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Title: Molly Brown's College Friends

Author: Nell Speed

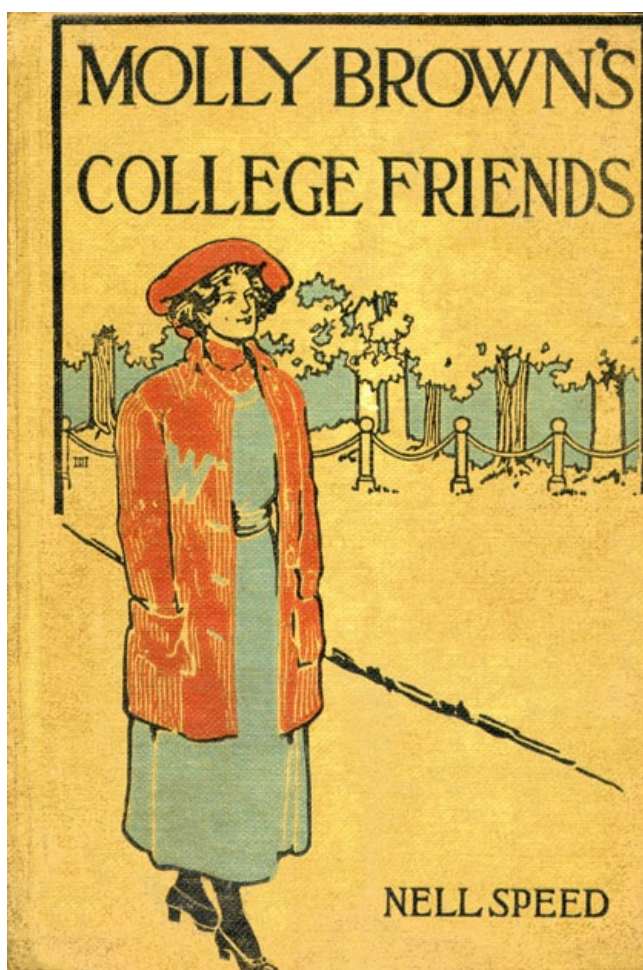
Illustrator: Charles L. Wrenn

Release date: July 14, 2011 [EBook #36733]

Language: English

*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK MOLLY BROWN'S COLLEGE FRIENDS ***

E-text prepared by
Stephen Hutcheson, Rod Crawford, Dave Morgan, eagkw,
and the Online Distributed Proofreading Team
(<http://www.pgdp.net>)





[She blew in at nightfall with a huge suit-case.](#)

(Frontis)

(Molly Brown's College Friends)

MOLLY BROWN'S COLLEGE FRIENDS

By NELL SPEED

AUTHOR OF
"The Tucker Twins Series," "The Carter
Girls Series," etc.



A. L. BURT COMPANY
Publishers New York
Printed in U. S. A.

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Molly Brown's College Friends

CHAPTER I

NANCE OLDHAM

"I am so afraid Nance will be changed," sighed Molly as she put the finishing touches to the room her old friend was to occupy.

"I'll wager anything she is the same old Nance Oldham," insisted Professor Green, obediently mounting the ladder to hang the last snowy curtain at the broad, deep window in the guest chamber overlooking the campus. "I think she is the kind of girl who will always be the same. Is that straight?"

"A little bit lower at this end—there! What a comfort you are, Edwin!" and Molly viewed the effect approvingly.

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"Pretty good general houseworker, eh?" and the dignified professor of English at Wellington College ran nimbly down the ladder and hugged his wife. She submitted with very good grace to his embraces in spite of the fact that the fresh bureau scarves and table covers with which she was preparing to decorate her old friend's room were included in the demonstration of affection.

Professor Edwin Green always declared that he never expected to catch up on all the years he had loved Molly Brown and had been forced to let "concealment like a worm in the bud feed on his damask cheek." He and Molly had been married almost four years on that day in March when he was assisting in the imposing rite of hanging curtains in the guest chamber, and she was still as wonderful to him as she had been on that day they had walked through the Forest of Fontainebleau and he had confessed his love. She was the same charming girl who had lingered too long in the cloisters and been locked in to be rescued by him on her first day at college, now so many years ago.

[9]

Indeed, Molly Brown has changed very little since last we saw her. Little Mildred is walking and talking and singing little tunes and saying Mother Goose rhymes. She even knows her letters upside down and no other way, having learned them from blocks, presumably standing on her curly head as she acquired the knowledge.

There is another baby in the nursery now: little Dodo, whose real name is George, a remarkably satisfactory infant who sleeps when he should and wakes in a good humor, taking the proper nourishment at the proper hours and going back to sleep. Molly had learned the great secret of young motherhood from her first born: not to take parenthood too solemnly and seriously, and to realize that Mother Nature is the very best mother of all and babies thrive most when left as much as possible to her all-wise and tender care.

Nance Oldham, Molly's old friend and roommate at college, was coming at last to make her long promised visit to the Greens. Little wonder that Molly feared she would be changed! Nance's path in life had not been strewn with roses. No doubt my readers will remember that Mrs. Oldham, her mother, was a clever woman, lecturer, suffrage agitator, anything but a homemaker. When Nance finished college she had gone back to Vermont and dutifully kept house for her neglected father, although her secret ambition was to teach. Mr. Oldham had been so happy in having a home of his own that Nance had felt fully repaid for her sacrifice. Her mother, too, had at last realized the delights of home, when someone else had the trouble of keeping it, and had spent much more time with her family than she had for many years.

[10]

A lingering illness had attacked Mr. Oldham and after two years of tender nursing on the part of his daughter and futile ineffectual attempts at tenderness on the part of his wife, the poor man had passed away. Then it was that Nance's friends had felt that her career might begin, but Mrs. Oldham had suddenly decided that she could not live without the husband who had been ever patient with her vagaries and she had gone into a slow decline. More nursing and self-denial for the patient Nance!

[11]

She was an orphan now and although she was in reality little more than a girl she felt old and settled, that the little youth she had ever had, had left her years ago. Molly had written her immediately on hearing of Mrs. Oldham's death, declaring that she and her Edwin were ready and eager for the long-deferred visit. "I say 'visit,'" wrote Molly, "but I want you to make your home with us. Little Mildred calls you Aunt Nance and Dodo will call you the same as soon as he can talk."

The guest chamber was now in perfect order. The fresh curtains hung as straight as a learned professor of English could hang them, the bureau scarf and table cover were smooth and spotless, and on the window sill blossomed a pot of sweet violets sent by Mrs. McLean from her own greenhouse.

"I wonder about Nance and Andy McLean," said Molly, as she and her husband were walking to the station to meet their guest.

[12]

"Wonder what about them?"

"Wonder if they will ever marry!"

"Pooh! I fancy it was just a schoolgirl affair. They don't often amount to much."

"Schoolgirl affairs can be right serious, as you of all others should know!"

"Thank goodness, some of them!" said Edwin devoutly.

"I reckon Nance will be in deep mourning," sighed Molly. "I hate mourning,—I mean long veils and crêpe trimmings."

"So do I,—a relic of barbarism!"

"I'll give up my literary club for a while. I know Nance will not feel like seeing a lot of young people."

Professor Green said nothing but he felt it was rather hard on Wellington that any of its pleasures should be curtailed because of the death of a lady in Vermont. But Molly must do what she thought best. He hoped their guest would not put too long a face on life and would not prove inconsolable.

The long train stopped at the little station at Wellington and Molly and her husband eagerly scanned the few passengers who alighted from the Pullman. One lady in a long crêpe veil got an embrace from the impulsive Molly but she turned out to be an utter stranger and not the beloved Nance.

[13]

"She didn't come!" cried Molly.

"Oh yes, she did, but she came on a day coach," and there was Nance hugging Molly and shaking hands with Professor Green at the same time.

That gentleman was viewing his wife's old friend with great satisfaction. Instead of the long crêpe veil and the lugubrious black-clothed figure, here was a slight young woman in a neat brown suit and furs, with a close brown velvet toque and a chic little dotted brown veil.

"Nance! I was expecting——"

"Of course you were expecting to find me swathed in black. I am doing what Mother asked me to do. She hated mourning and so did Father and I am a fright in black and it would have meant a new outfit, which I can ill afford, and so——"

[14]

"And so you are a sensible girl," said Professor Green approvingly, as he took possession of her traveling bag and trunk check.

"Oh, Nance, you are not changed one bit!" cried Molly.

"You are changed a lot," said the truthful Nance, "but you are more beautiful. In fact, you never were really beautiful before, but now, now——"

"Oh, spare my blushes!" cried Molly, who did not spare herself but blushed and blushed and blushed again.

Nance was the same little brown-eyed person with the same honest look out of those eyes. In repose her mouth did have a slight droop at the corners but otherwise she might have been a college girl still, so youthful were her lines and so clear and rosy her healthy skin. Her hair was as Molly had always remembered it, smooth and glossy with much brushing and every lock in place.

[15]

"Are you tired, honey? If you are, we can go home in the bus," suggested Molly. "Look what a fine motor bus we have now! Do you remember the old yellow one with the lame horses?"

"Do I? And also that I met you right at this station when we were both freshmen and we rode up in that bus together. Oh, Molly, it is wonderful to be here with you! No, I'm not tired, so let's walk."

The professor was due for lectures and the girls left him without reluctance. Even husbands were superfluous when such old friends met after being separated for so many years. There was so much to talk about, so many loose threads to catch up, so much belated news that had not seemed important enough to write.

"I'm dying to see the children."

"They are lovely! There is Mildred now waving to us from your window. I wonder what she is doing in there. I do hope she has not got into mischief," said Molly uneasily.

The guest chamber was still spotless and Molly breathed a sigh of relief. She had had visions of the irrepressible Mildred's making dolly sheets of the bureau scarf or of putting her black kitten to sleep in the snowy bed. The chubby imp was standing with her back to the window, her hands behind her. Her golden curls made a halo around her charming face, her brown eyes were soft and dreamy and her rosebud mouth looked as though butter would not melt in it.

[16]

"Come, darling, and speak to Aunt Nance," said Molly.

"Ain't no Aunt Nance!"

"Mildred!"

"Never mind, Molly! Don't force her. She and I will end by being sweethearts, I am sure," said Nance laughing.

"Never mind, Dodo will be your sweetheart now," declared Molly, going through all the agony of motherhood when the offspring refuses to be polite. "You may go to Katy, Mildred," in a tone as severe as she could make it.

Mildred sidled around, carefully keeping her back to her mother.

[17]

"What have you in your hand, darling?"

"Fings!"

"What things?"

"I been a-tuttin'."

"Scissors! Oh, Mildred, you know how afraid your mother is for you to play with scissors! What am I to do with you?"

Mildred made a sudden resolution. Why not throw herself on the mercy of this new aunt for protection. She darted by her mother and sprang into the ready arms of Nance.

"I been a-tuttin' a bunch of vi'lets for my Aunt Nance—an' I been a-fwingin' her curtains all pretty

for her.”

In one hand she had tightly clasped a huge pair of shears and in the other the violets which she had ruthlessly culled from the pot sent by Mrs. McLean.

“Oh, Mildred, see what you have done,” agonized Molly. “Mrs. McLean sent them to you, Nance. I am so sorry they are spoiled.”

“But they are not,” declared Nance, trying to keep down the blush that would come at the knowledge that Andy McLean’s mother had shown her this attention. “We can put this dear little bunch in water, and I am sure there are many more buds to bloom. Let’s see, Mildred.” [18]

“’Deed they is! I wouldn’t cut no li’l baby buds off for nothin’ or nothin’. ’Tain’t no bad Milly in this house.”

“But the curtains!” wailed poor Molly when she viewed the neat fringes that her daughter had so carefully slashed with the great shears.

“Now don’t worry about that,” insisted Nance. “Mildred and I are going to cut them off and hem them up. Aren’t we, Mildred? Very short curtains are all the style now, anyhow.”

“Yes!” exclaimed the wily Mildred eagerly, “the windows likes to show they silk stockings, jes’ like the ladies.”

“Oh, you darling!” cried Nance, sinking down and holding the child in her arms, while Molly rescued the long and dangerous shears.

“Now, Muvver, you needn’t to worry no mo’, Aunt Nance an’ I is done made up an’ I done forgive her an’ all.” [19]

“But how about you! Who has forgiven you?”

“Me! I done forgive myself ’long with Aunt Nance. I say right easy way down inside me: ‘Milly, ’scuse me!’ An’ then way down inside me say mos’ politeful: ‘You’s ’scusable, darlin’ chil’.’”

“Molly, how can you resist her?” asked Nance.

“Well, I don’t reckon I can,” said Molly, whimsically. “But you won’t do it any more, will you, Mildred?”

“No’m, never in my world—cross my heart an’ wish I may die—bake a puddin’ bake a pie did you ever tell a lie yes you did you know you did you broke yo’ mammy’s teapot lid.”

“Some of Kizzie’s nonsense!” laughed Molly, remembering in her childhood saying exactly the same thing.

And so Nance Oldham was received into the home of the Edwin Greens. Already she had won the approval of the master by appearing in colors and not swathed in black (men always do hate mourning). Mildred had decided to love and honor and make her obey. Little Dodo soon accepted her lap as an especially nice place to spend his few waking moments, and Molly’s love and welcome were assured from the beginning of time. [20]

CHAPTER II

 [21]

BY THE FIRELIGHT

The only home Nance Oldham had ever known she had made herself after she left college. Her childhood and girlhood had been spent in boarding houses with her patient father, while her brilliant mother made occasional hurried and preoccupied visits to them. There had been a time when Nance had felt bitterly towards her mother because she was not as other mothers were, but the realization had finally come to her that her mother could no more be as other mothers than other mothers could be as Mrs. Oldham was. She had decided that instead of her mother’s being a mistake, that she, Nance, was the mistake. She should never have been born; but now that she was born she intended to make the best of it. The fact that she had never had a home made a home just that much more precious and desirable in her eyes. [22]

What a lovely home this square old brick house on the campus made! Nance remembered well in her college days that it was not such a very attractive place, rather bleak, in fact. It needed a mistress, the soul of a house; and now in place of the blank uncurtained windows of old days, Molly’s genial hospitality and kindness seemed to look out from every pane of glass. The college girls named Mrs. Edwin Green “The Fairy Godmother of Wellington.” She was called into consultation on every occasion. The President of Wellington wondered if it were not incumbent upon her to offer Molly a salary for her services.

