Douglas Amanda M.

A Modern Cinderella

Amanda Douglas

A Modern Cinderella

Douglas A.

A Modern Cinderella / A. Douglas — «Public Domain»,

Содержание

Douglas Amanda M.
A Modern Cinderella

CHAPTER I
AT THE PALACE

"You may stay down here until nine o'clock if you like," said Bridget. "It's awful cold upstairs. Be sure to wrap yourself good in the old blanket. And put a little coal on the range. If you let my fire go out, I'll skin you alive."

When Marilla first heard that threat she shuddered all over. If you scratched a little bit of skin off it hurt dreadfully. But Bridget never did it. Sometimes she hit her a slap on the shoulder. She couldn't even bear to skin a rabbit. "What do you mean by it?" Marilla gained courage to ask once, when she came to feel at home.

"Oh, I don't know. My mother used to say it. Sometimes she took a strap to us, but she wasn't ever real hard."

Marilla knew about the strap in Bethany Home though she didn't often get it.

"I'll remember about the fire."

"Good night!" Bridget was off.

She always took two or three evenings out in the week and had Sunday afternoon instead of Thursday because they had late dinners during the week. She was very excellent help, so Mrs. Borden let her have her own way.

It was nice and warm in the kitchen; clean, too. Bridget couldn't abide a dirty kitchen. Marilla had wiped the dishes, scoured out the sink and set the chairs straight around. It was a basement kitchen with a dining room above. The front was the furnace cellar, the middle for vegetables and what Bridget called truck.

Marilla sat in the little old rocking chair and put her feet on the oven hearth. It was very nice to rock to and fro and no babies to tend nor Jack to bother with. She sang a few hymns she knew, she said over several, little poems she had learned and spelled a few words. Bridget had turned the gas low, and she couldn't reach it without getting on a chair or she could have read. So she told herself a story that she had read.

It was very comfortable. She was getting a bit sleepy. Suppose she took a teeny nap as she did sometimes when she was waiting for Bridget. So she shook up the old cushion, brought up the stool, sat on that and laid her head in the chair. And now she wasn't a bit sleepy. She thought of the stove and put on some coal, lest she *might* fall asleep.

She hoped it would be warmer tomorrow when she took out the twins. Then she would venture to stop at the book store window and look at the pictures on the magazine covers. There was a baby that looked so like the twins it made her laugh. She didn't think the twins pretty at all. They had round chubby faces and almost round eyes, and mouths that looked as if they were just ready to whistle, and brown fuzzy hair without a bit of curl in it. But they *were* good, "as good as kittens," their mother said. She did so wish she had a kitten. She had brought such a pretty one from the store one day, a real maltese with black whiskers, but Bridget said she couldn't have a cat forever round under her feet and made her take it back.

Jack was past five and very pretty, but bad as he could be. Bridget said he was a "holy terror," but she thought holiness was goodness and didn't see the connection. He was a terror, that any one could see.

There was a queer shady look in the corners. She wasn't a bit afraid. The children at Bethany Home weren't allowed to be. She liked this a great deal better. She wasn't compelled to eat her whole breakfast off of oatmeal, and always had such lovely desserts for dinner. And sometimes Mrs. Borden gave her and Jack a banana or a bit of candy. Oh, yes, she would much rather live here even if Jack was bad and pinched her occasionally though his mother slapped him for it, or pinched him back real hard.

What made this lovely, rosy, golden light in the room? It was like a soft sunset. She had been saying over a lot of Mother Goose rhymes; of course she was too old for such nonsense and Jack didn't like them. And in "One, two, buckle my shoe," she wondered which she liked best: "Nineteen, twenty, my stomach's empty," or "nineteen, twenty, I've got a plenty." That was Bethany Home where you only had so much for supper and one little cracker. And here there was plenty. It made her laugh.

And then suddenly there was a pretty little woman in the room dressed in something soft and shining and in her hand she held a stick with a bunch of gay bows at the end. She was so sweet and smiling that Marilla couldn't feel afraid.

"You don't know me, Cinderella?" she began, looking at the child.

"Oh, that isn't my name."

"You don't sit in the ashes any more but I dare say you brush up and carry them out in the morning. But I don't find Cinderellas often at this time of night."

"I wish I was Cinderella. I have a little foot though, only it don't look so in these big brogans. I put some soles inside of them, bits of velvet carpet and they keep my feet nice and warm. I do think if the glass slipper wasn't too teeny weeny I could wear it."

"You're a cute one. About the soles, now. Most children haven't any useful ideas," and she laughed. "I knew who you were; now can you guess who I am?"

"Why if I was Cinderella you'd be a fairy godmother. But there ain't any such things; nor Santa Claus. I like the stories about 'em and I'm awful sorry. I'm only Mrs. Borden's bound-out girl, but I like it here."

"You think so?" She gave the most curious, delightful laugh. "You are Cinderella and I am the fairy godmother."

Marilla sprang up and studied her. She was so pretty and her gown looked as if it was sprinkled with diamond dust. She had never seen any one like her, but at twelve her range of observation had been rather limited.

"Well, what do you think of me?"

Marilla stood wide eyed and speechless.

"Why – you are very beautiful. Oh, I wish you were a fairy godmother! I'd like to go to fairy land. I don't think any one would mind much, but I do believe the twins would care. Bridget says there isn't any such thing and then she tells about a little girl who was toted away and had to stay seven years."

"You couldn't stay that long, and times have changed, and you have no envious sisters. You're a rather lonely little body with no father or mother."

"Oh, how did you know that?"

She laughed, the softest, merriest laugh.

Marilla looked and looked, the little body was so sweet and mysterious.

"Oh, fairy godmothers know a great many things. They keep watch over the Cinderellas and then when they find one to their liking they appear to her, and then strange things happen."

"Yes they are strange," said the little girl.

"Would you like to go to the ball?"

"Oh! Why I'm afraid I wouldn't know what to do," hesitatingly, "I've never seen a ball."

"You can dance. I saw you dancing with an organ grinder."

"Oh, yes, I can dance that way, but–"

"Would you like to go?"

"Oh, wouldn't I!" Marilla's eyes shone with delight. "If you were a fairy godmother you could put me in some clothes."

Marilla didn't believe in it at all, but it was very funny.

"Then just step out here."

She did with the strangest sort of feeling. The fairy touched her with the wand. Her clothes fell in a heap. The big shoes dropped off. There was a shimmery pink silk frock with lace and ribbons and the daintiest pink kid slippers with diamond buckles and pink silk stockings with lovely clocks. She went dancing around the kitchen light as a feather, her eyes shining, her cheeks like roses, her lips full of smiles. She was fairly bewitched.

"You'll do," exclaimed godmother, and she threw a beautiful white cloak about her.

"But we haven't a pumpkin in the house and Bridget catches all the mice and burns them up. So you can't make a carriage–"

"There's one at the door." The hall seemed all alight and they went out. Yes, there was a coach with lamps on both sides, two horses and a driver, besides a footman who helped them in with a fine air, and drove off as gay as if it was Christmas night, though it were really March.

The streets were alight, the windows shining in splendor. Marilla had never seen anything like it. Presently they stopped at what seemed to the little girl a great palace with broad white marble steps and tall carved columns lighted by myriads of colored lights and the vestibule was hung with vines. There were statues standing round that looked like real people only they were so white from top to toe. Then they went up another beautiful stairway that led to a gallery where there were numbers of inviting little rooms, and throngs of elegantly dressed people, not any larger than boys and girls. A maid took off their wraps, and brushed Marilla's hair and it fell in golden rings all over her head.

