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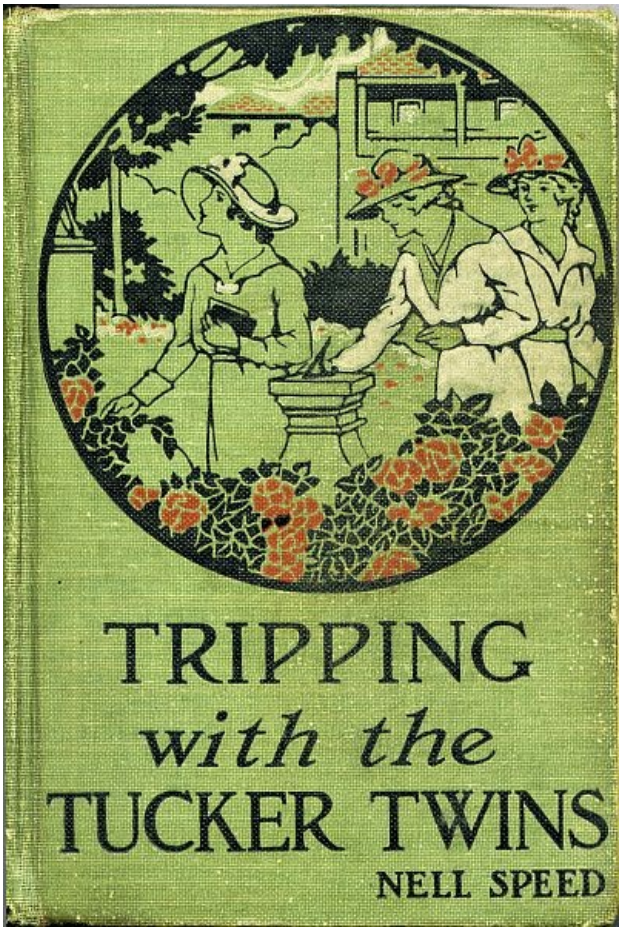

The room we girls were to occupy was a great square chamber with a large window looking on a cobbled street.
(*Frontis*) (*Tripping with the Tucker Twins*)

TRIPPING WITH THE TUCKER TWINS

By NELL SPEED
Author of
"The Molly Brown Series," "The Carter Girls Series," etc.

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Tripping with the Tucker Twins

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CHAPTER I

ASSETS AND LIABILITIES

After our boarding-school burned on that memorable night in March, it seemed foolish to start to school again so late in the season; at least it seemed so to the Tucker twins and me. Their father and mine were rather inclined to think we had better enter some institute of learning in Richmond or take extra classes, do something besides loaf; but we earnestly pleaded to be let off for the rest of the year, and they succumbed to our entreaties.

My ankle gave me a good deal of trouble. You remember, no doubt, how I sprained it getting out of the second-story window when the false alarm of fire rang, the afternoon before the real *bona fide* fire. Dee's first aid to the injured was all very well for the time being, but when we arrived in Richmond a surgeon had to be called to attend to it, and the ankle was put in plaster.

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"A sprain can be much more serious than a break," the surgeon said solemnly as he looked at the much swollen foot and ankle. "I shall have to take an X-ray of this to be sure no bones are broken, and then, young lady, you will have to be quiet for some days, how many I can't yet tell."

Never having been disabled in my life, I had no idea how irksome it could become. On no account to put your foot to the ground and to feel perfectly well is about as hard a job as could be given me, an active country girl. Father came up from Milton and heartily agreed with the surgeon in charge.

"I have set a carload of broken legs in my time and bandaged a wagonful of ankles, and I am sure I have had less trouble from the legs than the ankles. It is because, as a rule, a sprain is not

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treated seriously enough. Now, honey, you have got to sit still and take it."

I sat still all right, although it nearly killed me to do it. Not even crutches were allowed for a week for fear I might be tempted to bear my weight on the offending member.

The Tuckers, father and twins, were goodness itself to me. I was afraid to express a wish, because no matter how preposterous it was they would immediately rush off and try to get whatever silly thing I had in a careless moment expressed a desire for. For instance, one day Dum came in enthusiastic over a new drugstore drink she had discovered:

"Vanilla ice cream with fresh pineapple mixed up with it, orange syrup and lots of bubbly soda! The best mess you ever sucked through a straw!"

"Ummm-ummm! Sounds good to me! When I can trust this old limb of Satan I am going to make straight for that drugstore and drink three of them." [8]

Mr. Tucker had just arrived from the newspaper office where he labored many hours a day. He must have been tired sometimes, but he never looked it and never complained of work. Eternal youth seemed to belong to him, and undying energy.

"Good? I think it sounds awful!" he exclaimed. "You girls must astonish your poor little insides with the impossible mixtures you put in 'em."

"I think it sounds fine, and I am surely going to have three of them just as soon as I can toddle."

Mr. Tucker laughed and left the room, and I wearily resumed a not very interesting book I was reading while Dum followed her father. I read on, hoping to come to something better. I fancy not more than ten minutes had elapsed when father and daughter burst into the room, Dum carrying two foaming soda-water glasses and Zebedee one. The dauntless pair had actually cranked up Henry Ford, as they dubbed their little old automobile, and speeded down to the drugstore where they knew how to make that particular mixture, and brought them back to me. [9]

"Your blood be on your own head if you drink them. They look pizen to me."

But drink them I did, all three, much to the wonderment of Zebedee, who declared that girls were fearfully and wonderfully made. I did feel slightly fizzly, but after my kind friends had brought them to me and even braved the danger of arrest and fine for speeding, trying to get the drinks to me with the foam on, I felt it was up to me to show my appreciation. The only way to show it was to drink the soda. What if I did burst in the effort?

The Tucker twins and I were almost seventeen, our birthdays coming quite near together, and their father, now Zebedee to all of us, was about thirty-seven, I think, almost thirty-eight. The Tuckers were so irresponsible in some ways that I often felt myself to be older than any of them, although I was certainly not very staid myself. Zebedee always declared he was just grown up enough to keep out of debt, but keep out of debt he would no matter what temptations he had to withstand. Tweedles regarded debt as the only lawful state, and hard they found it to keep within their allowance, but the one time when Zebedee was really severe was when they exceeded that allowance. Dum was worse about it than Dee, as her artistic temperament made it hard for her to keep up with money. [10]

"It just goes, and I don't know where!" she would exclaim.

When we got back to Richmond after the fire, one day when Zebedee was in Norfolk attending a convention of newspaper men, to be gone several days, the sisters realized that a day of reckoning had arrived and they must take stock of their assets and liabilities. Each one had borrowed small sums from various friends at school, intending to pay back out of allowances forthcoming, and also expecting to realize large sums from old clothes that our washerwoman would sell on commission to the colored contingent in the village. Colored people for some unknown reason would much rather have clothes that have been worn by white people than new ones out of shops. Of course the fire had interrupted this traffic and Tweedles never expected to see the money owed them by our washerwoman's clients. [11]

"I could have worn that corduroy skirt for months longer, but I thought I could get two dollars and a half for it at least and help get out of debt," wailed Dee.

"And I just loved my blue linen shirtwaist and the frayed cuffs hardly showed at all, and now the old washerwoman has got my shirt and the fifty cents, too—to say nothing of my old-rose dinner dress that I am scared to death about every night for fear Zebedee will ask me why I don't wear it. He always liked the color of it so much," and Dum looked ready to weep.

"Well, girls, count it all up and see where you stand; maybe I can lend you enough to get you out," I said.

"You sound like we were in jail," declared Dee ruefully. "I don't see how on earth you keep on top so yourself. You seem to do as many things as we do and always pay your share, and still you don't get in debt." [12]

"I don't know how it is," I laughed, "unless I am like the Yankee who left his wife a large fortune, much to the astonishment of his neighbors, who did not know he had anything. When questioned as to the way her husband had made the money, the wife said: 'Wal, you see my

husband was powerful fond of oysters, and whenever he went up to the city he just didn't get any.' You girls don't know how free you are with money. If you buy a paper that costs a penny you always say, 'Keep the change!' And then when a tip of ten cents is all that is necessary, you invariably give twenty-five."

"I know that's so," they contritely tweedled.

"Count up and see where you're at," and then they figured in silence for a few minutes.

"I owe five dollars and seventy-three cents," said Dee, getting hers added up first and emptying her purse; "I've got just thirty-seven cents and a street car ticket between me and the penitentiary." [13]

"And I owe seven dollars and twenty-three cents and I haven't got anything but a green trading stamp and a transfer to Ginter Park that I did not use," and Dum searched in the corners of her purse for a possible penny that might have escaped her.

"I've three dollars and will have some more soon, as father is going to send me a check for a spring suit. You let me pay you both out of debt."

"We just can't. It only puts off the evil hour. We can't let you give us the money, and how will we ever pay it back?"

"Why don't you earn it?" I ventured.

"Earn it! Splendid! But how? Dum earned fifty cents once making paper dolls to sell at the Arts and Crafts, and Zebedee pays us both to dust the books and put them back in the right places, something the housemaids are incapable of doing; but this money we must earn without letting Zebedee get on to it. Where's the morning paper?" [14]

But Dum had already got it and was poring over the want ads. Dee had to content herself with the news section, while Dum monopolized the "Help Wanted—Female" part.

"What's this?" demanded Dee, reading headlines: "'Ordinance to prohibit the drivers of jitney cars!' That is a sin and a shame. I can't see why they can't let the poor men make a little money without issuing ordinances. Oh, it is only under consideration! They may not pass it——

"By the great Jumping Jingo, I've got a scheme! I'm going to turn Henry Ford into a jitney bus. Zebedee'll be away for two more days, and by the time he comes back I bet I'll have enough to pay my debts and blow us all to the swellest supper at Rueger's."

Jitneys had just reached Richmond that spring, and every man or boy out of work who could beg, borrow or steal an old tumbled-down car had gone into the business of running a jitney. The streets were swarming with them, and the public, pleased with the novelty, patronized them to the neglect and chagrin of the trolleys. Of course there were some drivers who would hardly have been trusted with coal carts, and there were many accidents by reason of this. We adored the jitneys. Of course, I had not been able to ride in them because of my ankle keeping me house-bound, but I loved to see them swing around the corner, and always had my chair or sofa in the bay window where I could get a good view of them. There seemed to be such a happy, good-natured crowd of passengers; and certainly many a shopgirl and workingman got to ride in a jitney who had despaired before of ever being fortunate enough to get into an automobile. The Tuckers were strong upholders of the poor man's rights and patronized the jitneys whenever their own Henry Ford was out of commission or in use by some other member of the family. [15]

"But what will your father say?"

"More than likely he will say something that won't bear repetition, but by that time I will have paid my debts." [16]

"But will they let girls run one?"

"How are they going to help it? The ones who are running them are liable to be stopped any day, but so far there are no laws one way or the other about it, and I am going to get in my licks before they have time to make any. Besides, I am not going to look very feminine."

"That's what I get for being a pig and snatching up the want column before you could get it. Now if I had let you have it like a lady I could have got the jitney scheme first," grumbled Dum.

"What difference does that make? You can go in on it, you goose!"

"But I'm not going in. I think I ought to earn something my own way. That was your scheme, and I am not going to butt in on it."

"Well, you know you are welcome; but suit yourself."

"But, Dee, you say you are not going to look very feminine. Surely you are not going to wear pants?" I asked, aghast at what these Heavenly Twins would do next. [17]

"Oh, no! I have no intention of landing in the pen. I'm just going to make up the upper half to look mannish. I'll wear Zebedee's big coat, which I tried to make him take to Norfolk with him and he wouldn't, just to be stubborn. Now ain't I glad?" and she put it on to show how well it fitted. "If it is a nice cool day I can keep the collar turned up so! Now there is no law about a lady's hat, and I am going to wear Zebedee's chauffeur's cap." She accordingly put it on, pulling

it well down over her ears. "Now all I need is a dirty face. I've never yet seen a jitney driver who did not have a shady face. I wonder if I had not better just acquire it by the natural method of gradual accumulation, or if I could smudge it on tomorrow morning."

By this time Dum and I were reduced to a pulp with the giggles. Dum had for the time being abandoned her search for a lucrative job and had entered with zest into her sister's plans. [18]

"Your hair is too lumpy-looking under your cap and it rides up too high on your head."

"Well, it shall have to be cut off then. It will grow out again."

"Dee! No! You mustn't! That would make your father really angry. Plait it in a tight rope and put it down your neck, inside your collar."

No sooner said than done, and now the cap came down to meet the upturned collar.

"You must wear Zebedee's gloves and take off your ring. Your hands look mighty sissy. You'll do fine if Henry Ford will just behave and you don't have to get out to crank him. It's too bad about the pants. You would be perfect if you could just wear pants. If you should have to get out, it would sho' be a joke if you got arrested for wearing skirts. You look terribly like a bad boy," and so she did. "And now I must get back to the task of finding a job for myself," and Dum returned wearily to the want column. Dee's delightful get-rich-quick scheme made everything else seem very colorless. [19]

"'Wanted—A mother's helper to mind four children and wash dishes.' What do you reckon the lazy thing would be doing while I was doing all that for her? 'Wanted—Woman to wash only by the day.' Does the idiot think I could keep it up all night? Here we are! 'Wanted—Twenty able-bodied young women to apply between the hours of three and five p. m. to make house-to-house canvass, selling a number of household novelties.'" Dum grabbed her hat and began to draw on her gloves. "Here, Page, cut this out for me. It is ten minutes to three now and I can just get there!"

Dum was out of the house before we could say Jack Robinson, the clipping from the want column grasped tightly in her hand and her chin set in its determined, square, do-or-die lines.

"When Dum looks like that she always gets what she goes after," said Dee, looking admiringly after her twin as she jumped in Henry Ford, who spent a large part of his waking life parked in front of the apartment house or newspaper office. "Maybe going in a car, even a bum one like Henry, will queer her game. If she will only have sense enough to stop a little to one side of the place!" [20]

We waited in almost breathless silence for Dum's return, Dee experimenting with her hair for the morrow's fray and I gazing out of the window at the whirling jitneys skidding around the corner, making hair-breadth escapes.

"There she is!" and Henry Ford sure enough threaded his way jauntily through the crowded street, turned himself about like a graceful skater and parked himself in good order just one inch from the curb. The Tuckers were all born chauffeurs, and, like most born chauffeurs or riders or drivers, they showed their skill by going faster than the law allows. They prided themselves on being able to go very close to things without touching them, and indeed I have seen Henry Ford almost take the buttons off the fat traffic cop at Seventh and Broad. That time Zebedee was driving, and as he skimmed by the grinning policeman he called out: [21]

"If it had been after dinner I would have hit you," and the delighted officer shook his fat sides and patted his bay window with its row of gleaming buttons, showing he understood Mr. Tucker's joke. "There are two classes of persons I always keep in with—policemen and cooks. You can get into no very serious trouble when you have them on your side," Zebedee had laughed gaily.

"I've got a job! I've got a job!" cried Dum, almost breathless with haste and excitement as she rushed into the room where Dee and I waited.

"What is it?"

"Selling household novelties, of course. I'm to report at eight in the morning. I was the third girl to get in to see the boss. You never saw such a pompadoured, gum-chewing crowd in your life. I felt so ladylike I hardly knew myself. The boss was sure some household novelty himself. He is fat and soft, looks powerful like a dough ball, wears button shoes and an embroidered vest, curly black hair done up in a roach and stewed prune eyes and a full set, upstairs and down, of false teeth that look like [22]

"'Thirty white horses on a red hill,
Now they dance, now they prance,
Now they stand still.'"

"But, Dum, what on earth are household novelties?" I gasped.

"And how much are you to get?" demanded Dee.

"One at a time! There is a whole bunch of novelties: one is a little plug to keep windows from rattling; another a needle-threader; another a silver polish; another a spot-knocker; a patent batty-cake turner that makes the batty-cake do the flipflap by pressing a button—either for cakes or omelettes; then there's Mrs. Rand——"

"No, not really!"

Mrs. Rand was a miscellaneous implement we had taken to boarding-school that had been purchased from a street fakir and we had named for the landlady at Willoughby Beach, who had [23] been very irate over the Tuckers having lost the one she had in the cottage they rented from her. It was a combination apple-corer, can-opener, cheese-grater, potato-parer, and what not. It was the kind of thing you could use for everything but the things it was intended for. It was a great screw-driver and tack hammer and invaluable to gouge things out of deep cracks.

"I'll buy a Mrs. Rand with pleasure," I promised. "I have never ceased to regret that I did not save ours in the fire and let the pincushion Cousin Park Garnett gave me perish in the flames."

"Well, that's one sale already! That means five cents. I get five cents on every sale I make."

"I'll take a batty-cake turner just to see it do the flipflap, if it takes a whole trip of fares to pay for it."

"Good for you, Dee! I'll ride in your jitney if my work takes me in the West End."

CHAPTER II [24]

EARNING A LIVING

We were up bright and early the next morning. I was dressed and tenderly cared for, with my easy chair dragged into the bay window, where I could command a view of the street east and west as far as the eye could reach. A housemaid, whose duty it was in the morning to do up the Tuckers' apartment, was cautioned to look in on me every half-hour to see that I wanted for nothing.

"Zebedee would kill us for leaving you this way," declared Dum as she embraced me good-by. "Nothing but the exigencies of the case excuse us."

"'My poverty and not my will consents,'" quoted Dee. "We'll be in for lunch. We've got to eat, and it might just as well be here." The maid was instructed to bring a generous supply of lunch up to the apartment at one o'clock. "If we have it up here I won't have to wash my face. I have [25] worked so hard to make the dirt on it look casual that I can't contemplate going all over it again."

Of course my meals had to be brought up to me from the café because of my old ankle, and the girls often had theirs brought up, too, although they preferred going down as a rule. They insisted they missed too many tricks by having them sent up. "No second and third helps to pie, and the one help you get too dainty for us."

"Look out the window for me every ten minutes or so and pray that Henry won't get cranky and have to be cranked and have me expose my skirts to the rude gaze of the public," begged Dee as she hugged me good-by. She had to forego the kiss as she was afraid of rubbing off her dirty make-up, and I was quite willing to have it thus. Brindle, her beloved bulldog, was not so squeamish as I, however, and gave her an affectionate and disastrous lick. "Brindle can keep you company, honey. Good-by, darling," to the dog. "I'm going to take you down to your household [26] necessity, Dum, and I am going to do it for nothing, too. I am loaded to the guards with gas. I reckon I won't put out my sign until I get downtown. I'll start my trade from down there."

Dum had lettered the jitney sign for her the evening before. It was most artistic, done in large blue letters on white cardboard:

MONUMENT AVENUE

5c JITNEY 5c

Dee was not a day too soon in her venture, for already the authorities were taking the matter of the jitney business in hand, and the privilege of running a jitney without special license and a $5,000 bond was on the verge of being withdrawn from the legion of owners of broken-down Fords.

My morning was far from dull. The attentive maid came popping in every few minutes, I had a [27] pile of new magazines and papers, and there was the never-dying excitement of watching for Dee and her blue-and-white sign.

On her return trip, after taking Dum to the household necessities, she had a lone passenger—certainly not enough money in that to pay for the gas; but on the downtown trip she caught many an early worm, and her car was actually running over. At that time there were no rules about standing on the steps and overcrowding, and Dee had taken in every one who had raised a finger. I counted thirty-five cents, which was going some for a five-passenger car. Dee had a small plaid shawl which she had wrapped around her legs to conceal her skirt. She looked as much like a boy as Zebedee himself must have at her age. She never forgot to look up at my window, and, on seeing me, would touch her cap in a most gentlemanly way, a grin on her funny, dirty face.

Up to nine-thirty her downtown trips were all crowded, while her outgoing ones were but sparsely patronized. Then there was a lull in her traffic until about eleven, when the shoppers began to pour downtown. Women and babies! women and babies! Sometimes women and dogs! Brindle, who never left the window, and seemed to be watching for Dee and Henry Ford as eagerly as I was, resented the dogs very much. He felt that his rightful place was in that car, and any dog who dared get in it was to be disciplined through the window glass if he could not reach him in any other way. [28]

Every time Dee raised her dirty face and grinned at us Brindle would tremble all over with excitement and joy. I trembled, too, for fear that he would break the great pane of glass, he scratched on it with such vigor.

Before the hordes of shoppers were disposed of the men and business women began to jitney their way back to their homes for luncheon. It was actually almost one o'clock. I could hardly believe it. The morning had been fraught with excitement to me as I had kept account of Dee's earnings, and in watching for her and keeping up with her gains I had had little time for literature. [29]

At one o'clock sharp, Henry Ford, shorn of his gorgeous blue-and-white placard, parked in front of the apartment house, and in a moment a breathless and excited Dee was hugging first Brindle and then me, quite careless of her make-up.

"Gee, but I am tired and hungry! It is a sin to be wasting all those fares. Just see how crowded the jitneys are! But I am so hungry I'm fittin' to bust. Where's Dum? Here, count my earnings while I scrape off enough dirt to eat." She poured into my lap a pile of silver and nickels.

"Four dollars and fifteen cents!" I called to her in the bathroom, where she was punishing her begrimed face. "I counted more than that; I kept watching and saw you every time you passed."

"Oh, yes, I took a load of old soldiers out to the Soldiers' Home for nothing. I gave them the time of their lives. They were so tickled, I took them down and back again. That made sixty cents short." [30]

That was so like Dee and explained the many old men I had seen in the car.

Dum came bursting in just as the maid brought a tray laden with food. "Lord love us, but I'm tired! I have had a rip-roaring time, though. I can get off a spiel that would sell household novelties to Fiji Islanders. Mrs. Rand has taken like hot cakes, and the batty-cake turner went with it to turn those cakes." She had with her a disreputable-looking canvas telescope that contained her samples. Her job was to go from house to house and take orders, to be delivered later. Her pocket was bursting with signed agreements to pay for said wares on delivery. "Here, Page, please count 'em up and see how rich I am. What did you make, Dee? I am dying to hear all about your morning! You tell first and then I'll tell."

"I made four dollars and fifteen cents. I can't tell you about my morning now because I've got to eat with my mouth. I'm missing fares until it makes me sick," and Dee jumped into her lunch with such vim that Dum and I deemed it wiser to eat, too, for fear there would be nothing left from the voracious jitneur. [31]

"Henry did not have to be cranked but once, and that was when we were at the end of the line up at Robinson Street and there were no passengers in. I bumped over a high car track, and you know how indignant that makes old Henry. I was awfully glad I had just dumped my last fare. Not a soul saw my skirts." This was mumbled with a full mouth as Dee steadily stoked up, accomplishing in about ten minutes one of the largest meals I ever saw.

"Dee, I am afraid you will have apoplexy or something," Dum remonstrated.

But Dee declared that a workingman must eat a lot. She could easily digest anything she could accommodate, and she was not quite full yet. Finding I had not tasted my consommé, for being shut up as I was my appetite was nothing to boast of, Dee drank it down on top of cocoanut pie and currant jelly, the dessert she had just finished. [32]

"To fill up the cracks!" she exclaimed, and with a whirl she was out of the apartment and back in her jitney once more, alert for fares.

"Isn't she a great girl, though?" said Dum, a little wistfully. "Four-fifteen was a good haul. Have you counted up my pledges yet?"

"Yes, you have twenty-seven. At five cents apiece that makes one dollar thirty-five cents. That's not a bad morning's work."

"No, that's not so bad, and maybe I can do better this afternoon. I am going to kick for another part of town tomorrow. They gave me the swellest part of Franklin Street, and so many of the houses were where our friends live that it was hard to be businesslike. I put it up to them as a perfectly businesslike proposition, however, and would not let them sign up unless they wanted my wares for their own sake, not mine. I had an awful time with your cousin, Park Garnett. She made out she did not know me, and I did not force my acquaintance on her, but I just talked and talked and made her look at everything I had—Mrs. Rand, batty-cake flapper, and all the needle-threaders, spot-knockers, and silver polish—and, what's more, I did not leave her ugly, ponderous old house until I had made her sign up for fifteen cents' worth of household necessities—I mean [33]

fifteen cents for me. I expatiated on Mrs. Rand until there was nothing for her to do but own one, and I played battledore and shuttlecock with her ball of gray yarn (of course she was knitting another shawl with purple scallops) and the batty-cake turner until she was dizzy and would have signed up to get me out of the house, I think. She bought some silver polish, too, because I took her fat old pug up in my lap and showed her how much his collar needed rubbing. Jeremiah, the blue-gummed butler, was fascinated by my wares, and kept tiptoeing back into the room to fix the fire or pretend he heard the bell or something. That put it into my head to make the rest of the rounds in the backs of the houses, where the servants can see my novelties, and I had fine [34] luck. I am going to stick to the alleys and back doors all afternoon."

Dum was, as usual, perfectly open and straightforward, with absolutely no idea of concealing her identity. I had not dreamed that she was contemplating going into the homes of her friends and acquaintances with her peddling job. I couldn't help wondering what Mr. Tucker would say to it. He was accustomed to the scrapes of his progeny and used to say just so long as they told the truth and kept out of jail, he could stand it; but these new escapades did seem to be a little more serious than any they had heretofore plunged into. They were certainly not doing anything wrong from a moral standpoint, but they were giving Mrs. Grundy a chance to do a lot of gabbling. I could not help laughing over Cousin Park, although I secretly wished that Dum could have started her back-door canvassing before she reached that ponderous edifice belonging to my relative. It merely meant that Mrs. Garnett would have some tangible grievance against my [35] friends, for whom she held a prejudice that no politeness on their part seemed to do away with. Certainly Zebedee had been very kind and pleasant to her on several occasions, and he had been quite attentive to her on that memorable picnic the summer before. He had also done all that was required of him toward entertaining her guest, Mabel Binks, in the early part of the winter. In fact, Tweedles and I felt that he had done more than common politeness required toward the amusement of that flashy young woman.

"Did you tell Cousin Park I was in town?" I asked.

"No, indeed; I never claimed acquaintance with her, I tell you! She made out that she had never seen me before and I fell in with her mood and just be'ed an agent, only that and nothing more. Sometimes I think maybe she really did not know me. You know she won't wear glasses all the time and I believe her eye-sight is bad." [36]

I devoutly hoped this to be the case. I had not informed Cousin Park of my presence in Richmond and had father's consent to this concealment, as we both of us knew that she would be tearing around and drag me out of the Tuckers' apartment and incarcerate me in her prison-like mansion, whether I would or no. Father and I felt the same way about her house. Father always said he was afraid the butler, Jeremiah, would bite him, and every one brought up by a mammy knew that "to be bit by a blue-gummed nigger was certain death." Jeremiah was really a very nice old man in spite of his lugubrious air of officiating at your funeral while he was actually serving the very heavy viands with which Mrs. Garnett's oiled walnut table was laden.

"Maybe she didn't know you, after all," I ventured cheerfully.

"Well, if she didn't or did, it is all one to me. I don't have to deliver the novelties, as that is done by some trustworthy person employed steadily by the boss, and in the meantime I have [37] earned fifteen cents at the funereal mansion. I must tear myself away now and begin a systematic visiting of the back doors of the homes fronting Monroe Park. Good-by, honey," and Dum, too, was gone.

Brindle and I were left to watch for the meteoric appearances of Dee and to get through the afternoon as best we might.

Dee did a thriving business. As the afternoon went on she never passed without a car full and sometimes running over. Her face was tense and as often as not she forgot to look up and salute Brindle and me.

"She will be a tired little girl when the day is over," I said to Brindle, and he wagged his tail and snuffled his appreciation of my noticing him. Dee had just passed, the back seat of Henry two-deep with passengers and on the front seat a very dressy looking young woman who seemed to be sitting very close to the stern young jitneur. That was one of the times Dee had forgotten to look up and poor Brindle was in deep distress.

CHAPTER III [38]

A TEMPEST IN A TEAPOT

It was almost dark and still the twins had not returned. The maid came in and turned on the electric light and brought me the menu from the café. I ordered a substantial dinner for the three of us and with the assistance of the good-natured girl got myself into another dress and smoothed myself up a bit.

A quick step sounded in the hall just as I settled in my chair and the maid went down to order dinner. Tweedles at last—one of them, anyhow! It turned out to be Mr. Tucker, and I was covered

with confusion! What on earth was I to say to him? What business did he have coming home before he was expected?

"Hello, little friend! Where are those girls? You don't mean that both of them have had the heartlessness to go out at one time and leave you all by yourself? I wouldn't have thought it of them!" [39]

"Oh, they—they—I reckon they'll be in soon. I haven't been lonesome at all. Brindle and I have been looking out of the window at the jitneys—" dangerous ground! If the girls wanted to tell their father of their escapades they were to be allowed to do so, but it was not my business. Why didn't they come on in? I knew they would sooner or later divulge to their beloved Zebedee, but they had certainly meant to get all over with their schemes while he was away.

"We weren't looking for you until day after tomorrow," I stammered.

"Well, is that any reason why you shouldn't be glad to see me now?"

"Oh, no! We are glad to see you—that is, I am."

"That is to say, Tweedles will not be?" he questioned.

"Of course they will be." Why, oh, why didn't they come on? [40]

Weary footsteps dragging along the hall and Dum appeared. Her hat was on one side, not at a jaunty angle but just at that hopelessly out-of-plumb slant. Her face was dirty enough to suit Dee's idea of a jitney driver. Her hair was dishevelled and her shoes very dusty.

"Oh, Page, only fifteen orders in all the afternoon and I am nearly dead! I'll never be able to make a living peddling household no—— What,—you!" and her mouth formed itself into a round O as she spied her wonderful parent.

"Yes, I!"

"You!"

"Yes, me! If you understand that better."

"Oh!"

"Is that all you can say when I chased back from the meeting in Norfolk expecting to find three lone ladies so glad to see me? Page greets me with an icy mitt, and now all you can say is 'You!' and 'Oh!' Where is Dee? Maybe she will at least ask me how I am."

More tired footsteps dragging along the hall, and in came Dee. [41]

"I am rolling in wealth but I am so tired that nobody had better say 'boo' to me or I'll weep."

