

Blanchard Amy Ella

Three Little Cousins



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CHAPTER I

Molly and Polly

It had stopped raining; Molly made quite sure of it by looking into the little puddles upon the walk. At first she thought there were drops still falling upon them, but it was only the wind which ruffled the surface. The green grass was misty with rain and upon the bushes the shining drops hung from every twig. Presently a sudden burst of sunshine broke through the clouds and changed the drops to sparkles of light. "There!" exclaimed Molly, "I see a piece of blue sky. Now I may go, mayn't I, mother? It is clearing off."

Mrs. Shelton came to the window and Molly with serious face watched her scan the sky. "It really is brighter," Mrs. Shelton decided. "Yes, I see a piece of blue big enough for a Dutchman's breeches so I think the rain is over, but you'd better put on your rubbers, Molly."

Molly scarcely waited to hear but danced out of the room and down the steps. "Don't forget your rubbers!" her mother called after her, and Molly scurried to the closet under the stairs, grabbed the rubbers, snatched up her hat and was out of the door in a twinkling. Steadying herself on one foot, she drew on the overshoes, for there was no time to sit down; she could hear the whistle of the cars in the distance and knew there was barely time to reach the station before the train would stop.

It was an important occasion, for would not the express bring Molly's Cousin Polly whom she had always longed to meet? And not only Polly was coming but their Uncle Dick who was bringing Polly all the way from Colorado to the east. Uncle Dick was not so much of a novelty as Polly, but he was quite as ardently expected, for he was the jolliest fellow in the world, Molly thought, and, though he teased her unmercifully, he was full of jokes and funny quips and amusing anecdotes, besides being generous in the extreme and always ready to put himself out to do a kind turn. As for Polly, Molly had many conjectures concerning her. What sort of girl would she be who had always lived on a ranch far away from the rest of the world; a girl who had never been to school and only a few times to church, who had never seen a big city, nor an automobile, nor even a trolley car? Would she be very wild indeed, whooping like a savage Indian and eating with her knife like an untutored woodsman? Would Molly be ashamed to have her friends meet her? These questions, to which the answer was so near, Molly asked herself for the hundredth time as she walked toward the station.

Already the train was slowing up and in a few moments Molly was standing tiptoe, looking eagerly along the line of cars. Then she watched each person who descended the steps till at last she was rewarded by the sight of a tall young man who lifted down a little girl about Molly's age, a fair-haired, rosy-cheeked little girl, prettily dressed, and in no way suggesting a wild Indian. The instant Molly saw her, she was seized with a fit of shyness and could not follow her first impulse to rush forward. Instead she waited where she was till the two came up.

"Hello!" cried Uncle Dick. "I expected you would come at least to the next station to meet us, and here you are backing away instead."

Feeling that Polly might think that she really did not show the eagerness to see her that she ought to expect, Molly put out her hand but was presently seized in Polly's fervent hug. "Oh, but I am glad to see you," she said. "I could scarcely wait to get here, could I, Uncle Dick? It's such a long way and to-day was the longest one of all."

"I've been just crazy to see you, too," returned Molly. "I was so afraid it would rain hard and mother would not let me come to meet you. Where's Uncle Dick going? Oh, I see; he is looking

after your baggage. Don't you hate sleeping-cars, and didn't it seem funny to have no one but Uncle Dick all these days?"

"No one but Uncle Dick; I like that," said that gentleman rejoining them. "Are you going to have me called a nobody at the very outset, Polly?"

"Oh, I didn't mean – " began Molly covered with confusion.

"Oh, yes you did; you said it when you thought my back was turned," interrupted her uncle.

Polly began to pound him with her fist. "Quit your nonsense, you great big, long-legged, old tease," she said. "You know that wasn't what Molly meant. You aren't a bit nice to her; you began to tease her the very minute you set eyes on her. You'd better be pretty good to her or I won't let you take me home again; so there, sir."

Uncle Dick gave her a playful shake. "You'll be homesick enough in a week from now to go home by yourself," he warned her.

"She'll do no such thing," cried Molly, gathering courage from Polly's example. "She'll just love it here, I know. Come along, Polly; we'll get home first."

But, in spite of their trying to run ahead, Uncle Dick's long legs overtook them, and with a hand, which they could not shake off, on the shoulder of each, he rushed them along so fast that they were breathless when they reached the front gate. Molly's mother was at the door to greet them. She gathered travel-stained little Polly into her arms. "Dear Polly, I am so glad we are to have you with us at last," she said. "Are you very tired, dearie? Was it a tiresome journey?"

"It was rather tiresome at the last," Polly acknowledged, "though at first I liked it for there were some very kind ladies who came as far as St. Louis, but the rest of the way I did get tired of sitting still all day. I am dreadfully cindery and black, Aunt Betty, so I am afraid you can't see at all what I look like. I did try to get off some of the worst about an hour ago, but I suppose I am still very black, as black as Manuel."

