

LITTLE FRIEND LYDIA

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*"WE'LL ASK HER FOR A DRINK," RESPONDED SAMMY, NEVER
AT A LOSS*

Little Friend Lydia

BY

ETHEL CALVERT PHILLIPS

With Illustrations by

EDITH F. BUTLER

[image]

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Illustrations

“We’ll ask her for a drink,” responded Sammy, never at a loss
“This is your bedroom, Lydia”
“It’s spring, Lucy Locket,” chattered Lydia. “That’s why you have a
new hat and a new dress”
Such a cobbler’s shop had never been seen before

[image]

Little Friend Lydia

CHAPTER I—Christmas Eve

It was Christmas Eve, and twenty little boys and girls were watching for Santa Claus. Ten little boys in blue-striped blouses and dark-blue neckties, ten little girls in blue-checked aprons and dark-blue hair-ribbons fixed their eyes on the big folding doors and thought the time for them to open would never come.

All day long excitement had reigned supreme in the Children's Home, a roomy comfortable house set on the very edge of the big city, and where were gathered the motherless and fatherless children who found love and care under its hospitable roof. Each ring of the doorbell brought chattering groups to hang over the banisters, each sound of wheels on the driveway was the signal for excited faces to be pressed against the window-pane and for round eyes to try in vain to bore through the paper wrappings of mysterious bundles whisked out of sight all too soon. Peeks through the parlor keyhole were forbidden, but passing the door on the way to luncheon several children were seen to stop and sniff the air as though they might actually smell out the secret.

"Nurse Norrie called it an 'entertainment,'" said big Mary Ellen to a group gathered round her in the playroom. "I do wonder what 't will be. It will be to-night anyway; she said so."

"It's cowboys and Indians, that's what it is," declared Sammy, an agile youth who all morning had somehow managed to look out of the window and over the banisters at the same time when occasion demanded. "It's going to be a Wild West show to-night, I think." And Sammy galloped up and down the playroom in imitation of the dashing broncos he hoped to see that night.

"Do you think Miss Martin would have horses in the parlor?" asked Mary Ellen scornfully. "I hope it will be tableaux." And Mary Ellen immediately pictured herself the most beautiful tableau of them all, attired as a Red Cross nurse

draped in the American flag, with a noble expression on her face, and perhaps supporting a wounded soldier or two.

Little Tom took his finger out of his mouth long enough to say, "I hope it's candy"; and at this pleasing thought Luley and Lena, the fat little twins, clapped their hands in agreement. Polly, always a little behindhand, hadn't made up her mind yet what the surprise was to be. So Mary Ellen turned to Lydia, a quiet little girl whose brown eyes looked out shyly upon the world from under a thatch of yellow curls. Now Lydia remembered clearly her Christmas a year ago, so although she felt a little shy about speaking out before them all, she was sure she had guessed the secret.

"I think it's Santa Claus," said Lydia timidly, "and maybe a Christmas Tree too."

Miss Martin, who took good care of these little children and loved them every one, stood in the doorway listening and laughing.

"I'll give you just one hint," said she, "if you promise not to ask me another question. Lydia is the warmest. Sammy is freezing cold, so is Mary Ellen. Tom is warm, too, but Lydia is hot, red-hot I should say." And then Miss Martin closed the door and fled. In the hall she met fat Nurse Norrie carrying a pile of clean blouses.

"Hark ye to the noise in there," said Nurse Norrie with a chuckle. "I'm thinking if we live through this day we'll live through anything."

But at last evening came and they were all gathered in the back room with only a few moments more to wait. Patient Miss Martin took pity on them and answered the same questions over and over as she moved about the room straightening twisted neckties and perking up fallen hair-ribbons.

"Yes, I'm sure Santa Claus is coming," said Miss Martin for the tenth time to Luley and Lena, who hand in hand trotted up with the question every few minutes as if asking something new each time. "Why am I sure, Polly? Because he comes every year to the Children's Home. He has never forgotten us yet."

"Maybe he's stuck in the snow," said Sammy gloomily; "it's deep, deep. Maybe he's having a fight with the Indians."

At this thought Sammy brightened, but Luley and Lena put out their under lips in such pitiful fashion that Miss Martin was glad to hear Mary Ellen say sturdily:

"I don't believe there ever was a snowdrift or an Indian either that could keep Santa Claus away."

"Good, Mary Ellen," said Miss Martin with an approving smile; "I'm sure you are right. Take your finger out of your mouth, Tom. Yes, Lydia, what is it?"

Lydia stood on tiptoe and spoke softly. She didn't want any one else to hear her question.

“Miss Martin,” whispered she, “will Santa Claus bring you whatever you ask for—even if it won’t go into your stocking?”

“Of course he will,” answered Miss Martin with an arm about Lydia. “Think of our big swing he brought last year. That wouldn’t go in a giant’s stocking. Think of the big—What’s that sound, children?”

Every one listened. Nearer and nearer and nearer came the jingle of sleigh-bells, little by little the folding doors slid open, and there before their very eyes Santa Claus himself came into the room. Sammy said afterward he knew he saw him come down the chimney and step out of the fireplace, and this in spite of Mary Ellen who declared she saw him come walking through the door. But however he came, there he was, covered with snow and with a big pack on his back fairly bursting with toys. Dolls and drums and horns, jack-in-the-boxes, toy lambs, furry dogs, soft white rabbits stuck out in every direction. Luley and Lena fixed their round eyes upon two white cats peeping slyly side by side over the edge of the pack, and oh, how they hoped that Santa Claus would know that they wanted those pussies more than anything in the world.

Santa Claus stationed himself beside the big glittering Christmas Tree gay with its colored horns, shining balls, red and white cranberry and popcorn chains.

“Here I am, children, at last,” said he, with an engaging smile all round. “A little late, but it’s not my fault. You must blame my reindeer for that. Dancer and Prancer were in such a hurry to get here that on a roof near by they didn’t look where they were going, and Prancer stubbed his toe quite badly against the chimney. But here we are now, with a bagful of toys—something for every one.”

Santa Claus looked for a moment into the blue eyes, the black eyes, the gray and the brown eyes all earnestly fixed on him.

“First of all,” began Santa Claus with a merry nod, “here are twin pussycats who are looking for two little girls just like these.” And he stepped straight over to Luley and Lena and put the pussies into their outstretched arms. How did he know that that was what they wanted? Perhaps because they had been looking so longingly at them ever since he came into the room. But then how did he know that Mary Ellen wanted a paint-box and a Red Cross doll, and Sammy a Noah’s Ark and a drum and a horn? It was really wonderful how Santa Claus could tell exactly what each one wanted. There was little Tom who longed to play with dolls, but who couldn’t bear it when the big boys laughed and called him “a girl.” And what should Santa Claus give to him but a soldier boy in khaki uniform, carrying a shining bayonet. Surely no boy would be ashamed to play with that, and yet at night, with the bayonet under Tom’s pillow, General Pershing, Jr., would cuddle as well as any baby doll.

Before long every one’s arms were full. Even the grown-up visitors, enjoying the scene from a distant corner, were not forgotten, but held boxes of candy

shaped like little doll houses. Polly carried a white rabbit and a big picture-book off into her special corner. Sammy, skillfully performing on horn and drum simultaneously, woke echoes in the attic. Toy trains ran merrily round and round. Fire engines dashed bravely in every direction. It seemed as if Santa Claus's pack must be empty. But no, there he stood holding a baby doll in long white dress and little white cap, a baby doll who stretched out her arms as if asking some one to come and hold her, please.

"Here's a baby looking for a mother," called out Santa Claus. "Perhaps she will tell me her mother's name." And Santa Claus held the baby up to his ear.

"She says she wants Lydia," announced Santa Claus. "Where's Lydia?"

"Yes, where is Lydia?" asked Miss Martin, looking about. "I haven't seen her for a long time."

At this one of the visitors came forward, a visitor all the children knew, for she came often to see them. It was Mrs. Morris, a little old Quaker lady, who always wore a gray silk dress, a snow-white kerchief, and sometimes a little white cap. The children called her "Friend Morris" after a fashion she loved, and well might they call her so, for she gave generously of time and thought and money for their happiness and welfare. Friend Morris stepped to an open door and peeped behind it.

"Here is little Friend Lydia," said she. "Come out, Lydia. Surely thee is not afraid of the good Santa Claus." And she took Lydia gently by the hand and drew her out of her corner.

Lydia shook her head.

"No, Friend Morris," said she, "I'm not afraid of Santa Claus. But I want him to give away all his toys, and then I will ask him for my present."

"But see what Santa Claus has for thee, Friend Lydia," said Mrs. Morris, leading her to where Santa Claus stood watching them with a smile on his lips. "A beautiful baby doll. Surely that is the present thee wants."

"No, I want to whisper it in his ear," persisted Lydia.

She raised her brown eyes to Santa Claus, who looked down at her a moment in silence and then lifted her in his arms.

"What is it, Lydia?" he said softly. "Tell me."

"I want," whispered Lydia with her arm about Santa Claus's neck, "I want a father and a mother, a real father and mother of my own. Miss Martin said you could give a present that wouldn't go in a stocking. And I will give you back the baby doll."

Santa Claus thought for a moment, and then he tightened his hold upon the little girl looking so anxiously into his face.

"Now, Lydia," said he, "I'll tell you just how it is. I don't carry that kind of a present around in my bag with me, but I'll try to get it for you if you are willing

to wait a little while for it. You keep the baby doll. Take good care of her, and I'll go to work and see what I can do for you. How will that be?"

Santa Claus had merry blue eyes, and now he looked straight at Lydia as if he meant what he said.

"You won't forget?" asked Lydia.

"I won't forget," said Santa Claus. "I promise."

He put Lydia on the ground with a parting pat on her head.

"And now I must be off," said he. "My reindeer won't stand much longer. I believe they're out on the lawn here now. Merry Christmas, children! 'Merry Christmas to all and to all a good-night!'"

And Santa Claus was out of the window, across the porch, and out of sight before you could turn around. The jingle of the sleigh-bells died away, the Christmas party was over, and it was time to go to bed.

Lydia slowly climbed the stairs with the new dolly in her arms. Mary Ellen was beside her, admiring her own Red Cross nurse as she went.

"What shall you name your doll?" asked Mary Ellen. "Mine is Florence Clara Barton Nightingale. See the little ring your doll has. And a gold locket round her neck."

"Her name is Lucy Locket," answered Lydia in a flash. "I've thought of it just this minute."

Upstairs ten little boys popped into bed before you could say Jack Robinson. They had no long hair to be brushed and braided. But Miss Martin and good-natured Nurse Norrie worked quickly, and before long ten little girls were tucked snugly into their beds too. Miss Martin lighted the night light and turned to go.

"Merry Christmas to all and to all a good-night," said Miss Martin softly, just like Santa Claus.

Lydia was the only little girl wide awake enough to answer.

"Merry Christmas," said Lydia sleepily. "Lucy Locket, you heard Santa Claus promise, didn't you?"

And then little Friend Lydia fell fast asleep too.

CHAPTER II—The Real Christmas Present

Christmas morning, and oh, how early every one woke and jumped out of bed! Sammy was the first to look out of the window, and his shouts of joy brought everybody pell-mell to look out too.

“Snow,” he called, “more snow! Hurry up and get dressed.”

Sure enough the ground was covered with a fresh fall of snow, and at that moment up came the red winter sun making a beautiful sparkling Christmas world for the children to look upon.

Breakfast over, out they all trooped, and up went a snowman only to fall under a hail of snowballs. Mary Ellen and Polly pulled Lydia and the twins about on the sled, refreshing themselves between-times with wild toboggans down the hill. It seemed only a moment before Miss Martin called them in to make ready for church.

Two by two they walked along, past houses with wreaths of holly in the windows, sometimes catching glimpses between curtains of Christmas Trees like their own.

In the church it was green and sweet-smelling. From their seats in the balcony the children looked up at a big red star blazing high among the pine and balsam boughs. They sat quietly, the older ones now and then understanding a little of what was said, while between-times they counted the organ-pipes or swung their feet softly, the unlucky Sammy occasionally coming up against the pew with a thump. Every one—Miss Martin, too—was glad when their turn came to sing, and they could stretch stiff little legs and open their mouths wide. They sang—

“Away in a manger,
 No crib for a bed,
 The little Lord Jesus
 Lay down His sweet head.
 The stars in the sky
 Looked down where He lay,
 The little Lord Jesus
 Asleep on the hay.

“The cattle are lowing,
 The dear baby wakes.
 The little Lord Jesus
 No crying He makes.
 I love Thee, Lord Jesus,
 Look down from the sky,
 And stay by my cradle

To watch lullaby.”

Lydia had a clear little voice and she sang out with a will, and all the while she sang she was thinking of Santa Claus’s promise.

After church came dinner—turkey and plum pudding—and then the children settled down around the Tree to play with their new toys. Lydia was rocking Lucy Locket to sleep when Nurse Norrie came into the room.

“Friend Morris has sent for you, Lydia,” said she. “Alexander is waiting outside.”

Nurse Norrie looked carefully at Lydia’s face and hands.

“You’re as clean as a pin,” said she. “It would be well if others were more like you.” And she rapped gently upon Sammy’s head as she passed. Sammy looked up with a grin.

“I don’t care,” said he with Christmas daring. “I don’t want to be clean. It’s sissy.”

On the doorstep Lydia slipped her hand in Alexander’s, and off they started. Alexander and his wife, Friend Deborah, were Quakers who had lived for many years with Mrs. Morris, and the children knew them well. Friend Deborah wore a drab stuff dress and a kerchief like Friend Morris, and Alexander’s broad-brimmed hat was quite different from that worn by other men.

“No, Lydia,” Alexander was saying, “thee is not going to Friend Morris’s house. She is spending the afternoon with friends in the city, and thee is to go there. And thee is going to ride on the Elevated cars.” Alexander knew that Lydia would like this.

Lydia gave a little skip of happiness. She did like to ride on the Elevated train high up in the air and look straight into the windows of the houses as they passed. To-day, as she kneeled on the seat and looked out, she saw Christmas Trees and family dinner-parties, a baby fastened in a high chair drumming on the window with his new rattle, and a little girl holding up her Christmas dolly to look out of the window too. At that moment the train stopped, and Lydia and the little girl smiled and waved and the dolly threw a stiff kiss in Lydia’s direction. Then on they went again, and all too soon Lydia and Alexander left the train, climbed down the steep flights of steps, and turned into a narrow little street with small, old-fashioned brick houses on either side of the way. Before one of them Alexander stopped and rang the bell, and in a moment the door was opened by a pretty lady with pink cheeks and soft brown hair who said, “Merry Christmas, Alexander. And this must be little Friend Lydia. Come in, Lydia. Friend Morris is upstairs waiting for you.”

And the pretty lady, whose name was Mrs. Blake, led Lydia into a bedroom to leave her hat and coat, and then upstairs where first of all Lydia spied a little

kitchen and then a big room where Friend Morris sat before a blazing open fire.

It sounds topsy-turvy, doesn't it? the bedrooms downstairs and the kitchen upstairs? But this is how it happened. Mr. Blake was an artist. He painted the most beautiful pictures in the world, Lydia thought, when she saw them, and his workroom or studio was the whole top floor of the house, except for a tiny little kitchen tucked away in a corner at the head of the stairs. So you see for yourself why the bedrooms were downstairs, and as Lydia afterward came to think it the nicest house that could ever be, it must have been a good arrangement after all.

