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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK A HOUSE PARTY WITH THE TUCKER TWINS ***





SLEEPY TOOK HER BY THE ARM AND
CARRIED HER OFF, PROTESTING, * * * BUT
HAPPY IN BEING COERCED. [Page 37.](#)

A HOUSE PARTY WITH THE TUCKER TWINS

[3]

By
NELL SPEED

*Author of "The Molly Brown Series," "The Carter
Girls Series," "At Boarding School With
the Tucker Twins," etc., etc.*

With Four Illustrations
by
ARTHUR O. SCOTT



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A House Party With the Tucker Twins

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CHAPTER I

MAXTON

THERE may be more fun than a house-party, but I doubt it. Certainly I, Page Allison, have never had it. What could be more delightful than to spend two weeks in a beautiful old country home with such a host as General Price, and to have as fellow guests all the girl friends you care for most in the world,—to say nothing of some of the male persuasion that at least you don't hate?

Harvie Price had been promised this house-party by his grandfather as reward of merit, and, like most things earned by hard labor, it proved to be worth the work expended. The Tucker Twins of course were there, Mary Flannagan, Shorty Hawkins, George Massie (alias Sleepy), Wink White, Jim Hart, and Ben Raglan, whose other name was Rags. There were two men from the University whom we did not know before, but it did not take long for us to forget that they were new acquaintances. They fitted in wonderfully well and a few hours found them behaving like old and tried friends. Their names were Jack Bennett and Billy Somers, and both of them hailed from Kentucky. There was a new girl in the party, Jessie Wilcox. She wasn't quite so easy to know as the new boys.

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I always feel like crying when I think of dear little Annie Pore's connection with that house-party. She was of course the very first person Harvie asked, the one he wanted most. I think in his mind the party was given to Annie, and when Mr. Pore with characteristic selfishness and stubbornness refused to let her go, it was a blow indeed.

His plea was that he needed her to keep the store for him. He had hired a clerk after Annie went to boarding-school, and owing to his growing business, had kept the boy on through vacation, but on the eve of the house-party had seen fit to get rid of him, having sent him on an unasked for and undesired holiday.

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"I found it out only this morning," said Harvie gloomily.

He had come to meet us at the landing, most of us having arrived by boat from Richmond. He was doing his best to look cheerful, feeling that a cloud must not be cast over the entire party because one member could not be there. He said he felt he knew me well enough to speak out on the subject of Mr. Pore, and speak out he did.

"But has your grandfather tried to persuade him to let her come?"

"No! You see Grandfather is a great believer in State's Rights, and he carries his theories down to the individual. He says that Mr. Pore is a wrong-headed father but it is his own affair and he refuses to interfere. He takes the stand that he has no more right to dictate to Mr. Pore how to run his household, than Massachusetts had to interfere in our own little matter of slavery here in

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Virginia, back in the sixties."

"Poor Annie! We shall have to work out some kind of a scheme for her. I'll tell Mary and the Tuckers. I am sure we can get the tiresome old Englishman to come around somehow."

"I wish I thought so, but I tell you that Mr. Arthur Ponsonby Pore has never been known to change his mind. Besides he is leaving to-day for Richmond to be gone several days."

That is often the way with persons who have not much mind to change; they seem to have none to spare; but Mr. Pore was a cultivated, learned gentleman,—surely he was amenable to reason.

Price's Landing was a quiet little wharf almost hidden by the overhanging willows. It took the boat only a moment to drop one mail bag and take on another, or to do the same by the occasional passengers. It seemed hardly worth while to go through the motions of landing for such small traffic, but Harvie assured us that in watermelon time or when tobacco was being shipped they were a very important trading point, one of the busiest along the James. [11]

The village was about an eighth of a mile back from the landing and it looked as though not even watermelon time could wake it up. There were two stores, Mr. Pore's and a rival concern; a blacksmith shop, sprawling far out in the road; a schoolhouse; three churches; a post-office; and four residences.

"I'd like to stop and have all of you see Annie now, but Grandfather is expecting us and perhaps we had better come back later on," said Harvie, who was driving one of the vehicles sent to meet us.

The road to Maxton, the Prices' place, skirted the village and then went directly up quite a steep elevation. The house was built on top of the hill commanding a fine view of the river. The lawn sloped down to the water's edge where one could see a very attractive boat-house and several boats riding at anchor.

"Lovely! Lovely!" we exclaimed. [12]

"I'm mighty afraid I'm going to run down that hill and jump in the water," cried Dum.

"Well, hills are certainly made to run down and water to jump in," declared one of the new acquaintances, Billy Somers, who was standing on the springs of the vehicle in the rear holding on by the skin of his teeth and the back seat. "I bid to do what you do."

The mansion (one could not call it just plain house) was a perfect specimen of colonial architecture, red brick of a rich rare tone with a great gallery across the front, the roof of which was supported by huge white pillars. The front door was a marvel of beautiful proportions, line and detail. A great hall might have been given on the porch, or gallery, as it is called in the South. Indeed, a sizable party might have been held on each one of the broad stone steps that led to the lawn. Only a very long-legged person could go up or down those stairs without taking two steps to a tread.

A house like Maxton is very wonderful and beautiful but somehow never seems very homelike to me. Every time you go in and out of your front door to have to tackle those stairs would take from the homey feeling. Now at my home, Bracken, you are closer to Mother Earth and not nearly so grand and toploftical. [13]

Standing on the gallery to greet the guests were General Price and his maiden sister Miss Maria, the general tall and stately and Miss Maria short and fat. It was easy for the brother to look aristocratic and dignified, in fact he could not have looked any other way, so deserved no credit; but for the sister to look equally so was a marvel. Her figure reminded me of Mammy Susan's tomato pincushion, a treasure I had been allowed to play with in my childhood. She was quite as round in the back as the front and her waist was like the equator: an imaginary line extending from east to west. Her face was in keeping with her figure, round and fat, but through those rolls of flesh the high born lady looked out. Her voice was very sweet and the hand that she extended to us was as white as snow. She must have been about seventy years old, but thanks to her rotundity there were no wrinkles on her pink and white face. Of course she was dressed in black silk and old lace! How else could she have been clothed? [14]

The general would have served as a model for the make-up of a movie actor in a before-the-war film. The Tuckers and Mary and I decided later on that we felt just like a movie as we went up those grand broad steps with our host and hostess at the top.

The hall carried out our feeling of being on the screen.

"My, what a place to dance!" whispered Dee to me, but General Price heard her and smiled his approval. He was dignified himself but we were thankful he did not expect us to be.

"You shall dance here to your heart's content, my dear. Many a measure has been trod in this hall."

Dee looked a little depressed at being expected to tread a measure. That sounded rather minuetish to the modern ear. We wondered what he would think of the dances of the day. [15]

Maxton was laid out in the form of a cross with two great wings, one on each side of the hall. The girls were lodged upstairs in one wing, the boys in the other. Downstairs in the boys' wing were the parlors and smoking room and General Price's chamber and office; in the girls', the

dining room, breakfast room, sewing room, chamber, linen room, storeroom, Miss Price's chamber and her small sitting room where she directed her household. There was a basement with more storerooms, pantries, a billiard room and a winter kitchen, but in the summer an outside kitchen was used. All of these things we found out later on a tour of inspection with our hostess.

The great hall ran through the house and the back door was exactly like the front. Thanks to the lay of the land, however, there was not quite such a formidable array of steps. It seemed much more homelike in the back than the front. From the rear gallery one stepped into a formal garden, gravel paths, box hedges, labyrinth and all.

"Oh, ain't it great, ain't it great?" cried Mary, dancing up and down the waxed floor of the great bedroom she and I were to occupy. Dum and Dee Tucker were put in the room with the other girl, Jessie Wilcox. If Annie could have come she was to have been with Mary and me. [16]

"I've got no business calling it great, though," she said as she stopped prancing, "when Annie can't be here. What are we to do about it, Page Allison?"

"Let's call Tweedles in consultation. They can think up things."

Tweedles were very glad to come. Miss Wilcox, who had motored over to Maxton several hours ahead of us, had already taken possession of the room and had begun to unpack her many fluffy clothes. Miss Maria had introduced all of us to our fellow visitor and had graciously expressed a desire that we should be good friends. We were willing, but it remained to be seen whether the stranger would meet us half way. She was a beautiful little creature with dark eyes and hair. Evidently she was very dressy or she would not have had to take up two double beds and all the chairs with her clothes. She seemed to have no idea of making room for the Tuckers nor did she make any excuse for spreading herself so promiscuously. [17]

"She needn't think I am going to move them," said Dum. "If they aren't off my bed by bedtime, I'll just go to sleep on them. I wish we could come in with you girls."

"Of course that would never do," declared Dee. "We must stay where Miss Price put us."

"Maybe Miss Wilcox will turn out to be fine," I suggested, hoping to turn the tide of Dum's disapproval.

"Fine! She's too fine. I wish you could see her fluffy ruffles. But this isn't thinking up something to do about poor little Annie. My, I wish Zebedee could have come!"

We all wished the same thing, but since he couldn't come we felt we must think up something for ourselves.

"He could have talked old Ponsonby Pore into letting Annie come, I just know," said Dee. [18]

"Maybe we could do the same thing," I suggested.

"Harvie says nothing will move him."

"Well, one thing sure, we can go to see Annie and he can't drive us out, not after he has visited us at the beach. He'll just have to be polite to us."

"Can't she come up in the evening? Surely she must stop keeping store sometimes," asked Mary.

"Country stores never close. At least the one near us never does. They might miss the sale of a box of matches or a stick of candy. I used to think, when I was a little girl, that I would rather keep a store than do anything in all the world. I talked about it so much that Mammy Susan got right uneasy about me."

"Well, Harvie and Sleepy are blue enough about it, so we must cheer up," said Dee. "We are to be here two weeks and if we behave real well maybe they will ask us for longer, and surely in that time we can make that old stickinthemud come around. Zebedee could think up a way in a minute."

CHAPTER II

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THE COUNTRY STORE

THE Prices had the right idea about entertaining a crowd of young people: that was to let them entertain each other. If a dozen boys and girls can't have a good time just because they are girls and boys then there is something very dull about them and the combination is hopeless. There was nothing dull about this crowd gathered in the hospitable Price mansion. Harvie was too well bred to let the disappointment about the non-appearance of one guest make him neglect the others. Poor George Massie was the one who could not conceal his feelings. Annie was the first and only girl he had ever cared for and now he sat, a mountain of woe, consuming large quantities of luncheon as though the business of eating were the only solace in life.

"Wake up, Sleepy, the worst is yet to come!" teased Rags.

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Sleepy only groaned and dismally accepted another hot biscuit. The funny thing about Sleepy was that he was so in love with Annie that he did not at all mind being teased.

"I am going down to see Annie right after luncheon. Don't you want to go too?" I whispered to Sleepy who was next to me.

"Sure!"

"We are trying to think up a plan by which we can get her hateful old father to let her join us here."

"Brute!"

"Don't you think the girl is pretty, sitting next to Wink?"

Miss Wilcox had plunged into a flirtation with that budding young doctor, placed on her right, not forgetting to turn to her left quite often to include Jack Bennett in her chatter.

"No! Like blondes best!"

Miss Wilcox looked up quickly. I was almost sure she had heard Sleepy. She glanced quite seriously around the table, regarding each girl intently. Certainly there were no decided blondes there except Mary Flannagan, whose hair was red, and even the best friends of dear old Mary could not call her beautiful. The Tucker twins were more brunette than blonde, Dum's hair being red black and Dee's blue black. As for me, Page Allison, I was neither one thing nor the other. My hair was neither light nor dark and my eyes were grey. She need not look at me so hard. I wasn't the blonde that Sleepy liked best.

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Farther acquaintance with Jessie Wilcox explained her concern over Sleepy's remark. She was a very nice girl just so long as she was "it," but she could not brook a rival of any sort. She must be the center of attraction, admired by all, praised by all. The minute she felt that there was someone who was considered more beautiful than she was, could dance better, sing better, do anything better, that minute she was a changed being.

Her previous visits to Maxton had been very delightful as she had always been praised and petted to her heart's content. Both General Price and his sister were devoted to her and she was ever a welcome visitor. Her grandfather's home was about ten miles from Price's Landing, and whenever she came from New York to see him she must spend part of her time with the old people at Maxton. Harvie admired her very much, as who would not? She was beautiful, intelligent, very quick-witted and charming. He had never seen her with any other girl except her best friend, who on one occasion had been at Maxton with her, and this friend, being hopelessly plain and rather slow of wit, but served as a foil to the little beauty.

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After overhearing Sleepy's announcement about blondes, she looked at me so steadily that I began to blush. I was suddenly very conscious of my tip-tilted nose and of the added toll of freckles that the summer always exacted from it. I wondered if anyone else was noticing the almost disagreeable expression of her usually sweet countenance.

I was glad when Miss Maria arose as a signal for us to leave the table.

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"Make yourselves at home!" the general said in his hospitable way. "Maxton is yours to do with as you please. There are horses in the stables for any of you who want to ride or drive; there are boats on the river; there are swings on the lawn; the tennis court is in condition for matches if you care to play. All I ask of you is not to fall off the horses or let them run away with you and kill you; and not to tumble into the river and drown."

"That seems a reasonable request," I laughed. "How about falling out of the swings or beating each other up with tennis rackets?"

"Oh, well! I must not put too many restrictions on youth," he said, pinching my ear.

Jessie looked at me again rather severely and once more I felt mighty freckled.

"Let's get a rig and go see Annie," suggested Sleepy.

"All right! Tweedles and Mary want to go, too."

"Let's get in ahead of them," he pleaded.

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"Come on, Page!" shouted Dum. "We want you in a set of tennis."

"Now I was just going to ask her to come for a row," cried Dee. "Wink and Jim told me to engage you. They have gone to see about the boat."

"Sorry, but I've got a date with Sleepy."

"Humph! Miss Allison seems to be rather in demand," said Jessie to Jack Bennett. She said it in a low voice but I heard quite distinctly.

"Yes! They say she is the most popular girl at her school."

"Oh, is that so? I can't see the attraction."

"Well, she must have it because girls like her as well as the fellows. They say Dr. White is terribly smitten on her."

"Absurd!"

I quite agreed with her. The sooner Wink White stopped hypnotizing himself into thinking he was in love with me, the better I would have liked it. Of course every girl likes to have attention, but I thought entirely too much of Wink to be pleased to have him looking at me like a dying calf. He was such a nice boy, so good looking, so clever, so agreeable,—except when he was alone with me. Then his whole nature seemed to undergo a change. I dreaded being left with him and usually managed to avoid it. He was my fly in the ointment of this house-party. I did not at all relish having this young Kentuckian state it as a fact that Wink was interested in me. Jessie Wilcox was welcome to him if she could persuade him to transfer his affections.

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Sleepy and I skimmed away in a spruce red-wheeled buggy with a young horse that evidently liked to be moving.

"Fierce about Annie!" he said. "I'd like to wring that old duffer's neck."

"I hope he has gone before we get there, then," I laughed. "If Mr. Tucker could only get hold of him, I bet he could bring him around."

Mr. Pore had not gone, however, when we drew up at the cross roads where the country store stood. He was engaged in trying to sell a large rake to a farmer, while Annie was busily employed in measuring off two yards and three-quarters of unbleached cotton for the farmer's wife and then computing the amount due when the cotton was worth eight and two-third cents a yard. She completed the calculation just as we came in.

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How glad she was to see us! Mr. Pore seemed pleased to renew my acquaintance, too. He gave only a formal greeting to Sleepy but shook my hand in what he meant to be a cordial way. The fact that I was part English and that part of me came up to his idea of social equality, made him look upon me as desirable. He had not forgotten that my mother and his wife had been friends in England. He honestly felt that there were no Americans who were his equals. General Price might be almost so, but not quite. He saw no reason why his beautiful daughter should not spend her young life weighing out lard and measuring calico for negroes, but every reason why she should not demean herself by mixing socially with any but the highest.

Mr. Pore's store was like every other country store except that it was perhaps a little more orderly, not much though. Order in a country store seems to be impossible. The stock must be so large and so varied to suit all demands that there never is room for it. I have never seen a country store that was not crowded. How the keepers of such stores ever take stock of their wares is a mystery to me. Perhaps they never do, but just go on buying when the supply gets low, and selling off as they can, putting money in the till until it gets full and then sending it to the bank. Usually they run their affairs in a haphazard manner and their books would defy an expert to straighten out. No matter from what walk of life the country storekeepers are drawn, they are all more or less alike, whether they are younger sons of the nobility as was Mr. Pore or elder sons of the soil (with much soil sticking to them) as was old Blinker, who ran the rival emporium at Price's Landing. They always have more stock than they have store, and their books usually look as though entries had been made upside down.

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The Pores' store had shelves stretching from one end to the other, down both sides and reaching as high as the ceiling. On these shelves were piled dry-goods of all grades and material, lamps, shoes, harness, hardware, canned goods of every description, crackers, soap, starch, axle grease, false hair, perfume, patent medicines, toys, paint brushes, brooms, tobacco, writing paper, china and glass ware, jars, pots and pans, pokers, baseball bats, millinery, overalls, etc., etc.

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The things that were too tall for the shelves, like Grandfather's clock, consequently stood on the floor. The aisle between the counters was blocked with sewing machines, kitchen tables, chairs, lawn mowers, crates of eggs and cases of ginger ale and sarsaparilla. There were barrels of coarse salt and great tins of lard, firkins of mackerel and herring, barrels of flour and sacks of meal. One would think that everything in the world that could be bought or sold was in that little store, but no! A door to one side led into another room and this room was also full to overflowing. There were more barrels of provisions for man and beast; sacks of chicken feed and bran; stoves of all kinds; poultry netting; coils of wire fencing; gardening implements and away back in a corner I spied a coffin.

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What a setting for such a jewel as Annie Pore! Her beauty shone resplendent from its background of apron gingham and butter crocks. I fancied I could detect a little redness to her eyelids as though the disappointment in not being at Maxton with her friends had caused some weeping, but her manner was calm and her expression one of resignation to fate and the decrees of a selfish father. I could not help thinking how I would have behaved under the circumstances, or the Tucker twins. I would not have cried, to be sure, but neither would my expression have been resigned. As for Dum and Dee: they would no doubt have broken up the shop.

"We are so sorry Annie can't come to the house-party," I ventured as the farmer who had been haggling for the rake decided not to take it.

Why Mr. Pore was ever able to sell anything I could not see. His manner was so superior and

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condescending. Harvie told me afterwards that Mr. Pore had succeeded in spite of himself. He was scrupulously honest in the first place and then he always carried the best line of goods. As for the science of salesmanship: he had yet to learn its rudiments. He looked sore and irritated at having failed to make the sale but put on more than ever the manner of insulted royalty. I saw the farmer making for the rival store where a little later he emerged. Blinker had made the sale.

When I ventured the above remark, Annie looked as though she wished I wouldn't, and her father, I am sure, regretted the fact that I was part English, and that English of good blood; otherwise he could easily have annihilated me.

"It is a matter I do not care to discuss," he said with a freezing hauteur.

"Oh, I am not discussing with you, my dear Mr. Pore! I am merely telling you. All of us are so devoted to Annie and we have looked forward to being with her on this house-party all summer. I am sure if Harvie had known earlier that you would not be able to spare Annie at this time, he would have been glad to postpone the party."

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"Ahem—I—am compelled to take this occasion for a business trip. When one is engaged in mercantile pursuits, it is necessary to make periodical visits to the city to replenish one's wares."

"Oh, certainly, I understand, but we still are dreadfully sorry about Annie. Of course we know that you want her to have all the pleasure on earth. That is the way fathers are made. We are sure you will make your stay as brief as possible so that Annie can join us at Maxton."

He looked somewhat taken aback and murmured something more about mercantile pursuits. Sleepy sat on a keg of nails with eyes as big as saucers while Annie had the startled expression of one who sees her friend enter the cage of a man-eating lion.

"You see I am an only child, too, Mr. Pore, and my mother is dead, just like Annie's. I know better than anyone how much a father can be to a little motherless daughter, and how that father can plan and deny himself for his child. You can't tell me anything about the love of a father."

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As Mr. Pore had never attempted to tell of any such thing, this was most audacious of me. Annie was actually gasping and Sleepy choked, but Mr. Pore looked at me quite solemnly through his gold-rimmed glasses.

"Sometimes my father is called away; you see a country doctor's time is not his own, either, and he has had to leave me just when I felt I most needed him—on birthdays—and—and—all kinds of holidays, but he comes back to me just as fast as he can. My father is thinking of getting an assistant and then he can have more time, I hope. You have had an assistant, too, have you not?"

He bowed gravely.

"Where is he, then?"

"He is away on leave."

"Ill? That is too bad!"

"No, not ill! He is having a much-needed holiday."

"Oh, then he has gone on a trip?"

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"I fancy not."

"Why, then I am sure he would be glad to come back and relieve Annie so she can come to Maxton. Oh, Mr. Pore, do please write for him to come on back and take his holiday later!"

"Really, Miss Allison——" he began in his most dignified Oxford donnish manner.

"Oh, I just know you will! You and Father and Mr. Tucker are all just alike. You can't bear to deny your girls any pleasure."

His expression was comical at having these virtues thrust upon him.

"I—er—I—shall endeavor to return from this enforced journey, necessary to replenish the stock which one engaged in mercantile pursuits in the rural districts finds it expedient to carry, and on my return if all goes well with the business, I shall permit my daughter to enjoy the hospitality extended to her by my neighbor, General Price."

"I knew you would! I knew you would!" and I shook his limp hand which Dee Tucker had once said reminded her of nothing so much as an old pump handle that had lost the sucker. Everybody knows how that feels, at least everybody who has had dealings with pumps. You grasp the handle expecting some resistance and a flow of water in response; but when the sucker has disappeared, the handle will fly up in a strange limp manner and unless the pumper is wary there is danger of getting a lick in the nose.

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I cared not for a response. If no flow of kindness was the result of my enthusiasm, I cared not a whit. Annie was to be one of the house-party and I had saved the day. I remembered how Mr. Tucker, dear old Zebedee, had declared that he had won over Mr. Pore by treating him like a human being, that time he had persuaded him to let Annie come to Willoughby to the vacation party. I had treated him as I would any ordinary kind father and he had been so astonished and

pleased at his portrait that he had unconsciously accepted it as a likeness and begun to pose to look like it.

CHAPTER III

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ENGAGING IN MERCANTILE PURSUITS

A WARNING whistle from the up-going steamboat made the dignified Mr. Pore step lively. With admonitions to Annie to keep an eye to business and with a limp handshake to Sleepy and me, a peck of a kiss on Annie's white brow, he seized his ancient Gladstone bag and made for the landing. That bag must have been a leftover from the old days in England, and more precious it was in its owner's eyes than the finest new suitcase that money might buy.

All of us were relieved that he was gone. I giggled with joy and Annie smiled at Sleepy and me as she had not done since we arrived.

"All the gang is coming down soon to see you, honey. They would have come with us but we slipped off," said I, going behind the counter to hug my little friend. I always have had a way of calling Annie my little friend, which is most absurd as she is inches taller than I am, but there has been a feeling somehow that she must be protected, and persons who must be protected seem little even when they are big.

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"Gee, I wish I could take you on a little drive before they come!" exclaimed Sleepy.

"That is very kind of you but of course I can't leave the shop," sighed Annie.

"Yes, you can! I am here!"

"But I wouldn't let you keep shop for me," laughed Annie.

"I'd like to know why not—I bet I can sell more things than you can. Just you try me."

"It isn't that! I just couldn't let you. It is something I have to do but it is not right for you to do it."

"Such nonsense! You just put on your hat and go with Sleepy. How do you know what is the price of things?"

"Almost all the goods have marks on them but here is a list of prices, besides,—but Page, dear, —I just couldn't let you do it."

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"Well, you just can!" and I took off my own hat and put it on her head. I hadn't known before what a pretty hat it was. Any hat would be glorified by Annie's wonderful honey-colored hair. "Now give me your apron!" and I untied the little frilly affair that Annie wore to keep shop in and put it on myself.

Sleepy took her by the arm and carried her off, protesting, laughing, holding back, but happy in being coerced.

"Take her for a long drive, Sleepy! I can run this store and sell it out of supplies in no time, I am sure."

I heard the sound of the red wheels of the spruce little buggy die away as the driver let the young horse have free rein. I gave a sigh of joy. Here I was keeping store at last! What would Mammy Susan say? It is not often that the acme of one's ambition is reached so young. I smoothed down my apron and slipped in behind the counter just as a customer entered.

It was a farmer's wife who had driven over to the landing for provisions. She hitched her horse and ramshackle buggy in front of the store and came in prepared to spend a delightful hour. Going to the store in the country is the event of the week. Her eye had an eager gleam and there was a flush on her high cheek bones. She was a gaunt-looking woman with hair slicked up so tight under her stiff straw hat that it looked as though it must hurt. The hat had all the flowers that grow in an old-fashioned garden bedecking it, to say nothing of spiky bows of green ribbon and a rhinestone buckle. She had on a linen duster which had evidently been hastily donned over a calico house dress.

[38]

"Where's Mr. Pore?"

"He has gone to Richmond."

"Where's Annie?"

"She has stepped out for a moment. Please may I serve you?"

"No, I reckon I'll come again when some of them are in. I'll go over to Blinker's and trade this morning."

Heavens! Was I to stand still and see customers go over to the rival store? Had I missed my vocation after all my dreams? Was storekeeping not what I was cut out for?

[39]

"I'm sorry you won't stay and see these new gingham," I faltered. A gleam in her eye emboldened me to proceed. "They are making them up so pretty in Richmond now."

"Well, I wonder if they are! Are you from Richmond?"

"I have been visiting there but I am from Milton. I love to visit in Richmond. Don't you? It is such a good way to get the new styles."

That had fetched her. She gave up all idea of trading with Blinker. What did he know of styles and the way gingham were being made up in the city? I got down stacks of dry-goods and with my first customer began to plan a wonderful garment for the protracted meeting soon to take place. Gingham was decided not to be fine enough for the occasion and a pretty piece of voile was chosen instead. A silk drop skirt must go with it and bunches of velvet ribbon must set it off. The farmer's wife was having the time of her life and I was enjoying myself to the utmost. I measured off the material in a most professional manner, trembling for fear the customer would find out what a novice I was. I was thankful that she was to make it instead of me. With all of my learned talk about clothes, I could not have sewed up a pillowslip and had it fit the pillow. [40]

Next on the program was chicken feed. The rats had devoured her supply of wheat saved for the poultry and the corn had not yet been harvested. We had to go in the adjoining room for that and I had a chance to peep at my price list on the way. I persuaded her also into laying in a supply of canned soups and got her interested in a lawn mower and a patent churn. She declared she was coming over the next day with her husband and try to persuade him to purchase both of them for her.

"Men-folks are mighty slow to get implements for the women. I ain't complaining of my old man, but he thinks he must have every new-fangled bit of farming machinery that comes along while I am churning with the same old big-at-the-bottom-and-little-at-the-top-little-thing-in-the-middle-goes-flippityflop churn that my mother had. As for the bit of lawn around the house that he 'lows me,—that has to be cut with a sickle just when I can catch a hand to do it. Now if I had that little lawn mower I could run it myself and keep things kind of tidy like 'round the house." [41]

"Of course you could," I assented. "Now don't you want some of this cheese? It is right fresh." I had noted a great new cheese in a glass case that had evidently been cut only that morning. "Do you ever make polenta? This cheese would be fine for that."

"No, do tell! I never even heard of it."

"Why, it is a great dish among the Italians and is the best thing you ever tasted."

"I'm a great hand for cooking and sho' do relish a new recipe."

"Take three cups of boiling water and one cup of corn meal and one cup of grated cheese, and a teaspoon of salt. Stir the meal into the boiling water and let it cook until it begins to get thick and then put in the cheese and salt and bake it in a well-greased pan. It is dandy eating." [42]

"Well now, doesn't that sound nice? Give me a pound of the cheese and one of those new pans to bake it in. My pans are all pretty nigh burnt out."

"Did you ever try any of this glassware for baking? It is so nice and clean and the crust looks so pretty showing through. To be sure it is more expensive than tin, but it is so satisfactory."

"I never heard of such a thing! Show it to me."

I had noticed with some surprise that Mr. Pore had a supply of the fire-proof glass just coming into general use. He was certainly a progressive buyer for one who was such a poor salesman. I sold her two glass baking dishes and then more dry-goods. It took three trips for us to carry out all her packages to the buggy. More purchasers had arrived in the meantime. I foresaw a busy time. [43]

A little colored girl with three eggs tied up in a rag wanted to trade them for flour.

"My maw is makin' a cake fur the barsket fun'ral an' she ain't got a Gawd's mouth er flour in the house. She say if'n she can trade these here fur some flour she'll be jes' a-kitin'."

"Whar you git them aigs?" asked an old uncle suspiciously. I had just sold him a plug of "eatin' terbaccer."

"I git 'em out'n the nesses, whar they b'long," she asserted, tossing her wrapped plaits scornfully.

"Yer ain't got but one hen an' I done see yo' maw a-wringing her naick this ve'y mawnin'."

"What'n if'n yer did? That ole blue hen been layin' two three times er day lately, an' my maw she says she mus' about laid out by this time, so she up'n kilt her fer the barsket fun'ral goin' on at de same time of de big meetin'. But laws a mussy! Do you know she was that full er aigs that it war distressful?" The child's eyes were wistful at the remembrance.

"Well, well! Nobody can't tell 'bout women an' hens. It seems lak nobody don't speak up an' testify how much good they is in some sisters 'til they is dead an' gone. Same way with hens! Same way with hens! Is yo' maw gwinter bile it or bake it?" [44]

"Sh'ain't 'cided. If'n yer bile it yer gits soup extry an' if'n yer bake it yer gits stuffin' an' graby."

