Raymond Evelyn

Dorothy's House Party

Evelyn Raymond
Dorothy's House Party

http://www.litres.ru/pages/biblio_book/?art=23154923
Dorothy's House Party:

Содержание

Raymond Evelyn
Dorothy's House Party

CHAPTER I
THE END OF AN INFAIR

Dorothy sat up in bed and looked about her. For a moment she did not realize where she was nor how she came to be in such a strange and charming room. Then from somewhere in the distance sounded a merry, musical voice, singing:

> "Old Noah of old he built an ark —
> One more river to cross!
> He built it out of hickory bark —
> One more riv – "

The refrain was never finished. Dorothy was at the open window calling lustily:

"Alfy! Alfy Babcock! Come right up here this very, very minute!"

"Heigho, Sleepy Head! You awake at last? Well, I should think it was time. I'll be right up, just as soon as I can put these yeller artemisias into Mis' Calvert's yeller bowl."

A fleeting regret that she had not waked earlier, that it

was not she who had gathered the morning nosegay for Mrs. Betty's table, shadowed the fair face of the late riser; but was promptly banished as the full memory of all that happened on the night before came back to her. Skipping from point to point of the pretty chamber she examined it in detail, exclaiming in delight over this or that and, finally, darting within the white-tiled bathroom where some thoughtful person had already drawn water for her bath.

"Oh! it's like a fairy-tale and I'm in a real fairy-land, seems if! What a dainty tub! What heaps of great soft towels! and what a lovely bath-robe! And oh! what a wonderful great-aunt Betty!"

A moisture not wholly due to the luxurious bath filled Dorothy's eyes, as she took her plunge, for her heart was touched by the evidences of the loving forethought which had thus prepared for her home-coming before she herself knew she possessed a birthright home. Of her past life the reader if interested may learn quite fully, for the facts are detailed in the two books known as "Dorothy's Schooling," and ""

So though it was still a radiantly happy girl who welcomed Alfaretta it was a thoughtful one; so that Alfy again paused in her caroling to demand:

"Well, Dolly Doodles, what's the matter? If I'd been as lucky as you be I wouldn't draw no down-corners to my mouth, I wouldn't! I'd sing louder'n ever and just hustle them 'animals' into that 'ark' 'two by two,' for 'There's one more river to cross! One more river – One more river to cro-o-o-oss!'"

But without waiting for an answer the young farm girl caught her old playmate in her strong arms and gave her a vigorous hug.

"There, Miss Dorothy Calvert, that don't begin to show how tickled I am 'bout your good fortune! I'm so full of it all 't I couldn't hardly sleep. Fact. You needn't stare, though 'tis a queer thing, 'cause if there's one thing more to my liking than another it's going to bed on such a bed as Mis' Calvert has in every single one of her rooms. There ain't no husk-mattresses nor straw shake-downs to Deerhurst. No, siree! I know, for I went into every single chamber from roof to cellar and pinched 'em all. The 'help' sleep just as soft as the old lady does herself. Softer, Ma says, 'cause old-timers like her if they didn't use feathers just laid on hard things 't even Ma'd despise to have in her house. However, everybody to their taste! and say, Dolly, which of all them pretty dresses are you goin' to put on? What? That plain old white linen? Well, if you don't beat the Dutch and always did! If I had all them silks and satins I'd pick out the handsomest and wear that first, and next handsome next, and keep right on, one after another, till I'd tried the lot, if I had to change a dozen times a day. See! I found them cardinal flowers down by the brook and fetched 'em to you."

With one of her sudden changes of mood Alfaretta dropped down upon the floor and pulled from the pocket of her old-fashioned skirt a cheap paper pad. It was well scribbled with penciled notes which the girl critically examined, as she explained:

"You see, Dorothy, that your story is like reading a library book, only more so; and lest I should forget some part of it I've wrote it all down. Listen. I'll read while you finish fixin'. My! What a finicky girl you are! You was born – "

"But, Alfy, please! I protest against hearing my own history that way!" cried the other, making a playful dash toward the notes, which Alfaretta as promptly hid behind her. Then, knowing from experience that contest was useless, Dorothy resigned herself to hearing the following data droned forth:

"You was born – "

"Of course!"

"'Twon't do you a mite of good to interrupt. I'm in real down earnest. You'll – you'll be goin' away again, pretty soon, and having come into your fortunes you'll be forgettin' – " Here Alfy sobbed and dabbed her knuckles into her eyes – "'Cause Ma says 'tain't likely you'll ever be the same girl again – "

"I should like to know why not? Go on with your story-notes. I'd even rather hear them than you talking foolishly!"

"Well, I'll have to begin all over again. You was born. Your parents were respectful – respective – hmm! all right folks though deluged with poverty. Then they died and left you a little, squallin' baby – "

"Alfy, dear, that's unkind! I don't admit that I ever could be a squaller!"

Alfaretta raised her big eyes and replied:

"I ain't makin' that up. It's exactly what Mis' Calvert said her

own self. 'Twas why she wouldn't bother raisin' you herself after your Pa and Ma died and sent you to her. So she turned you into a foundling orphan and your Father John and Mother Martha brung you up. Then your old Aunt Betty got acquainted with you an' liked you, and sort of hankered to get you back again out of the folkses' hands what had took all the trouble of your growing into a sizable girl. Some other folks appear to have took a hand in the business of huntin' up your really truly name; and Ma Babcock she says that Mis' Calvert'd have had to own up to your bein' her kin after awhile, whether or no; so she just up and told the whole business; and here you be – a nairess! and so rich you won't never know old friends again – maybe – though I always thought you – you – you – Oh! my!"

Alfaretta bowed her head to her knees and began to cry with the same vigor she brought to every act of her life. But she didn't cry for long; because Dorothy was promptly down upon the floor, also, and pulling the weeper's hands from her flushed face, commanded:

"It's my turn. I've a story to tell. It's all about a girl named Alfaretta Babcock, who was the first friend I ever had 'up-mounting,' and is going to be my friend all my life unless she chooses otherwise. This Alfy I'm talking about is one of the truest, bravest girls in the world. The only trouble is that she gets silly notions into her auburn head, once in a while, and it takes kisses just like these – and these – and these – to drive them out. She's going to be a teacher when she grows up – "

Alfy's tears were dried, her face smiling, as she now interrupted:

"No. I've changed my mind. I'm either going to be a trained nurse or a singer in an opera. Premer donners, they call 'em."

"Heigho! Why all that?"

Alfaretta dropped her voice to a whisper and cautiously glanced over her shoulder as she explained:

"Greatorex!"

"Miss Greatorex? What has that poor, learned dear to do with it?" demanded Dorothy, astonished.

"Everything. You see, she's the first woman teacher I ever saw – the first *woman* one. Rather than grow into such a stiff, can't-bend-to-save-your-life kind of person I'd do 'most anything. Hark! There's somebody to the door!"

Both girls sprang to open it and found a maid with a summons to breakfast; also with the request that "Miss Dorothy should attend Mrs. Calvert in her own room before going below stairs."

Dorothy sped away but Alfaretta lingered to put the cardinal flowers into a vase and to admire afresh the beautiful apartment assigned to her friend.

There was honest pleasure in the good fortune which had come to another and yet there was a little envy mingled with the pleasure. It was with a rather vicious little shake that she picked up the soft bath-robe Dorothy had discarded and folded it about her own shoulders; but the reflection of her own face in the mirror opposite so surprised her by its crossness that she

stared, then laughed aloud.

"Huh! Ain't you ashamed of yourself, Alfy Babcock? When you put on that two-sticks, ten-penny-nails-look you're homely enough to eat hay! 'Tain't so long ago that Dolly hadn't no more in this world than you've got this minute. Not half so much either, 'cause she hadn't nobody belongin', nobody at all, whilst you had a Ma and Pa and a whole slew of brothers and sisters. All she's found yet is a terrible-old great-aunt and some money. Pa says 'money's no good,' and – I guess I'll go get my breakfast, too."

