

SARAH ORNE JEWETT

BETTY LEICESTER: A
STORY FOR GIRLS

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I.

AS FAR AS RIVERPORT

Two persons sat at a small breakfast-table near an open window, high up in Young's Hotel in Boston. It was a pleasant June morning, just after eight o'clock, and they could see the white clouds blowing over; but the gray walls of the Court House were just opposite, so that one cannot say much of their view of the world. The room was pleasanter than most hotel rooms, and the persons at breakfast were a girl of fifteen, named Betty Leicester, and her father. Their friends thought them both good-looking, but it ought to be revealed in this story just what sort of good looks they had, since character makes the expression of people's faces. But this we can say, to begin with: they had eyes very much alike, very kind and frank and pleasant, and they had a good fresh color, as if they spent much time out-of-doors. In fact, they were just off the sea, having come in only two days before on the Catalonia from Liverpool; and the Catalonia, though very comfortable, had made a slower voyage than some steamers do in coming across.

They had nearly finished breakfast, but Betty was buttering one more nice bit of toast to finish her marmalade, while Mr. Leicester helped himself to more strawberries. They both looked a little grave, as if something important were to be done when breakfast was over; and if you had sat in the third place by the table, and, instead of looking out of the window, had looked to right and left into the bedrooms that opened at either hand, you would guess the reason. In Betty's room, on her table, were ulster and her umbrella and her traveling-bag beside a basket, these last being labeled "Miss E. Leicester, Tideshead;" and in the room opposite was a corresponding array, excepting that the labels read, "T. Leicester, Windsor Hotel, Montreal." So for once the girl and her father were going in different directions.

"Papa, dear," said Betty, "how long will it be before you can tell about coming back from Alaska?"

"Perhaps I shall know in a month," said Mr. Leicester; "but you understand that it will not be like a journey through civilized countries, and there are likely to be many hindrances and delays. Beside, you must count upon our finding everything enormously interesting. I shall try hard not to forget how interesting a waiting young somebody called Betty is!"

Betty made an attempt to smile, but she began to feel very dismal. "The aunts will ask me, you know, papa dear," she said. "I am sure that Aunt Barbara felt a little grumpy about your not coming now."

"Dear Aunt Barbara!" said Mr. Leicester seriously; "I wish that I could have managed it, but I will stay long enough to make up, when I get back from the North."

"Your birthday is the first of September; thirty-nine this year, you poor old thing! Oh if we could only have the day in Tideshead, it would be such fun!" Betty looked more cheerful again with this hope taking possession of her mind.

"You are always insisting upon my having a new birthday!" said Mr. Leicester, determined upon being cheerful too. "You will soon be calling me your grandfather. I mean to expect a gold-headed cane for my present this year. Now we must be getting ready for the station, dear child. I am sure that we shall miss each other, but I will do things for you and you will do things for me, won't you, Betsey?" and he kissed her affectionately, while Betty clung fast to him with both arms tight round his neck. Somehow she never had felt so badly at saying good-by.

"And you will be very good to the old aunts? Remember how fond they have always been of your dear mamma and of me, and how ready they are to give you all their love. I think you can grow to be a very great comfort to them and a new pleasure. They must really need you to play with."

There was a loud knock at the door; the porter came in and carried away a high-heaped armful from Betty's room. "Carriage is ready at the door, sir," he said. "Plenty of time, sir;" and then went hurrying away again to summon somebody else. Betty's eyes were full of tears when she came out of her room and met papa, who was just looking at his watch in the little parlor.

"Say 'God bless you, Betty,'" she managed to ask.

"God bless you, Betty, my dear Betty!" Mr. Leicester said gravely. "God bless you, dear, and make you a blessing."

"Papa dear, I wasn't really crying. You know that you're coming back within three months, and we shall be writing letters all the time, and Tideshead isn't like a strange place."

"Dear me, no! you'll never wish to come away from Tideshead; give it my love, and 'call every bush my cousin,'" answered Mr. Leicester gayly as they went down in the elevator. The trying moment of the real good-by was over, and the excitement and interest of Betty's journey had begun. She liked the elevator boy and had time to find a bit of money for him, that being the best way to recognize his politeness and patience. "Thank you; good-by," she said pleasantly as she put it into his hand. She was hoarding the minutes that were left, and tried to remember the things that she wished to say to papa as they drove to the Eastern Station; but the minutes flew by, and presently Mr. Leicester was left on the platform alone, while the cars moved away with his girl. She waved her hand and papa lifted his hat once more, though he had already lost sight of her, and so they parted. The girl thought it was very hard. She wondered all over again if she couldn't possibly have gone on the long journey to the far North which she had heard discussed so often and with such enthusiasm. It seemed wrong and unnatural that she and her father should not always be together everywhere.

It was very comfortable in the train, and the tide was high among the great marshes. The car was not very full at first, but at one or two stations there were crowds of people, and Betty soon had a seat-mate, a good-natured looking, stout woman, who was inclined to be very sociable. She was a little out of breath and much excited.

"Would you like to sit next the window?" inquired Betty.

"No, lem me set where I be," replied the anxious traveler. "'Tis as well one place as another. I feel terrible unsartin' on the cars. I don't expect you do?"

"Not very," said Betty. "I have never had anything happen."

"You b'en on 'em before, then?"

"Oh, yes, indeed," said Betty.

"Ever b'en in Boston?—perhaps you come from that way?"

"I came from there this morning, but I am on my way from London to Tideshead." Somehow this announcement sounded ostentatious, and Betty, being modest, regretted it.

"What London do you refer to?" asked the woman, and, having been answered, said, "Oh, bless ye! when it comes to seafarin' I'm right to home, I tell you. I didn't know but you'd had to come from some o' them Londons out West; all the way by cars. I've got a sister that lives to London, Iow; she comes East every three or four year; passes two days an' two nights, I believe 't is, on the cars; makes nothin' of it. I ain't been no great of a traveler. Creation's real queer, *ain't* it!"

Betty's fellow-traveler was looking earnestly at the green fields, and seemed to express everything she felt of wonder and interest by her last remark, to which Betty answered "yes," with a great shake of laughter—and hoped that there would be still more to say.

"Have you been to sea a good deal?" she asked.

"Lor' yes, dear. Father owned two thirds o' the ship I was born on, and bought into another when she got old, an' I was married off o' her; the Sea Queen, Dexter, master, *she* was. Then I sailed 'long o' my husband till the child'n begun to come an' I found there was some advantages in bringin'

up a family on shore, so I settled down for a spell; but just as I got round to leavin' and goin' back, my husband got tired o' the sea and shippin' all run down, so home he come, and you wouldn't know us now from shorefolks. Pretty good sailor, be ye?" (looking at Betty sharply).

"Yes, I love the sea," said Betty.

"I want to know," said her new friend admiringly, and then took a long breath and got out of her gloves.

"Your father a shipmaster?" she continued.

"No," said Betty humbly.

"What trade does he follow?"

"He has written some books; he is a naturalist; but papa can do almost anything," replied Betty proudly.

"I want to know," said the traveler again. "Well, I don't realize just what naturalists hold to; there's too many sects a-goin' nowadays for me. I was brought up good old-fashioned Methodist, but this very mornin' in the depot I was speakin' with a stranger that said she was a Calvin-Advent, and they was increasin' fast. She did 'pear as well as anybody; a nice appearin' woman. Well, there's room for all."

Betty was forced to smile, and tried to hide her face by looking out of the window. Just then the conductor kindly appeared, and so she pulled her face straight again.

