

Sheba Blake Publishing Corp.

ACROSS THE YEARS

Eleanor H. Porter



Sheba Blake Publishing Corp.

ACROSS THE YEARS

Eleanor H. Porter



ELEANOR H. PORTER

Across the Years

First published by Sheba Blake Publishing Corp. 2021

Copyright © 2021 by Eleanor H. Porter

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, scanning, or otherwise without written permission from the publisher. It is illegal to copy this book, post it to a website, or distribute it by any other means without permission.

This novel is entirely a work of fiction. The names, characters and incidents portrayed in it are the work of the author's imagination. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events or localities is entirely coincidental.

Eleanor H. Porter asserts the moral right to be identified as the author of this work.

Sheba Blake Publishing Corp.

2288 Crossrail Dr

Atlanta, GA 30349

support@shebablake.com

First edition

Cover art by Sheba Blake

Editing by Sheba Blake

This book was professionally typeset on Reedsy

Find out more at reedsy.com



Contents

[1. When Father and Mother Rebelled](#)

[2. Jupiter Ann](#)

[3. The Axminster Path](#)

[4. Phineas and the Motor Car](#)

[5. The Most Wonderful Woman](#)

[6. The Price of a Pair of Shoes](#)

[7. The Long Road](#)

[8. A Couple of Capitalists](#)

[9. In the Footsteps of Katy](#)

[10. The Bridge Across the Years](#)

[11. For Jimmy](#)

[12. A Summons Home](#)

[13. The Black Silk Gowns](#)

[14. A Belated Honeymoon](#)

[15. When Aunt Abby Waked Up](#)

[16. Wristers for Three](#)

[17. The Giving Thanks of Cyrus And Huldah](#)

[18. A New England Idol](#)

[About the Author](#)

One

When Father and Mother Rebelled



“‘Tain’t more ‘n a month ter Christmas, Lyddy Ann; did ye know it?” said the old man, settling back in his chair with a curiously resigned sigh.

“Yes, I know, Samuel,” returned his wife, sending a swift glance over the top of her glasses.

If Samuel Bertram noticed the glance he made no sign. “Hm!” he murmured. “I’ve got ten neckerchiefs now. How many crocheted bed-slippers you got?—eh?”

“Oh, Samuel!” remonstrated Lydia Ann feebly.

“I don’t care,” asserted Samuel with sudden vehemence, sitting erect in his chair. “Seems as if we might get somethin’ for Christmas ‘sides slippers an’ neckerchiefs. Jest ‘cause we ain’t so young as we once was ain’t no sign that we’ve lost all our faculty for enj’ment!”

“But, Samuel, they’re good an’ kind, an’ want ter give us somethin’,” faltered Lydia Ann; “and—”

“Yes, I know they’re good an’ kind,” cut in Samuel wrathfully. “We’ve got three children, an’ each one brings us a Christmas present ev’ry year. They’ve got so they do it reg’lar now, jest the same as they—they go ter bed ev’ry night,”

he finished, groping a little for his simile. "An' they put jest about as much thought into it, too," he added grimly.

"My grief an' conscience, Samuel,—how can you talk so!" gasped the little woman opposite.

"Well, they do," persisted Samuel. "They buy a pair o' slippers an' a neckerchief, an' tuck 'em into their bag for us—an' that's done; an' next year they do the same—an' it's done again. Oh, I know I'm ongrateful, an' all that," acknowledged Samuel testily, "but I can't help it. I've been jest ready to bile over ever since last Christmas, an' now I have biled over. Look a-here, Lyddy Ann, we ain't so awful old. You're seventy-three an' I'm seventy-six, an' we're pert as sparrers, both of us. Don't we live here by ourselves, an' do most all the work inside an' outside the house?"

"Yes," nodded Lydia Ann timidly.

"Well, ain't there somethin' you can think of sides slippers you'd like for Christmas—'specially as you never wear crocheted bed-slippers?"

Lydia Ann stirred uneasily. "Why, of course, Samuel," she began hesitatingly, "bed-slippers are very nice, an'—"

"So's codfish!" interrupted Samuel in open scorn. "Come," he coaxed, "jest supposin' we was youngsters again, a-tellin' Santa Claus what we wanted. What would you ask for?"

Lydia Ann laughed. Her cheeks grew pink, and the lost spirit of her youth sent a sudden sparkle to her eyes. "You'd laugh, dearie. I ain't a-goin' ter tell."