"Who is Manuel?" asked Molly.

"He's the blackest one of the Mexicans who work for father," Polly replied.

"Take your cousin up-stairs and see to making her comfortable," Mrs. Shelton told Molly. "Well, Dick, I believe you are actually taller than when I last saw you. When are you going to stop growing?" she said to her brother.

"When I come east to live," he returned. "Everything is big out our way, you know. Everything, including our hearts."

"That's true enough in your case," responded his sister. "Your old room is ready for you. Run right up; I must speak to the maids."

By this time, the two little girls were in the room they were to share together, and in a few minutes Polly had made herself more presentable by the use of soap and water, and with Molly's help in changing her dress. Then the cousins faced each other and examined one another critically, and presently both burst out laughing. "You don't look a bit as I thought you did," said Molly.

"Neither do you," returned Polly. "I thought you would be fair, like a doll I have named Molly."

"And I thought you would be like a picture I have of Minnehaha," returned Molly. Then they laughed again. "Isn't it funny that we are both named for our grandmother," continued Molly. "Suppose you had been called Molly instead of Polly, wouldn't we get mixed up?"

"Yes, almost as much as if we were both called Polly," said Polly, laughing again.

"Are you very, very fond of Uncle Dick?" asked Molly.

"Oh, dear, yes; I adore him. We are just the best sort of friends. He is the greatest tease, but I know ways to tease him, too."

"Oh, do tell me," Molly begged, "for he teases me nearly to death, though I think he is perfectly splendid."

"Wait till he is in a teasing mood, and you'll see," Polly answered. "Oh, Molly, I am perfectly wild to think I am to see the ocean. I have lived among the mountains all my life, and I am wild to get to the sea."

"You will love it," Molly assured her. "Won't we have a fine time all summer together?" She looked admiringly at Polly's curling locks, her dimples, and her pretty fresh white frock. Here was a cousin of whom she need not be ashamed. Why had Uncle Dick called her as wild as a March hare? Why had he given Molly the impression that an Indian was a tame creature beside Polly Perrine?

Polly was thinking much the same thing. Why had Uncle Dick given her the idea that she would find her cousin a fair, doll-like creature? To be sure she had seen a photograph of Molly, but she had worn a hat and coat when it was taken and one could easily get a wrong impression from it.

"Let's go down," proposed Molly; "I have lots of things to show you; besides I want to see Uncle Dick." She felt a little jealous of her cousin's claim to their uncle, and she felt sure her father would appropriate him if he happened to come in before she reached the porch where her mother was sitting with her brother.

Her father had not arrived, having gone to some business meeting which was sure to keep him late. Uncle Dick was lolling back in a porch chair. "Hello, youngsters," he cried as he caught sight of his nieces. "How are you getting along? What do you think of each other?"

Polly ran to him, and perching herself upon the arm of the chair, turned up his nose with an impertinent finger. "Badness," she said, "why did you tell me that Molly looked like a wax doll?"

"Did I tell you that? Well, if I were a maker of wax dolls, I could make one just like her, I think, if I had some of old Doc's tail for hair and two pieces of coal for eyes."

"Her eyes aren't black; they're like two pieces of brown velvet," objected Polly, "and her hair isn't a bit like Doc's tail; it is as soft as silk. Your nose must go up higher for that, sir." She gave his nose an extra tilt while he squirmed under the process.

"There, there, Polly, that is high enough!" he exclaimed; "it will never come down again if you turn it up too high."

"I hope it will not," said Polly; "I hope it will stay turned up like Dicky-pig's."

"Who is Dicky-pig?" asked Molly.

"Oh, he is a little pig I named after my beautiful uncle; he looks just like him," said Polly mirthfully.

"Does your brother look like a pig?" Dick asked his sister.

Mrs. Shelton smiled as she looked at the handsome youth. "I don't detect a striking resemblance," she replied, rising to leave.

"Well, he acts like one sometimes," declared Polly. "I want to know, too," she went on, to her uncle, "if you have been telling Molly things about me that aren't so."

"He said you were wild as a March hare and looked like an Apache Indian," announced Molly from the other side of the chair, giving her uncle's hair a tweak.

"Two to one is not fair," cried Dick. "I draw the line at having my hair pulled out by the roots; it is quite enough to have my nose mauled all out of shape. Here, young woman, you must be kept in better order. Polly, you are setting a bad example to your cousin; never before has she pulled my hair." He grabbed first one and then the other, stowed them away under his knees and held them tight.

"You're spoiling my clean frock," complained Polly. "Let me out and I'll not turn up your nose." Dick loosed his hold, "till the next time," added Polly darting away.

Dick made a grab for her and Molly, too, escaped. "Come back, come back!" cried Dick. "I have something for you, Molly, and you shall have it if you will answer me one question."

The girls slowly returned, but kept at a safe distance. "What is the question?" asked Molly.

