

Johnston Annie Fellows

The Little Colonel's Holidays



Annie Johnston

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CHAPTER I

THE MAGIC KETTLE

Once upon a time, so the story goes (you may read it for yourself in the dear old tales of Hans Christian Andersen), there was a prince who disguised himself as a swineherd. It was to gain admittance to a beautiful princess that he thus came in disguise to her father's palace, and to attract her attention he made a magic caldron, hung around with strings of silver bells. Whenever the water in the caldron boiled and bubbled, the bells rang a little tune to remind her of him.

"Oh, thou dear Augustine,
All is lost and gone,"

they sang. Such was the power of the magic kettle, that when the water bubbled hard enough to set the bells a-tinkling, any one holding his hand in the steam could smell what was cooking in every kitchen in the kingdom.

It has been many a year since the swineherd's kettle was set a-boiling and its string of bells a-jingling to satisfy the curiosity of a princess, but a time has come for it to be used again. Not that anybody nowadays cares to know what his neighbour is going to have for dinner, but all the little princes and princesses in the kingdom want to know what happened next.

"What happened after the Little Colonel's house party?" they demand, and they send letters to the Valley by the score, asking "Did Betty go blind?" "Did the two little Knights of Kentucky ever meet Joyce again or find the Gate of the Giant Scissors?" Did the Little Colonel ever have any more good times at Locust, or did Eugenia ever forget that she too had started out to build a Road of the Loving Heart?

It would be impossible to answer all these questions through the post-office, so that is why the magic kettle has been dragged from its hiding-place after all these years, and set a-boiling once more. Gather in a ring around it, all you who want to know, and pass your curious fingers through its wreaths of rising steam. Now you shall see the Little Colonel and her guests of the house party in turn, and the bells shall ring for each a different song.

But before they begin, for the sake of some who may happen to be in your midst for the first time, and do not know what it is all about, let the kettle give them a glimpse into the past, that they may be able to understand all that is about to be shown to you. Those who already know the story need not put their fingers into the steam, until the bells have rung this explanation in parenthesis.

(In Lloydsboro Valley stands an old Southern mansion, known as "Locust." The place is named for a long avenue of giant locust-trees stretching a quarter of a mile from house to entrance gate, in a great arch of green. Here for years an old Confederate colonel lived all alone save for the negro servants. His only child, Elizabeth, had married a Northern man against his wishes, and gone away. From that day he would not allow her name to be spoken in his presence. But she came back to the Valley when her little daughter Lloyd was five years old. People began calling the child the Little Colonel because she seemed to have inherited so many of her grandfather's lordly ways as well as a goodly share of his high temper. The military title seemed to suit her better than her own name, for in her fearless baby fashion she won her way into the old man's heart, and he made a complete surrender.

Afterward when she and her mother and "Papa Jack" went to live with him at Locust, one of her favourite games was playing soldier. The old man never tired of watching her march through the wide halls with his spurs strapped to her tiny slipper heels, and her dark eyes flashing out fearlessly from under the little Napoleon cap she wore.

She was eleven when she gave her house party. One of the guests was Joyce Ware, whom some of you have met, perhaps, in "The Gate of the Giant Scissors," a bright thirteen-year-old girl from the West. Eugenia Forbes was another. She was a distant cousin of Lloyd's, who had no home-life like the other girls. Her winters were spent in a fashionable New York boarding-school, and her summers at the Waldorf-Astoria, except the few weeks when her busy father could find time to take her to some seaside resort.

The third guest, Elizabeth Lloyd Lewis, or Betty, as every one lovingly called her, was Mrs. Sherman's little god-daughter. She was an orphan, boarding on a backwoods farm on Green River. She had never been on the cars until Lloyd's invitation found its way to the Cuckoo's Nest. Only these three came to stay in the house, but Malcolm and Keith MacIntyre (the two little Knights of Kentucky) were there nearly every day. So was Rob Moore, one of the Little Colonel's summer neighbours.

The four Bobs were four little fox terrier puppies named for Rob, who had given one to each of the girls. They were so much alike they could only be distinguished by the colour of the ribbons tied around their necks. Tarbaby was the Little Colonel's pony, and Lad the one that Betty rode during her visit.

After six weeks of picnics and parties, and all sorts of surprises and good times, the house party came to a close with a grand feast of lanterns. Joyce regretfully went home to the little brown house in Plainsville, Kansas, taking her Bob with her. Eugenia and her father went to New York, but not until they had promised to come back for Betty in the fall, and take her abroad with them. It was on account of something that had happened at the house party, but which is too long a tale to repeat here.

Betty stayed on at Locust until the end of the summer in the House Beautiful, as she called her godmother's home, and here on the long vine-covered porch, with its stately white pillars, you shall see them first through the steam of the magic caldron.)

Listen! Now the kettle boils and the bells begin the story!

CHAPTER II

THE END OF THE SUMMER

"Oh, the sun shines bright on my old Kentucky home,
'Tis summer, the darkies are gay,
The corn-top's ripe and the meadows are in bloom,
And the birds make music all the day."

It was Malcolm who started the old tune, thrumming a soft accompaniment on his banjo, as he sat leaning against one of the great white pillars of the vine-covered porch. Then Betty, swinging in a hammock with a new *St. Nicholas* in her lap, began to hum with him. Rob Moore, sitting on the step below, took it up next, whistling it softly, but the Little Colonel and Keith went on talking.

It was a warm September afternoon, and all down the long avenue of giant locust-trees there was scarcely a leaf astir. Keith fanned himself with his hat as he talked.

"I wish schools had never been invented," he exclaimed, "or else there was a law that they couldn't begin until cold weather. It makes me wild when I think of having to go back to Louisville to-morrow and begin lessons in that hot old town. Lloyd, I don't believe that you are half thankful enough for being able to live in the country all the year round."

"But it isn't half so nice out heah aftah you all leave," answered the Little Colonel. "You don't know how lonesome the Valley is with you all gone. I can't beah to pass Judge Moore's place for weeks aftah the house is closed for the season. It makes me feel as if somebody's dead when I see every window shut and all the blinds down. When Betty goes home next week I don't know how I shall stand it to be all by myself. This has been such a lovely summah."

"We've had some jolly good times, that's a fact," answered Keith with a sigh, to think that they were so nearly over. Then beating time with his foot to the music of Malcolm's banjo, he began to sing with the others:

"Oh, weep no more, my lady, weep no more to-day.
We will sing one song for my old Kentucky home,
For my old Kentucky home far away."