Her good temper quite restored, this young philosopher skipped away and joined her mother and sisters in the great kitchen where they were already seated at table.

In Mrs. Calvert's room the happy old lady greeted Dorothy with such a warmth of affection that the girl felt no lack of others "belongin'" – for which lack Alfaretta had pitied her – and only yearned to find a way to show her own love and gratitude. There followed a happy half-hour of mutual confidences, a brief reading of the Word, a simple prayer for blessing on their new lives together, and the pair descended to the cheerful room where their guests were assembling: each, it seemed, enjoying to the utmost their beautiful surroundings and their hostess's hospitality.

Jests flew, laughter rang, and the Judge could scarcely refrain from song; when just as the meal was over James Barlow appeared at the long, open window, his mail bag over his shoulder, and instant silence succeeded as each person within

waited eagerly for his share in the contents of the pouch.

There were letters in plenty, and some faces grew grave over their reading, while for the Judge there was a telegram which Jim explained had just come to the office where was, also, the post-office.

"Hmm! that ends my vacation in earnest! I meant to stay a bit longer out of business, but – Mrs. Calvert, when's the next train cityward, please?"

Mrs. Betty returned:

"I've half a mind not to tell you! But, of course, if – Dorothy, you'll find a parcel of time tables in that desk by the fireplace. Take them to Judge Breckenridge, please."

Nor was he the only one to make them useful; for it followed that the Deerhurst "infair," begun on the night before and planned to extend over several days must be abruptly ended. The hostess was herself summoned elsewhere, to attend the sick bed of a lifelong friend, and the summons was not one to be denied. Even while she was reading the brief note she knew that she must forsake her post and with a thrill of pride reflected that now she had one of her own kin to install in her place. Young as Dorothy was she must act as the hostess of Deerhurst, even to these gray-headed guests now gathered there. But, presently it appeared, that there would be no guests to entertain. President Ryall was needed to supervise some changes at his college; merchant Ihrie must hasten to disentangle some badly mixed business affairs; Dr. Mantler would miss the "most interesting case on record if

he did not come at once to his hospital;" and so, to the four old "boys," who had camped together in the Markland forests, the end of playtime had indeed come, and each after his kind must resume his man's work for the world.

Young Tom Hungerford's furlough from West Point expired that morning, and his mother felt that when he returned to the Academy she must establish herself for a time at the hotel near-by. At her invitation Mrs. Cook and Melvin were to accompany her; that these Nova Scotians might see something of lads' military training outside their own beloved Province.

Catching the general spirit of unrest, Miss Greatorex suddenly announced that it was time she returned to the Rhinelander. Maybe she dreaded being left the only adult in the house, for as yet no mention had been made as to the disposal of her charges, Molly and Dolly. Certainly, she felt that having been burdened with their cares during the long summer she was entitled to a few days' rest before the beginning of a new school year. The lady added:

"Besides all that, I shall have no more than sufficient time to arrange my specimens that I obtained in Markland."

A short silence fell once more upon that company in the breakfast room, and somehow the brilliant sunshine seemed to dim as if a storm were rising; or was it but a mist of disappointment rising to Dorothy's eyes as she glanced from one to another and realized how well she loved them each and all, and how sad the parting was.

But her last glance fell upon her Aunt Betty's face and she bravely smiled back into the kindly eyes so tenderly smiling upon her. After all, that was the Calvert way! To meet whatever came with "head erect and colors flying," and she, too, was Calvert. She'd prove it! Cried she, with that characteristic toss of her brown curls:

"Well, if everybody *must*– what can I do to help? As for you two, darling 'father' and 'mother,' I hope nothing's going to take you away from Deerhurst all of a sudden, like the rest!"

But there was, although there was no suddenness in this decision. As they presently informed her, the crippled ex-postman had made himself so useful at the sanitarium where he had spent the summer that he had been offered a permanent position there, at a larger salary than he had ever received as letter-carrier in Baltimore. He had also secured for his wife Martha a position as matron of the institution; and the independence thus achieved meant more to that ambitious woman than even a care-free home with her beloved foster-child. The death of their old aunt had released Martha from that separation from her husband which had so sorely tried her and, though sorry to part again from Dorothy, she was still a very happy woman.

"We shall always love one another, Dolly dear, but we've come to 'the parting of the ways.' Each as the Lord leads, little girl; but what is the reason, now that Mrs. Calvert's grown-up party has ended, what is the reason, I say, that you don't give a House

Party of your very own?”

CHAPTER II
CHOOSING THE GUESTS

Those who must go went quickly. By trains and boats, the various guests who had gathered at Deerhurst to welcome Dorothy's home-coming had departed, and at nightfall the great house seemed strangely empty and deserted. Even Ma Babcock had relinquished her post as temporary housekeeper and had hurried across the river to nurse a seriously ill neighbor.

"I may be back tomorrer and I may not be back till the day after never! I declare I'm all of a fluster, what with Mis' Calvert goin' away sort of leavin' me in charge – though them old colored folks o' her'n didn't like that none too well! – and me havin' to turn my back on duty this way. But sickness don't wait for time nor tide and typhoid's got to be tended mighty sharp; and I couldn't nohow refuse to go to one Mis' Judge Satterlee's nieces, she that's been as friendly with me as if I was a regular 'ristocratic like herself. No, when a body's earned a repitation for fetchin' folks through typhoid you got to live up to it. Sorry, Dolly C.; but I'll stow the girls, Barry and Clarry and the rest, 'round amongst the neighbors somewhere, 'fore I start. As for you, Alfy – "

"Oh, Mrs. Babcock! Don't take Alfy away! Please, please don't!" cried Dorothy, fairly clutching at the matron's flying skirts, already disappearing through the doorway.

Mrs. Babcock switched herself free and answered through the opening:

"All right. Alfy can do as she likes. She can go down help tend store to Liza Jane's, t'other village, where she's been asked to go more'n once, or finish her visit to you. Ary one suits me so long as you don't let nor hender me no more."

Not all of this reply was distinct, for it was finished on the floor above, whither the energetic farm-wife had sped to "pack her duds"; but enough was heard to set Alfaretta skipping around the room in an ecstasy of delight, exclaiming:

"I'm to be to the House Party! Oh! I'm to be to the Party!"

But this little episode had been by daylight, and now the dusk had fallen. The great parlors were shut and dark. Prudent old Ephraim had declared:

"I ain't gwine see my Miss Betty's substance wasted, now she's outer de way he'se'f. One lamp in de hall's ernuf fo' seein' an' doan' none yo chillen's go foolin' to ast mo'."

So the long halls were dim and full of shadows; the wind had risen and howled about the windows, which were being carefully shuttered by the servants against the coming storm which Dinah prophesied would prove the "ekernoctial" and a "turr'ble one"; and to banish the loneliness which now tormented her, Dorothy proposed:

"Let's go into the library. There's a fine fire on the hearth and the big lamp is stationary. Ephraim can't find fault with us for using that. We'll make out a list of the folks to ask. You, Alfy,

shall do the writing, you do write such a fine, big hand. Come on, Molly girl! I'm so glad you begged to stay behind your Auntie Lu. Aren't you?"

"Ye-es, I reckon so!" answered the little Southerner, with unflattering hesitation. "But it's mighty lonesome in this big house without her and West Point's just – just heavenly!"

"Any place would be 'heavenly' to you, Molly Breckenridge, that was full of boys!" retorted Dolly. "But don't fancy you'd be allowed to see any of those cadets even if you were there. Beg pardon, girlie, I don't want to be cross, but how can I have a decent party if you don't help? Besides, there's Monty and Jim left. They ought to count for something."

