

Wells Carolyn

Dick and Dolly



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CHAPTER I

THE BROOK

Dick and Dolly were twins and had been twins for nine years.

Most of these years had been spent with Grandma Banks and Aunt Helen, for Dick and Dolly were orphaned when they were tiny tots, and Aunt Helen Banks was their mother's sister.

Then, about two years ago, Grandma Banks had died, and now Aunt Helen was to be married and go far away across the sea to live.

So their Chicago home was broken up, and the twins were sent to the old Dana homestead in Connecticut, to live with their father's people.

This transfer of their dwelling-place didn't bother Dick and Dolly much, for they were philosophical little people and took things just as they happened, and, moreover, they were so fond of each other, that so long as they were together, it didn't matter to them where they were.

But to the two people who lived in the old Dana place, and who were about to receive the twin charges, it mattered a great deal.

Miss Rachel and Miss Abbie Dana were maiden ladies of precise and methodical habits, and to have their quiet home invaded by two unknown children was, to say the least, disturbing.

But then Dick and Dolly were the children of their own brother, and so, of course they were welcome, still the aunts felt sure it would make a great difference in the household.

And indeed it did.

From the moment of the twins' arrival, – but I may as well tell you about that moment.

You see, Aunt Helen was so busy with her wedding preparations that she didn't want to take the time to bring Dick and Dolly all the way from Chicago to Heatherton, Connecticut, so she sent them East in charge of some friends of hers who chanced to be coming. Mr. and Mrs. Halkett were good-natured people, and agreed to see the twins safely to Dana Dene, the home of the waiting aunts.

And the aunts were waiting somewhat anxiously.

They had never seen Dick and Dolly since they were tiny babies, and as they had heard vague reports of mischievous tendencies, they feared for the peace and quiet of their uneventful lives.

"But," said Miss Abbie to Miss Rachel, "we can't expect children to act like grown people. If they're only tidy and fairly good-mannered, I shall be thankful."

"Perhaps we can train them to be," responded Miss Rachel, hopefully; "nine is not very old, to begin with. I think they will be tractable at that age."

"Let us hope so," said Miss Abbie.

The Dana ladies were not really old, – even the family Bible didn't credit them with quite half a century apiece, – but they were of a quiet, sedate type, and were disturbed by the least invasion of their daily routine.

Life at Dana Dene was of the clock-work variety, and mistresses and servants fell into step and trooped through each day, without a variation from the pre-arranged line of march.

But, to their honest souls, duty was pre-eminent, even over routine, and now, as it was clearly their duty to take their brother's children into their household, there was no hesitation, but there was apprehension.

For who could say what two nine-year-olds would be like?

But in accordance with their sense of duty, the Misses Dana accepted the situation and went to work to prepare rooms for the new-comers.

Two large sunny bedrooms, Dolly's sweet and dainty, Dick's more boyish, were made ready, and another large room was planned to be used as a study or rainy-day playroom for them both. Surely, the aunts were doing the right thing, – if the children would only respond to the gentle treatment, and not be perfect little savages, all might yet be well.

Now it happened that when Mr. and Mrs. Halkett reached New York with their young charges, the trip from Chicago had made Mrs. Halkett so weary and indisposed that she preferred to remain in New York while her husband took the twins to Heatherton. It was not a long trip, perhaps three hours or less on the train, so Mr. Halkett started off to fulfil his trust and present Dick and Dolly at the door of their new home, assuring his wife that he would return on the first train possible after accomplishing his errand. Mrs. Halkett took pride in seeing that the children were very spick and span, and prettily arrayed, and gave them many injunctions to keep themselves so.

Sturdy Dick looked fine in his grey Norfolk jacket and knickerbockers, with wide white collar and correct tie. Pretty little Dolly was in white piqué, very stiff and clean, with a tan-coloured coat and flower-trimmed hat.

The twins looked alike, and had the same big, dark eyes, but Dick's hair was a dark mass of close-cropped curls, while Dolly's was a tangle of fluffy golden ringlets. This striking effect of fair hair and dark eyes made her an unusually attractive-looking child, and though they had never thought of it themselves, the twins were a very beautiful pair of children. Docilely obedient to Mrs. Halkett's injunctions, they sat quietly in the train, and did nothing that could by any possibility be termed naughty.

Truth to tell, they were a little awed at the thought of the two aunts, whom they did not yet know, but had every reason to believe were not at all like Auntie Helen. They chatted together, as they looked out of the window at the landscape and stations, and Mr. Halkett read his paper, and then looked over his timetable to see how soon he could get back to New York.

There was a train that left Heatherton for New York about half an hour after their own arrival, so he hoped he could leave the twins at Dana Dene and return to the metropolis on that train. But owing to a delay of some sort they did not reach the Heatherton station until about twenty minutes after schedule time.

After the train Mr. Halkett desired to take back to New York, there was no other for two hours, and greatly annoyed was that gentleman. When they stood at last on the station platform, a pleasant-faced Irishman approached and informed Mr. Halkett that he was from Dana Dene, and had been sent to meet Master Dick and Miss Dolly. As the man appeared so capable and responsible, Mr. Halkett was tempted to put the children in his care, and return himself at once to New York.

He explained about the trains, and told of his wife's illness, and the intelligent Michael said at once:

“Shure, sor, do yez go back to New York. I'll be afther takin' the childher safe to the house. Don't yez moind, sor, but go right along. Lave all to me, sor.”

Impressed with the man's decisive words, and sure of his trustworthiness, Mr. Halkett assisted the children into the carriage, and bidding them good-bye turned back to the station.

Dolly looked a little wistful as he turned away, for though no relative, he had been a kind friend, and now she felt like a stranger in a strange land.

But Dick was with her, so nothing else really mattered. She slipped her hand in her brother's, and then Michael picked up his reins and they started off.

It was early May, and it chanced to be warm and pleasant. The carriage was an open one, a sort of landau, and the twins gazed around with eager interest.

“Great, isn't it, Dolly?” exclaimed Dick, as they drove along a winding road, with tall trees and budding shrubs on either side.

“Oh, yes!” returned Dolly. “It’s beautiful. I love the country a whole heap better than Chicago. Oh, Dick, there’s woods, – real woods!”

“So it is, and a brook in it! I say, Michael, can’t we get out here a minute?”

“I think not,” said the good-natured coachman. “The leddies is forninst, lookin’ for yez, and by the same token, we’re afther bein’ late as it is.”

“Yes, I know,” said Dick, “but we won’t stay a minute. Just let us run in and see that brook. It’s such a dandy! I never saw a brook but once or twice in all my life.”

“Yez didn’t! The saints presarve us! Wherever have yez lived?”

“In the city, – in Chicago. Do stop a minute, please, Michael.”

“Please, Michael,” added Dolly, and her sweet voice and coaxing glance were too much for Michael’s soft heart.

Grumbling a little under his breath, he pulled up his horses, and let the children get out.

“Just a minute, now,” he said, warningly. “I’ll bring yez back here some other day. Can yez get under the brush there?”

“We’ll go over,” cried Dick, as he climbed and scrambled over a low thicket of brush.

Dolly scrambled through, somehow, and the two children that emerged on the other side of the brush were quite different in appearance from the two sedate-looking ones that Mr. Halkett had left behind him.

Dick’s white collar had received a smudge, his stocking was badly torn, and his cheek showed a long scratch.

Dolly’s white frock was a sight! Her pretty tan coat had lost a button or two, and her hat was still in the bushes.

“Hey, Doddy, hey, for the brook!” shouted Dick, and grasping each other’s hands, they ran for the rippling water.

“Oh!” cried Dolly, her eyes shining. “Did you *ever*!”

To the very edge of the brook they went, dabbling their fingers in the clear stream, and merrily splashing water on each other.

All this would have been a harmless performance enough if they had been in play clothes, but the effect on their travelling costumes was most disastrous.

