

STORIES
POETRY

The Inglenook

SKETCHES
TRAVEL

REEBIE'S CALL.

"O Dearest, can't I please!"
"Why, Reebie, girl!"

Dearest stopped arranging the freshly ironed white dress on the clothes horse. The "washer-lady" was sick and Dearest was ironing just what was most necessary, though she was still white and weak from a long illness.

"Dearest, I'll be so, so careful!"

"But to-morrow is Children's Day, girlie, and if you should get it mussed or soiled—"

"No, I really and truly won't! I'll sit just as still, like you and Tante."

Dearest still hesitated. Sending a little girl to visit a playmate in a crisp white gown which she must have smooth and clean next day, was not the kindest thing—to the gown. But as Reebie had explained, this was "such a very special occasion" and she had promised to be careful.

"And my blue ribbons?" she pleaded as she danced upstairs behind her mother. "I s'pose I ought to have a card case, too. I wrote me some cards." She brought out a half dozen squares of white card board on which she had written in a careful jiggly hand:

MISS REEBIE MORRIS,

891 Walnut Street.

Any day.

"You see," she explained, "I couldn't put on it 'Thursday' or any other 'special day, because there might be a picnic or a party and I shouldn't like to have to stay at home. Do you think this will do?"

"Very nicely," Dearest answered heartily, "and the little blue velvet hand-bag which Tante gave you at Christmas time will make a beautiful card case. See, it matches your ribbons. There," she slipped the elastic band of the "Rosie" hat under Reebie's plump chin and took down the blue, pink-edged parasol. "Now, you won't forget, Reebie? I know I ought not to allow you to wear that dress to-day, and you must be careful."

"Dearest, I am sure I can keep it as fresh as it is now," Reebie said earnestly, as holding herself and her parasol very straight, she turned down Elm-road to the home of Mary Bowman, her "very best friend."

Mary lived at the edge of the village on a big farmlike place. Reebie usually ran every step of the way over there so as not to waste any unnecessary minute of the two short play hours. But to-day, she walked up the steps most sedately.

"Is Miss Mary at home?" she asked politely, as Mrs. Bowman came to the door.

Mrs. Bowman smiled; "Yes, I think so, won't you come in?"

Reebie spread her stiffly starched short skirts carefully from under her and sat down on the edge of the hair-cloth sofa, looking very like a great white toad stool. Hair cloth sofas and cotton skirts are both slippery, so she braced her feet against the bright green castle tower in the carpet.

Mary was slow about coming; Reebie felt that this was not wholly polite. Dearest and Tante always hurried in when anyone called. But then, they did not have all the wonderful creatures of the barn and meadow to leave. At the thought of them, Reebie sighed and began to wish that she had come over to play instead of call. She did not dare even get up and look at the curious shells and cups, because she felt that Dearest would not do such a thing when she went calling.

When Mary appeared at last, she seemed unhappy, but she shook hands gravely and then both sat down.

"I've come to call on you," Reebie finally explained. It was strange how one forgets all the interesting and important things which fairly said themselves when you were playing.

"Mother told me I'd better change my dress," Mary answered in the kind of voice her mother used with strangers; "and put on shoes and stockings; but I never guessed you'd come this way."

There was a touch of disgust in her tone.

Reebie was troubled. Calling was not such very good fun after all and grown people must be very dull to enjoy it as they seemed to be. But now that she had begun she would not give up. "You look very nice," she said politely, remembering what Tante had said when Mrs. Jameson apologized for her dress.

"It's more fun," Mary said a little crossly, for she thought Reebie's new play stupid.

Just then a bright idea occurred to her. "Wouldn't you like to see my kittens?" she asked eagerly. "They are in the barn. John found them yesterday."

Reebie's eyes brightened. Her heels ached dreadfully, and the green tower seemed to get further and further away, while the Bowman barn was the most fascinating place that Reebie knew, with the hidden nests in the hay and the white grunting pigs which stuck funny wiggly noses between the bars, for the bit of sorrel or pig weed you offered them. To these was now added the superlative charm of four kittens. But Reebie was not easily turned aside from what she had set out to do. She pushed herself back on the sofa with weary determination.