"I won't—'pon honor!"

"But it's so silly," faltered Lydia Ann, her cheeks a deeper pink. "Me—an old woman!"

"Of course," agreed Samuel promptly. "It's bound ter be silly, ye know, if we want anythin' but slippers an' neckerchiefs," he added with a chuckle. "Come—"

out with it, Lyddy Ann.”

“It’s—it’s a tree.”

“Dampers and doughnuts!” ejaculated Samuel, his jaw dropping. “A tree!”

“There, I knew you’d laugh,” quavered Lydia Ann, catching up her knitting.

“Laugh? Not a bit of it!” averred Samuel stoutly. “I—I want a tree myself!”

“Ye see, it’s just this,” apologized Lydia Ann feverishly. “They give us things, of course, but they never make anythin’ of doin’ it, not even ter tyin’ ‘em up with a piece of red ribbon. They just slip into our bedroom an’ leave ‘em all done up in brown paper an’ we find ‘em after they’re gone. They mean it all kind, but I’m so tired of gray worsted and sensible things. Of course I can’t have a tree, an’ I don’t suppose I really want it; but I’d like somethin’ all pretty an’ sparkly an’—an’ silly, you know. An’ there’s another thing I want—ice cream. An’ I want to make myself sick eatin’ it, too,—if I want to; an’ I want little pink-an’-white sugar pep’mints hung in bags. Samuel, can’t you see how pretty a bag o’ pink pep’mints ‘d be on that green tree? An’—dearie me!” broke off the little old woman breathlessly, falling back in her chair. “How I’m runnin’ on! I reckon I am in my dotage.”

For a moment Samuel did not reply. His brow was puckered into a prodigious frown, and his right hand had sought the back of his head—as was always the case when in deep thought. Suddenly his face cleared.

“Ye ain’t in yer dotage—by gum, ye ain’t!” he cried excitedly. “An’ I ain’t, neither. An’ what’s more, you’re a-goin’ ter have that tree—ice cream, pink pep’mints, an’ all!”

“Oh, my grief an’ conscience—Samuel!” quavered Lydia Ann.

“Well, ye be. We can do it easy, too. We’ll have it the night ‘fore Christmas. The children don’t get here until Christmas day, ever, ye know, so ‘t won’t interfere a mite with their visit, an’ ‘twill be all over ‘fore they get here. An’

we'll make a party of it, too," went on Samuel gleefully. "There's the Hopkines an' old Mis' Newcomb, an' Uncle Tim, an' Grandpa Gowin'—they'll all come an' be glad to."

"Samuel, could we?" cried Lydia Ann, incredulous but joyous. "Could we, really?"

"I'll get the tree myself," murmured Samuel, aloud, "an' we can buy some o' that shiny stuff up ter the store ter trim it."

"An' I'll get some of that pink-an'-white tarl'tan for bags," chimed in Lydia Ann happily: "the pink for the white pep'mints, an' the white for the pink. Samuel, won't it be fun?" And to hear her one would have thought her seventeen instead of seventy-three.

* * *

A week before Christmas Samuel Bertram's only daughter, Ella, wrote this letter to each of her brothers:

It has occurred to me that it might be an excellent idea if we would plan to spend a little more time this year with Father and Mother when we go for our usual Christmas visit; and what kind of a scheme do you think it would be for us to take the children, and make a real family reunion of it?

I figure that we could all get there by four o'clock the day before Christmas, if we planned for it; and by staying perhaps two days after Christmas we could make quite a visit. What do you say? You see Father and Mother are getting old, and we can't have them with us many more years, anyway; and I'm sure this would please them—only we must be very careful not to make it too exciting for them.

The letters were dispatched with haste, and almost by return mail came the answers; an emphatic approval, and a promise of hearty cooperation signed “Frank” and “Ned.” What is every one’s business is apt to be no one’s business, however, and no one notified Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Bertram of the change of plan, each thinking that one of the others would attend to it.

“As for presents,” mused Ella, as she hurried downtown two days before Christmas, “I never can think what to give them; but, after all, there’s nothing better than bed-slippers for Mother, and a warm neckerchief for Father’s throat. Those are always good.”

The day before Christmas dawned clear and cold. It had been expected that Ella, her husband, and her twin boys would arrive at the little village station a full hour before the train from the north bringing Ned, Mrs. Ned, and little Mabel, together with Frank and his wife and son; but Ella’s train was late—so late that it came in a scant five minutes ahead of the other one, and thus brought about a joyous greeting between the reunited families on the station platform itself.

