

Penelope Ellen

AND HER FRIENDS

*Three little girls of
1840*

by Ethel Parton

Illustrated by Margaret Platt



Also by Ethel Parton

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To
MARIETTA, KARKILIE, and ANNE PLATT WITHINGTON,
the three young nieces
of my dear friend of many years,
Anne Withington

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1. “And Sing High Low, My Ranzo Ray”

PENELOPE ELLEN PURVIS, Penny for short, held fast to her mother’s hand, carried her firm little chin tilted high, glanced this way and that with a pair of bright round eyes that blinked tears back so resolutely nobody would have guessed they were trying to come, and smiled a steady little tight smile.

She was being noble.

Often before she had found it a help in time of trouble to play at being noble; if it didn’t quite turn a person into being noble really and truly, yet it generally carried you as far as being pretty good, and bearing disagreeable things without a fuss. Today, of course, was different, and much, much harder. A whole year, perhaps more than a year, before she would see either her father or her mother again! Captain Purvis had gone on two long voyages before, but his wife had stayed at home. This time she was going too. Penny hastily swallowed a lump in her throat, turned a small sob into a cough, and tilted her chin even more cockily. It made her look not at all the way she felt.

“She prances like a peacock. I think she must be haughty, don’t you?” said a sweet but rather whiny voice as she passed. It belonged to a little girl a year or two younger than Penny, and about as much younger than another little girl who stood beside her, just in front of a big barrel at one side of the long wharf. “Don’t you, Cressy?” the whiny voice persisted. “Don’t you think she’s haughty? She stared right over our heads as if we weren’t anybody at all! She did! I don’t see why she smiled at us in church yesterday if she was going to stare right over our heads like that today, do you, Cressy? Cressy, do you? I don’t think she’s nice a bit! Not a bit!” The speaker sniffed forlornly, and rubbed her nose with a mittened forefinger.

“Oh, I don’t believe she’s haughty, Thudy; I guess she just didn’t see us,” the little girl called Cressy answered uncertainly. “I’m glad I didn’t nod, though; I was just going to. Oooh, my hands are getting numb. I wish I’d worn my mittens.”

Her eyes followed Penny Purvis, who had reached the end of the wharf. A ship lay moored there, and the gangplank leading

aboard was not wide enough for two. Penny had released her mother's hand to follow her across, then quickly caught hold of it again. Together they walked along the deck to the companionway and disappeared below.

Mrs. Purvis's bags and boxes had all been brought down and neatly stowed since early morning, when the captain had gone aboard, but she herself had remained ashore as long as possible, at the house of her relatives, the Otways, where she had lived as a child, and where Penny, during the period of her absence, would spend most of her time in the care of her lovely young aunt, Lucy Otway. Captain Richard Purvis did not like fuss or tears or emotional farewells in public, or aboard ship, and it had been understood that all good-bys should be said on land at the Otways' and his wife be driven alone to join him on the ship. She had agreed willingly; she too had thought it the best plan, especially as Aunt Lucy was frail and easily upset, but at the last minute Penny had begged so hard to be allowed to come with her, and have just a little time longer together, and had promised so earnestly to make no trouble, that her mother had consented—especially as she found that after all it was what she very much wanted herself.

That was how Penny happened to be there, and that was why she was still gallantly smiling as they vanished below deck. It was not Penny's eyelashes, but those of Melissa Purvis, her mother, that were the dampest; and not Penny's smile, but her mother's, which was the more quivery of the two.

Cressy watched the mother and daughter disappear, and shivered. Thudy beside her sniffed tearfully, shivering too, and mopping her eyes. She had already cried two handkerchiefs into useless damp wads.

Thudy was Cressy Pidgen's cousin. Her full name was Arethusa Amelia Thripp, and she lived with some other cousins, the Rings (Aunt Martha Ring had been a Pidgen), because her father was away at sea most of the time, and never had any home or any money, and good-hearted Uncle Zeb Ring and Aunt Martha let her make her home with them. But except for little Dilly and the baby, the children at the Rings' were all boys, and so Arethusa had picked up a habit of tagging about after Cressy, who was older than she, but only by a year and a half. Cressy was continually be-

ing told that she ought to be kind to Arethusa, poor child, and of course she knew she ought, and she really tried. But the other girls didn't like Thudy much, and sometimes left Cressy out of things because of her, and so she couldn't help thinking of Thudy as tagging on. People—other children, at any rate—generally did think of Arethusa as tagging on. She was that kind of child.

Cressy glanced towards her. "I might have known it," she told herself. "Sopping wet again!"

Arethusa's eyes and nose were as pink as a rabbit's, what with tears and mopping and the wind. Cressy gave a jerky sigh, and reflected that even Thudy's third handkerchief wouldn't last long at that rate. Pretty soon, she supposed, she would have to lend her one of her own. Thudy often sniffed with so much less reason than she had today that it could hardly be expected she would keep dry with her father about to set sail on a goodness-knew-how-long voyage and perhaps never come home again.