"Ain't got no brothers an' sisters?" asked the funny old soul.

"No," said Betty. "Papa and I are all alone."

"Mother ain't livin'?" and the kind homely face turned quickly toward her.

"She died when I was a baby."

"My sakes, how you talk! You don't feel to miss her, but she would have set everything by you." (There was something truly affectionate in the way this was said.) "All my child'n are married off," she continued. "The house seems too big now. I do' know but what, if you don't like where you're goin', I will take ye in, long's you feel to stop."

"Oh, thank you," said Betty gratefully. "I'm sure I should have a good time. I'm going to stay with my grandaunts this summer. My father has gone to Alaska."

"Oh, I do feel to hope it's by sea!" exclaimed the listener.

The cars rattled along and the country grew greener and greener. Betty remembered it very well, although she had not seen it for four years, so long it was since she had been in Tideshead before. After seeing the stonewalled and thatched or tiled roofs of foreign countries, the wooden buildings of New England had a fragile look as if the wind and rain would soon spoil and scatter them. The villages and everything but some of the very oldest farms looked so new and so temporary that Betty Leicester was much surprised, knowing well that she was going through some of the very oldest New England towns. She had a delightful sense of getting home again, which would have pleased her loyal father, and indeed Betty herself believed that she could not be proud enough of her native land. Papa always said the faults of a young country were so much better than the faults of an old one. However, when the train crossed a bridge near a certain harbor on the way and the young traveler saw an English flag flying on a ship, it looked very pleasant and familiar.

The morning was growing hot, and the good seafarer in the seat beside our friend seemed to grow very uncomfortable. Her dress was too thick, and she was trying to hold on her bonnet with her chin, though it slipped back farther and farther. Somehow a great many women in the car looked very warm and wretched in thick woolen gowns and unsteady bonnets. Nobody looked as if she were out on a pleasant holiday except one neighbor, a brisk little person with a canary bird and an Indian basket, out of which she now and then let a kitten's head appear, long enough to be patted and then tucked back again.

Betty's companion caught sight of this smiling neighbor after a time and expressed herself as surprised that anybody should take the trouble to cart a kitten from town to town, when there were

two to every empty saucer already. Betty laughed and supposed that she didn't like cats, and was answered gruffly that they were well enough in their place. It was one of our friend's griefs that she never was sure of being long enough in one place to keep a kitten of her own, but the pleasant thought came that she was almost sure to find some at Aunt Barbara's where she was going.

It was not time to feel hungry, but Betty caught sight of a paper box which the waiter had brought to the carriage just as she was leaving the hotel. She was having a hot and dusty search under the car-seat for the sailor woman's purse, which had suddenly gone overboard from the upper deck of her wide lap, but it was found at last, and Betty produced the luncheon-box too and opened it. Her new friend looked on with deep interest. "I'm only goin's far as Newburyport," she explained eagerly, "so I'm not provided."

"Papa knew that I should be hungry by noon," said Betty. "We always try not to get too hungry when we are traveling because one gets so much more tired. I always carry some chocolate in my bag."

"I expect you've had sights of experience. You ain't be'n kep' short, that's plain. They ain't many young gals looks so rugged. Enjoy good health, dear, don't ye?" which Betty answered with enthusiasm.

The luncheon looked very inviting and Betty offered a share most hospitably, and in spite of its only being a quarter before eleven when the feast began, the chicken sandwiches entirely disappeared. There were only four, and half a dozen small sponge-cakes which proved to be somewhat dry and unattractive.

"I only laid in a light breakfast," apologized Betty's guest. "I'm obliged to you, I'm sure, but then I wa' n't nigh so hungry as when I got adrift once, in an open boat, for two days and a night, and they give me up"—

But at this moment the train man shouted "Newburyport," as if there were not a minute to be lost, and the good soul gathered her possessions in a great hurry, dropping her purse again twice, and letting fall bits of broken sentences with it from which Betty could gather only "The fog come in," and "coast o' France," and then, as they said good-by, "'t was so divertin' ridin' along that I took no note of stoppin'." After they had parted affectionately, she stood for a minute or two at the door of the still moving train, nodding and bobbing her kind old head at her young fellow-passenger whenever they caught each other's eye. Betty was sorry to lose this new friend so soon, and felt more lonely than ever. She wished that they had known each other's names, and especially that there had been time to hear the whole of the boat story.

Now that there was no one else in the car seat it seemed to be a good time to look over some things in the pretty London traveling bag, which had been pushed under its owner's feet until then. Betty found a small bit of chocolate for herself by way of dessert to the early luncheon, and made an entry in a tidy little account book which she meant to keep carefully until she should be with papa again. It was a very interesting bag, with a dressing-case fitted into it and a writing case, all furnished with glass and ivory and silver fittings and yet very plain, and nice, and convenient. Betty's dear friend, Mrs. Duncan, had given it to her that very spring, before she thought of coming to America, and on the voyage it had been worth its weight in gold. Out of long experience the young traveler had learned not to burden herself with too many things, but all her belongings had some pleasant associations: her button-hook was bought in Amsterdam, and a queer little silver box for buttons came from a village very far north in Norway, while a useful jackknife had been found in Spain, although it bore J. Crookes of Sheffield's name on the haft. Somehow the traveling bag itself brought up Mrs. Duncan's dear face, and Betty's eyes glistened with tears for one moment. The Duncan girls were her best friends, and she had had lessons with them for many months at a time in the last few years, so they had the strong bond in friendship of having worked as well as played together. But Mrs. Duncan had been very motherly and dear to our friend, and just now seemed nearer and more helpful than ever. The train whistled along and the homesick feeling soon passed, though Betty remembered that Mrs. Duncan had said once that wherever you may put two persons one is always hostess and the

other always guest, either from circumstances alone or from their different natures, and they must be careful about their duties to each other. Betty had not quite understood this when she heard it said, though the words had stayed in her mind. Now the meaning flashed clearly into her thought, and she was pleased to think that she had just now been the one who knew most about traveling. She wished so much that she could have been of more use to the old lady, but after all she seemed to have a good little journey, and Betty hoped that she could remember all about this droll companion when she was writing, at her own journey's end, to papa.

II. THE PACKET BOAT

The day was one of the best days in June, with warm sunshine and a cool breeze from the east, for when Betty Leicester stepped from a hot car to the station platform in Riverport the air had a delicious sea-flavor. She wondered for a moment what this flavor was like, and then thought of a salt oyster. She was hungry and tired, the journey had been longer than she expected, and, as she made her way slowly through the crowded station and was pushed about by people who were hurrying out of or into the train, she felt unusually disturbed and lonely. Betty had traveled far and wide for a girl of fifteen, but she had seldom been alone, and was used to taking care of other people. Papa himself was very apt to forget important minor details, and she had learned out of her loving young heart to remember them, and was not without high ambitions to make their journeys as comfortable as possible. Still, she and her father had almost always been together, and Betty wondered if it had not after all been foolish to make a certain decision which involved not seeing him again until a great many weeks had gone by.

The cars moved away and the young traveler went to the ticket-office to ask about the Tideshead train. The ticket-agent looked at her with a smile.

"Train's gone half an hour ago!" he said, as if he were telling Betty some good news. "There'll be another one at eight o'clock to-morrow morning, and the express goes, same as to-day, at half past one. I suppose you want to go to Tideshead town; this road only goes to the junction and then there's a stage, you know." He looked at Betty doubtfully and as if he expected an instant decision on her part as to what she meant to do next.

