COOLIDGE SUSAN

WHAT KATY DID AT SCHOOL

Susan Coolidge

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Coolidge S.

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CHAPTER I. CONIC SECTION

It was just after that happy visit of which I told at the end of "What Katy Did," that Elsie and John made their famous excursion to Conic Section; an excursion which neither of them ever forgot, and about which the family teased them for a long time afterward.

The summer had been cool; but, as often happens after cool summers, the autumn proved unusually hot. It seemed as if the months had been playing a game, and had "changed places" all round; and as if September were determined to show that he knew how to make himself just as disagreeable as August, if only he chose to do so. All the last half of Cousin Helen's stay, the weather was excessively sultry. She felt it very much, though the children did all they could to make her comfortable, with shaded rooms, and iced water, and fans. Every evening the boys would wheel her sofa out on the porch, in hopes of coolness; but it was of no use: the evenings were as warm as the days, and the yellow dust hanging in the air made the sunshine look thick and hot. A few bright leaves appeared on the trees, but they were wrinkled, and of an ugly color. Clover said she thought they had been *boiled* red like lobsters. Altogether, the month was a trying one, and the coming of October made little difference: still the dust continued, and the heat; and the wind, when it blew, had no refreshment in it, but seemed to have passed over some great furnace which had burned out of it all life and flavor.

In spite of this, however it was wonderful to see how Katy gained and improved. Every day added to her powers. First she came down to dinner, then to breakfast. She sat on the porch in the afternoons; she poured the tea. It was like a miracle to the others, in the beginning, to watch her going about the house; but they got used to it surprisingly soon,—one does to pleasant things. One person, however, never got used to it, never took it as a matter of course; and that was Katy herself. She could not run downstairs, or out into the garden; she could not open the kitchen door to give an order, without a sense of gladness and exultation which was beyond words. The wider and more active life stimulated her in every way. Her cheeks grew round and pink, her eyes bright. Cousin Helen and papa watched this change with indescribable pleasure; and Mrs. Worrett, who dropped in to lunch one day, fairly screamed with surprise at the sight of it.

"To think of it!" she cried, "why, the last time I was here you looked as if you had took root in that chair of yours for the rest of your days, and here you are stepping around as lively as I be. Well, well! wonders will never cease. It does my eyes good to see you, Katherine. I wish your poor aunt were here to-day; that I do. How pleased she'd be?"

It is doubtful whether Aunt Izzie would have been so pleased, for the lived-in look of the best parlor would have horrified her extremely; but Katy did not recollect that just then. She was touched at the genuine kindness of Mrs. Worrett's voice, and took very willingly her offered kiss. Clover brought lemonade and grapes, and they all devoted themselves to making the poor lady comfortable. Just before she went away she said,

"How is it that I can't never get any of you to come out to the Conic Section? I'm sure I've asked you often enough. There's Elsie, now, and John, they're just the age to enjoy being in the country. Why won't you send 'em out for a week? Johnnie can feed chickens, and chase 'em, too, if she likes," she added, as Johnnie dashed just then into view, pursuing one of Phil's bantams round the house. "Tell her so, won't you, Katherine? There is lots of chickens on the farm. She can chase 'em from morning to night, if she's a mind to."

Katy thanked her, but she didn't think the children would care to go. She gave Johnnie the message, and then the whole matter passed out of her mind. The family were in low spirits that morning because of Cousin Helen's having just gone away; and Elsie was lying on the sofa fanning herself with a great palm-leaf fan.

"Oh, dear!" she sighed. "Do you suppose it's every going to be cool again? It does seem as if I couldn't bear it any longer."

"Aren't you well, darling?" inquired Katy, anxiously.

"Oh, yes! well enough," replied Elsie. "It's only this horrid heat, and never going away to where it's cooler. I keep thinking about the country, and wishing I were there feeling the wind blow. I wonder if papa wouldn't let John and me go to Conic Section, and see Mrs. Worrett. Do you think he would, if you asked him?"

"But," said Katy, amazed, "Conic Section isn't exactly country, you know. It is just out of the city,—only six miles from here. And Mrs. Worrett's house is close to the road, papa said. Do you think you'd like it, dear? It *can't* be very much cooler than this."

"Oh, yes! it can," rejoined Elsie, in a tone which was a little fretful. "It's *always* cooler on a farm. There's more room for the wind, and— oh, every thing's pleasanter! You can't think how tired I am of this hot house. Last night I hardly slept at all; and, when I did, I dreamed that I was a loaf of brown bread, and Debby was putting me into the oven to bake. It was a horrid dream. I was so glad to wake up. Won't you ask papa if we may go, Katy?"

"Why, of course I will, if you wish it so much. Only"—Katy stopped and did not finish her sentence. A vision of fat Mrs. Worrett had risen before her, and she could not help doubting if Elsie would find the farm as pleasant as she expected. But sometimes the truest kindness is in giving people their own unwise way, and Elsie's eyes looked so wistful that Katy had no heart to argue or refuse.

Dr. Carr looked doubtful when the plan was proposed to him.

"It's too hot," he said. "I don't believe the girls will like it."

"Oh, yes! we will, papa; indeed we will," pleaded Elsie and John, who had lingered near the door to learn the fate of their request.

Dr. Carr smiled at the imploring faces, but he looked a little quizzical. "Very well," he said, "you may go. Mr. Worrett is coming into town to-morrow, on some bank business. I'll send word by him; and in the afternoon, when it is cooler, Alexander can drive you out."

"Goody! Goody!" cried John, jumping up and down, while Elsie put her arms round papa's neck and gave him a hug.

"And Thursday I'll send for you," he continued.

"But, papa," expostulated Elsie, "That's only two days. Mrs. Worrett said a week."

"Yes, she said a week," chimed in John; "and she's got ever so many chickens, and I'm to feed 'em, and chase 'em as much as I like. Only it's too hot to run much," she added reflectively.

"You won't really send for us on Thursday, will you, papa?" urged Elsie, anxiously. "I'd like to stay ever and ever so long; but Mrs.

Worrett said a week."

"I shall send on Thursday," repeated Dr. Carr, in a decided tone. Then, seeing that Elsie's lip was trembling, and her eyes were full of tears, he continued: "Don't look so woeful, Pussy. Alexander shall drive out for you; but if you want to stay longer, you may send him back with a note to say what day you would like to have him come again. Will that do?"

"Oh, yes!" said Elsie, wiping her eyes; "that will do beautifully, papa. Only, it seems such a pity that Alexander should have to go twice when it's so hot; for we're perfectly sure to want to stay a week."

Papa only laughed, as he kissed her. All being settled the children began to get ready. It was quite an excitement packing the bags, and deciding what to take and what not to take. Elsie grew bright and gay with the bustle. Just to think of being in the country,—the cool green country,—made

her perfectly happy, she declared. The truth was, she was a little feverish and not quite well, and didn't know exactly how she felt or what she wanted.

The drive out was pleasant, except that Alexander upset John's gravity, and hurt Elsie's dignity very much, by inquiring, as they left the gate, "Do the little misses know where it is that they want to go?" Part of the way the road ran through woods. They were rather boggy woods; but the dense shade kept off the sun, and there was a spicy smell of evergreens and sweet fern. Elsie felt that the good time had fairly begun and her spirits rose with every turn of the wheels.