"Count for mighty little, seems if, the way they sneak off by themselves and leave us alone. Gentlemen, *Southern* gentlemen, wouldn't act that way!"

"Oh, sillies! What's the use of spoiling a splendid time? It's just like a cow givin' a pailful of milk then turnin' round and kickin' it over!" cried good-natured Alfy, throwing an arm around each girl's shoulders and playfully forcing her into the cheery library and into a great, soft chair. Of course, they all laughed and hugged one another and acknowledged that they had been "sillies" indeed; and a moment later three girlish heads were bending together above the roomy table, whereon was set such wonderful writing materials as fairly dazzled Alfaretta's eyes. So impressed was she that she exclaimed as if to herself:

"After all, I guess I won't be a trained nurse nor a opera singer.

I'll be a writin' woman and have just such pens and things as these."

"Oh, Alfy, you funny dear! You change your mind just as often as I used to!"

"Don't you change it no more, then, Dorothy C.?" demanded the other, quickly.

"No. I don't think I shall ever change it again. I shall do everything the best I can, my music and lessons and all that, but it'll be just for one thing. I lay awake last night wondering how best I could prove grateful for all that's come to me and I reckon I've found out, and it's so – so simple, too."

"Ha! Let's hear this fine and simple thing, darling Dolly Doodles, and maybe we'll both follow your illustrious example!" cried Molly, smiling.

"To – to make everybody I know as – as happy as I can;" answered the other slowly.

"Huh! That's nothing! And you can begin right now, on ME!" declared Miss Alfaretta Babcock, with emphasis.

"How?"

"Help me to tell who's to be invited."

"All right. Head the list with Alfaretta Babcock."

"Cor-rect! I've got her down already. Next?"

"Molly Breckenridge."

"Good enough. Down she goes. Wait till I get her wrote before you say any more."

They waited while Alfy laboriously inscribed the name and

finished with the exclamation:

"That's the crookedest back-name I ever wrote."

"You acted as if it hurt you, girlie! You wriggled your tongue like they do in the funny pictures;" teased Molly, but the writer paid no heed.

"Next?"

"Dorothy Calvert."

"So far so good. But them three's all girls. To a party there ought to be as many boys. That's the way we did to our last winter's school treat," declared Alfaretta.

"Well, there's Jim Barlow. He's a boy."

"He's no *party* kind of a boy," objected Molly, "and he's only —*us*. She hasn't anybody down that isn't us, so far. We few can't make a whole party."

But Dolly and Alfy were wholly serious.

"Montmorency Vavasour-Stark," suggested the former, and the writer essayed that formidable name. Then she threw down the pen in dismay, exclaiming:

"You'll have to indite that yourself or spell it out to me letter by letter. He'll take more'n a whole line if I write him to match the others."

"Oh! he doesn't take up much room, he's so little," reassured idle Molly, with a mischievous glance toward the doorway which the other girls did not observe; while by dint of considerable assistance Alfy "got him down" and "all on one line!" as she triumphantly remarked.

"That's two boys and three girls. Who's your next boy?"

"Melvin Cook. He's easy to write," said Dolly.

"But he's gone."

"Yes, Alfy, but he can come back. They'll all have to 'come' except we who don't have to."

A giggle from behind the portières commented upon this remark and speeding to part them Dolly revealed the hiding figures of their two boy house-mates.

"That's not nice of young gentlemen, to peep and listen," remarked Molly, severely; "but since you've done it, come and take your punishment. You'll have to help. James Barlow, you are appointed the committee of 'ways and means.' I haven't an idea what that 'means,' but I know they always have such a committee."

"What 'they,' Miss Molly?"

"I don't know, Mister Barlow, but you're – it."

"Monty, you'll furnish the entertainment," she continued.

The recipient of this honor bowed profoundly, then lifted his head with a sudden interest as Dorothy suggested the next name:

"Molly Martin."

Even Alfy looked up in surprise. "Do you mean it, Dorothy C.?"

"Surely. After her put Jane Potter."

James was listening now and inquired:

"What you raking up old times for, Dorothy? Inviting them south-siders that made such a lot of trouble when you lived 'up-

mounting' afore your folks leased their farm?"

"Whose 'Party' is this?" asked the young hostess, calmly, yet with a twinkle in her eye.

"All of our'n," answered Alfaretta, complacently.

"How many girls now, Alfy?" questioned Molly, who longed to suggest some of her schoolmates but didn't like a similar reproof to that which fell so harmlessly from Alfaretta's mind.

"Five," said the secretary, counting upon her fingers. "Me, and you, and her, and – five. Correct."

"Mabel Bruce."

"Who's she? I never heard of her," wondered Molly, while Jim answered:

"She's a girl 'way down in Baltimore. Why, Dorothy C., you know she can't come here!"

"Why not? Listen, all of you. This is to be *my* House Party. It's to be the very nicest ever was. One that everyone who is in it will never, never forget. My darling Aunt Betty gave me permission to ask anybody I chose and to do anything I wanted. She said I had learned some of the lessons of poverty and now I had to begin the harder ones of having more money than most girls have. She said that I mustn't feel badly if the money brought me enemies and some folks got envious."

Here, all unseen by the speaker, honest Alfaretta winced and put her hand to her face; but she quickly dropped it, to listen more closely.

"Mabel was a dear friend even when I was that 'squalling baby'

Alfy wrote about. I am to telegraph for her and to send her a telegraphic order for her expenses, though Aunt Betty wasn't sure *that* would be acceptable to Mr. and Mrs. Bruce. To prevent any misunderstanding on that point, you are to make the telegram real long and explicit. I reckon that's what it means to be that committee Molly named. She'll make six girls and that's enough. Six boys – how many yet Alfy?"

"Three. Them two that are and the one that isn't."

"Mike Martin."

Both Jim and Alfy exclaimed in mutual protest:

"Why Dorothy! That fellow? you must be crazy."

"No, indeed! I'm the sanest one here. That boy is doing the noblest work anybody ever did on this dear old mountain; he's making and keeping the peace between south-side and north-side."

"How do you know, Dorothy?" asked Jim, seriously.

"No matter how I know but I do know. Why, I wouldn't leave him out of my Party for anything. I'd almost rather be out of it myself!"

Then both he and Alfaretta remembered that winter day on the mountain when Dorothy had been the means of saving Mike Martin from an accidental death and the quiet conference afterward of the two, in that inner room of the old forge under the Great Balm Tree. Probably something had happened then and there to make Dolly so sure of Mike's worthiness. But she was already passing on to "next," nodding toward Alfy, with the

words:

"The two Smith boys, Littlejohn and Danny."

Jim Barlow laughed but did not object. The sons of farmer Smith were jolly lads and deserved a good time, once in their hard-worked lives; yet he did stare when Dorothy concluded her list of lads with the name:

"Frazer Moore."

"You don't know him very well, Dolly girl. Beside that, he'll make an odd number. He's the seventh – "

"Son of the seventh son – fact!" interrupted Alfaretta; "and now we'll have to find another girl to match him."

"I've found the girl, Dolly, but she won't match. Helena Montaigne came up on the train by which your Father John left for the north. You could hardly leave her out from your House Party, or from givin' her the bid to it, any way."

"Helena home? Oh! I am so glad, I am so glad! Of course, she'll get the 'bid'; I'll take it to her myself the first thing to-morrow morning. But you didn't mention Herbert. Hasn't he come, too?"

James Barlow nodded assent but grudgingly. He had never in his heart quite forgiven Herbert Montaigne for their difference in life; as if it were the fault of the one that he had been born the son of the wealthy owner of The Towers and of the other that he was a penniless almshouse child. Second thoughts, however, always brought nobler feeling into the honest heart of Jim and a flush of shame rose to his face as he forced himself to answer.

