

Johnston Annie Fellows

The Little Colonel in Arizona



Annie Johnston

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CHAPTER I.

MARY TELLS ALL SHE KNOWS

"Joyce," said Jack Ware, stopping beside his sister's seat in the long, Western-bound train, "I wish you'd go back into the observation-car, and make Mary stop talking. She's telling all she knows to a couple of strangers."

"Why don't you do it?" asked Joyce, looking up from her magazine with a teasing smile. "That dignified scowl of yours ought to frighten anything into silence."

"I did try it," confessed Jack. "I frowned and shook my head at her as I passed, but all the good it did was to start her to talking about *me*. 'That's my brother Jack,' I heard her say, and her voice went through the car like a fine-pointed needle. 'Isn't he big for fourteen? He's been wearing long trousers for nearly a year.' They both turned to look at me, and everybody smiled, and I was so embarrassed that I fell all over myself getting out of sight. And it was a girl she said it to," he continued, wrathfully. "A real pretty girl, about my age. The fellow with her is her brother, I reckon. They look enough alike. He's a cadet from some military school. You can tell by his uniform. They laugh at everything that Mary says, and that makes her go on all the worse. So if you don't want them to know all our family history, past, present, and to come, you'd better go back and shut up that chatterbox. You know what Mary's like when she gets started."

"Yes, I know," sighed Joyce, "but I don't dare move now. Norman has just fallen asleep, and he's been so restless all day that I don't want him to waken until mamma has had her nap." She glanced down at the little six-year-old brother stretched out on the seat beside her with his head in her lap, and then across the aisle at her mother, lying with her white face hidden among the shawls and pillows.

"If I send for Mary to come back here, she'll flop around until she wakes them both. Can't you get her out on to the rear platform for awhile? I should think she would enjoy riding out there on one of those little camp-stools. Slip one of those oranges into your pocket, and whisper to her to follow you out and guess what you have for her."

"Well, I'll try," said Jack, dubiously, "but I'm almost sure she won't budge. It isn't every day she gets an audience like that. It flatters her to have them laugh at everything she says, and as sure as I stop and speak to her she'll say something that I don't want to hear."

"Oh, never mind, then," said Joyce. "They are strangers, and probably we'll never see them again, so it won't make any difference. Sit down here and forget about them. You can have this magazine in a minute, just as soon as I finish reading this half-page."

But Jack did mind. He could not forget the amused glances that the pretty girl had exchanged with her big brother, and after standing irresolutely in the aisle a moment, he strolled back to the observation-car. Slipping into a wicker chair near the door, he sat waiting for Mary to look in his direction, so that he could beckon her to come to him.

Half the passengers had gone to sleep and forgotten that they were being whirled across the great American Desert as fast as the limited express-train could carry them. Some were reading, and some gazing out of the windows at the monotonous wastes of sand. The only ones who really seemed to be enjoying the journey were his small sister and her audience of two. She sat on a footstool in the aisle, just in front of them, a box of candy in her lap, and a look of supreme satisfaction on her face. Two little braids of blond hair, tied with big bows of blue ribbon, bobbed over her shoulders

as she talked. Jack was too far away to hear what she said, but his scowl deepened whenever the girl exchanged amused glances with her brother.

"This candy is almost as good as the fudge we used to make at home every Saturday afternoon," said Mary, putting a chocolate-covered marshmallow in her mouth, and gravely running her tongue around her lips. "But we'll never again make any more fudge in that house."

"Why not, dear?" asked the girl, with encouraging interest. This child was the most diverting thing she had found on the long journey.

"Oh, everything has come to an end now. Joyce says you can never go back when you've burned your bridges behind you. It was certainly burning our bridges when we sold the little brown house, for of course we could never go back with strangers living in it. It was almost like a funeral when we started to the train, and looked back for the last time. I cried, because there was the Christmas-tree standing on the porch, with the strings of popcorn and cranberries on it. We put it out for the birds, you know, when we were done with it. When I saw how lonesome it looked, standing out in the snow, and remembered that it was the last Christmas-tree we'd ever have there, and that we didn't have a home any more, why I guess *anybody* would have cried."

"Why did you sell the little home if you loved it so?" asked the girl. It was not from any desire to pry into a stranger's affairs that she asked, but merely to keep the child talking.

"Oh, mamma was so ill. She had pneumonia, and there are so many blizzards in Kansas, you know, that the doctor said she'd never get rid of her cough if she stayed in Plainsville, and that maybe if we didn't go to a warm place she wouldn't live till spring. So Mr. Link bought the house the very next day, so that we could have enough money to go. He's a lawyer. It used to be Link and Ware on the office door before papa died. He's always been good to us because he was papa's partner, and he gave Jack a perfectly grand gun when he found we were coming out among the Indians.

"Then the neighbours came in and helped us pack, and we left in a hurry. To-morrow we'll be to the place where we are going, and we'll begin to live in tents on New Year's Day. You'd never think this was the last day of the old year, would you, it's so warm. I 'spose we'll be mixed up all the time now about the calendar, coming to such a different climate."

There was a pause while another marshmallow disappeared, then she prattled on again. "It's to Lee's Ranch we are going, out in Arizona. It's a sort of boarding-camp for sick people. Mrs. Lee keeps it. She's our minister's sister, and he wrote to her, and she's going to take us cheaper than she does most people, because there's so many of us. Joyce and Jack and Holland and Norman and mamma and me makes an even half-dozen. But we're going to keep house as soon as our things come and we can get a place, and then I'll be glad that Jack has his gun. He can't shoot very well yet, unless it's at something big like a stable door, but you always feel safer, when there's Indians around, if you've got something to bang at them."

Here she lowered her voice confidentially. "Holland scared Norman and me most to death one night. We were sitting on the rug in front of the fire, before the lamp was lighted, saying what would we do s'posen an Indian should come to the camp sometime, and try to scalp us, and just when we were so scared we didn't dare look around behind us, he rolled out from under the bed where he'd been hiding, and grabbed us by the hair, with the awfulest whoop, that made us feel as if we'd been dipped in ice-water. Why, we didn't stop yelling for half an hour. Norman had the nightmare that night. We never did find out how Joyce punished Holland, but what she did to him was plenty, for he hasn't scared us since, not yet, though you never know when he's going to.

"Joyce isn't afraid of anything on earth. You ought to hear about the way she played ghost once, when she was in France. And she just talked right up to the old monsieur who owned the Gate of the Giant Scissors, and told him what she thought of him."

"How old is this Joyce?" asked the tall young fellow whom his sister called Phil. "She sounds interesting, don't you think, Elsie?" he said, leaning over to help himself to a handful of candy.

Elsie nodded with a smile, and Mary hastened to give the desired information. "Oh, she's fifteen, going on sixteen, and she *is* interesting. She can paint the loveliest pictures you ever saw. She was going to be an artist until all this happened, and she had to leave school. Nobody but me knows how bad it made her feel to do that. I found her crying in the stable-loft when I went up to say good-bye to the black kitten, and she made me cross my heart and body I'd never tell, so mamma thinks that she doesn't mind it at all.

"Things have gone wrong at our house ever since I had the mumps," she began again, when she had slowly crunched two burnt almonds. "Holland sprained his wrist and mamma nearly died with pneumonia and Norman upset the clothes-horse on the stove and burnt up a whole week's ironing. And after that Jack had both ears frosted in a blizzard, and Bob, our darling little fox-terrier that Joyce brought from Kentucky, was poisoned."

"That *was* a list of misfortunes," exclaimed Phil, sympathetically, "enough to discourage anybody."

"Oh, at our house we never get discouraged to *stay*," answered Mary. "Of course we feel that way at first, but Joyce always says 'Remember the Vicar,' and then we stiffen."

"The vicar," echoed Phil, much puzzled.

"Yes, the Vicar of Wakefield, you know. Don't you remember what bad luck they all had, about the green spectacles and everything, and he said, '*Let us be inflexible, and fortune will at last change in our favour!*'"

"Was there ever anything funnier!" exclaimed Phil, in an aside, as this bit of wisdom was rolled out with such a dramatic toss of the head, that the big blue bows on the little blond braids bobbed wildly. "The idea of a child like that reading the 'Vicar of Wakefield.'"

"Oh, I didn't read him myself," answered Mary, eager to be entirely truthful. "Joyce read it aloud to all the family last winter, and since then we've all tried to do as the Vicar did, be inflexible when troubles come. Even Norman knows that if you'll swallow your sobs and *stiffen* when you bump your head, or anything, that it doesn't hurt half so bad as when you just let loose and howl."

Jack started to his feet when he heard the laugh that followed, sure that Mary was saying something that ought to be left unsaid. He reached her just in time to hear her remark, "We're going to eat in the dining-car to-night. Our lunch has all given out, and I'm glad of it, for I never did eat in a dining-car, and I've always wanted to. We're going to have ice-cream, if it doesn't cost too much."

Jack's face was crimson as he bent down and whispered in Mary's ear, and it grew several shades redder as she calmly answered aloud, "No, I don't want to go out on the platform. It's blowing so hard, I'll get my eyes full of sand."

