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[Jack And Jill](#)

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## Chapter 10 - The Dramatic Club

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While Jack was hopping gayly about on his crutches, poor Jill was feeling the effects of her second fall, and instead of sitting up, as she hoped to do after six weeks of rest, she was ordered to lie on a board for two hours each day. Not an easy penance, by any means, for the board was very hard, and she could do nothing while she lay there, as it did not slope enough to permit her to read without great fatigue of both eyes and hands. So the little martyr spent her first hour of trial in sobbing, the second in singing, for just as her mother and Mrs. Minot were deciding in despair that neither she nor they could bear it, Jill suddenly broke out into a merry chorus she used to hear her father sing: -

"Faut jouer le mirliton,  
Faut jouer le mirlitir,  
Faut jouer le mirliter,  
Mir - li - ton."

The sound of the brave little voice was very comforting to the two mothers hovering about her, and Jack said, with a look of mingled pity and admiration, as he brandished his crutch over the imaginary foes, -

"That's right! Sing away, and we'll play you are an Indian captive being tormented by your enemies, and too proud to complain. I'll watch the clock, and the minute time is up I'll rush in and rescue you."

Jill laughed, but the fancy pleased her, and she straightened herself out under the gay afghan, while she sang, in a plaintive voice, another little French song her father taught her: -

"J'avais une colombe blanche,  
J'avais un blanc petit pigeon,  
Tous deux volaient, de branche en branche,  
Jusqu'au faite de mon dongeon:  
Mais comme un coup de vent d'automne,  
S'est abattu là, l'épervier,  
Et ma colombe si mignonne  
Ne revient plus au colombier."

"My poor Jean had a fine voice, and always hoped the child would take after him. It would break his heart to see her lying there trying to cheer her pain with the songs he used to sing her to sleep with," said Mrs. Pecq, sadly.

"She really has a great deal of talent, and when she is able she shall have some lessons, for music is a comfort and a pleasure, sick or well," answered Mrs. Minot, who had often admired the fresh voice, with its pretty accent.

Here Jill began the Canadian boat-song, with great vigor, as if bound to play her part of Indian victim with spirit, and not disgrace herself by any more crying. All knew the air, and joined in, especially Jack, who came out strong on the "Row, brothers, row," but ended in a squeak on a high note, so drolly, that the rest broke down. So the hour that began with tears ended with music and laughter, and a new pleasure to think of for the future.

After that day Jill exerted all her fortitude, for she liked to have the boys call her brave and admire the cheerful way in which she endured two hours of discomfort. She found she could use her zither as it lay upon her breast, and every day the pretty music began at a certain hour, and all in the house soon learned to love and listen for it. Even the old cook set open her kitchen door, saying pitifully, "Poor darlint, hear how purty she's singin', wid the pain, on that crewel board. It's a little saint, she is. May her bed above be aisy!"

Frank would lift her gently on and off, with a kind word that comforted her immensely, and gentle Ed would come and teach her new bits of music, while the other fellows were frolicking below. Ralph added his share to her amusement, for he asked leave to model her head in clay, and set up his work in a corner, coming to pat, scrape, and mould whenever he had a spare minute, amusing her by his lively chat, and showing her how to shape birds, rabbits, and queer faces in the soft clay, when the songs were all sung and her fingers tired of the zither.

The girls sympathized very heartily with her new trial, and brought all manner of gifts to cheer her captivity. Merry and Molly made a gay screen by pasting pictures on the black cambric which covered the folding frame that stood before her to keep the draughts from her as she lay on her board. Bright birds and flowers, figures and animals, covered one side, and on the other they put mottoes, bits of poetry, anecdotes, and short stories, so that Jill could lie and look or read without the trouble of holding a book. It was not all done at once, but grew slowly, and was a source of instruction as well as amusement to them all, as they read carefully, that they might make good selections.

But the thing that pleased Jill most was something Jack did, for he gave up going to school, and stayed at home nearly a fortnight after he might have gone, all for her sake. The day the doctor said he might try it if he would be very careful, he was in great spirits, and limped about, looking up his books, and planning how he would astonish his mates by the rapidity of his recovery. When he sat down to rest he remembered Jill, who had been lying quietly behind the screen, while he talked with his mother, busy putting fresh covers on the books.