"I knew that there was a stage," she answered, feeling a little alarmed, but hoping that she did not show it. "The time-table said there was a train to meet this"—

"Oh, that train is an express now and doesn't stop. Everything's got to be sacrificed to speed."

The ticket-agent had turned his back and was looking over some papers and grumbling to himself, so that Betty could no longer hear what he was pleased to say. As she left the window an elderly man, whose face was very familiar, was standing in the doorway.

"Well, ma'am, you an' I 'pear to have got left. Tideshead, you said, if I rightly understood?"

"Perhaps there is somebody who would drive us there," said Betty. She never had been called ma'am before, and it was most surprising. "It isn't a great many miles, is it?"

"No, no!" said the new acquaintance. "I was in considerable of a hurry to get home, but 't isn't so bad as you think. We can go right up on the packet, up river, you know; get there by supper-time; the wind's hauling round into the east a little. I understood you to speak about getting to Tideshead?"

"Yes," said Betty, gratefully.

"Got a trunk, I expect. Well, I'll go out and look round for Asa Chick and his han'cart, and we'll make for the wharf as quick as we can. You may step this way."

Betty "stepped" gladly, and Asa Chick and the handcart soon led the way riverward through the pleasant old-fashioned streets of Riverport. Her new friend pointed out one or two landmarks as they hurried along, for, strange to say, although a sea-captain, he was not sure whether the tide turned at half past two or at half past three. When they came to the river-side, however, the packet-boat was still made fast to the pier, and nothing showed signs of her immediate departure.

"It is always a good thing to be in time," said the captain, who found himself much too warm and nearly out of breath. "Now, we've got a good hour to wait. Like to go right aboard, my dear?"

Betty paid Asa Chick, and then turned to see the packet. It was a queer, heavy-looking craft, with a short, thick mast and high, pointed lateen-sail, half unfurled and dropping in heavy pocket-like loops. There was a dark low cabin and a long deck; a very old man and a fat, yellow dog seemed

to be the whole ship's company. The old man was smoking a pipe and took no notice of anything, but the dog rose slowly to his feet and came wagging his tail and looking up at the new passenger.

"I do' know but I'll coast round up into the town a little," said the captain. "'T ain't no use asking old Mr. Plunkett there any questions, he's deaf as a ha'dick."

"Will my trunk be safe?" asked Betty; to which the captain answered that he would put it right aboard for her. It was not a very heavy trunk, but the captain managed it beautifully, and put Betty's hand-bag and wrap into the dark cabin. Old Plunkett nodded as he saw this done, and the captain said again that Betty might feel perfectly safe about everything; but, for all that, she refused to take a walk in order to see what was going on in the town, as she was kindly invited to do. She went a short distance by herself, however, and came first to a bakery, where she bought some buns, not so good as the English ones, but still very good buns indeed, and two apples, which the baker's wife told her had grown in her own garden. You could see the tree out of the back window, by which the hospitable woman had left her sewing, and they were, indeed, well-kept and delicious apples for that late season of the year. Betty lingered for some minutes in the pleasant shop. She was very hungry, and the buns were all the better for that. She looked through a door and saw the oven, but the baking was all done for the day. The baker himself was out in his cart; he had just gone up to Tideshead. Here was another way in which one might have gone to Tideshead by land; it would have been good fun to go on the baker's cart and stop in the farm-house yards and see everybody; but on the whole there was more adventure in going by water. Papa had always told Betty that the river was beautiful. She did not remember much about it herself, but this would be a fine way of getting a first look at so large a part of the great stream.

It was slack water now, and the wharf seemed high, and the landing-stage altogether too steep and slippery. When Betty reached the packet's deck, old Mr. Plunkett was sound asleep; but while she was eating her buns the dog came most good-naturedly and stood before her, cocking his head sideways, and putting on a most engaging expression, so that they lunched together, and Betty left off nearly as hungry as she began. The old dog knew an apple when he saw it, and was disappointed after the last one was brought out from Betty's pocket, and lay down at her feet and went to sleep again. Betty got into the shade of the wharf and sat there looking down at the flounders and sculpins in the clear water, and at the dripping green sea-weeds on the piles of the wharf. She was almost startled when a heavy wagon was driven on the planks above, and a man shouted suddenly to the horses. Presently some barrels of flour were rolled down and put on deck—twelve of them in all—by a man and boy who gave her, the young stranger, a careful glance every time they turned to go back. Then a mowing-machine arrived, and was carefully put on board with a great deal of bustle and loud talking. There was somebody on deck, now, whom Betty believed to be the packet's skipper, and after a while the old captain returned. He seated himself by Mr. Plunkett and shook hands with him warmly, and asked him for the news; but there did not seem to be any.

"I've been up to see my wife's cousin Jake Hallet's folks," he explained, "and I thought sure I'd get left," and old Plunkett nodded soberly. They did not sail for at least half an hour after this, and Betty sat discreetly on the low cabin roof next the wharf all the time. When they were out in the stream at last she could get a pretty view of the town. There was some shipping farther down the shore, and some tall steeples and beautiful trees and quaintly built warehouses; it was very pleasant, looking back at it from the water.

A little past the middle of the afternoon they moved steadily up the river. The men all sat together in a group at the stern, and appeared to find a great deal to talk about. Old Mr. Plunkett may have thought that Betty looked lonely, for after he waked for the second time he came over to where she sat and nodded to her; so Betty nodded back, and then the old man reached for her umbrella, which was very pretty, with a round piece of agate in the handle, and looked at it and rubbed it with his thumb, and gave it back to her. "Present to ye?" he asked, and Betty nodded assent. Then old Plunkett went away again, but she felt a sense of his kind companionship. She wondered whom she must pay

for her passage and how much it would be, but it was no use to ask so deaf a fellow-passenger. He had put on a great pair of spectacles and was walking round her trunk, apparently much puzzled by the battered labels of foreign hotels and railway stations.

Betty thought that she had seldom seen half so pleasant a place as this New England river. She kept longing that her father could see it, too. As they went up from the town the shores grew greener and greener, and there were some belated apple-trees still in bloom, and the farm-houses were so old and stood so pleasantly toward the southern sunshine that they looked as if they might have grown like the apple-trees and willows and elms. There were great white clouds in the blue sky; the air was delicious. Betty could make out at last that old Mr. Plunkett was the skipper's father, that Captain Beck was an old shipmaster and a former acquaintance of her own, and that the flour and some heavy boxes belonged to one store-keeping passenger with a long sandy beard, and the mowing-machine to the other, who was called Jim Foss, and that he was a farmer. He was a great joker and kept making everybody laugh. Old Mr. Plunkett laughed too, now that he was wide awake, but it was only through sympathy; he seemed to be a very kind old man. One by one all the men came and looked at the trunk labels, and they all asked whether Betty hadn't been considerable of a traveler, or some question very much like it. At last the captain came with Captain Beck to collect the passage money, which proved to be thirty-seven cents.

"Where did you say you was goin' to stop in Tideshead?" asked Captain Beck.

"I'm going to Miss Leicester's. Don't you remember me? Aren't you Mary Beck's grandfather? I'm Betty Leicester."