By and by they left the woods, and came out again into the sunshine. The road was dusty, and so were the fields, and the ragged sheaves of corn-stalks, which dotted them here and there, looked dusty too. Piles of dusty red apples lay on the grass, under the orchard trees. Some cows going down a lane toward their milking shed, mooed in a dispirited and thirsty way, which made the children feel thirsty also.

"I want a drink of water awfully," said John. "Do you suppose it's much farther? How long will it be before we get to Mrs. Worrett's, Alexander?"

"'Most there, miss," replied Alexander, laconically.

Elsie put her head out of the carriage, and looked eagerly round. Where was the delightful farm? She saw a big, pumpkin-colored house by the roadside, a little farther on; but surely that couldn't be it. Yes: Alexander drew up at the gate, and jumped down to lift. them out. It really was! The surprise quite took away her breath.

She looked about. There were the woods, to be sure, but half a mile away across the fields. Near the house, there were no trees at all; only some lilac bushes at one side; there was no green grass either. A gravel path took up the whole of the narrow front yard; and, what with the blazing color of the paint and the wide-awake look of the blindless windows, the house had somehow the air of standing on tip-toe and staring hard at something,—the dust in the road, perhaps; for there seemed to be nothing to stare at.

Elsie's heart sank indescribably, as she and John got very slowly out of the carryall, and Alexander, putting his arm over the fence, rapped loudly at the front door. It was some minutes before the rap was answered. Then a heavy step was heard creaking through the hall, and somebody began fumbling at an obstinate bolt, which would not move. Next, a voice which they recognized as Mrs. Worrett's called: "Isaphiny, Isaphiny, come and see if you can open this door."

"How funny!" whispered Johnnie, beginning to giggle.

"Isaphiny" seemed to be upstairs; for presently they heard her running down, after which a fresh rattle began at the obstinate bolt. But still the door did not open, and at length Mrs. Worrett put her lips to the keyhole, and asked,—

"Who is it?"

The voice sounded so hollow and ghostly, that Elsie jumped, as she answered: "It's I, Mrs. Worrett,—Elsie Carr. And Johnnie's here, too."

"Ts, ts, ts!" sounded from within, and then came a whispering; after which Mrs. Worrett put her mouth again to the keyhole, and called out:

"Go round to the back, children. I can't make this door open anyway.

It's swelled up with the damp."

"Damp!" whispered Johnnie; "why, it hasn't rained since the third week in August; papa said so yesterday."

"That's nothing, Miss Johnnie," put in Alexander, overhearing her. "Folks hereaway don't open their front doors much,—only for weddings and funerals and such like. Very likely this has stood shut these five years. I know the last time I drove Miss Carr out, before she died, it was just so; and she had to go round to the back, as you're a-doing now."

John's eyes grew wide with wonder; but there was no time to say any thing, for they had turned the corner of the house, and there was Mrs. Worrett waiting at the kitchen door to receive them. She

looked fatter than ever, Elsie thought; but she kissed them both, and said she was real glad to see a Carr in her house at last.

"It was too bad," she went on, "to keep you waiting so. But the fact is I got asleep and when you knocked, I waked up all in a daze, and for a minute it didn't come to me who it must be. Take the bags right upstairs, Isaphiny; and put them in the keeping-room chamber. How's your pa, Elsie,—and Katy? Not laid up again, I hope."

"Oh, no; she seems to get better all the time."

"That's right," responded Mrs. Worrett, heartily. "I didn't know but what, with hot weather, and company in the house, and all,—there's a chicken, Johnnie," she exclaimed, suddenly interrupting herself, as a long-legged hen ran past the door. "Want to chase it right away? You can, if you like. Or would you rather go upstairs first?"

"Upstairs, please," replied John, while Elsie went to the door, and watched Alexander driving away down the dusty road. She felt as if their last friend had deserted them. Then she and Johnnie followed Isaphiny upstairs. Mrs. Worrett never "mounted" in hot weather she told them.

The spare chamber was just under the roof. It was very hot, and smelt as if the windows had never been opened since the house was built. As soon as they were alone, Elsie ran across the room, and threw up the sash; but the moment she let go, it fell again with a crash which shook the floor and made the pitcher dance and rattle in the wash-bowl. The children were dreadfully frightened, especially when they heard Mrs. Worrett at the foot of the stairs calling to ask what was the matter.

"It's only the window," explained Elsie, going into the hall. "I'm so sorry; but it won't stay open. Something's the matter with it."

"Did you stick the nail in?" inquired Mrs. Worrett.

"The nail? No, ma'am."

"Why, how on earth did you expect it do stay up then? You young folks never see what's before your eyes. Look on the window-sill, and you'll find it. It's put there a purpose."

Elsie returned, much discomfited. She looked, and, sure enough, there was a big nail, and there was a hole in the side of the window-frame in which to stick it. This time she got the window open without accident; but a long blue paper shade caused her much embarrassment. It hung down, and kept the air from coming in. She saw no way of fastening it.

"Roll it up, and put in a pin," suggested John.

"I'm afraid of tearing the paper. Dear, what a horrid thing it is!"

Replied Elsie in a disgusted tone.

However, she stuck in a couple of pins and fastened the shade out of the way. After that, they looked about the room. It was plainly furnished, but very nice and neat. The bureau was covered with a white towel, on which stood a pincushion, with "Remember Ruth" stuck upon it in pins. John admired this very much, and felt that she could never make up her mind to spoil the pattern by taking out a pin, however great her need of one might be.

"What a high bed!" she exclaimed. "Elsie, you'll have to climb on a chair to get into it; and so shall I."

Elsie felt of it. "Feathers!" she cried a tone of horror. "O John! why did we come? What shall we do?"

"I guess we shan't mind it much," replied John, who was perfectly well, and considered these little variations on home habits rather as fun than otherwise. But Elsie gave a groan. Two nights on a feather-bed! How should she bear it!

Tea was ready in the kitchen when they went downstairs. A small fire had been lighted to boil the water. It was almost out, but the room felt stiflingly warm, and the butter was so nearly melted that Mrs. Worrett had to help it with a tea-spoon. Buzzing flies hovered above the table, and gathered thick on the plate of cake. The bread was excellent, and so were the cottage cheeses and the stewed quinces; but Elsie could eat nothing. She was in a fever of heat. Mrs. Worrett was distressed at this

want of appetite; and so was Mr. Worrett, to whom the children had just been introduced. He was a kindly-looking old man, with a bald head, who came to supper in his shirt-sleeves, and was a thin as his wife was fat.

"I'm afraid the little girl don't like her supper, Lucinda," he said.

"You must see about getting her something different for to-morrow."

"Oh! it isn't that. Every thing is very nice, only, I'm not hungry," pleaded Elsie, feeling as if she should like to cry. She did cry a little after tea, as they sat in the dusk; Mr. Worrett smoking his pipe and slapping mosquitoes outside the door, and Mrs. Worrett sleeping rather noisily in a big rocking-chair. But not even Johnnie found out that she was crying; for Elsie felt that she was the naughtiest child in the world to behave so badly when everybody was so kind to her. She repeated this to herself many times, but it didn't do much good. As often as the thought of home and Katy and papa came, a wild longing to get back to them would rush over her, and her eyes would fill again with sudden tears.

