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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK, PRINCESS POLLY'S PLAYMATES ***

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PRINCESS POLLY'S PLAYMATES

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AUTHOR OF

"Princess Polly," "Princess Polly at School," "Princess Polly by the Sea," "Princess Polly's Gay Winter," "Princess Polly at Play."

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PRINCESS POLLY'S PLAYMATES

CHAPTER I

IN THE GARDEN

"IF it was only true that castles COULD be enchanted, then I'd surely think Sherwood Hall was one," said the little girl with soft, dreamy eyes.

"You'd think Sherwood Hall was what?" questioned the other little girl, who had paused to rest her foot upon a stone, while she tied the ribbons of her shoe.

"An enchanted castle!"

"Why Vivian Osborne! You're always thinking of fairy tales," was the quick reply, and she laughed as if the idea were impossible.

"Now Leslie Grafton," Vivian replied, "you just come here, and look where Sherwood Hall shows between the trees. See the sun on the red roofs, and on those lovely windows! Can't you almost SEE the captive princess looking from her casement?"

"Well there she is!" cried Leslie laughing, "and we don't have to ALMOST see her. We can TRULY see her."

"Oh, wasn't it fine that just as we were talking, Princess Polly opened her window, and looked out," said Vivian, as together they ran up the avenue, and in at the gateway of Sherwood Hall.

"It was Lena Lindsey who first thought of calling her 'Princess Polly,' and she's always so sweet that the name seems to belong to her," said Leslie.

Polly had seen them, and when they reached the house, she was waiting to greet them.

"The postman is coming!" they cried, "the postman is coming, and we ran ahead to tell you!"

"Oh, perhaps there's a letter from Rose!" said Polly.

"That's what we thought," said Leslie, "and if there is, DO tell us some of it. We love Rose Atherton as much as you do."

Polly Sherwood shaded her eyes with her hand, and looked along the broad avenue.

"Oh, now I see him!" she cried, "and he's taking out a handful of letters as he comes along."

The postman laughed at Polly's eagerness.

"Three for you, Miss Polly," he said, as he placed them in her hands.

Polly looked at the envelopes. "That one is from my cousin," she said. "She always uses pink paper, and that one is from a little girl I used to play with before we came to live at Sherwood Hall. I know, because her paper is always pale green, but THIS one--" she held up the envelope with a little cry of delight, "THIS one is from Rose!"

With Leslie and Vivian looking over her shoulder, Polly opened the

letter.

"Read it with me," she said.

"Oh, read it aloud while we listen," said Leslie.

Rose had been a dear little playmate when she had lived with her Aunt Judith in a little cottage, near Sherwood Hall. Now that she had gone to live with her Great-Aunt Rose, for whom she had been named, and some miles distant, her little friends remembered her, and wished that she were with them.

Now, as Polly read the letter, it seemed as if little Rose Atherton were talking to them.

"Dear Princess Polly:--" the letter began, and then followed loving assurance of her true affection for her "own Polly," very tender inquiries for Sir Mortimer, the beautiful cat, and tales of little happenings in the new home.

"Great-Aunt Rose is kind, and Aunt Lois is gentle and sweet, but I'm LONSUM.

"The rooms are large, and cool and dark, and sometimes when the garden is hot and sunny, I go to the parlor, and try to amuse myself, but oh, I wish I had someone to play with. When I try to pick out a tune on the piano, the notes sound so loud, I turn around to see if Aunt Rose is provokt, but she never folows me. There's a portrate of a funny old man that hangs at the end of the parlor, and I always think he's watching me. When I smile, he seems to smile, and when I'm lonsum, he doesn't look jolly at all. There's five people in this house beside me. There's my two aunts, and three servants, but no one makes any noise, and oh, sometimes I WISH they would.

"Aunt Rose says sometime she'll give a party for me, but she says there must be no romping, and that it must be dig-ni-fide. I don't believe I spelled that right, and I'm not sure what it means, but it doesn't sound nice. I don't believe the children that come to it, will like a party that's digni--, I can't write that long word again.

"Aunt Lois is to have her portrate painted, and I'm to go with her to the artist's studyo.

"Aunt Rose just came in, and said, 'That is a long letter. Shall I help you with the spelling?' I didn't let her. I know some of the words are funny, but I don't want her to see this letter.

"I haven't said anything norty in it, only about how quiet and lonsum it is, but she mite not like that. I just had to tell you. Aunt Rose is going to ask you to visit me, and I'll be so glad when you come.

Your loving little friend,

ROSE.

P.S.--Aunt Rose said this morning that I ort to sine my name, Rose Jerusha Atherton, because that's her name, and I was named for her. How can I? Isn't JERUSHA orful?"

Of course the three little friends sympathized with Rose.

They felt as if they had seen the quaint, beautiful old house, with its dark, cool rooms.

They seemed to see bright, merry little Rose, now quiet, and lonely, wandering through the great hall to the parlor, to find a companion in the piano, or looking up into the friendly face of the old gentleman whose portrait she had described.

"And she says she is to go with her aunt to the artist's studio," said Leslie, "and wouldn't I like to do that? Just think what fun it would be to see him painting."

"I wonder if he'll let Rose watch him?" said Polly.

"There'd be no fun in going if she couldn't see him paint," declared Leslie "and if I were Rose, I WOULD watch him, if I had to peep when he wasn't looking."

"Oh you WOULDN'T!" said Vivian.

"I WOULD," said Leslie firmly, and Vivian did not reply.

"I wonder what her Aunt Lois will wear?" said Polly. "All of the portraits in our drawing room are young ladies in lovely gowns, with flowers in their hair, and jewels, many, many jewels, and plumes, and fans. Her Aunt Lois wouldn't wear such things as that!"

They wondered much about the portrait, and decided to question Rose regarding it.

"And now," said Polly, "I'll lay these letters on the table in the hall. I can read them later. We'll play."

It was easy to choose a game. The first choice, when the little playmates were at Sherwood Hall, was always "Hide-and-Seek."

There were such fine places for hiding, so many odd nooks where no one would ever think of looking that the game seemed always new, and interesting.

They had been playing but a short time, when Inez Varney ran up the driveway.

"What are you playing?" she asked.

"Hide-and-Seek," said Polly, "and it's Lena's turn to blind. Come! I know a fine place, big enough for three."

Usually Inez objected to whatever game her friends chose, but she was in a pleasant mood, and said that she would rather play "Hide-and-Seek" than anything else.

She clasped Polly's hand, and while Lena counted, the three ran off to the place that should be large enough to keep them from sight.

One fact made Inez easy to please; Rose was not with them.

Rose Atherton had been a bright, merry little playmate, beloved by all save Inez, and yet the only fault that Inez could find in Rose was her popularity.

Naturally jealous, Inez did not like to see that everyone loved Rose, and to know that Polly Sherwood, or Princess Polly, as everyone called her, cared more for Rose than for any of her friends, seemed really too provoking.

"NOW, Princess Polly must choose another BEST friend, and I wish it might be ME!" thought Inez.

She knew that Rose was sweet tempered. She knew that her own temper was hasty.

Could she keep from saying the sharp things that so often came from her red lips? She MUST, if she would win Polly's love!

Inez was pleasing to look at, but she was wrong in thinking herself more attractive than the other playmates.

Vivian and Leslie were much prettier than Inez, and they were pleasant and good tempered, always ready for a merry time, while Blanche Burton, and her little sister, Dollie, were ever welcome at Sherwood Hall.

It surely would seem as if Inez were foolish to think Princess Polly might prefer her silly little self, to all the others.

Indeed, she would have been far happier to have been willing to be one of her many playmates. Inez was not at all content, however. She wished to be PREFERRED.

The game went on merrily, and Inez seemed gayer than usual.

"Tag" followed "Hide-and-Seek," and the music of their merry laughter echoed through the garden, as they chased each other around the clumps of shrubbery, across the brook, and through the grove.

It was Vivian, who innocently caused the first sharp word to be spoken.

They were resting in the shade of some flowering shrubs. Princess Polly

had taken off her large hat, and wielding it as a fan, blew the bright curls back from her pink cheeks.

"If Rose were here, she'd say:

"Now while we're resting, Princess Polly, tell us a fairy tale," said Vivian.

"That's just what she'd say," said Polly, "and one afternoon we sat beside the brook, near the fountain, and took turns telling them."

Inez looked at Polly's eyes, and saw the regret that they so plainly expressed.

She would have been pleased if her little playmates had never mentioned Rose.

"And once," continued Polly, "we played that we were fairy queens, and we made flower crowns. It was early morning, and we tried to pick the flowers with the dew on them, but the dewdrops fell off. Then we sprinkled them with water from the brook, and they sparkled like diamonds."

Inez moved uneasily.

"We have fine times together," said Vivian, "but it was still brighter when Rose was here."

"Anybody'd think we couldn't play without her!" snapped Inez, springing to her feet, and running across the lawn.

Then realizing that she had been rude, and not wishing to offend Polly, she turned, and looking over her shoulder, she said:

"I must go home now, so I'll just hurry."

"Why, a minute ago she was sitting as still as if she intended to stay here all night!" said Vivian.

"It was what you said, Vivian, that made her run off," said Leslie.

"What did I say?" questioned Vivian.

"Oh, you said it was nicer to have Rose with us," explained Leslie.

"She's likely to hear us talk of Rose whenever she comes here," said Polly.

"Then she'll stay away," said Leslie.

Polly would not say what was in her mind, but Leslie was less careful.

"Let her just stay away then!" she said, stoutly, "we love Rose, and

we're wondering how long it will be before we'll see her. She's sweeter than Inez."

Sweet Princess Polly! She would not say anything unpleasant even of Inez.

"Rose is just dear," she said, but of Inez she said nothing.

"Inez says mean things," said Vivian, "and it would be real hard to forgive her, so it's lucky she doesn't ever ask us to."

"Why Vivian!" cried Polly, "you would if she asked you to, wouldn't you?"

Vivian did not like to answer, so she only said:

"She wouldn't ask me."

Just at that moment Harry Grafton sprang over the wall, and joined the group.

"Inez Varney is waiting for you and Vivian," he said. "I was going over to call for Rob Lindsey, and just as I was passing, she asked me to tell you. I asked her why she didn't come in and wait for you here, but she only shook her head, and said; 'Oh, because.' That's a girl's reason, and it's a funny one."

Harry laughed, and then, having delivered his message, he ran down the driveway, and up the avenue to call for his chum, Rob.

He nodded to Inez as he passed her, whistling gaily as he hurried along.

"Girls are queer," he said, pausing in his whistling solo, to speak his thoughts.

"Even nice girls are queer SOMETIMES," he murmured. "Of course Princess Polly is always pleasant, and my sister Leslie isn't even odd, but Inez is freaky, and Vivian, well,--she's something like Inez."

In the garden the three little girls stood where Harry had left them.

"What shall we do?" said Leslie. "We came to play with you, Polly, what ought we to do?"

Polly's eyes had looked troubled, but now she smiled.

"Oh, go, please, and see Inez. Perhaps she truly wishes she'd been pleasant. You can come ANY time to play with me, but it's NOW that Inez feels good."

Polly's words were wise. She knew Inez to be hasty, and she thought that if, for the moment, she was sorry for her rudeness, she should have the chance to say so, before she could change her mind.

Leslie would not say so, but in truth, she did not care what Inez had to say.

Vivian was curious, and eager to know why Inez had waited so long to see them.

Inez stood at the gateway waiting for her two playmates.

Leslie said something about having to hurry home, but Vivian pausing beside Inez, waited for her to speak.

It was not pleasant to stand talking on the sunny sidewalk, and turning, they walked a little way up the driveway.

Polly questioned if Inez really might be sorry for her hasty words. Nothing could have tempted her to listen, nor was she near enough to have heard a word that they were saying, but from where she was standing, she could see Inez and Vivian. She wondered why Leslie had not remained. The shrubbery hid her, but she could see them plainly.

She saw Inez lay her hand upon Vivian's arm.

"Oh, I WISH they'd make up," whispered Princess Polly.

Then something soft rubbed against her ankles.

"Oh, darling Sir Mortimer!" she whispered, "they are ALMOST making up!"

She peeped again, daintily holding back her skirts.

"They're not smiling yet," she said softly.

"I guess we won't wait," she whispered, as she stooped to take the big cat in her arms.

"Keep still, Mortimer," she said, "I'm going to whisper right in your ear. I LIKE them all, but I LOVE Rose."

Sir Mortimer rubbed his soft head against Polly's pink cheek.

"That means that you do, too," said Polly.

CHAPTER II

A LITTLE HERO

"Tell us a story," said Lena Lindsey, and her brother echoed her words.

"Oh, Rob, what shall I tell? Lena wants a fairy tale, and you wouldn't like that; boys never do," said Polly.

"Oh, yes he would," Lena said quickly, "if it's about knights, and princes, like the one you told the other day."

"That's it," agreed Rob, "tell us one about somebody who goes out to seek his fortune."

Princess Polly dearly loved fairy tales, and on stormy days, with Sir Mortimer purring in her lap, would sit for hours reading stories of elves, and dwarfs, of splendor and enchantment.

Then, on sunny days she would tell them to her playmates, and often she spun them from her own imaginings.

"Tell us one you made up!" the children often said.

Now, while with Rob, and Lena, she sat upon the grass, and watched their eager faces, she decided to tell a new, and charming tale that would delight them. "Once upon a time," said Polly--

"That's right!" cried Rob.

Polly shook her finger to silence him, and began again.

"Once upon a time there lived a prince who was very, VERY handsome, but very poor.

"One day he found that his money was almost gone, so he took his pet horse, and started out to seek his fortune.

"He rode, and rode 'til he came to a dark forest. He was a brave prince, so he was not afraid, and rode right into the woods, and when he reached a pool, he stopped to let his horse drink,--"

"Oh, this is the interesting part where something happens, but it's so warm, I'll have to run up to the house, and get my little sunshade," said Polly.

"Wait just a minute," cried Rob, "stay just where you are, and I'll bring you one."

"Why, Rob, where'll you get it?" said Lena.

"Just you wait, and you'll see!" cried Rob, turning as he ran to say, "don't tell any more 'til I come."

"What DID he mean?" Polly asked, but Lena could not guess, and they wondered if Rob had been joking.

They had not long to wait, however, for in a few moments he came running back to them, waving a huge leaf over his head.

It proved to be a rhubarb leaf, with a red stalk.

"There!" he cried, "I went over home on purpose to get this for you."

"Oh it's a big green sunshade, with a fine red handle," cried Polly,
"how pretty! Now I can tell the story."

"Yes, and you can tell it all before your sunshade WILTS!" said Lena,
with a laugh.

"That's a fine sunshade," said Rob, as he handed her the leaf.

"And Polly looks like a princess under it," said Lena.

"Now, tell the story," said Rob.

"And while his horse was drinking, a mist floated over the pool, and out
of the mist sprang a little, old witch," continued Polly, leaning
forward, and lowering her voice, to make the tale sound mysterious.

Lena and Rob bent toward her, that not a word might be lost.

"What happened?" whispered Rob.

Polly's eyes were bright.

She raised her forefinger, as she spoke.

"'Take the path to the right,' said the little, old witch, 'and KEEP to
the right, no matter how thick the forest, and you'll come to a
fountain. At the fountain you'll find a beautiful nymph, and SHE'LL tell
you what to do next.'"

"And did he?" questioned Rob, eagerly.

"Be still, Rob. Let Polly tell it," whispered Lena, laying her hand on
his arm.

"The Prince mounted his horse," continued Polly, "and just then he
noticed the little path at the right of the pool. He'd not seen it
before. He turned his horse into the path, and the horse acted as if he
knew the way, and trotted along at a fine gait.

"At last he reached the fountain, but the nymph wasn't anywhere in
sight.

"'What DID the witch tell me to say?' said the prince.

"Then a voice said:

"'Cymbrel! Cymbrel!
By a fountain or a well,
Whistle thrice, and you shall see,
A lovely nymph will come to thee!'

"Then the prince called out: 'Cymbrell! Cymbrell!' and whistled three times, and out of the fountain rose a lovely nymph. There were pearls and diamonds in her hair, and her robe was of rainbow colored mist.

"She held out her hand, and the prince sprang from his horse, and bowed low before her.

"There never was anyone so lovely as you,' said the prince, and he was--"

"Just WILD to win her," said Rob, who had been silent a long time.

"That's it," agreed Polly, "he was wild to win her, and he didn't say a word, for fear that the mist would melt, and she'd disappear.

"Then she spoke, and her voice sounded like music.

"I am enchanted," she said.

"And the prince said 'So am I_,'" said Rob.

"Oh, no he DIDN'T," laughed Polly.

"You mustn't interrupt," said Lena.

"I'm not interrupting," said Rob, "I'm only helping Princess Polly with the story, and telling how I'd have felt, if I'd been the prince."

"Well, you aren't the prince," Lena replied, "so you listen."

"When the prince looked up, and saw that the lovely nymph was smiling, he felt so strong and brave that he told her that he wanted to win her, and he asked what would--would undo, oh that ISN'T the word, but that's what he meant," said Polly, "so never mind, I'll use it. He wanted to know what would undo the enchantment.

"You can not win me until I am disenchanting. Free me, and I am yours. My enchantment must last until the ogre who dwells in this forest is killed,' whispered the nymph.

"The prince drew his sword.

"With this I will free you, and you shall be mine,' he said, and mounting his horse he rode through the forest, looking this way, and that, in search of the ogre.

"Every evening he rode back to the fountain, and there he wearily told the nymph that he had not yet found the ogre.

"She always told him to be brave, and continue the search.

"At last came a day when there was a fearful battle in the woods!"

Polly's eyes were bright, and she leaned forward in her excitement.

Her rhubarb leaf parasol had wilted, and she cast it aside.

"There was a gale that broke the great branches of the trees, and pulled up shrubs by the roots, and when the wind was blowing hardest, the ogre rushed out from his cave, right into the pathway in front of the prince's horse.

"The horse pranced, and pawed the dirt, because he was scared, but the prince was brave.

"He thought only of the beautiful nymph, and he slashed at the big ogre, and with the third blow from his sword the ogre fell dead.

