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FAIRY PRINCE AND OTHER STORIES
BY THE SAME AUTHOR

OLD-DAD
PEACE ON EARTH, GOOD-WILL TO DOGS
RAINY WEEK
E. P. DUTTON & COMPANY
FAIRY PRINCE
AND OTHER STORIES

BY
ELEANOR HALLOWELL ABBOTT

AUTHOR OF "MOLLY MAKE-BELIEVE," "RAINY WEEK," ETC.
NEW YORK
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FAIRY PRINCE

In my father's house were many fancies. Always, for instance, on every Thanksgiving Day it was the custom in our family to bud the Christmas tree.

Young Derry Willard came from Cuba. His father and our father had been chums together at college. None of us had ever seen him before. We were very much excited to have a strange young man invited for Thanksgiving dinner. My sister Rosalee was seventeen. My brother Carol was eleven. I myself was only nine, but with very tall legs.

Young Derry Willard was certainly excited when he saw the Christmas tree. Excited enough, I mean, to shift his eyes for at least three minutes from my sister Rosalee's face. Lovely as my sister Rosalee was, it had never yet occurred to any of us, I think, until just that moment that she was old enough to have perfectly strange young men stare at her so hard. It made my father rather nervous. He cut his hand on the carving-knife. Nothing ever made my mother nervous.

Except for father cutting his hand it seemed to be a very nourishing dinner. The tomato soup was pink with cream. The roast turkey didn't look a single sad bit like any one you'd seen before. There was plenty of hard-boiled egg with the spinach. The baked potatoes were frosted with red pepper. There was mince pie. There was apple pie. There was pumpkin pie. There were nuts and raisins. There were gay gold-paper

bonbons. And everywhere all through the house the funny blunt smell of black coffee.

It was my brother Carol's duty always to bring in the Christmas tree. By some strange mix-up of what is and what isn't my brother Carol was dumb--stark dumb, I mean, and from birth. But tho he had never found his voice he had at least never lost his shining face. Even now at eleven in the twilightly end of a rainy Sunday, or most any day when he had an earache, he still let mother call him "Shining Face." But if any children called him "Shining Face" he kicked them. Even when he kicked people, tho, he couldn't stop his face shining. It was very cheerful. Everything about Carol was very cheerful. No matter, indeed, how much we might play and whisper about gifts and tinsels and jolly-colored candles, Christmas never, I think, seemed really _probable_ to any of us until that one jumpy moment, just at the end of the Thanksgiving dinner, when, heralded by a slam in the wood-shed, a hoppytyskip in the hall, the dining-room door flung widely open on Carol's eyes twinkling like a whole skyful of stars through the shaggy, dark branches of a young spruce-tree. It made young Derry Willard laugh right out loud.

"Why, of all funny things!" he said. "On Thanksgiving Day! Why, it looks like a Christmas tree!"

"It is a Christmas tree," explained my sister Rosalee very patiently. My sister Rosalee was almost always very patient. But I had never seen her patient with a young man before. It made her cheeks very pink. "It _is_ a Christmas tree," she explained. "That is, it's going to be a Christmas tree! Just the very first second we get it 'budded' it'll start right in to be a Christmas tree!"

"_Budded?_" puzzled young Derry Willard. Really for a person who looked so much like the picture of the Fairy Prince in my best story-book, he seemed just a little bit slow.

"Why, of course, it's got to be _budded_!" I cried. "That's what it's for! That's----"

Instead of just being pink patient my sister Rosalee started in suddenly to be dimply patient too.

"It's from mother's Christmas-tree garden, you know," she went right on explaining. "Mother's got a Winter garden--a Christmas-tree garden!"

"Father's got a garden, too!" I maintained stoutly. "Father's is a Spring garden! Reds, blues, yellows, greens, whites! From France! And Holland! And California! And Asia Minor! Tulips, you know. _Buster's!_ Oh, father's garden is a _glory_!" I boasted.

"And mother's garden," said my mother very softly, "is only a story."

"It's an awfully nice story," said Rosalee.

Young Derry Willard seemed to like stories.

"Tell it!" he begged.

It was Rosalee who told it. "Why, it was when Carol was born," she said.

"It was on a Christmas eve, you know. That's why mother named him Carol!"

"We didn't know then, you see"--interrupted my mother very softly--"that Carol had been given the gift of silence rather than the gift of speech."

"And father was so happy to have a boy," dimpled Rosalee, "that he said to mother, 'Well, now, I guess you've got everything in the world that you want!' And mother said, 'Everything--except a spruce forest!' So father bought her a spruce forest," said Rosalee. "That's the story!"

"Oh, my dear!" laughed my mother. "That isn't a 'story' at all! All you've told is the facts! It's the _feeling_ of the facts that makes a story, you know! It was on my birthday," glowed mother, "that the presentation was to be made! My birthday was in March! I was very much excited and came down to breakfast with my hat and coat on! 'Where are you going?' said my husband."

"Oh--Mother!" protested Rosalee. "'Whither away?' was what you've always told us he said!"

"'Whither away?' of course _was_ what he said!" laughed my mother.

"'Why, I'm going to find my spruce forest!' I told him. 'And I can't wait a moment longer! Is it the big one over beyond the mountain?' I implored him. 'Or the little grove that the deacon tried to sell you last year?'"

"And they never budged an inch from the house!" interrupted Rosalee. "It was the funniest----"

Over in the corner of the room my father laughed out suddenly. My father had left the table. He and Carol were trying very hard to make the spruce-tree stand upright in a huge pot of wet earth. The spruce-tree didn't want to stand upright. My father laughed all over again. But it wasn't at the spruce-tree. "Well, now, wouldn't it have been a pity," he said, "to have made a perfectly good lady fare forth on a cold March morning to find her own birthday present?"

My mother began to clap her hands. It was a very little noise. But jolly.

"It came by mail!" she cried. "My whole spruce forest! In a package no bigger than my head!"

"Than your rather fluffy head!" corrected my father.

"Three hundred spruce seedlings!" cried my mother. "Each one no bigger than a wisp of grass! Like little green ferns they were! So tender! So fluffing! So helpless!"

"Heigh-O!" said young Derry Willard. "Well, I guess you laughed--then!"

When grown-up people are trying to remember things outside themselves I've noticed they always open their eyes very wide. But when they are remembering things inside themselves they shut their eyes very tight. My mother shut her eyes very tight.

"No--I didn't exactly laugh," said my mother. "And I didn't exactly cry."

"You wouldn't eat!" cried Rosalee. "Not all day, I mean! Father had to feed you with a spoon! It was in the wing-chair! You held the box on your knees! You just shone--and shone--and _shone_!"

"It would have been pretty hard," said my mother, "not to have shone a--little! To brood a baby forest in one's arms--if only for a single day--? Think of the experience!" Even at the very thought of it she began to _shine_ all over again! "Funny little fluff o' green," she laughed, "no fatter than a fern!" Her voice went suddenly all wabbly like a preacher's. "But, oh, the glory of it!" she said. "The potential majesty! Great sweeping branches--! Nests for birds, shade for lovers, masts for ships to plow the great world's waters--timbers perhaps for cathedrals! O--h," shivered my mother. "It certainly gave one a very queer feeling! No woman surely in the whole wide world--except the Mother of the Little Christ--ever felt so astonished to think what she had in her lap!"

Young Derry Willard looked just a little bit nervous.

"Oh, but of course mother couldn't begin all at once to raise cathedrals!" I hastened to explain. "So she started in raising Christmas presents instead. We raise all our own Christmas presents! And just as soon as Rosalee and I are married we're going to begin right away to raise our children's Christmas presents too! Heaps for everybody, even if there is a hundred! Carol, of course, won't marry because he can't propose! Ladies don't like written proposals, father says! Ladies----"

Young Derry Willard asked if he might smoke. He smoked cigarets. He took them from a gold-looking case. They smelled very romantic. Everything about him smelled very romantic. His hair was black. His eyes were black. He looked as tho he could cut your throat without flinching if you were faithless to him. It was beautiful.

I left the table as soon as I could. I went and got my best story-book. I was perfectly right. He looked exactly like the picture of the Fairy Prince on the front page of the book. There were heaps of other pictures, of course. But only one picture of a Fairy Prince. I looked in the glass. I looked just exactly the way I did before dinner. It made me feel queer. Rosalee didn't look at all the way she looked before dinner. It made me feel very queer.

When I got back to the dining-room everybody was looking at the little spruce-tree--except young Derry Willard and Rosalee. Young Derry Willard was still looking at Rosalee. Rosalee was looking at the toes of her slippers. The fringe of her eyelashes seemed to be an inch long. Her cheeks were so pink I thought she had a fever. No one else came to bud the Christmas tree except Carol's tame coon and the tame crow. Carol is very unselfish. He always buds one wish for the coon. And one for the crow. The tame coon looked rather jolly and gold-powdered in the firelight. The crow never looked jolly. I have heard of white crows. But Carol's crow was a very dark black. Wherever you put him he looked like a sorrow. He sat on the arm of Rosalee's chair and nibbed at her pink sleeve. Young Derry Willard pushed him away. Young Derry Willard and Rosalee tried to whisper. I heard them.

"How old are you?" whispered Rosalee.

"I'm twenty-two," whispered young Derry Willard.

"O--h," said Rosalee.

"How young are you?" whispered Derry Willard.

"I'm seventeen," whispered Rosalee.

"O--h," said Derry Willard.

My mother started in very suddenly to explain about the Christmas tree. There were lots of little pencils on the table. And blocks of paper. And nice cold, shining sheets of tin-foil. There was violet-colored tin-foil, and red-colored tin-foil--and green and blue and silver and gold.

"Why, it's just a little family custom of ours, Mr. Willard," explained

my mother. "After the Thanksgiving dinner is over and we're all, I trust, feeling reasonably plump and contented, and there's nothing special to do except just to dream and think--why, we just list out the various things that we'd like for Christmas and----"

"Most people end Thanksgiving, of course," explained my father, "by trying to feel thankful for the things they've already had. But this seems to be more like a scheme for expressing thanks for the things that we'd like to have!"

"The violet tin-foil is Rosalee's!" I explained. "The green is mine! The red is mother's! The blue is father's! The silver is Carol's! Mother takes each separate wish just as soon as it's written, and twists it all up in a bud of tin-foil! And takes wire! And wires the bud on the tree! Gold buds! Silver buds! Red! Green! Everything! All bursty! And shining! Like Spring! It looks as tho rainbows had rained on it! It looks as tho sun and moon had warmed it at the same time! And then we all go and get our little iron banks--all the Christmas money, I mean, that we've been saving and saving for a whole year! And dump it all out round the base of the tree! Nickels! Dimes! Quarters! Pennies! Everything! And----"

"Dump them all out--round the base of the tree?" puzzled young Derry Willard.

Carol did something suddenly that I never saw him do before with a stranger. He wrote a conversation on a sheet of paper and waved it at young Derry Willard. It was a short conversation. But it was written very tall.

"Phertalizer!" explained Carol.

My father made a little laugh. "In all my experience with horticulture," he said, "I know of no fertilizer for a Christmas tree that equals a judicious application of nickels, dimes, and quarters--well stirred in."

"Our uncle Charlie was here once for Thanksgiving," I cried. "He stirred in a twenty-dollar gold piece. Our Christmas tree bloomed everything that year! It bloomed tinsel pompons on every branch! And gold-ribbon bow-knots! It bloomed a blackboard for Carol! And an ice-cream freezer for mother! And----"

"And then we take the tree," explained my mother, "and carry it into the parlor. And shut the door."

"And lock the door," said my father.

"And no one ever sees," puzzled young Derry Willard, "what was written

in the wishes?"

"_No one_" I said.

Rosalee laughed.

"Some one--must see," said Rosalee. "'Cause just about a week before Christmas father and mother always go up to town and----"

"Oh, of course mother _has_ to see!" I admitted. "Mother is such friends with Christmas!"

"And father," laughed Rosalee, "is such friends with mother!"

"Usually," I said.

"Eh?" said father.

"And then," explained mother, "on Christmas morning we all go to the parlor!"

"And there's a fire in the parlor!" I explained. "A great hollow Yule log all stuffed full of crackly pine-cones and sputtering sparkers and funny-colored blazes that father buys at a fireworks shop! And the candles are lighted! And--and----"

"And all the tin-foil buds have bloomed into presents!" laughed Derry Willard.

"Oh, no, of course--not _all_ of them," said mother.

"No tree ever fulfills every bud," said my father.

"There's Carol's camel, of course," laughed Rosalee. "Ever since Carol was big enough to wish, he's always wished for a camel!"

"But mostly, of course," I insisted, "he wishes for kites! He got nine kites last Christmas."

"Kites?" murmured young Derry Willard.

"_Kites!_" I said. "I _have_ to talk a good deal. Once always for myself. And all over again for Carol." It seemed a good time to talk for Carol. Perhaps a person who came all the way from Cuba could tell us the thing we wanted to know. "Oh, Carol's very much interested in kites!" I confided. "And in relationships! In Christmas relationships especially! When he grows up he's going to be some sort of a jenny something--I think it's an ologist! Or else keep a kite-shop!"

"Yes?" murmured young Derry Willard.

There are two ways I've noticed to make one listen to you. One is to shout. The other is to whisper. I decided to whisper.

"You don't seem to understand," I whispered. "It's Christmas relationships that are worrying Carol and me so! It worries us dreadfully! Oh, of course we understand all about the Little Baby Christ! And the camels! And the wise men! And the frankincense! That's easy! But _who_ is Santa Claus? Unless--unless--?" It was Carol himself who signaled me to go on. "Unless--he's the Baby Christ's _grandfather_?" I thought Derry Willard looked a little bit startled. Carol's ears turned bright red. "Oh, of course--we meant on his _mother's_ side!" I hastened to assure him.

"It is, I admit, a new idea to me," said young Derry Willard. "But I seem to have gotten several new ideas to-day."

He looked at mother. Mother's mouth looked very funny. He looked at father. Father seemed to be sneezing. He looked at Rosalee. They laughed together. His whole face suddenly was very laughing. "And what becomes," he asked, "of all the Christmas-tree buds that _don't_ bloom?" It was a funny question. It didn't have a thing in the world to do with Santa Claus being a grandfather.

"Oh, mother never throws away any of the buds," laughed Rosalee. "She just keeps them year after year and wires them on all over again."

"All unfulfilled wishes," said my mother. "Still waiting--still wishing! Maybe they'll bloom some time! Even Carol's--camel," she laughed out suddenly. "Who knows, sonny-boy--but what if you keep on _wishing_ you'll actually travel some day to the Land-Where-Camels-Live? Maybe--maybe you'll own a--a dozen camels?"

"With purple velvet blankets?" I cried. "All trimmed with scarlet silk tassels? And smelling of sandalwood?"

"I have never understood," said my father, "that camels smelt of sandalwood."

Young Derry Willard didn't seem exactly nervous any more. But he jumped up very suddenly. And went and stood by the fire.

"It's the finest Christmas idea I ever heard of!" he said. "And if nobody has any objections I'd like to take a little turn myself at _budding_ the Christmas tree!"

"Oh, but you won't be here for Christmas!" cried everybody all at once.

"No, I certainly sha'n't be," admitted Derry Willard, "unless I am invited!"

"Why, of course, you're invited!" cried everybody. Father seemed to have swallowed something. So mother invited him twice. Father kept right on choking. Everybody was frightened but mother.

Young Derry Willard had to run like everything to catch his train. It was lucky that he knew what he wanted. With only one wish to make and only half a minute to make it in, it was wonderful that he could decide so quickly! He snatched a pencil! He scribbled something on a piece of paper! He crumpled the "something" all up tight and tossed it to mother! Carol and mother wadded it into a tin-foil bud! They took the gold-colored tin-foil! Rosalee and I wired it to a branch! We chose the highest branch we could reach! Father held his overcoat for him! Father handed him his bag! Father opened the door for him! He ran as fast as he could! He waved his hand to everybody! His laugh was all sparkly with white teeth!

The room seemed a little bit dark after he had gone. The firelight flickered on the tame coon's collar. Sometimes it flickered on the single gold bud. We cracked more nuts and munched more raisins. It made a pleasant noise. The tame crow climbed up on the window-sill and tapped and tapped against the glass. It was not a pleasant noise. The tame coon prowled about under the table looking for crumbs. He walked very flat and swaying and slow, as tho he were stuffed with wet sand. It gave him a very captive look. His eyes were very bright.

Father got his violin and played some quivery tunes to us. Mother sang a little. It was nice. Carol put fifteen "wishes" on the tree. Seven of them, of course, were old ones about the camel. But all the rest were new. He wished a salt mackerel for his coon. And a gold anklet for his crow. He wouldn't tell what his other wishes were. They looked very pretty! Fifteen silver buds as big as cones scattered all through the green branches! Rosalee made seven violet-colored wishes! I made seven! Mine were green! Father made three! His were blue! Mother's were red! She made three, too! The tree looked more and more as tho rainbows had rained on it! It was beautiful! We thanked mother very much for having a Christmas-tree garden! We felt very thankful toward everybody! We got sleepier and sleepier! We went to bed!

I woke in the night. It was very lonely. I crept down-stairs to get my best story-book. There was a light in the parlor. There were voices. I peeped in. It was my father and my mother. They were looking at the Christmas tree. I got an awful shock. They were having what books call "words" with each other. Only it was "sentences!"

"Impudent young cub!" said my father. "How _dared_ he stuff a hundred-dollar bill into our Christmas tree?"

"Oh, I'm sure he didn't mean to be impudent," said my mother. Her voice was very soft. "He heard the children telling about Uncle Charlie's gold piece. He--he wanted to do something--I suppose. It was too much, of course. He oughtn't to have done it. But----"

"A hundred-dollar bill!" said my father. Every time he said it he seemed madder.

"And yet," said my mother, "if what you say about his father's sugar plantations is correct, a hundred-dollar bill probably didn't look any larger to him than a--than a two-dollar bill looks to us--this year. We'll simply return it to him very politely--as soon as we know his address. He was going West somewhere, wasn't he? We shall hear, I suppose."

"Hear _nothing_!" said my father. "I won't have it! Did you see how he stared at Rosalee? It was outrageous! Absolutely outrageous! And Rosalee? I was ashamed of Rosalee! Positively ashamed!"

"But you see--it was really the first young man that Rosalee has ever had a chance to observe," said my mother. "If you had ever been willing to let boys come to the house--maybe she wouldn't have considered this one such a--such a thrilling curiosity."

"Stuff and nonsense!" said my father. "She's only a child! There'll be no boys come to this house for years and years!"

"She's seventeen," said my mother. "You and I were married when I was seventeen."

"That's different!" said my father. He tried to smile. He couldn't. Mother smiled quite a good deal. He jumped up and began to pace the room. He demanded things. "Do you mean to say," he demanded, "that you want your daughter to marry this strange young man?"

"Not at all," said mother.

Father turned at the edge of the rug and looked back. His face was all frowned. "And I don't like him anyway," he said. "He's too dark!"

"His father roomed with you at college, you say?" asked my mother very softly. "Do you remember him--specially?"

"Do I remember him?" cried my father. He looked astonished. "Do I

remember him? Why, he was the best friend I ever had in the world! Do I remember him?"

"And he was--very fair?" asked my mother.

"Fair?" cried my father. "He was as dark as a Spaniard!"

"And yet--reasonably--respectable?" asked my mother.

"Respectable?" cried my father. "Why, he was the highest-minded man I ever knew in my life!"

"And so--dark?" said my mother. She began to laugh. It was what we call her cut-finger laugh, her bandage laugh. It rolled all around father's angriness and made it feel better almost at once.

"Well, I can't help it," said father. He shook his head just the way Carol does sometimes when he's planning to be pleasant as soon as it's convenient. "Well, I can't help it! Exceptions, of course, are exceptions! But Cuba? A climate all mushy with warmth and sunshine! What possible stamina can a young man have who's grown up on sugar-cane sirup and--and bananas?"

"He seemed to have teeth," said my mother. "He ate two helpings of turkey!"

"He had a gold cigaret-case!" said my father. "_Gold!_"

My mother began to laugh all over again.

"Maybe his Sunday-school class gave it to him," she said. It seemed to be a joke. Once father's Sunday-school class gave him a high silk hat. Father laughed a little.

Mother looked very beautiful. She ruffled her hair a little on father's shoulder. She pinked her cheeks from the inside some way. She glanced up at the topmost branch of the Christmas tree. The gold bud showed quite plainly.

"I--I _wonder_--what he wished," she said. "We'll have to look--some time."

I made a little creak in my bones. I didn't mean to. My father and mother both turned round. They started to explore!

I ran like everything!

I think it was very kind of God to make December have the very shortest

days in the year!

Summer, of course, is nice! The long, sunny light! Lying awake till 'most nine o'clock every night to hear the blackness come rustling! Such a lot of early mornings everywhere and birds singing! Sizzling-hot noons with cool milk to drink! The pleasant nap before it's time to play again!

But if December should feel long, what would children do? About Christmas, I mean! Even the best way you look at it, Christmas is always the furthest-off day that I ever heard about!

My mother was always very kind about making Christmas come just as soon as it could. There wasn't much daylight. Not in December. Not in the North. Not where we lived. Except for the snow, each day was like a little jet-black jewel-box with a single gold coin in the center. The gold coin in the center was noon. It was very bright. It was really the only bright light in the day. We spent it for Christmas. Every minute of it. We popped corn and strung it into lovely loops. We threaded cranberries. We stuffed three Yule logs with crackly cones and colored fires. We made little candies. All round the edges of the bright noon-time, of course, there was morning and night. And lamplight. It wasn't convenient to burn a great many lamps. At night father and mother sat in the lamplight and taught us our lessons. Or read stories to us. We children sat in the shadows and stared into the light. The light made us blink. The tame crow and the tame coon sat in the shadows with us. We played we were all jungle-animals together waiting outside a man's camp to be Christianized. It was pleasant. Mother read to us about a woman who didn't like Christmas specially. She was going to petition Congress to have the Christ Child born in leap-year so that Christmas couldn't come oftener than once in four years. It worried us a little. Father laughed. Mother had only one worry in the world. She had it every year.

"Oh, my darling, darling Winter garden!" worried my mother. "Wouldn't it be awful if I ever had to die just as my best Christmas tree was coming into bloom?"

It frightened us a little. But not too much. Father had the same worry every Spring about his Spring garden. Every Maytime when the tulip-buds were so fat and tight you could fairly hear them splitting, father worried.

"Oh, wouldn't it be perfectly terrible if I should die before I find out whether those new 'Rembrandts' are everything that the catalogue promised? Or whether the 'Bizards' are really finer than the 'Byblooms'? Now, if it was in phlox-time," worried my father. "Especially if the phlox turned out magenta, one could slip away with scarcely a pang. But in tulip-time ----?"

We promised our mother she should never die at Christmas-time. We promised our father he should never die at tulip-time. We brought them rubbers. And kneeling-cushions. We carried their coats. We found their trowels. We kept them just as well as we could.

But, most of all, of course, we were busy wondering about our presents.

It hurries Christmas a lot to have a Christmas tree growing in your parlor for a whole month. Even if the parlor door is locked.

Lots of children have a Christmas tree for a whole month. But it's a _going_ tree. Its going is very sad. Just one little wee day of perfect splendor it has. And then it begins to die. Every day it dies more. It tarnishes. Its presents are all gathered. Its pop-corn gets stale. The cranberries smell. It looks scragglier and scragglier. It gets brittle. Its needles begin to fall. Pretty soon it's nothing but a _clutter_. It must be dreadful to start as a Christmas tree and end by being nothing but a clutter.

But mother's Christmas tree is a _coming_ tree. Every day for a month it's growing beautifuler and beautifuler! The parlor is cool. It lives in a nice box of earth. It has water every day like a dog. It never dies. It just disappears. When we come down to breakfast the day after Christmas it simply _isn't there_. That's all. It's immortal. Always when you remember it, it's absolutely perfect.

We liked very much to see the Christmas tree _come_. Every Sunday afternoon my mother unlocked the parlor door. We were not allowed to go in. But we could peep all we wanted to. It made your heart crinkle up like a handful of tinsel to watch the tin-foil buds change into presents.

Two of Carol's silver buds had bloomed. One of them had bloomed into a white-paper package that looked like a book. The other one had strange humps. Only one of Rosalee's violet buds had bloomed. But it was a very large box tied with red ribbon. It looked like a best hat. One of father's blue buds had bloomed. One of mother's red buds. They bloomed very small. Small enough to be diamonds. Or collar-buttons. 'Way back on the further side of the tree I could see that one of my green buds had bloomed. It was a long little box. It was a narrow little box. I can most always tell when there's a doll in a box. Young Derry Willard's golden bud hadn't bloomed at all. Maybe it was a late bloomer. Some things are. The tame coon's salt fish, I've noticed, never blooms at all until just the very last moment before we go into the parlor Christmas morning. Mother says there's a reason. We didn't bother much about reasons. The parlor was very cold. It smelt very cold and mysterious. We didn't see how we could wait!

Carol helped us to wait. Not being able to talk, Carol has plenty of time to think. He can write, of course. But spelling is very hard. So he doesn't often waste his spelling on just facts. He waits till he gets enough facts to make a philosophy before he tries to spell it: He made a philosophy about Christmas coming so slow. He made it on the blackboard in the kitchen. He wrote it very tall.

"Christmas has got to come," he wrote. "It's part of time. Everything that's part of time has got to come. Nothing can stop it. It runs like a river. It runs down-hill. It can't help itself. I should worry."

Young Derry Willard never wrote at all. He telegraphed his "manners" instead. "Thank you for Thanksgiving Day," he telegraphed. "It was very wonderful." He didn't say anything else. He never even mentioned his address.