The night was very uncomfortable. Not a breath of wind was stirring, or none found its way to the stifling bed where the little sisters lay. John slept pretty well, in spite of heat and mosquitoes, but Elsie hardly closed her eyes. Once she got up and went to the window, but the blue paper shade had become unfastened, and rattled down upon her head with a sudden bump, which startled her very much. She could find no pins in the dark, so she left it hanging; whereupon it rustled and flapped through the rest of the night, and did its share toward keeping her awake. About three o'clock she fell into a doze; and it seemed only a minute after that before she waked up to find bright sunshine in the room, and half a dozen roosters crowing and calling under the windows. Her head ached violently. She longed to stay in bed, but was afraid it would be thought impolite, so she dressed and went down with Johnnie; but she looked so pale and ate so little breakfast that Mrs. Worrett was quite troubled, and said she had better not try to go out, but just lie on the lounge in the best room, and amuse herself with a book.

The lounge in the best room was covered with slippery purple chintz. It was a high lounge and very narrow. There was nothing at the end to hold the pillow in its place; so the pillow constantly tumbled off and jerked Elsie's head suddenly backward, which was not at all comfortable. Worse,—Elsie having dropped into a doze, she herself tumbled to the floor, rolling from the glassy, smooth chintz as if it had been a slope of ice. This adventure made her so nervous that she dared not go to sleep again, though Johnnie fetched two chairs, and placed them beside the sofa to hold her on. So she followed Mrs. Worretts advice, and "amused herself with a book." There were not many books in the best room. The one Elsie chose was a fat black volume called "The Complete Works of Mrs. Hannah More." Part of it was prose, and part was poetry. Elsie began with a chapter called "Hints on the Formation of the Character of a Youthful Princess." But there were a great many long words in it; so she turned to a story named "Coelebs in Search of a Wife." It was about a young gentleman who wanted to get married, but who didn't feel sure that there were any young ladies nice enough for him; so he went about making visits, first to one and then to another; and, when he had stayed a few days at a house, he would always say, "No, she won't do," and then he would go away. At last, he found a young lady who seemed the very person, who visited the poor, and got up early in the morning, and always wore white, and never forgot to wind up her watch or do her duty; and Elsie almost thought that now the difficult young gentleman must be satisfied, and say, "This is the very thing." When, lo! her attention wandered a little, and the next thing she knew she was rolling off the lounge for the second time, in company with Mrs. Hannah More. They landed in the chairs, and Johnnie ran and picked them both up. Altogether, lying on the best parlor sofa was not very restful; and as the day went on, and the sun beating on the blindless windows made the room hotter, Elsie grew continually more and more feverish and homesick and disconsolate.

Meanwhile Johnnie was kept in occupation by Mrs. Worrett, who had got the idea firmly fixed in her mind, that the chief joy of a child's life was to chase chickens. Whenever a hen fluttered past the kitchen door, which was about once in three minutes, she would cry: "Here, Johnnie, here's another

chicken for you to chase;" and poor Johnnie would feel obliged to dash out into the sun. Being a very polite little girl, she did not like to say to Mrs. Worrett that running in the heat was disagreeable: so by dinner-time she was thoroughly tired out, and would have been cross if she had known how; but she didn't— Johnnie was never cross. After dinner it was even worse; for the sun was hotter, and the chickens, who didn't mind sun, seemed to be walking all the time. "Hurry, Johnnie, here's another," came so constantly, that at last Elsie grew desperate, got up, and went to the kitchen with a languid appeal: "Please, Mrs. Worrett, won't you let Johnnie stay by me, because my head aches so hard?" After that, Johnnie had a rest; for Mrs. Worrett was the kindest of women, and had no idea that she was not amusing her little guest in the most delightful manner.

A little before six, Elsie's head felt better; and she and Johnnie put on their hats, and went for a walk in the garden. There was not much to see: beds of vegetables,—a few currant bushes,—that was all. Elsie was leaning against a paling, and trying to make out why the Worrett house had that queer tiptoe expression, when a sudden loud grunt startled her, and something touched the top of her head. She turned, and there was an enormous pig, standing on his hind legs, on the other side of the paling. He was taller than Elsie, as he stood thus, and it was his cold nose which had touched her head. Somehow, appearing in this unexpected way, he seemed to the children like some dreadful wild beast. They screamed with fright, and fled to the house, from which Elsie never ventured to stir again during their visit. John chased chickens at intervals, but it was a doubtful pleasure; and all the time she kept a wary eye on the distant pig.

That evening, while Mrs. Worrett slept and Mr. Worrett smoked outside the door, Elsie felt so very miserable that she broke down altogether. She put her head in Johnnie's lap, as they sat together in the darkest corner of the room, and sobbed and cried, making as little noise as she possibly could. Johnnie comforted her with soft pats and strokings; but did not dare to say a word, for fear Mrs. Worrett should wake up and find them out.

When the morning came, Elsie's one thought was, would Alexander come for them in the afternoon? All day she watched the clock and the road with feverish anxiety. Oh! if papa had changed his mind,—had decided to let them stay for a week at Conic Section,—what should she do? It was just possible to worry through and keep alive till afternoon, she thought; but if they were forced to spend another night in that feather-bed, with those mosquitoes, hearing the blue shad rattle and quiver hour after hour,—she should die, she was sure she should die!

But Elsie was not called upon to die, or even to discover how easy it is to survive a little discomfort. About five, her anxious watch was rewarded by the appearance of a cloud of dust, out of which presently emerged old Whitey's ears and the top of the well-known carryall. They stopped at the gate. There was Alexander, brisk and smiling, very glad to see his "little misses" again, and to find them so glad to go home. Mrs. Worrett, however, did not discover that they were glad; no indeed! Elsie and John were much too polite for that. They thanked the old lady, and said good-by so prettily that, after they were gone, she told Mr. Worrett that it hadn't been a bit of trouble having them there, and she hoped they would come again; they enjoyed every thing so much; only it was a pity that Elsie looked so peaked. And at that very moment Elsie was sitting on the floor of the carryall, with her head in John's lap, crying and sobbing for joy that the visit was over and that she was on the way home. "If only I live to get there," she said, "I'll never, no, never, go into the country again!" which was silly enough; but we must forgive her because she was half sick.

Ah, how charming home did look, with the family grouped in the shady porch, Katy in her white wrapper, Clover with rose-buds in her belt, and everybody ready to welcome and pet the little absentees! There was much hugging and kissing, and much to tell of what had happened in the two days: how a letter had come from Cousin Helen; how Daisy White had four kittens as white as herself; how Dorry had finished his water-wheel,—a wheel which turned in the bath-tub, and was "really ingenious," papa said; and Phil had "swapped" one of his bantam chicks for on of Eugene Slack's Bramapootras. It was not till they were all seated round the tea-table that anybody demanded an

account of the visit. Elsie felt this a relief, and was just thinking how delicious every thing was, from the sliced peaches to the clinking ice in the milk-pitcher, when papa put the dreaded question,—

"Well, Elsie, so you decided to come, after all. How was it? Why didn't you stay your week out? You look pale, it seems to me. Have you been enjoying yourself too much? Tell us all about it."

Elsie looked at papa, and papa looked at Elsie. Dr. Carr's eyes twinkled just a little, but otherwise he was perfectly grave. Elsie began to speak, then to laugh, then to cry, and the explanation, when it came, was given in a mingled burst of all three.

"O papa, it was horrid! That is, Mrs. Worrett was just as kind as could be, but so fat; and oh, such a pig! I never imagined such a pig! And the calico on that horrid sofa was so slippery that I rolled off five times, and once I hurt myself real badly. And we had a feather-bed; and I was so homesick that I cried all the evening."