"Then the prince rode back to the fountain, and there stood the nymph, only she wasn't a nymph any more, but a real, truly princess.

"She ran to meet him, and he swung her up into his saddle, and they rode back to his castle.

"There she told him that he need never leave her to seek his fortune, because she had more gold than they could ever spend, and so they lived happy ever after."

"Oh, I love to have the fairy tales end like that," said Lena, with a happy sigh.

"And when a fellow hears of a prince who is daring, he wants to start right out, and do something just as brave," said Rob, his brown eyes looking out across to the distant hills. "There isn't the chance to save nymphs, and princesses, now!"

"Oh, Rob, it doesn't matter," said Polly, "for if there was a nymph to fight for, I just KNOW you'd be brave!"

"I'm SURE I would mean to be, but I haven't had the chance to try!" said Rob, with a sudden fit of shyness, "but if it was YOU, Polly, I'd--I'd do most anything!"

"I know you would," Polly answered gently.

"That was a lovely story," said Lena, "did you make it up?"

"Yes, and I got so excited when the ogre came out, and rushed at the prince, that I was all out of breath just TELLING it," said Polly.

"And when you told about the gale you frightened me," said Lena, "because I was SURE that the ogre was coming!"

Polly had a charming way of telling her stories, and those who listened, remembered them, and thought of them again and again.

Perhaps Rob thought oftener of them, than did any other of her friends. He was very fond of Polly, and never thought of her as Polly Sherwood, but always as Princess Polly.

He would not have told his thoughts to anyone, but in his heart he longed to do something brave that she might know that he had not boasted idly, when he had said that her fairy tales had made him long to do valiant deeds.

For days after the morning spent at Sherwood Hall, Rob dreamed of the story that Polly had told.

"Oh, pshaw! Those things don't happen nowadays," he muttered, in disgust. "Not that fairy things EVER happened," he added, "but knights really lived, and they did things that proved their courage."

While Rob dreamed, and pondered over the valiant knights of old, Polly, blowing huge soap bubbles, stood in the sunlight, making them larger and larger, and laughing when they floated away on the soft breeze.

She, too, was dreaming.

The scent of the garden flowers made the air sweet, the yellow butterflies, at play in the sunshine, fluttered too near a bubble.

It burst with the touch of their soft wings, and they flew away, frightened that a clear, beautiful globe had chased them, and then so mysteriously disappeared.

Vivian Osborne watched her, and so still had she been, that Polly had almost forgotten that she was there.

Again she dipped her pipe into the bowl of suds, and gently she blew, determined to make a larger bubble than she had yet made.

How beautiful it was! The trees, the blue sky mirrored on its glossy surface, and--yes, there were the holly-hocks reflected on it, and curving to fit its globe-like form.

"Oh!" cried Vivian, "see the colors on it, blue, and pink, and green, and your house, Polly. Don't it look like a tiny castle?"

"M--m," agreed Polly, for the pipe stem between her red lips would not permit her to talk. When the bubble was as large as she dared to make it, she swung it from the pipe and they saw it sail away.

Sir Mortimer, who had been watching Polly, scampered off after the bubble. He often chased a bright, colored ball, and this he thought was the finest ball he'd ever seen.

It dropped to the grass, and just as puss reached it, it burst. Sir Mortimer stared at the place where it had vanished.

Polly and Vivian laughed at his surprise. He touched the spot with his soft paw, then, turning, trotted away, as if to let them see that the matter was beneath noticing.

"Oh, he's the dearest kitty!" cried Vivian, "blow another bubble, Polly, and blow it right at him."

Laughing at the thought of surprising Sir Mortimer, Polly blew a fine bubble, and swung it toward him.

He blinked at it, as it came nearer, and then,--oh, how they laughed, he began to back away from it.

It overtook him, however, and landed squarely on his upturned nose.

He sneezed in disgust, and rubbed his nose violently with his paw.

"Oh, Mortimer darling, I won't do it again. If you don't like soap bubbles, you needn't have them," said Polly, picking him up, and caressing him.

It was evident that he forgave her, for he at once commenced to purr.

When Vivian said that she must go, Polly walked part of the way with her for company.

"Are you truly going to visit Rose Atherton, soon? Inez Varney said you were," said Vivian.

"Oh, yes," Polly replied, "I have the invitation, and I'm to go the first week mama will let me. I may go next week. When I KNOW what day I can go, I'm to write, and tell Rose, and Rose, with her Aunt, will call for me at the station."

"Aren't you wild to go?" asked Vivian.

"Wild?" repeated Polly, "why I can hardly wait for the day. I want to see the lovely, old house, and all the fine things, but most of all, I long to see Rose."

"Well, Inez said--no, I guess I won't tell you what Inez said," Vivian paused.

Did she dislike to repeat Inez' words, or was she waiting for Polly to coax her to tell them? No one could have guessed.

Polly, thinking that Inez often spoke unpleasantly, turned toward Vivian, and laying her little hand on her arm, said:

"I guess you'd better not tell what Inez said. I won't feel any different toward Rose, if you do. I love Rose, and I'm going to visit her, and I know I'll have a fine time."

"Oh, I'm sure you will," said Vivian, and she said it as if she meant it.

"And Rose is coming to visit me," said Polly, "and when she comes, most of the girls will be glad to see her. I wish they ALL would."

"_I_ will," said Vivian, "and you'll see that I am. I'll help to make her glad that she came."

Some one came running swiftly behind them, and they turned to see who it might be.

It was Harry Grafton, breathless and excited.

"Oh, what do you think?" he cried. "Dollie Burton got almost run over, and would have, if it hadn't been for Rob Lindsey. I tell you, he's a splendid fellow, and my father saw it all, and he says it was the bravest thing he ever saw done, and he shook hands with Rob, and little Dollie is only frightened, but she's almost--"

"Why, Harry Grafton! What ARE you saying?" cried Polly.

"What has happened to Dollie?" said Vivian.

At that moment Leslie came running to tell the news.

"Only think!" she cried, "dear little Dollie Burton was almost--"

"That's what I just told them!" declared Harry, "and I'm proud just to be Rob's friend."

Polly and Vivian were as excited as Harry and his sister were, and for a few moments the four little playmates talked at the same time, and Polly at last realized that she was not getting a clear idea of what Rob had done, or what had happened to wee Dollie Burton.

At last Harry grew calmer, and, with Leslie's help, told the story.

Little Dollie had been playing in her own garden, where surely one might think that she was safe. A horse from a neighbor's stable had escaped, and went plunging down the street.

The tiny girl ran down the driveway to look after the flying horse, and just as Dollie reached the road, the horse turned, and ran wildly back in the direction whence he had come.

The little girl seemed too frightened to run, and stood still in the path of the madly racing horse.

Rob Lindsey seeing her danger, sprang out into the street, snatched her up when the animal was about to trample upon her, and bore her to safety setting her down once more in her own garden.

"My father was just coming along," said Harry, "and he saw Rob rush out into the street, and grab Dollie just in time to save her, and he says Rob stood an awful chance of being run over.

"Rob declares it wasn't much to do. He says he didn't have time to think, and be scared.

"Father took his hand, and just told him that that was the brave part of it. He told Rob that a coward would have thought only of himself.

"I tell you, he's a hero, as much as those we read of.

"Mrs. Burton says that she can not say enough to tell how she feels, when she thinks that little Dollie is alive, and unhurt, and all because of Rob!"

"There he is now," cried Leslie.

"Oh, everyone run along. I want to speak to him just a minute myself," said Polly, and, as usual, they obeyed.

Very shyly Rob approached. He felt that he was receiving too much praise from everyone, and yet--a word of approval from Princess Polly, ah, that would be worth much!

"Rob," she said, when the others had walked along, "Rob, don't ever say again that you'd LIKE to be brave. You ARE brave!"

"She wasn't a nymph, and I wasn't a prince," said the boy, blushing.

"You're as brave as any prince in any fairy tale I ever read," said Polly, and Rob wondered who would care for greater reward than that.

CHAPTER III

POLLY VISITS ROSE

At last the day came when Polly was to make the little trip that would begin at the station in her own town, and end at a place, some miles distant, where, when the train stopped, she would see Rose waiting for her.

She thought it would seem finer to go quite alone, but Mrs. Sherwood would not permit that.

"The maid must ride with you, and remain beside you until Rose and her aunt meet you. Then, she can return on the next train," she had said, and Polly knew it was useless to object.

And when, at last, the excitement of saying "good-bye" was over, and the train had already left the little town far behind, Polly settled back in her seat, and fell to dreaming.

The thought of little Dollie, frightened, but unhurt, of Rob who had so bravely saved her, of Lena's pride in Rob, flitted through her mind. It would be a pleasant bit of news to tell Rose.

Then she began to think of Great-Aunt Rose, and to wonder how she looked.

"Rose has told me in her letter that she's a handsome old lady, but that isn't like seeing her. How ever SHALL I know her? Oh, of course, I will. She'll be with Rose."

The maid, who had taken the seat behind Polly, reached forward, and touched her shoulder.

"You're not getting drowsy, are you, Miss Polly?" she asked, "we're almost there."

A gay little laugh answered her question.

"How COULD I go to sleep on the way to see Rose?" she asked, "and how near are we now?"

"The next station, but one," said the maid, "and I'll begin to gather up the bag, and suit case."

"The next but one!" cried Polly, and she sat up very straight, and looked from the window. Was the town where Rose lived as pretty as this?

There were great trees that cast long shadows, and here, and there a glimpse of a river that reflected the blue sky, and the floating clouds. There were fine houses with spacious lawns, and lovely gardens, and over all the sunlight playing, and Polly felt that she was riding into an enchanted country, over which Rose, and Great-Aunt Rose presided.

Polly did not notice what the brakeman said, but the maid did, and she spoke quickly.

"Come, Miss Polly, here we are, and we'll do well to get off right now before folks crowd toward the door. By the looks I think everyone means to stop here!"

It certainly looked as if the maid had spoken truly, for men reached for parcels that had been stowed in bundle racks, and women commenced to gather up hand bags, and wraps.

Polly wondered if anyone intended to remain in the car.

She slipped from the seat to the floor, and then, just as they stopped at the station, she turned and peeped from the window.

"Oh, there she is! There she is!" she cried, "and she's in a fine carriage with an old lady that looks like a portrait in our drawing room. Look! Look!"

"We can't stop to look," said the maid, "or we'll be left on the train."

"Oh, we CAN'T stay!" cried Polly, as she hurried toward the door.

She could not imagine anything more dreadful than to be detained on the train, and ride on, and on, while Rose would find no little friend to welcome.

She alarmed the maid by rushing down the steps, and across the platform, and she almost took Great-Aunt Rose's breath away, when she flew at Rose, and the two little girls embraced laughing, and yes, crying just a little at the same time.

A slender figure, a huge picturesque hat, and a mass of curling, flaxen hair, were all that Aunt Rose had seen, but now hand in hand, they were coming toward the carriage.

"A lovely face, surely," murmured Great-Aunt Rose, "a sweet, and lovely face."

"This is Princess Polly," said Rose, "and Polly, dear, this is my Great-Aunt Rose."

Aunt Rose, as she preferred to be called, offered her hand to Polly, who now stood beside the carriage. "I am so glad to see you, my dear," said the gentle old voice, and so cordially was it said, that Polly blushed, and smiled with delight.

She afterward told Lena Lindsey that she felt as if Aunt Rose were her own aunt, and that she had ALWAYS known her.

The ride to the house was along an avenue shaded with huge, old elm trees, and when they drew up at the house, Polly looked with round eyes at its grand, old portico, its great pillars, its terraces, and masses of lovely flowers.

Rose had said that the house was fine, but that had not told half the beauty of the grand, old mansion.

They sprang from the carriage, and Rose begged that she might run upstairs with Polly just a moment before lunch.

"I want to show her my room," she said, and Aunt Rose smiled, and nodded assent.

"Oh, Polly, Princess Polly!" she said, when they reached the pretty chamber, "it is so long since we've played together, and now--now I have you, all to myself. See the queer bed, with the canopy over it. The

first night I came, I was afraid to sleep in it. Now, I like it, and to-night we'll cuddle close together in it, and draw the curtains."

"Oh, what fun!" cried Polly, "and we can play we're in a castle, and no one can enter, unless we let them!"

"Oh, yes, and we'll stay awake, oh, ever so long, just to talk," said Rose.

And when Polly had seen everything in the chamber that Rose wished to show, they ran down to the parlor to see the portraits.

"I'd like to see them all," said Polly, "but most of all I want to see the picture of the old gentleman that sometimes smiles at you."

Together they ran down the stairway to the parlor.

How cool it was! Vines that hung upon the piazza shaded the windows, and flickering sunbeams danced upon the polished floor, and brightened the color of the Persian rug.

The portraits seemed to look with interest at Polly, and she smiled back at them, and nodded as she passed them.

"They look like real people," she said, "and it doesn't seem polite to pass them without nodding."

"I know it," agreed Rose, "and I nod and smile at them, but the picture at the end of the room smiles more than the others do. Come, and see him."

Together they stood looking at the little old gentleman.

Polly admired his flowered satin waistcoat, his powdered wig, and rosy cheeks, but most of all she liked his merry, twinkling eyes.

"He DOES smile," said Polly.

"Yes, he does," agreed Rose, "but now, just for a moment, frown, and then he doesn't SEEM to smile."

It was an odd sight, the two merry little faces puckered into an attempt at a frown, and the old portrait looking down at them, as if in surprise that their smiles had vanished.

"Now, let's both smile together!" cried Rose.

Immediately two pairs of merry eyes looked up at him, and two red mouths smiled, and showed rows of pearly teeth.

"There!" said Polly, "he ALMOST laughed, and that dimple in his chin looked DIMPLER than before."

"That's what I told you," said Rose, "and sometimes, when I'm lonesome, he's a comfort."

At lunch Aunt Rose talked much with Polly, and gentle Aunt Lois seemed charmed with the little guest.

When lunch was over, Aunt Rose left the little playmates to amuse themselves, because she felt sure that Polly must have a budget of news to tell, and they certainly would enjoy their bit of gossip better, if no older person listened.

They spent the afternoon in the garden, walking along, their arms about each other's waists.

Later they would care for games, but this first day was delightful just to talk together.

They passed a little arbor, and Polly stopped to admire it.

Just as she looked up at the vine that blossomed on its roof, a strange little face peeped over the hedge, then dodged out of sight.

"Who was that?" Polly asked.

"Who? Where?"

"Just behind the hedge," whispered Polly.

Rose looked, and in an opening at the lower part of the hedge she saw a bit of a dark gray frock.

"Oh, it's Evangeline Longfellow Jenks, the little girl that's going to be a poet," whispered Rose.

"But you said her poetry was funny," said Polly, as softly as Rose had spoken.

"It IS" declared Rose, "but she keeps writing it all the time."

Just then Evangeline's round, white face again appeared above the hedge, and at that moment Aunt Rose came out on the porch.

"Come over here, Evangeline," she said kindly, "and meet our little guest."

"I'm not dressed up," said the voice behind the hedge, "but I've just made a poem, and I can read it from here!"

Without waiting to be urged, and in a thin, high-pitched voice, she read these lines, which she earnestly believed were beautiful:

"Oh, the sun is shining,
And the moon is near by;

I can't see the moon,
But it's in the sky-
Somewhere.

"I need no sun or moon;
I'll be a poet soon.
I write every day
Some kind of a lay-
Somewhere."

"What DOES she mean?" whispered Polly.

"I don't think it means ANYTHING, but she enjoys making up verses whether they mean anything or not," Rose whispered in reply.

Polly was anxious to see what the little girl looked like who felt that she was to be a poet, but Evangeline Longfellow Jenks did not intend to be seen in an ordinary frock.

She felt that her position as a future poet demanded that she be finely dressed.

On this especial morning she had been doing a very unpoetic thing--she had been trying to drink from the hose!

Her skirts were completely soaked, and her shoes were covered with mud that the dripping hose had splashed up from the garden bed.

"A person like ME ought not to drink from a horrid old hose. My mama read about some one, I've forgotten who, who drank from a crystal chalice. I don't know what that is, but it sounds grand, and I wish I had one," murmured the small girl behind the hedge.

Aunt Rose repeated her invitation, but the poetic child seldom thought it necessary to be polite, and never replied unless she chose to. This time she remained silent, and Aunt Rose, with an odd little smile returned to the house.

Then a strange thing happened.

Another face peeped over the hedge, but this time it was a saucy one, with bright, brown eyes that fairly danced with merriment.

"Reg'lar ninny, ain't she?" he asked, with a chuckle.

"Oh, Lester, you MUSTN'T!" cried Rose.

"Yes, I must!" said the boy. "She sneaked off into the house when you weren't looking, so she can't hear me, and when she's too far off to hear, I have to call her some kind of a horrid name, 'cause it helps me some!"

"But she's your own cousin, and you oughtn't, you know. If it isn't

wicked, it MUST be naughty to call her a ninny," said Rose.

"I wish she wasn't my cousin, I ain't fond of her," said the boy, with a frown on his handsome face.

"She did a mean thing this morning, and I'll get even with her," he continued, "and when she wrote one of her everlasting old poems about me, it was more than I could stand. Just read it and I guess you won't blame me."

He thrust a crumpled bit of paper over the hedge.

Rose ran to the hedge, and took the paper. She was curious to know what kind of a poem Lester had inspired.

Who could blame her that she laughed when she read the ridiculous lines?

"Lester's a boy, but he's not brave;
The cat scratched him, and he cried.
He's not the kind of a boy I like
Although I've often tried.

His eyes are brown, but I don't care;
His freckles are yellow, and so is his hair.
He teases, so he has no heart,
And he runs after the old ice-cart."

"Could a fellow stand THAT? said Lester, his cheeks very red.

"It wasn't nice," said Rose, "and Lester, wait a moment," as the boy turned to go.

"This is Polly Sherwood, my best friend. Polly, this is Lester Jenks. He's a nice boy, only he's provoked this morning."

Polly offered her little hand over the hedge, and Lester blushed, and took it.

"Are you the little princess?" he asked bluntly.

"Just a make-believe one," said Polly.

"We all call her 'Princess Polly' at home," Rose explained.

"You look right to be called that anywhere," said Lester, and it was Polly's turn to blush.