"'Boo!'" said Zebedee.

"Oh, you?" and Dee proceeded to burst into tears which certainly did not improve her begrimed countenance.

"Great heavens! What is the matter?" he cried, turning fiercely on Dum.

Dum did the most natural thing in the world for a poor little half-orphan who had been trying to pay her debts by honest toil, selling household novelties at back doors and tramping up and down cobble-stoned alleys until she had worn a blister on her heel—she just burst out crying, too.

Zebedee looked hopelessly at me, evidently expecting me to be dissolved in tears, too, but the ludicrous side of things had struck my risibles and, willy-nilly, I succumbed to laughter. Brindle, however, was sympathetic with his beloved mistress, and set up such a howling as never was heard before.

"By the great Jumping Jingo! What is the matter? Have I done something? Is anybody dead? What do you mean, Dee, by having on my coat and cap? What do you mean, Dum, by fifteen orders? Page, you can speak; tell me what's up." [42]

"I—I——"

"Go on and tell him, Page!" tweedled the twins, trying to control their emotions.

"Well, Tweedles got a little behind with their finances and the fire came along at Gresham at a rather inopportune moment as they were expecting to save up on allowances——"

"And the old clothes! Don't forget the old clothes!" from a very crumpled-up Dee.

"They also were negotiating some sales with the laundress, of cast-off clothing." Zebedee was looking me through and through with his ice-blue eyes. I had never had the least fear of him from the moment I had met him, but now I felt, to say the least, quite confused. He looked stern, and his eyes, which had been only the color of blue, blue ice, but always seemed warm, were now as cold as ice, too.

"Well, go on!" [43]

"The fire broke out and now the old laundress has the clothes and the money, too. So Tweedles

were all broken up over owing so much money and I suggested that they turn in and earn some."

"You suggested it?" still very coldly.

"Yes, I suggested it, and I would do the same thing again. I think it is a great deal better for people to get to work and pay off their debts at any honest labor than to keep on owing them——"

I gulped and got red. I was tired of having Mr. Tucker look at me with his cold expression of a criminal judge. I had done nothing wrong, and neither had the girls, for that matter. I felt a great wave of anger rising in me, and I stood up on my bad ankle, forgetting all about having one, and faced my host, ready for battle. He looked rather startled, and the twins stopped sobbing and began to dry their eyes on two very grimy handkerchiefs. I do not often get very angry, but there was something about being looked at as Zebedee looked at me, that made me lose all control of myself. He made me feel that I was a bad little girl while he considered himself a superior old [44] gentleman. Now up to this time the father of my two best friends had always treated me like a grown-up young lady, and had never made me feel that there was any difference to speak of between his age and mine, and he had no right with one wave of his hand to put me back in the kindergarten class.

"Why, Page——"

"Don't 'Why, Page' me! You came back before we expected you and startled us somewhat, as Tweedles hoped to get the money earned before you returned. The girls are dead tired and need their dinner and kind sympathy instead of being bullyragged——"

"Page! Please! I only wanted to know how Tweedles went to work to make all the money you say they owe. I am not a bit angry, not the least little bit. I think you are very unkind to me."

"Well, you looked at me so coldly and sneered so."

"No! You are mistaken!" [45]

"Yes, you did, when I said I suggested it."

"I am awfully sorry, little friend," and now his ice-blue eyes melted, literally melted, as he, too, began to leak, as the Tuckers call their free giving way to tears. You remember, it was a trait of the family. They thought no more of weeping than of laughing or sneezing. They wept when they felt weepy just as they laughed when anything amused them or sneezed when they felt sneezy.

"I tell you what you do, girls: you go on and wash up and change your dresses, and then we'll have dinner, and after dinner we'll talk it all over like sensible people without getting angry or huffy or anything that we might get." Zebedee wiped his eyes and gave his girls a hug and kiss in spite of their grimy, soiled countenances, and then he turned to me as they flew to the bathroom to do his bidding. I had become conscious of my ankle as I stood there disobeying the doctor's commands, and now that it was all over I flopped back in my chair, feeling very grateful for its support. [46]

"Now you have gone and put your weight on your foot and it is all my fault."

"Oh, no! Not at all!"

"It is just as much my fault as that Tweedles came in worn out with making a living and had dirty faces and were hungry——"

"Nobody said that was your fault!"

"Well, what was my fault, then?"

"It was your fault for looking at me so disapprovingly. You were what Tweedles call Mr. Tuckerish. You were so cold and grown-up and made me feel so young and naughty, and as I had not done a thing on earth but just suggest to the girls that they try to earn some money, not specifying how they should go about it, it did seem hard that you should be so hard on me. It hurt my feelings."

"Well, on the other hand, little girl, how about my feelings? Here I had come tearing home from Norfolk expecting to find three charming girls, all of them overjoyed to see me, and what do I find? Nothing but 'What, yous!' from first one and then the other—stammered greetings, and [47] then tears and flashing eyes and false accusations."

At that I burst out laughing, and Zebedee did the same. It was such a tempest in a teapot! I was ahead of him, however, and by my sudden anger over nothing or almost nothing I had unwittingly turned his attention from Tweedles and their misdemeanors, and now I was sure he would be only amused over their escapade.

"We are all of us mighty glad to have you back. I don't see what made you think we weren't."

"Foolish of me, wasn't it? I realize now that it was excess of emotion and delight that made all of you behave as you did."

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[48]

CHAPTER IV

WHAT ZEBEDEE SAID

We ate dinner very quietly. The twins began to perk up a bit in the salad course, and by the time we got to Brown Betty and the Roman punch they were quite themselves, except for a langour that might have come from overeating as much as from overexertion.

Zebedee avoided the subject of money-making with great tact. He had much to tell us of Mr. and Mrs. Robert Gordon and their little home in Norfolk and their happiness and hospitality. Mrs. Gordon was or had been our beloved Miss Cox, a teacher at Gresham. She had married Mr. Gordon at Willoughby Beach the summer before while she was chaperoning us, and all of us felt that we had been instrumental in making the match and were in a measure responsible for the great happiness of the couple.

The maid had removed all traces of dinner and we were seated snugly around the drop light on [49]
the library table, a table that had been converted into a dinner table when the Tuckers decided to dine in their apartment, which boasted no housekeeping arrangements. There was a deep silence broken only by a smothered yawn from Dee. Running a jitney for almost eleven hours is some sleep-provoker.

"Well, girls, aren't you going to take your poor old father in out of the cold?" and Zebedee looked appealingly at his daughters.

"Well, it was this way——" they started in the same breath.

"One at a time, please! Dum, you begin."

"Well, you see I owe seven dollars and twenty-three cents to different girls at Gresham and I didn't have a red cent and no telling how long before allowances are due, so I just thought I'd try to earn something. I found an ad for twenty young women to sell household novelties and so I applied for the job."

"That was rather ambitious as a starter. Were you going to be all twenty right from the first?" [50]

"Silly and flippant! I got the job, at least one twentieth of it, and started out this morning at eight o'clock. I am to get five cents on every sale. I went up and down Franklin and Grace streets all morning, going in the front doors, but this afternoon I tried the back doors because naturally the servants are more interested in these labor-saving devices than the mistresses; besides, I saw so many people we know when I went in the front way that I was afraid if they bought from me they would do it from pity or something, and I wanted to be very businesslike and create a burning desire for the really excellent articles I am selling. I didn't want to hold up anyone."

"That's right!" I was trembling for what Zebedee would say about Dum's meeting all the friends on her canvassing jaunt, but I realized that I did not really know that gentleman as well as I thought I did. He did not seem to mind in the least if perhaps everyone in Richmond knew that one of his girls had been out going from house to house in the most fashionable residential [51]
districts selling batty-cake flappers and spot-knockers.

"I have made in all on commissions two dollars and ten cents, I think. I have completely worn out my shoes on the cobblestones in the alleys and have got a blister on my heel as big as all my commissions put together."

"Have you collected your money yet?"

"No! I don't get it until the goods are delivered and my customers pay up."

"How long does your job last?"

"Oh, until the whole town is combed with a fine tooth comb. Our boss wants every lady in Richmond to have the advantage of these household novelties." Dum unconsciously took on the tone usual with the house-to-house canvasser.

Zebedee gave a smile but there was no divining what his real thoughts were any more than if he had been the Sphynx herself. He looked to me rather like a man who was seeing a real good show and was deeply interested but reserving his final opinion of the merits of the actors and the playwright until the curtain. [52]

"Now, Dee, let's hear from you!"

"Well,—while Dum was looking at the want column, I saw on the front page that the poor men who run jitneys were in a fair way to be crowded out of their business by all kinds of ordinances and things that were likely to be put on them."

"Yes, they won't have long to run without giving bonds, etc."

"I just knew how much you felt for the poor men and approved of their venture, and so I just decided I'd run a jitney myself for a day or so and get myself out of debt. I owe five dollars and seventy-three cents to schoolmates and did not have but thirty-seven cents and a street car ticket. I wanted to let Dum in on my scheme but she said she would get out and earn her own

money. I did not dream I could make so much, and indeed I couldn't have, if I had not speeded like fun. The cops knew Henry in spite of his sign, and I believe they knew me through the dirt and make-up, and they never once stopped me. [53]

"Of course I had to run in high a lot and it took gas, but I am going to pay for that out of my earnings. I made four dollars and fifteen cents this morning and I have not counted yet what I took in this afternoon." She turned the pockets of her father's greatcoat inside out into my lap and the bills and coin made such a showing that I thought it no wonder she had announced she was rolling in wealth. I counted six dollars and thirty-five cents. That made ten dollars and fifty cents for the day's work.

"I think being a jitneur is mighty hard work. There is a nerve-racking something about it that sho' does you up. In the first place there are always some idiots on board, the kind that rock the boat, and they will sit on the doors and are liable at any time to go spinning into the street. Then there are some old ladies who always drop their nickels and then you stand chugging away, scared to death for fear Henry will give up the ghost, and that means getting out to crank up when you have got on skirts and don't want to flaunt them." [54]

"I have been wondering what you did about your skirts."

"Did nothing! Just ignored them! I didn't have to crank up but once this morning, and that was when I hit a hole out on Robinson Street and Henry blinked out; but I had just got rid of my last fare and no one saw my disgrace. This afternoon I had awful bad luck. There were three funerals and every single one of them crossed my route and I had to wait for them to pass. You know how Henry gets mad and stops playing when he has to stand still too long—well, every one of those funerals got me in bad. One of them I was glad to see, as I was having an awful time. A girl dressed up to beat the band had got on the front seat with me and she was lollapalusing all over me, and I had no room to drive. She would talk to me, although I never encouraged her with anything sweeter than a grunt. I had made an awful mash and was up against it. She got me so hacked I let a fare get away from me,—man just got out and walked off without paying. I felt like Rosalind must have felt when Phebe pursued her or like Viola when Olivia got soft, but this girl [55] was more of the Phebe type. I was afraid she was going to spend the afternoon with Henry and me. She had just intimated that she would go on downtown with us again and make a round trip when we struck the funeral. Henry chugged away and then stopped off short. I dropped the plaid shawl I had my skirts wrapped up in and climbed over the foolish virgin, and I tell you I blessed the day I was born a girl then. I wish you could have seen the minx. I cranked up and climbed back, and there was no more lollapalusing from her. She scrouged herself over into her own corner and laughed a scornful laugh. The people on the back seat had been amused by her goings-on before, but when they found out I was a girl, they roared with laughter and my mash got out on the next corner. She gave me a dime and told me I could keep the change, so I did not lose anything after all from the man who sneaked off."

"You didn't really keep it?" exclaimed Dum. [56]

"Keep it! O course I did! It would have been very melodramatic to hurl it after her. I was not driving a jitney for my health. I was out for money—rocks—spondulix—tin—the coin—and that idiot's dime was just as good as any man's. Besides, she had taken up more than her share of room and owed me something for letting the sneak get off.

"That dollar bill! I bet you can't guess who paid me that,—Mrs. Barton Alston. She got in and handed me the dollar and said: 'Here, boy! Just ride me until that is used up!' It was ten round trips so she was with me a good part of the afternoon. She said she never did get out in automobiles much these days, that her friends sometimes come and drive her out to the cemetery, but she is tired of graveyards and wants to cheer up some. She told me all this when we were having a little spin alone, but I heard her telling some of the fares the same thing. She was real nice and jolly and took people on her lap and did the honors of the jitneys with as much graciousness as she used to entertain before they lost their money. I was sorry she was so broad- [57] beamed, as it was difficult to get three on the seat while she stayed with me, and of course when you are running a jitney every inch counts. When her ten round trips were up, I hated to tell her and took her another for luck. Some day let's go get her, Zebedee, and take her out to the Country Club or something and give her a good time. She is mighty tired of being supposed to be in retirement, mourning for Mr. Alston. She never did recognize me, although I talked to her quite freely. She called me 'Boy' all the time. Gee whilikins, but she can talk!"

"There are others!" put in Dum. "Do you know you have not stopped once for half-an-hour?"

"Well, I'm not out of gas yet."

"No, I reckon not! You are some self-starter, too. Nobody has to get out and crank you up and persuade you to get going. Funerals don't stop you. You go in high all the time, go so fast a traffic cop can't see your number."

"Well, I'm afraid I have monopolized the conversation some but it has been a very exciting day. [58] I'm going to divide up with you, Dum. I believe between us we can get all of those debts paid."

"Oh, Dee, that would be too good of you!"

"Nonsense! You worked just as hard as I did. I believe in an equal distribution of wealth. Count up, Page, and see where we stand."

"Let's see! You made ten dollars and fifty cents; Dum made two dollars and ten cents—that makes twelve dollars and sixty cents. You owe five dollars and seventy-three cents—Dum owes seven dollars and twenty-three cents. That makes twelve dollars and ninety-six cents. You are thirty-six cents short."

"Oh, but I've got thirty-seven cents and a street car ticket. That leaves a penny over, to say nothing of the ticket. Hurrah! Hurrah!" and those irresponsible Tuckers, all three of them, got up and danced the lobster quadrille with me in the middle. When they stopped, completely out of breath, Dee exclaimed:

"Oh, Zebedee! I am awfully sorry, but I am afraid you will have to pay for the gas after all. I [59] charged it."

And all Zebedee said was: "I'll be——" and just as Dee said would be the case, what he said does not bear repetition and certainly is not to be printed.

Mrs. Barton Alston had many a treat from the Tuckers. Dum did not collect her two dollars and ten cents until she had made many trips to the boss. He tried to persuade her to accept a steady job with him as an agent for household novelties, and while she naturally could not do it, she declared it gave her a very comfortable feeling that if she should have to earn her living there was at least one avenue open to her.

The day after Dee's success as a jitneur the paper came out with headlines that the jitneys were no longer within the law. Bonds must be furnished, licenses must be paid, etc. Dee had been not a day too soon in her venture.

Zebedee never said one word of reproach to Tweedles. When he gave voice to the unprintable remark above he was through. [60]

"I know I ought to do something about it," he moaned to me several days after when he caught me alone. "It was a very risky thing for both of my girls—they might have got in no end of scrapes —but what am I to do? If I row with them and get Mr. Tuckerish even you get out with me, and somehow I feel as long as the girls tell me everything, that they can't get into very serious mischief. I know I have not done my part by them. If I had been the right kind of unselfish father I would have married long ago when they were tiny little tots and have had some good, sensible woman bring them up."

"They don't look at it that way."

"Well, you could hardly expect them to 'kiss the rod'."

I laughed aloud at that.

"What's the matter?"

"I am wondering what the 'good, sensible woman' would think at being called a rod. I wonder if there is any woman good enough to undertake the job of rod."

"Perhaps not," he said ruefully. "You see when my little Virginia died, all my friends and hers [61] got busy and found a roomful of worthy ladies that they considered the proper persons to marry me and bring up the twins, but all of them were rather rod-like in a way, and somehow I never could make up my mind to kiss 'em either. The trouble about me is I can't grow up, and anyone whom my friends consider a suitable age for me now, I look upon as a kind of mother to me."

"I think Tweedles are getting on pretty well without a stepmother," I managed to say. I felt about as bad as the twins themselves would have at the thought of Zebedee's marrying again. "They never do anything too bad to tell you, but they do lots of things I fancy they would not tell a stepmother."

"Well, little friend, if you think that, I reckon I'll worry along 'in single blessedness' for a while yet."

The Tucker Twins had been living in dread of a stepmother ever since they had been conscious of living at all. It was a theme with all of their relations and friends and one that was aired on [62] every occasion. "Jeffry Tucker should marry again!" was the cry and sometimes the battle cry of every chaperone in Richmond. As Mr. Tucker said, it was always some good, settled lady who needed a home and was willing to put up with the twins who was selected as his mate.

"I don't want to run an old ladies' home. If I ever marry I shall do it for some reason besides furnishing a stepmother to my family and giving a haven of refuge to some deserving lady."

"I don't want to seem disloyal to Dum and Dee, but I think it might be rather salutary if you talk to them just as you have to me, I mean about stepmothers and things. It might make them a little more circumspect."

"All right, I'll try; but I am afraid I have cried 'Wolf!' too often and they would just laugh at me."

Tweedles did listen to him quite seriously when he broached the subject of his duty to marry again and give them the proper chaperonage. [63]

"Oh, Zebedee, please don't talk about such terrible things. We'll be good and learn how to

sew," wailed Dum. "I'm going to make some shirts the very first thing."

"Oh please, please spare me! I couldn't bear for you to get so good that I'd have to wear home-made shirts!" And so the threat of a stepmother was withdrawn for the time being.

CHAPTER V [64]

A TRIP TO CHARLESTON

My ankle improved rapidly and in another week I was able to walk and still another to dance. I had been patience itself, so my friends declared, and I am glad they thought so. I had really been impatience itself but had kept it to myself.

"Girls, I've got a scheme!" exclaimed Zebedee one evening after dinner. "I want to send a special correspondent to South Carolina to write up the political situation and I am thinking about sending myself. If I do, I am going to take all of you. I have written your father, Page, and an answer came from him today. He says you may go, as he knows it would do you good. I haven't said anything about it to you girls until I was sure I could work it." [65]

"Oh goody, goody, goody! Where will we go first?"

"Charleston first! I may leave you there awhile, as I have to do some knocking around, but it will not be for very long, not more than a day at a time."

We plunged into shopping the very next day. Father had sent me a check for necessary clothes, and the all-important matter had to be attended to speedily.

"Let's get all of our things exactly alike and pass for triplets! It would be such a scream on Zebedee," suggested Dee.

"Triplets, much! We'd just look like a blooming orphan asylum and get in a book. It seems to me that every book I pick up lately is about orphan asylums. Chauffeurs and orphans and aviators form the theme for every book or magazine story I read. No, indeed! Let's get our clothes just as different as possible," said Dum, rapidly turning the pages in *Vogue*.

"All right. Then we can wear each other's. I'm going to get brown." [66]

"I'm crazy for dark green, if you don't think it will make my freckles show on my nose too much. My nose and its freckles are a great trial to me."

"Nonsense! You've got the cutest nose in Virginia and Zebedee says he likes freckles," said Dee, always tactful.

"Well, he can have them, I'm sure I don't want them. What color are you going to get, Dum?"

"Anything but blue. There is a refinement about blue that I can't stand right now. I want something dashing and indicative of my sentiments of its being my bounden duty to have a good time."

"Red?"

"No, red's too obvious! I think I'll get lavender or mauve. Then I can wear violets (when I can get them). I think lavender suits my mood all right. It is kind of widowish and widows when they get into lavender are always out for a good time. I tell you when widows get to widding they are mighty attractive. I don't see why they don't stay in their pretty white crêpe linings, though. They [67] are so terribly becoming. I mean to make a stunning widow some day."

"First catch your flea before you kill him," taunted Dee.

"Well, I can't see the use in having your hair grow in a widow's peak on your forehead if you can't ever be a widow. It seems such a waste."

"There's time yet! You are only seventeen," I laughed.

"Seventeen is old enough to know what style suits me best. Weeds are my proper environment."

In spite of Dum's conviction about weeds she purchased a most becoming and suitably youthful suit in a soft mauve. Dee got exactly the same style in brown and I in green. We deviated in hats, however, and each girl thought her own was the prettiest, which is a great test of hats. Hats are like treats at soda fountains: you usually wish you had ordered something you didn't order and something your neighbor did. [68]

Spring was late in making its appearance in Virginia that year, but since we were going to South Carolina we bravely donned our new suits and hats. Zebedee declared he was proud of us, we were so stylish.

"I have a great mind to grow some whiskers so people won't think I am your little nephew," he said as he settled us in our section. The three of us girls were to occupy one section, two below

and one above, lots to be cast how we were to dispose ourselves.

"Nephew, much! You've got three gray hairs in your part now," declared Dee.

"Each of you is responsible for one of them." Mr. Tucker often classed me with his own girls and really when I was with them I seemed to be a member of the family. He treated me with a little more deference than he did Tweedles because he said I seemed to be older. I was really a few days younger.

Dee got the upper berth in the casting of lots and Dum and I slept in the lower, at least, Dum slept. I was conscious of much jerking and bumping of the train, and Dum seemed to be [69] demonstrating the batty-cake flipflapper all night.

We had left Richmond with a belated sprinkling of snow, but as we were nearing Charleston at about five-thirty in the morning we ran through a fine big thunder storm, and then torrents of rain descended, beating against the windows. Of course some bromide who got off the train with us, said something about "the back-bone of winter."

What a rain! It seemed to be coming down in sheets, and such a thing as keeping dry was out of the question. Tweedles and I regretted our new spring suits and straw hats, but since we had been so foolhardy as to travel in them we had to make the best of it and trust to luck that they would not spot.

The train had reached Charleston at six and by rights it should have been dawn, but it was as dark as pitch owing to the thunder clouds that hung low over the city.

Zebedee hustled us into a creaking, swaying bus that reminded us somewhat of the one at [70] Gresham. Other travelers were there ahead of us and as everyone was rather damp the odor of the closed vehicle was somewhat wet-doggish.

We rattled over the cobblestones through narrow streets, every now and then glimpsing some picturesque bit of wall when we came to one of the few and far between lamp posts. But it was generally very dim and would have been dreary had we not been in a frame of mind to enjoy everything we saw and to look at life with what Dee called "Behind-the-clouds-the-sun's-still-shining" spirit.

The bus turned into better lighted streets with smoother paving.

"Meeting Street," read Dum from a sign. "Doesn't that sound romantic? Do you reckon it means lovers meet here?"

"It may, but I am very much afraid it just means the many churches that abound on this street," laughed Zebedee.

I wondered who the people were in the bus with us, but they seemed to take no interest at all in us. There were two pale old ladies in black crêpe veils drawn partly over their faces; a [71] dignified old gentleman in a low-cut vest and a very high collar with turned-down flaps that seemed especially designed to ease his double chin; and a young girl about sixteen or seventeen who had evidently been in a day coach all night and was much rumpled and tousled therefrom. She seemed to belong to the pompous old gentleman, at least I gathered as much, as I had seen him meet her at the station and noticed he gave her a fatherly peck of greeting. Not a word did they utter however on that bumpy bus ride, and although the two pale old ladies in crêpe veils had stiffly inclined their shrouded heads as father and daughter entered the vehicle and they in turn had acknowledged the bow, not one word passed their lips. Evidently a public conveyance was not the proper place for Charlestonians to converse. The girl, who was very pretty in spite of being so tired and dishevelled, smiled a sympathetic smile when Dum enthused over Meeting Street. I had a feeling if we could get her by herself she would chatter away like any other girl. [72]

Perhaps the old man won't be so stiff when he gets his breakfast. It is hard to be limber on a wet morning and an empty stomach. When one has so much stomach it must be especially hard to have it empty, I thought.

It seemed very impertinent of the omnibus to bump this dignified old gentleman so unmercifully. He held on to his stomach with both hands, an expression of indignation on his pompous countenance, while his double chin wobbled in a manner that must have been very trying to his dignity.

The pale old ladies in crêpe veils took their bumping with great elegance and composure. When the sudden turning of a corner hurled one of them from her seat plump into Zebedee's arms, if she was the least disconcerted she did not show it. A crisp "I beg your pardon!" was all she said as she resumed her seat. She did pull the crêpe veil entirely over her face, however, as though to conceal from the vulgar gaze any emotion that she might have felt. Of course we giggled. We always giggled at any excuse, fancied or real. The pretty girl giggled, too, but turned [73] it into a cough as her father pivoted his fat little person around and looked at her in evident astonishment.

The bus backed up to our hotel where a grinning porter was in readiness to capture our bags. Our fellow travelers were evidently relieved at our departure. I saw through the window that both ladies put back their stuffy veils and that the old gentleman relaxed his dignified bearing somewhat and entered into conversation with them. The young girl, however, peered rather

wistfully through the drenched pane at us as we gaily took possession of the hotel lobby.

"Wasn't she sweet! Maybe we will see her again sometime," said Dee.

"I couldn't see her at all from where I sat," declared Zebedee. "Her old father's embonpoint obstructed my view."

The hotel where Zebedee had decided to take us was not the newest and most fashionable in Charleston, but he had heard it was the most typical and that the cooking was quite good. It had [74] been built years before the famous earthquake, and had still marks of that calamity. The floors, many of them, had a down-hill tendency, and there were cracks under the doors and I believe not one right angle in a single wall of the house.

The room we girls were to occupy was a great square chamber with a large window looking out on a cobbled street. There were picturesque doors, and walls with mysterious shuttered windows, where one could occasionally see eyes peering forth. It is against the Charleston code of manners to open shutters or raise the blinds of windows that look out on the street.

The floor of our room was on a decided slant and this caused a very amusing accident. There was a large armchair with broad substantial rockers into which Dum sank to rest her weary bones until breakfast. The chair was pointed down-hill and over Dum went backwards, and nothing in the world but her fine new spring hat saved her from getting a terrible bump on her head. [75]

"It's like living in the Tower of Pisa!" she exclaimed as we pulled her up.

"You had better remember to rock up-hill next time," admonished Dee. "I bet you, we will all develop a mountain leg living on such a slant. But isn't it fascinating? As soon as breakfast is over, let's go out and explore. I want to peep in the shutters all along the way and see what everybody is having for breakfast and going to have for dinner."

"That's just the way I feel! If anything is shut, I want to peep in. If it is locked, I want to get in."

Our hotel was run on the American plan and our grinning waiter insisted upon bringing us everything on the bill of fare. I think he saw in Zebedee the possibilities of a liberal tip. In South Carolina there is a law against tipping. In all of the rooms of hotels the guests are reminded of this by large printed placards, but like most laws of the kind it seems made only to be broken.

"The tight-wads who kicked against tipping the poor colored servants now have the law on [76] their side and can get out of it gracefully, but the people who tip because they feel that the servants have earned some little acknowledgment of their faithful services, go on tipping just as though no law had been made," said Zebedee, as he slipped some silver under the side of his plate in view of the watching darky, who pounced upon it with a practiced hand, while making a feint of removing finger bowls.

"I am going to turn you girls loose now to find your way around and seek out the wonders of Charleston. I have work to do and politicians to see."

"All right! Don't worry about us!" tweedled the twins.

"I want to get a map of the city first," said Dee, "so we can get our bearings," but Dum and I cried down this project.

"Let's find out things for ourselves and then get a map and guide book to verify us. It's lots more fun to go at it that way."

"Well, all I know is that this hotel is on Meeting Street, and on our right is Church Street and [77] on our left King. The street under your window is Queen, and if you walk south down Meeting you come to the Battery. You can't get lost and can't get in any trouble unless you try to climb the spiked fences or get over the walls covered with broken bottles. I'll meet you at luncheon at one," and Zebedee took himself off to find out things from some of the political lights of the city.

We were left to our own devices. The sun had come out and if we had not been in the rain we would not have believed it could have come down in such torrents only a short while ago. Our dresses did not spot.

"Let's not go in any place this morning but just walk around and see from the outside. It would be low of us to do the graveyards and things without Zebedee. He loves those things and will want to see them," said Dee.

It was a strange taste for one so cheerful, but it was the truth that Mr. Tucker was especially fond of poking around musty old churches and reading epitaphs on tombstones. [78]

We walked to St. Michael's, looking longingly through the iron gates at the quaint old tombstones, but refrained from going in for Zebedee's sake. We passed many beautiful old houses, some of them in perfect repair, brave in fresh paint, with trimmed hedges and gravel walks in their lovely old gardens that we could see by peering through the wrought-iron gates. Some of the houses, though, looked as though they had not been painted since the Revolution, and their gardens were grown up with weeds, with ragged, untrimmed hedges and neglected paths.

Almost every house, big or little, boasts a southern gallery or porch. The houses are built right

on the street, but the large door opens from the street to the porch and not to the house. The gardens are to the side and back, and, as a rule, are surrounded by great brick walls with either iron spikes across the top or ferocious broken bottles cemented to the bricks. The windows, opening on the street, are kept shuttered closely, and iron bars give you to understand that there is no breaking into Charleston society by night or day. The corners of the houses, where the [79] porches are, also are protected from possible interlopers by great iron spikes, a foot long and sharp enough to pierce the hide of a rhinoceros. The porches are also shuttered, partly to protect the inmates from the rude gaze of the passer-by and partly to protect them from the ruder gaze of the southern sun.

There was almost no one on the street. The Charleston men had gone to their places of business, leisurely to pursue a desultory living, and Charleston ladies do not go on the street in the morning, so we were afterwards told. We met several darkies crying their wares and saw an occasional housewife making a furtive purchase from some of these hucksters. These ladies, we judged, only came out because their establishments did not boast servants. As a rule, however, the old cooks seemed to do the buying.

The Charleston darky has a very peculiar lingo, so peculiar, in fact, that Tweedles and I found it difficult to understand. It is very different from the speech of our Virginia negroes. They seem [80] to clip the words off very short, and their voices are lighter and higher than our colored people's.

