

Literature.org:

[Authors](#)  
[Contact](#)

[Jack And Jill](#)

[Louisa May Alcott](#)

This Book:

[Contents](#)  
[Previous Chapter](#)  
[Next Chapter](#)

Chapter 3 - Ward No. 1

---

For some days, nothing was seen and little was heard of the "dear sufferers," as the old ladies called them. But they were not forgotten; the first words uttered when any of the young people met were: "How is Jack?" "Seen Jill yet?" and all waited with impatience for the moment when they could be admitted to their favorite mates, more than ever objects of interest now.

Meantime, the captives spent the first few days in sleep, pain, and trying to accept the hard fact that school and play were done with for months perhaps. But young spirits are wonderfully elastic and soon cheer up, and healthy young bodies heal fast, or easily adapt themselves to new conditions. So our invalids began to mend on the fourth day, and to drive their nurses distracted with efforts to amuse them, before the first week was over.

The most successful attempt originated in Ward No. 1, as Mrs. Minot called Jack's apartment, and we will give our sympathizing readers some idea of this place, which became the stage whereon were enacted many varied and remarkable scenes.

Each of the Minot boys had his own room, and there collected his own treasures and trophies, arranged to suit his convenience and taste. Frank's was full of books, maps, machinery, chemical messes, and geometrical drawings, which adorned the walls like intricate cobwebs. A big chair, where he read and studied with his heels higher than his head, a basket of apples for refreshment at all hours of the day or night, and an immense inkstand, in which several pens were always apparently bathing their feet, were the principal ornaments of his scholastic retreat.

Jack's hobby was athletic sports, for he was bent on having a strong and active body for his happy little soul to live and enjoy itself in. So a severe simplicity reigned in his apartment; in summer, especially, for then his floor was bare, his windows were uncurtained, and the chairs uncushioned, the bed being as narrow and hard as Napoleon's. The only ornaments were dumbbells, whips, bats, rods, skates, boxing-gloves, a big bath-pan and a small library, consisting chiefly of books on games, horses, health, hunting, and travels. In winter his mother made things more comfortable by introducing rugs, curtains, and a fire. Jack, also, relented slightly in the severity of his training, occasionally indulging in the national buckwheat cake, instead of the prescribed oatmeal porridge, for breakfast, omitting his cold bath when the thermometer was below zero, and dancing at night, instead of running a given distance by day.

Now, however, he was a helpless captive, given over to all sorts of coddling, laziness, and luxury, and there was a droll mixture of mirth and melancholy in his face, as he lay trussed up in bed, watching the comforts which had suddenly robbed his room of its Spartan simplicity. A delicious couch was there, with Frank reposing in its depths, half hidden under several folios which he was consulting for a history of the steam-engine, the subject of his next composition.

A white-covered table stood near, with all manner of dainties set forth in a way to tempt the sternest principles. Vases of flowers bloomed on the chimney-piece, - gifts from anxious young ladies, left with their love. Frivolous story-books and picture-papers strewed the bed, now shrouded in effeminate chintz curtains, beneath which Jack lay like a wounded warrior in his tent. But the saddest sight for our crippled athlete was a glimpse, through a half-opened door, at the beloved dumb-bells, bats, balls, boxing-gloves, and snow-shoes, all piled ignominiously away in the bath-pan, mournfully recalling the fact that their day was over, now, at least for some time.

He was about to groan dismally, when his eye fell on a sight which made him swallow the groan, and cough instead, as if it choked him a little. The sight was his mother's face, as she sat in a low chair rolling bandages, with a basket beside her in which were piles of old linen, lint, plaster, and other matters, needed for the dressing of wounds. As he looked, Jack remembered how steadily and tenderly she had stood by him all through the hard times just past, and how carefully she had bathed and dressed his wound each day in spite of the effort it cost her to give him pain or even see him suffer.

"That's a better sort of strength than swinging twenty-pound dumb-bells or running races; I guess I'll try for that kind, too, and not howl or let her see me squirm when the doctor hurts," thought the boy, as he saw that gentle face so pale and tired with much watching and anxiety, yet so patient, serene, and cheerful, that it was like sunshine.

"Lie down and take a good nap, mother dear, I feel first-rate, and Frank can see to me if I want anything. Do, now," he added, with a persuasive nod toward the couch, and a boyish relish in stirring up his lazy brother.

After some urging, Mamma consented to go to her room for forty winks, leaving Jack in the care of Frank, begging him to be as quiet as possible if the dear boy wished to sleep, and to amuse him if he did not.

Being worn out, Mrs. Minot lengthened her forty winks into a three hours' nap, and as the "dear boy" scorned repose, Mr. Frank had his hands full while on guard.