Something in the mournful melody, coupled with the thought that this was the end of the summer, and the last of such visits to beautiful old Locust for many a long day, touched each face with a little shade of sadness. For several minutes after the last note of the song died away no one spoke. The only sounds were the bird-calls, and the voices of the cook's grandchildren, who were playing on the other side of the house.

As in many old Southern mansions, the kitchen at Locust was a room some distance back from the house. In the path that led from one to the other, three little darkies were romping and tumbling over each other like three black kittens.

Fat old Aunt Cindy, waddling into the pantry to flour-bin or sugar-barrel, glanced at them occasionally through the open window to see that they were in no mischief, and then went calmly on with her baking. She knew that they were not like white children who need a nurse to watch every step. They had taken care of themselves and each other from the time that they had learned to crawl.

In Aunt Cindy's slow journeys around the kitchen, she stopped from time to time to open the oven door and peep in. Finally she flung it wide open, and, with a satisfied grunt, took out a big

square pan. A warm delicious odour filled the kitchen, and floated out around the house to the group on the porch.

"I smell gingerbread!" exclaimed Rob, starting up and sniffing the air excitedly with his short freckled nose.

"Me too!" exclaimed Keith. "It's the best thing I ever smelled in my life. Doesn't it make you hungry?"

"Fairly starved!" answered Malcolm.

Lloyd tiptoed to the end of the porch and listened. "If Aunt Cindy's singin' one of her old camp-meetin' tunes then I'd know she was feelin' good, and I wouldn't mind tellin' her that we wanted the whole pan full. But if she happened to be in one of her black tempahs I wouldn't da'h ask for a crumb. She always grumbles if she has to cut a cake while it's hot. She says it spoils them. No, she isn't singin' a note."

"Somebody might slip it out while she isn't looking," suggested Rob. "I'd offer to try, but Aunt Cindy seems to have a grudge against me. She cracked me over the head one day with a gourd dipper, because I spilled molasses on the pantry floor. We wanted to make some candy, and Lloyd sent me in through the window to get it. I dropped the jug, and Aunt Cindy charged at me so furiously that I went out of that window a sight faster than I came in. Whew! I can feel that whack yet!" he added, screwing up his face, and rubbing his head. "You'd better believe I've kept out of her reach ever since."

"I'll tell you what let's do," suggested Keith, growing hungrier every minute as he snuffed that tantalising fragrance. "Let's play that Aunt Cindy is an ogre, a dreadful old fat black ogre, and the gingerbread is some kind of a magic cake that will break the spell she has cast over us, if we can only manage to get it and eat some."

"Oh, yes," agreed Rob, eagerly. "Don't you remember the story that Joyce used to tell us about the Giant Scissors that could do anything they were bidden, if the command were only given in rhyme? Whoever rescues the cake will be the magic Scissors. We can draw lots to see who will be it. Make up a rhyme somebody."

"Giant Scissahs, so bewitchin',
Get the cake out of the kitchen!"

ventured the Little Colonel after a moment's thought.

"Giant Scissors, for our sake
Will you please to take the cake."

added Malcolm, while Betty followed with the suggestion:

"Giant Scissors, rush ahead
And bring us back the gingerbread."

"That's the best one," said Rob, "for that calls the article that we're starving for by name. Now we'll draw lots and see who has to play the part of the Scissors and storm old Gruffanuff's castle."

Carefully arranging five blades of grass between his thumbs, he passed around the circle, saying, "The one who draws the shortest piece has to be 'it.'" There was a shout from all the others and a groan from himself when he discovered that the shortest piece had been left between his own thumbs.

"I'll have to put on my thinking cap and plan some way to get it by strategy," he exclaimed, dropping down on the steps again to consider. "I wouldn't brave Aunt Cindy in single combat any more than I'd beard a lion in his den. Help me think of something, all of you."

Just then the three little pickaninnies, who had been playing in the path by the kitchen door, ran around the corner of the porch in hot pursuit of a grasshopper.

"Here, Pearline," called Rob, beckoning to the largest and blackest of them. The child stopped and came slowly toward him. Her head, with its tight little braids of wool sticking out in all directions like tails, was tipped shyly to one side. One finger was in her mouth. With the other hand she was nervously plucking at the skirt of her red calico dress.

"What's your gran'mammy doing now?" inquired Rob.

"Beatin' aigs in de kitchen." Pearline was wriggling and screwing her little black toes around in the dust as she answered, almost overcome with embarrassment.

"Pearline," said Rob, lowering his voice impressively, "do you think that you could slip into the kitchen as e-easy as a creep-mouse and tiptoe into the pantry behind your gran'mammy's back and pass that pan of gingerbread out through the window to me while she isn't looking? I'll give you a nickel if you'll try."

Pearline gave a swift inquiring look toward the Little Colonel, and seeing her nod consent, she turned to Rob with a delighted flash of white teeth and eye-balls.

"Yessa, Mist Rob. I kin do it if you'll come whilst she's makin' a racket beatin' aigs. But she'll bus' my haid open suah, if she cotch me."

"Mothah doesn't care if we have the gingahbread," said the Little Colonel, and Rob added, reassuringly, "We won't let her touch you. Now I'm going all the way around by the spring-house, so she can't see me, for I'm her sworn enemy. When I get under the pantry window I'll call like some bird – say a pewee. When you hear that, Pearline, you just come a-jumping. She always sets the things out on that shelf under the pantry window to cool, and you slip in and pass that gingerbread out to me before she has time to guess what's happened."

Rob started off, and a moment later the clear call of "pewee" floated up from under the pantry window, to the waiting group on the porch. "Come on, let's see the ogre get him," called Keith. Just as they rushed around the corner of the house they heard a scream, and then a mighty clatter of falling tinware in the kitchen made them pause.

There was a scurry of flying feet through the orchard, and a snapping of dry twigs. Rob had made his escape with the gingerbread, but hapless Pearline had fallen into the clutches of the ogre. Only for a moment, however. Through the window came a flash of red calico, and up the path two bare black legs went flying like run-away windmills. The broad slap-slap of Aunt Cindy's pursuing slipper soles followed, but it was an uneven race. Pearline, wasting not a single breath in outcry, fled around the house and down the avenue like a swift black shadow, and her panting pursuer was left to hold her fat sides in helpless wrath.

"Just you wait till I get my hands on you, chile," she called with an angry toss of her white-turbaned head. "I'll make you sma't! I'll learn you to come carryin' off white folkses vittles an' scarin' me out of my seven senses!"

"No, Aunt Cindy, you sha'n't touch her! You mustn't do a thing to Pearline," called the Little Colonel, meeting her squarely in the path and stamping her foot. "It's all ou' fault, because we sent her, and it was Rob who carried off the gingahbread. There he comes now."

