

Blanchard Amy Ella

A Dear Little Girl's Thanksgiving Holidays



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Содержание

CHAPTER I	4
CHAPTER II	16
CHAPTER III	27
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	37

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CHAPTER I THE INVITATION

"Any news, mother?" asked Edna one Friday afternoon when she came home from school.

"There's a letter from grandma," replied Mrs. Conway after kissing the lips held up to hers. "There isn't any real news in it, but there is an invitation."

"What kind of an invitation?"

"A Thanksgiving kind."

"Oh, mother, what do you mean?"

"I mean that grandma wants us all to spend an old-fashioned Thanksgiving with her; the kind she used to have when she was young. She says she and grandpa are both getting old and they may not be able to have the whole family there together again."

"And are we going?"

"Yes, I think so."

"The whole family?"

"I think perhaps you and I will go on a day or two ahead and let the others follow. Celia and the boys can come with your father, who probably could not get off till Wednesday afternoon. Grandma asks that I bring my baby with me."

"And that means me," returned Edna, hugging herself. "How long shall we stay, mother?"

"That depends upon several things which will have to be learned later, so I can't tell just yet."

Edna danced off to hunt up her brothers that she might tell them the news. She found them in their little workshop over the stable. Charlie was making a new box to put in his pigeon house and Frank was watching him. They had not seen their little sister since Monday for she and her sister Celia went to school in the city, remaining until the Friday afternoon of each week.

"Hello!" cried Charlie, looking up. "When did you come?"

"Oh, we've just come, only a few minutes ago, and what do you think is the news?"

"The Dutch have taken Holland," returned Charlie, hammering away at his box. "Just hand me that box of nails, Frank, won't you?"

"That's a silly answer," said Edna with contempt.

"Well, if it's news, how did you expect me to know it?"

"I didn't expect you to know it, only to guess."

"Well, I guessed," replied Charlie teasingly. "I suppose it's a foolish sort of thing; Uncle Justus has grown another hair in his eyebrows or your friend Dorothy has a new hat."

"It's nothing so unimportant," Edna continued; "for it concerns you boys, too, but if you don't want to know I'll go up to Dorothy's; she'll be interested even if she isn't going."

"Going? Where?" cried both boys.

"That's for me to know and for you to find out," retorted Edna, beginning to scramble down the ladder. Both boys darted after; Charlie swung himself down ahead of her to the floor below and was ready to grab her before she reached the last rung. Then there was much laughing, scrambling, tickling and protesting till at last Edna was compelled to give up her secret, ending triumphantly with: "And I'm going first with mother."

"Who said so?" questioned Charlie.

"Mother did. We are to go two or three days ahead of anyone else."

"Oh, well, I don't care," returned Charlie. "There wouldn't be any boys for me to play with anyhow."

"How many are coming for Thanksgiving?" asked Frank.

"I don't know exactly," Edna answered, "but I suppose all the aunts and cousins and uncles that can get there. Aunt Lucia and Uncle Bert and of course Aunt Alice and her boys, Ben and his brother. Ben will have to go, and I'm awfully glad; he's my favoritest cousin."

"How about Louis?"

"He is not any relation to grandma and grandpa Willis, is he?"

"I don't know; I never could get relations straight. I hope he isn't any kin to them and I am sorry he is to us, for he is a pill."

You know he is, no matter what you say. Just look how he acted last summer. You needn't try to excuse him, for Dorothy told me all about it."

Edna could not deny facts, for it was quite true that her cousin Louis was not above blame in sundry instances, so she changed the subject by saying, "I think I'll go over to Dorothy's anyhow."

The boys did not try to detain her and she ran out along the road and up to the old-fashioned house where her friend Dorothy Evans lived. Dorothy was playing with her kitten out on the side porch. She had dressed the little creature in long clothes and was walking up and down singing to it as it lay contentedly in her arms, its two gray paws sticking out from the sleeves of a little red sacque belonging to one of Dorothy's dolls.

"Doesn't Tiddlywinks look funny?" said Dorothy by way of greeting. "And isn't he good? I believe he likes to be dressed up, for he lies as still as anything. Of course, if he fussed and meowed, I would take off the things and let him go."

Edna touched the soft silvery paws gently. "I believe he does like it," she returned. "See, he shuts his eyes exactly as if he felt nice and cozy. Oh, Dorothy, guess what! We are all going to grandpa Willis's next week. We are all going for Thanksgiving, only mother and I are going first. Isn't that lovely?"

"Lovely for you, I suppose," replied Dorothy dejectedly, "but I shall miss you dreadfully."

"Oh, no, you won't, when you have Margaret and Nettie so near. Besides I shall not be gone long, not more than a week."

"Are there any girls there?" asked Dorothy, a little jealously.

