

Wells Carolyn

The Dorrance Domain



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CHAPTER I

COOPED UP

"I *wish* we didn't have to live in a boarding-house!" said Dorothy Dorrance, flinging herself into an armchair, in her grandmother's room, one May afternoon, about six o'clock.

She made this remark almost every afternoon, about six o'clock, whatever the month or the season, and as a rule, little attention was paid to it. But to-day her sister Lilian responded, in a sympathetic voice,

"I wish we didn't have to live in a boarding-house!"

Whereupon Leicester, Lilian's twin brother, mimicking his sister's tones, dolefully repeated, "I wish *we* didn't have to live in a boarding-house!"

And then Fairy, the youngest Dorrance, and the last of the quartet, sighed forlornly, "I wish we didn't have to live in a *boarding-house!*"

There was another occupant of the room. A gentle white-haired old lady, whose sweet face and dainty fragile figure had all the effects of an ivory miniature, or a painting on porcelain.

"My dears," she said, "I'm sure I wish you didn't."

"Don't look like that, grannymother," cried Dorothy, springing to kiss the troubled face of the dear old lady. "I'd live here a million years, rather than have you look so worried about it. And anyway, it wouldn't be so bad, if it weren't for the dinners."

"I don't mind the dinners," said Leicester, "in fact I would be rather sorry not to have them. What I mind is the cramped space, and the shut-up-in-your-own-room feeling. I spoke a piece in school last week, and I spoke it awful well, too, because I just meant it. It began, 'I want free life, and I want fresh air,' and that's exactly what I do want. I wish we lived in Texas, instead of on Manhattan Island. Texas has a great deal more room to the square yard, and I don't believe people are crowded down there."

"There can't be more room to a square yard in one place than another," said Lilian, who was practical.

"I mean back yards and front yards and side yards, – and I don't care whether they're square or not," went on Leicester, warming to his subject. "My air-castle is situated right in the middle of the state of Texas, and it's the only house in the state."

"Mine is in the middle of a desert island," said Lilian; "it's so much nicer to feel sure that you can get to the water, no matter in what direction you walk away from your house."

"A desert island would be nice," said Leicester; "it would be more exciting than Texas, I suppose, on account of the wild animals. But then in Texas, there are wild men and wild animals both."

"I like plenty of room, too," said Dorothy, "but I want it inside my house as well as out. Since we are choosing, I think I'll choose to live in the Madison Square Garden, and I'll have it moved to the middle of a western prairie."

"Well, children," said Mrs. Dorrance, "your ideas are certainly big enough, but you must leave the discussion of them now, and go to your small cramped boarding-house bedrooms, and make yourselves presentable to go down to your dinner in a boarding-house dining-room."

This suggestion was carried out in the various ways that were characteristic of the Dorrance children.

Dorothy, who was sixteen, rose from her chair and humming a waltz tune, danced slowly and gracefully across the room. The twins, Lilian and Leicester, fell off of the arms of the sofa, where they had been perched, scrambled up again, executed a sort of war-dance and then dashed madly out of the door and down the hall.

Fairy, the twelve year old, who lived up to her name in all respects, flew around the room, waving her arms, and singing in a high soprano, "Can I wear my pink sash? Can I wear my pink sash?"

"Yes, yes," said Mrs. Dorrance, "you may wear anything you like, if you'll only keep still a minute. You children are too boisterous for a boarding-house. You *ought* to be in the middle of a desert or somewhere. You bewilder me!"

But about fifteen minutes later it was four decorous young Dorrances who accompanied their grandmother to the dining-room. Not that they wanted to be sedate, or enjoyed being quiet, but they were well-bred children in spite of their rollicking temperaments. They knew perfectly well how to behave properly, and always did it when the occasion demanded.

And, too, the atmosphere of Mrs. Cooper's dining-room was an assistance rather than a bar to the repression of hilarity.

The Dorrances sat at a long table, two of the children on either side of their grandmother, and this arrangement was one of their chief grievances.

"If we could only have a table to ourselves," Leicester often said, "it wouldn't be so bad. But set up side by side, like the teeth in a comb, cheerful conversation is impossible."

"But, my boy," his grandmother would remonstrate, "you must learn to converse pleasantly with those who sit opposite you. You can talk with your sisters at other times."

So Leicester tried, but it is exceedingly difficult for a fourteen year old boy to adapt himself to the requirements of polite conversation.

On the evening of which we are speaking, his efforts, though well meant, were unusually unsuccessful.

Exactly opposite Leicester sat Mr. Bannister, a ponderous gentleman, both physically and mentally. He was a bachelor, and his only idea regarding children was that they should be treated jocosely. He also had his own ideas of jocose treatment.

"Well, my little man," he said, smiling broadly at Leicester, "did you go to school to-day?"

As he asked this question every night at dinner, not even excepting Saturdays and Sundays, Leicester felt justified in answering only, "Yes, sir."

"That's nice; and what did you learn?"

As this question invariably followed the other, Leicester was not wholly unprepared for it. But the discussion of air-castles in Texas, or on a prairie, had made the boy a little impatient of the narrow dining-room, and the narrow table, and even of Mr. Bannister, though he was by no means of narrow build.

"I learned my lessons," he replied shortly, though there was no rudeness in his tone.

"Tut, tut, my little man," said Mr. Bannister, playfully shaking a fat finger at him, "don't be rude."

"No, sir, I won't," said Leicester, with such an innocent air of accepting a general bit of good advice, that Mr. Bannister was quite discomfited.

Grandma Dorrance looked at Leicester reproachfully, and Mrs. Hill, who was a sharp-featured, sharp-spoken old lady, and who also sat on the other side of the table, said severely, to nobody in particular, "Children are not brought up now as they were in my day."

This had the effect of silencing Leicester, for the three older Dorrances had long ago decided that it was useless to try to talk to Mrs. Hill. Even if you tried your best to be nice and pleasant, she was sure to say something so irritating, that you just *had* to lose your temper.

But Fairy did not subscribe to this general decision. Indeed, Fairy's chief characteristic was her irrepressible loquacity. So much trouble had this made, that she had several times been forbidden

to talk at the dinner-table at all. Then Grandma Dorrance would feel sorry for the dolefully mute little girl, and would lift the ban, restricting her, however, to not more than six speeches during any one meal.

Fairy kept strict account, and never exceeded the allotted number, but she made each speech as long as she possibly could, and rarely stopped until positively interrupted.

So she took it upon herself to respond to Mrs. Hill's remark, and at the same time demonstrate her loyalty to her grandmother.

"I'm sure, Mrs. Hill," Fairy began, "that nobody could bring up children better than my grannymother. She is the best children bring-upper in the whole world. I don't know how your grandmother brought you up, – or perhaps you had a mother, – some people think they're better than grandmothers. I don't know; I never had a mother, only a grandmother, but she's just the best ever, and if us children aren't good, it's our fault and not hers. She says we're boist'rous, and I 'spect we are. Mr. Bannister says we're rude, and I 'spect we are; but none of these objectionaries is grandma's fault!" Fairy had a way of using long words when she became excited, and as she knew very few real ones she often made them up to suit herself. And all her words, long or short came out in such a torrent of enthusiasm and emphasis, and with such a degree of rapidity that it was a difficult matter to stop her. So on she went. "So it's all right, Mrs. Hill, but when we don't behave just first-rate, or just as children did in your day, please keep a-remembering to blame us and not grandma. You see," and here Fairy's speech assumed a confidential tone, "we don't have room enough. We want free life and we want fresh air, and then I 'spect we'd be more decorious."