"I'd like to come over some day," he said.

"Come NOW," said Rose.

"I wish I could, but I can't," said the boy. "I've an errand to do for my aunt, and I ought to go now. I'll come some other day, perhaps to-

morrow. I've some money, and I'd like to treat."

He looked admiringly at Polly, and Rose was delighted.

"He's ever so much fun," she said, when Lester had gone to do the errand that he had spoken of.

"He lives the next house to Evangeline," she continued, "and he's awfully tired of her poetry."

Polly did not wonder at that.

"And I DO hope, when he comes, Evangeline won't come with him," said Rose.

"So do I," agreed Polly, "only it may be that she's nice SOMETIMES."

Rose came closer, and looking straight into Polly's blue eyes, she said:

"She brings her old poetry book EVERY time!"

"Oh, dear, can't she leave it at home?" said Polly.

"She WON'T," said Rose, "and she's either writing in it, or reading it all the time, so there's not a minute for play."

"Doesn't she care for 'Tag' or 'Hide-and-Seek?'" questioned Polly.

"She doesn't EVER like anything but that poetry," declared Rose.

"Oh, dear," sighed Polly, for she felt that if Evangeline were to come often, she would spoil much of the visit that, without her, would be so pleasant.

"We'll be out sometimes," said Rose, "for Aunt Rose will take us about, and we're to go to the studio some day when Aunt Lois goes. I've been there, and the pictures are lovely, and some days we shall drive, and then if she comes she won't find us."

"If she'll come on the days that we're OUT, and stay away the days that we're at home, it will be just FINE!"

"Oh, Rose, I believed it's naughty, but I would be glad if it happened, just HAPPENED that way," Polly said.

CHAPTER IV

THE VILLAGE NUISANCE

At Sherwood Hall Polly was greatly missed, and her playmates felt less interest in their games now that she was not with them.

In all the village there was no one so lonely as Aunt Judith. She missed the merry chatter of happy, cheery Rose. Bright, and merry she had been, even although there were many things that she longed for, and could not have, most of all, some one to love her.

Now, as Aunt Judith busied herself about the cottage, or out in the tiny garden, she realized how much the child's hands had helped.

"She used to dust for me," she would say to herself, as she moved about the tiny sitting room, putting it in order.

"She always fed the chickens," she murmured, one morning, on her way out to the coop.

She stooped to open the door, when a shrill voice shouted at her.

"Look out! Look out! The ol' rooster's mad!"

Aunt Judith was startled, and Gyp was delighted.

"Why were you meddling with the hens?" she asked, in quick wrath.

"Don't hurt 'em to be watched, does it?" was the saucy answer.

Aunt Judith looked at the imp-like figure astride the fence.

"You're a nuisance!" she cried, "I wish the town was rid of you!" "Ding-te-ding-te-dingle-te-ding!" sang Gyp, in an almost ear-splitting solo.

"Ding-te-ding--I tell ye what, if ye put jest the tip of yer finger between them slats, that 'ere ol' rooster 'll bite it almost off'n yer!" he remarked, "I know, 'cause I TRIED it."

"You keep your fingers away from the coop, and yourself out of my yard," cried Aunt Judith, "or I'll have you arrested."

"Wow!" shrieked Gyp, and slipping from the fence, he ran to the woods, lest Aunt Judith should immediately put her threat into effect.

The one, and only thing that Gyp feared was a policeman.

A wild little ragamuffin, living in an old hut that was home only in name, with parents as ignorant as himself, he was viewed with contempt by every child in the town, and feared by them, as well.

There was nothing that he dared not do--if no policeman were in sight.

It was well known by everyone that when Gyp once became interested in anything, he would not let it alone until something occurred that he thought more attractive.

Aunt Judith, shading her eyes with her hand, waited until she felt sure that Gyp did not intend to return. Then locking the door, and closing the windows, she made her way down the avenue toward the parsonage.

She felt unusually lonely, and the parson's wife was always glad to see her.

The walk was a long one, and when Aunt Judith had reached the parsonage, she paused for a moment to enjoy the light breeze before opening the little gate. "I saw you coming," said a pleasant voice, "and I guess you felt the heat on the way. Come in, and sit down under the big maple trees. It's cooler than it is in the house."

As she spoke, the parson's wife took Aunt Judith's arm, and led her to a rustic seat, and seating herself beside her, commenced to talk of bits of parish news.

Aunt Judith's mind was far away with Rose, and her answers became more, and more wide of the mark.

"I think the boys of the choir sing BEAUTIFULLY," chirped the little woman, "but they really should have new cotta's, but the society feels that it really can't afford it."

"Yes'm," said Aunt Judith.

"And there are some that think we ought to have an organist. Mrs. Bingley volunteers to play until we're able to hire some one, but she isn't much of a player. She says she can't play any music unless it's written in ONE flat. She says it's the only key she knows. She says two flats make her uneasy, but THREE flats makes her simply WILD!"

"Well, if I DON'T let them out of the coop they'll be sick, and if I DO let them out, they're likely to get lost."

The parson's wife stared uneasily at Aunt Judith. Then thinking that she must have been needlessly startled, she again spoke.

"As I said before, what makes her WILD is three flats," she said.

"But the chicken-coop is ALL slats," said Aunt Judith, "what DO you mean by THREE?"

"Don't you feel well?" the little woman asked anxiously, leaning toward Aunt Judith, and looking up into her shrewd face.

"Why, yes," Aunt Judith replied, "only I'm lonesome without Rose, and some anxious about the hens."

A sigh of relief escaped the other woman's lips, but she did not explain.

"She's so worried about her own affairs that she simply didn't notice what I was talking about," she thought.

Realizing that Aunt Judith's mind was so full of her own interests that, for the time, she could think of nothing else, she dropped church matters, and asked when she had heard from Rose.

And while in the cool shade of the large trees, they talked of the tiny cottage, its garden, the chickens, and most of all, Rose, matters near the hen-coop were becoming rather lively.

Aunt Judith watching to see if Gyp intended to return, did not dream that he was watching her.

He saw her enter the cottage, and waited until she left the house to saunter down the avenue.

Then he ran across the little open field from the wood, and, crouching behind the back fence, near the coop, again waited until he felt sure that she was not simply in the house of some neighbor, but, instead, had gone to the "square."

Then springing over the fence like a monkey, he told a few facts to the old rooster.

"Ye're a mean ol' thing!" he cried, "jest a mean ol' critter ter bite a feller's finger like ye did mine. I'll pay yer fer what ye done! Look at this, an' see how ye like it!"

At that moment, and to the utter astonishment of the rooster, and his family, Gyp sprang up and down in a series of wild jumps, shouting, and yelling to the limit of his strength.

"Yow-ow! Hoop-high-jinks!" shrieked Gyp, his wiry arms, and legs flying in more directions than seemed possible, his shoes, that were many sizes too large for him, clattering on the hard-trodden earth of the hen-yard.

"How-re-ow-re-ow!" he roared, dodging this way, and that, in order to keep directly in front of the frightened rooster.

The rooster ducked, and dodged in vain, for Gyp managed to do his outrageous dance exactly in front of him, wherever he might be.

The hens kept up a perpetual squawking, and ran wildly about, while the downy chicks huddled in fear under the huge leaves of a burdock plant, and uttered little frightened peeps that, however, were unheard in the din that Gyp and the hens created.

Then suddenly something happened.

With a wild whoop, and an extra high jump, he lost his balance, and fell against the little gate.

He was not hurt, but he was surprised, and, for a moment, sat absolutely still, while the hens, led by the big rooster, ran over him, and out into the field beyond.

"I s'pose she'll say I let 'em out. I DID, an' I DIDN'T!" he said with a chuckle.

"Long's they're out, they might as well have a good run for once," he cried, and shouting "Shoo! Shoo!" and brandishing his arms, he rushed after them.

When he had tired of chasing the hens, he hurried away to the other end of the avenue, with the bright idea of learning if there might be a chance for mischief there.

A fine kite disappeared from Harry Grafton's lawn, a ball that Rob Lindsey had been playing with could not be found, while at Sherwood Hall the lawn mower was searched for, and discovered in the brook.

Old Martin dragged it forth, remarking as he did so:

"It looks like the work of old Nick, or that wild lad, Gyp."

No one had seen Gyp around the place, but, for the matter of that, no one had seen him flying a kite, or playing with a ball.

The articles had disappeared, however, and, as usual, everyone thought Gyp the culprit.

"It took work, and time to make that kite," said Harry, "I wouldn't think any one would be mean enough to take it."

"Unless it was Gyp," said Rob, "he's mean enough for anything, and I wouldn't wonder if the same chap that went off with your kite, took my ball along at the same time."

Both boys were urged to hunt carefully before accusing any one, but thorough search failed to bring forth either kite or ball.

Then Leslie missed a book that she had left on the piazza, and Dollie Burton lost her loviest doll.

Poor little Dollie! She could not be comforted, and promises of a new doll caused a fresh outburst of tears. It wouldn't be the same one that she had loved so, and she refused to have a new one until later, when her grief would be less fresh.

It was in vain that Blanche told her that a new doll would be as dear as the old one, the little girl refused to play, and her cherub face looked very sad, the dimples failing to show, because the smiles would not appear.

"That bad boy, Gyp, has took it," she wailed.

"Oh, Dollie, he might take a kite, or a ball from Harry, and Rob, but he wouldn't want a doll! Just think! What would HE do with a doll?"

"He's got little sisters, you said he had," Dollie replied, "p'raps he stole it for them. I wouldn't care if he'd just took my old one, but he was a bad boy to take my best one. I'll tell him so! You'll see!"

It was a baby's threat, and Blanche did not dream that her wee sister would do anything of the sort.

Dollie had a good memory, however, and Gyp sometimes passed the house.

She was as determined as any older child might have been, to give Gyp the scolding that she thought he deserved.

Oddly enough, he passed the house the next morning.

His restless black eyes were looking furtively about as if in search of something that he might snatch. Little Dollie, for the moment, had forgotten the lost doll.

With a long, flowering branch in her hand, she was walking up and down the driveway, looking more like a doll than anything else, in her dainty frock, her white socks, and bronze slippers.

"Sing a song o' sixpence, A pocket full of rye,--"

"Oh, YOU, YOU--wait for me!" In her wrath, the wee girl had forgotten his name.

Gyp stood still, and waited, open mouthed, while Dollie ran toward him.

He thought her the loveliest thing he had ever seen, and wondered that she wished to speak to him.

"You naughty, BAD boy!" she cried, striking at him with the flowering branch. "Naughty, BAD boy! You bring it back to me!"

Again the flowers hit him, but they gave nothing worse than a love pat.

"What'll I bring ye?" he asked awkwardly, "I ain't got anything you'd want. Ye look like them fairies I've read 'bout."

[Illustration with caption: "Ye've lost yer dolly, hev ye?"]

"DIDN'T you take my best doll?" she asked, her anger gone, and her red lips trembling.

Two big tears ran down the pink cheeks.

Then the strangest thing happened. Gyp, the imp, the one who apparently had no feeling, stooped, and peeping into the lovely little face, spoke

very gently:

"Ye've lost yer dolly, hev ye? I ain't seen it, but I'll try ter find it for yer."

"Oh, WILL you?" she cried, smiling through her tears, "then I'm sorry I whipped you with this branch, and come! Let's bofe of us hunt together."

She offered him her little hand, and very carefully he took it.

He walked as if on air. Who else had ever offered him a hand? Who had ever spoken kindly? This lovely little girl had smiled at him, and had wished to be with him while he searched.

How he worked!

Like a little wild creature he crawled under shrubs, and, using his fingers like claws, tugged at grass, and twigs, as if his only interest were to find the doll.

"Was yer near the brook when ye was playin' with it?" asked Gyp.

"Oh, oh, I WAS, but I'd forgotten it. Didn't anyone hunt there! Let's go, quick, maybe we'll find her!"

She gave him a sunny smile, and in delight, he again took the wee hand she offered him, and together the ragged boy, and the wee, dainty girl hurried away to the brook.

It was a bit of the same brook that ran through the garden at Sherwood Hall.

Just as they reached the brook something backed up from the water's edge.

"Oh, Beauty! Beauty! What ARE you doing?" cried Dollie.

The puppy growled, and continued dragging something up the little bank.

"Here Mr. Puppy! Gim me that!" cried Gyp.

"Why, it's my lovely Aurora!" cried Dollie, dancing wildly about.

Gyp, fearless because the little dog was only a pup, tugged at the body of the doll, while Beauty held firmly to its pink skirt.

The muslin frock gave way under the strain, and the puppy, with a bit of the muslin in his mouth, rolled over on the grass, while Gyp, doubting if the bedraggled doll would be accepted, held it out, dripping, for Dollie to look at.

"IS it the doll what ye lost?" he asked.

"Oh, yes; yes it is," cried Dollie, "and I love her just as much as I did before she was drowned!"

Regardless of her own dainty frock, she hugged the dripping doll to her breast.

"You're a GOOD boy to help me," she said, "I said I was sorry I hit you, and I am. I just WISH I hadn't."

"I'd rather ye'd hit me, than any other person touch me," Gyp muttered, and then, for fear that someone at the house might SEND him off, he turned, and ran away. Little Dollie looked after him.

"I wonder if he heard me SAY he was good," she whispered.

Then with soft eyes she looked at the vanishing figure.

"He 'most always ISN'T good, but this time he was," she said.

Beauty, like most little dogs, had a habit of running off with any article that he could snatch, and hiding it.

Tiring of the doll he had dropped it in the brook, and then, when he happened to remember it, had dragged it forth, intending, doubtless, to give it another good shaking.

CHAPTER V

THE LITTLE GREEN DOOR

Dear little Dollie Burton's warm, loving heart had been touched, and she eagerly told everyone how Gyp had helped to find her dear Aurora.

"You see, Rob," she said, one day, "he's SOME naughty, but he ISN'T all naughty. Mama always says: 'Wait 'fore you 'cuse anyone,' but I didn't wait. I just 'cused him as hard as I could, and NOW I'm sorry."

"Oh, you're a trump, Dollie," said Rob.

"Is a 'trump' a nice thing to be?" questioned the wee girl.

"The best thing in the world," Rob declared laughing.

"Well, I didn't know," the little girl replied, "'cause when Nora's cleaning closets, and finds old things, mama says: 'Take that trumpery out to the waste barrel,' and you say trump isn't same as trumpery."

"Guess not! Dollie, you're the best little girl I know," said Rob, to which Dollie replied: "And you're the bestest boy _I_ know."

The news flew through the neighborhood that Gyp had found the doll.

"Well, that's one decent thing he did," said Rob Lindsey, "and I s'pose there's just a chance that he didn't take my ball, or your kite, but who else would do it?"

"Sure enough," said Harry Grafton, "who else would?"

Vivian and Blanche, with Lena Lindsey, were walking with their arms about each other's waists. It was really too warm to play, but it was never too warm to talk.

"Just think," said Vivian, "when Polly is here, we play no matter how hot it is."

"Yes, except when we coax her to tell us some stories," said Lena. "She's fun to play with, because when we're tired of the old games, she can always make up a new one," said Vivian.

And while Polly's friends were talking lovingly of her, she had been telling Rose many pleasant things of the playmates that both so well knew.

It was only for a moment that they talked of their little friends, however, because both were anticipating a trip to an artist's studio, where they would see beautiful pictures, and where Aunt Lois was to sit for her portrait.

Aunt Rose had gone to spend the day with a friend, and Aunt Lois, thinking it hardly kind to leave the two little girls at home, had decided to take them with her.

"He's a fine artist, and one who has painted portraits of many distinguished people. I hardly know if he is greatly interested in children, but he surely will be willing that you should enjoy his pictures, if you make no noise, and do not talk to disturb him," she had said.

"Oh, if we may see the pictures, we'll promise not to make the least bit of noise," said Rose, speaking very loudly that Aunt Lois, who was quite deaf, might hear.

"Guess what he looks like," said Rose, as they walked along beside Aunt Lois.

"Oh, I think he will be tall, and slender, with dark eyes, and wavy hair, and he'll bow like this, when he lets us in," Polly said, pausing on the sidewalk to make a very low bow.

"I don't believe he'll bow like that," said Rose, "because he's such a GREAT artist. He'll feel pretty big. I guess he's not very light, or very dark, but I think he'll be tall and SOME stout. Don't you know how

the lawyer that lives on our street looks? Just as if he owned all the houses on the avenue. "_I_ think he'll give us a teenty little bow like this," and she gave a jerky little nod, "but I think he'll be quite nice to us after we are in."

"This way," said Aunt Lois, and they crossed the street, and stopped before a quaint looking building. The massive oak door boasted a huge knocker, in the form of a frowning lion's head that held a huge brass ring.

Aunt Lois lifted the ring, and let it fall clattering against the door.

The little girls wondered if the artist would be angry. COULD that knocker have made less noise?

Aunt Lois was so very deaf that she did not realize what a din she had made, and smiled serenely as she stood waiting.

Polly was just wondering if the artist were too offended to respond, when the door opened, and a tall, sturdy man, with his palette and brushes in his hand, welcomed them.

"Ah, you have come for your sitting, and you are prompt," he said.

"I endeavored to be on time," said Aunt Lois, "and, because my sister is away I've brought Rose and our little guest with me. I can promise that they will not in any way disturb you. Rose has often been here with me, but this is her little friend, Polly Sherwood."

Mr. Arthur Kirtland welcomed her very graciously, and urged her to enjoy, with Rose, the pictures that hung upon the studio walls, stood upon easels, and around the room.

"We'll walk about very softly, and may we go into the little room where the lovely children are, Mr. Kirtland?" Rose asked.

"Oh, surely," he answered quickly, "you may like the child studies best."

He meant what he said, and he also thought that if they were pleased with the pictures in the little room that led from the main studio, it would be quite as well.

True, a large screen kept both artist and sitter apart from the rest of the studio, but Arthur Kirtland liked to be wholly alone, and undisturbed while painting a portrait, and he was very glad when the children tired of the pictures in the large studio, and went out into the small room.

"He didn't look like what you guessed, did he?" said Rose, when together they seated themselves in the little room.