A shrimp seller was very interesting to us. We did not know what he had or what he was calling, and followed him down the street trying to find out. He held up high on his open hand a great flat basket and he sounded as though he were trying to give a college yell:

"Rah, rah, rah, Shrimpy! Rah, rah, Shrimpy! Rah!"

"What on earth are you selling?" asked Dum.

"Rah shrimp! Rah shrimp! Buysome, Missy! Buysome, Missy!"

Then we saw his squirming wares and understood.

"But we couldn't do anything with raw shrimps," we declared regretfully.

"Well den, Missy lak nig sing fer heh?"

"Why, yes, that would be fine," and the boy held high his basket of squirming raw shrimps and sang in a strange falsetto the following song: [81]

"Shrimpy, Shrimpy; rah, rah, Shrimpy!
Who wants Shrimp ter-day?
When you hear de Shrimp man holler,
Better come dis way.

"Shrimpy, Shrimpy; rah, rah, Shrimpy!
Sho' I'll heap de plate.
Ain't I see my gal dere waitin'
Stannin' by de gate?

"Shrimpy, Shrimpy; rah, rah, Shrimpy!
All de cooks in town,
When I holler 'I got Shrimpy'
Mus' be tunnin' roun'."

We applauded him vigorously and each one gave him a dime, thereby doing a very foolish thing, as ever after during our stay in Charleston we were pursued by the little darkies who wanted to sing to us.

CHAPTER VI [82]

THROUGH THE GRILLE

None of us had ever been so far south before and the palmetto trees were a great astonishment to us.

"They don't look natural to me, somehow," declared Dum, "but kind of manufactured. The trunks with that strange criss-cross effect might have been made by kindergarten children and as for the leaves—I don't believe they are real."

"It does seem ridiculous for people to have these great things twenty feet high, growing in their back yards when we nurse them with such care at home and are so proud if we can get one to grow three feet. Mammy Susan has a palm, 'pa'm' she calls it, that she has tenderly cared for for four years and it is only about up to my waist now. I wish she could see these trees." [83]

"I feel like the lady from Minnesota who came on a visit to Richmond and was so overcome by

the magnolia trees. She remarked: 'I have never seen such large rubber plants.' But don't these palmetto trees have a strange swishy sound? They make me feel like 'somebody's a-comin',' kind of creepy."

Dee was peering into a garden belonging to one of the old houses that had not known paint since the Revolution. The garden, however, was not neglected but evidently cared for with loving hands. There were borders of snowdrops and violets; purple and white hyacinths primly marked the narrow gravel walk, and clumps of rhododendron and oleander were so well placed that one felt that a landscape gardener must have had the planting of them. Two large palmetto trees stood like sentinels on each side of the wrought-iron gate, which was hung from great square brick pillars. A massive brick wall surrounded the garden with an uninviting coping of ferocious spikes.

We had our faces close to the grille trying to see a little more of the garden while the above [84] conversation was going on. All of us longed to get in like Alice in Wonderland. How to do it was the problem!

If that we could see was so enchanting, what we couldn't see must be even more so.

"Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard
Are sweeter; therefore ye pipes play on."

No doubt it was very rude of us to stand there peering in, but we were so enthralled by the beauty of the garden and so filled with the desire to get in that we forgot Mr. Manners entirely. Just as Dee said that the palmetto trees made her feel like somebody was coming, somebody did come. We heard a voice, a very irate voice indeed, behind the wall declaiming in masculine tones:

"There is no use in discussing the matter further, Claire! I tell you I shall never give my consent to Louis' going into such a profession. Planting gardens, forsooth! That is work for negroes, negroes directed by women." [85]

"But, papa, it is a very honorable profession, and Louis has such a love for flowers and such marvelous taste in arranging them. Just see what he has done for our garden! He could do the same for others, and already he is being sought by some of the wealthy persons of Charleston to direct the planting of their gardens."

The second voice evidently belonged to a young girl. There was a sweet girlishness about it and the soft, light accent of the Charlestonian was very marked. I don't know how to give an idea of how she said Charleston, but there was no R in it and in its place I might almost put an I. "Chailston" is as near as I can come and that seems 'way off.

"Bah! Pish! *Nouveau riches! Parvenues!* What business have they to ask a Gaillard to dig in their dirt? It is not many generations since they have handled picks themselves and now they want to degrade one of the first Charleston families."

"But, papa, what is he to do? Louis is nineteen and you know there is no money for college. He [86] cannot be idle any longer. He must have a profession."

It was a strange thing that three girls who prided themselves on being very honorable should have deliberately stopped there and listened to a conversation not intended for their ears, but in talking over the matter later we all agreed that we did not realize what we were doing. It seemed like a bit out of a play, somehow: the setting of the garden, the strange ante-bellum sentiments of the old gentleman and all.

"What is he to do? There have never been but three ways for a gentleman to earn a living: the Church, Law, the Army. Now, of course, the last avenue is closed to a Southern gentleman as he could hardly ally himself with the enemies of his land. The Church and the Law are all that are left for one of our blood. Since, as you are so quick to inform me, there is no money for Louis to go to college and a degree is quite necessary for one expecting to advance himself by practice of law, I see nothing for him to do but go into the ministry." [87]

"Louis be a preacher, papa! Why, he has not the least calling."

"He has more calling to occupy a pulpit than to be down on his hands and knees planting gardens for these vulgar Yankees."

"But, papa, what pulpit? Are we not Huguenots? Has not Louis been brought up in that faith and how could he preach any other? The Huguenot church here is the only one in the United States, and it has only forty members, and you know yourself now that so many of those members live in other cities that we often have a congregation of only six, counting our own family. There certainly is no room for him in that pulpit."

And then the old man did what men often do when they are worsted in an argument, he became very masculine and informed the girl that she had much better attend to her household duties and leave man's business to man.

"But, papa, I must say one more thing,—I think Louis is very despondent and needs encouragement. He hates to be idle and he is forced to be. I was shocked by his appearance this [88] morning. I am very sorry I went on the visit to Aunt Maria. I am afraid he has needed me."

Papa gave a snort and then we had a shock. He had evidently walked away from Claire in

disgust, and suddenly there loomed in sight a familiar low-cut waistcoat enveloping the portly embonpoint of our early morning companion in the bus.

We did not wait to see his double chin. The glimpse we had of the low-cut vest made us beat a hasty retreat. We walked down the street with what dignity we could assume.

"I'm pretty ashamed of myself," said Dum.

"Me, too! Me, too!" from Dee and me.

"I don't know what made us stay and listen, it was so thrilling somehow. Aren't you sorry for Claire? And poor Louis! To think of having only one profession open to you and that to be preaching to six persons including your own family."

"Yes, and no doubt there is already an incumbent," I suggested. "I'd love to know Claire. Didn't [89]
she sound spunky and at the same time respectful. I hope she can bring the old fat gentleman around."

"She might bring him around, but she can't get around him, he's too fat," laughed Dee. "I tell you I'd like to know Louis. I fancy he must be interesting. Isn't their name romantic? Gaillard sounds like it ought to go with poignard: Louis Gaillard drew his poignard and defended himself from the cannaille."

"Isn't it funny that we should have peeped into the very garden belonging to the pretty rumpled girl in the bus? Now I s'pose we will run against the pale old dames in the crêpe veils."

I had hardly spoken before we did run against the very old ladies. They had darted out of a large shabby old house about a block from the Gaillard's home and were in the act of purchasing "Rah, rah, rah, Shrimpy! Shrimpy! Rah, rah, rah!"

Their veils were off now but they still had an air of being shrouded in crêpe, although their
dresses were made of black calico. It seemed to take two of them to buy a dime's worth of [90]
shrimps, and the shrimp vender stood patiently by while they picked over his wares.

"They are quite small, Sam," complained the taller of the two.

"Yes, Miss Laurens, but yer see dese hyar is shrimpys, dey ain't crabs, nor yit laubsters."

"Poor things! I just know they have a hard time getting along," sighed Dee. "They look so frail and underfed. Just look back at their house! It is simply huge. And look at their porches! Big enough for skating rinks! Do you suppose those two little old ladies live there all by themselves?"

"I fancy they must have a lot of servants," ventured Dum.

"Of course they haven't any or they wouldn't be buying shrimps themselves. They live all alone in that great house and eat a dime's worth of shrimps a day. They have just been off burying their last relative who did not leave them a small legacy that they have, in a perfectly decent and ladylike way, been looking forward to. I have worked out their whole plot and mean to write 'em [91]
up some day."

"Oh, Page, you are so clever! Do you really think that is the truth about them? What are they going to do now?" asked Dum.

"Do? Why, of course they are going to take boarders, 'paying guests.' Don't you know that there are only two ways for a Charleston lady to make a living? The men have three according to his Eminence of the Tum Tum. Women as usual get the hot end of it and there are only two for them: taking boarders and teaching school."

"Well, I only wish we could go board there. I am dying to get into one of these old houses. I bet they are lovely. Did you notice they had an ugly, new, unpainted, board gate? I wonder where their wrought-iron one is. They must have had one sometime. Their house looks as though a beautiful gate must have gone with it." Dum had an eye open for artistic things and the iron gate had taken her fancy more than anything we had yet seen in Charleston.

"When I write them up I am going to use that, too, in my story. Of course they sold the gate to [92]
some of the *parvenu* Yankees, that the old gentleman scorned so. I can write a thrilling account of their going out at night to bid the beautiful gates good-by forever, those gates that had played such an important part in their lives. Through their portals many a coach (claret-colored, I think, I will have the coaches be) has rolled, bearing to their revels the belles of the sixties. (Everyone in the sixties was a belle.) I have an idea that the smaller Miss Laurens was once indiscreet enough to kiss her lover through the bars of that gate but the taller one never got further than letting her young man lightly touch her lily hand with his lips."

"Oh, Page, you are so ridiculous to make up all of that about two snuffy old ladies. Now I want you to write a real story about Claire and her brother Louis. I am sure they are interesting without making up. I still wish I could see Louis. I'd tell him to spunk up and go dig for the nice
people all he wants to. I know they are nice if they are only twice removed from a pick and [93]
shovel, according to old Mr. Gaillard," said Dee, ever democratic.

We had reached the Battery, a beautiful spot with fine live-oaks and palmettos. Spanish moss hung in festoons from some of the trees. It was the first any of us had seen.

"They say it finally kills the trees if too much of it grows on them, but it is certainly beautiful," said Dum.

"It is like these old traditions, worn out and senseless; a few of them are all right and give a charm to the South, but when they envelop one as they do his Eminence of the Tum Tum they simply prove deadly," philosophized Dee.

"Good for you, Dee! Please remember what you have just said and when I get home I'm going to put it in my note book. It would come in dandy in the story I am going to write about the old ladies and their gate." I had started a note book at the instigation of Mr. Tucker, who said it might prove invaluable to me in after years if I meant to write.

I believe Charleston is the only city in the United States that has a direct view of the ocean. [94] You can look straight out from the Battery between Fort Sumter and Sullivan's Island to the open sea. Fort Moultrie is on Sullivan's Island and on the Battery is a fine statue of Sergeant Jasper who stands with hand extended, pointing to the fort where he so gallantly rescued and replaced the flag, with the words: "We cannot fight without a flag!"

Fort Sumter is a spot made famous by the war between the States. It was bombarded in 1861 and I believe is noted as having stood more bombarding than any port in history up to the time of Port Arthur.

"Now don't you wish we had a guide book and map? I want to know what those places are out in the harbor. Next time I am going to do my way!" exclaimed Dee, but a kindly park policeman, the only living creature on the Battery, told us all we could have got out of a guide book and more perhaps. He pointed out where the steps had been that Princess Louise descended to embark with her brilliant cortège after her memorable visit to Charleston in '83. He showed us Sullivan's [95] Island, nothing more than a misty spot on the horizon, where Poe laid the scene of "The Gold Bug." He led us up to the old gun from the *Keokuk*, patting it lovingly and reverently. He was a charming old man and seemed to take a personal interest in everything on the Battery. His accent was fine and had the real Charleston softness. I wondered if he, too, did not belong to a fine old family and unlike Mr. Gaillard had discovered that there were more ways than three for a gentleman to earn a living.

Next he showed us the bust of William Gilmore Simms, South Carolina's great author, novelist, historian, poet. And then he put my mind entirely at rest about his being somewhat out of his element in serving as a park policeman by quoting Simms at length in his beautiful poem:

"The Grape Vine Swing

"Lithe and long as the serpent train,
Springing and clinging from tree to tree,
Now darting upward, now down again,
With a twist and a twirl that are strange to see; [96]
Never took serpent a deadlier hold,
Never the cougar a wilder spring,
Strangling the oak with the boa's fold,
Spanning the beach with the condor's wing.

"Yet no foe that we fear to seek,
The boy leaps wild to thy rude embrace;
Thy bulging arms bear as soft a cheek
As ever on lover's breast found place;
On thy waving train is a playful hold
Thou shalt never to lighter grasp persuade;
While a maiden sits in thy drooping fold,
And swings and sings in the noonday shade!

"O giant strange of our Southern woods!
I dream of thee still in the well-known spot,
Though our vessel strains o'er the ocean floods,
And the Northern forest beholds thee not;
I think of thee still with a sweet regret,
As the cordage yields to my playful grasp,
Dost thou spring and cling in our woodlands yet?
Does the maiden still swing in thy giant clasp?"

What a dear old man he was! We could hardly tear ourselves away, but it was twelve o'clock and we had promised to meet Zebedee for a one o'clock luncheon. We told him good-by, and promised to come to see him some more and then made our way along the eastern walk of the Battery.

The breezes always seem to be high down on the Charleston Battery, as it is exposed to the four winds of heaven. The sky had clouded over again and quite a sharp little east wind was [97] blowing, whistling rather dismally through the palmetto trees that grow all along the beautiful street that runs beside the waterfront.

Very handsome houses are on this street, with beautiful gardens. The walls are not so high

there, and we wondered if the owners were as aristocratic as those enclosed by high walls.

"Maybe every generation puts another layer of brick on the wall," suggested Dee, and I made a mental reservation that that, too, would go in my notebook about Charleston.

CHAPTER VII [98]

THE ABANDONED HOTEL

As we followed this street, East Bay Street it is called, we came upon a great old custard-colored house built right on the water's edge so that the waves almost lapped its long pleasant galleries.

"Isn't this a jolly place?" we cried, but when we got closer to it we decided jolly was certainly not the name for it.

The window panes of its many windows were missing or broken. The doors were open and swinging in the strong breeze that seemed to develop almost into a hurricane as it hit the exposed corner of the old custard-colored house. A tattered awning was flapping continuously from one end of the porch, an awning that had been gaily striped once, but now was faded to a dull gray except one spot where it had wrapped itself around one of the columns and in so doing, [99] had protected a portion of itself from the weather to bear witness to its former glory.

"What a dismal place! What could it have been?"

"It is open! Let's go in and see what we can see."

"It is positively weird. I am afraid of ghosts in such a place even in broad daylight," I declared half in earnest, but Tweedles wanted to go in and I was never one to hang back when a possible adventure was on foot.

The creaking door swung in as if propelled by unseen hands and we found ourselves in a hall of rather fine proportions with a broad stairway leading up. Doors opening into this hall were also swinging in the wind, so we entered the room to the right, the parlor, of course, we thought. The paper was hanging in shreds from the wall, adding to the dismal swishing sound that pervaded the whole building. From this room we entered another hall that had a peculiar looking counter built on one side. [100]

"What do you fancy this thing is for?" demanded Dum.

"I've got it! I've got it!" exclaimed Dee. "This is an old inn or hotel or something and that is the clerk's desk. Look, here is a row of hooks for keys and here is a rusty key still hanging on the hook."

"It must have been a delightful place to stay with such a view of the harbor and those beautiful porches where one could sit and watch the ships come in. This room next must have been the dining room, and see where there is a little stage! That was for the musicians to sit on," enthused Dum.

"When they finished supper they put the tables against the wall and danced like this," and Dee pirouetted around the dusty, rotting floor.

"Isn't it awful to let a place like this go to pieces so? I don't believe there is a whole pane of glass in the house, and I am sure no door will stay shut. It's too gloomy for me; let's get out in the street again," I begged.

"You can go, but I am going upstairs before I leave. I should think a would-be author would [101] want to see all the things she could, and if there are any ghosts meet them," and Dee started valiantly up the creaking stairs. Of course Dum and I followed.

A silence settled on us as we mounted. The wind that had been noisy enough below was simply deafening the higher we got. The paper that was hanging from the ceilings rattled ceaselessly and the wind was tugging at what was still sticking tenaciously to some of the side walls making a strange whistling sound.

"Gee whiz! I feel like Jane Eyre!" whispered Dum.

"No; 'The Fall of the House of Usher'!" I gasped. "Just think of such a place as this being right here in sight of all those grand houses!"

"I know it's haunted! I feel a presence!" and Dee stopped suddenly on the landing.

"Who's a 'fraid cat now?" I taunted. "Let the would-be author go in front. 'Infirm of purpose, give me the dagger!'"

At that Dee ran lightly on ahead of us and disappeared in a room to the right. We followed in [102] time to see her skirts vanishing through a door beyond.

"This must have been the bridal chamber, it is so grand. Just look at the view of the harbor through this window," said Dum, still whispering, as there was something about the place, a kind of gruesomeness, that made one feel rather solemn. I thought of Poe's "Haunted Palace" and whispered some of the stanzas to Dum, for the moment both of us forgetting Dee, who had rushed off so precipitately.

"'In the greenest of our valleys
By good angels tenanted,
Once a fair and stately palace—
Radiant palace—reared its head.
In the monarch Thought's dominion,
It stood there;
Never seraph spread a pinion
Over fabric half so fair.

"'But evil things in robes of sorrow,
Assailed the monarch's high estate;
(Ah, let us mourn, for never morrow
Shall dawn upon him desolate!)
And round about his home, the glory
That blushed and bloomed
Is but a dim-remembered story
Of the old time entombed. [103]

"'And travelers now, within that valley,
Through the red-litten windows see
Vast forms that move fantastically
To a discordant melody;
While like a ghastly, rapid river,
Through the pale door
A hideous throng rush out forever,
And laugh—but smile no more.'"

I had hardly finished the last stanza of what is to me the most ghastly poem in the English language, when a strange blood-curdling shriek was heard echoing through the rattle-trap old house.

"Dee!" we shouted together and started on a run through the door where we had last seen her new brown suit vanishing. It opened into a long corridor with doors all down the side, evidently bedrooms. Numbers were over the doors. All the doors were shut. Where was Dee? The wind had stopped as quickly as it had started and the old house was as quiet as the grave.

"Dee! Dee!" we called. "Where are you, Dee?"

Our voices sounded as though we had yelled down a well. No answer! My eye fastened on the door with No. 13 over it. All of us have some superstitions, and anyone brought up by a colored [104] mammy is certain to have many.

"No. 13 is sure to be right," I thought, and pushed open the door.

A strange sight met my gaze: Dee, with her arms thrown around a youth who crouched on the floor, his face buried in his hands while his whole frame was shaken with sobs! From the chandelier hung a rope with a noose tied in the dangling end, and under it a pile of bricks carefully placed as though some child had been building a house of blocks. The bricks had evidently been taken from among others that were scattered over the hearth near a chimney that had fallen in.

Our relief at finding Dee and finding her unharmed was so great that nothing mattered to us. Dee put her finger on her lips and we stopped stock-still. The slender figure of the young man was still convulsed with sobs, and Dee held him and soothed him as though he had been a baby and she some grandmother. Finally he spoke, with his face still covered: [105]

"Claire must never know!" Claire? Then this was Louis Gaillard! Dee had said several times she would like to know him, but she had had no idea of her idle wish being granted so quickly and in such a manner. When the boy said "Claire must never know," Dee arose to the occasion as only Dee could and said in a perfectly matter-of-fact tone: "No, Louis, I promise you that Claire shall never know from me." This calling him by name at the time did not seem strange to him. He was under such stress of emotion that the use of his Christian name by an unknown young girl seemed perfectly natural to the stricken youth.

It seems that when Dee went on ahead of us while I was so grandiloquently spouting poetry, she had flitted from room to room. The doors had been open all along the corridor except in No. 13. She had had a fancy to close them after each exploration until she had come to 13. On opening that door she had met a sight to freeze her young blood, but instead of freezing her young blood she had simply let out a most normal and healthy yell. Louis Gaillard was standing [106] on the pile of bricks that he had placed with great precision under the chandelier, and as Dee entered he was in the act of fitting the noose around his poor young neck. His plan of course had been to slip the noose and then kick the pile of bricks from under him and there to hang until he

should die.

The realization of what had occurred came to Dum and me without an explanation, which Dee gave us later when we could be alone with her. Dee, in the meantime, continued to pat the boy's shoulder and hold him tight in her courageous arms until the sobs ceased and he finally looked up. Then he slowly rose to his feet. He was a tall, slender youth, every inch of him the aristocrat. His countenance was not weak, just despondent. I could well fancy him to be very handsome, but now his sombre eyes were red with weeping and his mouth trembling with emotion.

"I don't know what made me be so wicked," he finally stammered. [107]

"I know. You are very despondent over your life. You are tired of idleness and see no way to be occupied because your father opposes the kind of thing you feel yourself fitted to do," and Dee, ordinarily the kind of girl who hated lollapalusing, as she called it, took the boy's nerveless hand in both of hers. She said afterwards she knew by instinct that he needed flesh and blood to hang to, something tangible to keep his reason from leaving him. He looked at her wonderingly and she continued: "Claire has been away on a trip and while she was gone your father has nagged you. He thinks working in flowers is not the work for a Gaillard and wants you to be a lawyer or preacher. You have no money to go to college, and he seems to think you can be a preacher without the education necessary to be a lawyer—which is news to me. You have offers to plant gardens right here in Charleston, but your father will not permit you to do it. You have become despondent and have lost appetite and are now suffering from a nervousness that makes you not quite yourself." [108]

"But you—how do you know all this?"

"I am ashamed to tell you how I know it. I am afraid you will never be able to trust me if you know."

"I not trust you! You seem like an angel from heaven to me."

"Well, first let me introduce my sister and friend to you."

Dee had a wonderful power of putting persons at their ease and now in these circumstances, to say the least unconventional, she turned and introduced us to Mr. Louis Gaillard with as much simplicity as she would have shown at a tennis game or in a ball-room. He, with the polished manners of his race, bowed low over our proffered hands. All of us ignored the pile of bricks and the sinister rope hanging from the chandelier.

"We are twins and this is our best friend, Page Allison. We have got some real long names, but Dum and Dee are the names we go by as a rule, Dum and Dee Tucker. We are down here in Charleston with our father Jeffry Tucker, Zebedee for short. And now I want you to do us a big favor——" [109]

"Me? A favor for you?" Dee had proceeded rather rapidly and the dazed young man had some difficulty in following her.

"Yes, a favor! I want you, all of us want you, to come up to the hotel and have lunch with us and meet Zebedee. It is lunch time now almost, and we promised to be back in time,—you see, if you come with us, Zebedee can't row with us about being late. He will be awfully cut up over our being late—nothing makes him so cross. I know if you are with us he will be unable to rag us. Just as soon as he gets something to eat he will be all right."

What was Dee driving at? Zebedee cross! Had she caught the young man's malady and gone a little off her hooks? Dum and I looked at each other wonderingly—then a light dawned on us: she wanted to get the young man entirely away from this terrible room, and felt if she made him think that he was to go along to protect us from an irate father, he would do it from a sense of chivalry. [110] Having more experience with an irate father than any other kind, Louis was easily persuaded.

"Certainly, if I can be of any assistance!"

"Well, you can! Now let's hurry!"

CHAPTER VIII [111]

TUCKER TACT

It was quite a walk back to the hotel but we did it in an inconceivably short time. It was only 1.10 as we stepped into the lobby. We walked four abreast wherever the sidewalk permitted it and when we had to break ranks we kept close together and chatted as gaily as usual. Louis was very quiet but very courteous. The fresh air brought some color back to his pale cheeks and the redness left his eyes. He was indeed a very handsome youth. He seemed to be in a kind of daze and kept as close to Dee as he could, as though he feared if she left him, he might again find himself in the terrible dream from which she had awakened him.

What was Dee to say to her father? How account for this young man? I was constantly finding [112]

out things about the Tuckers that astonished me. The thing that was constantly impressing me was their casualness. On this occasion it was very marked. What father would simply accept a situation as Zebedee did this one? We three girls had gone out in the morning to his certain knowledge knowing not one single person in the whole city, and here we were coming back late to lunch and bringing with us a handsome, excited looking young man and introducing him as though we had known him all our lives.

Mr. Tucker greeted him hospitably and took him to his room while we went to ours to doll up a bit for lunch. He had no opportunity to ask us where we got him or what we meant by picking up forlorn-looking aristocrats and bringing them home to lunch. He just trusted us. To be trusted is one of the greatest incentives in the world to be trustworthy.

Anyone with half an eye could see that Louis Gaillard needed a friend, and could also see that all of us had been under some excitement. Zebedee not only had more than half an eye, but was [113]
Argus-eyed. Louis must have been very much astonished at the irate old parent he had been led to expect. Mr. Tucker never looked younger or more genial. He had had a profitable morning himself, digging up political information that he considered most valuable, and now he was through for the day and had planned a delightful afternoon to be spent with us seeing the sights of Charleston.

"Was anyone in all the world ever so wonderful as our Zebedee?" asked Dum as she smoothed her bronze black hair and straightened her collar, getting ready for luncheon.

"I'm so proud of him, but I knew he would do just this way! Not one questioning glance! I know he is on tenter hooks all the time, too. The cat that died of curiosity has got nothing on Zebedee. I tell you, Page, Dum and I will walk into the dining room ahead with Louis and you make out you are expecting a letter and stop at the desk and try to put him wise. He is sure to wait for you." [114]

"All right! But must I tell him everything? It will take time."

"Oh, don't go into detail, but just summarize. Give a synopsis of the morning in a thumb-nail sketch. You can do it."

"I can try."

We found Mr. Tucker and the youth waiting for us in the lobby. The appearance of the guest was much improved by soap and water and a hair brush. Whose appearance is not? We started into the dining room, and as per arrangement I had to go back to the desk. Zebedee of course went with me, and the twins kept on with Louis.

"I know you are not expecting a letter but want to tell me what's up," he whispered.

"Exactly! We were peeping into a garden and overheard the old fat man we saw in the bus this morning telling the pretty daughter that he intended that his son Louis should be a preacher at the Huguenot church here, where they often have a congregation of only six, boasting a membership of forty, many of them out-of-town members. Louis wants to be a landscape [115]
gardener, anyhow, to plant gardens, for which he has a great taste, but old Tum Tum thinks that is beneath the dignity of a Gaillard. Claire, the daughter, was very uneasy about Louis, as he seemed despondent. We were ashamed of having listened. Eavesdropping is not our line, but we did it before we knew we were doing it." Zebedee smiled, and I went on talking a mile a minute. "We walked around the Battery and then went into an old deserted hotel, where all the doors were open and all the windows gone. We wandered around and then went upstairs.

"Dee left us and went down a long corridor, where the bedrooms were, and when she got to Number Thirteen she went in and found Louis getting ready to hang himself. The rope was on the chandelier, and he had a pile of bricks to stand on. He was putting the noose on his neck when she opened the door, and then she screamed bloody murder, and we heard her and ran like rabbits until we got to Thirteen, and I knew it was the right door just because it was Thirteen. We [116]
found poor Louis crouching down on the floor, and Dee had her arms around him and was treating him just like a poor little sick kitten. He was sobbing to beat the band, and as soon as he could speak, he said: 'Claire must never know!' and then we knew that he was the boy who wanted to plant gardens. Dee called him Louis and talked to him in such a rational way that he pulled himself together. He seemed like some one out of his head, but we chatted away like we always do, and he kind of found himself. Dee asked him to come home to lunch to protect us from your rage at our being late. She knew you wouldn't mind, and she felt that if she put it up to him that way he would think he ought to come. She said you would not give way to anger before strangers. We are mighty proud of you for being so—so—Zebedeeish about the whole thing."

"Two minutes, by the clock!" cried Zebedee, when I stopped for breath. "How I wish I had a reporter who could tell so much in such a short time! I am mighty glad you approve of me, for I [117]
certainly approve of my girls. Now we will go in and eat luncheon and Louis shall not know I know a word. I will see what I can do to help him. Gee whiz! That would make a great newspaper story, but I am a father first and then a newspaper man."

We actually got in and were seated at the table before Tweedles and Louis had settled on what to order. Zebedee pretended to be very hungry and to be angry, and only his sense of propriety with a guest present seemed to hold back his rage at being kept waiting. He acted the irate, hungry parent so well that we almost exploded.

Louis ate like a starving man. As is often the case after a great excitement, a desire for food

had come to him. His appetite, however, was not so much larger than ours. All of us were hungry, and I am afraid the hotel management did not make much on running their place on the American plan. Wherever there was a choice of viands, we ordered all of them.

"You must know Charleston pretty well, Mr. Gaillard, do you not?" asked our host, when the first pangs of hunger were allayed. [118]

"Know it? I know every stone in it, and love it. But I do wish you would not call me Mr. Gaillard."

"All right, then, Louis! I wonder if you would not show us your wonderful old city this afternoon—that is, all of it we could see in an afternoon. You must not let us take up your time if you are occupied, however."

"I haven't a thing to do. I finished at the high school in February, and have nothing to occupy me until the graduating exercises in June. I'd think it a great honor and privilege to show you and the young ladies all I can about Charleston," and Louis looked his delight at the prospect. "I must let my sister know first, though. She may be wondering where I am."

"'Phone her!" tweedled the twins.

"We haven't a telephone," simply.

No telephone!

We might have known to begin with that such a modern vulgarity as a telephone would not be tolerated in the house belonging to his Eminence of the Tum Tum. [119]

"You have plenty of time to walk down and tell her, and I think it would be very nice if she would consent to come with you. We should be overjoyed to have her join our party," said the ever hospitable Zebedee.

