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Elsie's Vacation and After Events

Martha Finley

Imprint

This book is part of TREDITION CLASSICS

Author: Martha Finley

Cover design: Buchgut, Berlin - Germany

Publisher: tredition GmbH, Hamburg - Germany

ISBN: 978-3-8424-8583-9

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CHAPTER XXI.

ELSIE'S VACATION

CHAPTER I.

Captain Raymond went back to the hotel feeling somewhat lonely and heartsore over the parting from his eldest hope, but as he entered the private parlor where his young wife and most of the party were, his look and manner had all their accustomed cheeriness.

He made a pleasant remark to Violet, fondled the little ones, and talked for a few minutes in his usual agreeable way with Mr. and Mrs. Dinsmore and the others; then glancing about the room, as if in search of someone or something, asked, "Where are Lulu and Gracie?"

"Why, I thought they were here," Violet answered in some surprise, following the direction of his glance. "They seem to have slipped out of the room very quietly."

"I must hunt them up, poor dears! for it is about time we were starting for the *Dolphin*," he said, hastily leaving the room. A low sobbing sound struck upon his ear as he softly [2]opened the door of the room where his little girls had slept the previous night, and there they were down on the carpet near a window, Gracie's head in her sister's lap, Lulu softly stroking the golden curls and saying in tender tones, "Don't, Gracie dear; oh, don't! It can't be helped, you know; and we have our dear papa and Mamma Vi, and the little ones left. Besides, Maxie will come home again to visit us one of these days."

"Oh, but he'll never live at home with us any more," sobbed Gracie; "at least I'm afraid he won't; and—and oh, I do love him so! and he's the only big brother we have."

"But we have papa, dear, dear papa, who used to be obliged to go away and leave us; but we have him all the time now," Lulu replied half chokingly. "I wish we could have them both, but we can't, and we both do love papa the best after all."

"And papa loves his two dear little girls more than tongue can tell," the captain said in tenderest tones, drawing near, bending down to take both in his arms together, and kissing first one and

then the other. "Be comforted, my darlings," he went on, holding them close to his heart; "we haven't lost our Maxie by any means; and though I left him feeling a trifle homesick and forlorn, he will get over that in a day or two I know, and greatly enjoy the busi[3]ness of preparing himself for the life work he has freely chosen."

"But, oh, papa, how he will miss our lovely home, and you, and all of us!" sobbed Gracie, hiding her tear-stained face on her father's shoulder.

"Not as you would, my darling," he replied, holding her close and caressing her with great tenderness. "Boys are different from girls, and I think our dear Maxie will soon feel very happy there among his mates, though he will, I am sure, never cease to love his father, sisters, Mamma Vi, baby brother, and his home with them all."

"Papa, I'm thinking how he'll miss the pleasant evenings at home – the good talks with you," sobbed the little girl.

"Yes, darling, but I will tell you what we will do to partly, at least, make up that loss to our dear boy."

"What, papa?" she asked, lifting her head and looking up into his face, with her own brightening a little.

"Suppose we each keep a journal or diary, telling everything that goes on each day at home, and now and then send them to Maxie; so that he will know all that we are doing?"

"Oh, what a good thought, papa!" exclaimed Lulu, giving him a vigorous hug and kiss. "And Maxie will write us nice, inter[4]esting letters; and some day he'll come home for a visit and have ever so much to tell us."

"Yes," her father said, "and I think we will have interesting letters from him in the meantime."

"And perhaps I'll learn to like writing letters, when it's just to please Maxie and comfort him," said Grace, wiping away her tears and trying to smile.

"I hope so, darling," her father replied, bestowing another kiss upon the sweet little tear-stained face. "But now, my dears," he added, "put on your hats; it is time to go back to the *Dolphin*."

They hastened to obey, and he led them to the parlor, where they found the rest of the party ready to accompany them on board the yacht.

The sun was setting as they reached the *Dolphin's* deck and they found a luxurious repast ready for them to partake of by the time outdoor garments could be laid aside and wind-tossed hair restored to order.

