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\*\*\* START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE COMINGS OF COUSIN ANN \*\*\*

# The Comings of Cousin Ann

# The Comings of Cousin Ann

By  
Emma Speed Sampson

Author of  
"Mammy's White Folks"  
"Billy and the Major"  
"Miss Minerva's Baby"  
"The Shorn Lamb"



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*The Comings of Cousin Ann*

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# The Comings of Cousin Ann

## CHAPTER I

### The Veterans of Ryeville

Ryeville had rather prided itself on having the same population—about three thousand—for the last fifty years. That is the oldest inhabitants had, but the newer generation was for expansion in spite of tradition, and Ryeville awoke one morning, after the census taker had been busying himself, to find itself five thousand strong and still growing.

There was no especial reason for the growth of the little town, save that it lay in the heart of rolling blue-grass country and people have to live somewhere. And Ryeville, with its crooked streets and substantial homes, was as good a place as any. There were churches of all denominations, schools and shops, a skating rink, two motion picture houses and as many drug stores as there had been barrooms before prohibition made necessary a change of front. There were two hotels—one where you “could” and one where you “couldn’t.” The former was frequented by the old men of the town and county. It stood next to the courthouse. Indeed its long, shady porch overlooked the courthouse green. There the old men would sit with chairs tilted against the wall and feet on railing and sadly watch the prohibition officers hauling bootleggers to court.

There were a great many old men in Ryeville and the country around—more old men than old women, in spite of the fact that that part of Kentucky had furnished its quota of recruits for both Union and Rebel armies.

In Kentucky, during the war between the states, brother had been pitted against brother—even father against son. The fact that the state did not secede from the Union had been a reason for the most intense bitterness and ill feeling among families and former friends. The bitterness was gone now and ill feeling forgotten. The veterans of the blue and the gray sat on the Rye House porch together, swapping tales and borrowing tobacco as amicably as though they had never done their best to exterminate one another.

“As for Abe Lincoln,” declared Major Fitch, an ancient confederate, “if it hadn’t been for him Gawd knows what we’d ‘a’ had to talk about in these dry days. I tell you, sah, we ought to be eternally grateful to Abe Lincoln. I for one am. I was a clerk in a country store when the war broke out and I’d ‘a’ been there yet if it wasn’t for the war. I’m here to say it made me and made my fam’ly. We were bawn fighters—my fo’ brothers and I—and up to the sixties we were always in trouble for brawling. The war came along and made a virtue of our vices. My mother used to be mighty ‘shamed when she heard we were called the ‘Fighting Fitches.’ That was befo’ the war, and one or the other of us boys was always up befo’ the co’t for wild carrying on. But, bless Bob, when we were called ‘Fighting Fitches’ for whipping the Yankees the old lady was as pleased as Punch.”

“What did they call ye fer not bein’ able to whup us?” asked a grinning old giant from the mountains.

“Nothin’—‘cause we were able. All we needed was mo’ men and mo’ food and mo’ guns. We’d ‘a’ licked the spots off of you Yanks if we had had a chance. You wouldn’t stand still long enough to get whipped.”

So the talk went on, day in and day out. Battles were fought over and over but never finished. They always ended with a draw and could be resumed the next morning with added zest and new incidents. One old man, Pete Barnes, who had the distinction of being the only private who frequented the porch at Rye House, always claimed to have been present at every battle mentioned—even Bunker Hill and the battle of New Orleans.

“Yes sirree, I was there; nothin’ but a youngster, but I was there!” he would assert. “There wasn’t a single battle the Fo’th Kentucky Volunteers didn’t get in on an’ the Johnny Rebs would run like hell when they heard we were comin’. I tell you when we got them a goin’ was at Fredericksburg in ‘62—must have been ‘bout the middle of December. We beat ‘em even worse than we did at Chickamauga the following year.”

“Aw dry up, Pete. You know perfectly well the Yanks got licked at both of those battles,” a jovial opponent would declare, but Pete Barnes was as sure his side had won as he was that he had been present at the surrender of Cornwallis and there was no use in trying to persuade him otherwise.

The Rye House faced on Main Street and nothing happened on that thoroughfare that escaped the oldsters on the porch. If anything was going on all they had to do was move their chairs from the side porch to the front, whether it was a circus parade or a funeral, or just Miss Ann Peyton’s rickety coach bearing her to Buck Hill, which was the first large farm the other side of the creek, the dividing line between Ryeville and the country. There were several small places but Buck Hill the only one of importance.

On a morning in June the old men sat on the porch as usual, with feet on railing and chairs tilted to the right angle for aged backbones. Nothing much had happened all morning. The sun was about the only thing that was moving in Ryeville and that had finally got around to the side porch and was shining full on Colonel Crutcher's outstretched legs.

"I reckon we'd better move," he said wearily. "Th'ain't much peace and quiet these days, what with the sun."

"Heat's something awful," agreed Pete Barnes, "but it ain't a patchin' on what it was at Cowpens."

"Cowpens!" exclaimed a necktie drummer who was stopping at the Rye House for a day or so, "I thought Cowpens was a battle fought between the United States and the English back in 1781."

"Sure, sure!" agreed Pete, "I was a mere lad, but I was there."

"It was in January, too," persisted the drummer.

"Of course, but we made it so hot for the—for the other side that this June weather is nothin' to it."

There was a general laugh and moving of chairs out of the rays of the inconsiderate sun.

"By golly, we're just in time," said Colonel Crutcher. "There comes Miss Ann Peyton's rockaway. Where do you reckon she's bound for?"

"Lord knows, but I hope she's not in a hurry," said Judge Middleton—judge from courtesy only, having sat on no bench but the anxious bench at the races and being a judge solely of horses and whiskey. "Did you ever see such snails as that old team? Good Golddust breed too! Miss Ann always buys good horses when she does buy but to my certain knowledge that pair is eighteen years old. Pretty nigh played out by now but I reckon they'll outlast old Billy and Miss Ann."

"I reckon the old lady has to do some scrimpin' to buy a new pair," said Major Fitch. "By golly, I remember when she was the best-looking gal in the county—or any other county for that matter. She was engaged to a fellow in my regiment—killed at Appomattox. She had more beaux than you could shake a stick at, but I reckon she couldn't get over Bert Mason. She wasn't much more than a child when the war broke out, but the war aged the girls as it did the boys."

"I hear tell Miss Ann is on the move right smart lately," ventured Pete Barnes.

"So they tell me," continued Major Fitch. "I tell you, havin' comp'ny now isn't what it used to be, what with wages up sky-high and all the niggers gone to Indianapolis and Chicago so there aren't any to pay even if you had the money, and food costin' three times what it's wuth. I reckon it is no joke to have Miss Ann a fallin' in on her kin nowadays with two horses that must have oats and that old Billy to fill up besides."

"Yes, and Little Josh tells me Miss Ann is always company wherever she stays," said the Judge. "He wasn't exactly complaining but just kind of explaining. You see his wife, that last one, just up and said she wouldn't and she wouldn't. I reckon Miss Ann kind of wore out her welcome last time she was there because she came just when Mrs. Little Josh was planning a trip to White Sulphur and Miss Ann wouldn't take the hint and the journey had to be put off and then the railroad strike came along and Little Josh was afraid to let his wife start for fear she couldn't get back. Mrs. Little Josh is as sore as can be about it and threatens if Miss Ann comes any more that she will invite all of her own kin at the same time and see which side can freeze out the other. The old lady hasn't been there this year and she hasn't been to Big Josh's either. Big Josh's daughters have read the riot act, so I hear, and they say if their old cousin comes to them without being invited they are going to try some visiting on their own hook and leave Big Josh to do the entertaining. They say he is great on big talk about family ties and the obligations of kinship but that they have all the trouble and when their Cousin Ann Peyton visits them he simply takes himself off and leaves them to do the work. Big Josh lives up such a muddy lane it's hard to keep servants."

Miss Ann's lumbering carriage had hardly reached the far corner when the attention of the old men on the porch was arrested by a small, low-swung motor car of the genus runabout. No doubt its motor and wheels had been turned out of a factory but the rest of it was plainly home made. It was painted a bright blue. The rear end might have applied for a truck license, as it was evidently intended as a bearer of burdens, but the front part had the air of a racer and the eager young girl at the wheel looked as though she might be more in sympathy with the front of her car than the back. Be that as it may, she was determined not to let her sympathies run away with her but, much to the delight of the dull old men on the Rye House porch, she stopped her car directly in front of them and carefully rearranged a number of mysterious-looking parcels in the truck end of her car.

"Hiyer, Miss Judith?" called Pete Barnes. The girl must stop her engine to hear what the old man was saying.

"What is it?" she called back gaily.

"I just said hiyer?"

"Fine! Hiyer, yourself?" she laughed pleasantly, although stopping the engine entailed getting out and cranking, since her car boasted no self-starter.

All of the old men bowed familiarly to the girl and indulged in some form of pleasantry.

"Bootlegging now, or what are you up to?" asked Major Fitch.

"Worse than that—perfumes and soaps, tooth pastes and cold creams, hair tonics and henna dips, silver polish and spot removers—pretty near everything or a little of it; but I'm going to come call on all of you when I get my wares sorted out."

"Do! Do!" they responded, but she was in and off before they could say more.

"Gee, that's a pretty girl!" exclaimed the necktie drummer.

"I reckon she is," grunted Colonel Crutcher, "pretty and good and sharp as a briar and quick as greased lightning. There isn't a girl like her anywhere around these parts. I don't see what the young folks of the county are thinking about, leaving her out of all their frolics."

"Well, you see—" put in another old man.

"Yes, I see the best-looking gal of the bunch and the spunkiest and the equal of any of them and the superior of most as far as manners and brains are concerned, just because she comes of plain folks—"

"A little worse than plain, Crutcher," put in Judge Middleton. "Those Bucks—"

"Oh, then she lives at Buck Hill?" asked the drummer.

"Buck Hill! Heavens man! The Bucknors live at Buck Hill and are about the swellest folk in Kentucky. The Bucks live in a little place this side of Buck Hill. There's nobody left but this Judy gal and her mother. I reckon their place would have gone for debt if it hadn't so happened that the trolley line from Louisville cut through it and they sold the right of way for enough to lift the mortgage. They do say that the Bucknors and Bucks were the same folks originally but that was in the early days and somehow the Bucks got down and the Bucknors staid up. Now the Bucknors would no more acknowledge the relationship to the Bucks than the Bucks would expect them to."

"I should think anybody would be proud to claim kin with a peach like that girl," said Major Fitch. "Her mother is a pretty good sort too, but slow. I reckon when they get cousinly inclined they always think of old Dick Buck, Judy's grandfather, who was enough to cool the warmest feelings of kinship."

Nodding assent to the Major's remark, the veterans lapsed into sleepy silence.

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## CHAPTER II

### Cousin Ann at Buck Hill

"Here comes Cousin Ann!" It was a wail from the depth of Mildred Bucknor's heart.

"Surely not!" cried her mother. "There are lots of other places for her to visit before our turn comes again. There's Uncle Tom's and Cousin Betty's and Sister Sue's, and Big Josh and Little Josh haven't had her for at least a year. Are you sure, Mildred?"

"It looks like the old rockaway and Uncle Billy's top hat," said Mildred. "It is too much to bear just when we are going to have a house party! Mother, please tell her it isn't convenient this June and have her go on to Big Josh's."

"Oh, my dear, you know Father wouldn't hear of my doing that. Maybe it isn't she after all. Nan, climb up on the railing and see if that could be Cousin Ann Peyton's carriage coming along the pike and turning into the avenue."

"Well, all I have to say is if it is her—"

"She," corrected her mother.

"Her carriage. Wait until I finish my sentence, Mother, before you correct me," and the girl climbed on the railing of the front porch where the ladies of the Bucknor family were wont to spend the summer mornings. Clinging to one of the great fluted columns she tiptoed, trying to peer through the cloud of limestone dust that enveloped the approaching vehicle.

"It's her all right and I don't care what kind of grammar I use to express my disgust," and Nan jumped from the railing. "I don't see why—"

"Well, my dear, it can't be helped. You know how your father feels about his kin. Better run and tell Aunt Em'ly to send Kizzie up to get the guest chamber in order."

"Oh, Mother, you know it is in order. Nan and I have been busy up there all morning getting it ready for the girls. We've even got flowers all fixed and clean bureau scarves and everything," said Mildred, trying not to weep.

"Yes, and linen sheets. We thought you wouldn't mind, Mother, because you see Jean Roland is used to such fine doings, and this is her first visit to Kentucky. We know you have only three pairs of linen sheets but this seemed the psychological time to use them. I've a great mind to go

yank them off the bed.”

“But, Mother,” pleaded Mildred, “couldn’t we put old Cousin Ann Peyton in the little hall room? I can’t see why she always has to have the guest chamber. She’s no better than anybody else.”

“But your father—”

“What difference will it make to Father? He needn’t even know where we put Cousin Ann.”

“What do you think about it, Aunt Em’ly?” Mrs. Bucknor asked the lean old colored woman who appeared in the doorway. “Here comes Miss Ann Peyton, and the young ladies want to put her in the little hall bedroom because they have planned to put their company in the guest chamber?”

“Think! I think I’m a plum fool not ter have wrang the neck er that ol’ dominick rooster yestiddy when he spent the whole day a crowin’ fer comp’ny. I pretty nigh knowed we were in fer some kind er visitation.”

“Maybe he was crowing for our house party,” suggested Nan.

“No, honey, that there rooster don’t never crow for ‘vited comp’ny. Now if I had er wrang his neck he’d ‘a’ been in the pot, comp’ny or no, an’ it ‘ud cure him of any mo’ reckless crowin’.”

“But, Aunt Em’ly, what do you think about putting Miss Ann in the hall room?”

“Think! I think she’ll git her back up an’ that ol’ Billy’ll be shootin’ off his mouf, but we-all done entertained Miss Ann an’ ol’ Billy an’ them ca’ige hosses goin’ onter three months already this year an’ it’s high time some er the res’ of the fambly step up. What’s the matter with Marse Big Josh? An’ if he air onable what’s the matter with Marse Lil Josh? Yassum, put her in the hall room an’ ‘fo’ Gawd I’ll make that ol’ Billy keep his feet out’n the oven, if not this summer, nex’ winter. He’s the orneris’ nigger fer wantin’ ter sit with his feet in the oven.”

“Then, Mother, may we keep the guest chamber for the girls? Please say yes!” begged Nan. “Aunt Em’ly thinks it is all right and you know you have always been telling us to mind Aunt Em’ly because she has such good judgment.”

“Well, my jdgment air that Miss Ann oughter been occupewin’ the hall room for some fifty year or mo’, ever sence she an’ that ol’ Billy took ter comin’ so reg’lar,” said Aunt Em’ly. “If I had it ter do over I’d never ‘a’ let him git so free with his feet in the oven. The truf er the matter is, Miss Milly, that you an’ Marse Bob Bucknor an’ all yo’ chilluns as well, long with all the res’ of the fambly includin’ of Marse Big Josh an’ Marse Lil Josh, done accepted of Miss Ann Peyton an’ ol’ Billy an’ the ca’ige hosses like they wa’ the will of the Almighty. Well, now le’s see if Miss Ann Peyton can’t accept the hall room like it wa’ the will er the Almighty an’ if ol’ Billy can’t come ter some ‘clusion that Gawd air aginst his dryin’ out his ol’ feet in my oven.”

While this discussion was going on, the cloud of limestone dust had disappeared and from it had emerged a quaint old coach, lumbering and shabby, drawn by a pair of sleek sorrel horses, whose teeth would have given evidence of advanced age had a possible purchaser submitted them to the indignity of examining them. Their progress was slow and sedate, although the driver handled the reins as though it were with difficulty that he restrained them from prancing and cavorting as they neared the mansion.

Old Billy’s every line, from his dented top hat to his well-nigh soleless boots, expressed dignity and superiority. He was quite sure that being coachman to Miss Ann Peyton gave him the right to wipe those worn boots on the rest of mankind.

“Look at that ol’ fool nigger!” exclaimed Aunt Em’ly in disgust. “Settin’ up there lookin’ mo’ like a monkey than a man in that long-tail blue coat with brass buttons an’ his ha’r like cotton wool an’ whiskers so long he haster wrop ‘em. The onlies wuck that nigger ever does is jes’ growin’ whiskers.”

“Oh, come now, Aunt Em’ly,” remonstrated a young man who stepped from the study window on the porch as the old coach lumbered up the driveway, “Uncle Billy keeps his horses in better condition than any on our farm are kept. Poor old Uncle Billy!”

“Poor old Uncle Billy, indeed!” snapped Mildred. “I reckon, Brother Jeff, you’d say poor old Cousin Ann, too.”

“Of course I would. I can’t think of any person in the world I feel much sorrier for.”

“Well, I can. I feel lots sorrier for Nan and me with our house party on hand and Cousin Ann turning up for the second time since Christmas. It’s all well enough for you and Father to be so high and mighty about honoring the aged, and blood being thicker than water and so on. You don’t have to sleep with Cousin Ann, the way Nan and I do sometimes.”

“We-ell, no!” laughed Jeff.

“Hush, Mildred. Remember how Father feels about the comings of Cousin Ann. You and Nan must be polite.” Mrs. Bucknor sighed, realizing she was demanding of her daughters something that was difficult for her to perform herself. Being polite to Cousin Ann had been the most arduous task imposed upon that wife and mother during twenty-five years of married life.

At the yard gate Uncle Billy drew in his steeds with a great show of their being unwilling to stop. He turned as though to command the footman to alight and open the door of the coach. With feigned astonishment at there being no footman, he climbed down from the box with so much dignity that even Aunt Em’ly was impressed, though unwilling to acknowledge it.

"That ol' nigger certainly do walk low for anybody who sets so high," she whispered to Mildred. The bowing of Uncle Billy's legs in truth took many inches from his height. But the old man, in spite of crooked legs, worn-out boots, shabby livery and battered high hat, carried himself with the air of a prime minister. Miss Ann Peyton was his queen.

There was an expression of infinite pathos on the countenance of the old darkey as he opened the door of the ancient coach. Bowing low, as though to royalty, he said, "Miss Ann, we air done arrive."

Jeff Bucknor took his mother's arm and gently led her down the walk. Involuntarily she stiffened under his affectionate grasp and held back. It was all very well for the men of the family to take the stand they did concerning Cousin Ann Peyton and her oft-repeated visits. Men had none of the bother of company. Of course she would be courteous to her and always treat her with the consideration due an aged kinswoman, but she could not see the use of pretending she was glad to see her and rushing down the walk to meet her as though she were an honored guest.

"It is hard on Mildred and Nan," she murmured to her stalwart son, as he escorted her towards the battered coach.

"Yes, Mother, but kin is kin—and the poor old lady hasn't any real home."

"Well then she might—There are plenty of them—very good comfortable ones—"

"You mean homes for old ladies? Oh, Mother, you know Father would never consent to that. Neither would Uncle Tom nor Big Josh. She would hate it and then there's Uncle Billy and the horses—Cupid and Puck—to say nothing of the chariot."

Further discussion was impossible. Mother and son reached the yard gate as Uncle Billy opened the coach door and announced the fact that Miss Ann had arrived at her destination. Then began the unpacking of the visitor. It was a roomy carriage, and well that it was so. When Miss Peyton traveled she traveled. Having no home, everything she possessed must be carried with her. Trunks were strapped on the back of the coach and inside with the mistress were boxes and baskets and bundles, suitcases and two of those abominations known as telescopes, from which articles of clothing were bursting forth.

It was plain to see from the untidy packing that Miss Ann and Uncle Billy had left their last abode in a hurry. Even Miss Peyton's features might have been called untidy, if such a term could be used in connection with a countenance whose every line was aristocratic. As a rule that lady was able so to control her emotions that the uninitiated were ignorant of the fact that she had emotions. She gave one the impression on that morning in June of having packed her emotions hurriedly, as she had her clothes, and they were darting from her flashing eyes as were garments from the telescopes.

Gently, almost as though he were performing a religious rite, Uncle Billy lifted the shabby baggage from the coach.

"Let me help you, Uncle Billy. Good morning, Cousin Ann. I am very glad to see you," said Jeff, although it was impossible to see Cousin Ann until some of the luggage was removed.

"Thank you, cousin." Miss Ann spoke from the depths of the coach. Her voice trembled a little.

At last, every box, bag and bundle was removed and piled by Uncle Billy upon each side of the yard gate like a triumphal arch through which his beloved mistress might pass.

Old Billy unfolded the steps of the coach. These steps were supposed to drop at the opening of the door but the spring had long ago lost its power and the steps must be lowered by hand.

"Mind whar you tread, Miss Ann," he whispered. Nobody must hear him suggest that the steps were not safe. Nobody must ever know that he and Miss Ann and the coach and horses were getting old and played out.

Miss Ann had dignity enough to carry off broken steps, shabby baggage, rickety carriage—anything. She emerged from the coach with the air of being visiting royalty conferring a favor on her lowly subjects by stopping with them. Her dignity even overtopped the fact that her auburn wig was on crooked and a long lock of snow-white hair had straggled from its moorings and crept from the confines of the purple quilted-satin poke bonnet. The beauty which had been hers in her youth was still hers although everybody could not see it. Uncle Billy could see it and Jeff Bucknor glimpsed it, as his old cousin stepped from her dingy coach. He had never realized before that Cousin Ann Peyton had lines and proportions that must always be beautiful—a set of the head, a slope of shoulder, a length of limb, a curve of wrist and a turn of ankle. The old purple poke bonnet might have been a diadem, so high did she carry her head; and she floated along in the midst of her voluminous skirts like a belle of the sixties—which she had been and still was in the eyes of her devoted old servant.

Miss Peyton wore hoop skirts. Where she got them was often conjectured. Surely she could not be wearing the same ones she had worn in the sixties and everybody knew that the articles were no longer manufactured. Big Josh had declared on one occasion when some of the relatives had waxed jocose on the subject of Cousin Ann and her style of dress, that she had bought a gross of hoop skirts cheap at the time when they were going out of style and had them stored in his attic—but then everybody knew that Big Josh would say anything that popped into his head and then swear to it and Little Josh would back him up.

"By heck, there's no room in the attic for trunks," he had insisted. "Hoop skirts everywhere! Boxes of 'em! Barrels of 'em! Hanging from the rafters like Japanese lanterns! Standing up in

the corners like ghosts scaring a fellow to death! I can't keep servants at all because of Cousin Ann Peyton's buying that gross of hoop skirts. Little Josh will bear me out in this."

And Little Josh would, although the truth of the matter was that Cousin Ann had only one hoop skirt, and it was the same she had worn in the sixties. Inch by inch its body had been renewed to reclaim it from the ravages of time until not one iota of the original garment was left. Here a tape and there a wire had been carefully changed, but always the hoop kept its original form. The spirit of the sixties still breathed from it and it enveloped Miss Ann as in olden days.

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## CHAPTER III

### Cousin Ann Is Affronted

Mrs. Bucknor stood aside while Uncle Billy and Jeff unpacked the carriage but as the visitor emerged she came forward. "How do you do, Cousin Ann?" she said, trying to put some warmth in her remark. "Have you driven far?"

Cousin Ann leaned over stiffly and gave her hostess a perfunctory peck on her cheek. "We left Cousin Betty Throckmorton's this morning," she said with a toss of the purple poke bonnet.

"Then you must have had a very early breakfast." It was a well-known fact that the sorrel horses, although of the famous Golddust breed, were old and could travel at a stretch only about five miles an hour.

"We lef' Miss Betty's befo' breakfas'," said Uncle Billy sadly, but a glance from his mistress made him add, "but we ain't hongry, case we done et our fill at a hotel back yonder."

"I deemed it wise to travel before the heat of the day," said Miss Ann with an added dignity. "Take my luggage to my room, Billy."

"Yassum, yes, Miss Ann," and the old man made a show of tying his team to the hitching post although he knew that the fat old Cupid and Puck were glad to stop and rest and nothing short of oats would budge them.

Mildred and Nan came slowly down the walk, followed by Aunt Em'ly. "We've got to let her kiss us and we might just as well get it over with," grumbled Mildred.

"Well, they's some compersations in bein' black," chuckled Aunt Em'ly. "I ain't never had ter kiss Miss Ann yit."

"How do you do, cousins?" and Miss Peyton again stooped from her loftiness and pecked first one girl and then the other. The old lady called all of her young relations cousin without adding the Christian name and it was generally conceded that she did this because she could not keep up with the younger generation in the many homes she visited.

"Mother, remember your promise," whispered Mildred.

"Yes, Mother, remember," added Nan. "Now is the time, before the trunks and things get put in the wrong room."

"Uncle Billy, Miss Ann is to have the room next the guest chamber. I mean the—hall room," hesitated poor Mrs. Bucknor, who was always overawed by Cousin Ann.

Uncle Billy put down the two bulging telescopes he had picked up and looking piteously at Mrs. Bucknor said, "What you say, Miss Milly? I reckon I done misumberstood. You mus' 'scuse ol' Billy, Miss Milly."

"Miss Milly done said I'll show you the way," said Aunt Em'ly, picking up a great hat box and a Gladstone bag. "I'll he'p you carry up some er these here bags an' baggage."

The gaunt old woman stalked ahead, while Billy followed, but far from meekly. His beard with its many wrapped plaits wagged ominously and he could hardly wait to get beyond earshot of the white folks before he gave voice to his indignation.

"What's all this a puttin' my Miss Ann off in a lil' ol' hall bedroom? You-alls is gone kinder crazy. The bes' ain't good enough fer my Miss Ann. How she gonter make out in no little squz up room what ain't mo'n a dressin'-room? Miss Ann air always been a havin' the gues' chamber an' I'm a gonter 'stablish her thar now. Miss Milly done got mixed up, Sis Em'ly," and the old man changed his indignant tone to a wheedling one. "Sholy yo' Miss Milly wa' jes' a foolin' an' seein' as th'ain't nobody in the gues' chamber we'll jes' put my Miss Ann thar."

The door of the guest chamber was open and the determined old darkey pushed by Aunt Em'ly and entered the room prepared by Mildred and Nan for their friends.

"See, they mus' a' got a message she wa' on the way, kase they done put flowers in her room an' all," and old Billy kneeled to loosen the straps of the telescopes.

"Git up from yonder, nigger!" exclaimed Aunt Em'ly. "The young ladies air done swep and garnished this here room for they own comp'ny. Th'ain't nothin' the matter with that there hall

room. It air plenty good enough fer mos' folks. I reckon yo' Miss Ann ain't a whit better'n my Miss Mildred and my Miss Nan—ain't so good in fac', kase they's got the same blood she air an' mo' of it. They's a older fambly than she is kase they's come along two or three generations further than what she is. They's Peytons an' Bucknors an' Prestons an' Throckmortons an' Butlers an'—an' every other Kentucky fambly they's a mind ter be."

Uncle Billy staggered to his feet and looked at Aunt Em'ly with amazement and indignation. He tried to speak but words failed him. She towered above him. There was something sinister and threatening about her—at least so the old man fancied. Aunt Em'ly was in reality merely standing up for the rights of her own especial white folks, but to the dazed old man she seemed like a symbolic figure of famine and disaster, lean and gaunt, pointing a long, bony finger at him. He followed her to the hall bedroom and deposited his burdens and then staggered down the stairs for the rest of Miss Ann's belongings.

Poor Uncle Billy! His troubles were almost more than he could bear. Not that he personally minded getting up before dawn and flitting from Mrs. Betty Throckmorton's home before any member of the household was stirring. His Miss Ann had so willed it and far be it from him to object to her commands. Even going without breakfast was no hardship, if it so pleased his beloved mistress. The meal he had declared to Mrs. Bucknor they had eaten at a hotel on the way was purely imaginary. Crackers and cheese from a country store they had passed on their journey and a spray of black-heart cherries he had pulled from a tree by the wayside was all he and his mistress had eaten since the evening before at supper.

That supper! Would he ever forget it? From the back porch steps he had heard the insults flung at Miss Ann by her hostess. Of course everybody who was anybody, or who had ever belonged to anybody, knew that Mrs. Elizabeth Throckmorton, known as Cousin Betty, was not really a member of the family but had merely married into it. According to Uncle Billy's geography she was not even an American, let alone a Kentuckian, since she had come from some foreign parts vaguely spoken of as New England. He and Miss Ann never had liked to visit there, but stopped on rare occasions when they felt that being an outsider her feelings might be hurt when she heard they had been in her neighborhood, had passed by her farm without paying their respects in the shape of a short visit.

The encounter between the two ladies had been short and sharp, while the Throckmorton family sat in frightened silence. Miss Ann and Uncle Billy had been there only two days but from the beginning of the visit Uncle Billy had felt that things were not going so smoothly as he had hoped. Things had not been running very well for the chronic visitors in several of the places visited during the last year but there had been no open break or rudeness until that evening at the Throckmortons'. It was a little unfortunate that they had come in on the family without warning, just as the oldest grandchildren were recovering from measles and the youngest daughter, Lucy, had made up her mind to have a June wedding. The measles had necessitated an extra house cleaning and fumigation of the nursery and the young sufferers had been put in the guest chamber to sleep, while the June wedding meant many visits to Louisville for trousseau and much conversation on the subject of who should not be invited and what kind of refreshments must be served.

A more unpropitious moment for paying a visit could not have been chosen. It was plain to see that the Throckmortons were not aware of the honor conferred upon them. The guest chamber having been converted into a convalescent hospital, Miss Ann must share room and bed with the reluctant Lucy. Bureau drawers were cleared and part of a wardrobe dedicated to the aged relative. Moreover there was no room in the stable for the visiting carriage horses, as a young Throckmorton had recently purchased a string of valuable hunters that must be housed, although Miss Ann's Golddust breed were forced to present their broad backs to the rain and wind in the pasture.

Old Billy slept in the coach, but he often did this in late years—how often he never let his mistress know. In early days he had been welcomed by the servants and treated with the respect due Miss Ann Peyton's coachman, but the older generation of colored people had died off or had become too aged and feeble to "make the young folks stand around." As for the white people, Uncle Billy couldn't make up his mind what was the matter with them. Wasn't Miss Ann the same Miss Ann who had been visiting ever since her own beautiful home, Peyton, had been burned to the ground just after the war? She was on a visit at the time. Billy was coachman and had driven her to Buck Hill. He wasn't old Billy then, but was young and sprightly. He drove a spanking pair of sorrels and the coach was new and shiny. It was indeed a stylish turnout and Miss Ann Peyton was known as the belle and beauty of Kentucky.