Lydia felt at home at once, Friend Morris was so smiling, and Mrs. Blake so friendly, and Mr. Blake so full of fun. He stood before the fire looking down at the little girl, and something in the tall figure with the merry smile made her thoughts fly back to Santa Claus and her conversation with him the night before.

"They wouldn't let me have anything to eat, Lydia," said he, taking Lydia's hand in his, "and I'm as hungry as a bear. But now that you've come perhaps they will give me a cake."

Lydia saw the cakes on a little table in the corner, and hoped that she might have one too. But before she could answer some one jumped down from the window-sill and walked slowly toward her. It was a big Angora cat gray all over save for four white boots and a white necktie.

"This is Miss Puss Whitetoes," said Mr. Blake. "Miss Puss, will you shake hands with Lydia?"

Sure enough, Miss Puss held out her paw and shook hands most politely. Then as Lydia sat on the floor beside her, she jumped into the little girl's lap and in no time they were the best of friends.

"Lydia!" said a voice from far away, "Lydia!"

Lydia looked up from gently scratching Miss Puss's head and saw that Mrs. Blake, busy at the tea-table, was calling her. Every one was smiling, so she smiled back.

"Mr. Blake can't wait any longer for his cakes, Lydia," said Mrs. Blake. "Will you help me pass the tea?"

Lydia very carefully carried a cup of tea to Friend Morris, and one to Mr. Blake, and then in her own cup of milk she dipped the silver tea-ball one, two, three times. It really almost tasted of tea after that. And as for the cakes—Lydia never before ate anything quite so good as those little cakes.

"And now, Friend Lydia, will thee sing a song for us?" asked Mrs. Morris. So Lydia sang:

"I saw three ships go sailing by
On New Year's Day in the morning."

Then Mr. Blake and Lydia recited "The Night Before Christmas," and were loudly applauded by Friend Morris and Mrs. Blake.

Now the room began to grow dark. Miss Puss settled herself for a nap in front of the fire, and Mr. Blake took Lydia on his lap. He was glad to hold a little girl in his arms again, for once he had had a little daughter of his own and had lost her.

"Did you have a nice Christmas, Lydia?" he asked. "What did Santa Claus bring you?"

"He brought me a doll," answered Lydia, settling down on his lap with a sigh of content, "and she has a ring and a locket and so I named her Lucy Locket. But that's not my real present. I must wait for that; and Santa Claus will try to bring it to me by-and-by. He promised."

"A real present?" said Mr. Blake. "And what kind of a present is that?"

"It's a father and a mother," whispered Lydia in his ear, "a real father and mother of my own. Do you think he'll bring it to me?"

"I do," said Mr. Blake, "I do, indeed. I'm almost sure he will."

He looked straight at Lydia as he spoke, and something in his blue eyes made her say, "You look just like Santa Claus—the way he did last night."

"Do I?" said Mr. Blake with a laugh. "Well, I don't know a better person to look like than Santa Claus."

Lydia put up her hand and patted his face.

"I'm going to give you something," said she. "I was saving it for Mary Ellen. It's mine, I didn't eat it myself, but I want to give it to you. It's one of those good little cakes." And she drew it from her crummy pocket and put it in Mr. Blake's hand.

"Thank you, Lydia," said he, "thank you. But I wouldn't be surprised if Mrs. Blake could make up a little box for you to take home to Mary Ellen. Mother!" he called, "Mother!"

Mrs. Blake came into the room, and then, instead of saying anything about little cakes for Mary Ellen, "You tell her, Mother," said Mr. Blake. "You tell her."

"Oh, Friend Morris," said Mrs. Blake, "you tell Lydia, won't you?"

So Friend Morris came forward, and she was smiling as she had smiled all afternoon.

"Friend Lydia," said she, "last night thee asked a present of Santa Claus, and to-day the present is given thee. Here are a good father and a good mother who will love thee well, and in turn they will have the love of a good little daughter. Does thee not understand what I am saying to thee, Friend Lydia?"

For Lydia was staring at Friend Morris with wide-open eyes. She could scarcely believe her ears. Friend Morris was still smiling, but tears were in her eyes. Then Lydia threw her arms about Mr. Blake's neck. "A real father," said

Lydia. She turned to Mrs. Blake and held her as if she would never let her go. "And my own mother," said Lydia, "my own mother."

And there they were just so when Alexander's knock came at the door.

"This is the nicest Christmas we've ever had, isn't it, Lydia?" said Mr. Blake, his voice a trifle husky. Lydia smiled up into his face and softly patted the big hand laid upon her shoulder.

"And you'll come back day after to-morrow, Lydia, to stay," said Mrs. Blake, her arm still round the little girl, "and never go away again."

Lydia nodded happily. She wasn't able to talk about it yet. It seemed too good to be true. But she gave every one a parting hug all round. Then she whispered something in Mr. Blake's ear.

"Please don't forget the little cakes for Mary Ellen," said little Friend Lydia.

CHAPTER III—The New Home

The next two days were the most exciting days Lydia had ever known. First of all she told the good news over and over to Miss Martin, and Mary Ellen, and Nurse Norrie, and Sammy, and all the rest of them. Miss Martin wasn't a bit surprised. She almost acted as if she had known it all along.

"The saints bless us! It's no trouble you'll be making any one, the way you keep yourself clean," was all Nurse Norrie said.

But Mary Ellen and Polly and Sammy were as excited and interested as Lydia could wish. Their tongues flew and their heads wagged up and down, and if Lydia couldn't answer all the questions they asked her, they answered them themselves.

"Do you think you will have ice cream every day for dinner, Lydia?" asked Polly.

Lydia didn't know what to think, but Mary Ellen answered for her.

"Of course," said Mary Ellen emphatically, "and perhaps pie, too. And always griddle cakes for breakfast."

"Oh, I wish some one would take me," said Polly longingly. "If I was prettier maybe they would." And Polly sighed as she wistfully felt of her little snub nose.

"Pooh!" said Sammy with a defiant air, "I don't care! I'm going to live with

a cowboy out West and ride three horses at once, I am. Maybe I'll shoot Indians, too. I don't care!"

But they all looked at Lydia as if they thought her a fortunate little girl, and indeed Lydia herself thought so, too.

"Perhaps you will come and see me sometimes," said she, giving what comfort she could, "and we will have more of those good little cakes."

This happy suggestion made them all feel better. And when Mrs. Blake came to take Lydia away, there were only smiling faces and cheerful good-byes; for the last thing Mrs. Blake said was:

"Lydia is going to have a party some day very soon and she wants you all to come. Don't you, Lydia?"

Lydia, smiling, nodded. "I told you so," to her friends, and held tight to Mrs. Blake's hand as they went down the street. Every now and then she gave a skip, but only a very little one, for she carried Lucy Locket in her arms. Mrs. Blake was as happy as Lydia, and you had only to look at the smile on her lips and in her eyes to know it.

"Did I tell you there is a doll carriage at home for Lucy Locket?" said she, looking down at the little figure hopping at her side.

Lydia's eyes sparkled.

"I never had a carriage before," was her answer. Her heart seemed full to overflowing with happiness and love. Then Lydia stood still on the street.

"Please, do I call you Mother right away?" said she, looking up into the kind face that already wore a look like that of the mother Lydia did not remember.

"Oh, yes, indeed, Lydia," answered Mrs. Blake, "this very minute if you like."

"And Father, too?"

"And Father, too, as soon as he comes home to-night."

"Do you hear, Lucy Locket?" whispered Lydia. "My Mother and Father, my Mother and Father, my Father and Mother, my Father and Mother."

It made a nice little song, and Lydia was singing it to herself as they went up the steps of the little brick house that was to be her home.

Once inside, Mrs. Blake led the way down the hall and opened the door.

[image]

"THIS IS YOUR BEDROOM, LYDIA"

"This is your bedroom, Lydia," said she, watching the brown eyes grow bigger and bigger as they gazed. Lydia looked round the room, and then she

looked up at her new mother, and then she looked round the room again. It was hard to believe that this was all for her. For she saw a little white bed, and beside it a white cradle just big enough for Lucy Locket. There was a little bureau and a book-case full of picture-books. On a low table stood a work-basket, and near by a little rocking-chair held out its arms as if saying, "Come and sit in me." And over in the corner was the doll carriage, only waiting to give Lucy Locket a ride.

But Lydia was walking slowly around the room, for halfway up the wall there were pictures, pictures of people Lydia knew very well.

"There's Red Riding Hood," said she, "and her mother with the basket. And here she meets the wolf, and here is grandmother's house with the wolf in bed. And here are the Three Bears and Goldilocks, and there she goes running home to her mother. And here is Chicken Little, and Henny Penny, and all of them. Mean Foxy Loxy!" said Lydia.

Lydia's pleasure in the room was so keen that Mrs. Blake felt well repaid for her effort in making it ready for the little girl. She smiled at Lydia's raptures, and opened the little closet door.

"You might put your hat and coat away," said she, "and then perhaps Lucy Locket wants to go riding or to sleep in the cradle."

"I think she wants a ride," said Lydia.

But when she peeped under the blue-and-white cover, there was some one already taking a nap in Lucy Locket's carriage. Who but Miss Puss Whitetoes who opened her eyes sleepily at Lydia and shut them tight again. Then she wiggled her little pink nose. That meant, "I'm sleepy." She winked one ear. That meant, "Go away." So Lydia tucked the cover about her, and put Lucy Locket to bed in the new cradle. Lucy was a good child and soon fell fast asleep, and then Lydia rode the sleeping Miss Puss up and down the hall until she woke, and, springing out of the carriage, whisked upstairs like a flash.

Lydia followed, and found Mother at work in the kitchen, briskly beating eggs in a big yellow bowl and taking peeps now and then into the oven which gave out savory smells whenever the door was opened.

"Will it be pie and ice cream to-night, Mother?" asked Lydia, remembering the words of Mary Ellen.

"No," said Mrs. Blake with a laugh; "Indian pudding to-night."

"That's what Sammy would like," said Lydia, sniffing hungrily. "He's going to shoot Indians or be an Indian chief when he grows up. He doesn't know which."

In the studio a fire was blazing and crackling, and Lydia lay down on the rug to watch it and wait for Father to come home. Her head was whirling with all the pleasant happenings of the day. Even the flames seemed to have merry faces that smiled and nodded to her as they rose and fell.

“Red and orange and yellow fairies, and little blue ones too,” thought Lydia. “And they dance and they dance and they never stop. I wonder if they ever go to bed?” And with that Lydia shut her eyes and sailed off to sleep herself.

Miss Puss jumped down from the window-sill and sat before the fire to wash her face. But though she was busy she kept her eyes wide open, and every now and then she changed her place, because the fire was crackling harder than ever, and little yellow sparks were flying about. Suddenly an extra big spark lighted on the rug close beside Lydia. The little yellow light grew larger and larger, and soon it began to creep closer and closer to the sleeping little girl.

And what did wise Miss Puss do then?

Out into the kitchen she ran where Mother was making the Indian pudding. “Meow! Meow!” said Miss Puss, pulling at Mrs. Blake’s apron with her paw. “Me-o-ow!”

“What is it, Miss Puss?” said Mother. “I never heard you cry like that before.”

“Meow!” answered Miss Puss, and back she ran into the studio. Mrs. Blake followed, and just in time, for the corner of the rug was blazing merrily, and Lydia was still sound, sound asleep.

It took only a moment to lift Lydia out of danger and to stamp down the flame, and luckily Mr. Blake came home in time to help. Lydia was neither frightened nor hurt, and indeed rather enjoyed the excitement, while every one was so proud of Miss Puss that they couldn’t praise and pet her too much.

After dinner, Mother, and Father, with Lydia on his lap, sat watching Miss Puss enjoy, as a reward, a saucer of cream for her supper.

“We must give her some fish to-morrow,” said Mr. Blake. “That’s what pussies like to eat, eh, Lydia?”

“Every time I see that hole in the rug I shall remember what Miss Puss did the very first night Lydia came to us,” said Mother, leaning forward to give Lydia’s hair an affectionate smooth.

“We’ll write a poem about it,” said Mr. Blake.

“This hole is to remind the Blakes
That for their own and Lydia’s sakes,
Miss Puss must dine on richest cream
And little silver canned sardine.”

“That’s lovely!” interrupted Lydia, clapping her hands, “and here’s some more:

“Because she saved me from burning up,
She is better than any doggy pup.”

“Well,” said Mr. Blake, holding the satisfied Lydia off at arm’s length to look at her, “why didn’t you tell me before that you were a poetess? You’ve given me a shock.” And to her delight he fanned himself as if quite overcome.

“I didn’t know it myself until just this minute,” said Lydia, trying to be modest under this praise. She settled back in his arms and reached out for Mrs. Blake’s hand.

“Isn’t it nice?” said she happily, looking from one face to the other. “Aren’t we going to have good times? I am. I know I am. They’ve begun now.”

“I feel sure you are right, Lydia,” answered Mrs. Blake promptly. “Now that you’ve come, I know we shall all have the very best times we’ve ever had in our lives. Just wait and see.”

CHAPTER IV—A Picture and a Party

Lydia’s good times began every morning when she opened her eyes and leaned over the edge of the bed to see how Lucy Locket had spent the night in her new white cradle.

And all day long Lydia was so busy that at night she had been known to fall asleep on Father’s lap upstairs, and not remember a single thing about going to bed at all. After breakfast she dried the dishes for her mother, and no one could dust a room any better than could Lydia Blake. Then out to market with Mother, and home again to wheel the doll carriage up and down the sunshiny street.

And who do you think rode in the carriage? It really belonged to Lucy Locket. But when day after day Miss Puss Whitetoes snuggled down on the cushions and held up her paws so that Lydia could fasten the carriage strap, Lydia couldn’t resist giving sly Miss Puss a ride. And Lucy Locket didn’t mind at all. She was a great sleepy-head, and liked nothing better than to lie in her cradle. Sometimes, too, Lydia would prop her up in the front window and wave to the smiling Lucy every time she wheeled the carriage past the house. At first Miss Puss would sit up straight like a baby, with her paws folded in front of her, but little by little her eyes would close and she would slip down until all you could see was one gray ear. And by that time Lydia herself was ready to go into the

house.

And her afternoons were busy too. For one day Mr. Blake said, "Lydia, would you like to give a present to Friend Morris?"

Yes, indeed, Lydia would.

"I can make nice horse-reins on a spool, Father," said she, proud of her accomplishment.

"I know you can," said Mr. Blake. "But I was wondering if Friend Morris wouldn't like a picture of you dressed like a little Quaker girl. Mother will make the dress, just like the one Friend Morris wore when she was a little girl. I will paint the picture, and you shall give it to her. I believe Friend Morris would like that present."

"I think she would too," said Lydia, who herself liked the idea of dressing up. "It's much nicer than horse-reins."

So Mother made a little gray dress, with a white kerchief, and a white cap. And over the cap Lydia wore a little gray Quaker bonnet.

Then every afternoon, she stood very still while Mr. Blake painted the picture, looking from Lydia to the canvas and back again at Lydia.