"That must have been gratifying to Mrs. Worrett," put in Dr. Carr.

"Oh! she didn't know it, papa. She was asleep, and snoring so that nobody could hear. And the flies!—such flies, Katy!—and the mosquitoes, and our window wouldn't open till I put in a nail. I am so glad to get home! I never want to go into the country again, never, never! Oh, if Alexander hadn't come!—why, Clover, what are you laughing for? And Dorry,—I think it's very unkind," and Elsie ran to Katy, hid her face, and began to cry.

"Never mind, darling, they didn't mean to be unkind. Papa, her hands are quite hot; you must give her something." Katy's voice shook a little; but she would not hurt Elsie's feeling by showing that she was amused. Papa gave Elsie "something" before she went to bed,– a very mild dose I fancy; for doctors' little girls, as a general rule, do not take medicine, and next day she was much better. As the adventures of the Conic Section visit leaked out bit by bit, the family laughed till it seemed as if they would never stop. Phil was forever enacting the pig, standing on his triumphant hind legs, and patting Elsie's head with his nose; and many and many a time, "It will end like your visit to Mrs. Worrett," proved a useful check when Elsie was in a self-willed mood and bent on some scheme which for the moment struck her as delightful. For one of the good things about our childish mistakes is, that each one teaches us something; and so, blundering on, we grow wiser, till, when the time comes, we are ready to take our places among the wonderful grown-up people who never make mistakes.

CHAPTER II. A NEW YEAR AND A NEW PLAN

When summer lingers on into October, it often seems as if winter, anxious to catch a glimpse of her, hurries a little; and so people are cheated out of their autumn. It was so that year. Almost as soon as it ceased to be hot it began to be cold. The leaves, instead of drifting away in soft, dying colors, like sunset clouds, turned yellow all at once; and were whirled off the trees in a single gusty night, leaving every thing bare and desolate. Thanksgiving came; and before the smell of the turkey was fairly out of the house, it was time to hang up stockings and dress the Christmas tree. They had a tree that year in honor of Katy's being downstairs. Cecy, who had gone away to boarding-school, came home; and it was all delightful, except that the days flew too fast. Clover said it seemed to her very queer that there was so much less time than usual in the world. She couldn't imagine what had become of it: there used to be plenty. And she was certain that Dorry must have been tinkering all the clocks,—they struck so often.

It was just after New Year that Dr. Carr walked in one day with a letter in his hand, and remarked: "Mr. and Mrs. Page are coming to stay with us."

"Mr. and Mrs. Page," repeated Katy; "who are they, papa? Did I ever see them?"

"Once, when you were four years old, and Elsie a baby. Of chouse you don't remember it."

"But who are they, papa?"

"Mrs. Page was your dear mother's second cousin; and at one time she lived in your grandfather's family, and was like a sister to mamma and Uncle Charles. It is a good many years since I have seen her. Mr. Page is a railroad engineer. He is coming this way on business, and they will stop for a few days with us. Your Cousin Olivia writes that she is anxious to see all you children. Have every thing as nice as you can, Katy."

"Of course, I will. What day are the coming?"

"Thursday,—no, Friday," replied Dr. Carr, consulting the letter, "Friday evening, at half-past six. Order something substantial for tea that night, Katy. They'll be hungry after traveling."

Katy worked with a will for the next two days. Twenty times, at least, she went into the blue room to make sure that nothing was forgotten; repeating, as if it had been a lesson in geography: "Bath towels, face towels, matches, soap, candles, cologne, extra blanket, ink." A nice little fire was lighted in the bedroom on Friday afternoon, and a big, beautiful one in the parlor, which looked very pleasant with the lamp lit and Clover's geraniums and china roses in the window. The tea- table was set with the best linen and the pink-and-white china. Debby's muffins were very light. The crab-apple jelly came out of its mould clear and whole, and the cold chicken looked appetizing, with its green wreath of parsley. There was stewed potato, too, and, of course, oysters. Everybody in Burnet had oysters for tea when company was expected. They were counted a special treat; because they were rather dear, and could not always be procured. Burnet was a thousand miles from the sea, so the oysters were of the tin- can variety. The cans gave the oysters a curious taste,—tinny, or was it more like solder? At all events, Burnet people liked it, and always insisted that it was a striking improvement on the flavor which oysters have on their native shores. Every thing was as nice as could be, when Katy stood in the dining-room to take a last look at her arrangements; and she hoped papa would be pleased, and that mamma's cousin would think her a good housekeeper.

"I don't want to have on my other jacket," observed Phil, putting his head in at the door. "Need I? This is nice."

"Let me see," said Katy, gently turning him round. "Well, it does pretty well; but I think I'd rather you should put on the other, if you don't mind much. We want every thing as nice as possible, you know; because this is papa's company, and he hardly ever has any."

"Just one little sticky place isn't much," said Phil, rather gloomily, wetting his finger a rubbing at a shiny place on his sleeve. "Do you really thing I'd better? Well, then I will."

"That's a dear,"—kissing him. "Be quick, Philly, for it's almost time they were here. And please tell Dorry to make haste. It's ever so long since he went upstairs."

"Dorry's an awful prink," remarked Phil, confidentially. "He looks in the glass, and makes faces if he can't get his parting straight. I wouldn't care so much about my clothes for a good deal. It's like a girl. Jim Slack says a boy who shines his hair up like that, never'll get to be president, not if he lives a thousand years."

"Well," said Katy, laughing: "it's something to be clean, even if you can't be president." She was not at all alarmed by Dorry's recent reaction in favor of personal adornment. He came down pretty soon, very spick and span in his best suit, and asked her to fasten the blue ribbon under his collar, which she did most obligingly; though he was very particular as to the size of the bows and length of the ends, and made her tie and retie more than once. She had just arranged it to suit him when a carriage stopped.

"There they are," she cried. "Run and open the door, Dorry."

Dorry did so; and Katy, following, found papa ushering in a tall gentleman, and a lady who was not tall, but whose Roman nose and long neck, and general air of style and fashion, made her look so. Katy bent quite over to be kissed; but for all that she felt small and young and unformed, as the eyes of mamma's cousin looked her over and over, and through and through, and Mrs. Page said,—

"Why, Philip! is it possible that this tall girl is one of yours? Dear me! how time flies! I was thinking of the little creatures I saw when I was here last. And this other great creature can't be Elsie? That mite of a baby! Impossible! I cannot realize it. I really cannot realize it in the least."

"Won't you come to the fire, Mrs. Page?" said Katy, rather timidly.

"Don't call me Mrs. Page, my dear. Call me Cousin Olivia." Then the new-comer rustled into the parlor, where Johnnie and Phil were waiting to be introduced; and again she remarked that she "couldn't realize it." I don't know why Mrs. Page's not realizing it should have made Katy uncomfortable; but it did.

Supper went off well. The guests ate and praised; and Dr. Carr looked pleased, and said: "We think Katy an excellent housekeeper for her age;" at which Katy blushed and was delighted, till she caught Mrs. Page's eyes fixed upon her, with a look of scrutiny and amusement, whereupon she felt awkward and ill at ease. It was so all the evening. Mamma's cousin was entertaining and bright, and told lively stories; but the children felt that she was watching them, and passing judgment on their ways. Children are very quick to suspect when older people hold within themselves these little private courts of inquiry, and they always resent it.

