

W. A. G.'s Tale

Margaret Turnbull

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***** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK W. A. G.'S TALE *****

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W.A.G.'S TALE

EDITED BY

MARGARET TURNBULL

WITH ZOBZEE ILLUSTRATIONS
BY THE AUTHOR

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ILLUSTRATIONS

I STARTED TO GET BETTER AND WRITE THIS BOOK (p. 153) (colored)
Frontispiece From a drawing by M.L. Kirk

A ZOBZEE

ON THE BRIDGE

HE JUMPED OUT AND TOOK A ROPE AND PULLED THE BOAT CLOSE

SHE WASHED AND I DRIED

HE TURNED AND WENT INTO THE WHITE STONE HOUSE, AND ALL THE CATS RAN
AFTER HIM

HE SMOKED A PIPE, AND I PLAYED WITH ALL HIS TEDDY-CATS

BRINGS HIM DOWN, PERSIMMONS AND ALL

SO I TOOK MY FISHING-ROD AND FLICKED IT AT HIM

NEVER YOU MIND, BABY DEAR, COME ON

WHAT'S AN ABSENT-MINDED BEGGAR?

HEY, ROBINSON CRUSOE, HERE'S YOUR MAN FRIDAY

HE HAD TO TAKE A CAN-OPENER AND CUT AUNTY EDITH'S FOOT OUT

WE ALL WORKED WITH HOSE AND EVERYTHING

AUNTY MAY GOT A HATCHET AND MADE A CHOP AT THE SNAKE

I BELIEVED THEY HAD REALLY GONE AWAY, AND LEFT ME ALL ALONE
I TOLD HIM ALL ABOUT AUNTY MAY
SLID DOWN WITHOUT A BIT OF NOISE
I WOKE UP AND FOUND MYSELF LYING ON THE PORCH
AND IT WAS UNCLE BURT

W.A.G.'S TALE

PREFACE BY THE AUTHOR

I have been sick. Now I am better the Doctor makes me lie in bed because of all that Anti-toxin he put in me, which weakens the heart. Anti-toxin isn't a lady, it's a medicine for diphtheria. Aunty May is a lady. She reads me books and plays games with me. But I am tired of books written about nature, and animals, and Indians, and fairies, and I wished out loud that somebody would write a book about a boy, just like me. So to-day Aunty May brought me a big, thick blank book with red covers, and with rings at the back to let me add more paper when I want to, and she told me to write my own story, a little every day.

[Illustration: "Zobzee"]

So that's what I am going to do, and illustrate it with "Zobzees."
"Zobzees" are thin dancing people--like this. I invented that name, and a country and a language for them, which only Aunty May and I know. But I am not going to write my book in that. I am going to print it, like other books, but draw "Zobzees" because they are easy; and if nobody else reads it except me and Uncle Burt when he comes home, it will be fun for us, anyway.

CHAPTER I

UNCLE BURT'S BILLY

My name is William Ainsworth Gordon, and my initials spell W.A.G. That is why Aunty May and I call this book "W.A.G.'S TALE." If it was about a dog it would be "Tail Wags." So it's true and a joke too.

I am ten years old and my father and mother are in Heaven, and I have only Uncle Burt to take care of me. Uncle Burt isn't my real uncle, but he was my father's chum when they were at West Point, and he promised father to take care of me. And he does, only he had to go to the Philippines with his soldiers; so his sister, Aunty Edith, is taking care of me until he comes back. Everybody else calls me William, but he

calls me "Billy," so I am the one this chapter is named after.

Aunty May says I can begin with the very day Aunty Edith brought me down here. That was the day Uncle Burt went away to join his regiment, and everybody was sort of quiet, and even the big people cried a little. I cried a good deal, when nobody was looking, and when Uncle Burt caught me at it in the corner of the room, he didn't say a word, but just picked me up and held me so tight that one of his buttons got stamped on my cheek like a seal. He said he'd give way and cry, too, for it was good for the eyes, only his Colonel had expressly ordered him not to, saying he would leave all red-eyed men home, which would be terrible for a soldier. So I begged him not to give way, and he said he wouldn't if I'd stop, because one fellow bawling makes it hard for the other fellow not to. So I stopped and we laughed a little, and then he showed the mark on my cheek to Aunty Edith, and said, "This shows that this young man belongs to me, so be careful of Uncle Burt's Billy and return him in good condition, for there will be a dreadful time if I find him chipped or broken, when I come back."

Then the lady I call Aunty May, though she isn't any relation to me either, but is just Aunty Edith's friend, laughed and said she would be careful to treat me nicely. And she has. I like her best next to Uncle Burt. She didn't cry. She laughed a lot, and every time Uncle Burt got sad and tried to talk to her, she laughed more, and she took me on her lap and kept me there all the time Uncle Burt was saying good-bye to her.

He looked more like crying than than any other time. He said, "Good-bye, May; won't you change your mind?" and she said, "Oh, no, Burt, I can't." Then he was going to say something else when I said, "Remember the Colonel, Uncle Burt, and don't get your eyes too red to go," and then they both laughed. Uncle Burt said, "Look after Miss Heath for me, Billy, while I'm gone," and I said, "Sure I will. I'm going to adopt her as my Aunty, too." She put her arms round me and hugged me and Uncle Burt said, "Lucky Billy," and then the door closed, and Aunty Edith began to cry and Aunty May looked queer for a minute and went to the door. I thought she'd run after him, but she stopped and said, "Come along, Sir William, and we'll pack our bags, 'cause we're all going to the country on the 3.10." And I took hold of her hand, and we went upstairs together, and packed my bag and put in my gun, my soldiers, my books and my paint-box. Then Aunty Edith stopped crying and tied a veil over her face. If she'd been a soldier she'd been left home all right.

We got in a taxi with a lot of bags and things and went to the Pennsylvania Station, which is miles and miles long, I think, but there are lots of kind black men who wear red caps and run up and take your bags and carry them for you just as easy, One of them took my bag and Aunty May's suitcase, but Aunty Edith had another one--a fat one--all alone for her things.

We just had time for our train, so we had to hurry right through the waiting-room, and I couldn't stop and see all the things there are to see, or watch the people coming down the stairs. People's legs are funny if you watch them coming down--like things made with hinges.

Then we got into a nice big train with chairs in it that swung round. They call it a "Pullman" which is a good name for a car, only it's the engine that pulls the man and the car, too, really. Then we got all

comfortable, with another nice colored man who showed his teeth at us, and put our bags up on a rack, and Aunty May gave me some sweet chocolate and a magazine with pictures in it, and Aunty Edith said. "I wish we didn't have to change at Trenton,"--and--then--I fell asleep.

The next thing I knew Aunty May was saying to me, "Wake up, Billy, dear, it's Trenton now." She put on my jacket and the man took our bags again and we stepped out on a big platform, and then another man took all our bags and we went up one stair, and down another, and waited on a long platform, where trains kept shooting up every minute.

I couldn't understand what the man in uniform said, until at last a funny little train--all short, only half as long as our New York one, and with funny, hard straight seats--came, and we climbed in. Aunty Edith and Aunty May and me had to carry our own bags and fix 'em. The train waited a long time, but at last it moved, and Aunty May put her arm round me and sat me next the window, only it wasn't open, because it was only April and wasn't warm enough yet, and said, "Now we're off to East Penniwell."

The train just crawled along, and there was a big canal on the one side. I saw a canal boat with two men and a dog on it, and they were cooking something in a big pot on the top of a stove that stood right out of doors, on top of the boat, with a stovepipe that didn't go into any chimney, but right up into the air--with smoke coming out of it!

I showed it to Aunty May and she said, "You will see them every day when we get to the towpath," and I felt awful glad at that, because though the boat moved slow, the train moved fast, and I didn't get a good look at the boy who was driving the mules. I couldn't be sure whether he'd made a face at me or not, but I think he did.

Then by and by on the other side of the train came a great big river, all fast and running along and some bubbling-up places in it where rocks stood up. Aunty May said those were rapids and this was the Delaware River, the one Washington crossed.

I think more of him than ever, now I've seen the river, for it's good and wide and it must have been a cold job getting over it. I told Aunty May I hoped it wasn't at the rapids he tried to cross, and she said, "Oh, no," and "I'll show you," and presently the train stopped and the conductor said, "Washington's Crossing," There was a big tree, where he could have tied a boat if he'd wanted to. Aunty May said maybe he did; and a white house where I guess the soldiers got something to eat and drink. Anyway, I hoped so. Aunty May said she'd never asked, so she couldn't say, positively, as it was so long ago, but it wouldn't hurt to think they did. So I imagined it that way.

Then our train stopped at a station and we got out. I hadn't been ready for its stopping, and I got so busy getting my things on, and getting my bag in my hand, that I didn't hear the name of it, and I asked Aunty May if it was East Penniwell, and she said, "Oh, no, this is Scrubbsville, New Jersey, and East Penniwell is in Pennsylvania."

"Will we get into another train, then?" I asked, and Aunty May laughed and said, "Oh, no, just wait and see." Then we got off and walked down, carrying our bags, to a big bridge right over the Delaware.

There was a man sitting, at the end of the bridge, in a little house

with a window in it, and you paid him two cents apiece before you could get on the bridge to go to Pennsylvania. He is the Toll-Man and it is a Toll-Bridge, and it seemed to me very funny to have to pay to walk. Aunty May said it was funny, too, but Aunty Edith said it was a nuisance.

Aunty Edith asked the Toll-Man if we could leave our big suitcase there, until Mr. Tree the grocer came over with a wagon for our trunks, later, and he said, "Yes." He was a nice smiling man.

Then Aunty Edith and Aunty May and I, and Aunty Edith's bag and my little one, which Aunty May carried because she said we had a long walk ahead of us, went over the bridge.

[Illustration: On the Bridge]

The wind almost blew my cap away, but I caught it just in time, and on the bridge we met a big man carrying a paint-box and a folding-up stool, like Aunty Edith has, and he had an E-normous dog, as big as me, and it galumphed at me, and I got behind Aunty Edith, for she is very big both ways, and the man said, "Down, Pete," When the dog downed, he shook hands with Aunty Edith, and she introduced him to Aunty May and me, and he said he was glad to see us, and I could come and play with his children up the towpath.