"Couldn't Miss Puss be in the picture, too?" asked Lydia. "She is all gray and white, just like me."

So Miss Puss was put in the picture, sitting as still as could be at Lydia's feet. Mr. Blake worked quickly, and so the picture was soon finished, and it happened that the very next day Lydia had a party. Mary Ellen and Sammy and Polly and little Tom were coming with Miss Martin to spend the afternoon.

When Lydia saw the children walking up the street, their friendly faces shining with soap and water and happy smiles, she hopped up and down in the window and waved both hands in greeting. If she had been a boy she would have turned a somersault, I know.

"Is this our quiet little Lydia?" Miss Martin asked Mrs. Blake, with a laugh. "What have you done to her?"

For Lydia was dragging the children into her bedroom, and telling them of Mother and Father and Miss Puss, and bidding them look at Lucy Locket's cradle, and the doll carriage, and the picture-books, all in one breath, and before they even had time to take off their hats and coats. From the noise, and the confusion, and the rushing about, and the sound of many voices all talking at once, as Lydia took them from one end to the other of that little house, you might have thought that all twenty children from the Children's Home had come visiting instead of four!

But after a little they quieted down, and when Mrs. Blake and Miss Martin peeped in at them, this peaceful scene met their eyes. Sammy was lying flat on the floor, lost in a picture-book of cowboys and Indians galloping madly over the

Western plains. Polly was wheeling lazy Miss Puss up and down the hall. Over in a corner, sure that no one was looking at him, little Tom had turned his back upon the world, and was comfortably rocking Lucy Locket to sleep as he swayed to and fro in the little rocking-chair. In the closet, Lydia was proudly showing her Quaker dress to the admiring Mary Ellen. When she spied her mother—

“May I put it on?” she asked. “Mary Ellen thinks it’s almost as good as a Red Cross nurse.”

“Would you like to dress up as a nurse yourself this afternoon, Mary Ellen?” asked Mrs. Blake, who read a longing in Mary Ellen’s eye.

And in a twinkling you wouldn’t have known happy Mary Ellen. For a big cooking-apron covered her from neck to heels, and, with a Red Cross cap on her head, you couldn’t have found a better nurse if you had searched the whole world over. Polly was turned into a fine lady, in a silk dress, a lace cap, and three strings of beads about her neck. Such flauntings and preenings, such bowing and curtsying as the three little peacocks indulged in, what time they weren’t admiring themselves in the mirror! They looked up to see Mr. Blake laughing at them in the doorway. He made a low bow and shook them by the hand as if they had been real grown-up people.

“Aren’t you going to do anything for the boys?” he asked, for Sammy and Tom were looking on with envious eyes. “Come upstairs with me, boys. I’ve a trunkful of things to wear.” And so he had, to use when he was painting pictures.

Such shouting and laughing as now floated down from the studio! The little girls sat at the foot of the stairs, and every now and then they would creep a step higher. At last the door opened and they started up with a rush, but it was only Father speaking to Miss Martin.

“Do you mind if I put paint on their faces?” he asked.

“Not a bit,” said Miss Martin, who was used to all kinds of antics on the part of her brood, and who never said “no” when she could possibly answer “yes.”

“But not on their mouths, Father,” called Mother. “We haven’t had the real party yet.”

Then the door closed again, for hours and hours it seemed to Lydia and Polly and Mary Ellen, though Mother said it was only ten minutes by the clock.

But when Mr. Blake called “All aboard!” and they trooped up into the studio, they forgot their long wait in admiration at what they saw. For there stood an Indian, wearing a real deerskin over his shoulders, and with real deerskin leggings that ended in gay beaded moccasins. On his head was a gorgeous feather head-dress, and in his hands he carried a bow and arrow. His face was ornamented with spots and stripes and splashes of red and yellow and blue paint. He was not a very fierce-looking warrior, for he was grinning from ear to ear, and when the girls saw that smile, they knew.

“Sammy!” said Lydia and Polly and Mary Ellen in a breath.

As for Tom, there he stood in a black velvet cloak, and a big black hat, with green plumes drooping off the edge. He had a big black curling mustache that almost covered his face, but the pride of his heart was a pair of high, shiny, black boots, so big for him that he couldn’t take a step without holding on to them with both hands for fear of losing them off. He wore a short wooden sword thrust in his belt, and I really don’t know what the fine lady and the Quakeress would have done without that sword. For they immediately set sail down Studio River in a boat made of two chairs and a stool. Tom’s sword kept the alligators and crocodiles from climbing into the boat after them. But alas! they were attacked by an Indian brave, skulking in the woods. They were all but killed by him, but were speedily brought back to health by a Red Cross nurse, who happened to be taking a stroll that afternoon in those selfsame woods.

This was such a good game that they played it over and over again, until Mrs. Blake called them to come to the “real party,” and that they were quite ready to do. Sandwiches, little cakes, cups of milk disappeared like magic. They ate and ate and ate until even Sammy could eat no more.

Then there came a knock at the door, and who should it be but Friend Morris! She stared in surprise at all of them, but at Lydia most of all. And when Mr. Blake whispered in Lydia’s ear, and she led Friend Morris over to the picture Father had painted for her, it was a long time before Friend Morris had a word to say. She looked and looked at the picture, and she looked and looked at Lydia. Lydia couldn’t tell whether Friend Morris was going to laugh or cry.

“Don’t you like the present?” asked Lydia. “I wanted to make you horse-reins, but Father said you would like this better.”

“Like it, Friend Lydia?” said Mrs. Morris at last. “There isn’t another present in the whole world that I would like so well as this.”

Lydia and Father and Mother nodded and smiled at one another. They were so glad that Friend Morris was pleased, and that their present was a success.

Then, cozily, they all gathered round the open fire, and each of the children hung up an apple on a string to roast before the blaze. They turned and turned the string to cook the apples through and through, and when at last they were done, a grown person might have thought them burned in spots and raw in others, but the children ate them with the greatest relish.

And while they watched the apples twist and turn, and the flames rise and fall—

“Would thee like me to tell a story?” asked Friend Morris, with a hand on Lydia’s Quaker cap,—“a story my grandmother used to tell me, of a little Quaker girl who lived a long time ago?”

“Are there Indians in it?” demanded Sammy, admiring, with head on one

side, his deerskin leggings stretched before him.

Friend Morris nodded, and every one settled back comfortably to hear the story she had to tell.

CHAPTER V—The Story of Little Gwen

“It was a long time ago,” began Friend Morris, “when a little Welsh girl named Gwen set sail from England, with her father and mother and a company of Friends, to cross the Atlantic Ocean and make a new home for themselves in America. When they were perhaps halfway across, Gwen had a new little brother, and as he was born on the ocean he was given the name ‘Seaborn.’

“Travel was slow in those days, and it seemed a long time to little Gwen before the ship reached land, and she could run and jump as much as she pleased on the solid ground, as she could not do on the crowded ship’s deck. But even then their travels were not over, for Gwen’s father, with a few other men and their families, pushed on into the woods where they meant to settle and build their homes.”

“Were there Indians in the woods?” asked Sammy eagerly.

“Yes, plenty of them, but all friendly to the Quakers,” answered Friend Morris. “I’m sorry for thee, Sammy, but there won’t be a single fight in this story.”

“Never mind,” said Sammy generously, “I’ll like to hear it just the same.”

“What kind of a house did Gwen have in the woods?” asked Mary Ellen, anxious to hear the story.

“No house at all, for a time,” said Friend Morris. “At first, each family chose its own tree, and under it they lived, glad of any shelter that would protect them from sun and rain.”

“Like the squirrels and rabbits,” murmured Lydia.

“Then, as the weather grew colder, they dug caves in the bank of the river, where with a roof of boughs and comfortable beds of leaves, they lived until they were able to build real houses of logs or stone.”

“That was nice,” said little Tom. “I’d like to live in a cave. I’d keep the bears out with my sword.”

“Gwen liked it, too, though I don’t know that she saw any bears,” answered Friend Morris. “But oh, how glad her mother was when their log house was finished. It had a ladder on the outside that led to the upper room, and Gwen learned to run up and down this ladder as quickly as a squirrel runs up a tree. Gwen’s father had built the house on the river-bank far away from his friends, for some day he meant to clear the land and have a large farm.

“There was little time for visiting in those busy days, and Gwen might have been lonely if it had not been for Seaborn. He was a fat roly-poly, a year old now, creeping and crawling into all kinds of mischief, and Gwen spent her spare moments trotting around after him. He was a good-natured baby, but now he was cutting his teeth, and this made him cross and fractious. And he cried. Oh! how he cried. His mother rubbed his gums with her thimble to help his teeth through, and he cried harder than ever. Gwen danced up and down and shook his home-made rattle, a gourd filled with dried peas, but he only pushed her away. And just then came the time for the big Friends’ Meeting to be held across the river in the town of Philadelphia.

“Father will go, but we must stay at home, Gwen,” said her mother. “We meant to take thee, and Seaborn, too, but thee couldn’t ask me to take this crying baby anywhere.”

“How long would thee be gone, Mother? Two days and a night?” asked Gwen. “Wouldn’t thee trust me to stay at home and take care of Seaborn?”

“And Gwen coaxed and wheedled, and wheedled and coaxed, until the next morning, feeling very important and grown-up, she saw her father and mother start across the river in their little boat, bound for the great Quarterly Meeting.

“That very afternoon Seaborn’s nap was so quiet and peaceful that Gwen wasn’t the least surprised, on peeping into his mouth when he woke, to see a big new tooth shining in that pink cavern. What if it was raining and they couldn’t go out of doors? It was easy enough to amuse Seaborn now.

“All day and all night it rained, and the next morning the sky was as gray and the rain came down as hard as ever. Gwen saw that the river was rising, and had overflowed its banks, and she hoped nothing would prevent Mother and Father from coming home that night. She was a little lonely, but not one bit frightened until, late in the afternoon, a narrow stream of water came under the door, and trickled slowly across the floor. Gwen ran to the window. There was water several inches deep all around the house, and she could see that it was rising every moment.”

“Oh dear,” said Polly, “what did she do?”

“This is what she did,” said Friend Morris. “The only way to go upstairs was by the ladder on the outside of the house. Gwen wrapped Seaborn in a shawl, and splashing through the water, she carried him upstairs. Then down she ran

for milk and a bowl of cold porridge, and by that time the water was so deep she was afraid to go downstairs again.”

“I think she was a clever little girl to think and act so quickly,” said Mrs. Blake, who was enjoying the story quite as well as the children.

“She was a brave little girl, too,” went on Friend Morris. “She wrapped up warmly, and, lighting a candle, sat down in the doorway of the upper room to watch and wait. It grew darker and darker, and still the rain fell steadily. Seaborn was sound asleep, and Gwen was nodding, when suddenly she sat up with a jerk. A little boat was moving toward them over the water that covered the ground in front of the house, and to Gwen’s delight it stopped at the foot of the stairway ladder.

“‘Father,’ called Gwen, ‘Mother, has thee come home? Here we are, upstairs in the doorway.’

“But it was neither father nor mother who answered. A deep voice said, ‘Ugh! Missy come, I take.’ And Gwen looked down into the brown face of an Indian.”

“In his war paint, with a tomahawk?” asked Sammy, his own feathers standing out with interest.

“No, indeed,” said Mrs. Morris, “in peaceful attire. He had often traded with Gwen’s father, and he knew the Quakers were having a Meeting over the river. So when he saw the light in the house, he came as a friend to help. He was called *Lame Wolf*, because he limped a little, and Gwen was very glad indeed to see him.

“‘I take,’ said *Lame Wolf* again, and held up his arm to beckon Gwen.

“Down the ladder she scrambled, with Seaborn in her arms, and off the canoe glided through the darkness. And that is the last sleepy little Gwen remembered until she woke the next morning with the sun shining in her face.

“She was lying in an Indian wigwam, with a fire burning in the middle of the floor, and beside it, crouching over the blaze, an old Indian squaw.

“‘My brother!’ cried Gwen, springing up; ‘where is Seaborn?’

“The old woman seemed to understand, for she grunted and pointed outside. And there, hanging from the low branch of a big tree, in company with several Indian babies, swung Seaborn.”

“Oh, didn’t it hurt?” asked Lydia, with a little shudder. “Did they hang him by the neck?”

“No, Lydia, no,” said Friend Morris, with a smile. “He was strapped in an Indian cradle, a flat board covered with skins and moss. And he seemed to like it, for he smiled and chuckled when he saw his sister.

“Gwen knew they must be in an Indian camp, for she saw many wigwams, and horses tethered about them. Already, groups of Indian squaws were at work,

scraping animal skins and trimming leggings and moccasins with bright-colored beads. Little girls were going to and fro, carrying wood and water. Little brown boys ran past, with bows and arrows in their hands, off for a day's play. Gwen was glad to see her friend, Lame Wolf, limping toward her. He said, 'Eat! Come!' and led the way back into the wigwam where the old squaw gave Gwen a bowl of soup.

"Then Lame Wolf lifted Seaborn down from the tree, and took them before the chief Big Bear. Big Bear listened to Lame Wolf's story. He looked kindly at Gwen, motioned Lame Wolf to hang Seaborn on a near-by tree, where his own papoose swung in the shade, and then called to his little girl, Winonah, peeping shyly round the wigwam. She took Gwen by the hand and led her off to see her dolls."

"Dolls?" said Polly and Lydia together. "Do little Indian girls have dolls?"

"Certainly they do. These dolls were made of deerskin, with painted face, beads for eyes, and one had a fine crop of horsehair and another one of feathers. Each doll had its cradle, too, and Gwen and the chief's little daughter played happily together.

"In the afternoon, Seaborn and Papoose, all the name the chief's little boy owned as yet, were taken from their cradles and put upon the ground to roll and tumble to their hearts' content. Gwen and Winonah were near by watching them. Suddenly little Papoose began to choke and cough. His eyes grew big and round and he gasped for breath. Winonah ran for her mother and left Gwen alone. And then in a flash, Gwen knew what she must do. Once Seaborn had swallowed a button and it had lodged in his throat. Little Papoose must have put something in his mouth that was choking him now. So Gwen did as she had seen her mother do for Seaborn. She bravely put her fingers down poor little Papoose's throat, grasped something, and drew it out. It was a smooth white pebble big enough to choke a dozen little Papooses!"

"She was as good as a Red Cross nurse," said Mary Ellen excitedly, her eyes shining. "Didn't Big Bear and little Papoose's mother praise her for saving his life?"

"Yes, indeed, Mary Ellen," answered Friend Morris. "They praised her, and they gave her presents when she went home the next day, and all her life they were her good friends. And that was really best of all."

"What were the presents?" asked the children in chorus.

"An Indian dress for herself, a cradle for Seaborn, a doll in its little cradle, and beautiful skins as a present for her mother. And that is all my story," ended Friend Morris, smiling down into the flushed faces gathered about her knee.

"Thank you, Friend Morris," said Lydia, giving her apple a last twirl. "Gwen was a nice girl."

“It was a good story,” said Sammy, with a nod of his feathered head, “even if there wasn’t any fighting in it.”

“Now, eat your apples, children,” said Miss Martin. “Here’s Alexander come to take us home, and somehow you must be turned back into boys and girls again before you can go out into the street.”