"What beautiful hair," she exclaimed, "just like threads of silk. You must let it grow long. And such lovely eyes; but she's thin."

"Yes, rather," said godmother, "But she has dancing feet. She's a real Cinderella."

"There's so many of them and only one Prince. What a pity!"

"But each has her turn, and they are very happy."

Then Marilla glanced around the gallery. That was well lighted and had a cushioned seat against the wall. Groups were sitting together or rambling about. And a great circular room, down stairs lighted by a magnificent chandelier whose prisms seemed in constant motion and rayed off every imaginable color with a faint musical sound.

"Oh! oh! oh!" and her eyes were full of tears though her lips smiled.

"Now we will go down," said godmother.

That was by another way. But this place was a perfect land of delight. She had never read of anything like it, but the Arabian Nights had not come in her way. Some were dancing about informally, some talking and laughing. There were the most elegantly attired boys in silks and velvets made in all pretty fashions. Silk stockings and light colored pumps, jackets trimmed with frills of lace, some with satin trousers wide enough for petticoats at the bottom and blue velvet sailor collars. There was no end of fancy attire.

"This is to be your knight, Sir Aldred. And this is the new Cinderella. Take good care of her until the Prince comes."

He bowed with most enchanting grace.

"There are so many of them!" he said, as he took her hand, "But she is the prettiest of them all."

The knight gave her hand a little squeeze and she turned rosy red.

"Come this way," and he led her along. It was odd to be introduced as Cinderella, but everybody was so sweet and cordial that she kept smiling and bowing.

Presently a cluster of bells sounded and everybody fell into line along the outer edge of the beautiful building. It was a grand march and the tapping of the feet seemed like an encore to the

music. Then the first couple stepped out on the floor. Everybody dances in fairy land that is presided over by godmothers. Oh, it was just enchanting!

"Are you tired?" Sir Aldred asked presently.

"Oh, no, I never imagined anything so utterly delightful. And the splendid dressing. Are there many Cinderellas here?" a little timidly.

"Oh, yes. They love to come, but the new one always dances with the Prince. He will come in presently for you."

"Oh, I shall feel afraid." She really felt tears rushing to her eyes.

"No, you will not, for he is truly most delightful, a regular Prince Charming. You see, it is different in fairy land. You forget for awhile who you have been. That's the charm of it. And you're such a lovely dancer."

"And – and – is there any glass slipper?"

She seemed to remember something about that.

"That's in the story. The Prince isn't looking for a wife now. And you couldn't dance in a stiff glass slipper. It might shiver to pieces. What pretty little feet you have! And such a lovely curly head."

It seemed quite delightful to be praised and she was glad she pleased him.

Then there was a curious quivering about the place as if every one was drawing a long breath, and the lights were mysterious, while all the little bells twinkled. And there stood the Prince.

He was taller than any of the others and very handsome. As for his attire, I couldn't begin to describe it, it was so resplendent with silk and velvet and jewels.

Sir Aldred led the little lady up to him and said: "This is Cinderella."

The Prince bowed and pressed a kiss upon her hand and she was glad it was lily white and not rough and red.

"I am very glad you are here Cinderella, I hope you will have a happy time. You look so."

"Oh I know I shall." She blushed and cast her eyes down in such a sweet fashion that he really longed to kiss the lids.

Then the music commenced and they stepped out as if they had danced together all their lives. The others formed a circle and went round them, bowing as they passed. There were such fascinating figures, changing frequently, each one prettier than the last. She wondered how they could remember; how *she* could do it. They all looked so lovely. It certainly was fairy land.

Now and then the Prince bent over and said something charming to her as if she had been a fine lady and the odd thing was that she could answer him readily. The music began to go slower and died in softest melody. Then he turned and said —

"Now we will go out and have some refreshments. You must be tired after all this dancing, but you don't look it at all."

"Oh, I feel as if I could dance all night. I believe I am bewitched."

He gave her the sweetest smile that any Cinderella ever had.

"I am very glad. Sometimes they think of the ashes and cinders and wonder whether the pleasure will last. Then the lightness goes out of their feet and the smiles from their rosy lips. The thing is to enjoy it while you are here. You are a very delightful Cinderella; I must ask godmother to keep a watch over you. I hope to meet you again."

The banquet room was beautiful as well; there was a great oval table with a chandelier shedding a thousand lights from the gorgeous prisms. Underneath was a tiny lake full of blooming water lilies. There were mounds of fruit and flowers, nuts from all over the world, piles of cake, candied fruit, ices made in all kinds of shape. The most beautiful plates and dishes, glass and crystal and servants piling up dainties and pouring out fragrant drinks.

At the head sat the Prince and Cinderella. He rose and drank to her health and good fortune with the most exquisite verse and Sir Aldred returned with a charming reply. Certainly there were no envious or jealous sisters. Every one was so merry and talked with his or her neighbor, and every girl

had a knight who was devoted to her. Were they all Cinderellas, and had the Prince been as delightful to them? Every face beamed with wondrous satisfaction.

"But I don't understand it at all," and she glanced up wonderingly.

"Oh, you don't have to in fairy land. You just take all the pleasure that comes. You are not thinking of all the tomorrows. There will be something nice and pleasant if you look for it in the right place. For little Cinderella, we must not be looking for tomorrow's joy. You cannot find them tonight. There are flowers that fold their leaves but will open again tomorrow. You would be short sighted to sit down and cry tonight about it."

Marilla was a good deal puzzled.

"You must be a happy little Cinderella when you have been to fairy land. You must not lose faith in fairy godmothers. They come at unexpected times and in different guise. And that is what keeps the world bright and the heart young, and sometime the real Prince comes."

Her heart beat with a mysterious joy. She was full of gladness.

Then they walked around and all the other Cinderellas seemed so happy when he smiled and spoke to them. The beautiful music went on. Here and there groups were dancing again.

And then it seemed as if a giant caught her and almost shook her to pieces, and the beautiful lights wavered and vanished. She was brought upon her feet with a force that would have shivered any glass slipper.

"You little huzzy! What are you doing up this time of night, instead of asleep in bed? Rouse up! rouse up! Lucky you didn't let my fire go out this cold night! Come, hustle!"

There seemed a sort of crash. Marilla glanced around with half-opened eyes. Yes, this was the old kitchen. There was Bridget with the lighted end of a candle in the tin candlestick.

"Come! get along, sleepy head." She gave her a push up the stairs and through the halls, half scolding her but not cross. "It's a wonder the gobble sirs didn't come after you. If you'd been carried off now! It's awful cold. I'd sleep in my stockings and they'll be good and warm in the morning."

Marilla hustled off her clothes, wrapped herself in an old blanket and tumbled into bed in a little heap. But there was some mysterious music floating through her brain and a fragrance in the air. The Prince smiled down into her eyes, and the fairy godmother she should always believe in. For she had been to real fairy land; that was the truth.

CHAPTER II
JACK

The Bordens were nice, ordinary people enjoying life in a commonplace way. There was Mr. Jack Borden, the junior partner in a fairly successful law firm, his wife an averagely nice, sensible body, Miss Florence, her husband's sister, a bright girl of three and twenty, whose lover was in South America on a five years' contract, with one year yet to serve.

After the twins were born they tried a grown nursemaid who bored them by sitting around when she was upstairs and making many excuses to get down to the kitchen, where she disputed with Bridget who declared one or the other of them must go, and they simply could not give up Bridget. The babies slept a good deal of the time and only cried when they were hungry. The mother and aunt thought them the dearest things and their father was as proud of them as a man could well be. If it wasn't for giving them an airing now and then – but when it came pleasant weather they *must* be taken out.

