

Wells Carolyn

Betty's Happy Year



Carolyn Wells
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I

A THANKSGIVING GUEST

“What a gorgeous day for a sleigh-ride! Did you ever see such sunny, twinkling snow, and such crisp, crackly air? It fairly snaps off as you breathe it!”

Betty McGuire stood on the steps of the veranda as she spoke. Her mother, in the doorway, was smiling down at her, and her pony, Dixie, was jingling his bells and pawing at the snow and ice in the driveway below.

It was the first trial of the pretty new cutter, and the joyous excitement of the occasion made Betty's cheeks as red as her scarlet tam-o'-shanter cap, or her red cloth coat with its high fur collar. Betty drew on her driving-gloves, still talking to her mother.

“Isn't it a darling sleigh, Mother? Did you ever see such a pretty one? And Dixie is so proud of it.”

“It's a beauty, Betty. I know you'll enjoy it. Are you taking Tilly for a ride?”

“No; I'm going for May Fordham to-day. We're planning for the party, you know. I'll take Tilly some other day.”

“Very well; be home by sundown, won't you?”

“Yes; or very soon after. All right, Pete.”

The face of the big Irishman beamed with pleasure as he assisted Betty into the new sleigh and tucked the fur robe round her.

“Tis a foine turnout, Miss Betty,” he said; “an' mosht becomin' to Dixie, – the proud little baste!”

“He is proud of it,” agreed Betty, as she gathered up the lines. “He's just vain enough to love those silver bells jingling about him. Good-by, Mother.”

“Good-by, darling,” said Mrs. McGuire, and after watching Betty disappear down the winding drive, she returned to the house.

Denniston Hall, though a beautiful summer place, was equally attractive in winter. Then the wide front veranda was inclosed with glass, and, heated by an arrangement of steam-pipes, made a delightful sun-parlor. The house was of the old-fashioned type that has two front doors opening into two large halls.

Large parlors between these halls and a wing on either side, provided numerous rooms, and several of these boasted wide fireplaces where crackling logs blazed gaily or smoldered comfortably, as occasion required.

The family at Denniston was a rather unusual one. The place belonged to Betty, the fifteen-year-old daughter, who had recently inherited a large fortune from her Grandfather McGuire.

She had supposed herself an orphan, but after buying her home and establishing herself there, she had discovered that her mother was living, and, to their mutual delight, they were at last brought together. Mrs. McGuire had come to Denniston to live with Betty and was more than willing to accept also Betty's adopted brother, Jack, and the three-year-old baby, Polly.

And now, though Mrs. McGuire was nominally head of the household, yet, as the details of housekeeping were looked after by capable Mrs. Kinsey, Betty's mother had little to do except to enjoy the reunion with her long-lost child. As for Betty, now that her mother was restored to her,

there seemed to be no flaw in her happiness, and the merry girl danced gaily through life, like a ray of glad sunshine.

Unused to advice or restraint of any sort, she could not at once accustom herself to asking her mother's permission for anything, but Mrs. McGuire appreciated the unusual circumstances, and wisely concluded to bide her time, and establish their rightful relationship by degrees.

Moreover, she was so happy herself, at the reunion with her idolized child, whom she had lost as a tiny baby, that she had no wish to dictate or to interfere with Betty's plans. Mrs. McGuire was a gentle little lady, with golden hair and blue eyes, and her amiability made her beloved by all the servants and adored by the three children. She had fitted into her niche at Denniston without disturbing any one else, and had supplied the one want of Betty's life, that of a real mother, who would love her with real mother-love. And happy in the knowledge and possession of this love, Betty felt that life had no further joys to offer her; and she was as contented as any girl of fifteen could wish to be.

On this particular sunny afternoon, as she went skimming along the white roads in her new sleigh, her mind was divided between the actual delights of the bracing winter atmosphere and gay jingle of her new sleigh-bells, and her busy imagination which was looking forward to some fine plans that she and May Fordham had in prospect. She drove in through the open gates of a large, well-kept place, and as she neared the house, May, who had watched from the window, came out, all ready for the sleigh-ride.

"Oh, Betty, what a beautiful cutter!" she exclaimed, as Dixie paused and stood in prancing attitude to be praised. "And it suits Dix perfectly, doesn't it?" she added, patting the pony, who showed by his actions that he fully appreciated the applause he was getting.

May jumped in beside Betty, and in another moment, away they went, flying along the firm, well-packed road. Betty turned away from the village, and toward the open country, where they might dash over long stretches without meeting much traffic, and thus have a better chance to chatter.

"Thanksgiving's only just a week from to-day," said May; "will there be time, Betty, to get everything ready?"

"Well, we'll have to fly round, of course. But if we invite everybody to-day, they can all get to work on their costumes at once. And a week's time enough, I should think. I hope Tilly will like the idea, but I don't know about her, – she's such a fuss."

"We'll soon know," laughed May, as Dixie was gently drawn to a standstill in front of Tilly Fenn's home.

The well-trained little pony always stood without being tied, so the girls jumped from the sleigh and ran up the steps, moderating their gay laughter as they decorously pushed the door-bell.

"Come up to my room, girls," called Tilly, over the banister, as they were admitted.

So in a few moments the three chums were busily talking of Betty's project.

"A real old-fashioned Thanksgiving party," said Betty, enthusiastically; "everything Puritan, you know. We'll all wear plain gray dresses and white fichus and aprons, and dear little Puritan caps, and the boys must rig up the right kind of clothes. What did men wear then?"

"Oh, knee-breeches and long stockings, and bunches of bows at the knees," said May, who was a history lover.

"Yes, and broad white collars, and sort of Norfolk jackets, and broad-brimmed hats," added Tilly.

"With a feather?" suggested Betty.

"Oh, no; not a feather, – I think, – that isn't Puritanish. But a buckle, – I think, – well, anyway we can look up pictures, and see."

"Yes," agreed Betty, "and I'll fix up Jack's clothes. Mother'll help me. Then we'll have the feast of the real old-timey kind. Baked beans, you know, – and doughnuts, and cider, – "

"And pumpkin-pies, – "

"And nuts and gingerbread; – it will be lovely!"

“Well, I like it,” said Tilly, a little hesitatingly, “but I don’t know about a dress. Aunt won’t help me, – I’m sure; – and I simply can’t make one myself.”

“I’ll help you,” said Betty, “and I’m sure Mother’ll make you one, if you can’t get one any other way. But perhaps you could borrow one. The old Adams ladies have lots of old-fashioned clothes.”

“Yes, maybe I could,” and Tilly’s eyes brightened at this way out of her difficulty. “And I can make brown bread for the feast. That’s old-fashioned.”

“Oh, I’ll provide all the supper,” said Betty, “because it’s my party. And afterward, we’ll have old-fashioned dances, with a fiddler to call out the figures.”

“I don’t believe the Puritans danced,” said Tilly.

Betty’s face fell. “Well, I don’t care to keep it too Puritanic,” she said. “We’ll just have it as old-fashioned as we like, and have the rest any way we want it.”

“Yes, that’s the best,” said May.

“But your table must look old-fashioned, – with candles, you know; Aunt’ll lend you her old brass candlesticks if you want them.”

“Yes, I do; and I know where I can borrow some old blue dishes and pewter platters.”

“Oh, it will be lovely fun!” sighed May. “How many are you going to ask?”

“About twenty. I don’t believe Jack will care much about dressing up – he hates it; but I’ll coax him to. Well, come on, May, we must go and invite the others. Don’t worry about your dress, Tilly. If you can’t borrow one, Mother and I will fit you out.”

“Thanks. You’re a dear, Betty; I wish you’d let me make brown bread for you, though. I can make it to perfection.”

“I’ll tell you what, Betty,” said May, “why don’t you have a sort of ‘Harvest Home.’ They’re lovely and picturesque. You make a great big pile of things like cabbages and pumpkins and potatoes, and decorate it with corn husks and things; and then, don’t you see, we can all bring something for it, and afterward we can give the eatables to the poor people in ‘The Hollow.’ And Tilly can donate some brown bread to them, too.”