"No, not a bit, and the reason you could guess what he was like was

because you'd seen him," said Polly, "and when he made the funny little bow just as you did, I almost laughed."

"I don't wonder he struts when he walks. Just think who he's painted! Two dukes, one is that man with the red hair, and the eyes that laugh at you. It's out in the big room," said Rose, "don't you remember it?"

"Yes, but I like the big lady in velvet, and lace, that hangs next to him," said Polly.

"That's his wife, Mr. Kirtland said so," said Rose.

"Oh, would you think a lovely lady like that would marry a man with red hair?" said Polly.

"P'raps she liked red hair," Rose said, "and Polly, did you ever see anything so cunning as that picture of a little girl with her hands full of roses?"

Polly thought the picture charming, and together they walked around the little room enjoying flower studies, sketches, and finished pictures of children, until Polly espied a small door.

"Oh, see that funny little door!" she whispered, "where does that lead to? Is it a closet door, do you suppose?"

"Oh, no, that's not a closet," Rose replied, "I've often seen it open. Just outside it is a wee little garden just big enough to hold some fine holly-hocks. I'll show you. 'Most always the door is open."

"Open it softly. He wouldn't like it if we made a noise," whispered Polly.

Rose turned the latch very gently, and opened the door a few inches. A flood of golden sunlight swept in, and just outside the tall holly-hocks in gorgeous coloring swayed in the soft breeze.

"Hear them rustle just as if they were paper flowers," whispered Polly. "Oh, it's lovely out there."

"Let's go out just a little way."

"All right," agreed Rose, "come out, and I'll shut the door," and Polly followed her out into the sunlight.

"Oh, you didn't latch the door," said Polly.

"Oh, dear! I meant to," said Rose, "but it isn't MUCH open. If I go back, and pull it real hard to make it latch it'll make a noise, and Mr. Kirtland won't like it. We won't stay out long, so it doesn't matter."

"When we DO go back, let's sit on that little sofa in the corner. That's a cosy place."

"All right," agreed Rose, and together they walked up and down the little path that led from the tiny, side door to the street.

"The studio is grand, and the people he's painted look as if they could speak, if they chose," said Polly, "but somehow it made me feel queer to see them all looking at me."

"And once I peeped over my shoulder and that man in the hunting costume had his eyes right on me," said Rose, "and I turned my head away. When I turned again, he looked as if he'd speak, and if he DID, I just know he'd say: 'I'm still looking at you, Rose Atherton; you can't dodge ME!'"

"I do truly love the pictures," Polly said, "but I never saw so many all at once, and I didn't feel queer about them, until we'd been with them quite a while. I guess we'd feel different if somebody had been talking. It was still and cool in there, and did you notice? The corners in the little room were shady and almost dark."

"He doesn't speak, after he really begins to paint," said Rose. "He says: 'Turn a bit this way Miss Lois. No, not quite so much, that's it. Now hold that pose, please,' and then he doesn't speak again until he stops painting.

"At first he said Aunt Lois could rest often, but she doesn't care to. She says it's easy to sit in the big carved chair. I'd be wild to sit still so long!"

"Hello!" a merry voice shouted, and they turned toward the street.

It was Lester Jenks. He was beckoning to them, and they ran out to the sidewalk.

"What ye' doing here?" he asked.

"Aunt Lois is having her portrait painted, and we came with her, and we're just waiting 'til she's ready to go home."

"Oh, then I'll tell you what let's do. Let's have some ice cream! I said I'd treat some day, and I know a nice place. Come!" urged the boy, but they hesitated.

"Don't you want to?" he asked.

"Oh, yes!" they cried, "but we ought to ask Aunt Lois," said Rose, "and we can't. Mr. Kirtland is painting, and he hasn't said a single word for ever so long. It's so still in there that it makes you feel as if you ALMOST mustn't breathe. I wouldn't dare to run right in and ask Aunt Lois!"

"Why, you don't have to. We'll just skip over to the ice cream parlor, and we'll be back long before he's done painting. Come along! If you

don't, I'll think you don't want to, and that isn't nice when I've asked you," said Lester. "Oh, dear, it isn't polite to let him think that when I'm wild to go, and I just KNOW Polly is," thought Rose.

"Are you SURE it won't take us long to go, and get back?" Polly asked.

"Oh, it's just a step!" said Lester.

"There's a nice little old lady keeps the place, and she gives you awful big ice creams for five cents. You have 'em on a marble table in her little parlor. There's a green carpet on the floor, and the room is awful cool. Oh, come on! I wish you would."

The invitation was not elegantly expressed, but it certainly was CORDIAL.

"I guess we'll have to go," said Rose, "would you, Polly?"

"I'd like to," was the reply.

"Then come!" said Lester, "we'll be there and back here before anyone would guess you'd been even outside that door."

They waited for no more urging, and together the three little friends ran across the street, through a side street, and down a broad avenue.

"It's just a little farther down this way," said Lester.

"Why it's ever so far from the studio, Lester Jenks, and you SAID we'd just skip to it," said Rose, breathlessly.

"Well, aren't we skipping?" he said with a laugh, "we run a few steps, and then you and Polly skip along a little way, and then you run again."

Rose was just wondering if they ought to turn back without the little treat, when Lester caught her hand, saying:

"Here we are," and he boldly opened the door.

A tiny bell tinkled as the door closed behind them, and a little, white haired old lady came out to greet them.

"We want some ice cream, these ladies and me," said Lester, trying to look as tall as possible, and hoping that she did not notice that he was wearing knee breeches. He thought that no one would dream that he was a small boy if only they could not see those knee breeches that he so heartily despised.

The old lady served the cream in dainty glasses, and heaped it high in a tiny pile that really amounted to little, but looked great--for five cents.

"How cool and dark it is in here," said Rose.

"It is a lovely place to eat ice cream in," said Polly.

The strawberry ice cream was very, very pink, and they thought it delicious.

"Do you think we've been gone long, YET, Lester?" questioned Rose.

"Of course not," said Lester, but Rose wished that he would eat his cream a little faster.

When the tiny glasses were quite empty Lester bought a package of candy for his friends, and having paid for the treat, opened the door for them to pass out onto the sidewalk.

"Why it looks different," said Polly, "is it cloudy, since we went in there?" But the sky showed no clouds. Then where had the bright sunlight gone?

"Oh, I b'lieve it's late!" cried Rose, "do you s'pose it is? It was long after lunch when we started for the studio, oh, ever so long after. We staid there looking at the pictures for hours, I guess, and then we came with you, Lester."

"It CAN'T be late," the boy replied, although he truly believed that it was.

"We could go back a shorter way than the one we came. Shall we?" he asked.

"Oh, yes, yes!" cried Rose, "we must get there before Aunt Lois is ready to go. If Mr. Kirtland is still painting we can go in softly by the little side door, and wait until it is time to go."

Lester led the way, and the three children ran down one street, and up another, until at last they paused for breath.

"This short way seems longer than the way we came!" ventured Polly.

"We AREN'T lost, are we?" cried Rose.

"I turned into the wrong street when we started," admitted Lester, "but it's only a little way now."

"Then let's hurry just that little way," said Rose.

She clasped Polly's hand, and again they ran on, and after a few moments, Lester cried: "There it is!"

Sure enough! There was the clump of holly-hocks, and close beside it, the little green door.

CHAPTER VI

AT THE STUDIO

"Good-bye, good-bye!" they cried to Lester, "and thank you, oh thank you, but we must hurry!"

Lester waved his cap to them, and then raced down the avenue.

Then, treading softly, they ran along the little path, past the holly-hocks, and--the little green door was closed.

"Oh, Rose!" gasped Polly, but Rose had grasped the knob, and found that while the door looked to be closed, it had only been swung to with the breeze.

She pushed it open, and noiselessly they entered.

Softly they crept across the floor, Polly clinging to Rose's hand, and when they had reached the little divan, they sat down, and for a moment, neither spoke.

They still clasped hands, and when Polly looked toward the doorway that led into the large studio, Rose looked that way too.

From where they sat, they could not see either the painter or his model.

Polly leaned toward Rose.

"Doesn't he EVER talk when he's painting?" she whispered.

Rose shook her head.

"I 'most always bring a book with me, and while Aunt Lois is posing, I read stories," she whispered in reply.

Then for a time neither spoke.

The old clock out in that other room ticked to prove that all was not silent, but it made the waiting children more lonely.

They could not see its face, but after what seemed a long time, it chimed a single note.

"Oh, dear! That's only a half hour. I thought it was going to strike," whispered Rose, "and then we'd have known what time it was."

"Don't you dare to go in there, just a little way, and peep at the clock? It's just around the corner," whispered Polly.

"I promised we wouldn't disturb him while he was painting," whispered Rose, "but I do b'lieve I'll have to soon. I'm just wild to see if he's beginning to put away his paints."

"There isn't the least sound as if he was putting away ANYTHING" said Polly.

"I'll just HAVE to look," said Rose, whispering as softly as before. "We're awfully tired waiting, and keeping so still. It will help some to know what time it is, and if he sees me looking at the clock, perhaps he'll say he's 'MOST ready to stop painting."

She slipped from the divan, and tip-toed to the doorway, pushed the heavy hanging aside just enough to permit her to pass through. The portiere dropped heavily behind her, and Polly listened--listened.

"Oh, I hope he won't be angry. He ought not to after we've waited so long, but he's a great artist, and I s'pose Rose is disturbing him. I hope he won't scold. I didn't really tell her to go in and look at the clock, but I didn't tell her NOT to," thought Polly.

"Why DOESN'T she come back?" she whispered, a second after, when, as if in answer, the portiere was pushed aside, and Rose, a very frightened little Rose, hurried to Polly, her eyes startled, and her cheeks pale.

"He isn't there! Aunt Lois isn't there! We're alone in this studio, and I'd rather be alone ANYWHERE than here!" she cried, and they shuddered when the vacant rooms echoed her voice.

"But we don't have to STAY here!" cried Polly, "come! It's getting late, and we must hurry, or we'll be afraid to go down the streets alone."

"We CAN'T go!" cried Rose, "that's just the horrid part of it!"

"WHY can't we?"

As she asked the question Polly sprang to her feet, and clasping Rose's hand, drew her toward the door.

"It's no use, Polly," said Rose, "We CAN'T go home, because I don't know the way!"

Polly stared at her for a second in surprise.

"Why you've been here before with your Aunt Lois," she said.

"I know I have," Rose replied, "but I haven't noticed just how we came. It's a long walk, and don't you remember how many different streets we turned into, before we got here? I tell you truly, Polly, I don't know the FIRST THING about going home!"

"Then we must wait here 'til they come for us," said Polly, "Oh hark! What was that?"

Together they sank upon the little divan, and now they spoke only in whispers.

"I don't know what the noise was, but it was in that other room. When I had looked at the clock, and I turned to come back, I HAD to pass the big suit of armor. Polly, I knew there wasn't anyone in it, but all the same I thought its eyeholes looked at me!"

"Oh--o--o! Didn't that sound as if his iron glove rattled against his shield?" was Polly's startled whisper.

"It's that, or--he's--WALKING!" gasped Rose.

The two terrified children clung to each other. They stared toward the large doorway, and their breath came faster.

Did the portiere sway?

No, it hung straight from its pole, but beyond, in that other room; was anyone moving about in there?

They hardly dared breathe.

At last Rose whispered, turning that her words might reach Polly's ear.

"It's still in there now," she said, "and don't you think--"

She did not finish the question, for, at that moment, something creaked, and slipped to the floor, rolling evidently until it must have met another object that stopped it.

"There wasn't a single sound here when it was bright daylight, and Mr. Kirtland was busy painting. Why DO the things in his studio ACT so when he's away?" said Polly.

"It's as if they knew we were here, and just wanted to scare us," whispered Rose.

Frightened, hungry, weary, and nervously staring into that shadowy doorway, they waited--waited hoping that someone might come before anything happened to make their terror greater.

At the great house on the avenue, there was wild excitement. At the end of the sitting, Aunt Lois had gone to the little room, expecting to find two tired children who would be eager to go home. The sitting had been longer than usual, and she would reward them for their patience by stopping at the confectioner's on the way home and purchasing some fine candy for them.

"I am to come to you again on Thursday," she said. "Very well, I will try to be prompt. The children must be tired of waiting. If you are willing, I'll bid you 'Good afternoon' here, and go out by the side door

with them."

Without waiting for him to reply, she had hastened to the smaller room, only to find that it was empty.

She was not at all frightened.

Her first thought was that the long afternoon had been tedious, and they had gone home.

"I shall find them on the piazza waiting for me," she said. "Rose would have asked if she might go, but I had told her not to interrupt while he was painting."

Gentle Aunt Lois had no thought of being angry. Instead, she was sorry that the hours had dragged so heavily for Rose and Polly.

She purchased two fine boxes of candy, smiling as she walked along with her parcel, that was to be a surprise.

She walked slowly because she was very tired. She wondered that Rose did not run to greet her.

"Where are the children?" she asked, as the maid opened the door.

"Sure, they've not been home since they went out with you," said the maid.

Aunt Lois sank on the great hall chair, and the frightened maid thought that she was ill.

"Are ye faint, mum?" she asked, "an' will I be gettin' ye a glass o' water?"

"Call the coachman," said Aunt Lois.

"Sure, I don't want to be bold with advice, but I'd not like ter see ye goin' out fer a ride feelin' like ye do now. I'd think--"

"GET the coachman!" said Aunt Lois, and the girl, now thoroughly frightened, did as she was bid.

Nora ran at top speed to the stable, crying, as she reached the door:

"Oh, John, John! Miss Lois is come home, an' she's talkin' o' goin' right out ter ride, an' her sick, an' she wants ye ter come to her in the hall now, an' me not knowin' what ter do, at all!"

"Hi! Now calm down like a good lass, and tell a man what you need. I can't make sense out of what you said. Now, then?"

"Oh, come in, come in!" cried Nora, and turning, she ran toward the house, the coachman following, muttering something about girls never

having their wits about them.

But when he reached the house, and heard that Rose and charming little Princess Polly were missing, his kindly face looked very serious, and he promised to get help and make a thorough search of the town.

He called the gardener and a boy who had been helping him, and then came the question as to where to look first.

In the street some boys were playing ball, among them, Lester Jenks.

"It might be that they were around the neighborhood, but haven't yet come home," ventured the gardener.

"That's not likely," said the coachman, "but we might ask a few questions of those boys.

"Hi, there, boys! Have you seen Rose, or her friend Polly around here this afternoon?"

"They went down town with Rose's aunt to Mr. Kirtland's studio," shouted Lester. "Here, Jack, pitch decently, will you?"

"Look here, young feller! This ain't no joke. Quit playin' ball long 'nough ter hear what I say. They're lost, those two little girls are. They haven't come home!"

"I saw 'em down there, when I was there, and I left them there, in the little yard when I came home."

"When was that?" said John.

"Oh, 'bout six, I guess," said Lester. "I don't know exactly."

The coachman hurried to the house.

"If ye please, 'm, the Jenks boy says he saw them out in the little garden that joins the studio at about six. It's about half past six, or so, now, 'm, an' ye've just reached home. I can't make out how ye missed them, but I think I'll go over ter Mr. Kirtland's house, and if he isn't out ter some reception, like he often is, I'll ask the loan of his key, and with the gardener, I'll hunt there first. I believe they're there."

Aunt Lois, now really wild with anxiety, could only say: "Go, at once. Go somewhere, do something, to find them. See! It is getting dusky. Wherever they are, they are frightened, I know, and surely I am almost sick with fear for their safety."

Mr. Kirtland was at home, and while he could not believe the children were in his studio, he felt that no place should be neglected in the effort to find them, and he insisted upon joining the searching party.

Meanwhile, in the studio the dusky shadows had grown deeper. The two

terrified little girls had begun to wonder if anyone would ever come for them.

They still clung to each other, and for some time not a sound had broken the stillness. Naught save the ticking of the clock, and that did not startle them, but, rather, by its monotonous tune, seemed like a friend that sought to cheer them.

Not even a team passed, and no footstep upon the sidewalk told of a pedestrian who walked by the building.

"If you heard someone walk past this place would you wish he'd stop, or would you wish he wouldn't?" whispered Rose.

"I'd hate to hear him go right by without stopping, because I'd know he wasn't coming to take us home, but if he stopped I'd be scared!" whispered Polly.

"Hark!"

Rose grasped Polly's arm.

"It's in THERE! It's in THERE!" they shrieked, as if with one voice, then in a frightened little heap they slipped to the floor and tried to draw the rug over them to hide and shield them from they knew not what!

Suddenly both rooms were flooded with light, and a familiar voice spoke.

"They're not here, you see; I felt sure that they could not be in the studio. We must search elsewhere, and lose no time about it."

It was Arthur Kirtland's voice, and scrambling to their feet, they ran to greet him, all fear left behind.

"Oh, Mr. Kirtland, we ARE here," cried Rose.

"And we've been here just almost FOREVER," Polly added.

"And, oh, here's John!" cried Rose. "Now we can go home!"

"I think ye can, bein's yer Aunt Lois thinks ye're both lost, and no knowin' whether we'll find ye or not. Ye better be tellin' Mr. Kirtland how it is ye are here after he'd thought the place empty, and he'd locked it up, an' gone home."

Quickly they told the story of their trip to the ice cream parlor, and of their late return, finding entrance by the little green door.

Of the lonely waiting, of the noises that had frightened them.

"Oh, Mr. Kirtland! That armor is standing just as it did when it was daylight here, but truly we heard his sword rattle against his shield, and once--" Rose's voice faltered.

"Once," said Polly, taking up the story, "we thought he walked across the floor!"

"I have heard the same thing," was the quick reply, "and I am not at all surprised that you were terrified."

Rose and Polly were grateful that he did not laugh or even look amused.

"But he COULDN'T walk," said Rose; "it's only an iron suit."

"Oh, he surely doesn't move," Arthur Kirtland said, and he smiled kindly at the children, "but sometimes I think a tiny mouse mistakes it for a huge cage and runs around in it, and as to his walking, the cars on the railroad that runs back of the studio jar the building and shake the suit of armor. I think that may be what you heard."

"Well, it sounds harmless enough when ye know what made the noise," John said, with a laugh, "and now I guess ye'll be some willin' ter go home ter Aunt Lois. The carriage is at the door."