"That will do, Fairy," said Mrs. Dorrance, looking at her gravely.

"Yes'm," said Fairy, smiling pleasantly, "that'll do for one."

"And that makes two! now you've had two speeches, Fairy," said her brother, teasingly.

"I have not," said Fairy, "and an explanatory speech doesn't count!"

"Yes, it does," cried Lilian, "and that makes three!"

"It doesn't, does it, grandma?" pleaded Fairy, lifting her big blue eyes to her grandmother's face.

Mrs. Dorrance looked helpless and a little bewildered, but she only said, "Please be quiet, Fairy; I might like to talk a little, myself."

"Oh, that's all right, grandma dear," said Fairy, placidly; "I know how it is to feel conversatory myself."

The children's mother had died when Fairy was born, and her father had given her the name of Fairfax because there had always been a Fairfax Dorrance in his family for many generations. To be sure it had always before been a boy baby who was christened Fairfax, but the only boy in this family had been named Leicester; and so, one Fairfax Dorrance was a girl. From the time she was old enough to show any characteristics at all, she had been fairy-like in every possible way. Golden hair, big blue eyes and a cherub face made her a perfect picture of child beauty. Then she was so light and airy, so quick of motion and speech, and so immaculately dainty in her dress and person, that Fairy seemed to be the only fitting name for her. No matter how much she played rollicking games, her frock never became rumpled or soiled; and the big white bow which crowned her mass of golden curls always kept its shape and position even though its wearer turned somersaults. For Fairy was by no means a quiet or sedate child. None of the Dorrances were that. And the youngest was perhaps the most headstrong and difficult to control. But though impetuous in her deeds and mis-deeds, her good impulses were equally sudden, and she was always ready to apologize or make amends for her frequent naughtiness.

And so after dinner, she went to Mrs. Hill, and said with a most engaging smile, "I'm sorry if I 'fended you, and I hope I didn't. You see I didn't mean to speak so much, and right at the dinner table, too, but I just *have* to stand up for my grannymother. She's so old, and so ladylike that she can't stand up for herself. And I was 'fraid you mightn't understand, so I thought I'd 'pologize. Is it all right?"

Fairy looked up into Mrs. Hill's face with such angelic eyes and pleading smile, that even that dignified lady unbent a little.

"Yes, my dear," she said; "it's all right for you to stand up for your grandmother, as you express it. But you certainly do talk too much for such a little girl."

"Yes'm," said Fairy, contritely, "I know I do. It's my upsetting sin; but somehow I can't help it. My head seems to be full of words, and they just keep spilling out. Don't you ever talk too much, ma'am?"

"No; I don't think I do."

"You ought to be very thankful," said Fairy, with a sigh; "it is an awful affliction. Why once upon a time –"

"Come, Fairy," said Mrs. Dorrance; "say good-night to Mrs. Hill, and come up-stairs with me."

"Yes, grandma, I'm coming. Good-night, Mrs. Hill; I'm sorry I have to go just now 'cause I was just going to tell you an awful exciting story. But perhaps to-morrow –"

"Come, Fairy," said Mrs. Dorrance; "come at once!" And at last the gentle old lady succeeded in capturing her refractory granddaughter, and led the dancing sprite away to her own room.

CHAPTER II

REBELLIOUS HEARTS

Although Mrs. Cooper's boarders were privileged to sit in the parlor in the evening, the Dorrances rarely availed themselves of this permission. For the atmosphere of the formal and over-punctilious drawing-room was even more depressing than that of the dining-room. And even had the children wanted to stay there, which they didn't, Mrs. Dorrance would have been afraid that their irrepressible gayety would have been too freely exhibited. And another thing, they had to study their next day's lessons, for their hours between school and dinner-time were always spent out of doors.

And so every evening they congregated in their grandmother's room, and were studious or frivolous as their mood dictated.

To-night they were especially fractious.

"Granny-mother," exclaimed Lilian, "it just seems as if I *couldn't* live in this house another minute! there is nobody here I like, except our own selves, and I just hate it all!"

"Did *you* go to school to-day, my little man?" said Leicester, shaking his finger in such funny imitation of Mr. Bannister, that Lilian had to laugh, in spite of her discontentment.

"I'm so tired of him, too," went on Lilian, still scowling. "Can't we go and live somewhere else, grandmother?"

Mrs. Dorrance sighed. She knew only too well the difficulty of securing desirable rooms in a desirable locality with her four lively young charges; and especially at the modest price she was able to pay. Already they had moved six times in their two years of boarding-house life, and Mrs. Dorrance dreaded the thought of a seventh similar experience.

"Lilian, dear," she said, gently, "you know how hard it is to find any nice boarding-house where they will take four noisy children. And I'm sure, in many respects, this is the best one we've ever found."

"I suppose it is," said Dorothy, looking up from the French lesson she was studying, "but I know one thing! as soon as I get through school, and I don't mean to go many years more, we're going to get away from boarding-houses entirely, and we're going to have a home of our own. I don't suppose it can be in Texas, or the Desert of Sahara, but we'll have a house or an apartment or something, and live by ourselves."

"I wish you might do so," said her grandmother, "but I fear we cannot afford it. And, too, I think I would not be able to attend to the housekeeping. When we used to have plenty of servants, it was quite a different matter."

"But granny, dear," cried Dorothy, "I don't mean for you to housekeep. I mean to do that myself. After I get through school, you know, I'll have nothing to do, and I can just as well keep house as not."

"Do you know how?" asked Fairy, staring at her oldest sister with wide-open blue eyes.

"Can you make a cherry pie?" sang Leicester. "I don't believe you can, Dot; and I'll tell you a better plan than yours. You wait until I get out of school, and then I'll go into some business, and earn enough money to buy a big house for all of us."

"Like the one in Fifty-eighth Street?" said Dorothy, softly.

The children always lowered their voices when they spoke of the house on Fifty-eighth Street. Two years ago, when their grandfather died, they had to move out of that beautiful home, and none of them, not even little Fairy, could yet speak of it in a casual way.

The children's father had died only a few years after their mother, and the four had been left without any provision other than that offered by their Grandfather Dorrance. He took them into his home on Fifty-eighth Street, and being a man of ample means, he brought them up in a generous,

lavish way. The little Dorrances led a happy life, free from care or bothers of any sort, until when Dorothy was fourteen, Grandfather Dorrance died.

His wife knew nothing of his business affairs, and placidly supposed there was no reason why she should not continue to live with the children, in the ways to which they had so long been accustomed.

But all too soon she learned that years of expensive living had made decided inroads upon Mr. Dorrance's fortune, and that for the future her means would be sadly limited.

Mrs. Dorrance was a frail old lady, entirely unused to responsibilities of any kind; her husband had always carefully shielded her from all troubles or annoyances, and now, aside from her deep grief at his death, she was forced suddenly to face her changed circumstances and the responsibility of her four grandchildren.

She was crushed and bewildered by the situation, and had it not been for the advice and kind assistance of her lawyer, Mr. Lloyd, she would not have known which way to turn.

Dorothy, too, though only fourteen years old, proved to be a staunch little helper. She was brave and plucky, and showed a courage and capability that astonished all who knew her.

