

Blanchard Amy Ella

A Dear Little Girl at School



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CHAPTER I

COUSIN BEN

Edna and Cousin Ben Barker were on the back porch. It was a favorite place, for it was always shady there in summer and out of the wind on cold days. If big Cousin Ben did not always like to be where Edna was, on the other hand Edna invariably sought out Cousin Ben if he were to be found about the premises.

On this special afternoon he was doing something to his wheel, getting it in order for a long ride which he had planned for the next day. Edna stood watching him, ready to hand a tool or run for a piece of rag to be used in cleaning, or to fill the oil can from the bottle on the shelf upstairs.

"Where are you going to-day, Cousin Ben?" Edna always asked this for Cousin Ben's replies were generally so funny.

"I'm going to the woods," he said, "to see Johnny-jump-up."

"Why will he jump up?" asked Edna in pleased expectancy of something amusing.

"Because the dog-wood bark, you know."

"I know dog-wood blossoms," returned Edna a little doubtfully.

"Of course, and I dare say you know the dog-wood bark, too, don't you?"

"Ye-es, I suppose so."

Cousin Ben went on burnishing the metal he was at work upon. "You see," he continued after a moment, "the catkins will all be out and when I meet one I shall say, 'Pussy, will oh, will you tell me the way to the elder Berries.'"

"What do you suppose she will say?" inquired Edna settling herself well content to continue this sort of talk, though thinking it was scarcely the season for Pussy-willows.

"She will say: 'The elder Berry? My dear boy, any dog ought to know the way there.' You see she knows I am a Barker."

Edna laughed. "Go on."

"And I will say, 'Yes, madam, but that sassy Fras always tries to get in my path. It is a very easy matter to whip poor Will, but sassy Fras is another matter.' Then she will ask: 'Did you ever try to haze L. Nutt?' and I will reply, 'Chestnuts!' for I don't like to talk about hazing, being in a position to expect a little of it any day. Well, Ande, I must be off or I will find Pip's sis away." Cousin Ben always called Edna Ande because he declared that was what her name really was but had been turned hind side before. Some persons, Edna's sister Celia and Agnes Evans, for instance, called Cousin Ben a very silly boy, but Edna thought his kind of nonsense great fun.

It was an afternoon in autumn. For some time past, Edna and her sister had been going into the city to school every day, but this was the last week when this would be done, for after this they would go only on Mondays returning on Fridays till the days became long again. During the winter when it was still dark at seven in the morning, and when the afternoons were so short, it had seemed better that they should not come home every day. Therefore, as Aunt Elizabeth Horner and Uncle Justus wanted much to have them remain, it was so arranged. Edna was a great favorite with her Uncle Justus, for she had spent the winter previous at his house and had gone to his school. Then, on account of Mr. Conway's business, the family had removed from the town in which they had formerly lived and had taken a house a little out of the city.

Like most children Edna loved the country and was glad of the change. A little further up the road lived her friend Dorothy Evans and her sister Agnes, the latter was a little older than Edna's sister Celia. All four girls attended Uncle Justus' school and so did Margaret MacDonald, the adopted daughter of good Mrs. MacDonald who lived in the big gray stone house with the lovely grounds. Margaret was having a pretty hard time of it, as she had never had much opportunity of going to school and was far behind the girls of her own age. Edna and Dorothy were her staunch defenders, however and when matters came to a too difficult pass the older girls were appealed to and could always straighten out whatever was wrong. Frank and Charlie, Edna's brothers, were almost too large for Uncle Justus' school, where only little fellows went, so they went elsewhere to the school which Roger and Steve Porter attended. It was Cousin Ben's first year at college, and he was housed at the Conways, his mother being an elder sister of Edna's mother.

After seeing Cousin Ben start off, Edna left the porch and stood for a moment thinking what she would do next. This being the last time she would be at home for the entire week, she concluded she ought to make the most of it, but first she must get together such things as she should want for Monday. "Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday afternoons, and Monday, too. There are only four, after all," she said, counting the days on her fingers. "It seems very much longer when you first think of it." And then, as she continued to think, to her surprise she discovered that only Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays would be the entire days she would spend away from home.

She was so interested in having found this out that she ran upstairs to her mother, to tell of it. "Mother," she said, "I have made a discovery."

"You have, and what is it?" said Mrs. Conway.

"Why, here I've been thinking I'd be away from you the whole week all but Saturday and Sunday, and now I find out I shall see you every day but three, 'cause, you know, I don't start till after breakfast on Monday, so that's one day. Then Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday I don't see you, but I get back in time for dinner on Friday, so there is Friday, Saturday and Sunday, three more days. Isn't it fine?"

"Very, I think."

"And the funny part is," Edna went on busily thinking, "I am at school five days out of the seven. It's almost like a puzzle, isn't it? I think I shall take Ada with me and leave her there. She is used to it, and won't mind as much as some of the other dolls, for she was there all last year and besides, Aunt Elizabeth gave her to me. Aunt Elizabeth is quite kind sometimes, isn't she?"