He bent again to whisper, this time savagely, and then turned back toward the other car, not waiting for her answer. But it followed him shrilly in an indignant tone: "It's no such a thing, Jack Ware! I'm not telling all I know."

A few minutes later a freckle-faced boy of twelve appeared in the door, looking up and down the car with keen gray eyes. The moment his glance fell on Mary, he started down the aisle toward her with such an air of determination that she started up in dismay.

"Oh, dear!" she exclaimed. "There's Holland beckoning for me. Now I've got to go."

"Why should you go for him rather than Jack?" asked Phil. "He isn't nearly so big."

"You don't know Holland," said Mary, taking a step forward. "He doesn't mind making a scene anywhere we happen to be. If he was told to bring me, he'd do it, if he had to drag me down the aisle by my hair. Good-bye. I've had a mighty nice time, and I'm much obliged for the candy."

The Ware family were already seated in the dining-room when Phil and Elsie went in to dinner a little later. Mary, over her soup, was giving an enthusiastic account of her new acquaintances. "They're going to their grandfather's in California," she said. "It's the most beautiful place you ever heard of, with goldfish in the fountain, and Gold of Ophir roses in the garden, and Dago, their old pet monkey, is there. They had to send him away from home because he got into so much mischief. And Miss

Elsie Tremont, that's her name, is all in black because her Great-Aunt Patricia is dead. Her Aunt Patricia kept house for them, but now they live at their grandfather's. Mr. Phil is only seventeen, but he's six feet tall, and looks so old that I thought maybe he was thirty."

"Gracious, Mary, how did you find out so much?" asked Joyce, with a warning shake of the head at Norman, who was crumbling his bread into his soup.

"Oh, I asked him if he was married, and he laughed, and said he was only seventeen, just a schoolboy, a cadet in a military academy out in California. There they are now!" she added, excitedly, as the waiter pulled out two chairs at the little table across the aisle.

Both the newcomers smiled at Mary, who beamed broadly in response. Then they gave a quick side-glance at the rest of the family. "What a sweet-looking woman the little mother is," said Elsie, in a low tone, "and Joyce *is* interesting, but I wouldn't say she is exactly pretty, would you?"

"Um, I don't know," answered Phil, after another politely careless glance in her direction. "She has a face you like to keep looking at. It's so bright and pleasant, and her eyes are lovely. She'd be jolly good company, I imagine, a sort of a surprise-party, always doing and saying unusual things."

In the same casual way, Joyce was taking note of them. She felt strongly drawn toward the pretty girl in black, and wished that they were going to the same place, so that she might make her acquaintance. Once when they were all laughing at something Norman said, she looked up and caught her eye, and they both smiled. Then Phil looked across with such an understanding gleam of humour in his eyes that she almost smiled at him, but checked herself, and looked down in her plate, remembering that the handsome cadet was a stranger.

The train stopped at a junction just as Mary finished her ice-cream, which she had been eating as slowly as possible, in order to prolong the pleasure. Finding that there would be a wait of nearly half an hour, Joyce persuaded her mother to go back to the rear platform of the observation-car, and sit out awhile, in the fresh air. Although the sun was down, it was so warm that Mrs. Ware scarcely needed the shawl Joyce drew around her shoulders.

"I can't believe that this is the last day of December," she said to Mary, as Joyce hurried into the station to make some inquiry of the ticket-agent. "The last day of the old year," she added. "These electric-lights and the band playing over there in the park, and all the passengers promenading up and down in front of the station, bareheaded, make it seem like a summer resort."

Mary peered after the promenading passengers wistfully. The boys had disappeared to watch the engine take water, and there was no one for her to walk with. Just then, Phil and Elsie Tremont, sauntering along, caught sight of her wistful little face.

"Don't you want to come too?" asked Elsie, pausing. "You'll sleep better for a little exercise."

"Oh, yes!" was the delighted reply. "May I, mamma? It's Miss Elsie Tremont, that I told you about, that ran away with a monkey and a music-box when she was a little bit of a girl."

"I'm afraid that with such an introduction you'll think I'm not a proper person to trust your daughter with, Mrs. Ware," said Elsie, laughing, "but I assure you I'll never run away again. That experience quite cured me."

"Probably Mary has given you just as alarming an impression of us," answered Mrs. Ware. "She has never learned to regard any one as a stranger, and all the world is her friend to confide in."

"Wouldn't you like to walk a little while, too?" asked Elsie, stirred by some faint memory of a delicate white face like this one, that years ago used to smile out at her from a hammock in the Gold of Ophir rose garden. She was only five years old the last time she saw her mother, but the dim memory was a very sweet one.

"Yes, come! It will do you good," urged Phil, cordially, influenced partly by the same memory, and partly by the thought that here was a chance to make the acquaintance of Joyce as well. According to her little sister she was an unusually interesting girl, and the glimpse he had had of her himself confirmed that opinion.

So it happened to Joyce's great astonishment, as she hurried back to the train, she met her mother walking slowly along beside Elsie. Phil, with Mary chattering to him like an amusing little magpie, was just behind them. Almost before she knew how it came about, she was walking with them, listening first to Elsie, then to Phil, as they told of the boarding-school she was going back to in California, and the Military Academy in which he was a cadet. They had been back home to spend the Christmas vacation with their father, whom they did not expect to see again for a long time. He was a physician, and now on his way to Berlin, where he expected to spend a year or two in scientific research.

At the warning call of all aboard, they hurried back to the car just as the boys came scrambling up the steps. Acquaintances grow almost as rapidly on these long overland journeys across the continent as they do on shipboard. The girls regretted the fact that they had not found each other earlier, but Jack and Phil soon made up for lost time. Phil, who had hunted wild goats among the rocks of Catalina Island, and Jack, who expected unlimited shooting of quail and ducks at Lee's Ranch, were not long in exchanging invitations for future hunting together, if either should happen to stray into the other's vicinity.

"I feel as if I had known you always," said Elsie to Joyce, as they separated, regretfully, at bedtime, wondering if they ever would meet again. "I wish you were going to the boarding-school with me."

"I wish you were going to stop in Arizona," answered Joyce. "Maybe you can come out to the ranch sometime, when you are on your way back East."

"I think that we ought to all sit up together to see the old year out and the new year in," protested Mary, indignant at being hurried off to bed at half-past seven.

"You'll see the change all right," remarked Jack, "and you'll have a chance to make a night of it. We have to get off at Maricopa a little after midnight, and there's no telling when that train for Ph[oe]nix will come along. They say it's always behind time."

Late that night, Elsie, wakened by the stopping of the train, looked at her watch. The new year had just dawned. A brakeman went through the car with a lantern. There were strange voices outside, a confusion of calls, and the curtains of her berth swayed and shook as a number of people hurried down the aisle, laden with baggage. Somebody tripped over a pair of shoes, left too far out in the aisle, and somebody muttered a complaint about always being wakened at Maricopa by people who had no more consideration for the travelling public than to make their changes in the dead of night.

"Maricopa," she thought, starting up on her elbow. "That is where the Wares are to get off." Raising the window-shade, she peered out into the night. Yes, there they were, just going into the station. Jack and Holland weighted down with baggage, Joyce helping the sweet-faced little mother with one hand, and dragging the drowsy Norman after her with the other, Mary sleepily bringing up the rear with her hat tipped over one eye, and her shoe-strings tripping her at every step.

"Bless her little soul, she's the funniest, fattest little chatterbox of a girl I ever saw," thought Elsie, as she watched her stumble into the station. "Good-bye, little vicar," she whispered, waving her hand. "May you always keep inflexible. I wonder if I'll ever see any of them again. I wish I were in a big family like that. They do have such good times together."

As the train pulled slowly out and went thundering on into the darkness, she tried to go to sleep again, but for a long time, whenever she closed her eyes, she saw the little house in Kansas that Mary had described so vividly. There it stood, empty and deserted in the snow, with the pathetic little Christmas-tree, left for the birds. And far away, the family who loved it so dearly were facing blithely and bravely the untried New Year, in which they were to make for themselves another home, somewhere out on the lonely desert.

"Oh, I do hope they'll keep 'inflexible,'" was Elsie's last waking thought. "I do hope they'll have a happy New Year."

CHAPTER II.

A ROBINSON CRUSOE OF THE DESERT

Joyce stood in the door of the little adobe house, and looked out across the desert with tears in her eyes. If *this* was to be their home through all the dreary years that stretched ahead of them, it hardly seemed worth while to go on living.

Jack, in the bare unfurnished room behind her, was noisily wielding a hatchet, opening the boxes and barrels of household goods which had followed them by freight. He did not know which one held his gun, but he was determined to find it before the sun went down.

For nearly three weeks they had been at Lee's Ranch, half a mile farther down the road, waiting for the goods to come, and to find a place where they could set up a home of their own. Boarding for a family of six was far too expensive to be afforded long. Now the boxes had arrived, and they had found a place, the only one for rent anywhere near the ranch. Joyce felt sick at heart as she looked around her.

