The Candy Country

by Louisa May Alcott

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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE CANDY COUNTRY ***

Transcriber’s Note: Table of Contents added.

THE CANDY COUNTRY

BY

LOUISA M. ALCOTT

AUTHOR OF “LITTLE WOMEN,” “LITTLE MEN,” “AN OLD-FASHIONED GIRL,” “AUNT JO’S SCRAP-BAG,” “LULU’S LIBRARY,” ETC.

illustrated

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THE CANDY COUNTRY

“I shall take mamma’s red sun umbrella, it is so warm, and none of the children at school will have one like it,” said Lily, one day, as she went through the hall.

“The wind is very high; I’m afraid you’ll be blown away if you carry that big thing,” called Nurse from the window, as the red umbrella went bobbing down the garden walk with a small girl under it.

“I wish it would; I always wanted to go up in a balloon,” answered Lily, as she struggled out of the gate.

She got on very well till she came to the bridge and stopped to look over the railing at the water running by so fast, and the turtles sunning themselves on the rocks. Lily was fond of throwing stones at them; it was so funny to watch them tumble, heels over head, splash into the water. Now, when she saw three big fellows close by, she stooped for a stone, and just at that minute a gale of wind nearly took the umbrella out of her hand. She clutched it fast; and away she went like a thistle-down, right up in the air, over river and hill, houses and trees, faster and faster, till her head spun round, her breath was all gone, and she had to let go. The dear red umbrella flew away like a leaf; and Lily fell down, down, till she went crash into a tree which grew in such a curious place that she forgot her fright as she sat looking about her, wondering what part of the world it could be.

The tree looked as if made of glass or colored sugar; for she could see through the red cherries, the green leaves, and the brown branches. An agreeable smell met her nose; and she said at once, as any child would, “I smell candy!” She picked a cherry and ate it. Oh, how good it was!—all sugar and no stone. The next discovery was such a delightful one that she nearly fell off her perch; for by touching her tongue here and there, she found that the whole tree was made of candy. Think what fun to sit and break off twigs of barley sugar, candied cherries, and leaves that tasted like peppermint and sassafras!

Lily rocked and ate till she finished the top of the little tree; then she climbed down and strolled along, making more surprising and agreeable discoveries as she went.

What looked like snow under her feet was white sugar; the rocks were lumps of chocolate, the flowers of all colors and tastes; and every sort of fruit grew on these delightful trees. Little white houses soon appeared; and here lived the dainty candy-people, all made of the best sugar, and painted to look like real people. Dear little men and women, looking as if they had stepped off of wedding cakes and bonbons, went about in their gay sugar clothes, laughing and talking in the sweetest

voices. Bits of babies rocked in open-work cradles, and sugar boys and girls played with sugar toys in the most natural way. Carriages rolled along the jujube streets, drawn by the red and yellow barley horses we all love so well; cows fed in the green fields, and sugar birds sang in the trees.

Lily listened, and in a moment she understood what the song said,—

“Sweet! Sweet! Come, come and eat, Dear little girls With yellow curls; For here you’ll find Sweets to your mind. On every tree Sugar-plums you’ll see; In every dell Grows the caramel. Over every wall Gum-drops fall; Molasses flows Where our river goes. Under your feet Lies sugar sweet; Over your head Grow almonds red. Our lily and rose Are not for the nose; Our flowers we pluck To eat or suck. And, oh! what bliss When two friends kiss, For they honey sip From lip to lip! And all you meet, In house or street, At work or play, Sweethearts are they. So, little dear, Pray feel no fear; Go where you will; Eat, eat your fill. Here is a feast From west to east; And you can say, Ere you go away, ‘At last I stand In dear Candy-land, And no more can stuff; For once I’ve enough.’ Sweet! Sweet! Tweet! Tweet! Tweedle-dee! Tweedle-dee!”

“That is the most interesting song I ever heard,” said Lily, clapping her sticky hands and dancing along toward a fine palace of white cream candy, with pillars of striped peppermint stick, and a roof of frosting that made it look like the Milan Cathedral.

“I’ll live here, and eat candy all day long, with no tiresome school or patchwork to spoil my fun,” said Lily.

So she ran up the chocolate steps into the pretty rooms, where all the chairs and tables were of different colored candies, and the beds of spun sugar. A fountain of lemonade supplied drink; and floors of ice-cream that never melted kept people and things from sticking together, as they would have done had it been warm.

For a long while Lily was quite happy, going about tasting so many different kinds of sweeties, talking to the little people, who were very amiable, and finding out

curious things about them and their country.

The babies were made of plain sugar, but the grown people had different flavors. The young ladies were flavored with violet, rose, and orange; the gentlemen were apt to have cordials of some sort inside of them, as she found when she ate one now and then slyly, and got her tongue bitten by the hot, strong taste as a punishment. The old people tasted of peppermint, clove, and such comfortable things, good for pain; but the old maids had lemon, hoar-hound, flag-root, and all sorts of sour, bitter things in them, and did not get eaten much. Lily soon learned to know the characters of her new friends by a single taste, and some she never touched but once. The dear babies melted in her mouth, and the delicately flavored young ladies she was very fond of. Dr. Ginger was called to her more than once when so much candy made her teeth ache, and she found him a very hot-tempered little man; but he stopped the pain, so she was glad to see him.

A lime-drop boy and a little pink checkerberry girl were her favorite playmates; and they had fine times making mud-pies by scraping the chocolate rocks and mixing this dust with honey from the wells near by. These they could eat; and Lily thought this much better than throwing away the pies, as she had to do at home. They had candy-pulls very often, and made swings of long loops of molasses candy, and bird’s-nests with almond eggs, out of which came birds who sang sweetly. They played foot-ball with big bull’s-eyes, sailed in sugar boats on lakes of syrup, fished in rivers of molasses, and rode the barley horses all over the country.

Lily discovered that it never rained, but snowed white sugar. There was no sun, as it would have been too hot; but a large yellow lozenge made a nice moon, and red and white comfits were the stars.