"Yes, course. The hull fambly's here."

Dorothy checked the teasing words which rose to her lips, for when ambitious Jim relapsed so hopelessly into incorrect speech it was a sign that he was deeply moved; and it was a relief to see Alfaretta once more diligently count upon her fingers and to hear her declare:

"We'll never'll get this here list straight and even, never in this endurin' world. First there's a girl too many and now there's a girl too short!"

"Never mind; we'll make them come out even some way, and I'll find another girl. I don't know who, yet, and we mustn't ask any more or there'll be no places for them to sleep. Now we've settled the guests let's settle the time. We'll have to put it off two or three days, to let them get here. I wish your cousin Tom Hungerford could be asked to join us but I don't suppose he could come," said Dolly to her friend Molly.

"No, he couldn't. It was the greatest favor his getting off just for those few hours. A boy might as well be in prison as at West Point!"

"What? At that 'heavenly' place? Let's see. This is Wednesday night. Saturday would be a nice time to begin the Party, don't you all think?"

"Fine. Week-end ones always do begin on Saturday but the trouble is they break up on Monday after;" answered Molly.

"Then ours is to be a double week-ender. Aunt Betty said 'invite them for a week.' That's seven days, and now Master Stark

comes your task. As a committee of entertainment you are to provide some new, some different, fun for us every single one of those seven days; and it must be something out of the common. I long, I just long to have my home-finding House Party so perfectly beautiful that nobody in it will ever, ever forget it!"

Looking into her glowing face the few who were gathered about her inwardly echoed her wish, and each, in his or her own way, resolved to aid in making it as "perfect" as their young hostess desired.

Monty heaved a prodigious sigh.

"You've given me the biggest task, Dolly Doodles! When a fellow's brain is no better than mine – "

"Nonsense, Montmorency Vavasour-Stark! You know in your little insides that you're "nigh tickled to death' as Alfy would say. Aren't you the one who always plans the entertainments – the social ones – at your school, Brentnor Hall? You're as proud as Punch this minute, and you know it, sir. Don't pretend otherwise!" reproved Molly, severely.

"Yes, but – that was different. I had money then. I hadn't announced my decision to be independent of my father and he – he hadn't taken me too literally at my word;" and with a whimsical expression the lad emptied his pockets of the small sums they contained and spread the amount on the table. "There it is, all of it, Lady of the Manor, at your service! Getting up entertainments is a costly thing, but – as far as it goes, I'll try my level best!"

They all laughed and Dorothy merrily heaped the coins again before him.

"You forget, and so I have to remind you, that this is to be *my* Party! I don't ask you to spend your money but just your brains in this affair."

"Huh! Dorothy! I'm afraid they won't go much further than the cash!" he returned, but nobody paid attention to this remark, they were so closely watching Dorothy. She had opened a little leather bag which lay upon the table and now drew from it a roll of bills. Crisp bank notes, ten of them, and each of value ten dollars.

"Whew! Where did you get all that, Dorothy Calvert?" demanded Jim Barlow, almost sternly. To him the money seemed a fortune, and that his old companion of the truck-farm must still be as poor in purse as he.

She was nearly as grave as he, as she spread the notes out one by one in the place where Monty had displayed his meager sum.

"My Great-Aunt Betty gave them to me. It is her wish that I should use this money for the pleasure of my friends. She says that it is a first portion of my own personal inheritance, and that if I need more – "

"More!" they fairly gasped; for ten times ten is a hundred, and a hundred dollars – Ah! What might not be done with a whole one hundred dollars?

"'Twould be wicked," began James, in an awestruck tone, but was not allowed to finish, for practical Alfaretta, her big eyes

fairly glittering, was rapidly counting upon her fingers and trying to do that rather difficult “example” of “how many times will seven go into one hundred and how much over?” “Seven into ten, once and three; seven into thirty – Ouch!”

Her computation came to a sudden end. The storm had broken, all unnoticed till then, and a mighty crash as if the whole house were falling sent them startled to their feet.

CHAPTER III
THE FIRST AND UNINVITED GUEST

For an instant the group was motionless from fear; then Jim made a dash for the front entrance whence, apparently, the crash had come. There had been no thunder accompanying the storm which now raged wildly over the mountain top, and Alfy found sufficient voice to cry:

"'Tain't no lightnin' stroke. *Somethin's* fell!"

The words were so inadequate to the description that Molly laughed nervously, and in relieved tension all followed James forward; only to find themselves rudely forced back by old Ephraim, gray with fear and anxiety.

"Stan' back dere, stan' back, you-alls! 'Tis Eph'am's place to gyard Miss Betty's chillens!"

He didn't look as if the task were an agreeable one and the lads placed themselves beside him as he advanced and with trembling hands tried to unbar the door. This time he did not repulse them, and it was well, for as the bolts slid and the heavy door was set free it fell inward with such force that he would have been crushed beneath it had they not been there to draw him out of its reach.

"Oh! oh! oh! The great horse chestnut!" cried Dorothy,

springing aside from contact with the branches which fell crowding through the doorway. Hinges were torn from their places and the marvel was that the beautifully carved door had not itself been broken in bits.

Jim was the first to rally and to find some comfort in the situation, exclaiming:

"That's happened exactly as I feared it would, some day; and it's a mercy there wasn't nobody sittin' on that piazza. They'd ha' been killed dead, sure as pisen!"

"Killing generally does mean death, Jim Barlow, but if you knew that splendid tree was bound to fall some day why didn't you say so? We – " with a fine assumption of proprietorship in Deerhurst – "we would have had it prevented," demanded Dorothy.

Already she felt that this was home; already she loved the fallen tree almost as its mistress had done and her feeling was so sincere, if new, that nobody smiled, and the lad answered soberly:

"I have told, Dolly girl. I kept on tellin' Mrs. Calvert how that lily-pond she would have dug out deeper an' deeper, and made bigger all the time, would for certain undermine that tree and make it fall. But – but she's an old lady 't knows her own mind and don't allow nobody else to know it for her! Old Hans, the gardener, he talked a heap, too; begged her to have the pond cemented an' that wouldn't hender the lilies blowin' and'd stop trouble. But, no. She wouldn't listen. Said she 'liked things perfectly natural' and – Well, she's got 'em now!"

"Jim Barlow, you're – just horrid! and – ungrateful to my precious Aunt Betty!" cried Dorothy, indignant tears springing to her eyes. To her the fallen tree seemed like a stricken human being and the catastrophe a terrible one. "It's taken that grand chestnut years and years and years – longer'n you or I will ever live, like enough – to grow that big, and to be thrown down all in a minute, and – you don't care a mite, except to find your own silly opinion prove true!"

"Hold on, Dolly girl. This ain't no time for you an' me to begin quarrelin'. I do care. I care more'n I can say but that don't hender the course o' nature. The pond was below; 'twas fed by a spring from above; she had trenches dug so that spring-water flowed right spang through the roots of that chestnut into the pond; and what could follow except what did? I'm powerful sorry it's happened but I can't help bein' common-sensible over it."

"I hate common-sense!" cried Molly, coming to the support of her friend. "Anyway, I don't see what good we girls do standing here in this draughty hall. Let's go to bed."

"And leave the house wide open this way?"

Dorothy's sense of responsibility was serious enough to her though amusing to the others, and it was Monty who brought her back to facts by remarking:

"The house always has been taken care of, Dolly Doodles, and I guess it will be now. Jim and I will get some axes and lop off these branches that forced the door in and prop it shut the best way we can. Then I'll go down to the lodge with him to sleep

for he says there's a room I can have. See? You girls will be well protected!" and he nodded toward the group of servants gathered at the rear of the great hall. "So you'd better take Molly's advice and go up-stairs."

