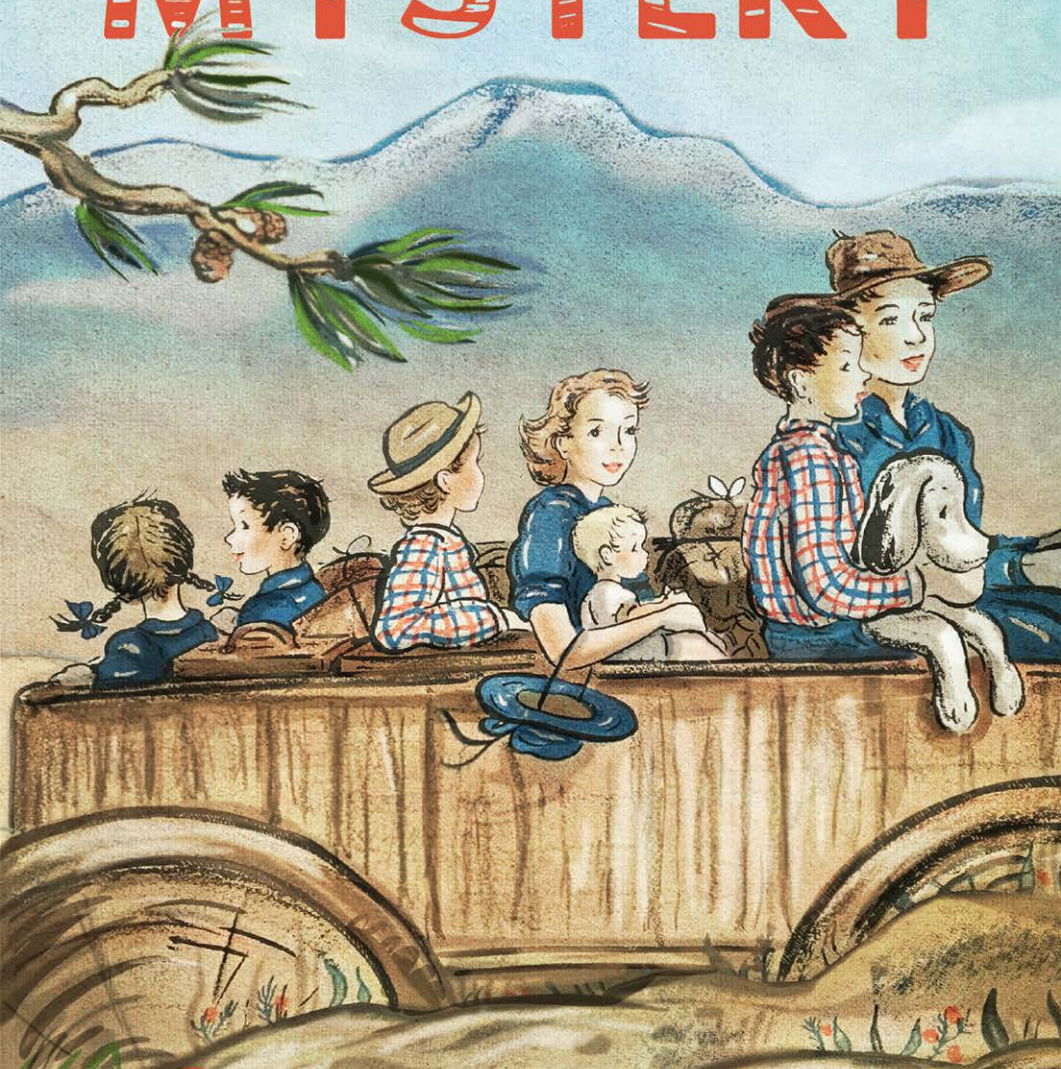


THE MAIL WAGON MYSTERY



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by
MAY JUSTUS

THE MAIL WAGON MYSTERY

An adventure awaited the six Murray children! They had been invited to stay with their relatives out of town while their mother recovered from an illness. Little did they know that an ancient feud, a charge against their uncle, and a mysterious stranger in the town would motivate them to unite as family and friends to unravel a mystery.

"This fun story of healing, unity, and love is a delight to read. This is exactly the kind of gentle, inspiring literature that builds strong writers, strong minds, and strong hearts."