"Toe be sure, toe be sure," said the old gentleman, much pleased. "I wonder that I had not thought of you at first, but you have grown as much as little Mary has. You're getting to be quite a young woman. Command me," said the shipmaster, making a handsome bow. "I am glad that I fell in with you. I see your father's looks, now. The ladies had a hard fight some years ago to keep him from running off to sea with me. He's been a great traveler since then, hasn't he?" to which Betty responded heartily, again feeling as if she were among friends. The storekeeper offered to take her trunk right up the hill in his wagon, when they got to the Tideshead landing, and on the whole it was delightful that the trains had been changed just in time for her to take this pleasant voyage.

III.

A BIT OF COLOR

Betty had seen strange countries since her last visit to Tideshead. Then she was only a child, but now she was so tall that strangers treated her as if she were already a young lady. At fifteen one does not always know just where to find one's self. A year before it was hard to leave childish things alone, but there soon came a time when they seemed to have left Betty, while one by one the graver interests of life were pushing themselves forward. It was reasonable enough that she should be taking care of herself; and, as we have seen, she knew how better than most girls of her age. Her father's rough journey to the far North had been decided upon suddenly; Mr. Leicester and Betty had been comfortably settled at Lynton in Devonshire for the summer, with a comfortable prospect of some charming excursions and a good bit of work on papa's new scientific book. Betty was used to sudden changes of their plans, but it was a hard trial when he had come back from London one day, filled with enthusiasm about the Alaska business.

"The only thing against it is that I don't know what to do with you, Betty dear," said papa, with a most wistful but affectionate glance. "Perhaps you would like to go to Switzerland with the Duncans? You know they were very anxious that I should lend you for a while."

"I will think about it," said Betty, trying to smile, but she could not talk any more just then. She didn't believe that the hardships of this new journey were too great; it was papa who minded dust and hated the care of railway rugs and car-tickets, not she. But she gave him a kiss and hurried out through the garden and went as fast as she could along the lonely long cliff-walk above the sea, to think the sad matter over.

That evening Betty came down to dinner with a serene face. She looked more like a young lady than she ever had before. "I have quite decided what I should like to do," she said. "Please let me go home with you and stay in Tideshead with Aunt Barbara and Aunt Mary. They speak about seeing us in their letters, and I should be nearer where you are going." Betty's brave voice failed her for a moment just there.

"Why, Betty, what a wise little woman you are!" said Mr. Leicester, looking very much pleased. "That's exactly right. I was thinking about the dear souls as I came from town, and promised myself that I would run down for a few days before I go North. That is, if you say I may go!" and he looked seriously at Betty.

"Yes," answered Betty slowly; "yes, I am sure you may, papa dear, if you will be very, very careful."

They had a beloved old custom of papa's asking his girl's leave to do anything that was particularly important. In Betty's baby-days she had reproved him for going out one morning. "Who said you might go, Master Papa?" demanded the little thing severely; and it had been a dear bit of fun to remember the old story from time to time ever since. Betty's mother had died before she could remember; the two who were left were most dependent upon each other.

You will see how Betty came to have care-taking ways and how she had learned to think more than most girls about what it was best to do. You will understand how lonely she felt in this day or two when the story begins. Mr. Leicester was too much hurried after all when he reached America, and could not go down to Tideshead for a few days' visit, as they had both hoped and promised. And here, at last, was Betty going up the long village street with Captain Beck for company. She had not seen Tideshead for four years, but it looked exactly the same. There was the great, square, white house, with the poplars and lilac bushes. There were Aunt Barbara and Aunt Mary sitting in the wide hall doorway as if they had never left their high-backed chairs since she saw them last.

"Who is this coming up the walk?" said Aunt Barbara, rising and turning toward her placid younger sister in sudden excitement. "It can't be—why, yes, it is Betty, after all!" and she hurried down the steps.

"Grown out of all reason, of course!" she said sharply, as she kissed the surprising grandniece, and then held her at arm's-length to look at her again most fondly. "Where did you find her, Captain Beck? We sent over to the train; in fact, I went myself with Jonathan, but we were disappointed. Your father always telegraphs two or three times before he really gets here, Betty; but you have not brought him, after all."

"We had to come up river by the packet," said Captain Beck; "the young lady's had quite a voyage; her sea-chest'll be here directly."

The captain left Betty's traveling-bag on the great stone doorstep, and turned to go away, but Betty thanked him prettily for his kindness, and said that she had spent a delightful afternoon. She was now warmly kissed and hugged by Aunt Mary, who looked much younger than Aunt Barbara, and she saw two heads appear at the end of the long hall.

"There are Serena and Letty; you must run and speak to them. They have been looking forward to seeing you," suggested Aunt Barbara, who seemed to see everything at once; but when Betty went that way nobody was to be found until she came to the kitchen, where Serena and Letty were, or pretended to be, much surprised at her arrival. They were now bustling about to get Betty some supper, and she frankly confessed that she was very hungry, which seemed to vastly please the good women.

"What in the world shall we do with her?" worried Aunt Mary, while Betty was gone. "I had no idea she would seem so well grown. She used to be small for her age, you know, sister."

"Do? do?" answered Miss Barbara Leicester sternly. "If she can't take care of herself by this time, she never will know how. Tom Leicester should have let her stay here altogether, instead of roaming about the world with him, or else have settled himself down in respectable fashion. I can't get on with teasing children at my age. I'm sure I'm glad she's well grown. She mustn't expect us to turn out of our ways," grumbled Aunt Barbara, who had the kindest heart in the world, and was listening anxiously every minute for Betty's footsteps.

It was very pleasant to be safe in the old house at last. The young guest did not feel any sense of strangeness. She used to be afraid of Aunt Barbara when she was a child, but she was not a bit afraid now; and Aunt Mary, who seemed a very lovely person then, was now a little bit tiresome,—or else Betty herself was tired and did not find it easy to listen.

After supper; and it was such a too-good supper, with pound-cakes, and peach jam, and crisp shortcakes, and four tall silver candlesticks, and Betty being asked to her great astonishment if she would take tea and meekly preferring some milk instead; they came back to the doorway. The moon had come up, and the wide lawn in front of the house (which the ladies always called the yard) was almost as light as day. The syringa bushes were in full bloom and fragrance, and other sweet odors filled the air beside. There were two irreverent little dogs playing and chasing each other on the wide front walk and bustling among the box and borders. Betty could hear the voices of people who drove by, or walked along the sidewalk, but Tideshead village was almost as still as the fields outside the town. She answered all the questions that the aunts kindly asked her for conversation's sake, and she tried to think of ways of seeming interested in return.

"Can I climb the cherry-tree this summer, Aunt Barbara?" she asked once. "Don't you remember the day when there was a tea company of ladies here, and Mary Beck and I got some of the company's bonnets and shawls off the best bed and dressed up in them and climbed up in the trees?"

"You looked like two fat black crows," laughed Aunt Barbara, though she had been very angry at the time. "All the fringes of those thin best shawls were catching and snapping as you came down. Oh, dear me, I couldn't think what the old ladies would say. None of your mischief now, Miss Betty!" and she held up a warning forefinger. "Mary Beck is coming to see you to-morrow; you will find some pleasant girls here."

"Tideshead has always been celebrated for its cultivated society, you know, dear," added Aunt Mary.

Just now a sad feeling of loneliness began to assail Betty. The summer might be very long in passing, and anything might happen to papa. She put her hand into her pocket to have the comfort of feeling a crumpled note, a very dear short note, which papa had written her only the day before, when he had suddenly decided to go out to Cambridge and not come back to the hotel for luncheon.

