

## CHAPTER XV. A DISOBEDIENT BROTHER

Dan was his own man again in the morning, though rather pale and weak; he wanted to get up, but Cecily ordered him to stay in bed. Fortunately Felicity forgot to repeat the command, so Dan did stay in bed. Cecily carried his meals to him, and read a Henty book to him all her spare time. The Story Girl went up and told him wondrous tales; and Sara Ray brought him a pudding she had made herself. Sara's intentions were good, but the pudding-- well, Dan fed most of it to Paddy, who had curled himself up at the foot of the bed, giving the world assurance of a cat by his mellifluous purring.

"Ain't he just a great old fellow?" said Dan. "He knows I'm kind of sick, just as well as a human. He never pays no attention to me when I'm well."

Felix and Peter and I were required to help Uncle Roger in some carpentering work that day, and Felicity indulged in one of the house-cleaning orgies so dear to her soul; so that it was evening before we were all free to meet in the orchard and loll on the grasses of Uncle Stephen's Walk. In August it was a place of shady sweetness, fragrant with the odour of ripening apples, full of dear, delicate shadows. Through its openings we looked afar to the blue rims of the hills and over green, old, tranquil fields, lying the sunset glow. Overhead the lacing leaves made a

green, murmurous roof. There was no such thing as hurry in the world, while we lingered there and talked of "cabbages and kings." A tale of the Story Girl's, wherein princes were thicker than blackberries, and queens as common as buttercups, led to our discussion of kings. We wondered what it would be like to be a king. Peter thought it would be fine, only kind of inconvenient, wearing a crown all the time.

"Oh, but they don't," said the Story Girl. "Maybe they used to once, but now they wear hats. The crowns are just for special occasions. They look very much like other people, if you can go by their photographs."

"I don't believe it would be much fun as a steady thing," said Cecily. "I'd like to SEE a queen though. That is one thing I have against the Island--you never have a chance to see things like that here."

"The Prince of Wales was in Charlottetown once," said Peter. "My Aunt Jane saw him quite close by."

"That was before we were born, and such a thing won't happen again until after we're dead," said Cecily, with very unusual pessimism.

"I think queens and kings were thicker long ago," said the Story

Girl. "They do seem dreadfully scarce now. There isn't one in this country anywhere. Perhaps I'll get a glimpse of some when I go to Europe."

Well, the Story Girl was destined to stand before kings herself, and she was to be one whom they delighted to honour. But we did not know that, as we sat in the old orchard. We thought it quite sufficiently marvellous that she should expect to have the chance of just seeing them.

"Can a queen do exactly as she pleases?" Sara Ray wanted to know.

"Not nowadays," explained the Story Girl.

"Then I don't see any use in being one," Sara decided.

"A king can't do as he pleases now, either," said Felix. "If he tries to, and if it isn't what pleases other people, the Parliament or something squelches him."

"Isn't 'squelch' a lovely word?" said the Story Girl irrelevantly. "It's so expressive. Squ-u-e-l-ch!"

Certainly it was a lovely word, as the Story Girl said it. Even a king would not have minded being squelched, if it were done to music like that.

"Uncle Roger says that Martin Forbes' wife has squelched HIM," said Felicity. "He says Martin can't call his soul his own since he was married."

"I'm glad of it," said Cecily vindictively.

We all stared. This was so very unlike Cecily.

"Martin Forbes is the brother of a horrid man in Summerside who called me Johnny, that's why," she explained. "He was visiting here with his wife two years ago, and he called me Johnny every time he spoke to me. Just you fancy! I'll NEVER forgive him."

"That isn't a Christian spirit," said Felicity rebukingly.

"I don't care. Would YOU forgive James Forbes if he had called YOU Johnny?" demanded Cecily.

"I know a story about Martin Forbes' grandfather," said the Story Girl. "Long ago they didn't have any choir in the Carlisle church--just a precentor you know. But at last they got a choir, and Andrew McPherson was to sing bass in it. Old Mr. Forbes hadn't gone to church for years, because he was so rheumatic, but he went the first Sunday the choir sang, because he had never heard any one sing bass, and wanted to hear what it was like.