It was considered very fortunate at the time of the fire that Ann was visiting and had all of her clothes and jewels with her. They at least were saved. From Buck Hill they had gone to the home of other relations and so on until visiting became a habit. Her father, a widower, died a few weeks after the fire and later her brother. The estate had dwindled until only a small income was inherited by the bereaved Ann. Visiting was cheap. She was made welcome by the relations, and on prosperous blue-grass farms the care of an extra pair of carriage horses and the keep of another servant made very little difference. Cousin Ann, horses and coachman, were received with open arms and urged to stop as long as they cared to.

In those days there always seemed to be plenty of room for visitors. The houses were certainly no larger than of the present day but they were more elastic. Of course entertaining a handsome young woman of lively and engaging manners, whose beaux were legion, was very different from having a peculiar old lady in a hoop skirt descend upon you unawares from a

shabby coach drawn by fat old horses that looked as though they might not go another step in spite of the commands of the grotesque coachman with his plaited beard and bushy white hair.

But that supper at the Throckmortons'! Uncle Billy was seated on the porch steps with a pan of drippings in his hand, wherein the cook had grudgingly put the scrag of a fried chicken and a hunk of cold corn bread. The cook was a new cook and not at all inclined to bother herself over an old darkey with his whiskers done up in plaits. The old man silently sopped his bread and listened to the talk of the white folks indoors.

"Cousin Ann, have you ever thought of going to a home for aged women?" Mrs. Throckmorton asked. Her tone was brisk and businesslike, though not unkind. Mrs. Throckmorton had been entertaining this old cousin of her husband for many years and while she was not honored with as many visits as some of the relations she was sure she had her full share. It seemed to her high time that some member or near member of the family should step in and suggest to the old lady that there were such homes and that she should enter one.

"I? Ann Peyton go to an old ladies' home? Cousin Betty you must be in a jocular vein," and Uncle Billy saw through the open door that his mistress drew herself up like a queen and her eyes flashed.

"Well, plenty of persons quite as good as you go to such homes every day," insisted the hostess. "I should think you would prefer having a regular home and not driving from pillar to post, never knowing where you will land next and never sure whether your relations will have room for you or not. As it is, just now I am really afraid it will not be convenient for you to stay much longer with us. What with Lucy's wedding and the measles and everything! Of course you need not go immediately—"

"That is enough, Cousin Betty. Never shall it be said that we have worn out our welcome. We go immediately." Miss Ann's voice was loud and clear. She stood up and pushed back her chair sharply. "We beg to be excused," she said and turned to walk from the room.

"Oh, nonsense, Cousin Ann!" exclaimed Mrs. Throckmorton impatiently. "Nobody said you must go immediately. It was just with the wedding imminent and—anyhow I meant it for the best when I mentioned a home for aged women. You would be quite comfortable in one and I am sure I could find exactly the right sort. You would have to make a deposit of several thousands—I don't know exactly how much but you must have a little something left since you pay old Billy's wages and have your horses shod and so on. Of course in the home you would have no such expenses. You could sell your horses and your old coach is little more than junk, and old Billy could go to a home too."

Miss Ann had paused a moment but when Mrs. Throckmorton spoke of her carriage as junk and suggested a home for Billy, too, her indignation knew no bounds and with a commanding gesture of dismissal she stalked from the dining-room. Billy was summoned and since it was out of the question to start so late in the evening it was determined that daylight should find them on their way to Buck Hill—Buck Hill where a certain flavor of old times was still to be found, with Cousin Bob Bucknor, so like his father, who had been one of the swains who followed in the train of the beautiful Ann Peyton. Buck Hill would always make her welcome!

And now—Buck Hill—and a hall bedroom!

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## CHAPTER IV

### The Energy of Judith

"Mother, Cousin Ann Peyton is at Buck Hill. I saw her old carriage on the road when I went in for my express parcels."

"Why will you insist upon saying Cousin Ann, Judith?" drawled Mrs. Buck. "I'd take my time about calling anybody cousin who scorned to do the same by me."

As Judith's mother took her time about everything, the girl smiled indulgently, and proceeded in the unpacking of the express packages.

"I'm so glad I am selling for this company that sends all goods directly to me instead of having me take orders the way the other one did. I'm just a born peddler and I know I make more when I can deliver the goods the minute they are bought and paid for. I'm going to take Buck Hill in on my rounds this year and see if all of my dear cousins won't lay in a stock of sweet soap and cold cream."

"There you are, calling those Buck Hill folks cousin again. Here child, don't waste that string. I can't see what makes you so wasteful. You should untie each package, carefully pick out the knots, and then roll it up in a ball. I wonder how many times I've told you that."

"So do I, Mother, and how many times I have told you that my time is too precious to be picking out hard knots. I bet this minute you've got a ball of string as big as your head, and please tell

me how many packages you send out in a year.”

The girl's manner was gay and bantering. She stopped untying parcels long enough to kiss her mother, who was laboriously picking the knots from the cut twine.

Mrs. Buck continued, “Wasting all of that good paper too! Here, let me fold it up. My mother and father taught me to be very particular about such things and goodness knows I've tried to teach you. I don't know where we'd be if I didn't save and if my folks before me hadn't done so.”

It was a well-known fact that Judith's maternal grandparents, Mr. and Mrs. Ezra Knight, had been forced to abandon their ancestral farm in Connecticut and had started to California on a hazard of new fortunes but had fallen by the wayside, landing in Kentucky where their habits of saving string and paper certainly had not enriched them. Such being the case a whimsical smile from the granddaughter was pardonable.

“There is no telling,” she laughed, “but you go on saving, Mother dear, and I'll try to do some making and between us we'll be as rich as our cousins at Buck Hill.”

“There you are again! I'd feel ashamed to go claiming relations with folks that didn't even know I existed. I can't see what makes you do it.”

“Oh, just for fun! You see we really and truly are kin. We are just as close kin as some of the people Cousin Ann Peyton visits, because you see she takes in anybody and everybody from the third and fourth generation of them that hate to see her coming. Yesterday in Louisville I looked up the family in some old books on the early history of Kentucky at the Carnegie Library and I found out a lot of things. In the first place the Bucks weren't named for Buck Hill.”

The land owned by Mrs. Buck had at one time been as rich as any in Kentucky, but it had been overworked until it was almost as poor as the deserted farm in Connecticut. As Judge Middleton had said, the price of the right-of-way through the place sought by the trolley company had enabled her to lift the long-standing mortgage. She had inherited the farm, mortgage and all, from her father, who had bought it from old Dick Buck. The house was a pleasant cottage of New England architecture, built closer to the road than is usual on Kentucky farms. Old Mr. Knight had also followed the traditions of his native state by building his barn with doors opening on the road. The barn was larger than the house, but at the present time Judith's little blue car and an old red cow were its sole inhabitants. The hay loft, which was designed to hold many tons of hay, was empty. Sometimes an errant hen would find her way up there and start a nest in vain hopes of being allowed to lay her quota and begin the business of hatching her own offspring in her own way, but Judith would rout her out and force her to comply to community housekeeping in the poultry-house.

The Knights' motto might have been: “Lazy Faire” and the Buck's “Nuff Said,” as a wag at Ryeville had declared, but such mottoes did not fit Miss Judith. Nothing must be left as it was unless it was already exactly right and enough was not said until she had spoken her mind freely and fearlessly. Everything about this girl was free and fearless—her walk, the way she held her head, her unflinching hazel eyes and ready, ringing laugh. Even her red gold hair demanded freedom and refused to stay confined in coil, braid or net.

“I'm sure I don't know where you came from,” Mrs. Buck drawled. “You're so energetic and wasteful like. Of course my folks were never ones to sit still and be taken care of like the Bucks,” and then her mild eyes would snap a bit, “but the Knights believed in saving.”

“Even energy?” asked Judith saucily.

“Well, there isn't any use in wasting even energy. My father used to say that saving was the keynote of life as well as religion. I reckon you must be a throw back to my mother's grandfather, who was a Norse sailor, and reckless and wasteful and red-headed.”

“Maybe so! At any rate I'm going to plough some guano into these acres, even though I can't plough the seas like my worthy grandpap, Sven Thorwald Woden, or whatever his name was. Just look at our wheat, Mother! It isn't fit to feed chickens with because our land is so poor. I'm tired of this eternal saving and no making. There is no reason why our yield shouldn't be as great per acre as Buck Hill, but we don't get half as much as they do. I've got to make a lot of money this summer so as to buy bags and bags of fertilizer. I've got a new scheme.”

“I'll be bound you have,” sighed Mrs. Buck.

“But you'll have to help me by making cakes and pies and things and peeling potatoes.”

“All right, just so you don't hurry me! I can't be hurried.”

“What a nice mother you are to say all right without even asking what it is.”

“There wasn't any use in wasting my breath asking, because I knew you'd tell me without asking.”

“Well, this is it: I'm going to feed the motormen and conductors. I got the idea yesterday when I was coming up from Louisville by trolley, when I saw the poor fellows eating such miserable lunches out of tin buckets with everything hot that ought to be cold and cold that ought to be hot. I heard them talking about it and complaining and the notion struck me. I went up and sat by the men and asked them how they would like to have a supper handed them every evening, because it seems it is the night meal they miss most, and they nearly threw a fit with joy. I'm to begin this very day.”

Mrs. Buck threw up her hands in despair. “Judy, you just shan't do any such thing.”

"Now, Mother, honey, you said you'd help and the men are not bringing any supper from home and you surely wouldn't have them go hungry."

"But you said I would not have to hurry."

"And neither will you. You can take your own time and I'll do the hurrying. I only have two suppers to hand out this evening, but I bet you in a week I'll be feeding a dozen men and they'll like it and pay me well and before you know it we'll be rich and we can have lots better food ourselves and even keep a servant."

"A servant! Heavens, Judith, not a wasteful servant!"

"No indeed, Mother, a saving one—one who will save us many steps and give me time to make more money than you can save. I'll give them fried chicken this evening and hashed brown potatoes and hot rolls and plum jam and buttermilk. The radishes are up and big enough to eat and so are the young onions. All conductors eat onions. They do it to keep people from standing on the back platform. I am certainly glad the line came through our place and we have a stop so near us. I'll have to order a dozen baskets with nice, neat covers and big enough to hold plates and cups and saucers. Thank goodness we have enough china to go around what with the Buck leavings and the Knight savings. I'm going to get some five and ten cent store silver and a great gross of paper napkins. I tell you, Mother, I'm going to do this up in style."

Mrs. Buck groaned out something about waste and sadly began paring potatoes, although it was then quite early in the forenoon and the trolleyman's supper was not to be served until six-thirty.

"That child'll wear herself out," she said, not to herself but to an old blue hen who was scratching around the hollyhocks, clucking loudly. The hen had a motherly air, having launched so many families, and Mrs. Buck felt instinctively she might sympathize with her.

"Thank goodness I ain't got but one to worry about," she continued as the repeated clucks brought Old Blue's brood around her. "Now just look at that poor old hen! I wonder if she'd rather be a hen and have so many large families to raise or if she wishes she'd been a rooster and maybe been fried in her youth."

Deep thinking was too much for Mrs. Buck. She stopped peeling potatoes and fell into a brown study. The side porch was a pleasant place to sit and dream. Judith had sorted out her wares and stored them in the back of her blue car. She had caught two chickens and dressed them and set a sponge for the hot rolls. She had promised herself the pleasure of serving the motorman and conductor a trial supper whose excellence she was sure would bring in dozens of orders.

A whirr from the barn and in a moment Judith was off and away, leaving a cloud of dust behind her.

"No hurry about the potatoes!" she called as she passed the house, and then her voice trailed off with, "I'll be back by and by."

"Just like the old woman on a broomstick in Mother Goose," Mrs. Buck informed the hen and then since there was no hurry about the potatoes she fell to dreaming again. It was very peaceful on the shady porch with that whirlwind of a Judy gone for several hours on one of her crazy peddling jaunts. What a girl she was for plunging! Again the mother wondered where she came from and for the ten thousandth time agreed with herself that it must be the blood of the Norse sailor cropping out in her energetic daughter.

"It might have been the Bucks way back yonder somewhere. Certainly she didn't get any up-and-doing from old Dick Buck or my poor husband." Mrs. Buck always thought and spoke of her husband as her poor husband. That was because he had died in the first year of their marriage. Perhaps a merciful Providence had taken him off before he had time to develop to any great extent the traits that made his father, old Dick Buck, a by-word in the county as being the laziest and most altogether no-account white man in Kentucky.

Her thoughts drifted back to her childhood in New England. She could barely remember the old white farmhouse with its faded green shutters that rattled so dismally in the piercing winds that seemed to single out the Knight house as it swept down between the hills. She recalled vividly the discussion carried on between her parents in regard to their mode of moving West—whether by wagon or rail—and the final decision to go by wagon because in that way they might save not only railroad fare but the bony team. Furniture was packed ready for shipment and stored in a neighbor's barn until they were sure in just what part of the West they would settle. California had been their goal, but Kentucky seemed far enough. They had stopped for a while in Ryeville with an old neighbor from New England and, hearing of a farm owned by one Dick Buck that was to be sold for taxes, they determined to abandon the journey to California and put what savings they had on this farm.

The mortgage went with the farm. That Ezra Knight bargained for, but what he had not bargained for was that old Dick Buck and his son, young Dick, also were included in the purchase. They lived in a two-room log house, a little behind the site Ezra had selected for his own domicile. This was the natural place to build, since the land sloped gently from it, giving a proper drainage, and then the well was already there and a wonderfully good well it was.

The new house was built, the plan following the old house they had left in Connecticut as closely as possible, but still old Dick Buck stayed on in his log cabin. Every day he told Ezra Knight he was planning to move, but always some unforeseen event would arise to make it necessary for him to postpone his departure. The houses were not fifty feet apart, the back yard of the New

England cottage serving as a front yard to the cabin. The days stretched into weeks, the weeks into months. Ezra grew impatient and the old Dick took to his bed with a mysterious malady that defied the skill of the country doctor. Mrs. Knight, a kindly soul, ministered to his wants, saying she couldn't let a dog suffer if he was a neighbor. The months stretched into years. Every time Ezra approached the one time owner of the farm on the subject of his finding some other place of abode, old Dick had an attack of his mysterious malady and Ezra would have to give up for the time being.

In the meantime young Dick was growing into a likely lad and little Prudence Knight had let down her skirts and put up her hair. Dick was employed on the Knight farm, and what was more natural than he should take his meals with them? Old Dick found it equally natural that he should also make one at the frugal board. When Ezra died, which he did ten years after he moved to Kentucky, old Dick and young Dick kindly offered to sit up with the corpse. The bereaved wife made the bed in the low-ceilinged attic room for them and what more natural than they should stay on? Stay on they did until young Dick and Prudence were married; until young Dick died. Then old Dick stayed on and Mrs. Knight died and his daughter-in-law and the little flame-haired Judith were left to fend for themselves.

After the death of Mrs. Knight of course leaving was impossible. Old Dick even spoke of himself as the sole support of his daughter-in-law and her little Judith. He began to look upon hunting and fishing as a duty and seemed to feel that they would have been destitute without his occasional donation of a small string of perch or a rabbit. Mrs. Knight tolerated him because she was used to him. Judith had a real affection for the old man and, when he died, mourned for him sincerely. To be sure he had been a very untidy old person who had never done a day's work in all his life but at least he had a nimble wit which had appealed to the child.

After his death Judith trapped rabbits and caught fish. She did many things besides, however, as by that time family funds were so low and the farm so unproductive it was necessary for some member of the family to begin to make money. She was fourteen at the time her grandfather died—a slim long-legged girl giving promise of the beauty that the old soldiers and the drummer on the Rye House porch acknowledged later on. Even then the wire-spring energy was hers that still puzzled her mother—energy and an ever-present determination to get ahead. Sometimes she caught enough fish to sell a few. Sometimes she carried rabbits into the town for sale. In blackberry season she was an indefatigable picker. She went in for chickens and had steady customers in Louisville for her guaranteed eggs. School was looked upon as part of the business of getting ahead. Nothing in the way of weather daunted her. She went through the high school with flying colors and got a medal for not having missed a single day in four years.

At nineteen she was teaching school for eight months of the year and the other four peddling toilet articles and a few side lines and now planning to feed the motormen on the interurban trolleys.

"Well, well! I guess she got it from the Norse sailor," sighed Mrs. Buck picking up another potato.

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## CHAPTER V

### Uncle Billy's Diplomacy

The hall bedroom at Buck Hill was not such a small room, except in comparison with the other rooms, which were enormous. There was plenty of space in it for Miss Ann and a reasonable amount of luggage, but not for Miss Ann and three trunks and the numerous bags and bundles and boxes, which Billy stowed away, endeavoring to make the place as comfortable as possible for his beloved mistress.

"I'll unstrap yo' trunks an' we kin git unpacked an' then I'll tote the empties up in the attic 'ginst the time we 'cides ter move on," he said, looking sadly at Miss Ann as she sank listlessly in a chair. Miss Ann allowed herself to be listless in the presence of Billy, and Billy alone. At the sound of a step on the stairs she stiffened involuntarily. Nobody must find Ann Peyton slouching or down-hearted. It was only Mildred going up for a last look at the guest chamber, to make sure everything was in readiness for her company. She did not come to her old cousin's room so Miss Ann felt at liberty to relax once more.

"Billy, I am not going to unpack yet," she faltered. "I—I—perhaps we may have to start off again in a hurry."

"Don't say it, Miss Ann! We won't never be called on ter depart from Buck Hill 'til we's good an' ready—not whilst Marse Bob Bucknor's prodigy is livin', an' Mr. Jeff the spitin' image of his gran'dad. I's sho Miss Milly done put you in this pretty lil' room kase she thought you'd like it, bein' so handy to the stairs an' all, an' the windy right over the baid so's you kin lay an' look out at the trees an' flowers—an' if there ain't a wishteria vine a comin' in the casement an' twinin' aroun' jes' like a pixture. I tell you Miss Ann, this here room becomes you powerful much. I

wonder they ain't never give it ter you befo'. It's a heap mo' homey like than the gues' chamber an' I'm thinkin' it's agonter be quieter an' cooler an' much mo' habitationable."

"Yes, Billy, I'm sure it will be." There was a plaintive suggestion of tears in her voice.

"Now, Miss Ann, you git in yo' wropper an' lay down a spell an' I'm gonter fotch you a cup er tea. You's plum tuckered out what with sech a early start an' mo'n likely no sleep las' night. You ain't called on ter be a botherin' yo' little haid 'bout nothin'. Jes' you res' yo'se'f an' after you rests you kin come down on the po'ch an' git the air."

If he had been a mammy coaxing a child Billy's tone could not have been more gentle or loving. He busied himself unstrapping the trunks and valises and then hurried off for the cup of tea, declaring he would be back in a moment although he well knew that a trial of will with Aunt Em'ly lay before him. Tea and toast he determined to have for his mistress—if over the cook's dead body. Aunt Em'ly was queen of the kitchen and nothing irritated her more than having extra food to prepare.

"Let 'em eat they victuals when they's served, three times a day without no stint or savin' an' not be peckin' in between times," she hurled at poor old Billy when he meekly demanded a tray for the hall bedroom.

"I'll fix it myself, Sis Em'ly, an' I won't make a mite er dirt. Miss Ann air plum flabbergasted what with sech a long trip an' no breakfas'."

"I thought you done boas' you et at a hotel," sniffed the old woman. "How come she air hongry fer tea an' toas' if she done et at a hotel."

"Sho—sho—but you see it done got jolted down an' Miss Ann—Please, Sis Em'ly. I ain't a arskin' nothin' fer myse'f, but jes' for my Miss Ann. You done won out consarnin' gues' chambers an' hall bedrooms so you mought be willin' ter give a po' tired lady a cup er tea."

Aunt Em'ly was really a very kind person, but there was something about old Billy's long beard tied up in innumerable plaits, his bow legs and general air of superiority, that had always irritated her. For years she had been held in the subjection of politeness by this unwelcome guest by the attitude of her white people to his mistress, but now the barriers were down and Mrs. Bucknor had openly expressed her impatience at this too-frequent visitor and had been persuaded by her daughters to give Miss Ann the hall room, no longer need she assume cordiality to the old servant. Of course she intended to make the tea for Miss Ann but she also intended to be as disagreeable as possible while the kettle boiled.

The old man sat meekly in the corner of the kitchen, watching Aunt Em'ly while she scalded the small Rebecca pot and measured out the tea. He was glad to see that she put in an extra spoonful as that meant that he too might find some much-needed refreshment. She made quite a stack of toast and buttered it generously, although all the time she grumbled and frowned.

"Here, take it, an' git out'n my kitchen. I don't much mo'n git the breakfus dishes washed befo' I haster begin gittin' dinner an' if I's gonter have ter be a stoppin' every five minutes ter fix trays I like ter know when I will git through."

"Thank you, Sis Em'ly, thank you!" cried old Billy, seizing the coveted tray and making a hasty exit. "Her bark air wus'n her bite," he chuckled, "an' I do hope Miss Ann ain't gonter take away her appletite for dinner by eatin' all this toas' an' drinkin' this whole pot er tea, kase I tell you now ol' Billy's stomic air done stuck to his back with emptiness."

The tea and toast did put heart in the weary travelers. Miss Ann left half the simple feast for Billy, commanding him to go sit in the corner of the room and devour his share.

"Now I'm gonter rub down my hosses an' wash the ca'ige, and if you's got any little odd jobs fer me ter do I'll mosey back this way arter dinner. Praise Gawd, the Buck Hill folks has dinner in the middle of the day, an' plenty of it. These here pick-up, mid-day canned salmon lunches air bad enough for the white folks but by the time they gits ter the niggers th'ain't nothin' lef but the can. I hear tell the young ladies air 'spectin' of comp'ny so I reckon you'll be a needin' yo' sprigged muslin ter take the shine out'n all the gatherin'. I'm a gonter press it fer you, even if a hot iron air arskin' a big favor with some er these free niggers."

"Oh, Billy, you needn't bother to press my gown. It makes very little difference what I wear. I don't believe I can appear this evening."

"Miss Ann, air you sick? Ain't yo' tea picked you up none?"

"No, Billy, I'm not sick. I'm just so miserable. I'm beginning to see that we are no longer wanted—even here at Buck Hill." The old woman's voice quavered piteously. "They used to want us—everywhere. At least, if they didn't they pretended they did. I don't know when it started—this drawing back—this feeling we are a burden. When did it begin, Billy?"

"'Tain't never begun. You's jes' so blue-blooded you is sensitive like, Miss Ann. You is wanted mo'n ever. You-all's kin is proud ter own you. You air still the beauty of the fambly, Miss Ann. I knows, kase I done seed every shemale mumber of the race er Peytons an' Bucknors an' all. Th'ain't never a one what kin hol' a can'le ter you. Don't you go ter throwin' off on my Miss Ann or you'll be havin' ol' Billy ter fight. I ain't seed nothin' in this county ter put long side er you, less'n it wa' that pretty red-headed gal what went whizzin' by us up yonder on the pike in a blue ortermobubble. I ain't knowin' who she air but one thing that made her so pretty wa' that I member the time when you wa' jes' like her. She turned her head aroun' ter look at us an' she give me sech a start I pretty nigh fell off'n my box."

"I ain't meanin' no disrespect ter Marse Bob an' Miss Milly's daughters, but they ain't nothin' by the side er that there young gal what dusted us this mornin'. The bes'-lookin' one er their daughters is Mr. Jeff. He air sho growed ter a likely young man. He air certainly kind an' politeful too. Didn't he say pintedly he wa' glad ter see you? Didn't he ketch a holt an' help me tote ev'y las' one er these here trunks up here? When the young marster air so hospitle I don't see whe'fo' you gits notions in yo' haid."

"Perhaps you are right, Billy," and Miss Ann again held up her head. She must not let herself slump. The will that had carried her through all the long years of visiting must carry her still. She had demanded and hence received homage and respect from her kinsmen for two generations and she must continue to do it. It would be fatal at this point to show weakness or truculence. She had been and intended to be always the honored guest at the various homes that she visited. The unfortunate occurrence at Cousin Betty Throckmorton's was to be ignored—forgotten. Billy was right; she must dress with care. The matter of the hall bedroom must be treated lightly and accepted as a compliment. It wasn't as though she had been put out of the guest chamber. She knew in her heart that in times that were past any youthful visitors expected at Buck Hill must have made way for her, but she did not acknowledge it to herself or to Billy.

She shook out the sprigged muslin and gave it to the old man to press. Then, with meticulous care, she began the business of unpacking. It was with some irritation that she found only the top drawer of the bureau empty. In the other drawers Mrs. Bucknor had put away sundry articles which she had forgotten about—remnants of cloth, old ribbons and laces and photographs. The hall room was used only when there was an overflow of guests and only transient visitors put there. For transients one drawer was sufficient. In the wardrobe there hung an old hunting suit of Jeff's and several dancing frocks belonging to Mildred and Nan, that had been temporarily discarded to await future going over by the seamstress.

"They might have spared me this," Miss Ann muttered, as she endeavored to make hanging room for her voluminous skirts.

She snatched the offending garments from the hooks and put them in a pile on the floor. Then she pulled out the lower bureau drawers and dumped the contents on top of the old hunting suit and dancing frocks.

"There! I shall give them to understand I am not to be treated with ignominy. I am Ann Peyton. I have always been treated with consideration and I always intend to be."

The old eyes flashed and the faded cheeks flushed. She gave the pile of debris a vicious little kick. The blow dislodged from the mass a small, old-fashioned daguerreotype. There was something about the little picture that was familiar. She stooped and picked it up. It was her own likeness, taken at seventeen, a slender, charming girl whose expression gave one to understand that she could not be still much longer. She would have been a better subject for a motion-picture camera than the invention of Daguerre. Youth looked into the eyes of age and Miss Ann put her hands over her own poor face as though to hide from youth the ravages of time. It seemed to her that the young Ann looked out on the old Ann and said, "What have you done with me? Where am I? You needn't tell me that you and I are one and the same."

Slowly she walked to the bureau and slowly she raised her eyes to the mirror and then gazed long and sadly at her face.

"Ann Peyton, you are a fool. You have always been a fool. It is too late to be anything else now and you will go on being a fool until the end of time. This child had more sense than you have."

Reverently she placed the little daguerreotype in her handkerchief box. It was the picture she had given Bob Bucknor, the father of the present owner of Buck Hill and the grandfather of Jeff. He had prized it once but now it was thrown aside and forgotten by all. She then stooped over and gathered up the articles on the floor and carefully put them back in drawers and wardrobe. She washed her face and hands, straightened her auburn wig, changed her traveling dress to a more suitable one and then sailed majestically down the stairs.

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## CHAPTER VI

### A Question of Kinship

Jefferson Bucknor had been away from home, except for flying visits, for five years. Like most of the young men of his age, the World War had broken in on his college course. He had gone into training at the first suggestion of his country's need. He was then in his junior year at the University of Virginia. Law had been his goal and at the close of the war he hastened back to finish what he had begun. Determined to hang out his shingle as soon as possible, he had studied summer and winter until he got his degree. He was now at home, taking a much-needed rest and getting acquainted again with his family. The sisters had grown up while he was away, and his father and mother were turning gray. He had only arrived the day before the coming of

Cousin Ann, and could not help regretting that his sisters were having this house party. It would have been pleasant to be quietly at home for a while.

"When does your company come?" Jeff asked Mildred. Cousin Ann had joined them on the front porch, where the family awaited the summons to dinner. "Mildred and Nan are having a swarm of guests," he explained to the old cousin.

"Ah, indeed!" said Cousin Ann.

"Some of them come at six-thirty and the rest at seven from Louisville. We are to meet them at the trolley. You'll go with us, won't you, Jeff?" asked Mildred.

"Of course, if you need me."

"Need you! I should say we do need you. Why, you are to fall madly in love with Jean Roland. We've fixed it all up. She's rich and beautiful."

"Yes, and we put linen sheets on the bed in the guest chamber," broke in Nan. "Jean Roland is used to grand things, but she'll have to sleep three in the bed and so will all of us—now."

"Hush!" from Mrs. Bucknor. There was an embarrassed silence. Cousin Ann's backbone stiffened. Mrs. Bucknor looked reproachfully at her daughters, who giggled helplessly. It was a relief to have the head of the house arrive at that moment.

Mr. Bucknor was a hale and hearty man of fifty, florid and handsome, slightly dictatorial in manner, but easily influenced by his wife, who was all softness and gentleness. He was generous and hospitable, priding himself on keeping up the reputation in which Buck Hill had gloried in the past—that of an open house with bed and board for all of the blood. He greeted his Cousin Ann with a cordiality that might have been balm to her wounded feelings had she not been aware that that was Cousin Bob's manner to everybody.

"And where do you come from, Cousin Ann?" he demanded. "I hope all were well. Cousin Betty Throckmorton's? Well, well! I thought Sister Sue was to have the honor of your company. It will keep! It will keep! Measles at Cousin Betty's? Heavens! I hope none of them will go off in pneumonia. You must give us a nice long visit. Always glad to have you, Cousin Ann. Glad to have any of my kin come and stay as long as they choose. Blood is thicker than water, I say, and blue blood is thicker than red blood."

"Thank you, cousin," was all Miss Ann could say.

"By the way, Mildred, speaking of falling in love, who is that pretty girl I saw on the trolley yesterday?" asked Jeff. "I can't remember ever having seen her around here before, but then the girls have all grown beyond me since I left home. She has what some people call auburn hair, but I like to call it red, although it had lots of gold in it. She got on the last stop before you get into Ryeville. Seemed to know everybody on the car—even the motorman and conductor. At least, I saw her chatting with them—the ones who were relieved at the last switch and were eating their suppers. She was as lively as a cricket—was just bubbling over with energy—"

"Oh, I know who that was," said Mildred. "It sounds like that forward Judith Buck. She has no idea of her place. I never saw such a girl. She rides around the country in a ridiculous looking little home made blue Ford with a spring wagon back and puts on all the airs of sporting a Stutz racer. She never stops for anybody but just whizzes on by. Sometimes she even bows to us, although she gets mighty little encouragement from me, I can tell you."

