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THE QUEST OF HAPPY HEARTS

BY

KATHLEEN HAY

CONTENTS

CHAPTER

I. Plans

II. On the Way

III. A Glimpse of the Tower Room

IV. Plans for the Party

V. Exploring the Forest

VI. Marty and Jerry

VII. Talking over the Day

VIII. The Story of the Tower Room

IX. Adding to the Quest

CHAPTER I

PLANS

"Whoever heard of such a plan--a visit to Land's End! The very name of the place suggests the last spot on the globe; a great old house set down on the edge of a forest; and Dad called off on business for an indefinite period, but seemingly content to ship us on a wild goose chase. He's scarcely told us a word before of the place or of great-aunt Janice Meredith!"

Nora's tones were dismal indeed, as she rushed into the living room to join the other girls to discuss their journey.

She found the group the reverse of cheerful, at the prospect of this sudden change of plans, by the invitation to go to Land's End for a visit. "I have spent many happy days there with Aunt Janice and others," Mr. Meredith had told them on leaving, "but since your uncle Harry's death, have been there seldom--some day--" just at that point he paused with a sigh, and changed from what he had started to say--"Be dutiful and very loving to Aunt Janice; now there's only time for good-bye."

That was all they knew, entirely too little to satisfy the young Meredith family!

"A visit to Land's End, what a prospect," Janey joined in sympathy with Nora; the two were near together in age, while Beth and Alice were younger. They sat listening to the complaints of the older girls, not yet having had a chance to express their views.

"Great-aunt Janice may be a lovely old lady," Beth seeing a chance broke in, by way of consolation; she threw down her story book to join in the discussion and plans that were inevitable.

The two brothers Don and Harry had gone to the station to see their father off and so the girls did not know their views as to what was to happen.

"How can we tell what Land's End is like, it may be a--a--castle!"

"Don't be silly, Beth--you must be reading a fairy tale!" Nora's tone was scornful, but in a moment she was sorry.

Alice, the youngest of the Meredith's clapped her hands happily, however, at Beth's suggestion.

"It _may be_ a real--palace, Beth--wouldn't that be delightful?"

"Well, call it a castle of dreams, if you like," Nora began to smile, "it's no use crying over what can't be helped, because that wouldn't change the situation; if we _must_, that's settled. Dad has made the arrangements for us, by accepting the invitation, and there's nothing left to do but make the best of it after all!"

Janey's face, as well as Beth's and Alice's began to brighten at Nora's changed attitude.

"Land's End may be far happier to visit than we can dream of," Janey joined in quietly, "and now we had best get right to packing, for there isn't much time to lose."

"Could we do a little shopping?" Beth asked, "there may not be any stores near."

"We can't carry too much though," Nora said, by way of precaution, "however we must all remember to take Aunt Janice something; it's good of

her to take us all in for an indefinite visit."

"Only six additions of the Meredith family." At that they all began to laugh merrily, and good humor was restored.

"Would you believe it, I've just begun to think of Aunt Janice's side; she doesn't know us at all, yet has invited us on a long visit. I just believe she must be a sweet, brave old lady!"

Janey looked up quickly from preparations--"I'm sure Aunt Janice is a dear," she said pleasantly, "and I for one am going prepared to have a good time, and to try and cheer her up. Dad said we must be dutiful and loving."

"What's _dutiful_?" asked Alice.

Nora laughed. "There now, Janey--explain yourself."

"Well, Alice, I think it will mean for us to be obedient, and respectful in trying to do everything to please Aunt Janice. I guess that is what Dad meant."

Beth and Alice looked much happier; the visit to Land's End was growing more and more interesting, since Nora and Janey were beginning to be ashamed of their first attitude and trying to make amends.

"There's a song that goes like this," said Janey:

"I would be true, for there are those who trust me,
I would be pure, for there are those who care,
I would be strong, for there is much to suffer,
I would be brave, for there is much to dare'..."

"I love to sing those words, don't you, Nora? There always seems a lot of things to _do_ in it, that are worthwhile."

"There are a lot of worthwhile things to follow out in the song," Nora replied, "suppose we all sing it together, before we start to get ready for our journey?"

They all crossed quickly over to the open piano in one corner of the room. Nora had taken music and so was the pianist of the family. She struck the opening chords, and then they all joined in singing it through.

"_I_ would look up--and laugh--and love--and lift_--" the music died away, while the girls remained in thought for a few moments. It was Nora who broke the pause, glancing around on the group who had always looked up to her.

"I think the words are beautiful," she commented softly--"I somehow feel braver, when I sing them thoughtfully--'_I_ would look up_--_and laugh_--_and love_--_and_--_lift_!"

"I think I'll take that as my motto to try and follow."

"I would like to also," Janey, too, was thinking hard.

Then they broke up, happier because of the challenge in the song to worthwhile effort, and ready now to begin the preparations of the impending journey to Land's End!

CHAPTER II

ON THE WAY

The next day was a busy one for the Merediths, but at last everything was ready, and bag and baggage they boarded the train and were off on the journey.

"I wonder what it's all going to be like, really?" Nora and Janey peered out on the passing scenes, as they sped along.

Directly in front of them were Beth and Alice, and beyond them, Don and Harry, who felt the responsibility of their position as protectors of the four girls.

Don and Harry were also speculating.

"I wonder how it ever came to be called _Land's End_?"

"I believe Dad said the land ran up into a narrow kind of neck and so people, just trying to find a name, made it out of that, I suppose; it sounds rather mysterious however; who knows but what we _may_ run up on an adventure."

