UNDERSTOOD BETSY

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Understood Betsy by Dorothy Canfield

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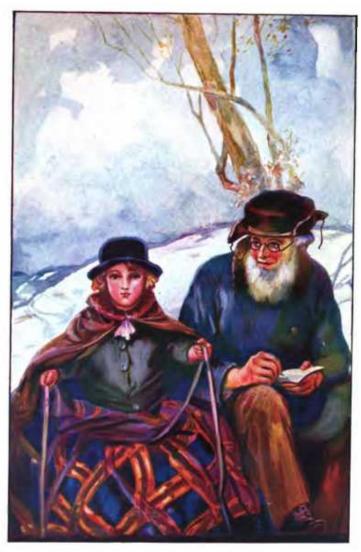
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DOROTHY CANFIELD

UNDERSTOOD BETSY





UNCLE HENRY LOOKED AT HER, EYEING HER SIDEWISE OVER
THE TOP OF ONE SPECTACLE-GLASS.

Understood Betsy. Frontispiece (Page 34.)



by DOROTHY CANFIELD Fisher



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CONTENTS

	COMILIMIE				
I	Aunt Harriet Has a Cough		20		PAGE 1
\mathbf{II}	Betsy Holds the Reins .		9.00		27
ш	A Short Morning				52
IV	Betsy Goes to School				74
V	What Grade is Betsy? .				89
VI	If You Don't Like Convers Book Skip this Chapter!			- 77	110
VII	Elizabeth Ann Fails in an E	xan	inati	ion	137
VIII	Betsy Starts a Sewing Societ	y	•		161
IX	The New Clothes Fail .	٠			186
X	Betsy Has a Birthday .	٠		*	201
XI	"Understood Aunt Frances"	i	•		234

UNDERSTOOD BETSY

CHAPTER I

AUNT HARRIET HAS A COUGH

When this story begins, Elizabeth Ann, who is the heroine of it, was a little girl of nine, who lived with her Great-aunt Harriet in a medium-sized city in a medium-sized State in the middle of this country; and that's all you need to know about the place, for it's not the important thing in the story; and anyhow you know all about it because it was probably very much like the place you live in yourself.

Elizabeth Ann's Great-aunt Harriet was a widow who was not very rich or very poor, and she had one daughter, Frances, who gave piano lessons to little girls. They kept a "girl" whose name was Grace and who had asthma dreadfully and wasn't very much of a "girl" at

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all, being nearer fifty than forty. Aunt Harriet, who was very tender-hearted, kept her chiefly because she couldn't get any other place on account of her coughing so you could hear her all over the house.

So now you know the names of all the household. And this is how they looked: Aunt Harriet was very small and thin and old, Grace was very small and thin and middle-aged, Aunt Frances (for Elizabeth Ann called her "Aunt," although she was really, of course, a first-cousin-once-removed) was small and thin and if the light wasn't too strong might be called young, and Elizabeth Ann was very small and thin and little. And yet they all had plenty to eat. I wonder what was the matter with them?

It was certainly not because they were not good, for no womenkind in all the world had kinder hearts than they. You have heard how Aunt Harriet kept Grace (in spite of the fact that she was a very depressing person) on account of her asthma; and when Elizabeth Ann's

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father and mother both died when she was a baby, although there were many other cousins and uncles and aunts in the family, these two women fairly rushed upon the little babyorphan, taking her home and surrounding her henceforth with the most loving devotion.

They had said to themselves that it was their manifest duty to save the dear little thing from the other relatives, who had no idea about how to bring up a sensitive, impressionable child, and they were sure, from the way Elizabeth Ann looked at six months, that she was going to be a sensitive, impressionable child. It is possible also that they were a little bored with their empty life in their rather forlorn, little brick house in the medium-sized city, and that they welcomed the occupation and new interests which a child would bring in.

But they thought that they chiefly desired to save dear Edward's child from the other kin, especially from the Putney cousins, who had written down from their Vermont farm that they would be glad to take the little girl into

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their family. But "anything but the Putneys!" said Aunt Harriet, a great many times. They were related only by marriage to her, and she had her own opinion of them as a stiffnecked, cold-hearted, undemonstrative, and hard set of New Englanders. "I boarded near them one summer when you were a baby, Frances, and I shall never forget the way they were treating some children visiting there! . . . Oh, no, I don't mean they abused them or beat them . . . but such lack of sympathy, such perfect indifference to the sacred sensitiveness of child-life, such a starving of the child-heart. . . . No, I shall never forget it! They had chores to do . . . as though they had been hired men!"

Aunt Harriet never meant to say any of this when Elizabeth Ann could hear, but the little girl's ears were as sharp as little girls' ears always are, and long before she was nine she knew all about the opinion Aunt Harriet had of the Putneys. She did not know, to be sure, what "chores" were, but she took