"She means to be kind all the time, but she has rather a stern manner."

"Did you used to be afraid of her when you were a little girl?"

"No, honey, because I didn't know her. She is your papa's aunt, you know."

"And he told me he didn't see much of her, for he lived in quite another place, and I suppose by the time he grew up he wasn't afraid of anybody. Well, anyhow, I'm glad it won't be 'butter or molasses' all the week."

"What do you mean, dearie?"

"Why, you know we couldn't have both and there were never any preserves. Sometimes there were stewed apples, the dried kind, and they were not so very bad when they were sweet enough and had a lot of lemon flavor in them. I used to ask Ellen to do them that way and she always would, except when Aunt Elizabeth was in the kitchen and then she had to do as Aunt Elizabeth told her. If you have more preserves than you can use, don't you think you could send her some, mother? You see we shall not be here to eat them, Celia and I, and you won't have to use so many."

"That is an idea. Why, yes, I can send some in every week when you go, and Celia can tell Aunt Elizabeth to have them for your supper."

"How will she tell her?" asked Edna, feeling that this was an ordeal that she would not like to go through.

“Why, it will be very easy to say, ‘Aunt Elizabeth, here are some preserves mother thought would be nice for supper to-night.’ Don’t you think that would be easy to say?”

“Ye-es,” returned Edna a little doubtful if this would have the proper effect. “I think myself it would be better to let Ellen have them or Uncle Justus.”

Her mother laughed. Edna’s awe of Aunt Elizabeth was so very apparent.

“There is one thing I wish you would promise,” the little girl went on, “and that is, that you will always have hot cakes on Saturday mornings so I can have butter and syrup both.”

“I promise,” replied her mother smiling.

“I know Louis is mighty glad not to be going back,” Edna continued, “and I’m rather glad he isn’t myself, for this year I shall have Celia.”

“I thought you were fond of Louis.”

“I am pretty fond of him, but I’d rather have girls about all the time than boys all the time. Girls fuss with you, of course. They get mad and won’t speak, but I’d liefer they’d do that than try to boss you the way boys do. Mother, there is another thing I wish you would do, and that is I wish you would tell Aunt Elizabeth that she will please let Dorothy come to play with me sometimes. Dorothy is my particular friend, you know, and Aunt Elizabeth will never allow me to have her visit me unless you say she can.”

“Did she never allow you to have company last winter?”

Edna shook her head and a sigh escaped her.

“I will arrange that Dorothy shall come,” said her mother quite firmly.

“It’s going to be much nicer than last year,” remarked Edna in a satisfied tone, “for I shall always have Celia to go to, and you will be so near, too, and besides I like Uncle Justus much better than I did at first.”

“Of the two I should think you would have more fear of Uncle Justus than of Aunt Elizabeth,” said her mother looking down at her.

“I did at first, but I found it was mostly on account of his eyebrows; they are so shaggy.”

Mrs. Conway smiled. “I have heard it said that he can be rather terrible,” she remarked.

“Oh, well, so he can, but he isn’t all the time and Aunt Elizabeth is.”

“I hope this year you will find out that it is only Aunt Elizabeth’s eyebrows, too.”

“It couldn’t be, for she hasn’t any to speak of,” returned Edna. As she talked she was carefully packing the little trunk in which Ada’s clothes were kept. It was a tiny trunk, only about six inches long. Aunt Elizabeth had made it, herself, by covering a box with leather and strapping the leather across with strips of wood glued on. Edna liked the trunk much better than a larger one which had been bought at the store. Aunt Elizabeth was very clever in making things of this kind and would sometimes surprise her little niece with some home-made gift which was the more prized because it was unusual. The child remembered this now and began to feel that she had not shown herself very grateful in speaking as she had done a moment before. “Mother,” she said. “I didn’t mean that Aunt Elizabeth was frightful all the time. She is very kind when she gives me things like this trunk.”

“You don’t mean frightful,” replied Mrs. Conway laughing, “you mean she is rather formidable.”

But that was too much of a word for Edna, though she did not say so. Having stowed away Ada’s belongings, three frocks, two petticoats, a red hood and sacque, a blue dressing-gown and apron, she shut the lid. “I don’t think I’ll take her furs this week because she’ll not need them,” she remarked, “and I don’t think I will take any of my other dolls because I will be so glad to see them next Friday. Mother, if you come into town any time during the week will you come out to see us?”

“If I have time I certainly shall.”

Edna gave a sigh of content. It was surely going to be much better than last year. “Mother,” she said, changing the subject, “do you think Cousin Ben is silly?”

“He can be rather silly but he can also be very sensible. He is silly only when he wants to tease or when he wants to amuse a little girl I know.”

