Mary Jane—Her Visit eBook

Mary Jane—Her Visit by Clara Ingram Judson

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Page 1

MARY JANE'S ARRIVAL

It seemed to Mary Jane that some magic must have been at work to change the world during the night she slept on the train. All the country she knew had hills and valleys and many creeks and woods of pine trees. But when she waked up in the morning and peeped out of the window of her berth, she saw great wide fields and woods that seemed always far away. And the occasional creek that the train rumbled over was small and could be seen a long way off, coming across the fields toward the railroad. And the roads! How funny they were! They came straight and white toward the train, each just exactly as smooth and as regular as the one before.

To be sure the country was pretty; yellow buttercups and bright blue flowers bloomed along the track and the fields looked fresh and green in the morning sun.

"I think I'm going to like it anyway, even if the hills are all smoothed out," said Mary Jane as she looked at it thoughtfully, "and maybe I'd better put on my shoes and stockings." She rummaged in the funny little hammock that hung over her window, found the shoes and stockings and put them on, and was just wondering if it was time to dress when she heard Dr. Smith's voice outside.

"Yes, Sambo, I'm awake," he was saying, "and you may call the young lady."

Before Mary Jane had had time to wonder who the "young lady" might be, there was a great shaking of her curtain and the voice of the porter said, "Thirty minutes to Glenville!"

Quick as a flash Mary Jane stuck her head out between the curtains and replied, "That's where my great grandmother lives and I'm going to see her!"

The porter was vastly surprised ("I guess he thought I was going to sleep all day!" thought Mary Jane scornfully), but before he had a chance to reply anything, Dr. Smith called across, "Good morning, Mary Jane! How did you sleep?"

"All the night, just like I do at home," answered Mary Jane, "except one time when they bumped something into my bed—what was it, do you 'spose?"

"Most like they put on a new engine," said Dr. Smith. "Now, how long will it take you to dress, my dear?"

"Just a tinny while," said Mary Jane, "because I've got my shoes and stockings on now. And when may I wash my face and you put on my hair ribbon?"

Dr. Smith stepped out from his berth and looked at Mary Jane in dismay.

“You may wash your face any time you like, my dear,” he said, “but I can’t tie your hair ribbon. I don’t know how!”

Mary Jane laughed at the funny face he made and then she smiled in her most motherly fashion. “Then it’s a good thing I forgot and left it on last night,” she said, “and don’t you worry, I can perk it up and make it look real tidy.”

“You’re a good little traveler,” complimented Dr. Smith. “I’ll take you along again. Now let’s see who’s ready first.”

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Mary Jane put on the rest of her clothes; then she took her little bag, just as her mother had told her to, and went into the dressing room and washed her face and made herself neat and tidy. She got back in time to see the porter make up her bed and she was glad of that because bed-unmaking on a train by daylight seemed even more wonderful and interesting than bed-making the night before.

She sat down on the seat across the aisle while he worked, so she could see everything he did.

“My mother and I don’t make beds that way at home,” she announced suddenly.

“Sure not,” agreed the porter, and then by way of keeping up the conversation, he added, “Like to ride on a train?”

“’Deed I do,” said Mary Jane happily, “and I like to go see my grandmother—it’s my Great-grandmother Hodges I’m going to see, you know. And my mother isn’t going and my daddah isn’t going because he works and my sister Alice isn’t going because she’s in school and anybody isn’t going but just my Dr. Smith and me ’cause I’m five and that’s a big girl.”

“Well!” exclaimed the porter, and he actually stopped making beds to look at such a big little girl. Mary Jane liked him and started to tell him about Doris and the birthday party and the pretty things in her trunk, but Dr. Smith came back just then and there was no more time for talk.

“Got your coat?” he asked, “and your hat and your—everything?”

“He put ’em there,” said Mary Jane, pointing to the next seat where she had seen the porter put her things, “and my gloves are in my pocket and my bag’s all shut.”

“That’s good.” said Dr. Smith. “You’d better put your things on now. Here, I’ll hold your coat.”

It was a good thing Mary Jane started putting on her gloves just when she did. For before she had the last button safely tucked in its button hole, the porter had slipped in to a white coat and had picked up her bag and Dr. Smith’s big grip and started for the door of the car; the great long train was slowing up at a little station.

They got off in such a hurry that Mary Jane hardly had time to say good-by to the kind porter before the train hurried away and some one picked her up and kissed her and exclaimed, “Well, well, well! Such a *big* girl!” and she found herself kissing dear Grandfather Hodges—she knew him well because he had visited her home and she had a nice, comfortable, “belonging” feeling the minute she saw him.

“Now you two stay right here by the car,” said Grandfather, “while I get the trunk.” And Mary Jane had her first chance to look around.

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The station wasn't a bit like the station at her home—not a bit. It was a funny little frame house with a platform, out in front. And there wasn't any roof out over where the trains went or anything like that; just the little house and the platform. And instead of the piles of trunks on great trucks that she supposed were in every station, there was only her own little trunk dumped forlornly on the platform. And instead of the many men busy about various duties, there was not a single man, at least not one that Mary Jane could see. Grandfather took the check that Dr. Smith gave him and went into the little station with it. In a second he was back and what do you suppose he did? He picked up her trunk and set it in the back of his waiting automobile just as easy as could be! Mary Jane was that surprised he could see it and he laughed gayly and said, "That's the way we do our baggaging here, Mary Jane. We'll not wait for any sleepy baggage men—not when Grandmother and hot griddle cakes and honey are waiting for us, will we?"

And Mary Jane, who was getting hungry enough to find breakfast a most interesting subject, settled down in the front seat beside her grandfather and said, "No, we won't!"

Dr. Smith climbed into the back seat beside the trunk and Grandfather started the car and went spinning down the road.

"Your roads all know where they're going, don't they?" Mary Jane asked as they got under way.

"Yes," replied Grandfather in surprise; "don't yours?"

"Not like yours do," said Mary Jane positively; "ours go this way." And with her finger she made some big curves in the air.

"Oh!" laughed Grandfather, "you mean that yours are curving because of the hills and that ours are straight. Yes, our roads are pretty straight but you'll like that when you get used to it, because then you can't get lost. There's a road every mile and each road goes just the way it by rights ought to go because there aren't any hills to get in the way." And all the while Grandfather was talking, he was driving the car along the straight road just as fast as could be.

"And aren't there any hills before we get to your house?" asked Mary Jane after a while.

'"Well," said Grandfather smilingly, as he slowed the car down, "what do you think about that yourself?"

Mary Jane looked before her, the way she could see Grandfather wanted her to look, and, right there close, she saw a big, old-fashioned white house. It had a flower bed, a great big round flower bed, in the yard in front of it and a curving driveway along the side. And it had a wide porch all across the front, a porch that had seats and a swing and everything a little girl would like to see on a porch. A lot of windows with green

shutters were scattered over the house, and through the windows Mary Jane could see ruffled white curtains at every window. And on the porch of this house stood a pretty, white-haired grandmother, just the sort of a grandmother that belongs to every white house in the country.

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“I think there aren’t any hills because here we are!” exclaimed Mary Jane happily as Grandfather stopped the car by the side steps.

Quick as a minute Dr. Smith jumped her out of the car and Grandmother Hodges, for it really was she, just as Mary Jane had guessed, gave her a hug and a dozen kisses and Mary Jane felt at home from that minute.

“Now don’t bother about that trunk,” said Grandmother briskly. “It can wait! I don’t know what Dr. Smith promised we’d have for breakfast this morning, but griddle cakes and honey are what I have ready. Come right on in, Dr. Smith.”

She took off Mary Jane’s coat and hat and laid them on the couch in the living-room, and then they all went in to what Mary Jane thought was the best breakfast she had ever eaten in all her five years. There were bananas and cream, oh, such good cream; and eggs and bacon and griddle cakes and honey. Mary Jane had never eaten honey on griddle cakes before, and she liked it so well that they quite lost count of the number she ate!

“If you go on as you’re beginning,” laughed Dr. Smith, “you’ll be so big and fat by the time you go home that I’ll have to go along with you and tell them you’re Mary Jane Merrill, that’s what I will!”

“I’ll risk their knowing,” said Grandmother; “that child was almost starved! If you’re in a hurry, don’t wait for her. And Father” (she turned to Grandfather Hodges), “you be sure to take Mary Jane’s trunk up to her room before you go to the barn. She’ll want to open it right away to get out her play dress.”

By the time Mary Jane was through her breakfast the trunk had been carried upstairs and Grandfather Hodges was off to the barn.

“You come out to see me whenever you’re ready,” he said as he left.

“And I’ll be running along too,” said Dr. Smith, “though I must admit I’d rather stay and help show Mary Jane the farm than to call on sick folks this morning. I’ll be by to see you this evening, little girl, to hear what you think of all the new sights.” And he started down the road toward his home—it was such a little way that he preferred to walk.

“Now, Mary Jane,” said Grandmother briskly, “what would you like to play while I do the dishes?”

“I’d like to do them too,” said Mary Jane promptly.

“A little girl five years old do dishes?” exclaimed Grandmother.

"'Deed, yes, Grandmother," said Mary Jane, much pleased to think Grandmother was so impressed. "I'm a little *past* five, you know, and I can work a lot!"

"Just think of that," exclaimed Grandmother approvingly. "Then we'll be through in no time. I'll wash and you wipe, and I'll put away. Let me tie this apron over your pretty traveling dress."

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While they did the work, Mary Jane answered all the questions about Mother and Alice and Father that Grandmother could ask and then, as soon as the last dish was put away the two went upstairs and unpacked the trunk. Such fun as it was to put all her own ribbons and handkerchiefs into the funny little bureau that stood in Mary Jane's room! And to hang up her dresses, or watch Grandmother hang them, in the queer little closet that had a latch like a front gate! Mary Jane was to have a whole room and a whole closet and a bureau all to herself, and she wouldn't feel a bit lonesome because Grandmother's room was right next and the door stood open all the night long, Grandmother said.

When everything was in neat order, Mary Jane put on her dark blue rompers and big blue sun hat, and they went downstairs.

"There now," said Grandmother; "we're all fixed. And before I do another thing, I'm going to take you all around and show you everything you want to see."

They started down the back walk toward the barn that looked so interesting. But they hadn't gone half the way to it before the telephone, back in the house, gave a long, loud ring.

EXPLORING THE FARM

"There now!" exclaimed Mrs. Hodges impatiently, "that's the 'phone and I'll have to answer and see what's wanted. You walk along slowly, Mary Jane, right over to the barn and through the gate and I'll hurry and catch up with you as quickly as I can."

Left alone, Mary Jane walked past the wood shed; passed what seemed to be a tool house because through the open door she saw tools of all sorts and sizes; and on across the yard toward the barn yard gate.

"She said 'through the gate,'" thought Mary Jane, "and this must be the gate. I wonder if it opens?" She shook the gate as hard as she could but it didn't open; it didn't even look as though it intended to open; it looked shut for all day, and Mary Jane was almost discouraged about getting into the barn yard till she happened to think of a gate at the back of Doris's yard (her little playmate Doris who lived next door to Mary Jane's own home) that looked surprisingly like this gate. To be sure it was little, and this gate was big and wide, but both had boards crosswise, just right for climbing.

"We climbed on Doris's when it wouldn't open," she thought, "so I guess this one will climb too."

She put her foot carefully on the first bar—nothing happened; on the second—-everything seemed all right; on the third and in a minute she was over and climbing proudly down on the other side.

“Grandfather! Grandfather!” she called as she ran gayly toward the barn; “I did it! The gate wouldn’t open so I—Oh, dear! Oh! Oh! It’s coming! *Grandfather*!” she screamed breathlessly as she saw, coming out of the barn—not Grandfather as she had expected —but a great, fat, grunting *pig*!

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Mary Jane shrank back toward the gate and how she did wish it was open so she could slip through and shut it tightly behind her. She was afraid to turn her back to the pig long enough to climb over the gate as she had come; all the while she was trying her best to think of some way to get away, that fat, grunting pig was coming closer and closer. Now it was half the length of the barn yard away. Now it seemed to have spied her and was coming straight for her—nose to the ground sniffing and grunting louder than ever.

Grandfather, working in the barn, heard and came a-running as fast as ever he could run; and Grandmother, 'way in the house, heard and dropped the receiver and ran out so fast that she was breathless when she reached the little girl. Grandfather was nearest so got to her first. Really, he saw what the matter was as soon as he got outside the barn and he shouted to the pig and flapped his arms in such a comical fashion that Mary Jane hardly knew whether to be afraid of him or to laugh. But the pig had no such doubts. She seemed to know that he meant she should go away. She gave one final snort—almost at Mary Jane's toes—and then turned and went back to the barn as fast as she could waddle. The faster she waddled the more Grandfather flapped, till first thing she knew Mary Jane was laughing and had forgotten all about being afraid.

Grandfather reached down and picked her up, and Grandmother, who came through the gate at that minute (she seemed to know how to open it, Mary Jane noticed), patted her and gave her a kiss and a hug.

"Did we frighten you first thing, Puss?" asked Grandfather tenderly. "That old Mrs. Pig wouldn't hurt you for anything. She was just trying to get acquainted."

"Yes?" replied Mary Jane doubtfully, "but you see I'm not used to getting acquainted that way. I 'spect she wouldn't hurt me, but she didn't *act* like she wouldn't hurt me," she added.

Grandfather threw back his head and laughed at that. "No, she didn't; you're right, Mary Jane! She acted pretty bad. But you shouldn't be here alone before you get used to our family."

Grandmother explained about the 'phone calling her back. "And I left the receiver hanging, I came so quickly," she added laughingly. "I guess I'll go back now and hang it up."

"Then I'll show Mary Jane around myself," said Grandfather firmly. "She's more important than work, so there!" He set her down beside him, took her hand snugly in his own (and it feels pretty good to have somebody hold your hand when everything is strange, you know that yourself), and they started off.

First they went into the barn where they saw Mrs. Pig, grunting still, but standing very meekly in her own corner; and eleven little pigs that grunted such cunning, squeaky little grunts. Mary Jane wasn't afraid of them for one minute. They weren't dirty as Mary Jane supposed pigs always were, not a bit dirty; they were tidy and neat and their little round sides shone like silk.

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“Oh, I like *them*, Grandfather!” she exclaimed. “Could I play with them someday?”

“I thought you didn’t like pigs,” teased Grandfather.

“Oh, but these aren’t *pigs*,” corrected Mary Jane; “these are *piggies*; nice piggies like in my painting book. I like *them*.”

“I don’t know about playing with them,” laughed Grandfather; “we’ll have to see. But I’ll tell you what you may do; when we’re through looking all over the place, you may come back here with me and feed them. Would you like that?”

Would she? Mary Jane clapped her hands and wanted to insist on feeding them right that very minute; only, just in time, she remembered that she wasn’t to tease. So she slipped her hand back into Grandfather’s big one and they went on with their walk.

Next they saw Brindle Bess, but Mary Jane didn’t like her as well as the little pigs. She switched her tail and looked around at Mary Jane so pointedly that Mary Jane was really relieved when Grandfather slipped around and opened the door and let her wander out to pasture.

“She’s an awful *big* cow, isn’t she, Grandfather?” said Mary Jane, as the cow ambled off.

“Oh, I don’t know about that,” said Grandfather, not understanding.

“Well, she’s lots bigger than me when I’m five,” said Mary Jane positively. “I think I like little things best.”

“Then I’ve the very creature to show you,” said Grandfather, “and we might as well see him now because your grandmother will want to show you the chickens when she comes out. We’ll lock this door so Mrs. Pig can’t get out into the front barn yard again, and then we’ll cross the road and I’ll show you something you’ll like.”

“Will it be big?” asked Mary Jane as she skipped along beside him.

“Middling big and middling little,” answered Grandfather.

“Will it be brown or gray?” asked Mary Jane, thinking of the cow and the pigs.

“Neither,” said Grandfather.

That puzzled Mary Jane, but she couldn’t think of anything else to guess so she kept her eyes carefully ahead as they went down the yard and across the road, in hopes she Would see the surprise quicker that way.

Across the road from Grandfather's house was a strip of wooded land which Grandfather had let grow wild. Grandmother loved the trees and the wild flowers and liked to feel that they were near to her.

"Oh!" exclaimed Mary Jane as they crossed the road, "see those trees! Are those the surprise?"