The people all lived on sugar, and never quarrelled. No one was ill; and if any got broken, as sometimes happened with such brittle creatures, they just stuck the parts together and were all right again. The way they grew old was to get thinner and

thinner till there was danger of their vanishing. Then the friends of the old person put him in a neat coffin, and carried him to the great golden urn which stood in their largest temple, always full of a certain fine syrup; and here he was dipped and dipped till he was stout and strong again, and went home to enjoy himself for a long time as good as new.

This was very interesting to Lily, and she went to many funerals. But the weddings were better still; for the lovely white brides were so sweet Lily longed to eat them. The feasts were delicious; and everybody went in their best clothes, and danced at the ball till they got so warm half-a-dozen would stick together and have to be taken to the ice-cream room to cool off. Then the little pair would drive away in a fine carriage with white horses to a new palace in some other part of the country, and Lily would have another pleasant place to visit.

But by and by, when she had seen everything, and eaten so much sweet stuff that at last she longed for plain bread and butter, she began to get cross, as children always do when they live on candy; and the little people wished she would go away, for they were afraid of her. No wonder, when she would catch up a dear sugar baby and eat him, or break some respectable old grandmamma all into bits because she reproved her for naughty ways. Lily calmly sat down on the biggest church, crushing it flat, and even tried to poke the moon out of the sky in a pet one day. The king ordered her to go home; but she said, “I won’t!” and bit his head off, crown and all.

Such a wail went up at this awful deed that she ran away out of the city, fearing some one would put poison in her candy, since she had no other food.

“I suppose I shall get somewhere if I keep walking; and I can’t starve, though I hate the sight of this horrid stuff,” she said to herself, as she hurried over the mountains of Gibraltar Rock that divided the city of Saccharissa from the great desert of brown sugar that lay beyond.

Lily marched bravely on for a long time, and saw at last a great smoke in the sky, smelt a spicy smell, and felt a hot wind blowing toward her.

“I wonder if there are sugar savages here, roasting and eating some poor traveller like me,” she said, thinking of Robinson Crusoe and other wanderers in strange lands.

She crept carefully along till she saw a settlement of little huts very like mushrooms, for they were made of cookies set on lumps of the brown sugar; and queer people, looking as if made of gingerbread, were working very busily round several stoves which seemed to bake at a great rate.

“I’ll creep nearer and see what sort of people they are before I show myself,” said Lily, going into a grove of spice-trees, and sitting down on a stone which proved to be the plummy sort of cake we used to call Brighton Rock.

Presently one of the tallest men came striding toward the trees with a pan, evidently after spice; and before she could run, he saw Lily.

“Hollo, what do you want?” he asked, staring at her with his black currant eyes, while he briskly picked the bark off a cinnamon-tree.

“I’m travelling, and would like to know what place this is, if you please,” answered Lily, very politely, being a little frightened.

“Cake-land. Where do you come from?” asked the gingerbread man, in a crisp tone of voice.

“I was blown into the Candy country, and have been there a long time; but I got tired of it, and ran away to find something better.”

“Sensible child!” and the man smiled till Lily thought his cheeks would crumble. “You’ll get on better here with us Brownies than with the lazy Bonbons, who never work and are all for show. They won’t own us, though we are all related through our grandparents Sugar and Molasses. We are busy folks; so they turn up their noses and

don’t speak when we meet at parties. Poor creatures, silly and sweet and unsubstantial! I pity ’em.”

“Could I make you a visit? I’d like to see how you live, and what you do. I’m sure it must be interesting,” said Lily, picking herself up after a tumble, having eaten nearly all the stone, she was so hungry.

“I know you will. Come on! I can talk while I work.” And the funny gingerbread man trotted off toward his kitchen, full of pans, rolling-pins, and molasses jugs.

“Sit down. I shall be at leisure as soon as this batch is baked. There are still some wise people down below who like gingerbread, and I have my hands full,” he said, dashing about, stirring, rolling out, and slapping the brown dough into pans, which he whisked into the oven and out again so fast that Lily knew there must be magic about it somewhere.

Every now and then he threw her a delicious cooky warm from the oven. She liked the queer fellow, and presently began to talk, being very curious about this country.

“What is your name, sir?”

“Ginger Snap.”

Lily thought it a good one; for he was very quick, and she fancied he could be short and sharp if he liked.

“Where does all this cake go to?” she asked, after watching the other kitchens full of workers, who were all of different kinds of cake, and each set of cooks made its own sort.

“I’ll show you by and by,” answered Snap, beginning to pile up the heaps of gingerbread on a little car that ran along a track leading to some unknown storeroom, Lily thought.

“Don’t you get tired of doing this all the time?”

“Yes; but I want to be promoted, and I never shall be till I’ve done my best, and won

the prize here."

"Oh, tell me about it! What is the prize, and how are you promoted? Is this a cooking-school?"

"Yes; the prize for best gingerbread is a cake of condensed yeast. That puts a soul into me, and I begin to rise till I am able to go over the hills yonder into the blessed land of bread, and be one of the happy creatures who are always wholesome, always needed, and without which the world below would be in a bad way."

"Bless me! that is the queerest thing I've heard yet. But I don't wonder you want to go; I'm tired of sweets myself, and long for a good piece of bread, though I used to want cake and candy at home."

"Ah, my dear, you'll learn a good deal here; and you are lucky not to have got into the clutches of Giant Dyspepsia, who always gets people if they eat too much of such rubbish and scorn wholesome bread. I leave my ginger behind when I go, and get white and round and beautiful, as you will see. The Gingerbread family have never been as foolish as some of the other cakes. Wedding is the worst; such extravagance in the way of wine and spice and fruit I never saw, and such a mess to eat when it's done! I don't wonder people get sick; serves 'em right." And Snap flung down a pan with such a bang that it made Lily jump.

"Sponge cake isn't bad, is it? Mamma lets me eat it, but I like frosted pound better," she said, looking over to the next kitchen, where piles of that sort of cake were being iced.