Not that the fine new ship *Mercator* was likely to come to grief; not at all. A brand-new beautiful ship with Captain Richard Purvis in command—Captain Purvis, whose little daughter had looked across the aisle yesterday in church and smiled a nice, jolly smile, even though Mr. Fox was looking straight down at them from the high pulpit! Penelope—Penny—Purvis—a nice name, Penny Purvis; she wished she knew her. No, there was nothing wrong with the ship, nor her captain. Captain Purvis had a fine reputation for seamanship. But Arethusa's father, Simeon Thripp, she had heard her mother say, couldn't be trusted in any foreign port two minutes without getting into trouble; if it wasn't one thing, it was another, from doings he ought to be ashamed of to fevers, which are an act of God. Still, of course, Thudy ought to love her own father, and of course she did. It must be hard for her to have him go.

Cressy sighed and fished for the extra handkerchief.

"You'd better take this, Thudy," she said penitently. "I guess you need it more than I do."

Thudy sniffed a whole series of sniffs and accepted it awkwardly, letting slip her own moist one, which a puff of wind caught and blew away until it brought up flattened against a mooring post. It clung there for a moment and then, just before Cressy could snatch it, flapped gently away ahead of her like a big white moth,

went over the edge, and landed in the river. Cressy carefully removed her own last-and-only handkerchief from the inner pocket of her blue pelisse and held it tight in her hand. Not that she felt any wish to cry—*she* wasn't Simmy Thripp's daughter!—but her nose felt chilly and she suspected that she too might presently begin to sniff. She hated snuffles, and besides, it is not easy to feel comfortably lady-like while sniffing and snuffling, and Mamma so often reminded her "always to look and behave like a little lady." Mrs. Pidgen was a milliner and mantua-maker—there was a small neat sign in the front window which said so—and she pointed out that if customers should ever happen to see Cressy looking anything but neat and genteel, or see her behaving any way but genteelly, it would be a reflection on her mother and likely to be bad for business.

It was quite a responsibility having to be so especially careful to be lady-like, more than other little girls, but it couldn't be helped, and Cressy was the more willing to try because she did really very much wish to be a perfect lady *sometime*, though she would have preferred to wait for perfection till she was grown up.

It is not possible to sniff, if a person must sniff, in the way a lady should perform that act, without a proper handkerchief. Cressy shot another glance at Arethusa; it looked as if that unfortunate child might need even a fourth! She would be sure to shed a flood of tears presently when the *Mercator* got under way. Well, if she should she would have to do without it, that was all! Cressy dabbed her own nice little nose resolutely, although with care not to rub it red. Red noses are most ungenteel.

The sun was still bright, the sky and water blue as blue could be, and the day would still be pleasantly mild up in the town; but on the wharf a chill breath rose from the lapping water and damp piles, and the short puffs of east wind that just managed to cross the bar and ripple the flats held a raw sharpness remindful of the fact that winter was close at hand. Cressy dabbed her nose again, and again wished she had worn her mittens. She tucked her bare hands up under the armpits of her caged blue pelisse, hugged her crossed arms tight over her chest, and soon felt her fingers grow less stiff, and the gooseflesh on her arms less goosy.

More and more people were gathering on the wharf, and the bustle on the deck of the *Mercator* was growing livelier. The tide had passed the full and turned some time ago, and the vessel would be going out soon on the ebb.

“Oh!” she said suddenly. “There’s Penny Purvis coming back. Look, Thudy! She’s all alone!”

Thudy looked. She too saw the little figure appear again on the deck, a figure snugly buttoned into a gay plaid coat, with gay copper-gold curls flying about her face from under the scoopy brim of a brown felt bonnet trimmed with gay green ribbons. For a moment the little figure seemed to be lost in Captain Dick Purvis’s swift, swooping hug; for a longer, clinging moment in the clasp of Melissa, his wife; then, quite alone, it broke away and dashed down the gangplank to the dock. It wormed its way, ducking under arms, skipping over feet, dodging around a bunchy, shawled woman here and a fat gentleman there, straight across to where Cressy and Arethusa were standing. Their eyes grew round and startled as Penny’s lips parted, and they saw she meant to speak to them.

Just behind was the great hogshead, set quite by itself with no keg or bale or anything else near by to use as a step-up, and without something to step on it was too high for a girl of Penny’s size to mount. But the top of it, if it could be reached, would make a perfect look-out, raising anyone who could get there well above the heads of the crowd.

“Help me up! Please help me up!” begged Penny breathlessly. “Just a little boost and I can do it! My father and mother are both on the ship, and I want to be where I can see the last of them, and they can see the last of me. Oh, please!”

She had found a toe-hold with one foot on one of the great hoops of the hogshead and clutched the upper edge, while she hopped unsteadily on the other foot.

“I don’t believe I can—I mean I don’t believe you can,” said Cressy, “but we can try. Oh, dear me! No, we can’t—see, the barrel is all sticky; you’ve got a great spot on your nice pelisse already!”

“I don’t care if I’ve forty-’leven spots on my nice pelisse! I’m going to get up—and you needn’t get yourself sticky if that’s what you’re afraid of! You can help me without touching the old thing at all.”