— Jenny Phillips



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Chapter 1

Over the Mountain

In the dining room of the parsonage, the Murrays were eating supper by the flickering light from three inches of rose-colored candle. The candle was not a festive note—it was serving from necessity, since the Light and Power Company had cut off the lights the day before.

“Let’s take an oil can to church next Sunday and take up a contribution,” suggested Dick, who was thirteen and had a sense of humor which tempted him at times beyond the borderline of perfect propriety.

“Why, Dick!” said eighteen-year-old Harriet, who tried to speak to him severely and reprove him in a grave, sisterly way and failed to do her full duty. After all, it was Dick’s fun and foolishness which had relieved the tension

of these trying days. It was he who made fun of their makeshifts at housekeeping all by themselves. It was he who thought of cheerful news for Mother and who assured Father in every letter that things were all right and getting better!

A month ago Mother had become ill, so ill that it had been decided best to take her to Asheville, where she could have the best of medical care. She was still there and Father was with her. There was some improvement, very slow, but sure, according to Father's letters. However, no homecoming was in sight yet. Meanwhile the rest of the family, the Murray Six, as the neighbors called them, were having a hard time of it making ends meet. The neighbors were kind. They contributed food from their own little patches and gardens, and one who had a cow gave milk for Billy Boy. But there were so many expenses for which there must be ready money. Harriet often wondered how her mother had made such a tiny income answer the endless demands upon it. Mother had always managed; always she seemed to be able to provide for just one more need. But Mother had had much practice in the gentle art of economy, and Harriet lacked her experience. After she had totally failed at first to make the household expenses and the money come out even, she had found a little book marked BUDGET hanging on a nail in her mother's room. This contained a plan for spending which helped her out, and since then the management had gone more smoothly.

Still, there were numerous difficulties. The budget notes had no plan for such emergencies as Nancy's need

for a graduation dress or shoes for John and Joan who, being twins, wore out their clothes together, as they did other things. Nancy's dress had taken the light money last month. Now the new shoes had taken it again, hence the need for eating their supper tonight by the light of an old Christmas candle.

"Any more bread?" asked John.

"Or soup?" added Joan.

"No more bread," replied Harriet, "but some very nice hot potatoes." She went to the kitchen after them. When she came back, Dick and Nancy had their heads close together over a sheet of paper.

"Oh, is it a letter from Father?" she asked.

"No, from some of our relatives," giggled Nancy, "and such a letter—*printed* with a lead pencil and such funny spelling!"

"It's a nice letter," Dick asserted. "From Uncle Matthew, addressed on the envelope to the whole family, and you stop making fun of it, Miss Fancy Nancy!" As he spoke he snatched the letter away from Nancy's critical inspection and regarded her with scowling looks across the dining table.

"When did it come?" Harriet asked quickly to change the trend of discussion. As elder sister she often had to serve as a timely mediator between quick-tempered, belligerent Dick and teasing, provoking Nancy.

The letter had come in the late mail, and the postmaster had just stopped in with it on his way home. Harriet took it closer to the light which was burning near the candlestick socket.

“I will read it aloud,” she told the group. “Some of you have not heard it.”

Dick and Nancy settled down to listen with the others. The twins leaned forward, and Billy Boy stopped sucking his spoon for a minute or two.

Dear Children:

We uns have just hearn tell about the trouble in yore family and are mighty distressed about it. Can't you all come and live with us till times are better? There is room for all, and you are more than welcome. Write us when to look for you. The train stops at Slab Town. Hit's ten miles farther to Far Beyant, and I'll meet you all with the wagon.

Your Uncle Matthew Murray

A moment's silence followed. Then Dick spoke: “It's a nice letter, isn't it?” He ignored Nancy and addressed himself to the rest of them.

“It's a very kind letter,” said Harriet. “From Uncle Matthew, Father's brother. Why, Dick, you are named for him, don't you know—Richard Matthew Murray?”

Dick assumed a superior air. “Yes, and he's a big hunter!” he boasted. “He's the best shot in the whole country. I've heard Dad tell of shooting matches where Uncle Matt got one prize right after the other. I'd like to go to Far Beyant. Dad has always promised me.”

“I want to go, too!” John announced.

“I want to go,” echoed Joan.



“I came to meet you uns—you,” Bob said.



She looked up to see a flash of red in the bushes.