"Poor stuff. No substance. Ladies' fingers will do for babies, but pound has too much butter ever to be healthy. Let it alone, and eat cookies or seed-cakes, my dear. Now, come along; I'm ready." And Snap trundled away his car-load at a great pace.

Lily ran behind to pick up whatever fell, and looked about her as she went, for this was certainly a very queer country. Lakes of eggs all beaten up, and hot springs of saleratus foamed here and there ready for use. The earth was brown sugar or ground

spice; and the only fruits were raisins, dried currants, citron, and lemon peel. It was a very busy place; for every one cooked all the time, and never failed and never seemed tired, though they got so hot that they only wore sheets of paper for clothes. There were piles of it to put over the cake, so that it shouldn't burn; and they made cook's white caps and aprons of it, and looked very nice. A large clock made of a flat pancake, with cloves to mark the hours and two toothpicks for hands, showed them how long to bake things; and in one place an ice wall was built round a lake of butter, which they cut in lumps as they wanted it.

"Here we are. Now, stand away while I pitch 'em down," said Snap, stopping at last before a hole in the ground where a dumb-waiter hung ready, with a name over it.

There were many holes all round, and many waiters, each with its name; and Lily was amazed when she read "Weber," "Copeland," "Dooling," and others, which she knew very well.

Over Snap's place was the name "Newmarch;" and Lily said, "Why, that's where mamma gets her hard gingerbread, and Weber's is where we go for ice-cream. Do you make cake for them?"

"Yes, but no one knows it. It's one of the secrets of the trade. We cook for all the confectioners, and people think the good things come out of the cellars under their saloons. Good joke, isn't it?" And Snap laughed till a crack came in his neck and made him cough.

Lily was so surprised she sat down on a warm queen's cake that happened to be near, and watched Snap send down load after load of gingerbread to be eaten by children, who would have liked it much better if they had only known where it came from, as she did.

As she sat, the clatter of many spoons, the smell of many dinners, and the sound of many voices calling, "One vanilla, two strawberries, and a Charlotte Russe," "Three stews, cup coffee, dry toast," "Roast chicken and apple without," came up the next

hole, which was marked “Copeland.”

“Dear me! it seems as if I was there,” said Lily, longing to hop down, but afraid of the bump at the other end.

“I’m done. Come along, I’ll ride you back,” called Snap, tossing the last cooky after the dumb-waiter as it went slowly out of sight with its spicy load.

“I wish you’d teach me to cook. It looks great fun, and mamma wants me to learn; only our cook hates to have me mess round, and is so cross that I don’t like to try at home,” said Lily, as she went trundling back.

“Better wait till you get to Bread-land, and learn to make that. It’s a great art, and worth knowing. Don’t waste your time on cake, though plain gingerbread isn’t bad to have in the house. I’ll teach you that in a jiffy, if the clock doesn’t strike my hour too soon,” answered Snap, helping her down.

“What hour?”

“Why, of my freedom. I never know when I’ve done my task till I’m called by the chimes and go to get my soul,” said Snap, turning his currant eyes anxiously to the clock.

“I hope you will have time.” And Lily fell to work with all her might, after Snap had put on her a paper apron and a cap like his.

It was not hard; for when she was going to make a mistake a spark flew out of the fire and burnt her in time to remind her to look at the receipt, which was a sheet of gingerbread in a frame of pie-crust hung up before her, with the directions written while it was soft and baked in. The third sheet she made came out of the oven spicy, light, and brown; and Snap, giving it one poke, said, “That’s all right. Now you know. Here’s your reward.”

He handed her a receipt-book made of thin sheets of sugar-gingerbread held together by a gelatine binding, with her name stamped on the back, and each leaf crimped

with a cake-cutter in the most elegant manner.

Lily was charmed with it, but had no time to read all it contained; for just then the clock began to strike, and a chime of bells to ring,—

“Gingerbread, Go to the head. Your task is done; A soul is won. Take it and go Where muffins grow, Where sweet loaves rise To the very skies, And biscuits fair Perfume the air. Away, away! Make no delay; In the sea of flour Plunge this hour. Safe in your breast Let the yeast-cake rest, Till you rise in joy, A white bread boy!”

“Ha, ha! I’m free! I’m free!” cried Snap, catching up the silver-covered square that seemed to fall from heaven; and running to a great white sea of flour, he went in head first, holding the yeast-cake clasped to his breast as if his life depended on it.

Lily watched breathlessly, while a curious working and bubbling went on, as if Snap was tumbling about down there, like a small earthquake. The other cake-folk stood round the shore with her; for it was a great event, and all were glad that the dear fellow was promoted so soon. Suddenly a cry was heard, and up rose a beautiful white figure on the farther side of the sea. It moved its hand, as if saying “Good-by,” and ran over the hills so fast they had only time to see how plump and fair he was, with a little knob on the top of his head like a crown.

“He’s gone to the happy land, and we shall miss him; but we’ll follow his example and soon find him again,” said a gentle Sponge Cake, with a sigh, as all went back to their work; while Lily hurried after Snap, eager to see the new country, which was the best of all.

A delicious odor of fresh bread blew up from the valley as she stood on the hill-top and looked down on the peaceful scene below. Fields of yellow grain waved in the breeze; hop-vines grew from tree to tree, and many windmills whirled their white sails as they ground the different grains into fresh, sweet meal, for the loaves of bread that built the houses like bricks and paved the streets, or in many shapes formed the people, furniture, and animals. A river of milk flowed through the

peaceful land, and fountains of yeast rose and fell with a pleasant foam and fizz. The ground was a mixture of many meals, and the paths were golden Indian, which gave a very gay look to the scene. Buckwheat flowers bloomed on their rosy stems, and tall corn-stalks rustled their leaves in the warm air that came from the ovens hidden in the hillsides; for bread needs a slow fire, and an obliging volcano did the baking here.

“What a lovely place!” cried Lily, feeling the charm of the homelike landscape, in spite of the funny plump people moving about.