I said, "Yes, sir," but Aunty May and me kept away from Pete, because we didn't know him then. We know him now and like him. The man said, "Wait till I get back and I'll take you up in the launch." Then he went on to Scrubbsville, and Aunty Edith said, "Such a pleasure to meet Mr. Turner. Now William won't get tired walking up. Won't that be nice, William, to go up the canal in the launch, instead of walking?" I said, "Yes, 'm, Aunty Edith," to her, but to Aunty May I said, "Will that Pete be in the boat, too?" and Aunty May whispered back, "Ow Gracious! I hope not. But don't let him know we're afraid, old man." So I took her hand tight and we followed Aunty Edith, who is an awful fast walker and always has so many things to do.

First we went to the Post-Office, which is a little wooden building, and the Postmaster knows everybody and looks at you over his glasses. Then we went up a funny street with brick pavements, awful old. There are houses on that very street built before the Revolution, and a big cannon in the square. We went to Mr. Tree's, and he's a nice, big grocer man, with everything in his shop, and he patted me on the head and gave me a chocolate candy, which Aunty Edith said I might eat, if I ate it slowly. He said he would bring our trunks and bags up right away. Aunty Edith said, "Now I've got to order oil from Tryer and coal from Quick and some thread from Miss Macfarland's notion store," and I said, "Why don't the servants do all that, Aunty Edith?" She laughed and said, "There are no servants for us at East Penniwell, William; we do the work ourselves," Aunty May said, "But it will be fun, Billy. All the artists like Aunty Edith live that way down here, and you and I will be the writer people and we'll do lots of funny things together. Only, Edith," she said, "the boy and I are weary; where can we rest while you finish your shopping?"

"Oh, very well," Aunty Edith said; "come and I'll show you the launch and you can get in that and sit and wait for Mr. Turner."

We walked up a funny, hilly, crooked street, with partly brick

pavements again and partly stone, till we came to an old wooden bridge over a canal, and then Aunty May squeezed my hand and said, "Billy, this is our canal," We crossed the bridge, and went down a few steps and there was Mr. Turner's launch. We got in and sat and watched the water and made up stories to each other, till Aunty Edith and Mr. Turner came, all full of bundles. Mr. Turner started the launch and we went chug-chugging along. But Pete didn't get in. He swam part of the time and ran and barked on the towpath the other part.

The canal boats came down past us, and they began to have lights on them, and the trees were all green and hung down by the canal banks, and I could see where the dogwood was beginning to come out in the woods. There were some ducks swimming in the canal, and a farmhouse high above us on the bank. Then nothing but the towpath, which is the path on one side of the canal where the mules walk when they drag the canal boats.

By and by I saw two tiny white houses, with their roofs and chimneys sticking up over the canal bank, and one of them had a funny green door, and honeysuckle all growing over the fence. Mr. Turner never stopped till Aunty Edith called, "Oh, we're going past," Then he stopped and jumped out and took a rope and pulled the boat close to the bank, where there were some stones placed like steps. I saw the two houses plainly then, one a white stone one and one a white wooden one with a green door.

[Illustration: He jumped out and took a rope and pulled the boat close]

We all stepped out, with our bags, and said good-bye to Mr. Turner, and his launch went away up the canal past us, and Aunty Edith took a key out of her pocket and went down a step, into the garden of the house with the green door, and opened it, and said to Aunty May and me, "Come in, children. This is OUR HOUSE."

[Illustration]

CHAPTER II

OUR HOUSE

Aunty May and I went inside, and we looked at each other and laughed. It was small, like a doll's house, and the room we stepped into, through the doorway, had a window the same side as the door, which looked out on the towpath, and two windows at the back, and a stovepipe coming right out of the floor and running up through the low ceiling.

When I went and looked out of the back windows, I called to Aunty May, "Oh, see, it's the Delaware." And it was.

There, right at the foot of our back garden, under the willow trees, was the Delaware River, running along, very fast.

I said, "Come on, let's go down to the river, Aunty May." But Aunty Edith said, "First, look at the house."

We went through a little door into another long, narrow, low room, with

a window on the towpath and a window on the river, and a queer old-fashioned bureau and two iron beds in it, and a clothes-horse, in one corner, covered with muslin. When you opened one flap of it, it was a closet. This was Aunty Edith and Aunty May's room.

In the other room, with the stovepipe in the middle of it, was a big couch, and that was to be my bed at night. There was a big closet at one end, made out of the place where the steps went up to the attic, and that was where my clothes were to hang. One side of the room had bookshelves, and on the wall were some of Aunty Edith's paintings; and there was a doorway at one end without any door.

I said to Aunty Edith, "How do we get to the river from this house? Do we have to go out of the front door and run down? And where's the stove that the pipe belongs to? Is it in a cellar?" Then both the aunts laughed, and they went to this doorway without any door, and there was a funny thing that looked like a clumsy ladder. Aunty Edith told me those were our best stairs, and that once they were canal boat stairs.

Well, you climbed down them very carefully, for they tipped a little, and you landed on a dark little landing with a door. You opened the door and stepped down a step and there you were in the nicest old kitchen you ever saw!

The top part of the house was wooden, but this under part was of stone and cement, and the walls inside were cement, and the ceiling was just wood with the big floor beams showing through. And there was a door with glass in the top, that you could look through down to the river and the willows; and there was a window with a deep window seat you could sit in and look at the river; then there was a long window at the side, where the outside steps came down from the towpath, and that opened in two halves and had narrow panes of glass. It looked out on a garden.

A big cook-stove, with a kettle steaming on it, was at one end of the room; and a nice big table, and there were some comfortable chairs, and pots and pans hanging over and under the mantel back of the stove.

There was a rug on the floor, and a pantry with lots of good things to eat in it, and a big couch that I sat down on, and looked around.

There was a little place in the wall, too, that had once been a window, but was closed up and made into a little cupboard for dishes.

I said, "My! isn't this lovely?" Aunty May squeezed my hand and said it was, and Aunty Edith looked around and said, "Well, Mrs. Katy Smith did get my postal in time, after all. I'm so glad, because if she hadn't, it wouldn't have been so nice and clean in here, and there would have been no fire. Now, I'm going to take off my things and make a supper for us all."

Aunty May said, "I'll help you," but Aunty Edith said, "Not this first time, May. You take the boy out and show him the garden and the river,"

So Aunty May and I took hold of hands and went out, and there was a long flower-bed running right down to the river-bank, on both sides of a long grassplot; and beyond the grass and flowers was a lot of ploughed land for vegetables and things; and beyond that there were a lot of woods. There was a path between the grassplot and the flower-bed next the fence of our neighbor, in the white stone house, and we went down that, and

when we came to the end of the flower-bed there was a big apple tree, and then we went under that and stood on the river-bank, and there was the Delaware!

Under the biggest willow tree there was a seat made of an old box, and Aunt May and I sat down for a minute and looked at the river. It was so clear that I could see the little fishes swimming along, and I threw a stick in it, and it went by so fast that Aunt May said, "My! how swift the current is. You must be careful, Billy-boy, and not go near the edge when you are alone." I said, "Yes, 'm, but I am to go in wading when it gets warmer."

We went along the bank a little farther, and there were more trees, cherry trees, and willow trees, and buttonwood trees, and lots of nice places for us to put our hammocks. Then we went back to the house, and there was Aunt Edith in a big gingham apron toasting bread and making chocolate. I laughed and said, "Oh, Aunt Edith, I never saw you look like that in the city." Then we all laughed, and Aunt Edith said, "You will see me look like this very often down here, for we all have to do our share of the work. You, too, Billy. You will have to help us." I said, "That will be bully."

Aunt May set the table, and we all sat down and ate our toast and ham and eggs, and drank our chocolate, and I thought it was better than anything I had ever eaten.

Just when we were in the middle of it, I heard footsteps crunching along the walk, and down the steps at the side of the house from the towpath. I called, "Some one's coming." Aunt Edith went to the door.

It was Mr. Tree with the trunks and the suitcase. He said, "Hullo, young fellow. Have you come to take care of these ladies?" And I said, "Yes, sir"; and he said, "That's right. Look after 'em. It'll be a load off my mind to know they've got a man on the premises. It's right lonely up here." And I told him we wasn't afraid. I asked him if he needed any help, but he said no, and he was so terrible big and strong that he lifted the trunks as if they were boxes.

After he had gone, Aunt Edith said she must unpack, and Aunt May said, "Do, Edith; Billy and I will do the dishes."

So Aunt May tied a big clean towel around my waist, and she washed and I dried. There was no running water, just a pump outside the kitchen shed, right out of doors.

[Illustration: She washed and I dried]

I pumped for Aunt May and we had a lovely time. We played a game with the dishes. Plates were ladies and saucers were little girls, and cups were little boys, and knives and forks were policemen and spoons were servants. We had a lot of fun, when the knives and forks marched round the table, and ordered the other dishes into the cupboard.

After that was done, Aunt May said she must go upstairs and help Aunt Edith, and unpack her own typewriter. Aunt May writes stories, too, only she uses a typewriter and I use a pencil.

Aunt May asked me whether I'd sit in the window seat and read a picture-book or would I explore the garden. I said I would do both; look

at pictures a little while and go in the garden. Aunty May made me promise not to go too near the river, or too far down the towpath.

Then she went upstairs and I read a little till I had enough of reading, and I thought I'd go to the towpath, but first, as I was thirsty, I thought I'd get a glass and take a drink at the pump. But when I tried to pump, the pump-handle just went up in the air, and wouldn't pump up any water!

And just as I tried it again, I heard somebody say, "That pump handle oughter been left up in the air. Say, young feller, you gotter pour some water down first. That pump ain't been used stiddy for some little while back. Ease it up and she'll go all right."