Leaning over the mossy bank to reach the water caused fearful green stains on white piqué and on light-grey knickerbockers. Hands became grimy, and faces hot and smudgy. But blissfully careless of all this, the children frolicked and capered about, rejoiced to find the delightful country spot and quite oblivious to the fact that they were on their way to their new home.

“Let’s wade,” said Dick, and like a flash, off came four muddy shoes, and four grass-greened stockings. Oh, how good the cool ripply water did feel! and how they chuckled with glee as they felt the wavelets plashing round their ankles.

Across the brook were the dearest wild flowers, – pink, yellow, and white.

“We must gather some,” said Dolly. “Can we wade across?”

“Yep; I guess so. It doesn’t look deep. Come on.”

Taking hands again, they stepped cautiously, and succeeded in crossing the shallow brook, though, incidentally, well dampening the piqué skirt, and the grey knickerbockers.

Sitting down on the mossy bank, they picked handfuls of the flowers and wondered what they were.

“Hollo! Hollo!” called Michael’s voice from the road, where he sat holding his horses.

“All right, Michael! In a minute,” shrilled back the childish voices.

And they really meant to go in a minute, but the fascination of the place held them, and they kept on picking flowers, and grubbing among the roots and stones at the edge of the water.

“We really ought to go,” said Dolly. “Come on, Dick. Oh, look at the birds!”

A large flock of birds flew low through the sky, and as they circled and wheeled, the children watched them eagerly.

“They’re birds coming North for the summer,” said Dick. “See those falling behind! They don’t like the way the flock is going, and they’re going to turn back.”

“So they are! We must watch them. There, now they’ve decided to go on, after all! Aren’t they queer?”

“Hollo! Hollo! Come back, yez bad childher! Come back, I say!”

“Yes, Michael, in a minute,” rang out Dolly’s sweet, bird-like voice.

“In a minute, nothin’! Come now, roight sthstraight away! Do yez hear?”

“Yes, we’re coming,” answered Dick, and together they started to wade back across the brook.

Then there were shoes and stockings to be put on, and with sopping wet feet, and no towels, this is not an easy task.

They tugged at the unwilling stockings and nearly gave up in despair, but succeeded at last in getting them on, though the seams were far from the proper straight line at the back. Shoes were not so hard to put on, but were impossible to button without a buttonhook, so had to remain unbuttoned.

Meantime, Michael was fairly fuming with angry impatience. He could not leave his horses, or he would have gone after the truants, and no passers-by came along whom he could ask to hold his restive team.

So he continued to shout, and Dick and Dolly continued to assure him that they were coming, but they didn’t come.

At last they appeared at the thicket hedge, and as the two laughing faces peeped through, Michael could scarcely recognise his young charges. Torn, soiled, dishevelled, unkempt, there was absolutely no trace of the spick and span toilets Mrs. Halkett had looked after so carefully, in spite of her aching head and tired nerves.

“Yez naughty little rascals!” cried Michael. “Whatever possessed yez to tousel yerselves up loike that! Shame to yez! What’ll yer aunties say?”

For the first time, the twins realised their disreputable appearance.

What, indeed, would their new aunties say to them? Aunt Helen would have laughed, in her pretty, merry way, and sent them trotting away to clean up, but with new and untried aunties they couldn’t be sure. Moreover, they had an idea that Aunt Rachel and Aunt Abbie were not at all like pretty, young Auntie Helen.

Rescuing her hat from the thorn bush where it hung, Dolly looked ruefully at its twisted flowers. The more she tried to pull them into shape, the worse they looked.

She put it on her head, dismayed meanwhile to find her broad hair-ribbon was gone, and her sunny curls a moist, tangled mop.

Dick was conscious of a growing feeling of wrong-doing, but there was nothing to be done but face the music.

“Get in,” he said, briefly to his sister, and they clambered into the carriage.

Michael said no more; it was not his place to reprimand the children of the house, but he sat up very straight and stiff, as he drove rapidly toward home. To be sure, his straightness and stiffness was to conceal a fit of merriment caused by the thought of presenting these ragamuffins at the portals of Dana Dene, but the ragamuffins themselves didn’t know that, and regretful and chagrined, they sat hand in hand, awaiting their fate.

CHAPTER II

THE ARRIVAL

In the dark and somewhat sombre library at Dana Dene, Miss Rachel and Miss Abbie sat awaiting their guests. The room might have been called gloomy, but for the sunshine that edged in through the long, narrow, slit-like windows, and made determined golden bars across the dark-red carpet. Both the Misses Dana showed clearly their anxiety to have the children arrive and end their suspense.

"If only they're tidy children," said Miss Rachel for the fiftieth time; and Miss Abbie responded, as she always did, "Yes, and quiet-mannered."

Miss Rachel Dana was of rather spare build, and sharp features. Her brown hair, only slightly tinged with grey, was deftly arranged, and every curled lock in its right place. Her pretty house-dress of dark blue foulard silk, with white figures, was modishly made and carefully fitted.

Miss Abbie was a little more plump, and her gown was of a shade lighter blue, though otherwise much like her sister's.

The ladies had a patient air, as if they had waited long, but though they now and then glanced at the clock, they expressed no surprise at the delayed arrival. Trains were apt to be late at Heatherton, and they knew Michael would return as soon as possible. They had not gone themselves to the station to meet the twins, for it had seemed to them more dignified and fitting to receive their young relatives in their own home. Meantime, the young relatives were drawing nearer, and now, quite forgetting their own untidy appearance, their thoughts had turned to the waiting aunts, and the welcome they would probably receive.

"I don't believe they'll be as nice as Aunt Helen," said Dick, candidly, "but I hope they'll be jolly and gay."

"I hope they'll like us," said Dolly, a little wistfully. She had always missed a mother's love more than Dick had, and her affectionate little heart hoped to find in these aunties a certain tenderness that merry Aunt Helen had not possessed.

Dick eyed his sister critically. "I don't believe they will," he said, honestly, "until we get some clean clothes on. I say, Dollums, we look like scarecrows."

"So we do!" said Dolly, fairly aghast as she realised the state of her costume. "Oh, Dick, can't we get dressed up before we see them?"

"Course we can't. Our trunks and bags haven't come yet; and, anyway, they'll probably be on the porch or somewhere, to meet us. Buck up, Dolly; don't you mind. You're just as nice that way."

"Is my face dirty?"

"Not so much dirty, – as red and scratched. How *did* you get so chopped up?"

"It was those briers. You went over, but I went through."

"I should say you did! Well, I don't believe they'll mind your looks. And, anyway, they'll have to get used to it; you 'most always look like that."

This was cold comfort, and Dolly's feminine heart began to feel that their appearance would be greatly in their disfavour.

But she was of a sanguine nature, and, too, she was apt to devise expedients.

"I'll tell you, Dick," she said, as an idea came to her; "you know, 'a soft answer turneth away wrath'; no, – I guess I mean 'charity covereth a multitude of sins.' Yes, that's it. And charity is love, you know. So when we see the aunties, let's spring into their arms and kiss 'em and love 'em 'most to death, and then they won't notice our clothes."

"All right, that goes. Let me see, – yes, your face is clean," – Dick made a dab or two at it with his handkerchief. "How's mine?"

“Yes, it’s clean,” said Dolly, “at least, there aren’t any smudges; but you’d better wash it before supper.”

“All right, I will. Here we go now, turning in at the gate. Be ready to jump out and fly at them if they’re on the porch.”

They weren’t on the porch, so the twins went in at the great front door, which was opened for them by a smiling maid, whose smile broadened as she saw them. Then, repressing her smile, she ushered them to the library door and into the presence of the two waiting aunts.

“Now!” whispered Dick, and with a mad rush, the two flew across the room like whirlwinds and fairly *banged* themselves into the arms of Miss Rachel and Miss Abbie Dana.

This sudden onslaught was followed by a series of hugs and kisses which were of astonishing strength and duration.

