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bered on board, panting.

When she rejoined her father her

"Yes, very like," he agreed, and he

"And so this is Mount Mark! Isn't

"I don't know. I hadn't thought to

with porches, don't you? Has the par-

"Yes, a big one on the south, and a

There, that is the parsonage!"

sonage a porch?"

her.

CHAPTER I.

Introducing Her.

None but the residents consider Mount Mark, Iowa, much of a town, face was flushed. "Oh, father," she and the very most patriotic of them said quite snappily, "isn't that just like all has no word of praise for the ugly me?" little red C. B. & Q. rallway station. Mount Mark is anything but proud of smiled. the little station. At the same time it certainly does owe the railroad and the it a funny name, father? Why do they state a debt of gratitude for its pres- call it Mount Mark?" ence there. It is the favorite social rendezvous for the community! The inquire. We turn here, Prudence. This arrival of a passenger train in Mount is Main street. The city part of the Mark is an event-something in the town-the business part-is to the nature of a C. B. & Q. "at home," and south." is always attended by a large and enthusiastic gathering of "our best cried. "Such nice big maples, and such people." All that is lacking are the proverbial "light refreshments!"

So it happened that one sultry morning, late in the month of August, there was the usual flutter of excitement and tiny one in front. We have the house confusion on the platform and in the fixed up pretty well, Prudence, but of waiting room of the station. The habitues were there in force. Conspicuous among them were four gayly dressed young men, smoking cigarettes o'clock, but we can get a good deal and gazing with lack-luster eyes upon done before then. Mrs, Adams is comthe animated scene, which evidently bored them.

The Daily News reporter, in a wellcreased, light gray suit and tan shoes. and with eyeglasses scientifically balanced on his aquiline nose, was making pointed inquiries into the private plans of the travelers. The young woman | shaded lawn greeted one first. Great, going to Burlington to spend the weekend was surrounded with about fifteen other young women who had come to "see her off." Mount Mark is a very respectable town, be it understood, and looked homey, and big, and inviting. girls do not go to the station without an excuse!

A man in a black business suit stood alone on the platform, his hands in his pockets, his eyes wandering from one to another of the strange faces about him. His plain white ready-made tie proclaimed his calling.

"It's the new Methodist minister," volunteered the baggage master, cross- | thanked God for it when she said her ing the platform. "I know him. He's prayers. And a furnace, too! And not a bad sort."

"They say he's got five kids, and a long time for it, and we've been very nost of 'em girls," responded the Ad- patient indeed, but, between you and ams express man. "I want to be on me, father, I am most mightily glad hand when they get here, to pick out a we've hit the luxury land at last. I'm girl." tor, bobbing his head through the win- and electric lights! Oh, father !" dow, "you need to. They tell me every girl in Mount Mark has turned you down a'ready."

old, rambling barn, I was so thankful tioning, on Prudence's dress. It was I couldn't resist praying about it." plexed "member." "Do you call that dence's eyes had followed Mrs. Ada blessing?"

"Yes, indeed I do," declared Prudence. Then she explained patiently: dress is any color! Well, I think it "Oh, it is on the children's account, really is, but it isn't any of the reguyou know. They have always longed lar shades. It is my own invention, for a big, romantic barn to play in. but I've never named it. Fairy grew hold in."

house, Mrs. Adams looked at this par- one of hers down for me! At first I sonage girl in frank curiosity and some laughed, and then I was insulted. Fairy dismay, which she strongly endeavored is three years younger than I, and

Father did run, but Prudence, fleetcrbe so nice to have a grown girl in the turned. From that time on Fairy's footed, outdistanced him and clamparsonage! Prudence was nineteen clothes were cut down for me. I still

from all account, but she looked like a feel bitter about it. Fairy is dark, and child, and-well, it was not exactly dark blues are becoming to her. She grown-up to give thanks for a barn, handed down this dress-it was dark to say the very least! Yet this girl blue then. But I was not wanting a

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had full charge of four younger chil- dark blue, and I thought it would be dren, and was further burdened with less recognizable if I gave it a con- lines, rather commanding in appearthe entire care of a minister-father! trasting color. I chose lavender. I ance, a little splendid-looking. Even Well, well! Mrs. Adams sighed a dyed it four times, and this was the relittle. sult.'

"You are tired," said Prudence sympathetically. "It's so hot walking, Mrs. Adams, when she could control isn't it? Let's sit on the porch until her voice. you are nicely rested."