"She is so still, I guess she is asleep," thought Jack, peeping round the corner.

No, not asleep, but lying with her eyes fixed on the sunny window, beyond which the bright winter world sparkled after a fresh snow-fall. The jingle of sleigh-bells could be heard, the laughter of boys and girls on their way to school, all the pleasant stir of a new day of happy work and play for the rest of the world, more lonely, quiet, and wearisome than ever to her since her friend and fellow-prisoner was set free and going to leave her.

Jack understood that patient, wistful look, and, without a word, went back to his seat, staring at the fire so soberly, that his mother presently asked: "What are you

thinking of so busily, with that pucker in your forehead?"

"I've about made up my mind that I won't go to school just yet," answered Jack, slowly lifting his head, for it cost him something to give up the long-expected pleasure.

"Why not?" and Mrs. Minot looked much surprised, till Jack pointed to the screen, and, making a sad face to express Jill's anguish, answered in a cheerful tone, "Well, I'm not sure that it is best. Doctor did not want me to go, but said I might because I teased. I shall be sure to come to grief, and then every one will say, 'I told you so,' and that is so provoking. I'd rather keep still a week longer. Hadn't I better?"

His mother smiled and nodded as she said, sewing away at much-abused old Caesar, as if she loved him, "Do as you think best, dear. I always want you at home, but I don't wonder you are rather tired of it after this long confinement."

"I say, Jill, should I be in your way if I didn't go to school till the first of February?" called Jack, laughing to himself at the absurdity of the question.

"Not much!" answered a glad voice from behind the screen, and he knew the sorrowful eyes were shining with delight, though he could not see them.

"Well, I guess I may as well, and get quite firm on my legs before I start. Another week or so will bring me up if I study hard, so I shall not lose my time. I'll tackle my Latin as soon as it's ready, mother."

Jack got a hearty kiss with the neatly covered book, and Mamma loved him for the little sacrifice more than if he had won a prize at school. He did get a reward, for, in five minutes from the time he decided, Jill was singing like a bobolink, and such a medley of merry music came from behind the screen, that it was a regular morning concert. She did not know then that he stayed for her sake, but she found it out soon after, and when the time came did as much for him, as we shall see.

It proved a wise decision, for the last part of January was so stormy Jack could not have gone half the time. So, while the snow drifted, and bitter winds raged, he sat snugly at home amusing Jill, and getting on bravely with his lessons, for Frank took great pains with him to show his approbation of the little kindness, and, somehow, the memory of it seemed to make even the detested Latin easier.

With February fair weather set in, and Jack marched happily away to school, with Jill's new mittens on his hands, Mamma nodding from the door-step, and Frank ready to give him a lift on the new sled, if the way proved too long or too rough.

"I shall not have time to miss him now, for we are to be very busy getting ready for the Twenty-second. The Dramatic Club meets to-night, and would like to come here, if they may, so I can help?" said Jill, as Mrs. Minot came up, expecting to find her rather low in her mind.

"Certainly; and I have a basket of old finery I looked up for the club when I was rummaging out bits of silk for your blue quilt," answered the good lady, who had set up a new employment to beguile the hours of Jack's absence.

When the girls arrived, that evening, they found Mrs. Chairwoman surrounded by a strew of theatrical properties, enjoying herself very much. All brought such contributions as they could muster, and all were eager about a certain tableau which was to be the gem of the whole, they thought. Jill, of course, was not expected to take any part, but her taste was good, so all consulted her as they showed their old silks, laces, and flowers, asking who should be this, and who that. All wanted to be the "Sleeping Beauty," for that was the chosen scene, with the slumbering court about the princess, and the prince in the act of awakening her. Jack was to be the hero, brave in his mother's velvet cape, red boots, and a real sword, while the other boys were to have parts of more or less splendor.

"Mabel should be the Beauty, because her hair is so lovely," said Juliet, who was quite satisfied with her own part of the Queen.

"No, Merry ought to have it, as she is the prettiest, and has that splendid veil to wear," answered Molly, who was to be the maid of honor, cuffing the little page, Boo.

"I don't care a bit, but my feather would be fine for the Princess, and I don't know as Emma would like to have me lend it to any one else," said Annette, waving a long white plume over her head, with girlish delight in its grace.