Aunt Hetty Vanderveer who was queer and going on to eighty, who couldn't live with a relative for they always wanted to borrow her money, got tangled up in a house on which she had a mortgage, and called her grandnephew, Mr. John Borden to her rescue. She took the house and persuaded them to come there, and she would live with them on certain conditions. She was to have the third floor front room and the store room, get her breakfast and tea and take dinner with them though it was their luncheon. Night dinners she despised. She entertained herself sewing patchwork, a dressmaker sent her bags of silk pieces; knitting baby socks and stockings and reading novels. They did get along very well though it made a good deal of running up and down.

The spare room and Bridget's room was on this floor. On the second, two sleeping chambers, the nursery and the bath. Down stairs a long parlor and a dining room, with a basement kitchen which Bridget declared she liked above all things. A woman came to do the washing and ironing, Bridget's nephew took out the ashes and swept the stoop and sidewalk. Bridget was a strong, healthy, good natured Irish woman when you didn't meddle with her, and the ladies were very glad not to meddle. But some one for the babies they must have.

One day a friend came in for a subscription to some of her charities and heard the appeal.

"Now, I'll tell you just what to do," she said "Go over to the Bethany Home, you take the car out to the Melincourt Road that passes it. Ask for Mrs. Johnson. They have two girls; they put them out when they are twelve. And since you only want some one to amuse the babies and take them out, and she will be growing older all the time, you see, you can bring her up in your ways. Yes, that is what I'd do."

Mrs. Borden followed the advice. There was a stout, rather vacant looking German girl, a good worker who delighted in scrubbing and scouring and who would make an excellent kitchen maid. The other was Marilla Bond, an orphan with no relatives that any one knew; a fair, nice looking intelligent child, with light curly hair cropped close, rather slim, and with a certain ready, alert look that was attractive.

Mrs. Borden brought her home for a month's trial. She took to the babies at once, and Jack took to her. Oddly enough, so did Bridget. She had such a quaint sweet way of saying, "Yes'm" and "No'm;" she did what she was told to do with alacrity, she ran up and down stairs on numberless errands. She was a very good reader and at first, Jack kept her busy in this respect. But she wanted to hear about lions and tigers and men killing them and Indian fights and matters that didn't please the little girl at all. Mother Goose was babyish.

The twins sat on a blanket on the floor and sometimes rolled around a little. She played with them, talked to them and they really listened to the stories that she acted off and laughed gleefully.

"They certainly *are* intelligent," Aunt Florence said with pride.

On nice sunny days when it was not very cold she took them out in the carriage. They were carried down and put in it, then brought up again. Their mother "wasn't going to have any nurse breaking their backs by a fall."

So when the month of probation was ended, Marilla was bound to Mr. and Mrs. John Borden, to be clothed and fed and sent to school for half a year. She really did like her new home. Only if it wasn't for Jack! He pinched her sometimes, and once he kicked her but his mother gave him a good trouncing.

The twins had some bread and milk and were put to bed at six. Then Cinderella went down stairs but not to sit in the ashes. She did numerous things for Bridget and they had a cozy dinner together, always a dessert, and they were so good.

"If Jack only wouldn't run away," she said. "You see I can't leave the babies, and I am so afraid he will get lost."

"Let him get lost then; that'll bring his mother to her senses, and you tell her."

He did come near it one day. She took the babies home and explained and then said she would go and find him.

Aunt Florence went with her. They had quite a long search and finally asked the policeman, who said: "there was a little boy down here on a stoop, crying."

Jack, sure enough, and he was very glad to be found. His mother kept him in the house for two days and then he promised to be very good.

"Now, if you make any trouble you shall not go out for a whole week."

The babies hadn't gone much farther than "*agoo, agoo*," but Marilla tried her best to make them talk. They each had a rubber doll and the child would dance them up and down and make them turn somersaults and stand on their heads, and invent every sort of grotesque action.

Jack was a good looking little fellow and had been spoiled in the earlier years. He was a little afraid of his father, and sometimes his mother *would* make him mind, but he was very full of badness.

Aunt Florence wanted some silk and twist and spools of cotton one morning.

"You could find your way down to Grand street where the stores are, couldn't you Marilla – where we went that Saturday night?"

"Oh, yes. Down there opposite the park."

"Yes. It's a big store. Day and Belden. I'll write it out for you and you may take my Leggy bag. Be sure and put the change in it before you leave the store."

"Yes'm," with her sweet accent.

"She may take Jack, and the babies will have a good long nap. Now Jack, you must be very good and mind Marilla, or you shan't go out again for a week."

Jack said he would. He looked very pretty in his brown coat with its fur collar, and his brown mittens.

"Give me a penny a'cause I'm gonter be good."

"I'll wait and see whether you are going to good or not."

Jack stood it pretty well until they reached the little park which was a rather long triangle with a few trees in it. Here he made a sudden dash and was off like a squirrel.

Marilla was after him. "Go it sonny," cried a man laughing, but she gained on him and took him by the arm with a jerk that nearly capsized them both.

He could not pull away. She marched him across the street and found the store, and asked for the notion department. There were the spools of all kinds.

"Will you please open the bag and find an order in it," she said in a very nice manner.

The girl smiled. "Three spools of silk, two twist, black cotton number 60, white cotton, 60, 70 and 80."

She put up the order and sent the money whizzing to the cash clerk, handing the bag to Marilla.

"What's that thing like a railroad for?" asked Jack, keeping his eyes upon it.

"That carries the money."

"Gee! I wish I had one at home!"

The change came back. Marilla opened the bag to put it in and used both hands. Jack was off like a flash, turning here and there through the aisles. Clear down to the end of the store was a toy department. Marilla was almost up to him when he grabbed a handful of toys and ran on.

"Oh, do please stop him!" she cried to the clerk.

Two or three joined the chase. Finding they were gaining on him he threw down the articles and stamped furiously upon them.

"What is all this row?" asked the floor walker.

"The little boy snatched the toys and ran," said the young clerk.

"Oh, Jack, how could you!" cried Marilla.

Jack laughed insolently.

"Is he your brother?" in a sharp tone.

"I'm only the nurse girl, please, sir," and Marilla began to cry.

The floor walker shook Jack until he was purple in the face.

"You little thief! You ought to go to the Station House. I've half a mind to send you!"

"Oh, please don't," pleaded Marilla. She stooped to pick up some of the broken pieces. "I think his mother will pay for them."

"Who's his mother?"

"Mrs. John Borden, 138 Arch Street."

"What brought you in the store."

"I was sent to buy some things. They are in this bag, and – the change."

A gentleman came up to inquire into the matter.

"These children ought to be taught a lesson. That Granford boy carried off an expensive toy the other night and I sent a note to his mother that brought her to terms at once. See what is the value of these things."

The counter girl began to place the pieces together and examine the marks.

"It is – sixty-seven cents."

"That's too much. We'll send a note to his mother, and young sir, if you dare to come in this store again, we'll send you to jail, I think."

Quite a crowd had collected. One lady looked at him sharply.

"Why, it's little Jack Borden," she said. "What's the matter?"

Marilla told the story over.

"I don't care," Jack flung out. "I just stamped on the old things."

"Take that to Mrs. Borden," and the man handed Marilla a folded note. "Now, I'll see you out, young sir."

Marilla trembled from head to foot. She was very much ashamed though none of it had been her fault. But what would Mrs. Borden say? What if Mrs. Borden should send her back to the Bethany Home! Oh, she did not want to go. But she could not manage Jack.

The young man stopped short when they reached the house, "I ain't comin' in just now," he said decidedly.

