

THE SEND-AND-FOTCH BOOK

By Esther Greenacre Hall

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TWILIGHT was weaving dusky blue threads through the warp of the tree branches as Nancy Davis stepped from the back door of the log cabin that squatted like a gray toad on the bank of Dog-leg Creek. For a moment she paused, feeling herself a part of the pattern of the Kentucky forest. Only a whippoorwill's soft call and the murmur of the water broke the stillness.

"Hit's that still you could nigh hear the roots of growing things a-pushing through the ground," she murmured to herself. "Pears like a pretty spring night like this oughter quiet my spirits and keep 'em from fester in' fer want of a new dress. But la me! Hit's sech a sweet dress—leastways the picter in the book makes hit seem so. Gin I had that dress I could hold up my head to be above even that proudful Mary Perkins."

With a shake of her tousled brown head as though to brush aside troublesome thoughts, Nancy tilted up her pointed chin and in a high sing-song called out, "Here pig-wee, pig-wee, pig-wee. Here piggy, piggy, pig." Her call trailed away over the narrow valley. She paused. Then in a loud, guttural tone added, "Ugh-ugh-ugh."

There was a rustle at the edge of the clearing and an elephantine hog lumbered into the open. From the gourd in the crook of her arm, Nancy threw out table scraps. "Hit's a pure pity you hain't got ary appetite, George Washington," she chuckled. "Ary sence we found you half starved last winter you been eating more of our vittles than us young-uns put together."

"Nancy, oh, Nannie," called a small girl from the door.

"Won't you leave us study on the send-and-fotch book now? We'll both be mighty keerful of it—honest."

"Shore 'nough. I'll get hit fer you," answered Nancy. " 'Bye, Washington. Come on into the house, children."

Inside the one-room cabin a fire flamed on the stone hearth, casting vagrant shadows on the log walls and lighting up the faces of the small boy and girl and old man as they sat before it. From the mantel Nancy took down the brilliantly colored mail-order catalogue and dropped down on a hickory stool close to the fire.

"Lemme hold hit," cried Tom, making a grab at the book.

But Nancy hugged it close in her arms. "Fer shame on you, Tom Davis. We got to gentle this book. Never have we had sech a pretty thing afore and hit's untelling when we'll e'er ag'in possess one. You and Lucy stand beside me and look on whilst I turn

the pages. La, Gran’pappy,” she added, smiling up at the old man, “I shore wish you could pleasure in this book, too.”

Gran’pappy blinked his faded eyes. “I shore do crave to look, too, gal. Gin my eyes could see right I’d read off as smart as you, fer I reckon I’m the onliest old body on Dog-leg Creek as can read.”

The girl nodded. “You’re the knowingest man here-about. Ary body knows hit’s your eyes ’n’ not your skull-piece that don’t work to do no good.”

“Haste, Nannie. Show us the play pretties.” Tom nudged his big sister impatiently. Intently the three scrutinized the toys.

“There’s one o’them engine buggies like teacher narrates about.” Tom pointed to a toy automobile.

“And there’s a store least-un. Hain’t hit sweet-looking,” cried Lucy indicating a doll pictured on one of the pages.

The toys entirely inspected, Lucy asked to turn to the clothes. “I plumb hate to look at wearing things,” Nancy said hesitantly. “Hit hurts my feelings to see clothes we need so turrible bad and can’t buy.”

Lucy’s face was wistful as she eyed the models in the dress section. “Them dresses is too pretty to wear,” she sighed. “I allow folks jest buys them to gladden their hearts by looking on them ary day. They don’t never wear them, do they?”

“Silly-wit,” scoffed her brother. “Course folks wear them. Hurry up and leave me see the overalls. They’re what I want.”

But Lucy hovered over the dresses. “That blue one’s the dress I hungers atter,” she said. “And Nannie wants that red one. Don’t you, Nannie?”

Nancy said nothing but stared at her favorite. It was a large colored style plate—red and white print with perky ruffles. “That’s jest the kind of dress I been a-craving all my days—only I didn’t know it,” she thought. “Gin Mary Perkins could see me in sech a fine frock—”

She bent close to the page and read below the picture:

“One of the loveliest dresses \$1.35 ever bought. Study its lines a moment! The graceful drooping bow—the graceful ripple of the new flounced cuffs, of the fashionable peplum ruffle in front, of the all-around flared skirt, the easy curve of the fitted waist! Picture the gay red background with white figures. Remember that the fabric is guaranteed washable. Sizes fourteen to twenty years—\$1.35.