Suddenly there flashed upon Miss Ann's inward eye a picture of a bright-haired girl in a little blue car who had passed her coach only that morning, and with the picture came the remembrance of Uncle Billy's words: "I ain't seed nothin' in this county ter put 'long side er you lessen it wa' that pretty red-headed gal what went whizzin' by us up yonder on the pike in a blue ortermobubble." She remembered that he had declared the girl looked as she had looked in her youth.

Mildred continued her diatribe concerning the lively Judith: "Surely you remember her, Jeff. She used to come here selling blackberries when she was a kid—a little barefooted girl and as pert as you please even then. After old Dick Buck died she used to trap rabbits and bring them here for sale and sometimes fish. It always made me mad for Aunt Em'ly to encourage her by making Mother buy the things. I think poor persons should be taken care of all right but they should know their place."

"But what is her place?" asked Jeff, a flush slowly spreading over his handsome, rather swarthy countenance.

"Well, I should say her place was at the back door," declared Mildred. "Old Dick Buck's granddaughter needn't expect to get any social recognition from me."

"Me either!" chimed in Nan.

"Of course not!" said Mrs. Bucknor. Mr. Bucknor was reading the morning paper and seemed oblivious to the conversation.

"She doesn't look to me like a girl who cared a whit for social recognition," said Jeff quietly, although his lip had a curl that showed his disapproval of his family's snobbishness.

"Don't you believe it," said Mildred, with rather more violence than the subject under discussion warranted. "I went to high school with her for a year and then thank goodness Father sent me to a private school. She was the greatest smart Aleck you ever saw. Had herself elected president of the class and was always showing off, getting medals for never being late and never

missing a single day of school since she started. She was always acting in plays and getting up class entertainments for devastated Europe. Some of the girls in Ryeville wanted to ask her to join our club, but I just told them they could count me out if they did any such thing."

"Me too!" said Nan.

"And I tell you Buck Hill is too nice a place for parties for the set to let Nan and me out. She's got a place as teacher now, out in the county near Clayton. I can't abide her. She even had the impertinence to tell some of the girls once that the original name of her family was the same as ours—that her old grandfather, Dick Buck, had told her so. The idea! Next she'll be claiming kin with us Bucknors."

"What's that? What's that?" asked Mr. Bucknor, dropping his paper. "Who claims kin with us?"

"Old Dick Buck's granddaughter. Isn't it ridiculous?"

"Not at all," spoke Cousin Ann, coming into the conversation as a ship in full sail might break into a fleet of fishing boats. "Not ridiculous at all. In fact, quite the proper thing for the young woman in question to do. She, too, may have pride of birth and there is no reason why she should not claim what is due her."

"But—" interrupted Mildred. Miss Ann Peyton paid no attention at all to the girl. She addressed her remarks to Jeff, who was all respectful attention.

"Yes, cousin, the Bucks are descended from the Bucknors quite as much as you or I are. I recall it all now, although I have not thought of it for many, many years. I can remember hearing my grandfather tell of a brother of his Grandfather Bucknor who, out of pure carelessness, dropped the last syllable of his name. It was in connection with a transfer of property. The deed was recorded wrongly, naming Richard Buck. He was a lazy man and rather than go to the trouble of having the matter corrected he just allowed himself to be called Richard Buck. He left Kentucky after that, but his son returned later on. My grandfather told me a slump in fortune began from that time and the Buck branch of the family has been on the downward road ever since. Perhaps, having reached the bottom, this young person is now ascending. But low or high, the fact remains that she is kin."

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed Mr. Bucknor, "I didn't dream that old tale had a word of truth in it. I've heard old Dick Buck, when he was drunk, insisting that he belonged to my family, but it sounded ridiculous on the face of it."

"Exactly!" chorused Mildred and Nan.

"However, I must look into the matter," the father continued somewhat pompously. "If the girl is kin we must claim her."

"Oh, Bob, I beg of you to do no such thing," said Mrs. Bucknor gently, laying a restraining hand lightly on her husband's arm. Her touch was soft and light but it held Bob Bucknor as effectively as iron handcuffs might have. "If this girl is as forward as Mildred and Nan say she is, it would be very embarrassing to have her constantly asserting her kinship with our girls. I am sure I do not know her at all. She is pretty and no doubt is good, but she is naturally common and evidently very pushing."

"All right, my dear, all right! You know best," responded Mr. Bucknor.

At this juncture Kizzie announced dinner, which was a relief to all of them.

"Take my arm, Cousin Ann," said Jeff gallantly.

For a moment the old woman and the young man stood looking off over the rolling meadows of blue grass. Cutting the lush green pasture lands was the white limestone turnpike. Far off in the distance a blue speck appeared on the white road. In a twinkling it grew into a car and then went whizzing by, leaving a cloud of white dust in its wake. Jeff smiled and, glancing down at his old cousin, caught an answering smile on her face.

"I'm rather glad she's kin," he whispered, and she gave his arm a tiny squeeze.

Then the thought came to him: "I wonder if she is as bold and forward as Mildred says she is. I wish she hadn't been so familiar with those motormen. That wasn't very ladylike to go up and engage them in conversation. Perhaps Mildred is right. You could hardly expect old Dick Buck's granddaughter to be very refined—but, gee, she's a good looker!"

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## CHAPTER VII

### Judith Makes a Hit

Judith reached home in time to prepare an excellent basket supper for her motormen customers. She was determined that her food should be so good it would advertise itself and every employe on the line would demand service. All of the potatoes were not peeled when she

was ready for them, but her mother's explanation was that it seemed a pity to peel potatoes because there was so much waste in that method. It really was better to cook them in the skins. Judith kissed her and laughed.

"Another time we'll cook them in their jackets, Mumsy dear, but I cleared enough money this morning to afford to waste a few potato peelings. If I have a week of such luck, I'll have to get in more supplies. The girls in this county are just eating up my vanishing cream and my liquid powder that won't rub off. I've made a great hit with my anti-kink lotion with the poor colored people. Half the female world is trying to get curled and the other half trying to get uncurled. I have got rid of dozens and dozens of marcel wavers, the steel kind that must dig into you fearfully at night, and bottle after bottle of that quince seed lotion, warranted to keep hair in curl for an all-day picnic, where it usually rains, and, if it doesn't, you fall in the creek to even up."

"Judy, you take my breath away with such talk and such goings on. I can't bear to think of your selling things to negroes. There is no telling what might happen to you if you don't look out."

Mrs. Buck had an instinctive dislike for the colored race. She never trusted them and was opposed even to employing them for farm work. She preferred the most disreputable poor white to the best negro. It was a prejudice inherited from her father and mother, who on first coming to Kentucky had done much talking about the down-trodden blacks, but being unable to understand them had never been able to get along with them.

Old Dick Buck had said of Mr. and Mrs. Ezra Knight, "They've got mighty high ideas about negroes but they ain't got a bit of use for a nigger."

Judith shared none of this prejudice. She liked colored people and they liked her and respected her. As she went speeding along the roads in her little blue car, there was never a darkey old or young who did not wish her well and bow low to her friendly greeting. Only that morning she had given a lift to a bent old man who was on his way to Mr. Big Josh Bucknor's, and thereby saved him many a weary mile.

"I'd take you all the way, Uncle Peter, but I can't trust my left hind tire up that bumpy lane," Judith explained.

"Ain't it the truf, Missy? If Mr. Big Josh would jes stop talkin' 'bout it an' buil' hisse'f a road! He been lowin' he wa' gonter git busy an' backgammon that lane fer twenty-five years an he ain't never tech it yit. That's the reason they done sent fer me. The ladies in the fambly air done plum wo' out what with cookin' fer comp'ny an' washin' up an' all. It looks like comp'ny air the only thing what don't balk at that there lane. They done sint a hurry call fer ol' Peter, kase they got a notion Miss Ann Peyton air on the way. They phoned down ter the sto' fer me ter put my foot in the pike an' come erlong. They done got a phome message from way over yonder at Throckmorton's that dus' from Miss Ann's coach wa' a risin'. They ain't mo'n got shet er a batch er visitings when here come news that Miss Ann air a comin'. The ladies air sho' peeved an' they done up an' said they ain't a gonter stay home an' Mr. Big Josh tell 'em ter go 'long if they's a min' an' he'n me'll look arfter Miss Ann."

"But she is at Buck Hill," said Judith. "I am sure of it. I saw her carriage turning in there this morning. Poor old lady!"

"I ain't seein' that she air so po'."

"It seems very pitiful to me for her never to be wanted, always coming and always having to pack up and leave. I'd love to have her come visit me. You know she and I are of the same blood, Uncle Peter—or did you know it?"

"Land's sake, Missy, I mus' a made a mistake. I been a thinkin' all along that I wa' a ridin' with ol' Dick Buck's gran'baby. You mus' scuse me."

"So you are, Uncle Peter, I am Judith Buck, but I have just as good a right to be Judith Bucknor as Mr. Bob Bucknor or Mr. Big Josh Bucknor, or any of them."

"Well, bless Bob! Do tell!" was all the old man had time to ejaculate, as they came to the mouth of the lane, bumpy in dry weather and muddy in wet, and he must leave the swiftly moving car and again trust to his old limbs to carry him on his way. His step was lighter, however, as he was the bearer of good tidings to all the white folks at Mr. Big Josh's. Miss Ann Peyton was not coming, but was making a visit at Buck Hill. He was full of other news, too, but was not quite sure whether it would be so welcome to the family.

"Not that she ain't mo' likelier than mos' er the young genderation," he muttered.

Judith had a slap-dash impressionistic manner of cooking all her own, following no rules or recipes, but with an unerring instinct that produced results. She said she cooked by ear. Whatever her method, the motormen were vastly pleased with the hot suppers she brought them and the word was passed that the pretty red-headed girl at the last stop before you got to Ryeville would furnish a basket supper at a reasonable figure and soon almost every man on the line was eager to become one of her customers.

The first supper was difficult because she was determined to have it absolutely perfect, and her mother would insist upon getting in her way, offering various suggestions that might save a tenth of a cent.

"I tell you, Mumsy, I am not saving but making. Please sit down in this chair by the table, while I behave like the man in the lunatic asylum who thought he was a steam engine. I'm afraid I

might get off the track and run over you. If you just stay still in one spot I'll get through. I can't go over you, I can't go around you and I can't go under you.

"There's the whistle blowing for two stops before ours and I'm ready. Hurrah for a fortune, Mumsy!" and with a kiss Judith was off, bearing a basket in one hand and a tin cooler of buttermilk in the other.

The Bucks' farm was a triangle, bounded on two sides by converging roads and the other by the pasture lands of Buck Hill. The trolley line skirted the back of the farm, but turned sharply toward Ryeville before reaching the corner where the two roads met. The track curved about five hundred feet beyond the location of the stop where Judith had promised to meet the car with the suppers. There was a short cut from the rear of the house and Judith always took short cuts. Through the orchard, down the hill, across a stream, up the hill, skirting a blackberry thicket, through a grove of beeches, dark and peaceful with lengthening shadows falling on mossy banks, went the girl. She stopped a moment in the grove and looked out across the fertile country—everywhere more fertile than the Buck farm but nowhere more beautiful, she thought.

"I wish I had time to stop here longer," she sighed, putting down her basket and patting a great beech tree. "Thank goodness the Bucks were too lazy to cut you down and the Knights too slow." The honk of an automobile horn startled her. A seven-seated passenger car was coming down the road and in the distance could be seen the approaching trolley.

"Got to run after all," she cried. "That's what I get for making love to a tree." She flew along the path by the fence and reached the small station before the trolley slowed down for the stop. Breathless but triumphant she stood, large basket in one hand, buttermilk cooler in the other.

The big motor car, which was driven by Jeff Bucknor, was parked by the roadside. From it emerged Mildred and Nan in all the glory of fresh and frilly lawns and the latest in hats from a Louisville milliner.

"Now, Jeff," said Mildred, "you must get out and meet the bunch, and be sure you make no mistake. You are to fall in love with Jean Roland and no one else. She is the smallest and the darkest and much the best dressed. I do hope and trust it will be love at first sight. She is already just wild about you, without ever even seeing you, and when she sees you she is sure to topple over completely."

"What nonsense," scoffed Jeff.

Mildred ignored the presence of Judith Buck, although they could not help seeing her, since her blue cotton dress and her red gold hair made a spot of color that would surely have affected the optics of a stone blind person. Her color was naturally high, and frying chicken over a hot wood stove and sprinting for the trolley had added to it. Nan did worse than ignore the presence of her neighbor, as she openly nudged her sister and whispered audibly:

"Look at her! What do you suppose she has in her basket?"

"Hot rolls, fried chicken, hashed brown potatoes, damson jam, radishes and young onions. Can't you smell 'em?" answered Judith quite casually, as though announcing a menu at a restaurant. At the same time she smiled brightly and looked at the Misses Bucknor with no trace of either embarrassment or resentment. Jeff, who was plainly mortified at Nan's rudeness, laughed in spite of himself.

One of the things that irritated Mildred more than anything else about Judith Buck was that she seemed never to take offense, nor even to know when an insult was intended. Sometimes she would wear for a moment a quizzical smile, but usually she presented what she called a duck's back to intentional slights. Having satisfied Nan's curiosity concerning what was in her basket, she stepped forward to the platform and swung the cooler of buttermilk back and forth in the manner of a brakeman with a red lantern.

"I think they will stop here anyhow, Miss Buck," said Jeff. "Do let me help you on with your basket. I know it is heavy. I am Jefferson Bucknor. Perhaps you don't remember me, but I have seen you often when you were a child. I've been away from home a long time."

While Jeff was introducing himself to Judith the trolley had slowed up and stopped. Three young women and two young men were standing on the platform ready to alight. They were part of the house party and delighted greetings were exchanged between them and Mildred and Nan.

One of the young men, catching sight of Judith, gave only a hurried handshake to his hostesses and then sauntered towards the end of the platform where the girl in blue cotton was standing. He was a handsome youth, dressed in the latest and most pronounced style. His manner and general carriage were indefinably impudent. He came quite close to Judith and peered into her face and only turned to join the others at a sharp call from Mildred.

"Tom Harbison, come here this minute!"

At Jeff's proffers of assistance Judith had smilingly thanked him. "But I'm not getting on myself—only my basket and can of milk," she said.

"Then I'll help them on," said Jeff, although Judith assured him she was quite able to do it herself.

"Yonder she is!" the conductor shouted to the motorman. "I knew she would come. I never knew a red-headed gal to disappoint a fellow yet."

Eagerly the basket was seized by the hungry men and loud was their shout of joy over the can of ice-cold buttermilk.

"You'll find a note inside explaining how you can phone me if you want extras," called Judith. "See you to-morrow at the same time. Be sure and bring back my basket and dishes."

The trolley moved off, leaving the house party grouped at one end of the platform, Judith and Jeff at the other. It was plain that something was vexing Mildred and the smart young beauty by her side. Jeff, however, was perfectly unconscious of being the cause of their annoyance.

"Thank you ever so much," said Judith. "You are a grand assistant to the chief cook."

"I am delighted to have helped you, but please tell me what on earth you mean by bringing food to motormen."

"Mean? Why, it's my business. I am caterer-in-ordinary to the six-thirty trolley and perhaps others," she laughed and looked him squarely in the eyes. For a moment, in spite of the persistent demand from Mildred for him to hurry, Jeff gazed into hers. He flushed a little and then with a hurried good-bye joined his sisters and their guests.

Mildred managed to have Jean Roland occupy the front seat by the driver. Jean was pretty, well-dressed and no doubt was fascinating. Jeff remembered he was supposed to fall in love with her at first sight. Therefore he looked at her critically. She was all Mildred had promised, but Jeff found himself gazing over the head of his companion at a slender figure in blue gingham, disappearing over the hill.

It was a distinct annoyance to him that Tom Harbison should lean far out of the back of the car and wave his forty-dollar panama hat at Judith Buck's retreating figure, and even a greater annoyance that Judith should turn around when she got to the brow of the hill and see the fine hat doing obeisance to her.

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## CHAPTER VIII

### Cousin Ann Looks Backward

Mildred was right. Buck Hill was a perfect place for parties—of all kinds. There was a long, broad hall leading into double parlors on one side and on the other the dining-room and sitting-room. The satiny floors—ideal for dancing—reflected in their polished surfaces rare pieces of old mahogany. French windows opened on the porches, where comfortable wicker chairs and hammocks were plentiful.

The garden to the south of the house was noted in a county famous for gardens. Mr. Bucknor prided himself on having every kind of known rose that would grow in the Kentucky climate. The garden had everything in it a garden should have—marble benches, a sun dial, a pergola, a summer house, a box maze and a fountain around which was a circle of stone flagging with flowering portulacca springing up in the cracks. The shrubs were old and huge, forming pleasant nooks for benches—now a couple of syringa bushes meeting overhead, now lilacs, white and purple extending an invitation to lovers to come sit on the bench. Oh, Buck Hill was a place for lovers! The garden a place of all places!

The house party was in full swing. Five guests had arrived on the six-thirty and three more on the seven o'clock trolley and a car of six had driven over from Lexington in time for supper. The mansion was filled and running over, but the overflow could always be taken care of in "The Office," a cottage near the house, a building quite common in old southern homes, often set aside for young male visitors.

Cousin Ann had been lying down all afternoon in response to the earnest pleadings of old Billy. He had pressed the sprigged muslin and it hung on a hook behind the door in readiness for the mistress. Then he brought her a pitcher of water, fresh from the well, and a funny little tight bouquet of verbenas.

"I thought you mought w'ar 'em in yo' ha'r, Miss Ann," he said. "I 'member how you uster always w'ar verbeny in yo' ha'r."

"So I did, Billy." Miss Ann raised her hand to her hair, but quickly dropped it, remembering suddenly that her own snowy locks were exposed to view. She did not relish having even old Billy see her without her wig. She drew a scarf over her head and Billy turned his away, pretending he had not seen what she did not want him to see.

"Now you dress up pretty, Miss Ann, an' 'member th'ain't gonter be nary pusson here what kin hol' a can'le to you."

"Have they come yet, Billy?"

"Some air come an' mo' air comin', so I reckon you'd bes' rise an' shine, Miss Ann. Kin I he'p you none?"

Such was the old man's devotion to his mistress that he would gladly have served her as lady's maid had he been called on to do so.

"I hope the fuss these young folks kick up ain't gonter 'sturb you none," he said as he opened the door and shrieks of gay laughter floated up from the hall below.

The business of dressing was a serious one for Miss Ann Peyton. In the first place she was exquisitely neat and particular and every article of clothing must be exactly right. Her clothes were old and worn and every time she dressed some break was discovered that must be darned. Her hoop skirt was ever in need of repair, with tapes that had broken from their moorings or strings that had come loose. On this evening she discovered a small hole in her little satin slipper that must be adroitly mended with court plaster. The auburn wig must be combed and curled. A touch of rouge must be rubbed on the poor old cheeks. The Peyton pearls must be taken from the strong box—a necklace, earrings, breastpin and tiara. When all was over Miss Ann really did look lovely. With the dignity and carriage that any queen might have envied she swept down the broad stairway.

"Heavens! Mildred, why didn't you let us know you were to have a fancy dress ball?" cried Jean Roland, and all of the gay young things gathered in the broad hall looked up as Miss Ann descended. To most of them she was but a figure of fun.

"Oh, that's nobody but old Cousin Ann Peyton," explained Mildred. "She's our chronic visitor. She always dresses like a telephone doll."

Miss Ann heard both remarks, but gave no sign of annoyance, except to hold her head with added dignity. A chronic visitor could not afford to show resentment at the thoughtless rudeness of young persons. It seemed to the old lady that young cousins in all the homes where she visited were growing more and more outspoken and rude and less and less considerate of her. She still deemed it her right to be honored guest wherever she chose to bestow the privilege of her company, although her self-esteem had had many a quiet dig and a few hard knocks in the recent months.

Sometimes the thought came to Cousin Ann that the young cousins were perhaps taking their cue from the older generation. Were the older ones quite as polite and cordial as they had been? Of course one might expect brusqueness from Betty Throckmorton, but was there not a change of manner even here at Buck Hill—not just rudeness from Mildred, who was nothing but a spoiled child, but from Mr. and Mrs. Bucknor themselves? Then there was Big Josh and Little Josh, both of whom had made excuses about having her and had assured her they would write for her to come to them later on and she had heard from neither of them.

She paused a moment and looked down on the happy young people. She wondered if they realized how happy they were or if it would be necessary to be old to appreciate the blessing of merely being young. Suddenly a picture of her youth came back to her with a poignancy that almost hurt. It was in that very hall and she was standing on those very stairs—perhaps in that self-same spot. There was a house party at Buck Hill and she had come from Peyton only that morning in a brand new carriage with Billy driving the spanking pair of nags. Billy was young then, but so trustworthy that her father had been willing to let him take charge of his daughter. She remembered the rejoicing in the family when she arrived. How they gathered around her and embraced her! Robert Bucknor, the father of the present owner, was then a young man. How gentle and tender he was with her, how courtly and kind!

When he saw her standing alone on the stairs looking down on the assembled company he had sprung up the steps, two at a time, and taken her hand in his: "Oh, Cousin Ann, how beautiful you are! If I could only feel that the time might come when this would be your home—yours and mine."

And she had answered, "Not yet, Cousin Robert, please don't talk about it yet," because the memory of Bert Mason, the young lover who had been killed in the war, was still too vivid for her to think of other ties. "But you are very dear to me and if ever—" Thus she had put him off.

While she had stood there talking to Robert Bucknor—young then and now old and dead and gone—Billy, with ashen face, had come to her with the news that Peyton, her beloved home, was completely destroyed by fire. She had fainted. Young ladies usually fainted in those days when overcome by emotion. How the friends and cousins rallied around her with offers of assistance! They actually quarreled about her, so eager were they for her to visit them.

"You must make your home with me."

"No, with me!"

"I must have part of her."

"My turn is next," and so on.

And then the owner of Buck Hill and his sweet wife had told her that their home was hers and she was ever to feel as free to be there as though she had been truly a daughter of the house. Then had begun the years of visiting for Ann Peyton. Her father had died a few weeks after the fire and later an only brother. She had more invitations to visit than she knew what to do with. Billy had been welcome, too, and there was always stable room for her horses and a place in the coach house for her carriage, no matter where she visited.

How many years had passed since that evening in June when she had stood in that spot and looked down on the crowd of young men and women? She dared not count, but there was the grandson of that Robert Bucknor, standing in the great hall and trying hard to pretend to be interested in what a beautiful girl was saying to him. The beautiful girl was the one who had made the remark about a fancy dress ball. The grandson of Robert Bucknor had not heard her

say it nor had he heard his sister's cruel answer, as he had come into the hall the moment afterward. Now he was plainly bored, but trying to conceal it. The girl was chattering like a magpie. Suddenly Jeff looked up and saw Miss Ann.

"Oh, Cousin Ann!" he cried, bounding up the steps, two at a time, quite as his grandfather had done on that day so many, many years ago, "how lovely you look! I'd like to dance a minuet with you." Then he gave her his arm and escorted her down the stairs. Supper was announced immediately and Jeff marched in with his aged cousin, much to the chagrin of Mildred, who had planned otherwise for her good-looking brother.

"Horrid old thing!" she said to Tom Harbison, who was dancing attendance on her. "Grabbing Jeff that way! How does she expect the men to go around if she takes one of the beaux?"

"And did you see her with flowers in her hair?" asked Nan in a stage whisper. "Verbenas!" and then a fat boy who sang tenor and passed as something of a wag sang:

"Sweet Evelina,  
Last time I seen her  
Stole a verbena  
Out of her hair."

At this all the young folks laughed. Miss Ann heard Nan's stage whisper, and felt Mildred's glance of disapproval and was quite conscious that the fat boy's song was meant to make game of her, but nothing mattered much except that Robert Bucknor's grandson, who looked so like him, had run up the steps to meet her and had told her she looked lovely and was now holding her hand tightly clasped against his warm young heart. She saw old Billy peeping from the pantry door as they entered the dining-room and she caught his glance of pride and gratification when she appeared with the young master.

"What I tell you?" he muttered. "Ain't my Miss Ann the pick er the bunch?"

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## CHAPTER IX

### The Veterans' Big Secret

"Mumsy dear," said Judith, "I'm going over to Buck Hill this morning and sell all kinds of things to my cousins and their guests."

"Judith, you are not! How can you go near those people when they treat you like the dust under their feet?"

"But, Mumsy, they don't. People can't treat you like dust under their feet unless you are beneath them, and I'm not in the least teensy weensy bit beneath the Bucknors of Buck Hill. Now they might treat me like the dust in the air—the dust they have to breathe when the wind blows—breathe that or stop breathing altogether. They might not like to breathe me in. I might be a little thick for them, but breathe me they must. I did not make myself kin to them. I just *am* kin to them. I don't know that it makes any great difference to me to know that I am. I rather like to think that, way back yonder, what is now me had something to do with building Buck Hill, because it is beautiful. The part that's me may have planned the garden. Who knows?"

"But I'm not going there to sell things because they are my cousins. I'm not going to mention such a disagreeable subject. I'm too good a salesman for that. I am merely going there because I think I might make some money. They have a house party on and when people go visiting they always forget their tooth brushes and hairpins. I don't exactly enjoy having Mildred Bucknor pretend I'm not around when I know I'm very much in evidence. She had that way with her at school and then it would have hurt me, if I had not been perfectly conscious of the fact that she couldn't tell the difference between nouns and verbs in Latin and got gender and case and tense all mixed up.

"Yes, Mumsy, I'm going to Buck Hill and clear about five dollars, even though I may have to take a good snubbing. I want to go less than ever since Jefferson Bucknor was so nice to me yesterday evening. I didn't tell you he helped boost my basket on the trolley and actually took the can of buttermilk in his own aristocratic hands and swung it on to the platform. Well, he did, and he made his sister furious—and he bored a pretty girl with whom he is supposed to fall in love—one of the house party. I don't want poor Mr. Jeff Bucknor to have to take up for me—which he is sure to do if the hammers begin to knock—but even to spare his feelings I will not quit trying to sell my wares."

"Judith, you must not lower yourself."

"I'm not lowering myself one bit, Mumsy. Just look at it this way: Suppose I had a shop in Ryeville. Wouldn't I serve any customers who came to the shop, whether they were kin and refused to admit kinship or not—whether they called me red-head, when everybody knows my hair is auburn, or not? I'd hardly refuse to sell to those persons who did not consider me their

social equal and did not ask me to house parties or to dances when my feet are just itching to dance. I'd sell to any and everybody who came in the shop. Exactly! Well, now you see I have a shop on wheels. I must go to any and every body who might have use for my wares. I'd have a very limited clientele if I stuck to those who considered me on their level and whom I considered on mine. So give me your blessing, Mumsy, and wish me well."

"Judith, how you do run on! Aren't you afraid that that Jeff Bucknor will think you are running after him?"

"Not in the least. He's not that kind of a man. I know by the way his ears are set and the way his hair grows on his forehead and the way his eyes crinkle up at the corners as though he never missed a joke. People who never miss jokes don't go around thinking other persons are running after them all the time. I know by the way he looks out of his eyes. It isn't only his eyes that look at you but there is something behind them that looks at you. I reckon if I were a sissy girl I'd say his eyes were soulful, but you see I'm not. I tell you, Mumsy, my Cousin Jeff is a powerful likely young man and I'm quite proud of him. Too bad he doesn't know he's my kin."

Mrs. Buck sighed. "I guess he wouldn't claim relationship with you if he did know. Those Bucknors of Buck Hill are a proud-stomached lot. They've been dusting me on the pike ever since I was a little girl—dusting me and never even seeing me."

"Did you ever speak to them?"

"Of course not. I was never one to put myself forward."

"Well, why should they speak to you any more than you speak to them? Aren't you as good as they are? Surely, and a great deal prettier. You are as much prettier than Mrs. Bucknor as a day lily is prettier than a cabbage rose," declared Judith.

"Oh, how you do talk, Judy! Of course, when I say they didn't ever speak I mean they never went out of their way to speak. When we had deaths over here they kind of acted neighborly like and sent word to call on them if we needed anything, but we never did, as my mother and I always saved mourning from time to time. I guess they'd have been a little more back-and-forth friendly if it hadn't have been for your Grandfather Buck. He was kind of difficult like when he was drinking and that was most times. He was either drinking or getting over drunks as a general thing. Then he was mighty lazy and shiftless."

"Poor Mumsy! You've had a right hard time with us Bucks. Grandfather Buck was so lazy he worried you to death and I'm so energetic I know I annoy you terribly. But all this talking isn't selling toilet articles to house parties. By the way, I got a 'phone message from my motormen. They want six suppers this evening. That means I must run into Ryeville and buy some more baskets and lay in provisions of all kinds. I wish I'd been triplets, or at least twins. I could accomplish so much more."

"Land sakes, Judy! Surely you do enough as it is. All six dinners at once?"

"Oh no! Two on the six, two on the six-thirty and two for the seven. I'm afraid I'll wear the path into a ditch. I'm glad to see the beets are big enough to eat and before you know it we'll have some snap beans and peas. I'm going to get a little darkey to work the garden, because I simply can't give the time for it. Besides, my time is really too valuable for digging just now. Did I tell you I had taken the contract to develop all the amateur photographic films for Baker & Bowles? I saw them about it the other day. They have an awful time getting it done right and they knew I had done a lot of that work for school, so they asked me to try. Of course I couldn't let such a chance slip and since I can do it at night I accepted. It will take only one or two evenings a week. They furnish all the chemicals and it pays very well. I'll do it through the summer anyhow, until school starts."

"What a child! What a child!" was all Mrs. Buck could say. "I don't believe even the Norse sailor could have beat her."

Again the old men on the hotel porch were treated to a sight of Judith Buck. She parked her little blue car directly across the street from the Rye House and began the business of shopping.

"What you reckon that Judy gal is up to now?" queried Judge Middleton. "I betcher she's goin' in the butcher shop."

"I betcher she ain't," said Pete Barnes for the sake of argument. "I betcher she's going in the Emporium to buy herself a blue dress."

"Maybe," ruminated Major Fitch. "I always did hold to women folks that had sense enough to wear blue. That blue that Miss Judith Buck wears is just my kind of blue too—not too light and not too dark—kinder betwixt and between, like way-off hills or—"

"Kittens' eyes," suggested Colonel Crutcher with a twinkle.

"Cat's foot! Nothin' of the kind! Anyhow, that kind of blue is mighty becomin' to Miss Judith."

They all agreed to this and when Judith appeared again with her arms laden with bundles to be stowed in the back of the car the old men called in chorus:

"Hiyer, Miss Judith?"