When Marilla was in the house she always answered the door bell. Bridget protested she could not run up and down so much and she didn't always hear it. Miss Florence came now.

"Oh, Marilla, what's the matter?"

"Jack has run off down the street. And, oh, Miss Florence" – ending in a fit of crying.

"What *is* the matter? Did you lose the money?"

"Oh, no, here is everything and the change. But Jack–"

"Come upstairs and tell us." Miss Florence opened the bag, counted the change, took out the parcels and a note.

"Why, what is this?"

"The man told me to bring it home. I held Jack's hand tight all the way down to the store and gave the girl the bag because I couldn't open it with one hand. She took out the money and put in the parcel and gave it to me and said, 'Wait for the change.' When it came she handed it to me and turned away, and when I was putting it in the bag Jack ran off. You know how the paths go in and out. I looked and looked and saw him over at the toy counter, but before I could reach him he snatched a lot of things and ran, and the girl went after him, too, and then he threw them down and stamped on them and ever so many people came and the man was very angry–"

Marilla cried as if her little heart had been broken. Miss Florence handed the note to her sister who had been listening in amaze.

"Marilla," began Florence, "you have done the errand very well. Don't cry, child. We shouldn't have let Jack go with you."

Mrs. Borden's face turned very red. "A great fuss about sixty-seven cents. Accidents will happen."

"But throwing them down and stamping on them was no accident, Amy. That child is dreadful. He doesn't mind Marilla when he is out of our sight, hardly when he is in it. And I don't know what the babies would do without her."

They began to cry now. They always cried together and lustily.

"Where's Jack?" asked his mother.

"He ran down the street."

"Don't worry about Jack, Marilla; you go down and get the babies' bread and milk ready."

Marilla went and of course told the mishap to Bridget.

"That young'un 'll get in prison some day; you see! He's a rascal through and through, a mean dirty spalpeen, a holy terror! And if they set to blaming you, I'll threaten to leave; that I will."

"You don't think they'll send me back to Bethany Home?" in a distressed tone.

"They'd be big fools to! I don't know where they'd get another like you. If that Jack was mine, I'd skin him alive and hang him out bare naked, the mean little thief! And the missus knows he's bad through and through."

Marilla took the basin of dinner upstairs. The babies had hushed their crying and gave a sort of joyous howl at the sight. Florence had talked her sister-in-law into a more reasonable view of the case. Then the babies were fed and comforted and sat on the blanket with playthings about them. They could climb up a little by chairs, but they were too heavy for much activity.

Mrs. Borden picked up her slipper and went down stairs, opening the front door. Jack was slowly sauntering back and she beckoned to him. He had begun to think it was feeding time as well as the babies.

"I was gone, to put 'em back – " he began —

She took off his pretty coat and then she did spank him for good. Meanwhile the bell rang for lunch. She put him on a chair in the end of the parlor and said —

"Now you sit there. If you dare to get up you'll get some more. And all the lunch you can have will be a piece of bread without any butter." And she left the door open so she could see if he ventured down.

But after the bread he went up stairs and straight to Marilla.

"You old tell tale! You'll be rid on a rail and dumped in the river," and he kicked at her.

"The man sent a note–"

"Jack," interposed his mother sternly.

Then the babies were bundled up and carried down stairs, well wrapped up for their ride. Manila enjoyed the outing when she didn't have Jack. She went down again by the stores. There were two

she delighted in, book and stationery stores. One window was full of magazines and papers, and she read bits here and there. She was so fond of reading and she would piece out the page she read with her own imaginings. She always staid out two hours, more when it was pleasant, and brought back the babies, rosy and bright eyed.

"Jack," and his father took him on his knee that evening, "you have been a very bad boy today. You have been a thief. Suppose the man had sent you to the Station House?"

"I wouldn't a' gone."

"Well, you would have had to. Thieves break laws and are sent to prison. And there you broke up the toys. You must never go in a store again without your mother."

"M'rilla took me in."

"And mother and Auntie supposed they could trust you. Now they can't. You will have to be watched and punished, and I am going to do it. There'll be no more Sunday walks with me, either."

"Can't I go alone?"

"Not until you are a good boy."

Jack looked rather sober, but his father saw he was not making much impression. And presently his mother put him to bed.

"I really don't know what to do with Jack," his mother said on her return, taking up her sewing.

"Listen to this," and Mr. Borden read from the paper an account of three boys who had managed to enter a grocery store and steal some quite valuable stock. Ages, seven, nine and ten.

"I'd rather bury Jack tomorrow than have such a thing published about him," he said.

"And Jack used to be so nice," returned his mother with a sigh.

"We've indulged him too much, and we have idealized childhood too much; we've laughed at his smart tricks and his saucy replies, and tried high moral suasion, but we must turn over a new leaf. When he is bad he must be punished severely enough to make an impression. Are you sure of that girl, Marilla?"

"Yes. She's truthful and so sweet to the babies. Bridget says she wouldn't even touch a piece of cake without asking for it. But I think she does sometimes shield Jack. He has a nasty way of pinching and I do slap him for it. I'm afraid of his pinching the babies. But we never do leave him alone with them."

"See here," began Florence, "why not send him to Kindergarten. The new term is just beginning. I think boys ought to be with other boys. And those classes are made so entertaining. The many employments take a child's mind off of mischief, and they are trained in manners. Oh dear! think, what a blessed time we should have!"

"I don't know but it is a good idea," said Jack's father. "He will have to mix with children some time, and our training hasn't proved such a brilliant success. Oh, I do want him to grow up a nice boy. But boys seem an awful risk now-a-days. I never knew so many youthful criminals."

"I'd like to know who that woman was who recognized Jack in the store. That mortifies me awfully."

"And it will get told all over, I know," returned Aunt Florence.

"Well, children do out grow a good many of these disagreeable capers."

The next night Mr. Borden brought home something in a paper bag and Jack begged the bag "to bust," watching his father as he shook out a leather strap cut in thongs and said —

"Now, Jack, every time you do any naughty, ugly thing, I am going to punish you with this strap. You must not pinch Marilla or the babies, not kick any one nor tell what isn't true. We want you to be a pretty good boy, otherwise you will have to be sent to the reform school."

"I'd like to go to the 'form school."

"Not much," was the comment.

"Why, I'd run away."

"There's a high fence all around, and you couldn't climb it."

"Then I'd holler like fury."

"And be put in a dark dungeon."

"There was a man in a story who dug his way out. That's what I'd do."

Arguing was useless. He was such a little fellow, but fertile in expedients.

"I don't want ever to use this strap on my little boy. I hope he will be good."

"What is good and what is bad."

"Come to bed, Jack. You're getting silly."

On Monday morning Jack went to Kindergarten. The house was like another place. And Jack was very much entertained. He soon learned what a "punch below the belt" meant, and a "biff in the eye" and several other fighting terms.

"And they're a set of gumps," he declared. "They can't read right off, they've got to write it, and I can read most anything and spell words, too. But they make pictures and lovely things, and sing. Yes, I like to go."

CHAPTER III
PLAYING HOOKEY

Marilla thought she had lovely times with Jack in school, but she did have to run up and down so much that some nights her little legs fairly ached. But now she took the babies out to the big park where she could sit and watch the merry children at play and the beds of flowers coming out, and there were the funny pussy willows and the long tails of yellow forsythia and some squirrels running around, and birds calling to each other. Then there were pretty children playing about and some nurse girls that she talked to. She felt so rested sitting here, and sometimes her thoughts went back to the March night when she had fallen asleep by the warm stove and had that wonderful, beautiful dream. She felt very happy over it. And the Cinderella meant all the little hard worked girls who had few pleasures. Oh, she wished they could all have one night in that magic fairy land.