"Not like us. There is a little girl, mother says, that grandma has taken in to help her and Amanda; Amanda is the woman who lives there and cooks and churns and does all sorts of things."

"Is it in the real country?"

"It is real country and yet it isn't, for it is a village. Grandpa has a farm, but just across the street is a store and the church is only a few steps away, and there are lots of neighbors; some have big places and some have little ones. Grandpa's isn't as big as the biggest nor as little as the littlest."

"Does he keep horses and cows and chickens and things?"

"Oh, my, yes, and ducks and turkeys and sheep."

"I should think it would be a pretty nice sort of place."

"It is lovely and I am always crazy about going there."

"But please don't stay too long this time," urged Dorothy.

"I'll have to stay till mother brings me back," returned Edna cheerfully. "I wish there were another kitten, Dorothy, so I could have a live doll, too."

"You might take the mother cat," Dorothy suggested; "she is very gentle and nice."

They went in search of Tiddlywinks' mother, but Madam Pittypat objected to being made a baby of, for, though she was gentle enough, she squirmed and twisted herself out of every garment they tried upon her, and, at the first opportunity, walked off in a most dignified manner, as though she would say: "Such a way to treat the mother of a family!"

So the two little girls concluded that they would free Tiddlywinks and turn him again into a kitten. They left him stretching himself and yawning lazily, as they trudged off to see their friend, Margaret McDonald, that they might tell her Edna's news.

The days sped by quickly until Tuesday came, when Edna and her mother were to start on their journey. Edna at first decided to take her doll Ada "because she is more used to traveling," she said, but at the last moment she changed her mind saying that Ada had been on so many journeys that she thought someone else should have a chance and, therefore, it was her new doll, Virginia, who was dressed for the trip. The previous year Edna had spent Thanksgiving Day with her Uncle Justus; this year it would be quite a different thing to sit at table with a whole company of cousins instead of dining alone with Uncle Justus.

It was a journey of three hours before the station of Mayville was reached, then a drive of four miles to Overlea lay before them. But there was grandpa himself waiting to help them off the train, to see that their trunks were safely stowed into the big farm wagon, and at last to tuck them snugly into the carriage which was to bear them to the white house set in behind a stately row of maples. These had lost their leaves, but a crimson oak still showed its red against the sky, and the vines clambering up the porch waved out scarlet banners to welcome the guests.

Grandma Willis was standing on the porch to greet them as they drew up before the door. Behind her stood Amanda and

behind Amanda a little girl about twelve or thirteen. Behind the little girl trailed a cat and three kittens. At the sight of these Edna gave a squeal of delight. "New kittens, grandma? How lovely! I'm so glad," she cried.

Grandma smiled. "Well, give me a good hug and kiss first and then Reliance can let you take one of the kittens to hug."

"Who is Reliance? Is that what you call the mother-cat?"

"No, her name is Tippy. Reliance is the little girl who, we hope, is going to carry out the promise of her name."

Edna did not understand this latter speech but she smiled encouragingly at Reliance who smiled back at her. Then after the huggings and kissings were given to Mrs. Willis, Reliance picked up one of the kittens and held it out to Edna who cuddled it up to her and followed the others into the house.

It was a big old-fashioned place where the Willis family had lived for many generations. In the large living-room was a huge fireplace in which now a roaring fire crackled and leaped high. There was a small seat close to it and on this Edna settled herself.

"Here, here, aren't you going to stay a while?" cried grandpa who had given over the carriage into the hands of Ira, the hired man, and who had just come in.

"Why, of course we are going to stay," replied Edna.

"Then why don't you take off your things? Mother, isn't there any place they can lay their bonnets and coats? It seems to me there should be a bed or cupboard somewhere."

"Now, father," protested Mrs. Willis, "you know this house is

big enough to hold the hats and coats of the entire family."

"Didn't know but you were house-cleaning and had every place turned upside down."

"Now, father," Mrs. Willis continued, "you know we've been days getting the house cleaned and that everything is in apple-pie order for Thanksgiving."

Grandpa gave Mrs. Conway a sly wink. "You'd think it ought to be in apple-pie order," he said, "by the way they have been tearing up the place. Couldn't find my papers, my sticks, my umbrella or anything when I wanted them. I am glad you all have come so you can help me hunt for them."

"Why, father, how you do go on," Mrs. Willis interposed. The old gentleman laughed. He was a great tease, as Edna well knew.

"Where shall we go to lay off our things, mother?" asked Mrs. Conway.

"Up to your own old room over the dining-room. Here, Reliance, take the kitten and you, Edna, can come along with your mother."

"There's no need for you to go up, mother," said Mrs. Conway. "I have been there before, you know, and I think I can find the way." Then the two smiled wisely at one another.