[Illustration: Turned and went into the house, and all the cats ran after him]

I turned around, and there, leaning against the fence, was an old man with big blue eyes and a white mustache, and a pipe, and a plaid vest and a soft hat, and the biggest lot of cats I ever saw. Seven of them, white and gray and black and mixed colors, all looking up at me.

I was so surprised that I didn't know what to say. But the old gentleman said, "Wait here, and I'll fetch you a kittle of water," and he turned and went into the white stone house, and all the cats ran after him. But he shut the door tight, and the cats sat waiting and mewing on the back porch, and I held on to the pump-handle and waited too.

[Illustration]

CHAPTER III

OUR NEXT-DOOR NEIGHBOR

In a minute he came out with a tin pail in his hand, and all the cats ran after him, and he said, "Shoo, Teddy," and they ran away a little bit, but came back and mewed and rubbed against his feet. He handed me the pail across the fence, and I took it, and he said, "A little at a time, boy." Then he went up to his porch and got a big dish and said, "Here, Teddy, Teddy," and all the cats ran to him, and he fed them.

I stood watching him, and he said, "Why don't you ease the pump?" and I said, "If you please, sir, which one of your cats is Teddy?" He said, "Sho, boy, they're all named Teddy after President Roosevelt, and because it saves trouble. When I calls, 'Here, Teddy,'--they all comes. When I calls, 'Shoo, Teddy,'--they all shoos," And I said, "That's the best idea I ever heard of--for cats."

He said, "Now, boy, you lift the handle of that pump high and throw some water into her, and then keep a-pumping." And I did, and the water came, and I pumped up a glassful, but he wouldn't take any.

Then I said I'd fill the pail and bring it round because I'd like to see his cats close to, and he said, "Never mind the pail, young fellow, jist hand it over and come round yourself,"

[Illustration: He smoked a pipe, and I played with all his Teddy-cats]

So I did, first calling to Aunt Edith to ask if I might, and she came to the door and shook hands with him, over the fence, and said, "How do you do, Mr. Taylor. This is William Gordon, the son of Captain Gordon, I told you of." Then he said, "Sho, you don't meanter say it! I served under his grandfather." And Aunt Edith said to me, "William, Mr. Taylor was a soldier in the army all through the Civil War, and he can tell you lots about it." So I went over to his house and we sat on his back porch, and he smoked a pipe, and I played with all his Teddy-cats.

[Illustration]

Mr. Taylor told me he was seventy-three years old, and I said, "My! I'd never guessed it, you look younger than that"; and he said, "Yes, boy, I'm stepping along."

Then he told me when he was a boy he worked on one of the canal boats, and at that time there were many more boats, for most of the freight, that goes in freight trains now on railroads, came down the canal in boats. After that he enlisted in the army and went away out West. He told me when he was young the West was the West, and you could shoot buffaloes. He knows because he shot them. Then when the Civil War broke out, he stayed in the army, enlisted again and fought all through it, and came home with a bullet in his leg.

His father was a cooper and built the stone house Mr. Taylor lives in for a cooper shop, and that was why it was built so solid and had such thick walls. He took me into the cellar and showed it to me, for that was where they set the iron hoops to cool. I asked him who lived with him in it, and he said he was all alone, everybody was gone, he said, but him. I told him about my father and mother then, and how I would be all alone if it wasn't for Uncle Burt, and he said Uncle Burt was a fine man and a good soldier.

He said he was glad I lived next door. I told him I was glad, too. He asked me if I went in for any kind of sport like shooting; and I said, not yet, but I climbed trees, and he said, when his cherries were ripe, if I didn't make myself sick on Aunt Edith's, I could climb his, when he was around.

Then I asked him if he would tell me a story about the Civil War, and he laughed and said the most of them were too full of fighting and sad things for a little boy like me; and I told him I didn't mind them being a little bloody; that I wasn't a kindergarten baby.

He laughed some more, and said: "Speaking of climbing trees makes me think of how near I was to being captured by some rebels once. You know, boy, Quakers is agin all fighting, so at the beginning of the war, when we regulars was sent to drill with a lot of new men and knock them into shape, I was some surprised when fust thing I seen was young Jim Wilton, whose father I knowed to be a Quaker living on the corner of the same street where my uncle lived in Phillydelphy.

"I says to him, 'Hullo, Jim, what you doing here?' and he said, 'Well, Tom, I come here to larn you how to fight.' 'And you a Quaker's son,' says I. 'Yup,' he says, 'and thee knows that my old folks is none too pleased; but somehow I couldn't stay home comfortable with all the other

boys fighting to free the blacks, so here I be.'

"Well, I was right glad to see him, and get news of all the old neighbors, and Jim and me gits very chummy; and when there's a piece of business needing the attention of one of us, it usually gits the attention of both. Me and him hunting in couples as it were.

"That's how it come about that one time, there being a bit of spying to be done, me and Jim finds ourselves in rebel uniforms, waiting and listening beside a camp-fire outside the rebel General's tent, using our ears and our eyes too. When up rides General Stuart, who used to be my commanding officer in the old days before he turnt reb, when he was in the regular army.

"My! but I was in a terrible taking, for Stuart had a gredge agin me for somepin I'd done. I'll tell ye about that another day. 'T warn't me was to blame. But if he onct caught sight of me, it would be short shrift at the end of the rope.

"So Jim and me begins edging away, until we could get a gait on without being noticed; and get away we did, and into the woods where our own clothes were hid; made the change and was getting back to our own quarters, happy as larks to be on the home road; laughing to think how near we'd been to General Stuart, without his knowing it; and patting ourselves on the back at how neatly we'd done the trick, when Jim looks up and says, 'Hey, Tom, look at them persimmons,' Sure enough, there was a tree full of the nicest ripe persimmons you ever see, right in our way.

"Now our rations hadn't been any too full lately and we were pretty nigh hungry all the time.

"'Tom,' he says, 'I uster be the best tree-climber in the county. I gotter get me some of those,'

"'Aw, Jim,' I says, 'don't be a fool. The woods may be full of rebels. I'm full as hungry as you are, but I ain't going to stop for any persimmons.'

"'Just a handful,' he says, 'and it won't take a minute. Will you wait?'

"'No, I won't,' I says, being so doggoned tired that I knew if I sat down I'd fall asleep. 'I'm for pushing back to camp, and if you ain't all kinds of a foolish boy, you'll do the same.'

"So I went on, and Jim, he gives me one look, and then he gives the tree a squint, and sho! he was off and up it before you could say 'Jack Robinson.' Climb! well, rather. He was up it in no time, and eating and slinging the persimmons into his hat. It made me so mad that I just naturally turned my back and went right on.

"Suddenly I hears a kind of whistle that was our signal--Jim's and mine--to look out for trouble. So I drops right down and rolls over into the bushes, and draws them over me, so I can't be seen. Then I lays quiet and listens.

"I hears voices, and turning my head so softly that the bushes don't move, I peeps out and sees a party of rebs a-coming down the path. They'd seen Jim, just after he'd give me his warning, and they lays for

him under the tree, and one of them rebs, who was just as handy at the climbing as Jim, goes up and brings him down, persimmons and all. The rebs laugh, and eat his persimmons and take him prisoner and march off; Jim allowing that he was so hungry that he'd stolen off by his lonesome to get something to eat. One of the men had heard the whistle Jim gave, but Jim explaining that he whistled in surprise at seeing them, they only beats up the bush a little, not coming near me.

[Illustration: "Brings him down, persimmons and all"]

"They go off, with Jim never so much as looking my way, though they passed so close to me that the lieutenant's heel scrunched my little finger. I had to take it without hollering or moving, for if I had they'd taken me along with Jim. And that's what tree climbing brings a man to."

"What became of Jim?" I asked.

"Oh, Jim, he was kept a prisoner all through the war, so he never got no enjoyment out of his life, never seeing a bit of real fighting--just marching and drilling and prison. So that, as he said, he might just as well never 'a' run away,--seeing he had to bide a non-combatant, which is the same as Quaker, after all."

"Then he didn't like it, did he?" I asked.

"No," Mr. Taylor said, laughing, "he didn't. And let this be a warning to you, young man. Don't you go up a tree for persimmons or cherries or other fruits whatsoever, agin the advice of your elders and betters."

"No, sir, Mr. Taylor," I said, "I never will."

CHAPTER IV

ON THE TOWPATH

Our house is so nearly on the towpath, that the mules eat the honeysuckle from the fence, and as there is only a tiny flower-bed between the house and the fence, you can hear the voices, and the tramping of the mules, as plainly indoors as out.

At night, when you wake up in the dark, you think they are coming in. That's at first. By and by you get so used to them that you don't think about it.

One reason why we came down so early in the spring is that I'm not to be sent to school until the fall, because I'm not to use my eyes too much, until they get stronger. Measles made them a little weak. So I have one hour with Aunty May for reading and sums, and half an hour with Aunty Edith for French; and then I don't have to do anything else for the rest of the day, until nearly dark, when I water the flower-beds for both the aunties.

But from eleven until four, except at lunch-time, I must not bust into the house and holler at Aunty May--for she is writing; and I must not

run after and plague Auntie Edith, when she goes up the towpath--for she's painting.

Mr. Taylor, being seventy-three, can be spoken to at any time, except when he's doing his baking. Then he doesn't want anything or anybody round his feet, he says. Just as if I was cats!

This morning I'm writing about. I was out on the towpath, fishing for eels, so I could put one in the tub which stands by the pump to catch the overflow; because Auntie May is very much afraid of snakes and eels, and she squeals so funny when she sees them that it is what Mr. Taylor calls "a fair treat" to hear her.

I thought if I got her good and scared with seeing one in the tub, she might be so mad that she'd not be able to write, and would chase me round the garden.

It's too bad Auntie May's grown up. She likes to play as well as any boy I know, and she's good at it, too, if it wasn't for her writing. Uncle Burt used to complain of that writing, too, when he was home. He said it interfered a lot--when he wanted her to play with him.

Anyway the eels didn't bite, but I thought maybe I'd get a sunfish, and that's nearly as good a scream-starter, if Auntie May doesn't expect it to be there.