"My, no!" replied Grandfather; "those are only a couple of wild crab trees—they do look pretty full of bloom as they are, don't they? But the surprise is a real, live, running around surprise. Here, let me boost you over the fence; that's more fun than a dozen gates." He set Mary Jane over the fence and then came in the gate and locked it carefully behind him.

"Are you 'fraid it'll get away, is that why you lock the gate?" asked Mary Jane.

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“Well, it’s pretty little to run away,” said Grandfather, “but you never can tell, so I lock it to be sure.” He took hold of Mary Jane’s hand again as he added, “now just behind these trees; and around these bushes; and—”

“I see it myself,” exclaimed Mary Jane, “and I know what it is—it’s a little sheep!” She dropped his hand and ran a few steps toward the lamb she saw grazing a few steps away. But just as she drew near, the lamb spied her and started to meet her. Mary Jane ran quickly back toward her grandfather; it was one thing to go to meet the lamb herself and quite another to have the lamb come and meet her! “Will he grunt?” she asked.

“Not a single grunt!” laughed Grandfather. “He’s the friendliest little creature you ever saw. See?” Grandfather took Mary Jane’s hand and laid it on the soft wool of the lamb’s back. “He likes you already and he’ll like you even better when you bring him something good to eat. Before very long you will learn to climb this fence all by yourself; then you can come over here and play with him any time you want to.”

“And pick flowers for my grandmother, too?” asked Mary Jane as she looked at the lovely bluebells that grew around where they were standing.

“You’re a girl after your grandmother’s own heart!” exclaimed Grandfather delightedly; “you can pick all the flowers you like. But let’s not stop now. Don’t you want to see more of the farm?”

Mary Jane did, so they left the lamb with a promise to come again later and went back across the road to the house. There they met Grandmother who declared that she was through with the telephone long ago and wanted to show Mary Jane the chickens herself.

“Very well,” said Grandfather; “but don’t you show her the garden.”

“I won’t,” replied Grandmother, and they both looked so mysterious that Mary Jane was sure some surprise was in that garden.

“Are you going to show it to me?” she asked her grandfather.

“Some day,” he replied, “but there’s too much else to see this morning. The garden can wait.”

So Mary Jane and her grandmother went to the chicken yard and Grandfather started for the barn to finish his work.

If you’ve ever seen about a hundred cunning, little, yellow and white and gray chickens, so soft and fluffy they look as though they were Easter trimmings; and dozens of motherly looking hens ambling around and a few big, important-looking roosters crowing

in the sunshine, you know just what Mary Jane saw when they reached the chicken yard. For her part, Mary Jane had never seen such a sight before, and she was so surprised and pleased she could hardly believe her eyes.

“Are they all *yours*, Grandmother?” she asked in amazement.

“I should say they are,” laughed Grandmother. “You stand right here—no, that rooster won’t come any closer,” she added as one big fellow crowed loudly near by. “You stay here till I get some feed and you shall see a funny sight.”

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She slipped into the chicken house and returned in a minute with a small basket of grain. "Here, Mary Jane," she said, "you hold this so—and throw the grain out on the ground so—" and she did just as she wanted Mary Jane to do, "and watch them come!"

Mary Jane reached her hand into the basket of grain, took out a handful and threw it far as she could; and then how she did laugh as she saw the chickens scramble for it!

"Can I do it again?" she asked delightedly.

"All you like till the grain is gone," replied Grandmother.

"There now," said Grandmother, after awhile, "we've stayed so long here it's 'most dinner time. Are you hungry, Mary Jane?"

Mary Jane started to say no, because she was *sure* the morning hadn't more than begun, but to her surprise she found she *was hungry*, oh, awfully hungry.

"I thought so," laughed Grandmother, who guessed what the little girl was thinking, "and it's most eleven, so we'd better see what we're going to have to eat. How about chicken and biscuits and apple dumplings and cream?"

"They're my favorites," said Mary Jane, with a little skip of pleasure. "Every one's my favorite, all of 'em!"

So she and Grandmother put away the grain basket and went into the house.

THE HUNT FOR EGGS

"Now then," said Grandmother when they got into the kitchen, "while I get dinner, we'll talk."

"But what's the matter?" asked Mary Jane.

"Matter where?" questioned Grandmother. "I don't see anything the matter!"

"What's the matter out there?" said Mary Jane, pointing out the door to the chicken yard where they had just been; "something's happened."

Grandmother stepped over to the door where Mary Jane was standing and looked out. "Oh!" she exclaimed, for she saw in a minute what Mary Jane meant, "that noise?"

Mary Jane nodded.

“That noise means that an egg has been laid,” explained Grandmother, smiling, “and that Mrs. Hen is very proud of it and wants us to know what she has done.”

“Oh!” cried Mary Jane happily, “and then you go out and get them in a basket just like mother told me she used to do? May I go now?”

“Better not start before dinner,” suggested Grandmother, “because sometimes egg-hunting takes quite a little time. Wait till you get through dinner and then you may hunt all afternoon if you like—egg-hunting is fun!”

So the minute she was through with her apple dumplings, Mary Jane asked, “And now, please, may I get the eggs?”

“Got you hunting eggs already?” asked Grandfather. “Well, I wonder if you’ll like it as well as your mother used to. Have you your basket?”

“Not yet,” said Grandmother. “I mean to let her get it herself. She’ll feel more at home when she begins to find her way around alone. If you locked the pigs in, she can go anywhere she likes all alone.”

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“They’re locked up fast,” Grandfather assured her—much to Mary Jane’s relief.

“Then, Mary Jane,” continued Grandmother, “you go out to the barn and up the little ladder you’ll find in the middle of the barn. And in the loft somewhere, I’m sure you’ll see it easily, you’ll find a little, covered basket. It’s the very one your mother and your Aunt Cornelia used to carry egg-hunting. If it’s too dusty, bring it here, and I’ll clean it for you. Now run along, Pet,” added Grandmother with a kiss for the up-turned face, “and don’t be long. I’ll miss my little girl.”

Just as Mary Jane opened the screen door to go out, a beautiful big black and brown dog came running up to the door.

“Well, Bob!” exclaimed Grandmother, “where have you been all morning? I wanted Mary Jane to get acquainted with you right away and you weren’t anywhere around! Mary Jane, this is Bob, our good dog, and he’s the best creature friend a little girl can make.” She stepped out of the door with Mary Jane and they both sat down on the steps and talked to Bob. Mary Jane liked him from the first. He had such a pretty face and such friendly, kind eyes and he looked as though he would be good to little girls.

“May he go with me to the barn?” she asked.

“Indeed, yes,” replied Grandmother. “You just start along and watch him follow you! He’ll go wherever you go from now on. You won’t even have to call him!”

Mary Jane jumped up and, just as Grandmother said, Bob jumped up from the steps too and together they started off to the barn.

“Can you climb up a ladder?” asked Mary Jane gayly, as she skipped along by Bob. “I can climb a ladder all by myself! I did it one day when Mother hung curtains.”

But dear me! When Mary Jane saw the steep ladder that went up to the barn loft she wasn’t so sure she could climb a ladder after, all! She had been thinking of a nice little step-ladder such as her mother had and this was a steep, narrow ladder made of funny little pieces of wood nailed on to narrow strips that were fastened to the barn. Not a bit like any ladder Mary Jane had ever seen before.

“But the basket’s up there, Bob,” said Mary Jane, glad of some one to think aloud to, “and my grandmother she wouldn’t tell me to go up if I couldn’t, so I guess I’ll try.”

She put one foot on the ladder and then the other. “Why, it’s just like climbing a gate only it isn’t a gate,” she announced proudly, “and I’m way up a’ready!”

It was easy to step from the ladder to the loft because the sides of the ladder went on up high and she simply held tight to them and stepped off onto the floor Of the loft.

And *that* was the funniest place Mary Jane had ever seen! Hay everywhere, and a pleasant, fragrant smell that pleased Mary Jane even though she hadn't an idea why. She looked around a minute and then hunted for the basket.

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Over in the corner, under a funny little, cobwebby window she found it, half hidden by the tossed up hay.

She recognized it at once because of the curious little cover Grandmother had spoken of. But, dear me, Grandmother would surely have to clean it before it was used for cobwebs and scraps of hay were all over the top!

“I wonder if the cover comes off, or just opens like a door,” thought Mary Jane as she bent over it. “I guess I’d better see.”

She moved the cover the tiniest bit and found it was fastened to one side. “It’s like a box,” she said aloud, “and it opens easy, I know!”

She opened it out and what *do* you suppose she saw down in the bottom of that basket? You’d never guess!

Four of the cunningest little gray mice! All snuggled down together into a little ball of fur—Mary Jane would never have guessed there were four, they were so tiny, only she saw the four little black noses and four pairs of beady black eyes.

“You darlingest!” she exclaimed happily, and sat right down in the hay beside the basket to watch them. She reached her finger in and touched their silky little backs; she watched them snuggle down tight and tighter together and she altogether forgot about Bob and egg-hunting and Grandmother and everything, she was so delighted. But Bob didn’t forget about her, not he.

For a while he waited patiently at the bottom of the ladder. He seemed to know that she might have to hunt a while for the basket. But as the minutes went by and she didn’t come and didn’t come, he grew more and more restless. He whined, and he walked around the barn and he looked out the door. Then he came back to the foot of the ladder and put his front feet on the highest step he could reach.

But still there was no sign of Mary Jane coming down. And for her part, the little girl was so interested in her mice that she wouldn’t have noticed had he barked out loud.

Finally he could stand it no longer. With a sudden turn, as though he had quickly made up his mind something must be done, he ran out of the barn and up to the kitchen door.

Grandmother Hodges saw him and supposed Mary Jane was with him so she called kindly, “Did you find the basket, dear?”

No answer.

“Bring it in here for me to dust it off, Mary Jane,” she added.

No answer.

“That’s funny,” she exclaimed; “what ails the child?” And she stepped to the door to see why Mary Jane didn’t answer.

That was exactly what Bob wanted her to do. The minute he saw she was coming to the door he bounded off in the direction of the barn.

Grandmother understood at once, as Bob had known she would, and without even stopping to drop the tea towel she had in her hand she followed him out to the barn.

Bob ran ahead, turning two or three times to make sure she was coming, till he reached the foot of the ladder. There he danced around as though he was trying to say, “Now I’ve brought you here, do see what’s the matter!”

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“Is she up there yet, Bob?” asked Grandmother wonderingly. Then she called, “Mary Jane! Mary Jane! Mary Jane!”

“Oh, Grandmother!” replied the little girl, hearing for the first time, “they’re the cunningest! Do come see!”

“Whatever has the child found!” she exclaimed, but she went up the ladder just the same to make sure Mary Jane was happy.

It wasn’t more than a minute before Grandmother, too, was down in the hay, admiring the little mice till even Mary Jane was satisfied. “You’re a good one,” she said, “to find such a nice family right away. This old basket’s been here for years, but that looks like a brand new nest and a brand new family. You’ll have something to tell your sister about when she comes now, won’t you?”

“And may I take them down to the house?” asked Mary Jane.

“Look behind you and see if you want to,” answered Grandmother.

Mary Jane turned and looked as she was told and she saw, peeping out from behind the hay, the distressed face of mother mouse. Poor thing! She was *so* afraid something terrible was happening to her babies!

“No, I don’t want to,” said Mary Jane promptly. “I want to keep them right here and come up and see them whenever I want to.”

“That’s best,” agreed Grandmother. “You come with me and I’ll find you another basket and then you and Bob and I will hunt eggs.”

So that is the way Mary Jane happened to have a pretty, brand new, pink basket for hunting eggs: and that’s why they were so late getting the eggs that it was almost supper time before they were through.

THE MYSTERIOUS BUNDLES

For three days after Mary Jane came to visit her grandparents, the sun shone bright and warm and the little girl spent all the time out of doors. She raced around the yard with Bob; she played with the lamb in the wood across the road; she watched her grandfather feed the little pigs; she fed the chickens and hunted eggs. And, the most fun of all, she watched the baby mice in the dusky, sweet-smelling hay loft. Till, really, by the time she had had her supper of bread and milk, Mary Jane was ready to tumble into bed and sleep straight through the night without ever a thought of being homesick.

But the minute she awakened on the morning of the fourth day, Mary Jane knew that something was different. The sun wasn't shining across her coverlet as it had before; and from the window came the sound of dripping, dripping, dripping rain. The kind of rain that you love if everybody's indoors and can stay in and the fire's going brightly and Mother's near to talk to. And also the kind of rain that makes you feel very queer if you know Mother's hundreds of miles away and you aren't going to see her for a good many weeks.

Mary Jane felt a queer feeling in her throat. Suddenly she tossed the covers back, picked up her clothes so quickly she didn't even stop to see if she had both stockings, and ran into her grandmother's room. "I'm *not* going to cry, so there!" she said to herself hastily.

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“Well, good morning,” said Grandmother cheerfully. “That’s nice to dress in here! I was just wishing I had company.”

“Does rain make you feel like you wanted somebody right close?” asked Mary Jane.

“Every time,” agreed Grandmother. “And sometimes, when your grandfather’s working out in the barn, and Bob’s out there with him, and I’m all alone in the house, I just wish and wish I had a little girl about your size here to talk to. I’m so glad you’re come, Mary Jane, you’re such good company!”

And immediately, would you believe it? Mary Jane forgot all about being homesick and maybe going to cry, and began wondering what she could do for her grandmother!

“What are we going to do to-day, Grandmother?” she asked as they went down the stairs together.

“Let me see,” said Grandmother thoughtfully, looking at the little girl. “First, of course, we’ll get breakfast—wouldn’t you like fresh corn bread and maple syrup?” Mary Jane nodded happily, for she liked Grandmother’s corn bread. “Then we’ll do the dishes and make the beds—but that won’t take long with you helping me. Then we’ll peel the potatoes and start the meat cooking for dinner. Then we’ll—by the way, Mary Jane,” she asked suddenly, “what have you in those two packages in your trunk?”

Mary Jane stared at her grandmother a minute and tried to think whatever she might mean. Then she remembered. “Those two bundles wrapped up in brown paper and tied and everything?”

“Those are the ones,” nodded Grandmother. “I saw them the other morning when I unpacked your trunk but we were in a hurry to get-out doors then so I didn’t ask about them. What are they?”

“I don’t know,” said Mary Jane. “Mother put them in and she said you’d understand. She said just let you see and you’d know what she meant.”

“Then I guess I know,” said Grandmother, laughing. “We have to look at them!”

“Let’s go now,” said Mary Jane.

“Oh, my no,” replied Grandmother, “before breakfast? I should say not! We’ll do all the things we planned to do, right straight through the plan. Then we’ll get those bundles and see if I can guess what your mother meant.”

Mary Jane liked the good breakfast Grandmother prepared and she loved helping set the table and clear it off and help with the work like a grown-up person, but she was

glad when at last everything was done and she and Grandmother went up the stairs to look at those mysterious bundles.

“You get the bundles out of your trunk, Mary Jane,” said Grandmother, “and I’ll get my glasses.”

“Then shall we go down’ to the sitting-room?” asked Mary Jane.

“No, we’ll stay right up here,” said Grandmother, smiling, “because unless I miss my guess, we’ll want to be up here before we’re through anyway.”

That puzzled Mary Jane more than ever because, in all the three days she had been there. Grandmother had never sat upstairs, but always in her big rocker at the bay window in the room they called the sitting-room. She hurried to her room, raised the cover of her little trunk and turned it way back so it wouldn’t fall on her. Then she reached in and got out the two bundles, and hurried back to Grandmother’s room.

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“There’s some writing on them,” she announced.

“Then I expect that will help us guess what we are to do with them,” said Grandmother, and she adjusted her glasses. “Let’s see what it says.” She read off the first one, “’This is the way Mary Jane learns to sew.’ Shall we open this first, Mary Jane?” she asked, “or shall we read what the other one says?”

“Oh, I know, I know! I know!” cried Mary Jane, clapping her hands. “I know what that is, Grandmother, only I came away in such a hurry that I forgot all about it! It’s a present for you—I made it all myself! Let’s open it first.”

“A present for me?” asked Grandmother. “I guess we will open it first.” And she carefully undid the string, opened out the paper and looked inside. “A picture card! My dear little girl!” she exclaimed, “and you did it all yourself?”