"I'll read to you. Here's Watt, Arkwright, Fulton, and a lot of capital fellows, with pictures that will do your heart good. Have a bit, will you?" asked the new nurse, flapping the leaves invitingly. - for Frank had a passion for such things, and drew steam-engines all over his slate, as Tommy Traddles drew hosts of skeletons when low in his spirits.

"I don't want any of your old boilers and stokers and whirligigs. I'm tired of reading, and want something regularly jolly," answered Jack, who had been chasing white buffaloes with "The Hunters of the West," till he was a trifle tired and fractious.

"Play cribbage, euchre, anything you like;" and Frank obligingly disinterred himself from under the folios, feeling that it was hard for a fellow to lie flat a whole week.

"No fun; just two of us. Wish school was over, so the boys would come in; doctor said I might see them now."

"They'll be along by and by, and I'll hail them. Till then, what shall we do? I'm your man for anything, only put a name to it."

"Just wish I had a telegraph or a telephone, so I could talk to Jill. Wouldn't it be fun to pipe across and get an answer!"

"I'll make either you say;" and Frank looked as if trifles of that sort were to be had for the asking.

"Could you, really?"

"We'll start the telegraph first, then you can send things over if you like," said Frank, prudently proposing the surest experiment.

"Go ahead, then. I'd like that, and so would Jill, for I know she wants to hear from me."

"There's one trouble, though; I shall have to leave you alone for a few minutes while I rig up the ropes;" and Frank looked sober, for he was a faithful boy, and did not want to desert his post.

"Oh, never mind; I won't want anything. If I do, I can pound for Ann."

"And wake mother. I'll fix you a better way than that;" and, full of inventive genius, our young Edison spliced the poker to part of a fishing-rod in a jiffy, making a long-handled hook which reached across the room.

"There's an arm for you; now hook away, and let's see how it works," he said, handing over the instrument to Jack, who proceeded to show its unexpected capabilities by hooking the cloth off the table in attempting to get his handkerchief, catching Frank by the hair when fishing for a book, and breaking a pane of glass in trying to draw down the curtain.

"It's so everlasting long, I can't manage it," laughed Jack, as it finally caught in his bed-hangings, and nearly pulled them, ring and all, down upon his head.

"Let it alone, unless you need something very much, and don't bother about the glass. It's just what we want for the telegraph wire or rope to go through. Keep still, and I'll have the thing running in ten minutes;" and, delighted with the job, Frank hurried away, leaving Jack to compose a message to send as soon as it was possible.

"What in the world is that flying across the Minots' yard, - a brown hen or a boy's kite?" exclaimed old Miss Hopkins, peering out of her window at the singular performances going on in her opposite neighbor's garden.

First, Frank appeared with a hatchet and chopped a clear space in the hedge between his own house and the cottage; next, a clothes line was passed through this aperture and fastened somewhere on the other side; lastly, a small covered basket, slung on this rope, was seen hitching along, drawn either way by a set of strings; then, as if satisfied with his job, Frank retired, whistling "Hail Columbia."

"It's those children at their pranks again. I thought broken bones wouldn't keep them out of mischief long," said the old lady, watching with great interest the mysterious basket travelling up and down the rope from the big house to the cottage.

If she had seen what came and went over the wires of the "Great International Telegraph," she would have laughed till her spectacles flew off her Roman nose. A letter from Jack, with a large orange, went first, explaining the new enterprise: -

"Dear Jill, - It's too bad you can't come over to see me. I am pretty well, but awful tired of keeping still. I want to see you ever so much. Frank has fixed us a telegraph, so we can write and send things. Won't it be jolly! I can't look out to see him do it; but, when you pull your string, my little bell rings, and I know a message is coming. I send you an orange. Do you like gorver jelly? People send in lots of goodies, and we will go halves. Good-by.

"Jack"

Away went the basket, and in fifteen minutes it came back from the cottage with nothing in it but the orange.

"Hullo! Is she mad?" asked Jack, as Frank brought the despatch for him to examine.

But, at the first touch, the hollow peel opened, and out fell a letter, two gum-drops, and an owl made of a peanut, with round eyes drawn at the end where the stem formed a funny beak. Two bits of straw were the legs, and the face looked so like Dr. Whiting that both boys laughed at the sight.

"That's so like Jill; she'd make fun if she was half dead. Let's see what she says;" and Jack read the little note, which showed a sad neglect of the spelling-book: -

"Dear Jacky, - I can't stir and it's horrid. The telly graf is very nice and we will have fun with it. I never ate any gorver jelly. The orange was first rate. Send me a book to read. All about bears and ships and crockydiles. The doctor was coming to see you, so I sent him the quickest way. Molly Loo says it is dreadful lonesome at school without us. Yours truly,

"Jill"

Jack immediately despatched the book and a sample of guava jelly, which unfortunately upset on the way, to the great detriment of "The Wild Beasts of Asia and Africa." Jill promptly responded with the loan of a tiny black kitten, who emerged spitting and scratching, to Jack's great delight; and he was cudgelling his brains as to how a fat white rabbit could be transported, when a shrill whistle from without saved Jill from that inconvenient offering.