"I don't know what we would do without her. I believe the college would simply go to pieces without Mrs. Edwin Green."

The students, old and young, rich and poor, flocked to the brick house which they dubbed "The Square Deal." There Molly administered advice and love and sympathy with absolute impartiality, also with perfect unconsciousness that she was the guiding star of the student body.

"She is the only really truly democratic person I ever knew,—of course, besides O. Henry, and I didn't exactly know him," Billie McKym declared. "She and O. Henry simply don't regard money one way or the other in their judgment of persons. Now most social workers think of the rich as necessary evils in the way of pocketbooks and such. They really take no interest in anyone who does not need financial or moral help, but Molly and O. Henry are just as good to the rich as the poor."

[23]

Billie was back at Wellington taking extra courses that she wasn't certain what she was to do with, but she felt anything was preferable to coming out into society in New York, which was the inevitable sequence the moment she was through with college.

Billie rather resented the guest at the Square Deal as did many of Molly's youthful friends.

"There's never any seeing Molly alone now," she grumbled.

"Never!" agreed Mary Neil, a red-headed junior who had what she termed a "mash" on Mrs. Green. Molly, being totally unaware of this, was ever causing the poor girl to turn green with jealousy.

[24]

"To think of her stopping the 'Would-be's' just because Miss Oldham's mother died, and she didn't even think enough of her to put on mourning," asserted Lilian Swift as she peeped in the mirror over the mantel to adjust her own very becoming black and white hat, worn as second mourning for a great-aunt who had left her a legacy.

These girls were assembled in the library at the Greens', waiting to see their friend. That evening the "Would-be Authors' Club" was to have met, but Molly, their president, had felt it best to postpone it because of Nance's recent bereavement. The "Would-be Authors" was now a flourishing organization with a waiting list that almost stretched around the campus. They met together for mutual benefit and encouragement and sometimes for discouragement. The only requisite for membership was to scribble at fiction. On coming into this club it was necessary to pledge oneself to take a criticism like a man. No matter how severe a drubbing your story called forth, you must smile and smile.

[25]

"Girls, I'm so sorry to keep you waiting, but Mildred had got chewing-gum in her hair and I simply had to get it out before her whole wig stuck together," said Molly as she came in with Dodo in her arms and Mildred trotting after her like a veritable little colt following its dam. "My friend, Miss Oldham, will be down in a moment."

The girls looked at one another meaningly.

"I want all of you to like my friend," continued Molly, as though she could divine their thoughts. "She has had a hard time and she needs the companionship of young people more than anyone I know."

Molly then told them of Nance's devotion to her mother and father, of her thwarted ambition, of her unselfishness and cleverness.

"It seems strange for her not to wear mourning for her mother," said Lilian.

"Perhaps it does, but when you think of it, what you wear has nothing to do with your feelings. It is in a way part of Nance's unselfishness that she did not put on mourning. Her father disliked it, her mother could not abide it, and as she said, it meant a new outfit which she could ill afford. It is a great deal easier just to give up to grief and exude gloom than it is to be cheerful and radiate light and happiness."

[26]

Molly was in a measure irritated by Lilian's criticism of her beloved Nance, but Lilian was a person who always spoke her mind no matter what was involved, and she had a certain sturdiness and honesty of opinion that disarmed one.

"Well, that's all right," she answered bluntly, "but while she is being so unselfish about her clothes, why doesn't she spunk up a bit about the 'Would-be Authors?'"

"What about them?"

"Why, postponing the meeting because she is in such deep grief."

"That wasn't Nance. I am responsible for that foolishness. She only found out about it to-day and declares she will go back to Vermont if I dare make a single change in my way of living. I want all of you to get messages to the club to be sure and come this evening."

[27]

"Bully for Nance!" cried Billie McKym.

Nance came into the room just as Billie was cheering her.

"I'm mighty glad it's bully for me, if I'm the Nance. But why 'Bully for Nance?'"

"Just because you are here with Mrs. Green and can come to our literary club this evening," said Billie with a straight face.

"But I am no scribbler," declared Nance.

"But you are a wonderful critic," said Molly. "Among so many scribblers it is well to have one sane person willing to compose the audience. It is my turn to read to-night and I want your criticism."

"If I can come in that capacity, I am more than willing," smiled Nance as she settled herself to her knitting.

"I remember many times you saved me from making a bombastic goose of myself on my college themes," laughed Molly. "What I flattered myself was pathos, under your cool judgment turned out often to be bathos." [28]

Molly leaned over and gave her friend an affectionate pat. At this show of love, Mary Neil jumped up so suddenly that she upset little Mildred, who was sitting on the sofa by her, and without saying a word rushed from the room.

"What on earth!" exclaimed Molly.

"The suddenness of Mary,—that's all," declared Billie.

"Good title for a story!" said Lilian, getting out a note-book.

"Oh, you scribblers!" laughed Nance.

Little Mildred was picked up and comforted and in a short while the visitors took their departure.

"Molly, do you know what was the matter with that interesting looking red-headed girl?" asked Nance as they settled to the delights of a twilight chat, while Nance busily plied her knitting needles on the long drab scarf that seemed to grow under her agile fingers like magic.

"I have no idea." [29]

"She was jealous of me. I noticed how she looked at me when I came in and she never said a single word while all of us were chatting. Then the moment you gave me a little pat, she jumped up as though she had received an electric shock and fled."

"Absurd! I hate to think it of Mary."

"It's true all the same. Didn't you know she was crazy about you?"

"No, and I don't want to know it. A girl had better be beau-crazy than have these silly cases with other girls. I am going to put a stop to it in some way."

"How, may I ask?"

"I might do like Peg Woffington and put my hair up in curl papers and appear at my very worst."

"Well, dearie, your worst might be so much better than some person's best that that might not work. But don't think I've got a case on you."

"Never! We were foolish enough college girls but we never were that foolish. I can't remember anyone in our crowd having these silly mashes. Can you?" [30]

"Unless it was the affair Judy Kean had with Adele Windsor. Do you remember when poor Judy turned up with her hair dyed a blue black?"

"Do I?" and the friends went off into peals of laughter just as Mrs. McLean ushered herself into the firelit room.

"The door was open so I came right in," announced that dear woman. She caught Nance's hands in a strong grasp and drew the girl towards her. "I am glad to see you, my dear," she said simply. Her well-remembered Scotch accent fell pleasingly on Nance's ear.

"The violets were lovely. I thank you so much," faltered Nance.

Molly wondered at the embarrassment of her friend. She had longed to talk to Nance about Andy McLean but did not know how to begin. She shrank from prying into her guest's affairs, but the eternal feminine in her was on the alert for the romance she had no doubt was there. [31]

"And now I must tell you all about Andy," said his fond mother. "I know you want to hear about him,—eh?"

"Indeed we do," put in Molly quickly, while Nance tried to go on with her knitting, but I am afraid dropped more stitches than she picked up.

"He has resigned from the hospital staff in New York where he was doing so splendidly and is to go to France as an ambulance surgeon."

"Oh!" came involuntarily from Nance.

"Splendid!" cried Molly.

"It is what he should do," declared his Spartan mother. "His father and I would not have it otherwise. Of course, the States will be at war before the month is out and Andy might wait and enlist with his own country, but in the meantime he is needed, and sadly needed, by my country, mine and his father's."

"He will come see you before he sails, will he not?" asked Molly.

"Of course! He may spend a month with us."

"That will be splendid indeed."

[32]

Nance said nothing, but the flames that sprang from the wood fire lit up a very rosy countenance.

"I must be going now. I only ran in for a moment to bring the news of my Andy and to see this little friend again. Come to see me, both of you," and the doctor's wife was gone.

"Molly! I should never have come to you!" said Nance the moment the door closed on their visitor. Katy, the Irish nurse, had come for the baby. Little Mildred had fallen asleep, her head in Nance's lap.

"My darling girl! Why?"

"I can't spoil Andy's visit to his mother. If I am here, it will be spoiled."

"Nance, how can you say so?"

"Because it is the truth. He will have to see me, and he hates me."

"He couldn't!"

"He left me two years ago in a rage and swore it was over for good and all; and he couldn't have said such things to me if he had not hated me."

[33]

"And you—do you hate him?"

"Of course not!" and again the flickering fire showed off her blushes.

"Did you say nothing to him but nice things?"

"We-ll, not exactly,—but he said the things he said first."

"Were the things he said worse than the things you said?"

"No!" with a toss of her independent head, "I gave him back as good as he sent."

"You shouldn't have done it. You knew how the things he said hurt, and with your superior knowledge of what it meant to be wounded, you were cruel to hurt him so."

"But he should have known! That kind of philosophy is above me. Suppose the Allies conducted their warfare under those principles, what would become of us? Germany hit first and France and Belgium knew how it hurt, and so they should not have hit back. There is a big hole in your reasoning, honey."

"But that is not the same. Germany and France didn't love one another, while you and Andy——"

[34]

"Well, it is all over now!" and Nance composed herself and tried to go on with her knitting. Molly thought in her heart perhaps it was not so "over" as Nance thought.

"Why did you and Andy quarrel?"

"I had promised when Father no longer needed me that I would—would—marry him. How could I tell that Mother would want to come live with me when poor Father was gone? Andy came as soon as he learned of Father's death and seemed to think I could pick right up and marry him, and when I objected to such unseemly haste he said I had been flirting with him. The idea of such a thing! He got it into his head that Dr. Flint, the physician who had been with us through poor Father's long illness, was the cause of my holding back."

"A young doctor?"

"Ye-es!"

"Was he—was he—attentive?"

"Perhaps—well, yes—he did propose to me but I had no idea of accepting him. Andy should have known me well enough to realize that I couldn't be so low as to jilt him. When Andy came, Mother had just told me that she never expected to leave me again. I never did have a chance to tell this to him, he was so angry and so jealous. He wanted me to marry him immediately and leave Vermont,—and how could I when Mother was home, sick and miserable and reproaching herself for having been away from Father so much?"

[35]

"Did your mother not know of your engagement to Andy?"

"No-o! You see, poor Mother was not—was not the kind of mother one confided in much. Afterwards, when I nursed her through all those months, she was so softened if I had had anything to confide I should have done so, but then there was nothing left to confide."

"Poor old Nance!" said Molly lovingly.

"Well, I'm not sorry for myself a bit. No doubt I might have gone whining to Andy and made him take back all the things he said, but I am no whiner. It was a good thing we found out in time we could say such things to each other!"

[36]

"Maybe it was a good thing to find out in time how it hurt to say such things and have such things said to one, and then it would never happen again," said the hopeful Molly.

Nance divined that Molly was thinking how best she could bring these two estranged lovers together, and determined to frustrate any matchmaking plans the young matron might be hatching.

"Promise me, Molly, you will not say a thing to Andy or to anyone. It is something that is hopelessly mixed up and my pride would never recover if Andy should know that I cared."

"You do care then?"

"Of course I care! I never had very many friends and if I cared for Andy enough to engage myself to him, I could not get over it ever, I am afraid. But you have not promised yet."

"I promise," said Molly sadly. "But if you love Andy, it does seem so foolish——"

"But remember you have promised!"

CHAPTER III

[37]

THE WOULD-BE'S

What a chattering there was as the crowd of girls gathered for the weekly meeting of their literary club! Professor Green beat a hasty retreat from the library. He declared that listening to schoolgirl fiction was no treat to him. Besides there was so much to be read concerning the war in that month of March, 1917, and little time in which to read it. War was an obsession with Edwin Green. Waking and sleeping it was ever with him. He regretted his being unable to enlist as a private in the French army, so strong were his sympathies with that struggling nation. Certain that his country would finally drop its neutrality and come out strongly for democracy and the Allies, he could hardly wait for the final declaration of war. He had his den, safe from the encroachments of the "Would-be Authors' Club," and there he ensconced himself with enough newspapers and magazines to furnish reading matter for the whole of Wellington.

[38]

The rules of the club were as follows: Two pieces of original fiction must be read at each meeting. A chairman for the evening must be appointed by the two performers. All manuscript must be written legibly if not typewritten, so that the club need not have to wait while the author tried to read her own writing. Criticism must be given and taken in good humor and good faith.

Molly, in forming this club, had endeavored to have in it only those students who were really interested in short story writing and ambitious to perfect themselves, but in spite of her ideals there were some members who were in it for the fun they got out of it or for a certain prestige they fancied they would gain from these weekly meetings at the home of the popular wife of a popular professor. These slackers were constantly bringing excuses for plots when their time came to read, or trying to work off on the club old essays and theses on various subjects not in the least related to fiction.

[39]

"You are to read this evening, I believe, Mary," said Molly to Mary Neil as the library filled. "You missed last time and so got put on this week."

"Yes—I—that is—you see, I sat up all night trying to finish a story but couldn't get it to suit me."

"Did you bring it?"

"Oh no, it was too much in the rough."

"That's too bad, Mary!" cried Lilian Swift. "There are plenty of us who had things to read and you cut us out of the chance."

"Surely some of you must have brought things," said Molly, trying not to smile, knowing full well that in almost every pocket of the really and truly "Would-be's" some gem of purest ray serene in the shape of a manuscript was only waiting to be dived for. The self-conscious expression on at least a dozen faces put her mind at rest in regard to the program of the evening.

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"It seems I have the appointing of a chairman for the meeting in my power, since the other reader has fallen out of the running," said Molly, looking as severely as she could look at the sullen, handsome Mary Neil, "so I appoint Billie McKym."

Billie, a most ardent scribbler, had been drawn into the procession of short-story fiends by her dear friend Thelma Larson, who was destined to become famous as a writer of fiction. Billie had no great talent but she possessed a fresh breezy line of dialogue that covered a multitude of sins in the way of plot formation, motivation, crisis, climax and what not.

"Remember, Billie, the chair is not the floor," teased one of the members.

Billie was a great talker and although she was no pronounced success as a writer of fiction, she was a good critic of the performance of others.

"Just for that I'll ask you, Miss Smarty, to serve as vice, and when I have something important to say I'll put you in the chair for keeps."

"Oh, let Mrs. Green begin and stop squabbling," demanded a girl who had a plot she was dying to divulge and devoutly hoped she would be called on when their hostess got through. [41]

"Then begin!" and Billie rapped for order.

Molly took her seat by the reading-lamp and opened her manuscript. Having to read before the club was just as exciting to Molly as to the veriest freshman. Her cheeks flushed and her hand trembled a wee bit.