"U--m--m," said my father.

"It's because of the hundred-dollar bill," said my mother. "He doesn't want to give us any chance to return it."

"Humph!" said my father. "Do we look poor?"

My mother glanced at the worn spot in the dining-room rug. She glanced at my father's coat.

"We certainly do!" she laughed. "But young Derry Willard didn't leave us a hundred-dollar bill to try and make us look any richer. All young Derry Willard was trying to do was to make us look more Christmassy!"

"Well, we can't accept it!" said my father.

"Of course we can't accept it!" said my mother. "It was a mistake. But at least it was a very kind mistake."

"Kind?" said my father.

"Very kind," said my mother. "No matter how dark a young man may be or how much cane-sirup and bananas he has consumed, he can't be absolutely depraved as long as he goes about the world trying to make things look more Christmassy!"

My father looked up rather sharply.

My mother gave a funny little gasp.

"Oh, it's all right," she said. "We'll manage some way! But who ever heard of a chicken-bone hung on a Christmas tree? Or a slice of roast beef?"

"Some children don't get--anything," said my father. He looked solemn. "Money is very scarce," he said.

"It always is," said my mother. "But that's no reason why presents ought to be scarce."

My father jumped up.

My father laughed.

"Great Heavens, woman!" he said. "Can't anything dull your courage?"

"Not my--Christmas courage!" said my mother.

My father reached out suddenly and patted her hand.

"Oh, all right," he said. "I suppose we'll manage somehow."

"Of course we'll manage somehow," said my mother.

I ran back as fast as I could to Carol and Rosalee.

We thought a good deal about young Derry Willard coming. We talked about it among ourselves. We never talked about it to my father or my mother. I don't know why. I went and got my best story-book and showed the Fairy Prince to Carol. Carol stared and stared. There were palms and bananas in the picture. There was a lace-paper castle. There was a moat. There was a fiery charger. There were dragons. The Fairy Prince was all in white armor, with a white plume in his hat. It grasped your heart, it was so beautiful. I showed the picture to Rosalee. She was surprised. She turned as white as the plume in the Fairy Prince's hat. She put the book in her top bureau-drawer with her ribbons. We wondered and wondered whether young Derry Willard would come. Carol thought he wouldn't. I thought he would. Rosalee wouldn't say. Carol thought it would be too cold. Carol insisted that he was a tropic. And that tropics couldn't stand the cold. That if a single breath of cold air struck a tropic he blew up and froze. Rosalee didn't want young Derry Willard to blow up and freeze. Anybody could see that she didn't. I comforted her. I said he would come in a huge fur coat. Carol insisted that tropics didn't have huge fur coats. "All right, then," I said. "He will come in a huge _feather_ coat! Blue-bird feathers it will be made of! With a soft brown breast! When he fluffs himself he will look like the god of all the birds and of next Spring! Hawks and all evil things will scuttle away!"

There certainly _was_ something the matter with the Christmas tree that year.

It grew. But it didn't grow very fast.

My father said that perhaps the fertilizer hadn't been rich enough.

My mother said that maybe all Christmas trees were blooming rather late this year. Seasons changed so.

My father and mother didn't go away to town at all. Not for a single day.

Late at night after we'd gone to bed we heard them hammering things and running the sewing-machine.

Carol thought it smelt like kites.

Rosalee said it sounded to her like a blue silk waist.

It looked like a worry to me.

It got colder and colder. It snowed and snowed.

Christmas eve it snowed some more. It was beautiful. We were very much excited. We clapped our hands. We stood at the window to see how white the world was. I thought about the wise men's camels. I wondered if they could carry snow in their stomachs as well as rain. Mother said camels were tropics and didn't know anything about snow. It seemed queer.

A sleigh drove up to the door. There were three men in it. Two of them got out. The first one was young Derry Willard. It was a fur coat that he had on. He was full of bundles. My father gave one gasp.

"The--the impudent young--" gasped my father.

We ran to the door. The second man looked just exactly like young Derry Willard except that he had on a gray beard and a gray slouch hat. He looked like the picture of "a planter" in "Uncle Tom's Cabin." My father and he took just one look at each other. And then suddenly they began to pound each other on the back and to hug each other. "Hello, old top!" they shouted. "Hello--hello--_hello_!" Derry Willard's father cried a little. Everybody cried a little or shouted or pounded somebody on the back except young Derry Willard and Rosalee. Young Derry Willard and Rosalee just stood and looked at each other.

"Well--well--well!" said Derry Willard's father over and over and over. "Twenty years! _Twenty_ years!" The front hall was full of bundles! We fell on them when we stepped. And we fell on new ones when we tried to get up. Whenever Derry Willard's father wasn't crying he was laughing! "So this is the wife?" he said. "And these are the children? Which is Rosalee? Ah! A very pretty girl! But not as pretty as your wife!" he laughed. "Twenty years! _Twenty_ years!" he began all over again. "A bit informal, eh? Descending on you like this? But I couldn't resist the temptation after I'd seen Derry. We Southerners, you know! Our impulses are romantic! Tuck us away anywhere! Or turn us out--if you must!"

My father was like a wild man for joy! He forgot all about everything except "twenty years ago."

We had to put the two Mr. Derry Willards to bed in the parlor. There was no other room. They insisted on sleeping with the Christmas tree. They had camped under every kind of branch and twig in the world, they said. But _never_ had they camped under a Christmas tree.

Father talked and talked and talked! Derry Willard's father talked and talked and talked! It was about college! It was about girls! It was about boys! It was about all sorts of pranks! Not any of it was about studies! Mother sat and laughed at them!

Rosalee and young Derry Willard sat and looked at each other. Carol and I played checkers. Everybody forgot us. I don't know who put me to bed.

When we came down-stairs the next morning and went into the parlor to see the Christmas tree we _screamed_!

Every single weeny-teeny branch of it had sprouted tinsel tassels! There were tinsel stars all over it! Red candles were blazing! Glass icicles glistened! There were candy canes! There were tin trumpets! Little white-paper presents stuck out everywhere through the branches! Big white presents piled like a snowdrift all around the base of the tree!

Young Derry Willard's father seemed to be still laughing. He rubbed his hands together.

"Excuse me, good people," he laughed, "for taking such liberties with your tree! But it's twenty years since I've had a chance to take a real whack at a Christmas tree! Palms, of course, are all right, and banana groves aren't half bad! But when it comes to real landscape effect--give me a Christmas tree in a New England parlor!"

"Palms?" we gasped. "Banana-trees?"

Young Derry Willard distributed the presents.

For my father there were boxes and boxes of cigars! And an order on some Dutch importing house for five hundred _green_ tulips! Father almost sw--ooned.

For mother there was a little gold chain with a single pearl in it! And a box of oranges as big as a chicken-coop!

I got four dolls! And a paint-box! One of the dolls was jet-black. She was funny. When you squeaked her stomach she grinned her mouth and said, "Oh, lor', child!"

Rosalee had a white crêpe shawl all fringes and gay-colored birds of paradise! Rosalee had a fan made out of ivory and gold. Rosalee had a gold basket full of candied violets. Rosalee had a silver hand-mirror carved all round the edge with grasses and lilies like the edges of a little pool.

Carol had a big, big box that looked like a magic lantern. And on every branch where he had hung his seven wishes for a camel there was a white card instead with the one word "Palestine" written on it.

Everybody looked very much perplexed.

Young Derry Willard's father laughed.

"If the youngster wants camels," he said, "he must have camels! I'm going to Palestine one of these days before so very long. I'll take him with me. There must be heaps of camels still in Palestine."

"Going to Palestine before--long," gasped my mother. "How wonderful!"

Everybody turned and looked at Carol.

"Want to go, son, eh?" laughed Derry Willard's father.

Carol's mouth quivered. He looked at my mother.

My mother's mouth quivered. A little red came into her checks.

"He wants me to thank you very much, Mr. Willard," she said. "But he thinks perhaps you wouldn't want to take him to Palestine--if you knew that he can't--talk."

"Can't talk?" cried Mr. Derry Willard. "_Can't talk?_" He looked at mother! He looked at Carol! He swallowed very hard! Then suddenly he began to laugh again!

"Good enough!" he cried. "He's the very boy I'm looking for! We'll rear him for a diplomat!"

Carol got a hammer and opened his big box. It was a magic lantern! He was wild with joy! He beat his fists on the top of the box! He stamped his feet! He came and burrowed his head in mother's shoulder. When Carol burrows his head in my mother's shoulder it means, "Call me anything you want to!"

Mother called him anything she wanted to. Right out loud before everybody. "Shining Face!" said my mother.

There were lots of other presents besides.

My father had made a giant kite for Carol. It looked nine feet tall. My father had made the dearest little wooden work-box for my mother. There was a blue silk waist for Rosalee. My mother had knitted me a doll! Its body was knitted! Its cheeks were knitted! Its nose was knitted! It was wonderful!

We ate the peppermint-candy canes. All the pink stripes. All the white stripes. We sang carols. We sang,

O, the foxes have holes! And the birds build their nests
In the crotch of the sycamore-tree!
But the Little Son of God had no place for His head
When He cameth to earth for me!

Rosalee's voice was like a lark in the sky. Carol's face looked like two larks in the sky.

The tame crow stayed in the kitchen. He was afraid of so many strangers. The tame coon wasn't afraid of anything. He crawled in and out of all the wrapping-papers, sniffing and sniffing. It made a lovely crackling sound.

Everything smelt like fir balsam. It was more beautiful every minute. Even after every last present was picked from the tree, the tree was still so fat and fluffy with tinsel and glass balls that it didn't look robbed at all.

We just sat back and stared at it.

Young Derry Willard stared only at the topmost branch.

Father looked suddenly at mother. Mother looked suddenly at Rosalee. Rosalee looked suddenly at Carol. Carol looked suddenly at me. I looked

suddenly at the tame coon. The tame coon kept right on crackling through the wrapping-papers.

Young Derry Willard made a funny little face. There seemed to be dust in his throat. His voice was very dry. He laughed.

"My wish," said young Derry Willard, "seems to have been the only one that--didn't bloom."

I almost died with shame. Carol almost died with shame. In all that splendiferousness, in all that generosity, poor Derry Willard's gold-budded wish was the only one that hadn't at least bloomed into _something_!

Rosalee jumped up very suddenly and ran into the dining-room. She looked as tho she was going to cry.

Young Derry Willard followed her. He didn't run. He walked very slowly. He looked a little troubled.

Carol and I began at once to fold the wrapping-papers very usefully.

Young Derry Willard's father looked at my father. All of a sudden he wasn't laughing at all. Or rubbing his hands.

"I'm sorry, Dick," he said. "I've always rather calculated somehow on having my boy's wishes come true."

My father spoke a little sharply.

"You must have a lot of confidence," he said, "in your boy's wishes!"

"I have!" said young Derry Willard's father, quite simply. "He's a good boy! Not only clever, I mean, but good! Never yet have I known him to wish for anything that wasn't the _best_!"

"They're too young," said my father.

"Youth," said Derry Willard's father, "is the one defect I know of that is incontestably remedial."

"How can they possibly know their own minds?" demanded my father.

"No person," said Derry Willard's father, "knows his own mind until he's ready to die. But the sooner he knows his own heart the sooner he's ready to begin to live."

My father stirred in his chair. He lit a cigar. It went out. He lit it

again. It went out again. He jerked his shoulders. He looked nervous. He talked about things that nobody was talking about at all.

"The young rascal dropped a hundred-dollar bill--when he was here before!" he said. He said it as tho it was something very wicked.

Young Derry Willard's father seemed perfectly cheerful.

"Did he really?" he said.

"It's a wonder the crow didn't eat it!" snapped my father.

"But even the crow wouldn't eat it, eh?" said Derry Willard's father. Quite suddenly he began to laugh again. He looked at my mother. He stopped laughing. His voice was very gentle. "Don't be--proud," he said. "Don't ever be proud." He threw out his hand as tho he was asking something. "What difference does anything make--in the whole world," he said, "except just young love--and old friendship?"

"Oh, pshaw," said father. "Oh, pshaw!"

Rosalee came and stood in the door. She looked only at mother. She had on a red coat. And a red hat. And red mittens.

"Derry Willard wants to see the Christmas-tree garden," she said. "May I go?"

Derry Willard stood just behind her. He had on his fur coat. He looked very hard at father. When he spoke he spoke only to father.

"Is it all right?" he said. "May _I_ go?"

My father looked up. And then he looked down. He looked at Derry Willard's father. He threw out his hands as tho there was no place left to look. A little smile crept into one corner of his mouth. He tried to bite it. He couldn't.

"Oh--_pshaw_!" he said.

Carol and I went out to play. We thought we'd like to see the Christmas-tree garden too. The snow was almost as deep as our heads. All the evergreen trees were weighed down with snow. Their branches dragged on the ground. It was like walking through white plumes.

We found mother's Christmas-tree garden. We found Rosalee and young Derry Willard standing right in the middle of it. It was all caves and castles! It was like a whole magic little city all made out of white plumes! The sun came out and shone on it! Blue sky opened overhead!

Everything crackled! It was more beautiful even than the Christmas tree in the parlor.

They didn't hear us.

Rosalee gave a funny little cry. It was like a sob. Only happy.

"I love _Christmas_!" she said.

"I love _you_!" said Derry Willard.

He snatched her in his arms and kissed her.

A great pine-tree shivered all its snow down on them like a veil.

We heard them laugh.

We ran back to the house. We ran just as fast as we could. It almost burst our lungs. We ran into the parlor. I didn't tell. Carol couldn't tell.

My father and young Derry Willard's father were talking and talking behind great clouds of smoke. The Yule log was blazing and sputtering all sorts of fireworks and colors. Only mother was watching it. She was paring apples as she watched. A little smile was in her eyes.

"What a wonderful--wonderful day to have it happen!" she said.

I couldn't stand it any longer. I ran upstairs and got my best story-book. I brought it down and opened it at the picture of the Fairy Prince. I laid it open like that in Mr. Willard's lap. I pointed at the picture.

"_There!_" I said.

Derry Willard's father put on his glasses and looked at the picture.

"Well, upon my soul," he said, "where did you get that?"

"It's my book," I said. "It's always been my book."

My father looked at the picture.

"Why, of all things," he said.

"Why, it looks exactly like Derry!" said my mother.

"It _is_ Derry!" said Derry's father. "But don't ever let Derry know

that you know that it is! It seems to tease him a little. It seems to tease him a very great deal in fact. Being all rigged out like that. The illustrator is a friend of mine. He spent the Winter in Cuba three or four years ago. And he painted the picture there."

I looked at Carol. Carol looked at me. It was an absolutely perfect Christmas! If this were true, then everything beautiful that there was in the world was true, too! Carol nudged me to speak.

"Then Derry really is a Fairy Prince?" I said.

Father started to speak.

Mother stopped him.

"Yes! Rosalee's Fairy Prince!" she said.

THE GAME OF THE BE-WITCHMENTS

We like our Aunt Esta very much because she doesn't like us.

That is--she doesn't like us specially. Toys are what our Aunt Esta likes specially. Our Aunt Esta invents toys. She invents them for a store in New York. Our Aunt Esta is thirty years old with very serious hair. I don't know how old our other relatives are--except Rosalee! And Carol! And myself!

My sister Rosalee is seventeen years old. And a Betrothess. Her Betrother lives in Cuba. He eats bananas. My brother Carol is eleven. He has no voice in his throat. But he eats anything. I myself am only nine. But with very long legs. Our Father and Mother have no age. They are just tall.

There was a man. He was very rich. He had a little girl with sick bones. She had to sit in a wheel chair all day long and be pushed around by a Black Woman. He asked our Aunt Esta to invent a Game for her. The little girl's name was Posie.

Our Aunt Esta invented a Game. She called it the Game of the Be-Witchments. It cost two hundred dollars and forty-three cents. The Rich Man didn't seem to mind the two hundred dollars. But he couldn't bear the forty-three cents. He'd bear even that, though, he said, if it would only be sure to work!

"_Work?_" said our Aunt Esta. "Why _of course_ it will work!" So just the first minute she got it invented she jammed it into her trunk and dashed up to our house to see if it would!

It worked very well. Our Aunt Esta never wastes any time. Not even kissing. Either coming or going. We went right up to her room with her. It was a big trunk. The Expressman swore a little. My Father tore his trouser-knee. My Mother began right away to re-varnish the scratches on the bureau.

It took us most all the morning to carry the Game down-stairs. We carried it to the Dining Room. It covered the table. It covered the chairs. It strewed the sideboard. It spilled over on the floor. There was a pair of white muslin angel wings all spangled over with silver and gold! There was a fairy wand! There was a shining crown! There was a blue satin clock! There was a yellow plush suit and swishy-tail all painted sideways in stripes like a tiger! There was a most furious tiger head with whisk-broom whiskers! There was a green frog's head! And a green frog's suit! There was a witch's hat and cape! And a hump on the back! There were bows and arrows! There were boxes and boxes of milliner's flowers! There were strings of beads! And yards and yards of dungeon chains made out of silver paper! And a real bugle! And red Chinese lanterns! And--and everything!

The Rich Man came in a gold-colored car to see it work. When he saw the Dining Room he sickened. He bit his cigar.

"My daughter Posie is ten years old," he said. "What I ordered for her was a Game!--not a Trousseau!"

Our Aunt Esta shivered her hands. She shrugged her shoulders.

"You don't understand," she said. "This is no paltry Toy to be exhausted and sickened of in a single hour! This is a real Game! Eth-ical! Psycho-psycho--logical! Unendingly diverting! Hour after hour! Day after day!--Once begun, you understand, it's never over!"

The Rich Man looked at his watch.

"I have to be in Chicago a week from tomorrow!" he said.

Somebody giggled. It couldn't have been Rosalee, of course. Because Rosalee is seventeen. And, of course, it wasn't Carol. So it must have been me.

The Rich Man gave an awful glare.

"Who are these children?" he demanded.

Our Aunt Esta swallowed.

"They are my--my Demonstrators," she said.

"Demonstrators?" sniffed the Rich Man. He glared at Carol. "Why don't you speak?" he demanded.

My mother made a rustle to the door-way.

"He can't," she said. "Our son Carol is dumb."

The Rich Man looked very queer.

"Oh, I say," he fumbled and stuttered. "Oh, I say--! After all there's no such great harm in a giggle. My little girl Posie cries all the time. All the time, I mean! Cries and cries and cries!--It's a fright!"

"She wouldn't," said our Aunt Esta, "if she had a game like this to play with."

"Eh?" said the Rich Man.

"She could wear the Witch's hideous cape!" said our Aunt Esta. "And the queer pointed black hat! And the scraggly gray wig! And the great horn-rimmed spectacles! And the hump on her back! And----"

"My daughter Posie has Ti--Titian red curls," said the Rich Man coldly. "And the most beautiful brown eyes that mortal man has ever seen! And a skin so fair that----"

"That's why I think it would rest her so," said our Aunt Esta, "to be ugly outside--instead of inside for a while."

"_Eh?_" said the Rich Man.

He glared at our Aunt Esta.

Our Aunt Esta glared at him.

Out in the kitchen suddenly the most beautiful smell happened. The smell was soup! Spiced Tomato Soup! It was as though the whole stove had bloomed! My Father came to the door. "What's it all about?" he said. He saw the Rich Man. The Rich Man saw him. "Why, how do you do?" said my Father. "Why, how do you do?" said the Rich Man. They bowed. There was no room on the Dining Room table to put the dishes. There was no room anywhere for anything. We had to eat in the kitchen. My Mother made

griddle cakes. The Rich Man stirred the batter. He seemed to think it was funny. Carol had to sit on a soap-box. Our Aunt Esta sat on the edge of a barrel with her stockings swinging. It made her look not so strict. "All the same," worried the Rich Man, "I don't see just why you fixed the price at two hundred dollars and forty-three cents?--Why not two hundred dollars and forty-five cents? Or even the round sum two hundred and one dollars?"

Our Aunt Esta looked pretty mad. "I will be very glad--I'm sure," she said, "to submit an itemized bill."

"Oh, nonsense!" said the Rich Man. "It was just your mental processes I was wondering about.--The thing, of course, is worth any money--if it works!"

"If it works?" cried our Aunt Esta.

The Rich Man jumped up and strode fiercely to the Dining Room door.

Our Aunt Esta strode fiercely after him, only littler. Our Aunt Esta is very little.

The Rich Man waved his arms at everything,--the boxes,--the bundles,--the angel-wings,--the cloaks,--the suits,--the Chinese Lanterns.

"All the same, the thing is perfectly outrageous!--The size of it!--The extent! No house would hold it!"

"It isn't meant," said our Aunt Esta, "to be played just in the house.--It's meant to be played on a sunny porch opening out on a green lawn--so that there's plenty of room for all Posie's little playmates to go swarming in and out."

The Rich Man looked queer. He gave a little shiver.

"My little daughter Posie hasn't got any playmates," he said. "She's too cross."

Our Aunt Esta stood up very straight. Two red spots flamed in her cheeks.

"You won't be able to keep the children away from her," she said, "after they once begin to play this game!"

"You really think so?" cried the Rich Man.

Out in the kitchen my Father looked at my Mother. My Mother looked at my

Father. They both looked at us. My Father made a little chuckle.

"It would seem," said my Father, "as though it was the honor of the whole family that was involved!" He made a whisper in Carol's ear. "Go to it, Son!" he whispered.

Rosalee jumped to her feet. Carol jumped to his feet. I jumped to my feet. We snatched hands. We ran right into the Dining Room. Carol's face was shining.

"Who's going to be Posie-with-the-Sick-Bones?" I cried.

"S--s--h!" said everybody except our Aunt Esta.

Our Aunt Esta suddenly seemed very much encouraged. She didn't wait a minute. She snatched a little book from her pocket. It was a little book that she had made herself all full of typewriter directions about the Game.

"_Someone_, of course," she said, "will have to be the Witch,--someone who knows the Game, I mean, so perhaps I--?"

We rushed to help her drag the old battered tricycle to the Porch! We helped her open up every porch door till all the green lawn and gay petunia blossoms came right up and fringed with the old porch rug! We helped her tie on the Witch's funny hat! And the scraggly gray wig! And the great horn-rimmed spectacles! We helped her climb into the tricycle seat! We were too excited to stay on the porch! We wheeled her right out on the green lawn itself! The green lilac hedge reared all up around her like a magic wall!

We screamed with joy! The Rich Man jumped when we screamed. The Rich Man's name was Mr. Trent.

"And Mr. Trent shall be the Black Woman who pushes you all about!" we screamed.

"I will not!" said Mr. Trent.

But Carol had already tied a black velvet ribbon on the Rich Man's leg to _show_ that he was!

Our Aunt Esta seemed more encouraged every minute. She stood us all up in front of her. Even Father. She read from her book. It was a poem. The poem said:

Now come ye all to the Witch's Ball,
Ye Great, ye Small,

Ye Short, ye Tall,
Come one, Come all!

"I will not!" said the Rich Man.

He sweated.

"Oh Shucks! Be a Sport!" said my Father.

"I will _not_!" said the Rich Man.

He glared.

Our Aunt Esta tried to read from her book and wave her wand at the same time. It waved the Rich Man in the nose.

"Foul Menial!" waved our Aunt Esta. "Bring in the Captives!"

"Who?" demanded the Rich Man.

"You" said our Aunt Esta.

The Rich Man brought us in! Especially Father! He bound us all up in silver paper chains! He put a silver paper ring through my Father's beautiful nose!

"Oh, I say," protested my Father. "It was 'guests' that I understood we were to be! Not captives!"

"Ha!" sniffed the Rich Man. "Be a Sport!"

They both glared.

Our Aunt Esta had cakes in a box. They seemed to be very good cakes. "Now in about ten minutes," read our Aunt Esta from her book, "you will all begin to feel very queer."

"Oh--Lordy!" said my Father.

"I knew it!" said the Rich Man. "I knew it all the time! From the very first mouthful--my stomach----"

"Is there no antidote?" cried my Mother.

Our Aunt Esta took off her horn-rimmed spectacles. She sniffed.

"Sillies!" she said. "This is just a Game, you know!"

"Nevertheless," said the Rich Man, "I certainly feel very queer."

"When you all feel equally queer," said our Aunt Esta coldly, "we will proceed with the Game."

We all felt equally queer just as soon as we could.

Our Aunt Esta made a speech. She made it from her little book.

"Poor helpless Captives (said the Speech). You are now entirely in my power! Yet fear not! If everybody does just exactly as I say, all may yet be well!"

"Hear! Hear!" said my Father.

The Rich Man suddenly seemed to like my Father very much. He reached over and nudged him in the ribs.

"Shut up!" he whispered. "The less you say the sooner it will be over!"

My Father said less at once. He seemed very glad to know about it.

Our Aunt Esta pointed to a boxful of little envelopes.

"Foul Menial," she said. "Bring the little envelopes!"

The Rich Man brought them. But not very cheerfully.

"Oh, of course, it's all right to call me that," he said. "But I tell you quite frankly that my daughter Posie's maid will never stand for it! Her name is Elizabeth Lou!--Mrs. Jane--Frank--Elizabeth Lou--even!"

Our Aunt Esta looked at the Rich Man. Her look was scornfuller and scornfuller.

"All Witch's servants," she said, "are called 'Foul Menial!--From the earliest classical records of fairy tale and legend down to----'"

"Not in our times," insisted the Rich Man. "I defy you in any Intelligence Office in New York to find a--a----"

Our Aunt Esta brushed the contradiction aside. She frowned. Not just at the Rich Man. But at everybody. "We will proceed with the Rehearsal--as written!" she said. She gruffed her voice. She thumped her wand on the floor. "Each captive," she said, "will now step forward and draw a little envelope from the box."