“That’s a fine idea,” said Betty; “we’ll ask everybody to bring something for the Harvest Home, and then the next day we can all make the round of The Hollow in the big box-sleigh.”

“Yes, I know some families down there who would be more than glad to get things like that,” said Tilly.

“And well may anybody be glad to get the good bread you make,” said Betty. “I’m coming tomorrow, Tilly, to take you for a ride in my new sleigh, and then we can talk about your dress for the party and other things to be done.”

Gay good-bys were said, and the two girls went jingling away in the sleigh again.

Tilly was not so happily situated in life as Betty and May. She lived with an aunt who, though she took good care of her, was not very sympathetic in the matter of young people’s pleasures, and taught Tilly to sew and to make bread, because she considered such things the important part of a girl’s education. And she was right enough in that, if she had only realized that a girl of fifteen wants and needs her share of fun as well as of useful knowledge.

Moreover, Mrs. Fenn was not wealthy, and though she had had sufficient means for comfort, she was economical by nature, and would have considered a purchase of a dress for Tilly to wear just for one occasion, a reckless extravagance.

But in spite of her aunt’s restrictions, Tilly was a very gay and merry girl, and was always one of the half dozen that composed Betty’s little clan of friends.

“I don’t believe the boys will dress up,” said May, as they drove back to the village to deliver more invitations.

“Then they can stay home,” said Betty, promptly. “It’s going to be a lovely party if everybody takes interest in it, and those who don’t take an interest aren’t wanted. Now, we’ll go to Agnes Graham’s, and see what she and Stub say about it.”

Agnes said yes at once, and declared that she could fix up a dress as easily as anything. “Come in, Stub,” she called to her brother who was in the next room; “somebody wants to see you.”

Stub Graham was so nicknamed because he was the thinnest and scrawniest boy you ever saw. He was very tall for his age, and the name of Stub or Stubby was so comical that it pleased his friends to use it.

“Hello, girls,” he called, as his smiling face appeared in the doorway. “What, Betty, a party? Will I come? Well, I should say so! When is it to be?”

Stub festooned his length along a sofa and gave a brotherly tweak to Agnes’s long, thick pigtail.

“On Thanksgiving night,” said Betty, and then she told him what kind of a party it was to be.

“Gay!” exclaimed Stub. “Of course I’ll get up a rig. Sweet little sister will help me, and I’ll be a regular Miles Standish or somebody like that. May I wear a cloak, I mean a golfsapey thing? I think they wore those in Puritan days, with a dinky white collar, like Fauntleroy’s only without lace on it.”

“Good for you, Stub!” cried Betty. “You have just the right ideas! Can’t you help the other boys, – if they need help?”

“Sure! I’ll get them all together, and if they don’t learn quickly enough, I’ll be a dressmaker to ’em. And I’ll help you fix your show, Betty. You ought to have strings of red peppers and onions hung across overhead.”

“Oh, do help me, Stub! Won’t you and Agnes come over in the morning, and help me do those things? Oh, *won’t* we have fun!”

After that it was easy. Very few of the girls they invited made any objection to wearing the Puritan costume, and if the boys objected, as some did, they were referred to Stub Graham, who soon changed their minds for them.

“It’s going to be perfectly beautiful, Mother!” said Betty, as, after dinner that evening, she sat on a low stool at her mother’s side.

This was Betty’s favorite position, for, though a big girl, she loved to cuddle against her mother and caress her pretty hand, or play with the laces and ribbons of her dainty gown. And now, in their beautiful drawing-room at Denniston, they sat before the big open fire, while Betty told about the party.

Jack, who lounged in a big chair on the other side of the fireplace, was greatly interested. To Betty’s surprise he was entirely willing to wear a Puritan costume, though he observed, incidentally, he’d rather dress as an Indian, and Indians were quite as appropriate to the period as Puritans.

“But they didn’t attend the Thanksgiving feasts,” said Betty; “they lurked in the ambushes; so if you want to do that, all right.”

“Ho!” cried Jack, “I believe you think an ambush is a kind of a shrub!”

“It is, isn’t it, Mother?” asked Betty, turning her big dark eyes confidingly to her mother’s loving face.

“No, my girlie, that’s one of your funny mistakes. But you’re right about the Indians not joining with the Puritans at table; at least, they didn’t often do so.”

Both Betty and Jack had been deprived of early education, and though they were now studying very hard in a brave endeavor to “catch up” to other children of their own age, they frequently made errors which were quite funny enough to make any one smile.

So Jack good-naturedly explained to Betty about Indians in ambush, which was a subject he had quite thoroughly studied in his history lessons.

“And if I can’t be an Indian,” he went on, “I’ll be a Puritan gentleman. Grandma Jean will make my toggery; I’ll tell her just how, and I’ll make you proud of me, Betty.”

Grandma Jean was Mrs. Kinsey, the housekeeper and general assistant to the children, whenever they needed her capable aid.

“And what shall I wear, Mother?” asked Betty, draping the soft frills of her mother’s trailing gown across her own slippered feet.

“I think you’ll have to be the ‘Puritan maiden, Priscilla,’ though you’re far from the right type. Your dark curls, dancing eyes, and red cheeks ought to be pale, fair hair in smooth bands, and a pale face with meek eyes.”

“Ho!” laughed Jack, “you’re not very Puritanic, are you, Betty? But you’ll look all right in a cap, I’m sure.”

“I think I’ll make you a dress of gray silk,” went on Mrs. McGuire; “with a soft mull fichu crossed on your breast, and a starched cap, turned back in Puritan fashion.”

“I like red,” observed Betty, looking down at her own red cashmere frock with black velvet bows on it.

“But not for Puritan attire,” said her mother, smiling. “I’ll fix your costume, Betty, and you must promise not to slip up-stairs and add a red sash at the last minute.”

Betty’s fondness for bright colors, and especially red, was a household word, and Mrs. McGuire fancied that the novelty of plain dove-gray and white would not be unbecoming to rosy-cheeked Betty.

For the next few days nothing was talked of but the old-fashioned party.

Pete was consulted about the Harvest Home part of it, and he suggested that an old flower stand which was out in the tool house should be painted up, and put in one end of the dining-room to hold the donations of fruits and vegetables.

Then, by adding a few vines and flowers, it could be made an attractive decoration.

“Fine!” cried Betty. “That’ll be just the thing! We can put pumpkins and cabbages down below, and apples and potatoes in the upper shelves, and trail vines over them all.”

Ellen, the cook, was quite willing to make all sorts of goodies that were deemed appropriate, and to the lists of baked beans and gingerbread, were added such satisfactory dishes as roast turkey and pumpkin-pie.

But no ice-cream or dainty salads or bonbons were allowed, for Betty wanted to keep the real atmosphere of a plain old-fashioned Puritan Thanksgiving.

Preparations went busily on, until on Tuesday a letter came from Grandfather Irving.

He was the father of Mrs. McGuire, and lived in Boston. Both Mr. and Mrs. Irving had been invited long ago to spend Thanksgiving at Denniston, but had declined because of another engagement.

Now, Mr. Irving wrote, the other engagement had been canceled, and they were greatly pleased to say they could go to Denniston after all. Moreover, he announced, they would bring with them a charming young lady who was visiting them.

“She is an English girl,” Mr. Irving wrote, “Miss Evangeline Maxwell. As she is sixteen years old, she will prove a delightful companion for Betty, and I am glad to show her such an attractive portion of our country, as I am sure Denniston must be. She has never visited America before, and though she finds some of our ways strange, she tries to adapt herself to them. We will arrive on Wednesday afternoon about four o’clock.”

Betty read this letter with dismay. Mr. and Mrs. Irving were of an old and aristocratic Boston family, and Betty rather stood in awe of them. They had not yet been to Denniston, but Betty had made a brief visit to their Boston home.