I was thankful for the little training I had in mathematics when it was up to me to convert eggs into flour. Some problem! I put in a little extra flour to make sure and the child skipped off.

At this juncture the Tucker twins, Mary Flannagan, and a troop of young men from Maxton blew in. I was secretly relieved that Miss Wilcox was not of the party. Not that I minded her seeing me keep store, but I had a feeling she might be a little scornful of Annie Pore.

"Where is Annie?" cried Dum.

"We are nearly dead to see her," declared Dee.

"Gone driving with Sleepy. I am keeping store in her absence. His Lord High Muck-a-Muck has embarked for Richmond." [45]

"What fun! What fun! We bid to help!"

"Maybe only one had better help, as purchasers coming in might be overcome by too many clerks," I laughed.

"You are right! Dee must be the one because she is so tactful," said Dum magnanimously.

So Dee took off her hat and got behind the candy and ginger ale side of the counter, and then such a buying and selling ensued as that country store had never witnessed.

Of course everybody treated everybody else and then had to be treated in turn. I stayed on the dry-goods side, and while I was not doing such a thriving business as Dee, still I had my hands full. The farmer's wife had met some acquaintances and sent them to Pore's to see the new clerk who could tell them so much about Richmond styles. I had to draw a gallon of kerosene for one customer, but Wink insisted upon doing this for me. I did not want him to one little bit. If I was to be storekeeper, I preferred being one, not just playing at it. [46]

"I think you are wonderful, Page, to do this for Annie," he whispered to me as we made our way to the coal oil barrel.

"Nonsense! What is wonderful about it?"

"You are always kind to everybody but me."

"Do you want me to keep store for you?"

"No, I want you to keep house for me," he muttered.

"But I did not know you had a house," I teased.

He pumped vigorously at the coal oil.

"I intend to have one some day."

"A grand one, surely, if you expect to have a housekeeper!"

"Page, you know what I mean!" He looked longingly into my eyes that I knew were full of mischievous twinkles.

"All I know is, you have wasted about a quart of kerosene."

The floor was flooded. It is a difficult thing to pump coal oil and make love at the same time. Poor Wink had done both of his jobs badly. He looked aghast at the havoc he had caused. [47]

"I am a bungling fool!" he cried.

"No, Wink, you are not that. You are just not an adept at—pumping coal oil."

"Why are you always different with me? You don't treat other fellows the way you do me."

"You don't treat other girls the way you do me," I retorted.

"Of course not! I don't feel towards them as I do towards you."

"Well, it is a good thing your feelings don't make you grouchy with everybody. You just exude gloom as soon as you get with me. But this isn't keeping shop for Annie," and I grabbed the oil can from him and ran back into the store.

I was very glad to see Wink make his way to Dee. He usually went to her after a bout with me. They were great friends and seemed to have a million things of interest to discuss and nothing to disagree about. I could have been just as good a friend to him if he had only dropped the eternal subject and treated me as he did Dee: like an ordinary girl who was ready for a good time but had no idea of a serious attachment. We were nothing but chits of girls, after all, and only out of school because Gresham happened to burn down before we had time to graduate. [48]

"Umm! How you do smell of coal oil!" cried Dee. "Don't dare to touch anything in my line of groceries until you have washed your hands. There's a basin back there."

Wink laughed and washed his hands as commanded. Now if I had said to him what Dee had he would have been furious, and gloom impenetrable would have ensued.

That afternoon I cut off and planned four different dresses for four farmers' wives, selling

trimming and ribbons and fancy buttons. I made many trades with persons bringing in eggs and chickens and carrying off various commodities in exchange. I was never so busy in my life. Dee was equally so, even after we had persuaded the noisy crowd from Maxton to depart.

[49]

"Goodness! I feel as though I had been serving at a church fair," cried Dee, sinking down exhausted on a soap box.

She had just wheedled a shy young farmer into thinking that existence could not continue without a box of scented soap and a new cravat, although he had made a trip to the store for nothing more ornate than salt for the cattle.

"How do you reckon Annie ever gets through the day if this one is a sample? I haven't stopped a minute and here come some more traders."

The fact was that Dee and I had done about three times as much selling as the Pores usually accomplished. Word had gone forth that we were keeping shop, and everybody hastened to the country store. Dee found this out by accident over the telephone. There was such a violent ringing of the bell that she hastened to answer it, not being on to the country 'phone where everybody's bell rings at every call. This is what she overheard:

"Say, Milly! Pore's have got some gals from Richmond clerking there. They can put you on to the styles."

[50]

"So I hear! I'm gettin' the mule hitched up fast as I can to go over."

And then a masculine voice took it up evidently from another section:

"They say they are peaches, too!"

"That you, Dick Lee? Where'd you hear about them?"

"Saw Lem Baker on the way, goin' for salt. He got it from Jim Cullen."

"I bet you'll be there soon yourself," broke in the voice of Milly.

"Sure! My car is already cranked up gettin' up speed for the run. S'long!"

"Wait! What you goin' to buy, Dick? Your sister told me you went to the store yesterday and laid in enough for a week."

"Well, I may get a coffin," laughed the gay voice of Dick as he hung up the receiver.

[51]

CHAPTER IV

DEE TUCKER MAKES A SALE

"PAGE! I've been eavesdropping! I declare I never meant to do it. I got into the swim of the conversation and somehow couldn't get out of it," cried Dee, blushing furiously. "I don't know what Zebedee would say if he knew it."

"Why, honey, that isn't eavesdropping!" I laughed. "Country people always listen to everything they can over the 'phone. That is the only way we have of spreading the news. I can assure you that perfectly good church members in our county make a practice of running to the telephone every time a neighbor's bell rings. How many were on the line when you cut in?"

"Three or four, I should say, I couldn't quite tell."

Then Dee told me the conversation she had overheard, making me a party to the crime of eavesdropping.

[52]

"Here comes Dick now, I do believe. He was the one who was all cranked up ready to come."

There was a great buzzing and hissing on the road as a disreputable looking Ford came speeding down the hill. I have never seen such a dilapidated car, and still it ran and made good time, too. There was not a square inch of paint left on its faithful sides, and the top was hanging down on one side, giving it the appearance of a broken-winged crow. The doors flapped in the breezes, and the mud-guards were bent and twisted as though they had had many a collision.

Dick, however, was spruce enough to make up for the appearance of his car. He had on a bright blue suit, the very brightest blue one can imagine coming in any material but glass or china; a necktie made of a silk U. S. flag, with a scarf pin which looked very like an owl with two great imitation ruby eyes; but I found on inspection it was the American Eagle. His shoes were very gay yellow and his socks striped red and white, carrying out the color scheme of his cravat.

[53]

I ducked behind my side of the counter leaving the field clear for Dee. She stood to her guns and gave the newcomer a radiant smile. She was there to sell goods for Annie Pore and sell them she would.

"Evenin'!"

"How do you do? What can I do for you?"

"Pretty day!"

"Yes, fine! Is there something I can show you?"

"Not so warm as yesterday and a little bit cooler than the day before!"

"Yes, that is so. We've got in a fresh cheese,—maybe you would like a few pounds of it."

"Looks like rain but the moon hangs dry."

"Oh, I hope it won't rain,—but maybe it will—let me sell you an umbrella,—they are great when it rains."

"We don't to say need rain for most of the crops, but it wouldn't hurt the late potatoes."

"Oh, I'm glad of that!"

"But the watermelons don't need a drop more. They are ripening fine,—rain would make them too mushy like. I'm going to ship a load of them next week. I 'low I'll get about three hundred off of that sandy creek bottom." [54]

"Fine! Watermelons are my favorite berry."

Right there I exploded and the young man let out a great haw! haw! too that helped to break the ice, and also enabled Dee to stop her painful rejoinders to his polite small talk, and then he began to buy. I heard Annie and Sleepy as they hitched the horse at the post and I hoped devoutly the festive Dick would buy out the store before they got in.

Already he had purchased six cravats, a new coal skuttle, a much-decorated set of bedroom china, a bag of horse cakes, some canned salmon and a box of axle grease when Annie made her appearance.

She was looking so lovely that I did not blame Sleepy for having the expression of a hungry man. She was certainly good enough to eat.

"Oh, Page, we had such a wonderful drive! I am so afraid we were gone too long, but George simply would not turn around." Annie was the only person who always called Sleepy by his Christian name. [55]

"He was quite right. I have had the time of my life. Dee is helping me. She is in the other room now, selling a young man named Dick everything in the store. Don't butt in on her; let her finish her sales. Here come the others! They said they would be back to see you."

In came all the house-party and such a hugging and kissing and handshaking ensued as I am sure that little country store had never before witnessed.

"Oh, Annie, we miss you so!" cried Mary.

"Indeed we do!" from the others.

"Maybe I can be with you in a day or so," said Annie. "Father is going to try to return in a very little while."

"Well, until he does come back one of us is going to be with you every day," declared Dum. "Page and Dee need not think they are the only ones who are going to help."

Annie's eyes were full of happy tears. "What have I done to deserve so many dear friends?" she whispered to me. [56]

"Nothing but just be your sweet self!" I answered. "I must peep in and see what Dee is doing to that poor defenseless Dick. I bet she has sold him a kitchen stove by this time."

Annie and I made our way into the outer room, where at the far end we could see Dick and Dee in earnest converse.

"It is a very excellent one," she was declaiming. "In fact, I am sure there is not a better one to be bought. It is air tight and water tight; of the best material; the latest style; the workmanship on it is very superior; the price is ridiculously low. Really I think all country people ought to have one in the house for emergencies. One never can tell when one will be needed and sometimes they are so difficult to get in a hurry."

"That's so!" agreed the enamored Dick. "But I reckon I could get this any time from old man Pore if I should need it."

"Oh, no! You see this is the only one in stock and somebody might come for this this very night, and then where would you be if you needed it? Then even if you could get another one, it might not be nearly so attractive as this one. They are going up, too, all the time,—effect of the war. Of course this was bought when they were not so high, and I am letting you have advantage of the price we paid for it. After this they will be up at least forty per cent.—that's the truth. The war prices are something fierce." [57]

"Ain't it the truth?"

"Yes, and then you might not be able to get another lavender one. I just know lavender would be becoming to you. I'd like to see you in a lavender one."

"Would you really now? That settles it then! I'll have to get old Pore to trust me, though, until I sell my melons."

"Oh, that's all right. Just whenever you feel like paying."

I was completely mystified. What on earth was that ridiculous girl selling to the young farmer? Annie was reduced to the limpness of a wet dishrag by what we had overheard. The giggles had her in their clutches and she could not speak. [58]

"Do you think you can help me out with it?" asked the young man.

"Sure! It is not heavy yet."

Around the labyrinth made by the farming implements, stoves, etc., came the buyer and seller, he backing and she carefully guiding him. Between them they carried a long something; I, at first, could not make out what.

"A coffin!" I gasped.

Through the door they made their way into the store proper. Some colored customers had just come in and these fell back with expressions of curiosity and awe equally mingled on their black faces.

"Who daid? Who daid?" they whispered, but no one vouchsafed any information. Dee looked supernaturally solemn and Dick only wanted to get his latest purchase safely landed in his car.

The house-party had adjourned to the porch in front, and when the lugubrious procession emerged from the store the gaiety suddenly ceased. As Dick backed out, the young men doffed their caps and the girls bowed their heads. What was their amazement when Dee turned out to have hold of the other end. Every man sprang forward to take her place, but she sadly shook her head and held on to her job. [59]

"It isn't heavy," she whispered.

Dum's eyes filled with tears. She thought with sadness that in a short while it would be heavy when it fulfilled its destiny. She was very proud of her twin that she should be so kind and helpful at such a time. How like Dee it was to be assisting this poor young man, who had perhaps lost some one near and dear to him!

No one spoke, but all remained reverently uncovered while the coffin was hoisted on the back seat of the ragged old car. The young men assisted in this, although Dee would not resign her place as chief mourner.

"Who daid? Who daid?" clamored the darkies who seemed to spring up from the ground, such a crowd of them appeared in the twinkling of an eye. [60]

"I don't know," said Dum in a teary voice, "but isn't it sad?"

"'Tain't Miss Rena Lee 'cause I jes' done seed her headin' fer the sto'," declared a little pickaninny.

"She ain't a-trus'in' her bones ter Mr. Dick's artermobe. She done sayed she gonter dribe her ole yaller mule whar she gwinter go."

"Ain't de Lees got a boardner? Maybe it's de boardner," suggested a helpful old woman.

"Well, I wonder if it is! Here he come! I'm a-gwinter arsk him."

Dick came out laden with his other purchases.

"Lawsamussy! It mus' be de boardner an' all er her folks is a-comin' down, 'cause how come Mr. Dick hafter buy all them things otherwise? Look thar chiny an' coal skuttles an' what not!"

"Who daid, Mr. Dick? Who daid?"

"Nobody I know of!" grinned the young man.

"Ain't it de boardner?"

"What boarder?" [61]

"Miss Rena's boardner!"

"Sister Rena hasn't any boarder that I know of. Here, get out of the road or I'll let you know who is dead!"

He took a fond farewell of Dee and cranking up his noisy car, he jumped to his seat and speeded home with the coffin and the coal skuttle bouncing up and down right merrily.

"Ain't nobody daid?" grieved a sad old woman.

"No! Nobody ain't daid!" snapped an old man. "Nobody ain't eben a-dyin'. Now that thar Dick Lee done bought up th' only carsket in the sto' an' my Luly is mighty low—mighty low."

"Sho-o' nuf I ain't heard tell of it. Is she in de baid?"

"Well, not ter say in de baid—but on de baid, on de baid. Anyhow 'tain't safe to count on her fer long. White folks is sho' graspin' these days. They is sho' graspin'."

The old man departed on his way grumbling.

"Caroline Tucker, what did you sell that coffin to that young man for?" demanded Dum sternly. [62]

"Just to see if I could, Virginia Tucker. I told him I'd like to see him in a coffin lined with lavender, and he was so complimented, he immediately bought it to keep for a rainy day."

Dee and I had made so many sales that Annie had to send a telegram informing her father of the diminished stock. It was necessary to order another coffin immediately in case the ailing Luly might need it.

CHAPTER V

 [63]

THE HUMAN FLY

GENERAL PRICE was vastly amused over the account of Dee's sale of the coffin to the amiable Dick. Miss Maria was frankly shocked, and Miss Wilcox amazed and a little scornful.

"I never cared for slumming," she announced that night when we had retired to the girls' wing.

"But helping Annie Pore keep store is not slumming," said Dee, the dimple in her chin deepening.

Dee Tucker had a dimple in her chin just like her father. When father and daughter got ready for a fight, those dimples always deepened.

"Most kind of you, I am sure, although that sort of adventure never appealed to me. I have taught in the mission school in New York's East Side, but when the class is over I always leave. I can't bear to mix with the lower classes. It is all right to help them but not by mixing." [64]

"But you don't understand,—Annie Pore is one of our very best friends. She is not the lower classes. She is better born than any of us and prettier and better bred and more accomplished ___"

"Ah, indeed! I should like to behold this paragon."

"Well, you shall behold her all right! She is going to join us here in a day or so."

Jessie Wilcox looked very much astonished and quite haughty. She could not understand the Prices asking such a person to meet her. The daughter of a country storekeeper was hardly one whom she cared to know socially. Dee had gone about it the wrong way to make the spoiled beauty look with favor on the little English girl:—prettier, better born, better bred, indeed! As for accomplishments: what accomplishments could a dowdy little country girl have that she had not?

The Tuckers and Jessie Wilcox were not hitting it off very well in the great bedroom which they shared. Dum had declared she would not move the fluffy finery which was spread out on her bed and she stuck to her word. [65]

"What are you going to do with these duds?" she asked rather brusquely.

"Oh, you just put them back in my trunk," drawled the spoiled roommate.

"Humph! You had better ring for your maid. I'm not much on doing valet work."

With that she caught hold of the four corners of the bedspread and with a yank deposited the whole thing adroitly on the floor, butter side up.

Dee told me afterwards that Jessie's expression was one of complete astonishment. She was not used to being treated like the common herd. Much Dum cared! She got into the great four-posted bed with perfect unconcern, while Dee tactfully helped the pouting Jessie to hang up her many frocks.

"She had better be glad I didn't go to bed on them," stormed the unrepentant Dum when she told me about it. "As for Dee: I was disgusted with her for being so mealy-mouthed. Catch me hanging up anybody's clothes! I bet you one thing,—I bet you she keeps her fripperies off my bed after this." [66]

I was in a way sorry for Jessie. I know it must be hard to be a spoiled darling turned loose with the Tucker twins. They were always perfectly square and fair in all their dealings, but they demanded squareness and fairness in others. Jessie was evidently accustomed to being waited on and admired, and the Tuckers refused to do either of these things necessary for the happiness of their roommate. She had always chosen her friends with a view to setting off her own charms, girls who were homely, less vivacious, duller. It did not suit her at all to be outshone in any way. She was certainly the prettiest girl in the house-party, that is, before Annie arrived, but she was

not the most attractive. There never were more delightful girls in all the world than the Tucker twins, witty, charming, vivacious, and very handsome. I could see their development in the two years I had known them and realized that they were growing to be very lovely women.

Mary Flannagan was nobody's pretty girl but she had something better than beauty, at least something that proves a better asset in life: extreme good nature and a sense of humor that embraced the whole universe. She had humor enough to see a joke on herself and take it. That, to me, is the quintessence of humor. Wherever Mary was there also were laughter and gaiety. She had a heart as big as all Ireland, from which country she had inherited her wit as well as her name. [67]

Mary was not quite so bunched up as she had been. Two years had stretched her out a bit, but she would always be something of a rolypoly. She was as active as a cat, and so determined was she to end up as a character movie actress she never stopped her limbering-up exercises. After I would get in bed at night she would begin. She would turn somersaults, stand on her head, walk on her hands, do cart-wheels, bend the crab, fall on the floor at full length and do a hundred other wonderful stunts.

"I am so plain I'll have to go in for slap-stick comedy and maybe work up to the legit., but go in I will. Why, Page, there is oodlums of money in movies and think of the life!" [68]

"I can see you, Mary, as a side partner to Douglas Fairbanks. Can you climb up a wall like a fly?" I laughed.

"No-o, not yet but soon! I can't get much practice in wall scaling. I am dying to try this wall outside our window. It is covered with ivy and would be easy as dirt, I know," and she poked her head out the window, gazing longingly at the tempting perpendicularity of the wall beneath.

Mr. Thomas Hawkins, alias Shorty, thought Mary was just about the best chum a fellow could have, and great was his joy when Fate landed him at the same country house with the inimitable Mary. Shorty, too, had made out to grow a bit since first we saw him make the great play in the football game at Hill Top. He was a very engaging lad with his tousled mane, rosy cheeks and clear boy's eyes.

"Is Shorty going to get into the movies, too?" I teased. [69]

"No,—navy!"

"Oh, how splendid! I didn't know he had decided."

"Yes! He has talked to me a lot about it," said Mary quite soberly.

"What do you think about it?"

"Me? Why, I think our navy is going to have to be enlarged and I can't think of anybody better suited to it than Shorty. He is a descendant of Sir John Hawkins, you know, and that means seafaring blood in his veins."

How little did Mary and I think, as we lay in that great four-post bed and wisely discussed preparedness, that our country would really be at war in not so very many months, and that Shorty's entering the navy would be a very serious matter to all of his friends, if not to him.

No thoughts of war were disturbing us. The great war was going on, but then we were used to that and we were too young and thoughtless for it to bother us. It was across the water and no one we knew personally was implicated. Maxton was too peaceful a spot for one to realize that such a thing as bloodshed could go on anywhere in all the world. Our great room with its two huge beds and massive wardrobe, bureau and washstand, had once sheltered Washington and later on Lafayette; and then as the ages had rolled by, General Lee had visited the Prices and had slept in the very bed where Mary and I were lying so sagely and smugly arguing for preparedness. Perhaps the mocking-bird that every now and then gave forth a silvery trill in the holly tree near our window was descended from the same mocking-bird that no doubt had sung to the great warrior as he lay in the four-poster. [70]

How quiet it was! A whippoorwill gave an occasional cry away off in the woods, and once I heard the chugging of a small steamboat puffing its way up the river, and then a little later the swish swash on the shore of the waves made by the stern wheel. But for that, the night was absolutely still.

"Page," whispered Mary, "are you asleep?"

"Fortunately not, or I'd be awake," I laughed.

"I'm thinking about getting up and trying to scale that wall. I am 'most sure I could do it with all that ivy to dig my toes in." [71]

"Why don't you wait until morning?"

"Because I don't want an audience. It is best to practice these stunts without anyone looking."

"Suppose you fall!"

"That's something movie actresses have to expect. I won't fall far if I do fall."

"Will you mind if I look on?"

"No, indeed! I can pretend you are the director."

Everything was as quiet as the grave when Mary bounced out of bed to practice her stunt. I followed, nothing loath to see more of the wonderful night. Some nights are too beautiful to waste in sleeping. It has always seemed such a pity to me that we could not fill up on sleep in disagreeable weather, and then when a glorious moonlight night arrives, be able to draw on that reserve fund of sleep and just sit up all night.

"Isn't it splendid out on the lawn? And only look at the river in the moonlight. I'd certainly like to be out there in a boat this minute with some very nice interesting person to recite poetry to me," I mused. [72]

"I heard Wink White begging you to take a row with him."

"Yes, but I see myself doing it."

"Don't you like him?" asked Mary, sitting in the window ready for the trial descent.

"Of course I like him, but he's such a goose."

"Shorty thinks he is grand."

"So he is—grand, gloomy, and peculiar. If he'd only not be so sad and lonesome when he is with me."

"Of course all of us have noticed how different he is with you, never laughing and joking as he does with us but sighing like a furnace. But here goes! This is no time for analyzing the character of young Doctor Stephen White,—this is a play of action."

"But, Mary, ought you try to climb down in your nighty? It might get tangled around your feet."

"Oh, but the movie ladies always have to get out of windows in their nighties. I must practice in costume to get used to it." [73]

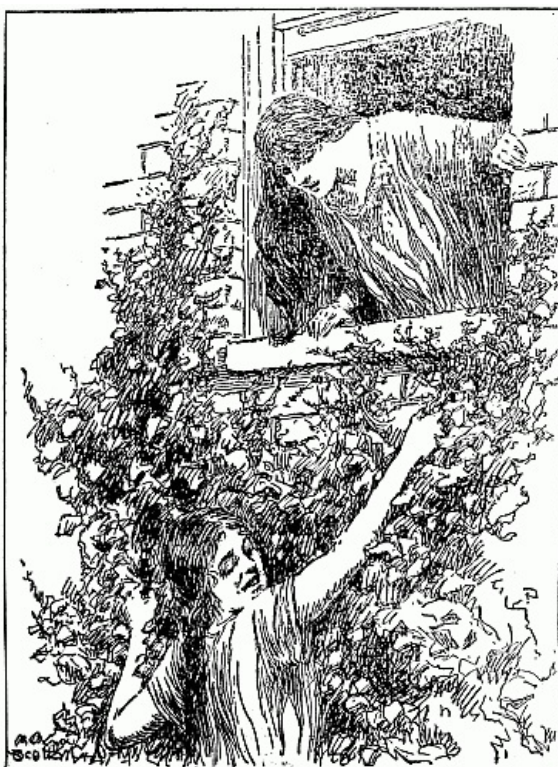
"Barefooted, too?"

"Of course! I need all these toes to hang on by. Next time I am going to have my ch-e-i-ild, but this first time perhaps I had better not try to carry anything."

"I should think not,—but, Mary, do be careful."

I was looking down the perpendicular wall and it began to seem to me to be a crazy undertaking. The vines were very thick and would no doubt offer a foot-rest to the daring girl, but suppose she lost her head or the vine pulled loose from the wall!

It is a much easier matter to climb up and get in a window than it is to get out of one and climb down. There is something very scary about projecting one's bare foot into the unknown. Mary, however, was too serious in her desire to perfect herself for her chosen profession to stop and wiggle her toes with indecision. She was out of the window in a moment. I held my breath. [74]



**I ALMOST BEAT MARY TO THE GROUND I
LEANED SO FAR OUT OF THE WINDOW.**

"Oh, God save her! Oh, God save her!" I whispered.

"Fireman, save my ch-e-i-ild!" came back in sibilant tones from Mary.

I couldn't help laughing although I was trembling with fright. I almost beat Mary to the ground I leaned so far out of the window. Sometimes the thick ivy hid her from my sight and again she would loom out very white in the moonlight.

Down at last! I felt like shouting for joy. Now began the ascent which was a small matter compared to the descent.

When the climber was about half-way up, I suddenly became aware of figures on the edge of the lawn. "The servants returning from church," I thought. Harvie had told me that "big meetin'" was going on and his aunt was quite concerned about her servants, as they had a way of taking French leave at "big meetin'" time. With the house-party in session, a paucity of servants would be quite serious. Extra inducements had been offered and the whole corps had promised to remain, taking turn about in getting off early for night church. [75]

Anyone who has lived in the country, where

colored servants are the only ones, knows what a serious time "big meetin'" can be. The whole negro population seems to go mad in a frenzy of religious fervor. Crops that are inconsiderate enough to ripen at that period remain ungathered; the washwoman lets soiled clothes pile up indefinitely; cooks refuse to cook; housemaids have a soul above sweeping; cows go dry for lack of milking; horses go uncurried and vehicles unwashed and ungreased.

I smiled when I saw that straggling group returning from church, knowing they would not be fit for any very arduous tasks the next day. I remembered how Mammy Susan used to berate our darkies for their delinquencies on days following meetings. As the churchgoers approached the house, which they had to pass to reach the quarters on the other side of the great house, they suddenly became aware of Mary's white figure hanging midway between heaven and earth. [76]

Shouts and groans arose! One woman fell to the ground and, regardless of her finery, rolled on the grass imploring her Maker to save her. I trembled for fear Mary would fall, but she clung to the vine and scrambled up and in the window. The darkies ran like frightened rabbits.

"They thought you were a ghost, I believe."

"Well, I came mighty near giving up the ghost. When I heard those groans I thought something had me sure," panted the great actress, looking ruefully at a long rent in her very best nighty. "I did it all right, but being a great movie actress who is to play opposite Douglas Fairbanks is certainly hard on one's rags. Look, here's another tear! Another and another! I did that when the first darky squealed."

Of course we went to bed giggling.

"I wish Tweedles had seen you, but they would not have been willing to be mere audience. As for me,—I have no desire to be classified as a human fly. I wonder if we will hear some wild tale from those silly darkies." [77]

But Mary was fast asleep before she could express her opinion. I could not sleep until I got the following limerick out of my system:

THE HUMAN FLY
Our Mary, an actress so flighty,
Scaled a wall in her very best nighty.
A nail proved a snag
And tore her fine rag,
She came back a la Aphrodite.

CHAPTER VI

"BIG MEETIN'"

I AWAKENED early the next morning in spite of having been manager of a movie studio at all hours of the night. Mary was sleeping heavily. After all, I fancy climbing up and down a brick wall is harder than merely watching someone else do it. She had a big scratch across her cheek and her thumb had bled on the pillow. She must have snagged it on the same nail she had her best nighty. I peeped out of my eastern window and found Dum Tucker was doing the same thing from hers. [78]

"Hello, honey! I'm so glad you're awake," she whispered. "Let's dress and go out."

"Is Dee asleep?"

"Sound! And the Lady Jessie is likewise snoozing, not looking nearly so pretty with her hair up in curl papers and her face greased with cold cream. I bet I can beat you dressing!" [79]

We sprang from our doors into the hall at the same time and feeling sure we were the only ones awake in all the great mansion, we had the never-to-be-scorned joy of sliding down the bannisters. I'd hate to think I could ever get so old I wouldn't like to slide down bannisters. Of course I know I shall some day get too old to do it, but not too old to want to.

We ran out the great back door which opened on the formal garden.

"My, I'm glad we waked! I was nearly dead to sit up all night," said Dum.

"Me, too! Mary and I were awake very late. Did you hear anything?"

"Did I!"

"What did you hear?"

"A strange scratching along the wall,—I thought it was a whole lot of snakes climbing up to our window. There is only one thing in the world I am afraid of, and that is snakes."

"Mammy Susan says that 'endurin' of the war, they is sho' to be mo' snakes than in peaceable

times.' Of course she has no idea that this war is away off across the water, and if it were inclined to breed snakes, it wouldn't breed them over here. But that snake you heard last night was Mary Flannagan scaling the wall. She is practicing all the time for the movies."

[80]

"Pig, not to call us!"

"I was dying to, but was afraid of raising too much rumpus."

The garden was beautiful at all times, but at that early hour it was so lovely it made us gasp. A row of stately hollyhocks separated the flower garden from the vegetables. Banked against the hollyhocks were all kinds of old-fashioned garden flowers: bachelor's buttons, wall-flowers, pretty-by-nights, love-in-a-mist, heliotrope, verbena, etc. There was a thick border of periwinkle whose glossy dark green leaves enhanced the brilliancy of the plants beyond. One great strip was given up entirely to roses,—and such roses!

"Gee! This is the life!" cried Dum, kneeling down among the roses, going kind of mad as usual over the riot of color. Dum's love of color and form amounted to a passion. "Only look at the shape of this bud and at the color way down in its heart. Oh, Page, I am so glad we came out! Only think, this rosebud might have opened and withered with not a soul seeing it if we had not happened along:

[81]

"Full many a gem of purest ray serene
The dark, unfathomed caves of ocean bear—
Full many a flower is born to blush unseen
And waste its sweetness on the desert air."

"I wonder where the servants are?" I queried. "At this hour in the country they are usually beginning to get busy. I tell you, Mammy Susan has 'em hustling by this time at Bracken."

"I'm hungry as a bear! Don't you think we might get the old cook to hand us out a crust?" suggested Dum. "Getting up early always makes me famished."