It was hard to go back to checked aprons and blouses after ribbons and feathers and war paint, but at last it was done. And Mary Ellen said “Thank you” for all of them when she put her arms round Mrs. Blake’s neck.

“Good-night,” said Mary Ellen. “And please do ask us soon again.”

CHAPTER VI—Daffodils and Daisies

“Daffydowndilly has come up to town,
In a yellow petticoat and a green gown,”

sang little Friend Lydia, as she pushed the doll carriage up and down in the warm spring sunshine. From the window of each little house in Lydia’s street, bowls of bright daffodils or tulips nodded to her as she passed, and the flower-beds in the near-by park were masses of scarlet and yellow bloom.

“It’s spring, Lucy Locket,” chattered Lydia. “That’s why you have a new hat and a new dress. Sit up straight and don’t crush your flowers.” And Lydia sat Lucy up and straightened her gay rose-covered straw bonnet.

“There’s Father coming,” went on Lydia. “Hold on tight, and we’ll go meet him.” And Lydia ran the carriage over the stones so fast that poor Lucy slipped down under the blanket quite out of sight, hat and all.

[image]

“IT’S SPRING, LUCY LOCKET,” CHATTERED LYDIA. “THAT’S WHY YOU HAVE A NEW HAT AND A NEW DRESS”

“Father!” called Lydia. “There’s something the matter with Miss Puss. She wouldn’t come riding to-day, and she ran away from me down cellar. She’s hiding behind a barrel and she won’t come out.”

“She probably doesn’t feel well,” said Mr. Blake, waiting for Lydia at the foot of their own steps. “I should leave her alone, if I were you, until she is better. You know when a cat is sick she goes off by herself, and I shouldn’t be surprised if that is why Miss Puss hides down cellar. Perhaps she has spring fever.” And Mr. Blake smiled down into Lydia’s anxious face.

“Can’t you give her some medicine?” she asked. “You made me well when I had a pain.”

“She may need a change of air,” answered Father seriously. “Suppose we take her to the country?”

“For a whole day, with lunch?”—and Lydia beamed at the thought.

“No, for the whole summer,” said Father, pinching Lydia’s cheek. “Lock the front door here and go.”

“When?” demanded Lydia, her eyes shining—“to-morrow? I’m ready. I have a new hat, and so has Lucy. Come up here, you poor child, and we’ll go in and tell Mother.” And Lydia dragged the long-suffering Lucy, still smiling, from under her blanket, and darted into the house, leaving Father to follow with the carriage.

“Mother, we’re all going to the country!” cried Lydia, running into the studio, where Mother was setting the table for lunch. “Maybe we’ll go to-morrow. Shall I pack my bag right away?”

Mrs. Blake sat down to laugh.

“Well, now that Father has told you, the sooner we go the better, I’m sure,” said she. “Pack your bag, if you like, but I don’t think we can be ready to go before ten days at least.”

“Ten days?” And Lydia looked as disappointed as if Mother had said ten years.

“That isn’t long,” said Father encouragingly. “Come here, and I’ll show you how short it is.”

Mr. Blake was busy with paper and scissors. Snip, snip, snip, and ten little paper dolls holding hands in a row were unfolded before Lydia’s curious eyes.

“Here’s a doll for every day,” said Mr. Blake. “Tear off one each morning until there is only one left, and that is the day we go to the country.” And Father set Lydia on his shoulder and wheeled gayly about the room.

“Come to lunch, you ridiculous pair,” said Mother, laughing at them. “Lydia, you haven’t asked yet where you are going, and so I’ll tell you. You are going up to Hyatt, where the children have their summer home, and our little house is just over the way from Friend Morris’s big house. And you can see Mary Ellen

and Sammy and all of them every day if you like, and Father's going to paint his masterpiece, and we'll have the nicest summer we've ever had in all our lives."

And Mother, out of breath, with cheeks as pink as Lucy Locket's rosy hat, joined her "ridiculous pair" in a second dance of joy down the room and back to the luncheon table again.

For the next ten days Lydia was as busy as a bumble-bee. She packed and unpacked her new little traveling-bag no less than a dozen times. She trotted about on errands until Father took to calling her "Little Fetch-and-Carry." She spent a great deal of time instructing Lucy Locket how to behave on the train, and she tenderly cared for the invalid Miss Puss, who was slowly recovering her former high spirits.

Day after day she tore off the paper dolls and put them away in a box for "Lucy to play with on the train," and when at last there was only one doll left, Lydia placed a kiss upon her tiny paper cheek.

"You are the nicest one of all," she whispered, "because to-day we go."

And go they did, Father carrying a heavy suitcase and Lydia's little bag, Mother with Miss Puss in a wicker basket, and Lydia bearing the proud Lucy Locket, decked in her finest and on her very best behavior. Lydia waved good-bye to Tony, the iceman, and stopped to tell Joe, the one-legged newsboy, who had a paper-stand on the corner under the Elevated Road, that she would be away all summer. Then after a short ride underground she found herself on the train, really bound for the country.

It is to be hoped that Lucy Locket and Miss Puss behaved on that train ride as well as they ought, for Lydia, with her nose pressed against the window-pane, was so interested in all she saw that she quite forgot her charges, and could scarcely believe it when Father said, "There's the river, Lydia. We get off station after next."

But sure enough, at station after next there stood Alexander ready to lift her down the high steps of the train, and to drive them all home along the River Road behind Friend Morris's fine gray horses, Owen and Griff. Friend Morris was already settled for the summer, and she was watching for them on the steps of her broad veranda, overlooking the river, as Alexander swung round the drive and up to the door in fine style.

Lydia leaned from the carriage for a peep at her own house just across the road. She saw a low, white cottage, whose tiny porch, with a bench at either end, she decided at once would make a good place to play dolls. The vines over the porch fluttered a welcome to her, the trees waved and beckoned her to come, and Lydia could scarcely wait to eat her supper at Friend Morris's before running over and visiting every nook and corner of the little house. It was not very large inside, but what of that when two big porches, one upstairs and one down, ran

across the back of the house that overlooked the river.

“The downstairs porch is where we spend our days,” said Mother, “and the upstairs porch is where we spend our nights.”

“Me, too?” asked Lydia, all excitement at the prospect.

“You, too, Lyddy Ann,” answered Father, “and Lucy Locket and Miss Puss likewise, unless she chooses to spend her nights in the catnip bed.”

For Miss Puss had scented the bed of catnip round the corner of the house, and was rolling and tumbling in it to her heart’s content. Mr. Blake and Lydia stood enjoying the sight, and Father pointed out a little garden bed that was to be Lydia’s very own.

“Will you plant flowers or vegetables?” asked he.

“Flowers, please,” said Lydia, her face aglow with pleasure. “Pink and red and blue and yellow ones I’d like.”

“To-morrow, then, we’ll spade it up,” said Father. “And now we had better be off to bed if we are going to do gardening in the morning.”

Out on the upper porch stood the three beds in a row. Lydia, in her long nightgown, hopped about, so excited it was hard to think of going to sleep.

But Mother tucked her under the warm blankets, and soon the sleeping-porch was as quiet as the soft, dark night all about it.

But Lydia was not asleep. She lay watching the twinkling stars and waving tree-tops, and suddenly the thought of Lucy Locket popped into her head. Lydia remembered just where she had left her, lying on the table in the hall below. Poor Lucy, missing her own white cradle, no doubt, to say nothing of her little mother’s care.

Softly Lydia crept out of bed and pattered across the sleeping-porch. She groped her way through the bedroom and started downstairs. And then, somehow, she tripped over her long nightgown, and down the stairs she crashed head first.

It seemed as if Father reached the foot of the stairs almost as soon as Lydia did. He picked her up carefully, and felt all over for broken bones, and then he carried the sobbing Lydia upstairs, and tenderly placed her in Mother’s arms.

“My head! My foot! Lucy Locket!” sobbed Lydia.

There was a big lump on her head, and out came the bottle of witch hazel to be used with soothing effect. The bruised ankle was gently rubbed with something that smelled like furniture polish.

And then Lydia was tucked in bed again, this time with Lucy Locket beside her.

But instead of going to sleep, Lydia began to cry. She was tired, and excited, and frightened by her fall. At first she cried so softly that only Lucy Locket knew it, but the sobs grew so loud that in a moment Father said, “Lydia, crying?”

A sniff was all Lydia's answer, but it said, "Yes, Father, I'm crying," as plainly as could be.

Mr. Blake put out his strong right arm and pulled Lydia's little bed close beside his own.

"What's the trouble, Lydia?" said he gently.

"I'm afraid," said Lydia, with another sniff. "I'm afraid a big fish will come out of the river and get me." And she really thought that was the reason she was crying.

Mr. Blake hunted for Lydia's hand and found it.

"In the first place," said he, "there isn't any such fish. And in the second place, if he comes I won't let him hurt you. Now will you try to go to sleep?"

"Yes," said Lydia, "I will."

So holding fast to Father with one hand, and to Lucy Locket with the other, Lydia at last fell asleep.

CHAPTER VII—Dr. Wolfe

The next morning when Lydia woke, the bump on her head felt as big as a hen's egg. She lay feeling it proudly, and wishing that Mary Ellen could see it. Mary Ellen was always so interested in bumps, and cuts, and bruises, but the children's summer home, Robin Hill, would not open until next week, and Lydia could only hope the bump was a lasting one. She hoped, too, it would be bright red or purple, but when she climbed out of bed in search of a mirror, poor little Lydia fell on the floor in a heap and screamed with pain.

"My ankle! My ankle!" was all she could say.

And when Father saw the badly swollen ankle, he said:

"This won't do. I'll have to send for Dr. Wolfe."

But at these words, Lydia clung to Mother and began to scream again.

"No, no!" she cried, "I won't, I won't, I won't have Dr. Wolfe!"

"Why not?" asked Father in astonishment. "What's the matter with Dr. Wolfe?"

"I'm afraid!" sobbed Lydia. "It's Red Riding Hood's wolf. I'm afraid!"

"Lydia," said Father impatiently, "you are talking nonsense. Dr. Wolfe is

an old friend of Friend Morris. He is as kind as he can be, and very fond of little girls."

"Yes, fond of eating them," thought Lydia.

She didn't say this aloud, but she buried her head in her pillow and refused to listen to any pleasant things about Dr. Wolfe. He was Red Riding Hood's wolf, and she wouldn't see him, and her ankle hurt, and she was the most miserable little girl in the world.

So Mr. Blake, shaking his head, went away, and that was really the best thing he could do. For when Lydia was left alone she stopped crying, and by the time Mother appeared with a breakfast tray, she was able to sit up and eat a whole bowl of oatmeal without stopping. Her ankle did not hurt unless she moved it, so, propped up with pillows, and looking at a picture-book, she felt quite like herself again.

"Hello the house!" said a voice, and Lydia, peering through the piazza railing, saw a man on the grass below looking up at her. He was short and plump, with a little white beard and glittering gold-bowed spectacles. He smiled up at Lydia and called:

"Good-morning! Is anybody home?"

"Yes, I am," answered Lydia. "I don't know where Mother and Father are. I haven't seen them for a long time."

"Isn't it rather late to be in bed?" asked the little old gentleman. "I've been up a long time myself, and had a walk by the river too."

"But I'm sick," said Lydia importantly; "I've hurt my head and my ankle. I can't get up."

"You don't say so," said the old gentleman, interested at once. "Well, in that case, I'd better come up."

And in a twinkling he was up the steps and sitting at the side of Lydia's bed.

"How did you get such a bump on your head?" said he. "It's as handsome a one as ever I saw, and I've seen a good many."

"I fell downstairs last night," answered Lydia, feeling her "handsome bump" with fresh pleasure, and glad to tell her story. "I hurt my head and my ankle. I can't walk."

"Then I'm the very man for you," returned the old gentleman cheerfully, "for I'm a tinker. I tinker people—their heads, and their arms, and their legs. It's well I happened along this morning. And now that I've seen the bump on your head, if you're willing I'll have a look at your ankle, too."

Lydia sat very still while the jolly tinker carefully felt of the injured ankle, and asked her a question or two. She screwed up her face with pain now and then, but she didn't shed a single tear. At last the tinker nodded as if satisfied,

and sat down again on the side of the bed.

"In tinker talk," said he, "it's a strain. But the truth is that overnight you've been bewitched. Yes," said the tinker gravely, "you've been turned into the Princess-Without-Legs. And I have a pretty good idea who did the mischief. But my magic is stronger than his magic, and the first thing you know, you will be as well as ever again."

Lydia was listening to all this with eyes and mouth wide open.

"Who did it?" said she in a whisper. She felt as if she had stepped inside a fairy book, and that if she spoke aloud she would step outside again.

"My cousin," answered the old gentleman in a low voice, "my wicked cousin. Did you ever hear the story of Red Riding Hood?"

Lydia nodded and leaned farther forward.

"The wolf in that story is my wicked cousin," said the old gentleman sadly. He felt in his pocket for his handkerchief and blew his nose violently.

"A wolf," thought Lydia, "for a cousin. Why, I know who he is.—You are Dr. Wolfe!" cried she, her voice loud with surprise. "Are you Dr. Wolfe?"

"That's what they call me," admitted the tinker, "but if you don't care for the name you may call me anything you like. I can't help what my cousin does, you know. It's very hard to have him in the family. And I'm not one single bit like him. Can't you see that?"

"Yes, I can," said Lydia pityingly, the tinker seemed so downcast. "You can't help it, and I don't mind calling you Dr. Wolfe one bit. I'm sorry for you." And she reached out and took his hand in hers.

"Then you forgive me for having such a cousin?" asked the anxious Dr. Wolfe.

"Yes, I do," returned Lydia earnestly. "I do."

"Good," said the Doctor, shaking her hand. "And now we must set our magic to work and cure that ankle. First of all, the Princess-Without-Legs must have a slave." And he clapped his hands together one, two, three times.

Lydia's eyes sparkled in anticipation. A slave! She fixed her eyes on the doorway, and was very much disappointed at the appearance of her own mother in answer to the summons.

"Not you, not you, Mrs. Blake," said Dr. Wolfe, laughing. "That was meant to call the slave of the Princess-Without-Legs."

"Who?" asked Mrs. Blake, opening her eyes as wide as Lydia's. "Princess who?"

"It's me, Mother, it's me," Lydia called out. "I'm the Princess-Without-Legs, and this is Dr. Wolfe, and I'm going to have a slave."

"Well," said Mrs. Blake, smiling at the Princess, "you are? And where is the slave?"

"I'll fetch him," said Dr. Wolfe briskly, disappearing into the bedroom, where Lydia could hear him talking in a low voice.

Presently he reappeared followed by Mr. Blake, and in his arms Dr. Wolfe carried a big brown furry rabbit with glittering yellow glass eyes.

"Your slave, Princess," said Dr. Wolfe, putting him on the bed beside Lydia, who fell to stroking the soft fur. "He will take his head off for you if needs be, he's that faithful. Try and see."

Lydia gently lifted off the rabbit's head and peeped inside. He was filled with red and green and white candies.

"You may think these are candies, Princess," said Dr. Wolfe with a twinkle in his eye, "but they are far more than that. They are magic pellets, an offering of your devoted slave. The red pellets will make you brave if your ankle gives you pain. The white ones will keep you happy and cheerful so long as you have to lie still. And the green ones are for good luck. They must be taken three times a day, one of each kind after each meal, and you must take your after-breakfast dose now."

