That opened with a key:
He looked again, and found it was
A Double Rule of Three:
'And all its mystery,' he said,
'Is clear as day to me!'

If I ever understand it, it will be thanks to you and Lewis Carroll!"

The Tuckers had been to school pretty steadily all their lives, so they were able to go into the sophomore class in everything. I bitterly regretted that my education had been so erratic, but determined to make the best of it.

Dum helped me with my French and we tried to keep to our rule of talking French at the table; but as we did what Mammy Susan called our own "retching" and my vocabulary was somewhat limited, we had to resort to English a great deal or go unfed.

I know Dum and Dee felt sorry for me for being in a kids' class in Mathematics. I didn't really mind nearly so much as they thought I did. The kids were nice to me and I made some mighty good friends among them.

There was one little bunchy girl named Mary Flannigan who turned out in the end one of the best friends I ever had in my life. She was short and stumpy, with scrambled red hair and a freckled face and the very keenest sense of humor I had ever known. She was a year younger than I was but very well up in her classes, and she had a genius for mimicry that was irresistibly funny. She had some stunts that endeared her to all the girls. She could do a dog fight or cats on the back fence; and could go so like a mosquito that you were certain you would be bitten in a moment. She was something of a ventriloquist, which made these accomplishments especially delightful.

Mary and I were put into Algebra at the same time, and to our joy Miss Cox was to teach us. Mary had found out Miss Cox, too. Tweedles and I had religiously refrained from telling any of the girls about her mad revel on the day of our arrival, but we had tried to make them understand what a very good old girl she was if you could just find her out; and our attitude toward her was having its effect on the whole school. Miss Cox, realizing that she was really liked and understood, had a change of expression as well as heart. Her sad, crooked face was now a happy, crooked face and she no longer saved her jokes for Tweedles and me, but got them off indiscriminately, and very good jokes they were, too. The classes in voice culture became more popular, and more and more girls wrote home begging to be allowed to "take singing."

I shall never forget Mary's and my first lesson in Algebra. Miss Cox looked at us with her twisted smile.

"Algebra is rather a poetical-sounding name, don't you think?" she asked us.

"Maybe it is," said Mary, "but I bet it takes it out in sounding so."

"Oh, I don't know about that," and Miss Cox opened the book at the first page and read as follows: "'In Algebra, the operations of Arithmetic are abridged and generalized by means of Symbols.' That appeals to the imagination somewhat, I think. 'Symbols which represent numbers.' Just that word 'Symbol' sets me to dreaming. Arithmetic is the prose of Mathematics where everything is stated and nothing left to the imagination, but Algebra is very different. 'Known Numbers are usually represented by the first letters of the alphabet, as a, b, c. Unknown Numbers, or those whose values are to be determined, are usually represented by the last letters of the alphabet, as x, y, z.' The unknown numbers,—the mysterious numbers,—for what is unknown is in a measure mysterious and what is mysterious is romantic or poetic. That is the way I think of it. In working your Algebra, don't just look at it as hard, dry facts to be mastered, but let x, y, z be the Great Unknown that you are to find. Let the problem be a plot that you are to unravel as Poe did 'The Gold Bug.'"

You may well imagine that Mary and I set to with a will to get all we could out of such a thrilling subject. There were times when we felt that Miss Cox was drawing a little on her imagination to find poetry in such an example as this, for instance:

$$4x^{-2/3}-3x^{-1/3}-27=0$$

On the whole, though, Algebra was much more interesting than Arithmetic, and sometimes I had the realization that it did mean a lot to me; and Mary said she felt the same way. Anyhow, in the early spring we were able to take the sophomore tests and go on in that class. Miss Peyton said she considered it really wonderful that I should have progressed so rapidly, but I told her it was all due to Miss Cox's being so certain that Lewis Carroll and I had similar brains.

CHAPTER IX.

FOOTBALL.

None of our crowd had reached what the grown-ups call "the boy age." We had our heroes of romance that it was difficult for any of the male persuasion in real life to live up to. Tweedles declared that Zebedee was boy enough for them; although Dum thought if she ever met a Prosper le Gai she might consider him; while Dee had an idea a boy like Laurie, in "Little Women," would be some sport and she might be willing to knock around with him a bit. Jane Eyre's "Mr. Rochester" was my beau ideal.

"I want a dark, masterful lover who could tie the poker up in a bowknot if he had a mind to; a rude man who could bring tears to my eyes by his gruffness, and then, with the gentleness of a woman, soothe my aching head."

"Oh, Page," chimed in Annie Pore, "how could you want such a ruffian? I like Henry Esmond, so kind and courteous and dignified——"

"Yes, and as stiff as a poker. My 'Mr. Rochester' could tie him up in a bowknot in no time——"

"And soothe your aching head with him, too, I fancy. I think a man who is rude enough to make a woman cry and strong enough to tie up pokers would be more than likely to beat his wife with said poker." This from Mary Flannigan, who was in our room during the discussion of our favorite heroes. "I want 'Charles O'Malley' or nothing. Give me a man who is gay and rollicking, at the same time good-tempered and kindly if quick to fight withal."

We had to laugh at Mary. She was such a little Mother Bunch, with her crinkly red hair bushing out around her fat freckled face,—hardly a likely person to attract a hero of romance. Mary wore as many petticoats as Mammy Susan and all of them were tied around her waist with draw

strings. I verily believe that she and Mammy Susan were the only persons left in the world who wore red flannel petticoats. In that day and generation when slimiky skirts were the rage, you can fancy how Mary looked with her gathered skirts. She also had a leaning toward deep ruffles around her neck, which more than ever gave her the look of a clown dog.

She had a way of breaking into the conversation very much as the clown dog breaks into the ring, and no matter how serious she was, we simply had to laugh at her. She was very good-natured and not the least bit touchy. We laughed at her general bunchiness just because we couldn't help it, but one and all liked her for her good temper and ready wit and respected her for her excellent standing in her classes, where she was the youngest pupil. We also envied her the delightful stunts that I believe I have mentioned before.

"I'd rather be able to go like a dog, the way Mary can, than make the finest statue of one that ever was done," sighed Dum.

"Nonsense, Dum. Anybody can go like a dog with a little practice, but to make one in clay is going some. But to return to our lovers: what do you girls say to taking in the football game over at Hill-Top? The seniors are going, one and all, and Miss Peyton says any of us can go who wish. Miss Cox will chaperon the sophomores."

Hill-Top was a boys' school on the other side of the village from Gresham Academy, and young ladies from our school were always invited to the match games there; and our school in turn sent a formal invitation to the pupils of Hill-Top when an interesting basketball game was to be played at Gresham.

"Oh, do come, all of you. I've never seen a game of football in my life and I'm just wild to," I begged.

"I guess I won't go," said Annie.

"Well, I think you've got another guess coming, unless you have a powerful good reason," I exclaimed.

"My only reason is that I am so embarrassed with boys," and poor Annie gave her usual painful blush.

"Oh, you won't have to speak to the boys. They never notice the Sophs, anyhow, but give all their twaddle to the Juniors and Seniors. If a boy, old enough to walk 'loney, breaks through Mabel Binks' guard, he is a hero for fair," laughed Dee.

So, Annie's objections overcome, we hurried her and Mary off to put on their hats and wraps, and quickly donning our own, got downstairs just in time to form in line with the Sophomores, who were starting under the leadership of Miss Cox for the game at Hill-Top.

"I'm glad to see you are going, Page," said Margaret Sayre, as she hooked her arm in mine. "I am to help Miss Cox keep order, although I don't really think I am needed. Sophomores are never boy crazy. The Juniors are the ones, as a rule, that need quieting. Sometimes I wonder where all the bad Juniors go to and where all the good Seniors come from."

"Well, I reckon the bad Juniors were once good Sophomores and they can just as easily turn into good Seniors," I responded.

The Juniors at Gresham were a rather wild lot and they had as a leader Mabel Binks, who, although she was a Senior, chose her friends entirely among the Juniors. The truth of the matter was, as Mammy Susan used to say, Mabel would rather be a "king among buzzards than a buzzard among kings." The Seniors would have none of her leadership and among them she had to take a back seat; while the Juniors welcomed her to their ranks with joy, not realizing why she had chosen them, and flattered by her notice.

The long line of girls, two abreast, wound its way through the streets of the little town and out into the country again to the boys' school. It was really a very pretty sight, this row of blooming, happy girls, all ages and sizes, dressed in the universally becoming dark blue, with their jaunty velvet sailor hats perched at every conceivable angle on heads of hair of every conceivable color.

"Doesn't Annie Pore look pretty in her new hat?" whispered Miss Sayre.

These velvet sailors were ordered by the school and every pupil was obliged to have one. All of us were glad that Annie was forced to discard her forlorn-looking crêpe hat that looked for all the world like a last year's bird's nest. The black velvet sailor was exactly right for her, throwing into

pleasing contrast her milk-white skin, and bringing out the wonderful tints in her ripe-wheat hair. Jo Barr with wonderful tact had managed to change the hang of her dragging skirt and it was now even around the bottom.

"I think she is beautiful and she is really very fine in many ways. I have grown so fond of her. All of us have. And I think Dum and Dee are having a splendid effect on her spirits, for she is not nearly so lugubrious."

"Dum and Dee may be having a fine effect, too," laughed Miss Sayre, "but a girl named Page Allison is doing her part. All the faculty notice it. I wish someone like you could be in every class, someone to leaven the whole lump with a certain quality of camaraderie. Annie Pore was as forlorn a specimen of humanity as ever stepped out of a 'bus that first day here, and now look at her!"

Annie was laughing heartily as Mary Flannigan made a noise like a sick kitten, throwing her voice, with her powers as a ventriloquist, so it seemed to come from a clump of sumac by the roadside. Dee was peering eagerly into the bushes before she caught on to the joke. Annie Pore certainly did not look like the same girl. No one would think of nicknaming her "Orphan Annie" now. The name clung to her, however, among a certain class, thanks to Mabel Binks, who had not been able to forgive or forget the laugh raised against her by Annie on the first day of school.

Hill-Top was built much in the same style as Gresham, and it, too, had the Parthenon effect with its big white pillars. The view was not quite so fine as ours, but from the little experience I had had of boys, I imagined they did not go in for views to any great extent.

"A primrose by the river's brink,
A common primrose was to him and nothing more."

For that matter, I noticed that mighty few of the girls at Gresham appreciated the view, and as Miss Sayre said, thought more of dessert for dinner than of the view of the mountains.

The game was just starting as we arrived, so we seated ourselves on the benches provided for the visitors with as little stir as possible. Dum got on the other side of me to put me on to the points of the great game of football.

"It seems too foolish and backwoodsy for me never to have seen a game," I said, "but at Milton everyone is too old to do more than walk through a set of croquet or too young to do more than bounce a rubber ball. Father occasionally threatens to go up to Richmond for the Virginia-Carolina game at Thanksgiving, but somebody is always coming or going (I mean getting born or dying), and we have never made it yet."

"Never mind, honey," and Dum gave me a hug, "you'll learn all the points of the game to-day, and some time when we are back in Richmond, Zebedee will give us a great football party. We always go to the Thanksgiving game. I don't see what Zebedee will do without us this year."

"Who, that good-looking pa of yours?" said Mabel Binks, who was seated right in front of us, with the Juniors, as usual. "Why, I'll wager he can find someone to take your place. I bet he's having a pretty good time with you kids off his hands."

Dum's hands clinched and unclinched. Her eyes were closed and her lips moving. I had not lived with the Tucker Twins for several weeks without finding out what that meant. When Dum did that way, it meant she was trying to control her temper. Her lips formed these words: "Oh, God, make me good! Don't let me biff Mabel Binks! Don't let me biff Mabel Binks!"

For a moment the wicked wish came into my heart that she would "biff Mabel Binks"; but when I thought of the consternation it would arouse in Gresham and the disgrace to our class, to say nothing of poor hot-headed Dum, I felt ashamed of myself for harboring such a militant desire. I slipped my hand over Dum's clenched fist and in a moment I felt it relax.

"Thank you, Page. God answered my prayer quicker than usual, thanks to you," and Dum gave a great sigh of relief. "It seemed to me almost like it would be wrong if I didn't hit her. Zebedee would fight for us any day and I don't see why I can't fight for him."

"Well, when you come down to facts, Dum, Mabel Binks did not say anything derogatory of your father. She said he was good-looking and intimated that he was naturally popular. I fancy she would like to go to the Thanksgiving game herself with him. There is nothing for you to fight about. I have an idea that Mr. Tucker can take care of himself enough not to take her to the game at least," I whispered; and Dum laughed aloud so that Mabel turned around and asked, "What's the joke?" And Dum had the satisfaction of saying in honeyed tones: "One of the kid jokes that I fancy you would not appreciate."

The game of football at first impressed me as little more than a tangle of legs, and a dog fight at Bracken had more sense to it; but as Dum explained the points, I began to see some method in the seeming madness of twenty-two boys lying down on one poor ball and yelling. Needless to add, I very soon became as enthusiastic about that game as all other games I ever had any knowledge of, and before the football season was over I was as rabid a rooter as the Tuckers themselves.

"I believe you are a born lover of games, Page," said Miss Sayre, smiling as my enthusiasm got the better of me and I let out a piercing shriek in honor of a short, bow-legged boy who had seized the ball at a crucial moment and literally dodged his way through the Seniors and made a goal. The game was between the Seniors and Sophomores, and of course the Sophomores of Gresham were in honor bound to root for the Sophomores of Hill-Top.

"Who's all right? Who's all right?
Shorty!—Shorty! Out of sight!"

yelled the class for their bow-legged hero, and then the Seniors gave him fifteen 'rahs. Seniors always have a special feeling for Sophomores and a game between them is usually a very friendly bout. Of course the Seniors do not exactly want to be beaten, but they take a great delight in the prowess of their pet class. In spite of Shorty's good playing and a great deal

of good playing from the other ten Sophomores, the Seniors won, which was quite meet and proper. The younger boys had put up a good fight and were much applauded by their elders.

CHAPTER X.

BOYS.

After the football game, some of the more self-assured boys came over to the visitors from Gresham and singled out their friends to conduct them to the tables on the lawn where the matron was serving ice cream.

All the boys spoke to Miss Cox and seemed on the most friendly terms with her. I remembered then that she went over to Hill-Top twice a week for the purpose of training a chorus. She knew them all by name and chatted with them very freely, much more freely than she did with any of the girls, except Dum and Dee and me.

"Evidently, Miss Cox understands boys better than she does girls and they understand her," thought I. Her manner with them was frank and natural, exactly as it had been with Mr. Tucker.

A tall, good-looking boy was holding a laughing conversation with her about the game. He it was who had saved the day for the Seniors when it had looked as though the younger class would certainly win, owing to the strategic movements of the popular Shorty.

"Didn't the kid make a fine play, though, Miss Cox? It seemed a pity to take the game from them; but I tell you, if the Sophomores won from the Seniors there would be no living with them. They're rather a cocky lot as it is, bless 'em."

"Yes, they are fine boys and I wish they might have won just this once. They worked so hard and you Seniors were playing so lazily you almost let the game slip through your fingers. It would have been a good lesson for your team if they had lost."

"That's just what I tell them, Miss Cox. I hate lazy playing, even if you are up against something easy. I believe in playing the game to the best of your ability, if it's nothing but push-pins."

I certainly liked the way that boy talked and agreed with him. I unconsciously drew nearer to where he and Miss Cox were standing, not with any idea of being introduced but because I was interested in what they were saying.

"No, you don't, Miss Buttinsky," was whispered in my ear, "Seniors first when there is a good thing in sight," and Mabel Binks crowded in front of me and deliberately joined the group around Miss Cox. An introduction to the handsome football player naturally followed. I drew back abashed. One of the most hateful things about Mabel Binks was that she usually attributed her motives to other persons. She was determined to meet this boy and she took for granted it was what I was after, too.

I felt like employing Dum's method and praying not to "biff Mabel Binks," but I was anxious to see what the outcome would be and if the handsome youth, whose name I had learned was Harvie Price, would be attracted by the charms of the stylish Mabel. Mabel was not a bad-looking girl, rather handsome, in fact, but a trifle too vivid for my taste. Her eyes were as black and shiny as new patent-leather shoes; her abundant hair, coarse and curly; her lips too full and red; her figure handsome but rather too well developed for a girl of seventeen. She was always richly dressed and in the latest style.

The idea of the directors of Gresham in having the pupils dress in blue suits and black hats was to do away with the custom of overdressing common to many boarding schools. They seemed to think that a blue suit was a blue suit. They were vastly mistaken, however, as anyone with half an eye could see by comparing Mabel Binks with Annie Pore. Annie Pore's appearance I have described. Mabel's suit was a costly affair of handsome cloth combined with velvet and trimmed with fur. The skirt was slit, showing a cerise petticoat; a cerise crêpe de Chine tie gave color to her very V-necked blouse; and around her velvet sailor she had pinned several large, fine ostrich plumes. The latest style of high-heeled pumps with cut steel buckles were on her feet, making them a little too prominent, considering their size and shape. Spotless white gloves finished her costume; unless one might consider the strong odor of musk perfume the finishing touch. She did look handsome and her clothes were pretty and fine, but a little too fine for a football match.

"Oh, Mr. Price," she gushed, "your playing was just grand. All of us were just wild about it. I said 'it,' not 'you,' you understand," and she giggled affectedly. "I think it was real noble of you to let the kids get any points at all."

"Yes, mighty noble," said Harvie Price, looking at his dashing admirer rather quizzically, "so noble they came mighty near winning the whole shooting match."

"Isn't that ice cream they are serving over there?" she hinted. "I think ice cream is simply grand."

"Ah, Miss Binks, you praise my feeble game and ice cream with the same words. Fortunately, ice cream is more easily taken in than I am. Hey, you Shorty, come here," he called to the jolly-looking little Sophomore who was trotting by. "I want to introduce you to Miss Binks. Mr. Thomas Hawkins, Miss Binks. Shorty, she's dying for some ice cream."

"Your humble servitor, madam," and Thomas Hawkins made a low bow. "Shall I bring it to you or take you to it?"

"Bring it here," said Mabel shortly. Just then Harvie Price saw Annie Pore talking to Mary Flannigan and Dee.

"Tell me who that girl is over there, the one with the thick yellow plait," he asked Mabel.

"Oh, that's 'Orphan Annie.' Isn't she a mess?"

"Is her name Annie Pore?"

"I believe it is or poor Annie, if you prefer."

"Well, by Jove! Who would have thought it!" and Harvie Price without any apology left the dashing Mabel and going up to Annie took her by both hands. He shook them warmly and exclaimed: "Little Annie Pore, where on earth did you come from? I am glad to see you." And Annie, without the least embarrassment, was equally delighted to see him.

"Oh, Harvie, I did not dream you were here. You've grown so I didn't know you."

"Grown! And what have you been doing? Certainly not standing still. And how is everyone at the Landing? Geewhilikins, I'd like to spend another summer there! Just think, it is five years since I have been there."

"Everything is about the same. Your grandfather is rather more feeble but as handsome as ever."

"Yes, I know, poor old Grandad," said Harvie soberly. Annie told me afterward that a family row had separated old General Price from his son, Harvie's father, and for that reason the boy had not been allowed to come to his ancestral home at Price's Landing.

"And how is your father? As British as ever and still invisibly clothed in blue paint?"

"Yes, about the same," blushed Annie.

"You know I like your father, Annie, and didn't mean anything," and the boy looked very sorry that he had embarrassed his little friend.

"That's all right, Harvie, but you know——"

"Yes, I know," he said sympathetically. "Now come on and let's have some ice cream. Who are your special friends? Introduce me and I'll take them all."

Dum and Dee and Mary Flannigan and I were of course the chosen few, and as soon as Shorty had arranged so Mabel Binks could "take in" the ice cream, he joined us and a very merry time we had. We met many boys and liked most of them. They were a healthy, wholesome lot and almost as much fun as girls. Miss Cox joined us and let herself go with as much abandon as she had in the Lobster Quadrille.

I have never seen anyone so happy as Annie Pore. She and Harvie Price had been friends from the time they could walk. The boy had spent a great deal of his time with his grandfather at Price's Landing and the little English maid, whose father kept the country store, was the one white child in the neighborhood whom the proud old aristocratic General Price considered suitable to associate with his grandson.

"You ought to see Mr. Pore," Harvie confided to me. "I tell you he is a rare one. He is about the best educated man I ever met. Grandad says he can think in Latin. Be that as it may, he can certainly teach it. I had some lessons from him during one summer and have been grateful to him ever since. He is awfully English and just as strict with Annie as can be. Mrs. Pore was a beautiful woman and it seemed strangely incongruous to see her in the country store measuring calico and what not. Grandad used to say she looked like a Duchess at a Charity Bazaar. Nobody at Price's Landing ever has known what brought Mr. Pore to keeping a country store in a little Virginia village."

"Maybe thinking in Latin wasn't nourishing," I suggested.

"I fancy that was it," he laughed, "but why should an Oxford graduate keep a country store for a livelihood? There must have been other avenues open to him."

"Perhaps his beautiful wife discovered she had a genius for selling at Charity Bazaars, and when the time came to choose a profession, she chose what she had shown talent for as an amateur," I hazarded.

"Well, I see Miss Page Allison has some imagination and if she ever has to choose a profession it should be novel writing."

"Perhaps it will be," I said, "but I'd rather keep a country store than do anything. You can see so many people that way, 'specially if you have the postoffice in it."

"You like people, then?" inquired the boy.

"Like people? I should say I do. I just adore people; and I mean to know just as many people as I can."

