

WELLS

CAROLYN

TWO LITTLE

WOMEN ON A

HOLIDAY

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Two Little Women on a Holiday

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CHAPTER I

A WONDERFUL PLAN

"Hello, Dolly," said Dotty Rose, over the telephone.

"Hello, Dot," responded Dolly Fayre. "What you want?"

"Oh! I can't tell you this way. Come on over, just as quick as you can."

"But I haven't finished my Algebra, and it's nearly dinner time, anyway."

"No it isn't,—and no matter if it is. Come on, I tell you! You'd come fast enough if you knew what it's about!"

"Tell me, then."

"I say I can't,—over the telephone. Oh, Dolly, come on, and stop fussing!"

The telephone receiver at Dotty's end of the wire was hung up with a click, and Dolly began to waggle her receiver hook in hope of getting Dotty back. But there was no response, so Dolly rose and went for her coat. Flinging it round her, and not stopping to get a hat, she ran next door to Dotty Rose's house.

It was mid January, and the six o'clock darkness was lighted only by the street lights. Flying across the two lawns that divided the houses, Dolly found Dotty awaiting her at the side door.

"Hurry up in, Doll," she cried, eagerly, "the greatest thing you ever heard! Oh, the very greatest! If you only CAN! Oh, if you ONLY can!"

"Can what? Do tell me what you're talking about." Dolly tossed her coat on the hall rack, and followed Dotty into the Roses' living-room. There she found Dotty's parents and also Bernice Forbes and her father. What could such a gathering mean? Dolly began to think of school happenings; had she cut up any mischievous pranks or inadvertently done anything wrong? What else could bring Mr. Forbes to the Roses' on what was very evidently an important errand? For all present were eagerly interested,—that much was clear. Mr. and Mrs. Rose were smiling, yet shaking their heads in uncertainty; Bernice was flushed and excited; and Mr. Forbes himself was apparently trying to persuade them to something he was proposing.

This much Dolly gathered before she heard a word of the discussion. Then Mrs. Rose said, "Here's Dolly Fayre. You tell her about it, Mr. Forbes."

"Oh, let me tell her," cried Bernice.

"No," said Mr. Rose, "let her hear it first from your father. You girls can chatter afterward."

So Mr. Forbes spoke. "My dear child," he said to Dolly, "my Bernice is invited to spend a week with her uncle, in New York City. She is privileged to ask you two girls to accompany her if you care to."

Dolly listened, without quite grasping the idea. She was slow of thought, though far from stupid. And this was such a sudden and startling suggestion that she couldn't quite take it in.

"Go to New York, for a week. Oh, I couldn't. I have to go to school."

Mrs. Rose smiled. "That's just the trouble, Dolly. Dot has to go to school, too,—at least, she ought to. Bernice, likewise. But this invitation is so delightful and so unusual, that I'm thinking you three girls ought to take advantage of it. The question is, what will your parents say?"

"Oh, they'll never let me go!" exclaimed Dolly, decidedly. "They don't want anything to interfere with my lessons."

"No, and we feel the same way about Dotty. But an exceptional case must be considered in an exceptional manner. I think your people might be persuaded if we go about it in the right way."

"I don't believe so," and Dolly looked very dubious. "Tell me more about it."

"Oh, Doll, it's just gorgeous!" broke in Bernice. "Uncle Jeff,—he's father's brother,—wants me to spend a week with him. And he's going to have my cousin, Alicia, there at the same time. And he wants us to bring two other girls, and Alicia can't bring one, 'cause she's at boarding school, and none of the girls can get leave,—that is, none that she wants. So Uncle said for me to get two, if I could,—and I want you and Dot."

"A whole week in New York! Visiting!" Dolly's eyes sparkled as the truth began to dawn on her. "Oh, I WISH I could coax Mother into it. I've never been to New York to stay any time. Only just for the day. How lovely of you, Bernie, to ask us!"

"There's no one else I'd rather have, but if you can't go, I'll have to ask Maisie May. I must get two."

"Are you going anyway, Dots?"

"I don't know. I want to go terribly, but I don't want to go without you, Dolly. Oh, WON'T your mother let you?"

"The only way to find out is to ask her," said Mr. Forbes, smiling. "Suppose I go over there now and ask. Shall I go alone, or take you three chatterboxes along?"

"Oh, let us go," and Dotty sprang up; "we can coax and you can tell about the arrangements."

"Very well," agreed Mr. Forbes, "come along, then."

So the four went across to the Fayre house, and found the rest of Dolly's family gathered in the library.

"Here is Mr. Forbes, Daddy," said Dolly, as they entered.

Mr. and Mrs. Fayre and Trudy, Dolly's older sister, greeted the visitor cordially, and looked with smiling inquiry at the eager faces of the three girls.

Dolly went and sat on the arm of her mother's chair, and, putting an arm around her, whispered, "Oh, Mumsie, please, PLEASE do say yes! Oh, please do!"

"Yes to what?" returned Mrs. Fayre, patting her daughter's shoulder.

"Mr. Forbes will tell you. Listen."

"It's this way, my dear people," began Mr. Forbes. He was a man with an impressive manner, and it seemed as if he were about to make a speech of grave importance, as, indeed, from the girls' point of view, he was. "My brother Jefferson, who lives in New York, has invited my daughter to spend a week in his home there. He has asked also another niece, Miss Alicia Steele. He wants these girl visitors to bring with them two friends, and as Alicia does not wish to avail herself of that privilege, Bernice may take two with her. She wants to take Dotty and Dolly. There, that's the whole story in a nutshell. The question is, may Dolly go?"

"When is this visit to be made?" asked Mrs. Fayre.

"As soon as convenient for all concerned. My brother would like the girls to come some day next week, and remain one week."

"What about school?" and Mrs. Fayre looked decidedly disapproving of the plan.

"That's just it!" exclaimed Dotty. "We knew you'd say that! But, Mrs. Fayre, my mother says this is the chance of a lifetime,—almost,—and we ought, we really OUGHT to take advantage of it."

"But to be out of school for a whole week,—and what with getting ready and getting home and settled again, it would mean more than a week—"

"But, mother, we could make up our lessons," pleaded Dolly, "and I DO want to go! oh, I do want to go, just AWFULLY!"

"I should think you would," put in Trudy. "Let her go, mother, it'll be an education in itself,—the visit will. Why, the girls can go to the museums and art galleries and see all sorts of things."

"Of course we can," said Bernice, "and my uncle has a beautiful house and motor cars and everything!"

"That's another point," said Mr. Fayre, gravely. "You must realise, Mr. Forbes, that my little girl is not accustomed to grandeur and wealth. I don't want her to enjoy it so much that she will come back discontented with her own plain home."

"Oh, nonsense, my dear sir! A glimpse of city life and a taste of frivolity will do your girl good. Dolly is too sensible a sort to be a prey to envy or discontent. I know Dolly fairly well, and I can vouch for her common sense!"

"So can I," said Bernice. "Doll will enjoy everything to the limit, but it won't hurt her disposition or upset her happiness to see the sights of the city for a short time. Oh, please, Mr. Fayre, do let her go."

"Just as her mother thinks," and Mr. Fayre smiled at the insistent Bernice.

"Tell me of the household," said Mrs. Fayre. "Is your brother's wife living?"

"Jeff has never been married," replied Mr. Forbes. "He is an elderly bachelor, and, I think is a bit lonely, now and then. But he is also a little eccentric. He desires no company, usually. It is most extraordinary that he should ask these girls. But I think he wants to see his two nieces, and he fears he cannot entertain them pleasantly unless they have other companions of their own age."

"And who would look after the girls?"

"Mrs. Berry, my brother's housekeeper. She is a fine noble-hearted and competent woman, who has kept his house for years. I know her, and I am perfectly willing to trust Bernice to her care. She will chaperon the young people, for I doubt if my brother will go to many places with them. But he will want them to have the best possible time, and will give them all the pleasure possible."

"That part of it is all right, then," smiled Mrs. Fayre; "it is, to my mind, only the loss of more than a week of the school work that presents the insuperable objection."