She was learning to sew a little as well, and she thought she should like it if there was a little more time. But the babies began to crawl around now and Violet would pick up anything and put it in her mouth; so you had to watch her every moment. And though they generally slept from ten to twelve, there was the door to answer, little things to be done for Aunt Hetty whose bell would ring just as she had her work fixed ready to sew. Then likely she would lose her needle.

But she managed somehow to keep very sweet-tempered. She wished she could go to school.

"We'll see next fall," Mrs. Borden said. "The twins will be larger and less trouble."

Sundays were pretty good; Mr. Borden took out the children in the afternoon. She had to help Bridget with the vegetables for dinner, which was at midday and there was so much washing-up afterwards, at least drying the dishes, that there was barely time to go to Sunday school. But the singing was so delightful. She sang the pretty hymns over to the babies. In the evening the family generally went out or had company. So after Jack and the babies were abed she used to read, unless Jack wouldn't go to sleep and torment her with questions that were unanswerable.

On the whole Jack had been pretty good for a fortnight. One afternoon Mrs. Borden had gone out, Miss Florence had some visitors in the parlor. Marilla had fed the babies who were laughing and crowing when Aunt Hetty's bell rang. She ran up.

"M'rilla get me some hot water, quick, and that aromatic ammonia, I'm so faint and feel queer all over. Be quick now."

She ran down, but could not run up lest she might spill the water. Aunt Hetty was gasping for breath, and leaning back in the big chair. She swallowed a little, then she went over on Marilla's shoulder and the child was frightened at her ghastly look. There was the lavender salts–

Just then there was a succession of screams from the babies. Could she leave Aunt Hetty? Miss Florence called her, then ran up stairs herself.

And this was what had happened; Jack had come home and finding no one, knew there was some candy on the closet shelf. And there hung the strap. He wondered if it would hurt very much? The babies looked too tempting. So he began to strap them and enjoyed the howling. He was just going to leave off when Aunt Florence flew into the room.

"Oh, Jack, you cruel, wicked boy!" Then she seized the strap and he soon had an opportunity to known how much it hurt.

"Marilla! Marilla!" she called.

"Oh, Miss Florence, something dreadful has happened to Aunt Hetty, and I'm fast with her."

She came up. "Oh, she looks as if she was dying or dead. Let's put her on the lounge and you go for Bridget."

"What is the matter with the children."

"Oh, go, quick! I'll tell you afterward."

The child summoned Bridget and just ran in to comfort and kiss the babies.

"Oh, Jack, you never – oh, look at their poor little hands! You bad, wicked boy!"

"If you say much, I'll give you some–"

Marilla snatched at the strap and flung it upon a high shelf. Jack wiped his eyes and went out to play. Marilla ran upstairs again. They were fanning Aunt Hetty and bathing her face and head.

"Marilla, will you go to the parlor and ask that lady to come up here, – Mrs. Henderson. Bridget thinks – oh, and we ought to have a doctor! I must telephone."

"And then can I stay with the babies?"

"Yes, yes."

"Poor babies!" Marilla fairly stopped them with witch hazel. Their little fat hands and their shoulders were swollen already. She kissed them, but she couldn't take them both and they wanted to be cuddled. So she sat down and hugged them and really cried herself.

Bridget came down, "She isn't dead but she's a mighty hard faint on her. And what happened to the children?"

Marilla explained in a broken voice.

"Oh, the murtherin' little devil! You take one and I'll comfort 'tother. But you can't lift her."

No; Marilla couldn't lift such a dead weight. Bridget walked the floor and patted Pansy and crooned over her, but the hurt was pretty deep.

Aunt Florence came down.

"She's over the faint. Mrs. Henderson is going to stay a while. Oh, poor babies!"

"I must look after my meat or it'll burn," and she gave the baby to Miss Florence.

"I'll sit in the rocking chair and you put her in my lap, I think she's hurt more than Violet. You see, I ran upstairs when Miss Hetty's bell rang, and she fell on my shoulder, and I never thought–"

"I gave it to him good, and his father'll finish him tonight. Oh, dear! Well, there comes their mother."

There was a hubhub with both babies crying again. Mrs. Borden laid aside her hat and coat and took up Violet, sent Marilla for a pitcher of milk and both babies were comforted with a drink.

"Sit on the floor and hold them. They're so heavy. Poor sweet babies."

The sobs ceased after a while. Violet fell asleep, Pansy was bathed again and grew quieter. The doctor came and said it was a bad fainting spell but that Mrs. Vanderveers heart was weak from age.

Marilla fixed Pansy's supper, fed her and undressed her, and her mother laid her in the crib. Then she said —

"You may go and help Bridget a little with the dinner."

Marilla arranged the table and the master of the house came in. Jack sneaked in, also. Mrs. Henderson staid, so no explanations were made. Jack was very quiet and behaved beautifully, but he wanted to go to bed at once. Violet woke and had her supper and quiet was restored. Then a man came in to consult Mr. Borden about some business.

"It was awful that Jack should go at the babies so," said Mrs. Borden to her sister.

"I don't know about telling his father. You gave him one whipping–"

"And a good hard one. I'm afraid of boys getting so used to that mode of punishment that they don't mind it. But father brought up four boys in that manner and they have all made nice men. I don't see where Jack gets his badness from."

Jack's mother sighed. "And yet he can be so lovely."

"I've been considering," rejoined Florence. "Suppose we hold this over his head for a while. I might talk to him."

"Well, we can try it."

So Aunt Florence talked to him very seriously, and said if he wasn't a better boy they would have to send him off somewhere in the country where there were no children. She would not tell his

father just now, but if he ever struck or pinched the babies again she certainly would, and he would be punished twice over. He must remember that.

He put his arms around her neck, and kissed her. “I’m awful sorry. I didn’t think it hurt so,” he said naively.

“Papa will hurt you a great deal more than I did,” was her reply.

And then Jack had a sudden accession of goodness. His teacher was proud of him. How much was due to his pretty face and winsome manner, one couldn’t quite tell, but the nursery had a lovely rest and Marilla didn’t have to watch out every moment.

Mrs. Borden secretly wished the twins were prettier. They were too fat, and when she tried to diet them a little they made a terrible protest. Here they were fourteen months old and couldn’t walk yet, but they were beginning to say little words under their nurse’s steady training.

Aunt Hetty made light of her attack and was soon about as usual, but she did not take long walks and laid on the lounge a good deal. “Folks can’t stay young forever,” she said, “and I’m getting to be quite an old lady.”

Then they began to plan for a summering.

Last year they had not gone anywhere. Advertisements were answered, and Florence visited several places. They would take Marilla of course, she was coming to have a thin, worn look. Aunt Hetty would visit a grand niece, who had been begging her to come. Bridget would stay in the house, she had no fancy for cantering about. Mrs. Borden would live at home through the week and rejoin them on Saturday afternoons. They must get off soon after school closed. There was no end of sewing. Some pretty skirts were altered over for Marilla, as there was enough for full dresses in them.

The place was on Long Island, a country house with only two other boarders. It was barely a quarter of a mile from the seashore, with a great orchard and grass all about, shady places for hammocks and numerous conveniences, besides moderate board.

Jack had not been an angel all the time. Some days he wouldn’t study. Then he had two fights with boys. He threw stones at cats – sometimes dogs, and broke two or three windows which he didn’t set out to do. He was getting tired of school and the weather was warm.