Harry laughed.

"Well, from its title it sounds rather quiet, but we won't have much time for speculation, and as you say we may run up on something quite exciting during our visit to the woods!"

They chatted away merrily for awhile, until almost before they could realize the distance had passed so quickly, they were at their destination, while a voice was calling--"all off for Land's End!"

Nora, Janey, Beth and Alice, Harry and Don, sprang to their feet in surprise, while eagerly peering into the dusk of the outside, to catch a glimpse of the scene awaiting.

A sudden jolt warned them that the trip was over and gathering up their bundles they began to pile out.

They were greeted at the train steps by a friendly man, who took them at once to a car not far distant.

"Is this Land's End?" Don inquired.

"It is indeed," laughed their pilot, "did you imagine we all had to walk out here?"

"I--I--really didn't know," Don replied, trying to be polite, while sticking to the truth.

"I thought perhaps it might be the end of the world!"

Small Alice suddenly joined in the conversation from her corner, half hidden by packages and suit cases; after that the tension was over and they all talked merrily as they glided along.

"Well, here we are, and there's Aunt Janice Meredith," Nora was the first to jump out and go forward to greet the small figure awaiting them in a flood of light, that stretched out in welcoming rays in all directions.

"A very, very warm welcome to all of my Meredith nieces and nephews!" said the diminutive lady, holding out both hands in greeting.

Alice nudged Beth, her eyes big with excitement.

Their friendly pilot had said goodnight, and slipped quietly away, leaving them to themselves for the first meeting.

"Come right in to supper, the old place hasn't had such a merry set for quite a while, and it does my heart good to have you."

The old lady turned and led the way into a spacious dining room, where the table was set with the daintiest china and gleaming silver.

The room also seemed filled with the softest most musical notes, that made the place seem to Beth and Alice like fairyland at once.

"Now tell me about your journey," Aunt Janice began, after seeing to the comfort of each, because she declared, they must really be almost famished after the long trip.

Soon they began to talk and the evening advanced in an unaccountable manner toward bedtime, so delightful were the hours of getting acquainted. When she felt they must break up, Aunt Janice led the way up the winding stair.

"Good-night, and happy dreams!" she said, with a smile for all the group, "take a good rest now, and be ready for some good times tomorrow."

"Oh, Aunt Janice, we're already having a lovely visit, and you are indeed kind to invite us for a stay in this beautiful, old house."

"The more the merrier, my dear," she beamed on Nora. "All of you in turn, will make the old place far happier than it has been in a long while, and I shall be much helped by having you here."

"Is it a fairy castle?" Alice had slipped one hand into the old lady's, as they stood talking together.

"I think I'll wait a bit and let you tell me if it seems like a real fairy castle, Alice, after you've been here awhile."

"That will be fun," Beth answered.

Aunt Janice smiled.

"Don't you believe in fairies? The fairies I believe in have always been welcome companions of mine, namely, the fairies of kindness, good thoughts and wishes and deeds; they drive out loneliness, if you let them live under your roof. Moreover, the world then seen is brighter because of their light."

Alice beamed.

"There is a little song that says, 'Brighten the corner where you are--', I love brightness and light, don't you, Aunt Janice?"

"I believe we feel that way, Janey, because of the One who is the Source of all good thoughts, wishes and deeds and who said, 'I am the Light of the world.' How desolate life would be without the light of His love, shed on dark pathways to make them shine!"

Nora and Janey looked quickly into the old lady's face. They saw both sadness and gladness, smiling through.

"I'm sure we're going to love it here," they said impulsively, as they threw their arms around the old lady to bid her goodnight.

"I'm ever so glad that you feel that way; you may look forward to some happy hours and surprises, I hope--just wait and see!"

Then Aunt Janice turned, and with a wave of her hand, disappeared into a room at the end of the long hall.

CHAPTER III

A GLIMPSE OF THE TOWER ROOM

Not even the excitement of anticipation could keep the Merediths awake that first night of their visit to Land's End, but after a refreshing

sleep, bright and early the next morning they were awakened by the sun shining through the green blinds that shaded the old castle windows.

Also by Aunt Janice calling pleasantly, "Did you have a good night's rest, and are you ready to go down to breakfast now?"

She beamed happily around on all the young Meredith's, as they hurriedly joined her at the top of the stairs.

A little later at the breakfast table she asked suddenly,--"What shall the program be today; an exploring expedition into the forest--a trip to the city to shop, or perhaps a ride on the ponies and a visit to the old castle gardens?"

"Oh," chorused the Merediths--"everything sounds so delightful, it's hard to choose!"

Aunt Janice's eyes twinkled.

"Perhaps I'd best help you out to begin with then--suppose you explore the gardens and the old place this morning; then by the afternoon, you'll be ready to choose what you'd prefer next. I shall not go along, but you are to feel perfectly at home; go anywhere you fancy--_only_--," Aunt Janice lowered her voice--"only pass quickly by the tower room at the extreme west wing--perhaps sometime--," the old lady paused, a sigh escaping her lips, that she forgot to stifle, but quickly remembering, brought back a bright smile, as she first led them in family prayers and then waved them off, bidding her young visitors to have a happy morning.

"What a wonderful old place!" Nora was the first to speak, as they passed here and there examining one thing after another.

"It certainly is," Harry's eyes were thoughtful. "I wonder why Dad has only dropped a word, here and there, of it, and about Aunt Janice. I hardly realized that she was real until we came and saw!"