The captain missed the bright face of his first-born at the table, but, exerting himself for the entertainment of the others, seemed even more than usually cheery and genial, now and then indulging in some innocent jest that made his little girls laugh in spite of themselves, and at length almost forget, for the moment, their part[5]ing from Max, and their grief over the thought that he would no longer share their lessons or their sports, and would be at home only after what, in the prospect, seemed to them a long, long time; and then but for a little while.

On leaving the table all gathered upon deck. There was no wind, but the yacht had a steam engine and used her sails only on occasions when they could be of service. Stars shone brightly in the sky overhead, but their light was not sufficient to give an extended view on land or water, and as all were weary with the excitement and sightseeing of the day, they retired early to their berths.

Poor Grace, worn out with her unusual excitement, and especially the grief of the parting with Max, was asleep the instant her head touched the pillow. Not so with Lulu; her loneliness and depression banished sleep from her eyes for the time, and presently she slipped from her berth, threw on a warm dressing-gown, and thrust her feet into felt slippers. The next moment she stole noiselessly into the saloon where her father sat alone looking over an evening paper.

He was not aware of her entrance till she stood close at his side, her hand on his shoulder, her eyes fixed, with a gaze of ardent affection, upon his face.

"Dear child!" he said, looking up from his [6]paper, and smiling affectionately upon her; then tossing the paper aside and putting an arm about her waist, he drew her to his knee and pressed fatherly kisses upon lip and cheek and brow, asking tenderly if anything

was wrong with her that she had come in search of him when he supposed her to be already in bed and sound asleep.

"I'm not sick, papa," she said in reply; "but oh, I miss Maxie so!" The words were almost a sob, and she clung about her father's neck, hiding her face on his shoulder.

"I, too, miss my boy more than words can tell," he replied, stroking her hair with gently caressing touch, and she was sure his tones trembled a little with the pain of the thought of Max left alone among strangers; "but I thank God, our Heavenly Father, that I have by no means lost my eldest son, while I still have another one and three dear daughters to add to my happiness in our sweet home."

"I do want to add to it, you dear, dear, good papa!" she said, hugging and kissing him over and over again. "Oh, I wish I was a better girl for your sake, so that my wrong-doing would never give you pain!"

"I think—and am very happy in the thought—that you are improving," he said, repeating his caresses; "and it is a great comfort to me," he continued, "that my little girls need [7]not be sent away from home and their father to be educated."

"To me also, papa," she returned. "I am very thankful that I may live with my dear father always while we are spared to each other. I don't mean to ever go away from you, papa, but to stay with you always, to wait on you and do everything I can to be a great help, comfort, and blessing to you; even when I'm grown up to womanhood."

"Ah!" he returned, again smoothing her hair caressingly and smiling down into her eyes; then holding her close, "I shall be very glad to keep you as long as you may prefer life with me, my own dear, dear child," he said in tender tones. "I look upon my dear eldest daughter as one of the great blessings my Heavenly Father has bestowed upon me, and which I hope he may spare to me as long as I live."

"Papa, I'm so, so glad you love me so dearly!" she exclaimed, lifting to his eyes full of love and joy; "and oh, I do love you so! I want to be a great blessing to you as long as we both live."

"I don't doubt it, my darling," he replied. "I doubt neither your desire nor purpose to be such."

"Yes, sir, I do really long to be the very greatest of comforts to you, and yet," she sighed,[8] "I have such a bad temper you know, papa, I'm so wilful too, that — that I'm afraid — almost sure, indeed — I'll be naughty again one of these days and give you the pain of punishing me for it."

"That would grieve me very much, but would not diminish my love for you," he said; "nor yours for me, I think."

"No, indeed, papa!" she exclaimed, creeping closer into his embrace, "because I know that when you have to punish me in any way it makes you very, very sorry."

"It does indeed!" he responded.

"Papa," she sighed, "I'm always dreadfully sorry and ashamed after one of my times of being disobedient, wilful, and ill-tempered, and I am really thankful to you for taking so much pains and trouble to make a better girl of me."

"I don't doubt it, daughter," he answered; "it is a long while now since I have had any occasion to punish you, and your conduct has rarely called for even so much as a reproof."