"Sure! She is a nice-looking old party and no doubt would be as pleasant as she looks. Her name is Aunt Milly."

We made our way to the kitchen, determined to return to the garden to enjoy the crust or whatever the cook might see fit to give us. A covered way connected the summer kitchen with the wing of the house where the dining-room was. This open passage was covered with a lovely old vine, one not seen in this day and generation except in old places: Washington's bower. It is a very thick vine that sends forth great shoots that fall in a shower like a weeping willow. It has a dainty little purple blossom that the bees adore, and these turn later into squishy, bright red berries. The trunk of this vine is very thick and sturdy and twists itself into as many fantastic shapes as a wisteria.

[82]

The kitchen was built of logs; in fact it was the original homestead of the family, having been erected by the earliest settlers at Price's Landing. Later on it had been turned into a kitchen when the mansion had been built. The great old fireplace with its crane and Dutch oven was still there, although the cooking was now done on a modern range. This black abomination of art, but necessity of the up-to-date housekeeper, was smoking dismally as we came in.

[83]

"Aunt Milly, please give me a biscuit!" cried Dum to a fat back bending over the table.

The owner of the back straightened up and turned. It was not Aunt Milly, but Miss Maria Price!

"Oh!" was all we could say.

The sedate black-silked and real-laced lady of the day before presented a sad spectacle when we made that early morning raid on the Maxton larder. In place of the handsome black silk she wore a baggy lawn kimono, and the fine lace cap had given place to a great mob cap that set off her moon-like face like a sunflower. Her countenance was so woebegone that it distressed us and two great tears were squeezing their way from her sad eyes.

"Why, Miss Price! Please excuse us," I said, seeing that Dum was speechless.

"Oh, my dear, it is all right now that you have seen me out here in this wrapper. These good-for-nothing darkies have one and all sent me word they are sick this morning and cannot come to work, and here I am with no breakfast cooked. I am so distressed that Harvie's friends should not be well served. What shall I do? What shall I do?"

[84]

"Do! Why, let all of us help," exclaimed Dum.

"Let his guests help! Why, my dear, I could not bear to do such a thing."

"Well, you could bear to let us help a great deal better than we could bear having you work yourself to death and let us be idle," said I, putting my arm around her fat neck, that was just about the right height to put one's arm around. Her waist was out of the question, being not only so low down that I should have had to stoop to reach it but invisible at that, since it was, as I have said before, only an imaginary line.

"I have never before in all the fifty years I have been keeping house at Maxton had to make a fire. I have done the housekeeping since Ma died. My sister-in-law, Harvie's grandmother, was too delicate to keep house, so I have always done it. I know exactly how things should be done

but I have never had to do them. There has always been a cook in the kitchen at Maxton.—This is the first time.—And to think it should come to pass when Harvie's friends are here. I was opposed to having the house-party during big meeting. There is never any depending on the darkies at that time.—Oh me! Oh me!"

[85]

"Now, Miss Price," I said, placing a chair behind her and gently pushing her heaving bulk into it, "you are to sit right here and tell Dum Tucker and me what to do. We love to do it."

"But, child——"

"First, let me pull out the dampers," I suggested, suiting the action to the word and thereby stopping the smoking of the range. "Now mustn't the rolls be made down?" I asked, seeing a great pan on the table with the lid sitting rakishly on one side of a huge mass of dough, already risen beyond its bounds.

"Yes, but I——"

"Let me do that. I love to fool with dough."

"But do you know how?"

"Of course I know how."

[86]

After a scrubbing of hands made grubby by a weed I had pulled up in the garden, I began to make down the rolls after the manner approved by Mammy Susan, that most exacting of teachers.

"Now what can I do?" demanded Dum.

"You must sit still and tell us what next, and after we get things under way if you want the other girls to help, I'll call them."

"The breakfast table must be set,—but, my dears, I can't bear to have guests working! Such a thing has never been known at Maxton!"

Dum hastened to the dining-room where she exercised her own sweet will in the setting of the table. First she had the joy of cutting a bowl of roses for the center. She found mats and napkins in the great old Sheraton sideboard, and Canton china that Miss Price told her was the kind to use. The silver was still in the master's chamber where it was taken every night by the butler and brought out every morning by that dignified functionary. I think the non-appearance of the butler was almost as great a blow to Miss Price as the defection of the cook.

[87]

"Jasper has been with us since before the war and the idea of his behaving this way!" she moaned. "I did not expect anything more from these flighty maids and the yard boy,—they have only been here five or six years,—but Milly and Jasper!"

"But maybe they are ill," I said, trying to soothe her hurt feelings.

"I don't believe a word of it! How could five of them get ill at once? More than likely that trifling Willie, the yard boy, has got religion. Milly told me he was 'seeking' and I have known there was something the matter with him lately, he has been so utterly worthless," and our hostess heaved a sigh with which I could thoroughly sympathize. I well knew that a "seeking" servant was but a poor excuse.

"How well you do those rolls, my child! Who taught you?"

Then I told Miss Maria of my old mammy who had been mother and teacher and nurse for me since I was born.

[88]

I shaped pan after pan of turnovers and clover-leaves and put them aside for the second rising.

"What next?"

Miss Maria had decided to give over sighing and bemoaning, also apologizing for letting us work. She evidently came to the conclusion that the headwork had to go on and it was up to her to get busy in that line, at least. Dum and I were vastly relieved that she consented to sit still, as she took up so much room when she moved around that she retarded our progress quite a good deal. Seated in a corner by the table, she could tell us what to do without interrupting traffic.

Herring must be taken out of soak and prepared for frying; batter bread must be made; apples must be fried (she did the slicing); coffee must be ground; chicken hash must be made after a recipe peculiar to Maxton, with green peppers sliced in it and a dash of sherry wine.

[89]

The cooking part was easy, but keeping up the fire has always been too much for my limited intelligence. Wood and more wood must be poked in the stove at every crucial moment. In the midst of beating up an omelette one must stop and pile on more fuel. Peeping in the oven the rolls may be rising in regular array with a faint blush of brown appearing on each rounded cheek; the batter bread may be doing as batter bread should do: the crust rising up in sheer pride of its perfection sending forth a delicious odor a little like popcorn;—but just then the joy of the vainglorious cook will take a tumble,—the fire must be fed.

"Now is this what you had planned for breakfast, Miss Maria? You see we have got everything under way, and if there was anything else I can do it," I asked.

"Of course no breakfast is really complete without waffles," sighed the poor lady, "at least, that is what my brother thinks. He will have to do without them this morning, though."

"Why? I can make them and bake them!"

[90]

"But, child, you must be seated at the table with the other guests. I could not let you work so hard."

"But I love to cook! Please let me!"

"All right, but who can bring the hot ones in? It takes two to serve waffles. I, alas, am too fat to go back and forth."

"Of course I am going to wait on the table," cried Dum, "and when I drop in my tracks, the other girls can go on with the good work."

"Well, well, what good girls you are! I have been told that the girls of the present time are worthless and I am always reading of their being so inferior to their mothers, but I believe I must have been misinformed."

"I hope you have been," laughed Dum. "My private opinion is that we are just about the same,—some good and some not so good; some bad and some not so bad. Anyhow, I am sure that there is not a girl on this party who would not be proud to help you, or boy, either, for that matter."

"We shall have to call the boys to our aid, too, I am afraid," said Miss Maria, glancing ruefully at the wood-box. "The wood is low and we can't cook without wood, eh, Page?"

[91]

"Won't I love to see them go to work," and Dum danced up and down the kitchen waving a dish-cloth.

The quiet mansion was astir now. The rising bell had routed the sleepy heads out of their beds, and from the boys' wing came shouts of the guests who were playing practical jokes on one another or merely making a noise from the joy of living. Dee and Mary found us in the kitchen and roundly berated us for not calling them in time to help. Dee reported that Jessie Wilcox was still in the throes of dressing.

"One of you might go pull some radishes and wash them and peel them," suggested Miss Maria.

Dee was off like a flash and came back with some parsley, too, to dress the dishes.

"Mary, get the ice and see to the water," was the next command from our general. "I must go now and put on something besides this old wrapper," and our aristocratic hostess sailed to the house, her lawn wings spread.

[92]

Our next visitor was General Price himself, very courtly and very apologetic and very admiring. He had just learned of the defection of the servants when he called for his boots and they were not forthcoming. Jasper had blacked his boots and brought them to his door every morning for half a century, but no Jasper appeared on that morning. The boots remained unblacked.

Another duty of the hitherto faithful butler had been to concoct for his master and the guests a savory mint julep in a huge silver goblet. This was sent to the guest chambers and every lady was supposed to take a sip from the loving cup. It was never sent to the boys, as General Price frequently asserted that liquor was not intended for the youthful male, and that he for one would never have on his soul that he had offered a drink to a young man. He seemed to have a different feeling in regard to the females, thinking perhaps that beautiful ladies (and all ladies were beautiful ladies in his mind) would never take more than the proffered sip.

[93]

On that morning during the big meeting General Price must make his own julep. This he did with much pomp and ceremony, putting back breakfast at least ten minutes while he crushed ice and measured sugar and the other ingredients which shall be nameless. A wonderful frost on the silver goblet was the desired result of the crushed ice. The mint protruding from the top of the goblet looked like innocence itself. The odor of the fresh fruit mingling with the venerable concoction of rye was delicious enough to make the sternest prohibitionist regret his principles.

"Now a sip, my dear; the cook must come first," he said, proffering me the completed work of art.

"Oh no, General Price! I might not take even a sip if I am to cook waffles. I might fall on the stove."

"A sip will do you good, just a sip!" he implored.

[94]

It was good and just a sip did not do me any harm. I had not the heart to deny the courtly old man the pleasure of indulging in this rite that was as much a part of the daily routine as having his boots blacked and brought to his door or conducting family prayers.

"Delicious!" I gasped.

"More delicious now than it was," he declared, "since those rosy lips have touched the brim," and then he quoted the following lines with old-fashioned gallantry:

"Drink to me only with thine eyes,

And I will pledge with mine;
Or leave a kiss but in the cup
And I'll not look for wine.
The thirst that from the soul doth rise
Doth ask a drink divine;
But might I of Jove's nectar sup,
I would not change for thine.

"I sent thee late a rosy wreath,
Not so much honoring thee
As giving it a hope that there
It could not withered be;
But thou thereon didst only breathe,
And sent'st it back to me;
Since when it grows, and smells, I swear,
Not of itself but thee!"

He bowed low and handed me a beautiful rosebud, the same, I believe, before which Dum had stood so enthralled earlier in the morning. I took a long sniff and then pinned it in my hair, much to the old gentleman's delight. [95]

He turned away to have another fair guest take the prescribed sip, and that naughty Mary Flannagan buried her nose in my beautiful rose and whispered:

"But thou thereon didst only breathe,
And sent'st it back to me;
Since when it blows and smells I swear,
Not of itself but whiskey!"

CHAPTER VII

THE REASON WHY

THAT was a very merry breakfast. From my kitchen fastness I could hear the peals of laughter as Mary pretended to be a field hand, brought into the dining-room for the first time, to wait on the table. I even left my waffles for a moment to peep in the door. Dee, who was helping with the waiting, spied me and gave the assembled company the tip, and before I could get away they grabbed me and pulled me into the room where I had to listen to three rousing cheers for the cook. A batch of waffles burnt up in consequence, although I ran down the covered way like Cinderella when the clock struck twelve. A warning smell of something burning gave me to understand my time was up.

Baking waffles is a very exciting pastime. The metamorphosis that batter undergoes in almost a twinkling of an eye into beautiful crisp brown beauties is a never ending delight and joy to the cook. With irons just hot enough (and that is very hot indeed) and batter smooth and thin, smooth from much beating and thin from much milk and many eggs, I believe a baker of waffles can extract as much pure pleasure from her profession as a great musician can from drawing his bow across a choice Cremona; or a poet can from turning out successful verse; or a painter from watching his picture grow under his skilled hands. [97]

The house-party was full up at last, and then the cook and waitress must be seated in the places of honor and be waited on by the whole crowd. Not quite all of the crowd, I should have said, as Jessie was superior to waiting on anybody. She seemed quite scornful of us for being able to help Miss Maria.

"I have never been an adept at the domestic arts," she said somewhat stiffly. "I could not cook or wash dishes if my life depended on it."

"Humph!" sniffed Dum, "I reckon you could if you got good and hungry. Of course you couldn't do it well, that is, not as well as Page, for she can't be equalled. As for washing dishes,—you can take your first lesson after Page and Mary and Dee finish breakfast. All of these dishes have to be washed and there is no one to do it but the house-party." [98]

"Well, I guess not!" and Jessie looked at her pretty soft, beringed hands.

"Very well then, you can do the upstairs work! Beds must be made, you know!"

"Absurd! Do you take me for a housemaid?"

"No, I wouldn't have you for one, but you might get a job for a few hours before the folks found out about you."

Dum's tone was rollicking and good-natured. She seemed to have no idea that she was insulting the pretty Jessie. It never entered Dum's head that anyone would shirk a duty that was so apparent as taking the work of Maxton in hand.

I enjoyed that breakfast very much. Harvie baked waffles for us and Wink White brought them in. The young men from Kentucky ran back and forth waiting on us, all of them making more noise and having more collisions than would have been the case had a regiment been feeding.

[99]

Shorty had already begun to grease the buck-saw preparatory to sawing up wood for Miss Maria. He and Rags had volunteered to supply the fuel. Then the cows must be milked; the horses curried and fed; in fact, all the farm work must be done.

I never saw nicer, more considerate boys than were on that party. They vied with one another in briskness and efficiency. They wanted to help us with dishwashing and housework, but there was enough outside work to keep them busy, and with all good intentions in the world, most men-folks are a hindrance rather than a help when it comes to so-called woman's work.

How we did fly around! Miss Maria got real gay and giddy in the general whirlwind that ensued. Dum and Mary undertook to be housemaids, and such a spreading up of beds and flicking of dusters was never known. The beds did look a little bumpy, but what difference did it make? The dust they swished off with the feather dusters settled quietly back on the things, but why not? Maxton was beautifully kept and very clean but there is always dust on furniture in the morning, no matter how well it has been cleaned the day before. Jessie's bed they left unmade, declaring that she could sleep in the same hole for a month before they would even spread it up for her.

[100]

"Lazy piece!" cried Dum. "I actually believe she does not mean to turn a hair."

That young lady had taken herself off to the parlor where she was singing in the most operatic manner with a very well-trained strong voice with about as much sweetness to it as cut glass. The accompaniment she was rendering on the piano was brilliantly executed, so much so that I thought for a moment she had in a pianola record. I peeped in the parlor and smiled at her, fearing somehow that she must feel herself to be an outsider and that was why she was not entering into the fun of helping. I got no answering smile but something of a cold stare, so I beat a hasty retreat and hastened off to consult with Miss Maria about future meals.

[101]

I found that lady sitting on a bench in the covered passage leading to the kitchen. Her spirit was willing but her flesh was too much for her. She must rest. I sank by her, not sorry at all to indulge in a little sly resting of my own. Cooking is great fun but certainly exhausting.

"What for dinner, Miss Maria?"

"Oh, my dear, I can't contemplate your helping about dinner, too!"

I couldn't help having a little inward fun with myself over her speaking of my helping. I had certainly cooked breakfast myself, but since she fooled herself into thinking that I had only helped to cook it, it made no difference to me.

"But someone will have to cook it unless the servants are miraculously cured in time for it."

"That's so!" and she sighed a great sigh.

"I know you wish we would all of us go home, but please don't wish it. We are having such a good time and don't want to leave one little bit."

[102]

"Oh, my dear! Don't think I could have such inhospitable sentiments. My brother would be deeply distressed if he thought you thought I thought such things."

Both of us laughed at her complicated thinks and then began the serious matter of dinner.

"Thank goodness, I had those trifling creatures dress the chickens yesterday. That, at least, is out of the way."

"Oh, good! Have you got them all dressed? Then let's have chicken gumbo. If we make enough of it, it will be the dinner, with a great dish of rice to help in each soup plate."

"Splendid!" declared Dee, pausing for a moment to listen to the proposed menu. "And it will be such an economy in dishes, too. Just a plate and spoon all around and no frills."

Dee had been as busy as possible washing dishes while Miss Maria wiped, and I cleared the table.

"But, child, can you make a gumbo? It is very difficult, I am afraid."

"Not a bit of it. I have Mammy Susan's recipe tucked away somewhere in my brain. I can get to work on it immediately and then it will be done for dinner. It can't cook too long."

[103]

Dee and Wink undertook to gather the vegetables, but they took so long that a relief and search party had to be sent to the garden after them.

They were so busy discussing the different kinds of bandages that they had forgotten their mission. Wink had taken a leaf from Adam's-and-Eve's-needle-and-thread and was demonstrating on Dee's arm the reverse bandage. Her other arm was already decorated with the figure eight style made from a long green corn leaf. How I wished Wink would treat me as sensibly as he did Dee. They seemed to be having such a good time as I, who was one of the search party, discovered them in the tomato patch solemnly debating the values of the various styles. Now if Wink had ever agreed to discuss such a thing as that with me he would have felt compelled to say

all kinds of silly things, and as for bandaging my arm,—it would have been out of the question, as he would have felt it necessary to ask to kiss my hand or some such stuff.

[104]

The right kind of gumbo must have tomatoes, okra, potatoes, onions and corn in it, and anyone who has served apprenticeship under Mammy Susan will make the right kind of gumbo. Miss Maria and I started in preparing those vegetables at nine o'clock and it took us one solid hour to finish, working as hard as we could go. I was beginning to be very fond of the old lady. She was so gentle and sweet. I asked her many questions about Maxton and its history, and since, like many gentlewomen of her age, she lived in the past, she was most happy to recount to me tales of the lovely old place and its aristocratic founders.

"Oh, yes, we have a ghost," she laughed, when I asked her to tell me if there were any such inhabitants. "It is a lady ghost, too, and inhabits your wing of the house, as is the way with all the ladies of Maxton. It is the young sister of my great grandfather,—that makes her my great, great aunt."

[105]

"Oh, please tell me about her!"

"Well, all right, if you promise not to get scared. The darkies keep such tales going. They firmly believe in ghosts, and when they tell a ghost story they always say either they themselves have seen the dread shape or they know someone who has seen it. This ghost has not been seen at Maxton in my generation, but Jasper and Milly have heard the tale from their grandparents and they see that it is duly handed down to their grandchildren. The appearance of this spectre is supposed to presage dire calamity."

"Do you know anyone who has seen it?" I asked, testing the skillet to see if it was hot enough to begin frying the chicken. Chicken for gumbo must be fried before you start the soup, if anything so rich and thick as gumbo could be called soup.

"I knew an old man who thought he had seen it. Well, to go on with my tale:—this young great, great aunt of mine was engaged to be married to a gentleman of high degree, much older than herself. This of course was back in Colonial days. She had consented to the match in obedience to her father's commands, but she evidently did not relish it very much. The day came for the wedding and she was dressed in her white gown and veil. The company had assembled from miles around. A boat load of guests from Williamsburg had arrived and the feasting and dancing had begun. Among them was a young blade from over the seas who had paid court to the fair Elizabeth,—that was her name. It was whispered that she returned his love and that was the real reason for her reluctance to mating with the lord of high degree.

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"After being clothed in the wedding gown, Elizabeth had sent the women from her room on a plea that she must be alone to pray. She locked the door the moment they were gone and rushed to the window which was open, it being a warm moonlight night. Standing below the window was the lover. He called up to her to come down to him. The ivy was thick on the wall, as it is now, and for an agile young girl I fancy it was not such a very difficult climb. It must have taken a brave soul though to make the start. Many a time in my youth," and here Miss Maria blushed as red as one of the tomatoes she was peeling, "I have sat in that window, it is the room you are occupying, and tried how it would seem to climb down that wall. I have never done more than poke my foot out about an inch, though. Perhaps if the lover had been calling to me, it might have given me courage. Elizabeth got about half-way down when her long satin dress and veil got caught on a nail or snag of some sort, and no matter how she pulled she could not get loose. Just think of it! There the poor girl hung, with her lover frantically calling to her and the precious moments flying. Already they were knocking on the door of her chamber and crying out for admission. His steed was ready to fly with her if only she could get the gown loose. Material in those days was stouter than now. I'll wager anything that a piece of white satin could not be found now that would not tear, or any other material, for that matter."

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Remembering Mary's gown of the night before, I readily agreed with her.

"Before the miserable lover could mount to her side to cut the dress loose, the plot was discovered and the poor girl had the agony of seeing her true love killed by the infuriated bridegroom to be. She swooned and it is said she never regained consciousness. Her poor little heart must have snapped in two. And now it is said that sometimes her white figure can be seen hanging from the ivied wall. Once in my youth the darkies thought they saw it as they were coming home from church on a moonlight night, but on investigation it turned out to be a towel that had blown out of the window and hung, perhaps on the identical nail that was the undoing of poor Elizabeth. I remember well," and she laughed like a girl again, "how scared they all of them were. It was in slave days and they were forced to come to work the next day, but nothing but being slaves could have made them come."

"Oh, Miss Maria, Miss Maria!" I cried, dropping the potato I was peeling, "I know now what is the matter with your servants. They are not ill but they have seen the ghost!"

[109]

And I told her about Mary's ambition and her escapade of the night before. The old lady almost rolled off her chair she laughed so. She was not one bit shocked but vastly interested.

"To think of her doing it! No lover was calling her, either."

"I don't know about that. How about it, Mary?" I called to my friend who had come down to help pick up chips now that the chamber work was accomplished.

When I told Mary about the family ghost story and that she was no doubt responsible for the non-appearance of the servants, she was overcome with confusion. Miss Maria begged her to treat the matter as a joke.

"Why, my dear, I never would have known all you dear girls as I now do if it had not happened. You would have come and gone as nothing but Harvie's guests, and now you are my own true friends. I am glad the reason why is unearthed, though, because now we can at least make those good-for-nothings come and wash the dinner dishes." She drew Mary down beside her on the bench. [110]

"But, Mary, you didn't answer me," I teased. "I asked you if a lover was calling you when you climbed down the wall."

"Yes! He is calling me all the time!" cried Mary, striking an attitude of one being called by a lover. "His name is Douglas Fairbanks."

"Douglas Fairbanks? I don't know the family," said dear old puzzled Miss Maria. "Who is Douglas Fairbanks?"

"Why, Miss Maria, he is a movie actor, the very best ever!" explained Mary.

"Where did you get to know him, child? Who introduced you?"

"I don't know him, never saw him except on the screen!"

"Ah, I see, a hero of romantic fiction!"

"But he's not fiction—he's the realest flesh and blood person you ever saw in your life."

Then Mary tried to tell our hostess of the wonders of the movie where Douglas was the star. The old lady endeavored to take it all in, but not having been to the city since the perfecting of the cinematograph, it was up-hill work. Of course she knew that movies existed, but she could not grasp the joy of them, as she had nothing to go upon but the memory of a magic lantern. [111]

"Don't you like the theatre?" I asked.

"Yes, indeed, I like it very much. To be sure I have never seen but two performances, but I got great enjoyment from them. You must remember, my dears, that I am country bred and have had little chance to see the city sights."

I never realized before how cut off from the world persons are who depend on steamboats. Here was this dear lady, born and bred one of the finest ladies of the land, but being of a naturally retiring disposition and always having been occupied from her girlhood with keeping house she had let the world pass her by.

"What were the two things you saw, Miss Maria?" asked Mary gently. [112]

"Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch and the Old Homestead. I was quite shocked at the latter, was really glad I was with a lady. I think I would have sunk through the floor from mortification had there been a gentleman with me."

"The Old Homestead shocking?" I asked wonderingly. "Not the Old Homestead! It must have been something else."

"Oh, no, I remember the title distinctly. It was when they had that scene with that naked statue in the parlor. It was terrible to me."

What a compliment to have paid the author and actor of that time-honored play! Actually the statue of the Venus de Milo had shocked this simple soul from the country just exactly as Denman Thompson had made it do the old man in the melodrama. Mary and I didn't laugh, but we almost burst from not doing so.

"And now I must send Harvie down to the quarters to make those good-for-nothings return. Sick, indeed! I intend to make every last one of them take a dose of castor oil and turpentine!"

And the intrepid lady was as good as her word.

CHAPTER VIII

THE CIRCUS

THE gumbo being made and nothing to do but cook it, and that quite slowly, I was able to run from my self-imposed duties for a while and join the crowd that had formed to go to the negro quarters and persuade them that they were not sick, that there was no ghost, and that their duty and interests lay at Maxton.

The cabins were at least a quarter of a mile from the great house, and very comfortable and picturesque they were. The road lay through a beautiful oak forest and then skirted a corn field. Each cabin had a good piece of ground around it and from every chimney there arose a curl of

blue smoke. They were evidently expecting a visit from the family, because there were several little pickaninnies waiting at a turn in the road, and when they saw us they set off in a great hurry shouting:

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"Dey's a-comin'! Dey's a-comin'!"

"That's to give them time to get into bed before we get there," said Harvie sagely. "I wish I knew Latin and Greek as well as I do the coloreds' methods."

Sure enough, we could see the little nigs running from house to house shouting the warning.

"I reckon we would all learn Latin and Greek if it was as simple as our friends' machinations," I said. "I bet you this minute Aunt Milly is stirring up a cake or something for big meetin' and she will have to hurry up and get it out of sight."

It so happened Aunt Milly's house was the first one we entered. Harvie knocked on the door gently and then more briskly when there was no answer. Finally a smothered sound penetrated the closed door and windows. "Ummmm! Ummmm!" Taking it to mean we must enter, we opened the door. I sniffed pound cake.

Aunt Milly's cabin boasted but one room and an attic and a lean-to kitchen. The old woman, whose bulk was only equalled by Miss Maria's, was lying in bed. Her coal black face had no look of illness but one of extreme determination. She was showing the whites of her eyes like a stubborn horse.

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"How you do, Mr. Harbie?" she said thickly. "An' all de yuthers ob you? Won't you take some cheers and set a while?"

"No, thank you, Aunt Milly, we only came to see how you were getting on and to tell you that Aunt Maria hopes you will be up in time to wash the dinner dishes."

"Me? No, Mr. Harbie! I'm feared I is seen my last days er serbice."

"Why, Aunt Milly, are you so ill as all that?"

"Yessir! Yessir! I got a mizry in my back an' my haid is fittin' tow bus'. I ain't been able to tas'e a mouthful er victuals sence I don' know whin. My lim's is all of a trimble and looks lak my blood is friz in my gizzard."

"Have you had the doctor?"

"No, not to say recent! I was that sorry tow lay up whin yo' comp'ny was a-visitin' of yo' grandpaw, but whin mawnin' come I jes' warn't fitten tow precede."

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"It is strange that all of you should have got sick the same day, Aunt Milly," said Harvie, his eyes twinkling with his knowledge of the subject.

"You don't say that that there Jasper an' them gals didn't go do they wuck?" asked the old woman, but her tone was somewhat half-hearted. She was evidently not an adept at dissembling.

"Now, Aunt Milly, you know that not a single servant turned up at the great house this morning, and these young ladies had to do all the cooking and housework, and we boys did the outside work. You need not try to make me think you didn't know it. We know exactly what is the matter with all of you——"

"Laws-a-mussy, Mr. Harbie! Th' ain't nuthin' 'tall the matter with me, but I's plum wo' out. I been a-cookin' nigh onter mos' a hunnerd years."

"But all these other servants haven't been cooking or anything else anywhere near that long. We all of us know what is the matter: last night coming home from big meeting there wasn't a thing the matter. You all of you meant to come back to work this morning. You came home late, but you had promised Aunt Maria to stay on while my guests were here, and you meant to do it. The moon was shining bright and just as you came over the hill and got out of that bit of pine woods, off there towards the landing, you saw a ghost——"

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"Gawd in heaben, Mr. Harbie! Did you see her, too?" Poor old Aunt Milly's eyes were almost popping out of her head.

"No, I didn't see her; I wish I had," and Harvie gave Mary a nudge. "But Miss Page Allison here saw it, and Miss Mary Flannagan knows all about it because she was the ghost."

"She—she—she was which?"

"It was this way, Aunt Milly," said Mary, going over close to the old woman's bed. "I wanted to see if I could climb down the ivy on the wall outside of our window, and just as all of you came home from church my—my—garment got hung on a nail and I couldn't budge for a moment. I snagged my thumb, too, see!"

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"Well, if that don't beat all!" was all the old woman had strength to say. She threw back the bedclothes and disclosed her ample person fully clothed in a purple calico dress. "Hyar, gimme room tow git out'n this hyar baid. I's got a poun' cake a-cookin' in de oben an' I s'picion it nigh 'bout time ter take it out." She rolled out of bed and waddled to the stove. "I's moughty skeered the fire done gonter git low while Mr. Harbie was a-argufyin'. It would 'a' made a sad streak in

my cake, an' that there is somethin' I ain't never been guilty ob yit."

"Now, Aunt Milly," said Harvie, when our minds were set at rest as to the perfection of the cake which was done to a beautiful golden brown, "you send for the rest of the servants and tell them the truth about the ghost and let them know they must be up at the great house within an hour."

"Sho'! Sho', child!" she assured him.

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Grabbing a broom from the corner she jabbed it under the bed, thereby causing much squealing. Three little darkies rolled out, looking very much like moulting chickens from the combination of dust and feathers they had picked up from their hiding place.

"Here you lim's er Satan! Run an' fotch all de niggers on de plantation and tell 'em I say come a-runnin' tow my cabin as fas' as they laigs kin a carry 'em. You kin tell 'em I'se in a fit an' that'll fetch 'em." She chuckled and sank on a chair to have her laugh out.