But grandma would go and presently Edna found herself in a large room which looked out upon the west. Mrs. Conway stood still and gazed around her. "How natural it all seems," she said, "even to the pictures upon the walls. I went from this room a bride, Edna, and when I come back to it I feel not a day older."

This is the same furniture, but this is a new carpet, mother, and new curtains, and the little cot you have put in for Edna, I suppose."

"Yes, there are some things that will not last a lifetime," answered Mrs. Willis, "and we must furbish up once in a while. I thought you would rather have Edna here with you than elsewhere, and at such a crowded time we have to stow away as we can. I have put another cot in my room for one of the other children and Celia is to go in with Becky."

While they were talking Ira brought up the trunks and Mrs. Conway commenced the task of unpacking, so very soon they were settled and ready for dinner, which was served in the big dining-room where was another open fireplace not quite so large as the first, but ample enough. Reliance waited upon the table and helped to clear away the dishes afterward.

"When you are through with your tasks, Reliance, you can take Edna out and show her the chickens and pigs and things," said grandma.

"Reliance is quite a recent addition to the family, isn't she?" said Mrs. Conway when the little maid went out.

"Yes," Mrs. Willis replied. "Amanda isn't as young as she was and we thought it would be a good thing to have someone here who could save her steps and who could be trained to take her place after a while. I think Reliance promises to be very capable in time."

While her mother talked to the grandparents, Edna walked

softly around the room looking at the different things, the pictures, books and ornaments. There was a high mantel upon which stood a pair of Dresden vases and two quaint little figures. In the middle was a china house with a red door and vines over the windows. Edna had always admired it and was glad to see it still there. She stood looking at it for a long time. She liked to have her grandmother tell her its history. "That was brought to me by my grandfather when he returned from England," Mrs. Willis always said. "I was a little girl about six years old. Later he brought me those two China figures. He was a naval officer and that is his portrait you see hanging on the wall."

"I love the little house," remarked Edna, knowing that the next word would be: "You may play with it if you are very careful. It is one of my oldest treasures and I should be very grieved if it were broken."

The little house was then handed down and Edna examined it carefully. "It is so very pretty," she said, "that I should like to live in it. I would like to live in a house with a bright red door."

"I used to think that same thing when I was a little girl," her grandmother told her.

"I think maybe you'd better put it back so I won't break it," said Edna, carefully handing the treasure to her grandmother, "and then will you please tell me about the pictures?"

"The one over the mantel is called 'The Signing of the Declaration of Independence,' and that small framed affair by the chimney is a key to it, for it tells the names of the different

men who figure in the picture."

"I will look at it some day and see if I can find out which is which," said Edna. "That is Napoleon Bonaparte over there; I know him."

"Yes; and that other is General Washington, whom, of course, you know."

"Oh, yes, of course; and I know that little girl, the black head over there; it is my great-great-grandmother."

"The silhouette, you mean? Yes, that is she, and she is the same one who did that sampler you see hanging between the windows. She was not so old as you when she did it."

Edna crossed the room and knelt on a chair in front of the sampler. It was dim with age, but she could discern a border of pink flowers with green leaves and letters worked in blue silk. She followed the letters with the tip of her finger, tracing them on the glass and at last spelling out the name of "Annabel Lisle, wrought in her seventh year."

"Poor little Annabel, how hard she must have worked," sighed Edna. "I am glad I don't have to do samplers."

"You might be worse employed," said her grandmother, smiling.

"Did you ever do a sampler?" asked Edna.

"Not a sampler like this one, but I learned to work in cross stitch. Do you remember the little stool in the living-room by the fireplace?"

"The one with roses on it that I was sitting on?"

"Yes; that I did when I was about your age, and the sofa pillow with the two doves on it I did when I was about Celia's age. I was very proud of it, I remember."

"May I go look at them?"

"Assuredly."

So Edna went into the next room and carefully examined the two pieces of work which now had a new importance in her eyes. A little girl about her age had done them long ago. She discovered, too, a queer-looking picture behind the door. It was of a lady leaning against an urn, a weeping-willow tree near by. The lady held a handkerchief in her hand and looked very sorrowful. Edna wondered why she seemed so sad. There were some words written below but they were too faint for her to decipher, and she determined to ask her grandmother about this picture which she had never noticed before. While she was still looking at it, Reliance came to the door to say, "I can go now; I've finished what I had to do." Edna turned with alacrity and the two went out together.

CHAPTER II

RELIANCE

"How long have you lived here?" Edna asked her companion when they were outside.

"About six months," was the reply.

"Are you 'dopted?" came the next question.

"No, I'm bound."

Edna looked puzzled. "I don't know what that is. I know a girl that was a Friendless and she was 'dopted so now she has a mother and a beautiful home. Her name used to be Maggie Horn, but now it is Margaret McDonald. Is your name Reliance Willis?"