Next morning Mrs. Page sat by while Katy washed the breakfast things, fed the birds, and did various odd jobs about the room and house. "My dear," she said at last, "what a solemn girl you are! I should think from your face that you were at least five and thirty. Don't you ever laugh or frolic, like other girls your age? Why, my Lilly, who is four months older than you, is a perfect child still; impulsive as a baby, bubbling over with fun from morning till night."

"I've been shut up a good deal," said Katy, trying to defend herself; "but I didn't know I was solemn."

"My dear, that's the very thing I complain of: you don't know it! You are altogether ahead of your age. It's very bad for you, in my opinion. All this housekeeping and care, for young girls like you and Clover, is wrong and unnatural. I don't like it; indeed I don't."

"Oh! housekeeping doesn't hurt me a bit," protested Katy, trying to smile. "We have lovely times; indeed we do, Cousin Olivia."

Cousin Olivia only pursed up her mouth, and repeated: "It's wrong, my dear. It's unnatural. It's not the thing for you. Depend upon it, it's not the thing."

This was unpleasant; but what was worse had Katy known it, Mrs. Page attacked Dr. Carr upon the subject. He was quite troubled to learn that she considered Katy grave and careworn, and unlike what girls of her age should be. Katy caught him looking at her with a puzzled expression.

"What is it, dear papa? Do you want anything?"

"No, child, nothing. What are you doing there? Mending the parlor curtain, eh? Can't old Mary attend to that, and give you a chance to frisk about with the other girls?"

"Papa! As if I wanted to frisk! I declare you're as bad as Cousin Olivia. She's always telling me that I ought to bubble over with mirth. I don't wish to bubble. I don't know how."

"I'm afraid you don't," said Dr. Carr, with an odd sigh, which set Katy to wondering. What should papa sigh for? Had she done any thing wrong? She began to rack her brains and memory as to whether it could be this or that; or, if not, what could it be? Such needless self-examination does no good. Katy looked more "solemn" than ever after it.

Altogether, Mrs. Page was not a favorite in the family. She had every intention of being kind to her cousin's children, "so dreadfully in want of a mother, poor things!" but she could not hide the fact that their ways puzzled and did not please her; and the children detected this, as children always will. She and Mr. Page were very polite. They praised the housekeeping, and the excellent order or every thing, and said there never were better children in the world than John and Dorry and Phil. But, through all, Katy perceived the hidden disapproval; and she couldn't help feeling glad when the visit ended, and they went away.

With their departure, matters went back to their old train, and Katy forgot her disagreeable feelings. Papa seemed a little grave and preoccupied; but the doctors often are when they have bad cases to think of, and nobody noticed it particularly, or remarked that several letters came from Mrs. Page, and nothing was heard of their contents, except that "Cousin Olivia sent her love." So it was a shock, when one day papa called Katy into the study to tell of a new plan. She knew at once that it was something important when she heard his voice: it sounded so grave. Beside, he said "My daughter," he began, "I want to talk to you about something which I have been thinking of. How would you and Clover like going away to school together?"

"To school? To Mrs. Knight's?"

"No, not to Mrs. Knight's. To a boarding-school at the East, where Lilly Page has been for two years. Didn't you hear Cousin Olivia speak of it when she was here?"

"I believe I did. But, papa, you won't really?"

"Yes, I think so," said Dr. Carr, gently. "Listen, Katy, and don't feel so badly, my dear child. I've thought the plan over carefully; and it seems to me a good one, though I hate to part from you. It is pretty much as your cousin says: these home-cares, which I can't take from you while you are at home, are making you old before your time. Heaven knows I don't want to turn you into a silly giggling miss; but I should like you to enjoy your youth while you have it, and not grow middle-aged before you are twenty."

"What is the name of the school?" asked Katy. Her voice sound a good deal like a sob.

"The girls call it 'The Nunnery.' It is at Hillsover, on the Connecticut River, pretty cold, I fancy; but the air is sure to be good and bracing. That is one thing which has inclined me to the plan. The climate is just what you need."

"Hillsover? Isn't there a college there too?"

"Yes: Arrowmouth College. I believe there is always a college where there is a boarding-school; though why, I can't for the life of me imagine. That's neither here nor there, however. I'm not afraid of your getting into silly scrapes, as girls sometimes do."

"College scrapes? Why, how could I. We don't have any thing to do with the college, do we?" said Katy, opening her candid eyes with such a wondering stare that Dr. Carr laughed and replied: "No, my dear, not a thing."

"The term opens the third week in April," he went on. "You must begin to get ready at once. Mrs. Hall has just fitted out Cecy: so she can tell you what you will need. You'd better consult her, to-morrow."

"But, papa," cried Katy, beginning to realize it, "what are *you* going to do? Elsie's a darling, but she's so very little. I don't see how you can possibly manage. I'm sure you'll miss us, and so will the children."

"I rather think we shall," said Dr. Carr, with a smile, which ended in a sigh; "but we shall do very well, Katy; never fear. Miss Finch will see to us."

"Miss Finch? Do you mean Mrs. Knight's sister-in-law?"

"Yes. Her mother died in the summer; so she has no particular home now, and is glad to come for a year and keep house for us. Mrs. Knight says she is a good manager; and I dare say she'll fill your place sufficiently well, as far as that goes. We can't expect her to be *you*, you know: that would be unreasonable." And Dr. Carr put his arm round Katy, and kissed her so fondly that she was quite overcome and clung to him, crying,—

"O papa! don't make us go. I'll frisk, and be as young as I can, and not grow middle-aged or any thing disagreeable, if only you'll let us stay. Never mind what Cousin Olivia says; she doesn't know. Cousin Helen wouldn't say so, I'm sure."

"On the contrary, Helen thinks well of the plan; only she wishes the school were nearer," said Dr. Carr. "No, Katy, don't coax. My mind is made up. It will do you and Clover both good, and once you are settled at Hillsover, you'll be very happy, I hope."

When papa spoke in this decided tone, it was never any use to urge him. Katy knew this, and ceased her pleadings. She went to find Clover and tell her the news, and the two girls had a hearty cry together. A sort of "clearing-up shower" it turned out to be; for when once they had wiped their eyes, every thing looked brighter, and they began to see a pleasant side to the plan.

"The travelling part of it will be very nice," pronounced Clover.

"We never went so far away from home before."

Elsie, who was still looking very woeful, burst into tears afresh at this remark.

"Oh, don't darling!" said Katy. "Think how pleasant it will be to send letters, and to get them from us. I shall write to you every Saturday. Run for the big atlas,—there's a dear, and let us see where we are going."

Elsie brought the atlas; and the three heads bent eagerly over it, as Clover traced the route of the journey with her forefinger. How exciting it looked! There was the railroad, twisting and curving over half-a-dozen States. The black dots which followed it were towns and villages, all of which they should see. By and by the road made a bend, and swept northward by the side of the Connecticut River and toward the hills. They had heard how beautiful the Connecticut valley is.

"Only think! we shall be close to it," remarked Clover; "and we shall see the hills. I suppose they are very high, a great deal higher than the hill at Bolton."