"Oh, yes, yes!" they cried.

"A studio is a lovely place in the day-time," said Polly, "and the pictures are beautiful then, but when it begins to be dark it's DIFFERENT."

"Different! I guess that's so," said the coachman; "and now, come! We'll drive home at a lively pace."

"Oh, doesn't it seem good to be safe!" cried Polly when, snugly seated in the carriage, they saw that they were on their own familiar avenue.

"Yes, and we always like to be GOING somewhere, and now we're glad that we're almost home," said Rose.

"I guess anybody would be glad to get away from that studio, if they'd ever been in there alone when it gets darker and darker every minute," said Polly.

"Do you b'lieve Mr. Kirtland would dare to be there at night?" questioned Rose.

"Why, he came there after us!" cried Polly, in surprise.

"Well, he had our coachman with him," Rose replied; "he didn't come alone!"

"That's so," agreed Polly; "he couldn't be afraid with the coachman for company!"

Aunt Lois was just beginning to think that she could not bear waiting to hear from the searching party, when she heard little feet upon the

piazza, the music of merry voices, and when the maid opened the door, Rose ran in, followed by Polly.

"Oh, please may I stay, 'm, to hear what happened to the two dears?" pleaded Nora.

Aunt Lois smiled assent, and then Rose, with Polly's help, told the story of the afternoon, of their return to the studio, of the terror that seemed to fill shadowy corners when twilight came.

"And the noises! Oh, Aunt Lois, you don't know what strange sounds there were in that studio! I love the pictures, and it's beautiful there in the daylight, but I can't forget the fright we had, and I won't want to go there again for, oh, a LONG time!" said Rose.

"We've told you how dark and lonely it was," added Polly, "but you'd have to HEAR that armor clank to know how it sounded."

"I'm so deaf that some of the lesser noises would not have reached me, and really that is the only mercy I know of in being deaf," Aunt Lois said. "You've both been so completely frightened there, that I, too, think you would better not go there for some time. Indeed, I wish something very bright and cheery might occur that would turn your thoughts from the studio."

"Ye'll not let the children go there, but if I might make so bold as to advise ye, 'm, I'd ask ye ter let the portrait go an' stay away from there. The place is jist haunted, and the demons might get ye, even in daylight!" Nora had shrieked that Aunt Lois might hear.

"Nora! Nora! Not a word of demons or haunting! You well know that I do not approve of any such foolish notions," Aunt Lois replied.

Nora went back to the kitchen and there expressed her belief to the cook, that studio place was "just full of old spooks!"

CHAPTER VII

AN UNEXPECTED GUEST

ON the day after the one at the studio, Rose and Polly sat on the terrace, their laps filled with flowers. Each was weaving a wreath for the other, and each was intent upon making a very beautiful one.

"Mine will be syringas and pink geraniums," said Rose, "and, Polly Sherwood, would you ever think shadows could be so horrid as they were last night?"

"No, I wouldn't," said Polly, "specially when we're out here in the

sunlight. Now, just see what I'm doing. I'm making this wreath of pink rosebuds and mignonette. You'll look fine in it when it's done."

"So will you, Princess Polly, when you wear the wreath I'm making. You always look like a TRULY princess, but you'll look more like one than ever when you have this on. I put syringas in it because they're so sweet," said Rose.

"That's why I used mignonette," said Polly. "Look! Mine is half done."

"Oh, it's lovely!" cried Rose.

They surely were having a fine time. The gay colored boxes filled with bonbons that Aunt Lois had given them lay on the grass between them, and they were almost empty boxes, because busy little hands had paused so often to dip into them.

"Six left," said Rose; "three for you and three for me. Let's keep the boxes for paper dolls, they're such pretty ones."

"We will," agreed Polly, "and now, Rose, try on the wreath."

"Oh, it looks fine on your brown curls," she cried, as she placed the pretty wreath on Rose's head.

"And here's yours," said Rose, as she laid it lightly upon Polly's flaxen curls.

"Oh, my, it's just the right kind of a wreath for you!" she cried.

"Let's go in and show them to Aunt Lois."

They sprang from the grass and turned toward the house just in time to meet Nora, the maid, as she was coming toward them.

"Yer Aunt Lois wants yer ter come right in, Miss Rose, an' bring Miss Polly with yer," she said.

"That's funny," said Rose, with a merry laugh in which Polly joined, "for we were just going to run in and let her see our wreaths."

"Well, now, ye look like fairies with the bright flowers on yer hair, an' do ye go right in, because there's someone has come that's wantin' ter see yer. Keep the flowers on yer heads an' go right in," said Nora.

"Who is it, Nora?" Rose asked, her eyes bright with excitement.

"Well, I do no whether she'd want yer ter be surprised or let me tell yer, but--it's yer Uncle John!"

The smiles fled from their faces.

"Uncle John!" gasped Rose. "Oh, Nora, is he very old? Does he carry a cane? Is he deaf? Is he going to take me away from here?"

She had clasped her hands nervously, and stood waiting for Nora to answer her questions.

"Now, Miss Rose," said Nora, her eyes twinkling, "I think ye better go right in an' see him."

"But should you think he's over NINETY?" persisted Rose.

"Well I shouldn't say he was OVER that," Nora replied dryly.

"Come Polly," said Rose. "There's nothing else to do but to go in."

With lagging steps they walked along the path and turned toward the house. Then for the first time they saw the automobile in which the guest had arrived.

"Why, who drove him here?" said Rose. "Look! There's no man waiting in it, and if he's NINETY he wouldn't drive alone, would he?"

Polly shook her head.

"Perhaps he isn't QUITE that," she said.

It was the only bit of encouragement that she could offer.

"I think I'll wait here on the piazza," she said when they had reached the door.

"Why, don't you want to meet him?" Rose asked.

"Oh, yes," Polly answered, "but if he's--if he, oh, I don't quite know how I mean it. I just thought perhaps you'd like to know him a little, and then I'll come in, and _I'_LL know him, too."

Nora, just behind them, reached forward and touched Rose's shoulder.

"Run right in," she said, "the gentleman's waiting to see you."

For the moment she forgot Polly, and hastening across the great hall, lest Uncle John might guess that she did not wish to meet him, little Rose Atherton entered the long, cool parlor, and found herself face to face with a tall, handsome man, who rose to greet her. His waving hair was touched with gray, his brown eyes were merry.

"So this is little Rose," he said, "will you come and let me look at you? Why, who made the dainty wreath for you?"

He offered not one, but both his hands to her, and with a happy cry, she laid her little hands in his.

"Will you come for a few days and make me a visit?" he asked. "You will have a pleasant time, and we shall get acquainted. I think I can make

you like me, little Rose."

"Oh, I do, I DO like you NOW!" she cried, and her little heart was filled with delight.

Here was a cheery, handsome young uncle, in place of the unattractive old uncle that she had supposed awaited her.

"Don't remove your wreath," he said, as she raised her hands toward the flowers, "because it is really very becoming. Were you playing alone when I arrived?"

"Oh, no," said Rose, "I was so glad when I saw you, because--" she hesitated.

"Because?" he said, his eyes twinkling.

"Because you aren't OLD. I thought my Uncle John MUST be 'most ninety," she said softly, so that Aunt Lois might not hear.

"And Polly, Princess Polly, was with me. She's my little guest. May I bring her now? She's so beautiful you'll just love to look at her."

"Oh, then, bring Miss Polly at once," he said.

Rose ran to the hall.

"Oh, come, come!" she said, in a whisper so loud that it reached Uncle John's ear and caused him to laugh softly.

"Come!" she repeated. "He's as handsome as a prince," and clasping Polly's hand, she returned to the parlor.

He greeted Polly as cordially as he had Rose, and Polly at once decided that Rose's Uncle John was the handsomest man, next to her dear papa, that she had ever seen.

"I have been asking Lois to loan Rose to me for a few days, and she has consented. Rose seems to think it might be enjoyable. I would not think, however, of taking her from you while you are her guest, Miss Polly, but if you will come with her, I shall be doubly happy. I have a lovely place at the shore. Will you come?"

"Oh, I'd love to," said Polly, "there's nothing finer than the shore."

"MAY we?" Rose asked, running to Aunt Lois.

"Why, certainly. I think the change will be pleasant for you. Nora must pack whatever you will need in your suit cases. Uncle John never did like to wait for anything, and he wishes to take you back with him."

Uncle John took a package from his pocket.

"I stopped on my way and purchased two veils. Men don't know much about such things, and when the clerk showed me a box full of them, I didn't know which to choose. I looked at a pink and a blue one, and because I'd no idea which you'd like best, I brought them both to you, Rose. You can loan one to Polly. You'll need your hats tied on securely on your ride to the shore."

"Oh, see the lovely, LOVELY VEILS!" cried Rose, when, having opened the parcel, the soft blue and pink gauze lay before them.

"No one could have found prettier ones," said Rose. "Oh, thank you for bringing them to me. I like to have gifts, but, oh, I LOVE to know folks care to give them to me. That's BEST of all."

"Dear little girl, you are right about that," Uncle John said heartily, "and now run and get your wraps, and we'll spin away to the shore."

"Oh, Polly, Princess Polly, Princess Polly! ISN'T he dear?" whispered Rose, when together they climbed the stairway to help Nora to choose what they would need for the visit.

"Oh, Nora!" cried Rose, "why didn't you tell me he wasn't old at all?"

"Sure, now," replied Nora, "if I'd said what I thought, I'd have said he looked like a noble lord, so he does."

"And I'm to go, too, Nora!" cried Polly, "and wasn't he kind to seem just as glad to have me as he was to have Rose. Of course, he wasn't TRULY, but he was SOME glad, and I wish he was my Uncle John, too."

"Well, now," said Nora, "do ye just PLAY he's yer own uncle, and go along with Rose, and himself ter have a fine visit."

Nora found it something of a task to pack the two suit cases, because the two little girls were so excited that they could hardly keep still long enough to choose what they wished to carry.

"Put my pink dress in, Nora, and Polly, you take your pink one, too," said Rose, "and, oh, come over here to the window and see how lovely the automobile looks from here!"

Away they ran to the window.

"It's a beauty," said Polly, "and I'd rather ride in a red one than--"

"Miss Polly, will I be puttin' yer pink frock in?" questioned Nora, "sure, he's waitin', an' we ought ter hurry the packin'!"

"Well we ought to hurry!" agreed Polly, "and, Rose, didn't his eyes just twinkle when he asked us to come!"

"And to think I EVER believed he was old!" said Rose.

"Hold still till I tie yer hats on with a veil. Now, which will ye wear, Miss Rose?"

"Pink, because it's ROSE color," cried Rose.

"No, no!" said Polly; "the blue is prettier!"

At last they were ready. They ran down the stairway, Nora following with the suit cases, and laughing because they hopped on every other stair.

"All ready? Why, what charming little ladies I have to take home! Those veils are really all right, and hugely becoming. Would you like to start now, or wait an hour or two?" As he asked the question his brown eyes were dancing.

"Oh, now, NOW!" they cried.

He laughed, and stooping, lifted little Rose so that he could look straight into her eyes, eyes as brown as his own.

"Little Rose Atherton," he said softly, "you are like your father, and your mother, too, but most of all you are every inch an Atherton."

He kissed her gently and set her down, but the look in his eyes and the kiss had won her little heart, and she clung to his hand.

Aunt Rose and Aunt Lois had been all that was kind, but Uncle John! Ah, he would LOVE her!

She had always wanted someone to love her.

"Do be careful, John," said Aunt Lois "I can't seem to think those automobiles are as safe as my carriage is."

"I'll take the best of care of my precious little passengers," he said, "and Lois!" speaking loudly, that she might hear, "I remember a ride that I took with you years ago. The horse shied at a piece of old paper in the road, at a girl with a red parasol, and a half dozen other equally harmless things. I'll promise you the automobile won't act like that! If it does, I'll sell it and get another!"

At last they were off. They had waved their hands to Aunt Lois, and now, side by side, they were spinning over the road, Uncle John feeling very proud of his lovely little guests.

They laughed and chattered all the way, and Uncle John thought he never had heard merrier music.

It was when they had left the country town behind and caught the first glimpse of the sea that their cries of delight charmed him.

"See the sails! The sails way out there against the sky!" cried Rose.

"And the big gulls!" cried Polly. "See them fly way, way up high, and then down, down again to the waves."

It had been a long, sunny road, with seldom a turn, and only occasionally a glimpse of the sea, but suddenly the road curved, winding around behind a high bluff, and there, blue and glistening in the sunlight, lay the sea, the big blue sea!

"We're here at the shore!" cried Rose, "and oh, I've never been there before. I didn't know it was so lovely!"

"You're a real little sailor's lass, or rather, a sea-captain's lass, if you love the sea so well!" said Uncle John, well pleased with her excitement and delight.

He stopped that they might watch the incoming tide for a few moments, then off over the road they sped.

"Here we are!" he cried, when after a half hour's more ride, they turned in at the driveway of a fine shore villa.

"Welcome to 'The Cliffs'!" said Uncle John.

He lifted them down, and taking each by the hand, turned toward the broad piazza.

"Ah, Mrs. Wilton, you were looking for us!" he said, greeting the housekeeper, a stout, cheery looking woman, who took the suit cases and smiled, as if caring for two small girls were the one thing that delighted her.

"Yes, I was watching for you, and when you drove up to the house I said to myself:

"Well, he's TWICE lucky, for he wanted Rose for a visitor, and he's found another child to bring with her!"

She greeted the children cordially as they were introduced.

"Her name could be nothing but Atherton," she said, "why, sir, she looks like you enough to be your own child."

"She is my BORROWED little girl," Uncle John replied, "she's MINE while here."

CHAPTER VIII

AT THE SHORE

Three days had passed, and Uncle John Atherton had filled them full of pleasure.

They had bathed in the surf, they had taken long tramps along the beach when the tide was out, they had sailed in his yacht, "The Dolphin," they had been up at the great hotel, where a fine hop was enjoyed.

Was there any pleasure that he had not given them?

One morning he looked into the two bright little faces, as they sat at breakfast, and wondered what he would best choose for the day's chief event.

"I believe I'll ask you two little friends to choose your amusement for to-day. What shall we do first?" he asked.

"'The Dolphin!' A sail on 'The Dolphin!'" they cried without a moment's hesitation.

"Then get on those sailor frocks that you wore yesterday, and your big sailor hats, and we'll sail on the 'briny deep,' right after breakfast," was the quick reply.

He was well pleased, for they had chosen just that which he so loved to do.

They hurriedly finished their breakfast and ran up to their room to put on the pretty sailor suits that he had so admired.

"Rose!" called Uncle John.

"I'm almost ready," she answered.

"No hurry," he replied, "only when you, and Polly are ready, run right down to the boat. I've told Donald to take you for a row, and just as soon as I have finished some letters, I'll go with you for a sail."

"Oh, that will be fine!" cried Rose, "because while we are waiting for you we'll be on the water."

Uncle John returned to his letters, and soon Rose and Polly hurried down to the piazza and out onto the driveway.

It was a short run to the beach, where they found Donald, the little Scotch lad, waiting for them.

With a new knife he was whittling a bit of wood into the rude semblance of a boat.

He had intended to go fishing with another boy, and he was not pleased to be rowing two small girls, so much younger than himself; therefore he was sullen. True, he was well paid for rowing them, and he was glad of the money, but, ungrateful little lad that he was, he most unwillingly

waited for Rose and Polly.

"I'd 'nough rather be fishing," he grumbled, but aloud he said:

"Come on!"

They followed him, clambered into the boat, and soon were out on the water, singing a pretty boating song that Uncle John had taught them:

"Floating, floating over the sea,
Blithe of heart and gay are we.
Riding lightly over the foam,
O'er the sea 'tis joy to roam."

"I b'lieve I could row," said Rose.

"Huh! Girls can't do much," said Donald roughly.

"Girls CAN!" cried Polly, vexed that the boy should annoy Rose.

"Huh! Not MUCH!" he replied.

He was not in the least interested in their merry chatter. He felt sure that small girls were of no use.

He talked very loudly of lines, spars, windlass and davits. To be sure, he did not know one from the other, but then he knew that the little girls did not know, and he hoped to impress them.

"What ARE those things?" Polly asked, when he had been talking for some time, and constantly using names that they did not know.

"Oh, a man couldn't tell girls so they'd understand," said Donald, squaring his shoulders and trying to look as large as possible.

"A MAN!" cried Polly, and although neither had meant to do it, both laughed merrily.

Donald was angry, too angry to reply, but under his breath he muttered:

"Laugh if ye want ter, but I'll get even!"

It was in vain that Rose and Polly tried to talk with him.

He only glowered, and was too sullen to answer the questions that they asked, and for a time they were silent. Rose spoke first.

"Why are you rowing us back?" she cried. "We don't want to go back yet!"

"Got ter go back a minute," said the boy, "just for a arrant."

He rowed close to a short pile that was near the shore and in very shallow water. There was a huge iron ring attached to the pile, used for

mooring small boats.

Donald, who had been watching the shore very closely, now, to hide his interest, bent all his energy in fastening the chain of the boat to the ring.

"There!" he said, "that's fast, an' you girls are safe if you sit still till I come back."

He sprang from the boat, and waded through the shallow water, then ran up on the beach, shouting:

"Jock! Jock! Wait a minute!"

"Donald! Don't stay long!" cried Rose, and Polly echoed her words, but Donald either did not, or would not hear!

They watched the two boys as they stood for a moment talking, then ran down the beach.

"I don't think he was very nice to go off and leave us here while he does errands," said Polly.

"He wasn't nice at all," said Rose, "and I'll tell Uncle John, if he gets here first."

"Is this chain VERY long?" Polly asked a moment later.

"I don't know," said Rose, looking over the side of the boat and down into the water.

"I don't see it," she said a moment later, "why did you ask that, Polly?"

"Oh, I was only wondering how far we could float before the chain would look tight. We've gone ever so far, and the boat doesn't tug at it yet!" Polly said.

"It will, though!" said Rose.

Still they floated, and for a time they were silent, contented to be out in the sunshine.

Then suddenly Rose looked up at Polly, quick terror in her eyes.