Two of these figures came running to meet her as she slowly walked down the yellow path from the hill. One was a golden boy, with a beaming face; the other a little girl in a shiny brown cloak, who looked as if she would taste very nice. They each put a warm hand into Lily’s, and the boy said,—

“We are glad to see you. Muffin told us you were coming.”

“Thank you. Who is Muffin?” asked Lily, feeling as if she had seen both these little people before, and liked them.

“He was Ginger Snap once, but he’s a Muffin now. We begin in that way, and work up to the perfect loaf by degrees. My name is Johnny Cake, and she’s Sally Lunn. You know us; so come on and have a race.”

Lily burst out laughing at the idea of playing with these old friends of hers; and all three ran away as fast as they could tear, down the hill, over a bridge, into the middle of the village, where they stopped, panting, and sat down on some very soft rolls to rest.

“What do you all do here?” asked Lily, when she got her breath again.

“We farm, we study, we bake, we brew, and are as merry as grigs all day long. It’s school-time now, and we must go; will you come?” said Sally, jumping up as if she liked it.

“Our schools are not like yours; we only study two things,—grain and yeast. I think you’ll like it. We have yeast to-day, and the experiments are very jolly,” added Johnny, trotting off to a tall brown tower of rye and Indian bread, where the school was kept.

Lily never liked to go to school, but she was ashamed to own it; so she went along with Sally, and was so amused with all she saw that she was glad she came. The brown loaf was hollow, and had no roof; and when she asked why they used a ruin, Sally told her to wait and see why they chose strong walls and plenty of room overhead. All round was a circle of very small biscuits like cushions, and on these the Bread-children sat. A square loaf in the middle was the teacher’s desk, and on it lay an ear of wheat, with several bottles of yeast well corked up. The teacher was a pleasant, plump lady from Vienna, very wise, and so famous for her good bread that she was a Professor of Grainology.

When all were seated, she began with the wheat ear, and told them all about it in such an interesting way that Lily felt as if she had never known anything about the bread she ate before. The experiments with the yeast were quite exciting,—for Fräulein Pretzel showed them how it would work till it blew the cork out, and go fizzing up to the sky if it was kept too long; how it would turn sour or flat, and spoil the bread if care was not taken to use it just at the right moment; and how too much would cause the loaf to rise till there was no substance to it.

The children were very bright; for they were fed on the best kinds of oatmeal and Graham bread, with very little white bread or hot cakes to spoil their young stomachs. Hearty, happy boys and girls they were, and their yeasty souls were very lively in them; for they danced and sang, and seemed as bright and gay as if acidity, heaviness, and mould were quite unknown.

Lily was very happy with them, and when school was done went home with Sally and ate the best bread and milk for dinner that she ever tasted. In the afternoon

Johnny took her to the cornfield, and showed her how they kept the growing ears free from mildew and worms. Then she went to the bakehouse; and here she found her old friend Muffin hard at work making Parker House rolls, for he was such a good cook he was set to work at once on the lighter kinds of bread.

“Well, isn’t this better than Candy-land or Saccharissa?” he asked, as he rolled and folded his bits of dough with a dab of butter tucked inside.

“Ever so much!” cried Lily. “I feel better already, and mean to learn all I can. Mamma will be so pleased if I can make good bread when I go home. She is rather old-fashioned, and likes me to be a nice housekeeper. I didn’t think bread interesting then, but I do now; and Johnny’s mother is going to teach me to make Indian cakes to-morrow.”

“Glad to hear it. Learn all you can, and tell other people how to make healthy bodies and happy souls by eating good plain food. Not like this, though these rolls are better than cake. I have to work my way up to the perfect loaf, you know; and then, oh, then, I’m a happy thing.”

“What happens then? Do you go on to some other wonderful place?” asked Lily, as Muffin paused with a smile on his face.

“Yes; I am eaten by some wise, good human being, and become a part of him or her. That is immortality and heaven; for I may nourish a poet and help him sing, or feed a good woman who makes the world better for being in it, or be crumbed into the golden porringer of a baby prince who is to rule a kingdom. Isn’t that a noble way to live, and an end worth working for?” asked Muffin, in a tone that made Lily feel as if some sort of fine yeast had got into her, and was setting her brain to work with new thoughts.

“Yes, it is. I suppose all common things are made for that purpose, if we only knew it; and people should be glad to do anything to help the world along, even making good bread in a kitchen,” answered Lily, in a sober way that showed that her little

mind was already digesting the new food it had got.

She stayed in Bread-land a long time, and enjoyed and learned a great deal that she never forgot. But at last, when she had made the perfect loaf, she wanted to go home, that her mother might see and taste it.

“I’ve put a good deal of myself into it, and I’d love to think I had given her strength or pleasure by my work,” she said, as she and Sally stood looking at the handsome loaf.

“You can go whenever you like; just take the bread in your hands and wish three times, and you’ll be wherever you say. I’m sorry to have you go, but I don’t wonder you want to see your mother. Don’t forget what you have learned, and you will always be glad you came to us,” said Sally, kissing her good-by.

“Where is Muffin? I can’t go without seeing him, my dear old friend,” answered Lily, looking round for him.

“He is here,” said Sally, touching the loaf. “He was ready to go, and chose to pass into your bread rather than any other, for he said he loved you and would be glad to help feed so good a little girl.”

“How kind of him! I must be careful to grow wise and excellent, else he will be disappointed and have died in vain,” said Lily, touched by his devotion.

Then, bidding them all farewell, she hugged her loaf close, wished three times to be in her own home, and like a flash she was there.

Whether her friends believed the wonderful tale of her adventures I cannot tell; but I know that she was a nice little housekeeper from that day, and made such good bread that other girls came to learn of her. She also grew from a sickly, fretful child into a fine, strong woman, because she ate very little cake and candy, except at Christmas time, when the oldest and the wisest love to make a short visit to Candy-land.

Poor Billy dangling from a bough, high above the ground. Page 43.