"Oh, don't say insuperable," urged Mr. Forbes. "Can't you bring yourself to permit that loss? As Dolly says, the girls can make up their lessons."

"They can—but will they?"

"I will, mother," cried Dolly; "I promise you I will study each day while I'm in New York. Then I can recite out of school hours after I get back, and I'll get my marks all the same."

"But, Dolly dear, you can't study while you are in New York. There would be too much to distract you and occupy your time."

"Oh, no, Mrs. Fayre," observed Bernice, "we couldn't be all the time sightseeing. I think it would be fine for all us girls to study every day, and keep up our lessons that way."

"It sounds well, my dear child," and Mrs. Fayre looked doubtfully at Bernice, "and I daresay you mean to do it, but I can't think you could keep it up. The very spirit of your life there would be all against study."

"I agree with that," said Mr. Forbes, decidedly. "I vote for the girls having an entire holiday. Lessons each day would spoil all their fun."

"They couldn't do it," Trudy said. "I know, however much they tried, they just COULDN'T study in that atmosphere."

"Why not?" asked Bernice. "We're not young ladies, like you, Trudy. We won't be going to parties, and such things. We can only go to the shops and the exhibitions and for motor rides in the park and such things. We could study evenings, I'm sure."

"It isn't only the lessons," Mrs. Fayre said; "but I can't feel quite willing to let my little girl go away for a week without me." Her pleasant smile at Mr. Forbes robbed the words of any reflection they might seem to cast on his brother's invitation. "I'm sure Mrs. Berry would do all that is necessary in the way of a chaperon's duties, but these girls are pretty young even for that. They need a parent's oversight."

Mrs. Fayre was about to say a mother's oversight, when she remembered that Bernice had no mother, and changed the words accordingly.

There was some further discussion, and then Mrs. Fayre said she must have a little time alone to make up her mind. She knew that if Dolly did not go, Maisie May would be asked in her place, but she still felt undecided. She asked for only an hour or two to think it over, and promised to telephone directly after dinner, and tell Mr. Forbes her final decision. This was the only concession she would make. If not acceptable then her answer must be no.

"Please do not judge my wife too harshly," said Mr. Fayre as he accompanied Mr. Forbes and Bernice to the door. "She still looks upon Dolly as her baby, and scarcely lets her out of her sight."

"That's all right," returned Mr. Forbes. "She's the right sort of a mother for the girl. I hope she will decide to let Dolly go, but if not, I quite understand her hesitancy, and I respect and admire her for it. Bernice can take somebody else, and I trust you will not try over hard to influence Mrs. Fayre in Dolly's favour. If anything untoward should happen, I should never forgive myself. I would far rather the children were disappointed than to have Mrs. Fayre persuaded against her better judgment."

The Forbeses departed, and then Dotty Rose went home, too.

"Oh, Dollyrinda," she whispered as they stood in the hall, "do you s'pose your mother'll EVER say yes?"

"I don't believe so," replied Dolly mournfully. "But, oh, Dot, how I do want to go! Seems 'sif I never wanted anything so much in all my life!"

"You don't want to go a bit more than I want to have you. Why, Dollops, I shan't go, if you don't."

"Oh, yes, you will, Dotty. You must. It would be silly not to."

"But I couldn't! I just COULDN'T. Do you s'pose I could have one single bit of fun going to places without you? And knowing you were here at home, longing to be with us! No-sir-ee! I just couldn't pos-SIB-ly! So just you remember that, old girl; no Dolly,—no Dotty! And that's SURE!"

There was a ring in Dotty's voice that proclaimed an unshakable determination, and Dolly knew it. She knew that no coaxing of Bernice or even of Dolly herself, could make Dotty go without her chum.

For chums these two were, in the deepest sense of the word. They were together all that was possible during their waking hours. They studied together, worked and played together, and occupied together their little house, built for them, and called Treasure House.

Dolly knew she couldn't enjoy going anywhere without Dotty, and she knew Dot felt the same way about her. But this was such a big, splendid opportunity, that she hated to have Dotty miss it, even if she couldn't go herself. The two girls said good-night, and Dolly went back to her family in the library.

"I hate terribly to disappoint you, Dolly darling," began her mother, and the tears welled up in Dolly's blue eyes. This beginning meant a negative decision, that was self evident, but Dolly Fayre was plucky by nature and she was not the sort that whines at disappointment.

"All right," she said, striving to be cheerful, and blinking her eyes quickly to keep those tears back.

"Now, look here, Edith," said Mr. Fayre, "I don't believe I can stand this. I don't differ with you regarding the children, but I do think you might let Dolly go on this party. Even if it does take a week out of school, she'll get enough general information and experience from a week in the city to make up."

"That's just it, Will. But the experiences she gets there may not be the best possible for a little girl of fifteen."

"Oh, fifteen isn't an absolute baby. Remember, dear, Dolly is going to grow up some day, and she's getting started."

"And another thing. I asked Mr. Forbes a few questions while you were talking to Bernice, and it seems this other girl, the niece, Alicia, is attending a very fashionable girls' boarding school."

"Well, what of that? You speak as if she were attending a lunatic asylum!"

"No; but can't you see if Dolly goes to stay a week with wealthy Bernice Forbes and this fashionable Alicia, she'll get her head full of all sorts of notions that don't belong there?"

"No, I won't, mother," murmured Dolly, who, again on her mother's arm chair, was looking earnestly into the maternal blue eyes, so like her own. And very lovingly Mrs. Fayre returned the gaze, for she adored her little daughter and was actuated only by the best motives in making her decisions.

"And, here's another thing," said Dolly, "Dot won't go, if I don't. It seems too bad to spoil HER fun."

"Oh, yes, she will," said Mrs. Fayre, smiling. "She would be foolish to give up her pleasure just because you can't share it."

"Foolish or not, she won't go," repeated Dolly. "I know my Dot, and when she says she won't do a thing, she just simply doesn't do it!"

"I'd be sorry to be the means of keeping Dotty at home," and Mrs. Fayre sighed deeply.

CHAPTER II

A FAVOURABLE DECISION

All through dinner time, Mrs. Fayre was somewhat silent, her eyes resting on Dolly with a wistful, uncertain expression. She wanted to give the child the pleasure she craved, but she had hard work to bring herself to the point of overcoming her own objections.

At last, however, when the meal was nearly over, she smiled at her little daughter, and said, "All right, Dolly, you may go."

"Oh, mother!" Dolly cried, overwhelmed with sudden delight. "Really? Oh, I am so glad! Are you sure you're willing?"

"I've persuaded myself to be willing, against my will," returned Mrs. Fayre, whimsically. "I confess I just hate to have you go, but I can't bear to deprive you of the pleasure trip. And, as you say, it would also keep Dotty at home, and so, altogether, I think I shall have to give in."

"Oh, you angel mother! You blessed lady! How good you are!" And Dolly flew around the table and gave her mother a hug that nearly suffocated her.

"There, there, Dollygirl," said her father, "go back and finish your pudding while we talk this over a bit. Are you sure, Edith, you are willing? I don't want you to feel miserable and anxious all the week Dolly is cut loose from your apron string."

"No, Will; it's all right. If you and the Roses and Trudy, here, all agree it's best for Dolly to go, it seems foolish for me to object. And it may be for her good, after all."

"That's what I say, mother," put in Trudy. "Doll isn't a child, exactly. She's fifteen and a half, and it will be a fine experience for her to see a little bit of the great world. And she couldn't do it under better conditions than at Mr. Forbes' brother's. The Forbes' are a fine family, and you know, perfectly well, there'll be nothing there that isn't just exactly right."

"It isn't that, Trudy. But,—oh, I don't know; I daresay I'm a foolish mother bird, afraid of her littlest fledgling."

"You're a lovely mother-bird!" cried Dolly, "and not foolish a bit! but, oh, do decide positively, for I can't wait another minute to tell Dot, if I'm going."

"Very well," said Mrs. Fayre, "run along and tell Dotty, and Bernice, too."

Dolly made a jump and two hops for the telephone, and soon the wires must have bent under the weight of joyous exclamations.

"Oh, Dolly, isn't it fine!"