"Well, that is the requisite for successful novel writing, so our professor in English tells us: 'Know people and sympathize with them, all kinds and conditions.' But tell me something, Miss Page, does Annie sing? Mrs. Pore's voice brought old sinners to church that had not been for many a year. She sang in the choir at the little old Episcopal church at Price's Landing and although I was nothing but a kid,—you see I have not been there for five years,—I used to thrill all over when she chanted the *Te Deum Laudamus*."

"Oh, yes, Annie's voice is splendid. Miss Cox is teaching her and I believe she expects great things of her. We are to have a concert at Gresham before long and then you can hear her."

I looked over at a group of girls and boys where Dum and Annie were talking very gayly with Tom Hawkins, alias Shorty, and smiled to think of Annie's hesitancy in coming that day because she was so afraid of boys, and then I laughed outright when I considered how little Shorty resembled Dum's hero, Prosper le Gai.

The ice cream that Shorty brought to Mabel Binks must have been as bitter as gall, judging from the faces that young lady made while devouring it, nor did it "set easy on her innards," as Mammy Susan would put it. Could it be that she had literally turned green from jealousy and the ice cream was innocent, after all? It must have been a bitter pill to have the despised "Orphan Annie," with her kid friends, carry off the most desirable young man at Hill-Top.

"Aren't you feeling well, Mabel?" said the good-natured Josephine Barr, as Harvie Price and I passed near her on our way to join the group where my special friends were.

"Yes, I'm just disgusted. Did you ever see such a beau grabber in your life as that countrified Page Allison? And there's 'Orphan Annie' actually posing as a belle! They make me sick."

I did not hear what Jo answered, but I felt that Annie and I were safe in her hands. My cheeks were burning as though Mabel had given me a real slap.

"Don't you mind, Miss Page. If girls only knew how fellows detest that kind of thing! It must be awful to be a girl and not fight things out. If a boy had insulted me as that girl did you just now, I'd either beat him or get beaten in short order."

"Well," I said, pulling myself together as I realized that after all Mabel Binks was not much of a lady, "you see, I have already beaten her, although I did not know at the time I was doing it. Annie and I have got the 'beaux,' that is, if she means you and Shorty."

"Bully for you! That's the way to talk. I see Miss Binks will not pull off anything over you. Can Annie defend herself, too?"

So I told him of the first day at Gresham and the cheer the Seniors gave Annie because of her come-back at Mabel Binks.

"Poor little Annie! I don't see how anyone could try to hurt her," and the big boy looked very tenderly at his one-time playmate. "I am certainly glad she has found such good friends at Gresham as you and those wonderful twins, and also that nice little square Irish girl who looks like a match for our Shorty."

That night before lights out bell rang, we had a little chat in our room. Mary and Annie had scurried across the hall in their kimonos. Dum was in bed and Dee and I had unearthed some slight refreshment in the way of crackers and sweet chocolate, which we passed around.

"I bet Prosper le Gai would have played a dandy game of football," said Dum, getting her sheets all crumby with crackers. "He always smiled in battle. I noticed Harvie Price did, too."

"Do you know, I think Harvie Price looked a little like Laurie in 'Little Women,'" said Dee.

"I always did think so," exclaimed Annie. "When you were talking about Laurie this morning I thought of Harvie. I never dreamed of seeing him. I'm so glad you girls liked him."

"I tell you he's all right," said Mary, "but I wouldn't be at all astonished if Charles O'Malley wasn't just such another boy as Shorty when he was a kid."

CHAPTER XI.

LETTERS AND SEVERAL KINDS OF FATHERS.

From Page Allison to Miss Sue Lee, Washington, D. C.

My dearest Cousin Sue:

You told me not to write to you until I had got real settled and could give you some decided opinions about the place and the people. I am settled now and feel as though I had been born and bred here. I just love it and am making loads and loads of friends.

First thing I must tell you how right my clothes are. It is splendid not to have to think about them, but just to put them on and know that they are suitable. Some of the girls here are great dressers, in spite of the endeavors of the directors to put them into a kind of uniform, but I can't see that their fine clothes make them any more popular than the others. Do you know, Cousin Sue, I'd rather be popular than be president?

My roommates, the Tucker twins, are awfully popular, but they don't care nearly so much about it as I do. You see, they have been knowing lots of people all their lives and I haven't. Sometimes I am afraid I'll get kind of mealy-mouthed in my anxiety to have people like me, and the only thing that saves me from it is my hatred of fools and snobs. I know I shouldn't hate fools because they can't help it, but I think snobs ought to be hated.

We have become acquainted with some boys from Hill-Top, the academy on the other side of the town. They are real nice and I find I am not at all embarrassed with them. They are not a bit beauy or lovery (the Tuckers and I would hate that), but they are just boys and have got lots more sense than I expected to find in the male sex.

The Juniors here at Gresham are lots of them beau crazy. They talk about boys from morning till night. I do hope when I get to be a Junior I won't go through that stage. Miss Sayre, a lovely girl and too nice to me for anything,

a pupil teacher and at least nineteen, says she has never known but one girl in her life who arrived at her age without going through the stage of talking about boys all the time, and she says that poor girl was dumb and she took it out in making eyes. Dum and Dee and I told her we'd cut out our tongues before we'd make boys our sole topic of conversation, and Miss Sayre just laughed and asked us if we would gouge out our eyes, too.

I am doing very well in my studies, and working awfully hard. You see, we have to spend a certain time over our books and learn in spite of ourselves. French is coming easy to me and I believe it is because Father has drilled me so thoroughly in Latin. I am getting on top of Mathematics by the hardest kind of climbing. At first I felt as though I'd have to remove mountains ever to learn a thing, but now I realize I don't have to remove mountains, but just climb them; and certainly as you climb you get an outlook that you never dreamed of.

Father writes very cheerfully but I am afraid he is mighty lonesome. I feel very selfish to be off here having such a good time when I know how hard it is for him. I wish you would write him a nice long letter. Your letters always do him good.

I like Miss Peyton, our principal, ever and ever so much; she is so just. All of the teachers are pretty nice, but I am not getting quite as much from the English Literature teacher as I hoped I would. She is a good teacher, I have no doubt, but not interesting. I have the feeling that she likes what the textbooks tell her to, and has no taste of her own. Her knowledge of poetry, for instance, stops with the age of Tennyson.

You know Father's extravagance and relaxation is poetry, past, present and even future. He has been reading poetry to me since before I could talk, and a new poet is more interesting to him than a new disease. He had never told me that poetry had to arrive at a certain age, like veal or cheese, before it was worthy to be taken in; and I brought down the scorn and wrath of Miss Prince on my devoted head and came mighty near getting enough demerits to keep me in bounds a week, because I asked her if she did not think Masefield's poem of "The Dauber" had more atmosphere of the deep sea in it than "The Ancient Mariner." She looked at me very severely through her visible bi-focals and said: "Miss Allison, this is a class in

English Literature; and matters foreign to the subject are not to be discussed."

I rather miss the reading I have always done. We study so hard there is no time to read, and the library is one of these donated ones. It has sets of Dickens and Scott in such fine print that you can't keep your place, a few odd volumes of Thackeray, Milton and Pope, and the rest of the shelves are crowded with books that some generous patron evidently has had no use for himself. They are the kind of books that Father says are good enough to keep the doors open with or to put under a rocker when you don't want to rock.

There is a good encyclopedia and dictionary and our textbooks are very complete. I believe it is good for me to have to confine myself to the textbooks for a while, but I shall be glad to be at Bracken again and curl up on the sofa with the dogs some dull old rainy day and read as long as I can see.

Some day I hope you will know my friends. I have told them all about you and they think you are splendid. The Tucker twins are going to stay a few days at Bracken during the holidays, and I am to be with them for a week-end in Richmond. It will be a more agreeable visit than the time I spent with Cousin Park Garnett, I fancy. By the way, Cousin Park sent me a present the other day. You could never guess what it is: a black and purple crocheted shoulder shawl! I'm real glad to have it because we are going to have a dicker party and it will be the very thing to contribute.

You don't know how much obliged I am to you for the huge box of marshmallows. We have not opened it yet, as we are saving up for a grand spread that Dum and Dee and I are going to give. Good-by, dear Cousin Sue.

Yours devotedly,

PAGE.

Mr. Jeffry Tucker to the Misses Virginia and Caroline Tucker.

Richmond, Va.
November 28, 19—

My dearest Tweedles:

How am I ever to get through Thanksgiving without you? Of course I'm going to the game to root for Virginia, but I'll be mighty lonesome. I've been invited to join several parties, but I believe I'll take old Brindle and go by my lonely. The only pleasure I take in Thanksgiving is that it is just a little nearer to Christmas, when I'll have my babies back with me for a delirious three weeks.

I miss you so much that I can't remember what my reason was for thinking it best for you to go to boarding school. I must have had some good reason, but it is swallowed up in misery over your absence. Could it have been that you needed training and to learn to control yourselves? Foolish notion! When you come home you can fight all over the shop if you've a mind; and sass your pa until he crawls under the bed with Brindle; and get late to your meals; and go around with holes in your stockings; do anything, in fact, that your fancy dictates. All I ask of you is to come home the same old Tweedles, loving your poor, lonesome, old Zebedee as much as ever.

I am delighted that you are making so many good friends. There is nothing in all the world like friends and the ones made in early years are worth all the others put together.

Please remember me to Miss Page Allison and tell her I saw her father the other day, and he was looking mighty fit, considering he has not had her to take care of him for so long. He had come up to Richmond for a medical convention. I am glad you are enjoying Miss Page so much. I liked her on short acquaintance better than any friend you have ever had. I am delighted that you have invited her to spend some of the holidays with us. I asked Dr. Allison if he could spare her to us for a few days, and he said of course he could. You girls seem to have a mutual admiration society. Miss Page, according to Dr. Allison, is as enthusiastic about my girls as my girls are about his girl.

I am intensely gratified that the three of you have kept up with the poor scared child we met on the train. Such a wholesome trio would be sure to be good for the timid, miserable little thing. You must ask her to come to see us in Richmond if you have not already done so.

I am sending you a box of goodies for your day-after-Thanksgiving spread. I am afraid some of the things are contraband, but people who make rules would not make them unless they expected schoolgirls and their outrageous young fathers to break them. I fancy I have concealed the true nature of the contents of the box, and unless the supervision is very thorough, it will pass muster and the contraband articles find the way to their destination—your little insides. Love to Jinny Cox.

Good-by,
ZEBEDEE.

Dr. James Allison to Miss Page Allison.

Bracken, Sunday aft.

My dear little daughter:

I saw young Jeffry Tucker in Richmond last week and what he had to tell me of my girl gratified me greatly. I am not going to divulge to you what he said, but you may know it was something pretty nice.

I miss you very much, my dear Page, but poor old Mammy Susan is worse off than I am because she is at home all the time and I am off on my rounds, and when I am at home, thank God, I have books. I do not mean to say that books take the place of my girl, but I mean I can bury myself in them and for the time being be oblivious to everything else.

Sally Winn is still trying to die, poor woman. I was called out in the wee small hours this morning to help her cross the Styx. She has been more determined than ever since Mrs. Purdy passed over. She is very jealous and said this morning: "Betty Purdy always was a pushing thing. She made out all the time she didn't want to go but that's not so, I know. She's been getting ahead of me all her life. Pretended she married Purdy because he was so bent on it that she had to. Everybody knows it was just the other way, she was so bent on it, Purdy had to." Of course you must have heard that Mr. Purdy courted Sally first. I suggested that it would be well if she tried to live and perhaps she might console the widower; and do you know, I left her with a much stronger pulse.

I hope your Thanksgiving will go off finely. I cannot tell you how we long for you, my dear; but Christmas will soon be here, and in the

meantime I am going to bury myself in a new book I got in Richmond last week.

I am so glad for you to make these good friends you write of. The Twins sound delightful. Tucker is one of the best fellows I know. He is ridiculously young to be the father of girls as old as you. He is one of the cleverest newspaper men in the South, so clever I wonder the South keeps him. New York newspapers seem to suck in all the bright men sooner or later.

I am so glad your friends will come to Bracken for a visit with you during the holidays, and I will of course let you go to them for a visit. I may run up to the city at the same time. Cousin Park Garnett has made me promise to stay with her the first time I go to Richmond, so I am afraid the trip will not be altogether hilarious for me.

The dogs send love to their mistress in yaps, yowls and whines. Mammy says she hopes "you ain't done wash all de meat off'n you in dem plumbin' tubs."

With much love,
FATHER.

From Mr. Arthur Ponsonby Pore to Miss Annie de Vere Pore.

Price's Landing, Va.

My dear Annie:

I am most gratified at the account you give of the progress you are making in your studies. The authenticity of your account is verified by the report I have received from the principal of the institution.

I am surprised and grieved that you should find your wardrobe not sufficient for your needs. There is a vulgar tendency among all Americans to overdress which you must avoid. Remember that in your veins flows the blood of Ponsonby and de Vere and that is more to be considered than all the fine clothes in the world of the *nouveau riche*. I will send you the box containing some old lace and a white dress of your Mother's. If that is not suitable, I think you had better not appear at the concert of which you write.

I also wish to warn you against undue intimacies with persons of whom you know little or nothing. The sacrifice I am making in sending you to boarding school is not that you may amuse yourself with friends no doubt beneath you in birth and breeding but that you may perfect yourself in your studies and cultivate your voice, which may prove of material benefit to you.

General Price called on me yesterday and told me he had received a letter from his grandson, Harvie, in which he had mentioned the fact that he had met you at a football game. I hope you are not wasting much of your time in such frivolous pursuits.

Yours truly,
ARTHUR PONSONBY PORE.

CHAPTER XII.

ANNIE'S MOTHER.

We were rather troubled about Annie Pore and what on earth she was going to wear to the concert. Her wardrobe, not being extensive, was well known to all of her friends and certainly there was nothing suitable in it for a girl who was going to have to stand up on the stage and sing.

"If she would only not be so proud," groaned Dum; "but who could say to Lady Clara Vere de Vere, 'Let me lend you some of my duds?' Now I shouldn't in the least mind borrowing anything from anybody if I thought the person cared for me. Don't I wear the Liberty scarf your Cousin Sue sent you every time I find it idle, and if I could borrow from you, Page, why shouldn't Annie?"

"Well, it is different, Dum, because Annie hasn't got anything. You borrow the scarf just as a frill, but if it were a necessity I don't believe you would." I had intense sympathy for Annie because I could fancy what my own clothes would have been if dear Cousin Sue Lee had not had them in charge. Miss Pinky Davis, our country dressmaker, would have turned out just such another crooked seamed suit as Annie's if Cousin Sue had not insisted on a mail order, and I know my shirtwaists would have been big where they should have been little, and little where they should have been big: and as for Middy blouses, there is no telling what they would have looked like: rick-rack trimming on the collar, no doubt, and ruffles around the tail. Cousin Sue did let Miss Pinky make me some white evening dresses and they turned out all right because Cousin Sue bridled Miss Pinky's fancy.

"Let me see," said Dee, "as far as I can remember Annie has a blue serge skirt, two white shirtwaists, one blue poplin one and a plaid silk blouse for Sunday. I can't bear to think of her on the stage in any of that array. Of course it makes no difference to any of us, but think of that nasty Mabel

Binks and her following! Ugh! I tell you one thing," she added excitedly, "if any of them make Annie feel bad, they've got me to fight."

"Me, too," chimed in Dum.

"Well, I can't see that that would help Annie's clothes much," I laughed, "but it might keep you, Tweedles, from having apoplexy."

"Dee, you've got so much tact, you go see Annie and find out what she is going to wear," suggested Dum.

"Oh, no, not me! I'm so afraid I might leak, and that would never do," and Dee got out a handkerchief ready for emergencies. "You see, I feel so bad about Annie and so desperately sorry for her that I have to cry just thinking about her, and what would it be if she should get out her poor little blouses and ask my advice? Just think of all the clothes Jo Barr has, simply going to waste and how old Jo would love to dress Annie up in them! Still, we all know that Annie would be cut to the quick at the suggestion of such a thing. Oh, dear, oh, dear! I wonder what Zebedee would do."

"Well, I know what I am going to do," I said, uncurling myself from the window sill where I could, by a good deal of craning of the neck, catch a glimpse of my beloved mountains; "I'm going in and have it out with Annie. She knows I love her and I don't believe I'll hurt her feelings. I think she trusts us, and when you really trust people they simply can't hurt your feelings unless you have a natural born chip on your shoulder, which Annie hasn't."

"Oh, Page, you are just like Zebedee," tweedled the twins. "That's what he would do."

I found Annie looking very like old Rain-in-the-Face. She was in a forlorn heap on the floor; her eyes red; her ripe-wheat hair all disheveled; and in her hand a crumpled letter. On the floor by her was an unopened box which had just come by parcels post.

Her "Come in" in answer to my knock had been more like a sob than an invitation to enter.

"What is it, dear Annie? Tweedles and I have just been talking about you and we wonder if you know how much we love you. Do you?"

"Oh, Page, I don't see how you can!"

"Well, we do, and I said I believed you loved us enough to trust us. I mean to understand that we could never hurt your feelings in any possible way, just because we'd rather be boiled alive than hurt you."

Annie looked up and smiled a rather watery smile, but a smile all the same.

"Now s'pose you trust me and tell me what is the matter. What are friends for if you can't tell them your troubles?"

"Oh, Page, I'd like to tell you, but it would seem so disloyal to my Father."

"You understand, Annie, that if you tell me anything it would be just like telling it to a Father Confessor. I mean I'd never breathe a word of it." It sounded as though I were full of curiosity, but while of course I did want to know, my reason for pressing Annie was that I felt she needed to let off steam, that is, her pent-up emotions.

"I know you are the best friend any girl ever had and I believe I will tell you all about everything."

"Well, wash your face first and let me brush your hair while you talk."

So Annie got up and bathed her face, and while I combed and brushed her thick, yellow hair, she told me the following tale:

"You see, Page, my Father is an Englishman and he is awfully proud. He does not understand a little girl a bit nor did he understand my beautiful Mother. He loved her, though, adored her, in fact, and I know has never been happy one minute since she died; that's been about four years now. He does not love me, though, I am afraid; but maybe I do him an injustice and don't understand him. Anyhow, he is never chummy and chatty with me like Mr. Tucker is with Tweedles."

"I bet he does love you, Annie. My Father is not so intimate with me as Mr. Tucker is with his girls, but I know he loves me. You see, Mr. Tucker is almost the same age as his daughters and I fancy your Father is much older than you are, just as mine is." And I went on brushing her hair, knowing she was becoming calmer and beginning rather to enjoy talking about herself.

"My Father, you know, is very well born; in fact, his Father was a baronet of very ancient stock and his elder brother now has the title and estates. Father was educated for the church. He has an Oxford degree and is very scholarly. However, after all his education, he did not want to take orders. He felt that he had no vocation for the ministry, and he and my grandfather had an awful row about it. You see, English younger sons have to do something. Mother told me all this. Father has never mentioned it to me. He occasionally reminds me that I am of good birth and that is his only reference to England. Immediately after this row with Grandfather, he met Mother and fell in love with her at first sight. It was at a Charity Bazaar."

"Oh——!" I exclaimed involuntarily, but made out I was sneezing. I remembered the conversation I had held with Harvie Price about Mrs. Pore and the Charity Bazaar.

"Mother's people are noble, too. She was the daughter of a younger son of the Earl of Garth, but she had not a penny to her name. When she met my Father, she was visiting some very wealthy relatives who were interested in her and preparing to launch her on the concert stage. Mother had a wonderful voice, you know."

"Yes, Harvie Price told me that all the old sinners in your county went to church to hear her sing."

"Well, Mother fell in love, too, and in spite of all that her rich relatives had to say about her career, she married Father; and then what did Grandfather, Sir Isaac Pore, do but stop Father's allowance? It was not very much but it was enough for the young couple to live on if they lived very simply. Sir Isaac thought he could force Father into taking orders; but Father was opposed to doing this, feeling he was not suited to the Church, and Mother upheld him in his resolve."

"They were right, I think. It seems an awful sin to me for a man just to go into the ministry for a living," I ventured.

"Of course they were right. Then my parents were in a quandary. Father had about two thousand dollars to his name and that wouldn't go very far. They decided to come to America, he to go into some kind of business and Mother to do something with her voice. They stayed in New York for a year. He got some teaching, coaching boys for college, and she sang in a church. Mother said they had a hard time. Father's manner was proud and overbearing and he was so intolerant of Americans that he lost pupils constantly. Then my brother was born and Mother had to give up her position in the church."

"Oh, I did not know you had a brother!" I exclaimed.

"Yes, he died before I was born. He lived five years, I believe. I think that is one reason Father does not love me more. You see, all of his hopes were settled on the boy, who was in line for the title. My uncle, the present baronet, has no boys. Well, they got on the best they could until the boy died. They went from place to place, Father always able to get pupils because of his talents and education and always losing them because of his proud intolerance. Mother had lots of tact and charm and she was always smoothing things over and pacifying Father."

"She must have loved him a whole lot not to have pacified him with a big stick," I thought, but I did not give utterance to my reflection.

"They finally landed in Norfolk. I was born there, so you see, I am a Virginian. While at Norfolk, Mother heard of the country store at Price's Landing which could be bought for very little. She had come into possession of a small legacy, and she immediately bought the store and all the stock and we moved there and have been there ever since."

"English people are always getting small legacies. I never heard of Americans getting them," I said as I plaited Annie's hair in the great rope that was the envy of us all.

"We really have prospered at Price's Landing. Mother took charge of the store a great deal and by her graciousness won customers, and when once people get used to Father, they don't seem to mind his stiffness so much;

"From Mother!" exclaimed the girl, trembling with excitement.—Page 156.

everybody but me; somehow, I'm always afraid of him," and Annie looked very sadly at the crumpled letter in her lap.

"Mother was so gay and cheerful; I wish I could be like her. She would sing at her work and Father would smile and look almost happy when he would hear her voice."