So one afternoon he thought he would take a walk instead. He would go out to the park where they went on Sundays. It was so warm in school. He was getting quite tired of the confinement.

He found a group of children and played with them awhile. Then they ran off home and he rambled on and on until he came to a street up a few steps. A wagon was standing there and two little boys were hanging on behind.

“Come on, its real fun,” sang out one of them. “You get a good ride.”

Jack thought it would be. They showed him how to hold on. The driver had been busy with an account book and now he touched up the horses. “Hanging on” wasn’t so easy Jack found, and you had to swing your legs underneath. The man paused again at a saloon and he dropped off; his hands were very tired. The man went in the place and when he came out one of the boys said —

“Hi! Mister, won’t you give us a ride?”

The man laughed. “Where you want to go? I’m for Roselands.”

“We want to go there,” was the reply.

“Well, crawl up here. Two of you’ll have to sit on the wagon bottom.”

“I’m going to sit with the driver, ’cause I asked.”

It wasn’t a very clean floor to sit on, Jack thought, and the wagon bumped a good deal, the beer kegs rattled against each other. But the boys laughed and called it fun. There was another stop and then the driver asked who they were going to see in Roselands.

“Oh, no one. We’re going just for fun.”

“Where’d you live?”

The boys all lived at Newton.

"Jiminy; then you better get out and trot back. I'm going over the mountain where I put up for the night. Mebbe you can get a ride back. It's two miles down to the place where I took you in."

"Yes, we better get out," replied the biggest boy. "Oh, we can soon foot it back. Much obliged for the ride, Mister."

The man nodded.

They sat off quite cheerily. Automobiles passed them and carriages containing ladies, one or two loaded trucks. Jack began to get very tired and lagged. "Come, hurry up," the biggest boy said. Jack ran a little distance for a change. He began to wish he was back in school. Presently a farm wagon came jogging along.

"Give us a ride?" The biggest boy's name was Dick and he seemed the spokesman.

"Yes – where ye want to go?"

"To Newton."

"I turn off at the crossroads, ye kin ride that fur."

That was a great relief. They were quite jolly again, though Jack didn't understand the fun. But when they dismounted, Dick asked him where he lived.

"In Arch Street."

"Well, that's clear over there," indicating it with his head. "Ta ta, little sonny."

They both laughed and Jack felt rather affronted. Over there seemed a long way. Then it was clouding up and night was coming on. He went straight along, but now he was hungry, and his little legs ached. He had been instructed if he was ever lost to ask the way to Arch Street. So he asked now.

"Oh, sonny, you're a long way from Arch Street. Keep straight on until you come to Taylor, then ask again."

Here was a bakery with a pleasant, motherly woman. He went in.

"Please ma'am, would you give me a bun? I'm lost and I can't find my way back to Arch Street."

"You poor child! Yes, and here's a cake, beside. Arch Street isn't far from the eastern end of the park. Sit and get rested. Who's your father?"

"Mr. John Borden."

The woman shook her head.

"Thank you, very much." Jack rose.

"You go straight down three blocks. Then ask a policeman. Oh, I guess you'll get home safely."

Jack walked his three blocks. Then there was a low rumble of thunder. Oh, dear! He began to cry. Was there never a policeman!

"What's the matter bub?" asked a kindly voice.

"I'm lost. I can't find my way home."

"Where is home?"

"Arch Street."

"Come on. We'll find it. It's bad to be lost. Where have you been?"

"Oh, I can't tell all the places," sobbingly.

They entered the park. Even that was large enough to get lost in. It grew darker and darker and there was a sprinkle of rain. Jack held tight to the man's hand, and it seemed as if the park was full of bears. He was so frightened. They came to one of the entrances.

"Now you keep straight on and you will come to Arch Street. Good-bye little lad. It's raining quite fast. Hook it along."

Jack *did* run. Houses began to look familiar.

Yes, here was his own street. Oh, how glad he was. He almost flew. And his father ran down the steps and caught his little wet boy in his arms.

"Oh, Jack! Jack! Amy," he cried through the open hall door, "he's here! he's here!"

There had been a great commotion, for Jack had been instructed to come straight home from school even if he went out afterward. And when it came dinnertime with no Jack, and the dreadful

things that one could conjure up – being run over, being kidnapped – for he was such a pretty little fellow! Mr. Borden telephoned to the Police Precinct, to two hospitals, went out to search, inquiring of the neighboring children. No, he had not been playing with them. Mrs. Borden was wild with terror. Aunt Florence said some boy had coaxed him off somewhere, but she was desperately afraid that he laid crushed in some hospital. And now they all hugged and kissed him; and what with the fatigue, the fright and all, Jack really had an hysteric.

They rubbed him and put him in some dry clothes and gave him a dose of aromatic ammonia to steady his nerves, and then some supper. And he said he went to the park and came out somewhere, and a man took him and two other boys for a ride. Dick was such a nice, big fellow. He said nothing about hanging on behind, he had a feeling that wouldn't redound to the story. And the man took them out to Roselands and wasn't coming back–

"Roselands," cried his mother. "Oh, Jack you might have been kidnapped. Never, never go riding with any strange man. And how did you get back?"

"We walked some, then another man rode us a little way, and the boys went off and I got lost more and more and couldn't find a cop, and asked every so many people, and a woman gave me a bun and a cake, and then a man took me across the park and told me to go straight along. And I was afraid of the thunder and all, and I was wet, and oh, dear!"

"Never mind, Jack. You're safe home now. You must come straight home from school, you have always been told that."

And he hadn't been to school at all!

But he was very sleepy and his mother put him to bed and kissed him a dozen times. The scoldings would save until tomorrow.

Jack was rather languid the next morning and a little afraid. But he was the best boy in school, and brought home a note from his teacher, never suspecting his sin would find him out so soon.

Miss Collins asked his mother if she would send the reason why Jack was not at school yesterday afternoon, as they were required to put it down in the record book.

"Oh, Jack! You didn't go to school yesterday afternoon! What *were* you doing?"

Jack hung his head, "I took a little walk, and then – and then – I was afraid it was late, and some children were playing – !"

"Oh, you naughty boy! That is playing truant. I don't know what your father will say!"

"I don't want to any more. I'd rather go to school. It wasn't funny a bit. And I don't want to ride in any old wagon that jounces and jounces, and I did get so tired. What did the teacher say?"

"They have to put the true reason down in the record book. And there it will stay always. My nice little boy was a truant-player. And we shall all be so ashamed. What will your father say? And he was so afraid last night that you were killed!"

"Oh, mama, I never will do it again, never!" Jack hung round his mother's neck and cried and she cried with him, thinking of her tumult of agony last night. And she had him safe – her little boy!

"Jack," she began presently, "can't you be brave enough to tell papa how it began. Climb up in his lap and tell him how sorry and ashamed you are."

"Will he strap me?"

"You deserve it I think. But he surely would if I told him. And when people do wrong they must bear the punishment."

"But I never will do it again."

"Tell him that, too."

Of course they talked it over at dinner time. Jack was not at all vainglorious. Afterward, he hung around and presently climbed up in his father's lap.

"My dear little son," and his father kissed him.

"But papa, I was badder than all that." Badder seemed to admit more enormity than simply bad, "I – I went in the park to walk and I staid so long that – that–"

"That you were ashamed to go back?"

"Well" – Jack had spasms of direct truth tellings now and then, like most children.

"I didn't feel so 'shamed then as when teacher spoke of it this afternoon. It looked so pleasant I thought I'd go on. Some of the boys said it was funny to play hookey, but I don't want to do it ever again. And if I had been killed somewhere!" Jack began to cry.