Uncle Dick dived down into one of his pockets and drew forth a box of candy which he laid on the chair by his side. "I want to see how you are progressing with your studies," he remarked with gravity. "By the way, is school over yet?"

"No, it closes next week," Molly told him, eyeing the candy.

"Ah, then I must visit it and inquire into your record," said her uncle with an air of dignity.

"Oh, Uncle Dick!" Molly was on pins and needles lest he should really do something of the kind, and if he should hurt the feelings of her dear Miss Isabel whom she adored, Molly did not know what she should do. Miss Isabel might not understand her uncle's joking ways and – oh, dear! Her anxious look made her uncle chuckle with glee.

"I'll go sure as a gun," he declared, seeing a chance to tease.

"Oh, please don't," begged Molly.

"Why not go? Indeed I shall. I am confident from your manner, Miss Shelton, that it really is necessary that I should make some inquiries for the credit of the family. Tell me why I should not go, if you please."

"Why – why – none of the girls' uncles ever do go," said Molly lamely.

"Not a bit of reason why I should not start the custom. What is your teacher like? Old, with little bobbing curls each side her face? Wears a cap, does she? or false frizzes and her teeth click when she talks?"

"She's nothing like that at all," returned Molly indignantly. "She is perfectly lovely with blue eyes and long black lashes, and the beautifullest hair, and she has the prettiest, whitest teeth, like even corn on the cob."

"My, oh, my! All the more must I go," said Dick. "Is she young, dear niece? How old might she be, darling Molly?"

"Oh, I don't know; I think about twenty-one, for she has only been teaching a year. She didn't leave college till last summer, and she told me she wasn't seventeen when she first went there."

"Delightful," said Uncle Dick meditatively. "Where is my sister? I must interest her in this matter. Now, Molly, sweet girl, answer my question and you shall have, not only this box of candy, but another to take to – what did I understand your teacher's name to be?"

"It is Isabel Ainslee, and it is a beautiful name."

"I quite agree with you. Now, Molly, answer me. How many cakes can you buy two for three cents apiece?"

Molly looked at Polly. This was a puzzler surely. "Two," she ventured uncertainly.

Uncle Dick looked at her penetratingly. "That might be the answer under some circumstances," he said.

This puzzled Molly more than ever and she looked at Polly for inspiration.

Polly was laughing. "You're an old fraud," she said to her uncle. "That is no question at all. It is nonsense, Molly. It depends entirely upon how much money you have. If you have six cents you can buy two cakes."

"So you can," returned Molly, seeing daylight. "I have just six cents, so I could buy two cakes at three cents apiece."

"But you didn't answer; it was Polly who did," said her uncle.

"Then Polly takes the candy," said that person darting forward and snatching up the candy box which she thrust into Molly's hand. "Here, Molly, run," she cried. And run Molly did, holding fast to the box and giving one backward glance at her uncle which showed him laughing and shaking his fist at the two retreating figures.

"Just wait till I see that Isabel Ainslee," he called after them. "I'll fix it for you, Molly Shelton."

But Molly had no fears, for Polly whispered; "He's only trying to tease, Molly. Don't mind him."

CHAPTER II

Uncle Dick at School

It wanted but a week of the time when the delightful season would begin which meant long days of freedom for the two little girls, for they were to spend the summer in a dear little cottage by the sea. Ever since Aunt Ada Reid bought her cottage it had been Molly's happy experience to spend the summer there, and to enjoy the delight of running wild. Polly was already enthusiastic but she became doubly so as the time approached and Molly dwelt upon the joys before them.

"We can run anywhere we like and nobody cares," Molly told her, "and there is so much to do the days never seem half long enough. Just this week of school, and then free! free! Uncle Dick didn't do as he threatened after all; he has not been to the school once."

"Oh, he has forgotten all about it," returned Polly.

But Uncle Dick had not forgotten, as the day's proceedings proved. Polly was deeply interested in school matters, for she had been taught at home always, and knew nothing of routine and system, which, even in a small school, must be carried on. She had gone as a visitor with Molly when the rules were not so strictly enforced, for in the last warm days of the term Miss Ainslee was lenient and Polly thought school life perfectly delightful with easy lessons and ever so many interesting things said and done by both teacher and pupils.

The two little girls were sitting side by side, listening attentively to Miss Ainslee's account of the early Britons, when the door softly opened and a tall young man appeared. He looked smilingly around. Molly gave the stifled exclamation: "Uncle Dick!" Polly jumped to her feet but sat down again.

It was a hot morning. The breeze scarcely stirred the leaves of the wistaria vines over the windows. Once in a while a robin gurgled out his cheerful song which Molly always declared reminded her of cherry juice; the little girls in thin frocks fanned themselves behind the rows of desks. Miss Ainslee's back was toward the door and she kept on with the reading, not having heard the intruder who presently made a step forward and gave a roguish glance in Molly's direction, to that young person's confusion, for the color mounted to her cheeks. What was he going to do she wondered. He gave an apologetic little cough which caused Miss Ainslee to look up from her book with a surprised expression.