All at once, I felt my cap pushed right off, and I looked up and there was a boy, riding on the top of an old gray mule, that was one of two tired-looking mules, dragging a canal boat.

There was nobody on the boat that I could see, 'cept one man asleep on the top.

"Gimme my cap, boy," I said.

"Aw, you and your fishin'," he says. "Git off the towpath."

And I said: "You can't say that to me. We've got the right of way here, because I live in that house with the green door."

"Oh, you do," says he. "Well, baby dear, go in and tell yer wimmin folks ye've lost your cap"; and he chucked my cap right into the canal!

Well, I couldn't get it, without falling in, and there was the canal-boat coming along ready to run over it. So I took my fishing-rod and flicked it at him, and there--I had caught the eel after all! It struck him, all cold and slippery, and he yelled, and it hit the mule, and the mule ran away, dragging the other mule with it, right up the slope to Rabbit Run Bridge!

[Illustration: "So I took my fishing-rod and flicked it at him"]

The boy had grabbed the fishing-rod, so that my rod and my eel went with them.

My! but I was mad, but kind of excited, too, for a man came up from the inside of the canal boat and yelled, and the man on the deck woke up and yelled, and the boy was yelling!

There was a farmer driving along the road and across the bridge and when he saw mules coming, lickity-split, where mules never come,--right up to the bridge,--he yelled too, and licked his horse to get out of the way. The boy, he licked the mules with my rod. He'd thrown my eel back into the water.

He was as cool as could be, and by and by he got the mules calmed down, and one of the men from the boat jumped off and helped him and they got the ropes all straight again and started off. The boy never said a word, except when the man asked him what did it. Then he told him, "The mule didn't like the looks of that baby boy there on the canal bank." The man shook his fist at me, and I called, "Gimme my cap." And the boy said, "Wait till we come back"; and he made an awful face as they went away, turning round and riding backwards to do it.

I knew then that he was the same boy that made a face at me when I was in the train.

Well, I had to tell Aunty Edith, and she looked very severe, and gave me my second-best cap and said, "William, do be careful, this time." But I only told her that the boy threw my cap into the water. I didn't tell that he said he was coming back.

But I talked to Mr. Taylor about it, and he agreed that when I saw the boy again, I'd have to have it out with him, and he'd stand referee to see that there was no unfair advantage took of me or him.

"For," says he, "you can't be called baby darling free and often by them boat boys, and neither can you eel them boat boys and scare their mules. All things being equal, you ask him his intentions next time and come to some mew-tual feeling on the matter, which won't reach the ears of your Aunty Edith. The ears of your Aunty May," say she, "could be reached and enjoyed by them fine, if took alone, and without t'other Aunty present."

Well, every day I kept a watch-out for that boy, and for a whole week I didn't see him.

One Monday, Aunty May asked Aunty Edith if I couldn't go down,--it was raining,--if I put on my raincoat and boots, with Mr. Taylor, when he went to the mail, and bring her some stamps and stamped envelopes. Aunty Edith said, "Oh, all right, May, but it seems to me you eat stamps. They disappear so fast." Aunty May laughed, and said,

"Be-that-as-it-may," which is what she always says when she wants to stop discussing, "William goes."

So I got ready, and Mr. Taylor and me started down. It's a mile away.

Mr. Taylor doesn't like umbrellas, neither do I, so, as it was only misting, Aunty May said I needn't.

Just as we got to Rabbit Run Bridge, who came along, with his mules, and the same canal boat, and the same man asleep, under an umbrella this time, but that BOY!

Mr. Taylor says, that the et-i-ket of such things makes him leave me and go sit on the bridge while I had it out. So I went down and said to the boy, "Hey, you, where's my cap?" And he grinned and said, "I give it

to your eel. He's a-wearing of it now, and it looks fine on him."

That strikes me so funny that I began to laugh; then I remembered that wasn't what I wanted to do. So I says, "Come on down till I polish you up for what you did to my cap"; and he says, "I'll be down in a minute to fix you for what you done to my mule. I've gotter put him in trousers to-morrow, his legs is so damaged."

Then I began to laugh again, at the thought of a mule in trousers. "Aw, come on down," I said. "You ain't got any trousers for him." "Have, too," he said; "I'm making them spare minutes out of Turkey red. And when I adds brass buttons and pockets I'll put 'em on, the next time he passes your house."

I began to laugh again, and then he jumped down, and before I knew it hit me a punch on the nose. That made me so mad that I hit at him and it struck his leg, and he said, "Ouch," and jumped so that I looked at his leg, and saw it was black and blue already.

"Who did that?" I said.

"Never you mind, baby dear," he said: "come on. If my leg did get caught between the boat and the bank and ground agin a stone this morning, I can still fight an eel-catcher."

[Illustration: "Never you mind, baby dear, come on"]

And he hopped up to me on one foot, and I saw he wasn't much bigger than me, maybe eleven or twelve, and he had all he could do to keep from crying because his leg hurt him so; but he was so quick that I just had to dodge to get out of the way.

"Say," I said, after I'd gotten out of his reach, "I don't want to hit you when you're hurt. And anyway," I said, "I don't know that I care about fighting with anybody who can make eels wear caps and mules red trousers. Wait a minute and I'll get a clean rag and some witch-hazel for your leg."

"No, you don't," he says; "I ain't going to be fussed over, but if you gotta pitcher-book, like the one I seen you reading one day, that, an' something to chew'll keep my mind off my leg, and when it's all right again, I'll come past and smash you into bait for eels."

That didn't seem quite what I wanted, but I told Mr. Taylor the boy was hurt and I couldn't fight, and he said "Certainly not--agin reg-u-lations."

Then he said he'd wait for me a minute, and I ran back home, because I knew I'd get there faster than any canal mule, and I bust into the room, and told Aunt May, and first she didn't like my busting in like that, and then she got interested. She gave me a picture-book and a piece of rag, and some witch-hazel in a bottle, and a big piece of cake. When I got out, the boy was just coming up to the fence, and Aunt May wanted to tie up his leg for him, but he wouldn't. So she explained to him that the stuff in the bottle and the rag was for his leg, and he said, "Yes, 'm, thanks," and then she went in the house quick, so's I could speak to him myself. I'd asked her to.

He said, "Well, eel-catcher, this will help me some. And if I pass this

way agin, I'll look you up."

"Oh, do," I said.

"Want yer book back?" he calls.

"No," I said, "when you get through with it, give it to the eel."

"No," says he, "he's not fond of reading, but I know an old mushrat that's fond of anything like print. I'll give it to him, so any time you see him reading it by moonlight, with his spectacles on, you'll know it's my friend."

"Oh, come back soon," I called, "and tell me more about it"; for he was getting slowly and slowly away from me.

"I will," he shouted, "if I don't make a mistake and swallow the witch-hazel."

CHAPTER V

ON THE DELAWARE

I thought I'd never get tired of having a river at our back door, but one day I nearly hated the Delaware.

This is how it happened: Aunty Edith had a rowboat with a place in the stern where you could fix a big sketching-umbrella, and go sketching without getting too sunburnt; and when I was very good, 'specially good, I could go with her.

When I was just ordinary good, and Aunty Edith wasn't using the boat, Aunty May and I used to borrow it and play "Robinson Crusoe," and Aunty May made the funniest "Man Friday" you ever saw. She would pretend not to know any language but "glub-glub," and so I had to teach her the names of things and she would shake all her hair down and dance a war-dance, when I got her to understand. This was when we'd reached our Island. There was one across the river from us, and on a corner of it we used to picnic and play.

Mr. Turner's children all were girls, and they went to school, or had music-lessons, or something, so I only had them once in a while to play with, and then they always wanted to play fairy-tales, and make me the Prince. I hate Princes because they're always bothering about finding some Princess. I'd rather have been an Ogre or a Dwarf or a Bad Giant. They had some fun. But the girls always got their Indian Boy to be those. He was a big boy from the Carlisle Indian School, who came in the summer to help about the house and the grounds, and he was great fun. He showed me how to make bows and arrows, and taught me how to swim and things like that, and how to push off a canoe. But mostly Aunty May was the one I had to play with right on the spot, and just when you'd made up your mind that she was a grown-up and wouldn't do it, she'd begin some funny thing, and she was almost as good as a real boy.

Well, Mr. Turner had a man visiting him, a painting-man, and he came

down to see Aunty Edith, and they put their heads on one side and screwed up their eyes, and looked at paintings, and had tea, and talked about art so long that Aunty May and I couldn't be quiet any longer, but just had to go down into the garden and play Wild Men of Borneo. That means taking a beanpole and yelling and dancing and trying to see who can vault and jump the farthest with the pole, and when you win you say, "Glug-Glug."

We were right in the middle of this, and Aunty May was a little red-faced, and her hair was kind of wild, when we heard somebody laugh, and there was the painter-man down by the river, laughing as hard as he could laugh; and Aunty Edith trying to look severe at Aunty May and not able to, on account of her looking so comical. She had a black smudge from the end of the beanpole, which had been in a bonfire, across her forehead. You see she had just jumped the farthest, and was hollering, "Glug-Glug."

Aunty May laughed pretty hard, too, and we all laughed then, and Aunty May went up to the house to turn into a clean-faced grown-up again, and Aunty Edith unlocked the boat and handed the big umbrella to the man and told him to use the boat as often and as long as he liked. He put his paint-box and sketch-block in, and got in himself, and I stood looking at him, wishing he'd ask me--when he did.

"Want to come, young man?" he said, and I said, "Yes, I'll take my book and my fish-line and be very quiet. May I, Aunty Edith?"

Aunty Edith said, kind of doubtful, "I'm not going, William. Maybe you'd better not."

Well, I guess I looked awful sorry at that, for the man said, his name was Mr. Garry Louden,--"Oh, let him come, Edith, I'll look after him"; and Aunty Edith said, "But you're such an absent-minded beggar, Garry, and this is Burt's most precious charge."

"Oh, he'll be all right," Mr. Garry said; "I'll bring him home right as a trivet. Hop in, son."

So I jumped in and waved good-bye to Aunty Edith, and we started up the river.

