

MARJORIE ON BEACON HILL



ALICE TURNER CURTIS

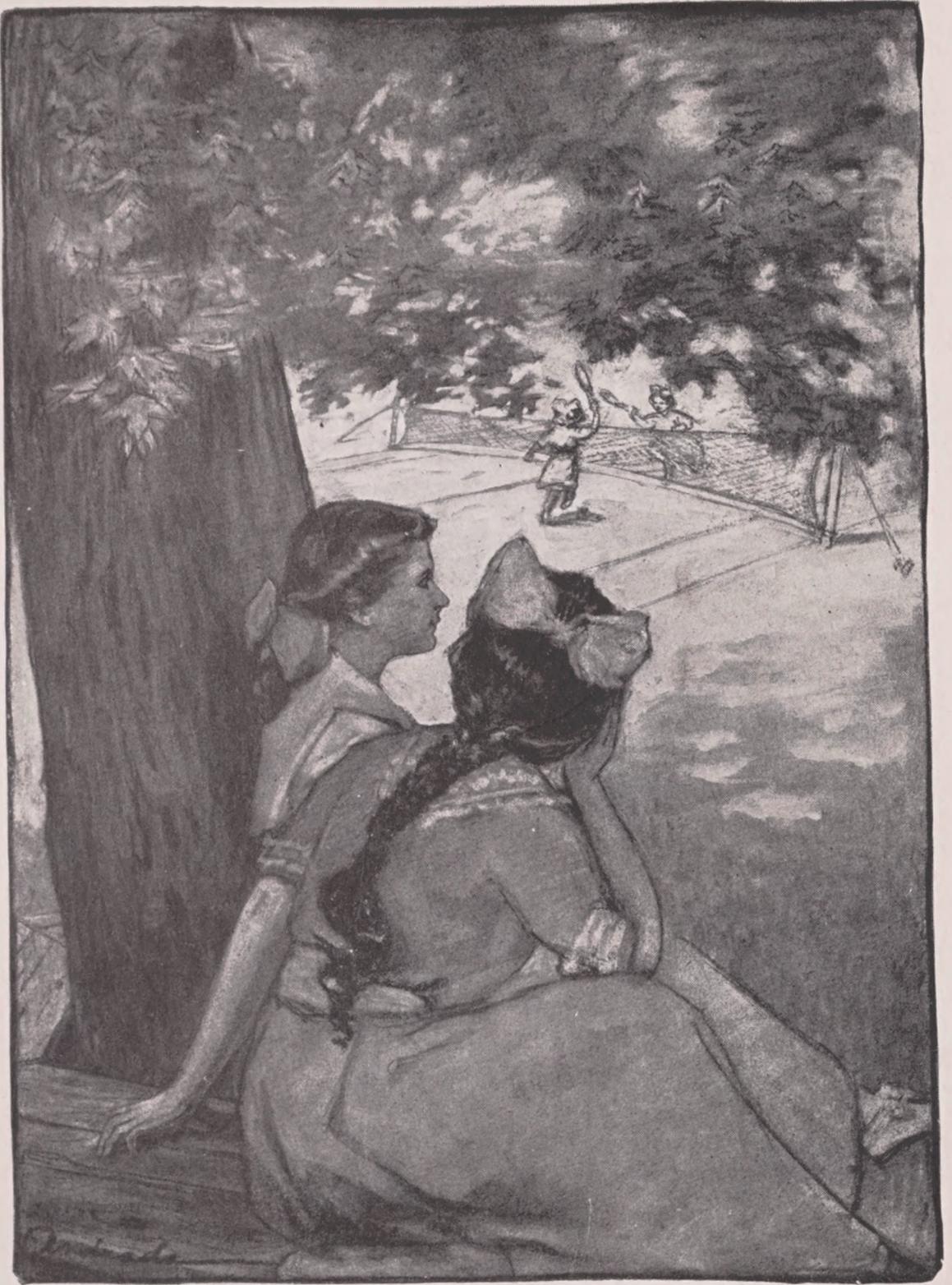


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“ WE OUGHT TO DO SOMETHING ”



“ YOU UNDERSTAND NOW, DON'T YOU ? ”



“ WE HAVE BEEN WATCHING FOR YOU ”

Marjorie On Beacon Hill

By

ALICE TURNER CURTIS

Author of "Marjorie's Way," "Marjorie's
Schooldays," "Marjorie in the
Sunny South," Etc.

Illustrated by Mary F. Andrade



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Introduction

MARJORIE PHILIPS, whose previous adventures were described in "Marjorie's Way," "Marjorie's Schooldays" and in "Marjorie in the Sunny South," comes to spend the winter with Mrs. Melchin in her home on Beacon Hill, in Boston, together with the two little mill girls, whom Marjorie helped to release from an ignorant and cruel uncle. In the historic city of Boston Marjorie becomes acquainted with interesting people, and helps Sophronia and Ann in many useful ways. She has a happy time with her new schoolmates, and when the time comes that she must make an important decision she is unselfish, and decides wisely. Those who have followed her career in the previous books will find in this volume the same helpful, friendly little girl, and will be amused and touched by Ann's adventures and Sophronia's faithful affection for her best friend.

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Marjorie on Beacon Hill.

Marjorie on Beacon Hill

CHAPTER I

IN BOSTON

“LOOK, Ann, look! There she comes!”

“Where, Sophronia?” and an eager-eyed girl with smooth brown hair, and bright eyes, leaned over her sister’s shoulder to peer out of the bow window of Mrs. Melchin’s library which commanded a wonderful view of Boston Common, and of the slope of Beacon Hill.

“On the other side of the street; see! She’s stopped. She’s looking straight up at this window!” And Sophronia waved both hands up and down and nodded her head gaily in response to a little gesture of greeting from a girl on the other side of the street who stood looking up at the bow window. She was a girl nearly fifteen years of age. She, too, had brown hair; it waved softly back from her face under a becoming brown felt hat. The hat matched the neat suit of brown cloth, and as she waved her hand toward the two girls in the window Marjorie made a very attractive little figure.

“She’s coming across the street. There’s the bell, and Billings has let her in,” exclaimed Sophronia; and the sisters rushed from the room and met Marjorie at the head of the stairs.

“We have been watching for you half an hour,” said Sophronia, as Marjorie took off her coat and hat. “You can stay all day, can’t you? Mrs. Melchin said you would.”

Both the girls looked a little anxious, as Sophronia spoke, but at Marjorie’s smiling assent they, too, smiled happily.

“It’s all so wonderful,” said Sophronia, sitting down close beside Marjorie, “that sometimes I am afraid I shall wake up and find that Ann and I are back in the cotton mill. We should be there this minute if it hadn’t been for you,” and she looked at Marjorie with so much gratitude that Marjorie hardly knew what response to make.

Six months before Sophronia and Andromeda Cutts had been little workers in one of the great cotton mills of South Carolina. It was Marjorie who had given them a chance for a happier life. With her friend Betty Savory she had planned a day’s picnic at her plantation home for the mill girls, and on that day, touched and unhappy over the injustice of Sophronia’s life of toil, Marjorie had told the little mill girl to run away from the uncle who had sent the sisters into the mill. Fortunately, however, Marjorie’s mother and aunt discovered the plan, and suggested a much wiser

one. Sophronia and Andromeda were taken in charge by a kind lady in Columbia, and Mrs. Melchin, a friend of Marjorie's grandmother, and a stockholder of the cotton mill, was persuaded to have the girls come to her Boston home. A boy from the same mill had also come North, and was with Farmer Wyman in Ashley, an hour's ride from Boston. Mrs. Melchin had become greatly interested in the two little mill girls. They had spent the summer with her at her Cohasset home, and she had taught them to read, supplied them with suitable clothing, and, after their six months' experience of kindness and affectionate care, they were developing into attractive and promising children.

On the return to Boston in the early autumn, however, Mrs. Melchin had been puzzled as to the wisest course to pursue with her charges, and had finally decided to ask Mr. and Mrs. Philips to "lend" her Marjorie for the winter.

"She can go to school, have music lessons, and she will be a great help with Sophronia and Ann," she had written to Mrs. Philips, and Mrs. Philips had consented. Marjorie had come North the previous week and was visiting her aunt, Miss Maria Wing, in Ashley. She had come in to spend the day with her friends.

"When are you coming to stay?" questioned Ann, sitting very close to her guest, and smoothing her pretty brown skirt with her thin fingers.

"Next week," responded Marjorie. "Aunt Maria has

decided to start for the plantation on Thursday, and we are coming in here Wednesday."

"Is she going to keep school?" questioned Sophronia, who remembered the schoolhouse among the pine woods at Marjorie's home.

"Yes, indeed. And Betty and Tryphosa and Grace and Edith will all go," answered Marjorie.

There was a little silence, for Marjorie's smile had disappeared, and both Sophronia and Ann knew that she was thinking of her far-off home, and her friends, and the happy days of the year before.

"And Adrienne and Lucy Wilson are going with Aunt Maria," Marjorie continued cheerfully; "they are going to stay at my house and go to school. So, you see, my mother won't be so lonesome to have me away from home."

"It's all lovely," declared Sophronia. "Are we going to school, Miss Marjorie?"

"You mustn't call me 'Miss,'" said Marjorie, with a little laugh. "We are about of an age, and we are friends. I don't call you 'Miss.'"

Sophronia's pale face flushed a little. "But you are different from we-uns—us, I mean," she replied. "You know so much more."

"I expect to have to study to keep up with you after this," declared Marjorie laughing. "Mrs. Melchin says you learn very quickly."

"Yes, she does," exclaimed Ann, eagerly. "I wish I did, but the minute I look at a book my head begins to

ache. Mrs. Melchin says perhaps it is because my eyes are not right. Just think, I may have to wear glasses!"

There was such a note of delight in Ann's voice that Marjorie looked at her in surprise. Ann evidently considered that glasses were not only an adornment but a mark of intelligence. Sophronia also was beaming with pleasure.

"Everybody surely is good to us," she said. "I'd never looked to any such thing as Ann's having glasses."

"You are going to have some one come here and teach you every day," said Marjorie, "and probably I can help you with your lessons, too."

"Oh, I was hoping we-uns was a-goin' to school with you," said Sophronia.

Marjorie explained to the girls that pupils had to learn certain things before they could enter the school she was to attend.

"Seems's if all our life was clean wasted up to the very day we-uns—us, I mean ; no, we, I mean—went out to your house on that picnic," said Sophronia, a little mournfully. "I can't remember that nothing pleasant ever happened to me before that day. I just dragged 'round."

"Then don't think of anything that happened before that day," said Marjorie; "begin right there."

"With Robinson Crusoe?" suggested Sophronia. "I reckon I will. My! When you read me about that

island, and all the nice things Mr. Crusoe found there, and I lay in the hammock and ate cake, I thought I was in heaven sure."

"It wasn't any nicer than the piazza at Cohasset, was it?" questioned Ann. "That was mighty nice."

"N-no. I don't know as 'twas really better," answered Sophronia, "but I sort of took the piazza for granted, you see; and the cake and hammock was, I mean were, more than I had ever expected."

"Why, good-morning," sounded a shrill voice from the adjoining room.

"Oh, that's 'Pickwick,' isn't it?" said Marjorie. "The very first time I came here that parrot almost frightened me. You see, I had never heard birds talk before."

"Ann said she was glad all birds couldn't talk; there are so many at Cohasset," said Sophronia.

Mrs. Melchin was at Ashley for the day, and Marjorie was to stay until her return.

"Cora can go walking with us after luncheon," Ann said. Luncheon was served in the pleasant dining-room, and Billings waited upon the three little girls very carefully. He noticed approvingly that Sophronia and Ann no longer leaned their arms on the table, or used both hands to carry a glass of water to their lips.

"Mrs. Melchin has given each of us a doll," said Ann, "but I reckon we won't play much with dolls. There's too many other things to do."

"They are well-meaning children, Miss Marjorie,"

Billings found a chance to say, as they left the dining-room. Billings had been in Mrs. Melchin's employ for many years, and Marjorie was a great favorite with the faithful servant.

"There's a telephone call for you, Miss Marjorie," said Cora as the girls returned to the library, and Marjorie hastened to respond.

"It's from Mrs. Melchin," she explained to Sophronia and Ann; "she says that Mr. Field and Luke Sanders are coming over this afternoon to take us for a walk, so Cora needn't go." As Marjorie hung up the receiver and turned toward her companions she noticed their expression. They were standing just inside the library door, tightly grasping each other's hands. Their mouths were slightly open, their eyes big and round.

"What is it?" asked Marjorie. Sophronia drew a long breath and released her sister's hand.

"It's that talking machine," she explained; "it skeers us every time. You don't reckon there's any witch-work about it, do you?" and she looked at Marjorie anxiously.

Marjorie laughed. "Why, Sophronia," she said, "it's just a telephone. There are wires, you know, and the voices go over the wires."

The sisters looked at each other, then Sophronia spoke again.

"Seems queer! Would you tell us how voices can go over a wire, Miss Marjorie?"

"Well," Marjorie did not like to say how very little

she knew about anything that she used as often as she did the telephone, "well," she repeated, "I know it's something about electricity; electric currents over the wire."

Sophonria shook her head. "Currants grow on bushes," she announced; "there's rows of bushes at Cohasset. I don't reckon that electric currants could grow in air on a wire. Those voices coming right into a room that way can't be 'counted for by no currants," and she and Ann nodded their heads wisely.

This seemed very funny to Marjorie, but she did not laugh.

"I mean a current, like a draught of air, not a fruit," she explained. "I know it is easy to explain just how the voice is carried, but I don't know enough to tell you. When Mr. Field comes we will ask him; he knows all about it."

Marjorie was very glad that Mr. Field and Luke were coming. Luke Sanders' home was on her father's plantation, and when Marjorie was a little girl she had taught him to read. He was now doing excellent work in the Mechanics' Art School, and was very useful to Mr. Field, an artist, and his best friend.

Before the girls had ceased discussing the telephone Ann called out from her seat in the window, "Here they come," and in a minute the other two girls were at the window looking down the slope of the hill.

A small man, who walked with a slight limp, and used a cane, and a tall, vigorous-looking boy were

coming up the hill. As they reached the crossing opposite the house they looked up, as Marjorie had done, and seeing the girls in the window raised their hats, and in a few moments they had entered the library.

“Put your hats on, and come out,” said Mr. Field; “these October days are too beautiful to be indoors. We’ll walk along the esplanade as far as the Harvard Bridge and take a car to Cambridge.”

“That will be splendid,” said Marjorie; “and Mr. Field, will you tell us all about the telephone?”

Mr. Field held up his hands, as if he were too much surprised to reply, and then said, “My dear children, ask Luke! He knows all about it. Indeed he can make a wireless to any desired point. He will tell you anything, everything about telephones.”

“Can you, Luke?” questioned Marjorie.

“Why, I’ve studied about it, and tried some experiments,” said Luke. “Farmer Wyman and I have wireless connection.”

“All ready?” questioned Mr. Field, as Sophronia and Ann came back with their hats and coats; “then let us start, and after Luke has told you all there is to tell about telephones, I will tell you something far more delightful!”

The little mill girls looked at him a little doubtfully. They could not quite understand how grown people could be so care-free as Mr. Field always seemed.

“Tell us now, Mr. Field,” urged Marjorie.

Mr. Field shook his head.

“No, telephones first,” he replied. “What I have to tell you is about—about ——”

“About what?” asked Marjorie.

“About a surprise!” replied Mr. Field very seriously.

CHAPTER II

SOPHRONIA'S ADVENTURE

“WELL, Marjorie,” said Mr. Field, as the little group walked down the pleasant street, “we all think that you are a pretty brave sort of a girl to promise to stay all winter with us here in Boston.”

“I think so, too,” responded Marjorie, “and when I remember all the lovely times at home, and now that Adrienne and Lucy are there it will be even better at Aunt Maria's school, why, I almost wonder what made me say I wanted to come. But you know, Mr. Field, that my father said I might come right home any time, if I was homesick.”

“Of course. But these two little girls that you rescued from the mill are going to be much happier because you are here, and it is going to be much easier for Mrs. Melchin,” said Mr. Field.

“That is what mother said when we talked it over,” replied Marjorie. “You see, it is almost as if I had adopted Sophronia and Ann. Mother says that I must be careful about making mistakes because Sophronia thinks everything I do must be right,” and Marjorie gave a happy little laugh as though she thought it was

a very delightful thing to have some one have so good an opinion of her.

Luke and the little girls were ahead, and were evidently not finding much to talk about. At Brimmer Street they turned and walked through a narrow side street toward the river. Mr. Field pointed out the bridges spanning the Charles, and they all strolled along the embankment talking of the places of interest that Mr. Field pointed out.

Before they reached the Harvard Bridge, where they were to take the car for Cambridge, Mr. Field stopped suddenly.

“Luke!” he exclaimed, “I must return to the studio at once; I had quite forgotten that I had made an appointment for some visitors there. Can you take Marjorie and her friends home?”

“Yes, sir! Of course,” answered Luke, and again excusing himself to Marjorie Mr. Field hurried away.

“Can’t we go to Cambridge just the same?” asked Marjorie, looking at Luke questioningly. “Of course we can; there’s a car now. Come on,” she called to the others, running ahead without waiting for Luke’s response, or even to see if the others were following her. She waved at the car; it stopped, and as Marjorie reached the platform it started. The conductor’s hand steadied her little lurch forward to an empty seat and Marjorie gave a quick breath and looked behind her. Where were Luke and the girls? The car was going on at a good pace; she stood up and looked out

hoping her companions were on the platform, but they were not. "Oh!" she exclaimed. "Stop the car! They didn't get on."

The conductor made his slow way toward her. "They'll come along on the next car, all right," he assured her as she told him that her friends had not got on the car.

"You'll find them all right when you get home. Fare, please!" said the conductor.

"But we were not going home. We were just going for a ride," explained Marjorie.

"Fare, please," said the conductor briefly; he had apparently lost all interest in her story.

"I haven't any money. I left my purse at Mrs. Melchin's," said Marjorie.

The conductor pulled the rope sharply. "Get off here," he said, as the car came to a stop. "Walk back and meet the others where you left them."

Marjorie got off the car, which had now reached the further side of the bridge. She looked longingly across the river. "I do hope they'll stay right where I left them," she thought. "I'll hurry as fast as I can," and she started to run, but a good many people were coming and going, and she soon discovered that her progress would be more rapid if she looked ahead, and did not go at such a rate that she was continually jostling against people.

As she neared the Boston end of the bridge she scanned the embankment eagerly for a sight of her

friends. But they were not to be seen. She walked slowly along, wondering where they could be, and finally decided that Luke had taken the little girls back to Mrs. Melchin's.

"I'm sure that's what he would do," she thought. "Luke would know that if I didn't find them here I would go right home," and greatly cheered and encouraged by this decision Marjorie started back along the way they had come.

When Marjorie had turned to Luke with the suggestion that they should go to Cambridge, even if Mr. Field could not go with them, he had been close behind her. He had turned to tell Sophronia of Marjorie's decision, and had not understood her call to hurry to catch the Cambridge car, so that Marjorie had reached the car and was on board before her companions knew it.

"She's gone!" exclaimed Sophronia, before Luke had finished his explanation.

"Where?" Luke thought Sophronia meant that her sister was gone, for he did not see Ann.

"Marjorie's gone!" said Sophronia, pointing to the bridge.

"Where's Ann?" demanded Luke, and then Sophronia looked behind her. She turned back to Luke with a puzzled look. "I don't know," she said.

"Why, you ought to know!" exclaimed the boy. "Ann was here a moment ago. Where is she?"

Sophonra shook her head. "I reckoned we-uns

would see trouble," she said slowly. "I reckon Ann's in the water."

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Luke, rushing toward the railing and looking over.

"She couldn't get in the water unless she climbed over this fence and jumped in," he declared.

Tears were running down Sophronia's face. "And Miss Marjorie's lost, too!" she sobbed.

"Marjorie isn't lost!" asserted Luke. "You couldn't lose a girl like Marjorie; she'll be all right. But we must find your sister. She doesn't know as much as a wise kitten."

"Maybe she's gone up one of these little roads," suggested Sophronia, pointing to the paths leading up to the street.

"What would she do that for?" questioned Luke.

Sophronia shook her head.

"Like as not something's catched her," she suggested fearfully.

"You stay right here," commanded Luke; "now remember: don't you move from this place till I come back, and I'll go up to the street and look for her," and he was off.

Sophronia stared after him. "I reckon I'll just find Miss Marjorie," she decided wiping her eyes. "She said we-uns was to go to Cambridge, and maybe Ann's with her. That Sanders boy is terrible slow," and Sophronia started back toward the bridge, quickening her pace as she neared the car line. A big trolley car

came to a standstill just as she reached the bridge. "Cambridge!" called out the conductor, and Sophronia stumbled up the steps and into the car much as Marjorie had done. Marjorie had said to go to Cambridge, and Sophronia was quite sure that it must be the right thing to do.

"Fare, please," demanded the conductor, repeating it as Sophronia made no response. Then, his car being well filled, he moved on and, on his return, either by mistake or because he did not want to put a girl off the car, passed her by, and Sophronia rode on. On over the bridge, through dull and unlovely streets, into a noisy square, past big brick buildings set in elm-shaded spaces, down a broad street and on and on until every passenger except Sophronia had left the car.

"End of the line," called the conductor, and, as Sophronia made no move to get out, he called again, "All out. This car does not go any further." And Sophronia slowly made her way out.

"Where's Cambridge?" she asked.

"Right here. Where do you want to go?" asked the conductor, looking curiously at the solemn-faced little girl.

"Mr. Field ——" began Sophronia, who intended to explain the whole story, when the conductor interrupted her.

"Right over there!" he said pointing to a store on a corner over whose door was fastened a sign reading '*Field's*.'

Sophronia smiled. This, she thought, was the very place that Mr. Field had probably intended to take them, and Marjorie and Ann were doubtless waiting for her there. She thought of Luke with scorn. "I reckon he'll be s'prised when we-uns all comes back," she thought. "This is some of Mr. Field's folks' store, I reckon," and she walked bravely in.

Marjorie and Ann were not to be seen, but this did not disturb Sophronia. "Mr. Field told me to come here," she explained to a very stout young man who stood behind a counter.

"Oh!" the young man looked at her as if he was very much surprised. "You're rather young, ain't you?" he questioned.

"Past fourteen," answered Sophronia.

"Well, you go up-stairs and see what Mrs. Field says," and the stout young man led the way to a door opening on a stairway. "Go right up, and tell her that Mr. Field sent you," he said, and Sophronia obeyed.

The stairway led up to a small square passageway with one door. Sophronia rapped a little timidly, although she assured herself that Marjorie must be inside expecting her.

"Come in," called a voice. "Come right in," and Sophronia opened the door.

"Well, I declare, it took you a long time to get here! Take off your coat and hat. Where's your things? I expected you were older, but you're better than nobody. Here, watch the baby till I get back; I

shan't be away but a minute, and he'll probably sleep. What's your name?" And the stout little woman came to a full stop and her sharp black eyes regarded Sophronia questioningly.

"Sophronia Araminta Cutts," replied the surprised girl.

"Gracious! You must be from the Provinces. I'll call you Sophy. Now take off your things, and set down. If Charles Edward wakes up you just rock him. I won't be away long," and before Sophronia had made up her mind to ask about Marjorie, the stairway door closed after Mrs. Field, and the little girl was left alone with Charles Edward. Sophronia peered into the cradle to make sure that it really contained a baby. Assuring herself of this she sat down in a low rocking-chair and looked curiously around the room. On one side of the room stood an upright piano, and on its top were vases, and many small ornaments. There were two highly polished tables in the room, and these were also covered with a variety of vases and bowls. The wall paper was very bright with red flowers, and there were so many pictures that Sophronia did not look at any of them. It was a very different place from the simple rooms of the Cohasset house or the stately simplicity of Mrs. Melchin's city home. But Sophronia instantly decided that it was beautiful.

"I reckon things are happening to me a great deal more wonderful than what happened to Mr. Robinson

Crusoe," she whispered to herself. "Mrs. Field will probably come back with Marjorie. This suttinly is a fine place," and she turned admiring eyes toward the curiously shaped vases and huge lamp with its shade of colored glass.

While Sophronia sat in Mrs. Field's sitting-room over the Cambridge grocery store guarding the slumbers of Charles Edward, her sister Ann was waiting patiently on the esplanade for the return of her companions. She had ventured up one of the paths, an admiring follower of a little red dog, and on her return to the embankment her friends had strangely disappeared. But Ann was not alarmed. "I'll watch the passin' till they-uns comes back," she decided, and placidly established herself on one of the comfortable seats facing the promenade, and there Luke found her after his hurried search through the street leading to the river.

"Well, Ann!" he exclaimed. "I've had a great hunt for you."

Ann smiled. "I just went up from the river a piece," she explained. "I reckoned you'd know I'd come back. Where's Sophronia, and Margie?"

"Lost!" declared Luke, feeling that if he was not so nearly grown up that he would like to cry, for what would Mr. Field say to him, and what might not happen to the two girls who had disappeared?

Ann did not seem alarmed. "I reckon they've gone home," she announced calmly. "Most likely they would."

Luke's face brightened. "You're a brick, Ann!" he declared. "Of course that's just what they would do. Come on. I was pretty well frightened, I can tell you. I thought they were lost."

Ann had to almost run to keep up with Luke, and in a very little while they were at Mrs. Melchin's door.

Marjorie stood in the hall just behind Billings.

"Oh, I am so glad!" she exclaimed as she saw Luke and Ann. "Where's Sophronia?"

"Isn't she here?" asked Luke.

Marjorie shook her head; even Ann's placid smile faded.

"You had better telephone for Mr. Field, Miss Marjorie," suggested Billings, and a few minutes later Mr. Field was startled by Marjorie's voice telling him over the telephone that Sophronia Cutts was lost.

CHAPTER III

A WELCOME MESSAGE

MR. FIELD listened to Marjorie's account of Sophronia's disappearance. As she finished Luke exclaimed, "It's all my fault. I ought to have taken Sophronia with me."

"Nonsense," responded Mr. Field. "No matter who is to blame, that isn't the question. We must find Sophronia. First of all we will call up the police stations and tell them to look out for her. Then I will go down to the embankment ; she may be there now waiting for us."

Marjorie was very unhappy. All this trouble had come from her thoughtless rush after the Cambridge car, and she said to herself that if anything happened to Sophronia she could never be happy again. "Even Betty would not have been so careless," thought Marjorie, remembering her impulsive little Southern friend. Beside her anxiety about Sophronia, Marjorie remembered that Mrs. Melchin had felt that with Marjorie her new charges were perfectly safe. "She will never trust me again, and what will Aunt Maria think?" Marjorie sat down near the table and covered her face with her hands, quite forgetful of Ann, or of Mr. Field and Luke.

“Marjorie,” Mr. Field’s voice sounded a little sharp, and she looked up quickly, “I am going out for a short time. Luke will stay with you and Ann. Be careful in regard to answering telephone communications, and do not leave the house. Remember, neither of you is to go out.”

Marjorie nodded, and Ann promised eagerly. Ann did not seem worried or alarmed; she informed “Pickwick” that he was a “Pretty Poll,” wandered about the room, and finally established herself in the bow window where she could look out on the street.

The telephone bell rang, and Luke answered the call.

“It’s a message for you, Marjorie. Your aunt says that you must be sure to take the 4:30 train. That will give you just time to get to the station,” and Luke glanced at the big clock whose hands pointed to the hour of four.