"I should think the white silk dress, the veil, and the feather ought to go together, with the scarlet crape shawl and these pearls. That would be sweet, and just what princesses really wear," advised Jill, who was stringing a quantity of old Roman pearls.

"We all want to wear the nice things, so let us draw lots. Wouldn't that be the fairest way?" asked Merry, looking like a rosy little bride, under a great piece of illusion, which had done duty in many plays.

"The Prince is light, so the Princess must be darkish. We ought to choose the girl who will look best, as it is a picture. I heard Miss Delano say so, when the ladies got up the tableaux, last winter, and every one wanted to be Cleopatra," said Jill decidedly.

"You choose, and then if we can't agree we will draw lots," proposed Susy, who, being plain, knew there was little hope of her getting a chance in any other way.

So all stood in a row, and Jill, from her sofa, surveyed them critically, feeling that the one Jack would really prefer was not among the number.

"I choose that one, for Juliet wants to be Queen, Molly would make faces, and the others are too big or too light," pronounced Jill, pointing to Merry, who looked pleased, while Mabel's face darkened, and Susy gave a disdainful sniff.

"You'd better draw lots, and then there will be no fuss. Ju and I are out of the fight, but you three can try, and let this settle the matter," said Molly, handing Jill a long strip of paper.

All agreed to let it be so, and when the bits were ready drew in turn. This time fate was evidently on Merry's side, and no one grumbled when she showed the longest paper.

"Go and dress, then come back, and we'll plan how we are to be placed before we call up the boys," commanded Jill, who was manager, since she could be nothing else.

The girls retired to the bedroom and began to "rig up," as they called it; but discontent still lurked among them, and showed itself in sharp words, envious looks, and disobliging acts.

"Am I to have the white silk and the feather?" asked Merry, delighted with the silvery shimmer of the one and the graceful droop of the other, though both were rather shabby.

"You can use my dress. I don't see why you should have everything," answered Susy, who was at the mirror, putting a wreath of scarlet flowers on her red head, bound to be gay since she could not be pretty.

"I think I'd better keep the plume, as I haven't anything else that is nice, and I'm afraid Emma wouldn't like me to lend it," added Annette, who was disappointed that Mabel was not to be the Beauty.

"I don't intend to act at all!" declared Mabel, beginning to braid up her hair with a jerk, out of humor with the whole affair.

"I think you are a set of cross, selfish girls to back out and keep your nice things just because you can't all have the best part. I'm ashamed of you!" scolded Molly, standing by Merry, who was sadly surveying her mother's old purple silk, which looked like brown in the evening.

"I'm going to have Miss Delano's red brocade for the Queen, and I shall ask her for the yellow-satin dress for Merry when I go to get mine, and tell her how mean you are," said Juliet, frowning under her gilt-paper crown as she swept about in a red table-cloth for train till the brocade arrived.

"Perhaps you'd like to have Mabel cut her hair off, so Merry can have that, too?" cried Susy, with whom hair was a tender point.

"Light hair isn't wanted, so Ju will have to give hers, or you'd better borrow Miss Bat's frisette," added Mabel, with a scornful laugh.

"I just wish Miss Bat was here to give you girls a good shaking. Do let someone else have a chance at the glass, you peacock!" exclaimed Molly Loo, pushing Susy aside to arrange her own blue turban, out of which she plucked the pink pompon to give Merry.

"Don't quarrel about me. I shall do well enough, and the scarlet shawl will hide my ugly dress," said Merry, from the corner, where she sat waiting for her turn at the mirror.

As she spoke of the shawl her eye went in search of it, and something that she saw in the other room put her own disappointment out of her head. Jill lay there all alone, rather tired with the lively chatter, and the effort it cost her not to repine at being shut out from the great delight of dressing up and acting.

Her eyes were closed, her net was off, and all the pretty black curls lay about her shoulders as one hand idly pulled them out, while the other rested on the red shawl, as if she loved its glowing color and soft texture. She was humming to herself the little song of the dove and the donjon, and something in the plaintive voice, the solitary figure, went straight to Merry's gentle heart.

"Poor Jilly can't have any of the fun," was the first thought; then came a second, that made Merry start and smile, and in a minute whisper so that all but Jill could hear her, "Girls, I'm not going to be the Princess. But I've thought of a splendid one!"

"Who?" asked the rest, staring at one another, much surprised by this sudden announcement.

