

"It's all very nice, and rather like a fairy tale. I mean a sort of fairy palace, where everything is made of silver and crystal, and things are done for you, you don't know how," said Christabel, as they pursued their way. "Only it makes one just a little afraid of the sound of one's own voice, and I don't feel quite as if I knew what to say or do. It's just a little bit like a bad dream sometimes, when one can't breathe freely, you know, and then I wish I were at home with father and mother; but it's amusing to hear people talk, and it will be great fun telling them all about it when we do get back. But a fortnight is a long time—at least it seems so now."

"Time will go more quickly when we get used to things," answered Gertrude wisely. "I know just what you mean, Chriss; but I'm sure Mrs. Chesterton is very kind, and, if we may take walks together and amuse ourselves as we like, we shall quite enjoy it after a little bit. But we must take care of our dresses and things, for you know we have not got very many, and mother would not like us to go about looking dirty or dragged. We can't be grand or fine, and it would not be suitable to try; but we can be neat and clean and fresh—so please be careful to keep so."

This bit of advice was not altogether superfluous, for Miss Chrissie was fond of rollicking about in a fashion that left speedy traces on her attire. At home this did not much matter, as she would take her rambles in an old frock that wanted no saving; but it certainly would not do to submit the pretty, dainty morning-dresses they had made for "visiting," to any such rough treatment, and Chrissie recognized this herself with a little sigh.

"Visiting is certainly a doubtful joy," she remarked, and Gertrude laughed at her sorrowful look.

Nevertheless, the sisters enjoyed their morning ramble very much; indeed they enjoyed it so much that they rather overlooked the time, and being used to an eight o'clock breakfast, forgot what a difference it made to the length of the morning when that once Gertrude looked at her watch, to find that it was just one, and they were, they knew, a long way from the house. The thought of being late for lunch after what Mrs. Chesterton said was dreadful.

"We must find a nearer way back," said Chrissie, with decision. "If we go through the wood we shall cut off a long piece. The road has made two sides of a triangle. Come along, I will take you. You know I never lose my bearings. It is all Mr. Chesterton's property—we shall not be trespassing. They said we might go anywhere we liked."

Thus urged, Gertrude gave way, though a little against her better judgment; for she was afraid the woods might be wet and brambly, and she had a suspicion that "short cuts" sometimes proved treacherous. However, Chrissie had a capital "bump of locality," and the wood was very pretty and pleasant that bright September day, and certainly they got over the ground very fast.

"I'm sure we are nearly back at the lodge!—we shall be in time after all!" cried Chrissie eagerly—when a few minutes later they were brought up short by an obstacle they had never dreamed of. To be sure, it was only a narrow little stream, a stream that a good wide jump would clear. Chrissie could have taken it herself a year or two back, when she was in the happy stage of "short petticoats;" but she knew it was beyond her present powers, and, besides, the ground beyond was soft and boggy with the recent heavy rains. A jump across would be fatal to the pretty dresses of which such care must be taken, the stream looked hopelessly late, and to turn back would make Mr. Chesterton, of whom they stood in wholesome awe. What was to be done? It was a regular dilemma.

"Oh, dear! oh, dear!" cried Chrissie. "What is to become of us now?"

"Anything the matter, ladies?" asked a pleasant voice behind. They turned quickly, to see a tall, broad-shouldered young fellow, in a grey knickerbocker suit, standing a few paces behind them, with a friendly smile in his frank grey eyes.

"Oh, ah! you want to get across. Let me see, I think we ought to manage that," he looked quickly about him here and there, and then took a flying leap, and recommenced his search on the opposite side of the stream.

"Ah, here we are!" he said at last, and appeared the next moment lugging with him a long deal plank, which he dexterously ran across from bank to bank.

"You see, it's always across the brook in winter; but in any ordinary summer there's no water here, and so it gets kicked on one side. These ridiculous summer rains we've had have filled the stream; but no one seems to have had the sense to put the plank across. It's quite steady. I'll keep my foot on it. One at a time. There! that is all right. Here we are, safe and sound!"

"I am sure we are very much obliged to you," said Gertrude. "We were in a great difficulty, for time is pressing."

"We have to be back for lunch, and I'm afraid I shall be late now," added Chrissie, as they hastened along. "You seem to know this part of the country. Can you please tell us if it is far from here to the Chase. I think they call it—Mr. Chesterton's house?"