“I like his silly better than some of the big girls’s sillies. They giggle so much and aren’t funny at all. I think he is very funny. He says such queer things about the trees and plants in the woods. He twists their names around so they mean something else. Like the dog-wood, bark, you know. Mother, what is hazing?”

“It is the kind of thing the college boys do to those in a lower class; they play tricks on them which sometimes are really very cruel.”

“Do you mean they really hurt them?”

“Sometimes they hurt them very much. I knew of one young man who was forced into a pond of water on an icy day in the fall, and who nearly died of pneumonia in consequence of the cold he took from having to be in his wet clothes so long.”

“Do you think they will do anything like that to Cousin Ben?”

“I certainly hope not, though no doubt there will be some tricks played on him as he is a Freshman.”

Edna knew what a Freshman was but the matter of hazing was quite new to her and troubled her very much. Cousin Ben had gone out alone to the woods. Perhaps this very moment someone was lying in wait for him.

Hastily setting away the doll and trunk she ran downstairs, put on her coat and hat and started up the road toward the woods nearest. She had no exact plan in her mind, but she knew Cousin Ben had probably gone to see one of his classmates who lived just beyond this piece of woods. The college was on the outskirts of the city and the dormitories were within easy walking distance, so that one was liable to see a group of college boys at almost any time. Edna trotted along hoping to overtake her cousin. She did not believe anyone would attack him unless he were alone, and she meant to keep him company on his return walk. Just as she reached the edge of the woods she came upon a group of Sophomores standing a short distance away and she heard one say. “We’ll nab him as he comes out, boys.”

Who could they mean but Cousin Ben? She walked slowly that she might, if possible, hear more.

“You’re sure he came this way?” she heard another say.

“Sure,” was the reply. “We saw him go in Abercrombie’s gate.”

That settled it in Edna’s mind, for it was Will Abercrombie whose house Cousin Ben most frequented. She hesitated a moment, wondering what path her cousin would take, and then she remembered that the short cut was through the woods; it was much longer by the road. It was already getting rather late and it looked grim and gloomy in the woods, but there was nothing to do but face any danger and go straight ahead. She was crafty enough not to turn in at once for fear the boys might suspect, so she kept on a short distance to where the road turned and then she cut into the bit of forest scrambling up the bank and scratching her hands, with the brambles, but reaching the path in a few minutes. The further she went the darker it grew. The sun was setting and she could see long fingers of light between the trees. She wished she had some one with her, that Cousin Ben would appear before she went much further, but there was no sign of him and she plodded on, the dead leaves rustling about her feet or falling from overhead, giving her little starts of fear. It seemed a long, long way, and she almost wished she had not undertaken the work of rescue, but at last she saw, dimly ahead of her, a figure approaching and heard a cheerful whistling which she recognized as her cousin’s. And she darted forward to meet him.

CHAPTER II

THE SECRET

Cousin Ben striding along did not at first see the little girl, but at her calling “Cousin Ben, Cousin Ben,” he stopped short.

“Why, you little monkey, what are you doing here?” he said. “The bugaboos will catch you here in these dark woods.”

“There isn’t such a thing as bugaboos,” returned Edna stoutly, “and I should be very silly to think so, but something will catch you if you don’t look out.”

“The gob-e-lins will get you if you don’t look out,” replied Cousin Ben, laughing. “Is that what you are trying to say? If you are not afraid of bugaboos neither am I afraid of goblins. What do you think is going to get a big fellow like me?”

“Why,” said Edna at once becoming serious, “I will tell you; I heard some college boys talking back there by the edge of the woods.”

“You did? and what did they say?”

“They said: ‘We’ll nab him as he comes out, boys.’”

“Humph! What did they look like? Did you know any of them?”

“The one who said that was John Fielding, and there was another that I’ve seen before. He sits back of our pew at church.”

“Sophs, both of them, and did you come all this way to tell me about it?”

“Why, yes, I was afraid they wanted to haze you.”

“What do you know about hazing?”

“Mother told me about a young man who nearly died of pneumonia because some of the boys doused him in cold water, in a pond or something.”

“And you didn’t want me to have pneumonia. I won’t on this occasion, I promise you. I think we can circumnavigate those fellows. I won’t see Johnny-jump-up to-day.”

Edna laughed. “Won’t they be disappointed?”

“They will that. Now come along and let’s get out of here.”

“Which way shall we go?”

“Oh, we will take the back road and come out there below the MacDonald barn so they won’t get a hint of our coming home, for the barn is below the woods, you know. It is a little further, but I hope you don’t mind that.”

“No, indeed, I am so glad to have you get out of the way of those boys.”

“If I can manage to side-track them for a while perhaps they won’t be so keen. I thought they had it in for me, and have been rather expecting an onslaught.”