After Mr. Dorrance's affairs were settled up, it was discovered that the family could not remain in the home. Although the house was free of incumbrance, yet there was no money with which to pay taxes, or to pay the household expenses, even if they lived on a more moderate scale. Only a few years before his death, Mr. Dorrance had invested a large sum of money in a summer hotel property. This had not turned out advantageously, and though Mrs. Dorrance could not understand all of the business details, she finally became aware that she had but a net income of two thousand dollars to support herself and her grandchildren.

Helpless and heart-broken as she was, she yet had a certain amount of indomitable pride, which though it might break, would never bend.

In her quiet, gentle way she accepted the situation, and endeavored to find a suitable boarding-place that would come within her means. The big house had been rented to strangers, as Mr. Lloyd considered that a better investment than selling it. The furniture had been sold, except a few choice personal belongings which had been stored away against better days.

With a cheerful placidity, which was but the reaction of her utter helplessness, Mrs. Dorrance began her new life.

The children took the change more easily. Although they fretted and stormed more, yet that very fact gave a sort of outlet to their disappointment, and, too, their youth allowed them to adapt themselves more easily to the changed conditions.

And had it been possible for them to have a home of their own, they would perhaps have been as happy as in their grandfather's mansion.

But Mrs. Dorrance well knew her own limitations, and realized that at her age she could not take up the unaccustomed cares of housekeeping.

And so they boarded; and it was unsatisfactory to all concerned; principally because children do not agree with boarding-houses and *vice versa*.

"Well, there is one thing to look forward to," said Dorothy, in her cheerful way; "it's the first of May now. In a month, school will be over for this term, and then we can go to the seashore or the country, and get away from Mrs. Cooper's for the summer, anyhow."

"Yes," exclaimed Lilian, "won't it be fun! I vote for the country this year. What do you say, Leicester?"

The twins, though possessing strong individual opinions, usually referred all questions to each other, though this by no means implied a change of mind on the part of either.

"Country's all right," said Leicester, "but I like mountains. Mountainous country, you know; I don't mean Pike's Peak or Mount Washington."

"I like the seashore," said Fairy. "'Course you needn't go there just 'cause I like it, – but I do think it's awful nice. There's the water you know, and the big waves come in all tumble-bumble, – oh, it's beautiful to see them! And if I could have a new bathing-suit trimmed with red braid like Gladys Miller's, I do think –"

"Wait a minute, Fairy," said her grandmother; "you're doing your thinking too soon. I'm sorry, children, more sorry than I can tell you, but I don't see how we can go away this summer, to the mountains or seashore or anywhere else."

"Oh, grannymother!" cried Dorothy in dismay; "you don't mean we must stay in the city all summer!"

"I'm afraid so, my dear. I can't see any hope for anything else."

"But grandma, we went last year, and we stayed all summer, and we had a lovely time." This from Lilian, whose brown eyes were already filling with tears.

"In the city! all summer! well, I just guess *not!*" shouted Leicester. "I'm going off of Manhattan Island, if I have to go as a tramp."

"Tramping isn't so bad," said Lilian, brightening up; "we could carry our things in handkerchiefs slung on sticks over our shoulders."

"But grannymother couldn't tramp," said Fairy.

"The streets will be broad and the lanes will be narrow,
So we'll have to take grannymother in a wheel-barrow,"

chanted Dorothy. "But tell us truly, granny, dear, why can't we go away?"

Grandmother Dorrance looked sad, but her face wore that air of placid determination which the children had come to look upon as indicative of final and unalterable decision.

"This last winter," she said, "was much more expensive than the winter before. There was the doctor and the nurse, when Fairy was ill; we are paying a little more board here than we did at Mrs. Watson's; and then, somehow, your clothes seem to cost more every year. I don't know how it is, I'm sure," and the sweet old face assumed the worried look that always pained Dorothy's heart, "but somehow there isn't any money left for a summer trip."

"But grandma," said Leicester, with a great desire to be businesslike, "can't we find a place to board in the country, for just the same price as we pay here?"

"No, it always costs a little more per week at any summer place than in the city. And that is not all; there are the traveling expenses, and you'd all need new summer clothes, and there are many extra expenses, such as laundry work, and things that you children know nothing about."

Dorothy sat thinking. She had closed her French book and sat with her elbows on the table in front of her, and her chin in her hands. Dorothy Dorrance was a very pretty girl, although it had never occurred to her to think so. She had dark eyes like her father's, but had inherited her mother's blonde hair. Not golden, but a light golden-brown, which fell into soft shining curls which tossed about her temples, and escaped from the thick twist at the back of her head. She had a sunshiny smile, which was almost always visible, for Dorothy was light-hearted and of a merry nature. She was an all-round capable girl, and could turn her hand to almost anything she undertook. She had a capable mind too, and often astonished her grandmother by her intelligent grasp of business matters or financial problems. Indeed, Dorothy at sixteen had a far more practical knowledge of the ways and means of existence than Mrs. Dorrance at seventy.

"Grandmother," she said at last, after she had sat for some minutes staring straight ahead of her, and looking, as Leicester said, "almost as if she were really thinking." "Grandmother, I think we are old enough now, – at any rate I am, – to know something about our income. How much money do we have a year?"

"That's easily told, my child; since your grandfather's death we have very little. I own the house on Fifty-eighth Street, but from the rent of that I have to pay taxes and repairs. Of course Mr. Lloyd attends to all these matters, and his judgment is always right, but I can't help thinking there is very little profit in that house."

"Wouldn't it be better to sell that house, and invest the money in some other way?" said Dorothy, straightforwardly.

"Mr. Lloyd says not, dearie, and of course he knows. Then besides that, I own the large hotel property which your grandfather bought a few years before he died. But as I cannot rent it, and cannot sell it, it is not only no source of income to me, but it is a great expense."

"Oh, 'Our Domain' up in the mountains," said Dorothy.

"Yes, 'Our Domain'; but I wish it were the Domain of somebody else," said her grandmother.

This hotel property had always been called "Our Domain," by the family and when Mr. Dorrance was alive, had been looked upon as a sort of a joke, but the present view of the situation did not seem at all humorous.

"Never mind," said Leicester, who was always hopeful, "I think it's very nice to own a Domain. It makes us seem like landed proprietors, and some day, who knows, it may prove valuable."

CHAPTER III

DOROTHY'S PLAN

One afternoon, about a week later, the children were again in their grandmother's room waiting for dinner-time.

To be exact, they weren't in the room, but were literally half in and half out. For Mrs. Dorrance's room had two front windows, and two children were hanging out of each, in a precarious and really dangerous way.

The twins, in one window, were vying with each other as to which could lean out farthest, without falling out; and in the other window Dorothy was leaning out as far as possible, and at the same time trying to keep a very excited Fairy from pitching headlong to the street.

The simple explanation of this acrobatic performance is, that they were looking for the postman. Not that they really thought he would come any sooner for their endangering their lives, but each young Dorrance considered it of the highest importance to catch the first glimpse of him.

"Oh, dear, do you suppose the house is sold?" said Lilian, for the dozenth time.

"Hi!" screamed Dorothy; "there he is! we'll soon know now."

Dorothy having won the game, they all tumbled into the room again, and Leicester started down-stairs for the mail.

"Gently, my boy, gently," warned his grandmother. "Don't go down whooping like a wild Indian."

Leicester assumed a sudden air of decorum, and disappeared; while the girls clustered around their grandmother, all talking at once.

"What do you think, grandmother?" cried Dorothy, "guess, – which way do you guess?"

"I guess, no," said Mrs. Dorrance, who was used to guessing games.