“Why, it’s not so bad we were late, after all,” cried Ella. “This is fine—now we can all go together!”

“Jove! but we’re a cheery sight!” exclaimed Ned, as he counted off on his fingers the blooming faces of those about him. “There are ten of us!”

“Only fancy what they’ll say at the house when they catch their first glimpse of us!” chuckled Frank. “The dear old souls! How Father’s eyes will shine and Mother’s cap-strings bob! By the way, of course they know we’re coming to-day?”

There was a moment’s silence; then Ella flushed. “Why! didn’t—didn’t you tell them?” she stammered.

"I? Why, of course not!" cried Frank. "I supposed you were going to. But maybe Ned—" He paused and turned questioning eyes on his brother.

Ned shook his head. "Not I," he said.

"Why, then—then they don't know," cried Ella, aghast. "They don't know a thing!"

"Never mind, come on," laughed Ned. "What difference does it make?"

"What difference does it make?" retorted Ella indignantly. "Ned Bertram, do you suppose I'd take the risk of ten of us pouncing down on those two poor dears like this by surprise? Certainly not!"

"But, Ella, they're expecting six of us to-morrow," remonstrated Frank.

"Very true. But that's not ten of us to-day."

"I know; but so far as the work is concerned, you girls always do the most of that," cut in Ned.

"Work! It isn't the work," almost groaned Ella. "Don't you see, boys? It's the excitement—'twouldn't do for them at all. We must fix it some way. Come, let's go into the waiting-room and talk it up."

It was not until after considerable discussion that their plans were finally made and their line of march decided upon. To advance in the open and take the house by storm was clearly out of the question, though Ned remarked that in all probability the dear old creatures would be dozing before the fire, and would not discover their approach. Still, it would be wiser to be on the safe side; and it was unanimously voted that Frank should go ahead alone and reconnoiter, preparing the way for the rest, who could wait, meanwhile, at the little hotel not far from the house.

The short winter day had drawn almost to a close when Frank turned in at the familiar gate of the Bertram homestead. His hand had not reached the white knob of the bell, however, when the eager expectancy of his face gave

way to incredulous amazement; from within, clear and distinct, had come the sound of a violin.

“Why, what—” he cried under his breath, and softly pushed open the door.

The hall was almost dark, but the room beyond was a blaze of light, with the curtains drawn, and apparently every lamp the house contained trimmed and burning. He himself stood in the shadow, and his entrance had been unnoticed, though almost the entire expanse of the room before him was visible through the half-open doorway.

In the farther corner of the room a large evergreen tree, sparkling with candles and tinsel stars, was hung with bags of pink and white tarletan and festoons of puffy popcorn. Near it sat an old man playing the violin; and his whole wiry self seemed to quiver with joy to the tune of his merry “Money Musk.” In the center of the room two gray-haired men were dancing an old-time jig, bobbing, bowing, and twisting about in a gleeful attempt to outdo each other. Watching them were three old women and another old man, eating ice cream and contentedly munching peppermints. And here, there, and everywhere was the mistress of the house, Lydia Ann herself, cheeks flushed and cap-strings flying, but plainly in her element and joyously content.

For a time the man by the hall door watched in silent amazement; then with a low ejaculation he softly let himself out of the house, and hurried back to the hotel.

“Well?” greeted half a dozen voices; and one added: “What did they say?”

Frank shook his head and dropped into the nearest chair. “I—I didn’t tell them,” he stammered faintly.

“Didn’t tell them!” exclaimed Ella. “Why, Frank, what was the trouble? Were they sick? Surely, they were not upset by just seeing you!” Frank’s eyes twinkled “Well, hardly!” he retorted. “They—they’re having a party.”

"A party!" shrieked half a dozen voices.

"Yes; and a tree, and a dance, and ice cream, and pink peppermints," Frank enumerated in one breath.

There was a chorus of expostulation; then Ella's voice rose dominant. "Frank Bertram, what on earth do you mean?" she demanded. "Who is having all this?"

"Father and Mother," returned Frank, his lips twitching a little. "And they've got old Uncle Tim and half a dozen others for guests."

"But, Frank, how can they be having all this?" faltered Ella. "Why, Father's not so very far from eighty years old, and—Mabel, Mabel, my dear!" she broke off in sudden reproof to her young niece, who had come under her glance at that moment. "Those are presents for Grandpa and Grandma. I wouldn't play with them."