"Here it is at last," called Jack, triumphantly, dropping the hatchet and throwing pillows and bedding out of the box in reckless haste to reach his most cherished possession, the fine hammerless shotgun which Mr. Link had given him Christmas. He had intended to carry it with him on the journey, in its carved leather case, but in the confusion of the hurried packing, some well-meaning neighbour had nailed it up in one of the boxes while he was absent, and there had been no time to rescue it. He had worried about it ever since.

"Oh, you beauty!" he exclaimed, rubbing his hand along the polished stock as he drew it from the case. Sitting on the floor tailor-fashion, he began whistling cheerfully as he fitted the parts together.

"Joyce," he called, peering down the barrels to see if any speck of rust had gathered in them, "do you suppose we brought any machine-oil with us? I'll uncrate the sewing-machine if you think that the can is likely to be in one of the drawers."

"I don't know," answered Joyce, in such a hopeless tone that Jack lowered his gun-barrels and stared at her in astonishment. Her back was toward him, but her voice certainly sounded choked with tears. It was so unusual for Joyce to cry that he felt that something very serious must be the cause.

"What's the matter, sister?" he inquired. "You aren't sick, are you?"

"Yes!" she exclaimed, with a sob, turning and throwing herself down on the pile of pillows he had just unpacked. "I'm sick of everything in this awful country! I'm sick of the desert, and of seeing nothing but invalids and sand and cactus and jack-rabbits wherever I go. And I'm sick of the prospect of living in this little hole of a mud-house, and working like a squaw, and never doing anything or being anything worth while. If I thought I had to go on all my life this way, I'd want to die right now!"

Jack viewed her uneasily. "Goodness, Joyce! I never knew you to go all to pieces this way before. You've always been the one to preach to us when things went wrong, that if we'd be inflexible that fortune would at last change in our favour."

"Inflexible fiddlesticks!" stormed Joyce from the depths of a bolster, where she had hidden her face, "I've been holding out against fate so long that I can't do it any more, and I'm going to give up, right here and now!"

"Then I don't know what will become of the rest of us," answered Jack, raising his empty gun to aim at a butcher-bird in the fig-tree outside the door. "It's you that has always kept things cheerful when we were down in the mouth."

Joyce sat up and wiped her eyes. "I think that it must be that old camel-back mountain out there that makes me feel so hopeless. It is so depressing to see it kneeling there in the sand, day after

day, like a poor old broken-down beast of burden, unable to move another step. It is just like us. Fate is too much for it."

Jack's glance followed hers through the open door. Straight and level, the desert stretched away toward the horizon, where a circle of mountains seemed to rise abruptly from the sands, and shut them in. There was Squaw's Peak on the left, cold and steely blue, and over on the right the bare buttes, like mounds of red ore, and just in front was the mountain they must face every time they looked from the door. Some strange freak of nature had given it the form of a giant camel, five miles long. There it knelt in the sand, with patient outstretched neck, and such an appearance of hopeless resignation to its lot, that Joyce was not the only one who found it depressing. More than one invalid, sent to the surrounding ranches for the life-giving atmosphere of Arizona, had turned his back on it with a shiver of premonition, saying, "It's just like me! Broken-down, and left to die on the desert. Neither of us will ever get away."

It made no difference to Jack what shape the mountains took. He could not understand Joyce's sensitiveness to her surroundings. But it made him uncomfortable to see her so despondent. He sat hugging his gun in silence a moment, not knowing how to answer her, and then began idly aiming it first in one direction, then another. Presently his glance happened to rest upon a battered book that had fallen from one of the boxes. He drew it toward him with his foot. It was open at a familiar picture, and on the opposite page was a paragraph which he had read so many times, that he could almost repeat it from memory.

"Hello!" he exclaimed. "Here's an old friend who was in as bad a fix as we are, Joyce, and he lived through it."

Leaning over, without picking up the book from the floor, he began reading from the page, printed in the large type of a child's picture-book:

"September 30, 1609. I, poor, miserable Robinson Crusoe, being shipwrecked during a dreadful storm in the offing, came on shore this dismal, unfortunate island, which I called the Island of Despair, all the rest of the ship's company being drowned, and myself almost dead. All the rest of the day I spent in afflicting myself at the dismal circumstances I was brought to, viz., I had neither house, clothes, weapons, nor place to fly to, and in despair of any relief saw nothing but death before me, either that I should be devoured by wild beasts, murdered by savages, or starved to death for want of food."

A long pause followed. Then Joyce sat up, looking teased, and held out her hand for the book. "I don't mind old Crusoe's preaching me a sermon," she said, as she turned the tattered leaves. "Now he's done it, I'll quit 'afflicting myself at the dismal circumstances I was brought to.' I've wished a thousand times, when I was smaller, that I could have been in his place, and had all his interesting adventures. And to think, here we are at last, in almost as bad a plight as he was. Only we have a weapon," she added, with a mischievous glance at the gun Jack was holding.

"And that means food, too," he answered, proudly, "for I expect to kill many a quail and duck with this."

"Oh, we're better off than Crusoe in a thousand ways, I suppose, if we'd only stop to count our blessings," she answered, now ready to take a more cheerful view of life since she had had her little outburst of rebellion. "He didn't have a Chinaman driving by with fresh vegetables twice a week, as we will have, and we have clothes, and a house, such as it is, and a place to fly to, for Lee's Ranch will always be open to us if we need a refuge."

"So we can start at the place where Crusoe was when he really began to enjoy his Island of Despair," said Jack. "Shall I go on unpacking these things? I stopped when you announced that you were going to give up and die, for I thought there wouldn't be any use trying to do anything, with you in the dumps like that."

Joyce looked around the dingy room. "It's not worth while to unpack till the place has been scrubbed from top to bottom. If we're going to make a home of it, we'll have to begin right. The

landlord won't do anything, and we could hardly expect him to, considering the small amount of rent we pay, but I don't see how we can live in it without fresh paper and paint."

"I wish we'd find a ship cast up on the sands of the desert to-morrow," said Jack, "that would have all sorts of supplies and tools in it. The shipwrecks helped old Robinson out amazingly. I'd make a bookcase if we did, and put up shelves and all sorts of things. This would be a fine place to show what I learned in the manual training-school. We need benches and rustic seats out under those umbrella-trees."

"We'll have to buy some tools," said Joyce. "Let's make out a list of things we need, and go to town early in the morning. Mrs. Lee said we could borrow Bogus and the surrey to-morrow."

"All right," assented Jack, ready for anything that promised change.

"And *Jack!*" she exclaimed, after a long slow survey of the room, "let's paint and paper this place ourselves! I'm sure we can do it. There's a tape measure in one of the machine drawers. Suppose you get it out and measure the room, so we'll know how much paper to buy."

Joyce was her old brave, cheery self again now, giving orders like a major-general, and throwing herself into the work at hand with contagious enthusiasm. With the stub of a pencil Jack found in his pocket, she began making a memorandum on the fly-leaf of Robinson Crusoe. "Paint, turpentine, brushes, screws, nails, saw, mop, broom, scrubbing-brush, soap," she wrote rapidly.

"And a hatchet," added Jack. "This one belongs to the Mexican at the ranch. And, oh, yes, an axe. He says that Holland and I can get all the wood we need right here on the desert, without its costing us a cent, if we're willing to chop it; mesquite roots, you know, and greasewood."

"It's fortunate we can get something without paying for it," commented Joyce, as she added an axe to the list. Then she sat studying the possibilities of the room, while Jack knocked the crate from the machine, found the tape measure, and did a sum in arithmetic to find the amount of paper it would take to cover the walls.

"I can see just how it is going to look when we are all through," she said, presently. "When this old dark woodwork is painted white, and these dismal walls are covered with fresh light paper, and there are clean, airy curtains at the windows, it won't seem like the same place. Mamma mustn't see it till it is all in order."

Exhausted by the journey, Mrs. Ware had been too weak to worry over their future, or even to wonder what would become of them, and had handed over the little bank-book to Joyce.

"Make it go just as far as it will, dear," she said. "You are too young to have such a load laid on your shoulders, but I see no other way now." Joyce had taken up the burden of responsibility so bravely that no one but Jack knew of her moments of discouragement, and he was forgetting her recent tears in her present enthusiasm.

"Oh, I wish it was to-morrow," she exclaimed, "and we had all our supplies bought so that we could begin."

"So do I," answered Jack. "But it's nearly sundown now, and the supper-bell will be ringing before we get back to the ranch, if we don't start soon."

"Well, lock the doors, and we'll go," said Joyce, beginning to pin on her hat.

"Oh, what's the use of being so particular! Mrs. Lee says everybody is honest out in this country. They never turn a key on the ranch, and they've never had anything taken either by Mexicans or Indians in all the years they've lived here. It isn't half as wild as I hoped it would be. I wish I could have been a pioneer, and had some of the exciting times they had."