"Don't you sing at your work ever?" I asked.

"No, no, I am so afraid of disturbing Father."

"I bet he'd like it. Why don't you try? Your voice must be like your Mother's."

"Oh, I couldn't—really, Page. Well, to go on:

"Mother used to play a lovely game with me, and no one knew we were playing it, which made it just so much more fun. We used to pretend while we were keeping store that it was a Charity Bazaar——" (I laughed aloud) "especially when dear old General Price came in for anything. You see, most of the people at Price's Landing, while very kind and good, are quite ordinary; but General Price is very aristocratic and fine, and we could play the game with him to perfection. He had so much manner that sometimes it almost seemed that he was playing, too." This was too delicious, and here was I sworn to secrecy! I certainly did want to tell Harvie Price, but a Father Confessor must keep many good things to himself.

"Mother died when I was eleven." I made a rapid calculation how long poor Annie must have been wearing the old crêpe hat. "Since then, Father

and I have looked after the store together and now we have a clerk," only Annie called it "clark." "We are not so poor as we used to be and the books show we are making a very comfortable living, but Father saves and saves. He started doing it before Mother died and it worried her a lot. She said he used to be a great spender and she had to do the saving, but when money began to come more easily he seemed to hate to part with it. She made him promise before she died that I should go to boarding school or I know it would never have come about. Of course he doesn't know how girls of the day dress and how odd I look, but even if he did know I believe he would let me be ridiculous rather than spend money on anything that he considered unnecessary." Annie's eyes flashed, which was an improvement on the eternal tears she seemed so prepared to shed.

"I am going to let you read this letter from him so you can see," and she handed me the crumpled sheet. It was the letter which is in the last chapter.

It was certainly some letter. I could not help comparing it with the one I had just received from my Father, and also one that Tweedles had read me from their Zebedee. I hardly knew what to say but I knew what to think, and that was that one of the so-called "vulgar Americans" ought to give him a good beating!

"Well, Annie, I wouldn't mind that letter. Your Governor evidently doesn't understand girls. Let's have a look in the box." We cut the string and took off the outside wrapper. The box was tightly corded.

"It is just as Mother left it," sighed Annie. "He didn't even open it to see if the things in it were of any value for me. I'm glad he didn't, because I like to feel that I am untying her knots myself."

We didn't cut those strings, but Annie carefully and reverently picked loose the knots. When the top was taken off the box, there was a faint smell of dried rose leaves. The contents were carefully wrapped in blue tissue paper. "To keep the things from turning yellow with age," whispered Annie.

I felt somehow as though I were at a funeral. Annie didn't cry, though, as one might have expected, but her countenance shone with a kind of subdued light and she looked like an angel. She shook out a soft, white, crêpe de Chine dress made over silk. It looked as fresh as though it had just come

from the dressmaker's. In another wrapper was a lovely real lace scarf and in yet another some white silk stockings.

"Oh, Annie, Annie!" and I jumped up and down for joy. "They are exactly right for you! And see how carefully they have been packed! Not a wrinkle in the dress! Here, take off your clothes and try it on."

"Mother wore it at the Charity Bazaar where she met Father. Her rich cousin had just had it made for her," and the excited child began to take off her shabby blouse and skirt.

"All you will need for the concert is white slippers and you will surely wear mine just to let me know you love me," I begged.

Annie flushed and I was afraid her stubborn pride was going to master her, but she astonished me by saying: "Yes, I will wear them if you will lend them to me. I remember Mother told me she had to borrow slippers from a friend that night, but she knew her friend loved her and so did not mind."

I slipped the dress over her head, but as she pushed her arm into the sleeve she stopped and drew her hand quickly out.

"Wait, the sleeve is pinned." So it was, and pinned through a letter that was sealed and addressed to Annie.

"From Mother!" exclaimed the girl, trembling with excitement. "Every now and then I find a little note from her. She knew she could not live for a long time before she died." Out fluttered two ten-dollar bills and a five wrapped in a tiny penciled note.

My Darling:

The time may come when you will wish to wear this dress that I have saved so carefully for you; and when that time comes you may also want a little money that perhaps you will not have, money for clothes, I mean. I give you this twenty-five dollars for your very own, to spend as your needs require. It is not much, but it may help you to look like other girls. Fathers do not always understand what girls need, but Mothers know. I earned this money myself, giving singing lessons to the blacksmith's daughter and you

helped me by keeping store while I taught, so you can take added pleasure in spending it.

MOTHER.

Something happened right here that was to say the least unexpected: I, Page Allison, gave up and cried like a baby. I know I hadn't cried so since old Buster, my pointer, died. And Annie Pore, instead of bawling, which she would have been perfectly justified in doing, never shed a tear; but with that exalted look on her face, which she had worn from the time she opened the box, she actually comforted me by patting me on the back and smoothing my hair.

"Page, Page, it's all right; don't be so miserable," she said as she endeavored to soothe me. So I blew my blooming nose and made her go on trying on the dress. It was a wonderful fit, just a little too long for a girl of fifteen, but we hemmed it up in no time. Strange to say, although the dress was more than twenty years old, it was not out of style but cut very much according to the prevailing mode. The truth of the matter is that Dame Fortune is quite like the old preacher who wrote a barrel of sermons, and when he had preached them all, he just turned the barrel up-side-down and began again. Fashions and styles get put in the barrel only to appear again after so many years.

"Have you a catalogue for a mail-order house, Page? Because I want to spend my money right off."

"Yes, I'll get it for you just as soon as my nose dies down a little. I don't want Tweedles to know I've been crying. What are you going to get?"

"Plenty of middy blouses and a good skirt to wear with them, some dancing slippers and some kind of simple dress I can put on in the evening, if the money can be stretched to it."

I was sure it could with careful ordering; and in a few minutes I thought my nose would bear inspection, so I went back to 117 to get the catalogue. Tweedles was out visiting, so I did not have to run the gauntlet of their curiosity.

Annie and I soon found exactly the right things in my wonder book, and we had the letter written ordering the things before the warning bell rang for visiting to cease.

"I fancy Father would be awfully cut up if he could know I am spending all of this money on my clothes; but he needn't know anything about it. I can wear my old things during the holidays and next summer——"

"Oh, Annie," I broke in, "you are making an awful mistake if you do not let your Father know all about this letter from your Mother, and take him into your confidence immediately. It wouldn't be fair to him if you didn't."

"Not fair to Father! I never thought of such a thing. I am afraid he will be awfully angry with me."

"How could he be? Aren't you doing exactly what your Mother tells you to? I tell you, honey, it pays every time to be perfectly frank. You try and see if it doesn't."

The warning bell rang and I had to beat a hasty retreat, but before I went I kissed poor little Annie and she clung to me and whispered: "I know you are right and I'll write to Father to-morrow and send him Mother's letter."

"That's a good girl; but, Annie, get your letter off to New York for your things first before the Governor has time to veto it."

"Well, what ho!" exclaimed the twins as they tore in to our rooms, undressing as they came to beat the lights out bell to bed. "Tell us all about Annie!"

"There's nothing to tell," I declared, making the mental reservation that there was nothing I could tell, "except that her father sent her a pretty white crêpe de Chine dress that she is going to look charming in, and she has consented to borrow my white slippers for the occasion."

"Oh, how splendid!" cried Dum. But Dee looked at me very solemnly and said: "Page Allison, I know where to put my confidence. Annie Pore has told you the story of her life and wild horses could not drag it from you. I wouldn't have even known she had told if your precious little freckled

nose wasn't as red as a cherry." I felt awfully foolish but I borrowed my policy from the Tar Baby "an' kep' on sayin' nothin'."

After the light was out, I gave a little audible chuckle as I lay there going over in my mind the very exciting happenings of the evening. I chuckled to think what Mabel Binks would say if she knew the despised "Orphan Annie" was the granddaughter of a baronet on her father's side and the great-granddaughter of an earl on her mother's.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE CONCERT.

The concert was a great affair. They had not only the singing and playing from the musical pupils, but refreshments afterward and a little reception. Many of the townspeople came and the boys from Hill-Top. Our Assembly Hall was full to overflowing. Miss Jane Cox was in a highly nervous state.

"I have two pupils who will sing flat," she confided to me, "and if they do it to-night, I'll die of mortification."

"Well, Annie Pore is going to do you credit, anyhow, I feel sure," I said, hoping Miss Cox would take a more cheerful view.

"Yes, I am looking to her to save the day. Have you seen her? She looks beautiful."

I had seen her; in fact, I had hooked her up. My slippers fitted finely and Annie's dress was without doubt the best-looking one on the stage that evening.

Mabel Binks headed the programme with a flashy selection on the piano. She was in her element, showing off. Everything about her proclaimed *le dernier cri* of fashion. Even her hair was the latest creation of twists and rolls. Her hands were covered with rings and her arms had several bracelets in the form of snakes coiling around them. These rings and bracelets had a way of clicking ever so slightly but just enough to accentuate the effect that her performance was a purely mechanical one.

"Pianola," whispered Dee to me. Dee and I had captured dear old Captain Leahy and made him sit between us. The old fellow was in fine feather and full of jokes. Miss Peyton smiled approval when she saw that we had taken care of her old friend, who always came to the school entertainments by her especial invitation.

"And do ye call that music? I'd rather hear 'Sweet bye and bye' played on the whistle of an engine by a freight engineer on our line than that rattle bang. The freight engineer puts some sowl into his worrk, some meaning. He wants to let his frinds know he is a-cooming home, and his wife to know that 'tis toime to put on the frying pan and get the pot to b'iling. But that, what does that mean? Nothing but nimble fingers. There's no heart in it,—just noise."

We heartily agreed with the old man, but at the close of Mabel's performance there was such a storm of applause from the Juniors who were her especial admirers that the perfunctory clapping from the rest of the audience was completely drowned. She bowed and smiled and rattled her bangles and then sat down and played "Annie Laurie" with her foot on the loud pedal all the time, and with all the variations possible to weave around the beautiful old air.

"Now isn't that too Mabel Binksy for anything?" hissed Dum in my ear. She was right behind us sitting next to Harvie Price, who had sought us out on his arrival at Gresham. "She knows perfectly well that Annie Pore is to sing 'Annie Laurie,' and she chose that for her encore deliberately and without the knowledge of Miss Cox or the piano teacher, either. Cat!"

"And why should ye insult poor pussy so, Miss Tucker?" asked the Captain, who had overheard Dum's remark. "I haven't a cat to me name who would do such a trick."

Annie followed Mabel immediately. I wondered if she would be upset by Mabel's having just played her song, but she was not a whit. She whispered to Miss Cox, who was to play her accompaniment and they evidently decided to change the program.

As Annie came on the stage, I verily believe half of the girls did not at first recognize her. Her dress had that unmistakable air that a good dressmaker can give, and twenty years had not diminished the style; but it was Annie's walk and manner that astonished everyone, even her best friends. Could this be the same, tearful little Annie? She wasn't really little, but I always had thought of her as small just because she seemed to need protection. She was quite as well grown as the Tuckers and a little larger than I was. Her carriage had dignity, and there was a poise and ease to her

that is rare in a school girl. Miss Cox played the opening bars to Tom Moore's beautiful and touching song, "Believe me if all those endearing young charms," and Annie sang with the simplicity and confidence of a great artist.

Believe me, if all those endearing young charms,
Which I gaze on so fondly to-day,
Were to change by to-morrow and fleet in my arms,
Like fairy gifts fading away,
Thou wouldst still be adored, as this moment thou art,
Let thy loveliness fade as it will,
And around the dear ruin each wish of my heart
Would entwine itself verdantly still.

It is not while beauty and youth are thine own,
And thy cheek unprofaned by a tear,
That the fervor and faith of a soul may be known,
To which time will but make thee more dear!
No, the heart that has truly loved never forgets,
But as truly loves on to the close,
As the sunflower turns to her god when he sets
The same look which she turned when he rose.

There is something in that song that touches everyone, old and young. As Annie finished, for a moment there was perfect silence and then such an ovation as the little English girl did have! Old Captain Leahy beat his peg leg on the floor. "Forgetting me manners in me enthusiasm," he declared. Annie bowed and smiled, no more flustrated than Alma Gluck would have been.

"Did you ever see such stage presence?" whispered Dee. "Why, she is more at home there than we are in 117 in our kimonos."

"That's because she loves to sing and knows she can do it," and at the risk of being considered Annie's claque, I started fresh applause which was taken up by the whole audience; and after another whispered conference with Miss Cox, Annie sang again. This time it was "Bonnie, sweet Bessie,

the maid of Dundee." These were songs her mother had taught her, and I could almost fancy the spirit of the mother had entered into the daughter.

"I could almost see her mother as she sang," Harvie Price said to me later on. "I believe Annie's voice is going to be stronger than her mother's and it has the same note of pathos in it. Why, it was all I could do to keep from sobbing when she sang 'Sweet Bessie.' And did you see Shorty? Why, Shorty had his face buried in his hands, and now he pretends he has caught a bad cold! Isn't she pretty, too? The old man must have loosened up some to get that swell dress for her. Grandfather wrote me the other day that Mr. Pore is so economical these days that he won't go to church because he does not want to part with his nickel. He says he is making money, too, on the store, since there is absolutely no competition at the Landing."

"I am so glad you liked her dress," I answered, nearly dead to tell this nice, sympathetic boy all about it; but keeping to my role of Father Confessor, I naturally said nothing about how she came by it.

"I am hoping I can spend part of next summer with my grandfather," continued Harvey. "You know my Governor and his Father fell out about politics and I had to stop going there, but, thank goodness, they have made up now. Father would vote for Roosevelt, while Grandfather thinks anybody belonging to him must be a Democrat. And not long ago Father decided that President Wilson was, after all, about the best President we have ever had, so he wrote to Grandfather and said he was sorry he had ever voted for a Republican; and now the row is over and the family is reunited. Grandfather is very arbitrary and of course it is hard to live with him, but he is the kindest and most generous old man, and I truly love him."

"Annie Pore says he is charming and delightful and that her mother cared so much for him," I said, feeling that that much of Annie's talk with me it would be all right to repeat. This conversation with Harvie was after the concert when we were having refreshments in the Gymnasium. The concert had gone off very well. Miss Cox was jubilant because her pupils who would sing flat had refrained for the occasion. Miss Cox herself had sung delightfully and had won the heart of old Captain Leahy by giving "The Wearing of the Green" as an encore.

When the programme was all over and everyone had done the best she could, Miss Peyton made a little speech and said that by especial request from some of the older guests Miss Annie Pore was to sing "Annie Laurie."

That was really the treat of the evening. We were delighted because it made Mabel Binks so mad.

"I am some weary of that sob stuff from 'Orphan Annie,'" I heard her say to one of the Hill-Top boys.

"Why, I think it is great!" was his unsympathetic reply. "And what a little beauty she is, too!"

Once off the stage, Annie's shyness returned in full force, but it soon wore off under the genial good fellowship of the Tuckers and Mary Flannigan, and Harvie's big-brother air of pride in her success, and Shorty's funny reproaches for making him catch such a bad cold. She looked very happy, and not even Mabel Binks could mar her cheerfulness, although she plainly heard Mabel say to a Junior: "I wonder who lent her that dress. It certainly looks familiar to me and anyone could see it was shortened for the occasion."

My stitches were not so small as they might have been!

CHAPTER XIV.

THE SPREAD.

Saturday night was a great time for spreads as there was no study hall on that evening and the girls could come early and stay late. A grand feast was in preparation at 117 Carter Hall. Mr. Tucker had sent a box that had passed inspection at the office, although it was filled with contraband articles; but as he wrote Tweedles, they wouldn't make rules if they did not expect them to be broken.

"My, I'm glad Miss Peyton doesn't put us on our honor not to have cake and such," said Dee as she opened up a box stamped with the name of a well-known drygoods firm and plainly marked in a masculine hand: "Virginia's Shoes, the fourth pair she has had since Spring and she must be more careful and have her old ones half-soled."

"Isn't old Zebedee a peach? Look! Tango sandwiches!" (The catalogue to Gresham plainly says: "Nothing but crackers, fruit and simple candy is allowed to be eaten in the rooms.")

"Here are olives done up to look like shoe polish," said I, diving into the big box. "And what is this big round parcel at the bottom?" On it I read: "Caroline's winter hat. I think you are a very vain girl to insist on your winter hat just to wear it home on the train for Christmas. I hope it is not mashed but think it would serve you right for thinking so much about your appearance." The hat proved to be a great caramel cake, stuck all over with English walnuts, packed so carefully it was not a bit mashed. Jars of pickle masqueraded shamelessly as Uneeda Biscuit, being ingeniously pasted up in the original wrappers. Cream cheese and pimento sandwiches came dressed as graham wafers; and a whole roasted chicken had had a very comfortable journey buttoned up in Dum's old sweater, with a note pinned over its faithful breast saying that Dum must make out with that sweater for another season as Mr. Tucker could not put up with her selfish extravagance.

We heard afterward that Miss Sears, whose duty it had been to inspect this box before it was delivered to the girls, had said that she was surprised to find that Mr. Jeffry Tucker did not spoil the twins nearly so much as she had been led to believe. In fact, he seemed to be rather strict with them and quite critical. For instance, an old sweater that he expected Dum to wear through the season was not really fit to be seen in!

There were several boxes of candy, besides all the other goodies. They were all marked peppermint but were really candied fruit, chocolates, nougat and what not.

"I tell you, Zebedee is some provider when he gets started," said Dee. "I'm glad I didn't eat much dinner and I intend to eat no supper at all."

We were taking stock of our eatables before supper bell so we could see how many girls we could invite to the spread. It was etiquette at Gresham to give a girl fair warning when a spread was under way, so she could save space and not go and fill up in the dining-room. We wanted to avoid feeling like the old countryman who had his first experience with a table d'hôte dinner. Not knowing there was to be so much following the first course, he ate too much of it, and afterward loudly lamented: "Thar I sot chock full er soup."

Annie Pore was, of course, on the list and funny little Mary Flannigan and the two Seniors, Sally Coles and Josephine Barr. They had been especially nice to our crowd and we were anxious to show them some attention. That made seven in all.

"We've really got food for one more or even two," declared Dee, "but maybe we had better go easy because there is really not room for more."

117 was rather crowded with the three beds, two bureaus, three chairs and a table, and seven girls would just about fill it to overflowing. It did not look like the bare cell that had so appalled us on our day of entering Gresham. We now had a scrim curtain at the window; rugs on the floor; Tweedles had pretty Roman blankets on their beds with bright sofa cushions; while I had a beautiful log cabin quilt that Sally Winn had pieced for me in between her different death throes. The walls were literally covered with pennants from many schools and colleges with a few pictures

that Dum had stuck in her trunk, purloined from their apartment in Richmond.

"I don't believe Zebedee will ever miss them, and they mean a lot to me," she had said when Dee had expressed astonishment on her producing them from her trunk. "I am so constituted that I've just got to have something beautiful to look at every now and then." The room was pleasant and cozy but the crowded walls rather got on my nerves. Bracken was so big and simple (some people would have called it bare) that I could not get used to such a conglomeration in a bedroom. I kept my taste to myself, however, as they were two to one, and no doubt my ideas of decoration were very old-fashioned and out of date.

Sally Coles and Jo Barr, whom we sought out before supper, were glad to accept and vowed they would eat not a bite before the feast so that they could come perfectly empty. Of course Annie Pore and Mary Flannigan were holding themselves in readiness for the arrival of the promised box from Mr. Tucker, and the news of its having come safely to hand was greeted with enthusiasm.

You get tired of any steady food except home food and sometimes you think you are tired of that, but as a rule you are pretty glad to get back to it. I fancy the table at Gresham was kept up about as well as any boarding school, but we knew that as sure as Tuesday was coming, roast veal was coming, too; and Wednesday would bring with it veal potpie; Thursday, beefsteak; and Friday, fish; Saturday, lamb stew with dumplings; Sunday, roast chicken; and Monday, not much of anything. This certainty bored us, and sometimes I used to think if I couldn't find something in the potpie besides veal, I'd scream. I had to do a lot of looking at the mountains on Wednesday, somehow.

A spread was a godsend, and an invitation to one was not as a rule given in vain. As Sally Coles and I fox-trotted together in the Gym after supper, she whispered in my ear: "It's certainly good of you kids to ask Jo and me. We're crazy about coming."

"We think it's pretty nice of you Seniors to come. You didn't even know we are to have caramel cake, either, did you?" I answered.

"Heavens, no! I'm mighty glad we didn't accept Mabel Binks's bid to a Welsh rarebit in her room. We fibbed and told her we had a partial engagement. It was just with each other but we didn't tell her that, and now you Sophomores have saved our souls by making our imaginary engagement a real one. I hate to tell even a white lie, but I'd hate a deal more to have to go to a spread of Mabel Binks's giving. Don't you know the hammers will be flying to-night? Can't you hear Mabel and those rapid Juniors she runs with knocking everything and everybody?"

"Yes, I reckon the only way to save your skin is to stay with her and help knock. But how does she manage a rarebit when we are not allowed to have chafing dishes?"

"Manages the same way you and the Tuckers manage to have caramel cake, I fancy. We are not allowed to have cake, either. Of course it is easier to hide a cake than it is a chafing dish, especially if the cake is sliced and there are a half-dozen empty girls to help. I believe some of the girls keep their chafing dishes under their mattresses. Did you hide your cake well before you came down to supper? It would be the psychological moment for some busybody to make an inspecting tour—and then, good-by, cake!"

"Oh, you scare me to death!" and I grabbed Dee, who was whirling by, trying a brand new step with a giddy Junior, and, whispering Sally's warning to her, we beat a hasty retreat. Our beloved cake was on the table covered with a napkin just as we had left it, seemingly, but on raising the cloth we discovered that a great wedge had been cut out of it.