"It's a pretty street, isn't it?" she eagerness. shady, porchy houses. I love houses



a very peculiar color. In fact, it was "But a barn !" ejaculated the per- no color at all-no named color. Pru-

ams' glance, and she spoke frankly. "I suppose you're wondering if this

to conceal from the bright-eyed Pru- before then she had got my handed-

"Do the twins dress alike?" inquired

"This is a fine chance for us to get They do it on purpose to escape the acquainted," said the good woman with handed-downs! They won't even have ing, like three children, as they werehair ribbons different. And the result Now, if the truth must be told, there is that poor Connie never gets one had been some ill-feeling in the Ladies' new thing except shoes. She says she | Prudence was a very little taller than Aid society concerning the reception of cannot help thanking the Lord in her they. When they reached the fence Prudence. After the session of con- prayers that all of us outwear our that bordered the parsonage, the scene for the beautiful morning, for kind

> and the twins are thirteen. They are exclaimed, and clasped their hands. tences extracted from the prayers of a very clever lot of girls."

just a girl yourself."

"I don't want to go to school," laughed Prudence. "Not any more. I fence. like it, just taking care of father and the future."

Mrs. Adams. "Don't you have dreams other. of the future? Girl's in books nowadays dream-'

"Yes, I dream," interrupted Pru- shook their heads. dence, "I dream lots-but it's mostly of what Fairy and others will do when I tor jumping a three-wire fence, and get them properly raised. You'll like running full speed across his front girls came in from school, eager to be the girls, Mrs. Adams, I know you will. yard in pursuit of a flying family? It up and away again. Still the grave They really are a gifted little bunch- may possibly have occurred-we have young minister sat discoursing upon except me. I'm just common little Pru- never seen it. Neither had the three serious topics with the fidgety Prudence of the Parsonage-but the oth- Misses Avery. Nor did they ever ex- dence-and in spite of dust and per-

But-well, when I found this grand, clothes, and lingered, in silent ques- They are coming!" they trooped to Miss Alice's window with a speed that would have done credit to the parsonage girls themselves.

First came the minister, whom they knew very well by this time, and considered quite respectable. He was lively, as was to be expected of a Methodist minister, and told jokes, and laughed at them! Now, a comical rector-oh, a very different matter-That's why I couldn't resist saying my up and out and around, and one day it wasn't done, that's all! At any rate, prayers-I was so happy I couldn't when I was so nearly out of clothes I here came the Methodist minister, hardly felt I could attend church any laughing, and on one side of him As they walked slowly toward the more, she suggested that I cut an old | tripped a small, earnest-looking maiden, clasping his hand, and gazing alternately up into his face and down at the stylish cement sidewalk beneath her feet. On the other side was Fairy. dence. The Ladies had said it would downs. But now the tables were The Misses Avery knew the girls by name already-having talked much with Prudence.

> "Such a Fairy !" gasped Miss Millicent, and the others echoed the gasp but wordlessly.

For Fairy was very nearly as tall as her father, built upon generous from their windows they could discern something distinctly Junolike in this sixteen-year-old girl, with the easy, elastic stride that matched her father's, and the graceful head, well car-"Yes - unfortunately for Connie. ried. A young goddess-named Fairy! Behind them, laughing and chattercame the twins with Prudence, each with an arm around her waist. And shoes before we can outgrow them .- | for a moment resembled a miniature | friends, for health, and family, and par-Connie is only nine. Fairy is sixteen, riot. The smaller girls jumped and sonage. Connie always prayed in sen-Fairy leaned over the fence, and "And what are you going to do?" in- stared intently at this, their parsonage

quired Mrs. Adams, looking with real home. Then the serious little girl affection at the bright, sweet face. scrambled under the fence, followed went better. The prayers of the chil-"You ought to go to school. You're closely by the lithe-limbed twins. A dren changed-became more personal, pause, a very short one-and then Pru- less flowery. They remembered that

"Hold the wire up for me, papa !" the girls-with Fairy to keep me bal- cried Fairy. "I'm too fat." And a secanced! I read, but I do not like to ond later she was running gracefully sonage only three weeks, when a visstudy .-- No, you'll have to get along across the lawn toward the parsonage. iting minister called on them. It was with me just the way I am, Mrs. Ad- The Methodist minister laughed boy- about ten minutes before the lunchams. It's all I can do to keep things ishly, and placing his hands on the eon hour at the time of his arrival. going now, without spending half the fence post, he vaulted lightly over, Mr. Starr was in the country, visiting, time dreaming of big things to do in and reached the house with his daugh- so the girls received him alone. It ters. Then the Misses Avery, school- was an unfortunate day for the Starrs, "Don't you have dreams?" gasped teachers and elderly, looked at one an- Fairy had been at college all morning,

Miss Avery, and the others slowly

Now, think ! Did you ever see a rec-

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amazed, and quite proud. Connie was an honor to the parsonage-but they were concerned lest they themselves should not do quite so well when their days came.