The three emissaries made all haste with the joyful news and in an incredibly short time the cabin was full to overflowing. We went out in Aunt Milly's little yard and Harvie mounted an old beehive so he could make a speech. Aunt Milly drove her black guests out, and they, feeling they had been cheated of their natural rights since she wasn't having a fit, stood sullenly at attention while the young master told them the truth about the ghost and gave them the ultimatum about returning to Maxton.

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They were not so easy to convince as Aunt Milly. Mary's thumb might have been snagged in some other way. Had they not seen the ghost with their own eyes, the ghost they had been hearing of ever since they were children? When news came of Aunt Milly's being in a fit they were sure that the prophetic calamity was upon them presaged by the appearance of the ghost. Mr. Harvie could talk all he wanted to, but they were from Missouri. They had seen and were convinced by what they saw. They were respectful but firm in their attitude of unbelief. Jasper spoke:

"I ain't a-gibin' you de lie, Mr. Harbie, but I've done seed de ghoses an' you ain't. I's plum skeered ter go up ter de gret house. My gran'mammy done tell me yars an' yars gone by dat whin dat ghoses comes fer me to clar out. She say she after some nigger, my gran'mammy did. De tale runs dat it war a nigger what tole de bridegroom dat her beau lover was a-fixin' ter tote her off, an' whin dat ere ghoses comes she ain't come fer no good."

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"What would make you believe that it was not a ghost, Uncle Jasper?" asked Mary, who seemed to feel it was up to her to prove the falsity of the ghost story.

"Nothin' but seein' it warn't. I b'lieve it war a ghoses 'cause I seen it war a ghoses, an' whin I see it ain't a ghoses I gonter b'lieve it warn't, an' not befo'."

Mary drew Tweedles and me off in whispered conference and then mounted the beehive by the side of Harvie and made her maiden stump speech. The darkies clapped with delight. They had never seen a female prepare to make a speech except under the stress and excitement of getting religion.

"Ladies and gentlemen——" she began.

"Do she mean us?" came in a hoarse whisper from Willie, the yard boy, who was trying to get religion but who experienced great difficulties because of certain regulations in the way of not eating and not laughing.

"Yes, I mean you," cried the orator. "Since I am the person who was climbing out of the window last night when you were coming from church, and since you will not believe it was not a ghost unless you see me do it, I will take the liberty to invite all of you up to the big house to see the show. It will be a free show, a circus in fact, and there may be a few other attractions, too. Will you come?"

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"Sho' we'll come!" came in a chorus.

"How 'bout big meetin'?" asked one of the housemaids doubtfully.

"Pshaw! This kin' er circus ain't no harm," declared one of the field hands. "Didn't de young miss say it war a free circus?"

"Sho' it's free an' ain't we free, an' who gonter gainsay us?" and the other housemaid tossed her bushy head saucily.

"Yes, an' free and free make six an' six days shall we labor an' do all the wuck, also the play, fur the sebeth is the sabbath of the Lawd my Gawd!" cried a voice from behind the cabin, and then there came into view the strangest figure I have ever beheld. It was a tall gaunt old colored man with a straggly grey beard. He was dressed in wide corduroy trousers and top boots; instead of a coat he wore a green cloth basque with a coarse lace fichu and tied around his waist was a long gingham apron. His hat was a wide brimmed black straw trimmed in purple ribbons with a red, red rose hanging coyly down over one ear. He was smoking a corn-cob pipe. In his hand he carried a covered basket.

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"Lady John!" exclaimed Harvie. "I am very glad to see you."

"Well, now ain't you growed!" said the crazy old man in a voice as soft and feminine as one could hear in the whole south; but at that moment one of the little pickaninnies tried to peep in his basket, and with a masculine roar, he laid about him vigorously with his stick, and with a deep bass voice gave the little fellow a tongue lashing that drove him back into Aunt Milly's cabin.

It seems that the old man had lost his reason many years before and was now obsessed with the desire to be considered a woman. He lived alone in a cabin some miles from Price's Landing, growing a little tobacco, enough corn for his own meal, a little garden truck and a few fruit trees. He had some chickens and when he could save enough eggs he would bring them over for Miss Maria Price to buy. The news of the ghost seen at Maxton had traveled to his cabin in that wonderful way that news in the country does travel, and he had come over to add his quota of superstition to the general store. [124]

Harvie introduced the old man to the members of the house-party. He caught hold of his apron as though it had been a silken gown and made a curtsy to each one.

"Lady John, we are just asking all of these friends of ours to come up to the great house to a kind of circus. They won't believe that it was not a ghost they saw last night clinging to the ivy on the east wall and we are going to prove it to them. We shall be very glad to see you, too, if you want to come."

"Thank you kindly, young marster, thank you kindly! I was on my way up there whin the crowd concouring here distracted my intention. I'll be pleased to come, pleased indeed." He spoke in a peculiarly mincing way in a high voice. [125]

"I thought you was too pious like to go to the circus, Lady John," giggled the frivolous housemaid.

"Well, you thought like young niggers think—buckeyes is biscuit!" he declared in his natural bass. "The Bible 'stinctly states that there was circuses in them days, an' I ain't never heard er no calamities a-befallin' them what was minded to intend 'em."

"Is that so?" asked Dee. "I can't remember where it said so, but then I do not know the Bible as I should."

"Child! Look in the hunnerd chapter er Zekelums an' there you'll fin' at the forty-'leventh verse that Gawd said to Noah: 'Go ye to the circus tents of the Fillystimes an' get all the wile animiles that there ye fin' an' have a p'rade 'til ye gits to the ark of the government.' Now if'n the Lord Gawd warn't a-tellin' Noah to git them animiles together for a show, what was it for? What was it for, I say?" [126]

There was no answer to this pointed remark, so he continued:

"An' Brother Dan-i-el! Brother Dan-i-el, I say! What was he a-doin' in a cage of man-eatin' lions for if he warn't in a circus? Answer me that! And Brother 'Lige! Who ever hearn tell of a gold chariot out of a circus p'rade? A chariot of fire! I tell you they was monstous shows in them days. If them Bible charack'-ters warn't too good to ack in a circus, I reckon this po' ole nigger ain't a-goin' to set up himanher self as bein' above lookin' on."

"Maybe you will act in our circus then," suggested one of the boys.

"No, sir! No, sir! I an' Brother 'Lish will be contentment jes' to look on. Brother 'Lish, he didn't make no move to jine the p'rade whin Brother 'Lige wint by in his gran' chariot. He was glad to stan' aside and let Brother 'Lige git all the glory. He caught the velvet cloak with all the gran' 'broidry and was glad to get it. I bet nobody shouted louder than him whin Brother 'Lige stood up 'thout no cloak in his pink tights. I b'lieve that Brother 'Lish was glad to get that cloak an' it come in mighty handy, 'cause they do say that whin he was a-sittin' in Brother 'Lige's cabin that very night, the mantel fell on him. No, sir, it never hurt him at all, but I reckon they couldn't have much fire 'til they got it put back. But he had the cloak to wrop up in." [127]

This delightfully original interpretation of the scriptures fascinated all of us. I could see Mary was listening very attentively to Lady John. He would be another stunt for the clever girl. Mary was a great impersonator and could mimic anything or anybody.

"Are you going to have the circus after dinner or before?" asked one of the party.

"Before!" cried Mary. "I'd be afraid to trust the ivy with my weight plus the gumbo I intend to eat."

CHAPTER IX

THE PERFORMANCE

WHEN we got back to Maxton, whom should we find sitting on the bench by Miss Maria but Mr. Jeffrey Tucker? He looked as though he had known her all her life and no one would have dreamed

that this was his second meeting with her. His first had been the summer before when that enterprising gentleman had made a trip to Price's Landing to persuade Mr. Pore to wake up to the fact that Annie was invited to go to Willoughby on a beach party and that all he had to do was let her go.

"Zebedee, darling! Where did you come from?" cried Dee, breaking away from the crowd as she spied her youthful father and racing like a wild Indian to get the first hug.

"Richmond via Henry Ford!" he managed to get out as Dum scrouged in for her share of hugging. [129]

"And, Page! Little friend!" he said, freeing one of his hands and clasping mine.

How I did love to be called his little friend! He never called me that in a way that made me feel young and silly, either, but somehow he gave me the impression that he was depending on me, I don't know just for what but for something. I was as glad to see him as his own Tweedles were, I am sure.

"Did you come down alone?" I asked.

"No, indeed, I had the pleasure of the learned discourse of Mr. Arthur Ponsonby Pore on my journey hither."

"Oh, good! He is back, then, and maybe we can have Annie," said Dee.

"She is upstairs now," announced that wonderful man.

"Oh, Zebedee! I just knew you could work it!" and Dee gave him another bear hug for luck.

Dee had sent a telegram to her father asking him to get hold of Mr. Pore and persuade him to hurry back and release Annie.

Miss Maria was anxious to hear of our success with the servants and was delighted to know of their contemplated return. When we told her that the only way to get them back was to have a circus, she was greatly amused. Zebedee, of course, entered into the scheme with his usual enthusiasm. [130]

"When is it to be?"

"Now!" I answered. "The darkies are on their way, ten thousand strong."

"But, my dear, there are only five house servants," said Miss Maria.

"Yes, but all the field hands had laid off, too, because of the ghost. I fancy all of the colored people from the quarters are coming up to be convinced against their will that the ghost was not a ghost."

"But suppose Mary can't climb down again. She might kill herself this time," wailed the poor hostess.

"Not at all!" I reassured her. "It will be much easier to do it in daylight than in darkness."

"Of course it will!" declared the intrepid movie star. "And, besides, last night was only the dress rehearsal, and all actors say that the dress rehearsal is much more nervous work than the real performance. Now I must go dress my part," and so we raced up to our room where we found dear Annie unpacking her suitcase with such a happy smile on her face that she looked like an angel. [131]

How we did chatter! We had to tell her all about our plan for the society circus. Looking out of the window where Mary was to make her fearsome descent, Annie shuddered.

"I don't see how you can do it."

"If *you* only could, what a bride you would make!" exclaimed Mary.

Mary had determined to dress as a bride and now began the work of finding suitable duds. Miss Maria came in to assist just when we were beginning to despair. None of us was blessed with enough clothes to be willing to spare any of them for such a hazardous undertaking, none save Jessie Wilcox and she had them to spare, but we would not have asked her for any to save her. That superior young lady had been quite scornful of us while we were working and then afterwards on the walk to the quarters. Now she had gone off for a row on the river with Wink, who seemed to think that when I was so enthusiastic over the arrival of the father of my best friends he had a personal grievance. He liked Zebedee a great deal himself but seemed to think I did not have the same right. I am sure Jessie was a brave girl to go rowing with a man who had such a one-sided way of looking at things. Anyone with such a biased judgment could not be trusted to trim a boat, I felt. [132]

When Miss Maria found out our trouble, she had Harvie bring from the attic a little old haircloth trunk, and throwing it open, told us to help ourselves. It was filled with all kinds of old-fashioned gowns, some of them of rich brocade and some of flowered chintz. At the very bottom we unearthed a wedding dress which had belonged to some dead and gone Price, Miss Maria did not even know to whom. It was yellow with age but had not a break in it. It was some squeeze to get the bunched Mary in it, but with much pulling in and holding of the breath we finally got it [133]

hooked.

"And here's a veil!" cried Dum, who had been standing on her head in the trunk hunting for treasures.

It was nothing but a piece of white mosquito netting that had been put in this trunk by mistake evidently, but it was quite a find to us, and with a few dexterous twists we had Mary standing before us a blushing bride.

"How about your shoes, Mary?" I asked. "Last night you said you had to have bare toes to dig in the wall."

"So I have! Gee, what are we to do about it? It would never do to have a barefoot bride; but I simply could not climb down in shoes."

"I have it!" cried Dum. "Let's have a cavalier down on the ground, your 'beau lover,' you know, like the Elizabeth of long ago, and you take off your slippers and throw them down to him." [134]

"Good! Page, please go tell Shorty I need him."

Shorty was game and in a twinkling of an eye we had him rigged out as a very presentable if rather youthful "beau lover."

The darkies had come and were seated on the ground about twenty feet from the house. News of a free show had spread like wildfire and I am sure at least fifteen were gathered there. It seemed hard that we must amuse fifteen to get five.

The show opened with a boxing match between the young men from Kentucky, Jack Bennett and Billy Somers. This was most exciting and nothing but the presence of General Price kept the darkies from putting up bets on the fight.

Next on the program was the Tuckers' stunt: Dum and Dee, back to back, were buttoned up in two sweaters which they put on hind part before and then fastened on the side, Dum's to Dee's and Dee's to Dum's.

"This, Ladies and Gentlemen," said Zebedee, who was doing the part of showmaster, "is Milly Christine, the two-headed woman. She is the most remarkable freak of nature in the world today. She has two heads, four legs, four arms, but only one body. She is very well educated and can speak several languages at the same time. She also can sing a duet with herself (at least she thinks she can). Fortunately she is in love with herself, otherwise she would get very bored with herself. There is only one difficulty about being this kind of a twin: if you don't like what your twin likes you have to lump it. Now Milly, here, sometimes eats onions and poor Christine has to go around with the odor on her breath; and Christine got her feet wet and poor Milly has caught a bad cold from it." With this Dee sneezed violently, a regular Tucker sneeze which was as good as a show any time. "Milly is always getting sleepy and wanting to go to bed when Christine feels like dancing." Dee put her head on her breast and gave forth stertorous snores while Dum gaily waltzed around dragging the sleeping twin. There were roars of applause. [135]

Next Harvie came around the house walking on his hands and Jim Hart doing cartwheels. Rags had the stunt known as "Come on, Eph!" It is a strange thing, where the performer wiggles and shakes himself until his clothes seem to be slipping off. All the time he emits sounds from which one gathers that he wants Eph to come on. This brought down the house and Rags had an encore.

I had to dance "going to church" while the twins patted for me. I never did have any little parlor tricks but they would not let me off. The darkies treated it quite seriously and when I went around shaking hands, which is part of the dance, they arose and joined the dance. This broke the ice and warmed them up for the ghost scene soon to follow.

The circus was proving a great success. The rows of happy black faces gave evidence of that. We had decided to have some music next, but made the great mistake of putting Annie on the program ahead of Jessie. It was taken as an insult and that spoiled piece refused to sing at all. Annie sang charmingly, however. She accompanied herself on a banjo, and if my dance had started the darkies, her song got them all going. She sang, "Clar de Kitchen." I wonder if my readers know that old song. It was famous once on every plantation but in this day of rag time and imitation darky songs one hardly ever hears it. [136]

CLAR DE KITCHEN
In ol' Kentuck, in de arternoon,
We sweep de flo' wid a bran new broom,
And arter dat we form a ring,
And dis de song dat we do sing:

Chorus—

O, clar de kitchen, ol' folks, young folks,
Clar de kitchen, ol' folks, young folks,
Ol' Virginy never, never tire.

I went to de creek, I couldn't get across,
I'd nobody wid me but a ol' blin' horse;

But ol' Jim Crow come a-ridin' by,
Says he, "Ol' fellow, yo' horse will die."
It's clar de kitchen, etc.

My horse fell down upon de spot.
Says he, "Don't you see his eyes is sot?"
So I took out my knife, and off wid his skin,
When he comes to life I'll ride him agin.
So clar de kitchen, etc.

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A jay-bird sat on a hickory limb—
He winked at me and I winked at him;
I picked up a stone and I hit his shin,
Says he, "You'd better not do dat agin."
So clar de kitchen, etc.

A bull-frog, dressed in soger's clothes,
Went in de field to shoot some crows;
De crows smell powder and fly away—
De bull-frog mighty mad dat day.
So clar de kitchen, etc.

I hab a sweetheart in dis town,
She wears a yaller striped gown;
And when she walks de streets around,
De hollow of her foot makes a hole in de ground.
Now clar de kitchen, etc.

Dis love is a ticklish ting, you know,
It makes a body feel all over so;
I put de question to Coal-Black Rose,
She's as black as ten of spades, and got a lubly flat nose.
Now clar de kitchen, etc.

"Go away," says she, "wid your cucumber shin,
If you come here agin I stick you wid a pin."
So I turn on my heel, and I bid her good-bye,
And arter I was gone she began for to cry.
So clar de kitchen, etc.

So now I'se up and off you see,
To take a julep sangaree;
I'll sit upon a tater hill
And eat a little whip-poor-will.
So clar de kitchen, etc.

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I wish I was back in ol' Kentuck,
For since I lef' it I had no luck—
De gals so proud dey won't eat mush;
And when you go to court 'em dey say, "O, hush!"
Now clar de kitchen, etc.

Of course before Annie got through, everybody was joining in the chorus, and the darkies were patting and some of them dancing. There wasn't the ghost of a ghost in their minds now and really we might have dispensed with the grand finale as far as they were concerned. Maxton was no longer a place to be shunned; but Mary was to go through with her act before lunch and I for one knew that that gumbo was stewing down mighty thick. I stole off once and stirred it and put it back a little.

CHAPTER X

[140]

THE GHOST OF A GHOST

THE last patter occasioned by Annie's spirited tune had died away and a sudden hush fell upon the seated throng. It was time for the great act. We thought the impressiveness of the scene would be heightened if someone would tell the story. General Price suggested Lady John as the best raconteur of the neighborhood. Of course Lady John was more than pleased to comply. He loved to be in the lime light and to show off. This was his opportunity.

"Ladies, gemmen an' niggers, what ain't neither, some er you," he declaimed, standing up on an ivy-covered stump and making his inimitable curtsy, "I is a-makin' this speechifyng at the inquest of the white folks an' if respec' is not handed to me it is also infused to them." That rather

silenced the tittering that Lady John's elevation had caused.

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"Gen'l Price is inquested me to lay befo' de meetin' de gospel of de ghoses what is thought by some to hant these here abode of plenty. Without more pilaverin' I'll lay holt the shank of the tale.—Mos' about a thousan' years ago whin my gran'mammy warn't mo'n a baby an' Gen'l Price here, savin' his presence, warn't even so much as thought about although his amcestroms were abidin' here, the tale runs they war a young miss of the family by name Lizzy Betty. Miss Lizzy Betty war that sweet an' that putty that all the young gemmen war mos' ready to eat her up. Ev'y steamboat that come a-sailin' up de ribber brought beaux for Miss Lizzy Betty. One young man come all dressed in gold an' wid a long feather in his hat an' a sword as long as a hoe han'le. He had no land an' he had no boat but he come on his hoss a-ridin' ober de hills, an' Miss Lizzy Betty she done tol' him she would be his'n through sickness an' through healthfulness.—But, ladies an' gemmen an' you niggers what is 'havin' better'n I ever seed you 'have befo', ol' Marse Price he got yuther notions in his haid. He see no reason why Miss Lizzy Betty shouldn't marry to suit him stid er herse'f. They was a rich ol' man what didn't carry all his b'longin's on his back, an' ol' Marse Price he go to de sto' an' come back with a dress an' veil for Miss Lizzy Betty an' he say fer her to go put it on an' he'd fotch the preacher. An' 'twas all the po' young thing could do to git word to her beau lover. All the comp'ny was dissembled an' de bride had comb out her har an' put on de dress an' veil, whin she say to her frien's an' de nigger maid fer them to lef her alone fer a moment so she could wrestle in prayer. So so soon as they got out her room, she locked de do' an' thin she peeped out'n de winder, an' thar, kind an' true, was de beau lover."

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At this point Mary poked her head out of the window and Shorty appeared below brave in all his finery, although it was not of pure gold as in Lady John's version. This was some astonishment to the old tale teller and he stopped in his narrative.

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"Hist!" called the bride to Shorty below. "Are you there, sweetheart?"

"Aye, aye!" answered the future bluejacket. "Can you climb down the wall or shall I come up to you and carry you off in my flying machine?"

"I am coming down!" choked Mary. "But, Algernon, I cannot scale the fearsome wall in shoes and hose; what must I do?"

"Take them off, fair Lizzy Betty, and throw them down to me."

With that, Mary threw down to the faithful Shorty some huge tennis shoes, the property of Harvie. Shorty caught them, one at a time, and each catch felled him to the earth, much to the delight of the audience.

Then began the dangerous act. The agile Lizzy Betty was out of the window in a twinkling of an eye. Her mosquito net veil floated in the breezes. Her satin train she managed with great dexterity, kicking it from her, thereby disclosing to view the blue serge gym bloomers she was wearing. She swung herself down until midway she came upon the fated snag; there she paused and deliberately hooked her veil in the nail.

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Here old Lady John, seeing his chance, took up the tale and began:

"As Miss Lizzy Betty was a-hurryin' down, an' she sho' could clam like a cat, she got her finery cotched on a rusty nail, an' thar she hung as helpless as a ol' coon skin tacked on de barn do'. De beau lover he dance up an' down like he goin' crazy."

Shorty began to prance and cry out to his lady love; but she hung there weeping in loud boos.

"Bymby ol' Marse Price 'gun ter 'spicion sompen, an' he up'n bang on de chamber do'. 'Hyar there, Lizzy Betty! Come on an' git married! The victuals is a-gittin' col' whilst you is a-prayin'.' Po' Miss Lizzy Betty could a-hear 'em hollerin' and beatin' an' bangin', an' still her dress it catch on de nail. Jes' then de rich ol' bridegroom come a-shamblin' roun' de house, an' he an' de beau lover clasp one anudder in mortal death grips. De ol' man, he got so clost to him dat de sword what was as long as a hoe han'le didn' do de beau lover no good whatsoever, but de lil' penknife what de ol' man carry for to whittle with went clean home to de beau lover's heart."

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At the proper cue, Wink, who had submitted to be dressed up in a red table cover with a Santa Klaus beard made out of a switch borrowed from Miss Maria, came sidling around the house.

"Vilyun!" he cried, and grabbing Shorty around the waist, they wrestled and swayed until Shorty's long silk stockings, borrowed from Dum, came down and hung around his feet, and his fancy trunks, nothing more nor less than a bathing suit carefully rolled up, came unrolled and hung down in a most ludicrous manner. Finally the deadly penknife was dug into his ribs and he expired, calling to the lovely Lizzy Betty.

"An' de lubly Miss Lizzy Betty, she tuk a fit then an' thar an' if'n her paw hadn't er got a ladder an' gone up'n unhooked her, she'd a-been hangin' thar yit, same as in dis hyar circus," and Lady John pointed impressively at the bunched figure of Mary clinging to the ivy with fingers, teeth and toe-nails.

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The applause could have been heard down at the landing, I am sure. Mary unfastened her mosquito net veil from her head and finished her descent, leaving the veil caught to the snag.

"Now, you black rascals," cried General Price, "you can see the ghost any night you've a mind.

There she hangs, and I reckon I'll leave her there to shame you with. Now get to work!"

His words were stern but his face wore a smile and his tone was kindly. The field hands went off to work, the uninvited guests melted away, and the house servants took up their tasks where we had left off.

Willie, the yard boy, wore a broad grin on his countenance. I heard him say to one of the housemaids:

"I done mist my chanst for de kingdom dis year. I 'lowed I'd come through to-night, but these hyar carryin's on done flimflammed me. I been a-laughin' an' singin' an' what's more a-dancin', an' 'twarn't no David a-dancin' befo' de Lord, nuther. 'Twas jes' a-pattin' an' Clar de Kitchen dance. I hear rumors of gumbo for dinner, too, an' I sho' is glad I done turned from grace. I hope de young misses what concocted of de gumbo done put my name in de pot. Dis here seekin' is pow'ful appetizin'."

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Our circus had been a decided success. Old and young, black and white had enjoyed it. Mary felt that she had redeemed herself. Had she not scared the servants off and then wiled them back? Had she not held thousands thrilled and breathless while she made her perilous descent?

"It is wonderful for you to be able to climb that way," said our courtly host. "I have never seen a young lady so agile."

"But I shall have to learn to climb in shoes," sighed our movie star. "Douglas Fairbanks can."

CHAPTER XI

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THE PICNIC

WHEN a crowd of young people get together there is sure to be a picnic if there is a spark of life in them. There were many sparks of life in this crowd, enough to supply many picnics.

We had been at Maxton ten days when the picnic came off, and we had had ten days of unalloyed fun. Of course, we had many gags on each other and jokes that were only jokes because we were on a house-party together. Those jokes if told would sound very flat, indeed. I believe there is no bore so great as the person who has been off with a crowd for a fortnight and comes back and tries to bring to life all the silly jokes that were perpetrated. They may have been brilliant and witty at the time, but it takes the setting and the circumstance to make them appear so to someone not blessed with an invitation to said house-party.

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Mr. Tucker had come and gone and come again when we decided to go on the picnic. His faithful Henry Ford could bring him to Price's Landing in about one-fourth of the time it took if one trusted to the deliberate meanderings of the steamboat. He was a favorite with all of the party, young and old, and his arrival was hailed with delight. Miss Maria put on her best and filmiest lace cap for his benefit, and to her delight, that wonderful man noticed it and talked to her about old lace with a knowledge that astounded her.

He told me afterwards he found lace a topic which always interested old ladies, so he had deliberately made it his business to find out about lace and be prepared to converse on the subject. He also had some general knowledge of crochet stitches, and knew how much yarn it took to knit a sweater. It was too ludicrous to see him solemnly talking fancy work with some ancient dame. Tweedles and I have been sent off into hysterics when we have found him bending over a rainbow afghan, with some old lady eagerly asking his advice as to the depth of the border or something else equally feminine. He seldom went home, after a week-end spent at some resort, that he did not have a commission to match embroidery silk for some lady who had calculated wrong, or send back a bale of wool for some energetic person who had suddenly decided to knit socks for the poor Belgians or a sweater for a long-suffering male relative. Certainly Zebedee's interest and knowledge on the subject of lace caps would have won Miss Maria's affections had they not already been his.

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General Price was as glad to see him as was his old sister. Of course, the European war was of paramount interest to everyone during those years, and Jeffry Tucker always brought some item of news to be recounted and discussed. He came laden with newspapers and magazines, and the general would bury himself under them, only emerging for meals. He and Zebedee would spend hours discussing the situation. Topographical maps were studied until one would think those two gentlemen could have found their way blindfolded over every inch of the western front.

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The Mexican situation, too, must be thoroughly threshed out. The old warrior was like some ancient war horse that sniffs the battle from afar. As a veteran of the Civil War he had many experiences to recount and analogies to bring forth. Mr. Tucker listened to him with an attention that was most flattering. Naturally General Price freely announced that Tucker was the most agreeable man of his acquaintance.

Mr. Arthur Ponsonby Pore spent one evening with us at Maxton and the general and Zebedee hoped to get some new outlook from their English acquaintance on the subject of the war that so

nearly touched him, since many of his kinsmen must surely be in the trenches; but Mr. Pore's interest seemed purely academic, and as his knowledge was principally gained from two- and three-week-old London *Graphics*, those voracious gentlemen got but little satisfaction from the hours spent with Arthur Ponsonby.

"He cares more about what language will finally be spoken on the Servian border than he does about the submarine menace!" cried Zebedee indignantly, coming out on the gallery where I was getting a breath of air after a particularly trying dance with poor Wink, who never had learned how. We danced almost every night at Maxton,—tread many a measure, as our dear old host put it. Dee said she thought Wink was a good dancer and she seemed to be able to keep step with him very well, but the Gods evidently had ordained that Wink and I could do nothing in harmony. He either stepped on my toes or I stepped on his,—the latter arrangement I much preferred.

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"Well, when you come right down to it," I said, defending poor Mr. Pore, "that is, after all, a very important thing. What language is to be spoken there will mean which side is victorious."

"I know that, little Miss Smarty, but I also know if I have to listen any longer to that Britisher's rounded periods, what language will be spoken here,—it will not be fit to print, either. How can a man sit still down on the banks of a river in a foreign country and feel that it is not up to him to do a single thing for his country when her very existence is in peril!"

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"But what can he do?"

"Do? Heavens, Page, he can do a million things!"

"He is too old to fight."

"No one is ever too old to fight,—that is, to put up some kind of a fight. He does not even contribute to a relief fund! He as good as told me he did not. He says he is afraid that what he sent might fall into the hands of the Germans and help them, so he considers it more patriotic not to send anything. I've been taking up for that man against Tweedles, but ugh! I'm through now."

"Oh no, you are not," I laughed; "if Mr. Pore should come out on the porch this minute and ask a favor of you, I bet you would be just as nice to him as you always have been."

"Never! Five pounds of Huyler's if I am not as cold as a fish to His Nibs!"

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At this psychological moment His Nibs appeared.

"Aw, I say, Mr. Tucker, when you return to Richmond, will you be so kind as to do a little commission for me?"

Zebedee made inarticulate noises in his throat and Mr. Pore continued:

"Some freight has gone astray and if you could look it up from that end, it would be of great assistance to me."

"Have you written about it?" Zebedee's manner was not quite so Zebedeeish as I could have wished, since five pounds of Huyler's was at stake.

"No, I have not corresponded with the wholesale firm from whom I purchased the goods, as I heard from my daughter that you were expected, and I considered that it would be much more satisfactory to all concerned if you could give it your personal attention."

As soon as Mr. Pore mentioned Annie, Zebedee seemed to have a change of heart. He evidently felt that Annie's father must be cajoled into good behavior, and nothing must be done or said to make that stubborn parent have an excuse for taking any pleasures from Annie.

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"Certainly, Mr. Pore," he said politely, if a little distantly. "Just give me your bill of lading and I will look into the matter for you."

In my mind's eye I saw the five pounds of candy. I had certainly won. But was it fair of me to take advantage of poor Zebedee's tender heart? Certainly not!

"Shall it be chocolates?" he asked, when Mr. Pore had finished his transaction and taken himself off.

"It shall be nothing!" I exclaimed. "Don't you know I know why you were decent to the old fish? It was not just plain politeness that made you do it, it was your feeling for Annie, poor little thing!"

"How do you know so much?"

"Why, I saw you change your mind the moment he dragged in Annie, and I knew what you were thinking just as much as though you had said it aloud: 'Don't do anything to make things hard for Annie.' Now isn't that so?"

