Mountain Fold

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Endpapers

Scale line is 3.5” long

Book Covers

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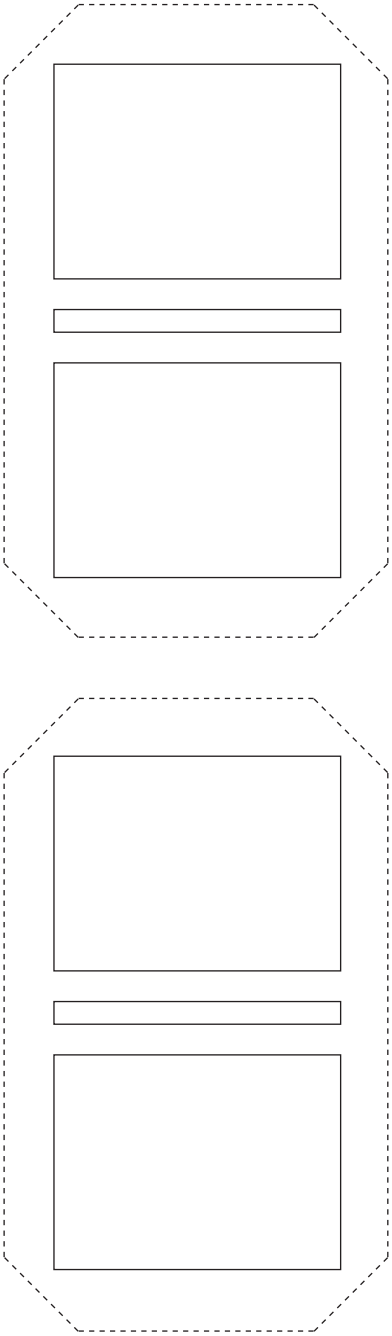

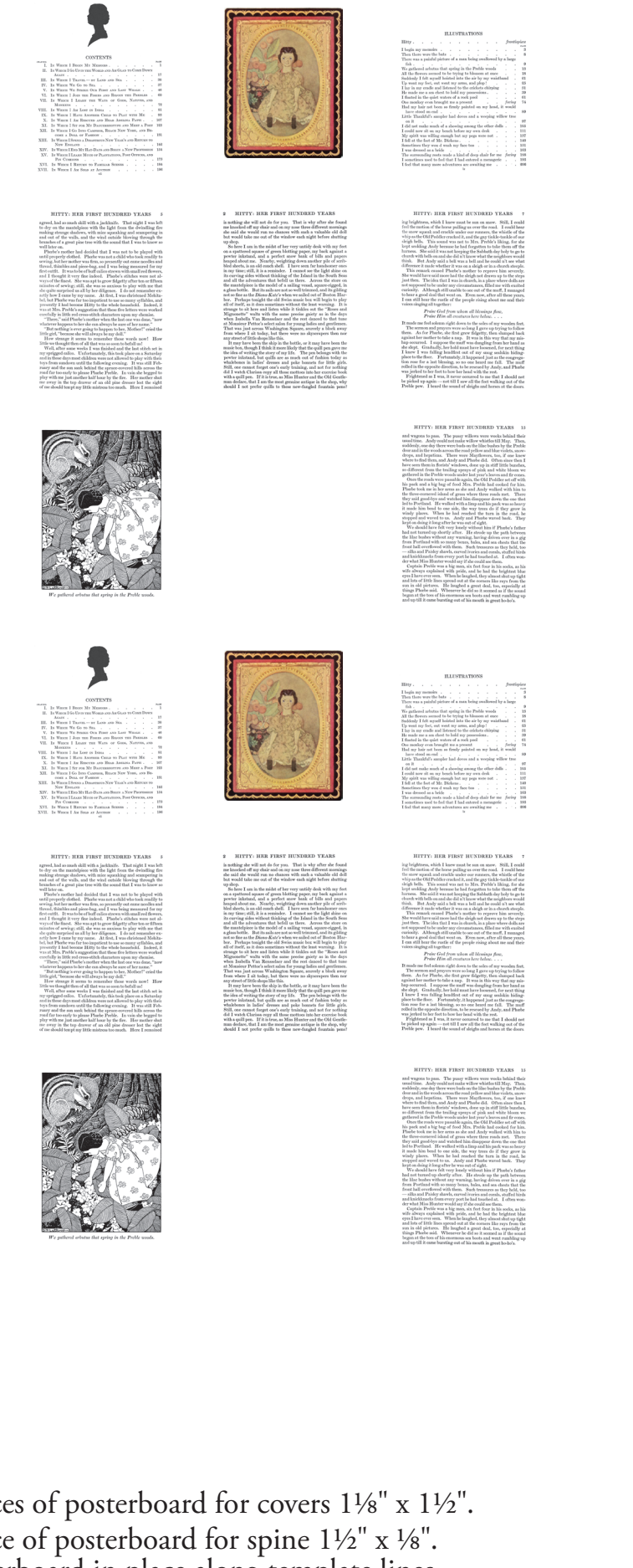

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widesnarls and swirls. That was the reason he had carried this about in the bottom of his pack ever since he had started peddling. Mostly he did his best business from May to November when roads were open and the weather not too cold for farmers' wives and daughters to stand on their doorsteps as he spread out his wares. But that year he tramped further north than he had ever been before. Snow caught him on a road between the sea and a rough, woody country. The wind blew such a gale it tangled great drifts across the road in no time and he was forced to come knocking at the kitchen door of the Preble House, where he had seen a light.

