

Fanny Aunt

**More Mittens; with The Doll's
Wedding and Other Stories**



Aunt Fanny

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Fanny A.

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Aunt Fanny More Mittens; with The Doll's Wedding and Other Stories / Being the third book of the series

A LETTER FROM AUNT FANNY

My Darling Children:

I wrote these stories, as I have already told you, some years ago, and took a great deal of pains with them. I called them "Life Among the Children;" when, lo and behold! somebody else had written a book with the very same name, but very different stories, and I never knew one word about it.

You may believe how sorry I was to take this pretty title when it belonged to another; and I was very thankful that I could get at the printer and have it changed.

What do you think of "The Doll's Wedding" for a name? I like it very much, because "Lily," whose dolls were married, is one of my particular pets; and what I have related, took place precisely as you read it. Lily is a funny darling; she had a "doll's regatta" once, and I do believe, in my next book, I will tell you all about it.

Meanwhile, if you will only laugh and grow fat as Lily does, and above all, try to be good and lovely as Maggie the Child Heroine is, I will write stories to interest you until my fingers feel as if they were all thumbs; for that is just how they *do* feel when they are very tired.

I wish I knew you all. I believe about three hundred children call me "Aunt Fanny" now, but I have room in my heart for *ever, ever* so many more. You see I have a patent elastic heart; and when you would think it was so crowded that a small doll could not squeeze in, if you only try, you would find there was plenty of room for *one more*, and that one would be you.

I wish good Mr. Somebody would make a telescope on purpose for me, powerful enough to see all the darling children at once. Fancy how perfectly delightful to see every little innocent child in the world with one eye!

Oh! that thought has quite upset me, laughing and thinking about it. So many little smiling faces at once – a great deal better than staring at the man in the moon, who has no expression at all worth talking about.

When I get it I will invite you all to come and take a peep at yourselves.

Good-by! I blow you a hundred kisses; and I hope the breeze is fair, so you will get them all safe and warm from your loving

Aunt Fanny.

THE DOLL'S WEDDING

One day, Alice came home from school, and opening her drawer, to put away her things, she saw a letter lying on the very top of a pile of pantalets.

"Why, who can this be for?" said she, in a tone of delighted surprise. "Is it for me, mamma?"

"Yes," said her mother, "and it is sealed up so tight, that I expect it is of the greatest importance; perhaps from the President of the United States, requesting you to come to Washington immediately, to dine with him."

"Dear me, how delightful!" exclaimed Alice. "I like getting a letter, it's so very *oldy*, you know – just like grown people; did you pay the postman?" and in her impatience and excitement, she tore the envelope all to pieces. "Now read it, mamma, please," and then she began to jump up and down, and ended by turning a summerset on the bed.

Her mother laughed, and said: "If that is the way you are going to behave, when you go to see the President, I think he will be slightly astonished; but let us see, first, if he wrote it," and she read thus: —

"Dear Alice —

"My doll is to be married on next Friday, at two o'clock; and I should be very happy to see you, and as many dolls as you can bring.

"Yours, truly,

Lily.

"Wednesday, Oct. 20th, 1858."

"Isn't it too nice!" cried Alice, with a joyful little scream. "A wedding!" and she bounced into a rocking-chair, and nearly tipped over backwards. "Dear me! what a *leany*-back chair! I very nearly upset. I'll take Anna with me; but she must have a new dress immediately – and a hoop petticoat; and, oh, mamma! her hands are all to pieces; the cotton is sticking out in every direction; can't you buy her a new pair? these old brown ones will never do to go to a wedding. Oh, dear! I am so glad," she continued, clapping her hands, "I won't have any trouble with her hair, because it is made of china, and I need not put it up in curl-papers, as I did that poor old thing's in the corner, staring at me so crossly, just because I cut her nose off: she can't go to the wedding; she would frighten the bride into fits."