"I hope so," laughed Dr. Carr, who came into the room just then. The hill at Bolton was one of his favorite jokes. When mamma first came to Burnet, she had paid a visit to some friends at Bolton, and one day, when they were all out walking, they asked her if she felt strong enough to go to the top of the hill. Mamma was used to hills, so she said yes, and walked on, very glad to find that there was a hill in that flat country, but wondering a little why they did not see it. At last she asked where it was, and, behold, they had just reached the top! The slope had been so gradual that she had never found out that they were going uphill at all. Dr. Carr had told this story to the children, but had never been able to make them see the joke very clearly. In fact, when Clover went to Bolton, she was quite struck with the hill: it was so much higher than the sand-bank which bordered the lake at Burnet.

There was a great deal to do to make the girls ready for school by the third week in April. Mrs. Hall was very kind, and her advice was sensible; though, except for Dr. Carr, the girls would hardly have had furs and flannels enough for so cold a place as Hillsover. Every thing for winter as well as for summer had to be thought of; for it had been arranged that the girls should not come home for the autumn vacation, but should spend it with Mrs. Page. This was the hardest thing about the plan. Katy begged very hard for Christmas; but when she learned that it would take three days to come

and three days to go, and that the holidays lasted less than a week, she saw it was of no use, and gave up the idea, while Elsie tried to comfort herself by planning a Christmas-box. The preparations kept them so busy that there was no time for any thing else. Mrs. Hall was always wanting them to go with her to shops, or Miss Petingill demanding that they should try on linings, and so the days flew by. At last all was ready. The nice half-dozens of pretty underclothes came home from the sewing-machine woman's, and were done up by Bridget, who dropped many a tear into the bluing water, at the thought of the young ladies going away. Mrs. Hall, who was a good packer, put the things into the new trunks. Everybody gave the girls presents, as if they had been brides starting on a wedding journey.

Papa's was a watch for each. They were not new, but the girls thought them beautiful. Katy's had belonged to her mother. It was large and old-fashioned, with a finely wrought case. Clover's, which had been her grandmother's, was larger still. It had a quaint ornament on the back,—a sort of true-love knot, done in gold of different tints. The girls were excessively pleased with these watches. They wore them with guard-chains of black watered ribbon, and every other minute they looked to see what the time was.

Elsie had been in papa's confidence, so her presents were watch cases, embroidered on perforated paper. Johnnie gave Katy a case of pencils, and Clover a pen-knife with a pearl handle. Dorry and Phil clubbed to buy a box of note-paper and envelopes, which the girls were requested to divide between them. Miss Petingill contributed a bottle of ginger balsam, and a box of opodeldoc salve, to be used in case of possible chilblains. Old Mary's offering was a couple of needle-books, full of bright sharp needles.

"I wouldn't give you scissors," she said; "but you can't cut love—or, for the matter of that, any thing else—with a needle."

Miss Finch, the new housekeeper, arrived a few days before they started: so Katy had time to take her over the house and explain all the different things she wanted done and not done, to secure papa's comfort and the children's. Miss Finch was meek and gentle. She seemed glad of a comfortable home. And Katy felt that she would be kind to the boys, and not fret Debby, and drive her into marrying Alexander and going away,—an event which Aunt Izzie had been used to predict. Now that all was settled, she and Clover found themselves looking forward to the change with pleasure. There was something new and interesting about it which excited their imaginations.

The last evening was a melancholy one. Elsie had been too much absorbed in the preparations to realize her loss; but, when it came to locking the trunks, her courage gave way altogether. She was in such a state of affliction that everybody else became afflicted too; and there is no knowing what would have happened, had not a parcel arrived by express and distracted their attention. The parcel was from Cousin Helen, whose things, like herself, had a knack of coming at the moment when most wanted. It contained two pretty silk umbrellas—one brown, and one dark-green, with Katy's initials on one handle and Clover's on the other. Opening these treasures, and exclaiming over them, helped the family through the evening wonderfully; and next morning there was such a bustle of getting off that nobody had time to cry.

After the last kisses had been given, and Philly, who had climbed on the horse-block, was clamoring for "one more,—just one more," Dr. Carr, looking at the sober faces, was struck by a bright idea, and, calling Alexander, told him to hurry old Whitey into the carryall, and drive the children down to Willett's Point, that they might wave there handkerchiefs to the boat as she went by. This suggestion worked like a charm on the spirits of the party. Phil began to caper, and Elsie and John ran in to get their hats. Half an hour later, when the boat rounded the point, there stood the little crew, radiant with smiles, fluttering the handkerchiefs and kissing their hands as cheerfully as possible. It was a pleasant last look to the two who stood beside papa on the deck; and, as they waved back their greetings to the little ones, and then looked forward across the blue water to the unknown places they were going to see, Katy and Clover felt that the new life opened well, and promised to be very interesting indeed.

CHAPTER III. ON THE WAY

The journey from Burnet to Hillsover was a very long one. It took the greater part of three days, and as Dr. Carr was in a hurry to get back to his patients, they travelled without stopping; spending the first night on the boat, and the second on a railroad train. Papa found this tiresome; but the girls, to whom every thing was new, thought it delightful. They enjoyed their state-room, with its narrow shelves of beds, as much as if it had been a baby house, and they two children playing in it. To tuck themselves away for the night in a car-section seemed the greatest fun in the world. When older people fretted, they laughed. Every thing was interesting, from the telegraph poles by the wayside to the faces of their fellow-passengers. It amused them to watch people, and make up stories about them,—where they were going, and what relation they could be to each other. The strange people, in their turn, cast curious glances toward the bright, happy-faced sisters; but Katy and Clover did not mind that, or, in fact, notice it. They were too much absorbed to think of themselves, or the impression they were making on others.

It was early on the third morning that the train, puffing and shrieking, ran into the Springfield depot. Other trains stood waiting; and there was such a chorus of snorts and whistles, and such clouds of smoke, that Katy was half frightened. Papa, who was half asleep, jumped up, and told the girls to collect their bags and books; for they were to breakfast here, and to meet Lilly Page, who was going on to Hillsover with them.

"Do you suppose she is here already?" asked Katy, tucking the railway guide into the shawl-strap, and closing her bag with a snap.

"Yes: we shall meet her at the Massasoit. She and her father were to pass the night there."

The Massasoit was close at hand, and in less then five minutes the girls and papa were seated at a table in its pleasant dining-room. They were ordering their breakfast, when Mr. Page came in, accompanied by his daughter,—a pretty girl, with light hair, delicate, rather sharp features, and her mother's stylish ease of manner. Her travelling dress was simple, but had the finish which a French dressmaker knows how to give to a simple thing; and all its appointments—boots, hat, gloves, collar, neck ribbon—were so perfect, each in its way, that Clover, glancing down at her own gray alpaca, and then at Katy's, felt suddenly countrified and shabby.

"Well, Lilly, here they are: here are your cousins," said Mr. Page, giving the girls a cordial greeting. Lilly only said, "How do you do?" Clover saw her glancing at the gray alpacas, and was conscious of a sudden flush. But perhaps Lilly looked at something inside the alpaca; for after a minute her manner changed, and became more friendly.

"Did you order waffles?" she asked.

"Waffles? no, I think not," replied Katy.

"Oh! why not? Don't you know how celebrated they are for waffles at this hotel? I thought everybody knew *that*." Then she tinkled her fork against her glass, and, when the waiter came, said, "Waffles, please," with an air which impressed Clover extremely. Lilly seemed to her like a young lady in a story,—so elegant and self-possessed. She wondered if all the girls at Hillsover were going to be like her?