"Well, of all the mean tricks!" spluttered Dee. "Who do you s'pose ——?"

"Thank goodness, they only took about a fourth! What is left is enough to give all seven of us fever blisters. Caramel cake with nuts in it always gives me fever blisters," I laughed.

"But I don't mind. I'll take the cake, fever blisters and all, every time."

"Me, too! Well, I hope that the thief will have a mouth full of them," said Dee vindictively.

"Well, honey, it's a sight better to have some mean girl take off one fourth than some teacher in her mistaken zeal take off the whole thing and give us demerits, besides. Here's your handkerchief," I said, picking up a little pink crêpe de Chine one from the floor.

"Not mine, I don't possess such a thing. Don't you know Zebedee and Dum and I use the same sized handkerchiefs? When we want a handkerchief, we want a handkerchief, not a little pink dab. It must be yours."

"No, I haven't any crêpe de Chine ones. Here's an initial—B. It certainly is scented up." The finishing touch to Mabel Binks's costume on the afternoon we had seen the game at Hill-Top came back to me suddenly: the strong odor of musk. The handkerchief smelt exactly the same way.

"Well, Dee, I reckon it won't take a Sherlock Holmes to say who took the cake, now. Let's not give her back her hanky until to-morrow. If we took it to her to-night she would know that we are on to her, and she would be just mean enough to peach on us and have our cake seized." So we determined, like Dee and Prosper le Gai, to "bide our time."

What a spread we did have and what fun! Dum turned up with two more girls, members of our class, and there was enough and to spare. Mr. Tucker was as lavish as Mammy Susan herself. We had no plates or glasses, but we had plenty of box tops for dishes and our toothbrush mugs served as loving cups to drink the very sour lemonade Dee made in the water pitcher. The same knife carved the chicken, then cut the cake. The olives, always difficult to extract from the bottle, were poured into the soap dish which I had scoured hard enough to suit the most squeamish.

"My, what good eats!" exclaimed Jo Barr. "And how did you ever smuggle that cake within the lines?" We showed her the wrapper it had come in and the stern note from Mr. Tucker.

"Well, if that doesn't beat all! I tell you there is nothing like being smart enough to keep the eleventh commandment: 'Thou shalt not get found out.' I had a whole fruitcake taken bodaciously from me last year. I am always breaking the eleventh." And that was so. Poor Jo always got caught up with.

"Well, I tell you one thing," said the wise Sally, "that cake had better skidoo until danger of inspection passes. Teachers are a suspicious lot."

I just got it whisked under a down cushion on Dee's bed when there was a sharp rap on the door. "Come in," we called in a chorus. It was Miss Sears, rather astonished at our ready invitation to enter.

"Oh, girls, having a spread, are you," glancing sharply at the innocent-looking packages of crackers and peppermint candy without coming all the way into the room. "Well, I hope you will have a nice time."

"Won't you join us, Miss Sears?" asked Dum sweetly.

"Oh, thank you, no. I am on inspection duty to-night," and she closed the door, never seeing that Jo had wrapped the roasted chicken up in a spangled scarf she was sporting. That chicken had had all kinds of dressing in its fat, young life: first its own feathers; then the dressing, which is really the un-dressing; then the dressing, which is really the stuffing; then Dum's old sweater; and now Jo's fine scarf.

We proceeded then to put the good, appetizing food where nothing short of an X-ray could inspect. So thorough were those nine girls that not a crumb of cake nor scrap of sandwich was left to tell on us. The chicken bones were some problem but we decided that if each girl took a bone and disposed of it, it would simplify matters somewhat. Sally got the wishbone and said she was going to gild it and put it on her "memory string."

When we had eaten to repletion, we demanded stunts from those gifted that way. Mary did a dog fight and new turn she had just mastered: going like a mouse.

"I wish I could think it was a mouse who nibbled the cake," sighed Dum. "It kind of hurts me all over to feel that somebody did it."

"Well, if it was a mouse, I bet it sounded like this," and Mary imitated Mabel Binks's nasal speech until we almost had hysterics.

"Why do you fancy she took only a hunk instead of the whole cake?" I asked. "It would have been so much more like her to take it all."

"That's the reason she only took part. She thought by behaving out of character she would throw us off the scent," suggested Sally.

"Well, if she wanted to throw us off the scent, she shouldn't have dropped her handkerchief," said Dee. "But let's forget it and think of something pleasant. Annie, you sing, please," and she handed Jo's guitar to the blushing Annie. Annie was always embarrassed when she had to sing before a few persons. She got her "stage presence" when there was a real audience.

"What shall it be?" asked Annie.

"Oh, something real sentimental and lovesick," demanded Sally, who was supposed to be engaged; and with a little humorous twinkle in her usually sad eyes, Annie sang "Sally in our Alley."

Of all the girls that are so smart
    There's none like pretty Sally;
She is the darling of my heart,
    And she lives in our alley.
There is no lady in the land
    Is half so sweet as Sally;
She is the darling of my heart,
    And she lives in our alley.

Of all the days that's in the week
    I dearly love but one day—
And that's the day that comes betwixt
    A Saturday and Monday;
For then I'm dressed all in my best
    To walk abroad with Sally;
She is the darling of my heart,
    And she lives in our alley.

Then Dum and Dee stood back to back and buttoned themselves up in their sweaters, which they had put on hindpart-before and impersonated the two-headed woman, Milly-Christine, singing a duet, "The mocking bird is singing o'er her grave," in two distinct keys. That was an awfully funny stunt and one the Tuckers had made up themselves. Before we had half

exhausted the talent of the assembled guests, the bell rang to warn us that lights must soon be out and we had to break up.

The next morning there was a fine crop of fever blisters due to the very rich cake. Annie Pore and Sally Coles were the only ones who escaped with a whole skin. When I handed Mabel Binks her smelly, pink, crêpe de Chine handkerchief, I noticed that her rather full lips were decorated with a design similar to my own.

"Here's your handkerchief," I said. "Cake with caramel and nut filling is awfully rough on the complexion, isn't it?" And the girl had the decency to blush.

CHAPTER XV.

HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS.

I could hardly believe that it was I, Page Allison, who had been off to boarding school. Bracken was so exactly as I left it and I dropped so easily into my old habits and customs, that I felt as though I had only dreamed I had been away. The dogs almost ate me up for joy, and Mammy Susan had three kinds of hot bread for supper. Father and I chatted away for dear life for a while, and then we just as naturally settled down to a quiet evening of reading, as though I had merely been over to Milton to mail a letter. He was vastly pleased to have me back, and every now and then looked over his glasses at me with a very happy smile on his dear, old, lean, weather-beaten face; and I lay curled up in a big Sleepy-Hollow chair simply devouring the last "Saturday Evening Post" that I had bought on the train coming from Gresham, feeling that I had about the pleasantest home and the best father and kindest Mammy Susan and the finest dogs on earth.

"Mr. Tucker tells me you have asked him down to hunt," I said as I surprised a loving glance from Father.

"Yes, yes, I thought it would be nice if he could come when his girls pay you their promised visit. He is mighty good company. I declare he can keep a whole party in a good humor," and Father chuckled, evidently in remembrance of some witticism of Mr. Tucker's. "We are thinking of getting up a deer hunt over in the swamp. Jo Winn shot a good-sized buck last month and I am told a great many persons have seen deer in the distance lately."

This was over in a corner of our county where many small rivers and creeks formed a perfect network, making very inaccessible, marshy land. The hunting was as a rule pretty good and during the winter we feasted quite royally on wild turkey, partridge and rabbit. Deer, of course, were not so plentiful, but an occasional one was shot. It seems strange that Virginia, the first state settled, should still be boasting big game.

"I wish you could take us. Dum and Dee would like it a lot."

"And you, I fancy, would just go along out of politeness," he teased.

"Well, you know I'd rather get killed myself than kill anything, but the Tuckers have their own guns and often go hunting with their father. I believe they are very good shots."

"If you think they can stand the trip, we'll take them. I know you can stand what I can stand, unless boarding school has made you soft. Let me feel your arm—ah, as hard as ever."

"That's basketball and gym work. I'd have been soft, indeed, if I hadn't gone in for athletics. I'm so glad we can go. I'll write to the twins to bring their guns and rough clothes."

Christmas day came and went with plenty of good cheer and happiness, but none of the hurry and bustle of the present-day Christmas in town. At Bracken we knew nothing about white tissue paper and Christmas seals and bolts of red and green ribbon. Our simple gifts to one another were exchanged without much ceremony; and then Father and I got into his buggy, with the colt ready to run twenty miles if he could get the bit between his teeth, and distributed baskets and bags of candy, nuts and oranges to our many poor neighbors, colored and white. We always had a box of oranges for the holidays and simple candy and mixed nuts by wholesale quantities.

"I'd like to take these things around on Christmas Eve and let the little children think Santa Claus brought them, but I know the mothers would give them their share right away and then there would be nothing for Christmas day."

"Well, I believe they think 'Docallison' is a kind of Santy, anyhow," I said, as we whizzed up to a particularly poor-looking cabin that seemed to be simply running over with little nigs. The grimy window was black with their dusky faces and the doorway was so full that the children in front were being pushed out onto the rickety excuse for a porch.

"Howdy, Aunt Keziah! I hope you and your family are well this beautiful morning," called Father, pulling in the colt and taking from between his

knees a large hamper literally running over with sweets.

"Chris'mus gif'! Chris'mus gif'!" came in a chorus from all the little mouths. Aunt Keziah hobbled out, smacking the little blacks as she came with a very horny hand; but they seemed to take it as a kind of pleasantry and bobbed up grinning from ear to ear.

"Shet ep, yer lims er Satan! Cyarn't yer see Docallison's colt ain't go'nter stan fer no sich yellin's? Chris'mus gif', Docallison! Chris'mus gif', Miss Page!"

This last came with a voice as soft as the wings of a dove, while the tone in which she had admonished the little darkies had been as rough as a nutmeg grater. You could hardly believe the two voices had issued from the same lips. Aunt Keziah was the neighborhood "Tender": that is, she minded the children whose natural guardians had gone away for one reason or another,—sometimes to work in the cities, sometimes as house servants for the county families, where such encumbrances as offspring were not welcome. She was paid a small sum for each child and always spoke of them as "bo'ders."

Aunt Keziah had her charity, too, (as who has not?) and supported several orphans. These she treated with especial kindness, and always made the "bo'ders" wait until the objects of charity were helped to "ash-cake an' drippin's."

Father lifted out the heavy basket and the pickaninnies swarmed like flies around a molasses barrel.

"Git back, thar, you kinky-haided Gabe. You know you ain't nothin' but a bo'der. You let dis here lil orphant Minnie git fust grab," and Gabe got back and Minnie came proudly up and got her bag of candy and nuts. We had tied the treat up in separate packages so there could be no broken hearts. Mammy Susan had reported that Aunt Keziah had two new ones, Milly Jourdan's twins, making fourteen in all.

"What did you name the twins, your new boarders, Aunt Keziah?" I asked.

Aunt Keziah demanded one thing from her patrons and that was that she be allowed to name her charges. No matter what their names had been up to the time they entered her domain, they had to be rechristened. A big boy who had been called Bill for eight winters was now known as Clarence. Mary Banks was Chrystobel and Mump Davis, a raw-boned, fiery-looking boy, part Indian, seethed and chafed under the *nom de guerre* of Fermentation. The charity orphans kept the names their mothers had seen fit to give them, out of respect for the departed.

"Well, Miss Page, I studied a long time 'bout them thar twins. Naming is moughty important fer boys special, sence matrimony cyarn't in no way improve 'em, an' I done decided to call 'em Postle Peter an' Pistle Paul."

"Capital, capital!" laughed Father. "I hope Postle Peter and Pistle Paul are healthy. You raise the strongest children in the county, Aunt Keziah."

"Yassir, Docallison," said the old woman with a toothless grin. "They's a right likely pair. The reason my bo'ders an' all is so healthy is 'cause I make 'em wash theyselves. An' ev'y las' one er 'em is gotter have two shuts or shifts to they backs er I won't tend 'em. An' what they ain't a wearin', I puts in a pot an' biles. De boys gits a big washin' on Chusdays an' Fridays, an' de gals on Wednesdays an' Sat'days. Sometimes whin de lil gals all gits washed of a Sat'day night, it looks like it's a kinder pity to was'e all them hot suds what ain't ter say dirty, so I picks out a boy er so dat done got siled some, and makes him take a extra scrub, jist fer luck. As fer eatin's, dey don't git nothin' but corn braid an' drippin's wif lasses on Sunday ef I kin make out to have 'em, but dey gits a plenty of what dey do git and de victuals 'grees wif 'em, an' I don't never have a nigger a month 'fo he's as fat as a possum."

"Well, Aunt Keziah, you are doing a fine work, raising healthy citizens. I hope you will have a happy Christmas and a prosperous New Year. There are toys enough to go around in the bottom of the basket and here's a pound of tea for you and some tobacco for your pipe and some chocolate drops that are easy to chew."

"Thank yer, thank yer. Docallison, specially fer de sof' candy. I always did useter have a sweet tooth but now I ain't got nothin' but a sweet gum, but I's got dat all right."

Just then the colt, tired of standing, made a bolt and all we could do was to wave good-by to the funny old woman and her fourteen charges.

"Old Aunt Keziah is bringing up those children according to the teachings of modern science, even to sterilizing their shirts and shifts, and she doesn't know there is such a word as germ. I fancy the many cracks in the cabin wall where you can see daylight are partly responsible for the health of the 'bo'ders.' I find more sickness among the colored people where their cabins are better built and airtight. Ventilation is avoided like the plague," said Father as he got the colt under control and we went spinning off to some more "pensioners," as he called them.

The doctor's buggy was finally emptied of its load and we skimmed back home with the colt as fresh as ever, agreeing that we would not give up horses for all the automobiles under the sun. There is an exhilaration that comes from driving a good horse that I do not believe a car can give one, no matter how fine the car or expert the driver.

Mammy Susan had a dinner for us that was fit for kings and queens. It seemed a pity to cook so much for just Father and me, but some of that dinner found its way to many a cabin where Father felt it was most needed; and then on Christmas Day the dogs were given extra rations and not limited to their one big feeding of corn meal and salt, scalded and baked in a great pan until it was crisp. On this day of days they had a bone apiece and all kinds of good scrapings.

After dinner we settled ourselves to enjoy the Christmas books, of which there were many, as our tastes were well known. Father's patients were considerate enough not to send for him all afternoon. Not a soul got sick on this happy Christmas day. Even poor Sally Winn did not try to die.

CHAPTER XVI.

A VISIT FROM THE TUCKERS.

The Tuckers arrived, and Tucker-like, neither at the time nor by the route expected. I was just calling Sam to hitch Peg (short for Pegasus) to the surrey to drive to Milton to meet them, when the unaccustomed toot of an automobile attracted my attention. It was tearing down our avenue at breakneck speed. Dee was at the wheel with Mr. Tucker beside her, and Dum was bouncing around alone on the back seat.

"Beat the train! By Jove, I thought we could!" exclaimed Mr. Tucker, when he spied me at the yard gate. "We were so afraid you might have started for Milton. That's the reason we were violating the speed limit," and they all piled out, the girls hugging me and kissing me and Mr. Tucker almost hugging me and not quite kissing me.

"It was such a grand day we couldn't resist coming in the car," tweedled the twins, "but if you had started for Milton before we got here, we would have died of mortification."

When I told them I had not even had Peg hitched up yet, they were delighted.

"A mounted policeman chased us just as we were leaving Manchester, but we dusted him so Tweedles and I are hoping he did not get our number," said Mr. Tucker.

I called Sam to bring in the grips and rugs.

"I am sorry he can't take your steed around to the stable, Mr. Tucker, but we don't know a thing about automobiles at Bracken."

"Leave it where it is, maybe we can have a spin later on."

We went into the house, where the open wood fires made everything bright and cheerful, although not very warm for persons who are accustomed to steam heat. Mammy Susan in a stiffly starched purple calico dress with a gay bandanna handkerchief on her head was ready to greet the guests.

"Well, bress the Lord, an' you done come all the way from town in that there fire wagon. I hearn the horn a tootin' and a rushin' like mighty wings, and I says, says I: 'Susan Collins, 'tis the Angel Gabr'el a comin' fer you.' So I clap on my clean head hankcher an' a starched apron tow be ready fer the Resrection."

"Mammy Susan, we've heard a lot about you. Page talks about you all the time at school," said the twins, shaking the old woman warmly by the hand.

"Well, now, does she? Mammy's baby don't fergit her any more'n Mammy fergits her baby. An' is this your pa? Well, save us, ef you don't look more like somebody's great-grandson than anybody's pa."

"Well, they do treat me like a stepson, sometimes, Mammy," laughed Mr. Tucker. "If I could only take on the looks of years without the years, I'd be glad, and maybe I could command more respect."

"Why don't you grow some whiskers, then? They ain't nothin' so ageyfying as whiskers on a young man."

"I'll do it, I'll do it!" exclaimed Mr. Tucker.

"Yes, and you do and we'll pull 'em out," Tweedles declared.

"Well, here am I a-gassin' when I ought to be settin' a little lunch fer the travelers."

"Oh, we had lunch on the way," the three of them declared. "We were not going to be any trouble to you by coming so much earlier than we were expected."

"Oh, now, you must be hungry," I said. "It won't take Mammy Susan a minute."

"Cose they's hungry, child. Can't I tell hungry folks soon as I claps eyes on 'em? Maybe they did eat a snack in that there chariot of fire, but the way they come down the abenue was enough to jolt down a Christmus dinner, plum puddin' an' all, an' plum puddin' takes a heap er joltin'," and Mammy Susan hastened out to "set a little lunch,"—which the Tuckers later declared was a feast.

They were hungry and cold, in spite of their protestations to the contrary, and cold turkey and country ham with the delicious little cornmeal cakes that Mammy could stir up and bake in half a minute disappeared like magic.

"Such coffee!" and Mr. Tucker rolled up his eyes in ecstasy. "And real cow cream! I tell you, Tweedles, as soon as you finish getting this much needed education, we've got to get out of an apartment and into a house where we can do some real housekeeping and have some home cooking."

"You ought to be made to eat at Gresham for a month or so, Zebedee, and you would think the café is pretty fine," said Dee. "The grub at Gresham is not so bad, but there is such a deadly sameness to it."

"Well, the grub may be tejus," broke in Mammy, who had just come in with a heaped-up plate of corn cakes, "but it must hab suption in it, 'cause lil Miss Page is growd in width as well as wisdom, and you two young twin ladies is got cheeks like wine-saps."

"You are right, Mammy, the food must be pretty good to keep them so fat and rosy," said Mr. Tucker, helping himself plentifully to the dainty little cakes.

"Yassir," and Mammy had a sly twinkle in her kind old eyes, "an' that there caffy whar you gits yo' victuals mus' be dishin' out some nourishment, too, 'cause you ain't to say peaked lookin'."

How we did laugh at Zebedee, and as for him, he got up and gave Mammy a little hug. The Tuckers all knew how to take jokes on themselves.

"She certainly did get you, Zebedee," teased Dum. "You were trying to be so Mr. Tuckerish, too, admonishing Dee and me for complaining about the food at Gresham."

Father came in soon from his rounds and greeted the visitors in his kindly hospitable way. Mr. Tucker was to have several days' holiday from his newspaper and Father said the neighborhood was in an extremely healthy condition, owing to the clear, cold weather, and he did not expect to be overworked; so the gentlemen began immediately to plan their hunts. Dum and Dee were wild at the prospect of going on the deer hunt.

"I saw Jo Winn this morning, daughter," said Father, "and he will go with us. He has a cousin from New York who is visiting him and he wants to take him."

"Well, if the cousin has no more conversation than Jo he certainly will not bore us with his chatter," I said. "Now, how about lunch, Father? We must give Mammy some warning, because she gets flustrated if we come at her too suddenly."

"To-morrow suits Jo and his kinsman, and it will suit us, too, I think. Tell Mammy how many of us there are and tell her to put up twice as much lunch as you think she should. That ought to be 'most enough. We'll want the big camping coffee pot and a skillet and some salt; also some sliced bacon, ground coffee and sugar, and a little flour to roll the rabbits in. We may make a fire and cook some if we get cold and have good luck in the morning."

I went out to the kitchen to interview Mammy, Tweedles following me, and then we had to go see the dogs. Dee approved of them and they heartily approved of her. Dum did not have the passion for them that Dee and I had, but she liked them well enough. The dogs licked her hand respectfully and then jumped up on Dee and knocked her down and had a big romp.

How delightful it was to have some companions of my own age at my beloved Bracken! The Tuckers wanted to see everything and go everywhere. We visited the horses in the stable and the cows in the pen and climbed up in the hay loft to hunt for eggs that a sly old blue hen refused to lay in the proper place.

"It's just like Grandpa Tucker's, only nicer," declared Dum. "Grandpa treats us as though we were about two years old and treats Zebedee as

though he had just arrived in his teens, so when we go there, while we have splendid times, we are being told what not to do from morning till night."

"Well, nobody ever has told me not to do things," I said. "Mammy Susan grumbles when she thinks I am too venturesome, but she has always ended by letting me have my own way; and Father says he thinks my way is about as good as anybody's way."

"Well, isn't it funny you are not spoiled?" tweedled the girls.

"I believe I used to be spoiled when I was a tiny thing; but Father says if people grow up spoiled, it is because they lack sense, and he always said he knew I had sense enough to live down the spoiling that he and Mammy Susan just couldn't help giving me."

"I believe Dr. Allison is right, Dee," said Dum very solemnly, "and when we are unruly with Zebedee I know it is not the fault of our early training that we love to lay it on, but just plain lack of sense."