"Polly, Princess Polly!" she cried, "is there ANY chain on this boat?"

"Why of course!" said Polly, "didn't you see Donald fasten it to that big iron ring on the post?"

Rose leaned forward and looked into Polly's eyes.

"I saw him fasten ONE END of it, Polly, and so did you, but was the

OTHER end fastened to this boat?'

"Why, yes, I--oh, Rose, you DON'T think we're--DRIFTING?" gasped Polly.

"You can't get up, and turn round," said Rose, "because Uncle John told us always to keep our seats in a boat, but can't you just twist round enough to see?"

With great care Polly turned, and saw just what she feared--the ring on the boat and NO CHAIN CONNECTED!

With a white little face Polly turned, and with parted lips looked at Rose.

"We ARE drifting--JUST DRIFTING!" she whispered hoarsely.

"Drifting!" cried Rose. "Oh, Polly, what SHALL we do?"

"Sit still," whispered Polly, "and wait--just WAIT!"

"What WILL Uncle John do? And where will he think we are?" said Rose.

"Oh, I don't know!" wailed Polly, "but I'm SURE we ought to do something. Just look how far we are from the shore, and we're going all the time!"

They looked in despair toward the beach. No one was in sight, and the dancing waves glistened in the sunlight, as if they laughed, feeling no pity for the two frightened children in the boat.

"Do you s'pose we could row?" questioned Polly.

"I don't know how," said Rose, "but it didn't look hard when Donald did it."

They reached for the oars, but found that neither was strong enough to lift one, and Rose's eyes filled with tears when she looked at Polly, while Polly's brave effort to cheer Rose with a smile failed, because her own lips were quivering.

"Let's sit down in the bottom of the boat, it seems safer," said Rose.

They slipped from their seats, and each clung to the other.

"If only Uncle John knew!" wailed Rose.

"If only he knew!" echoed Polly, with a sob.

Still the little boat rocked lightly on the waves, and now they no longer tried to hide their fear, but cried, because they could not help it.

Out on a high bluff a tall, square-shouldered man leveled a powerful

glass and looked out across the waves.

Evidently he saw what he was looking for, and hastily slinging the leather strap that held the glass over his shoulder, he strode down to the shore.

Completely tired, the two children lay sobbing and clinging to each other, no longer looking toward the shore, because now they were too far out to clearly see it.

A white gull circled near them, and the whirring of its wings made Polly open her eyes.

"A great gull!" she whispered, then, oh, the joy in her cry:

"The Dolphin! The Dolphin!"

Rose scrambled to her knees.

"Oh, it is! It is! DEAR Uncle John!" she cried.

It was a quick turn from terror in the little boat to joy and safety in the big yacht, with Uncle John, big, brave Uncle John, to care for them.

"You must tell me all about this," he said, when they were once aboard the yacht, "but not a word until after we've had a wee lunch."

The steward brought dainty sandwiches, cakes, fruit and hot chocolate, and the happy little trio enjoyed it heartily, partly because it was a delicious spread, but far more because of their feeling of safety after their terror.

The children had been frightened, but bright, cheery Uncle John had suffered more than he would have admitted when, through his powerful glass, he had seen the two little occupants of the rowboat crouching close together, rocked at the will of the waves and going steadily out to the open sea.

He knew that it would take but a short time to reach them, but would they remember what he had so often told them?

If they should change places in the boat and thus capsize it, no yacht could reach them in time to save them!

Now, with Polly and Rose beside him, safe and sound, he felt as if a heavy cloud had lifted.

After the lunch had been enjoyed, Uncle John asked for the story of their plight, and together they told it, telling of the start with Donald, of his sullenness, his anger, and his muttered threat.

"I don't know SURELY, TRULY, what he said, but I thought he said:

"'I'll get even with them,' and Polly thought so, too," concluded Rose.

"And after he'd said that, he wouldn't talk at all," said Polly.

"And we thought he'd fastened the boat when we saw him hitching one end of the chain to the big ring," said Rose, "and he waded out to the shore, and ran off up the beach with another boy."

"We shouted to him, and told him not to stay long, but he didn't answer, and didn't look back, but just kept on running until he met another boy, and then they ran away together," said Polly.

"The other boy had a fishing pole," added Rose.

"Oh, he did, did he?" said Uncle John, "well, I wouldn't be surprised if young Donald had a fishing outfit tucked snugly away in some cranny in the rocks, where he doubtless found it after he left you."

"What WOULD have happened to us if you hadn't found us?" said Rose.

Uncle John Atherton's brown eyes were not twinkling as he turned to reply, and Polly thought she saw a tear on his lashes.

His arm tightened about Rose, and he drew her closer.

"I don't like to think what MIGHT have happened to you two little friends, alone on the open sea. I shall settle with Donald later," he said.

"What will you do?" questioned Rose, looking up into his face with eager, yet anxious eyes.

"Why do you ask?" he questioned.

"I wouldn't think to ask if you were smiling," said Rose, "but you look so stern--oh, I don't care if you scold him some, but 'tho he was mean, and naughty, don't make him feel TOO bad."

"You've a loving heart," was the quick reply, "and like all the Athertons, you are generous."

"Generous?" said Rose, in quick surprise, "I didn't say give him anything. I only said: 'Don't make him feel TOO bad!'"

"My dear little girl, there are other ways of being generous beside bestowing gifts. It is VERY generous of you, when Donald has treated you so cruelly, to ask mercy for him. I'll remember your tender pleading in his behalf, but Donald must be made to know, and fully understand that what he did was far worse than merely naughty, it was wicked!

"And now, for the time, we'll talk no more about Donald. You and Polly are safe and sound, the little boat is floating just behind us, all the sky is blue and cloudless. We are bounding over the sparkling waves,

without a thought or care.

"I am master of the Dolphin, and you and Polly are two lovely little sea fairies that I have invited aboard to keep me company."

CHAPTER IX

PRINCESS POLLY RETURNS

THE days spent at the shore sped as if on golden wings, and Uncle John declared that the sunlight seemed brighter while Rose remained under the red roof of "The Cliffs."

He had given his little guests every pleasure, he had bought them a beautiful collection of shells, and a tiny ship for each to sail in the brook at Sherwood Hall. Was there anything that he had not done for their happiness, their delight while with him at the shore?

Now the day for their departure had arrived, and his genial face looked strangely quiet, and he forgot to laugh and joke with them.

He watched Rose closely, and once, when she looked up at him, she thought his eyes looked grieved.

She laid her hand on his arm, and spoke the thought that was troubling her.

"You don't want me to go?" she questioned. "You wish I was not going back to Aunt Rose?"

Uncle John sat down in his great arm chair, and lifted Rose to his knee.

Looking into her brown eyes that were so like his own, he gazed for a moment, then he spoke, and his voice was very gentle.

"I wanted you to come to me for this little visit, but I did not dream how hard it would be to let you go. I shall miss you, I think you know that, little Rose."

"I do, oh, I do, and I don't want to go. I wouldn't EVER be ready to leave you Uncle John!" she cried.

Quickly two strong arms were around her, holding her fast, as he whispered:

"WHY, little girl? Tell me WHY?"

"Because you love me," sobbed Rose. "Aunt Judith took care of me because she HAD to, but she always said it was a nuisance, and now Aunt Rose and

Aunt Lois are kind and good to me, and they like to have me with them, but they never--"

The soft little voice paused.

"They'd never think to hold me if I felt badly, and sometimes I'm so lonely. Other little girls have mamas to care for them, and big, tall papas who love them, and truly aunts, real GOOD aunts aren't the same."

"How about uncles? Are THEY worth while?" questioned Uncle John.

She lifted her head, and seeing the twinkle in his fine eyes, she smiled through her tears.

"I've only one uncle," she said, "but he's the best one in the world!"

"He's scheming now to find a way to be with you at least a part of each year," was the quick reply.

"Oh, WILL you, CAN you do that?" cried Rose.

"I think so," he said, "and I cannot now tell you just how I shall manage it, but I am quite sure that I can do it, and until I am ready to talk with your Aunt Rose regarding it, you must promise to keep it for a little secret, a pleasant thing to think of when days are a bit dull."

"Oh, I will, I will!" cried Rose. "I won't say a word about it, but I'll think of it every day!"

Her tears had vanished, and when Polly came running in she did not dream that Rose had been crying.

"Only think," said Polly, "I have to say 'Good-bye' twice to-day, for I'm to leave here, and then I'm to leave Rose's house to go back to Sherwood Hall!"

"And we both knew that this was the day that Polly was to go home, but last night she got a letter," said Rose, "and her mama says that she's glad she's having such a lovely time, but that Sherwood Hall is so lonely without her, she can't spare her any longer.

"I do think it must be dreadful there with Princess Polly away, but I wish I didn't have to give her up."

"Well, now, suppose we make the trip as cheerful as possible," said Uncle John. "You have your suit cases, your boxes of shells, your little boats and two hand bags. Really, I think the automobile will be far more comfortable than the cars."

"Oh, yes, yes!" they cried in delight.

"And I'll drive you over to Aunt Rose's house. I'll stay while we lunch with her, and later in the afternoon we'll take Polly to Sherwood Hall,

where I shall take the opportunity to tell Mrs. Sherwood how greatly I have enjoyed her little daughter as my guest."

"Oh, what fun!" cried Polly, "and mama will see you. I told her you were ALMOST as handsome as papa!"

"Oh, spare my blushes!" said Uncle John, "but all the same, I thank you, little Princess Polly, for your good opinion of me. I trust that Rose, and I may borrow you again some day."

[Illustration with caption: "Look!" she cried, "the waves never danced prettier."]

"And I'll love to be borrowed!" cried Polly, "for this has been a fine visit. Just think how much I have to tell when I am at home, and Lena and Rob and Leslie and Harry come up and ask:

"Did you have a nice time Polly? Where did you go? What did you do while you were away,' and I'll hardly know where to begin, because there's so much to tell."

They ran down to the beach "Just to say 'Good-bye' to the waves," Rose said.

"Look!" she cried. "The waves never danced prettier."

It was with a light heart that Rose let Uncle John help her into the automobile beside Polly. She was to have two long rides with him, and, oh, the secret that she had promised loyally to keep!

"He will fix it so he can be with me PART of the time, SOME of the time!" sang her happy little heart, and her eyes brightened and her cheeks grew pinker with the thought.

She laughed and chattered with Polly all the way, and the long ride seemed all too short, for before she dreamed that they were near the old Atherton house, they turned in at the driveway, and Nora, who had seen them coming, stood smiling a welcome from the doorway.

They made a happy party at lunch, and Aunt Rose was so evidently glad that Rose had returned that the little girl felt almost guilty when she thought of the secret that Uncle John had given her to keep.

"It isn't that I don't want to stay here; I mean it isn't JUST that. It's that I can stay here, and be happier because I have Uncle John now, and he loves me, and, oh, he's planning, just simply planning to--"

Just as she reached that point Uncle John commenced to tell a very funny story, and in the laughter that greeted it she, for the moment, forgot the secret.

Uncle John said nothing of his plan to Aunt Rose. Indeed, he was not quite ready to do that. He knew Aunt Rose Jerusha Atherton too well to

tell a part of any plan to her. He knew that she wished her little namesake to be always with her, and he wisely intended to say nothing of his wish regarding Rose until his scheme was complete.

"Then," thought Uncle John, "I'll have my way. I usually do!" and he smiled as if the thought amused him.

Rose felt that the house seemed less gloomy than she had thought, but she knew that it was Uncle John and Princess Polly who helped to make it cheery.

And when, in the afternoon, they were once more speeding over the shady roads toward Sherwood Hall, it seemed as if every day since she had first met Uncle John had been a holiday.

It was Polly who interrupted her dreaming.

"Why, Rose Atherton!" she said, "I said 'Good-bye' to your two Aunts and to Nora and to Lester Jenks, but I never thought to say it to Evangeline! I didn't want to talk to her, but I did mean just to say 'Good-bye.'"

"Well, I guess you needn't mind," said Rose. "It may be you'd OUGHT to have said it, but she never'd let you go without writing an old poem, and p'raps it would have been a long one."

"Oh, dear," said Polly, "I'm ALMOST glad I forgot!"

It was a cordial welcome that awaited them at Sherwood Hall. Mrs. Sherwood could not wait until Polly should be beside her, but stood upon the broad piazza, watching until the big automobile appeared around the bend of the road.

"Ah, there they come!" she cried, "my own little Princess Polly is coming back to Sherwood Hall."

Up the broad driveway it came, and the moment it stopped Polly sprang out and into the arms that opened wide to receive her.

"Oh, it's lovely to be with Rose, and I've had a fine time, so why IS it so sweet to come home?" she cried.

"We who have loving hearts can easily understand," said Mrs. Sherwood, "and Mr. Atherton doubtless remembers of days when, as a boy, he went on vacation trips that he enjoyed with all the ardent spirit of youth, yet when the day came for returning, his heart beat faster. Home, after all, seemed the dearest place!"

"That is exactly as I remember it, but there's one thing that you did not mention, and that was the tears that I had to hide," said Uncle John.

"I started on my camping trips with high spirits, yet a bit of regret at

leaving home caused my eyes to fill. I could not let the other boys see the tears for fear of being laughed at, so I made all sorts of excuses for the moisture by talking of dust and cinders; that, however, never deceived my comrades for a moment. Therefore, they dubbed me 'Softy,' a name that I detested."

The sound of a firm tread on the gravel walk caused them to turn as Arthur Sherwood came to greet his guest, and to welcome his little daughter, Polly.

The older members of the party seated themselves on the broad piazza, and while they were pleasantly chatting, Polly and Rose found their little boats that Uncle John had purchased for them, and away they ran to the brook to try them.

"Mine has rubies and emeralds for cargo," said Rose, "and a few, just a FEW necklaces. What has yours, Polly?"

"Mine has diamonds and sapphires," said Polly, "and there are bracelets and bangles in the hold."

"Oh, see their sails!" cried Rose, "how fine, they look just like real ships, that have truly cargoes."

"And see them in the water!" said Polly. "The real boats floating, and the shadow boats down, down in the water. Which are finest, the TRULY boats or the shadow boats?"

"The truly boats are dearest, because Uncle John gave them to us, and they are real, but the shadow boats are beautiful and they look like fairy ships," said Rose.

"Push yours out into the brook away from the shore," said Polly, "and I'll lash the water with this switch."

"All right," said Rose, and she gave the tiny craft a gentle push.

Polly struck the water sharply with her switch.

"Look! Look!" she cried, "See the boats rocking on the waves! See the bubbles! Don't it look almost like foam?"

The boats rocked, and danced on the little waves that were only ripples on the surface, and Polly was about to use the switch harder in an attempt to make a hurricane when they heard Uncle John calling:

"Rose! Rose!"

"Oh, he's calling me," cried Rose, and lifting the little boats from the water they ran back to the driveway.

A few weeks earlier Rose would have found it hard to leave Polly, and she did regret it, but the fact that Uncle John would be with her on the

way back to Aunt Rose made it easier.

Then there was his promise, that only he and her own little self knew about!

And later she was to visit Polly! Oh, these were pleasant things to think of!

The "Good-byes" were said, Mrs. Sherwood had urged Rose to come a little later to visit Polly, Uncle John had agreed to call whenever Rose was at Sherwood Hall, Mr. Sherwood had promised to drive over to call upon the master of "The Cliffs" and enjoy a sail on the Dolphin, and Rose, as they drove away, spoke the thought that told of her happiness.

"I feel as if they were my own relatives," she said, "and oh, Uncle John, isn't it different from the way it was when I lived here with Aunt Judith. Then I felt so very poor, because I had only one person that was really my own and SHE didn't,--need a little girl. Now I have Aunt Rose and Aunt Lois and you, and you ALL want me."

"We need you, dear little Rose, and especially do _I_ need you."

"And you said perhaps, just PERHAPS, you could--" She paused.

"I said I should try to arrange things so that I could be with you a part of each year.

"I think I can manage it, little Rose, if you say nothing about it until I tell you that you may."

"I'll keep it," said Rose, "you'll see how I'll keep it!"

On the way down the avenue they stopped at Aunt Judith's cottage.

Repeated raps at the door brought no response, however, and just as they turned to go, Gyp, the ever present Gyp, howled a bit of news from his perch on the roof of the hen coop.

"Say! 'Taint no use ter pound on that 'ere door. She ain't to home, 'cause she's somewhere else! I seen her go out. She had a basket on her head, an' a bunnit on her arm! No, a bunnit on her, oh--pshaw! I do'no' how ter say it! Heigh-o-dingerty-dingty-dum!"

He had done the usual thing. Whenever embarrassed Gyp took to the woods.

Uncle John looked after the flying figure, and laughed when Gyp paused in the middle of the field to turn a somersault before disappearing in the woods.

CHAPTER X

GWEN CALLS UPON POLLY

Polly's return was hailed with delight, and it seemed as if every child in the neighborhood turned its steps to ward Sherwood Hall to greet her, and to hear all about her visit.

Lena Lindsey, with her brother Rob, Leslie Grafton, and Harry, Vivian Osborne, and, indeed, all of her little friends and playmates hastened to see her, to hear from Rose, and to tell all of the small neighborhood happenings that had occurred while she had been away.

"I've three white rabbits," said Rob, "and I want to show them to you, Polly."

"And mama has bought the dearest angora kitten for me. I wish you'd come down soon and see it," urged Leslie; "it's just a baby cat and you can't help loving her, she's so cunning."

"I haven't anything new to show you," said Vivian, laughing merrily. "I mean I've nothing of my own, but there's SOMETHING I'll show you, and I guess it's different from anything you ever saw!"

"Why, Vivian Osborne! What ARE you going to show Polly?" Harry Grafton asked.

Vivian's eyes were dancing as she whispered something in Harry's ear.

"Oh, THAT'S it, is it? Well, I guess Polly WILL look when you show it to her!"

"You just tell me this minute!" said Polly. "I'm wild to know what IT is!"

"IT," said Vivian, "is a girl, a very pretty little girl!"

"Then why is she a sight to see, and why DO you laugh?" Polly asked, completely puzzled.

"She LOOKS well enough," Vivian replied, "but she ACTS like--"

"The old SCRATCH!" said Rob.