Lydia picked out a red and a green and a white pellet, and putting bunny's head on again, popped the red one into her mouth. She saw Dr. Wolfe unrolling a wide white bandage, and she thought just then she needed the red one most of all. But with Father's arm about her, and Mother's hand in both of hers, Lydia bore the pain without crying, and smiled bravely at the slave, whose yellow eyes gleamed sympathetically at her ankle nicely bound in its white bandage.

And in the week that followed, a week that might have been long and tiresome for a little girl who was not used to keeping still, the slave of the Princess-Without-Legs did his work well. As a soft, comfortable bedfellow, he was second only to Lucy Locket. He listened patiently to the long stories Lydia spun for him. And his manners with Miss Puss Whitetoes were truly remarkable, and should have put that rude cat to shame. For though Miss Puss in the country was much more independent than Miss Puss in the city, and not only declined to be cuddled, but often refused to keep company with Lydia when she was all alone, still Miss Puss was jealous of the slave, and could scarcely bear to see him in his place of favor at Lydia's side. She growled and hissed and arched her back at the sight, and many a good laugh Lydia had at her silly behavior.

And Lydia had great comfort in the slave's magic pellets. With a red candy in her mouth, she took pride in not crying or wincing when her ankle was bandaged. She tried to remember that the white candies meant, "No grumbling, no complaining, Lydia. Squeeze out a smile, Lydia. Don't be a snarley-yow, Lydia." And they helped her over many moments when she wanted to be cross and disagreeable.

But the green candies that brought good luck! Lydia often counted over on

her fingers what they had done for her.

"There's the three picture-puzzles that Friend Morris gave me, that's one," she would say. "And the little boy and girl cookies that Friend Deborah makes for me, that's two. And the boat with the wooden sailor that Alexander whittled, that's three. Then there's the afghan for Lucy Locket that Mother showed me how to knit. And Father's postcard game. Is that number five or six?"

And Lydia would begin all over again counting on her fingers.

Of all these pastimes, Lydia liked best the afghan, and the postcard game. The afghan was a gay striped affair—Roman, Mother called it—pink and blue and yellow and white and black. Before you were tired of working on pink it was time to begin on blue, and so it was always interesting. To be sure, at first, Mother had to be near at hand to pick up dropped stitches, but after a little practice Lydia could knit nicely by herself, with a mishap only now and then.

Mr. Blake's postcard game was the most fun. One day, in he came with a package of picture postcards, showing the river, the church, the bridge, the schoolhouse, Crook Mountain where the river turned—all the pretty spots in the town of Hyatt. On every one of these he wrote Lydia's name and address, and put them into an empty box, with a little book of stamps.

"Every day you must choose a card to send to yourself," said he, "and I will mail it for you."

So at once, Lydia chose a picture of Friend Morris's house, and the next morning she was listening for the postman's whistle, when round the house he came on his bicycle and handed in the postcard. But what do you think sly Father had done? On the back of the card he had drawn a picture, a picture that made Lydia, and the friendly postman, and Mother, and every one who saw it laugh. For there was Lydia, after her fall, being helped up the stairs again by Lucy Locket, while round the top of the stairs peeped the head of the faithful slave. And Lydia's own head and ankle were wrapped round and round in yards and yards of bandage.

"Just like the soldiers at the war," said the delighted Lydia.

So every morning she had a visit from the postman, who enjoyed the pictures quite as well as any one else. And they were funny. For once it was Lydia running away from a wolf straight into the open arms of the real Dr. Wolfe, and as he and Lydia were now the best of friends you may be sure they both enjoyed the joke. And again it was Miss Puss pushing Lydia in the doll carriage as a return for past favors, or Lydia in a mad ride on the back of her slave, her hair blown in the wind, while tiny rabbit slaves cheered them on their way.

So the days slipped quickly by, and now Lydia could be carried about the house by Father, her "second slave," as he sometimes called himself in fun.

"Come, Lyddy Ann," said he one morning, "you are going to have a long

trip to-day, over to Friend Morris's. She has some medicine for you."

"Medicine?" said Lydia, making a wry face. "I don't want any medicine, Father, I don't."

"Yes, you do," said Mr. Blake, picking her up; "you want this kind. Its name is Maggie."

"Maggie?" said Lydia, patting the top of Mr. Blake's head and crushing his hat over one eye. "Maggie Medicine, Maggie Medicine. I never heard of that kind before. Hurry, please, Father, take me quick, so I can see Maggie Medicine."

CHAPTER VIII—Maggie Medicine

Friend Morris and Mrs. Blake sat rocking on the broad veranda as Mr. Blake carried Lydia, waving and blowing kisses, across the road.

"Oh, Mother, what is Maggie Medicine?" called Lydia. "Friend Morris, do you know?"

The ladies laughed and nodded, and Father said, "Listen, Lydia."

There was a sound of crunching gravel and the roll of wheels, and then round the corner of the house stepped a little dark-brown pony, drawing a light wicker basket wagon after him, and led by Alexander, who tried in vain to repress a proud smile.

"This is thy medicine, Friend Lydia," said Friend Morris, coming forward to the veranda steps, "a medicine that will bring back rosy cheeks to thee, I hope. Every day thee is to go for a ride—"

But Friend Morris got no farther, for Lydia lurched forward in Father's arms and caught her round the neck.

"I love thee, Friend Morris," she whispered, "and I love thy medicine. And I will lend thee Lucy Locket for a whole day, and give thee three green candies for good luck beside."

"I thank thee, little Quaker," answered Friend Morris with a laugh, straightening her cap and patting Lydia's cheek. "Now, Alexander has a lump of sugar for thee to give Maggie, and then he will take thee for a ride."

So Lydia rather timidly fed Maggie a lump of sugar, and then Alexander drove her in triumph down the River Road as far as the village, where he bought

a little whip with a red ribbon to be stuck in the front of Maggie's cart, but never to be used on her, at Lydia's earnest request.

And every pleasant day after that, Lydia went for a drive with Mother or Father or Alexander. One day Friend Deborah drove Lydia far up a shady back country road in search of a woman who wove rag rugs. Friend Morris wanted to order two blue-and-white rugs for the upper hall. The rug woman stood at her gate as she bargained with Friend Deborah, and Lydia could only stare at her in amazement, for the woman's hands were bright blue! She could scarcely wait until Maggie was trotting homeward to ask Friend Deborah if she had seen them, too.

Friend Deborah laughed.

"It's because she dyes, Lydia," said she.

"Dies?" said Lydia, more puzzled than before.

"Yes, dyes the rags different colors, the rags that she uses for her rugs," explained Friend Deborah, slapping the reins on Maggie's back.

"Oh," said Lydia, and fell to thinking. This was a piece of news that must be treasured up for Sammy's delectation. He would enjoy a piece of work like that. How fascinating to be a different color every day!

So, one afternoon, when Sammy and Mary Ellen walked down from Robin Hill to play with Lydia, whose ankle was well now, the first thing to be talked over was the story of the rug woman.

"She lives in a little house all by herself, with three hens and a pig. Friend Deborah told me. And her hands are bright blue. And she dyes the rags and makes them into rugs. We have one, and so has Friend Morris, and Friend Morris is going to have two more."

Lydia stopped, out of breath, and Mary Ellen asked:

"Where does she live? Is it far? Could we go?"

"Oh, it's far up this road," answered Lydia, pointing. "And when you come to a little bridge, you turn past the mill, and then after a while you're there."

"I'm going," said Sammy, determined to see the woman with the blue hands, or perish in the attempt. "I'm going now," and he rose to his feet. "Want to come?"

"Oh, I do," said Lydia piteously. "I want to go dreadfully, but I can't walk so far. My lame foot gets so tired."

"We'll carry you," announced Mary Ellen, with a decided air. "Sammy and I will make a chair of our hands and carry you."

But Sammy had a bright idea. He pointed to the open stable door, and, out of it, as if to solve their problem for them, walked Maggie Medicine, harnessed to her cart.

"Quick," said Sammy, "before any one stops us."

"Oh, Sammy, do you think we ought?" asked Mary Ellen in a little voice, a

question that was not meant to be answered, for she had already boosted Lydia into the cart and was scrambling in herself.

“Fraid-cats may stay at home. We’re a-going,” was Sammy’s reply, as he started Maggie down the drive with a shake of the reins and a flourish of the whip.

And while Maggie Medicine jogs peacefully along the country road, shaking her head and twitching her ears now and then as a sign to Sammy to stop jerking the reins, let us see where all the grown people were this sunny afternoon.

In the first place, Mary Ellen and Sammy had been asked to spend the afternoon to keep Lydia company, because Father and Mother and Friend Morris were invited out to spend the day. Friend Deborah, who had gone about her work all morning with her head tied up in a handkerchief, had at last been forced to go to bed “to favor the faceache,” as she said. Alexander, to keep the house quiet and give the children a good time, had planned a drive, but no sooner had he fastened the last strap in Maggie’s harness than word came that the black colt had jumped the pasture bars and was running away.

So poor patient Alexander was racing up the hot, dusty road in one direction, while innocent Maggie, with her load, ambled along in the other. When they came to the little bridge, Maggie saw a cool, shady back road stretching before her in pleasant contrast to the dusty highway, and being a wise little pony, she promptly turned in and trotted briskly past the mill as she had done the week before with Friend Deborah. Sammy thought it was due to his skillful driving, but Maggie twitched her ear as if to say, “Don’t imagine that I pay any attention to you children, please.”

On they went, until Lydia pointed to a little house, half hidden under vines, with two or three bedraggled hens scratching about in the front yard.

“That’s it,” said Lydia. “I remember it. That’s it.”

“What shall we say when we see her?” asked Mary Ellen anxiously. “Goodness, I almost wish we hadn’t come.”

“We’ll ask her for a drink,” responded Sammy, never at a loss, whose sharp eyes had spied a well round the corner of the house. “We’ll have a good look at her hands, too, when she works the bucket.”

The children scrambled out of the cart, and leaving Maggie to nibble the roadside grass, walked into the front yard. The house seemed deserted. There was no stir of life within doors, and without, the hens stepped about and pecked at the ground in perfect silence. A hush fell upon the children. It was not nearly so much fun as they had expected. To tell the truth, Lydia wished she were at home.

“I smell the pig,” whispered Mary Ellen.

Lydia nodded.

Sammy, the venturesome, pushed round the corner of the house, and beckoned with a grimy hand for them to follow.

“The woodshed,” he exclaimed in a stage whisper. “Look, full of things.”

On a bench in the woodshed stood a row of kettles, each full of a colored liquid. Sammy stuck his finger in one and drew it out dripping with yellow dye.

“Whiz!” muttered Sammy. “Looka!”

In went another finger—this time it came out purple.

“Try it,” urged Sammy; “this is great.”

The girls shrank away at Sammy’s approach. Unfortunately, they leaned against the bench, and how were they to know that this particular bench had a weak leg? Over it went, with a frightful clashing and crashing of kettles, and a perfect flood of gay color streamed over the woodshed floor, generously splashing shoes and stockings in spite of a hurried rush outside.

But at the corner of the house, the children almost wished they had stayed in the woodshed, and allowed themselves to be drowned in a sea of dye. For a dreadful figure rose before them, a figure whose hands dripped red, whose face was marked with red, whose apron bore the print of scarlet hands—and the dripping red hands were shaken angrily at them, and a hoarse voice called words to them they were too frightened to hear. It was only the rug woman, summoned by the noise from her task of re-dipping the faded red church carpet, but the sight of her almost stopped the children’s hearts from beating, and made their breath come quick.

Sammy, the boaster, he who often bragged that one day he would dispose single-handed of six red Indian braves on the war-path, even Sammy quailed, and, with not a thought of his companions, made a dash for Maggie, gazing over the fence with inquiring eyes, and with one bound seated himself in the cart. The girls made haste to follow, Mary Ellen with her arm about Lydia, for the lame ankle had received a cruel wrench, and tears were rolling down Lydia’s cheeks as she hopped and hobbled and stumbled along in her haste to be gone.

But at last they were safely in the cart, and Maggie, excited no doubt by Sammy’s shouts and the woman’s angry cries, broke into a canter that speedily took them out of sight and sound of the catastrophe. On sped Maggie, through the hot summer afternoon, past the mill, round the curve, down the broad road toward home.

And there a short distance from Friend Morris’s gate came running toward them Friend Deborah and Alexander. Poor Friend Deborah held a hand to her aching face, but she was able to gasp, “Oh, children, how thee has frightened me!”

“And exasperated me,” added truthful Alexander, as his eye traveled from panting little Maggie, with foam-flecked mouth, to the once neat little cart, now

covered with dust, and badly stained within by spots and splashes of dye.

Good Quaker that he was, he said no more, but he looked grave as he listened to the story the children had to tell.

“Has thee stopped to think at all of the trouble and the loss thee has caused the poor rug woman, who never did thee any harm?” he inquired soberly.

The children hung their heads and did not answer. At last Mary Ellen, twisting the end of her braid, murmured, “I will give her my spending money until I’ve paid her back,” and Sammy nodded in agreement. As they each had a penny a week for spending money Alexander’s lips twitched, but this the children did not see.

“And look at thy shoes and stockings,” said Friend Deborah, who had been surveying the three culprits as they stood before her. “What must be the state of thy feet? Will thee ever wash them white again?”

This was too much for Lydia. Her lip had been trembling for some time, and now the thought of red and green and blue feet upset her completely. She broke into loud sobs, and cast herself down upon the roadside grass.

“My foot hurts, my foot hurts, and no one loves me.” And she buried her face in the friendly clover, and cried despairingly.

Sammy was winking hard, and Mary Ellen was biting her lip and digging a hole in the dust with the tip of her strange green and purple shoe.

Alexander’s kind heart melted at the sight.

“Ye cannot have gray heads on green shoulders,” said he; and as Friend Deborah carried the weeping Lydia into the house for a bath and bed, Alexander helped the other two travelers upon a passing wagon and rode with them to Robin Hill.

Lydia and Mary Ellen and Sammy never knew how Mr. Blake laughed when he heard the story. He himself went to see the rug woman, and his visit was so satisfactory that when he left, the rug woman held out her hand, purple this time, and invited him to come again.

“You are a gentleman, sir,” said she, “and you have more than paid for what I lost. Bring your little girl the next time you come.”

But Lydia had no desire to pay that visit.

For a long time, Father’s favorite question was, “Lydia, what color feet do you prefer?” But Lydia could never see anything funny in that joke.

She quite agreed, however, with Friend Morris, who said when she heard the story:

“I think the most sensible member of the party was Maggie Medicine, who took thee safely there and back.”

And to this Friend Lydia always nodded “yes.”

CHAPTER IX—Cobbler, Cobbler, Mend My Shoe

“Lydia,” called Mrs. Blake one morning, from the lower porch where she sat sewing, “what makes you walk on the side of your foot?”

Lydia was carrying the heavy watering-can round to her garden-bed. There had been no rain for weeks, and the leaves and the grass and the flowers all bore a coating of fine dust. Last night Lydia had forgotten to water her garden, and now she was hurrying to do it before the sun crept round the corner of the house.

But at the sound of her mother’s voice, she set the can on the gravel path and sat herself down beside it.