"Silly of me to get stage fright but I can't help it," she laughed.

"How do you reckon we feel then?" drawled a little girl from Alabama, who only the week before had been torn limb from limb by the relentless "Would-be's."

"This is a story that I have sent on many a journey and it always comes back to its dotting mother. I have received several personal letters about it——"

"Oh, wonderful!" came from several members.

"Only think, the most encouraging thing that has happened to me yet was once a Western magazine kept my manuscript almost three weeks," sighed a willowy maiden. [42]

"Now please criticize it just as severely as you can. I want to sell it, and something must be done to it before the editors will take it," begged Molly, getting over her ridiculous stage fright.

"Fire away!" said parliamentary Billie.

"How long is it?" asked Lilian Swift.

"About five thousand words, I think!"

"Whew!" blew the girl who hoped to get her plot in edgewise.

There was a general laugh and then Molly cleared her throat for action. "First, let me tell you I saw a clipping in the *New York Times* asking for Fairy Godmothers for the soldiers. That was what put the idea in my head. The title is: 'Fairy Godmothers Wanted.'"

You could have heard a pin drop while Molly read, and occasionally one did hear the scratching of a pencil wielded by a member who was on a critical war-path.

CHAPTER IV

FAIRY GODMOTHERS WANTED

The ballroom was crowded but very quiet. The belle of the ball was the night nurse, deftly accomplishing the many duties that fall to the share of a night nurse. A letter must be written for a poor Gascon who had lost his right arm; a Bedouin chief must be watered every five minutes; a little red-headed Irishman begging for morphine to ease his pain, and a sad Cockney lad sobbing because he was "'omesick for 'Ammersmith," must be comforted.

The beautiful old château had been converted into a hospital early in the war and the *salle de bal* was given over to the convalescents. The convalescent male is a very difficult proposition, and the little nurse sometimes felt her burden was greater than she could bear. There was so much to do for these sick soldiers besides nurse them. One thing, she must good-naturedly submit to being made love to in many different languages. She could stand all but the Bedouin chief. [44]

"He seems so like our darkeys at home," she had whispered to the one American who was getting well rather faster than he liked to admit.

This American wanted to get well and be back in the trenches, but who was to make love to the pretty night nurse in good old American when he left the convalescent ward?

"You promised to do something for me to-night. Don't forget! You must be almost through with all

of these fellows.”

“Ready in a minute!” She flitted down between the rows of cots, tucking in the covers here, plumping up a pillow there. The Bedouin was watered for the last time that night and finally closed his rolling black eyes.

“Now, what is it?” she asked, sinking down on a stool by the American’s bed, which was placed in an alcove at one end of the great salon. “If it is writing a letter, thank goodness, it won’t have to be in the second person singular in French. Why do you suppose they teach us such formal French at school? I can’t *tutoyer* for the life of me.”

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“Same here! *Je t’aime*’s all I know. But I don’t want you to write a letter for me. I want you to read some. But first I must know your really truly name. I—I—like you too much just to have to call you nurse.”

“Mary Grubb!”

“No! Not really?”

“Yes! I’d like to know what is the matter with my name. It is a perfectly good name, I reckon.”

“Yes, Mary is beautiful—but—the other! Never mind, you can change it.”

“I have no desire to do so, at least not for many a day. I think Grubb is especially nice. It suggests Sally Lunn and batter bread.”

“There now, I would know you are from the South even if your dear little ‘reckons’ didn’t come popping out every now and then. Do you know, I have a friend who lives in Kentucky, and when the war is over I have been planning to go see her, but now—but now—I am afraid she won’t want to see me.”

[46]

“You mean the scars?” and she looked pityingly at the young man and put her firm little hand on his head. “Why, they will not amount to much. They will just make you look interesting. Your eyes will be well, I just know they will. Look at this long scar that has given the most trouble! It has turned to a pleasing pink and will be almost gone in a few months. You see you are so healthy.”

“It isn’t altogether the scars. If you think they are pretty, maybe she will, too. There is something else. I want to read over all this packet of letters before I decide something. You had better begin or that big, black, bounding beggar over there will begin to whine for water again. After you read the letters, maybe I will tell you the other reason why my friend in Kentucky might not want to see me.”

He took from under his pillow a packet of little blue letters, tightly tied with a piece of twine.

“Here they are! These letters have meant a lot to me while I was in the trenches. They still mean a lot to me. They were written by my Fairy Godmother.”

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“Oh! Are they love letters?”

“No, indeed! I wouldn’t ask a woman to read another woman’s love letters. I wouldn’t let anyone but you read these letters, but my eyes are too punk to read them myself and I have to—to hear them to decide something, something very important.”

“All right! A nurse is a kind of father confessor and what one hears professionally is sacred.”

“But, my dear, I am not thinking of you as a nurse.”

“But I am thinking of you as a patient.”

She slipped the top letter from the packet and turned it over. “So your name is Stephen Scott!”

“Didn’t you know my name, either? How funny!”

“I only know the names of the patients who have charts, and you are too well to waste a chart on. We nurses call you the convalescent American. Sure these are not love letters?”

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“Of course!” impatiently. “But if you don’t want to read them to me, just say so. Maybe you are tired. Of course you are. You look pale and your little hand is trembling.”

“No, no! I am not tired! Let me begin.”

The *salle de bal* of the old château was very quiet. The wounded soldiers were dropping off to sleep one by one. Even the Bedouin chief had stopped rolling his eyes and was softly snoring. In a low clear voice she read the letters.

MY DEAR GODSON:

It is so wonderful to be a Godmother that I can hardly contain myself for joy. It is through an advertisement I saw in a New York paper, headed Fairy Godmothers Wanted, that I happen to have you and you happen to have me. I consider our introduction quite regular as it came through the wife of a great general.

I wonder how you like belonging to me? I wonder if you are as alone in the world and homeless as I am. I wonder if you are big or little, dark or fair, old or young. I wonder all kinds of things about you,—after all, it makes no difference, any of these things. You are my Godson and every day I am

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going to pray for you and think about you. I am going to send you presents and write you long letters and send you newspapers. The only trouble about it is by the time I get hold of English papers they will be weeks and weeks old. I wonder if American magazines and papers would appeal to you. I wonder what kind of presents you would like,—not beaded antimacassars and not mouchoir cases surely. I will knit you a sweater maybe, but I am not very fond of knitting.

This business of being a Fairy Godmother is a very serious one, more serious than being a real mother, I believe. A real mother can at least do something towards forming the character of her child, but a Fairy Godmother has her child presented to her and takes it as the husband used to take his bride in the old English prayer book: "With all her debts and scandals upon her." The worst of it is that she is ignorant what those debts and scandals are. I don't even know what kind of smoke to send you. Are you middle-aged and sedate and do you smoke a corn-cob pipe? Are you young and giddy and do you live on cigarettes? A terrible possibility has entered into my mind! Are you one of those awful persons that uses what our darkeys call "eatin' tobacco"? If so, I shall begin to train you immediately.

Perhaps you want to know something about me. There is not much to know. I am an orphan of independent means and character. Being the first, enables me to be the second, which sounds like a riddle but isn't. You see I have rafts and oodlums of kin, and if I did not have an income of my own they would step in and coerce me even more than they do. I said in the beginning that I was homeless. I am not really that, but the trouble is I have too many homes. I must spend the winter with Aunt Sally and the spring with Cousin Kate. Cousin Maria and Uncle Bruce want me to take White Sulphur by storm with them as chaperones; and so it is from one year's end to the other, kind relations planning for me. I am bored to death with it all and am even now preparing a bomb to throw in this camp of overzealous kin. But I'll tell you about that later,—that is, if you want to hear about it. I may be boring you stiff. If I am, it is an easy matter for you to repudiate me and tell Mrs. Johnson to get you a more agreeable Godmother.

My numerous family does not at all approve of my being a Godmother. They think I am too young for the responsibility and have entered upon it too lightly. I even heard Aunt Sally whisper to Cousin Maria: "Just like her mother!" That means in their minds that I am headstrong and difficult. You see my mother was also of independent means and character. Also (I whisper this) she was not a Southerner. That is as serious in a Southerner's eyes as not being British is in yours. They think it is very forward of me to be writing to a man what has not been properly introduced. Uncle Bruce suggests that you may not even be born. I tell him soldiers don't have to be born and that the bravest soldiers that were ever known sprang up from dragon's teeth.

I am sending you as my first present all kinds of tobacco, even plug. I must not let my prejudices get away with me. If my dear Godson likes "eatin' tobacco," he shall have it. If you don't indulge in it, give it to some soldier less dainty. For my part, I should think the trenches would be dirty enough without adding to them.

I want to tell you that I like your name. I think Stephen Scott sounds very manly and upstanding, somehow. I am hoping for a letter from you just to give me an inkling of your tastes. Of course I know one of the duties of a Fairy Godmother is not to worry her charge, and I don't want to worry you but to help you. I think of you in those damp, nasty ditches eating all kinds of food, served in all kinds of ways. (I am sure what should be hot is cold, and what should be cold is hot.) And when I sit down to batter-bread and fried chicken I can hardly force it down, I do so want you to have it instead of me.

Your affectionate Godmother,
POLLY NELSON.

The night nurse quietly folded up the first letter and slipped it back in its blue envelope. She had a whimsical, amused expression on her face.

"What are you smiling over? Don't you think that is a nice letter?"

"I didn't say it wasn't."

"But you didn't say it was. I think that is a sweet letter. I tell you it meant a lot to me. Of course, I am not the homeless Tommy she thought I was. I fancy I have as many Aunt Sallies and Cousin Marias as she has, but they happen to be in New England."

"You are not an orphan, then!"

"Oh, yes! I'm an orphan all right enough, but I am related to half of Massachusetts and all of Boston."

"Did you tell your Fairy Godmother that?"

"No,—that's what makes me feel so bad. I was afraid she would stop being my Godmother if she found out I was—well, not exactly poor, so I—I didn't exactly lie—"

"You didn't exactly tell the truth, either," and the night nurse curled her pretty lip and looked disgusted.

"Oh, please don't be angry with me, too. I know she will be. I have simply got to tell her the truth about myself. I did let her know I am an American. I am going to write her a letter just as soon as I can see to do it. But go on with the next, please. You are sure it is not tiring you too much?"

"Sure," and the night nurse slipped out another.

MY DEAR GODSON:

It was very nice of you to answer my letter so promptly. I am so glad you are an American and do

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not chew tobacco. You must not feel compelled to answer all my letters because you must be very busy and I have very little to do, so little that I am becoming very restless. I have thrown the bomb in the camp of the enemy, my kin. They are shattered into smithereens. I am going to enter a hospital, take training, and just as soon as I am capable go to France with the Red Cross nurses. I should like to go immediately but I want to be a help not a hindrance, and they say all the untrained persons who butt in on the war zone are a nuisance. Six months of training should make me fit, don't you think? But how should you know?

I am very happy at the thought of being of some use. I owe it all to you, my dear Godson. If I had not been presented with you I should never have thought of such a thing. Just as soon as I realized that over in the trenches was a human being who wanted to hear from me and whom I could help, I began to take a new interest in the war and all the soldiers, and then I began to feel that maybe I, insignificant little I, might be of some use to those poor soldiers, some use besides just knitting foolish caps and mittens and sending the *Saturday Evening Post* and cigarettes. I only wish I could go immediately. My training begins to-morrow. Aunt Sally and Cousin Maria feel that it is a terrible blot on the family name. They are sure someone will say that I am doing this because I am not a success in society, although they say over and over that I am. I don't know whether I am or not, all I know is that society is not a success with me. Uncle Bruce is rather nice about it all.

There are so many I's in this letter I am mortified. I believe writing to a Godson in the trenches is almost like keeping a diary. I am sending you some cards and poker chips (but you mustn't play for money). I'd hate to think that my presents exerted a poor moral influence on my dear Godson. Would you mind just dropping a hint as to what kind of presents would be most acceptable? I have never been in the habit of giving presents to men and the kinds of presents some of my friends give would not be very appropriate, it seems to me. Silver match boxes and cigarette holders would not be very useful, nor would silk socks with initials embroidered on them be much better. Do you like chocolate drops and poetry?

Your affectionate Fairy Godmother,
POLLY NELSON.

The night nurse laughed outright at the close of the letter and Stephen Scott reached out for the packet from which she was extracting a third blue envelope.

"If you are going to make fun of them, you can stop."

"I wasn't making fun. I was just thinking what funny presents girls do give men."

"Well, so they do, but my little Godmother gave me bully presents,—cigarettes to burn, home-made molasses candy and beaten biscuit. She had lots of imagination in the presents she sent and the blessed child never did burden me with a work-box but sent me a gross of safety-pins that beat all the sewing kits on earth. I don't believe you like my Godmother much."

"Don't you? Well, I do."

"You should like her because somehow you remind me of her."

"Oh! Have you seen her?"

"Only in my mind's eye. I begged her for a picture of herself but she has never sent it. She has promised it, though. You see I got to answering her letters in the same spirit in which she wrote to me, only I was not quite so frank, I am afraid. She told me everything about herself while I told her only my thoughts. I never did tell her I was not a homeless soldier of fortune. She thinks I am absolutely friendless and dependent on my pay as a private for my living. Sometimes I wish I didn't have a sou—at least I have felt that way—but now—"

"But now what?"

"But now I don't think it is so bad to have a little tin," and he held one of the little stained hands in his for a moment.

She gently withdrew it and opened a third letter. This was full of hospital experiences and so were all that followed. The tone of them became more intimate and friendly. The desire to serve was ever uppermost—just to get in the War Zone and help.

"I got awfully stuck on her, somehow," confessed the man. "She was so sweet and so girlish—I did not say so for fear of scaring her off, but I used to write her pretty warm ones, I am afraid."

"Why afraid?"

"Don't you know?"

"How should I know?"

"Why, honey, you must see that I am head over heels in love with you. I oughtn't to be telling it to you when I have written my little Godmother that as soon as the war is over I am going to find her and tell her the same thing. But, somehow, I was loving her only on paper and in my mind; but you—you—I love you with every bit of my heart, soul and body." He caught her hand and all of the poor little slim blue letters slipped from the twine and scattered over the floor.

"Oh, the poor little letters!" she cried. "Is that all they mean to you?"

"Oh, honey, they meant a lot to me and still do, but they are just letters and you are—you."

