

The Thirteen Betsy-Tacy Books

by Alice Merchant

Betsy-Tacy

Age level: 5 - 7 years

SUMMARY: After Betsy and Tacy become best friends at Betsy's fifth birthday party, they are inseparable. Betsy is lively and imaginative, invents wonderful games, and can make up stories. Tacy, though bashful with people she doesn't know well, is just as merry as Betsy and is a wonderful companion. Together they picnic, explore, dress up, go calling, and gaze upon a certain "chocolate-colored house," where they eventually meet a new friend, Tib.

Betsy-Tacy and Tib

Age level: 6 - 9 years

SUMMARY: Betsy, Tacy, and Tib, who are now eight years old, play just as well together as Betsy and Tacy did, and they never quarrel. Tib, though less imaginative than Betsy and Tacy, is a good sport and enchants the other two with her beauty and accomplishments, which include dancing, cooking, and sewing. Their games are even more imaginative, and their world expands further up the Big Hill, which rises behind Betsy's house.

Betsy and Tacy Go Over the Big Hill

Age level: 8 - 11 years

SUMMARY: When Betsy, Tacy, and Tib turn ten and have "two numbers" in their ages, they make new discoveries which are fitting with their years. Through their interest in the crowning of the new king of Spain and their friendship with Naifi, who lives in a settlement of Syrian immigrants known as Little Syria, they become aware of themselves as Americans in an international world. Their interest in royalty results in a major quarrel with sisters Julia and Katie over who should be crowned Queen of Summer and in Betsy's recognition of stubbornness as one of her faults.

Winona's Pony Cart

Age Level: 6-9 years

SUMMARY: Winona Root is almost eight years old. More than anything in the world, she wants a pony for her birthday. She wishes so hard for a pony that she's sure to get one—at least, that's what she tells her friends Betsy, Tacy and Tib. It's only when the exciting day grows near that Winona begins to wonder: What if her father meant it when he said she couldn't have a pony?

Betsy and Tacy Go Downtown

Age Level: 10 - 13 years

SUMMARY: Now that Betsy, Tacy, and Tib are twelve, they are old enough to walk to town. With their new friend Winona, whose father can provide her with complimentary tickets to plays, they discover the world of theater as both audience and performers in the town's new Opera House. Betsy, who is beginning to take her writing seriously, makes biweekly trips to the new library. During their downtown explorations, the friends discover horseless carriages, boys (though not to the extent of their sisters, Julia and Katie), and Betsy's long-lost Uncle Keith.

Heaven to Betsy

Age Level: 12 - 17 years

SUMMARY: Betsy and Tacy are now freshmen at Deep Valley High School. Betsy must cope with many changes - a move to a new neighborhood, Tib's return to Milwaukee, making new friends, and her strong interest in boys and resulting dissatisfaction with her appearance. Her challenge is to adjust to these changes while not neglecting her writing. Being high-spirited and gregarious, Betsy finds herself a key member of the Crowd, which includes Tacy, Winona, and many new friends. They have lots of fun, Betsy's heart gets broken, and she

learns the hard way to value herself and her writing ambitions. In reviewing the year, Betsy perceives herself as having grown up considerably.

Betsy in Spite of Herself

Age Level: 12 - 17 years

SUMMARY: During Betsy's sophomore year she becomes dissatisfied with herself and her personality. Tiring of her sisterly relationship with the boys in the Crowd, she longs to be a "siren" like her sister Julia. She is particularly interested in a new boy in town, Phil Brandish, who is handsome, older, and owns a red auto. To snare him, a new personality is in order, and spending Christmas in Milwaukee with Tib provides the perfect opportunity to do a "come back completely changed" personality revision. It is a wonderful Christmas for Betsy, during which she and Tib explore Milwaukee, enjoy a German Christmas, and dream up a "dramatic and mysterious" personality for Betsy. Upon returning home to Deep Valley, Betsy assumes the new personality; and though the Crowd misses the old Betsy, Phil is smitten. Betsy finds it difficult to maintain the role, however. This, and her refusal to neglect her writing strains their relationship, which ultimately fails. The experience teaches Betsy that although she must be true to herself, she can also stretch the boundaries of her personality a little.