“How can I take that train?” demanded Marjorie. “Mr. Field told me not to leave the house! How can I go to Ashley and tell them that I have lost Sophronia!” Marjorie’s voice sounded as if tears were very near, and Luke regarded her seriously.

“I reckon you’d better do as your aunt says,” he responded, after a moment’s thought. “Cora will take you to the train, and I’ll stay here and answer any telephone messages. And I will tell Mr. Field. You see, Marjorie, you ought to go and tell Mrs. Melchin how this happened.”

“Oh!” Marjorie’s exclamation was nearly a sob, but

she put on her coat and hat, and called Cora, the young colored maid who so often reminded her of the plantation and "Aunt Cora."

"I'll tell Sophronia you just had to go to Ashley," said little Ann, coming close to Marjorie, and looking up into her face with her appealing little smile. "I reckon Sophronia 'll be home 'fore dark."

"Good-bye, Ann." Marjorie's voice was choked. She resolved to herself that if Sophronia was really lost, never found, that Ann should be her own special charge, always.

It was a very sober Marjorie who took her place in the Ashley train. Her heart was full of anxiety about Sophronia, and she hardly knew how she could tell the story to her Aunt Maria and Mrs. Melchin.

It was after five when Mr. Field returned, and soon after Mrs. Melchin, who had left Ashley in her automobile before Marjorie's arrival, reached home, and Mr. Field told her the sad little story of the afternoon. The old lady listened calmly. "Poor Marjorie!" she exclaimed as he finished. "She will take all the blame on herself. I wonder why Sophronia didn't wait as you told her to, Luke? It's her fault. She had no business to start off by herself."

Ann had listened to this conversation and was quick to see that they all blamed Sophronia. She began to feel very much alone, and very unhappy; and, for the first time since her sister's disappearance, became anxious about her. "I reckon Sophronia won't ever come

back," she exclaimed, and then, to the surprise and dismay of her companions, she began to weep bitterly.

"Take this girl up-stairs and put her to bed," said Mrs. Melchin sharply, and Cora led Ann out of the room.

"This is the result of interfering in other people's affairs!" declared the old lady, looking at Mr. Field reproachfully. "Here I am responsible for these two girls, and look at the trouble I am in. I am too old to be bothered this way; I knew I was. I knew I didn't want them, and yet I let Maria Wing and Marjorie persuade me that it was my duty. And all on account of my owning a few shares in a cotton mill. I won't keep those shares another day. Not one!" and Mrs. Melchin looked as if this decision ought to relieve her of all further responsibilities.

They had just finished a rather quiet dinner, when a telephone call sent Luke flying to answer.

"Yes, this is Mrs. Melchin's house," they heard him answer. "Yes, on Beacon Street. Yes! Yes! Yes!"

"What is it, I do wonder," whispered Mrs. Melchin, and Luke's replies went on:

"Yes, I have the number. Yes, sir! Thank you very much. Mrs. Melchin will send right over after her," and Luke hung up the receiver, and swung round to face Mrs. Melchin with a radiant face.

"Sophronia's found!" he announced. "She's all right. She is in Cambridge."

Mr. Field was on his feet, and Mrs. Melchin's face lost its anxious look.

“Order the car, Arthur, and you and Luke go fetch her,” she said, adding in a lower tone, “I am thankful.”

Mr. Field and Luke were out of the room almost before she had finished speaking, and the old lady was left alone. She sank back in her chair with a sigh of relief. “Pickwick” muttered, “Well, well! I declare,” and then silence settled over the room. Mrs. Melchin was thinking of many things, and did not notice when the big door was pushed open and a little figure, in a long white gown, that almost covered her bare feet, crept into the room. Ann came forward so noiselessly that she had reached Mrs. Melchin’s chair before its occupant knew that any one was near.

“Well, well! I declare!” she exclaimed, looking up in surprise and for the moment hardly recognizing her unexpected visitor. “Who’s this?”

“Me,” answered Ann, timidly. “I reckon I skeered you!”

“No, child, no!” answered Mrs. Melchin. “What do you want?”

“I reckon you-uns don’t know that ’twas me made all this trouble,” began the child in a faltering voice. From the very first she had stood in awe of Mrs. Melchin; and Mrs. Melchin’s sharp dismissal of her that evening had added a new sense of fear; but Ann had a certain fine courage about her. To defend Sophronia she could face even Mrs. Melchin’s disapproval, and she quickly told her little story, adding, “Sophronia wouldn’t go to do nothing wrong, ’deed she wouldn’t.”

“You’ll catch cold ; have pneumonia, like as not, and make no end of trouble.” Mrs. Melchin was really thinking aloud. But Ann received it as a merited reproof.

“I reckon you wish we-uns was back in the cotton mill,” she said meekly. “Uncle Besum said you’d be sick of us.”

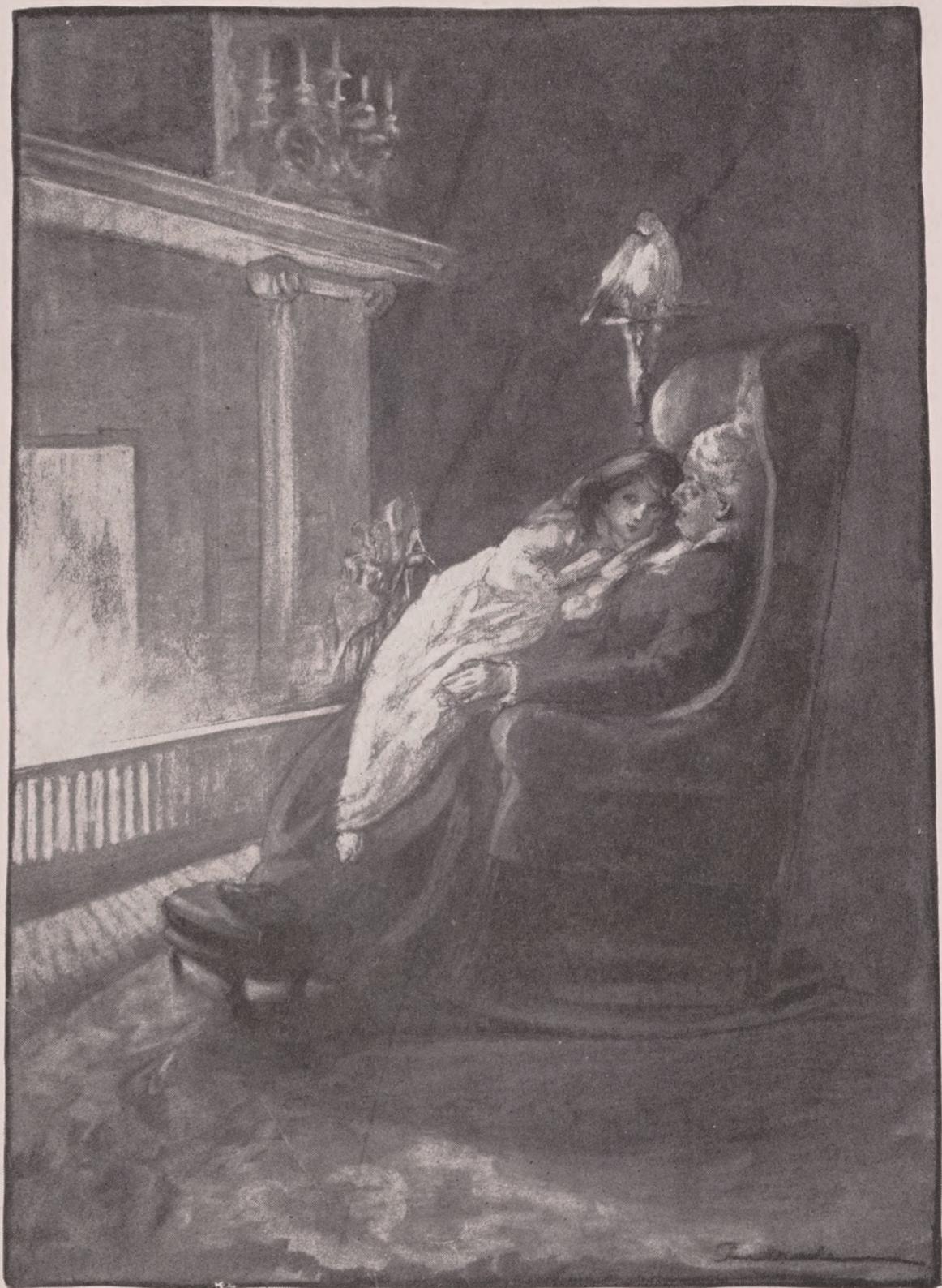
“Miserable creature that he is,” responded Mrs. Melchin. “Come here, child.”

Ann took a hesitating step forward, and quivered with surprise when Mrs. Melchin’s arm drew her nearer, and as the old lady lifted the slight figure into her lap she gave a half-startled exclamation. It was the first time in her life that Ann remembered having kind arms about her.

“I don’t want you to get cold, child,” and Mrs. Melchin’s voice was tender. She took the fleecy wool shawl from her own shoulders and wrapped it about Ann. “Now, Ann, what made you think I wanted to be rid of you ?” she asked, and before Ann could answer, she went on : “You must not think that, ever. I have lived alone a good many years, and I am a selfish old woman, Ann. That’s why I blamed Sophronia for being lost, and sent you off to bed. You understand now, don’t you ?”

Ann’s appealing eyes looked into Mrs. Melchin’s, and a little smile came over the face of the child and was reflected on Mrs. Melchin’s.

“I ain’t skeered of you a mite,” confided Ann, her



“ YOU UNDERSTAND NOW, DON'T YOU ? ”

stiff little figure relaxing into a more natural position, and her smooth little head resting easily against Mrs. Melchin's shoulder.

Mrs. Melchin's arm tightened its clasp. It had been a long time since Mrs. Melchin had held a child as she now held Ann. "And Sophronia is found, and everything is all right," she said.

Ann sat up so suddenly that she nearly fell out of Mrs. Melchin's lap; then her head went back to its old resting-place, and she announced, "I knew she wasn't really lost. I 'spected her back before."

When Cora came into the room half an hour later Mrs. Melchin held up a warning finger. Ann was fast asleep. "Can you carry her up-stairs, Cora?" whispered Mrs. Melchin, and the good-natured girl bent over and lifted Ann, and with a smiling nod of understanding carried the little figure back to bed.

Mrs. Melchin rose to her feet, and stood for a moment, listening. Yes, there were voices in the hall. Then the sound of steps on the stairs, and Sophronia stood before her. Mr. Field quickly told the little story. The grocer's wife in Cambridge had expected a nurse girl, and on Sophronia's appearance had accepted her without question. Later on the rightful applicant had appeared, with the result that the grocer had called up Mrs. Melchin's house, and Sophronia was safe at home.

"They seemed almost sorry to let Sophronia come home," said Mr. Field.

“I hope Sophronia wasn’t sorry to come,” responded Mrs. Melchin, in so kind a tone that Mr. Field looked at her in wonder.

“’Twas a beautiful place,” declared Sophronia, “and Charles Edward was a nice baby. Maybe you’ll let me go over and see Charles Edward some time?”

Sophronia had taken the whole adventure very calmly. Not until some days later, when she had been told of police officers searching the streets after her, and of Marjorie’s anxiety and unhappiness, did she realize that she had caused a great deal of trouble.

“I reckon the reason I felt so safe was on account of Mr. Crusoe,” she said. “He had strange things happen, so I took for granted that maybe I would.” In her heart Sophronia was always hoping to discover Crusoe’s island. At Cohasset she had felt quite sure that the island could be easily reached, but had not dared to suggest it.

Luke telephoned Sophronia’s return to Marjorie, and the little girl was sure that no more welcome message had ever traveled over the wires.

“You haven’t blamed me at all, Aunt Maria,” said Marjorie as they talked over the adventures of the day.

“I don’t need to, my dear,” responded her aunt; “it isn’t necessary to find fault with people who see their mistakes and are as sorry for them as you are.”

“Aunt Maria, I do hope I am going to grow up just like you,” responded Marjorie impulsively, and then

they both laughed; for on Marjorie's first visit to Ashley she had been so anxious to resemble her aunt that she had put on a long dress, and had been ready to be a "grown-up" before she was ten years old.

It was a late hour that night before Marjorie slept, and she made many good resolves for the future. She would always think things over, she resolved, before deciding what to do. And she would not blame people who made mistakes, and, best of all, she would try and be like Aunt Maria.

CHAPTER IV

THE PAPER PAGEANT PARTY

“IT’S our last week in Ashley, and we must have the best time we can,” announced Adrienne Wilson the next morning when she made her usual daily visit on Miss Wing. Adrienne and her younger sister Lucy were to return to South Carolina with Miss Wing and remain for the winter.

“Ada has a lovely plan,” went on Adrienne. “She wants ——!” Adrienne came to an abrupt pause. “Why, what is it, Marjorie?” she asked.

Marjorie had suddenly exclaimed, “Mr. Field’s surprise!” and in answer to her friend’s question she said, “I wonder what he meant. He told us yesterday that he had a surprise for Sophronia, Ann and me, and then so much happened that we all forgot it. What do you suppose it was?”

“Can’t imagine,” answered Adrienne briefly. “I guess he was the one to be surprised. Never mind about that now, Marjorie. Ada is going to have a party for us. Her mother said she could, and you know how lovely Mrs. Streeter always is. We will have the nicest kind of a time.”

Ada Streeter’s friends were all very fond of Mrs.

Streeter, and always very glad of an invitation to the shabby little house with the wonderful garden. It was Mrs. Streeter who had taught Adrienne how to darn stockings neatly, and who had shown her how to make the wonderful sugar cookies that were always ready for Ada's friends when they came to see her. Mrs. Streeter knew a great deal about the wild flowers that grew by the country roadsides, and along the river banks, and in the fields and woods, and the girls had enjoyed many happy hours with her in long tramps after some rare blossom.

"There's Ada now!" exclaimed Marjorie, and ran to open the door for her friend. Ada's dresses were never so pretty or so expensive as those of Adrienne, Marjorie or Betty Savory, but they were always neat and fresh in appearance. Some of them were made of dresses that Mrs. Streeter could no longer wear. But no little girl in Ashley had so many dainty white collars as Ada Streeter. Mrs. Streeter was never idle; a piece of dainty embroidery could always be found in her work-basket; this work the girls all knew as "Ada's collars."

"I'm going to have a party!" announced Ada; "it's really for you, Marjorie, and Adrienne and Lucy, but mother says that she thinks it would be nice to ask Miss Gray, and Ferdinand Webb, and Farmer Wyman and Alexander Most."

"What can boys do at a party?" inquired Adrienne a little scornfully.

“Mother thought perhaps Alexander had never been to a party,” explained Ada.

“That’s just like your mother ; always thinking to do pleasant things for people,” retorted Adrienne.

Alexander, “Duck,” as he had been called in the mill, was the boy who had come to live with Farmer Wyman. He was one of Miss Gray’s pupils at the village school, and he and Ferdinand Webb were already the best of friends.

“Mother said that I was to tell you that it was to be a ‘Pageant Party.’ I am going to send notes to the others,” said Ada.

“Does ‘Pageant Party’ mean that we are all to dress up ?” asked Adrienne hopefully.

“No, mother said she would tell us. I don’t even know,” responded Ada.

“You haven’t told us when the party is to be, Ada,” Marjorie reminded her.

“To-morrow night at half-past seven ; now I must hurry to school. It seems dreadful not to have you girls there,” said Ada and with a hasty good-bye started off.

Marjorie wondered what a “Pageant Party” could possibly be, and even Aunt Maria had no solution to offer. She was very glad when the next evening came. Mr. Wilson, Adrienne and Lucy called for her, and Mr. Wilson promised Miss Wing to bring Marjorie safely home when he brought his own little daughters.

As they reached Ada’s gate they found Ferdinand Webb waiting. “Didn’t want to go in alone,” he ex-

plained, and kept very close to Mr. Wilson until they reached the sitting-room. Miss Gray, Farmer Wyman and Alexander Most were already there. On the wall over the comfortable sofa was a large sheet of brown wrapping-paper on which was printed the word "HIAWATHA" in large letters. On the sofa were eight piles of illustrated magazines and illustrated papers. On the top of each of these piles lay a pair of scissors, a small brush, and four sheets of brown paper. The big table in the center of the room was cleared off and eight chairs set around it. On each corner of the table was a shallow bowl filled with flour paste.

"How many of you are familiar with Longfellow's poem 'Hiawatha'?" asked Mr. Streeter. Farmer Wyman and Miss Gray responded instantly. Ada and Marjorie and Ferdinand all said that they knew it "pretty well," but Adrienne, Lucy and Alexander shook their heads. In fact Alexander was wondering to himself what a "poem" was.

Mr. Streeter then read them the beautiful introduction to the poem :

"Should you ask me, whence these stories?
Whence these legends and traditions,
With the odors of the forest,
With the dew and damp of meadows,
With the curling smoke of wigwams,
With the rushing of great rivers?
I should answer, I should tell you,
'From the forests and the prairies,
From the great lakes of the Northland.'"

Then he told them briefly the story of Hiawatha's song, of the Peace-Pipe, of the Four Winds, how "the sons of Mudjekeewis had their stations in the heavens," controlling the winds.

Then, of the Blessing of the Corn-fields, and of the story of Winter—"It was Peboan, the Winter!"—and of Hiawatha's departure "To the regions of the home-wind."

Alexander listened eagerly. Every day new and wonderful things were finding their way into the mind of this Southern boy, and henceforth the word "poem" would have a very beautiful meaning to him.

As Mr. Streeter finished his story, Mrs. Streeter explained what a Paper Pageant was. "You are to cut from these papers and magazines any picture that will fit into the story," she said. "Each one of you can decide on four scenes from 'Hiawatha,' and then paste your pictures to represent those scenes on those squares of brown paper."

In a few moments they were all eagerly at work. The advertisements produced more Indians, canoes, and stars than did other parts of the magazines, and Ferdinand and Alexander compared their "finds" with delight. Farmer Wyman and Lucy discussed how many birds could be properly placed in one picture, and it was very evident that the "Pageant" idea was successful.

As the clock struck eight, Mrs. Streeter announced that the "Pageant" was ready to open. She had

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fastened a strip of scarlet cloth across one end of the room, and now as she called each name its owner was to pin the pasted pictures he or she had completed on the scarlet cloth. There was a great deal of laughter and merry talk over the different pictures, and as they were fastened in place each one announced the scene it represented.

Alexander, who had been greatly impressed with the "Four Winds of the Heavens," had made a remarkable picture. On each corner of his paper was pasted an Indian. In the center was the picture of a bear. It was his idea of the sons of Mudjekeewis controlling the Winds, and conquering the "Great Bear of the mountains."

Lucy thought that Hiawatha's Picture-Writing,

" On the smooth bark of the birch-tree,
On the white skin of the reindeer,"

was the very best of all, and had marked a number of birds as "Owl and eagle, crane and hen-hawk." But Farmer Wyman's pictures were decided to be the best of all.

"I'd sure like to send these to Dimp," Alexander whispered to Ferdinand, remembering his boy friend in the South, and looking admiringly at the rows of queer pictures. Ferdinand knew all about Dimp, for he and Alexander had become warm friends, and he resolved to ask Mrs. Streeter to give the "Pageant

Pictures" to Alexander to send to Dimp, and this Mrs. Streeter was very glad to do. Ferdinand agreed to write the letter that was to accompany them, and to mark the pictures which Alexander had made.

While the others were talking over the pictures Ada and her mother had been clearing the table of its litter of papers, and were now putting on plates and cups and saucers. Then Ada brought in a bright tin pan heaped with snowy pop-corn; this brought an admiring exclamation from Alexander. A plate of molasses candy also appeared, and a heaping dish of tiny bread and butter sandwiches; last of all came the hot cocoa. As they gathered about the table Farmer Wyman turned to Alexander and said:

"Well, my boy, I think we must have a party. What do you say?"

Alexander flushed a deep crimson, and smiled broadly. A party! He, "Duck" Most, have a party! It seemed so remarkable a thing that he decided that Farmer Wyman must be joking.

"And, as most of you young people go to school, I think that Saturday will be an excellent day for you all to come over to the farm and have dinner with Alexander," continued Farmer Wyman. "I guess we'll call it a 'Cocoon Party.'"

"Yes, indeed," exclaimed Alexander, whose eyes had brightened at the word "cocoon," but Farmer Wyman held up a warning finger. "Sshh," he said. "We won't tell them a word about it until we have them all

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safely at the farm. Now, will you all promise to come?"

"Yes, indeed!" came a chorus of voices, and Ferdinand and Alexander exchanged a smile of understanding, for Ferdinand now spent a fair share of his leisure time at the Wyman farm, and knew something of what Farmer Wyman's plan must be for a "cocoon party."

It was after nine o'clock when Mr. Wilson appeared to take his little daughters and Marjorie home. The wonderful "Hunter's Moon" of October lit up the pleasant village street, and the sharp, clear air had a little fragrance of dead leaves. Lucy was eager to tell her father about the wonders of "Hiawatha," while Marjorie and Adrienne talked over the many things they were interested in. "I do hope Mrs. Melchin is going to really like Sophronia and Ann," said Marjorie. "You see, now it would be hard for them if they really had to go to an orphan asylum, or home for girls."

"But you told them that orphan asylums were wonderful places," Adrienne reminded her.

"I know I did," acknowledged Marjorie, "and Aunt Maria herself says that asylums are splendid for children who haven't any homes; but now, you see, after having a home, Sophronia and Ann would know the difference."

"What makes you think that Mrs. Melchin won't keep them?" questioned Adrienne. "Of course she means to, after asking you to spend the winter, and all."

"I was only wondering," responded Marjorie. She

had not told Adrienne all of the adventures of the previous day; of her own thoughtless rush into the street-car and all the trouble that had followed. But she thought a good deal about it, and feared that Mrs. Melchin might decide that two girls were going to be too much trouble; and that she, Marjorie, would not prove to be any help.

“If she doesn’t keep them it will be all my fault,” Marjorie thought unhappily.

Miss Wing opened the door as Marjorie said good-night to her friends, and was interested in hearing all about the happy evening, and of Farmer Wyman’s invitation to the farm for Saturday. “I don’t even know what the word ‘cocoon’ means,” said Marjorie.

“Dear me! Dear me!” exclaimed Miss Wing. “What will become of my reputation as a school-teacher when one of my pupils can say that? I must tell you, even if it is ten o’clock and time for you to be in bed and asleep. A cocoon is the nice silken winter overcoat in which the moths, after they cease being caterpillars, roll themselves up for the winter. They generally attach themselves to a leaf or twig; and there they are, nice and comfortable, until it is time to come out in the spring sunshine, with wonderful big wings of beautiful colors.”

As Aunt Maria talked she had been leading the way up-stairs with Marjorie close behind her.

“But how could Farmer Wyman have a cocoon party?” questioned Marjorie.

“Wait and see,” responded Miss Wing laughingly, and bade her little niece good-night. As Ada and Adrienne afterward told Marjorie, they, too, had been curious to know what “cocoon” really were, and had made the same discovery. Alexander could have told them a great deal about the big moths that he had watched on summer evenings at the farm. They seemed very wonderful and beautiful to him, and he was looking forward to Saturday when he could show his friends the winter homes, the “cocoon,” of the moths about which he had learned a good deal. He had already a number of beautiful moths and butterflies, neatly mounted on cardboard in small boxes with glass tops, and had a plan by which he expected to add largely to his collection before spring. The “cocoon party,” he was sure, would be a wonderful success.

CHAPTER V

ALEXANDER'S COCOON PARTY

MISS WING, Mrs. Streeter and Miss Gray were included in the invitation to Farmer Wyman's party, and were as eager to accept as was Marjorie herself. Farmer Wyman came over with his big team and drove his guests out to the farm.

"Feels a bit like snow," he declared, as he tucked the warm robes carefully about his passengers.

Marjorie and Lucy were on the front seat with Farmer Wyman, Adrienne and Ada had the second seat to themselves, while Miss Gray, Miss Wing and Mrs. Streeter occupied the back seat. Ferdinand had decided to go over on his bicycle, and had arrived at the farm before Farmer Wyman started for the village.

"I know what cocoons are," Lucy shyly informed Farmer Wyman, as they left the village, the big horses trotting briskly over the frozen road, and carrying them past prosperous farms and up the pleasant slope toward their destination. "Cocoons are the houses where moths live in the winter," continued Lucy.

Farmer Wyman appeared to be very much surprised that Lucy should have made this discovery. "You will be telling me what a 'cocoon party' is, I expect," he said.

"I don't know *sure*, but I guess it's going after cocoons," Lucy responded.

"Don't let the others know that you've found out," Farmer Wyman warned her in a very distinct whisper, and Lucy promised with great seriousness.

As they neared the top of the hill, where the Wyman farm commanded a wonderful view of distant mountains and woodlands, Farmer Wyman waved his whip toward the hills. "I used to think that the world ended on the other side of those hills," he said. "I thought it sort of curved off into the shape of a globe; and, when I was a little fellow, I promised myself that just as soon as I grew up I would journey to the top of that highest mountain and look over."

"What did you think that you would see?" asked Marjorie.

"I had an idea that it would be a great sea, dashing up against a smooth mountain wall," replied Farmer Wyman.

"And didn't you ever go to the mountain top?" asked Marjorie.

The old farmer shook his head. "No, I've never been. You see, a boy learns a good deal while he is growing up, and I found out that there were higher mountains yet to be seen from the top of my high peak, and that the sea was hundreds of miles away."

As he finished his little story Farmer Wyman turned his horses into the elm-shaded avenue that led up to the square white farmhouse. Mrs. Meek, his housekeeper,

with Alexander and Ferdinand were on the porch steps to welcome them, and Alexander led the horses away to their stable, closely followed by "Webb," as Ferdinand now wished to be called, much to Alexander's surprise.

"You had better have a warm drink after your ride. These October days are getting sharpish," said Mrs. Meek, leading the way into the big comfortable living-room. There was a brisk little fire on the hearth and a round table drawn up before it. On this table was a big plate of fresh doughnuts.

"Help yourself!" said Mrs. Meek, "and I'll just step to the kitchen and bring you a warm drink."

She was back in a moment with a big blue pitcher, from which arose a spicy fragrance which made them all wonder what it could contain.

"I hope you'll like this," said Mrs. Meek, filling their glasses; "it's a drink I invented myself; just taste it and tell me if it's all right."

"To absent friends," said Miss Wing, lifting her glass, and they all drank the little toast in the hot, foamy liquid with which their glasses were filled.

"Splendid!" declared Miss Gray. "It tastes of sugar and spice and all things nice."

"There! I'm real pleased!" and Mrs. Meek smiled upon the young teacher. "It's really only milk and the whites of eggs, with sugar and nutmeg, beaten up together and heated in a double-boiler, and then more nutmeg and another beating."

Ferdinand and Alexander were back in time for their share, and then Farmer Wyman told them that the party was ready to begin.

“It begins in the chestnut grove,” he said leading the way across the farmyard toward the pasture. “You young people have sharp eyes, and now you can use them to good advantage. First of all do you all know what cocoons are?”

“Yes, indeed!” answered Ada. “Miss Gray gave us an hour’s talk on moths yesterday, and we know all about cocoons and where to look for them.”

“Alexander has some splendid luna moths that he caught last summer,” volunteered Ferdinand. “They are green, and have wings as big as my hand.”

“A good many cocoons can be found on the ground,” said Alexander, as they reached the edge of the chestnut grove. “You see, they spin their cocoons over a leaf, and the leaf falls,” he explained, looking carefully among the rustling leaves through which they were walking.

“Look! Look!” Marjorie held up a leaf to which was attached a gray silky cocoon, about as large as a pigeon’s egg.