"It puzzles me, too," Nora agreed, "I keep thinking that maybe I'll wake up directly and find I've been dreaming."

"And we thought Land's End was going to be the end of everything! The old place holds a mystery, and I can't but wonder what it is."

The undercurrent of excitement was thrilling to the Merediths, as their thoughts turned to Aunt Janice's parting injunction about the tower room.

"If there's anything bothering Aunt Janice, I'd do anything to help her out." Nora was speaking softly.

"Perhaps we can help," Don said, "anyhow we can follow out her instructions, whatever they may be."

"I love Aunt Janice," Alice joined in, "don't you?"

"She's a perfectly darling old lady," Beth replied, a sentiment that expressed the feelings of all the Merediths.

A sudden turn in their wanderings, revealed the mysterious west wing and tower room, that was uppermost, just then, in their minds.

With its clinging ivy that covered the old walls, it looked more mysterious than they dreamed it would. In another moment, however, they remembered what Aunt Janice had said, and hurried on by.

"I don't think we ought to look at it even at a distance," Nora remarked, "because I'm sure that room holds the secret that shadows the old place; for some reason Aunt Janice isn't ready to disclose it."

"And _I_ believe that Dad would have told us all about the castle if it hadn't been for the mystery." Janey glanced back over her shoulder as she spoke, then gave a suppressed scream.

"There's someone inside the tower room," she gasped--"I saw a handkerchief waving behind the ivy covered window!"

"Hush!" Nora broke in hurriedly, "you imagined that, Janey--probably a white pigeon has flown in and can't find its way out again."

"Imagined indeed!" Janey's voice was shaking with excitement, "I tell you that someone is there at this moment, peering through those overhanging vines."

Alice began to cry softly, while Nora had to turn her attention toward pacifying the little girl.

"Don't cry Alice, I think it is only a white pigeon that can't escape, and is flying back and forth to find an opening; there's nothing mysterious in that; now promise not to say anything of this to Aunt Janice."

"I'll try to remember," and Alice dried her tears with Nora's words of comfort, and soon they caught up with the party ahead, and for the time being the incident was forgotten.

The morning hours slipped rapidly along, but at last they had gone over the old place and gardens, which stretched around on all sides. With reluctance they then retraced their steps, thinking perhaps they were overstaying their time.

Aunt Janice was standing in the door awaiting them.

"Did you have a pleasant morning; and what do you think of the old gardens?"

"Beautiful" and "Wonderful!" Their exclamations of delight and pleasure, were quite satisfying to Aunt Janice.

"We're having the loveliest visit, and everything is charming."

The old lady's face was a picture, as she smiled on the group, reacting to the breath of youth, again awakened in her heart, by these happy young visitors.

"Suppose it could be managed, would all of you care to make the old castle your--home?" She spoke on impulse on hearing their words of praise.

"Oh, Aunt Janice--" Nora replied quickly, "it would seem like the happy ending to a book!"

"Perhaps it can be arranged then," the old lady clasped her hands together--"you could have all of the advantages of the near-by city, and yet we could have a merry time out here in the old homestead, if only Gwen--" she paused, suddenly remembering, and cut short the words unuttered.

"Come--" she said, turning abruptly, "lunch is waiting, and I feel sure you must be ready for it, after the morning hours of exploration."

CHAPTER IV

PLANS FOR THE PARTY

Luncheon over, the ponies were brought out from the stables, and as Don expressed it, they seemed ready-made for their visit.

The boys were overjoyed as they mounted and galloped away down the long avenue for a ride; the girls at first being satisfied with a trot around the grounds on "Brownie's" broad back.

After the delightful day had gone at last, tired but happy they gathered around Aunt Janice as she sat knitting.

"You must have a fortune growing around the old place on all of those fine forest trees!" Harry commented.

Aunt Janice looked toward the speaker quickly.

"Well, I believe it is one of the finest in this part of the country; you may all take a basket of lunch and go out exploring there, if you like, soon--all varieties of lovely ferns grow about in damp places and you can bring some back to help make the old place look green and pretty inside, as well as on the outside, for we must get ready for a party."

"A party--a party--" chorused several voices at once.

"I see the plan meets with approval; all right then; I'll have a good lunch put up and you may spend the day, and wander around to your heart's content!"

"How delightful!--and shall we play games, too?"

Alice had come up close to Aunt Janice and placed one small hand in hers. "Isn't everything going to be just ever so happy?"

"Happier by far than it has been for years, because of you young people to make it so, and last but not least, we shall have as many games in the program as you care to play."

The next hour or so passed rapidly in discussing the plans for the party to be, and all of the Merediths including Aunt Janice, were sorry when the hands of the old grandfather's clock began to warn them of the breaking up hour.

After they had separated for the night, Nora and Janey kept on talking of the delightful hours that they had spent.

"I never dreamed that Land's End would be as beautiful as a dream story," Nora remarked, "and I said such cross things about coming at first. I don't feel that I deserve this wonderful visit."

"You didn't really mean them, Nora; nor did I. I'm sure Aunt Janice and Dad would understand."

"I hope so, because I'm really sorry and ashamed."

"I am afraid we all say things only too often that are so unworthy; wouldn't we have much more happiness, Nora, if we would heed the warning of the Bible to guard our tongue and not to judge our fellowmen?"

"Y--es,--I suppose so. I think this place should be called the Castle of Delight, instead of Land's End; it would certainly be more appropriate."