She gave him a glad, grateful look, an embrace of ardent affection, then, laying her cheek to his, "You dear, dear papa, you have made me feel very happy," she said, "and I'm sure I am much happier than I should be if you had let me go on indulging my bad temper and wilfulness. Oh, it's so nice to be able to run to my [9]dear father whenever I want to, and always to be so kindly received that I can't feel any doubt that he loves me dearly. Ah, how I pity poor Maxie that he can't see you for weeks or months!"

"And don't you pity papa a little that he can't see Maxie?" he asked, with a smile and a sigh.

"Oh, yes! yes indeed! I'm so sorry for you, papa, and I mean to do all I can to supply his place. What do you suppose Maxie is doing just now, papa?"

"Doubtless he is in his room preparing his lessons for to-morrow. The bugle-call for evening study-hour sounds at half-past seven, and the lads must be busy with their books till half-after nine."

He drew out his watch, and glancing at its face, "Ah, it is just nine o'clock," he said. "Kiss me good-night, daughter, and go back to your berth." [10]

CHAPTER II.

Max was in his room at the Academy, busy with his tasks, trying determinately to forget homesickness by giving his whole mind to them, and succeeding fairly well. Very desirous, very determined was the lad to acquit himself to the very best of his ability that he might please and honor both his Heavenly Father and his earthly one.

By the time the welcome sound of gun-fire and tattoo announced that the day's work was over he felt fully prepared for the morrow's recitations. But he was in no mood for play. The quiet that had reigned through the building for the last two hours was suddenly broken in upon by sounds of mirth and jollity — merry boyish voices talking, singing, some accompanying themselves with the twang of a banjo or the tinkle of a guitar; but Max, closing and putting his book aside, kept his seat, his elbow on the desk, his head on his hand, while with a far-away look in his dark eyes, he indulged in a waking dream.

He seemed to see the *Dolphin* steaming down the bay, his father, perhaps, sitting in the saloon [11] with the other grown folks (the younger ones would be pretty sure to have retired to their state-rooms), and thinking and speaking of his absent son. Or, it might be, pacing the deck alone, his heart going up in prayer to God for his first-born — his "might and the beginning of his strength," — that he might be kept from sin and every danger and evil and enabled to prove himself a brave, true follower of Christ, never ashamed or afraid to show his colors and let it be known to all with whom he had to do that he was a disciple, a servant of the dear Lord Jesus.

"Lord, help me; help me to be brave and faithful and true," was the silent petition that went up from the boy's heart.

"Homesick, bub?" asked a boyish voice, in mocking tones. "I believe most of the fellows are just at the first, but they get over it after a bit without much doctoring."

"I'm inclined to think it is not a dangerous kind of ailment," returned Max, in a pleasant tone, lifting his head and turning toward his companion with a smile that seemed rather forced. "However, I was thinking not of home, exactly, but the homefolks who are just at present aboard my father's yacht and steaming down the bay."

It was only by a great effort he repressed a sigh with the concluding words.[12]

"That's a handsome yacht and about the largest I ever saw," was the next remark of his room-mate, a lad—Benjamin Hunt by name—of about the same age as himself, not particularly handsome but with a good, honest face.

"Yes, and a splendid sailor," returned Max, with enthusiasm. "Papa bought her this summer and we've had a jolly good time sailing or steaming (sometimes one and again the other, the *Dolphin* has both sails and engines) along the coast and a short distance out to sea."

"Had a good, safe captain?" Hunt asked, with a quizzical smile.

"My father, a retired naval officer; there could be none better," returned Max, straightening himself slightly, while the color deepened on his cheek.

"Yes; I don't wonder you are proud of him," laughed Hunt. "I happened to see him when he brought you here, and I must say I thought he had a fine military bearing and was—well, I think I might say one of the handsomest men I ever saw."

"Thank you," said Max heartily, glancing up at Hunt with a gratified smile. "I suppose being so fond of him I may not be a competent judge, but to me my father seems the best, the noblest, and the handsomest man that ever lived." [13]

"Didn't force you to come here against your will, eh?" queried Hunt jestingly.