What Miss Rachel and Miss Abbie thought can never be known, for they had no power of thought. Victims of a volcanic visitation do not think, – at least, not coherently, and the Dana ladies were quite helpless, both mentally and physically.

“Dear Auntie,” cooed Dolly, patting the cheek of the one she had attacked, though not knowing her name; “are you glad to see us?”

Miss Rachel stared stupidly at her, but the stare was not reassuring, and Dolly’s heart fell.

“Jolly glad to get here,” cried Dick, loyally trying to carry out Dolly’s plan, as he nearly choked the breath out of the other aunt. Miss Abbie had a little more sense of humour than her sister, – though neither of them was over-burdened with it, – so she said to Dick:

“Then do stop pommeling me, and stand off where I can see what you look like!”

But this was just what Dick was not anxious to do. So he only clung closer, and said, “Dear Auntie, which is your name?”

“I’m your Aunt Abbie,” was the response, not too gently given, “and now stand up, if you please, and stop these monkey-tricks!”

Of course, since she put it that way, Dick had to desist, and he released his struggling aunt, and bravely stood up for inspection.

Miss Rachel, too, had pushed Dolly away from her, and the twins stood, hand in hand, waiting for the verdict. It was an awful moment. The physical exertion of the manner they had chosen of greeting their aunts had made their flushed little faces still redder, and the scratches stood out in bold relief.

Also, their soiled and torn garments looked worse in this elegantly appointed room even than they had in the woods or in the carriage.

Altogether the twins felt that their plan of defence had failed, and they were crestfallen, shy, homesick, and pretty miserable all ’round.

But the funny part was, that the plan hadn’t failed. Though the aunts never admitted it, both their hearts were softened by the feeling of those little arms round their necks, and those vigorous, if grimy kisses that fell, irrespectively, on their cheeks, necks, or lace collars.

Had it not been for this tornado of affection, the greeting would have been far different. But one cannot speak coldly to a guest who shows such warmth of demonstration.

“Well, you *are* a pretty-looking pair!” exclaimed Miss Rachel, veiling her real disapproval behind a semblance of jocularly. “Do you always travel in ragged, dirty clothes?”

“No, Aunt Rachel,” said Dick, feeling he must make a strike for justice; “at least, we don’t start out this way. But you see, we had hardly ever seen a brook before – ”

“And it was so lovely!” put in Dolly, ecstatically.

“And wild flowers to it!” cried Dick, his eyes shining with the joy of the remembrance.

“And pebbly stones!”

“And ripply water!”

“And birds, flying in big bunches!”

“Oh, but it was splendid!”

“And so you went to the brook,” said Aunt Rachel, beginning to see daylight.

“Yes’m; on the way up from the station, you know.”

“Did Michael go with you?”

“No; he sat and held the horses, and hollered for us to come back.”

“Why didn’t you go when he called you?”

“Why, we did; at least, we went in a minute. But, Aunt Rachel, we never had seen a real live brook before, not since we were little bits of kiddy-wids, – and we just couldn’t bear to leave it.”

“We waded in it!” said Dolly, almost solemnly, as if she had referred to the highest possible earthly bliss.

The Dana ladies were nonplussed. True, the affection showered on them had tempered their severity, yet now justice began to reassert itself, and surely it would not be just or fair to have these semi-barbaric children installed at Dana Dene.

“Did your aunt in Chicago let you act like this?” asked Aunt Abbie, by way of trying to grasp the situation.

“Well, you see, there never was a brook there,” said Dick, pleasantly. “Only Lake Michigan, and that was too big to be any fun.”

“Oh, isn’t Heatherton lovely?” exclaimed Dolly, her big, dark eyes full of rapture.

She had again possessed herself of Miss Rachel’s hand and was patting it, and incidentally transferring some “good, brown earth” to it, from her own little paw.

Though Dolly had planned their mode of entrance, she had forgotten all about it now, and her affectionate demonstrations were prompted only by her own loving little heart, and not by an effort to be tactful.

In her enthusiasm over the beautiful country-side, she fairly bubbled over with love and affection for all about her.

“Are you both so fond of the country, then?” said Miss Abbie, a little curiously.

“Yes, we love it,” declared Dick, “and we’ve ’most never seen it. Auntie Helen always liked fashionable places in summer, and of course in winter we were in Chicago.”

“And we were naughty,” said Dolly, with a sudden burst of contrition, “to go wading in the brook in our good clothes. Mrs. Halkett told us *’spressly* not to get soiled or even rumpled before we saw you. And we’re sorry we did, – but, oh! that brook! When can we go there again? To-morrow?”

“Or this afternoon,” said Dick, sidling up to Aunt Rachel; “it isn’t late, is it?”

The twins had instinctively discerned that Miss Rachel was the one of whom to ask permission. Aunt Abbie seemed more lovable, perhaps, but without a doubt Aunt Rachel was the fixer of their fate.

“This afternoon! I should say not!” exclaimed Miss Rachel. “It’s nearly supper time now, and how you’re going to be made presentable is more than I know! Have you any other clothes?”

“In our trunks, – lots of ’em,” said Dick, cheerfully. “But these are our best ones. Mrs. Halkett put them on us purpose to come to you. I’m sorry they’re smashed.”

Dick’s sorrow was expressed in such blithe and nonchalant tones, that Miss Rachel only smiled grimly.

“Are you hungry?” she said.

“No’m,” said Dick, slowly, and Dolly added, “Not *very*. Of course we’re always *some* hungry. But Aunt Rachel, can’t we go out and scoot round the yard? Just to see what it’s like, you know. Of course, this room is, – beautiful, but we do love to be out doors. May we?”

“No,” said Miss Rachel, decidedly, and though Miss Abbie said, timidly, “Why don’t you let them?” the elder sister resumed:

“Go out on my lawn looking like that? Indeed you can’t! I’d be ashamed to have the chickens see you, – let alone the servants!”

“Oh, are there chickens?” cried Dolly, dancing about in excitement. “I’m *so* glad we’re going to live here!”

She made a movement as if to hug her Aunt Rachel once again, but as she saw the involuntary drawing away of that lady’s shoulders, she transferred her caress to Dick, and the tattered twins fell on each other’s necks in mutual joy of anticipation.

“You are a ridiculous pair of children,” said Aunt Abbie, laughing at the sight; “but as I hope you’ll show some of your father’s traits, you may improve under our training.”

“If we can train such hopeless cases,” said Miss Rachel. “Has nobody ever taught you how to behave?”

“Yes,” said Dick, growing red at the implication. “Auntie Helen is a lovely lady, and she taught us to be honourable and polite.”

“Oh, she did! and do you call it honourable to go off wading in your best clothes, while we were waiting for you to come here?”

Dick’s honest little face looked troubled.

“I don’t know,” he said, truly, but Dolly, who was often the quicker-witted of the two, spoke up:

“It may have been naughty, Aunt Rachel, but I don’t ’zackly think it was dishonourable. Do you?” Thus pinned down, Miss Rachel considered.

“Perhaps ‘dishonourable’ isn’t quite the right word,” she said, “but we won’t discuss that now. I shall teach you to behave properly, of course, but we won’t begin until you look like civilised beings, capable of being taught. Just now, I think hot baths, with plenty of soap, will be the best thing for you, but as you have no clean clothes, you’ll have to go to bed.”

“At five o’clock! Whew!” said Dick. “Oh, I say, Aunt Rachel, not to bed!”

“Anyway, let us go for a tear around the yard first,” begged Dolly. “We can’t hurt these clothes now; and I don’t believe the chickens will mind. Are there *little* chickens, Aunt Abbie?”

“Yes, little woolly yellow ones.”

“Like the ones on Easter souvenirs? Oh, *please* let us see them now, —*please*!”

More persuaded by the violence of her niece’s plea than by her own inclination, Miss Rachel said they might go out for half an hour, and then they must come in to baths and beds.