Aunt Cindy darted an angry look at her sworn enemy, as he came up with hands and mouth both full. Then facing the children, with her hands on her hips, she launched into such a scolding as only an old black mammy, who has faithfully served three generations of a family, is permitted to give.

"For mercy sakes, Aunt Cindy, what are you making such a fuss for?" exclaimed Keith. "It's all your own fault. You know as well as we do that nobody in the Valley can make cake as good as yours. You oughtn't to have tempted us with such delicious gingerbread. It's the best I ever tasted." Here he stuffed his mouth full again, with an ecstatic "*Yum*, but that's good," and passed the plate back to Betty.

There was no resisting the flattery of Keith's expression as he swallowed the stolen sweets. A grim smile twitched Aunt Cindy's black face, but to hide the fact that her vanity had been touched by the chorus of unstinted praise which followed Keith's compliments, she began flapping her face with her gingham apron.

"Oh, you go 'long!" she exclaimed, in a gruff voice. But knowing Aunt Cindy, they knew that they had appeased her, and even Pearlina need no longer fear her wrath, although she grumbled loudly all the way back to her savoury kitchen.

They carried the plate around to the porch, followed by the three Bobs in their big bows of yellow, pink, and green, who tumbled around their feet, begging for crumbs until the last one was eaten, and then curled up in the hammock beside Betty.

"I wonder what we'll be doing ten years from now," said Malcolm, as he picked up his banjo again and began striking soft chords. He was looking dreamily down the long locust avenue where the afternoon shadows were lengthening across the lawn.

"I'll be through college by that time, and Rob and Keith will be starting back for their junior year. You girls will be out in society probably, and old Aunt Cindy will surely be dead and gone. I wonder if we'll ever sit here together again and talk about old times and laugh over this afternoon – the way Pearlina flew through that window. Wasn't it funny?"

"I am more interested in what I may be doing ten weeks from now," said Betty. "I haven't an idea whether I'll be in London or Paris or the Black Forest. I don't know where Cousin Carl expects to take us first. But I'd rather not know. The whole trip is sure to be full of delightful surprises as a fruit-cake is of goodies. I'd rather happen on them as they come, than crumble it up to find what there'll be ten bites ahead."

"Well, I know what I'll be doing," said the Little Colonel, decidedly. "School begins then, and it will be the same old things ovah and ovah again. Music lessons, practice an' school; school an' practice an' music lessons. Oh, I know what is ahead of me. All plain cake without a single plum in it."

"Don't be so sure of that, little daughter," said a pleasant voice in the doorway, and looking up, they saw Mrs. Sherman standing there with an open letter in her hand. "We can never be sure of our to-morrows, or even our to-days, and here is a surprise for you to begin with, Lloyd."

Malcolm sprang up to bring her a chair, and Lloyd tumbled the Bobs out of the hammock that she might take their place beside Betty, while she listened to the reading of the letter.

"It is from Mrs. Appleton – from your Cousin Hetty," began Mrs. Sherman, turning to Betty. "I wrote her that you wanted to go back to the farm a little while before starting abroad with Eugenia and her father, and this is her answer. She has invited Lloyd and me to go with you for a short visit."

"Oh, godmother! And you'll go?" cried Betty, nearly spilling Lloyd out of the hammock as she sprang up in joyful surprise. "You don't know how I've dreaded leaving you and dear old Locust. It will not be half so hard if you can go with me, and I want you both to see Davy and all the places I've talked about so often."

"But how can I miss school, mothah?" cried the Little Colonel. "I'll fall behind in all my classes."

"Not so far but that you can make it up afterward by a little extra study. Besides, you will be going to school every day that you are away. I don't mean the kind you are thinking of," she hastened to say, seeing the look of wonder in Lloyd's eyes. "But every day will be a school day and you'll learn more of some things than all your books can teach you. There are all sorts of lessons waiting for you in the Cuckoo's Nest."

Lloyd and Betty gave each other a delighted hug while Rob remarked, mournfully, "I wish my father and mother wanted me to have some school days that are all holidays. Think of it, boys, not a line of Latin."

The five o'clock train came rumbling down the track with a shrill warning whistle, as it passed the entrance gate at Locust.

"It is time to go, Keith," exclaimed Malcolm. "You know we promised grandmother and Aunt Allison to be back at half-past five. We must say good-bye now, for ten whole months."

"It will be longer than that for me," said Betty, wistfully, as the boys came up to shake hands. "There is no telling what will happen with the ocean between us. But no matter where I go, I'll never forget how lovely you have all been to me this summer, and I'll always think of this as the dearest spot on earth, – my old Kentucky home."

They watched the three boys go strolling off down the avenue, shoulder to shoulder, feeling that all the good times were disappearing with them. Then they fell to talking of the Cuckoo's Nest, and making plans for their visit. But what happened there must wait to be told at the second bubbling of the caldron and another ringing of the bells.

CHAPTER III

BACK TO THE CUCKOO'S NEST

It was very early on a bright September morning that Mrs. Sherman, Betty, and Lloyd took the train for the Cuckoo's Nest; but there was such a long time to wait at the little way station where they changed cars, that it was nearly sundown when they came to the end of their journey.

Mr. Appleton was waiting for them with the big farm wagon, into which he lifted Betty's Bob, whining in his hamper, Mrs. Sherman's trunk, and then Betty's shabby little leather one that had gone away half empty. It was coming back now, nearly bursting with all that her godmother had packed into it with the magic necklace, "for love's sweet sake."

"Shall we have to wait long for the carriage?" asked Lloyd, shading her eyes with her hand to look down the dusty road. "There is nothing in sight now."

Mr. Appleton gave a hearty laugh as he pointed with his whip to the wagon. "That's the kind of a carriage folks ride in out here," he said. "I reckon you never rode in one before. Well, it will be a new experience for you, for it jolts considerable. I couldn't put in more than one spring seat on account of the trunks, but there's room enough for you and your ma beside me, and I brought along a little stool for Betty to sit on."

Lloyd's face flushed at her mistake, and she was very quiet as they drove along. The wagon did "jolt considerable," as Mr. Appleton said, and she wondered if she should find everything as queer during her visit as this ride from the railroad station to the house. The spring seat was so high that her feet dangled helplessly. She could not touch the floor of the wagon bed even with her toes. Every time they went down a hill she had to clutch her mother's arm to keep from pitching forward on top of Betty, seated on the low stool at her feet.

Betty was quiet, too, thinking how much had happened in the three months since she had passed along that road. She had gone away in a sunbonnet, with an old-fashioned brown wicker basket on her arm, and a feeling in her frightened little heart that the world was a great jungle, full of all sorts of unknown terrors. She was coming back now, in a hat as stylish as Lloyd's own, with a handsome little travelling satchel in her hands, and a heartful of beautiful memories; for she had met nothing but kindness, so far as she had travelled in the world's wide jungle.