“All myself,” said Mary Jane proudly, and she leaned up against her grandmother and pointed out the perfections. “See? It’s a picture of a little girl, that’s me, and she’s raking her garden. And here,” she picked up another one, “this is a picture of a butterfly that flies over the garden. I did one of a little girl, that’s me, with a pink sunbonnet and one with a sunflower and I sent those to my Aunt Effie. And these are for you.”

“I certainly am pleased,” said Grandmother heartily and she kissed Mary Jane once for each card. “And what else have we here?”

“That’s my sewing things,” said Mary Jane as she opened out the rest of the package; “that’s my needle case and my thread and my cards to sew.”

“Then let’s have a sewing day,” suggested Grandmother, “and you sew your cards and I’ll do my mending.”

“But first let’s open the other bundle,” suggested Mary Jane, who, like Grandmother, had forgotten it for the minute. “I don’t know what it’s got inside.”

“We’ll see,” said Grandmother, and she read on the outside, “’I wish I had more.’”

“That’s funny,” said Mary Jane, “more what?”

“Wait and see,” replied Grandmother, and Mary Jane noticed that her eyes twinkled. “She needn’t have worried, I have plenty.” And she undid the bundle.

“Why! Why—how funny!” exclaimed Mary Jane when she saw what the bundle contained. “That isn’t anything! Why did Mother send those? They’re just scraps.”

“Not scraps, dear,” said Grandmother, and, much to Mary Jane’s surprise, she seemed very pleased, “pieces. They’re pieces for a quilt. Your mother always was crazy about my quilts.”

“But those aren’t quilts,” insisted Mary Jane. “Those are just rolls out of the scrap bag —I’ve seen them there. That’s a piece of my rompers,” she added, pointing to a roll of blue, “and that’s my best pink gingham, and that’s Alice’s new school dress.”

“So much the better,” laughed Grandmother. “When you know what things are from, your quilt is more interesting. Let’s put these on the bed while you come with me to the linen room and see what a quilt is.”

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They went down the hall to a queer little room that had shelves from the floor to the ceiling and on every shelf was bedding of some sort. Grandmother took down a quilt from the middle shelf and spread it out on the floor. "There, Mary Jane," she said, "look at that! There's a piece of your mother's first short dress and a piece of her mother's graduating dress—that pink sprigged scrap; and that's your Uncle Tom's shirt waist; and —well, don't you see? There they are; all the 'scraps' as you call them cut into pieces and made into a quilt. I've always promised that your mother should have this some day. I think I'll have to send it to her now if she's raising a girl who don't know what a quilt is!"

Mary Jane got down on her hands and knees and looked at each piece. "Oh, I know now!" she suddenly exclaimed, "I remember! Mother made one for her doll bed when she was a little girl and it had a piece like this with a red horse shoe in it."

"To be sure," said Grandmother much pleased. "Did she show it to you?"

"Yes, only I disremembered for a while," said Mary Jane solemnly. "She showed it to me the day we sewed. She made it when she was a little girl about as old as me, maybe, because they didn't have nice sewing cards then."

"Yes, she made it when she was visiting me, one summer, just as you are here now," said Grandmother thoughtfully.

"Oh, Grandmother," cried Mary Jane suddenly, and she was so excited she sat up straight and tall, "I'll tell you what let's do to-day!"

"Well," said Grandmother, kindly.

"Let's me make a quilt."

"Fine!" said Grandmother, "only you know you can't make it all in one day—it takes a long time to make a quilt, a good quilt."

"Let's begin it then," said Mary Jane, "and let's make it all pretty like this."

"I'll put this away," replied Grandmother, "and then I'll get my piece bag and see what I have that goes well with what your mother sent. Then we'll make a pattern and cut our pieces—you see, there's a lot to quilt-making before the sewing begins."

[Illustration: "We'll make a pattern and cut out our pieces—there's a lot to quilt-making."]

"Goody!" cried Mary Jane happily, "I know I'm going to like it all!"

And she did.

She liked the hunting out pretty pieces and cutting them out (yes, she did some of that herself, cutting carefully by the little pattern Grandmother made for her) and counting them and pinning them together: four blues with five pink, or four figured with five plain; everything was four and five.

Then, when material was ready for seven blocks, Grandmother said they had done enough cutting for one day. So they gathered up the pinned together blocks and went downstairs to the cozy sitting-room and sewed the rest of the morning. And while they sewed Grandmother told stories about when Mary Jane's mother was a little girl and came to visit.

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Right in the middle of a fine story, Grandfather came into the room and asked, “Isn’t there going to be any dinner to-day?” And sure enough it was five minutes to twelve o’clock!

Grandmother jumped up and hurried to the kitchen and Grandfather said, “Well, isn’t it too bad it’s a rainy day?”

“Rainy?” exclaimed Mary Jane, for she’d forgotten all about the rain and her lonesomeness of the early morning. “Rainy? Why, Grandfather! Rainy days are the best days of all when they’re days at Grandmother’s house!”

GARDENING WITH GRANDFATHER

“This sewing business and feeding chickens and watching mice is all very well,” said Grandfather one day, “but I’d like to know where I come in? If it wasn’t for having good company at meal time and for about ten minutes after supper in the evening, I’d never guess I had a little granddaughter visiting me—I wouldn’t, indeed!”

Mary Jane looked very serious. She wasn’t quite certain sure whether Grandfather was really disappointed in her or whether he was only teasing.

Grandmother saw she was puzzled and helped her out by saying, “Very well, Mr. Hodges, then you should find something your little great granddaughter likes to do!” And from the way Grandmother’s eyes twinkled, Mary Jane knew that she understood Grandfather was only teasing. And, oh, dear, but she was relieved! It’s fine to go visiting; but it’s dreadful to be visiting and disappoint folks; and Mary Jane was glad to know she hadn’t.

“That’s exactly what I’m doing, my dear,” laughed Grandfather. “I’m finding something.”

“Are you really, Grandfather,” cried Mary Jane happily. “Let’s go do it now! I’m all through my dessert; may I please be excused, Grandmother?” and Mary Jane prepared to slip down from her chair.

“No use,” said Grandfather with a shake of his head. “It isn’t ready yet.”

“Not ready?” echoed Mary Jane. “Does it have to be ready before we do it?”

“It surely does,” laughed Grandfather, “That’s the reason we haven’t done it before.”

“But I think I’ll like it without being ready,” suggested Mary Jane as she went around to his chair. “Let’s see if I wouldn’t.”

“No, sir, you can’t tease me that way, Pussy,” laughed Grandfather. “You’ll have to wait.”

“Is it alive?” asked Mary Jane, who by this time was fairly bubbling over with curiosity.

“Well, yes,” replied Grandfather and he chuckled to himself in high glee.

“Is it big as me?” asked Mary Jane.

“One way ’tis and another way ’tisn’t,” said Grandfather.

“Oh, dear!” sighed Mary Jane, “that’s the kind I never can guess!” Then she thought carefully for a real good question. “Is it brown or gray?”

Grandfather leaned back and laughed. When he finally could answer he said, “It’s partly grayish brown and some day it may be all brown for a’ I know.”

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“Then it isn’t a mouse and it isn’t a lamb,” said Mary Jane positively, “and that’s all I can think of now.”

“That’s a good thing,” said Grandmother, “for there’s the postman and I surely expect a letter from your mother to-day.”

One of the things that Mary Jane most loved to do was to run out front when the rural mail carrier came along in his little wagon and watch him put the mail in the box out in front of her grandfather’s house. Usually they spied him way down the road just about the time they were through dinner and Mary Jane would run out and watch him. The first time he saw her he handed the mail out to her and that disappointed her greatly. She had wanted to see him put the mail in the box as Grandfather had told her he would. So on the second day, Grandfather went out with her and explained to the carrier that little girls from the city liked mail that came in boxes better than mail that was just handed in city fashion. And after that, the carrier smiled and nodded to her each time and then tucked the mail as carefully into the box as though he didn’t know she would take it out the first minute he was out of sight.

“I’ll go down with you,” said Grandfather, rising quickly from the table, “because I’m expecting a letter too.”

Sure enough! There was a letter for Grandmother that looked very much as though it came from Mary Jane’s mother; and a letter for Grandfather that looked to be exactly the same letter! There wasn’t a mite of difference so far as Mary Jane could see, except in the one Grandfather said was his, the first word was shorter. And there was a letter for Mary Jane too, the first letter she ever received from her mother.

They all three sat down on the front steps to read. First Mary Jane opened hers and Grandmother helped her read it. “I’m going to learn to read myself,” declared Mary Jane, “’cause folks that get letters ought to know how to read them.”

“You’re right they should,” agreed Grandmother, “and I shouldn’t wonder a bit but what a certain little girl I know would go to school this fall.”

“And that little girl’s me?” asked Mary Jane.

“That little girl’s you,” said Grandmother. “Now listen while I read my letter.”

So Mary Jane sat real still and heard Grandmother’s letter.

“Now then, Father,” said Grandmother as she folded hers up and put it back in the envelope, “we’ll hear yours, Grandfather.”

“Not right now,” said Grandfather, rising suddenly and starting for the barn. “I’m too busy to stop any more.” And that was the last they saw of him all afternoon.

“I do think that’s the queerest,” said Grandmother as she looked after her husband. “He’s always so anxious to hear letters and I know he isn’t as busy as he makes out. But if he don’t want to tell he won’t, Mary Jane, so I guess we’d better stop thinking about it.”

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Mary Jane ran up to her room to put her precious letter away for safe-keeping. Then she and Grandmother tidied up the dinner work and dressed for afternoon. Grandmother didn't have lots of hard work to do, as some farm folks have, for she and Grandfather had long ago stopped doing the hardest work on the farm. They rented out most of their land and kept for themselves only enough garden and chicken yard and pasture to make them feel comfortably busy. So Grandmother had plenty of time for pleasant walks and rides with Mary Jane.

Grandfather seemed to be tired at supper that evening so nothing was said about secrets or letters or anything like that, and he went off to bed about as soon as Mary Jane did.

But the next morning he seemed rested and jolly as ever.

"Do you happen to know any little girl around here who wants to work with me today?" he asked at the breakfast table.

"That's what Daddah says when he wants me to work in my garden," said Mary Jane.

"You don't tell me!" exclaimed Grandfather in great surprise. That was one of his favorite expressions, and Mary Jane had to always stop and think before she could realize that what he meant was, "You do tell me!" "And what do you say to him when he asks you that?"

"I say, 'I know one little girl and that's me,'" replied Mary Jane.

"And what do you say to me?" continued Grandfather.

"I say, 'I know one little girl, and she's right here,'" laughed Mary Jane and she jumped down from the table and gave her grandfather a big bear hug. "What is it we're going to do?"

"Wait and see," said Grandfather.

"Then it's the secret!" exclaimed Mary Jane, dancing around. "It's the secret! I know it is! Grandmother! Let's hurry quick and do our work so we can go."

"You put on your sun hat and go this very minute," exclaimed Grandmother. "You've been such a good little helper—I guess I can get along alone one day."

So in about one minute Mary Jane had her sun hat from upstairs and was going out the back door with her grandfather.

They went out past the tool house and past the chicken yard and up to the garden.

“No, Bob,” said Grandfather as Bob tried to push in through the garden gate with them, “we don’t need you here. G’on back to the house!” And Bob turned obediently and ran back.

“Isn’t he the nicest dog!” explained Mary Jane, as they went along. And then she stopped right short and couldn’t say another word. For right there in front of her, just as plain as day as though it had been growing a whole spring, was her own garden! Yes, her *very own* garden! With the nasturtiums in front and the marigolds next and the young lettuce in the back. Mary Jane could hardly believe her eyes!

“Why—but—how—I thought gardens stayed in one town!” she finally exclaimed.

“They do usually,” said Grandfather and his eyes twinkled with pleasure over her surprise, “usually they do.”

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“But my garden didn’t,” stammered Mary Jane. “Did it come on a train like I did?”

“No,” laughed Grandfather; “guess again.”

“It couldn’t come any other way,” insisted Mary Jane, “’cause I was out here last week with Grandmother to see her lettuce and this wasn’t here then and you can’t come ’way from my house in one day unless you ride on a train—it’s too far.”

“That’s good thinking for Miss Five-year-old,” said Grandfather proudly, “so I guess I’ll have to explain. You see, I wrote to your mother and asked her how your garden was at home. And she told me, exactly; she even drew a little picture so I would know just how things were planted. After I got that letter, it was easy to take nasturtiums and marigolds and lettuce from your grandmother’s garden and make one for you. She was glad to give you some.”

“So that’s the reason you wouldn’t read Mother’s letter yesterday,” said Mary Jane.

“That’s it,” agreed Grandfather.

“And that’s the reason you were so tired last night,” continued Mary Jane. “You’d been working so hard to ’sprise me.”

“Well,” admitted Grandfather, “that may have had something to do with it.”

“I think I’ve got the *bestest* grandfather!” exclaimed Mary Jane suddenly, and she threw her arms around him so hard, oh, ever so hard. “And now do we work here?”

“Not to-day,” said Grandfather, “because you couldn’t work with my big tools. Tomorrow morning I’ll drive into the village and get you a little set of tools just your size like you have at home. This afternoon we’ll look around and see if everything’s all right in my garden. Then to-morrow we can go to work, as soon as we come home.”

Mary Jane took hold of his hand and together they went back into his nice big garden.

“Um-m-m,” said Grandfather suddenly as he bent over his carrot bed. “I was afraid so, I was afraid so!”

“What’s the matter?” asked Mary Jane who couldn’t see that much was wrong.

“See those nibbled off carrots?” asked Grandfather.

Mary Jane looked closely and saw the broken tips.

“We’ll have to catch that thief,” said Grandfather. “I guess we need Bob after all.” Grandfather stuck his finger to his mouth and made a loud whistle. Then he called, “Here Bob! Here Bob! Here Bob!”

Bob came bounding down the garden path, wagging his tail and eager to be of use.

“See that?” demanded Grandfather, pointing to the broken tips.

Bob sniffed and sniffed. He twisted his ears backward and forward and sniffed again. Then he started briskly over to the back of the garden.

“We’ll find him!” exclaimed Grandfather. “Come on, Mary Jane! Bob’s not much of a hunter but I’ll guess that he’ll find him and we’ll scare him off!”

Mary Jane, who didn’t in the least understand who “him” was or what was going to be found or done, trotted along behind her grandfather and Bob eager to see something new.

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THE GARDEN THIEF

“What are we doing, Grandfather?” asked Mary Jane as she trotted along behind her grandfather and Bob. “What are we doing and where are we going and who’s the thief?”

“No time to talk,” called Grandfather over his shoulder. “You’ll see! Come along and take hold of my hand.”

Mary Jane ran as fast as ever she could till she caught up with her grandfather and got a firm hold of his hand. Then she felt better: for when a little girl doesn’t know what *is* going on, she wants to have hold of *something*—you know how that is yourself. Bob led them out of the corner of the garden; across the small cornfield back of the barn; across the pasture and into the woods beyond. There he stopped and sniffed in the bushes and through the dead leaves in what Mary Jane thought was the most curious way she had ever seen a dog act.

“Well!” exclaimed Grandfather disgustedly, “if you can’t find him any better than that—I’ll hunt myself!” And to Mary Jane’s amazement, he too, began hunting in the piles of dead leaves where Bob was diligently sniffing.

Suddenly he cried, “Mary Jane! Mary Jane! Come here this minute!”

Mary Jane, who had been standing by a stump where her grandfather left her when he followed Bob into the woods, eagerly ran over to where he stood. He waited quietly till she was clear up to him and then he reached down and lifted up a pile of dead leaves and rubbish.

“Oh, Grandfather!” exclaimed the little girl, “what are they?”

“What do you think they are?” he asked.

“I don’t think,” replied Mary Jane, “’cause I never saw them before. But they look like the Easter things at the store.”

“Right you are!” exclaimed Grandfather much pleased. “They’re baby rabbits—and in one of the prettiest little nests I ever found. I’m glad you were along to see.”

“Were they what you were hunting, Grandfather?” asked Mary Jane as she half timidly bent over the little bundle of gray and white fur. “They wouldn’t steal your garden, would they?”

“No, not those pretty little things,” replied Grandfather, “but their father would. Can’t say as I blame him though,” continued Grandfather, laughing, “with such a family to feed

he'd naturally have to get whatever he could. Usually the rabbits don't bother my garden. Well, Pussy, what shall we do with them?"

"Do with them?" asked Mary Jane. "What is there to do?"