"No, it is Reliance Fairman, and it wasn't ever anything else. I was friendless, too, till Mrs. Willis took me."

"Oh, and did you live in a house with a lot of other Friendlesses?"

"No, I wasn't in an orphan asylum, if that's what you mean, but I reckon I would have had to go there or else to the almshouse."

"Oh!" This seemed even more dreadful to Edna and she looked at her companion with new interest, at the same time slipping her hand into the other's to show her sympathy. "Tell me about it," she said.

"Why, you see, my parents died. We lived about three miles from here, and your grandmother used to know my grandmother;

they went to the same school, so when us children were left without any home or any money your grandmother said she would take me and keep me till I was of age, so they bound me."

"How many children were there?"

"Three boys and me. Two of the boys are with Mr. Lukens and the other is in a home; he is a little chap, only six. If he'd been bigger maybe your grandfather would have had him here, and perhaps he will come when he is big enough to be of any use."

"I think that would be very nice and I shall ask grandfather to be sure to take him. Do you like it here?"

"Oh, yes, I like it. Amanda is awful pernickity sometimes, but I just love your grandmother and it is a heap sight better than being hungry and cold."

"Would you have to stay supposing you didn't like it?" Edna was determined to get all the particulars.

"I suppose so; I'd have to stay till I was eighteen; I'm bound to do that."

Edna reflected. "I suppose that is what it means by being bound; you are just bound to stay. I wonder if anyone else was ever named Reliance," she went on, being much interested to hear something about so peculiar a name.

"My grandmother was, her that your grandmother knew."

"Oh, was she? Then you are named after your grandmother just as my sister Celia is named Cecelia after hers. Yours is a funny name, isn't it? I don't mean funny exactly, for I think it is quite pretty, but I never knew of anyone named that."

"I don't mind it when I get it all, but when my brothers called me Li I didn't like it. Your grandmother gives me the whole name, and I am glad she does; but she said they generally used to call my grandmother Lyley when she was a little girl."

"I think that is rather pretty, too, don't you?"

"Yes, but I like the whole name better."

"Then I will always call you by the whole name," Edna assured her. "Can you tell stories, Reliance?"

"Do you mean fibs or reading stories like – let's see – Cinderella and Jack and the Beanstalk?"

"Oh, I mean the Cinderella kind; I'd hate to think you told fibs."

"I can tell 'em, but I guess I don't care to. I know two or three of the other kind and Bible stories, some of them: Eli and Samuel, and David and Goliath, and all those."

"Do you go to school?"

"Half the year, but I guess I won't be going very much longer. I'll soon be going on fourteen; I'll stop when I'm fifteen."

"Oh, shall you? Then what will you do?"

"I'll learn to housekeep and cook, and to sew and all that. Mrs. Willis says it is more important for me to be educated in the useful things, that I'll get along better if I am, and I guess she is right. My mother couldn't cook worth a cent and she just hated it, so we didn't get very good vittles."

"Was it your mother's mother after whom you were named?"

"No, my father's mother. The Fairmans lived around here, but

there ain't many of them left now. My father was an only child, and he married my mother out of town; she hadn't ever been used to the country. She used to work in a store and that's why she couldn't cook, you see."

Edna pondered over this information, wondering if everyone who worked in a store must necessarily turn out a poor cook.

"You ought just to see what's getting ready for Thanksgiving," said Reliance, changing the subject, "I never seen such a pile of stuff. It fair makes my mouth water to think of it; pies and cakes and doughnuts and jellies and I don't know what all. I guess there's as many as twenty or thirty coming, ain't there?"

"Let me see; I shall have to count. There will be Aunt Alice and her two boys, Ben and Willis, and Uncle Bert Willis with his five children and Aunt Lucia; that makes ten, and then there will be all of us, papa and mamma and us four children; that makes – let me see – " she counted hurriedly on her fingers. "How many did I say, Reliance? Ten? Oh, yes, and six make sixteen. Then there are the greats; great Aunt Emmeline and her brother, Wilbur Merrifield, and his daughter, Cousin Becky. Sixteen did I say? and three make nineteen. Oh, yes, Cousin Becky's sweetheart that she is going to marry soon; he is coming and he will make it just twenty. Counting grandpa and grandma there will be twenty-two, and counting you and Amanda there will be twenty-four to eat the goodies."

"You didn't count the two men, Ira and Jim," said Reliance; "they will eat here, too."

"Oh, yes, I forgot them. What a crowd, twenty-six people. If they cut a pie in six pieces it would take over four to go around once, wouldn't it?"

"I suppose we would be allowed a second piece on Thanksgiving Day," remarked Reliance, "though maybe with the other things no one would want it."