"Well, I'm going to try to be mighty good, then," exclaimed Dee. "If there is anything in the world I hate, it's stupidity."

CHAPTER XVII.

DEER HUNTING.

It was a glorious morning. Of course we had to get up before the sun thought of such a thing. Indeed, there was a crazy, old, lop-sided, dissipated-looking, gibbous moon still hanging on to life when we came piling out of the warm, lighted house and climbed into the two vehicles waiting for us. Father and Mr. Tucker were to go in Father's buggy, and the girls and I were very snug, three on the seat of the runabout, with the lunch and coffee pot bouncing around in the back, and the Tuckers' guns carefully stowed under the seat.

Jo Winn joined us at Milton, the New York cousin in the buggy with him. We were curious to see the cousin, whom Father had reported as being "quite likely." Jo was as good as gold and perfectly intelligent with a keen sense of humor, but he was as silent as the tomb. His sister Sally was the greatest chatterbox in the world, I am sure. She simply never stopped talking except on those occasions when she was doing her best to "shuffle off this mortal coil," and then she seemed to be not able to stop talking long enough to die thoroughly. Just when the grave was yawning for her (or maybe because of her) she would think of something she simply had to talk about and come back to life.

The Winns were F. F. V.'s, in that they were among the first families in Virginia, if not of Virginia. They were not aristocrats, certainly. They came of good pioneer stock who were tillers of the soil in the seventeenth century and still were in the twentieth. They had lived on the same tract of land for two centuries and a half, and in America that should stand for aristocracy, but somehow with the Winns it never had. They had no desire to be considered great folk and so they never were. The war between the states had left them as it had found them, in fairly prosperous circumstances. Never having owned slaves, the emancipation of the negroes did not affect them one way or the other. Having always done their own sowing and

reaping, they could still do it. The family had never been much on marrying, and now there were none left but the hypochondriacal old maid Sally and her younger brother Jo.

I had given the twins a history of the Winns as we spun over to Milton. Pegasus was in fine feather, which seems a strange thing to say of a horse, but of one whose name suggests wings, perhaps it is appropriate.

"I fancy Jo is so silent because Sally talks so much," suggested Dum.

"Maybe it is the other way and Sally talks so much to make up for Jo's silence," I said; "but I hope the cousin from New York will strike a happy medium."

"A 'cousin from New York' always sounds so exciting and just as like as not he'll come from Hoboken. Dr. Allison says he is about twenty-five, so I reckon he'll not notice us kids, anyhow. It won't break our hearts, that's sure," and Dee tossed her blue-black head in disdain of all males.

Jo and the cousin were waiting for us at the crossroads. The cousin was a good-looking young man with blue eyes and light hair, very picturesque in a brand new hunting suit, leggins and all.

"They won't stay new long," I whispered to the girls, "with Jo's hounds flopping all over them."

Jo was forced to open his mouth and speak, as it was up to him to introduce the cousin, but he did it in as few words as possible.

"Mr. Kent—Miss Allison." And then an appealing glance at me gave me to understand that the matter was in my hands, so I took up the social burden and introduced Jo and Mr. Kent to the Tuckers. Mr. Reginald Kent, —that was the picturesque name that went with the picturesque corduroy suit,—proved himself to be a young man of resources. He had no idea of taking the long drive to the spot of the possible deer alone with the silent Jo, the hounds wallowing all over his new clothes.

"See here," he exclaimed, "I think one of us fellows ought to get in with the young ladies. They might need some protection on the trip." Jo looked very much amused at my needing protection and the twins certainly looked

buxom enough to take care of themselves without the help of Mr. Reginald Kent.

"Well, sort yourselves in a hurry," called Father. "The colt won't stand another minute and I don't want to get too far ahead of the rest of you."

"Let me get in with Mr. Winn," begged Dee. "I'm crazy to ride with the dogs." Jo's dogs were the only ones going, although the pack at Bracken plead piteously to be allowed to join the party. It seemed best not to take too many, and Jo's dogs were so well trained that the men had decided on them.

Mr. Reginald Kent squeezed his new corduroys between Dum and me, and Dee jumped into the buggy with the grinning Jo. Dee declared later that Jo talked as much as most men and was a very agreeable person; but I fancy the real truth of the matter was that Dee chattered away at her usual rate, and that Jo was such an eloquent listener Dee never did discover that she was doing all the talking. Certainly they found a topic of interest to both of them in the dogs, and as talking about the dogs meant patting the dogs, the dogs naturally were pleased.

Our cavalier proved to be very cheerful and very complimentary. He was evidently much pleased to escape the silent Jo. We liked him in spite of his fulsome compliments, and when we gave him to understand that flattery was not the way to curry favor with us, he became more natural and we had a very amusing time with him. It turned out that he did not live in Hoboken as Dee had predicted, but in the heart of New York City. He was employed by an advertising firm, not only as a writer of advertisements, but also as illustrator.

"Of course there is no pleasant way of making a living," he said, "but I long to get out of this commercial art and into regular illustrating."

"But I adore ads," exclaimed Dum. "Dee and Zebedee and I always read every word of them and Zebedee says you can find more pure fiction in them than in the magazine proper—or improper."

"Well, after this I shall do my work more enthusiastically and more conscientiously, knowing there is a chance of its coming under such eyes," and Mr. Kent's glance of admiration into Dum's hazel eyes gave her to understand he was speaking of those particular eyes and not Dee's and

Zebedee's. I rather expected to see Dum give him a back-hander, but instead she blushed in rather a pleased way, just as any young girl should on receiving such a compliment from a handsome young man from New York.

The roads in our county are much improved, thanks to the automobilists who have worked such reforms throughout the whole country. On that morning they were hard and dry, even dusty, and we went spinning along through the frosty air, Father ahead with the colt behaving as though it were a hurry call and every moment counted. I was next in line and Peg was giving me all I could do to hold her in. She seemed to want to let us all see that an upstartish colt could trot no faster than she could. I was rather glad that Mr. Reginald Kent had taken a fancy to hazel eyes instead of gray, as I needed my gray eyes to pick a smooth road for Peg. Jo Winn and Dee were just far enough behind us to keep out of our dust, and occasionally we could hear Dee's ringing laugh and an unusual guffaw from the silent Jo.

"You see now why we couldn't come in your automobile, as Mr. Tucker wanted," I said to Dum, as Father wheeled the colt sharply to the left into a forest of pines where scrub oaks and chinquepins almost concealed a very poor excuse for a road.

"Come on, Daughter," Father called back to me; "we'll keep close together through the woods, as there is no dust."

I really believe that the road through that pine forest is the very worst road in Virginia, and that is saying a good deal, as my beloved state has only recently awakened to the fact that it reflects on her standing to be noted as having the worst roads in the Union. That particular road had great granite bowlders; ruts that threatened to swallow us; gnarled tree roots that stretched across the path as though they meant to trip us up; and sometimes even a fallen trunk over which we would have to bounce, testing the springs of our vehicles to their utmost endurance.

"Well, I reckon little Henry Ford" (that is what the Tuckers called their car), "would have been ditched long before this," gasped Dum, as one wheel took a bowlder and the other a deep rut.

"Miss Allison, I haven't asked you to let me assist you in driving, just because I know you can do it so much better than I can," said Mr. Kent. "I'd

have turned over there as sure as I'm born."

"Well, I came mighty near doing it," I laughed. "If Dum's hat had not been on the side and tilted toward the bowlder, we would have landed in the ditch, I know. We had just about an ounce's weight in our favor."

"I guess it's a good thing I part my hair in the middle in these hairbreadth escapes. Just think, suppose it had been parted on the left side and had counterbalanced Miss Dum's hat tipped toward the right! Over we would have gone."

Just then a Molly Cotton-tail jumped up out of the bracken and the dogs set up a fearful howling. It was all Jo Winn and Dee could do to hold them in their places. Mr. Tucker and Dum looked longingly at their guns but the colt would not stand for shooting going on so close to him, and, besides, when people go out for deer they do not want to begin on rabbits. So little Miss Molly got off for that time at least.

I was glad. There is something in my make-up that recoils from killing anything. To be sure, I am fond of a rabbit's hind leg, about as good eating as one can find, but when I am picking on one of those hind legs I have to close my mind carefully to the fact that that same hind leg has helped to carry some Bre'r Rabbit through many a briar patch. If the image comes to me of a perky little white tail scurrying through the bushes with the eager dogs in pursuit, I simply have to give up eating the delectable morsel and Mammy Susan has to broil me some bacon.

"Hi, there, Uncle Peter," called Father to an old negro man approaching on a mule, a great sack of corn balanced on his pommel, "don't tell me you are not at home when we are coming to see you."

"Well, Docallison, I done tech bottom in de meal bag dis very mawnin', an' I was jes' a takin' some cawn to de mill; but efn de quality folks is a comin' ter see me, I kin sho make out wif de scrapin's till anudder day."

"We are going to try our luck with the deer, Uncle Peter, and I thought we would leave our teams at your cabin and get you to bring our provisions over to Falling Water in your wheelbarrow."

"'Visions, you say? Well, efn you's goin' ter have 'visions, dey ain't no us'n my goin' ter de mill fer days ter come. 'Visions from Bracken means dat Mammy Susan done had her say-so, and dat ole nigger 'oman is sho a amplified perfider. They'll be 'nuf leavins ter feed de multitude on Mount Aryrat." And Uncle Peter turned his willing mule's head around and led the way to his cabin.

Click! Click! went Mr. Kent's pocket camera. "Exactly the type I am looking for! Now, Miss Dum, when you look through the advertisements several months from now, be sure to notice a certain molasses that is to be put on the market. Uncle Peter will be there taking his corn to the mill so he can have a 'pone to sop in de 'lasses.' Oh, look at the cabin! Isn't it charming?"

It was indeed a typical log cabin. It was old, very old, but Uncle Peter kept it in good repair, patching the mortar in the chinks from time to time and propping up the great stone chimney that stood at about the angle of the Leaning Tower of Pisa. On the door and walls were tacked many coon skins. That is the method employed for curing the skins, and Uncle Peter made quite a little money selling coon skins. He had only a small clearing around his cabin but a good cornfield down in the creek bottom.

"'Light, 'light," said Uncle Peter, "Rosana will be that proud ter 'ceive you. She been throwing rocks all mornin' at that ole Shanghai rooster who would crow fer comp'ny. Co'se Rosana didn't know de comp'ny was a goin' ter be white folks. She done' low it would be some er dem low-down niggers tother side er de swamp what is always a-comin' empty and gwine away full."

Aunt Rosana squeezed herself sideways through the cabin door. She was a mountain of flesh, with about as much shape as a football. Indeed, she looked very like the potato babies Mammy Susan used to make me: a big potato for the body; a little potato for a head, stuck on with a match; feet and arms of peanuts; and a face scratched on with a kitchen fork. Her voice sounded like hot mashed potato as she bade us welcome.

"Well, efn I won't hab ter gib dat ole Shanghai rooster a extry handful er wheat! Here I been a-was'in' time all mornin' tryin' ter make him shet up his 'nostigatin' fer comp'ny, not thinkin' he was a-crowin' fer quality. I mought

a-knowed he wouldn't er crowed so loud an' clear fer nuthin' but niggers, an' swamp niggers, at dat," and a laugh shook her huge body, reminding me of the "bowl full of jelly."

We were glad to stretch ourselves after the long drive, and Aunt Rosana took us into her cabin while the men of the party attended to unhitching the horses. The cabin was spotless, although the one room it boasted was kitchen, parlor and bedroom in one. A great fireplace almost the entire length of one side of the room was really the kitchen. Aunt Rosana scorned iron stoves and still did her cooking with pot-hooks and Dutch ovens. Even now, hanging from one hook, was a singing black iron kettle and from another a covered pot from which issued an aroma that told me that Uncle Peter was going to have cabbage for dinner. Homemade rag rugs covered the floor almost entirely, but wherever a spot of oak flooring showed, it was gleaming white with much scrubbing.

A great four-poster had the place of honor opposite the fireplace. It was a bed fit for the slumbers of kings and princes. Many families in Virginia will exhibit just such beds and proudly tell you that in those beds Lafayette and Washington had slept. I don't know how Uncle Peter and Aunt Rosana happened to have it, but I know that the beautiful old bed had never harbored a more worthy couple. The patchwork quilt, with its intricate rising-sun pattern, was Aunt Rosana's handiwork. The walls were decorated with brilliant chromos, calendars dating back into the 'seventies and on up to date.

The twins were charmed with the place and their interest was most flattering to Aunt Rosana. She showed them all her treasures, even her photograph album.

"And who are all of these people?" asked Dum, who was politely looking at every photograph.

"Lor', chile, I dunno. Peter bought dat ere album at a sale ober in de nex' county. Ev'ybody in de book is white, an' dey looks like quality ter me; but dese days yer can't tell. Some er de quality is lookin' moughty stringy an' de oberseer class is pickin' up so dey is kinder mergin' inter great folks."

"What's this up your chimney?" queried Dee, peering up the great flue.

"Oh, dat's whar I smokes my meat. They's some shoulders up dar; an' some sides er baking wif a streak er fat an' a streak er lean as pretty as any you kin buy in de city. An' them's my little chany valuebowles what I been collecking of sence I was a baby," said Aunt Rosana to Dum, who was examining a great array of little china ornaments on top of a large old highboy.

There were little china girls kissing little china boys; little baskets with turtle doves on the handles; pink puppies and green cats, some of them meant for match safes and some of them purely ornamental; little cups and saucers of every shape and hue; little pitchers with big ears and some with no ears at all. I have never been in a cabin of self-respecting colored people where there was not a chest of drawers or a table filled with similar treasures. I know Aunt Rosana thought as much of her "chany valuebowles" as Father did of his books, and her sensations when Dum almost dropped a little shell-covered box was just what Father's would have been if he had seen a careless reader turn down a page in one of his beloved books, or bend back the covers of one of his first editions.

"Do look at this," begged Dum of Mr. Kent, who had just entered the cabin. She held up in her hand a china cow of a decidedly lavender hue with horns and hoofs of gilt, and quoted:

"'I never saw a purple cow;
I never hope to see one;
But I can tell you, anyhow,
I'd rather see than be one.'"

"'Ah, yes, I wrote the "Purple Cow"—
I'm sorry now I wrote it!
But I can tell you, anyhow,
I'll kill you if you quote it!'"

laughed Mr. Kent, taking the fearful and wonderful animal in his hands and examining it with great interest. "Isn't this place delightful? If I had only brought my sketching things instead of my gun, I'd stay here and paint. I'm going to ask Aunt Rosana to let me take some time exposures of the interior of her cabin. Just look at that bed and that fireplace! Thank goodness, I've got my camera with a perfectly new film good for twelve exposures."

"Well, Gawd be praised dat ole Shanghai gib me warnin' of comp'ny comin' an' I done stirred my stumps an' straightened up some, efn my room's goin' ter git its Dager'type took," and Aunt Rosana's flesh quivered with delight.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE MIGHTY HUNTER.

The pictures were soon taken and we were on our way to the low country. Everyone carried a gun but me. Uncle Peter brought up the rear with a wheelbarrow laden with the "'visions."

It was a long walk but such a delightful one that we never once thought of getting tired. Our way lay through a pine forest and was up hill and down dale. Tweedles and I were as well able to take the walk as any of the male persuasion, although it took some time to make Mr. Kent understand that we could get along without his assistance. He would help Dum over a worm fence, much to Dee's and my amusement, as we knew that Dum could vault it with one hand, just as we did.

"I never saw such independent young ladies as you three," he confessed after a daring leap we had made over a gulch. "The girls I know in New York expect to be assisted over every gutter."

"Maybe that's their town manner, and if they were turned loose in the country they might help themselves as well as we can," I suggested. "To tell the truth, it makes me fall down if anyone helps me."

"Do you know," whispered Dee to me, "I verily believe that Reginald Kent person is getting stuck on Dum? I hope he won't shoot her. I don't believe he ever carried a gun before in his life. He handles it like a walking stick."

"He's real nice, don't you think?" I asked.

"Oh, yes, nice enough, but I can't see why Dum lets him boost her over every stick and stone. She's perfectly able-bodied. She looks to me as though she rather liked to be treated like a boneless vertebrate," and Dee looked very disgusted. The fact was that Dum was taking the helping just as she was taking the compliments: in a perfectly natural, girlish way.

"Fond of the country?" asked Mr. Tucker, glancing with an amused twinkle at Mr. Kent's nonchalant manner of holding his gun.

"Oh, yes, fond enough, what I know of it. I've had to stick pretty close to Broadway all my life. I spent a summer down here with the Winns once when I was a kid and that's about the only country I've known."

"Haven't you hunted before?" questioned Dum, jumping back from the barrel of Mr. Kent's new gun that was pointing ominously at her.

"Well, I've shot the 'shoots' at Coney Island, and have practiced at hitting the bull's-eye in the galleries at that gay resort until I can ring the bell every time, but that is the extent of my experience," and Mr. Kent looked a little wistful. "I'd be mighty glad of some pointers from any of you that have had more."

"Well, point your gun, barrel down," tweedled the twins.

"Ah, so, I see," he said, grasping his gun in a more sportsmanlike manner, and all of us breathed a sigh of relief. I had been in terror for fear he might ring a b-e-l-l-e or hit some eye not in a bull ever since we left Aunt Rosana's cabin. "I'm awfully green," continued the young man, modestly. "I cut a poorer figure turned loose here in the country than old Uncle Peter would on the Great White Way."

"Not a bit of it," said Mr. Tucker kindly. He seemed rather impressed by Mr. Kent's frankness and modesty. Indeed, the young New Yorker could not cut a poor figure anywhere. He was well grown and sturdy and had an athletic swing to his walk due not only to much work in a gymnasium but to the "magnificent distances" he had been compelled to walk in New York.

I have noticed that town-bred persons as a rule walk much better than country-bred. When they get on rough ground they walk as though it were smooth, while country people when they strike pavements look as though they were still getting over plowed ground. Reginald Kent, if he did not know how to carry a gun, knew how to carry himself. With shoulders back, chin in and head well up, he stepped along like a West Pointer; while Jo Winn slouched with shoulders bent and head forward.

We chatted away very merrily until we came to the creek where the party was to separate. There was not much chance of any game, big or little, with such a crowd tramping through the woods. It was agreed that Father, Mr. Tucker and Jo Winn should cross the creek and go on to the river, where they were to take a skiff, owned by old Uncle Peter and kept moored at a certain spot, known to Father; from there they were to go into the marshes; and, later on, come down the river and join us at the mouth of the creek. We were to keep on straight down the creek with Uncle Peter and Mr. Kent, who earnestly desired to stay and "take care" of the ladies.

"I'm going to change my loads for rabbits," said Dee, suiting the action to the word. "This big shot would tear a rabbit all to pieces and I believe we are more apt to see rabbits than deer."

Mr. Kent followed suit but Dum kept "loaded fur b'ar," as she expressed it. Dee soon got a rabbit, which she wept over.

"She always does that," explained Dum. "She shoots things for the love of shooting and then bawls because she has taken an innocent life."

We had one of Jo's dogs with us. The other two had gone with the three men to stalk the possible deer. Our dog started up several rabbits and Mr. Kent joyously got two of them.

"Gee, this beats clay pigeons and shooting galleries," he declared. "I feel like a man-eating lion now; since I have tasted blood, I'll never be content to go back to my quiet, uneventful life."

We pitched camp near the mouth of the creek on a cliff overlooking the river. Uncle Peter and I made a fire and skinned the rabbits, while the Tuckers and the cavalier went off in search of more game. Under a great ledge of rock we found some snow left from a storm we had before Christmas, and after washing the rabbits well and letting them stand in cold water long enough to get out the animal heat, we buried them in the snow: "Ter git the fraishness out'n em," explained Uncle Peter.

I always loved to mess around a campfire, and Uncle Peter proved a most delightful companion.

"I like this a lot better than killing things, Uncle Peter," I said.

"Sho, child, so do I. I've been a-huntin' all my life, but it ain't been fer pleasure. I hunts fer a livin' an' I wouldn't shoot nothin' fer the love er killin' any mor'n I'd go dig taters fer exercise. I digs taters fer taters. I done tuck de libbuty of bringin' some sweet taters I made dis year fer ter roas' fer you-alls dinner," and the old man pulled a bag from the wheelbarrow that held great sweet potatoes almost as big as my head.

"They's nothin' so 'lectable as sweet taters what is roasted in de cam'fire. Jes' put 'em down in de ashes and kiver 'em over an' den fergit 'em, jes' fergit 'em. Dey can't cook too long 'kase de mo' de outside burns de mealier de inside is go'nter git," and Uncle Peter piled on more brushwood and raked the hot ashes over the yams.

Every now and then we heard a shot off in the direction of the Amazons and their so-called protector. I did hope the girls were having good luck and would come back with game of some sort. Uncle Peter and I got out the "'visions" and began to prepare for the hunters who, experience told us, would come along soon, hungry as wolves.

"Killin's a mighty ap'tizin' spo't," laughed Uncle Peter, "an' victuals cooked in de open seems ter be mo' tasty-like dan de ones in kitchens."

First we fried the bacon and then put it in a covered pan to keep hot, and used the bacon grease to fry the rabbits, which we had seasoned very highly and rolled in flour. I filled the coffee pot with fresh water from a bubbling spring near by, and, resting it on two stones about six inches apart, I raked out hot coals, and soon it began to heat up. I had just completed this culinary feat when Uncle Peter whispered to me:

"Look, chile, down yander by the ribber!"