"No, indeed! he only let me come because I wanted to. I think he would have been glad if I had chosen the ministry, but you see I

don't think I have any talent in that line, and I inherit a love for the sea, and papa says a man can do best in the profession or business that is most to his taste, so that perhaps I may be more useful as a naval officer than I could be in the ministry."

"Especially in case of war, and if you turn out a good and capable commander," returned Hunt, tossing up a ball and catching it as it fell. "I sometimes think I'd like nothing better; a fellow would have a chance to distinguish himself, such as he could never hope for in time of peace."

"Yes; and if such a thing should happen I hope it will be when I'm ready to take part in the defence of my country," said Max, his cheek flushing and his eyes kindling, "but war is an awful thing considering all the killing and maiming, to say nothing of the destruction of property; and I hope our country will never be engaged in another. But excuse me," he added, opening his Bible, "I see we have scarcely fifteen minutes now before taps will sound."

At that Hunt moved away to his own side [14]of the room, from whence he watched Max furtively, a mocking smile on his lips.

Max was uncomfortably conscious of it, but tried to ignore it and give his thoughts to what he was reading. Presently, closing his book he knelt and silently offered up his evening prayer, asking forgiveness of all his sins, strength to resist temptation, and never be afraid or ashamed to own himself a follower of Jesus, his loving disciple, his servant, whose greatest desire was to know and do the Master's will; and very earnestly he prayed that no evil might befall his dearly loved and honored father, his sisters or brother, Mamma Vi, or any of those he loved; that they might be taken safely through all their journeying, and he permitted to see them all again when the right time should come; and having committed both them and himself to the watchful care of his Heavenly Father, he rose from his knees and began his preparations for bed.

"Well, sonny, I hope you will sleep soundly and well after saying your prayers like the goodest of little boys," sneered Hunt.

"I shall sleep none the worse," returned Max pleasantly.

"I'll bet not a bit better than I shall without going through any such baby-like performance."

"God is very good and often takes care of [15]those who don't ask him to," said Max; "but I don't think they have any right to expect it; also I am sure I should be shamefully ungrateful if I were to lie down for my night's rest without a word of thanks to him for his protecting care over me and mine through the day that is just past. As to its being a baby-like performance, it is one in which some of the greatest, as well as best men, have indulged. Washington was a man of prayer. So was General Daniel Morgan—that grand revolutionary officer who whipped Tarleton so completely at the battle of the Cowpens. There was Macdonough also, who gained that splendid victory over the British on Lake Champlain in the war of 1812-14. Have you forgotten that just before the fight began, after he had put springs on his cables, had the decks cleared, and everything was ready for action, with his officers and men around him, he knelt down near one of his heaviest guns and in a few words asked God to help him in the coming struggle? He might well do that, because, as you know of course, we were in the right, fighting against oppression and wrongs fit to rouse the indignation of the most patient and forbearing of mortals."

"That's a fact!" interrupted Hunt. "Americans have always been forbearing at the start; but let them get once thoroughly roused and [16]they make things hot enough for the aggressors."

"So they do," said Max, "and so I think they always will; I hope so, anyhow; for I don't believe it's right for any nation to allow any of its people to be so dreadfully wronged and ill-treated as thousands of our poor sailors were, by the English, before the war of 1812 taught them better. I don't believe the mass of the English people approved, but they couldn't keep their aristocracy—who hated republicanism, and wanted always to continue superior in station and power to the mass of their countrymen and ours—from oppressing and abusing our poor sailors, impressing, flogging, and ill-treating them in various ways, and to such a degree that it makes one's blood boil in reading or thinking of it. And I think it's right enough for one to be angry and indignant at such wrongs to others."

"Of course it is," said Hunt; "and Americans always will resist oppression—of themselves or their weaker brethren—and I glory in

the fact. What a fight that was of Macdonough's! Do you remember the incident of the gamecock?"

"No; what was it?"

"It seems that one of the shots from the British vessel *Linnet* demolished a hencoop on the deck of the *Saratoga*, releasing this game[17]cock, and that he flew to a gun-slide, where he alighted, then clapped his wings and crowed lustily.

"That delighted our sailors, who accepted the incident as an omen of the victory that crowned their arms before the fight was over. They cheered and felt their courage strengthened."