"Hiyer, yourselves?" she answered.

"Come over and tell us the news," they begged, and she ran across the street and perched on the railing of the Rye House, while she recounted what news she had picked up on her peddling trip of the day before.

"Uncle Peter Turner has gone over to cook and wash dishes for the ladies at Mr. Big Josh Bucknor's. They haven't had a servant for weeks. They thought Miss Ann Peyton was coming but she turned in at Buck Hill, I saw her. She has been visiting the Throckmortons and left there in a hurry. Old Aunt Minnie, over at Clayton, has just had her hundredth descendant. She had sixteen children of her own and all of them have had their share of children and grandchildren. I know it's so because I just sold one of the great-granddaughters some hair straightener and a box of flea powder and she thought of getting some talcum powder for the new baby, but decided to use flea powder instead."

The old men laughed delightedly. "Tell us some more," they demanded.

"The widow Simco, at Nine Mile House, asked me what had become of Mr. Pete Barnes. I sold her some henna shampoo and a box of bronze hairpins."

Pete grinned sheepishly, but straightened his cravat and pulled his whiskers in a way men have when complimented by the fair sex.

"How's your business?" asked Major Fitch.

"Which business?" asked Judith. "I've got so many you'll have to say which one. But all of them are coming on pretty well. I must be going. So long!" She was up and away like a blue flash.

"Now ain't she likely?" quavered old Judge Middleton. "There ain't many pretty gals like her'd stop an' gossip with a bilin' of ol' has-beens like us."

"Yes, that's the truth," said Colonel Crutcher. "Did you see Bob Bucknor's oldest girl going by in her father's car while Miss Judy was cheering us up? She had a young blood in with her—that young Harbison from Louisville. He nearly fell out of the car, rubbering at Miss Judy. That Bucknor miss hardly more than glanced this way, but she was showing the whites of her eyes in that glance. My granddaughter, Betty, was telling me only last night that the only reason Judy Buck wasn't asked to join their dancing club was that the Bucknor gals got their backs up about asking her and kind of talked them down—calling Judy common and poor white trash and such like. Betty says the girls all like her better than they do the Bucknors, but you know how it is with the folks from Buck Hill—they just naturally take the lead in social matters and nobody ever has crossed them. I wish I had a house of my own. I tell you I'd give that Judy Buck a comin' out party that would make your hair curl," declared the Colonel.

"Well, I've got a house, but it wouldn't be big enough to ask all the people I'd want to have to Miss Judy's ball," spoke up Major Fitch.

"By golly, I got a idee!" exclaimed Pete Barnes, letting his chair that had been tilted against the wall drop on all four legs and bringing his feet, which had been draped over the railing, to the floor at the same time with a resounding stamp. "I got an idee for sure."

"Well?" asked Major Fitch.

"Let's all of us ol' ones get together an' hire the skating rink an' give Miss Judy Buck a party that this county won't ever forget."

The other chairs came down on all fours and the veterans of the Rye House porch drew together in solemn conclave. Old tongues clicked and old beards wagged, while Pete Barnes' idea took constructive shape.

"We'll ask all the neighborhood and even some out of the neighborhood. We'll have the band up from Louisville and a caterer from there and do the thing up brown," chuckled Pete.

"Maybe society will hold back when we ask them to come to old Dick Buck's granddaughter's ball," suggested one.

"Don't tell 'em whose ball it is until they get there. That's the way to catch the snippy ones. Let's don't even tell Miss Judy. It might make her kind of shy. Just let 'em all get to dancin' an' kinder warmed up an' then when we got 'em where they can't back out without bein' mighty rude we'll up an' make speeches an' let the county know how we stand for that girl an' what she is an' how proud we are of her," suggested Judge Middleton.

"We'll get all the old boys in town to come in on it. I mean our crowd, and there won't be one who will give the secret away. And we'll give that gal a rush that would turn her pretty red head if it belonged to anybody else—but there is no turning a wise head like hers."

"We won't let any women in on it either," said Pete.

"Not even the Widow Simco?" asked Major Fitch.

"The women oughter have looked after the gal long ago, and now we men folks will take it on us. What'll we call the ball?" asked Mr. Barnes, ignoring the Major's thrust.

"Call it a dayboo party, but jes' don't say whose it is," suggested Colonel Crutcher. "There'll be plenty of jokes about it an' the smart Alecks will try to get the laugh on us because they'll be a thinkin' we don't know what dayboo means an' we'll take the laugh an' keep it 'til we need it. Lets go get the invites struck off over to the Ryeville Courier right now."

The old men got busy immediately, although it was a lazy morning in June and the Rye House porch was shady and cool. Recruits were mustered in until they numbered ten, all anxious and eager to share expense and glory. First, the skating rink was engaged for the following Friday night. A caterer in Louisville was next called up by telephone and supper ordered, "with all the fixin's" that the latest thing in debut parties demanded. The band was engaged and the invitations set up in type and printed before the noon whistles blew for dinner. To be sure, the

invitations did somewhat resemble notices of an auction sale, but what did it matter to the old men of Ryeville, who were undertaking this party for their favorite girl? This was the card:

*You Are Invited to Attend a Debut Ball  
At the Skating Rink on Friday Night  
By the Old Men of Ryeville  
Dancing and Refreshments Free  
R. S. V. P. P. D. Q.*

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## CHAPTER X

### Judith Scores Again

The house party at Buck Hill was not proving the great success that Mildred and Nan had hoped for. All of the elements of pleasure and gaiety were present but to the anxious hostesses the affair seemed to drag somewhat. In the first place, brother Jeff utterly refused to fall in love with their prize guest and the prize guest, being accustomed to conquest, was peevish in consequence. Not that Jeff was in the least rude. On the contrary, he was especially polite and charming to all of his sisters' friends, fetching and carrying for them, dancing with them, playing tennis with the athletic, talking sentimental nothings with the romantic, and gravely discussing the Einstein theory with the high-brows. He did everything that was required of him but fall in love with Jean Roland.

The young people were gathered at one end of the long piazza. At the other end sat Miss Ann Peyton and Mrs. Bucknor. Miss Ann was engaged in her favorite occupation of crocheting thread lamp-mats and Mrs. Bucknor vainly endeavoring to get to the bottom of the family stocking basket. The forenoon is always a difficult period in which to entertain a house party. It seems almost impossible to start anything, at least so Mildred and Nan felt. Even the most frivolously inclined do not want to flirt in the morning.

Everybody was feeling a little dull, perhaps from having eaten more breakfast than is usual in this day and generation, but Buck Hill held to the custom of olden times of much and varied food with which to start the day. One can't be very lively after shad roe, liver and bacon, hot rolls and corn cakes all piled on top of strawberries and cream, and the whole washed down with coffee.

Jean Roland smothered a yawn, a deliberate yawn—not the kind you can't repress because the air is close and you feel like a goldfish when the water in the bowl has not been changed and you must gape for breath. The fat boy had been dancing attendance on her for the last hour and she was wearied with his witty sallies. Jeff and Willis Truman, a former classmate, had started a game of bridge with two of the more serious-minded girls.

"Bridge is one of the things I can't play," Jean had announced, and it was hardly complimentary that the game was being played in spite of her.

"By the way, Jeff, you know the Titian-haired queen you were so taken up with at the station last evening that you couldn't greet your guests?" asked Tom Harbison. "I saw her again this morning."

"That little country person!" exclaimed Jean Roland. "No style at all to her."

"Not a particle!" echoed Nan.

"Oh, that little cousin of ours?" said Jeff, pausing in his game.

"Jeff, how can you?" cried Mildred. "She's a very common person who happens to be named Buck and now they are trumping up some foolish old tale that they were Bucknors 'way back yonder in the middle ages and that they are related to us. It is too ridiculous for words."

"Our kin all the same," teased Jeff, going on with his game.

"Right fetching skirt!" said Tom. "She was flirting with some men on the hotel porch when we drove by this morning. I reckon they were all cousins, too."

Jeff looked up from his game with a gleam of anger in his eye. He lost track of the cards, got confused, played from the wrong hand, blocked himself from a re-entry and promptly got set. All because Tom Harbison intimated that Judith Buck was not conducting herself with propriety.

"Here comes somebody! I saw a car turn in from the pike," announced Nan. "I hope it isn't any more company."

The attention of everyone was focused on the approaching vehicle. It was Judith's little blue car, skimming down the avenue with the usual speed exacted of it by its stern young mistress, who seemed bent on getting at least thirty-six hours out of the twenty-four. No one could have said she did not have style in her manner of turning a curve and neatly landing at the yard gate.

"Speak of the devil," muttered Mildred, "if it isn't that Judith Buck. What on earth can she

want?"

Judith, with her usual expedition, was out of the car and with sample case in hand was through the gate and half way up the walk before any one attempted to answer Mildred's query.

"Come to see your brother, perhaps," suggested Jean Roland.

"Ah, be a sister to me," sighed the fat boy, "please be a sister to me, Mildred."

Judith faltered not a moment, but marched straight up the steps. The young men all jumped from their seats and Jeff came forward with outstretched hand, but the girl pretended not to see the gesture. With a businesslike "Good-morning," she proceeded to open up her sample case and begin her salesman's patter: "I have here—" She was determined that the call should be purely a commercial one and that the Bucknors could none of them think for a moment that she sought or even desired any social dealings with them.

"Perhaps you had better take your wares to the back door. The servants may want to buy some," suggested Mildred, with more insolence than her family dreamed she was capable of showing.

"Thank you. A little later on I shall take advantage of your kind suggestion. I have a line of wares especially put up for back doors. These things I have been telling you about are intended for front doors. Unlike most of the companies who have similar goods on the market, this one allows the agent to deliver the article the moment the sale is made," Judith continued in her salesman's manner. "I have a complete stock of goods in my car and while I sell by sample you do not have to wait for days and weeks to enjoy the really excellent bargains I am enabled to offer you. This now is a cleansing cream. No matter how clean you may think your face is, you will find after applying this you are vastly mistaken. Yes, disconcerting for the moment but comforting when you realize how much cleaner you are to be than your neighbor."

The young people had gathered around her and even Miss Ann Peyton and Mrs. Bucknor put down their work and came to see what Judith had to sell.

"Will any one of you young ladies let me prove the value of this cream by applying it to the countenance?"

"Anoint me," suggested the fat boy.

"Oh, no, this is intended solely for ladies. I have a masculine brand to which I am coming later. I will give a sample jar to any one who will let me demonstrate on her."

Judith's manner was businesslike and impersonal, but her color was heightened by excitement that she was determined not to show.

"Why don't you try it on yourself?" said Nan. "I bet yours will come off, all right."

Judith dipped her fingers in the jar and daubed her glowing cheek with the cleansing cream. Everybody laughed. "And now while we leave this cream on for a minute or two I will endeavor to interest you in my various powders." She gave an animated recommendation of powders from talcum to insect.

"And now we will see the miraculous powers of the cleansing cream." She took a handkerchief from her pocket and after a vigorous rubbing of the anointed cheek submitted the evidence to the audience.

"That is excellent," said Mrs. Bucknor. "Let me have a jar."

Next Judith demonstrated the virtues of a vanishing cream and made several sales. Then the men must be told of an excellent shaving soap and healing powder. Scented soaps of all kinds were then displayed, shampoos, hair tonics, pocket combs, tooth brushes and paste.

The lassitude which had held the house party in thrall was dispelled. It was almost as though Judith had applied a cleansing fluid to the atmosphere. She stood in their midst, displaying her wares with an earnestness and simplicity that was most convincing. Who could help but buy from the girl?

Miss Ann looked at her long and searchingly. So this was the girl that old Billy thought resembled his mistress. Her thoughts went back to her girlhood. When she was the age of this Judith could she have so demeaned herself as to go around peddling cosmetics and soaps? Certainly not! She would have starved before she would have stooped to such an occupation. Starved! What did she know about starving? The morning she had gone away from Cousin Betty Throckmorton's without her breakfast was the first time in her life she had ever missed a meal. Visitors in the blue-grass regions of Kentucky are not apt to be hungry. Would it have been better if, when she was young and strong, she, too, had endeavored to help herself instead of visiting, eternally visiting?

All of this flashed through the old lady's mind. Suppose there had been no cousins and aunts and uncles to visit—what then? Suppose she had been as this girl was, with no relations on whom she might depend for assistance. Suppose her relations had been poor. Suppose they had not wanted her. Not wanted her! Did they want her? Did anybody want her? So intently did she gaze on Judith's face that the girl's eyes were drawn in the direction of the old lady. Miss Ann would have liked to buy some of the toilet articles, but the quarterly allowance from her small estate was not due for many days and never was there money enough for her to indulge herself in the kind of wares Judith offered for sale. For a moment Judith stopped her salesman's patter and gazed into the eyes of Cousin Ann Peyton.

"Poor old lady!" was her thought. "It must be terrible to be old and idle. I wish I could do

something for her just to let her know I like her. I believe I might even love her.”

The sales had been larger than Judith in her fondest dreams had imagined they could be. Even the scornful Mildred purchased a few things that took her fancy and the young men, one and all, remembered they were sadly in need of shaving cream and tooth brushes, or if they were not in immediate need it was just as well to lay in a supply. There was much laughing and talking and badinage, but through it all Judith held herself with a certain poise that gave all of the buyers to understand that she was merely the store-keeper and did not wish to be regarded in any other light.

Jeff was singularly silent while Judith was crying up her wares. He stood moodily aside, looking on but never offering to purchase shaving cream or other masculine requirements. He wished she had not come. He resented her placing herself in a position for all of these wretched persons to patronize her. He hated the look on Tom Harbison’s face as he edged closer and closer to the girl, insisting upon putting down his name for one of every article offered for sale.

Judith, however, was so bent on being a salesman that she was absolutely unaware of the admiration she had evidently created in the eyes of young Harbison. When she went to her car to get the wares stored in the back it was Harbison who sprang forward to assist her. Jeff watched the couple as they went down the walk to the yard gate and a suppressed fury gripped him when he noticed that Tom was much closer to Judith than was necessary. He knew perfectly well that Tom Harbison always walked too close to any girl, and had a habit of leaning over any member of the fair sex with a protecting air, occasionally touching her elbow as though to assist her over anything, even so small as a pebble, that might be in her way. When they reached the yard gate one might have supposed a dragon threatened the ladye faire, so solicitous was his manner, so brave his bearing.

Jeff could stand it no longer. He ran down the steps and with long strides arrived in time to assist the supposedly helpless maiden.

“I want to help you,” he said shortly.

“That’s very kind, but really the things are not heavy,” and Judith began busily picking out the articles from the back of her car and putting them in a basket.

But Jeff had come to help, and help he would. He assumed a cousinly air that put Tom Harbison’s courtliness entirely in the shade. If any protecting was to be done he, Jeff Bucknor, was going to do it. He was the proper person to carry the basket of toilet articles as heir apparent to Buck Hill and an avowed kinsman of the lady. He even managed to crowd Harbison from the walk as, with basket in one hand, he protected the astonished Judith with the other. When the back-door customers were visited, the young master insisted upon accompanying Judith, and there he stood guard while she talked concerning the virtues of her anti-kink lotion and scented soaps.

She wished he would leave her for a moment, as she had a little private business to transact with Uncle Billy, but he stuck closer than any brother was ever known to stick and she must let him see her hand to the old man a package, saying:

“Please, Uncle Billy, give this to Miss Ann Peyton and tell her it is from a sincere admirer. It is just a bottle of lavender water, but I thought she might like it.”

Uncle Billy bowed so low that his beard almost touched the ground.

“Thank you, thank you, missy! I been a sayin’ that you air the onlies’ one in the whole county what kin hol a can’le to what my Miss Ann wa’ in ol’ days—an’ air now fer that matter.”

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## CHAPTER XI

### A Surprise for Cinderella

The Ryeville Courier reported that the county was “agog” over the ball to be given by the veterans of the Rye House porch. Invitations were delivered with the same expedition that they had been printed and by nightfall of the day the scheme was hatched everybody who was anybody, and a great many who made no pretense of being, had received a notice that he or she was expected to come to the skating rink on Friday night to a debut party.

“We’ll show ‘em,” boasted Judge Middleton, who with Colonel Crutcher had driven about town in his buggy, delivering invitations. “First, we’ll stop at the Buck place and ask Judith. We can’t have a party without our Cinderella.”

Judith had returned from her peddling trip, and was busily engaged in preparing the motormen’s supper, when her old admirers arrived.

“Hi, Miss Judy!” they called from the buggy.

“Hi, yourself!” she cried, appearing around the side of the house with floury hands and flushed

face.

"We're gonter give a ball and we want to ask you to come to it," said the Colonel. "It is to be this Friday night coming."

"Oh, I wish I could, but you know I never leave my mother at night. You see, she is all alone."

"Of course you don't, but your mother is especially invited to this ball. See her name is written over yours on the envelope. Why, child, it wouldn't be a ball unless you came. We—we—" but here Judge Middleton dug an elbow into the Colonel's ribs and took the conversation in his own hands.

"The fact is, Miss Judy, all of us old fellows think a lot of you and we are kind of 'lowing you'd dance with us and make it lively for us. We'll take it as a special favor if you stretch a point and come—you and your mother."

Judith glowed with appreciation and put a floury hand on the old man's arm.

"Oh, Judge Middleton, you are good—all of you are so kind to me. I'd rather come to your party than do anything in the world. I never have been to a real ball—a picnic is about the closest I've come to one, that and some school entertainments, but you see I haven't a suitable dress. You wouldn't like me to come looking like Cinderella after the clock struck twelve, would you now?"

"Well, you'd look better than most even if you did," put in Colonel Crutcher, "but you needn't be coming the Flora McFlimsey on us. Don't we see you running around here in a blue dress all the time? And if that ain't good enough I bet you've got a white muslin somewhere with a blue sash and maybe a blue hair ribbon."

Judith laughed. "Well, I reckon I have and, after all, nobody is going to look at me and I do want to go. I'll say yes and I can bulldoze Mother into accepting, too, I am sure. I think it is the grandest thing that ever happened for all of you to be giving a debut party, and I'm going to come, and what's more, I intend to dance every dance."

"Now you are talkin'," shouted the old men. "Save some dances for us."

After they had driven away, the buggy enveloped in the inevitable cloud of limestone dust, Judith still stood in the yard until she saw the cloud, little more than a speck in the distance, turn into the Buck Hill avenue.

"I reckon they'll all laugh at the dear old men and make fun of their having a debut party for themselves, but I think it is just too sweet of them. Oh, oh, oh, if I only had a new dress!"

There was a general invitation for Buck Hill, family and visitors, and an especial one for Miss Ann Peyton, to whom the old men of Ryeville wished to show marked respect as being of their generation.

"Of course, we shall all go," announced Mr. Bucknor.

"It sounds rather common," objected Mildred. "And only look at the invitations! Did anyone ever see such ridiculous-looking things?"

But everyone wanted to go in spite of Mildred's uncertainty, so R. S. V. P.'s were sent P. D. Q. and old Billy got busy greasing harness and polishing the coach so that his equipage might be fit for the first lady of the land to go to the ball.

"Air you gonter 'pear in yo' sprigged muslin?" he asked Miss Ann, "or is the 'casion sech as you will w'ar yo' black lace an' diments?"

"Black lace and diamonds," said Miss Ann, "but I shall have to begin darning immediately. Lace is very perishable."

"It sho' is," agreed Billy. Far be it from him to remind his mistress that the black lace had been going long enough to deserve a pension. So Miss Ann darned and darned on the old black lace and with ammonia and a discarded tooth brush she cleaned the diamond necklace and earrings and the high comb set with brilliants and her many rings. It was exciting to be going to a ball again. It had been many a year since she had even been invited to one. She was as pleased as a child over having an invitation all to herself—not that she would let anyone know it, but she let old Billy express his gratification.

"I tell you, Miss Ann, that there Colonel Crutcher air folks, him an' Judge Middleton both. They don't put on no airs but they's folksy enough not ter have ter. I reckon they knowed you's a gonter be the belle er the ball wheresomever it air an' that's the reason they done brung you a spechul invite."

The old men of the town met on the Rye House porch after supper that night to report progress.

"Everything's goin' fine," was the general report.

"Not an out-and-out refusal yet."

"Came mighty near not getting Miss Judith," said Colonel Crutcher. "First she couldn't leave her mother and then when we told her Mrs. Buck was especially invited she put up a plea of not having the right kind of dress. Said she'd look like Cinderella after the clock struck twelve. But the Judge and I looked so miserable over it that the child finally said she'd come, but I reckon she'll be wearing an old dress."

"Looks like she's got so many businesses she might buy herself a dress," suggested one.

"Not her. She's saving every cent to put guano on the land."

"Well, beauty unadorned is adorned the most," mused Major Fitch.

"Say, I got a idee," put in Pete Barnes.

"Go to it, Pete! Your idees are something worth while here lately. What is it?"

"What's the reason we can't get little Judy a dress over to Louisville? Us old men can all chip in an' it wouldn't amount to mor'n a good nights losin' at poker."

"She's right proud. Do you reckon she'd get her back up and decline to accept it?" asked Judge Middleton.

"Not Judith. She's not the kind to be hunting slights, but suppose we send it to her anonymous like and pretend her fairy godmother had something to do with it," suggested Pete.

"And who's gonter buy it? We don't want any of the Ryeville women in on this," said Colonel Crutcher.

"I got another idee," said Pete. "Let's get the motormen to get their wives down at the other end to shop for us. I was talkin' to one only this mornin' an' he said Miss Judy cooked the best dinner he ever et an' I'm pretty sure they'd be glad to help us out."

"But they might help us out too gaudy like."

"Gee, they couldn't go wrong if we told them it must be white—white with a blue sash."

"I'd like it to be white tarlatan or something thinnish and gauzy like and kind of stand-outy without being stand-offish."

"And I think a few gold beads, kind of trimming it up, would be becoming to our debutante."

"And we ought to get her slippers and stockings to match."

"How about the size?"

That was a stumper until Pete Barnes had another idee, and that was that old Otto Schmidt, the trusty shoe repairer of Ryeville, might know. He did. In fact, even then he had a pair of Judith's shoes to be half soled.

"She's schlim and long," said Otto, "five and a half touble A."

So five and a half double A it was. "And make 'em gold," suggested the Colonel.

The motorman approached was delighted to undertake the commission. "My wife's pretty grateful not to have to be worrying herself to death about my supper and she'll be tickled stiff to have a chance to go spend some money even if it isn't for herself. She used to be saleslady in the biggest shop in Louisville, before she married me. She's just about Miss Buck's size, too," he said.

Minute directions were given the kindly motorman as to the dress being white and thinnish and stand-outy, with a blue sash and gold bead trimming, the slippers long and slim and gold.

"A blue ribbin for her hair, if you don't mind, too," said Pete Barnes. "I been always a holdin' that there ain't anything so tasty as a blue ribbin in a gal's hair."

"They don't wear ribbons in their hair any more," said Major Fitch. "I believe they all are using tucking combs nowadays."

"Well, then, I give in. Our gal must be stylish, but I'd sure like a blue ribbin in her hair. Get her a good tuckin' comb then."

The ball was to be on Friday. Judith's mind was so full of it she found it difficult to attend to her many self-imposed duties.

"Actually, Mumsy, I tried to sell anti-kink to a bald-headed white man. I really believe I shall have to give up my peddling job until after the ball is over," she said.

Mrs. Buck had entered only half-heartedly into the plan of going to the ball, and had agreed to go only because Judith had pleaded so earnestly with her. Her best and only black silk must be taken out and sunned and aired and pressed.

"I declare, I've had it so long the styles have caught up with it again," she exclaimed.

"Well, I wish I could say the same for my white muslin," sighed Judith. "I've a great mind to wear it hind part before, to make a little change in it. Anyhow, I intend to have just as good a time in it as though it were white chiffon, embroidered in gold beads. My white pumps aren't so bad looking. I'll take time to-morrow to shampoo my hair. Do you know, Mumsy, Cousin Ann Peyton's wig is just the color of my hair. Poor old lady! Pity she can't lose it!"

It was Thursday night. The day's work was over, the last dish from the motormen's supper washed and put away and Mrs. Buck and her daughter were having a quiet chat, seated on the side porch. It was a pleasant spot, homelike and comfortable. It was on this porch that the summer activities of the farm were carried on. Here they prepared fruit for preserving and even preserved, as a kerosene stove behind a screen in the corner gave evidence. Here they churned, in a yellow cradle churn, and worked the butter.

"It saves the house if you can do most of your work in the open," Mrs. Buck had said.

Judith had stretched a hammock across the corner of the porch, and now she was allowing herself to relax for awhile before going to bed. She pushed herself gently to and fro with one slender foot on the porch floor, and looked out dreamily over the fields flooded with moonlight—

fields bought by her grandfather Knight from her grandfather Buck, inherited by him from his father, who had inherited from his father. Each generation had done what it could to impoverish the land and never to improve it. Now it was up to her, nothing but a slip of a girl nineteen years old, to buy guano and bring the land back to its original value.

"Ho, hum! If Grandfather Buck hadn't wasted so much and Grandfather Knight hadn't saved so much I could put my earnings in a new georgette dress to wear to the old men's debut ball," she sighed.

A few vehicles passed the house—now an old-fashioned buggy, now a stylish touring car—each one leaving a trailing cloud of limestone dust.

"Listen, Judith, I heard the gate click."

"Nothing but an owl clucking, Mumsy. I heard it, too, but nobody would be coming to see us this time of night."

"It might be some young beaux coming to see you," suggested Mrs. Buck. "You'd have plenty of them if you weren't so—so—businesslike."

Judith laughed merrily. "Well, I reckon they'd come anyhow if they wanted to, but I must say, Mumsy, I'm kind of snobbish about your so-called beaux. I might like the boys if they would only stop being so silly and understand that I'm a human being with a mind and soul. I reckon I've always been too busy to play much with the boys around Ryeville. The old men like me though."

"That's not getting anywhere," complained Mrs. Buck, who frankly hoped for a husband for her daughter, although her own matrimonial venture had not been any too successful.

"That was a knock!" insisted the mother a moment later. Judith jumped up from the hammock. "I'll go outside and see who it is."

"Indeed you won't! If it's callers you've got to receive them in the house. Just light the lamp in the parlor and then open the door. I ain't fit to see anybody so I won't go in."

Judith did as her mother directed, lit the lamp in the parlor and then cautiously opened the door. Nobody was there, but a large dress box was leaning against the door and fell into the hall when the door was opened. The girl picked it up and carried it into the parlor.

"Mumsy! Come quick! I don't know what it is but it isn't a beau. Never mind your dress, but just come!"

The string was broken by eager young hands, although Mrs. Buck begged to be allowed to pick out the knots. The top of the box was snatched off, disclosing much white tissue paper with a folded note pinned in the center.

"It must be flowers," cried Judith. "I'm so excited I can't make up my mind to take off the wrappings."

"Well, read the note! It's addressed to you," said Mrs. Buck.

"It says: 'To Miss Judith Buck, from her old fairy god-fathers.' Oh, Mumsy, my old men are sending me some flowers, to wear to the ball, I guess. I'll clip the stems to keep them fresh."

"Well, why don't you open 'em up?"

Layer by layer Judith removed the tissue paper. At last the precious contents of the box were revealed—a white chiffon dress, delicately brodered with tiny gold beads, with a twisted girdle of blue with cloth of gold, a dainty blue comb set with brilliants. In a separate wrapper at one end of the box, gold slippers and stockings were discovered.

"Oh, Mumsy! I'm going to cry," and Judith did shed a few tears and sob a few sobs.

"Surely you are not going to accept clothes from any man, Judith." Mrs. Buck's tone was stern and disapproving.

"Of course not from any one man, but this is from about ten men—the dear old men who are giving the ball! I wouldn't be so mean as not to accept this gift. What's more, I'm going to try the things on this minute. Look! There's even a silk slip to wear under it. Whoever bought this outfit knew how to buy. Mumsy, Mumsy! The slippers fit. Oh, I'm a real Cinderella, but the best thing about it is that the old men must truly love me, the dears."

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## CHAPTER XII

### Jeff Gives a Pledge

Until recently it had been the custom for Miss Ann Peyton, on every fine afternoon, to have old Billy drive her forth for an airing. It exercised the horses and gave Billy a definite occupation, besides affording some change of scene for his mistress. This habit of a lifetime had been abandoned because Miss Ann and Billy had come to a tacit understanding that the less the old

coach was used the better for all concerned. Like the hoop skirt, little of the original creation remained. It had been repaired here and renewed there through the ages, until the body was all that the carriage maker would have acknowledged and that had many patches.

The coach had been a very handsome vehicle in its day, with heavy silver mountings and luxurious upholstery. The silver mounting was Billy's pride and despair. No fussy housekeeper ever kept her silver service any brighter than Billy did the trimmings of the old carriage, but in late years there never seemed to be room in any carriage house for Miss Ann's coach and it took much rubbing to obliterate the stains caused by continual exposure. Billy often found a new rent in the cushions, from which the hair stuffing protruded impertinently. He would poke it back and take a clumsy stitch only to have it burst forth in a fresh place.

There had always been a place in the carriage house at Buck Hill for Cousin Ann's coach until the family had gone in largely for automobiles and then the carriage house had been converted into a garage, the horse-drawn vehicles in a great measure discarded and now the ancient coach must find shelter under a shed, with various farming implements. Billy felt this to be as much of an insult as putting his mistress out of the guest chamber, but he must make the best of it and never let Miss Ann know. Of course the coach must be ready to take the princess to the ball. Wheels must be greased and silver polished.

"I wisht my mammy done taught me howter sew," old Billy muttered, as he awkwardly punched a long needle in and out of the cushions, vainly endeavoring to unite the torn edges.

"What's the matter, Uncle Billy?" asked Jeff Bucknor, who had just crawled from under one of the cars, where he had been delightfully employed in a manner peculiar to some males, finding out what was wrong with the mysterious workings of an automobile.

"Nothin' 'tall, Mr. Jeff! I wa' jes' kinder ruminatin' to myse'f. I din't know nobody wa' clost enough ter hear me. I wa' 'lowin' ter sew up this here cushion so's it would las' 'til me'n Miss Ann gits time ter have this here ca'ige reumholzered. We're thinkin' a nice sof' pearl gray welwit will be purty. What do you think, Mr. Jeff?"

