

In a minute, the boys had examined the knots and announced that some seemed harder and smoother than the rest of the wood and some softer and rougher.

"I guess we're on the wrong scent," said Walter.

(I am so tired of telling them not to 'guess' when they ought to 'think,' that I decided it really was a 'guess' this time.)

"Why shouldn't a knotty problem be knotty because it's all tied up?"

"Perhaps," I assented; "involved, intricate, like a knot. Hm! The dictionary or some of the language books may help. I wish you'd find out for me after tea."

Walter was busy cutting a "W"—of course—when Donnie held up a bit of board.

"Look, mummie, the funny holes! The knots came out. They weren't in straight."

"And you haven't found out yet what makes the knots, have you?" I encouraged.

"Why they're—" Walter began, but caught my look and went on with his carving.

"It would be good fun to find out. Walter can help you some. You know where the wood came from?"

"Papa brought it from Jackson's."

Walter gave a chuckle of superiority.

"I s'pose he thinks Jackson put the knots in to fill up holes."

"I don't!"—with a 'punch' at Walter's anatomy.

"What were they doing when you were at Jackson's, Don?" I asked.

"The big saw was making planks out of the logs; and I saw them making boards like these, too."

"Were there knots in the planks and boards then?"

"I don't know. I didn't think about knots then."

"Well, I love to get hold of something I didn't think of before; don't you?" (Silence.)

"Mummie! I know! I know! They're little branches."

"Good for you, son."

"And that big, big one in the plank," (I had noticed him examining one) that was a big branch—the plank was a big tree!"

"And you said these knots were not in straight," I ventured.

The jig-dancing stopped. He poked his fingers into the knotholes again and glanced out at the

bare maples on the lawn. I saw the idea coming, and suggested, "you might put a stick in for a branch."

"They don't go 'zackly like those out there, do they, Mum?"

"Hello! Here you are with your little class intent on its specimens and full of the zeal for experiment!" Don was already hugging his father's knees.

"Go away, you incorrigible pedagogue! The child is just amusing himself," I protested. "Don't, in mercy's name, tell him he's 'studying' anything; you'll spoil the fun."

"Walter had the mats up in the front hall when I came in. I asked if he was house-cleaning, and he said, 'Dad, hardwood has no knots in it, has it?' 'Can't you find any?' said I. 'But hardwood trees have branches' he was debating when I came out."

"Walter must be on a separate hunt of his own," I laughed. "Donnie has an idea that he could tell what kind of trees these boards were by the angle of the knots, the way they're arranged, and all that. I'm sure I couldn't."

Here Walter burst out with, "I know, muz! The hardwood branches are so high up—and there's no balsam in the knots, either!"

I saw from this disconnected jargon what he had been thinking out, but my leisure time was all spent, for that afternoon.

"It will do you good," I advised the pedagogue, "to go with them up to the woods before tea. Take Milly too; she has been at that piano over an hour."

I longed to go with them and follow up the discoveries. I am densely ignorant about these dear, out-of-door things, having had the misfortune to spend my childhood in a city.

"I'd think," said Walter, picking up one of the pieces of board, "that the knots would be only in the outside of a log, but *all* these boards can't be from the outside."

"You mean because the branches are all on the outside of the trunk?"

"Yes. At least—*do* they come from away inside?"

"It does look like it; but I never thought of it that way. You can easily find out next time you are at the mill."

"You'd hardly think, Muz, that a tree was planning, years ahead, what branches it was going to have, would you?"