“And supper?” asked Dick, hopefully.

“Yes, bread and milk after you’re clean and tucked into bed.”

“*Only* bread and milk?” said Dolly, with eyes full of wheedlesomeness.

“Well, perhaps jam,” said Aunt Abbie, smiling, and somehow her smile augured even more than jam. Out they scampered then, and soon found Michael, who introduced them to the chickens and also to Pat, who was the gardener.

“I like you,” said Dolly, slipping her little hand into Pat’s big one, both being equally grimy. “Please show us all the flowers and things.”

There was so much to look at, they could only compass a small part of it in their allotted half-hour. Dana Dene covered about thirty acres, but it was not a real farm. A vegetable garden supplied the household wants, and the rest of the estate was park and flower beds and a bit of woods and an orchard and a terrace, and the poultry yard and stables, and other delights of which the children could only guess.

“Aren’t you glad we came?” said Dolly, still hanging on to Pat’s hand.

“I – I guess so, Miss,” he replied, cautiously; “but I can’t say yet, for sure. Ye’re rampageous, I’m afraid. Ain’t ye, now?”

“Yes,” said Dick, who was always honest, “I think we are. At least, everybody says so. But, Pat, we’re going to try not to make you any trouble.”

“Now, that’s a good boy. If ye talk like that, you ’n me’ll be friends.”

Dolly said nothing, but she smiled happily up into Patrick’s kind eyes, and then, with their usual adaptability to circumstances, the twins began to feel at home.

CHAPTER III

AN EARLY STROLL

Soon after daybreak next morning, Dolly woke, and surveyed with satisfaction her pretty room. Pink roses clambered over the wall paper, and over the chintz hangings and furniture, and over the soft, dainty bed-coverlet.

It was much more attractive than her room at Aunt Helen's, and as Dolly loved pretty things, she gave a little sigh of content and nestled comfortably into her pillows. Then she heard Dick's voice whispering through the closed door between their rooms.

"Hi, Dolly; I say! Aren't you up yet?"

"No, are you?"

"Yes, and 'most dressed. Hustle, can't you? and let's go out and chase around the place."

"Before breakfast?"

"Yes; breakfast isn't until eight o'clock, and it's only six now."

"All right, I'll hustle," and Dolly sprang out of bed, and began to dress.

The twins were a self-reliant pair, and quite capable and methodical when they had time to be.

Dolly dressed herself neatly in a clean blue and white plaid gingham; and as she could tie her hair ribbon quite well enough, except for special occasions, the blue bow on her golden curls was entirely satisfactory.

"I'm all ready, Dick," she whispered at last, through the door, "and we mustn't make any noise, for maybe the aunties are asleep yet."

"All right; I'll meet you in the hall."

So both children went on tiptoe out into the big, light hall, and softly down the stairs.

No one seemed to be stirring, but they unfastened the locks and chains of the front doors, and stepped out into the beautiful fresh morning.

"I've *got* to holler!" said Dick, still whispering. "They can't hear us now."

"Yes, they can; wait till we get farther away from the house."

So, hand in hand, they ran down the garden path, and when a grape arbour and a cornfield were between them and their sleeping aunts, they decided they were out of hearing.

"Hooray!" yelled Dick, as loud as he could, at the same time turning a jubilant handspring.

Dolly was quite as glad as her brother, but contented herself with dancing about, and giving little squeals of delight as she saw one rapturous sight after another.

"Oh, Dick," she cried, "there's a fountain! 'way over there on the little hill. Do you s'pose that's on our grounds?"

"Course it is. This is all ours, as far as you can see, and more too. That woody place over there is ours; Pat told me so."

"We'll have picnics there. And Dick, maybe there are fairies in the woods."

"Sure there are. That's just the kind of woods that has fairies. But they only come out at night, you know."

"Yes, but it's only just a little past night now. The sun has only been up a short time. Maybe there are some fairies there yet."

"Maybe; let's go and see."

With a skip and a jump the children started for the woods, which, however proved to be farther away than they had thought.

They trudged merrily on, stopping now and then to speak to a robin, or kick at a dandelion, but at last they came to the edge of the grove.

“Oh, Dick!” cried Dolly, in ecstasy, “think of having a real woods, right in our own yard! Isn’t it gorgeous!”

“Great! but go softly now, if we want to see fairies. I’m ’fraid they’ve all gone.”

Hand in hand the children tiptoed into the wood. They moved very cautiously, lest they should step on a twig, or make any noise that should frighten the fairies.

“There’s where they dance,” whispered Dick, pointing to a smooth, green mossy place. “But of course they always fly away when the sun rises.”

“Yes, I s’pose so,” said Dolly, regretfully. “Shall we come out earlier to-morrow?”

“Yes; or we might come out to see them some night. Moonlight nights; that’s the time!”

“Would you dare? Oh, Dick, wouldn’t it be grand!”

“Hey, Dolly, there’s a squirrel; a real, live one! That’s better’n fairies. Oh, look at him!”

Sure enough, a grey squirrel ran past them, and now sat, turning his head back to look at them, but ready for instant flight if they moved.

But they didn’t move, they knew better; and scarce daring to breathe, they sat watching the wonderful sight.

Meantime, there was consternation in the household. At seven o’clock Miss Rachel had sent Hannah, the waitress, to call the twins.

The maid returned with a scared face, and announced that the children had gone.

“Gone!” cried Miss Rachel, who was engaged in making her own toilet; “where have they gone?”

“I don’t know, ma’am; but they’re not in their rooms, and the front door is wide open.”

“Oh, they’ve run away!” cried Miss Rachel, and hastily throwing on a dressing gown, she went to her sister’s room.

“Get up, Abbie,” she exclaimed. “Those children have run away!”

“Run away? What do you mean?”

“Why, they’ve gone! I suppose they didn’t like us. Perhaps they were homesick, or something. Abbie, do you suppose they’ve gone back to Chicago, all alone?”

“Nonsense, Rachel, of course they haven’t! Children always rise early. They’re probably walking in the garden.”

“No, I don’t think so. Something tells me they’ve run away because they don’t like us. Oh, Abbie, do you think that’s it?”

“No, I don’t. Go on and dress. They’ll be back by the time you’re ready for breakfast. If you’re worried, send Hannah out to hunt them up.”

So Hannah was sent, but as she only looked in the verandas and in the gardens near the house, of course, she didn’t find the twins. By the time the ladies came downstairs, Hannah had impressed Pat and Michael into service, and all three were hunting for the missing guests.

But it never occurred to them to go so far as the woods, where Dick and Dolly were even then sitting, watching the grey squirrel, and looking for fairies.

“I’m thinkin’ they’ve fell in the pond,” said Pat, as he gazed anxiously into the rather muddy water.

“Not thim!” said Michael; “they’re not the sort that do be afther drownin’ thimselves. They’re too frisky. Belikes they’ve run back to the brook where they shtopped at yisterday. Do yez go there an’ look, Pat.”

“Yes, do,” said Miss Rachel, who, with clasped hands and a white face was pacing the veranda.

“Don’t take it so hard, sister,” implored Miss Abbie. “They’re around somewhere, I’m sure; and if not, – why, you know, Rachel, you didn’t want them here very much, anyway.”

“How can you be so heartless!” cried Miss Rachel, her eyes staring reproachfully at her sister. “I do want them; they’re brother’s children, and this is their rightful home. But I wish they wanted

to stay. I'm sure they ran away because they didn't like us. Do you think we were too harsh with them yesterday?"

"Perhaps so. At any rate, they *have* run away. I thought they were in the garden, but if so, they would have been found by now. Do you suppose they took an early train back to New York?"

"Oh, Abbie, how *can* you say so! Those two dear little mites alone in a great city! I can't think it!"

"It's better than thinking they are drowned in the pond."

"Either is awful; and yet of course some such thing must have happened."