Grandfather looked down at the little girl; by this time she was on her knees beside the nest, and bending over the little rabbits as though she'd like to touch them but didn't feel quite well enough acquainted. "Shall we leave them out here or—"

But Mary Jane didn't give him a chance to finish his sentence.

"Oh, Grandfather!" she exclaimed, "could we take them home?"

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“I guess we could if you wanted to,” he said. “Your mother was always a great hand for pet rabbits and I believe that the very house I once built for her, is up in the loft to this day. Let’s cover them over again and go find it.”

“Will they stay here while we’re gone?” asked Mary Jane as he tenderly laid the leaves back over the little creatures.

“They will till their mother gets a chance to take them away,” answered Grandfather. “If she thinks we’ll hurt them, she’ll carry them to some other hiding place. But if we hurry, we’ll get them first.”

“Won’t she know that we’ll take good care of them?” asked Mary Jane.

“She won’t know it at first,” replied Grandfather, “but she’ll soon find out. We’ll fix them up in a comfortable box and they’ll be as safe and happy and perhaps even better fed than if they’d stayed out here in the woods where stray dogs might hurt them. Come on, now, Pussy; let’s hurry for the box.”

Mary Jane took hold of his hand again and they hurried back through the pasture and the cornfield to the barn.

It didn’t take Grandfather long to find the little rabbit house he had made for Mary Jane’s mother years ago. “The box part is good as new,” he said, “and I’ll get some fresh screening from the attic to cover over this open side.”

Mary Jane trotted along beside him up to the mysterious, big attic at the top of the house, where, from a dark corner, he pulled a strip of new wire screen. They took it down to the back porch where he had left the box and in less than half an hour he had the new home all ready for the rabbits.

Of course Grandmother heard them working around and came to see what was going on.

“Oh, the cunningest bunnies, five of them, we found,” Mary Jane told her, “little and soft and gray and white just like the Easter bunnies in the store, and we’re going to bring them up to your house to live so not any bad dogs will hurt them and so I can feed them.”

“Won’t that be fun,” said Grandmother approvingly, “but how are you going to carry them?”

Mary Jane stared at her grandmother thoughtfully. “Will they go in my hand?”

“Carry five?” asked Grandmother. “I thought you said five. You couldn’t get that many in your hand.”

“No-o-o, I ’spect I couldn’t,” said Mary Jane. “How’ll I do it?”

“Suppose we fix a basket,” suggested Grandmother, “then they would be safe and comfortable while they made the journey.”

Mary Jane thought that a wonderful idea and she helped Grandmother hunt up a basket from the storeroom and fold a soft old cloth to line it. By the time they had it all ready, Grandfather had the new home finished and he and Mary Jane set out for the woods to get their new family.

Just before they got to the nest they saw the mother rabbit dart away. Such a pretty little thing she was, all soft gray except her tiny stub of a tail which was snow white. She hurried away so quickly Mary Jane hardly got more than a glance at her before she was out of sight behind a log.

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“I’ll wager she’ll watch us,” said Grandfather, chuckling, “and then she’ll know where we take her babies. Well, that’s all right, Mrs. Rabbit,” he added; “you’ve a right to know where your family is. If you’d made a safer nest, I’d leave them here for you, but as it is, they’ll be better off where they’re going than where they are.”

“But didn’t you say they ate the garden?” asked Mary Jane, suddenly remembering what had started them out on their journey.

“Yes, they do a bit,” answered Grandfather, “but they mostly let us alone so I guess we won’t think any more about the little they stole.” While he was talking, he had set the basket on the ground and now he lifted off the rubbish and tenderly took out two little rabbit babies and set them in the basket.

“Why!” exclaimed Mary Jane as she bent over to see, “they’s only three bunnies!”

“Sure enough!” agreed Grandfather. “How many did you think there were?”

“I didn’t think,” said Mary Jane. “I counted them; they had five noses when we saw them before. I know because I can count one, two, three, four, five!”

“You surely can,” said Grandfather much puzzled, “then their mother must have taken two away. Like as not she was after another one when she saw us coming. Now cover them up good and warm, Mary Jane,” he added as he set the third bunny into the basket, “and we’ll hurry off home.”

He let her carry the basket every bit of the way, and she was careful, oh, so very careful, not to jiggle the bunnies as she walked.

When they got back to the porch Grandmother came out to watch them put the bunnies onto the nice soft cotton she had fixed in the corner of the box and she showed Mary Jane how to fix water and some freshly picked lettuce for them.

“Now, then,” she said, “that’s enough for now. Dinner’s ready and I guess you’re ready for it!”

Mary Jane was hungry enough to be willing to leave the rabbits long enough to eat—but no longer. The minute she had finished she ran out to watch her pets. She sat down on the grass beside the box and watched and watched and watched, but those funny little fellows didn’t eat or do anything! They just stayed snuggled up in the soft cotton as tight as ever they could.

“They feel strange and queer, just like you would if some one took you away from your bed,” said Grandmother when she came out to see how Mary Jane was getting along. “Why don’t you come and take a ride with me and maybe by the time you come home, they’ll be better acquainted and will come out and eat.”

So Mary Jane reluctantly left her post of watching and went riding. Grandfather surprised them and went along too, and the new gardening tools and a big sun hat were bought and stowed away in the back of the car.

“Let’s not stay too long,” said Mary Jane, as they turned away from the store; “let’s see if the bunnies feel better now.”

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“I don’t believe that child wants to ride a bit,” laughed Grandmother. “We might as well go home!” So they turned back the way they had come.

The minute she was out of the car, Mary Jane ran to the rabbit house. Not a rabbit was there! Not one of the pretty bunnies she had left snugged up in the corner!

“Grandfather!” called Mary Jane, “Grandmother! Come quick! They’s gone!”

“Think of that!” exclaimed Grandfather as he hurried up to see.

“Poor child! That’s too bad!” cried Grandmother sympathetically as she peered into the empty box. “Like as not their mother came after them, though how she got them out I don’t quite see.”

“I do,” laughed Grandfather, and he pointed to a hole in the back of the box. “I guess this wood wasn’t as sound as I thought it was! Well, if she wanted them that much, I guess she deserves them! But who’d a thought she’d be so quick!”

“Where are my bunnies?” cried Mary Jane, “where did she take them?” And Grandmother noticed that she was bitterly disappointed.

“Never you mind, pet,” said Grandmother, and she put her arm comfortingly around the little girl. “They’re not far away, depend on that. But if you want something to feed and take care of, something all your own—I’ll get it for you.”

“Will you, Grandmother, really truly?”

“Really truly,” nodded Grandmother, “and you shall keep it in this pretty little house!”

“Goody!” exclaimed Mary Jane, “and will it be pretty like my Easter rabbits?”

“Every bit as pretty,” said Grandmother, “just come with me to see if it isn’t!”

And she took hold of Mary Jane’s hand and together they went toward the chicken house.

MARY JANE’S FAMILY

“Is it a chicken?” asked Mary Jane as she saw the direction they were taking.

“Bless the child!” exclaimed Grandmother, “she can ask questions the fastest! No, my dear, it isn’t a chicken! You’d better wait and see.”

“Yes, I’m a-waiting,” said Mary Jane with a tiny sigh, “but I hope it isn’t very long waiting, ’cause I like to see what I’m going to have.” And she skipped along by her grandmother as fast as she could.

Fortunately it wasn’t very far to the chicken house, so she hadn’t long to wait. They went in at the front of the house; that was no surprise because Mary Jane had been there every day of her visit. She looked around quickly but she didn’t see anything new, anything that looked like a surprise. But Grandmother didn’t stop there; she went on back through a little door Mary Jane had never noticed, and into a room that was nice and warm and had a big desk in it. Or at least Mary Jane thought it looked like a big desk. And there wasn’t anything there that looked like a surprise; Mary Jane would have begun to be worried if she hadn’t been so sure Grandmother must know what she was talking about.

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“Now, let’s see how heavy you are,” said Grandmother, “maybe we’ll need your Grandfather after all.” She put her hands under Mary Jane’s arms and tried to lift her up. “I can do it but I can’t hold you long enough,” she said with a shake of her head, “better run call your grandfather, dear.”

“But he’s way out in the barn,” cried Mary Jane who was fairly dancing with eagerness she was so anxious to see the surprise; “can’t I get a chair?” And then she thought how silly that was when of course there wasn’t a chair in the chicken house! “Or a box, Grandmother,” she added as an after thought.

“A box?” questioned Grandmother, looking around thoughtfully, “oh, yes! I know. There’s one right out in that next room. It’s not very heavy and I believe you can get it yourself, Mary Jane. Suppose you try.”

Mary Jane was very glad to try. She hurried out the door into the other room, spied the box over in the corner and dragged it back into the little room where Grandmother was waiting.

“See, Grandmother?” she said proudly. “I can stand on it.”

“So you can, so you can,” agreed Grandmother much pleased. “You’re a good planner, little girl. Now turn the box on its long side, so; and climb on it; then—”

“What’s that noise?” exclaimed Mary Jane suddenly as through the quiet of the little room she heard a queer, “Peep! Peep!” So many “peeps,” so soft and low that she was hardly sure she heard them.

“Never mind!” cried Grandmother, who was looking into the big case that Mary Jane had thought was a desk. “Climb up quickly and look!”

Mary Jane needed no second urging. She set the box on its long side and, grasping her grandmother’s hand firmly so it wouldn’t tip over as she stepped on it, she climbed up and looked into the “desk.”

Such a sight as met her eyes! Tiny little chicks! Rows and rows and rows of them! Under the glass cover of that queer looking case.

“They’s about a million!” she gasped in amazement, “all in one box!”

“Not a million, dear,” laughed Grandmother, “but a good many and they’re almost ready to take out.”

“But how did they get in?” asked Mary Jane much puzzled.

Grandmother explained that the queer looking “desk” was really an incubator—a box in which eggs were kept warm till the little creature inside each egg was big enough to break the shell and take care of itself.

Mary Jane looked and looked and looked and thought it was the most wonderful of all the many wonders she had seen at Grandmother’s. She thought of a dozen questions she wanted to ask, but Grandmother seemed so busy tending to this and that and the other that she decided to wait till some other time to ask them.

“Now, dear,” said Grandmother, “you stay here and be deciding which you want for yours while I get your grandfather to help me take them out. I was so in hopes you could see this, pet, because I knew you’d like to.”

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She bustled out of the room in search of Grandfather, and Mary Jane studied over the rows of chickens. And just at that minute she spied *them*! She knew the second she saw them that there was her family.

They were huddled down in one corner, all six of them and they seemed lonesome and —well, different. Of course Mary Jane may have imagined that, but so it seemed to her. Their bills were funny and their eyes were different from the eyes of the other chicks, and the shape of their tails and of their wings seemed different, some way.

“I’m going to have you and give you a nice time,” said Mary Jane, whispering tenderly above the case cover. “I’d like to take care of you, so don’t you mind if you are funny!” And with the tip, tip of her finger, she touched the glass directly over them.

Just then Grandmother Hodges came back into the room with Grandfather right behind her.

“Grandmother!” cried Mary Jane eagerly, “may I have any ones? May I pick them out? May I have these funny little ones? These that are all by their lonesomes in the corner?”

Grandfather and Grandmother both looked to where Mary Jane pointed.

“The ducks!” they exclaimed together. “They came out all right!”

Then Grandmother added, “To be sure you may have them, Mary Jane. Those are ducks, and I put in six eggs so we could have a bit of roast duck, come winter. They’ll be sure to get into trouble with the chickens and I would be so glad if you’ll make them your family and look after them for me. Here, Father,” she said to her husband, “let’s take them out for her first.” So Grandfather got the basket Mary Jane and her grandmother had brought out with them and then he held up the glass cover while Grandmother tenderly lifted the tiny ducks, one by one, and set them inside. Then she covered them all over with a thick cover.

“But Grandmother,” cried Mary Jane in dismay, “they can’t breathe! They’ll die!”

“Not they,” laughed Grandmother. “Run along now, and set the basket in the sun by your rabbit box. I’ll be right out and fix them up for you.”

So for the second time that day, Mary Jane found herself carrying a basket of living creatures. “Wouldn’t Doris like to be here!” she said to herself as she thought of her little friend back home, “and wouldn’t I like to show her my family!” She walked slowly and carefully so as not to tip the baby ducks and it was with a sigh of relief that she finally set them down by the rabbit box.

Fortunately, Grandmother came along in just a few minutes so Mary Jane didn't have time to worry about the "peeps" that were coming more and more loudly from the basket.

Grandmother took the ducks one by one from the basket and set them on some soft bits of old wool in the corner of the box. "We don't need a cover for this box," she said, pulling at the screen Grandfather had tacked on, "till they get bigger. We'll take it off so you can take care of them easier. There now!" she added as the screen came off, "we'll cover them up so," and she laid the soft cloth that had been on the basket over the little ducks; "now we'll let them be for a while."

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“But we didn’t feed them, Grandmother,” objected Mary Jane.

“To be sure not,” laughed Grandmother. “They don’t want anything to eat just yet. Not to-day. All they want is to be warm and cozy.”

“Don’t they want anything to drink either?” asked Mary Jane.

“No,” replied Grandmother, “nothing to drink either. To-morrow you can fix them a drinking dish and I’ll show you about their food, but now, we’ll just let them be. Listen! What’s that?”

Grandmother straightened up and counted the rings of her telephone bell.

“Yes, that’s our ring. You take this basket back to your grandfather while I answer it.”

But before Mary Jane got out to the chicken house Grandmother was back at the kitchen steps calling, “Father! Father!” And then as she got no answer she called to Mary Jane, “Mary Jane! Tell your grandfather it’s long distance and he should come quick!”

Mary Jane hurried in to tell her grandfather the message and then she waited, wonderingly, till he should come back. Had anything happened?

COUSIN JOHN’S VISIT

But the minute Mary Jane saw her grandfather smile as he came back into the chicken house, she knew that if something *had* happened it was a nice something—for he was smiling a nice sort of a smile.

“Good news for us, Pussy,” he said. “Now you’re going to have some one to play with.”

“Another Bob?” asked Mary Jane.

“Another fiddlesticks!” laughed Grandfather. “Haven’t you enough animal friends as it is? What would you do with more? No, sir! This is a real playmate.”

“Who is she?” asked Mary Jane.

“*She*!” laughed Grandfather, “is your cousin Margaret’s boy John—or rather, she’s your mother’s cousin. They live over in Benset, you know, Pussy. They promised that if you came this summer, they’d let John come over for a visit so you two could play.”

“Oh, goody!” cried Mary Jane happily, “how big is he?”

“About as big as you are, I expect,” said Grandfather thoughtfully, “but I can’t really say because I haven’t seen him for a long time. But you’ll know all about him to-morrow.”

After that Grandfather and Grandmother fixed the little chickens as quickly as ever they could, and then Grandfather went out to clean up his car and Grandmother and Mary Jane hurried off to the kitchen to see about the baking of good things to eat, for Cousin Margaret was to bring Tom herself and would stay part of a day before going back.

How Mary Jane did love the work and bustle! Grandmother made a big jar of sugar cookies (she let Mary Jane put the sugar on them herself, and you know that’s fun!), and a big cake with thick chocolate icing (and Mary Jane scraped out the frosting bowl), and then she “dressed” two chickens (and Mary Jane thought that the most wonderful performance she had ever seen).

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Then they went upstairs and got out fresh bedding, and Mary Jane herself put out the fresh towels in the guest bathroom. And by that time it was six o'clock—time for bread and milk. Everybody went to bed early so as to be up and feeling fine in the morning.

Next morning Mary Jane helped Grandmother with the morning work; then she put on her pink gingham dress and got out her biggest pink plaid hair ribbon for Grandmother to tie. And in no time at all, they were off to the station.

When the train stopped and left a pretty lady and a rosy-cheeked little boy of about Mary Jane's age on the tiny platform, Mary Jane suddenly felt very shy. She had never played with little boys, except Junior, and he was so much younger she didn't count him, and she didn't quite know how to talk to a little boy cousin she had never seen before. But she needn't have worried about what to say because the grown folks talked all the time and the two children on the front seat beside Grandfather Hodges, simply sat and looked at each other all the way home!

But after Grandfather had helped them out, by their own doorstep, Mary Jane seemed to feel that something must be said so she remarked, "Would you like to see my mice?"

"I thought girls were afraid of mice," replied John.

"Well, I'm not," said Mary Jane scornfully. "Come on see 'em." And she started for the barn.