“That’s a splendid find,” said Alexander. “I know that means a good big moth when spring comes.”

“Let me see, Marjorie,” and Mrs. Streeter took the cocoon and examined it carefully. “I think it’s the *Telea polyphemus*,” she said; “if it is, it will come out an even larger moth than any of Alexander’s lunas;

and it will be a wonderful golden brown, with soft grays and delicate pinks."

"Do the wings have 'eye-spots,' and look like the colors on a peacock's tail?" questioned Alexander eagerly.

"Yes, I believe they do," responded Mrs. Streeter.

"I have seen those, but I never caught one," said Alexander, looking a little longingly at the silky envelope of the beautiful moth.

After Marjorie's "find," the others were all more eager in their search, and before leaving the chestnut woods Lucy, Miss Gray and Ferdinand were each successful in securing cocoons, but, as nearly as could be determined, these were the envelope of lunas.

"Now for the brook!" said Farmer Wyman. "There's where I expect to find the spice-bush silkmoth."

"In the water?" questioned Lucy, wonderingly.

"No, my dear, but there are a good many sassafras and spice bush and wild cherry trees near the brook, and those are the kind of trees that the spice-bush silkmoth prefer," replied the farmer.

By the time Mrs. Meek rang the big bell to call them to the one o'clock dinner, all the party had been successful in finding at least one cocoon; but Marjorie was the only one who had secured a *Telea polyphemus*. She had resolved to take it to Boston to show to Sophronia and Ann. Mrs. Streeter told her that if the cocoon was kept in a warm room the moth might emerge as

early as February, and Marjorie was sure that it would be a beautiful thing to watch it, with its great wings so rich in color.

"What shall we do with these?" questioned Adrienne, as she walked toward the farmhouse with Marjorie and Ada.

"Mother says that we needn't pay any attention to them," said Ada. "We can put them on top of a bookcase and leave them; and when spring comes the moths know it, just as the flowers do, and they begin to prepare to come out, and, the first thing we know, there they are, waving their beautiful wings up and down and looking as if they had just come from fairy-land."

"It will be something to tell 'the Six' about, won't it?" suggested Adrienne; "only they would think it was a fairy story unless they could really see the moths come out from the cocoons."

"The Six" were six little girls in Boston, who were the friends of the Ashley girls, and whom the "Marjorie Club" were pledged to help. They had all visited Farmer Wyman and Miss Wing, and had enjoyed many happy days with their Ashley friends. The "Marjorie Club" had helped these little girls to many useful and pleasant things.

"I'm going to take my cocoon to Boston for Sophronia and Ann to see; and perhaps Mrs. Melchin will ask 'the Six' to come and see it. You know she gave them a doll party at her house," responded Marjorie.

“‘The Six’ are getting to be big girls,” said Ada thoughtfully, but before either of her companions could respond Alexander came up with the request to be allowed to look at the cocoon Marjorie had found.

“I’m going to hunt right hard for one like this,” he said as he handed it back to her.

After dinner Alexander showed them his collection of butterflies and moths; many of these were very beautiful.

“How do you ever catch them?” questioned Adrienne, and Alexander showed them his butterfly net, made of a delicately meshed net attached to a round hoop, forming a deep wide-mouthed bag, which he had fastened to a pole.

“Maybe they’d enjoy looking at your oak plantation, Alexander,” suggested Mrs. Meek. She was very proud of the fact that Alexander already knew more about the plants, birds, and insects of the country than the boys of the village, and encouraged and helped him in all his efforts to add to his knowledge.

“He’s going to find out a good many important things right on this farm,” she confided to Miss Gray as they followed Alexander into the big kitchen. “I shouldn’t be a bit surprised if he wrote a book about such things as trees and birds and moths some day.”

On the wide window-shelf of the eastern window stood a row of wide-necked fruit jars. “This is my oak plantation,” said Alexander, a little shyly, pointing to the jars.

Each of the jars was about half-filled with water. The tops were covered by neatly-fitted circles of white paper. Suspended from these circles of cardboard by a strong thread, hanging points down, were acorns, one in each jar, and hanging just above the water.

In one jar the acorn had burst its shell and a little root was growing downward. In another, a number of roots could be seen and a stem had reached upward, a hole had been cut for it in the white paper cover, and a tiny oak tree was making its appearance.

"I reckon I'll try some chestnuts, too," said Alexander, as his guests exclaimed over his "oak plantation."

"Why, I can do that in Boston," said Marjorie. "I know Sophronia and Ann would think it was wonderful. I could keep the bottles in my window; the sun shines in all the morning."

"You think about those girls all the time," said Adrienne a little complainingly. "Why don't you think about me? I'm going to South Carolina next week for all winter!" And Adrienne tried to throw a very despondent note into her voice.

"And live with my mother and father, and go to school to my Aunt Maria, with dear Betty and Tryphosa and Grace and Edith," responded Marjorie laughingly. "Oh, you can't expect *me* to be sorry for you, Adrienne."

"You would be there too, Marjorie, if you hadn't bothered your head about those mill girls," said Adrienne a little scornfully.

“Do you remember the first time we saw Sophronia, the day of the picnic at the plantation?” asked Marjorie.

“Indeed I do, and of all the poor looking girls I ever saw Sophronia was certainly the worst,” answered Adrienne. “Why, she wasn’t even clean!”

“No, I’m afraid she wasn’t,” agreed Marjorie. “Well, if I hadn’t thought about her, she would be just like that now, wouldn’t she? Only more tired, more dirty, perhaps.”

“You’re a brick, Marjorie!” declared Adrienne. “Some way you make all of us want to help people. I suppose I’ll be looking out for another Andromeda before spring!”

“I hope you will,” said Marjorie with a little laugh. “You see, I have to think about Sophronia and Ann, because that’s what Mrs. Melchin wants me at her house for. I’m almost afraid, Adrienne, that she may not want to keep them!”

“Why not? Why, it would be dreadful if she didn’t!” declared Adrienne.

“It would be all my fault,” said Marjorie solemnly, and before she could explain Mrs. Streeter’s voice called them to come back to the sitting-room and see some wonderful hoods that Mrs. Meek was just finishing for “the Six,” in whom she was greatly interested.

As the clock struck four Alexander brought the big wagon up to the porch steps.

"It's been a lovely party, Alexander," said Miss Gray, as she took her place in the wagon, "and you have taught me a good deal to-day."

This seemed a very wonderful thing to Alexander, and he said it over to himself as he stood on the porch steps and watched his friends drive away.

On the ride home Miss Wing had Marjorie's seat beside Farmer Wyman, and Marjorie and Adrienne sat together.

"This makes me think of our ride on David's coach to Columbia," said Marjorie. "Do you remember how Tryphosa and Madame Savory sang?"

"Yes, indeed; let us sing," responded Adrienne. "We'll sing, just as your aunt drank her spiced milk, 'to absent friends,'" and a moment later the girlish voices began the same old song that they had sung months before when riding over the beautiful South Carolina road.

"Oh, dear, what can the matter be!
Oh, dear, what can the matter be,
Oh, dear, what can the matter be,
Johnny's so long at the fair."

CHAPTER VI

MARJORIE'S MISTAKE

THE room given to Sophronia and her sister in Mrs. Melchin's Boston house faced the east, and the morning sun made it very bright and pleasant. There were two large windows, and from these the little girls could look out over the roofs of other houses toward the blue waters of the harbor. They could see the tall granite shaft of Bunker Hill, and were now familiar with the story of the great battle of the Revolution. Mrs. Melchin had taken the little girls to Concord and Lexington and told them of the attack and defeat of the British troops. But none of these great facts had so impressed Sophronia as had the story of "Robinson Crusoe." She believed that to be as real and true as history itself.

Their room seemed very beautiful to the sisters. It had two little white beds, two bureaus, two chairs and a round low table of just the right height to rest a book on, or to spread out paper dolls, or on which to set a work-basket. The walls were tinted a soft yellow, and the floor covering was of dull brown. There was only one picture on the walls, a copy of Guido's "St. Michael," and both the children loved the beauti-

ful head with its wonderful expression of firmness and tenderness.

A little bath room opened from their chamber, and Ann considered the bath tub, with its shining nickel faucets and the spotlessness of the porcelain, as a most beautiful and wonderful object.

Marjorie's room was on the same floor, facing on the front. Her windows looked down on the tall trees of the Common, the high buildings beyond, and the towers and spires of many churches. The wonderful sunset glows of dull crimson fading into pink behind the distant spires, the myriads of lights that glimmered from the shop windows on Tremont Street, made her often think that it was a very wonderful thing that a scene of such beauty at the beginning of every evening was spread out before her ; and she often called Sophronia and Ann into her room at sunset to look out with her.

Marjorie's room was the same size as that of her friends, and furnished in much the same manner with the exception of a low desk that stood between the front windows. There were two broad shelves above this desk for Marjorie's books, and on one of these shelves rested the cocoons she had brought in from Ashley. The colored maid, Cora, had a room on the same floor.

As Marjorie sat at her desk one afternoon a fortnight after the party at Farmer Wyman's, she was not thinking of her pleasant surroundings or even of all that she hoped to do for the little mill girls ; she was

thinking of her mother and father and of the far-off Southern home, where Miss Wing, with Adrienne and Lucy Wilson, were already installed.

There was no sunset glow this afternoon, and if there had been Marjorie would not have seen it, for she was homesick. The skies were dull and gray outside, a cold wind thrashed about among the Common's big trees, and now and then a spiteful dash of rain came against the windows.

Mrs. Melchin was taking her usual afternoon nap, and the house was very quiet. Now and then Marjorie was conscious of a murmur of voices from the back room, where Sophronia and Ann were conscientiously trying to prepare their lessons for the next day. Marjorie knew just how hard this was for them to do without her help. Twice she had heard them tiptoe to her door and rap softly, but she had not answered and they had gone softly away.

"I don't care if they do want me to help them," she said to herself, as she sat with head over the desk; "it's awful to be in this big city with nobody belonging to me. Awful!" and she sobbed quietly over her own loneliness. "I reckon I'll go home; father said I could," she decided, and raising her head she looked out into the gray world, now rapidly growing dark. She saw the lights flash out in the tall windows, but with no sense of their beauty, for her thoughts were all fixed on herself.

"I'll tell Mrs. Melchin I can't stay!" she thought.

getting up to turn on the electric light that hung over her desk. "I reckon if I go home Mrs. Melchin will just have to send Sophronia and Ann to the orphan asylum. Aunt Maria says it's a real good place; anyway it's a sight better than living the way they always have."

As Marjorie talked to herself the little clock on her desk struck the hour of five. In a few minutes Mrs. Melchin would expect the three little girls to come to her in the library. Dinner was served at six, then they all returned to the library, listened to music or Marjorie read aloud for a while, and at eight they said good-night to Mrs. Melchin and went to bed.

"Oh, dear," grumbled Marjorie as another tap came at her door. "Come in," and the door swung open and Sophronia appeared.

"We-uns is all ready," she announced smilingly.

"'We-uns,'" echoed Marjorie scornfully. "What is the use of your trying to learn anything, if you are going to keep on talking that way? 'We-uns,'" and without another word Marjorie pushed past Sophronia and ran down-stairs.

Sophronia stood looking after her with wondering eyes. The smile faded from her face. Marjorie had never before been impatient or unkind toward her, and Sophronia was sure that this change could mean only one thing, and that was that Marjorie was tired of her, had ceased to be her friend.

"I reckon she's right," the little mill girl whispered

to herself. "'Tain't no manner of use for we-uns—us—to try to learn. No manner of use," and she sighed sorrowfully. "Miss Marjorie's mighty sorry she ever took up with us," she said to Ann, as she went back into their room. Ann looked up in surprise, and at the sight of her sister's gloomy face her own smile faded.

"What have we done?" she asked.

Sophronia shook her head.

"Then it's all right!" declared Ann. "I reckon you'd know if we'd done something wrong, and if you don't know, why, then we haven't. And I don't believe that Mrs. Melchin is sorry she took up with us. Mrs. Melchin says 'dear' to me right often; and she says I learn right fast. Your old Marjorie is just cross!" and Ann again fixed her eyes on the book of wonderful pictures, as if the whole question was settled to the satisfaction of every one concerned.

But an instant later she screamed in surprise, for Sophronia had grasped her by the shoulders and was shaking her vigorously.

"Take it right back! This minute, Andromeda Cutts! The likes of you-uns calling Miss Marjorie cross! Take it back!"

The shaking ceased, but Sophronia stood over the frightened Ann evidently waiting for Ann to retract.

"Miss Marjorie was just like an angel to us, and you know it, Ann. We was miserable till she began looking after us. 'Tain't her fault if we are too stupid to learn. 'Course she's 'shamed of us."

It was this that Marjorie heard as she stood outside the open door. Mrs. Melchin had sent her back to tell Sophronia and Ann to come down, and Marjorie had come, a little reluctantly, and had reached the doorway in time to see Sophronia administer the vigorous shaking, and to hear herself called an "angel."

"'Angel' indeed!" she whispered to herself. "I'm a horrid selfish thing, and I'm going to tell them so this minute. Sophronia," she called, "I heard what Ann said and she's just right, only I was worse than cross. I'm the one you ought to shake," and she managed to smile as she came into the room. "I don't suppose you can forget how horrid I was, can you, Sophronia?" and she put her arm across Sophronia's shoulders.

"Everybody is cross at times," announced little Ann. "I reckon there isn't much harm in saying so."

Sophronia did not even hear what Ann was saying; she was looking at Marjorie with adoring eyes.

"Come on," said Marjorie. "Mr. Field and Luke are down-stairs; they are going to stay to dinner. Mr. Field has brought a lot of pictures for us to see. Come on," and the three girls went down to the library. Marjorie had quite forgot her homesickness. Ann's declaration that she, Marjorie, was "cross" had struck home; while Sophronia's loyal faith in her made Marjorie realize how much she meant to them. "They never shall go to an asylum, never!" she whispered to herself. "I'll go myself before I'll let Sophronia go."

"I have not forgotten the 'surprise' I promised you,

Marjorie," said Mr. Field, as they gathered about the library table to look at the sketches he had brought; "but so much happened that day that I decided to postpone it until after Miss Wing had gone South."

"They are having lovely times at home," responded Marjorie.

Mrs. Melchin looked at her little guest anxiously, and noticed that Marjorie was not her usual happy self. The old lady sighed a little. During the summer she had found the two mill children a good deal of care, and had decided that unless Marjorie came to stay through the winter she would be obliged to find another home for them. Now it seemed to her that Marjorie was not contented.

"Homesick, like as not," thought Mrs. Melchin. "Well, if she goes home I'll find a good place for Sophronia; maybe I could manage to keep little Ann. I'll think it over."

"We are going to have good times right here in Boston," Mr. Field continued. "Wait until you know about my surprise."

Luke nodded smilingly, as if he knew all about it, and as if it was indeed something wonderful; and Marjorie began to feel interested, and to forget the dull unhappy afternoon, and her unkindness toward Sophronia.

"When is this remarkable 'surprise' to occur?" asked Mrs. Melchin.

"Next Saturday afternoon is the time set," responded Mr. Field.

“A very suitable time,” said his hostess. “I am going to a lecture that afternoon and you can take charge of my family,” and she smiled and nodded to Marjorie.

“And where is the ‘surprise’ to be?” Marjorie asked.

“At my studio,” answered Mr. Field, “at two o’clock.”

“An excellent hour,” said Mrs. Melchin. “I will bring the girls, and I will come after them at four o’clock; and they are not to start for home until I do come.”

“No, indeed!” agreed Marjorie promptly.

All the evening Sophronia’s eyes rested questioningly first on Mrs. Melchin, then on Marjorie. She did not seem to even notice the beautiful pictures, and once or twice failed to respond when spoken to. The happy brightness had died out of her face, and as Mrs. Melchin looked at her she said to herself that Sophronia looked stupid, “and I begin to believe she is,” decided the old lady. “Dear me, dear me! They’ve got me into a great deal of trouble, I’m afraid, with these mill children; and I don’t see as Marjorie is going to help me out much. Dear me!”

When Mr. Field and Luke started for home it was raining, and a cold east wind swept down Beacon Hill. The girls went up-stairs to bed, and Ann was soon fast asleep, but Marjorie lay long awake. She could not forgive herself for having been so unkind to Sophronia. Sophronia lay staring into the darkness, and listening

to the wind and rain. "I reckon Mrs. Melchin would let Ann stay," she thought to herself. "Ann's younger and littler and smarter than I be. If I was gone like as not she'd keep Ann till she grew up," and with this pleasant thought her eyes closed and she forgot her troubles in sleep.

CHAPTER VII

MR. FIELD'S "SURPRISE"

MARJORIE had brought a number of acorns and chestnuts home from Farmer Wyman, and had carefully followed Alexander's directions in putting them in the small glass jars that Cora smilingly provided for her. These jars were set in one of the windows of Sophronia's room, and every day the two sisters looked eagerly for the appearance of the delicate sprouts. After they began to show the girls were greatly interested and watched for the stem, turning upward toward the light, from which the tiny tree would grow. The parrots were a continual source of wonder to Sophronia and Ann, and they never tired of listening to "Nero's" brief statements, or to "Pickwick's" "Well! Well!"

There were many beautiful and wonderful things in the old mansion to interest and entertain two little girls who had seen as little as had Sophronia and Ann. There were no memories of a home, and of happy times within a loving circle of friends to make them homesick. They had never even dreamed of such good fortune as now surrounded them. To Sophronia these happy surroundings seemed all due to Marjorie. Her

heart was filled with gratitude toward the girl who had been the first to be sorry for her, and to take some trouble to help her. All her life Sophronia would think of Marjorie as her best friend.

Ann accepted the great change in their lives quite as a matter of course; and did not think, as Sophronia did, that Marjorie was always right in everything she said and did. Ann was evidently Mrs. Melchin's favorite. The little girl was taking piano lessons, and Mrs. Melchin sat beside the big piano for a half hour every morning to direct her practice.

"It don't seem as if I could wait until Saturday," declared Marjorie, on the morning after Mr. Field's visit, as she and Sophronia stood looking out of the library window. "I do wonder what the 'surprise' can be. What do you suppose it is, Sophronia?"

"I don't know," Sophronia answered very precisely. She had made a firm resolve that morning to be very careful in regard to her speech; never to say "we-uns" again as long as she lived, and to do everything she could to please Marjorie. She had also made another resolve: if she made mistakes and Marjorie got tired of her she would go away. Sophronia knew just where she would go. She would go to Cambridge and take care of Charles Edward in the beautiful rooms over the grocery store.

Sophronia was glad to remember that Charles Edward had "taken" to her. His mother had said so, and had told Sophronia that if she ever wanted a

chance to take care of a baby to come right to her, for Mrs. Field had also "taken" to the serious-eyed, quiet little girl. Sophronia was almost glad that she had discovered Cambridge by herself. It was very pleasant to her to feel that two people had liked her and would be glad to see her again.

"I wouldn't run away," she decided, "for that would make trouble; they'd think they must find me. I'd just tell Mrs. Melchin not to bother 'bout me, that I was going over to take keer—care—of Charles Edward. 'Course, of course,"—Sophronia was now trying very hard to remember to use the right words, and corrected her mistakes very promptly,—“of course I shall try right hard to please Miss Marjorie so that I can stay here with Ann.”

"Don't you wonder what the surprise is, Sophronia?" asked Marjorie. "You haven't said a word about it."

"No, I don't wonder," answered Sophronia.

Marjorie looked at her a little wistfully. Sophronia seemed so different this morning. She spoke so slowly, "almost as if she did not want to speak at all," thought Marjorie. "It's my fault," she acknowledged to herself, and was very kind and thoughtful of her little friends all that morning and for many days to come.

"I know it will be lovely, and you will have a splendid time, Sophronia," she continued. "Now I must start for school, and when I get home I'll read

to you and Ann from that new book Mrs. Melchin gave us."

"Thank you," responded Sophronia. "Will you tell me what a 'dictionary' is, Marjorie?"

"Why, that big book on the table is a dictionary," answered Marjorie; "it tells what each word means. Good-bye," and Sophronia was alone with "Pickwick" and "Nero," who were both very busy with bits of apple.

Sophronia looked at the big leather-covered dictionary in admiring surprise. She had asked Cora that morning how people knew what words were the right words to use, and Cora had answered, "By the dictionary."

"It'll take a mighty long time, I reckon," thought Sophronia, but she opened the big book determined that, sooner or later, she would learn all the "right" words, and when Mrs. Melchin came into the library a few minutes later she found Sophronia laboriously spelling out words and their meaning.

The Saturday which Mr. Field had set for the girls to come to his studio was the week before Thanksgiving, and proved a clear sunny day. In the morning Marjorie had a music lesson, and after that was over she taught little Ann how to darn a stocking. As Ann came into Marjorie's room, Marjorie gave a little sigh; for she could not help but remember her gay happy mornings at home with Betty Savory, and in Ashley with Adrienne and Ada. Ann seemed a very poor

substitute for these friends, but Marjorie was beginning to realize what it meant to think of others, instead of her own pleasure, and giving Ann her own little rocking-chair, she sat down beside her and began teaching her how to darn. "My mother says this is one of the fine arts," she told Ann, as she deftly sent her needle over and under the delicate threads.

"What's a 'fine art'?" questioned Ann.

"Why, darning," laughingly responded Marjorie, "if you do it well enough. Music and pictures and poems are fine art, I suppose," and, wishing to change the subject, Marjorie asked, "What is Sophronia doing?"

"Studying the dictionary," answered Ann. "Do you reckon we'll all come home from the surprise?" she asked, a little soberly. "We didn't that day Mr. Field took us to walk."

"Of course we will, Ann."

"Mebbe," said the little girl doubtfully. Sophronia had explained to Ann just what the dictionary had to say about the word "surprise," and neither of the girls had felt that a word of such meaning could promise much pleasure. To Marjorie it meant only wonderful and unexpected delights. She determined that she would do her best to make Ann and Sophronia enjoy it, even if it could not be for her like the happy days at the plantation and at Ashley.

It was Luke who opened the studio door for the three girls, and who showed them into a small room where they were to leave their coats and hats.

"*You'll* like the surprise," he assured Marjorie. "Come out in the studio when you get ready," and a moment later, closely followed by Ann and Sophronia, Marjorie opened the studio door, and, to the half-terrified surprise of her companions, ran eagerly forward exclaiming, "Ada! Ada! Oh, this is a lovely surprise!"

"But I am not *the* surprise at all," responded Ada laughingly. "Or, if I am," she continued, "I am Mrs. Melchin's surprise. She wrote and asked mother to let me come up this morning, and to stay over Sunday with you!"

"Isn't that splendid! I never was so glad!" declared Marjorie happily. "I was wishing this morning that we could have some of our Ashley good times over."

"Do you like the girls in Miss Ray's school?" asked Ada.

"I don't know any of them very well," answered Marjorie. "You see, after school I hurry home so that Sophronia and Ann won't bother Mrs. Melchin."

While Ada and Marjorie were talking Mr. Field had taken charge of the other two girls and was showing them some of Luke's remarkable carvings in wood of birds and animals.

"I reckon this is fine art," ventured Ann.

"Yes, indeed," agreed Mr. Field. "Now you must come and be introduced to Marjorie's friend, Ada Streeter," and he led them across the studio to where the two friends were standing.

"Is she the 'surprise'?" Ann found courage to ask,

and was evidently disappointed at Mr. Field's reply that Ada was only a visitor, like themselves.

A curtain of dull green cloth was stretched across one end of the long room, and Luke was now busy bringing in chairs, which he set in rows across the studio, facing the curtain. He had just finished this employment when the studio bell rang, and he and Mr. Field both hurried out to answer it. There was a murmur of voices, and the door opened to admit Miss Ray, the head of the private school where Marjorie was now a day pupil. Close behind Miss Ray came the members of her school, walking very sedately, but turning to smile and nod to Marjorie, for Mr. Field had included all her schoolmates in this "surprise," and when Miss Ray had given them the invitation for an afternoon at the artist's studio she had explained that Mr. Field was a friend of Marjorie Philips, and the entertainment was for her. So they were all disposed to become better acquainted with the little Southern girl.

Marjorie at once took Ada, Sophronia and Ann and introduced them to Miss Ray, where Luke had reserved seats for them. Mr. Field had vanished behind the green curtain. Marjorie had been so surprised by finding Ada at the studio, and then by the arrival of the girls with whom she went to school, that now she wondered if anything more surprising could happen. Just then a little bell tinkled. The girls all became very quiet and a little figure in a scarlet cloak, a pointed

cap with a white plume, and high white boots came out at one side of the curtain, lifted the plumed cap in graceful salutation, and "Felicità!" both Ada and Marjorie exclaimed.

The little Italian girl smiled radiantly at the sound of her name. Her dancing black eyes rested for a moment upon her friends. Then, evidently quite at her ease, she once more donned her cap, bowed low, and began in a clear, musical voice :

"Listen, I've a pleasant story
Now to tell you, here to show you.
Story of a tree so wondrous,
All who see, and all who listen,
Will rejoice that I have told them,
Will rejoice that I have shown them,
How a tree of many blossoms,
All of use and all of beauty,
Each may own and each may treasure."

Felicità made her pretty bow and disappeared behind the curtain. As she vanished there was heard a merry tinkling sound and a number of little figures came trotting out from the other side of the green curtain. When they reached the center they stopped and bowed very low. They were Marie, Anna, Lottie, May and Dottie, "the Six."

Marie, in a somewhat uncertain voice, announced :

"I am a fairy, shut up in the tree ;
I sing in the leaves, as glad as can be.
My name is Contentment, and, as you will see,
I'm gay as a bird and as smart as a bee."

She bowed quickly, and tinkled off behind the curtain. Anna came next. It was evidently a very serious occasion for this little girl ; she spoke very slowly and distinctly.

“I am Patience, and I give
Strength so that the tree may live,
Never sad, yet never gay.
I bring joy with every day.”

Lottie, May and Dottie announced themselves respectively as Kindness, Truth and Friendship. Then the green curtain was drawn aside. A little murmur of admiration was heard from the audience. The stage was set to represent a forest dell. The ground was carpeted with wonderful fern-like mosses. A bank of blossoming azaleas showed behind the delicate green of ferns and tiny pine trees. Shrubs with pale yellow blossoms shut in the sides, and in the center was a wonderful tree.

“It’s a holly,” declared Marjorie, noticing its glossy green leaves and bright red berries.

“A holly doesn’t have oranges, and apples and roses on it,” responded Ada, in a whisper.

In fact, as Marjorie looked more closely, it seemed to her that there was every kind of a flower on this remarkable tree. There were white lilies, roses, peonies, blue larkspur, and apple blossoms. As they all looked at the stage there came a little shower of golden flakes down over the beautiful tree, and now, led by “Con-

Contentment," the six little girls came dancing and tinkling onto the stage. They formed in a ring about the tree, joined hands, and with graceful steps circled about in time to the gay tune that seemed to rise from behind the bank of azaleas. As they danced a little cloud of butterflies came drifting down among them. Wonderful butterflies; as big as your two hands, with wings of blue and scarlet and silver. Then, as the others danced, "Contentment" came a step or two nearer the admiring audience, made her graceful salutation, and in clear tones recited :

"Here's a bit of a song, to take along,
To remember every day,
'Tis, 'If you do right you can't go wrong,
And Kindness will show the way.'"

The music had stopped now, and the little dancers were taking from the tree the wonderful blossoms and throwing them to the audience.

"Oh! They're only paper flowers," exclaimed Ann in a disappointed voice, as a big rose came tumbling into her outstretched hands.