"Oh, Rob!" cried Lena, "Mama told you not to say that!"

"I know it," Rob admitted, "but I couldn't think of any other name that would give Princess Polly an idea what she was like."

"But who is she? Where is she?" questioned Polly.

"Oh, she lives in the next house to us," said Vivian. "Her papa has bought that fine large house that has the big lawn, and the lovely

garden at the back. She's very, VERY pretty, and if she didn't ACT so--"

"HOW does she act?" said Polly. "I tell you all truly, I'm wild to see her!"

"Rob told you how she acted," said Harry, with a laugh, "and old Scratch isn't half bad 'nough. Say! She wanted to have a wedding for her best doll the other day, and she cut a lace curtain off a yard from the floor to make a wedding veil for it!"

"'Twas a parlor curtain and I guess her mama didn't think that was cunning," said Lena.

"She tells lies--"

"Oh, Harry!" interrupted Leslie, "you mustn't."

"Well, she DOES, and they're too big to be called fibs," Harry said, stoutly.

"And the queerest thing is that Inez Varney plays with her all the time, and she doesn't ever play with any of us now. She hasn't been to my house since that new little girl came here to live," said Leslie.

"And Leslie don't care," declared Harry, "because Inez was getting queerer and queerer, and she wasn't the pleasantest playmate, but now she's so gay you'd hardly think she was Inez Varney."

Polly was greatly interested.

"What's the new little girl's name?" she asked.

"Gwen Harcourt, and mama says that Mrs. Harcourt is lovely, and I must be kind to Gwen," said Lena, "and it would be hard, only I don't often see her. She's always with Inez."

Polly had been away but two weeks. She had gone to visit Rose Atherton, intending to remain but a single week. Then when she was at "The Cliffs" she had written for permission to stay "just a little longer," and Mrs. Sherwood had extended the time an extra week.

During that time the house next to the Osborne's had been purchased, the family had moved in and the little daughter of the family had become very intimate with Inez, her near neighbor.

A short time surely for so much to have been accomplished.

Perhaps the "new little girl," as the other children called her, found it easier to capture Inez, and hold her for her BEST friend, because Inez was very eager for a little "chum."

She had hoped to be chosen by Princess Polly, to take the place of Rose. Disappointed, and angry because Polly Sherwood did not prefer her, she

would not try to choose a mate from her other playmates. Instead, she gave all of her time to the "new little girl," and never were two small girls more intimate.

A few days after Polly's return she was sitting on the stone wall near the entrance to the driveway.

A bright hued Japanese parasol kept the sun from her head and shoulders, and she sang a cheery melody, hitting her little heels against the wall to mark the time.

"Sunshine and showers,
Bees in the flowers,
Blue sky and floating clouds,
Soft Summer air;
Bright yellow butterfly,
His gauzy wings to try,
Floats like the thistledown,
Without a care.

"Now, to the velvet rose,
Off and away he goes,
Far from all other blooms
Roving so free;
Flighty, and light of heart,
Having of care no part,
Gay yellow butterfly,
Happy is he."

Inez Varney, with her new playmate, ran along the avenue. Inez was the only one of Polly's friends who had not been up to see her since her visit to Rose.

Now, in great haste, she clasped the hand of her little friend and ran to where Polly was sitting.

"This is Gwen Harcourt," said Inez, "and Gwen, this is Polly Sherwood, that all the children call 'Princess Polly.'"

"_I_ won't!" said little Miss Harcourt, stoutly.

"You NEEDN'T," said Polly, coolly.

The new little girl was surprised. She had believed that Polly would be very angry. Indeed, she was quite disappointed that Polly seemed not in the least to care.

"Is that your house up there between the trees?" she asked.

"Yes," said Polly, but she did not say: "Will you come in?"

That did not trouble Gwen, however. She needed no invitation. She could invite herself, and she did.

"I'm coming over to see you some day," she said.

Inez giggled. She thought her new friend's pertness very smart.

"You don't say you'll be glad to see me, but I'm coming just the same," said Gwen; "and p'raps I'll come to-morrow, and p'raps it'll be next week, but I'm truly coming."

Polly felt that she had never seen a prettier child, nor could she think of another as rude as Gwen Harcourt.

She was always kind and polite, but what could she say to this rude little girl that would be courteous and at the same time truthful?

"I can't tell her I'll be glad to have her come, for I just KNOW I don't want her. She's very pretty, but, someway, I'm sure I'd be happier without her," thought Polly.

Gwen Harcourt, vexed that Polly Sherwood had not been at all excited at the thought of receiving a call from her little self, turned toward Inez. "Come," she said, "let's go out in the sunshine and have a run. It's awful dull here!"

"I guess we'll be going," said Inez. "Gwen is so very gay that most places seem dull to her. Come!"

She held out her hand, Gwen grasped it, and together they ran down the avenue.

They did not even say "Good-bye," but raced off as if every moment spent with Polly were too dull to be endured.

"I said I shouldn't call her 'Princess Polly' and I shan't," said Gwen, to which Inez replied:

"Well, you don't HAVE to, and I guess she didn't care much."

Polly, looking after them, spoke softly to herself.

"What pretty eyes she had, and her hair was fine, too." Then, after a moment's hesitation, she spoke again.

"She was lovely to look at, but she wasn't very polite.

"She said she was coming over here some day, but I do hope that she won't hurry about it. I'm sure I don't need her as much as Inez does. I don't mind how long it is before I see Gwen Harcourt!"

Gwen Harcourt had a most unlovely disposition and no one could guess what she at any time might do. If Princess Polly had urged her to come very soon to Sherwood Hall she would have waited a week at least before appearing there.

As she had received no urging, she decided to go on the following day.

Very early the next morning Polly sat in a big chair in the library, reading her favorite fairy book. A slight sound caused her to look up from the page.

"Why, there she is!" she whispered.

There, indeed, was Gwen Harcourt, perched upon the fence that enclosed the piazza. She was looking straight in at the window, her bold little eyes noting every object in the room.

"Come out! Come out!" she cried, beckoning so frantically that she nearly lost her balance.

Polly was annoyed. She was in the midst of an enchanting tale, and she so wished to finish reading it. Truly, she was not glad to see Gwen Harcourt.

She never treated anyone rudely, however, so she closed her book and went out to greet her early visitor.

"I guess you'd think I wanted to come up here if you knew HOW I came," said Gwen.

"How did you come?" Polly asked, not because she cared but in order to say SOMETHING. She could not say that she was glad to see her.

"Through the window and over our hedge," said Gwen. "Mama said that as I'd been horrid at the breakfast table I must stay in all the forenoon. I didn't think that was fair, because I wasn't VERY horrid. I put my foot on the table so I could tie my shoe ribbons. Papa said, 'Gwendolen!' and I took it down quick. Then I took some peanut shells from my pocket and sailed them in my cup of chocolate. They looked like little boats. My piece of melon had the stem on it and I said it was a music box. I wound the stem round and round, and sung 'Yankee Doodle.' Mama made the waitress take me away from the table and I just howled all the way! I don't think I need have stayed in for such little things as that! I DIDN'T stay in. I jumped out of the window, it's near the ground, and then, because it was the shortest way, I scrambled right over the hedge. Horrid old thing! It had thorns on it, and it scratched my knee."

Polly thought her a handsome little savage.

Gwen thought that she had made an impression upon Polly.

"There was just one reason why I acted so. Mama had guests, and she had just been telling them what a good child I was, and I thought it would be a joke to do some queer things at the table.

"I thought because she had company she wouldn't send me away, but she

did," she concluded.

Her next remark was even more surprising than those that she had already made.

"Let's catch bugs!" she said.

"Oh, horrid!" cried Polly, "I couldn't do that!"

"I do," said Gwen, "and it's fun. I caught two big old beetles and tied threads on them for harnesses. Then I hitched them to a wee little paper box about an inch long and they made a good span. They dragged it all right 'til I dumped an old fuzzy caterpillar into the box, and then they tumbled over on their backs and squirmed and kicked like everything! If I could find one now I could show you how they kick."

"Oh, please don't," said Polly quickly, "I wouldn't like to see them wiggle."

"Then let's slide down your front steps," said Gwen. "Come on! Slide the way I do. I sit down on the top step and commence to slip. When I've slid over three steps I turn over and slide three that way. I get excited wondering whether I'll tear my frock, or only bump my knees. Sometimes it's both, and sometimes it's neither!"

Polly could not imagine why such antics could be amusing, and she knew that her mama would not like any such rough play.

"You don't seem to want to," said Gwen; "are you afraid of your clothes, or don't you dare to risk the bumps?"

"I don't think mama would like it," Polly said, gently, "but I'll play 'Hide-and-Seek' with you, or any game you like."

"Oh, I don't care for those old games," said Gwen, "so I'll tell you what we'll do. Come over to the stable and you get your coachman to let us have the horse and the cow. You ride the horse barebacked and I'll ride the cow. Come on! Don't be a fraidie cat!"

"Oh, dear," said Polly, "I know you won't like it, but I don't want to do that."

She saw Gwen's eyes snap, and knew that she was angry.

"I'll get my boat, and I'll let you sail it if you'd like to, in the brook," she said.

She did not enjoy her little guest, but she wished to be kind.

"I WOULDN'T like to," Gwen said, rudely, "sailing boats isn't lively. I guess as long as you don't want to play any jolly things I'll go home. I meant to shingle the cat's fur this morning, and I'll do that. I'm going to wet it sopping wet, part it in the middle from his head to his tail,

and then shingle it all but his tail!"

CHAPTER XI

GWEN TELLS A STORY

Of course, Gwen told Inez that she had been up to Sherwood Hall and that she thought it very dull.

"I wouldn't care to have such a big, BIG house," she said, "n I wouldn't want such a big garden."

It was a silly speech to make, because it was not true, and no one could believe it.

Her own house was fine, but no dwelling in the town could compare with grand, stately Sherwood Hall, and Gwen Harcourt knew that.

"Polly wouldn't play anything, so I came home," she said.

"Why, that's odd," said Inez, "she's always willing to play games."

"Oh, well, she wanted to play 'Hide-and-Seek' and that's too stupid. Let's play 'Tag' and see how hard we can run. You can make ever so much noise if you stamp your feet when you run on the asphalt. Le' me count!"

Inez did not dare to object.

"Eena, mena, mina, moot,
Le'me catch you by the foot;
Fill your eyes and mouth with soot,
Pull a tree up by the root.

"Hit you with a speckled trout,
Pull your hair to make it sprout;
Though you grumble, also pout,
One, two, three, and you are out."

"There!" said Gwen, "now you're it, so we'll begin to play."

"Why, how can I be 'it' when you said I was 'out?'" questioned Inez.

"Cause I SAY so, that's all," said Gwen, coolly, and Inez dared not say a word. She knew if she did that Gwen would be provoked and would probably go home.

She was a little tyrant and anyone who wish to play with her must do as she said if she cared for peace.

"Run, now!" she cried. "Run! But you can't catch me!"

Truly, she was fleet footed.

Up the long driveway, around the house, past old Towser's kennel, pausing just long enough to kick it in order that he might growl, up the front steps and along the piazza, over its railing, across a bed of choice flowering plants, breaking some, and crushing many, around the summer house and through the grape arbor, shouting like a little wild Indian, she ran, and Inez could not get near enough to touch her.

"You're slow!" cried Gwen, "slower than an old cow! You can't run like anything, so we might as well sit down!"

In truth, she was tired but she would not say so. It pleased her far better to find fault with Inez.

"When YOU get rested," she said, "we might climb up onto your barn and crawl into the cupola."

"Ye'll not be doin' that, young lady," said the gardener, who, as he was passing, had heard what she had said. "It's not safe, an' I know Mr. Varney'd not allow it."

"Horrid old thing!" said Gwen. "Who do you mean?" Inez asked, sharply.

"The gardener, of course," snapped Gwen.

"I guess I'll go home," she said, a moment later, and although Inez coaxed her, she would not remain nor would she say why she had decided to go.

Whenever she wearied of a place she left it, refusing to remain or explain why she would not stay. Inez looked after the little flying figure.

"I hate to have her go, but I couldn't run every minute," she said.

One sunny afternoon, Lena and Rob, Leslie and Harry were sitting on the lawn, listening to Polly's story of floating in a little boat out to the open sea. Of how she and Rose did not dream how naughty the boy, Donald, had been until they were so far out that they could hardly see the beach.

The boys thought it very exciting, and this was not the first time that they had heard it. Indeed, they had often asked her to tell it, and each time they had found it as interesting as when they first had listened to it.

"Now tell us about the first moment that you saw the Dolphin," said Rob.

Gwen Harcourt, seeing the group on the lawn, wondered what they were talking about.

There was but one way to find out, and she chose to take it. She ran up the path that led to where the little group was sitting and dropped on the grass beside Harry Grafton.

She listened to the story, but she did not think it at all amusing.

Anyone who knew Gwen would know that it could not interest her. She cared for no story of which she was not the heroine.

When the tale was finished and the playmates were telling Polly how fine a story it was, Gwen, speaking very loudly, made herself heard; she usually did.

"Everybody listen while I tell a story that'll scare you 'till you most can't breathe. It's a true story, too!"

"Go ahead, Gwen," said Rob.

"Yes, tell it!" said Harry. "I don't mind being scared if you can do it!"

She needed no urging.

"One time when I was little---" she commenced, but Harry interrupted.

"When was that?" he asked.

"Stop, Harry!" whispered Leslie.

"One time, when I was LITTLER than I am now, I went into our parlor all alone when it was almost dark, and looked at the pictures. Mama has ever so many, and some of them are landscapes and some of them are portraits.

"The one I liked to look at scared me every time I saw it. It was a big, tall lady dressed in yellow and she had a feather fan.

"When I saw her in the bright daylight I thought she moved SOME, but whenever I looked at her when it was almost dark she seemed to move MORE!"

Gwen paused to see if the other children were impressed, and looked up just in time to see Rob Lindsey "nudge" his sister. Her eyes flashed.

"Well, p'raps you don't believe it, Rob Lindsey, but I SAW it, and I guess I know!" she said.

"Go on, Gwen," said Rob, who was a great tease, "I only touched Lena's arm to let her know the 'scare' part of the yarn was coming."

Thus reassured, Gwen continued her story.

"Well, this time I'm telling 'bout, the lady in the yellow gown looked

at me, and--WAVED her fan!"

"Hot day?" questioned Rob, but Gwen chose not to notice what he said.

"She waved her big feather fan slower and slower, and then--she walked RIGHT OUT OF THE PICTURE and came down on the floor!"

"Oh--o!" said Princess Polly, and "Oh--oo--oo!" said Lena, but Rob asked a question.

"Did your fine lady come down on the floor in a heap?"

"Did she BUST her feather fan?" questioned Harry Grafton.

"You're not nice to laugh when I'm telling a story," said Gwen, "and I guess you wouldn't have laughed if you'd BEEN there!"

"Why, what happened?" Lena asked, partly because she was curious and partly to be kind.

"I'll never know just what did truly happen, because just as she came toward me, I was so scared I fainted, and when I came to, the lady had vanished, but the big hole in the canvas showed JUST WHERE SHE'D STOOD!"

"Why Gwen Harcourt! You know that story's a fib story all the way through!" said Harry.

"Tis NOT!" said Gwen, "and I guess I know!"

She sprang from the grass, and ran down the driveway.

"I guess when you see the big frame, and the picture with a big hole in it just the shape of the lady, that showed where she WAS, I guess you'll HAVE to b'lieve it," she said, and having said this to the boys that had teased her, she hurried down the avenue.

"Oh, what an awful story!" said Polly, "it made me feel like shivering, and I was glad the boys were with us."

"If Gwen Harcourt likes to tell such stories, she can," said Leslie, "but she needn't say they're true."

"Oh, but perhaps SOME of it--" Polly stopped. She had meant to speak kindly, but what part of so silly a story could be true?

"You've been in her parlor, Leslie," said Harry, "did YOU see the picture with the big hole in it, just where the fine lady stepped out from the frame? Leslie, HAVE you?"

"Yes," admitted Leslie, "I've been there."

"WAS the big picture with the big hole in it hanging there?" he asked.

"N--NO!" said Leslie, "and I'll tell you all something. A lady that mama knows heard some of Gwen's stories, and she told Mrs. Harcourt what perfectly awful things Gwen was telling, and Mrs. Harcourt said that she was very glad, and thankful that Gwen had such great imagination, and said she wouldn't, for the world do anything to check it, because it's a SURE sign she'll be something fine some day.

"Mrs. Harcourt said it was just wonderful what a strong imagination Gwen had, and she said she thought she would be either an author, or a play writer, or something great."

"And papa, when he heard that, said he'd want to be careful lest she grow up to be an awful liar!" said Harry.

"Oh, hush!" said Leslie, "papa said falsifier or some name like that."

"Well, that's the same thing," said Harry.

The little friends talked of Gwen, and the stories that she told.

The boys thought them ridiculous, and laughed at the idea that she expected her playmates to believe them, but neither Polly, Lena, nor Leslie could see it that way.

"I wouldn't mind the stories," Polly said, "because anyone can make up stories just for fun, but I do hate to have her say they're TRUE."

"And she sticks to it," said Harry.

"That's it," said Lena, "she says they're true, and she dared us to come down to her house, and see the picture!"

Gwen was safe in daring them, for not one of the little friends liked her well enough to go to her home, none save Inez, and Inez had not heard the story about the picture.

One sunny morning Polly ran along the avenue to overtake Lena Lindsey.

"Lena! Lena!" she cried, "wait for me! I've a letter from Rose," she said, as she walked along with Lena.

"Which way are you going?" Lena asked, "I want to hear what she says."

"I wasn't going anywhere 'til I saw you," said Polly.

"Then come along the path through the grove," said Lena, "and we'll stop on the bridge, and enjoy the letter there."

They ran along the path together, the sunbeams making Jack-o-lanterns at their feet. Light branches swayed in the wind, and through the dancing leaves the sunlight sifted, making Lena's hair a brighter brown, and Polly's flaxen ringlets like pale gold.

They reached the little bridge, and paused to watch the clear, rippling brook, as it ran beneath it, and out through the tiny grove.