"But how about the letters you wrote Miss Polly Nelson? Are they just letters to her and nothing

more? Don't you think it is possible that she may have treasured your letters, especially the pretty warm ones, and be looking forward to the end of the war with the same eagerness that you have felt up to—say——”

“The minute I laid eyes on you. At first I used to dream maybe you were she, but I began to feel that she must be much—younger—somehow, than you. You are so capable, so mature in a way. She is little more than a child and you are a grown woman.”

“I am twenty-one—but the war ages one.”

“I don't mean you look old—I just mean you seem so sensible.”

“And Miss Nelson didn't?”

“I don't mean that, I just mean she seemed immature. But suppose you read the last letter. And couldn't you do it with one hand and let me hold the other?”

“Certainly not!” and the night nurse stooped and gathered the scattered letters. Leaning over may have accounted for the rosy hue that overspread her countenance. [59]

“You certainly read her writing mighty easily. I had a hard time at first. I think she writes a rotten fist, although there is plenty of character in it, dear little Godmother!”

“Humph! Do you think so? I wouldn't tell her that if I were you—I mean that you think her fist is rotten.”

“Of course not, but begin, please, and say—couldn't you manage with one hand?”

But the night nurse was adamant and drew herself up very primly and began to read:

MY DEAR GODSON:

I am afraid gratitude has got the better of you. You must not feel that because a girl in America has written you a pile of foolish letters and sent you a few little paltry presents, you must send her such very loverlike letters in return. I am disappointed in you, Godson. I had an idea that you were steadier. Just suppose I were a designing female who was going to hold you up and drag you through the wounded-affections court? There is quite enough in your last two letters to justify such a proceeding. It may be only your poverty that will restrain me. In the first place, you don't know me from Adam or rather Eve. I may be a Fairy Godmother with a crooked back and a black cat, who prefers a broom-stick to a limousine; I may have a hare-lip and a mean disposition; I may write vers libre and believe in dress reform. In fact I am a pig in a poke and you are a very foolish person to think you want to carry me off without ever looking at me. I won't say that I don't want to see you and know you, because I do. I have been very honest with you in my letters because, as I told you once, it has seemed almost like keeping a diary to write to you, and I think a person who is not honest in a diary is as bad as the person who cheats at solitaire. When the war is over if you want to look me up you will find me in Louisville, Kentucky. When you do find me, I want you to be nothing but my Godson. You may not like me a bit and I may find you unbearable,—somehow, I don't believe I shall, though. I do hope you will like me, too. One thing I promise—that is, not to fall in love with anyone else until I have looked you over. And you—I fancy you see no females to fall in love with. [60]

I never let myself think about your getting killed. As Fairy Godmother I cast a spell about you to protect you. There are times when I almost wish you could be safely wounded. Those are the times when I doubt the efficacy of my prayers and the powers of my fairy gifts.

And now for the news: I am going to the front! I have worked it by strategy. A girl I know has had all her papers made out ready to join the Red Cross nurses, and now at the last minute her young man has stepped in and persuaded her to marry him instead. I have cajoled the papers from her and am leaving in a few hours. Aunt Sally and Cousin Kate, Uncle Bruce and Cousin Maria are half demented. They don't know how I worked it or I am sure they would have the law on me for perjury. I am free, white, and twenty-one now, and they could control me in no other way. Good-by, Godson! I wonder if we will meet somewhere in France. I will write you when I can, but I am afraid I shall not be able to send any more presents for a while. [61]

Your affectionate Godmother.

“Now don't you hate and despise me for telling you what I did just now? You see she says she will at least not fall in love with anyone else until she looks me over, and think what I have done! What must I do? I am going to try not to tell you I love you any more until that other girl knows what a blackguard I am, but you must understand all the time that I do.”

“I understand nothing, Mr. Stephen Scott. I am simply the night nurse in the convalescent ward and you have asked me to read some letters to you, and I have read them; and now it is my duty to forget what is in them, and I am going to do it,—I have done it. All I can say is that you might give Miss Polly Nelson the chance to find someone else she likes better than she does you before you are so quick to take for granted she will stick to her bargain, too. If there is any jilting going on, we Southern girls rather prefer to be the jilters than the jiltees.” [62]

“Don't say jilting! It isn't fair. Please be good to me! I am so miserable.”

The night nurse smiled in spite of herself and felt his pulse.

“There now! Just as I thought! You have worked yourself up into an abnormal pulse and I shall have to start a chart on you.”

“Abnormal nothing! How is a fellow's pulse to remain normal when you put your dear little

fingers on his wrist? But I forgot! I am not going to make love to you until I can let my Godmother know. Maybe she has met some grand English Tommy by this time——” And then he groaned aloud and cried: “But I don’t want her to do that, either!”

“Blessed if I’m not in love with two girls,” he thought.

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The night nurse sat quietly down to her charts after having gone the rounds of her ward. All was quiet. The convalescent soldiers were sleeping peacefully, dreaming of home, she hoped. Scott stirred restlessly now and then. He could not sleep but watched the busy little stained hand of the night nurse as it glided rapidly over the charts. She had no light but that of a guttering candle, carefully shaded from her patients’ eyes, but Scott could see her well-poised head and fine profile as she bent over her writing. How lovely she was! Would she ever listen to him? How she stood up for her sex,—and still she did not exactly repulse him. What a strange name for a girl like that to have! Grubb! It was preposterous. Indeed, he felt it his duty to make her change that name as soon as possible. Polly Nelson is a pretty name—dear little Godmother! Would she despise him, too, like this other girl? But did this other one despise him?

The night nurse made her rounds again and then left the ward for a moment. When she returned, she came to the American’s bedside.

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“A letter has just come for you, Mr. Scott.”

“For me? Splendid! Will you read it to me?”

“Yes, if you cannot possibly see to do it yourself.”

“I might, but I’d rather not.”

“It is in the same rotten fist of those I read you to-night.”

“My Fairy Godmother! I—I—believe I can see to read that myself.”

She handed him the letter. Her hand was trembling a little and so was his. She brought the guttering candle and he opened his letter.

Somewhere in France.

MY DEAR GODSON:

I have always been so frank with you that I feel I must make a confession. I promised you in my last letter, the one I wrote just before I left home, that I would not fall in love with anyone until after the war, when you were to present yourself in Louisville and we were to view each other for the first time. Dear Godson—— I have not kept my word. They say a man falls in love with his nurse often because of the feeling he has for his mother. She makes it seem as though he were a little child again. I reckon a nurse falls in love with her patient because he seems so like a little boy. She loves him first because of the maternal instinct. Be that as it may, I am in love with one of my patients. I tell you this fearing you may be wounded and you may fall in the hands of a cap and apron, and from a feeling of noblesse oblige you may not grasp the happiness within your reach.

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God bless you, my dear Godson!

Always,
YOUR FAIRY GODMOTHER.

P. S.—He is an American.

A great tear rolled down the scarred cheek of the young soldier and splashed on the signature. Then something happened that made him sit up very straight in his cot and stretch out a shaking hand for the night nurse. She was by his side in a moment.

“Look! Look! The ink is not dry yet. See where that tear dropped! Dry ink would not float off like that!” He turned the sheet over. It was a chart.

“But you—you—little Fairy Godmother! Who is he?”

“There is only one American in my ward.”

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“But you said your name was Grubb!”

“That’s my official name. Mary Grubb was the girl whose place I got with the Red Cross. Do you know, you hurt my feelings terribly when you said my fist was rotten?”

And Stephen Scott, holding the little stained and roughened hand in his, wondered that he ever could have made such a break.

“Thank God, you are just one girl, after all!” he cried.

But the night nurse wished that there were two of her for a while at least: one to stay by the bedside of the convalescent American and one to make out the charts that must be got ready for the morning rounds of the surgeon in charge.

THE CRITICS

"Ahem!" said Billie, rapping for order as the girls began all at once to say what they thought of "Fairy Godmothers Wanted." The one with the burning plot began rattling her paper in preparation of the turn she hoped for.

"First general impressions are in order! One at a time, please! You, Miss Oldham, you tell us how it strikes you."

"Pleasing on the whole, but——"

"We'll come to the 'buts' later," was the stern mandate of the chairman of the day.

"You, Lilian Swift, you next!"

"Too long!" from the blunt Lilian.

"The idea! I think it was just sweet," from the gentle Alabamian.

"I got kind of mixed in the middle and couldn't tell which was the nurse and which Polly Nelson," declared one who had evidently gone off into a cataleptic fit, no doubt dreaming of a story she meant to write some day.

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"I never, never could love a man who had deceived me," sighed the sentimental one with big eyes and a little mouth.

"Personal predilections not valuable as criticism," said Billie sternly.

Many and various were the opinions expressed. Molly diligently and meekly took notes, agreeing heartily with the ones who thought it was too long.

"Where must I cut it?" she asked eagerly.

"Cut out all the letters!" suggested Lilian.

"How could she? It is all letters," asked Billie, whose chair was becoming a burden as she felt she must get into the discussion.

"Cut 'em, anyhow. Letters in fiction are no good."

"Humph! How about the early English novelists?" asked Molly.

"Dead! Dead! All of them dead!" stormed Lilian.

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"Then how about Mary Roberts Rinehart and Booth Tarkington and lots of others? Daddy Longlegs is all letters."

"All the samey, it is a poor stunt," insisted the intrepid Lilian. "I call it a lazy way to get your idea over."

"Perhaps you are right, but the point is: did I get my idea over?"

"We-ll, yes,—but they tell me editors don't like letter form of fiction."

"Certainly none of them have liked this," sighed Molly, who had devoutly hoped her little story would sell. The money she made herself was very delightful to receive and more delightful to spend. A professor's salary can as a rule stand a good deal of supplementing.

"How about the plot, now?" asked Billie, having finished with the general impression.

"Slight!"

"Strong!"

"Weak!"

"Impossible!"

"Plausible!"

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"Original!"

"Bromidic!"

"Involved!" were the verdicts. The matter was thoroughly threshed out, Billie with difficulty keeping order. Nance was called on for the "but" that she had been left holding.

"The plot is slight but certainly original in its way. The letters are too long, longer than a Godmother would be apt to write, I think. The story could be cut to three thousand words, I believe, to its advantage."

"I have already cut out about fifteen hundred words," wailed Molly. "The first writing was lots longer."

"Gee!" breathed the one eager for a hearing.

"Now for the characterization! Don't all speak at once, but one at a time tell what you think of it."

"Did you mean to make Polly so silly?" asked Lilian.

"I—I—perhaps!" faltered Molly.

"Of course if you meant to, why then your characterization is perfect."

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"Silly! Why, she is dear," declared the girl from Alabama. "I don't like her having to nurse that black man, though."

"Too many points of view!" suddenly blurted out a member who had hitherto kept perfectly silent, but she had been eagerly scanning a paper whereon was written the requisites for a short story.

"But you see——" meekly began Molly.

"The point of view must either be that of the author solely or one of the characters," asserted the knowing one. "Why, you even let us know how the Bedouin feels."

"Oh!" gasped the poor author. "I think you would limit the story teller too much if you eliminated such things as that."

"Here's what the correspondence course says——"

"Spare us!" cried the club in a chorus.

"I hate all these cut and dried rules!" cried Billie. "It would take all the spice out of literature if we stuck to them."

"That's just it," answered Lilian. "We are not making literature but trying to sell our stuff. Persons who have arrived can write any old way. They can start off with the climax and end up with an introduction and their things go, but I'll bet you my hat that you will not find a single story by a new writer that does not have to toe the mark drawn by the teachers of short story writing."

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"Which hat?" teased Billie. "The one you put on for Great-aunt Gertrude? If it is that one, I won't bet. I wouldn't read a short story by a new writer for it."

"To return to my story," pleaded Molly, "do you think if I rewrite it, leave out the letters, strengthen the plot a bit and make Polly a little wiser that I might sell it?"

"Sure!" encouraged Lilian.

"Yes, indeed!" echoed Nance.

"And the black man—please cut him out! I can't bear to think of him," from the girl from Alabama.

"Dialogue,—how about it?" asked the chairman.

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"Pretty good, but a little stilted," was the verdict of several critics.

"I think you are all of you simply horrid!" exclaimed Mary Neil, who had been silent and sullen through the whole evening. "I think it is the best story that has been read all year and I believe you are just jealous to tear it to pieces this way."

"Stuff and nonsense!" said Lilian.

"We do hope we haven't hurt your feelings, Mrs. Green," cried the girl who was taking the correspondence course.

"Hurt my feelings! The very idea! I read my story to get help from you and not praise. I am going to think over what you have said and do my best to correct the faults, if I come to the conclusion you are right."

"You would have a hard time doing what everybody says," laughed Nance, "as no two have agreed."

"Well, I can pick and choose among so many opinions," said Molly, putting her manuscript back in its big envelope. "I might do as my mother did when she got the opinion of two physicians on the diet she was to have: she simply took from each man the advice that best suited her taste and between the two managed to be very well fed, and, strange to say, got well of her malady under the composite treatment."

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"Ahem!" said the girl with the burning plot, rattling her manuscript audibly so that the hardhearted Billie must perforce recognize her and give her the floor.

"I HAD A LITTLE HUSBAND NO BIGGER THAN MY THUMB"

"Aunt Nance, what's the use you ain't got no husband an' baby children?" Mildred always said use instead of reason.

"Lots of reasons!" answered Nance, smiling at her little companion. Mildred had moved herself and all her belongings into the guest-chamber. Her mother had at first objected, but when she found it made Nance happy to have the child with her, she gave her consent.

"Ain't no husbands come along wantin' you?"

"That is one of the reasons."

"I'm going to make Dodo marry you when he gets some teeth."

"Thank you, darling! Dodo would make a dear little husband."

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"Dodo wouldn't never say nothin' mean to you. He's got more disposition than any baby in the family."

"I am sure he wouldn't," said Nance, trying to count the stitches as she neatly turned the heel of the grey sock she was knitting. Nance was always knitting in those days.

"Cose if I kin get you a husband a little teensy weensy bit taller than Dodo, I'll let you know."

"Fine! But Dodo will grow."

"Maybe you'll make out to shrink up some. Katy kin shrink you. My muvver said Katy kin shrink up anything. She done shrunked up Dodo's little shirts jes' big enough for my dolly. I's jes' crazy 'bout Katy. I'm gonter ask her kin she shrink you up no bigger'n Dodo an' then won't you be cunning? You can look jes' like you look now only teensy weensy little. Your little feet'll be so long, not great big ones like mine, an' your little hands will be 'bout as big as my little fingers an'—an'—you kin knit little bits of baby socks an' I kin take you out ridin' in my little doll-baby carriage, all tucked in nice."