Dolly wasn't pleased to be thus set coolly aside in "her own house" but there seemed nothing better to do than follow this frank advice; therefore, taking a hand of each of her girl friends, she led the way toward her own pretty chamber and two small rooms adjoining.

"Aunt Betty thought we three'd like to be close together, and anyway, if we had all come that I wanted to invite we'd have to snug up some. So she told Dinah to fix her dressing-room for one of you – that's this side mine; and the little sewing-room for the other. She's put single beds in them and Dinah is to sleep on her cot in this wide hall outside our doors. It seemed sort of foolish to me, first off, when darling Auntie planned it, as if anything could happen to make us need Dinah so near; but now – My! I can't stop trembling, somehow. I was so frightened and sorry."

"I'm sorry, too, and I'm scared, too; but I'm sleepier'n I'm ary one," yawned Alfaretta.

"I'm sleepy, too;" assented Molly; and even the excited Dorothy felt a strange drowsiness creeping over her. It would be the correct thing, she had imagined, to lie awake and grieve over the loss of Mrs. Calvert's beloved tree, which would now be cut into ignominious firewood and burned upon a hearth; but – in five minutes after her head had touched her pillow she was sound

asleep as her mates already were.

Outside, the storm abated and the moon arose, lighting the scenery with its brilliance and setting the still dripping trees aglitter with its glory. Moonlight often made Dorothy wakeful and did so on this eventful night. Its rays streaming across her unshaded window roused her to sit up, and with the action came remembrance.

"My heart! That money! All those beautiful new bills that are to buy pleasant things for my Party guests! I had it all spread out on the library table when that crash came and I never thought of it again! Nobody else, either, I fancy. I'll go right down and get it and I mustn't wake the girls or Dinah. It was careless of me, it surely was; but I know enough about money to understand it shouldn't be left lying about in that way."

Creeping softly from her bed she drew on her slippers and kimono as Miss Rhinelander had taught her pupils always to do when leaving their rooms at night, and the familiar school-habit proved her in good stead this time. Once she would have stopped for neither; but now folding the warm little garment about her she tiptoed past old Dinah, snoring, and down the thickly carpeted stairs, whereon her slippered feet made no sound. Quite noiselessly she came to the library door and pushed the portière aside.

Into this room, also, the moonlight streamed, making every object visible. She had glanced, as she came along the hall, toward the big door, bolstered into place by the heavy settle

and hat-rack; and the latter object looked so like a gigantic man standing guard that she cast no second look but darted within the lighter space.

Hark! What was that sound? Somebody breathing? Snoring? A man's snore, so like that of dear Father John who used, sometimes, to keep her awake, though she hadn't minded that because she loved him so. The sound, frightful at first, became less so as she remembered those long past nights, and mustering her courage she tiptoed toward the figure on the lounge.

Old Ephraim! Well, she didn't believe Aunt Betty would have permitted even that faithful servant to spend a night upon her cherished leather couch; but the morning would be time enough to reprimand him for his audacity, which, of course, she must do, since she stood now in Mrs. Calvert's place, as temporary head of the family. She felt gravely responsible and offended as she crossed the room to the table where three chairs still grouped sociably together, exactly as the three girls had left them.

Ah! yes. The chairs were in their places, Alfaretta's list of guests as well, and even the little leather bag out of which she had drawn the wealth that so surprised her mates. But the ten crisp notes she had so spread out in the sight of all – where were they?

Certainly nowhere to be seen, although that revealing moonlight made even Alfy's written words quite legible. What could have become of them? Who had taken them? And why? Supposing somebody had stolen in and stolen them? Supposing that was why he was sleeping in the library? Yet, if there had been

thievery there, wouldn't he have kept awake, to watch? Supposing – here a horrible thought crept into her mind – supposing *he*, himself, had been the thief! She was southern born and had the southerner's racial distrust of a "nigger's" honesty; yet – as soon as thought she was ashamed of the suspicion. Aunt Betty trusted him with far more than she missed now. She would go over to that window and think it out. Maybe the sleeper would awake in a minute and she could ask him about it.

The question was one destined to remain unasked. As she stood gazing vacantly outward, her hands clasped in perplexity, something moving arrested her attention. A small figure in white, or what seemed white in that light. It was circling the pond where the water-lilies grew and was swaying to and fro as if dancing to some strange measure. Its skirts were caught up on either side by the hands resting upon its hips and the apparition was enough to startle nerves that had not already been tried by the events of that night.

Dorothy stood rooted to the spot. Then a sudden movement of the dancer which brought her perilously near the water's edge recalled her common sense.

"Why, it's one of the girls! It must be! Which? She doesn't look like either – is she sleep-walking? Who, what can it mean?"

Another instant and she had opened the long sash and sped out upon the rain-soaked lawn; and she was none too soon. As if unseeing, or unfearing, the strange figure swept nearer and nearer to the moonlit water, its feet already splashing in it, when

Dorothy's arms were flung around it to draw it into safety.

"Why – " began the rescuer and could say no more. The face that slowly turned toward her was one that she had never seen before. It was the face of a child under a mass of gray hair, and its expression strangely vacant and inconsequent. Danger, fear, responsibility meant nothing to this little creature whom Dorothy had saved from drowning, and with a sudden pitiful memory of poor, half-witted Peter Piper who had loved her so, she realized that here was another such as he. In body and mind the child had never grown up, though her years were many.

"Come this way, little lady. Come with me. Let us go into the house;" said the girl gently, and led the stranger to the window she had left open. "You must be the odd guest I needed for my House Party, to make the couples even, and so I bid you welcome. Strange, the window should be shut!"

But closed it was; nor could all the girl's puny pounding bring help to open it. Against the front door the great tree still pressed and she could not reach its bell; and confused by all she had passed through Dorothy forgot that there were other entrances where help could be summoned and sank down on the piazza floor beside her first, her uninvited guest, to wait for morning.

CHAPTER IV
TROUBLES LIGHTEN IN THE TELLING

But a few moments sufficed to show that this would not do. Despite her own heavy kimono she was already chilled by the air of that late September night, while the little creature beside her was shivering as if in ague, although she seemed to be half-asleep.

She reasoned that Ephraim must have waked and closed the library window and departed to his own quarters. But there must be some way in which a girl could get into her own house; and then she exclaimed:

"Why, yes! The sun-parlor, right at the end of this very piazza. All that south side is covered with glass and if I can get a sash up we can climb through. The place is as nice as a bedroom. Anyway, I'll try!"

She left the stranger where she lay and ran to make the effort, and though for a time the heavy sash resisted her strength, it did yield slightly and her fresh fear that it had been locked vanished. Yet with her utmost endeavor she could lift it but a few inches and she wondered if she would be able to get her visitor through that scant opening.

"I shall have to make her go through flat-wise, like crawling

through fence bars, and I wonder if she will! Anyhow, I must try. I – I don't like it out here in the night and we'll both be sick of cold, and that would end our party."

Dorothy never quite realized how that affair was managed.

Though the wanderer appeared to hear well enough she did not speak and had not from the first. Probably she could not, but she could be as stubborn and difficult as possible and she was certainly exhausted from exposure. It was a harder task than lifting the great window, but, at last, by dint of pushing and coaxing, even shoving, the inert small woman was forced through the opening and dropped upon the matted floor, where she remained motionless.

Dolly squeezed herself after and stooped above her guest, anxiously asking:

"Did that hurt you? I'm sorry, but there was no other way. Please try to get up and lie down. See? There are two nice lounges here and lots of 'comfy' chairs. Shawls and couch-covers in plenty – Why! it'll be like a picnic!"

