

## PART III.

IT was not until night that the ceremony called *taking the vows* was ever observed, it being supposed that the darkness lent so much impressiveness to the scene. The place chosen was a large unfinished attic room, where the children were sure of no interruption. It was lighted by two pilfered candle-ends, placed on either side of a small stand covered with a white cloth and called an altar.

On the altar was placed a dish with a red liquid in it, always spoken of as the blood of a bullock, and eventually poured upon the floor as an oblation to the gods. The utter seriousness with which the performance was conducted, the solemn aspect of Bee as she made her vows, the business-like air of Harold the high priest, made a comedy worth witnessing. As a climax, the performers joined hands, and taking the polka step very slow, passed three times around the altar, after which they blew out

the candles, and skipped breathlessly downstairs to the family circle.

That evening Harold, who was not a good scholar, had lessons to make up, and as Bee was too faithful to him to indulge in favorite sports which he must forego, she brought out her writing-materials, being occupied at that time in writing a story. Before Harold had hardly opened his books, Bee's busy brain was spinning its web of romance, and her slim fingers steadily moving back and forth over the paper, while the colonel looked at her curiously over his newspaper now and then, and Francis wasted jokes at her expense. She was happy in a world of her own creation, where disapproving grandfathers and teasing cousins were not.

At length Bee laid down her pen.

"Cousin Francis," she asked, "do you admire women with Roman noses?"

"Well, it depends upon how many each woman is supposed to have. As a rule, one Roman nose goes a long way with me."

"You mean you don't fancy them. Well, I'm not sure that I do myself. There's one good thing about a girl in a book, you can take off any one of her features the minute you get tired of it, and give her a

nicer one. I'm writing the description of the heroine, and I want to make her very beautiful. I always have the heroine beautiful, because she has to be remarkable in some way, and a clever heroine puts you to so much trouble. You have to be clever too."

"I see, I see! But tell me, Trix, are you writing a novel with a purpose; or is it simply one of the delightful old-fashioned romances that please the sentimental heart of man in all ages?" Cousin Francis delighted in talking a little over Bee's head, but he seldom could make her confess to being puzzled.

"It's a story of adventures," she answered, in a happy evasion. "The name of it is, 'The Wonderful Adventures of the Demon, the Dude, and the Darling.'"

"Very pretty, very pretty indeed," murmured the colonel's sister, sweet old Aunt Mary, who was deaf, and had just caught the last word.

"At first I thought of having it the *Deacon*, instead of the *Demon*," Bee went on, with great eagerness, "and I will now, if you think it's better; for it goes just as well that way: 'The Wonderful Adventures of the *Deacon*, the *Dude*, and the *Darling*;'

or 'The Wonderful Adventures of the *Demon*, the *Dude*, and the *Darling*.'"

"You don't consider them synonymous, I hope?"

Bee wrote synonymous in original orthography on a corner of her page; she had a passion for big words, and intended to consult the dictionary as to the meaning of this one, with a view to its future use.

"I consider that they both begin with a D," she said adroitly, "and that's what I want; it makes a nice rippling kind of a title, when all the words begin with the same letter. I think the title ought to be a kind of a rub-a-dub-dub before the procession starts, so that everybody will come to the window and look out."

"Come," cried Cousin Francis, "let's sample this story. Read the description of the heroine, Bee."

"You laughed at the last story I read to you," objected Bee, who had an inconvenient memory.

"Could n't have paid it a higher compliment. To amuse is the chief function of fiction."

"Well, then, you must know," explained Bee, "that the dude is trying to find some-

body in the world that's elegant enough for him to marry. He has explored Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Connecticut," said Bee, without winking. "Go on, Harold."

"New York, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Oh—o," drawled Harold.

"In short," interrupted Bee, impatient of detail, "he had scoured the United States, from Maine to Florida, and had at last, having put to sea, reached a beautiful little island that is n't down on the maps."

"Why not?" demanded Harold.

"Why not! Because the people that draw 'em have never found out about it, of course. Catch them leaving a blessed spot out that they might make a nuisance of to us children! You go on studying, and perhaps, some time, you'll get wisdom. On this island the dude had fallen in with the darling, who was a princess in disguise, and who, therefore, although he was deep in love with her, he thought was not elegant enough to be his wife."

"I'm afraid, after all, the plot is hackneyed," interrupted the critic, sadly.

Bee wrote hackneyed underneath synonymous, and proceeded.

"They met at the house of a peasant, where the dude stopped to inquire the way, and where a husking-party was going on. That's the gist of the story, so far; but of course the dude has had lots of adventure all along. Now I'm going to begin:—

"The dude counted off the pretty girls in the room, and found there were five blondes—a red-headed one—and ten brunettes; but neither of these compared for a moment with the darling, whose beauty was so dazzling that it made his eyes water —"

"Yes, like a hot potato. I know the sensation," struck in Cousin Francis. "Pretty girls often affect me the same way."

Bee scowled at the interruption, and went on:—

"The one in the sky-blue satin beats the record," said the dude, clapping his hands over his heart. ["Please excuse the language, but I've drawn this character from life," said Bee, with a sharp look at Francis.] "I will take her apart, and have some conversation with her."

"Take her apart! Merciful Heavens! how very rude of him!" interrupted Francis.

"Well, it does sound peculiar," Bee admitted, coloring, with a suspicion that she

had not used the correct phrase, "but I'm sure I've seen that expression in books."

"Try 'take her *aside*,'" suggested the other.

"I will take her aside, and have some conversation with her," Bee corrected. "He looked admiringly at the darling, who was indeed a beautiful creature; her eyes were of midnight darkness, or of celestial blue."

"Well, I should think it made a difference. Perhaps, though, one was black and the other blue."

"You see I have n't decided, yet, whether she is to be light or dark," Bee explained; "when I do, I shall scratch off one of these expressions."

"I admire your method. Go on, my child, it's capital."

"Her nose was classic and jaunty," Bee proceeded.

"Is it the same one that used to be Roman?" interrupted the critic.

Bee looked at him sharply, but he seemed serious, so she nodded and went on. "Her mouth was as red as a cherry, and her complexion like alabaster. The dude observed that she had beautiful arms and hands, and

her neck was as white as milk, and of faultless mould."

"I should n't admire a mouldy neck, myself," said Francis, "but there's no accounting for taste;" and this time, his words being accompanied by an unmistakable grin, Bee remarked, stiffly, that she had wasted a good deal of time, and should now set to work.