And now Alice ran off, and coaxed her sister, who was the very best sister in the whole world, or any where else, to make Anna a dress, grand enough for the occasion; and, thereupon, commenced a great rummaging in the rag-bag, and among their mother's stock of old ribbons; and in a short time Anna was made to look perfectly beautiful. The hoop petticoat gave her an appearance extremely like a balloon; and she had to sit down very carefully, to prevent it from going up in the air, and almost over her head.

When Friday came, it rained; and Alice's sister very kindly went to see if the wedding would come off, rain or shine. She came back with the information, that it would not take place if it rained; the ceremony would be postponed to the first fair day – a mode of proceeding rather unusual, but, I think, very sensible; and, I have no doubt, that *real live* people would be very glad to do the same; for some find it difficult to feel very happy when the rain is pouring down from the great black clouds.

Alice waited impatiently until Saturday. At first it was cloudy; but towards twelve o'clock the sun shone bright and warm, and Alice and her doll were soon dressed; the first, all smiles, doing every thing with a hop, skip and jump; while Miss Anna, whose heart, if she had any, was as hard, no doubt, as her china head, kept the same prinking smile on her face, as she was violently twisted and twitched about, and pins run into her in all directions; not to speak of her being thrown so hastily

on the bed, while Alice was having her bonnet tied and her gloves put on, that she fell over on the top of her head, and remained in this painful position a quarter of an hour.

And now, all was ready, and kissing every body, even the cat, for "good-bye," Alice set out, with her sister and Miss Anna, for the scene of the festivities.

When they arrived, they found they were the very first, and were received with great ceremony by Lily.

"Dear me, Alice," she said, "we were obliged to have the ceremony yesterday, for so many little girls came we did not like to disappoint them; but there is to be a reception to-day."

"A reception! what's that?" said Alice.

"Why, the bride will see all her friends. I will tell you about the ceremony that took place yesterday, then you will know every thing. Shall I?"

"Oh, do!" cried Alice; "have it over again, can't you?"

"Oh, no! that would not do," said Lily. "Well, we put the bride and groom in the middle-room, leaning against the door; and, as the minister could not stand up alone, I tied him fast to a chair; he did not speak loud: so it was a kind of tableau."

"Oh!" said Alice, "what's that?"

"Why, like a picture, my dear;" said Lily, who was two years older than Alice, and of course knew a great deal more. She made all her explanations with sweetness and good-nature. She did not say, "Pooh! don't you know that? – what a goose!" as some children do. She had been taught true politeness by her dear mother, and every one who knew Lily loved her dearly.

"Just think, Alice," said Lily, "when the doors were opened, every body burst out laughing at the groom. Now, please don't you make a face or laugh;" and Lily opened the door leading into the reception-room, and Alice and her sister burst out laughing, too, – they could not help it; for – though the bride was a splendid lady, with a tarlatan dress and thread-lace veil – the groom – who was no less than the Count de Morny – was a knit-worsted doll, most dismal to behold. His brown-worsted wig not being finished on the top, he had to keep his cap on before all the ladies. His eyes were made of steel beads, sewed close together; one was perfect, but half of the beads had dropped out of the other, making him look as if he were winking at the company. He wore white-worsted mittens, black pantaloons, and a fiery red jacket. His nose was made by sewing the middle of his face into a hard knot, and it was a nose of a shape never before seen on this earth: and, altogether, the poor Count de Morny looked very much like a monkey with the toothache; and must have known it, for he hung his head as if he were ashamed of himself.

And now Lily set up the count and his bride on the sofa, with the minister on her other side – all, in great state and dignity, ready to receive the company.

They arrived very fast; and, before long, fourteen little girls, and three little boys – the only live gentlemen of the party, – and about twenty dolls were assembled.

When they were ushered into the reception-room, and saw the comical-looking groom, there was such a peal of merry, childish laughter that you would have thought the room was full of singing-birds – such little rollicking trills and carols, it was perfectly delightful to hear them. But Lily, with a very solemn and grave air, said, "Ladies, the groom is not of a very *prippersessing* appearance, but (as Mr. Curtis told me to say) he has a great deal of money."

This made the children laugh more than ever. What did they know or care about money? You might as well have talked Latin to those innocent little ones, as to try to make them believe that any body was any better for the money they had. No! that sort of belief is for "children of a larger growth."