"Isn't it most time for recess?" asked Uncle Dick gently.

Miss Ainslee glanced at the clock. "Why yes," she replied, her surprise more evident.

"That's what my sister said, and as it is such a warm morning we thought – she thought some ice cream would be refreshing to you all, so she has sent over a freezer; I told the man to set it outside."

Pleased giggles issued from the little girls behind the desks.

"I never thought," continued Dick, "but perhaps I ought – we ought to have furnished dishes and spoons. You couldn't eat it from the ink-wells, I suppose." He turned to the children who again giggled delightedly.

"Oh, I think we can manage in an emergency," said Miss Ainslee. "We have a small cooking class here on Saturday mornings and there is quite a supply of dishes in the cupboard yonder. I think we can make them go around."

Dick's smile grew wistful as he said: "It was pretty hot coming over here, but I don't suppose you could ask me to have some of the cream with you; I'm not a little girl, you know, and I perceive you don't take boys."

A tremulous little smile danced about the corners of Miss Ainslee's mouth as she moved toward the cupboard.

"I could help to dish it out at least," Dick added hastily. "I could do that beautifully, couldn't I, Polly?" He turned to his niece.

"Oh, you are Molly's uncle, aren't you?" The puzzled expression with which Miss Ainslee was regarding him changed to one of understanding. "She has been talking of you for the past month. Certainly stay. I shall be very glad of your help."

Dick cast a triumphant look at Molly. "Then I'll go right out and take off the ice from the freezer," he said. "Will you have the cream in here or out there?"

"Out there, I think," returned Miss Ainslee. "I like the children to take their recess out of doors whenever they can. I will bring out the plates and spoons."

"No, don't," said Dick. "Just show me where they are. Oh, I see: among the gallipots and things. You please go and get the kids – I mean the little girls all settled and I will play butler."

To this Miss Ainslee would not consent, but she dismissed the children who fled out with excited whispers, and presently, to their great satisfaction, they were served with heaping saucers of ice cream and delicious little cakes. Once or twice Molly and Polly ventured near to where their uncle and Miss Ainslee were sitting under a great tree, but each time that they appeared Uncle Dick would say in a strong voice: "I want to inquire about Molly's marks, Miss Ainslee. How is she getting on with her arithmetic?" As this was Molly's bugbear, she would move off hastily whenever the study was mentioned while Uncle Dick looked after her with a twinkle in his eye. He politely took his leave after recess was over, though some of Molly's friends clamored for him to stay and tell them stories of the great west, for they had heard of his powers in that direction. He refused to stay, however, though he promised that he would come again, if Miss Ainslee would permit.

The girls all gathered around their teacher when the visitor had gone, and were loud in their praises of Molly Shelton's uncle. But Molly herself said never a word, though after school was dismissed she crept up to Miss Ainslee and whispered: "Did you tell him I never do get half my examples right?"

Miss Ainslee put her arm around her and whispered back: "No, dear, I didn't, for it wouldn't have been true. Sometimes you do get more than half of them right."

"I do try," said Molly wistfully.

"I know you do," returned Miss Ainslee, giving her a hug. So Molly went home satisfied that after all her uncle's visit to the school meant only good will and not a desire to discover the weak spots in his niece's record.

Uncle Dick made a second visit to the school at another recess hour when it threatened rain and he brought umbrellas for Molly and Polly, and rain it did, coming down in such torrents for a while that he accepted the shelter offered, and, while the thunder rolled and the lightning flashed, told the children such thrilling stories as completely absorbed the attention of the whole school, and no one thought of being afraid of the storm.

Then came the last day of the term when Uncle Dick, as invited guest, came with Mrs. Shelton to see the pretty Garden of Verses which Miss Ainslee had arranged for the closing entertainment. Even Polly took part in that and repeated the lines:

"A birdie with a yellow bill
Hopped upon the window sill,
Cocked his shining eye and said.
'Ain't you 'shamed, you sleepy-head!'"

while Molly, wearing a long silken gown, swept in with rustling skirt to say:

"Whenever auntie moves around
Her dresses make a curious sound;

They trail behind her up the floor,
And trundle after through the door."

She was called to the front of the little stage to receive the bunch of lovely roses her Uncle Dick sent her, and felt very grand when they were handed up to her. Polly, too, came in for her share of flowers, though hers were sweet-peas because her name began with P. However, that did not account for the white bell-like blossoms which were presented to Miss Ainslee, though Polly explained it by saying, "She is a belle, you know," and did not see the whole joke till she remembered Miss Ainslee's first name.

To Polly, Miss Ainslee was a paragon of perfection. She had never before known so dainty and pretty a young lady. The tutor which she and her brothers had was a young man who had gone to Colorado for his health, and when stranded in Denver was chanced upon by Dick Reid who befriended him and brought him home, where he was glad enough to teach the niece and nephews of his former college mate. Miss Ainslee was a teacher of quite another stamp and ardent little Polly adored her.