[Illustration: "What's an absent-minded beggar?"]

"What's an absent-minded beggar?" I asked Mr. Garry, and he said, "Oh, a fellow like me, who's always got his head full of pictures and things, and forgets what he's at."

"Then you don't really beg for anything, do you?" I said.

"Lord, no," he said, "except when I'm out with talkative young sports, and then I beg them to keep quiet."

So I took my fish-line and sat still as a mouse, while he looked up and down the river, and whistled to himself--when he got a good idea, I guess, for after he'd whistled some, he'd let the boat drift and make marks in his sketch-book. He was a nice man, but not used to little boys, I think, for he used awful big words, and didn't answer questions like Aunties and Uncles do.

By and by I told him about the Island, and he said, "Right you are, young Soc-ra-tees," and we landed there, and he kept saying, "Ripping," "Splendid," and things like that, and by and by he fished out some sandwiches and sweet chocolate from his pocket, and gave me some, and told me to stay there while he rowed around and explored farther up the side of the Island. I said, "All right," for with things to eat, and a nice brook, and a shady place, and a book, no boy need have any trouble finding things to do to keep himself amused. And I didn't.

I made a ship, and loaded it, and I made a fort on the other side of the brook, and when the ship came near the fort, the men from the fort came out and had a fight and sank her. Then when I got tired of that I read my book, and I read all I wanted to, and still Mr. Garry didn't come back. I could hear voices on the river, and once in a while a canoe shot past, but none of them was Mr. Garry, or Aunty Edith's rowboat.

By and by they stopped coming past and then I got up and went along the bank and looked for him. I could see, way across the river, a little white speck, shining through the trees, which I knew was our house.

My! didn't I want to be there! I didn't have any matches, of course. I'm not allowed to carry them. I couldn't make a fire, or anything, though it began to get dusky, and still Mr. Garry didn't come.

Then, suddenly, I remembered that he was an absent-minded beggar who forgot things, and maybe he'd forgot me. That made me feel awfully queer and lumpy inside me, and besides I was getting tired.

Nobody lived on that Island, except maybe some ground-hogs and squirrels and snakes, and--it wasn't any place for a boy who didn't have any food or tent or fire.

First thing I knew, when that struck me, I heard myself bawl--right out, "Oh, Aunty May--COME! Oh, Aunty May!" and then I was really frightened, for it sounded so loud, and so scared, and so babyish.

I kept still for a minute, and swallowed hard and then I yelled, "Hey! Hey!" out loud, without crying--hoping somebody would hear me. I did it a great many times, but nobody answered. Then I remembered that the boys were always landing here and hollering and shouting in fun, and nobody would pay any attention to it.

I tried to remember what Uncle Burt'd do if he was caught like this, and little like me. I thought maybe he'd take off his shirt and wave it, but then I remembered it'd be too dark to see. But anyway I guessed I'd better do something, so I took off my blouse, and put my sweater on, and tied my blouse to a tree, and it waved, quite fine, for there was a little breeze coming up. I tried rubbing sticks together for a light, but whoever made up that plan must have had stronger arms and hands than I had, for I rubbed till my arms ached so that I cried some, but I didn't get a single spark of light.

By this time it was very dark, and I was so hoarse with hollering, and so aching in my arms with rubbing sticks, and my legs hurt so with running up and down trying to see a boat or something, that I just dumped myself down on the grass and cried--and--I guess I--fell asleep. For the next thing I knew I heard some one calling my name, kind of loud, and kind of scared, "Billy, Billy, darling, are you there?" It was Aunty May in a canoe. I tried to call to her, but I was so hoarse and

tired, I just made a kind of noise in my throat.

[Illustration: Hey, Robinson Crusoe, here's your Man Friday]

Then I was so afraid she'd paddle away that I let out the finest yell you ever heard, and Aunty May called out, "Hey, Robinson Crusoe. Here's your Man Friday"; and she slid the canoe up to the bank, and I fell in so stiff, and she hugged me so hard, that it's a wonder we didn't upset.

[Illustration]

Usually I don't like hugging, but this time it was all right.

Then Aunty May told me that she had begun to get worried and so had Aunty Edith, knowing that Mr. Garry was an absent-minded beggar. Aunty Edith had gone up to Mr. Turner's to find if he was home, but Aunty May had insisted on going out in the canoe, though Mr. Taylor didn't like her to alone, and Mr. Taylor had gone down the towpath, toward the village, looking for us. Well, wasn't Aunty May mad when she found out how long I'd been alone and how badly I'd wanted her. She just paddled as fast as she could, and all the time pretended that we were wild savages who would catch Mr. Garry and put him on a desert island, just to see how he'd like it.

As we got nearer our house there were lights along the river-bank, and we called and a big boat came up to us, and in it was Mr. Garry, with a very white face, and Mr. Turner and Aunty Edith, and she was crying so hard that she couldn't see me at first.

When Aunty May said, "Don't cry, Edith, he's here," and handed me over, she gave me such a hard squeeze that I couldn't speak for a minute.

Mr. Garry all the time kept saying, "Say, old chap, I'm sorry, but I am such an absent-minded beggar." Aunty May said, "Yes, but you'll never have a chance to get absent-minded with this boy again."

He looked terribly sorry, and begged my pardon again, and I told him, "It was all right, only I didn't care to play Robinson Crusoe so truthfully--at night."

They hurried me up to the house and gave me warm things to eat and drink, and let me stay up longer than usual.

Aunty May wouldn't let Mr. Garry touch me or help her at all, and even Aunty Edith wouldn't hardly speak to him, till they found I was all right and not hurt any, except my blouse, which was left on the Island.

Mr. Garry gave me his own silver pen-knife, before he went away, so that I would "nevermore defenseless be," as he said, and we were quite friendly. But after he had gone, I heard Aunty May say that "Never would that absent-minded beggar take her boy away again"; and Aunty Edith said, "He's Burt's boy, not yours."

Aunty May didn't say anything, so I called out, "I'm your boy, too, Aunty May. Uncle Burt said so, and I'll never, never go out with an absent-minded beggar on the river again."

And I never have.

CHAPTER VI

GEORGE

For a while, I did have a real boy to play with, right in the house. It happened this way:--

Martha, who is Aunty Edith's colored washerwoman in the city, had a boy called George, who used to bring the clothes home. He was a little older than me--twelve years old--and he was always smiling, and his teeth were white and his eyes shiny. And when his mother wrote Aunty Edith that he was poorly, Aunty Edith had him sent down for a week--on trial, to stay in the attic above my room, and do the dishes for the Aunties, and run errands. He was to stay longer, if it was all right.

I wish it had been, for George was awful funny. He was very obliging, too, and I liked him. So did Aunty May, for he remembered all the stories his teachers had told him in school, and he would tell them to Aunty May and me, when we sat down under the willow trees, and we just loved it.

What Aunty Edith didn't love was what he did with the green paint. Aunty Edith had a lot left over in a pot after the kitchen was painted, and she thought it would be nice to paint the chairs and tables that we used out of doors.

We used to have breakfast and lunch, and even dinner, out in the little grapevine-covered back porch, which had a cement floor, level with the ground.

So just to keep George happy, Aunty Edith gave him that to do. He commenced it while Aunty May and I were doing lessons, and we could hear Aunty Edith explaining--Aunty Edith always does the explaining--and George all the time saying, "Yas, 'm, yas, 'm, Miss Edith." And by and by Aunty Edith came in and we could hear George whistling and singing. George did sing awful loud, and funny songs, so you'd have to stop and listen.

This morning he kept singing something about a man named "Sylvester," and he kept singing out the same thing over and over again, till Aunty May said, "Oh, dear, I can't hear myself speak. Edith, will you quiet the blackbird?" And Aunty Edith called to George not to sing so loud, and he said, "Yas, 'm, Miss Edith"; and the next minute it began louder than ever.

Then Aunty Edith went downstairs to tell him to take his work farther away from the house.

She hadn't been gone a minute till we heard her say, "Oh, good gracious, what shall I do? Come here, George, and see if you can take it off." George kept saying, "Yas, 'm, Miss Edith, yas, 'm"; and Aunty Edith was being so very spluttery, that Aunty May and I leaned out the window, and then we jerked our heads in and Aunty May said, "Don't you dare laugh out loud, Billy."

Then we looked again, and jerked our heads inside the window every time we felt the laugh coming on, which was pretty often, for you see George had put the paint-can, a small one, right on the doorsill, and Aunt Edith had put her foot in it, and it had caught.

There was Aunt Edith holding on to the grape-arbor while George pulled at the can, and the paint flowing around pretty free. Well, George couldn't pull it off, and finally he had to take a can-opener and cut Aunt Edith's foot out, just as though she were salmon, or something.

When we got to that part, Aunt May and I forgot ourselves and laughed out loud, and then Aunt Edith looked at us, and looked at her foot, and at George's black face all daubed with green paint, and his clothes, too, as he carefully cut her out, and she laughed, too. But it spoiled her shoe, and it took several days to wear the green off George.

[Illustration: He had to take a can-opener and cut Aunt Edith's foot out]

That was the too bad part of it. George was so fine for singing and telling stories and he just couldn't remember to do anything else.

When he went for the mail and the groceries, unless I went with him, he'd forget everything, and come home just as smiling as ever.

And he was brave, too, for he used to chase the village boys when they ran after him and called names, and besides that he and I built a lovely Filipino house up in the biggest willow tree, and had lots of fun, escaping from two boys at the farm across Rabbit Run Bridge, who chased us and tried to catch us. We got up in our tree-house and shot at them with bows and arrows, and they couldn't reach us. I liked having George. If he'd only stayed funny, without getting dangerous. But George got dangerous.

It was this way: George and the two boys on the farm, Samuel and Charlie Crosscup, were having a talk on the middle of Rabbit Run Bridge, about fire engines. Samuel said the East Penniwell fire engine could get up steam and run to a fire, with Sol Achers's old white horse hitched to her, quicker than a New York fire engine could. George and me said it couldn't. He said, "It could, because why? The East Penniwell horse and engine were used to the roads and the New York horses and engine would have to be showed."