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"Page, you are uncanny! Can you read everybody's mind?"

"Of course not! Only yours," I laughed.

"Do you know what I am thinking now?" He looked at me very intently. The light from the hall was flooding the gallery and I could see way down into his clear blue eyes.

"N-o!" I hesitated, and I am afraid blushed, too. "But I wish you would think that it would be nice to go try that new wiggly dance Jessie Wilcox has just brought from New York."

"I see, if you can't read my mind all the time, you can at least make me think what you want me to. Come on, honey, and show me the dance."

I got the candy in spite of my protestations of not deserving it.

The picnic was to be at Croxton's Ford, a beautiful spot about three miles down the river. The naphtha launch held eight quite comfortably and the rest were to go in rowboats. Mary and Shorty insisted upon paddling the canoe, although they were warned that it would be a tiring job, especially coming back. [157]

Miss Maria had planned to go with us although an all day picnic was a great undertaking for one of her shape, but she was very particular with girls intrusted to her and chaperoned most religiously. On the very morning of the picnic, sciatica seized her and she simply could not get out of bed. The general had business at the court-house and was off very early in the morning, so his going was out of the question. Miss Maria lay there groaning and moaning, miserable that her conscience could not consent to our going on such a jaunt, unchaperoned. As Tweedles and I had never been overchaperoned, in fact knew very little about such necessities, it seemed absurd to us.

"Do you really mean we can't go without a chaperone?" wailed Dum, who had set her heart on a long row in a little red boat that appealed to her especially.

"My dear, I am so sorry! I would get up if I could." [158]

"But I wouldn't have you get up, dear Miss Maria. I just want you to lie still and get well. We don't need a chaperone!"

"I know you don't need one, my child, but I have never heard of a picnic at Croxton's Ford without a chaperone."

"But Zebedee's a grand chaperone," put in Dee. "He is that particular! Why, Dum and Page and I have never been chaperoned in our lives."

"Zebedee's the strictest thing!" maintained Dum.

"So he may be," smiled the old lady, although one could see that the twinges in her poor hip were giving her great agony, "but as perfect as he is, he is not a woman."

"No,—he is certainly not that."

"Jessie Wilcox has never been on a picnic in her life without a chaperone, and I could not consent to one from Maxton unless it was perfectly regular."

A tap on the door disclosed the sympathetic Zebedee. [159]

"Please let me come in," he begged.

After a hasty donning of boudoir cap and bed sacque, he was admitted.

"Mr. Tucker, I am so sorry, but I cannot let the girls go on a picnic without a chaperone," said the old lady.

"Of course not!" and his eyes twinkled. "I'm going, though, and I am a perfect ogre of a chaperone, eh, Page?"

"Yes, something fierce, but Miss Maria says you are not a woman."

"That's so!" he said, puckering up his brows. We were mortally sure he was going to find a way. He always did. "How about Aunt Milly? She is perfectly respectable and would guard the young ladies like gold, I am sure."

"We-ll, I remember before the war we often went great distances with our maids. I think she would do. Please send her to me."

Zebedee rushed to do her bidding, but he evidently had an interview with Aunt Milly before he sent her to Miss Maria, as that old darky entered the bed chamber in a broad grin, tying something up in the corner of her bandanna handkerchief as she came. [160]

"Milly, I want you to chaperone for me to-day," said the poor invalid, groaning as she tried to move a bit in her great mahogany bed.

"Sho', Miss Maria! Does you want me to do it wif goose grease? Or maybe you'd like dat mixture er coal ile an' pneumonia? Dat's a great mixture. 'Twill bun you up but it sho' do scatter der pain."

"I don't mean massage, I said chaperone," and Miss Maria laughed in spite of her sciatic nerve.

"Yassum! I 'lowed you meant rub, an' I's mo'n willin' to rub. You'll hab to 'splain. I ain't quite sho' in my min' what shopper-roonin' is, but if it'll ease yo' pain, you kin jes' call on ol' Milly."

"It would ease my pain greatly if you would go with the young ladies on the picnic."

"Cook for 'em?"

"Oh no, Aunt Milly," I interrupted, "we never let the chaperone cook,—just to look after us and keep us straight." [161]

"Lawsamussy, chile! You all don't need nobody to keep you straight. Th' ain't nothin' wrong wid you all but jes' you's a little coltish."

"I know they don't need anyone, Milly, but I have never heard of a picnic at Croxton's Ford without a chaperone, and I wouldn't be willing for them to go without one."

"All right, Miss Maria! But you ain't thinkin' 'bout sendin' me nowhar in one er them thar skifty boats, is you?"

"Oh no, Aunt Milly!" said Dee reassuringly. "You must have a comfortable seat in the stern of the naphtha launch. We will give you the place Miss Maria would have had could she have gone."

"Well, Gawd save us! I ain't nebber set foot on or in the ribber in all my life an' I been born an' bred on its banks, too," and the old woman drew forth a big red bandanna handkerchief and wiped her eyes.

As she did so she came upon the something round and hard tied up in its corner, and at the same time she glanced up at Mr. Tucker. He, in a seemingly absent-minded way, put his hand in his pocket and jingled his keys and coin. [162]

"Well, all right, Miss Maria! If you say I mus' go, I reckon 'tain't fer me to gainsay you. Who gonter do my wuck at home?"

"There won't be much work to do, Milly, since all of the young people are going away, and the general has planned to spend the day at the court-house. The lunch baskets are ready, are they not?"

"Yassum! I been up sence sunup a-packin' 'em. It seemed like ol' times to be a-packin' all them victuals. I 'member what a gret han' you was for pickaniggers whin you was a gal. I reckon it's a-cuttin' all them samwidges yistiddy dat done combusted yo' hip now. You better let me rub you befo' I go a shopper-roonin'."

"Thank you, Milly, but if you chaperone, that will be work enough for you for to-day. You had better get ready now. Tell Willie to take you to your cabin in the buggy and wait and drive you back. You must hurry and not keep the young ladies waiting." [163]

Aunt Milly waddled off, filled with importance and pride but secretly dreading a water trip. Dee insisted upon massaging the poor invalid, who really was suffering intensely. Dee was a born nurse and was never so happy as when she could take command in a sick room. She drove all of us out, insisting the patient must be quiet. Wink, who was really and truly a doctor now, was called in and readily prescribed and what's more produced the medicine from a little kit he carried about with him. Dee rubbed and rubbed until it was time to start on the picnic. Miss Maria was so soothed that she dozed off and Dee tiptoed out of the room without making a sound.

No doubt the poor old lady enjoyed her day of quiet and rest. We must have been a great trial to her, because we were a noisy, hoydenish lot. Those of us who didn't sit up late at night making a racket, got up early in the morning to do so, and vice versa. She was so sweet and good-natured about us that she never let us feel we were a nuisance, but I am sure we must have been. [164]

CHAPTER XII

 [165]

THE SHOPPER-ROON

OF course Aunt Milly kept us waiting. There is no telling what rite she performed in her cabin in preparation for the momentous occasion of chaperoning. We were all seated in the boats waiting, the lunch stowed carefully in the locker of the launch and the bathing suits tucked under the seats, when Willie came racing up in a light red-wheeled buggy, one side so bent down with Aunt Milly's great weight that the springs were touching.

"Gawd pertec' me!" she prayed as Harvie and Zebedee between them handed her into the launch. The little craft did some perceptible sinking with the extra load and had to be lightened a bit.

"Sleepy, you had better get out," teased Rags.

Poor Sleepy had been having a strenuous week trying to monopolize Annie Pore. This was a difficult thing to do, as Annie seemed to attract the male sex willy nilly. She had no idea of flirting and never meant to hurt anyone, but there was something about her that appealed to the masculine element irresistibly. Wherever she went she made conquests by a certain clinging vine attitude she had towards the whole world. Mere man likes to be looked upon as a protector and Annie's timidity was meat and drink to his vanity. George Massie, alias Sleepy, was her slave; Harvie Price thought he looked upon her as a little sister, but I have never yet seen a big brother [166]

quite so anxious for the comfort of nothing but a sister; Jack Bennett seemed to find her very attractive and divided his allegiance between her and Dee; nothing but his loyalty to Sleepy kept Ben Raglan from entering the lists for the favor of the little English maid. He occasionally teased poor Sleepy, but that young giant never did know what I knew: that Rags really cared for Annie.

Sleepy, knowing that the launch was the safest place in which to embark for a picnic and understanding how timid Annie was and how poor a swimmer, had ensconced her in that vessel in a protected spot, and had found a place at her feet where he could look up into her pretty face. [167]

"Me get out? Get out yourself!" he cried indignantly.

"But it is not quality they want out but quantity," answered Rags. "You and Aunt Milly, being in the same boat, can't ride in the same boat."

Now George Massie was not really fat, but because of his great bulk he was usually thought of as being so. Certainly his bones were well covered but his muscles were hard as iron. What fat was there was well hammered down. He must have weighed at that time at least two hundred and twenty pounds, but then his six feet two inches could carry a good many pounds. He was cursed with money if ever a young man was. His father was very wealthy and George had never been denied a single thing in all his life. His principal ambition had been to make the football team at the University and even that had been granted him,—not because of money but because of brawn. [168]

He was studying medicine in a desultory way, taking a year longer to finish his course than the more ambitious Wink, who was not cursed at all with money but had unbounded energy and ambition. Sleepy's friends, and he had many of those necessary things, all adored him. He was so honest, so straightforward, so sympathetic. They deplored his lack of ambition, however. I used to feel that Sleepy was a lesson to all of the young men in his set because they realized that after all too much money often had a softening effect on character. There seemed to be no especial use for George Massie to graduate, because after he got his diploma what difference would it make whether he got patients or not? His adoration of Annie Pore had had a good effect on him, so Jim Hart had told me. The last year at the University he had done better studying than he ever had in his life, and his friends had hopes of his waking up to the fact that the world might need him, even if he did not need the world's money in doctor's fees. [169]

"Yes, Sleepy! You'll have to vamoose," insisted Jack Bennett, trying to squeeze himself down between George Massie and Annie.

"You are as big as any two other passengers," declared Rags.

"If that is the case, then suppose two other passengers take to the life-boats," suggested Zebedee. "Come on, Page, you are light and easy to row and there is a nice little brown boat waiting for us."

Dum and Billy Somers had already started in their picturesque red skiff, and Mary Flannagan and Shorty were well on their way in the canoe. They had been independent and had not had to wait while Aunt Milly arrayed herself in all the glories of a brand new purple calico and bright plaid head handkerchief.

"All right!" I acquiesced to Mr. Tucker's proposal.

After we were transferred to the little brown boat and on our way to Croxton's Ford, he said: [170]

"I am afraid I was selfish to ask you to come with me. I know I should not have taken you away from all of your young friends."

"Why, Zebedee! How absurd! You are the youngest friend I have, much the youngest."

"But you gave a very sad and unenthusiastic 'all right' to my proposition to come by skiff. Now, didn't you?"

"But it wasn't that I didn't want to come with you," I declared.

"Perhaps not, but merely that you didn't want to leave someone else to come with me. Now fess up, honey!"

"I have nothing to fess up about."

"Well, then, why did you look so crestfallen when I put it up to you to leave the launch?" and Zebedee dug his oars in the water with some viciousness.

"I didn't mean to. I—I——"

"You what?"

"I had a reason for wanting to stay in the launch."

"Didn't I say so? Who was the reason?" [171]

"It wasn't a who, at all—it was a which."

"A which?" he asked somewhat mystified.

"Yes, a which! If you must know, I wanted to be under the awning because of my freckled

nose," and I blushed until it hurt. My nose was a great annoyance to me. It was such a little nose to get so many freckles on it. The fact that they disappeared in the winter was but cold comfort to me.

"But I like freckles," he said quite solemnly, but his eyes were dancing with amusement.

"But I don't, and it's my nose. You are the only person who does like 'em."

"Who has been telling you he doesn't like them?"

"Nobody to my face, or rather to my freckles, but I heard Jessie Wilcox talking to someone about me and she called me a speckled beauty,—just exactly as though I were a trout or a coach dog or a turkey egg or something. And I know after this day on the water I'll be a sight."

"Do you care what she says?"

"I care what anybody says."

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"Why, little friend, I did not dream you put so much value on the opinion of others, especially where mere personal appearance is concerned." I thought I detected a note of disappointment in his voice.

"I don't about everything, but one's nose is mighty close to one, somehow."

"So it is," he laughed, "and I am so sorry to have been the means of injuring that touchy member. I can't help feeling kind of happy, though, that it was the awning you were loath to leave and not some one of those boys. Here's a nice linen handkerchief; why don't you tie that over your nose?"

Mr. Tucker always had the nicest linen handkerchiefs I ever saw, and he seemed to have clean, folded ones ready to produce for every emergency. I accepted his offer and tied it over the lower part of my face.

"Now you look like a little Turkish lady. Please say you are glad you came in the little brown boat," and my boatman shipped his oars and drifted with the current.

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It was a very easy thing to say because I was very glad. Now that my poor little nose was protected, I was perfectly happy. I always enjoyed being with Zebedee. We never talked out and we seldom had a disagreement; not that we agreed on every subject by any means, but we could disagree without having a disagreement. We talked about everything under the sun from Shakespeare to the musical glasses. I couldn't help comparing this boat ride to the one I had been overpersuaded to take with Wink only a few days before. We had started out with the best of intentions on my part to avoid all shoals in conversation, but before we had been out ten minutes Wink was gnawing his little moustache in fury and I was wishing I had stayed on shore. A row with Wink was sure to end in a row (pronounced rou).

The launch arrived at Croxton's Ford long before we did, but we came as fast as the current allowed, having drifted a good part of the way. The party had landed and had begun to make the camp for the day. It was a wonderful spot chosen for the picnic. A large creek, flowing into the river, broadened out almost into a lake, and in the mouth of this creek were innumerable small islands. Some of them had large trees growing on them, lovely sandy beaches and strips of verdure; others were too young to have trees but were covered with grass. The camp was pitched on the largest island, right at the mouth of the creek that afforded a landing for the launch. There was a famous spring on this island that was thought by the county people to have some great curative power. What it cured you of I don't know, but it tasted too good to be much good as a medicine, I imagine.

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Aunt Milly, who had proven herself to be an ideal chaperone, having slept during the entire journey, was now ensconced under a water oak on a warm sand bank with nothing to do but enjoy herself. This she did immediately by falling asleep again.

"Whin I ain't a-wuckin', I's a-sleepin'," she droned as slumber enfolded her.

Of course the camp fire must be made and potatoes and corn put to roast and the coffee-pot filled with the sparkling spring water. The trip down had made everybody hungry, whether accomplished without exertion as by those in the launch; or with the sweat of the brow as by Mary and Shorty in the canoe, or Dum and Billy Somers in the red skiff; or with just enough work to keep the boat in the current which was Zebedee's and my method of locomotion: one and all were hungry.

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"While dinner is cooking, let's have a swim," suggested Harvie. "You girls take this side of the island for a dressing-room and we'll take the other. Here are some low willows that make splendid walls."

Bathing suits were produced and while our chaperone slumbered and slept, we got into them and then into the water. Such water! It was clear and soft, so much more so than the water of the big river. The bottom was clean sand with no disturbing rocks and snags. The trees shaded the place chosen for our swim where the sloping beach made it safe for the timid close to shore, but ten yards of perseverance plunged the bold swimmer into really deep water.

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The shouts of joy would have waked the dead had there been any on the island, but nothing waked the sleeping Aunt Milly. She had burrowed down in the unresisting sand almost as deep as

some meteoric stone might have done. There she lay, having the rest that she deserved after the "mos' a hun'erd years er cookin'" that she declared she had served at Maxton.

"This is my island!" cried Dum, swimming over to a beautiful spot about twenty yards from camp. She clambered out on the strip of sand and stood with arms outstretched looking very handsome, her lithe young figure drawn up to its full height. "I am monarch of all I survey! I'm queen of this land!"

"Let me come help you rule," pleaded Billy Somers, who had followed her.

"I don't need a prime minister just now, thank you, but you might get in the waiting list."

"Thanks awfully!" and the young Kentuckian threw himself on the warm sand at her feet. What nice fellows those Kentuckians were, anyhow! They were full of life and fun, clean minded, clear thinking, well-mannered boys. Dum and Billy were friends from the moment they met and were usually the ringleaders in any larks that were started on the house-party. The strange thing about the friendship was that they looked alike, so very much alike that I believe some pioneer ancestor of Billy's must have come from the Tucker stock.

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Billy's hair had a bit more red in it than Dum's, not much, just enough to make his hair in the shade about the color Dum's was in the sun. Their foreheads were identical and their chins had the same tendency to get square when an argument was under way. They really looked quite as much alike as the twins themselves did. Zebedee declared that Billy made him feel a hundred years old because he looked so like his son, if he had ever had one. Billy was about three years older than the twins, and when we consider that the twins were born when their father was only twenty, no wonder the possibility of a son at seventeen made poor Mr. Tucker blue.

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"This is our island and we are going to permit no aliens to land here," called Dum as a challenge to all of us. "I am Queen Dum and Billy is General Billdad. We have held counsel and herewith make the proclamation that there is to be no immigration to this kingdom."

It took only a moment for us to answer the challenge. Dee headed the opposing forces, making a long dive that brought her up almost on the beach of the little kingdom. Dum was ready to push her back in the water and kerflop! she went before Zebedee could come to her aid. Then ensued such a battle as had not been fought in the United States since Custer's last rally.

Of course Dum and Billy had the advantage of position, but we so far outnumbered them that it took all of their strength to keep us from landing.

"Mary! Mary! You and Shorty come be our allies!" called Queen Dum to the couple who had gone to housekeeping on a small island near her own. Mary slid into the water like a turtle and Shorty followed. They landed from the rear and now the battle raged fiercely.

I know I got pitched back into the water at least a dozen times. Having learned to swim only the summer before at Willoughby, I was not a past master in the art, but I could keep above water indefinitely, thanks to Zebedee, my instructor, who had made floating the first requisite.



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"THIS IS OUR ISLAND AND WE ARE GOING TO PERMIT NO ALIENS TO LAND HERE."

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The odds were in our favor but the vantage they had in position was well-nigh discouraging us, when Zebedee and Wink made a flank movement and landed on the other side of the island, immediately pushing over the opposing forces into the foaming torrent and then pulling all of us onto dry land.

"Victory! Victory!" we shouted; and then for the first time since the battle began to rage we remembered our chaperone. She had awakened and dug herself out of her warm sand nest. What were her charges up to? It never entered the old woman's head that we were playing a game, and I fancy we looked in dead earnest.

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When she had dozed off after landing we were all of us clothed and in our right minds, and suddenly she awoke to find us anything but clothed, according to her strict ideas of propriety among the quality, never having seen girls in bathing suits; and not only were we in disgraceful dishabille, but we were engaged in a distressing brawl.

"My Gawd! My Gawd!" she wailed. "Here I been a-slumberin' an' sleepin' an' Miss Maria done tol' me to shopper-room. I trus'ed de white folks an' look at 'em!" She covered her face with her hands and wept aloud.

I fancy we were something to look at. Bathing caps were off and hair wet and tangled streaming down our backs. Dee had lost a stocking in the tussle and Rags had been bereft of more than half of his shirt, so that his white back gleamed forth in a most immodest abandon. Shorty had tapped Harvie on the nose and that scion of a noble race was bleeding like a stuck pig. The gore added color to the scene, and had not Aunt Milly already been certain that this was a real war we were raging, the blood of her young master would have convinced her.

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"Hi, you! You!" she called. "Quit dat!"

The battle being won, we had stopped for repairs but there were still here and there some fitful hostilities. For instance: Shorty had determined that Harvie needed some cold water on his bleeding nose and was rolling him into the creek. Both of them were shouting and pommelling each other as they rolled.

As they approached the large island where our camp was pitched, Aunt Milly became very much excited. Who were these vile wretches who had accepted the hospitality of the Prices and then turned against them, and while she, the natural protector of the young master, was sleeping, had well-nigh stripped him of his clothes and then bloodied him all over with his own blue blood, which was certainly flowing very redly?

"Hi, you! You little low flung, no 'count, bench-legged trash! What you a-doin' ter Mr. Harbie?" she called to the all-unconscious Shorty, who was having the time of his life as he and his friend wallowed in the water, wrestling as they swam.

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But Aunt Milly saw no joke in such doings. She looked around for something to use as a weapon and spied the camp fire where the corn and potatoes were being prepared to fulfill their mission. They were done to a turn by that tune and the fire had died down to a bed of red embers. The old woman grabbed from the ashes a great yam and with an aim that astonished one, she threw it and hit Shorty a sounding whack on his back.

"Wow!" yelled that young warrior.

"You'd better wow! An' don' you lan' here; you go back ter dem Injuns whar you come wid."

"Why, Aunt Milly! What on earth?" gasped Harvie as he saw the old woman stooping for more ammunition.

"Yo' ol' Milly gwine he'p you, dat's what!" She aimed another at the astonished Shorty, but that young man turned himself into a submarine and disappeared.

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Harvie clambered out of the water spluttering and laughing. His nose had stopped bleeding now and the water had washed off all traces of the gory disaster. He caught the rampant Milly by the arm:

"Aunt Milly, it's all a joke, a game! Nobody was abusing me. Don't throw away the potatoes, we are so hungry."

"Lawsamussy, chile! You can't fool this ol' nigger. I's seen folks a-playin' an' I's a-seen folks a-fightin', an' if'n that there warn't a battle royal, I neber seed one."

By this time all of us were headed for camp. As we came ashore her expression was still a belligerent one and she had a hot potato which she tossed from hand to hand ready for an emergency.

It took all the tact the Tuckers could muster among them to convince Aunt Milly that we had not been fighting, and even after she seemed to be convinced, she growled a bit when Shorty appeared all dressed and spruce, with his hair plastered down tight and his arm linked in Harvie's. She had the fidelity of some old dog for its master and it would take some time to erase from her mind and heart that terrible scene of Mr. Harbie being beaten and blooded and pitched into the water.

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We led her back to her seat in the sand and brought her dinner to her. We would not let her help cook or serve, but treated her like a real chaperone and waited on her right royally. She rolled her eyes a bit when to Shorty was relegated the task of taking her a cup of coffee. He pretended to be very much frightened and trembled violently as he handed her the brimming cup.

"Aunt Milly, how did you learn how to throw so well? You hit me with that potato just as though you belonged to a baseball nine."

"I been a-practicin' all my life a-throwin' at rats," she growled.

This brought down the house.

CHAPTER XIII

[185]

TANGLEFOOT

A SUFFICIENT time having elapsed since dinner, we decided to go in swimming again; at least the Tuckers decided to and all of us followed suit (bathing suit!). Aunt Milly was becoming accustomed to the ways of her charges and gave her gracious consent when we humbly asked it. She even stopped rolling her eyes at Shorty when she saw that Harvie was not injured, after all, and that he himself bore no malice towards his friend.

Mary, too, had something to do with mollifying the old woman. She went and sat on the sand bank by her side and explained to her how the battle royal started and what fun it had been. Of course ever since the circus, Mary had been a great favorite with all the servants. They looked upon her as a real celebrity. Mary had so many stunts and was always so willing to amuse persons that she was constantly being called on to do her dog fight or get off a feat of ventriloquism or something else. [186]

"Aunt Milly, if you forgive poor Mr. Hawkins for bloodying up Mr. Harvie, I'll go like a little pig caught under the gate for you."

"Lawsamussy, chil', kin you do that?"

"Sure! Will you forgive him if I do it?"

"Lemme hear you do it fust an' I'll see," said Aunt Milly with a sly look. She was getting too much capital out of the grudge she had against Shorty to give it up too readily.

So Mary went through all the agony of a little pig caught under the gate and even improved upon it to the extent of introducing another character into the act: she went like two pigs caught under the gate.

Aunt Milly sat in her sand hole entranced.

"Well, bless Bob! If it ain't it to the life! How you do it, honey?" So Mary had to do it once more and then Aunt Milly promised to forgive and forget.

"Come on and help clear up the remains of the feast, Mary," insisted Dum, who was ever determined that there should be no shirkers. [187]

"I'm busy mollifying," declared Mary. "My talents lie more in this direction," and she could not help mimicking Jessie Wilcox just enough to give Dum the dry grins. Jessie had not helped at all about luncheon but had insisted that Aunt Milly should be made to do whatever we had the hardihood to suggest that she might do. Aunt Milly, however, having been told that she was to do no "wuck," did none, and presented a duck back to all insinuations from the haughty Jessie.

"I don't care where your talents lie," insisted Dum, "you are going to come help clear these dishes off the cloth so I can fold it up."

Mary began to sing to a catchy tune this music-hall ballad:

"I want to be a actress, a actress, a actress,
I tell you I won't live and die a common serving gal.
I feel I've got the natur'
To act in a the-a-ter,
I'm just the kind of stuff to make a star profession-a-l-l."

"Well, now ain't she cute?" and Aunt Milly shook her fat sides with laughter. "She ain't ter say purty but she is sho' got a way wid her. She ain't so handsome as some but she gonter keep her takin' ways til' Kingdom Come, whilst some folks what ain't nothin' but purty won' hab nothin' lef' a tall whin the las' trump soun's. I ain't a got no 'jections ter purty folks,—now that there little Miss Annie Po' is sho' sweet lookin' an' sweet tas'in', too, but she is wuth somethin' sides. But some ain't." A glance of her rolling eyes in the direction of Jessie gave us to understand who "some" meant. [188]

Jessie and Wink were having a most desperate flirtation. He had not left her side a moment during the whole day. Jessie glanced occasionally in my direction with a little exultant toss of her head as much as to say: "See, miss, I've got your beau!" She was more than welcome to him, but I didn't think it kind to lessen her delight in her conquest, so I did my best to make her happy by sighing deeply every time I caught her looking at me.

The pleasure of going in swimming is going in again, so as I said before, as soon as a reasonable time had elapsed since our very filling dinner we again retired to our several tree-formed bath-houses and donned our suits for a farewell dip. [189]

"No more fights now!" commanded Zebedee sternly, just as though he had not been among the mighty warriors of the last fray.

Tweedles promptly caught him and gave him a good ducking until he yelled for mercy and help from Aunt Milly, but that model chaperone had gone off to sleep again and was deaf to his cries.

"That's what you get for being Mr. Tuckerish," declared Dum.

Jessie Wilcox was a good swimmer but was determined not to get her hair wet, so had not entered very largely into our water sports. Tweedles and Mary and I had lost our bathing caps in the great naval battle, and since our heads were already wet, we decided to get them wetter and let our hair dry on the trip home. As for Annie, getting her feet wet was about all she could make

up her mind to do, although her coils of honey-colored hair got a little damp. She would take shuddering steps into the water and when she got about knee-deep would lie down and go through the motions of swimming with one foot on the bottom. She had really learned to keep up on top of the water at Willoughby the summer before, but now had lost all confidence in herself and was content just to paddle around in the shallows.

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From one side of our large island there stretched a long narrow sand bar. The water just trickled through there, while the great volume of the creek flowed on the other side where we were swimming. There were many shallow spots where Annie could be perfectly safe, but she decided to walk out on the sand bar and there let down her hair and dry it in the sun. Her cavaliers who seldom left her alone for a moment happened to be engaged in some swimming stunts just then, so unattended she crossed the bar and, seating herself on the end of the neck of sand, she let down her beautiful hair and spread it out in the sun.

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"Only look at Annie! Isn't she lovely?" whispered Dum to me. "She looks like a mermaid or a Rhine maiden."

"Please sing something, Annie!" I called.

"What shall I sing?" laughed Annie, combing her hair with one of her side-combs and peeping at me through its golden glory.

"Anything, so it has water in it!"

Annie's voice had grown in richness and volume since the days at Gresham, although she had had no lessons since that time. She had taken advantage of the teaching she had received from Miss Cox and kept up her practicing by herself as best she could. Of course she should have been under some good master, and all of us felt indignant with Mr. Pore that he did not realize this and make some arrangement for his daughter. The outlay of money necessary for her musical education would have been great, but the returns would surely have been fourfold. Everyone who heard Annie sing could not but admire her voice. Even Jessie Wilcox praised it, although that young lady was not inclined to think anybody but herself worthy of compliments.

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The lovely thing about Annie was she was always ready to be obliging, and if her singing gave any pleasure, she was perfectly willing to contribute it to the general welfare. She never said she didn't have her music and could not sing without notes; she never gave the excuse of not being able to sing without accompaniment. When Annie sang, her shyness left her. She seemed to forget herself and lose all self-consciousness. As her clear soprano notes arose on the air, the noisy bathers quieted down and everyone listened.

On the banks of Allan Water
When the sweet spring-time did fall,
Was the miller's lovely daughter,
Fairest of them all.

For his bride a soldier sought her,
And a winning tongue had he,
On the banks of Allan Water,
None so gay as she.

On the banks of Allan Water
When brown autumn spreads his store,
There I saw the miller's daughter,
But she smiled no more.

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For the summer grief had brought her,
And the soldier false was he,
On the banks of Allan Water,
None so sad as she.

On the banks of Allan Water,
When the winter's snow fell fast,
Still was seen the miller's daughter,
Chilling blew the blast.

But the miller's lovely daughter,
Both from cold and care was free;
On the banks of Allan Water,
There a corse lay she."

"Bully!" exclaimed the audience.

"I'd like to meet that soldier," muttered Sleepy.

"Please sing some more," begged Rags.

And so she sang again. Now she stood up, took a few steps, and faced us as we paddled around.

"Look what a big hole Annie made in the sand, almost as big as Aunt Milly's," whispered Dee to me.