"And only paper butterflies," said one of the school-girls, "but they are lovely, just the same."

Luke had made the butterflies and painted them. He had attached them to tiny threads and fastened these to a slender rod which, at the proper moment, he had suspended over the dancing children.

Miss Ray's girls were all eager for a butterfly or a

flower as a souvenir of the afternoon, and Marjorie found herself surrounded by friendly faces and, before the time of departure arrived, began to feel very well acquainted with her schoolmates. Several of them asked if they could not come and see her, and they were all friendly and kind toward Sophronia and Ann, and greatly interested in the six little dancers.

"It has been the most wonderful day!" declared Marjorie, when Mrs. Melchin arrived to take her charges home.

"Mr. Field, it was lovely to make so many people happy," she said, as she bade her good friend good-bye and thanked him for the surprise.

"And having Ada for over Sunday is the very best part of it," she said to Mrs. Melchin.

The old lady nodded approvingly. "I hoped you would think so, my dear. I'm sure I do," she responded, smiling at Ada.

CHAPTER VIII

ADA'S VISIT

“ADA! I never was so glad of anything as I was to see you to-day!” declared Marjorie, as the two girls went up to Marjorie’s room.

“Then you know just how glad I am to be here,” responded Ada. “And just think, Marjorie, I never stayed all night in Boston in my life. And this is such a wonderful house. Do you like all those girls you go to school with, Marjorie?”

Marjorie shook her head. “I don’t like one single girl in that school, and not one single girl likes me,” she declared.

Ada looked at her friend in surprise. She could not quite believe that Marjorie was serious. In Ashley all the school children had liked Marjorie, and Ada had supposed that going to a new school would mean new friends.

“Probably it’s because you are not very well acquainted yet,” suggested Ada; “they all seemed pleasant this afternoon.”

“Of course they did.” Marjorie’s voice had a little note in it that Ada had never heard before. “They were pleasant to me to-day because, you see, the whole

affair at the studio was really for me, and they were all asked because they go to the same school I do."

"Haven't they been pleasant to you before?" questioned Ada.

The two friends were now comfortably established on the broad window-seat, where they could look out toward the western skies.

"Not what I call pleasant," said Marjorie. "They all say 'Good-morning' to me when they can't help it, and one or two will smile, when we meet in the hall or on the street. But that isn't like going to school with friends."

For a moment Ada did not respond, then she asked: "Are you the only girl in the school whose home is in some other place than Boston?"

"No, indeed! One girl is from Ohio, and one from Texas, I heard Miss Kent tell Mrs. Melchin the first day I was at school," replied Marjorie.

"Do you know those girls?" asked Ada.

"I've said 'Good-morning' to them." There was a questioning note in Marjorie's voice, as if she were wondering why Ada was so interested in girls from Ohio and Texas.

"I wonder if they, the girl from Ohio and the one from Texas, ever feel the way you do," said Ada. "I know I should, Marjorie. I should be homesick anyway to be away from father and mother, but if I was at school with girls who were friendly and liked me it wouldn't be so bad."

"I know what you are thinking, Ada. I know just as well as if you had said it," said Marjorie, resting one hand on Ada's arm. "You are thinking that if I had thought about those girls, and been pleasant toward them, that they would be my friends, and that I shouldn't be homesick. Honest! Wasn't that just what you were thinking?"

Ada smiled at Marjorie's earnestness. "Why, I suppose I was thinking something of the kind. I wasn't blaming you, Margie; of course you know that. But you know my mother tells me that I must always go and speak to new girls, and must try and make it pleasant for them, so I was wondering if you hadn't been a little 'stand-offy' with those girls."

"The Texas girl hasn't spoken to me," said Marjorie. "I don't see why I should be the one."

"Never mind about those girls; tell me about this wonderful house, and about Sophronia and Ann," interrupted Ada. "You can't think how excited I am to be here. Why, if I should ever go to Paris or to Alexandria, it wouldn't seem more remarkable than it does to be in Boston at Mrs. Melchin's," and Ada suddenly sprang up from the window-seat and did a graceful little dance step around the room.

Marjorie laughed happily. "I do wish I could see you every day, Ada. We always have such good times."

"You'll be telling me of your good times with Miss Ohio and Miss Texas, the next time I see you," replied

Ada, "and don't you have good times with Sophronia and Ann?"

"Sophronia and Ann?" Marjorie repeated.

"Why, yes. Of course Ann is younger, but we always liked to play with Lucy Wilson, and Ann seems good-natured. They are right here in the house, so I should think you could have real good times together."

"I never thought about having good times with Sophronia and Ann," said Marjorie. "I have always thought about helping them, and—and——" Marjorie hesitated, and then exclaimed, "There! I know exactly what I am. I'm a snob! Yes, I am. A snob thinks she is better than some one else, and quite superior to most other people. I have just thought how fine I was to get Sophronia away from the mill. I have been *horrid*, Ada!" and Marjorie sat up very straight and did not look at her friend.

"Well, try having a good time with Sophronia. Let's begin now," suggested Ada.

"How?" Marjorie's voice was eager.

Ada shook her head, with a little laugh.

"Would you ask them to come in here?" asked Marjorie.

"Can't we go in their room?"

"Come on!" Marjorie was on her way to the door with Ada close behind her.

The door of Sophronia and Ann's room was partly open. Sophronia sat there alone; an open dictionary

lay on the table beside her, but Sophronia was not spelling out words; she was sitting in the dusk thinking about Charles Edward.

“I’ll turn on the light,” said Marjorie. “Where’s Ann?”

“She is practicing on the pi-ana,” responded Sophronia.

“You must ask us to sit down, Sophronia; and you must say how glad you are to see us,” said Marjorie smilingly.

“Must I, Miss Marjorie? I am right glad, but I didn’t s’pose I had to say so,” responded Sophronia seriously. “Won’t you—you both have cheers?” she asked.

Her two visitors sat down, and Ada carelessly turned over the leaves of the dictionary, while Marjorie wondered to herself what Sophronia’s idea of a good time was.

“Sophronia,” she asked suddenly, “if you could do anything you wanted to, what would you do?”

Sophronia sent a quick glance of startled wonder at each of her two visitors, then a smile crept over her sober face.

“I reckon if I could do *just* what I wanted to, that I would start right off for that island where Mr. Crusoe lived,” she said.

“But that was only a make believe island. Robinson Crusoe was only a make believe himself,” explained Marjorie. “Some one just made believe, you know,

Sophronia, that there was such a man, and wrote the story about his being wrecked on a desert island."

"And there wasn't any such island?" demanded Sophronia, rising to her feet.

"No!" declared Marjorie and Ada.

"And there wasn't a man Friday, or a cave or a garden, and he didn't find all those things?"

Marjorie did not know enough to explain how Defoe had founded his story on the real experiences of Alexander Selkirk.

"Why, Sophronia, I supposed you knew that it was only a story," explained Marjorie. "Of course there are islands where people could do many of the things told about in that book."

"You read it to me out of a book," said Sophronia; "books ought to be true. I reckon this isn't true either," and she pointed scornfully toward the dictionary.

"Yes, indeed! Of course the dictionary's true," answered Ada. It seemed very funny to Ada and Marjorie that Sophronia should doubt the dictionary, but they did not laugh.

"What would you do, Sophronia—I mean what would you like to do next best to finding Crusoe's island?" insisted Marjorie.

"I reckon I won't tell," said Sophronia.

"But perhaps it is something that you could do," said Ada; "the reason we ask, Sophronia, is because we would help you if we could."

"I reckon I won't tell," said Sophronia. She was thinking to herself that next best to living on a desert island she would like living over a Cambridge grocery store and taking care of Charles Edward. "Seems like he wanted me to take keer of him," she whispered to herself, "and nobody here wants me much. I reckon they all plans to put up with me on account of bein' sorry for me, but they don't really want me. Not even Miss Marjorie."

"You needn't tell, Sophronia," declared Ada, "and I know just how sorry you feel that there isn't any such place as Crusoe's island; but I wonder if you like picture puzzles?"

Sophronia shook her head. She had never heard of a picture puzzle.

"It's great fun," Ada assured her. "I have one in my bag that I made for Marjorie; she hasn't seen it. I'll bring it in now," and Ada ran back to Marjorie's room, returning in a few moments with a small flat box, which she handed to Marjorie. "It is your present, so perhaps you would like to unwrap it," she said.

"Thank you, Ada," and Marjorie untied the cord and took off the paper in which the box was wrapped. She lifted the cover, and there before her rested a picture of her Aunt Maria's home in Ashley. The comfortable house, the fence, and familiar trees. "And if there isn't 'Sarah Mullins' on the porch," Marjorie exclaimed, pointing toward a responsible looking cat near

the front door. "How could you make so good a picture, Ada?"

"I drew it very carefully, then colored it with my water-colors and pasted it on cardboard," explained Ada; "then I drew the puzzle lines on the other side, pinned the picture, picture-side down, on a board, and cut the lines with a sharp knife."

Marjorie and Sophronia both looked at Ada admiringly.

"There's the dinner-bell," exclaimed Marjorie. "We must not keep Mrs. Melchin waiting. The picture puzzle is fine, Ada. We'll do it after dinner, won't we, Sophronia?" and slipping her hand under Sophronia's arm, she led the way down-stairs.

There was a little smile on Sophronia's face as she took her place at the table. "Maybe I'm like other girls. Maybe I am," she was whispering to herself. "Miss Marjorie took hold of my arm just the same as she did of Ada's."

After dinner the four girls returned to Sophronia's room and the picture puzzle provided them with amusement for the hour before bedtime. Sophronia and Ann found that here was something they could do just as well as Marjorie herself, and both thought it the happiest evening they had spent in Mrs. Melchin's house. They quite forgot to think of themselves as of less account than other more fortunate girls; and Marjorie and Ada were so interested in making the game pleasant for the other two girls that they did not think of themselves at all.

“It was great fun,” declared Marjorie, as she and Ada went to their own room. “It was splendid of you to make that picture puzzle for me, Ada. Wasn’t Sophronia clever about putting it together?”

“Yes, indeed!” responded Ada.

“I suppose I’ve been selfish, wanting all sorts of wonderful girls for friends,” confessed Marjorie. “I reckon if I had tried to be a little nicer to Sophronia and Ann I would have had a good time right in this house, and wouldn’t have needed new friends.”

“Don’t forget Miss Ohio and Texas,” Ada reminded her laughingly. “Perhaps they haven’t any Sophronia or Ann.”

“I won’t forget,” Marjorie promised.

CHAPTER IX

SOPHRONIA'S PARTY

“I AM going to make picture puzzles,” Sophronia said to Ann a few days after Ada's visit. “I have thought out a splendid way. I told teacher about it and she said I might.”

“Teacher” was a brisk young woman who came every morning to instruct Ann and Sophronia. When the little mill girls came to live with Mrs. Melchin neither of them could read nor write. During the summer Cora had taught them to read, and to write their names. Mrs. Melchin decided that it would not be wise to send them to school at present, and employed the young lady to come each morning to help the girls with their lessons. They were making good progress, their teacher said, and hoped they would be ready to begin school in another year.

“You can't make picture puzzles,” Ann responded in reply to her sister's statement. “You can't paint pictures.”

“I don't have to. There are all those colored pictures in those magazines and papers that Mr. Field gave us; and Cora said she would get me some old pasteboard boxes, and have cook make me a dish of paste. Then, all I have to do is just to stick the

pictures on, and mark out funny lines on the back, and cut them out."

"Where's your sharp knife?" asked Ann.

"Cora will get me a sharp knife."

"You'd better ask Miss Marjorie about it before you begin, I reckon," advised Ann.

"Yes," agreed Sophronia.

The sisters were always pleasant with each other. Sophronia was quite sure that every one who saw Ann must think her the brightest little girl possible. Ann took her sister's devotion quite for granted, and relied upon it as she did upon the sun's rising each morning, both pleasant facts in life that she need not think much about.

Marjorie listened to Sophronia's plan to make picture puzzles with evident interest, and when Sophronia finished Marjorie exclaimed:

"Sophronia, it will be fine. We will have a picture-puzzle party, if Mrs. Melchin is willing, and I'll ask Miss Ohio and Miss Texas. It will be just the thing," and then Marjorie told Sophronia about these two schoolmates, with whom she now felt better acquainted.

"'Miss Ohio's' name is really Millicent Hortense Trevelyan," explained Marjorie, "and she is living with an aunt in Brookline. Her aunt is an old maid, and doesn't really want Millicent—that's what 'Miss Ohio' says—but she can't get out of it. And 'Miss Texas' lives with some cousins on Pinckney Street. Her name

is Sarah Jones. She says her cousins love to have her, because her father pays them a lot of money to look after her. She says they really are her father's cousins, and they are two grown-up women; and they don't like to have her talk unless it is necessary."

"I reckon it ain't ever necessary," ventured Sophronia.

"Of course it is, for girls," responded Marjorie. "Anyway, neither of them has very good times, and they get right homesick. They both said that I was the first girl at school who had talked with them; and when I told them that not one single girl had said a word to me except 'Good-morning,' or ask me 'Where's the dictionary?' why, they were real pleased."

"How could you have a picture-puzzle party?" asked Sophronia, who really thought Marjorie did not need to bother about girls from Ohio and Texas.

"I'll tell you," responded Marjorie eagerly. "We would only ask those two girls; then there would be just five, and we could have it in my room. We'd bring your table in there, so as to have plenty of room. On one table we would have all the pictures and cardboard ready to paste, and on the other table we could mark out the lines and cut the pictures."

"Maybe they'd get all pasty," suggested Ann.

"That would be part of the fun, but we will ask Cora to lend us five big aprons," said Marjorie; "that is, if Mrs. Melchin wants us to have the party."

Mrs. Melchin listened to Marjorie's plan with evident approval. "But two extra girls does not make a party, does it, my dear?" she asked.

"Yes, indeed," responded Marjorie, "with Sophronia and Ann."

"And Marjorie," added Mrs. Melchin, "and I suppose Saturday afternoon is the best time. Well, tell Cora and Billings what you want, and if you wish to introduce your guests to 'Nero' and 'Pickwick' I have no objections. I shall not be at home on Saturday."

"It is really your party, Sophronia," Marjorie declared, as she told Sophronia that "Miss Ohio" and "Miss Texas" would be glad to come to the puzzle-party. "And, Sophronia, they have been in Boston a month, and neither of them has been asked to see any other girls. They think it is splendid to come and see you and Ann."

Sophronia and Ann thought it was splendid, too, and were glad that Saturday was so near. They asked Marjorie many questions about Millicent Hortense Trevelyan and Sarah Jones.

"Sarah Jones looks just *like* Sarah Jones," declared Marjorie. "She isn't very tall and she isn't very stout or very thin. She isn't exactly dark, but her hair isn't light, and her eyes are not dark."

Sophronia was sure she knew just how Sarah Jones looked, but Ann did not understand what Marjorie could mean. Ann decided to herself that Marjorie

was different from other girls, and that Sophronia was trying to be like Marjorie.

"Does Millicent Hortense Trevelyan look like her name?" questioned Sophronia a little anxiously.

"No-o," responded Marjorie, regretfully. "I don't suppose any one could look just like that, at least not until she were grown up."

"I reckon a girl would have to grow right tall to look like that name," said Sophronia.

"Of course she would," agreed Marjorie, "and be very beautiful and dignified."

Sophronia nodded.

"I must go practice," said Ann, and ran off leaving the two older girls together.

"Would you just hear me say a few dictionary words, Miss Marjorie?" asked Sophronia.

"Yes, 'Miss Sophronia,'" replied Marjorie laughingly.

Since Ada's visit Marjorie had not been homesick. Instead of sitting alone in her room she had asked Sophronia to bring her books and sit with her; and had begun reading aloud to her from a book that seemed to Sophronia far from being equal to "Robinson Crusoe."

"It's better one way, because it is true," Sophronia decided. It was "The Story of Boston," beginning with its early settlement, telling of the Indians who formerly lived on the shores of Massachusetts Bay, and of the time when the Common was used as a cow pasture.

Sophronia had been quick to feel the change in Mar-

jorie's manner toward her. Marjorie had been kind always, with the exception of that one quick exclamation of impatience, but now she treated Sophronia as a friend. "She smiles at me just like she smiled at those Ashley girls," Sophronia thought happily.

"I am so glad I spoke to Sarah Jones and Milly Trevelyan," said Marjorie on Saturday morning, as she and Sophronia were making preparations for the guests of the afternoon. "Why, Sophronia, you can't think how different it seems to go to school now. You see, Milly is always watching for me, and Sarah has things to tell me at recess; and we write letters to each other in cypher."

"'Cypher!'" echoed Sophronia; "that's a figure."

"No, to write letters in 'cypher' means to write them so that no one who does not understand the 'code' can make out what they are about. You can't read writing, so I'll tell you about it. If Milly wants to ask me to wait a minute after school for her she just writes 'American history,' and I understand. If I can't wait I write back 'X,' and if I can wait I write 'O.' We have little books called 'codes,' and we keep thinking up 'cyphers' for things and tell each other, and then we all three write it down in our 'codes.' It's wonderful. Nobody could understand what we write to each other."

"No, indeed!" agreed Sophronia admiringly. "I reckon it's hard work for you-uns—you, I mean—to understand it."

“We can always look in our ‘codes,’” said Marjorie.

Before the “party” began Cora spread an old sheet on the center of Marjorie’s room. “Then you won’t need to look out for scraps,” she explained, “and when you get through I can gather up the sheet and there’ll be no bits of paper on your floor.”

The girls all thought this was an excellent plan, and when Cora brought in five white aprons, which she advised the girls to tie about their necks, they felt ready to begin at once. Cora also furnished them with scissors, knives and five little gray bowls filled with smooth flour paste, and soft pieces of old white cotton cloth with which to paste the pictures on to the cardboard.

“Milly’s aunt is going to bring her in,” said Marjorie, as the three girls stood in the big library window waiting for their guests, “but Sukey Jones said she could run over from Pinckney Street in a minute but she supposed one of the grown-up cousins would think that they must come with her, and come after her.”

“I reckon you say ‘Milly’ and ‘Sukey’ because they are ‘cypher’ words, don’t you, Marjorie?” asked Sophronia.

Before Marjorie could answer, Billings opened the library door and a tall, slender girl came into the room. She was so tall that at first Sophronia and Ann both thought she must be much older than Marjorie, but Millicent was really a year younger. Her eyes were very blue, and her hair very light.

“Why, she does look just like a ‘Millicent,’” Sophronia whispered to Ann; a remark which the younger girl received with a sniff. She thought Marjorie and Sophronia were very silly to talk about girls looking like names. “I reckon they couldn’t tell what an ‘Ann’ ought to look like,” she thought with satisfaction in possessing such a name.

Sarah Jones was only a moment behind Millicent, and after the little visitors had admired “Nero,” “Beauty” and “Pickwick,” Marjorie led the way up-stairs.

“My, this is a big house, isn’t it? It’s funny to have three parrots in one house, and three girls, too. Which talk the most, girls or parrots? My cousins say I am worse than a parrot. I don’t know what they mean,” chattered Sarah as they went up the stairs.

“I reckon on account of talking,” Sophronia explained.

“I reckon so too,” agreed Sarah cheerfully, “but if they talked more I shouldn’t talk so much. But I think people ought to talk, don’t you, Double-M.?” and she turned toward Marjorie.

“Of course,” agreed Marjorie.

Before the afternoon was over Sophronia felt very glad that Marjorie had told her about the “cypher code,” for the three schoolmates at times carried on a conversation which no one but themselves could understand.

“Sophronia thought of these picture puzzles,” Marjorie explained to her guests.

After the pictures were pasted on the cardboard the girls found it would take some time for them to dry properly, before they could be marked or cut.

"We'll just spread them out on my table and leave them until next Saturday," suggested Marjorie, "then you girls come again and we will do the marking and cutting." Millicent and Sarah thought this an excellent plan.

"Ann has a tame pigeon," Sophronia announced as the girls unfastened the long white aprons.

"I feed it on the window-sill every morning and every night," Ann explained, "and Sophronia has named him 'Robinson Crusoe.'"

Sarah was eager to see a tame pigeon, and the girls all went into Ann's room.

"See the little trees!" exclaimed Sarah. "My! I'd like to have something like that in my window to watch."

Marjorie told her how the acorns had been put in the jars, and also about the moth cocoons she had brought from Farmer Wyman's.

Ann had taken a little tin box from a drawer in her bureau, and was now breaking up a cracker. She opened one of the windows and put the bits on the sill.

"It's early, but perhaps R. C. will come," said Ann. The other girls laughed at the abbreviation, and Sophronia regarded her sister proudly. Ann could talk in "cypher," too, she thought.

"There he is. Oh, isn't he a beauty!" whispered Sarah, as a pigeon, of soft gray plumage with perfectly white wings, came floating down to the window-sill. It turned its pretty head from side to side, picked up the bits of cracker and fluttered away.

"I wish I could feed a pigeon," said Sarah Brown, "but if I did my cousins wouldn't like it."

"How do you know they wouldn't?" asked Ann.

"Oh, I know. They never like to have me do anything unless they tell me to," said Sarah.

"I guess relatives are all like that," said Millicent. "My aunt says girls shouldn't speak unless they are spoken to, when older people are present."

"My!" exclaimed Sarah. "I'm glad my cousins haven't found that out. They say I'm worse than a parrot, but I don't mind that."

Cora rapped on the door and said smilingly: "Miss Marjorie, tea is served in the dining-room."

"Ain't that grand!" Sarah whispered to Ann; "sounds just like grown-ups. I guess my mother will be pleased when I write her about to-day."

"Here," said Ann, handing her a little package, "here are some crackers. You just take them home and crumb them up on your window-sill, and I reckon you can have a tame pigeon, too. *I've* lived with relatives, and I know just how horrid it is." Ann had not forgotten Uncle Besum; she was quite sure that Millicent and Sarah were to be pitied, and wished she could do something to make them more happy.

CHAPTER X

RESCUING "ROBINSON CRUSOE"

ANN watched for the white-winged pigeon each morning, running to the window as soon as she was out of bed to put out bits of cake, apple, or the cracked wheat Cora had given her. If "Robinson Crusoe" happened to be late to breakfast Ann would lean out of the window and look along the roofs of the neighboring houses hoping to discover him. Generally, however, "Robinson" or "R. C.," as the girls now called him, arrived in good season, and his flutterings and chirpings were the first sounds the little girls heard on waking.

"I wonder where 'R. C.' stays at night?" Ann would say every morning, and at night she would watch the bird as it floated off across the housetops.

"'R. C.' knows me. I'm right sure he does," she would declare, as the pigeon turned its head toward her. And when, after several weeks, it really took a bit of cake from her hand, Ann was happier than she had been since the proud day when she had been fitted for glasses.

She told Marjorie of the wonderful happening, and Marjorie and Sophronia were as eager to see this proof of the pigeon's tameness as even Ann herself could wish.

"It's getting so cold now at night I'm afraid 'R. C.' will freeze," Ann said one afternoon, as she put out the usual rations for the bird. "I reckon Mrs. Melchin wouldn't like it if I took him in nights."

Marjorie shook her head. "No," she agreed, "I'm sure she wouldn't like it."

"I don't see why not. 'R. C.' is just as pretty as the parrots. Prettier, I think."

"He can't talk," Marjorie reminded her.

"I'm right glad of it," declared Ann. "Suppose he came screaming out, 'Crackers, breakfast-time!' at me every morning. I shouldn't care anything about him. I understand 'R. C.'s' way of talking, and it's a good deal softer and more pleasant than parrot's talk."

It was a cold day in early December as the girls stood in Ann's room watching "R. C." take his evening meal. As he finished he came close up to the window, snuggled his head down into his feathers, apparently deciding that he would stay near his friends.

"I do believe he is going to stay here!" exclaimed Ann; "and it's snowing." A little flurry of white flakes filled the air, and settled on the broad window-shelf. "Oh, dear!" Ann's voice sounded as if she were very near to tears.

"Wait a minute," exclaimed Marjorie. "I'll be right back," and she ran out of the room.

"Do you reckon she's gone to ask Mrs. Melchin to let us take 'R. C.' in?" questioned Ann hopefully.

"Maybe," responded Sophronia; "anyway she has

thought of something to help. Marjorie always has beautiful thoughts."

The pigeon looked like a ball of feathers, huddled up in the snow, that was now falling thick and fast.

Marjorie's steps were heard in the hall, and in a moment she was in the room holding out a small square wooden box. "Look!" she exclaimed. "Billings got this for me. It will make a splendid house for 'R. C.' We can put it out on the window-sill—and he will go right in and be nice and dry."

"It won't stay on the window-sill," said Ann. "Hear the wind. It would blow that box off in a minute."

"I believe it would," agreed Marjorie. "What can we do?"

"I know. Give me the box," and Sophronia took "R. C.'s" "lodging house" from Marjorie. "Give me some cracked wheat, Ann," she demanded, and Ann brought the bag in which "R. C.'s" provisions were kept.

Sophronia turned the box on one side, covered the lower side with the grain, and then held it out to Ann. "'R. C.' is more used to you," she said. "You raise the window and talk to him the way you always do; let the window down so it will hold the box and 'R. C.' will walk into it after the grain."

Marjorie and Ann both looked at Sophronia admiringly, and Ann promptly obeyed. At the sound of her voice "R. C.'s" head came up and he walked smartly

into the box, and, after eating the grain, settled himself in the far corner of the box, with little chirpings and coos, that Ann declared were his thanks for shelter.

The next morning Billings came up and nailed the box securely to the window-sill. The opening was toward Ann's window, so that "R. C." had to walk around the box, and enter on the open side facing the house. It did not take him very long to discover the way, and after that every night the pigeon came to its snug shelter.

Millicent Trevelyan and Sarah Jones were now frequent visitors at Mrs. Melchin's, and Sophronia's picture puzzles were given to "the Six," greatly to their delight. Marjorie had written to Betty Savory and Adrienne Wilson about the "cypher code" and they immediately became members of the "Code Club," sending letters to Marjorie, that she spent much time in translating. Ada also became a member, and the code book was rapidly growing into a bulky volume.

Marjorie's friendliness toward the girls in her class at school soon won her a place among them, and before Christmas time "Miss Ohio," "Miss Texas" and "Miss South Carolina," as the three little strangers were affectionately called, were feeling quite at home with their Boston schoolmates, and were all included in many pleasant gatherings.

The class in American history in Miss Kent's school had many pleasant excursions, as their teacher took

them to see many of the places where historic events had occurred. They visited the Old North Church, in whose tower hung the signal light for which Paul Revere had watched "on the 19th of April in '75," before starting on his ride to Concord and Lexington to warn the country folk to be up and to arm to defend their liberty. The Old South Church, used by the British officers for a riding-school, and King's Chapel, where distinguished men had preached and worshiped for nearly three centuries. Sophronia and Ann were included in some of these excursions and listened with wonder-filled eyes to Miss Kent's interesting stories of the days when Massachusetts was an English colony, and when colonial governors, and British officers in red coats and cocked hats walked on Beacon Street.

Marjorie's letters to her mother and father told them of these interesting things, and Miss Wing read them aloud to the girls in her school. Mr. Philips kept the letters very carefully, saying that when Marjorie was really grown up she would like to read them.

"I wonder where 'R. C.' is?" Ann asked one morning a few days after the box had been put out. "I haven't heard him, and he isn't in his box."

"Oh, he's just taking a fly before breakfast, the way people take a walk," replied Marjorie, who had stopped at Ann's door, to remind her that the breakfast bell had rung. Sophronia had gone down-stairs. "He'll come back," added Marjorie starting toward the stairway.