They talked a little longer, Betty and the grandaunts, until sensible Aunt Barbara said, "Now run up-stairs to bed, my dear; I am sure that you must be tired," and Betty, who usually begged to stay up as long as the grown folks, was glad for once to be sent away like a small child. Aunt Barbara marched up the stairway and led the way to the east bedroom. It was an astonishing tribute of respect to Betty, the young guest, and she admired such large-minded hospitality; but after all she had expected a comfortable snug little room next Aunt Mary's, where she had always slept years before. Aunt Barbara assured her that this one was much cooler and pleasanter, and she must remember what a young lady she had grown to be. "But you may change to some other room if you like, my dear child," said the old lady kindly. "I wouldn't unpack to-night, but just go to bed and get rested. I have my breakfast at half past seven, but your Aunt Mary doesn't come down. I hope that you will be ready as early as that, for I like company;" and then, after seeing that everything was in order and comfortable, she kissed Betty twice most kindly and told her that she was thankful to have her come to them, and went away downstairs.

It was a solemn, big, best bedroom, with dark India-silk curtains to the bed and windows, and dull coverings on the furniture. This all looked as if there were pretty figures and touches of gay color by daylight, but now by the light of the two candles on the dressing-table it seemed a dim and dismal place that night. Betty was not a bit afraid; she only felt lonely. She was but fifteen years old, and she did not know how to get on by herself after all. But Betty was no coward. She had been taught to show energy and to make light of difficulties. What could she do? Why, unpack a little, and then go to bed and go to sleep; that would be the best thing.

She knelt down before her trunk, and had an affectionate feeling toward it as she turned the key and saw her familiar properties inside. She took out her pictures of her father and mother and Mrs. Duncan, and shook out a crumpled dress or two and left them to lie on the old couch until morning. Deep down in the sea-chest, as Captain Beck had called it, she felt the soft folds of a gay piece of Indian silk made like a little shawl, which papa had pleased himself with buying for her one day at Liberty's shop in London. Mrs. Duncan had laughed when she saw it, and told Betty not to dare to wear it for at least ten years; but the color of it was marvelous in the shadowy old room. Betty threw the shining red thing over the back of a great easy-chair and it seemed to light the whole place. She could not help feeling more cheerful for the sight of that gay bit of color. Then a great wish filled her heart, dear little Betty; perhaps she could really bring some new pleasure to Tideshead that summer! The old aunties' lives looked very gray and dull to her young eyes; it was a dull place, perhaps, for Betty, who had lived a long time where the brightest and busiest people were. The last thing she thought of before she fell asleep was the little silk shawl. She had often heard artistic people say "a bit of color;" now she had a new idea, though a dim one, of what a bit of color might be expected to do in every-day life. Good-night, Betty. Good-night, dear Betty, in your best bedroom, sound asleep all the summer night and dreaming of those you love!

IV. TIDESHEAD

However old and responsible Betty Leicester felt overnight, she seemed to return to early childhood in spite of herself next day. She must see the old house again and chatter with Aunt Barbara about the things and people she remembered best. She looked all about the garden, and spent an hour in the kitchen talking to Serena and Letty while they worked there, and then she went out to see Jonathan and a new acquaintance called Seth Pond, an awkward young man, who took occasion to tell Betty that he had come from way up-country where there was plenty greener'n he was. There were a great many interesting things to see and hear in Jonathan's and Seth's domains, and Betty found the remains of one of her own old cubby-holes in the shed-chamber, and was touched to the heart when she found that it had never been cleared away. She had known so many places and so many people that it was almost startling to find Tideshead looking and behaving exactly the same, while she had changed so much. The garden was a most lovely place, with its long, vine-covered summer-house, and just now all the roses were in bloom. Here was that cherry-tree into which she and Mary Beck had climbed, decked in the proper black shawls and bonnets and black lace veils. But where could dear Becky be all the morning? They had been famous cronies in that last visit, when they were eleven years old. Betty hurried into the house to find her hat and tell Aunt Barbara where she was going.

Aunt Barbara took the matter into serious consideration. "Why, Mary will come to see you this afternoon, I don't doubt, my dear, and perhaps you had better wait until after dinner. They dine earlier than we, and are apt to be busy."

Betty turned away disappointed. She wished that she had thought to find Mary just after breakfast in their friendly old fashion, but it was too late now. She would sit down at the old secretary in the library and begin a letter to papa.

"Dear Papa," she wrote, "Here I am at Tideshead, and I feel just as I used when I was a little girl, but people treat me, even Mary Beck, as if I were grown up, and it is a little lonely just at first. Everything looks just the same, and Serena made me some hearts and rounds for supper; wasn't she kind to remember? And they put on the old silver mug that you used to have, for me to drink out of. And I like Aunt Barbara best of the two aunts, after all, which is sure to make you laugh, though Aunt Mary is very kind and seems ill, so that I mean to be as nice to her as I possibly can. They seemed to think that you were going off just as far as you possibly could without going to a star, and it made me miss you more than ever. Jonathan talked about politics, whether I listened or not, and didn't like it when I said that you believed in tariff reform. He really scolded and said the country would go to the dogs, and I was sorry that I knew so little about politics. People expect you to know so many new things with every inch you grow. Dear papa, I wish that I were with you. Remember not to smoke too often, even if you wish to very much; and please, dear papa, think very often that I am your only dear child,

Betty.

"P. S.—I miss you more because they are all so much older than we are, papa dear. Perhaps you will tell me about the tariff reform for a lesson letter when you can't think of anything else to write about. I have not seen Mary Beck yet, or any of the girls I used to know. Mary always came right over before. I must tell you next time about such a funny, nice old woman who came most of the way with me in the cars, and what will you think when I tell you the most important thing,—I had to come up river on the packet! I wished and wished for you.

Betty."

Dinner-time was very pleasant, and Aunt Mary, who first appeared then, was most kind and cheerful; but both the ladies took naps, after dinner was over and they had read their letters, so Betty went to her own room, meaning to put away her belongings; but Letty had done this beforehand, and the large room looked very comfortable and orderly. Aunt Barbara had smiled when another protest was timidly offered about the best bedroom, and told Betty that it was pleasant to have her just across the hall. "I am well used to my housekeeping cares," added Aunt Barbara, with a funny look across the table at her young niece; and Betty thought again, how much she liked this grandaunt.

The house was very quiet and she did not know exactly what to do, so she looked about the guest-chamber.

There were some quaint-looking silhouettes on the walls of the room, and in a deep oval frame a fine sort of ornament which seemed to be made of beautiful grasses and leaves, all covered with glistening crystals. The dust had crept in a little at one side. Betty remembered it well, and always thought it very interesting. Then there were two old engravings of Angelica Kauffmann and Madame Le Brun. Nothing pleased her so much, however, as papa's bright little shawl. It looked brighter than ever, and Letty had folded it and left it on the old chair.

Just then there came a timid rap or two with the old knocker on the hall-door. It was early for visitors, and the aunts were both in their rooms. Betty went out to see what could be done about so exciting a thing, and met quick-footed Letty, who had been close at hand in the dining-room.

"'Tis Miss Mary Beck come to call upon you, Miss Betty," said Letty, with an air of high festivity, and Betty went quickly downstairs. She was brimful of gladness to see Mary Beck, and went straight toward her in the shaded parlor to kiss her and tell her so.