They cut through the woods, coming out the other side and taking a short road not much used, which brought them out a little distance from the main road which was then easily reached. “Now we’re safe,” said Edna with satisfaction as she saw her own gate.

“We? You don’t suppose they’d haze you, do you?”

“Oh, no, but I feel safer when I am near home.”

Ben dropped his bantering tone when they came up to the gate. “I say, Edna,” he said, “you are a real Trojan to do this for me, and I shall not forget it in a hurry. Lots of big girls and boys, too, would have let the thing go, and not have taken the trouble. I am a thousand times obliged to you.”

“Oh, but I wanted to do it, you know. I should have been very unhappy if anything had happened to you.”

"I believe you would," returned Ben seriously; and they went in the house together.

This was the last Edna heard of hazing and if Cousin Ben was ever caught he did not tell her or anyone else.

Monday came around quite soon enough and Edna started off with her sister Celia to go to the city. It seemed quite natural to be back in the room which she had occupied the year before, only now Celia would share it with her. Ada was put in her old place on a little chair, her trunk by her side, and then the two girls went down to the school-room where a number of the pupils had already gathered. One of these was Clara Adams, a little girl whom Edna was sorry to see entering the school that year. She was a spoiled, discontented child who was continually pouting over some fancied grievance, and was what Dorothy and Edna called "fusty." For some reason she was always trying to pick a quarrel with Edna, and by the whispering which went on when Edna entered the room and the sidelong looks which were cast at her, as two or three girls, with hands to mouths, nudged one another, she felt sure that on this special occasion she was being talked about. However, she paid no attention to this little group but went over to where Dorothy was sitting and began to tell her about the preserves which Celia had successfully given in Ellen's charge.

At recess the same group of girls which had been whispering in the morning, again gathered in one corner and began their talk in low tones. Clara Adams was in the centre and it was she to whom the others were all looking. Clara was a favorite because of her wealth rather than because of her disposition, and she had followers who liked to have it said that they were intimate with her.

"What do you suppose they are talking about?" said Dorothy after a while.

"I'm sure I don't know and what's more I don't care," replied Edna. "Do you care, Dorothy?"

"Oh, I don't know; just a little, I think. See, they are going over and whispering to Molly Clark, and she is getting up and going over there. I wonder what it is all about."

Edna wondered, too, but neither she nor Dorothy found out that day. The same thing went on the next day. One by one most of the girls whom Edna and Dorothy liked the best were seen to join the little company of whisperers, and whenever Clara Adams would pass the two friends she would give them a look as much as to say: Wouldn't you like to know what we know?

"I think it is just horrid mean of them," said Dorothy when the next day came and they were no nearer to knowing the secret than they had been in the beginning.

"I heard Molly say something about to-morrow afternoon," said Edna. "They are all going to do something or go somewhere. I am going to tell sister, so I am."

"And I'll tell my sister. Maybe they know something about it, Edna."

They lost no time in seeking out their sisters to whom they made known the state of affairs. "And they are getting hold of nearly all the nicest girls," complained Edna. "Molly Clark, and Ruth Cutting and all those. They haven't said anything to Margaret, for I asked her. She isn't here to-day."

"Have you any idea what they are going to do?" Dorothy asked her sister.

"I have an idea, but it may not be right."

"Oh, tell us, do." The two younger girls were very eager.

Agnes leaned over and said in a low voice, "I believe they are getting up some sort of club."

"Oh!" This idea had never occurred to either of the little girls before.

"And they don't want us in it," said Edna, "I wonder why."

"It is all that horrid Clara Adams," declared Dorothy. "She is jealous of you because you always know your lessons and behave yourself, and she don't like me because I go with you and won't give you up for her."

"How do you know?" asked Edna.

"I know," returned Dorothy, and then she shut her lips very tightly.

"All the girls used to like us," said Edna sadly.

"Bless your dear heart," said Agnes drawing the child to her, "I shouldn't care. They will be sorry enough after a while, you may be sure, and will wish they had treated you two better. Celia,

we mustn't let those little whippersnappers have it all their own way. Never you mind, children, we'll do something, too. Celia and I will talk it over and let you know to-morrow. You and Celia come up to our house Saturday afternoon and we'll see if we can get Margaret and perhaps one or two others. Now run along and let us talk over a plan I have."

The two went off joyously, arms around one another. When Agnes championed their cause there was no more reason to be troubled, and they finished their recess in a corner by themselves quite content.

There were not more than a dozen little girls in the class and when half of these had gone over to the enemy, and one or two were absent it left a very small number for Edna and Dorothy to count upon, but they did not care after the older girls had taken up their cause, and they cast quite as independent looks at Clara as she did at them. They would have a secret too. "And it will be a great deal nicer than theirs," declared Dorothy. So when the bell rang they went back to their seats in a very happy frame of mind.