Mrs. Preble always said she didn't know how she and Phebe would have got along without the Old Peddler, for it took all those years, and all those years of hard work, to dig themselves out from water and frost the house, the cow, and the chickens in the barn. Even when the weather cleared, the roads were impassable for many days and roads storehoused in Portland Harbor. So the Peddler decided to stay on and help with odd jobs round the place. In exchange, since Captain Preble was off on his ship for months to come.

At that time, Phebe Preble was a little girl of seven with gay and friendly ways and fair hair that hung in smooth, round curls on either side of her face. It was for her that I was transformed from a piece of mountain-ash wood only six and a half inches high, and nearly as tall as a bayberry candle, into a doll of parts. My first memories, therefore, are of a square, pleasant room with brown beams and a great fireplace like a square cave, where flames licked enormous logs of wood and an old black kettle hung from an iron crane. The first wood I ever heard were Phebe's as she called to her mother and Andy: "See, now the doll has a foot!" They came over to pour at me as the Old Peddler held me between his thumb and forefinger, turning me this way and that in the firelight so my paint would dry. I can remember Phebe's excitement over my features and her mother's amazement that the old man had been able to give such a small bit of wood a real nose and even a pleasant expression. Surely no one, they all

agreed, had so much skill with a jackknife. That night I was left to dry on the mantelpiece with the light from the dwindling fire making strange shadows, with mice squeaking and scampering in and out of the walls, and the wind outside blowing through the branches of a great pine tree with the sound that I was to know so well later on.

Phebe's mother had decided that I was not to be played with until properly clothed. Phebe was not a child who took readily to sewing, but her mother was firm, so presently out came needles and thread, thimbles and piece-bags, and I was being measured for my first outfit. It was to be a buff calico sleeves with small red flowers, and I thought it very fine indeed. Phebe's stitches were not always even, but I was in no position to complain, for I was stitched in minutes of sewing; still, she was so anxious to play with me that she quite surprised me all by her diligence. I do not remember exactly how I came by my name. At first, I was christened Mehitabel, but Phebe was far too impatient to use so many syllables, and presently I had become Hitty to her whole household. Indeed, it was at Mrs. Preble's suggestion that these five letters were worked carefully in little red cross-stitch characters upon my chemise.

"There," said Phebe's mother when the last one was done, "now whatever happens to her she can always be sure of her name."

"But nothing is ever going to happen to her, Mother!" cried the little girl, "because she will always be my doll."

How strange it seems to remember those words now! How little we thought then of all that was so soon to befall us!

Well, after some weeks I was finished and the last stitch set in my rpingpod calico. Unfortunately, this took place on a Saturday and for two nasty little months thereafter, I was stitched in the dark and the sun sank behind the spruce-covered hills across the road far too early to please Phebe Preble. So vain she begged to play with me just another half hour by the fire. Her mother did not approve of this, but Phebe was so much of a spoiled child that she could keep her way in the top drawer of an old pine dresser but the sight of me should tempt my little mischiefs too much. Here I remained

is nothing she will not do for you. That is why after she found me knocked off my chair and on my nose three different mornings she said she would run no chances with such a valuable doll she had would take me out of the window sash night before shutting up shop.

So here I am in the midst of her very untidy desk with my feet on a spattered square of green blotting paper, my back against a pewter inkstand, and a perfect more bank of bills and papers heaped above me. Nearby, weighting down another pile of scribbled sheets, is an old conch shell. I have seen her bandmaster ones in curving sides without thinking of the Island in the South Seas and all the adventures that befell us there. Across the store on the mantelpiece is the model of a sailing vessel, square-rigged, in a glass bottle. But its sails are not so well trimmed, and its gilding not as fine as the *Diana Kate*'s when we sailed out of Boston Harbor. Perhaps tonight the old Swiss music box will begin to play with its just another half hour by the fire. Her mother did not approve of this, but Phebe was so much of a spoiled child that she could keep her way in the top drawer of an old pine dresser but the sight of me should tempt my little mischiefs too much. Here I remained

ing brightness, which I knew must be son on snow. Still, I could feel the motion of the brave pulling as ever the end. I could hear the snow squeak and crackle under our runners, the whistle of the whip as the Old Peddler cracked it, and the gay tinkle-tankle of our sleigh bells. This sound was not to Mrs. Preble's liking, for she kept scolding Andy because he had forgotten to take them off the harness. She said it was not keeping the Sabbath day holy to go to church with bells on and she did n't know what the neighbors would think. But Andy said a bell was a bell and he could n't see what difference it made whether it was on a sleigh or in a church steeple.