"I think so too," Janey agreed. "I wonder if we'll come across any people living in the forest?"

"I wonder" Janey echoed. "Perhaps the old man who brought us from the station in Aunt Janice's car. He may live in there, and we might stop and invite him to the party."

Nora laughed.

"He isn't really old, Janey. I thought him pretty vigorous. Who knows though, whom we may find deep in the forest? We shall have to ask Aunt Janice though for permission to invite guests."

"The more the merrier, sir, she said--
While gazing on the tulip bed,--
Come be our flower-guests, so sweet--"

And make our party quite complete!"

"I didn't know you were a poetess, Nora! I'm sure Aunt Janice will let us have all the flower guests we want--from woods or garden."

"The sooner we stop talking, the sooner morning will come again, and so good-night and sweet dreams, Janey."

But Janey slipped out of bed and over to the window for one more look at the terrace, white and silvery in the bright moonlight.

"Have you forgotten the mystery of the tower room, Nora?"

Nora brushed back her brown curls, impatiently.

"Come back to bed and to sleep, Janey--you probably saw, as I said, a white pigeon imprisoned in the room; dismiss the thought, and forget all about it."

Janey was peering through the open window on the moonlit terrace below.

"I'm sure a white figure went gliding by and disappeared among the trees. Come quick, Nora, and watch!"

Janey's voice was shaking with excitement, and it was only after several minutes of remonstrance from Nora that she was persuaded she was acting foolishly to be hunting up mysteries in perhaps just a passing traveler, and so gave up and returned to bed.

"Maybe you'll find out I'm right about the waving handkerchief from the tower room, and also about that passing figure. I think they're connected, so there, Nora--you just wait and see when the mystery is all cleared up!"

With that thought foremost in her mind, Janey at last, fell asleep.

CHAPTER V

EXPLORING THE FOREST

Bright and early after breakfast, the Merediths, bidding Aunt Janice good-bye, started out on their exploring expedition into the forest.

"You may make a whole day of it, if you like," Aunt Janice had said, "and have a picnic dinner--only be careful."

"We will--" they assented, "and as you don't mind if we stay all day, we can camp out, and play we're a gypsy band, and have lots of fun."

The old lady smiled. Beth had run back for a moment.

"Won't you be lonely?" she asked, but Aunt Janice thinking of their pleasure, had shaken her head.

"Not since you'll be coming back to have supper with me; don't stay any longer than sundown."

"All right," replied Don.

"I nearly forgot," Nora began, "may we invite any one in the forest, whom we chance to meet?"

Aunt Janice nodded in the affirmative, and at last they were off.

The blue mist across the hills was melting into thousands of sparkling dewdrops, as the sun began to climb higher in the sky.

Janey looked at the open scenery as they came to the edge of the shadowy forest.

"I wish we were going to the hills to camp--it's dark in there, where the pathway is so shadowed by the forest trees!"

Nora read her thoughts, and put a warning finger to her lips.

"Don't be silly, Janey; don't you see Don and Harry ahead? We'll play that we are all going on a quest, and they will be our knights--there's nothing to fear."

Janey's face brightened, and Beth and Alice, thinking only of the good time ahead, danced merrily along the way.

"Wouldn't it be fun, if we found a little cabin, in the heart of the forest?" Don turned toward Harry to help with the basket of lunch, that he had been carrying since they left.

Harry's eyes began to sparkle.

"Maybe we will; I, for one, am out on a real adventure."

"We're leaving the mystery of the tower room behind--" Janey paused, remembering that it was Aunt Janice's secret, after all, of which she spoke; yet she had not been able to shake off her nervous feelings, even though Nora had laughed at her fears!

"I read a story once called, 'The Adventure of the Happy Heart.'"

"What a pretty title, Nora--tell us about it."

"The Happy Heart stood for anyone who tried to make someone, who was lonely, glad, every day or whenever the opportunity arose, on the road of life, as they adventured along its path."

"What a lovely idea!" Janey cried. "Where did you find the story?"

"In our Sunday school library; it all ended with the heart that started out to bring gladness into other lives along the way; because every happy heart in turn, made another happy, and the one who started it, was full to overflowing with joy, all of her days!"

"Let's try and find someone today on our adventure."

"There's no time like the present," Don stepped back, and pointed mysteriously through an opening in the trees ahead, that revealed at the end of a winding footpath, a real log--cabin!

"Oh," gasped Janey, turning to catch Beth and Alice's hands--"maybe it's a gypsy hut!"

"Don't be a goose-girl," laughed Don, "whoever heard of a gypsy settling down in one place; they are a wandering tribe."

"We'll be the scouts and go ahead and bring back a report."

Harry and Don started forward--

"Brave knights of old--" Nora said softly, as the two disappeared down the trail, toward the unknown, in the shape of a small cabin at the end!

"Well, this may be our chance to begin on our quest for happy hearts," Nora, her eyes following the boys, spoke again.

"I like adventuring for happy hearts, don't you?"

"So do I--"

"And I--"

"And I!"

"I believe Aunt Janice was the first one on our chain."

"I believe you are right, Janey--" and Nora smiled around on the group--"we shall count her as the first link of joy on our quest of adventuring for happy hearts!"

"Lovely!" exclaimed Janey--"I wonder who will be the next?"

"I wonder, too--" Nora replied, as they watched the retreating "knights" disappearing down the shadowy forest trail!