Each captive stepped forward and drew a little envelope from the box.

Inside each envelope was a little card. Very black ink words were written on each card.

"Captives, stand up very straight!" ordered our Aunt Esta.

Every captive stood very straight.

"Knock your knees together with fear!" ordered our Aunt Esta.

Every captive knocked his knees together with fear.

"Strain at your chains!" ordered our Aunt Esta. "But not too hard! Remembering they are paper!"

Every captive strained at his chains but not too hard! Remembering they were paper!

Our Aunt Esta seemed very much pleased. She read another poem from her book. The poem said:

Imprisoned thus in my Witchy Wiles,
Robbed of all hope, all food, all smiles,
A Fearful Doom o'er-hangs thy Rest,
Unless thou meet my Dread Behest!

"Oh, dear--oh, dear--oh, dear--oh, dear!" cried our Mother. "Can nothing save us?"

My Father burst his nose-ring!

Rosalee giggled!

Carol and I jumped up and down! We clapped our hands!

The Rich Man cocked his head on one side. He looked at our Aunt Esta. At her funny black pointed hat. At her scraggly gray wig. At her great horn-rimmed spectacles. At the hump on her back. "U-m-m," he said. "What do you mean,--'witch-y wiles?'"

"_Silence!_" said our Aunt Esta. "Read your cards!"

We read our cards.

Carol's card said "PINK BREEZE" on it. And "SLIMY FROG."

Our Aunt Esta poked Carol twice with her wand. "Pitiful Wretch!" said

our Aunt Esta. "It is now two o'clock.--Unless you are back here exactly at three o'clock--bearing a _Pink Breeze_ in your hands--you shall be turned for all time and eternity into a _Slimy Green Frog_!--Go hence!"

Carol went hence. He henced as far as the Mulberry Tree on the front lawn. He sat down on the grass with the card in his hand. He read the card. And read it. And read it. It puzzled him very much.

"Pitiful Wretch, go _hence_!" cried our Aunt Esta.

He henced as far as the Larch Tree this time. And sat down all over again. And puzzled. And puzzled.

"Go _hence_, I say, Pitiful Wretch!" insisted our Aunt Esta.

My Mother didn't like Carol to be called a "Pitiful Wretch."--It was because he was dumb, I suppose. When my Mother doesn't like anything it spots her cheek-bones quite red. Her cheek-bones were spotted very red.

"Stop your fussing!" said our Aunt Esta. "And attend to your own business!"

My Mother attended to her own business. The business of her card said "SILVER BIRD" and "HORSE'S HOOF."

Even our Aunt Esta looked a bit flabbergasted.

"Oh, dear--oh, dear," said our Aunt Esta. "I certainly am sorry that it was you who happened to draw that one!--And all dressed up in white too as you are! But after all--" she jerked with a great toss of her scraggly wig, "a Game is a Game! And there can be no concessions!"

"No, of course not!" said my Mother. "Lead me to the Slaughter!"

"There is not necessarily any slaughter connected with it," said our Aunt Esta very haughtily. But she hit my Mother only once with her wand.

"Frail Creature," she said. "On the topmost branch of the tallest tree in the world there is a silver bird with a song in his throat that has never been sung! Unless you bring me this bird _singing_ you are hereby doomed to walk with the clatter of a Horse's Hoof!"

"Horse's Hoof?" gasped my Mother. "With the clatter of a Horse's Hoof?"

My Father was pretty mad. "Why, it's impossible!" he said. "She's as light as Thistle-Down! Even in her boots it's like a Fairy passing!"

"Nevertheless," insisted our Aunt Esta. "She shall walk with the clatter

of a Horse's Hoof--unless she brings me the Silver Bird."

My Mother started at once for the Little Woods. "I can at least search the Tallest Tree in _my_ world!" she said.

It made my Father nervous and nervous. "Now don't you _dare_" he called after her, "climb _anything_ until I come!"

"Base Interloper!" said our Aunt Esta. "Keep Still!"

"Who?" said my Father.

"_You!_" said our Aunt Esta.

I giggled. Our Aunt Esta was very mad. She turned me into a White Rabbit. I was made of white canton flannel. I was very soft. I had long ears. They were lop-ears. They were lined with pink velvet. They hung way down over my shoulders so I could stroke them. I liked them very much. But my legs looked like white night-drawers. "Ruthy-the-Rabbit" was my name. Our Aunt Esta scolded it at me.

"Because of your impudence, Ruthy-the-Rabbit," she said, "you shall not be allowed to roam the woods and fields at will. But shall stay here in captivity close by my side and help the Foul Menial do the chores!"

The Rich Man seemed very much pleased. He winked an eye. He pulled one of my lop-ears. It was nice to have somebody pleased with me.

Everybody was pleased with Rosalee's bewitchment. It sounded so restful. All Rosalee had to do was to be very pretty,--just exactly as she was! And seventeen years old,--just exactly as she was! And sit on the big gray rock by the side of the brook just exactly as it was! And see whether it was a Bright Green Celluloid Fish or a Bright Red Celluloid Fish that came down the brook first! And if it was a Bright Green Celluloid Fish she was to catch it! And slit open its stomach! And take out all its Directions! And follow 'em! And if it was a Bright Red Celluloid Fish she was to catch _it_! And take out all its Directions and follow _them_!--In either case her card said she would need rubbers and a trowel.--It sounded like Buried Treasure to me! Or else Iris Roots! Our Aunt Esta is very much interested in Iris Roots.

It was my Father's Bewitchment that made the only real trouble. Nothing at all was postponed about my Father's Bewitchment. It happened all at once. It was because my Father knew too much. It was about the Alphabet that he knew too much. The words on my Father's card said "ALPHABET." And "BACKWARDS." And "PINK SILK FAIRY." And "TIN LOCOMOTIVE HEAD." And "THREE MINUTES." Our Aunt Esta turned my Father into a Pink Silk Fairy with White Tarlatan Wings because he was able to say the Alphabet

backwards in three minutes! My Father refused to turn! He wouldn't! He wouldn't! He swore he wouldn't! He said it was a "cruel and unnecessary punishment!" Our Aunt Esta said it wasn't a Punishment! It was a Reward! It was the Tin Locomotive Head that was the punishment! My Father said he wouldn't have cared a rap if it had been the Tin Locomotive Head!--He could have smoked through that! But he wouldn't be a Pink Silk Fairy with White Tarlatan Wings!

The Rich Man began right away to untie the black velvet ribbon on his leg, and go home! He looked very cheated! He scorned my Father with ribald glances! "Work?" he gloated. "Of course it won't work! I knew all the time it wouldn't work!--Two hundred dollars! And forty-three cents?" he gloated. "H-a!"

Our Aunt Esta cried! She put her hand on my Father's arm. It was a very small hand. It didn't look a bit like a Witch's hand. Except for having no lovingness in it, it looked a good deal like my Mother's hand.

My Father consented to be turned a little! But not much! He consented to wear the white tarlatan wings! And the gold paper crown! But not the garland of roses! He would carry the pink silk dress on his arm, he said. But he would not wear it!

The Rich Man seemed very much encouraged. He stopped untying the black velvet ribbon from his leg. He grinned a little.

My Father told him what he thought of him. The Rich Man acknowledged that very likely it was so. But he didn't seem to mind. He kept right on grinning.

My Father stalked away in his gold paper crown with the pink dress over his arm. He looked very proud and noble. He looked as though even if dogs were sniffing at his heels he wouldn't turn. His white wings flapped as he walked. The spangles shone. It looked very holy.

The Rich Man made a funny noise. It sounded like snorting.

My Father turned round quicker than scat. He glared right through the Rich Man at our Aunt Esta. He told our Aunt Esta just what he thought of her!

The Rich Man said it wasn't so at all! That the Game undoubtedly was perfectly practical if---

"If nothing!" said my Father. "It's you yourself that are spoiling the whole effect by running around playing you're a Black Slave with nothing on but a velvet ribbon round one knee! The very least you could do," said my Father, "is to have your face blacked! And wear a

plaid skirt!"

"_Eh?_" said the Rich Man.

Our Aunt Esta was perfectly delighted with the suggestion.

The Rich Man took her delight coldly.

He glared at my Father. "I don't think I need any outside help," he said, "in the management of my affairs.--As the Owner indeed of one of the largest stores in the world I----"

"That's all right," said my Father. "But you never yet have tried to manage the children's Aunt Esta.--Nothing can stop her!"

Nothing could! She pinned an old plaid shawl around the Rich Man's waist! She blacked his face! He had to kneel at her feet while it was being blacked! He seemed to sweat easily! But our Aunt Esta blacked very easily too! He looked lovely! Even my Father thought he looked lovely! When he was done he wanted to look in a mirror. My Father advised him not to. But he insisted. My Father got up from making suggestions and came and stood behind him while he looked. They looked only once. Something seemed to hit them. They doubled right up. It was laughter that hit them. They slapped each other on the back. They laughed! And laughed! And laughed! They made such a noise that my Mother came running!

It seemed to make our Aunt Esta a little bit nervous to have my Mother come running. She pointed her wand. She roared her voice.

"Where is the Silver Bird?" she roared.

My Mother looked just as swoone-y as she could. She fell on her knees. She clasped her hands.

"Oh, Cruel Witch," she said. "I _saw_ the bird! But I couldn't reach him! He was in the Poplar Tree!--However in the world did you put him there?--Was that what you were bribing the Butcher's Boy about this morning? Was that----?"

"Hush!" roared our Aunt Esta. "Your Doom has overtaken you! Go hence with the clatter of a Horse's Hoof until such time as your Incompetent Head may----"

"Oh, it wasn't my head that was incompetent," said my Mother. "It was my legs. The Poplar Tree was so very tall! So very fluffy and undecided to climb! So----"

"With the clatter of a Horse's Hoof!" insisted our Aunt Esta. "There can be no mercy!"

"None?" implored my Mother.

"None!" said our Aunt Esta.

She gave my Mother two funny little wooden cups. They were something like clappers. You could hold them in your hand so they scarcely showed at all and make a noise like a horse galloping across a bridge! Or trotting! Or anything! It made quite a loud noise! It was wonderful! My Mother started right away for the village. She had on white shoes. Her feet were very small. She sounded like a great team horse stumbling up the plank of a ferry-boat. "I think I'll go get the mail!" she said.

"Like that?" screamed my Father.

My Mother turned around. Her hair was all curly. There were laughs in her eyes.

"I _have_ to!" she said. "I'm bewitched!"

"I'll go with you!" said my Father.

My Mother turned around again. She looked at my Father! At his golden crown! At his white spangled wings! At the pink silk skirt over his arm!

"Like--that?" said my Mother.

My Father decided not to go.

The Rich Man said he considered the decision very wise.

They glared.

Way over on the other side of the green lilac hedge we heard my Mother trotting down the driveway. _Clack_-clack--_clack_--clack sounded the hoof-beats!

"My Lord--she's pacing!" groaned my Father.

"Clever work!" said the Rich Man. "Was she ever in a Band? In a Jazz Band, you know, with Bantam Rooster whistles? And drums that bark like dogs?"

"In a _what_?" cried my Father. He was awful mad.

Our Aunt Esta tried to soothe him with something worse. She turned to

me.

"Now, Ruthy-the-Rabbit," she said. "Let us see what you can do to redeem the ignominy of your impudent giggling!" She handed me the Bright Green and the Bright Red Celluloid fishes. She poked her wand at me. "Hopping all the way," she said. "Every step of the way, you understand,--bear these two fish to the Head-Waters of the Magic Brook,--the little pool under the apple tree will do,--and start them ex--ex--peditiously down the Brook towards Rosalee!"

"Yes'm," I said.

Our Aunt Esta turned to the Rich Man.

"Foul Menial," she said. "Push my chariot a little further down the Lawn into the shade!"

The Foul Menial pushed it.

My Father pushed a little too.

I hopped along beside them flopping my long ears. Our Aunt Esta looked ex -actly like a Witch! The Rich Man's black face was leaking a little but not much! It would have been easier if he hadn't tripped so often on his plaid shawl skirt! My Father's white wings flapped as he pushed! He looked like an angel who wasn't quite hatched! It was handsome!

When we got to the thickest shade there was a man's black felt hat bobbing along the top of the Japonica Hedge. It was rather a soft-boiled looking hat. It was bobbing just as fast as it could towards the house.

When our Aunt Esta saw the hat she screamed! She jumped from her chariot as though it had been flames! She tore the scraggly gray wig from her head! She tore the hump from her back! She kicked off her wooden shoes! Her feet were silk! She ran like the wind for the back door!

My Father ran for the Wood-Shed!

The Rich Man dove into the Lilac Bush!

When the Rich Man was all through diving into the Lilac Bush he seemed to think that he was the only one present who hadn't done anything!

"What you so scared about, Ruthy?" he said. "What's the matter with everybody? Who's the Bloke?"

"It's the New Minister," I said.

"Has he got the Cholera or anything?" said the Rich Man.

"No, not exactly," I explained. "He's just our Aunt Esta's Suitor!"

"Your Aunt Esta's _Suitor?_" cried the Rich Man. "_Suitor?_" He clapped his hand over his mouth. He burst a safety-pin that helped lash the plaid shawl around him. "What do you mean,--'_Suitor?_'_" he said.

It seemed queer he was so stupid.

"Why a Suitor," I explained, "is a Person Who Doesn't Suit--so he keeps right on coming most every day to see if he does! As soon as he suits, of course, he's your husband and doesn't come any more at all--because he's already there! The New Minister," I explained very patiently, "is a Suitor for our Aunt Esta's hand!"

We crawled through the Lilac Bush. We peeped out.

Our Aunt Esta hadn't reached the back door at all. She sat all huddled up in a little heap on the embankment trying to keep the New Minister from seeing that she was in her stocking-feet. But the New Minister didn't seem to see anything at all except her hands. Being a Suitor for her hands it was natural, I suppose, that he wasn't interested in anything except her hands. Her hands were on her hair. The scraggly gray wig had rumbled all the seriousness out of her hair. It looked quite jolly. The New Minister stared! And stared! And stared! Except for having no lovingness in them, her hands looked _very_ much like my Mother's.

"Our Aunt Esta's got--nice hands," I said.

The Rich Man burst another safety pin.

"Yes, by Jove," he said. "And nice feet, too!" He seemed quite surprised. "How long's this minister fellow been coming here?" he said.

"Oh, I don't know," I said. "He comes whenever our Aunt Esta comes."

The Rich Man made a grunt. He looked at the Minister's hat.

"Think of courting a woman," he said, "in a hat like that!"

"Oh, our Aunt Esta doesn't care anything at all about hats," I said.

"It's time she did!" said the Rich Man.

"We'll go out if you say so," I suggested, "and help them have a

pleasant time."

The Rich Man was awful mad. He pointed at his plaid shawl! He pointed at his black face!

"_What?_" he said. "Go out like _this_? And make a fool of myself before that Ninny-Hat?"

"Why, he'd love it!" I said.

The Rich Man choked.

"That's quite enough reason!" he said.

There was a noise in the wood-shed. We could see the noise through the window. It was my Father trying to untie his wings. He couldn't.

The Rich Man seemed to feel better suddenly. He began to mop his face.

"It's a great Game, all right," he said, "if you don't weaken!" He pulled my ears. "But why in the world, Ruthy----" he worried, "did she have to go and tuck that forty-three cents on to the end of the bill?"

"Why, that's her profit!" I explained.

"Her--profit?" gasped the Rich Man. "Her _Profit_?"

"Why, she had to have something!" I explained. "She was planning to have more, of course! She was planning to go to Atlantic City! But everything costs so big! Even toys! It's----"

"Her _Profit_?" gasped the Rich Man. "Forty-three cents on a two hundred dollar deal?" He began to laugh! And laugh! "And she calls herself a Business Woman?" he said. "Why, she ought to be in an Asylum!--All women, in fact, ought to be in Asylums--or else in homes of their own!" Quite furiously he began to pull my ears all over again. "_Business Woman_" he said. "And both her feet would go at once in the hollow of my hand! _Business Woman!_"

Out in the roadway suddenly somebody sneezed.

It made the Rich Man jump awfully.

"Ruthy, stay where you are!" he ordered.

"I can't!" I called back. "I'm already hopped out!"

From my hop-out I could see the Person Who Sneezed! Anybody would have

known that it was Posie-with-the-Sick-Bones! She was sitting in an automobile peering through the hedge! There was a black woman with her!

The Rich Man crackled in the bushes. He reached out and grabbed my foot. He pulled me back. His face looked pretty queer.

"Yes, she's been there all the time," he whispered. "But not a soul knows it!--I wanted her to see it work!--I wanted to be sure that she liked it--But I was afraid to bring her in! She catches everything so! And I knew there were children here! And I was afraid there might be something contagious!"

He peered out through the Lilac Branches. There was quite a good deal to peer at.

Down in the meadow Rosalee was still running up and down the soft banks of the brook trying to catch the Celluloid Fish. She had on a green dress. It was a slim dress like a willow wand. She had her shoes and stockings in one hand. And a great bunch of wild blue Forget-me-Nots in the other. Her hair was like a gold wave across her face. She looked pretty. The Springtime looked pretty too.--Out in the wood-shed my Father was still wrestling with his wings.

Up on the green mound by the house our Aunt Esta was still patting her hair while the New Minister stared at her hands.

The Rich Man turned very suddenly and stared at me.

"_Contagious?_" he gasped out suddenly. "Why, upon my soul, Ruthie--it's just about the most contagious place that I ever was in--in my life!"

He gave a funny little laugh. He glanced back over his shoulder towards the road. He groaned.

"But I shall certainly be ruined, Ruthie," he said, "if my little daughter Posie or my little daughter Posie's Black Woman ever see me at close range--in these clothes!" He took my chin in his hands. He looked very deep into my eyes. "Ruthie," he said, "you seem to be a _very_ intelligent child.--If you can think of any way--_any_ way, I say--by which I can slink off undetected into the house--and be washed----"

"Oh Shucks! That's easy!" I said. "We'll _make_ Posie be the Witch!"

When I hopped out this time I stayed hopped! I hopped right up on the wall! And stroked my ears!

When Posie-with-the-Sick-Bones saw me she began to laugh! And clap her hands! And kick the Black Woman with her toes!

"Oh, I want to be the Witch!" she cried. "I want to be the Witch for ever and ever! And change everybody into everything! I'm going to wear it home in the automobile! And scare the Cook to Death! I'm going to change the Cook into a cup of Beef Tea! And throw her down the sink! I'm going to change my Poodle Dog into a New Moon!" she giggled. "I'm going to change my Doctor into a Balloon! And cut the string!"

The Rich Man seemed perfectly delighted. I could see his face in the bushes. He kept rubbing his hands! And nodding to me to go ahead!

I went ahead just as fast as I could.

The Black Woman began to giggle a little. She giggled and opened the automobile door. She giggled and lifted Posie out. She giggled and carried Posie to the Witch's chariot. She giggled and tied the Witch's hat under Posie's chin. She giggled and tied the humped-back cape around Posie's neck.

Posie never stopped clapping her hands except when the Witch's Wig itched her nose.

It was when the Witch's Wig itched her nose that the Rich Man slunk away on all fours to be washed. He giggled as he slunk. It looked friendly.

Carol came. He was pretty tired. But he had the Pink Breeze in his hands. It was Phlox! It was very pink! It was in a big flower pot! He puffed out his cheeks as he carried it and blew it into Breezes! It was pretty! It was very heavy! He knelt at the Witch's feet to offer it to her! When he looked up and saw the Strange Child in the Witch's Chair he dropped it! It broke and lay on the ground all crushed and spoiled! His mouth quivered! All the shine went out of his face!

It scared Posie to see all the shine go out of his face.

"Oh, Boy--Boy, put back your smile!" she said.

Carol just stood and shook his head.

Posie began to scream.

"Why doesn't he speak?" she screamed.

"He can't," I said. "He hasn't any speech!"

"Why doesn't he cry?" screamed Posie.

"He can't," I said. "He hasn't any cry!"

Posie stopped screaming.

"Can't he even swear?" she said.

"No, he can't," I said. "He hasn't any swear!"

Posie looked pretty surprised.

"I can speak!" she said. "I can cry! I can swear!"

"You sure can, Little Missy!" said the Black Woman.

Posie looked at Carol. She looked a long time. A little tear rolled down her cheek.

"Never mind, Boy," she said. "I will help you make a new Pink Breeze!"

"Oh Lor, Little Missy," said the Black Woman. "You never helped no one do nothin' in your life!"

"I will if I want to!" said Posie. "And we'll make a Larkspur-Colored Breeze too, if we want to!" she said. "And I'll have it on my window-sill all blue-y and frilly and fluttery when everything else in the room is horrid and hushed and smothery!--And we'll make a Green Breeze----" She gave a little cry. She looked at the Waving Meadow where all the long silver-tipped grasses ducked and dipped in the wind. She stretched out her arms. Her arms were no bigger than the handles of our croquet mallets. "We'll dig up all the Waving Meadow," she cried. "And pot it into Window-Sill Breezes for the hot people in the cities!"

"You can't!" I said. "It would take mor'n an hour! And you've got to be the Witch!"

"I will not be the Witch!" said Posie. She began to scream! "It's my Game!" she screamed. "And I'll do anything I like with it!" She tore off her black pointed hat! She kicked off her stubby wooden shoes! She screamed to the Black Woman to come and bear her away!

While the Black Woman bore her away Carol walked beside them. He seemed very much interested that any one could make so much noise.

When Posie saw how much interested Carol was in the noise, she stopped en--tirely screaming to the Black Woman and screamed to Carol instead.

While Carol walked beside the Noise, I saw the New Minister come down the Road and go away. His face looked red.

Our Aunt Esta came running. She was very business-like. She snatched up her wooden shoes and put them on! She crammed on the scraggly gray wig and the humped-back cape!

"Foul Menial!" she called. "Come at once and resume the Game!"

The Black Woman stepped out of the bushes. She looked very much surprised. But not half as surprised as our Aunt Esta.

Our Aunt Esta rubbed her eyes! She rubbed them again! And again! She looked at the Black Woman's face. It was a _real_ black face. She looked at the Black Woman's woolly hair.--It was _real_ woolly hair! Her jaw dropped!

"Ruthy-the-Rabbit, hop here!" she gasped.

I hopped.

She put her lips close to my ear.

"Ruthy-the-Rabbit," she gasped. "Do I see what I think I see?"

"Yes, you do!" I said.

She put her head down in her hands! She began to laugh! And laugh! And laugh! It was a queer laugh as though she couldn't stop! The tears ran out between her fingers!

"Well--I certainly _am_ a Witch!" she laughed. Her shoulders shook like sobs.

The Rich Man came running! He had his watch in his hand! He was all clean and shining! He saw the Black Woman standing by the Witch's chair! He saw the Witch in the chair! He thought the Witch was Posie! He grabbed her right up in his arms and _hugged_ her!

"Though I'm late for a dozen Directors' Meetings," he cried, "it's worth it, my Precious, to see you laugh!"

"I'm not your Precious!" cried our Aunt Esta. She bit! She tore! She scratched! She shook her scraggly gray wig-curls all over her face! It was like a mask! But all the time she kept right on laughing! She couldn't seem to stop!

The Rich Man kissed her. And kissed her! Right through her scraggly gray wig-curls he kissed her! He couldn't seem to stop!

"Now, at last, my Precious," he said. "We've learned how to live! We'll

play more! We'll laugh more!"

Our Aunt Esta tore off her wig! She tore off her hump! She shook her fist at the Rich Man! But she couldn't stop laughing!

The Rich Man gave one awful gasp! He turned red! He turned white! He looked at the wood-shed window to see if my Father had seen him.

My Father had seen him!

The Rich Man said things under his breath. That is, most of them were under his breath. He stalked to his car. He ordered the Black Woman to pick up the Real Posie and stalk to his car! He looked madder than Pirates!

But when he had climbed into his car, and had started his engine, and was all ready to go, he stood up on the seat instead, and peered over the hedge-top at our Aunt Esta! And grinned!

Our Aunt Esta was standing just where he had left her. All the laughter was gone from her. But her eyes looked very astonished. Her cheeks were blazing red. Her hair was all gay and rumpled like a sky-terrier's. It seemed somehow to be rather becoming to our Aunt Esta to be kissed by mistake.

The Rich Man made a little noise in his throat. Our Aunt Esta looked up. She jumped. The Rich Man fixed his eyes right on her. His eyes were full of twinkles.

"Talk about Be-Witchments!" he said. "Talk about--_Be-Witchments_!--I'll be back on Tuesday! What for?--Great Jumping Jehosophats!" he said. "It's enough that I'll be back!"

My Father stuck his head and the tip of one battered wing out the wood-shed window. He started to say something. And cocked his ear instead.

It was towards the village that he cocked his ear.

We all stopped and cocked our ears.

It was a funny sound: Clack-Clack-_Clack_! Clack-Clack-_Clack_!
Clack-Clack--_Clack_!

It was my Mother cantering home across the wooden bridge.

It sounded glad.

My Father thought of a new way suddenly to escape from his wings! And ran to meet her!

THE BLINDED LADY

The Blinded Lady lived in a little white cottage by the Mill Dam.

She had twenty-seven cats! And a braided rug! And a Chinese cabinet all full of peacock-feather fans!

Our Father and Mother took us to see them.

It smelt furry.

Carol wore his blue suit. Rosalee wore an almost grown-up dress. I wore my new middy blouse.

We looked nice.

The Blinded Lady looked nice too.