This remark caused Phebe's mother to express him severely. She would have said more had the sleigh not drawn up to the steps of the church. The Preble pew was a high box, with a door that was not supposed to be under any circumstances filled in with curious curiosity. Although still unable to use out of the mouf, I managed to hear a good deal that went on. Even now, after eighty years, I can still hear the rustle of the people rising about me and their voices singing all together:

Praise God from whom all blessings flow,
Praise Him all creatures here below . . .

It made me feel solemn right down to the soles of my wooden feet. The hymns and prayers were so long I gave up trying to follow them. As for Phebe, she first grew fidgetty, then slumped back against her mother to take a nap. It was in this way that my mishap occurred. I suppose the mouf was dangling from her hand as she slept. Gradually, her hold must have loosened, for next thing I knew I was falling, falling out of the sleigh and down from the seat, to the floor. Fortunately, it happened just as the congregation rose for a last blessing, so no one heard our fall. The mouf rolled in the opposite direction, to be rescued by Andy, and Phebe was jerked to her feet to hoe her hand with the rest.

Frightened as I was, it never occurred to me that I should not be picked up again — not till I saw all the feet walking out of the Preble pew. I heard the sound of sleighs and horses at the door.

that my two wooden feet could produce such an effect upon him.

Fortunately for me, Phebe Preble was not good at keeping secrets to herself. Before the week was out she had confessed her disobedience in taking me to church and had promised to mend her ways if only I could be restored to her. Accordingly, she was set down to sew an extra large slot on her sampler, while Andy and the Old Peddler drove off to fetch me back.

So pen, not even the finest quill, could describe my joy at being once more in the midst of my family. No fire has ever seemed so bright and hoping as that in the Preble fireplace. How good to feel its warmth upon me and to see it making flickers of brightness on the shining pots and pans and on Phebe's fair head, bent over the square of canvas upon which she was working this motto in cross-stitch:

Conscience distasteful truths may tell,
But much her sacred lesson well.
Whoever lives with her at style
Loses his better friend for life.

No wonder Phebe and I knew it by heart, for her mother had decreed that I was not to be played with till the final *e* had been sewed in satisfactorily. This took many days, and there were tears and knottings of thread and much taking out and putting in of stitches.

I looked on sympathetically from an upper shelf to which I had been banished. This was to be a lesson to the little girl, and after hearing all the things Mrs. Preble told Phebe about conscience and how careful one must be to listen and do as they said, I began to feel glad that dolls do not have them. I think Phebe wished that she could lose hers, judging from the sighs I heard her give over the sampler.

* * * *

Spring was very late in coming to Maine that year. It was mid-March before the first thaw set in and for a month after that the road was a river of mud, so it was well-nigh impossible for horses

and wagons to pass. The pussy willows were weeks behind their usual time. Andy could not make willow whistles till May. Then, suddenly, one day there were buds on the lilac bushes by the front door and in the woods across the road yellow and blue violets, snowdrops, and hepatica. There were May-flowers, too, if one knew where to find them, and Andy and Phebe did. Often since then I have seen them in florists' windows, done up in stiff little bunches, so different from the trailing sprays of pink and white that we gathered in the Preble woods under last year's leaves and fir cones.

Once the roads were passable again, the Old Peddler set off with his pack and a big bag of food Mrs. Preble had cooked for him. Phebe took me in her arms as she and Andy walked with him to the three-cornered island of grass where three roads met. There they said goodbye and watched him disappear down the one that led to the sea. The road he took was a broad one and his pack was so heavy it made him bend to one side, the way trees do if they grow in windy places. When he had reached the turn in the road, he stopped and waved to us. Andy and Phebe waved back. They kept on doing it long after he was out of sight.

We should have felt very lonely without him if Phebe's father had not turned up shortly after. He strode up the path between the lilac bushes without any warning, having driven over in a gig from Portland with so many boxes, bales, and sea chests that the front hall overflowed with them. Such treasures as they held, too — silks and Paisley shawls, carved ivories and corals, stuffed birds and knickknacks from every port he had touched at. I often wondered what Miss Hunter would say if she could see them.

Captain Preble was a big man, six feet four in his socks, as his wife always explained with pride, and he had the brightest blue eyes I have ever seen. When he laughed, they closed shut my light and lots of little lines opened out at the corners like rays from the sun. He was fond of his wife and daughter and of his ship, which he called the *Diana Kate*. Whenever he did so it seemed as if the sound began at the box of his enormous sea boots and went rumbling up and up till it came bursting out of his mouth in great hooks's.