Nevertheless, Jack barred the back door and locked the front one, before following Joyce across the yard, and over the little bridge spanning the irrigating canal, into the public road. They stood there a moment, looking back at the house, just one big square adobe room, with a shed-kitchen in the rear. Around three sides of it ran a rough sort of porch or shack, built of cottonwood posts, supporting a thatch of bamboo-stalks and palm-leaves. While it would afford a fine shelter from the

sun in the tropical summer awaiting them, it was a homely, primitive-looking affair, almost as rough in its appearance as if Robinson Crusoe himself had built it.

"It's hopeless, isn't it!" said Joyce, with a despairing shake of the head. "No matter how homelike we may make it inside, it will always be the picture of desolation outside."

"Not when the leaves come out on that row of umbrella-trees," answered Jack. "Mrs. Lee says they will be so green and bushy that they will almost hide the house, and the blossoms on them in the spring are as purple and sweet as lilacs. Then this row of fig-trees along the road, and the clump of cottonwoods back of the house, and those two big pepper-trees by the gate will make it cool and shady here, no matter how scorching hot the desert may be. We'll have to give them lots of water. Oh, that reminds me, I'll have to have a pair of rubber boots, if I am to do the irrigating. The water will be in again day after to-morrow."

Joyce groaned as she opened the book she was carrying, and added boots to the long list on the fly-leaf. "What a lot it's going to take to get us started. Crusoe certainly had reason to be thankful for the shipwrecked stores he found."

"But it'll cost less to get the boots than to hire a Mexican every eight days to do the irrigating," said Jack.

Following the road beside the canal, they walked along in the last rays of the sunset, toward the ranch. Birds twittered now and then in the fig-trees on their right, or a string of cows went lowing homeward through the green alfalfa pastures, to the milking. The road and canal seemed to run between two worlds, for on the left it was all a dreary desert, the barren sands stretching away toward the red buttes and old Camelback Mountain, as wild and cheerless as when the Indians held possession. Some day it too would "rejoice and blossom like the rose," but not until a network of waterways dug across it brought it new life.

Once as they walked along, a jack-rabbit crossed their path and went bounding away in a fright. A covey of quail rose with a loud whirr of wings from a clump of bushes beside the road, but they met no human being until Holland and Mary, just from school, came racing out from the ranch to meet them with eager questions about the new home.

Chris, the Mexican, had made the round of the tents, building a little fire of mesquite wood in each tiny drum stove, for in February the air of the desert grows icy as soon as the sun disappears. Mrs. Ware was sitting in a rocking-chair between the stove and table, on which stood a lamp with a yellow shade, sending a cheerful glow all over the tent. Joyce took the remaining chair, Jack sat on the wood-box, and Mary, Norman and Holland piled upon the bed, to take part in the family conclave. The canvas curtain had been dropped over the screen-door, and the bright Indian rugs on the floor gave a touch of warmth and cosiness to the tent that made it seem wonderfully bright and homelike.

"I don't see," said Mary, when she had listened to a description of the place, "how we are all going to eat and sleep and live in one room and a kitchen. It takes three tents to hold us all here, besides having the ranch dining-room to eat in. What if Eugenia Forbes should come from the Waldorf-Astoria to visit us, or the Little Colonel, or some of the other girls from Kentucky, that you knew at the house-party, Joyce? Where would they sleep?"

"Yes," chimed in Holland, teasingly, "or the Queen of Sheba? Suppose *she* should come with all her train. It's about as likely. We would have to play 'Pussy wants a corner' all night, Mary, and whoever happened to be 'it' would have to sit up until he happened to find somebody out of his corner."

"Goosey!" exclaimed Mary, sticking out her tongue at him and making the worst face she could screw up. "Honestly, what would we do, Joyce?"

"We're not going to try to live in just one room," explained Joyce. "The doctor said mamma ought to sleep in a tent, so we'll get a big double one like this, wainscoted up high, with floor and screen-door, just like this. Mamma and you and I can use that, and the boys will have just an ordinary camping-tent, without door or floor. They have been so wild to be pioneers that they will be glad to come as near to it as possible, and that means living without extra comforts and conveniences. In the

house one corner of the room will be the library, where we'll put papa's desk, and one corner will be the sewing-room, where we'll have the machine, and one will be a cosy corner, with the big lounge and lots of pillows. If the Queen of Sheba or the Little Colonel should do such an improbable thing as to stray out here, we'll have a place for them."

"There goes the supper-bell," cried Norman, scrambling down from the bed in hot haste to beat Mary to the table. Joyce waited to turn down the lamp, close the stove draughts, and bring her mother's shawl, before following them.

"How bright the camp looks with a light in every tent," she said, as they stepped out under the stars. "They look like the transparencies in the torchlight processions, that we used to have back in Plainsville."

Mrs. Ware's tent was in the front row, so it was only a step to the door of the dining-room in the ranch house. The long table was nearly filled when they took their seats. Gathered around it were people who had drifted there from all parts of the world in search of lost health. A Boston law-student, a Wyoming cowboy, a Canadian minister, a Scotchman from Inverness, and a jolly Irish lad from Belfast were among the number.

The most interesting one to Joyce was an old Norwegian who sat opposite her, by the name of Jan Ellestad. Not old in years, for his hair was still untouched by gray, and his dark eyes flashed at times with the spirit of the old vikings, when he told the folk-lore of his fatherland. But he was old in sad experiences, and broken health, and broken hopes. The faint trace of a foreign accent that clung to his speech made everything he said seem interesting to Joyce, and after Mrs. Lee had told her something of his history, she looked upon him as a hero. This was the third winter he had come back to the ranch. He knew he could not live through another year, and he had stopped making plans for himself, but he listened with unfailing cheerfulness to other people's. Now he looked up expectantly as Joyce took her seat.

"I can see by your face, Miss Joyce," he said, in his slow, hesitating way, as if groping for the right words, "that you are about to plunge this ranch into another wild excitement. What is it now, please?"

"Guess!" said Joyce, glancing around the table. "Everybody can have one guess."

During the three weeks that the Wares had been on the ranch they had made many friends among the boarders. Most of them could do little but sit in the sun and wait for the winter to creep by, so they welcomed anything that relieved the monotony of the long idle days. Mary's unexpected remarks gave fresh zest to the conversation. The boys, bubbling over with energy and high spirits, were a constant source of entertainment, and Joyce's enthusiasms were contagious. She was constantly coming in from the desert with some strange discovery to arouse the interest of the listless little company.

Now, as her challenge passed around the table, any one hearing her laugh at the amusing replies would not have dreamed that only a few hours before she was sobbing to Jack that she was sick of seeing nothing but invalids and sand and cactus.

"We haven't any name for our new home," she announced, "and I'm thinking of having a name contest. Any one can offer an unlimited number, and the best shall receive a prize."

"Then I'll win," responded the Scotchman, promptly. "There's nae mair appropriate name for a wee bit lodging-place like that, than *Bide-a-wee*."

"That is pretty," said Joyce, repeating it thoughtfully. "I love the old song by that name, but I'm afraid that it isn't exactly appropriate. You see, we may have to bide there for years and years instead of just a wee."

"Give it a Spanish name," said the minister. "Alamo means cottonwood, and you have a group of cottonwoods there. That would be just as good as naming it The Pines, or The Oaks, or The Beeches."

"No, call it something Indian," said the cowboy. "Something that means little-mud-house-in-the-desert, yet has a high-sounding swing to the syllables."

"Wait till we get through fixing it," interrupted Jack. "It'll look so fine that you won't dare call it little-mud-house-in-the-desert. We're going to paint and paper it ourselves."

"Not you two children," exclaimed the Norwegian, in surprise.

"With our own lily fingers," answered Joyce.

"Then you'll have an interested audience," he answered. "You'll find all of us who are able to walk perching in the fig-trees outside your door every morning, waiting for the performance to begin."

"Whoever perches there will have to descend and help, won't they, Jack?" said Joyce, saucily.

"Oh, mamma," whispered Mary, "is Mr. Ellestad really going to climb up in the fig-tree and watch them? *Please* let me stay home from school and help. I know I can't study if I go, for I'll be thinking of all the fun I'm missing."

CHAPTER III.

A DAY AT SCHOOL

It was with a most unwilling mind and an unhappy heart that Mary began her third week at school. In the first place she could not bear to tear herself away from all that was going on at the new house. She wanted to have a hand in the dear delights of home-making. She wanted to poke the camp-fire, and dabble in the paste, and watch the walls grow fresh and clean as the paper spread over the old patches. The smell of the fresh paint drew her, and gave her a feeling that there were all sorts of delightful possibilities in this region, yet unexplored.

In the second place, life in the new school was a grievous burden, because the boys, seeing how easily she was teased, found their chief pleasure in annoying her. She was a trusting little soul, ready to nibble the bait that any trap offered.

"Never mind! You'll get used to it after awhile," her mother said, consolingly, each evening when she came home with a list of fresh woes. "You're tired now from that long walk home. Things will seem better after supper." And Joyce would add, "Don't look so doleful, Mother Bunch; just remember the vicar, and keep inflexible. Fortune is bound to change in your favour after awhile." But the third Friday found her as unhappy as the third Monday.

There were two rooms in the school building, one containing all the primary classes, the other the grammar grades, where Holland found a place. Mary had one of the back seats in the primary department, and one of the highest hooks in the cloak-room, on which to hang her belongings. But this Friday morning she did not leave her lunch-basket in either place.