The two ladies were on the verge of hysterics, and the servants, who had all been hunting for the children, were nonplussed. Pat had jumped on a horse, and galloped off to the brook which had so taken their fancy the day before, and Michael stood, with his hands in his pockets, wondering if he ought to drag the pond. Delia, the cook, had left the waiting breakfast and had come to join the anxious household.

"I'm thinkin' they're not far off," she said; "why don't ye blow a horn, now?"

"That's a good idea," said Miss Abbie; "try it, Michael."

So Michael found an old dinner-horn that had hung unused in the barn for many years, and he blew resounding blasts.

But unfortunately, the babes in the woods were too far away to hear, and forgetful of all else they watched two squirrels, who, reassured by the children's quiet, ran back and forth, and almost came right up to Dick and Dolly's beckoning fingers.

"If only we had something to feed them," said Dick, vainly hunting his pockets for something edible.

"If only we had something to feed ourselves," said Dolly; "I'm just about starved."

"So'm I; let's go back now, and come to see the squirrels some other time, and bring them some nuts."

"All right, let's."

So back they started, but leisurely, for they had no thought of how the time had slipped by. They paused here and there to investigate many things, and it was well on toward nine o'clock when they came within hearing of Michael's horn, on which he was blowing a last, despairing blast.

"Hear the horn!" cried Dick. "Do you s'pose that's the way they call the family to breakfast?"

"Oh, it isn't breakfast time, yet," said Dolly, confidently. "I'm hungry enough, but it can't be eight o'clock, I know. And, besides, I want time to tidy up."

The clean frock had lost its freshness, and the blue bow was sadly askew, for somehow, try as she would, Dolly never could keep herself spick and span.

They trudged along, through the barnyard and the garden, and finally came to the kitchen door, which stood invitingly open.

"Let's go in this way," said Dolly; "it's nearer, and I can skin up to my room and brush my hair. I don't want Auntie Rachel to think I'm always messy."

In at the back door they went, and as the kitchen was deserted, they looked around in some surprise.

"Might as well catch a bun," said Dick, seeing a panful of rolls in the warming oven.

The hungry children each took a roll, and then sped on up to their rooms, intent on tidying themselves for breakfast.

"For goodness' sake, Dolly!" exclaimed Dick's voice through the door, "it's after nine o'clock! Do you s'pose they've had breakfast, and where is everybody?"

"After nine o'clock!" said Dolly, opening the door, to make sure she had heard aright. "Well, if this isn't the queerest house! Hurry up, Dick, and brush your hair, and we'll go down and see what's the matter. I know they haven't had breakfast, for the kitchen range was all full of cereals and things."

A few moments later, two neat and well-brushed children tripped gaily downstairs. They went into the library, where their two aunts, nearly in a state of collapse, were reposing in armchairs.

“Good-morning, aunties,” said the twins, blithely. “Are we late?”

Miss Abbie gasped and closed her eyes, at the astonishing sight, but Miss Rachel, who was of a different nature, felt all her anxiety turn to exasperation, and she said, sternly:

“You naughty children! Where have you been?”

“Why, we just got up early, and went to look around the place,” volunteered Dolly, “and we didn’t know it got late so soon.”

“But where were you? We’ve searched the place over.”

“We went to the woods,” said Dick. “You see, Aunt Abbie, I felt as if I must screech a little, and we thought if we stayed too near the house, we might wake you up. It was awful early then. I don’t see how nine o’clock came so soon! Did we keep breakfast back? I’m sorry.”

“Why did you want to screech?” said Miss Abbie, quickly. “Are you homesick?”

“Oh, no! I mean screech for joy. Just shout, you know, for fun, and jump around, and turn somersaults. I always do those things when I’m glad. But as it turned out, we couldn’t, very much, for we were watching for fairies, and then for squirrels, so we had to be quiet after all.”

“And so you wanted to shout for joy, did you?” asked Aunt Rachel, much mollified at the compliments they paid so unconsciously.

“Oh, yes’m! Everything is so beautiful, and so – so sort of enchanted.”

“Enchanted?”

“Yes; full of fairies, and sprites. The woods, you know, and the pond, and the fountain, – oh, Dana Dene is the finest place I ever saw!”

Dick’s enthusiasm was so unfeigned, and his little face shone with such intense happiness, that Miss Rachel hadn’t the heart to scold him after all. So, resolving to tell the twins later of the trouble they had caused, she went away to tell Delia to send in breakfast, and to tell Michael to go and find Patrick, for the twins had returned.

“You see,” explained Dolly, as they sat at breakfast, “we went out of the house at half-past seven, by the big, hall clock. And I thought then we’d stay an hour, and get back in time to fix up before we saw you. We’re not very good at keeping clean.”

“So I see,” said Aunt Abbie, glancing at several grass stains and a zigzag tear that disfigured Dolly’s frock.

“Yes’m; so we ’most always try to get in to meals ahead of time, and that ’lows us to spruce up some.”

“We try to,” said Dick, honestly, “but we don’t always do it.”

“No,” returned Dolly, calmly; “’most never. But isn’t it ’stonishing how fast the time goes when you think there’s plenty?”

“It is,” said Aunt Rachel, a little grimly. “And now that you’re to live here, you’ll have to mend your ways, about being late, for I won’t have tardiness in my house.”

“All right,” said Dolly, cheerfully; “I’ll hunt up my watch. It doesn’t go very well, except when it lies on its face; but if I put it in my pocket upside down, maybe it’ll go.”

“It must be a valuable watch,” remarked Aunt Abbie.

“Yes’m, it is. Auntie Helen gave it to me for a good-by gift, but I looked at it so often, that I thought it would be handier to wear it hanging outside, like a locket, you know. Well, I did, and then it banged into everything I met. And the chain caught on everything, and the watch got dented, and the crystal broke, and one hand came off. But it was the long hand, so as long as the hour hand goes all right, I can guess at the time pretty good. If I’d just had it with me this morning, we’d been all right. I’m real sorry we were late.”

Aunt Rachel smiled, but it was rather a grim smile.

“I don’t set much store by people who are sorry,” she said; “what I like, are people who don’t do wrong things the second time. If you are never late to breakfast again, that will please me more than being sorry for this morning’s escapade.”

“I’ll do both,” said Dolly, generously, and indeed, the twins soon learned to be prompt at meals, which is a habit easily acquired, if one wishes to acquire it.

CHAPTER IV

GARDENS

“Now, children,” said Aunt Rachel, as they all went into the library, after breakfast, “you may play around as you choose, but I don’t want you to go off the premises without permission. No more wading in the brook, and coming home looking disreputable. You may go to our wood, or anywhere on the place, and stay as long as you like, provided you are here and properly tidy at meal-times. But outside the gates, without permission, you must not go: Can I trust you?”

“Yes, indeed, Aunt Rachel,” said Dick; “I’m sure we don’t want to go anywhere else, with all this beautiful place to play in. Why, we haven’t half explored it yet. Pat says there are thirty acres! Think of that!”

“Yes, it’s a fine old place,” said Miss Rachel, with justifiable pride in her ancestral home. “And I’m glad to have you young people in it, if you’ll only behave yourselves, and not keep us everlastingly in hot water.”

“We do want to be good, Auntie,” said Dolly, in her sweet way; “and if we’re bad a few times, just till we learn your ways, you know, you’ll forgive us, won’t you?”

Pretty little Dolly had a wheedlesome voice, and a winning smile, and Miss Rachel found it difficult to speak sternly, when the big, dark eyes looked into her face so lovingly.

“Yes, I’m sure you want to be good, my dears, and also, we want to do the right thing by you. So we’ll learn each other’s ways, and I’m sure we’ll get along beautifully.”

Miss Rachel was not used to children, and she talked to them as if they were as grown-up as herself, but Dick and Dolly understood, and sat patiently while she talked, though, in truth, they were impatient to get away, and run outdoors again.