"I guess, yes!" shouted Lilian; "of course it's sold! and we'll have lots of money and we'll go to Europe, and Africa, and Chicago, and everywhere!"

"And over to Brooklyn," chimed in Fairy; "I do want to go to Brooklyn, 'cause I've never been there and Gladys Miller says it's awful funny, and besides –"

"A letter! here's a letter," cried Leicester, bouncing into the room; "open it, open it quick, granny dear!"

"I can't," said the old lady, helplessly; "you children make such a noise, I'm all bewildered. Open it, Dorothy, and read it aloud; and the rest of you, do try to keep still."

Eagerly, Dorothy tore open the letter, and began to read it:

Mrs. Elizabeth Dorrance:

Dear Madam: – I had a final interview to-day with Mr. Ware. As you know, he had about concluded to buy your hotel, but he has been making inquiries concerning it, and has learned that it has not been occupied for several years. He fears that he cannot make it pay as a business venture, and has therefore definitely decided not to buy it.

I do not wish to discourage you, my dear madam, but it looks to me as if it would not be possible to sell the hotel this season, and indeed, I doubt if you can ever dispose of it to your satisfaction. The next best course, in my opinion, would be for you to allow it to be sold at auction. This plan would enable you to pay the back taxes now due, and relieve you of further obligations of the same sort, – though I fear there would be little or no margin of profit for you in this arrangement.

However, should you think best to adopt this course, please advise me promptly, and I will take the necessary steps in the matter.

I am, my dear madam,

Respectfully yours,

"Lewis H. Lloyd."

At the conclusion of this letter the four Dorrance children groaned in concert. Their concerted groan was an old-established affair, and by reason of much practice they had brought it to a high state of perfection. It began with a low wail which deepened and strengthened through several bass notes, and then slid up to high C with a wild, final shriek. It was most effective as an expression of utter exasperation, but Mrs. Dorrance, though accustomed to it, lived in a state of fear lest it might cause the landlady to request them to give up their rooms.

"Oh, dear," said Lilian, after the groan had subsided, "I felt sure that Ware man was going to take the old place. I think he's mean!"

"I think Mr. Lloyd is mean," broke in Dorothy. "I don't like him!"

"It isn't his fault, my dear," said her grandmother. "He has done all in his power to sell the place, but it seems to be unsalable, except at auction. And that would probably mean that our financial affairs would be in no better state than they are now."

"I'd like to see Our Domain," said Leicester, thoughtfully; "what's it like, grandmother?"

"I don't know, dear; I've never seen it. Your grandfather never saw it either. He bought the property through an agent, merely as a speculation."

"Ho!" cried Leicester, "the idea of owning a Domain that nobody has ever seen! why, perhaps there is nothing there at all, and so of course nobody will buy it."

"People!" exclaimed Dorothy, suddenly, her eyes shining, and her whole air expressive of a wonderful discovery. And, too, when Dorothy said, "People!" in that tone of voice, the others had learned that she meant to announce one of her plans. As a rule, her plans were wild and impracticable schemes, but they were always interesting to listen to.

"People, I'll tell you exactly what we'll do. Grandma says we can't afford any extra expense this summer. So, – we'll go and live in our Domain!"

"Well, of all crazy things," said Lilian, in a disappointed tone. "I thought you were going to say something nice."

"It *is* nice," said Dorothy; "you think it isn't, because you don't know anything about it. I know all about it. Now listen and I'll tell you."

"Know all about it!" said Leicester; "you don't even know where it is!"

"Anybody can find that out," went on Dorothy; "and then when we find out, all we have to do is to go there. And then we'll live in the house, no matter what it is. It's ours, and so we won't have to pay any rent, and we girls will do all the housework and cooking, and so it won't cost near as much as boarding. And the difference will pay our traveling expenses to the Domain, wherever it is. And we won't need any new clothes to go to a place like that, and it will be perfectly lovely, as good as a prairie or a Texas, or anything! Now then!"

"Whew!" exclaimed Leicester; "I do believe you've struck it right this time. It will be great! I'll do my share of the work, – it will be just like camping out. What do you suppose the house is like?"

"Isn't it lovely not to know!" cried Lilian; "everything about it will be such a surprise. When can we go, grandmother?"

"Oh, my dears, how you rattle on," said Mrs. Dorrance, half-laughing, and yet beginning to take an interest in Dorothy's plan.

Fairy was keeping up a running fire of conversation, but nobody paid any attention to her.

"Where is the place, grandmother?" asked Dorothy, who was taking it all a little more seriously than the others; "you must know at least what state it's in."

"Oh, yes, I know that. It's on the shore of Lake Ponetcong, – in the northern part of New Jersey."

"What a fearful name!" cried Leicester; "but I don't care if it's called Alibazan, so long as there's a lake there. You never told us about the lake before."

"A lake!" said Lilian, with an ecstatic air; "I shall just stay on that all the time. I shall have a rowboat and a sailboat and a canoe –"

"And a cataraman," supplemented her brother; "you can use the hotel for a boathouse, Lilian, and we'll build a little cabin to live in."

"Don't go so fast, children," said Mrs. Dorrance; "if you'll give me a minute to think, I'm not sure but I could see some sense in this arrangement."

"Oh, granny, dear," cried Dorothy, clasping her hands beseechingly; "do take a minute to think. Take several minutes, and think hard, and see if you can't think some sense into it."

"As you say," began Mrs. Dorrance, while the children were breathlessly quiet in their anxiety, "the living expenses would be very much less than in any boarding-house. And in a country-place like that, you would not need elaborate clothes. But there are many things to be considered; you see, I've no idea what the house is like, or in what condition we would find it."

"Oh, never mind that," pleaded Dorothy; "let's take our chances. That will be the fun of it, to go there, not knowing what we're going to. And anyway, we'll have room enough."

"Yes," said Mrs. Dorrance, smiling; "in a hotel you will probably have room enough. But what do you mean by saying you can do the housework? In the first place you're not strong enough, and secondly, you don't know how."

"I'll do the work," said Fairy. "I don't care if I am only twelve, I can cook; 'cause when I went to Gladys Miller's one day, she had a little stove and she showed me how. I'll do all the cooking, and you other girls can do the domesticker work. Leicester can do all the man's work, and grannymother can be a Princess of high degree, and just sit and look on. And then on some days –"

"Oh, yes, we know how to work," interrupted Dorothy. It was always necessary to interrupt Fairy if anybody wanted to say anything.

"And I won't mind how much I have to do, if we have some outdoors around us. Only think, it's May out of doors now, and here we have to stay shut up in this old boarding-house, same as in December."

"You may go out for a while if you care to, little girl," said Leicester, assuming a grown-up air.

"I don't want to go out on paved streets," said Dorothy; "I want green fields and trees and cows."

"I want free life and I want fresh air," sang Leicester, "and I do believe we are going to get it. Come, granny, speak the word, – say we may go."

"I can't say, positively," said Mrs. Dorrance, "until I write to Mr. Lloyd and see what he thinks of it. If he agrees to the plan, I suppose we might try it. But it is all so uncertain."

"Never mind the uncertainty," said Dorothy; "just leave it all to me. Now see here, grandmother, for twelve years you've looked after us children, and taken care of us, and now, I think we're getting old enough to look after ourselves. Anyway, let us try it. Let us all go up to the Domain, and spend the summer there. We'll do the best we can, and if we fail it will be our own fault. You're not to have any responsibility, you're just to be there as a kind of guardian angel and general adviser. Nothing very dreadful can happen to us, – at least, nothing half so dreadful as staying in the city all summer. Now just write to Mr. Lloyd, and don't ask his opinion, but tell him you've decided to do this, and just ask him how to get there."