When the little girls had returned from the closing exercises of the school, their thoughts turned to the next excitement which was the journey northward with Uncle Dick. They were to start the very next morning, and their trunks stood ready to go.

As they entered the hall, Mrs. Shelton picked up a letter which the postman had just brought. It had a foreign postmark, and Molly knew it must be from her Aunt Evelyn, her Uncle Arthur's wife, who lived in England. Mrs. Shelton sat down in the library and opened the letter. She had read only a few lines when she exclaimed: "Well, I declare!"

"What is it, mother?" asked Molly. "What does Aunt Evelyn say? How is Mary?"

"She is better, and what do you think, Molly? Uncle Arthur is coming over and is going to bring Mary with him. They are on their way."

"Oh, Polly! Polly!" cried Molly, "what do you think? Our Cousin Mary is coming. Three Marys in one house and all named after the same grandmother. Tell us more, mother. When are they coming and how long are they going to stay, and all about it. Are they going to Aunt Ada's with us?"

"Wait a minute," said Mrs. Shelton, scanning the final page of her letter. Molly watched her till she read the last word. "It is this way," Mrs. Shelton told her; "your Uncle Arthur has to come to America on business and Mary, you know, has not been very well, so when the doctor advised a sea voyage, Uncle Arthur decided to bring Mary with him and leave her with some of us while he should travel about to look after his business matters. It was all determined upon very hurriedly and Aunt Evelyn is much concerned lest she is giving us a charge we may not wish to undertake. However, I shall hasten to let her know that we shall be delighted to welcome Mary. My own little niece whom I have never seen! It is a great happiness to have both my nieces here this summer." She smiled at Polly.

"But when is she coming?" asked Molly.

"In about a week I should judge."

"Oh, we will be gone then," said Molly, turning to Polly. She hardly knew whether to be glad or sorry of the fact.

"I am glad I determined to wait a little later before going away with your father," continued Mrs. Shelton, "for now I shall be here to receive Arthur and Mary, and can bring Mary up with me on the way to Rangeley. Aunt Ada will be perfectly delighted to know she is to have a visit from Mary, for she has asked so many times that her parents would lend her for a summer."

"It will be just lovely to expect her," said Molly hospitably. "I do hope we shall like her, mother, and that she will be as easy to get acquainted with as Polly is. I feel as if I had always known Polly; she is just like a sister."

"I fancy you will find Mary somewhat different from Polly," said Mrs. Shelton, remembering her sister-in-law's exact little ways, and thinking of Polly's unfettered life on the ranch. "However, I am sure she is a dear child and that we shall love her very dearly."

"I wish she had been here to see the Garden of Verses and our costumes," said Polly, who was quite carried away by the morning's performance.

"Oh, I suppose she sees much finer things in England," said Molly. "I suppose she dresses much finer, too, than we do. Why, there are kings and queens and princesses over there, and they wear ermine and crowns and tiaras."

"I haven't the least idea what a tiara is," said Polly.

"I don't know exactly myself," acknowledged Molly, "but I know it is something you wear on your head and it is studded with diamonds or some kind of precious stones."

"Maybe it is some kind of hat," ventured Polly.

Molly wasn't quite sure, but she wondered if Mary would have one. "At least she can tell us what it is like," she remarked to Polly.

Mrs. Shelton had hurried from the room to tell the news to her brother and the little girls were left in the library alone. Molly was thinking very seriously. Presently she said: "Polly Perrine, if you will never, never tell any one, I'll tell you something. Cross your heart you won't tell."

Polly promptly crossed her heart. "I won't tell," she assured her cousin.

"Then," said Molly looking furtively around, "I am not sure I am glad Mary is coming."

"Oh, why not?" asked Polly, looking the least bit shocked.

"Why, she may be prim and fusty and spoil our plays. I notice often that two girls can play together beautifully, but when a third one comes she is sure to want to do something that one of the others doesn't like and either breaks up the play or gets mad and goes off making you feel sort of hurt and queer inside. You know it is hard to please everybody and the more people you have to please the harder it is."

Polly pondered upon this philosophy of her cousin's. "Well," she said finally, "perhaps if she doesn't like to play our way, she can find some one else to play with."

"Of course she can. I never thought of that," said Molly in a relieved tone. "I remember now before I knew you were coming mother told me that Mrs. Wharton was going to have her granddaughter with her this summer, and I was very glad because the Mowbrays have gone abroad, and I expected to have them to play with. Now we can pair off; you and I can go together and Mary can go with Grace Wharton. I don't suppose," she added after a minute, "that it would be quite polite always to have it that way, for Mary is our own cousin and we can't shove her off on a stranger."

"Maybe we shall not want to," said Polly. "If she is real nice, Molly, we won't mind taking turns, or we can all three play together when the Wharton girl isn't there."

"But don't you ever, ever tell that I said I wasn't sure of wanting Mary," said Molly impressively.