“I shall send you to school,” went on Miss Rachel, “but not for a week or two yet. I want to learn you myself a little better first.”

“Yes’m,” said Dolly, who was equally well pleased to go to school or to stay at home. But Dick wanted to go.

“Let us go pretty soon, won’t you, Auntie?” he said; “for I want to get acquainted with the Heatherton fellows.”

“Boys, Dick,” corrected Aunt Abbie, who was beginning to think the twins rather careless of their diction.

“Yes’m, I mean boys. Are there any who live near here?”

Miss Rachel pursed her lips together.

“The Middletons live in the place next to this,” she began, and Dolly broke in:

“Oh, that pretty place, with the stone pillars at the gate?”

“Yes,” went on her aunt. “But Mrs. Middleton and we are not – that is – ”

“Oh, you’re not good friends, is that it?” volunteered Dick.

“Well, yes; I suppose that is it. You children are too young to understand, but let it be enough for you that I prefer you should not play with the little Middletons. There are other neighbours equally pleasant for your acquaintance.”

“All right, Auntie,” agreed Dick. “Cut out the Middletons. And now mayn’t we run out to play?”

“First, I’ll take you up and show you your playroom. It’s more for rainy days, as you seem to like to be out of doors in fine weather. But come and see it, anyway.”

The two aunts led the way, and the children followed to a large, delightful room in the third story.

There was a big table in the middle, and smaller tables and chairs about. There was a pleasant little writing-desk for each, well furnished with pretty writing materials. Low bookshelves ran round

two sides of the room, and the other side showed a jolly big fireplace, and pleasant windows with deep seats.

A roomy, comfortable old sofa and a chest of drawers completed the furnishing.

"It isn't finished," said Miss Abbie, "because we don't yet know your tastes."

"It's lovely, Aunties!" cried Dolly, flinging her arms round the neck of one after the other, and finally embracing Dick in her enthusiasm.

"Oh, it's just gay!" Dick cried. "I've always wanted a big playroom, and now we've got one. Can I whittle and jigsaw up here?"

"Yes, you may do just exactly as you please. You may bring your young friends up here, and entertain them whenever you choose."

"That is, after we get the friends," supplemented Dolly.

"Yes, but you'll soon get acquainted. There are many nice children in Heatherton. Do you play dolls, Dolly?"

"Yes, I do, when I have any little girls to play with. But, you see, I play with Dick so much, I get out of the habit of dolls. But I do love 'em. When our big box of things comes, I've lots of dolls in it, and Dick's tool-chest and jigsaw – oh, it will be splendid to fix them all up here!"

"Yes, Michael will help you. He'll fix a good workbench, for you, Dick, if you're fond of fussing with tools. Do you cut your fingers much?"

"Sometimes, Aunt Rachel, but not always. Say, you're awful good to us. We're ever so much obliged."

Dick was more awkward at expressing his appreciation than Dolly, but the honest joy on the boy's face showed his admiration of the room, and Aunt Rachel's heart warmed toward him, for she too was sometimes unable to express herself aptly.

"Now we'll skiddoo," said Dolly, as she patted Miss Abbie's hand by way of farewell. "We want to see Pat feed the chickens."

"Yes, dearie, run along, but, – would you mind if I ask you not to use those – those unusual words?"

"Skiddoo? Oh, that's an awful useful word, Aunt Abbie. I don't see how I could get along without it, but I'll try if you say so."

"Yes, do try, Dolly; I want my niece to be a refined, ladylike little girl, not a slangy one."

"Yes'm." Dolly drew a little sigh. "I want to do what you want me to do. But I'm pretty forgetful, Aunt Abbie, so don't be 'scouraged, will you, if I don't get good all at once?"

Dolly had a childish trick of omitting the first syllable of a word, but Aunt Abbie kissed the earnest little face, and assured her that she wouldn't get 'scouraged.

So away the twins scampered, down the stairs, and out into the sweet, clear morning air.

Dana Dene stood high on an elevation that looked down on the small town of Heatherton. The view from the terrace in front of the house was beautiful, and as Dick and Dolly looked down at the clustered buildings they tried to guess what they were.

"That's the church," said Dick, triumphantly pointing to an unmistakable spire.

"One of 'em," corrected Dolly; "there's another, and I wonder what that big stone building is; prob'ly the school where we'll go."

"P'raps. Is it, Patrick?"

"Well, no, Master Dick; that isn't exactly the school fer ye children. That's the jail, – the county jail, so it is."

"Oh," cried Dolly, in dismay; "I don't want to go to school to a jail! Where is the school-house, Patrick?"

"There's three of 'em, Miss Dolly. But the grandest is that white house ferninst, an' I'm thinkin' ye'll go there."

"Are my aunts very grand, Patrick?"

“Oh, yes, miss. We’re the quality of the hull place. There’s nobody like the Danas.”

“That’s nice,” said Dolly, with a little air of satisfaction.

“Huh,” said Dick; “what sort of a country do you think this is, Dolly? Everybody is as good as everybody else. Why do you talk that way, Pat?”

“Well, sor, it may be. But everybody in Heatherton, they thinks Miss Rachel and Miss Abbie is top o’ the heap, you see.”

“All right,” returned Dick. “I don’t mind if we are. But what about the Middletons? Aren’t they nice people?”

Pat’s face clouded. “Don’t be askin’ me about the Middletons,” he said; “I’ve nothin’ to say for or agin ’em. Now, if so be’s you want to see them chickens, come ahead.”

They went ahead or, rather, they followed Pat to the chicken yard, and spent a blissful half-hour among the feathered wonders.

They learned the names of the various kinds of chickens, and Dolly declared she should never tire of watching the little yellow fledglings patter around and peep.

“They’re not still a minute,” she said. “Can I try to catch one?”

Pat showed her how to lift one gently, without hurting the little soft ball of down, and as it was such a pretty little yellow one, Dolly named it Buttercup, and Pat said it should always be her own chicken.

Then Dick picked one out for his very own, and he chose a black one, and called it Cherry, because, he said, some cherries are black.

This made Pat laugh, and then he told the twins to run away and play by themselves, as he had to go to work in earnest.

“What’s your work, Pat?” asked Dolly, who liked to stay with the good-natured Irishman.

“I have to do the gardens, Miss Dolly. An’ it’s rale work, it is, not play. So do ye run away, now.”

“Oh, Pat, let us see you garden,” begged Dolly.

“Please do,” said Dick. “We never saw anybody garden in our life.”

“Ye didn’t! Fer the love of green corn, where was ye brung up?”

“In the city; and summers we had to go to hotels, and we never even saw a garden dug.”

“Come on, then; but ye mustn’t bother.”

“No, we won’t bother,” and with a hop, skip, and jump, they followed Pat to the toolhouse. There was such an array of spades, hoes, rakes, and other implements, that Dick cried out: “Oh, let us garden, too! Pat, can’t we each have a little garden, – just a square patch, you know, and plant things in it?”

“Arrah, a garden, is it? An’ who’d be afther weedin’ it, an’ keepin’ it in order fer ye?”

“Why, we’d do it ourselves,” declared Dolly, fixing her eyes on Pat with her most coaxing smile. “Do let us, Pat, dear.”

“Well, ye must ask yer aunties. I cudden’t give no such permission of myself.”

Away flew the twins to the house, in search of the aunties, and when the twins ran, it was a swift performance indeed. They held hands, and their feet flew up and down so fast that they looked like some queer sort of windmill rolling along.

Bang! in at the front door they went, and almost upset Miss Rachel, who was serenely crossing the hall.

“Oh, Auntie, may we have a garden?” shouted Dick, seizing his aunt’s hand, and leaning up against her to steady himself after his exhausting run.

“Oh, Auntie, may we? Do say yes,” cried Dolly, who had flung her arms round Miss Rachel’s waist, and who was dancing up and down to the imminent danger of the good lady’s toes.