"Are you for the Chase? That's jolly! So am I! If you'll come with me, I'll show you a short cut that will take us there in no time. Mrs. Chesterton is my aunt. I often run across and see her when I have an odd week to spare. I'm quite the son of the house, y' u'll find"—he laughed in his pleasant, frank fashion—"but I don't remember seeing you there before though."

"No, this is our first visit. We only arrived last

night. That is why we are so horribly afraid of being late!" answered Chrissie with equal frankness.

He laughed as he led the way onward with rapid steps.

"Oh, there's nothing to be afraid of. The old boy's bark is worse than his bite, and my aunt never scolds. Besides, we shall be in lots of time. I'll take care it's all right."

"Oh, I don't care a bit now we have a companion in distress," cried Chrissie. "They will be much too busy greeting you to think of our misdeeds."

Somehow, the appearance on the scene of some young creature of their own generation made a vast difference in the feelings of the two girls; it was reassuring and cheering, and being used to the society of big brothers, they felt at home with this stranger from the first.

It was plain that he was a great favorite at the Chase. His arrival there was hailed with the warmest welcomes, and the hosts and guests alike combined to make much of "Donald." There was nothing oppressive in the atmosphere now, as the girls quickly discovered. Donald got up a "four," and they played tennis all the afternoon, and when tea was over he took them out on the lake in the punt to see the moon rise.

After dinner he instituted games and music, and was the life and soul of the party; but naturally he and the two sisters, being the only young people of the company, drew together by mutual affinity—and not only that night, but during the following days. He attended them frequently on their walks, taught them the mysteries of all sorts of indoor games on wet afternoons, and got up tennis matches on fine ones, making their visit to the "grand house" altogether a different thing. A fortnight did not seem at all a long time to look forward to now. Indeed, Chrissie sometimes expressed a doubt as to whether she should feel ready to return home when the appointed day came.

CHAPTER THE SECOND.

One of the pleasures provided by kind Mrs. Chesterton for her two guests was the use of a little village-cart, and a steady pony to draw it. Both girls could drive, and it was very pleasant, when nothing more attractive offered, to go out in the cart and explore the country for themselves.

Donald had been requested to go out with his gun and try to exterminate from a certain piece of land the rabbits, who were suffering from fleas owing to the wet season, and were in danger of infecting the sheep; and his mornings were not always his own, and when he went out shooting, the girls generally took a drive.

They were walking the pony along a narrow, rough lane one day, when the sudden sound of a gun startled them, or, to speak the truth, it was the report that startled them, but the sudden exclamation that followed it. The sisters looked at each other, and Chrissie turned white.

"It was Mr. Ross-Lewin's voice. Oh! Gerty, can anything have happened?"

"Perhaps I had better go and see," said Gertrude quietly. "It may be nothing; but—"

"Oh, do go! I am sure something has happened. I will wait for you here."

Gertrude was far more useful on an emergency than her younger sister, for she never lost her self-control. She left the road, climbed the bank, and got through the hedge—it was no time to think of pretty frocks now—and hardly had she done so before she saw Donald Ross-Lewin leaning against a gate some twenty yards away, his face very pale, and blood streaming from his left hand, which he was trying to bind up. In a moment she was by his side.

"Can I help you?"

"Miss Denzil! Well, I am in luck! Only it's too bad to ask you to do anything so disagreeable. Oh, thanks! You understand this kind of thing better than I do. How clever you are!—an old hand at surgery, evidently. I'm awfully sorry to be such a nuisance."

"How did it happen? Are you much hurt?"

"Not more than I deserve, I dare say, for my carelessness. Gun went off as I got over the gate. I thought it was only on half-cock. There's a good bit of the charge lodged in there"—indicating his hand. "I suppose I'd best go off to some surgeon and have it looked to."

"We have got the pony-cart close by," said Gertrude. "We will drive you."

"Will you really? That is good of you. A friend in need, you know."

"That is what you were to us when we met you first. One good turn deserves another."

The nearest doctor lived about two miles away, and luckily they found him at home, just about to start off on his rounds. He was a clever, but somewhat rough-and-ready kind of man, and, when he heard what was amiss, he at once demanded that one of the young man's "sisters" should come to the surgery too.

"I've no one on the place—my lad's out, and so is my wife. I shall want some help, and whichever of you two has the best nerve, come along with your brother."

"These ladies are not my sisters," said Donald hastily. "You must manage alone. They have kindly brought me to your door; but we must not detain them longer."

"Humph!" grunted the old man. "Seems to me they'll have to stay and drive you back. You don't suppose you'll be fit to walk, do you?"