"I should like that above all things if she can come." Of course we knew that the obstacle to her coming would be the old father who would no doubt demand our pedigrees before permitting a member of his family to be seen on the street with us. "Mr. Tucker, I should like to have a few minutes' talk with you when we finish luncheon."

"I am through now, even if these insatiate monsters of mine have ordered pie on top of apple dumpling, so you come on with me, Louis, while they finish. No doubt they will be glad to get rid of us so they can order another help all around."

"What do you reckon he wants to say to Zebedee?" said Dee, biting a comfortable wedge out of her pie, which, in the absence of Zebedee, she picked up in her fingers to eat as pie should be eaten. [120]

"Why, he is going to tell him all about this morning. Don't you see, he feels that maybe your father will not think he is a reliable person or something; anyhow, he is such a gentleman that he knows the proper thing to do is to make a clean breast of his acquaintance with us."

"Well, now, how do you know that?" asked Dum.

"I don't know it. I just imagine it."

"Do you know, Page, I believe you will be an author. You've got so much imagination."

"It is just nothing but thinking what you would do in a person's place provided you had the nature of that person. Now you are high-minded, too; fancy yourself in Louis' place—what would you do?"

"Go tell Zebedee all about it, of course."

"Exactly! So would anyone if he expected to continue the acquaintance begun in such a strange way." [121]

"I want to see Louis before he goes for his sister. You see, we never did tell him how we happened to know his name and all about his affairs. I must tell him that and also let him know that we came up in the bus with his father and sister this morning. He can let her know something about us without divulging the terrible thing that came so near happening at the old hotel." Dee devoured the last morsel of pie and we went to the parlor, where we found Zebedee clasping hands with Louis, who was flushed and shiny-eyed but looked very happy.

"Poor boy!" exclaimed Zebedee to me, as Dee turned to Louis and drew him to a seat by the window. "He has told me the whole thing like the gentleman he is. He says he must have been demented. He has been very nervous lately, and all the time his sister was away his father has nagged him to death, and this morning, evidently after you monkeys listened to the talk in the garden, the old gentleman got him in a corner and pronounced the ultimatum: either law or the ministry. Of course, the ministry is out of the question, and the law means years of waiting, even if he had the money to go to college. He could begin and earn a livelihood tomorrow laying out these gardens and planting them, but the obdurate parent says if he does not obey he will withdraw the light of his countenance." [122]

"I'd say withdraw it; the sooner the better."

"So would I; but I could not give that advice to Louis until I know more about him and his people. I hope the sister can come."

She did come, although I believe she did not inform her father of what she was going to do. She was more than a year younger than her brother, and he was evidently the pride of her heart. I prayed that she might never know the terrible calamity that had come so near to her life. I believe she could never have breathed a happy breath again as long as she lived if that knowledge had been hers.

Louis had just told her some Virginians whom he had met on the Battery—Mr. Tucker, his two daughters and their friend—had made friends with him, and had asked him to accompany them in [123] their sightseeing expedition and had suggested his bringing her. He let drop that we had arrived that morning in the bus, and she immediately concluded that we were her companions in misery on that wet, bumpy drive.

CHAPTER IX [124]

CHURCHYARDS

Graveyards seemed a strange place to want to spend the afternoon after our experience of the morning, but the cheerful Zebedee always made for them, just as a sunbeam seems to be hunting up the dark and gloomy corners.

"Saint Michael's first, as that is the nearest," suggested Louis.

We entered the churchyard through massive old iron gates, and, turning to the right, followed Louis to perhaps the most unique grave stone in the world: the headboard of an old cedar bed. It is a relic of 1770. The story goes that the woman buried there insisted that her husband should go to no trouble or expense to mark her grave. She said that she had been very comfortable in that same bed and would rest very easy under it and that it would soon rot away and leave her [125] undisturbed. She little dreamed that more than a century later that old cedar bed would be preserved, seemingly in some miraculous way, and be intact while stones, reverently placed at the same time, were crumbling away.

"It seems like John Keats' epitaph: 'Here lies one whose name was writ in water.' Keats thought he was dead to the world, and see how he lives; and this poor woman's grave is the first one that tourists are taken to see," I mused aloud.

"I have often thought about this woman," said Claire, in her light, musical voice. "I have an idea that she must have been very hard-worked and perhaps longed for a few more minutes in bed every morning, and maybe the husband routed her out, and when she died perhaps he felt sorry he had not given her more rest."

"You hear that, Page?" asked Dum. "You had better have some mercy on me now. I may 'shuffle off this mortal coil' at any minute, and you will be so sorry you didn't let me sleep just a little while longer." (It had been my job ever since I started to room with the Tucker twins to be the [126] waker-up. It was a thankless job, too, and no sinecure.) "See that my little brass bed is kept shiny, Zebedee dear."

"I wonder why it is that no one ever seems to feel very sad or quiet in old, old graveyards?" I asked, all of us laughing at Dum's brass bed.

"I think it is because all the persons who suffered at the death of the persons buried there are dead, too. No one feels very sorry for the dead; it is the living that are left to mourn. Old cemeteries are to me the most peaceful and cheerful spots one can visit," said Zebedee, leaning over to decipher some quaint epitaph.

"I think so, too!" exclaimed Claire, who had fitted herself into our crowd with delightful ease. "New graves are the ones that break my heart."

Louis turned away to hide his emotion. He had been too near to the Great Divide that very morning for talk of new-made graves and the sorrow of loved ones not to move him.

There was much of interest in that old burying ground, and Louis proved an excellent cicerone. [127] He told us that the church was started in 1752; that the bells and organ and clock were imported from England, and that the present organ had parts of the old organ incorporated in it. The bells were seized during the Revolution and shipped and sold in England, where they were purchased by a former Charleston merchant and shipped back again. During the Civil War they were sent to Columbia for safekeeping, but were so badly injured when Columbia was burned that they had to be again sent to England and recast in the original mold. They chimed out the hour while Louis was telling us about them as though to prove to us their being well worth all the trouble to which they had put the worthy citizens of Charleston.

"Saint Philip's next, while we are in the churchly spirit," said Louis; "and then the Huguenot church."

St. Philip's was a little older than St. Michael's. The chimes for that church were used for making cannon for the Confederacy, and for lack of funds up to the present time they have not been replaced. On top of the high steeple is a beacon light by which the ships find their way into the harbor. [128]

We had noticed at the hotel, both at our very early breakfast and at luncheon, a very charming couple who had attracted us greatly and who, in turn, seemed interested in us. The man was a scholarly person with kind, brown eyes, a very intelligent, comely countenance, and a tendency to baldness right on top that rather added to his intellectual appearance. His wife was quite pretty, young, and with a look of race and breeding that was most striking. Her hair was red gold, and she had perhaps the sweetest blue eyes I had ever beheld. Her eyes just matched her blue linen shirtwaist. What had attracted me to the couple was not only their interesting appearance, but the fact that they seemed to have such a good time together. They talked not in the perfunctory way that married persons often do, but with real spirit and interest.

As we entered the cemetery of St. Philip's, across the street from the church, we met this couple standing by the sarcophagus of the great John C. Calhoun. The lady bowed to us sweetly, acknowledging, as it were, having seen us in the hotel. We of course eagerly responded, delighted at the encounter. We had discussed them at length, and almost decided they were bride and groom; at least Tweedles had, but I thought not. They were too much at their ease to be on their first trip together, I declared, and of course got called a would-be author for my assertion. [129]

"I hear there is a wonderful portrait of Calhoun by Healy in the City Hall," said the gentleman to Zebedee, as he courteously moved for us to read the inscription on the sarcophagus.

"Yes, so I am told, but this young man who belongs to this interesting city can tell us more about it," and in a little while all of us were drawn into conversation with our chance acquaintances.

Louis led us through the cemetery, telling us anything of note, and then we followed him to the Huguenot church, accompanied by our new friends. [130]

A Huguenot church has stood on the site of the present one since 1667. Many things have happened to the different buildings, but the present one, an edifice of unusual beauty and dignity, has remained intact since 1845. The preacher, a dear old man of over eighty, who is totally blind, has been pastor of this scanty flock for almost fifty years. He now conducts the service from memory, and preaches wonderful, simple sermons straight from his kind old heart.

"Oh, Edwin, see what wonderful old names are on these tablets," enthused the young wife —"Mazyck, Ravenel, Porcher, de Sasure, Huger, Cazanove, L'Hommedieu, Marquand, Gaillard ——"

"Yes, dear, they sound like an echo from the Old World."

"This Gaillard is our great, great grandfather, isn't he, Louis?" asked Claire. "My brother knows so much more about such things than I do."

"Oh, is your name Gaillard?"

And then the introductions followed, Zebedee doing the honors, naming all of us in turn; and then the gentleman told us that his name was Edwin Green and introduced his wife. [131]

I fancy Claire and Louis had not been in the habit of picking up acquaintances in this haphazard style, and the sensation was a new and delightful one to them. The Tuckers and I always did it. We talked to the people we met on trains and in parks, and many an item for my notebook did I get in this way. Zebedee says he thinks it is all right just so you don't pick out some flashy flatterer. Of course we never did that, but confined our chance acquaintances to women and children or nice old men, whose interest was purely fatherly. Making friends as we had with Louis was different, as there was nothing to do but help him; and his sex and age were not to be considered at such a time.

"Are you to be in Charleston long?" asked Zebedee of Mr. Green.

"I can't tell. We are fascinated by it, but long to get out of the hotel and into some home."

"If I knew of some nice quiet place, I would put my girls there for a few days while I run over to Columbia on business. I can't leave them alone in the hotel." [132]

"I should love to look after them, if you would trust me," said Mrs. Green, flushing for fear Zebedee might think her pushing.

"Trust you! Why, you are too kind to make such an offer!" exclaimed Zebedee.

"We have some friends who have just opened their house for—for—guests," faltered Claire. "They live only a block from us, and are very lovely ladies. We heard only this morning that they are contemplating taking someone into their home." Tweedles and I exchanged glances; mine was a triumphant one. The would-be author had hit the nail on the head again. "Their name is Laurens." I knew it would be before Claire spoke.

"Oh, Miss Gaillard, if you could introduce us to those ladies we would be so grateful to you!" said Zebedee. "You would like to stay there, wouldn't you, girls?"

"Yes! Yes!" [133]

"And Mrs. Green perhaps will decide to go there, too, and she will look after you, will you not, Mrs. Green?"

"I should be so happy to if the girls would like to have me for a chaperone."

"Oh, we'd love it! We've never had a chaperone in our lives but once, and she got married," tweedled the twins.

And so our compact was made, and Claire promised to see the Misses Laurens in regard to our becoming her "paying guests."

Mr. Green, who, as we found out afterward, was a professor of English at the College of Wellington and had all kinds of degrees that entitled him to be called Doctor, seemed rather amused at his wife's being a chaperone.

"She seems to me still to be nothing but a girl herself," he confided to Zebedee, "although we have got a fine big girl of our own over a year old, whom we have left in the care of my mother-in-law while we have this much talked-of trip together."

"Oh, have you got a baby? Do you know, Dum and I just stood Page down that you were bride and groom!" [134]

"Molly, do you hear that? These young ladies thought we were newlyweds."

"I didn't!"

"And why didn't you?" smiled the young wife.

"I noticed you gave separate orders at the table and did not have to pretend to like the same things. I believe a bride and groom are afraid to differ on even such a thing as food."

"Oh, Edwin, do you hear that? Do you remember the unmerciful teasing Kent gave you at Fontainbleu because you pretended to like the mustard we got on our roast beef in the little English restaurant, just because I like English mustard?"

"Yes, I remember it very well, and I also remember lots of other things at Fontainbleu besides the mustard."

Mrs. Green blushed such a lovely pink at her husband's words that we longed to hear what he did remember.

"Kent is my brother—Kent Brown." [135]

"Oh! Oh!" tweedled the twins. "Are you Molly Brown of Kentucky?"

"Yes, I was Molly Brown of Kentucky."

"And did you go to Wellington?" I asked.

"Yes, and I still go there, as my husband has the chair of English at Wellington."

"Girls! Girls! To think of our meeting Molly Brown of Kentucky! We have been hearing of you all winter from our teacher of English at Gresham, Miss Ball."

"Mattie Ball! I have known her since my freshman year at college. Edwin, you remember Mattie Ball, do you not?"

"Of course I do. An excellent student! She had as keen an appreciation of good literature as anyone I know of."

"She used to tell us that she owed everything she knew to her professor of English at Wellington," said Dee, who knew how to say the right thing at the right time, and Professor Green's pleased countenance was proof of her tact.

Then Mrs. Green had to hear all about Miss Ball and the fire at Gresham, which Tweedles related with great spirit, laying rather too much stress on my bravery in arousing the school. [136]

"I deserve no more credit than did the geese whose hissing aroused the Romans in ancient times," I declared. "Why don't you tell them how you got Miss Plympton out of the window in her pink pajamas?"

The Greens laughed so heartily at our adventures that we were spurred on to recounting other happenings, telling of the many scrapes we had got ourselves in. Claire listened in open-eyed astonishment.

"It must be lovely to go to boarding-school," she said wistfully.

"It sounds lovelier than it is. We tell about the scrapes and the fun, but there are lots of times when it is nothing but one stupid thing after another. It's lots lovelier just to be at home with your father."

Claire shook her head doubtfully, and, remembering her father, we did not wonder at her differing with Dum.

"I have always held that home was the place for girls until they were old enough for college," said Mrs. Green. "That is, if they mean to go to college." [137]

"But we don't!"

Zebedee and Professor Green had walked on ahead. Louis was sticking close to Dee, so close that Dum whispered to me that he must think she had him on a leash. Claire and Dum and I were having the pleasure of flocking around Mrs. Green.

"You see, we haven't got a piece of mother among us, and we had to go somewhere, as Zebedee—that's our father, you know—had his hands so full of us he couldn't ply his trade of getting out newspapers. Dee and I are some improved since we first were sent off to school, and now that Gresham is burned, we don't want to break into a new school. I tell you, it is some job to break into a school. Page Allison lives in the country, and she had to go to boarding-school or not at all."

"Well, why don't you go to college now? Wellington would just suit you, I am sure." [138]

"Somehow I have never been crazy to go to college. I want to do something else. You see, I want to model. I feel as though I just had to get my hands in clay and form things out of it."

"And you?" said the sweet young woman, turning to me.

This Molly Brown of Kentucky certainly had the charm of sympathy. You found yourself telling her all kinds of things that you just couldn't help telling her. She seemed so interested, and her eyes were so blue and so true.

"Oh, I mean to be a writer!" I blurted out. "That's the reason I don't want to go to college. If I am going to write, I had better just write, I think, and not wear myself to a frazzle over higher mathematics."

"That's the way I used to feel. The only good I could ever get out of that hated study was just knowing I had done my best. My best seemed so feeble by the side of the real mathematicians that it was a constant mortification to me. I used to call mathematics my hair shirt. No matter how well I got along in other things, I was always conscious of a kind of irritation that I was going [139] to fail in that. I just did squeeze through in the end, and that was by dint of wet towels around my head and coaching and encouragement from my friends. I think it is quite natural to dislike a subject that always makes you appear at your worst. Certainly we are not fond of people who put us in that position!"

I might have known our new friend would hate mathematics. I have never yet been attracted very much by any woman who did get along very well in it, except, of course, Miss Cox. I don't mean to say that female mathematicians cannot be just as lovely and charming as any other females, but I mean that I have never hit it off with them, somehow.

"What are you going to write?" asked Claire.

"Write short stories and long novels, when I find myself. I'm still flopping around in a sea of words. Don't you write, Mrs. Green? It seems to me Miss Ball said you did."

"Yes, I write a little—that is, I write a lot, but I have published only a little. I send and send to [140] magazine after magazine. Every mail is an event to me—either it brings back a manuscript or it doesn't bring one, and sometimes it brings an acceptance slip, and then I carry on like one demented. Edwin says he is jealous of the postman and wishes Uncle Sam would have women deliver the mail."

"It must be wonderful to get into a magazine. My only taste of it is seeing myself in print in our school paper. Don't you write poetry, Mrs. Green?"

"Well, I have melted into verse, but I think prose is more in my line. The first money I ever made was a prize for a real estate advertisement in poetry, and of course after that I thought that I must 'lisp in numbers' on all occasions; but it was always lisping. And you—do you write poetry, too?"

"Yes, she does," broke in Dum; "and Zebedee thinks it is bully poetry. He said he was astonished that she could do it. And he is a newspaper writer and knows."

"I am sure he does. Some day we will have a tournament of poetry, and you will show me yours [141] and I will show you mine. And you, Miss Gaillard? Are you counting upon going to college?"

Mrs. Green turned to Claire, who had been very quiet as we strolled along Church Street, on our way to Washington Park, which is a small enclosure by the City Hall.

"Oh, no, I—I will not pursue my studies any more. I keep house for my father, who does not approve of higher education for women," and the girl sighed in spite of herself. "I could not go, anyhow," she continued, "as Louis and papa need me at home."

Not one word of lack of money, which we knew was an insurmountable obstacle with the Gaillards, but I believe a Charlestonian would as soon speak of lack of ancestry as lack of money. Money is simply something they don't mention except in the bosom of the family. They don't mention ancestry much, either; not nearly as much as Virginians do. They seem to take for granted that anyone they are on speaking terms with must be well born or how did they get to be [142]

on speaking terms?

The Gaillards left us at Washington Park as Claire thought she must hurry back to her papa, who no doubt by that time was in a fret and a fume over her long, unexplained absence. Mr. Gaillard was the type of man who thought a woman's place was in her home from morning until night, and any little excursion she might make from her home must be in pursuit of his, the male's, happiness. Claire promised to see the Misses Laurens and find out from them if we could get board in their very exclusive home. Louis asked to be allowed to take us to other points of interest on the morrow, and with feelings of mutual esteem we parted.

CHAPTER X [143]

THE HEAVENLY VISION

That little park in the heart of Charleston is a very delightful spot. It is a tiny park, but every inch of it seems teeming with interest, historical and poetical. In the center is the shaft erected by the Washington Light Infantry to their dead in '61-'65. The obelisk is in three sections of granite, representing the three companies. On the steps of the square pedestal are cut the twelve great battles of the war.

Zebedee dared us to recite them, but we fell down most woefully, except Dum, who named all but Secessionville.

Little darkies were playing on the steps, running around the shaft and shouting with glee as they bumped their hard heads together and rolled down the steps. [144]

"Black rascals!" exclaimed Zebedee. "If it had not been for you, that monument need never have been erected."

But the little imps kept up their game with renewed glee, hoping to attract the attention of the tourists. Tourists were simply made of pennies, in the minds of the Charleston pickaninnies. Seeing we had noticed them, they flocked to where we had settled ourselves on some benches facing the monument and began in their peculiar South Carolina lingo to demand something of us —what it was it took some penetration to discover. There were five of them, about the raggedest little monkeys I ever saw. Their clothes stayed on by some miracle of modesty, but every now and then a streak of shiny black flesh could be glimpsed through the interstices. (I got that word from Professor Green, which I put down in my notebook for safekeeping.)

"Do' white fo'ks wan' we-all sin' li'l' song?"

"What?" from all of us.

"Sin' li'l' song! La, la, la, tim chummy loo!" and the blackest and sassiest and most dilapidated of them all opened his big mouth with its gleaming teeth and let forth a quaint chant. [145]

"Oh, sing us a little song?" and we laughed aloud.

"Why, yes, we do," assented Professor Green, "but don't get too close. The acoustics would be better from a short distance, I am sure."

"Edwin is enough of a Yankee not to like darkies coming too close," laughed Mrs. Green. "You know a Northerner's interest in the race is purely theoretical. When it comes right down to it, we Southerners are the only ones who really understand them. I remember what one of the leaders of the negroes said: 'A Northerner loves the negro but has no use for a nigger, while a Southerner can't stand the negro but will do anything on earth for a nigger.'"

"That's right, I believe," said Zebedee; "but I must say I agree with Doctor Green, and think under the circumstances that a short distance will help the acoustics."

The five song birds formed a half-circle a few feet from us, and, led by the sassy black one, poured forth their souls in melody. The leader seemed to be leader because he was the only one with shoes on. His shoes were ladies' buttoned shoes, much too long and on the wrong feet, which gave their proud possessor a peculiar twisted appearance. Having good black legs of his own, he needed no stockings. [146]

"It must be a great convenience to be born with black legs," sighed Dee. "You can go bare-legged when you've a mind to, and if you should be so prissy as to wear stockings, when they get holes in them they wouldn't show."

The following is the song that the little boys sang, choosing it evidently from a keen sense of humor and appreciation of fun:

"How yer git on wid yer washin'?
'Berry well,' yer say?
Better charge dem Yankee big price
Fo' dey gits away.
Dey is come hyar fer de wedder,

Pockets full ob money.
Some one got ter do dey washin',
Glad it's me, my honey.
Wen I ca'y in de basket,
Eb'y week I laff
Des ter see dem plunkin' out
Dollah an' a ha'f. [147]
Co'se I ain't cha'ge home fo'ks dat,
Eben cuff an' collah,
Tro' in wid dey udder clo's—
All wash fer a dollah.
Soon de Yankees will be gone,
An' jes de po' fo'ke here;
Cha'ge dem, honey, all yer kin
Ter las' yer trou' de year."

When they finished this song, which was given in a high, peculiar, chanting tune, the little boy of the shoes began to dance, cutting the pigeon wing as well as it had ever been done on a vaudeville stage, I am sure, while the other four patted with such spirit and in such excellent time that Zebedee got up and danced a little *pas seul*, and Mrs. Green declared it was all she could do to keep from joining him.

"I learned to jig long before I did to waltz," she said, "and I find myself returning to the wild when I hear good patting."

"So did I," I said; "Tweedles can pat as well as a darky. We will have a dancing match some day, too."

The minstrels were remunerated beyond their dreams of avarice, and cantered off joyfully to buy groun'-nut cakes from the old mauma on the corner, where she sat with her basket of [148] goodies on her lap, waving her palmetto fan, between dozes, to scare away the flies.

"Who's the old cove over there with the Venus de Milo effect of arms?" asked Zebedee, pointing to a much-mutilated statue near the Meeting Street entrance of the park.

"Why, that's William Pitt. Louis Gaillard told me we would find it here," explained Dee. "He said it was erected in seventeen-sixty-nine by the citizens of Charleston in honor of his promoting the repeal of the Stamp Act. His arm got knocked off by a cannon ball in the siege of Charleston."

"This over here is Valentine's bust of Henry Timrod," called Dum from a very interesting-looking bronze statue that had attracted her artistic eye all the time the little nigs were singing.

"Timrod! Oh, Edwin, he is the one I am most interested in in all South Carolina," and Mrs. Green joined Dum to view the bust from all angles. Of course, all of us followed.

"'Through clouds and through sunshine, in peace and in war, amid the stress of poverty and [149] the storm of civil strife, his soul never faltered,'" read Mrs. Green from the inscription on the monument of one of the truest poets of the South. "'To his poetic mission he was faithful to the end. In life and in death he was "Not disobedient unto the heavenly vision."'"

I whipped out my little notebook and began feverishly to copy the tribute. I found Mrs. Green doing the same thing in a similar little book.

"'Not disobedient to the heavenly vision'! I should like to have such a thing on my monument. I used to think that just so I could make a lot of money I wouldn't mind what kind of stuff I wrote; but now I do want to live up to an ideal," she exclaimed to me. "Do you feel that way?"

"I don't know whether I do or not. I don't believe I could stand the stress of having my manuscript rejected time after time and the storm of returning it again and again. I am afraid I'd be willing to have written the Elsie books just to have made as much money as they say the [150] author of them has made. I know that sounds pretty bad, but——"

"I understand, my dear. I fancy my feeling as I do is something that has come to me just because the making of money is not of as much importance to me as it used to be. There was a time in my girlhood when I would have written Elsie books or even worse with joy just to make the money."

"I can't quite believe it. You look so spirituelle, and I believe you have always been obedient to the heavenly vision."

"Look on this side," said my new friend, laughing and blushing in such a girlish way that it seemed ridiculous to talk of her girlhood as though it had passed. "This inscription is more utilitarian:

> "'This memorial has been erected with the proceeds of the recent sale of a very large edition of the author's poems, by the Timrod Memorial Association, of South Carolina.'

"and then:

"'Genius, like Egypt's Monarch, timely wise,

Erects its own memorial ere it dies.'

"Oh, Edwin, look! Here is the ode that mother sings to little Mildred, here on the back of the monument. Mildred is my baby, you know," she said, in explanation to us, "and mother sings the most charming things to her." [151]

"Please read it to us, Molly; I didn't bring my glasses."

That is what Professor Green said, but when we had known him longer we found out he was not so very dependent on glasses that he could not read an inscription carved in one-inch letters, but that he always made his wife read aloud when he could. When she read poetry, it was music, indeed. It seems he first realized what he felt for her when she read the "Blessed Damosel" in his class at college. He had been her instructor, as he had Miss Ball's.

"This ode of Timrod's was sung for the first time on the occasion of decorating the graves of the Confederate dead at Magnolia Cemetery, here in Charleston, in sixty-seven, so I am told."

No wonder Professor Edwin wanted his Molly to read the poem! Her voice was the most wonderfully sympathetic and singularly fitted to the reading of poetry that I have ever heard. I longed for my father to hear her read. He could make me weep over poetry when I would go dry-eyed through all kinds of trouble, and now Mrs. Green had the same power: [152]

"'Sleep sweetly in your humble graves,
Sleep, martyrs of a fallen cause;
Though yet no marble column craves
The pilgrim here to pause.

"'In seeds of laurel in the earth
The blossom of your fame is blown,
And somewhere, waiting for its birth,
The shaft is in the stone!

"'Meanwhile, behalf the tardy years
Which keep in trust your storied tombs,
Behold! your sisters bring their tears,
And these memorial blooms.

"'Small tributes! but your shades will smile
More proudly on these wreaths today,
Than when some cannon-moulded pile
Shall overlook this bay.

"'Stoop, angels, hither from the skies!
There is no holier spot of ground
Than where defeated valor lies,
By mourning beauty crowned!'"

We were all very quiet for a moment and then St. Michael's bells rang out six-thirty o'clock, and in spite of poetical emotions we knew the pangs of hunger were due and it was time for dinner. [153]

We were to sit together at a larger table that evening at dinner, to the satisfaction of all of us.

"It is a mutual mash," declared Dee, when we went to our room to don dinner clothes. "The Greens seem to like us, and don't we just adore the Greens, though!"

"I believe I like him as much as I do her," said Dum. "Of course, he is not so paintable. She makes me uncertain whether I want to be a sculptor or a painter. I have been thinking how she would look in marble, and while she has good bones, all right, and would show up fine in marble, she would certainly lose out if she had to be pure white and could not have that lovely flush and those blue, blue eyes and that red-gold hair."

"I don't see why you talk about Mrs. Green's bones!" exclaimed Dee, rather indignantly. "I can't see that her bones are the least bit prominent."

"Well, goose, I mean her proportions. Beauty, to my mind, does not amount to a row of pins if it is only skin deep; it's got to go clean through to the bones." [154]

"Well, I don't believe it. I bet you Mrs. Green's skeleton would look just like yours or mine or Miss Plympton's or anybody else's."

"You flatter yourself."

"Well, girls," I cried, feeling that pacific intervention was in order, "there's no way to prove or disprove except by X-ray photography so long as we have Mrs. Green on this mundane sphere. I certainly would not have a row over it. Mrs. Green's bones are very pleasingly covered, to my way of thinking."

"They are beautiful bones, or their being well covered would not make any difference. Just see here"—and Dum began rapidly sketching a skull and then piling up hair on it and putting in a

nose and lips, etc.—"can't you see if the skull is out of proportion with a jimber jaw and a bulging forehead that all the pretty skin on earth with hair like gold in the sunset would not make it beautiful?"

"Well, I know one thing," put in Dee: "I know you could take a hunk of clay and start to make a [155] mouse and then change your mind and keep on piling clay on, and shaping it, and patting it, and moulding it until you had turned it into a cat. If you can do that much, I should like to know why the Almighty couldn't do the same thing. Couldn't He start with chunky bones, and then fill them out and mould the flesh, pinching in here and plumping out there until He had made a tall and slender person?"

"Dee, you make me tired—you argue like a Sunday School superintendent who is thinking about turning into a preacher. The idea of the Almighty's changing His mind to start out with! Don't you know that from the very beginning of everything the Almighty has planned our proportions, such as they are, and He would no more put a little on here and pull a little off there than He would start to make a mouse and turn it into a cat?"

"All right, if you think a beauty doctor can do more than the Almighty, then I think your theology needs looking after." [156]

"I know one thing," I said: "I know it is after seven and you will keep your father waiting for his dinner when we already kept him waiting for his luncheon. The Greens are to have dinner with us, and it is mighty rude to keep them waiting."

Tweedles hurriedly got into their dinner dresses and were only ten minutes late, after all.

"What made you girls so late?" demanded Zebedee, when we were seated around the table, encouraging our appetites with soup, which is what the domestic science lecturers say is all that soup does.

"We were having a discussion, Dum and I. Page was the Dove of Peace, or we would be going it yet."

"Tell us what the discussion was about and we will forgive you," said Professor Green.

"It was about Mrs. Green's bones," blurted out Dum.

"My bones! I thought I had them so well covered that casual observers would not be conscious of them," laughed the beautiful skeleton, who was radiant in a gray-blue crêpe de chine dress [157] that either gave the selfsame color to her eyes or borrowed it from them, one could never make out which.

"Oh, we did not mean you were skinny," and Dum explained what the trend of the argument had been, much to the amusement of the owner of the bones in question and also of her husband and Zebedee.

"Miss Dum's argument reminds me of something that Du Maurier says in that rather remarkable little book, 'Trilby,'" said Professor Green. "He says that Trilby's bones were beautiful, and even when she was in the last stages of a wasting disease, the wonderful proportion of her bones kept her beautiful."

"There now, Dee, consider yourself beaten!" and Dee acknowledged her defeat by helping Dum to the heart of the celery.