“What? Oh, my, how you do fluster me! What is it?”

Miss Rachel shook off the two, and seated herself in a hall chair, to regain her equilibrium, both physical and mental, but the twins made another wild dash at her. “Please,” they coaxed, patting her

arm and her face and occasionally each other's hands in their excitement. "Please, Auntie, a garden for our very own."

"Two, – one for each of us. May we? Oh, please say yes! Do, Auntie, do, say yes."

Miss Rachel found her voice at last.

"If you want anything," she said, "stop jumping around like a pair of wild savages. Sit down on that settee, and tell me quietly, and one at a time, what it's all about."

"Let me tell, Dick," said Dolly, and knowing his sister's talent for persuasion, Dick willingly kept quiet while Dolly told.

They sat side by side on the hall settee, opposite their aunt, and scarcely dared move, while Dolly made her plea.

"You see, Auntie," she began, "we've never had a garden; never even seen one made. And so, we thought, perhaps, maybe, as there's so much spare ground lying around, we hoped maybe you'd let us each have a little garden of our own. Just a little tiny one, you know."

"For pity's sake," exclaimed Miss Rachel, "is all this fuss about a garden? Why, you can have a dozen, if you like."

"Oh, thank you, Auntie," cried Dolly, repressing her inclination to fly over and hug her aunt, lest it be considered a "fuss." "One's enough, – one apiece, I mean. And what can we plant?"

"Why, plant anything you choose. Pat will give you seeds, and if he hasn't what you want, we'll buy some when we go driving this afternoon."

Dick was overcome by his aunt's kindness and whole-souled generosity. But he had no intention of making a fuss, – not he. He rose and quietly crossed the hall, and bowing low in front of the lady, said:

"Aunt Rachel, I do think you're the very best person in the whole world!"

"So do I!" said Dolly. "Seems 's if I *must* squeeze you!"

"Not now," said Miss Rachel, smiling; "you nearly squeezed the breath out of me a few moments ago. I'll take your enthusiasm for granted. Now, run out, and make your gardens. Tell Pat I said you're to have whatever you want for them."

"Hurrray! Hooroo!" cried Dick, unable to repress himself longer, and throwing his cap up in the air, without having had the least intention of doing so.

It landed on the high chandelier, and Hannah had to bring the long-handled feather duster to get it down.

"Please 'scuse Dick, Aunt Rachel," said loyal little Dolly, seeing her brother's regretful look. "He didn't mean to fling that cap till he got outdoors, but somehow –"

"Somehow, it flung itself," cried Dick; "cause I'm so glad about the garden!"

Away they went, banging the door behind them, and Miss Rachel sat a few minutes, seriously considering whether or not she could keep such little cyclones in her hitherto quiet and well-ordered home.

"It isn't so much what they've done," she said, as she went and talked it over with Miss Abbie, "as what they may do. They're liable to fling caps anywhere, and break all the bric-à-brac, and bang all the furniture – well, if there were any place to send them, they should go to-day."

"You don't mean that, Rachel," said Miss Abbie. "They are noisy, I know, but I think we can train them to better manners; and they have dear, loving little hearts."

"Too loving," said the elder sister, ruefully. "They nearly felled me to the floor, the way they rushed at me. I'm not over the shock yet!"

"Well," sighed Miss Abbie, "I suppose it's because we're not used to children; but they do seem especially sudden in their ways."

CHAPTER V

A PLAYGROUND

“Sudden in their ways,” just described Dick and Dolly. After getting their aunt’s sanction, they flew back to the toolhouse, and tumbling in at the door, nearly upset Pat by their sudden dash for spades and hoes.

“She says we can!” cried Dolly; “how do you begin, Pat? What do we do first?”

“Dig, of course,” declared Dick, seizing the biggest spade he could find.

“All right; where shall we dig?”

Dolly grabbed another spade, and skipping out of the toolhouse, began to dig frantically in the path that led from the doorstep.

“Whisht! now! Miss Dolly, don’t be fer sp’ilin’ me good path!”

Pat was amiable, but the vigorous enthusiasm of these children began to appal him. He was always deferential to his employers, and he looked upon the twins as members of his employers’ family, and so he considered himself under their orders. But he also began to see that he must direct matters himself, if these impetuous youngsters were to have a real garden.

“Well,” he said, “if so be’s yer aunts has give permission, we must make the gardens fer ye. But we must do ’t dacint an’ proper. Don’t begin by diggin’ up me tidy paths.”

“I won’t, Pat; I’m sorry!” and Dolly carefully smoothed away the clefts she had dug with her spade.

“Now, we’ll consider,” said Pat, greatly interested in the plan. “First of all, where will ye be selectin’ the place?”

The twins gazed around, at the various gardens, terrace, woodland, and water, and then Dolly said, decidedly:

“In the woods; that’s the prettiest place.”

“Oh, ho!” laughed Pat. “Why, little miss, ye can’t grow things in the woods! Leastwise, only ferns an’ moss! Don’t ye want flowers, now?”

“Oh, yes; of course we do! And I forgot they have to have sunshine.”

“Goosie!” cried Dick. “Now, I think a place near the pond would be nice, and then we can fetch water easily, – for I s’pose we have to water our flowers every day, don’t we, Pat?”

“Yes; unless it rains fer ye, which it sometimes do. Now, s’pose ye let me s’lect yer place, an’ then do ye pick out yer own choice o’ flowers.”

“Do,” cried Dolly. “You know so much better than we do where a garden ought to be.”

Pat considered carefully for a few moments, casting his eye thoughtfully toward various parts of the estate.

“Come on,” he said, at last, and the children followed him, as he strode off.

Just beyond the beautifully kept terrace was a stretch of lawn, entirely open to the sunlight, save for a big horse-chestnut tree in one corner.

Here Pat paused, and indicating by a sweep of his arm a section about seventy-five feet square, he said:

“I’m thinkin’, instead of only a garden, by itself, it’d be foine for ye to make yersilves a rale playground.”

Dolly’s quick mind jumped to the possibilities.

“Oh, Pat, a playground, all for ourselves, with our two gardens in it!”

“Yes, miss; and an arbour, and seats, an’ a table, an’ – ”

But he got no further, for Dick and Dolly seized him by either hand, and jumped up and down, fairly shouting with delight.

“Oh, Pat, Pat, I never heard of anything so lovely!”

“How could you think of it? Let’s begin at once!”

“But ye must behave!” cried Pat, shaking his hands loose from their grasp, and waiting for them to stop their antics.

“Yes, yes; we’ll behave!” said Dolly, suddenly standing stock-still, and looking very; demure. “What do we do first, dig?”

“I’m thinkin’ yez better dig a whole acre, – an’ see if ye can’t work off some of yer animile sperrits! Such rampageous bein’s I niver saw!”

“We’ll be quiet, Pat,” said Dick, earnestly; “now let’s begin.”

“Well, thin, – first, we must plan it, sure. Suppose we drive a shtake here fer wan corner; and thin the big tree will be the opposite corner. Now ye see the size av it.”

“Yes,” agreed Dolly, “it’s a lovely size.”

“Thin, supposin’ we plan to set out a little low hedge all around the four sides, wid an openin’ or two – ”

“And an arched gateway!” cried Dolly, with sparkling eyes.

“Yes, miss, say an arched gateway or two. An’ then, inside ye can have three or four garden-beds, – fer sep’rate plants, ye know, – an’ yer arbour, an’ whatever else ye like.”

“Oh!” said Dolly, sitting plump down on the ground from sheer inability to bear up under these wonderful anticipations.

“Now, what’s to do first?” said Dick, eager to get to work.

“Well, first we’ll lay out our flower beds. Now I don’t s’pose ye know the difference between seeds an’ plants, do ye?”

“Oh, yes! Plants grow from seeds.”

“Well, av coorse they do. But I don’t mean that. Ye see, some flowers ye set out as plants; an’ some ye raise from seeds.”