I couldn't think of anything to say, but George said, "No, sah. Dat ain't no ways so. For de New York fire engines and horses is so trained that they goes over any road and anywhere according as the Fire Chief he directs, and it doan mek no difference whether they've been up dataways befo' or not They jist naturally eats up all distances."

Well, that made the Crosscup boys mad, and they kept telling all about the East Penniwell engine house, and my! it must be a lovely place, if all they say is true. George he told them then about the New York engine houses, and my! they must be splendid if George really knew. He said he did. He said his mother's cousin washed for three firemen and she'd oughter know. I guess she ought to, but George did remember so much about those things, and forgot so quick about others, that sometimes I really didn't know what to be sure about.

Well, it began to rain, and George was going to take me home, when one

of the boys said, "Aw, don't go home, yet. Come on into the old barn and let's play knife until the rain stops."

I guessed we'd ought to go home right away with the bundles and change, but George said, "On no account can I git you wet. Miss Edith wouldn't stand for that nohow." So I went with him. And we played knife on the floor. It was a big empty barn. That is there weren't any cattle in it, just hay.

It stood a long way from the house, and on a little hill. By and by the thunder and lightning got quieter, but the rain made it dark, and I said, "Oh, George, let's go. It's too dark to see in here anyway." But George wouldn't go until he had finished his game, and when the other boys said, "It's too dark to play knife any more," George said, "Let's play robber's cave. I got something in my pocket will make it light." He took out a box of matches and a candle-end, and said, "Let's stick it up yere, and then play robbers. This'll be the den"; and he put the candle into the neck of an old bottle.

I said, "Oh, George, Aunty Edith doesn't let you have matches." George said, "Look yere, these matches was give me to-day, and this ain't Miss Edith's barn. If these young gemmun is willing to play in their father's barn with a candle, you ain't got no call to say anything, has yer?" And the boys said, "Aw, it's all right. Come on. William ain't yer boss. He's nothing but a kid anyway."

Well, that made me mad, and I wouldn't play robbers with them, and I slid down to the barn floor, and went to the door, and looked out to see if it was getting any lighter. But George, he put on a terrible look, and began to say, "I'm the King of the Robbers, who's this yere a-peekin' and a-spyin' in my den?" Then Sam called out, "It's me. I'm the King of the Pirates, and I've come to take ye bound hand and foot to my ship. Stand by, men!" "Men" was his brother Charlie, and they made a dash at George. He danced and flew at them with a stick and called to me to come and be his man and help him fight 'em off.

I was just running to do it, for it looked like pretty good fun, and the rain was pretty hard, when somebody knocked the bottle with their foot, and over it went into a heap of straw, and before the boys could race back and put it out, the hay was on fire.

Oh, dear! I hope I never see anything like that again. We boys were so scared at first, we couldn't move, and then, with a yell, the Crosscup boys ran to tell their father, with me and George after them.

[Illustration: We all worked with hose and everything.]

We only ran a little ways toward the other barn, and then we found an old bucket, and George yelled to me to get a bit of rope, and we lowered it into the canal and ran back to throw the water on the fire. But it was too little, and the fire was too big.

Farmer Crosscup came running with his hired man, and we all worked with hose and everything, but the barn burned, all but the north wall, and so fast that though George and I ran and ran for help, and though Mrs. Crosscup telephoned to town for engines, it was through burning before they got up.

After this, George had to go. Aunty Edith got him sent to a place for

colored children, where he could have fresh air, and some one to look after him, but he had to go away from East Penniwell. The farmers said he was "dangerous." I was sorry and Aunty May was sorry, too, but it couldn't be helped. George was sorry, too, but at the last minute he leaned from the wagon and whispered to me, "Anyway, I done proved dat dere old fire engine wuz too slow."

CHAPTER VII

LEFT ALONE

After George went away, it seemed very quiet on the towpath. It grew warmer and warmer, and the cherries got ripe and were picked, and I climbed trees and played more, and had fewer lessons, because it was so hot, and the little Turner girls came down to play with me sometimes, because school was out. I went up and played with them sometimes, but not often unless the launch came down, because it was a long way to walk in the hot sun.

Mr. Taylor and me used to sit on his back porch, where it was cool, and tell one another stories.

He told me some fine ones about the war, and when he was a boy. More things seemed to happen to boys then than they do now, and I told him so, and he laughed and said that was only because he was seventy-three and remembered about them. He said that when I was seventy-three, "some little feller'll think the same thing when you tell him about the fust airship and things like that."

I laughed at me ever being seventy-three, but I suppose I will some day. The only fun we had before the letter came was early that very morning, when Aunty May was sitting reading some clippings her editor had sent her, with her back to the little cupboard I told about, that was made out of an old window.

I came down the stairs from my room and stood looking at her, wishing she'd look up so I could interrupt. But she didn't and I stood there just as quiet for a minute, and wondering why I suddenly thought about the pictures in my book on India. Then I heard a little rustle, and I knew. Just above Aunty May's head, uncoiling itself from round a pile of plates in the corner, was a big black and yellow snake.

I called out, "Hey, Aunty May! Quick! There's a snake behind you!" And she looked up and said, "Billy, I'm not in the mood for playing."

[Illustration: Auntie May got a hatchet and made a chop at the snake]

I said, "Oh, Aunty, I'm not fooling. Quick, or it will land on your head"; and she turned round and looked right at the snake and it looked at her, and Aunty May gave a scream, and jumped away, and the snake dropped down on the floor and commenced to wiggle behind the couch.

Then I tell you there was some fun. Aunty Edith came down just as Aunty May got a hatchet and made a chop at the snake, but she never touched it, and Aunty Edith wouldn't let me go behind the couch after him.

Mr. Taylor, who was coming along the towpath from the village (he brought us the mail every morning), came down and asked, "What's up, young feller? I heerd the wimminfolk screeching. What ye been up to?"

I told him I hadn't done anything. It was a snake. Then Mr. Taylor and me pulled out the couch, but he wasn't there. We poked sticks behind the pantry, but couldn't find him.

There was a big hole in the cement there, and Mr. Taylor said, "Sho, the poor snake was more frightened than ye was, Miss May, and it's likely he's down the river-bank by now." Then Aunty May and me told him how big it was and what color, and he said, "I knew a couple of wimmin kept a milk snake in their dairy for a pet. Maybe this feller wants pettin'." Aunty May said he'd never get it from her, and she took a piece of tin and a hammer and tacks and went to close up the hole, but Mr. Taylor said, "Wait a minute, Miss May"; and he whispered to her, "Stand by a minute. There's a letter here from the War Department to Miss Edith, and I'm doubting it's being the best of news."

Well, poor Aunty May turned so white and sat down so quickly with her face in her hands, that Aunty Edith, who came in the room just then from putting the axe away in the shed, said, "Why, May, did the snake frighten you as much as that?" Aunty May didn't answer. She just clutched Mr. Taylor and said, "Where is it?" Then Mr. Taylor looked at her and at Aunt Edith, and said "Sho" once or twice, and then he pulled out of his pocket a long envelope, and put it in Aunty Edith's hands.

She sat down very quick, and tried to open it, but her hands shook so that she couldn't. Aunty May took it from her and tore it open, and they both leaned over and read it. Then Aunty Edith cried so for a while she couldn't tell us anything, but at last Aunty May took my hand and we went out on the porch, and she told us that Uncle Burt had got hurt in a little fight--not a real battle, a "skirmish" with some natives, and he was to be sent home on sick-leave.

Then she and Mr. Taylor talked about what the letter said, and he shook his head, and told her it looked like a bad job to him. Aunty May told me to go over and sit with Mr. Taylor while she talked with Aunty Edith.

Mr. Taylor and me sat there, not very happy, because I was thinking of Uncle Burt, and somehow I couldn't make him sick or hurt, he was so big and so very strong.

I said that to Mr. Taylor, and he said, "Them there guns don't care how big and strong a man is, they picks 'em down. They're cruel things, boy, firearms is. Don't you ever go a-monkeying with them, mind that." I said I wouldn't.

We sat there so quiet that we could hear the Aunties talking, and Aunty Edith crying every now and then, in the house. Aunty May wasn't crying, but she seemed quite angry about something. I could hear her say, "You shall take it, Edith, and you shall do as I say, or I'll throw it into the canal." Then again, "What is the money to me if--" And then Aunty May began to cry and Aunty Edith began to be soothing to her, and the more she soothed the harder Aunty May cried, till I heard Aunty Edith say, "All right, May, dear. I promise I'll do it, if you'll only stop crying."

Aunty May stopped right away, and presently she came out, and her eyes were red, but her mouth was smiling, like it always does when she gets what she wants.

She came and sat down by Mr. Taylor and me, while Aunty Edith went up to write out telegrams and letters, and told me that Aunty Edith was going out to bring Uncle Burt home, and that she was going with her as far as San Francisco; that while they were gone I was to stay at the Turners', for she thought they would look after me for her, and would I be a good boy until she came back?

I promised I would, but, oh, I felt awful, and I begged her to take me with her, but she said she couldn't because Aunty Edith was so tired and sorry, and she would have to look after her all the time, and I must stay at home and be good and wait. She would come back for me, in a little while, and we'd wait together for Uncle Burt.

So as long as Mr. Taylor sat there looking at me with his winky blue eyes, I didn't dare howl or anything, but my! I did feel like it. So I just said, "Yes, 'm, Aunty May, I'll be good." She kissed me right before him. It was a little mean of her, but he looked the other way and said, "Shoo, Teddy."

Then Aunty May said, "There isn't a minute to be lost, Billy, so come in and pack your box, while I go across to the farmhouse and call the Turners up on the 'phone."

I went into the house, where Aunty Edith was very quiet and packing very hard; and I packed the big suitcase with some of my things, for Aunty Edith said I could always get in the house and get the rest of them any time.

Presently Aunty May came back and said, "It's all right. They are dears. They are coming down for Billy, right away, and they'll take you and me to the train. Do you think you can do it, Edith? We've just an hour." Aunty Edith said, "Of course I can."