The somewhat oppressive grandeur of the great house on Commonwealth Avenue made a strong impression on simple-minded Betty, and she had determined that when Mr. and Mrs. Irving should visit her at Denniston she would do all in her power to surround them with the careful formality they seemed to enjoy.

So when she learned that on the very next day not only Mr. and Mrs. Irving would arrive, but also a strange young lady from England, Betty wished she had more time for preparation.

It was in vain that Mrs. McGuire told her that her grandparents were not at all exacting.

“Why, Betty,” she said, “Mother and Father and I used to spend our summers down in that old country house of the Rosses’, and do you suppose there was much form or ceremony there?”

But Betty was not to be turned aside from her purpose.

“I’d be ashamed not to do the right honor by my grandfather and grandmother,” she said. “And it’s not but what my home is good enough, and my ways of living, but I must not have the foolish party I was going to have. I must have a fine and bountiful Thanksgiving dinner, with soups and fancy ice-creams and things with French names to ’em. I’d not set before them the baked beans and pumpkin-pies, at all. And I’d not have a rollickin’ crowd of boys and girls dressed up in the silly rags we’re thinkin’ of!”

It was only when Betty grew very much excited that she neglected her final g’s and *almost* relapsed into her long-discarded Irish accent. But she was so earnest in this matter, that she lost control of her tongue.

“An’ I’d think shame for the stylish English girl to see such cuttin’s up, so I would! They’re all right for us Greenborough girls as likes ’em; but the fine young lady shall find accommodations more to her taste, that I’m bound!”

And so what did impulsive Betty do but jump into her little sleigh, and fly round the village, recalling her invitations to a Puritan Thanksgiving feast, and asking the young people to come instead to a dance in the evening, and to wear their prettiest and most correct party frocks. Then she consulted with her mother and Ellen and Mrs. Kinsey, and among them they planned a dinner that would have pleased the most fastidious diners-out in any city. Betty did not herself know the names of the dishes she wanted served, but the services of a competent caterer were to be assisted by the skilled work of the home servants, and Betty felt that she had done the best she could to honor her relatives with a Thanksgiving feast.

Mrs. McGuire tried to persuade her not to give up the Puritan party, but Betty was firm.

“No,” she said, with snapping eyes; “I’ll not have the English young lady making fun of our country games. I’ll give her as good as she has in her own country, and I’ll do the best I can for my grandparents as well.”

“Well, I think it’s a shame!” declared Jack. “Here I’ve the loveliest brown cloth rig you ever saw. Cloak and knickerbockers and buckled slippers! Why, Betty, your grand Miss Maxwell would like me a heap better in those togs than in my Tuxedo.”

Betty faltered for an instant, then said:

“Maybe she would, Jack; but the girls and boys haven’t all such fine costumes. Some are just fixed up out of cheese-cloth and waterproofs. No, sir, it isn’t right by quality people to give ’em the kitcheny things we were going to have to eat at the feast, and if we leave out the old-fashioned dinner, there’s no fun in the old-fashioned clothes.”

“All right,” said Jack, who always bowed to Betty’s commands and never presumed to dictate.

And Betty was honest in her motives. It was not at all pride in her handsome home and its beautiful appointments that influenced her; it was the impulse to give of her very best to honor her dear grandparents and their young guest, and it was a more severe disappointment than any one knew, for her to give up the gay and jolly party she had planned for.

But Betty’s determination was of the immovable kind, and every plan for the Puritan party was dropped, and every plan for the proper reception of the guests was pushed forward; and so ably was all this done, that, on Wednesday afternoon, the house was in readiness and the family, in holiday attire, awaited their guests.

The Denniston carriage brought them from the station, and the reunion was a most happy one.

Mr. and Mrs. Irving may have seemed a bit punctilious as to the formal routine of their own house, but that in no way interfered with their hearty expressions of pleasure at finding themselves under their granddaughter’s roof. And they soon showed both by joyous words and manner that they were genuinely glad to meet Jack and Baby Polly and Grandma Kinsey.

Miss Maxwell was not quite as Betty had pictured her. She was quiet and reserved, but she seemed shy rather than haughty.

Betty tried hard to draw her out, but the English girl replied in monosyllables, and though most courteous and polite, was bafflingly unresponsive to the cordial chatter of both Jack and Betty.

“Iceberg!” thought Jack, to himself; “I’ve a good notion to say Boo! and see if she’d jump.”

But he didn’t, for Jack was always on his good behavior when Betty wanted him to be.

Dinner passed off beautifully. Of course, this was not the grand feast, – that was for to-morrow; but the well-cooked and well-served family dinner was a credit to Betty’s household. The evening was a little stiff. All sat primly on the brocaded chairs in the drawing-room and made polite conversation; but there was a certain restraint, which, however, Betty accepted as a necessary result of “having company.”

At last they all went to bed, and Betty lay awake, wondering whether it could be her fault that Miss Maxwell didn’t seem to be enjoying herself. “No,” said her mother, to whom Betty confided her anxiety in a little bedtime chat. “No, dearie, it isn’t your fault, except that perhaps you’re a little overanxious about it all. Perhaps if you’d take Miss Maxwell a little more simply, – a little more as you take May Fordham or Tilly Fenn, – ”

“Oh, Mother, I couldn’t talk to Miss Maxwell as – as jokingly as I talk to the other girls! Why, even her name is Evangeline!”

Mrs. McGuire smiled, as she kissed Betty good night. “It is an imposing name,” she said, “but try not to be afraid of it.”

Next morning, Betty did try. She took Miss Maxwell for a sleigh-ride, but they did not make much progress toward chumminess.

It was after luncheon, when the girls went up to Betty’s room for a little chat, that Betty, more perplexed than ever, involuntarily blurted out her anxiety.

“Are you like this at home?” she said, scarcely realizing that the question was extremely personal. “Do you never chum with people?” Miss Maxwell broke into a ringing laugh.

“I’m the chummiest thing in the world,” she said; “I’d love to be chums with you, but I’m so – so afraid of you!”

“Afraid of *me!*” exclaimed Betty, opening her dark eyes wide in astonishment. “Why, it’s scared to death I am of you!”

Then both girls went off into peals of laughter, for Betty’s quick wit caught the real state of the case, and Evangeline, too, saw the truth.

“But I thought you so grand I must be extra polite,” said Betty, as they became calm again.

“And I thought because you were the owner of this big house, I must behave with great dignity! Please be chums. May I call you Betty?”

“I should hope so! I’m still too much afraid to say Evangeline, though.”

“Call me Van, then; lots of my friends do, and I like it.”

“I love it! It makes us friends at once. I think it was the ‘Evangeline’ part of you that scared me most. Why, when I heard that, I made the boys and girls give up our baked beans dinner, and have lobster pâtés and soufflée meringue.”

“A baked beans dinner! What do you mean? My! but that sounds jolly!”

So Betty told Evangeline of the Puritan party that had been set aside because of the unexpected guests.

“Oh, what a shame!” cried Van. “I should have *loved* it; can’t you get it up again? I can scabble up a frock, I’m sure! It would be so *much* more fun than a grand dinner! oh, a thousand times more! Pumpkin-pie and cider and candle-light! Oh! Oh! *Can’t* you get it back?”

“I don’t see how I could, Van. It’s after two now, and dinner’s at seven. But let’s try. Jack! Jack!”

Jack came at Betty’s call, and he was informed of the wonderful discoveries the two girls had made concerning each other. He looked a little disgusted at Betty’s lack of intuition in the matter, and said: “Whew! what queer things girls are!” but he accepted the new situation, and set his wits to work to help Betty out.

“Why, I should think we could manage it somehow,” he said. “Give Pete and Ellen charge of the dinner part of it; send word to your gorgeous caterer man that the dinner is postponed; and you, Betty, hop into the cutter and fly round and tell those who haven’t any telephone, while I stay here and call up all those who have. I’ll wager they’ll all come.”

Come they did, every one of them. They wore quaint Puritan costumes, which were delightful to look at, if they were made of such humble materials as cheese-cloth and silkoline. The boys were stunning in their picturesque suits, and the dining-room was truly old-fashioned with its onions and red peppers strung from the rafters. The homely viands were eaten with decided enjoyment, and afterward even old Mr. Irving joined in the Virginia Reel.