“Because, Mother, there’s a hole in my shoe, and the pebbles get in,” she answered. “Look,” and she lifted her foot so that Mother could see the sole of her little canvas shoe.

“Sure enough, I see it,” said Mrs. Blake. “Go in and change your shoes, Lydia, and then run up to the shoemaker’s, and see whether he can mend this old pair. But water your garden first, and be sure you put the can away.”

Lydia hurried through her task, and then, stealing softly behind Mrs. Blake, put her arms about her mother’s neck.

“Mother,” she whispered, “may I wear my ‘brown bettys’? I’ll be so careful of them.”

“Brown bettys” was Lydia’s affectionate name for her new bronze slippers, slippers worn only on Sunday or upon special occasions, and Mrs. Blake raised her eyebrows at this request.

“Your best slippers?” said she. “Why should you wear them to the shoemaker’s? No, Lydia, I couldn’t consider it. It wouldn’t be suitable.”

“It would suit me very much,” pouted Lydia. “The shoemaker would like to see them, and maybe I’ll meet the minister. I want to wear them. I do.” And Lydia, with a frown on her face, stood kicking the piazza railing and scowling at her mother.

Mrs. Blake sewed for a moment without speaking. Then she looked down

the path to the river.

“Here comes your father,” she said quietly. “Don’t let him see you with such a look on your face. Go in at once, and put on your black ‘criss-cross’ shoes, and when you come out I will tell you how to go to the shoemaker’s.”

As Lydia disappeared, Mr. Blake came slowly up the path, and threw himself into a porch hammock.

“Hot work, painting a masterpiece,” said he, with a yawn, and before Lydia came out in her black “criss-cross” shoes, as she called her strapped slippers, her father had fallen asleep.

Every morning, before the clock struck three, Mr. Blake was on his way up the river, and by the time the sun rose he was already hard at work upon his picture, for the subject of “the masterpiece” was Dawn on the River, and must be painted at dawn and at no other time. Naps followed such early rising as a matter of course, and Lydia, after a peep, came tiptoeing out on the porch as softly as could be for fear of waking him. Her ill-humor had vanished, and she listened to her mother’s directions with not a cloud on her face.

“Go up the village road and take the first turn,” said Mother in a whisper. “Walk along until you come to something that doesn’t look one bit like a shoemaker’s shop. You will know it by the flowers, and by the trademark over the door. The shoemaker’s name is Mr. Jolly.”

So Lydia skipped up the road with her old shoes under her arm.

“Cobbler, cobbler, mend my shoe,
Have it done at half-past two,
Stitch it up and stitch it down,
And see if now my shoe is found,”

she sang over and over to herself as she went.

Up the side road the houses were few, and Lydia peered carefully at each for special flowers and the shoemaker’s trademark over the door. But only the usual garden flowers nodded in the breeze, so Lydia kept on until she saw a blaze of color down the road before her. She could see the scarlet and white of flowers and the bright green of leaves, but they seemed to be growing on top of the house instead of on the ground, and it was not until she drew very near that she saw it was not a house at all, but a carriage drawn up at the side of the road, an old-fashioned black coach that had certainly been turned into a shoemaker’s shop, for out of the open window floated Rap-i-tap-tap! Rap-i-tap-tap! Rap-i-tap-tap! that told of some one hard at work within. Over the door on a nail hung a pair of baby’s pale-blue kid shoes, the cobbler’s trademark, and as for the flowers—Lydia wished her own little garden-bed looked one quarter as well. For

gorgeous masses of scarlet and white bloom covered the carriage roof, flowered in the coachman's box, and grew in little window-boxes cunningly fastened on the doors.

[image]

SUCH A COBBLER'S SHOP HAD NEVER BEEN SEEN BEFORE

Such a cobbler's shop had never been seen before, and Lydia was staring at it in amazement when a head popped out of the doorway, and a voice said:

"Flowers or shoes?"

"W-what?" stammered Lydia, taken by surprise.

"I said 'flowers or shoes?'" repeated the voice, that belonged to Mr. Jolly, the cobbler, Lydia felt sure, for he wore a leather apron, and held a small hammer in one hand and a shoe in the other. "Some folks come to me for flowers, some folks come to me for shoes. Which are you?"

"Shoes," answered Lydia, taking them from under her arm and handing them up to Mr. Jolly. "My mother wants to know whether you can mend them."

Mr. Jolly looked them over with his head on one side like a bird. Then he nodded.

"Yes, I can," said he. "Done to-morrow this time. Don't you like flowers?"

Lydia was no longer startled by his abrupt questions.

"Yes, I do," she answered, as sparing of words as he.

"Have you a garden?" he asked.

"Yes," said Lydia, "but not so nice as yours."

"Take good care of it?" inquired Mr. Jolly, with a keen look. "Ever forget to water it? Dry weather we're having. Plenty of care, plenty of water; that's what makes a good garden."

"I take pretty good care of it," answered Lydia truthfully. "Sometimes I forget. I'll come to-morrow for my shoes." And she turned to go.

"Wait," called Mr. Jolly. "Don't you want to know why I have a shop like this?"

"Yes, I do want to know," answered Lydia, wondering whether he read the question in her eye.

"Too polite to ask, eh?" said Mr. Jolly. "Well, most folks ask, and I tell them it's for 'hedloes to catch medloes.' You're Mr. Blake's little girl, aren't you? He's a nice man. Well, I'll tell you because you didn't ask. I have my shop out here because she can't stand the noise of the hammer"—and Mr. Jolly nodded toward the nearest house. "Twenty years she's been lying in that bed and never touched

a foot to the floor, and two years ago last spring she said to me, 'Jolly, I can't bear another tap of that hammer.' And so I bought the old coach—springs are gone—and moved out here. Gives the town something to talk about, too. Everybody comfortable all round." And Mr. Jolly with a chuckle drew in his head and fell to work again.

Above the taps of his hammer Lydia called out, "I'll come to-morrow for my shoes. Good-bye!" and then home she ran as fast as she could go.

"Father!" she cried, climbing upon Mr. Blake's lap as, refreshed by his nap, he sat reading the newspaper, "Mr. Jolly knows you. He says you are nice. Who is 'she'?"

"She?" repeated the puzzled Mr. Blake. "You will have to tell me something more about her before I can answer that question, I'm afraid. Is it a puzzle?"

"She has been in bed for twenty years, and never touched a foot to the floor, and she can't bear the sound of the hammer," explained Lydia in an excited burst.

"Oh, that's Mrs. Jolly," said Mr. Blake. "She has something the matter with her back and can't walk. Mr. Jolly and I are old friends. He's a good fellow."

"He's going to mend my shoes for me," went on Lydia. "He told me to take good care of my garden, and I must go to-morrow and get my shoes."

Lydia could talk of nothing for the rest of the day but Mr. Jolly and his strange little shop.

The next morning she was impatient to be off on her errand, but Mrs. Blake woke with a bad headache, and there were many odds and ends that Lydia could do about the house to save her mother steps. At last Mrs. Blake went to lie down, and Lydia, after spreading a shawl over the invalid's feet, and pressing a kiss into the palm of the hand that lay so limply on the bed, hurried up the road after her shoes.

The tap of Mr. Jolly's hammer reached her ears soon after she came in sight of the flowery shop, but Lydia was intent upon a little figure seated upon the step of the coach. It was that of a small boy, perhaps four years old, whose hair was as black as Lydia's was golden, whose face was streaked with the mark of tears and dirt, and who held in his hand a slice of bread and butter.

"I wonder if it's Mr. Jolly's little boy?" thought Lydia.

But when Mr. Jolly looked up from his hammering, he gave a bird-like nod at Lydia, and then one at the little boy.

"Look what I found in my shop this morning," said he.

The little boy's brown eyes filled with tears, and he put his slice of bread and butter on the grass beside him.

"I won't go back," said he, his lip quivering. "I won't go back."

"No, sonny, that you won't, if I can help it," returned Mr. Jolly, with an emphatic tap of his hammer. "They didn't serve you right, and that's a fact. It's

the little Bliss boy,” he explained to Lydia. “What did you say your name was?”

“Roger,” murmured the child huskily.

“His father and mother just died, and there’s no one to take care of him, so Farmer Yetter said he’d take him and bring him up with his own boy sooner than see him go to the poorhouse. But he says he didn’t have much to eat, and they worked him hard for such a little feller, and the big boy plagued him. So last night he up and run away, and this morning I found him asleep in my shop.”

“I won’t go back,” insisted Roger, as Mr. Jolly paused for breath. “I won’t go back. He pinched me. He hit me with the harness.” And pushing back his sleeve, he showed great black-and-blue spots on his thin little arm.

“No, sonny, you shan’t go back,” repeated Mr. Jolly soothingly. “I’ll take you to a nice place, Robin Hill. I guess they’ll make room for you somehow. This little girl will tell you how nice it is there. Won’t you?”

“Are there any boys?” asked Roger anxiously. “I won’t go if there are.”

“But they are nice boys,” said Lydia, eager for the good name of her special friends, Sammy and Tom. “They wouldn’t hurt you for anything. They are lots of fun to play with. And you will like Miss Martin, she is so good to you.”

Roger shook his head.

“I don’t like boys,” said he. “Do you live there?”

“I used to,” answered Lydia, “but I don’t now.”

“Then I’ll go with you,” announced Roger, picking up his bread and butter, and taking a firm hold on Lydia’s dress.

“You stay here with me, sonny,” said Mr. Jolly, nodding and winking in a friendly way, “and long about evening when I get my work done I’ll take you up to Robin Hill. You heard the little girl tell it’s a good place to be.”

“No, I’ll go home with her,” said Roger, his mind quite fixed. “I like her. I want to live with her.” And he held tighter than ever to Lydia.

Mr. Jolly and the little girl looked at one another a moment in silence. Neither knew quite what to do or say. At last Lydia spoke.

“If you let him go home with me, I’ll tell Father all about it, and he will fix it for us somehow. I know he will.”

“Maybe you’re right,” said Mr. Jolly, after a pause. “Mr. Blake’s a good man. You tell him if there’s any trouble with Farmer Yetter that I’ll take the blame. And I’ll step round to-night and see what he says.”

Lydia and Roger started off together, and it was not until they were nearly home that Lydia thought of her shoes. She had completely forgotten them, and so had Mr. Jolly.

But once in sight of home, Lydia spied Father on the little front porch, watching up the road for her. So, taking a fresh hold on the little boy’s hand, she hurried forward, forgetting everything in her eagerness to tell Roger’s story.

CHAPTER X—Robin Hill

Mr. Blake came down the road to meet them, and in his hand he carried Lydia's little traveling-bag.

"I'm going away," thought Lydia. "Where am I going? And what will become of Roger?"

As Mr. Blake drew nearer he smiled and waved the bag in the air.

"You are going visiting, Lydia," he called cheerfully. "But who is your new little friend?"

"Oh, Father, it's Roger," answered Lydia, forgetting her own affairs in her interest in the little boy who stood peeping shyly over her shoulder. "He wanted so to come with me, and Mr. Jolly didn't know what to do, so I said you would fix it. And Mr. Jolly will come and see you to-night, and I was to tell you all about it."

Mr. Blake sat down on the stone wall at the side of the road, and listened to the tale Lydia had to tell.

"Let me see your arm, son," said he gently, when Lydia had finished. "So that is where the big boy pinched you, is it? Have you any more places like that?"

Roger nodded, and put his hand on his side and his back.

"He hit me with the harness," said he, with trembling lip. "I want to stay with her. I won't go back." And Roger smeared away his tears with the back of a grimy little hand, while with the other he clutched his new friend Lydia.

"No, of course you won't go back, son," answered Mr. Blake, pursing up his lips as if to whistle. "We can do better by you than that. My little girl is going up to Robin Hill to make a visit, and you shall go along with her. Miss Martin will simply have two visitors instead of one." And Mr. Blake smiled down into the serious little faces looking up into his.

"Mother's head is worse, Lydia," he explained, "and Dr. Wolfe isn't sure what the trouble is. So you are to make a little visit at Robin Hill, and I will telephone every day, and come to see you when I can."

"But won't Mother want me to wait on her?" asked Lydia anxiously. "Is she very sick?"

"I hope not," answered Father, in such a cheerful voice that Lydia felt better immediately. "Don't fret. You will probably be home in a few days, and you know you will want to stay, anyway, until Roger feels at home. Here comes Alexander; he will take you up. And I packed your bag myself, Lydia. I think I put everything in. I know I packed your favorite brown slippers, and Lucy Locket is on top of everything."

Mr. Blake was lifting the children into the cart as he spoke. He talked in a low voice to Alexander, and then with a kiss to Lydia, and a pat upon Roger's black pate, he started back to the house, and off they drove.

"They are my 'brown bettys'!" cried Lydia after him. "Tell Mother I'll wear them only on Sunday."

Maggie Medicine trotted bravely up the road and under the big oak trees that made the driveway at Robin Hill such a shady and comfortable place to play. There were no children in sight, but Miss Martin was watching for them on the broad veranda, and she came forward to help them out of the cart.

"So this is Roger," said she, smiling and holding out her arms to the forlorn child, who willingly crept into their comfortable shelter. "Your father has just telephoned me, Lydia, so I know all about him. You will find the children in the barn, I think." And Miss Martin carried Roger off for the bath and the nap that the tired, dusty little boy needed sorely.

Lydia gladly left her charge in such good hands, and with a hasty good-bye to Alexander, ran off to find her friends. She was glad to be visiting, and she thought Robin Hill beautiful, and indeed it was as pleasant a place to spend the summer as could be found anywhere. The living-rooms were spacious and cool, the bedrooms sunny and airy. A big attic, meant for play on rainy days, crowned the top of the house, and there each child had a place for the treasures that would otherwise have been strewn from one end to the other of Robin Hill, or have been banished altogether. Sticks, stones, weeds, cocoons, acorns, "Anything that can't walk, swim, or fly," was Miss Martin's decree. "Live-stock must go into the barn."

So out in the barn lived Snowball and Nig, the white and the black rabbits given Sammy by Dr. Wolfe. The first day, yes, the first hour of Sammy's arrival at Robin Hill, in trying to climb the old apple-tree, down he came to the ground on his head, and four big stitches were set by the doctor in order to mend his broken crown. Sammy bore the pain like a hero, and not until it was all over and he was left alone with Miss Martin did he shed a few salt drops upon her friendly shoulder. But the sore head was soon forgotten, when that very afternoon had come the two rabbits to be Sammy's special charge and delight throughout his summer stay. Friendly old Billy, the horse, and the two placid white cows, Brindle and Bossy, were quite accustomed to their many little visitors, and submitted with a good grace to be patted, and stroked, and fed hay and lumps of sugar.

Back of the house lay the garden, and there each child large enough to wield rake and hoe had his own little plot. During the first weeks of spring planting, Miss Martin was overwhelmed with promises of peas and beans and radishes for the Robin Hill table. Sammy and Polly and Mary Ellen had a scheme whereby, if their crops were as successful as they hoped, they would sell their produce to the village grocer, and with the proceeds make an interesting purchase.

“We’ll buy a piano,” said Polly.

“A gold chain for Miss Martin,” said Mary Ellen.