Chrissie had cast a frightened, imploring look at Gertrude, who answered it by descending from the cart with a quietly resolute air.

"I will come with you," she said, "and my sister will wait with the pony. I understand enough of surgery, I think, to be of a little use."

"Sensible girl! sensible girl!" muttered the old doctor, and, disregarding Donald's remonstrances, Gertrude followed him to his surgery.

Chrissie was left a long time alone; but at last her companions returned, both of them looking very pale, though Donald tried to make light of the whole thing, and was only vexed that the girls should have been "let in" for anything so unpleasant.

Great consternation reigned at the Chase when it became known that Donald had met with a disabling accident; and great praise was bestowed upon the two girls who had shown so much sense and presence of mind. The doctor who came on later in the day to see how his case was going, spoke plainly as to the danger there might have been if the injury had not been promptly looked to, and openly wished that all girls had the sense and calmness and gentleness of Gertrude Denzil.

Donald had no idea of playing the invalid, and appeared at the dinner-table with his arm in a sling. Gertrude sat next him, still almost as pale as himself, and much less disposed for food. He saw this, and presently said in a low voice—

"I'm so sorry about this morning! It has quite upset you."

"No indeed. It is silly of me to keep thinking of it. But I never saw anyone shot before; and it might have been so much worse."

"Would you have cared if it had been?"

"Of course I should have cared," she glanced up at him as she spoke, and then suddenly dropped her eyes. A deep flush suffused her face, but she could hardly have told what brought it there.

"I never thanked you for all your kindness," said Donald, in a low voice. "I'm a dreadfully bad hand at that kind of thing; but, indeed, it made all the difference having you there."

When the gentlemen rejoined the ladies in the drawing-room, Donald gave one hasty look round, and then walked to the open window and stepped out on to the paved walk beneath the verandah.

"Ought he to go out?" said one kind old lady, with an anxious look at their hostess. "Young people are so rash. They never think of chills, and so on; but erysipelas so often follows gun-shot wounds if the cold gets at them. Do you not think he should come in?"

But Mrs. Chesterton leaned forward with a mysterious look on her face, and spoke in a whisper that expressed volumes of meaning—

"Ah, don't be cruel to the poor boy! Indeed, he will take no harm, for it is as warm as summer; and he is aching to have it out—one can see that at a glance."

"Oh!" breathed the old lady, nodding her head with a look of great wisdom. "So that is how the land lies, is it?"

A week later Gertrude and Chrissie had returned to their pleasant country home. The tribe of brothers and sisters were enchanted to have them back, and, if Gertrude was a little more silent than was her wont, the younger sister made up for it by her endless flow of exuberant spirits. The number of stories she had to tell seemed exhaustless—the little ones were never tired of listening.

The story of the first walk and the last drive they had taken were always the favorites, and "Donald," as the children persisted in calling him, was quite a hero.

"Chrissie! Chrissie!" cried young Roland, in wild excitement, rushing up the long garden-path to the summer-house at the end. "There's a gentleman just come to see papa; and he's got a yellow mustache and grey eyes, and his hand in a sling—and oh, I do believe it's Donald!"

A laughing look crept over Chrissie's face as she bent over her work.

"Well, I really should not wonder if it were."

The children went back to their tasks, and Roland pranced up and down the path in restless excitement; but Flossie, the next sister below Chrissie, pressed up to her and said in a whisper—

"Do tell me why he's come; I'm sure you know."

"I don't, I only guess."

"Please tell me what you guess—just whisper."

Chrissie laughed, and leaned her head towards Flossie's.

"I guess he's come to ask papa for Gerty—for the loan of her for good and all."

Flossie's eyes were round with wonder.

"Does he want to marry her? Oh Chrissie!—wouldn't that be romantic! What will papa say?"

"That remains to be proved, my dear; but I almost think he may say 'Yes.' You see, he and mamma are fond of saying that 'Mr. Ross-Lewin was very kind to their little girls,' and you know, 'one good turn deserves another!'"

English family of tourists visiting Zoological Garden, New York.

Sister—"What a fine large 'en?"

Brother—"It's not an 'en, it's a 'awk."

Mother—"It's not a 'en, nor a 'awk. It's a howl."

Father—"It's neither a 'en, a 'awk, nor a howl. It's a heagle, the hembler of this blawsted country."

A letter with the following address has just been sent to the Dead Letter Office at Washington:

Sylvester Brown, a web-faced scrub,

To whom this letter wants to go,

Is chopping cordwood for his grub

In Silver City, Idaho,