But in less than a moment the minister-father began his prayer. When he said "Amen." Prudence was on her feet and half-way upstairs before the others were fairly risen. Fairy stood gazing intently out of the window for a moment, and then went out to the barn to see if the horse was through eating. Mr. Starr walked gravely and soberly out the front door, and around the house. He ran into Fairy coming out the kitchen door, and they glanced quickly at each other.

"Hurry, papa," she whispered; "you can't hold in much longer! Neither can I!"

And together, choking with laughter, they hurried into the barn and gave full vent to their feelings.

So it was that the twins and Connie were alone for a while.

"You did a pretty good job, Connie," said Carol approvingly.

"Yes, I think I did myself," was the complacent answer. "But I intended to put in, 'Keep us as the apple of thy eye, hold us in the hollow of thy hand,' and I forgot it until I had said 'Amen.' I had a notion to put in a postscript, but I believe that isn't done."

"Never mind," said Carol, "I'll use that in mine, tomorrow."

It cannot be said that this form of family worship was a great success. The twins were invariably stereotyped, cut and dried. They thanked the Lord others she had often heard, and every time with nearly disastrous effect.

But later on the morning worship dence, too, was wriggling beneath the when they knelt they were at the feet of God, and speaking direct to him.

The family had been in the new parand Prudence had been rummaging in "Did you ever?" gasped the oldest the attic, getting it ready for a rainy day and winter playroom for the younger girls. She was dusty and tired.

The luncheon hour arrived, and the ers!" And Prudence flung out her pect to. And if they had seen it, it spiration, she was good to look upon.

away down the track, where a thin of No. 9 and Prudence-heard nothing



"Run, Father, Run!"

of this conversation. He was not a handsome man. His hair was gray at the temples, his face was earnest, only saved from severity by the little clusters of lines at his eyes and mouth which proclaimed that he laughed often and with relish.

"Train going east !"

The minister stood back from the crowd, but when the train came pounding in a brightness leaped into his eyes. A slender girl stood in the vestibule, waving wildly at him a small gloved hand. When the train stopped she leaped lightly from the steps.

"Father !" she cried excitedly, and, small and slight as she was, she elbowed her way swiftly through the gaping crowd. "Oh, father !" And she flung her arms about him joyously, unconscious of admiring eyes. Her father kissed her warmly. "Where is your baggage?" he asked, a hand held out to relieve her.

"Here!" And with a radiant smile she thrust upon him a box of candy and a gaudy-covered magazine.

"Your suitcase," he explained patiently.

"Oh!" she gasped. "Run, father run! I left it on the train!"

sure we'll all feel much more religious "Yah !" mocked the telegraph opera- in a parsonage that has a bathroom He had thrown open the door, and Prudence stood upon the threshold of her new home. Together she and her But the Methodist minister, gazing father went from room to room, up-

stairs and down, moving a table to the curl of smoke announced the coming | left, a bed to the right-according to her own good pleasure. Afterward they had a cozy luncheon for two in the "dining room."

"Oh, it is so elegant to have a dining room," breathed Prudence happily, "I always pretended it was rather fun. and a great saving of work, to eat and cook and study and live in one room, but inwardly the idea always outraged me. Is that the school over there?" "Yes, that's where Connie will go.

There is only one high school in Mount Mark, so the twins will have to go to the other side of town-a long walk, but in good weather they can come home for dinner."

"Oh, that's a lovely place over there, father !" exclaimed Prudence, looking from the living room windows toward the south. "Isn't it beautiful?"

"Yes. The Avery family lives there. The parents are very old and feeble, and the daughters are all-elderlyand all schoolteachers. There are four of them, and the youngest is forty-six. Dear me, it is two o'clock already, and I must go at once. Mrs. Adams will be here in a few minutes, and you will not be lonely."

But when Mrs. Adams arrived at the parsonage she knocked repeatedly, and in vain. Finally she gathered her robes about her and went into the back yard. She peered into the woodshed, and saw no one. She went into the barn lot, and found it empty. In despair, she plunged into the barn-and stopped abruptly.

In a shadowy corner was a slender figure kneeling beside an overturned nailker, her face buried in her hands, too," urged Mrs. Adams. "I want to Evidently this was Prudence engaged know all about every one of you. Tell in prayer-and in the barn, of all places in the world !

