

Betsy and Tacy Go Over the Big Hill

By Maud Hart Lovelace

Chapter One: Getting to Be Ten

Betsy, Tacy, and Tib were nine years old, and they were very anxious to be ten.

"You have two numbers in your age when you are ten. It's the beginning of growing up," Betsy would say.

Then the three of them felt solemn and important and pleased. They could hardly wait for their birthdays.

It was strange that Betsy and Tacy and Tib were in such a hurry to grow up, for they had so much fun being children. Betsy and Tacy lived on Hill Street which ran straight up into a green hill and stopped. The small yellow cottage where Betsy Ray lived was the last house on that side of the street, and the rambling white house opposite where Tacy Kelly lived was the last house on that side. They had the whole hill for a playground. And not just that one green slope. There were hills all around them. Hills like a half-opened fan rose in the east behind Betsy's house. Beyond the town and across the river where the sun set there were more hills. The name of the town was Deep Valley.

Tib didn't live on Hill Street. To get to Tib's house from the place where Betsy and Tacy lived, you went one block down and one block over. (The second block was through a vacant lot.) But Tib lived near enough to come to play with Betsy and Tacy. She came every day.

"They certainly have fun, those three," Betsy's mother used to say to Betsy's father.

They did, too.

Betsy's big sister Julia played with Tacy's sister Katie, but they didn't have so much fun as Betsy and Tacy and Tib had. They were too grown-up. They were twelve.

Betsy's little sister Margaret, Tacy's younger brother Paul, and Tib's yellow-headed brothers, Freddie and Hobbie, had fun all right, but not so much fun as Betsy and Tacy and Tib had. They were too little.

Going on ten seemed to be exactly the right age for having fun. But just the same Betsy and Tacy and Tib wanted to be ten years old.

They were getting near it now. Betsy and Tacy were growing tall, so that their mothers were kept busy lengthening their dresses. Tib wasn't as tiny as she used to be, but she was still tiny. She still looked like a picture-book fairy. The three girls had cut their hair when they were eight years old and didn't know any better, but it had grown out. Tib's curls once more made a yellow fluff around her little face. Tacy had her long red ringlets and Betsy had her braids again.

"When I'm ten," said Betsy, "I'm going to cross my braids in back and tie them with ribbons."

"I'm going to tie my hair at my neck with a big blue bow," Tacy replied.

"We can't put it up in pugs quite yet, I suppose," Betsy said.

"But pretty soon we can," said Tacy. "On top of our heads."

Tib did not make plans like that. She never did.

"I only hope," she said, "that when I get to be ten years old people will stop taking me for a baby."

For people always thought that Tib was younger than she was. And she didn't like it a bit.

Tacy got to be ten first because her birthday came in January. They didn't have many birthday parties at Tacy's house. There were too many children in the family. Mrs. Kelly would have been giving birthday parties every month in the year, almost, if every child at the Kelly house had had a party every birthday. But when Tacy was ten, Betsy and Tib were invited to supper. There was a cake with candles on it.

Tacy didn't look any different or feel any different.

But she knew why that was. Betsy and Tib weren't ten yet.

"We'll all have to get to be ten before it really counts, I suppose," Tacy said.

Tib got to be ten next because her birthday came in March. Tib didn't have a birthday party; she had the grippe instead. But she was given a bicycle, and her mother sent pieces of birthday cake over to Betsy and Tacy.

And Tib didn't look any different or feel any different. But she didn't expect much change until Betsy got to be ten. And Betsy's birthday didn't come until April.

Tacy and Tib didn't say very much about being ten. They were too polite. They talked about presents and birthday cakes, but they didn't mention having two numbers in their age. They didn't talk about beginning to grow up until the afternoon before Betsy's birthday.

That afternoon after school they all went up on the Big Hill hunting for violets. It was one of those April days on which it seemed that summer had already come, although the ground was still muddy and brown. The sun was shining so warmly that Betsy, Tacy, and Tib pulled off their stocking caps and unbuttoned their coats. Birds in the bare trees were singing with all their might, and Betsy, Tacy, and Tib sang too as they climbed the Big Hill.

They sang to the tune of "Mine eyes have seen the glory," but they made up the words themselves:

*"Oh, Betsy's ten tomorrow,
And then all of us are ten,
We will all grow up tomorrow,
We will all be ladies then..."*