She and Patty Ritter, the little girl who sat across the aisle from her, had had an indignation-meeting the day before, and agreed to hide their baskets in a hedgerow, so that there could be no possibility of Wig Smith's finding them. Salt on one's jelly cake and pepper in one's apple-pie two days in succession is a little too much to be borne calmly. Wig Smith's fondness for seasoning other people's lunches was only one of his many obnoxious traits.

"There," said Mary, scanning the horizon anxiously, to see that no prowling boy was in sight. "Nobody would think of looking behind that prickly cactus for a lunch-basket! We're sure of not going hungry to-day!"

With their arms around each other, they strolled back to the schoolhouse, taking a roundabout way, with great cunning, to throw Wig Smith off the track, in case he should be watching. But their precautions were needless this time. Wig had set up a dentist's establishment on the steps of the stile, his stock in trade being a pocket-knife and a hat full of raw turnips. Nothing could have been friendlier than the way he greeted Mary and Patty, insisting that they each needed a set of false teeth. Half a dozen of his friends had already been fitted out, and stood around, grinning, in order to show the big white turnip teeth he had fitted over the set provided by Nature. As the teeth were cut in irregular shapes, wide square-tipped ones alternating with long pointed fangs, and the upper lip had to be drawn tightly to hold them in place, the effect was so comical that they could hardly hold the new sets in position for laughing at each other.

In payment for his work, Wig accepted almost anything that his customers had to offer: marbles, when he could get them, pencils, apples, fish-hooks, even a roll of tin-foil, saved from many chewing-gum packages, which was all one girl had to trade.

A search through Mary's orderly pencil-box failed to show anything that he wanted of hers, but the neatly prepared home lesson which fluttered out of her arithmetic caught his eye. He agreed to make her the teeth for a copy of six problems which he could not solve. Mary had much the hardest part of the bargain, for, sitting on the stile, she patiently copied long-division sums until the second bell rang, while he turned off the teeth with a few masterful strokes of his knife.

"Let's all put them in as soon as we're done singing, and wear them till we recite spelling," he suggested. "It's mighty hard to keep from chawin' on 'em after they've been in your mouth awhile. Let's see who can keep them in longest. Every five minutes by the clock, if the teacher isn't lookin', we'll all grin at onct to show that they're still in."

Needless to say, the usual Friday morning studiousness did not prevail in the primary room that morning. Too many eyes were watching the clock for the moment of display to arrive, and when it did arrive, the coughing and choking that was set up to hide the titters, plainly told the teacher that some mischief was afoot. If she could have turned in time to see the distorted faces, she must have laughed too, it was such a comical sight, but she was trying to explain to a row of stupid little mathematicians the mysteries of borrowing in subtraction, and always looked up a moment too late.

Mary Ware, having written every word of her spelling lesson from memory, and compared it with her book to be sure that she knew it, now had a quarter of an hour of leisure. This she devoted to putting her desk in order. The books were dusted and piled in neat rows. Everything in her pencil-box was examined, and laid back with care, the slate-rag folded and tucked under the moist sponge. There was another box in her desk. It had bunches of violets on it and strips of lace-paper lining the sides. It smelled faintly of the violet soap it had once held. She kept several conveniences in this, pins, and an extra hair-ribbon in case of loss, a comb, and a little round mirror with a celluloid back, on which was printed the advertisement of a Plainsville druggist.

As she polished the little mirror, the temptation to use it was too great to resist. Holding it under the desk, she stretched her lips back as far as possible in a grotesque grin, to show her set of turnip teeth. They looked so funny that she tried it again with variations, rolling her eyes and wrinkling her nose. So absorbed was she that she did not realize that a silence had fallen in the room, that the recitation had stopped and all eyes were turned upon her. Then her own name, spoken in a stern tone, startled her so that she bounced in her seat and dropped the mirror.

"Why, *Mary Ware!* I'm *astonished!* Come here!"

Blushing and embarrassed at being called into public notice, Mary stumbled up to the platform, and submitted to an examination of her mouth. Then, following orders, she went to the door, and with much sputtering spat the teeth out into the yard.

"I'll see you about this after school," remarked the teacher, sternly, as she stumbled back to her seat, overcome by mortification.

If the teacher had not been so busy watching Mary obey orders, she would have noticed a rapid moving of many jaws along the back row of seats, and a mighty gulping and swallowing, as the other sets of teeth disappeared down the throats of their owners.

"So this has been the cause of so much disturbance this morning," she remarked, crossly. "I'm astonished that one of the quietest pupils in the school should have behaved in such a manner." Then as a precaution she added, "Is there any one else in the room who has any of these turnip teeth? Raise your hands if you have."

Not a hand went up, and every face met Mary's indignant accusing gaze with such an innocent stare that she cried out:

"Oh, what a story!"

"Open your mouths," commanded the teacher. "Turn your pockets wrong side out."

To Mary's amazement, nobody had so much as a taste of turnip to show, and she stood accused of being the only offender, the only one with judgment awaiting her after school. With her head on her desk, and her face hidden on her arms, she cried softly all through the spelling recitation. "It wasn't fair," she sobbed to herself.

Patty comforted her at recess with half her stick of licorice, and several of the other girls crowded around her, begging her to come and play Bird, and not to mind what the boys said, and not to look around when Wig Smith mimicked the teacher's manner, and called after her in a tantalizing tone, "Why, *Mary Ware!* I'm *astonished!*"

Gradually they won her away from her tears, and before recess was over she was shrieking with the gayest of them as they raced around the schoolhouse to escape the girl who, being "It," personated the "bad man."

As they dropped into their seats at the close of recess, hot and panting, a boy from the grammar room came in and spoke to the teacher. It was Paul Archer, a boy from New York, whose father had recently bought a ranch near by. He held up a string of amber beads, as the teacher asked, "Does this belong to any one in this room?"

They were beautiful beads. Mary caught her breath as she looked at them. "Like drops of rain strung on a sunbeam," she thought, watching them sparkle as he turned and twisted the string. Paul was a big boy, very clean and very good-looking, and as little Blanche Ellert came up to claim her necklace, blushing and shaking back her curls, he held it out with such a polite, dancing-school bow that Mary's romantic little soul was greatly impressed. She wished that the beautiful beads had been hers, and that she had lost them, and could have claimed them before the whole school, and had them surrendered to her in that princely way. She would like to lose a ring, she thought, that is, if she had one, or a locket, and have Paul find it, and give it to her before the whole school.

Then she remembered that she had worn her best jacket to school that morning, and in the pocket was a handkerchief that had been hung on the Sunday-school Christmas-tree for her in Plainsville. It was a little white silk one, embroidered in the corners with sprays of forget-me-nots, blue, with tiny pink buds. What if she should lose that and Paul should find it, and hold up the pretty thing in sight of all the school for her to claim?

As the morning wore on, the thought pleased her more and more. The primary grades were dismissed first at noon, so she had time to slip the handkerchief from her jacket-pocket, tiptoe guiltily into the other cloak-room, and drop it under a certain wide-brimmed felt hat, which hung on its peg with a jauntier grace than the other caps and sombreros could boast. It seemed to stare at her in surprise. Half-frightened by her own daring, she tiptoed out again, and ran after Patty, who was hunting for her outside.

"There won't be any salt in our cake and pepper in our pie to-day," Patty said, confidently, as they strolled off together with their arms around each other. "Let's get our baskets, and go away off out of sight to eat our dinners. I know the nicest place down by the lateral under some cottonwood-trees. The water is running to-day."

"It'll be like having a picnic beside a babbling brook," assented Mary. "I love to hear the water gurgle through the water-gate."

Seated on a freshly hewn log, after a careful survey had convinced them that no lizards, Gila monsters, or horned toads lurked underneath, the little girls opened their baskets, and shook out their napkins. The next instant a wail rose from them in unison:

"Ants! Nasty little black ants! They're over everything!"

"Just look at my chicken sandwiches," mourned Mary, "and all that lovely gingerbread. They're walking all over it and through it and into it and around it. There isn't a spot that they haven't touched!"

"And my mince turnovers," cried Patty. "I brought one for you to-day, too, and a devilled egg. But there isn't a thing in my basket that's fit to eat."

"Nor mine, either," said Mary, "except the apples. We might wash them in the lateral."

"And I'm nearly starved, I'm so hungry," grumbled Patty. "An apple's better than nothing, but it doesn't go very far."

"It's no use to go and ask Holland for any of his lunch," said Mary. "By this time he's gobbled up even the scraps, and busted the bag. He always brings his in a paper bag, so's there'll be no basket to carry home."

Cautiously leaning over the bank of the lateral, Mary began dabbling her apple back and forth in the water, and Patty, kneeling beside her, followed her example. Suddenly Patty's apple slipped out of her hand, and she clutched frantically at Mary's arm in her effort to save it, and at the same

time keep her balance. Both swayed and fell sideways. Mary's arm plunged into the water, wetting her sleeve nearly to her shoulder, but, clawing at the earth and long grass with the other hand, she managed, after much scrambling, to regain her position.