"Good!" said Max, "that cock was at better business than the fighting he had doubtless been brought up to."

"Yes; so say I:

"O Johnny Bull, my joe John,
Behold on Lake Champlain,
With more than equal force, John,
You tried your fist again;
But the cock saw how 'twas going.
And cried 'Cock-a-doodle-doo,'
And Macdonough was victorious,
Johnny Bull, my joe!""

"Pretty good," laughed Max. "But there are the taps; so good-night." [18]

CHAPTER III.

Lulu woke early the next morning and was dressed and on deck before any other of the *Dolphin's* passengers. Day had dawned and the eastern sky was bright with purple, orange, and gold, heralding the near approach of the sun which, just as she set her foot on the deck, suddenly showed his face above the restless waves, making a golden pathway across them.

"Oh, how beautiful!" was her involuntary exclamation. Then catching sight of her father standing with his back toward her, and apparently absorbed in gazing upon the sunrise, she hastened to his side, caught his hand in hers, and carried it to her lips with a glad, "Good-morning, you dear papa."

"Ah! good-morning, my darling," he returned, bending down to press a kiss on the bright, upturned face.

"Such a lovely morning, papa, isn't it?" she said, standing with her hand fast clasped in his, but turning her eyes again upon sea and sky. "But where are we now? Almost at Fortress Monroe?"

"Look and tell me what you see," was his [19]smiling rejoinder, as, with a hand on each of her shoulders, he turned her about so that she caught the view from the other side of the vessel.

"O papa, is that it?" she exclaimed. "Why, we're almost there, aren't we?"

"Yes; we will reach our anchorage within a few minutes."

"Oh, are we going to stop to see the old fort, papa?" she asked eagerly.

"I think we are," was his smiling rejoinder. "But you don't expect to find in it a relic of the Revolution, do you?" he asked laughingly, pinching her cheek, then bending down to kiss again the rosy face upturned to his.

"Why yes, papa; I have been thinking there must have been a fight there. Wasn't that the case?"

"No, daughter; the fortress was not there at that time."

"Was it in the war of 1812-14, then, papa?"

"No," he returned, smiling down on her. "The building of Fortress Monroe was not begun until 1817. However, there was a small fort built on Point Comfort in 1630; also, shortly before the siege of Yorktown, Count De Grasse had some fortifications thrown up to protect his troops in landing to take part in that affair."

But just then the talk was interrupted by the coming on deck of one after another of their party and the exchange of morning greet-

ings; [20]then followed the interest and excitement of the approach to the fortress and anchoring in its vicinity.

Next came the call to breakfast. But naturally, and quite to Lulu's satisfaction, the talk at the table turned upon the building of the fort, its history and that of the adjacent country, particularly Hampton, two and a half miles distant.

The captain pointed it out to them all as they stood upon the deck shortly afterward.

"Which is Old Point Comfort, papa?" asked Grace.

"That sandy promontory on the extremity of which stands Fortress Monroe," he answered. "Yonder, on the opposite side, is Point Willoughby, the two forming the mouth of the James River; and these are the Rip Raps between the two. You see that there the ocean tides and the currents of the river meet and cause a constant ripple. There is a narrow channel of deep water through the bar, but elsewhere between the capes it is shallow.

"Beyond the Rip Raps we see the spacious harbor which is called Hampton Roads. It is so large that great navies might ride there together."

"And I think some have ridden there in our wars with England?" remarked Rosie, half inquiringly.[21]

"You are quite right," replied the captain; "that happened in both the Revolution and the last war with England.

"In October, 1775, Lord Dunmore, the British governor of Virginia,—who had, however, abdicated some months earlier by fleeing on board a man-of-war, the *Fowey*,—driven by his fears, and his desire for revenge, to destroy the property of the patriots, sent Captain Squires, of the British navy, with six tenders, into Hampton Creek.

"He reached there before the arrival of Colonel Woodford— who, with a hundred Culpepper men, had been sent to protect the people of Hampton—and sent armed men in boats to burn the town; protecting them by a furious cannonade from the guns of the tenders.

"But they were baffled in the carrying out of their design; being driven off by Virginia riflemen, concealed in the houses. Excellent