MARTY AND JERRY

Don and Harry, starting down the trail, had cautioned the girls to wait where they were, until they received the signal to come and join them, or otherwise.

"It may be just a deserted cabin that belongs to Aunt Janice, and that we can claim if she's willing--" then the boys had hastened on deeper into the forest.

"Suppose--" Harry began, "that we find that the log cabin, so hidden away, has something to do with the secret of the tower room!"

"Then we won't investigate, because Aunt Janice doesn't seem to want us to know."

In another moment, as they came nearer the hut, voices could be heard speaking inside, and a dog began to bark furiously.

"Be quiet, 'Gem'--down--down--who's there?"

The boys, waiting a few feet away, replied, "Harry and Donald Meredith; we were just exploring and thought we'd come up and see if anyone was occupying the cabin, but your dog sounds mean."

The door had opened by this time, while a boy, holding "Gem" by the collar, appeared.

"Oh, 'Gem' is our protector, you see. Marty and I are alone at night sometimes, when Grandfather's away foresting; you are from the Castle then?"

"We're visiting our Aunt Janice; she gave us a basket of lunch and said we might have a day of exploration."

"Then, we were also to gather greens and wild ferns, for a party that she is giving for us later."

"How nice!" a bright-eyed girl had joined her brother at the door.

She nudged him quickly as a reminder.

"Why don't you ask them in, Jerry?"

The boy smiled--"This is Marty, my sister--and she's wondering if you won't come in--see, 'Gem' is quite friendly now, since he sees that you are also friends!"

Don and Harry stooped to pat the small dog, capering around at their feet.

"Thanks--" they both replied, "but we left Nora, Janey--Beth and Alice, behind; they were waiting for us to make a discovery here."

The small girl clapped her hands impulsively.

"Girls--" she cried, "there are girls too, Jerry!"

Jerry looked as pleased as his sister--"Go and bring them along, Marty--they may be afraid of 'Gem.'"

In a flash, Marty disappeared down the trail.

Nora was watching and came to meet her. She noted at a glance, the worn, shabby red dress, but neat appearance, of the small stranger of the forest cabin.

"I've come for you--" Marty began timidly--"Jerry said you were afraid to come nearer he guessed, but 'Gem' is friendly now--come!"

Nora held out a hand in greeting.

"We shall love to if you'll have us--" she smiled, as Janey, Beth and Alice joined her.

"We want you all," Marty said at once, and indicated that they follow her lead.

"This is our home--Jerry and I and Grandfather live here, together."

"How nice! We are all on a visit to Aunt Janice Meredith, and I'm sure she'll be willing for us to come and see you often."

Marty gave a little gasp.

"The castle must be a grand place to live--but--" she hesitated,--"but one evening late, we were passing there, and I thought I saw something white waving from a window--Grandfather said though, not to say anything about it, but I forgot; he called it, the story of the tower room--Do you know it?"

She looked inquiringly at Nora, who shook her head quickly.

"Aunt Janice hasn't told us yet, but we know it makes her sad, and so we don't mean to try and find out, you see!"

"It's a secret, I guess--" Marty continued, "and of course secrets must be kept."

"We're making Aunt Janice happy again," Beth beamed, "she told us so herself!"

They had gathered in front of the cabin now, and the boys began to cast wishful eyes at the lunch basket.

"Let's have our picnic right here under this big tree, if Marty and Jerry are willing; it's been quite a while since breakfast!"

"Oh, of course--it will be lots of fun to have you," they both joined at once in the invitation. "We usually wait for Grandfather for awhile, but if he's too long in coming, we have dinner without him."

"You are to be our guests today though, and the more the merrier,--Aunt Janice said that of us; let's spread the table."

Alice skipped around as they made preparations, running back and forth, and helping Marty with tumblers and a pitcher of cool water from the spring.

Even the Merediths were not prepared for such a feast! Aunt Janice had everything good imaginable, packed to overflowing, in the basket; enough and more to spare, even after the hungry boys and girls, had eaten all they could, with "Gem" to do his part.

"There's not quite enough left for another picnic!" Beth looked over the table and gave a little sigh.

Everyone joined in the laugh that followed.

"Why, you sound sorry," Nora said, "we'll leave the rest of the feast for Jerry's and Marty's Grandfather."

Jerry's face brightened, although he began to demur, but Harry and Don ended the discussion at once, by declaring they would certainly not lug the heavy basket back again.

"Won't you get hungry though?" Marty's eyes rested on the delightful things left.

"No, indeed; supper will be waiting and ready, when we get back to the castle."

"It's beginning to get late, too--we've stayed here so long, since finding you and Jerry in the cabin."

"Please, don't go yet," Marty began, fearing Janey's remark was leading up to that point.

"We promised Aunt Janice to be back by sundown, and we haven't explored very much of the forest," Nora smiled.

"Then you'll come another day," Jerry proposed, "and Marty and I can go along too; I'm sure Grandfather will be willing."

Another happy hour slipped by, and then the Merediths knew their time was really up.

"I just wish you could all live here," Marty's eyes were beginning to look cloudy.

"We'll come soon again, and of course you and Jerry are to be guests at the party, whenever it comes off."

"Of course," Nora joined in with Janey, at once--"Aunt Janice told us that we could invite any one we met out here."

Marty and Beth had caught hands at the mention of a party and were dancing around in a circle. Then Nora began laughing--

"Why, we've had such a pleasant day, that we forgot all about digging up wild ferns to carry back with us."