Strange to relate, they hadn't got half way across the barn yard before the big pig, the same one that had so frightened Mary Jane on her first day, ran out of his pen in the barn and made straight for them. Grandfather had been in a hurry both times he went for the train and had forgotten to lock him up, most likely. John, who wasn't any more used to creatures than Mary Jane had been, screamed and screamed at the top of his voice.

Mary Jane looked at him scornfully and, forgetting all about how she herself had felt when *she* first came, said, "He won't hurt you! I'll send him away!" And without a thought of fear, she waved her arms around as she had seen Grandfather do on that first day. Mrs. Pig stopped short as she had for Grandfather, and Mary Jane, delighted with the success she seemed to be having, waved and shouted till Grandfather, hearing the commotion, came running to see what the matter could be.

"Well! Well! Well!" he exclaimed when he reached the barn gate and saw what had happened. "Say I couldn't make a farmer's girl out of you, Mary Jane! I'm proud of you! Isn't she a good one, John?"

John, his eyes round with fear for himself and with admiration for his new little cousin, nodded "Yes."

After that Grandfather stayed around near where they were and helped Mary Jane show John the little pigs, Brindle Bess the cow, and then the baby mice (who soon wouldn't be babies any more, by the way) up in the loft. And of course they went across the road to see the lamb that by now was well acquainted with Mary Jane; and they played with Bob who came frisking to meet them. And last of all they showed John the brand new baby ducks.

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“I’d have liked the rabbits best,” said John when they had told him about the pets that were found and lost so soon the day before. “Couldn’t we get them back again?”

“Maybe we could, maybe we could,” said Grandfather thoughtfully. “We hadn’t tried. Maybe that foolish mother took them back to where we got them. ’Twould be just like her. Let’s go see.”

So with a child on each side of him (just the very thing he liked best too), Grandfather and his guests went back through the cornfield and the pasture lot to where the rabbit nest had been.

“Well,” said Grandfather as he bent over the rubbish where the nest had been, “for a boy who had just come onto a farm, you’re a pretty good guesser, my son. Look here!” He pulled back the rubbish, just as he had done the day before, and there, before their eyes were the rabbits, five of them, just as soft and just as warm and comfortable as though they had never taken a journey in their lives.

[Illustration: “There, before their eyes were the rabbits, five of them.”]

“Didn’t they like our house we made for them?” asked Mary Jane.

“’Pears not,” said Grandfather. “What do you want to do about it, children?”

“I’ve always wanted some rabbits in a box,” said John, “and I never did have any. I want to feed ’em and watch ’em, you know.”

“Yes, I know,” agreed Grandfather, but that was all he said.

Mary Jane thought of saying that the box already had a family in it, her family of ducks, but she thought maybe that wouldn’t be polite, and anyway, likely as not there were more boxes, so she just kept still, very still.

And while they were all three standing there, wondering, Mary Jane looked up and over in the hedge, she spied the mother rabbit standing partly on her hind feet and looking at them as *hard*!

“Look!” cried Mary Jane, “there’s their mother!”

The sound of a voice startled the little mother and she ran away, lipity, lipity, lip; lipity, lipity, lip; such a funny little run! till she reached the shelter of a log. There she waited —they could see the tip, white of her tail through the leaves.

“She’s waiting to see what happens to her babies!” exclaimed Mary Jane, and suddenly she made up her mind about rabbit pets. “Let’s leave them here, John,” she said

quickly. “Their mother’s lonesome if they go up to the house. Let’s leave them here and I’ll give you half of my ducks.”

“All right,” agreed John, “but may I come and see them sometimes, Grandfather?”

“As often as you like. You just let me know and we’ll come twice a day,” said Grandfather, “and you’ll have most as much fun with the ducks, I’ll wager. Now let’s see if we can’t hunt up some dinner.” And they turned to the house.

Such a big day as Mary Jane and John did have! They played and they hunted eggs and they rode on the cow; yes, that can be done, didn’t you ever try it? And they fed the chickens, and by night time they were so sleepy and tired they hardly noticed their supper.

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But after supper Grandfather sat down to look at his paper. And as he spread it out before him he suddenly chuckled to himself.

“The very thing!” he said, “the very thing! Why didn’t I think of that before?” Then he looked over at the droopy-eyed little folks sitting on the window seat. “But I suppose you wouldn’t care to go?”

“Go where?” exclaimed both children in a breath. “Where, Grandfather?”

“What you talking about, Father?” asked Grandmother.

Instead of answering, Grandfather passed his paper over to her and pointed to where he had been reading.

Grandmother laughed and nodded. “Yes, if you want to,” she said, “but they’d better be going to bed in a hurry if they’re going to do all that to-morrow!”

“Tell us! Tell us!” cried Mary Jane eagerly.

“Not a word,” laughed Grandfather.

“Not a word,” insisted Grandmother. “You wouldn’t sleep a wink. You just stop thinking about what it is and go to sleep. Father, you take John up and I’ll go with Mary Jane.”

So without finding out the least thing, for Grandmother wouldn’t even answer a question, not one, Mary Jane went off to bed—and to sleep.

GRANDFATHER’S TREAT

It didn’t take long to call those children the next morning, you may be sure of that. Just one word and they were up and dressing and more eager than ever to know what Grandfather was planning to do.

“Now will you tell us?” asked John as he ran into the living-room where Grandfather was sitting.

“Not a word till you’ve eaten your breakfast,” replied Grandfather laughingly.

“Not even a hint?” exclaimed Mary Jane as she hurried in, buttoning her play dress as she came, just in time to hear what her Grandfather said.

“Not even a hint,” repeated Grandfather, “not till each of you has eaten your bowl of oatmeal and as much other breakfast as Grandmother says you should.”

“Come on, then, John,” said Mary Jane practically; “let’s eat quick!” And she lead the way into the dining-room, where Grandmother had the breakfast served and ready to eat.

Never did bowls of oatmeal disappear so rapidly as did those! And when the children had eaten a baked apple, an egg and a piece of toast apiece, Grandmother declared that they had done their full duty and could hear the surprise.

“But I’m not through myself!” exclaimed Grandfather in mock surprise. “Did you put your breakfast on your chairs? You couldn’t have eaten it *this* soon!” And he pretended to hunt around under the table for the breakfast.

“You know we didn’t hide it, Grandfather!” cried Mary Jane; she had been there long enough to get used to Grandfather’s teasing so she wasn’t puzzled by it as John was. “Now you’ll have to tell us, won’t he, Grandmother?”

Grandmother nodded and Grandfather got up from his chair and went to the dining-room closet. He rummaged on the shelf a minute and then brought out a big roll of paper. “There!” he exclaimed as he laid it in front of the children, “you may unroll that and see if you can tell what it is? Better lay it on the floor so you don’t tip the cream pitcher over.”

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The children set the roll on the floor; then Mary Jane held the rolled up part while John pulled it open. They didn't have it half unrolled before both children exclaimed, "A circus! It's a circus. Grandfather! Are we going to a circus?"

"Shouldn't wonder a bit," said Grandfather indifferently as he took another piece of toast; "shouldn't wonder a bit. That is, of course," he added with marked politeness, "unless you don't care to go."

"You *know* we care to go," laughed Mary Jane and she jumped up and gave him a big bear hug. "You know we just want to go the mostest of anything in the world, we do!"

"Then we'll go!" said Grandfather and he stopped his teasing and told them all about his plans. "We'll start about nine o'clock so we'll have plenty of time because we have to drive about fifteen miles and get our lunch and—"

"And see the parade," interrupted John.

"Oh, yes, we see the parade before lunch, you're right," laughed Grandfather. "I see there's going to be nothing skipped in this day. Then we want to see all the animals and get good seats and everything."

"Then we'd better start right now," suggested Mary Jane.

"Dear me, no, not for two hours yet!" exclaimed Grandfather. "That's the reason I got you that poster. See? It's all rolled up again. Now I'll help you unroll it so you can look at it while you wait for the time to start."

Grandmother helped too, and the big poster picture was unrolled and a chair set on each end of it to hold it open. Then Mary Jane and John could walk around and see it well. It was a picture of the parade and showed camels and lions in cages and elephants and clowns and pretty ladies and everything and of course it was most interesting to look at. But it wasn't so interesting that the children forgot to look at the clock—indeed, no! They watched and watched and watched and finally the clock said, "Eight!"

"Now then," said Mary Jane, "that's all I'm going to look. Let's roll it up and get ready. Maybe we can help Grandmother."

They found a good many interesting things to do. Grandmother had decided that they had better take their lunch with them and eat it in the car because the town where the circus was to be was small and there might be no good place for them to eat.

John got the lunch box from the storeroom and Mary Jane helped wrap sandwiches and chicken and cake in oiled paper; and by quarter of nine everything was ready.

“Fifteen minutes to wash hands and faces and change your clothes,” exclaimed Grandmother as she heard Grandfather bring the car up to the house. “Can you do it?”

“’Deed yes,” said Mary Jane, scampering on ahead up the stairs. “I can wash myself and you just look at the cracks. And I can put my own dress and shoes on. I can do lots!”

“I should say you can!” exclaimed Grandmother admiringly. “You do all you can then, dear, and I’ll help John.”

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At one minute to nine they were all at the door ready to climb into the car and be off.

“Did you give them their spending money?” asked Grandmother as she helped stow the lunch into the car.

“Not yet,” answered Grandfather. “I’ll give it to them when they get there.”

“Listen to the man!” exclaimed Grandmother in disgust, “and make them miss half the fun of carrying their own money. Wait a minute!” She hurried into the house and came back in a minute with two little black purses in her hand. “There now, children,” she said as she handed a purse to each child, “you can carry your own money. Here’s two nickels for you, Mary Jane, and two nickels for you, John. Don’t lose them!”

“We won’t,” said Mary Jane and she clutched hers tightly in her hand, “and may we buy anything we want?”

“Anything you want—anything!” Grandmother assured her.

“We’ll be home at six,” called Grandfather as he started the car and they whisked down the drive and away.

Such a jolly drive as that was! They talked about the circus they were to see and how they would spend their money. And whether the lion would roar and what they should buy. And if the lady could really truly do everything on her horse that the picture said she could and how much ice cream cones would cost. You see Grandmother had been right—half the fun of spending money was the holding the money beforehand and planning how it was to be spent.

Arriving at the village where the circus was, Grandfather drove them by the great white tents—how wonderful and mysterious they did seem too!—and then he found a good place to leave the car and they walked to the main street where, from the second story of an office building, they saw the parade go by.

When the sound of the calliope was growing fainter in the distance and the children were certain sure that every bit of the parade had gone by, John looked away from the window and asked, “Can we go to the circus just as soon as we eat our lunch?”

“Yes, I should think we could,” answered Grandfather.

“Then let’s eat right now!” said John eagerly.

“Not such a bad idea,” laughed Grandfather as he looked at his watch. “Then we’ll have plenty of time.”

They thanked the kind gentleman in whose office they had been and walked to the car to eat their lunch. It was a good thing Grandfather had left the car out of sight of the circus tent, for it was hard enough to think about eating as it was! Had the tents been in sight it would have been harder still. But on this quiet street and with the wonderful parade to talk about they did full justice to Grandmother's good meal. And when they had finished, even to the tempting little apple pies, one for each person, they started for the circus.

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If you've been to a circus yourself, you know something of the sights they saw and of the sounds they heard. If you haven't better get *your* grandfather (or your father, if your grandfather isn't handy) to take you to see one, for all the interesting things Mary Jane and John heard and saw couldn't be put into one chapter—not even if it was a double long one! They saw curious animals, munching away at their dinner as though they had lived right there in that spot all their lives instead of seven hours. They saw crawling snakes and marvelous birds and the elephants that swayed their trunks backward and forward, backward and forward, as though they were doing morning exercises. And the ponies! The prettiest little ponies! Mary Jane didn't know there *were* such pretty ponies in all the world. She liked them the best of anything she saw. John liked the monkeys, and Mary Jane and he fed them peanuts that Grandfather bought and they felt so very important because the keeper said that the sign, "Don't feed these animals," needn't bother them!

Then they went into the big tent and found their seats—just in time they were too, for the clowns came running in at that very minute and kept the children, and the grown folks, too, in an uproar of laughter. After the circus really began, it seemed to Mary Jane that she must be in a dream. It didn't seem as though all those jumping, racing, men and horses and elephants and all, *could* be real! She had to pinch herself hard to be sure she was awake.

Right in the middle a man came around with ice cream cones and John bought one.

"May I buy one too, Grandfather?" asked Mary Jane.

"Just as you like," said Grandfather. "It's your money." And for the first time she remembered the purse with the two nickels that she had all the time held tightly clutched in her hand! She bought the cone and ate it as she watched the circus—calmly indifferent to the fact that it was leaking onto her pretty pink dress. You simply can't notice *everything* at a circus!

Finally the great show was over. The last of the Cinderella parade slipped behind the curtains and folks began to hurry home. Grandfather took hold of each child and together they climbed over the seats till they reached the safe ground.

"Shall we look at the animals again?" he asked.

"We might try," said Mary Jane doubtfully, "but my looking don't see!"

"Poor child," said Grandfather as he suddenly realized how tired the little girl must be. "I expect your 'lookers' are tired enough to go home." He picked her up and set her on his shoulder and then, grasping John's hand firmly, he made his way out of the crowd.

“But I can’t go home *yet*!” exclaimed John, when he saw they were leaving the grounds. “I haven’t spent all my money!”

“Well, we can’t go home with any money left, that’s a sure thing!” laughed Grandfather. “What do you want to get?”

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“Another ice cream cone,” said John, as he spied a man going by with a tray.

“All right,” said Grandfather, “do you want one too, Pussy?”

“No, I know what I want, but it isn’t here yet,” said Mary Jane.

“Where is it?” asked Grandfather.

“At the gate,” replied Mary Jane. “I saw it when we came in and I want to buy it for my grandmother ’cause she couldn’t come.”

“That’s a good idea,” said Grandfather. “You tell me when we come to it.”

Mary Jane pointed out the stand where balloons were sold, and with grandfather’s help picked out a fine big red one to take to Grandmother.

Of the drive home Mary Jane remembered not a thing. She had seen and heard so much that she just sat and listened while Grandfather and John talked about everything. She almost went to sleep twice—almost but not quite, because she had to stay awake to hold Grandmother’s balloon and keep it from blowing out of the car.

Grandmother was watching for them when they drove into the yard and was delighted with her balloon, said she felt exactly as though she had been to the circus herself.

She tied it to the big glass water pitcher so they could see it all the while they were eating their supper and she thanked Mary Jane many times, for thinking to bring it to her.

“I know what I’m going to do first thing in the morning,” said John, as he and Mary Jane climbed upstairs to bed. “I’m going to get out that picture and see if they did everything it said.”

“Well, I know they did,” said Mary Jane positively, “and they did more too, because they did all the noise; I heard ’em!”

LEARNING TO COOK

John stayed a whole week at Grandfather’s and every one of the seven days, he and Mary Jane had a beautiful time. They fed chickens for Grandmother and gathered eggs; they visited the rabbits, carrying with them tit-bits of lettuce so they could the easier make friends with the little creatures; they played with the lamb and watched Mary Jane’s ducks and rode in the car with Grandfather and altogether had a wonderful time. But the thing that both Mary Jane and John liked the best—well, anyway, *almost* the best of all, was playing circus in the barn.

They pretended that the downstairs was the animal tent and that Brindle Bess was the elephant—“she waves her hind tail just like he did his front tail, so that’s almost the same,” John said—and that the hogs were lions and little pigs, tigers. And they pretended that the loft was the performers’ tent and that they were the circus folk. Mary Jane learned to turn a summerset in the hay and she tried to walk a rope but that didn’t work very well because the rope came down; evidently it wasn’t tied tightly. John stood on his head and did tumbling and was learning to throw three bottles at one time. They tried to do the elephant-eating-his-dinner act with Brindle Bess but she didn’t seem to understand (maybe because she hadn’t been to the circus herself) and tipped the table over and broke two dishes so they had to give that up.

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But finally Cousin Margaret came to take John home and Mary Jane was left without a playfellow.

“No use moping around, Mary Jane,” said Grandmother briskly as she saw Mary Jane sitting dolefully and idly on the back steps an hour after John had gone. “Find something to do as you did before John came and you’ll feel happier.”

“But everything I know to do, needs two to do it,” complained Mary Jane. “I don’t know any children’s things for just one!”