Mabel hesitated, plainly rebellious. In each hand was a gray worsted bed-slipper; atop of her yellow curls was a brown neckerchief, cap fashion.

There were exclamations from two men, and Ned came forward hurriedly. "Oh, I say, Ella," he remonstrated, "you didn't get those for presents, did you?"

"But I did. Why not?" questioned Ella.

"Why, I got slippers, you see. I never can think of anything else. Besides, they're always good, anyhow. But I should think you, a woman, could think of something—"

"Never mind," interrupted Ella airily. "Mother's a dear, and she won't care if she does get two pairs."

"But she won't want three pairs," groaned Frank; "and I got slippers too!"

There was a moment of dismayed silence, then everybody laughed.

Ella was the first to speak. "It's too bad, of course, but never mind. Mother'll see the joke of it just as we do. You know she never seems to care

what we give her. Old people don't have many wants, I fancy."

Frank stirred suddenly and walked the length of the room. Then he wheeled about.

"Do you know," he said, a little unsteadily, "I believe that's a mistake?"

"A mistake? What's a mistake?"

"The notion that old people don't have any—wants. See here. They're having a party down there—a party, and they must have got it up themselves. Such being the case, of course they had what they wanted for entertainment—and they aren't drinking tea or knitting socks. They're dancing jigs and eating pink peppermints and ice cream! Their eyes are like stars, and Mother's cheeks are like a girl's; and if you think I'm going to offer those spry young things a brown neckerchief and a pair of bed-slippers you're much mistaken—because I'm not!"

"But what—can—we do?" stammered Ella.

"We can buy something else here—to-night—in the village," declared Frank; "and to-morrow morning we can go and give it to them."

"But—buy what?"

"I haven't the least idea," retorted Frank, with an airy wave of his hands. "Maybe 'twill be a diamond tiara and a polo pony. Anyway, I know what 'twon't be—'twon't be slippers or a neckerchief!"

* * *

It was later than usual that Christmas morning when Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Bertram arose. If the old stomachs had rebelled a little at the pink peppermints and ice cream, and if the old feet had charged toll for their unaccustomed

activity of the night before, neither Samuel nor Lydia Ann would acknowledge it.

“Well, we had it—that tree!” chuckled Samuel, as he somewhat stiffly thrust himself into his clothes.

“We did, Samuel,—we did,” quavered Lydia Ann joyfully, “an’ wa’n’t it nice? Mis’ Hopkins said she never had such a good time in all her life before.”

“An’ Uncle Tim an’ Grandpa Gowin’—they was as spry as crickets, an’ they made old Pete tune up that ‘Money Musk’ three times ‘fore they’d quit.”

“Yes; an’—my grief an’ conscience, Samuel! ‘tis late, ain’t it?” broke off Lydia Ann, anxiously peering at the clock. “Come, come, dear, you’ll have ter hurry ‘bout gettin’ that tree out of the front room ‘fore the children get here. I wouldn’t have ‘em know for the world how silly we’ve been—not for the world!”

Samuel bridled, but his movements showed a perceptible increase of speed.

“Well, I do’ know,” he chuckled.

“‘T wa’n’t anythin’ so awful, after all. But, say,” he called triumphantly a moment later, as he stooped and picked up a small object from the floor, “they will find out if you don’t hide these ‘ere pep’mints!”

The tree and the peppermints had scarcely disappeared from the “front room” when Frank arrived.

“Oh, they’re all coming in a minute,” he laughed gayly in response to the surprised questions that greeted him. “And we’ve brought the children, too. You’ll have a houseful, all right!”

A houseful it certainly proved to be, and a lively one, too. In the kitchen “the girls” as usual reigned supreme, and bundled off the little mother to “visit with the boys and the children” during the process of dinner-getting, and after dinner they all gathered around the fireplace for games and stories.

“And now,” said Frank when darkness came and the lamps were lighted, “I’ve got a new game, but it’s a very mysterious game, and you, Father and Mother, must not know a thing about it until it’s all ready.” And forthwith he conducted the little old man and the little old woman out into the kitchen with great ceremony.

“Say, Samuel, seems as if this was ‘most as good as the party,” whispered Lydia Ann excitedly, as they waited in the dark. “I know it; an’ they hain’t asked us once if we was gettin’ too tired! Did ye notice, Lyddy Ann?”