The guest made no effort to rise but waved the other aside with a sleepy, impatient gesture, then fell to shaking again as if she were desperately cold. Dorothy was too frightened to heed these objections and since it was easier to roll a lounge to the sufferer than to argue, she did so and promptly had her charge upon it; but she first stripped off the damp cotton gown from the shaking body and wrapped it in all the rugs and covers she could find. She did not attempt to penetrate further into the house then, because

she knew that Ephraim had bolted and barred the door leading thither. She had watched him do so with some amusement, early in the evening, and had playfully asked him if he expected any burglars. He had disdained to reply further than by shaking his wise old head, but had omitted no precaution because of her raillery.

"Well, this may not be as nice as in my own room but it's a deal better than out of doors. That poor little thing isn't shivering so much and – she's asleep! She's tired out, whoever she is and wherever she came from, and I'm tired, also. I can't do any better till daylight comes and I'll curl up in this big chair and go to sleep, too," said Dorothy to herself.

She wakened to find the sunlight streaming through the glass and to hear a chorus of voices demanding, each in a various key:

"Why, Dorothy C!" "How could you?" "Yo' done gib we-all de wussenes' sca', you' ca'less chile! What yo' s'posin' my Miss Betty gwine ter say when she heahs ob dis yeah cuttin's up? Hey, honey? Tell me dat!"

But Dinah's reproofs were cut short as her eye fell upon the rug-heaped lounge and saw the pile of them begin to move. As yet no person was visible and she stared at the suddenly agitated covers as if they were bewitched. Presently, they were flung aside; and revealed upon a crimson pillow lay a face almost as crimson.

"Fo' de lan' ob lub! How come dat yeah – dis – What's hit mean, li'l gal Do'thy?"

Dolly had not long been missed nor, when she was, had anybody felt serious alarm, though the girl guests had both been aggrieved that she should not have wakened them in time to be prompt for breakfast. They dressed hurriedly when Norah came a second time to summon them, explaining:

"Miss Dorothy's room is empty and her clothes on the chairs. I must go seek her for she shouldn't do this way if she wants to keep cook good natured for the Party. Delaying breakfast is a bad beginning."

Then Norah departed and went about her business of dusting; and it was she who had found the missing girl in the sun-parlor, and it had been her cry of relief that brought the household to that place.

Demanded old Ephraim sternly:

"Why fo' yo'-all done leab yo' baid in de middle ob de night an' go sky-la'kin' eround dis yere scan'lous way, Missy Dolly Calve't? Tole me dat!"

"Why do you leave yours, to sleep on the library couch, Ephraim?" she returned, keenly observing him from the enclosure of her girl friends' arms, who held her fast that she might not again elude them.

Ephraim fairly jumped; though he looked not at her but in a timid way toward Dinah, still bending in anxious curiosity over the stranger on the couch; and she was not so engrossed but that her turbaned head rose with a snap and she fixed her fellow servant with a fiercely glaring eye. Between these two

equally devoted members of "Miss Betty's" family had always existed a bitter jealousy as to which was the most loyal to their mistress's interests. Let either presume upon that loyalty, to indulge in a forbidden privilege, and the wrath of the other waxed furious. Both knew that for Ephraim to have lain where Dorothy had discovered him, during that past night, was "intol'able" presumption, and at Dinah's care would be duly reported upon and reprimanded.

Alas! The old man's start and down-dropped gaze was proof in Dorothy's opinion of a graver guilt than Dinah imputed to him, and when he made no answer save a hasty exit from the room her heart sank.

"Oh! how could he do it, how could he!" and then honesty suggested. "But I haven't asked him yet if he did take the bills!" and she smiled again at her own thoughts.

Attention was now diverted to Dinah's picking up the stranger from the couch and also departing, muttering:

"I 'low dis yeah's a mighty sick li'l creatur'! Whoebah she be she's done fotched a high fevah wid her, an' I'se gwine put her to baid right now!"

Illness was always enough to enlist the old nurse's deepest interest and she had no further reproof for the delayed breakfasts or Ephraim's behavior.

There followed a morning full of business for all. Jim Barlow and old Hans, with some grumbling assistance from the "roomatical" Ephraim, whose "misery" Dinah assured him had

been aggravated by sleeping on a cold leather lounge instead of in his own feather-bed – these three spent the morning in clearing away the fallen tree, while a carpenter from the town repaired the injured doorway.

When Dorothy approached Jim, intending to speak freely of her suspicions about the lost money, he cut her short by remarking:

"What silliness! Course, it isn't really lost. You've just mislaid it, that's all, an' forgot. I do that, time an' again. Put something away so careful 't I can't find it for ever so long. You'll remember after a spell, and say, Dolly! I won't be able to write that telegram to Mabel Bruce. I've got no time to bother with a parcel o' girls. If I don't keep a nudgin' them two old men they won't do a decent axe's stroke. They spend all their time complainin' of their j'ints!"

"Well, why don't you get a regular woodman to chop it up, then?"

"An' waste Mrs. Calvert's good money, whilst there's a lot of idlers on her premises, eatin' her out of house and home? I guess not. I'd save for her quicker'n I would for myself, an' that's saying considerable. I'm no eye-servant, I'm not."

"Huh! You're one mighty stubborn boy! And I don't think my darling Aunt Betty would hesitate to pay one extra day's help. I've heard her say that she disliked amateur labor. She likes professional skill," returned the girl, with decision.

James Barlow laughed.

"I reckon, Dolly C., that you've forgot the days when you and

I were on Miranda Stott's truck-farm; when I cut firewood by the cord and you sat on the logs an' taught me how to spell. 'Twouldn't do for me to claim I can't split up one tree; and this one'll be as neat a job as you ever see, time I've done with it. Trot along and write your own telegrams; or get that Starky to do it for you. Ha, ha! He thought he could saw wood, himself. Said he learned it campin' out; but the first blow he struck he hit his own toes and blamed it on the axe being too heavy. Trot along with him, girlie, and don't hender me talkin'."

The "Little Lady of the Manor," as President Ryall had called her, walked away with her nose in the air. Preferred to chop wood, did he? And it wasn't nice of him – it certainly wasn't nice – to set her thinking of that miserable old truck-farm and the days of her direst poverty. She was Dorothy Calvert now; a girl with a name and heiress of Deerhurst. She'd show him, horrid boy that he was!

But just then his cheerful whistling reached her, and her indignation vanished. By no effort could she stay long angry with Jim. He was annoyingly "common-sensible," as he claimed, but he was also so straight and dependable that she admired him almost as much as she loved him. Yes, she had other friends now, and would doubtless gain many more, but none could ever be a truer one than this homely, plain-spoken lad.

She spied the girls and Monty in the arbor and joined them; promptly announcing:

"If our House Party is to be a success you three must help.

Jim won't. He's going to chop wood. Monty, will you ride to the village and send that telegram to Mabel Bruce?"

The lad looked up from the foot he had been contemplating and over which Molly and Alfy had been bending in sympathy, to answer by another question:

"See that shoe, Dolly Calvert? Close shave that. Might have been my very flesh itself, and I'd have blood poisoning and an amputation, and then there'd have been telegrams sent – galore! Imagine my mother – if they had been!"

"It wasn't your flesh, was it?"

"That's as Yankee as I am. Always answer your own questions when you ask them and save a lot of trouble to the other fellow. No, I *wasn't* hurt but I *might* have been! Since I'm not, I'm at your service, Lady D. Providing you word your own message and give me a decent horse to ride."

"There are none but 'decent' horses in our stable, Master Stark. I shall need Portia myself, or we girls will. You can go ask a groom to saddle one – that he thinks best. I see through you. You've just been getting these girls to waste sympathy on you and you shall be punished by our leaving you alone till lunch time. I'll write the message, of course. I'd be afraid you wouldn't put enough in. Only – let me think. How much do telegrams cost?"

"Twenty-five cents for ten words," came the prompt reply.

"But ten would hardly begin to talk! Is telephoning cheaper? You ought to know, being a boy."