“A hand-organ,” said Sammy, in a burst of inspiration, “and travel all over, taking pennies in a hat. We’ll be rich.” And Sammy smacked his lips at the thought.

To-day, after dinner, at which Roger did not appear, Lydia, with arms about Mary Ellen and Polly, visited the pets, and listened to all the hopes and plans of her friends, not, however, without telling a few of her own.

Tom, growing brown and rosy and more boyish every day, led her to the swing lately put up in the woodshed, and gave her a swing in his finest style, running under and back in a manly fashion that he much admired. He seldom put his finger in his mouth now, and resorted to General Pershing, Jr., for comfort only on the rare occasions when in disgrace.

Sammy graciously permitted Lydia to feed Snowball and Nig with cabbage leaves, and her admiration of their wiggling pink noses so moved him that he offered to show his cut without asking a favor in return, quite contrary to his usual custom.

Lydia missed two of her old friends. Luley and Lena had gone away to a new home of their own, and Polly and Mary Ellen excitedly told of their call last week at Robin Hill.

“They came in an automobile,” said Polly, much impressed, “and their hair was done in curls, just alike, and they wore beautiful big pink hair-ribbons. And their new mother’s hat was just dripping with feathers. She doesn’t call them Luley and Lena any more at all. Their names are Eloise and Eleanore.” And Polly rolled up her eyes at the thought of her little friends’ grandeur.

“I shouldn’t think they would know who they are, changing their names that way,” said downright Mary Ellen. “And their clothes were so fine they didn’t dare play with us, either. I don’t believe they have any better times than we do.” And Mary Ellen surveyed with complete satisfaction her dark gingham dress and stout little shoes. The children no longer dressed alike in blue-and-white, and Mary Ellen was particularly proud of her blue-and-green Scotch plaid.

“Oh, I do,” said Polly, not at all influenced by this good sense. “I think it’s lovely to change your name. I’d give anything if mine was Edna Muriel. Don’t you think that’s a pretty name, Lydia?”

“Yes, lovely,” answered Lydia absently. She was thinking of her bronze slippers, and wondering what Mary Ellen would say to them. Perhaps she would scorn her for taking such pleasure in them. It was quite true that they were not meant for rough play.

But Nurse Norrie was calling them in to supper, and Lydia could only say in a low voice to Polly as they lagged behind Mary Ellen on their way to the house:

“I’ve a lovely pair of bronze slippers with me, and you shall try them on after supper.”

Polly nodded, her eyes dancing, and as they hurried out on the porch after washing face and hands, she pinched Lydia’s arm gently, by way of reminder of their secret, as she passed her on the way to her seat.

The table was set on the back veranda where it was cool and shady, and each boy and girl stood quietly behind his or her chair until grace was said and Miss Martin had taken her seat. To-night Miss Martin came leading little Roger whose long nap was only just over, and on her other side stood Tom, his heart in a flutter. It was his turn for the first time to say grace. Bravely he started off, but to his great surprise he heard himself saying:

“Now I lay me down to sleep,
I pray, Thee, Lord, my soul to keep.”

He heard Sammy snicker, he felt the little girl beside him shake with laughter, so Tom stopped short.

“No, that isn’t right,” said he aloud.

He thought for a moment, but not a word of the little grace so carefully taught him came back to help him out. Suddenly, his Bible verse of last Sunday flashed upon his mind.

“The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want,” repeated little Tom boldly, and then he turned to pull out Miss Martin’s chair as a sign that his part was done.

“Was that all right?” he whispered audibly; “I forgot the other one.”

There was a strange look about Miss Martin’s mouth, and she passed her handkerchief over her face before answering.

“Very nice, Tom, to think of another verse so quickly, since you forgot the grace.” She spoke so that the whole table could hear, and her eyes were fixed on Sammy, whose face was red and who was making queer noises. “I wish I felt sure we all could do that,” she added pointedly.

“Yes, ma’am,” answered Sammy, choking back his laugh. “I mean, no, ma’am, I don’t think I could.” And Sammy fell to work upon the bowl of oatmeal before him, glad to escape the gaze of so many eyes.

Roger looked slowly round the long table laden with plates of brown and

white bread, pitchers of foamy milk, bowls of apple-sauce. His eyes traveled down one side of the table, past his friend Lydia, to Sammy, intent now upon his supper; flyaway Cora, never still a minute; big Joe, little Joe, Josephine, and Joey; freckled little Freddy; and rested upon Mary Ellen presiding sedately over the foot of the table. Up the other side he came, looking at little English Alfie; spectacled John; Louise and Minette, the tiny, black-eyed French refugees; honest American William, with round blue eyes and snub nose; fat little Gus, whose pranks and hairbreadth escapes already rivaled those of Sammy; baby Celia; Polly, smiling and nodding mysteriously at Lydia; and lastly at Tom, who, duty done, was thoroughly enjoying his well-earned meal. Eighteen hearty and happy little boys and girls they were, kindly and well disposed toward him, too, for they smiled and nodded at the newcomer, and attentively saw that all his wants were supplied.

"Aren't they nice?" asked Lydia, following Roger's gaze. "I knew you would like the boys. They won't hurt you. And the girls are fun, too." And Lydia beamed proudly round at her friends, old and new.

"I'll take you out to see my rabbits after supper, if you like," offered Sammy, extra polite because of his recent behavior.

"And I'll give you a swing," volunteered Tom bashfully.

The boys were nice, Roger thought, and when, after supper, Lydia whispered hastily, "You go with the boys now, Roger, and I'll come in a minute; I only want to show something to Polly," he trotted off contentedly, and was soon engrossed in the bunnies, who obligingly devoured cabbage leaves, with seemingly no limit to their appetite.

Lydia and Polly hastened upstairs and into the room where Lydia was to sleep that night with two other little girls. Her bag had been unpacked, and her clothes neatly disposed in one of the small cupboards that lined the wall. On the window-sill lay Lucy Locket, and beside her only one of the bronze slippers.

"Why, I don't see it anywhere, Polly," said Lydia, after a third search of the cupboard for the missing shoe. "You help me look."

The girls made a careful search, but no bronze slipper was to be found.

"I know I brought them both," said Lydia at last, her face puckering. "Father said so, and I looked in the bag myself."

"Perhaps some one has taken it," was all Polly, her eyes big and round, could suggest.

"I know who did it!" exclaimed Lydia, her head in a whirl at her loss. "It's that Mary Ellen. She took my slipper because she didn't like them, and I'm going to tell Miss Martin."

And in a twinkling, Lydia was running down the hall calling:

"Miss Martin! Miss Martin! One of my 'brown bettys' is gone, and Mary Ellen took it! Mary Ellen has taken one of my 'brown bettys'!"

CHAPTER XI—Who Stole the Brown Betty?

Out on the front veranda, in the twilight, sat Miss Martin surrounded by a little group of children. It was the quiet hour before bedtime when, by ones and twos and threes, the children came together for the talk or story that made a pleasant ending to their day.

To-night, Louise and Minette were having a lesson in English. They were perched like two little blackbirds on the arm of Miss Martin's chair, and Louise was repeating obediently, "Yez, Meez Mart, I lov' you, Jo," while Minette's contribution was to pull her curls across her eyes and laugh. Mary Ellen sat on the top step, engrossed in the braiding of a horse-hair ring. Sammy and Tom, escorting little Roger, came round the house from the barn, and settled themselves at Miss Martin's feet.

"Tell us a story, please, Miss Martin," begged Josephine, twisting Louise's black curls as she spoke, "about when you were a little girl."

"Were you ever a little girl?" asked Gus, sitting up straight in his amazement. "Did you ever have a father and a mother?"

Miss Martin laughed, but before she could answer this question there was a sound of flying feet, and Lydia ran out into the midst of the peaceful scene.

"My slippers! My 'brown bettys'!" she gasped excitedly. "One is gone! Mary Ellen took it. I know she did! I can't find it, and Polly can't find it either."

Mary Ellen dropped her horse-hair ring, and stared at Lydia in astonishment.

"I never did!" said Mary Ellen in a burst. "I never touched them. I didn't see her slippers." And her eyes flashed in righteous indignation.

"Yes, she did," interposed Roger, going over to Lydia and taking her hand. "Mary Ellen took Lydia's slippers."

"Oh, you—you—" cried Mary Ellen, making a dart at Roger as words failed her in her wrath.

"Children, stop!" commanded bewildered Miss Martin. "Stop this minute,

and tell me what all this trouble is about. What have you lost, Lydia, and why do you think Mary Ellen has taken it?"

"I didn't," muttered Mary Ellen defiantly. "I didn't."

"Be quiet, Mary Ellen," said Miss Martin again. "Tell, Lydia, what have you lost?"

"My slippers," said Lydia, her eyes filling with tears at the thought of her lost treasure; "one of my 'brown bettys,' my bronze slippers. They are my best. Father packed them for me, and I saw them in my bag, and now only one of them is upstairs with the rest of my clothes. I can't find the other, and Polly can't either."

"But why do you say that Mary Ellen has taken it?" asked Miss Martin, with a keen look at both little girls.

"She didn't like it because Luley and Lena were too dressed up to play," answered Lydia, "so she wouldn't like my slippers either."

"But I don't think Mary Ellen would touch them, even if she didn't approve of them," said Miss Martin, hoping to find her way out of the tangle. "Did you touch Lydia's slippers, Mary Ellen?"

"No, ma'am," answered Mary Ellen virtuously, feeling public opinion turn her way.

Behind Miss Martin's back, her eyes fixed on Lydia, she noiselessly said:

"I'll never speak to you again as long as I live."

"I don't care," answered Lydia out loud.

"Don't care?" repeated Miss Martin, not understanding. "Of course you care; we all do. Now, Roger, why did you say Mary Ellen took the slipper? Did you see her take it?"

"No, but Lydia said so," returned the little boy innocently. To a stanch friend like Roger, whatever Lydia said must be so.

"Children, did any of you see or touch Lydia's slipper?" was the next question. "No? Then, Sammy, go find out who unpacked Lydia's bag, and ask her to come here."

Sammy returned with Kate, Nurse Norrie's niece.

"Sure I saw the slippers, Miss Martin," said Kate. "I put them both on the window-sill with the doll baby, and then I saw that the screen had fallen out of the window, and I ran down to tell Mat to put it in, and I never thought of them from that moment to this."

"It must have fallen out of the window," said Miss Martin, "though I don't exactly see how. We'll ask Mat to take a lantern and look for it in the grass."

Mat carefully searched in the grass, and round the roots of the big tree, whose branches brushed against the very window-sill, and which knew the answer to the puzzle if only they could tell. He swung his lantern over the piazza

roof and window-ledges, too, but in vain. The bronze slipper was not to be found, and Lydia and Mary Ellen went to bed side by side without even saying good-night.

Miss Martin hesitated whether to try to reconcile the little girls, but Lydia still believed Mary Ellen responsible for her loss, and Mary Ellen was hurt and angry at the undeserved suspicion.

"If I talk to them, no doubt they will say they are sorry, and that they forgive one another," Miss Martin reflected wisely, "but they will say it really to please me. They won't feel any different in their hearts. I will wait and see whether the mystery won't clear itself up to-morrow."

So, trusting in the morrow, Miss Martin put the thought out of her mind for the time being, since no one but Lydia now believed Mary Ellen had anything to do with the disappearance of the "brown betty," and Lydia was forbidden to repeat her unwarranted accusation.

"Good news for you, Lydia," was Miss Martin's morning greeting. "Your mother is better, and you are to go home this afternoon."

"Oh, goody!" said Lydia, smiling broadly as she sat up in bed. But the next instant the smile was gone and a cloud had come in its place.

"Did you find my slipper?" she asked eagerly.

"We haven't looked for it again," answered Miss Martin cheerfully. "After breakfast every one will turn to and hunt, and I feel sure we shall find it. We will do our best, anyway, won't we, Mary Ellen?" And Miss Martin smiled into the downcast face.

"Yes, Miss Martin," returned Mary Ellen politely, but she continued to lace her boots without a glance in Lydia's direction. Plainly Mary Ellen still felt herself to be an injured person. There was even an idea in shrewd Miss Martin's mind that Mary Ellen found not a little enjoyment in her martyrdom.

After breakfast every one started in a different direction, but search and hunt as children, maids, and men did in every conceivable nook and corner, there was no trace of the missing slipper, and at last they were forced to give up the search, and admit that apparently it had simply vanished from the face of the earth.

"But it must be somewhere," Miss Martin repeated. "It didn't walk away by itself. I won't give up."

By dinner-time the fruitless search was over, and in the afternoon the children scattered to their play, Polly and Tom escorting Lydia and Roger in a tour of the vegetable garden, hoping thus to raise the drooping spirits of their visitors.

Miss Martin missed Mary Ellen, and going in search of her, found her in her bedroom, leaning on the window-sill from which the bronze slipper had taken its mysterious flight.

The little girl had nursed her sense of injury all day, and now had stolen away from the other children to spend a lonely afternoon. She was deep in thought, but not so absorbed that she did not hear Miss Martin enter the room, although she continued to gaze out of the window.

"I guess if I died, Lydia would feel badly," she was thinking. "I would be dressed all in white, with my hair in long curls, and I would hold one white rose in my hand. They would all come and look at me, and oh, how they would all cry! I guess Lydia would cry hardest of all. Perhaps, though, they wouldn't even let her in, she's been so mean to me." And a tear was all ready to roll down Mary Ellen's cheek, when she felt a hand on her shoulder.

"What do you see, sister Anne?" asked Miss Martin, gayly. "Are there any birds' nests in the tree?" She apparently did not notice the abused look Mary Ellen turned upon her as she sat down in the window beside the child.

"No, but there are two squirrels in the tree, big fellows. Here they come." And Mary Ellen pointed to the two gray squirrels climbing in swift darts higher and higher up the old trunk. "Aren't they cute?" she whispered, neglecting her own grievance for interest in the squirrels. "Their hole is by that big branch. There goes one in now."

Mary Ellen and Miss Martin held their breath as the remaining squirrel pursued his way up the tree. When he reached the branch opposite their window, to their delight he turned and crept toward them. Motionless, they watched him leap from the tip of the swaying bough to the broad window-sill, where he sat upright, peering sharply about with his bright little eyes.

And then in a flurry, with every appearance of haste, Mr. Squirrel departed, for Mary Ellen had abruptly broken the spell. She had waved her arms wildly, and had called out in a loud voice:

"Miss Martin, I believe they took Lydia's slipper."

Miss Martin stared at Mary Ellen for a moment.

"I believe they did, Mary Ellen," said she slowly. "I never heard of such a thing before, but I do believe they did."

"The screen was out," went on Mary Ellen, "and they are great big squirrels, and the slippers are little. He came right up on the window-sill now; you saw him yourself, Miss Martin. Oh, how can we find out? Can't we find out?"

"Of course we can," said Miss Martin, as pleased as could be at the thought. "At least we can try. Come, Mary Ellen, won't it be a surprise if those squirrels are the thieves?" And she ran downstairs with Mary Ellen at her heels.

Five minutes later, when Mat placed the long ladder against the old maple and prepared to mount it, not a child was missing from the group at the foot of the tree. The news had spread like wildfire, and long legs and short legs had toiled desperately in those few moments for fear of missing some of the excitement.