"There's the schoolhouse," she cried, presently, with a thrill of pleasure as they passed the deserted playground, overgrown with weeds. It was still vacation time in this country district. "There's our playhouse under the thorn-tree," she added, half rising from the stool to point it out to Lloyd. "And that bare spot by the well-shed is where we play vineyard and prisoner's base. We always have so much fun at recess."

The Little Colonel looked where Betty pointed, but the weather-beaten schoolhouse, the weeds, and the trampled spot of ground did not suggest any good times to her. It seemed the loneliest, dreariest place she had ever seen, and she turned away with a slight shrug of the shoulders. Not so slight, however, but Betty saw it. Then, suddenly she began to look at everything through the Little Colonel's eyes. Somehow everything began to appear ragged and gone-to-seed and little and countrified and common. So she did not exclaim again when they passed any of the other old landmarks that had grown dear to her from long acquaintance.

There was the half-way tree, and the bridge where they always stopped to lean over the railing and make rings in the water below, by dropping pebbles into the clear pools. And there was the flat rock where they could nearly always find a four-leaf clover, and, farther along, the stile where a pet toad lived. She and Davy always pretended that the toad was a toll-gate keeper who would not let them climb the stile unless they paid him with flies.

All these places were dear to Betty, and she had intended to point them out to Lloyd as they went along; but after that shrug, she felt that they would have no interest for any one but herself. So she sat quietly on the little stool, wishing that Lloyd could enjoy the ride home as much as she was doing.

"Oh, how lonesome looking!" exclaimed Lloyd, as they turned the last corner and came to the graveyard, with its gleaming tombstones. Betty only smiled in reply. They were like old friends to her, but of course Lloyd could not understand that. She had never strolled among them with Davy on summer afternoons, or parted the tangled grass and myrtle vines to read the names and verses on the mossy marbles, or smelled the pinks and lilies growing over the neglected mounds.

The wild rose was gone, that had hung over the old gray picket-fence to wave good-bye to Betty the morning she went away, but the same bush held out a long straggling branch that almost touched her face as they drove past, and the sunset glow shone pink across it. Beside it was the headstone with the marble hand for ever pointing to the place in the marble book where were deeply carven the letters of the text, "*Be ye also ready.*" With that familiar greeting Betty felt that at last she had really reached home, and indeed that she had scarcely been away. For everything was just as she had left it, from the spicy smell of the cedar boughs, to the soft cooing of a dove in a distant woodland. Cow-bells jingled in the lane, and the country quiet and contentment seemed to fill the meadows, as the sunset glow filled all the evening sky.

"There's Davy," said Mr. Appleton, as a chubby, barefoot boy came racing down the lane to open the gate for them, and then hang on the back of the wagon as it rattled along to the house.

"He has been talking about you all week, Betty. He couldn't eat any dinner to-day, he was so excited about your coming."

Betty smiled back at the beaming little face, as shining as yellow soap and perfect happiness could make it, and her conscience smote her that she had not missed him more, and written to him oftener while she was away from him. But however great his loneliness might have been, it was all forgotten at the sight of her, and his delight was unbounded when the hamper was unstrapped and Bob came tumbling out to frisk over his bare toes.

"Now Betty will have two shadows," laughed Mr. Appleton. "That boy follows her everywhere."

Betty led the way into the house. On the porch steps Lloyd stopped her to whisper: "Mercy, Betty! How many children are there?" Several tow heads like Davy's were peering around the corner of the house, and a two-year-old baby toddled across the porch, squeezing a kitten in his arms.

"There are six, altogether," answered Betty. "Scott is just Rob Moore's age, but he is so bashful that you'll not see much of him. Then there's Bradley. He is such a tease that we keep out of his way as much as possible. Davy comes next. He's the nicest in the bunch. Then Morgan is six, and Lee is four, and that's the baby over there. They haven't named him yet, so the boys just call him Pudding."

"And is that your cousin Hetty?" whispered Lloyd, as a tall, thin woman came out on the porch to greet her guests. In that greeting Betty forgot that Mrs. Appleton was only a fourth cousin, her welcome was so warm; she thought only how nice it was to have a family to come back to. Looking into the woman's tired face with eyes that had grown wiser in the summer's absence, the child saw that it was hard work and care that had made it grow old before its time, and realised that the tenderness she had longed for had been withheld only because her cousin Hetty had been too overworked to take time to show it.

"Maybe she might have been as bright and sweet as godmother, if she hadn't had to work so hard," thought Betty. "Still I can't imagine godmother saying snappy cross things, no matter how tired she might get."

"Supper's 'most ready," said Mrs. Appleton, ushering them into the house. "I reckon you'll want to tidy up a bit after that long ride on the dusty cars. Well, Molly didn't forget to fill the water-pitcher, after all, though she usually forgets everything, unless I'm at her heels every blessed minute to remind her."

"Molly!" repeated Betty, in surprise. "Who is she?"

"Oh, I forgot you didn't know. She is an orphan I took from the asylum soon after you left. It's been such a hard summer that I had to have somebody to help, so Mr. Appleton went to St. Joseph's orphan asylum and picked me out this girl. She's fourteen, and big for her age, but as wild as a Comanche Indian. So I can't say she's been as much help as I'd hoped for. But she's good to the baby, and she can wash dishes. They taught her that at the asylum. I tell you I've missed *you*, Betty. I didn't realise how many steps you saved me until you were gone. Now, if you'll excuse me, Mrs. Sherman, I'll go and see about supper. You'll find your room just as you left it, Betty."

As the door closed behind her and Betty, the Little Colonel turned to her mother with a puzzled face. "Did you evah see anything so queah in all yo' life?" she asked. "A bed in the pahlah! What if somebody should come to call aftah I've gone to sleep. Oh, I think this place is awful! I don't see how people can be happy, living in such an odd way."

"That is your first holiday lesson," said Mrs. Sherman, beginning to unpack her travelling bag. "You'll have to learn that our way of living is not the only way, and that people can be just as good and useful and happy in one place as another. Some people are so narrow-minded that they never learn that. They are like car-wheels that can move only when they have a certain kind of track to run on. You can be that kind of a person, or you can be like a bicycle, able to run on any road, from the narrowest path to the broadest avenue. I've found that people who can fit themselves to any road they may happen to be on are the happiest, and they are the easiest to live with. That is one of the greatest accomplishments any one can have, Lloyd. I'd rather have my little daughter able to adapt herself gracefully to all circumstances, than to sing or paint or model or embroider."