"It's the fellows; do you want to see them?" asked Frank, gazing down with calm superiority upon the three eager faces which looked up at him.

"Guess I do!" and Jack promptly threw the kitten overboard, scorning to be seen by any manly eye amusing himself with such girlish toys.

Bang! went the front door; tramp, tramp, tramp, came six booted feet up the stairs; and, as Frank threw wide the door, three large beings paused on the threshold to deliver the courteous "Hullo!" which is the established greeting among boys on all social occasions.

"Come along, old fellows; I'm ever so glad to see you!" cried the invalid, with such energetic demonstrations of the arms that he looked as if about to fly or crow, like an excited young cockerel.

"How are you, Major?"

"Does the leg ache much, Jack?"

"Mr. Phipps says you'll have to pay for the new rails."

With these characteristic greetings, the gentlemen cast away their hats and sat down, all grinning cheerfully, and all with eyes irresistibly fixed upon the dainties, which

proved too much for the politeness of ever-hungry boys.

"Help yourselves," said Jack, with a hospitable wave. "All the dear old ladies in town have been sending in nice things, and I can't begin to eat them up. Lend a hand and clear away this lot, or we shall have to throw them out of the window. Bring on the doughnuts and the tarts and the shaky stuff in the entry closet, Frank, and let's have a lark."

No sooner said than done. Gus took the tarts, Joe the doughnuts, Ed the jelly, and Frank suggested "spoons all round" for the Italian cream. A few trifles in the way of custard, fruit, and wafer biscuits were not worth mentioning; but every dish was soon emptied, and Jack said, as he surveyed the scene of devastation with great satisfaction, -

"Call again to-morrow, gentlemen, and we will have another bout. Free lunches at 5 P.M. till further notice. Now tell me all the news."

For half an hour, five tongues went like mill clappers, and there is no knowing when they would have stopped if the little bell had not suddenly rung with a violence that made them jump.

"That's Jill; see what she wants, Frank;" and while his brother sent off the basket, Jack told about the new invention, and invited his mates to examine and admire.

They did so, and shouted with merriment when the next despatch from Jill arrived. A pasteboard jumping-jack, with one leg done up in cotton-wool to preserve the likeness, and a great lump of molasses candy in a brown paper, with accompanying note: -

"Dear Sir, - I saw the boys go in, and know you are having a nice time, so I send over the candy Molly Loo and Merry brought me. Mammy says I can't eat it, and it will all melt away if I keep it. Also a picture of Jack Minot, who will dance on one leg and waggle the other, and make you laugh. I wish I could come, too. Don't you hate grewel? I do. - In haste,

"J.P."

"Let's all send her a letter," proposed Jack, and out came pens, ink, paper, and the lamp, and every one fell to scribbling. A droll collection was the result, for Frank drew a picture of the fatal fall with broken rails flying in every direction, Jack with his head swollen to the size of a balloon, and Jill in two pieces, while the various boys and girls were hit off with a sly skill that gave Gus legs like a stork, Molly Loo hair several yards long, and Boo a series of visible howls coming out of an immense mouth in the shape of o's. The oxen were particularly good, for their horns branched like those of the moose, and Mr. Grant had a patriarchal beard which waved in the breeze as he bore the wounded girl to a sled very like a funeral pyre, the stakes being crowned with big mittens like torches.

"You ought to be an artist. I never saw such a dabster as you are. That's the very moral of Joe, all in a bunch on the fence, with a blot to show how purple his nose was," said Gus, holding up the sketch for general criticism and admiration.

"I'd rather have a red nose than legs like a grasshopper; so you needn't twit, Daddy," growled Joe, quite unconscious that a blot actually did adorn his nose, as he labored over a brief despatch.

The boys enjoyed the joke, and one after the other read out his message to the captive lady: -

"Dear Jill, - Sorry you ain't here. Great fun. Jack pretty lively. Laura and Lot would send love if they knew of the chance. Fly round and get well.

"Gus"

"Dear Gilliflower, - Hope you are pretty comfortable in your 'dungeon cell.' Would you like a serenade when the moon comes? Hope you will soon be up again, for we miss you very much. Shall be very happy to help in any way I can. Love to your mother. Your true friend,

"E.D."

"Miss Pecq."