And now Lily took up each little girl, in turn, and introduced her and her dolls to the bride. When Alice went, she did not know exactly what to say; but she recollected what the gentlemen on last New Year's day said to her mother, and she thought that would do nicely; so, dropping a pretty little courtesy, she pressed the white-kid hand of the bride, and, as a blush mantled in her cheek, she said, "How do you do? I wish you many happy returns of the season!" by which Alice meant, I

suppose, that she ought to be married every year. At any rate, it was thought a very fine speech, and was imitated and repeated several times.

I must describe Rosalie's doll. Remember, dear little reader, this is all true. Well, Rosalie had a beautiful doll, dressed in a white tarlatan, covered all over with spangles, and trimmed with scarlet. She had an elegant bouquet of flowers on the waist, called a *corsage*, and the most splendid cut-glass diamonds on her wrists and shoulders. Rosalie's doll was decidedly the belle of the party.

There was a little girl present that was in what Lily called "a peck of troubles," for she had had no idea that it was to be such a grand affair, and she had brought her doll in a plain, white dress, rather tumbled, and, what was worse, barefooted. Just to think – a lady at a party without stockings or shoes! If she had been alive, instead of being made of china, I am sure she would have fainted.

When Lily saw Bertha's distress, she said, "I will lend your doll a pair of shoes, and she can be a lady from the other side of the Mississippi, where they are not so particular;" and little Bertha's face brightened into happiness again.

Jessie, a sweet little blue-eyed fairy, with quiet, gentle manners, brought two beautiful dolls, dressed in white, trimmed with black velvet. The children all kissed the dolls, they thought them "so sweet;" but Lily's mother kissed Jessie, and I think she had the best of it.

Ellie had a dolly that ought to have married the Kentucky giant, for she was so big she had to have a whole chair to herself. The dear little girl was so anxious to have her appear to advantage that, before she came to the party, she went with her brother into the garden, and, after a grand consultation, they picked two immense dahlias, which she insisted should be pinned on dolly's shoulders, and her mother had great difficulty in persuading her that dolly looked much handsomer without them.

Hugh, a dear little boy with very bright eyes, brought a boy-doll, which he called Mr. Brown.

There was one *live* doll at the party. She was not quite as high as Ellie's doll, and such a sweet little blue-eyed creature, with such soft, curling hair that, if she had not been jumping and laughing nearly all the time, you would really have taken her for a beautiful wax doll. Her name was little "Mary," and she was about two years old.

I wish you could have heard little Mary sing "Where is my little Kitty gone," sitting in a tiny chair with her little doll in her arms, bobbing it up and down in her lap to keep time. Her sweet little baby voice was like a robin's note; and I, for one, would not have lost that dear little song for all the Italian operas from here to China.

There were a great many other pretty children, and splendid dolls that I have no time to describe; and the bride and groom sat on the sofa and stared at them all, as if they never meant to look at any thing else.

And now that all had congratulated the happy couple, you would have thought that the queen of fun and frolic had joined the party, and all the cross children had gone up to the moon, and never meant to come down again; for the children – putting the dolls on the chairs, to play grown people – all tumbled down on the carpet, and had a grand game of "hunt the slipper," and did not leave off till supper was announced.

Supper was set out in – hem! – in the garret; but, let me tell you, it is quite as fine to go up so high to supper, as to dive down in the basement; at all events the children thought so, for they scuffled and scrambled up the stairs, all laughing and talking, and nobody listening, so that they might as well have given their ears to their dolls, for any use they were, and arrived at the festive banquet quite breathless.

And now, what a splendid sight presented itself! The table was beautifully ornamented, and brilliantly lighted by four candles about as long as your finger, one at each corner; in the centre was a large wedding cake, at least as big round as a breakfast plate, with roses and lilies and daffadowndillies all over it, perfectly beautiful to look at, and perfectly delicious to eat; and there was every thing else on the table that you can think of.