"Yes, the sand must be awfully soft. I'm glad it's not quicksand, though. That's so dangerous." But what I knew about the dangers of quicksand I kept to myself, as Annie had begun:

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"To sea, to sea! The calm is o'er;
The wanton water leaps in sport,
And rattles down the pebbly shore;
The dolphin wheels, the sea-cow's snort,
And unseen mermaids' pearly song
Comes bubbling up the weeds among——"

And just then a strange thing happened: Annie began to sink. The little sand island she had chosen as a place of refuge where she might dry her hair was evidently only an island in the making, and the sand had not packed down. It was quicksand, but not so quick as it might have been, as she had been on it some minutes before it began to give way under her weight. She looked frightened and tried to pull her one foot up, but it stuck. The last lines of her song were in a fair way to be enacted before our very eyes if haste was not made.

Annie gave a scream and made desperate struggles to extricate herself. The swimmers all started to her rescue, George Massie leading the way, shooting through the water like a shark.

I clutched Zebedee as he went by me. "Get the little brown boat and I'll help! The sand may be dangerous all around there."

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He was a quick thinker and turned without a word, landed on the big island and I followed. We launched the little brown boat that we had shoved up among the weeds and in a very short time were floating out into deep water. With a few strong strokes of the oars we had arrived at the spot where we were in truth much needed.

Sleepy had grasped Annie, who was now engulfed up to her knees. Of course he was about the worst person among us to have got first to her rescue because of his great weight. He gave a tremendous pull, grasping Annie around her waist. She came out of the sand making a noise like a whole drove of cattle lifting their hoofs out of the mud. Annie was perfectly limp with fright. She clung to George Massie like some little panic-stricken child.

The frantic Rags reached the sand bar immediately behind Sleepy, and Harvie swam him a close second. The water was quite deep within a few feet of the fatal spot that the innocent Annie had chosen as the best place to dry her hair. The beach of quicksand shelved suddenly into swimming depth. As Harvie and Rags stepped from this swimming hole into shallow water they realized that they, too, had hurled themselves into danger. They stuck fast.

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Annie clung desperately to George. Her eyes were closed and she was so pale I thought she must have fainted. It was a few moments before the rest of the party realized that the three youths were being slowly sucked down. They knew it, however, from the moment they touched the bar.

"Throw Annie out into the water!" said Harvie hoarsely. Annie had not fainted as I had thought, for at these words she clung so desperately to poor Sleepy that he could not loose her hands.

Harvie reached over and unclasped them, holding them tightly until Sleepy could raise her up farther in his arms to throw her.

"Float, Annie! You can float!" shouted Dee. "Do as I tell you!"

Annie, ever inclined to obedience, spread her arms out as she struck the water and floated off as neatly as some well-built yacht launched for the first time. Of course the others grabbed her as soon as she got to them.

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By this time Zebedee and I had the little brown boat to the rescue. We came alongside the poor stick-in-the-muds.

"Take Sleepy first!" cried the other two. "He's in worse than we are."

Taking Sleepy first was no joke. He had sunk at least a foot and a half. Zebedee tugged at him and Sleepy tugged at himself. The little boat almost capsized and still the young giant could not pull his feet out of the treacherous mire.

"You are not in far, Rags; come on and help trim the boat," I insisted, paddling the stern around in reach of Rags. He caught hold and with a quick spring was in the boat.

"Now, Harvie!" I commanded. "We can't get Sleepy unless you come help." I knew perfectly well that Harvie had a notion he must not get in the boat until his friend was saved. In the meantime, Zebedee was struggling to raise Sleepy and the boat was in sad need of ballast. Harvie did as I bade him and with a mighty effort extricated himself and landed in the boat. The legs of both the boys were covered with mire up to their knees.

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All the time we were doing this, the rest of the party was not idle. Of course some of them had to look after the frightened Annie. Dum and Billy Somers had struck out immediately for the red boat which was beached on the far side of the island, realizing as they soon did that the only way to get the boys out of the quicksand was by boat. Mary and Shorty also made for the canoe,

thinking it might be needed, too.

Glad we were when the red boat came alongside of ours and we could lash them together to make more purchase for Sleepy. The little brown boat did not have weight enough to do the job alone. And now with a long pull and a strong pull and a pull all together, we at last got him out.

If when Annie got her feet out of the sand she made a noise like a drove of cattle lifting their hoofs out of the mud, you can fancy what the noise was when Sleepy came out. It was like a great ground swell, and so much water had that young giant displaced, when he removed his bulk I am sure the depth of the creek was perceptibly lowered. [199]

Now it was all over we could giggle, which Dum and I did until Zebedee got really outdone with us and threatened to box us both. It had been a close shave and he felt it was not a time for giggling, but Dum and I were no respecters of time or place. When the giggles struck us, giggle we must.

"If it had not been for your quickness, Page, it might have been a very serious tragedy," he said solemnly. "I never thought of the boats but was going to swim to Annie's assistance."

"I have seen this quicksand before. I almost lost one of my dogs several years ago. He started out in the creek to get a stick I had thrown for him and as soon as he touched the sand he began to sink. I never heard such cries as he gave trying to pull his feet out. I got two fence-rails and crawled out to him and pulled him in. Father nearly had a fit when I told him about it. He sent men down and had the creek dredged." [200]

"I think we should put a sign up here," said Harvie, and a few days later he did paint "Danger" on a sign and came back to Croxton's Ford and planted it at the fatal spot.

It had been a very trying experience, but young people don't brood over things that might have been serious. That is something left to the so-called philosophy of old age. By the time we were in dry clothes and on our way home, the fact that some of our party had been in a fair way to losing their lives seemed something to be joked about.

Of course poor Sleepy came in for his share, but much he cared. He stretched himself at Annie's feet, and possessing himself of a little corner of her sweater, which he clutched tightly in his great hand just as a little baby might cling to its mother's dress, he dropped off into a sleep of exhaustion. He looked very peaceful and happy as he lay there and Annie looked down on his handsome head with affection and admiration in her blue eyes. [201]

"I know one thing," announced Rags; "I'll never see sticky fly-paper again without thinking of this day. I felt exactly like a poor fly stuck fast in tanglefoot. I am sure my legs are a foot longer than they were when I left Maxton this morning." As Ben Raglan's legs were abnormally long, we all devoutly hoped that the stretching was not permanent. Proportioned somewhat like a clothes-pin, he could not stand much lengthening of limb.

"Shorty, it's too bad you weren't first aid man this time," teased Harvie. "It might have made a man of you. All you need is a good stretching."

"Wait until I get you where Aunt Milly can't help you and I'll give you the pounding you need," answered the boy, as he paddled the canoe in the wake of the launch. [202]

Aunt Milly was comfortably ensconced in the seat of honor, sleeping the sleep of the just and generous chaperone.

CHAPTER XIV

 [203]

A YOUNGER SON

WE found Miss Maria much improved but still bed-ridden. She said Wink's medicine was the most efficacious she had ever had, as it had given her a day of rest free from pain. I fancy the quiet had done her as much good as the medicine. She regretted to report that Mr. Pore had telephoned a peremptory message to the effect that Annie should come home the first thing in the morning and bring her clothes.

"Now isn't that the limit?" stormed Dum. "What on earth can he want? We haven't but three more days here and it seems to me he might—" But Annie looked so pained that Dum didn't say what he might do.

"He needs me, I fancy," said Annie sadly.

"So do we need you! And how about Sleepy and Harvie and Rags?" But Annie didn't know how about them, so she only blushed. [204]

"Maybe you can come back," I suggested.

"No, I fancy not, or why should he say I must bring my clothes?"

All of us were at a loss to fathom the behavior of Mr. Pore, but we were too tired to discuss it

farther. We were thankful for the time we had been able to wrest Annie from his selfish demands. I was sorry, indeed, that Zebedee had attended to his old freight for him. I heartily agreed with Dum's sentiments which she muttered under her breath:

"Pig!"

"Anyhow, we are going down with you," declared Mary.

"But I must go before breakfast," said Annie.

"Well, we can travel on an empty stomach quite as well as you can and a great deal weller," insisted Dum, and Dee and Mary and I agreed.

"Please don't awaken me," said Jessie as she twisted her hair into the patent curlers that she managed so well nobody but a girl could have told that her curls were not natural. "I certainly want to sleep in the morning. Dr. White begged me to go rowing with him before breakfast, but I can't bear to get up so early in the morning. It seemed to distress him terribly but then he is such a flirt one can never tell." All this with many glances in my direction. [205]

We had gathered in the room occupied by Tweedles and Jessie for a little chat before turning in for the night.

"How cr-u-le!" exclaimed Mary. "What makes you think he is such a flirt?"

"Ah, that would be telling!" and Jessie began dabbing on the cold cream.

It is strange how indifferent some girls are to what other girls think of them. Jessie Wilcox, the most careful person in the world to look well when any males were around, did not mind in the least letting us see her with her hair twisted up in little wads and clasped with innumerable arrangements made of wire covered with leather. The things looked like huge ticks sticking out from her head, not such a shapely head, either, now that one saw it with the hair drawn back so tightly. Cold cream may be a future beautifier but certainly not a present one. She laid it on in generous hunks and then massaged herself, contorting her countenance in a most disconcerting manner. [206]

"I don't think Wink is a flirt at all," said Dee stoutly. "He is a very good friend of mine and I reckon I know him about as well as anybody in the world. Of course he will flirt if it is up to him, but that is not making him a flirt."

"Ah, indeed!" and Jessie began rubbing cocoa butter on her neck. "Perhaps you don't know the flirtatious side of him."

"Thank goodness, I don't. He and I talk sense to each other," and Dee scornfully sniffed the air. She and Dum hated the odor of cocoa butter, declaring it made their room smell like an apothecary's shop.

"Why don't you and Dum come in our room for to-night?" I suggested, scenting mischief as well as cocoa butter in the air, since the usually tactful Dee was on the war-path. "You will be sure to disturb Jessie in the morning if you sleep in here. Come on! I'll sleep three in the bed with you and get in the middle at that," and so they came, expressing themselves privately as glad to get away from their roommate, who did smell so of cocoa butter and also looked so hideous with her hair done up in those tick-like arrangements and her face shiny with grease. [207]

"Cat! What does she mean by calling Wink a flirt?" raged Dee, who was surely a loyal friend.

"Maybe he is one," suggested Dum.

"Virginia Tucker, I am tired unto death but I'll challenge you to a boxing match if you say that again."

"You are no more tired than I am and I'll say it again!" maintained Dum. "All I said was: 'Maybe he is,' and maybe he is!" No one of the name of Tucker ever took a dare, and the twins crawled out of the great bed where I had taken my place in the middle.

"Girls! Girls! You are so silly," I cried wearily. "You haven't your boxing gloves and you know you might beat each other up with your bare fists. This is no fighting matter, Dee, at least nothing to fight Dum about. Go fight Jessie Wilcox! She is the one who has the proof of Wink's ways." [208]

We were relieved that my reasoning powers quelled the disturbance. Tweedles got back into bed. The twins very rarely resorted to trial by combat now. It had been their childish method of settling difficulties, as their father had brought them up like boys whose code of honor is to stop fussing and fight it out.

"I can't see why you think it is such an awful thing to call Wink a flirt," I said, when all danger of a battle had subsided. "You certainly flirt sometimes yourself."

"When?" indignantly.

"When you sell coffins to healthy young farmers," I asserted.

No more from Dee that night.

We were up early the next morning to escort Annie home, so early that no one was stirring, not even the servants. It seemed ridiculous for her to go so early, but the message from her father was one not to be lightly ignored. She had told Miss Maria and the general good-by the night before and Harvie was to drive her home, but when we crept downstairs there was no Harvie to be found; so we made our way out to the stable where Mary and I hitched up. As we drove off, all five of us crowded into a one-seated buggy, we beheld a very sleepy Harvie waving frantically from the boys' wing and vainly entreating us to wait; but we weren't waiting for sleepy-heads that morning, and drove pitilessly away.

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There was an air of bustling in the store when we piled out of our small buggy. Mr. Pore was in his shirt sleeves, his glasses set at a rakish angle on his aristocratic nose and an unaccustomed flush on his usually pale countenance. He was busy pulling things off of the shelves and piling them up on the counters. The clerk (he called him a "clark," of course, after the manner of Englishmen), was just as busy.

To my amazement I heard Mr. Pore say to a little boy who had been sent to the store on a hurry call for matches: "Haven't time to wait on you; go over to Blinker's."

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What did this mean? Actually sending customers to the rival store!

"Father!" exclaimed Annie, as Mr. Pore gave her his usual pecky kiss. "I didn't know you were going to take stock to-day."

"Neither did I, my dear." His tone was a bit softer than I had ever heard it. And "my dear"! I had never heard him call Annie that before.

"What is it, Father?"

"I have news from England."

"Not bad news, I hope!"

"Well, yes! I might call it bad news."

"Oh, Father, I am so sorry!"

"Ahem! My brother, the late baronet, is—er—no more."

"You mean Uncle Isaac is dead?"

"Yes!"

"What was the matter? When did you hear?"

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"A cablegram states he was killed in a recent battle," and Mr. Pore went on making neat piles on the counter with cans of salmon. I wanted to shake him for more news that I felt sure he had.

Annie took off her hat and tied on an apron ready to help in the arduous task of taking stock. Tweedles and Mary and I stood in the doorway as dumb as fish. Why should a man whose brother had recently died in England feel a necessity of taking stock in a country store? It was too much for us. Suddenly it flashed through my brain that maybe Mr. Pore was going to England. His brother, Sir Isaac Pore, had a son, so Annie had told me, who was, of course, in line for the title.

Mr. Pore finished with the salmon and then spoke with his usual pomposity: "The message also states that my brother's only son has met with an untimely death in the Dardanelles."

Annie dropped a box of soap and stood looking with big eyes at her father.

"I find it necessary that we go to England, and before we go, I deem it advisable to make an inventory of our goods and chattels."

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"Go to England! When?" gasped Annie.

"I fancy we can arrange to be off in about a week."

This was news that touched all of us. Annie going to England! We might never see her again, and her dried-up old father was standing there announcing this fact with as much composure as though he had decided to move his store across the road or do something else equally ordinary.

"You see," he continued with his grandiloquent manner, "the demise of my brother and his son, who is unmarried, advance me to the baronetcy, and—"

"Then you are Sir Arthur Ponsonby Pore!" blurted out Dum.

"Exactly!" he announced calmly, as though he had been inheriting titles all his life.

"Is Annie Lady Anna then?" asked Mary.

"No, she is still Miss Pore. Only a son inherits a title from a baronet," he said with a trace of bitterness. I remembered what Annie had told me of her brother's death and her father's resentment of her being a girl.

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"Well, she would make a lovely Lady Annie all the same," said Dee. "I bet everybody in England will just about go crazy about her."

"Ah, indeed!" was his supercilious remark to this effusion.

"We are going to come down and help you, Annie," I whispered. "I know there are lots of things we can do. You will need help about your clothes. I can't sew, but I can count clothes-pins and chewing-gum while you sew. Don't you want us to help, Mr. Pore?"

That gentleman was as usual quite dumbfounded by being treated like an ordinary human being, and with some hemming and hawing he finally acknowledged that our assistance would be acceptable. His idea was to sell his business and stock to the highest bidder.

Great was the consternation and surprise at Maxton when we announced the choice bit of news that we had picked up that morning before breakfast. Sleepy looked as though he might have apoplexy, his face got so red and his hand trembled so. Harvie got pale and suddenly realized that Annie was not just a little sister. Poor Rags put maple syrup in his coffee and cream on his waffle in the excitement occasioned by the unwelcome news. [214]

They were at breakfast when we burst in on them, at breakfast and rather sore with all of us for having run off without them. Jessie was holding the fort alone, the only female present, as Miss Maria was still unable to get up. That beautiful young lady was looking lovelier than ever in a crisp handkerchief-linen frock. Her curls were very curly and her lovely brunette complexion not at all the worse for the scorching sun of the day before. My poor nose had six more freckles than when I came to Maxton, six more by actual count, and there was not room for the extra ones at all. Mary's freckles were like the stars in the sky, every time you looked you could find another; Dee had her share, too; and Dum had begun to peel as was her habit. Jessie was pretty, very pretty, but the picture of her with her face all greased up and the tick-like curlers covering her head would arise whenever I looked at her. [215]

"Why doesn't Mr. Pore leave Annie here with us until the submarine warfare is over with?" asked Mr. Tucker.

"We never thought of suggesting it," tweedled the twins.

"I did think of it but I knew she wouldn't be willing to have Sir Arthur go alone," I said, rather proud of myself for being the first one to give him his title.

"How much more suited he is to being a member of English aristocracy than engaging in mercantile pursuits in America," laughed the general. "I only wish his lovely wife might have shared the honor with him. Ah me, what a woman she was!"

"He was mighty cold and clammy about his brother's death," said Dee. "When Annie asked if it was bad news he had he said he might call it bad news; but his tone was far from convincing." [216]

"He hasn't seen his brother for over twenty years and he rowed with all his family before he left England, so I reckon it was hard to squeeze out many tears over his death. I felt awful bad about the poor young son," and Dum looked ready to shed tears herself without having to resort to the squeezing process. "An untimely death in the Dardanelles!" That sounds so tragic."

"Yes, that made me feel like crying, too," said Dee. "Just think of a splendid young Englishman, handsome and brave and charming, being shot to pieces by German bullets! I have an idea he had succeeded to the title and estates only a few days before, and while he was sad about his father, he still was looking forward to being the baronet when he got home."

"What makes you think he was handsome?" put in the more matter-of-fact Mary.

"I am sure he must have looked like Annie, and just think what a wonderfully handsome man he must have been! He had her lovely hair, I almost know he did, and great blue eyes and a strong, straight back," and Dum wiped her own eyes that would fill when she thought of the splendid young Englishman gone to his death. [217]

"I don't like to break in on this grand orgy of feeling," I said, "but you must remember that Annie got her looks from her mother, as her father had none to spare. This poor young man may have been all the things you girls picture him to be, but he is just as likely to have inherited his looks from Uncle Arthur Ponsonby. He may have had no chin at all and have had champagne-bottle shoulders and a long neck."

"Page, how can you? Don't you know that people who meet untimely deaths in the Dardanelles are always brave and handsome?" teased Zebedee. "For my part, I am sorrier for the present baronet, Sir Arthur, than for the late lamenteds. Only think how far the poor man has drifted from all the manners and customs of his race!" [218]

"Not manners, maybe customs! His manners are quite the thing to go with titles, I think. As for Annie,—she has a way with her that will make her shine in any society," I asserted.

Everyone agreed with me audibly but Jessie. She had not yet adjusted herself to look upon Annie as anything but the badly-dressed daughter of a country storekeeper, who could sing better than she could and had attracted three out of the nine beaux on the house-party.

SLEEPY WAKES UP

HOUSE-PARTIES have to end sometime and the one at Maxton was no exception. We had been invited for two weeks, and although Miss Maria graciously asked us to extend the time of our stay, we felt that the old lady had had enough of high jinks for a while. We had become very fond of her and I think she liked us, too. The general was in love with the whole bunch, he declared. He made his gallant, bromidic speeches to each one in turn, playing no favorites.

"If I were fifty years younger I would show these chaps a thing or two," he would say.

My private opinion was that the chaps did not need a thing or two shown them, as they seemed quite on to the fact that Maxton was a romantic spot and that there is no time like the present for getting off tender nothings. There being Jacks to go around for the Jills and some to spare, if there were any heartaches they were among the males, as there were no wallflowers among the girls. [220]

If the death of Sir Isaac Pore and his son and heir did not cause overmuch grief in the heart of the storekeeper at Price's Landing, it had a dire effect on three young men in the great house on the hill. The only way in which they could give vent to their feelings was in heroic attempts to assist in the inventory of the stock. That meant at least that they could be near Annie and gain her gratitude. Annie's gratitude was not a difficult thing to gain. She was in a state of perpetual astonishment that all of us loved her so much.

"What have I done to make all of you so kind to me?" she would ask. And the answer would be:

"Everything, in that you are your own sweet self."

Mr. Pore, or rather Sir Arthur, seemed to think we were helping in the shop because of our admiration and respect for him, and since he thus flattered himself we let him go on thinking so, and even encouraged him in this delusion since it simplified matters for all of us. Sleepy even sneaked the daughter off on a lovely long buggy ride while Dum checked up a shelf full of dry-goods, supposed to be done by Annie. [221]

The seemingly impossible was accomplished and that before we left Maxton: a complete inventory of the stock of a crowded country store was made and in order, all because of the many helpers. A purchaser was found by the expeditious Zebedee, and everything, including the good will, sold, lock, stock, and barrel, at a very good price considering the haste of the transaction.

Annie and her father actually did get off within the week. How it was accomplished I can't see, and as we had left Maxton before they made their getaway I shall never know. Harvie, who was the only one of us left, said that Sir Arthur was as standoffish and superior as ever. He started on his journey with the same old Gladstone bag and, as far as Harvie could make out, the same English clothes he had brought to Price's Landing all those years and years ago. [222]

"If they weren't the same, where on earth could he have bought any like them? They don't make them in this country," he said, when he told me of it.

Harvie, having awakened to the fact that Annie was a very charming, beautiful girl, whom he had for years looked upon as a kind of sister but who was not a sister and was moreover very much admired by other members of his sex, now was making up for lost time as fast as possible. He had no feeling of *noblesse oblige* in regard to Sleepy. He surely had as much right to love Annie as George Massie had and more right to tell her of it, since she was almost his sister. He hovered around her to the last, doing a million little things to help her and assuring her in the meantime of his undying affection, but Annie never did seem to understand that he was being any more than a big brother to her. Never having had a big brother, she did not know that big brothers do not as a rule express their love for the little sisters in such glowing terms. [223]

George Massie went gloomily off when the house-party broke up. He felt that he could not in decency stay longer at Maxton since all the others were leaving, although he longed to be near Annie. He sought me out on the boat when we were bound for Richmond and sighing like a furnace sank down by my side. If it had been a sailboat we were traveling in instead of an old side-wheel steamboat, I am sure the great sigh he heaved would have sent us faster on our way.

"Something fierce!" he muttered.

"Yes, it is hard, but maybe they will come back sometime, or perhaps when you get your degree you can go over to England and see her."

"Get my degree! Do you think I am going back to the University? Not on your life!"

"But what will you do? You must have some ambition," I said rather severely.

"Yes, I've got ambition all right; I'm going to do my bit in France as stretcher bearer. I decided last night." [224]

"Really?"

"Sure! I'm just wasting my time at the University. I talked it out with Annie. She has lots of feeling about England and the war, and if she cares, then it is up to me to help her country some."

"Oh, Sleepy! I think that is just splendid of you," I cried. "When will you go?"

"Ahem—I'm thinking of going on the same boat with Mr.—Sir Arthur Pore."

I could not help laughing.

"Does Annie know?"

"No, I was afraid she might make some objection. I think I'll just surprise her on the steamer."

"Won't you have to get passports and permits and things before you can go?"

"Yes, I'll set the ball rolling as soon as I get to Richmond. Mr. Tucker is attending to Sir Arthur's and I guess I'll go see him as soon as we land. He knows how to do so many things."

That was certainly so. Mr. Jeffry Tucker not only could and would match zephyr for old ladies, but he knew just how to get passports for pompous English noblemen who had but recently kept country stores on the banks of the river, and for the lovely daughters. He also knew how to get rushed-through passports for rich young medical students who had taken sudden resolutions to do a bit in France because of a kind of vicarious patriotism. [225]

George Massie had a busy week. He must rush off to see his people, who no doubt were quite confounded by his unwonted energy. He must get the proper clothing for his undertaking and also make his will, since he had quite an estate in his own name. He must tell many relations farewell and explain as best he could his sudden passion for carrying the wounded off of the battle fields.

When he came in to tell the Tuckers good-by before he went to New York to embark on the steamer with the unsuspecting Pores, he looked almost thin and quite wide awake, so they told me.

The Tuckers had tried to persuade me to wait in Richmond with them for a few days before going to Bracken so that together we could see the last of our little English friend, for Sir Arthur and Annie were to take a train in Richmond for New York. But I had been too long away from my father and felt that I must hasten home to him. [226]

Needless to say that Zebedee had the passports all ready for them to sign and berths engaged on the New York sleeper and passage on an English vessel, sailing the following Saturday.

Tweedles told me that Annie clung to them at parting as though they had been a life rope. The poor girl felt that she was going into a strange cold world. It must have been even worse for her than the memorable time when she started on what she thought was going to be that lonesome, forlorn journey to Gresham. That trip had proven to be very enjoyable in spite of all her fears; and perhaps this journey across the ocean was not going to be so very forlorn, either.

I should not relish much the idea of a trip with Sir Arthur Ponsonby Pore. I can fancy his aloof manner with fellow passengers, who perhaps were seeking acquaintance with his lovely daughter; his disregard for the comfort of others; his haughtiness with the steward. The only way to travel in peace with the baronet would be to have him get good and seasick before the vessel got out of sight of Sandy Hook, and stay so until she was docked at Liverpool. Then he might prove a very pleasant traveling companion, provided he was so ill that he had to stay in his bunk. [227]

Of course as the days passed we became desperately uneasy about Annie. It seemed a perfect age since they had sailed and still no news of the safe arrival of the vessel. I was at Bracken, away from the constant calling of extras that was the rule in the city during those stirring war times. Tweedles told me they rushed out in the night to purchase a paper every time an extra was called, fearing news of a disaster to the *Lancaster*, the old-fashioned wooden boat the Pores had taken.

Zebedee had promised to telephone to them if news came to his paper concerning the steamer, news either of disaster or safety. The following is the letter I received from Dee written in the excitement of a message but that moment received from her father. [228]

Richmond, Va.

DEAREST PAGE:

Zebedee has just cabled me that he has had a telephone message from Liverpool that a mine had struck the *Lancaster* about five hours out from port and the open boats had to take to the passengers. All on board were saved although some of the passengers were much shaken up. (I hope Arthur Ponsonby was one of the much shaken.) We are greatly excited about poor Annie. She is so afraid of water. It is feared all baggage is lost. (Good-by to the Gladstone bag!)

Dum and I can hardly wait for the cable that we just know Sleepy will send us as soon as he can. Aren't we glad, though, that Sleepy was along? He will take care of Annie no matter what happens. It may be weeks and months before we can get a letter from Annie, telling us all about it. We are awfully sorry it should have happened to Annie, but Dum and Zebedee and I just wish we had been along. I bet you do, too!

These times are so stirring, I don't see how we can all of us sit still. If our country ever gets pulled into the mix-up I tell you I'm going to get in the dog fight,

too. Zebedee says he is, too, and so is Dum. I want to study veterinary surgery so I can help the poor horses when they get wounded and look after the dear dogs who work so hard to bring in the wounded. Zebedee is afraid that is man's work but I tell him bosh! plain bosh! There is no such thing as man's work any more in this world. He says I'm an emancipated piece and I tell him I'm glad he realizes it. Dum and I are hard at work at war relief work. We go three times a week and roll bandages. I like the work but Dum sits up and lets tears drop on the bandages, thinking about all the poor soldiers they are to bind up. I cry a little, too, sometimes. Zebedee says if we bawl over new bandages, what would we do over real wounds? I tell him salt is a good antiseptic and a few sincere tears won't hurt the poor wounded.

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Dum and I have adopted a French war orphan between us. Ten cents keeps one for a day and it does seem mean of us not to give that much. We always waste that much money, and more, every day of our lives. It means only letting up a bit on the movies or drinking water instead of limeade when one is thirsty. Zebedee has got himself one all by himself and he is going to keep it by letting up on one cigar a day. He says his smoke is bitter to him now that he realizes that every time he lights a ten cent cigar he might be feeding a little Belgian baby. We offered to get him some rabbit tobacco and dry it nicely so he could smoke it in a pipe, but he said never mind. Poor Zebedee is so choosy about his smoke that he would rather give it up altogether than not have it good.

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We've got a scheme on hand for a jaunt but I'm going to let Zebedee have the pleasure of springing it on you if the plan works out. Dum says I'm not leaving a thing for her to tell. She says it is not ethical for one member of a family to write such a long letter to a person that other members correspond with, but I tell her I have told you very little news and that my letter has been more taken up with psychology and the conduct of life.

Of course I started this letter to tell you about Annie and the good ship *Lancaster*, but since all I know about it is that it hit a mine and all hands were saved in open boats I could not enlarge on that bit of news much. We will let you know when we hear more.

Zebedee and Dum and Brindle send you much love. Give mine to Dr. Allison and Mammy Susan, also many hugs to the dogs.

Affectionately,

DEE.

CHAPTER XVI

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THINGS HAPPENING

ONE of the delights of leaving home is coming back, at least so I always felt about my beloved Bracken. I indulged in many little jaunts during the summer but each home-coming was as pleasant as the trips. First there had been the house-party at Maxton, which had been so full of good times, then a short stay at home and almost before I had settled myself, a hurry call from the Tuckers to go to a mountain camp run by some very spunky girls from Richmond, the Carters.

Those days in camp were a delightful experience and quite an eye-opener as to what girls can do if it is up to them. The Carter girls had been brought up in extravagant luxury, but when their father had a nervous breakdown and they suddenly found themselves with no visible means of support, they jumped in and ran a week-end boarding camp on the side of a mountain in Albemarle, and actually supported the whole family and made some money besides.

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They were the busiest people I ever saw, but they managed to tuck in a lot of fun along with it. I certainly hope to see more of those girls, as they interested me tremendously. Douglas was the oldest; she seemed to be the balance wheel for the family. I never saw such poise in a young girl,—not a bit "society," either. She had given up college and was going to stay at home and help. Helen was the next, a stylish creature with more clash and swing to her than even my beloved Tweedles. She was the one who directed the cooking as though she had been catering to boarders all her life, and I was told that she had never thought of such a thing until the spring before, when her father got ill. She evidently had no head for money and I am afraid had an extravagant way with her that gave poor Douglas some trouble.