The cliff where we had pitched our little camp overlooked the river, and about a hundred yards from the base of our cliff was a graveled ford, or shallows. The scrub growth was close down to the water's edge but stretching out into the stream was a little sandy beach. Beyond the scrub growth rose the dark pines, and an occasional oak with its great bare branches towered above all meaner trees. From the underbrush had stepped a young buck. He was picking his way daintily across the pebbles to the water's edge. How beautiful he was! I wanted our guests to have good sport,

but I longed with a longing that was almost a prayer that no one with a gun was seeing what Uncle Peter and I were seeing. What wind there was came from his direction so he got no scent of us, and he drank his fill with unconcern, as though he lived in the "forest primeval." Then he proudly raised his antlered head and stood a moment sniffing the air.

"Bang!" rang out a shot, whizzing close to my ear, and "Bang!" came the echo from the cliff. The young buck stood a moment as though sculptured, and not until the echo answered did he drop. It almost seemed that the echo had been the good shot that had laid low this possible future leader of herds.

"Oh, the pity of it! The pity of it!" my heart cried out. Turning, I saw my friends on a ledge of rock farther down the river; Dum, with her smoking gun still raised to her shoulder, an exalted look on her face and her black hair with the coppery lights tumbling all about her, an Amazon, indeed; Dee, crumpled up in a little heap, her hands over her face.

"Hurrah!" shouted Reginald Kent, beside himself with excitement.

Dee jumped up from her crumpled heap and clambered down the cliff, tears streaming down her face and great sobs shaking her body. She fortunately had on waterproof boots, because she thought no more of water than she did of land. She splashed right across the shallow ford and, kneeling down by the poor deer, she buried her tear-stained face on his twitching shoulder.

Just then the skiff with Mr. Tucker, Father and Jo Winn came round a bend in the river.

"Hello! What's this?" called Mr. Tucker in some alarm, seeing his daughter kneeling on the sand by an expiring stag. "Where's Dum? What's happened?"

"It's just Dee, deedling," called out Dum. "I shot the deer and now Dee's breaking her heart."

"O—h, O—h, but he recognized me just before he died!" sobbed Dee. "I could tell by the way he looked at me."

"It was a good thing he did 'recognize' you," grinned Jo Winn. "If he had not, he might have gored you. An injured buck is a right dangerous thing to fool with."

We comforted Dee as best we could and praised Dum for her shot. Soon we were gathered around our campfire, and then Uncle Peter and I came in for our share of praise for the good dinner we had cooked.

"We'll feast on venison to-morrow," said Father.

"Ah, never!" shuddered Dee. "I couldn't, not after he recognized me."

"Maybe Molly Cottontail, whose hind leg you seem to be enjoying so, would have recognized you, too, if she had ever seen you before," teased Mr. Tucker. "Now, Miss Page, here, has such a tender heart she can't eat rabbit that she has seen running in the woods but contents herself with bacon."

"Have you no pity, then, for the poor faithful hogs?" asked Father. "They no doubt enjoy life as much as the deer or Bre'r Rabbit. That is perhaps bacon from one of old Sally's offspring; and, Page, you used to play with those pigs when they were little as though they were kittens. I have no doubt all of the litter would recognize you. When we begin to sentimentalize about our food, we had better 'open our mouths and shut our eyes,' as there is no telling to what lengths it may lead us."

"But, Doctor, you know 'Pigs is pigs,'" broke in Mr. Tucker, and the discussion ended with a laugh.

After dinner the gentlemen made another excursion across the river but came back without having seen even a deer track. They got a few partridges, however, and some rabbits and were content. We started home through the pine forest a very happy, merry party.

Mr. Reginald Kent stuck closer than a brother to Dum's side, and Mr. Tucker, who was walking with me, and I overheard this conversation between the infatuated young New Yorker and the ingenuous Dum:

"Do you know, Miss Dum, you looked like Diana when you stood on that rock and aimed at the deer? I wanted to paint you awfully bad and did

click the camera on you. I hope you don't mind."

"Oh, no, I don't mind if it will help you any in your advertising. Are you going to put me in the 'lasses ad, too?"

"Oh, now, Miss Dum, quit your kidding! You know I didn't mean I wanted to paint you for advertising, I meant for myself." And then Dum blushed.

Mr. Tucker frowned. He evidently did not relish his girls getting old enough to be talked to that way.

"Miss Dum, will you do me a great favor?" continued Mr. Kent. "I want more than anything in the world a lock of your hair. It is the most wonderful hair I have ever seen. Sometimes it looks black, and then in another light it is almost red. When it came down while you were aiming at the deer, it was like copper in the sun. Please give me just a little lock to take back to New York with me."

"I am afraid Zebedee would not like for me to cut my hair," answered Dum primly. "But I tell you," she added generously, "I can save you the combings, if you would like them."

Mr. Reginald Kent looked rather nonplused and Mr. Tucker handed me his gun to hold while he rolled in the leaves for very joy. As we were bringing up the rear, nobody saw this pantomime but me, and I was as glad as Dum's father that she was not going to be grown up for a while yet.

Mr. Kent was to go back to New York on the following day; in a little more than a week Dum would be in boarding school; and it would of necessity be many a day before the two could meet again. Perhaps the next time they do meet, Dum will have grown to the age when she will know that to offer a young man combings in lieu of a lock is not conducive to romance.

CHAPTER XIX.

A VISIT TO RICHMOND.

Those were certainly three mad, merry days I spent in Richmond with the Tuckers. Poor Father had to go to Cousin Park Garnett's and he just hated it. But he had promised her that the first time he went to Richmond he would stay at her house, and stay he had to.

The Tuckers met us at the station in little Henry Ford. It had been only a few days since they had been with us at Bracken, but we had much to talk about and a great deal of news to exchange.

"Father is having the deer skin tanned to make a rug for our room at Gresham, and the antlers are to be mounted for a hat-rack," exclaimed Dum.

"Sally Winn tried to die last night, and I drove over to Milton with Father, and Jo told me he thought you, Dee, were the most sensible lady he had ever met," I managed to get in.

"He promised me a pointer pup; I hope he won't forget it. Brindle had a fight yesterday and is all bunged up from it. I know you are dying to meet Brindle," said Dee.

"No doubt she is pining away for that honor," teased Mr. Tucker, "but don't you think she could wait until after luncheon? How about it, Miss Page?"

"Well, if Brindle can stand it, I fancy I can," said I. And so we went to a delightful restaurant, where we had a scrumptious luncheon (I know no other word to express it): Lynhaven oysters on the deep shell; Hampton spots so beautifully cooked that it must have made them glad to be caught and fried; shoestring potatoes vying with the fish in charm; Waldorf salad, with everything in it but the kitchen stove, as Dee declared.

Cousin Park was not expecting Father until the afternoon, so he was spared to us for a little while, much to his delight and ours.

"Now, what shall we have for dessert?" asked our genial host. "Tweedles always wants pie,—cocoanut, as a rule."

"Pink ice cream for me," said Father. "Did you ever see a country Jake that didn't want pink ice cream as soon as he hit the city?"

"What seasoning?" laughed Mr. Tucker.

"I don't care, just so it's pink."

"I believe I'll have what Father has. I like it pink, too."

"Well, cocoanut pie for mine," ordered Dum.

"And lemon meringue for mine," ordered Dee.

"You are not like the young man who never ate lemon meringue pie because it messed up his ears so, are you, Dee?" said Mr. Tucker; and so our gay little luncheon proceeded.

"My, how I hate to go to Cousin Park's!" sighed Father. "She is kind in a way, but so—so—ponderous."

"Poor Father!" and I patted his knee under the table, "I do wish you didn't have to go."

"Well, I have plenty of engagements that will keep me busy, and I won't have to do much more than eat and sleep there. But it is her long formal dinners that bore me so."

"Well, you have simply got to have dinner with us to-morrow, Saturday, evening at the Country Club, and no doubt these girls will have you fox-trotting before the evening is over," and Mr. Tucker would not take "No" for an answer,—not that Father was very persistent in his refusal. We dropped the dear man at Cousin Park's great, dark house and he had the look of "Give up all hope ye who enter here."

The Tuckers had a very attractive apartment in a large, new, up-to-date building, but I could fancy the havoc that Dum and Dee caused whenever they resorted to the gloves to settle their disputes. The place was so full of nicknacks that one could hardly turn around. There were really enough of what Mammy Susan called "doodads" to decorate a mansion, and all of these things were crowded into a not very large apartment. Some of the

things were very beautiful and all of them were interesting, but if they belonged to me I would pack about half of them away in storage.

I thought of a colored woman in the country who lived in a very small cabin with six little children falling over her feet all the time, and she used to pray fervently, "Oh, Gawd, gimme grace not ter git so pestered dat I'll throw ary one er dem out do's." I am afraid I would have been so pestered with all of the doodads that I would surely have thrown some of them outdoors.

"Miss Page, I have been trying to persuade Tweedles to help me to get rid of some of the mess in these rooms," said Mr. Tucker, almost as though he had read my mind. "I feel the stuffiness of it even more since our visit at Bracken." That was it, the simplicity of Bracken had spoiled me for overcrowded rooms.

"But Zebedee, everything we want to get rid of is just the thing you think most of, and the things that you think superfluous are our special treasures," complained Dum.

"Well, I am afraid we'll have to wait until you get some kind of education, and then, if stocks is riz, we'll move into a house big enough to spread out in."

Their rugs were beautiful and their pictures I have since found out were very fine. At that time, however, they did not seem very good to me. The taste in art of a fifteen-year-old girl who has seen next to no pictures is not to be relied upon; and no doubt my taste was abominable.

Brindle took me to his heart and made me perfectly at home. He was a bow-legged, brindle bull with undershot jaw and eyes like damson jam. Dee loved him next to Zebedee and Dum; and I know cried herself to sleep many a night at boarding school, longing for her pet. He was certainly a very human person, or rather dog, I should say, and ruled the Tuckers with a rod of iron. He actually made Mr. Tucker get out of a chair that he, Brindle, had taken a fancy to, and he curled himself up on the seat with a haughty sniff that made us scream with laughter, until Dee insisted that we control our merriment, as Brindle did not like to be laughed at.

"It is his one fault," she said; "he has not a very keen sense of humor."

"He has one other, Dee," said Mr. Tucker; "he does smell like a dog, you must admit." Dee had to admit it, but declared she thought a dog should smell like a dog and not like a tuberose; so the discussion ended.

We took in the movies that afternoon. I don't know how many of them, but it was great fun.

"Zebedee won't usually let us go without him," said Dee, "but he thinks you are dignified enough to hold us down."

"Me—dignified? Why, father thinks I am as wild as a March hare!"

"Well, Zebedee says you know when to be quiet. Zebedee likes you a lot, Page," declared Dum. "If you weren't exactly what you are, Dee and I would be awfully jealous of you. What you blushing about?" Such a double-barreled compliment would make an old pair of leather saddle bags blush; and a girl of my thin skin naturally took on a rosy hue, that Dee declared put me out of the chaperone class.

That evening we went to a vaudeville performance. Mr. Tucker's newspaper connection gave him the *entrée* anywhere in the house, so we were very grand in box seats. A particularly amusing black-faced artist was giving a song-and-dance when Dee exclaimed:

"Look up there in the balcony!" And what should we see but Father's dear old lean, solemn face convulsed with merriment. Zebedee—I mean Mr. Tucker—went up and made him join us.

"How did you escape Cousin Park?" I asked.

"Oh, she thinks I am in solemn conclave with some of my professional brethren! I didn't exactly tell a lie, but I acted one. It was either that or burst a blood vessel. You know my Cousin Park, do you not, Mr. Tucker?"

"Y-e-s, I know her, but she never seems to know me. With Mrs. Garnett, one must have either plenty of very blue blood or more than plenty of very yellow gold. I've got blue blood to burn, but no yellow gold, as you know. There must be something radically wrong with me in her eyes. What it is, I don't know; nor do I much care. I was very fond of her husband. Major Peyton Garnett was a good friend to me. I admired him immensely."

"Yes, the Major was a fine old gentleman," said father. He afterward told me that one reason he had to escape from Cousin Park's presence or break a blood vessel was that she had so many unkind things to say of Mr. Jeffry Tucker, the old croaker that she was! "I am sorry for you, Page, but you are in for a Sunday dinner at Cousin Park's." I groaned in agonized anticipation. "I couldn't get out of it for you, my child, she made such a point of it. She is our kinswoman, and we have to show her some respect."

"Well, thank goodness, this time I don't have to go to the dentist's, too! The combination of Cousin Park and the dentist is a strong one, I can tell you. If you can stand her, Father, I reckon I can."

"That's my good girl," said Father, patting my shoulder, and Mr. Tucker gave me a warm and friendly glance and said:

"Tweedles and I will see that you get there late and come away early."

It seems to me I laughed more at that vaudeville performance than anybody in the theater. I had seen very few shows in my life, and everything was new and fresh to me. I was not bored even by the strong man who seemed to be so tiresome to the audience, and no joke was too much of a chestnut to be scorned by me. To have Father with us, too, made my cup of happiness full to the brim.

The next evening, Saturday, we had dinner at the Country Club, and stayed for the dance afterward. The Country Club was a beautiful building with spacious grounds, golf links, tennis courts, and a view of the James River that appealed to me very much. The dinner was fine, and Father and I had a splendid time.

"I am glad to escape all the meals I can at the apartment house café," confessed Mr. Tucker. "When Tweedles are away, I eat anywhere but at home."

"You are an extravagant piece," said Dee.

"But I have my regular meals served for Brindle," laughed Mr. Tucker.

"Oh, that alters the case, then!" exclaimed Dee. "Brindle should have just as good food as people, with a variety of vegetables."

What a ballroom floor they had at that clubhouse! I had never danced, as I said before, until I went to school, but I had been an apt pupil because I was such an eager one, and now knew enough of the modern dances to get along very well. I had never in my life danced with a man. At school we took turns guiding, and I was much sought after because of my being so untiring.

"Miss Page, you are the guest of honor and I am the host, so it is in order that you give me this first dance." And Mr. Jeffry Tucker bowed in front of me as though I were a great society belle.

The Tuckers were all born dancers, and as I glided away with Mr. Tucker, I remembered what Miss Jane Cox had said about his leading the germans at the University with his little sweetheart Virginia, afterward his wife. A great wave of pity for the poor little dead wife swept over me, and I came very near missing step in a rather intricate dance we were attempting. It must have been so sad to die and leave such a delightful husband and the twins, who were such charming girls that they must have been cunning little babies. What a vigorous presence was Jeffry Tucker's! He must have been a lover that any girl would have been happy with. I hoped if I ever did have a lover that he would be the kind that I fancied Mr. Tucker must have been. Something made me blush as my thoughts dwelt on my ever having a lover.

"My, what a color dancing gives you!" exclaimed my partner. "A minute ago you looked so sad I wondered what you were thinking of, and now you are as rosy as the dawn."

"'It is darkest just before dawn,' you know," I answered. I wondered what he would have said had he known what I was thinking of when I looked so sad. And then a strange thing happened, and the kind of thing has happened very often in my life when I have been with Mr. Tucker: he took up my thoughts almost as though he had read them and said:

"I was thinking of my little girl wife, Virginia. I so often think of her when I dance. She and I danced our youth away. She was a wonderful dancer. She had the same smooth glide that you have. I hate a hoppy dancer," and with his usual disregard of appearances he wiped his eyes in which the big tears had gathered. I did feel so sorry for him, I actually had the hardihood to pat him on the shoulder where my left hand rested, but I

could not say anything to him, I felt so choky. The sun came out in a very few moments, however, and he smiled into my eyes, and we finished the dance without ever losing a step. I know Mr. Jeffry Tucker is the only person in the world who could cry and dance at the same time. His tears were sincere, too, quite as sincere as his dancing, and he certainly put his whole soul into every step he took.

"Miss Page, you have been mighty good to Tweedles. I don't know how to thank you for it," he said, as the music stopped and left us stranded across the ballroom from Father and the twins, also, who had been dancing with some college boys, home for the holidays.

"Me good to them! Why, they are good to me, as good as gold!"

"Oh, I know what you have done for them. They control themselves so much better than they used to and are so much more considerate in every way. I see your influence at every turn. They haven't had a fight since they came home and actually listen when I talk, whether I have anything to say or not." I had to laugh at this. I had really made the girls come to their senses about fighting when they disagreed. Even with gloves on, it was a very boisterous way of settling disputes; and we had a rule at 117 Carter Hall, instituted by me, that a fine of one penny was imposed when any of us interrupted, unless the speaker had had the floor out of all reason.

We found the girls enthusiastic over the dancing, and Father having as good a time as any of us. It was his first experience in seeing the much written and talked-of new dances, and he was greatly interested.

"Why, daughter, you dance beautifully!" he said fondly, as I squeezed in by him. "If you have learned as much Latin and French at Gresham as you have dancing, you will be a highly-educated young woman."

"Well, I can't promise that," I laughed; "but I know how to conjugate 'to dance' both in Latin and French."

"Well, to be able to conjugate as well as dance means you are becoming very erudite. That is a very pretty step that Dum has been taking. Is that the fox-trot? It looks easy, too."

"It is easy, Doctor Allison," answered Dum, "and now they are going to dance it again. Come on and try!" And to the delight and astonishment of all of us, Father was on the floor with Dum fox-trotting with a precision that made us know he had been watching the dancers very carefully and had been mentally dancing for some time. I know he had not danced for at least sixteen years, but, like Miss Jane Cox, once a dancer, always a dancer.

"This is more fun than Gresham," whispered Dee to me, when we stopped to rest a minute between dances. The college students had been very attentive and the twins and I had danced every dance. Who should come rushing up to us at this moment but Mabel Binks! She embraced us noisily, and one would have thought we were her long-lost sisters. We were coldly polite, but she overlooked our want of cordiality and fastened herself on to us. There was nothing for us but to introduce her to Father and Mr. Tucker and the young men who had been dancing attendance on us. That was what she wanted, and the dead set she made at Mr. Tucker showed what she considered big game. The festive Mabel, who lived in Newport News, was stopping in Richmond for a few days on her way back to Gresham. She was visiting an old cousin who, she volubly explained, was too selfish to do anything for her pleasure. She had with difficulty persuaded her to bring her to the Country Club, and now they were there the cousin either wouldn't or couldn't introduce her to any men.

"I can just shift for myself, I'll let her know!" the dashing girl exclaimed. "The wall is not meant for me to hold up, and if no one will ask me to dance, I'll get out and do a *pas seul*!"

"I should like to see that *pas seul*, but first will you do me the extreme honor to dance this with me?" said Mr. Tucker, with mock grandiloquence.

"Dee-lighted!" gushed Mabel, and was soon engaged in a boisterous hopping match with Mr. Tucker.

"I could kill Zebedee!" said Dum through clenched teeth. "I believe that Binks thing came through Richmond with the hope of meeting him, and here he tumbles at the first shot and goes off dancing with her as though it —— Oh, I can't talk about it, it makes me so furious. Look how they are romping, too! I dare Dee or me to romp that way."

I could but recall the views Mr. Tucker had so recently expressed to me about dancers who hopped, and here he was jumping around like a hen on a hot griddle, and as far as I could see, enjoying himself very much. I sympathized with Dum; while I did not feel called upon to get into a rage and clench my teeth, I was a little disappointed in my kind host. I felt very young and shy all of a sudden. Mabel, as she triumphantly bore off the prize, had in a most condescending way tossed me her handkerchief and gloves with a "Here, child, hold these for me!" That I would not do. The heavy smell of musk that hung around all of Mabel's belongings sickened me; and why should she make a catch-all of me, anyhow? I put them down disdainfully on a chair, meeting with Dum's hearty approval by my act, and then had a nice quiet dance with Father, who proved to be as good a partner as one could want.

CHAPTER XX.

DINNER AT COUSIN PARK'S.

Sunday dawned and with it the consciousness that I had to go through the ordeal of dinner with Cousin Park. Oh, how I hated the thought of it! We had slept late after the unusual hours we had kept the night before, and Mr. Tucker had kindly had our breakfast sent up from the café.

"That's to make up for treating us the way he did last night," said Dum, buttering her cakes as she sat up in bed.

"Treating us what way?" inquired Dee.

"Dancing with that Binks abomination. He knew he had no business to do it."

"Why, Dum," I said, determined to cool her down if possible, "I don't really see how Mr. Tucker could have done otherwise. A schoolmate who from all appearances is devoted to his daughters, joins our group and lets it be known that she is dying to dance, indeed is thinking of dancing alone. Why, there was no way for a gentleman to behave than just exactly as Zeb —I mean Mr. Tucker—did behave. I would have been pleased if my Father had done exactly as yours did, and I believe Father would if her innuendos had been addressed to him."

"Well, Doctor Allison would never have hopped as Zebedee did. What I hate to think about is the way that girl is going to tell all the girls at school about our handsome young Father and how he devoted himself to her. I bet she comes here to-day on some pretext or other."

"Well, I'll sic Brindle on her if she does. He can't stand cats!" hissed Dee, who was becoming worked up by Dum's evident passion.

"Well, I'll tell you one thing: the ruder you are to Mabel the more polite your Father will be; and the more polite you are, the more indifferent Mr.

Tucker will be," I admonished.

"How did you get so wise, old Solomon?" asked Dum, in rather muffled tones through a mouthful of flannel cakes.

"Why, Mammy Susan says, 'Men folks an' mules is moughty sim'lar; jes' nachally contrary-wise. Ef yer want 'em ter go ter de mill, make out dey's got ter stay in de parsture, an' jes' ter spite yer dey'll run all de way ter de mill.'"

"Well, we'll make out Zebedee has got to go to the mill and he'll want to stay in the pasture. Mabel Binks is more like a mill than a pasture," said Dum, rather taken with my philosophy.

"Yes, and 'All is grist that comes to her mill,' too," declared Dee. "I am going to try the plan on Zebedee this minute," and she bounced up and donning slippers and kimono went in to the living room where Mr. Tucker was deep in the Sunday paper. She left the door slightly ajar and Dum and I could plainly hear the conversation.