HOW THEY RAN AWAY

Two little boys sat on the fence whittling arrows one fine day. Said one little boy to the other little boy,—

“Let’s do something jolly.”

“All right. What will we do?”

“Run off to the woods and be hunters.”

“What can we hunt?”

“Bears and foxes.”

“Mullin says there ain’t any round here.”

“Well, we can shoot squirrels and snare woodchucks.”

“Haven’t got any guns and trap.”

“We’ve got our bows, and I found an old trap behind the barn.”

“What will we eat?”

“Here’s our lunch; and when that’s gone we can roast the squirrels and cook the fish on a stick. I know how.”

“Where will you get the fire?”

“Got matches in my pocket.”

“I’ve got a lot of things we could use. Let’s see.”

And as if satisfied at last, cautious Billy displayed his treasures, while bold Tommy did the same.

Besides the two knives there were strings, nails, matches, a piece of putty, fish-hooks, and two very dirty handkerchiefs.

“There, sir, that’s a first-rate fit-out for hunters; and with the jolly basket of lunch

Mrs. Mullin gave us, we can get on tip-top for two or three days," said Tommy, eager to be off.

"Where shall we sleep?" asked Billy, who liked to be comfortable both night and day.

"Oh, up in trees or on beds of leaves, like the fellows in our books. If you are afraid, stay at home; I'm going to have no end of a good time." And Tommy crammed the things back into his pockets as if there were no time to lose.

"Pooh! I ain't afraid. Come on!" And jumping down Billy caught up his rod, rather ashamed of his many questions.

No one was looking at them, and they might have walked quietly off; but that the "running away" might be all right, both raced down the road, tumbled over a wall, and dashed into the woods as if a whole tribe of wild Indians were after them.

"Do you know the way?" panted Billy, when at last they stopped for breath.

"Yes, it winds right up the mountain; but we'd better not keep to it, or some one will see us and take us back. We are going to be real hunters and have adventures; so we must get lost, and find our way by the sun and the stars," answered Tommy, who had read so many Boys' Books his little head was a jumble of Texan Rangers, African Explorers, and Buffalo Bills; and he burned to outdo them all.

"What will our mothers say if we really get lost?" asked Billy, always ready with a question.

"Mine won't fuss. She lets me do what I like."

That was true; for Tommy's poor mamma was tired of trying to keep the lively little fellow in order, and had got used to seeing him come out of all his scrapes without much harm.

"Mine will be scared; she's always afraid I'm going to get hurt, so I'm careful. But I guess I'll risk it, and have some fun to tell about when we go home," said Billy,

trudging after Captain Tommy, who always took the lead.

These eleven-year-old boys were staying with their mothers at a farm-house up among the mountains; and having got tired of the tame bears, the big barn, the trout brook, the thirty colts at pasture, and the society of the few little girls and younger boys at the hotel near by, these fine fellows longed to break loose and "rough it in the bush," as the hunters did in their favorite stories.

Away they went, deeper and deeper into the great forest that covered the side of the mountain. A pleasant place that August day; for it was cool and green, with many brooks splashing over the rocks, or lying in brown pools under the ferns. Squirrels chattered and raced in the tall pines; now and then a gray rabbit skipped out of sight among the brakes, or a strange bird flew by. Here and there blackberries grew in the open places, sassafras bushes were plentiful, and black-birch bark was ready for chewing.

"Don't you call this nice?" asked Tommy, pausing at last in a little dell where a noisy brook came tumbling down the mountain side, and the pines sung overhead.

"Yes; but I'm awful hungry. Let's rest and eat our lunch," said Billy, sitting down on a cushion of moss.

"You always want to be stuffing and resting," answered sturdy Tommy, who liked to be moving all the time.

He took the fishing-basket, which hung over his shoulder by a strap, and opened it carefully; for good Mrs. Mullin had packed a nice lunch of bread and butter, cake and peaches, with a bottle of milk, and two large pickles slipped in on the sly to please the boys.

Tommy's face grew very sober as he looked in, for all he saw was a box of worms for bait and an old jacket.

"By George! we've got the wrong basket. This is Mullin's, and he's gone off with our prog. Won't he be mad?"

“Not as mad as I am. Why didn’t you look? You are always in such a hurry to start. What shall we do now without anything to eat?” whined Billy; for losing his lunch was a dreadful blow to him.

“We shall have to catch some fish and eat blackberries. Which will you do, old cry-baby?” said Tommy, laughing at the other boy’s dismal face.

“I’ll fish; I’m so tired I can’t go scratching round after berries. I don’t love ’em either.” And Billy began to fix his line and bait his hook.

“Lucky we got the worms; you can eat ’em if you can’t wait for fish,” said Tommy, bustling about to empty the basket and pile up their few possessions in a heap. “There’s a quiet pool below here, you go and fish there. I’ll pick the berries, and then show you how to get dinner in the woods. This is our camp; so fly round and do your best.”

Then Tommy ran off to a place near by where he had seen the berries, while Billy found a comfortable nook by the pool, and sat scowling at the water so crossly, it was a wonder any trout came to his hook. But the fat worms tempted several small ones, and he cheered up at the prospect of food. Tommy whistled while he picked, and in half an hour came back with two quarts of nice berries and an armful of dry sticks for the fire.

“We’ll have a jolly dinner, after all,” he said, as the flames went crackling up, and the dry leaves made a pleasant smell.

“Got four, but don’t see how we’ll ever cook ’em; no frying-pan,” grumbled Billy, throwing down the four little trout, which he had half cleaned.

“Don’t want any. Broil ’em on the coals, or toast ’em on a forked stick. I’ll show you how,” said cheerful Tommy, whittling away, and feeding his fire as much like a real hunter as a small boy could be.

While he worked, Billy ate berries and sighed for bread and butter. At last, after much trouble, two of the trout were half cooked and eagerly eaten by the hungry

boys. But they were very different from the nice brown ones Mrs. Mullin gave them; for in spite of Tommy's struggles they would fall in the ashes, and there was no salt to eat with them. By the time the last were toasted, the young hunters were so hungry they could have eaten anything, and not a berry was left.