Then came Nan, a perfect love of a little thing, all poetry and charm but with a conscience that made her do her duty in spite of preferring to live in the clouds. Lucy was the youngest girl and showed promise of being perhaps the best-looking of all the very handsome sisters, but she was too young to say for certain. At any rate, she was a very attractive child. Then there was Bobby, the little brother, an *enfant terrible* and a perfect little duck.

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Mr. Carter was the most pathetic figure I have ever seen: a big, strong man, accustomed to

action and power, reduced to letting his daughters make a living for him. He seemed to have lost the power of concentration, somehow. Mr. Tucker said he thought he would get well but it was going to take a long time. He had worked beyond mental endurance trying to keep his family in luxury.

Mrs. Carter was the kind of woman who reconciles one to being a half-orphan, not that my little mother would ever have been that kind, but I mean it is better to be motherless than to have the kind she was. I thought she was very pretty, very gracious, with a wonderful social gift, but the kind of woman who flops at the first breath of disaster. Those Carter girls will have her on their hands just like a baby until the end of time. Whenever she was crossed, she simply went to bed in a ravishing boudoir cap and bed sacque and there she lolled until she carried her point. [234]

The Carters were so interesting to me that I should like to tell more about them but they really should be in a book all to themselves, they and their week-end camp. I had never been right in the mountains before, but after my stay among them I felt that I liked it even better than the seashore. Father said that the last wonderful thing I saw was always the most wonderful thing in the world. He also said that that was just as it should be. That when persons begin to look backward all the time instead of forward, the sutures of their skulls are too firmly knit together and all of their pleasures have to be of memory. New things make no impression on their brains. He said he intended to keep his skull in a semi-pliable state like a baby's and go on looking at the world as a rattle for him to have a good time with. [235]

I had often thought that my dear father spent a terribly humdrum existence for a man of his ability and intense interest in current events. While I loved the country in general and Bracken in particular, I also loved to get out into the world occasionally and get a new outlook, a different view-point as it were; get somewhere where things were happening. Nothing much ever seemed to me to happen in the country.

One day I said as much to him. He smiled and drew me to him.

"Why, honey, things are happening all the time in the country just as much as in town. I like to get away occasionally, too, but not because I want to be where things are happening,—in fact, I like to get away from so many things happening at once as they do in my life here as a country doctor. The things that happen in cities I feel more impersonal about."

"But you like to read about the things that happen in cities."

"Yes, and city people like to read about the things that happen in the country, too. Aren't all the popular magazines filled with stories of rural life?" [236]

"Ye-s! But they are romances that are made up."

"But not made up out of whole cloth! Come and go with me to-day on my rounds."

"Oh, I'd love to, but Miss Pinkie Davis has come to sew for me and I have to be here to help."

"Let her stay and we will give her a holiday. Poor Miss Pinkie has precious few holidays. She can read all the new magazines and rest her busy fingers."

Of course Miss Pinkie was agreeable to the arrangement. She did have very few holidays and no time to read the romances she craved. We left her ensconced in a hammock on the shady porch with a pile of magazines beside her and a beatific smile on her paper doll countenance. Something interesting was already happening in the country, at least something interesting to Miss Pinkie. [237]

It was a wonderful day in late September. The winter corn had been cut and stacked in shocks that always reminded me of Indian wigwams. The tobacco had been housed the week before and now from each tobacco barn arose a mist of blue smoke. Groups of men could be seen standing around every barn gathered there to take part in the sacred rite of curing the green tobacco. A steady fire must be kept up day and night, and all the men in the countryside seemed to feel it could not be done without the personal supervision of each and every one of them.

"Suppose the women had some important steady cooking to do where the fire had to be kept up day and night, do you think they would have to call in all the other women in the county to assist?" laughed Father. "Men are funny animals."

"The tobacco crop was pretty good, wasn't it?" I asked.

"Fine! Never saw a better. I guess many a poor soldier in the trenches will be thankful that it is so. They say this war is being fought on the wheat and tobacco crops." I thought Father gave me a sly glance, but when I asked him what he was looking at he said nothing much, he only thought my nose was growing a little. [238]

Everybody had a word of greeting for Dr. Allison as we drove by. We were stopped again and again, sometimes for a word of advice from the family physician as to Jim's sore throat or Mary's indigestion; sometimes to prescribe for a hog or cow that was indisposed, and once to decide if San Jose scale had attacked a peach orchard. We could not stop long with each person as we were on a hurry call, but Father always had a moment to spare; and then the colt had to make up for lost time and was given free rein at every good stretch of road.

The colt was the colt by courtesy and habit. He had long ago passed the skittish age, but his

spirit was one of eternal youth and his ways so coltish that no other name seemed to suit him. One could as soon think of Cupid's growing up to be an old gentleman as the colt's ever becoming a safe, steady nag. Enough things happened in the country for him, and he thought that each thing that happened was something for him to dance and prance about. A flock of belated blackbirds twittering in an oak tree was enough to make him get the bit in his teeth and run a quarter of a mile. A rabbit running across the road was something to shy over,—and I agree with the colt in that. As many times as I have seen it, there is something about a Molly Cottontail as she lopes across the road that always startles me. She bobs up so suddenly from nowhere and disappears as rapidly into the nowhere.

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Driving the colt was an excitement in itself that must have kept life from becoming dull to my dear father. There could be no loafing on that job. Reins had to be well up in hand and the driver must be fully cognizant of things that the imaginative animal no doubt looked upon as possible enemies. Sometimes I think he was playing a game with himself and making excitement to keep his existence from being humdrum. At any rate, it was great fun to be behind the spirited animal on that crisp September morn. No one could drive so well as Father. He had a sure, steady, gentle but firm touch on the rein that soothed the most nervous horse. Father's driving always reminded me of Zebedee's dancing.

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Our hurry call was to a young farmer's wife. The gates were wide open as though we were expected and no obstacles were to delay us. The husband, Henry Miller, was waiting for us at the stile block. His face was drawn and white and great tears were rolling down his weather-beaten cheeks.

"She's awful bad off, Doctor. I'm afraid she's gonter die," he whispered huskily.

"Oh no, my son! I have no idea of such a thing. Maybe you had better unhitch my horse. He is not much on the stand. Page, you help him, please."

Now Father knew perfectly well that I could look after the colt by myself, but he simply wanted to occupy Mr. Miller. Silently we undid the straps and led him to the stable. I realized he was feeling too deeply to listen to my chatter, so I kept very quiet. When we started back to the house I told him he must not bother about me,—that I had a book and would just make myself at home out in the summer-house.

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"I will come, too," he faltered. "Looks like I'll go crazy if I have to stay alone."

"Oh, do come! Maybe you would like me to read to you."

"No, Miss Page! Just let me talk to you. You see I feel so bad about Ellen because she ain't been back to see her folks. I didn't know she wanted to go, but it seems she did and didn't like to say so. I ought to have known about it. If I hadn't have been a numskull I would a-known. I've been so happy just to be with her that I never thought she wasn't just as happy to be with me."

"Why, Mr. Miller, I am sure she was. Everybody is always saying how happy Mrs. Miller is. Only the other day I heard Sally Winn declare she never saw such a contented young married woman. Sally says lots of young married women are not happy; that it takes a long time for them to get used to husbands instead of sweethearts; but that your wife didn't have to do that because you seemed just like a sweetheart all the time."

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"Did she say that,—did she truly? I wonder what made her think it."

"Something your wife told her, I reckon!"

"Oh, thank you! Thank you for that! She could have gone to her mother if I had known she wanted to."

"Of course she could, but maybe she did want to go to her mother and didn't want to leave you. I bet that was the reason she didn't tell you she wanted to see her mother. She knew you would insist upon her going, and then she would have had to leave you."

Now the poor anxious young man was smiling. He wiped his eyes and grasped my hand.

"You are powerful like Doc Allison, Miss Page. He knows how to cure a sick spirit just as well as a sick body, and you sure can comfort a fellow, too."

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There was the creak of a screen door being hastily opened on the side porch of the farmhouse and an old colored woman came running out. Henry Miller jumped to his feet but could not go to meet her. Fear seemed to grip him. What news was she bringing?

"Marse Hinry, it's a boy! It's a boy!"

"A boy?"

"Yassir, a boy, an' jes' as peart as kin be, an' Miss Ellen——"

"Is she dead?"

"Daid! Law, chile, she is the livinges' thing you ever seed an' what's mo' she is a-axin' fer you jes' lak she can't stan' it a minute longer 'thout she see you. Baby cryin' fer you, too!" and sure enough we did hear a faint squeaky cry issuing from an upstairs room.

The newly-made parent sprinted to the house as though he were in a Marathon race, and the

old colored woman and I looked at each other and wiped the tears off that would roll down our cheeks.

"Young paws allus is kinder pitable," she remarked, and then hastened back to her labors.

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Father came out soon, his lean face beaming with smiles, his arm thrown around the shoulders of the ecstatic Henry. We were to stay to dinner at the farmhouse, much to the delight of the old colored cook. It was deemed a great privilege in the county to have Doc Allison stop for dinner.

"I done made a dumplin' fer Marse Hinry," she said, as we were sitting down to the hospitable board. "In stressful times men-folks mus' eat or they gits ter broodin' on they troubles, an' whin men-folks gits ter broodin' if'n they ain't full er victuals fo' yer know it they is full er liquor."

As Henry Miller was a most respectable, church-going young man this amused Father very much.

"That's so, Aunt Min, so you feed him up. He had better look out, anyhow, because before you know it that young man upstairs will be whipping him."

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This delighted the negress, who chuckled with glee as she passed the dumplings.

"I is glad it's a boy 'cep'n' they is been so many boys born here lately that this ol' nigger is beginning ter s'picion that these here battles I hear 'bout is goin' ter spread this-a-way. In war time all the gal babies is born boys."

"Oh, I hope not, Aunt Min," said Father gravely.

"Yassir! An' the snakes! I never seed the like of snakes this summer gone by. That means the debble is busy an' the debble is the father of war."

"True, true!" sighed the doctor. "Well, I hope it won't come to us until the youngster upstairs is able to help defend us."

While we were at dinner, Father was called up on the Millers' telephone. Mrs. Reed, an old lady on the adjoining farm, was very ill and the doctor must leave his dumpling unfinished and fly to her. The colt was harnessed with the expedition used in a fire engine house and we were on our way in an incredibly short time.

CHAPTER XVII

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MORE THINGS HAPPENING

THE Reeds were aristocrats of the first rank. There were no men in the family at all, no one but old Mrs. Reed, who had been a widow for at least forty years, and her two old maid daughters, Miss Elizabeth and Miss Margaret.

Weston was a beautiful place if somewhat gone to seed by reason of the impossibility of obtaining the necessary labor to keep it up. The house was a low rambling building, part brick and part frame, where rooms had been added on in days gone by when the family was waxing instead of waning, as was now the case.

Miss Elizabeth insisted upon my coming in the house although I longed to be allowed the privilege of exploring the garden, which I had remembered with great pleasure from former visits with my father. No matter if potatoes had to go unplanted and wheat uncut, the ladies of Weston had never permitted the flower garden to be neglected. I could see it from the window of the parlor through the half closed blinds. Cosmos and chrysanthemums were massed in glowing clumps, holding their own in spite of a light frost we had had the night before. The monthly roses, huge bushes that looked as though they had been there for centuries, were blooming profusely.

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Mrs. Reed was very, very low, so low that her daughters feared the worst. A door opened from the parlor into her bedroom, which the daughters spoke of always with a kind of reverence as "the chamber." Through this door I could hear the low clear voice of the old lady as she greeted the doctor.

"How do you do, James? I am glad to see you once more."

"Yes, Mrs. Reed, I am more than glad of the privilege of seeing you. May I feel your pulse?" His tone was that of a man who requests to kiss one's hand.

"You may, James, but there is no use. I am quite easy now, but only a few moments ago my heart quite stopped beating. Each time I swing a little lower. Did I hear someone say you had little Page with you?"

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"Yes, madame! She is in the parlor."

"I want to see the child."

I heard quite distinctly but I did not want to go in, shrinking instinctively from the ordeal of

speaking to the old lady who was swinging so low.

Miss Elizabeth came for me. It seemed impossible to me that anyone could be older than Miss Elizabeth, who looked a hundred. She was in reality almost seventy. The mother was ninety but did not look any older than the daughter nor much more fragile. Miss Margaret was much more buxom than Miss Elizabeth and perhaps ten years younger. She was regarded by the two older ladies as nothing more than a child.

"Mother wants to see you," whispered the weeping Miss Elizabeth. Miss Elizabeth always did weep about everything. In fact, in the course of her threescore years and almost ten, so many tears had flowed down her cheeks that they had worn a little furrow from the corner of her eye to the corner of her mouth, where it made a neat little twist outward just in time to keep the salt water out of her mouth. These wrinkles in the poor lady's cheeks gave to her countenance a whimsical expression of laughter. The little twist at the end of the furrow was responsible for this.

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I went as bidden and hoped no one knew how I hated it.

"Page, Mrs. Reed wants to see you a moment," said Father very gently.

"How do you do?" I whispered in such a wee voice that I felt as though someone away off had said it and not I. I knew that Mrs. Reed was deaf, too, and that I should have spoken in a loud tone.

"I'll be better soon, child," answered the old lady, who did not seem to be deaf at all. They say sometimes just before death that faculties become quite acute.

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"How pretty you are, my dear, almost as pretty as your mother. I hope you appreciate what a good man your father is." Her voice was very low and I had to lean over to catch what she was saying. Her thin old hands were lying on the outside of the counterpane and they seemed to me to look already dead. I had never seen a dead person but I fancied that their hands must look just that way. I was deeply grateful to Fate that I did not have to take one of those hands.

"Yes; ma'am—I—believe I do. He is the best man in the world."

"He is so honest. Now he knows I am almost gone and he would not tell me a lie about it for anything,—would you, James?"

"No, madame!" and Father put his finger again on her wrist. Miss Elizabeth wept silently and Miss Margaret sobbed aloud.

"Tell me, has Ellen Miller's baby come?"

"Yes, I have just come from there. It is a fine boy and mother and baby doing well."

"Good! I am glad when I hear some men are being born into the county. Too many women! Too many women! What are you girls crying for?" she asked, turning her head a little on the pillow and looking with wonder at the two old ladies she called girls. "There is no use in crying for me. I am glad to die,—not that I have not been happy in my life,—yes, very happy! But there are more on the other side than this side now for me. Your father and brothers, my father and mother and brothers and sisters, all my friends. Do you think I'll know them, James?"

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"Yes, madame, I think you will."

"I don't expect them to know me," the faint old voice went on. "How could they know me, so old and wrinkled and feeble? My husband was only fifty-five when he died and I was still nothing more than a child of fifty. My hair had not turned and I was very lively. Do you think he will be disappointed to find me so old?"

Her mind was wandering now and her voice trailed off to the finest thread. Father motioned me to go, but before I could turn the old lady suddenly sat up in bed and called to her daughters:

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"Don't forget to have the giant-of-battle rose trimmed back and those hollyhocks transplanted!" Then she fell back on her pillow and closed her eyes.

I slipped out of the room and ran into the garden where Father found me a half hour later.

"How is Mrs. Reed, Father?" I asked. He looked at me wonderingly.

"She is well again," he answered gently. "She was dead, my dear, before you left the room."

"Oh, Father!" I gasped.

"I was sorry for you to be there, but I got fooled. I thought the old lady was going to live a few hours longer, but doctors know mighty little when you come down to life and death. Come, honey! We must go. I have a sick child to see on my way home."

We had to stop at a little country store on the way to see the sick child to get some chewing-gum for the youthful patient. Father always had chewing-gum for the sick kiddies and that kept him in high favor with them. Doc Allison was looked upon as a kind of concrete Santy who gave un-Christmas presents. He carried peppermints always in his pocket, and when a child was told to poke out his tongue he more than likely would find a peppermint on it before he pulled it in again.

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The child was better and our stay did not have to be very lengthy. All the children in the family had insisted upon showing their tongues to the giver of peppermints, which delayed us a few moments.

"And now for home!" said Father, who was looking tired. He actually handed the reins to me to drive while he filled his pipe for a peaceful smoke.

We were passing through a settlement where there was the usual post-office, country store, church and schoolhouse, with a few houses straggling around, when a young man ran out into the road and called desperately to Father to stop. I drew rein and he came panting to the buggy. [254]

"Doc Allison, please come be witness for us!"

"Witness? What for?"

"Well, Julia and I have walked off to get married. I won't say 'run off' because both of us are of age and have been of age for a good five years. But Julia's mother is that cantankerous that she won't let her get married if she knows about it, and so we have come to the parson's with license and all; but he says we must have witnesses and there's no one in the settlement right now but the postmaster and the storekeeper and they can't leave their jobs, and besides they are afraid of the old lady. She is on her way here now, I believe, so you'll have to hurry."

We found the bride in the parson's parlor looking nervously out of the window. She, too, was afraid of the old lady. I was sorry for the parson because he must have been afraid, too, but he went manfully through the ceremony. He had hardly finished with: "Whom God hath united let no man put asunder," when there was a terrible commotion in the road. An old lady came driving up in a spring wagon. She had blood in her eye, a terribly rampagious old lady. She stepped out of the wagon and I noticed she had on top boots. She wore a short, scant skirt and a workman's blue chambray shirt and a man's hat pulled down over as determined a countenance as I have ever seen. [255]

"Mrs. Henderson!" gasped the preacher, turning pale, and well he might as Mrs. Henderson was someone to stand in awe of.

"Come on home here, girl!" she said roughly, as she made her way into the parson's parlor.

"Her home is where I live now," said the young man, putting his arm around the bride.

"Nonsense! I never got too late to anything in my life. I telephoned these folks over here that they had better not stand as witness to any ceremony until I got here, and I know they wouldn't do it." She had been too enraged to notice Father and me, but now when Father stepped up and spoke to her, she fell back in confusion. [256]

"My daughter and I were fortunately in time to witness the ceremony," he said quietly. "It is all over now and your daughter is safely married."

"Married!"

"Yes, Mrs. Henderson, and I advise you to sit still a moment and compose yourself. You will have apoplexy some of these days flying off in these rages." He looked at her very sternly. "Your daughter has married a good young fellow and she will be much happier than she would be remaining single."

"What business is it of yours, I'd like to know?"

"No business at all, except that I was asked to witness the ceremony by your son-in-law; and if you should get sick from the excitement you are working yourself into, you will send for me post haste," answered Father coolly.

"Never! Not after the bad turn you have done me!" [257]

"Well, that's as you choose," he laughed.

Then he kissed the bride, who had said never a word but clung to her husband; shook hands with the groom and the parson; held out his hand to the irate, booted old woman. She would have none of him, however, but folded her arms and sniffed indignantly. She made me think of:

"But Douglas 'round him drew his cloak,
Folded his arms and thus he spoke:"

One couldn't help laughing at her but feeling sorry for her, too.

"She'll have to pay for this," said Father, as we started again for home. "She has been going into rages like this all her life and usually has a spell of sickness after one like to-day's."

"But, Father, you surely would not go to her after the way she spoke to you!"

"Of course I would if she needs me. Country doctors can't be too touchy. It isn't as though she could get someone else as she could in town. In cities a doctor isn't so important as he is in the country. There are always plenty more to answer a call that he turns down. I have never in my life refused a patient." [258]

We had a quiet drive home, Father smoking his pipe, while I gave undivided attention to the

prancings and shying of the colt. I was thinking of all the happenings of the day.

"A penny for your thoughts!" he said, pinching my ear. "I bet I know what you are ruminating."

"Well!"

"You have come to the conclusion that a good deal can happen in a country neighborhood in a day: a birth, a death, a marriage and a quarrel."

CHAPTER XVIII

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THE END OF AN EVENTFUL DAY

THINGS kept on happening. When I got out of the buggy to open the big gate leading into the avenue, a gate that was supposed to work by pulling a string but which never did, I saw some peculiar tracks in the dust of the road.

"An automobile has gone in," I exclaimed, "and hasn't gone out, either! Look, the tracks don't come back!"

"Heavens! I do hope I am not to go out again," said Father wearily. "I'd like to sit on the back of my neck in my sleepy-hollow chair and talk or listen as the case might be. I am too tired even to read."

"Me, too! And hungry's not the word!"

"A midday dinner gets mighty far off by supper time. I hope Susan realizes that."

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A dusty Ford car was drawn up near the stile block. It looked familiar, but then all Fords have a way of looking that.

"Who on earth can it be? Well, if I have to go out again at least you and the colt won't," sighed the poor country doctor. "I am going to make the owner of that car carry me wherever I am to go and what's more bring me back. I am not going to sit on the front seat with him, either, and listen to his jabber. Me for the rear and a whole seat to myself. I might even get a nap."

A sudden opening of the front door and who should come tearing out but Dum and Dee Tucker and Zebedee? Of course the lines of the dusty car were familiar: Henry Ford himself, faithful servitor!

The tired feeling vanished very quickly in our joy at the disclosure of the owner of the car. Father was always glad to see the Tuckers but was doubly glad now, because it being the Tuckers, meant it was not someone to snatch him away from his sleepy-hollow chair.

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At Mammy Susan's instigation the twins were already installed in my room. There were plenty of guest chambers at Bracken, but we always liked to be in the same room. Whenever we had tried sleeping in separate rooms we felt we had missed something.

"How did it happen?" I cried, hugging the twins again as we hastened to my room to make ourselves fit for the supper that Mammy Susan warned us she was a-dishin' up.

"Well, we are having a Tucker discussion and we thought you and Dr. Allison should be called in consultation, especially as you are one of the parties concerned," answered Dum.

"Me?"

"Yes, you! We'd like to know what plan we could make where you were not concerned," put in Dee.

"Please tell me what it is!"

"Wait until after supper, and when the men-folks light their pipes, then we can talk it out. You can do twice as much with Zebedee when he is fed," said the knowing Dee.

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"Father, too, is more amenable to reason," I laughed.

Mammy Susan had fully realized that a midday dinner is a long way from supper and had planned a royal feast for us, and when the Tuckers arrived she added to her menu to suit their tastes and appetites. Mammy Susan always remembered what guests liked best, and no matter how much trouble it was to her, usually managed to have that particular dish. The Tuckers were prime favorites with the dear old woman and she could not do enough for them.

Supper over, we adjourned to the library where a cheery wood fire was crackling in the great fireplace. There was frost in the air and a fire was quite acceptable, although we had the windows wide open. Father and I loved to make up a big fire and then have plenty of cold fresh air.

"I can't see the use er heatin' up the whole er Bracken, but if Docallison is a-willin' ter pay fer cuttin' the wood, 'tain't fer me ter 'jec'," said Mammy Susan as she peeped in to see that there

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was plenty of wood, hoping in her secret soul that there would not be so she could have some excuse for quarreling with the yard boy. Mammy Susan waged an eternal warfare with the yard boy, whoever he might be. We had so many it was hard to keep up with their changing names, so Father called them all George.

It was dear Mammy's one failing. She simply could not live in peace with other servants. We had long ago given up trying to have a housemaid, as Mammy Susan would have complained of the lack of efficiency of a graduate of a domestic science school of the first standing. No one could help her cook. Mrs. Rorer herself would have been found wanting in the culinary department of Bracken.

"Humph! Wood enough fer onct!" she grumbled. "If'n I hadn' er got right behin' that there so-called George there wouldn' er been. He is the triflinges' nigger," she mumbled, as she went through the hall. Zebedee ran after her and her grumblings were changed to chucklings by something that passed between them.

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"Poor old Susan!" said Father, as he sank into the deepest hollow of his chair. "She is so capable herself that she expects all of her race to toe the mark, too. She is very lenient with the white people whom she loves and absolutely adamant with the coloreds. The white folks can do no wrong and the black folks can do no right."

Pipes were filled for the two parents and a box of candy opened for the daughters, and then we were ready for the business of the day to be discussed.

"Dr. Allison, what are you going to do with Page this winter?" asked Mr. Tucker.

"Do with Page! Why—nothing but—nothing at all."

"Oh, but, doctor——" broke in Dum and in the same breath Dee clamored:

"We want——" but nobody heard what we wanted as I had to put in my oar saying I thought I ought to stay at home.

"Now, see here, if we all of us talk at once we won't get anywhere, and we might just as well have stayed in Richmond," complained Zebedee.

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"Well, let's appoint a chairman then," I suggested, "and everybody address the chair. I nominate Mr. Tucker chairman pro tem."

He was duly elected.

"Nominations are in order for chairman," and the chairman pro tem rapped for order.

"I nominate Mr. Tucker for chairman," said Father contentedly from his easy chair.

"I second the nomination," from me.

"I nominate Dr. Allison!" cried Dum.

"Second the nomination!" said Dee, jumping to her feet for a speech. "Zebedee is too Mr. Tuckerish when he gets in the chair to suit me, and besides he will have to be talking too much in this meeting to occupy the chair with any grace."

"I withdraw my name as candidate," said the first nominee graciously. "Any other nominations? The chair hears none,—then it is in order to make the election of Dr. Allison unanimous." It was done so with three rousing cheers.

Father always enjoyed the Tuckers' foolishness and he was now in a state of relaxation and contentment, after a strenuous day spent in doing his duty, that fitted in well with our cheerful guests.

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"Well, I'm glad to have the chair if I can sit in it," he said. "Friends, since there are no minutes, we can dispense with the reading of them. What is the business of the day?"

"Mr. President, what are we going to do with our daughters this coming winter?" said Zebedee, rising to his feet and speaking after due acknowledgment from the chair. "'The time has come' the walrus said, 'to talk of many things,' but this business of occupying these girls, whom a Merciful Providence has confided to our care, is a serious matter. They are too young to stop school altogether, especially since they don't want to make débuts——"

"Who said we didn't? We'd do anything rather than go back to school," interrupted Dum.

"Mr. Tucker has the floor," said Father with mock severity.

"I rise to a question of privilege," announced Dee solemnly. "We are 'most as old as Zebedee was when he got married and quite as old as our mother was." At this Zebedee laughed a little and wiped his eyes once. He always had a tear ready for his young wife who was spared to him such a little while.

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"Well, honey, even if you are, times have changed. Young folks don't stop school as soon as they used to."

"Didn't I tell you he would get Mr. Tuckerish? Just listen to him! Talking about young folks as though he were a million."

"Address the chair!" and Father rapped for order.

"May I ask your indulgence for a moment, Mr. President?" asked Zebedee meekly. "As I was saying, when the gentleman from nowhere interrupted me: our daughters are too young to stop studying altogether. Don't you think so?"

"If you will allow the chair to express an opinion, I am afraid they are."

"Of course Gresham's burning down was most inopportune, as they would have been safely placed for another year there, but now that it is burned and not rebuilt yet——"

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"We wouldn't go back there, anyhow, with that old Miss Plympton bossing things," asserted Dum.

"Now what I want to find is some way to have them go on studying and learning and still not be bored to death," and Zebedee sat down.

"A Daniel come to judgment!" I whispered.

"Are you addressing the chair?" asked Father.

"No, I was just talking to myself."

"Of course, I want to study art more than anything in the world!" exclaimed Dum, bouncing on her feet and forcing an acknowledgment from the chair before Dee had time to get it. "I can't see the use in burdening myself with Latin and math when I am nearly dead to model things."

"Well, you haven't overburdened yourself with knowledge yet, I am glad to say," teased her father.

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"Are you addressing the chair?" asked our president sternly. "If not, pray do so."

"Well, Mr. President, I want to study physiology and anatomy," said Dee. "And for the life of me I can't see what good ancient history and French would do me."

"And I want to be a writer, and it seems to me the best way to be one is—just to be one," I remarked.

"Exactly!" smiled Father.

"And now we want to talk over what is the best way for these girls to get what they want and still not be idle," said Mr. Tucker. "I should like to hear what our honored president has to say."

"Well, friends, this has kind of been sprung on me. I have been living in a kind of fool's paradise, thinking that maybe our girls knew enough to stop; but I see that I was wrong. Girls never know enough to stop. I'll let my third do whatever you let your two-thirds do, if it isn't too wild."

"But, Father, I am going to stay right here at Bracken with you! You know you need me."

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"Of course I need you, but you don't think I need you any more than Tucker needs his daughters. You will settle down soon enough and now is the time to gather material for writing. Things make an impression on you now that wouldn't when you are older. One can put off writing longer than getting experience," and Father drew me down on the arm of his chair.

"Where do you think these monkeys should go to get these varied industries they are longing for, Tucker?"

"New York, I should say."

CHAPTER XIX

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PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

NEW YORK! The very sound of the name thrilled me. It was all I could do to keep from following the twins in their demonstration of joy and gratitude lavished on their father. I contented myself, however, by rumpling up my father's hair.

"When?" gasped Father, when I had finished with him.

"Immediately if not sooner!" said Zebedee, coming out unscathed from the embraces of his girls. "I have been thinking a lot about it and I really believe it would be the best thing for them. They can in a way find themselves, and they don't get in any more scrapes without us than they do with us."

"That's so," agreed Father.

"Oh, we won't get in any scrapes at all!" declared Dee.

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"Not a single one, if you only trust us!" maintained Dum.

"I'm not going to take my oath upon it that you won't get into some, but if you talk over anything you are contemplating, in the way of adventure, with wise little Page, I don't believe your scrapes will amount to much."

Zebedee always complimented me by insisting that my judgment was good, and for a wonder, the girls did not mind when he praised me. They were very jealous of their father's praise when it was laid on too thickly, except where I was concerned, but they agreed with him heartily when he lauded me to the skies.

"You shouldn't say that," I said, blushing. "I might prove myself unworthy of the trust imposed in me,—and then what?"

"Then I shall have to declare myself at fault in character reading."

"But, Page, you know you always hold us down! When we get into trouble it is against your judgment. If we listen to you, we keep straight," said Dum. [273]

"You mean I preach!"

"That's the funny thing about you, Page: you give us sage, grown-up advice without preaching. We wouldn't listen a minute if you preached."