"I think pearl gray would be lovely and it would look fine with the handsome silver mountings, but in the meantime wouldn't you like me to give you some tow linen slips that belong to one of the cars. You could tack them on over your cushions and it would freshen things up a lot."

"Thankee, Marster, thankee! If it wouldn't unconvenience you none." Old Billy's eyes were filling with tears. It was seldom in late years that anyone, white or colored, stopped to give him kind words or offers of assistance. The servants declared the old man was too disobliging himself to deserve help and the white people seemed to have forgotten him.

Jeff got the freshly laundered linen covers and then climbed into the old coach and deftly fastened them with brass headed tacks.

"Now I do hope Cousin Ann will like her summer coverings," he said.

"She's sho' too—an' we's moughty 'bleeged ter you, Marse Jeff. Miss Ann an' me air jes' been talkin' 'bout how much you favors yo' gran'pap, Marse Bob Bucknor as war. I don't want ter put no disrespec' on yo' gran'mammy, but if Marse Bob Bucknor had er had his way Miss Ann would er been her."

"I believe I have heard that Grandfather was very much in love with Cousin Ann. Why did she turn him down?" asked Jeff, trying not to laugh.

"Well, my Miss Ann had so many beau lovers she didn't know which-away ter turn. Her bes' beau lover, Marse Bert Mason, got kilt in the wah an' Miss Ann got it in her haid she mus' grieve jes' so long fer him. But the truf wa' that Miss Ann wouldn't a had him if he had er come back. She wa'n't ready ter step off but she wa' 'lowin' ter have her fling. Then the ol' home kotched afire an' then me'n Miss Ann didn't have no sho' 'nough home an' we got ter visitin' roun' an' Marse Bob, yo' gran'pap, kep a pleadin' an' Miss Ann she kep' a visitin', fust one place then anudder, an' Marse Bob he got kinder tired a followin' aroun' takin' our dus' an' befo' you knowd it he done transfered his infections ter yo' gran'mammy, an' a nice lady she wa', but can't none er them hol' a can'le ter my Miss Ann, then or now—'cept'n maybe that purty red-headed gal what goes a whizzin' aroun' the county an' don't drap her eyes fer nobody. 'Thout goin' back a mite on my Miss Ann, I will say that that young white gal sho' do run Miss Ann a clost second."

"You mean Miss Judith Buck, Uncle Billy?" and Jeff's face flushed. He had been thinking a great deal about Judith Buck and he was trying to school himself to stop thinking about her. Yet it pleased him that the old darkey should thus mention her.

"Yes sah, Miss Judith Buck."

"Goodness, Uncle Billy, what is that strange rumbling and buzzing I hear?" interrupted Jeff. "Your carriage sounds as though you had installed a motor in the rear."

"Lawsamussy, Mr. Jeff, that ain't nothin' but a bumbly bee nes', what we done pick up somewhere on our roun's. Them bees sho' do give me trouble an' it looks like I can't lose 'em. 'Course I could smoke 'em out but somehow I hates ter make the po' things homeless an' I reckon they's got a notion that the hollow place in the back er this here ca'ige b'longs ter them an' the knot hole they done bored is the front do'. When me'n Miss Ann has ter drive on I jes' sticks a cawn cob in the hole an' the bees trabels with us. Sometimes their buzzin' air kinder comp'ny ter me. I ain't complainin' but times I'm lonesome an' I wisht I mought er had a little cabin somewheres an' mebbe some folks er my own."

"Yes, Uncle Billy, I know you must get tired of not having a real home of your own. Didn't you ever marry and haven't you any kin?"

"No sah, I ain't never married an' as fer as I knows I ain't got any kin this side er the grabe. You see, sah, it wa' this a way. I been kinder lookin' arfter Miss Ann sence she wa' a gal an' I always said ter myself, 'Now when my mistis marries I'll go a courtin' but not befo'.' I had kinder took up with Mandy, a moughty likely gal back there jes' after the wa' and me'n her had been a talkin' moughty sof' befo' Miss Ann lef' home that time when the ol' place burnt up. It looks like I never could leave Miss Ann long enuf to go back an' finish my confab with Mandy. An' arter a while Mandy must er got tired of waitin' fer me an' she took up with a big buck nigger from Jeff'son County an' they do say she had goin' onter twenty chilluns an' about fo' husbands."

"Uncle Billy, you have certainly been faithful to Cousin Ann. I don't see what she would have done without you."

"Gawd grant she won't never have ter, Marse Jeff! It'll be a sad day fer this ol' nigger when Miss Ann goes but I'm a hopin' an' prayin' she'll go befo' I'm called. If I should die they would'n be nobody ter fotch an' carry fer Miss Ann. She gits erlong moughty fine here at Buck Hill, but some places I have ter kinder fend fer us-all right smart. Miss Ann air that proudified she don't never demand but ol' Billy he knows an' he does the demandin' fer her. An' I presses her frocks an' sometimes I makes out to laundry fer her in some places whar we visits an' the missus don't see fit ter put Miss Ann's siled clothes along with the fambly wash. An' I fin's wil' strawberries fer her, an' sometimes fiel' mushrooms, an' sometimes I goes out in the fall an' knocks over a patridge an' I picks an' briles it an' sarves it up fer a little extry treat fer my lady."

"She certainly would be lost without you, Uncle Billy, but I'm going to make you a promise. If you should be called before my cousin I do solemnly swear that I'll see to it that she has every comfort. The family owes you that much and I for one will do what I can for Cousin Ann. On the other hand, if Cousin Ann should go first, I'll do what I can to help you."

"Oh, Marse Bob—I mean Marse Jeff—you air lif' a load from a ol' man's heart. Yo' gran'pap air sho' come ter life agin in his prodigy. Nothin' ain't gonter make much diffunce ter me arfter this. I been a thinkin' some er my burdins wa' mo' than I kin bear, but 'tain't so. My back air done fitted ter them, kase you done eased me er my load." The old man wept, great tears running down his furrowed brown cheeks and glistening on his long, grotesque beard.

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## CHAPTER XIII

### The Debut Party

Everything was propitious for the debut party, even the weather. A brisk shower in the morning, followed by refreshing breezes, gave assurance of a night not too hot for dancing but not too cool for couples so inclined to sit out on the balcony and enjoy the moonlight.

The ten old men were very much excited as the time approached for their ball. The skating rink was swept and garnished and decorated with bunting and flags, and wreaths of immortelles rented from the undertaker. Extra chairs were also furnished by that accommodating person. The caterer from Louisville came in a truck, bringing with him stylish negro waiters and many freezers and hampers. The musicians arrived on the seven o'clock trolley, almost filling one car with their great drums and saxophones and bass fiddles.

The women who were either supported by, or supported, the ten old men were kept busy by their aged relatives hunting shirt studs and collar buttons, pressing broadcloth trousers, letting out waistcoats or taking them up, sewing on buttons and laundering white ties. The barber had to call in extra help, because of the trimming of beards and shaving of chins and cutting of hair that the party entailed.

Judge Middleton was chosen to make the speech naming the guest of honor for whom the debut party was given.

"He's got the gift of gab," Pete Barnes had said, "but I hope he ain't gonter forget 'twas my idee."

One of the many virtues that belong to country people is that they come on time. At eight o'clock the fiddles were tuning up, the skating rink lights were on and already Main Street was crowded with a varied assortment of vehicles—automobiles, buggies, wagons, surreys, rockaways and even a large hay wagon that had brought a merry party of young folks from Clayton.

Buck Hill arrived, three automobiles strong, besides Miss Ann Peyton's coach. Behind them came Judith Buck and her mother, the little blue car brave from a recent bath and Judith's eyes shining and dancing like will-o-the-wisps.

"Mumsy, listen! They are tuning up! I'm going to dance every dance if I have to do it by myself. I don't know any of the new dances, but it won't take me a minute to learn. It's the golden

slippers that make me feel so like flying.”

“Now, Judy, don’t take on so. It ain’t modest to be so sure you’ll be asked to dance. Besides, you must save your dress and slippers and not wear them out this first time you wear them.”

Judith laughed happily. “Oh, Mumsy, what a spendthrift you are with your breath! I’m going to dance my dress to a rag. Did you ever think that Cinderella may have just danced her dress to rags by twelve o’clock and after all the fairy godmother had nothing to do with it? Cinderella danced every dance with the prince and perhaps he was an awkward prince and tangled his feet in her train. In fact, I am sure he was awkward or he would have caught up with her when she tried to run away, and she with one shoe off and one shoe on like ‘Diddle, diddle, dumpling, my son John!’”

“Let me help you out, Mrs. Buck.” It was Jeff Bucknor, leaning over the little blue car. He had heard every word of Judith’s foolishness and seemed to be much pleased with it, considering he was a learned young lawyer getting ready to hang out his shingle, and supposed to be above fairy stories and nursery jingles.

Jeff had noticed, as he passed Judith’s home, that the little blue car was parked in front and his surmise was that the girl was going to the ball but had not yet gone. He registered the determination to hurry his own crowd into the skating rink and wait and speak to Judith. This decision had come immediately after his promising himself that he wasn’t even going to think any more about the girl, and that if she happened to be one of the guests at the debut party he was going to spend the evening being pleasant to his sisters’ friends and not even ask her to dance.

Mrs. Buck accepted his offer of assistance with shy acquiescence. The blue car was not easy to get out of, as the seat was low and there was no step, so Jeff must swing the lady out, lifting her up bodily and jumping her to the curbing. She came down lightly but flustered.

Unreasoning anger filled Jeff Bucknor’s heart when he released the blushing Mrs. Buck to find Tom Harbison had pushed his way in between the sidewalk and the blue car and was insisting upon helping Judith to alight.

“Thanks awfully, but I am accustomed to getting out by myself,” she said.

“And I am accustomed to helping beautiful young ladies out of cars,” said Tom. “You don’t know what a past master I am in the art.”

“If there were any beautiful young ladies around I am sure they would be delighted, but since there are not any in sight your art will have to languish for lack of exercise,” flashed Judith.

Mrs. Buck and her daughter had both covered their finery with old linen dusters, which they had planned to discard before entering the hall. It was a distinct annoyance to Mrs. Buck that these two handsome young cavaliers should see them thus enveloped.

“They’ll get the wrong impression of my girl,” was her thought, and now here was Judith wasting her time and the precious dancing hours bantering with a strange young man as to whether she should be allowed to jump from her car unassisted or should be helped out in a ladylike manner.

“Well, Judith, come along one way or the other,” Mrs. Buck drawled.

“Perhaps Miss Buck would take one of my hands and one of yours,” suggested Jeff to Tom.

“Perhaps the decrepit old lady will,” laughed Judy, making a flying leap between their outstretched hands without touching them and landing lightly on the sidewalk by her mother. “Thank you both very much,” she said, and clutching her mother’s arm she hurried into the lobby of the skating rink and was lost to view in the crowd of arriving guests.

“Here’s the dressing-room, Mumsy, and we can leave our awful old dusters in there. Weren’t you furious at being seen in the horrid things and that by the best beaux of the ball? Now, Mumsy, you just stick to me and we’ll go say howdy to the dear old men and thank them for my dress and shoes and stockings and then you can go sit by some of your nice church members, while I find somebody to dance with me.”

“But, Judy, surely you are not going to thank the old men right out before everybody, and surely you are not going to ask anybody to dance with you!”

“Of course not, Mumsy! I’m going to use finesse about both things. You just see how tactful I am. Oh! Oh! Oh! I’m so excited! Just look at the streamers and flags and all the funny funeral wreaths, and only listen to the music! I’m about sure there are wings on my golden slippers. Really and truly, Mumsy, they do not touch the ground when I walk. I’m simply floating in a kind of nebulous haze—in fact I believe I am charged with electricity.”

“Charged with foolishness, you mean!”

“Oh, but Mumsy, look, we are right behind my cousins from Buck Hill. Let’s don’t go in too close to them. I’m entirely too happy to take a snubbing from Mildred Bucknor. Doesn’t Cousin Ann Peyton look beautiful?”

“You mean the old lady in hoop skirts? She’s terribly behind the times, ain’t she? But, Judy, who was the young man who was so bent on helping you out of the car? You didn’t pretend to introduce him.”

“Mr. Harbison. I have not met him myself yet. I believe he is Mildred Bucknor’s special property.”

The ten old men of the receiving line were drawn up in battle array, in all the glory of their best clothes. Pete Barnes was gorgeous in checked trousers and Prince Albert coat, with his bushy iron-gray hair well oiled and combed in what used to be known as a roach, a style popular in his early manhood. Some of the veterans were in uniform—the blue or the gray. All wore white carnations in their button-holes. The guests shook hands with the hosts and then moved on. Those who had come merely to look on sought the chairs ranged against the wall; others who wanted to dance were eagerly arranging for partners if they were men, while the fair sex assumed a supreme indifference. Colonel Crutcher busied himself giving out dancing cards and seeing that the young people were introduced.

The first sensation of the evening was the entrance of Miss Ann Peyton. With slow grace and dignity she sailed into the ballroom and approached the receiving line alone. Mr. and Mrs. Bucknor had stopped a moment to speak to some acquaintances and Mildred had intentionally held back the crowd of young people comprising the house party from Buck Hill, whispering that they really need not mix with the others.

"Of course we must speak to those ridiculous old men, but after that we can just stay together. It will be lots more fun."

"Here comes Miss Ann Peyton!" the whisper went around the hall.

"Well, if it isn't Cousin Ann!" Big Josh Bucknor boomed to his daughters.

"For goodness sake don't ask her to go home with us," begged those ladies.

Big Josh slapped his leg and laughed aloud. Everything about Big Josh was loud and hearty. He was a short, fat man with a big, red face and a perfectly bald head. The Misses Bucknor were tall and aristocratic in figure and bearing. They were constantly being mortified by their father's tendency to make a noise and his unflinching habit of diverging from the strict truth. But Big Josh was more popular in the county than his conscientious daughters.

Old Billy had wormed his way into the ballroom with the pretext of having to carry Miss Ann's shawl. Quietly he slipped up the stairs into the balcony and, hiding behind the festooned bunting, he peeped down on his beloved mistress as she stood, a quaint, old-fashioned figure, making her bow to the receiving line.

"By gad, Miss Ann, you are looking fit," said Major Fitch. "We are proud to have you with us. I hope you will save me a dance. Yes, yes! We are going to have some reels and lancers and some good old time quadrilles. If the young uns don't like it they can lump it. Here, Colonel Crutcher, give Miss Ann a dance card. How about giving me the first square dance?"

"And put me down for the next," begged the Colonel gallantly. "It won't be the first quadrille I have stepped with you."

All down the line Miss Ann was greeted with kindness and courtesy. Old Billy almost fell out of the balcony, so great was his joy when he saw Miss Ann's card in demand and realized that his mistress was being sought after. A flush was on the old lady's cheeks as she swept across the ballroom floor and seated herself in the outer row of chairs, reserved for the dancers. A little titter arose.

"What a funny-looking old woman!" was the general verdict.

"By the great jumping jingo, they shan't laugh at her!" exclaimed Big Josh. "She's kin—hoop skirt and all."

His daughters held him back a moment: "Remember! Don't dare invite her home with you."

Big Josh made a wry face but he immediately went to speak to his aged cousin, looking threateningly at the crowd who had dared to giggle at anyone related to him.

"How do you do, Cousin?" he said, pushing her voluminous skirts aside so that he might slide into the chair next to her. "Glad to see you looking so spry. Thought we couldn't come to-night because the lane is so bad after the rain this morning. Dust three feet deep yesterday and to-day puddles big enough to drown a pig. I'm gonter get me a flying machine. Lots cheaper than trying to put that road in condition. Yes—I'll get a family machine for the girls and a light little fly-by-night for myself. I believe in the latest improvements in everything.

"Oh, yes, I have flown often. Every time I go to Louisville a friend takes me up. Not afraid a bit—love it. Of course I know how to run the motor—simplest thing in the world. All you have to remember is not to sneeze while you are up in the air. Sneezing is sometimes fatal. It destroys your equilibrium as nothing else does and you are liable to make a disastrous nose dive. Running an airplane is much easier than an automobile. Nerve? Not a bit of it. I tell you, Cousin Ann, when I get my flying machine I'll come get you and ride you to my place and then you will be spared the bumps of that devilish lane. Just as soon as I get it I'll drop you a line. Of course, old Billy can bring the carriage and horses up at his convenience. You are at Buck Hill now, I understand. I tell you, I'll 'phone over just as soon as my airplane comes and you can get yourself ready for a flight. Be sure to wrap up warm and put something over your head."

Miss Ann assured him she would.

"By crickity! Who is that girl speaking to the old men now? That red-headed girl in the fairy queen dress? Bless Bob, if it ain't old Dick Buck's granddaughter. I used to give her a lift into school when she was a kid. I tell you she's got some style about her. Looks more born and bred than any gal here. I don't see where she got it from."

"From the Bucknors!" announced Miss Ann, firmly.

"Bucknors! Oh, come now, Cousin Ann, you aren't going to come that old gag on me. Old Dick Buck used to boast he was our kin when he got drunk, but it is absurd. Drunk or sober, he was no relation of ours."

"He was your cousin, both drunk and sober. I've heard my grandfather tell—" and Miss Ann launched into the tale.

"Well, by gad, if she's of the blood we ought to recognize her!" declared Big Josh, smiting his thigh with a resounding smack. "I'll speak to the family about it. Little Josh will be here to-night and Cousin Betty Throckmorton's Philip and no doubt many of the clan. I tell you I wouldn't mind claiming kin with a gal like that, especially now that old Dick Buck is dead."

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## CHAPTER XIV

### On With the Dance

Others besides Big Josh had noticed Judith as she came forward to speak to her old friends. Her dress, a shimmer of white and gold, might have been wished on her by a fairy godmother, a thing of gossamer and moonbeams.

"Who is it?"

"Who can it be?"

"Nobody but little Judy Buck, you say?"

"Where did she get her clothes?"

"Worked like a nigger and bought 'em! Why not? She's the best little worker in town. Got a bunch of irons in the fire and she surely ought to get some clothes out of it."

"But old Dick Buck's granddaughter's got no right to be mixing with county society."

"The Knights were a good sort and Dick wasn't anything but lazy and trifling and sometimes a little tipsy. There wasn't anything mean about old Dick."

"Well, she's a humdinger for looks, is all I've got to say."

So the talk went around. Judith, all unconscious of having attracted attention, shook hands gaily with the old men and all but kissed them in her joy, and promised to dance with every one of them and immediately had her card filled with trembly-looking autographs.

"Won't you dance, Mrs. Buck?" suggested Colonel Crutcher, but Mrs. Buck declined with agitated blushes, declaring her health was too feeble for such carryings-on.

"Well, I'm going to put you in a front seat so you won't miss anything and then Miss Judy can sit by you when she is not dancing. That's all right, I'll get some of your church members to keep you company."

Colonel Crutcher conducted mother and daughter across the ballroom and, much to the confusion of Mrs. Buck, placed them next to Miss Ann Peyton. That lady was seated in solitary grandeur, Big Josh having departed to look up other members of the family.

"Miss Peyton, this is a little friend of mine I want to introduce to you, Miss Judith Buck, and her mother, Mrs. Buck."

Miss Ann bowed with what might be called gracious stiffness, and moved her skirts a fraction of an inch to make room for Judith.

Mrs. Buck was thankful that some church friends were found by whom she might sit and be as inconspicuous as possible. She would have been frightened beyond words if she had been forced to sit by Miss Ann Peyton. Not so Judith! The girl looked levelly into the old woman's eyes and then sat down.

"I want to thank you for the toilet water you sent to me by my servant. It was very kind of you," said Miss Ann.

"I loved to do it."

"Why did you?"

"I don't know. Perhaps because ever since I was a tiny little girl I have watched you go driving by on the pike and I've always wanted to give you a present. Sometimes I used to pick flowers and hide behind the fence, thinking maybe I could stop your carriage and give them to you, but I was too shy, and old Billy always looked so fierce—as though he were taking the Queen to Windsor. But I used to make up stories about you and your coach and now I am too big and old to make up silly stories and no longer shy and hiding behind hedges, but I kind of felt that the toilet water might be the essence of the flowers I used to pick for you when I was a little girl—the ones you never got."

"Ah, indeed!" was all Miss Ann said, but she sought the girl's hand and held it a moment in the folds of her billowing lace dress.

Then the music started and the ball had begun and Major Fitch was bowing low in front of Miss Ann, claiming the first quadrille, and Colonel Crutcher was holding out his hands for Judith.

"Dance in the set with me," Miss Ann whispered to Judith, as though they were girls together.

Of course nobody dances quadrilles in these jazz days, but the old men had stipulated that the band from Louisville must know how to play for quadrille and lancers and dusty old music had been unearthed and now the ball was opened with an old-fashioned quadrille, with Pete Barnes calling the figures with the gusto of one practiced in the art.

"Swing your partner! Balance all! Swing the corners! Ladies change! Sashay all! First couple to the right, bow and swing! Second couple to the right—do the same thing! Bow and swing! Bow and swing! Third couple to the right—do the same thing! Bow and swing! Bow and swing! Right and left all around—bow to your partner! Promenade all!"

Miss Ann and her partner glided and dipped and bowed, Miss Ann tripping and mincing and Major Fitch pointing his toes and crooking his elbows with much elegance and occasionally taking fancy steps to the edification of all beholders.

Judith gave herself up to the dance with abandon. The music took possession of her and she swayed and rocked to its beat and cut pigeon wings with Colonel Crutcher, much to the delight of that veteran. She smiled at Miss Ann and Miss Ann smiled at her as Pete Barnes called, "Ladies change." They squeezed hands as they passed and Judith whispered, "Isn't it lovely?" and Miss Ann murmured, "Lovely!"

There was no doubt about it that the set in which Miss Ann and Judith was dancing was the popular one. The spectators moved to that end of the hall and when the dancers indulged in any particularly graceful steps they were applauded. Old Billy crept from the balcony and hid himself behind a palm, where he could look out on his beloved mistress and declare to himself over and over, "She am the pick er the bunch."

Jeff Bucknor, although he had resolved to give the evening up to making his sisters' friends enjoy themselves, found himself taken up with watching Judith Buck. He had fully intended to ask Jean Roland to dance the first dance with him, but had seen her led forth by the fat boy without once offering a rescuing hand. While the quadrille was being danced he stood by a window and looked on. As soon as the quadrille was over he hurried to Judith's side.

"Please let me have the next dance, Miss Buck."

"I believe I have an engagement," panted Judith, looking at her card. "Yes, it's a waltz and dear old Mr. Pete Barnes has put his name down. See!" She held it up for Jeff's inspection. Pete had written, "Set this dance out with your true admirer, Pete Barnes."

"Nonsense," cried Jeff. "You mustn't sit out dances with old men when young men are dy—want to dance with you."

"Mustn't I though? Not when old men have been good to me beyond belief? These are my old men and I wouldn't break an engagement with one of them for a pretty. Mr. Pete Barnes had a sabre cut once that made him a little lame and he can't dance, so I promised to sit out the waltz with him," explained Judith.

"All right, then the next dance on your card!"

"That is with Major Fitch and the next with Judge Middleton—that's the Lancers—then the Virginia Reel with old Captain Crump. I'm very sorry, but I believe I am booked up until the intermission, which I hope means supper."

"You can't mean you are going to give up the whole evening to those old fellows. Miss Buck, Judith! Yes, I have a perfect right to call you Judith. You are my cousin. I—I—just found it out the other day. In fact, I am your nearest male relative," Jeff said whimsically, "and as such I forbid you to spend the whole evening wasting your sweetness on the old men. They may be very fine old chaps, but—"

"May be! But! There is no maybe and no but about it. They are the loveliest old men in the world. You got to be a cousin too suddenly, Mr. Bucknor. Kinship is something deeper than a sudden flare. The old men are my fairy godfathers and that is closer than forty-eleventh cousins. Why, they even gave me my lovely dress so I could come to the ball. No, Mr. Barnes, I haven't forgotten," she said, tucking her hand in the old man's arm as he came up to claim her promise. She looked over her shoulder and laughed at Jeff Bucknor. "Good-bye, Cousin!" she called.

Jeff moodily sought refuge behind Cousin Ann's draperies. He knew he was behaving rudely, not to dance with the girls of the house party. He was sure Mildred and Nan would berate him, but he felt as though there were weights on his feet. Miss Ann graciously made room for him.

"A very charming ball, Cousin," she said.

"Yes!"

"Why are you not dancing?"

"Nobody to dance with—unless you will favor me," he added gallantly.

"No, my dear cousin, I have danced once to-night and I am afraid I had better not venture again. I am very fatigued from the unwonted exertion." Indeed, the old lady did look tired, although

very happy and contented. "Why do you not endeavor to engage my charming vis-a-vis? I see she is not dancing either."

"Humph! She has given me to understand she preferred talking to old Pete Barnes to dancing with me. She's a strange girl, Cousin Ann, and I can't make her out."

At least Jeff had the satisfaction of seeing Judith refuse to dance with Tom Harbison. That young man had crossed the floor with his accustomed assurance, had bowed low in front of Judith and begged her to favor him, even taking her by the hand and endeavoring to draw her from her chair, but she had refused him in short order.

Judith danced and danced with the old men. Whatever the step they decided to take the girl followed. She was a born dancer and, after a few paces, could adapt herself to any partner. There were other young men besides Jeff and Tom who sought her hand in the dance, but she was always engaged to some one of the ten old men. The only chance for the young ones was for the old ones to fall by the wayside, which they did occasionally when their old legs refused to carry them farther.

"I'd break in on them if they weren't so old," declared one young farmer.

"It wouldn't do a bit of good," said a young doctor. "I tried and she turned me down—said she had promised the old duffer the whole dance."

So it happened that Judith's time was fully taken up by her fairy godfathers until the supper-time intermission.

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## CHAPTER XV

### Cinderella Revealed

The rattle of china and silver had begun in a room beyond the dancing hall and an aroma of coffee and a suggestion of savory food was in the air. Dancers and spectators sniffed in anticipation. The music stopped. Judge Middleton walked towards the end of the hall. He had Judith Buck by his side, her hand resting lightly on his arm. She was chatting gaily, but the Judge looked rather serious.

When the couple reached a spot near the bass drum, the Judge stopped and, borrowing the stick from the musician, he rapped sharply on the side of the drum.

"He's going to make a speech!"

"Be quiet!"

"Judge Middleton is going to talk!"

The other nine old men called for order. Another sharp rap on the drum and all was still.

"Friends," the Judge said, "I have something to say to you." One could have heard a pin drop. "Of course all of us old men know that you have had a very good time, laughing at us because we sent out invitations calling this a debut party. We are pleased to have given so many of our friends a good laugh. We did it on purpose, because we have all of us lived a long time and we know how popular it makes you to furnish a good laugh. We are proud and happy that so many persons have seen fit to come to our party and we hope you are having a pleasant time to repay you for your trouble."

"Hear! Hear!"

"The best this year!"

"Do it again!"

"I wonder if any of you noticed that our invitation did not say to whom we were giving this debut party? We left that out on purpose, because we were afraid it might scare off the person whom we are delighted to honor. Up to this moment the dear child whose debut party this is has been entirely ignorant that it is hers."

Judith, who had been standing by her old friend, utterly unconscious of self, wholly absorbed in his speech, now looked at him with an expression of startled amazement. She gave a little gasp and blushed violently.

"Friends of Ryeville and our county, we, the old men of the neighborhood, wish to tell you that this debut ball is in honor of our fairy godchild, Miss Judith Buck."

A ripple of applause ran around the room.

"We know that we are not doing the conventional thing in the conventional way," the Judge continued, "but we wanted to do something different for a girl who is different. Only a few days ago we were sitting, talking, discussing matters and things, when the thought came to us that we should like to do something for a girl who has never been too busy to stop and have a

pleasant word with us old men. It was my friend, Pete Barnes, who thought of this way."

"Yes, my idee, my idee!" cried Pete.

"I am sure a great many of you already know our young friend. You have seen her grow from childhood to young womanhood—watched her trudging in to school in all weathers, determined to get an education at any cost—noted her record at school, always at the top or near the top. Perhaps others in Ryeville besides the old men have been cheered by her happy face and ready wit and sympathy."

"Hear! Hear!"

"And now we old men wish to present formally to society Miss Judith Buck. If you have any criticism to make of our method, please blame us and not our guest of honor. This is a surprise party for her."

"Well, I call that right down pretty," said Big Josh to his Cousin Bob. "I have been wanting all evening to get in a word with some of the crowd concerning this young lady, but it looks like it's hard to get away from the women folk long enough to talk sense."

"I believe I know what you mean," said Mr. Bucknor uneasily. "It won't do, Josh, it won't do."

"The dickens it won't do, if we decide to claim her!"

"But the ladies, Josh, the ladies! I fancy Cousin Ann has told you what she told me. The tale got my madam and the girls up in arms and I can't cope with the whole biling of them. I'd say no more about it if I were you. Of course we must go up and shake hands with the girl, and do the polite, but the least said the soonest mended—about her being related to us. You know well enough if the women folk are opposed it would be harder on the girl than just letting the matter drop right where it is."

"Well, I reckon I can control the ladies in my family," blustered Big Josh.

"Ahem!" said Mr. Bob Bucknor, with a significant glance at his cousin, "I must confess that I can't always do so. I find that entertaining Cousin Ann Peyton, for months at a time, is about all I can do in the way of coercion where the ladies of my family are concerned."

"I'm going to relieve you of that burden, Bob," declared Big Josh. "I fully realize you have had more than your share lately, but the truth of the matter is my lane is in mighty bad shape here lately. I have just been talking to Cousin Ann about coming to us for a spell. In fact, I've been telling her I'd come and fetch her before so very long."

Judith stood demurely between Judge Middleton and Major Fitch and made her bow to Ryeville society. They had asked Mrs. Buck to stand by her daughter, but that lady begged to be excused.

"I'm just a private person," she said, "and it would frustrate me so I'd be sure to have one of my attacks."

Everybody went up and shook hands with the guest of honor—even Mildred Bucknor, although she did not enjoy it at all.

"It is the silliest thing I ever saw in my life," she declared. "As though that Judith Buck wasn't forward enough as it is, without those ridiculous old men forcing her on people this way. If we had known the party was given to her, we never should have come, but now that we are here we naturally must behave as gentle folk and be decent."

"Of course," echoed Nan. "We couldn't leave just as supper is announced either. That would be impolite."

"Very!" said the fat boy.