All the dolls were set up stiff and straight on one side, and the children on the other, and the children eat for both sides, and had the most delightful time, till the minister, who was a wax doll with short hair and movable eyes, was discovered to be fast asleep, or else his eyes had been accidentally put out – and, as the candles were also going out, it was high time for supper to be over.

The children now came down stairs, and, before they left, were invited by Lily to inspect the presents.

"Oh, dear!" cried Alice, "what a splendid silver cake-basket! and here is a knife, fork, and spoon, and, goody! just see these other spoons, with her name on them, how very *arittoscratic*."

Between you and me, little reader, the basket, and knife, fork and spoon, were silver – made of pewter; but there were, besides, six "darling little spoons," that were really silver, which had been given to Lily by her aunt; and Lily had presented them to her doll, the bride.

"And only see this china basket," said little Jessie; "blue basket and red handle; how perfect!"

"And who gave her the splendid embroidered pincushion, I wonder," said Alice, jumping up and down; "it will hold a whole row of pins, I'm sure; and the beautiful preserve dishes, they would hold one cherry apiece; dear me! how nice they look!"

"They are salt-cellars," answered Lily, laughing, "and this is a china candlestick. I shall have to have some candles made, the size of knitting needles; but, dear me, ladies! just look at the groom! He must be going crazy!"

The children all turned to look, and there was the Count de Morny tumbled over on the sofa with his legs up in the air.

"What conduct!" cried Lily; "he ought to be ashamed of himself," and she marched up to the sofa, and took the bride's hand and boxed the Count's ears well, saying that "boxing ears was very much practised, since Queen Victoria had set the fashion."

And now it was getting late, for the sun's rays were coming red and aslant into the room, and all the little ones gathered up their dolls, and prepared to leave this delightful party.

I should think there were about two hundred kisses exchanged on this occasion; for everybody kissed everybody, and then everybody kissed Lily and the bride; and Lily kissed everybody else, and nobody kissed the Count de Morny, which was quite as many kisses as he deserved, for he was a perfect scarecrow, and nothing else; you might as well have tried to fish the moon out of the river, as expect him to sit up straight, and behave himself, or do any thing but wink and blink, and tumble over on his ugly old nose.

After the kissing, everybody said good-bye, and all the children went home delighted, to tell their parents of the nice time they had had; and they all hoped that Lily would soon take it into her dear little head, to invite them to another doll's wedding, as she had about a dozen dolls, and more paper dolls than she could count. Be sure, if she does, I will give you a faithful account of the whole affair.

WHAT CAME OF GIPSYING; OR, Think before you Act

I once knew a bright-eyed, handsome boy, with curling brown hair, which he had a habit of throwing, with a quick jerk of his head, back from his forehead; and this habit was a sort of type of his character, for he was so impetuous, that he would act upon an idea the very moment it came into his head, and this want of reflection led him into innumerable scrapes – some of them pretty serious.

"Charlie," said his father to him one day, "if you expect to get sugar plums and amusing story books in your Christmas stocking, instead of a birch rod, you must mend your ways considerably. How will you get along when you grow up to be a man, if you rush about the world like a comet, upsetting every thing in your way, and doing all manner of imprudent things without stopping to think twice?"

"Well, now, dear papa, I really will try to think twice before I do a thing, if I possibly can, though I have just read a very funny anecdote about that very saying."

"What was it?" said his father.

"It was this: An old gentleman had a black servant, who always acted as if he had no head, or might as well have been without one – something like me, I suppose; but his master tried his best to put some sense into his head, and did not omit to tell him, at least fifty times a day, 'Now, Cato, always think twice, before you speak once,' until at last Cato got it by heart. One evening the poor old gentleman fell fast asleep, while he was reading the newspaper. He held in his hand a lighted candle. All at once his head went bob, bob, right into the candle, and instantly his wig took fire! Cato came in at this very instant. Here was a chance! Now he could win his master's approval, by putting the oft-repeated adage into practice, so he cried aloud, 'Massa, I tink once – Massa, I tink twice – Massa, your wig on fire!' and then rushed to his master, who was now wide awake, his wig blazing like a chimney, and tore it off, though not before the poor old gentleman had received a pretty severe scorching. Now what do you think of that, papa?" continued Charlie, looking very mischievous.