"I set the trap down there, for I saw a hole among the vines, and I shouldn't wonder if we got a rabbit or something," said Tommy, when the last bone was polished. "You go and catch some more fish, and I'll see if I have caught any old chap as he went home to dinner."

Off ran Tommy; and the other boy went slowly back to the brook, wishing with all his might he was at home eating sweet corn and berry pie.

The trout had evidently gone to their dinners, for not one bite did poor Billy get; and he was just falling asleep when a loud shout gave him such a fright that he tumbled into the brook up to his knees.

"I've got him! Come and see! He's a bouncer," roared Tommy, from the berry bushes some way off.

Billy scrambled out, and went as fast as his wet boots would let him, to see what the prize was. He found Tommy dancing wildly round a fat gray animal, who was fighting to get his paws out of the trap, and making a queer noise as he struggled about.

"What is it?" asked Billy, getting behind a tree as fast as possible; for the thing looked fierce, and he was very timid.

"A raccoon, I guess, or a big woodchuck. Won't his fur make a fine cap? I guess the other fellows will wish they'd come with us," said Tommy, prancing to and fro, without the least idea what to do with the creature.

"He'll bite. We'd better run away and wait till he's dead," said Billy.

"Wish he'd got his head in, then I could carry him off; but he does look savage, so

we'll have to leave him awhile, and get him when we come back. But he's a real beauty." And Tommy looked proudly at the bunch of gray fur scuffling in the sand.

"Can we ever eat him?" asked hungry Billy, ready for a fried crocodile if he could get it.

"If he's a raccoon, we can; but I don't know about woodchucks. The fellows in my books don't seem to have caught any. He's nice and fat; we might try him when he's dead," said Tommy, who cared more for the skin to show than the best meal ever cooked.

The sound of a gun echoing through the wood gave Tommy a good idea,—

"Let's find the man and get him to shoot this chap; then we needn't wait, but skin him right away, and eat him too."

Off they went to the camp; and catching up their things, the two hunters hurried away in the direction of the sound, feeling glad to know that some one was near them, for two or three hours of wood life made them a little homesick.

They ran and scrambled, and listened and called; but not until they had gone a long way up the mountain did they find the man, resting in an old hut left by the lumbermen. The remains of his dinner were spread on the floor, and he lay smoking, and reading a newspaper, while his dog dozed at his feet, close to a well-filled game-bag.

He looked surprised when two dirty, wet little boys suddenly appeared before him,—one grinning cheerfully, the other looking very dismal and scared as the dog growled and glared at them as if they were two rabbits.

"Hollo!" said the man.

"Hollo!" answered Tommy.

"Who are you?" asked the man.

"Hunters," said Tommy.

“Had good luck?” And the man laughed.

“First-rate. Got a raccoon in our trap, and we want you to come and shoot him,” answered Tommy, proudly.

“Sure?” said the man, looking interested as well as amused.

“No; but I think so.”

“What’s he like?”

Tommy described him, and was much disappointed when the man lay down again, saying, with another laugh,—

“It’s a woodchuck; he’s no good.”

“But I want the skin.”

“Then don’t shoot him, let him die; that’s better for the skin,” said the man, who was tired and didn’t want to stop for such poor game.

All this time Billy had been staring hard at the sandwiches and bread and cheese on the floor, and sniffing at them, as the dog sniffed at him.

“Want some grub?” asked the man, seeing the hungry look.

“I just do! We left our lunch, and I’ve only had two little trout and some old berries since breakfast,” answered Billy, with tears in his eyes and a hand on his stomach.

“Eat away then; I’m done, and don’t want the stuff.” And the man took up his paper as if glad to be let alone.

It was lucky that the dog had been fed, for in ten minutes nothing was left but the napkin; and the boys sat picking up the crumbs, much refreshed, but ready for more.

“Better be going home, my lads; it’s pretty cold on the mountain after sunset, and you are a long way from town,” said the man, who had peeped at them over his paper now and then, and saw, in spite of the dirt and rips, that they were not farmer boys.

“We don’t live in town; we are at Mullin’s, in the valley. No hurry; we know the way, and we want to have some sport first. You seem to have done well,” answered Tommy, looking enviously from the gun to the game-bag, out of which hung a rabbit’s head and a squirrel’s tail.

“Pretty fair; but I want a shot at the bear. People tell me there is one up here, and I’m after him; for he kills the sheep, and might hurt some of the young folks round here,” said the man, loading his gun with a very sober air; for he wanted to get rid of the boys and send them home.

Billy looked alarmed; but Tommy’s brown face beamed with joy as he said eagerly,—

“I hope you’ll get him. I’d rather shoot a bear than any other animal but a lion. We don’t have those here, and bears are scarce. Mullin said he hadn’t heard of one for a long time; so this must be a young one, for they killed the big one two years ago.”

That was true, and the man knew it. He did not really expect or want to meet a bear, but thought the idea of one would send the little fellows home at once. Finding one of them was unscared, he laughed, and said with a nod to Tommy,—

“If I had time I’d take you along, and show you how to hunt; but this fat friend of yours couldn’t rough it with us, and we can’t leave him alone; so go ahead your own way. Only I wouldn’t climb any higher, for among the rocks you are sure to get hurt or lost.”

“Oh, I say, let’s go! Such fun, Billy! I know you’ll like it. A real gun and dog and hunter! Come on, and don’t be a molly-coddle,” cried Tommy, wild to go.

“I won’t! I’m tired, and I’m going home; you can go after your old bears if you want to. I don’t think much of hunting anyway, and wish I hadn’t come,” growled Billy, very cross at being left out, yet with no desire to scramble any more.

“Can’t stop. Good-by. Get along home, and some day I’ll come and take you out with me, little Leatherstocking,” said the man, striding off with the dear gun and dog

and bag, leaving Billy to wonder what he meant by that queer name, and Tommy to console himself with the promise made him.