The father held him close for some minutes.

"Jack," he said at length, "you have been a very bad boy, and I am glad it wasn't a happy afternoon. I hope you never will play truant again. Think how mama and I suffered not knowing what had happened to you and afraid our little boy might be brought home dead. You ought to be punished but you seem to have suffered somewhat, and I am going to trust you, only, you can't go walking with me on Sunday, and maybe there are some other pleasures you will be deprived of. I'm awfully sorry and mortified that your name must go on record down at City Hall as a truant from school. Some of my friends may see it. These things are sure to get to daylight and make your family ashamed of them, and your teachers; just try to think of that when you do the things you know are wrong, for even a little boy will know that. Didn't something tell you staying from school was wrong?"

Jack crept closer in his father's arms. He was too young for much reasoning, and the man wondered if he would have been so penitent if he had had what boys call a real good time.

They let the matter go at that. Jack looked very wistful when his father took the babies out Sunday morning and said no word to him. He followed Marilla round as she dusted up the rooms and wanted to know about Bethany Home.

"Were the children always good?"

"Oh, no. There were a good many bad ones among them."

"Did they have a strap?"

"Yes, a bigger one than your father's."

"Will papa get a bigger one when I'm big?"

"Oh, Jack, I hope you won't need any strap. Why can't you be a good boy?"

Jack gave a long sigh. "Sometimes badness comes into your mind just sudden like."

After a pause – "Did you like Bethany Home?"

"Not as well as being here. I've told you that forty times. And there were no little babies. And no dessert, only a teeny little bit on Sunday. And just a sweet cracker for tea."

"What makes you like the babies? They can't talk nor do anything. And they are not as pretty as I am. Folks used to say when I was real little, 'Oh, what a lovely child.'"

Marilla laughed, Jack did know that he was very good looking.

"They'll be pretty by and by. And they are real sweet. I like babies. I like kittens and little chickens."

"I like a dog. Cats scratch."

"Not unless you torment them. Now I am going down stairs to put the dishes on the table. Then I must go and help Bridget."

"Bridget won't let me come down in the kitchen. She chases me out with a stick."

"Children are a bother in the kitchen. They ask so many questions."

Then his mother and Aunt Florence came home from church, and his father with both babies asleep. He carried them upstairs.

Marilla was getting to be quite a handy table maid for all but the heavy dishes. She placed them on the dumb waiter and started them down stairs. Mrs. Borden took off the others. When the babies were awake Marilla had to stay up with them.

Mrs. Borden dished the cream. "Jack will not have any today," his mother said.

Jack sat still with his eyes full of tears but said not a word.

But he went to Sunday school with Marilla and behaved beautifully.

“If he was always as good as this,” the child thought, “how I should love him.” He did not even tease for a walk, a thing she was quite afraid he would do.

CHAPTER IV
POOR CINDERELLA

Oh, how busy they were and the babies took this opportunity to begin the cutting of teeth. The auto came for Aunt Hetty. Some of the parlor furnishings were packed away, everything swathed in linen. The closing exercises of the kindergarten took place and Jack distinguished himself by repeating a pretty little poem. In September he would be six.

Then came the last week. They would go on Saturday. Sunday was Fourth of July but it would be held on Monday. Trunks were packed, the last bit of shopping done. The babies fretted and Marilla took them out morning and afternoon with strict injunctions to keep on the shady side of the street. It seemed to grow hotter and hotter. The child lost her appetite and could not eat Bridget's choice tid-bits. Oh, how her little legs ached, and her back felt sometimes as if it would fall apart.

"It's good you are going," declared Bridget.

"You're almost a skeleton. Goodness knows I shall miss you enough, and just be thinking of your coming back."

Jack had gone down town with his mother to get some sandals and slippers. She was very glad, for sometimes his talking almost set her crazy, and she really was afraid to be impatient with him.

She had found a beautiful quiet street with great trees that fairly met in the middle of it. Many of the families were away. She sat on one special stoop where the house was all shut up tight. There were no children in the street.

It seemed this day, Thursday, as if she would never get there. The babies were so heavy. She sat down on the second step, leaning against the stone column and pushed the carriage to and fro. Curious shadows went dancing before her eyes, sometimes she could not see at all. And she was so sleepy!

Pansy threw her rattle out and cried for it. Marilla stepped down to pick it up and fell on the sidewalk. What was the matter with her legs? they seemed to have lost their strength. She crawled up again. All the world, the trees and houses went flying round and all was dark. She was falling down – down – Poor little Cinderella!

The babies missed the soft soothing voice. They cried louder and louder, then howled. Some children came to see what was the matter two quite big boys among them. The policeman looked down from the corner and paced with his slow tread.

"What's the row here?" he asked.

A lady came down one of the stoops on the opposite side of the street; a rather tall, slim woman in a soft gray dress and hat with violets around the crown. She crossed over. The policeman had taken the girl by the shoulder and given her a rough shake.

"Those children howl enough to wake the dead, and she's asleep here."

But as he partly raised her Miss Armitage saw that her face was deadly white.

"Oh, poor child!" she cried. "What can be the matter? And whose babies are these?"

"They're Jack Borden's little sisters – twins. And thats the nuss gal," said one of the big boys.

"Do you know where they live?"

"Round in Arch street."

"Could you take them there?"

"Well – yes'm."

"Then take them," rejoined the lady.

The carriage being moved she sat down on the step and took the girl in her arms.

"She isn't dead – I see the flutter in the temple."

"Better go to the hospital," proposed the policeman.

Marilla opened her eyes and glanced up but did not seem to notice anything; then the lids fell and the beautiful long lashes shadowed her cheeks.

"Carry her to my house across the street," and she led the way.

He picked up the light burden as if it had been a feather. She opened the door and asked him to take the child upstairs and lay her on the couch.

"I am obliged to you," she said. "In a way I am in Settlement work. We'll have a doctor and see what is the matter. Then I'll decide about the hospital. And I will find out about those people."

"You're a good sort, ma'am," and he touched his hat brim to her.

"Jane," she called. "This poor child isn't exactly in a faint, but something is the matter. Get a warm bath ready and we'll put her in. I'll telephone to Dr. Richards."

"Yes – he was just going out. Would be up for a first call."

Miss Armitage undressed her. She was clean and neat, but the poor little body was painfully thin. Then they carried her to the bath. Jane rubbed her softly and she gave some responsive sighs.

"What a pretty lot of little curls and fine as silk. I do wonder who she can be?"

"She's the little nurse girl who brings those babies, twins I suppose they are, and sits on the stoop over opposite."

"What happened?"

"Well it's some sort of a collapse. Now I'll find a nice nightgown, and we'll see what the doctor says."

Marilla opened her eyes. They were a sort of blueish gray, but now very heavy and dull. Her lips moved, but the tone was very low. It sounded as if she said "fairy godmother" and Miss Armitage smiled.

"Oh, poor little thing!"

Dr. Richards flew around in his auto.

"Oh, I thought something had happened to you," he began.

"It has," and she detailed the simple story.

He followed her up to the room. It was such a lovely, restful room. A white bed in the alcove, white window drapery, a carpet with considerable light blue in it, a dressing case, a writing desk, some books and pictures, mostly Madonnas.

"Poor child," he said. "She's been worked too hard. All her strength seems gone. And a case of heat prostration. It's been an awful day. Who is she?"

Miss Armitage told over the incident. "I have seen her sitting there several times. It is shady in the afternoon."

"Two fat babies," and he laughed. "I should think one would be enough for such a child to manage. Overwork and underfeeding I think, and the heat. I'll see if I can rouse her."