His father laughed, and answered: "That was a very unfortunate application of very good advice, but another old saying is, 'There are exceptions to every rule,' and, in some cases you must act on the instant to do any good; but, with these exceptions, prudence, reflection and, above all, a careful regard to the whisperings of conscience, and a constant appeal to your Father in heaven, to guide your steps aright, will go far towards making you the good boy, and good man, I hope and pray you will become; do try, my dear son, to overcome this dangerous fault in your character."

Charlie looked very grave, and made a great many resolutions to be a perfect pattern of prudence from that time forth, but, alas! these good resolutions must have flown to the moon, for he kept them but a very short time, as (with great sorrow) I shall tell you.

The heedless boy was very fond of reading, and, as you may suppose, the books he liked the most were "Robinson Crusoe," "Gulliver's Travels," and "Peter Wilkins," because they were so full of adventures.

He was so excited by Robinson Crusoe, that if he had dared, he would have gone off to sea to look for a desolate island, and be Robinson Crusoe number two; but he was a little too much in awe of his father for that, and he might never have had an adventure if he had not chanced one morning upon a party of gipsies sitting around a fire in a wood, near his home. Their glittering eyes, swarthy complexions, and air of careless enjoyment, fired the boy's imagination. It gave him a new idea. Splendid! The very thing! What perfect happiness! The woods were large, and he could run off and be a gipsy immediately. It was as plain as A B C that he would have a first-rate time.

It was school vacation just then – lovely summer weather. The white clouds, which the sweet south wind wafted along, deepened by contrast the glorious blue heaven above; the sweet, tranquil,

drowsy country sounds; the grassy, daisy-spangled banks of the noisy little brook; and the great dark, thick woods, so rich in foliage that the sun's rays made only dimples beneath, that came and went as the leaves were stirred. All these beautiful things made a life in the joyous, free, open air, seem the very embodiment of happiness, and Charlie, without a thought of the consequences, determined to be a gipsy without a moment's loss of time.

It happened – by good chance or by bad chance – that, at this very moment, Arthur, Harry, Richard and George, (Harry's little brother,) friends and schoolmates of Charlie's, came to ask him to go fishing with them. What an opportunity! Five jolly fellows together! As they went along he would invite them to be his band, and he would be the captain. Capital!

The boys shouldered their fishing rods, and started off, now darting after a butterfly, now jumping over a boulder, as boys always do; every one in the highest spirits, and quite ready for the first fun that offered.

They soon arrived at the water, and, in a very short time, had caught a dozen fish, when Charlie, with sparkling eyes, began —

"I say, fellows, I am going to turn gipsy. Don't you want to go along?"

"What for?" drawled Arthur, who was rather a slow coach.

"What for? why, for fun. Who wants to be shut up at home all the time, and have an old granny of a nurse blowing him up because his hands are dirty, or because he don't come home, before the dinner bell rings, to have his hair brushed and his jacket twitched straight. Now, out in the woods we can be as dirty as we please, and nobody can say boo! and the dinners will come to us, and we won't have to run the moment a bell rings."

"But suppose the dinners don't come?" suggested Richard, who was very fond of pastry and cakes, "I, for one, can't live on stewed moonshine and mustard. If that is to be served up, I shall wish I was out of the woods, and home again."

"I'll go with you," shouted Harry.

"And I," said little George, imitating his brother. "Come along, we are all ready; the longer we stand, the *fearder* we'll be. Hurra! hurra!"

"That's you! all right!" cried Charlie, joyfully. "I tell you, I've every thing fixed, – that is, in my *head*. Hurra! for a gipsy life, and a camp in the wild woods free, with a kettle hung up on sticks, and all sorts of goodies for tea. There's some poetry for you!"