Patty, with a scream, rolled over into the water. The ditch was shallow, not more than waist-deep, but as she had fallen full length, she came up soaking wet. Even her hair dripped muddy little rivers down over her face. There was no more school for Patty that day. As soon as her old yellow horse could be saddled, she started off on a lope toward dry clothes and a hot dinner.

Mary looked after her longingly, as she sat with her sleeve held out in the sun to dry, and slowly munched her one cold apple. She was so hungry and miserable that she wanted to cry, yet this child of nine was a philosopher in her small way.

"I'm not having half as bad a time as the old vicar had," she said to herself, "so I won't be a baby. Seems to me, though, that it's about time fortune was changing in my favour. Maybe the turn will be when Paul finds my forget-me-not handkerchief."

With that time in view, she carefully smoothed the wrinkles out of her sleeve as it dried, and pulled the lace edging into shape around the cuff. Then she combed the front of her hair, and retied the big bows. She was not equal to the task of braiding it herself, but a glance into the little celluloid mirror satisfied her that she looked neat enough to march up before the school when the time should come for her to claim her handkerchief.

Every time the door opened before the afternoon recess she looked up expectantly, her cheeks growing red and her heart beating fast. But no Paul appeared, or anybody else who had found anything to be restored to its owner. She began to feel anxious, and to wonder if she would ever see her beloved forget-me-not handkerchief again.

At recess she dodged back into the hall after every one had passed out, and stole a quick glance into the other cloak-room. The handkerchief was gone. Somebody had picked it up. Maybe the finder had been too busy to search for the owner. It would be brought in before school closed; just before dismissal probably. The prospect took part of the sting out of the recollection that she was to be kept after school that evening, for the first time in her life.

During the last period in the afternoon, the A Geography class always studied its lesson for next day. Mary specially liked this study, and with her little primary geography propped up in front of her, carefully learned every word of description, both large print and small, on the page devoted to Africa.

"Your hair is coming undone," whispered the girl behind her. "Let me plait it for you. I love to fool with anybody's hair."

Mary nodded her consent without turning around, and sat up straight in her seat, so that Jennie could reach it with greater ease. She never took her eyes from the page. The teacher, who was putting home lessons on the board for the D Arithmetic to copy, was too busy to notice Jennie's new occupation.

Mary enjoyed the soft touch of Jennie's fingers on her hair. It felt so good to have it pulled into place with smooth, deft pats here and there. After the bows were tied on, Jennie still continued to play with it, braiding the ends below the ribbon into plaits that grew thinner and thinner, until they ended in points as fine and soft as a camel's-hair paint-brush. Evidently they suggested brushes to Jennie, for presently she dived into her desk for something quite foreign to school work. It was a little palette-shaped card on which were arranged seven cakes of cheap water-colour paint. The brush attached to the palette had been lost on Christmas Day, before she had had more than one trial of her skill as an artist.

The water-bottle, which held the soap-suds devoted to slate-cleaning, stood behind the pile of books in her desk. She drew that out, and, having uncorked it, carefully dipped the end of one of Mary's braids into it. Then rubbing it across the cake of red paint, she proceeded with a joyful heart to paint the African lion in her geography the most brilliant red that can be imagined.

Mary, still enjoying the gentle pull, little guessed what a bloody tip swung behind her right shoulder. Then the caressing touch was transferred to the left braid, and the greenest of green Bedouins, mounted on the most purple of camels, appeared on the picture of the Sahara.

The signal for dismissal, sounding from the principal's room across the hall, surprised both the girls. The time had passed so rapidly. Mary, putting her hand back to feel if her bows were properly tied, suddenly jerked her right braid forward in alarm. The end was wet, and – was it *blood* that made it so red? With a horrified expression she clutched the other one, and finding that wet and green, turned squarely around in her seat. She was just in time to see the geography closing on the red lion and green Bedouin, and realized in a flash how Jennie had been "fooling" with her hair.

Before she could sputter out her indignation, the teacher rapped sharply on the table for attention. "Will you *please* come to order, Mary Ware?" she said, sternly. "Remember, you are to remain after the others are dismissed."

To have been publicly reprimanded twice in one day, to have been kept after school, to have had one's lunch spoiled by ants, and to have been left miserably hungry all afternoon, to have had the shock of a plunge almost to the shoulder in icy water, and the discomfort of having a wet sleeve dried on one's arm, to have had one's hair used as paint-brushes, so that stains were left on the back of the new gingham dress, was too much. Mary could keep inflexible no longer. Then she remembered that no one had brought back the forget-me-not handkerchief, and with that to cap her woes, she laid her head down on the desk and sobbed while the others filed out and left her.

Usually, Holland found her waiting for him by the stile when the grammar grades were dismissed, but not seeing her there, he forgot all about her, and dashed on after the boy who tagged him. Then he and George Lee hurried on home to set a new gopher-trap they had invented, without giving her a thought. The faithful Patty, who always walked with her as far as the turn, had not come back to school after her plunge into the lateral. So it came about that when Mary finally put on her hat and jacket in the empty cloak-room, the playground was deserted. As far as her tear-swollen eyes could see up and down the road, not a child was in sight. With a sob, she stood a moment on the top step of the stile, then slowly swinging her lunch-basket, in which there were no scraps as usual to appease her after-school hunger, she started on the long, two-mile walk home.

It looked later than it really was, for the sun was not shining. She had gone on a long way, when a sound of hoofs far down the road made her look back. What she saw made her give another startled glance over her shoulder, and quicken her pace. Half-running, she looked back again. The sound was coming nearer. So was the rider. Another glance made her stand still, her knees shaking under her; for on the pony was an Indian, a big, stolid buck, with black hair hanging in straight locks over his shoulders.

She looked wildly around. Nobody else was in sight, no house anywhere. The biggest man-eating tiger in the jungles could not have terrified her like the sight of that lone Indian. All the tales that Jack and Holland had told for their mutual frightening, all that she had read herself of tortures and cruelties came into her mind. Their name was legion, and they were startlingly fresh in her memory, for only the evening before she had finished a book called "On the Borders with Crook," and the capture of the Oatman girls had been repeated in her dreams.

Sure that the Indian intended to tomahawk her the instant he reached her, she gave one stifled gasp of terror, and started down the road as fast as her fat little legs could carry her. A few rods farther on her hat flew off, but she was running for her life, and even the handsome steel buckle that had once been Cousin Kate's could not be rescued at such a risk.

She felt that she was running in a treadmill. Her legs were going up and down, up and down, faster than they had ever moved before, but she seemed to be making no progress; she was unable to get past that one spot in the road. And the Indian was coming on nearer and nearer, with deadly certainty, gaining on her at every breath. She felt that she had been running for a week, that she could

not possibly take another step. But with one more frantic glance backward, she gave another scream, and dashed on harder than before.

CHAPTER IV. WARE'S WIGWAM

Phil Tremont, driving out from Phoenix in a high, red-wheeled cart, paused at the cross-roads, uncertain whether to turn there or keep on to the next section-line. According to part of the directions given him, this was the turning-place. Still, he had not yet come in sight of Camelback Mountain, which was to serve as a guide-post. Not a house was near at which he might inquire, and not a living thing in sight except a jack-rabbit, which started up from the roadside, and bounded away at his approach.

Then he caught sight of the little whirl of dust surrounding Mary in her terrified flight, and touched his horse with the whip. In a moment he was alongside of the breathless, bareheaded child.

"Little girl," he called, "can you tell me if this is the road to Lee's ranch?" Then, as she turned a dirty, tear-stained face, he exclaimed, in amazement, "Of all people under the sun! The little vicar! Well, you *are* a sprinter! What are you racing with?"

Mary sank down on the road, so exhausted by her long run that she breathed in quick, gasping sobs. Her relief at seeing a white face instead of a red one was so great that she had no room for surprise in her little brain that the face should be Phil Tremont's, who was supposed to be far away in California. She recognized him instantly, although he no longer wore his uniform, and the broad-brimmed hat he wore suggested the cowboy of the plains rather than the cadet of the military school.

"What are you racing with?" he repeated, laughingly. "That jack-rabbit that passed me down yonder?"

"A – a – a *Indian*!" she managed to gasp. "He chased me – all the way – from the schoolhouse!"

"An Indian!" repeated Phil, standing up in the cart to look back down the road. "Oh, it must have been that old fellow I passed half a mile back. He was an ugly-looking specimen, but he couldn't have chased you; his pony was so stiff and old it couldn't go out of a walk."

"He *was* a-chasing me!" insisted Mary, the tears beginning to roll down her face again. She looked so little and forlorn, sitting there in a heap beside the road, that Phil sprang from the cart, and picked her up in his strong arms.

"There," said he, lifting her into the cart. "'Weep no more, my lady, weep no more to-day!' Fortune has at last changed in your favour. You are snatched from the bloody scalper of the plains, and shall be driven home in style by your brave rescuer, if you'll only tell me which way to go."