We had a merry dinner and found our new friends as interesting as they seemed to find us. We discussed everything from Shakespeare to the movies. Professor Green was not a bit pedagogic, [158] which was a great comfort. Persons who teach so often work out of hours—teach all the time. If preachers and teachers would join a union and make a compact for an eight-hour workday, what a comfort it would be to the community at large!

"Edwin, Miss Allison——"

"Please call me Page!"

"Well, then, Page—it certainly does come more trippingly on my tongue—Page is meaning to write, and she, too, is putting things down in a notebook."

"I advised that," said Mr. Tucker. "It seems to me that if from the beginning I had only started a notebook, I would have a valuable possession by now. As I get older my memory is not so good."

When Zebedee talked about getting older it always made people laugh. He sounded somehow as little boys do when they say what they are going to do when they put on long pants. I fancy he and Professor Green were about the same age, but he certainly looked younger. He must have [159] been born looking younger than ever a baby looked before, and eternal youth was his.

"I know a man in New York, newspaper man, who began systematically keeping a scrap-book when he was a youth. He indexed it and compiled it with much care, and now that he is quite an old man he actually gets his living—and a very good living at that—out of that scrap-book," declared Zebedee. "He has information at hand for almost any subject, and the kind of intimate information one would not find in an encyclopedia. He will get up an article on any subject the editors demand, and that kind of handy man commands good pay."

"It is certainly a good habit to form if you want to do certain kinds of writing, but it takes a very strong will for a writer of fiction who runs a notebook not to be coerced by that notebook. I mean in this way: make the characters do certain things or say certain things just to lead up to some anecdote that the author happens to have heard and jotted down in his notebook. Anecdotes in books should happen just as naturally as they do in life: come in because there is [160] some reason for them. The author who deliberately makes a setting for some good story that has no bearing on the subject-matter is a bore just as the chronic joke-teller is. If you can see the writer leading up to a joke, can see the notebook method too plainly, it is bad art. I'd rather have puns—they are at least spontaneous."

"Please lend me your pencil, Zebedee," I entreated.

"What are you going to do with it?"

"Write down what Professor Green has just said in my notebook. I think some day it may come in handy."

"You mean as a warning to all young authors?" questioned the professor.

"Oh, no, I think I may have my characters all sitting around a table at a hotel in Charleston and gradually work up to the point and have some one get it off."

And Mrs. Green, also an advocate of the notebook system as a memory jogger, applauded me for my sauciness to her wise husband.

CHAPTER XI [161]

THE GUITAR

"Page," whispered Dee to me, "do you know, I can't sleep tonight unless I know that the awful rope hanging to that chandelier has been taken away. I have a terrible feeling that Louis might get despondent again and go back there and try to do the same thing. I can't call the thing by name—it seems so horrible."

I knew that Dee was still laboring under quite a strain. During dinner she had been very quiet, and now that we had adjourned to the pleasant courtyard on which the dining room opened, where the gentlemen were indulging in coffee and cigars and the rest of us were contenting ourselves with just coffee, she seemed to be nervous and fidgety. Zebedee noticed it, too, and every now and then I caught him watching her with some anxiety. [162]

To catch a young man in the nick of time and keep him from making away with himself is cause for congratulation but not conducive to calmness, when one happens to be only seventeen and not overly calm at that.

"Why don't you tell your father?" I whispered back.

"He'll think I am silly, and then, too, I don't want him to think that I think Louis is likely to repeat his performance. It might give him an idea that Louis is weak and make him lose interest in him. I don't consider him weak, but he is so down in the mouth there is no telling how the thing will work out. Can't you make up some plan? Couldn't we sneak off and go down there? Would you be afraid?"

"Afraid! Me? You know I am not afraid on the street, but I must say that old custard-colored house is some gruesome."

While I was wavering as to whether I could or couldn't go into the deserted hotel at night with no one but Dee, Professor Green proposed that all of us should take a walk down on the Battery. [163]

"There is a wonderful moon rising this minute over there in the ocean and not one soul to welcome it."

So we quickly got into some wraps, as we remembered what a breeze could blow on the Battery, and Dee concealed under her coat her electric flashlight and I put my scissors in my pocket.

"We can shake the crowd and get our business attended to without anyone's being the wiser," I whispered.

A place that is ugly by day can be beautiful by moonlight, and a place that is beautiful by day can be so wonderful by moonlight that it positively hurts like certain strains of the violin in the "Humoresque" or tones of a great contralto's voice. Charleston on that night was like a dream city. We passed old St. Michael's churchyard, where the old cedar bed loomed like a soft, dark shadow among the white tombstones.

"How it shows up even at night!" said Zebedee. "It reminds me of what a friend of mine once said: that the way to make yourself heard in a noisy crowd and to attract the attention of [164] everyone is to whisper. The noisy crowd will be quiet in a moment and everybody will try to hear

what you are saying. The low-toned whisper of that old bedstead is heard above all the clamor of the snow-white, high-toned tombstones."

"Humph! Isn't our pa poetical tonight!" teased Dum.

"I should say I am! I bet you are, too, but you are too old to confess it. I glory in it."

We turned down Tradd Street to Legare, which is, I fancy, the most picturesque street in the United States. We had learned that afternoon to pronounce Legare properly. We had naturally endeavored to give it the finest French accent, but were quietly put on the right track by Claire Gaillard. "Lagree" is the way, and now we aired our knowledge to the Greens, who were pronouncing it wrong just as we had.

"Tradd Street was named for the first male child born in the Colony, so the guide-book tells me," said Mrs. Green. "If there were any females born, they did not see fit to commemorate the fact." [165]

"Perhaps the early settlers did not consider the female of the race anything to be walked on—maybe they were not the downtrodden sex that they are in the present day. A street is no good except to walk on or ride over, and surely a female's name would not be appropriate for such an object. My wife is very jealous for the rights of women, whether they be alive or dead," said Professor Green.

"They might at least name something after us besides things to eat. Sally Lunn and Lady Baltimore cake are not much of a showing, to my mind," laughed Mrs. Green.

"There's Elizabethan ruff, and de Medici collar, and Queen Anne cottage, and Alice blue," I suggested.

"Yes, and Catherine wheels, and Minnie balls, and Molly-coddles——"

"I give up! I give up! I was thinking of Charleston and the first male baby."

And so we chatted on as we turned the corner into Legare. We soon came to the beautiful Smyth gateway and then to the Simonton entrance. They vie with each other in beauty of design. [166] The shutters of all the houses on the street were tightly closed, although it was a very mild evening, but we could hear light laughter and gay talk from some of the walled gardens; and occasionally through the grilles we caught glimpses of girls in light dresses seated on garden benches among the palmettos and magnolias, their attendant swains behaving very much as attendant swains might behave in more prosaic surroundings.

"I can't think of the girls who live in these walled gardens as ever being dressed in anything but diaphanous gauze, playing perhaps with grace hoops or tossing rose leaves in the air," said the professor. "It seems like a picture world, somehow."

"Yes, but behind the picture no doubt there is a dingy canvas and even cobwebs, and maybe it is hung over an ugly old scar on the paper and has to stay there to hide the eye-sore—there might even be a stovepipe hole behind it," I said, sadly thinking of the Gaillards and how picturesque [167] they were and what sad things there were in their lives.

"Mercy, how forlorn we are!" exclaimed Zebedee. "Let's cheer up and merrily sing tra-la! Right around the corner here on King Street is the old Pringle House. They say there has been more jollity and revel in that mansion than almost anywhere in the South."

The Pringle House looked very dignified and beautiful in the mellow light that the moon cast over it. It is of very solid and simple design, with broad, hospitable door and not quite so formidable a wall as some of its neighbors; at least one can see the entrance without getting in a flying machine.

"Ike Marvel was married in that front parlor there—the room to the right, I believe it was," said Professor Green. "I wonder if he wrote his 'Reveries of a Bachelor' before or after the ceremony?"

"I'd like to get in there and poke around," I sighed.

"And so should I," chimed in Mrs. Green. "I am sure it is full of possible plots and counterplots [168] for you and me, my dear."

"Do you young ladies know where the Misses Laurens live?" questioned the professor. "We might take a view of our possible abode as 'paying guests' and see how it looks by moonlight."

And so we left the Pringle House and wended our way back to Meeting Street, where we had only that morning seen the pale, sad ladies buying ten cents' worth of shrimps and regretting that they were not as big as lobsters. We hoped when they got the paying guests they would not be quite so economical in their purchases.

The house was still and dark except for a gleam of light from an upper chamber.

"A wax candle, I'll be bound, in an old silver candlestick!" I thought.

The unpainted board gates were uncompromisingly ugly by moonlight as well as by day; but the old house with its long galleries and chaste front door was even more beautiful.

"Oh, Edwin, do you think we will really get into that house? It is to me even lovelier than the [169]

much-vaunted Pringle place. But how sad about these gates! They look so new and ugly."

"Page has a lovely story she has made up about the gates," said Dum. Dee was still quiet, with little to say on that moonlight walk. "She is sure the pale old ladies sold them for a fabulous sum to some rich Yankee. She also says she knows the younger and less pale of the old ladies used to kiss her beau through the grille of the old wrought-iron gate——"

"Beau! Why, Dum Tucker, I never used such a word in connection with an inmate of this old aristocratic mansion! I said lover. Beau, indeed! I should as soon think of saying she was chewing gum or doing something else equally plebeian."

"Hush! Listen! I hear a guitar," from Zebedee.

From the stillness of the garden behind the high brick wall where the ugly board gate flaunted its newness we could hear the faint twanging of a guitar. It sounded faint and cracked, but very sweet and true, and then a plaintive old soprano voice began to sing. We were afraid to breathe [170] or move. It had the quality of a lunar rainbow it was once my joy and privilege to behold: a reflection of a reflection, the raindrops reflecting the moon, the moon reflecting the sun. I can give no idea of that experience without repeating the song she sang. I could not remember it, and had never seen it in print, but Professor Green, who seemed to be a person who knew many things worth while knowing, told us it was a poem of Dinah Maria Mulock Craik's, called "In Our Boat." He sent me a copy of it after we got back to Richmond:

"'Stars trembling o'er us and sunset before us,
Mountains in shadow and forests asleep;
Down the dim river we float on forever,
Speak not, ah, breathe not—there's peace on the deep.

"'Come not, pale sorrow, flee till tomorrow;
Rest softly falling o'er eyelids that weep;
While down the river we float on forever,
Speak not, ah, breathe not—there's peace on the deep.

"'As the waves cover the depths we glide over,
So let the past in forgetfulness sleep,
While down the river we float on forever,
Speak not, ah, breathe not—there's peace on the deep. [171]

"'Heaven shine above us, bless all that love us;
All whom we love in thy tenderness keep!
While down the river we float on forever,
Speak not, ah, breathe not—there's peace on the deep.'"

Nobody said a word. We softly crept down the street.

"Now you understand how we happened to listen when Claire and her father were talking," I whispered to Zebedee. "It seemed no more real than this old lady's song did."

Zebedee wiped his eyes. Of course the song and its setting had made all the Tuckers weep. Molly Brown was not dry-eyed, and one might have spied a lunar rainbow in my eyes, too.

CHAPTER XII [172]

MORAL COURAGE

The Battery was wonderful, wonderful, and out of all whooping. The moon was high up over the water, having made her début sooner than Professor Green had calculated. The tide was coming in, or rather rolling in, and every wave seemed to rise up to catch a little kiss from the moon. The palmettos were, as is their way, rustling and waving their leaves like ladies of olden times in swishing silks using their fans as practiced flirts. The live-oaks did very well as cavaliers bending gallantly to catch the tender nothings of the coquettes. The Spanish moss on one particularly twisted oak hung like a great beard from the chin of some ancient, and as the slender palmetto swayed in the breeze and waved her tresses provokingly near, the gray beard mingled with them for a moment.

"The old rip!" exclaimed Zebedee to me. [173]

"Why, I was just thinking that! It does look just like an old man."

Mr. Tucker and I, as no doubt I have remarked before, often came out with exactly the same thought almost as though we were able to read each other's minds.

"Of course she should not have led him on if she did not want to be kissed. She certainly came very near chucking him under the chin. A girl can't expect a man to withstand temptation forever. Just because a man is looked upon as a gray-bearded loon is no sign he feels like one."

The others had gone on ahead and were standing under the monument of Sergeant Jasper, who was still patiently pointing to Fort Moultrie.

"Do you think it is a girl's fault always if a man kisses her?"

"Well, no, not exactly. I certainly don't think it is a girl's fault for being kissable—but it seems to me her instinct might tell her when she is getting too kissable and she might—wear a veil—or do something to protect the poor man a little." [174]

"Why should he not put on smoked glasses or look the other way? I can't see that it is up to the poor palmetto."

"Perhaps you are right," he said, more soberly, it seemed to me, than the conversation warranted. "I am going to Columbia tomorrow," rather sullenly.

"Are you, really? Tweedles and I are going to miss you terribly. We do wish you didn't have to go."

"'We'! Can't you ever say I? Do you have to lump yourself with Dum and Dee about everything?"

What a funny, cross Zebedee this was! I looked at him in amazement. He was quite wild-eyed, with a look on his face that was new to me. If I had not known that he was a teetotaler, or almost one, I might have thought he had been drinking. I must have presented a startled appearance, for in a moment he pulled himself together.

"Excuse me, Page! I think the moon must have gone to my head. The full moon makes me act [175] queer sometimes, anyhow. You have heard of persons like that, haven't you? That's where lunatic got its name—Luna, the moon, you know," he rattled on at a most astonishing pace. "How old do you reckon Mrs. Green is? She looks very young. Do you think Professor Green is as old as I am?"

"Older, I should think; but then he is so—so—high-foreheaded it makes him look older."

"He was her teacher at college, so they tell me. She must have been quite young when he first knew her."

"Yes, she was only sixteen when she entered Wellington, I believe."

"They seem very happy," with a deep sigh that made me feel so sorry for him.

"He must be thinking of his little Virginia," I thought. She had lived only a year after her marriage and had been only nineteen when she died—he only a year or so older. "I suspect the moonlight reminds him of her. I know he did not mean to pick me up so sharply, and I am just not going to notice it." [176]

Dee, who was biding her time hoping to get the crowd settled somewhere so we could slip off to the custard-colored hotel, now called to us to see the bust of William Gilmore Simms, and to tell her father about the nice, aristocratic old policeman who had so enthralled us by reciting the "Grape-Vine Swing" that morning.

Finally, with much maneuvering on her part, everyone was seated on some benches looking out over the water, with a clump of palmettos protecting them from the wind and at the same time hiding the road to the old house on the corner. Professor Green and Zebedee had entered into an amicable discussion of the political situation, and Mrs. Green was in the midst of an anecdote about her friend and sister-in-law, Judy Kean, now Mrs. Kent Brown, an anecdote told especially for Dum's benefit, since it was of art and artists.

"Now's the time! Hurry!" whispered Dee.

In a moment we had slipped away and were sprinting along the walk to the custard-colored house. It was not much of a run, about two city blocks, I fancy, and we did it in an incredibly [177] short time.

The old house looked very peaceful and still from without, but as we entered the door we found that, as was its habit, a wind was imprisoned in its walls and was whistling dolorously. The moonlight flooded the hall and stairs, making it quite light. Dee clutched my hand, and we went up those steps very quietly and quickly, through the bridal chamber and on into the corridor beyond, on which the numbered doors opened.

No. 13 was open! We paused for a moment as we approached it. Hark! Certainly there was someone in the room. It seemed to me as though I weighed a million pounds and had only the strength of a kitten. Fascinated, we crept closer, although I do not see how the kitten in me lifted the great weight I felt myself to have. There was a dim light in the room from a small kerosene lantern. Louis Gaillard was there, standing tiptoe upon the pile of bricks. Was he trying to fit that awful noose around his neck again? I felt like screaming as Dee had in the morning, but no sound [178] would come from my dry throat.

Louis' face, that could be seen in the light of the lantern, did not look like the face of one who meant to make away with himself. There was purpose in it, but it was the purpose of high resolve. Grasping the rope as high up as he could with one hand, with the other he gave it a sharp cut with a knife. Dee and I leaned against each other for support. The rope was down, and now the thing for us to do was get out of that building as fast as we could. Louis must never know we had

been there. We blessed the wind, which made such a noise rattling the shutters and streamers of hanging wall paper that the boy remained absolutely unconscious of our presence. He had begun to destroy the pile of bricks as we crept away, taking them carefully back to the hearth where he had found them.

We sailed down the steps of that old hotel as hungry boarders might have done in days gone by "when they heard the dinner bell." We were out on the sea-wall and racing back to our friends [179] before Louis had finished with the bricks, I am sure.

"Page," panted Dee, "don't you think Louis had lots of moral courage to go back there where he had so nearly come to grief and take down that rope and unpile those bricks?"

"Courage! I should say he had! I was nearly scared to death when I saw him there, weren't you?"

"I have never gone through such a moment in my life. It was worse than this morning, because this morning I did not know what to expect, while tonight I almost knew what was coming—the worst. When I saw the lantern and realized Louis was there, I could almost see him with the noose around his neck!"

Dee shivered and drew her coat more closely around her. Her face looked pale and pinched in the moonlight, while I was all in a glow from our race along the sea-wall.

"Dee, I believe you are all in."

"Oh, I'm all right—just a bit cold." [180]

"All right, much! You are having a chill this very minute—you are, Dee—a nervous chill, and no wonder!"

We had been gone such a short time that no one seemed to have missed us. Professor Green was still on the subject of initiative and referendum, and Mrs. Green had just finished a thrilling tale of art students' life in Paris when we sank on the bench beside them. Dee was shaking like an aspen, although she still insisted there was nothing the matter.

"Zebedee, Dee must go home immediately. She is sick, I believe."

"Dee sick?" and he sprang to his feet. "What's the matter with you, honey? Where do you feel sick? What hurts you?"

"Nothing! Oh, nothing!" and poor Dee's overwrought nerves snapped and she went off into as nice a fit of hysterics as one could find outside of a big boarding-school for girls.

"Dee, Dee, please tell me what is the matter!" begged her frantic father.

"She can't talk, but I can! She must go home and be put to bed. She has had too much [181] excitement for one day."

"Where have you and she just been?" rather sternly, while Dee sobbed on with occasional giggles, Mrs. Brown and Dum taking turns patting her.

"We have been back to the custard-colored house," I faltered.

"Oh, you little geese! What did you want there, please?"

"Dee could not sleep until she knew the rope was cut from the chandelier. We went back to cut it down."

"Oh, I see. Did you cut it down?"

"No; Louis was there cutting it down when we got there. We didn't let him see us. But at first when we saw him we thought—we thought—maybe—he—he——" I could go no further. I could not voice our apprehensions before the Greens, who knew nothing of our experience of the morning.

"You poor babies! Why didn't you ask me to attend to it?" [182]

"I wanted to, but Dee said you might think it was silly of us; and then she did not want you to think that maybe Louis was not trustworthy. She felt he needed all the friends he had—not to lose any."

"Loyal old Dee! Now, honey baby, you put your arm around me and I'll put my arm around you, and we will get over to the King Street car and be back to the hotel in a jiffy. The rest of you can walk, if you want to."

None of us wanted to, as we felt some uneasiness about Dee, although she had calmed down to an occasional sob that might pass for a hiccough. We piled on the trolley and were back at the hotel in short order.

The good breeding of the Greens was very marked during this little mix-up. Never once by word or look did they show the slightest curiosity as to what we were talking about. They were kind and courteous and anxious to help Dee have her chill and get over the hysterics, but that was all.

"Hadn't I better get a doctor for Dee?" poor Zebedee inquired, almost distracted, as he always was when one of his girls had anything the matter. [183]

"I really do not think so," said Mrs. Green. "If you will let me take Dee in charge, I am sure I can pull her through. Doctor McLean, at Wellington, complains that I have lessened his practice by taking charge of so many cases where a doctor is not really needed."

"You had better trust her, Tucker; she has healing in her wings." (Professor Green and Zebedee had sealed their rapidly growing friendship by calling each other Green and Tucker.) Tweedles always said that no one ever called their father Mr. Tucker longer than twenty-four hours unless he got to acting Mr. Tuckerish.

So Mrs. Green came to our room and had Dee in bed after a good hot bath and a dose of aromatic spirits of ammonia. She brought her own hot-water bag and put it to her feet, and then, tucking her in, gave her a motherly kiss. As she was certainly not very much older than we were, I might have said big-sisterly, but there is a difference, and that kiss was motherly. I know it was [184] because I got one, too, and it seemed to me to be the female gender of the kind father gives to me, only on rare occasions, however, as we are not a very kissy family.

"Now, dear, you must go to sleep and not dream even pleasant dreams. Don't dream at all."

And our kind friend prepared to leave us.

"Well, I feel fine now—but—but—I can't go to sleep until I tell you all about Louis and what happened today."

"But, my dear, you need not tell me. I think you must be quiet now. You see, I told your father I would be the doctor, and I must not let you do things to excite you. Talking about a trying experience would be the worst thing in the world for you."

"But I have been thinking it all over and I feel that you and Professor Green would be the ones of all others to take an interest in Louis and advise what to do about him."

"All right—in the morning!" [185]

"No! Tonight. I want you to talk it over with your husband tonight."

"If you feel that way about it, just shut your eyes and go to sleep; Dum and I will do the telling without your assistance," I said; and Dee, who was in the last stages of exhaustion, gave in and was asleep almost before we got the light off.

Dum and I followed Mrs. Green to her room, where we told her the whole frightful business. She was all interest and solicitude.

"The poor boy! I just know Edwin will think of something to do for him. Although Edwin has taught girls always, he does understand boys thoroughly. If we can get board with the Laurens ladies we will be quite near Louis and his sister, and as we get to know them we can find out how to help the boy without hurting his pride. I think all of you girls have shown the 'mettle of the pasture' in the way you have grappled with this very trying occasion."

"'Twas Dee! She thought of asking Louis to lunch and everything. Dee has so much heart, I [186] wonder she is not lop-sided," said Dum, who was as upset as Zebedee over Dee's going to pieces. "You see, Dee and I have lots of fusses, but it is almost always my fault, because I am so mean. Dee is the most wonderfullest person in the world."

Mrs. Green smiled and hugged the enthusiastic Dum.

"Yes, I know what a sister can be. My sister, Mildred, is not my twin in reality, but the Siamese twins cannot be closer than we are in spirit. I hardly ever see her now, either, as she lives in the northwest and I am at Wellington all winter and in Kentucky in the summer. Fortunately, love can work by wireless at any distance, so absence does not affect our affection for each other."

We told our lovely lady good night, and then it was she gave us the selfsame kind of kiss she had given Dee.

"Doesn't it seem ridiculous that we have known her only since this afternoon? I feel as though I had known her all my life. If I go to New York to study at the League, she is going to have me [187] meet her sister-in-law, Mrs. Kent Brown. She is the one Miss Ball told us about who got in such funny scrapes at college—you remember, Judy Kean, who dyed her hair black?"

Dum and I were in the elevator, on our way downstairs to hunt up Zebedee to tell him how Dee was faring. We found him in the lobby, still talking to Professor Green. He was greatly relieved that Dee was herself again, and I assured him that by morning she would be better than herself.

"I have been telling Green all about that poor Louis Gaillard," he confessed. "I did not feel it to be a breach of confidence, after the way Dee had flopped, letting the cat out of the bag half-way, anyhow; besides, I want him to talk the matter over with his wife. I feel that perhaps they will know how to help the boy."

"Molly will, I feel sure. She always sees some way to help."

Dum and I burst out laughing at Professor Green's words. [188]

"That is just what she said about you," I laughed. "Dee wanted us to tell her all about Louis so she could talk it over with you, thinking there might be something you could suggest about helping him, and she said: 'Edwin will think of something to do for him. He understands boys thoroughly, if he does teach girls.'"

And so ended our first day in Charleston. What a day it had been! Rain and sunshine, wind and moonlight, poetry and prose, fiction and fact! A young life saved, and friendship born! Dee going off in hysterics, and Dum and I so tired at last that we could hardly crawl back into the elevator to be borne to our room!

We found Dee sleeping like a baby, and in five minutes we were sleeping like two more babies. I wonder if Louis Gaillard slept.

CHAPTER XIII

[189]

ENGAGING BOARD

Whether Louis slept or not on that night after his near-extinction, he was with us early the next morning to bring the glad news that the Misses Laurens would consent to receive us in their home. The Greens were as delighted as we were. Zebedee was to take the first available train to Columbia, and as Professor Green had some important mail to get off, arrangements were left to the females. We were to call on the Misses Laurens at eleven o'clock, accompanied by Claire Gaillard.

"Just to think that we are actually going to live in that old house!" exclaimed Mrs. Green, who was quite as enthusiastic over anything that pleased her as any of us girls. "Do you think we can ever know the one who sang, well enough to ask her to sing to us?"

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"I doubt it!" from Dum. "If they are as top-loftical in their home as they were in the bus the other morning, I doubt their even speaking to us. But I want to see their furniture and portraits whether they speak to us or not. I bet that house is just running over with beautiful things."

Claire, whom we picked up at her home on the way to the Misses Laurens', endeavored to prepare us for the stilted dignity of our prospective hostesses. We had seen them in the bus and knew how they could conduct themselves; but we had also seen them haggling for shrimps, so we knew they had their weaknesses; and we had heard one of them sing, and knew that she at least had a heart.

In answer to the bell, which, by the way, was the old-fashioned pulling kind that made a faint jangle 'way off in the most remote end of the house, a gawky, extremely black girl opened the door that led from the street to a great long porch or gallery. Steps from this porch led to a tangled old garden with palmettos and magnolias shading the walks, sadly neglected and grass-grown, that wound around flower beds long since given over to their own sweet will. A fat stone Cupid, heavily draped in cumbersome stone folds, was in the act of shooting an iron arrow at a snub-nosed Psyche some ten feet from him. There was a sun-dial in the center of the garden, and every now and then one spied an old stone bench, crumbling and moss-grown, through the tangle of vines and shrubs.

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"Oh!" came from all of us with one accord. It was very lovely and very pathetic, this old garden, so beautiful and so neglected and gone to seed!

"Louis is wild to restore it," whispered Claire. "You know, he can do the most wonderful things with a garden."

We did know, having peeped into their garden so rudely the day before, but we kept very quiet about that.

The gawky black girl plunged ahead of us and ushered us into the house door. This door was smaller than the one on the street, but followed the same chaste style of architecture. The hall was astonishingly narrow, but the room we were told to "Jes' go in an' res' yo'se'fs in yander!" we found to be of fine proportions, a lofty, spacious room.

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The fiddle-backed chairs and the spindle-legged tables and claw-footed sofas in that room would have driven a collector green with envy. Curtains hung at the windows that were fit for bridal veils, so fine they were and so undoubtedly real. The portraits that lined the walls were so numerous and so at home that somehow I felt it an impertinence that I, a mere would-be boarder, should look at them. They belonged and I didn't, and if by good luck I could obtain an introduction to them, then I might make so bold as to raise my eyes to them, but not before.

There was a dim, religious light in the room, and the portraits, many of them needing varnishing and cleaning, had almost retired into their backgrounds. They peered out at us in some indignation, those great soldiers and statesmen, those belles and beauties. I don't know why it is that ancestors always attained eminence and were great whatever they tried to do, while descendants have to struggle along in mediocrity, no matter how hard they try.

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The Misses Laurens glided into the room, and Claire introduced us. I don't know how the girl

had accounted for her acquaintance with us. Perhaps she had not been compelled to account at all. We were received with courtesy but with a strange aloofness that made me feel as though I had just had the pleasure of being presented to one of the portraits, not real flesh and blood. Arabella and Judith were their names. To our astonishment the elder, Miss Arabella, turned out to be the sentimental one with the voice, while Miss Judith, the younger, was the sterner of the two and evidently the prime mover in this business of taking "paying guests." Usually it is the younger sister who goes off to romance and the elder who is more practical; at least, it is that way in fiction.

"We have come to you, hoping you will take us to"—Mrs. Green, who was spokesman for us, faltered; could she say "board" to those two? Never!—"will let us come to stay with you." That was better. [194]

"We shall be very pleased to offer you the hospitality of our home during your stay in Charleston," from Miss Judith.

"Yes, we Charlestonians are always sorry when guests to our city have to accept entertainment at a hostelry," fluttered Miss Arabella. "For a long time the better element of our community was greatly opposed to the establishment of such places. We argued that when visitors came to Charleston, if they were distinguished and worthy they should be entertained in private homes; and if they were not distinguished and not worthy, we did not care for them to sojourn here under any circumstances."

"We are a party of six," continued Mrs. Green, doing her best to be businesslike in the interview. "My husband and I, these three young ladies, and Mr. Tucker, the father of these two," indicating Tweedles, who were breathing heavily, a sure sign of laughter that must come sooner or later. "Mr. Tucker is now in Columbia," she went on to explain, "but will shortly return." [195]

"We shall be pleased to see him whenever his affairs permit him to leave the capital of our State."

"You will have room, then, for all of us?"

"Certainly; we have entertained as many as twenty guests quite often. Not recently; but we still can accommodate that number without inconvenience or crowding."

Miss Judith was spokesman now, while Miss Arabella glided from the room. In a moment the ungainly girl who had opened the door came in, evidently in response to a signal from the mistress, bearing a silver tray with a Bohemian glass decanter and beautiful glasses with slender stems and a plate of wafers that were so thin and delicate one could easily have eaten a barrel of them without feeling stuffed.

"That will do, Dilsey," said Miss Judith, evidently knowing better than to trust the handmaiden, who certainly had the appearance of what Mammy Susan called "a corn fiel' nigger," with the rare old Bohemian glass. Miss Judith served us herself to apricot cordial, the most delicious thing I ever tasted. "We brewed it ourselves from a recipe that has been in our family for centuries," she said, with the simplicity that one might use in saying "like the pies mother used to make." [196]

Still there was no talk of terms or question of our viewing our rooms. Such things are not discussed with guests. The guests are simply given the best the house affords, and of course are too well-bred to do anything but be pleased.