"Oh, Dotty, it's splendid! I can hardly believe it!"

"Have you told Bernice?"

"Not yet. Had to tell you first. When do we go?"

"Next Tuesday, I think. Now, you tell Bernie, so she can write to her uncle that we accept."

And then there was another jubilation over the telephone.

"Fine!" cried Bernice, as she heard the news. "Lovely! I'd so much rather have you two girls than any others. I'll write Uncle Jeff to-night that I'll bring you. And I'll come over to-morrow, and we'll decide what clothes to take, and all that."

Mrs. Fayre sighed, as Dolly reported this conversation.

"You girls can't do a bit of serious study all the rest of the time before you go," she said. "Now, Dolly, I'll have to ask you to do your lessons every day, before you plan or talk over the trip at all."

"Yes, mother, I will," and Dolly started at once for her schoolbooks.

It was hard work to put her mind on her studies, with the wonderful possibilities that lay ahead of her. But she was exceedingly conscientious, was Dolly Fayre, and she resolutely put the subject of the New York visit out of her mind, and did her algebra examples with diligence.

Not so, Dotty Rose. After Dolly's telephone message, she flung her schoolbooks aside, with a shout of joy, and declared she couldn't study that night.

"I don't wonder," laughed her father. "Why, Dot, you're going on a veritable Fairy-tale visit. You are quite justified in being excited over it."

"I thought you and Dolly didn't like Bernice Forbes very much," said Mrs. Rose.

"We didn't use to, mother. But lately, she's been a whole lot nicer. You know Doll made her sort of popular, and after that, she helped along, herself, by being ever so much more pleasant and chummy with us all. She used to be stuck up and disagreeable; ostentatious about being rich, and all that. But nowadays, she's more simple, and more agreeable every way."

"That's nice," observed Mr. Rose. "Forbes is not a popular man, nor a very good citizen; I mean he isn't public-spirited or generous. But he's a fine business man and a man of sound judgment and integrity. I'm glad you're chums with his daughter, Dotty. And you ought to have a perfectly gorgeous time on the New York visit."

"Oh, we will, Daddy; I'm sure of that. What about clothes, Mumsie?"

"I'll have to see about that. You'll need a few new frocks, I suppose, but we can get them ready made, or get Miss Felton to come for a few days. There's nearly a week before you start."

"I want some nice things," declared Dotty. "You know Bernice has wonderful clothes, and I suppose her cousin has, too."

"Maybe your wardrobe can't be as fine as a rich man's daughter," said her father smiling at her, "but I hope mother will fix you up so you won't feel ashamed of your clothes."

"I think they'll be all right," and Mrs. Rose nodded her head. "I'll see Mrs. Fayre to-morrow, and we'll find out what Bernice is going to take with her. You children can't need elaborate things, but they must be right."

The Rose family spent the entire evening talking over the coming trip, and when Dotty went to bed she set an alarm clock, that she might rise early in the morning to do her lessons for the day before breakfast. She did them, too, and came to the table, smiling in triumph.

"Did all my examples and learned my history perfectly," she exulted.

"So you see, mother, my trip won't interfere with my education!"

"Oh, you can make up your lessons," said her father, carelessly. "I wouldn't give much for a girl who couldn't do a few extra tasks to make up for a grand outing such as you're to have."

"I either!" agreed Dotty. "But the Fayres are worried to death for fear Doll will miss a lesson somewhere."

"Dolly learns more slowly than you," remarked her mother. "You have a gift for grasping facts quickly, and a good memory to retain them."

"You ought to be grateful for that," said Mr. Rose.

"I am," returned Dotty. "When I see Dolly grubbing over her history, I can't understand how she can be so long over it."

"But she's better in mathematics than you are."

"Yes, she is. She helps me a lot with the old puzzlers. She thinks we'll study in New York. But somehow, I don't believe we will."

"Of course, you won't," laughed Mr. Rose. "Why, you'd be foolish to do that. A fine opportunity has come to you girls, and I advise you to make the most of it. See all the sights you can; go to all the pleasant places you can; and have all the fun you can cram into your days. Then go to sleep and rest up for the next day."

"Good, sound advice, Dads," said Dotty; "you're a gentleman and a scholar to look at it like that! But I don't know as we can go about much; I believe Mr. Forbes is quite an old man, and who will take us about?"

"I thought the housekeeper would," said Mrs. Rose.

"I don't know at all, mother. It seems Bernie has never visited there before, though she has been to the house. Her uncle is queer, and why he wants his two nieces all of a sudden, and his two nieces' friends, nobody knows. It's sort of mysterious, I think."

"Well, it's all right, as long as you're properly invited. It seems strange Bernie's cousin didn't care to take a friend."

"Yes; I wonder what she's like. Bernice hasn't seen her since they were little girls. She lives out in Iowa, I think. She's at school in Connecticut somewhere. It's all sort of unknown. But I like that part of it. I love new experiences."

"I always do too, Dot," said her father. "I reckon when you come home, you'll have lots to tell us."

"New York isn't so strange to me," said Dotty. "I've been there a lot of times, you know. But to go and stay in a house there,—that's the fun. It's so different from going in for a day's shopping with mother. Or the day we all went to the Hippodrome."

"You'll probably go to the Hippodrome again, or some such entertainment," suggested Mrs. Rose.

"I dunno. I imagine the old gentleman doesn't favour such gaiety. And the housekeeper lady will likely be too busy to do much for us. We can't go anywhere alone, can we?"

"I don't know," replied Mrs. Rose. "You must be guided by circumstances, Dotty. Whatever Mr. Forbes and Mrs. Berry say for you to do, will be all right. Make as little trouble as you can, and do as you're told. You'll have fun enough, just being with the girls."

"Indeed I will! Oh, I'm so glad Dolly can go. I wouldn't have stirred a step without her!"

"No, I know you wouldn't," agreed her mother.

Next day at school recess, Bernice showed the girls a letter she had received from Alicia.

"You know I haven't seen her in years," Bernice said; "I think she must be more grown up than we are, though she's only just sixteen."

"Dearest Bernice:" the letter ran.

"Isn't it simply screaming that we're to camp out at Uncle Jeff's! I'm wildly excited over it! Do you know why he has asked us? I'm not sure, myself, but I know there's a reason, and it's a secret. I heard aunt and father talking about it when I was home at Christmas time, but when I drifted into the room, they shut up like clams. However, we'll have one gay old time! Think of being in New York a whole week! I don't want to take any of the girls from here, for fear they'd bring back tales. Don't you bring anybody you can't trust. Oh, I've laid lots of plans, but I won't tell you about them till I see you. Bring all your best clothes, and ask your father for quite a lot of money, though I suppose Uncle Jeff will give us some. I can scarcely wait for the time to come!

"Devotedly yours,

"ALICIA."

"What does she mean by a secret reason for your going?" asked Dolly.

"I haven't an idea," replied Bernice. "My father knows, though, I'm quite sure, 'cause he smiled at that part of Alicia's letter. But he wouldn't tell me. He only said, 'Oh, pshaw, nothing of any consequence. It's very natural that a lonely old bachelor uncle should want to see his little girl nieces, and it's very kind and thoughtful of him to ask you to bring friends.' He says Uncle Jeff is not fond of company, and spends all his time by himself. He's a scientist or naturalist or something, and works in his study all day. So, dad says, it'll be fine for us girls to have four of us to be company for each other."

"It's gorgeous!" sighed Dotty, in an ecstasy of anticipation. "But what does your cousin mean by bringing a lot of money? We can't do that,—and our parents don't let us spend much money ourselves, anyway."

"Oh, that'll be all right," said Bernice, carelessly. "We won't need much money. And if we go to matinees, or anything like that, of course, I'll pay, if Uncle Jeff doesn't. You two girls are my guests, you know.

You needn't take any money at all."

"All right," said Dolly, and dismissed the subject. Money did not figure very largely in her affairs, as, except for a small allowance for trifles, she never handled any. Nor did Dotty, as these two were still looked upon as children by their parents.

But motherless Bernice bought her own clothes and paid her own bills; and so generous was her father, that there was no stint, and as a consequence, she too, cared and thought little about money as a consideration.