"Long distance telephoning is about as expensive a luxury as

one can buy, young lady. But, why hesitate? It won't take all of that hundred dollars," he answered, swaggering a trifle over his superior knowledge.

Out it came without pause or pretense, the dark suspicion that had risen in Dorothy's innocent mind:

"But I haven't that hundred dollars! It's gone. It's —*stolen*!"

"Dorothy Calvert! How dare you say such a thing?"

It was Molly's horrified question that broke the long silence which had fallen on the group; and hearing her ask it gave to poor Dorothy the first realization of what an evil thing it was she had voiced.

"I don't know! Oh! I don't know! I wish I hadn't. I didn't mean to tell, not yet; and I wish, I wish I had kept it to myself!" she cried in keen regret.

For instantly she read in the young faces before her a reflection of her own hard suspicion and loss of faith in others; and something that her beloved Seth Winters had once said came to her mind:

"Evil thoughts are more catching than the measles."

Seth, that grand old "Learned Blacksmith!" To him she would go, at once, and he would help her in every way. Turning again to her mates she begged:

"Forget that I fancied anybody might have taken it to keep. Of course, nobody would. Let's hurry in and get Mabel's invitation off. I think I've enough money to pay for a message long enough to explain what I want; and her fare here – well she'll have to pay

that herself or her father will. I've asked to have Portia put to the pony cart and we girls will drive around and ask all the others. So glad they live on the mountain where we can get to them quick."

"Dolly, shall you go to The Towers, to see that Montaigne girl?" asked Alfaretta, rather anxiously.

"Yes, but you needn't go in if you don't want to, Alfy dear. I shall stay only just long enough to bid her welcome home and invite her for Saturday."

"Oh! I shouldn't mind. I'd just as lief. Fact, I'd *admire*, only if I put on my best dress to go callin' in the morning what'll I have left to wear to the Party? And Ma Babcock says them Montaignes won't have folks around that ain't dressed up;" said the girl, so frankly that Molly laughed and Dorothy hastened to assure her:

"That's a mistake, Alfy, dear, I think. They don't care about a person's clothes. It's what's inside the clothes that counts with sensible people, such as I believe they are. But, I'll tell you. It's not far from The Towers' gate to the old smithy and I must see Mr. Seth. I must. I'm so thankful that he didn't leave the mountain, too, with all the other grown-ups. So you can drop me at Helena's; and then you and Molly can drive around to all the other people we've decided to ask and invite them in my stead. You know where all of them live and Molly will go with you."

"Can Alfy drive – safe?" asked Molly, rather anxiously.

Dolly laughed. "Anybody can drive gentle Portia and Alfy is a mountain girl. But what a funny question for such a fearless rider as you, Molly Breckenridge!"

"Not so funny as you think. It's one thing to be on the back of a horse you know and quite another to be behind the heels of another that its driver doesn't know! Never mind, Alfy. I'll trust you."

"You can," Alfaretta complacently assured her; and the morning's drive proved her right. A happier girl had never lived than she as she thus acted deputy for the new little mistress of Deerhurst; whose story had lost none of its interest for the mountain folk because of its latest development.

But it was not at all as a proud young heiress that Dorothy came at last to the shop under the Great Balm Tree and threw herself impetuously upon the breast of the farrier quietly reading beside his silent forge.

"O, Mr. Seth! My darling Mr. Seth! I'm in terrible trouble and only you can help me!"

His book went one way, his spectacles another, dashed from his hands by her heedless onrush; but he let them lie where they had fallen and putting his arm around her, assured her:

"So am I. Therefore, let us condole with one another. You first."

"I've lost Aunt Betty's hundred dollars!"

Her friend fairly gasped, and held her from him to search her troubled face.

"Whe-ew! That is serious. Yet lost articles are sometimes found. Out with the whole story, 'body and bones' – as my man Owen would say."

Already relieved by the chance of telling her worries, Dorothy related the incidents of the night, and she met the sympathy she expected. But it was like the nature-loving Mr. Winters that he was more disturbed by the loss of the great chestnut tree than by that of the money. Also, the story of the stranger she had found wandering by the lily-pond moved him deeply. All suffering or afflicted creatures were precious in the sight of this noble old man and he commented now with pity on the distress of the friends from whom the unknown one had strayed.

"How grieved they'll be! For it must have been from some private household she came, or escaped. There is no public asylum or retreat within many miles of our mountain, so far as I know. I wonder if we ought to advertise her in the local newspaper? Or, do you think it would be kinder to wait and let her people hunt her up? Tell me, Dolly, dear. The opinion of a child often goes straight to the point."

"Oh! Don't advertise, please, Mr. Seth! Think. If she belonged to you or me we wouldn't want it put in the paper that – about – you know, the lost one being not quite right, someway. If anybody's loved her well enough to keep her out of an asylum they've loved her well enough to come and find her, quiet like, without anybody but kind hearted people having to know. If they don't love her – well, she's all right for now. Dinah's put her to bed and told me, just before I came away, that it was only the exposure which had made her ill. She had roused all right, after a nap, and had taken a real hearty breakfast. She's about as big as

I am and Dinah's going to put some of my clothes on her while her own are done up. Everybody in the house was so interested and kind about her, I was surprised."

"You needn't have been. People who have lived with such a mistress as Madam Betty Calvert must have learned kindness, even if they learned nothing else."

Dorothy laughed. "Dear Mr. Seth, you love my darling Aunt Betty, too, don't you, like everybody does?"

"Of course, and loyally. That doesn't prevent my thinking that she does unwise things."

"O – oh!!"

"Like giving a little girl one hundred dollars at a time to spend in foolishness."

Dorothy protested: "It wasn't to be foolishness. It was to make people happy. You yourself say that to 'spread happiness' is the only thing worth while!"

"Surely, but it doesn't take Uncle Sam's greenbacks to do that. Not many of them. When you've lived as long as I have you'll have learned that the things which dollars do *not* buy are the things that count. Hello! 'By the pricking of my thumbs, something wicked this way comes.'"

The blacksmith rose as he finished his quotation and went to the wide doorway, across which a shadow had fallen, and from whence the sound of an irritable: "Whoa-oa, there!" had come.

It was a rare patron of that old smithy and Seth concealed his surprise by addressing not the driver but the horse:

"Well, George Fox! Good-morning to you!"

George Fox was the property of miller Oliver Sands, and the Quaker and his steed were well known in all that locality. He was a fair-spoken man whom few loved and many feared, and between him and the "Learned Blacksmith" there was "no love lost." Why he had come to the smithy now Seth couldn't guess; nor why, as he stepped down from his buggy and observed, "I'd like to have thee look at George's off hind foot, farrier. He uses it – " he should do what he did.

How it was "used" was not explained; for, leaving the animal where it stood, the miller sauntered into the building, hands in pockets, and over it in every part, even to its owner's private bedroom, as if he had a curiosity to see how his neighbor lived. Seth would have resented this, had it been worth while and if the miller's odd curiosity had not aroused the same feeling in himself. It was odd, he thought; but Seth Winters had nothing to hide and he didn't care. It was equally odd that George Fox's off hind foot was in perfect condition and had been newly shod at the other smithy, over the mountain, where all the miller's work was done.

"It seems to be all right, Friend Oliver."

"Forget that I troubled thee," answered the gray-clad Friend, as he climbed back to his seat and shook the reins over his horse's back, to instantly disappear down the road, but to leave a thoughtful neighbor, staring after him.

"Hmm. That man's in trouble. I wonder what!" murmured

Seth, more to himself than to Dorothy, who had drawn near to slip her hand in his.

"Dear me! Everybody seems to be, this morning, Mr. Seth; and you haven't told me yours yet!"

"Haven't I? Well, here it is!"

He stooped his gray head to her brown one and whispered it in her ear; with the result that he had completely banished all her own anxieties and sent her laughing down the road toward home.