And then you never saw such a packing time. It made me so dizzy watching those two Aunties fly around, that presently I went outside, and sat with Mr. Taylor, who was on the front step, "Waiting orders," he said; and didn't we just get them, though!

When Aunty Edith called, "Billy, the tags, please," didn't I just run! and when Aunty May said, "Mr. Taylor, will you please help me with this window?" he jumped around as though he was seventeen instead of seventy-three.

By and by the launch came down, but a little late, so it was decided that I was to wait with Mr. Taylor until they took the Aunties to the train; and they'd get me on the way back.

[Illustration: I believed they had really gone away, and left me all alone]

After a few minutes the trunks were in the launch, the house was locked and Mr. Taylor had the key. The Aunties kissed me good-bye, and Aunty Edith promised to tell Uncle Burt I was a good boy, and Aunty May said she'd come back for me as soon as she could--and they shook hands with Mr. Taylor and he said, "Sho, I gotter feed them Teddy-cats," and went

down the steps. Then they got into the launch and went off, and I waved at them as long as I could see them; and then I sat down by the canal bank and felt as if I couldn't bear it, for it wasn't till then I believed they had really gone away and left me all alone.

[Illustration]

CHAPTER VIII

AT TURNERS'

Up at Turners' it was nice. They had a big stone house with lots of room in it, and the girls, Charlotte and Grace, were nice to play with, and Mrs. Turner always seemed to know what a boy wanted. She did pat me on the head and call me "pigeon" sometimes, but then, she did that to Mr. Turner, too, so I didn't mind.

At first I thought it was going to be so nice, that I'd forget about everything till Aunty May came back, but by and by, though they were nice as nice can be, I began to miss Aunty May till it hurt like a toothache.

I missed Aunty Edith, too, but Aunty May and I had played most together, and next to Uncle Burt, I loved her best.

The Turners had an old ruined mill on their grounds, and we children used to hang our bathing-suits in there and use it to dress in when we went swimming in the creek.

It was very old, and all the machinery, the wheels and things, were made of wood. Up in the top there was a nice big loft, with a wide window, where nobody ever went. When I found this out, I took a broom up there and swept it by the window, and got an old chair, and one of the old barrels for a table, and when I didn't want to play with Charlotte and Grace, or when it rained, I used to get a piece of bread or cake, or an apple, and go off there, all by myself. Sometimes I read, sometimes I wrote books and drew, and sometimes I just sat and thought about Uncle Burt and Aunty May, and Aunty Edith. And it got nearer and nearer the time for Aunty May to come back.

The very day that she was to come home, I was doing this, thinking about her, I mean--a little harder than usual, because Mr. Turner had told me at breakfast that after all Aunty May wouldn't be back till to-morrow, when I heard somebody else breathing in the room. I turned around, and there was Henry, the Indian boy from the Carlisle School, sitting crouched on the floor.

He was a great big boy, fifteen or sixteen, and he helped with the work in the house in the summertime. Henry was always nice to us children, and we liked him a great deal.

I said "Hullo, Henry, what are you doing in my library?" And he showed all his teeth at me and said he was doing the same that I was doing there; he had come up to be sad and alone. Then I told him all about Aunty May, and he was sorry for me, and he told me about the school, and

the teachers, and football, and his people, and I was sorry for him.

Then he told me that when he got very sorry about everything, sometimes, he just dressed himself and got out of his bed at night and walked and walked until he got tired, and then came back and slept.

He told me how lovely everything looked in the country, early in the morning, and I told him I'd like to do that, too, some morning, but how did he get up without waking people? Then he showed me how he could move in his stocking feet and no one could hear him. And it was true. If I sat with my back to Henry I would still think he was sitting back of me, when he was over by the door, really. So I practiced that, too. "Playing Indian," he called it; and he promised next time he had that feeling, he'd throw some gravel at my window, and I could come down.

[Illustration: I told him all about Aunty May]

I asked him how soon he thought it'd be, and he looked at me very long, and then, just as somebody called, "Henry, where are you? Come and take the canoe out," he leaned down and whispered in my ear, "To-night, be ready."

Well, I could hardly eat my supper for thinking of it, and I went to bed so quickly and quietly that Mrs. Turner called me "pigeon" and patted my head, because the little girls didn't want to go and were a little noisy.

After I got into bed and was just falling asleep, I did just for a minute think I should have asked Mrs. Turner if I could go, but honestly I never thought of that till then, because Aunty May wasn't there. I would have thought of telling her. Anyway Henry had told me not to tell, and I didn't know whether he meant just the children or not.

Well, I stayed awake a long time, and got up softly and dressed again, and then I stayed asleep it seemed to me just a teeny while, when a bit of grass and gravel hit me on the nose.

I woke up and more came flying through my open window, so I got up softly and kneeled on my bed, and there was Henry down on the ground, looking up at me.

When he saw me he put his finger to his lips, and sent a big piece of clothes-rope flying through the window on to the bed, all without a word.

Then he shaped with his mouth to use that and not the stairs, for the stairs were creaky.

So I put the noose at the end over my bed-post and held on tight, and slid down, without a bit of noise, to the ground, where Henry caught me.

I came down so fast it hurt my hands, but Henry washed them with water, at the well, and tied them up, all without speaking, and we went softly out of the yard, not toward the towpath, but up the long road over the hills.

It was very early morning, about three o'clock, and everything looked lovely.

[Illustration: Slid down without a bit of noise]

When we got far away from the house, I asked Henry if he wasn't hungry, and he shook his head, no, but gave me a Uneeda biscuit out of a box, and I ate three or four, and all the time he was walking on in the nice soft light, without saying anything.

Presently we got to the top of a hill, and Henry stood still, and so did I. There was the sun coming up and making all sorts of lovely colors on the sky.

When we looked at it a little while, Henry said, "How does the little, lonely boy like walking in the morning?" and I said, "Fine."

We walked on, and sometimes Henry didn't say anything, and sometimes he whistled, and sometimes he talked to me about Carlisle and football, and out-of-doors and things like that, and I had a lovely time and didn't notice how far away we were getting.

At last the sun came up all the way, and I said, "Oh, Henry, we'd better get back now, for Mrs. Turner will miss us and not know where we are."

But Henry threw himself flat on the grass,--we had sat down to rest a minute because I was tired, and didn't say anything at all for a long time.

Then he lifted his head and his white teeth showed, and his eyes smiled at me, and he said quite softly, "I am not going back."

Oh, how queer I felt when he said those words. Maybe it was as Aunty May said, because I hadn't enough breakfast in my insides, but everything went round like a clock for a minute, the sky, the trees, and the strange road, and the strange houses, and then I said in a funny voice, "Oh, Henry, you don't mean that."

He said, "Yes, I am tired of everything there"; and he pointed down the road we had come along. "I am going back to my own people; back to the school."

Then he offered to take me with him, and to carry me part of the way, as I was little and got tired too easily to keep up with him. But though he was kind, and I wanted very much to go with him, and not be left alone, I couldn't, because I remembered this was the day Aunty May was coming home; and now, what would she and the Turners think of me!

I was so sorry that I was pretty near crying, except that the Indian boy was looking at me with his bright eyes, and I remembered that Indians do not cry, and would think me a poor kind of a boy if I did.

So I just shook my head, and told him I must go back and meet Aunty May. He didn't like this, until I had promised him that I would only say he'd left me and had gone on to Carlisle, and I would not say where he'd left me, so that he'd get a fair start. But I didn't like to say even that for fear I'd have to tell what wasn't so, until he told me it was all right, because I didn't know where we were, and he wouldn't tell me.

He told me he liked me very much and was sorry I wouldn't go with him, and he divided the crackers and told me to sit still and not look until I had counted 100. I did, and when I'd finished there wasn't any Henry

to be seen.

I ate a cracker, and started back down the road again, and now everybody was up and I met men on the roads and dogs barked at me, and oh, how long the road seemed!

I went on and on till I thought I should fall down, and I was so thirsty I didn't know what to do.

By and by, I came to a place where there was a toll-gate, and then I knew I was lost, for we hadn't passed any on the road coming up, and besides I hadn't any money.

So I stood still and tried to think, but I felt hot and tired and my head went round a little. Then I thought I'd go to the back door of the tollhouse, and then maybe some one would tell me how to go and they wouldn't have to feel so badly about telling me I couldn't get through without any money. So I went round to the back yard and there was nobody in it.

Then I went up to the kitchen door and knocked and nobody came, but I heard a little voice at the kitchen window say, "Hey, boy, what do you want?"

I looked and there was a little boy, just about seven or eight, sitting in a chair by the window, and I came up to it, and called to him--"I want to know the road to East Penniwell, and I want a drink of water."

At first he just shook his head, and then he opened the window, and said, "Hurry up. We got diphtheria here and nobody's allowed to speak to me. That's why the tollhouse is shut up. Ain't you 'fraid?"

I said, "I don't know what it is, and I'm awfully hungry and thirsty and I want to know the road to East Penniwell."

"Well," he said, "poor boy"; and handed me out a glass of milk and a piece of bread, and I was drinking the milk, when I heard some one yell at me. It was a man running up to the house, and the boy grabbed the cup away and said, "Here comes Pop. You'd better leg it." I ran as fast as I could out the gate and down the road he told me to take. The man didn't chase me far, and I didn't hear what he said, his dog barked so. But I didn't feel quite so tired, though I ached a lot still, and my feet were awful wet, through running right through a brook when the man called at me.

I went right on. Sometimes I lay down under a tree, sometimes I sat down by the road.

I don't see why a road that seems all right when you're going up it, seems so terrible when you are going down. But maybe it's because I made wrong turnings, and always when the men asked me if I'd ride with them a little ways, I said, "No," because I would have to tell them I belonged at Turners', and they might ask me about Henry, the Indian boy.

Last I took a turning that led me farther and farther down a road I never remember seeing before and there were no cross-road places; no farmhouses, and no man came along on a wagon. I just had to keep on, feeling sicker and sicker, till, just as I made a short turn, I came out on a road that led to Crosscup's farm and Rabbit Run Bridge!