She sat in a very little chair in the middle of a very large room. Her skirts were silk and very fat. They fluffed all around her like a pen-wiper. She had on a white lace cap. There were violets in the cap. Her eyes didn't look blinded.

We sat on the edge of our chairs. And stared at her. And stared. She didn't mind.

All the cats came and purred their sides against our legs. It felt soft and sort of bubbly.

The Blinded Lady recited poetry to us. She recited "Gray's Elegy in a Country Churchyard." She recited "The Charge of the Light Brigade." She recited "Bingen on the Rhine."

When she got all through reciting poetry she asked us if we knew any.

We did.

We knew "Onward Christian Soldiers," and "Hey Diddle, Diddle, the Cat and the Fiddle." And Rosalee knew two verses about

It was many and many a year ago

In a kingdom by the sea,
That a maiden lived whom you may know
By the name of Annabel Lee.

We hoped the Blinded Lady would be pleased.

She wasn't!

The Blinded Lady said it wasn't nearly enough just to know the first two verses of anything! That you ought to know all the verses of everything! The Blinded Lady said that every baby just as soon as it was born ought to learn every poem that it possibly could so that if it ever grew up and was blinded it would have something to amuse itself with!

We promised we would!

We asked the Blinded Lady what made her blinded.

She said it was because she made all her father's shirts when she was six years old!

We promised we wouldn't!

"And now," said the Blinded Lady, "I'd like to have the Little Dumb Boy come forward and stand at my knee so I can touch his face!"

Carol didn't exactly like to be called the Little Dumb Boy, but he came forward very politely and stood at the Blinded Lady's knee. The Blinded Lady ran her fingers all up and down his face. It tickled his nose. He looked puckered.

"It's a pleasant face!" said the Blinded Lady.

"We like it!" said my Father.

"Oh _very_ much!" said my Mother.

"Has he always been dumb?" said the Blinded Lady.

"Always," said my Mother. "But never deaf!"

"Oh _Tush_!" said the Blinded Lady. "Don't be stuffy! Afflictions were meant to talk about!"

"But Carol, you see," said my Mother, "can't talk about his! So _we_ don't!"

"Oh--_Tush_!" said the Blinded Lady.

She pushed Carol away. She thumped her cane on the braided rug.

"There's one here, isn't there," she said, "that hasn't got anything to be sensitive about? Let the Young Lassie come forward," she said, "so I can touch her face!"

It made Rosalee very pink to have her face explored.

The Blinded Lady laughed as she explored it.

"Ha!" she said. "Age about seventeen? Gold hair? Sky-blue eyes? Complexion like peaches and cream?--Not much cause here," laughed the Blinded Lady, "for this Young Lassie ever to worry when she looks in the glass!"

"Oh but she does!" I cried. "She worries herself most to death every time she looks!--She's afraid her hair will turn gray before Derry comes!"

"S-s-h!" said everybody.

The Blinded Lady cocked her head. She ruffled herself. It looked like feathers.

"Derry?" said the Blinded Lady. "Who's Derry?--A _beau_?"

My Father gruffed his throat.

"Oh Derry's just a young friend of ours," he said.

"He lives in Cuba," said my Mother.

"Cuba's an island!" I said. "It floats in water! They eat bananas! They have fights! It's very hot! There's lots of moonlight! Derry's father says that when Rosalee's married he'll build a----."

"Hush, Ruthy!" said my Father. "You've talked quite enough already!"

The Blinded Lady patted her skirts. They billowed all around her like black silk waves. It looked funny.

"H-m-m-mmm!" she said. "Let the Child-Who's-Talked-Too-Much-Already come forward now so that I can feel her face!"

I went forward just as fast as I could.

The Blinded Lady touched my forehead.

She smoothed my nose,--my cheeks,--my chin.

"U-m-mmm," she said. "And 'Ruthy' you say is what you call her?"

My Father twinkled his eyes.

"We have to call her something!" he said politely.

"And is this bump on the forehead a natural one?" said the Blinded Lady.
"Or an accidental one?"

"Both!" said my Father. "That is, it's pre-em-i-nently natural for our daughter Ruthy to have an accidental bump on her forehead."

"And there are, I infer," said the Blinded Lady, "one or two freckles on either side of the nose?"

"Your estimate," said my Father, "is conservative."

"And the hair?" said the Blinded Lady. "It hasn't exactly the texture of gold."

"'Penny-colored' we call it!" said my Mother.

"And not exactly a _new_ penny at that, is it?" said the Blinded Lady.

"N--o," said my Mother. "But rather jolly all the same like a penny that's just bought two sticks of candy instead of one!"

"And the nose turns up a little?" said the Blinded Lady.

"Well maybe just a--trifle," admitted my Mother.

The Blinded Lady stroked my face all over again. "U-m-m-m," she said. "Well at least it's something to be thankful for that everything is perfectly normal!" She put her hands on my shoulders. She shook me a little. "Never, _never_, Ruthie," she said, "be so foolish as to complain because you're not pretty!"

"No'm!" I promised.

"Put all the Beauty you can _inside_ your head!" said the Blinded Lady.

"Yes'm!" I promised. "And I've just thought of another one that I know! It's about

You must wake and call me early, call me early, mother dear,

For I'm to be Queen o' the May, mother, I'm to be----"

"_Foolish!_" said the Blinded Lady. "It wasn't sounds I was thinking of this time, but _sights_!" She pushed me away. She sighed and sighed. It puffed her all out. "O--h," she sighed. "O--h! Three pairs of Young Eyes and all the World waiting to be looked at!"

She rocked her chair. She rocked it very slowly. It was like a little pain.

"I never saw _anything_ after I was seventeen!" she said. "And God himself knows that I hadn't seen anywheres near enough before that! Just the little grass road to the village now and then on a Saturday afternoon to buy the rice and the meat and the matches and the soap! Just the wood-lot beyond the hill-side where the Arbutus always blossomed so early! Just old Neighbor Nora's new patch-work quilt!--Just a young man's face that looked in once at the window to ask where the trout brook was! But even these pictures," said the Blinded Lady, "They're fading! Fading! Sometimes I can't remember at all whether old Nora's quilt was patterned in diamond shapes or squares. Sometimes I'm not so powerful sure whether the young man's eye were blue or brown! After all, it's more'n fifty years ago. It's new pictures that I need now," she said. "New pictures!"

She took a peppermint from a box. She didn't pass 'em. She rocked her chair. And rocked. And rocked. She smiled a little. It wasn't a real smile. It was just a smile to save her dress. It was just a little gutter to catch her tears.

"Oh dear me--Oh dear me--Oh dear me!" said my Mother.

"Stop your babbling!" said the Blinded Lady. She sniffed. And sniffed. "But I'll tell you what I'll do," she said. "These children can come back here next Saturday afternoon and----."

"Why there's no reason in the world," said my Mother, "why they shouldn't come every day!"

The Blinded Lady stopped rocking. She almost screamed.

"Every day?" she said. "Mercy no! Their feet are muddy! And besides it's tiresome! But they can come next Saturday I tell you! And I'll give you a prize! Yes, I'll give two prizes--for the two best new pictures that they bring me to think about! And the first prize shall be a Peacock Feather Fan!" said the Blinded Lady. "And the second prize shall be a Choice of Cats!"

"A Choice of Cats?" gasped my Father.

The Blinded Lady thumped her cane. She thumped it pretty hard. It made you glad your toes weren't under it.

"Now mind you, Children!" she said.

"It's got to be a _new_ picture! It's got to be something you've seen yourself! The most _beautifullest_! The most _darlingest_ thing that you've ever seen! Go out in the field I say! Go out in the woods! Go up on the mountain top! And _look around_! Nobody I tell you can ever make another person see anything that he hasn't seen himself! Now be gone!" said the Blinded Lady. "I'm all tuckered out!"

"Why I'm sure," said my Father, "we never would have come at all if we hadn't supposed that----."

The Blinded Lady shook her cane right at my Father.

"Don't be stuffy!" she said. "But get out!"

We got out.

Old Mary who washed and ironed and cooked for the Blinded Lady showed us the shortest way out. The shortest way out was through the wood-shed. There were twenty-seven little white bowls of milk on the wood-shed floor. There was a cat at each bowl. It sounded lappy! Some of the cats were black. Some of the cats were gray. Some of the cats were white.

There was an old tortoise-shell cat. He had a crumpled ear. He had a great scar across his nose. He had a broken leg that had mended crooked.

Most of the cats were tortoise-shell _and_ black _and_ gray _and_ white! It looked pretty! It looked something the way a rainbow would look if it was fur! And splashed with milk instead of water!

"How many quarts does it take?" said my Mother.

"_Quarts?_" said Old Mary. She sniffed. "_Quarts?_" It takes a whole Jersey cow!"

The Blinded Lady called Rosalee to come back. I went with her. I held her hand very hard for fear we would be frightened.

There was a White Kitten in the Blinded Lady's Lap. It was a white Angora. It wasn't any bigger than a baby rabbit. It had a blue ribbon on its neck. It looked very pure. Its face said "Ruthy, I'd like very much to be your kitten!"

But the Blinded Lady's face didn't know I was there at all.

"Young Lassie," said the Blinded Lady. "What is the color of your Derry's eyes?"

"Why--why--black!" said Rosalee.

"U-m-mmm," said the Blinded Lady. "Black?" She began to munch a peppermint. "U-m-m-m," she said. She jerked her head. Her nose looked pretty sharp. "That's right, Young Lassie!" she cried. "Love _early_! Never mind what the old folks say! Sometimes there isn't any late! Love all you can! Love----!" She stopped suddenly. She sank back in her skirts again. And rocked! Her nose didn't look sharp any more. Her voice was all whispers. "Lassie," she whispered, "when you choose your Peacock Feather Fan--choose the one on the top shelf! It's the best one! It's sandal wood! It's----"

My boots made a creak.

The Blinded Lady gave an awful jump!

"There's someone else in this room besides the Young Lassie!" she cried.

I was frightened. I told a lie.

"You're en--tirely mistaken!" I said. I perked Rosalee's hand. We ran for our lives. We ran as fast as we could. It was pretty fast!

When we got out to the Road our Father and Mother were waiting for us. They looked pleasant. We liked their looks very much.

Carol was waiting too. He had his eyes shut. His mouth looked very surprised.

"Carol's trying to figure out how it would feel to be blind," said my Mother.

"Oh!" said Rosalee.

"O--h!" said I.

Carol clapped his hands.

Rosalee clapped her hands.

I clapped my hands.

It was wonderful! We all thought of it at the same moment! We shut our

eyes perfectly tight and played we were blinded all the way home!

Our Father and Mother had to lead us. It was pretty bumpy! I peeped some! Rosalee walked with her hands stretched way out in front of her as though she was reaching for something. She looked like a picture. It was like a picture of something very gentle and wishful that she looked like. It made me feel queer. Carol walked with his nose all puckered up as though he was afraid something smelly was going to hit him. It didn't make me feel queer at all. It made me laugh.

It didn't make my Father laugh.

"Now see here, you young Lunatics," said my Father. "If you think your Mother and I are going to drag you up the main village street--acting like this?"

We were sorry, we explained! But it had to be!

When we got to the village street we bumped right into the Old Doctor. We bumped him pretty hard! He had to sit down! I climbed into his lap.

"Of course I don't know that it's you," I said. "But I think it is!"

The Old Doctor seemed pretty astonished. He snatched at my Father and my Mother.

"Great Zounds, Good People!" he cried. "What fearful calamity has overtaken your offspring?"

"Absolutely nothing at all," said my Father, "compared to what is going to overtake them as soon as I get them home!"

"We're playing blinded," said Rosalee.

"We've been to see the Blinded Lady!" I explained.

"We're going to get prizes," said Rosalee. "Real prizes! A Peacock Feather Fan!"

"And the Choice of Cats!" I explained.

"For telling the Blinded Lady next Saturday," cried Rosalee, "the prettiest thing that we've ever seen!"

"Not just the prettiest!" I explained. "But the most precious!"

"So we thought we'd shut our eyes!" said Rosalee. "All the way home! And find out what Sight it was that we missed the most!-- Sunshine I think

it is!" said Rosalee. "_Sunshine_ and all the pretty flickering little shadows! And the way the slender white church spire flares through the Poplar Trees! Oh I shall make up a picture about _sunshine_!" said Rosalee.

"Oh, Sh--h!" said my Mother. "You mustn't tell each other what you decide. That would take half the fun and the surprise out of the competition!"

"Would--it?" said Rosalee. "Would it?" She turned to the Old Doctor. She slipped into the curve of his arm. The curve of his arm seemed to be all ready for her. She reached up and patted his face. "You Old Darling," she said. "In all the world what is the most beautiful--est sight that _you_ have ever seen?"

The Old Doctor gave an awful swallow.

"_Youth!_" he said.

"Oh, youth Fiddle-sticks!" said my Father. "How ever would one make a picture of _that_? All arms and legs! And wild ideas! Believe me that if I ever once get _these_ wild ideas and legs and arms home to-day there will be----"

We never heard what there would be! 'Cause we bumped into the Store-Keeping Man instead! And had to tell _him_ all about it!

Nobody kissed the Store-Keeping Man. He smelt of mice and crackers. We talked to him just as we would have talked to Sugar or Potatoes.

"Mr. Store-Keeping Man," we said. "You are very wise! You have a store! And a wagon! And a big iron safe! And fly-papers besides!--In all the world--what is the most beautifullest thing that you have ever seen?"

The Store-Keeping Man didn't have to worry about it at all. He never even swallowed. The instant he crossed his hands on his white linen stomach he _knew_!

"My Bank Book!" he said.

My Father laughed. "_Now_ you naughty children," said my Father, "I trust you'll be satisfied to proceed home with your eyes open!"

But my Mother said no matter how naughty we were we couldn't go home without buying pop-corn at the pop-corn stand!

So we had to tell the Pop-Corn Man all about it too! The Pop-Corn Man was very little. He looked like a Pirate. He had black eyes. He had gold

rings through his ears. We loved him a good deal!

"In all the world--" we asked the Pop-Corn Man, "what is the most beautiful--est sight that you have ever seen?"

It took the Pop-Corn Man an awful long time to think! It took him so long that while he was thinking he filled our paper bags till they busted! It was a nice bustedness!

"The most beautifulest thing--in all zee world?" said the Pop-Corn Man. "In all zee world? It was in my Italy! In such time as I was no more than one bambino I did see zee peacock, zee great blue peacock stride out through zee snow-storm of apple-blossoms! And dance to zee sun!"

"O--h," said Rosalee. "How pretty!"

"Pretty?" said the Pop-Corn Man. "It was to zee eyes one miracle of remembrances! Zee blue! Zee gold! Zee dazzle! Zee soft fall of zee apple-blossoms!--Though I live to be zee hundred! Though I go blind! Though I go prison! Though my pop-corn all burn up! It fade not! Not never! That peacock! That apple-blossom! That shiver!"

"Our supper will all burn up," said my Mother, "if you children don't open your eyes and run home! Already I _think_ I can smell scorched Ginger-bread!"

We children all opened our eyes and ran home!

My Mother laughed to see us fly!

My Father laughed a little!

We thought about the Peacock as we ran! We thought quite a little about the Ginger-bread! We wished we had a Peacock! We hoped we had a Ginger-bread!

Our Home looked nice. It was as though we hadn't seen it for a long while. It was as though we hadn't seen anything for a long while! The Garden didn't look like Just a Garden any more! It looked like a _Bower_! Carol's tame crow came hopping up the gravel walk! We hadn't remembered that he was so black! The sun through the kitchen window was real gold! There _was_ Ginger-bread!

"Oh dear--Oh dear--Oh _dear_!" said Rosalee. "In a world so full of beautiful things--however shall we choose what to tell the Blinded Lady?"

Carol ran to the desk. He took a pencil. He took a paper. He slashed the

words down. He held it out for us to see.

"I know what I'm going to choose," said the words.

He took his pencil. He ran away.

Rosalee took her pencil. She ran away. Over her shoulder she called back something. What she called back was "Oh Goody! I know what _I'm_ going to choose!"

I took my Father's pencil. I ran away. I didn't run very far. I found a basket instead. It was a pretty basket. I made a nest for the White Kitten in case I should win it! I lined the nest with green moss. There was a lot of sunshine in the moss. And little blue flowers. I forgot to come home for supper. That's how I chose what I was going to write!

When we woke up the next morning we all felt very busy. It made the day seem funny.

It made every day that happened seem funny.

Every day somebody took somebody's pencil and ran away! My Mother couldn't find anything! Not children! Not pencils!

Rosalee took the Dictionary Book besides.

"Anybody'd think," said my Father, "that this was a Graduation Essay you were making instead of just a simple little word-picture for a Blinded Lady!"

"Word-picture?" said Rosalee. "What I'm trying to make is a Peacock Feather Fan!"

"I wish there were three prizes instead of two!" said my Mother.

"Why?" said my Father.

Carol came and kicked his feet on the door. His hands were full of stones. He wanted a drink of water. All day long when he wasn't sitting under the old Larch Tree with a pencil in his mouth he was carrying stones! And kicking his feet on the door! And asking for a drink of water!

"Whatever in the world," said my Mother, "are you doing with all those stones?"

Carol nodded his head that I could tell.

"He's building something," I said. "Out behind the barn!--I don't know what it is!"

Carol dropped his stones. He took a piece of chalk. He knelt down on the kitchen floor. He wrote big white letters on the floor.

"It's an Ar--Rena," is what he wrote.

"An Arena?" said my Mother. "An _Arena_?" She looked quite sorry. "Oh Laddie!" she said. "I did so want you to win a prize!--_Couldn't_ you have kept your mind on it just a day or two longer?"

It was the longest week I ever knew! It got longer every day! Thursday was twice as long as Wednesday! I don't seem to remember about Friday! But Saturday came so early in the morning I wasn't even awake when my Mother called me!

We went to the Blinded Lady's house right after dinner. We couldn't wait any longer.

The Blinded Lady pretended she was surprised to see us.

"Mercy me!" she said. "What? Have these children come again? Muddy feet? Chatter? And all?" She thumped her cane! She rocked her chair! She billowed her skirts!

We weren't frightened a bit! We sat on the edge of our chairs and laughed! And laughed!

There was a little white table spread with pink-frosted cookies! There were great crackly glasses of raspberry vinegar and ice! Old Mary had on a white apron!--That's why we laughed! We _knew_ we were expected!

My Father explained it to everybody.

"As long as Carol couldn't speak his piece," he said, "It didn't seem fair that any of the children should speak 'em! So the children have all written their pieces to read aloud and----"

"But as long as Carol wasn't able to read his aloud," cried my Mother, "it didn't seem fair that any of 'em should read theirs aloud! So the children's father is going to read 'em. And----"

"Without giving any clue of course," said my Father, "as to which child wrote which. So that you won't be unduly influenced at all--in any way by--gold-colored hair, for instance or--freckles----"

"Or _anything_!" said my Mother.

"U-m-m-m," said the Blinded Lady.

"Understanding of course," said my Father, "that we ourselves have not seen the papers yet!"

"Nor assisted in any way with the choice of subject," said my Mother.
"Nor with the treatment of it!"

"U-m-m," said the Blinded Lady.

"I will now proceed to read," said my Father.

"So do," said the Blinded Lady.

My Father so did.

He took a paper from his pocket. He cleared his throat. He put on his eye-glasses. He looked a little surprised.

"The first one," he said, "seems to be about 'Ginger-bread'!"

"_Ginger-bread?_" said the Blinded Lady.

"Ginger-bread!" said my Father.

"Read it!" said the Blinded Lady.

"I will!" said my Father.

Ginger-bread is very handsome! It's so brown! And every time you eat a piece you have to have another! That shows its worth as well as its handsomeness! And besides you can smell it a long way off when you're coming home! Especially when you're coming home from school! It has molasses in it too. And that's very instructive! As well as ginger! And other spices! The Geography is full of them! Molasses comes from New Orleans! Spices come from Asia! Except Jamaica Ginger comes from Drug Stores! There are eggs in ginger-bread too! And that's Natural History and very important! They have to be hen's eggs I think! I had some guineas once and they looked like chipmunks when they hatched. You can't make ginger-bread out of anything that looks like chipmunks! It takes three eggs to make ginger-bread! And one cupful of sugar! And some baking soda! And---

"Oh Tush!" said the Blinded Lady. "That isn't a picture! It's a recipe!--Read another!"

"Dear me! Dear me!" said my Mother. "Now some child is suffering!" She looked all around to see which child it was.

Carol kicked Rosalee. Rosalee kicked me. I kicked Carol. We all looked just as queer as we could outside.

"Read _on_!" thumped the Blinded Lady.

My Father read on.

"This next one," he said, "seems to be about Soldiers!"

"Soldiers?" said the Blinded Lady. "Soldiers?" She sat up very straight. She cocked her head on one side. "Read it!" she said.

"I'm reading it!" said my Father.

The most scrumptious sight I've ever seen in my life is
Soldiers Marching! I saw them once in New York! It was
glorious! All the reds and the blues and the browns of the
Uniforms! And when the Band played all the different
instruments it seemed as though it was really _gold_ and
silver music they were playing! It makes you feel so
brave! And so unselfish! But most of all it makes you wish
you were a milk-white pony with diamond hoofs! So that you
could _sparkle_! And _prance_! And _rear_! And _run away_
just for fun! And _run_ and _run_ and _run_ down clattery
streets and through black woods and across green pastures
snorting fire--till you met more Soldiers and more Bands
and more Gold and Silver Music! So that you could _prance_
and _sparkle_ and _rear_ and _run away_ all over
again,--with _flags flying_!

"U-m-m," said the Blinded Lady. "That _is_ pretty! And spirited
too!--But--But it doesn't exactly warm the heart.--And no one but a boy,
anyway, would _want_ to think about soldiers every day.--Read the next
one!" said the Blinded Lady.

"Oh all right," said my Father. "Here's the last one."

"Read it!" said the Blinded Lady.

"I'm trying to!" said my Father. He cleared his throat and put on his
eye-glasses all over again. "Ahem!" he said.

"The most beautifulest thing I've ever seen in all my life
is my Mother's face. It's so----"

"_What?_" cried my Mother.

My Father looked at her across the top of his glasses. He smiled. "_Your face!_" he said.

"W--what?" stammered my Mother.

My Father cleared his throat and began all over again.

The most beautifulest thing I've ever seen in all my life is my Mother's face! It's so pleasant! It tries to make everything so pleasant! When you go away it smiles you away! When you come home it smiles you home! When you're sick it smiles you well! When you're bad it smiles you good! It's so pretty too! It has soft hair all full of little curls! It has brown eyes! It has the _sweetest_ ears!--It has a little hat! The jolliest little hat! All trimmed with do-dabs! And teeny pink roses! And there's a silver ribbon on it! And----

"My Mother had a hat like that!" cried the Blinded Lady.

"_Did_ she?" said my Mother. Her face still looked pretty queer and surprised.

The Blinded Lady perked way forward in her chair. She seemed all out of breath. She talked so fast it almost choked her!

"Yes! Just _exactly_ like that!" cried the Blinded Lady. "My Mother bought it in Boston! It cost three dollars! My Father thought it was an awful price!--She wore it with a lavender dress all sprigged with yellow leaves! She looked like an angel in it! She _was_ an angel! _Her_ hair was brown too!--I haven't thought of it for ages!--And all full of little curls! She had the kindest smile! The minister said it was worth any two of his sermons! And when folks were sick she went anywhere to help them! _Anywhere!_--She went twenty miles once! We drove the old white horse! I can see it all! My brothers' and sisters' faces at the window waving good-bye! My father cautioning us through his long gray beard not to drive too fast!--The dark shady wood's road! The little bright meadows!--A blue bird that flashed across our heads at the watering trough! The gay village streets! A red plaid ribbon in a shop window! The patch on a peddler's shoe! The great hills over beyond!--There was hills all around us!--My sister Amy married a man from way over beyond! He was different from us! His father sailed the seas! He brought us dishes and fans from China! When my sister Amy was married she wore a white crêpe shawl. There was a peacock embroidered in one corner of it! It was pretty! We curled her hair! There were yellow roses in bloom! There was a blue larkspur!----"

The Blinded Lady sank back in her chair. She gave a funny little gasp.

"I _remember_!" she gasped. "The Young Man's eyes were _blue_! His teeth were like pearls! When he asked the way to the trout brook he laughed and said----"

The Blinded Lady's cheeks got all pink. She clapped her hands. She sank back into her Skirts. Her eyes looked awful queer.

"I see _everything_!" she cried. "_Everything!_--Give the Peacock Feather Fan to the Magician!"

Rosalee looked at Carol. Carol looked at me. I looked at Rosalee.

"To the Magician?" said my Father.

"To the Magician?" said my Mother.

"To the Young Darling who wrote about her Mother's Face!" thumped the Blinded Lady.

My Father twisted his mouth.

"Will the 'Young Darling' who wrote about her Mother's Face please come forward--and get the Peacock Feather Fan!" said my Father.

Carol came forward. He looked very ashamed. He stubbed his toe on the braided rug.

"It seems to be our son Carol," said my Father, "who conjured up the picture of--of the blue larkspur!"

"What?" said the Blinded Lady. "_What?_"

She tapped her foot on the floor. She frowned her brows.

"Well--well--well," she said. "It wasn't at all what I intended! Not at _all_!--Well--well--well!" She began to rock her chair. "But after all," she said, "an agreement is an agreement! And the First Prize is the First Prize!--Let the Little Dumb Boy step forward to the Chinese Cabinet and choose his Peacock Feather Fan!"

Rosalee gave a little cry. It sounded almost like tears. She ran forward. She whispered in Carol's ear.

Carol opened his eyes. He took a chair. He pushed it against the cabinet. He climbed up to the highest shelf. There was a fan as big as the moon! It was sandalwood! It was carved! It was all peacock feathers!