The waffles came, crisp and hot, with delicious maple syrup to eat on them; and the party made a satisfactory breakfast. Lilly, in spite of all her elegance, displayed a wonderful appetite. "You see," she explained to Clover, "I don't expect to have another decent thing to eat till next September,—not a thing; so I'm making the most of this." Accordingly she disposed of nine waffles, in quick succession, before she found time to utter any thing farther, except "Butter, please," or, "May I trouble you for the molasses?" As she swallowed the last morsel, Dr. Carr, looking at his watch, said that it was time to start for the train; and they set off. As they crossed the street, Katy was surprised to see that Lilly,

who had seemed quite happy only a minute before, had begun to cry. After they reached the car, her tears increased to sobs: she grew almost hysterical.

"Oh! don't make me go, papa," she implored, clinging to her father's arm. "I shall be so homesick! It will kill me; I know it will. Please let me stay. Please let me go home with you."

"Now, my darling," protested Mr. Page, "this is foolish; you know it is."

"I can't help it," blubbered Lilly. "I ca—n't help it. Oh! don't make me go. Don't, papa dear. I ca—n't bear it."

Katy and Clover felt embarrassed during this scene. They had always been used to considering tears as things to be rather ashamed of,– to be kept back, if possible; or, if not, shed in private corners, in dark closets, or behind the bed in the nursery. To see the stylish Lilly crying like a baby in the midst of a railway carriage, with strangers looking on, quite shocked them. It did not last long, however. The whistle sounded; the conductor shouted, "All aboard!" and Mr. Page, giving Lilly a last kiss, disengaged her clinging arms, put her into the seat beside Clover, and hurried out of the car. Lilly sobbed loudly for a few seconds; then she dried her eyes, lifted her head, adjusted her veil and the wrists of her three- buttoned gloves, and remarked,—

"I always go on in this way. Ma says I am a real cry-baby; and I suppose I am. I don't see how people can be calm and composed when they're leaving home, do you? You'll be just as bad to-morrow, when you come to say good-by to your papa."

"Oh! I hope not," said Katy. "Because papa would feel so badly."

Lilly stared. "I shall think you real cold-hearted if you don't," she said, in an offended tone.

Katy took no notice of the tone; and before long Lilly recovered from her pettishness, and began to talk about the school. Katy and Clover asked eager questions. They were eager to hear all that Lily could tell.

"You'll adore Mrs. Florence," she said. "All the girls do. She's the most fascinating woman! She does just what she likes with everybody. Why, even the students think her perfectly splendid, and yet she's just as strict as she can be."

"Strict with the students?" asked Clover, looking puzzled.

"No; strict with us girls. She never lets any one call, unless it's a brother or a first cousin; and then you have to have a letter from you parents, asking permission. I wanted ma to write and say that George Hickman might call on me. He isn't a first cousin exactly, but his father married pa's sister-in-law's sister. So it's just as good. But ma was real mean about it. She says I'm too young to have gentlemen coming to see me! I can't think why. Ever so many girls have them, who are younger than I."

"Which Row are you going to room in?" she went on.

"I don't know. Nobody told us that there were any rows."

"Oh, yes! Shaker Row and Quaker Row and Attic Row. Attic Row is the nicest, because it's highest up, and furthest away from Mrs. Florence.

My room is in Attic Row. Annie Silsbie and I engaged it last term.

You'll be in Quaker Row, I guess. Most of the new girls are."

"Is that a nice row?" asked Clover, greatly interested.

"Pretty nice. It isn't so good as Attic, but it's ever so much better than Shaker; Because there you're close to Mrs. Florence, and can't have a bit of fun without her hearing you. I'd try to get the end room, if I were you. Mary Andrews and I had it once. There is a splendid view of Berry Searles's window."

"Berry Searles?"

"Yes; President Searles, you know; his youngest son. He's an elegant fellow. All the girls are cracked about him,—perfectly cracked! The president's house is next door to the Nunnery, you know; and Berry rooms at the very end of the back building, just opposite Quaker Row. It used to be such fun! He'd sit at his window, and we'd sit at ours, in silent study hour, you know; and he'd pretend to

read, and all the time keep looking over the top of his book at us, and trying to make us laugh. Once Mary did laugh right out; and Miss Jane heard her, and came in. But Berry is just as quick as a flash, and he ducked down under the window-sill; so she didn't see him. It was such fun!"

"Who's Miss Jane?" asked Katy.

"The horridest old thing. She's Mrs. Florence's niece, and engaged to a missionary. Mrs. Florence keeps her on purpose to spy us girls, and report when we break the rules. Oh, those rules! Just wait till you come to read 'em over. They're nailed up on all the doors,– thirty-two of them, and you can't help breaking 'em if you try ever so much."

"What are they? what sort of rules?" cried Katy and Clover in a breath.

"Oh! about being punctual to prayers, and turning you mattress, and smoothing over the under-sheet before you leave your room, and never speaking a word in the hall, or in private study hour, and hanging your towel on your own nail in the wash-room, and all that."

"Wash-room? what *do* you mean?" said Katy, aghast.

"At the head of Quaker Row, you know. All the girls wash there, except on Saturdays when they go to the bath-house. You have your own bowl and soap-dish, and a hook for you towel. Why, what's the matter? How big your eyes are!"

"I never heard any thing so horrid!" cried Katy, when she had recovered her breath. "Do you really mean that girls don't have wash-stands in their own rooms?"

"You'll get used to it. All the girls do," responded Lilly.

"I don't want to get used to it," said Katy, resolving to appeal to papa; but papa had gone into the smoking-car, and she had to wait. Meantime Lilly went on talking.

"If you have that end room in Quaker Row, you'll see all the fun that goes on at commencement time. Mrs. Searles always has a big party, and you can look right in, and watch the people and the supper-table, just as if you were there. Last summer, Berry and Alpheus Seccomb got a lot of cakes and mottoes from the table and came out into the yard, and threw them up one by one to Rose Red and her room-mate. They didn't have the end room, though; but the one next to it."

"What a funny name!—Rose Red," said Clover.

"Oh! her real name is Rosamond Redding; but the girls call her Rose Red. She's the greatest witch in the school; not exactly pretty, you know, but sort of killing and fascinating. She's always getting into the most awful scrapes. Mrs. Florence would had expelled her long ago, if she hadn't been such a favorite; and Mr. Redding's daughter, beside. He's a member of Congress, you know, and all that; and Mrs. Florence is quite proud of having Rose in her school.

"Berry Searles is so funny!" she continued. "His mother is a horrid old thing, and always interfering with him. Sometimes when he has a party of fellows in his room, and they're playing cards, we can see her coming with her candle through the house; and when she gets to his door, she tries it, and then she knocks, and calls out, 'Abernathy, my son!' And the fellows whip the cards into their pockets, and stick the bottles under the table, and get out their books and dictionaries like a flash; and when Berry unlocks the door, there they sit, studying away; and Mrs. Searles looks so disappointed! I thought I should die one night, Mary Andrews and I laughed so."

I verily believe that if Dr. Carr had been present at this conversation, he would have stopped at the next station, and taken the girls back to Burnet. But he did not return from the smoking-car till the anecdotes about Berry were finished, and Lilly had begun again on Mrs. Florence.

"She's a sort of queen, you know. Everybody minds her. She's tall, and always dresses beautifully. Her eyes are lovely; but, when she gets angry, they're perfectly awful. Rose Red says she'd rather face a mad bull any day than Mrs. Florence in a fury; and Rose ought to know, for she's had more reprimands than any girl in school."