CHAPTER V
RIDDLES

"There's a most remarkable thing about this House Party of ours! Every person invited has come and not one tried to get out of so doing! Three cheers for the Giver of the Party! and three times three for – all of us!" cried happy Seth Winters, from his seat of honor at the end of the great table in the dining-room, on the Saturday evening following.

Lamps and candles shone, silver glittered, flower-bedecked and spotlessly clean, the wide apartment was a fit setting for the crowd of joyous young folk which had gathered in it for supper; and the cheers rang out as heartily as the master of the feast desired.

Then said Alfaretta, triumphantly:

"The Party has begun and I'm to it, I'm in it!"

"So am I, so am I! Though I did have to invite myself!" returned Mr. Winters. "Strange that this little girl of mine should have left me out, that morning when she was inviting everybody, wholesale."

For to remind her that he "hadn't been invited" was the "trouble" which he had stooped to whisper in Dorothy's ear, as she left him at the smithy door. So she had run home and with the aid of her friends already there had concocted a big-worded

document, in which they begged his presence at Deerhurst for "A Week of Days," as they named the coming festivities; and also that he would be "Entertainer in Chief."

"You see," confided Dolly, "now that the thing is settled and I've asked so many I begin to get a little scared. I've never been hostess before – not this way; – and sixteen people – I'm afraid I don't know enough to keep sixteen girls and boys real happy for a whole week. But dear Mr. Winters knows. Why, I believe that darling man could keep a world full happy, if he'd a mind."

"Are you sorry you started the affair, Dolly Doodles? 'Cause if you are, you might write notes all round and have it given up. You'd better do that than be unhappy. Society folks would, I reckon," said Molly, in an effort to comfort her friend's anxiety. "I'm as bad as you are. It begins to seem as if we'd get dreadful tired before the week is out."

"I'd be ashamed of myself if I did that, Molly, I'll go through with it even if none of you will help; though I must say I think it's – it's sort of mean for you boys, Jim and Monty, to beg off being 'committees.'"

"The trouble with me, Dolly, is that my ideas have entirely given out. If you hadn't lost that hundred dollars I could get up a lot of jolly things. But without a cent in either of our pockets – Hmm," answered Monty, shrugging his shoulders.

Jim said nothing. He was still a shy lad and while he meant to forget his awkwardness and help all he could he shrank from taking a prominent part in the coming affair.

Alfaretta was the only one who wasn't dismayed, and her fear that the glorious event might be abandoned was ludicrous.

"Pooh, Dorothy Calvert! I wouldn't be a 'fraid-cat, I wouldn't! Not if I was a rich girl like you've got to be and had this big house to do it in and folks to do the cookin' and sweepin', and – and rooms to sleep 'em in and everything!" she argued, breathlessly.

"You funny, dear Alfaretta! It's not to be given up and I count on you more than anybody else to keep things going! With you and Mr. Seth – if he will – the Party cannot fail!" and Alfy's honest face was alight again.

It had proved that the "Learned Blacksmith" "would" most gladly. At heart he was as young as any of them all and he had his own reasons for wishing to be at Deerhurst for a time. He had been more concerned than Dorothy perceived over the missing one hundred dollars, and he was anxious about the strange guest who had appeared in the night and who was so utterly unable to give an account of herself.

So he had come, as had they all and now assembled for their first meal together, and Dorothy's hospitable anxiety had wholly vanished. Of course, all would go well. Of course, they would have a jolly time. The only trouble now, she thought, would be to choose among the many pleasures offering.

There had been a new barn built at Deerhurst that summer, and a large one. This Mr. Winters had decreed should be the scene of their gayest hours with the big rooms of the old mansion for quieter ones; and to the barn they went on that first evening

together, as soon as supper was over and the dusk fell.

"Oh! how pretty!" cried Helena Montaigne, as she entered the place with her arm about Molly's waist, for they two had made instant friends. "I saw nothing so charming while I was abroad!"

"Didn't you?" asked the other, wondering. "But it *is* pretty!" In secret she feared that Helena would be a trifle "airish," and she felt that would be a pity.

"Oh! oh! O-H!" almost screamed Dorothy, who had not been permitted to enter the barn for the last two days while, under the farrier's direction, the boys had had it in charge. Palms had been brought from the greenhouse and arranged "with their best foot forward" as Jim declared. Evergreens deftly placed made charming little nooks of greenery, where camp-chairs and rustic benches made comfortable resting places. Rafters were hung with strings of corn and gay-hued vegetables, while grape-vines with the fruit upon them covered the stalls and stanchions. Wire strung with Chinese lanterns gave all the light was needed and these were all aglow as the wide doors were thrown open and the merry company filed in.

"My land of love!" cried Alfaretta. "It's just like a livin'-in-house, ain't it! There's even a stove and a chimney! Who ever heard tell of a stove in a barn?"

"You have! And I, too, for the first time," said Littlejohn Smith at her elbow. "But I 'low it'll be real handy for the men in the winter time, to warm messes for the cattle and keep themselves from freezin'. Guess I know what it means to do your

chores with your hands like chunks of ice! Wish to goodness Pa Smith could see this barn; 'twould make him open his eyes a little!"

"A body could cook on that stove, it's so nice and flat. Or even pop corn," returned Alfaretta, practically.

"Bet that's a notion! Say, Alfy, don't let on, but I'll slip home first chance I get and fetch some of that! I've got a lot left over from last year, 't I raised myself. I'll fetch my popper and if you can get a little butter out the house, some night, we'll give these folks the treat of their lives. What say?"

Whatever might be the case with others of that famous Party these two old schoolmates were certainly "happy as blackbirds" – the only comparison that the girl found to fully suit their mood.

When the premises had been fully explored and admired, cried Mr. Seth:

"Blind man's buff! Who betters me?"

"Nobody could – 'Blind man's' it is!" seconded Monty, and gallantly offered: "I'll blind!"

"Oh! no choosing! Do it the regular way," said Dolly. "Get in a row, please, all of you, and I'll begin with Herbert. 'Intry-mintry-cutry-corn; Apple-seed-and-apple-thorn; Wire-brier-limber-lock; Six-geese-in-a-flock; Sit-and-sing-by-the-spring; O-U-T – OUT!' Frazer Moore, you're – IT!"

The bashful lad who was more astonished to find himself where he was than he could well express, and who had really been bullied into accepting Dorothy's invitation by his chum,

Mike Martin, now awkwardly stepped forward from the circle. His face was as red as his hair and he felt as if he were all feet and hands, while it seemed to him that all the eyes in the room were boring into him, so pitilessly they watched him. In reality, if he had looked up, he would have seen that most of the company were only eagerly interested to begin the game, and that the supercilious glances cast his way came from Herbert Montaigne and Mabel Bruce alone.

Another half-moment and awkwardness was forgotten. Dorothy had bandaged the blinder's eyes with Mr. Seth's big handkerchief, and in the welcome darkness thus afforded he realized nothing except that invisible hands were touching him, from this side and that, plucking at his jacket, tapping him upon the shoulder, and that he could catch none of them. Finally, a waft of perfume came his way, and the flutter of starched skirts, and with a lunge forward he clasped his arms about the figure of:

"That girl from Baltimore! her turn!" he declared and was for pulling off the handkerchief, but was not allowed.

"Which one? there are two Baltimore girls here, my lad. Which one have you caught?"

Mabel squirmed, and Frazer's face grew a deeper red. He had been formally introduced, early upon Mabel's arrival, but had been too confused and self-conscious to understand her name. He was as anxious now to release her as she was to be set free, but his tormentors insisted:

"Her name? her name? Not till you tell her name!"

“I don’t know – I mean – I – ’tain’t our Dolly, it’s t’other one that’s just come and smells like a – a drug store!” he answered, desperately, and loosened his arms.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.