"You are going to find things very different here from what you have been accustomed to at home, but it wouldn't be polite or kind to appear to notice any difference. For instance, some of the best people I ever knew think it is silly to serve dinner in courses, as we do. They like to see everything on the table at once, – soup, salad, meats, and desserts."

"I hate everything all higgledy-piggledy!" muttered the Little Colonel, with her face in a towel. "I'll try not to show it, mothah, but I'm afraid I can't help it sometimes."

Meanwhile, Betty, with Davy tagging after her, and Bob frisking on ahead, had started up the steps to her own little room in the west gable. As she turned on the landing, the door at the foot of the stairs moved slightly, and she caught the gleam of a pair of sharp gray eyes peering at her through the crack.

"It's Molly!" whispered Davy, catching Betty's skirts, and scrambling after her as fast as his short fat legs would allow.

"Say, Betty, did you know that she's a *witch*? She says that she can go through keyholes, and that on dark nights she sails away over the chimney on a broomstick with a black cat on her shoulder. Even Scott and Bradley are afraid of her. They dasn't do anything she tells them not to."

"Sh!" whispered Betty, warningly, with a backward glance over her shoulder. The girl behind the door had stepped out on the landing for a better view, but she darted back to her hiding-place as Betty turned, and their eyes met.

"She looks like a gypsy," thought Betty, noticing her straight black hair hanging around her eyes. "And she seems ready to dodge at a word."

"She tells us ghost stories every night after supper," exclaimed Davy. They had reached the gable room, and, while Betty hung up her hat and unlocked her trunk, he curled himself up comfortably on the foot of her bed. "She can make you shiver no matter how hot a night it is."

Betty scarcely noticed what the boy was saying. At any other time she would have been surprised at his talking so much. Just now she was looking around her with a feeling of strangeness. Everything seemed so much smaller than when she had left the place. Her room had not seemed bare and cheerless before she went away, because she had seen no better. But now, remembering the pretty room that had been hers in the House Beautiful, the tears came into her eyes. For a moment the contrast made her homesick. Instead of the crystal candlesticks, here was a battered tin one. Here

were no filmy curtains at the windows, no white fur rugs on a dark polished floor. Only a breadth of faded rag carpet, spread down on bare unpainted boards. Here was no white toilet-table with furnishings of gold and ivory; no polished mirror in which she could see herself from head to foot. She looked mournfully into the tiny looking-glass that was so small that she could see only one-half of her face at a time. Then from force of habit she stood on tiptoe to see the other half. The mouth was not smiling as it used to in the old days.

She was recalled from her homesick reverie by Davy's voice again.

"Molly didn't want you and that other girl to come here," he confided. "She said you'd be snobs; that all rich people were. Bradley asked Molly what a snob was, and said if it was anything bad that she shouldn't call you that, 'cause you wasn't one, and always tied his fingers up when he cut hisself, and helped him with his mul'plication tables and everything. And Molly said she'd call you what she pleased, and treat you just as mean as you deserved, and if we dared say a word she'd shut the first one that tried it up in the smoke-house in the dark; then she'd say *abra-ca-dab-ra* over us."

Davy's voice sank to a frightened whisper as he rolled the dread word over his tongue in unconscious imitation of Molly. He was quivering with excitement, and his cheeks were unusually red. He had talked more in the few minutes than he often did in days.

"Why, Davy, what's the matter?" cried Betty. "What do you mean by abracadabra?"

"Hush! Don't say it so loud," he begged earnestly. "It's Molly's hoodoo word. Bradley says she can conjure you with it, same as coloured folks when they put a rabbit's foot on you. I had to tell, 'cause I'm afraid Molly's going to do something mean to you."

"Does your mother know that she tells you those silly things?" demanded Betty, turning on him quickly. But Davy had lost his tongue, now that his confession was made, and only shook his head in reply.

"Then don't listen to her any more, Davy boy," she said, taking him by the ears and kissing him playfully, first on one dimpled cheek and then on the other. "Poor Molly doesn't know any better, and she must have lived with dreadful people before she went to the orphan asylum. You stay with Lloyd and me, after this, and don't have anything more to do with her when she tells you such stories."

"That's just what she said you'd do," said Davy, finding his voice again. "She said that you and that other girl would be stuck up and wouldn't play with her, or let us either, and that she'd always be left out of everything. But she'd get even with you for coming in with your high and mighty airs and fine clothes to turn us against her."

"That's the silliest thing I ever heard," answered Betty, indignantly. Then a puzzled look crept into her brown eyes, as she stood pouring out the water to wash her face. "I'll ask godmother about it," she said to herself. "She'll tell us how we ought to treat her."

But there was no opportunity that evening. Molly sat down to the supper-table with them, much to the surprise of the Little Colonel, unused to the primitive customs of farm life, where no social difference is made between those who are served and those who do the serving. Remembering her mother's little sermon, she did not show her surprise by the smallest change of expression.

After supper Betty offered to help with the dishes as usual, but her cousin Hetty sent her away, saying it would not do to soil her pretty travelling dress; that she was company now, and to run away and entertain Lloyd. So Betty, with a sigh of relief, went back to the porch, where Mr. Appleton, with Pudding in his lap, was talking with Mrs. Sherman.

Betty hated dish-washing, and after her long holiday at the house party it seemed doubly hard to go back to such unpleasant duties. She did not see the swift jealous look that followed her from Molly's keen eyes, or the sullen pout that settled on the older girl's lips, as, left to herself, she rattled the cups and plates recklessly, in her envious mood.

Out on the porch Betty sank into a comfortable rocking-chair, and sat looking up at the stars. "Isn't it sweet and still out here, godmother?" she asked, after awhile. "I love to hear that owl hooting

away off in the woods, and listen to the pine-trees whispering that way, and the frogs croaking down in the meadow pond."

"Oh, I don't," cried the Little Colonel, with something like a sob in her voice, as she nestled her head closer against her mother's shoulder. "It makes me feel as lonesome as when Mom Beck sings 'Fa'well, my dyin' friends.' I think they're the most doleful sounds I evah heard."

Presently, when Mr. Appleton went in to carry the sleepy baby to bed, the Little Colonel put her arms around her mother's neck, whispering, "Oh, mothah, I wish we were back at Locust. I'm so homesick and disappointed in the place. Can't we go home in the mawnin'?"

"I think my little girl is so tired and sleepy that she doesn't know what she wants," whispered Mrs. Sherman, in reply. "Come, let me take you to bed. You'll think differently in the morning. Do you remember the old song?"

"Colours seen by candle-light
Never look the same by day."