"The party won't be for awhile yet, and so after all we'll have a plenty of time," Don said. "I think Aunt Janice will agree that it's better to make another trip for them anyway."

"I'm sure she will--" Beth had her arms around Marty, "and you and Jerry will know where we can find the prettiest ones."

Good-byes were at last over, and they all waved until Marty and Jerry were swallowed up by the shadowy forest trees.

"Forward--march--" ordered Don--"it's almost sunset!"

"After a delightful day!"

Nora spoke softly, as they followed the trail, that led out of the forest.

"And, I believe, we've found two more on our quest for happy hearts," she ended, joyously.

CHAPTER VII

TALKING OVER THE DAY

After supper was over, Aunt Janice gathered the Merediths in a circle around her, to talk over the happenings of the day spent in the forest.

"What exciting adventure did you have?"

There was a twinkle in the old lady's eyes, and Janey seeing it, knew that Aunt Janice was wondering what made them forget to bring back the ferns that they had set out so bravely to gather.

"We truly did have a delightful adventure," they all chorused, in reply

to her question--"and we could hardly wait to tell you about it."

"Let's begin at the beginning."

"Naturally," Don said, glancing over at Janey--"that's the right place to start."

"--Don--Aunt Janice is waiting."

"Well--we got deep into the forest, when suddenly, at the end of a long narrow path there appeared a--log cabin!"

"We thought at first it might be a gypsy hut!"

"Don't be silly, Beth--you've forgotten that gypsies wander from place to place."

"Never mind," Aunt Janice spoke softly--"what did you find?"

"Marty and Jerry and 'Gem'." Alice could wait no longer for a turn to speak.

"She has climaxed the story before the climax!"

They all joined in the general laughter that followed the youngest Meredith's remark.

"You'd love Marty and Jerry, Aunt Janice," Nora said--"they are really delightful, and I'm sure you'll approve of our asking them to the party."

The old lady smiled, as she looked around on the eager faces. She was thinking of Mr. Greyson, the children's grandfather, who had known better days, but on account of reverses, had been so reduced, that he had come out from the city and asked work of her as a forester. Old Peter Greyson was proud and would have nothing except what he earned.

"Do you know Marty and Jerry?"

"I know of them, but the grandfather is quite a worthy man, and I'm glad you discovered the children."

"Do you think the grandfather will let them come?"

Beth's mind was on the forthcoming party.

"We shall certainly hope so. I'm sure if he could be made to see that he is depriving them of pleasure by keeping them so close, he would."

"We'll find him and tell him," Janey planned.

"We had a delightful picnic with Jerry and Marty; that made us forget about looking for the ferns for decorating."

"After all the party is some time off, and you can make another expedition to find those."

"I thought you'd say that," and Janey looked lovingly at the sweet face before her.

"It would have done your heart good to see how Jerry and Marty enjoyed your delicious lunch."

"To say nothing of ourselves!" Don supplemented.

"Well, you may have another as soon as you like, and I'll be sure to include the Greyson's next time."

"Land's End is the most delightful place in the world--" Janey threw her arms around Aunt Janice impulsively, while sudden tears brimmed over and splashed down her cheeks.

"Why, my dear, you must be all tired out," the old lady began sympathetically. But Janey shook her head.

"I was thinking that we don't deserve the jolly time you're giving us--at first when Dad told us of your invitation we--we--didn't want to come at all!"

Nora looked crestfallen, also.

Aunt Janice seeing the cause of their woe, immediately set their hearts at rest.

"Why I don't blame you, not even a little bit, my dears--Land's End doesn't sound a bit inviting, if you don't really know anything about it; no wonder you felt regretful!"

Janey's tears were quickly dried.

"We didn't know you then, Aunt Janice."

"Nor this lovely old castle and garden--"

"Nor the forest--with Marty and Jerry living in it--"

"Neither did we know that we were setting out, like Nora's story, on a quest for happy hearts."

"I think that is a lovely quest to be traveling on; how far have you gone on the way?" Aunt Janice was all interest, as she included the whole group in the question.

For a moment everyone was silent, then Nora broke the pause shyly--"We put you as the first Aunt Janice, on the quest for happy hearts, because you said we had brought gladness into your life. You're the golden link that began our chain of happiness."

"Quite right--quite right--" Aunt Janice agreed heartily, almost overcome herself. "But now it's bedtime, so let us first of all thank our heavenly Father for our happiness and then go to bed. We all need a refreshing sleep."

For a few minutes they all listened devoutly as Aunt Janice read the Twenty-third Psalm, after which they joined her in prayer and in the singing of the doxology. Then bidding Aunt Janice a hasty good-night, tired out with the day's adventure, the Merediths trooped away to enjoy the great blessing of sleep and rest.

CHAPTER VIII

THE STORY OF THE TOWER ROOM

Tell us a story, please tell us a story, Aunt Janice!"

"A story, Janey? What shall it be about?"

"About the old castle in the long ago," Beth hastened to beg, for she too, dearly loved the story hour.

The quiet moment seemed to have at last arrived, as they all gathered together on the broad veranda, in the twilight.

The old lady smiled. "A story of long ago! It seems I shall hardly know just where to begin; in the long ago, there used to be merry parties, but--" just there she paused, and linked it up with the present--"now since you young people have come, it seems more as it did then."

Aunt Janice's face was thoughtful, and for a few moments no one interrupted the thread of her thoughts.

Outside the twilight deepened, and the stars began to shine down through the rustling trees, in the garden.