Blue! Bronze! It was _beautiful_! He took it! He went back to his seat!
His mouth smiled a little! But he carried the Fan as though it was hot!

"The second prize of course," said the Blinded Lady, "goes to the child
who wrote about the soldiers!"

Rosalee stepped forward.

The Blinded Lady took her hand. "It is not exactly as I had wished,"
said the Blinded Lady. "But a Choice of Cats is a Choice of Cats!--You
will find them all in the wood-shed Young Lassie--awaiting your
decision! Choose wisely! A good cat is a great comfort!"

We went to the wood-shed to help Rosalee choose her cat.

All the cats purred to be chosen. It was sad. My Father said it wasn't.
My Father said one cat was plenty.

The White Persian Kitten lay on a soap box. It looked like Easter
Lilies. Rosalee saw it. She forgot all about the fan.

Carol didn't forget about the fan. He stamped his foot. He shook his
head. He took Rosalee's hand and led her to the old Tortoise Shell Cat.
He put the old Tortoise Shell cat in Rosalee's arms. Rosalee looked
pretty surprised. So did the cat.

My sorrow made tears in my eyes. My Mother came running.

"Bless your heart, Ruthy-Girl," she said. "You shall have a Ginger-bread
to-night that _is_ a Picture!" She put a little box in my hand. There
was a little gold pencil in the box. It was my Mother's best little gold
pencil with the agate stone in the end. "Here's Mother's prize,
Darling," she said. "The Prize Mother brought for _whichever_ child
didn't win the Blinded Lady's prizes! Don't you worry! Mother'll always
have a prize for whichever child doesn't win the other prizes!"

My sorrow went away.

We all ran back to the Blinded Lady to thank her for our Beautiful
Party. And for the prizes.

My Father made a speech to the Blinded Lady.

"But after all, my dear Madam," he said, "I am afraid you have been
cheated!--It was '_new_' pictures that you wanted, not old ones!"

The Blinded Lady whacked at him with her cane. She was awful mad.

"How do you know what I want?" she said. "How do you know what I want?"

My Father and my Mother looked at each other. They made little laughs with their eyes.

The Blinded Lady smoothed herself.

"But I certainly am flabbergasted," she said, "about the Old Tom Cat! Whatever in the world made the Young Lassie choose the old battle-scarred Tom?"

Rosalee looked at Carol. Carol looked at me. I looked at the Old Tom.

"Maybe she chose him for--for his historicalness," said my Mother.

"---Maybe," said my Father.

We started for the door. We got as far as the Garden. I remembered something suddenly. I clapped my hands. I laughed right out! "No! She didn't either!" I said. "She chose him for Carol's Ar--Rena--I bet'cher! Carol's going to have him for a Cham--peen! We'll fight him every afternoon! Maybe there'll be tickets!"

"Tickets?" said my Father.

"Oh my dears," said my Mother. "A cat-fight is a dreadful thing!"

My Father looked at the Old Tom! At his battered ears! At his scarred nose! At his twisted eye! The Old Tom looked at my Father! They both smiled!

"Infamous!" said my Father. "How much will the tickets be?"

We went home. We went home through the fields instead of through the village.

Carol held the Peacock Feather Fan as though he was afraid it would bite him.

Rosalee carried the Old Tom as though she knew it would bite her.

When we got to the Willow Tree they changed prizes. It made a difference.

Rosalee carried the Peacock Feather as though it was a magic sail. She tipped it to the breeze. She pranced it. And danced it. It looked fluffy.

Carol carried the Old Tom hugged tight to his breast. The Old Tom looked _very_ historical. Carol looked very shining and pure. He looked like a choir-boy carrying his singing book. He looked as though his voice would be very high.

My Father and Mother carried each other's hands. They laughed very softly to themselves as though they knew pleasant things that no one else knew.

My hand would have felt pretty lonely if I hadn't had the little gold pencil to carry.

I felt pretty tired. I walked pretty far behind.

I decided that when I grew up I'd be a Writer! So that no matter what happened I'd always have a gold pencil in my hand and _couldn't_ be lonely!

THE GIFT OF THE PROBABLE PLACES

My Mother says that everybody in the world has got some special Gift. Some people have one kind and some have another.

I got my skates and dictionary-book last Spring when I was nine. I've always had my freckles.

My brother Carol's Gift is Being Dumb. No matter what anybody says to him he doesn't have to answer 'em.

There was an old man in our town named Old Man Smith.

Old Man Smith had a wonderful Gift.

It wasn't a Christmas Gift like toys and games. It wasn't a Birthday Gift all stockings and handkerchiefs.

It was the _Gift of Finding Things_!

He called it "The Gift of the Probable Places."

Most any time when you lost anything he could find it for you. He didn't find it by floating a few tea-leaves in a cup. Or by trying to match cards. Or by fooling with silly things like ghosts. He didn't even find

it with his legs. He found it with his head. He found it by thinking very hard with his head.

People came from miles around to borrow his head. He always charged everybody just the same no matter what it was that they'd lost. One dollar was what he charged. It was just as much trouble to him he said to think about a thimble that was lost as it was to think about an elephant that was lost.--I never knew anybody who lost an elephant.

When the Post Master's Wife lost her diamond ring she hunted more than a hundred places for it! She was most distracted! She thought somebody had stolen it from her! She hunted it in all the Newspapers! She hunted it in all the stores! She hunted it all up and down the Village streets! She hunted it in the Depot carriage! She hunted it in the Hired Girl's trunk! Miles and miles and miles she must have hunted it with her hands and with her feet!

But Old Man Smith found it for her without budging an inch from his wheel-chair! Just with his head alone he found it! Just by asking her a question that made her mad he found it! The question that made her mad was about her Baptismal name.--Her Baptismal name was Mehetabelle Euphemia.

"However in the world," said Old Man Smith, "did you get such a perfectly hideous name as Mehetabelle Euphemia?"

The Post Master's wife was madder than Scat! She wrung her hands. She snapped her thumbs! She crackled her finger-joints!

"Never--_Never_," she said had she been "so insulted!"

"U-m-m-m--exactly what I thought," said Old Man Smith. "Now just when--if you can remember, was the last time that you felt you'd never been so insulted before?"

"Insulted?" screamed the Post Master's Wife. "Why, I haven't been so insulted as this since two weeks ago last Saturday when I was out in my back yard under the Mulberry Tree dyeing my old white dress peach-pink! And the Druggist's Wife came along and asked me if I didn't think I was just a little bit too old to be wearing peach-pink?--_Me_--_Too Old? Me?_" screamed the Post Master's Wife.

"U-m-m," said Old Man Smith. "Pink, you say? Pink?--A little powdered Cochineal, I suppose? And a bit of Cream o' Tartar? And more than a bit of Alum? It's a pretty likely combination to make the fingers slippery.--And a lady what crackles her finger-joints so every time she's mad,--and snaps her thumbs--and?--Yes! Under the Mulberry Tree is a _very Probable Place_!--One dollar, please!" said Old Man Smith.

And when the Grocer's Nephew got suspended from college for sitting up too late at night and getting headaches, and came to spend a month with his Uncle and couldn't find his green plaid overcoat when it was time to go home he was perfectly positive that somebody had borrowed it from the store! Or that he'd dropped it out of the delivery wagon working over-time! Or that he'd left it at the High School Social!

But Old Man Smith found it for him just by glancing at his purple socks! And his plaid necktie. And his plush waistcoat.

"Oh, yes, of course, it's perfectly possible," said Old Man Smith, "that you dropped it from the basket of a balloon on your way to a Missionary Meeting.--But have you looked in the Young Widow Gayette's back hall? 'Bout three pegs from the door?--Where the shadows are fairly private?--One dollar, please!" said Old Man Smith.

And when the Old Preacher lost the Hymn Book that George Washington had given his grandfather, everybody started to take up the floor of the church to see if it had fallen down through a crack in the pulpit!

But Old Man Smith sent a boy running to beg 'em not to tear down the church till they'd looked in the Old Lawyer's pantry,--'bout the second shelf between the ice chest and the cheese crock. Sunday evening after meeting was rather a lean time with Old Preachers he said he'd always noticed.--And Old Lawyers was noted for their fat larders.--And there were certain things about cheese somehow that seemed to be soothin' to the memory.

"Why, how perfectly extraordinary!" said everybody.

"One dollar, please!" said Old Man Smith again.

And when Little Tommy Bent ran away to the city his Mother hunted all the hospitals for him! And made 'em drag the river! And wore a long black veil all the time! And howled!

But Old Man Smith said, "Oh Shucks! It ain't at all probable, is it, that he was aimin' at hospitals or rivers when he went away?--What's the use of worryin' over the things he _weren't_ aimin' at till you've investigated the things he _was_?"

"Aimin' at?" sobbed Mrs. Bent. "Aimin' at?--Who in the world could ever tell what any little boy was aimin' at?"

"And there's something in that, too!" said Old Man Smith. "What did he look like?"

"Like his father," said Mrs. Bent.

"U-m-m. Plain, you mean?" said Old Man Smith.

"He was only nine years old," sobbed Mrs. Bent. "But he did love Meetings so! No matter what they was about he was always hunting for some new Meetings to go to! He just seemed naturally to dote hisself on any crowd of people that was all facing the other way looking at somebody else! He had a little cowlick at the back of his neck!" sobbed Mrs. Bent. "It was a comical little cowlick! People used to laugh at it! He never liked to sit any place where there was anybody sitting behind him!"

"Now you're talking!" said Old Man Smith. "Will he answer to the name of 'Little Tommy Bent?'"

"He will not!" said Mrs. Bent "He's that stubborn! He's exactly like his Father!"

Old Man Smith wrote an entirely new advertisement to put in the papers. It didn't say anything about Rivers! Or Hospitals! Or 'Dead or Alive!' It just said:

LOST: In the back seat of Most Any Meeting,
a Very Plain Little Boy. Will _not_
answer to the name of "Little Tommy
Bent." Stubborn, like his Father.

"We'll put that in about being 'stubborn,'" said Old Man Smith, "because it sounds quaint and will interest people."

"It won't interest Mr. Bent!" sobbed Mrs. Bent. "And it seems awful cruel to make it so public about the child's being plain!"

Old Man Smith spoke coldly to her.

"Would you rather lose him--handsome," he said. "Or find him--_plain_?"

Mrs. Bent seemed to think that she'd rather find him plain.

She found him within two days! He was awful plain. His shoes were all worn out. And his stomach was flat. He was at a meeting of men who sell bicycles to China. The men were feeling pretty sick. They'd sent hundreds and hundreds of he-bicycles to China and the Chinamen couldn't ride 'em on account of their skirts!--It was the smell of an apple in a man's pocket that made Tommy Bent follow the man to the meeting.--And he answered to every name except 'Tommy Bent' so they knew it was he!

"Mercy! What this experience has cost me!" sobbed Mrs. Bent.

"One dollar, please!" said Old Man Smith.

"It's a perfect miracle!" said everybody.

"It 'tain't neither!" said Old Man Smith. "It's plain Hoss Sense! There's laws about findin' things same as there is about losin' 'em! Things has got regular habits and haunts same as Folks! And Folks has got regular haunts and habits same as birds and beasts! It ain't the Possible Places that I'm arguin' about!--The world is full of 'em! But the _Probable Places_ can be reckoned most any time on the fingers of one hand!--That's the trouble with folks! They're always wearin' themselves out on the Possible Places and never gettin' round at all to the _Probable_ ones!--Now, it's perfectly possible, of course," said Old Man Smith, "that you might find a trout in a dust-pan or a hummin' bird in an Aquarium--or meet a panther in your Mother's parlor!--But the chances are," said Old Man Smith, "that if you really set out to organize a troutin' expedition or a hummin' bird collection or a panther hunt--you wouldn't look in the dust pan or the Aquarium or your Mother's parlor _first_!--When you lose something that _ain't got_ no _Probable Place_--then I sure _am_ stumped!" said Old Man Smith.

But when Annie Halliway lost her _mind_, everybody in the village was stumped about it. And everything was all mixed up. It was Annie Halliway's mother and Annie Halliway's father and Annie Halliway's uncles and aunts and cousins and friends who did all the worrying about it! While Annie Halliway herself didn't seem to care at all! But just sat braiding things into her hair!

Some people said it was a railroad accident that she lost her mind in. Some said it was because she'd studied too hard in Europe. Some said it was an earthquake. Everybody said something.

Annie Halliway's father and mother were awful rich. They brought her home in a great big ship! And gave her twelve new dresses and the front parlor and a brown piano! But she wouldn't stay in any of them! All she'd stay in was a little old blue silk dress she'd had before she went away!

Carol and I got excused from school one day because we were afraid our heads might ache, and went to see what it was all about.

It seemed to be about a great many things.

But after we'd walked all around Annie Halliway twice and looked at her all we could and asked how old she was and found out that she was nineteen, we felt suddenly very glad about something.--We felt suddenly

very glad that if she really was obliged to lose anything out of her face, it was her mind that she lost! Instead of her eyes! Or her nose! Or her red, red mouth! Or her cunning little ears! She was so pretty!

She seemed to like us very much too. She asked us to come again.

We said we would.

We did.

We went every Saturday afternoon.

They let us take her to walk if we were careful. We didn't walk her in the village because her hair looked so funny. We walked her in the pleasant fields. We gathered flowers. We gathered ferns. We explored birds. We built little gurgling harbors in the corners of the brook. Sometimes we climbed hills and looked off. Annie Halliway seemed to like to climb hills and look off.

It was the day we climbed the Sumac Hill that we got our Idea!

It was a nice day!

Annie Halliway wore her blue dress! And her blue scarf! Her hair hung down like two long, loose black ropes across her shoulders! Blue Larkspur was braided into her hair! And a little tin trumpet tied with blue ribbon! And a blue Japanese fan! And a blue lead pencil! And a blue silk stocking! And a blue-handled basket! She looked like a Summer Christmas Tree. It was pretty.

There were lots of clouds in the sky. They seemed very near. It sort of puckered your nose.

"Smell the clouds!" said Annie Halliway.

Somebody had cut down a tree that used to be there. It made a lonely hole in the edge of the hill and the sky. Through the lonely hole in the edge of the hill and the sky you could see miles and miles. Way down in the valley a bright light glinted. It was as though the whole sun was trying to bore a hole in a tiny bit of glass and couldn't do it.

Annie Halliway stretched out her arms towards the glint. And started for it.

I looked at Carol. Carol looked at me. We knew where the glint was. It was Old Man Smith's house. Old Man Smith's house was built of tea cups! And broken tumblers! And bits of plates! First of all, of course, it was built of clay or mud or something soft and loose like that! And

while it was still soft he had stuck it all full of people's broken dishes! So that wherever you went most all day long the sun was trying to bore a hole in it!--And couldn't do it!

It seemed to be the glint that Annie Halliway wanted. She thought it was something new to braid in her hair, I guess. She kept right on walking towards it with her arms stretched out.

Carol kept right on looking at me. His mouth was all turned white. Sometimes when people _talk_ to me I can't understand at all what they mean. But when Carol looks at me with his mouth all turned white, I always know just exactly what he means! It made my own mouth feel pretty white!

"We shall be punished!" I said. "We'll surely be punished if we do it!"

My brother Carol smiled. It was quite a white smile. He put out his hand. I took it. We ran down the hill after young Annie Halliway! And led her to the glint!

Old Man Smith was pretty surprised to see us. He was riding round the door-yard in his wheel chair. He rolled his chair to the gate to meet us. The chair squeaked a good deal. But even if he'd wanted to walk he couldn't. The reason why he couldn't is because he's dumb in his legs.

"What in the world do you want?" he asked.

I looked at Carol. Carol looked at me. He kicked me in the shins. My thoughts came very quickly.

"We've brought you a young lady that's lost her mind!" I said. "What can you do about it?"

Something happened all at once that made our legs feel queer. What happened was that Old Man Smith didn't seem pleased at all about it. He snatched his long white beard in his hands.

"Lost her mind?" he said. "Her _mind_? Her _mind_? How dar'st you mock me?" he cried.

"We _darsn't_ at all!" I explained. "On account of the bears! We've read all about the mocking bears in a book!"

He seemed to feel better.

"You mean in the good book?" he said. "The Elijah bears, you mean?"

"Well, it was _quite_ a good book," I admitted. "Though my Father's got

lots of books on Tulips that have heap prettier covers!"

"U--m--m--m," said Old Man Smith. "U--m--m--m----. U--m----m----m."

And all the time that he was saying "U--m----m----m--U--m----m----m," young Annie Halliway was knocking down his house. With a big chunk of rock she was chipping it off. It was a piece of blue china cup with the handle still on it that she chipped off first.

When Old Man Smith saw it he screamed.

"Woman! What are you doing?" he screamed.

"Her name is Young Annie Halliway," I explained.

"Young Annie Halliway--_Come Here!_" screamed Old Man Smith.

Young Annie Halliway came here. She was perfectly gentle about it. All her ways were gentle. She sat down on the ground at Old Man Smith's feet. She lifted her eyes to Old Man Smith's eyes. She looked holy. But all the time that she looked so holy she kept right on braiding the handle of the blue china cup into her hair. It cranked against the tin trumpet. It sounded a little like the 4th of July.

Old Man Smith reached down and took her chin in his hands.

"Oh my Lord--what a beautiful face!" he said. "What a beautiful face!--And you say she's lost her mind?" he said. "You say she's lost her mind?" He turned to Carol. "And what do _you_ say?" he asked.

"Oh, please, Sir, Carol doesn't say anything!" I explained. "He can't! He's dumb!"

"_Dumb?_" cried Old Man Smith. "So this is the Dumb Child, is it?" He looked at Carol. He looked at himself. He looked at my freckles. He rocked his hands on his stomach. "Merciful God!" he said. "How are we all afflicted!"

"Oh, please, Sir," I said, "my brother Carol isn't afflicted at all!--It's a great _gift_ my Mother says to be born with the Gift of Silence instead of the Gift of Speech!"

He made a little chuckle in his throat. He began to look at Young Annie Halliway all over again.

"And what does your Mother say about _her?_" he pointed.

"My Mother says," I explained, "that she only hopes that the person who

finds her mind will be honest enough to return it!"

"What?" said Old Man Smith. "To return it?--Honest enough to return it?"

He began to do everything all over again!--To chuckle! To rock! To take Young Annie Halliway's chin in his hand!

"And what did you say your name was, my pretty darling?" he asked.

Young Annie Halliway looked a little surprised.

"My name is Robin," she said. "Dearest--Robin--I think."

"You think wrong!" said Old Man Smith. He frowned with ferocity.

It made us pretty nervous all of a sudden.

Carol went off to look at the bee-hive to calm himself. Young Annie Halliway picked up the end of one of her long braids and looked at that. There was still about a foot of it that didn't have anything braided into it. I didn't know where to look so I looked at the house. It was very glistening. Blue it glistened. And green it glistened! And red it glistened! And pink! And purple! And yellow!

"Oh, see!" I pointed. "There's old Mrs. Beckett's rose-vase with the gold edge!--She dropped it on the brick garden-walk the day her son who'd been lost at sea for eleven years walked through the gate all alive and perfectly dry!--And that chunky white nozzle with the blue stripe on it?--I know what that is!--It's the nose of Deacon Perry's first wife's best tea pot!--I've seen it there! In a glass cupboard! On the top shelf!--She never used it 'cept when the Preacher came!"

"The Deacon's second wife broke it--feeding chickens out of it," said Old Man Smith.

"And that little scrap of saucer," I cried, "with the pansy petal on it?--Why--Why _that's_ little Hallie Bent's doll-dishes!--We played with 'em down in the orchard! She died!" I cried. "She had the whooping-measles!"

"That little scrap of saucer," said Old Man Smith, "was the only thing they found in Mr. Bent's bank box.--What the widow was lookin' for was gold!"

"And that green glass stopper!" I cried. "Oh, Goodie----Goodie----_Goodie_!--Why, that----"

"Hush your noise!" said Old Man Smith. "History is solemn!--The whole

history of the village is written on the outer walls of my house!--When the Sun strikes here,--strikes there,--on that bit of glass,--on this bit of crockles--the edge of a plate,--the rim of a tumbler,--I read about folk's minds!--What they loved!--What they hated!--What they was thinking of instead when it broke!--" He snatched his long white beard in his hands. He wagged his head at me. "There's a law about breakin' things," he said, "same as there's a law about losin' them! My house is a sample-book," he said. "On them there walls--all stuck up like that--I've got a sample of most every mind in the village!--People give 'em to me themselves," he said. "They let me rake out their trash barrels every now and then. They don't know what they're givin.'--Now, that little pewter rosette there----"

"It would be nice--wouldn't it," I said, "if you could find a sample of Young Annie Halliway's mind? Then maybe you could match it!"

"_Eh?_" said Old Man Smith. "A sample of her mind?" He looked jerky. He growled in his throat. "A--hem----A--hem," he said. He closed his eyes. I thought he'd decided to die. I screamed for Carol. He came running. He'd only been bee-stung twice. Old Man Smith opened his eyes. His voice sounded queer. "Where do they _think_ she lost her mind?" he whispered.

"In Europe," I said. "Maybe in a train! Maybe on a boat! They don't know! She can't remember anything about it."

"U--m--m," said Old Man Smith. He looked at Young Annie Halliway. "And where do _you_ think you lost it?" he said.

Young Annie Halliway seemed very much pleased to be asked. She laughed right out.

"In a March wind!" she said.

"_Eh?_" said Old Man Smith. He turned to me again. "What did you say her name was?" he asked.

I felt a little cross.

"Halliway!" I said. "Halliway--Halliway--_Halliway_! They live in the big house out by the Chestnut Trees! They only come here in the Summers! Except now! The Doctors say it's Mysteria!"

"The Doctors say _what_ is Mysteria?" said Old Man Smith.

"What Annie's got!" I explained. "What made her lose her mind! Mysteria is what they call it."

"U--m--m," said Old Man Smith. He reached way down into his pocket. He

pulled out a box. He opened the box. It was full of pieces of colored glass! And of china! He juggled them in his hands. They looked gay. Red they were! And green! And white! And yellow! And blue! He snatched out all the blue ones and hid 'em quick in his pocket. "She seems sort of partial to blue," he said.

There was one funny big piece of glass that was awful shiny. When he held it up to the light it glinted and glowed all sorts of colors. It made your eyes feel very calm.

Annie Halliway reached out her hand for it. She didn't say a word. She just stared at it with her hand all reached out.

But Old Man Smith didn't give it to her. He just sat and stared at her eyes.

Her eyes never moved from the shining bit of glass. They looked awful funny. Bigger and bigger they got! And rounder and rounder! And stiller and stiller!

It was like a puppy-dog pointing a little bird in the grass. It made you feel queer. It made you feel all sort of hollow inside. It made your legs wobble.

Carol's mouth was wide open.

So was Old Man Smith's.

Old Man Smith reached out suddenly and put the shining bit of glass right into Annie Halliway's hand. It fell through her fingers. But her hand stayed just where it was, reaching out into the air.

"Put down your arm!" said Old Man Smith.

Annie Halliway put it down. Her eyes were still staring very wide.

"Look!" said Old Man Smith. "Look!" He dropped several pieces of colored glass china into her lap.

She chose the handle of a red tea cup and a little chunk of yellow crockery. She stared and stared at them. But all the time it was as though her eyes didn't see them. All the time it was as though she was looking at something very far away. Then all of a sudden she began to jingle them together in her hand,—the little piece of red china and the chunk of yellow bowl! And swing her shoulders! And stamp her foot! It looked like dancing. It sounded like clappers.

"Oh, Ho! This is Spain!" she laughed.

Old Man Smith snatched all the blue pieces of china and glass out of his pocket again and tossed them into her lap. He looked sort of mad.

"Spain?" he said. "Spain? What in the Old Harry has a handful of glass and china got to do with Spain?"

"Harry?" said Annie Halliway. "Old--Harry?" Her eyes looked wider and blinder every minute. It was as though everything in her was wide awake except the thing she was thinking about. "Har--ry?" she puzzled. "Harry?" she dropped the red and yellow china from her hand and picked up a piece of blue glass and offered it to Old Man Smith. "Why, _that_ is Harry!" she said. She reached for the pig-tail that had the blue Larkspur braided into it. She pointed to the pig-tail that had the blue fan braided into it. "Why, _that_ is Harry!" she said. She made a little sob in her throat.

Old Man Smith jingled his hands at her.

"There--There--There, my Pretty!" he said. "Never mind--Never mind!"

He opened his hands. There were some little teeny-tiny pieces of plain glass in his hands. Little round knobs like beads they were. Very shining. They made a nice jingle.

When Annie Halliway saw them she screamed! And snatched them in her hand! And threw them away just as far as she could! All over the grass she threw them!

"I will not!" she screamed. "_I will not! I will not!_" Her tears were awful.

When she got through screaming her face looked like a wet cloth that had everything else wrung out of it except shadows.

"Where--is--Harry?" said Old Man Smith. He said it very slowly. And then all over again. "Where--is--Harry?--You wouldn't have dar'st not tell him if you'd known."

Annie Halliway started to pick up some blue glass again. Then she stopped and looked all around her. It was a jerky stop. Her jaw sort of dropped.

"Harry--is--in--prison!" she said. Even though she'd said it herself she seemed to be awfully surprised at the news. She shook and shook her head as though she was trying to wake up the idea that was asleep. Her eyes were all scrunched up now with trying to remember about it. She dragged the back of her hands across her forehead. First one hand and then the

other. She opened her eyes very wide again and looked at Old Man Smith.

"Where--is--Harry?" said Old Man Smith.