“Listen to the child!” laughed Grandmother, “when she played the whole day long, all by herself and as happy as could be! Well, then, dear,” she added kindly, “if you don’t know a children’s thing to do, how about a grown folks’ thing?”

“Oh, Grandmother!” exclaimed the little girl happily, “is there a grown-up folks’ thing I can do?”

“I shouldn’t wonder,” said Grandmother, smiling mysteriously. “I shouldn’t wonder a bit.”

“But I don’t want to sew,” said Mary Jane, suddenly wondering if her grandmother might be thinking of that, “I don’t feel sew-ish.”

“No, it’s not sewing,” replied Grandmother. “I haven’t time for sewing this morning because I’m going to make strawberry jam.”

“Then what is it?” asked Mary Jane and she pressed her face up against the screen door in her effort to look inside at her grandmother’s work.

“You come in and wash your hands and face—wash them good with soap,” said Grandmother, “then bring me one of Grandfather’s big handkerchiefs and I’ll tell you what it is.”

That puzzled Mary Jane and she immediately forgot all about John and her lonesomeness. She hurried to the bathroom and washed her hands and face the very best she knew how. Then she reached into Grandfather’s drawer and picked out a handkerchief and took it down to Grandmother.

“Now get me five pins from my basket,” said Grandmother.

Mary Jane got the pins in a jiffy and then Grandmother stopped her work and began to unfold and refold the handkerchief.

“What—” began Mary Jane as she watched Grandmother’s hands busy folding, “what’s it going to be?”

“A cap,” replied Grandmother, smiling, “a cap for the cook who’s going to get our dinner”; and she set the cap squarely on Mary Jane’s head!

“Me? Get dinner? Me? By myself?” exclaimed Mary Jane, “but I don’t know how!”

“Oh, yes, you do,” laughed Grandmother, “and what you don’t know how, you can learn. Do you know what potatoes look like?”

“Why, of course,” replied Mary Jane and she giggled at such a funny question for potatoes were her favorite vegetable. “I’ve seen ’em at home and I’ve seen ’em in your cellar.”

“Sure enough!” said Grandmother, nodding approvingly, “then you’ll know what to do. Take that pan over there,” and she pointed to the table, “and go into the cellar and pick out six nice smooth potatoes.”

Mary Jane did as she was told and she thought it was lots of fun too, to hunt over the bin as she had seen Grandmother do and pick out potatoes that just suited her.

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“Now then,” said Grandmother when Mary Jane brought up the potatoes, “take that scrubbing brush over there and scrub them clean. Then open the oven door with this holder and lay the potatoes on the shelf to bake.”

“Just like I scrub my hands?” asked Mary Jane.

“Just the same,” answered Grandmother, “only you don’t use soap.”

“How about some baked apples?” asked Grandmother as the oven door was shut on the potatoes; and Mary Jane noticed that she said it just as though Mary Jane could do anything or cook anything a body might want.

“They’re good, *I* think,” replied Mary Jane.

“So do I,” said Grandmother, “and we’ll have some. Your Grandfather opened the last box just this morning. You pick out three, Mary Jane, and bring me the apple corer from the drawer and the flat brown bowl from the pantry.”

By that time, Mary Jane felt as important as any cook in the land. She washed the apples. Grandmother hadn’t said to do that, but Mary Jane was sure it should be done. Then she took the bowl and the corer over to where Grandmother was working with her strawberries.

“Hold the apple so,” said Grandmother, showing just how an apple should be cored, “and turn the corer so—see if you can do the next, Mary Jane.”

Mary Jane could. Not as quickly as Grandmother had done it, of course, but she did it just the same and set it into the bowl as Grandmother had done.

“Now comes the fun part,” said Grandmother; “your mother used to love to fix apples I remember.”

“Did she do ’em just like me?” asked Mary Jane.

“Just exactly,” said Grandmother. “Get a cup of sugar from the bin; and a teaspoon of cinnamon from that brown box over there and the pat of butter you’ll find on the pantry shelf. Mix the sugar and cinnamon together and fill up the holes in the apples with it—-there’s your spoon, dear.”

Grandmother went on with her work and Mary Jane stirred the sugar and cinnamon and filled up the apples—it was lots of fun, she didn’t wonder her mother had liked to do it! Then Grandmother showed her how to put a lump of butter on the top of each apple—-“just like a hat, Grandmother!” exclaimed Mary Jane delightedly—and set the bowl in the oven by the potatoes.

“Now can you set the table?” asked Grandmother.

“’Deed yes,” said Mary Jane proudly; “I do that for Mother.”

“I thought so,” replied Grandmother. “I won’t have to show you about that.”

And she didn’t. Mary Jane put the silver and the napkins and the pepper and salt and glasses and dishes all just as they should be. And at Grandmother’s suggestion she put on a pat of butter and a glass of Grandfather’s favorite jelly.

“How’s the circus lady?” called Grandfather, who happened to come into the kitchen just then.

“She’s gone,” cried Mary Jane, “and a cook lady’s come to visit you.” And she skipped out from the dining-room to show him her cap.

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“Well, I like circuses,” said Grandfather solemnly, “but I must say that right at this minute I’d rather had a cook lady than a dozen circuses—so there! Who’s getting dinner?” he added as he saw Grandmother working away at her jam.

“Mary Jane is,” answered Grandmother “and I expected to be through by now to broil the steak—she’s everything else ready. But,” she added worriedly, “I simply can’t stop for ten minutes and I know her potatoes are about done!”

“Is there another handkerchief around here somewhere?” asked Grandfather suddenly.

“In your drawer there’s lots,” said Mary Jane, but for the life of her she couldn’t see what Grandfather meant.

“You get it,” he said, and she dashed upstairs on the errand.

“There now,” said Grandfather after she handed it to him, “how’s that?” Mary Jane laughed and laughed at the funny sight. He had twisted the handkerchief around his head dusting cap style and was bowing to her in a grand fashion. “I guess I can cook too!” he declared, “bring on the steak!”

Mary Jane got the steak out of the ice box and helped him salt and pepper it; then, while he broiled it—yes, he did know how, Mary Jane had thought he was only fooling—she took up the potatoes and apples and got the pitcher of water.

“I tell you what,” said Grandfather proudly as they sat down to dinner a minute later, “it’s all very well to be a circus lady but personally, I prefer a good cook, Mary Jane, and if you keep on as you’ve begun, you’ll be a good one!”

“I’m going to keep on,” said Mary Jane, proudly, “’cause it’s more fun than playing.”

“Good for you,” said Grandfather, “and by the way, Mother, have you told her where she’s going to-night?”

“Not a word,” said Grandmother, smiling.

“Goody!” cried Mary Jane, clapping her hands happily, “it’s a surprise.”

“Yes, it is,” laughed Grandmother, “you never did it before that’s certain. But you have to finish your dinner and then take a good nap—a really for sure enough nap, before you know a single thing about it so it’s no use to ask questions. I’ll tell you this much though,” she added as she saw Mary Jane look a bit disappointed, “you’ll wear your best dress and your biggest hair ribbon.”

Now what in the world was coming? Mary Jane couldn’t think and she went to her nap wondering and wondering and wondering.

THE STRAWBERRY SOCIABLE

It's awfully hard to go to sleep when you're wondering all the time what you're going to do when you wake up. But Mary Jane finally did drop off to sleep—perhaps the fact that Grandmother pulled down the shades helped. However it was, Mary Jane slept soundly and had to be called twice when it was time to get up. She blinked open her eyes and was just trying to guess if Grandfather had gone down to his breakfast when Grandmother called, "do you wear a sash with your best dress, dear?"

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That waked her in a jiffy and immediately she remembered about the surprise that was to come and that she was to wear her best dress and biggest ribbon.

“Yes, Grandmother, my pink sash,” she answered, and she tossed off the light quilt Grandmother had spread over her and ran into the next room. Grandmother was laying out her own best dress and shoes on her bed. It was the first time Mary Jane had known of her wearing them and she guessed right away that something pretty important must be going on.

“What’s the surprise, Grandmother?” she asked eagerly, “can you tell me now?”

“Surely dear,” replied Grandmother kindly, “I’d have told you before only I was afraid you’d stay awake and ask questions. To-night is the annual strawberry sociable of the village church and I thought maybe you’d like to go. Your grandfather and I always attend and I think you’re old enough to go—especially now, as you’ve had such a good sleep.”

Mary Jane stared at her grandmother as though she didn’t understand a word she had said.

“What is it—a strawberry sociable?” she asked.

Grandmother bent down and kissed her. “I forget my little city girl don’t know all our ways,” she said, smilingly. “A strawberry sociable is our big time of the year. We haven’t taken you to our church yet, dear, because your grandfather and I don’t go as regularly in the summer as we do in the winter, but maybe you’ve noticed it as we’ve driven through the village. The little white church with the steeple and the green blinds?”

“Yes,” said Mary Jane, nodding eagerly, “I’ve seen it. The one with the big yard.”

“That’s the one,” said Grandmother, “and it’s that yard we’re going to this evening. All our people have fine gardens and a good many of us have berry patches. We save our finest berries and take them to the church to-night for the sociable. The folks who have no berries take cake and in that way every one helps and we raise money. We’re trying to get enough for an organ now.”

“But how do you get the money?” asked Mary Jane, to whom this was all new.

“We sell the strawberries and cake—ten cents for a dish of fruit with a piece of cake,” explained Grandmother. “I expect you never heard of the like before, but I think you’ll have a good time all the same. There’ll be other little girls there, Frances Westland and Helen Loiter and maybe others; you’ll have a beautiful time. Now let’s get out your things.”

If there was one thing above another that Mary Jane loved to do, it was to dress up in her best clothes. She loved the feel of the soft, fine materials and she liked the crisp hair ribbons and dainty shoes. She was so glad that her mother had let her bring her brand new dress that she had worn to her birthday party and the wide pink hair ribbon and sash that went with it. Grandmother said they would dress before supper as she wanted to be ready to go early for she knew that Mary Jane should not stay late.

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It took some time for those two busy ladies to dress. Grandmother wasn't used to hair bows and sashes of course and they went pretty slow. Then likely as not there was a good deal of visiting went along with the dressing for Grandmother and Mary Jane were good company. So it's not much wonder that by the time each had inspected the other and had decided that everything was exactly as it should be. Grandfather called to say that supper time had come. Grandmother and Mary Jane went grandly down the stairs in answer to his call and he stood at the bottom and admired and complimented till Mary Jane had to drop her grand air and giggle, he was so funny.

Grandmother laughed, too, and then bustled out to the kitchen, put on a great big all-over apron and prepared the supper.

"We'll not have a thing but eggs and bread and jam and milk," she announced, "because with all the cake and strawberries you're going to have that's all you should eat—just very plain food. Mary Jane, you slip on this apron and help Grandfather feed the chickens and by that time I'll have supper ready to eat."

When they drove up to the village church an hour later Mary Jane looked upon a yard of hurry and fun such as she had never before seen. Men were fixing lanterns on wires, others were carrying chairs and arranging them around tables underneath the lanterns. Women were fixing great bowls of crimson berries (and oh, how good they did look, Mary Jane thought!) on a long table that stretched across the back of the yard. Other women were unpacking baskets of tempting looking cakes and cutting them up into pieces ready for serving.

Grandmother took one basket of berries out of the back of the car and Grandfather took the other and they walked over to the table, Mary Jane following meekly behind.

"This is my little great granddaughter, Mary Jane Merrill," said Grandmother to the lady in charge, "and as she's never been to a strawberry sociable before, I'm going to look after her till she gets used to things—you've plenty of help here anyway."

"Glad to meet you, Mary Jane," answered the lady and Mary Jane made her prettiest courtesy, "you'll like the sociable better when the lanterns are lighted and the other little girls come. Don't you want to come and eat some cake crumbs now?"

Much as Mary Jane liked cake crumbs, she didn't fancy staying with the strange people when she might be with her grandmother, so she hung back shyly and Grandmother declined the offer for her.

"I think we'll walk around first, thank you, Miss Oliver," said she, "and get our little girl to feeling more at home."

Mary Jane liked the walking around and watching the busy folks at their curious work. And, before she hardly realized it, twilight had set in, men had lighted the gay Japanese lanterns and the yard had become full of jolly people—the strawberry sociable had begun.

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Grandfather hunted up Helen Loiter, a pretty little black haired girl and Frances Westland to whom Mary Jane took a fancy at once. She wore a plain little white dress and a big blue hair ribbon and seemed so kind and pleasant to the little stranger. Helen, on the other hand, was dressed in a much trimmed and be-ruffled frock and seemed to feel far too dressed up to be natural.

“I’m going to get you girls your berries,” said Grandfather, as he settled them at a table over to one side where they could sit as long as they liked and eat and visit, “and if you want more cake, just let me know.”

“Let’s hurry and eat this up so he’ll get us some more,” said Helen. “I’ve got a dime of my own and if he gets us another dish, that’ll make three times!”

“Oh, let’s eat slow and talk,” said Frances, “no use hurrying, maybe we won’t want three dishes. Is your mother here, too, Mary Jane?”

“No,” answered Mary Jane, “but my sister’s coming next week and my mother’s coming before very long after that.”

“Why didn’t you bring your best dress so you could wear it to-night?” demanded Helen as she took a big bite of berries. “I should think you’d like a pretty dress for tonight!”

“This is my best dress,” said Mary Jane in amazement, “it’s my very best dress and my best hair ribbon and everything!”

“Well, I don’t think it looks like it,” said Helen, scornfully, “it hasn’t a single ruffle and not one bit of lace! I guess your father must be pretty poor!”

Mary Jane looked at Helen’s be-ruffled frock that was trimmed and trimmed with yards of cheap lace and then she looked at her own dress, so plain and neat with only a bit of hand embroidery for its ornament. Then she looked at Frances’ dress that was more like her own. And a queer feeling of lonesomeness—a lonesomeness that she hadn’t felt since the rainy day so long ago, began to come over her.

But before she had time to think of an answer, Frances spoke up. “Aren’t you ashamed of yourself, Helen Loiter! Talking that way to Mrs. Hodges’s little girl! I guess folks can dress as they please without asking you! My dress isn’t fancy either and my father’s got as much money as yours has, so there!”

Mary Jane looked at Frances admiringly and felt much better.

“How old are you?” continued Frances, turning her attention pointedly to Mary Jane.

“I’m five,” replied Mary Jane, “how old are you?”

“I’m seven, only I’m not very big for seven so you wouldn’t guess it,” said Frances, “do you go to school?”

“No, not yet,” answer Mary Jane, “but I’m going to some day.”

“Of course you are, stupid!” said Helen, “everybody does! Well, I’m bigger’n you are. I’m eight and I’m in second grade! So there!” And she polished out the bottom of her dish with her spoon. “I guess your grandfather’s forgotten all about getting us some more cake—I’m going to get some for myself. You two slow pokes can sit around and wait if you want to. I’ll not!” And she flounced herself out of her chair and ran over to the cake table.

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Left by themselves Frances and Mary Jane compared notes as little girls will. Mary Jane told her about her own home; about her friend Doris and her sister Alice and the birthday party and everything she could think of. And Frances told about her school and her garden—yes, she had one about as big as Mary Jane's—and about her pet calf.

"Father gave it to me when it was only a day old," she said, "and when it's big enough, I'm going to sell it and get money to take music lessons. Won't that be fun?"

Mary Jane thought it would; she looked admiringly at Frances and thought she was quite the most wonderful little girl she had ever met.

When Grandfather came up to them a few minutes later, he had to speak twice so busy were they with their talk. He got them each another dish of berries and then, when they were through eating that, he took them walking around the yard so they could see the lanterns and so that Mary Jane would see and be seen by all his friends. Frances seemed to know every one and that was a great help to Mary Jane who wasn't used to meeting so many people.

All too soon Grandmother announced that it was time to go home. The candles in the lanterns flickered out one by one; the housewives busied themselves with clearing up the remnants of cake and berries; the fathers (and grandfathers) carried baskets back to the cars, lit lights and made ready for the homeward journey.

Frances and Mary Jane told each other good night and Frances promised to come over and see Mary Jane very soon.

"Well, what did you think of the sociable?" asked Grandmother as they spun along home. "I saw you talking with Frances and Helen; did you like your new friends, dear?"

"I liked Frances so much," said Mary Jane, "and she's coming to see me."