"I'm a little scared of that Alicia person," said Dolly to Dotty as they walked home from school.

"Pooh! I'm not. She's no richer than Bernie."

"It isn't that. I'm not afraid of rich people. But she seems so grown up and—well, experienced."

"Well, sixteen is grown up. And we're getting there, Dolly. I shall put up my hair while I'm in New York."

"Why, Dot Rose! Really?"

"Yes, that is if Alicia does. Bernice often does, you know."

"I know it. I'll ask mother if I may."

"Goodness, Dolly, can't you decide a thing like that for yourself? What would your mother care?"

"I'd rather ask her," returned the conscientious Dolly.

Mrs. Fayre smiled when Dolly put the question. "I've been expecting that," she said. "You'd better do as the others do, dear. If they twist up their pigtails, you do the same."

"I'll show you how," offered Trudy. "If you're going to do it, you may as well learn a becoming fashion."

So Trudy taught her little sister how to coil up her yellow, curly mop in a correct fashion, and very becoming it was to Dolly.

But it made her look a year or two older than she was.

"Oh!" exclaimed her mother, when she saw her, "Where's my baby? I've lost my little girl!"

"Just as well," said Dolly, delighted at her achievement and pirouetting before a mirror. "It's time I began to be a little grown up, mother."

"Yes, I suppose it is. I felt just the same when Trudy put up her curls for the first time. I am a foolish old thing!"

"Now, don't you talk like that," cried Dolly, "or I'll pull down my hair and wear it in tails till I'm fifty!"

"No, dear; do as you like about it. And, if you want to wear it that way while you're in New York, do. It's all right."

More discussions came with the new dresses. Mrs. Fayre was for keeping to the more youthful models, but Mrs. Hose felt that the girls should have slightly older styles. Bernice's frocks were almost young ladyish, but those were not copied.

Dotty and Dolly always had their things similar, different in colouring but alike in style. So their respective mothers had many confabs before the grave questions were settled.

And the result was two very attractive wardrobes that were really right for fifteen-year-old girls. Afternoon dresses of voile or thin silk, and one pretty party dress for each of dainty chiffon and lace. Morning frocks of linen and a tailored street suit seemed to be ample in amount and variety.

Bernice had more and grander ones, but the two D's were entirely satisfied, and watched the packing of their small trunks with joyful contentment.

Dolly put in her diary, declaring she should write a full account of each day's happenings.

"Then that'll do for me," said Dotty. "I hate to keep a diary, and what would be the use? It would be exactly like yours, Doll, and I can borrow yours to read to my people after you've read it to your family."

"All right," agreed Dolly, good-naturedly, for what pleased one girl usually suited the other.

They didn't take their schoolbooks, for it made a heavy load, and too, all agreed that it would spoil the pleasant vacation. The girls promised to make up the lessons on their return, and so it seemed as if nothing marred the anticipation of their splendid holiday.

CHAPTER III

THE ARRIVAL

The girls were put on the train at Berwick and as Mrs. Berry was to meet them at the station in New York, they were allowed to make the trip alone.

"I think this train ride the best part of the whole thing," said Dolly, as she took off her coat and hung it up beside her chair. "I do love to ride in a parlour car; I wish we were to travel in it for a week."

"I like it, too," agreed Bernice. "Oh, girls, what fun we're going to have! You won't like Uncle Jeff at first, he's awful queer; but there's one thing sure, he'll let us do just as we like. He's very good-natured."

"What's Mrs. Berry like?" asked Dotty. "I suppose we'll obey her?"

"Yes, but she's good-natured, too. I can twist her round my finger. Oh, we'll have a high old time."

"S'pose Mrs. Berry shouldn't be there to meet us when we get in," suggested Dolly. "What then?"

"She will, of course," said Bernice. "But if she shouldn't, if the car broke down or anything like that, we'd take a taxicab right to the house."

This sounded very grown-up and grand to the two D's, who had had little experience with taxicabs, and Dotty exclaimed with glee, "I'd rather do that than go in Mr. Forbes' car! What a lark it would be! Oh, Bernice, can we go somewhere in a taxicab while we're there?"

"I don't know, Dotty,—I s'pose so. But why should we? Uncle Jeff has two cars, and the chauffeur will take us wherever we want to go."

"But I've never been in a taxicab,—without older people, I mean, and I'd love to try it."

"Well, I expect you can," returned Bernice, carelessly. "I dare say you can do pretty much anything you want to."

"But do behave yourself, Dot," cautioned Dolly; "you're so daring and venturesome, I don't know what mischief you'll get into!"

"Oh, we won't get into mischief," laughed Bernice. "There'll be enough fun, without doing anything we oughtn't to."

"Of course, I won't do anything wrong," declared Dotty, indignantly. "But there are so many things to do, it sets me crazy to think of it!"

"I'm going to buy things," announced Bernice. "There aren't any decent shops in Berwick, and I'm going to get lots of things in the city stores."

"We can't do that," said Dolly, decidedly. "We haven't lots of money like you have, Bernie; I'm going to see things. I want to see all the pictures I possibly can. I love to look at pictures."

"I want to go to the theatre," and Dotty looked at Bernice inquiringly.

"Will we, do you s'pose?"

"Oh, yes, Mrs. Berry will take us. Perhaps we can go to matinees, alone."

"I don't think we ought to do that," and Dolly looked distinctly disapproving.

"Oh, come now, old priggy-wig," said Dotty, "don't be too awfully 'fraidcat!"

"It will be just as Mrs. Berry says," Bernice informed them. "Father said I must obey her in everything. Uncle Jeff won't pay much attention to what we do, but Mrs. Berry will. I wonder if Alicia will be there when we get there."

But Alicia wasn't. As the girls came up the stairs into the great station, they saw a smiling, motherly-looking lady waiting to welcome them.

"Here you are!" she cried, and it wasn't necessary for Bernice to introduce her friends, except to tell which was which.

"I feel as if I knew you," Mrs. Berry said, and her kindly grey eyes beamed at them both. "Now I must learn to tell you apart. Dolly with golden hair,—Dotty with black. Is that it?"

"Is Alicia here?" asked Bernice, eagerly.

"No; she's coming in at the other station. She won't arrive for an hour or more. Where are your checks? Let George take them."

The footman took the checks and looked after them, while Mrs. Berry piloted the girls to the waiting motor-car.

It was a large and very beautiful limousine, and they all got in, and were soon rolling up Fifth Avenue.

"How splendid it all is!" exclaimed Dolly, looking out at the crowds. "It seems as if we must get all snarled up in the traffic, but we don't."

"Kirke is a very careful driver," said Mrs. Berry, "and he understands just where to go. How you've grown, Bernice. I haven't seen you for two years, you know."

"Yes, I have. We're all getting to be grown-ups, Mrs. Berry. Isn't Alicia?"

"I don't know. I haven't seen her for a long time. But she's at a very fashionable school, so I suppose she is full of notions."

"What are notions?" asked Dolly, smiling up into the speaker's eyes.

"Oh, notions," and Mrs. Berry laughed, "well, it's thinking you know it all yourself, and not being willing to listen to advice. I don't believe you have notions, Dolly."

"No, she hasn't," said Bernice. "But Dotty and I have! However, I promised Dad I'd obey you, Mrs. Berry, in everything you say, so I don't believe you'll have any trouble with us."

"Land, no! I don't expect any. Now, let me see; I've two big rooms for you all, with two beds in each. I suppose you'll room with your cousin, Bernice, and these other two girls together?"

"Yes, indeed," said Dolly, quickly, for she had no idea of rooming with any one but Dotty.

"That settles itself, then."

"But suppose I don't like Alicia," said Bernice, doubtfully. "Suppose we quarrel."

"All right," and Mrs. Berry nodded her head, "there are other rooms. I don't want you to be uncomfortable in any particular. I thought you'd like it better that way. The two rooms I've fixed for you, are two big ones on the second floor. Mine is on the same floor, in the rear. Your uncle's rooms are upon the third floor."

"I think it sounds fine," declared Bernice, "and I'm sure I'll get on with Alicia, if she does have 'notions.'"