"How many kinds of pie will there be?" asked Edna.

"Three at least. I heard Amanda say that she would make the fillings to-day for pumpkin, lemon and apple; she has the crust all done. She has made the jelly, too; it's to be served with whipped cream. Your grandma was talking about having plum pudding, but Amanda said she didn't see the sense of having it when it wasn't Christmas, and there would be such lots of other things, all the nuts and apples and such things. There is going to be chicken pie, besides the turkeys and the oysters."

"Dear me," sighed Edna, "I am afraid I shall eat a great deal and be very uncomfortable. I was last year for a little while because I ate two Thanksgiving dinners. What did you do last year, Reliance?"

Reliance looked very sober. "We didn't have much of a Thanksgiving last year, for it was just before my mother died and she was ill then, so us children just had to get along the best we could. Somebody sent us in a pie and some jelly for mother and that is about all we had to be thankful for. I suppose it was much better than nothing. We ate all the pie at one meal. Billy said we might as well for it wouldn't last two days anyhow unless we had

little bits of pieces, so each of us had a whole quarter. Billy tried to trap a rabbit or shoot a squirrel or something, but he hadn't enough shot and the rabbits didn't trap."

Secretly Edna was rather glad to hear this, even though it meant that the Fairmans went without meat for dinner. She walked along pondering over these facts and wondering which were to be preferred. She could not tell whether to be glad the squirrels and rabbits had escaped or to be sorry that the Fairmans could not have had game for Thanksgiving. It was rather a hard matter to settle, so finally she dismissed the subject and gave her attention to the pigs whose pen they now had reached. Edna did not think them very cleanly or attractive creatures, however, and was very soon ready to leave them that she might see the chickens and ducks which she found much more interesting.

The short November day was already so near its end that the fowls were thinking of going to roost, though the hour was not late, and after watching them take their supper, which Edna helped Reliance to distribute, the two girls went on to the garden, now robbed of most of its vegetables. There were a few tomatoes to be found on the vines; though celery, turnips and cabbages made a brave showing. Edna felt that she was quite a discoverer when she came across some tiny yellow tomatoes which the frost had not yet touched, and which she gathered in triumph to carry back to her mother.

"I know where there's a chestnut tree," announced Reliance suddenly.

"Oh, do let's find it," said Edna. "I will put the tomatoes in my handkerchief and carry them that way. We ought to gather all the chestnuts we can, for I know mighty well after the boys come there won't be a nut left." There was a rush down the hill to the big chestnut tree about whose roots lay the prickly burs which the frost had opened to show the shining brown nuts within.

"I don't see how we are going to carry them," said Edna after a while, when she had gathered together quite a little heap.

"I'll show you," Reliance told her, and began tying knots in the corners of the apron she wore. "There," she said, "that makes a very good bag, and what we can't carry that way we can leave and come back for to-morrow. We'd better take as many as we can, though, for to-morrow will be such a busy day I may not be able to come, and if we don't, the squirrels will get them all."

"I could come alone, now that I know the way," said Edna, "or maybe mamma would come with me."

"I suppose we'd better be going back," said Reliance when she lifted the improvised bag to her arm. "It is near to milking time and that means getting ready for supper."

"What do you do to get ready for supper?" asked Edna taking hold of one side of the bag.

"Oh, I set the table and go down to the spring-house for the butter and cream. I can skim milk now, but I couldn't at first, I got it all mixed up."

"Do you skim all the milk?"

"Oh, no, that we put on the table to drink is never skimmed."

The skimmed milk goes to the pigs."

"Oh, does it? I think you feed your pigs pretty well. Are we going to watch them milk?"

"You can if you like; I've got to go right back."

"You don't help with the milking then?"

"No; Ira does it. Your grandpa says it is man's work, but Ira lets me do a little sometimes so I will learn."

"Aren't you afraid of the cows?"

"No, indeed, are you?"

"Kind of. They have such sharp horns sometimes," answered Edna by way of excusing her fear.

"Your grandpa's don't have; he keeps only dehorned cattle."

"What are they?"

"The kind that have had their horns taken off so they don't do any damage."

"I think maybe I wouldn't mind that kind so much," said Edna, after considering the matter for a moment. "If you don't mind, I think I would like to stop and see Ira milk."

Reliance said she didn't mind in the least and, therefore, she left the little girl at the bars of the stable yard which was quite as near as she wished to stand to the herd of cows gathered within.

"Want to come in and learn to milk?" asked Ira, looking up with a smile at the little red-capped figure.