“I’m so glad,” said Betty, as she and Van went to their rooms after the party was over, “that I learned of your ability to ‘chum,’ before it was too late.”

“I’m glad, too,” said her English guest; “I wouldn’t have missed this experience for anything. I shall always remember what is probably the only Thanksgiving party I shall ever attend.”

II

A CHRISTMAS CELEBRATION

“Why, of course,” said Betty, “Christmas will be fun, whatever we do; but I mean I’d like to do something specially exciting.”

“Such as?” demanded Jack, her adopted brother.

“Oh, I don’t know; I can’t think of anything. But we can have a party here any time; I’d like to go somewhere else for the day – somewhere where there’s something to see and do.”

“Restless little Betty,” said her mother, smiling. “Well, what do you think of going to Lakewood for a few days?”

Betty looked dubious.

“Lakewood is lovely,” she said, “and I do want to go there again sometime; but it doesn’t seem just right for Christmas. I want to do something more – more – ”

“Rackety,” suggested Jack.

“Yes, more gay and festive. I’d like to fly to the North Pole in an air-ship.”

“With flags waving and bands playing?”

“Yes. Wouldn’t it be fun? What could we do, Mother?”

Her mother caressed Betty’s curly head and smiled indulgently at her, as she said:

“Let me think a minute. There must be plenty of places if you’re bent on going away somewhere. How about New York?”

“Oh, that’s just right!” cried Betty. “Let’s all go to New York to spend Christmas, and see the beautiful things there. Oh, *wouldn’t* we have fun!”

Betty’s eyes fairly shone with delighted anticipation, and she threw a sofa-pillow at Jack to stir him to greater enthusiasm.

“Wake up, Sleepyhead!” she cried. “Come on, let’s plan it all.”

“If you choose,” said her mother, “you might invite Agnes Graham and her brother to go with you.”

“Oh, Mother! That will be grand! We’ll have the greatest time anybody ever had!”

“Glorious!” said Jack, roused to enthusiasm at last. “It will be fine if Jamie, or ‘Stub’ as we call him, is along. When shall we start?”

“Christmas is next week, Thursday, Betty,” said her mother. “Suppose we start about Tuesday and come home on Friday?”

“Just right!” said Betty. “And stay at a fine hotel and go to the shops – and the play? Oh, Mother, could we go to the play?”

“Yes, I think we’ll go to a *matinée*,” said her mother. “Do you think Mrs. Graham would spare both her children on Christmas day?”

“I don’t know,” said Betty, a little doubtfully, “but I’ll ask her, and I know Agnes and Stub will be crazy to go, so prob’ly we can coax her into it.”

Wheedlesome Betty did “coax Mrs. Graham into it,” though that lady was loath to be separated from her son and daughter at the Christmas season. But the proposed trip was so tempting that permission was finally given, and the four young people were radiant with happiness at the prospect.

“I shall take Lisette,” said Mrs. McGuire, speaking of her own maid, “and if I get too tired to take you children around to all the places you want to go to, she can go with you; she is thoroughly reliable and capable.”

So everything was arranged.

Tuesday proved to be a clear, cold day, and the party started off in high spirits. Of course the Grahams were Betty’s guests for the whole trip.

Though Betty's large fortune, inherited from her paternal grandfather, was all her own, her mother had been appointed her guardian until she should come of age; and while conscientious and prudent as to expenditures, she also was determined that Betty should be allowed a goodly number of the harmless pleasures that her large income justified her having.

So when the New York trip was decided upon, Mrs. McGuire made every effort to give the children the most enjoyable time possible.

And it was for this reason she proposed taking the two Grahams as guests.

Lisette had been with her mistress a long time, and was well versed in looking after the luggage and all such details, so the party had nothing to do but enjoy every moment. But, noticing a tendency on Jack's part to make himself useful and attentive, Betty's mother wisely encouraged it, knowing it was for the boy's own good.

When they reached New York, the children, used to the quiet village life of Greenborough, were fascinated and almost bewildered by the noise and confusion. Jack had never been in New York before, and Betty only once, but the bustle and rush of the city appealed to them both, and many kindly people smiled as they noted the shining eyes and eager faces of the four friends.

"A taxicab will not hold us all," said Betty's mother, "so, Lisette, you take the young ladies and Master James in that one, and, Jack, will you kindly call that electric hansom for you and me?"

Proud to be of service, Jack beckoned to the hansom driver, and soon the two vehicles were whizzing away to the Plaza Hotel, where rooms had been engaged for the party.

"Well, if this isn't great!" said Stub Graham, who, though addressed by Lisette as "Master James," was "Stub" to the others. "I say, Betty, you're the brickiest sort of a brick to ask us to this splendiferous treat!"

Betty smiled happily. She was looking out at the hurrying throngs of people, the tall buildings, the gay shop-windows, and the jam of traffic, with unspeakable delight in the novelty and excitement of the scene.

"And to think of three days of this gorgeousness! Three whole days!" said Agnes, squeezing Betty's arm in her glee.

They soon reached the hotel and found Betty's mother and Jack already there and waiting for them in the great entrance-hall.

Betty was a little awed by the splendor all about her, and Agnes and Stub were frankly delighted, and looked around with undisguised interest.

But Jack, feeling a new responsibility as the escort of Mrs. McGuire, had, quite unconsciously, acquired a manner as of one accustomed to elaborate hotels and in no way impressed by them. He seemed quite at home and he paid no attention to the surroundings, but in a simple, unaffected, but perfectly correct fashion, he stood by Betty's mother, carrying her wrap gracefully over his arm, and holding himself in readiness to obey her slightest wish.

"Where did Jack get that manner?" thought Betty, in amazement, and then she realized that he was acquiring it merely by association with her mother, and through a natural ability to adapt to himself her innate refinement and gracious ways.

Betty was impulsive herself and now, though secretly moved to mirth by Jack's quiet elegance of manner, she resolved to try harder to improve her own demeanor.

They all went at once to the rooms reserved for them, a beautiful apartment overlooking Central Park.

It was quite a little home of itself, as there was a comfortable sitting-room, attractive dining-room, and four bedrooms with dressing-rooms and baths.

A large room with two beds was allotted to Betty and Agnes, and a similar one across the entrance-hall was for the two boys. Lisette had a small room opening from Mrs. McGuire's own which adjoined the girls' room. In a short time bags and trunks were unpacked and a few individual belongings scattered about, and the apartment seemed quite like a private home.

“Why do we have a dining-room?” asked Betty. “Can’t we eat in the big restaurant down-stairs?”

“Sometimes, if you choose,” said her mother. “But I think our Christmas dinner is a personal sort of feast, and I’d like it better here by ourselves.”

“So should I,” agreed Jack. “Lots more fun, Betty.”

“But we’ll dine down-stairs to-night,” went on Mrs. McGuire; “so skip away, girlies, and put on pretty frocks for the occasion.”

“Isn’t it larks!” said Betty, as she and Agnes went to their room to dress. “Look at the beautiful Park! To-morrow we’ll take a ride in it. I wish we could go to-night.”

“I don’t want to go to-night,” returned Agnes. “I’d rather stay here in this beautiful hotel. There’s so much to see.”

“So there is. Hurry and dress. What are you going to wear?”

“I brought my blue voile,” said Agnes. “Mother thought that would be right.”

“So it is; you look lovely in blue. I’m wearing this Dresden silk. They go nicely together.”

Betty expeditiously arranged herself in the pretty light silk frock, and the girls hooked each other up and tied each other’s hair-ribbons, so that when Lisette came to offer her services, they were quite unnecessary. The boys, too, had made good time with their dressing and awaited the girls in the sitting-room.

“Oh, I wish we were going to dance!” said Agnes. “But I suppose we couldn’t in a hotel.”

“We can dance up here after dinner,” said Jack. “Mother will play for us, I am sure; for see, there’s a piano here!”