CHAPTER IV

"TO BARLEY-BRIGHT."

The next few days went by happily for the Little Colonel, for Betty took her to all her favourite haunts, and kept her entertained from morning till night. Once they stayed all day in the woods below the barn, building a playhouse at the base of a great oak-tree, with carpets of moss, and cups and saucers made of acorns.

Scott and Bradley joined them, and for once played peaceably, building a furnace in the ravine with some flat stones and an old piece of stove pipe. There they cooked their dinner. Davy was sent to raid the garden and spring-house, and even Lee and Morgan were allowed a place at the feast, when one came in with a hatful of guinea eggs that he had found in the orchard, and the other loaned his new red wheelbarrow, to add to the housekeeping outfit.

"Isn't this fun!" exclaimed the Little Colonel, as she watched Betty, who stood over the furnace with a very red face, scrambling the eggs in an old pie-pan. "I bid to be the cook next time we play out here, and I'm going to make a furnace like this when I go back to Locust."

High above them, up the hill, on the back porch of the farmhouse, Molly stood ironing sheets and towels. Whenever she glanced down into the shady hollow, she could see Lloyd's pink dress fluttering along the ravine, or Betty's white sunbonnet bobbing up from behind the rocks. The laughing voices and the shouts of the boys came tantalisingly to her ears, and the old sullen pout settled on her face as she listened.

"It isn't fair that I should have to work all day long while they are off having a good time," she muttered, slapping an iron angrily down on the stove. "I s'pose they think that because I'm so big I oughtn't to care about playing; but I couldn't help growing so fast. If I *am* nearly as big as Mrs. Appleton, that doesn't keep me from feeling like a little girl inside. I'm only a year older than Scott. I *hate* them! I wish that little Sherman girl would fall into a brier patch and scratch her face, and that a hornet would sting Betty Lewis smack in the mouth!"

By and by a tear sizzled down on the hot iron in her hand. "It isn't fair!" she sobbed again, "for them to have everything and me nothing, not even to know where my poor little sister is. Maybe somebody's beating her this very minute, or she is shut up in a dark closet crying for me." With that thought, all the distressing scenes that had made her past life miserable began to crowd into her mind, and the tears sizzled faster and faster on the hot iron, as she jerked it back and forth over a long towel.

There had been beatings and dark closets for Molly many a time before she was rescued by the orphan asylum, and the great fear of her life was that there was still the same cruel treatment for the little sister who had not been rescued, but who had been hidden away by their drunken father when the Humane Society made its search for her.

Three years had passed since they were lost from each other. Molly was only eleven then, and Dot, although nearly seven, was such a tiny, half-starved little thing that she seemed only a baby in her sister's eyes. Many a night, when the wind moaned in the chimney, or the rats scampered in the walls, Molly had started up out of a sound sleep, staring fearfully into the darkness, thinking that she had heard Dot calling to her. Then suddenly remembering that Dot was too far away to make her hear, no matter how wildly she might call, she had buried her face in her pillow, and sobbed and sobbed until she fell asleep.

The matron of the asylum knew why she often came down in the morning with red eyes and swollen face, and the knowledge made her more patient with the wayward girl. Nobody taxed her patience more than Molly, with her unhappy moods, her outbursts of temper, and her suspicious, jealous disposition. She loved to play, and yelled and ran like some wild creature, whenever she had a chance, climbing the highest trees, making daring leaps from forbidden heights, and tearing her

clothes into ribbons. But she rebelled at having to work, and in all the time she was at the asylum the matron had found only one lovable trait in her. It was her affection for the little lost sister that made her gentle to the smaller children on the place and kind to the animals.

She had been happier since coming to the Appleton farm, where there were no rules, and the boys accepted her leadership admiringly. She found great pleasure in inventing wild tales for their entertainment, in frightening them with stories of ghosts and hobgoblins, and in teaching them new games which she had played in alleys with boot-blacks and street gamins.

All that had stopped with the arrival of the visitors. Their coming brought her more work, and left her less time to play. The sight of Lloyd and Betty in their dainty dresses aroused her worst jealousy, and awoke the old bitterness that had grown up in her slum life, and that always raged within her whenever she saw people with whom fortune had dealt more kindly than with herself. All that day, while the seven happy children played and sang in the shady woodland, she went around at her work with a rebellious feeling against her lot. Everything she did was to the tune of a bitter refrain that kept echoing through her sore heart: "It isn't fair! It isn't fair!"

Late in the afternoon a boy came riding up from the railroad station with a telegram for Mrs. Sherman. It was the first one that had ever been sent to the farm, and Bradley, who had gone up to the house for a hatchet, waited to watch Mrs. Sherman tear open the yellow envelope.

"Take it to Lloyd, please," she said, after a hurried reading. "Tell her to hurry up to the house." Thrusting the message into his hand, she hurried out of the room, to find Mrs. Appleton. Bradley felt very important at being the bearer of a telegram, and ran down the hill as fast as his bare feet could carry him over the briars and dry stubble. He would have teased Lloyd awhile by making her guess what he had, before giving it to her, if it had not been for Mrs. Sherman's request to hurry.

Lloyd read the message aloud. "*Aunt Jane alarmingly ill; wants to see you. Come immediately.*" "Oh, how provoking!" she exclaimed. "I s'pose we'll have to start right off. We always do. We nevah plan to go anywhere or do anything without Aunt Jane gets sick and thinks she's goin' to die. She's an old, old lady," she hastened to explain, seeing Betty's shocked face. "She's my great-aunt, you know, 'cause she's my grandmothah's sistah. I wouldn't have minded it so much when we first came," she confessed, "but I don't want to leave now, one bit. We've had a lovely time to-day, and I hate to go away befo' I've seen the cave you promised to take me to and the Glenrock watahfall, and all those places."

It never occurred to the Little Colonel that she might be left behind, until she reached the house and found her mother with her hat on, packing her satchel.

"I've barely time to catch the next train," she said, as Lloyd came running into the room. "It is a two-mile drive to the station, you know, and there's not time to get you and all your things ready to take with me. It wouldn't be wise, anyhow, for everything is always in confusion at Aunt Jane's when she is ill. Mrs. Appleton will take good care of you, and you can follow me next week if Aunt Jane is better. Betty will come with you, and we'll have a nice little visit in the city while she does her shopping and gets ready for her journey. I'll write to you as soon as I can decide when it will be best for you to come. Aunt Jane's illness is probably half scare, like all her others, but still I feel that I must never lose a moment when she sends for me, as she might be worse than we think."