Polly promised, and just then they were called to luncheon and went down-stairs with their arms around each other.

CHAPTER III

Mary

A week later the family was settled for the summer in Miss Ada Reid's cottage by the sea. In front of them was a stretch of green; beyond were the jagged rocks, and then came the ocean. The landing was some distance from the cottage and was upon the bay side of the peninsula, so, although Polly had caught glimpses of the sea during her journey, she did not have a clear view of the wide expanse until they had nearly reached the house and the great blue ocean spread out before her. Then she danced up and down with sheer joy.

"It is just as big and just as blue as I thought," she cried. "Oh, I am so happy! I am so happy!"

Molly was delighted at Polly's enthusiasm, for she, too, loved the sea and the rocks and the wide stretches of grassy hummocks. "There is the cottage," she told her cousin; "the one peeping over that little hill. It looks just like a brownie, doesn't it, with its surprised window-eyes? I always call the cottage 'The Brownie,' and Aunt Ada says it is a very good name for it, because it is a sort of brown."

"I should call it gray," said Polly.

"It is really gray, but it is a sort of brownish gray, and anyhow I like the name of Brownie for it. There is Aunt Ada on the porch watching for us."

Miss Reid came running out to meet them. She gave Molly a hug and a kiss and then turned to her other niece. "And this is our Polly, isn't it?" she said. "Bless the dear; I am so glad to see her. Come along in all of you; I know you are as hungry as hunters and I have dinner all waiting."

"Oh, Aunt Ada, is there to be baked mackerel?" asked Molly.

"Yes, and lobster salad, too."

"Are the wild roses in bloom yet, and are the wild strawberries ripe?" queried Molly.

"The strawberries are trying to get ripe, but I haven't seen a single wild rose yet. Come right in; I know by Dick's eager look that he is ready for my baked mackerel. I have Luella Barnes to help me this year," she whispered, "and she has a big white satin bow in her hair because we have a young man as guest." She laughed mirthfully and Polly thought the way her eyes squeezed up was perfectly fascinating. Her Aunt Ada had visited Colorado when Polly was a baby, but, of course, Polly did not remember it, nor would her aunt have recognized her baby niece in the little rosy-cheeked girl before her.

"This is something like our house," said Polly, looking around with a pleased expression at the unplastered room with its simple furnishings.

"Then you will feel at home," said her aunt. "Take off your hats, girlyes, while I see to dinner, for you know the necessity, Molly, of looking after things yourself up this way."

Just here Luella appeared. She was a tall, angular young woman with a mass of fair hair, very blue eyes and a tiny waist. The white satin bow was conspicuous, and as she caught sight of Dick Reid she simpered and giggled in what the little girls thought a very silly way since it displayed Luella's bad teeth to which she evidently never gave the least attention. However, they all soon forgot everything but satisfying their appetites with the baked mackerel, deliciously fresh, the roasted potatoes, young peas and lobster salad.

"These taste so different from canned things," said Polly, passing up her plate for a second helping of lobster.

Luella reached out a bony arm and took the plate. "I'm glad to see you can eat hearty," she remarked. "Give her a real good help, Mr. Reid."

Molly giggled, though she knew the ways of the "hired help" her aunt employed in the summer. Aunt Ada gave her a warning look, for the natives were quick to take offense and Miss Ada had no wish to be left with no one in the kitchen. "And when is Mary coming?" she asked.

"Oh, we don't know exactly," Molly told her. "Mother will bring her up when she and papa go to Rangeley. Mother thought it would be in about a week. What will you do with three little girls to look after, Aunt Ada?"

"Oh, I expect them to look after me," returned Miss Ada.

"And if they don't do that properly, or if they get obstreperous," put in Uncle Dick, "it is the easiest thing in the world to throw them overboard. I'll do it for you, Ada; the rocks are very handy, and it will not be much of a job."

Polly made a face at him. "I know how much you'll throw us over," she said. "You'd better not try it with me, you sinful evil-doer."

"You see what is before you, Ada," said Dick. "You'll rue the day you consented to have three nieces with you for a whole summer; yet," he shook his head and said darkly, "I know what can be done if worse comes to worst."

"What then, Mr. Dicky-Picky?" said Polly.

"That's for me to know and for you to find out," he replied.

"My, ain't she sassy?" said Luella in a loud whisper to Miss Ada, "but then he ain't no more'n a boy the way he talks."

This was too much for Dick who could not keep his face straight as he rose from the table quickly. "Who's for the rocks, the cove or the woods?" he asked.

"The rocks, the rocks, first," cried both little girls.

"I want to show Polly the dear little pools where the star-fish are, and the cave under the rocks where we found the sea-urchins and where those queer bluey, diamondy shining things are," said Molly.

Polly squeezed her hand. "Oh, I'm so excited," she said. "I have been just wild to see all those things."

"You shall see them in short order," her uncle told her. "We keep our aquarium in the front garden."