And now, laughing, and excited by their anticipations, off they all started, dragging their fish along, and stumbling through the bushes, to get clear of the wood paths, and bury themselves in the thickest part of the forest. It was a long time before they found a place that seemed lonely enough, but they did discover just the right place at last – a small, open spot, sweet enough and secluded enough to have made a ball-room for the fairies; and Charlie's handsome eyes fairly danced with delight, as he threw himself down, and cried:

"Here we are, boys! splendid place this! Trees all around, and the ground carpeted with beautiful soft moss."

"All but the soft," growled Richard, jumping up, and making a variety of wry faces. "Only look what a great thorn I have sat down upon. I'm half killed. I wonder what thorns were made for?"

"For four-legged gentlemen, with very long ears," answered Arthur. "They are perfectly devoted to them. I think it's very odd you should be so fond of thorns, as you are not a donkey."

"Fond – fiddlesticks! Let a fellow alone, can't you?"

"Don't tease him, Arthur," cried Charlie. "Here, I say, all of you, guess this: Mr. Martingale has ten fine horses, and there are only twenty-four feet among them all."

"Twenty four feet!" said Harry; "impossible! You say they are fine horses, and ten of them. Every horse has four feet, and four times ten are forty – that's certain."

"Perhaps," said little George, "some of them are a new style of horse; six have the right number of feet, making the twenty-four, and the rest crawl on their bellies, like snakes."

"Goodness! how absurd!" exclaimed Arthur. "I have heard of Mr. Barnum's woolly horse, and a saw-horse, and a chestnut horse, and a horse-chestnut; and a flying-horse, and a horse-fly; and a clothes-horse, and a horse-cloth; and a rocking-horse. But a snake-horse is something new."

"Give it up?" said Charlie. "Suppose you alter the spelling a little."

"Oh! I have it!" shouted Arthur. "The horses had twenty *fore* feet, and they also had twenty *hind* feet. That's the best catch I ever heard. Just see, fellows, what comes of being head-boy in spelling-class. I'm the boy for learning! I dare say Dr. Addup is crying his eyes out, because it is vacation, and he won't see me for a month."

"I've got twenty-four appetites," said Richard; "when is the plum-pudding coming up?"

"The fish for the first course, and here they are," said Charlie.

"But I don't like raw fish," said George; "and where is the fire to cook 'em?"

"Don't be in a hurry," said the captain. "I'll fix that in a minute; I know all about it – read it in a book; all you have to do, is, to find two sticks, and rub them together, and there's your fire right off."

But our young gipsy soon found the difference between a fire with two sticks in a book, and a fire with two sticks in a wood. He rubbed his two sticks together, until *he* was in a perfect blaze with the exertion, but the blaze he wanted would not come.

"Hang the sticks!" he exclaimed; "the people in the books always did it so easily, why can't I?"

Luckily for the success of the gipsy party, one of the band just then happened to spy a match, which some chance wanderer had dropped, and a few dry sticks having been hastily collected, a fine fire was soon crackling and snapping merrily.

Delighted with their success, they next held a grand consultation, on the noble science of cooking.

"The gipsies hang a kettle on forked sticks," said Richard; "and fish, flesh, and fowl are all put in together, making, what I should call, stewed hodge-podge."

"Well, there are ninety-nine reasons why we won't use the kettle," said Arthur, who considered himself the wit of the party, – "and the first is, we have no kettle, so I won't trouble you with the rest. Good gracious!" he continued, "I'm so hungry, I could eat what I perfectly hate, and that's a boiled calf's head."

"And I forty sour apples," cried Harry. "I wish one of these trees could be turned into hot ginger-bread, wouldn't we *pitch in*?"

As there was no kettle to be had, they endeavored to fry the fish by sticking them on the top of forked sticks. But, somehow, the fish would not stay "stuck." They fell off into the blaze, and smoked, and "sizzled," and smelt like any thing but delicious food; and there was great scorching of fingers, and singeing of hair, as the new cooks tried to twitch them out. At last, covered with ashes, and, of course, without plates or any other civilized comfort, the banquet was "served" in the young gentlemen's fingers, and tea began, Richard declaring he was "hungry enough to eat a rhinoceros."