"Hush! Speak low, or you will spoil it all. Look in the Bird Room, and tell me if that isn't a prettier Princess than I could make?"

They all looked, but no one spoke, and Merry added, with sweet eagerness, "It is the only thing poor Jill can be, and it would make her so happy; Jack would like it, and it would please every one, I know. Perhaps she will never walk again, so we ought to be very good to her, poor dear."

The last words, whispered with a little quiver in the voice, settled the matter better than hours of talking, for girls are tender-hearted creatures, and not one of these but would have gladly given all the pretty things she owned to see Jill dancing about well and strong again. Like a ray of sunshine the kind thought touched and brightened every face: envy, impatience, vanity, and discontent flew away like imps at the coming of the good fairy, and with one accord they all cried, -

"It will be lovely; let us go and tell her!"

Forgetting their own adornment, out they trooped after Merry, who ran to the sofa, saying, with a smile which was reflected in all the other faces, "Jill, dear, we have chosen another Princess, and I know you'll like her."

"Who is it?" asked Jill, languidly, opening her eyes without the least suspicion of the truth.

"I'll show you;" and taking the cherished veil from her own head, Merry dropped it like a soft cloud over Jill; Annette added the long plume, Susy laid the white silk dress about her, while Juliet and Mabel lifted the scarlet shawl to spread it over the foot of the sofa, and Molly tore the last ornament from her turban, a silver star, to shine on Jill's breast. Then they all took hands and danced round the couch, singing, as they laughed at her astonishment, "There she is! There she is! Princess Jill as fine as you please!"

"Do you really mean it? But can I? Is it fair? How sweet of you! Come here and let me hug you all!" cried Jill, in a rapture at the surprise, and the pretty way in which it was done.

The grand scene on the Twenty-second was very fine, indeed; but the little tableau of that minute was infinitely better, though no one saw it, as Jill tried to gather them all in her arms, for that nosegay of girlish faces was the sweeter, because each one had sacrificed her own little vanity to please a friend, and her joy was reflected in the eyes that sparkled round the happy Princess.

"Oh, you dear, kind things, to think of me and give me all your best clothes! I never shall forget it, and I'll do anything for you. Yes! I'll write and ask Mrs. Piper to lend us her ermine cloak for the king. See if I don't!"

Shrieks of delight hailed this noble offer, for no one had dared to borrow the much-coveted mantle, but all agreed that the old lady would not refuse Jill. It was astonishing how smoothly everything went after this, for each was eager to help, admire, and suggest, in the friendliest way; and when all were dressed, the boys found a party of very gay ladies waiting for them round the couch, where lay the brightest little Princess ever seen.

"Oh, Jack, I'm to act! Wasn't it dear of the girls to choose me? Don't they look lovely? Aren't you glad?" cried Jill, as the lads stared and the lasses blushed and smiled, well pleased at the frank admiration the boyish faces showed.

"I guess I am! You are a set of trumps, and we'll give you a first-class spread after the play to pay for it. Won't we, fellows?" answered Jack, much gratified, and feeling that now he could act his own part capitally.

"We will. It was a handsome thing to do, and we think well of you for it. Hey, Gus?" and Frank nodded approvingly at all, though he looked only at Annette.

"As king of this crowd, I call it to order," said Gus, retiring to the throne, where Juliet sat laughing in her red table-cloth.

"We'll have 'The Fair One with Golden Locks' next time; I promise you that," whispered Ed to Mabel, whose shining hair streamed over her blue dress like a mantle of gold-colored silk.

"Girls are pretty nice things, aren't they? Kind of 'em to take Jill in. Don't Molly look fine, though?" and Grif's black eyes twinkled as he planned to pin her skirts to Merry's at the first opportunity.

"Susy looks as gay as a feather-duster. I like her. She never snubs a fellow," said Joe, much impressed with the splendor of the court ladies.

The boys' costumes were not yet ready, but they posed well, and all had a merry time, ending with a game of blind-man's-buff, in which every one caught the right person in the most singular way, and all agreed as they went home in the moonlight that it had been an unusually jolly meeting.

So the fairy play woke the sleeping beauty that lies in all of us, and makes us lovely when we rouse it with a kiss of unselfish good-will, for, though the girls did not know it then, they had adorned themselves with pearls more precious than the waxen ones they decked their Princess in.