And then they reached the big house on upper Fifth Avenue, and as they entered, Dolly felt a little appalled at the grandeur everywhere about her. Not so Dotty. She loved elegance, and as her feet sank into the deep soft rugs, she laughed out in sheer delight of being in such beautiful surroundings. Mrs. Berry took the girls at once to their rooms, and sent the car for Alicia.

"I'll give the front room to Dotty and Dolly," she said to Bernice; "and you can have the other. It's quite as nice, only it looks out on the side street, not on the Avenue."

"That's right, Mrs. Berry. Dot and Dolly are more company than Alicia and I are. We're really members of the family. I was so surprised at Uncle Jeff's inviting us. Why did he do it, anyway?"

"Why, indeed!" said Mrs. Berry, but her expression was quizzical. "No one can tell why Mr. Forbes does things! He is a law unto himself. Now, girls, your trunks are coming up. And here are two maids to unpack for you and put your things away. You can direct them."

Mrs. Berry bustled away, and two neat-looking maids appeared, one of whom entered Bernice's room and the other attended on Dot and Dolly.

"Which frocks shall I leave out for dinner?" the maid asked, as she shook out and hung up the dresses in the wardrobe.

"The blue voile for me," replied Dolly, "and—er—what is your name?"

"Foster, miss," and she smiled at Dolly's gentle face.

"And the rose-coloured voile for me," directed Dotty. "You'll find, Foster, that our frocks are pretty much alike except as to colour."

"Yes, ma'am. And these patent leather pumps, I daresay?"

"Yes, that's right," and Dotty flung herself into a big easy-chair and sighed in an ecstasy of delight that she really had a ladies' maid to wait on her. Dolly didn't take it so easily. She wanted to look after her own things, as she did at home. But Dotty motioned to her not to do so, lest Foster should think them inexperienced or countrified.

Their simple belongings were soon in place, and the two D's wandered into Bernice's room.

Here everything was helter-skelter. Finery was piled on beds and chairs, and hats were flung on top of one another, while shoes and veils, gloves and hair-brushes were scattered on the floor.

"It's my fault," laughed Bernice, "don't blame Perkins for it! I'm hunting for a bracelet, that has slipped out of my jewel case, somehow. It must be in this lot of stockings!"

It wasn't, but it turned up at last, inside of a hat, and Bernice gave a little squeal of relief.

"That's all right, then!" she cried; "I wouldn't lose that for worlds! It's a bangle father gave me for Christmas, and it has a diamond in the pendant. All right, Perkins, put the things away any place you like. But save hooks and shelves enough for my cousin Alicia. She'll be in this room with me."

Each large room had what seemed to the two little women ample room for clothes. But Bernice had brought so much more than they did, that her things overflowed the space provided.

"I'll wear this to-night, for dinner," she said, pulling out a light green silk from a pile of frocks.

"Oh, Bernie!" exclaimed Dotty; "not that! That's a party dress, isn't it?"

"Not exactly. I've more dressy ones. But it is a little fussy for a quiet evening at home, I suppose. Well, what shall I wear?"

"This?" and Dotty picked out a simple challie.

"Oh, gracious, no! That's a morning frock. I guess I'll stick to the green. Don't you think so, Perkins?"

"Yes, miss. It's a lovely gown." The maid was interested in the girls, her life in the quiet house being usually most uneventful. This sudden invasion of young people was welcomed by all the servants, and there were many in Jefferson Forbes' palatial home. Mrs. Berry had engaged several extra ones to help with the increased work, but the two maids assigned to the girls were trusted and tried retainers.

And then, there was a bustle heard downstairs, a peal of laughter and a perfect flood of chatter in a high, shrill voice, and with a bounding run up the staircase, Alicia burst into the room where the three girls were.

"Hello, Bernice, old girl!" she shouted, and flung her arms around her cousin's neck, giving her resounding smacks on her cheek. "Golly! Molly! Polly! but I'm glad to see you again! Forgotten me, have you? Take a good look! Your long lost Alicia! 'Tis really she! And look who's here! I'll bet a pig these two stammering, blushing young misses are the far-famed Dolly and Dotty, but which is which?"

"Guess!" said Dotty, laughing, as Dolly stood dismayed, and half frightened at this whirlwind of a girl.

"All right, I'll guess. Lemmese! Dolly Fayre and Dotty Rose;—you see I know your names. Why, the fair one is Dolly of course, and that leaves Dotty to be you!"

"Right!" cried Dotty, and Alicia flew to her and grabbed her as enthusiastically as she had Bernice.

"Oh, you chickabiddy!" she cried. "I foresee we shall be chums! I love Towhead, too, but I'm a little afraid of her. See her steely blue eyes, even now, fixed on me in utter disapprobation!"

"Not at all," said Dolly, politely, "I think you're very nice."

The calm demureness of this speech was too much for Alicia, and she went off in peals of laughter.

"Oh, you're rich!" she cried; "simpully rich! WON'T we have fun! I'm 'most afraid I'll love you more'n the other one—the black haired witch." And then Dolly was treated to an embrace that ruffled her hair and collar and came near ruffling her temper. For Dolly didn't like such sudden familiarity, but her good manners kept her from showing her annoyance.

"Oh, you don't fool me!" cried Alicia; "I know you think I'm awful! Too rambunctious and all that! But I'm used to it! At school they call me That Awful Alicia! How's that?"

"Fine, if you like it—and I believe you do!" laughed Dolly.

"Mind reader! I say, Bernice, where am I to put my togs! You've squatted on every available foot of property in this room! I thought it was to be ours together! But every single bed in the room is covered with your rags. I've two trunks of duds, myself."

"Two trunks! Why did you bring so much?"

"Had to have it. There's lots of things I carry around with me beside clothes. Why, I've brought a whole chafing-dish outfit."

"Goodness, Alicia," exclaimed Bernice, "do you think Uncle Jeff won't give us enough to eat?"

"I take no chances. But it isn't that. It's thusly. Say we're out of an evening, and on returning, are sent straight to beddy-by. How comforting to have the necessary for a little spread of our own! Oh, I've tried it out at school, and I can tell you there's something in it. But, where, ladies and gentlemen, WHERE I ask you, can I put it? Bernice has all the places full."

"Leave it in your trunk," suggested Dolly, "until you want to use it."

"Angel child!" cried Alicia. "I knew you had some brain concealed among that mop of yellow silk floss! I'll do that same, and be thankful if my voracious cousin leaves me enough room for a few scant and skimpy clodings!"

And then, as Perkins unpacked Alicia's trunks and Foster came in to help, the room really seemed incapable of holding all.

"We'd better get out, Doll," said Dotty, laughing, as Alicia deposited an armful of petticoats and dressing jackets in her lap.

"Oh, don't go! I want you to hold things till I find a place for them. And, say, are your own wardrobes full?"

"No!" cried Dolly. "Just the thing! Put your overflow in our room, we've less than a dozen dresses between us."

"Goodness gracious me! Oh, you're going to buy a lot in the city,—I see!"

"No, we're not," said Dolly, who never sailed under false colours; "we brought all we had, all our best ones. I mean. But we don't have things like you and Bernice."

"You frank little bunch of honesty! Isn't she the darling! All right, neighbours, since you insist, I'll put some seventeen or twenty-four of my Paris confections in your empty cupboards."

Of course, Alicia was exaggerating, but she really did take half a dozen frocks into the two D's room, and hung them in outspread fashion right over their best costumes.

"And, now, since one good turn deserves another," she rattled on, "I'll just toss my extra shoes and slippers into your lowest bureau drawer, and my stockings into the next one. There's plenty of room."

So there was, by crowding the contents already there. But Alicia was so quick of motion, and so gay of speech that they couldn't refuse to let her have her way. And, too, it seemed inevitable, for there wasn't room for Alicia's things and Bernie's in the same room, and the D's shelves and bureau drawers showed much vacancy.

"Now, what do we wear this evening?" Alicia asked, tossing over her dresses. "This, let us say?" She held up a low—necked evening gown of silk tissue.

"No, you goose," said Bernice, decidedly. "Your respected uncle would think you were crazy! Here, wear this."