The first mouthful tasted "first rate," but, presently Arthur sang out, "Hollo! I'm choking! my mouth's full of scales, and there is something inside of this fish, that I never saw at home."

"Oh, goodness! I never thought of cleaning them; how stupid!" said Charlie; "Never mind, boys! we'll know better next time."

"But I want some salt, and some bread and butter," said little George; "Robinson Crusoe had them."

"Where's my ship, to get all these things," said Charlie; "we're not on an island."

"But I thought you said you had every thing fixed."

"So I did – in my head; but you see – " answered Charlie, hesitating and scratching his head, and looking very much bothered – "you see – "

"Come, come, boys," interposed Harry, "no fighting in the camp; we are a sort of greenhorn gipsies, now, but we shall be all right by-and-bye, and have a first-rate time. I wish I had a drink of water – but never mind. Hurrah for the gipsies, and success to our side!"

Harry's good humor infected the rest of the party, and their hunger being quieted by the meal, bad as it was, they piled more sticks on the fire, just for the pleasure of seeing them burn, and sat down at a little distance, to tell stories to each other, of all the gipsies, and wild adventures they could remember.

By this time the glorious flush of sunset rested upon every thing. The little fairy glade, with the fire in its centre; the handsome, animated faces of the thoughtless boys, as they sat grouped together in careless but not ungraceful attitudes; the crimson, purple, and golden clouds above, altogether, made a very charming picture, and, so far, gipsy life certainly seemed *colour de rose*.

But the shadows gradually lengthened; the glowing colors became fainter; and the gray twilight came stealing on. Occasionally a dissipated little bird would give a faint twitter, as he was hurrying home in the deepening gloom, from a late dinner party. Insensibly the boys relapsed into silence, and, wearied with their long tramp, began to think of going to bed; but here commenced new troubles.

"The beds! and the tents! Even the real gipsies did not sleep upon the bare ground – what was to be done?"

"Here's a pretty how-de-do!" cried Arthur; "this is worse than the fish and the fire; matches may be sometimes dropped in the woods, but mattresses never," and here poor Charlie came in for a scolding chorus from every body.

"Let's get some big branches, and lean them against a tree," said little George.

"Where's the axe to cut them with," said Richard.

"Dig a cave," cried Harry.

"What with – our nails? I have a jackknife," said Richard, "I'll lend it to you; suppose *you* begin."

Charlie's face looked about as blank as this O, while the boys were talking. He was completely nonplussed, and too proud to acknowledge it. And now, for the first time, his father's warning voice rose in his memory, and in the midst of his vexation, another voice, "the still small voice" of conscience, reproached him for having acted with silly impetuosity; and this time he had brought his friends, as well as himself, into discomfort and trouble. A bitter repentant tear came into his eye, but he hastily dashed it away, with the cuff of his sleeve. By this time all was dark; there was no moon that night, and the stars, blinking and twinkling in their far-off homes, gave scarcely a glimmer of light in the dense forest. The burning twigs alone revealed to Charlie the wearied, vexed faces of his companions. Throwing his hair back from his forehead, by the quick, characteristic movement I have mentioned, he said cheerfully:

"I tell you what, fellows, we are here, and we must stay here to-night, at least. We can't burrow like rabbits, and we don't understand roosting on one foot like birds; suppose we all lie down in a heap, one top of the other, and, when the bottom one of all is warm enough, take him out and put him on top."

This made the boys roar with laughter, and at last, somehow or other, they squeezed, and pushed, and tumbled, and jumbled themselves together, like a family of kittens, and not a soul could tell which were his own arms or legs, as they stuck out, over, under, and across each other, and then they shut their eyes, and tried to fall asleep.

But here new troubles began. Myriads of insects came buzzing around them, a superannuated old bull-frog and his wife set up a dismal bellowing, in a swampy spot close by, and, apparently, any quantity of high-tempered owls were holding a mass meeting, all hooting and tooting, and talking at once. A general attack was made on the poor little gipsies by a nimble army of mosquitoes, who seemed to be in a perfect frenzy of delight, at the fine supper provided for them. The boys slapped, and whacked, and kicked in the dark, and hit each other, three times as often as they did their foes.