Annie Halliway never took her eyes from Old Man Smith's face.

"It--It was the night we crossed the border from France to Spain," she said. Her voice sounded very funny and far away. It sounded like reciting a lesson too. "There were seven of us and a teacher from the Paris art school," she recited. "It--It was the March holiday.----There--There--was a woman----a strange woman in the next compartment who made friends with me.--She seemed to be crazy over my hair.--She asked if she might braid it for the night."

Without any tears at all Annie Halliway began to sob again.

"When they waked us up at the Customs," she sobbed, "Harry came running! His face was awful! 'She's braided diamonds in your hair!' he cried. 'I heard her talking with her accomplice! A hundred thousand dollars' worth of diamonds! Smugglers and murderers both they are!--Everybody will be searched!--He tore at my braids! I tore at my braids! The diamonds rattled out! Harry tried to catch them!--He pushed me back into the train! I saw soldiers running!--I thought they were going to shoot him! He thought they were going to shoot him!--I saw his eyes!--He looked so--so surprised!--I'd never noticed before how blue his eyes were!--I tell you I saw his eyes!--I couldn't speak!--There wasn't anybody to explain just why he had his hands full of diamonds!--I saw his eyes! I tell you I couldn't speak!--I tell you I never spoke!--My tongue went dead in my mouth! For months I never spoke!--I've only just begun to speak again!--I've only just----"

She started to jump up from the ground where she was sitting! She couldn't!--She had braided Old Man Smith and his wheel chair into her hair! When she saw what she had done she toppled right over on her face! And fainted all out!

Over behind the lilac bush somebody screamed.

It was Annie Halliway's Mother! With her was a strange gentleman who had come all the way from New York to try and cure Annie Halliway. The strange gentleman was some special kind of a doctor.

"Hush--Hush!" the Special Doctor kept saying to everybody. "This is a very crucial moment! Can't you see that this a very crucial moment?" He pointed to Annie Halliway on the grass. Her Mother knelt beside her trying very hard to comb Old Man Smith and his wheel-chair out of her pig-tail. "Speak to her!" said the Doctor. "Speak to her very gently!"

"Annie?" cried her Mother. "Annie?--Annie--_Annie?_"

Annie Halliway opened her eyes very slowly and looked up. It was a brand new kind of a look. It had a bottom to it instead of being just through and through and through. There was a little smile in it too. It was a pretty look.

"Why, Mother," said Annie Halliway. "Where am I?"

The Special Man from New York made a queer little sound in his throat.

"Thank God!" he said. "She's all right _now_!"

It seemed pretty quick to me.

"You mean--" I said, "that her Mysteria is all cured--now?"

"Not _Mys_teria," said the Special Man from New York, "_Hys_teria!"

"No!--_Her_steria!" corrected Old Man Smith.

The Special Man from New York began to laugh.

But Annie Halliway's Mother began to cry.

"Oh, just suppose we'd never found her?" she cried. She looked at Carol. She looked at me. She glared a little. But not so awfully much. "When you naughty children ran away with her?" she cried. "And we couldn't find her anywhere?--And the Doctor came? And there was only an hour to spare?--And we got a horse and drove round anywhere? And--And----"

"I wouldn't have missed it for anything!" said the Special Man from New York.

"And all your appointments waiting?" cried Annie Halliway's Mother.

"Darn the appointments!" said the Special Man from New York. He slanted his head and looked at Old Man Smith. "We arrived," he said, "just at the moment when the young lady was gazing so--so intently at the piece of shiny glass." He made a funny grunt in his throat. "Let me congratulate you, Mr.--Mr. Smith!" he said. "Your treatment was most efficient!--Your hypnosis was perfect! Your----"

"Hip _nothing_!" said Old Man Smith.

"Of course, in a case like this," said the Special Man from New York, "the Power of Suggestion is always----"

"All young folks," said Old Man Smith, "are cases of one kind or another--and the most powerful suggestion that I can make is that somebody find 'Harry!'"

"'Harry?'" said Annie Halliway's Mother. "'_Harry?_'--Why, I've got four letters at home for Annie in my desk now--from some im--impetuous young man who signs himself 'Harry!!--He seems to be in an Architect's office in Paris! 'Robin' is what he calls Annie!--'_Dearest_ Robin'----"

"Eh?" said Annie Halliway. "What? _Where?_" She sat bolt upright! She scrambled to her feet! She started for the carriage!

Her Mother had to run to catch her.

The Special Man from New York followed them just as fast as he could.

Old Man Smith wheeled his chair to the gate to say "Good-bye."

Everything seemed all mixed up.

Annie Halliway's Mother never stopped talking a single second.

"Oh, my Pet!" she cried. "My Precious. My Treasure!"

With one foot on the carriage step the Special Man from New York turned round and looked at Old Man Smith. He smiled a funny little smile.

"Seek--and ye shall find!" he said. "That is--if you only know _How_ and _Where_ to seek."

Old Man Smith began to chuckle in his beard.

"Yes, I admit that's quite a help," he said, "the knowing _How_ and _Where!_--But before you set out seekin' very hard for anything that's lost it's a pretty good idea to find out first just exactly what it is that you're seekin' for!--When a young lady's lost her _mind,_ for instance, that's one thing!--But if it's her _heart_ that's lost, why, that, of course, is quite another!"

Annie Halliway's face wasn't white any more. It was as red as roses. She had it in her Mother's shoulder.

The horses began to prance. The carriage began to creak.

Annie Halliway's Mother looked all around.

"Oh, dear--oh, dear--oh, dear, Mr.--Mr. Smith," she said. "How shall I ever repay you?"

Old Man Smith reached out his hand across the fence. There was sort of a twinkle in his eye.

"One dollar, please," said Old Man Smith.

THE BOOK OF THE FUNNY SMELLS--AND EVERYTHING

It was Carol who invented the Book. He didn't mean any harm.

I helped him.

We called it "The Book of the Funny Smells--and Everything."

It was one Tuesday noon coming home from school that we stopped the Lady on the street.

She was a very interesting looking lady. She looked like all sorts of different-colored silk roses. And a diamond brooch.

"Excuse us, Madam," I said. "But we are making a book! And we have decided to begin it with you! If you were a Beautiful Smell instead of a Beautiful Lady,--what Beautiful Smell in the Whole Wide World would you choose to be?"

The lady reeled back against the wall of the Post Office. And put on a gold eyeglass to support her.

"Merciful Impudences!" she said. "What new kind of census is this?"

We knew what a "census" was.

"No! It isn't that at all!" I explained. "This is something important."

Carol showed her the book. He showed her the pencil he was going to write the book with.

"When it's all done," I explained, "everybody will want to read it!"

"I can well believe it," said the Lady. She looked at Carol. Everybody looks at Carol.

"Who are you children, anyway?" she said.

"My name is Ruthy," I explained. "And this is my brother Carol."

She began to look at Carol all over again. She reached out and shook him by the shoulder.

"Dumbness!" she said. "Why let Sister do all the talking?"

My stomach felt pretty queer.

"My brother Carol _can't_ talk," I explained. "He _is_ dumb!"

The Lady turned very red.

"Oh dear--Oh dear--Oh dear," she said. She opened her purse. She took out a dollar bill. "Surely something could be done about it!" she said.

"We are not looking for money," I explained. "We are perfectly rich. We have warm underalls. And two parents. And an older sister. We have a tame coon. And a tame crow. Our Father could paint the house any Autumn he wanted to if he'd rather do it than plant Tulips."

The Lady looked at her watch. It was a bright blue watch no bigger than a violet is.

"This is all very interesting," she said. "But at the obnoxious hotel which you run in this village dinner is at twelve o'clock and if I'm not there at exactly that moment there will not be another dinner, I suppose, until twelve o'clock the next day. So----"

"Probably not," I said. "So if you don't feel timid at all about walking out with strangers, my brother Carol and I will walk home to the Hotel with you and write our book as we go."

The Lady bit herself. She bit herself in the lip. She began to walk very fast.

Carol walked very fast on one side of her. I walked very fast on the other. Carol carried the book. He carried it wide open so as to be all ready any moment. I carried the pencil.

"Can you tell me," said the Lady, "just why you and your brother have picked upon me as the first victim of your most astonishing interrogations?"

"Because you are the only Lady we ever saw in our lives that we didn't know who she was!" I explained. "And that makes it more interesting!"

"O--h," said the Lady. She gave a queer little gasp. It was the Hotel

happening! She ran up the hotel steps. There was a Gentleman waiting for her at the top of the steps. He was a tall Gentleman with a very cross mustache. The Lady whispered something to him. He shook his mustache at us.

"Get out of here, you Young Scamps!" he cried. "Get out of here, I say! _Get out!_"

No one had ever shaken his mustache at us before. We sat down on the step to think about it.

The Gentleman ran off to call the Hotel Proprietor.

The Lady looked a little sorry. She came running back. She stooped down. She took the book from Carol. And the pencil from me. She laughed a little.

"You funny--funny children," she said. "What is it you want to know? The Most Beautiful Smell in the whole wide world,--is that it?--The Most Beautiful Smell in the whole wide world?" She looked back over her shoulder. She wrote very fast. Her cheeks looked pink. She banged the book together just the first second she had finished. She pulled my ear. "I'm--I'm sorry," she said.

"Oh, that's all right," I assured her. "We'll be round and write the rest of the book some other day!"

The Man with the Cross Mustache kept right on hunting all around.

When the Hotel Proprietor came running and saw who we were he gave us two oranges instead, and a left-over roll of wall-paper with parrots on it, and all the old calendars that were in his desk.

We had to race home across the railroad trestle to get there in time. It wasn't till we reached the Blacksmith Shop that we had a chance to stop and see what the Lady had written in our book. There was a Smoke Tree just outside the Blacksmith Shop. It was all in smoke. We sat down under it and opened our book.

This is what the Lady had written in our book.

The most beautiful smell in the world is the smell of an old tattered baseball glove--that's been lying in the damp grass--by the side of a brook--in June Time.

I looked at Carol. Carol looked at me. We felt surprised. It wasn't exactly what you would have expected. Carol rolled over on his stomach. He clapped his heels in the air. He pounded his fists in the grass.

We forgot all about going home. We went into the Blacksmith's Shop instead. It was a very earthy place. But nothing grew there. Not grass. Not flowers. Not even vines. Just Junk!

The Blacksmith's name was Jason. He looked something like a Stove that could be doubled up in its stomach and carried round to all four corners of a horse for the horse to put his foot on. He was making shoes for a very stout black horse. The horse's name was Ezra. There were a great many sparks around! And iron noises! And flames! And smouches! Ezra's hoofs seemed to be burning! It smelt so funny we didn't think it would be polite to ask Jason what he'd rather smell like instead! So we decided to begin the other way about. But whatever way you decided you had to scream it.

"Jason," I screamed. "If you were a Beautiful Sound instead of a Beautiful Blacksmith, what Beautiful Sound in the whole wide world would you choose to be?"

"_Eh?_" screamed Jason. He stopped hammering. He stopped thumping. He stopped boiling poor Ezra's hoof with a red hot poker. "_Eh?_" he said all over again. "Well, that's a new one on me! What's the Big Idea?"

"Well--I want to know," said Jason. He sat down on a great block of wood. He wiped his sleeve on his face. It made his sleeve all black. "If I was a Sound--?" he said. "Instead of a Man?--Instead of a man?" It seemed to puzzle him a good deal. "Not to be a man--any more you mean? No arms? Legs? Stomach? Eyes?--To get all worn out and busted stayin' on forever in one place? And then thrung away?--But to be just a--just a Sound?--Just a Sound? Well, of all the comical ideas! Of all the----" Then quite suddenly he whacked his hand down in a great black smouch on his knee and clanged his feet like dungeon chains across a clutter of horseshoes. "I've got it!" he cried. "I've got it!--If I was a Sound instead of a man I'd choose to be a Song!--Not great loud band-tunes, I mean, that nobody could play unless he was hired! And charged tickets! But some nice--pretty little Song--floatin' round all soft and easy on ladies' lips and in men's hearts. Or tinklin' out as pleasant as you please on moonlight nights from mandolin strings and young folks sparkin'. Or turnin' up just as likely as not in some old guy's whistle on the top of one of these 'ere omnibuses in London Town. Or travellin' even in a phonograph through the wonders of the great Sahara Desert. Something all simple--I mean that you could hum without even botherin' with the words. Something people would know who you was even if there _wasn't_ any words!--Something all sweet and low----'Sweet and Low,' that's it! My Mother used to sing it! I hain't thought of it for forty years! _That's_ the one I mean!"

"Sweet and Low"--he began to sing.

Sweet and low--Sweet and low--
Wind of the Western Sea----

His voice was all deep and full of sand like the way a bass drum makes you feel in your stomach. I looked at Carol. Carol looked at me. We felt pretty surprised. Jason the Blacksmith looked more surprised than anyone! But he kept right on singing!

Over the rolling waters go--
Come from the--the something--moon and blow--
While my little one--while my pretty one--sleeps.
Father will come to his babe in the nest--
S-silvery--something--all out of the West--
Silvery----

We ran!

When we got to the Smoke Tree and looked back there was no sound at all in the Blacksmith Shop except the sound of Ezra thumping his hoofs. And Jason being a Song instead of a man!

The faster we ran the more surprised we felt.

When you read a book, of course, you expect to be surprised. If you didn't think the person who made the book was going to tell you something that you didn't know before you wouldn't bother to read it. But when you're writing a book it doesn't seem exactly as though so many unexpected things ought to happen to you!

We were pretty glad when we ran right into the Old Minister who preaches sometimes when all the young ministers can't think of anything more to preach about.

The Old Minister was leaning against the Bridge. The Old Lawyer was leaning against the Bridge with him. They were waving their canes. And their long white beards. And arguing about the "Thirty-Nine Articles."--Carol thinks it was the "Fifty-Seven Varieties" they were arguing about. But the "Fifty-Seven Varieties" I'm almost sure is Pickles. It's the "Thirty-Nine Articles" that is Arguments!

The Old Minister laughed when he saw us coming. "Well--Well--Well!" he cried. "See who's here! And carrying such a big book too! And all out of breath!" He put his arm round Carol. I thought he was going to ask us our Catechisms. And there wasn't any breath left in our catechisms.

"Oh, if you were a Beautiful Sound," I gasped, "instead of a Beautiful Preacher--what Beautiful Sound in the whole wide world--would you--would

you choose to be?"

"Eh?" said the Old Minister. "Eh?--What's--that? A--A--Sound instead of a Preacher? Well, upon my word!--This minute, you mean? Or any minute? If I was a Beautiful Sound instead of----?" He mopped his forehead. He looked pretty hot. He twinkled his eyes at the Old Lawyer. "Well--just this minute," he said, "I'd rather be the Sound of Foaming Beer than anything else in the world that I can think of!" He thumped his cane on the ground. The Old Lawyer thumped his cane on the ground. They both started off down the road thumping as they walked. We heard them chuckling as they thumped. They weren't arguing any more about the "Thirty-Nine Articles." They were arguing about Cheese.

And that was surprising too!

There wasn't any dinner left when we got home except just knives and forks and spoons. My Mother found us two bowls to go with the spoons. And some milk to go with the bowls. And some crackers to go with the milk. Everything went very well.

We told my Mother we were sorry to be late but that we were writing a book and it was very important.

My Mother said yes,--she knew that writing books was very important and had always noticed that people who wrote 'em were very apt to be late to things. Her only regret, she said, was that Carol and I hadn't had a little more time in which to form habits of promptness before we began on such a chronic career as Literature.

My Father said "Stuff and Nonsense!" My Father said that if we'd kindly condescend to tear ourselves away from the Charms of Literature for one brief afternoon he'd like to have us weed the Tulip Bed.

We said we would.

We forgot all about our book. It isn't that pulling up weeds is any special fun. It's the putting flowers back that you've pulled up by mistake that is such a Game in itself. You have to make little splints for them out of Forsythia twigs. You have to build little collars of pebble-stone all around them to keep marauding beetles from eating up their wiltedness. You have to bring them medicine-water from the brook instead of from the kitchen--so that nobody will scream and say, "Oh, what have you done now?--Oh, what have you done now?"

It was Supper Time before we knew it. There was creamed chicken for supper. And wild strawberry preserve. And a letter from our sister Rosalee. Our sister Rosalee is in Cuba visiting her Betrother. She wrote seven pages about it. She seemed to like her Betrother very much.

My Mother cried a little. My Father said "Oh, Pshaw! Oh, Pshaw! You can't keep 'em babies forever!" My Mother tried not to look at my Father's eyes. She looked at his feet instead. When she looked at his feet instead she saw that there were holes in his slippers. She seemed very glad. She ran and got a big needle. And a big thread. My Father had to sit very still.

It seemed a very good time to remember about the Book.

Carol went and got the Book. He put it down on the Dining Room table. It was a gray book with a red back to it. It said "Lanos Bryant" across the back of it. It was Lanos Bryant who had given us the book. Lanos Bryant was the Butcher. It was an old Account Book. The front of it was all mixed up with figurings. It was in the back of it that we were making Our Book.

My Mother looked up. She smiled at us.

"Why, bless my heart," she said, "we mustn't forget about the children's Book!"

"No such luck," said my Father.

Everybody smiled a little.

"What's the Book about?" said my Mother.

I looked at Carol. Carol looked at me. He nudged me to go on.

"It's about You!" I said. "And about Father! And about Jason the Blacksmith! And about the Old Preacher. And about most anybody I guess that would like to be About-ed!"

"Well--Well--Well," said my Mother. "And what is it for?"

"Oh, it's just for fun," I said. "But it's very important.--Just the first instant anybody reads it he'll know all there is to know about everybody without ever having to go and make calls on them! Everything interesting about them I mean! Everything that really matters! Lots of things that nobody would have guessed!"

"Mercy!" said my Mother. She stopped mending my Father and jumped right up.

My Father jumped right up too!

"Oh, it isn't written yet!" I said. "It's only just begun!"

"O--h," said my Mother. And sat down again.

"We though maybe you and Father would help us," I said.

"O--h," said my Father. And sat down again too.

Carol began to laugh. I don't know why he laughed.

"It's--it's just a set of questions," I explained.

Carol opened the Book and found the questions.

"Just five or six questions," I explained. "All you have to do is to answer the questions--and tell us how to spell it perhaps.--And then that makes the Book!"

"It certainly sounds simple," said my Mother. She began mending my Father very hard. "And what are some of the questions?" she asked.

"Well--the first question," I explained, "is 'What is your name?'"

My Mother gave a little giggle. She hushed my Father with her hand.

"Oh surely," she said, "there couldn't be any objection to telling these pleasant children our names?"

"No--o," admitted my Father.

My Mother looked up. She twinkled her eyes a little as well as her mouth.

"Our names are 'Father' and 'Mother'," she said.

Carol wrote the names in the Book. He wrote them very black and literary looking. "Father" at the top of one page. And "Mother" at the top of the other. They looked nice.

"All right then," said my Father. "Fire away!"

I looked at my Father. I looked at my Mother. I didn't know just which one to begin with. Carol kicked me in the shins for encouragement. I decided to begin with my Mother.

"Oh Mother," I said. "If you were a Beautiful Smell instead of a Beautiful Mother,--what Beautiful Smell in the whole wide world--would you choose to be?"

"Eh? What's that? _What?_" said my Father. "Well, of all the idiotic foolishness! Of all the--"

"Why no--not at all," said my Mother. "Why--Why I think it's rather interesting! Why--Why--Though I must admit," she laughed out suddenly, "that I never quite thought of things in just that way before!" She looked out the window. She looked in the fire-place. She looked at my Father. She looked at Carol. She looked at me. She began to clap her hands. "I've got it!" she said. "I know what I'd choose! A White Iris! In all the world there's no perfume that can compare with the perfume of a White Iris!--Orris root they call it. Orris--"

"Humph! What's the matter with Tulips?" said my Father.

"Oh but Tulips don't have any smell at all," said my Mother. "Except just the nice earthy smell of Spring winds and Spring rains and Spring sunbeams!--Oh of course they _look_ as though they were going to smell tremendously sweet!" she acknowledged very politely. "But they're just so busy being _gay_ I suppose that--"

"The Tulip Goldfinch," said my Father coldly, "is noted for its fragrance."

"Oh dear--Oh dear--Oh dear," said my Mother. She seemed very sorry. She folded her hands. "Oh very well," she said. "Mondays,--Wednesdays,--Fridays,--and Sundays,--I will be the fragrance of the Tulip Goldfinch. But Tuesdays,--Thursdays and Saturdays I really must insist on being the fragrance of a White Iris!"

"Humph!" said my Father. "There aren't any of them that are worth the nice inky lithograph smell of the first Garden Catalogues that come off the presses 'long about February!"

My Mother clapped her hands again.

"Oh Goodie!" she said. "Write Father down as choosing to smell like 'the nice inky lithograph smell of the first Garden Catalogues that come off the presses 'long about February!'"

My Father had to tell us how to spell "Lithograph." Carol wrote it very carefully. My Mother laughed.

"Well really," said my Mother, "I'm beginning to have a very good time.--What is Question No. 2?"

"Question No. 2," I said, "is:--If you were a Beautiful Sound instead of a Beautiful Father and Mother,--what Beautiful Sound in the whole wide world would you choose to be?"

My Father felt better almost at once.

"Oh Pshaw!" he said. "That's easy. I'd be the Sound of Gold Pieces jingling in the pocket of a man--of a man--" He looked at my Mother. "--Of a man who had a Brown-Eyed Wife who looked something like my Brown-Eyed Wife--and three children whose names--when you spoke 'em quickly sounded very similar--yes, very similar indeed to 'Ruthy' and 'Carol' and 'Rosalee'!"

"Oh what nonsense!" said my Mother.

"What does the jingle of Gold Pieces amount to?--Now if I could be any Sound I wanted to--I'd choose to be the sweet--soft--breathy little _stir_ that a nice little family makes when it wakes up in the morning--so that no matter how much you've worried during the long black night you can feel at once that everything's all right! And that everybody's all there!--In all the world," cried my Mother, "I know of no sweeter sound than the sound of a nice little family--waking up in the morning!"

I turned to Carol's page. I laughed and laughed. "Bubbling Fat is what Carol would like to sound like!" I cried. "The noise that Bubbling Fat makes when you drop doughnuts into it!--But I?--If I could be any lovely Sound I wanted to,--I'd like to be the Sound of Rain on a Tin Roof--at night! All over the world people would be lying awake listening to you! And even if they didn't want to listen they'd have to! Till you were good and ready to stop!"

It took Carol a good while to write down everything about "Gold Pieces" and a "Nice Little Family waking up in the Morning" and "Rain on a Tin Roof."

"The next question is pretty hard," I explained. "Maybe you'd like to be thinking about it.--If you were a Beautiful Sight--that people came miles to see,--what Beautiful Sight in the whole wide world would you choose to be?"

My Father didn't wait a minute. "A Field of Tulips!" he said.

Carol pounded the table with his fists. His face was like an explosion of smiles. He pointed to my Father's page in the Book.

"It's already written!" I said. "We guessed it all the time!"

We turned to my Mother. We saw a little quiver go through my Mother's shoulders.

"I'd choose to be a Storm at Sea!" said my Mother.

"_What?_" cried my Father.

"A Storm at Sea!" said my Mother.

My Father stopped saying "What?" And made a little gasping sound instead. "_You?_--_You?_" he said. "The gentlest soul that ever breathed?--Would like to be a 'Storm at Sea'?"

"It's only the 'mother' side of me that is gentle!" laughed my Mother. She threw back her head suddenly. She thrust out her hands. It jerked her soft, calm hair all fluffy and wild across her forehead. Her eyes danced! Her cheeks turned all pink! "Oh _wouldn't_ it be fun?" she cried. "All the roaring! And the ranting! And the foaming! And the _Furying_!--Racing up the beaches in great waves! And splashes! _Banging_ against the rocks! Scaring the fishes almost to pieces! Rocking the boats till people fell _Bump_ right out of their berths onto the floor! Ruffling the gulls till----"

"You wouldn't actually--wreck a boat would you?" said my Father.

My Mother stopped tossing her head. And waving her hands. She gave a little sigh. She began mending my Father again very hard.

"Just----pirates," she said.

"O--h," said my Father.

"We intended to make the next one about 'Motions,'" I explained. "But it was too hard. Carol wanted to be an Elevator!--Carol says an Elevator is like quick-silver in a giant thermometer that's gone mad!--He wanted to be the motion it makes when the Elevator's going down and the floor's coming up! But it made me feel queer in my stomach!"

"Merciful Heavens!" said my Father. "What kind of a family have I drawn?--My Wife wants to be a 'Storm at Sea' and my Son aspires to feel like an 'Elevator Gone Mad!'"

Carol looked at my Mother. My Mother looked at Carol. They laughed their eyes together.

"So we made it 'Money' and 'Memory' instead," I explained.

"Made what 'Money' and 'Memory' instead?" said my Father.

"The next two questions," I explained.

"O--h," said my Mother.

"Fire away!" said my Father.

"Question No. 4," I said. "Which do you like best? _Times?_ or _Things?_"

"Times or Things?" said my Father. "Whatever in the world do you mean?" His eyebrows looked pretty puzzled.

"Why, we mean," I explained, "if somebody gave you five whole dollars for your birthday--how would you rather spend it?--What would you get most fun out of, we mean?--_Times?_ Or _Things?_--Would you be most apt to spend it for Rabbits, we mean? Or going to a Fair?"

"Oh," said my Father, "I see!--Times or Things?--Times--or things?--Why _Things_!" he decided almost at once. "_Things_ of course!--When you buy a _Thing_ you've got something really tangible for your money! Something definite! Something really to show!--'Rabbits' I admit would probably not be my choice.--But a book, now! A set of garden tools?--A pair of rubber boots even?"