Some of the words Nancy did not understand. But they sounded grand, like poetry the teacher read in school. She shut the catalogue abruptly.

“Oh, Nannie, I hain’t finished looking!”

“Lemme see the overalls.”

But Nancy was firm. “Gin we look on hit much longer we’ll get to craving things so bad we won’t pleasure in ary thing we have or do.”

Gran’pappy looked at her understandingly. “Nancy’s right,” he quavered. “Hit’s a pure pity to think too much on what we hain’t got.”

Nancy stood up and put the catalogue back on the mantel.

“Shuck off your clothes, young-uns, and go to bed,” she said.

When the rest were asleep Nancy crawled out of bed and wrapped a quilt around her shoulders. “I’m weak, pure weak,” she thought as she took down the catalogue and crouched beside the hearth. By the light of the dying embers she stared at the red and white dress, reading again and again, “One of the loveliest dresses \$1.35 ever bought.”

May slipped slowly into June. Every day from sun-up to sun-setting the Davis children hoed corn in the steep patch that lay high on the hillside above the cabin. The children’s legs ached. Their backs ached. The sun was a great hot hand pressing mercilessly down upon their heads. Nancy hoed with slow, even strokes. Several rows above her, Tom and Lucy lifted their hoes jerkily, stopping often to rest.

“Psst, Nannie. Thar comes Mary Perkins,” warned Lucy.

Nancy pushed back her straw hat. Sure enough. Picking her way up the slope was a girl in a crisp black and white calico. Mary’s father was the biggest moonshiner on Dog-leg. It was no wonder that Mary always had pretty dresses and even wore shoes in summer time. Nancy disliked Mary because of her superior manner, while Mary bore a grudge against the other girl for beating her in a spell-down before school closed. Their manner bespoke their mutual dislike.

“Howdy,” said Mary, not too warmly, yet affably enough.

“Howdy,” Nancy gruffly returned the greeting. She was acutely aware of the tear in her skimpy skirt and of dust on her legs and face.

“I jest been down to the store sending off an order fer some new clothes,” volunteered the visitor. “I figgered I’d need a new dress fer the anniversary celebration.”

Tom and Lucy edged down the hill. “What cel’bration?” asked Tom.

“Why, ain’t you heern tell? Thar’s going to be great goings-on in Windsor-town—fireworks ’n’ a merry-go-round ’n’ speeches ’n’ the governor hisself will be thar.”

“Really!”

“The governor!”

“Yes. I allow folks from ary holler fer miles around will be thar. Hit’s too bad you got young-uns and an old grandsir’ to keer fer, Nancy. I don’t reckon you’ll be going. Will you?”

“Likely not,” Nancy answered.

Tom and Lucy raced down to the cabin to tell their grandparent the news, and Nancy followed as soon as Mary had left.

“To think that the governor of this great Kaintucky-land will be thar!” exclaimed the old man when he heard the news. “I’m too trimblish to go the twenty mile to Windsor-town, e’en gin we had a mule to ride. But you young-uns can go. There’s no need for you to stay home with me.”

Tom and Lucy set up whoops of glee, but Nancy’s face was sober. “I don’t feel to go without you, Gran’pappy,” she said. “I’d ruther bide at home.”

“Shame on you, Nancy Davis,” scolded Gran’pappy. “Would you keep the young-uns from paying honor to our grandsir’s that made this Kaintucky-land free from the English rule? I’m nigh the end of the trail. But you young-uns are jest putting foot to life. You need to see great folk like a governor so’s you’ll everly grow big in your deeds and thoughts.”

“What’ll we wear?” cried Lucy.

Nancy frowned. “Fer massy sake, I don’t see how we can go to Windsor-town! Tom’s trousers are nigh worn through the seat. And Lucy’s calico has more holes than our picket fence. This dress of mine is so short I’m ashamed to have even the chickens see me in hit.”