"Where is the garden?" asked Polly innocently.

Her uncle laughed as he led the way over the hummocks down the rugged path to the rocks. Here they clambered over crags and barnacled boulders till they came to a quiet pool reflecting the blue of the sky. Its sides were fringed with floating sea-weeds and it was peopled by many sorts of strange creatures which thrived upon the supplies brought in by the ocean with its tides. A green crab scuttled out of sight under some pebbles; a purple star-fish crept softly from behind a bunch of waving crimson weeds; a sea-anemone opened and shut its living petals; by peering under the shelving rock one could see the dainty shell of a sea-urchin.

Polly gazed astonished at the pool's wonders. "It is like fairy-land," she whispered. "I never saw anything so beautiful. Can we come here every day and will the little pools with these queer creatures always be just this way?"

"We can always come at low tide," Molly told her.

"Then I'll always come down here at this time every day."

"But it will not be low tide always at this time," said Molly.

"Oh, won't it?" returned inland little Polly, quite taken aback. "Why won't it?"

Then her uncle told her how the coming in of the tide changes just as the rising of the moon does, and that one must know the difference in time to be sure. Then he went on to explain something about the small creatures which inhabited the pools, the barnacles which covered the rocks up to a certain point.

"Why don't the barnacles go any higher?" asked Polly. "I should think they would grow and grow just like grass does over bare places in the ground."

"They extend only to high water-mark," her uncle told her, "for you see they are fed by the ocean. If you will watch closely, you can see them open and close as the waves come and go."

"Isn't it wonderful?" said Polly in an awe-struck voice.

"I like it best when the tide is up," remarked Molly, "for I don't think all that dark sea-weed that covers the rocks is very pretty."

Polly looked down at the long ropes of seaweed which clung to the craggy places beneath them. "It makes the rocks look just like buffaloes or some strange kind of animals," she said. "I shall call that Buffalo Rock, and that other the Lion's Den, for it looks like a lion lying down."

"There is a dear place further down," said Molly. "It is sheltered from the wind and we have tea there sometimes. There is a cunning fireplace that Uncle Dick built there last year. I wonder if it is still standing. Let's go and see."

They followed the shore a little further and found a flat rock not far below the top of the bluff. The fireplace was nearly as they had left it, and only required a few stones to make it as good as new. Molly viewed it with a satisfied air as her uncle topped it with a final stone. "There," she exclaimed, "it is ready for our first afternoon tea! We'll toast marshmallows, too, as soon as we can get some at the store."

"Why can't we get them to-day?" asked Polly who did not want to put off such a pleasure.

"Because Mr. Hobbs never has any before the Fourth of July. He always gets in his good things then, but never a day sooner or later. I know him of old," said Dick.

"By that time Mary will be here," said Molly thoughtfully, "and we can have our first tea-party in her honor."

"Yes, and she can help us make our Fourth," said Uncle Dick, laughing. "She has never known our great and glorious Fourth over there in England."

"Of course not," said Polly. "I forgot she was a wicked Britisher."

"Not very wicked," said Uncle Dick.

"But we must never let her think we have any grudge against her because we were the ones that won the Revolution," said Molly. "It wouldn't be polite to pick at her because she isn't an American. Do you suppose she will be very snippy, Polly? and will be disagreeable and run down America?"

"Oh, my, I hope not; I'd hate her to be that way," returned Polly alarmed at such a prospect. "It would be dreadful for us to be quarreling all the time and of course we couldn't keep still if she runs down our country. What shall we do if she does?"

"Send her to me," said Uncle Dick.

This settled the matter and was a relief to both little girls, who considered that what Uncle Dick didn't know was not worth knowing, besides he had a smiling way of putting down persons who bragged too much, as the cousins well knew.

"I am just crazy to see her, and yet somehow I dread it," Polly told Molly.

Molly confessed to much the same feeling and declared that she would be glad when the first meeting was over and they were all acquainted. Then she undertook to show Polly more of her favorite haunts and it was supertime before they had begun to see all they wished to.

The next week Mary arrived with Mrs. Shelton who remained but a short time before she resumed her journey. Mary was a slim, pale, plainly-dressed little girl who looked not at all as her cousins imagined. She did not seem shy but she had little to say at first, sitting by herself in a corner of the porch as soon as dinner was over and answering only such questions as were put to her.

"Did you have a pleasant trip?" asked Molly by way of beginning the acquaintance.

"No," returned Mary. "Fancy being seasick nearly all the way."

"Oh, were you? Wasn't that disagreeable?"

"Most disagreeable," returned Mary.

There was silence for a few minutes and then Mary put her first question: "Do you always eat your meals with your parents, or only when you are at a curious place like this?"

"Why, we always do," Polly answered. "Where would you expect us to eat them? In the kitchen?"

"No," returned Mary; "in the nursery."

"There is no nursery here, you know," Molly informed her.

"Yes, I know; that is why I asked. But in the city, or in your own home you have a nursery?"