"Good morning, Zebedee," and the sound of a hearty kiss. "It was awfully good of you to have breakfast sent up to us. We did not mean to oversleep."

"Glad to do it, Tweedledeedles. I thought all of you would be tired after tripping the light fantastic toe almost into Sunday morning."

"Say, Zebedee, Page has to go to her Cousin Park's to dinner to-day, so don't you think it would be nice to have Mabel Binks to dinner with us?"

Dum gasped and started to rush into the sitting room, without the formality of a kimono, but I grabbed her and with a warning finger quieted her.

"Oh, come now, Dee, I should think you and Dum would be content to spend your last Sunday at home quietly with your poor old lonesome Zebedee. I can't see what you want with Miss Binks. She is much older than you, Tweedles, and not a bit the kind of person I should encourage you to have as an intimate. I get the names of your schoolmates mixed, but wasn't

she the girl you wrote me was so purse-proud and unfeeling in her treatment of that nice ladylike little girl from Price's Landing?"

"Ye—s, but I thought you liked her pretty well last night."

"Why, I never gave her a thought! She so plainly asked me to dance with her that I had to do it; but that was all. She is showily handsome and amusing enough in the daring way in which she talks, but nay, nay, not for me!"

More sounds of kissing, and then: "Now run on and all of you get dressed in a hurry so we can take a nice spin with Henry Ford and go to church before Miss Page has to be delivered over to the Dragon."

"What's that smell, Zebedee? The hall is reeking with a terrible odor," asked Dee, sniffing suspiciously.

"I can't imagine. I was afraid you and Dum and Miss Page had gone in for musk. The whole apartment is permeated with it." Dee went out into the little hall connecting the girls' bedroom with the living room and poked around the hatrack, where the odor seemed to be strongest.

"Here it is," she cried, "in your overcoat pocket!"

"Oh, that wretched girl's gloves! She asked me to hold them for her just before we left the club, and I must have put them in my pocket. Hang 'em outside the bathroom window. That smell is enough to make all of us faint. Please turn my pocket inside out, so it can air."

"What did I tell you?" and Dee burst into the bedroom, waving the smelly gloves as she came; "the minx made Zebedee keep her gloves just so she could get around here. We'd better dress in a hurry so we can be ready to receive her. She might eat up poor Zebedee without his knowing what got him," and she scornfully hung the offensive kids out the bathroom window.

Mabel Binks did come before Dum and I were quite dressed, but Dee was installed in the living room waiting for her with Brindle at her side ready to sic on Mabel if she showed signs of walking off with the handsome young father.

"Oh, you naughty man, I am almost sure you purloined my gloves last night!" we heard her say, in her loud and strident tones. "I thought I would stop in on the way to church to get them."

"Yes, he did hook them from you," said Dum, making her appearance like a whirlwind. "Zebedee is great on that. He steals girls' gloves all the time and gives them to Dee and me. We never have to buy any. All the girls get him to hold their gloves for them and then he brings them home to us and we divide them up. Here yours are. Zebedee did not know whose they were, but we recognized the perfume you are so fond of. They are too big for us, so we were not going to row over them." Mr. Tucker sat dumfounded during this tirade of Dum's, and as for me, I had to dive back in the room from which I was emerging to get my countenance straightened out.

Dee buried her nose in Brindle's neck and made such a funny little noise trying to keep back her laughter that Brindle growled and wrinkled up his neck in a most ominous manner. Mabel took the gloves, and for once her aplomb deserted her. She beat a hasty retreat with good-bys that were scarcely audible.

I fully expected that Mr. Tucker would admonish Dum for the ridiculous fabrication of which she had been guilty, but he seemed to forget all about the behavior befitting a parent, and caught us by the hand and in a moment we were dancing the Lobster Quadrille and singing lustily, "Will you, won't you, won't you, will you, will you join the dance?"

"Now hurry up and get on your hats and jackets and we will speed little Henry Ford to church." And off we went in a Christian frame of mind and at peace with the whole world, especially Dum, who had scored heavily over the detested Mabel.

The hour for dinner at Cousin Park's had at last come. How slowly I walked up the broad stone steps leading to her fine house! The same lugubrious butler opened the door that had performed that office when I visited Cousin Park on that other memorable occasion. He had the air of one who is letting in the mourners. I involuntarily glanced at the door bell to see if by any chance crêpe could be hanging from it.

This butler's appropriate name was Jeremiah, and he was what is known as "a blue-gum nigger." I smiled when I greeted him, and for a moment he showed his blue gums in a vain attempt at cheerfulness, but he quickly subsided into his habitual gloom. I recalled what Mammy Susan had said to me many a time. "Be mighty keerful, honey; don' nebber cross a blue-gum nigger, fer de bite er one is rank pizen and sho death."

Cousin Park was seated in state in her ugly, handsome, oiled-walnut parlor. The room was of noble proportions and might have been pretty, but Cousin Park had happened to marry the genial Major at the period when oiled walnut was the prevailing style, and her whole life had been built on the oiled-walnut basis ever since. Her costly velvet carpets still came right to the edge of the floor and were snugly tacked close to the baseboard. No hardwood floors and rugs for her.

The heavy furniture was deeply carved, and if the unwary visitor forgot himself for a moment and attempted to lounge in his chair he was quickly brought to a sense of propriety by a carved pineapple getting him between his shoulders or maybe a bunch of grapes striking him in the small of his back. I usually tried to sit on the horsehair sofa. Long practice in riding bareback had given me a poise that enabled me to be very comfortable seated thus without sliding off. The pictures were hung close up to the ceiling according to the style in vogue in times gone by. They were mostly dark portraits in heavy gilt frames and they glared down at you as though they resented your intrusion into their mausoleum.

Father was seated forward in his chair, trying to avoid the pineapple, and on his face was an expression like that of a little boy who has been taken to church and fears every minute to be questioned as to the text. I rather expected our stern relative to tell him to go wash his hands for dinner. He jumped up and hugged me enthusiastically, and I felt ashamed that I had hated so to come. Cousin Park gave me an upholstered embrace and I made for the horsehair sofa, that seemed friendly and yielding in comparison with Cousin Park.

"Well, so you have torn yourself away from those Tuckers long enough to do your duty, have you?" I scented a battle from afar, but determined to

be good and not say anything to make my cousin angry. No doubt she was hungry and would be more agreeable as soon as dinner was announced.

"It is kind of you to ask me to dinner, Cousin Park, and I am glad to come," I meekly replied. And thinking maybe it would be tactful to change the subject, I said to Father: "How do you feel after dancing last night?"

"Fine, daughter; I never had such a good time in my life."

"Cousin James! You—dancing! You are surely jesting—you—you—a man of your age!"

"Oh, I'm not so awfully old, Cousin Park! There were men on the floor ten years older than I am—bank presidents, eminent surgeons, and several judges, all dancing the new dances with the utmost abandon."

"Well, where on earth did you learn the new dances, Cousin James?"

"Well, I never saw them danced before, so it must have been by a correspondence course." And Father winked at me.

The sepulchral butler came in to announce dinner just at this crucial moment when his irate mistress looked as though she would burst her tight black satin basque in which she had been so compactly hooked. He quavered in a sad voice: "Dinner is served," but his tone reminded me of Jeremiah, Chapter IX, first verse: "Oh, that my head were waters and mine eyes a fountain of tears that I might weep day and night!"

The dining room was one degree more cheerful than the parlor, as instead of the portraits there were Audubon prints and the Marriage of Pocahontas. A heavy walnut sideboard laden with massive silver almost filled one side of the room. The table was precisely set and the food may have been good, but everything was so ponderous, including the hostess, that when we got through with the long tiresome courses I felt like the old wolf that Mammy Susan used to tell about. He swallowed seven little kids whole and then, while he slept by the water's edge, the Widow Goat came and ripped him open, took out the dear little kids and put in their place seven huge stones. The old wolf was naturally thirsty after this surgical operation, and so was I when I had packed in and hammered down roast chicken, boiled hominy, mashed potatoes, baked rice, macaroni and I don't

know what besides, except that we topped off with a plum pudding that was the last straw.

I longed for sleep with an intensity that was truly painful, and I could see that poor dear Father was desperate. The conversation at the table was as heavy and starchy as the food. Father and I could not help comparing it to the gay little dinner we had enjoyed the night before at the Country Club.

Dum looked at me aghast. "Page, you here, and Dee!"—Page 271.

Cousin Park's manner was always dictatorial, even when she was the visitor instead of the hostess, and on that day she seemed to think she was born to boss the Universe. She picked on me most of the time and I let her do it, knowing Father must have had his share of correction, but when she began on my friends, the darling Tuckers, I got a little restive. Mammy Susan always told me: "Don't sass old folks till dey fust sass you," and I began to feel that old folks were sassing me considerably. I smiled to myself, remembering that Mr. Tucker had told me that when the Major died, at his funeral they sang "Peace, perfect peace," and the pall bearers themselves could hardly keep from grinning to think what a far from peaceful time the poor Major had had on earth.

Father came to my rescue when our masterful cousin finally sprung this mine on us: "I am astonished, Cousin James, that you should have no more

sense of propriety than to let Page visit that Jeffry Tucker without a chaperon."

"Why, Cousin Park, you astonish me! Page is visiting Mr. Tucker's daughters, her schoolmates. They are all three very young to have a question of propriety brought up."

"I don't care, a woman is never too young or too old to be made the subject of gossip," and Cousin Park creaked ominously.

"Well, that being the case, I think it is highly improper and imprudent for me to be visiting you, unless we can look upon Jeremiah as a chaperon."

And Cousin Park, knowing herself to be worsted, sighed a great, heaving sigh and looked sadly at the Major's portrait, as though if he had been alive he would have protected her.

How glad we were to hear the toot of Henry Ford and to know that our time in purgatory was over. The fresh air took away that awful drowsiness, and the cheerful talk of the Tuckers as we spun out into the country made us forget the deadly conversation we had been forced to be a party to. Father had an engagement for supper with a medical brother, and he was to go back to Bracken the next day.

"Blood may be thicker than water," he said. "In fact, to-day it was so thick you couldn't stir it, but never again do I intend to make a visit at Cousin Park Garnett's. Why, I feel as though that blue-gum nigger had bitten me."

CHAPTER XXI.

THE DESPERATION OF DUM.

Back at Gresham and trying to get into harness! Some of us kicked over the traces, feeling our oats, as it were; and Dum got the bit between her teeth and came very near running all the way home before we could stop her.

It was hard to get into what Mr. Mantilini calls "the demnition grind" after three weeks of untrammeled freedom. The whole school seemed restive and the teachers were not much better than the pupils. Miss Peyton had to drive her coach very carefully. Her infinite tact showed itself constantly. A word of warning here, a slight tightening of the reins there, just a little tap to the ones who seemed inclined to laziness, and soon we were trotting along the road of knowledge just as though we had not been kicking up our heels in the green pastures. All but Dum, she could not get back to work.

"If the year were only half over, but it's only the middle of January now! We've got months and months to wait before we see Zebedee again. When we once get into February, I can stand it better. I can't and won't study, and as for demerits—let 'em give me all they want to. Let 'em put me in bounds. I don't want to go off of the old place. What fun is it to walk down into that dinky little village keeping step like convicts? I'd rather have striped clothes like convicts than these old stupid blue things. There is some variety in stripes but this eternal, and everlasting dark blue—ugh! I hate it!"

"But, Dum," I expostulated, "if you get so many demerits you will not only be in bounds but you'll have to write pages and pages of dictionary."

"I'll see 'em make me. 'You can lead a horse to water but you cannot make him drink.' They can tell me to write the dictionary all they want to, but I've yet to see the man, woman, or child who can make me write anything. I just won't and that's an end of it."

"But what will your Father think?" I asked, hoping to get on her better side by appealing to her love for her adored Zebedee.

"Think? 'He can think like young niggers think: buckeyes is biscuit.'"

This made me roar, as it was a saying I had told the twins that Mammy Susan had taught me when I was a child. There was no persuading the headstrong Dum. She had the bit between her teeth and she was rushing straight to destruction. She got zero in her classes during the day, and that night in study hall she spent the time making cunning little brownies out of the colored clay she had brought in her pocket. She did not open a book except for the purpose of propping it up on her desk to conceal the little lifelike figures she was so busy modeling.

Dee gazed at her with an agonized expression on her face and I gave her many an appealing glance, but she merely made a face at me and went on with her sculpture. Where was it to end? Zero for that day's lessons and many preceding days; and not a single one prepared for next day. She seemed perfectly careless of the teacher who was keeping study hall, as though she invited reproval; but it so happened that Miss Sears, who was on duty that night, did not seem to notice Dum's behavior. When the study hall was over, the reckless girl picked up all her brownies and carried them carefully on her open book up to her room, right under Miss Sears's nose.

"She must be crazy," whispered Dee to me, "and Miss Sears must be in love or blind or something. She didn't see how Dum was cutting up."

"Well, Dum was certainly reckless. I thought every minute she was going to be called down. You've got to be either good or careful, and Dum was certainly neither."

Miss Sears beckoned to me and I fell back, and the Tuckers went on to 117.

"Page," said Miss Sears, "Miss Peyton is rather worried over Virginia Tucker. Of course I saw how she was conducting herself during study hall, but Miss Peyton has decided the best way to get hold of Dum is to let her alone for a while. The rest of the school is back in working order, but she is as wild as a deer. Miss Peyton asked me to take you into our confidence and see if you can help us some. Will you keep a pretty sharp eye on Dum?"

"You mean tell on her if she gets into scrapes?" I asked, flushing painfully.

"My dear girl, no. You would not be the kind we would go to if we wanted an informer. We want you to try to influence Dum to quiet down, and let her realize that she must get to work. Demerits seem to have no effect on her. I verily believe she enjoys getting as many as she can. You have lots of influence with those girls, and I believe a talk from you would do her more good than being brought up before the faculty," and Miss Sears looked at me very kindly.

"Well, I'll do my best but I can't promise that Dum will listen to me." I did not like to say that I had already done what I could, but I determined to try, try again.

Dum had her brownies ranged in a line on the bureau and under each she had tucked one of her visiting cards, on which she had written something. Dee looked sad and Dum defiant.

"I was just telling Dum," began Dee.

"Never mind what you were telling Dum," interrupted the outrageous girl. "It's none of your business nor is it Page Allison's if I get into scrapes. I reckon I'm old enough to take care of myself without the assistance of persons no older nor wiser than I am."

"So you are, but you owe a penny for interrupting Dee; that's twenty-five cents since the holidays," I said sternly.

"I don't care if I do. I don't intend to pay it. I need my money for other things besides this foolishness."

I looked at Dum in amazement. She and Dee often were rude to each other but in the three months that I had known them, neither one of them had been anything but scrupulously polite to me. I realized that silence would be the better part of valor in this encounter, so I prepared for bed without saying a word. I gave a warning glance at Dee, and she, ever tactful, held her peace. Dum was evidently disappointed, as she was simply "sp'iling for a fight."

We got to bed as lights out bell rang and in a moment everything was perfectly quiet. I did not go to sleep immediately but pondered over what Miss Sears had said. "How can I best help Dum?" I asked myself. I must keep an eye on her and still not let her know it. It was hard to take her rudeness without giving her as good as she sent, but I felt that a real loss of temper on my part would mean an equal loss of influence. I dropped off to sleep with Dum on my mind.

It must have been a little after midnight when I awakened, and something prompted me to glance at Dum's bed. It was a bright night, the moon not full, but big enough to make everything in the room visible. A light snow was on the ground, which aided the lighting powers of the moon by reflection.

Dum's bed was empty. Her nightgown was on the floor and her clothes which I had seen her throw on the chair near her bed were gone. I got up in an excitement that made my heart go like a trip hammer and found her hat and jacket gone, too. "Dee, Dee," I said in as quiet a voice as I could command, "Dum is gone!"

"Gone! Gone where?" said poor sleepy Dee.

"I don't know, but it is up to us to find out. Get into your clothes as fast as you can. I don't believe she has been gone long, her bed is so warm."

I had felt it as soon as I jumped out of mine. Dee shuddered at this announcement of mine. She said afterward it sounded like the report of a coroner's inquest.

Fire engine horses could not have sprung into their harness quicker than Dee and I did into our clothes. In a twinkling we were wrapped in our warm sweaters and had donned hats and rubbers, the last not only because of the snow but to deaden our footsteps down the long corridors. I got ready a moment sooner than Dee and I struck a match and read one of the cards Dum had stuck under the little clay brownies: "To Miss Peyton as a parting token of appreciation of her discipline." I gasped with astonishment. Dum was crazy surely, perfectly daft.

"What is on the card?" asked Dee anxiously.

"Oh, just some of Dum's nonsense! Hurry!" I did not think I had better tell Dee. It sounded like a last farewell.

We found the front door unlocked. She had certainly gone out recently, as the watchman made his rounds every hour and it was then 12:20 by the big clock in the hall. I know the wisest thing for us to have done would have been to warn the watchman and let Miss Peyton know, but somehow I felt that we could cope with Dum by ourselves; and I also knew that the offense that Dum was guilty of was a very serious one and might mean that she would be expelled from Gresham.

"The moon on the breast of the new-fallen snow,
Gave a luster of midday to objects below."

So, thank goodness, the prints of Dum's tennis shoes were quite plain to us. I was relieved to see that they went toward the village. I had had a nameless fear of the lake. On we sped! Once we saw where poor Dum had evidently paused and then turned back for a few yards. That encouraged me more than anything we had found out yet. She was softening and relenting.

"What do you suppose she means to do, Page?" panted Dee.

"She is trying to make that 12:40 train to Richmond. There she is!"

We had turned a sharp corner and there about a hundred yards ahead of us was Dum. She had almost reached the crossing where Captain Leahy had his unique abode. One minute more would land her at the station, and already we could hear the far-off whizzing of the approaching express. There was a light in the little gatehouse and just at that moment the dear old man emerged and began to let down his gate.

"Well, Saints preserve us! And what maid travels so late? Why, if she isn't one of the sponsors of Oliver." Dum stopped stockstill in the road.

"Captain Leahy, I'm going to take that midnight train to Richmond. Will you flag it for me?"

"And sure I'll do anything to please the ladies, but aren't ye young and tinder to be after taking such a thrip at this toime o' night?"

"But I have to go. I could never go back to Gresham now, and it would be best for me to go straight to my Father."

Dee and I had advanced silently, thanks to our rubber shoes, and we now came up behind the old Irishman and Dum.

"Come on, Dum, you can get back to Gresham before the watchman makes his one o'clock rounds if you hurry."

Dum looked at me aghast. "Page, you here, and Dee!"

"Where should I be but with my twin? We have never spent a night apart yet, Dumplingdeedledums." Dee's tact had won the day. That was Mr. Tucker's pet name for Dum, and Dee using it at such a time brought Dum to her senses. "What would Zebedee think and say of this escapade?" was what came to Dum's mind.

"Good-night, Captain, I reckon I won't go to Richmond to-night. We'll have to hurry to get in before one. That's the 12:40 now whistling for the crossing." And before the old man could get his breath, we had scurried away over the light fall of snow like so many rabbits.

It was uphill most of the way back to Gresham, but we made short work of it. If I had not been so desperately afraid the watchman would discover that the front door was unlocked before we got back and perhaps raise an alarm, I would have enjoyed our run immensely. The moon went behind a great black cloud, but we knew our way well enough not to be dependent on her light. Not one word did we speak, but saved our breath for this real fox-trot.

At the school at last! I tried the great door, almost afraid to breathe. It yielded to my push and we were in the dark hall. I had just sense enough left to lock the door, and then we flew up the steps and were safe in our room without having encountered the watchman.

"Quick work!" I gasped, falling on my bed. "Down to the station and back in forty minutes!"

But safety was not ours yet. We heard a door open down the corridor and light-slippered steps approaching 117.

"In bed with you, quick!" exclaimed Dum; and without the formality of night dresses, we jumped into bed, only taking the precaution to remove our hats. Diving under the covers with only our noses sticking out, we were to all appearances as lost to the world as the seven sleepers.

It was a teacher who had evidently heard a suspicious noise and had come out to investigate. She stopped a minute in front of our door and then gently turned the knob. "All quiet along the Potomac!" She stood a minute listening to Dum's "gently taken breath" and Dee's lifelike snore, and then quietly retired on tiptoe; and in a moment we heard her door close at the end of the corridor. If we got dressed like engine horses going to a fire, we got undressed like boys seeing who can get into the swimming hole first.

Dum kissed us both good-night, or rather good-morning, but said never a word about what her intentions had been nor the reasons for her flitting. We were asleep in a minute and the next morning I had to pinch myself to see if it had not been a dream. Our damp skirts and overshoes and each girl's hat under her bed was all that made me realize that we had been on that mad chase at midnight after the irrepressible Dum.

"Girls, you are both bricks!" exclaimed Dum, rubbing her eyes as the relentless rising bell tolled out. "Just think! If you had not come for me, I would have been in Richmond by this time and poor old Zebedee disgraced for life. There is nothing I can do to make it up to you——"

"Yes, there is," chorused Dee and me, "get to work again."

"I wasn't quite through what I was saying, but I am not going to impose the fine that you owe for interrupting, and I am going to pay my fine that amounts to a quarter now. I was awfully ashamed of not paying it last night, but you see I just did have enough money to get me to Richmond if I traveled on a day coach, so I had to let my debts of honor slide. I have been a bad, rude, unreasonable girl and I am just as sorry as I can be. I deserve to be expelled.

I don't know what has been the matter
with me but I believe I have been getting ready to go to the home for the criminally insane. I hated the school; I hated the teachers; I hated lessons and rules; I just wanted Zebedee. He was the only person I wanted and I wanted him so bad I was just going to have him." Dum got out one of the

gentlemen's handkerchiefs that she and Dee used and wept copiously. "Do you reckon we'll be found out?"