"N--o," said my Mother very softly, "I'm almost sure I'd rather 'go to the Fair!--' _Times_' or ' _Things_'?--Yes I'm perfectly positive," she cried out, "that _Times_ give me more pleasure than _Things_ do!--Now that I think of it I can see quite plainly that always--always I've preferred to spend my money 'going to the Fair!'"

"Yes, but how foolish," said my Father. "When the Fair's over it's over!--Nothing left to show for it but just a memory."

My Mother laughed right out loud. It was the prettiest laugh.

"Now that's where you're mistaken!" she laughed. "When the Fair's what you call 'over,'--that's the time it's really _just begun_!--Books get lost--or puppies chew them! Garden tools rust! Even the best rubber boots in the world get the most awful holes poked through their toes!--But a Happy Memory?--A Happy Memory--?" She jumped up suddenly and crept into my Father's arms.

My Father stroked her hair. And stroked it.

Carol kicked me in the shins.

"There's only one more question!" I cried out pretty loud.

"What is it?" said my Mother. It sounded pretty mumbly through my Father's shoulder.

"Oh this one is very important," I said. "It's about _colors_."

"Colors?" said my Father. He didn't seem to care nearly as much as you'd have thought he would.

"C--Colors," mumbled my Mother.

"Somewhere in a book," I explained, "we read about a man who wanted his memory 'kept green?'--Why _green?_ Why not pink?--Why not blue?--Or even red with a cunning little white line in it?"

"_Eh?_" said my Father.

"If you were going away," I explained.

My Mother's hands clutched at his coat. She gave a queer little shiver. "Oh not--'away!'" she protested.

"For ever and ever," I explained.

My Mother's face came peering out from the shadow of my Father's shoulder. She started to laugh. And made a little sob instead. "Oh not for----ever----and _ever_?" she said.

We all sat and looked at each other. I felt awful queer in my stomach.

Carol kicked me in the shins. He wrote something quick on a piece of paper and shoved it across the table at me.

"_China_ was the place that Carol meant!" I explained. "Oh he didn't mean--at all--what you thought he meant!--If you were going away to--to _China_ --for ever and ever--and ever--and gave your Best Friend a whole lot of money like twenty-five dollars to remember you by--what color do you _hope_ he'd keep your memory?"

"Oh--yes--why of course!" said my Father quite quickly. "It's a jolly one after all, isn't it!--Color--Color?--Let me see!--For twenty-five dollars you say? Yes Yes!--The very thing! _Yellow_ of course! I hope my Best Friend would have wit enough to buy a _Lamp_!--Nothing fancy you know but something absolutely reliable.--Daytimes to be sure your memory wouldn't be much use to him. But nights--the time everybody needs everybody the most,--Nights I say,--looking back from--from _China_ was it that you designated?--Nights it would be rather pleasant I think to feel that one lived on and on--as a yellow glow in his friend's life."

My Father reached out and pinched my ear.

"How about it, Ruthy?" he asked.

"Oh that's all right," I admitted. "But if I gave my Best Friend twenty-five dollars to remember me by--I hope he'd buy a Blueberry Bush!--Just think of all the colors it would keep your memory!--White in blossom-time! And blue in fruit-season! And red as blood all the Autumn! With brown rabbits hopping through you!--And speckled birds laying--goodness knows what colored eggs! And--"

Somebody banged the front door. Somebody scuffled on the threshold. Somebody shouted "Hello--Hello--Hello--!" It was the Old Doctor.

We ran to see if he had peppermints in his pocket.

He had!

After the Old Doctor had given us all the peppermints he thought we ought to have--and seven more besides, he sat down in the big cretonne chair by the window, and fanned his neck with a newspaper. He seemed to be pretty mad at the people who had made his collars.

"W-hew!" he said. "The man who invented a 21-inch collar ought to be forced to suck boiling starch through the neck of a Blueing Bottle!"

We didn't see just why.

The Old Doctor said he didn't care to discuss it.

"Any news to-day?" asked my Father.

"News enough!" said the Old Doctor. He seemed pretty mad about that too!

"Such as what?" asked my Father.

"There's a Prince and Princess in town!" said the Old Doctor. "Or a Duch and Duchess!--Or a Fool and Fooless!--I don't care what you call 'em!--They've got some sort of a claim on the old Dun Vooles estate. Brook,--meadow,--blueberry----hillside,--popple grove,--everything! They've come way from Austria to prove it! Going to build a Tannery! Or a Fertilizer Factory! Or some other equally odoriferous industry! Fill the town with foreign laborers!--String a line of lowsy shacks clear from the Blacksmith Shop to the river!--Hope they choke!"

"Oh my dear--my dear!" said my Mother.

The Old Doctor looked a little funny.

"Oh I admit it's worth something," he said, "to have you call me your

'dear.'--But I'm mad I tell you clear through. And when you've got as much '_through_' to you as I have, that's _some mad_!--W-hew!" he said. "When I think of our village,--our precious, clean, decent, simple little All-American village--turned into a cheap--racketty--crowd-you-off-the-sidewalk Saturday Night Hell Hole...?"

"Oh--Oh--OH!" cried my Mother.

"Quick! Get him some raspberry shrub," cried my Father.

"Maybe he'd like to play the Children's new Game!" cried my Mother.

"It isn't a Game," I explained. "It's a Book!"

My Mother ran to get the Raspberry Shrub. She brought a whole pitcher. It tinkled with ice. It sounded nice. When the Old Doctor had drunken it he seemed cooled quite a little. He put the glass down on the table. He saw the Book. He looked surprised.

"Lanos--Bryant? Accounts?" he read. He looked at the date. He looked at my Father. "What you trying to do, Man?" he said. "Reconstruct a financial picture of our village as it was a generation ago? Or trace your son Carol's very palpable distaste for a brush, back to his grandfather's somewhat avid devotion to pork chops?" He picked up the book. He opened the first pages. He read the names written at the tops of the pages. Some of the names were pretty faded.--"Alden, Hoppin, Weymoth, Dun Vorlees," he read. He put on his glasses. He scrunched his eyes. He grunted his throat. "W-hew!" he said. "A hundred pounds of beans in one month?--Is it any wonder that young Alden ran away to sea--and sunk clear to the bottom in his first shipwreck?--'Roast Beef'?--'Roast Beef'?--'Malt and Hops'?--'Malt and Hops'?--'Roast Beef'?--'Malt and Hops'?--Is _that_ where Old Man Weymoth got his rheumatism?--And Young Weymoth--his blood pressure?--Dun Vorlees?--Dun Vorlees?--_What?_ No meat at all from November to February?--No fruit?--Only three pounds of sugar?--Great Gastronemics! Back of all that arrogance,--that insulting aloofness,--was _real_ Hunger gnawing at the Dun Vorlees vitals?--Was _that_ the reason why--?--Merciful Heavens!" cried the Old Doctor. "This book is worth twenty dollars to me--this very minute in my Practice! The light it sheds on the Village Stomach,--the Village Nerves,--the--"

"Please, Sir," I said. "The Book is Carol's. Mr. Lanos Bryant gave it to him.--And we're planning to get a great deal more than twenty dollars for it when we sell it!"

"_Eh?_" said the Old Doctor. "_What?_"

He jerked round in his chair and glared at Carol.

"This I'll have you understand, my Young Man," he said, "is in the cause of Science!"

Carol looked pretty nervous. He began to smooth his hair as well as he could without bristles. It didn't smooth much.

"Oh please, Sir," I explained, "people who write books never have smooth hair!"

"Who's talking about writing books?" roared the Old Doctor.

"Please, Sir, we're trying to talk about it," I said. My voice sounded pretty little. "It's the back part of the book that's the important part," I explained. "It's the back part of the book that we're writing!"

"Eh?" said the Old Doctor.

He slammed the book together. He stood up and began to look for his hat.

There didn't seem a moment to lose if we we're going to get him into our book. I ran and caught him by the hand. Even if his face was busy his hands always had time to be friends with Carol and me.

"Oh please--please--please," I besought him. "If you were a Beautiful Smell instead of a Beautiful Doctor,--what Beautiful Smell in the whole wide world would you choose to be?"

"What?" said the old Doctor. "What? W-h-a-t?" he kept saying over and over. He looked at my Father. He looked at my Mother. My Mother told him about our Book. He made a loud Guffaw. "Guffaw" I think is the noise he made. Carol is sure that it is! He looked at Carol. He looked at me. He began to Guffaw all over again.

"Well really, Young Authorettes," he said, "I hardly know how to answer you or how to choose. Ether or Chloroform and general Disinfectants being the most familiar savors of my daily life,--the only savors indeed that I ever expect to suggest to anybody--" He looked out the window. There was an apple-blossom tree. It made the window look very full of June. His collar seemed to hurt him. It made him pretty serious. It made his voice all solemn.

"But I'll tell you, Kiddies," he said quite suddenly. "I'll tell you the Sweetest Thing that I ever smelled in my life!--It was the first Summer I was back from College.--I was out on the Common playing ball. Somebody brought me word that my Father was dead.--I didn't go home.--I slunk off instead to my favorite trout-brook--and sat down under a big white birch

tree--and _cursed_!--I was very bitter. I needed my Father very much that year. And my step-mother was a harsh woman.--Late that night when I got home,--ugly with sorrow,--I found that I'd left my Catcher's glove. It happened to be one that my Father had given me.--With matches and a tin-can lantern I fumbled my way back to the brook. The old glove lay palm-upward in the moss and leaves. Somebody had filled the palm with wild violets.--I put my face down in it--like a kid--and bawled my heart out.--It was little Annie Dun Vorlees it seemed who had put the violets there. Trailed me clear from the Ball Field. Little kid too. Only fourteen years to my twenty. Why her Mother wouldn't even let me come to the house. Had made Annie promise even not to speak to me.--But when Trouble hit me, little Annie--?" The Old Doctor frowned his eyebrows. "Words!" he said. "It's _words_ after all that have the real fragrance to 'em!--Now take that word 'Loyalty' for instance. I can't even see it in a Newspaper without--" He put back his head suddenly. He gave a queer little chuckle. "Sounds funny, doesn't it, Kiddies," he laughed, "to say that the sweetest thing you ever smelled in your life was an old baseball glove thrown down on the mossy bank of a brook?"

I looked at Carol. Carol looked at me. His eyes were popping. We ran to the Book. We snatched it open. It bumped our heads. We pointed to the writing. I read it out loud.

The most beautiful smell in the world is the smell of an old tattered baseball glove that's been lying in the damp grass--by the side of a brook--in June Time.

My Mother looked funny.

"Good Gracious," she said. "Are my children developing 'Second Sight'?--First it was the 'Field of Tulips' already written down as their Father's choice before he could even get the words out of his mouth!--And now, hours before the Old Doctor ever even dreamed of the Book's existence they've got his distinctly unique taste in perfumes all--"

"But this isn't the Old Doctor!" I cried out. "She wrote it herself. It's the Lady down at the hotel. It's the--the Empress that the Old Doctor was talking about!"

"The--Empress?" gasped the Old Doctor.

"Well maybe you said 'Princess,'" I admitted. "It was some one from Austria anyway--come to fuss about the old Dun Vorlees place! You said it was! You said that's who it was!--It's the only Strange Lady in the village!"

"What?" gasped the Old Doctor. "_What?_" He looked at the book. He read

the Lady's writing. Anybody could have seen that it wasn't our writing. It was too dressy. He put on his glasses. He read it again.

--the smell of an old tattered baseball glove--that's been lying in the damp grass--side of a brook--June Time.

"Good Lord!" he cried out. "Good Lord!"--He couldn't seem to swallow through his collar. "Not anyone else!" he gasped. "In all the world!--There couldn't possibly be anyone else! It must--It must be little Annie Dun Vorlees herself!"

He rushed to the window. There was a grocery boy driving by.

"Hi! Hi there!" he called out. "Don't mind anybody's orders just now! Take me quick to the Hotel!--It's an Emergency I tell you! She may be gone before I get there!"

We sat down on the sofa and curled up our legs. Our legs felt queer.

My Mother and Father sat down on the other sofa. They looked queer all over. They began to talk about the Village. It wasn't exactly the Village that we knew. It was as though they talked about the Village when it was a child. They talked about when the Bridge was first built. They talked about the Spring when the Big Freshet swept the meadow. They talked about the funny color of Jason the Blacksmith's first long trousers. They talked about a tiny mottled Fawn that they had caught once with their own hands at a Sunday School picnic in the Arbutus Woods. They talked about the choir rehearsals in the old white church. They talked about my Father's Graduation Essay in the High School. It was like History that was sweet instead of just true. It made you feel a little lonely in your throat. Our Tame Coon came and curled up on our legs. It made our legs feel better. The clock struck nine. Our Father and Mother forgot all about us. Pretty soon we forgot all about ourselves. When we woke up the Old Doctor had come back. He was standing by the table in the lamplight talking to my Father and my Mother.

He looked just the same--only different--like a portrait in a newspaper that somebody had tried to copy. All around the inner edges of his bigness it was as though someone had sketched the outline of a slimmer man.--It looked nice.

"Well it was little Annie Dun Vorlees!" he said.

"Was it indeed?" said my Father.

"Hasn't changed a mite!" said the Old Doctor. "Not a mite!--Oh of course she's wearing silks now instead of gingham.--And her hair?--Well perhaps it's just a little bit gray but----"

"Gray hair's very pretty," said my Mother.

"Humph!" said the Old Doctor. "I expected of course that she'd think me changed a good deal. I've grown stout. 'Healthy' she called it.--She thought I looked 'very healthy'!" The Old Doctor shifted his feet. He twitched at a newspaper on the table. "That Austrian gentlemen with her isn't her Husband," he said. "She's a--she's a widow now.--It's her Husband's brother."

"Really?" said my Father.

"Oh_Thunder_!" said the Old Doctor. "I guess perhaps I spoke a little bit hastily when I was here before--about their ruining the Village!--I've been talking a bit with Annie and--" His face turned quite red suddenly. He laughed a little. "There won't be any changes made at present in the old Dun Vorlees place--I imagine.--Not at present anyhow."

He looked over at us. We scrunched our eyes perfectly tight.

"Asleep," he said. He picked up our Book. He tucked it under his arm. He looked at my Father and Mother. "It's quite time," he said, "that you started a Bank Account for these children's college education.--It costs a great deal to send children to college nowadays. Carol will surely want a lot of baseball bats.--And girls I know are forever needing bonnets!" He took two Big Gold Pieces from his pocket and put them down on the table where our Book had been. They looked very shining.

My Father gave a little gasp. He jumped up! He started to argue!

My Mother hushed him with her hand. "S--sh----not to-night!" she whispered. "Not to-night!"

She looked at the Old Doctor. She looked at our Book all hugged up tight under his arm. Her eyes looked as though they were going to cry. But her mouth looked as though it was going to laugh.

"Oh of course--if it's in the Cause of Science," she said. "If it's in the Cause of Science."

THE LITTLE DOG WHO COULDN'T SLEEP

It was our Uncle Peter who sent us the little piece of paper.

It was a piece of paper torn out of that part of a newspaper where people tell what they want if they've got money enough to pay for it.

This is what it said:

"WANTED a little dog who can't sleep to be night companion for a little boy who can't sleep. Will pay fifty dollars."

Our Uncle Peter sent it to my Father and told him to give it to us.

"Your children know so many dogs," he said.

"Not--fifty dollars' worth," said my Father. He said it with points in his eyes.

"Oh--I'm not so sure," said my Mother. She said it with just a little smile in her voice.

It was my Mother who gave us the big sheet of brown paper to make our sign. My brother Carol mixed the paint. I mixed the letters. It was a nice sign. We nailed it on the barn where everybody who went by could see it. It said:

"Carol and Ruthy.
Dealers in Dogs who
Can't Sleep."

Nobody dealt with us. We were pretty discouraged.

We asked the Grocer if he had a little dog who couldn't sleep. We asked the Postman. We asked the Butcher. They hadn't.

We asked the old whiskery man who came every Spring to buy old bottles and papers. HE HAD!

He brought the dog on a dungeon chain. He said if we'd give him fifty cents for the dungeon chain we could have the dog for nothing.

It seemed like a very good bargain.

Our Father lent us the fifty cents.

He was a nice dog. We named him Tiger Lily. His hair was red and smooth as Sunday all except his paws and ears. His paws and ears were sort of rumped. His eyes were gold and very sweet like keepsakes you must never spend. He had a sad tail. He was a setter dog. He was meant to hunt. But he couldn't hunt because he was so shy. It was guns that he was so shy

about.

Our Mother invited us to wash him. He washed very nicely.

We wrote our triumph to our Uncle Peter and asked him to send us the fifty dollars.

Our Uncle Peter came instead in an automobile and took Tiger Lily and Carol and me to the city.

"Of course he isn't exactly a 'little dog,'" we admitted. "But at least he's a dog! And at least he 'can't sleep'!"

"Well--I wonder," said our Uncle Peter. He seemed very pleased to wonder about it. He twisted his head on one side and looked at Tiger Lily. "What do you mean,--'doesn't sleep'?" he said.

Because my brother Carol is dumb and never talks I always have to do the explaining. It was easy to explain about Tiger Lily.

"Why when you're in bed and fast asleep," I explained, "he comes and puts his nose in your neck! It feels wet! It's full of sighs and a cool breeze! It makes you jump and want your Mother!--All the rest of the time at night he's roaming! And prowling! And s'ploring!--Up the front stairs and down the back--and up the front and down the back!--Every window he comes to he stops and listens! And listens!--His toe-nails have never been cut!--It sounds lonely!"

"What does he seem to be listening for?" said our Uncle Peter.

"Listening for gun-bangs," I explained.

"O--h," said our Uncle Peter.

The city was full of noises like gun-bangs. It made Tiger Lily very nervous. He tried to get under everything. It took us most all the afternoon to get him out.

The little boy's name was Dicky. He wasn't at home. "Come again," said the man at the door. We came again about eight o'clock at night. It seemed as late as Christmas Eve and sort of lonely without our Parents or any other presents. We had to climb a lot of stairs. It made Tiger Lily puff a little and look very glad. It made our Uncle Peter puff some too. It made the little boy's Mother puff a good deal. There wasn't any Father. The Mother was all in black about it. Her clothes looked very sorrowful. But her face was just sort of surprised. She had white hands. She carried them all curved up like pond-lilies. She was pretty. Even if you'd never seen her but once in a train window you'd always have

remembered.

The little boy's room was very large and full of lights. There were tinkly glass things hanging everywhere. There was a music-box playing. There was a tin railroad train running round and round the room all by itself making a bangy noise. There was a wound-up bird in a toy cage crying "Hi! Hi!" There was a crackling fire. Everything was tinkling or playing or singing or banging or crackling. It sounded busy. You had to talk very loud to make any one hear you.

The little boy sat on top of a table in a big bay window looking out at the night. His knees were all cuddled up into the curve of his arms. He had on a little red wrapper and bare legs and fur slippers. He was lots littler than us. He looked cunning.

We stamped our feet on the rug.

"Here's your dog!" I said.

When the little boy saw Tiger Lilly he jumped right down from the table and screamed. It was with joy that he screamed. He threw his arms right around Tiger Lily's neck and screamed all over again. Tiger Lily liked it very much.

"What makes his paws so fluffy?" he screamed. "How soft his face is! He's got sweet eyes! He's got a sad tail! What's his name? Where did you get him? Is he for me? Do I have to pay money for him? What does he eat? Will he drink coffee?" Just as though he was mad about something he began suddenly to jump up and down and cry tears. "Why doesn't somebody answer me?" he screamed. "Why doesn't somebody tell me?"

He got so excited about it that he hit Carol on the nose and blooded him quite a good deal.

The little boy's mother came running.

"Oh hush--hush, Dicky!" she cried. "Don't be in such a hurry! The boy will tell you all about it in time! Give him time I say! Give him time!"

"No he won't," I explained. "My brother Carol never tells anything. He can't."

"He's--dumb," said our Uncle Peter.

The Lady looked sort of queer.

"Oh dear--Oh dear--Oh dear," she said. "What a misfortune!"

Our Uncle Peter sort of sniffed his expression.

"Misfortune?" he said. "I call it the greatest blessing in the world!" He glared at little Dicky. "Yes the greatest blessing in the world!" he said. "A child who doesn't babble or fuss!--Or SCREAM!"

The Lady looked more and more surprised. She turned to the little boy.

"'Dumb,' Dicky," she said. "You understand? Doesn't speak?"

Dicky looked at his Mother. He looked at Carol. A little pucker came and blacked itself between his eyebrows. As though to toss the pucker away he tossed back his whole head and ran to Tiger Lily and threw his arms around Tiger Lily's neck.

"Doesn't---EVER?" he said.

"Doesn't ever--what?" said our Uncle Peter.

"Sleep?" said Dicky.

"It was the boy we were talking about," laughed his Mother. "Not the doggie." She tried to put her arms around him.

He wiggled right out of them and ran back to Tiger Lily.

"Is it his adenoids?" he cried. "Have you had his eyes tested? How do you know but what it's his teeth?"

"Whose teeth?" frowned our Uncle Peter.

"Tiger Lily's!" cried Dicky.

His Mother made a sorry sound in her throat.

"Poor Dicky," she said. "He's had most everything done to him!--Tonsils,--spine,--eyes,--ears,--teeth!--Why the last Doctor I saw was almost positive that the Insomnia was due entirely to--" In the very middle of what it was due to she turned to our Uncle Peter. Her voice got very private. Our Uncle Peter had to stoop his head to hear it. He had a proud head. It didn't stoop very easily.

"He isn't my own little boy," she whispered.

As though his ears were magic the little boy looked up and grinned. His eyes looked naughty.

"Nobody's own little boy," he said. "Nobody's own little boy!" As though it was a song without any tune he began to sing it. "Nobody's--Nobody's own little boy!"

The Lady tried to stop him. He struck at her with his feet. It made a hurt on her arm. He snatched Tiger Lily by the collar and started for the door.

"Going to find Cook and get a bone!" he said. He said it like a boast. He slammed the door behind him. It made a rude noise. He came running back and looked a little sorry, but mostly bashful. He pointed at Tiger Lily. "What--What's HE afraid of?" he said.

"Noises," I explained.

"Noises?" cried the little boy. He cried it with a sort of a hoot. It sounded scornful.

"Oh pshaw!" he said. "There isn't a noise in the world that I'm afraid of! Not thunder! Not guns! Not ANYTHING! Noises are my friends! In the night I take torpedoes and crack 'em on the hearth just to hear them sputter! I've got three tin pans tied on a string! I've got a pop-gun!"

He ran back to the table to get the gun. It was a nice gun. It was painted bright blue. It looked loud.

When Tiger Lily saw it he dove under the bed. It was hard to get him out. The little boy looked very astonished.

"It's gun-bangs--specially--that Tiger Lily is afraid of," I explained.

"Gun-bangs?" said the little boy.

"That's why he can't ever hunt," I explained.

"Hunt?" said the little boy. "Not--ever you mean?" He looked at Tiger Lily. He looked at the blue pop-gun. "Not ever? Ever? Ever?" Way down in his little fur slippers it was as though a little sigh started and shivered itself up-up-up--up till it reached his smile. It made his smile sort of wobbly. "Oh all right!" he said and ran away as fast as he could to hide the blue pop-gun in the bottom of the closet. A velocipede he piled on top of it and two pillows and a Noah's Ark and a stuffed squirrel. When the piling was all done he looked back at our Uncle Peter. It was across one shoulder that he looked back. It made his little smile look twisty as well as wobbly. One of his eyebrows had crooked itself. "It's--It's SILENCES that I'm afraid of," he said.

He grabbed Tiger Lily by the collar again and started for the door. As

though he was playing a Game he reached out one finger and tagged everybody as he passed them. Everybody except Carol. When he started to tag Carol he snatched back his finger and screamed instead. "He's a Silence!" he screamed. "He's a Silence!" Still holding tight to Tiger Lily's collar he ran for the stairs.

Flop-Flop-Flop his little fur slippers thudded on the hard wood floor. Tick-Tick-Tick Lily's toe-nails clicked along beside him. It sounded cool. And slippery.

His Mother wrung her hands. It seemed to be with despair that she wrung them.

"Yes that's just it," she despaired. "It's 'Silences' that he's afraid of! That's what keeps him awake all night banging at things! That's what worries him so!"

"But he gave up the noisy pop-gun," said our Uncle Peter. "Gave it up of his own accord when he saw that it frightened the dog."

"Why so he did!" said the Mother. She seemed very much surprised. "Why so he did!--Why I don't know that I ever knew him to give up anything before. He's been so delicate--and--and the only child and everything--I'm afraid we've spoiled him."

"U--m--m," said our Uncle Peter.

"And all the circumstances of the case are so bewildering," despaired the lady.

Like white pond-lilies floating in a black gloom her sad hands curled in her lap. It seemed to be at our Uncle Peter that they curled.

"Are they indeed?" said our Uncle Peter. It was the "circumstances" that he meant.

"Very bewildering," said the Lady. Her cheeks got a little pink. She jumped up and went to the door and listened a minute at the head of the stairs. When she came back to her chair she shut the door behind her.

"As I told you," she whispered, "the little boy isn't my own little boy."

"So I understood," said our Uncle Peter.

"His Mother died when he was born," said the Lady.

"Very sad indeed," said our Uncle Peter.

"Dicky is six years old," said the Lady. "I married his Father a year and a half ago. His Father was killed in an accident a year ago--"

"Oh dear--Oh dear," said our Uncle Peter.

The Lady began all over again as though it was a lesson.