“Oh, I think seeds will be most fun,” said Dolly: “You just stuff ’em in the ground and then they grow, don’t they, Pat?”

“Well, yes, miss; if yer seeds is right, an’ yer ground’s right, an’ if ye stuff ’em in right, an’ take care of ’em right, afterward.”

“Oh, we can do all that,” Dick assured him, grandly, and Pat’s eyes twinkled, as he replied:

“Av coorse ye can!”

Then Pat called Michael to help him, and they drove stakes and tied twine to them, until they had the playground distinctly marked out.

“Now, we’ll consider yer flower-beds, an’ lave the other considerations till later,” announced Pat. “Ye see, yer seed-beds must be in the mornin’ sun, an’ have the shade of an afternoon. So, wid the big tree ferninst, we can aisy manage that.”

“Seeds seem to be pretty particular,” observed Dolly.

“They be that, Miss; but so likewise is the plants. Some wants sun an’ some wants shade, an’ if they don’t get what they wants, they jist lies down an’ dies!”

Then Pat and Michael selected the best spots, and marked out two oval flower-beds of goodly size, and two straight, narrow seed-beds somewhat smaller.

“Miss Dolly’s, we’ll say, will be on this side, an’ Master Dick’s on that. Now, if so be’s ye childhern wants to dig, fer mercy’s sake dig! Ye can’t hurt the ground.”

Pat well knew that his own strong arms would spade up the beds later, and he would fill them with the right sort of soil, and get them in perfect order for planting; but the twins were delighted at the idea of doing their own digging, and went to work with their usual enthusiasm.

It was hard work, but they enjoyed it, and though not very scientifically done, they did manage to dislodge the soft turf, and riddle up the dirt beneath.

"I s'pose it won't be such hard work after the digging is dug," said Dolly, looking at her blistered little palms.

"Why, Dolly Dana!" exclaimed Aunt Abbie, who came out just then, to see how the gardens progressed; "don't you dig another bit! You poor, dear child, your hands are in a dreadful state! Go in and ask Aunt Rachel for some salve."

"No, indeedy!" declared the valiant Dolly. "I'm going to plant my seeds now!"

"Oh, no, miss," said Pat. "Them beds isn't ready yet. Nor ye haven't got yer seeds."

"Don't be too impetuous, Dolly," said Aunt Abbie. "This afternoon, we'll plan out what is best to plant and then by to-morrow, if Patrick has the beds ready, you can do your planting."

Dick was still digging away, manfully, quite unwilling to admit there were blisters on his own hands.

But Aunt Abbie made him stop, for though the digging was good fun, there was no use in causing himself needless pain, and Patrick would do the beds all over, anyway. So Aunt Abbie persuaded the children to turn their attention to planning their playground.

She quite approved of Pat's suggestions, and sent for Miss Rachel to come out and assist with the plans.

Both ladies were very fond of gardening, and entered enthusiastically into the idea of the pretty playground. Miss Rachel instructed Pat to buy and set out a low hedge of privet all round the inclosure; and they decided on two entrances, front and back, each to be adorned by an arch covered with a flowering vine.

An arbour was planned for the centre, but Dolly chose to call it a playhouse. For it was to be big enough to have seats and a table inside.

It was to be built tent-shape; that is, very long, slender poles would be set up in pairs, meeting at the top, like the letter A. There would be about a dozen pairs of these poles, each pair about two feet apart, and thus they would have a long arbour on which to train vines and flowers.

A ridge-pole along the top would keep it all firm and steady, and quickly growing vines should be chosen, which would soon cover the whole frame.

Michael, who was clever at carpenter work, volunteered to make a table and benches, and Dick, who was also fond of tools, felt sure he could help.

Aunt Abbie said she would give a garden swing as her contribution to the playground, and Aunt Rachel said she, too, would give something nice, but what it would be, was a secret as yet.

Then it was nearly dinner-time, so they went back to the house, and the four sorry-looking little hands were carefully washed and anointed with a soothing lotion.

Heatherton people approved of midday dinners, and so the hungry children sat down to an ample and satisfying meal, to which they were fully prepared to do justice.

"You know," said Aunt Rachel, as they chatted at table, "you are to take care of these gardens yourselves. Pat and Michael have all they can do, already; and though they have helpers in the busy seasons, I expect you two to weed and water your own flower-beds."

"Of course, Auntie," said Dolly; "that's what we want to do."

"Else they wouldn't be ours," chimed in Dick. "There are lots of flower-beds around the place, but these are to be our very own. And how can they be, if we don't do all the work on 'em?"

"That's right," said Aunt Rachel, approvingly. "Patrick will superintend your work, and he or Michael will keep the grass and the paths in order, but the rest is for you to do. Do you know anything about flowers?"

"Not a thing!" declared Dolly. "But I want to raise violets and carnation pinks."

"That proves you don't know much," said Aunt Abbie, laughing. "Why, those are the very things you couldn't possibly raise!"

"Why?" said Dolly, looking surprised.

“Because they are too difficult. They require hothouses, or, at least cold frames. You must content yourself with simpler blossoms; nasturtiums, phlox, asters, peonies – ”

“Oh, those are just as good,” said Dolly. “I don’t care much what flowers they are, if they’ll grow.”

“I like big plants,” said Dick. “Could I have sunflowers and hollyhocks, Aunt Rachel?”

“Yes, my boy; I’m sure you can manage those. Have a hedge at the back of your playground of those flowers, and also cosmos and goldenglow.”

After dinner they went to the library, and made lists of the flowers they would have. Aunt Abbie drew diagrams of their gardens, and advised the right kinds of flowers to grow together.

“I want you to grow up to love gardening,” said Miss Rachel, “but as you are now quite young, and very ignorant on the subject, you must begin with the simplest and easiest sorts of plants.”

Then the aunts explained how the children must plant seeds in their seed-beds, and after the tiny shoots sprang up, how they must be separated and thinned out.

“And throw away some of them!” exclaimed Dolly in dismay.

“Yes; that’s to make the others stronger and healthier plants.”

“What do we plant in our big gardens?” asked Dick.

“Well, there you can have such plants as you want. Roses, geraniums, and Canterbury Bells are good ones. And then, you transplant to those beds your seedlings that you have already started yourselves.”

“And can’t we plant any seeds in the flower beds?”

“Oh, yes; such as do not need transplanting. You can have borders of portulacca, candytuft, sweet alyssum, and such things.”

“My! it sounds grand!” said Dolly, to whom nearly all these names were new.

“Now suppose we go out there again,” said Aunt Rachel, “and see what seeds Pat has on hand. Then we’ll know what to buy for you.”

So back went the quartette, and found the playground had assumed quite a definite air.

A narrow strip of upturned earth showed the line of the hedge that was to be set out. The flower-beds and seed-beds were neatly cut in shape and properly spaded. Little stakes marked the places for the arbor poles, and white cords outlined paths that were yet to be cut.

“It doesn’t seem possible it’s ours!” said Dolly, drawing a blissful sigh of contentment.

“Now here’s some seeds as I already have,” said Pat, offering a box of packets to the children.

“Oh, can we plant some now, – right away?” asked Dick.

“Yes; let us do so,” said Aunt Abbie, who was nearly as eager as the children to get the garden started.

So they selected nasturtiums, poppies, marigolds, and morning glories from Pat’s box, and all went to work at the planting.

The aunts showed Dick and Dolly how to poke a little hole in the ground, about three inches deep, and then drop in a nasturtium seed. Then they covered it over with dirt, pressed it down lightly, and watered it.

This was an enthralling occupation, and the children worked carefully and did just as they were told. Poppies came next, and these seeds were planted quite differently. The ground was made quite smooth, and then slightly watered. Then Pat showed them how to sprinkle the fine seed scantily over the top of the ground, and not put any dirt over it at all. A thin layer of cut grass was scattered over them to keep the seeds from too much sunlight.

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