"Dear Madam, - I am happy to tell you that we are all well, and hope you are the same. I gave Jem Cox a licking because he went to your desk. You had better send for your books. You won't have to pay for the sled or the fence. Jack says he will see to it. We have been having a spread over here. First-rate things. I wouldn't mind breaking a leg, if I had such good grub and no chores to do. No more now, from yours, with esteem,

"Joseph P. Flint"

Joe thought that an elegant epistle, having copied portions of it from the "Letter Writer," and proudly read it off to the boys, who assured him that Jill would be much impressed.

"Now, Jack, hurry up and let us send the lot off, for we must go," said Gus, as Frank put the letters in the basket, and the clatter of tea-things was heard below.

"I'm not going to show mine. It's private and you mustn't look," answered Jack, patting down an envelope with such care that no one had a chance to peep.

But Joe had seen the little note copied, and while the others were at the window working the telegraph he caught up the original, carelessly thrust by Jack under the pillow, and read it aloud before any one knew what he was about.

"My Dear, - I wish I could send you some of my good times. As I can't, I send you much love, and I hope you will try and be patient as I am going to, for it was our fault, and we must not make a fuss now. Ain't mothers sweet? Mine is coming over to-morrow to see you and tell me how you are. This round thing is a kiss for good-night.

"Your Jack"

"Isn't that spoony? You'd better hide your face, I think. He's getting to be a regular mollycoddle, isn't he?" jeered Joe, as the boys laughed, and then grew sober, seeing Jack's head buried in the bedclothes, after sending a pillow at his tormentor.

It nearly hit Mrs. Minot, coming in with her patient's tea on a tray, and at sight of her the guests hurriedly took leave, Joe nearly tumbling downstairs to escape from Frank, who would have followed, if his mother had not said quickly, "Stay, and tell me what is the matter."

"Only teasing Jack a bit. Don't be mad, old boy, Joe didn't mean any harm, and it was rather soft, now wasn't it?" asked Frank, trying to appease the wounded feelings of his brother.

"I charged you not to worry him. Those boys were too much for the poor dear, and I ought not to have left him," said Mamma, as she vainly endeavored to find and caress the yellow head burrowed so far out of sight that nothing but one red ear was visible.

"He liked it, and we got on capitally till Joe roughed him about Jill. Ah, Joe's getting it now! I thought Gus and Ed would do that little job for me," added Frank, running to the window as the sound of stifled cries and laughter reached him.

The red ear heard also, and Jack popped up his head to ask, with interest, -

"What are they doing to him?"

"Rolling him in the snow, and he's howling like fun."

"Serves him right," muttered Jack, with a frown. Then, as a wail arose suggestive of an unpleasant mixture of snow in the mouth and thumps on the back, he burst out laughing, and said, good-naturedly, "Go and stop them, Frank; I won't mind, only tell him it was a mean trick. Hurry! Gus is so strong he doesn't know how his pounding hurts."

Off ran Frank, and Jack told his wrongs to his mother. She sympathized heartily, and saw no harm in the affectionate little note, which would please Jill, and help her to bear her trials patiently.

"It isn't silly to be fond of her, is it? She is so nice and funny, and tries to be good, and likes me, and I won't be ashamed of my friends, if folks do laugh," protested Jack, with a rap of his teaspoon.

"No, dear, it is quite kind and proper, and I'd rather have you play with a merry little girl than with rough boys till you are big enough to hold your own," answered Mamma, putting the cup to his lips that the reclining lad might take his broma without spilling.

"Pooh! I don't mean that; I'm strong enough now to take care of myself," cried Jack, stoutly. "I can thrash Joe any day, if I like. Just look at my arm; there's muscle for you!" and up went a sleeve, to the great danger of overturning the tray, as the boy proudly displayed his biceps and expanded his chest, both of which were very fine for a lad of his years. "If I'd been on my legs, he wouldn't have dared to insult me, and it was cowardly to hit a fellow when he was down."

Mrs. Minot wanted to laugh at Jack's indignation, but the bell rang, and she had to go and pull in the basket, much amused at the new game.

Burning to distinguish herself in the eyes of the big boys, Jill had sent over a tall, red flannel night-cap, which she had been making for some proposed Christmas plays, and added the following verse, for she was considered a gifted rhymester at the game parties: -

"When it comes night,  
We put out the light.  
Some blow with a puff,  
Some turn down and snuff;  
But neat folks prefer  
A nice extinguis\_her\_.\_  
So here I send you back  
One to put on Mr. Jack."

"Now, I call that regularly smart; not one of us could do it, and I just wish Joe was here to see it. I want to send once more, something good for tea; she hates gruel so;" and the last despatch which the Great International Telegraph carried that day was a baked apple and a warm muffin, with "J. M.'s best regards."