"Oh, no, thank you," returned Edna hastily. "I'd rather watch you." She would really have like to try her hand if there had been but one cow, but when there were six, how could a young person

be certain that one of the number would not turn and rend her? To be sure, they were much less fearsome without horns, but still they were too big and dreadful to be entirely trusted. So she stood watching the milk foam into the shining tin buckets and then she walked contentedly with Ira to where Amanda was waiting to strain the milk and put it away in the spring-house.

"Do you keep it out here all winter and doesn't it freeze?" asked Edna.

"In winter we keep it in the pantry up at the house. If it should turn cold suddenly now, we'd have to bring it in," Amanda told her, as she carefully lifted the earthen crocks into place. "There comes Reliance for the cream and butter," she went on. "Reliance, I'll carry up the milk and you come along with the rest. Don't tarry down here, and be sure you lock the spring-house door and fetch in the key." Then she went out leaving the two little girls behind.

Reliance carefully attended to her duties, Edna watching her admiringly. It must be a fine thing to be so big a girl as this, one who could be trusted to do work like a grown-up woman. "Let me carry something," she offered, when Reliance stepped up the stone steps and outside, carrying the butter in one hand and the pitcher of cream in the other.

"If you would lock the door and wouldn't mind taking the key along, I wouldn't have to set down these things," Reliance said.

Edna did as she was asked, standing tip-toe in order to turn the big key in the heavy door.

"When we get to the house you can hang the key on its nail behind the kitchen door," Reliance told her. "It is always kept there."

Edna swung the big key on her finger by its string and trotted along by the side of Reliance, asking many questions, and delighting to hear Reliance enlarge upon the all-important subject of the Thanksgiving festivities.

"We've got to get up good and early," Reliance remarked, "for there's a heap to be done, even if we are ahead with the baking. I expect to be up before daylight, myself, and I reckon Ira will be milking by candlelight," she added, as she entered the kitchen door. Mrs. Conway was in the kitchen talking to Amanda, and Edna hastened to show her little hoard of tomatoes. "We gathered a whole lot of chestnuts, too," she told her mother. "They were all on the ground down the hill behind the barn."

"I know the very tree," Mrs. Conway told her. "We must roast some in the ashes this evening. Come along, supper is ready and you must get yourself freshened up."

Edna followed along and, in the prospect of supper and then of roasting chestnuts, she forgot all about the spring-house key. This, by the way, was lying on the door-mat where she had dropped it. A little later on, it was picked up by Reliance and was slipped into the pocket of her gingham apron. "I won't remind her that she dropped it. Likely as not she forgot all about it," said Reliance to herself. "I ought not to have trusted it to as little a girl as she is."

It was not till after she was in bed that Edna remembered that she had ever had the key. Where had she put it? She had no recollection of it after she had swung it by its string upon her finger on the way to the house. "It must be on the kitchen table," she told herself. "I opened my handkerchief there to show mother the tomatoes." She sat up in bed wondering if she would better get up and go down, but she finally decided to wait till her mother should have come to bed and then confide in her.

However, try as she would, she could not keep awake. It had been an exciting and fatiguing day and she was in the land of dreams in a few minutes, not even having visions of keys, spring-houses or Thanksgiving dinners, but of the mother cat and her three kittens who were climbing chestnut trees and throwing down chestnuts to her.

CHAPTER III

WHERE'S THE KEY?

Very, very early in the morning Edna was awake. She was not used to farmyard sounds and could not tell if it were a lusty rooster, an insistent guinea-fowl or a gobbling turkey whose voice first reached her. But whichever it was, she was quite broad awake while it was yet dark. She lay still for a few minutes, with an uncertain feeling of something not very pleasant overshadowing her, then she remembered the key. "Oh, dear," she sighed, "if they can't get into the spring-house there will be no cream for breakfast and no butter, either. The key must be found."

She got up and softly crept to the window. A bright star hung low in the sky and there was the faintest hint of light along the eastern horizon. Presently Edna saw a lighted lantern bobbing around down by the stable and concluded that Ira must be up and that it was morning, or at least what meant morning to farmers. She stood watching the light grow in the east and finally decided that she would dress and be all ready by the time it was light enough to hunt for the lost key.

By now she could see well enough to find her clothes, but, fearing lest she should waken her mother, she determined to go to the bathroom at the end of the hall rather than use the

wash-stand in the room where she was, so she gathered up her clothing in her arms, and went down the entry, made her toilet and crept down stairs. There was a light burning in the lower hallway, but it was dark all through the rest of the house and she was obliged to feel her way through the rooms. There was a noise of some one stirring in the pantry. She opened the door of the kitchen gently and peeped in. A lamp was burning on the table, but no key lay there. Edna tip-toed in quietly and felt on the nail where the key should hang, thrusting aside a gingham apron belonging to Reliance which hung just above its place, but the nail was empty and she was forced to believe she had dropped the key somewhere between the spring-house and the kitchen. She tip-toed out of the kitchen, turned the key of the outside door and closed it after her as noiselessly as possible, and in another moment was outside in the chill November air. It was rather fearsome to make one's way down dim paths where some wild creature might still be lurking after a night's raid from the woods near by, and she imagined all sorts of things. First, something stole softly by her and was off like a shot through the tall weeds growing beyond the fence; it was only a rabbit who was more frightened at Edna than she at it. Next, the bushes parted and a small white figure crept stealthily forth. The child's heart stood still and she stopped short. Then came a plaintive meow and she discovered one of the three kittens out on an adventuring tour. She picked up the little creature which purred contentedly as she snuggled it to her, continuing her way.