The next day a new pupil appeared and at recess she was swooped down upon by one of Clara's friends and was borne away, but after a while she left the group and went back to her seat. Dorothy and Edna were out in the school yard playing, but when they came in the new scholar looked smilingly at Edna and after a while she made her way to where they were standing. "Isn't this Edna Conway?" she asked.

"Yes, I'm Edna," was the reply from the little round-faced girl who smiled at her.

"I'm Jennie Ramsey, and my mother told me to be sure to speak to you and tell you I was at the fair last year and I was so glad when you got the doll."

"Oh, were you there?" Edna looked pleased. "I am so glad you have come here to school. This is Dorothy Evans."

Jennie and Dorothy smiled at each other and Edna went on. "Dorothy don't you remember about Mrs. Ramsey who took so much trouble to get Margaret away from that dreadful woman? She must be a lovely mother, for she was so dear to Margaret."

"Do tell me about her," said Jennie. "I have been so much interested, for mother told me all about how you ran against her in the street and how you won the doll for her and all about her being adopted so I did hope I should know you some day. I'd like to be friends, if you will let me."

"Oh, I'd love to be," Edna spoke heartily, "and I am so glad you know about Margaret. She comes here to school, but of course she isn't very happy about having to be in the class with such little girls. Mrs. MacDonald is talking of getting a governess for her till she can catch up a little, but we shall be sorry to have her not come here."

"Do you know Clara Adams?" Dorothy asked. "I mean did you know her before you came to school?"

"Yes, I know her. She is in my Sunday-school class," returned Jennie, but she said nothing more, yet both the other two felt quite sure that there was no likelihood of Jennie's going over to the other faction. Then the bell rang and they all took their seats.

"Don't you like her?" whispered Edna before Miss Ashurst had taken her place.

Dorothy nodded yes, and glanced across at Clara who curled her lip scornfully.

When school was dismissed Jennie and Dorothy walked home together. Agnes and Dorothy remained in the city during the week just as the two Conway sisters had begun to do. Edna sought her sister Celia after dinner when the two had their study hour. "Isn't it nice," said Edna, "Jennie Ramsey has come to school, and she is such a nice little girl. I heard Uncle Justus say once that Mrs. Ramsey was much wealthier than Mrs. Adams but that one never saw her making any pretence because of her money. What is pretence, sister?"

"It is pretending, I suppose. I think he meant she didn't put on airs because of having money."

Edna nodded. She quite understood. "Wasn't it lovely for Jennie to want to be friends? She said her mother told her to be sure to speak to me, and, oh, sister, we saw one of the other girls go

over and try to get her to join Clara's set and she didn't stay but came over to us. She said she knew Clara but I don't believe she likes her. Did you and Agnes talk about, you know what?"

"Yes, and we'll tell you but you mustn't ask me any questions now for I shall not answer. Now let us get to work or Aunt Elizabeth will be down on us for talking in study hour."

Edna turned her attention to her books and in a moment was not thinking of anything but her geography.

She could scarcely wait till the next day, however, when she and Dorothy should learn what Agnes had planned, but alas, she was not allowed this pleasure for Aunt Elizabeth called her from the school-room just at recess and took her down to see Miss Martin, the daughter of the rector of the church. Of course Edna was very glad to see Miss Martin, for she was very fond of her, but she did wish she had chosen some other day to call, and not only was Edna required to remain down in the parlor during the whole of recess but she was again summoned before she had a chance to speak a word to anyone at the close of school. This time it was to run an errand to the shop where an order had been forgotten and Edna was despatched to bring home the required article, Ellen being too busy to be spared.

She felt rather out of sorts at having both of her opportunities taken from her. "I don't see why they couldn't have sent sister," she said to herself, "or why they couldn't do without rice for just this once. I should think something else would be better, anyway, for dessert than rice and sugar." But there was no arranging Aunt Elizabeth's affairs for her and when the dish of rice appeared Edna was obliged to eat it in place of any other dessert. Her ill humor passed away, however, when Uncle Justus looked at her from under his shaggy brows and asked her if she didn't want to go to Captain Doane's with him. This was a place which always delighted her, for Captain Doane had been all over the world and had brought back with him all sorts of curiosities. Moreover, there was always a supply of preserved ginger taken from a queer jar with twisted handles, and there was also an especially toothsome cake which the captain's housekeeper served, so Edna felt that the feast in store for her, quite made up for the poverty of a dessert of boiled rice and sugar.

She wondered that Celia was not also asked to go, but she remembered that Celia did not know Captain Doane, and that probably she would think it very stupid to play with shells and other queer things while two old gentlemen talked on politics or some such dry subject. Therefore she went off very happily, rather glad that after all there was a pleasure for this day and one in prospect for the morrow.