But Ann did not follow her; she opened the window

and crawled out on the window-ledge. "I was sure I heard him," she said aloud, looking along the roof for some trace of her pet.

There was a wide ledge on which the windows opened; below this the roof sloped gently to another narrower coping which formed a gutter to carry off rain. As Ann crouched on the window-ledge she heard a complaining chirp toward the left, and as she looked along the roof in that direction she saw "R. C."

"What is he doing!" she exclaimed, for the bird would flutter up a foot or two from the upper ledge and then drop back suddenly. Ann called to him. And he started up quickly with a plaintive note, but immediately dropped back.

"Oh, what is the matter?" called Ann, and wished, for the first time, that her pet could talk. "R. C." was evidently frightened, and as Ann crept a little further along the ledge she discovered that in some way he was fastened by a string to the window-ledge. "He'll break his leg if he keeps on pulling that way," thought Ann, creeping a little further toward the bird, "and if he can't get loose he'll starve," and at the thought of such things befalling "R. C." she crept on, not realizing her own danger or the fact that any slip on her part would send her hurtling down the roof and off into space. "If I can only see where the string is fastened," thought the little girl, as she worked her way rapidly toward the corner. At her approach the bird fluttered even more desperately, and Ann could see that the



SHE CREPT ON, NOT REALIZING HER OWN DANGER

string was caught under the edge of the cornice. She spoke softly to the pigeon, and at her repeated gentle calls he gradually became less frantic and at last fluttered on to her outstretched hand. Ann now kept very still. She was stretched at nearly her full length along the ledge. Holding the bird in both hands she dared not sit up, and in that position it was nearly impossible to disentangle him from the snarl of string in which his foot was held. There was, fortunately, no wind, and the morning sun lay warm upon the roof; but the December air was sharp, and in a little while Ann's feet began to ache with the cold and little shivers crept over her.

Sophronia ran up to their room to call her sister to breakfast, and returned to the dining-room to announce that Ann was not in her room. "She isn't in the library either," she said anxiously.

"She wouldn't go out on the street, would she?" questioned Mrs. Melchin.

"Oh, no!" Sophronia answered. "You told us never to go out alone," and Mrs. Melchin smiled at Sophronia's reply, as the little girl evidently considered that it would not be possible to disobey such a decision.

"Perhaps Ann is in my room," suggested Marjorie. "I'll run up and see," and she started up the stairs.

Just then Billings appeared at the dining-room door; he looked very much alarmed.

"If you please, Mrs. Melchin, there's a policeman at the front door, and he says there's a little girl on our roof."

“What?” exclaimed the horrified old lady.

“A little girl, if you please,” repeated Billings.

“The policeman says we must get her off,” continued Billings, “and that it must be done careful. If she starts to stand up or to turn round she’ll tumble into the street, he says; and if she stays there long this cold morning she’ll freeze, he says,” and Billings waited respectfully.

“Tell him to do something quick,” commanded Mrs. Melchin; “if I live till spring it will be a miracle. Oh, dear, oh, dear!”

Sophronia had not waited to hear the end of Billings’ story. As she reached the door of her room Marjorie stood there. “Ann’s on the roof,” Marjorie whispered. “We mustn’t frighten her, but we must get her in.”

“I’ll get her,” Sophronia replied. “Ann will do what I tell her,” and she went toward the open window and leaned out. “Ann, you just get yourself back into this room,” she called. “You needn’t be skeered; just let go of that bird and creep backward till you get here and I’ll pull you in.”

“I ain’t goin’ to let go of him,” announced Ann, “leastways not ’til I get his foot clear of this string. I reckon I’ll manage it.”

“You’d better,” commanded Sophronia, watching her sister fearfully. “Ain’t you most froze?”

Ann made no answer; she was resting her elbows on the ledge and slowly working her pet out of the

snarl of string. Sophronia heard heavy feet on the stairway. "Keep all those folks quiet," she commanded Marjorie, drawing her head in from the window. "Don't you let one of them speak. I'll get her," and Marjorie ran to obey. She felt sure that Sophronia would succeed.

Sophronia returned to the window just in time to watch "R. C." flutter out of Ann's hands, a free bird once more.

"Come on back," commanded Sophronia.

"Reckon I can't," replied Ann weakly.

"Andromeda Cutts, you wriggle yourself right back to this window or I'll tell Mrs. Melchin to march you straight back to Uncle Besum."

Ann made a backward movement immediately.

"And you keep yourself close to this 'ere roof," Sophronia went on sternly. "I reckon Uncle Besum 'll tend to you right smart if he gets a hold on you."

The backward wriggle became more rapid. Ann evidently had lost all fear of the narrow shelf as compared to the possible terrors of a return to Uncle Besum.

"You'd better come along right smart," kept on Sophronia, and as Ann's feet and legs came past the window she called out:

"You can pull yourself in, I reckon."

Sophronia drew back into the room, and turned around to face Marjorie, Billings, Cora, and a tall policeman. "Go out this minute," she commanded. "You'll skeer her so she'll fall backward."

There was an immediate flight, and as the door swung to behind them Ann's head appeared at the window, followed rapidly by the rest of her small person.

"Shut that window right down this minute," ordered Sophronia, "getting Mrs. Melchin's house cold as Uncle Besum's cabin. You ought to have some sense, but you ain't!" she concluded scornfully; "not the least bit."

Ann began to cry. That Sophronia should apparently turn against her was more than could be borne. She threw herself on her bed sobbing bitterly, and in a second her sister was beside her holding her tightly.

"I had to jaw you, honey, 'deed I did," she explained. "I was that skeered you'd go fallin' off and *off* and OFF."

It was a half hour before the sisters came shyly into the dining-room. There was a cup of steaming hot milk for Ann, her toast was crisp and warm, and Cora heaped marmalade upon her plate. No one spoke to her of "Robinson Crusoe" or of the roof, and Ann made an excellent breakfast and ran away to the library.

"She'll never do it again," Sophronia assured Mrs. Melchin. "I reckon I skeered Ann worse than she did us."

"I hope you did. You are a good girl, Sophronia, and a smart girl," Mrs. Melchin responded, and at this unexpected praise Sophronia glowed with happiness.

CHAPTER XI

CHRISTMAS

“WELL, Marjorie, what are we going to do about Christmas?” Mrs. Melchin asked one morning when Marjorie came into the library. It was just a week before Christmas day. Marjorie’s school had closed for the holiday vacation; but Mrs. Melchin had decided that it was best for Sophronia and Ann to continue their lessons until Christmas day.

“Do you mean for Sophronia and Ann?” responded Marjorie. “I don’t suppose they know what ‘Christmas’ means, and I’m sure they never had Christmas gifts or saw a Christmas tree.”

“Then I think our Christmas will be a very pleasant one,” said Mrs. Melchin; “but we must try to be sure that Sophronia and Ann understand about Christmas,—what it really is and means.”

Marjorie nodded, for she realized what her good friend meant, as her own thought of Christmas was a very beautiful one. The story of the star in the east, and of “the exceeding great joy” with which the wise men had welcomed it, had been told to Marjorie on every Christmas eve since she was a very small girl.

“I think, Marjorie,” continued Mrs. Melchin, “that Sophronia and Ann will like to hear why there is a day

set apart by all civilized nations as a day of rejoicing, a day of loving-kindness. Your grandmother used to tell the story to her children on every Christmas eve."

"And mother always has told it to me," said Marjorie. "I think I won't wait until Christmas eve to tell them about it. You see, everybody is talking 'Christmas,' and it is just as well to tell them now."

"Perhaps it is better," agreed Mrs. Melchin, "and to-morrow you and I will make our plans to give Sophronia and Ann a happy time that they will always like to remember."

Mrs. Melchin's suggestion came at just the right moment, for Marjorie's thoughts were with all the dear people in her Southern home, and the realizing that Sophronia and Ann had no happy thoughts of Christmas, and that it was possible for her to do a great deal for them, gave her a new interest and happiness.

All that morning Marjorie busied herself with books in the library. From one she copied a beautiful verse about Christmas, from another a single line. She selected Dickens' "Christmas Carol" to read aloud, and asked Sophronia and Ann to come up to her room in the afternoon.

"Is it a surprise?" questioned Ann hopefully.

"I'm going to read to you," answered Marjorie.

There had been a heavy fall of snow on the previous night, and the Common glistened under its white cover. Every branch and twig of the tall trees were edged with ermine, and boys and girls were out with sleds

coasting down the historic paths, carefully avoided by smiling pedestrians, many of whom turned to watch the swift descent of the delighted youngsters.

Marjorie stood at her window looking out. "It's pretty!" she thought. "It is different from the lovely long hills and green woods in Ashley, and of course it isn't like the plantation, but I am beginning to like it."

She turned at the sound of Ann's tap on her door, and a moment later the three girls were gathered around Marjorie's table. She had brought up a book of colored photographs of Jerusalem, and as Ann and Sophronia looked over these Marjorie told them, as her mother had first told her, the story of the first Christmas eve. "And now people keep Christmas day as a day of loving-kindness toward everybody," she concluded.

"And to make presents," added Sophronia. Marjorie noticed that both her friends were very sober, but not until Christmas day did she realize that both Ann and Sophronia had passed a very unhappy time because they wanted to give her a Christmas gift, and had not then thought how it would be possible.

Marjorie had nearly finished reading "The Christmas Carol," when a smart knock on the door made her pause, and in response to her "Come in!" the door swung open and Cora appeared in the doorway.

"Mrs. Melchin sent you up a little refreshment," said the smiling girl, setting down the pretty tray in front of Marjorie.

“It’s lovely!” declared Marjorie, and Ann and Sophronia were both smiling with pleasure. “Tell her we are *ever* so much obliged,” continued Marjorie, “and thank you, too, Cora.”

On the tray were three dainty china cups filled with cocoa. On the top of each was whipped cream, white and foamy. There was a plate of tiny heart-shaped cakes with white frosting, and a silver dish filled with candies.

“It’s really the beginning of the good times Christmas brings,” declared Marjorie, as she helped herself to a cake.

“I wonder where Uncle Besum is,” said Sophronia, as she sipped the delicious chocolate. “I reckon he’s having a terrible miserable time somewheres.”

Sophonria’s voice was so serious that both the other girls looked at her in astonishment, and there was a trace of alarm in Ann’s expression until after her sister’s next remark.

“I reckon we shan’t ever know,” and at this Ann sighed with relief. It seemed to Ann that one of the blessings of life would be never to hear a word about Uncle Besum.

The next day Mrs. Melchin and Marjorie talked over their plans for Christmas.

“I think we will all go out Christmas eve and follow the ‘waits,’ and see the Christmas candles,” said Mrs. Melchin; “the ‘waits,’ you know,” she added, without waiting for Marjorie’s question, “are little groups of

people who go about the streets singing Christmas carols. Sometimes the choir boys from the Church of the Advent sing before the houses of those who have been ill and shut in ; and there are older singers, men and women. Here at the West End rows of lighted candles are set in many windows, and people follow the singers about the streets."

Marjorie was sure this would be delightful, and Ann and Sophronia listened in amazement, and were eager for Christmas eve to come.

"We'll have the tree lit directly before dinner," Mrs. Melchin told Marjorie. "I hoped that Mr. Field and Luke would be with us, but they are going to Ashley to stay that week with Farmer Wyman."

"They'll have a lovely time," said Marjorie a little wistfully, remembering the big lions of snow which Luke and Ferdinand had made on a winter's visit to the farm.

"And we shall have a lovely time, too," responded Mrs. Melchin. "I have just happened to think that Sophronia and Ann haven't had a penny to spend since they came North. I am ashamed to have been so careless ; but they were so surprised when I gave them each a dollar this morning, and told them that after this they could expect the same amount on the first day of every month, that perhaps they haven't wanted any money."

"I don't believe they have," Marjorie responded earnestly. "I know I haven't spent a penny of what

father sent me until I began to get ready for Christmas."

Sophronia and Ann considered a dollar a large amount, and the two sisters were sure they could buy many wonderful things with it.

"There are shops, with beautiful things to sell, on that street the other side of the Common," said Sophronia. "Cora goes over there sometimes to do errands for Mrs. Melchin, and I'm going to ask her to let me go along, and then I'll buy presents! Presents!" repeated Sophronia, as if she found joy in the sound of the word.

"And I'll go, too," declared Ann.

"I reckon it'll be better for us to go separate," said Sophronia.

"Maybe," agreed Ann.

There was a pleasant air of mystery about the big house during the week before Christmas, and Marjorie was sure that she was the busiest girl in the city. The gifts for the dear home people, for Ada and Farmer Wyman, for "the Six," as well as for Sophronia and Ann, gave her a good deal to do and kept her happily busy. She was helping Ann make a laundry bag of wonderfully figured cretonne, as a gift for Mrs. Melchin; as Ann stitched slowly and carefully Sophronia worked steadily upon a linen case to hold handkerchiefs.

Cora had consented for Sophronia to go shopping with her on one day, and Ann the next, and both the little girls felt as if the riches of the world were spread

before them. Neither of the sisters had ever been in a store before, and Sophronia, who Cora took first, and who had believed that almost anything could be bought for one dollar, came home to tell Ann strange things of the wonderful things that could be bought.

“I reckoned to buy a diamond ring for Marjorie, and a watch for you, Ann,” she began, “and I told Cora, and the way she laughed! It seems those things cost a sight, and Cora said that no matter how many dollars I had that Marjorie wouldn’t want a diamond ring, and that Mrs. Melchin wouldn’t let her wear one if she had two dozen.”

“What did you buy?” questioned Ann.

Sophronia shook her head. “Wait till Christmas. Nobody must know what people buy,” she answered, “but don’t you start out to buy anything like diamonds, ’cause one dollar won’t pay for them.”

“I’m going to ask Marjorie before I buy things,” declared Ann; and it was Marjorie who advised the purchase of the cretonne for the laundry bag, and gave Sophronia the linen to make Mrs. Melchin a handkerchief-case.

“I shan’t spend much more than a dollar,” Marjorie told the girls. “You see mother is going to send me a big box of holly, and I am going to give sprays of that to Milly and Sukey with boxes of candy. I’m going to make the candy. Mrs. Melchin said I might go down in the kitchen to-morrow and make all the candy I want; don’t you girls want to help?”

“ Yes, indeed ! ” they both answered.

“ And I shall give Ada and Farmer Wyman and each of ‘ the Six ’ just the same, ” went on Marjorie.

“ I’d reckon those wouldn’t be *your* presents then, ” said Sophronia, “ or only about half yours, and the rest Mrs. Melchin’s. ”

“ That’s just what I said, Sophronia, when Mrs. Melchin told me that I could have all the sugar and nuts and things I wanted for candy ; and we talked it over, so her present to me is to be all the things I need for candy, and that makes it all right. ”

Sophronia agreed that no fault could be found with that arrangement, and Marjorie went on. “ Adrienne, Betty and the other girls at Aunt Maria’s school won’t want candy and holly, of course, so I am going to send each one of them a Christmas candle, to burn on Christmas eve. Mrs. Melchin knows where I can get a dozen for twenty-five cents ; that will leave me seventy-five cents for postage and other things. You see, I always work a handkerchief for my mother and one for Aunt Maria and for my father. ”

“ We shall know better what to do next year, I reckon, ” said Sophronia.

Marjorie had learned to make candy during her stay in Ashley, and had carefully written down her Aunt Maria’s recipe for creamed walnuts, and molasses caramels. Ada Streeter had taught her how to make chocolate fudge and cream peppermints, and Marjorie felt sure that her friends would all appreciate her candy.

Mrs. Melchin told her that she would find boxes for her candy in the storeroom ; and when the little girls saw the pretty round boxes, covered with red and white glazed paper, they all exclaimed with delight.

“ This is part of Christmas, too, isn't it ? ” said Ann, as she cracked the nuts for Marjorie's candy. Sophronia was being taught how to make fudge, and was carefully following Marjorie's directions.

“ You must each start a recipe book, ” Marjorie announced. “ My grandmother did when she was a little girl only ten years old, and my mother and aunt each have one, and this is mine, ” and Marjorie held up a little square book in which her candy recipes were neatly written.

“ We must leave the kitchen just as nice as we found it, ” Marjorie said, when the big platters were covered with rows of the candy they had made. So every dish was carefully washed, pans and spoons scrubbed, and nut shells brushed up and burned, and a dish of candy left for the cook with Marjorie's thanks for the use of the kitchen.

“ 'Tis a lady she is, ” the gaunt Scotch woman, who had been cook for Mrs. Melchin for a long time, declared as she looked about the neat kitchen, and then looked at the candy and read Marjorie's message.

The day before Christmas it snowed ; but at sunset the sky cleared, the snow ceased, and dusk found the city sparkling over its beautiful robe of white. The stars came out clear and bright ; there was no wind,

and all the world seemed to be ready for the greatest day of the year.

As Mrs. Melchin and the three girls entered the dining-room for the evening meal, there was a chorus of exclamations. There were no lights in the room excepting in the far corner, where a tree glowed with red, white, yellow and blue; tiny electric bulbs hanging from every branch, and on the top of the tree a big yellow star. How many things that held! The girls were sure there had never been such a wonderful Christmas tree before. Sophronia and Ann were as happy as any two girls in all the world, and as Mrs. Melchin looked at them Marjorie heard her whisper, "The best of dividends. The very best!"

"We will put on high overshoes to-night," said Mrs. Melchin, as they finished dinner, "and we will start out as soon as you are ready."

Mrs. Melchin and Ann led the way, and Sophronia and Marjorie followed. Groups of people were making their way through the narrow side streets, and already the glimmer of candles could be seen in many windows.

"Look! Look!" exclaimed Ann, and at the corner of Chestnut Street the little group came to a standstill.

"It's just like fairy-land," whispered Marjorie to Sophronia.

"I reckon it is," responded her companion.

The freshly fallen snow reflected the gleams from the many candle-lit windows, and the dark outlines of

the tall trees. Down the street came a party of singers, carrying bright Japanese lanterns fastened to long poles. They stopped very near to where the girls stood, and in a moment the voices rose in the clear air:

“ In December ring
Every day the chimes ;
Loud the gleemen sing,
In the streets their merry rhymes.

“ Shepherds at the grange,
Where the Babe was born,
Sang, with many a change,
Christmas carols until morn.”

They were all in a quiet mood as they made their way home. Marjorie was thinking that next year she would be in her own dear home, and resolved that she would do all she could this year to help Sophronia and Ann. The sisters were both thinking what a beautiful world it was, how good and kind people were. “I reckon Christmas made folks good,” Sophronia said to Ann, as they went into their pleasant chamber. “Mrs. Melchin says that the star was to remind people that loving-kindness was a Christmas gift.”

Mrs. Melchin was thinking of many things, but through all her thoughts was growing a resolve in regard to the two little sisters, who had come from a miserable existence into the comfort and delight of friendliness and love.

“It will mean something in life besides parrots,” she said aloud, greatly to the surprise of Cora, who was unfastening her overshoes. For Mrs. Melchin was nearly resolved to adopt Ann and Sophronia.

CHAPTER XII

A VISIT

“WHY, yes, Miss Ann, there’s no reason why you shouldn’t have a branch of the tree if you want it,” replied Billings, when Ann asked him, on Christmas morning, what was to be done with the pretty spruce tree which had borne such beautiful gifts the previous night. Billings had replied that the tree would be carried away by the ashman, and then Ann had ventured to ask for a branch. Billings carefully cut off one of the larger branches and handed it to the little girl, and she ran off up-stairs with it.

Billings smiled as he watched her. “’Tis a pleasant thing to have young people in the house,” he thought, and wondered to himself how long these girls would stay.

Sophronia was with Mrs. Melchin and Marjorie in the library when Ann carried the green bough up-stairs. She opened her chamber window and leaned out, looking for “R. C.,” but, fortunately for her plan, he was not to be seen.

Ann pushed the bough in between the small wooden box and the window. It stood upright “just like a little tree,” she exclaimed happily, as she looked at it admiringly. Then she opened the lower drawer of her

bureau and drew out a muslin bag filled with pop-corn. Taking out a handful she stuck them over the branch wherever they would stay, and then left a little heap of them on the top of the box. One of Ann's gifts was a box of candy, and from this she now selected a large pink bonbon, a round, soft chocolate, and a yellow jelly-like square, which she found no trouble to attach to the spruce twigs. Beside this she spread a handful of nuts, cut into tiny bits, a handful of the cracked wheat, and an apple cut in small pieces along the window-sill.

"Now I should think that 'R. C.' would have a party and invite his friends," thought Ann, as she softly closed the window.

Every morning the pigeon flew away, sometimes not returning until night, but this morning as Ann stood looking out over the housetops she saw "R. C.," accompanied by two other birds, fluttering down on the edge of the roof of the next house, and a moment later all three were on her window-sill. There was a fluttering of wings, a chirping inquiry, followed by appreciative notes as all three began on "R. C.'s" feast. "It's exactly as if he expected a Christmas tree," thought Ann, as "R. C." pecked at the pink bonbon, and settled himself comfortably on the top of the box.

The two visitors evidently appreciated their fare, and while they were eating half a dozen little brown sparrows came along and helped themselves greedily.

Ann watched them with delight. "I do wish Sophronia and Marjorie could see," she thought, and at

that moment heard her sister's voice saying, "What are you looking at, Ann?"

Ann held up a warning finger. "Sssh!" she cautioned, and Sophronia and Marjorie tiptoed to her side and looked out.

The three little girls exchanged smiles. "It was lovely of you to think of it," Marjorie whispered, slipping her arm across Ann's shoulder.

In a few moments the visiting pigeons joined "R. C." on top of the box, and the girls went across the hall to Marjorie's room.

"You gave me exactly what I wanted, Sophronia," said Marjorie, as she took up a pretty red box which held six lead-pencils, of different colors, each one sharpened and ready for use.

"My box is just like it," said Ann.

"And the laundry bag is just the thing, Ann," continued Marjorie, for that had been Ann's gift to her friend. Marjorie had given them each a neat brown leather purse; while Mrs. Melchin's gift to each one of her little guests was a pretty fur collar and muff of gray chinchilla. Marjorie's collar and muff was lined with delicate pink silk, Sophronia's was lined with gray, and Ann's with blue; otherways they were exactly alike.

"Mrs. Melchin said for us to put on our hats and coats and be ready to go out at ten o'clock," said Sophronia.

"Shall we wear our furs?" questioned Ann.

"Of course, and we had better get ready this minute; it is ten minutes of ten," said Marjorie.

Mrs. Melchin was waiting for them in the hall. She was warmly dressed, and a big basket stood on the floor beside her.

"Nobody is to ask a question, remember," she said smilingly, as they went out, Billings carrying the big basket to the waiting automobile.

In a moment they were whirling past the State House, with its gilded dome, down between tall buildings, crossing Tremont Street, and twisting and turning through narrow streets until the car stopped before the big railway station.

"Oh!" exclaimed Marjorie, who recognized the place at once, and turned a radiant face toward Mrs. Melchin.

"No guesses allowed!" declared Mrs. Melchin. But Marjorie was smiling happily. A red-capped porter took prompt possession of the big basket, and they all walked down the long platform to a waiting train. Marjorie fairly skipped along. "We're going to Ashley," she whispered to Sophronia, and Sophronia smiled because she knew that her friend was happy; but the little mill girl was quite sure that Beacon Street was as beautiful a place as any one could hope to find.

"It's lovely," Marjorie said to Mrs. Melchin, when the train had started.

"There'll be some lovely surprise at Ashley," Marjorie assured Sophronia and Ann; "there always is. I can't think what it will be."

When the train stopped at the pretty station of Ashley Marjorie looked out eagerly. "There's Luke!" she exclaimed, "and Ferdinand Webb; and oh! there's Ada!"

Evidently Mrs. Melchin's party had been expected, for Farmer Wyman's big sleigh, with the strong, well-matched pair of horses, was drawn up near the platform, and Farmer Wyman himself was holding the reins.

There were many "Merry Christmases" to be said as the newcomers were tucked warmly into the sleigh. Marjorie and Ada were beside Farmer Wyman and could hardly talk fast enough to tell each other all they had to say. Mrs. Melchin with Sophronia and Ann had the middle seat, while the boys shared, with the basket, the back seat.

What a wonderful ride it was that Christmas morning for that sleighful of happy people! Down the village street exchanging merry greetings with neighbors and friends. The sparkling, sunlit air; the white fields stretching away to the black trunks of apple orchards, and distant wood-covered hills. Then into the road where snow-laden firs and spruce rose on each side like sentinels. Then up the long hill to the farm.

Mrs. Meek, Mr. Field and Mr. and Mrs. Streeter and Alexander were all there to welcome them. Two black kittens frisked wildly about the pleasant living-room as if trying to say how glad they were to have company.

It was not long before Ann had made friends with them in the big winged-chair near the open fire. Luke and Ferdinand had gone with Alexander to unharness the horses, and Mrs. Melchin and Mrs. Meek were unpacking the big basket, out of which many wonderful things appeared. There was a big flat box for Ada containing a set of furs,—chinchilla, of course, exactly like Marjorie's, only the linings were of scarlet silk; and Mrs. Meek declared that she had never expected to have such a present, not in this world at any rate, when she opened the little leather box and took out a gold pin set with pearls.

“It doesn't bring you a bit more pleasure than this lovely shawl brings me,” responded Mrs. Melchin, holding up the white fleecy wool shawl which Mrs. Meek had knit for her.

There was a five dollar gold piece for each of the boys, who were almost speechless with gratitude.

Then came the Christmas dinner, a wonderful roast goose, jelly-like apple sauce; how good it all tasted, and how dainty bits were selected for each one. Sophronia looked about the table, and wondered why all these people were so good to Ann and to her; and with the thought she remembered the Great Gift, made on this day, to all the world. “Loving-kindness, one to another,” she repeated to herself. “I reckon that's the reason. It's doing the way they'd be done by. It sure is.”

After dinner the boys and girls went out to coast

down the long hill on the double-runner that Ferdinand and Luke had made the winter before. At Mrs. Meek's suggestion the girls left their muffs at home and wore the warm white mittens that the good woman had knitted for each of them.

"Just think, Sophronia and Ann have never slid down-hill in all their lives!" said Ada as they all took their places on the long sled, with Ferdinand for steersman. Down the hill they flew, over the "thank-you-ma'ams," across the roadway and down the pasture slope.

"Now for the walk back," exclaimed Ada, turning to Ann.

"I ain't goin' to slide again," answered Ann, a little tremble in her voice, and clinging to her sister's arm. "I felt as if I was going straight off into nowhere. I sure did!"

"We don't want you to be frightened, Ann," Luke said in his friendly way; "the rest of us want to slide. What do you want to do?"

"Can I do just what I want to?" Ann asked.

"On Christmas day! Well, I should say you could," answered Luke.

"I'd like to go back to the house, where it's warm, and play with those nice kittens," answered the little girl.

"That's all right. Run along," said Luke, and Ann lost no time in recovering the safety and warmth of the sitting-room, from the sunny windows of which she

watched the coasters, standing with both the kittens in her arms, and looking admiringly at the courageous deeds of her friends.

It was nearly dusk when Farmer Wyman left his guests at the railway station, and drove back to the farm.

"What do you think of Christmas, Ann?" asked Mrs. Melchin, as they all gathered about the tea table that night.

"Beau-ti-ful," responded Ann, who had just taken a bite of a hot muffin covered with honey, and could not, therefore, speak as quickly as usual.

Mrs. Melchin patted Marjorie's hand that rested on the table. "All your doing, my dear girl," she said nodding toward the happy faces of Sophronia and Ann.