Mary Beck was sitting on the edge of a chair, and was dressed as if she were going to church, with a pair of tight shiny best gloves on and shiny new boots, which hurt her feet if Betty had only known it. She wore a hat that looked too small for her head, and had a queer, long, waving bird-of-paradise feather in it, and a dress that was much too old for her, and of a cold, smooth, gray color, trimmed with a shade of satin that neither matched it nor made a contrast. She had grown to be even taller than Betty, and she looked uncomfortable, and as if she had been forced to come. That was a silly, limp shake of the hand with which she returned Betty's warm grasp. Oh dear, it was evidently a dreadful thing to go to make a call! It had been an anxious, discouraged getting-ready, and Betty thought of the short, red-cheeked, friendly little Becky whom she used to play with, and was grieved to the heart. But she bravely pushed a chair close to the guest and sat down. She could not get over the old feeling of affection.

"I thought you would be over here long ago. I ought to have gone to see you. Why, you're more grown up than I am; isn't it too bad?" said Betty, feeling afraid that one or the other of them might cry, they were both blushing so deeply and the occasion was so solemn.

"Oh, do let's play in the shed-chamber all day to-morrow!"

And then they both laughed as hard as they could, and there was the dear old Mary Beck after all, and a tough bit of ice was forever broken.

Betty threw open the parlor blinds, regardless of Serena's feelings about flies, and the two friends spent a delightful hour together. The call ended in Mary's being urged to go home to take off her best gown and put on an every-day one, and away they went afterward for a long walk.

"What are the girls doing?" asked Betty, as if she considered herself a member already of this branch of the great secret society of girls.

"Oh, nothing; we hardly ever do anything," answered Mary Beck, with a surprised and uneasy glance. "It is so slow in Tideshead, everybody says."

"I suppose it is slow anywhere if we don't do anything about it," laughed Betty, so good-naturedly that Mary laughed too. "I like to play out-of-doors just as well as ever I did, don't you?"

Mary Beck gave a somewhat doubtful answer. She had dreaded this ceremonious call. She could not quite understand why Betty Leicester, who had traveled abroad and done so many things

and had, as people say, such unusual advantages, should seem the same as ever, and only wear that plain, comfortable-looking little gingham dress.

"When my other big trunk comes there are some presents I brought over for you," confessed Betty shyly. "I have had to keep one of them a long time because papa has always been saying every year that we were sure to come to Tideshead, and then we haven't after all."

"He has been here two or three times," said Mary. "I saw him go by and I wanted to run out and ask him about you, but I was afraid to"—

"Afraid of papa? What a funny thing! You never would be if you really knew him," exclaimed Betty, with delighted assurance. She laughed heartily and stopped to lean against a stone wall, and gave Mary Beck a little push which was meant to express a great deal of affection and amusement. Then she forgot everything in looking at the beautiful view across the farms and the river and toward the great hills and mountains beyond.

"I knew you would think it was pretty here," said Mary. "I have always thought that when you came back I would bring you here first. I liked to call this our tree," she said shyly, looking up into the great oak branches. "It seems so strange to be here with you, at last, after all the times I have thought about it"—

Betty was touched by this bit of real sentiment. She was thankful from that moment that she was going to spend most of the summer in Tideshead. Here was the best of good things,—a real friend, who had been waiting for her all the time.

V. AT BECKY'S HOUSE

When the happy Becky flew in to free herself from her Sunday clothes she did not meet either member of her family, but on her return from the walk she found her mother grimly getting the supper ready.

"Oh, I have had such a lovely time," cried Becky, brimful of the pleasure of Betty's return. "She is just the same as she used to be, exactly; only grown like everything. And I saw Miss Barbara Leicester, and she was lovely and asked me to stay to tea, and Betty did too, but I didn't know whether you would like it."

"I am going to have her come and take tea with us as soon as I can, but I don't see how to manage it this week," said Mrs. Beck complainingly. "I have so much to do every day that I dread having company. What made you put on that spotted old dress? I don't know what she could have thought, I'm sure. If you wanted to take off your best one, why didn't you put on your satine?"

"Oh, I don't know, mother!" answered Becky fretfully. "Betty had on a gingham dress, and she said I couldn't get over the fences in my best one, and I didn't think it made any difference."

"Well, no matter," said Mrs. Beck sighing, "they saw you dressed up decently at first. I think you girls are too old to climb fences and be tomboys, for my part. When I was growing up, young ladies were expected to interest themselves in things at home."

The good cheer of the afternoon served Becky in good stead. She was already helping her mother with the table, and was sorry in a more understanding way than ever before for the sad-looking little woman in black, who got so few real pleasures out of life. "Betty Leicester says that we can have this one summer more any way before we are really grown up," she suggested, and Mrs. Beck smiled and hoped they would enjoy it, but they couldn't keep time back do what they might.

"Did she show you anything she brought home, Mary?"

"No, not a single thing; we were out-doors almost all the time after I made the call, but she says she has brought me some presents."

"I wonder what they are?" said Mrs. Beck, much pleased. "There's one thing about the Leicesters, they are all generous where they take a liking. But then, they have got plenty to do with; everybody hasn't. You might have stayed to tea, I suppose, if they wanted you, but I wouldn't run after them."

"Why mother!" exclaimed honest Becky. "Betty Leicester and I always played together; it isn't running after her to expect to be friends just the same now. Betty always comes here oftenest; she said she was coming right over."

"I want you to show proper pride," said the mistaken mother. It would have been so much better to let the two girls go their own unsuspecting ways. But poor little Mrs. Beck had suffered many sorrows and disappointments, and had not learned yet that such lessons ought to make one's life larger instead of smaller.

Mary's eyes were shining with delight in spite of her mother's plaintive discouragements, and now as they both turned away from the plain little supper-table, she took hold of her hand and held it fast as they went out to the kitchen together. They very seldom indulged in any signs of affection, but there was a very happy feeling roused by Betty Leicester's coming. "Oh good! drop-cakes for tea!" and Mary capered a little to show how pleased she was. "I wish I had asked her to come home with me, she always used to eat so many of our drop-cakes when she was a little girl; don't you remember, mother?"

"Yes; but you mustn't expect her to be the same now," answered Mrs. Beck. "She is used to having things very different, and we can't do as we could if father had lived."

"Grandpa says nobody has things as nice as you do," said Mary, trying to make the sun shine again. "I know Betty will eat more drop-cakes than ever, just because she can hold so many more. She'll be glad of that, now you see, mother!" and Mrs. Beck gave a faint smile.

That very evening there were quick steps up the yard toward the side door, and Betty opened the door and came in to the Becks' sitting-room. She stopped a moment on the threshold, it all looked so familiar. Becky had grown, as we know; that was the only change, and the old captain sat reading his newspaper as usual, with a small lamp held close against it in his right hand; Mrs. Beck was sewing, and on the wall hung the picture of Daniel Webster and the portraits in watercolors of two of the captain's former ships. Betty spoke to Captain Beck with an air of intimacy and then went over to Becky's mother, who stood there with a pale apprehensive look as if she thought there was no chance of anybody's being glad to see *her*. However, Betty kissed her warmly and said she was so glad to get back to Tideshead, and then displayed a white paper bundle which she had held under her wrap. It looked like presents!

"Aunt Barbara had to write some letters for the early mail and Aunt Mary was resting, so I thought I would run over for a few minutes," said the eager girl. "My big trunk came this afternoon, Becky."

"How is your Aunt Mary to-day?" asked Mrs. Beck ceremoniously, though a light crept into her face which may have been a reflection from her daughter's broad smile.

"Oh, she is just the same as ever," replied Betty sadly. "I believe she isn't sleeping so well lately, but she looks a great deal better than when I was a little girl. Aunt Barbara is always so anxious."

