

**THE CROFTON
COUSINS. A TALE
FOR CHILDREN**

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The Crofton Cousins. A Tale for Children by Emma Marshall

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EMMA MARSHALL

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The Crofton Cousins at the Vicarage.

THE
CROFTON COUSINS.

A Tale for Children.

By EMMA MARSHALL.

"Brothers in heart, they hope to gain
An undivided joy;
That man may one with man remain
As boy was one with boy."

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THE CROFTON COUSINS.

CHAPTER I.

THE INVITATION.

"THERE'S the postman! Oh, mamma!—may we run for the letters?" and, hardly waiting for a reply, Percy and Harry Crofton had slipped down from their chairs at the table, where they were seated at their lessons, and were rushing out of the room in a moment.

Amy, a gentle girl of eleven years old, was left by her mother's side, who said, with a half sigh, "What spirits those boys have! but I wish Percy would be quieter. I have quite made up my mind that he must go to the Grammar School after Christmas."

"It does not signify so much now, mamma, as there are no other lodgers, except for your sake," and Amy laid the small white hand, which had been busy turning over the pages of a French dictionary, tenderly on her mother's.

The little boys soon came back, Percy holding a letter high above his head. "It's from grandpapa, I am certain, but it has got the Morley post-mark."

but it's his writing, I know—do look, mamma." Percy gave his mother the letter, and then Amy said, "Come, let mamma read it in peace; go on with your copy, Harry; and look, Percy, here's the word that puzzled us so much in our French reading."

But the "rat-tat" of the postman had unsettled the boys very effectually, and Amy found that curiosity as to the contents of the letter had driven out of Percy's head all remembrance of the translation.

"It is fine and bright now," said Mrs. Crofton, at last. "You may put away your books, children, and go and see if Hannah is ready to go out."

Amy obeyed; but Percy said, "Please tell me if it's from grandpapa, *do* mamma."

"Don't tease mamma, Percy," Amy said, for she saw her mother's face was anxious and perplexed.

"It is too cold for you, Amy, let the boys go alone; there has been a sharp frost, and you could not walk fast enough to keep warm."

Amy looked pleased to stay at home, but she went out of the room with her brothers, and found their warmest gloves and comforters, and rescued Harry's hoop-stick from the top of the wardrobe, in her mother's room, where Hannah had put it when Master Harry had come in so *uproarious* the afternoon before. Then, when Hannah was ready, and the eager boys had departed, Percy rather indignant at going alone with Hannah; Amy went back to her mother.

Amy was a delicate child; she had a pale face and

soft light brown hair, her eyes were sweet and loving in their expression, and her voice was the most delightful sound you can imagine. She sang beautifully, and music was her great delight; but Amy Crofton was lame; she could walk without a stick, but she limped very much, and people who passed her by her joyous brothers' side would turn round and look at her, and say, "Poor child!" while really Amy needed no pity. She was very happy.

"Amy, dear!" said her mother, when she had settled with her work-basket by her side, and had just picked up a stray leaf from a geranium in the window, which she was trying to keep through the winter, "the letter is from your grandpapa. He is come to Rookwood Manor, and says he shall not go out of England again for some time. He asks us all to go to Rookwood for the New Year. Would you like it?"

"Oh, mamma!" and Amy's face brightened; "I should like to see papa's dear old house; and it would do you good."

"Yes, Amy, but there is the expense of the journey. I almost doubt if I can afford it. We must keep on this lodging, for it is cheaper and healthier than many—and then we must take Hannah; the boys must have some one to look after them."

"I can, mamma!"

"No, dear; not altogether. You are only too ready to be of use; but little Harry is so young, and I am not strong, alas! or we could manage without poor Hannah at all."

"How much will the journey cost, mamma? I wonder grandpapa does not offer to pay it—he knows you are poor."

"Grandpapa has many things to do with his money, dear, I daresay; it is kind of him to ask us all. Rookwood is a dear old place, even in winter. I knew how you would like it; and then the boys! My Percy will run wild with delight."

"Oh, let us go, mamma, dear! we can save in other things, can't we?"

"We will try, dear. I think it is too good an offer to refuse."

"You have not seen grandpapa since—since papa died."

"No, it is five years since," and Mrs. Crofton sighed again, and there was silence. It was broken at last by Amy bursting forth, as a bird does, into one of her songs. She went on for a minute, and then stopped.

"Do you mind it, mamma?"

"Oh no, darling, I like it," and song after song followed, while the wintry sun came in at the window of the sitting-room, through a gap in the houses opposite, and shone on the furniture of the little room, and found no dusty corners, or untidy places, where all was so scrupulously neat.

Mrs. Crofton had the whole first-floor of the house, and Hannah was her faithful servant, who had lived with her in brighter days, when Mr. Crofton was alive, and the pretty airy nurseries of Acton Vicarage had been gladdened by the sound of many little feet. She had seen her mistress weep over the