Marjorie smiled back at her good friend. She thought to herself how glad she was that Betty Savory had told her about little girls who worked in cotton mills, and in whom more fortunate people did not seem to be interested. "I'm glad we found Sophronia and Ann," she thought; "maybe it was all planned out that we should find them."

The girls were all sleepy at an earlier hour than usual, and Mrs. Melchin was quite ready to say good-night.

When Ann peered out of her window to be sure that "R. C." was safe at home in his box she exclaimed in surprise. "R. C." was there, and close beside him nestled two other pigeons.

“His company are staying all night,” she said to Sophronia, with a happy little giggle.

“Maybe he’s going to adopt them!” suggested Sophronia.

CHAPTER XIII

SOPHRONIA'S EDUCATION

IT had become Marjorie's custom, on her return from school each day, to walk with Sophronia and Ann. At first Cora or Billings had accompanied them, but, as the girls became more used to the streets, Mrs. Melchin permitted them to go alone. At first these walks led them only up the hill as far as the State House, and then directly home. On one occasion Cora went with them to see Sarah Brown on Pinckney Street, and Sarah and one of her cousins walked back with them, and after that Marjorie and her companions sometimes walked through Walnut to Mount Vernon Street and home again.

Marjorie was studying American history, and often pointed out some of the places, the story of which she had learned, to Ann and Sophronia. They read the tablet marking the place on Beacon Street where the residence of John Hancock had stood, and told them the story of Governor Hancock once being fined for "walking for pleasure on Sunday on the Common."

They had just come in from their afternoon walk one pleasant January afternoon and found Mrs. Melchin waiting for them in the library.

“Well! Well!” “Nero” called out as they entered the room, a greeting which never failed to delight the three girls.

“And what remarkable thing did Marjorie have to tell you to-day?” Mrs. Melchin asked as Ann unfastened her fur collar and took off her hat.

“She told us that the State House was finished in 1798,” replied Ann. “Just think, it’s been there for over a hundred years.”

“Indeed it has,” agreed Mrs. Melchin, “but the Old State House has been here a good many years longer than that.”

“That’s where Marjorie went with her teacher,” said Sophronia; “she told us about that. It has a carved lion and a crown, because it was built by the British.”

“The important thing about the Old State House, I think, is that on the 18th of July, 1776, the town clerk of Boston read from the balcony the Declaration of Independence to the multitude of people in the streets,” said Mrs. Melchin.

The little girls looked rather puzzled, so Mrs. Melchin explained that the Declaration of Independence meant that by it the North American colonies separated themselves from English rule forever.

“Our history teacher to-day told us a story about a little negro girl who was brought to Boston in 1761 from Africa,” said Marjorie, as Cora came in to the room to take their coats and hats. “Do you know about her, Cora?”

"Yes, Miss Marjorie," answered Cora, "I do if her name was Phillis Wheatley, and if she wrote poetry."

"Yes," said Marjorie eagerly, "that is the very one."

Cora smiled and left the room.

"Well, Cora evidently knows more than I do about Boston's history. *I* never heard of Phillis Wheatley," said Mrs. Melchin.

"Is it true, or is it just another 'Robinson Crusoe'?" questioned Sophronia.

"It's true," replied Marjorie. "She was only seven years old when she was brought here in a ship and sold as a slave. A lady named Mrs. Wheatley bought her, and Phillis could not speak a word of English; but Mrs. Wheatley taught her to read and write, and she studied Latin. She was so gentle and good that everybody liked her," concluded Marjorie.

"And what about the poetry?" questioned Mrs. Melchin.

"Yes, she wrote poetry, and Mrs. Wheatley took her to London. And when she was a woman the family gave her her freedom!"

"Well, well!" declared "Nero," and the girls all laughed delightedly, and Ann declared that sometimes she really wished "R. C." could talk, and told Mrs. Melchin that the two pigeons who came to the Christmas feast were still coming back each night to share "R. C.'s" box.

Ann had often gazed admiringly at the portrait of a lady which hung between the windows in Mrs. Melchin's

library. She and Sophronia had talked of it, and once, to their great mystification, they had heard Mr. Field say that it was "a Copley." To-day, as Mrs. Melchin seemed more ready to talk with them than usual, Ann decided that she would ask what "a Copley" was.

Mrs. Melchin smiled at the question, and in response pointed toward the portrait, but Ann's puzzled look showed that the picture did not explain what she wished to know.

"That is the portrait of my great-grandmother, and it was painted by an American artist named Copley," explained Mrs. Melchin. "He was born in Boston in 1737, and he was a poor little boy. His mother had a little shop on Bowdoin Square, and John Copley probably used to come over to the Common to play, just as so many little boys do now."

The girls were now eagerly interested, and Mrs. Melchin went on. "He did not have a very good chance as a boy, and often said that he never saw a good picture until he was a man. But he taught himself to draw and to paint by drawing and painting. When he was about seventeen he told his mother that he was an artist, and by the time he was twenty-three he had completed paintings which proved that he was right."

"Then what did he do?" asked Marjorie.

"He bought a 'farm' over here on the hill," replied Mrs. Melchin. "His house faced Beacon Street, very near this house, and his land ran back to Mount Vernon

Street, and down to the river. He had beautiful gardens, and it came to be a matter of course for every one who could afford it to have his portrait painted by Copley."

"Was he a soldier, too?" asked Marjorie, whose mind was full of the brave deeds of the men of Revolutionary days.

"No, my dear, he went abroad to study before the trouble began, and he never returned."

Marjorie thought a good deal about this artist, who had once owned a "farm" on Beacon Street, and even Sophronia began to think that history could be nearly as interesting as even Robinson Crusoe's adventures.

The winter days went very happily with the little household. With Marjorie's help the two sisters were learning to sew neatly, and before spring came both Sophronia and Ann could write legibly. Sophronia persevered in her determination to learn "dictionary words" with excellent results, and Mrs. Melchin was pleased and gratified with their progress.

Sophronia was the more thoughtful of the two, and she and Marjorie had many friendly talks when Mrs. Melchin had taken Ann, as she often did, to an afternoon concert, or on a visit to the Art Museum, or to Mr. Field's studio. Ann's music-teacher declared the girl possessed a natural gift for music, and Ann practiced faithfully. Marjorie knew that Mrs. Melchin was making many plans for Ann's future.

“But she never says a word about Sophronia,” Marjorie would say to herself, a little anxiously, for, unless Mrs. Melchin continued to befriend Sophronia, Marjorie feared that the little mill girl might again have to care for herself. She had this in mind when she urged Sophronia to learn to sew, and insisted that she set each stitch carefully and exactly.

“I wish that you could learn to cook, Sophronia,” she said one afternoon as they walked together toward the State House.

“So do I,” agreed Sophronia promptly. If Marjorie had expressed the desire that Sophronia should attempt to fly she would have consented just as promptly.

“You see,” continued Marjorie, “if a girl can sew nicely, and knows how to cook, it’s a great help.”

“Yes indeed,” answered her companion; “that’s just what Mrs. Field said when I was there that day. Charles Edward’s mother,” explained Sophronia.

“I remember,” said Marjorie, thoughtfully, recalling all that Sophronia had said in praise of the beautiful rooms over the grocery store, and of the attractions of Charles Edward. From that day a resolve shaped itself in regard to Sophronia in Marjorie’s mind; if, by some unlucky chance, Mrs. Melchin should not want both the sisters in her home Sophronia must learn all the things which would make her useful to Mrs. Field and Charles Edward and go and live with them.

“Do you remember where Charles Edward lives?” she asked.

"No," answered Sophronia, "I don't remember, but Mrs. Field wrote it down on a paper and just what car to take to get there. Because I hoped some time I might go and see Charles Edward again."

"Perhaps," rejoined Marjorie soberly.

Sophronia feared that her friend might think that she preferred Charles Edward to Mrs. Melchin's home, and hastened to explain: "I don't think much about it. Of course, I don't mean I'd like to stay with Mrs. Field. I'd rather stay with you and Ann and Mrs. Melchin than anywheres in all the world."

Marjorie smiled at her friend's eagerness, and then sighed. The more she thought of it the more she was convinced that Mrs. Melchin's interest in Ann meant that she liked Ann the best, and that it would not be long before she would decide that another home must be found for Sophronia. "And of course I must be ready to find it," she decided, "because I must always look after Sophronia."

It was the next day when Mrs. Melchin was surprised by a request from Marjorie for permission to ask Katie, the Scotch cook, to teach Sophronia how to cook.

"Does Sophronia want to learn to cook?" questioned Mrs. Melchin.

"Yes, indeed!" Marjorie assured her.

"Well, well, perhaps it may prove an excellent idea," said Mrs. Melchin. "I will talk with Katie and see what she says to it."

The result was that at the beginning of the follow-

ing week it was decided that Sophronia was to assist Katie for two mornings every week.

"I'm glad it's not I," declared Ann, when Sophronia told her.

"You see, you have music lessons," Sophronia explained, fearing that her sister might consider that she, Sophronia, was being selected for special favors. "And," continued Sophronia, "I want to learn all that I can about cooking, so when we grow up I can keep house for you."

Ann nodded approvingly. "I shall teach music," she announced, "and I'll earn a great deal. Maybe I'll get a dollar for every lesson, so we'll buy a house right near this one and you can keep house."

"And we will have Mrs. Melchin come to dinner, and Marjorie will come and visit us," responded Sophronia happily, "and I can do our sewing, too."

Ann agreed to her sister's plans, and Sophronia began her lessons with Katie.

Katie believed in thoroughness. "Just have yer eye on me whilst I pare the potatoes," she warned her pupil, and Sophronia watched her earnestly. "Now try one for yourself," she commanded; "a thin skin, remember. A good cook wastes naught."

Sophronia had learned obedience in a hard school, and proved a docile pupil. She enjoyed Katie's talk of her old home in Scotland, and Katie watched for the mornings that brought Sophronia to the kitchen. By March the little girl had learned many useful things.

She knew just how many minutes a potato should boil, she could cream potatoes, make potato yeast, and potato starch, and bake excellent rye muffins and Scotch scones. At the beginning of April Mrs. Melchin decided that Sophronia had better discontinue her lessons in cooking for a time, as she wanted her to give all her mornings to her lessons.

"You can do a good many things real well now, Sophronia," said Marjorie, on the day of Mrs. Melchin's decision, and Sophronia admitted that she could.

"I feel as if I couldn't be the girl who worked in the Columbia cotton mill," said Sophronia. "Why, it's only a year ago, Marjorie."

Sophronia certainly did not look like the pale, dull-eyed child who had been too tired to even care what might happen to her. She was taller, had gained in flesh. Her eyes were bright, her face round with the curves of health, and she was as straight and graceful as Marjorie herself.

Mrs. Melchin, to Marjorie's anxious eyes, seemed to be watching Sophronia closely. It was very evident that Ann was her favorite of the two sisters, and Marjorie feared that Mrs. Melchin was already deciding that a new home must be found for Sophronia. It was with this thought in mind that she one day asked Sophronia to let her see the paper Mrs. Field had given her.

She read the written address over carefully for a number of times, until she was quite sure she would

remember it, and then handed the paper back to Sophronia.

“I must try to see Mrs. Field,” she resolved, “so that if Mrs. Melchin decides that Sophronia can't stay here I can take her to Cambridge.”

CHAPTER XIV

PLANS FOR SOPHRONIA

IT was early in April when Marjorie received the letter from her mother saying that her Aunt Maria, Adrienne and Lucy Wilson would start for Ashley on the last day of the month. "Then there will be only the summer before I can go home," the little girl thought joyfully, counting off "May, June, July, August, September."

Marjorie and Sophronia were walking across the Public Gardens with Cora when Marjorie told them that it would be only a few weeks before her Aunt Maria would be back in Ashley. "And I am to go and stay a month with her as soon as she comes," she exclaimed enthusiastically, "and I'll have the best time in the world with Aunt Maria, Adrienne, Lucy and Ada. Just think of all they will have to tell me about mother and father!"

"A month!" repeated Sophronia in such a doleful tone that Marjorie looked at her questioningly.

"I was thinking that I should not see you," Sophronia explained, "but I'm right glad you are going to see your aunt."

“You will be glad to see her, too, won’t you, Sophronia?” responded Marjorie. “She always asks about you in every letter.”

But Sophronia thought the loss of Marjorie’s company for a month would not be made up by seeing Miss Maria.

“And you know, Sophronia,” went on Marjorie, “it is lovely for me to have Aunt Maria in Ashley, because I shall be with her half the time until I go home in October.”

“Half the time until you go home in October!”

The two girls were leaning on the rail of the bridge at the little lake. Cora was just beyond them talking with an acquaintance. As Sophronia repeated Marjorie’s words Marjorie turned toward her in surprise and saw that her friend was crying.

Sophronia had not cried over her own hard lot in Columbia; she had not cried when she saw Ann in danger, but at Marjorie’s joyful announcement that in a few months she would be going to her own home to stay, Sophronia had realized all this friend meant to her, and as Marjorie saw the tears she began to realize it also.

“Don’t cry, Sophronia; don’t cry,” she whispered softly.

“I—I—have to,” responded Sophronia brokenly; “it’s right selfish of me, but you’ve been so good to me. I don’t know how I’m going to stand it not to see you.”

"But you knew I'd have to go home some time, Sophronia, dear," said Marjorie.

Sophronia wiped her eyes, nodded her head, and tried to smile.

"It's right fine for you to have an aunt, and a mother and father," she said bravely. "You see, Marjorie, Ann and I never had nothing 'til you took notice of us. We never had friends like you have, so I reckon I've sort of set everything by you," and she smiled as if she had been asking forgiveness for some fault.

"Sophronia!" exclaimed Marjorie. "I have a beautiful plan for you! I've just thought of it, and I ought not tell you until Aunt Maria comes. And, Sophronia, I have been making plans about you all winter. And when I go home I shall think of you all the time, and, who knows! Perhaps we can go to college together!"

"College!" Sophronia's voice expressed all the surprise she felt.

"Yes," replied Marjorie. "You know that is one reason why my mother was willing for me to stay in Boston this winter; for it is all settled that I am to go to college. I am studying as hard as I can."

"But I shan't ever know enough to go," declared Sophronia.

"You must know; you must study *hard*," declared Marjorie. "Your teacher told Mrs. Melchin that you learned very quickly. And see all you have learned in one year! You have learned to read and write, you know a good deal of history and geography and arith-

metic. You must begin Natural History with me, and I don't see why you can't begin Latin Grammar."

Marjorie was enthusiastic over this new thought, and quite forgot her former plan for Sophronia to learn all about household duties, in order to go and live with Mrs. Field and care for Charles Edward.

"But there's Ann," said Sophronia. "I couldn't leave her."

"That's exactly what you said when I wanted you to run away from the cotton mill," said Marjorie. "I believe you would have stayed with Uncle Besum rather than have deserted Ann."

"I have to think about Ann," Sophronia replied soberly.

"Well, Sophronia, I *think* ——" and then Marjorie hesitated. She had started to assure Sophronia that Mrs. Melchin would be quite sure to take care of Ann, and then realized that she knew nothing whatever of her good friend's plans, so she finished her sentence by saying, "Anyway, you study just as hard as you can, and we'll see."

"Yes, indeed," agreed Sophronia hopefully. Marjorie had never failed her yet, and when Marjorie explained that "college" meant that they would see each other every day, Sophronia resolved to learn all she possibly could, in order to pass the examinations which would admit her to that wonderful place.

"It sounds like the orphan asylum you wanted me to go to," she said admiringly.

“Oh! But I didn’t really know about asylums,” explained Marjorie, and Sophronia asked no questions as to how much her friend knew of colleges.

Miss Wing’s neighbor in Ashley, Mrs. Webb, Ferdinand’s mother, was to open the pleasant house and have it ready for her return, and it was decided that Marjorie should be there to welcome her; and on the morning of the day of her aunt’s return home Marjorie arrived at the house and, with Mrs. Webb’s and Ada’s assistance, put everything in order for its mistress.

Miss Wing could not reach Ashley until late in the afternoon, and Marjorie resolved to have tea all ready for her. She felt very happy to be in the familiar house again, and sang as she went about her work.

“Aunt Maria always has preserves,” she told Ada, who was spending the day with her, “and Mrs. Webb has roasted a chicken, and I can cut it up. And I’ll bake potatoes and biscuit and make tea. I know that she will like to have supper at home.”

“Of course she will, and how proud she will be of you, Marjorie,” responded Ada admiringly.

“Why?”

“Because you can do so many things,” answered her friend, “and best of all because you think to do them at just the right time. And she will be proud of the way you look, too. You’ve grown tall this year, you know, Marjorie. You really begin to look grown up.”

“That’s because my skirts are longer. Do you re-

member, Ada, the first year I was here in Ashley, and how much I wanted to look exactly like Aunt Maria?"

"And I helped you do your hair the way your aunt does hers, and dress up in one of her dresses," said Ada, and both the girls laughed merrily over the time when Marjorie had prepared a surprise for her mother in making herself look as much like her Aunt Maria as possible.

"And you fell down the front steps when you ran to meet your mother, and Buff tore the dress. Oh, wasn't it funny?" laughed Ada.

"I have a great mind to dress up to-day for Aunt Maria," exclaimed Marjorie.

"That would be great!" Ada declared enthusiastically; "and couldn't I dress up, too?"

"Of course you could. We won't try to look like any one; we'll just dress up like old-fashioned ladies," decided Marjorie. "There are some of grandmother's things up in the attic in trunks. Let's go up and look at them."

"And we'll do our hair up," added Ada, as they at once started for the attic.

There was a black silk dress in one of the trunks. It had a very full skirt and many rows of narrow black velvet ribbon. There was a long cape of black lace, and some black mitts.

"You wear these, Ada. And I'll introduce you to Aunt Maria as if you were company come to have tea," said Marjorie.

But Ada was looking at the black dress and lace cap rather thoughtfully.

“What is it?” questioned Marjorie.

“Perhaps,” Ada hesitated a moment and then went on, “perhaps, Marjorie, we’d better not dress up in these. You see, they belonged to your Aunt Maria’s mother.”

“I see,” Marjorie responded soberly, and without another word the two girls carefully folded the dress and cape and put them back in the trunk, and went down-stairs.

“I’m so glad you thought of it, Ada,” Marjorie said as they reached the upper landing.

“I’ve thought of something else,” Ada declared; “let’s take some of those rolls of tissue-paper we saw in the attic and make us funny caps and aprons, and when your aunt gets here we’ll open the door and make very low bows, and walk backward and keep bowing until she is in the dining-room, and then wait on her just as if we were good fairies.”

“Can’t we make paper wings like fairies?” suggested Marjorie.

“Of course we can,” was the response, and in a moment both the girls were back in the attic after the rolls of tissue-paper, and were soon busily at work.

Ada decided upon white and crimson for her cap, wings and skirt, and Marjorie upon blue and yellow. As they pinned the paper, cut and fastened it into the desired shapes, Marjorie told Ada something of her

anxious plans for Sophronia. "You see, it isn't as if Mrs. Melchin had promised to keep both the girls," Marjorie explained.

"But it costs a good deal to go to college," suggested Ada. "Don't you suppose your Aunt Maria will know just what to do?"

"Of course she will! Ada, I do think you are wonderful," declared Marjorie.

Long before the time when Miss Wing's train could reach Ashley the two little girls had everything in readiness. The dining-room table was neatly set, the potatoes and biscuit ready for the oven, and Marjorie and Ada, with rather drooping wings of white and blue, and skirts of rustling tissue, were at one of the front windows looking down the street.

Mr. Wilson, after leaving Adrienne and Lucy at their own home, drove Miss Wing to the house. She looked eagerly toward the front door.

"I really thought Marjorie would be at the station," she said, "and I expected to see that front door wide open."

Mr. Wilson was helping her from the carriage as she spoke, and as he watched her go up the narrow walk between the flower beds he saw the front door open, and two small figures bowing very low. He laughed to himself as he turned his horses' head toward home. "Some of their nonsense," he said, with the happy thought that he would find his own little daughters in their own home after his lonely winter.

But Marjorie quite forgot to "walk backward bowing until reaching the dining-room," and at the first sight of her aunt had run toward her and exclaimed, "Oh, how glad I am! How good it is that you are here," and, with an arm about each of the girls, Aunt Maria had entered her own sunny pleasant sitting-room. Ada slipped away to the kitchen to put the biscuit and potatoes in the oven, and Aunt Maria and Marjorie went up-stairs together talking happily. Miss Wing had just brushed her hair, changed her boots for comfortable slippers, and washed her hands, when a shriek from the kitchen, a half-smothered cry of "Help," rang through the house. In a moment Marjorie, closely followed by her aunt, was running through the dining-room. As Marjorie opened the door into the kitchen her first thought was that Ada was crazy, for with one of the kitchen rugs wrapped about her the little girl was rolling on the floor.

"It's 'most out; it's 'most out," she said as Miss Wing ran to her assistance. "My wings caught fire at the stove," she explained, when the last spark had been carefully extinguished. "I pulled them off as quickly as I could, but the tissue skirt had caught, so I just lay down and rolled the rug tight around me and screamed."

"You did the very best thing," said Miss Wing; "your hair is badly singed, my dear girl, and I am afraid your own dress is ruined; but those things are of little matter when we think of what might have happened."

One of Ada's hands was slightly blistered, but she did not complain.

"Something always happens when we 'dress up,' doesn't it, Marjorie?" she said with a little laugh, as Marjorie fastened a soft bandage about her hand.

CHAPTER XV

A WEEK IN ASHLEY

THERE were so many things for Marjorie to talk over with Aunt Maria, and Adrienne and Lucy had so much to tell her about Betty and Tryphosa, that the first few days of her Ashley visit slipped away very quickly and happily, and a week was gone before Marjorie realized that the time was near for her to return to Boston.

“I do wish I could stay here with you, Aunt Maria,” Marjorie said, when the telephone message came that on the following day Mrs. Melchin was coming, and hoped Marjorie would be ready to return with her.

“I don’t see that Mrs. Melchin needs me now,” went on Marjorie. “Really, Sophronia has learned all I can teach her, and Ann is with Mrs. Melchin so much that she don’t need me at all.”

“You must not give up your own opportunity at school, my dear,” Aunt Maria reminded her. “You are learning many things that you would not learn at home, and the term is nearly over.”

“It’s another month before school closes,” said Marjorie, “and I’d just as soon keep on with school for that month if I could come straight here the very day it closed and stay all summer.”

“But, my dear, that is exactly what you are going to

do," her aunt responded. "Didn't Mrs. Melchin tell you? Your mother wrote her, and Mrs. Melchin sent back a glowing account of you, and said that Sophronia had learned more from being with you this winter than in any other way, and that you could come to Ashley when your school term ended."

"I am almost *too* glad," exclaimed Marjorie in so serious a voice that her aunt looked at her questioningly.

"You see, Aunt Maria," explained Marjorie, "it's just this way; when I'm at home or here in Ashley I feel like a little girl, and I think about having good times, and all that. But when I am at Mrs. Melchin's I think about Sophronia all the time, and wonder what I ought to do. You see, I'm Sophronia's best friend."

"I see," responded Aunt Maria gravely.

Then Marjorie told her aunt all her plans for Sophronia's future, and her fears that Mrs. Melchin might not intend to keep Sophronia.

It was a very anxious little face that Aunt Maria looked at so smilingly, as Marjorie finished.

"Cat's foot!" said Aunt Maria. "That is what your grandmother used to say to people who troubled themselves over their own thoughts. Mrs. Melchin will never desert any child who needs a home or friend, Marjorie. And you can't settle Sophronia's life any more than you can your own. It comes a day at a time, dear child. Just do the right thing to-day, and to-morrow will be all right for Sophronia and for you."

The anxious look faded from Marjorie's face, and she drew a long breath. "It will be lovely to be with you, Aunt Maria. You see, I haven't had anybody to talk things over with all winter."

"I see," and Aunt Maria's voice was very kind. She realized that her little niece had taken a great deal of responsibility in trying to help the little girls from the cotton mill. "Suppose you put on your hat and run down and ask Mrs. Wilson if Adrienne and Lucy mayn't come home with you to tea, and on your way invite Ada," she suggested.

"That will be lovely!" and Marjorie ran off to put on her hat and coat. As she opened the gate a big yellow dog came bounding around the corner.

"Come on, Buff," she called, and Buff barked his delight as he trotted along beside her.

As Aunt Maria watched the little figure going down the street, she said to herself that it was time for Marjorie to begin to play again. "And I must think of something pleasant for tea," she said aloud; "not only to eat, but something pleasant to do," and she started toward the kitchen to begin preparations for supper.

It was an hour later when Marjorie and her friends came gaily up the walk. Aunt Maria called out a welcome to them from the dining-room, where she was setting the table.

"Let me help," said Marjorie.

"Not to-night, dear," answered Aunt Maria.

"I think there's going to be a surprise," said Lucy

Wilson. "Miss Wing's voice sounds just as it does in school when she has something to tell us."

"Something smells good," declared Adrienne, sniffing appreciatively, "but I can't tell what it is."

"All ready," called Miss Wing, opening the door into the pleasant dining-room, and Marjorie and Lucy led the way out.

Miss Wing was just lifting the cover from a tureen of steaming clam stew. After that there was a delicious salad of fruit and nuts served on crisp lettuce leaves, with tiny round biscuit and spiced grapes. Then came the round frosted cakes and creamy chocolate; but there was no sign of any surprise until supper was quite over.

"I thought I heard a noise on the front piazza," said Ada.

"Very likely," Miss Wing answered. "I sent Ferdinand to do an errand for me, and he is probably bringing in what I sent him after. Now I want you girls to clear away supper, and wash the dishes for me, if you will. And please do not open the sitting-room door until I call you."

The girls all smiled, and readily promised. "Now if you will excuse me, young ladies," said Miss Wing, and her pupils all made the pretty curtsey which Tryphosa had taught them, and Miss Wing left the room, closing the door very carefully behind her.

"I can't guess what it is," said Marjorie, as she and Ada carefully removed the dishes.

“Doesn’t it seem fine to be in Ashley?” said Adrienne. “We shall have a splendid time this summer, if we are fifteen years old.”

Lucy looked at her sister a little reproachfully. “You’ll have a good time too, honey,” Adrienne assured her. “You’re past ten, you know.”

The dishes were all neatly washed and set away, before Miss Wing opened the dining-room door. As the girls entered the sitting-room they at once noticed a queer arrangement in one corner of the room. It looked like a large cabinet, only it was covered with green cloth. Miss Wing asked the girls to be seated, and pointed to the comfortable sofa.

As they sat down Luke Sanders came in from the front hall. He was smiling as if much pleased about something, and after greeting the girls, he disappeared behind the cabinet, where he could be heard whispering directions.

“Ferdinand is behind there, too; I know he is,” said Ada.

It was very hard for the girls to sit still and not ask questions.

“Isn’t it exciting!” Adrienne whispered; “lovely things always happen when Marjorie comes.”

In a moment Luke appeared in front of the cabinet, and made a very low bow.

“Young ladies,” he began with great dignity, “I am about to present to you a company of distinguished actors who will give you the trial scene from the ‘Mer-

chant of Venice.' As they are not used to this climate, and do not speak the English language, Miss Wing has kindly consented to read their parts for them." Luke again bowed and disappeared behind the curtain, and the girls applauded vigorously. Miss Wing took his place and began reading Shylock's demand for his "pound of flesh." As she read two small curtains, one on each side, drew apart showing a tiny "stage," perhaps two feet square, in the center of the cabinet. The "stage" was set to resemble a court-room. The "wise and upright judge" occupied his seat, lawyers were in their places, "Portia," in her red gown and cap, stood just below the judge's bench, and the bent figure of "Shylock" was in the foreground.