Bernice picked out one of the least ornate, a pretty Dresden silk, and then the girls all began to dress for dinner.

CHAPTER IV

A MERRY QUARTETTE

"Ready for dinner, girls?" sounded a cheery voice, and Mrs. Berry came bustling in. "Almost, aren't you? Try to remember that Mr. Forbes doesn't like to be kept waiting."

"I'm scared to death," said Bernice, frankly. "I never know what to say to Uncle Jeff, anyway, and being a guest makes it all the harder."

"Pooh! I'm not afraid," exclaimed Alicia. "Leave it to me. I'll engineer the conversation and all you girls need to do is to chip in now and then."

Alicia was a tall, fair girl, larger than any of the others. She was plump and jolly-looking, and had a breezy manner that was attractive because of her smiling good-natured face. She laughed a great deal, and seemed to have no lack of self-confidence and self-assurance. Her dress had many fluttering ribbons of vivid pink, and frills of lace of an inexpensive variety.

She led the way downstairs, calling out, "March on, march on to victory!" and the others followed.

The four entered the drawing-room, and found there a tall, dignified gentleman, in full evening dress. He had a handsome face, though a trifle stern and forbidding of expression, and his closely trimmed white beard was short and pointed. He had large, dark eyes, which darted from one girl to the other as the quartette appeared.

"H'm," he said, "this is Bernice; how do you do, my dear? How do you do?"

"I'm Alicia," announced that spry damsel, gaily, and she caught him by the hand.

"Yes, and very like your mother, my dear sister. Well, Alicia, if you possess half her fine traits, you'll make a splendid woman. But I doubt if you are very much like her except in appearance. You look to me like a flibbertigibbet,—if you know what that is."

"Yes, and I am one, thank you, Uncle Jeff," and Alicia laughed gaily, not at all abashed at her uncle's remark.

"These are my two friends from Berwick, uncle," said Bernice, introducing them. "Dolly Fayre and Dotty Rose."

"You are welcome, my dears," and the courteous old gentleman bowed to them with great dignity. "I trust you can find amusement and enjoy your visit here. Now, let us dine."

Dolly looked curiously at her host, as he stood back, and bowed the girls out of the room, before he followed them, but Dotty was so interested in the surroundings that she gave no second thought to Mr. Forbes, as she passed him.

The dining-room was a marvel of old time grandeur. Nothing was modern, but the heavy black walnut sideboard and chairs spoke of long usage and old time ways.

Mrs. Berry did not appear at the table, and evidently was not expected, as no place was set for her.

Mr. Forbes sat at the head, and two girls at either side. A grave-faced, important looking butler directed the service, and two footmen assisted. Everything was of the best, and wonderfully cooked and served, but Dolly and Dotty could scarcely eat for the novelty and interest of the scene.

"Come, come, Miss Fayre, eat your terrapin," counselled Mr. Forbes, "it is not so good cold."

"Oh, gracious, Uncle Jeff," exclaimed the volatile Alicia, "don't call those kids Miss! Call 'em Dotty and Dolly, do."

"Can't remember which is which," declared her uncle, looking at the two D's. "I can remember the last names, because the Fayre girl is fair, and the Rose girl is rosy. I shall call them Rosy and Fairy, I think."

"All right, Mr. Forbes," and Dolly smiled and dimpled at the pretty conceit.

"And you two must call me something less formal," he said. "Suppose you call me Uncle Forbes, as you are not really my nieces."

This seemed a fine plan and was readily adopted.

"And now," Mr. Forbes went on, "I don't mind confessing that I've no idea what to do with you girls. By way of entertainment, I mean."

"Oh, Uncle Jeff," said Bernice, "it's enough entertainment just to be here in New York for a week. Why, we will have all we can do to see the shops and the sights—I suppose we can go around sight-seeing?"

"Bless my soul, yes. Of course you can. Go where you like. Order the motors whenever you choose. Mrs. Berry will do all you want her to; just tell her your plans. All I ask is that I shan't be troubled with you during the day."

"Why, uncle," cried Alicia, "won't we see you at all in the daytime?"

"No. I am a very busy man. I cannot have my work interrupted by a pack of foolish chatterers."

"Whatever did you ask us for?" Alicia's round face wore a look of surprised inquiry.

"Never you mind, miss. I had a very good reason for asking you, but one doesn't always tell his reasons. However, I expect to see you every night at the dinner table, and for an hour or so afterward in the drawing room. The rest of the time you must amuse yourselves. Have you any friends in New York, any of you?"

"I have a few," said Dotty, as the inquiring glance turned in her direction.

"Invite them to the house when you choose," said Mr. Forbes, hospitably, if curtly.

"Oh, no, sir," said Dotty, quickly. "They wouldn't fit in."

Mr. Forbes chuckled. "You have a sense of the fitness of things, Miss Rosy. Why wouldn't they fit in?"

"Why, they're plain people. Not grand and elegant like you."

"Oho! So I'm grand and elegant, am I? And are you grand and elegant, too?"

Dotty considered. "Yes," she said, finally, "I am, while I'm here. I'm very adaptable, and while I'm in New York, I mean to be just as grand and elegant as the house itself."

Mr. Forbes burst into hearty laughter. "Good for you!" he cried. "When you're in Rome do as the Romans do. And you, Fairy of the golden curls. Are you going to be grand, also?"

"I can't," returned Dolly, simply. "I can only be myself, wherever I am. But I shall enjoy all the beautiful things as much as Dotty."

Again Mr. Forbes laughed. "You're a great pair," he said. "I'm glad I discovered you. And now, Bernice and Alicia, haven't you any young friends in town you'd like to invite to see you here? Remember the house is yours."

"Oh, Uncle Jeff," cried Alicia, "you are too good! Do you mean it? Can we do just as we like? Invite parties, and all that?"

"Yes, indeed. Why not? Have the best time possible, and see to it that those two little friends of yours have a good time, too."

"But won't you go with us anywhere?" asked Bernice; "I thought you'd take us to see places where we can't go alone."

"Bless my soul! Take a lot of chattering magpies sightseeing! No, not if I know it! Mrs. Berry will take you; and on a pinch, I might let my secretary accompany you, say to see the downtown big buildings or the bright lights at night."

"Oh, do you have a secretary?" asked Alicia. "What's he like?"

"Fenn? Oh, he's a good sort. Very dependable and really accommodating. He'll be of great help to you, I'm sure."

"What is your business, Mr. Forbes?" asked Dolly, who was much interested in this strange type of man. She had never seen any one like him, and he seemed to her a sort of fairy godfather, who waved his wand and gave them all sorts of wonderful gifts.

"I haven't any business, my dear. My occupation and amusement is collecting specimens for my collection. I am an entomologist and ornithologist, if you know what those big words mean."

"Yes, sir, I do." And Dolly smiled back at him. "Mayn't we see your collection?"

"I'm not sure about that, I don't show it to everybody. It is up on the fourth floor of this house, and no one is allowed up there unless accompanied by myself or Mr. Fenn. By the way, remember that, all of you. On no account go up to the fourth floor. Not that you'd be likely to, for you have no call above the second floor, where your rooms are. But this is a special command. The house is yours, as I said, but that means only this first floor and the one above it."

"Goodness me, Uncle Jeff!" said Alicia, "you needn't lay down the law so hard! We're not absolute babes, to be so strictly cautioned and forbidden! If you desire us not to go up the second flight of stairs, of course we won't."

"That's right, my dear, don't. But I do lay it down as a law, and it is the only law I shall impose on you. Except for that you can follow out your own sweet wills."

"But," said Dotty, her dark eyes brilliant with the excitement of the occasion, "I'm not always sure as to what is proper. I want to do just what is right. Is it correct for us to go about alone, in your big motor, with your chauffeur? Can we go to the art galleries and the shops alone?"

"Bless my soul! I don't know." The big man looked absolutely helpless. "Surely you must know such things yourselves. What do your mothers let you do at home? Oh, well, if you're uncertain, ask Mrs. Berry, she'll know. She's an all-round capable person, and she'll know all the unwritten laws about chaperonage and such things. Do as she bids you."