Though an adopted son, Mrs. McGuire had asked Jack to call her “Mother,” and the boy had been only too glad to do so.

“Play for you? Of course I will,” said the lady herself, entering the sitting-room. “And now we will go down to dinner. Lisette will stay here in charge of everything.”

Jack sprang to open the door.

He held it open till the last of his party went through it, and then he closed it and followed them. Somehow he was again in place to push the elevator bell, and Mrs. McGuire looked at him with pride as she noticed his quiet quickness and graceful ways.

Dinner was a delightful experience. Betty was a little bewildered by the array of silver and glass, and Stub frankly inquired which fork to use first, but Jack seemed to know by intuition.

“I’d like to live in a place like this always,” said Stub, as he ate his ice-cream.

“So wouldn’t I,” said Jack. “A hotel is all very well for a few days, but it isn’t a home.”

“That’s so,” agreed Agnes; “I suppose we’d get tired of it if we had it all the time.”

“Well, it’s good enough for me,” returned Stub. “When I’m a man, I’m going to live in one. I don’t see many boys here, though,” he added, looking round.

“No,” said Mrs. McGuire, smiling; “most boys prefer a home.”

And then dinner was over, and they all strolled through the hotel corridor and bought some flowers at the flower-stand, and some illustrated papers at the news-stand, and then went up to their own apartment.

Mrs. McGuire played the piano for them, and they danced a little, and then, after some planning for the next day’s entertainment, they all went to rest.

The next day was clear and pleasant, and when breakfast was served in their own dining-room, all the party were ready and eagerly awaiting it.

“Then it is decided,” said Mrs. McGuire, “that we have our Christmas tree this evening?”

“Oh, yes,” said Betty; “Christmas eve is the time for a tree, and to-morrow, on Christmas day, we’ll have our feast, our real Christmas dinner. Don’t you think so, Agnes?”

“Yes, indeed. And then the tree can stay here, can’t it, all day to-morrow? I love to look at a Christmas tree.”

“So do I,” said Betty. “And as I never had one before, I’ll keep this one as long as I can.”

It was less than a year since Betty had inherited her fortune, and before that she had been a poor little waif, without money and without a home.

Her mother's heart thrilled with gladness to think that Betty would have a tree this year, and she resolved to do everything in her power to make it a beautiful one.

Very soon after breakfast they started on a shopping expedition.

Two taxicabs were engaged, and the two girls, with Lisette, occupied one, while Mrs. McGuire and the boys rode in the other.

Such fun as they had shopping! They fairly tumbled out of one shop into another. The tree had been ordered from the hotel, but they bought ornaments and candles and festoons of tinsel rope, and Mrs. McGuire bought some other things secretly, as she wanted to have some surprises for the young people. Then everybody bought presents for everybody else. Betty found lovely things for the dear ones who had remained at Denniston, and for the faithful servants there, as well.

She bought presents for her young friends in Greenborough, too, and all these things they had expressed directly home. But the fun was in buying presents for each other. These, of course, must be kept very secret, and Betty would urge Jack in a whisper to take Agnes to another counter and keep her there, while Stub helped Betty choose the present for his sister.

And so with the whole four. Each must be safely removed from the scene of action while his or her gift was purchased.

Betty's mother cautioned the young folks that all gifts be simple and inexpensive.

So Agnes bought for Betty a pretty little white fan that she might carry to evening parties, and Betty bought for Agnes a slender gold bangle.

The boys bought knives for each other, which caused the girls much amusement, for neither Jack nor Stub knew that each had bought a knife, and the girls knew that the knives were exactly alike. Of course Betty wished to give more valuable gifts to Jack and her mother, so, under the guidance of Mrs. McGuire, she bought a beautiful little gold watch and fob for Jack. It was a beauty, and Betty knew it would give the boy the keenest pleasure.

For her mother she wanted to get something very nice indeed, but she had no one with whom to consult. Jack and the Grahams were no better able than herself to advise on such a subject, and Lisette could not be expected to know much about it.

But, by a fortunate occurrence, the way was made easy. Betty and her mother had gone to a great jewelry shop to buy Jack's watch, and, after the purchase was completed, they strolled about the shop looking at the beautiful things displayed in the cases.

Suddenly Betty spied a lady whom she recognized. It was Mrs. Sanderson, at whose house in New York Betty had first met Grandma Kinsey.

"Mother," said Betty, speaking very quickly, "will you stay right here and not look around for a few minutes?"

"I can't let you go away from me alone, Betty," said her mother, smiling at the earnest little face.

"But, Mother, I'm only going to the very next counter, and there's a lady that I know."

"Very well; I trust you not to go farther than the next counter; and I'll wait for you here."

"Don't turn round."

"No, but don't be too long."

Betty hurried to Mrs. Sanderson, who was looking at jewels at the next counter.

"How do you do, Mrs. Sanderson?" she said, speaking politely, but very rapidly. "Do you remember me? I'm Betty McGuire, and I was at your house last year with Mrs. Van Court, and I found Mrs. Kinsey there, and now she lives with me."

Mrs. Sanderson looked at the excited little girl, and at last she remembered her.

"Oh, yes," she said; "the little Irish girl who came into a fortune."

“Yes’m,” said Betty. “That’s me, ma’am. And since then I’ve found my mother, and she’s here with me. But I want to buy her a Christmas present unbeknownst to her, and I thought you’d be willing to help me a bit if I asked you.”

“What a strange child!” said Mrs. Sanderson, putting up her lorgnette to look at Betty again.

“Yes, I am, ma’am. But will you help me buy the present, and then I’ll introduce my mother; you’ll love her, ma’am, she’s that sweet!”

Always when Betty was embarrassed or excited she slipped back into her almost forgotten brogue. And perhaps it was that and the persuasive little voice that touched Mrs. Sanderson’s sympathies, for she said kindly:

“Why, certainly, my dear; I’ll help you with pleasure. What do you want to buy?”

“I want a small diamond brooch, please, and not too grand a one; my mother doesn’t like things too grand. But a plainish one that she could wear every day, and yet a good one at that.”

Mrs. Sanderson smiled, but she seemed to understand, and as the affable salesman showed them various styles, she selected one that seemed to fit accurately Betty’s requirements.

“This, I think, is lovely,” she said; “I’m sure your mother would like it.”

“I’m sure, too,” said Betty, “and it’s the very one I like best myself.”

The purchase was completed, and, with the little box in her hand, Betty took Mrs. Sanderson to the next counter to meet her mother. The ladies seemed too pleased to know each other, and Betty was very happy.

Then good-by greetings were exchanged and, as it was luncheon-hour, Betty’s mother marshaled her brood together.

“I think we won’t go back to the hotel for luncheon,” she said; “for it’s after one o’clock, and we still have some errands to do. So we’ll go over to the Waldorf and lunch there, which will give you hotel-loving children another glimpse of a New York Christmas crowd.”

This plan was carried out, and the young quartet watched with sparkling eyes the throngs of people on Christmas errands bent.

“Now to finish our errands, and then home,” said Mrs. McGuire, after luncheon was over.

But when they reached the hotel again, about mid-afternoon, Betty didn’t want to go in.

“Oh, Mother,” she pleaded, “the streets are so gay, and the people are all going along with bundles and holly wreaths, and it’s all so Christmas-evey, can’t we stay out longer?”

Her mother considered.

“I must go in,” she said, “and I want Lisette to help me. But, if you wish, you four may go for a ride in the Park or along the Avenue. But you must promise not to get out of the cab. The chauffeur is entirely reliable, and if you stay in the cab, you cannot get lost. Be back here in one hour, please.”

“We will,” chorused the four, so Mrs. McGuire and Lisette went into the hotel, and the four delighted young folk went for a further ride.

Their course down the Avenue was slow, owing to the crowded traffic; they had ample opportunity for observing the people, an amusement of which Betty never tired. Then afterwards a short spin in the Park, where the lights had already begun to gleam through the early winter dusk.

