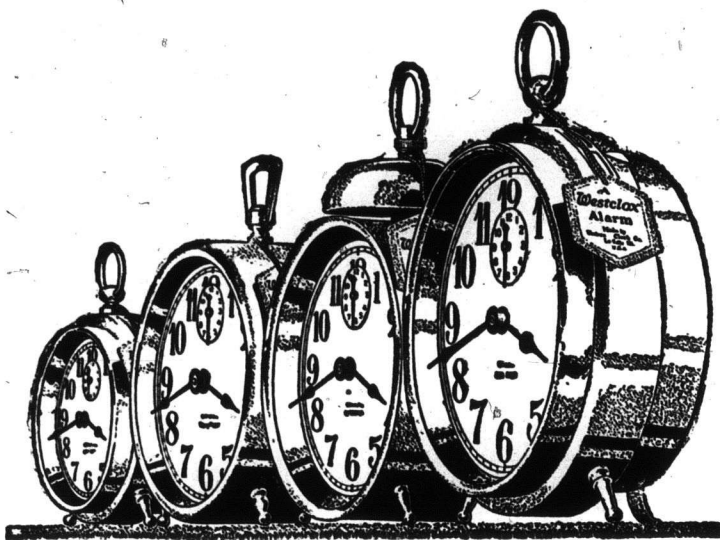




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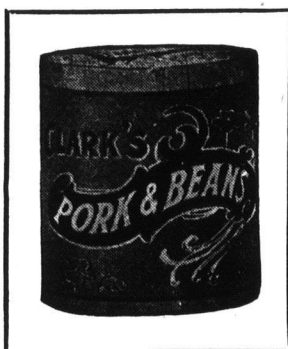
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"She hunched herself into a defiant little heap. 'Hateful ole thing!' sh whispered."

Goldilocks

By Lucille Baldwin Van Slyks

LILLY and the twins and Rosa rushed noisily in from school crying variously, "Want a doughnut!" "Doughnuts! Doughnuts!" and "Mayn't I have a raisin-cooky?"

"Wait a minute," laughed Mrs. Remson. "You haven't any of you said a word to Aunt Vance."

The four faces sobered instantly. "Halloo," said the twins, dimly.

"How d'you do?" asked Rosa, shyly, as she drew nearer and held out her thin little hand. Aunt Remson smiled, the gentle smile she unconsciously reserved for her motherless niece.

"My land," wheezed Aunt Vance, "this child gets more pindling all the time. William, even if he is a boy, has got more fat on his bones than she has."

"I weight seventy-nine pounds," chanted Billy, proudly, "and I grew four inches just this last year."

"Sounded like it when you come up the steps," responded his aunt, dryly.

"Now can I have a doughnut?" he demanded, turning to his mother.

"Do you think it's good for them to eat between meals?" put in Aunt Vance.

"They do get so hungry," murmured Mrs. Remson. "Meg's doughnuts never seem to hurt anyone, either."

"Well, I think all sweets are bad," sighed Aunt Vance, putting her hand to her cushiony side. "Doctor Flannery has positively forbid my touching them."

Rosa, rummaging in the cooky jar a moment later, peered naughtily across the lid at her cousins.

"Doc-tor Flummerty has pos-i-tively forbid," she mimicked, closing her eyes and sighing melodramatically.

"Gosh, but I hate Aunt Vance," sputtered Billy, his mouth full of doughnut. "She makes me think of mush."

Rosa shivered. "I'm glad my this year's stay is over there," she sighed, "only Ann Mary is nice. I love her Ann Mary. You'd like Ann Mary, Billy, for she makes the grandest apple pie."

"Shouldn't," snapped Billy, "shouldn't like any place nur anybody where Aunt Vance was."

"I shouldn't," decided the blue-eyed twin, "I shouldn't, either."

The brown-eyed one giggled. "I should," she insisted, impishly, "I certainly should."

"You should not," shrieked the other as they chased madly from the pantry. "You should not," her thin voice screamed "cause you're my twin and you couldn't."

"Could!" taunted the other from the grape-arbor fence. Billy and Rosa sauntered forth to watch the combat.

"What are you hanging round here for?" asked Rosa curiously as she nibbled close to the raisin.

"Crowd's gone to Bat Weaver's," he responded, laconically.

"Play hy-spy if I get enough kids?" demanded Rosa.

Billy considered, loftily. He hated playing with girls: it was only a little better than not playing at all. But in view of his recent difficulties with Bat Weaver he could not consistently enter into the neighborhood revelries, so when she had rounded up the twins, the three Schuyler girls, and the boy who had

just moved across the street, he consented to "count out" with a glib twisting of the mystic formula that elected the new boy "it." Rosa wriggled breathlessly through the cellar window to a snug nook under the side veranda. As she squirmed close to the lattice to peer out at the new boy, who was chanting monotonously "forty-fi-an-fifty-fifty-fi-an-sixty—" she observed that his half-shut eyes were slyly searching the landscape.

"O-oo-ooh, the little cheat," she thought, disgustedly. "Wait till I tell Bill on him."

Above her she could hear the creaking of Aunt Vance's rocker. Her dolorous voice sounded disagreeably clear above the creaking.

"You ought to put a stop to her stromping around so," said the lady, severely. "She isn't allowed to romp around so at my house; to my mind thirteen is altogether too big for such goings on." Rosa stuck out her tongue in the darkness. But she grinned when she heard Aunt Remson's laugh.

"She's just a little girl, really," said Aunt Remson. "I haven't the heart to stop her fun, Kate, I simply haven't. Did you notice what beautiful manners she has? Didn't she greet you nicely?" Rosa's head lifted proudly.

"Huh, manners is all that ever will be beautiful about her," grunted Aunt Vance. "My land, I never saw such a limpsey-looking child anywhere. She certainly don't get her plain looks from the Stephenson side, and I will say her mother was right pretty whatever else she was. It's a mystery to me how she can be so downright homely."

"Just growing fast," said Aunt Remson, lightly. "She has lovely eyes and I think she will be a great deal prettier in a year or so."

"Pretty!" snapped her sister-in-law. "That gawky little thing pretty! Don't be such a fool, Jane. I said to Ben when I sent her on to you last month that it was no wonder to me Frederick didn't mind not seeing her more'n twice a year. She just gets on my nerves. I could stand her staring eyes and her pindlingness—but that hair! Just stringy-looking I call it—you can't even braid it smooth. Put it in one braid and it's crooked—two of 'em simply look like rat-tails."

Rosa's hand was over her mouth smothering an impulsive gasp of protest as she hunched herself into a defiant little heap behind the lattice. "Hateful ole thing!" she whispered, hotly. "She's jus' stringy-looking, too! Ole, fat, bunchy-looking stringy! Don't care at all, I don't!"

But she yanked a slender braid over her shoulder and eyed it curiously. It was undeniably limp and t.in. The anger died in her great eyes and she stared, bewildered. She was quite unconscious of Aunt Remson's eager defense. She did not see the new boy peering through the lattice; she hardly heard him whooping joyously a moment later: "Touched the bye for Rosie! Yah, she's it!"

She pulled herself wearily through the cellar window, crawled up the stairs and cut onto the back veranda.

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