"A-a-a-hem!" stammered Mrs. Adams inquiringly.

"Amen!" This was spoken aloud and hurriedly, and Prudence leaped to her feet. Her fair hair clung about her face in damp, babyish tendrils, and girl?" her face was flushed and dusty, but alight with friendly interest. She ran forward eagerly, thrusting forth a slim and grimy hand.

"You are Mrs. Adams, aren't you? I am Prudence Starr. It is so kind of laughed. "In short, we are all girls you to come the very first day," she except father. He couldn't be, of cried. "It makes me love you right at the start."

"Ye-yes, I am Mrs. Adams." Mrs. Adams was embarrassed. She could not banish from her mental vision that | ams suggestively. kneeling figure by the nailkeg. Inter-

ample face, and Prudence promptly ly unsuitable for me." read it and hastened to reply.

in the barn, Mrs. Adams, I assure you. Then her eyes wandered down to her

In the Barn of All Places.

ference, when Rev. Mr. Starr was assigned to Mount Mark, the Ladies of It was Saturday morning when the

eager curlosity to the coming of Pru- dling in the bare idea. dence, the young mistress of the parsonage.

Mr. Starr had arrived at Mount Mark little thing. a week ahead of his family. Prudence aunt, and Prudence had come on a day few of them very likable." in advance of the others to "wind everything up," as she had expressed it But to return to the Ladies-the parsonage girls always capitalized the La- "Oh, impossible !" dies of their father's church-"One of us should go and help the dear child," said Mrs. Scott, the president of the Aids, when they assembled for their business meeting, "help her, and welcome her, and advise her."

"I was thinking of going over," said one, and another, and several others.

"Oh, that will not do at all," said the president. "I think in a case like this the president herself should represent the society. Therefore, I will undertake this duty for you."

But this called forth a storm of protest and it became so clamorous that it was unofficially decided to draw cuts! Which was done, and in consequence of that drawing of cuts, Mrs. Adams now sat on the front porch of the old gray parsonage, cheered by the knowledge that every other Lady of the Aid was envying her!

"Now, just be real sociable and tell me all about yourself, and the others, me everything."

"There isn't much to tell," said Prudence, smiling. "There are five of us; I am the oldest-I am nineteen. Then comes Fairy, then the twins, and then the baby."

"Are the twins boys, or a boy and a

"Neither," said Prudence, "they are both girls."

"More girls !" gasped Mrs. Adams. 'And the baby?'

"She is a girl, too," And Prudence course-or I suppose he would, for our family does seem to run to girls."

"Prudence is a very nice name for a minister's daughter," said Mrs. Ad-

rogation was written all over her ters," assented Prudence. "But is sad-

Mrs. Adams looked critically at this "I do not generally say my prayers young daughter of the parsonage. CHAPTER II.

hands dramatically.

The Rest of the Family.

the church had felt great interest it four young parsonage girls arrived in the man and his family. They inquired Mount Mark. The elderly Misses Avery, on every hand, and learned several in next door, looked out of their windows, teresting items. The mother had beer pending their appearance on Main taken from the family five years be street, with interest and concern. They fore, after a long illness, and Prudence were Episcopalians themselves, and in the eldest daughter, had taken charge all their long lives they had never so women, they looked forward with er. There was something blood-cur-

The Misses Avery considered Prudence herself rather a sweet, silly

"You have some real nice people in and the other children had spent the the Methodist church," Miss Dora had week visiting at the home of their told her. "I dare say you will find a

"Oh, I will like them all," said Prudence quickly and seriously.

"Like them all," echoed Miss Dora. "Not for us," said Prudence. "We are used to it, you know. When we

dislike people at first sight, we visit

"Quick! They Are Coming!"

them to the parsonage, and entertain throne in heaven, for Jesus' sake, them with our best linen and silver- Amen." ware, and keep on getting friendlier and friendlier, and-first thing you know, we like them fine !"

So the Misses Avery concluded that

is quite likely they would have joined the backsliders at that instant. But without wasting much time on

this gruesome thought, they hurried to a window commanding the best view gan?" of the parsonage, and raised it. Then they clustered behind the curtains, and watched and listened. There was plenty to hear! From the parsonage windows came the sound of scampering feet and banging doors. Once there was the unmistakable clatter of a chair overturned. With it all there was a of the household. There were five chil much as heard of a widower-rector constant chorus of "Oh, look!" "Oh! dren. So much was known, and being with five daughters and no housekeep- Oh !" "Oh, how sweet !" "Oh, papa !" "Oh, Prudence !" "Look, Larkie, look at this!"