The tear-stained little face was one broad smile as Mary leaned back in the seat. She pointed up the road to a clump of umbrella-trees. "That's where we turn," she said. "When you come to the trees you'll see there's a little house behind them. It's the White Bachelor's. We call him that because his horse and dog and cows and cats and chickens are all white. That's how I first remembered where to turn on my way home, by the place where there's so awful many white chickens. I was hoping to get to his place before I died of running, when you came along. You saved my life, didn't you? I never had my life saved before. Wasn't it strange the way you happened by at exactly the right moment? It's just as if we were in a book. I thought you were away off in California at school. How *did* it happen anyway?" she asked, peering up at him under his broad-brimmed hat.

A dull red flushed his face an instant, then he answered, lightly, "Oh, I thought I'd take a vacation. I got tired of school, and I've started out to see the world. I remembered what your brother said about the quail-shooting out here, and the ducks, so I thought I'd try it a few weeks, and then go on somewhere else. I've always wanted a taste of ranch life and camping."

"I'm tired of school, too," said Mary, "specially after all the terrible unpleasant things that have happened to-day. But my family won't let me stop, not if I begged all night and all day. How did you get yours to?"

"Didn't ask 'em," said Phil, grimly. "Just chucked it, and came away."

"But didn't your father say anything at all? Didn't he care?"

The red came up again in the boy's face. "He doesn't know anything about it – yet; he's in Europe, you know."

They had reached the White Bachelor's now, and turning, took the road that ran like a narrow ribbon between the irrigated country and the desert. On one side were the wastes of sand between the red buttes and old Camelback Mountain, on the other were the green ranches with their rows of figs and willows and palms, bordering all the waterways.

"Now we're just half a mile from Lee's ranch," said Mary. "We'll be there in no time."

"Do you suppose they'll have room for me?" inquired Phil. "That's what I've come out for, to engage board."

"Oh, I'm sure they will, anyhow, after to-morrow, for we're going to move then, and that'll leave three empty tents. We've rented a place half a mile farther up the road, and Jack and Joyce are having more fun fixing it up. That's one reason I want to stop school. I'm missing all the good times."

"Hello! This seems to be quite a good-sized camp!" exclaimed Phil, as they came in sight of an adobe house, around which clustered a group of twenty or more tents, like a brood of white chickens around a motherly old brown hen. "There comes Mrs. Lee now," cried Mary, as a tall, black-haired woman came out of the house, and started across to one of the tents with a tray in her hands. Her pink dress fluttered behind her as she moved forward, with a firm, light tread, suggestive of buoyant spirits and unbounded cheerfulness.

"She's doing something for somebody all the time," remarked Mary. "If you were sick she'd nurse you as if she was your mother, but as long as you're not sick, maybe she won't let you come. Oh, I never thought about that. This is a camp for invalids, you know, and she is so interested in helping sick people get well, that maybe she won't take any interest in you. Have you got a letter from anybody? Oh, I do hope you have!"

"A letter," repeated Phil. "What kind?"

"A letter to say that you're all right, you know, from somebody that knows you. I heard her tell Doctor Adams last week that she wouldn't take anybody else unless she had a letter of – of something or other, I can't remember, because one man went off without paying his board. We had a letter from her brother."

"No, I haven't any letter of recommendation or introduction, if that's what you mean," said Phil, "but maybe I can fix it up all right with her. Can't you say a good word for me?"

"Of course," answered Mary, taking his question in all seriousness. "And I'll run and get mamma, too. She'll make it all right."

Springing out, Phil lifted her over the wheel, and then stood flicking the dry Bermuda grass with his whip, as he waited for Mary to announce his coming. He could hear her shrill little voice in the tent, whither she had followed Mrs. Lee to tell her of his arrival.

"It's the Mr. Phil Tremont we met on the train," he heard her say. "Don't you know, the one I told you about running away with his little sister and the monkey and the music-box one time. He isn't sick, but he wants to stay here awhile, and I told him you'd be good to him, anyhow."

Then she hurried away to her mother's tent, and Mrs. Lee came out laughing. There was something so genial and friendly in the humorous twinkle of her eyes, something so frank and breezy in her hospitable Western welcome, that Phil met her with the same outspoken frankness.

"I heard what Mary said," he began, "and I do hope you'll take me in, for I've run away again, Mrs. Lee." Then his handsome face sobered, and he said, in his straightforward, boyish way that Mrs. Lee found very attractive, "I got into a scrape at the military school. It wasn't anything wicked, but four of us were fired. The other fellows' fathers got them taken back, but mine is in Europe, and it's so unsatisfactory making explanations at that long range, and I thought they hadn't been altogether

fair in the matter, so I – well, I just skipped out. Mary said I'd have to have references. I can't give you any now, but I can pay in advance for a month's board, if you'll take me that way."

He pulled out such a large roll of bills as he spoke, that Mrs. Lee looked at him keenly. All sorts of people had drifted to her ranch, but never before a schoolboy of seventeen with so much money in his pocket. He caught the glance, and something in the motherly concern that seemed to cross her face made him say, hastily, "Father left an emergency fund for my sister and me when he went away, besides our monthly allowance, and I drew on mine before I came out here."

While they were discussing prices, Mrs. Ware came out with a cordial greeting. Mary's excited tale of her rescue had almost led her to believe that Phil had snatched her little daughter from an Indian's tomahawk. She was heartily glad to see him, for the few hours' acquaintance on the train had given her a strong interest in the motherless boy and girl, and she had thought of them many times since then. Phil felt that in coming back to the Wares he was coming back to old friends. After it was settled that he might send his trunk out next day, when a tent would be vacant, he sat for a long time talking to Mrs. Ware and Mary, in the rustic arbour covered with bamboo and palm leaves.

Chris was calling the cows to the milking when he finally rose to go, and only rapid driving would take him back to Phoenix before nightfall. As the red wheels disappeared down the road, Mary exclaimed, "This has certainly been the most exciting day of my life! It has been so full of unexpected things. Isn't it grand to think that Mr. Phil is coming to the ranch? Fortune certainly changed in my favour when he happened along just in time to save my life. Oh, dear, there come Joyce and Jack! They've just missed him!"

Saturday afternoon found the new home all ready for its occupants. Even the trunks had been brought up from the ranch and stowed away in the tents. Although it was only two o'clock, the table was already set for tea in one corner of the clean, fresh kitchen, behind a tall screen.

Joyce, with her blue calico sleeves tucked up above her white elbows, whistled softly as she tied on a clean apron before beginning her baking. She had not been as happy in months. The hard week's work had turned the bare adobe house into a comfortable little home, and she could hardly wait for her mother to see it. Mrs. Lee was to bring her and Norman over in the surrey. Any moment they might come driving up the road.

Jack had offered to stay if his services were needed further, but she had sent him away to take his well-earned holiday. As he tramped off with his gun over his shoulder, her voice followed him pleasantly: "Good luck to you, Jack. You deserve it, for you've stuck by me like a man this week."

Since dinner Mary and Holland had swept the yard, brought wood for the camp-fire, filled the boiler and the pitchers in the tents, and then gone off, as Joyce supposed, to rest under the cottonwood-trees. Presently she heard Mary tiptoeing into the sitting-room, and peeped in to find her standing in the middle of the floor, with her hands clasped behind her.

"Isn't it sweet and homey!" Mary exclaimed. "I'm so glad to see the old furniture again I could just hug it! I came in to get the book about Hiawatha, sister. Holland keeps teasing me 'cause I said I wished I was named Minnehaha, and says I am Mary-ha-ha. And I want to find a name for him, a real ugly one!"

"Call him Pau-Puk-Keewis, – mischief-maker," suggested Joyce. "There's the book on the second shelf of the bookcase." She stepped into the room to slip the soft silk curtain farther down the brass rod.

"I'm prouder of this bookcase than almost anything else we have," she said. "Nobody would guess that it was made of the packing-boxes that the goods came in, and that this lovely Persian silk curtain was once the lining of one of Cousin Kate's party dresses."

"I'm glad that everything looks so nice," said Mary, "for Mr. Phil said he was coming up to see us this evening. I'm going to put on a clean dress and my best hair-ribbons before then."

"Very well," assented Joyce, going back to the kitchen. "I'll change my dress, too," she thought, as she went on with her work. "And I'll light both lamps. The Indian rugs and blankets make the room look so bright and cosy by lamplight."

It had been so long since she had seen any one but the family and the invalids at the ranch, that the thought of talking to the jolly young cadet added another pleasure to her happy day.

"Oh, Joyce," called Holland, from behind the tents, "may we have the paint that is left in the cans? There's only a little in each one."

"I don't care," she called back. That had been an hour ago, and now, as she broke the eggs for a cake into a big platter, and began beating them with a fork, she wondered what they were doing that kept them so quiet. As the fork clacked noisily back and forth in the dish and the white foam rose high and stiff, her whistling grew louder. It seemed to fill all the sunny afternoon silence with its trills, for Joyce's whistle was as clear and strong as any boy's or any bird's. But suddenly, as it reached its highest notes, it stopped short. Joyce looked up as a shadow fell across the floor, to see Jack coming in the back door with Phil Tremont.