CHAPTER III

A SATURDAY AFTERNOON

By Friday, Jennie, Dorothy and Edna had become quite intimate. Margaret was still kept at home by a bad cold, so these three little girls played at recess together joined by one or two others who had not been invited, or had not chosen, to belong to what the rest called "Clara Adams's set." There had been a most interesting talk with Agnes and Celia and a plan was proposed which was to be started on Saturday afternoon. Jennie had been invited to come, and was to go home with Dorothy after school to be sent for later.

Edna was full of the new scheme when she reached home on Friday, and she was no sooner in the house than she rushed up stairs to her mother. "Oh, mother," she cried, "I am so glad to see you, and I have so much to tell you."

"Then come right in and tell it," said her mother kissing her. "You don't look as if you had starved on bread and molasses."

Edna laughed. "Nor on rice. I hope you will never have rice on Saturdays, mother."

"Rice is a most wholesome and excellent dish," returned her mother. "See how the Chinese thrive on it. I am thinking it would be the very best thing I could give my family, for it is both nourishing and cheap. Suppose you go down and tell Maria to have a large dishful for supper instead of what I have ordered."

Edna knew her mother was teasing, so she cuddled up to her and asked: "What did you order, mother?"

"What should you say to waffles and chicken?"

"Oh, delicious!"

"But where is that great thing you were going to tell me?"

"Oh, I forgot. Well, when we got to school last Monday, there was Clara Adams and all the girls she could get together and they were whispering in a corner. They looked over at me and I knew they were talking about me, but I didn't care. Then I went over to Dorothy and we just stayed by ourselves all the time, for those other girls didn't seem to want to have anything to do with us. We hadn't done one single thing to make them act so, but Clara Adams is so hateful and jealous and all that, she couldn't bear to have us be liked by anybody. Dorothy told me she heard her say I was a pet and that was the reason I got along with my lessons. You know I study real hard, mother, and it isn't that at all. Clara said it was just because Uncle Justus favored me, and told Miss Ashurst too. Wasn't that mean?"

"I think it was rather mean, but you must not mind what a spoiled child like Clara says, as long as you know it isn't so."

"That's what Agnes says. We told Agnes and Celia how the girls were doing and how they had a secret and didn't want us to be in it, so Agnes said we could have a secret, too, and she has planned a beautiful one, she and Celia. I will tell you about it presently. Well, then Jennie Ramsey came."

"Jennie Ramsey? I don't think I ever heard you speak of her."

"No, of course you didn't, for I only just became acquainted with her. Mother, don't you remember the lovely Mrs. Ramsey that did so much about getting Margaret into the Home of the Friendless?"

"I remember, now."

“Well, she is Jennie’s mother, and she told Jennie to be sure to speak to me, because she knows Aunt Elizabeth, I suppose, but anyhow, she did. But first the Clara Adams set tried to get Jennie to go with them, but she just wouldn’t, and so she’s on our side. I know Clara is furious because the Ramseys are richer than the Adamses.”

“Oh dear, oh dear,” Mrs. Conway interrupted, “this doesn’t sound a bit like my little girl talking about one person being richer than another and about one little girl’s being furious about another’s making friends with whom she chooses.”

Edna was silent for a moment. “Mother,” she said presently, “it is all Clara Adams’s doings. If she wouldn’t speak to us nor let the other girls play with us, why, what could we do?”

“I really don’t know, my darling, we’ll talk of that directly. Go on with your story.”

“Well, so Agnes found out they were getting up a club and didn’t want us in it, so she said we could have a club, too, and we’re going to begin this afternoon – no, to-morrow afternoon. Mrs. Ramsey let Jennie go home with Dorothy to stay till to-morrow and she is going to send the automobile for her. She comes to school in the automobile every morning. I wish we had one then we wouldn’t have to stay in town all the week.”

“Dear blessed child, I am afraid Clara Adams is turning your head.”

“Clara? why she doesn’t even speak to me.”

“All the same you are beginning to care more for the things that are important to her than ever you did before. Never mind, we’ll talk about that later. Is that all?”

“It’s about all, for we haven’t had the club meeting yet. Agnes says she will start it and be the president for a month. Celia is going to be the secretary and when we know just what to do and how to carry it on then they will resign and some of us younger girls will be the officers.”

Mrs. Conway smiled to hear all this grown-up talk, but she looked a little serious a moment after.

Edna watched her face. “Don’t you approve of it, mamma,” she asked anxiously.

“Of the club? Oh, yes, if it is the right kind of one. I will ask Celia about it, but what I don’t like is that you should start it in a spirit of trying to get the better of another girl, though I can see that it is the most natural thing in the world for you to feel as you do, and I can see that Clara has really brought it on herself, but I do want my dear little girls to be charitable and above the petty meanness that is actuating Clara.”

“Then what do you think we ought to do?”

“I am not sure. I shall have to think it over. In the meantime by all means start your club. Where is Celia?”

“She went out with the boys to look at the new pigeons, but I wanted to see you first.”