Grandmother, who knew Helen much better than Grandfather did, understood in a minute. She slipped her arm around her little granddaughter and pulled her close. "So my little girl learned something as well as had a good time to-night, did she?" she whispered; "she learned how to pick out a friend. I'm glad Frances is coming to see you, dear!"

BURR HOUSES

The week after the strawberry sociable was the busiest one of Mary Jane's visit thus far. Frances came to see her twice and they became better friends each time. The Westlands lived two miles farther from the village than the Hodges did and Frances's father could easily leave her at the Hodges's home when he went into the village and get her again on his return trip. Mary Jane showed her all the interesting things she had

found—the pet mice, who were getting tamer and tamer all the time; the ducks, which were losing their pretty babyness by now and were getting almost big enough to look after themselves; the lamb and the pigs and Brindle Bess.

Of course Frances was used to country sights, so she wasn't as much surprised at what she saw as Mary Jane had been when she came from the city. But she was interested and she told Mary Jane many things about the farm creatures and the fun she had had with her own pets.

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Then one day Grandfather took Mary Jane to see Frances and Mary Jane had fun every minute of the two hours she was there. The Westlands kept many cows and Mary Jane saw twenty little calves—such gentle, soft-eyed little creatures that were so tame the girls could pet them and feed them all they wanted to. And chickens! Mary Jane had thought her grandmother had a good many but the Westlands had more!

“May we feed them all?” asked Mary Jane eagerly as she saw them.

“I guess Frances would be glad to have you,” laughed Mrs. Westland kindly; “she has to do it so much that I’m sure she’ll be glad for help at the job.”

So the girls went to the bins and gathered great handfuls of corn and oats for the feast. Frances gave a peculiar call which the chickens seemed to know and immediately they came a-running, hundreds of them, so fast that Mary Jane dropped the corn she held and tried to run away.

“They won’t hurt you,” laughed Frances, “see? I can let them eat right out of my hand!”

Mary Jane looked and thought that if Frances was safe she would be too. So she took some of the grain Frances handed over to her and bent down for them to eat out of her hand too. It wasn’t more than a minute before she had lost every trace of fear and could let the biggest rooster gobble up his grain right out of her hand. The girls tried dropping kernels of corn on their shoes and then holding up one foot for the chickens to reach for the grain. And they tossed occasional kernels way to the outside of the feeding group and then giggled to see how quickly the greedy ones whirled around to get all they could.

Then, before it was time to go, Mrs. Westland called them in and gave them each a big glass of rich milk and a plate of fat sugar cookies to eat on the porch. Altogether Mary Jane thought she had the most fun during that visit of any visit she had ever made! And before the little girls separated, Frances had promised to come over to Mary Jane’s house very soon.

The day after the call at the Westlands the postman brought a letter from Mrs. Merrill which said that Alice could come to her grandfather’s in two days if that would be convenient. Grandfather was very fond of Alice; she had visited there before and he was hoping she would have a nice long stay there this summer. So, as soon as he read the letter he got out his car, took Mary Jane with him and went into the village to telegraph that Alice should come at once.

The next morning Mary Jane helped her grandmother clean the room that Alice was to have—it was just across the hall from Mary Jane’s and was so quaint and cozy with its old-fashioned furniture and ruffled white curtains. Then the next day Grandmother made a great jar full of cookies; Mary Jane loved that because Grandmother let her cut

out some. They made stars and crescents and squares and some just plain round ones; and Mary Jane put the sugar and nuts over the top, too. Then they made apple pies and berry pies and a tart of each kind for Mary Jane's dinner and supper that day. Mary Jane decided then and there that she was going to be a good cook when she grew up because cooking was about the most fun of anything she had ever tried.

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On the morning Alice was to come, Mary Jane got up early; dressed herself as quickly as possible and ran down the stairs. Just in the nick of time she was too, for Grandfather was ready to start to the station.

“Take me, please take me along!” she called as she heard him crank up his car.

“Hello, Pussy; you up?” he answered; “to be sure you may go along. Get your grandmother to give you a big piece of coffee cake to eat on the way and we’ll be off.”

Grandmother heard what he said and had the coffee cake ready as Mary Jane ran into the kitchen. A wonderful big piece, she cut, all full of sugary, buttery “wells” that Mary Jane liked so much. She wrapped it in a napkin so it wouldn’t get Mary Jane’s dress sticky with its sweetness, threw a woolen scarf around the little girl’s shoulders for the early morning air was cool and waved a good-by as they rode out of the yard.

They reached the station just as the great train pulled in and saw the conductor and porter help Alice down the steps of the car. Mary Jane thought she had never seen any one look so nice in all her life! Grandfather set her out of the auto and she ran as fast as ever she could and threw her arms around her sister. Alice held her tight a minute and then turned to kiss her grandfather.

“So you’re here all right, Blunderbuss,” said Grandfather heartily, using the nickname he had given her long ago, “and you haven’t lost a bit of your hair!” Alice laughed as he looked admiringly at her long golden braids.

“I haven’t,” she replied teasingly, “but I can’t say as much for you!” And she laughed at her grandfather’s bald head.

“Such a girl! Such a girl!” exclaimed Grandfather proudly; “now I suppose I’ll have to get your trunk and take you home and stand your teasing the rest of the summer!” And in mock dismay he went for the trunk the baggage man had tossed off the train.

That was the beginning of more fun for Mary Jane. First there was the house and farm which must be shown to Alice just as carefully as though she had never seen it before. Then there were all the jolly things that Alice thought of to do—Alice was always thinking up something to do, it seemed. She fixed up a saddle for the lamb and taught Mary Jane to ride. She tied tiny bells on the rabbits so they could be more easily found. She helped Mary Jane take the ducks down to the creek at the end of the pasture and turn them into the water. Mary Jane thought it perfectly wonderful that they should know how to swim—“just as though they had taken regular lessons, Grandfather,” she said as she told him about it afterwards. And Alice learned how to make bread—with Mary Jane helping to turn the crank of the bread mixer so she wouldn’t feel left out.

On the third day of Alice’s visit Frances Westland came over to play and the three little girls went out into the front yard and wondered what they would do.

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“I wish we had doll houses here like we have at home,” said Mary Jane. “I know Frances would like to play with doll houses.”

“But you haven’t any here,” said Frances practically.

“Maybe we can get some,” said Alice thoughtfully; “we ought to be able to find something to make a doll house out of. Let’s hunt.”

“Where’ll we hunt?” asked Mary Jane.

“Let me see,” said Alice. She looked around the yard but saw nothing that interested her. She looked across the road to Grandmother’s lot and saw all the grasses and brush that flourished there.

“We ought to be able to find something over there,” she said; “let’s hunt.”

So the three little girls scrambled over the fence and roamed through the lot. The lamb was used to a good deal of petting and he supposed, of course, that was what they had come for. So he poked himself into their way at every step.

“No, sir,” said Alice, laughing; “we didn’t come to play with you to-day! You run along, sir!” She rubbed her hand over his back to push him away and something rough and pricky scratched her. She pulled at his wool and a small brown burr came off in her hand.

“Look! Girls!” she cried suddenly. “If he got this, there must be more in the lot!”

“Of course!” said Frances, looking scornfully at the burr Alice held up for her to see; “there’s a million over there—see? They’re an awful nuisance, burrs are, even this early in the season.”

“They may be a nuisance,” laughed Alice, “but I’ll venture to say they’ll make good doll houses for all that. Here! I’ll show you what I think we can do.” She ran over to where Frances had pointed out a lot of burrs, pulled off a handful and began sticking them together. “Yes, it works,” she said in a satisfied tone, “but let’s not stop to make the houses here. Let’s gather a lot of burrs and take them over to Grandmother’s front yard. Then we can make a whole village!”

Frances and Mary Jane didn’t quite see how a village was to come out of a lot of burrs, but Alice was so sure of what she was going to do that they thought she must be right. So they gathered up their skirts and filled them with burrs and then helped each other back over the fence.

Under the big pine tree, where the ground was the levelest of any place in the yard, Alice had them spread out all their burrs.

“Now,” she said when the burrs were ready, “you make them stick together—so. Make eight rows of six burrs each. That will be the floor of the house. Then start up the sides for walls.”

Frances and Mary Jane got the idea in a minute and they set to work in a jiffy. Such fun as it was! The houses and barns and churches grew so rapidly that none of the girls gave a minute’s thought to pricked fingers—there wasn’t time! When the stock of burrs was entirely used up, Alice set the houses along in a straight line as though they were on a street. Frances put the barns back of the houses where they belonged and Mary Jane ran to her garden for nasturtiums to lay by the houses for gardens.

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“But we haven’t any dolls to live in the houses!” exclaimed Frances suddenly.

“That’s easy,” said Alice; “I’ve made dolls before. Grandmother showed me how years ago. Come on and we’ll get some.”

She led the girls back to the orchard, where by now tiny green apples were lying on the ground, scattered there by the summer winds.

“You girls get all the apples you can while I get the toothpicks.” And she ran to the house.

“What does she mean?” asked Frances, who wasn’t used to this sort of play.

“I don’t know, but let’s do what she says and then we’ll find out,” answered Mary Jane, who had great confidence in this big sister of hers. They filled their skirts with apples of all sizes and hurried back to the front yard where Alice, carrying a box of toothpicks, met them.

“Now we’ll all make dolls,” said Alice as she spread out the picks. “Use the biggest apples for the body; stick in two toothpicks for arms and two for legs. And a middle-sized apple makes the head. Then take another toothpick and mark out eyes and nose and mouth—so!” And she set up the finished doll for the girls to see.

Frances and Mary Jane picked up apples and went to work too, and first thing they knew there was a doll standing in front of each house. They were just starting on animals, pigs and horses and cows which Alice showed them how to make, when Grandmother came out with a pitcher of lemonade and a basket of cookies. So the burr making turned into a party which lasted till Mr. Westland came tooting along the road and Frances had to go home.

EARNING MONEY

“Now if I only had a camera,” said Alice as she and Mary Jane and her grandmother were sitting out on the back porch one morning, shelling peas for dinner, “I’d take a picture of you both. Wouldn’t it make a good one?”

Grandmother looked at Mary Jane. The sunshine splattered through the cracks between the vine-covered lattice and shone on her bobbed brown hair, on her pink play dress and on the bright green pea pods in her lap. Mary Jane looked at her grandmother and saw the snow white hair, the kindly face that smiled above the big work apron and the busy hands.

“Wouldn’t it, though!” they both exclaimed at exactly the same minute. And then they all three had a good laugh.

“All the same I wish I had a camera,” insisted Alice.

“Does your mother think you’re old enough to know how to use one?” asked Grandmother.

“Old enough, Grandmother!” exclaimed Mary Jane. “Alice’s twelve!” And the way she said twelve showed that she thought twelve was very, very old indeed.

Grandmother smiled and Alice added, “She’s willing I should have one, Grandmother, only I must buy it myself. And saving money out of my allowance is slow work. I’ve a dollar now but I need seventy-five cents more.”

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“Seems to me you should be able to earn that much,” said Grandmother.

“Earn it?” asked Alice. “How?”

“Oh, by some sort of work,” answered Grandmother.

“Oh, could I really?” exclaimed Alice delightedly. “What could I do?”

“Could I earn some too?” asked Mary Jane eagerly.

“What do you want money for?” laughed Alice, as though a little girl wouldn’t have use for such a thing as money! “You always want to do everything, Mary Jane!”

“Of course she does,” said Grandmother comfortably, “and you do too. The thing I’m thinking about is more fun if done by two anyway. But what do you want your money for, dear?” she asked the little girl.

“I want it to get a present for my dear mother,” said Mary Jane, “a present that she don’t know anything about and that Daddah don’t know anything about and that nobody gives me the money for. Can I really truly earn some money?”

“Surely,” replied Grandmother. “See those woods, girls?” She pointed across the garden and across the cornfield to the woods about a quarter of a mile away. “In those woods are blackberry bushes, lots of them. And this is about the beginning of the blackberry season. Now if you girls really want to earn some money you may take your little baskets and go berrying. I’ll buy all you can pick at ten cents a quart. You ought to easily get your seventy-five cents that way, Alice, for the bushes ate usually loaded with berries.”

“But the berries are yours to begin with,” objected Alice, who liked to be fair; “we can’t sell you something that already belongs to you.”

“Of course you can’t,” replied Grandmother, much pleased with Alice’s honesty. “I shouldn’t have said ‘buy the berries’; I should have said ‘pay you for the picking’ at ten cents a quart. If I ‘bought’ the berries of any one I would have to pay fifteen or twenty cents a quart. And if I hired some one to pick them for me as I have some years, I would have to pay ten cents a quart, just as I offered you. So, you see, I promised you no more than you will fairly earn.”

“How do you pick berries?” asked Alice.

“There’s only one way,” laughed Grandmother, much amused at the question. “You touch them and off they come! Just pick them off the bushes and drop them in your basket and the thing is done.”

“Let’s go now,” said Mary Jane eagerly.

“Not now,” answered Grandmother, “because it’s too near dinner time. Wait till you have your dinner and a little rest of half an hour. Then you can start and pick all afternoon.”

By two o’clock the girls had hunted up the berry baskets Grandmother told them to find in the attic (cunning little baskets with long, curving handles they were, too) and, tying on their biggest sun hats, they started out through the garden path.

They crossed the field, climbed the fence into the woods and turned down the wagon road as Grandmother had directed them. And sure enough, there were the berry bushes just as she had said. Bushes that were fairly loaded with shining blackberries that glistened in the afternoon sunshine.

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[Illustration: “There were the berry bushes—fairly loaded with shining blackberries.”]

The girls set to work most enthusiastically and by the time Grandfather came to see how they liked their job (for, of course, he had heard all about it at dinner time) they had their baskets nearly full. He walked home with them and helped them measure out their berries with Grandmother’s quart measure. Alice had a quart and a half and Mary Jane a full, even quart and Grandmother paid immediately—fifteen cents for Alice and ten cents, a bright new dime, for Mary Jane.

“My, but I do be rich!” exclaimed Mary Jane delightedly. “I can get my dear mother the nicest thing!”

“Of course you can, Pussy,” said Grandfather, “and Alice will have her camera in no time. I get the best of all, though,” he added with a mysterious nod of his head.

“How do you?” asked both girls at once.

“I get to eat the jam!” replied Grandfather in a comical attempt at a whisper.

“They do too, bless their hearts!” exclaimed Grandmother. They shall eat all they want. I’ll make it first thing in the morning.”

“And first thing in the morning I mean to get more berries,” said Alice. “Let me see—-fifteen into seventy-five:—in four more days I’ll have enough money to get my camera!” And she danced around gayly, she was so delighted.

“Not quite,” laughed Grandfather; “don’t be in too big a hurry, Blunderbuss; you have to give the berries a chance to ripen. Better plan to go every other day. You’ll get more at a time that way.”

“And I’m going, too,” put in Mary Jane, “so I can get more money for Mother’s present.”

“I was thinking about that present while you girls were gone,” said Grandmother. “You’d better get that present in the city where the stores are good. Why don’t you save it for her Christmas gift? That would be nice.”

“But I wanted to give her something when she comes to take me home!” objected Mary Jane, who had set her heart on making her mother a gift, “something that I did.”

“That’s all right,” Grandmother assured her; “give her something then, too. Something you made yourself and save the money you earn till Christmas. How would you like to make her some blackberry jam? She likes blackberry jam and you could make that.”

“Could I really?” exclaimed Mary Jane, and she sidled over to where her grandmother was standing.

“How silly!” cried Alice. “You know she can’t make jam, Grandmother; she’s only five years old. Why, even I don’t know how to make jam and I’m twelve!”

“Is that so?” laughed Grandmother, and she slipped her arm around Mary Jane. “Well, what you can do and what Mary Jane can do has no connection. You don’t know what she can do. She’s going to be a good cook; she’s begun already. And if she wants to make a glass of jam for her mother, all by herself, she shall do it, so there! And you can make some, too, if you want to, dear,” she added kindly to Alice.

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“Thank you, Grandmother,” said Alice, “and I’m sorry I spoke so about you, dear,” she added to Mary Jane; “go ahead and make your jam, pet, and I’ll make Mother something else. I know it would be more fun for you to make it without me. May I make her a cake, Grandmother? Make it the day before she comes?”

Grandmother assured her that she could and they all went in to get supper.

The next morning Mary Jane put on her cooking cap and apron and she and Grandmother went at the jam while Alice and Grandfather rode to the village on an errand.