Mrs. Sherman packed rapidly while she talked, and almost before Lloyd realised that she was really to be left behind, a light buckboard was at the door, and Mr. Appleton was standing beside the horse's head waiting. There was not even time for Lloyd to cling around her mother's neck and be petted and comforted for the sudden separation. There was a hasty hug, a loving kiss, and a whispered "Good-bye, little daughter. Mother's sorry to go without her little girl, but it can't be helped. The time will soon pass – only a week, and remember this is one of your school days, and the lesson set for you to learn is *Patience.*"

Lloyd smiled bravely while she promised to be good and not give Mrs. Appleton any trouble. Her mother, looking back as they drove away, saw the two little girls standing with their arms around

each other, waving their handkerchiefs, and thought thankfully, "I am glad that Lloyd is here with Betty instead of at Locust. She'll not have time to be lonesome with so many playmates."

It was hard for Lloyd to keep back the tears as the carriage passed out of sight around the corner of the graveyard. But Bradley challenged her to a race down-hill, and with a loud whoop they all started helter-skelter back to the ravine to play. She had been busy making some pine-cone chairs for the little parlour at the roots of the oak-tree, when the telegram called her away, and now she went back to that delightful occupation, working busily until the supper-horn blew to call the men from the field. It was always a pleasure to Lloyd to hear that horn, and several times she had puffed at it until she was red in the face, in her vain attempts to blow it herself. All the sound she could awaken was a short dismal toot. It was a cow's horn, carved and polished, that had been used for nearly forty years to call the men from the field. When Mrs. Appleton puckered her lips to blow it, her thin cheeks puffed out until they were as round and pink as the baby's, and the long mellow note went floating across the fields, clear and sweet, till the men at work in the farthest field heard it and answered with a far-away cheer.

"Let's get Molly to play Barley-bright with us to-night," said Bradley, as they trudged up the hill. "It is a fine game, and if we help her with the dishes, she'll get done in just a few minutes, and we'll have nearly an hour to play before it gets dark."

The same thought was in Molly's mind, for after supper she called the boys aside and whispered to them. She wanted to slip away from the girls and not allow them to join in the game; but Bradley would not listen to such an arrangement. He insisted that the game would not be any fun without them.

Then Molly, growing jealous, turned away with a pout, saying that she might have known it would be that way. They had had plenty of fun before the girls came, but to go ahead and do as they pleased. It didn't make any difference to *her*. *She* could get on very well by herself.

Lloyd had gone down to the spring-house with Mrs. Appleton, but Betty heard the dispute and put an end to it at once. "Here!" she cried, catching up a towel. "Everybody come and help, and we'll be through before you can say Jack Robinson. Pour out the hot water, Molly. Get another towel, Bradley. We'll wipe, and Davy can carry the dishes to the pantry. We'll be through before Scott has half filled the wood-box."

Molly could not keep her jealous mood and sulky frowns very long in the midst of the laughing chatter that followed, and in a very few minutes Betty had talked her into good humour with herself and all the world. Such light work did the many hands make of the dish-washing, that the sky was still pink with the sunset glow when they were ready to begin the game.

"We always go down to the hay-barn to play Barley-bright," said Bradley. "I never cared for it when we played it at school in the day-time, but when we play it Molly's way it is the most exciting game I know. We usually wait till it begins to get dark and the lightning-bugs are flying about.

"Molly and I will stand the crowd, this time. Our base will be here at the persimmon-tree in front of the barn, and yours will be the pasture bars down yonder. The barn will be Barley-bright, and after we call out the questions and answers, you're to try to run around our base to the barn, and back again to yours, without being caught by a witch. There are six of you, so you can have six runs to Barley-bright and back, and if by that time we have caught half of you the game is ours. The witch has the right to hide and jump out at you from any place she chooses, but I can't touch you except when you pass my base. Now shut your eyes till I count one hundred, while the witch hides."

Six pairs of hands were clasped over six pairs of eyes, while Bradley slowly counted, and Molly, darting away from his side, hid behind the straw-stack.

"One – hun-dred – all eyes open!" he shouted. They looked around. The fireflies were flashing across the pasture and the dusk was beginning to deepen. Then six voices rang out in chorus, Bradley's shrill pipe answering them.

"How many miles to Barley-bright?"

*"Three score and ten!"
"Can I get there by candle-light?"
"Yes, if your legs are long and light—
There and back again!
Look out! The witches will catch you!"*

Molly was nowhere in sight, so with a delicious thrill of excitement, not knowing from what ambush they would be pounced upon, the six pilgrims to Barley-bright started off at the top of their speed. Across the pasture they rushed, around Bradley's base at the persimmon-tree, and up to the big barn door, which they were obliged to touch before they could turn and make a wild dash back to the pasture bars.

Just as they reached the barn door, Molly sprang out from behind the straw-stack; but they could not believe it was Molly, she was so changed. To their excited fancy she seemed a real witch. Her black hair was unbraided, and streamed out in elfish wisps from under a tall pointed black hat. A hideous mask covered her face, and she brandished the stump of an old broom with such effect that they ran from her, shrieking wildly.

Some heavy wrapping paper, a strip of white cotton cloth, and coal-soot from the bottom of a stove lid had changed an ordinary girl of fourteen into a nameless terror, from which they fled, shrieking at the top of their voices. The boys had been through the performance many times, but they enjoyed the cold thrill it gave them as much as Betty and Lloyd, who were feeling it for the first time.

Lee was caught in that first mad race, and Morgan in the second, and they had to go over to the enemy's base, where Bradley stood guard under the persimmon-tree. As they came in from the third run, Lloyd leaned against the pasture bars, out of breath.

"Oh, I believe I should drop dead," she panted, "if that awful thing should get me. I can't believe that it is only Molly. She seems like a real suah 'nuff witch." She glanced over her shoulder again with a little nervous shudder as the others began calling again:

"How many miles to Barley-bright?"

Betty was caught this time, and Lloyd, to whom the game was becoming a terrible reality, stood with her heart beating like a trip-hammer and her eyes peering in a startled way through the dusk. This time the witch popped up from behind the pasture bars, and Lloyd, giving a startled look over her shoulder as she flew, saw that the broomstick was flourished in her direction, and the hideous black and white mask was almost upon her. With an ear-splitting scream she redoubled her speed, racing around and around the barn, instead of touching the door and turning back, when she saw that she was followed.

Finally, with one sharp scream of terror after another, she darted into the great dark barn, in a blind frenzy to escape. She heard the voices of the children outside, the bang of the broomstick against the door, and then plunging forward, felt herself falling – falling!

There was just an instant in which she seemed to see the faces of her mother and Papa Jack. Then she remembered nothing more, for her head struck something hard, and she lay in a little heap on the floor below. She had fallen through a trap-door into an empty manger.