Gran’pappy blinked in distress. “I hain’t never put countenance to vanity,” he said. “But I’d ruther you stayed home than to be unseemly clad in the presence of the governor.”

“Aw shucks! We can’t go then. We’ll never get money fer clothes,” grumbled Tom.

“ ‘Pears like we never do have ary frolicking,” choked Lucy.

“Waal, mayhaps we can contrive clothes some way,” said Nancy, but in her heart she was doubtful.

One noon several days later as Nancy was putting cornpone to bake on the hot hearthstones, Tom burst in the door crying, “Nat Hill and Sam Perkins are quarreling at each other over George Washington. They both claims him.”

Nancy flew outside, Gran’pappy hobbling after her. The two men down at the picket fence took no notice of the children as they eyed the hog which was rooting around the porch.

“That thar’s *my* hog,” shrilled Nat Hill. “Hit run wild last summer with my other shotos but hit never come home in the fall. Hit’s my own hog I tell you, Sam Perkins.”

“That’s jest how come me to lose my hog,” declared Perkins. “See that long scar on that creetur’s left shoulder? Waal, my brute had a scar jest like that. He laid down on my scythe and cut hisself.”

“Shucks, ary hog is likely to get cut up in the brush. That ain’t nary proof. That’s my hog and gin you doubt hit look at hits left hind leg. See? Hit’s shorter than tothers.”

“Hit is that,” reluctantly agreed Perkins.

“Yes, and hogs can’t shorten their legs theirselves. Their legs are born right or not right. Now my hog was born with three right legs and one short-like. That’s my hog fer sartain ’n’ I’ll jest take him long home.”

“Neither of you is toting that hog away,” cried Nancy.

The men turned to her in surprise. “How come you by that hog, gal?” drawled Perkins.

“He come here nigh starved last winter,” answered Nancy. “We fed him like a least-un fer months. Being’s how you hain’t sartain you ever even seen him afore, I’ll keep him.” Her eyes flashed and her voice was determined.

“Dad-burned, but I craves that shote,” grumbled Perkins.

Nancy’s eyes narrowed. “Fer-why don’t you buy hit offen me?”

The men shuffled their feet in the dust.

“Waal, I don’t—” began Hill.

But Perkins smiled in a superior manner. “I’ll give a dollar.”

Hill’s mouth dropped in surprise but Nancy turned and walked away. “A dollar!” she said scornfully over her shoulder.

“Hey, gal, I’ll part with two dollar,” called Hill.

“Four,” shouted Perkins.

“Four-fifty.” The men glared at each other.

“Five dollar,” boomed Perkins.

Nancy hastened back to the fence. “He’s yourn. Gin you got the money you can tote him home now.”

In awed silence the others watched Perkins open a worn leather pouch and extract five crumpled dollar bills. Who but a moonshiner could possess that much money at one time! Nancy stretched out her hand. Her fingers trembled slightly as they gripped the bills. “Run fetch a rope fer Washington,” she told Tom in a voice husky with suppressed excitement.

“Waal, five dollar’s a right smart bit of money,” said Hill as he started off to follow Perkins and the hog down the trail. “That money’d buy enough store vittles to last our folks all winter. I’m right proud I didn’t squander ary cash. Besides the shote hain’t as fine looking as I jedged it was at first.”

As soon as the men were out of sight, the Davises hugged one another excitedly.

“Now we can buy some clothes,” squealed Lucy.

“We’ll go to Windsor-town.”

“You can see the governor,” beamed Gran’pappy.

All afternoon the family pored over the catalogue, Gran’pappy hovering around the children giving advice and trying unsuccessfully to distinguish the objects on the pages. At last the list was completed and Nancy read aloud: “Shirt fer Gran’pappy, seventy cents; overalls fer Gran’pappy, seventy-nine cents; shirt fer Tom, fifty cents; overalls fer Tom, seventy-nine cents; dress fer Lucy, seventy-nine cents; dress fer me, one dollar and thirty-five cents.”

She paused. “Hit ain’t seemly fer me to get a costlier frock than Lucy. I—”

“Shucks, gal, you need that red dress fer your sperrit’s good,” said her grandfather. “Now you tote that order right down to the store and have Lucas Wiley back the letter fer you ’n’ help you fill out the order paper proper.”