[77]

"But then I'll be too little to marry Dodo. You won't trust your doll to Dodo, and if I'm so teensy maybe he might break me."

"Well, then, I guess Katy'll have to stretch you some. She done stretched the shirt mos' a mile."

"What do you say to taking a little walk?"

"I say: 'Glory be!' That's what Kizzie, our cook, says when she's happy."

"Shall we take Dodo out in his carriage?"

"If I can put my dolly in, too!"

Dodo was awake and pleased to be included in this outing, if gurglings and splutterings were an indication of happiness. He and the doll were tucked safely in. Katy, who had been longing for the time to come when she could scrub the nursery, was delighted to be relieved of her charge for the time being.

"Where shall we walk?" asked Nance.

"Down by the lake! My dolly ain't never seed the lake yet. They's a little blue boat down there what my papa, the 'fessor, done say he gonter set sail in some day. He say he gonter go way out in the middle of the lake where th' ain't no little girls with curls to come tickle his nose in the morning. My papa is kind and good, but he sho' do hate to have his nose tickled with curls early in the morning."

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The lake! How many memories it brought back to Nance! The blue boat might be the same one in which Judy Kean had her memorable midnight jaunt, or was it a canoe? Nance smiled at the picture that arose in her mind's eye. It was their Junior year and Judy had gone off in a fit of jealousy and rage, and when she came to herself she was out in the middle of the lake while Molly and Nance rowed frantically after her. What a time they had covering their tracks to keep Judy from being found out and perhaps even expelled! Nance laughed aloud.

The sun was warm on that day in late March, almost like a southern sun. Dodo, lazy baby, had slipped from his sitting posture and lay flat on his back. He had the same characteristics as Mildred's doll baby: the moment he lay down his eyes closed.

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"Oh, what a sleepy husband I have got!" cried Nance. "Let's camp out here, darling. I brought my knitting and while my little husband sleeps——"

"And my doll baby, too!"

"You can play in that nice clean sand. Don't go too close to the water."

There was a stretch of beach at that side of the lake where a small pier had been built for a boat-landing. The sand was fine and white, a most delectable medium for houses or pies, whatever the

young sculptor wished to create.

Nance seated herself on a nice warm rock while her little companion busied herself collecting pebbles for the castle she contemplated building. The sock grew under the girl's skillful fingers while her thoughts were miles away from the poor soldier whose foot it was destined to cover. Dodo snoozed peacefully and no doubt the doll did, too.

"Look! Look! Aunt Nance, I've done found some kitty flowers!" cried Mildred, rushing to Nance with a switch of willow catkins she had found growing near the water's edge. [80]

"I had a little pussy
Her coat was silver grey.
She lived down in the meadow,
She never ran away.

"Her name was always Pussy,
She never was a cat.
'Cause she was a Pussy-Willow.
Now what do you think of that?"

sang Nance. "Now let me teach you that nice verse so you can say it to your father."

Mildred obediently learned the poetry in so short a time that her teacher marveled at her cleverness and good memory.

"Now, darling, you mustn't go quite so close to the water again. Aunt Nance will gather a big armful of the pussy-willows to take back to Mother, but you might get your little tootsies wet if you go too close to the edge. Then I'll have to put you in the carriage with my husband and run home every step of the way."

Mildred trotted off with assurances of caution. Nance settled herself to her knitting and her thoughts. What a boon this universal knitting has become to women who want to think and be busy at the same time! The girl's thoughts were centered on herself. What was she to do with her life? The desire to teach had left her with the years she had spent nursing her father and mother. United States was on the verge of war—any moment it might be declared. That would mean the women of the land would be in demand just as they had been in Europe. There would be work to do, but what was her share to be? [81]

This little breathing time with Molly was very sweet, but it could not go on forever. The time would come when she must take up life again. Her unruly thoughts would dwell on how different things would have been had Andy McLean not shown himself so unreasonable. She might have gone to the front with him. There was work in the hospitals in France for others besides trained nurses, lots of work! Cooking, cleaning, sewing, peeling potatoes, scrubbing floors—nothing was too menial for her. It would have been sweet to work near Andy, shoulder to shoulder in spirit even if he would happen to be the surgeon in charge and she a poor scrub girl. She might have been taking care of some of the war orphans. Minding little babies was her long suit, it seemed. A big tear gathered and spilled on the toe of the sock that was being so neatly finished off. [82]

A shrill scream broke on the still air.

"I'm a-sinkin'! I'm a-sinkin'!"

"Mildred!" cried Nance, jumping to her feet.

"Never mind, nurse, I'll go after her," said a stern voice from behind her. "You had better look after your other charge," in a tone which made no attempt to veil its sarcasm.

Dodo had awakened and was sitting up in the carriage reaching for the willow catkins. His position was precarious, as one more inch might have sent him headlong in the sand.

Nance dropped her knitting and grabbed the venturesome baby while the stern voice materialized into a tall grey figure with sandy hair who ran towards the water's edge, skinning out of his coat and vest as he ran and in some miraculous way also divesting himself of his shoes. His hat he had already hurled at Nance's feet. [83]

Mildred had walked out on the little pier and decided that she would get in the pretty blue boat that her father considered such a safe refuge from tickling curls. It was bobbing about most invitingly in easy stepping distance.

"Won't Aunt Nance be 'stonished?" the child had said to herself. "She's gonter holler out: 'M-i-i-l-dred! Where you Mi—ldred baby?' an' I gonter lay low an' keep on a-sayin' nothin'."

She put out her little foot and set it firmly on the bow of the boat that was almost grazing the edge of the landing.

"My legs is a-gettin' mos' long enough to step up to the moon an' stars," she boasted.

But how strangely boats behaved! This one did not stay still as she had expected but ran away from her. Her legs had not grown nearly so long as she had thought and they refused to grow another bit. The boat got farther and farther away and the horrid little pier seemed to be moving, [84]

too, and in the opposite direction. The time came when Mildred must choose between land and water. She decided to stay on shore and with a mighty effort jerked her little foot from the unsteady blue boat. Three years going on four is not a period of great equilibrium. Fate took matters out of Mildred's hands and kersplash! she went in the cold waters of the lake. It was not very deep so close to the shore, but neither was the little girl so very tall. By standing on her tiptoes she might have managed to keep her inquisitive nose out of the water, but the naughty blue boat came swinging back to her rescue and she clutched first the painter and then the side of the boat, screaming lustily as she clung.

The grey figure with the sandy hair ran lightly along the pier and with one swoop gathered the child up into his arms. He might have saved himself the trouble of taking off his coat and shoes, but he had seen the child as she fell in the water and did not know what would be required of him as life saver. Mildred was sobbing dolefully as she buried her wet curls in the neck of her rescuer. [85]

"Your nurse should have looked after you," he muttered.

"She had her husband to 'tend to," said Mildred, "an' I was a-keepin' keer of myself. 'Sides she ain't my nurse but my 'loved aunty."

"Oh! And who may you be?"

"I'm Mildred Carbuncle Green." The family name of Molly's mother, which was Carmichael, was thus perverted by this scion of the race.

"And your aunt's name?" asked the young man as he picked up his discarded coat and wrapped it around his burden.

"She's Aunt Nance——"

"Nance Oldham!" and he almost dropped little Mildred. "And you say she was busy with her husband?"

"Yessir! He keeps her busy mos' of the time."

The rescue and this conversation had taken but a moment. In the meantime, poor Nance had shoved her little husband back in the carriage and was rapidly wheeling him towards the scene of disaster. [86]

She had recognized Andy McLean in the tall grey figure and sandy hair. The moment he had spoken to her so sternly she had known it was he. At that moment she envied no creature in the world so much as an ostrich. If she could only bury her head in the sand. Why should Fate be so cruel to her? Why should Andy McLean come back on her horizon at that moment when she was neglecting her duty? But then, she reflected, if he had not come back at that psychological moment either Mildred would have drowned or Dodo broken his neck. She could not have rescued both of them at once. Indeed, both of them might have been killed! The fact that the water was shallow and Mildred could have walked out of it was no comfort to Nance, nor did it allay her suffering and self-reproaches in the least to know that almost every baby that has grown to manhood has at one time or another fallen out of his carriage or bed, down the steps or even out of the window. [87]

Andy McLean, too, was going through some uncomfortable moments as he held the dripping child close in his arms and made his way across the beach to Nance. There had never been a moment since he and Nance had parted that he had not regretted his hasty words; but what good were regrets? Nance could not have cared for him or she would have felt that at her father's death he was the person to whom she must turn instead of that Dr. Flint. As far as he could see, there was no reason under Heaven why Nance should not have married him immediately. He knew nothing of her mother's determination to give up her public life nor of her decision to remain at home for Nance to nurse. He had not yet learned of Mrs. Oldham's death, as he had arrived at Wellington only the evening before, and Mrs. McLean, with a wisdom sometimes granted mothers, had not mentioned Nance's name to him, much less the fact that she was even then visiting the Greens.

"Married! and so engrossed with her husband that she let little children entrusted to her care fall in the water and almost fall out of baby carriages! But where is the—the—cad?" was what Andy was thinking as he approached the frantic Nance, who was pushing the carriage as for dear life through the heavy sand. [88]

"Mildred! Mildred! You promised not to go near the water's edge!"

"I never went near it but jes' ran out on the little wooden street. I wasn't goin' to be naughty. I knowed I might get my feet wet down by the edge so I walked on the planks. I never done nothin' nor nothin'! 'Twas the bad little blue boat what wobbled."

Nance and Andy both laughed at the amusing child. The laugh made matters easier for them.

Brown eyes looked into blue and then such a blush o'erspread their countenances that a day's fishing under a summer sun could not have accomplished.

"You had better put her in the carriage—it is warm there and I can carry Dodo."

"No, I will keep her wrapped in my coat. That will be better." [89]

"But you—you might be cold."

"Not at all! I never catch cold," shortly.

Nance remembered otherwise, but there was nothing to do but turn and wheel the baby back to the house on the campus.

"I—you must think—I know I was careless to let such an accident happen to my charges. I have no excuse—I was just thinking!"

"About your husband, I fancy!"

Again Nance's cheeks were crimson, remembering only too well what her thoughts had been as she sat in the sand knitting.

"I—"

"Mildred told me about him," said Andy grimly.

"Did she?" laughed Nance, thinking that Andy was speaking of Dodo, of course. "He is a darling husband."

"Humph!" They walked on in silence, Andy taking great strides with Mildred clasped closely in his arms, while Nance wheeled the baby carriage, almost running to keep up. [90]

"I don't know what to call you," said Andy at last.

"Call me? Why, call me Nance! Why not? My name is still Nance no matter what has happened."

"I—I—perhaps he wouldn't like it."

"Who?"

"Your husband! Is it Flint?"

"Andy McLean, you are a fool! There is no other word for you!" and Nance grabbed Dodo from his carriage and ran up the steps, thankful that they had arrived at the Square Deal.

"If not Flint, who?" muttered Andy under his breath. "I am going to stay here until I find out."

Molly was not at home to receive her wet daughter. Nance and Katy rubbed her down and dressed her while Andy waited miserably in the library. Why had his mother not warned him that Nance Oldham was in Wellington? They had had a long talk and she had told him news of all their old friends. Molly and Edwin had been mentioned again and again but the fact that they had a guest had been kept dark. He had never talked to his mother about his break with Nance. A certain reticence in his make-up withheld him. Many times he had longed to put his head in her lap and tell her all about it. [91]

A great intimacy existed between Mrs. McLean and this only child, but instead of his being like a daughter to her, as is the case sometimes with a woman and an only child when that child happens to be a son, this worthy mother had adjusted herself more into the relationship of an elder brother to Andy. There were few if any subjects they could not discuss together, but somehow he could not bring himself to tell her of Nance. She had known they were engaged—that was easy to tell, and she knew the engagement was no more—that was all. Mrs. McLean bided her time.

"They are young yet," she had said to her husband. "Some misunderstanding has come up, but if they are really meant for one another it will be explained away. If they can't forgive, then they are not suited for mating." [92]

The good woman had been delighted beyond measure that Nance should be in Wellington while her son was on his farewell visit to her, and she had devoutly prayed that they might meet by chance, just as they had. Of course she had not stipulated in her prayers that Andy should mistake Nance for the Greens' nurse and reprimand her for carelessness; and then fish Mildred out of the water; and get Dodo and the hated Dr. Flint hopelessly mixed, and be called a fool for his blunder!

CHAPTER VII

NANCE PACKS HER TRUNK

Molly, coming in hurriedly from her labors at the French War Relief rooms where she had been engaged in making surgical dressings until her back ached so that she had more sympathy for the poor wounded than ever, if possible, found young Dr. McLean cooling his heels and drying his coat by her library fire.

"Andy! I am so glad to see you!" she cried, grasping both of his hands. "When did you come? Did you know Nance Oldham is with me?"

"Yes, I have seen her," grimly.

"Oh, then you know of her trouble?"

"Trouble! I shouldn't call it that. She evidently does not consider it in that light."

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"Andy McLean, how can you say such a thing?"

"Well, I formed my opinions from the evidence of my own eyes. In fact, she told me with her own lips that she was contented; if not in so many words, at least she gave me that impression."

"Resigned, of course! That is Nance's way, but she is very sad and lonesome for all that."

"Lonesome! Ye Gods, how many does she want?"

"Excuse me, Andy, but you are talking like a goose," declared Molly, irritated in spite of herself.

"Thank you, madam," he said, bowing low. "Your guest has just called me a fool and now you call me a goose. I bid you good-by."

"Good-by, indeed! Andy McLean, sit down here and let me send for your father. I believe my soul you are in a fever or something." Molly pushed him down in a chair near the fire. "Why, Andy, your coat is damp! Where have you been?"

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She drew a chair by him and seated herself, looking anxiously into his flushed face. Andy laughed in a hard tone.

"Perhaps you are right, but don't send for Father. I got my coat wet in a perfectly sane way, but perhaps you had better find out about that from Mrs. Fl—Nance—I mean."

Andy balked at that name of Mrs. Flint and then, besides, Nance had called him a fool when he had hinted at the doctor's being the happy man. At this juncture little Mildred came running into the library.