Grandfather King asked him what he thought of the choir. Mr. Forbes said it was 'verra guid,' but as for Andrew's bass, 'there was nae bass about it--it was just a bur-r-r-r the hale time.'

If you could have heard the Story Girl's "bur-r-r-r!" Not old Mr. Forbes himself could have invested it with more of Doric scorn. We rolled over in the cool grass and screamed with laughter.

"Poor Dan," said Cecily compassionately. "He's up there all alone in his room, missing all the fun. I suppose it's mean of us to be having such a good time here, when he has to stay in bed."

"If Dan hadn't done wrong eating the bad berries when he was told not to, he wouldn't be sick," said Felicity. "You're bound to catch it when you do wrong. It was just a Providence he didn't die."

"That makes me think of another story about old Mr. Scott," said the Story Girl. "You know, I told you he was very angry because the Presbytery made him retire. There were two ministers in particular he blamed for being at the bottom of it. One time a friend of his was trying to console him, and said to him,

"'You should be resigned to the will of Providence.'

"'Providence had nothing to do with it,' said old Mr. Scott.

"'Twas the McCloskeys and the devil."

"You shouldn't speak of the--the--DEVIL," said Felicity, rather shocked.

"Well, that's just what Mr. Scott said."

"Oh, it's all right for a MINISTER to speak of him. But it isn't nice for little girls. If you HAVE to speak of--of--him--you might say the Old Scratch. That is what mother calls him."

"'Twas the McCloskeys and the Old Scratch,'" said the Story Girl reflectively, as if she were trying to see which version was the more effective. "It wouldn't do," she decided.

"I don't think it's any harm to mention the--the--that person, when you're telling a story," said Cecily. "It's only in plain talking it doesn't do. It sounds too much like swearing then."

"I know another story about Mr. Scott," said the Story Girl.

"Not long after he was married his wife wasn't quite ready for church one morning when it was time to go. So, just to teach her a lesson, he drove off alone, and left her to walk all the way--it was nearly two miles--in the heat and dust. She took it very quietly. It's the best way, I guess, when you're married to

a man like old Mr. Scott. But just a few Sundays after wasn't he late himself! I suppose Mrs. Scott thought that what was sauce for the goose was sauce for the gander, for she slipped out and drove off to church as he had done. Old Mr. Scott finally arrived at the church, pretty hot and dusty, and in none too good a temper. He went into the pulpit, leaned over it and looked at his wife, sitting calmly in her pew at the side.

"It was cleverly done,' he said, right out loud, 'BUT DINNA TRY IT AGAIN!'"

In the midst of our laughter Pat came down the Walk, his stately tail waving over the grasses. He proved to be the precursor of Dan, clothed and in his right mind.

"Do you think you should have got up, Dan?" said Cecily anxiously.

"I had to," said Dan. "The window was open, and it was more'n I could stand to hear you fellows laughing down here and me missing it all. 'Sides, I'm all right again. I feel fine."

"I guess this will be a lesson to you, Dan King," said Felicity, in her most maddening tone. "I guess you won't forget it in a hurry. You won't go eating the bad berries another time when you're told not to."

Dan had picked out a soft spot in the grass for himself, and was in the act of sitting down, when Felicity's tactful speech arrested him midway. He straightened up and turned a wrathful face on his provoking sister. Then, red with indignation, but without a word, he stalked up the walk.

"Now he's gone off mad," said Cecily reproachfully. "Oh, Felicity, why couldn't you have held your tongue?"

"Why, what did I say to make him mad?" asked Felicity in honest perplexity.

"I think it's awful for brothers and sisters to be always quarrelling," sighed Cecily. "The Cowans fight all the time; and you and Dan will soon be as bad."

"Oh, talk sense," said Felicity. "Dan's got so touchy it isn't safe to speak to him. I should think he'd be sorry for all the trouble he made last night. But you just back him up in everything, Cecily."

"I don't!"

"You do! And you've no business to, specially when mother's away. She left ME in charge."



"You didn't take much charge last night when Dan got sick," said Felix maliciously. Felicity had told him at tea that night he was getting fatter than ever. This was his tit-for-tat. "You were pretty glad to leave it all to Cecily then."