As Nancy stood up, the catalogue slid off her lap to the floor. She stooped to pick it up. It was open at a page of queer-looking articles. Beneath the largest one pictured there she read: “For those who can’t see to read, this magnifying glass is a blessing. Guaranteed to make letters three times their normal size. Even the weakest eyes can see when this is used. It sells for only \$1.20.”

Nancy stared at it. Was there really something that could help Gran’pappy read?

“Hain’t you never coming?” called Tom.

“Walk on,” answered Nancy. “I’ll foller.”

With her stubby pencil she crossed out on the paper, “Red and white dress.” And in its place she wrote, “Reading glass, \$1.20.”

“ ‘Bye, Gran’pappy,” she said huskily.

Her feet, usually so swift and sure, acted strangely as she hurried down the creek trail. They slipped on wet stones in the branch bed and stumbled. A blackberry bush stretched a teasing bramble across the path. But Nancy neither heard the rip of her dress as she passed it nor felt the ugly scratch it left on her cheek. The red dress was gone. She’d never see its gladsome color, never touch its ruffles that were crisp and white.

There was great excitement in the Davis cabin three weeks later when a neighbor stopped by to leave the mailorder package. Nancy opened the box herself.

“I see some blue. Hit’s my dress,” shrieked Lucy.

“You’re the awkwardest gal. Get out of my way,” ordered Tom. “Thar’s my overalls.”

Nancy handed a package to old John Davis. “Here’s a surprise fer you, Gran’pappy,” she said.

With trembling fingers he unwrapped it. “Why, what be this? Hit’s glass.”

Nancy picked up the catalogue. "Hold the glass over some writing," she said eagerly. "I think that's how you use hit. Thar, now look through the glass."

The children crowded close. There was a breathless silence. The old man bent low and squinted through the oval. His voice came slow and wondering.

"Praise be to the Lord! I can read. I can see them words like my eyes was young ag'in. Hit's magic, pure magic. How come this charm to me, Nancy gal?"

Briefly she explained how she'd noticed the glass in the send-and-fotch book.

"Ne'er did I think sech happiness would reach me," marveled Gran'pappy. "I'm plumb wore out with happiness." And he sank down on a chair.

When the excitement had subsided Lucy suddenly cried, "Whar's Nancy's frock?"

"Why, hain't it here?" asked the old man anxiously.

Nancy picked up papers busily. "I changed my mind. It was too noisysome a color."

The children looked at her, perplexed. "But you wanted hit!" Lucy puzzled.

Gran'pappy looked at Nancy searchingly. "I allow with my glass you must 'a' spent all the money. Didn't you, gal?" he asked.

"Nigh all"

"I reckoned so. You're the unselfishest gal ever I knowed, Nancy."

Nancy sent him a quick smile but her lips trembled.

Early in the morning a week later the Davis children started on their journey to Windsor-town. By taking two days for the twenty miles, they could get there easily.

"Now don't mourn e'en a little grain 'cause I can't go," Gran'pappy told them in farewell. "With my reading glass I'm so gladsome that I don't care 'bout seeing ten governors. Jes' go on and have a good time."

Tom and Lucy were in the gayest of spirits, and Nancy had to remind them constantly not to go too fast and get worn out on the first part of the trip. All three wore their old clothes. The new apparel was wrapped in a gunny sack and slung across Nancy's back. Never before had the Davises been away from their valley, and every twist of the trail was alluring. Although Nancy tried her best to think only of the frolicking ahead, her thoughts persisted in turning to the red dress. How happy she would be if it were tucked in the roll on her back. Instead she had with her the linsey dress. It was her winter frock. She had woven it from wool that she had dyed in walnut bark. It was a coarse, heavy dress. How uncomfortable she'd look and feel in it on a hot day.

It was very early in the morning when the children entered Windsor-town on the day of the celebration. But already the town was full of people.

"Lookit the big houses," said Tom, pointing to a small two-story building.

"Lawsy, I never knowed there was so many folks in all Kaintucky," gasped Nancy.