The knowledge that the debut party was given to little Judith Buck in no way served to throw a damper on the festivities. On the contrary, the gaiety of the guests increased. Supper was a decided success and the stylish waiters from Louisville saw to it that everyone was served bountifully. Old Billy crept from behind the decorations and insisted upon waiting on his mistress.

"She am the queen er the ball," he said arrogantly to the young darkey who objected to giving up his tray to the old man.

"You mean the young lady who's havin' her comin' out?"

"No, I don't mean her, but my Miss Ann, who air a settin' over yonder all kivered with di'ments."

Miss Ann was weary and tremulous. She had been strangely moved by Judge Middleton's speech. Why, she did not know exactly, but all evening she had been putting herself in Judith's place, wondering what life would have held for her if at the turning point she had shown the character and spunk of this young girl. She had gone with the rest to shake hands with the girl after Judge Middleton's speech. She longed to declare their relationship, but was afraid to until the family accepted Judith. So Miss Ann merely took Judith's hand in hers and pressed it gently. All she said was, "I am so happy to have met you."

"Oh, thank you, Miss Peyton. I am indeed glad to know you." Judith had almost called her cousin. She devoutly hoped nobody had noticed it, but there was no time for repinings because one was stand-offish. Too many persons must be introduced to the debutante. Even had Mildred Bucknor been inclined to chat with her former schoolmate she would not have been allowed to do it. There were others who pressed forward to greet the fairy godchild of the old men of

Ryeville.

The general attitude of the assembly was good natured and congratulatory. The aristocratic contingent was inclined to be a little formal, but polite and not unkindly. The aristocrats were more or less related to one another, and most of them were connected, closely or distantly, with the Bucknors. Their formality in greeting Judith might easily have been accounted for by the fact that Big Josh Bucknor had kept the ball rolling in regard to old Dick Buck's kinship with the family. From the moment Miss Ann Peyton had made the statement that the Bucks and Bucknors were originally the same people, Big Josh had been spreading the news. All of them had heard it before, but nobody had ever given serious thought to it. To be related to slovenly, lazy, dissipated old Dick Buck was out of the question. The possibility of such a connection was laughably preposterous. It was quite a different matter, however, to contemplate receiving into the charmed circle a beautiful young girl who was everything her unworthy old grandparent had not been.

"But we must go slowly," Little Josh Bucknor had said, when approached by his cousin, Big Josh. "It's a great deal easier to get relations than it is to get rid of them. Ahem—Cousin Ann, for instance! Cousin Ann is so distantly related to us that one cannot trace the kinship, but we got started wrong with her in old days and now you would think she was as close as a mother or something.

"I'm mighty bothered about Cousin Ann, Big Josh. The fact of the matter is, my wife won't stand for her. I can't even make her go up and speak to the old lady. She's been talking to Cousin Betty Throckmorton and they've been hatching up a scheme to freeze out Cousin Ann and fix it so she'll have to go to an old ladies' home. Cousin Mildred Bucknor is in on it, too, and from the way they've had their heads together all evening I believe your daughters are in the plot."

"The minxes! I don't doubt it. Poor Cousin Ann! She's never done anybody any harm in her life," and Big Josh's round, moon-like face expressed as much sorrow as it was capable of.

"No—never any harm—but I reckon Cousin Ann hasn't done much good in her time. When you come right down to it, chronic visiting is a poor way to spend your time, unless you are a powerful good visitor, which Cousin Ann isn't. She got started wrong and never has got put on the right road. I don't see what we are going to do about it. Bob Bucknor is having more than his share, but I can't do a thing with my wife. You see, she made her own living before she married me and she's got no use for what she calls the unproductive consumer. She says that's what Cousin Ann is. Mrs. Bob is getting worn out with it, too, because her girls are grown now and they are kicking at having the poor old lady come down on them on all occasions. It looks as though we'd have to call a meeting of the family and thresh the thing out."

Little Josh, who had acquired the diminutive title merely because he had been born two years later than his cousin, Big Josh, showed despondency in every line of his six-feet-two.

"The women will all be banded against her and want to send her to a home, but we can't stand for that," said Big Josh. "The women'll have to get it into their heads that they can't boss the whole shooting match. Well, come on and let's speak to our little cousin. Oh, you needn't worry. I'm going to be as careful as possible and never say a word I shouldn't. I can't take her into the family unless all the others do. When we have the family meeting about Cousin Ann we might bring up this business of Miss Judith Buck at the same time."

"Good idea! Good idea!" agreed Little Josh.

What Big Josh said to Judith was, "And how do you do, Miss Buck? Remember you? Of course I remember you, but do you remember me?"

"And how could I forget you when you have given me many a lift on the road? You never passed me by without picking me up." Judith's manner was so frank and sweet and she smiled so brightly at Big Josh, returning his vigorous handshake with a strong, unaffected clasp, that the good-natured fellow was won over completely.

"Well, well! We've pretty near got the same name," he cried heartily. "You are Buck and I am Bucknor. I wouldn't be astonished if we had been the same in the beginning. Either your folks knocked the *nor* off or my folks stuck it on. Ha! Ha! We may be related for all we know."

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## CHAPTER XVI

### The Morning After

"All over and paid for!" yawned Colonel Crutcher the morning after the debut party. "I tell you I couldn't do it every night."

"Neither could I—nor every week, nor every month, nor even every year," agreed Major Fitch. "But I tell you, Crutcher, it was worth it, I mean digging in our jeans for the money and getting so tired out and feeling our age and everything. It was worth it all, just to see our girl's eyes shining and to prove what she is made of. I tell you she stood up there and received with as

much dignity as Queen Victoria herself."

The old men were gathered together on the Rye House porch, chairs tilted back and feet on railing as usual.

"I tell you, she's a thoroughbred, all right," declared Pete Barnes. "Why, that gal turned down two of the best-looking beaux at the hop—Jeff Bucknor and that young Harbison—just to sit down an' talk with me, old Pete Barnes. Jeff Bucknor was sore, too. He up an' claimed kin with her an' she just gave him the merry ha ha."

"Well, my j'int's are mighty stiff, but I'm proud to have trod a measure with Miss Judith Buck," said Colonel Crutcher.

"It was worth a lot to see Miss Ann Peyton again, too," said Judge Middleton. "I heard a good deal of talk on the side about Miss Ann last night. It seems that the family is getting together on the subject. The women folks are reading the riot act and simply refusing to have the old lady visit them any more. Big Josh was shooting off his lip pretty lively because the women of the family want to send her to an old ladies' home. I say poor Miss Ann, but at the same time I can see the other side."

Others beside the old men were weary after the ball. Miss Ann spent a sleepless night and could not drag herself from her bed in time for breakfast. When old Billy came to her room with a can of hot water for her morning ablutions, he found his mistress limp and forlorn.

"Jes' you lay still, my pretty, an' ol' Billy will bring you up some breakfus'. You had so many beaux las' night, hoverin' roun' you like bees 'roun' a honey pot, no wonder you air tuckered out this mornin'. I reckon you couldn't sleep with yo' haid so full er music an' carryin's on."

"I didn't sleep very well, Billy, because I am worrying. I am thinking perhaps we had better move on."

"Don't say it, Miss Ann, don't say it! Buck Hill air sho' the gyardin spot er all our visitations. What put you in min' er movin' on?"

"I overheard, without meaning to in the least, but they spoke quite loudly—I overheard Cousin Milly talking on the subject with some of the others at the ball and I am afraid we are not welcome here."

"Why, Miss Ann, 'twas only yistiddy that young Marse Jeff Bucknor up an' made me a solemn promise that you wouldn't never want fer nothin' so long as he mought live an' be able ter do fer you."

"That's very sweet of him, Billy, but this isn't his home alone. His mother is the mistress here. I think we might go visit Mr. Big Josh Bucknor for a while. He was very cordial and even said he would come for me in a flying machine because of the bad road leading into his place. What do you think of that, Billy? He said you could follow after with the carriage and horses."

"Well, Miss Ann, I think Marse Big Josh air as good as gol' an' as kind as custard, but I can't help a feelin' that he don't mean ev'y-thing he says. Not that he ain't a thinkin' at the time that he will do what he promises, but ev'ybody knows you have ter take what Marse Big Josh says with a dose of salts. I don't mean he wouldn't be proud an' glad ter have us-alls come an' visit him, but I mean he ain't liable ter be a flyin' any time soon er late in this here world er yet the world ter come. He ain't ter say sanctified."

"Well, we'll stay on here a while longer then, Billy, but far be it from me to have it said we had worn out our welcome."

"Now, Miss Ann, that there ain't possible here at Buck Hill. The house pawty air a breakin' up this day an' mo'n likely the gues' chamber will be returned to its rightful habitant. You mus' a hearn wrong 'bout Miss Milly not wantin' you. Miss Milly's all time stoppin' an' tellin' me how proud she air ter have you here under her roof an' how glad she air ter have sech a zample as you fer her gals ter foller in the footsteps er 'portment an' 'havior. An' Marse Bob air continuously singin' yo' praises. I hearn him tellin' Mr. Philip Throckmorton las' night that you were a gues' it wa' his delight ter honor. An' Mr. Philip Throckmorton said as how as soon as he had a home er his own you would be the fust pusson ter occupew his gues' chamber. An' then Mr. Little Josh he said how noble an' 'stinguished you were an' s'perior. I tell you, Miss Ann, these here folks air all proud er bein' yo' kin. They's all quarrelin' 'bout whar you air gonter visit nex'."

Thus the old man soothed her troubled spirit and lulled it into a semblance of repose. At any rate it was easier to pretend that she believed him. At least it made him happy, and in pretending she almost persuaded herself that her kinsmen were glad and anxious to have her. She drank the coffee her old servant brought her and settled herself for a morning of rest, although the house was buzzing with the breaking up of the house party.

The young people, too, were feeling the effect of last night's dissipation. The ball was not over at twelve o'clock, as the invitations had intimated it would be, but had gone on into the wee small hours of morning. It was not often that Ryeville had the chance to trip the light fantastic toe to the music of a Louisville band and the eager dancers had begged for more and more. The old people had dropped out, one by one, but the youngsters danced on and on.

Then it was that Judith had come into her own as it were, and all of the young men who had been denied before supper seemed determined to make up for lost time. The most persistent of the clamoring swains were Jeff Bucknor and Tom Harbison. This popularity of a person who had

always rubbed her the wrong way was wormwood to Mildred Bucknor, and for her brother and Tom Harbison to be rivals for Judith's favor added gall to the wormwood. Not that Mildred was not having a very good time herself. Indeed, she was always something of a belle and never lacked for partners, but she had other plans for her brother on the one hand and on the other Tom Harbison had paid her enough attention for her to consider him in a measure her property. She had even announced to several of her friends, in the strictest confidence, that she was engaged to him—or "as good as engaged."

The ball of the night before was under discussion at the breakfast table. It was pronounced, on the whole, to have been a very good ball and a fitting climax to the house party.

"Of course it is perfectly absurd for the old men to think they can put that Buck girl into society by merely giving her a debut party," said Mildred. "It takes something besides good clothes and an introduction to place people."

"How about beauty and intelligence and character?" asked Jeff.

"Well, tastes differ as to beauty, and if she had any sense she would know enough not to try to push herself where she isn't wanted. I don't think it is indicative of a very good character to accept clothes from a man. I heard, on very good authority, that a man gave her her dress. He paid a pretty penny for it, too, I am sure. Nan and I looked at some gowns like hers when we were in Louisville and they were too steep for us, I can tell you."

"I know about the dress. She told me," said Jeff.

"Ah, things have progressed pretty far with you," sneered his sister. "Perhaps she was letting you know she was by way of receiving gifts of such a character from her admirers."

Jeff couldn't trust himself to speak calmly in rebuttal of Mildred's accusations and so he left the room. One thing he had determined, and that was to cut his time of recreation short and knuckle down to the practice of law immediately. A spirit of antagonism was developing between brother and sister that greatly distressed Jeff. He had no doubt that he was somewhat to blame, but at the same time Mildred was spoiled and petulant and overbearing. He doubted her kindness of heart, too, since he had witnessed her cruelty in regard to Cousin Ann Peyton and Judith Buck. He also decided to try a hazard of new fortunes in Louisville rather than Ryeville as his family had planned.

Jeff was glad that the house party was breaking up. Perhaps now Buck Hill would settle down into peace and quiet and he would have a chance to discuss his affairs with his father and mother. He was glad that he would no longer be called upon to do the impossible—to fall in love with the dark beauty, Jean Roland, when for days and nights, in his mind's eye, was ever the picture of a fair girl with a halo of red-gold hair. He was glad, too, that the obnoxious Tom Harbison would be leaving. It was only lately that he had felt Tom to be obnoxious. If Harbison was in love with Mildred, as he had been led to believe was the case, what right had he to be so persistent in his attentions to Judith? Well, at any rate he was leaving the county and would have no more chance to hover around the girl. Any hovering that was done Jeff was determined to do himself.

"I have seen this girl but four times in all, unless I can count those times when she was a little, barefooted kid selling blackberries and I was such a fool I couldn't understand what she was to grow to be, and still I'm as sure as I shall ever be of anything in my life that she is the only girl for me." Thus he mused after he had left the room rather than listen to his sister's gossip. He was standing on the porch, looking through the trees at the garden beyond, and thinking what an appropriate background it would be for Judith's rare beauty. How he would like to lead her through the box maze and then sit beside her on the marble bench under the syringa bushes! If he could prevail upon the independent girl to listen to him, would his family receive her? Would it not be best for all concerned if he could forget Judith? Anyhow, he would not try to see her again, and he would soon be settled in Louisville, making only occasional visits home. Life looked dreary to Jeff.

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## CHAPTER XVII

### Uncle Billy Makes a Call

Judith and her mother were also the victims of the morning after. Mrs. Buck was pale and listless, complaining of shortness of breath, while Judith felt it impossible to accomplish the many duties she had planned for Saturday forenoon.

"The truth of the matter is I can't stop dancing. If I only had some quick music I could work to it. I wonder if Cinderella swept the hearth clean the morning after the ball. Mumsy, do you think the prince was there last night?" she asked.

"Prince! What prince?"

"Oh, just any old prince! Prince Charming! I think—in fact I am sure—I liked my Cousin Jeff

Bucknor better than any of the men who danced with me."

"Now, Judith, please don't start up that foolishness. Jeff Bucknor may dance with you because everybody else wanted to, but he would be very much astonished if he heard you calling him cousin."

"Well, he heard me last night, but he started it. He wanted to boss me, because he said he was my nearest of kin. I just laughed at him and called out, 'Good-bye, Cousin!' Mr. Big Josh Bucknor almost claimed kin with me, too. Wouldn't it be funny, Mumsy, if all of them got to doing it? It would be kind of nice to have some kinfolks who knew they were kin. I know you think I am conceited, but somehow I believe the men would be more pleased about it than the women. Maybe the women are afraid I'd take to visiting them like poor Cousin Ann!"

"Humph! Cousin Ann indeed!"

"But, Mumsy, she was real cousinish last night. There was a look in her eyes that made me feel that she was almost claiming relationship. She squeezed my hand in the quadrille, and when she came up to speak to me after the darling old men let the cat out of the bag about its being my debut party she was very near to kissing me."

"Well, I don't hold much to kissing strangers."

Mother and daughter were on the side porch, engaged in various household duties, while this desultory discussion was going on. Suddenly there appeared at the corner of the house old Uncle Billy. In his hand he carried a small package wrapped in newspaper. He bowed and bowed, wagging his head like a mechanical toy.

"You mus' 'scuse me, ladies, fer a walkin' up on you 'thout no warnin', but I got a little comin' out gif fer the young lady, if she don't think ol' Billy air too bold an' resumptious. It air jes' a bit er jewelry what air been, so's ter speak, in my fambly fer goin' on a hun'erd or so years. Ol' Mis, the gran'maw er my Miss Ann—Miss Elizabeth Bucknor as was—gib it to ter my mammy fer faithfulness in time er stress. It were when smallpox done laid low the white folks an' my mammy nuss 'em though the trouble when ev'ybody, white and black, wa' so scairt they runned off an' hid."

"Why, Uncle Billy, I think you are too lovely to give it to me. But you ought to keep it."

"Well, it ain't ever been much use ter me, seein' as I can't wear a locket, but I reckon you mought hang it roun' yo' putty neck sometime."

He took off the newspaper wrapping, disclosing a flat velvet box much rubbed and soiled. Touching a spring the lid flew open, disclosing a large cameo of rare and intricate workmanship, with a gold filigree border and gold back.

"I'd like ter give it ter you, if you won't be a thinkin' it's free-niggerish of me."

"Why, I think it is perfectly lovely of you. It is a beautiful locket—the most beautiful I ever saw. See, Mumsy, I can put it on my little gold chain."

"No doubt!" Mrs. Buck looked distrustfully at Billy, but the old man held himself so meekly and his manner was so respectful that her heart was somewhat softened.

"You sho' air got a pleasant place here. I allus been holdin' th'ain't no place so peaceful an' homelike as a shady side po'ch, with plenty er scrubbery an' chickens a scratchin' under 'em. I'd be proud to have a po'ch er my own, with a box er portulac a bloomin' in front er it an' plenty er nice red jewraniums sproutin' 'roun' in ol' mattersies cans—but, you see, me'n Miss Ann air allus on the jump—what with all the invites we gits ter visitate."

"Let me show you what a nice vegetable garden I have planted, Uncle Billy, and what a lovely well we have, with the coldest water in the county. Maybe you would like a drink of cold water, or perhaps you would like some fresh buttermilk. I have just churned and the buttermilk is splendid," said Judith.

"Thankee, thankee kindly, missy! I's a great han' fo' buttermilk." The old man followed Judith to the dairy and watched with admiring eyes as she dipped the creamy beverage from the great stone jar and poured it into a big glass mug.

"This was Grandfather Buck's mug. He liked to drink buttermilk from it, but he always called it a schooner. That was his house, back there. He never lived in it after Grandfather Knight died, so my mother tells me, but we always have called it his house. It still has his furniture in it, but nobody stays there."

"I hearn my Miss Ann a talkin' bout yo' fambly not so long ago. She say the Bucks an' Bucknors were one an' the same in days gone by but one er yo' forebears done mislaid the tail en' of his name. But Miss Ann say that don't make no mind ter her—that you is of one blood jes' the same. She even done up an' state that you air as clost kin ter her as the Buck Hill folks air. She air allus been a gret han' for geology an' tracin' back whar folks comed from."

"She—she didn't tell you to tell me that, did she, Uncle Billy?" Judith looked piercingly at the old man. He tried to say Miss Ann knew he was going to tell the girl of their kinship but her clear gaze confused him.

"Well, well, no'm, she didn't 'zactly tell me, but—No'm, she don't even know I done come a' callin'. She jes' thinks I'm out a exercisin' of Puck an' Coopid. Them's the names er my hosses."

"Perhaps she would not like your telling me this," persisted Judith.

"Well, missy, if you ain't a mindin' I believe I'll arsk you not ter mention what I done let slip. I ain't ter say sho' what the fambly air gonter do 'bout the matter. I done hear tell they air gonter hab a meetin' er the whole bilin' an' decide."

"Do!" fired Judith. "They will do nothing. You can tell them for me that I don't give a hang whether they want to claim kin with me or not. They did not have the making of me and I am what I am regardless of them. I know perfectly well that I am descended from the same original Bucknors but I'm glad my ancestor mislaid part of the name and I wouldn't have the last syllable back for anything in the world."

"Yassum!" gasped Billy.

"Uncle Billy, I didn't mean to be cross with you," laughed Judith, her anger gone as quickly as it had come, "but it does rile me for the family to think themselves so important and to feel they can have a meeting and make me kin to them or not as they please."

Billy, mounted on Cupid and leading Puck, rode slowly off. He wagged his great beard and talked solemnly to himself.

"Well now, you ol' fool nigger, you done broke yo' 'lasses pitcher. Whe'fo' you so nimble-come-trimble ter tell little missy 'bout the fambly confab? 'Cause you done hearn Marse Big Josh 'sputin' with Marse Bob Bucknor at the ball consarnin' the Bucks an' Bucknors ain't no reason whe'fo' you gotta be so bigity. Ain't yo' mammy done tell you, time an' agin, that ain't no flies gonter crawl in a shet mouf? All you had ter do wa' ter go an' give Miss Judy Buck the trinket an' kinder git mo' 'quainted an', little by little, git her ter look at things yo' way. You could er let drop kinder accidental like that she wa' kinfolks 'thout bein' so 'splicit. She done got her back up now an' I ain't a blamin' her. She sho' did put me in min' er my Miss Ann when she wa' a gal, the way she hilt up her haid an' jawed back at the fambly. An' she would er talked the same way if Marse Big Josh an' Marse Little Josh an' Marse Bob Bucknor theyselves had 'a' been there an' all the women folk besides. That little gal ain't feared er nobody. She done tol' me ter say she wouldn't have back that extry syllabub on her name fer nothin'. I reckon if I'd tell Marse Jeff that he'd go up in the air for fair. But this nigger is done talkin'—done talkin'."

He rode on, his brown old face furrowed with trouble. His bowed legs stuck out comically and the long tails of his blue coat spread themselves out on Cupid's broad back.

"An' that putty little cabin in the back, with po'ch an' all, an' little missy done say it got furnisher in it too," he murmured plaintively.

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## CHAPTER XVIII

### A Cavalier O'erthrown

The house party departed and Buck Hill settled into normalcy. Jeff had tried very hard to be what Mildred had expected him to be for the last few days. He had even said tender nothings to Jean Roland and expressed an eager desire to see her in Louisville, where she was to visit before returning to Detroit. So flattering was his manner that the girl forgave him for his inattention during her stay at Buck Hill and was all smiles at the parting.

The guests who did not leave by automobile took the noon trolley to Louisville. Among the latter was Tom Harbison. Mildred had rather hoped he would stay over Sunday at Buck Hill. He pleaded an engagement, however, but with melting eyes declared he would soon be back.

Jeff heaved a great sigh of relief when they were all gone, especially Miss Jean Roland. What a nuisance black-headed girls were, anyhow! He began to wonder what Judith was doing. Was she wearied after the ball? Was she on the road in her little blue car selling toilet articles? Would she feed the motormen and conductors, in spite of having been up until morning? Of course she would! Judith was not the kind of girl to fail in an undertaking and to let men go hungry.

"Half past five! She furnishes dinner for the men on the six-thirty. I wonder what she is giving them to-day?" Jeff smiled when he remembered how Judith had satisfied Nan's impertinent curiosity concerning what was in her basket. "I've a great mind to find out. Foolishness! I'll do nothing of the sort." The young man tried to lose himself in the intricate plot of a detective story but he had to confess he was not half so much interested in the outcome of the tale as he was in what Judith was to carry in her basket.

"I'll go help her lift the heavy load on the trolley," he decided, slinging aside the stupid book and starting across the meadows to the trolley station. He must traverse the broad acres of Buck Hill to the dividing line of Judith's mother's farm, then through a swampy creek bottom, up a hill to the grove of old beech trees, and then down to the trolley track.

"Can't make it! There's the whistle blowing for the next station," he said as he reached the grove. He stopped and, leaning against the smooth trunk of a great beech, looked out across the fields. There was Judith in a blue dress, standing on the little platform, a cooler of buttermilk in one hand, swinging it as before as a signal to the approaching trolley. She wore no hat and her

hair shone like spun gold.

"I'll wait here for her and maybe I can persuade her to sit down a minute and talk to me." Lazily he settled himself on a mossy bank, leaning against the friendly trunk.

The trolley car stopped. Eager hands were ready to receive the heavy cooler and laden basket. Only one passenger—a man—alighted and then the car sped on. Judith picked up the basket of empty dishes and milk can that had been deposited on the platform and turned to follow the path homeward. Jeff sprang to his feet, meaning to hasten to her and relieve her of her burden, when his intention was changed by seeing the man who had just alighted from the trolley walk quickly to her side.

The beech grove was too far off for Jeff to hear what was said but he could plainly see the couple, although not discernible to them because of the dense shade of the beeches. It was a shock to him to recognize the man as Tom Harbison. What was he doing back again when he had told Mildred he had an important engagement? Was his engagement with Judith Buck? She had not looked as though she expected anyone as she stood swinging her cooler. But then one can never tell. Young men don't go gallivanting after girls unless they are encouraged. On the other hand, what encouragement had Judith given him, Jeff Bucknor? None!

However, Tom Harbison certainly had no right to play fast and loose with his sister, Mildred. Jeff tried to persuade himself that his anger against Tom was solely the righteous anger of a brother.

Judith and her cavalier followed the path that led directly to the beech grove. Jeff Bucknor again seated himself on the mossy bank and watched their approach. He was totally unconscious of his own invisibility. Again he felt extreme annoyance with Tom Harbison because of his protecting manner. Anyone might have surmised the fields were full of raging bulls, vicious rams or wild boars, judging from Tom's solicitude for Judith's safety. Tenderly he assisted the active girl up the hill. Just as they got within earshot of Jeff, who was endeavoring to calm himself sufficiently to meet the couple with some appearance of equanimity, Judith paused.

"Now, Mr. Harbison, I appreciate very much your kindness in wishing to help me with this basket of dishes, which is not at all heavy, but I think you had much better go directly to your friends at Buck Hill. That path to the left will take you through the gap and over the meadow. I go to the right."

"Ah, but I am not going to Buck Hill this evening. I came back to Ryeville only to see you. I told you, my beauty, that I was going to. Don't you remember?"

"I am not your beauty and I do not remember."

"Well, I did and I have and you are."

"Maybe you have but I am not. I bid you good evening, Mr. Harbison. Give me my basket."

"No, no! Not so fast! You don't understand, my dearest girl. I really have come up here to see you and a fellow doesn't take that beastly ride twice in one day without some reward. Come on, like the peach that you resemble, and sit down here in this grove of trees with me. I tell you, honey, I'm loving you good and right."

"Nonsense! You don't know me and besides I have no time to sit down as I have two more trolley cars to meet with hot suppers for the motormen. Give me my basket! I must hurry home. I cannot let my customers go hungry."

"But I am hungry for love," cried Tom, seizing the hand Judith had stretched out for her basket. In the other hand she carried the empty milk can. Up to this time the girl had been half laughing. She was evidently amused by the gallantries of Tom and had met his advances with badinage, thinking he was in jest. However, when he grasped her hand and attempted to draw her towards him, she grew angry.

"Let me go, Mr. Harbison. You are forgetting yourself."

"I am not forgetting myself. I am just remembering myself. Here I have been in the same neighborhood with you for days and never once have I had so much as a kiss. Please! Please!" He caught the resisting Judith to him.

Tom was making a fool of himself and no doubt he would have realized it had he known that another man was hearing his pleading. Jeff on the other hand was so conscious of himself that he had not realized, until Harbison plunged into the frantic love-making, that the couple were not aware of his presence. Under the circumstances, what should he do? He certainly could not beat up a man for asking a beautiful girl to sit down in the shade of a beech tree with him, especially since he had meant to do that very thing himself had not Tom got there ahead of him. Should he make his presence known? Did Judith need his help?

The scene progressed so rapidly that before Jeff could make up his mind exactly what he should do Judith raised her empty milk can and gave the persistent Tom such a whack on the side of his head that the cavalier dropped the basket of china and, losing his balance, fell and rolled down the hill.

Evidently Judith did not need anyone's help. Tom picked himself up ruefully. Without a word he retraced the path he had so blithely taken a moment before and, hearing the outgoing trolley whistling for the station, he speeded up and boarded the car for Louisville.

Then Judith proceeded to sit down by her basket of broken china and burst into tears.

"Oh, my dear, my dear!" cried Jeff, no longer uncertain of what he should do. "Don't! Please don't! I wish I had wrung his neck."

"You! Where did you come from?" gasped Judith. "I didn't see you. You needn't think I am crying because—because—"

"Because you have been insulted?"

"No. I'm just so miserable because last night I was so happy, and all day I have been happy and now I am not." She looked like a little girl who had just found out her doll was stuffed with sawdust.

"Look at my dishes! As long as they had to be broken I wish I might have had the pleasure of hitting that man with them instead of making a dent in my perfectly good milk cooler." She laughed and began picking up the pieces of china.

Was this the staid young lawyer who had determined to see no more of this red-haired girl—to nip in the bud any feeling he might have developed for her? Was this the same man, running down dale and up hill with a basket of broken china on his arm, while the red-haired girl chased on ahead with an empty milk can, running to make up for lost time and not be late with the motormen's supper? He must wait and help Judith carry the basket. She had no time to wrangle with him about whether he should or should not wait. Supper was cooked but it must be packed properly and the finishing touches put to it. Mrs. Buck was wandering around the kitchen making futile attempts to help. Jeff, who was sitting outside on a bench under the syringa bushes, could hear her querulous drawl and Judith's quick, good-natured replies.

"Never mind the china, Mumsy. Some of the pieces can be used as soap dishes and some maybe we can mend. I'll tell you all about how it happened some day but now I must hurry. There's a young man waiting in the back yard to help me carry my basket. If you look out the side window you can see who it is, but don't let him see you peeping."

Then there was the mad race back to the station. There was no time or breath for talk. They reached the platform several minutes before the seven o'clock trolley.

"Heavens! I came mighty near forgetting what I came all the way from Buck Hill to find out," declared Jeff.

"And what was that?"

"I got to wondering what you would have in your baskets this evening."

"Ham croquettes, buttered beets, potato salad and hot muffins. Blackberry dumpling for dessert!" Judith smiled, as she chanted the menu.

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## CHAPTER XIX

### Miss Ann Moves On

The Bucknors of Buck Hill were going abroad. It was all settled and they were to start as soon as necessary arrangements could be made. The plan had been born in Mildred's mind and she had influenced her mother, who in turn had persuaded her husband and now passage was engaged and it was only a matter of a few weeks before they would sail.

It had all come about because Jeff had felt in duty bound to inform his sister that Tom Harbison had come back to Ryeville with the intention of calling on another girl, and that girl Judith Buck.

"I always said she was a forward minx," stormed Mildred.

"Right forward with her milk can," laughed Jeff, and then he told of Tom's rebuff and of the blow he had received instead of the kiss he demanded. "He's not worthy of you, little sister, and you must not bother your head about him," said Jeff.

But Mildred did worry and sulk and feel miserable. Tom had made more impression on Mildred's heart than Jeff had dreamed possible. The girl was suffering from blighted affections as well as mortification—both of which no doubt would be dispelled by the European trip.