Edna enjoyed the prospect of chicken and waffles too much to long too ardently for the next day. She hadn’t seen Cousin Ben yet so she went out to hunt him up, but discovering that he was hard at work over his studies she concluded not to disturb him but to go with the boys to hear them expatiate upon the qualities of the new pigeons, of the trade they had made with another boy and of various things which had been going on at their school.

Great preparations were made for the first meeting of the club. In the Evans house was a large attic, one corner of which Agnes and Celia turned into a club-room. The house was an old-fashioned one, and the attic window was small. There was, too, an odor of camphor and of soap, a quantity of the latter being stored up there, but these things did not in the least detract from the place in the eyes of the girls. What they wanted was mystery, a place which was out of the way, and one specially set aside for their meetings. A small table was dragged out of the recesses of the attic. It was rather wobbly, but a bit of wood was put under the faulty leg, and it did very well. One perfectly good chair was brought up for the president, the rest were content to be seated on whatever came handy, two chairs very much gone as to backs, one with the bottom entirely through, and a rickety camp stool made up the remainder of the furniture, but Agnes had taken care that

there were flowers on the table and that pens, pencils and paper were supplied. She also brought up some books "to make it look more literary," she said, and the organizers of the club were delighted.

They came whispering and with suppressed giggles up the steep stairway, made their way between piles of trunks and boxes to where Agnes sat in state, a call-bell before her. Margaret, much bundled up, had been permitted to join them, so they were the respectable number of six.

That morning the president and secretary had been closeted for an hour with Mrs. Conway and whatever they had determined upon in the beginning which seemed in the least unworthy was smitten from the plan.

The girls disposed themselves upon the various seats, Celia taking a place at the end of the table provided for the officers. There was much stifling of laughter and suppressed whispers before Agnes tapped the bell and said in the most dignified manner, "The meeting is called to order." Then each girl smoothed down her frock and sat up very straight waiting to hear what should come next. "The real object of our club," Agnes began, "is to find ways of being kind to our schoolmates, but we are going to do other things to entertain ourselves, things like bringing new games into the club and any new book we find particularly interesting. If anyone can write a story she is to do that, and if anyone hears anything particularly interesting to tell she is to save it up for the meeting. It has been proposed by Mrs. Conway that we call the club the Kindly Club or the Golden Rule. Celia, we'd better take a vote on the name. You might hand around some slips of paper and let the members write their choice. There is one thing about it; if we call it the Golden Rule Club, we can always refer to it as the G. R., and that will be rather nice, I think. However, you all must vote as you think."

There were not quite enough pencils, but by judicious borrowing they made out and the slips were handed in and gravely counted by Celia. "There are four votes for Golden Rule, and two for Kindly," she announced.

"Then it is a majority for Golden Rule, so the name of the club is the Golden Rule Club, or the G. R., whichever you choose to say when you are speaking of it. Now, let me see, oh, yes. We are the charter members. We haven't any charter but we can have one, I reckon. I'll get one ready for next time. Now, we must have rules. I haven't thought them all out, but I have two or three. We begin with the Golden Rule: 'Do unto others as ye would they should do unto you'; Mrs. Conway said we might head the list with that, for there was nothing better. Of course we all forget sometimes, but we mustn't any more than we can help. If we see a chance to do a kindness to any of our schoolmates we must do it, no matter if we don't like her, and we must try not to get mad with any of the girls. We must be nice to the teachers, too. You see it is a school club and affects all in the school. We big girls mustn't be hateful to you younger ones and you mustn't be saucy to us."

"Oh, dear," sighed Edna, "it's going to be pretty hard, isn't it?"

"I don't believe it is going to be as much fun as the other girls' club," complained Dorothy.

"Oh, yes it is. You wait and see," said Agnes. "After a while everyone of them will be dying to come into ours."

"Oh, Agnes, I don't believe a bit of that," said Dorothy.

"Oh, but you see we are going to have very good times, you forget that part. The kind word part is only when we are having dealings with our schoolmates and all that. We don't have to do just that and nothing else. For example, I have the loveliest sort of story to read to you all just as soon as the business part of the meeting is over, and then we are to have refreshments."

"Oh, good!" there was emphatic endorsement of this.

"There ought to be fines, I suppose," Agnes went on. "Let me see, what shall we be fined for? I shall have to get some light upon that, too, but I think it would be a good plan that any girl who voluntarily stirs up a fuss with another at school must pay a fine of not less than one cent. What do you think of that, Celia?"

“I should think that might be a good plan though I expect we shall all turn Quakers if we continue the club.”

Agnes laughed. “It does look that way. At all events we are to thank Clara Adams for it all. Her club is founded on unkindness and if we want to be a rival, Mrs. Conway says we must have ours founded on kindness.”

“Do you know anything about her club?” asked Jennie.