“Now for home,” said Jack decisively, when the hour had elapsed; and back they went to their hotel.

But when they entered their own sitting-room, nobody was there, – no tree, no presents, and no sign of any human being.

Betty opened the door of her mother’s bedroom, but that, too, was unoccupied, as, indeed, were all the bedrooms.

Betty looked frightened, and said, in a half-whisper: “Oh, *do* you suppose anything has happened to Mother?”

Then Jack laughed outright.

“Oh, Betty,” he said; “can’t you guess? I’ll wager Mother and Lisette are in the dining-room, and they’re fixing the tree in there!”

Sure enough, the dining-room door was closed, and when Betty flew to open it, she found it was locked as well.

“Let us in, Mother; let us in!” she cried.

“Not yet, my child,” said Mrs. McGuire, opening the door a tiny crack and peeping out. “You must all amuse yourselves till dinner-time.”

“Oh, can’t we help fix it?” said Jack.

“No; I’ve plenty of help in here, and you must keep out and not bother.”

Then the door was shut and locked again, and the young folks laughed to find themselves with occupation gone.

“All right; let’s get up a surprise for *her*,” said Betty.

“Oh, yes!” cried Jack; “just the thing! What’ll it be?”

“Wait. I’ll have to think. Oh, I’ll tell you, Jack; you go down to the flower place, and get a lot of white carnations – just heaps of ’em. And then get a lot of holly, and bring ’em all up, and I’ll show you. Oh, wait – get the biggest holly wreath you can find, and a paper of pins!”

Obediently Jack went off, and as the big hotel was able to supply such demands, he brought back everything Betty asked for.

“It won’t be much,” said Betty, as she tied a big towel over her pretty frock for an apron. “Come in my room, all of you, so she won’t see it if she comes out.”

The other three followed Betty, and she disclosed her plan. First she filled the center of the big wreath with white carnations, having first crisscrossed it closely with string, to keep the blossoms in place. Then she set the others to work picking off the red berries from the bunch of holly Jack had brought, sticking a pin through each. With these prepared berries Betty formed letters on the white background, and as she deftly did her task they saw the words grow under her fingers, “Merry Christmas to Mother.”

“Fine!” cried Stub. “Betty, you’re a real genius! I declare it’s the prettiest wreath I ever saw!”

It *was* pretty, for the holly wreath framed the loving greeting spelled out on the white carnations, and Betty’s true eye had spaced the letters admirably.

It was not quite finished when Mrs. McGuire emerged from the dining-room. But Betty hastily stuck in the remaining pins with their red berry heads, and Jack asked Mrs. McGuire not to peep into Betty’s room.

“Indeed, I won’t,” was the reply. “I’ve only time to dress for dinner, and you young people had better scamper if you want to have any evening left for your tree.”

Scamper they did, and soon a very hungry but jolly party made its way down to the dining-room.

The girls were in festival dress because it was Christmas eve. Their white frocks of filmy mousseline were cut out a little at the throat, and red sashes and hair-ribbons gave an air of Christmas to their costumes. Each wore a holly spray in her hair, and Jack declared himself proud of the visions of loveliness that graced his party.

But notwithstanding the jolly time they were having, and the excitement of it all, there was no lingering after dinner.

Though the girls would have liked to stay down-stairs and listen to the music and watch the people, yet the tree seemed to call loudly to them even through the closed door. So up they went, Betty’s little face fairly aglow with the happiness of her first real Christmas. She held her mother’s hand tightly as, at last, Lisette threw open the door of the dining-room, and they all went in.

The tree was a marvel. Stalwart porters of the hotel had set it in place, and had assisted Mrs. McGuire to decorate it. It shimmered and glittered with tinsel ropes; it sparkled with shining ornaments; it trembled with tiny lighted candles, and it fairly blazed with hundreds of tiny electric

lights of all colors. This was one of Mrs. McGuire's surprises. Even the Grahams had never seen a Christmas tree electrically lighted, and as for Stub – he fairly whistled in ecstasy.

“Oh, *what* a corker!” he exclaimed, for more grammatical language seemed inadequate.

Betty drew closer to her mother's side and slipped her arm around her waist, as she stood speechless before the beautiful tree.

“For me!” she exclaimed, her eyes as bright as the electric lights themselves.

“Yes,” said her mother, bending to kiss the top of her child's head. “And for Jack,” she added, holding out her other hand to the boy, who came, a bit shyly, to her embrace.

“And for all of us,” shouted Stub gaily; “you can't leave us out, Mrs. McGuire, and though my small sister seems for the moment to be speechless, yet I can assure you she thinks it's a very nice tree.”

“*Very nice tree!*” cried Agnes; “it's the gorgeouset, wonderfulest tree that ever was on the face of the earth! I know it is!”

After they had admired it over and over, Mrs. McGuire proposed that they take off the gifts, assuring them that such a proceeding would not mar the effect of the tree.

So the ever polite and ready Jack, aided by Stub when the gifts were flung high, took down the presents one by one, and delivered them to those whose names were written on them.

Somehow there seemed to be lots of gifts. For five people, each giving to every one else, made a good many, and then there were a lot of extra ones that just seemed to come from Santa Claus himself.

Of course Lisette was not forgotten, and she stood in the background, delighted beyond words to see Betty's pleasure in her beautiful Christmas tree.

Mrs. McGuire's present to her daughter was a gold locket containing a miniature of her own lovely face. It hung from a slender gold chain, and no gift could have pleased Betty more.

“I shall always wear it,” she said, as her mother clasped it round her throat; “and, Mother, you must always wear my gift.”

Her mother was greatly surprised at the diamond brooch, and wondered how Betty had sufficient taste and judgment to select such a beauty. So Betty told how Mrs. Sanderson had helped her, and all admired the lovely jewel when it was pinned at the top of its owner's delicate lace bodice.

The tables were filled with the various trinkets and knickknacks, and the floor was strewn with tissue-papers and narrow red ribbons. Then Jack and Stub brought in the big Christmas greeting Betty and the others had made, and her mother was delighted at the pretty attention.

It was late indeed when they sought their beds, for a refectio of ices and cakes had to be attended to, and some Christmas carols sung, and a Christmas dance indulged in. But at last all the lights were out, and the stars twinkled down on one of the happiest girls in the great city, a girl who was restfully sleeping after the joys of her first real Christmas.

III

BETTY AT BOARDING-SCHOOL

It was New Year's eve, and Betty, with her mother and Jack, was spending a few days at the Irvings' in Boston. Betty was a great favorite with her grandfather, and the two spent delightful hours together as the old gentleman showed Betty the many places of interest in the city.

Mr. Irving was of somewhat eccentric nature, and he declared that he much preferred Betty's frank and sometimes blunt straightforwardness to what he called the "airs and graces" of more fashionably trained young girls.

But Mrs. Irving did not share her husband's views. She thought Betty decidedly lacking in many details of correct deportment, and she urged Mrs. McGuire to send Betty to a boarding-school for a year or two, that she might be properly trained to take her place in society later, with the demeanor becoming a well-bred young lady and an heiress.

"But Betty isn't a young lady yet," said Mrs. McGuire, looking troubled when these arguments were laid before her.

"Not exactly, perhaps," returned her mother. "But she will live in a city ere long, and, as our descendant, should be made familiar with the finer points of correct behavior. Jack seems to pick up such things immediately, but Betty, though a dear child, is crude in her manner."

"Small wonder," said Mrs. McGuire, thinking of the lack of advantages in Betty's early life.

"True enough; and that's all the more reason why she should be placed in an atmosphere of correct deportment at once. She will learn much more by association with cultured young girls of her own age than by your individual tuition. You spoil her by letting her have her own way entirely too much, and you are blind to her faults. You know perfectly well, my dear, I have only Betty's good at heart in the matter."

Mrs. McGuire did know this, and yet she could not bear the idea of separation from her daughter, with whom she had been so lately reunited.

On New Year's eve the Irvings had made a party for Betty. They had invited young people from some of the best families they knew, and both Betty and Jack were greatly pleased when they learned of it.