"We can tell how to get there, ourselves," said Leicester; "let's look it up on the map. Fairy, get the big atlas, will you?"

Though Fairy was always called upon to wait on the other children, it was by no means an imposition, for the child was always dancing around the room anyway, and dearly loved to do things for people.

Soon three of the Dorrance children were gathered around the table studying the map. Fairy, in order to see better, had climbed up on the table, and was eagerly following with her tiny forefinger the track of Leicester's pencil.

"It isn't so very far, after all," he announced. "It's just across the ferry, and then up on the railroad till you get to it. It looks awfully near. Oh, I wish we were going to start to-morrow."

"Why can't we?" said Lilian, who always favored quick action.

"There's *no* reason," said Mrs. Dorrance, smiling at the impetuous children; "of course we can *just* as well take the seven o'clock train to-morrow morning as not!"

"Now you're teasing, grandma," said Lilian; "truly, when can we go?"

"Just the minute school closes," answered Dorothy. "I suppose we must stay for that, – I must, anyway; but we could get off the last week in May."

Here the announcement of dinner put an end to their planning for the present, but so gay of heart were they over their happy anticipations, that for once they didn't mind the gloomy dining-room and their irritating fellow boarders.

CHAPTER IV

THE DEPARTURE

After several interviews with Mr. Lloyd, and after discussing the matter with several other friends whose advice she valued, Mrs. Dorrance concluded that it was best to try Dorothy's plan. It did seem hard to keep the children in the city all summer, and however the experiment might result it could do no great harm in any way.

They were to start the last week in May, and though Mr. Lloyd had offered to go up with them, Grandma Dorrance had concluded that would not be necessary.

For all Mrs. Dorrance's gentle, helpless manner, the fine old lady had a certain reserve force, which often manifested itself in an unexpected decision.

Leicester, too, showed himself capable of rising to an emergency, and now that there was occasion for him to be looked upon as the man of the family, he determined to play well the part. He suddenly seemed to be as old as Dorothy, and though he deferred to her judgment, he made many good suggestions which she was glad to accept.

Indeed, the thought more than once occurred to Grandma Dorrance that the experiences of the coming summer would teach the children a great deal, and strengthen their characters in many ways, whatever else its results might be.

Not that the Dorrance children became sedate and responsible all at once. By no means. Their discussions were quite as animated as formerly, if not more so; and as the time of departure drew nearer, they became so excited and excitable that had they not been going away, there is a possibility that Mrs. Cooper might have invited them to do so.

Many of their friends came to see them during their last few days in the city, and nearly all brought them gifts or remembrances of some sort.

Grandma Dorrance viewed with dismay the collection of souvenirs that the children planned to take with them. It was the live gifts that troubled her most, and she was finally obliged to stipulate that they should be allowed to carry only one pet each. So Dorothy took a dog, a large and beautiful St. Bernard, which she had owned for some years. But as he was even less desirable in a boarding-house than children, they had been obliged to make his home with a friend who lived on Long Island. Dorothy had been in the habit of visiting him frequently, and a great friendship existed between them.

The twins chose a pair of rabbits, because they had never had any rabbits before, and as Leicester said, "What's a Domain without rabbits?"

Fairy hesitated long, between a kitten and a canary, but finally chose the kitten, as being less trouble and more comfort; and the bird was about to be returned to its donor. But Grandma Dorrance declared that she too was entitled to a pet and would take the bird for hers, whereupon Fairy was ecstatically happy.

It was a difficult caravan to plan and to move, but one Monday morning the departure was successfully accomplished.

Two carriages and a dray-load of trunks and boxes formed the procession.

Mrs. Dorrance had concluded that much of the necessary work of the house, especially at first, would be too hard for the girls; and had therefore decided to take with them a strong young Irish girl to help.

One of the waitresses, who was about to leave Mrs. Cooper's service anyway, seemed just the right one. Her name was Tessie, and she was a devoted friend of the young Dorrances. Her Irish sense of humor made her delight in their pranks, and it was to the satisfaction of all that she accompanied the party.

They crossed the city without attracting attention, but the procession that filed onto the ferry-boat could not long remain unnoticed.

Fairy persisted in dancing ahead, and then dancing back to know which way to go next. She carried her kitten in a basket, and talked to it incessantly through the slats. Lilian carried the bird-cage, and Leicester, a box containing the rabbits. Dorothy led her big dog by a leash, and as she had assumed a sudden dignity, born of the occasion, she made with the magnificent and stately animal beside her, an impressive picture. Tessie was entrusted with the care of Grandma Dorrance; and this was a wise arrangement, for though accustomed to traveling, Mrs. Dorrance was also accustomed to lean on some one else for the responsibilities of the trip.

Dorothy saw this more plainly than ever during their journey, and resolved more strongly than ever that she would relieve her grandmother of all possible care, and be a real help and support to her.

It was just as she reached this decision that Fairy lifted the lid of her basket and peeped in to talk to the kitten. But she opened the lid a trifle too wide and the frightened kitten jumped out and ran to the edge of the deck, where the poor little thing sat quivering, and shivering, and apparently just about to tumble into the water.

Involuntarily the four Dorrances gave one of their best concerted groans. The low moaning notes and the final shriek roused Dare, the great dog, to a sudden wild excitement. Breaking away from Dorothy's hold, he flew after the tiny Maltese kitten, and taking her head in his mouth, rescued her from imminent peril.

But Fairy, not appreciating that it was a rescue, looked upon it as a massacre, and began to howl piteously. Whereupon Dare deposited the squirming kitten at Fairy's feet, and added his bark, which was no faint one, to the general pandemonium.

All of which so disturbed poor Mrs. Dorrance, that she was glad to have Tessie lead her into the cabin, and there make her as comfortable as possible with a pillow and some smelling-salts.

Meantime peace and quiet had been restored to the party on deck, and they were waving joyful farewells to the tall buildings on Manhattan Island.

"There's the old Flatiron," cried Leicester; "good-bye, old Flatiron! hope I won't see you again for a long while."

"There's the new Flatiron too," cried Lilian. "I don't want to see that again for ever so long, either."

"You'll see flatirons enough, my lady," said Dorothy, "when you find yourself doing the laundry work for a large and able-bodied family."

"I won't have to do that, will I?" cried Lilian, aghast; "nobody told me that!"

"Well, we needn't wash the clothes," said Dorothy; "but likely we'll have to help iron; that is, if we wear any white dresses."

"I'll promise not to wear any white dresses," said Leicester.

"I don't care what I wear, if we just once get into the country," said Lilian. "Oh Dorothy, what *do* you suppose it will be like?"

"Just like Mrs. Cooper's," said Dorothy, smiling.

"Well it can't be like that," said Lilian; "and so I don't care what it is."

Another excitement came when they were all getting packed into the train. Dare had to travel in the baggage-car, of which he expressed his disapproval by long and continuous growlings. The rabbits were put there, too, but they made less fuss about it.

The bird and the kitten were allowed in the car with the children, and this arrangement added to the general gayety.

Although Mrs. Dorrance naturally considered herself in charge of the expedition, and though Dorothy felt sure she was, and though Leicester hoped he might be, yet it was really quick-witted Tessie who looked after things and kept matters straight.

The ride through northern New Jersey was not picturesque, and as there was very little to look at from the windows, the four soon returned to their favorite game of guessing what the new home would be like.