"But I'm calling on you, Mary." There was reproach in her voice.

"Miss Richards called on mamma, Wednesday, and she went to see the new well-house," Mary argued.

Reebie took a long breath. "Well, if Miss Richards did that I s'pose it must be polite. But I guess I'd better leave my card first."

O those sprawly, pink-nosed, blind mites! Reebie hung her bag, parasol and hat on the apple tree bough and cuddled the babies, forgetful of social duties, until Mamma Rosananti put an impatient paw on her knee.

"She thinks they are huns—" Mary interpreted. "We'll have to carry them back. Then we'll go down to the swamp."

"Oh, Mary! Reebie cried, then she looked down at her dress.

"It won't hurt that," Mary said, "any more than walking home would. You could take it off and put on one of my aprons, but it will be just as well to pin it up when we get into the meadow if we need to. And if it does get mussed a bit, you can iron it out. Mother always does mine. You can leave your slippers and stockings in the hollow oak at the end of the cow lane."

Reebie's eyes were like stars with excitement. She had never been down in a swamp and it was just like a story book to go down alone with Mary—and Reebie loved to do things like a story book. Still she hesitated, for Dearest had asked her to be careful.

Mary grew impatient. "I should think you might trust me," she said, "especially when I have been down there so many times. We'll come back whenever you want to. Come."

Reebie followed slowly. Of course a promise was a promise, but how could she muss her dress if she just walked along?

When they reached the bars, Reebie

took off her shoes and stockings, stuck a stocking into each shoe just as story boys do when they go fishing or swimming, then, spreading her skirts smoothly down around her as Mary directed, she rolled under the fence after her.

Poor Reebie's punishment, however, began before she had taken a half dozen steps, for though the first field was a fairly smooth sheep pasture over which Mary ran easily enough, to Reebie's soft feet which had never felt anything rougher than a carpet before, it was covered with a hundred prickly things which grew to knives when they rolled under a second fence into an old corn field.

Reebie shut her lips to a little red line and ran first on her heels and then on her toes. When, however, they started to climb a rough log, "horse and rider" fence, a groan escaped her in spite of herself, as the bark scratched her already blistered legs and feet.

Mary stopped astride the top log. "It's just because you aren't used to it," she explained. "It always hurts me the first time in the spring. But we'll come to a brook as soon as we are across this field and then you'll be all right."

That next field. It was full of stubble and cut Reebie's bleeding feet. Fortunately, the broadest pasture has its fence and presently they rolled under it and almost into a cold little stream.

Reebie could never forget how good that cold water felt if she lived to be a hundred years old. But Mary did not let her stay there long for a moment she was racing down the hill.

"There's the loveliest big mud hole there, next to the river, that'll be ever so much better for your feet than that," she called back.

So Reebie stumbled out across the swamp bottom, rough with the great snaky roots of the tamarack, from which the flood had washed away the earth.

"But my dress, Mary?" She stuck a toe into the mud and then drew back.

Mary laughed. "Why, you goosie, the bottom of it is a foot and a half above the mud. See, I'll pin it clear up. Now you can't get on a single bit, possibly."

Um! that mud did feel good to Reebie's hot, aching feet. Besides it was great fun to sink the foot clear in and then draw it out with a smacking sound.

"What a lot of nice things you know, Mary," Reebie exclaimed admiringly, as she followed her further and further in. The mud was at last half way up to their knees. Then they stood still listening to the river and watching a scarlet tanager and his wife bathe in a tiny pool under some ferns. Reebie felt sure it was the most beautiful, romantic thing she had ever done.

All at once, however, Mary gave a little scream, "It's a crawfish. He's pinched my toe. Oo-oo-oo!"

Reebie turned pale, for suddenly the whole ground seemed the hiding place of dreadful squirming, pinching creatures. She turned to get out, but the mud had been busy sucking her feet further down than she had realized and she could not draw them out. She pulled once, twice,—

"Oh!" Down she sat with a great splash.

Mary, more used to the mud, was almost not, but when she saw Reebie, she too, lost her balance. Fortunately the crawfish had loosened his grip in the pull through the mud and now