

up into her face as usual, waiting for her to begin. She was smiling very brightly indeed, *very* brightly; her face was all over smiles, so that I thought the story must be going to be a very nice one.

‘What is it, aunt Mary?’ I said; ‘I am quite ready. Do begin directly, please.’

‘It is not going to be a story at all, Alice,’ aunt Mary said, looking brighter than ever. ‘It is something a great deal better than a story, for it is quite true. We are going back to papa and mamma a week to-morrow, and when you get home you will find something that you have been wanting to have for a very long time. Now you must guess what it is.’

And aunt Mary began to wind the cotton.

Well, you know, there were so many things that I had been wanting to have for a very long time. In the first place, I had been wanting some perforated cardboard to make a book-marker for the new Bible which Mrs. Aidel had given to Skinny, and some coloured ribbon to line it with, and some silk to make the letters. Was it cardboard and ribbon and silk?

Aunt Mary shook her head. No; it was not cardboard and ribbon and silk; it was something a