"Yes, we have," Polly told her, "but we don't eat there."

"Really?" Mary looked much surprised. "And do you come to the table with the grown persons?"

"Why, certainly."

"How curious!"

Polly looked at Molly. "Don't you ever go to the table with your parents?" asked Polly.

"Sometimes we go for dessert."

"Well," returned Polly, "if I couldn't stay all the time, I must say I'd like better to come in for dessert than just for soup."

Mary looked serious, but Molly laughed. "Don't you want to go down on the rocks with us?" asked the latter.

"I think I would prefer to sit here," said Mary.

"All by yourself?" said Molly, surprised.

"Oh, yes, I like to be alone."

This was too decided a hint for the others not to take, so they marched off together. "Well," said Polly when they were out of hearing, "I don't think much of her manners, and I don't think I shall trouble her much with my company. She likes to be alone; well, she will be, as far as I am concerned."

"Oh, she feels strange at first," said Molly by way of excusing her English cousin. "After while she will be more 'folksy,' as Luella says."

"Well then, when she wants to come with us she can say so. I shall not ask her, I know. She is just like what I was afraid she would be stand-offish and airish. She reminds me of 'the cat that walks by herself.' I was always afraid the girls I might meet would be that way."

At this Molly looked quite hurt.

"Oh, I don't mean you," Polly went on, putting her arm around her cousin to reassure her. "You are just dear, Molly. I loved you right away."

Molly's hurt feelings disappeared at this. "I am sure," she remarked, "Mary needn't be so high and mighty; she hasn't half as pretty clothes as we have."

"And she doesn't look nice in those she does have," returned Polly.

From this the two went on from one criticism to another till finally they worked themselves up into quite hard feelings against Mary, and resolved to let her quite alone and not invite her to join their plays. This plan they began to carry out the next day to such a marked extent that their Aunt Ada noticed it.

"I did suppose Molly and Polly would want to show more hospitality to their little English cousin," she said to her brother.

Dick smiled. "They will in time," he said. "A dose of their own medicine might do them good."

"Perhaps Mary has really said something to offend them," said Miss Ada thoughtfully, "or possibly they misunderstand each other's ways. I will watch them for a day or two and try to discover what is wrong." She kept Mary at her side after this, and when she was not doing something to entertain her, Dick was, till both Molly and Polly began to add jealous pangs to their other grievances, yet they would only sidle up to their aunt and uncle or would sit near enough to hear what was said without joining in the conversation.

"They are jealous; that's what it is, poor dears," said their aunt to herself. "I must gather them all together in some way." So the next evening when she and Mary were established in a cozy corner by the open fire, she called the other two little girls, "come here, lassies. Mary has been telling me some very interesting things about England. Don't you want to hear them, too?"

Molly and Polly came nearer and sat on the edge of the wood-box together.

"Now," said Miss Ada, "I think it would be a good way to pass the time if each were to tell her most exciting experience. Mary can tell of something that happened to her in England; Polly can give us some experience of hers in Colorado, and Molly can choose her own locality. Molly, you are the eldest by a month or two, you can begin."

Molly was silent for a few minutes and then she began. "My most exciting time was last fall when we were going home from here. We took the early boat, you remember, Aunt Ada, and the sea was very rough. We were about half way to the city when a tremendous wave rushed toward us and we were all thrown down on deck. I went banging against the rail, but Uncle Dick caught me, though he said if the rail hadn't been strong we all might have been washed off into the sea. It was two or three minutes before we could get to our feet and I was awfully scared; so was everybody."

"It was not rough at all when we came down here from the city," remarked Mary.

"It is usually very smooth," said Miss Ada, "but the time of which Molly speaks it was unusually rough and we all had reason to be terrified. Now your tale, Polly."

Polly sat looking into the fire for a moment before she said, "I think the time I was most scared was once when Uncle Dick and I were riding home on our ponies. It was most dark and the sun was dropping behind the mountains; it always seems lonely and solemn then anyhow. I wasn't riding my own pony that day for he had hurt his foot, so I had Buster, Ted's broncho: I'd often been on him before and I wasn't a bit afraid to ride him. Well, we were coming along pretty fast because it was getting so late and we were a good distance from home. Of course there were no houses nearer than ours, and that was three miles away. I was a little ahead when a jack-rabbit jumped up right before Buster's nose and he lit out and ran for all he was worth. I held on tight, but he kept running and pretty soon I saw we were making toward a bunch of cattle. Buster used to be a cattle pony and I thought: suppose that bunch should stampede and I should get into the thick of them. I was always more scared of a stampede than anything else. Well, the cattle did begin to run but I jerked at Buster's bridle and managed to work him little by little away from the cattle, but he never stopped running till we got home and then I just tumbled off on the ground, somehow, and sat there crying till Uncle Dick came up. He had no idea that Buster was doing anything I didn't want him to, but just thought I was going fast for a joke and because I wanted to get home."

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