"What shall we call it?" asked Leicester; "it ought to have a name."

"And a nice one, too," said Dorothy; "for, do you know, I think we shall live there always."

"Wait 'til you see it," said Lilian; "we may not even want to stay over night."

"We couldn't stay always," said Fairy; "how would we go to school?"

"I suppose we couldn't," said Dorothy; "but after we all get through school, then we can; and it will be lovely to have a home of our own, so let's get a good name for it."

"Why not the Domain?" said Leicester. "That's what we've always called it, and so it sounds natural."

"That isn't enough by itself," said Dorothy. "How do you like the Dorrance Domain?"

They all liked this, and so The Dorrance Domain was decided upon, and they all rushed to tell grandma the name of her new home.

It was noon when the train reached the Ponetcong Station. Here they all bundled out, bag and baggage, children and animals. But as the boat, in which they were to continue their journey did not leave until one o'clock, there was ample time to get some luncheon, – which more than pleased the four hungry Dorrances. Upon inquiry, they were directed to a small country hotel and soon found themselves confronted with many small portions of not over-attractive looking viands.

But for once, the children cared little about what they ate or how it was served, so eager were they at the prospect of soon reaching their new home.

"What do you suppose it will be like?" said Lilian, quite as if she were propounding a brand-new conundrum.

"I've s'posed everything I can possibly think of," said Leicester; "but I'm willing to guess again if you want me to."

"It isn't worth while guessing much more," said Dorothy; "for very soon we will *know*. Now, Lilian, you and Fairy stay here with grandma, and Leicester and I will go over to that little store across the street and buy some things to take with us for supper to-night. Tessie may go too, to help us carry them."

But this plan was far from acceptable.

"That isn't fair!" cried Lilian; "buying things for our own home is the most fun yet, and I think we all ought to go together."

"So do I," said Fairy. "Let Tessie stay with grandma, and us four will go to purchase the eatables."

Fairy did not stutter, but, when excited, she was apt to put extra syllables in her words.

"Come on, then," said Dorothy, and with Dare bounding beside them, the four ran across the road to the little grocery shop.

"Let's be very sensible," said Dorothy, "and get just the right things. You know young housekeepers always do ridiculous things when they go to buy provisions. Now what do we need most?"

"Bread," said the twins together, and surely nobody could have criticised their suggestion as ridiculous.

"Yes," said Dorothy, and then turning to the grocer, she said politely, "Have you any bread?"

"Yes, miss," replied the grocer, staring in amazement at the four excited children; "what kind?"

"Why, just bread," said Dorothy; "fresh bread, you know. Is there more than one kind?"

"Yes, miss. Square loaf, long loaf, twist loaf and raisin bread."

"Oh!" exclaimed Dorothy, appalled by this superabundant variety.

But Leicester came to the rescue. "Raisin bread," said he; "that's the kind. And then we want some butter, if you please."

"Print, pat or tub?"

"Oh, not a whole tub full," said Dorothy, diligently trying to be sensible; "we couldn't carry a tub. I think we'll take a – a print."

"Yes, miss; anything else?"

The weight of responsibility was so great, that no one spoke for a moment, and then Fairy, in a burst of confidence began:

"You see, mister, we've never bought anything before; we've just eaten other people's things; but now we've got a home of our own, a really truly home, and these things are to eat in it. So of course you see we have to be very careful what we buy. We're trying very hard to be sensible housekeepers, 'cause my sister says we must, and she knows everything in the world. And so if you could 'vise us a little, we'd know better 'bout selectioning."

After this speech, a few questions from the grocer resulted in a frank and straightforward statement of the case by Dorothy, and then a judicious selection was made of immediate necessities for the commissary department of The Dorrance Domain.

CHAPTER V

THE MAMIE MEAD

As the man of the family and courier of the expedition, Leicester had assumed an air of importance, and looked after the baggage checks, tickets and time-tables with an effect of official guardianship.

"Why, it's a steamboat!" exclaimed Fairy, as a diminutive steamer came puffing up to the dock. "I thought it would be a canal-boat."

"People don't travel to a Domain in a canal-boat, my child," said Leicester, instructively.

"But you said we'd go on the canal," insisted Fairy; "and I want to see what a canal is like. There is one in my geography –"

"Skip aboard, kidlums, and you'll soon see what a canal is like," said Leicester, who was marshaling his party over the gangplank.

The *Mamie Mead* was the very smallest steamboat the children had ever seen, and it seemed like playing house to establish themselves on its tiny deck. Dare seemed to find it inadequate to his ideas of proportion, and he stalked around, knocking over chairs and camp-stools with a fine air of indifference.

Grandma Dorrance, who by this time was rather tired by the journey, was made as comfortable as possible, and then the children prepared to enjoy the excitements of their first trip on a canal.

The smoothness of the water amazed them all, and they wondered why it wasn't more like a river.

The locks, especially, aroused awe and admiration.

By the time they went through the first gate they had made the acquaintance of the captain, and could watch the performance more intelligently. It seemed nothing short of magic to watch the great gates slowly close, and then to feel their own boat rising slowly but steadily, as the water rushed in from the upper sluice.

"It's just like Noah and the Ark," exclaimed Fairy, "when the floods made them go up and up."

"It's exactly like that," agreed Dorothy, as the waters kept rising; "and we've nearly as many animals on board as he had."

All too soon they had risen to the level of the lake, and another pair of great gates swung open to let them through.

"Are we going to stay on top?" asked Fairy; "or must we go down again?"

"You'll stay on top this time, little missie," said good-natured old Captain Kane, smiling at Fairy. "This boat ain't no submarine to dive down into the lake."

"But you dived up into the lake," insisted Fairy.

"That was the only way to get here, miss. But any day you would like to go back and dive down, here's the man that will take you. The *Mamie Mead* is always glad of passengers. She don't get none too many nowadays."

"Why doesn't she?" asked Leicester, with interest.

"Well, you see, sir, since the hotel's been empty, they ain't no call for *Mamie* much. So whenever you kids wants a free ride, just come down to the dock and wave something. If so be's I'm goin' by, I'll stop and take you on. Is the place you're goin' near the hotel?"

"Near the hotel!" cried Dorothy; "why we're going *to* the hotel."

"You can't. 'Tain't open."

"I know it," said Dorothy; "but it will be when we get there. We have all the keys."

"For the land's sake! And what are you goin' to do there?"

"We're going to live there," exclaimed Leicester; "we own the place, – that is, my grandmother does."

"Own it? Own the Dorrance place?"

"Yes; we're all Dorrances."

"For the land's sake! Well, when you want to go down to the station for anything, this here boat's at your service, – that is, if I'm up this way."

"Do you come up this way often?" asked Dorothy, who appreciated the possible value of this offer.

"I allus comes once a week, miss. I goes over to Dolan's Point every Saturday. Will you be here till Saturday?"

"Saturday! Why we're going to stay all summer."

"Beggin' your pardon, miss, but I don't think as how you will. Just the few of you shakin' around in that big hotel! It's ridikilus!"

"Ridiculous or not, we're going to do it," said Leicester, stoutly; "but we thank you for your offer, Captain Kane, and very likely we'll be glad to accept it."

"Well, there's your home," said Captain Kane, as a large white building began to be visible through the trees.

Without a word, the Dorrance children looked in the direction the captain indicated.

High up on the sloping shore of the lake, they saw a great house which seemed to be an interminable length of tall, white columns supporting tiers of verandas.