"Dicky is six years old," she said. "I married his Father a year and a half ago. He was killed in an accident a year ago. It was all so sudden,--the marriage,--the accident,--everything--!" She began to cry a little. It made her clothes look sorrowfuller and sorrowfuller and her face more and more surprised. Once again she curled up her white pond-lily hands at our Uncle Peter. It was as though she thought that our Uncle Peter could help her perhaps with some of her surprises. "I--I didn't know his Father very long," she cried. "I never knew his Mother at all!----It's--It's pretty bewildering," she said, "to be left all alone--for life--with a perfectly, strange little boy--who isn't any relation at all!--All his funny little suits to worry about--and his mumps and his measles--and--and whether he ought to play marbles 'for keeps'--and shall I send him to college or not? And suppose he turns out a burglar or something dreadful like that?--And how in the world am I going to tackle his first love affair? Or his choice of a profession?--Merciful Heavens!--Perhaps he'll want to fly!"

"Why--you're just like a Hen," said our Uncle Peter.

The Lady didn't like to be called a Hen.

It ruffled her all up.

Our Uncle Peter had to talk about Base Ball to soothe her.

The Lady didn't know anything about Base Ball but it seemed to soothe her considerably to hear about it.

When our Uncle Peter was all through soothing her she looked up as pleasant as pleasant could be.

"WHY?" she said.

"Why--what?" said our Uncle Peter. He seemed a little perplexed.

"Why--am I like a Hen?" said the Lady.

"O--h," said our Uncle Peter. He acted very much relieved. "O--h," he said. "I was afraid it was something you were going to ask me about Base Ball. But a Hen----?" He looked with smiles at the Lady. "Oh but a

Hen--?--Why even a Hen, my dear Madam," he smiled, "a real professional true-enough hen doesn't take any too easily to the actual chick itself until she's served a certain sit-tightly, go-lightly, egg-shell sort of apprenticeship as it were to the IDEA.--Thrust a bunch of chicks under her before she's served this apprenticeship and----"

I jumped up and down and clapped my hands. I just couldn't help it.

"Oh, I know what happens!" I cried. "She sits too heavy! And squashes 'em perfectly flat!--There was a hen," I cried. "Her name was Lizzie! She was a good hen! But childless! The Grocer gave us some day-old chicks to put under her! But when we went out to the nest the next morning to see 'em--they couldn't have been flatter if they'd been pressed in the Bible!--My Brother Carol cried,--I cried,--my Mother----"

"I don't care at all who cried," said the Lady. It was true. She didn't. All she cared was to look at our Uncle Peter. The look was a stern look.

"And are you trying to imply, Mr.--Mr.--?"

"Merredith," said our Uncle Peter. "Percival Merredith.--'Uncle Peter' for short."

"Mr. Merredith," repeated the Lady coldly. "Are you trying to imply that my---step-son looks as though he had been pressed in a--a--Bible?"

I shook in my boots. Carol shook in his boots. You could hear us.

Our Uncle Peter never shook a bit. He just twinkled.

"Well--hardly," he said.

The Lady looked pretty surprised. When she wasn't looking surprised she looked thoughtful.

Her voice sounded little when she got it started again.

"Maybe--Maybe I DO take my responsibilities too heavily," she said. "But it's this--this sleeping business that worries me so."

"I should think it would," said our Uncle Peter.

"No Nurse Maid will stay with me," said the Lady. "They say it gives them the creeps.--It's enough to give anyone the creeps.--A grown person of course expects a certain amount of wakefulness, but a child,--a little care-free--heedless child--? Just when you think you've got him safely to sleep--all cuddled up in your own bed or even in his own bed--and are just drowsing off into the first real sleep you've had

for a week--?--Patter--Patter--Patter in the hall! Creak--Creak--Creak on the stairs! A chair bumped over in the Library!--Bumped over on purpose you understand! Just to make a noise! 'Noises are his friends,' he says. Why once--once--" The Lady's mouth smiled a little. "Once when I woke and missed him and hunted everywhere--I found him at last in the Pantry--on the floor--with his ear cuddled close up to a mouse-hole! Mouse-Nibble Noises he says are his special friends in the middle of the night when there isn't anything else.--ANYTHING to break the silence it seems to be!--Why in the world should he be afraid of a Silence? Nobody can account for it!"

"Possibly not," said our Uncle Peter. "Yet the fact remains that either within or just outside the borders of his consciousness the only two people responsible for his Being have disappeared unaccountably into a Silence----from which they have not returned."

"Oh dear," said the Lady. "I never thought of that! You mean--You mean--that perhaps he thinks that a Silence is a Hole that you might fall into if you don't fill it up with a Noise? Why the poor little fellow!--How in the world is one ever to tell?--Oh dear--Oh dear----" She sank back in her chair and floated her hands in her lap. Her eyes looked as though she was going to cry again. But she didn't cry. That is, not much. Mostly she just sighed. "It isn't as though he was an easy child to understand," she sighed. "He catches cold so easily, and mumps and everything.--And he's so irritable.--He kicks,--he bites,--he scratches!"

"So I have seen demonstrated," said our Uncle Peter.

"Oh, it's quite evident," cried the Lady, "that you think I'm harsh with him!--But whatever in the world would YOU do?" She threw out her hands toward the pretty room,--the rugs,--the pictures,--the fire,--the toys. "Perhaps you can tell me what he NEEDS?" she said.

"A good spanking," said our Uncle Peter.

The Lady gave a little gasp.

"Oh, not for punishment," said our Uncle Peter. "But just for exercise.--It's the only exercise that a lot of pampered, sedentary children ever get!"

"P--Pampered?" gasped the Lady. "S--Sed--entary?" As though her head was bursting with the noises all around the room she clapped her hands over her ears.

Our Uncle Peter jumped up from his chair and began to chase the little tin railroad train. It looked funny to see so large a man running after

so small a train. When he caught it it was having a railroad accident in the tunnel under the table where a book had fallen on the track. Like a beetle with no paint on its stomach he left it lying on its back with its little wheels kicking in the air.

"If only all the racket was as easily disposed of!" said the Lady.

"It IS!" said our Uncle Peter.

Like turning off faucets of water he turned off the noises one by one,--the window-breeze that made the glass dangles tinkle,--the funny jiggly spring that kept the toy bird screaming "Hi-Hi" in its wicker cage,--the music box that tooted horns and beat drums right in the middle of its best tunes! He looked like a giant stalking through the Noah's Ark animals! His foot was longer than the village store!

"If only I figured as largely in a less miniature world!" he said.

He looked at the Lady very hard when he said it as though he was saying something very important.

The Lady didn't seem to consider it important at all. She looked at her skirts instead and smoothed them very tidily.

"It's a--It's a pleasant day--isn't it?" said our Uncle Peter.

"V--very," said the Lady. Quite suddenly she looked up at him. Her cheeks were pink. She seemed to want to speak but didn't know quite how. She looked more surprised than ever. She bent forward very suddenly and stared and stared at him.

"Why--Why you're the gentleman," she said, "who was in the Fruit Store the day I bought the Alligator pears and dropped my pocket-book down behind the trash-barrel?"

"Also the day you bought the Red Mackintosh Apples," said our Uncle Peter. "The Grocer cheated you outrageously on them.--Also the day you wore the bunch of white violets and pricked your finger so brutally,--also the day on the ferry when there was a slight collision with a tug-boat and I had the privilege of--of----."

The Lady looked very haughty.

"It was the day of the Alligator Pears--that I referred to," she said. "The only day in my recollection!" Very positively she said it,--"the only day in my recollection." But all the time that she said it her cheeks got pinker and pinker. It was when she looked in the glass and saw how mistaken her positiveness looked that her cheeks got so pink.

Tap--Tap--Tap her foot stamped on the rug. "Did--Did you know who it was going to be---when you brought the dog?" she said. "That is,--did you know when you first saw the advertisement in the paper." Her white forehead got all black and frowny. "How in the world did you know--my name?" she said.

Our Uncle Peter made an expression on his face. It was the expression that our Mother calls his "Third-Helping-of-Apple-Pie Expression,"--bold and unashamed.

"I asked the Grocer," he said.

"It was a--a great liberty," said the Lady.

"Was it?" said our Uncle Peter. He didn't seem as sorry as you'd have expected.

The Lady looked at Carol. The Lady looked at me.

"How many children have you?" she said.

"None of my own," said our Uncle Peter. "But three of my brother Philip's,--Carol and Ruthy as here observed, and Rosalee aet. eighteen who is at present in Cuba engaging herself to be married."

"O--h," said the Lady.

"I am in short," said our Uncle Peter, "that object of Romance and Pity popularly known as a 'Bachelor Uncle.'"

"O--h," said the Lady. She seemed more relieved than you'd have supposed.

"But in my own case, of course--" said our Uncle Peter.

In the very midst of his own case he stopped right off short to look all around the room again as though he was counting how heavy the toys were and how heavy the money was that had bought the toys. All the twinkle came back to his eyes.

"But in my own case," he said, "I've always known ahead--of course--for a very long time--that I was going to have 'em.--Learned to sit lightly on the idea,--re-balance my prejudices,--re-adjust my--"

"Have--what?" gasped the Lady.

"Nephews and nieces," said our Uncle Peter.

"O--h," said the Lady.

"Had their names all selected I mean," explained our Uncle Peter. "Their virtues, their vices, their avocations, all decided upon.----Ruthy of course might have done with less freckles, and Carol here doesn't quite come up to specifications yet concerning muscle and brawn--and it was never my original intention of course that any young whipper-snapper niece of mine should engage herself to the first boy she fell in love with.--But taken all in all,--all in all I say--"

"I think," frowned the Lady, "you are perfectly----absurd."

The word "absurd" didn't seem to be at all the word she meant to say. She tried to bite it back but got it all mixed up with a little giggle. She bit the giggle instead. It twisted her mouth like a bitter taste.

Our Uncle Peter looked very sympathetic.

"You ought to get away somewhere on a journey," he said. "There's nothing like it as a tonic for the mind. Even if it's a place you don't like very much it clarifies the vision so,--dissipates all one's minor worries."

"--Minor worries?" said the Lady.

"Travel! Yes that's the thing!" said our Uncle Peter quite positively. All in a minute he seemed to rustle with time tables and maps and smell of cinders and railroad tickets. "Now there's Bermuda for instance!" he suggested. "Just a month of blue waters and white sand would put the roses back in your cheeks.--And Dicky--"

"Impossible," said the Lady.

"Or if Bermuda's too far," insisted our Uncle Peter. "What about Atlantic City? Think how Dicky would enjoy romping on the board walk--while you followed more sedately of course in a luxurious wheel chair!--The most diverting place in the world!--Yes quite surely you must go to Atlantic City!"

The Lady made a little gasp as though her Patience was bursted.

"You don't seem to understand," she said. "I tell you it's quite impossible!"

"W-H-Y?" said our Uncle Peter. He said it sharply like a Teacher. It HAD to be answered.

The Lady looked up. She looked down. She looked sideways. She wrung her

hands in her lap. Her face got sort of white.

"It isn't very kind of you," she said, "to force me so to a confession of poverty."

"'Poverty'?" laughed our Uncle Peter. He looked around at the furniture,--at the toys,--at the pictures. It was at most everything that he looked around. He seemed to be very cheerful about it.

The Lady didn't like his cheerfulness.

"Oh I've always had a little for myself," she explained. "Enough for one person to live very simply on. But NOW----? With this strange little boy on my hands,--I--I intend to go to work!"

"Go to----work?" said our Uncle Peter. "WORK?" He said it with a sort of a hoot. "Work? Work? Why, what in the world could YOU do?"

"I can crochet," said the Lady proudly. "And embroider. I can mend. I can play the piano. And really you know I can make the most beautiful pies."

"Apple pies," said our Uncle Peter.

"Apple pies," said the Lady. Like a handful of black tissue paper she crumpled up suddenly in her chair. Her shoulders shook and shook. The sound she made was like a sob going down and a laugh coming up. "I'm not crying," she said, "because it's so hard--but b--because the idea is so f--funny."

"F--F--Funny?" said our Uncle Peter. "It's preposterous! It's gro--tesque! It's--it's fantastic!"

He began to walk very fast from the book-case to the window and from the window back to the book-case again. It wasn't till he'd stubbed his toe twice on a toy Ferris Wheel that the twinkle came back to his eyes.

"Carol!" he said. "Ruthy!--In consideration of the reduced circumstances in which this very pleasant Lady finds herself don't you think that you could afford to offer her a reduced price on the dog,--your original profit on the deal being as noted \$49.50?"

The Lady jumped to her feet.

"Oh no--no--no!" she said. "Not for a moment! Fifty dollars is what I offered! And fifty dollars it shall be! All dogs I'm sure are worth fifty dollars. Especially if they don't sleep! Why all the other dogs that people brought me did nothing except sleep! On my sofas! In my

chairs! Under my tables! Night or day you couldn't drop even so much as a handkerchief on the floor that one or the other of them didn't camp right down and go to sleep on it! Oh, no--no--no," protested the Lady, "whatever my faults, a bargain is a bargain and----"

"Whatever your faults, my dear Madam," said our Uncle Peter, "they are essentially feminine and therefore enchanting! It is only when ladies ape the faults of men that men resent the same!--Your extravagant indulgency--" he bowed towards the toys--"your absolute innocence of all business guile--" he bowed towards Tiger Lily--"nerves strung so exquisitely that the slightest--the slightest--"

The Lady shivered her clothes like a black frost.

"It was advice that I was looking for, not compliments," she said.

"Oh ho!" said Uncle Peter. "I'm infinitely more adept with advice than I am with compliments!"

The Lady looked a little bit surprised. She frowned.

"It's my little boy that I want advice about," she said. "What IS the best thing I can do for him?"

Our Uncle Peter looked at the ceiling. He looked at the rug. He looked at the pictures on the wall. But it seemed to satisfy him most to look at the Lady's face.

"U--m--m," he said. "U--m--mmmm.--That isn't an easy question to answer unless you're willing first to answer a question of mine."

"Ask any question you want to," said the Lady.

"U--m--m," said our Uncle Peter all over again.

"U--m--m--Um--m--m--U--m--m. It takes a great deal of patience," said our Uncle Peter, "to bring up a little boy.--Unless every time he's naughty you can say to yourself 'Well, even so--think what a good man his Father grew to be!----Or every time he's good you're fair enough to admit that 'Even his naughty Father was once as nice as this!'"----All the twinkle went suddenly out of our Uncle Peter's eyes. It left them looking narrow. He made a quick glance at Carol. He made a quick glance at me. He seemed very pleased that we were so busy looking at a map of Bermuda. He stepped a little nearer to the Lady. His voice sounded funny. "Were you--were you very fond of the little boy's Father?" he said.

The Lady's face went blazing like a flame out of her black clothes. It was like a white flame that it went blazing. Her eyes looked screaming.

"How dare you?" she said. "You have no business!--What if I was?--What if I wasn't?" All the scream in her eyes fell down her throat into a whisper. "Suppose--Suppose--I--WASN'T?" she whispered.

"Then indeed I CAN give you advice," said our Uncle Peter.

The Lady reached out a hand to the book-case to make herself more steady.

"What--what is it?" she said.

Our Uncle Peter looked funnier and funnier. It wasn't like Christmas that he looked. Nor Fourth of July. Nor even like when we've got the mumps or the measles. It was like Easter Sunday that he looked! There was no twinkle in it. Nor any smoke. Nor even paper dolls. But just SHININGNESS! His voice was all SHININGNESS too!--If it hadn't been you never could have heard it 'cause he made his words so little.

"It's almost a year now," he said, "since our eyes first met.--You've tried your best to hide from me--but you couldn't do it.--Fate had other ideas in mind.--A chance encounter on the street,--that day on the ferry boat,--your funny little dog-advertisement in the paper?"

Quite suddenly our Uncle Peter straightened up like a soldier and spoke right out loud again.

"About your little boy," he said, "my advice about your little boy?--It being indeed so well-nigh impossible, Madam, for a woman to bring up a little boy very successfully unless--she did love his Father,--my advice to you is that without the slightest unnecessary delay you proceed to get him a Father whom you COULD love!"

Whereupon, as people always say in books, our Uncle Peter turned upon his heel and started for the door.

The Lady swooned into her chair.

Our Uncle Peter had to get a glass of water to un-swoon her.

I ran for a fan. It bursted my garter. When our Uncle Peter tried to mend it he swore instead.

The Lady came out of her swoon without an instant's hesitation.

"Here at least," she said, "is something that I know enough to do."

Her mouth was full of scorn and pins. It was with pins that she knew

enough to do it.

Our Uncle Peter looked very humble.

The Lady patted my knees.

"Little girls are so much easier to manage than little boys," she said.
"I don't seem to understand little boys."

"Nor big boys either!" said our Uncle Peter. He said it with gruffness.
It sounded cross.

"Perhaps I--don't want to understand them," said the Lady.

Our Uncle Peter's cheeks got sort of red.

"Suit yourself, my dear Madam," he said and started for the door. He picked up my hat and put it on Carol's head.--Carol's head looked pretty astonished. He took Carol's cap and put it on my head. He handed us our coats upside down.--All our pennies and treasures fell out on the floor. He snatched up the little boy's gloves by mistake and thrust them into his own pockets.

The Lady collected everything again and re-distributed them. She seemed to think it was funny. Not very funny but just a little. She looked at Carol sort of specially.

"Oh my dear Child," she said. "I hope you didn't mind because Dicky called you a 'Silence'?"

Carol did mind. He minded very much. I could tell by the way he carried his ears. They looked very stately. Our Uncle Peter whirled round in the door-way. His ears looked pretty stately too.

"All the men in our family," he said, "aim to meet the exigencies of life--sensibly."

The Lady seemed to consider the fact quite a long time before she smiled again.

"Oh very well," she said. "If the Uncle really is as sensible as the nephew perhaps he will consent to leave the children here with me to-night--instead of bearing them off to the confusion and general mis-button-ness of hotels."

Our Uncle Peter's face fairly burst into relief.

"Oh, do you really mean that?" he cried. "It IS their infernal buttons

that makes most of the worry!--And their prayers?--What IS the difference anyway between a morning and an evening prayer?--And this awful responsibility about cereals? And how in the world do you make sure about their necks?"

"Oh those are the things I know perfectly," said the Lady. "All the nice gentle in-door things."

Our Uncle Peter began to strut again.

"Oh pshaw!" he said. "It's only the outdoor things that are really important,--how to climb mountains, how to stop a runaway horse,--how to smother a grass fire!"

It put the Lady all in a flutter.

"Oh pshaw!" said our Uncle Peter. "That's nothing!--The very first instant you hear the maddened hoofs on the pavement you place yourself thus! And THUS!--And----"

The Lady tried to explain to him the difference between a morning and an evening prayer. "Now at night, of course," she explained, "everything is so very lonely that--"

Our Uncle Peter didn't seem to care at all how lonely it was.

"The instant you see the horses's blood-red nostrils,--JUMP!" cried our Uncle Peter.

It sounded pretty muddled to me.

"Personally," insisted the Lady, "I consider a rather soft sponge best for the neck."

"So that with your hands clutched like a vise on either side of the mouth," cried our Uncle Peter, "you can saw up and down with all the violence at your command! Now in fighting a grass fire, it's craft, not might, that you need. In that case of course--"

"Two hours if you're using a double boiler," explained the Lady, "but many people consider a rapider action more digestible, I suppose."

"My dear Lady----let me finish my explanation!" said our Uncle Peter.

"But I want to finish mine!" said the Lady.

Our legs got pretty tired waiting for all the explanations to get un-mixed up again.

It was nine o'clock before the Lady gave our Uncle Peter a cup of hot chocolate and turned him out doors.

"Just like a dog," said our Uncle Peter. We heard him say it across his shoulder as he went down the steps.

It made the Lady laugh a little.

It was warm milk in two great blue bowls that she gave us. "Just like kittens," we thought it was!

We heard the little boy's feet come thud-thud-thudding up the stairs. We heard Tiger Lily's toe-nails click-click-click along behind him.

The little boy looked very full of chicken and joyfulness. So did Tiger Lily.

"Cook says I've got to romp him!" he said. "Every day!--Twice every day!--More'n a hundred times some days! Out doors too! Not just in parks,--parks are good enough for cats,--but in real fields! Else he'll DIE!" Almost as though he was frightened he stooped down suddenly and laid his little ear on Tiger Lily's soft breast. "He's alive now!" he boasted. "You can hear his heart nibbling!" He threw back his little head and laughed and laughed and clapped his hands. He took Tiger Lily by the collar and led him over to the table by the window. He climbed up on the table and pulled Tiger Lily after him.

Tiger Lily was frightened, but not too much. He felt proud. His ears looked fluffy. His back was shining silk. His tail hung down across the edge of the table like a plume.

Far off in the city streets somewhere there was a noise that trolley cars make when they're climbing up a hill and the switch is too hard for them. It was a sour sound.

Tiger Lily started to make a little quiver in his back. The little boy threw his arm around him. A mouse nibbled in the wall. Tiger Lily cocked his head to listen but kissed the little boy's cheek instead. It was a nice kiss. But wet. The little boy laughed right out loud. Way down on the very tip end of Tiger Lily's plumey tail about two hairs wagged. When the little boy saw it his face went all shining. He threw both arms around Tiger Lily's neck. "T--Tiger Lily's--little boy!" he said. "T--T--" Something funny happened to his mouth. It was a teeny-weeny yawn that didn't seem to know just what to do about it. Nothing in all the world felt lonely any more.

Except me.

The Lady put me to bed.

Carol put himself to bed all except the knots in his shoestrings.

We went to sleep.

Pretty soon it was morning. And we went home.

Our Uncle Peter changed a lot of our dog-money into nickles so it would jingle. We sounded like cow-bells. It felt rich. Our Uncle Peter held us very tight by the hands all the way. He said he was afraid we might step into something wet and sink.

It had been Wednesday when we went away. It was only Thursday when we got home. It seemed later than that.

Our Mother was very glad to see us. So was our Father.

The Tame Crow flew down out of the Maple Tree and sat on Carol's head.

Our Tame Coon came out of the hole under the piazza and sniffed at our heels.

The posie bed in front of the house was blue with violets. The white Spirea bush foamed like a wave against the wood-shed window.

In spite of our absence nothing seemed changed.

We gave our Father a dollar of our money to buy some Tulips. We gave our Mother a dollar to spend any way she wanted to. We put the rest of it in a book. It was a Savings Bank Book that we put it into.

"For your old age," our Father said.

Our Father's eyes had twinkles in them.

"I hope you've thanked your Uncle Peter properly!" he said.

"For what?" said our Uncle Peter.

Our Father jingled the twenty nickles in his hand. "For all favors," he said.

Our Uncle Peter said he was perfectly repaid. He made a frown at my Father.

When bed-time came I climbed up into my Mother's lap and told her all

about it,--the house,--the cocoa,--the toy Ferris Wheel,--the blue daisies on the stair carpet,--the pigeon that lit on my window-sill in the morning,--the splashy way Tiger Lily lapped his milk.

"It will be interesting," said my Mother, "to see what we hear from Tiger Lily as Time goes on."

Time went on pretty quickly. Pansies happened and yellow poppies and ducks and two kittens and August.

It wasn't till almost Autumn that we ever heard from Tiger Lily or the little boy again.

When the letter came it was from the little boy. But it was the Lady who wrote it.

We thought her writing would be all black and sorrowful. But it was violet-colored instead, with all the ends of her letters quirked up with surprise like her face, only prancier.

"My dear little friends," wrote the Lady, "Dicky wishes me to tell you how much we enjoyed your delightful visit, and to say that Tiger Lily is a sweet dog. He thinks you are mistaken about Tiger Lily not hunting. Tiger Lily hunts very well he says,--'only different.' It's mice, he wants me to tell you, that Tiger Lily is very fierce about. And bugs of any sort. All in-door hunting in fact. Certainly our wood-boxes and our fire-places have been kept absolutely free of mice this entire season. And Cook says that not a June Bug has survived. Truly it's very gratifying. Also Dicky wants me to tell you that there's a field. It's got a brook in it where you can sail boats and everything. It's most a mile. This is all for this time Dicky says.

"With affectionate regards, I am, etc.----"

Our Mother looked up across the top of the letter. It was at my Father that she looked.

"Poor dear Lady," she said. "I hope she's happier now. It's that Mrs. Harnon, you know. Her marriage was so unfortunate to that dreadful Harnon man."

"U--m--m," said my Father.

We read the letter over and over waiting for the next one and wondering about Tiger Lily.

There wasn't any next one till most Thanksgiving. When it came at last it was Dicky's letter just the same, but it was written in our Uncle Peter's handwriting this time. It seemed funny. But perhaps the Lady's hand was lame and she advertised for help.--Our Uncle Peter reads all the newspapers.

The letter was awful short. And there weren't any quirks in it or anything. Just ink. This is what it said:

"Mutts:

Tiger Lily's got nine puppies. We're sleeping fine.

Dicky."

Our Mother looked at our Father. Our Father looked at our Mother. They both looked at the letter again.

"My brother Peter's handwriting just as sure as you're born!" said my Father.

"Of course it's Peter's writing," said our Mother. Her cheeks were quite pink. "Well of all the unexpected romances--" she said.

"Whose?" I said.

"Tiger Lily's," said my Father. He seemed to be in an awful hurry to say it.

I looked at my Mother. Her eyes were shining.

"Is a--Is a 'Romance' a something that you make a story out of?" I said.

"Yes it is," said my Mother.

I thought of my gold pencil.

"Oh, all right," I said, "when I get tall enough and more spelly I'll make a little story about it."

"You already have!" said my Mother.

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