> Then the eldest Miss Avery closed the window overlooking the parsonage corn and butter. We haven't even and confronted her sisters.

"We must just make the best of it." she said quietly.

But next door the gray old parsonage was full to overflowing with satisfaction and happiness and love. Everyone has experienced the ecstatic, creepy sensation of sleeping in a brand-new home. The parsonage girls reveled in the memory of that first night for many days. "It may be haunted for all we know," cried Carol deliciously. "Just think, Connie, there may be seven ghosts camped on the head of your bed, waiting-" "Carol !"

When the family gathered for worship on that first Sabbath morning, Mr. Starr said, as he turned the leaves of his well-worn Bible, "I think it would be well for you to help with the morning worship now. When I finish reading the chapter, Connie, you will whatever you wish as you do at night for yourself. I will fol. y you."

Connie's eyes were wide with responsibility during the reading of the chapter, but when she began to speak her voice did not falter. Connie had nine years of good Methodist experience back of her!

bow ourselves before thy footstool in and began: "Our Father we thank thee humility and reverence. Thou art our for this table." God, our Creator, our Savior. Bless us us, an unbroken family around thy she gasped out an explanation.

lence. Prudence was biting her lips painfully, and counting by tens as fast more into peals of laughter. as she could. Fairy was mentally go-Prudence was not entirely responsible. ing over the prayer, sentence by sen- that day. He did not seem to be so And they wondered, with something tence, and attributing each petition fond of sweet corn as he had assured akin to an agony of fear, if the younger, to the individual member in the old Prudence. He talked very little, too. girls "had it, too!" and when Miss church at Exminster to whom it be And as soon as possible he took his

Rev. Mr. Morgan realized that, and could not tear himself away. Finally Prudence sighed.

"Do you like sweet corn, Mr. Mor-

This was entirely out of the line of their conversation, and for a moment he faltered. "Sweet corn?" he repeated. "Yes, roasting ears, you knowcooked on the cob."

Then he smiled. "Oh, yes, indeed. Very much," he said.

"Well," she began her explanation rather drearily, "I was busy this morning and did not prepare much luncheon. We are very fond of sweet corn, and I cooked an enormous panful. But that's all we have for luncheon-sweet bread, because I am going to bake this afternoon, and we never eat it with sweet corn, anyhow. Now, if you care to eat sweet corn and butter, and canned peaches, we'd just love to have

you stay for luncheon with us." Rev. Mr. Morgan was charmed, and said so. So Prudence rushed to the kitchen, opened the peaches in a hurry. and fished out a clean napkin for their guest. Then they gathered about the table, five girls and the visiting minister. It was really a curious sight, that table. In the center stood a tall vase of goldenrod. On either side of the vase was a great platter piled high with sweet corn, on the cob! Around the table were six plates, with the necessary silverware, and a glass of water for each. There was also a small dish of peaches at each place, and an individual plate of butter. That was all-except the napkins. But Prudence make the first prayer. Just pray for made no apologies. She was a daughter of the parsonage! She showed Rev. Mr. Morgan to his place as graciously

and sweetly as though she were ushering him in to a twenty-seven-course banquet.

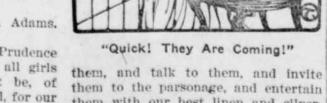
"Will you return thanks, Mr. Morgan?" she said.

And the girls bowed their heads. "Our Father, who art in heaven, we Rev. Mr. Morgan cleared his throat,

There was more of the blessing, but this day, and cause thy face to shine the parsonage girls heard not one adupon us. Blot out our transgressions, ditional phrase-except Connie, who pardon our trespasses. Wash us, that followed him conscientiously through we may be whiter than snow. Hide every word. Carol burst into merry not thy face from the eyes of thy laughter, close upon his reverent children, turn not upon us in wrath. "Amen"-and after one awful glare Pity us, Lord, as we kneel here pros- at her sister, Prudence joined in, and trate before thy majesty and glory, soon it was a rollicking group around Let the words of our mouths and the the parsonage table. Mr. Morgan himmeditations of our hearts be accept- self smiled uncertainly. He was puzable in thy sight, O Lord, our strength zled. More, he was embarrassed. But and our Redeemer. And finally save as soon as Carol could get her breath,

"You were just-right, Mr. Morganto give thanks-for the table! There's This was followed by an electric si- nothing-on it-to be thankful for!" And the whole family went off once

Mr. Morgan had very little appetite Alice cried excitedly, "Quick! Quick! longed. The twins were a liftle bat and walked hurriedly away. He



"Yes-for some ministers' daugh-