This was satisfactory, and Dotty began at once to make plans for the next day.

"Let's go to the Metropolitan Museum first," she said.

"All right," chimed in Alicia, "we'll go there in the morning, then. But to-morrow is Wednesday, and I want to go to a matinee in the afternoon. Can't we, Uncle Jeff?"

"Of course you can. Tell Fenn, he'll see about tickets for you. Just tell Mrs. Berry to see Fenn about it."

"Oh," sighed the outspoken Dotty, "it is just like Fairyland! Tell Fenn! Just as if Fenn were a magician!"

"He is," said Mr. Forbes, smiling at her enthusiasm. "I couldn't keep house without Fenn. He's my right hand man for everything. You girls mustn't claim too much of his time and attention, for I keep him on the jump most of the time myself."

"Does your collection keep you so busy?" asked Dolly, whose secret longing was to see that same collection, which greatly interested her.

"Yes, indeed. There's always work to be done in connection with it. I've a lot of new specimens just arrived to-day, awaiting classification and tabulation."

After dinner they all returned to the drawing-room. Mr. Forbes seemed desirous of keeping up a general conversation, but it was hard to find a subject to interest him. He would talk a few moments, and then lapse into absent-mindedness and almost forget the girls' presence.

At times, he would get up from his chair, and stalk up and down the room, perhaps suddenly pausing in front of one of them, and asking a direct question.

"How old are you?" he asked abruptly of Alicia.

"Sixteen," she replied. "I was sixteen last October."

"You look like your mother at that age. She was my only sister. She has now been dead—"

"Ten years," prompted Alicia. "I was a little child when she died."

"And who looks after you now? Your father's sister, isn't it?"

"Yes, Uncle Jeff. My Aunt Nellie. But I'm at school, you know. I shall be there the next four years, I suppose."

"Yes, yes, to be sure. Yes, yes, of course. And you, Bernice? You have no mother, either. But who looks after you?"

"I look after myself, Uncle. Father thinks there's no necessity for me to have a chaperon in our little home town."

"Not a chaperon, child, but you ought to have some one to guide and teach you."

"Dad doesn't think so. He says an American girl can take care of herself."

"Maybe so, maybe so. It might be a good thing for you to go to school with Alicia."

"It might be. But I like our High School at home, and we learn a lot there."

"But not the same kind of learning. Do they teach you manners and general society instruction?"

"No," said Bernice, smiling at thought of such things in connection with the Berwick school.

"But my father thinks those things come naturally to girls of good families."

"Maybe so, maybe so." And then Mr. Forbes again walked up and down the long room, seemingly lost in his own thoughts.

Dolly and Doty felt a little uncomfortable. They wanted to make themselves agreeable and entertaining, but their host seemed interested exclusively in his young relatives, and they hesitated lest they intrude.

As it neared ten o'clock, Mr. Forbes paused in his pacing of the room, bowed to each of the four in turn, and then saying, courteously, "I bid you goodnight," he vanished into the hall.

Immediately Mrs. Berry entered. It seemed a relief to see her kind, smiling face after the uncertain phases of their eccentric host.

"Now you young people must go to bed," the housekeeper said; "you're tired,—or ought to be. Come along."

Not at all unwillingly they followed her upstairs, and she looked after their comfort in most solicitous fashion.

After she had shown them how to ring the various bells to call the maids or to call her, in emergency, and had drawn their attention to the ice water in thermos bottles, and told them how to adjust the ventilators, she bade them good-night and went away.

The rooms had a communicating door, and this Alicia promptly threw open and came through into the two D's room.

"Oh, isn't it all the greatest fun! And did you EVER see anything so crazy as Uncle Jeff? What he wants us here for, I don't know! But it's something,—and something especial. He never asked us here to amuse him! Of that I'm certain."

"Not much he didn't!" and Bernice followed Alicia, and perched on the edge of Dolly's bed. "Isn't he queer? I didn't know he was so funny as he is. Did you, Alicia?"

"No; I haven't seen him since I was a tiny mite. But he's all right. He knows what he's about and I don't wonder he doesn't want us bothering around if he's busy."

"I'd love to see his collection," said Dolly. "I'm awfully interested in such things."

"Oh, well, you'll probably have a chance to see it while we're here," and Alicia began taking down her hair. "Now, girls, let's get to bed, for I'm jolly well tired out. But I foresee these poky evenings right along, don't you? We'll have to cram a lot of fun into our days, if the evenings are to be spent watching an elderly gentleman stalking around thus." And then Alicia gave a very good imitation of the way Mr. Forbes walked around. She didn't ridicule him; she merely burlesqued his manner as he paused to speak to them in his funny, abrupt way.

"What are you, my dear?" she said, looking at Dolly. "Are you a specimen I can use in my collection? No? Are you a fashionable butterfly? I say, Bernice," she suddenly broke off, "why was he so curious about the way we live at home, and who brings us up?"

"I don't know; and anyway, he knew how long our mothers have been dead and who takes care of us. Why did he ask those things over and over?"

"I think he's a bit absent-minded. Half the time he was thinking of matters far removed from this charming quartette of bewitching beauties. Well, it's up to us to make our own good time. I move we corral the big limousine for to-morrow morning and go in search of adventure."

"To the Metropolitan?" suggested Dolly.

"Yes, if you like, though I'd rather go to the shops," and Alicia gathered up her hairpins to depart. Her long light hair hung round her shoulders, and she pushed it back as she affectionately kissed Dolly and Dotty good-night. "You are sure two darlings!" she said emphatically.

CHAPTER V

GOING ABOUT

Four smiling, eager girls trooped down to breakfast the next morning, and found Mrs. Berry awaiting them. She presided at the table, and they learned that she would always do so at breakfast and luncheon, though she did not dine with them.

"Uncle Jeff says we may go to a matinee to-day," said Alicia, delightedly. "Will you see about the tickets, Mrs. Berry? Uncle said Mr. Fenn would get them if you asked him to."

"Yes, my dear. And what are your plans for the morning? Do you want the car?"

"Yes, indeed," said Bernice. "We're going to the Museum and I don't know where else."

"To the Library, if we have time," suggested Dolly. "I want to see all the places of interest."

"Places of interest never interest me," declared Alicia. "I think they're poky."

"All right," returned Dolly, good-naturedly, "I'll go wherever you like."

"Now, don't be so ready to give in, Doll," cautioned Bernice. "You have as much right to your way as Alicia has to hers."

"No, I haven't," and Dolly smiled brightly; "this is the house of Alicia's uncle, and not mine."

"Well, he's my uncle, too, and what I say goes, as much as Alicia's commands."

"There, there, girls, don't quarrel," said Mrs. Berry, in her amiable way. "Surely you can all be suited. There are two cars, you know, and if you each want to go in a different direction, I'll call taxi-cabs for you."

Dolly and Dotty stared at this new lavishness, and Dotty said, quickly, "Oh, no, don't do that! We all want to be together, wherever we go. And I think, as Dolly does, that Bernice and Alicia must choose, for they belong here and we're guests."

"You're two mighty well-behaved little guests," and Mrs. Berry beamed at them. "Well, settle it among yourselves. Now, what matinee do you want to go to? I'll order tickets for you."

"Will you go with us, Mrs. Berry?" asked Dolly.

"No, child. I hope you'll let me off. You girls are old enough to go alone in the daytime, and Kirke will take you and come to fetch you home. Now, what play?"

"I want to see 'The Lass and the Lascar'; that's a jolly thing, I hear," said Alicia, as no one else suggested anything.

"Musical?" asked Bernice.

"Yes," said Mrs. Berry, "it's a comic opera, and a very good one. I've seen it, and I'm sure you girls will enjoy it. I'll order seats for that. Be sure to be home for luncheon promptly at one, so you can get ready for the theatre."

"I can't believe it all," whispered Dotty, pinching Dolly's arm, as they ran upstairs to prepare for their morning's trip. "Think of our going to all these places in one day!"

"And six days more to come!" added Dolly. "Oh, it is too gorgeous!"