She had not heard the sound of their coming, for the noise of her egg-beating and her whistling. Joyce blushed to the roots of her hair, at being taken thus unawares, whistling like a boy over her cake-baking. For an instant she wanted to shake Jack for bringing this stranger to the kitchen door.

"We just stopped by for a drink," Jack explained. "Tremont was coming out of the ranch with his gun when I passed with mine, so we've been hunting together. Come in, Phil, I'll get a cup."

There was such a mischievous twinkle in Phil's eyes as he greeted her, that Joyce blushed again. This was a very different meeting from the one she had anticipated. Instead of him finding her, appearing to her best advantage in a pretty white dress, sitting in the lamplight with a book in her hands, perhaps, he had caught her in her old blue calico, her sleeves rolled up, and a streak of flour across her bare arm. She rubbed it hastily across her apron, and gathered up the egg-shells in embarrassed silence.

"Did you tell those kids that they might paint up the premises the way they are doing?" demanded Jack.

"What way?" asked Joyce, in surprise.

"Haven't you seen what they've done to the front of the house? They haven't waited for your name contest, but have fixed up things to suit themselves. You just ought to come out and look!"

Phil followed as they hurried around to the front of the house, then stood smiling at the look of blank amazement which slowly spread over Joyce's face. Down one of the rough cottonwood posts, which supported the palm and bamboo thatch of their Robinson Crusoe porch, was painted in big, straggling, bloody letters: "W-A-R-E-S W-I-G-W-A-M." Joyce groaned. She had made such an attempt to convert the rude shade into an attractive spot, spreading a Navajo blanket over her mother's camp-chair, and putting cushions on the rustic bench to make a restful place, where one could read or watch the shadows grow long across the desert. She had even brought out a little wicker tea-table this afternoon, with a vase of flowers on it, and leaned her mother's old guitar against it to give a final civilizing touch to the picture. But the effect was sadly marred by the freshly painted name, glaring at her from the post.

"Oh, the little savages!" she exclaimed. "How could they do it? Ware's Wigwam, indeed!"

Then her gaze followed Jack's finger pointing to the tents pitched under the cottonwood-trees. The one which she was to share with Mary and her mother stood white and clean, the screen-door open, showing the white beds within, the rug on the floor, the flowers on the table; but the large, circular one, which the boys were to occupy, was a sight to make any one pause, open-mouthed.

Perched beside it on a scaffolding of boxes and barrels stood Holland, with a paint-can in one hand and a brush in the other, putting the finishing touches to some startling decorations. Mary, on the other side, was brandishing another brush, and both were so intent on their work that neither looked up. Joyce gave a gasp. Never had she seen such amazing hieroglyphics as those which chased

each other in zigzag green lines around the fly of the tent. They bore a general resemblance to those seen on Indian baskets and blankets and pottery, but nothing so grotesque had ever flaunted across her sight before.

"Now, get the book," called Holland to Mary, "and see if we've left anything out." Only Mary's back was visible to the amused spectators. She took up the copy of "Hiawatha" from the barrel where it lay, careful to keep the hem of her apron between it and her paint-bedaubed thumbs.

"I think we've painted every single figure he wrote about," said Mary. "Now, I'll read, and you walk around and see if we've left anything out:

"Very spacious was the wigwam
With the gods of the Dacotahs
Drawn and painted on the curtains."

"No, skip that," ordered Holland. "It's farther down." Mary's paint-smeared fingers travelled slowly down the page, then she began again:

"Sun and moon and stars he painted,
Man and beast and fish and reptile.

"Figures of the Bear and Reindeer,
Of the Turtle, Crane, and Beaver.

"Owl and Eagle, Crane and Hen-hawk,
And the Cormorant, bird of magic.

"Figures mystical and awful,
Figures strange and brightly coloured."

"They're all here," announced Holland, "specially the figures mystical and awful. I'll have to label mine, or somebody will take my turtle for a grizzly."

"Oh, the little savages!" exclaimed Joyce again. "How could they make such a spectacle of the place! We'll be the laughing-stock of the whole country."

"I don't suppose that'll ever come off the tent, but we can paint the name off the post," said Jack.

"Oh, that's a fine name," said Phil, laughing, "leave it on. It's so much more original than most people have."

Before Joyce could answer, the rattle of wheels announced the coming of the surrey, and Mrs. Lee drove into the yard with Mrs. Ware and Norman, and her own little daughter, Hazel. Then Joyce's anger, which had burned to give Holland and Mary a good shaking, vanished completely at sight of her mother's amusement. Mrs. Ware had not laughed so heartily in months as she did at the ridiculous figures grinning from the tent. It seemed so good to see her like her old cheerful self again that, when she laughingly declared that the name straggling down the post exactly suited the place, and was far more appropriate than Bide-a-wee or Alamo, Joyce's frown entirely disappeared. Mrs. Lee caught up the old guitar, and began a rattling parody of "John Brown had a little Indian," changing the words to a ridiculous rhyme about "*The Wares had a little Wigwam*."

Mrs. Ware sat down to try the new rustic seat, and then jumped up like a girl again to look at the view of the mountains from the camp-chair, and then led the way, laughing and talking, to investigate the new home. She was as pleased as a child, and her pleasure made a festive occasion of the home-coming, which Joyce had feared at first would be a sorry one.

Phil shouldered his gun ready to start off again, feeling that he ought not to intrude, but Jack had worked too hard to miss the reward of hearing his mother's pleased exclamations and seeing her face light up over every little surprise they had prepared for her comfort. "Come and see, too," he urged so cordially that Phil fell into line, poking into all the corners, inspecting all the little shelves and cupboards, and admiring all the little makeshifts as heartily as Mrs. Lee or Mrs. Ware.

They went through the tents first, then the kitchen, and last into the living-room, of which Joyce was justly proud. There was only the old furniture they had had in Plainsville, with the books and pictures, but it was restful and homelike and really artistic, Phil acknowledged to himself, looking around in surprise.

"Here's the Little Colonel's corner," said Mary, leading him to a group of large photographs framed in passe-partout. "You know mamma used to live in Kentucky, and once Joyce went back there to a house-party. Here's the place, Locust. That's where the Little Colonel lives. Her right name is Lloyd Sherman. And there she is on her pony, Tar Baby, and there's her grandfather at the gate."

Phil stooped for a closer view of the photograph, and then straightened up, with a look of dawning recognition in his face.

"Why, I've seen her," he said, slowly. "I've been past that place. Once, several years ago, I was going from Cincinnati to Louisville with father, and something happened that we stopped on a switch in front of a place that looked just like that. And the brakeman said it was called Locust. I was out on the rear platform. I believe we were waiting for an express train to pass us, or something of the sort. At any rate, I saw that same old gentleman, – he had only one arm and was all dressed in white. Everybody was saying what a picture he made. The locusts were in bloom, you know. And while he stood there, the prettiest little girl came riding up on a black pony, with a magnificent St. Bernard dog following. She was all in white, too, with a spray of locust blossoms stuck in the cockade of the little black velvet Napoleon cap she wore, exactly as it is in that picture; and she held up a letter and called out: 'White pigeon wing fo' you, grandfathah deah.' I never forgot how sweet it sounded."

"Oh, that was Lloyd! That was Lloyd!" called Mary and Joyce in the same breath, and Joyce added: "She always used to call out that when she had a letter for the old Colonel, and it must have been Hero that you saw, the Red Cross war-dog that was given to her in Switzerland. How strange it seems that you should come across her picture away out here in the desert!"

Mary's eyes grew rounder and rounder as she listened. She delighted in romantic situations, and this seemed to her one of the most romantic she had ever known in real life, quite as interesting as anything she had ever read about.

"Doesn't it seem queer to think that he's seen Lloyd and Locust?" she exclaimed. "It makes him seem almost like home folks, doesn't it, mamma?"

Mrs. Ware smiled. "It certainly does, dear, and we must try to make him feel at home with us in our wild wigwam." She had seen the wistful expression of his eyes a few moments before when, catching Joyce and Jack by the arms, she had cried, proudly: "Nobody in the world has such children as mine, Mrs. Lee! Don't you think I have cause to be proud of my five little Indians, who fixed up this house so beautifully all by themselves?"

"Come back and take supper with us, won't you?" she asked, as he and Jack started on their interrupted hunt. "We'll make a sort of house-warming of our first meal together in the new wigwam, and I'll be glad to count you among my little Indians."

"Thank you, Mrs. Ware," he said, in his gentlemanly way and with the frank smile which she found so winning; "you don't know how much that means to a fellow who has been away from a real home as long as I have. I'll be the gladdest 'little Indian' in the bunch to be counted in that way."

"Then I'll get back to my cake-making," said Joyce, "if we're to have company for supper. I won't promise that it'll be a success, though, for while it bakes I'm going to write to Lloyd. I've thought for days that I ought to write, for I've owed her a letter ever since Christmas. She doesn't even know

that we've left Plainsville. And I'm going to tell her about your having seen her, and recognized her picture away out here on the desert. I wish she'd come out and make us a visit."

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