“Let’s go and see how old Chucky gets on,” he said good-naturedly, when the man vanished.

“Not till I’m rested. I can get a good nap on this pile of hay; then we’ll go home before it’s late,” answered lazy Billy, settling himself on the rough bed the lumbermen had used.

“I just wish I had a boy with some go in him; you ain’t much better than a girl,” sighed Tommy, walking off to a pine-tree where some squirrels seemed to be having a party, they chattered and raced up and down at such a rate.

He tried his bow and shot all his arrows many times in vain, for the lively creatures gave him no chance. He had better luck with a brown bird who sat in a bush and was hit full in the breast with the sharpest arrow. The poor thing fluttered and fell, and its blood wet the green leaves as it lay dying on the grass. Tommy was much pleased at first; but as he stood watching its bright eye grow dim and its pretty brown wings stop fluttering, he felt sorry that its happy little life was so cruelly ended, and ashamed that his thoughtless fun had given so much pain.

“I’ll never shoot another bird except hawks after chickens, and I won’t brag about this one. It was so tame, and trusted me, I was very mean to kill it.”

As he thought this, Tommy smoothed the ruffled feathers of the dead thrush, and, making a little grave under the pine, buried it wrapped in green leaves, and left it there where its mate could sing over it, and no rude hands disturb its rest.

“I’ll tell mamma and she will understand; but I won’t tell Billy. He is such a greedy old chap he’ll say I ought to have kept the poor bird to eat,” thought Tommy, as he went back to the hut, and sat there, restringing his bow, till Billy woke up, much more amiable for his sleep.

They tried to find the woodchuck, but lost their way, and wandered deeper into the

great forest till they came to a rocky place and could go no farther. They climbed up and tumbled down, turned back and went round, looked at the sun and knew it was late, chewed sassafras bark and checkerberry leaves for supper, and grew more and more worried and tired as hour after hour went by and they saw no end to woods and rocks. Once or twice they heard the hunter's gun far away, and called and tried to find him.

Tommy scolded Billy for not going with the man, who knew his way and was probably safe in the valley when the last faint shot came up to them. Billy cried, and reproached Tommy for proposing to run away; and both felt very homesick for their mothers and their good safe beds at Farmer Mullin's.

The sun set, and found them in a dreary place full of rocks and blasted trees half-way up the mountain. They were so tired they could hardly walk, and longed to lie down anywhere to sleep; but, remembering the hunter's story of the bear, they were afraid to do it, till Tommy suggested climbing a tree, after making a fire at the foot of it to scare away the bear, lest he climb too and get them.

But, alas! the matches were left in their first camp; so they decided to take turns to sleep and watch, since it was plain that they must spend the night there. Billy went up first, and creeping into a good notch of the bare tree tried to sleep, while brave Tommy, armed with a big stick, marched to and fro below. Every few minutes a trembling voice would call from above, "Is anything coming?" and an anxious voice would answer from below, "Not yet. Hurry up and go to sleep! I want my turn."

At last Billy began to snore, and then Tommy felt so lonely he couldn't bear it; so he climbed to a lower branch, and sat nodding and trying to keep watch, till he too fell fast asleep, and the early moon saw the poor boys roosting there like two little owls.

A loud cry, a scrambling overhead, and then a great shaking and howling waked Tommy so suddenly that he lost his wits for a moment and did not know where he was.

“The bear! the bear! don’t let him get me! Tommy, Tommy, come and make him let go,” cried Billy, filling the quiet night with dismal howls.

Tommy looked up, expecting to behold a large bear eating his unhappy friend; but the moonlight showed him nothing but poor Billy dangling from a bough, high above the ground, caught by his belt when he fell. He had been dreaming of bears, and rolled off his perch; so there he hung, kicking and wailing, half awake, and so scared it was long before Tommy could make him believe that he was quite safe.

How to get him down was the next question. The branch was not strong enough to bear Tommy, though he climbed up and tried to unhook poor Billy. The belt was firmly twisted at the back, and Billy could not reach to undo it, nor could he get his legs round the branch to pull himself up. There seemed no way but to unbuckle the belt and drop. That he was afraid to try; for the ground was hard, and the fall a high one. Fortunately both belt and buckle were strong; so he hung safely, though very uncomfortably, while Tommy racked his boyish brain to find a way to help him.

Billy had just declared that he should be cut in two very soon if something was not done for him, and Tommy was in despair, when they thought they heard a far-off shout, and both answered it till their throats were nearly split with screaming.

“I seem to see a light moving round down that way,” cried Billy from his hook, pointing toward the valley.

“They are looking for us, but they won’t hear us. I’ll run and holler louder, and bring ’em up here,” answered Tommy, glad to do anything that would put an end to this dreadful state of things.

“Don’t leave me! I may fall and be killed! The bear might come! Don’t go! don’t go!” wailed Billy, longing to drop, but afraid.

“I won’t go far, and I’ll come back as quick as I can. You are safe up there. Hold on, and we’ll soon get you down,” answered Tommy, rushing away helter-skelter, never minding where he went, and too much excited to care for any damage.

The moon was bright on the blasted trees; but when he came down among the green pines, it grew dark, and he often stumbled and fell. Never minding bumps and bruises, he scrambled over rocks, leaped fallen trunks, floundered through brooks, and climbed down steep places, till, with a reckless jump, he went heels over head into a deep hole, and lay there for a moment stunned by the fall. It was an old bear-trap, long unused, and fortunately well carpeted with dead leaves, or poor Tommy would have broken his bones.

When he came to himself he was so used up that he lay still for some time in a sort of daze, too tired to know or care about anything, only dimly conscious that somebody was lost in a tree or a well, and that, on the whole, running away was not all fun.

By and by the sound of a gun roused him; and remembering poor Billy, he tried to get out of the pit,—for the moon showed him where he was. But it was too deep, and he was too stiff with weariness and the fall to be very nimble. So he shouted, and whistled, and raged about very like a little bear caught in the pit.