Up and down the street the three went, halting at each tiny store window to inspect the displays with wondering eyes. By nine o'clock the dusty street was milling with people. Soon the crowd began to move toward a vacant lot where stood a great tent. Walking in the midst of the throng, Nancy and the children found themselves pushed into the tent. Grabbing Tom and Lucy, Nancy propelled them up an aisle to a bench directly in front of the platform.

"My, we shore got fine places," she panted.

"What comes now?" whispered Lucy.

"I heered somebody say the governor talks in here," said her sister.

Nancy glanced at the women around her. Most of them wore bright-colored calicoes and gingham. A few even had cheap silks.

"Howdy, Nancy," said a patronizingly sweet voice.

Directly behind Nancy sat Mary Perkins in a red silk dress with a yellow straw hat atop her yellow curls. Nancy caught her breath at the sight of such finery. She managed a smile. Then she sank down as low as she could so the old winter's dress wouldn't show any more than necessary. The dress was terribly hot and Nancy's face felt red.

Mary leaned forward to say, "I was proud pappy could help you out by buying that hog. He says hit really wa'n't worth the money but he aimed to give you a little extry money seeing you hain't got ary pappy."

Nancy flushed crimson and opened her lips to answer. But a piano began to bang out the national anthem. There followed speeches by Windsor officials, speeches by politicians from outside towns and more singing. Nancy scarcely heard them all. Why did Mary Perkins have to sit right behind her all dressed up in red silk while she wore her brown winter linsey?

"Ladies and gentlemen, it is my great pleasure and privilege to present the Honorable George Henderson Williams, governor of the state of Kentucky."

With a start Nancy realized where she was. She looked up at the tall, handsome man with white hair and kindly face. In a strong, compelling voice he spoke.

"No people in the United States have more right to be proud of their ancestry than have you mountain folk of Kentucky. It was your great-grandparents and their parents who first hewed their way through the forests from the Atlantic seaboard.

"The early Kentucky men were brave and courageous. But to me the women were the greatest to be admired. They left security and comfort. They came into the wilderness to fight beside their men, to bear children in deprivation, to care for their families undaunted and tireless. They made their own soap. They ground their own corn. They even spun their own clothes and—"

The voice broke off and Nancy, who had been sitting erect with glowing, uplifted face, felt the governor's glance meet hers. He stepped to the edge of the platform. He leaned forward. "Would the little girl with the brown hair and brown dress mind standing up just a moment?"

Nancy looked about her.

"You. I mean you. The little lady in the second row between the two children," said the governor.

Someone touched Nancy's shoulder. "He means you," people said. "Stand up, gal."

Bewildered, Nancy found herself half lifted to her feet by her neighbors.

"That's a lovely dress you have on, little girl," said the speaker. "Isn't it a hand-woven linsey?"

She nodded dumbly.

"I thought so. My grandmother had one. And who wove it?"

"I—I did."

"Really! Would you come up here?"

As in a dream Nancy walked up the platform steps. The governor took her hand and turned her to the audience. "I singled this girl out while I was talking, for her dress is a linsey like one my grandmother had. I am glad that the customs of our ancestors are not forgotten. I am glad that our mountain women do not all wear store dresses and that by the light of the open fire one Kentucky girl still weaves her gowns.

"I have visited many cities and seen fine ladies in silks and satins, but to me no dress I saw was as lovely as this homespun brown linsey." Turning, he clasped Nancy's hand.

There was tumultuous applause. People stood up as Nancy went down to her seat. They craned their necks to see the girl who had been honored by the governor. Lucy and Tom gripped her arms tightly, their faces shining. Even Tom was speechless. The governor continued his address, but Nancy's head was so awlirl that she didn't hear his words. Toward the end of the program Nancy could not resist looking over her shoulder at Mary Perkins. Mary's smile was ingratiating and honey sweet. "It's a lovely dress," her lips formed the words.

Nancy smiled a wise little smile of triumph to herself. She smoothed the brown linsey over her knees. It *was* a pretty weave after all. It must be getting cooler all of a sudden, for she now felt very comfortable in the winter dress. It was lucky she hadn't worn a flimsy store dress like the others.

Lucy plucked at her sleeve. "Hain't you proud you wore your old frock?" she said.

Nancy nodded. "The red dress was right smart looking," she whispered back. "But hit was too noisysome a color. A body wouldn't feel to live with hit long."