All eyes were fixed on Mat as he paused on the ladder outside the squirrels' hole, and slowly and impressively drew on his baseball glove. That had been his solution of the problem, when Miss Martin had feared that the squirrels would bite his hands.

In went the glove, and out it came with a chattering, scolding bunch of fur that Mat deposited at arm's length upon a branch. Next came a trembling gray ball, also to be placed carefully out of the way, and then, for the third time, Mat thrust in his hand and slowly drew out the missing "brown betty," scratched in places, filled with leaves, one button gone, but Lydia's lost bronze slipper nevertheless.

The children shrieked and hopped up and down in their excitement as Mat dangled it in the air before their eyes. Lydia was smiling happily, but her face was not so bright as Mary Ellen's.

"Try to put the squirrels back in their hole, Mat," called Miss Martin; but with a flirt and a whisk the squirrels proved that they had other plans, and were out of sight in a twinkling among the green leaves.

Slowly Mat descended to earth, and handed the slipper to Miss Martin, who, in turn, put it in Mary Ellen's hands.

"You, Mary Ellen, must have the pleasure of giving it to Lydia," said she, "because you are really the one who found the hiding-place."

Lydia received the slipper from her friend with a shy smile.

"Thank you, Mary Ellen," said she. "I'm sorry I thought you took it. And now that it's scratched, you won't mind my wearing them so much, will you?"

And arm in arm, the girls moved off, both entirely satisfied with this handsome apology.

"Look at them, whispering together out there," said Miss Martin, half an hour later, to Mr. Blake, as she told him the story of the slippers. "They are the best of friends now."

"Wouldn't it be a good thing if Mary Ellen had a pair of those fancy slippers for herself?" asked Mr. Blake. "If you say so, I'll take her down to the village now, and see what we can buy."

"Oh, that would be nice," answered Miss Martin, smiling at this good friend of her children. "She says she doesn't like them, but that is only because she hasn't any, I think. And we mustn't let Mary Ellen be too strong-minded. She is only nine years old, you know."

But Mary Ellen was not strong-minded in the least when she reached the village shoe shop. Indeed, she changed her mind three times before she finally decided upon a gay little pair of patent leather slippers with silver buckles.

"Now, what would you like, Roger?" asked kindly Mr. Blake of Lydia's faithful shadow, who had accompanied them as a matter of course.

"I'd like to go home with Lydia," answered Roger in all earnestness.

"I meant in the way of shoes," explained Mr. Blake. "Shiny rubbers, or high boots?"

But Roger selected a warm little pair of red felt slippers, in view, perhaps, of approaching winter weather.

The parting with Lydia was very hard. Roger wouldn't and couldn't understand why he must be separated from his friend, though Miss Martin explained it in the kindest and simplest way.

So Lydia, almost in tears herself, said good-bye, for Mr. Blake would not let her slip away when Roger's back was turned.

"We mustn't deceive him," said he. "He must learn he is among friends he can trust."

"I'll come and see you to-morrow," whispered Lydia, with a last warm hug. "I promise."

And with that bit of comfort, Lydia went home.

CHAPTER XII—Roger Comes Home

"Mother, how long was I away?" asked Lydia that night after supper.

The evenings grew cool now, and Mrs. Blake and Lydia were sitting indoors, while Mr. Blake walked up and down the gravel path, finishing his cigar. Lydia, on the window-seat, watched the red spark moving to and fro, while Mrs. Blake, with cheeks as pale as her soft white shawl, sat in the lamplight with a book on her lap.

"You were away a day and a night, weren't you?" she answered. "Why? Did it seem long to you?"

"It didn't seem long while I was there, but now it seems as if I'd been away a thousand years," was the reply. "Did you miss me, Mother?"

"Indeed I did," replied Mrs. Blake, with a shake of the head. "We all missed you, I'm sure."

"Yes," said Lydia, in a tone of satisfaction, "I asked everybody, and they all said they missed me. Father, and Alexander, and Deborah, and Friend Morris

when I took her a bunch of flowers before supper, and the postman when I met him on the road. The postman said he thought I looked older, I'd been away so long. Do you, Mother?"

"No, I can't say that I do," said honest Mrs. Blake. "Perhaps he meant taller. You do grow like a weed."

"No, he said older," insisted Lydia, twirling the curtain cord as she spoke. "It must have been a joke. The postman is a very joking man, Mother. Anyway, I like to be missed. I like everybody to miss me every minute I'm away. I hope they miss me now at Robin Hill. Roger does, I'm sure. Perhaps he is crying for me this very minute." And Lydia's eyes grew pensive at the thought.

Mrs. Blake knew that Lydia was talking in the hope of putting off her bedtime. The little clock on the mantel had struck eight fully five minutes ago.

"Roger is probably sound asleep in bed this minute," she answered sensibly. "It is after eight o'clock, Lydia."

"Yes, I know," answered the little girl, without moving, "but I thought I might be going to stay up a little longer, because it's the first night I came home."

Mrs. Blake only smiled at this hint, and opened her book.

Lydia was able now to make ready for bed by herself. When she was in her nightgown, she would call her mother, and Mrs. Blake would go upstairs to braid Lydia's curls into two little pigtails, hear her evening prayers, and tuck her in bed with a good-night kiss. But this evening Lydia was putting off her bedtime as late as she could.

"I'll just go say good-night to Father, then," she murmured gently, slipping down from the window-seat. She meant to take at least five minutes doing this, but the telephone rang and spoiled her plan.

Mr. Blake answered it. "Hello," said his voice from the hall. "Yes, Miss Martin. What's that? Roger? No, he isn't here. I'll come up and help you."

Mr. Blake stepped into the doorway, hat in hand.

"Miss Martin has telephoned that Roger has run away, and she thought he might possibly have found his way here. The rascal slipped out of bed, and they are pretty sure that he is not anywhere in the house. I'm going up to help her look for him. Perhaps I had better take Alexander with me, too," he added.

"Take me, Father, oh, take me!" cried Lydia, who had been listening with open eyes and ears. "I can find Roger, I know I can. Oh, take me with you!" And she rushed forward and clasped Mr. Blake about the knees.

"Take you, little magnet," said Mr. Blake, laughing; "I think Mother had better take you to bed." And he was gone, leaving Lydia so wide-awake she never wanted to go to bed again, she told her mother.

"You may wait until half-past eight," said indulgent Mrs. Blake, "if there is no news by that time you must go to bed. But after that, as soon as I hear

anything, I will come and tell you, if you are awake.”

Lydia stationed herself in the window to watch. It was not much fun staring out into the black night, but anything was better than going to bed. And any moment Father might come home with news of Roger. Oh, how she wished the little clock would stop or Mother would fall asleep. But nothing happened, and at half-past eight she started upstairs, dragging one foot slowly after the other.

Ten minutes later, Lydia was downstairs again in her nightgown, brush and comb in hand.

“I thought you would like to braid my hair down here to-night, Mother,” said she, placing the cricket at Mrs. Blake’s feet, and seating herself in view of the front door.

Mrs. Blake smiled at this new thoughtfulness. But she understood Lydia’s feelings, and in her sympathy she brushed and braided as slowly as she could. She herself wished Mr. Blake would return with news of the missing child. There were too many horses and automobiles, even at night, to make the roads safe for a “Wee Willie Winkie” to

“Run through the town,
Upstairs and downstairs,
In his nightgown.”

So they both were watching and listening when Mr. Blake’s step sounded on the porch. Lydia twitched the braid from her mother’s hands, and flew into the hall.

In came Mr. Blake with the runaway in his arms. He placed him in Mrs. Blake’s lap where, winking and blinking his dark eyes in the lamplight, in his dew-stained night-clothes, he lay looking about him like a little white bird. He wore his new red felt slippers, now covered with dust, and he carried in his hand a tiny horse given him by one of the children at Robin Hill. He smiled when he saw his friend Lydia kneeling at his feet, and waved his red slippers at her in greeting. It was plain to be seen that he was well pleased with his evening’s work.

“I found him marching down the road halfway between here and Robin Hill,” said Father, answering the question in Mrs. Blake’s eyes. “Alexander has gone on to tell Miss Martin. Well, young man, what have you to say for yourself?” he went on. “Running away seems to be your specialty. Do you mean to stay here with us for a while, or will you get me up in the middle of the night to bring you back from another trip down the road?” And Mr. Blake smiled down at the contented little figure cuddled in Mrs. Blake’s lap.

“You won’t run away again, will you, Roger?” asked Lydia coaxingly. “You want to stay here with me, don’t you?”

Roger nodded solemnly.

“Yes,” said he, “I’ll stay with you. I’ll stay with you forever.”

And then he sneezed one, two, three times.

“Mercy me!” said Mother. “Off to bed, both of you.”

And, bundled in the white shawl, the triumphant Roger was borne upstairs, Lydia hopping alongside, delighted with this unexpected turn of affairs.

“Roger is visiting us, Mother says,” explained Lydia the next morning, as she and Roger paid an early morning call upon Friend Deborah in her spotless kitchen, “but Roger says he has come to stay.”

The little boy, his eyes fixed upon a bowl of peaches, nodded.

“I like it here,” he said gravely. “I like Lydia. I like my new mother and father. I like peaches, too.”

“You mustn’t say that!” cried Lydia, scandalized. “It isn’t polite. You mustn’t ask, ever.”

“I didn’t ask,” returned Roger stoutly. “I only said I liked.”

But Lydia sighed, as if she had all the cares of a large family upon her shoulders. Roger must be taught so many lessons in politeness, and his table manners needed constant attention.

“Just watch me, Roger,” instructed Lydia. “Do just what I do.”

But at last Roger tired of her corrections.

“You have more spots at your place than I have,” he retorted between mouthfuls of mush. “And I didn’t cry when I took my medicine, and you did. And I wasn’t put to bed yesterday like you.” And with a flourish of his spoon, Roger placidly finished his supper, while the crestfallen Lydia slipped away to console herself with Lucy Locket, who never “answered back.”

“It is good for her, I suppose,” said Mrs. Blake, who, with Mr. Blake, was an amused spectator of this scene. “I am afraid we were making her selfish. It isn’t well for a child to grow up alone. And they love each other dearly. Roger follows Lydia about like her shadow.”

And so it was settled that Roger was to stay “forever” as he said.

“He’s stopped visiting!” cried the delighted Lydia, flying over to Friend Morris with the news. “He’s stopped visiting, and he’s going to be my brother. Isn’t it nice?”

Friend Morris nodded.

“He setteth the solitary in families, little Friend Lydia,” was her reply.

“Yes, Friend Morris,” answered Lydia politely, though she didn’t understand in the least what Friend Morris meant. “And I think we are all going home soon. Father’s ‘masterpiece’ is finished, and Miss Puss is so fat she can scarcely walk. It’s high time we went home, Mother says.”

But before the last day came, Mr. Blake planned a farewell ride, a ride back

in the country to see the famous waterfalls that people traveled from far and wide to view.

Friend Morris was invited, and Deborah and Alexander, and all Robin Hill, too. So, early on a bright, crisp autumn afternoon they started, three carriage loads—in deference to Friend Morris, who did not like automobiles—full of happy, chattering children, and grown folks, happy, too, if in a quieter way.

Deborah drove one carriage, with Mrs. Blake, on the back seat, watching over the safety of her special little flock. Alexander carefully drove Friend Morris, who had the quietest, best-behaved children placed in her charge, reliable children like Mary Ellen and Tom, wise, spectacled John and stolid English Alfie. The more harum-scarum boys and girls rode with Miss Martin and Mr. Blake, who took good care that Gus was placed next Miss Martin, and that Sammy sat beside him on the front seat.

“Are we going to see a real Indian woman, Mr. Blake?” asked Sammy, bouncing with excitement. “Lydia said you said so.”

“She will be at the toll-gate where we hitch the horses,” answered Mr. Blake. “At least, she has been there for years, and I suppose she is here this summer, too. In fact, I think she lives near by all the year round.”

Sammy possessed his soul in such patience as he could summon, and strained his eyes up the road for the interesting figure long before it was possible for her to be in sight.

Yes, the Indian woman was standing at the toll-gate, but Sammy was distinctly disappointed when he saw her. Neither did she improve upon closer inspection.

She was merely a swarthy-skinned, black-haired woman, dressed in a checked gingham dress and blue gingham apron, neither particularly clean, and she answered to the name of Mrs. Jones. Fancy an Indian named Jones! Sammy could scarcely conceal his indignation, and stared at the unconscious Mrs. Jones with such resentment in his eye that Miss Martin hurried him swiftly through the toll-gate, and past the cabin where Indian souvenirs were displayed for sale.

The party wandered along over the damp, mossy ground, and proceeded to survey the waterfalls, all of which were fortunately within easy walking distance.

“I choose High Falls,” remarked little Tom, as they wended their way back toward the gate. “It’s so big and high, and dashes down so hard.”

Most of the children had been greatly impressed by the huge, foaming cataract, that continually dashed its white length downward with a dull, booming roar. But Mary Ellen and Polly cast their vote for the delicate Bridal Veil; while Lydia, echoed by Roger, thought Silver Thread Falls the most beautiful of all.

Near the gate were rough wooden tables and benches, and, once seated, Sammy thought somewhat better of Mrs. Jones when she served them with birch

beer or sarsaparilla in thick mugs with handles.

"Now," said Mr. Blake, when the mugs were empty, "each one must choose an Indian souvenir, in memory of the day."

The delighted children crowded into the cabin, and critically surveyed the display placed before them. There were little birchbark canoes, and whisk-broom holders, also made of bark, beaded moccasins, strings of wampum, and small beaded pocketbooks. There were charming little pictures, not only of the Falls, but of Indian braves and maidens as well, and though it took a long time, at last every one had satisfactorily made his or her selection.

"Why are you so good to my children?" Miss Martin asked Mr. Blake, as, watching the boys and girls chattering happily over their treasures, they stood by the toll-gate waiting for a straggler or so.

"Think how good you have been to me," answered Mr. Blake promptly. "Didn't you give us Lydia? And without Lydia, we might never have had Roger. No, I think I owe you a good many more parties before we are even, Miss Martin."

"Look, Father!" cried Lydia, running up with Roger at her heels. "I chose a pocketbook. Do you like it? And Roger took a canoe."

The Indian woman, with the proceeds of the party jingling pleasantly in her pocket, smiled upon the little pair before her.

"Good friends, eh?" she commented. "I see, they stay together always. Good friends!"

"No," said Lydia shyly. "We are not friends; he's my brother."

"But you are my friend, too," returned Roger stoutly. "Friend Morris calls you that, and so do I."

On the drive home the children were tired and sleepy. They were content to sit quietly, and more than one stole a cat-nap on the way.

The Robin Hill party was safely deposited at their door, and Lydia and Mr. Blake drove slowly down the familiar road toward home. Mrs. Blake with Roger asleep on her lap, Deborah holding the reins, rode swiftly past them.

"Father," said Lydia, nestling close to him, "do you like the name that Friend Morris and Roger call me? Would you want to be called Friend Lydia?"

"I think it is a beautiful name," answered Mr. Blake, looking tenderly down at the little face gazing up into his. "And no matter how long you live, or wherever you go, I shall always hope that somebody in the world will call you little Friend Lydia."

[image]

U. S. A.

*** END OF THIS PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK LITTLE FRIEND LYDIA ***

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