There was a murmur of delight from the big sofa. And when Shylock walked across the stage, when Portia stepped forward and raised her arm, and when the judge bowed to her, the girls could no longer keep still; they clapped their hands, and Marjorie called out, "I know Luke made those funny little people."

"Ferdinand helped," came a voice from behind the cabinet. Then Luke and Ferdinand both came out, one on each side of the green curtain, and the girls went near enough to see the clever little marionettes which Luke had made and dressed. Their arms and legs were fastened to their bodies by linen tapes. And there were wires arranged, attached to the figures and running across the stage behind the curtains, which could be pulled so that the marionettes would walk,

bow, or even dance if the person who controlled the wires wished to make them.

"Mr. Field told us how to give a play," Luke explained, as he carefully took down the curtains, and the slight framework which supported them. "The stage, you see," he pointed out, "is just any table that we can set in the framework. Then I stand one side and Ferdinand the other, where we can pull the wires."

"I remembered about the marionettes just in time," said Miss Wing. "Luke has had them up at Farmer Wyman's, and brought them down to Ferdinand's this morning."

"It was a splendid surprise," declared Ada, and the other girls echoed "Splendid!" in a delighted chorus.

"And such a nice supper," said little Lucy.

"And I must go back to Boston," Marjorie said dolefully, "and leave all Ashley's good times for a month!"

"We'll have a beautiful summer," Adrienne declared, "and we will be making plans all the month until you come."

"Well, I've had a lovely time this week," Marjorie admitted, with her usual happy smile.

Luke had taken great satisfaction in making the little figures for his marionette show. He told Marjorie that he was at work on a pair of clog dancers, and that Mr. Field had given him a book on the history of marionettes and how to make them.

“Do you suppose Mrs. Melchin and Sophronia would like to see them some day at Mr. Field’s studio?” he had asked, and Marjorie had responded :

“Yes, indeed, and so would Ann, and my other friends. That is, if you want to ask them.”

And then it had been agreed that on the first Saturday after Marjorie’s return to Boston, if Mrs. Melchin and Mr. Field approved, Marjorie should invite “Miss Texas” and “Miss Ohio,” and any other of her school-mates whom she might think would enjoy the marionettes, to Mr. Field’s studio. She also promised that she and Sophronia would come to the studio the day after her arrival home and help Luke make costumes for the little wooden figures.

“You see,” he explained, “I can use these figures for almost any play if I only have the right things for them to wear. Mr. Field said I could have historical scenes, like George Washington and his generals arriving in Cambridge; or the schoolboys of Boston asking General Gage to protect their rights; about sliding down-hill, you know.”

Mrs. Melchin was greatly interested when Marjorie told her of Luke’s marionettes, and said that Sophronia, Ann and Marjorie could go to the studio the next afternoon to help Luke with the costumes for his figures. She gave them a silken bag filled with bits of wonderful silks and embroideries, and a box of tiny bead buttons. Many of these were of gilt and silver, and Luke was very enthusiastic over them, declaring

they would be just what he needed on the uniforms of army officers.

Mr. Field had several books with colored illustrations of colonial costumes, and suggested that the girls use them for guides in their work.

The studio was a very pleasant place even on an afternoon in May. From its big windows the girls could look out across the Charles River and toward the distant Brookline hills. The room was filled with fragrance for, in a big blue bowl on the window-sill, pink arbutus, from the Ashley woods, sent out its delicate perfume.

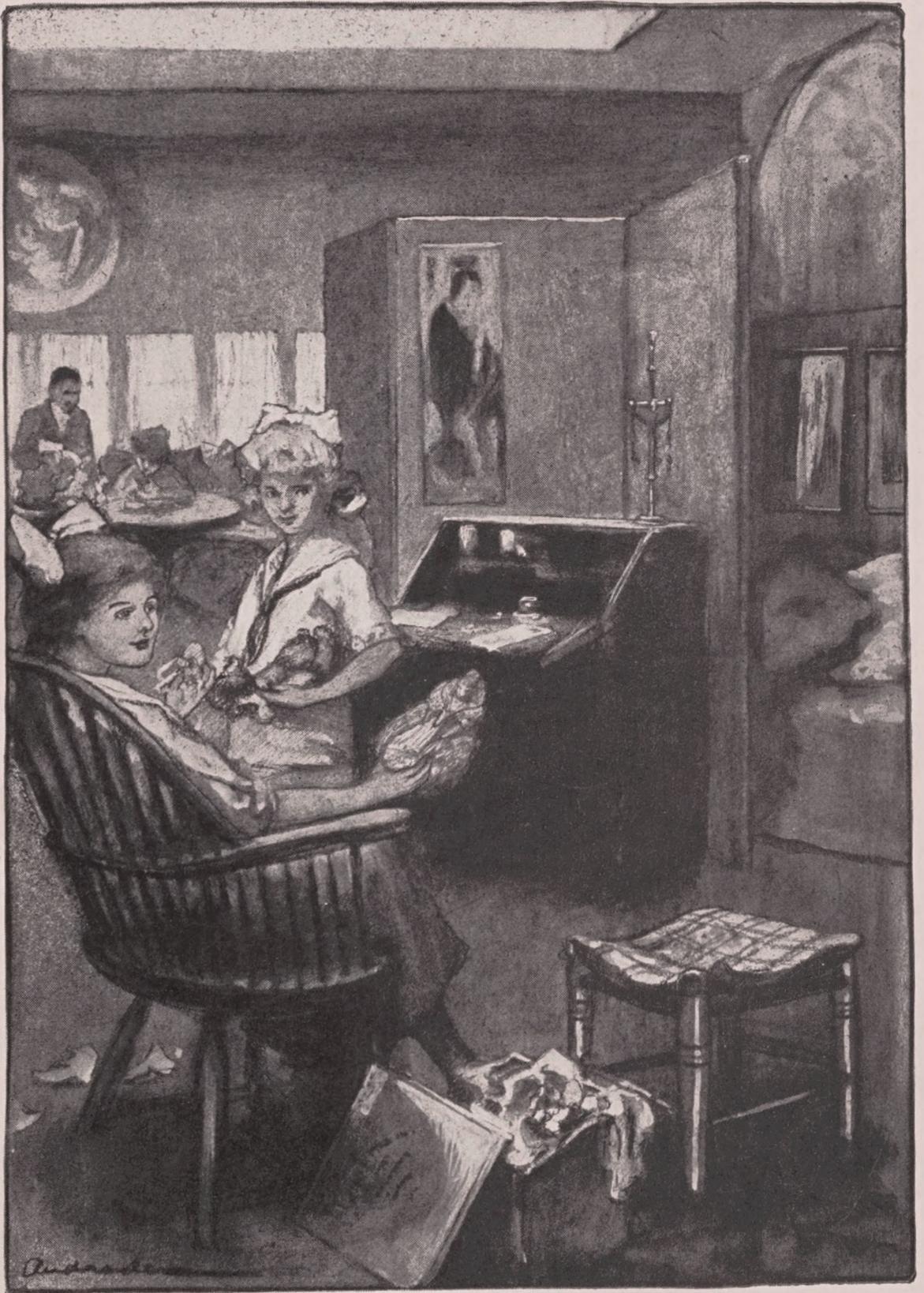
"It's more fun than dressing dolls," declared Marjorie, as she sewed tiny gilt buttons on the uniform intended for General Gage.

"Yes, indeed," agreed Sophronia, who was trying a skirt of royal purple on a "colonial dame."

Ann was not sewing, but was very contented curled up in a big chair turning over the leaves of one of the illustrated books.

The week went very quickly, and Marjorie's school-mates decided that she was the most fortunate girl in the school to have such friends as Mr. Field and Luke Sanders. The principal of the school was greatly interested in the marionettes, and said that she considered it an excellent way to teach history.

"Marjorie," called Luke, as Mrs. Melchin and the girls were just leaving the studio after the entertainment, and Marjorie stepped back to speak to him.



THE STUDIO WAS A PLEASANT PLACE

“What do you think!” he began eagerly. “Miss Kent has engaged me to bring my marionettes to her school next Wednesday and give ‘General Hancock’s Reception for the French Officers.’ She is going to pay me three dollars. And she told Mr. Field that she thought I could get other engagements at schools.”

“Of course you can. I am so glad, Luke,” replied Marjorie.

The tall boy looked at her gratefully.

“Do you remember teaching me to read?” he asked with a little laugh. “I reckon you’ve done a good deal to help people along. There’s Sophronia and Ann, besides me, and I don’t know who else,” he concluded.

“I never helped a bit, Luke Sanders!” responded Marjorie. “You did it all yourself.”

“Much obliged, just the same,” laughed the boy, and Marjorie ran down the steps and joined Mrs. Melchin.

“I feel proud of my South Carolina children,” that lady said, smiling at Ann, as the automobile carried them swiftly away toward home.

But Sophronia’s eyes were resting gratefully on Marjorie, and she was thinking to herself that but for Marjorie’s friendship neither Luke, Ann nor herself would be entitled to Mrs. Melchin’s friendly approval.

CHAPTER XVI

IN THE PINE WOODS

WHEN Marjorie awoke the first morning after her arrival in Ashley, she looked about the little room with a smile. It was the same little room over the front door, in her Aunt Maria's house, where she had slept four years ago on her first coming to Ashley. There were the same frilled muslin curtains, the faded carpet of blue and white, and the little white rocking-chair by the window. She wondered if the humming-birds still made their nest in the woodbine that clambered up the latticework.

"It's lovely to be here," she thought, and as she went down the narrow stairway to the kitchen she said to herself that this little house in Ashley was a much happier place to live than Mrs. Melchin's tall brick house on Beacon Street.

Aunt Maria's kitchen seemed to smile a welcome as the little girl entered. The stove was as shining black as ever, the floor the same beautiful yellow, and the braided rugs lay just as they had when first she came into the pleasant kitchen.

"I'll get breakfast, just as I used to," thought Marjorie, and very soon the fire was burning briskly, and there was the fragrance of coffee in the air. The bread

was cut ready for the toaster, and the water was bubbling in anticipation of dropped eggs. Then Marjorie went through the little passageway to the dining-room and when Miss Wing came down-stairs breakfast was ready.

“It seems so good to help myself,” said Marjorie as she brought in the toast and eggs.

“Now I think it is very pleasant to be helped,” responded her aunt. Before they had finished breakfast they saw Ada coming up the path, and Marjorie ran to open the door for her.

“You don’t look exactly like Ada this morning,” Marjorie exclaimed laughingly, resting her hands on Ada’s shoulders and looking at her friend. “I’m not sure if I like your hair looped up or not,” for Ada’s smooth braid was now turned up and fastened with a broad black ribbon.

“You ought to like it; you’ve done yours this way all winter,” responded Ada.

“I suppose we’ll get used to it,” said Marjorie, “but you don’t look like a little girl, Ada.”

“I’m not a little girl,” said her friend laughingly. “I am fifteen years old. My skirts are at the top of my boots now.”

“You talk as if it was your skirts that were growing instead of you.”

“That’s the way I feel,” laughed Ada. “I hurried this morning, for Adrienne and I both forgot to tell you something important yesterday. We forgot to tell

you that 'the Six' are coming to spend the day in the pine woods. They'll be here on the next train."

"Who comes with them?" asked Marjorie.

"Two mothers; Felicita's and Marie's," answered Ada. "We have a fine luncheon for them, and they will all be so glad to see you, Marjorie. Lucy is great friends with Felicita. They're just of an age and just of a size. Can't you go to the station now with me to meet them?"

"I'll ask Aunt Maria," said Marjorie, and ran into the dining-room.

"Run along, my dear," said her aunt. "I heard Ada plan for the day, and I will come up to the pines a little later on."

When the Boston train rolled in to the Ashley station Adrienne, Lucy, Ada and Marjorie were on the platform to welcome their visitors. The six little girls who came quietly down the car steps, and smilingly greeted their friends, did not look like the children whom Marjorie had met on that same platform four years ago when "the Six" came on their first visit to Ashley. These little girls were neatly dressed. (Ada, Adrienne, Lucy, and Marjorie were quick to recognize things of their own given to these girls.) They had suitable hats, their shoes were polished, and they seemed as happy as any children need be.

Felicita's dark-eyed little mother, too, had changed. Her eyes had a more hopeful expression, and she did not look overtired. She walked beside Marjorie as

the little party made their way along the village street toward the pine woods.

The others were in advance of them, and Marjorie could see that her companion's eyes rested proudly on Felicita.

"Felicita looks so much better—stronger, I mean—than she used to," said Marjorie.

"Ye-es. Felicita always well, always pleasant," responded the little woman. "She help me so mooch! She sew nice on clothes, and she keeps the children nice. She told you about the leetle club, eh?"

"Club?" questioned Marjorie, thinking her companion meant "the Six."

"I no mean 'the Seex.' No, I mean the club they have made. They call it 'the teen,'—tin, I mean. It is the leetle brothers and seesters club. Ye-es! These seex girls start it. But maybe I tell secrets," and the little woman stopped suddenly.

"Do tell me some more," exclaimed Marjorie; "it's splendid. When did they begin?"

"They just begin," replied Felicita's mother, "but maybe 'tis secret. Maybe 'tis surprise for you?"

"Perhaps it is. I do want to hear about it, but I'll wait," said Marjorie, and Felicita's mother smiled on her approvingly.

"I tell you thees: They help the teen to be good children. Ye-es! To keep themselves neat, and to spik respectful to people," and Felicita's mother nodded convincingly.

It was not a long walk to the pine woods, and in a

short time they were in the fragrant shade of the big trees. Hats were taken off, and Felicita and Lucy promptly removed their shoes and stockings. Some of the other girls followed their example, declaring that the pine spills felt as cool as water.

Ada and Dottie had walked up from the station together, and Marjorie noticed that Ada seemed in unusually good spirits, and was not surprised when she whispered, "I have something lovely to tell you, Marjorie. Come on for a little walk away from the others." The two friends slipped away from their companions and walked down the slope among the beautiful trees, until they came to a moss-covered log where they could get a glimpse of the river.

"I wanted to tell you this morning, when I came over to your house," Ada began, as they sat down on the log, "but I wasn't sure until Dottie got here." Ada stopped and smiled radiantly, quite as if Dottie's coming had explained everything.

"But what's the 'lovely thing' you want to tell me?" questioned Marjorie.

"Why, Dottie!" answered Ada in a surprised voice.

"I suppose I'm right stupid," said Marjorie, "but I haven't the least idea what you mean."

"I'm so excited that I can't talk plainly," declared Ada, "and of course you don't know what I mean. But I'm sure you remember that, from the very first, Dottie has been my favorite among 'the Six'?"

"Yes," agreed Marjorie, "but I supposed that was

because she was even poorer than the others, and because her mother wasn't quite as kind as the mothers of the other girls."

"I think I would have liked Dottie if she hadn't been poor," Ada answered seriously. "I remember the very first day I saw her how pretty I thought she was. Her hair was just like gold, and ——"

But Marjorie interrupted. "Ada! You haven't told me a single thing! You just keep praising Dottie."

Ada looked a little surprised. "Oh!" she began. "Well, I'll tell you *now*. You see, I've always liked Dottie, and I have talked a lot about her to father and mother; about her father not having steady work, and Dottie's mother being cross, and all that."

Marjorie had leaned back against the big tree, beneath which they were sitting, resolved to listen patiently. But she began to think that Ada's news was not so very thrilling after all.

"And last week," Ada continued, "father gave his consent."

"Consent to *what*?" She began to think that Ada was really stupid.

"Why, to Dottie's coming," answered Ada in a surprised voice.

"Ada Streeter!" exclaimed Marjorie, standing up and looking down into her friend's face. "Will you tell me what your father had to do with it, anyway? Of course Dottie would come if the others did."

"I don't mean to-day," said Ada. "I mean that

father said I might ask Dottie to come to our house and stay all summer; and I wrote to her mother, and so Dottie isn't going home with the others. She's going home with me."

"Oh, Ada!" Marjorie's voice and manner expressed as much surprise and pleasure as even Ada could expect, and for a little while the two girls talked busily. Then Marjorie laughingly declared that she didn't know but what the summer would be over before she could find out what Ada had wanted to tell her.

"You see," replied Ada, "my father is earning more money this year than he has ever earned—two hundred dollars more—so we can afford to do more pleasant things. Mother's going to have a new dress."

When Ada and Marjorie walked back up the slope to join the others they found that Aunt Maria had arrived with a big covered basket, and Mrs. Streeter, with Dottie beside her, was telling stories to a number of the younger girls.

Adrienne was unpacking the baskets and helping Miss Wing prepare the luncheon.

She looked up and nodded to her two friends. "Come on and help, you two," she called out to them, and a moment later Ada was saying:

"Adrienne, Dottie is going to stay all summer at our house."

"There!" laughed Marjorie. "Why didn't you tell me that way? It took her half an hour to tell me," she explained to Adrienne.

Dottie looked as if she needed a summer in the country. There were dark circles under her blue eyes, and her little face looked thin and tired.

“There are lots of things I can do for her,” Ada explained eagerly, “and father is going to put up a tent in our back yard for Dottie and me to sleep in. You’ll like that, won’t you, Dottie?”

Dottie shook her head vigorously, and a look of alarm crept over her face. She began to wish herself safe back in the tall tenement house, shut in by brick walls. But her fears soon vanished when Felicita’s mother nodded approvingly, and announced that she and her family slept on the roof every pleasant night, and that a tent would be far better.

“Adrienne, you accomplish more than both of these girls,” said Miss Wing, as luncheon was spread on a white cloth, and Adrienne, Ada and Marjorie waited upon the younger girls.

Adrienne’s face flushed at her teacher’s praise. She had grown from a heedless, careless girl into a very thoughtful “elder sister,” ready to take the small responsibilities that came her way; and praise from Miss Wing made her very happy.

After luncheon Felicita, Lucy, and Felicita’s mother wandered away among the beautiful pines, and Marie came up to Marjorie and said, “Miss Marjorie, ‘the Six’ want to tell you about our club.”

“There, Ada! That’s the way to begin to tell anything,” said Marjorie. “Now, Marie, tell us all about

it," and the little girl told briefly how "the Six" had remembered that they were now all "past ten years old," "as old as you were, Miss Marjorie, when you began to help us," she added; and they had decided that they wanted to help. "First we thought that we would call it the 'Sisters' Club,'" explained Marie, "because it's our sisters, you know, but they wanted a number."

"We mend their clothes," piped up Dottie.

"And we take them to walk and give them treats, and tell them to be polite," added Lotta.

May added that they were going to plan surprises for the "ten," now that school was over.

"And, if you please," said Marie, "'the Six' wanted me to say that now we were growing up so fast, being past ten, that perhaps you'd just as soon not give us so many good times, but give them to the 'ten.'"

"'A thing of duty is a job forever,'" Adrienne whispered to Miss Wing. "I can see us bringing up generations from Willow Lane."

Marie was standing in front of Marjorie, watching her face anxiously. Marjorie reached out and took the little girl's hand in her own and drew her near.

"Your club is splendid!" she declared, "and we'll help you, of course. But we can't give *you* up; 'the Six,' I mean. Why, we don't mean to *ever* give you up, do we, girls?"

"No, indeed," Ada replied promptly, and Marie and Dottie smiled happily, while Lotta and May rushed

away to find Felicita, that she might know how the great news had been received.

When the time came for the visitors to go to the station, there were six boxes all ready for them. Each box contained a jar of apple jelly, a round loaf of cake and a dozen cookies, and had been made ready by kind friends in the village. Dottie sent her box to her mother and went happily home with Ada, stopping in the back yard to look admiringly at the tent which Mr. Streeter was putting up.

Marjorie had been more quiet than usual that day. Ada's wish to give Dottie a happy summer had made Marjorie wonder if Sophronia would have a good summer. She remembered that, while Mrs. Melchin was always kind to Sophronia, she often took Ann away for an entire afternoon, leaving the elder sister alone.

"I thought I should forget all about Sophronia if I could only get to Ashley," Marjorie owned to herself, "and here I am thinking about her. Oh, dear!" She sat down on the porch steps, while Aunt Maria went in; as she sat there she heard the telephone ring, and her aunt's voice answer the call. A few moments later Miss Wing came out on the porch.

"Marjorie," she said, "Sophronia fell down-stairs this afternoon and broke her leg. Mrs. Melchin wants you to come in to-morrow morning."

CHAPTER XVII

A NEW MARJORIE

“OH, Aunt Maria, how could she?”

“She slipped on the stairs, my dear; and, beside the broken leg, there are other injuries,” replied Miss Wing.

Marjorie followed her aunt into the dining-room and sat down at the table, but she did not feel hungry.

“Poor Sophronia!” she said slowly. She was trying to make herself believe that the sense of unhappiness and disappointment which filled her heart was sorrow for Sophronia’s misfortune.

“Mrs. Melchin said that she hoped you could come in on the early train to-morrow morning,” said Miss Wing.

“What for?” asked Marjorie anxiously. “Does she just want me to come in and see Sophronia, or does she want me to come in and stay? Aunt Maria, you don’t suppose she wants me to stay, do you?”

“My dear girl, I am afraid that is just what she does want,” replied Aunt Maria.

“Oh, Aunt Maria! How can I go and be shut up in that house all summer, and miss all the good times here? Why, you said yourself that we should have the happiest summer we had ever had. And to-morrow we were all going up to the lake with Miss Gray; and the

next day Adrienne wanted me to come down and play tennis, and Saturday we were all going over to Farmer Wyman's. I *can't* go to Boston," and Marjorie hid her face on the table and began to cry.

Miss Wing's eyes rested tenderly on the bowed head. It was a great disappointment for her as well as for Marjorie, but she hardly knew what to say.

"Aunt Maria," and Marjorie's voice was broken and indistinct, "do you want me to go to Boston to-morrow?"

"No, my dear."

Marjorie sat up very straight, wiped her eyes, and a smile began to show itself around the corners of her mouth. "Then I shan't go!" she declared.

"You know, my dear girl, that I shall miss you very much. I meant that, when I answered you," Miss Wing said.

"Then you think I ought to go?" and Marjorie's voice sounded as if tears were very near.

"What do you think, Marjorie? It is for you to decide. If you feel that it is too great a sacrifice to go in and amuse Sophronia during the days when she must keep perfectly quiet in bed, you need not go. It is something for you to decide for yourself."

"Then I'm not going," Marjorie answered quickly.

"Very well. I will call up Mrs. Melchin and tell her so," said Aunt Maria; "and now that is settled won't you eat some supper? Here is your favorite plum jelly; the cream toast is a little cold, but it tastes good."

Marjorie was helped to toast and jelly and a slice of cold ham. But they remained on her plate untasted. She nibbled a sugar cooky, and tried to fix her thoughts on the good times ahead of her. "I should be silly to go off to-morrow," she thought.

As they left the table Marjorie began her usual work of helping her aunt with the tea things. Generally she had many things to talk about with Aunt Maria, but to-night she was silent. Her thoughts occupied all her attention, and she did not even notice that Aunt Maria also was more silent than usual.

The last cup and saucer had been set away before Marjorie spoke.

"Ann can amuse Sophronia," she said.

"Yes, I am sure Ann will be ready to do all she can," agreed her aunt pleasantly.

"And there is Cora," added the little girl hopefully.

"Don't worry about it, Marjorie. Mrs. Melchin will see that Sophronia is well taken care of. It is the week Mrs. Melchin intended going to Cohasset for the summer, so she may send Sophronia to a hospital," replied Aunt Maria; "I will ask her when I telephone."

Marjorie went out on the porch and Buff came running toward her. She sat down on the top step and put her arm around his neck. As she sat there, feeling very unhappy, in spite of all the good times she expected to enjoy, and wishing that she was in her own home and could tell her mother that, after all, the plantation was the happiest place in the world, her thoughts

were interrupted. "Hullo!" she heard a voice exclaim, and looking up saw Ferdinand Webb leaning on the fence.

"Hullo!" she responded, wishing that he would go into his own house.

"Say," continued Ferdinand amiably, "Farmer Wyman's been telling us that if it hadn't been for you Luke Sanders might never have had the big chance he has with Mr. Field. And Luke says you taught him to read."

Marjorie nodded. She thought it was very silly for Ferdinand Webb to tell her that, but hoped that now he had told her he would go away.

"And Farmer Wyman says it was you who started the folks here to help poor city children," Ferdinand continued amiably. "How did you happen to think of it?"

"Of what?" asked Marjorie dully.

"Why, of what I've been telling you! Your helping everybody," replied Ferdinand, climbing up and establishing himself comfortably on the top rail of the fence. "And I guess those little mill girls think you're an angel, don't they? Getting them out of the mill, and finding them a good home and all?" And Ferdinand looked at Marjorie as if he expected some appreciation of his tribute.

"No, they don't think I'm an 'angel,' Ferdinand Webb! And I'd thank you to get off my aunt's fence, and not sit there making fun of me." Marjorie pushed

Buff away and jumped up as she spoke, and before Ferdinand could really believe his ears she had rushed into the house, the heavy door closing behind her with a slam.

The dog and the boy looked at each other, and Ferdinand slid down from his perch. "Come on, Buff," he said, and the big yellow dog trotted obediently toward him. Ferdinand held the gate open, and they walked off together. "Wonder what made her mad?" questioned Ferdinand. "Guess she's so taken up with herself on account of having helped folks that she can't be pleasant. Humph!" and the boy patted Buff's head as if to assure him that he, Ferdinand, was to be trusted.

Marjorie did not go into the sitting-room again, but went quietly up to her own room. She sat down in the little white rocking-chair near the window and looked out. It was early June, and the long twilight had not yet faded into dusk. The garden fragrance of blossoming honeysuckle and jasmine came into the little room, and she heard the rustle of a bird in the woodbine beneath her window. Everything was very still and peaceful, and as Marjorie sat there, rebellious and unhappy, her thoughts suddenly centered about Sophronia. She remembered the first time that she had seen her, and then she recalled her own impatience with Sophronia in the early winter; and how glad she had been to come to Ashley; to leave Sophronia and Ann, and all sense of responsibility for them. And at last

Marjorie began to think of what had happened to the girl whom she had been so anxious to help.

"Sophronia has broken her leg!" she said aloud; "and Aunt Maria said she would have to lie perfectly quiet in bed for weeks!" Marjorie drew a long breath. And then, as suddenly as she had rushed in from the piazza, she ran down-stairs. "Aunt Maria! Aunt Maria!" she called, and Aunt Maria appeared at the sitting-room door.

"I'm going to Boston on the first train," Marjorie announced.

"But I have telephoned Mrs. Melchin not to expect you!" Miss Wing replied.

"Telephone her again, right away," Marjorie said. "I want to go; truly I do."

Miss Wing's face had brightened as Marjorie spoke, and she went toward the hallway, where the telephone was.

Marjorie followed her, and stood waiting. She was now as eager to return to Boston as she had been anxious, at supper time, to remain in Ashley.

"Don't they answer?" she asked, as no response came after her aunt's repeated calls.

"No," said Miss Wing; "we will wait a little while, and call them again. The line is busy."

"I am so horrid," Marjorie declared, as her aunt's arm rested gently about her shoulders, and they walked back toward the sitting-room.

"And I was just thinking how proud your mother

and father would be of their daughter, when they knew that you chose to go and stay with Sophronia. You know, my dear, that you need not go unless you really want to," said Miss Wing.

"I want to, Aunt Maria. You don't suppose this will make Mrs. Melchin tired of Sophronia, do you?"

