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Chapter 13 - Cosey Corner

Vacation was over, the boys went back to school, and poor Mac was left lamenting. He was out of the darkened room now, and promoted to blue goggles, through which he took a gloomy view of life, as might have been expected; for there was nothing he could do but wander about, and try to amuse himself without using his eyes. Anyone who has ever been condemned to that sort of idleness knows how irksome it is, and can understand the state of mind which caused Mac to say to Rose in a desperate tone one day

"Look here, if you don't invent some new employment or amusement for me, I shall knock myself on the head as sure as you live."

Rose flew to Uncle Alec for advice, and he ordered both patient and nurse to the mountains for a month, with Aunt Jessie and Jamie as escort. Pokey and her mother joined the party, and one bright September morning six very happy-looking people were aboard the express train for Portland two smiling mammas, laden with luncheon baskets and wraps; a pretty young girl with a bag of books on her arm; a tall thin lad with his hat over his eyes; and two small children, who sat with their short legs straight out before them, and their chubby faces beaming with the first speechless delight of "truly travelling."

An especially splendid sunset seemed to have been prepared to welcome them when, after a long day's journey, they drove into a wide, green door-yard, where a white colt, a red cow, two cats, four kittens, many hens, and a dozen people, old and young, were gaily disporting themselves. Everyone nodded and smiled in the friendliest manner, and a lively old lady kissed the new-comers all round, as she said heartily

"Well, now, I'm proper glad to see you! Come right in and rest, and we'll have tea in less than no time, for you must be tired. Lizzie, you show the folks upstairs; Kitty, you fly round and help father in with the trunks; and Jenny and I will have the table all ready by the time you come down. Bless the dears, they want to go see the pussies, and so they shall!"

The three pretty daughters did "fly round," and everyone felt at home at once, all were so hospitable and kind. Aunt Jessie had raptures over the home-made carpets, quilts and quaint furniture; Rose could not keep away from the windows, for each framed a lovely picture; and the little folks made friends at once with the other children, who filled their arms with chickens and kittens, and did the honours handsomely.

The toot of a horn called all to supper, and a goodly party, including six children besides the Camp-bells, assembled in the long dining-room, armed with mountain appetites and the gayest spirits. It was impossible for anyone to be shy or sober, for such gales of merriment arose they blew the starch out of the stiffest, and made the saddest jolly. Mother Atkinson, as all called their hostess, was the merriest there, and the busiest; for she kept flying up to wait on the children, to bring out some new dish, or to banish the live stock, who were of such a social turn that the colt came into the entry and demanded sugar; the cats sat about in people's laps, winking suggestively at the food; and speckled hens cleared the kitchen floor of crumbs, as they joined in the chat with a cheerful clucking.

Everybody turned out after tea to watch the sunset till all the lovely red was gone, and mosquitoes wound their shrill horns to sound the retreat. The music of an organ surprised the new-comers, and in the parlor they found Father Atkinson playing sweetly on the little instrument made by himself. All the children gathered about him, and, led by the tuneful sisters, sang prettily till Pokey fell asleep behind the door, and Jamie gaped audibly right in the middle of his favourite

"Coo," said the little doves: "Coo," said she,
 "All in the top of the old pine-tree."

The older travellers, being tired, went to "bye low" at the same time, and slept like tops in home-spun sheets, on husk mattresses made by Mother Atkinson, who seemed to have put some soothing powder among them, so deep and sweet was the slumber that came.

Next day began the wholesome out-of-door life, which works such wonders with tired minds and feeble bodies. The weather was perfect, and the mountain air made the children as frisky as young lambs; while the elders went about smiling at one another, and saying, "Isn't it splendid?" Even Mac, the "slow coach," was seen to leap over a fence as if he really could not help it; and when Rose ran after him with his broad-brimmed hat, he made the spirited proposal to go into the woods and hunt for a catamount.

Jamie and Pokey were at once enrolled in the Cosey Corner Light Infantry a truly superb company, composed entirely of officers, all wearing cocked hats, carrying flags, waving swords, or beating drums. It was a spectacle to stir the dullest soul when this gallant band marched out of the yard in full regimentals, with Captain Dove a solemn, big-headed boy of eleven issuing his orders with the gravity of a general, and his Falstaffian regiment obeying them with more docility than skill. The little Snow children did very well, and Lieutenant Jack Dove was fine to see; so was Drummer Frank, the errand-boy of the house, as he rub-a-dub-dubbed with all his heart and drumsticks. Jamie had "trained" before, and was made a colonel at once; but Pokey was the best of all, and called forth a spontaneous burst of applause from the spectators as she brought up the rear, her cocked hat all over one eye, her flag trailing over her shoulder, and her wooden sword straight up in the air; her face beaming and every curl bobbing with delight as her fat legs tottered in the vain attempt to keep step manfully.