CHAPTER V

A TIME FOR PATIENCE

They thought at first that she was hiding in the barn, afraid to come out, lest Molly might be lying in wait to grab her. So they began calling: "Come on, Lloyd! King's X! King's excuse! Home free! You may come home free!" But there was no answer, and Betty, suddenly remembering the trap-door, grew white with fear.

The children played in the barn so much that Mr. Appleton's first order, when he hired a new man, was that the trap-door must always be closed and fastened the moment he finished pitching the hay down to the manger below. The children themselves had been cautioned time and again to keep away from it, but Lloyd, never having played in the barn before, was not aware of its existence.

"Lloyd, Lloyd!" called Betty, hurrying into the twilight of the big barn. There was no answer, and peering anxiously ahead, Betty saw that the trap-door was open, and on the floor below was the gleam of the Little Colonel's light pink dress, shining white through the dusk.

Betty's startled cry brought the other children, who clattered down the barn stairs after her, into the straw-covered circle where the young calves were kept. They met Mr. Appleton, coming in from the corn-crib with a basket on his shoulder, and all began to talk at once. The words "Lloyd" and "trap-door" were all he could distinguish in the jumble of excited exclamations, but they told the whole story.

Hastily dropping his basket, he strode across to the manger that Betty pointed out, with a look of grave concern on his face. They all crowded breathlessly around him as he bent over the quiet little figure, lifting it gently in his arms. It was a solemn-faced little company that followed him up the hill with his unconscious burden. A cold fear seized Betty as she walked along, glancing at the Little Colonel's closed eyes, and the tiny stream of blood trickling across the still white face.

"Oh, if godmother were only here!" she groaned.

"There's no telling how badly Lloyd is hurt. Maybe she'll be a cripple for life. Oh, I wish I'd never heard of such a game as Barley-bright."

If the accident had happened at Locust, a doctor would have been summoned to the spot, as fast as telephones and swift horses could bring him, and the whole household would have held its breath in anxiety. But very little fuss was made over accidents at the Cuckoo's Nest. It was a weekly occurrence for some of the children to be brought in limp and bleeding from various falls. Bradley had once sprained his neck turning somersaults down the hay-mow, so that he had not been able to look over his shoulder for two weeks. Scott had been picked up senseless twice, once from falling out of the top of a walnut-tree, and the other time because a high ladder broke under him. Every one of the boys but Pudding had at some time or another left a trail of blood behind him from barn to house as he went weeping homeward with some part of his body to be bandaged. So Lloyd's fall did not cause the commotion it might have done in a less adventurous family.

"Oh, she's coming around all right," said Mr. Appleton, cheerfully, as her head stirred a little on his shoulder, and she half opened her eyes.

"Here you are," he added a moment later, laying her on the bed in the parlour. "Scott, run call your mother. Bring a light, Molly. We'll soon see what is the matter."

There were no bones broken, and in a little while Lloyd sat up, white and dizzy. Then she walked across the room, and looked at herself in the little mirror hanging over a shelf, on which stood a bouquet of stiff wax flowers. It was hung so high and tilted forward so much, and the wax flowers were in the way, so that she could not get a very satisfactory view of her wounds, but she saw enough to make her feel like an old soldier home from the wars, with the marks of many battles upon her.

A bandage wet with arnica was tied around her head, over a large knot that was rapidly swelling larger. Several strips of court-plaster covered the cut on her temple. One cheek was scratched, and she was stiff and sore from many bruises.

"But not half so stiff as you'll be in the morning," Mrs. Appleton assured her, cheerfully. "All that side of your body that struck against the manger is black and blue."

"I think I'll go to bed," said the Little Colonel, faintly. "This day has been long enough, and I don't want anything else to happen to me. Fallin' through a trap-doah and havin' my mothah leave me is enough fo' one while. I think I need her moah than Aunt Jane does. You'll have to sleep with me to-night, Betty. I wouldn't stay down heah alone fo' anything."

It was very early to go to bed, scarcely more than half-past seven, when Betty blew out the candle and climbed in beside the Little Colonel. She lay for a long time, listening to the croaking of the frogs, thinking that Lloyd had forgotten her troubles in dreamland, until a mournful little voice whispered, "Say, Betty, are you asleep?"

"No; but I thought you were."

"I was, for a few minutes, but that dreadful false face of Molly's woke me up. I dreamed it was chasing me, and I seemed to be falling and falling, and somebody screamed at me '*Look out! The witches will catch you!*' It frightened me so that I woke up all a tremble. I know I am safe, here in bed with you, but I'm shaking so hard that I can't go to sleep again. Oh, Betty, you don't know how much I want my mothah! I'll nevah leave her again as long as I live. My head aches, and I'm so stiff and soah I can't tu'n ovah!"

"Do you want me to tell you a story?" asked Betty, hearing the sob in Lloyd's voice, and divining that her pillow had caught more than one tear under cover of the darkness.

"Oh, yes!" begged the Little Colonel. "Talk to me, even if you don't say anything but the multiplication table. It will keep me from hearin' those dreadful frogs, and seein' that face in the dark. I'm ashamed to be frightened at nothing. I don't know what makes me such a coward."

"Maybe the fall was a sort of shock to your nerves," said Betty, comfortingly, reaching out to pat the trembling shoulders with a motherly air. "There, go to sleep, and I'll stay awake and keep away the hobgoblins. I'll recite the Lady Jane, because it jingles so beautifully. It goes like a cradle."

A little groping hand reached through the darkness and touched Betty's face, then buried itself in her soft curls, as if the touch brought a soothing sense of safety. In a slow, sing-song tone, as monotonous as the droning of a bee, Betty began, accenting every other syllable with a sleepy drawl.

"The *la-dy Jane* was *tall* and *slim*,
The *la-dy Jane* was *fair*.
Sir *Thomas* her *lord* was *stout* of *limb*,
His *cough* was *short* and his *eyes* were *dim*,
And he *wore* green *specs* with a *tortoise* shell *rim*,
And his *hat* was re-*mark*-ably *broad* in the *brim*,
And *she* was un-*common*-ly *fond* of *him*,
And *they* were a *lov*-ing *pair*.
And the *name* and the *fame* of this *knight* and his *dame*
Were *every*-where *hailed* with the *loud*-est ac-*claim*."

But it took more than the Lady Jane to put the restless little listener to sleep that night. Maud Muller was recited in the same sing-song measure, and Lord Ullin's daughter followed without a pause, till Betty herself grew sleepy, and, like a tired little mosquito, droned lower and lower, finally stopping in the middle of a sentence.

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