"Mumsy! Mumsy! Is you heard 'bout me an' the blue boat?"

"No, darling! But what makes your curls so wet?"

"That was that baddest blue boat. It wouldn't stay still 'til I got in—it jes' moved and moved—an' the little wooden street, it moved an' moved an' I went kerblim! kersplash!"

"In the lake! Oh, Mildred! I know you didn't mind Aunt Nance. Are you cold? Did Aunt Nance get wet? Where is Dodo?"

[96]

"You 'fuses me with so many ain't's an' do's and didn't's."

"You tell me all about it," said the doting mother, trying to compose herself as she gathered the first-born in her arms.

"Well, you see, me'n' Aunt Nance we went a-walkin' an' we tooked Dodo along an' my dolly, an' Aunt Nance she says that one use she ain't got no husband is 'cause don't no husband want her, an' I done tol' her that if Katy kin shrink her up some that Dodo kin be her husband. You see, Mumsy, I been a-feelin' sorry for Aunt Nance ever since that time I mos' went to sleep in her lap an' she talked about a beau lover what got to fightin' with her an' she hit him back. She wetted my ear all up with her tears. I jes' done thunk somethin'!" the child exclaimed, getting out of her mother's lap and peering curiously into Andy's face. "Is you the Andy what talked so crule to my Aunt Nance? 'Cause if you is, I'm sorry you done pulled me out'n the lake."

"Mildred! Mildred!" admonished Molly, but in her heart of hearts she knew that what the enfant terrible was saying to the young doctor was no doubt of a very salutary nature. He needed a good talking to and he was getting it.

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"I am the one," said Andy meekly.

"Well, when Dodo grows up to be big enough he is goin' to—to—cut you up in little pieces. He's growin' up fast an' bein' a husband is makin' him cut his teeth early—"

"Molly Brown!" interrupted Andy McLean eagerly. "Is Nance not married?"

"Married! The idea, Andy! Of course not!"

"Yes, she is! She's married to Dodo Green. I married 'em this morning," declared Mildred defiantly.

"Oh, oh! I see it all now!" laughed Molly hysterically. "You were talking about her mythical marriage while I was speaking of her mother's death."

"Her mother dead? I had not heard a word of it. Strange that so important a woman as Mrs. Oldham should have died without my seeing it mentioned in the paper."

"But Mrs. Oldham dropped out of public life two years ago, when her husband died, in fact. Nance had hardly rested from the long siege of nursing her father before she began on her

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mother.”

Andy bowed his sandy-haired head in his hands and groaned:

“Fool! Fool! Every kind of fool and goose you and Nance choose to call me,—fool and knave! Bad-tempered brute! Jealous idiot! Oh, Molly, please call Nance.”

When Nance had hurled her “fool” at Andy’s sandy head, she flew up-stairs, determined never to speak to him again. She longed for a few quiet moments in her own room, but Mildred must be rubbed down and dressed before she could seek retirement. She was sure he would leave the house immediately. His coat was wet and no doubt his vest and shirt, too, after having carried the dripping child such a distance. Of course he would not want to call on the Greens while she was in the house. The girl bitterly regretted having timed her visit so unfortunately. The Greens and McLeans were very intimate, and would perforce see each other often. She hated to be a wet blanket—a skeleton at the feast. She determined to pack her trunk and go on a promised visit to an old college friend then living in New York. Molly would object, she knew, but it was surely best for all of them that she should take herself off for a few weeks. [99]

Nance was always an orderly person and packing a trunk with her was a very simple matter. She began in her usual systematic way and had already folded her dresses neatly in the trays and was emptying the bureau drawers when Molly’s voice was heard calling her from the lower hall.

“Nance! Oh, Nance!”

She sounded quite excited. No doubt she had just been informed of Mildred’s accident and wanted to hear the details of it.

“Coming!” called Nance, hurrying down the steps. “Oh, Molly, what do you think of me for taking out the children and almost drowning Mildred? And while that was going on, little Dodo came within an ace of tumbling out of the carriage on his precious sleepy head! You will never trust them with me again.” [100]

“Nonsense! Mildred is old enough not to try to get in boats alone, and as for Dodo, Aunt Mary always said: ‘Whin chilluns grows up ‘thout ever gittin’ a tumble, they is sho’ to be idjits.’”

“Well, then, my real duty was to let him tumble,” laughed Nance. “What do you want with me, honey? I am very busy.”

“Not too busy to come in and talk with me a little while,” insisted the wily Molly, putting her arm around her friend’s waist and leading her to the library door.

“I do want to talk to you a moment,” agreed Nance. “Molly, I am going away for a few weeks.” They had reached the door, which was ajar, and Andy, ensconced in the sleepy-hollow chair dear to the professor’s bones, could plainly hear the conversation.

“Going away! You are going to do no such thing.”

“I must. There is no use in asking me why—you know why—— It is too hard for me and there is no use in pretending it is not.” [101]

“But, Nance——”

“I have begun to pack and I will go to-morrow.”

Instead of the hospitable protestations characteristic of Molly, that young housewife said not a word, but giving her friend a little push towards the fireplace, she grabbed up Mildred and rushed from the room, closing the door after her.

CHAPTER VIII

A DAMP COAT

Andy undoubled himself with alacrity and sprang from the sleepy-hollow chair. His stern face was softened and filled with a boyish eagerness.

“Oh, Nance! Can’t you forgive me?”

“Excuse me, Dr. McLean, I did not know you were still here,” and Nance turned to leave the room.

Andy with long strides reached the door first and with his back against it held out beseeching hands.

“Yes, I’m here and am going to stay here——”

[99]

[100]

[101]

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"Well, I am not! Please let me pass." Nance was filled with a righteous indignation against Molly at having played this trick on her.

"But, my dear, I must tell you what a fool I have been——"

"That is not necessary. I know."

Andy laughed. Nance had a laconic way of putting things that always tickled his humor.

"Now you sound like yourself, honey, but oh, please act like yourself! The real Nance Oldham could not be so cruel as to go off without letting me explain—I have no excuse—there could be none for my blind rage and jealousy—none unless loving you too hard could be called one. Will you listen to me?"

"I shall have to unless I stop up my ears, since you stop up the doorway." Nance was very pale and trembling. Two years of suffering could not be done away with in a moment and the girl had surely suffered.

"Couldn't we sit down and let me tell you?"

"We could!"

Andy eagerly directed Nance to the sofa, but she sedately seated herself in a small isolated sewing rocker. Andy accepted the amendment and placed his chair as near to hers as the frigid atmosphere around her permitted.

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"Before I explain I must apologize. I would have done it the very day after that awful row we had, the very moment after it, if I had not thought you hated me."

"And now?"

"And now I am going to apologize and explain, whether you hate me or not. I could do it lots better if you would let me hold your hand while I am doing it," but Nance drew Molly's knitting from a bag hung on the back of the chair and declared her hands were otherwise occupied. Molly had reached the purling end of a sleeveless sweater and no doubt would be glad of Nance's expert assistance.

"Nance, there never has been any other woman in my life but you, you and my mother. You know perfectly well from the time I met you, when I was at Exmoor College and you were here at Wellington, that you were the only girl in the world for me. I had a kind of notion in my fool brain that I was going to be the only man in the world for you. When we were engaged I thought I was, but when I realized that Dr. Flint was paying you such devoted attention, at your home constantly ——"

[105]

"My father's physician!"

"Yes, I know,—but, honey, you see you were way up there in Vermont and I was down in New York and I was hungry for you all the time, and when your father died I thought you would pick right up and come to me—I knew nothing of your mother's determination to stay with you—nothing of her illness—nothing but that you were staying in the same town with Flint and I must go back to New York. You did not tell me."

"Well, hardly, after the way you raged and tore! I felt if you could rage that way we had better separate."

"But, my dear, I'll never rage that way again—I've learned my lesson. Can't you forgive me?" Nance was silent.

"I love you just as much as I always did,—more, in fact. When little Mildred Green told me you had let her fall in the water because you were so busy with your husband, I wanted to die that minute. Of course I thought it was Flint. How could I know the child was playing a game with you? Nance, do you hate me as much as you did that terrible day two years ago?"

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"Yes!" Nance's answer was very low but Andy heard it.

"Well, then, there is no use in saying any more," he sprang to his feet, his face grey with misery.

"I didn't hate you then at all—nor do I now."

"Oh, Nance, don't tease me! Can you forgive me?" and poor Andy sank on his knees and bowed his head on her knees.

Nance's arms were around him in a moment. She hugged his sandy head to her bosom with one hand and patted his back with the other while he gave a great sob.

"Andy McLean, you are still wringing wet. Get up from here this minute and take off that coat and let me dry it! And your shirt is damp, too! My, what a boy! Here, sit right close to the fire and dry that wet sleeve."

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Andy meekly submitted in a daze. Nance's motherly attitude and sudden melting were too much for him. The coat was hung by the fire to dry while the young doctor stood helplessly by in his shirt sleeves.

"And now, Andy, I'm going to apologize to you and ask you to forgive me," declared Nance,

stoutly trying to go on with her knitting.

But Andy firmly took it from her and possessed himself of those busy hands.

"I was worse than you—when you said those hard things to me they hurt like fury—you didn't know how they did hurt, but I did, and I should not have done the same thing to you. I said worse things to you than you did to me,—at least I tried to."

"You did pretty well," said Andy whimsically, pressing one of the imprisoned hands to his lips.

"Dr. Flint did want to marry me; I guess he still does, but—but——"

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"But what, lassie?" Sometimes Andy dropped into his parents' vernacular.

"I am not going to tell a man in his shirt sleeves why I didn't marry Dr. Flint," said Nance firmly. "It is too unpicturesque."

"Then I'll put on my coat."

"No, you won't! I wouldn't tell a man in a wet coat, either."

"Why not?"

"Because I don't like to lay my brown head on a damp shoulder. Why don't you do as I told you and dry that shirt sleeve? Hold it close to the fire, sir!"

"I won't do it unless you tell me why you didn't marry Dr. Flint."

"Well, then, to keep you from catching your death of cold, I will tell you, but remember I have saved your life. It was—it was because—because he didn't have sandy hair and a bad temper," and Nance was enfolded in the despised shirt sleeves and found a very nice dry spot on which to lay her brown head.

The sun had set and twilight was upon them. The front door opened to admit the master of the house, but Molly was in ambush ready to catch him to keep him out of the library. Kizzie had started in to mend the fire but Molly stopped her.

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"Never mind the fire, Kizzie. It is all right for such a warm evening. Give us tea in the den."

"Why all of this mystery?" asked Edwin Green as he followed his wife back to the den, going on tiptoe as she demanded.

"Andy and Nance are in there."

"Andy McLean! Fine! I want to see him. Won't he be here to tea? I'll go in and speak to him."

"You'll do no such thing! Edwin Green, you may be—in fact, are, a grand lecturer on English, but you have no practical sense. Don't you know you might break in just at the wrong moment and Andy may get off to France without their making it up?"

"Making up what? Who making up: the Allies and the central powers?"

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"Oh, Edwin, you know I mean Nance and Andy!"

"What are they making up? If it is a row, let's go help them."

"Not a soul shall go in that room until they come out, unless it is over my dead body."

"Well, well! I'd rather stay in this room with your live body than go in there over your dead one," and the professor pulled his wife down on the sofa by him, "especially if you will give me some tea," as Kizzie came in grinning with the tea tray.

"They's co'tin' a-goin' on in yander, boss. The fiah is low an' the lights ain't lit, but Miss Molly she guard that do' like a cat do a mouse hole. Cose Miss Nance ain't got no maw to futher things up for her but Miss Molly is all ready to fly off an' git the preacher, seems like."

"I can't remember that things were made easy for me this way when I was addressing my wife," complained Edwin as he stirred his tea with his arm around his wife, a combination that could not have been made had his arm not been long and Molly still slender.

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"Ungrateful man! Why, Judy and Kent took the bus from Fontainebleau to Barbizon when they were simply dying to walk, just to give you a chance. Have you forgotten?"

"I haven't forgotten the walk—I never will—and if they really rode on my account, I'll pass on the favor to other lovers and stay out of my library until the cows come home; that is, if you will stay with me."

Molly told him then of the whole affair and how Mildred had righted matters, telling Andy just exactly the right thing to bring him to his senses.

"I am almost sure they have made up and are engaged again," sighed Molly ecstatically. A romance was dear to her soul and being happily married herself, she felt like furthering the love affairs of all her friends.

"They are either engaged or dead," laughed Edwin. "Such silence emanating from the library must bode extreme calamity or extreme bliss. If it continues much longer I think it is my duty as a

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householder to break in the door and offer congratulations or call the coroner, as the case demands."

"It is getting late. Maybe I had better go in and ask Andy to stay to dinner."

Molly, who had a deep-rooted objection to noise and usually talked in a low tone, now spoke in a loud voice as she bumped her way along the hall, pushing chairs and rattling the hat rack and calling out shrilly to the amused husband following her. Strange to say, she could not remember on which side of the door the knob was, although she had lived several years in that house. She fumblingly hunted it and finally opened the door with a great rattle.

Nance was seated sedately knitting and Andy was holding his coat close to the dying flames. The room was almost dark.

"Kizzie should have lighted the lamp and attended to the fire," Molly said briskly. Oh, Molly, how could you be so untruthful, blaming things on poor Kizzie, too? (Molly's conscience did hurt her for dragging Kizzie in and she gave the girl a long coveted blue hat that she had meant to keep for second best, feeling that it might act as a salve on her own tender, truth-loving soul. Kizzie, quite ignorant of the cause for this generosity, gratefully accepted the hat and asked no questions.)

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"Yes, it gets dark before one realizes," said Nance demurely.

"Ahem!" from the professor.

"Oh, Andy, your coat is still wet! Mildred told me you wrapped it around her. I'll get you Edwin's smoking jacket and have your coat dried. You must stay to dinner with us. I can 'phone your mother not to expect you at home."

Andy did not need much persuading, but accepted the invitation with alacrity. Molly called up Mrs. McLean to ask for the loan of her son for dinner.

"Yes!" exclaimed that wise lady at the other end of the wire. "I have been expecting a telephone call for the last half hour. You may keep him but I shall wait up to see him when he gets home. I am sur-r-e he'll have something to tell me. From my back window I saw Nance with the perambulator full of babies on her way to the lake and I sent Andy off for a walk, first putting a flea in his ear by suggesting that the lake was getting shallower and shallower. He has always been that inquisitive that I was sur-r-e he would make for that spot to find out why. I knew that all those poor-r young folks had to do was to meet. Keep him, Molly—and God bless you!"