“Measure out a good big cup full of berries,” said Grandmother; “pile it full as it will hold and wash them and put them in this pan.”

Mary Jane picked out nice big, juicy berries; that wasn’t hard to do because most of the berries were very fine; the girls hadn’t picked any other kind. Then she washed them carefully and put them in the pan Grandmother had given her.

“Now measure an even cupful of sugar,” said Grandmother, “and pour it over your berries.” And Mary Jane went to the sugar bin and did as she was told.

“Now,” continued Grandmother, “shake the berries till the sugar’s well mixed in and then set the pan on the stove.”

While the berries were cooking Grandmother had her hunt out a nice jelly glass, one that the top fitted on firmly; wash and dry it ready for the jelly. Then Mary Jane took a big spoon and Grandmother took a big spoon and they stood by the stove and watched the jam boil. When the bubbles got big, oh, very big, and looked as shining as big glass beads, Grandmother said it was about done and must be tested. She put her spoon in and then, holding it over the pan of jam, let the hot jam drop off.

“Almost done,” said Grandmother, with a satisfied nod; “now you try it, Mary Jane.”

So Mary Jane dipped her spoon in just as her grandmother had done and again the jam dropped off, this time a little slower and with longer drops. Grandmother told her to put the glass on a chair, on a paper, and by the time she had done that the jam was ready to pour into the glass.

When Alice and Grandfather came home from their errand the glass of jam was all done and was on the table near the window, covered neatly with its tin cover ready to give to Mrs. Merrill when she should come.

“And that won’t be so many days now either,” said Grandmother. “I declare, how this summer has gone!”

THE PICNIC AT FLATROCK

On the very day that Alice counted out her money and found she had the seventy-five cents she needed for her much wanted camera and that Mary Jane had fifty cents, there came a telegram from Mrs. Merrill saying that she and Mr. Merrill would arrive the next morning for a stay of ten days.

“Now this is something like old times,” said Grandmother happily as she and the two girls bustled around making ready for the guests. “Lots of cooking to do and two nice girls to help me do it. Seems like the days when our own girls were here! Mary Jane, you’ve done plenty of dusting for today; you go and get your grandfather to pick out two nice fat chickens for frys while I teach Alice about making her cake. She’s going to have a beauty to show her mother, that’s what she is!”

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Mary Jane liked doing things with her jolly grandfather, so she skipped out happily and found him in the barn.

“Pick out some frys, should we?” he said. “All right, that suits me, only we’ll fool her, Mary Jane; we’ll get *three*! I believe in having enough, I do.”

“What we going to do to-morrow, Pussy?” he asked when that job was done.

“Why, we’re going to get Mother and Father at the train and then we’re coming home.”

“Oh, yes, I know that,” said Grandfather, “but let’s do more than that. Let’s have a picnic to celebrate their coming.”

“Oh, Grandfather!” exclaimed Mary Jane, “could we?”

“We certainly could,” said Grandfather, “and I think it would be a fine thing to do. There’s a full moon and we could go about four and come home by moonlight. Let’s see what your grandmother and Alice think about it.”

Grandmother and Alice were enthusiastic. “I can take my cake!” exclaimed Alice eagerly. “It’s a beautiful cake, Grandfather, see?” she said proudly. “It’s all done but the frosting and I’m going to put that on as soon as it’s cool enough.”

“Looks good enough to eat,” said Grandfather admiringly, “and I’m sure it will be fine to-morrow.”

“And I can take my frys,” said Grandmother, planning; “your father loves cold fried chicken, girls,” she added, “and maybe your mother will make a bowl of her fine salad to-morrow while I make a custard—yes, Father, that’s just what we’ll do. We’ll have a picnic. Where’ll we go?”

“To Flatrock,” replied Grandfather, who had decided that point long ago, “and you needn’t plan too much fixyness because Mary Jane and I have a surprise.”

“Oh, goody!” cried Mary Jane. “What is it?” Everybody laughed at that and Grandfather took the little girl out to the garden to show her what the secret was. But they didn’t tell anybody else what it was—I should say not!

It was lucky there was plenty to do that day, and many interesting things to plan for the picnic; for, even so, Mary Jane thought the day would never end—never. She hadn’t realized she was so anxious to see her mother till she knew the long separation was so nearly over.

“To-morrow I’ll see my mother! To-morrow I’ll see my mother! To-morrow I’ll see my mother!” she whispered over and over to herself as she went to sleep, and she thought it was the best news she ever told herself.

She was awake and up the first of any one in the house the next morning, and long before Grandfather was ready to start she was out sitting in the automobile.

“Look who thinks she’s going to the station!” exclaimed Grandfather. “’Fraid you can’t go this time, Pussy; there won’t be room.”

“Oh, *Grandfather*!” exclaimed Mary Jane over the big lump that suddenly came into her throat, “I *must* go to see my *mother*!” And then she looked at her grandfather and saw the twinkle in his eye. “You’re just teasing, aren’t you, Grandfather?” she added anxiously.

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“Yes, I am, and I ought to be shot for it, so there!” said Grandfather, who, when he saw how eager she was, regretted his hasty teasing. “Surely you can go—we’ll start in two minutes.”

It wasn’t more than a second after her father and mother got off the great train before Mary Jane was held tight in her mother’s arms and oh, how good it did feel to be there! “I didn’t know how much I did want you,” cried Mary Jane, “till you’re here!”

Mother replied with a satisfying whisper and another pair of kisses, one on each rosy cheek, and then Father had to have his hug and they started gayly home.

After breakfast Mary Jane showed them all the creatures she had learned to love—from the lamb in the pasture lot to the ducks that now lived down by the creek. Then they went back into the house and Mary Jane gave her mother the glass of jam made all by herself (and you can just guess how proud and happy Mrs. Merrill was over *such* a gift!) and Alice showed her cake.

“Look’s good enough to eat right now,” said Mr. Merrill, smacking his lips; “let’s have a piece.”

“I should say not!” exclaimed Alice; “that’s to take to the picnic!”

So then they told all about the plan for the picnic, and Father and Mother were pleased just as everybody had known they would be. And every one set to work at the pleasant preparations.

Mrs. Merrill, Grandmother and Alice stayed in the kitchen, while Mr. Merrill joined Mary Jane and Grandfather in making preparations for the secret. They didn’t let any one see a thing of what they were doing and they carefully covered up the big basket that they stowed away in the back of the car.

At three o’clock they were off and with such good company and over fine roads the twenty-five mile ride to Flatrock seemed all too short.

“Now you folks who think you have the eats,” said Grandfather as they all got out of the car, “can just fool around any way you like. Mary Jane and I are going to build a fire for the coffee her father and I will be sure to want.”

“That’s no surprise,” laughed Alice; “Grandmother has the coffee in her basket and she told me I could help you make the fire!”

“Isn’t that amazing!” teased Grandfather, and Alice knew from the way he talked that she hadn’t guessed the secret after all.

Flatrock was a rough, wooded spot, most unusual for that region; and right through the middle of the woods a pretty little creek ran tumbling over some broad, flat rocks. It was by the side of one of these rocks, close by the little stream, that Grandfather started his fire. He pulled two logs together till they formed a big V; then he and Mr. Merrill and the girls gathered wood, twigs and branches and leaves, till they had a big pile between the logs. They set fire to these and soon they had a heap of glowing coals.

“Now,” said Grandfather, “I think it’s about time for our surprise. Shall we get it, Mary Jane?”

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She nodded “yes” and he went to the car, bringing back with him the mysteriously covered basket. “You shall take the cover off, Pussy,” he said.

Mary Jane pulled back the cover cloth and there, inside, was a basket full to the brim of —yes, it was—roasting ears! The very first of the season!

“We keep watch of our corn patch, we do,” said Grandfather, and he nodded solemnly at Mary Jane, “and now we’re going to have something good.”

They piled the roasting ears in on the hot coals, then they built another fire over the top of them, and by the time that had burned down the corn was ready to eat.

Grandmother and Mother and Alice unpacked the baskets and they all sat around and enjoyed the feast. Grandmother’s fried chicken and crullers and rolls and Alice’s fine cake, which was given the place of honor on a rock by itself where it could be seen all the time till they were ready to eat it, were pronounced the best ever.

The moon rose so clear and big and beautiful that it was hard to tell just when day ended and night began. So it was a surprise when Grandfather announced that it was eight o’clock and high time they were starting home. The few scraps, and there weren’t very many, were packed neatly into one basket and the party regretfully left the rocks and started for the car.

“Nobody ever comes along this road at this time of night,” said Grandfather. “I’ll just get the car out into the middle of the road where you can get in easier.” So he pulled it away from the fence where he had left it, and ran it out into the middle of the road. “Here, Pussy,” he added, “run around on the other side of the car and hand me that basket.”

Mary Jane did as she was told and after he had taken the basket from her she waited in the middle of the road, by the car, till he should be ready to help her in.

No one ever knew quite how it happened—it was all so sudden. Perhaps the other driver, too, thought that no one was ever on that road at that time of the evening. Out of the shadows and the moonshine, around the curve of the road, came a roadster moving so fast that before its driver could realize that some one stood in the center of the road, he had hit Mary Jane squarely and had tossed her over the fence on the opposite side of the road.

Grandfather jumped over the fence after her as quickly as he could out of the car, but, quick as he was, Mary Jane’s father was quicker. He picked up the little girl, carried her back to her mother and together they ran their hands over her—no bones seemed to be broken; her heart was beating and she was breathing. But *just* breathing, that was all.

She lay in her mother's arms as still and quiet—so still and so quiet that she didn't seem like Mary Jane—the Mary Jane who was always running and talking and lively.

Without more than a half-dozen necessary words Grandfather and Grandmother, Father, Mother and Alice got into the car and Grandfather put on all speed. The one thought in every one's mind was to get to Dr. Smith as quickly as ever they could. Grandfather was thankful for the moonlight that made the way so plain and he drove home the fastest he had ever driven.

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And so they came back from the picnic at Flatrock.

HOME AGAIN

“Would you speak to her, doctor?” asked Mrs. Merrill anxiously.

It was eight o’clock the next morning. They had reached home about an hour after they left Flatrock and fortunately had found Dr. Smith at home. He came at once in answer to their telephone call and was there even before they had Mary Jane undressed and put to bed. He examined her carefully and could find no broken bones and no injury, but still Mary Jane slept on, breathing, but so quietly and unnaturally that she didn’t seem like herself. Her mother and father had stayed by her all the night long; Grandmother, Grandfather and Alice had with difficulty been sent to bed after midnight and Dr. Smith had stayed most of the time.

But when she still didn’t stir the next morning Mrs. Merrill grew more and more anxious.

“I don’t know,” said the doctor doubtfully; “we might try. You speak to her; your voice would be the best.”

Mrs. Merrill bent low over her little girl and whispered, “Mary Jane! Mary Jane! Mother’s here!”

No answer, but Mrs. Merrill thought she saw a quiver on the little girl’s face, so she tried again.

“Mary Jane! Mary Jane! Mother’s here!” she repeated.

“I know,” whispered the little girl; “you com’d to-day,” and she opened her big blue eyes and looked at her mother.

Mrs. Merrill kissed her rapturously and held her close, and Mary Jane raised her arm enough to pat her mother’s shoulder. Then she looked around the room in surprise. “Where’s the moon?” she asked.

“The moon?” said Mrs. Merrill, and the laugh she tried to give with her answer sounded very near tears. “The moon went to sleep a long time ago.”

“And where’s the picnic?” continued Mary Jane wonderingly.

“The picnic was over before you were hurt,” said Mrs. Merrill.

Mary Jane stared at her wide eyed for two or three long minutes. “Don’t talk to her,” whispered Dr. Smith very softly; “let her think it out herself.”

So Mrs. Merrill just held her little girl close and waited.

“Oh, I know!” exclaimed Mary Jane as suddenly she remembered it all, “it came around the corner so fast—something big did, and then I’m here!”

“And lucky you are to be here, young lady,” said Dr. Smith, coming around to where she could see him. “How do you feel?”

“Hungry,” said Mary Jane briefly.

Dr. Smith and Mother laughed so that the others heard them downstairs and came running to hear what the good news could be.

“Is he going to stay for breakfast?” asked Mary Jane as she sat up in bed and pointed to Dr. Smith. “It *is* breakfast time, isn’t it, Grandmother?”

“Bless the child!” exclaimed Grandmother from the doorway, “of course it is! She shall have anything she wants!”

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They could hardly believe their eyes—those five who had seen the accident, but it was true. Mary Jane had not been hurt a bit—not more than a half-dozen scratches—only stunned by her fall. She got up in a few minutes, and with her mother's help (and how good it did seem to have her mother there *to* help) they soon came downstairs to breakfast. Grandmother was so happy and excited that if it hadn't been for the help of Alice, who could always be counted on to be "steady" when there was excitement a-foot, there's no telling what would have happened to that breakfast.

Alice got out the honey and set the extra place for Dr. Smith and cut the melons and brought the eggs to her grandmother. And Grandmother made some of her wonderful griddle cakes and they had a merry feast.

"Aren't you glad that big thing hit me?" asked Mary Jane of Dr. Smith as she passed up her plate for a third (or was it the fourth) helping of cakes, "'cause if it hadn't, you wouldn't have had any of Grandmother's griddle cakes this morning, you wouldn't."

Dr. Smith had to admit that some good comes of everything and that he certainly was glad to get those griddle cakes. "The whole trouble," he added, "was because you didn't take *me* to the picnic—of course that's not a hint!"

They all laughed at that and promised that he should go to the very next picnic they had—the very next.

How the days did fly after that.

Mary Jane would never have supposed that ten days could go so swiftly. They took long rides in the car; had several fine picnics—with Dr. Smith along whenever he could go; went fishing in the river miles away and spent a day on a farm where threshers were working—a wonderful day the girls thought for it was all new to them.

And finally it came time to pack the trunks and start for home.

Mary Jane had hard work deciding what to put in, just as she had had when she packed to come. She wanted to take all the burr houses and green apple dolls they had made; and the ducks and a lot of corn and apples for Doris. She finally agreed that she would leave out all the other things if she could take *one* house of burrs and *one* green apple doll just to show how they were made and then a nice box of red cheeked eating apples to give to her little friend.

It was decided to go home by the day trip. The journey was shorter that way and Alice begged to go at a time when they might eat in the diner. So they took the train at nine in the morning and would reach home in time for dinner that night.

Mary Jane found it very hard to say good-by to Grandmother and Grandfather. She had learned to love them dearly and they had been so good and kind and thoughtful to her

she would never, as long as she lived, forget the happy days she had spent with them. But, nice as it was to go away to visit, it was nicer still to be going home. Home to her own dolls and toys and friends and duties—everything that Mary Jane loved—that is, most everything, for it was hard to leave the lamb and the duck now grown so big and interesting and the baby mice—the new baby mice that had come to the barn loft family.

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She waved good-by to her Grandmother and Grandfather as long as she could see them—which wasn't very long for the train pulled away so quickly from the little station where the Merrills got on; and then she turned to her mother and said, "now let's talk about something quick."

"Very well," said Mrs. Merrill, "I was just wanting to do that. Let's talk about what you are going to do this winter."

"Do this winter?" exclaimed Mary Jane in surprise, "I'm going to do just like I always do. I'm going to play with my dolls and play with Doris and sometimes with Junior and help you and everything like I do, Mother."

"Think so, dear?" asked Mrs. Merrill, "how old are you?"

"I'm five," answered Mary Jane in surprise.

"Five and a little more than a quarter," corrected Mrs. Merrill, "and seems to me that's big enough to be going to kindergarten. What do you think?"

"Oh, is it, Mother?" exclaimed Mary Jane happily, "am I really big enough?"

"I'm afraid my little girl is growing up," said Mrs. Merrill with half a sigh, "and that she ought to go to school. What do you think, Father?"

"I think she'll like it and that she ought to go," said Mr. Merrill promptly; "suppose we start her the first of October?"

So it was settled that Mary Jane was to go to kindergarten. They made plans and talked till the porter came through the car and called, "First call for luncheon! First call for luncheon! Diner in the rear of the train!" And then they all went through the train to the diner and Mary Jane ate her first meal on the train.

And if you want to know about what Mary Jane did after she got home from her summer trip; and about all the fun and good times she had after she started to kindergarten, you must read—

MARY JANE IN KINDERGARTEN