"Do you think Dad may get here in time for the party?" Alice's tone was a tiny bit mournful, and Aunt Janice hastened to dispel any feeling of homesickness.

"Who can tell? Perhaps he may surprise us at any time now; anyway, I'm sure he wants you to spend happy days at the old place."

"We are, indeed we are!" chorused the Merediths together.

Alice placed an arm around Aunt Janice's shoulder, and began coaxingly--"Tell us the story of the Tower room, please." In vain Nora shook her head, but Alice did not look up. "The first day that we went

through the gardens, Janey saw something white waving from the window, but we hurried by, as you said, we must. Nora said, it was only a pigeon!"

Alice had completely forgotten her promise, and dismayed, but helpless to stop her, the others sat around, speechless.

Aunt Janice's face whitened with the request, but she patted gently the golden head against her shoulder.

"The story of the tower room is a long one, dearie, but perhaps you should know it. I shall try and hurry through it. Your own father could tell you much of those happy days gone by; Harry, his brother, and senior by a good many years, married Gwendolyn Arlington, and they had one son, beloved by his parents to almost a painful degree. When he was about sixteen years old perhaps, he insisted that the only thing that he wanted to do, was to go to sea, and although it almost broke his mother's heart, they gave in to his whim. With his departure, the life of the old place also seemed to go.

"In just a few months after that, a report was received that the vessel on which he had gone was lost with all the crew and passengers.

"After the terrible news, your Aunt Gwen's health failed, and she lost interest in everything; finally after the death of your uncle Harry, she went into a complete melancholy, and retired to the seclusion of the tower room, with an attendant. In all of these seven years since the tragedy, she has remained there; only at night sometimes, she wanders around the old gardens. Perhaps if Janey hadn't seen the handkerchief waving from the window, I should never have told the sad story of the tower room!

"The seasons have come and gone quietly since then, but this year I could stand it no longer. I had long wanted to see all of you dear nieces and nephews, and wrote asking your father's permission to have you for a long visit.

"He consented, and wrote of his business call that came just about the same time. He has come by to see me now and then, but for this same feeling of gloom that it has cast over the place he has never told you the sad story either, nor had we planned your coming before for the same reason."

Aunt Janice drew a breath of relief, as though after all in the telling a burden had rolled away.

The rustling trees broke the surrounding stillness, then the tinkling of a silvery bell at the gate.

"Who could be out on a visit so late?" The old lady peered through the shadows, as two figures advanced. The light streaming out from the hall revealed Donald Meredith and his brother Harry's son, supposed to have been lost seven years before!

The Meredith's sprang forward to greet their father, while Aunt Janice, the story warm on her lips that she had just been telling, sat quite still, scarcely believing what her eyes saw.

"Welcome, Donald--and--can it really be, or am I dreaming?"

She stretched out her arms, while the stalwart form of Harry and Gwendolyn's son walked straight into the shelter of their love.

Older of course, and careworn, because of those years of imprisonment among a savage tribe, yet the same! There was not time just then for the story of those years--how he alone survived in the shipwreck where all had been thought lost; of the struggle in the dark waters, but cast up at last unconscious on shore in the most uncivilized part of Africa where he had been a captive through the years. Then came the almost miraculous escape to a passing ship homeward bound!

Later, there would be time a plenty for all of the details or as much as he saw fit to tell.

Just a few low spoken words to Aunt Janice, and then he was off to find his mother--and who would draw the curtain aside on that scene?--The years seemed to roll back and link quickly with the present, while the tension broke. Gwendolyn, forgetting in the joy of the moment, the sorrow she had endured, came back to herself completely, and was even as she had been before!

Mr. Meredith, with his family and Aunt Janice, were discussing the wonderful happenings of the day, when into the picture stepped Gwen and her son, adding their happiness to the hearts overflowing for them. Little Alice stood holding her father's hand, while Don, Nora, Harry and Beth, looked wide-eyed at the turn of events.

"I wish," Alice broke into the silence, "that we might all stay here forever!"

The tiny bright-eyed old lady, her loving heart ashine in her face, looked into the eyes of all of the happy group.

"I'm sure that will be the most joyful way for us to spend the years; there is room and love in abundance for all; let's share them in the old castle together."

The Merediths joined hands in delight at the suggestion. "A home with dear Aunt Janice! How delightful!" Nora voiced in words the thoughts they all would utter--"Tomorrow we must go into the forest and tell Marty and Jerry the wonderful news."

"And bring back the ferns and vines for the party!"

Alice and Beth were skipping around in excitement, that the grown-ups felt, but expressed in a quieter way.

"Isn't it fine that you will be here for the party?" Janey was looking into her father's face as she spoke, softly--"Aunt Janice will be glad for us to show you around."

The old lady smiled her assent; but just then did not remind Janey of the years he had spent around the old place.

"Even Aunt Janice hasn't met Jerry and Marty," Beth said--"but you will both love them."

"I'm sure we shall."

Then Nora, thoughtful as usual, motioned the others into the next room.

"Let's leave them to talk together," she whispered--"they have been separated so long."

"The mystery of the tower room is gone forever!" Harry exclaimed.

"I _did_ see a handkerchief waving from the window, that day, Nora;" Janey's tone was triumphant. "Wasn't Aunt Janice good to tell us the story?"

"Alice--" Harry paused; for just then, no one felt like reminding her of the broken promise.

"All's well that ends well--" Don remarked, with a wise shake of his head.

CHAPTER IX

ADDING TO THE QUEST

"Aunt Janice--Dad--we're off for the forest again!"