My, wasn't I glad. But I wasn't going to Crosscup's house, not much! I knew what I'd do now. I'd get Mr. Taylor, and tell him, just as fast as I could.

That wasn't very fast, because my feet had needles in them, and dragged, but by and by I got there, and knocked at the door. Mr. Taylor opened it, with all the cats around him. I just began to speak, and say, "Good-morning, Mr. Taylor," when everything got kind of black and hazy, and I didn't remember any more.

CHAPTER IX

THE WHITE TENT

[Illustration: I woke up and found myself lying on the porch]

I didn't remember anything, until I woke up and found myself lying on the porch, and Mr. Taylor bending over me with a glass of water in his hand, all the Teddy-cats purring at me, and my head on somebody's lap. Mr. Taylor was saying, "Sho, I guess he's coming to, and ye'd better not let him see ye, jist at first"; but I turned quick before she could move, and grabbed her and said, "Oh, Aunty May."

I thought I'd shouted it, but it sounded just like a squeak.

Aunty May didn't care. She just lifted me up in her arms and held me tight, and said, "Oh, Billy, how could you run away from me?"

It took me the longest while explaining to her and to Mr. Turner and to Mr. Taylor, who didn't say anything but "Sho" and shoo the cats, and never looked at the others. But I knew he'd hear every word and remember it, if I didn't, so I told them exactly what happened. How sorry Henry was to go away, but that he had to, and that I didn't know where the place was that we'd parted at, and how I thought he was coming back when we started.

Mr. Turner said it was all right, that Henry was an honest, industrious boy, but he had fits of homesickness, though they had never known about his getting up early and walking.

Aunty May forgave me, and Mr. and Mrs. Turner forgave me too.

Mrs. Turner was in the launch, and was just telling me to jump in and come up with Aunty May to dinner, when Mr. Taylor, who had been listening and not saying anything, said, "I hope that wasn't the Lateeka Toll-House ye stopped at, young man. I heerd say there was so much diphtheria and scarlet fever there that they hev closed the tollhouse."

Then I remembered what the boy had said, and I had to say it to Aunty May, and Aunty held me very tightly for a minute, and said to Mrs. Turner, "No: it wouldn't be safe for the other children. I'll keep William down here, until we see if it develops."

Then both the ladies nodded to each other very sadly, but Mr. Turner

said, "Oh, he's a young husky. He'll be all right"; and they went away.

But I did develop. So much, that Aunty May had a sign put on the house, and nobody came near us for weeks and weeks but the nurse and the doctor, and Mr. Taylor, who used to hand things over the fence. And oh, how tired I got of being in bed, and being sick. Then when I got a little better, Aunty May and the doctor had a big tent put up in the woods near us, and the nurse went away, and Aunty May and I lived in the tent together, and I started to get better and write this book.

First, just a little at a time, and then by and by a good deal each day, and all the time Aunty May stayed with me, and never said I was naughty or anything. Just called me "Billy-boy" and spelled all the big words, and took care of me like I was a baby, because I was so weak.

One day, when I had sat up all day, dressed, I thought Aunty May looked kind of excited, and I saw a letter sticking out of her pocket, and I asked her if Aunty Edith was coming home, and she said, "Yes, very soon." She smiled so that I knew it must be something nice, so I clapped my hands and said, "Then Uncle Burt's all well again, too." For every time while I was sick, when I asked about Uncle Burt, Aunty May would say, "He's much better, but we mustn't talk." I had to be patient and wait then, but this day I said, "Oh. Aunty May, he is really better, isn't he?"

Then Aunty May laid down her letter and came and sat down by me and said, "Billy, how would you like to hear about Uncle Burt to-day?" and I told her, "I'd like to." Aunty May told me then that Uncle Burt had been shot very badly in the leg, and that he had a fever beside, and had been so ill that they thought he would die, but that Aunty Edith had gone out there and taken such good care of him that he was better, and was coming back with Aunty Edith. I asked for how long, and Aunty May got a little sad and said, "That's the hard part of it for Uncle Burt, Billy. He won't ever be able to go back to the army again. His leg is so badly hurt that he will always be a little lame."

Then Aunty May burst out crying, and so did I, for it seemed hard that big, splendid Uncle Burt should be lame. By and by Aunty told me that he had got the hurt when he turned back to help one of his men who had been shot; that even though he was hurt himself, he brought the soldier back to camp; so I ought to be proud of him.

But I was anyway, I told her. I couldn't be any more than I am. I knew Uncle Burt would do a thing like that. I just expected it of him. But I'd like to kill the man who hurt his leg.

Aunty May told me not to say that, for the poor thing had been killed, and she said, "War is a horrible thing," And I said, "Yes, 'm, but it wasn't a real war, only a skirmish"; and Aunty May said, "It was real enough for that poor wretch and for Burt."

I said, "But Uncle Burt'll find something else to do, some other way to be splendid, won't he?" And Aunty May just nodded her head, and we didn't say anything more for a long time and I lay still thinking about Uncle Burt and wondering how it would seem to be him, and lame. I said, "Will he use a crutch?" but Aunty May didn't know. She hoped not. And now, would I please get well, and be ready for her to hand me over whole to Uncle Burt.

I said I would, but she'd have to be handed over too, for Uncle Burt told me to take care of her for him.

I got better, and so did Aunty May. As fast as I grew better, she got more cheerful, and we used to have lots of fun. But all the time we stayed in the tent, and never went to the house. I used to hear hammerings and things, but I never saw anything, because I wasn't allowed to walk yet on account of the anti-toxin. I don't know whether that word is spelled right, but I don't like to ask Aunty May, it always makes her pale when I say the word.

One day, Aunty May brought a boy down the path with her. A mule boy. I heard the mules waiting for him outside, and it was the "cap and eel" boy, and he said, "How are you, young feller? Heerd you was sick!"

"Who told you?" I said.

"The Mushrat," he said. "He came a-whooping and a-running up the canal one night, an' hollered to me in passing that he wasn't going to bring no pitcher-books back to no diphtheria sore-throaters. Kina cowardly fellers, them mush-rats, so I brung it myself. Say, when ye going to get up and paste me?"

"When you put those turkey-red trousers on your mule," I said.

And then we both laughed, and Aunty May give him another picture-book, and some fruit, and asked him to come again, and he promised, and I lay back and heard his mule bells jingling up the path. It seemed so nice and peaceful, and everybody was so kind to me, that I felt lumpy inside, especially when I thought of Uncle Burt coming.

But would he be angry with me for bringing germs to his house, and right close to Aunty May? I asked Aunty May what she thought, and she said Uncle Burt would agree with her that I really couldn't help it, and that he wouldn't blame me, especially if she handed me over all right.

So we went to work on jellies and things and tried to get well, as fast as anything before he came.

One afternoon Aunty May said to me, "Billy, I think you're strong enough to go back to the house now. We've got rid of all the germs and the sickness in this nice big white tent, and now, my little soldier, we'll go back to barracks and wait for our Commanding Officer."

We packed up my books and papers and went down the path to the house, but it wasn't the same house any more.

It was bigger, and all around it ran a wide piazza, and on it were big wicker chairs, and Aunty May put me in one of them, and asked me how I liked it. And I said it was lovely, and it was. Inside there were more rooms than before and a bathroom with a big shiny tub and running water, and while it was a country house still, it was much more like a city house.

Aunty May said, "Do you think Aunty Edith will like it?" and I said yes; then she said, "Do you think a sick soldier would like to get well on this piazza?" and I said I knew he would. It was the finest ever.

We took hands and went around and looked at everything, and then we set

the table together. Aunty May wouldn't let Mrs. Katy Smith, who had come to help, do a thing to the table. We set it for four people. So I said, "Is company coming to dinner?" Aunty May hugged me and said, "Yes, Billy, but it's a surprise. Don't ask." But I kept guessing,--Charlotte and Grace Turner, and Mr. and Mrs. Turner, and everybody I knew in East Penniwell, and Aunty May said, "You're cold. You're cold."

Just then a carriage stopped at our door, and Aunty Edith got out, and then a thin pale man got out, and he carried a cane and leaned on Aunty Edith, and he came into the room: And IT WAS UNCLE BURT!

[Illustration: And it was Uncle Burt]

I gave such a yell that Aunty Edith looked frightened and Aunty May threw her arms about me and said, "Oh, Billy dear, don't get excited. It's bad for--" But Uncle Burt said, "No, it isn't. It's good for me." And he went to hug me, but Aunty May hadn't got her arms untwisted from me yet, so that he hugged both of us. He didn't seem to notice it at all until I pointed out to him that it was me he wanted and that he was kissing Aunty May, and he said, "Dear me, you don't say so"--and kissed her again. Then he kissed me.

He sat down, and Aunty May and me went and stood by him. That is, I stood by him and leaned on his well knee, and Aunty May kneeled down and put her head on his hurt knee, and he didn't seem to mind it at all. He put his hand on her head and smiled over to Aunty Edith, and she came and said, "Come, Billy, show me the house."

I said, "Yes, Aunty Edith, but first I want to give Aunty May back to Uncle Burt. She's all right, the germs didn't hurt her, though she got quite thin taking care of me."

"Did she, poor girl," said Uncle Burt.

Aunty May lifted her head up and said, "And Billy's all right. I took care of him,--for you."

Then Uncle Burt smiled at us both. His old smile, though he was so dreadful thin and pale. He said, "Well, and now I've come home to look after you both."

I showed Aunty Edith the house, and she told me all about her journey, and how long it took her, and how sick Uncle Burt was then, and how much better he was now; and that though he would always walk with a limp, he wouldn't need a crutch,--which made me very glad.

Then Uncle Burt and Aunty May came in, and Aunty Edith kissed Aunty May and they went to take off Aunty Edith's hat.

Uncle Burt let me take him to his room, and he told me, while I fished out a handkerchief for him and brushed his hair, that Aunty May was going to marry him and be my real Aunty, and I was to live with them both for always.

So this is a good place to end W.A.G.'s Tale.

THE END

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