The garden left behind, there was the lane to be passed through, and here some real cause for fear in Edna's opinion, for the cows that Ira had just finished milking were coming through the bars he had let down. They stumbled along clumsily, following one another over the rail, and ambled on to another set of bars where they stood till Ira should let them through. At first, Edna did not realize that they were not making for the spot where she stood and she took to her heels, fleeing frantically back to the garden, banging the gate behind her and standing still waiting till the cows were through and the bars up again. Seeing the cows safely shut out from the lane she ventured forth again and followed Ira's lantern to the barn. Here she stood looking around and presently the beams from the lantern fell upon her little figure with the white kitten still clasped in her arms.

Ira looked up in surprise. "Hello!" he cried. "What's took you up so airy? Why, I jest got through milkin', and, doggone it, it ain't skeerce light yit."

"I know," said Edna, "but I had to get up early, you see, so as to find the key before breakfast."

"Key? What key?"

"The key of the spring-house. Reliance gave it to me to carry and I was to have hung it up on a nail behind the kitchen door, and I forgot all about it till I was in bed. You see if it isn't found nobody can have any milk or cream for breakfast."

"Oh, I guess we could manage," returned Ira reassuringly. "Didn't drop it indoors, did you?"

"I don't think so. I looked in the kitchen as I came out and I didn't find it there. If it had been picked up, it would be on the nail, I should think."

"Most likely it would; it would be there sure if 'Mandy found it; she don't let nothin' stay out of place very long, I kin tell ye."

"As long as I didn't find it in the kitchen I thought I would come here because I saw you had a lantern, and it really isn't quite light enough to see very plainly, is it?"

"No, it ain't. Sun don't rise till somewheres around seven this time o' year. Well, you come with me and we'll work our way long the path from the spring-house and if we don't find the key we will go inside and inquire. I alwuz find it don't do no harm to ask questions, and that there key is bound to be somewheres betwixt this and the house."

He swung his lantern so its rays would shed a broad light along the way, and Edna pattered along just behind him, trying very hard to keep up with his long strides. When at last they reached the spring-house, he slackened his pace and began carefully to look to the right and to the left.

"You come right straight along, did you?" he questioned. "Didn't go cavortin' off nowheres pickin' weeds or chasin' cats, did you?"

"No, we came as straight as could be. Reliance had the butter and cream and we didn't stop once."

"Then I guess you likely dropped it inside, for I've sarched careful and I can't find it. Maybe when it comes real bright

daylight you could look again, but I should advise askin' at the house next thing you do."

He led the way into the kitchen where Amanda was briskly stirring about. "Well," she began, "what's wanting? Well, I declare if there ain't Edna. What's got you up so early, missy? I guess you're like the rest of us, couldn't sleep for thinking of all that's to do for Thanksgiving."

"You ain't picked up the spring-house key nowheres about, have you?" asked Ira.

"Why, no. You had it?"

"No, I ain't, but sissy there says 'Liance gave it to her to carry and she ain't no notion of what she done with it, thought mebbe she might ha' drapped it in here. She got so worried over it she riz from her bed and come out to hunt it up, says she was afraid nobody couldn't get no breakfast because of her losing of it."

"I guess we won't suffer for breakfast," said Amanda, looking down kindly at the little girl. "I don't carry back the milk nights this time of year. Any that's left I just set in the pantry and there is what was left from supper this blessed minute; butter, too, and cream, plenty for breakfast. You just rest your mind on that score."

"But," said Edna, "you will want a whole lot of things for the Thanksgiving cooking and what will you do with them all locked up?"

Ira laughed. "'Twouldn't be such an awful job to lift the door from its hinges, and if a body was right spry he could climb in

at the window after he'd prised it open and the things could be handed out. Besides we've got all the morning's milk and there'll be the night's milk and to-morrow's milk, so I don't see that we shan't get along first-rate. There is more than one way out of that trouble, ain't there, 'Mandy?'"

"I should say so. Wait till the sun's real high and I guess we'll find the key fast enough," she said to Edna. "Now, you stay right here and don't go running about in the cold; you'll be down sick traipsing about in the wet grass, and then where will your Thanksgiving be?"