It was a very civilized party, and quite unlike the merry gatherings of Greenborough children. The hours were from seven to ten, and the first part of the evening the guests sat round the rooms, in small gilt chairs that had been brought in for the occasion, and listened to the songs and stories of a professional entertainer.

It was a charming young woman who told the stories and sang the songs, and after each number the children clapped their hands sedately and waited for the next.

Secretly Betty thought it rather tame, and would have preferred a rollicking game or a merry dance. But she applauded with the others and tried to appear politely pleased.

After the program all marched decorously to the dining-room, where a pleasant little supper was served. Then the guests took leave, each making a correct courtesy to the hostess, and expressing their pleasure as if by rote.

"Well, if that wasn't the *stiffest* party!" said Betty to her mother, when they were alone later. "Those children were just like wooden images."

Mrs. McGuire looked troubled.

"Betty dear," she said, "you don't see these things quite rightly. Your grandmother thinks those children act correctly, and that you don't. But, you see, city life is quite different from that of a small village. How would you like to move to live in a big city, Betty?"

"And give up Denniston? My beautiful home! Oh, Mother, I don't want to do that!"

“No, and I don’t want you to. Well, we’ll see what can be done.”

The “seeing” resulted in long talks by the elders of the family, and these talks resulted in a decision to send Betty at once to a boarding-school at Hillside Manor, a fine country place about a hundred miles away.

As the winter term was just beginning, she was to go directly, without returning to Greenborough.

The school was most highly recommended, and Mrs. McGuire was persuaded that it would give Betty the “finish” she needed.

But the plan did not please Betty at all. She did not rebel, – that was not her way, – but she expressed her feelings in the matter so clearly that there was no doubt as to her state of mind.

“I don’t want to go, Mother,” she said; “I hate to be with a lot of girls – I want my own family and my *home*. Oh, Mother, must I leave my home when I love it so?”

“Yes, Betty darling,” said her mother, though strongly tempted to say “No”; “I see it is for your good to send you away, and I’m sure you ought to go. But I shall miss you dreadfully, and just count the days till your return.”

“It’s hard lines, Betty,” said Jack; “but as long as they all think you ought to go, I should think you’d be glad to go and learn the right sort of thing, whatever it is. Old Tutor Nixon is wise and all that, but he can’t fill the bill in other ways. At least that’s what Grandma Irving thinks, and so do I, too.”

In fact, there was no one who agreed with Betty’s ideas except her grandfather.

“All bosh,” he said. “My granddaughter is a natural, unaffected, unspoiled girl. You send her off to Madam Tippetwitch, or whoever she is, and she’ll come back an artificial young miss, with no thought but for fashions and foolishness.”

But the old gentleman was entirely overruled by the determination of his wife, and Betty was sent away.

None of the family accompanied Betty to the school, as Mrs. Irving felt sure the child would be less homesick if she started off with a gay party of girls who were going back to their classes.

And so good-bys were said at the station in Boston, and Betty made the trip to Hillside in company with half a dozen school-girls, in charge of one of the teachers. It was a strange position in which Betty found herself. An heiress in her own right, she yet felt a sense of inferiority which she herself could not explain.

Her Irish ancestry revealed itself in her warm-hearted willingness to be friends with the girls, and her inherited New England nature made her reserved and sensitive to either real or apparent slights from them. The girls, notwithstanding their inborn good breeding and their past seasons at Hillside Manor, looked at Betty with ill-concealed curiosity. They knew she was an heiress, and that very fact made them hold aloof from her, lest they be suspected of a spirit of toadying to wealth.

But Betty did not appreciate this point, and assumed that the girls were not very cordial because they considered themselves her superiors. Each one spoke to her, politely enough, but in constrained, perfunctory fashion, and then, feeling their duty done, they resumed their own chatter about matters unknown to Betty. Miss Price, the teacher, was a pleasant-faced lady, but, after a few courteous words, she became absorbed in a book, looking up only now and then to glance at her young charges. After a time Betty’s spirit of independence became aroused. She wondered if she were excluded from the girls’ sociability because she herself was lacking in cordiality. Smiling pleasantly, she said to Ada Porter, who sat next to her: “Are you in my classes?”

“I don’t know, really,” said Ada, not unkindly, but entirely uninterested. “What classes are you in?”

“I don’t know,” said Betty, smiling at the absurdity of the conversation.

But Ada didn’t seem to think it humorous, and merely stared at Betty, as she said, “How queer!”

Betty colored. She felt awkward and tongue-tied, and yet, the more she realized her inability to impress these girls pleasantly, the more she determined to do so.

Then Betty bethought herself of a box of fine candies in her satchel, and taking it out, she passed it around to the other girls.

Murmuring conventional thanks, each accepted one bonbon, but declined a second one, and then Betty found herself with her box in her lap, gazing out of the window, as much alone as if there had been no one in the car.

But at last the three hours' ride was over, and Betty's hopeful nature looked forward to finding some among the pupils who would be more friendly than her traveling associates.

Omnibuses from the school met them at the station, and by chance Betty was put in with a dozen girls none of whom had been with her in the car.

But conditions were no better than before. They nodded diffidently to Betty, and then began to chatter to each other with the gay freedom of old acquaintances.

One girl, however, who sat opposite Betty, was also a new pupil. She had coal-black hair and bright black eyes, that darted quickly about, seeming to take in everything.

"You're new, too, aren't you?" she said at last, leaning over to seize Betty's hand.

"Yes," replied Betty, grateful for the word spoken voluntarily to her.

"So am I. I think the other girls are hateful to ignore us so. But don't you mind; we'll show them!"

Though this was independence of spirit, Betty couldn't quite approve of the way it was expressed, nor of the belligerent wag of the head with which it was emphasized.

But the girl's attitude was friendly toward her, if rather hostile toward the others, and lonely little Betty yearned for friendliness.

"Well, you see, they all know each other," she said, smiling at the black-eyed one; "that makes such a difference, and they've so much to tell."

"All right; let us know each other, then. My name's Madeleine Gorman; what's yours?"

"Betty McGuire," said Betty, smiling into the friendly eyes.

"Betty! My, you are new! You must call yourself Elizabeth up here. Nicknames don't go."

"Well, I'd just as lief be called Elizabeth; I don't mind. But I'm Betty at home."

"Yes; I'm Maddy at home, and Mad, and Mother calls me Lina. But I'm sure Madeleine's the ticket in a fashionable boarding-school."

"Then you've been here before?"

"No, not here. But to three other grand schools. Mother's always changing about when she hears of a more 'select' one."

Betty was a bit bewildered. Surely the ambitions of Madeleine's mother were in line with those of Mrs. Irving, and yet Betty couldn't imagine her grandmother talking like that! She felt sure the Irvings *were* "select," but she felt equally sure they would never proclaim it in words.

She gave up the problem as too difficult, but, greatly cheered by Madeleine's cordiality, she met her friendly advances half-way, and when they reached the school they felt really well acquainted. Together they went to the principal.

Miss Frelinghuysen was an imposing-looking lady with sharp features and sharp eyes. She welcomed them with effusion, called each "my dear child," and expressed hope that each would be happy and contented at the school.

"May we room together, Elizabeth and I?" Madeleine asked.

Miss Frelinghuysen appeared to hesitate.

"Do you wish it, my dear?" she asked of Betty.

"Yes," replied Betty, hastily, concluding that a girl she knew to be friendly was preferable to any utter stranger; "yes, I should like it."

"Very well, then you may, my dear."

"You're a trump," said Madeleine, squeezing Betty's arm as they went away; "I was so afraid you wouldn't room with me."

“Why not?”

“Oh, I don’t know. You might feel too grand. You’ve just come into a lot of money, they tell me.”

“But that doesn’t make any difference to young girls,” said Betty, simply.

“Ho! doesn’t it?” said Madeleine, at which Betty laughed outright. She felt sure it couldn’t be true.