"Who's talking to you?" said Felicity.

"Now, look here," said the Story Girl, "the first thing we know we'll all be quarrelling, and then some of us will sulk all day to-morrow. It's dreadful to spoil a whole day. Just let's all sit still and count a hundred before we say another word."

We sat still and counted the hundred. When Cecily finished she got up and went in search of Dan, resolved to soothe his wounded feelings. Felicity called after her to tell Dan there was a jam turnover she had put away in the pantry specially for him. Felix held out to Felicity a remarkably fine apple which he had been saving for his own consumption; and the Story Girl began a tale of an enchanted maiden in a castle by the sea; but we never heard the end of it. For, just as the evening star was looking whitely through the rosy window of the west, Cecily came flying through the orchard, wringing her hands.

"Oh, come, come quick," she gasped. "Dan's eating the bad berries again--he's et a whole bunch of them--he says he'll show

Felicity. I can't stop him. Come you and try."

We rose in a body and rushed towards the house. In the yard we encountered Dan, emerging from the fir wood and champing the fatal berries with unrepentant relish.

"Dan King, do you want to commit suicide?" demanded the Story Girl.

"Look here, Dan," I expostulated. "You shouldn't do this. Think how sick you were last night and all the trouble you made for everybody. Don't eat any more, there's a good chap."

"All right," said Dan. "I've et all I want. They taste fine. I don't believe it was them made me sick."

But now that his anger was over he looked a little frightened. Felicity was not there. We found her in the kitchen, lighting up the fire.

"Bev, fill the kettle with water and put it on to heat," she said in a resigned tone. "If Dan's going to be sick again we've got to be ready for it. I wish mother was home, that's all. I hope she'll never go away again. Dan King, you just wait till I tell her of the way you've acted."

"Fudge! I ain't going to be sick," said Dan. "And if YOU begin telling tales, Felicity King, I'LL tell some too. I know how many eggs mother said you could use while she was away--and I know how many you HAVE used. I counted. So you'd better mind your own business, Miss."

"A nice way to talk to your sister when you may be dead in an hour's time!" retorted Felicity, in tears between her anger and her real alarm about Dan.

But in an hour's time Dan was still in good health, and announced his intention of going to bed. He went, and was soon sleeping as peacefully as if he had nothing on either conscience or stomach. But Felicity declared she meant to keep the water hot until all danger was past; and we sat up to keep her company. We were sitting there when Uncle Roger walked in at eleven o'clock.

"What on earth are you young fry doing up at this time of night?" he asked angrily. "You should have been in your beds two hours ago. And with a roaring fire on a night that's hot enough to melt a brass monkey! Have you taken leave of your senses?"

"It's because of Dan," explained Felicity wearily. "He went and et more of the bad berries--a whole lot of them--and we were sure he'd be sick again. But he hasn't been yet, and now he's asleep."

"Is that boy stark, staring mad?" said Uncle Roger.

"It was Felicity's fault," cried Cecily, who always took Dan's part through evil report and good report. "She told him she guessed he'd learned a lesson and wouldn't do what she'd told him not to again. So he went and set them because she vexed him so."

"Felicity King, if you don't watch out you'll grow up into the sort of woman who drives her husband to drink," said Uncle Roger gravely.

"How could I tell Dan would act so like a mule!" cried Felicity.

"Get off to bed, every one of you. It's a thankful man I'll be when your father and mother come home. The wretched bachelor who undertakes to look after a houseful of children like you is to be pitied. Nobody will ever catch me doing it again. Felicity, is there anything fit to eat in the pantry?"

That last question was the most unkindest cut of all. Felicity could have forgiven Uncle Roger anything but that. It really was unpardonable. She confided to me as we climbed the stairs that she hated Uncle Roger. Her red lips quivered and the tears of wounded pride brimmed over in her beautiful blue eyes. In the dim candle-light she looked unbelievably pretty and appealing. I

put my arm about her and gave her a cousinly salute.

"Never you mind him, Felicity," I said. "He's only a grown-up."