Jeff was to settle in Louisville and the home would be closed, with Aunt Em'ly as caretaker. But what was to become of Cousin Ann?

"We can't leave until her visit with us is completed," objected Mr. Bucknor.

"But, my dear, her visit to us will never be finished, unless we cut it short," sighed Mrs. Bucknor.

"Let her go visit some of the others," suggested Nan, "She's needing a change by this time anyhow."

"We must not be unclannish," admonished Mr. Bucknor. "Blood is—"

"Well, mine is not," interrupted Mildred. "I'm just fed up on all of this relationship business. Old

Cousin Ann isn't very close kin to us anyhow, if you stop and think. She wasn't even more than a third cousin to Grandfather Bucknor, and when it comes down to us she is so far removed it wouldn't count if we lived anywhere but in Kentucky or maybe Virginia. I thought you were going to have a meeting and come to some conclusion about Cousin Ann."

"So we are! So we are! I have been talking to Big Josh lately about it. Quite a problem! Big Josh does nothing but talk and laugh and we never get anywhere. However, we are going to have a gathering of the clan to-morrow in Ryeville and I shall bring up the subject."

"Well, don't let them persuade you to give up our trip just to have old Cousin Ann have a place to visit. We've had more than our share of her already. If she had a spark of delicacy she would go now and not wait until we are all upset with packing and all. I know you have not told her that we are going abroad, but you know she snoops around enough to have heard us talking. I bet she knows what our plans are as well as we know ourselves."

Mildred was right. Miss Ann did know the plans of her host and hostess. With windows and doors wide open and a whole family freely discussing their trip, it would have been difficult for one who retained the sense of hearing not to be aware that something was afoot. Miss Ann had heard and had determined to move on, but to which relation should she go? The faithful Billy was called in consultation.

"Billy, you have heard?"

"Yes, Miss Ann, I done hearn. I couldn't help a hearin' with niggers as full of it as whites."

"I wonder why they did not talk openly to me of their plans."

"Well, I reckon they's kinder shy, kase me'n you's a visitin'. I 'low we's gotter move on, Miss Ann." The old man's face was drawn with woe. "I kinder felt it a bad sign when Marse Jeff Bucknor up'n took hisse'f off to Lou'ville, an' now this talk 'bout the fambly a goin' ter furren parts an' a shuttin' up Buck Hill. Th'ain't no good gonter come of it—but howsomever we's gotter pack up an' leave."

"But where are we going, Billy? Cousin Big Josh—"

"Lawsamussy, Miss Ann, please don't mention that there domercile! Our ca'ige ain't good fer that trip. That lane would be the endin' er us-all. Don't you reckon we'd better rise an' shine to-morrow?"

"Yes, Billy, but where? There's Cousin Little Josh and Cousin Sue and Cousin Tom and Philip Throckmorton and Cousin David's oldest daughter, whose married name has escaped me, but she is living in Jefferson County. Could the horses go so far?"

"Miss Ann, I ain't so sho' 'bout the ca'ige, but I reckon if you don't hurry Cupid an' Puck none they's got a lot er go in them yet. I hear tell Miss Milly an' the two young ladies air a' contemplatin' a trip in ter Lou'ville in the mawnin' an' I done hear Marse Bob say he wa' a' gonter spen' the day in Ryeville with some er the kin folks, eatin' at the hotel. I 'low they'll git a right airy start."

"Exactly! Well, so will we, Billy. As soon as they are gone we will go too."

Miss Ann rather liked to make a mystery of her departure. One of her idiosyncrasies was that she seldom divulged the name of her next host to her last one. She would depart as suddenly as she had arrived, leaving a formal note of farewell if the head of the house happened to be away or asleep. She liked to travel early in the morning.

"Where are we going, Billy?" Miss Ann's voice was tremulous and her eyes were misty.

"Now, Miss Ann, s'pose you jes' leave that ter ol' Billy an' the hosses. We's gonter git somewhar an' they ain't no use'n worryin' whar. You go down an' set on the po'ch an' I'll pack yo' things an' I'll do it as good as anybody an' we'll crope out'n here in the mawnin' befo' Marse Bob an' Miss Milly's dus' air settled on the pike. I ain't a worryin' 'bout but one thing an' that is that a ol' dominicker hen air took ter settin' on the flo' er our coach an' I'm kinder hatin' ter 'sturb her when she feels so nice an' homelike. I reckon I kin lif her out kinder sof' an' maybe she kin hatch jes the same. She ain't got mo'n a day er so ter go."

"Billy, I am sorry to leave the neighborhood without seeing that lovely girl—the one who sent me the gift and to whom the ball was tendered. She is in reality my kinswoman. I have been tracing the relationship and find she is the same kin as my cousins here at Buck Hill—the young people I mean. I am sorry I did not tell her so."

"Yassum! Maybe some day you kin claim kin with her. I reckon she would be glad an' proud ter be cousins ter you, Miss Ann."

Billy had never told his mistress of his visit to Judith. That young person had impressed him as being not at all proud of being of the same blood as the Bucknors, or in the least desirous of claiming the relationship. "But she wa'n't speakin' er my Miss Ann," he said to himself.

Silently and swiftly old Billy packed his mistress's belongings. Every trunk, suitcase and telescope was in readiness for an early flitting. As he had boasted, they were starting almost before the dust raised by the departing car of Mr. and Mrs. Bucknor had settled.

"Hi, what you so nimble-come-trimble 'bout this mawnin'?" asked Aunt Em'ly, as she met Billy laden with baggage, sneaking out the back way, planning to load his coach before hitching up.

"Miss Ann an' me is done got a invite ter a house pawty an' we air gonter hit the pike in the cool er the mawnin'."

"Wha' you goin'?"

"Heaben when we die," was all Billy would divulge.

"Miss Milly an' Marse Bob ain't said nothin' 'bout Miss Ann leavin'. Fac' is Miss Milly lef' word fer me ter dish up a good dinner fer Miss Ann whilst they wa' away an' serve it on a tray bein' as she wa' all alone."

"Well, I 'low we'll be settin' down in the dinin'-room at the house pawty come dinner time," declared the old man, veiled insolence in his tone.

"What I gonter tell Marse Bob an' Miss Milly when they axes wha' Miss Ann done took herself?"

"I ain't consarned with what you tells 'em. My Miss Ann air done writ a letter ter Miss Milly an' if you ain't got a lie handy you kin jes' han' her the billy dux."

"I allus been holdin' ter it an' I'll give it ter you extry clarified, you's a mean nigger man—mean an' low lifed. I axes you, politeful like, wha' you an' Miss Ann a goin' an' all you kin give me is sass." Aunt Em'ly was full of curiosity and was greatly irritated not to have her curiosity satisfied. But Billy was adamant and Miss Ann more dignified than usual, as she doled out her small tips—all the poor old lady could afford, but presented to the servants whenever she departed with the air of royalty.

"Well, skip-ter-ma-loo, she's gone agin!" laughed Aunt Em'ly, as she stood with Kizzie and watched the old coach rolling down the avenue. "I reckon Marse Bob's gonter be right riled that I can't tell him wha' she goin' but you couldn't git nothin' outer that ol' Billy with an ice pick. I laid off ter ax Miss Ann herself but when she come a sailin' down the steps like she done swallowed the poker an' helt out this here dime ter me like it wa' a dollar somehow she looked kinder awesome an' I couldn't say nothin' but 'Thanky!' Kizzie, did you notice which-away the coach took when they reached the pike?"

"I think it went up the road to'ds Marse Big Josh's," said Kizzie, "but the dus' air pow'ful thick right now, owin' ter ortermobiles goin' both ways, so I ain't quite sho'."

"I wa' pretty night certain ol' Billy p'inted his hosses' heads to'ds Ryeville, but I ain't sho'. It air sech a misty, moisty mornin' an' what with the dus' it air hard ter punctuate. I reckon you's right, Kizzie, an' they's hit the pike fer Marse Big Josh's. Anyhow we'll say that when Marse Bob axes us. If you tells one tale an' I tells anudder Marse Bob'll be mad as a wet hen."

The old coach, creaking ominously, lumbered and rolled down the avenue. The bees, with their front door blocked by the corn cob, hummed furiously. Miss Ann, ensconced behind the barricade of luggage, gazed out on the rolling meadows of Buck Hill and thought bitterly of the old days when devoted cavaliers accompanied her coach, eager to escort her on her journey and vying with one another for a smile from the careless girl within.

She tried to remember the intervening years but could not. She was a beautiful young girl, sought after, welcomed everywhere. Then she was an old woman, unloved, unwelcome, nobody wanting her, nobody loving her. She did not know where Billy was driving her. She did not care. The old man had taken matters into his own hands and no doubt he would leave the decision to Cupid and Puck. She put her head against the upholstered back of the seat and dozed. The morning air came sweet and fresh across the blue-grass meadows. She had a dream, vague and uncertain, but in some unexpected and shadowy way she was happy. She awoke and dozed again. Again a sweet dream of peace and contentment.

The horses came to a standstill. Miss Ann awoke with a start. She did not know whether she had slept moments or hours. Billy had opened the door and was saying: "Miss Ann, we done arriv!" and then he began to unpack his beloved mistress.

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## CHAPTER XX

### A Heart-warming Welcome

"Mumsy, here comes Cousin Ann!"

"There you are at it again, Judith. I say shame on you for calling people cousin who don't even know they are related."

"Anyhow, here comes Cousin Ann!"

"Comes where? Along the pike? I don't see that that is anything to get excited over."

"But it is not along the pike. She is coming here—here in our home. Old Billy has stopped the horses and is down off his box and has opened the door and is unpacking the luggage. After a little while he will come to Cousin Ann."

"Do you know what that means, Mumsy? It means that we are to be taken into the bosom of the family, as it were. Cousin Ann only visits relations. I reckon I'm a snob but I can't help being

glad that I am to belong. I won't let anybody but you know that, Mumsy, but I'm going to be just as nice and kind to poor Cousin Ann as can be. You will too, won't you, dear Mumsy?"

"Well, I guess I know how to treat company," bridled Mrs. Buck.

Miss Ann sat, dazed and wondering, while Billy pulled out the luggage and piled it up by the white picket fence. She did not know where the old coachman had brought her. She wondered vaguely if it could be the home of Cousin David's oldest daughter whose married name had escaped her. Could she have slept a whole day?

Suddenly a red-haired girl in a blue dress came running down the walk and before Billy could get his mistress unpacked this girl had sprung into the coach and putting her arms around Miss Ann's neck kissed her first on one cheek and then on the other.

"Mother and I are real glad to see you and we hope you and Uncle Billy will stay with us just as long as you are comfortable and happy," said Judith. "Howdy, Uncle Billy!"

"Howdy, missy!" Great tears were coursing down the old brown face.

"The guest chamber is all ready, except for being sheeted and that won't take me a minute. Just bring the things right in, Uncle Billy. Here, I'll help and then Miss Ann can get out."

"Cousin Ann, child! I am your Cousin Ann Peyton." Miss Ann spoke from the depths of the coach. And then Mrs. Buck, having hastily tied on a clean apron, came down the walk and was introduced to the visitor, greeting her with shy hospitality.

"I'm pleased to meet you. Judith and I'll be right glad of your company."

How long had it been since anybody had said that to Miss Ann? The old lady flushed with pleasure.

"You are my cousin-in-law, but I don't know your name."

"Prudence—Prudence Knight was my maiden name."

"Ah, then, Cousin Prudence! It is very kind of you and your daughter to greet me so cordially. I hope Billy and I will not be much trouble during our short stay with you. Are you certain it is convenient to have us?"

Now be it noted that in all of the long years of visiting Miss Ann Peyton had never before asked whether or not her coming was convenient. Hitherto she had simply come and stayed until it suited her to move on.

"Indeed it is convenient," cried Judith. "Mother and I are here all alone and we have loads of room."

When Mr. and Mrs. Ezra Knight broke up housekeeping in New England they moved every stick of furniture they possessed to their new home. This furniture had been in the family for generations. There were old highboys of polished mahogany and chaste design, four-poster beds and gate-legged tables, a Sheraton sideboard and Chippendale chairs, a claw-footed secretary with leaded glass doors and secret drawers. There were hooked rugs and patchwork quilts of intricate and wonderful design, hand woven bedspreads of a blue seldom seen and Chinese cabinets and strange grotesque brasses, no doubt brought to New England by the Norse sailor man who had left his mark on the family according to Mrs. Buck.

Miss Ann Peyton felt singularly at home from the moment she entered the front door. The guest chamber, where old Dick Buck had made it convenient to spend the last years of his life, was so pleasant one hardly blamed the old man for establishing himself there. A low-pitched room it was, with windows looking out over the meadow and furnished with mahogany so rare and beautiful it might have graced a museum.

"Now, Cousin Ann, please make yourself absolutely at home. If you want to unpack immediately there is a dandy closet here, and here is a wardrobe and here is a highboy and here a bureau. Uncle Billy can take your trunks to the attic when you empty them. I wish I could help you, but Mumsy and I are up to our necks canning peaches and we can't stop a minute. If you want to come help peel we'd be delighted. We are on the side porch and it is lovely and cool out there," and Judith was gone.

Help peel peaches! Why not? Miss Ann smiled. Nobody ever asked her to help. It was a new experience for her. She decided not to unpack immediately, but donned an apron and hastened to the side porch.

It was pleasant there. Mrs. Buck was peeling laboriously, anxious not to waste a particle of fruit. She stopped long enough to get a paring knife and bowl for the visitor.

"Judith has gone to show your servant where to put the carriage and horses and then to open up the house in the back for him. It was the old house the Bucks had before my father bought this place—a good enough house with furniture in it. Judith gives it a big cleaning now and then and I reckon the old man can move right in."

Old Billy was in the seventh heaven of delight. A stable for Cupid and Puck, with plenty of good pasture land, a carriage house for the coach, shared with Judith's little blue car, but best of all, a house for himself!

"A house with winders an' a chimbley an' a po'ch wha' I kin sot cans er jewraniums an' a box er portulac! I been a dreamin' 'bout sech a house all my life, Miss Judy. Sometimes when I is fo'ced ter sleep in the ca'ige, when Miss Ann an' me air a visitin' wha' things air kinder crowded like, I

digs me up a little flower an' plants it in a ol' can an' kinder makes out my coachman's box air a po'ch. Miss Judy, it air a sad thing ter git ter be ol' an' wo' out 'thout ever gittin' what you wanted when you wa' young an' spry."

"Yes, Uncle Billy, I know how you feel, but now you have a little house and you can live in it as long as it suits you and grow all the flowers you've a mind to. Nobody has lived in it for years and years but I used to play down here when I was a little girl and had time to play. Every now and then I give it a good cleaning, though, and you won't have to do much to start with."

It was a rough, two-roomed cabin, with shabby furniture, but it seemed like a palace to the old darkey.

"I reckon I'll put me up a red curtain," he sighed. "I been always a wantin' a red curtain, an' bless Bob, if they ain't already a row of skilletts an' cookin' pots by the chimby. I am moughty partial ter a big open fiah place wha' you kin make yo' se'f a ol' time ash cake."

"Can you cook, Uncle Billy?"

"Sho' I kin cook, but I ain't git much chanct ter cook, what with livin' roun' so much."

"Well, you can help me sometimes when I get pushed for time," and Judith told the old man of the task she had undertaken of feeding the motormen.

"Sholy! Sholy!" he agreed and then the thought came to him as it had to Miss Ann—When before had he been asked to help?

Judith found the two ladies busily engaged in paring peaches. She was amused to discover that Miss Ann was quicker than her mother and more expert. The old lady's fingers were nimble and dainty and she handled her knife with remarkable skill.

"My goodness! You go so fast I can begin to can," cried Judith. Miss Ann's face beamed with happiness as she watched her young cousin weighing sugar and fruit and then lighting the kerosene stove which stood behind a screen in the corner of the porch.

Judith kept up a lively chatter as she sterilized glass jars and dipped out the cooked fruit. Miss Ann worked faster and faster and even Mrs. Buck hurried in spite of herself. Uncle Billy's amazement was ludicrous when he came upon his mistress making one of this busy family group. But in an instant the old man was helping, too.

The morning was gone but the peaches were all canned, the table filled with amber-colored jars. Billy must carry them to the storeroom and place them on the shelves. He ran back and forth looking like a little brown gnome and actually skipping with happiness. Miss Ann smiled contentedly while Mrs. Buck gathered up the peach skins and stones which she had saved with a view to making marmalade, although Judith assured her that the peach crop was so big that year there would be no use in such close economy.

"Now, we'll have luncheon and then everybody must take a nap," commanded Judith and everybody was very glad to, after the strenuous morning's work, but first Billy slipped out to the carriage house and pulled the corn cob out of the bumble bees' hole.

"There now, you po' critters! I reckon you kin call this home too an' jes' buzz aroun' all you'se a min' ter," the old man whispered happily.

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## CHAPTER XXI

### The Clan In Conclave

Mr. Bob Bucknor was troubled. He had always prided himself on keeping an open house for his relations and to him Cousin Ann was a kind of symbol of consanguinity. He paid very little attention to her as a rule, except to be scrupulously polite. He had been trained in politeness to Cousin Ann from his earliest childhood and had endeavored to bring his own children up with the same strict regard to hospitality and courtesy to his aged relative. His son had profited by his teaching and was ever kindly to the old lady, but his daughters had rebelled, and it could not be denied were even openly rude to the chronic visitor. Now this project of European travel was afoot and the problem of what to do with Cousin Ann must be settled. The masculine representatives of the family were meeting in Ryeville and the matter was soon under discussion.

"It's the women," declared Big Josh. "They are kicking like steers and they say they won't stand for her any longer."

"My wife says she has got a nice old cousin who would like to come and stay with us, and that she does all the darning wherever she stays and looks after the children besides. Nobody ever heard of Cousin Ann turning a hand to help anybody," said Little Josh.

"Well, I fancy you have heard the news that I am taking my wife and daughters abroad this month and I cannot keep the poor old lady any longer," sighed Bob Bucknor.

"Sure, Bob, we think you've had too much of her already," said Sister Sue's husband, Timothy Graves, "but Sue says she can't visit with us any more. The children are big enough now to demand separate rooms and our house is not very large—not as large as it used to be somehow. In old days people didn't mind doubling up, but nobody wants to double up with Cousin Ann and her horses are a nuisance and that old Billy irritates the servants and—"

"My mother says an old ladies' home is the only thing for her," said David Throckmorton.

"So do all the women. But who's going to bell the cat?" asked Big Josh.

"I reckon we'll have to go in a body and speak in chorus," suggested Little Josh. It was thus decided, after much argument. All the cousins were willing to contribute something towards the support of the old lady, but nobody was willing or able to take her in his home.

"Of course, we must provide for old Billy, too."

"Of course!"

"Well, after dinner all of you ride out to Buck Hill and there wait on the poor old thing and together we can break the news to her. It's going to make me feel awfully bad," declared Mr. Bob Bucknor.

"I reckon we'll all feel bad, but none of us must weaken," blustered Big Josh. "And while we are discussing family matters, how about this talk about that pretty Miss Judith Buck being a cousin?"

"The women folk have settled that. At least mine have; and since we are the closest neighbors there at Buck Hill—" began Bob Bucknor.

"You may be the closest neighbors, but you are not the closest kin. I'm for taking her into the clan. By golly, we haven't got too many pretty women in our family to be turning any down. I tell you, I'm going to call on her. Owe her a party call anyhow." Thus rumbled Big Josh.

"Better not," warned Mr. Bob Bucknor and then, since the clan were having dinner at the hotel where "you could" and a feeling of good cheer had begun to permeate the diners, Mr. Bucknor proceeded to tell the story, of course in the strictest confidence, about Tom Harbison and the milk can, all of which went to convince others beside Big Josh that Judith might prove a valuable acquisition to the family.

"I reckon she's coped with worse than our women," said Little Josh. "With poverty staring her in the face and old Dick Buck for a grandfather, she's kept her head up and made a living and got a tidy bank account, so I hear. All by herself, too! I think I'll call when you do, Big Josh, but I'll fight shy of the milk cans."

So it was voted that Judith was to be received into the family, Mr. Bob Bucknor making a mental reservation that he would not divulge the news to his wife and daughters until they were well out of Kentucky. He had strong hopes that European travel might soften the hearts of his daughters towards their pretty, red-haired cousin and neighbor.

"While we've got a little Dutch courage left, let's go on out to Buck Hill and tackle Cousin Ann," said Big Josh. "Now remember, all at once and nobody backing out and coughing. Everybody speak up strong and all together."

A handsome family of men they were, taken all in all—handsome and prosperous, good citizens, honorable, upright, courageous—but this thing of deliberately getting together to inform a poor old woman that no longer would their several homes be ready to receive her made them seem to themselves anything but admirable.

"Darn the women folks, I say!" rumbled Big Josh. "If they weren't so selfish and bent on their own pleasure we would not have to be doing this miserable thing."

"Perhaps if we had helped them a little with Cousin Ann they wouldn't be kicking so," humbly suggested Little Josh.

"Help them! Help them! How in Pete's name could we help them any more? I am sure I have allowed Cousin Ann to give me a lamp mat every Christmas since I was born and my attic is full of her hoop skirts." A smile went the rounds and Big Josh subsided.

Buck Hill never looked more hospitable or attractive, as the cousins speeded up the driveway—two cars full of Kentucky blue blood. The gently rolling meadows dotted with grazing cattle, the great friendly beech trees on the shaven lawn, the monthly roses in the garden, the ever-blooming honeysuckle clambering over the summer-house seemed to cry out, "Welcome to all!"

"Gee! Poor Cousin Ann!" muttered one. "No wonder she likes to stay here."

An unwonted silence fell on the group, as they tiptoed up the front walk. They could not have said why they walked so quietly, but had they been called on to serve as pall bearers to their aged relative they would not have entered into the duty with any greater solemnity.

Aunt Em'ly appeared at the front door.

"Lawsamussy, Marse Bob, you done give me a turn," she gasped, bobbing a courtesy to the assembled gentlemen. "Is you done et?"

"Yes, yes, Aunt Em'ly, we have had dinner, but we should like to—"

"Yassir! I'll git the ice cracked in no time an' sen' Kizzie fer some mint."

"Not yet, Aunt Em'ly," faltered her master miserably. "A little later, perhaps, but now—"

"I know! You done had a po' dinner an' come home fer some 'spectable victuals. It ain't gonter take me long."

"Not at all, Aunt Em'ly, we had an excellent dinner, but now—"

"Call Miss Ann Peyton," blustered Big Josh. "Tell her her cousins all want to see her," and then he swelled his chest with pride. He for one wasn't going to back out.

"Miss Ann done gone," grinned Aunt Em'ly.

"Gone where?" they asked in chorus.

"Gawd knows! She an' ol' Billy an' the hosses done took theyselves off this mawnin' jes' 'bout five minutes after my white folks lef."

"Didn't she say where she was going?" asked Mr. Bucknor.

"She never said 'peep turkey!' ter man or beast. She lef' a dime fer me an' one fer Kizzie an' she went a sailin' out, an' although I done my bes' ter git that ol' Billy ter talk he ain't done give me no satisfaction, but jes' a little back talk, an' then he fotch hisself off, walkin' low an' settin' high an' I ain't seed hide or har of them since. Miss Ann done lef' a note fer you an' Miss Milly, though."

The note proved to be nothing more than Miss Ann's usual formal farewell and did not mention her proposed destination.

"By the great jumping jingo, I hope she didn't try my lane with her old carriage!" exclaimed Big Josh. "That lane, with the women in my family at the end of it, would be the undoing of poor old Cousin Ann. May I use your phone, Bob? I think I'll find out if she's there before I go home."

Every man rang up his home and every man breathed a sigh of relief when he found that Miss Ann had not arrived. Wild and varied were their surmises concerning where she had gone.

"This is the most disgraceful thing that ever happened in the family," declared Timothy Graves. "Of course I know I am only law-kin, but still I feel the disgrace."

"You needn't be so proud of yourself, Tim, because you were some kin already before you married Sister Sue," chided Brother Tom. "I can't see that you are not in on it too."

"That's what I said."

"Yes, but you said it because you really felt it in your favor that you were law-kin," put in Little Josh.

"Nonsense!"

"Come, come," pleaded Mr. Bob Bucknor, "rowing with each other isn't finding out where Cousin Ann has gone. Kizzie! Aunt Em'ly!" he shouted, "get that cracked ice and mint now. Come on, you fellows, and let's see if we can find any inspiration in the bottom of a frosted goblet."

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## CHAPTER XXII

### A Great Transformation

It was unbelievable that a lumbering coach, with two fat horses, an old lady in a hoop skirt and a bow-legged coachman, could have disappeared from the face of the earth. Nevertheless, this seemed the case. Nobody knew where Cousin Ann had gone. Telephones were ringing into the night in vain attempts to trace the old lady. It had never made much difference to anyone before where Miss Ann had gone. For many years she had been leaving one relation's home and arriving at another's, and the comings and goings of Cousin Ann had created but a small ripple in family affairs. She had never deigned to say where next she intended to visit, so why now should the cousins be so disturbed over her whereabouts?

"I am so afraid something has happened to her," said Mr. Bob Bucknor. "I'll never forgive myself if Cousin Ann is in trouble, when I have literally driven her from my house."

"But, my dear, you have not driven her from your home," comforted his wife. "You had only intended to inform her that we were planning a trip abroad and she would have to visit somewhere else until arrangements could be made for her to be established in an old ladies' home. There was nothing cruel in that."

"Ah, but Cousin Ann is so proud and Buck Hill has always been a refuge for her."

The other cousins were likewise agitated. For Cousin Ann to have disappeared just as they were contemplating wounding her made them think that they had already wounded her. "Poor old lady!" was all they could say, and all of them said it until their women-folk were exceedingly bored with the remark.

Mr. Bob Bucknor determined to send for Jeff, if something definite was not heard of the missing

cousin within the next twenty-four hours. He vaguely felt that it might be time for the law to step in and help in the search.

In the meantime Miss Ann was very happy in the house built by Ezra Knight; and Uncle Billy was even happier in the cabin built by the Bucks of old. The Peyton coach stood peacefully in the carriage house, with the bees buzzing sleepily, free to come and go in their subway nest somewhere under the back seat. Cupid and Puck wandered in the blue-grass meadow, content as though they had been put to graze in the Elysian fields.

The first night under the roof of her newly recognized cousins was a novel one for Miss Ann. She had gone to bed not in the least bored, but very tired—tired from actual labor. In the first place, she had helped wipe all the many dishes accumulated from the motormen's dinners and then put them away. That task completed, she had become interested in Judith's work of mounting photographs—an order lately received and one that must be rushed.

"Want to help?" Judith had asked, and soon deft old fingers were vying with young ones.

"Why, Cousin Ann, you have regular fairy fingers," said Judith, and the old lady had blushed with delight. They worked until the task was completed, while Mrs. Buck nodded over "Holy Living and Dying."

In the morning, when Judith made her early way to the kitchen, she found a fire burning briskly in the stove, the kettle ready to boil and the wood box filled. Uncle Billy, smiling happily, was seated in the doorway. Judith thanked him heartily and he assured her he liked to help white ladies, but didn't hold much to helping his own race.

"They's ongrateful an' proudified an' the mo' you holps 'em the mo' they shifts. Me'n Miss Ann has been visitin so long we ain't entered much inter housekeepin', but somehow we seem so sot an' statiumnary now that it comes nachul ter both er us ter len' a han'."

"That's nice," laughed Judith. "I do hope you and Cousin Ann and Cupid and Puck will all feel at home. I wish you would keep your eye open for a nice, respectable woman who could help me, now that I have so many dinners to serve to the trolley men."

"I sho' will—an', Miss Judy, I'm wonderin' if you ain't got a little bitser blue cloth what I mought patch my pants with. If my coattails wa'n't so long I wouldn't be fitten ter go 'mongst folks."

After some discussion with her mother, in which the girl tried to make Mrs. Buck see the difference between saving and hoarding, Judith finally produced for old Billy many leftovers of maternal and paternal grandfathers.

"Mumsy, you are a trump. Now, you see you saved these things so someone deserving could use them, but if they had stayed in the attic until the moths had eaten them up while old Billy went ragged then that would have been wasteful hoarding."

"I'm not minding so much about your Grandfather Buck's things, but somehow it seems a desecration for that old darkey to be wearing your Grandfather Knight's trousers."

"That's what makes me say you are a trump, Mumsy. I know you look upon those broadcloth pants as a kind of sacred trust, and I just love you to death for giving in about them."

"And my father was tall and straight of limb, too," wailed Mrs. Buck. "It seems worse because old Billy's legs are so short and crooked."

Crooked they may have been, but short they were not. By the time the broadcloth trousers traveled the circuitous route of the old man's legs everything came out even.

"Fit me like they was made fer me," he exclaimed, showing himself to Judith.

"Perhaps they were," mused Judith. "And now the coat!"

It was a rusty coat, long of tail and known at the time of its pristine glory as a "Prince Albert." Ezra Knight had kept it for funerals and other ceremonious occasions.

"Is there ary hat?"

There was—a high silk hat with a broad brim. Mrs. Buck rather thought it was one that had belonged to her grandfather and not her father. At any rate, it rested comfortably on Billy's cotton white wool.

"Now, Uncle Billy, trim your beard and nobody will know you," suggested Judith. So trim his beard he did, much to the improvement of his appearance.

"Reform number one!" said Judith to herself.

Miss Ann slept the sleep of industry that first night at the Bucks', and the sun was high when she opened her tired old eyes. She lay still for a moment, wondering where she was. This room was different from any of the other guest chambers she had occupied. There was a kind of austerity in the quaint old furniture that was lacking in the bedrooms where modern taste held sway. Nothing had been taken from or added to the Bucks' guest chamber since Grandmother Knight had reverently placed there her best highboy and her finest mahogany bed and candle stand. On the mantel was the model of a ship that tradition said the Norse sailor had carved, and on the walls steel engravings of Milton and Newton—Milton looking up at the stars seeking the proper rhymes, and Newton with eyes cast down searching out the power of gravity from the ground.

Miss Ann looked on her surroundings and smiled peacefully. She thought over the happenings of yesterday and again she realized that it was a pleasant thing to be wanted. There was a knock at

the door. Billy, no doubt with hot water and maybe an early cup of coffee.

“Come in!”