"When may we come?" ventured Dum.

"At any time that suits your convenience."

"After luncheon today, then, will be a good time," suggested Mrs. Green, and I thought the two ladies breathed a small sigh of relief. Maybe they thought the Philistines were already upon them and come to stay.

"We three girls can sleep in one room!" I exclaimed, not having opened my mouth before except to take in the cordial and wafers. My voice sounded strange and harsh to me, somehow. [197]

"We are under no necessity for crowding," quietly from Miss Judith, who looked at me, I thought, in disapproval. What business was it of guests to dictate to the hostess what their sleeping arrangements should be? I subsided.

"You will have your boxes sent when it suits you. I am sorry we have no one to send for them." A boarding-house keeper to send for your luggage! What next?

There seemed no reason to linger longer since the ladies made no move to show us the rooms we were to occupy, and we all of us felt that to mention money would be too brutal. Mrs. Green rose to take leave, and all of us followed suit.

"We will return at about four, if that is convenient."

"We shall be pleased to see you at any time."

We bowed, the ladies bowed, and the portraits seemed to incline their painted heads a bit.

Dilsey was standing in readiness to show us out of the street door, and the sight of her grinning human countenance did me good. She at least was alive. [198]

Once on the street, we looked at one another knowingly, but the presence of Claire barred us from saying anything. We walked the block to her house, talking of the pleasure it would be to be so near her, and expressing to her our appreciation of the trouble she had taken to place us with her friends.

"Oh, we are too delighted to have you near," she declared. "Louis and I can talk of nothing else. Of course we are hoping to see a great deal of you."

We wondered if the pompous old father seconded this, and how the young Gaillards would get by with us. We were not, according to his ideas, desirable acquaintances. At least we fancied we would not be. Surely, however, Mrs. Green could pass muster anywhere.

"Louis wants to take you to see the old oak in Magnolia Cemetery just as soon as you feel like going."

"Oh, we couldn't go to a cemetery without Zebedee," declared Dee. "He loves them so!"

"Well, how about the Magnolia Gardens this afternoon? He is eager to be your guide there as well." [199]

"Is that where the azaleas are so beautiful?" asked Dum.

"Yes, and they are just right to see now. I hear they were never more beautiful than now."

"See them without Zebedee? Never!" Dee still objected. "He adores flowers as much as he does old tombstones."

"Well, then, Sullivan's Island, where Poe's 'Gold Bug' was written?" laughed Claire.

"Go somewhere that is interesting on account of Edgar Allan Poe without Zebedee! We could never be so heartless. Why, he knows Poe by heart."

"Well, Dee, I don't see any place we could go without Zebedee, according to you, unless it is back at school or to a dry goods shop."

"Well, Virginia Tucker, we could go see some pictures or something close by that he can run in on any time."

"Certainly you could! There's the wonderful collection of paintings at the City Hall," suggested Claire courteously, wondering a little, no doubt, at Dee's persistency in waiting for her father for all sight-seeing, and at her evident impatience with Dum. When the twins called each other Virginia and Caroline, it was, as a rule, something quite serious. So we settled on the City Hall as entertainment for the afternoon before our installment in our new quarters. [200]

"Dum, I didn't mean to be grouchy," said the repentant Dee, as soon as we got out of sight of Claire. "I was trying to head off a trip where carfare would be necessary. You know Louis never has any money of his own, and he would be wanting to pay for all of us, and I know would be cut to the quick if we didn't let him. You see, Zebedee is so bumptious he just naturally steps up and pays the fare before anybody else has time even to dig down in their jeans."

"My husband might have held his own with Louis," suggested Mrs. Green.

"Yes, I know; I thought of that, but then I did not know whether he would go or not. I think your husband is just lovely. I didn't mean he'd be the kind to hang back." Dee spoke so ingenuously and sincerely that the young wife had to forgive any fancied slight to her Edwin. [201]

It turned out, however, that Professor Green was still writing letters, and had decided to spend the afternoon finishing them up, so he would not have been able to hold his own digging in his jeans. It was like Dee to think of that matter of carfare. She had so much sympathy for the poor and miserable of creation that she seemed to be able to put herself in their places as it were. I fancy there is no more miserable person on earth than a youth who aspires to be squire of dames and has no money to pay the fare.

Professor Green was writing in the palmetto-shaded court of the hotel, and had seen us from there as we came up the street. He begged us to join him and tell him what success we had met with the Misses Laurens.

"Oh, Edwin, it was lovely! You never saw such a beautiful old house and furniture. The garden is a dream, has a sun-dial and stone benches and statues!" [202]

"The portraits are splendid, and there was a Wedgewood pitcher on the mantelpiece that I wouldn't trust Zebedee alone with if I were those ladies," exclaimed Dum.

"They had a lovely cat, too; so clean and soft, and he came to me in the friendliest way," from Dee.

"They gave us apricot cordial in Bohemian glass tumblers, and wafers you could see through," I put in.

"Well, all this sounds fine. How about the bedrooms? Were they attractive, too?"

"Bedrooms! We didn't see them."

"Oh, then you expect to sleep on the stone benches, perhaps."

"I wanted to ask to see them, but the ladies were so funny and stiff and seemed to want us to pretend to be guests, so that naturally we just pretended."

"I see. You came to terms with them, however, of course."

"Terms! You mean money terms? Why, Edwin, we could no more mention money in their [203] presence than we could rope in a house where the father has been hanged."

Professor Green went off into a fit of laughter that made me think that after all maybe he was younger than Zebedee. He kissed his wife twice right before us and in plain view of the passersby on Meeting Street, but he couldn't help it. She was so adorably girlish in her reasons for engaging board from Charleston aristocrats without even seeing the bedrooms, and with absolutely no idea of what remuneration those unbending dames would expect.

"I did say that Tweedles and I could sleep three in a room, and I wish you could have seen the way they jumped at me. It was Miss Judith. 'We are under no necessity for crowding,'" I mimicked her. "I did not like to insist, but of course I meant it might make our board a little cheaper. If you had been there, you would have knuckled under just like the rest of us."

"Do you think it would be wise to go without knowing? I don't want to seem mercenary with all of you high-minded ladies, but I do think there would be a certain satisfaction in knowing just [204] what one was paying for sun-dials and wafers that can be seen through."

"Well, then, you can do the asking! I can't. Was there ever a moment when we could broach the subject, girls?"

"Never!" we chorused loyally.

"We will just go 'buying a pig in a poke,' as it were, and maybe after a night on the garden bench I can muster up courage to ask them what I owe them for the privilege," teased the professor.

"I don't like betting on a certainty, but I don't believe you will be able to do it, and am willing to wager almost anything that you can't get yourself to the point any more than we could. You might ask Miss Arabella, but if you tackle Miss Judith and she looks at you as she did at me when I suggested three in a room, I bet you father's copy of Timrod's poetry that you change the subject."

"Done! I bet you the volume of J. Gordon Coogler's 'Purely Original Verse' that I am living at [205] the Maison Laurens on a purely business basis within the next seven hours. I am going to settle it before tonight."

"Will it be Miss Judith?" I asked, fearing Miss Arabella might be the cause of my losing the Timrod poetry, which I was anxious to write father I had found for him at the second-hand book store.

"Miss Judith and no other! I should feel very sneaky if I got my information through the easier channel of Miss Arabella. Miss Judith, and by seven o'clock."

"I hope we will know before Zebedee comes back," said Dee. "We shall never hear the last of it if he finds us boarding for untold sums."

"I shall feel myself a failure as a chaperone surely," remarked Mrs. Green.

"We think you a tremendous success," tweedled the twins.

CHAPTER XIV [206]

THE CLERK OF THE COUNCIL

We had a wonderful time at the City Hall that afternoon with Louis. It was quite near our hotel, so Dee's agony over Louis' feelings about carfare was assuaged.

My idea of a City Hall had always been that it was a very ugly and stiff place where City Fathers wrangled about sewerage and garbage collections, and whether they should or should not open up such and such a street or close such and such an alley,—a place where taxes were paid or evaded, and where one kicked about the size of the gas bill.

The Charleston City Hall was quite different. There may have been places where discontented persons contended about gas and taxes, but we did not see them. We were told that Charleston had but recently gone through what was a real riot on the subject of the election of the Mayor, [207] but there was a dignity and peace breathing from the very stones of that old edifice that made us doubt the possibility of dissension having been within its walls.

City Fathers could not have mentioned such a thing as sewerage and garbage in the presence of those wonderful and august portraits and busts. As for opening streets that never had been opened before! Why do it? And alleys that had always been closed! Let well enough alone.

Louis Gaillard was quite a friend of the Clerk of the Council, a very scholarly and interesting young man with a French name, who was kindness itself in showing us the treasures of the City Hall. He knew and loved every one of them, and Cornelia, the mother of the Gracchi, could not have been more eloquent in praise of her jewels. He might well be proud of them, as I doubt there being a more complete collection of things of civic and historical interest in any City Hall in all the world, certainly not in America.

In the Mayor's office there hung a peculiarly interesting fragment of a painting by Sir Godfrey Kneller. It was Queen Anne's hand resting on a crown. The rest of the picture had been cut away by some vandal after the wonderful painting had gone through various vicissitudes during the Revolutionary War. Queen Anne was always a dead, dull person to my mind, and the only thing that ever interested me about her was the fact that she did have a crown, and perhaps if the picture was to be destroyed the crown was about the most interesting part to preserve. [208]

I don't want to sound like a guide-book, and I am afraid I might if I tell of all the treasures in that Council Chamber. I must mention Trumbull's portrait of Washington, however. It is very wonderful. The great general stands in Continental uniform by his white charger, every inch a soldier.

"It does not look exactly like the Gilbert Stuart portraits," said Dum.

"No," explained the young man ingenuously, "Stuart painted Washington after he had false teeth, and that changed his appearance a great deal. This picture is valued at $100,000, but of course no money could induce the City of Charleston to part with it." [209]

Then there was Healy's portrait of John C. Calhoun, a wonderful painting. Dum and Mrs. Green thought that from an artistic standpoint it was of more value than the Trumbull portrait of Washington. I am frankly ignorant of what is best in pictures, but I am trying to learn. I certainly liked the Healy portrait very much, though. The hands were wonderful, and Dum said that was a true test of painting; that if an artist was not a top-notcher he could not draw hands, and usually made the model sit on them or put them in his pocket, or if it happened to be a woman, covered them up with drapery. The Clerk of the Council seemed very much amused by Dum's remarks and delighted with her interest, and we noticed he addressed most of his explanations to her while we trailed along in their wake.

There was a portrait of Francis Marion which rather amused us, as he is dressed in uniform with a brigadier general's hat. Now we all knew that Marion never wore anything more tony than a coon skin cap, and he looked as funny as Daniel Boone would painted in a Tuxedo with an opera hat. [210]

Portraits of President Monroe, Andrew Jackson, Zachary Taylor, General Moultrie, Beauregard, Wade Hampton, and five mayors who held the civic reins of Charleston in troublous times adorn the walls. There were many other Charlestonians of note whom their city had delighted to honor, but I am afraid of getting too guide-booky if I dwell on them.

The cablegram Queen Victoria sent at the time of the earthquake, expressing her sympathy for the sufferers has been carefully preserved. It is the original autograph copy, which, together with the letters from Mayor Courtney, Secretary of State Bayard, and E. J. Phelps, United States Minister to the Court of St. James, which were written in regard to obtaining the original message, are embodied in a book and handsomely bound. The message reads: [211]

> "To the President of the United States: I desire to express profound sympathy with the sufferers by the late earthquake, and await with anxiety further intelligence which, I hope, may show the effects to have been less disastrous than expected.
>
> (Signed) "VICTORIA, REGINA."

We took leave of the very agreeable Clerk of the Council regretfully. He had been so pleasant, and was so interesting that we hoped we might see him again.

"It seems a sin," sighed Dum, "to meet such a nice man as that and never to see him again."

"I always feel that I am going to meet persons like again," said Mrs. Green; "if not here, in the hereafter. Kindred souls must manage to get together or 'What's a heaven for?'"

"That's the way I like to think of heaven, a place where you find the persons you naturally like, not a place where you just naturally like all the persons you meet. I don't see why just because you are good enough to go to heaven you should lose all your discrimination. I could go to heaven a million years and not like Mabel Binks. Cat!" and Dum scowled. [212]

"Who is Mabel Binks?" laughed Mrs. Green.

"Oh, she's a person Dee and I can't abide. Page hates her, too, only she won't say so. She was at Gresham with us the first year we were there, and she started in making a dead set at Zebedee and has kept it up ever since."

"Is she pretty?"

"Oh, she's handsome enough in a kind of oochy-koochy style, but she is too florid to suit me. There's a letter from her to Zebedee now. She's always writing to him and trying to get him into

something or other."

"How do you know it's from her?" I asked.

I was not very joyful myself when our one-time schoolmate made too free with Mr. Tucker. I didn't really and truly think he cared a snap for her, but I well knew how persistent effort on the part of a designing female could eventually work wonders on the male heart.

"How do I know? I'd like to know who but Mabel Binks writes on burnt orange paper, with brown ink, with an envelope big enough to hold all the documents in the City Hall, and that smelling like a demonstration counter of cheap perfumes. I'd hate to think Zebedee could put up with two female admirers as gaudy as she is." [213]

Dum always stormed like that when Mabel Binks was in question, or any woman under fifty who happened to like her father. Dee was walking with Louis or she, too, would have joined in the tirade against their *bête noir*.

"I shouldn't think you would feel the slightest uneasiness about your father. I am sure you can trust his good taste if he should ever marry," and Mrs. Green drew Dum to her.

I didn't know about that. I thought it was quite possible for the wrong person to hoodwink Zebedee into not knowing his taste from hers. I had been brought up by Mammy Susan, who was somewhat of a cynic in her way, and she used to say:

"Th' ain't no countin' on what kin' er wife a widderman is goin' ter pick out. One thing you may be sho' of, a man nebber picks out two alike. If the fus' one was tall an' thin the nex' one is sho' ter be sho't an' fat. I tell yer, men is pow'ful weak an' women is mighty 'suadin'." [214]

That phrase that Mammy Susan was so fond of, "Men is weak an' women is 'suadin'," made me tremble sometimes for what the father of the twins might do. He had talked to me about marrying again, and had given me to understand many times that Mabel Binks was not his style, but sometimes I used to think that maybe "he doth protest too much."

We were missing Zebedee greatly, and were very glad when we got back to the hotel to learn from a long distance message that he would be with us the next morning.

CHAPTER XV [215]

WHO WON THE BET?

We arrived at the Misses Laurens, bag and baggage, at the appointed hour. Those ladies greeted us with studied courtesy, but it was evident from their manner that they looked upon us as Yankee invaders. The fact that Tweedles and I were from Virginia and Mrs. Green from Kentucky, all of us with as good Confederate records as one could wish, had no weight with them. We were all clumped as Northerners in their minds. But we were guests under their ancestral roof and must be treated with punctilious politeness.

Tweedles and I were shown into two large adjoining rooms, the Greens across the hall from us, with a room beyond theirs for Mr. Tucker. The beds were great four-posters that looked as though there should be little stepladders furnished to climb into them, like those the porter brings you to scramble into an upper berth. [216]

"Just 'spose you should fall out of bed! 'Twould be sure death," declared Dee.

"Look at this mahogany candle-stand! Did you ever in all your life see anything quite so lovely? And look, only look at this silver candlestick! It looks like it had been looted from some old Spanish church," and Dum reverently picked up the heavy old silver to examine the quaint design beaten around its base.

"But this wardrobe! I'm sure there's a skeleton in it hiding behind rustling old silks. It is big enough to go to housekeeping in. I wonder if Miss Arabella and Miss Judith ever played in it when they were children."

"Old Page, always romancing."

"Well, if anyone is ever going to romance she would do it here. It smells like romance even. I know there are jars of dried rose leaves in every room. I am sure there is lavender in the sheets and I am positive there is a ghost around somewhere."

"Can you smell it, too? How does a ghost smell? Not like a rat, I hope," teased Dee. [217]

"How are we going to sleep? If there is a ghost flaunting his fragrance around, I hope I shall not draw the lonesome singleton," said Dum.

"I'll take the room by myself," I said magnanimously, the truth of the matter being that while I approved of our custom of drawing straws or tossing up for everything, I was afraid that Dee might draw the lonesome singleton, and I did not think that after the experience she had so recently been through she should be put off by herself. I did not want to say anything about my

reasons, but decided that I would simply install myself in the far room.

"Are you aware of the fact, girls, that there is no gas in these rooms? These candlesticks are not meant for ornaments, but to light us to our couches. Shades of Bracken! I wonder if there is any plumbing!" Like most persons born and brought up without plumbing, I thought more of it than daily bread. I had my own great English bathtub at Bracken, but plumbingless houses were not always equipped with individual tubs. [218]

"I thought of asking Miss Arabella where the bathroom was, but somehow it was as difficult as asking her how much she charged for board, and I could not muster courage," laughed Dee.

"Where does that door go? If it is not locked, we might explore a little."

It yielded and proved to be the opening into an old-fashioned dressing-room that had been converted into a bathroom as an afterthought. It was big enough for four ordinary bathrooms, and had, besides the copper-lined bathtub, with plumbing that must have been the first to be installed in South Carolina, a wardrobe, bureau, washstand and several chairs. Another door opening into a narrow hall must have been meant for the other occupants of the house.

"Thank goodness for the tub, even if it is reminiscent of a preserving-kettle," I sighed. "I had visions of our making out with bird dishes, and had begun to regret that I had not taken several more baths at the hotel, where the arrangements were certainly perfect."

"It's an awful pity a body can't save up cleanliness like she can save up dirt," said Dee. [219] "Wouldn't it be nice if we could take seven baths in one day at a nice hotel and then come stay a week in a delightful old house like this, delightful in every way but tubs, and not have to wash all that time?"

"I knew a girl in Richmond who was one of these once-a-weekers, and she was going abroad for the summer and decided to get a Turkish bath before sailing. Do you know she saved up two weeks so as to get her money's worth? But we had better get unpacked and into our dinner dresses," and Dum began to pull things out of her suitcase with her unpacking manner—not calculated to improve the condition of clothes.

We found Professor and Mrs. Green walking in the garden.

"Edwin is as pleased as we were, and has forgiven us for not seeing the bedrooms, now that he finds he shall not have to sleep on a stone bench. We have a bed big enough for an old-fashioned family of fifteen to sleep in. I hope you girls are comfortably placed." [220]

"Yes, indeed, beautifully!" we exclaimed in chorus.

"Only look at this old sun-dial, Molly! '*Tempus Fugit*' carved around it! I don't believe Time has flown here for many a year. I think he has stood stock-still."

The garden was wondrously sweet in the soft evening light. Waxen white japonicas gleamed through the shrubbery and lilacs, lavender, purple and white were in a perfect tangle, meeting overhead, almost concealing an overgrown walk that led to a rustic summer house in the far corner. Wherever there was nothing else, there was honeysuckle. It seemed to be trying to overrun the place, but periwinkle was holding its own on the ground, asserting itself with its darker green leaves, and snow balls and syringa bushes, shaking off the honeysuckle that had tried to smother and choke it, rose superior with their masses of whiteness. Hyacinths, narcissi, lilies-of-the-valley, snowdrops and violets filled the beds to overflowing, a floral struggle for the survival of the fittest. [221]

"Won't Zebedee love it, though!" said Dee. "It seems almost as peaceful as a graveyard. Listen! Listen! A mocking-bird!"

"We might have known a mocking-bird would build here," whispered Mrs. Green. "There he is on that oleander, and there's his mate still busy with her household duties, carrying straw for her nest. It must be hard to be a female bird and not to be able to pour forth your soul in song, no matter how bursting you are with the joy of living. I always thought that it was unfair. No doubt that little newlywed mocking-bird feels as deeply as the male, but all she can do to show it is just drag straw and hairs and build and build, and then sit patiently on her eggs, and then teach the little ones to fly after she has worn herself to skin and bone grubbing worms for them. No doubt if she should begin to sing she would astonish her little husband to such an extent that he would call her a suffragette, and tell her a lady bird's place was in her nest and he could make noise enough for two, thank you!"

"Well, it certainly would be a pity for her to sing if she couldn't sing," objected Professor [222] Green. "I suppose long ages of thinking she couldn't sing has put her where she can't. Perhaps she can sing, and Mr. Cock Mocking-Bird has told her she can't because he wants the floor, or rather the swinging limb, himself."

"Edwin is trying to get me into an argument on feminism, but the evening is too perfect, and the mere male bird is singing too wonderfully to tempt me to bring discord into the garden."

"Have you talked business yet with either of the ladies, Professor Green? I am getting ready to tell my Timrod good-by."

"Well—er—not yet. I have not had an opportunity."

"Why, Edwin, you have seen both of them several times since we arrived."

"Yes, but the subject of our conversation was such that it did not seem an appropriate time to broach the matter of board."

All of us laughed at our masculine contingent's being as bad as we had been, and I felt more secure than ever that father would get his Timrod and I would own a volume of J. Gordon Coogler. [223]

Dilsey, the corn-field hand, almost fell down the steps announcing supper. Of course we were hungry, and even though the garden was so lovely we were glad to go to supper. We hoped its loveliness would keep, and we knew that food could not be trusted to.

The ladies of the house were dressed in stiff grosgrain silk. Mrs. Green knew the name of the kind of silk; we had never seen it before. She said she had an Aunt Clay in Kentucky who wore it on state occasions. They did not look nearly so funereal, as they had bits of fine old lace in necks and sleeves. Lace is a wonderful fabric for lightening up sombreness. It can cheer up dripping black.

It seems that I was wrong about the Misses Laurens having suffered recent bereavement. They had the mourning habit. Claire Gaillard had told us that they had had no deaths in the family for at least ten years, but that they always wore mourning, poor old things. When we met them in the bus, the morning of our arrival, they were not coming from the funeral of a relative who had not left them the legacy they had been counting on, as I had made up about them; on the contrary, they were coming from the wedding of a young cousin in a neighboring town. So the would-be author fell down that time in her surmises. Surely persons who expect to figure in plots of stories have no business looking as though they were coming from funerals when they have been to weddings. It is hard on real authors to have to contend with such contrariness, and simply impossible for would-bes. [224]

The dining-room was even lovelier than the parlor. The walls were papered with a hunting scene that had faded very little, considering it must have been there half a century. It was a peculiar paper that seemed to have been varnished, no doubt thus preserving it.

The sideboard was worth a king's ransom, whatever that is. It was not the eternal Colonial that is of course beautiful, but it has come to the pass that Americans think there is no other style worth considering. It was very old Florentine, as were also the chairs and table. The carving on the sideboard could only be equalled by the Cimabue gates, I am sure. The chairs were upholstered in deep red Genoese velvet. It seems a remote Huguenot ancestor had been United States Consul in Florence and had brought home with him this dining-room furniture. There were no pictures in this room, as with paper of that type pictures are out of place, but polychrome sconces were hung at intervals, half a dozen in all. The candles in them were not lighted, as it was still daylight, and a great silver candelabrum on the table gave what additional light was needed. [225]

The table was set with the finest Sevres china, cobweb mats and thin old teaspoons that looked a little like the old ladies themselves. The forks, however, were as big as two ordinary forks of the day; so big in fact that one might have been forgiven if, like Sam Weller, he "handled his wittles with cold steel."

Miss Judith looked flushed, and I was afraid she had been cooking the supper herself, while Miss Arabella had on a fresh thumb-stall that suggested a possible burn on her thin, blue-veined old hand. Supper consisted of fried chicken, hot rolls, four kinds of preserves, the inevitable rice that is served twice a day in South Carolina, as though to encourage home industries, and gravy, of course, to go on the rice, another thing that is the rule in the best families, so I have been told. [226]

It is very funny how different sections of the country establish their aristocracy by the way certain favorite dishes are served. I heard a lady from Plymouth, Massachusetts, say once that some of her townsmen were not really very good people; they put too much molasses in their baked beans. I am sure a South Carolinian would consider any one po' white trash who liked rice cooked mushy and not dry with every grain standing out like a pearl. Certainly anywhere in the South sugar in the cornbread would label any family as not to the manor-born, while in the North sugar in the cornbread is a regular thing, born or not born. [227]

Everything was delicious on that table, and the hostesses quite warmed up into a pleasant glow of hospitality. It is difficult to be stiff, even if you have swallowed a heredity poker, when gay, happy, hungry young people are at your board, showing their appreciation of your culinary skill by devouring everything handed to them.

Dilsey waited on table as though it had been set on ploughed ground, every now and then almost falling down in an imaginary furrow. The Misses Laurens completely ignored her awkwardness, although in all probability, being human, they were in agony for fear she would shoot the rolls across the room, or pour the coffee down a guest's back or do something else equally trying. Dilsey seemed delighted with her prowess, and every time she safely landed some article of food to the destination to which her mistresses had sent it, she gave a pleased cluck. She would come up to you and lean over your shoulder in a really most engaging manner, and say: [228]

"Now do hab a lil' mo' 'sarves! Try dem quinches dis time."

She was especially lively with the "graby," and handed it every time there was a lull in operations. Professor Green refused it so often that it really became embarrassing, but still the girl persisted in her endeavors. "Jes' lil' graby on yo' rice!" Finally Miss Arabella interfered to prevent further persecution, and this is where Professor Green "broke his 'lasses pitcher" with the Misses Laurens.

"Perhaps you do not care for gravy," she suggested. "Won't you have some butter on your rice? The butter to Professor Green, Dilsey."

"Thank you, no butter! I should like some sugar and cream on my rice, however. I am very fond of it that way."

"Sugar and cream! On rice!" came in gasps from both ladies.

Oh, ye gods and little fishes! What had our masculine contingent done? Flown in the face of customs older than Time! Dilsey's awkward waiting, taking boarders, nothing had upset the well- [229]
bred equanimity of these descendants of ancestors like this awful alien fact. "Sugar on rice! Cream on rice! The Yankees are upon us! Hide the spoons!" That was the manner they had when almost tearfully they instructed Dilsey to pass the rice, pass the sugar and cream.

The professor ate it with about as much relish as Proserpine must have eaten the dried-up pomegranate that Pluto obtained for her. He knew he had done something terrible, but, man-like, he did not know just exactly what it was. He knew that rice and sugar and cream were mixed up in it, but how? Had he realized as I did that his request for a peculiar combination of food had lost him the bet, perhaps it would have choked him outright. It was a difficult feat to accomplish at best, to tackle these old aristocrats on the subject of remuneration, but now that he had done such a terribly plebeian thing as to want his rice mushy and sweet, there was no possible way to get back in their good graces, certainly no quick way of doing it. A reconstruction period would have to be gone through with and then after much burying of many hatchets perhaps cordial [230]
relations could be re-established.

Professor Green looked scared and rather boyish. His Molly was bubbling over with suppressed merriment, while Dum and I had to assume a deep gloom to keep from exploding. Dee came to the rescue, of course, with rhapsodies over the garden, jumping from that to the pictures in the City Hall and back to praise Claire Gaillard, who was evidently a favorite of the old ladies.

The clock on the mantelpiece chimed seven and St. Michael's bells verified its strike. I looked up at Professor Green as he choked down the last of the fatal rice.

"I'll give you another hour," I whispered.

"Thank you, but I believe another year would not help me."

I now own J. Gordon Coogler and father will have his Timrod, which, after all, had never really been in jeopardy.

CHAPTER XVI [231]

LETTERS

From Mrs. Edwin Green to Mrs. Kent Brown, New York City.

Meeting Street,
Charleston, S. C.,
April .., 19...

My dearest Judy:

No doubt you and Kent will be astonished to find that Edwin and I are actually on the long talked-of trip to this wonderful old city. Mother is taking care of little Mildred in our absence, and Dr. McLean is to be called if she sneezes or coughs or does anything in the least out of the way. She is such a blooming, rosy baby, and so thoroughly normal that I am sure it is perfectly safe to leave her. Mother says she is more like Kent than any of her babies. [232]

Charleston is more delightful even than it has been pictured. We only got here yesterday morning, and already we love it as though we belonged here. We went to a hotel for one night, but by rare good chance have found board in one of the real old Charleston homes.

You will laugh when I tell you that after an acquaintance of about twenty-four hours I find myself the chaperone of three girls about seventeen years old. I know you and Kent are grinning and saying to each other: "Some more of Molly's lame ducks!" but I can assure you they are as far from being that as any girls you ever saw. They are the Tucker twins, Dum and Dee, otherwise known as Virginia and Caroline, and their friend, Page Allison—all from Virginia. They have come down

here with Mr. Tucker, the father of the twins, a newspaper man from Richmond, but he has had to go to Columbia on his paper's business and I volunteered to look after the girls in his absence. He is a delightful man, and he and Edwin are already Greening and Tuckering each other, which means that they struck up quite a [233] friendship. He is the most absurdly young person to be the father of these strapping twins. He looks younger than Edwin, but I fancy he must be a little older. You know Edwin's "high forehead" makes him look older than he is.

The Tucker twins are bright, handsome, generous, original—everything you like to see in young girls. Their mother died when they were tiny babies and their young father has had the raising of them. A pretty good job he has made of it, too, although he declares he has done nothing toward bringing them up but just remove obstacles. They call their father Zebedee, because of the old joke about "Who's the father of Zebedee's children?" They say nobody ever believes he is their father. Dum is most artistic, wants to be a sculptor. She hopes to study in New York next winter. Dee is as fond of lame ducks as you used to say I was, and may make a trained nurse of herself, or perhaps a veterinary surgeon.