Humming a melody all its own, it made its zigzag way between birches, and alders, maples, and elderblow, carrying on its shining surface stray leaves, and water spiders that struggled to see which first should reach the sunlit meadow land beyond.

"Now, read the letter," said Lena, "and does she say when she's coming here?"

"Oh, you hark, while I read," said Polly, taking from its envelope, the letter that she had, already, read three times.

Lena listened with delight. It would be an event to have little Rose Atherton come to Avondale! She told of Uncle John's frequent visits, and of long drives enjoyed with him.

"And here's something that made me laugh," said Polly.

"I told you about Evangeline Longfellow Jenks," she continued, "and she's written some more verses, and Rose copied this one. Just listen while I read it."

Polly took a slip of paper from the envelope, and read this absurd verse that was written upon it:

[Illustration with caption: "Lena listened with delight."]

"I'm to be a poet when I get big,
And I'll write a book that's bigger'n me.
My poems I make now are to practice on,
But when I'm big they'll be fine to see."

"Does she think THAT'S poetry?" said Lena, laughing because the verse was so absurd that she could not help it.

"If you think that one is funny, just listen to this," said Polly, turning the slip over, and reading from the other side.

"The sea is wet, and so is the brook;
The earth swings round and round.
The cat's asleep, and so are my feet,
So I'll write no more till anon."

"Why, what DOES she mean?" said Lena, when she could stop laughing long enough to ask.

"I don't know," said Polly, laughing as heartily as Lena did, "and the funny thing is that Evangeline says anyone could write poetry that folks understand. She says it's just TWICE as bright to make verses that NOBODY could understand!"

"I wouldn't want to have to play with her, and Rose says she runs away whenever she sees Evangeline coming," said Polly.

"I should think she would run," said Lena, "I would."

After the sweet little letter had been read, and Lena had asked for a second reading, Polly put it back into its envelope, and they talked of what Rose had written.

"Only think," said Polly, "her Aunt Rose doesn't wish her to be away from the house to go to school, so she's to have a private tutor at home, a music teacher, and a dancing teacher, and they're all to come to her house. She won't be in school with other little girls at all."

"I wouldn't like that," said Lena, "we have fine times together when school commences, and I don't believe I'd like teachers that came to my house. Well, I don't mean I wouldn't like the teachers, but I think it's more fun to go to school."

"I don't see how she's ever to get acquainted with other little girls," said Polly, "I think it sounds very lonesome!"

"So do I," said Lena, "but perhaps she doesn't. We'll know when she comes to your house, because I'm most sure she'll tell us."

"And we'll go to school the third week of next month," said Polly, "and Rose isn't to begin her lessons until two weeks later than that. She's coming to stay with me and spend the two weeks. Oh, won't we have fun?"

"Fun?" said Lena, "we'll do every fine thing we can think of. I'll tell Rob, and he'll help us make it jolly. He always does, and he likes Rose as well as we do."

"And who's Lester Jenks?" Lena asked, "is he the poetry girl's brother?"

"Oh, no, he's her cousin, and he's full of fun, and fine to play with," said Polly, "and he thinks Evangeline is pokey, and he laughs at her poetry. I didn't laugh at it, and I don't think he was nice to. I told him so, and he only laughed harder."

"He told Rose to tell me that he's going to send me a Valentine this year, and he says he's found a new place to get ice cream just a little way from where Rose lives. He says when I'm at her house the next time, he'll buy ice cream almost every day."

"Isn't he generous? And he says: 'Tell Princess Polly to hurry up and come,' and Rose says she can hardly wait 'til she sees me."

"Oh, Polly!" cried Lena, as a happy thought occurred to her, "if she's to be here when school has commenced, you can bring her to school. Teacher'll let us have guests."

"I'm glad you read the letter to me, because it makes it seem as if Rose was right here."

"And almost before you know it, she WILL be!" cried Polly, with a gay little laugh.

"I'll have to run along now," said Lena, "because Rob gave me this note to take to Harry Grafton, and I said I'd rush over there to give it to him. I forgot all about it when I stopped to hear Rose's letter. I guess I'd have stopped just the same, if I'd remembered Rob's note!" she said, and her brown eyes twinkled, as she looked over her shoulder on her way down the path.

CHAPTER XII

GYP RUNS AWAY

Polly stood on the little bridge and watched Lena until, at the opening between the trees, she turned and waved her hand, and then ran out upon the road.

"I'll find Sir Mortimer, and tell him Rose is coming to see us soon," she said.

She ran along the path, out onto the avenue, then up the broad driveway of Sherwood Hall.

As she passed the holly-hocks, she saw the big cat lying in front of them, basking in the sun.

"Oh, Mortimer darling, you'll tan in that hot sun," she said, "but she sat down beside him, as if the sun would have no effect upon her.

"See this letter?" she said, as she showed him the little envelope. Of course, Sir Mortimer promptly smelt of it.

"Oh, you don't need to see it so CLOSE, dear," said Polly, "you can surely look at it without putting your nose on it."

He stretched out his soft paw, and caught at the envelope, as if to play with it.

"Now, Mortimer, 't isn't any use for you to take the letter, because you know, dear, you couldn't read it, but I'll tell you the best thing in it, if you'll listen."

The big cat stared at her and blinked.

"Rose is coming to see us, and Mortimer, when I say US, that means you

and me. Of course she wants to see her Aunt Judith, and everyone in this town, but MOST she really wants to see us, that TRULY is you and me. Aren't you glad?"

He arched his neck, and rubbed against her, purring as if to show his delight with the news she had told him.

Polly took him in her arms, and carrying him to the hammock, seated herself, and began to swing very gently.

At another time, Sir Mortimer might have objected, but just now he was rather drowsy, and instead of jumping from the hammock, he curled up in Polly's lap, and seemed to be preparing for a nap.

"I love little pussy," sang Princess Polly, gently patting his handsome head.

"Look at her, now," said the cook, peeping from the kitchen window, and pointing at Polly, "ain't she the dearest child in the world?"

"Ye've no need ter ask," said the big butler, "fer ye know my answer. Our little Miss Princess Polly is the finest child I ever saw."

"And did ye mind that wild little heathen that came up here the other day, a prancin' all over the place, here one minute, an' there another? Sure, I expected ter see her shin up the side of the stable, an' then jump from the ridge-pole. She'd make nothin' of that!" said the maid.

"I think it must be that little Harcourt monkey," said the butler, "and I'm told her ma likes her wild pranks. What is it she calls 'em? Oh, yes, I remember. She says as how her darling is very VERVASHUS! What that means I do'no, but one thing I'm SURE of. If her youngster is THAT, our Miss Polly just AIN'T!"

And while Polly petted big Sir Mortimer, she thought of the dear letter, and softly whispered to her pet:

"Lena is just as glad that Rose is coming as you, and I are, and she said Rob would be glad, too."

There were other little people beside Polly and Lena who were thinking of the first days of school, and of them all, not one was more interested than wee Dollie Burton.

Indeed, she was both interested, and grieved. Interested to hear all that her sister, Blanche, and the other children had to say, and grieved because she could not understand why she could not at once begin to be a little school girl.

In vain was she told that she was far too small to think of going to school. She insisted that she was not so VERY little, and that she so wished to go.

"Blanche did not go to school until she was much larger than you, dear," her mother had said, "and I think it would be far better for you to stay at home this Winter. You can play school at home, and you can be the teacher, and your two little kittens, and your dolls can be your pupils."

"But I could play it nicer if I had been to school just a little while," said Dollie, "'cause then I'd know just how."

The rustic bridge upon which Polly and Lena had stood spanned the brook that ran through the grove.

The grove was a wee bit of woodland so near to dwellings that it was quite safe for children to play there.

Dollie Burton was so very small, however, that she had always played in the lovely grounds that surrounded her home.

Whenever she had ventured farther, she had been with Blanche, but to-day she had left the garden, and for the first time in her little life she had run away!

It was something that Harry Grafton had said that had caused her to do it.

"Why, Dollie, you'd feel lost if you went to school," he had said, "'cause you've always played in your yard."

He had not meant it unkindly, but he had offended little Dollie.

"I WOULDN'T feel lost outside of our garden any more than you would, Harry Grafton, so now!" she had cried.

"Don't you mind, Dollie," the boy had answered, but Dollie DID mind very much.

She had no thought as to where she was going when she ran from the garden, and it was only chance that led her to the grove.

She ran to the bridge and stood watching the rippling brook, as it rushed beneath it.

Softly she crooned a little tune, for wee Dollie was never long unhappy. She had almost forgotten how vexed she had been, and she laughed as she saw small bubbles sailing, sailing away to the meadow. Softly she hummed, and then little words, describing what she saw, fitted quaintly into the droll melody--

"See the pretty bubbles, bubbles,
Riding on the little brook;
See the spiders try to catch them,
And old Mr. Toady Frog sings
'Po-dunk!' and jumps down deep.

Oh, green old Mr. Toady Frog--

There's Blanche's teacher! I'll ask her, and p'raps she'll say 'yes.'"

A slender young woman with a gentle, smiling face, came along the path, and stepped upon the bridge.

She wondered who the tiny girl might be, until Dollie turned, and gave her a sunny smile.

"Oh, I wanted to see you this very minute!" cried Dollie; "I want you to tell mama I'm big 'nough to go to school. Will you, please, Miss Sterling. I'll LOVE you, if you will!"

The young girl was tempted to laugh, until she saw the red lips quiver. Then she knew how much her answer meant to the little girl, and kneeling beside Dollie, she put her arm around her, drawing her close.

"Dear, can't you love me, whatever I say?" she asked.

"Yes," said Dollie, "because you're so handsome."

"Oh, you are truly an artful baby," the young teacher said, with a laugh.

"But WILL you?" urged Dollie, "I do know SOMETHING. I can spell 'c-a-t, cat,' and I know that isn't kitten, and I can spell 'b-e, be,' and that isn't the bumble kind, so can I come to school?"

"Dollie, dear, you couldn't be in my class if you started this year, so I cannot give you permission. You would begin your schooldays in Miss Primson's room," was the reply.

"Why, she's the cross-looking teacher, with black eyes that look like this!"

Dollie touched the fore-finger of each hand with its thumb, thus making rings through which she peeped, in imitation of spectacles, and frowned as darkly as her baby face would permit.

Miss Sterling knew that she should not laugh at the grimace, but it was so very funny that she could not help it.

"Miss Primson is to teach in another town next season, so if you wait 'til next year you will have a new teacher to commence with, and you can work very hard, so as to get into my room as soon as possible," she said.

The child's face lighted with a happy smile.

"Oh, then, I don't want to go THIS year!" she cried, "I'll stay at home, as mama said, and keep school with my dolls and the kittens, but will you come sometimes, and see if I teach them right?"

"I certainly will," Miss Sterling said, kindly, "and I do hope your little class will behave nicely."

"The dolls will," said Dollie, hopefully, "but the kittens' manners are--awful!"

"Then that shows how much they need a teacher," Miss Sterling said, and Dollie felt sure that it must be right for her to remain at home, that those kittens might not be neglected.

"They run away 'thout asking to be s'cused, and they walk right into the saucer of milk. I don't s'pect them to use spoons, but they needn't sit down in it. How'd I look, if I sat down in MY plate when I was eating?"

There was no one near to answer her question, and the little girl hurried home, convinced that there must be no delay in educating the kittens.

There was one small person in the town who feared the opening of school, and that was Gyp.

During vacation days he was care free, but as it neared the time when all the children of Avondale would be, for the greater part of the day, in school, he began to watch any person who passed the shanty that he called "home," and to view with terror the blue coat of a policeman.

"They shan't ketch me!" he muttered, "I WON'T go to school!"

His mother, as ignorant as himself, enjoyed using him as a wood gatherer, and thus insisted that he was not old enough to go to school, when questioned by a member of the school committee.

"Not OLD enough!" cried the man in disgust, "why, woman, any child five years old can go to school."

"Gyp ain't five yet!" the woman had answered, stolidly.

"It's no use talking that way," was the quick reply, "he's NINE if he's a day. I think it's more likely that he's ten. Ye can't keep a child out of school unless he's less'n five, or over fourteen."

"Then he's OVER fourteen!" cried the woman.

"Less'n five one minute, and over fourteen the next!" said the man in disgust. "Grows kinder fast, don't he?"

"Well, he AIN'T goin' ter school!" the woman insisted, and the officer went his way.

Gyp, however, did not believe that he would long remain away from the shanty.

He determined to take no chances, and it seemed to him that the safest thing for him to do, was to keep well away from home.

At twilight he surprised his family by appearing with a huge bundle of fagots that he had gathered in the woods. He gave them yet another surprise by packing the wood upon the old wood pile behind the house, and running off again for more.

He returned with a larger bundle than the first.

"Kind 'o busy, ain't yer?" questioned his mother, but Gyp made no reply. She watched him, as he hastily piled the wood.

It certainly was unusual to see the boy work like that!

When asked to do a task, it was Gyp's habit to do it as slowly as possible, and to do as little as he dared.

Now, without waiting to be asked, he was working as if he had not a moment to spare!

Yet more amazing, on the next day, before any of his family was stirring, he was again at work, and soon a huge heap of fagots rose in the little back yard.

"What AILS ye, Gyp?" his mother asked, "Be ye sick?"

Gyp never answered unless he chose, and this was surely one of the times when he did not choose.

"Ornary critter!" said the woman, as she picked up her broom, and went in, closing the door behind her.

"NOW, I'll go!" said Gyp, and he ran off across the fields.

He could take care of himself, and he always managed, when away from home, to steal enough so that he was well fed. He knew that, if wood were needed, his mother would hunt for him, but with the big pile of firewood behind the shanty, she would not search for him. She would be glad that for a time she need not feed him!

Gyp had been shrewd when he had made that woodpile!

He found, when he had crossed the fields, that he was on a country road, and near a large farmhouse, whose big barn-door stood invitingly open.

In front of the house stood a baker's cart, and Gyp looked about to see if the driver were in sight.

"He's in that house!" whispered Gyp, in great excitement.

In haste, lest the man return, and catch him, he pulled out a draw, snatched some buns, and a pie, and darted with them into the barn, and

up on the hay in the loft, where he hugely enjoyed his treat.

He heard the man run out to the cart, push the draw to, and then drive off.

"I've had a fine treat, an' he ain't missed what I took, so that's all right," he said, with a laugh, "an' I guess I'll see who's got some fruit in his garden. That's what I want now!"

He went down the ladder like a monkey, ran from the barn, and a little farther up the road, found a fine blackberry patch, just over the wall.

Of these he ate until he cared for no more, and then, like a full-fledged tramp, strode down the dusty road.

"I ain't goin' ter be ketched 'fore their old school begins, fer if I AM ketched, they'll make me begin with the others, an' I ain't a goin' ter, but after its goin' on two weeks, then I'll be safe. They won't bother me then, an' I'll hang around the schoolhouse an' make things lively!"

He smiled as he muttered this threat, and his black eyes twinkled. Oh, yes, he would be delighted to play any outrageous trick that might startle both teacher and pupils.

He did not know that during all the season, those who intended that every child in town should be educated, strove with the same vigilance as at the beginning of the year.

"Gyp's run away!"

"Why, Harry Grafton, he's always running away from somewhere, or from someone," said Leslie.

"Oh, that's when he's been stealing things," said Harry, "but this time it's different. He ran away from the shanty, and I know, because I heard his mother asking a policeman to find him, and she said he'd been gone a week!"

"Wherever he is, he won't stay long," said Leslie, "he'll come running home."

"Why will he?" questioned Harry. "If he's run away, it's because he's tired of that old shanty, and I should think he would be!"

"WE'D be tired of it," said Leslie, "but he's used to it, and he'll come back, just because it's his home."

"P'raps he will," agreed Harry, "but I wouldn't think that place would seem like home even to Gyp!"

"I'm going up to play with Princess Polly," said Leslie, "and I'll tell her about Gyp. She's afraid of him, and I know she wouldn't want him to run away, but she may feel safer because he has."

"He wouldn't dare harm her," said Harry, with flashing eyes, "for he knows we boys wouldn't stand that. We'd fight for Princess Polly!"

"And she's the only thing I'd want to see you fight for. Mama says that boys who quarrel are vulgar, but it would be right to do ANYTHING for Princess Polly. She's the dearest girl in the world," said Leslie, "and Rose Atherton is next!"

"Yes," said Harry, "Rose is next."

Quite unaware that any of her playmates were near, Polly ran out into the sunshine, and taking a long bit of trailing vine for a skipping rope, tripped along the driveway.

"Oh, you're not a very nice rope," she said, "but you're a pretty make-believe rope. Here, Mortimer! You can have this for a string."

She ran along, dragging the vine, and Sir Mortimer, glad of a playmate, raced after it, as much excited as if he had been a kitten.

"We'll dance and play
The livelong day;
Ah, happy friends are we.
With summer flowers
And shady bowers
And young hearts light and free,"

sang Polly, and Leslie and Harry from their seat on the top of the stone wall, near the gate-way, echoed the last line;

"And young hearts light and free."

"Oh, I was singing to Sir Mortimer, and I didn't know anyone was near to hear me," said Polly, laughing gaily, as the two who had been her little audience sprang from the wall, and ran up the driveway to the garden.

Polly tossed the vine upon the grass, where Sir Mortimer promptly snatched it, and rolling over, became entangled in it.

"You'll want to take him to school with you," said Leslie, with a laugh, "but Mortimer will have to stay at home."

"They won't let even Princess Polly bring a cat to school," said Harry, "tho' I would if _I_ was the teacher."

"Then I wish you were the teacher, Harry," said Polly, "but I know I shall like school here at Avondale, and I shall have fine times, even if Sir Mortimer has to stay at home."

"Gwen Harcourt will be funny in whatever class they place her," said Harry, "because she says she doesn't want to go to school, and she means to act so that the teacher'll be GLAD to send her home!"

"And Rob Lindsey says there's ever so many new pupils coming this year, so the classes will be full, and there'll be just CROWDS of children to play with," declared Leslie.

Oh, there were merry days in store for the little playmates, and those who have learned to love Princess Polly, and would like to meet her again, to know what happened to Rose, and of the gay times at school, and at Sherwood Hall, may read of all this in

"PRINCESS POLLY AT SCHOOL"

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