“I know a little. I believe only girls who live in a certain neighborhood can belong to it. All others are to be turned down, and are to be left out of the plays at recess. It is something like that, I was told. However, we don’t care anything about those poor little sillies. We shall enjoy ourselves much more. I think we’d better not attend to any business to-day or we shall not have time for anything else. Have you made the minutes, Celia?”

“Yes, I think I have, and if I haven’t everything I can get you to tell me afterwards.”

“I suppose we should vote for the officers,” said Agnes, after a moment’s thought.

“Oh, no, don’t let’s,” said Edna, anxious for the story. “We all want you for president and Celia for secretary, don’t we, girls?”

“All in favor of making Miss Agnes Evans president of the club will please rise,” sang out Celia, and every girl arose to her feet. “That’s unanimous enough,” said Celia. “Now all in favor of my being secretary will please rise.” Another unanimous vote followed this and so the matter was speedily settled.

Then Agnes produced a manuscript paper and read them the most delightful of stories which was received with great applause. Then she whispered something to Dorothy who nodded understandingly, retired to the back of the attic and returned with two plates, one of delicious little cakes and the other of caramels to which full justice was done.

“What about the places of meeting and the refreshments?” asked Celia. “It isn’t fair for you always to furnish them and don’t you think we should meet at different houses?”

“Perhaps so, only you see it would be hard for us to go into the city on Saturdays after coming out on Friday, and you see Jennie lives in town.”

“Oh, but Mack can always bring me out in the motor car,” said Jennie, “though of course I should love to have you all come in to my house and so would mamma like it.”

“Well, we’ll meet at your house, Celia, the next time,” said Agnes, “and after that at Mrs. MacDonald’s. We can, can’t we, Margaret?”

“Oh, yes, I am sure she will be perfectly delighted. She is so pleased about the club, anyhow.”

“Then in the meantime we can be making up our minds about your house, Jennie,” said Agnes.

“I wish we had some little song or a sentence to close with,” said Celia.

“We can have. We can do all those things later. I think we have done a great deal for one day, don’t you all think so?”

“Oh, my, yes,” was the hearty response. “It has been perfectly lovely.”

“We might sing, ‘Little Drops of Water,’ for this time,” proposed Edna, “as long as we haven’t any special song yet.”

“That will do nicely, especially that part about ‘little deeds of kindness.’ We’re going to sing. All rise.” And the meeting was closed, the members groping their way down the attic stairs which by now were quite dark. But the effect of the club was to be far-reaching as was afterward shown, though it was little suspected at the time of its formation.

CHAPTER IV

A THANKSGIVING DINNER

The first direct effect of the club was far from pleasant to Edna, for she forgot all about studying a certain lesson, and did not remember about it till she and Dorothy met at school on Monday morning, and then she was overcome with fear lest she should be called upon to recite something of which she knew scarcely anything. However, by dint of peeps at the book between whiles, after devoting to it all the time she had before school was called to order, she managed to get through the recitation, yet not without many misgivings and a rapid beating of the heart when Miss Ashurst called upon her. Edna was always such a conscientious child about her lessons that Miss Ashurst rather overlooked the fact that upon this occasion she was not quite as glib as usual, and she took her seat with a feeling of great relief, determining that she would not forget her lessons another Saturday.

There was more than one opportunity that day to exercise the rule of the G. R. Club, and the girls of the Neighborhood Club, as they called theirs, were a little surprised at the appearance of good-will shown by the others.

“Oh, I know just what they are up to,” Clara Adams told her friends; “they want to get in with us and are being extra sweet. I know that is exactly their trick. Don’t you girls pay any attention to them. Of course we could let Jennie Ramsey in, because she lives on our street, but the others, we couldn’t any more than we could Betty Lowndes or Jessie Hill.”

“Well, it seems to me if they are good enough for Jennie Ramsey to go with they are good enough for us,” returned Nellie Haskell.

“No, I’m not going to have them,” replied Clara, “and if you choose to go over to them, Nellie Haskell, you can just make up your mind that I’ll have no more to do with you.” So Nellie succumbed although she did smile upon Dorothy when the two met and was most pleasant when Edna offered to show her about one of the lessons.

Agnes advised that the girls make no secret of their club. “It is nothing to be ashamed of, I am sure,” she said, “and if any of the girls want to join it I am sure they are quite welcome to.” And indeed it did appeal so strongly to some of the older girls that before the week was out several new members were enrolled, and it was decided to change the time of meeting to Friday afternoon so that those in the city might have their convenience considered while the girls living in the country could easily stay in till a later hour.

The little girls felt themselves rather overpowered by the coming into their ranks of so many older members, but on the other hand they felt not a little flattered at being important enough to belong to the same club, so as the rule worked both ways it made it all right, especially as Betty Lowndes and others were admitted and were no older than themselves.

“They may have more in number,” said Clara when she was told of how the club was increasing, “but we are more exclusive, my mother says.”

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