It is very difficult to find a lost person on these great mountains, and many wander for hours not far from help, bewildered by the thick woods, the deep ravines, and precipices which shut them in. Some have lost their lives; and as Tommy lay on the leaves used up by his various struggles, he thought of all the stories he had lately heard at the farm, and began to wonder how it would feel to starve to death down there, and to wish poor Billy could come to share his prison, that they might die together, like the Babes in the Wood, or better still the Boy Scouts lost on the prairies in that thrilling story, “Bill Boomerang, the Wild Hunter of the West.”

“I guess mother is worried this time, because I never stayed out all night before, and I never will again without leave. It’s rather good fun, though, if they only find me. I ain’t afraid, and it isn’t very cold. I always wanted to sleep out, and now I’m doing it. Wish poor Billy was safely down and in this good bed with me. Won’t he be

scared all alone there? Maybe the belt will break and he get hurt bumping down. Sorry now I left him, he's such a 'fraid-cat. There's the gun again! Guess it's that man after us. Hi! hollo! Here I am! Whoop! Hurrah! Hi! hi! hi!"

Tommy's meditations ended in a series of yells as loud as his shrill little voice could make them, and he thought some one answered. But it must have been an echo, for no one came; and after another rampage round his prison, the poor boy nestled down among the leaves, and went fast asleep because there was nothing else to do.

So there they were, the two young hunters, lost at midnight on the mountain,—one hanging like an apple on the old tree, and the other sound asleep in a bear-pit. Their distracted mothers meantime were weeping and wringing their hands at the farm, while all the men in the neighborhood were out looking for the lost boys. The hunter on his return to the hotel had reported meeting the runaways and his effort to send them home in good season; so people knew where to look, and, led by the man and dog, up the mountain went Mr. Mullin with his troop. It was a mild night, and the moon shone high and clear; so the hunt was, on the whole, rather easy and pleasant at first, and lanterns flashed through the dark forest like fireflies, the lonely cliffs seemed alive with men, and voices echoed in places where usually only the brooks babbled and the hawks screamed. But as time went on, and no sign of the boys appeared, the men grew anxious, and began to fear some serious harm had come to the runaways.

"I can't go home without them little shavers no way, 'specially Tommy," said Mr. Mullin, as they stopped to rest after a hard climb through the blasted grove. "He's a boy after my own heart, spry as a chipmunk, smart as a young cockerel, and as full of mischief as a monkey. He ain't afraid of anything, and I shouldn't be a mite surprised to find him enjoyin' himself first-rate, and as cool as a coocumber."

"The fat boy won't take it so easily, I fancy. If it hadn't been for him I'd have kept the lively fellow with me, and shown him how to hunt. Sorry now I didn't take them

both home," said the man with the gun, seeing his mistake too late, as people often do.

"Maybe they've fell down a precipice and got killed, like Moses Warner, when he was lost," suggested a tall fellow, who had shouted himself hoarse.

"Hush up, and come on! The dog is barkin' yonder, and he may have found 'em," said the farmer, hurrying toward the place where the hound was baying at something in a tree.

It was poor Billy, hanging there still, half unconscious with weariness and fear. The belt had slipped up under his arms, so he could breathe easily; and there he was, looking like a queer sort of cone on the blasted pine.

"Wal, I never!" exclaimed the farmer, as the tall lad climbed up, and, unhooking Billy, handed him down like a young bird, into the arms held up to catch him.

"He's all right, only scared out of his wits. Come along and look for the other one. I'll warrant he went for help, and may be half-way home by this time," said the hunter, who didn't take much interest in the fat boy.

Tommy's hat lay on the ground; and showing it to the dog, his master told him to find the boy. The good hound sniffed about, and then set off with his nose to the ground, following the zigzag track Tommy had taken in his hurry. The hunter and several of the men went after him, leaving the farmer with the others to take care of Billy.

Presently the dog came to the bear-pit, and began to bark again.

"He's got him!" cried the men, much relieved; and rushing on soon saw the good beast looking down at a little white object in one corner of the dark hole.

It was Tommy's face in the moonlight, for the rest of him was covered up with leaves. The little round face seemed very quiet; and for a moment the men stood quite still, fearing that the fall might have done the boy some harm. Then the hunter

leaped down, and gently touched the brown cheek. It was warm, and a soft snore from the pug nose made the man call out, much relieved,—

“He’s all right. Wake up here, little chap; you are wanted at home. Had hunting enough for this time?”

As he spoke, Tommy opened his eyes, gave a stretch, and said, “Hollo, Billy,” as calmly as if in his own bed at home. Then the rustle of the leaves, the moonlight in his face, and the sight of several men staring down at him startled him wide awake.

“Did you shoot the big bear?” he asked, looking up at the hunter with a grin.

“No; but I caught a little one, and here he is,” answered the man, giving Tommy a roll in the leaves, much pleased because he did not whine or make a fuss.

“Got lost, didn’t we? Oh, I say, where’s Billy? I left him up a tree like a coon, and he wouldn’t come down,” laughed Tommy, kicking off his brown bed-clothes, and quite ready to get up now.

They all laughed with him; and presently, when the story was told, they pulled the boy out of the pit, and went back to join the other wanderer, who was now sitting up eating the bread and butter Mrs. Mullin sent for their very late supper.

The men roared again, as the two boys told their various tribulations; and when they had been refreshed, the party started for home, blowing the tin horns, and firing shot after shot to let the scattered searchers know that the lost children were found. Billy was very quiet, and gladly rode on the various broad backs offered for his use; but Tommy stoutly refused to be carried, and with an occasional “boost” over a very rough place, walked all the way down on his own sturdy legs. He was the hero of the adventure, and was never tired of relating how he caught the woodchuck, cooked the fish, slid down the big rock, and went to bed in the old bear-pit. But in his own little mind he resolved to wait till he was older before he tried to be a hunter; and though he caught several woodchucks that summer, he never shot another harmless little bird.

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