"Not a bit of it," I reassured her. "The blessed snow that was in that black cloud hiding the moon last night has covered up all our rabbit tracks, and when we take our walk this afternoon I am going to slip out of line long enough to warn Captain Leahy not to tell on us. Now, Dum, you get back to bed and stay there all day. I am going to tell Miss Peyton you don't feel quite up to snuff, which is certainly so. You jump in and study all your back lessons that you have missed and catch up with your classes. It will take a day of diligent work to do it because you have loafed ever since we got back to school, and by to-morrow morning you will feel reconciled to life and take your place again."

"Well, that would be kind of pleasant, but bring me up enough breakfast, 'cause I am not too ill to eat; and before you go down, hand me those brownies I made last night," and Dum reduced the inoffensive little works of art to Limbo with one squeeze of her hand. "I was leaving one of them for each teacher. I wanted to make them into devils but thought maybe that would be a little too sassy. I don't feel a bit that way now. I may model some angels to-day if I can get time after I have mastered all my back work."

Miss Peyton was easily persuaded by me that a day in bed would restore Dum to health and reason. She said she had hoped I could do something with the refractory twin and she was going to trust to me, since I was a doctor's daughter and no doubt had inherited some skill as a healer.

That afternoon, when we took our walk, Dee and I got permission from the teacher in charge to stop a moment at the crossing, presumably to call on Oliver and see how much he had grown.

"Captain Leahy," I cried, "you won't tell anyone about our being down here last night, will you?"

"And phwat do ye take me for?" he asked. "Didn't I see that ye were after saving the little twinlet and that she was crazy with homesickness? I mind too well the time many years ago when I got off of that very express just as Miss Peyton, then a wee slip of a maid, was after boarding it; and I

took her by the hand and led her back to Gresham, she weeping bitterly all the toime. She was half mad for the sight of her folks and had run away from school."

"Miss Peyton!" we exclaimed in one breath. "Not Miss Peyton, the principal?"

"The same," he answered; "and this is the first toime, so help me, that I have mintioned it to a livin' sowl."

"Well, we'll never tell, Captain," I said, grasping his hand.

"And don't I know that? Would I be divulging the loiks to ye if I did not know the stoof ye are made of? I just tell ye so ye can know that I'll keep the little twinlet's secret as long as I have Miss Peyton's. If I iver tell it, it will be when she cannot be hurt by it, and some other poor little lamb can be oop-lifted."

"You want us to tell Dum, don't you?" asked Dee.

"For sure! And all of you come have tea with me soon and bring Miss Peyton."

We joined the line of blue-coated girls after a sharp run and then had to make up things to say about Oliver, because we had forgot even to ask about him.

Miss Cox spoke to me on the way to supper that evening. She looked worried and her face was crookeder than ever, but her eyes had a very kind light in them.

"Did I wake you last night, Page, when I opened your door?"

"Oh, was that you?" I involuntarily exclaimed.

"I had an idea some of you were awake," and the kindly woman smiled at my ingenuous acknowledgment. "I was afraid to knock, hoping you were asleep, so I tried the door and peeped in. I did not mean to be spying, but I have been very uneasy about Dum lately. I was afraid she needed some friendly advice. I had been writing late and had not been able to get to sleep, and I was almost certain I heard the front door open and shut. I

simply could not rest without making sure that you three girls were safe in your downies. I had thought I heard something some forty minutes before but tried to make myself think I was just a foolish, nervous old maid."

I felt very foolish during this talk and could hardly look kind Miss Cox in the eye, but I did not consider it to be my secret and I said nothing. Mammy Susan always said: "The saftest thing in fly time is ter keep yo' mouf shet," and I felt that this was fly time for me.

"I have written to Mr. Tucker," Miss Cox continued. "I don't want the twins to know it, but I felt it was my duty as an old friend of both their parents to let him know how miserable Dum is."

"Oh, I have written, too!" I cried. "I wish I could stop my letter now, but it is too late. Poor Mr. Tucker will think things are in a terrible way with Dum. I believe she is herself again now after a day in bed, but I just felt I must let him know that an early visit from him would be advisable. I wouldn't let Tweedles find out for a million that I have done it."

"Well, you keep my secret and I'll keep yours. I am glad the Tuckers, father and daughters, have such a wholesome friend as you," and Miss Cox pressed my hand warmly.

CHAPTER XXII.

MORE LETTERS.

From Miss Jane Cox to Mr. Jeffry Tucker.

My dear Jeff:

I feel it my duty to write you in regard to your daughter Virginia. I told you I would look after your girls and I have tried to, but since the holidays Dum has been very difficult and the teachers hardly know how to cope with her. My private opinion is that the child is longing so for you that she is in a fair way to be made sick by it. A vacation of three weeks seems to be very upsetting and a great many of the pupils find it hard to get back into line, but Dum does not even want to, so far as I can see.

I do not mean to complain of Dum. You surely understand that, but I want to let you know the state of affairs. I am writing entirely on my own hook as your friend and the friend of the other little Virginia, companion of my youth. I fancy Miss Peyton would not approve of my doing it, as she feels able to master poor Dum by kindness; but I have studied her closely and feel that I understand her temperament better than our beloved principal. I have been afraid the child might take it into her head to run away from school. It is not that she does not like Gresham. I believe she likes it very much. She is popular with the whole school and has many friends. She is a good student and has done well up to the time she returned from Richmond. Since that time her marks have been zero.

Page Allison, who has a very good influence on all the girls with whom she comes in contact, is looking after her and she may be able to bring her to reason; but in the meantime, my dear Jeff, I want you to write to Dum very often,—of course not mentioning the fact that you have heard from me,—and give her hopes of a visit from you in the near future. That would mean everything to her.

Of course, an attempt to run away from school would be a very serious fault if discovered, because of the effect on the rest of the pupils. I don't want to alarm you, but I feel that I would be a poor friend indeed if I did not let you know of the trouble your little daughter is in a fair way to get herself into. Dee is back at work and doing finely, although as a rule she is not a better student than Dum. I am told that during study hall this evening Dum made no effort to concentrate on her lessons, but spent the whole time modeling grotesque little figures in colored clay.

Hoping you will take this information as it is meant, not thinking that I am a "tattle tale tit," but that I have the welfare of the children of my old friends very much at heart, and that it would be a cowardly and selfish act for me to hold back for fear of being misunderstood, I am,

Your sincere friend,
JINNY COX.

From Mr. Jeffry Tucker to Miss Jane Cox.

Jinny dear:

You always were a trump, and I can never express to you the gratitude I feel for the letter you have written me about my poor little headstrong Dum. She was particularly docile about returning to school, but as I told her good-by at the station she had a kind of smoldering look in her eyes that bodest no good. She has the most generous and kind heart in the world, but has always been the more difficult of the twins to manage. The matter is she has an artistic temperament, but I have been trying to conceal this fact from her all her life, as I think when a person once discovers he has an artistic temperament, he can commit any crime in the name of his temperament and feel that the world must forgive him. I want my little Virginia to understand that it is up to her to behave just as well as the ordinary folks who have no temperament to speak of. I am writing to her by this mail, but of course she is never to know you wrote to me. I am coming up to Gresham for a little visit just as soon as my strenuous duties will permit, and then I hope we can have another Lobster Quadrille.

I am very thankful that Tweedles has such a delightful companion as Miss Page Allison. She has improved them more than all the schooling in

the world would. I am also thankful beyond measure that they have found such a friend as you are, dear Jinny. Keep on being good to them and if Dum shows further signs of insubordination, please telegraph me. I'll come, if no newspaper is published from this office for a month! Thanking you again, dear friend, in my name and also for the little Virginia, companion of your youth,

Very truly yours,
JEFFRY TUCKER.

From Page Allison to Mr. Jeffry Tucker.

Dear Mr. Tucker:

I can't bear to worry you, but I think you ought to know that Dum wants to see you mighty bad. She has been very restless since we got back to Gresham; and while she is quieter now and says she is going to study hard and be a model pupil henceforth, I am afraid she will break down because she has so many demerits to work off. Miss Peyton has been very kind and patient, but of course it would not be fair to the other students to let up on Dum; and I believe she has enough demerits to keep her in bounds for about three weeks.

Now please don't think I am bossy, but if you could write her and tell her that you think you might get up to Gresham in about three weeks, that would give her some ambition to work off those marks and not get any others. You see, if she is in bounds when you come, she can't see much of you.

I don't want Tweedles to know I am writing this to you, but if you should mention having got a letter from me, you can call it a "bread and butter letter."

You were so kind to me on my visit to the girls. I had about the gayest and best time I ever had in my life, and I do want to thank you for it.

Very sincerely,
PAGE ALLISON.

Miss Page Allison, from Mr. Jeffry Tucker.

My dear Miss Page:

Your word is law! In three weeks' time I will be in Gresham. I don't consider you a bit bossy but very sweet and kind and wise. Thank God, my poor little Dum has made such a friend. I wish I could flatter myself that I could call you friend as my girls can. I thank you from my soul for your interest in Tweedles.

Most gratefully,
JEFFRY TUCKER.

Mr. Jeffry Tucker to his daughters, Virginia and Caroline.

Dearest and best beloved Tweedles:

Surely "'tis an ill wind that blows nobody any good!" Know you that there has been a big shooting scrape up in the mountains, and it is of such importance that I have decided to cover the trial myself instead of sending a reporter. This trial comes off in a little over three weeks, and as Gresham is on the way, I am going to stop off to see my babies, and hope they will be glad to have their old Zebedee with them for a day or so. I'll manage to get there on Saturday afternoon and stay until Monday night. Be good girls until then, so you will not have any hateful demerits to work off.

I miss you so much, more than I did at first, but I'm trying to be a very good boy and stick to business. I can hardly wait to see you. Give my kindest regards to Miss Page, and tell her not to get any demerits between now and the time of my visit, as she must do whatever the Tuckers do on that visit.

YOUR OWN ZEBEDEE.

CHAPTER XXIII.

ZEBEDEE'S VISIT.

Mr. Tucker's promise of a visit did all that I knew it would for Dum. She worked off her demerits without a murmur; studied her lessons diligently; soon caught up in her classes; and was altogether an exemplary Dum.

If his promise of a visit worked such wonders, his visit completed the miracle. We had already come through our mid-year examinations, some with flying colors and some with tattered banners like the poor Confederate flags that you see in the Valentine Museum in Richmond,—but the thing was that we were through and none of our little crowd of cronies had failed. Annie Pore carried off the honors in Latin, thanks to the drilling she had been brought up on by the severe Oxford graduate. Dum was easily first in mathematics. Dee seemed to know the physiology off by heart. History was Mary Flannigan's forte and not a date from Noah's flood to the San Francisco earthquake could stump her. Literature was what most interested me, and it would have been silly not to get an honor when it did seem so easy.

We were rather proud of our achievements as a coterie of chums, and Miss Peyton, as a reward of merit, let all of us go to the station to meet Mr. Tucker, accompanied by Miss Cox.

How good it was to see him! I believe I was almost as glad as Tweedles. He looked very boyish indeed as he swung off the Pullman, a suitcase in one hand and a great basket, neatly covered with purple paper, in the other.

"I know what that purple paper means," cried Dee from afar. "He's been to Schmidt's and that basket's full of goodies."

So he had, and, Zebedee like, had a proposition for pleasure. I have seldom seen Mr. Tucker that he did not have some scheme on hand for amusement for someone, and the best thing about it was that he usually was

ready to partake of the fun himself; and his partaking of it meant there was twice as much fun as there would have been without him.

"There's skating on the lake surely?" he asked.

"Yes! Yes!" in chorus.

"Well, come along, and I'll get permission from your Lord High Executioner to take all of you skating, and we'll have supper on the bank. What do you say to that, Jinny?"

"Splendid! I haven't skated for years, though."

"Have you got your skates?"

"Oh, yes; you see this is all the home I have, so I've got everything I possess here."

"And you girls? All of you have skates that fit and shoes to skate in?"

"Yes! Yes!" And off we went, the gayest crowd imaginable. Of course Miss Peyton let us go. No one had ever refused Mr. Tucker anything in reason, I am sure, nor had he ever asked for anything out of reason.

"Will you have enough food for such a crowd? Had you not better come back to Gresham to supper?" asked Miss Peyton.

"Never fear. I have food enough for a dozen boys. I'll take good care of all of them and bring them back at bedtime."

There was another crowd on the lake when we got there: a party of Greshamites, Juniors and Seniors, and some boys from Hill-Top. The ice was perfect, and while the air was cold, it was not cutting but dry and invigorating. We put our basket in a safe place; that is, a place where everyone could see it. Mr. Tucker said the way to lose things, especially food, was to hide it. So he placed it on top of a little hillock overlooking the lake, where it looked like a great bunch of violets against the patches of snow.

Our skates did fit and our shoes were suitable, so we were on the ice in no time. One of the most irritating things under Heaven is to go skating

with persons whose skates don't fit or whose heels are too high or soles too thin. I had learned to skate on the duck pond at home; and while on the duck pond my stroke had been necessarily limited, I found when I got on the broad lake I could hold my own very well.

Annie Pore was timid and faltering if she tried to skate alone but did very well if she had a partner. Mary Flannigan, singularly ungraceful but a real racer, with flapping arms and bowed legs, could get over the ice faster than the fleetest boy from Hill-Top. The twins skated well, as they did everything in the way of athletics, and wonderfully handsome they looked skimming over the lake arm in arm.

Miss Cox was a revelation to us all. She had not skated for years but her stroke was as sure as it had ever been and in five minutes she and Mr. Tucker were doing the double Dutch roll together, now frontward, now backward, with all kinds of intricate strokes. I suddenly realized that with all of her crooked homeliness, Miss Cox was far from plain. Her figure was singularly graceful and her head very well set.

The boys cheered as they approached the far bank, where the ice was a little better.

"Who's all right? Who's all right?
Miss Cox, Miss Cox! Out of sight!"

I was supporting Annie Pore, so was necessarily going slowly, and I heard one of the Juniors say to Mabel Binks, who was looking very handsome in a red silk sweater and cap to match: "Who's the man with Miss Cox? They are some skaters, for sure."

"Oh, hello!" exclaimed Mabel. "If that ain't my beau from Richmond!"

I did not hear any more, but I felt amused a little and indignant a good deal. Harvie Price was among the boys and he immediately skated up and got in between Annie and me. He was a strong skater and soon we found ourselves doing stunts with him that we had not dreamed possible.

"That Dutch roll is not so hard when you get the hang of it. See, like this —raise your right foot, not too high—strike out with your left, a good long stroke, and then down with your right, crossing the left. Just look at us! We

are not quite up to Mr. Tucker and Miss Cox, but we surely are good enough to have some notice taken of us." And so we were.

"Pride goeth before a fall," however, and just as we were getting the hang of the stroke, we ran plump into Mary Flannigan and Shorty, who were having a race backward, and the five of us fell into an ignominious heap. Nobody was hurt, not even feelings! Mr. Tucker picked me up and skated off with me.

"Who was that good-looking young fellow you were skating with?"

"Oh, that was Harvie Price. He's a mighty nice boy, and an old friend of Annie Pore's."

"And that little runty boy with the bright face, the cause of your recent disaster, who was he?"

"Tommy Hawkins,—Shorty! Isn't he nice-looking?"

"Yes, very! I'm going to ask these boys to stay and have supper with us. You introduce me, and then I'll make myself known to the teacher I see over there; and if I include him in the invitation, maybe I can get permission for the boys to stay."

Of course the boys were delighted and with a great deal of finesse, Mr. Tucker ingratiated himself into the affections of the teacher who had them in charge, a Mr. Anderson, and he accepted for himself with alacrity and gave the boys permission.

"I wish I had grub enough for the whole ship's crew of them," sighed Mr. Tucker. "If there is anything in the world I like, it is to give a boy a treat. But seven of us and Mr. Anderson and the two boys will just about clean up my basket. I wanted to ask four boys so we could 'balance all,' but I was so afraid of running short."

Mabel Binks had been circling around us, determined to attract Mr. Tucker's attention. He had given her a polite bow but held tightly to my hands and skated on by her. She was a good skater and her red sweater showed off her figure to great advantage. Dum and Dee came racing up to us and we all caught hold of hands and went the length of the lake together.

"Don't we four get on well together, Zebedee?" exclaimed Dee.

"We certainly do," he answered heartily. "Miss Page seems to be just the oil needed to make us, salt, pepper, vinegar, hot Tuckers into a palatable dressing."

"Look here, Zebedee, it is up to you to skate with that despicable thing, Mabel Binks," and Dum looked sternly at her parent.

"I don't see it that way," he answered coolly.

"Well, you see she has gone around claiming you as her Richmond beau who came up to Gresham to see her, and now she says that I won't let you skate with her."

"Too bad, that," he laughed. "Well, honey, you can tell her that you have no influence over me at all. You could not keep me from skating with her nor can you make me do it."

The machinations of Mabel, however, were beyond our ken. She came bearing down on us, all sails spread as it were. We tacked as best we could, but the determined girl turned at that moment and skated backward right into our line. Dee, who was next to me, broke and avoided her, but I got the collision full force and went down with an awful whack, with Mabel's hundred and fifty pounds right on top of me.

"The best laid schemes o' mice an' men,
Gang aft a-gley."

Mabel had meant to occupy the center of the stage herself, and here was I, Page Allison, knocked senseless for a moment by the fall, while Mabel was simply pulled off me by the infuriated Zebedee and left to shift for herself. Dum said she looked awfully silly as she got unaided to her feet. Of course I could see nothing, as I was so dazed by the fall that at first I lay with my eyes closed. In a moment the crowd of skaters had gathered, and Dee told me it was like a dog fight, everybody trying to see at once.

"Page, little Page, are you dead?" were the first words that I heard, and Mr. Tucker's face the first one I saw.

"Dead? I should say not! I'm not even hurt. Let me get up," and I caught hold of his ready hand and struggled to my feet.

"She's not hurt! She's all right!" he called to the anxious Tweedles who had been pushed back by the curious crowd, and he wiped the ever-ready tears from his eyes. Then the boys from Hill-Top gave me a yell, our especial yell that we sophomores used at moments of supreme victory:

"Ice cream—soda water—ginger ale, pop!
Sophomores! Sophomores! Always on top!"

"I wish I had been," I said ruefully; and there was a general laugh.

A whistle from Gresham warned the girls that it was time to go back to the school, and in a short time the Hill-Top boys had to leave, all but Harvie and Shorty and the tutor, Mr. Anderson.

We piled more brush on the fire that had been started to warm toes by, and in a little while we had a blaze that, as dusk came on, lighted up the whole lake and made up for the lack of a moon.

I never saw such a wonderful lunch as Mr. Tucker had brought. There were sandwiches of all kinds; cream cheese and pimento, chicken, ham, tongue and lettuce. There was a great jar of chicken salad, beaten biscuit, cheese straws, olives, pickles and salted almonds, and a chocolate cake even larger than Dum's so-called best hat that Mr. Tucker had sent for the Thanksgiving spread.

"Bleat, my little goat, bleat,
Cover the table with something to eat," sang Dum. "Zebedee, you seem to me to be working magic. I don't see how all those things could have been packed in that basket."

"If yours had been the task to 'tote' it this far, you would have thought there was more than that in it," he answered.

"Well, ours will be the task to help 'tote' it back," said Dee in tones muffled by cream cheese.

The crowning wonder of the repast was some great thermos bottles that finally emerged from the bottom of the capacious basket. One was filled

with hot coffee and the other with hot chocolate, and lying snugly by them was a jar of whipped cream.

"Well, by the great jumping jingo, what next?" said Shorty. And then funny Mary Flannigan used her ventriloquist's powers and made a noise exactly like a puppy trying to get out of something, and Shorty bit. He dived into the basket to the assistance of the imaginary canine!

The coffee and chocolate were smoking hot, in spite of the long journey they had taken. Mr. Tucker had made a clever calculation, also, as to the number of guests, so the drinkables just did go around.

"I thought I heard Miss Binks say she was going to have supper with you," said Harvie Price to Dum.

"Ah, indeed! I fancy she did intend to, but after she made a hole in the ice with poor little Page, I reckon she forgot to wait for her invitation."

We ate up every crumb of that supper and the little birds who hoped to feast on what we left must have had but poor pickings.

"We shan't have to say:
'Bleat, bleat, my little goat, I pray,
And take the table quite away,'" laughed Mr. Tucker. "If I had been twins instead of Tweedles, I'd have brought twice that much."

We had had enough, and much gayety and good-humored repartee had made it a very delightful party. Mr. Anderson proved very agreeable and made himself pleasant to everybody. Miss Cox was happy and full of fun, and even Annie Pore forgot to be shy and actually rolled Shorty in a patch of snow because he stole a piece of chocolate cake, all icing, that she was saving for the last mouthful.

Everything must have an end, even skating parties and books—but there will be more skating parties and more books, too.

On the way back to Gresham, Mr. Tucker divulged to us that he had a scheme for pleasure, and if we girls, one and all, studied hard, and if Miss Cox would promise to be as blind to our faults as she honorably could, we were all of us included in the scheme! He had engaged a cottage at

Willoughby Beach for the month of July and there we were to camp out and live the simple life.

"Oh, how grand!" we gasped together.

We had something to look forward to now and knew that the last half of the year would fly by. We could hardly wait for the camping time to come, —and I just hope my readers are as anxious to hear about my "Vacation with the Tucker Twins" as I am anxious to tell them about it!

THE END.

Transcriber's Notes:

Obvious punctuation errors repaired.

Varied hyphenation was retained. This includes words such as Cotton-tail and Cottontail; gatehouse and gate-house.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK AT BOARDING SCHOOL WITH THE TUCKER TWINS ***

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