"They were surprised, I observed, when you and I came up the street together last night; quite a voyage we had," said the captain.

"Some day I mean to go down and come back again in the old packet; can't you go too, Becky?" said our friend. "Captain Beck'll be going again, won't you, Captain Beck? I didn't look at the river half enough because I was in such a hurry to get here."

"You're sunburnt, aren't you?" said Mrs. Beck, looking very friendly.

"I'm always brown in summer," acknowledged Betty frankly. "Hasn't Mary grown like everything? I didn't know how tall I must look until I saw her. I'm so glad that school is done; I was afraid it wouldn't be."

"She goes to the academy now, you know," said Mrs. Beck. "The term ended abruptly because the principal's wife met with affliction and they had to go out of town to her old home."

Betty, it must be confessed, had at this point an instinctive remembrance of Mrs. Beck's love for dismal tales, so she hastened to change the subject of conversation. Mrs. Beck was very kind-hearted when any one was ill or in trouble. Betty herself had a grateful memory of such devotion when she had a long childish illness once at Aunt Barbara's, but Mary Beck's mother never seemed to take half the pleasure in cheerful things and in well people who went about their every-day affairs. It seemed a good chance now to open the little package of presents. There were two pretty Roman cravats, and a carved Swiss box with a quantity of French chocolate in it, and a nice cake of violet soap, and a pretty ivory pin carved like an edelweiss, like one that Betty herself wore; for the captain there was a photograph of Bergen harbor in Norway, with all manner of strange vessels at the wharves. Then for Mrs. Beck Betty had brought a pretty handkerchief with some fine embroidery round the edge. It was a charming little heap of things. "I have been getting them at different times and keeping them until I came," said Betty.

Mary Beck was delighted, as well she might be, and yet it was very hard to express any such feeling. Somehow the awkward feeling with which she went to make the call that afternoon was again making her dreadfully uncomfortable.

The old captain was friendly and smiling, and Mary and her mother said "Thank you," a good many times, but Mrs. Beck took half the pleasure away by a sigh and lament that her girl couldn't make any return.

"It's the best return to be so glad to see each other, Becky!" said Betty Leicester, suddenly turning to her friend and blushing a good deal as they kissed one another, while the old captain gave a satisfied *humph* and turned to his newspaper again.

Mrs. Beck was really much pleased, and yet was overwhelmed with a suspicion that Betty thought her ungrateful. She was sorry that if there were going to be a handkerchief it had not been one with a black border, but after all this was a pretty one and very fine; it would be just right for Mary by and by.

The old cat seemed to know the young visitor, and came presently purring very loud and rubbing against Betty's gown, and was promptly lifted into her lap for a little patting and cuddling before she must run back again to the aunts. This cat had been known to Betty as a young kitten, and she and Becky had sometimes dressed her with a neat white ruffle about her neck to which they added a doll's dress. She was one of the limp obliging kittens which make such capital playmates, and the two girls laughed a great deal now as they reminded each other of certain frolics that had taken place. Once Mrs. Beck had entertained the Maternal Meeting in her staid best parlor, and the Busy B's, as the captain sometimes called them, had dressed the kitten and encouraged her to enter the room at a most serious moment in the proceedings. Even Mrs. Beck laughed about it now, though she was very angry at the time. Her heart seemed to warm more and more, and by the time our friend had gone she was in really good spirits. Becky must keep the cake of soap in her upper drawer, she said; nothing gave such a nice clean smell to things. It seemed to her it was a strange present, but it was nice to have it, and all the things were pretty; it wasn't likely that any of them were very expensive.

"Oh mother!" pleaded Becky affectionately; "and then, just think! you said last night perhaps she hadn't brought me anything, and it had been out of sight out of mind with her!" Mary was truly fond of her friend, but she could not help looking at life sometimes from her mother's carping point of view. It was good for her to be so pleased and happy as she was that evening, and she looked at her new treasures again and prudently counted the seventeen little chocolates in their gay papers twice over before she treated herself to any. She could keep their little cases even after the chocolates were gone.

Mrs. Beck mended and sewed on buttons long after the captain and Mary had gone to bed. She could not help feeling happier for Betty Leicester's coming. She knew that she had been a little grumpy to the child; but Betty had luckily not been discomforted by it, and had even thought, as she ran across the street in the dark evening and up the long front walk, that Becky's mother was not half so disapproving as she used to be.

VI. THE GARDEN TEA

There was a gnarled old pear-tree of great age and size that grew near Betty Leicester's east window. By leaning out a little she could touch the nearest bough. Aunt Barbara and Aunt Mary said that it was a most beautiful thing to see it in bloom in the spring; and the family cats were fond of climbing up and leaping across to the window-sill, while there were usually some birds perching in it when the coast was clear of pussies.

One day Betty was looking over from Mary Beck's and saw that the east window and the pear-tree branch were in plain sight; so the two girls invented a system of signals: one white handkerchief meant *come over*, and two meant *no*, but a single one in answer was for *yes*. A yellow handkerchief on the bough proposed a walk; and so the code went on, and was found capable of imparting much secret information. Sometimes the exchange of these signals took a far longer time than it did to run across from house to house, and at any rate in the first fortnight Mary and Betty spent the greater part of their waking hours together. Still the signal service, as they proudly called it, was of great use.

One morning, when Mary had been summoned, Betty came rushing to meet her.

"Aunt Barbara is going to let me have a tea-party. What do you think of that?" she cried.

Mary Beck looked pleased, and then a doubting look crept over her face.

"I don't know any of the boys and girls very well except you," Betty explained, "and Aunt Barbara likes the idea of having them come. Aunt Mary thinks that she can't come down, for the excitement would be too much for her, but I am going to tease her again as soon as I have time. It is to be a summer-house tea at six o'clock; it is lovely in the garden then. Just as soon as I have helped Serena a little longer, you and I will go to invite everybody. Serena is letting me beat eggs."

It was a great astonishment that Betty should take the serious occasion so lightly. Mary Beck would have planned it at least a week beforehand, and have worried and worked and been in despair; but here was Betty as gay as possible, and as for Aunt Barbara and Serena and Letty, they were gay too. It was entirely mysterious.

"I have sent word by Jonathan to the Picknell girls; he had an errand on that road. They looked so old and scared in church last Sunday that I kept thinking that they ought to have a good time. They don't come in to the village much, do they?" inquired Betty with great interest.

"Hardly ever, except Sundays," answered Mary Beck. "They turn red if you only look at them, but they are always talking together when they go by. One of them can draw beautifully. Oh, of course I go to school with them, but I don't know them very well."

"I hope they'll come, don't you?" said Betty, whisking away at the eggs. "I don't know when I've ever been where I could have a little party. I can have two or three girls to luncheon or tea almost any time, especially in London, but that's different. Who else now, Becky? Let's see if we choose the same ones."

"Mary and Julia Picknell, and Mary and Ellen Grant, and Lizzie French, and George Max, and Frank Crane, and my cousin Jim Beck,—Dan's too little. They would be eight, and you and I make ten—oh, that's too many!"

"Dear me, no!" said Betty lightly. "I thought of the Fosters, too"—

"We don't have much to do with the Fosters," said Mary Beck. "I don't see why that Nelly Foster started up and came to see you. I never go inside her house now. Everybody despises her father"—

"I think that Nelly is a dear-looking girl," insisted Betty. "I like her ever so much."

"They acted so stuck-up after Mr. Foster was put in jail," Mary went on. "People pitied them at first and were carrying about a subscription-paper, but Mrs. Foster wouldn't take anything, and said that they were going to support themselves. People don't like Mrs. Foster very well."