"Of course not, Marjorie! What makes you feel that Mrs. Melchin does not want Sophronia?" questioned Miss Wing.

"I don't know; just because I've been trying to shirk myself, I suppose," answered Marjorie. "I do hope we can let Mrs. Melchin know that I am coming before bedtime."

An hour later the message was sent, and Marjorie went to bed. Already she was making plans for Sophronia's entertainment. "I'll help her study the dictionary, and I'll read poetry to her, and find puzzles for her to guess, and do everything I can." Marjorie went to sleep quite happily. She had begun to think that she was going to enjoy going back to Boston.

There was no time the next morning for Marjorie to let her friends know of the change in her plans. Miss Wing was going to Boston with her, and as they fastened the front door behind them before starting for the station, Ferdinand came out from his own house.

"Ferdinand! Ferdinand Webb!" Marjorie called and ran toward the fence. "Ferdinand, will you do me a favor?"

The boy nodded soberly. He was still wondering at

Marjorie's unfairness toward Buff and himself on the previous evening. "Buff never did a mean thing in his life, and he's her own dog," Ferdinand had thought resentfully, when Marjorie had pushed Buff from the top step, and now he really wondered what Marjorie was going to ask him to do.

"Catch me ever praising a girl again," he had resolved to himself.

Marjorie quickly told him the story of Sophronia's accident, and that she was going to Boston. "You see, I have to stay with Sophronia; maybe I won't come back to Ashley. Will you tell Miss Gray, and Adrienne and Ada? And I'll write them just as soon as I can."

Ferdinand nodded.

"And I know you'll take care of Buff until Aunt Maria gets home."

Another nod from the boy.

Suddenly Marjorie remembered that she had been angry at Ferdinand the night before, and "for nothing," she said to herself.

She hesitated a moment. It seemed to her that, all at once, she was discovering a new Marjorie, and one she could not like very well.

"I'll tell 'em. And I'll look after Buff," Ferdinand answered.

"I didn't mean to be so horrid to you, or to Buff either," Marjorie acknowledged; "but it was because I was so unhappy. I hated to go back to Boston."

There was a nod in response.

“Well, good-bye,” said Marjorie.

“Good-bye,” responded Ferdinand, and Marjorie turned away. Ferdinand despised her, she thought, and she said to herself that she didn’t blame him. She had nearly reached the gate where Aunt Maria was waiting when she heard him running after her.

“Say, Marjorie, I’m going to carry your bag to the station.”

“Thank you, Ferdinand.” It was Miss Wing who answered, but that did not matter.

Marjorie had smiled, and Ferdinand said to himself: “I guess she didn’t mean to hurt Buff,” and decided to forgive her.

CHAPTER XVIII

HELPING MARJORIE

“IT’S a shame for Marjorie to have to go to Boston.” Adrienne and Ada were sitting under the big shady maple tree back of Adrienne’s house watching Lucy giving Dot her first lesson in tennis. Ferdinand had given them Marjorie’s message, and neither of the older girls cared about tennis that afternoon. They had been talking over Sophronia’s accident, and the disappointment of not having Marjorie with them.

“Ferdinand said that Marjorie seemed to think she would not come back this summer,” Adrienne continued; “and she is going home to South Carolina in October, and who knows when we shall see her again? You know I’m going to boarding-school.”

“Perhaps Marjorie won’t have to stay all summer,” Ada responded. “Miss Wing will be sure to find some way so she will come back. Isn’t Lucy a dear to be so kind to Dot? Look, Adrienne! Dot is really getting some idea of what a tennis racket is for.”

“Never mind Dot. I want to talk about Marjorie,” persisted Adrienne. “Marjorie is the one who always has the hard things to do. She has stayed in Boston all winter on account of those mill girls, because Mrs. Melchin wanted her to help teach them things, and

now, just when she could have a little fun, that clumsy girl tumbles down-stairs and Marjorie has to go right back.”

“I guess it’s pretty hard for Sophronia,” suggested Ada. But Adrienne’s sympathy was all with Marjorie.

“We ought to do *something*,” she declared.

“I don’t see what we can do,” responded Ada. “Mrs. Melchin doesn’t want us to come and stay with Sophronia.”

“Perhaps she does. I thought of a plan the minute Ferdinand told us that Mrs. Melchin wanted Marjorie to come in to amuse Sophronia. I don’t see why you and I shouldn’t take turns with Marjorie. I’d go in and stay a week and let Marjorie come out here, and then, when I got home, you could go in a week,” and Adrienne looked at her companion hopefully. But Ada’s face was very sober.

“It’s a lovely plan,” she answered slowly.

“Of course it is,” Adrienne agreed laughingly; “my plans always are. I’m sure my mother and father will let me go. Don’t you think that we’d better telephone Mrs. Melchin right away, so that she can tell Marjorie?” And Adrienne sprang up, eager to at once begin her arrangements to help Marjorie.

“You mustn’t telephone Mrs. Melchin yet,” said Ada, “because we haven’t asked our mothers. Miss Wing is coming home this afternoon; don’t you think, Adrienne, it will be better to wait and tell her of your plan, before we do anything about it?”

Two years earlier and Adrienne would have quickly resented any suggestion that interfered with her carrying out her own wishes. But several unhappy results of her own way had taught her to be willing to "think again," as she termed it, and, after a little hesitation, she agreed to Ada's suggestion.

On Miss Wing's return Ada and Adrienne were at the station to meet her, and to hear all she could tell them of Sophronia and Marjorie.

"Poor Sophronia doesn't want Marjorie to stay," Miss Wing told them, "and it will only be a few weeks before she can get about on crutches, the doctor says, and then Mrs. Melchin will go to Cohasset and Marjorie can come home to Ashley."

"Well, that isn't so bad as all summer," agreed Adrienne; "but Ada and I have a plan so Marjorie won't have to stay in Boston even a few weeks."

"But Marjorie wants to stay, my dear girls," said Miss Wing. "You see, it is rather hard for Mrs. Melchin to change all her plans just now, and stay in the city when she wishes to go to her country home. And she is doing it really on account of Marjorie's interest in Sophronia. And poor Sophronia will have to keep very still, stay in her own room for a good many days, and Marjorie can do a great deal to make it easier for her. You see, my dear girls, that Marjorie is really Sophronia's best friend; and so she must do all she can for her, always."

"Yes, Miss Wing, I know," responded Adrienne

eagerly ; “ but we want to help Marjorie. You see, we are Marjorie’s best friends,” and Adrienne told her plan. Before she had finished they had reached Miss Wing’s house. Somewhat to Ada’s surprise, Miss Wing seemed to think that Adrienne’s suggestion could be carried out.

“ It is a lovely idea, and I am quite sure that Mrs. Melchin will think so,” she said ; “ now you girls talk it over with your parents, and, if they agree, come up to-morrow morning and tell me about it, and then I will call up Mrs. Melchin.”

“ Miss Wing is splendid ! ” declared Adrienne, as the two girls started for home. “ She always understands. I am glad I don’t have to ‘ think again ’ on this plan. What makes you so sober, Ada ? You have hardly said a word about going to Boston. Don’t you want to help Marjorie ? ”

“ I don’t know as I can,” said Ada. “ There’s Dottie, you know.”

“ I don’t see what difference that makes,” replied Adrienne ; “ the week you go to Boston Lucy and I will do all we can to give Dot a good time.”

“ It isn’t just that—Dot having a good time,” said Ada. “ You see, I promised father that if I could have Dot stay all summer it shouldn’t make any extra work for mother ; and if I go away for a week there would be extra work, and she has enough to do now.”

“ I see,” said Adrienne slowly, and for a moment the two girls walked on in silence ; then Adrienne suddenly

exclaimed, "Why can't I help your mother? I'd love to, if she'll let me. Ask her, Ada, won't you? I know you want to help Marjorie just as much as I do."

Ada's face brightened. "You are splendid, Adrienne!" she declared. "It is wonderful how you think of things. I'll tell mother all about it and let you know in the morning."

"I can't wait until morning. Tell her now, Ada. I'll stay out here on the porch, and you come out and tell me what she says."

"All right," agreed Ada, and ran into the house. She was back in a few moments, and Mrs. Streeter came with her. Adrienne looked up anxiously. She wanted very much to have Ada share in the friendly scheme to help Marjorie, and as soon as she saw Mrs. Streeter's approving look she smiled happily.

"Don't be too sure that Mrs. Melchin will agree to take either or both of you in exchange for Marjorie," she said; "but if she will I shall be glad for Ada to go."

"And may I come over and help you, Mrs. Streeter?" Adrienne asked eagerly. "You know I can just as well as not."

"Thank you, my dear; it is very thoughtful of you," answered Mrs. Streeter, and as the kind eyes rested upon her Adrienne felt very proud and happy.

Miss Wing had just sat down to breakfast when Adrienne and Ada appeared.

"Now I'll call Mrs. Melchin," she said, after they

had told her that their parents were willing. The girls listened eagerly as Miss Wing repeated Adrienne's plan to Mrs. Melchin over the telephone. Then, while Mrs. Melchin was replying, they stood close to Miss Wing, waiting anxiously.

"Yes!" replied Miss Wing to some question of Mrs. Melchin's. Then another "Yes!" and then "I'll tell them what you say. It seems a good plan." Then a silence while Miss Wing listened, and at last she hung up the telephone receiver and turned a smiling face toward the girls.

"Mrs. Melchin is delighted," she told them, "and she has suggested something else. She thinks it will be a pleasant idea to surprise Marjorie. To take her out for a ride, bring her to Ashley, and then slip away, taking one of you girls with her, and leave Marjorie here with me. What do you think?"

The girls both agreed that it would be fun to surprise Marjorie and it was decided that on Saturday Adrienne should be ready to go back with Mrs. Melchin to Boston.

Marjorie resolved not to let Sophronia guess that coming back to Boston had meant any sacrifice to her; but Sophronia's affection for Marjorie was not to be easily deceived.

"I reckon I've spoiled your good times," she said, a little pleadingly, as Marjorie came into her room with an armful of fragrant rose-peonies from Miss Wing's garden, which she heaped upon Sophronia's bed.

“And I reckon that we are going to have a good time, you and I, right here in this room,” responded Marjorie smilingly, and Sophronia smiled back. “Get a good sniff of those peonies, and then I’ll put them in the window for ‘Robinson Crusoe’ to admire,” said Marjorie. “Ann and I are to have our luncheon upstairs with you to-day, Sophronia; that is if you want us.”

“I reckon I do,” said Sophronia, who began to think there might be compensations even for broken legs if Marjorie was to be with her.

“Then I’ll run into my room and leave my hat there. I’ll be back in a minute,” Marjorie said, and the pleasant-faced nurse smiled appreciatively. She began to think that her “case” was going to be an easy one, with Marjorie and Ann to entertain the invalid.

It was settled that the nurse could have the day off, and Marjorie was soon back again in Sophronia’s room, sitting where Sophronia would not have to move the least bit to look at her, and telling about all the Ashley happenings. Ann came up and sat down close to Marjorie.

“I didn’t think you’d come,” she said, when Marjorie finished describing some wonderful butterflies and moths which Alexander had added to his collection.

“Why not?” asked Marjorie, a little resentfully.

“Oh, I don’t know. I thought you’d rather stay in Ashley,” said Ann.

Marjorie did not answer.

"I told you she'd come. Marjorie always is better than anybody else to me," said Sophronia.

Cora came up to set the little table for the girls' luncheon. Sophronia's food was put on a little shelf-like table that swung from a standard across the bed. Ann and Marjorie took turns in waiting upon her. There was a delicious salad, toast, strawberries, ginger-snaps, and, just as they decided that they had quite finished, in came Cora with a tray of ice-cream. It was shaped like peaches, and Sophronia declared that it was too pretty to eat, and then, a little later, when the last spoonful had disappeared, that she believed things that were pretty tasted better than other things.

In the afternoon Marjorie read aloud, greatly to Ann's delight, and when at four o'clock in the afternoon the nurse returned, and said that her patient must say good-bye to visitors for that day, Marjorie exclaimed that the time had been short.

"See you in the morning," she said smilingly, as she kissed Sophronia, and followed Ann down the stairs.

They found Miss Wing and Mrs. Melchin waiting in the library for them. "We'll all go to the station with Maria," Mrs. Melchin said, and it seemed to Marjorie that Aunt Maria was very proud to be leaving her behind.

After saying good-bye to Miss Wing, Mrs. Melchin directed the chauffeur to take them to Mr. Field's studio.

"I want to see Luke," she explained to the girls.

“I thought perhaps it would amuse Sophronia for him to bring his marionettes down for her to see.”

Marjorie looked up at the kind lady sitting beside her. “I hope I can do lovely things for people when I grow up, just as you do,” she said admiringly.

“You are doing them now, my dear girl,” responded the old lady affectionately.

Luke was at home, and promised readily to bring his “show” for Sophronia’s amusement the very next day, and then Mrs. Melchin said she believed that she would like to ride a while, and off the car went down a broad avenue lined with trees toward the Reservoir district. There was a pleasant little breeze, and Marjorie and Ann enjoyed skimming along over the smooth road. They were both rather sleepy at their late dinner, and were quite ready to go early to bed.

“It isn’t going to be hard at all to stay with Sophronia,” Marjorie said to herself as she went to her own chamber that night.

CHAPTER XIX

MARJORIE DECIDES

IT seemed to Sophronia that it was almost worth while to have a broken leg, since it made everybody so kind to her. To have Marjorie ready to read to her, talk with her, or help her with numerous games and puzzles which Mr. Field had provided, to have wonderful luncheons with Ann and Marjorie, and have even Mrs. Melchin herself come up the stairs every day and sit by her bed, and smile so kindly at her, gave the little girl a new and happy realization of the friendliness around her. For Marjorie the first few days went very quickly. On two afternoons Mr. Field came for her, and they walked down to the esplanade and embarked on one of the small launches and sailed away up the river, under the Harvard bridge, and up beyond the city, coming back just at sunset. Sophronia was doing remarkably well, the doctor said, and added that she was so well cared for that she found it easier to keep quiet and give the broken bone a fair chance to knit.

When Saturday morning came Marjorie owned to herself that she was tired, and she was conscious that she dreaded to think that she must stay three weeks more shut up in the city house. At breakfast Mrs.

Melchin said, "Ann is to sit with her sister this morning, and you and I, Marjorie, are going for a ride."

Marjorie gave a little sigh of relief, and felt a little guilty to think that she was glad to be going off into the country, instead of staying with Sophronia.

"Cora will bring down your hat, my dear," Mrs. Melchin said. So Marjorie did not go up-stairs, nor did she know that Cora had brought down her bag, and that it was in the car when they rolled away from the Beacon Street house.

"What do you say to going out and having luncheon with your Aunt Maria?" suggested Mrs. Melchin.

"Oh! Could we? I'd love it!" responded Marjorie.

"I told Billings not to expect us back," said Mrs. Melchin, "and I ordered strawberry sherbet for Sophronia and Ann, so they will be quite happy without us."

"You think of the most beautiful things to do," said Marjorie happily. "Shall we stay all day?"

"Yes, and your aunt and Adrienne and Ada are expecting us," replied Mrs. Melchin.

Marjorie's spirits rose. She enjoyed the fragrant June air, the swift movement over the long stretches of pleasant country roads, and her thoughts were full of all she would have to tell her aunt and her friends.

Aunt Maria was watching for them, and Buff seemed glad to welcome his little mistress.

"The Scotch rose is in bloom," Marjorie exclaimed as she ran up the path, "and so are the sweet-williams."

“Adrienne wants you to come over to her house, my dear, and have a game of tennis before luncheon,” said Aunt Maria, and Marjorie started off with Buff at her heels.

“Now, my dear Maria,” said Mrs. Melchin, as she followed her friend into the dining-room, “we must have a talk, a serious talk, about this ‘assessment’—these girls at my house. You remember that I promised to keep them a year? Well, the year is over, and I have come to a decision.”

Aunt Maria nodded, and waited to hear what Sophronia’s and Ann’s fate was to be.

“We might as well sit down,” said Mrs. Melchin, “for I want to talk it all over with you. They are a good deal of care and trouble. I don’t want to shirk my share, but bringing up two girls is rather more than I feel equal to. I am an old lady, my dear,” and there was a plaintive note in Mrs. Melchin’s voice as if she wanted Miss Wing not to be severe with her if she fell short a little in carrying out helpful plans.

The two friends talked long and seriously, and when Marjorie came running into the house, nearly two hours later, they had just reached a decision.

“We will have to let Marjorie decide,” she heard her aunt say.

“Decide what?” she asked laughingly, and wondered why they both looked so sober, and why luncheon was not ready.

“I’ll tell you later, my dear,” said her aunt; “now

we must fly around and set the table. Luckily, there is no need of a fire to-day, and luncheon is all in the refrigerator."

"Shall I have time to go down to Ada's a minute before we start for Boston?" Marjorie asked Mrs. Melchin as they finished luncheon.

"Yes," replied Mrs. Melchin, and when Marjorie came back an hour later Mrs. Melchin had gone. Aunt Maria told her all about Adrienne's plan, and that Adrienne had gone to Boston to try and take her place with Sophronia for a week. "And when Adrienne returns Ada is to go, then you will probably not be needed more than another week in Boston," explained Aunt Maria, "as by that time Mrs. Melchin hopes Sophronia can be taken to Cohasset."

"Wasn't it splendid of Adrienne to think of it!" exclaimed Marjorie, "and I *am* glad to stay here with you. And Mrs. Melchin was fine, too, to slip away and not tell me. I do believe Sophronia will have a better time with new girls to talk to than she would to have me stay right along. Oh! Everything is coming out beautifully," and Marjorie danced a few steps across the room and back again to her Aunt Maria's side.

"You know, Aunt Maria, I have been worried all winter for fear that Mrs. Melchin would decide that she couldn't keep Sophronia. She likes Ann so much that I was pretty sure she would want to keep her, but she never seemed to appreciate Sophronia; but now," con-

cluded Marjorie, "I'm sure she will look out for them both."

Miss Wing was silent, and as Marjorie looked she noticed that her aunt had grown very serious. "What is it? Isn't Mrs. Melchin going to let Sophronia stay?" she asked.

"We didn't mean to tell you so soon, dear Marjorie," replied her aunt, "but you must not think that Sophronia is going to be deserted or neglected," for Marjorie's eyes had filled with tears at the thought that Sophronia was not to remain in the safety and comfort of Mrs. Melchin's home. "We have a plan for Sophronia," continued Miss Wing, "and it seems as if it was a happy one, but it is for you to decide."

"Why doesn't Mrs. Melchin want Sophronia?" almost wailed Marjorie.

"Mrs. Melchin has been very kind and generous. She has made both your little protégées welcome in her home, spent a good deal of money for them, and is willing to continue to be responsible for them, but she says that she does not want to keep them with her all the time, as she has done this year."

"What is the plan, then?" questioned Marjorie, but feeling sure that her Aunt Maria would say that Sophronia was to be sent to some home for friendless girls, and no longer thinking that such a refuge would be a happy place for the little mill girl.

"Come and sit on the porch, dear," suggested her aunt, and Marjorie followed her out to the little porch

in the rear of the house. It faced the pretty slope of lawn that went down to the brook, shaded by the big willow tree which Marjorie's grandmother had planted.

They sat down on the upper step, and Marjorie leaned against her aunt. She felt suddenly tired, and quite forgot to rejoice in the two weeks of Ashley good times before her.

"It's this way, my dear, and you will see how we all rely upon you," began Miss Wing, gently smoothing the brown head resting against her shoulder. "Mrs. Melchin has had the girls a year, and she has thought about them very carefully, so as to make plans for their future. She is an old lady, dear Marjorie, and not always strong or equal to new cares."

Marjorie moved impatiently. It seemed to her that Aunt Maria was postponing the telling of something unpleasant.

"This is what she has decided," continued Miss Wing, and at this Marjorie lifted her head and sat up very straight. "The girls are to stay in Cohasset with her this summer. In the autumn Ann is to go to a good school, where she will be well taught and well cared for in every respect."

"And Sophronia?" questioned Marjorie eagerly.

"That is for you to decide, Marjorie. Will you be willing to have Sophronia with you, in your own home, this winter? If you will, I have promised your mother's consent, and Mrs. Melchin will furnish the necessary money."

For a moment Marjorie made no reply. The sunset glow back of the willow was fading out. The evening star showed faintly in the summer sky, and Marjorie began to feel more unhappy and puzzled than ever before. If Mrs. Melchin wanted Sophronia to go back to the plantation, and was sending Ann to school, then, thought Marjorie, the two little mill girls would not have a home after all.

"So much has happened to-day, dear child, that you are tired," her aunt said. "We won't talk about it again until you wish to."

Marjorie thought to herself that she would never want to talk about it again. But she said good-night and went up to the little white room.

"I'm not going to think about it, either," she resolved. "I'm going to think about going up to the pine woods to-morrow with Lucy, and Ada and Dot. And about going out to Farmer Wyman's, and up to the lake!" But in spite of these resolves she found her thoughts going back to Sophronia; and all at once she exclaimed aloud, "Charles Edward! That's it. I have the address. I know Mrs. Field would like to have Sophronia."

At breakfast Miss Wing sent a little questioning look at Marjorie; but Marjorie did not mention Sophronia. She seemed her own light-hearted self, and played ball with Buff until the other girls arrived for her to go to the pines.

"Isn't Dot a dear?" Ada asked, as she and Marjorie

watched Lucy and Dot making wonderful dolls of the pine cones, and using their handkerchiefs for dresses. "I suppose your being so good to Sophronia made me want to do something special," went on Ada, "and that was why I thought of asking Dot to spend the summer."

Marjorie made no reply. She thought to herself that she wished Ada would not talk about Sophronia.

"Adrienne feels just the same," went on Ada; "that's what made her think of going to Mrs. Melchin's in your place. We're proud of you, Marjorie!" concluded her friend admiringly.

"Well, you needn't be," Marjorie answered, a little sharply.

As the days slipped by and her Aunt Maria did not again refer to Sophronia, Marjorie began to be troubled. Adrienne had returned from her visit with Sophronia, and declared that she had enjoyed every minute of the time. Ada's visit was nearly over, and Marjorie wondered to herself what would happen if she did not speak to her aunt about Mrs. Melchin's plans.

"I can't tell them about Charles Edward until I'm sure," she thought, and wondered how she could find some way to get to Cambridge, on her return to Boston, and see Mrs. Field. She remembered the address, and felt quite sure that she could find the place.

Sophronia was so glad to see her that Marjorie quite forgot to wish herself back in Ashley. The broken leg was mending satisfactorily. A pair of crutches were in Sophronia's room, and the doctor had said that it

would be quite safe for her to go to Cohasset the last of the week. Ann was rejoicing that she was again to be near the sea, but Sophronia owned that she would rather stay in Boston if Marjorie could stay with her, rather than go to the shore without her.

“Everybody’s been right good to me. I’ve had everything I wanted. That is,” and Sophronia corrected this statement by saying, “everything I *ought* to want. I’ll tell you something, Marjorie; something I haven’t told anybody; I’ve been wishing I could see Charles Edward!”

Marjorie laughed with delight. “Isn’t that funny, Sophronia? I have been thinking about him, too. I’ll tell *you* something. I am going over to Cambridge and see Mrs. Field. And perhaps it won’t be very long before you will see Charles Edward.”

“Is it a secret?” asked Sophronia, remembering the wonderful surprise of Adrienne’s and Ada’s visit, and thinking to herself that very likely Charles Edward was coming to see her in the same unexpected way.

“Well, we won’t tell anybody yet,” Marjorie answered. “You see, Sophronia, I shall go home in October, and——” Here Marjorie hesitated. She remembered that Sophronia had no home. That if she, Marjorie, wished she could take her to the plantation. And she realized, too, that in deciding to ask Mrs. Field to give Sophronia a home she had, as she said to herself, been meaning to “shirk.” She rushed suddenly out of the room and into her own, and shut the door.

“I’ve found you out, Marjorie Philips!” she whispered. “You let the girls praise you, and you think other people ought to do things. But you are a selfish shirk. You’ve tried and keep trying to have other people do things for Sophronia. Now you’ve just got to do them yourself. Sophronia is going South when you do, Marjorie Philips. And go to college when you do. And go shares, always!” And a few moments later Miss Maria Wing was called to the telephone, and heard Marjorie’s voice saying: “Aunt Maria, will you call Mrs. Melchin up, now, right away; and tell her that I’ve decided. I want Sophronia to go home with me in October. Yes, indeed! And stay always.”

As Marjorie turned from the telephone she found Mrs. Melchin standing just behind her.

“I heard your message, Marjorie. You are a dear child,” the old lady said kindly. “Now we can make plans.”

CHAPTER XX

MARJORIE AND MRS. MELCHIN

CHARLES EDWARD and his mother took their place in the big automobile beside Marjorie. It seemed to Marjorie that Charles Edward was trying very hard to say that he preferred an automobile to a baby-carriage.

"It's real kind, I'm sure," Mrs. Field said as the car sped along over the bridge, "and I'll be real pleased to see the little girl again. So she's going South with you in the fall? That's real nice, I'm sure."

For Marjorie had told Mrs. Melchin of how much Sophronia wanted to see Charles Edward, with the result that the visit had been promptly arranged by telephone, and Marjorie and Cora had been sent to bring the visitors.

Charles Edward proved himself a very entertaining visitor. He grabbed at the parrots, nearly fell downstairs, and kept Ann and Marjorie constantly on the alert. But Sophronia and his mother watched him admiringly; and when Sophronia declared that she thought Charles Edward was the smartest baby she had ever seen, Mrs. Field nodded approvingly; and told Mrs. Melchin that the moment Sophronia came into her house, nearly a year ago, she could see that Charles Edward "took" to her.

On the day after Charles Edward's visit, Mrs. Melchin removed her family to Cohasset and Marjorie returned to Ashley for the summer. She felt very care-free and happy. Mrs. Melchin had told her of what she meant to do for the little mill girls.

"I have set aside the stock I own in those Columbia mills for Sophronia and Ann," she said; "the dividends will pay for their education. And as long as I live Sophronia is to come North each summer and she and Ann will stay with me for the hot weather."

"It's lovely!" Marjorie had declared happily.

The summer went quickly by. Early in September Dot, healthy and happy, had returned to Boston. Adrienne was to go to a girls' school in a neighboring town, and Lucy would remain in Ashley. Marjorie, Miss Wing and Sophronia were to start for the South early in October, when Ann would begin school.

"You'll be gone by this time to-morrow, Sophronia," Ann said mournfully, as the sisters sat together on the sunny piazza at Cohasset. "I reckon I'll be right homesick not to see you for so many months. I 'most wish we was back in the mill, I do. Then we were always together."

"Andromeda Cutts! Take that right back," demanded Sophronia. "Of course you're going to miss me, and I'm going to miss you; but we're going to be happy thinking about each other. I'm going to be with my best friend, and I am going to try and be just as much like her as I can. And you are going to a

splendid school. Mrs. Melchin is going to see you every week, and you are to have music lessons. And when summer comes we'll be back here, right on this porch, together."

Ann managed to smile as Sophronia finished.

"I reckon it is better than the mill," she acknowledged.

"And we mustn't ever forget," concluded Sophronia earnestly, "that it's Marjorie who has done all this for us. We'd be ragged and dirty and ignorant and abused, all our lives, probably, if she hadn't helped us and taught us. And now I am to go to college with her, some day. And you are to be a musician. Mrs. Melchin says that you are. And it's all on account of Marjorie's helping us."

"Yes, Marjorie and Mrs. Melchin," Ann agreed, and Sophronia repeated her words.

"Yes, Marjorie and Mrs. Melchin."

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