"Oh!" exclaimed Dorothy, "that can't be it! that great, big place!"

"It looks like the Pantheon," said Lilian.

"You mean the Parthenon," said Leicester; "but I never can tell them apart, myself. Anyway, if that's the Dorrance Domain, it's all right! What do you think, Fairy?"

Fairy looked at the big hotel, and then said thoughtfully, "I guess we'll have room enough."

"I guess we will," cried Dorothy, laughing; and then they all ran to Grandma Dorrance, to show her the wonderful sight.

The good lady was also astounded at the enormous size of the hotel, and greatly impressed with the beauty of the scene. It was about three o'clock, on a lovely May afternoon, and the hotel, which faced the west, gleamed among trees which shaded from the palest spring tints to the dark evergreens. It was at the top of a high slope, but behind it was a background of other hills, and in the distance, mountains.

"*Aren't* you glad we came? Oh, grannymother, *aren't* you glad we came?" cried Dorothy, clasping her hands in ecstasy.

"Indeed I am, dear; but I had no idea it was such an immense house. How can we take care of it?"

"That question will come later," said Leicester; "the thing is now, how shall we get to it. How *do* people get to it, Captain Kane?"

"Steps," answered the captain, laconically.

"Up from the dock?"

"Yep; a hundred and forty of 'em."

"Oh, how can grandmother climb all those?"

"Settin'-places all the way along," suggested the captain, cheerfully.

"Oh, you mean landing-places on the stair-way?"

"Yep; so folks can rest. I guess your grandma'll get up all right; but what about all your trunks and things?"

"Why I don't know," said Leicester, suddenly losing his air of capable importance.

"Well, there's old Hickox; you might get him."

"Where can we find Mr. Hickox?"

"He's most generally settin' around the dock. Favorite restin'-place of his. Think I can see him there now."

After a few moments more the *Mamie Mead* bumped against the dock.

"Our own dock!" cried Dorothy; "oh, isn't it gorgeous!"

Probably such an excited crowd had never before landed from the *Mamie Mead*. The children all talked at once; Grandma Dorrance seemed rejuvenated by the happy occasion; Tessie was speechless with delight; Dare gave short, sharp barks expressive of deep satisfaction and the canary bird burst into his most jubilant song. Doubtless the kitten was purring contentedly, if not audibly.

The trunks and other luggage were put out on the dock, and Mr. Hickox sauntered up and viewed them with an air of great interest.

"I guess this is where I come in handy," he said, with a broad smile and a deferential bob of his head that somehow seemed to serve as a general introduction all around.

Mr. Hickox was a strange looking man. He was very tall, indeed, by far the tallest man the children had ever seen; and he was also very thin. Or perhaps *lean* is a more expressive word to describe Mr. Hickox, for he gave no impression of ill-health, or emaciation, but rather the leanness of muscular strength. His brown hair and side-whiskers were touched with gray, and his tanned face was wrinkled, but he did not seem like an old man. His blue eyes twinkled with good-humor, and his voice was delightfully kind.

Instinctively the Dorrance children felt that they had found a friend in this strange man, and they were grateful.

"Could you tell us, sir," said Leicester, "how we are going to get these trunks and things up to the hotel?"

"Well, yes, I can tell you that. I'm going to lug them up myself."

"What, carry them?" said Leicester, in surprise.

"Well, no; not carry them, – not exactly carry them. You see I've got a little contraption of my own; a sort of cart or dray, and I'll just put all that duffle of yours into it, and it'll be up to the top before you're there yourselves."

"You don't drag it up the stairs!"

"No, I go up the back way, – a roundabout, winding path of my own. But don't you worry, – don't worry, – Hickox'll look after things. It'll be all right."

Although Mr. Hickox spoke in short staccato jerks, his remarks seemed to carry authority; and nodding his head in a manner peculiar to himself, he went off after his cart.

"He's all right, he is," declared Captain Kane; "but his old woman, she isn't so right. But never mind 'bout that. You'll see old Mrs. Hickox sooner or later and then you can size her up for yourself. Well, me and *Mamie* must be gettin' along. You all jest stay here till Hickox comes back, and he'll get you up the hill all right."

As Captain Kane went away the children could hear him chuckling to himself, and murmuring, "Goin' to live in the hotel! well, well!"

As Grandma Dorrance would want frequent rests by the way, Dorothy proposed that she should start on up the steps with Tessie, while the rest waited for Mr. Hickox.

That long specimen of humanity soon came briskly along, trundling a queer sort of push-cart, which it was quite evident was of home manufacture.

"I made it myself," he declared, pointing with pride to the ungainly vehicle. "I was surprised that I could do it," he added modestly; "Mrs. Hickox, she was surprised, too. But she generally is surprised. You don't know my wife, do you?"

"No," said Dorothy, politely; "we haven't that pleasure."

"H'm," said Mr. Hickox, rubbing down his side-whiskers; "she's a nice woman, – a very nice woman, but you must take her easy. Yes, when you meet her, you must certainly take her easy. She doesn't like to be surprised."

"Do you think she will be surprised at us?" asked Lilian, who was well aware that many people thought the Dorrances surprising.

"Yes; I think she will. I certainly think she will. Why, to tell the truth, I'm some surprised at you myself, – and I ain't half so easy surprised as Mrs. Hickox."

As he talked, Mr. Hickox was bundling the luggage into his cart. He picked up trunks and boxes as if they weighed next to nothing, and deposited them neatly and compactly in his queer vehicle.

"Any of the live stock to go?" he inquired.

"No," said Dorothy, "we'll take the animals; unless, – yes, you might take the rabbits; their cage is so heavy."

"Yes, do," said Leicester; "then I'll carry the bird-cage, and you girls can manage the dog and the kitten."

So everything else was put into the dray, even the provisions they had bought at the grocery shop, and the children watched with astonishment, as Mr. Hickox started off, easily pushing the load along a winding path.

"He's the strongest man I ever saw," exclaimed Leicester; "and I'd like to go along with him to see how he does it."

"No, you come with us," said Fairy, dancing around, and clasping her brother's hand; "come on; now we're going up a million steps and then we will come to our own Domain."

Climbing the steps was anything but a work of toil, for continually new delights met their eyes, and they paused often to exclaim and comment.

About half-way up they found grandma and Tessie sitting on one of the small landings, waiting for them.

"Now we'll go the rest of the way together," said Dorothy, "for we must all see our Domain at the same time. Go as slowly as you like, grandmother, we're in no hurry."

CHAPTER VI

THE DORRANCE DOMAIN

Alternately resting and climbing, at last they reached the top, and for the first time had a full view of the Dorrance Domain.

"Oh," said Dorothy in an awe-struck whisper, "that's our home! All of it!"

Leicester, from sheer lack of words to express his feelings, turned double somersaults on the grass, while Fairy danced around in her usual flutterbudget way, singing at the top of her voice.

Lilian, the practical, after one look at the great building, said excitedly, "Grandmother, where are the keys, quick?"

The hotel itself was a white frame building, about two hundred feet long and three stories high. Huge pillars supported verandas that ran all around the house on each story. Broad steps led up to the main entrance, and at one corner was a large tower which rose for several stories above the main part of the house.

Although the whole place had a deserted aspect, – the shutters were all closed, and the lawns uncared for, – yet it did not seem out of repair, or uninhabitable. Indeed, the apparent care with which it had been closed up and made secure was reassuring in itself, and the children eagerly followed Lilian who had gained possession of the front door key.