"Aunt Barbara respects her very much. She says that few women would show the courage she has shown. Perhaps she hasn't a nice way of speaking, but Aunt Barbara said that I must ask Harry and Nelly, when we were talking about to-night." Betty could not help a tone of triumph; she and Becky had fought a little about the Fosters before this.

"Harry is just like a wild Indian," said Mary Beck; "he goes fishing and trapping almost all the time. He won't know what to do at a party. I believe he makes ever so much money with his fish, and pays bills with it." Becky relented a little now. "Oh, dear, I haven't anything nice enough to wear," she added suddenly. "We never have parties in Tideshead, except at the vestry in the winter; and they're so poky."

"Oh, wear anything; it's going to be hot, that's all," said industrious Betty, in her business-like checked apron; and it now first dawned upon Becky's honest mind that it was not worth while to make one's self utterly miserable about one's clothes.

The two girls went scurrying away like squirrels presently to invite the guests. Nelly Foster looked delighted at the thought of such a pleasure.

"But I don't know what Harry will say," she added, doubtfully.

"Please ask him to be sure to come," urged Betty. "I should be so disappointed, and Aunt Barbara asked me to say that she depended upon him, for she knows him better than she does almost any of the young people." Nelly looked radiant at this, but Mary Beck was much offended. "I go to your Aunt Barbara's oftener than anybody," she said jealously, as they came away.

"She asked me to say that, and I did," maintained Betty. "Don't be cross, Becky, it's going to be such a jolly tea-party. Why, here's Jonathan back again already. Oh, good! the Picknells are happy to come."

The rest of the guests were quickly made sure of, and Betty and reluctant Mary went back to the house. It made Betty a little disheartened to find that her friend took every proposition on the wrong side; she seemed to think most things about a tea-party were impossible, and that all were difficult, and she saw lions in the way at every turn. It struck Betty, who was used to taking social events easily, that there was no pleasuring at all in the old village, though people were always saying how gay and delightful it *used* to be and how many guests *used* to come to town in the summer.

The old Leicester garden was a lovely place on a summer evening. Aunt Barbara had been surprised when Betty insisted that she wished to have supper there instead of in the dining-room; but Betty had known too many out-of-door feasts in foreign countries not to remember how charming they were and how small any dining-room seems in summer by contrast. And after a few minutes' thought, Aunt Barbara, too, who had been in France long before, asked Serena and Letty to spread the table under the large cherry-tree near the arbor; and there it stood presently, with its white cloth, and pink roses in two china bowls, all ready for the sandwiches and bread and butter and strawberries and sponge-cake, and chocolate to drink out of the prettiest cups in Tideshead. It was all simple and gay and charming, the little feast; and full of grievous self-consciousness as the shyest guest might have been when first met by Betty at the doorstep, the pleasure of the party itself proved most contagious, and all fears were forgotten. Everybody met on common ground for once, without any thought of self. It came with surprise to more than one girl's mind that a party was really so little trouble. It was such a pity that somebody did not have one every week.

Aunt Barbara was very good to Harry Foster, who seemed at first much older and soberer than the rest; but Betty demanded his services when she was going to pass the sandwiches again, and Letty had gone to the house for another pot of chocolate. "I will take the bread and butter; won't you please pass these?" she said. And away they went to the rest of the company, who were scattered along the arbor benches by twos and threes.

"I saw you in your boat when I first came up the river," Betty found time to say. "I didn't know who you were then, though I was sure you were one of the boys whom I used to play with. Some time when Nelly is going down couldn't you take me too? I can row."

"Nelly would go if you would. I never thought to ask her. I always wish there were somebody else to see how pleasant it is"—and then a voice interrupted to ask what Harry was catching now.

"Bass," said Harry, with brightening face. "I do so well that I am sending them down to Riverport every day that the packet goes, and I wish that I had somebody to help me. You don't know what a rich old river it is!"

"Why, if here isn't Aunt Mary!" cried Betty. Sure enough, the eager voices and the laughter had attracted another guest. And Aunt Barbara sprang up joyfully and called for a shawl and footstool from the house; but Betty didn't wait for them, and brought Aunt Mary to the arbor bench. Nobody knew when the poor lady had been in her own garden before, but here she was at last, and had her supper with the rest. The good doctor would have been delighted enough if he had seen the sight.

Nothing had ever tasted so good as that out-of-door supper. The white June moon came up, and its bright light made the day longer; and when everybody had eaten a last piece of sponge-cake, and the heap of strawberries on a great round India dish had been leveled, what should be heard but sounds of a violin. Betty had discovered that Seth Pond,—the clumsy, good-natured Seth of all people!—had, as he said, "ears for music," and had taught himself to play.

So they had a country-dance on the green, girls and boys and Aunt Barbara, who had been a famous dancer in her youth; and those who didn't know the steps of "Money Musk" and the Virginia reel were put in the middle of the line, and had plenty of time to learn before their turns came. Afterward Seth played "Bonny Doon," and "Nelly was a Lady," and "Johnny Comes Marching Home," and "Annie Laurie," and half a dozen other songs, and everybody sang, but, to Betty's delight, Mary Beck's voice led all the rest.

The moon was high in the sky when the guests went away. It seemed like a new world to some young folks who were there, and everybody was surprised because everybody else looked so pretty and was so surprisingly gay. Yet, here it was, the same old Tideshead after all!

"Aunt Barbara," said Betty, as that aunt sat on the side of Betty's four-post bed,— "Aunt Barbara, don't say good-night just yet. I must talk about one or two things before I forget them in the morning. Mary Picknell asked me ever so many questions about some of the pictures, but she knows more about them than I do, and I thought I would ask her to come some day so that you could tell her everything. She ought to be an artist. Didn't you see how she kept looking at the pictures? And then Harry Foster knows a lovely place down the river for a picnic, and can borrow boats enough beside his own to take us all there, only it's a secret yet. Harry said that it was a beautiful point of land, with large trees, and that there was a lane that came across the fields from the road, so that you could be driven down to meet us, if you disliked the boats."

"I am very fond of going on the water," said Aunt Barbara, with great spirit. "I knew that point, and those oak-trees, long before either of you were born. It was very polite of Harry to think of my coming with the young folks. Yes, we'll think about the picnic, certainly, but you must go to sleep now, Betty."

"Aunt Barbara must have been such a nice girl," thinks Betty, as the door shuts. "And if we go, Harry must take her in his boat. It is strange that Mary Beck should not like the Fosters, just because their father was a scamp."

But the room was still and dark, and sleepiness got the better of Betty's thoughts that night.

VII. THE SIN BOOKS

One morning Betty was hurrying down Tideshead street to the post-office, and happened to meet the minister's girls and Lizzie French, who were great friends with each other. They seemed to be unusually confidential and interested about something.

"We've got a secret club and we're going to let you belong," said Lizzie French. "Where can we go to tell you about it, and make you take the oath?"

"Come home with me just as soon as I post this letter," responded Betty with great pleasure. "Do you think my front steps would be a good place?"

"It would be too hot; beside, we don't want Mary Beck to see us," objected Ellen Grant, who was the most pale and quiet of the two sisters. They were both pleasant, persistent, mild-faced girls, who never seemed tired or confused, and never liked to change their minds or to go out of their own way. Usually all the other girls liked to do as they said, and they were accordingly very much pleased with Betty, apparently because she hardly ever agreed with them.

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