It was Judith bearing a tray of breakfast.

“Not a bit of use in your getting up early, Cousin Ann, but every reason for you to have breakfast while it is fresh and hot, so I just brought it in to you. I often make my mother stay in bed for breakfast if she is not feeling very strong. There is nothing like starting the day with something in your tummy. It is a lovely day with a touch of autumn in the air. I do hope you slept.”

Judith chattered on, ignoring the fact that Miss Ann was evidently embarrassed that she had been caught minus her wig. The girl opened wide the shutters, letting the sunlight stream into the room.

“Oh, Cousin Ann, what wonderful hair you have! Why it is like the driven snow and as soft as silk! Please, please let me arrange it for you sometimes. I don’t know whether you ought to wear it piled on your head in coils and puffs, like a French beauty of way back yonder, or parted in the middle and waved on each side and drawn back into a loose knot.”

“Oh, child, you can’t think gray hair pretty.”

“Why, it is the loveliest thing in the world. If I had hair like yours I’d never cover it up. You will let me try to dress it won’t you? I just love to touch it,” and Judith fondled one of the silvered plats.

“Yes,” faltered the old lady. How long had it been since anyone but old Billy had complimented her? And when had anyone said her hair might be soft to the touch? Wigs do not last forever and Miss Ann had begun to realize that before many weeks a new one would be imperative. A new wig meant even greater scrimping than usual for Billy and his mistress. Funds must be very carefully handled when such an outlay became necessary. It was next in importance to a new horse, and greater than renewing a wheel on the coach. She had never dreamed that she might get along without a wig. She had begun wearing a wig many years ago, when her hair turned gray in spots. She had always considered dyed hair rather vulgar and so had resorted to a wig and, true to her character for keeping up a custom, she had never discarded the wig, although her hair had long since turned snow-white from root to end.

“Reform number two,” Judith said to herself as she viewed her handiwork on Cousin Ann’s hair. It was decided to part it in the middle and wave it on the sides and sweetly the old lady’s face was framed in the soft, silver locks.

“You look different from yourself, but lovely,” cried Judith. “You make me think of a young person trying to look old.”

She might have added: “Instead of an old person trying to look young,” but she did not.

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## CHAPTER XXIII

### The Lost Is Found

Two days passed and still the Bucknor clan was in ignorance of the whereabouts of Cousin Ann. It had so happened that Judith had been busy at home and had not gone into Ryeville for several days and nobody had called at her home, although since the famous debut party the Bucks had many more visitors than formerly.

Cousin Ann could not have concealed herself from the world more effectually had she tried. Concealment was far from her thoughts, however. She had no idea that a hue and cry would be raised for her. The Fates, in the shapes of Billy, Cupid and Puck, had taken her destiny in hand and landed her with this golden girl, who wanted her and loved her and petted her and made her feel at home. Here she would stay. How long? She would not let herself dwell on that subject.

What the rest of the family would think of her claiming kin with the hitherto impossible Bucks made little difference to the old lady. She determined never to divulge that old Billy had engineered the visit, but intended, when the question came up with her kinsmen, to let it be understood that she, Ann Peyton, had ruled that Judith Buck belonged to the family and had as good a right to the name of Bucknor as any person bearing the name.

The old men of Ryeville were seated in tilted chairs on the hotel porch. The little touch of autumn in the air made it rather pleasant when the sun sought out their feet resting on the railing.

“What’s this I hear about the disappearance of Miss Ann Peyton?” asked Major Fitch. “Someone told me that she has not been heard of now for several days and Bob Bucknor is just about having a fit over it. He and Big Josh are scouring the country for her, after having burnt up all

the telephone wires in the county trying to locate her."

"It's true," chuckled Colonel Crutcher. "My granddaughter says Mildred Bucknor is raising a rumpus because her father is saying he can't go abroad until Cousin Ann is found. First, he can't go because the old lady is visiting him and now he can't go because she isn't visiting him."

"Well, a big, old ramshackled rockaway like Miss Ann's, with a pair of horses fat enough to eat and the bow-leggedest coachman in Kentucky, to say nothing of Miss Ann herself with her puffy red wig and hoop skirts as wide as a barn door, couldn't disappear in a rat hole. They must be somewhere and they must have gone along the road to get where they were going. Certainly they haven't passed this way or we'd have seen them," said Judge Middleton.

"I hear tell Bob Bucknor has sent for Jeff to come and advise him," drawled Pete Barnes. "And I also hear tell that the Bucknor men were gettin' ready to let poor ol' Miss Ann know that she was due to settle herself in an ol' ladies' home. They were cookin' it up that day they all had dinner here last week."

"Yes, and what's more, I hear our Judy gal knocked that Tom Harbison down the hill with a milk bucket," laughed Pete. "I got it straight from Big Josh himself."

So the old men gossiped, basking in the autumn sunshine. They still quarreled over the outcome of the war between the states, but now they had a fresh topic of never-ending interest to discuss and that was their own debut party. Congratulations were ever in order on their extreme cleverness in giving the ball.

Pete Barnes was ever declaring, "It was my idee, though, my idee! And didn't we launch our little girl, though? I hear tell she is going to be asked to join the girls' club. That's a secret. I believe the girls are going to wait until Mildred and Nan Bucknor are on the rolling deep. As for the young men—they are worse than bears about a bee tree. Judy won't have much to do with them though. But you needn't tell me she doesn't like it."

"Sure she does. She's too healthy-minded not to like beaux. There she comes now! I can see her car way up the street—just a blue speck," cried Judge Middleton.

"Sure enough! There she is! She's got her mother in with her."

"That's not Mrs. Buck. Mrs. Buck always sits in Judy's car as though she were scared to death—and she hasn't white hair either."

"Hi, Miss Judy!"

"Hi, yourself!" and Judith stopped her car in front of the hotel.

"Boys, that's Miss Ann Peyton!" cried Major Fitch. "Miss Ann or I'll eat my hat!"

"She's already eaten her wig. No wonder we didn't know her! And she's left off her hoops!" cried the Judge.

The old men removed their feet from railing, dropped their chairs to all fours, sprang up and, standing in a row, made a low bow to the occupants of the little blue car. Then they trooped off the porch and gathered in a circle around the ladies.

"The last I heard of you, Miss Ann, was that you were lost," said Judge Middleton.

"Not a bit of it," declared Judith. "She is found."

"Yes—and I think I've found myself, too," said Miss Ann softly. "I am visiting my dear young cousin, Judith Buck."

"At my urgent invitation," explained Judith.

"I am staying on at her invitation, but I followed my usual habit and went uninvited," said the old lady firmly.

The old men listened in amazement. What was this? Miss Ann Peyton openly claiming relationship with old Dick Buck's granddaughter and riding around—minus wig and hoops—with the new-found cousin in a home-made blue car! Miss Ann was meek but happy.

"Well, I swan!" exclaimed Pete Barnes.

"What do you suppose he meant by saying they thought you were lost?" Judith asked on the way home from Ryeville. "Didn't they know you were coming to me?"

"No," faltered Miss Ann. "I seldom divulge where I intend to visit next. That is my affair," she added with a touch of her former hauteur—a manner she had discarded with the wig and hoop skirt. Wild horses could not drag from her the fact that she had not known herself where she was going.

"That's all right, Cousin Ann, but if you ever get tired of staying at my house I am going to be hurt beyond measure if you go off without telling me where you are going. Promise me you'll never treat me that way."

"I promise. I have never told the others because it has never made any difference to them."

When the blue car disappeared up the street the old men of Ryeville went into conference.

"Don't that beat bobtail?"

"Do you fellows realize that means our gal is recognized for good and all? Miss Ann may be played out as a visitor with her kinfolds, but she's still head forester of the family tree," said Judge Middleton.

"Don't you reckon we'd better 'phone Buck Hill or Big Josh or some of the family that Miss Ann is found?" asked Pete Barnes.

"No, let's let 'em worry a while longer. They've been kinder careless of Miss Ann to have mislaid her, and mighty snobbish with our gal not to have claimed kin with her long ago. My advice is let 'em worry, let 'em worry," decreed Major Fitch.

Miss Ann wasn't lost very long, however. That same evening, when Judith made her daily trip to the trolley stop with the men's dinner, Jefferson Bucknor stepped from the rear platform of the six-thirty.

"In time to carry your 'empties' for you," he said, shaking Judith's hand with a warmth that his casual greeting did not warrant. Judith surrendered the basket, but held on to the empty milk can.

"Your trusty weapon," said Jeff, and they both laughed. "Have you knocked anybody down lately?" the young man asked.

"Not many, but I am always prepared with my milk can. It is a deadly weapon, with or without buttermilk."

"I wonder if you are anywhere near so glad to see me as I am to see you. I have been sticking to business and trying to make believe that Louisville is as nice as Ryeville, and Louisville girls are as beautiful as they are reputed to be, and that the law is the most interesting thing in the world, but somehow I can't fool myself. Are you glad to see me?"

"Of course," said Judith.

"I wish you wouldn't swing that milk can so vigorously. I think a cousin might be allowed to ask if you are glad to see him without being in danger of having to take the same medicine Tom Harbison had to swallow. I've come home on a rather sad mission, in a way, and still I wanted to see my little cousin so much I can't help making a kind of lark of it. I am really worried very much, and should go to Buck Hill immediately, but if you don't mind, I'll hang around while you get the seven o'clock dinners packed and then help you carry them."

Judith did not mind at all. "I hope nobody at Buck Hill is ill," she said.

"No, but my father is in a great stew over old Cousin Ann Peyton. She is lost and he seems to feel I can find her. Why, I don't know, if he and Big Josh can't, even with the help of the marshal."

"I am sure you can," declared Judith demurely, and Jeff thought happily how agreeable it was to have someone besides a father have such faith in his ability.

"You must come in and wait," insisted Judith. "There is a fire in the dining-room. It is cold for September and a little fire towards evening is pleasant."

Jeff entered the home of his newly claimed cousin with a feeling of some embarrassment. It seemed strange that he had lived on the adjoining farm all his early years and that this was the first time he had been in the Bucks' house. There was a chaste New England charm about the dining-room that appealed to him. It was a fit background for the tall, white-haired old lady who was busily engaged in setting the table as the young people entered. She was smiling and humming a gay little minuet, as she straightened table mats and arranged forks and knives in exactly the proper relation to each other and the teaspoons.

Stooping and placing wood on the fire was an old negro man. His back was strangely familiar to Jeff and there was something about the lines of the white-haired old lady that made him stare. She was like Cousin Ann but couldn't be she. Not only the snowy hair and the simple, straight skirt of her gown were not those of the lost cousin, but the fact that she was engaged in household duties was even more convincing of a case of mistaken identity. It was old Billy that had flashed through his mind, when he noticed the fire maker, but old Billy never engaged in any form of domestic labor any more than his mistress.

"Someone to see you, Cousin Ann," said Judith, putting her arm around the old lady's waist.

Jeff choked and gasped.

That evening the telephone wires were again kept hot by the Bucknors and their many kinsmen. Everybody who had been informed of Miss Ann's being lost must be informed of her being found. Big and Little Josh drove over to Buck Hill to hear the story of Jeff's discovery.

"And what were you doing at the Bucks'?" Big Josh asked Jeff.

"I was calling on Miss Judith. In fact, I had jumped off the trolley at that stop because I hoped she would be there," said Jeff, his face flushing but his eyes holding a steady light as he looked into those of his father's cousin. He even raised his voice a little so as to make sure that everyone in the room might hear him.

"Well, well!" exploded Big Josh. "You have beat me to it. I was planning to go to-morrow to call on our Cousin Judith Buck. You know she is our cousin, Jeff—not too close, but just close enough. She has been voted into the family when we sat in solemn conclave and now to think of her proving she is kin before we had time to let her know of her election—prove it by taking poor Cousin Ann in and making her welcome! By jingo, she is a more worthy member of the clan than any woman we have in the family. I was all for taking her in because she is so gol darned pretty and up-and-coming. I must confess I wouldn't have been so eager about it if she had been jimber-jawed and cross-eyed, but, by the great jumping jingo, I'd say be my long-lost cousin now

if she had a wooden leg, a glass eye and china teeth!"

"Cousin Ann has left off her wig and her hoop skirts, too," said Jeff, "and old Billy has trimmed his beard, and, what is more, both of them were busy helping—Cousin Ann setting the table and Uncle Billy bringing in wood and mending the fire."

"Did Judith Buck make them do it," asked Mildred. "She was a great boss at school."

"That I don't know, but they seemed very happy in being able to help. Mrs. Buck told me she was glad to have a visitor. Her daughter is away so much and she gets lonely. Old Uncle Billy is established in a cabin behind the house—"

"The one old Dick Buck lived in," interrupted Big Josh.

"And the old man told me he was planning to do the fall ploughing with Cupid and Puck. He says they have plenty of pull left in them and my private opinion is that Cousin Ann's old coach will not stand another trip."

"See here," spoke Little Josh, who was the practical member of the family, "this is all very well, but we Bucknors can't sit back and let this little Judy Buck support our old cousin. The girl works night and day for a living and to try to pull the farm her Grandfather Knight left her and her mother back into some kind of fertility. Old Billy and Cousin Ann may set the table and make the fires, but that isn't bringing any money into the business. We've got to reimburse the girl somehow."

"She wouldn't stand for it," said Jeff. "She is as proud as can be to be able to have Cousin Ann visit her."

"Well, then we'll have to find a way that won't hurt her pride. Let's send things to Cousin Ann. It will please the old lady and at the same time help on our Cousin Judith."

"What kind of things?" asked Mr. Bob Bucknor, who had been singularly quiet and thoughtful ever since his mind was relieved as to his cousin's not being lost.

"The kind of things neighbors and kinsmen do for one another in our state and all other states where neighbors are neighborly and where blood is thicker than water, and blue blood thicker than any other kind," exclaimed Big Josh. "When you kill mutton don't you send me a quarter? Well, send one to the Bucks instead. When your potato crop was a failure owing to the bugs getting ahead of you, didn't I share with you? Well, let me share with this girl. When I harvest, aren't all the relations ready to send hands to help if I need help? Who ever helped Judith Buck?"

"I bet your smokehouse is full and running over this minute. I know mine is. Well, let them run over in the right channel. We can't do enough for this young cousin. Gee, man, just to think of our being spared the humiliation of having to go to Cousin Ann and, tell her that we couldn't look after her any longer! I break out in a cold sweat whenever I think of how near we came to it.

"If Cupid and Puck can't pull the plough, how about sending your tractor over and getting Cousin Judith's few acres broken up for her in three shakes of a dead sheep's tail? I'd do it if I were closer. Why, jiminy crickets! We owe her an everlasting debt of gratitude just for persuading Cousin Ann to step out of her wig and hoops, and another one for making that old Billy trim his beard. I believe his beard was what made the other darkeys hate him so, and I know if it hadn't have been for Cousin Ann's hoop skirt and wig she would have been helping the women folk around the house long before this. What they had against her was that she was always company wherever she stayed. I tell you, give me a red-headed girl for managing!"

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## CHAPTER XXIV

### Blessings Begin to Flow

"Well, I say it's a good thing these cousins of yours didn't decide sooner to recognize you, Judy, because if they had we wouldn't have had a single chair with a bottom left in it and the hooked rugs your Grandmother Knight brought to Kentucky would have been nothing but holes," declared Mrs. Buck. "I never saw so much company in my born days and constant setting wears out chairs and constant rocking wears out rugs.

"I don't say as it isn't nice to have company. I've been lonesome, in a way, all my life, because my mother and father weren't much hands at mixing, feeling themselves to be kind of different from the folks here in Kentucky, and then I married young, and trouble came early, and my poor dear husband's father wasn't the kind to attract the kind of people my mother felt were our equals—but now, sakes alive, never a day passes but it isn't cousin this and cousin that, coming to call or ringing the 'phone or sending some kind of present to Miss Ann.

"What do they expect Miss Ann to do with a bushel of winter onions and a barrel of potatoes and a keg of cider and a barrel of flour and six sides of bacon, two jowls and three hams, besides two barrels of apples and a hind quarter of the prettiest mutton I've seen for many a day? This

morning a truck drove up with enough wood to last us half through the winter—the best kind of oak and pine mixed and all cut stove length ready for splitting. That old Billy is mighty nice about splitting the wood and bringing it in. He's the most respectful colored person I ever saw and the only one I'd ever have around."

Mrs. Buck paused for breath and then proceeded: "While you were off teaching to-day somebody Miss Ann called Cousin Betty Throckmorton came to call and brought two daughters and a grandchild. I was mighty sorry for them to miss you and I told them so. I think Mrs. Throckmorton rather thought I ought to have said I was sorry for you to miss her, but being as she had come to see you and not you to see her and being as you are a sight better looking than she is or her daughters or the grandchild, I put it the other way. Anyhow, she was a very fine lady and couldn't say enough in praise of some of our furniture.

"She asked me where the secretary in the parlor came from and when I told her it belonged to my mother's side of the house—the Fairbankses—and came over on the third trip of the Mayflower she said no doubt she and I could claim relationship, as she, too, was a Fairbanks. And then she said to Miss Ann that people in the south paid so much more attention to relationship than they did in the north and no doubt she was as close to me as Miss Ann was to you.

"Then I got out that book your Grandmother Knight set such store by, with all of her family written down in it and a picture of the old original Fairbanks home, and Mrs. Throckmorton nearly fell over herself reading it and hunting out where she belonged in it and finally she found her line and then, sure enough, she and I are closer relations than you and Miss Ann. Then she called me Cousin Prudence and asked me to call her Cousin Betty. I'm afraid I can never get the courage to do that, but it does kind of tickle me for them to be claiming relationship with me too. We are the same folks we have always been."

"So we are, Mumsy, but perhaps the other fellow has had a change of heart. Does Cousin Ann like having so many callers?"

"Indeed she does, and she never stops telling them what a fine girl you are. Sometimes I can't believe she is really talking about my little Judy, she makes you out so wonderful. Mrs. Throckmorton—Cousin Betty—said she had got a letter from Mrs. Robert Bucknor, written from Monte Carlo, telling all about the good times they are having. It seems that that Mildred has caught a real beau. Cousin Betty's daughter said she hoped he'd be more faithful than Tom Harbison, and Cousin Betty hushed up. Evidently she didn't want me to know about Tom Harbison—not that I want to know. This beau is a count and rich and middle aged. It looks as though it might be a match. All of the ladies, even Miss Ann, thought it would be a good thing if Mildred married rich and lived abroad. They didn't want anything but good fortune for her, but I could tell they'd like to have her good fortune fall in foreign parts.

"At first Miss Ann was right stand-offish with Mrs. Throckmorton, but that lady went right up to her and kissed her and said, 'See here, Cousin Ann, you might just as well be glad to see me, because I am very glad to see you, and to see you looking so well and so comfortable and I'm also glad to see your pretty white hair and to know you've got some legs.' And Miss Ann laughed and said, 'Thank you, Cousin Betty,' and then they began to visit as sweet as you please. Old Billy went out and made the colored chauffeur go back and see his house and of all the big talking you ever heard, that old man did the biggest. I came back to the pantry to get out a little wine and cake for the company and I could hear him just holding forth."

"Poor old Uncle Billy! He is proud of having a house," laughed Judith. "His turkey red curtains are up now and his geranium slips started. He has put on a fresh coat of whitewash, within and without, and his floor is scrubbed so clean you could really make up biscuit on it. It is gratifying, Mumsy, that we have been able to make two old people as happy as we have Cousin Ann and old Uncle Billy. I only hope Cousin Ann doesn't bother you."

"Lands sakes, child, she is a heap of company for me and she is a great help. I don't see how such an old person can step around so lively. She stirred up a cake this morning. She says she has been clipping recipes out of newspapers for years and years but they have always made company of her wherever she has visited before and she has never been able to try any of her recipes. Her cake has got a little sad streak in it, owing to the fire getting low while it was baking, but that wasn't to say her fault altogether, as I told her I'd look after the fire while she picked out walnuts for the icing.

"We had a right good time though while the cake-making was going on and Mr. Big Josh Bucknor came to pass the time of day. He could not stop but a minute but he nearly split his sides laughing at Miss Ann in a big apron, turning her hand to cooking. She laughed, too, and made as if she was going to hit him with the rolling pin, like that woman in the newspaper named Mrs. Jiggs. Mr. Big Josh brought some fine fish as a present. He said he'd been fishing and had caught more than he could use."

That evening, after the dishes were washed, Judith, instead of beginning on the photographic work as was her custom, sat silent with folded hands, her head resting against the back of the winged chair. Her eyes were closed and her face was tense.

"Child, you look so tired," said Miss Ann. "You do too much. I am afraid my being here puts more on you than you can stand."

In all her many decades of visiting, that was the first time Miss Ann had ever suggested to a hostess that she might be troublesome. Judith insisted she was not tired and that Miss Ann was a help and no trouble, but the old lady could but see that there were violet shadows under the

girl's eyes and that the contour of her cheek was not so rounded as it had been in the summer.

That night, when Billy came to her room to see if she needed anything before retiring—an unfailling custom of the old man—Miss Ann was on the point of discussing with him the evident fatigue of their beloved young hostess, but before she could open the subject Billy said:

"Miss Ann, I done got a big favor ter ax you. I ain't 'lowin' ter imconvenience you none, but I air gonger go on a little trip. It air goin' on ter fifty years sence I had a sho' 'nuf holiday, bein' as I ain't never been ter say free ter leave you when we've been a visitin' roun', kase I been always kinder feard you mought need ol' Billy whilst you wa'n't ter say 'zactly at home, but somehows now you seem ter kinder b'long here with Miss Judy an' her maw an' my feets air been eatchin' so much lately th'ain't nothin' fer me ter do but follow the signs an' go on a trip."

"But, Billy—" began Miss Ann.

"Yassum, I ain't gonger be gone long. It ain't gonger be mo'n three or fo' days, or maybe five or six, but anyhow I's gonger be back here in three shakes er a dead sheep's tail. I kin see, as well as you kin, that Miss Judy air kinder tuckered out what with teachin' an' servin' up them suppers to the street cyar men. I'm a thinkin' that when I goes on my trip I mought fin' a good cook ter help Miss Judy out. Her maw am p'intedly 'posed ter nigger gals, but she ain't called on ter be. Me'n you knows by lookin' on with one eye that Mrs. Buck air mo' hindrance than help ter Miss Judy. You ain't gonger put no bans on my goin' air you, Miss Ann? Looks like it ain't 'zactly grabby fer me ter git a holiday onct every fifty years."

"Well, if—" Miss Ann tried again.

"Yassum, I done filled all the wood boxes in the house an' on the po'ch. I done split up enough kindlin' ter las' a week. I done scrubbed the kitchen an' cleaned out the cow shed an' put fresh straw in Cupid and Puck's stalls. I done pick a tu'key fer Miss Judy an' blacked the stove. I ain't lef nothin' undone, an' she ain't gonger have no trouble till ol' Billy gits back. I done already ax her what she thinks 'bout my goin' on a trip an' she say fer me ter git a move on me 'kase I needs it an' what's mo' she done rooted out'n the attic a top coat an' a pair er boots an' I'm a gonger go off dressed up as good as a corpse."

So Billy departed on his trip. When he had been gone four days and no message from him had come, Miss Ann was plainly a little uneasy about the old man.

"You ain't called on to be worried," said Mrs. Buck. "That old man can take care of himself all right. I must say I never expected the time to come when I'd confess to missing a darkey, but Uncle Billy is a heap of help around the place. He saves Judy a lot of work—things she never would let me do. I certainly hope nothing has happened to him."

Nothing had—at least nothing that his mistress or Mrs. Buck could have feared. When Judith went to the kitchen on Sunday morning, the one day she allowed herself to relax, she found the fire crackling in the stove and the kettle filled and ready to boil. Standing by the table, rolling out biscuit, was a small, old mulatto woman, wiry and erect. She was dressed in a stiff, purple calico dress and on her head was a bandanna handkerchief, the ends tied in front and standing up like rabbit ears.

Uncle Billy looked at Judith and grinned sheepishly. "Miss Judy, this air Mandy!"

"How do you do, Aunt Mandy? I am so glad you have come to help me. You have come for that, have you not?"

The old woman continued to roll the dough and cut out the biscuit with a brisk motion, at the same time looking keenly at Judith.

"Yes, I reckon that's what I come for mostly, and at the same time I come somewhat to be helped myself. As soon as I git these here biscuits in the oven I'll tell you what Billy air too shamefaced to own up to."

She whisked the biscuits into the oven and then proceeded, "Billy air kinder new to this business, but bein' as it's my fifth I'm kinder used to it. Billy an' me done got ma'id yesterday."

"Got what?"

"Ma'id! I'm his wedded wife. He done come down to Jefferson County courtin', an' bein' as I done buried my fo'th jes' las' year I up'n says yes as quick as a flash. I reckon Billy's been 'lowin' that so long as he couldn't be my fust, owin' to delays an' happenin's, he'd make out to be my las'. I been kinder expectin' that Billy'd come along for fifty-odd years an' every time I'd git a chance to git ma'id I'd kinder put it off, thinkin' he mought turn up, an' every time I'd bury a husband I'd say to myself, 'Now maybe this time Billy'll be comin' along.' I been namin' my chilluns arfter him off an' on. There's Bill an' Billy an' Bildad an' William an' Willy an' one er my gals is named Willymeeter. Of course I knowed he wa' kinder 'sponsible fer Miss Ann, an' I ain't never blamed him none, but I sho' wa' glad ter see him when he come walkin' in las' Wednesday an' jes' tol' me he wa' a needin' me an' he had a home er his own with a po'ch an' all. An' so we got ma'id."

Old Billy had realized his dream at last—a house he could call his own, with a porch and geraniums growing on it, and married to Mandy. It mattered not to him that he was her fifth venture in matrimony.

"Come next summer, we'll have a box of portulac a bloomin' befo' the house," he said to Judith. "I'm pretty nigh scairt ter be gittin' so many blessings ter onct. Sometimes I kinder pinch myself ter see if I ain't daid an' gone ter Heaben."

## CHAPTER XXV

### Uncle Billy Smiles

Judith stood on the platform, swinging her cooler of buttermilk as a signal to the six-thirty trolley to stop and be fed. Thanks to the help of Aunt Mandy and Uncle Billy she had been able to furnish dinners to the motormen and conductors all during the snows of winter and the rains of spring. It was June again, and a year since she began keeping what she called a basket boarding-house. It had proved a profitable business. At the same time she had the undying gratitude and admiration of her boarders.

The trolley stopped and eager hands relieved her of the basket and cooler. A young man swung from the platform of the rear car. Aunt Mandy had fried the chicken and Judith had not had to hurry to meet the six-thirty, so there was no excuse for the heightened color of her cheeks when she saw it was Jeff Bucknor.

"In time to carry your 'empties'," he said, taking the basket from her. "Are you glad to see me?"

"Yes!"

"Very glad?"

"Yes, very glad!"

They followed the path through the beech grove. "Can't we sit down a minute?" begged the young man. Judith complied. It was a venerable tree that sheltered them, with dense foliage on twisted limbs, the lower ones almost touching the ground.

"I so often think of this tree and this mossy bank," said Jeff. "I have been wondering all the way up from Louisville if you would sit here with me a while."

"You might have employed your time better."

"Yes, I might have wondered what you were giving the motormen for dinner. Judith, will you do me a favor? Please put down that milk can. I want to ask you something and I'd be much happier and feel much safer if you'd let the buttermilk can roll down the hill. There now, that's a good girl!" He gave the can a push and it rolled away, with much banging and jangling.

"First, let me ask your advice. The old men of Ryeville have sent for me to come and talk with them. It seems they want me to run for the office of county attorney. They say they are sure their candidate will be elected and I believe they can control the politics of the county from their hotel porch. I'll accept their proposition if you will tell me to."

"Why should I decide?"

"Oh, Judith, can't you see that life isn't worth living in Louisville or anywhere else if you are not with me? I have been loving you from the minute I first saw you standing on the platform swinging your milk can. In fact, I believe I have been loving you from the time I saw you on the trolley that day I got back home. Why I didn't love you when you were such a spunky little kid, tramping around peddling fish and rabbits and blackberries, I don't know. I must have been a blind fool or I would have. Anyhow, I love the memory of you when you were a little girl. Can't you care for me a little, Judith?"

"I believe I can."

"And you won't mind putting the *nor* back on your name?"

"No, Jeff. I won't mind."

Long the lovers sat under the great tree. The seven o'clock trolley whistled for the next to the last stop, but Jeff and Judith did not hear it. Fortunately for the hungry men, Uncle Billy had seen from afar the young people seeking the shade of the beech grove and when Judith did not return to the house he had astutely reasoned that matters of import were detaining her.

"Here, Mandy, give me that there basket er victuals an' I'll make tracks fer the platform. Miss Judy an' Marse Jeff air a co'tin' an' when folks air a co'tin' time ain't mo'n the win' blowin'."

Miss Ann received the news of the engagement with happy tears and Mrs. Buck said that it was Judith's business and she had always known what she wanted from the time she was born. If she wanted Jeff Bucknor, Mrs. Buck reckoned it was all right. He seemed a likely enough young man, but she hoped he knew how to save, because Judith did not.

The old men of Ryeville were satisfied when Jeff Bucknor told them he would run for the office of county attorney if they so wished it. At the same time he broke to them the news of his engagement. The veterans exchanged sly glances and laughed delightedly. Little did the young man dream that they had planned this political coup for the sole purpose of bringing to the county the person they considered the most suitable as a husband for their protege.

"It was my idee, my idee!" Pete Barnes declared.

The happiest of all the friends of the young couple was old Billy.

“Marse Jeff done tol’ me Miss Ann wa’n’t never ter want an’ now, bless Bob, he’s gonter come an’ live with us-alls an’ look arfter the whole bilin’. I sho’ air glad he’s gonter come here instead er us havin’ ter pick up an’ go wherever he is. The portulac air comin’ up so pretty in my box an’ my jewraniums air a bloomin’, an’ I done made Mandy one willin’ husband, an’ Miss Ann air so brisk an’ happy it would go hard on us all ter have ter be movin’. A ol’ hen air took ter settin’ in the ca’ige which makes it seem moughty homified. I’d sho’ be proud ter think me’n Miss Ann could live ter see the day that little chilluns would be playin’ stage coach an’ injun in Miss Ann’s ol’ rockaway.”

\*\*\* END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE COMINGS OF COUSIN ANN \*\*\*

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