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There was a little choking sound at the other end that Molly understood very well. She hung up the receiver "with a smile on her lip but a tear in her eye." It is all very well for a mother to be unselfish and want her son to marry and to be happy, but there is a tug of war going on in her heart all the time.

"I know how I will feel when Dodo gets engaged," Molly said to Edwin when she told him of what Mrs. McLean had said; but that young father went off into such shouts of laughter, Molly had a feeling that mere man could never understand a mother's heart.

CHAPTER IX

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PLANS

"I have no idea of going through dinner without letting you and old Ed know all about us!" said Andy as he took his place at Molly's hospitable board.

"What about you?" asked Molly, who was growing deceitful, her husband feared.

"About Nance and me! I can't keep it any longer," declared the happy young doctor. Nance kept her eyes on her plate but her mouth was twitching with amusement.

"What about you and Nance?" solemnly asked the professor.

"Why, we're engaged!"

"No! Not really?" and Edwin grinned.

"Oh, Andy! I'm so glad!" and Molly reached a hand out to her two friends, who were perforce placed across the table from each other since there were only four for dinner.

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Nance got up and kissed her hostess. "Oh, Molly, you are too lovely! Don't you know that I know that Andy and I have not fooled you one moment? Don't I see brandy peaches on the side table all ready for dessert, and don't you know that I know that those precious articles are only brought out on highdays and holidays? Isn't that fruit cake I smell, that you know perfectly well you made

and put away for next Christmas so it would be ripe and get better and better?"

"Well, I had to express my feelings somehow, and how did I know that you and Andy were going to tell your secret this very evening? I knew I mustn't say a thing until you two said something, and if I could not say anything, I could at least feed you."

"All I can say, Andy, is that if your experience in choosing a girl from that class of 19— is as fortunate as mine, you will be a pretty happy man, and by Jove, I believe you are running me a mighty close second," and to the astonishment of his wife, as Edwin Green was certainly a far from demonstrative man, he actually jumped from his seat and embraced Nance. Then Andy felt that he must kiss Molly, and Kizzie coming in at this juncture almost dropped the dish she was carrying. [117]

"Sich a-carryin's on I never seed. I'm a-thinking you folks had better sort yo'selves," and the girl went off chortling.

"Now tell me your plans!" demanded Molly when they settled down to dinner. Strange to say, they had got rather mixed up in the promiscuous embracing that had been going on, and Edwin and Andy had changed places. Edwin found himself seated at Molly's side while Andy had greatly disarranged the table by plumping himself down by his Nance.

"We are to be married immediately," announced Andy stoutly.

Nance gasped. The fact was they had been so busy explaining the past and living in the present while the fire had died so low in the library, that the future had not been touched upon. [118]

"Of course I may start for France at any time now, but before I go I mean to get me a war bride. It will be pretty bad leaving her, but then the war can't last forever, and I have decided it is my duty to go help, and I fancy it still is. When Uncle Sam steps in, maybe he can finish up things in a hurry. Then I can get back to Nance."

"Get back to me, indeed! If you think you are going without me, Andy McLean, you are vastly mistaken. If it is your duty to go help, it is my duty, too. Oh, I know I am no trained nurse, but I can do lots of other things. Dr. Flint says I am better than most trained nurses——"

Nance stopped short. She should not have mentioned Dr. Flint. Only suppose it had hurt Andy's feelings! Not a bit of it!

"Bully for Flint!" cried the accepted lover. "Oh, Nance, would you go with me?"

"I can scrub and cook and take care of babies."

"I don't know about that," teased Andy. [119]

"But you will always be near and pull them out of the water when I let them fall in," suggested Nance. "Won't you?"

"That I will! Just as near as I can get!" and Andy hitched his chair a little closer, thereby disarranging the table even more than he had done before. But although Molly was a very careful housekeeper and most particular about the looks of her table, she cared not one whit, but beamed on Andy as though he were the pink of propriety instead of a naughty boy.

What a change a little loving had made in the appearance of both Nance and Andy! The girl's clear skin was flushed and her eyes sparkling. The corners of her mouth had no trace of downward tendency now. The years of sadness and confinement spent in nursing her father and mother were forgotten. Nance had come into her own—her woman's heritage: to be beloved, to be guarded and cherished; at the same time to know that she was to be the companion, the helpmeet. As for Andy,—he beamed with joy. His face had lost the stern lines that had so distressed his mother. He looked again like the boy he was, not like the tired, disappointed man she had known of late. [120]

Nance had no romantic notions of what life in France meant in that early spring of 1917. She knew that there was no room for drones and unproductive consumers in that war-worn country. She knew that in marrying Andy and going with his unit she was to face work, privations, danger, even death; but with her eyes open she was determined to see it through.

"I would enlist in the United States army," Andy said to his host after dinner, as they lounged in the den and puffed away at their comforting pipes, "but I feel that I can be of more good right now in France where they are crying out for surgeons."

"It can't be many days now before war is declared," sighed Edwin. "By jiminy! I hate myself for not being able to get in the game."

"Too bad, old man! A fellow with a wife and two children has to think of them."

"Of course! I wouldn't let Molly know how I feel about it for any thing. I am not so young as I was, but I am stronger now than I was as a youth. As for my eyes—they are good enough eyes in glasses and my bald head would be no drawback." Edwin always would call his sparsely covered top "bald," but Molly, by diligent care, had made two blades of grass grow where only one had grown before, and with a microscope one could see the beginnings of a fuzzy crop of hair, at least so the fond wife insisted. [121]

"I bet she would say go, if it were put to her," said Andy.

"I'll not do it, though! It wouldn't be fair."

"Well, if it is put up to her, I bet on Molly Brown!"

CHAPTER X

ALL THE OLD GIRLS

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"I've got a wonderful scheme, Edwin," said Molly when she had finally engineered her husband out of the den and Nance in.

"I'll be bound you have. I never saw such a Mrs. Machiavelli!—First I mustn't go in the library but stick to the den, and now that I had just made myself at home in the den I must flee to the library."

Molly laughed at her husband's pretended discomfiture as he settled himself to find out what was going on at the front.

"Now read the news to me while I knit. There is no knowing how soon our own boys will be needing sweaters. I feel that every stitch I put in is important. Mercy, what a mess my knitting is in! I do believe that little monkey of a Mildred has been working on it. But she can't purl at all! Someone else has done it. No one has been here but Andy."

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"Well, I can't think Andy McLean would attempt a sweater," laughed Edwin. "Maybe Nance is responsible."

"But Nance is a past master!"

"She might have been trying a one-handed stunt and failed. I don't believe even Prussian efficiency could knit and get proposed to and accept all at the same time. Under the circumstances I think she should be forgiven for purling where she should have knitted and knitting where she should have purlled."

"You sound like the prayer book," said Molly, patiently pulling out stitches and deftly picking up where Andy asked to hold Nance's hand. "I almost feel as though I were committing a sacrilege. This sweater is like a piece of tapestry where the lady has recorded her emotions, using the medium she knew best. I just know dear old Nance tried to go on with her work all the time Andy was making love," and Molly wiped a wee tear off on the ball of yarn.

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"I tell you that sweater could tell tales if it could speak," teased Edwin. "Why don't you sew in one of your golden hairs so that the happy soldier who finally gets it will have some inkling of how the beautiful girl looks who made it?"

"Silly! But don't you want to hear what my scheme is?"

"Dying to!"

"I am going to try to get the old Queen's girls, that is our 'special crowd, to come to Nance's wedding. Katherine and Edith Williams are both in New York; Judy is there; Otoy Sen is in Boston; Margaret Wakefield is in Washington; Jessie Lynch is in Philadelphia——"

"Are there no husbands?"

"Oh, yes, plenty of them, but I'm not going to invite husbands! The babies can come if the mothers can't leave them, but the husbands are not invited. Katherine Williams and Jessie Lynch are the only ones who are still in single blessedness."

"Are you going to have them all stay here?" asked Edwin in amazement, never having quite accustomed himself to Molly's wholesale hospitality.

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"Of course! I can manage it finely. That will be only six extra ones. Why, at Chatsworth we had that much company any time. This house is really almost as big as Chatsworth and there we had our huge family to put away besides."

"All I can say is that you are a wonder, but please don't break yourself down over this wedding. What does Nance say to it?"

"I haven't asked her, but I know she is dying to see all the girls together. We have often talked about it, and wedding or no wedding I was going to try to get them here this next month. Otoy has already promised to come, you remember, and now she can just hurry up and get here for the wedding. She will have to bring Cho-Cho-San, who is just a bit older than Mildred. They can have great times together. You don't mind, do you, honey?"

"Mind! Of course not! You know I like company. I was just afraid you were giving yourself too large an order."

Nance, on being consulted, thought it would be wonderful to see all the old girls again before embarking on her great adventure, so letters were forthwith written and sent to the six friends, who one and all joyfully accepted. Business, husbands, babies, society were to be left behind for this grand reunion of the old Queen's crowd.

Otoyo Sen, now Mrs. Matsuki, whose exceedingly regretfully but honorable husband was gone on short journey and baby Cho-Cho-San must stay with humble mother for the wedding. As Molly had expected to have the child, this was as it should be.

Katherine had demanded leave from the lectures she was delivering, and Edith had an excellent nurse for her baby and could leave her family easily. Margaret Wakefield had no children and was able to cancel the many engagements that such an important person was sure to have, and her house was in such good running order that her husband, the rising young congressman, would want for nothing in her absence. Jessie Lynch had declined two luncheons, a dinner dance, and a theatre party, besides breaking as many more engagements in order to come to this wedding of the old college friend. Jessie was still unmarried although she had been the one that the prophecy had married off first. Pretty little Jessie had so many lovers it was hard to choose among them.

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The very first reply was from Judy and she, Judy-like, answered in person. [She blew in at nightfall with a huge suitcase](#), many parcels and her gay chintz knitting bag stuffed full of various things besides knitting.

"Kent was dying to come but I told him no children and dogs were allowed," announced that glowing young matron as she dropped her belongings, scattering them all over the library floor, and rushed around kissing and hugging everybody in the room. "I have come to help. I know you, Molly! You always act like triplets when there is any work on hand, and I know you, too, Nance! Your New England conscience will make you neglect Andy rather than seem to shirk work. I am here to sweep and dust and cook, take care of babies, or even to flirt with Andy if Nance does not look after him. I am going to dress the bride; find Edwin's collar buttons and studs for his dress shirt; see that the best man has the ring safe in his pocket; pay the preacher; put in the supply of rice and old shoes—in fact," she sang:

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"Oh, I am a cook and a captain bold,
And the mate of the Nancy brig,
And a bo'sun tight, and a midshipmite,
And the crew of the captain's gig."

The Greens had been sitting quite sedately around the lamp engaged in their various occupations when Judy burst in on them. The professor was getting up a lecture for the morrow, Mildred was cutting out paper dolls, and Molly and Nance had for the moment put down their eternal knitting and were giving their attention to whipping on lace for the modest trousseau. But the whirlwind that came in swept aside all sane business. Needles were hastily thrust in cloth; thimbles were mislaid; paper dolls dropped for something livelier; and lecture preparation abandoned. When Judy, after the breathless announcement of having come and her reasons for coming, began on the Nancy Bell, Edwin sprang to his feet and, joining in the dance that Judy was improvising, sang in a rollicking mixture of tenor and baritone:

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"And he shook his fist and tore his hair,
Till I really felt afraid,
For I couldn't help thinking the man had been drinking,
And so I simply said:

"Oh, elderly man, it's little I know
Of the duties of men of the sea,
And I'll eat my hand if I understand
However you can be

"At once a cook and a captain bold,
And the mate of the Nancy brig,
And a bo'sun tight, and a midshipmite,
And the crew of the captain's gig."

Little Mildred clapped her hands to see her dignified father cutting pigeon wings. She had yet to learn that dignity and Mrs. Kent Brown could not stay in the same room.

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"Oh, Judy! It is good to see you," gasped Molly when the chorus, in which all of them joined, had been sung over twice. "What a Judy you are, anyhow!"

"Let me take your suitcase up-stairs," suggested Edwin.

"And I will carry your parcels," insisted Nance, who was happy indeed over seeing her old college friend again.

"There is not a bit of use in taking a thing up-stairs. All of my clothes are in the knitting bag. Those parcels are wedding presents and the suitcase is full of all kinds of plunder. This big bundle is a tea basket from Kent and me. You and Andy can go to housekeeping in it. We thought you would rather have it than silver or cut glass, since you are going where there are no side boards to speak of."

"Oh, Judy, how splendid! It is exactly what I have been longing for," cried Nance, opening the charming Japanese basket. "Only look, plates, cups and saucers, tea pot, coffee pot, sugar bowl, cream pitcher, spoons, knives, forks, cannisters for coffee, tea, sugar, crackers, hard alcohol stove, chafing dish and tea kettle! All packed in two square feet of basket!"

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"A regular kitchen cabinet!" declared Molly. "Nobody but Nance could ever get them packed again in the right place, I am sure, Nance and Otoyō, perhaps."

"I just know Otoyō is going to bring her one like mine! I never thought of that when I got it. I saw it at Vantine's and simply fell in love with it. I wanted it so bad myself I got it for Nance. If Otoyō does bring one, I will exchange mine," said Judy generously.

"Indeed no! I wouldn't mind having two one bit and I am certainly not going to give up my very first wedding present," blushed Nance.

"Here is a steamer rug from dear old Mary Stuart. See how warm and soft it is! This is a pocket set of Shakespeare from Jimmy Lufton! He brought it to the train!"

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"But how lovely! I didn't dream of getting any presents," said Nance.

"How did they know about Nance?" asked Molly.

"I 'phoned them! I got your letter while Kent was at the armory so I just called up everybody I knew and told them the news. There is no telling what the excess calls will amount to, but I had either to do that or burst! 'Phoning is cheaper than bursting.

"Now I bet you can't guess what is in this great round box," said the effervescent Judy.

"Your wedding hat!" solemnly suggested Edwin.

"Hat your grandmother! Guess again!"

"A German bomb!"

"No! Cold, cold! You'll never get it! It is a wedding cake sent by Madeline Petit and Judith Blount. Now what do you think of that?"