"How many girls are there?" inquired Dr. Carr.

"There were forty-eight last term. I don't know how many there'll be this, for they say Mrs. Florence is going to give up. It's she who makes the school so popular."

All this time the train was moving northward. With every mile the country grew prettier. Spring had not fairly opened; but the grass was green, and the buds on the tress gave a tender mist-like color to the woods. The road followed the river, which here and there turned upon itself in long links and windings. Ranges of blue hills closed the distance. Now and then a nearer mountain rose, single and alone, from the plain. The air was cool, and full of brilliant zest, which the Western girls had never before tasted. Katy felt as if she were drinking champagne. She and Clover flew from window to window, exclaiming with such delight that Lilly was surprised.

"I can't see what there is to make such a fuss about," she remarked.

"That's only Deerfield. It's quite a small place."

"But how pretty it looks, nestled in among the hills! Hills are lovely, Clover, aren't they?"

"These hills are nothing. You should see the White Mountains," said the experienced Lilly. "Ma and I spent three weeks at the Profile House last vacation. It was perfectly elegant."

In the course of the afternoon, Katy drew papa away to a distant seat, and confided her distress about the wash-stands.

"Don't you think it is horrid, papa? Aunt Izzie always said that it isn't lady-like not to take a sponge-bath every morning; but how can we, with forty-eight girls in the room? I don't see what we are going to do."

"I fancy we can arrange it; don't be distressed, my dear," replied Dr. Carr. And Katy was satisfied; for when papa undertook to arrange things, they were very apt to be done.

It was almost evening when they reached their final stopping place.

"Now, two miles in the stage, and then we're at the horrid old Nunnery," said Lilly. "Ugh! look at that snow. It never melts here till long after it's all gone at home. How I do hate this station! I'm going to be awfully homesick: I know I am."

But just then she caught sight of the stagecoach, which stood waiting; and her mood changed, for the stage was full of girls who had come by the other train.

"Hurrah! there's Mary Edwards and Mary Silver," she exclaimed; "and I declare, Rose Red! O you precious darling! how do you do?" Scrambling up the steps, who plunged at a girl with waving hair, and a rosy, mischievous face; and began kissing her with effusion.

Rose Red did not seem equally enchanted.

"Well, Lilly, how are you?" she said, and then went on talking to a girl who sat by her side, and whose hand she held; while Lilly rushed up and down the line, embracing and being embraced. She did not introduce Katy and Clover; and, as papa was outside, on the driver's box, they felt a little lonely, and strange. All the rest were chattering merrily, and were evidently well acquainted: they were the only ones left out.

Clover watched Rose Red, to whose face she had taken a fancy. It made her think of a pink carnation, or of a twinkling wild rose, with saucy whiskers of brown calyx. Whatever she said or did seemed full of a flavor especially her own. Here eyes, which were blue, and not very large, sparkled with fun and mischief. Her cheeks were round and soft, like a baby's; when she laughed, two dimples broke their pink, and, and made you want to laugh too. A cunning white throat supported this pretty head, as a stem supports a flower; and, altogether, she was like a flower, except that flowers don't talk, and she talked all the time. What she said seemed droll, for the girls about here were in fits of laughter; but Clover only caught a word now and then, the stage made such a noise.

Suddenly Rose Red leaned forward, and touched Clover's hand.

"What's your name?" she said. "You've got eyes like my sister's. Are you coming to the Nunnery?"

"Yes," replied Clover, smiling back. "My name is Clover,—Clover Carr."

"What a dear little name! It sounds just as you look!"

"So does your name,—Rose Red," said Clover, shyly.

"It's a ridiculous name," protested Rose Red, trying to pout. Just then the stage stopped.

"Why? Who's going to the hotel?" cried the school-girls, in a chorus.

"I am," said Dr. Carr, putting his head in at the door, with a smile which captivated every girl there. "Come, Katy; come, Clover. I've decided that you sha'n't begin school till to-morrow."

"Oh, my! Don't I wish he was my pa!" cried Rose Red. Then the stage moved on.

"Who are they? What's their name?" asked the girls. "They look nice."

"They're sort of cousins of mine, and they come from the West," replied Lilly, not unwilling to own the relationship, now that she perceived that Dr. Carr had made a favorable impression.

"Why on earth didn't you introduce them, then? I declare that was just like you, Lilly Page," put in Rose Red, indignantly. "They looked so lonesome that I wanted to pat and stroke both of 'em. That little one has the sweetest eyes!"

Meantime Katy and Clover entered the hotel, very glad of the reprieve, and of one more quiet evening alone with papa. They needed to get their ideas straightened out and put to rights, after the confusions of the day and Lilly's extraordinary talk. It was very evident that the Nunnery was to be quite different from their expectations; but another thing was equally evident,—it would not be dull! Rose Red by herself, and without any one to help her, would be enough to prevent that!

CHAPTER IV. THE NUNNERY

The night seemed short; for the girls, tired by their journey, slept like dormice. About seven o'clock, Katy was roused by the click of a blind, and, opening her eyes, saw Clover standing in the window, and peeping out through the half-opened shutters. When she heard Katy move, she cried out,—

"Oh, do come! It's so interesting! I can see the colleges and the church, and, I guess, the Nunnery; only I am not quite sure, because the houses are all so much alike."

Katy jumped up and hurried to the window. The hotel stood on one side of a green common, planted with trees. The common had a lead-colored fence, and gravel paths, which ran across it from corner to corner. Opposite the hotel was a long row of red buildings, broken by one or two brown ones, with cupolas. These were evidently the colleges, and a large gray building with a spire was as evidently the church; but which one of the many white, green-blinded house which filled the other sides of the common, was the Nunnery, the girls could not tell. Clover thought it was one with a garden at the side; but Katy thought not, because Lilly had said nothing of a garden. They discussed the point so long that the breakfast bell took them by surprise, and they were forced to rush through their dressing as fast as possible, so as not to keep papa waiting.

When breakfast was over, Dr. Carr told them to put on their hats, and get ready to walk with him to the school. Clover took one arm, and Katy the other, and the three passed between some lead-colored posts, and took one of the diagonal paths which led across the common.

"That's the house," said Dr. Carr, pointing.

"It isn't the one you picked out, Clover," said Katy.

"No," replied Clover, a little disappointed. The house papa indicated was by no means so pleasant as the one she had chosen.

It was a tall, narrow building, with dormer windows in the roof, and a square porch supported by whitewashed pillars. A pile of trunks stood in the porch. From above came sounds of voices. Girls' heads were popped out of upper widows at the swinging of the gate, and, as the door opened, more heads appeared looking over the balusters from the hall above.

The parlor into which they were taken was full of heavy, old-fashioned furniture, stiffly arranged. The sofa and chairs were covered with black haircloth, and stood closely against the wall. Some books lay upon the table, arranged two by two; each upper book being exactly at a right angle with each lower book. A bunch of dried grasses stood in the fire-place. There were no pictures, except one portrait in oils, of a forbidding old gentleman in a wig and glasses, sitting with his finger majestically inserted in a half-open Bible. Altogether, it was not a cheerful room, nor one calculated to raise the spirits of new-comers; and Katy, whose long seclusion had made her sensitive on the subject of rooms, shrank instinctively nearer papa as they went in.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.