Thus warned, Edna was content to stay in the kitchen into which the morning light was beginning to creep and which was already warm from the big stove. In a few minutes, Reliance appeared from the next room where she had been setting the table. She was much astonished to learn that Edna had been down before her. "What in the world did you get up so soon for?" she asked.

"To find the key," Edna answered, and then told her all about the search, ending up with, "You haven't seen anything of it, have you, Reliance?"

Reliance's face broadened into a smile, as for answer she went behind the kitchen door and produced the key from its nail, holding it up to view.

"Why, where in the world did you get it?" inquired Edna in a tone of surprise. "It wasn't on the nail when I looked there for it a little while ago."

"You dropped it on the door-mat last evening," Reliance told her. "I found it there and slipped it into the pocket of my apron, and this morning when I went to get my apron, there it was so I just hung it up where it belonged."

"Well, I'm sure," said Amanda, "that's easily explained."

"Who'd ha' thought it," said Ira. "Well, that let's us out of another hunt. I won't have to wrastle with the door after all, will I?"

So, after all, Edna's early rising was unnecessary, but she did not feel sorry that she had had such an experience, and was content to sit and watch Amanda mould her biscuits and to help Reliance finish setting the table. Amanda insisted upon giving her a drink of buttermilk from the spring-house to which she despatched Reliance, advising Edna not to go this time. "You've had one tramp," she said, "and moreover you'll be starved by breakfast time if you don't have something to stay you."

The sausages were sizzling in the pan, and the griddle was ready for the buckwheat cakes when Mrs. Conway appeared. "Well, you did steal a march on us," she said to her little daughter. "How long have you been up? I didn't hear a sound. You must have been a veritable mouse to be so quiet."

"I've been up since before daylight," Edna told her. "I took my things into the bathroom so as not to disturb you; it was lovely and warm in there." Then again she repeated her story of the lost key.

"Reliance had the joke on her," said Amanda, "for she had

the key all the time."

"Why didn't you tell me you had found it?" asked Edna a little reproachfully as she turned to Reliance, who had by this time returned from the spring-house.

"I thought you would forget all about it, and I didn't think it was worth while to mention. Besides," she added, "I ought to have carried the key myself anyway."

"You're right there," remarked Amanda. "It is your especial charge and you oughtn't to have let anyone else fetch it in. Moreover, you'd ought to have hung it up the minute you found it, and there it would have been when it was looked for."

"Oh, don't scold her," begged Edna. "It was all my fault, really."

Amanda smiled. "I don't see it just that way. Folks had ought to learn when they're young that in this house there's a place for everything, and everything should be in its place. I rather guess, though, that that special key won't get lost again right away."

Edna felt that she had brought this lecture upon Reliance and felt rather badly to have done so, but the prospect of buckwheat cakes soon drove her self-reproach away and she went in to say good morning to her grandparents, well satisfied with the world in general and content to look ahead rather than at what was now past and gone, and which could not be altered.

Before the day had far advanced, came the first of the arrivals, Aunt Alice Barker and her two boys, Ben and Willis. Ben and Edna were great chums, though he was the older of the two boys.

Ben was alert, full of fun and ready to joke on every occasion, while Willis was rather shy and had not much to say to his little cousin, whom, by the way, he did not know so very well.

Edna would fain have spent the morning in the kitchen from which issued delectable odors, but Amanda had declared she wanted all the room there was, that she had scatted out the cats and dogs and she would have to scat out children, too, if they came bothering around. Therefore, to avoid this catastrophe, Edna took herself to a different part of the house, and was standing at one of the front windows when the carriage drove up.

"Oh, grandpa," she sang out, "here come Aunt Alice and her boys! Hurry! Hurry! or they will get here before we can be there to meet them."

Her grandfather threw down his newspaper and laid aside his spectacles. "Well, well," he said, "it takes the young eyes to find out who is coming. I didn't suppose Allie would be here till afternoon. What team have they. Why didn't they let us know so we could send for them!"

He followed Edna, who was already at the front door tugging at the bolt, then in another moment the two were out on the porch while yet the carriage was some yards away. Ben caught sight of them. "Hello!" he cried out. "Here we are, bag and baggage. Didn't expect us so soon, did you grandpa?"

"No, son, we didn't. How did you come to steal a march on us in this way?"

"The express was behind time so we caught it at the junction,

instead of having to wait for the train we expected to take. It didn't seem worth while to telephone; in fact we didn't have time, so we just got this team from Mayville and here we are. How are you Pinky Blooms?" He darted at Edna, tousled her hair, picked her up and slung her over his shoulder as if she were a bag of meal, and dropped her on the top step of the porch, she laughing and protesting the while.

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