Arrayed in warm coats and furs, the laughing quartette got into the big car, and George, the polite footman, adjusted the robes, and asked their destination.

"To the Metropolitan Museum, first," said Alicia, unselfishly.

"Oh," cried Dolly, with sparkling eyes, "are we really going there first! How good of you, Alicia!"

And from the moment they entered the vestibule of the great museum, Dolly was enthralled with what she saw. Like one in a trance, she walked from room to room, drinking in the beauty or strangeness of the exhibits. She ignored the catalogues, merely gazing at the pictures or curios with an absorbed attention that made her oblivious to all else.

"Watch her," said Alicia, nudging Dotty. "She doesn't even know where she is! Just now, she's back in Assyria with the people that wore that old jewellery!"

Sure enough Dolly was staring into a case of antique bracelets and earrings of gold and jewels. She moved along the length of the case, noting each piece, and fairly sighing with admiration and wonder.

"My gracious! isn't she the antiquarian!" exclaimed Alicia. "Look here, old Professor Wiseacre, what dynasty does this junk belong to?"

Dolly looked up with a vacant stare.

"Come back to earth!" cried Alicia, shaking with laughter. "Come back to the twentieth century! We mourn our loss!"

"Yes, come back, Dollums," said Dotty. "There are other rooms full of stuff awaiting your approval."

Dolly laughed. "Oh, you girls don't appreciate What you're seeing. Just think! Women wore these very things! Real, live women!"

"Well, they're not alive now," said Bernice, "and we are. So give us the pleasure of your company. Say, Dolly, some day you come up here all alone by yourself, and prow around—"

"Oh, I'd love to! I'll do just that. And then I won't feel that I'm delaying you girls. Where do you want to go now?"

"Anywhere out of this old museum," said Alicia, a little pettishly. "You've had your way, Dotty, now it's only fair I should have mine. We've about an hour left; let's go to the shops."

"Yes, indeed," and Dolly spoke emphatically. "I didn't realise that I was being a selfish old piggy-wig!"

"And you're not," defended Bernice. "We all wanted to come here, but, well, you see, Dolly, you do dawdle."

"But it's such a wonder-place!" and Dolly gazed longingly backward as they left the antiquities. "And there are rooms we haven't even looked into yet."

"Dozens of 'em," assented Alicia. "But not this morning, my chickabiddy! I must flee to the busy marts and see what's doing in the way of tempting bargains."

"All right," and Dolly put her arm through Alicia's. "What are you going to buy?"

"Dunno, till I see something that strikes my fancy. But in the paper this morning, I noticed a special sale of 'Pastime Toggery' at Follansbee's. Let's go there."

"Never heard of the place," said Dolly. "But let's go."

"Never heard of Follansbee's! Why, it's the smartest shop in New York for sport clothes."

"Is it? We never get sport clothes. Unless you mean middies and sweaters. My mother buys those at the department stores."

"Oh, you can't get exclusive models there!" and Alicia's face wore a reproving expression.

"No," said outspoken Dolly, "but we don't wear exclusive models. We're rather inclusive, I expect."

"You're a duck!" cried Alicia, who, though ultra-fashionable herself, liked the honesty and frankness of the two D's.

They reached the shop in question, and the four girls went in.

The Berwick girls were a little awed at the atmosphere of the place, but Alicia was entirely mistress of the situation. She had many costumes and accessories shown to her, and soon became as deeply absorbed in their contemplation as Dolly had been in the Museum exhibits.

"Why, for goodness' sake!" cried Bernice, at last. "Are you going to buy out the whole shop, Alicia?"

"Why, I'm not going to buy any," returned Alicia, looking surprised; "I'm just shopping, you know."

"Oh, is that it? Well, let me tell you it isn't any particular fun for us to look on while you 'shop'! And, anyway, it's time to be going home, or we'll be late for the luncheon and for the matinee."

"All right, I'll go now. But wait. I want to buy some little thing for you girls,—sort of a souvenir, you know."

"Good for you!" said Bernice, but Dolly demurred.

"I don't think you ought to, Alicia," she said. "I don't believe my mother would like me to take it."

"Nonsense, Towhead! I'm just going to get trifles. Nobody could object to my giving you a tiny token of my regard and esteem. Let me see,—how about silk sweaters? They're always handy to have in the house."

Unheeding the girls' protestations, Alicia selected four lovely colours, and asked the saleswoman to get the right sizes.

Dolly's was robin's egg blue; Dotty's salmon pink; Bernice's, a deep orange, and Alicia's own was white, as she declared she already had every colour of the rainbow.

Then she selected an old rose one for Mrs. Berry, getting permission to exchange it if it should be a misfit.

Alicia ordered the sweaters sent to her uncle's house, and the bill sent to her father. This arrangement seemed perfectly satisfactory to the shop people, and the girls set off for home.

"I feel uncomfortable about that sweater," announced Dolly, as they were on their way.

"That doesn't matter," laughed Alicia, "so long as you don't feel uncomfortable in it! Remove that anxious scowl, my little Towhead; I love to give things to my friends, and you must learn to accept trifles gracefully."

"But it isn't a trifle, Alicia. I know mother won't like it."

"Won't like that blue sweater! Why, it's a beauty!"

"I don't mean that. I mean she won't like for me to take it,—to accept it from you."

"All right; tell her you bought it yourself."

"Tell a story about it! No, thank you." Dolly's blue eyes fairly flashed at the thought.

"Well, my stars! Dolly, don't make such a fuss about it! Throw it away, or give it to the scullery maid! You don't have to keep it!"

Clearly, Alicia was annoyed. Dolly was far from ungrateful, and she didn't know quite what to do.

"Of course, she'll keep it," Dotty broke in, anxious to straighten matters out. "She adores it, Alicia; but we girls aren't accustomed to making each other gifts,—at least, not expensive ones."

"Well, you needn't make a habit of it. One sweater doesn't make a summer! I hope Mrs. Berry won't be so squeamish! If I thought she would, I'd throw hers in the ash barrel before I'd give it to her!"

"I s'pose I was horrid about it, Alicia," said Dolly, contritely; "I do love it, really, you know I do; but, as Dotty says, we never give such gifts. Why, I can't give you anything to make up for it—"

"And I don't want you to! You little goose! But like as not, you can sometime do something for me worth more than a dozen sweaters."

"I hope so, I'm sure. Will you tell me if I can?"

"Yes, baby-face! I declare, Dolly, it's hard to realise you're fifteen years old! You act about twelve,—and look ten!"

"Oh, not so bad as that!" and Dolly laughed gaily. "I s'pose I do seem younger than I am, because I've always lived in a small town. We don't do things like city girls."

"Deed we don't!" exclaimed Dotty. "I used to live in the city, and when I went to Berwick it was like a different world. But I've come to like it now."

"I like it," said Bernice, decidedly. "I think we have a lot more fun in Berwick than we could in New York. To live, I mean. Of course, this visit here is lovely, but it's the novelty and the strange sights that make it so. I wouldn't want to live in New York."

"Neither would I," and Dolly shook her head very positively.

"I would," said Alicia. "I'd just love to live here, in a house like Uncle Jeff's, and have all these cars and servants and everything fine."

"No, thank you," Dolly rejoined. "It's beautiful for a week, but it makes my head go round to think of living like this always."

"Your head is not very securely fastened on, anyway," and Alicia grinned at her. "You'll lose it some day!"

"Maybe so," smiled Dolly, affably, and then they suddenly found they were back home.

"Good time, girlies?" called out Mrs. Berry, as they entered. "Lunch is all ready; sit down and eat it, and get dressed for the matinee afterward, Mr. Fenn got fine seats for you,—near the front. You'll like the play, I know."

And like the play they did. It was a light opera, of the prettiest type, full of lovely scenery, gay costumes and bright, catchy music. "The Lass and the Lascar" was its name, and the lass in question was a charming little girl who seemed no older than the quartette themselves. The Lascar was a tall, handsome man, whose swarthy East Indian effects were picturesque and attractive. He had a magnificent baritone voice, and the girls sat breathless when he sang his splendid numbers. All four were fond of music and even more than the gay splendour of the show they enjoyed the voices and orchestra.

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