Don stood in the doorway, watching the two deeply engrossed in conversation, as he came up to announce their intentions.

"Don't forget the lunch basket--and remember the wild ferns and greenery for the decorations." Aunt Janice reminded.

"We surely will bring back some beautiful decorations this time; for tomorrow will be the party day!"

Aunt Janice was as happy in her preparations as any of the younger Merediths, and had been busy already giving orders for the bountiful feast, for the whole day and evening was to be one of an entire "gala" occasion.

Gwendolyn and her son, were as merry as two children, helping Aunt Janice with the plans wherever they could.

"How very merciful God has been!" the old lady said softly, her gaze resting lovingly on the group waiting outside, in the sunlight of another beautiful day.

"Oh, Donald--" she continued, "it seems almost too good to think of you and the dear children, coming to live here always, to gladden the years."

"We should be truly grateful," Mr. Meredith replied, "and it shall be the greatest pleasure to take care of you and your affairs."

Don had waited, not wanting to interrupt, and Aunt Janice seeing him, motioned that he come up to her side. In the happiness that had come to them all, she had not forgotten a plan that she had made for Marty and Jerry's grandfather and themselves.

"I want you to take a message to Mr. Greyson for me, Don--tell him that the manager is returning to his home in the city, and that I shall be glad if he will consider the vacancy, and accept at once if he will. The house of course goes with the position."

Don fairly exploded with the good news, as he rushed on out to catch up with the others, who had gone ahead. Nor did it take them long to find their new friends.

Marty and Jerry with their grandfather, were coming down the trail that led out from the cabin. They saw the Meredith's approaching and hurried forward to greet them.

Nora, Janey, Don, Harry, Beth and Alice, needed no introduction to Mr. Greyson, for much to their joy, they found him one and the same as the friend who had piloted them from the station, on the evening of their arrival at Land's End.

After the warm greetings were over, Don couldn't wait another moment to break the news.

"The mystery of the castle is over, for our cousin Harry has returned; he wasn't drowned at all, but kidnapped somewhere off the coast of Africa, in the most uncivilized region."

"And--" Janey interrupted, "his mother, who shut herself up in the tower room, is perfectly well again."

"We left them gathering flowers for the party!" Alice began, quickly joining in to have a part in the affair.

"Wait--" Don spoke up again--"I want to give Aunt Janice's message first."

Then, in a rush, it all came out--the words fairly running over one another for utterance, and ending with a glowing picture of the pretty house, nestled at the foot of the blue misty hills, "Please say you'll accept and move right in, Mr. Greyson; Aunt Janice really needs your help at once."

Marty and Jerry stood waiting, their faces pictures of eager expectancy. The house that Jerry described and of which they had only seen the outside, seemed like a real palace to them.

When their grandfather, without losing time, accepted the offer, their cup of joy seemed to overflow!

He laid a kindly hand on Don's shoulder.

"You may tell your aunt that I gladly accept, and will come to her for instructions at once."

The whole group who had been perfectly quiet as they waited, now broke into a jubilee of merriment.

"We're going to live with Aunt Janice--always," Beth said,--"isn't that delightful?"

"Quite delightful," Peter Greyson replied, as he looked round on the group. "We have these young visitors to the castle to thank for our part of the good times, because they found you, Marty and Jerry, away out here in the forest."

"We were out on an adventure--" Nora's eyes were shining, "a happiness quest, to find someone to whom we might bring happiness. I read a story once like that, and we decided to go on this same quest."

Marty clapped her hands gleefully--

"You've brought happiness to three of us today, and in a way to 'Gem' and the kitten and the cat, too! Can we move today, grandfather?"

Mr. Greyson, smiled down on his enthusiastic young granddaughter, with a shake of his head.

"I must go up to the castle first, and make all arrangements with Miss Meredith. I think that it will be best for me to see her, Don, and so I shall give her the answer before you get there--then, you may start to pack up things and get ready for the move, Marty. I'll leave you young folks to gather the greens for the party tomorrow, and have your picnic together afterwards."

"We will start to hunt them right away," Harry began, taking out his trowel, "because there's so much to do and we must make a beginning on our part, so all will be ready on time."

"Aunt Janice says the cake will be the biggest the old kitchen has ever

had baked."

"With the whitest, loveliest icing," Alice supplemented.

Everyone joined in the general laughter that followed Alice's speech.

With a smile, then, Mr. Greyson was off down the trail that led out of the forest and on toward the castle beyond.

Marty accompanied him for a short way along the path, her hand clasping his tightly, and Jerry remembering that he had forgotten to ask his grandfather something of importance, followed, to speak a word and return with Marty.

The Merediths waited in a group, until they returned to start to gather decorations.

"The chain of happiness for others, as well as for ourselves, is really growing," she began, her eyes following the three figures in the distance.

"Oh, Nora--" Janey said, "let's always try to keep on finding hearts that need happiness."

"Let's--" Beth agreed, and all of the others joined in accord in the lovely plan, that they had made theirs.

"Dear Aunt Janice started it all by inviting us on a visit to the castle; now it's growing beautifully."

"Because, you see, we are on a quest of happiness for others; our dear heavenly Father undoubtedly blessed such a quest, for He wants happy hearts. Only let us not forget that hearts must know our dear Lord Jesus to be crowned with happiness."

"Crowned with happiness!" Janey repeated softly. "Remember our motto, Nora?--_I would look up--and laugh--and love--and--lift_--."

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