Their friend, Page Allison, is a delightful girl. She is the daughter of a country [234] doctor, and has been the twins' room-mate at boarding school. By the way, these girls had heard of you, and me too, from Mattie Ball, who has been teaching them English literature at Gresham. (Mattie had been most complimentary to us both, so they have an exalted idea of us.) Page is lots of fun. She is in for anything that is going, but at the same time acts as a kind of balance wheel for the twins, who are a harum-scarum pair. Page has a writing bee in her bonnet, which of course appeals to me. You would have been amused to see both of us whip out our notebooks to take down things that we did not want to forget. Mr. Tucker is evidently very much interested in this little girl, more interested than he knows himself, and she is perfectly unconscious of his feeling in any way differently from the way he feels for his own daughters. I may be mistaken, however. I know when one is so happily married as I am it is a great temptation to be constantly match-making.

I fancy you and Kent are wondering why I should go to as interesting a place as [235] Charleston and then find nothing to write about but three schoolgirls. Charleston is thrilling indeed, but you know I always did think more of people than things. We are seeing the sights very thoroughly—have deciphered every inscription on the old tombstones in three cemeteries, and are going tomorrow to Magnolia Cemetery. They say there is the most wonderful old live oak tree there in the world.

Now that we are settled in a boarding-house, kept by two old befo'-the-war ladies, we may stay here quite a little while. Edwin needs this rest that the Easter recess fortunately offered him.

I wish I could picture these old ladies to you, but they are too wonderful to try to describe. Whistler's mother does not belong in the frame in which her artist son placed her any more than these ladies belong in this old house. They hate boarders. You can see it in spite of their punctilious manners and old-world courtesy. I believe we are the first they have had, and if they only knew how much nicer we are than most boarders, I fancy they would not hate us quite so much. [236] Mother always says that being a boarder changes one's whole nature—the gentlest and most generous becoming stern and exacting. At any rate, Edwin and I have not been boarders long enough to become very hateful, and these three girls could board forever and never become professionals in that line.

Please write to me soon. I am so glad Kent's firm won the competition for that great hotel. Tell him it is too bad I can't be there to tell him where the closets ought to be and which way the doors should open. He and I never agree on these points, you remember. It is splendid that you keep up your painting. I have no patience with these persons who insist that a career and matrimony cannot go hand in hand. Of course my little Mildred is very engrossing, but I do not intend to let her take every moment of the day and night. I find if I am going to write, however, that I cannot sew, but you know sewing was never one of my strong points. Giving it up is like Huck Finn's giving up stealing green persimmons. If [237] occasionally, and only occasionally, I can persuade a magazine to see how worth printing one of my stories is, and I can make an honest penny that way, it is surely no extravagance to get someone to make Mildred's little clothes and to buy mine ready-made.

But Edwin is rearing and champing for me to go walking with him, and I must also look up these dear girls I am chaperoning, so good-by, my dear sister-in-law. My best love to "that 'ere Kent," as Aunt Mary used to call him. Poor old Aunt Mary! How we shall miss her!

Yours with all the love in the world,

Molly Brown Green.

To Dr. James Allison, Milton, Va., from Page Allison.

Meeting Street,
Charleston, S. C.

My dearest Father:

I can't get over how good it was in you to let me go tripping with the Tuckers. It has been a wonderful experience, and we are having the most gorgeous time. [238] Already, of course, we have plunged into adventures, as is always the case if you train with the Tucker twins. I am not going to tell you of these adventures until I come back to Bracken; they are too thrilling for mere pen and ink.

As you see by the above address, we have left the hotel and are now installed in a boarding-house on Meeting Street. It seems absurd to call such a place a boarding-house—indeed, a sacrilege. It has just become a boarding-house in the last twelve hours, as I am sure we are the first "paying guests" the poor Misses Laurens have ever had.

We are being chaperoned by a perfectly lovely young woman, a Mrs. Edwin Green. She and her husband were at the hotel and we scraped up an acquaintance with them, and as Mr. Tucker had to go over to Columbia on business she offered to look after us while he was away. Tweedles and I have not been chaperoned before to any great extent, as Miss Cox was our one experience, and we think [239] chaperones are pretty nice, lots nicer than we had been led to expect. Certainly no one could be more charming than Miss Cox, unless it were this lovely Mrs. Green. In the first place, she is so sympathetic, then she is so kind, then she is so pretty, then she is so intelligent and so extremely well-bred,—on top of it all she has married one of the nicest men I ever saw; he really is almost as nice as Mr. Tucker and you. (I should have said you and Mr. Tucker, but you were an afterthought, as you well know!)

Afterthought or not, I do wish you were here, my dearest father. You would delight in the quaintness of this old city. I am getting all the postal cards I can find, which I will not send you, but will bring you, and make you sit down and listen to me while I tell you all about it. I am also going to bring you a volume of Henry Timrod's poetry, which you must duly appreciate, as it was difficult to find it. It seems that although the South Carolinians are very proud of him, none of them have seen fit to get out a new edition of his poetry, and the old editions are [240] very expensive. This I was told by the very pleasant man who has opened a second-hand book shop here.

I found a book there I was crazy to get for you, but as it was a first edition, and that a limited one, I could not afford it. By an amusing chance it has since become my property. I will tell you about that some day. It is entitled "Purely Original Verse," by J. Gordon Coogler. He, too, was a South Carolinian, and such ridiculous stuff you have never imagined. The kind man who owned the shop let me copy a few of the poems before I dreamed of possessing the book. What do you think of these?

A Couplet

Alas for the South, her books have grown fewer—
She was never much given to literature.

Byron

Oh! thou immortal bard!
Men may condemn the song
That issued from thy heart sublime,
Yet alas! its music sweet
Has left an echo that will sound
Thro' the lone corridors of time. [241]

Thou immortal Byron!
Thy inspired genius
Let no man attempt to smother—
May all that was good within thee
Be attributed to Heaven,
All that was evil—to thy mother.

A Pretty Girl

On her beautiful face there are smiles of grace
That linger in beauty serene,
And there are no pimples encircling her dimples
As ever, as yet, I have seen.

But, father dear, do not be too hard on this bard, or you will come under this ban:

Oh, jealous heart that seeks to belittle my gentle muse,

And blow your damnable bugle in my lonely ears;
You'll lie some day in expressing your recognition
Of this very song you disowned in other years.

Surely you must have sympathy for the person who could write the following stanza, especially when your only child goes tripping with the Tuckers when she ought to be down in the country with her old father:

I feel like some lone deserted lad,
Standing on the shore of life's great ocean,
Casting pebbles in its billows, as if to excite
Some past emotion.

Please give Mammy Susan my dearest love. I wish she could see the flower [242]
gardens down here. They are very wonderful. Every house almost has porch-boxes, and no place is too poor or mean to have some bright flowers around it. We went through some real slummy parts yesterday where no one but darkies lived; beautiful old foreign-looking houses that have belonged in days gone by to the wealthy. I don't believe a single window was without flowers. They were growing in tomato cans and old broken jars and pots, but flowers don't mind what they are in just so the people who plant them love them and know how to attend to them. They seemed to me to be making a braver show than they do when they boast brass jardinières.

I can't help thinking what Cousin Park Garnett would say if she knew that Mr. Tucker had left us alone in Charleston with a perfectly strange lady to chaperone us. I reckon she would throw about a million aristocratic fits.

I don't know how long we will be here. It will depend on Mr. Tucker. I think he needs a rest. He seems to me to be not quite himself. I have noticed that he is in a [243]
way irascible. That, you know, is not like him, as there never was but one better tempered man in all the world. You see, you were not an afterthought this time, but came first.

I must stop now without telling you about the dear ladies where we are boarding. They are like rare editions of old forgotten poetry, or odd pieces of china no one has used for generations but has kept in a cabinet until one has forgotten whether they are meant for tea or coffee. They are very dignified with us, but I have a notion that the Tucker twins will be able to limber 'em up by hook or crook. I saw the younger one almost smile when Dee took her cat in her arms.

Your devoted daughter,
PAGE.

CHAPTER XVII [244]

MISS ARABELLA

No ghosts came to disturb my slumbers in the great four-poster, but the early morning sun awoke me long before Tweedles gave any indication of coming to life. I thought for a while I was at Bracken. It must have been the lavender in the sheets and the mocking-bird, who was singing like Caruso just outside of my window. An odor will carry more suggestion than any sight; and sound comes next, I believe. I lay there wondering how long it would be before Mammy Susan would come bringing my bath-water, devoutly praying she would not "het" it up, but let me have it stinging cold from the well.

The realization that I was in Charleston came over me gradually; also, that no one would bring me bath-water, and that if I wanted first to go in the preserving-kettle I had better get up and take it. I had to go through the twins' room to get to the bathroom, and I found them sleeping like [245]
infants, looking ridiculously alike with their eyes shut and their chins snuggled down in the bed clothes. The squareness of Dum's chin and the dimple in Dee's was more of a differentiation in their case than even the eyes. Dum's were hazel while Dee's were gray, but the shape and setting were similar, if not identical. I stood a moment gazing at them, and it came over me with an added realization what their friendship had meant to me; theirs and their father's. I had known them according to the calendar only twenty months, not quite two years, but counting time by "heart throbs," I had known them since the beginning of time. God grant nothing should ever come between us!

Mr. Tucker had certainly been a little snappy with me before he went to Columbia, but I was never the kind to go around with a chip on my shoulder hunting for trouble, so if it was an accident I was perfectly willing to let it go at that. The truth of the matter was, that the Tuckers [246]
had one and all spoiled me. They were so lovely to me on all occasions that a slight let-up on the part of any one of them was more noticeable because of their usual kindness. He was to come back that day, and I was very glad, as indeed all of us were, although we were expecting a good

teasing for having so bravely undertaken the business of getting board and then moving in without any business arrangement.

The copper tub was not so bad, after all, and the Charleston water is always a delight to bathe in. It is strangely soft, as though it had just fallen from a summer cloud, and it has a peculiar sweetish taste. I dressed in a great hurry and soon found myself in the garden. The sun that had made his way into my window had not yet reached the garden, because of the high wall.

"One morning, very early, before the sun was up,
I rose and found the shining dew on every buttercup;
But my lazy little shadow, like an arrant sleepy-head,
Had stayed at home behind me and was fast asleep in bed."

That was what I thought as I stepped out into that wonderful old garden. There was a misty [247]
haze of early morning, and the freshness of the new-born day that few persons know of. Early rising is a habit that it is a pity ever to lose, and still it is something that the civilized world seems to fight against. Children naturally wake early, but as one grows older the sunrise is such a rarity that many grown-ups cannot remember ever having seen this wonderful spectacle which takes place every morning.

Father says that one of the signs of advancing years is waking quite early in the morning and not being able to go back to sleep. When he is called in to doctor old persons, who complain of waking early, he always tells them not to try to go back to sleep, but to get up and go out in the morning and see how glorious Creation is. Nature may be asserting herself in these old persons so they can get back some of the spirit of childhood before they are called to the Great Beyond. He always tells them to eat something, however, before they go to commune with Nature.

The mocking-bird was not holding the fort alone that morning, as he had the evening before. [248]
His little wife was still carrying building materials for their home, and he was helping, but every now and then he left off work, although he had heard no whistle blow to tell him it was time to stop. Then such a stream of melody as he would pour forth would put Caruso to the blush. Other birds were in the garden, and all of them very busy. A tiny song sparrow had something to say with remarkable volume considering his size, and Mr. Mocking-Bird listened intently, determined to learn the new song. A thrush broke in and then a stylish robin. I thought I heard the notes of a bobolink, but it turned out to be the mocking-bird, who seemed intent on singing down all the others. It reminded me rather of the sextette from "Lucia de Lammermoor" when the artists all seem to be trying to outdo each other and still harmony is the result.

I had brought down all the combings from our three heads, well knowing how the birds delight in hair as a building material. Of course Mammy Susan had done her best all my life to keep me from letting birds get any of my hair for nests, as it is supposed to be the very worst luck that can [249]
befall one, and terrible headaches are sure to be the lot of a person whose hair helps make a nest. Nevertheless, I had always sneaked my hair to the birds at Bracken, and this morning, feeling sure that I was the only person astir, I had quite openly brought a wad of hair, Dum's burnished black, Dee's blue black, and my curly brown, all mingled together. I put some on a lilac bush and some on the path where I noticed the builders had found some straw and would no doubt soon spy the more desirable material.

"I wish I had some of Molly Brown's," I said to myself. We had got in the habit of speaking of Mrs. Green as Molly Brown, and no doubt would soon begin to call her Molly to her face. "Hers would make the dear birds feel that they were weaving sunshine into their nests. I'm going to ask her for some."

I made my way very slowly and quietly, so as not to disturb the busy homemakers, along the overgrown path to the summer house.

I was mistaken in thinking I was the only human being astir in that enchanted garden. As I [250]
lifted a great branch of snowballs that, heavy with its own beauty, had fallen across the path, I saw that Miss Arabella was before me. She was seated in the summer house. The great gray cat was on the ground in front of her, looking up into her face with a sly expression in his round, yellow eyes.

"Now, Grimalkin, I give you fair warning. If you dare so much as look at one of these birds I will shut you up in the house for the rest of the day! You hear me, sir?"

"Me-i-ou——!" and he tried to slink off, deceit in every curve of his handsome body.

"No, you don't, sir!" and with astonishing agility for an old lady who had swallowed a hereditary poker, she swooped forward and caught the cat up into her lap. How different this was from the Miss Arabella of the evening before! Her soft gray hair, with a glint of gold in it, was all loosened about her face. There was a little flush on her cheeks, and instead of the sombre black dress she now wore a loose lavender wrapper. If it had been possible to back out and get up the [251]
garden path without being seen, I would have done it. I felt like Peeping Tom and Lady Godiva. Somehow this was Miss Arabella's naked soul I had come on, and I was afraid she would be terribly cut up. There was nothing for me, however, but to speak. I made a little scratching on the path with my toe and shook the snowball branch. She looked up, startled, and loosened her hold on Grimalkin, who immediately took advantage of her and sprang from her lap. This was no time for dignity! The cat at liberty in the garden meant havoc for the nesting birds.

"I'll catch him!" I cried, and then such a chase ensued! Grimalkin thought all the world moved as slowly as the dear ladies who had raised him, and at first scorned me as a pursuer, but I soon gave him to understand that a country girl with gym training added to her natural agility is a match for a fat old tomcat. I cornered him just as he started up the high wall, and, catching him by the back of his neck, in the proper place for a cat to be held, I carried him back to his smiling [252] mistress, who, all unmindful of his unsheathed claws, caught him to her bosom, where he soon dropped asleep, purring away as though that was where he meant to go all the time.

"You are very kind! I am exceedingly grateful to you!"

"Oh, not at all! It was my fault the cat got away. I thought I was all alone in the garden and did not mean to come on you this way. I fancied the birds and I were the only creatures awake."

"I always come down in the garden very early in the morning. I can't trust Grimalkin alone out here while the birds are nesting. After they have hatched and the little ones can fly they can escape from him, he is so fat, but I am always afraid he will drive the mocking-birds away. I can't sleep in the early morning, anyhow. Do you usually arise so early?"

"Not always, but I am a country girl, and country people always get up earlier than city people. My friends, the Tuckers, have to be dragged out of bed unless there is some especial reason for [253] getting up, and then they are energetic enough. I did not disturb them this morning as they were sleeping so peacefully."

Miss Arabella had made a place for me on the stone bench, and was still smiling at me in a very encouraging way. Perhaps she was as eager to find out things about me as I was about her.

"My sister was sleeping, too, at least she seemed to be trying to. Both of us, as a rule, awaken very early, but she lies still trying to get back to sleep, while I feel that it is best to get up and take advantage of the beautiful morning light. You must excuse my being *en déshabillé*. I did not expect to be seen."

"Oh, I think you look lovely!"

She didn't mind a bit, but blushed and patted my hand.

"I am very fond of young girls, but never see any nowadays but Claire Gaillard. She is the only one who comes to our sad old house."

"Sad! Not sad, it is too beautiful to be sad."

"It is its very beauty that seems sad to me," she sighed. "And the garden! I feel like a traitor to [254] let it get so unkempt. I am not strong enough to keep it weeded. All I have strength to do now is to keep Grimalkin from devouring the birds. Judith thinks I am very foolish. She lays more stress on having the furniture rubbed and keeping up the inside of the house, but to me the garden and birds are more important. I'd like to see the garden looking as it used to, with trim flower beds and the dead wood all cut away."

Miss Arabella seemed to forget I was there, or to forget I was a stranger, perhaps. I am sure she had no intention of unburdening her soul to me. She closed her eyes and I knew she was picturing the garden as it had been years ago, and perhaps she was even seeing the lover of the past as he looked when she kissed him through the gate. A thought wave seemed to have gone from me to her. I no sooner put my mind on the iron gates that I felt sure must have been where the ugly board ones were now, ere she began talking of those very gates. The sun had reached [255] the garden now, and was lifting the soft mist that hung over it like a tulle veil. I felt somehow that the veil of the past was being lifted, too, and Miss Arabella was letting me catch a glimpse of her true self.

"I hate that ugly gate," she mused. "I miss the beautiful old grille that had been there for so many years—where our friends and ancestors had come and gone so often."

"I was sure there must have been an iron gate there."

"Yes, my dear, one of the most beautiful in Charleston. We had to let something go. I thought the Stuart portrait of General Laurens would be the best, but Judith felt that the gates would be the thing to give up. She rather likes having the board ones that no one can see through. I hate them, as I like to look out on the street sometimes. The gates were very valuable, being wrought-iron of a most delicate and intricate pattern. There was hardly a spot where one could so much as get a hand through." I gasped here and had a vision of Miss Arabella, young and beautiful, trying [256] to get her hand through and ending by finding a place where her rosy lips with some pouting could reach her lover, locked out no doubt by a stern parent. "I don't know why I should speak of these things to you, child. It would provoke sister Judith very much if she knew——"

"But she won't know," and I took the frail old hand in mine. "I long to hear about the gates and the garden as it used to be. It is so lovely now that I can well picture what it must have been. Please go right on and tell me everything about it, and let me be your friend, as well as Claire."

And the old lady, with her eyes all soft, sat on the stone bench in that early morning, the purring Grimalkin clasped with one hand and the other holding mine, and told many wonderful tales of olden times. It was an hour never to be forgotten by me. The birds hopped close to us, some in search of the early worm and some intent on building material, stopping every now and then to pour forth the joy of living in song. They seemed to trust the lady of the garden to keep [257]

the enemy from them.

I hoped the stern Miss Judith was sleeping peacefully, and would not come stalking into our dreams like a great Grimalkin herself. Miss Arabella was enjoying herself immensely. She lived in the past, and her mind was like some old chest filled with faded souvenirs of a happier time. She had opened this wonder-box for me and was having the time of her life taking out treasure after treasure, shaking out the folds of some rare silken memory, or unwrapping some quaintly set jewel of experience. I listened entranced, only occasionally dropping a word to show my interest or pressing the little hand, so thin now that perhaps it might have slipped through the grille.

Dilsey, opening the shutters of the dining-room, brought us back to the present. The household was astir! Miss Judith must be up and doing by now. The sun had found the garden out with his searching rays, and the last bit of mist had disappeared. [258]

"My goodness! It must be getting quite late!" exclaimed my old new friend. "I am afraid you are sadly bored with my tales," she added penitently.

"Bored! Why, Miss Arabella, it has been lovely. I do thank you for talking to me and please do it some more."

"Well, another morning then, child! I must hurry in now and dress myself and be a sad old woman some more. I thank you for making me forget it for once,—being a sad old woman, I mean."

She certainly did not look like a sad old woman as she tripped down the path to the house, her lavender draperies brushing the syringa and lilacs as she passed. She seemed to me more to be the spirit of eternal youth and spring. Miss Arabella might swathe herself in black again and remember to respond to the hereditary poker, but I had glimpsed the real Miss Arabella and knew now that the sad old woman was merely the body in which a radiant spirit dwelt. It was this spirit that we had heard singing that night in the garden, "Speak not, ah, breathe not—there's [259] peace on the deep."

Tweedles were opening their eyes when I came in, and, uncovering their chins, so they did not look so much alike.

"Dressed already, Page?" yawned Dum.

"Yes, dressed and out in the garden for hours! I took down all the combings for the birds and they are crazy about them. Can't you hear their hymn of thanksgiving?"

"Pig! Why didn't you call me?" and Dee rolled out of bed to beat Dum to the copper-kettle-like bathtub.

"I hate to wake you up when I have to, and goodness knows I am not going to do any gratuitous waking," I laughed. "Girls! I have had the time of my life, and have got to know Miss Arabella real well. She is simply a darling!" and I rummaged for my notebook.

I was afraid to put off for a moment jotting down in my little book some of the impressions of the morning. If I should forget anything Miss Arabella had told me I would never forgive myself. I [260] wrote like mad all the time the twins were dressing, but it is strange about the things Miss Arabella divulged to me that morning; although I know that what an author or a would-be author hears in this life belongs to him, and is his property to be twisted and turned in his writing as he sees fit to use it, somehow those memories I have held sacred always, and I can't believe in my writing I could ever get so hard-pressed that I'd feel at liberty to make copy of what Miss Arabella told me on that enchanted morning in the garden.

CHAPTER XVIII [261]

A CHANCE FOR LOUIS

Contrary to our expectations, Zebedee did not tease us at all for engaging board without knowing what it was. He said he was in thorough sympathy with all of us for shying at the subject, and for his part he was perfectly willing to trust the dear old ladies to do exactly the right thing.

He blew in, his usual manner of arriving, while we were at luncheon, and as we might have known, took the Misses Laurens by storm. The hereditary pokers melted as if by magic and even Miss Judith succumbed to his charms and promised to go to a moving picture show with him some night. As for Miss Arabella: her poker was only an imitation one, anyhow, and it did not take much to limber her up. It was rather astonishing, though, to find her unbending to the [262] extent that she and Zebedee sang Gilbert and Sullivan operas together that evening in the garden, Zebedee doing Dick Deadeye with his usual abandon and Miss Arabella singing:

"I'm called little Buttercup, dear little Buttercup,
Though I could never tell why—
But still I'm called Buttercup, dear little Buttercup,

"I wouldn't be at all astonished to see Miss Judith dance a jig after this," whispered Dum to me. "Isn't our young father a wonder?"

He was certainly that. Professor Green looked on in envy and amazement, still bitterly regretting the sugar-on-the-rice episode. It is a strange thing what makes a "mixer." Professor Green was quite as kind as Zebedee, and quite as eager to make people happy. He was as intelligent, as well-bred, better educated, more traveled, but when the time came to make old persons forget their dignity and years or make young persons forget their youth and callowness, Zebedee certainly could put it all over the learned professor. I remember hearing one of the [263] twins say that he could make crabs and ice cream agree, and surely I believe he could.

"I have never met any one like him but once," said Mrs. Green as the singers finished a duet from "Pinafore" and began humming some tunes from "Patience," while Miss Judith sat smiling, and even occasionally supplying a missing word. "I used to know a young newspaper man named Jimmy Lufton, and he could keep a crowd happy and make the most impossible people mingle and enjoy themselves. It is only a very kind-hearted person who can do it, but of course, having a kind heart does not mean you have that power."

"Thank you, my dear, for that," said Professor Green, smiling whimsically if somewhat ruefully. "I remember very well how miserable that very Jimmy Lufton made me on that hay ride we went on in Kentucky, you remember, when it poured so that the creek almost carried us away, four-horse wagon and all. He made everybody gay and happy but me. I was so green with jealousy I almost sprouted." [264]

Mrs. Green blushed one of her adorable blushes that always made her look so lovely, we did not blame her husband for gazing at her as though she were a ripe peach and meant to be eaten up that moment.

"If you girls go to New York to pursue your studies I am going to write to Jimmy Lufton and send him a letter of introduction to you, that is, if you would care to meet him."

"If he is anything like Zebedee, I should say we would!" exclaimed Dee.

"I don't mean he is like him in every way, but just that he has that quality of mixing. I don't know how it is done. It is a talent as elusive as that of a born mayonnaise maker. I have seen persons who labored to have guests enjoy themselves, taking the greatest pains to seat them a certain way and introduce subjects congenial to all present, and still have the most dismal and doleful failures of parties; while others seem to be perfectly haphazard in their methods, and with a certain social charm make the lion and the lamb get on finely. The same way with mayonnaise [265] makers—some people can have the oil ice cold, the eggs on ice for days, chill the bowl and the fork even, drop the oil in half a minim at the time and beat and stir like the demented, and still turn out runny dressing, not fit for axle grease. Others can waive all precautions of having everything cold and pour in oil with perfect recklessness, stirring leisurely, dump in vinegar or lemon at the psychological moment with a pinch of salt and a dash of cayenne, and, behold! a smooth, beautiful mayonnaise is the result."

"Speaking of lemons! Who's here?" from Dum.

It was his Eminence of the Tum Tum, in all the glory of a starched piqué vest, followed by Claire and Louis, both of them rather ill at ease in their father's presence. Miss Judith introduced the paying and non-paying guests with all the ceremony of a presentation at the Court of St. James.

"Now I am afraid Mr. Tucker's mayonnaise is going back on him," whispered Mrs. Green to me; "I don't believe he and Jimmy Lufton together could beat in that old man and make him into a [266] smooth, palatable mixture."

But I was betting on Zebedee.

Miss Judith and Miss Arabella were looking around for their pokers so they could swallow them again, but Zebedee had hidden them, and with his inimitable good nature and tact he drew old Mr. Gaillard into his charmed circle. By some strange legerdemain he soon had the stiff old man telling tales of Charleston before the earthquake. He drew from him his opinion of the political situation of South Carolina and agreed with him that it was a pity that politics was no longer a gentleman's game. I happened to know that he felt it was the duty of every man to make it his game, but he evidently deemed it not the part of wisdom to voice his conviction to the old man.

We had agreed that we would do all in our power to make Mr. Gaillard like us, as in that way we hoped to be of some use to Louis. Zebedee and Professor Green had been discussing the boy quite seriously that very afternoon, and had thought of several ways to benefit him. They had [267] decided, however, to make friends with the father first and not spring their plans too suddenly.

Mr. Gaillard was evidently enjoying himself hugely. The Greens were most flattering in their attention as he pompously recounted his tales. Mrs. Green was looking her loveliest, and one could see with half an eye that he soon began to direct his conversation to her. He pulled down his starched vest that had an annoying way of riding up over his rotundity, and smoothed his freshly shaven double chin with the air of being quite a ladies' man. Tweedles and I drew Claire and Louis over to the summer house away from their father's disconcerting presence. Their easy

manners returned then and we spent a merry, happy hour.

Professor Green joined us after a while. He seemed anxious to make friends with Louis and to fathom the boy. I felt sure he had some plan for helping him and was sounding him, in a way. Louis was natural and simple in his attitude toward Professor Green, and I could see was making a very good impression. [268]

"You would like to go to college, would you not?"

"Beyond everything. I am prepared to enter college now, but I am nineteen and feel if I do not go soon it will be too late. I am rather late graduating at the high school but had to miss a year because of an illness."

"I think nineteen is a very proper age to enter college," said the professor kindly. "I wonder if you would like my old college, Exmoor? It is a small college, but of excellent standing."

"I am sure I should like any college," and Louis sighed.

"I am commissioned by the faculty of Exmoor to find a young Southern gentleman to take pity on a scholarship that has been endowed for their college. It seems that this scholarship can only be used by a Southerner, and he must be a gentleman born and bred. It was presented four years ago by a man whose only son was rescued from drowning by a daring young Southern boy. The father had more money than he could use, and he wanted to send the brave youth to college to show in some measure his appreciation of what he had done. To make the gift one that the boy could not hesitate to accept, he established a permanent scholarship at Exmoor. Of course no one is too proud or high-born to accept a scholarship. That boy graduates this year with high honors after four very creditable years at college, and now the faculty must find another Southerner to fill his place. The president asked me to be on the lookout for one while I am on this trip, and if you would like to take it, I should be proud and gratified to be the means of presenting it to you." [269]

Through this long speech Louis stood wide-eyed and flushed. Claire caught him by one hand and impulsive Dee by the other.

"Oh, sir!" was all he could falter.

"You must, you must!" exclaimed Dee.

"Louis, Louis, if you only can!" and Claire raised his hand to her cheek.

"But what will my father say?" [270]

"We are going to leave him to Mr. Tucker, at least he is going to prepare the way. I have had a long talk with Tucker this afternoon, and we have mapped out a plan of campaign."

"But your father surely could have no objection," said Dum. "A scholarship is something that everybody accepts."

"But father is very—very—well—proud, I might say," and poor Claire looked exceedingly uncomfortable.

"Well, this can make him prouder than ever," I put in. "He can be proud that his son is chosen to have this scholarship because of his being the nice Southern gentleman he is."

By this time Louis could command his voice, and he said:

"I can hardly tell you, sir, how much I appreciate the interest you have shown in me and your kindness in making this offer, and I hope to be able to accept it. I wish it might have been because of something I am in myself, and not just because I am the descendant of gentlemen."

"But you are what you are partly because of that descent," I insisted. "Persons of low extraction accomplish something in spite of it sometimes; but I must say it is pleasant to have scholarships thrust upon one because of being a Southern gentleman. I think in this day and generation our ancestors do precious little for us—just sit back in their gilt frames and make us uncomfortable—I am glad for some of them to be getting to work." [271]

Louis laughed and said he didn't know but that I was right. We all of us wanted to hear more of Exmoor, and Professor Green told us it was a small college, quite old and of excellent standing among educators, and that it was in walking distance of Wellington, where he occupied the chair of English. It turned out, however, that the professor was a great walker, and that Exmoor and Wellington were more than ten miles apart.

"Exmoor has a very fine course in agriculture and one of the greatest landscape gardeners in the United States is a graduate of that college, and boasts that he got his start there."

"Oh, Louis, that will be splendid, and you can specialize in that and come back to Charleston and do all the things you dream of doing!" exclaimed Dee, who still had Louis by the hand but was totally oblivious of the fact. [272]

She was so excited over the offer Professor Green had made her friend that she might even have hugged him without knowing she was doing it. Louis was not quite so unconscious as Dee, but was making the best of his opportunity. Dee's attitude toward Louis was very much one that she had toward Oliver, the kitten she saved from drowning our first year at boarding-school, a purely maternal feeling, looking upon herself as his protector and elderly friend (being about two

years his junior). Louis, however, was tumbling head over heels in love with her, as Dum and I could plainly see. There had not been many meetings, but when there were he stuck much closer than a brother to her side.