Mac and Rose were picking blackberries in the bushes beside the road when the soldiers passed without seeing them, and they witnessed a sight that was both pretty and comical. A little farther on was one of the family burial spots so common in those parts, and just this side of it Captain Fred Dove ordered his company to halt, explaining his reason for so doing in the following words

"That's a graveyard, and it's proper to muffle the drums and lower the flags as we go by, and we'd better take off our hats, too; it's more respectable, I think."

"Isn't that cunning of the dears?" whispered Rose, as the little troop marched slowly by to the muffled roll of the drums, every flag and sword held low, all the little heads uncovered, and the childish faces very sober as the leafy shadows flickered over them.

"Let's follow and see what they are after," proposed Mac, who found sitting on the wall and being fed with blackberries luxurious but tiresome.

So they followed and heard the music grow lively, saw the banners wave in the breeze again when the graveyard was passed, and watched the company file into the

dilapidated old church that stood at the corner of three woodland roads. Presently the sound of singing made the outsiders quicken their steps, and, stealing up, they peeped in at one of the broken windows.

Captain Dove was up in the old wooden pulpit, gazing solemnly down upon his company, who, having stacked their arms in the porch, now sat in the bare pews singing a Sunday-school hymn with great vigour and relish.

"Let us pray," said Captain Dove, with as much reverence as an army chaplain; and, folding his hands, he repeated a prayer which he thought all would know an excellent little prayer, but not exactly appropriate to the morning, for it was

"Now I lay me down to sleep."

Everyone joined in saying it, and it was a pretty sight to see the little creatures bowing their curly heads and lisping out the words they knew so well. Tears came into Rose's eyes as she looked; Mac took his hat off involuntarily, and then clapped it on again as if ashamed of showing any feeling.

"Now I shall preach you a short sermon, and my text is, 'Little children, love one another.' I asked mamma to give me one, and she thought that would be good; so you all sit still and I'll preach it. You mustn't whisper, Marion, but hear me. It means that we should be good to each other, and play fair, and not quarrel as we did this very day about the wagon. Jack can't always drive, and needn't be mad because I like to go with Frank. Annette ought to be horse sometimes and not always driver; and Willie may as well make up his mind to let Marion build her house by his, for she will do it, and he needn't fuss about it. Jamie seems to be a good boy, but I shall preach to him if he isn't. No, Pokey, people don't kiss in church or put their hats on. Now you must all remember what I tell you, because I am the captain, and you should mind me."

Here Lieutenant Jack spoke right out in meeting with the rebellious remark

"Don't care if you are; you'd better mind yourself, and tell how you took away my strap, and kept the biggest doughnut, and didn't draw fair when we had the truck."

"Yes, and you slapped Frank; I saw you!" bawled Willie Snow, bobbing up in his pew.

"And you took my book away and hid it 'cause I wouldn't go and swing when you wanted me to," added Annette, the oldest of the Snow trio.

"I shan't build my house by Willie's if he don't want me to, so now!" put in little Marion, joining the mutiny.

"I will tiss Dimmy! and I tore up my hat 'tause a pin picked me," shouted Pokey, regardless of Jamie's efforts to restrain her.

Captain Dove looked rather taken aback at this outbreak in the ranks; but, being a dignified and calm personage, he quelled the rising rebellion with great tact and skill, by saying, briefly

"We'll sing the last hymn: 'Sweet, sweet good-by' you all know that, so do it nicely, and then we will go and have luncheon."

Peace was instantly restored, and a burst of melody drowned the suppressed giggles of Rose and Mac, who found it impossible to keep sober during the latter part of this somewhat remarkable service. Fifteen minutes of repose rendered it a physical impossibility for the company to march out as quietly as they had marched in. I grieve to state that the entire troop raced home as hard as they could pelt, and were soon skirmishing briskly over their lunch, utterly oblivious of what Jamie (who had been much impressed by the sermon) called "the captain's beautiful teck."

It was astonishing how much they all found to do at Cosey Corner; and Mac, instead of lying in a hammock and being read to, as he had expected, was busiest of all. He was invited to survey and lay out Skeeterville, a town which the children were getting up in a huckleberry pasture; and he found much amusement in planning little roads, staking off house-lots, attending to the water-works, and consulting with the "selectmen" about the best sites for public buildings; for Mac was a boy still, in spite of his fifteen years and his love of books.

Then he went fishing with a certain jovial gentleman from the West; and though they seldom caught anything but colds, they had great fun and exercise chasing the phantom trout they were bound to have. Mac also developed a geological mania, and went tapping about at rocks and stones, discoursing wisely of "strata, periods, and fossil remains"; while Rose picked up leaves and lichens, and gave him lessons in botany in return for his lectures on geology.

They led a very merry life; for the Atkinson girls kept up a sort of perpetual picnic; and did it so capitally, that one was never tired of it. So their visitors thrived finely, and long before the month was out it was evident that Dr. Alec had prescribed the right medicine for his patients.