Betsy Was a Junior

Age Level: 12 - 17 years

SUMMARY: Betsy intends to make her junior year "simply perfect." Since Julia is leaving home to attend the university, Betsy makes plans to take Julia's place by staying home more and learning to play the piano as Julia did. She also plans to take school and her writing more seriously and to develop a friendship with Joe Willard, her rival in composition courses and essay contests throughout high school. The year starts out wonderfully with the return of Tib to Deep Valley, but Betsy's resolve is thrown awry when Joe is discovered to have acquired a girlfriend over the summer. Fascinated with Julia's descriptions of college life and sororities, Betsy starts a sorority consisting mainly of girls in her Crowd. Though she still works on her writing and piano, her social life edges out her time at home and her other schoolwork. It is a frivolous year all around; the sorority which deprived her of some popularity eventually dissolves; and Betsy discovers that her growing up, in spite of her best plans, is a long, slow process.

Betsy and Joe

Age level: 12-17

SUMMARY: During Betsy's senior year she and Joe finally begin dating, and they have wonderful times, as they share a common interest in writing and literature. Their relationship is complicated, however, by Betsy's continuing friendship with Tony, a member of the Crowd who has developed romantic feelings toward her. Since she doesn't want to cut off Tony entirely, whose tendency to wildness is tempered by his relationship to the Crowd, Betsy is caught in a dilemma. Both relationships are rocky for awhile but eventually all works out for the best, with Tony accepting Betsy's feelings for Joe and Betsy and Joe making plans for the future.

Carney's House Party

Age Level: 14 - adult

Carney's House Party is out of print

SUMMARY: This book focuses on Betsy's high school friend, Carney, who has just finished her sophomore year at Vassar. After a college friend expresses interest in visiting her in Deep Valley during the summer, Carney decides to invite her to a house party which also includes her best friend, Bonnie (who has just returned from Paris), and a surprise arrival from Betsy. There is another surprise visitor that summer; Larry Humphreys, whose relationship with Carney had been interrupted four years ago when his family moved to San Diego. Meanwhile, Carney is becoming friends with Sam Hutchinson, the son of an important family in Deep Valley. During Larry's visit, Carney must evaluate her feelings for the two men and make her decision.

Emily of Deep Valley

Age Level: 14 - adult

Emily of Deep Valley is out of print

SUMMARY: Emily finishes her senior year at Deep Valley High School and must bear the pain of seeing all her friends leave for the university while she must stay home and take care of her grandfather. She is very despondent, not only from missing her old high school days, but also from being prevented from fulfilling her dream to study social work at the university and become a social reformer. One day she decides to "muster her wits to her own defense" and makes plans to improve her situation. Her first change - a more grown-up hairstyle - attracts the notice of Cab, one of Betsy's old friends, who takes her to a dance. There Emily makes other friends, and these new friendships lead her to becoming more involved in the community. As a result of this new involvement, she observes how strained relations are between the Syrian immigrants and the rest of Deep Valley. Emily then starts a boys' club, including both Syrian and non-Syrian boys, to promote understanding between the two cultures. Throughout her activities she finds herself coming alive, falling in love, and discovering that she has fulfilled her dream right in Deep Valley.

Betsy and the Great World

Age Level: 14 - adult

SUMMARY: It is 1914 and Betsy, disenchanted with college life, sets off to spend a year abroad. Her aims are to gain experience for her writing and to "get over" Joe Willard, with whom she has quarreled. Her trip includes an eventful ocean cruise, several months in Munich, a month and a half in Venice, several weeks in Paris, and some time in London - interrupted by the beginning of the war. During her year abroad, Betsy struggles with homesickness and with making an adjustment to foreign life with only a rusty knowledge of German and French; but, with her usual strength of spirit, she resolves to improve her situation. The trip is full of friends, sights, romance, and of course, her writing. Betsy develops a more global perspective and returns home, just in time to escape the war, to Joe's awaiting arms.

Betsy's Wedding

Age Level: 14 - adult

SUMMARY: Once Betsy returns from Europe, she and Joe decide to get married. They move to Minneapolis, where Betsy's family and Tacy and her husband now live. Joe works as a reporter, and Betsy struggles with learning the household skills she never acquired. The two are wonderfully suited to each other and adjust to married life well, in spite of differences in temperament and traditions, dealing with a long visit from Joe's ailing aunt and worrying about the war. Tib, still unmarried, is quite independent with her career and new car. Betsy and Tacy, afraid that Tib's independence will prevent her from marrying, try to match her up with various men, with tragic and comic results. In the end, America joins the war and Joe must leave Betsy for awhile, promising to return. Before he leaves, everyone attends Tib's wedding (to a man she met on her own.)