Marilla opened her eyes and the lids seemed to fall from absolute weariness. The lips moved but made no sound.

"It is a kind of comatose state. Not knowing all that is back of it I can't quite make up my mind. If this awful heat would let up! I'll leave some drops to be given to her and will come in one my first round in the morning. I haven't been to the Settlement House yet."

"Oh, you must go. That little Mary Burns died at noon, and her mother is half crazy over it. Poor little thing, deformed and all that. This child has a nice straight body and a fine smooth skin. I'll go round in Arch street and see what I can learn about her."

"She looks worth saving if life really holds anything for her. Poor things! Why are so many sent into the world 'just to toil.'"

"I was going over–"

"Never mind now. I'll attend to it all, and see the Burns' priest. Don't be worried. These drops will keep up her strength," nodding to Marilla. "And I will report in the morning."

Dr. Richards went his way. Miss Armitage sat and considered. Perhaps it would be as well to go to Mrs. Borden's. They would be feeling much alarmed, no doubt. She explained to Jane and put on her hat again and picked up her sun umbrella, for some streets were still in a glow. This was the best part of the city however, and there were some fine trees.

She stopped and looked in a directory. There was only one Borden living on Arch street, a Mr. John Borden, lawyer. She made a note of the number. Arch street was some distance farther west, and then only a block or so. A very nice looking three-story brick with a stone stoop. She mounted and rang the bell. There certainly was a child or children crying.

A young woman much distraught answered the door. And now positive howls greeted her ears.

"We are in such trouble," apologized the woman.

"I am Miss Armitage and live in Loraine place, nearly opposite where the little girl fainted. Did the babies get home safely?"

"Oh, we are so glad! Won't you please come upstairs for my sister can't leave the children. We have been almost crazy! One boy said she fell off the steps. Is she much hurt?"

"She had a bad fainting spell. The doctor came and he hardly knows what to think until tomorrow. The policeman proposed sending her to the Hospital, but I am one of the managers of the Settlement House in Beacon street, so I had her brought over to my house. A fall, you said?"

"That was what a boy said – that she tumbled off the step. Oh, Pansy dear, do hush! You miss Marilla, don't you? The best little nurse in all the world. Oh, what *can* we do without her!"

Mrs. Borden was pacing the floor with the baby's head against her shoulder and gently patting her. She did not scream now, but sobbed in a very sleepy fashion.

"You see, we are to start on Saturday noon, and we shall not come back until the middle of September. We thought it would be so nice for Marilla, too, she'd kind of run down though she wasn't at all ill. Bridget worried that she ate so little and she was growing thin."

"How long has she been with you?"

"I took her from an institution – the Bethany Home – about the middle of October. She was just twelve, the Matron said. I think she was very glad to come. She's had a good home and plenty to eat. And one funny thing is that Bridget took such a fancy to her, and though Bridget's good as gold, she has some queer streaks."

Mrs. Borden sat down and drew a long breath. Pansy had fallen asleep at last.

"And we never let her lift the children or carry them up and down. I think babies are sometimes injured for life that way in falling. They used to sit on the rug and she'd tell them stories. I think she must have made them out of her head – funny things and she'd act them off and the babies would laugh and laugh – it was as good as a play. They seemed to understand every word. Marilla was a born nurse girl. But what can we do? We must have someone, and there's only such a little time."

Miss Armitage was thinking.

"Perhaps I might help you out," she said kindly. "There is a young girl with us who worked in a factory until she gave out. We sent her to the Rest House in the country and she *did* improve, but they wouldn't take her back in the factory. She's a nice pleasant girl about seventeen."

"Oh, how good of you to think of it! But I can't pay high wages, for there'll be her board and it won't be hard. When the babies are well they are as good as kittens though they can't scamper around so much. And they're so fat they won't walk very soon. It'll just be sitting round and amusing them and looking after their food. I couldn't give more than three dollars a week – we are not at all rich," with a short laugh of apology.

"I think Ellen would come for awhile."

"And I should want Marilla as soon as she was well enough. You see she's bound-out to me, and we all like her so much. I don't see what *could* have happened to her. She has been out in the fresh air most of the time and we always tell her to go slow with the babies, not rush along in the heat. What did she say?"

"Oh, she hasn't spoken at all. She lies just unconscious."

"Good gracious! Oh, you don't think she will die?" and Mrs. Borden really turned pale with fright.

"A person sometimes lies that way for days when overcome with the heat. The doctor can tell better tomorrow."

"Oh, poor little Marilla! She is so sweet-tempered. And you were so good not to send her off to a hospital. How ever should we have found her! There is so little time. When shall we hear about this other girl?"

"I will telephone as soon as I go home and tell them to send her in the morning," and Miss Armitage rose.

"We are so much obliged." She followed her visitor out in the hall.

"Do not come down," said Miss Armitage. "And I hope the babies will improve."

"Thank you – for everything."

The sun was going down and some stray wafts of wind wandered along, which made the heat rather more endurable.

"Jane," she said as she walked into the room, "did you notice any bruise on the child's head while you were bathing her. She fell off of the steps it seemed."

"There was none on her forehead. Her hair is very thick and I really did not look only to see that it was in a nice, clean condition. She hasn't suffered for want of cleanliness."

Then she told Jane all she had learned, adding:

"They seem very nice kind of people. But oh! those babies!"

Miss Armitage telephoned to the settlement House, stating the case.

"Yes, Ellen Day was still there and would be very glad of the position. She would go the first thing in the morning."

Jane insisted on bringing in a cot and sleeping beside the little girl who lay quite as still as if she were dead. Now and then she gave her the drops and fanned the air about her. The morning came and the city was astir again. But it was quiet in Loraine place. So many had gone away and there were no trolleys nearby.

They looked over Marilla's head and found one spot above the ear that had a small bit of discoloration, but it was not in a dangerous place. The doctor came in.

"I did not think there would be much change," he said. Then he tried to rouse her. Jane held her up while they gave her a little milk which she swallowed without difficulty. She opened her eyes and closed them again, then lay quiet.

He listened to Miss Armitage's interview and nodded as she went along.

"The child is terribly run down. I think she has worked harder than any one imagined. But they seem to have appreciated her."

No one could guess the strain of talking so incessantly to amuse the babies, of reading to Jack, of having eyes all over to see that he did not torment the little ones, push their playthings out of the way, give them sly pinches or tweak their hair. She did hate to tell tales on him. And when he coaxed to go out with her he was a constant care. School had been closed for a fortnight. Oh, how tired she was every night!

"You don't eat more than a bird," Bridget would complain.

"But I'm never hungry now, I shall be so glad when we get to the real country, and grass, and everything. I'm so tired of the rows and rows of red brick houses, and they all seem so hot."

And now Bridget was almost heart broken.

Ellen Day came in to tell Miss Armitage how glad she was that a good word had been spoken for her. "And she was sure she should like the ladies and the pretty little boy. But how fat the babies were and not a bit pretty. They were to start at twelve tomorrow."

It was still hot, but in the afternoon it clouded up and the evening brought a most refreshing shower. The hot wave was broken.

Sunday afternoon they had rolled the couch over by the window. Miss Armitage sat reading. Jane had gone out for a walk. The child seemed to have grown thinner in these few days.

She opened her eyes slowly and looked intently at the woman sitting there in her soft, white attire. She was so sweet and pretty.

"Are you a fairy godmother?" Marilla asked in a weak, wandering tone.

"A – what?" smiling in surprise.

"A fairy godmother. You don't look like the other one, but then it was night and we went to the King's ball. Oh, it was so splendid!"

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.