"All right, I promise never to do that objectionable thing," I laughed. "But really and truly, I don't think Father ought to afford this trip for me."

"Child, it's not a trip," and Father put his arm around me again. "It's part of your education. New York need not be such an expensive place if you girls go there with economical ideas in your heads, instead of extravagant ones."

"Certainly! We had better allowance them and that will be part of their training, as well as what they will get from the several schools. My girls know very little about finances and it is high time they learned. Experience is the only way for them to learn, as whenever I try to instill in them principles of economy they say I am Mr. Tuckerish," and Zebedee tried to look stern.

The idea of his instilling principles of economy in anybody's mind was so funny all of us had to laugh. One thing Mr. Tucker insisted on was not spending money until you had it; but the minute you did have it, what was it meant for but to spend? "Easy come, easy go!" was the motto for the whole Tucker family. [274]

"Oh, we will live so cheap I haven't a doubt we'll save oodlums of money!" cried Dum. "Mrs. Edwin Green told me a lot about how cheap one can live in Bohemia. She told us whenever we went to New York she was going to give us a letter of introduction to her brother and sister-in-law, Mr. and Mrs. Kent Brown."

Mrs. Edwin Green was the lovely young woman we had met in Charleston when we took our famous trip down there. She was a Miss Molly Brown of Kentucky who had married Professor Edwin Green of Wellington College. They were the very nicest couple I ever knew and we became great friends with them. We corresponded with her and a letter from "Molly Brown" was highly prized by all of us. [275]

"Yes, and she said we were to visit her at Wellington if we got anywhere near. Won't it be great?" and Dee danced around the library from pure glee.

"How will we live in New York?" I asked. "Shall we board or what?"

"Board, by all means! If you try to live any other way you will run into debt, I am afraid," said Zebedee.

"But we just naturally despise boarding," pouted Dum. "We've been boarding all our lives, it seems to me."

"But when you board, you are in a measure chaperoned," said her cautious parent.

"Chaperoned! Oh, Zebedee, you make me laugh. What boarding-house keeper has time to chaperone? Besides, isn't Page along to chaperone?"

"What do you think about it, Page? Come along now with that sage advice," teased Father.

"I have never boarded and don't know how I'd like it, but it seems to me the best thing for us to do would be to board when we first get there, and then if we can't stand it, take a little flat and keep house, or rather, flat." [276]

"Ah, I see why your advice is so sought after by our worthy friends, the Tuckers; you are as wise as Solomon and cut the baby in two and satisfy all parties. You will go to boarding to suit Tucker and then get a flat to suit the daughters, eh, honey?"

"Fifty-fifty is a safe course to pursue, and safety first is best and wisest for an official umpire," I maintained.

"I must say that the oracle has spoken well," said Zebedee. "Of course, if they are not happy boarding they must not keep to it, but it is better for them to start that way. They can learn the ropes and decide later on to get a flat if it seems wiser. We can go on with them and establish them, eh, doctor?"

"I reckon so, if my patients behave. Now that old Mrs. Reed is dead, I can leave perhaps—Ellen Miller's baby safely here, too!"

"Oh, Father, that will be simply grand, if you can only go!"

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"I haven't had a trip for a long, long time, and I think it is up to me to treat myself."

All of us thought so, too. It made it easier for me if Father was contemplating going with us for a little recreation. He worked so hard, had so little fun in his life. What fun there was he made for himself by treating life as something very amusing when all was told. His patience was only equalled by his sense of humor.

"Don't give out that you are going on a trip, Father, and then all of your cranky patients won't have time to trump up any illnesses. If Sally Winn hears of your intended departure, she will get up seven fits of heart failure and more flutterations and smotherines than enough to keep you at home."

"Poor Sally! I wish she could go on a trip herself. It would do more towards curing her than all the pink, pump water in the world."

Sally Winn was Father's hypochondriacal patient who called him up at all hours of the day and night for an imaginary heart trouble that was supposed to be carrying her off. She did not feel safe with Father out of the county and never let him get away if she could help it.

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"Why don't you suggest it to her? She might come on and visit her cousin, Reginald Kent."

"Reginald Kent! By Jove, I forgot that fellow when I proposed New York as a good place for you girls to top off your very incomplete education," and Zebedee groaned.

"Well, what is the matter with Reginald Kent?" bridled Dum.

"Matter! Nothing's the matter, that's what's the matter. See here, Dum Tucker, if you go to New York and fall in love with that good-looking, clever young man I'll kill myself," declared the desperate Zebedee, always afraid that some man would come along and cut him out with his girls.

"Nonsense, Zebedeedlums! Reginald Kent will have to fall in love with me before I fall in love with him."

"Well, if that's so, I'll fix him! I'll tell him what a bad proposition you are: mean, ungenerous, deceitful, secretive. I'll put him on to you." As these were all the things Dum was not, we felt safe.

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"Shan't we let Mary Flannagan know our plans? She may want to join us there," suggested Dee.

"Of course we want dear old Mary," Dum and I cried together.

We all of us thought with regret of what a winter like the one we were planning to have would have meant to Annie Pore.

Mary was a great favorite with both Father and Mr. Tucker, so they readily consented to our writing to her, suggesting that she should join us in New York if her mother thought well of the plan.

"She can go on with her movie stunts, and take up dancing and gym work in real earnest under the right instructors," said Dee.

"I hope she won't try to climb down any walls in New York," I laughed. "We mustn't get in a flat with ivy on the walls."

"Oh, so it is to be a flat, is it? I understood you were to board first," said Zebedee, pretending to be insulted.

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"So we are, but of course we will end up in a flat, and I fancy Mary will stand in awe of the boarding-house keeper enough to keep her from scaling her walls."

Our whole evening was spent in talking over our plans for topping off our education in New York. Father and Zebedee were like two boys in the suggestions they made. They had perfect faith in us, knowing that we had sense enough to bring us safely through the experience. I have wondered since if our mothers had been alive if they would have consented to the plan, but, of course, if our mothers had been alive, our education would not have been quite so loose-jointed. Mothers are much more particular than fathers about their daughters' education.

To be sure, Mrs. Flannagan did consent to Mary's going, but then she was rather a haphazard lady herself, looking upon life with a humorous twinkle in her Irish eye. She believed heartily in the doctrine of live and let live, and, forsooth, if Mary had mapped out for herself a career as a movie actress, why let her work it out! She, her mother, was certainly not going to block her game.

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Mammy Susan was the one who kicked up about my going. For once she and Cousin Park Garnett were of the same mind. Cousin Park almost got out an injunction on Father to restrain him as one who was not in his right mind. A lunacy commission would have had him locked up in the State Asylum, according to that irate dame.



MAMMY SUSAN, HOWEVER, HAD HER SAY OUT IN REGARD TO MY GOING AWAY FROM HOME. [Page 282.](#)

She never would have known about my going if she had not chosen to make a visitation at Bracken just when I was in the throes of getting ready to spend the winter in New York. Her own house was having some repairs, so she had made a convenience of our hospitality to escape the discomforts of paperhangers and painters. I was afraid at first that she would stay so long Father could not get away, but a lawsuit she was engaged in came to court and she was forced to cut her untimely visit short. I found out afterwards that the case, which was a trifling matter of back-yard fences, was put up first on the docket by some adroit wire-pulling done by no less a person than Mr. Jeffry Tucker, the ever ready. It was done so silently that Cousin Park never found it out. She was forced to return to her dismantled house, much to the regret of the workmen who were revelling in the absence of an exacting housekeeper.

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Mammy Susan, however, had her say out in regard to my going away from home: "I's gonter speak my min' if'n it's the las' ac' er my life. Gals ain't called on ter be a-trapsin' all the time. Mammy's baby ain't never gonter be content at Bracken no mo'. Always a-goin' an' never a-comin'. An' me'n Docallison so lonesome, too. I wisht you was twins—I 'low I'd keep one er you at home."

"Which one, Mammy Susan?"

"T'other one!"

CHAPTER XX

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A LETTER FROM ANNIE PORE TO PAGE ALLISON

*Grantley Grange,
Grantley, England.*

MY DEAREST PAGE:

It takes such an interminable time to get mail in these war times that I am afraid my letter will seem like last year's almanac by the time it reaches you. I must begin at the beginning and tell you of our journey across the ocean, but before I plunge into the lengthy recital I must inform you that I am very happy in my new home. I could not be anything but happy when I realize how much better off poor Father is. Of course the family is in the deepest mourning because of the death of Uncle Isaac and my cousin Grant, and there is an air of sadness in the whole village of Grantley; but everybody is very kind to us and I am sure I shall soon grow to love my aunts, the Misses Grace and Muriel Pore. These ladies are older than my father but they are quite strong and robust and it is wonderful what they can accomplish in the way of work.

All the women of England are busy at one thing or another. Women, great ladies who have never done any form of work before, not even dressed their own hair, are washing dishes in hospitals or doing other menial tasks.

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Uncle Isaac was a widower, so the aunts have had entire charge of the housekeeping at Grantley Grange for many years. I think they are very kind to me in not looking upon me as an interloper.

Aunt Grace tells me that their father, my grandfather, bitterly regretted his sternness towards my father and mother and was willing at any time to make amends, but my father would never answer his letters. Poor Father is so sensitive. That has always been his trouble. I live in constant terror now for fear someone will hurt his feelings and he will refuse to see people or make himself miserable. He is to make himself useful and serve his country by teaching the boys in a school at Grantley. All of the young teachers have gone to the front and the nation needs teachers for the boys and girls. I am so happy that Father is to serve his country, somehow, and this is, after all, a very noble service as it is for the future good of the British Empire.

I know you wonder what I am going to do. I was willing to nurse if my aunts

thought it wise, but was relieved when they decided that I could be of more use doing other things that life has already trained me to do. I know I should fail at the crucial moment as a nurse. I am so timid and do not seem to be able to shake off this shyness. It has been decided that I shall go every day to sing to the soldiers in the neighboring hospitals. That sounds like very little to do but when I tell you that I spend on an average of seven hours a day going to the various hospitals, you will realize that while it is very little to do, it takes a great deal of time to do it.

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So many of the old estates near here have been turned over to the Government for hospitals that one can motor from one to the other in a short time. The wounded soldiers are very kind to me and express themselves as liking very much to hear me sing. They like the American songs, especially the darky songs. I sang "Clar de Kitchen" to them yesterday and they made me give them three encores. I thought of the last time I sang it when we had the circus at Maxton, and I choked with emotion at the remembrance of all of my dear friends.

Life at Price's Landing seems very far off and unreal, although there are times when this life seems to be the unreal thing and I expect any moment to awaken and find it all a dream. I remember in my little room over the store how low the ceiling was, so low over my bed where it sloped to the dormer window that I could lie there and touch it with my hand, and many a time have I bumped my head when I sprang too hurriedly from my bed. I learned to put up my hand and gauge the distance before I got up, in that way saving my poor head many a bump. I find myself now, when morning comes and the sun peeps in the windows of my great bedroom, reaching up expecting to touch the low ceiling of my little room in Virginia. It gives me a strange sensation, almost as great a shock as when you take one more step up when you have reached the top of the stairs.

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The ceilings at Grantley Grange are quite as high as any I have ever seen. Too high for beauty, I think, but I don't dare say so. My aunts think perhaps there are more wonderfully beautiful places than the Grange, but they have never seen them,—except the great show places, of course. It is very beautiful and the time may come when I shall feel at home, but I still feel strange and something of an alien.

Father is as at home as though he had never left England. I wish all of you could see poor Father in his proper surroundings. He always was so out of place in the store. I think he felt irritated all the time that he was doing what he was doing, but a certain obstinacy in his character kept him from seeking more congenial employment. His sisters are very tender with him and I am hoping that he will begin to show to them the affection that I am sure he feels.

Now haven't I put the cart before the horse? I intended first to tell you all about our voyage over, and then lead up to conditions here, but I have left the first to the last.

In the first place poor Father was dreadfully seasick from the moment we got on the steamer, even before we started. There is something about the smell of machinery and rigging that makes him very ill. I tried to persuade him to stay on deck, but he would go to his stateroom, and there he stayed for the entire crossing.

I was anxious to see the last of my country. (I realize now that United States is my country. I realized it the moment I knew I was to live in England.) I stayed on deck as we steamed out of the harbor and kissed my hand good-by to New York's sky line and the Statue of Liberty. I felt very lonesome and very far away from all of my dear friends. There were letters down in my stateroom and I turned to go get them, when whom should I find at my side but George Massie? Page, I was never more astonished in all my life! I was glad, too, very glad. All the lonesome feeling left me. He told me that you and the Tuckers knew all about his coming and approved, so that was enough for me. The ocean did not seem near so vast nor the sky so high up.

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Father was very miserable, so miserable that I had to call in the ship's surgeon. The doctor made light of his malady but that did not make it any easier to bear. I had to nurse him a great deal, and as he shared his stateroom with another man it was rather embarrassing for me to go in at night and attend to poor Father's many wants. In fact, the man objected.

Then it was I decided to tell Father of George Massie's presence on board. Of course, he had no way to know my friend was there. He was very angry at first, but I had sudden courage and told him that we had not chartered the ship and other passengers had as much right there as we had, and that Mr. Massie was going abroad to serve the Allies. I also told him that George was willing to do anything for him he could, and would attend to him during the night when I could not come in his stateroom. Father became reconciled to George's presence then, and he could hardly have kept up his anger after the faithful way in which he nursed him for the rest of the journey.

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Of course, he did not have to be nursed all the time and we had much time on deck. The weather was perfect and I was not ill one moment. I had a seat at the captain's table and that dear old man saw to it that I was bountifully served. He was so kind to me, and to everyone in fact, but he seemed to think I needed especial care and my own father could not have been more attentive to me.

I know that the news of our boat having struck a mine must have been a great shock to all of my friends. I am sure that George's cablegram that all was well must have set your minds at rest, however.

It happened just at dusk after a wonderfully calm day. The sea had been like a mill-pond all day and the sun very hot, so hot that we had sought the shade of the boats on deck. Towards sunset the wind had suddenly risen and the waves had begun to look very high. Of course all waves look high to me, as I am fully aware that I am the most timid person in all the world. It turned quite cold, so cold that I put on my heavy coat. We were almost at the end of our journey. I had everything packed and in order; and at last we had persuaded Father to dress and come on deck. He had been much better for days and had been able to retain nourishment, which meant a return of his normal strength. He had even ventured down to dinner on that evening.

We had hoped to arrive in Liverpool by eight o'clock but we were proceeding very slowly and cautiously as the danger zone was filled with possible disaster. The captain assured us that we would land sometime during the night but he advised all of us to go to bed at the usual hour. Our voyage had been a very pleasant one. I had made many friends and was glad to feel that I had been able to throw off some of the miserable shyness that has always been such a handicap to me.

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For several days we had been wearing life-preservers by command of the captain. Of course we felt confident that there was no use in it, but still we had to do it. George was too big for any of those furnished by the ship's company, the straps refusing to meet; but I had pieced out the straps with some stout cotton cloth.

We were at dinner on that eventful day, all of us looking very strange and bulky in our safety-first garb, when suddenly there was an explosion that shook all of us out of our seats. I was dreadfully frightened but managed to appear calm for Father's sake, who because of his recent illness was much unnerved.

"Get your warm coats and any small hand baggage with your valuables!" the captain shouted, "and report on deck immediately."

I tell you we obeyed without any demur! Many of the passengers hurried up, not going to their staterooms at all, but Father felt he must get his Gladstone bag and I had a small satchel all packed, which I took. I never heard so much shouting in all my life. The women were screaming and the men shouting. There was only one child on board, a dear little girl of seven, and she and I were the calmest ones among the females. I was frightened at first but a sudden courage came to me. It may have been because the little girl slipped her hand in mine. Her mother had fainted and her husband was carrying her up on deck. The child's name was Winnie. She was a gentle little thing. We had made friends the very first day on board and had had many long talks together. Her mother was ill most of the time and Winnie and I had time to become very intimate. When she slipped her hand in mine, I knew that she expected me to look after her, and then it was God sent me strength to do it.

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The engines stopped the moment we hit the mine and the boat was listing so that when we got on deck we found a decided slant, so much so that it was difficult to walk. The life-boats were being loaded and launched. I was shocked to see how some of the men crowded in. The sailors were a rude lot from all the quarters of the globe, and few of them showed any desire to save anything but their own skins.

George Massie was everywhere. I was astounded at his powers of swearing, but he said afterwards that it was the only way to control people in times like that. He simply took command of the boats, for which the captain had no time. The officers were a rather weak lot and one and all concerned for their own safety. They say so many of the good seamen have enlisted that many of the passenger ships are manned by weaklings. The captain was splendid and did his duty like the English gentleman he was.

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Of course at first we feared it was a submarine that had hit us. Its being a mine that we had hit made us much more comfortable. At least, we were not to fall into the hands of the Germans.

"The ship is sinking so slowly that I can assure you there is no immediate danger," George had had time to tell Father and me. "It is safe to wait for the last boat, so let me help launch these others first and then I can get into the boat with

you. These sailors are too crazy to trust without a commander."

The captain had determined not to leave the ship until he was sure there was no chance of saving it. The chief engineer was to stay with him and several sailors volunteered. It so happened that they were able to get into port on their own steam and we might have stayed safely on board, but of course the chances were that she would sink and it was deemed wiser for us to take to the boats.

I wish all of you might have seen Father. He was very calm and brave after the first shock was over. He was not strong enough to help much but he was willing to help, and when the men crowded into the boats leaving women shrieking for places, he swore with almost as much fervor as George Massie himself. Do you know, Page, I know it sounds silly, but I believe I love my father more and am closer to him since I know he can swear a little? He swore to some purpose, too, as he called the selfish men such terrible names that two of them were actually abashed and got out of the first boat to give their places to two women.

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To make the scene more dismal it had begun to rain, such a cold, penetrating rain! Poor little Winnie clung to me and I could hear her praying: "Please God, save Mamma, and Papa, and me, and Miss Pore, and her papa, too, and the giant." She always called George the giant. "Don't let us get drowned dead!"

We got off at last! Winnie and her mother and father were in the boat with us. That was something George Massie managed. He saw that the father, Mr. Trask, was a good, reliable man and could help with the boat, and he also felt that Mrs. Trask and Winnie would need me, which they did. There were five other men in the boat with us and one other woman: a nice old Irish chambermaid, who never stopped praying a single moment until we were safe on the high seas in our tiny boat with the waves dashing all around us and the rain pouring on us.

I felt much safer on the steamer, although when we left her she had listed until her decks were at an angle of forty-five degrees. Of course the wireless had been busy sending appeals for help but we were three hours getting any. Mrs. Trask was very ill and had to lie in the bottom of the boat, where her husband and Father made her as comfortable as possible. Winnie sat in my lap and I wrapped her in a great rug that George had thrown around me. We kept each other warm under the rug and gave each other courage, too.

The vessel that picked us up was not very gracious about it. They had picked up so many shipwrecked persons since the war began that it was an old story to them and not at all interesting. It was a fishing smack and smelled worse than anything I have ever imagined in the way of odors. Poor Mrs. Trask actually fainted again from the stench of fish offal.

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True to the captain's promise, we did land sometime during the night, but we were not safely in bed as he had hoped, but propped up in the foul little cabin of the fishing smack trying to choke down some vile black coffee that one of the men, not so hardened to shipwrecks as the rest, had humanely concocted for us.

This is about all, dear Page! We got to bed when we reached Liverpool and stayed there for twenty-four hours. I kept Winnie with me, thereby saving the poor little thing the agony of seeing her mother die. Poor Mrs. Trask passed away the day after we landed. She was not strong enough to stand the shock and exposure. Mr. Trask is an Englishman and was going home to enlist and leave his wife and child with his own people. His wife thought it right but was evidently in the deepest misery over his decision. Maybe she was not sorry to die. I am so sorry for him and for the dear little girl. She is to come to Grantley Grange to visit me soon.

I can never tell you how splendid George Massie was. He was so brave and so determined. I did not dream he could command men as he did. He says it is football training that made him know what to do and how to do it. He is going to France next week to join the Red Cross as a stretcher bearer, I think. I shall miss him ever so much but know it is right for him to help if he can. Service is in the air here in England. There is no more talk of who you are or what you own or what your ancestors have done. It is: *What can you do? Then do it!*

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It is a tremendous experience to be in the midst of this war. No one talks anything but war. There are no entertainments of any sort except the theatres. I believe they keep them open to cheer up the people. The fields are full of women; the factories are kept up by them; the trams and busses are run by them,—in fact they do anything and everything that men did before the war.

You remember, do you not, how I was so afraid my clothes would look poor and mean and out of style? Well, on the contrary, for once in my life, I am better dressed than the persons with whom I come in contact. I am really ashamed to be so much better dressed than the other girls. It seems so frivolous of me. I know you can't help smiling to think of what the others' clothes must be.

I am writing to my dear Tuckers, too, and if you read their letter and they read

yours you can piece together what my life here is. Please send them on to Mary Flannagan when you have finished reading them. I have not time to write another long letter just now.

Besides singing to the soldiers, I am to teach music to the children in Father's school. You can readily see how busy I am to be.

I shall never cease to miss my dear friends in Virginia. Some day I hope to come back to America, but in the meantime I am going to do my bit here in England. Please write to me!

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Your devoted friend,
ANNIE PORE.

CHAPTER XXI

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A LETTER FROM GEORGE MASSIE TO PAGE ALLISON

Paris, France.
Poste Restante.

MY DEAR PAGE:

I left England last week after having stopped with the Pores at Grantley Grange for ten days or so. Say, Page, the old one ain't half bad! If you could have heard him swear when the beasts crowded in the life-boats ahead of the women, you would have forgot the grouch we had on about the way he has always done Annie. Say, that man can swear! I wonder where he has kept it all these years.

Of course, if a fellow ever is going to swear, it will be at a time like that, and if he doesn't swear some, it is because he is dumb. It is the kind of time when some women pray and some weep and most men swear. They don't mean anything, but it is just a kind of safety valve. Annie says I swore like a trooper, but I wasn't conscious of it at all. It just popped out of me. You see I had to intimidate the men who were behaving like cads, and the only way I knew how to do it was to swear, unless it was to biff them one with the oars, and I did not want to do that except as a last resort. The swearing worked.

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It was a very terrible experience and one I hope never to have to undergo again. It was not only terrible to think that all of those people might be at the bottom of the ocean in a short while, but it was almost worse to see the way people can be so scared that they think only of themselves. I reckon a fellow ought not to blame them. It seemed just blind animal instinct for self-preservation. My Annie was a trump. She was as calm and quiet as though shipwrecks had been an every-day experience with her. She looked out for a little child and its sick mother and helped people and quieted women and men, and after we had been afloat in our life-boat for hours and it was cold and rainy and the poor sick woman and an old Irish chambermaid began to despair and the kid began to cry, what should my Annie do but begin to sing "Abide With Me." I have never heard her sing better than she did out in the middle of that dirty sea. It did all of us good, and before you knew it, a little fishing smack almost ran us down in the darkness and then had the decency to stop and haul us aboard.

I reckon you think I'm pretty gaully to be saying "my Annie" so glibly. She's not really my Annie but she is going to be if I can make good. Of course I know she is too young to make her give an answer to me yet, but this war is going to age all of us, and when it is over I'll be a steady old man with white whiskers, and if Annie likes 'em, I'm going to get her answer then. I don't want to tie her up but leave her free. She might see a handsome Johnny that will put crimps in my plans and I want her to take him if she likes him, but I tell you, Page, I'm going to pray every day and all day from now until the war is over that she will like me best. The old man likes me. It seems I earned his undying gratitude by waiting on him when he was seasick and the doctor on board had made light of his ailment. I made out he was sick unto death and worked my fool fat self to a shadow fetching and carrying for him. Then when the explosion came and I did my best to keep order, he kind of cottoned to me more. I believe when I come back from the wars and beg an answer from Annie that His Nibs will be willing.

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He is much more attractive in his English setting. He really isn't half bad. His sisters are making a lot over Annie and now he is kind of getting stuck on her himself. 'Tain't so bad to be a woman in England now. Folks are thinking a good deal of women, and I tell you they should do so. Annie says he has always been sore that she was not a boy. Looks as though he had a hunch that he might inherit the title some day. I call him the old man right to his face, as somehow I can't school myself to say Sir Arthur. It is too story booky for me.

I am here in France waiting to be sent out with the Red Cross. I may drive an ambulance and I may just be a stretcher bearer. I will do whatever they see fit to put me to doing. There is plenty to do, they tell me, and they welcome every American who comes over with joy and gratitude. I wish we were in it as a nation. I believe we will end there, and if we do, I tell you someone else can drive the ambulance, as I mean to get in the game without a red cross on my sleeve.

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You don't know what I feel towards all of you girls, all of Annie's friends. I have lived to bless the day that I met you, although on that day I did anything but bless it. You remember how you bundled me up in the soiled clothes ready to send me to the laundry? I'll never forget it! Also, I'll never forget that you and the Tucker twins never told the rest of the fellows about it. That was sure white of you! Please put in a good word for me when you write to Annie, my Annie.

Yours truly,
GEORGE MASSIE.

CHAPTER XXII

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A LETTER FROM PAGE ALLISON TO THE TUCKER TWINS

Bracken, Va.
Milton P. O.

MY DEAREST TWEEDLES:

I am sending you letters from Annie and from Sleepy. I am awfully excited about Sleepy. He seems to be wide awake. Father says he will come through the war and be a distinguished person of some sort, he believes. I think Annie's letter is awfully interesting. Isn't it fun for old Sir Arthur Ponsonby Pore to have won the love of the Lady Annie by swearing? I know your father will die laughing over it.

I am up to my neck with Miss Pinkie Davis in the house, getting some sewing done so I won't have to be worried with shirt-waists and things when we get to New York. Mammy Susan is still miffed with me for going, and I feel awfully bad about it. Isn't it great that Mary can go, too? Do you reckon we'll see Jessie Wilcox in New York? Not if she sees us first, I fancy! Four girls in a flat and that flat not so very swell wouldn't appeal to Miss Wilcox, I think.

Father is giving iron tonics right and left, and has made up a gallon of pump water with a beautiful pink vegetable dye in it for Sally Winn so she won't have to die before he gets back. Poor Joe Winn is very sad that I did not let him know you were here on the last trip. I really forgot to do it. We were having such a wildly exciting time making our plans for New York that poor Joe never came into my head.

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It is so splendid that Father is going, too. If these people will only stay well until he can get started, then they can be sick all they want and have a doctor over from the crossing. There is a perfectly good doctor there, that is, a perfectly good doctor if one is prepared for death!

Good-by! I must stop and help Miss Pinkie. How I do hate to sew! To think in a few days almost I'll be IN NEW YORK WITH THE TUCKER TWINS.

Your best friend,
PAGE ALLISON.

THE END

HURST & COMPANY'S BOOKS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

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NEW BOOKS FOR GIRLS

TUCKER TWINS BOOKS

By NELL SPEED

Author of the Molly Brown Books.
Cloth Bound. Illustrated.

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HURST & COMPANY'S BOOKS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE
NEW BOOKS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE AND OLD PEOPLE
WHO FEEL YOUNG

[303]

PAUL AND PEGGY BOOKS

By FLORENCE E. SCOTT
Illustrated by ARTHUR O. SCOTT
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Across the Continent with Paul and Peggy
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These are delightfully written stories of a vivacious pair of twins whose dearest ambition is to travel. How they find the opportunity, where they go, what their eager eyes discover is told in such an enthusiastic way that the reader is carried with the travellers into many charming places and situations.

Written primarily for girls, her brothers can read these charming stories of School Life and Travel with equal admiration and interest.

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STORIES OF COLLEGE LIFE FOR GIRLS

MOLLY BROWN SERIES

By NELL SPEED
Cloth. Illustrated.



Molly Brown's Freshman Days

Would you like to admit to your circle of friends the most charming of college girls? Then seek an introduction to Molly Brown. You will find the baggagemaster, the cook, the Professor of English Literature and the College President in the same company.

Molly Brown's Sophomore Days

What is more delightful than a reunion of college girls after the summer vacation? Certainly nothing that precedes it in their experience—at least, if all class-mates are as happy together as the Wellington girls of this story. Among Molly's interesting friends of the second year is a young Japanese girl, who ingratiates her "humbly" self into everybody's affections.

Molly Brown's Junior Days

Financial stumbling blocks are not the only thing that hinder the ease and increase the strength of college girls. Their troubles and their triumphs are their own, often peculiar to their environment. How Wellington students meet the experiences outside the class-rooms is worth the doing, the telling and the reading.

Molly Brown's Senior Days

This book tells of another year of glad college life, bringing the girls to the days of diplomas and farewells, and introducing new friends to complicate old friendships.

Molly Brown's Post Graduate Days

"Book I" of this volume is devoted to incidents that happen in Molly's Kentucky home, and "Book II" is filled with the interests pertaining to Wellington College and the reunions of a post graduate year.

Molly Brown's Orchard Home

Molly's romance culminates in Paris—the Paris of art, of music, of light-hearted gaiety—after a glad, sad, mad year for Molly and her friends.

If you do not know Molly Brown of Kentucky, you are missing an opportunity to become acquainted with the most enchanting girl in college fiction.

HURST & COMPANY, Publishers, NEW YORK

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REX KINGDON SERIES **By GORDON BRADDOCK**

Cloth Bound. Illustrated.



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The title tells you what this story is; it is a rattling good story about baseball. Boys will like it.

Gordon Braddock knows what Boys want and how to write it. These stories make the best reading you can procure.

Transcriber's Notes:

Varied hyphenation was retained. This includes cart-wheels and cartwheels.

Obvious punctuation errors repaired.

The remaining corrections made are indicated by dotted lines under the corrections. Scroll the mouse over the word and the original text will appear.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK A HOUSE PARTY WITH THE TUCKER TWINS

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