“Yes, an’ they didn’t make us take naps, either. Ain’t it nice? Why, Samuel, I—I shan’t mind even the bed-slippers now,” she laughed.

“Ready!” called Frank, and the dining-room door was thrown wide open.

The old eyes blinked a little at the sudden light, then widened in amazement. Before the fireplace was a low sewing-table with a chair at each end. The table itself was covered with a white cloth which lay in fascinating little ridges and hillocks indicating concealed treasures beneath. About the table were grouped the four eager-eyed grandchildren and their no less eager-eyed parents. With still another ceremonious bow Frank escorted the little old man and the little old woman to the waiting chairs, and with a merry “One, two, three!” whisked off the cloth.

For one amazed instant there was absolute silence; then Lydia Ann drew a long breath.

“Samuel, Samuel, they’re presents—an’ for us!” she quavered joyously. “It’s the bed-slippers and the neckerchiefs, an’ they did ‘em all up in white paper an’ red ribbons just for us.”

At the corner of the mantelpiece a woman choked suddenly and felt for her handkerchief. Behind her two men turned sharply and walked toward the

window; but the little old man and the little old woman did not notice it. They had forgotten everything but the enchanting array of mysteries before them.

Trembling old hands hovered over the many-sized, many-shaped packages, and gently patted the perky red bows; but not until the grandchildren impatiently demanded, “Why don’t you look at ‘em?” did they venture to untie a single ribbon. Then the old eyes shone, indeed, at sight of the wonderful things disclosed; a fine lace tie and a bottle of perfume; a reading-glass and a basket of figs; some dates, raisins, nuts, and candies, and a little electric pocket lantern which would, at the pressure of a thumb, bring to light all the secrets of the darkest of rooms. There were books, too, such as Ella and Frank themselves liked to read; and there was a handsome little clock for the mantel—but there was not anywhere a pair of bed-slippers or a neckerchief.

At last they were all opened, and there remained not one little red bow to untie. On the table, in all their pristine glory, lay the presents, and half-buried in bits of paper and red ribbon sat the amazed, but blissfully happy, little old man and little old woman. Lydia Ann’s lips parted, but the trembling words of thanks froze on her tongue—her eyes had fallen on a small pink peppermint on the floor.

“No, no, we can’t take ‘em,” she cried agitatedly. “We hadn’t ought to. We was wicked and ongrateful, and last night we—we—” She paused helplessly, her eyes on her husband’s face. “Samuel, you—you tell,” she faltered.

Samuel cleared his throat.

“Well, ye see, we—yes, last night, we—we—” He could say no more.

“We—we had a party to—to make up for things,” blurted out Lydia Ann. “And so ye see we—we hadn’t ought ter take these—all these!”

Frank winced. His face grew a little white as he threw a quick glance into his sister’s eyes; but his voice, when he spoke, was clear and strong from sheer

force of will.

“A party? Good! I’m glad of it. Did you enjoy it?” he asked.

Samuel’s jaw dropped. Lydia Ann stared speechlessly. This cordial approval of their folly was more incomprehensible than had been the failure to relegate them to naps and knitting earlier in the afternoon.

“And you’ve got another party to-night, too; haven’t you?” went on Frank smoothly. “As for those things there”—he waved his hand toward the table—“of course you’ll take them. Why, we picked them out on purpose for you,—every single one of them,—and only think how we’d feel if you didn’t take them! Don’t you—like them?”

“Like them’!” cried Lydia Ann, and at the stifled sob in her voice three men and three women caught their breath sharply and tried to swallow the lumps in their throats. “We—we just love them!”

No one spoke. The grandchildren stared silently, a little awed. Ella, Frank, and Ned stirred restlessly and looked anywhere but at each other.

Lydia Ann flushed, then paled. “Of course, if—if you picked ‘em out ‘specially for us—” she began hesitatingly, her eyes anxiously scanning the perturbed faces of her children.

“We did—especially,” came the prompt reply.

Lydia Ann’s gaze drifted to the table and lingered upon the clock, the tie, and the bottle of perfume. “Specially for us,” she murmured softly. Then her face suddenly cleared. “Why, then we’ll have to take them, won’t we?” she cried, her voice tremulous with ecstasy. “We’ll just have to—whether we ought to or not!”

“You certainly will!” declared Frank. And this time he did not even try to hide the shake in his voice.