"Oh, murderation!" exclaimed poor Charlie, "what shall we do – what *shall* we do?" as the boys, unable to bear the torment any longer, started to their feet, little George fairly blubbering with

distress, and rummaging in vain in his pocket, for his pocket-handkerchief, to wipe away his tears, and rub his nose up, as little boys invariably do.

"Suppose we try to find some other place," said Richard, "we seem to have come to the very spot where all the mosquitoes live."

"Oh! don't," cried little George, "don't go running about the woods in the dark. Who knows how many bears there may be up in the trees."

"And robbers, too, with guns and pistols," said Arthur.

"And how can we light another fire, if we leave this?" said Richard, who was more practical than the rest. "By-the-way, I think I've heard that smoke will drive away mosquitoes; suppose we put on some green wood, and make a great smudge."

Any thing was better than being bitten; so the boys poked and groped around in the uncertain light, for the fire was very low, and picked up all the branches they could find, and heaped them upon the fire, and, sure enough, they did make a great "smudge," and set every body coughing, choking, and crying, until they were half crazy.

By degrees the mosquitoes did seem to be driven off a little, or else the gipsies were so tired and sleepy that they ceased to hear or feel them, for one after another became, first silent, then drowsy, and, finally, dropped off into slumber, too sound to be easily broken.

It was now midnight. The weary faces of these thoughtless, naughty boys were now and then revealed by a fitful gleam of the dying fire; the leaves of the trees were motionless; and there was a sudden hush and stillness in the air, as if nature, too, was weary, and had sunk into a deathlike sleep. Presently faint mutterings were heard; the stars disappeared, and the darkness became intense; great masses of black clouds rolled up to the zenith, and came swiftly down on the other side; the air freshened, and, in a moment, the tops of the giant trees bent their proud heads, and a rustling, rushing, crashing sound came through their branches as the wind swept by, in its fury breaking off small twigs with a crackling noise, and hurling them with innumerable leaves to the ground.

Suddenly a fierce, sharp flash of lightning leaped from the clouds, instantly succeeded by a tremendous, rattling clap of thunder awakening the boys, who, with screams of horror, started to their feet and clung to each other in terror.

For an instant after there was a dead, solemn silence, and then came the first great drops of rain pattering through the leaves, and again the trees were tossed by the blast like the angry waves of a stormy sea.

And now the rain descended in torrents, forked lightning blinded the eyes, and the crashing thunder was deafening. Heart-stricken, and wild with terror, the unhappy gipsies clung together, the rain drenching them to the skin; and poor little George, dizzy with fright, reeled and fell to the ground, and the boys, in their agony, thought he was dead.

Charley, broken-hearted, fell on his knees and, with tears streaming down his face, implored God to forgive him, and bring George back to life, and not inflict upon him this awful – awful punishment. He felt like a murderer. *He* alone was to blame; *he* had been the tempter, and his father had truly said that there were two things that followed the yielding to temptation – sin and repentance. He did repent. If he could only get back home with his dear companions, he would – he *would* be a steady boy ever after.

With trembling hands he lifted up little George's head, and entreated him to speak one word to him – "only one single word." A low groan, and a faint "Oh, Harry, take me home!" issued from the childish lips, to Charley's great joy; and his brother and the rest hung round, trying to keep the rain off, and saying, "Don't give up, little fellow! try to bear it a little longer; the storm is almost over."

Hark! what was that they heard? A far-off, distant shout. They listened with painful intentness. It came faintly again: "Hol-lo!" It must be – it was – yes – somebody was calling them; and, altogether, they gave a shrill cry of joy! Their hearts beat wildly. The shouts sounded louder. They hear their names called: Char-ley – Har-ry! They answer again, trembling – their whole frames thrilling. Lights

come dancing through the trees at a distance. They are coming nearer; and the boys, taking George in their arms, struggle through the wet branches with which the wind has covered the ground. In another moment they can dimly discern two men carrying lanterns, and Charley recognizes his father's voice.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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