Claire could see it as plainly as we could, and no doubt went through all the heartaches an only sister would. She evidently liked Dee very much, however, and was willing to efface herself completely if it would make Louis happy. But Dee would have been quite as astonished if the [273] kitten, Oliver, had stood up on his hind legs and sworn undying love for her; or Pharaoh's daughter, if the infant Moses had burst forth in amorous rhapsodies from his wicker basket after she had saved him from the waters of the Nile. She dropped his hand to pick up Grimalkin, and I am sure at the time she had no more sensations about the one than the other.

"If I might advise you young people," said Professor Green, "I think it will be just as well to say nothing to your father yet about the scholarship, but wait and Mr. Tucker and I will formally suggest it to him and ask his permission."

Of course the young Gaillards agreed heartily with Professor Green, and glad they were, no doubt, to have the office of approaching their pompous relative delegated to someone else. In the meantime, the pompous relative was making himself vastly agreeable, and the two arch conspirators, Molly and Zebedee, were doing all in their power to flatter and soft-soap him with a [274] view to gaining his confidence and putting in an entering wedge toward helping his son.

"Claire," said his Eminence of the Tum Tum, "have you extended an invitation to tea in the garden of our home to the Misses Laurens and their guests?"

We had joined the rest of the party, attracted by the gay laughter and evident enjoyment of the older members.

"No, father," said Claire timidly. I haven't a doubt that he had told her not to ask us until he found out whether we were worthy or not. "We shall be most pleased to have all of you to afternoon tea tomorrow."

Of course we were most pleased to accept, as no doubt that would be the occasion on which Louis' fate would be decided. Zebedee and the professor could put it up to him then.

"Mrs. Green, I came mighty near hugging your husband tonight," declared Dee, after the guests had departed and the dear old ladies had taken their bedroom candles and gone to their [275] Colonial couches, with strict admonitions to Zebedee to lock up. Already they were trusting him with that sacred rite of locking up.

"Why did you only come near doing it?" laughed the young wife.

"Well, I just grabbed Louis' hand instead. It was so dear of him to think of giving the scholarship to Louis. He was so lovely and gentle in his way of doing it, too. Now nothing lies between Louis and certain success. I just know if he can get the chance he will do something with himself. It will develop him to get away from his old father, too. How could anybody grow with that—that ponderous weight on him?"

"Mr. Gaillard is really not nearly so bad as I feared. He is very agreeable and very gallant."

"Oh, Molly darling, I did not think you would be taken in by flattery," teased the husband.

"But I did like him, not just because he flattered me, but because he was very nice to Miss Judith and Miss Arabella, too, and because—— Oh, just because!"

The truth of the matter was that Mrs. Green had a tendency to like everybody. It amounted to [276] almost a fault with her, but since there were degrees of liking and she did not like everybody in exactly the same way, we could not quite put it down as a fault. I must say, though, that I do like to see a little wholesome hatred possible in a character. I like people, too, lots and loads of people, but there are some kinds of people I just naturally don't like. I don't like horse-faced people with their eyes set up too high in their heads; I don't like men who wear club-toed button shoes, and I never could stand girls who toss their curls. Now Mr. Gaillard did not come under any of those heads of hatred, but somehow I did not like him one little bit: a case of Dr. Fell, I fancy.

"I do not like thee, Dr. Fell!
The reason why I cannot tell.
But one thing 'tis, I know full well—
I do not like thee, Dr. Fell."

Father had certain types he could not stand. I have heard him say: "I can stand a fool; I can stand a fat fool; but a fat fool with a little mouth I can't abide." I think Mr. Gaillard came under [277] his ban. He was fat and had a little mouth, and certainly while he was not a fool on all subjects, he was a big enough fool on the subjects he was a fool on to spread over all the things he was not a fool on.

I dreaded going to tea with the Gaillards. I had a terrible feeling that I might "sass" his Eminence of the Tum Tum. There was something about the way he pulled down his vest and wiped off his chin that deprived me of reason. I could well understand the temporary aberration that is the plea of criminals who say that some instinct over which they have no control compels them to commit murder. I could have punched Mr. Gaillard one with all the joy on earth.

"I feel the same way," declared Zebedee, when I voiced the above sentiments to him.

"Me, too! Me, too!" tweedled the twins.

"Do you know, Green, I think if Mrs. Green likes Mr. Gaillard, she had better broach the subject of the scholarship for Louis." [278]

"Oh, Mr. Tucker! You can do it so much better than I can."

"Now I don't want to be a shirker and will do it with joy, as I don't regard the old cove one way or the other. I'd just as soon ask him to come be printer's devil on my newspaper as not. But this is the thing: We want him to consent and let Louis have this chance, and I believe your husband will bear me out that it is good psychology for a person who really likes another to ask a favor rather than one who only pretends to. Now you say you like Mr. Gaillard——"

"So I do—that is, I don't dislike him, and I think he has some fine points."

"It would take an X-ray to discover them through all that plumpness," put in Dee flippantly.

"You, as the wife of the man who was commissioned by the President of Exmoor to bestow this honor on a Southern boy, would be the appropriate person, anyhow—that is, unless Green himself will do it."

"Not I! I feel toward him just as Miss Page does, and speaking of psychology—my astral body is [279] at war with his astral body to such an extent that a pricking in my thumb tells me he will grant no request of mine and Molly must bell the cat."

"All right! I am willing to do anything my lord and master puts on me, if you really think I can succeed."

"Succeed! Of course you can!" we chorused.

"Tomorrow afternoon, then, when we have tea with them in their garden, will be 'the time, the place, and the girl.' He will have to be nice under his own vine and fig tree," suggested Zebedee.

"There is one thing I ask of you," begged Dum.

"And what is that? I feel myself to be very important," and Mrs. Green wasted another beautiful blush.

"Wear blue! Your own blue! I know he is the kind of old man who can't resist a beautiful woman in blue."

CHAPTER XIX [280]

A RED, RED ROSE

I don't know whether it was the blue of her eyes or her dress or perhaps the fact that they matched so beautifully, but at any rate Mrs. Green put the proposition up to Mr. Gaillard with such adroitness that he consented to the scholarship, and so quickly that she could hardly believe the battle was won.

"I had not half used up my arguments," she said afterward, "and felt that I must go on persuading when he was already persuaded."

She had started out with the premises that of course he must feel sorry for the benighted North, so sadly in need of the softening influence of the South. She descanted on how a little leaven of good manners would leaven a whole lump of bad manners, and how popular Southern [281] students were in Northern schools and colleges because of the good manners and breeding they brought with them. (This was particularly hard on Mrs. Green, as she firmly held the opinion that people were the same all over the world, that good manners were the same everywhere. She felt, however, that she would use any argument to make Mr. Gaillard see the light.)

She then told the story of the grateful man who had established the scholarship at Exmoor for the four years of the academic course and expatiated on his opinion of Southern youths. She lauded the college as having turned out such good men. Gradually she got to the subject of Louis and how close Wellington was to Exmoor, and before the old man knew what he was doing he had consented to Louis' accepting the scholarship. He did it with an air of having loaded the Yankees with benefits in allowing one of his exalted position and azure blood to stoop and mingle with them; but it made no difference to us what he felt on the subject, just so he would let Louis accept. [282]

We were having tea in their lovely garden and Louis was showing us his flowers while Mrs. Green was wheedling "papa." She looked so lovely I verily believe the old gentleman would have accepted the scholarship himself just to be only ten miles from her for four years.

I believe Claire was even happier than Louis when "papa's" ultimatum was pronounced. She was going to miss him more than even she could divine, but her love for him was so deep that she

was willing to give up anything for him. Louis was glad and grateful, but the truth of the matter was he was so taken up with Dee that mere college and scholarships meant little to him.

"His eyes look just like Brindle's when he looks at her that way," sniffed Dum, who did not relish too much lovering toward her twin. "I shouldn't be in the least astonished if he began to whine to be taken up next."

"Why, Dum, I thought you liked Louis!"

"So I do. I like Brindle, too, and Oliver, the kitten; but I like them in their places, and that is not everlastingly glued to Dee's side. I must say I think he had better get out and hustle some [283] before he comes lollapalusing around Dee." I was awfully afraid someone would hear Dum, and stirred my tea very loudly to drown her tirade.

"But, Dum, Dee grabbed his hand herself last night; she said she did," I whispered, trying to set the conversation in a lower tone.

"Yes, I know that! But don't you reckon I saw him holding on to it for dear life? He was mighty limp on Claire's side and mighty strenuous on Dee's. When he had to put back a lock of hair, I saw him let go of his sister's hand and swing to Dee's. And Dee with about as much feeling for him as a wooden Indian!"

The Tuckers were, father and daughters, very strict about one another's admirers. I remembered how Dee had sniffed over Reginald Kent's admiration for Dum, and Zebedee, too; and how Dum and Dee carried on over any attention their father paid any female or any female paid him. Zebedee had not yet scented out Louis as a possible lover, but when he did I was sure to hear from him. They one and all brought their grievances to me. I used to think if any of them [284] ever should unite themselves to anyone in the holy bonds of matrimony, they would have to have a triple wedding to keep the persons the Tuckers were marrying from getting their eyes scratched out. If they were all in the same boat, they would have to behave and sit steady.

In the meantime, Dee's influence over Louis was certainly a wholesome one. Whether his love for her was of the undying brand or just the calf kind, it was very sincere and ardent, so ardent that Dee must soon wake up and realize that she had done a right serious thing when she put out her girlish hand and drew back that poor boy's soul just as it was getting ready for the journey to the Great Beyond. She was in a measure responsible for him now, and the time would come when she would have to be a woman and no longer a wooden Indian, have to treat Louis with a different manner from the one she had for Brindle and Oliver; that is, of course, provided Louis' love turned out to be the undying brand and not the calf kind. When it was said that Dee Tucker [285] treated anyone like a dog, it meant the highest praise for that person. She treated all dogs with a great deal more consideration than she did most people.

Every flower Dee admired, Louis immediately wanted to give her, but she persuaded him to let them go on blooming where they belonged. He had a greenhouse in the back of the garden, where some wonderful roses bloomed all the year round. A great Jaqueminot filled one side of the house, its crimson blooms beautiful to behold. Louis cut one and brought it out to Dee. I was glad I was the only one who heard him as he gave it to her, as I am sure Dum would have "acted up," as Mammy Susan calls it. Dum had gone to the tea table to put down her cup, and Mrs. Green had detained her a moment, while I wandered on in the maze of gravel walks. An oleander hid me from Louis and Dee as he handed her the marvelous open rose, and with a voice that even a wooden Indian would have remarked, he said: [286]

"When I send thee a red, red rose,
  The sweetest flower on earth that grows,
    Think, dear heart, how I love thee.
  Listen to what the red rose saith
  With its crimson leaf and fragrant breath:
  'Love, I am thine in life and death!
    Oh, my love, doth thou love me?'"

"Humph! Going some!" I thought, and backed down the walk, thereby running into Dum, who smeared a lettuce sandwich on my back in the encounter; but she did not know what I had heard.

CHAPTER XX [287]

MORE LETTERS

Mrs. Edwin Green, from Mrs. Kent Brown.

NEW YORK, April .., 19...

MOLLY DARLING:

Your letter was good to get. Kent and I had begun to feel like -in-laws, it had been so long since you had written. Mother Brown, the usually faithful chronicler of all the doings and sayings of the family, had cut us off with a postal. Now that

we know she is "keepin' keer" of little Mildred, we can understand her silence better. When Mother Brown does anything, she does it all over, and I am sure when she is doing such a thing as attend to anything so precious as her beloved grandchild she has no time for mere letter writing. [288]

Kent and I were greatly interested in what you had to tell us of the charming Virginians you have met in Charleston. It was almost uncanny, in a way, to hear from you of these people, as we had just been hearing of them from a very nice young man with whom Kent has struck up an acquaintance at the Y. M. C. A. gym, where Kent goes regularly to keep from getting flabby. The young man's name is Reginald Kent. It was the name Kent that they had in common (one in front and one behind) that first brought them together. They were always getting mixed up on account of it, my Kent answering when the other Kent was called, and vice versa.

This young Mr. Kent is an illustrator and advertising artist. He really is very clever and very wide-awake. He was dining with us at the very time that your letter was brought to me, on the last mail. I had to open it and read part of it aloud. He had just been telling us of some cousins named Winn he visits in the country in Virginia, and of some Richmond girls whom he has met staying with Page Allison, and these girls are no other than your Tucker twins. He says the first [289] time he met them he went on a deer hunt and that Miss Dum Tucker actually shot a deer. I was slightly incredulous, he thought, and to prove his story he took out of his pocketbook two kodak pictures, one of a very handsome, spirited-looking girl with her hair coming down and a rifle raised to her shoulder, and the other a fallen buck with a young girl kneeling beside him, her arms around his neck and her face buried on his shoulder. That one, he said, was Miss Dee, who wept buckets over the death of the buck, but managed afterward to partake of some of the venison.

I have an idea Mr. Reginald Kent thinks that Miss Dum Tucker is about the most attractive person he ever met. He is certainly very attractive himself, singularly wholesome and clean in appearance and mind. He seemed very happy at the prospect of this paragon of a girl's coming to New York to study. I will be very glad to be of any use to your friends I can, and if they do decide to come I will find board for them and mother them, too, if they need it. I know you are grinning at [290] the idea of my mothering anything—I, the harum-scarum, the flibberty-jibberty—but I am really very much settled down. I am so steady and good that Kent is afraid I am sick.

Caroline is doing the work very well for us. I am the envy of all the people we know because I can boast a really, truly Kentucky Bluegrass cook. She is awfully funny about New York, but I think is beginning to like it very well. Gas scared her nearly to death for a few days. She seemed to think there was some kind of magic in it, and I had to light the stove for her a million times a day. I found she was just keeping it burning all the time to save matches, and when I told her to turn it out if she wasn't using it, she almost cried, because, it seems, she was afraid of the pop it gave when she lit it. Then she began calling on me every time she wanted to light it, but after a week or so of such humoring she has learned to do it herself, and now everything is going along swimmingly. I find she is saving the burnt [291] matches, though, to make some kind of bracket with—something she saw back in "Kaintucky."

I think the greatest shock she ever had was when she found out that in New York you had to pay for onions. "I nebber hearn tell of no sich a place. If'n you ain't made out ter grow none yo'se'f, looks ter me lak some er yo' neighbors mought be ginerous enough to gib yer a han'ful fer seasonin', not fer fryin' or b'ilin'. I wouldn' spec a whole mess er onions as a gif'—but it do seem a shame ter hab ter buy a dash er seasonin'."

She almost got her head knocked off with the dumb-waiter the other day. She thought it was down, and it was up, and she put her head in the shaft to watch for it, all the time giving the most vigorous pulling to the rope. The dumb-waiter descended with great force and hit her squarely on the top of the head. I heard a great bump and flew to the kitchen. "Caroline! Caroline! What is the matter?" I cried. "'Tain't nothin' much, Miss Judy, but it mought 'a' been. That there deaf-and- [292] dumb dining-room servant done biffed me a lick that pretty near knocked a hole in his flo'." "Did it hurt very badly?" "No'm, it didn't ter say hurt none. It jes' dizzified me a leetle. You see, Miss Judy, it jes' hit me on the haid."

Just on the head!

I think Caroline is almost as much afraid of Aunt Mary's disapproval now that the old woman is dead as she was in her lifetime. Whenever she passes the picture I did of Aunt Mary on the back porch of Chatsworth shelling peas, she suddenly gets in a great hurry. She is not as a rule very energetic, but at the sight of Aunt Mary she gets a great move on her. She came in the other day from some jaunt she had been on, it being her afternoon off, and said: "Looks lak wherever I goes folks seem to 'vine I'm from de Souf. I ast a colored gemman how he guessed it an' he

said it was my sof' accident what gimme away. I's goin' ter try ter speak mo' Yankeefied an' see if'n I can't pass fer Noo York."

Caroline's first attempt at being Yankeefied was almost fatal. She made friends [293]
with some of the white maids in the apartment house, some Scandinavians, and in her endeavor to become New Yorky she swapped recipes with them, and the next morning served for breakfast the result: corn bread with sugar in it! You can picture Kent.

Kent and I are seeing some very pleasant people, but both of us are working very hard. I work every morning at the Art Students' League from 9 to 12. That means I leave the house with Kent. I go to market on the way to the League and get back to luncheon. Sometimes he comes in to luncheon, too, but he is usually too busy. In the afternoon I sew or read or go shopping or to the matinee, always something to do in New York, and then we have dinner at 6:30 and long, delightful evenings together, usually at home; but sometimes we take in a show and sometimes we dine at a restaurant. We have callers in the evening often and also return calls, but Kent is not much of a caller, as you know.

We have company to dinner, too, quite often now that Caroline has found [294]
herself. Kent delights in bringing home unexpected company. He has a notion he is still living in Kentucky and that this little two-by-four flat is Chatsworth itself. Caroline is fortunately accustomed to it, but I am afraid she will soon become corrupted by these Scandinavians, who would not put up with it one moment. Of course I don't mind how many companies he brings home, and if we are short on rations I can do like the immortal Mrs. Wiggs and just put a little more water in the soup. This idiosyncrasy of my young husband, however, has taught me to keep a supply of canned soups, asparagus tips, etc., in the store-room. My friends among the young married set tell me they market day by day and never have anything like that on the shelves as it makes the servants wasteful. Maybe it does, but I feel quite safe with Caroline and the canned goods, as she has never yet learned how to use a can-opener.

Please give the learned professor my best love. Kent sends his love to you both. This is such a long letter I am sure it will take two stamps to send it. [295]

Your ever devoted,
Judy Kean Brown.

Page Allison from Dr. James Allison of Milton, Va.:

Bracken, April .., 19...

My dear Daughter:

Mammy Susan and I were very glad to hear from you. You are a nice girl to write such a fine, long letter to a mere afterthought. If you write that splendid a letter to a mere afterthought, what would you do for a beforethought?

Your new friends sound delightful. I wish I might know them. The only kick I have about being nothing but a country doctor is that I meet so few new people. Of course it is interesting work, and I am not out of love with it, but sometimes I do get a weeny, teeny bored with poor Sally Winn's aches and pains, and wish either [296]
she had some new aches or she could tell about them in a more scintillating manner. Some new people are moving into our neighborhood, the Carters. Of course, as the name indicates, they are not new people except to our neighborhood. They have taken the old overseer's cottage on the Grantly estate, leased it from the two Miss Grants for a year, and are coming bag and baggage in a few days. I don't know how many of them there are, but I believe it is quite a family of girls and one or more boys and a mother and father, one of them an invalid. More pink pump water to be concocted by yours truly, I fancy. I hope they will be agreeable, since no doubt we will have to see something of them. The cottage is in miserable repair, and I only hope it will not tumble down on them. If they are coming to our county for fresh air, they will get it there winter and summer, as there are cracks in the walls as big as those in a corn crib. Pretty lawn, though, about the prettiest I know of anywhere, and trees that make me think of Tennyson's "immemorial elms." I shall not call on these new neighbors [297]
until you come home—that is, unless I am sent for to come and bring some pink pump water.

I have had a letter from General Price, Harvie's grandfather, asking for the pleasure of your company in the month of July on a house-party he is giving his grandson. It is such a dignified, ponderous epistle that I am afraid I shall have to send to Richmond for the proper stationery with which to reply. Nothing less than crested vellum could possibly carry my acceptance. The King of England could not observe more form were you being invited to put in two weeks at Windsor. It is very kind of him, however, to ask my little girl, and I hope by the aid of the dictionary to express myself with ease and verbosity in acknowledging the honor. Of course you want to go?

I shall be pleased to have the volume of Henry Timrod's poems. I'd like to see the Coogler poems, too. I enjoyed the extracts immensely. I have often heard of him and remember reading some reviews of his stuff when it came out years ago, before you were born, but I have never seen any of it. His efforts were so [298] impossible that the reviewers treated him, one and all, with mock seriousness, and I believe I have heard he took them all seriously and thought he was being praised when they were only poking fun at him. It is rather pathetic, I think, although of course he was an awful blockhead.

Mammy Susan was pleased at your account of the flowers in Charleston, and hopes you can send her a few clippin's. Her things are doing very well, and her lemon verbena has grown so that I tell her we shall have to build a lean-to to keep it in. She misses you very much and is beginning to count the days to the middle of May, when I assure her you will be back with us.

I hope your ankle is behaving itself. You do not mention it, so I fancy it is. Please remember me most kindly to all the Tuckers—father and daughters. I hope you are not bothering Jeffry Tucker by being with them too much. I think there is such a thing as the best friend wearing out her welcome by staying too long. I am sending you a check for your expenses. You have not divulged how much your board will [299] be, but if I do not make the check large enough, please inform me directly. A sickly winter means a little more money in the bank in the spring for a country doctor. Thank goodness, however, the spring seems to be a healthy one. I'd like to be a Chinese doctor and be paid only when my patients stay well. Sometimes it saddens me to feel that my living depends on disease.

Good-by, my dear little daughter.

FATHER.

CHAPTER XXI [300]

THE SUMMING UP

Charleston had taken a strong hold on all our affections. The spirit of the place seemed to possess us as we lazed away the hours in Miss Arabella's tangled old garden or in Louis' more combed and brushed one. Our friendship for the Greens grew stronger and deeper, and we were soon addressing Mrs. Green as Molly and her husband as 'Fessor. All of us were staying in the beautiful old Southern city longer than we had intended. Zebedee said he had no excuse for lingering longer, as he had threshed out the political situation to his own satisfaction and the dissatisfaction of the South Carolina "ring." He should be back on his job in Richmond, but he said he felt like one of the lotus-eaters and nothing much made any difference to him. [301]

'Fessor also had overstayed his holiday, but he declared that his assistant at Wellington could do the work as well as he could, which amused Molly greatly as she said it was the first time he had acknowledged that his assistant could do anything at all; he looked upon him usually as purely ornamental and not intended for use.

I knew father and Mammy Susan were wondering if I had forgotten them entirely, but my conscience, too, was lulled to rest, and I felt as though I could spend the rest of my days dreaming and dozing. Tweedles, of course, had nothing to do but stay with a light heart as no one was expecting them home but poor Brindle; and as Brindle was left in care of the elevator boy, who spoiled him outrageously, even treating him to ice cream cones, I really believe he did not mind being left nearly so much as Dee liked to think he did.

Every day we lengthened our stay in Charleston was as another pearl on the string to poor Louis, and to Claire, too, I think. Thanks to Molly and Zebedee, his Eminence of the Tum Tum had [302] accepted the whole crowd as desirable, and that meant that we could see as much of his children as we wanted to; and as we wanted to see them all the time, we did.

We went on wonderful jaunts with them, and saw everything that could be seen, Louis acting as guide. Sometimes we even persuaded one of the dear old ladies to go with us. I am sure they saw things they had not seen for a decade. We noticed one thing, that when Zebedee was along they always left their pokers behind.

Sullivan's Island thrilled us, and Dum and Zebedee tried to work out the whole scene of Poe's "Gold Bug," but as the island is now a popular summer resort, it was not an easy matter to do.

There is no use in trying to describe the Magnolia Gardens. The azaleas were in full bloom, and nowhere else in the world, I verily believe, is there such a sight. Some of the bushes are thirty feet high and look like giant bouquets.

"I feel like the country woman at the circus the first time she saw a hippopotamus," declared [303] Zebedee; "I don't believe there's no sich thing! It doesn't seem possible that these are growing plants and that in Richmond at Easter I have had to pay five dollars for a little azalea not much

more than two feet high."

The dark green of the magnolia and live-oak trees enhanced the glory of the flowers. It was so beautiful it hurt. Molly said it made her feel as she did the first time she ever saw an opera at the Metropolitan in New York. It was her freshman year at Wellington, and she had been invited to visit in New York during the Christmas holidays.

"It was 'Madame Butterfly,' and the scenery was so wonderful to me I could hardly listen to the music. I fancy cherry-blossom time in Japan must be almost as beautiful as this, but I can't believe it is quite so brilliant."

Magnolia Cemetery, which is just outside of Charleston and which Dee had refused to see without Zebedee, certainly would be a nice place to be buried in. It was sadder to visit because of the new graves there, and Zebedee had to abandon his usual cheerful graveyard spirits. He was [304] quite solemn and kept his hat off all the time.

Louis skirted us around the outer edge of the cemetery first and saved the great old oak for the last. It burst upon us with such force that as a crowd we were left breathless. The beauty of the azaleas at Magnolia gardens, compared to this hoary old monarch, were as a cheap obituary poem to the twenty-third psalm. And in saying that I do not mean to belittle the beauty of the gardens, but I have to put them in that category to make a place high enough in the scale of comparison for that tree.

It was huge, but bent over with years like some old man, and one great limb was resting on the ground, giving it the look of one kneeling in prayer. The foliage was vigorous and glossy, deeper and richer in color than that of many younger trees, just as the wonderful words of some grand old man, John Burroughs or his ilk, will make the utterances of younger men seem pale and feeble. [305]

In kneeling and coming so in touch with Mother Earth, this Father of the Forest had borrowed of her fullness, and now his trunk and huge limbs were covered with an exquisite ferny growth. Wild violets and anemones bloomed happily in the crotches of his great arms, and I saw a tiny wild strawberry ripening on his knee, having escaped the vigilance of the many birds nesting in the upper branches. Spanish moss hung in festoons from some of the limbs, seeming like a venerable beard.

I have never had anything affect me as that tree did. It was so gallant and brave, so kindly and beneficent! It had the spirit of youth and the kindliness of old age; the playfulness of a child and the wisdom of centuries. It must have seen the Indians crowded out by the white men; looked out across the harbor at the storming of Fort Moultrie, and almost a century later at the defence of Fort Sumter. Wars and rumors of wars were nothing to this veteran. While we were there a perky wren pounced down on the defenceless strawberry and gobbled it up, and I am sure the gray [306] beard thought no more of the gobbling up of the redmen than he did of that red berry. His comparisons were of æons and not of decades or mere centuries.

"There is no use in talking about it!" exclaimed Zebedee. "I've got to climb that tree, if it means one hundred dollars' fine and a month in jail."

That was exactly the way I felt. It seemed to me as though I simply had to get up that tree. The park policeman was nowhere in sight, and Zebedee ran lightly up the bent back of the ancient giant, Dum after him. It was easy climbing, and I would have followed suit in spite of my ankle, that I could not yet quite trust, if I had not seen the helmet of the policeman looming up over a near-by sepulchre.

Claire was shocked at what seemed to her a desecration, but Louis said afterward he knew just how Mr. Tucker felt. He had always wanted to get up that tree, and he considered it a kind of homage due the old oak. Trees were meant to climb, and it was no more a desecration to climb [307] one even if it did happen to be in a cemetery, than it was to smell a rose that bloomed there.

The policeman, all unconscious of the coons he had treed, came ambling up and stood and talked to us for quite a while until Dee tactfully drew him off to descant on the glories of the William Washington monument. Zebedee and Dum sat very still in their leafy bower, so still that Zebedee declared a bird came and tweaked some of Dum's hair out to help line his nest; but Dum said he did it himself until she had to make a noise like a catbird to make him stop.

There is no telling what fine and punishment would have been imposed on the miscreants. It was not that it was such a terribly naughty thing to do, but just that it had never been done before. They slipped down, however, while the policeman's back was turned and came up smiling around the other side with the innocent expression a cat assumes when he has been in the cream jug.

"It was worth it," whispered Zebedee to me; "I am so sorry you couldn't get up, too. The old [308] fellow was glad to have us up there. He told me that no children had climbed up to hug him for at least a hundred years. I didn't tell him that I was grown up, but just let him treat me like a little child. He didn't know the difference."

"I shouldn't think he would," I laughed, "when there isn't any difference."

And now it is time to stop, and I shall have to close my story of Charleston. All of us wanted to dream on there forever. It had been a wonderful time. We had made lifelong friends of Molly Brown and 'Fessor Green. We had flopped into the lives of the Gaillards and expected to stay. We had made our way into one of the most difficult and exclusive homes in the city of exclusive homes, and Miss Judith and Miss Arabella Laurens had taken us to their fluttering hearts.

Their thin pocketbooks had also opened to take in a fair and generous recompense for their kind hospitality—but it had been Zebedee and not Edwin Green who had finally and tactfully completed our business arrangements. [309]

Now Zebedee said he must get back to his newspaper. He felt it calling him, as he had discovered an advertisement on the editorial page—a crime in newspaperdom that was deserving of capital punishment. He must get back and chop off somebody's head.

Then 'Fessor Green began to fear his assistant was not able to do his work, and Molly couldn't wait another day to see little Mildred, her baby. I knew it was selfish for me to stay any longer from father, who did have a stupid time of it when all was told.

Dee began to feel that Brindle missed her. Dum said it was because Louis had the same expression in his eyes that Brindle did and it made Dee feel that she must get back to her pet.

We parted from our friends with many assurances of meeting again. The Greens asked us to visit them at Wellington or in Kentucky, where they spent their summers, and of course we asked them to come see us in Virginia. Molly was to send us letters of introduction to her friends in New York, and Louis was planning to stop in Richmond on his way to Exmoor. Parting was only planning for future meetings. [310]

I was to stay at Bracken for several months and then meet my friends at Price's Landing, so sometime I shall tell you my experiences there, in "A House Party with the Tucker Twins."

THE END

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[311]

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[312]

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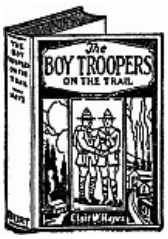

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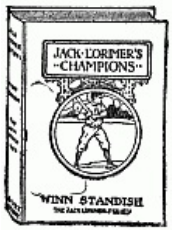

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Varied hyphenation was retained. This includes words such as sight-seeing and sightseeing.

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.

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