Hillside Manor was a large and rather magnificent house, yet when Betty and Madeleine reached their room, they found it small and cramped. There was only one window, and though the two beds were narrow, they left but little space to move about. There was only one wash-stand, and, accustomed of late to having nice things about her, Betty looked around in dismay.

It was not that she so much minded not having elaborate furnishings, but such close quarters to be shared with another made her feel hampered, and she thought longingly of her lovely big room at Denniston, with the dainty fittings all her own.

And yet she knew she would not like to room alone at the school. That was an awful loneliness to look forward to.

So she began unpacking her things to dress for dinner. Madeleine chattered all the time, seeming not to care whether Betty answered or not.

“You may have the top drawer of the dresser, and I’ll take the next,” said Madeleine, good-naturedly; “and we’ll divide the hooks in the wardrobe evenly. Which bed do you want?”

“I don’t care,” said Betty; “take your choice first.”

“All right; I’ll take this one,” and Madeleine flung two large hats on the bed she selected.

But as she immediately afterward piled a lot of her things on the other bed, it seemed to make little difference.

“Don’t mind those clothes,” she said apologetically. “Pile your own right on top of ’em. We’ll get ’em put away somehow.”

But there was no time then, as they must dress for dinner, and the gong would sound shortly.

Madeleine greatly admired Betty’s pretty rose-colored voile trimmed with delicate lace, and she was loud in her praise of Betty’s simple bits of jewelry.

“Oh, what a lovely locket!” she cried. “Let me wear it to-night, won’t you? I’d love to!”

Betty hesitated; she disliked to refuse her friend’s first request, but she couldn’t let any one else wear her locket, with her mother’s picture in it, too.

“I want to wear that myself,” she said frankly; “I always wear it afternoons. But you may wear my bangle instead, if you like.”

“Oh, yes, I’d love to,” and Madeleine slipped the pretty gold bangle on her wrist. “Won’t you lend me a hair-ribbon, Elizabeth, too? I see you’ve plenty of them, and mine are so old.”

“Certainly,” said Betty, willingly offering her box of new ribbons. Madeleine selected a pair of wide red ones, and gaily tied them on her black curls. As it happened, these were Betty’s favorite ribbons, and she had no other red ones, but she was wearing white ones herself, and she said nothing.

Madeleine helped herself to Betty’s cologne-water, and made free with several of her toilet appurtenances, and at last, after saying, “Oh, my dear, please lend me a handkerchief; mine are full of holes!” they went down-stairs.

Dinner was an awful ordeal. The girls sat at long tables, each headed by a teacher, and were expected to converse on light topics. Betty rather envied the ease with which most of them uttered trivial commonplaces, but she couldn’t help feeling that their accents and shrill little notes of laughter were artificial. Without even formulating her own thoughts, she felt that the girls were all self-conscious and critical of one another, and she conceived a sudden and violent antipathy to the whole atmosphere of the school that she knew she could never conquer.

Entirely unconscious of herself, Betty did not realize that she was not taking any part in the “light” conversation, and it was a shock when Miss Price said, in a somewhat mincing tone: “We

want you to join in our chat, Miss McGuire. Suppose you tell us how you spent your Christmas day.” Straightforwardly Betty said:

“We spent our Christmas day in New York, at the Plaza Hotel.”

No sooner had she said this than she saw, by the expressions on the girls’ faces, she had made a mistake.

“How interesting!” said Miss Price; but it suddenly flashed on Betty that they all thought her remark ostentatious, and that it was, in some way, inexcusable to spend Christmas day away from one’s home.

She couldn’t help looking distressed, for there was not a trace of ostentation in her whole nature, and her enjoyment of her wealth was merely in the simple pleasures that it brought her, without thought of vanity or pride in the possession of it.

Never before had she been accused of this, nor was she now, in words, but there was no doubting the meaning of the looks directed at her.

Miss Price tactfully changed the subject, but Betty made no more contributions to the “light” conversation of that dinner.

The hour in the drawing-room that followed was worse still. Had Betty only known it, her experience was not so very different from that of any new pupil at a strange school; for of course those who have known each other in previous terms naturally get together to talk over their vacation, and new-comers are left to be taken into favor later, if they qualify for it.

But Betty didn’t know this, and she felt it a personal slight that nobody talked to her and nobody seemed responsive if she opened a conversation.

Madeleine stayed by her side, but the more Betty talked with her, the more she was convinced she didn’t like her. “And it’s most ungrateful of me,” thought poor Betty to herself, “for she’s the only one who has shown me decent friendliness, so she is.”

At last it was bedtime, and the girls filed out of the room, saying good night to Miss Frelinghuysen as they passed.

“Hold your hand a little higher,” she said to Betty, “and your head just a trifle to one side, – so.”

Betty imitated the model, alas, only too well! So anxious was she to do as she was told, that her attitude was an exaggeration of the principal’s; indeed, it seemed a mockery, though nothing was farther from Betty’s intention.

The girls behind her giggled outright, which didn’t speak very well for their innate good breeding.

Miss Frelinghuysen turned scarlet, and said: “Report to me in my study to-morrow morning at ten, Miss McGuire. Good night.”

“Good night,” said Betty, all unaware of what she had done wrong.

“Oh, Elizabeth, you were killing!” declared Madeleine, when they reached their room. “But how dared you do it?”

She went off in peals of subdued laughter, only pausing at Betty’s amazed, “What *do* you mean?”

“Why, the way you mimicked the principal! It was great! You looked *so* ridiculous, and that made her seem silly. Oh, it was too good!”

“Why, I didn’t mean to do any such thing!” said Betty, ready to cry at the idea of having added a misdemeanor to her other troubles.

“Well, you did! And she’ll never believe you didn’t mean to. I couldn’t believe it myself if you didn’t look so scared to death. Oh, you’ll catch it to-morrow!”

Miserable indeed now, Betty began to prepare for bed. She could scarcely find room for her things, for Madeleine had appropriated far more than half of the cupboards and pegs; and the table and two chairs were strewn with her not very orderly wardrobe.

“Say, Elizabeth,” she said, suddenly coming toward Betty as they were almost ready to put out the light, “I want to ask you something. I’m sure you won’t mind, for of course it’s nothing to you, but will you lend me a little money? Just till my allowance comes, you know.”

“Why, yes,” said Betty, who, never having heard such a request before, supposed it was polite to grant it. “How much do you want?”

Encouraged by such prompt compliance, Madeleine doubled the amount she had meant to ask for.

“Could you – could you make it twenty dollars?” she said.

“Certainly; but what is there to spend money for here? I didn’t bring so very much with me.”

“Oh, I want to join a society to-morrow; I’m ’most sure I can get in, but you have to pay dues in advance.”

Betty gave Madeleine the money without further remark, and the two girls went to bed.

But Betty could not sleep. She lay there in the dark, wondering how she could live in this awful school. Madeleine’s mention of a society alarmed her. She would be glad to join a society if the girls would be nice to her; but to join one and have the members cool and unpleasant toward her would be awful.

And already she disliked Madeleine. Not because she had borrowed money, though somehow Betty felt that was not a right thing for a young girl to do, but because she was so careless with her things and so pushing and forward in her intimacy with Betty. Betty laughed to herself at this thought! Madeleine was *too* friendly, and the other girls were not friendly enough. Well, that was true. And Betty had looked at their faces carefully that evening. Not one had given her a glance of simple, kindly, girlish friendship. They had looked at her curiously, inquisitively, and even enviously, but for some reason she knew they didn’t like her.

Poor little Betty knew nothing of class distinction, and little dreamed that her warm-hearted, generous nature could easily conquer these difficulties in a short time. She fell at last into a troubled sleep, only to awaken long before dawn, with a heavy heart and a feeling of despair.

She lay in her narrow bed, thinking over the experiences of the day before, and looking forward to the interview with the principal to which she was summoned at ten o’clock.

And as she thought of that, her spirit revolted. She had not mimicked the lady’s manner. She had simply tried to do as she was told, and she would not be punished for it!

A great resolve came to her, so great that she could scarcely formulate it to herself.

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