With little difficulty they succeeded in unfastening the great front doors and threw them wide open to admit the May sunshine.

They found themselves at first in a large hall which ran straight through the house. It was furnished in red, with a velvet carpet and satin brocade sofas, which seemed to the Dorrances quite the most beautiful furnishings they had ever looked upon.

Arched off from this hall was a good-sized room, which Leicester declared to be the office, and as soon as the windows of that could be thrown open, the desks and safe and other office furniture proved he was right. Opening a wicket door, he flew in behind the great desk, and throwing open a large book which was there, he turned it around towards Dorothy with a flourish, and asked her to register.

"Oh," she cried, wild with excitement, "it's just like the Sleeping Beauty's palace. Everything is just as they went off and left it. Who registered last, Leicester?"

"The last is Mr. Henry Sinclair, who arrived here in July, summer before last."

"And nobody's been here since!" exclaimed Lilian; "just think of it! It seems as if we ought to register."

"You may if you like," said Leicester; "it's our register, you know."

But the ink was all dried up, and the pens all rusty, so they left the office and went to make further explorations.

Across the hall from the office was the great parlor. Many hands make light work at opening windows, and in a jiffy the parlor was flooded with sunshine.

Then there were more exclamations of delight, for the parlor appointments were truly palatial. Gorgeous frescoes and wall decorations, mirrors in heavily gilded frames, brocaded hangings, ornate furniture, and a wonderful crystal chandelier made a general effect that contrasted most pleasantly with Mrs. Cooper's unpretentious drawing-room.

Even a piano was there, and flinging it open, Dorothy struck up a brisk two-step, and in a moment the twins were dancing up and down the long room, while Fairy, who had been dancing all the time, simply kept on.

Grandma Dorrance sank onto a sofa and watched her happy grandchildren, no less happy herself.

It was a daring experiment, and she did not know how it would turn out, but she was glad that at last she was able to give the children, for a time at least, that desire of their heart, – a home in the country.

After the grand parlor, and several smaller reception rooms, all equally attractive, they went back across the hall, and through the office to investigate the other side of the house. Here they found the dining-rooms. One immense one, containing a perfect forest of tables and chairs, and two smaller ones.

One of the smaller ones which overlooked the lake, Dorothy declared should be their family dining-room.

"There's more room in the big dining-room," said Lilian, slyly.

"Yes, there is," said Dorothy; "and I *do* hate to be cramped. Perhaps we had better use the big one, and each one have a whole table all to ourselves."

"No," said Grandma Dorrance, "we'll use the small one every day, and then some time when we invite all Mrs. Cooper's family to visit us, we can use the large one."

"Oh," groaned Lilian, "don't mention Mrs. Cooper's dining-room while we're in this one."

After the dining-rooms came the kitchens, supplied with everything the most exacting housekeeper could desire; but all on the large scale requisite for a summer hotel.

"I should think *anybody* could cook here," said Dorothy; "and as I propose to do the cooking for the family, I'm glad everything is so complete and convenient."

"You never can cook up all these things," said Fairy, looking with awe at the rows of utensils; "not even if we have seventeen meals a day."

"*Will* you look at the dish towels!" exclaimed Lilian, throwing open the door of a cupboard, where hundreds of folded dish towels were arranged in neat piles.

At this climax, Mrs. Dorrance sank down on a wooden settle that stood in the kitchen, and clasping her hands, exclaimed, "It's too much, girls, it's too big; we never can do anything with it."

"Now you mustn't look at it that way, granny, dear," said Dorothy, brightly; "this is our home; and you know, be it ever so humble, there's no place like home. And if a home and all its fixings are too big, instead of too little, why, you'll have to manage it somehow just the same. Of course, I'm overpowered too, at this enormous place, but I won't own up to it! I will *never* admit to *anybody* that I think the rooms or the house unusually large. I *like* a big house, and I like spacious rooms! I *hate* to be cramped, – as possibly you may have heard me remark before."

"Good for you, Dot!" cried Leicester. "I won't be phased either. We're here, and we're here to stay. We're not going to be scared off by a few square miles of red velvet carpet, and some sixty-foot mirrors!"

"I think the place rather small, myself," said Lilian, who rarely allowed herself to be outdone in jesting; "I confess *I* have a little of that cramped feeling yet."

At this they all laughed, and went on with their tour of the house. Merely taking a peep into the numerous pantries, laundries, storerooms and servants' quarters, they concluded to go at once to inspect the bedrooms.

"Don't go up these stairs," said Leicester turning away from the side staircase. "Let's go back to the main hall, and go up the grand staircase, as if we had just arrived, and were being shown to our rooms."

"Oh, *isn't* it fun!" cried Fairy, as she hopped along by her brother's side. "I never had such a fun in my whole life! Wouldn't it be awful if we were really guests instead of purporietors?"

"*You* wouldn't be a guest," said Leicester, teasingly; "no well-conducted summer hotel would take a flibbertigibbet like you to board!"

"Nobody would take us Dorrances to board anyway, if they could help it," said Fairy, complacently; "we all know how obnoxious we are."

"I know," said Grandma Dorrance, sighing; "and if we can only make a little corner of this big place habitable, I shall certainly feel a great relief in not being responsible for you children to any landlady."

"Oh, come now, granny, we're not so bad, are we?" said Leicester, patting the old lady's cheek.

"You're not bad at all. You're the best children in the world. But just so sure as you get shut up in a boarding-house you get possessed of a spirit of mischief, and I never know what you are going to do next. But up here I don't *care* what you do next."

By this time they had reached the entrance hall, and assuming the air of a proprietor, Leicester, with an elaborate flourish and a profound bow, said suavely:

"Ah, Mrs. Dorrance, I believe. Would you like to look at our rooms, madam? We have some very fine suites on the second floor that I feel sure will please you. Are these your children, madam?"

"We're her grandchildren," volunteered Fairy, anxious to be in the game.

"Incredible! Such a young and charming lady with grandchildren! Now I should have said *you* were the grandmother," with another elaborate bow to Fairy.

Laughing at Leicester's nonsense, they all went up-stairs together, and discovered a perfect maze of bedrooms.

Scattering in different directions, the children opened door after door, pulled up blinds, and flung open windows, and screamed to each other to come and see their discoveries. Tessie followed the tribe around, wondering if she were really in fairyland. The unsophisticated Irish girl had never seen a house like this before, and to think it belonged to the people with whom she was to live, suddenly filled her with a great awe of the Dorrance family.

"Do you like it, Tessie?" asked Mrs. Dorrance, seeing the girl's amazed expression.

"Oh, yis, mum! Shure, I niver saw anything so grand, mum. It's a castle, it is."

"That's right, Tessie," said Leicester; "a castle is the same as a domain. And all these millions of bedrooms are part of our Domain. Our very own! Hooray for the Dorrance Domain!"

The wild cheer that accompanied and followed Leicester's hurrah must have been audible on the other side of Lake Ponetcong. At any rate it served as a sort of escape-valve for their overflowing enthusiasm, which otherwise must soon have gotten beyond their control.

"I think," said Mrs. Dorrance, "that it would be wise for you each to select the bedroom you prefer, – for to-night at least. If you choose to change your minds to-morrow, I don't know of any one who will object."

"Oh!" said Lilian, "to think of changing your room in a hotel just as often as you like, and nobody caring a bit! I shall have a different one every night."

"That won't be my plan," said her grandmother, laughing; "I think I shall keep the one I'm in, for mine, and make no change."

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