"Wonderful!" cried Molly, as she lifted the cake from its careful packing. "Fruit cake with white icing! How on earth did they happen to do it?"

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"You see I 'phoned them, too, because I always did like little Madeline in spite of the fact that she talks a fellow's ear off. I am not so fond of Judith, but I do admire her. She has spunked up so splendidly and taken her medicine like a man. She and Madeline are doing a thriving business in a swell part of town with tea rooms and all kinds of fancy cakes. Judith was the one who suggested sending the cake, Madeline told me. She said Judith said she knew Molly Brown would work herself to death over the wedding and she, for one, was going to send something to help out Molly. She said you were just goose enough to make the cake at home."

"I had planned to do it," laughed Molly. "I was going to start to-morrow."

"This huge box is candy to eat right now—that is Kent! I am almost afraid to eat it. He wanted to come so bad that he might have poisoned it for spite."

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"Why didn't you let him come? Dear old Kent!" exclaimed Molly.

"Well, I knew perfectly well that it is some job to sleep seven persons outside of one's own household, and it is doubly difficult when there are two sexes. Kent is as busy as can be anyhow: drilling day and night."

Kent Brown had taken the training at Plattsburg and was then engaged in passing on this training to a company of militia in New York. He and Judy were eagerly awaiting the declaration of war by the United States. There was no such thing as neutrality for them. Having been in France in that August of 1914, Judy considered herself already at war and Kent enthusiastically shared the sentiments of his wife. He was prepared to leave his profession of architecture, in which he was proving himself very successful, and join any regiment that was likely to see service.

Judy had done exactly what the Marquis d'Ochtè had asked her to do: she had come back to New York and plunged into war relief work. Because of her enthusiasm and untiring energy she had been of great assistance in recruiting workers. Her admiring husband said that she was what one might call a real booster. Any campaign Judy plunged in was sure to be a whirlwind campaign. She had her father's capacity for infinite work. Up to a certain period it had evinced itself in the form of infinite play, but now that the serious side of life had presented itself to her, the girl was working quite as hard as she had ever played. There was never anything half-way about our Judy. In New York she was canvassing for suffrage, keeping up her painting, and with her own hands cutting and folding enough surgical dressings to fill the peace ship, besides rounding up many

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workers for the cause. With it all she managed to be a very satisfactory wife and housekeeper. She and Kent were blissfully happy. There were red letter days in their calendar when both of them stopped working and went on some mad frolic. They had made many friends in New York, friends with whom they both worked and played. They had a hospitable apartment where the redoubtable Ca'line reigned in the tiny kitchen, Ca'line, trained by Mrs. Brown at Chatsworth and chastened by dear old Aunt Mary until she "knowed her place an' kep' it."

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Isn't it fun to see Judy again? I hope my readers feel as glad for her to come bounding into these pages as the Greens and Nance Oldham did when she opened the door of the library at the Square Deal and, upsetting everything, scattered papers and parcels hither and yon, her vivid personality permeating every corner of the room.

Just before Judy said good-night, she paused and exclaimed, "I must tell you, Molly, how much I enjoy the dear little Virginia girls you have passed on to me. The Tucker twins and Page Allison are just about the nicest girls I know, and Mary Flannagan is a duck. I used to be an awful snob about college girls,—somehow, I thought girls who did not go to college were not worth knowing, but I have changed my mind since I have met these girls. They are an interesting lot and as far as I can see know as much as we do."

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"I knew you would like them. I simply fell in love with them last spring in Charleston. Have you met their father?"

"No, but he must be some father! The girls call him Zebedee, which appeals to me, having always called mine Bobby."

"Zebedee? What a strange name!" said Nance.

"They say it is because nobody ever believes he is their father and so they want to know: 'Who is the father of Zebedee's children?' It seems he is only about twenty years older than they are and is one of those persons who never gets on in years. They declare they are really more mature than he is and not nearly so agile," laughed Judy.

"I have been meaning to ask them to Wellington and must certainly do it before they go back to Richmond," declared Molly, on hospitality bent as usual.

"All right, honey, but let's get Nance safely married and the wedding feast disposed of," insisted Judy, who thought her brother-in-law looked a little alarmed, fearing that Molly might decide that this was as good a time as any to have the Tuckers and Page Allison visit them.

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"Of course! I didn't mean now but later on, although it is a pity to put it off too long," teased Molly, seeing the worried look on Edwin's face. "I might make up two bunks on the pantry shelves and let one of them sleep in the bath tub."

CHAPTER XI

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AN INTERESTING COUPLE

"I came from New York with a very interesting couple," said Judy the next day as she vigorously stitched away at some of the wedding finery. "Of course I talked to them—I always talk to the interesting persons I meet traveling."

"So do I," said Molly as she finished a garment and put it aside for Kizzie to press.

"I never do," sighed Nance. "I do wish I had some of your and Judy's warm-heartedness."

"Nonsense! Your heart is just as warm as any that beats," objected Molly. "Ask Andy!"

"You see, honey, Vermont is Vermont and Kentucky is Kentucky! Persons from Kentucky haven't quite as hard shells as the ones from Vermont, but when once you get below the shell the kernel is about the same. You and Molly couldn't be any more alike than Kentucky beeches and Vermont pines," said Judy, pausing long enough in her labors to give Nance an encouraging pat.

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"Yes, and pines stay green all the year around," said Molly. "It is much better to be a pine than a beech."

"Well, tell us about the interesting couple," laughed Nance, much comforted.

"They were from Alsace but were very French in their sympathies. They looked a little German but they spoke beautiful French except that they did have a tendency to call Paris 'Baree.' They love Paris as much as I do. The man, Misel is his name, Monsieur Jean Misel,—is the best informed person I have seen for many a day. He knows the war situation as few persons do, I am sure. He seems to have been everywhere and known everybody. He even knew my father,—at least, knew all about him and was greatly interested in the fact that Bobby is soon to sail for France to help rebuild the roads. Madame Misel is much quieter than her husband but is very

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intelligent, I am sure. With all her reserve, she never misses a trick."

"Where was this interesting couple going?" asked Molly.

"Coming right here to Wellington! They have taken a cottage in the village and mean to live here. He is writing and she wants to do war work."

"How splendid!" cried Molly. "We need workers more than I can tell you. The students give what time they can, but a full college course is about all a normal girl can take care of in the way of work."

"You must call on them right off, Molly. I will go with you and Edwin must go, too. I know he will like Monsieur Misel."

"I'll ask him, but Edwin is sure to want to know why this lover of Paris is not fighting for France."

"Ah, the poor fellow! He is quite lame—walks with a cane and a crutch. He hinted rather darkly that his lameness is in some way due to the Germans, but I do not know in just what way. He was sensitive about his affliction, so his wife told me when he left us and went in the smoker, so naturally I did not ask him how the Germans were responsible for it. He is a young man, too, that is under forty, and very handsome."

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Professor Green was quite interested in what Judy had to tell him of the Misels. He promised to call with Molly and do all he could to make Wellington pleasant for them. He looked forward with pleasure to the conversations Judy assured him he would enjoy with that highly educated gentleman. Holding the chair of English in a woman's college is not bad, but there were times when Edwin Green longed for more man talk. He and Dr. McLean were sworn friends and saw much of each other, but they both of them welcomed with enthusiasm any masculine newcomer.

"I wonder if your friend could teach French, Judy," asked her brother-in-law. "Miss Walker is quite put to it for the end of the term. The French professor took French leave last week. He seemed too old to hold anything more weighty than a pen, but he has gone to fight."

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"That is the terrible part of it," sighed Judy. "They say all the superannuated dancing masters and French teachers are leaving to take up arms. It means that France is having a hard time. Why, oh why, don't we hurry up and get in the game?"

The call was made and Molly and her husband were quite as enthusiastic as Judy had been over the charms of the new neighbors. Monsieur Misel seemed the very person to take up the labors of the flown French professor, and Miss Walker accordingly engaged him. Molly felt she must have them to dinner in spite of the fact that she was deep in the preparations for the wedding.

"I'll have a very simple dinner and not make company of them, just make them feel at home," she declared, and her husband and Nance and Judy smiled knowingly. Molly always would have company and there was no use in trying to stop her.

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"I know when I die she will feel called upon to give me a good wake," laughed Edwin.

"Certainly, if people come hungry to your funeral, I'll feed them," answered Molly.

"Are our new friends, the Misels, hungry?"

"Not hungry for food, but they must be lonely so far away from their country and friends. Anyhow, they are invited now and have accepted, so there is no use in teasing me. You just see that there are cigars here for Monsieur Misel to smoke after dinner, and I'll attend to the rest."

How sad it was to see a man of Misel's beauty a hopeless cripple! He was a tall, stalwart fellow with a military bearing which the use of a crutch and cane could not take from him. His lameness had not affected the comeliness of his limbs or his erect carriage. He had very courteous manners and it seemed to be very hard on him not to spring from his seat when a lady entered the room.

On the evening of Molly's informal dinner when Nance, who was the only member of the household who had not met the strangers, came into the library, Misel stood up to be introduced, but his wife gave a low cry of alarm and sprang to his assistance, eagerly placing his crutch in one hand, his cane in the other. He sank to his seat with a smothered groan.

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"Jean, Jean! What am I to do with you?" said Madame Misel irritably. "He is so imprudent," apologetically to Molly, who had tears in her eyes at this exhibition of courage and weakness. She could well understand how Monsieur Misel's courteous desires could get the better of his strength.

Andy McLean was present and the doctor in him immediately became interested in the pitiable case. He had none of the hesitation Judy had shown in regard to questioning the Misels concerning the cause of the lameness.

"What is your trouble?" he asked bluntly. "If you can stand without support as you did a moment ago, I see no reason why you cannot be cured."

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"In time! In time!" said Misel with patient resignation.

"He has had the best medical attention," put in his wife.

Madame Misel usually spoke with a kind of slow hesitation, but now her words came rapidly. She had the air of trying to shield her husband from farther questioning on the part of Andy. Andy, however, was totally oblivious of this fact and went on.

"Who is his surgeon?"

"The great F——, in Baree!"

"What did he say?" asked Andy, impressed by the name.

"He—he—said—nerve centres—disturbed," answered Madame, returning to her hesitating speech. She did not stammer at all but seemed to pause to choose her words.

"If I can be of any assistance to you, I hope you will call on me," said Andy kindly.

In the meantime Misel sat with his hands over his eyes as though in great pain and his wife hovered over him solicitously. [147]

Dinner was soon announced and this time the lame man arose very cautiously and made his way slowly to the dining-room.

"Kindly—go—in—front—of—us," faltered Madame, and Molly marshalled her family and guests so that the Misels might bring up the rear. She fully appreciated how the wife felt about wanting to be the one to assist her poor lame husband. If her Edwin had been so crippled no one should have helped him but his own wife.

Molly turned to smile on the poor woman for whom her heart was sore. She could well understand the misery it must bring to see one most dear having to suffer so acutely. There was a dark place in the hall leading to the dining-room and the hostess feared the poor lame man might stumble there, so she stopped to warn him of a rug. She distinctly heard Madame say to her husband in no gentle tones but with an asperity almost malevolent:

"*Narr! Narr!*"

Molly began assiduously to hunt in the archives of her brain for the small German vocabulary which she could call her own. [148]

"*Narr!* What can *narr* mean?" the question kept recurring to her as dinner progressed. She visualized lists of words in a worn old blank book used at school. "*Narr, Nase, Nesse, Nest!*" She tried to remember the English on the opposite page. How well she remembered the little old book wherein was written the despised German exercises. The script in itself had been almost impossible to learn and as for mastering the language,—she had been so half-hearted about it that she had not been compelled to keep it up.

"*Narr, nase, nesse, nest!*" ran through and through and over and over in her mind. Suddenly just as Professor Green asked her what she would say to adjourning to the library, the list of English words flashed on her brain.

"'Fool, nose, nephew, nest!'" she cried audibly.

"What?" Edwin feared his Molly had gone crazy. [149]

"Oh—I—I—mean, yes—coffee in the library!" and she arose from her seat in confusion.

Why should that calm-looking, slow-speaking woman call her poor lame husband a fool? *Narr! Narr!* It was certainly strange.

CHAPTER XII

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AN OLD-TIME PARTY

The first one of the old girls to arrive was Otoyoy, Mrs. Matsuki, with the little Cho-Cho-San. Otoyoy had changed not at all in the years that had elapsed since college days. Perhaps an added matronly dignity was hers, but this was not much in evidence when she was with her dear old friends. She was beautifully and elegantly dressed. All her clothes were made of the most exquisite fabrics. Her blouses were of the finest and sheerest, if of linen; and the heaviest and richest, if of silk. Her furs were the furriest and her suits of the most approved cut and material. Her little boots were a marvel of fit and style.

"Perfect, like a Japanese puzzle!" Judy declared. "Every little part made to fit every other little part!" [151]

"Yes, and the whole a wonderful creation like some rare print or bit of pottery!" agreed Molly.

Otoyoy had adapted herself to the manners and customs of her adopted country, wearing them

with the same grace she did the garments. She had an English nurse for the little Cho-Cho-San and the child was being reared as much like American children as possible. A tiny little thing, she was, with coal black hair and slanting eyes. There was much mischief peeping from those eyes around the tip-tilted nose. The mouth was a crimson bow, ever ready to break into a tinkling laugh. She and Mildred rushed together as though their short lives had been spent waiting for this opportunity. Mildred was younger by several months but taller by several inches than the little Japanese. What a picture the two children made! Mildred, with her red gold hair curling in little ringlets all over her head, her round rosy face and wide hazel eyes, was exactly the opposite to Cho-Cho-San, with her straight, bobbed, ebony black hair, her oval, olive face and almond eyes.

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"I b'lieve I can tote you," said Mildred, who often used words current in Kizzie's vernacular.

"Tote! Tote! What is tote?" and the tinkling laugh rang out like glass chimes assailed by a sudden gust of wind.

"Why I tote my dolly—an' Mr. Murphy totes the coal—an'—an' Daddy totes his books to lexures—an'—an'—"

"May I tote something, also?"

"Oh, yes, you can tote Dodo. He's my baby brother."

"Oh, I'm so 'appee! I'm so 'appee!" and the little thing danced in glee. "My honorable mother told me when I came for a visit to her friends that it would be all 'appiness." The English nurse had left her stamp upon her charge just as Kizzie had upon Mildred. The occasional dropping of an h was the result. Cho-Cho-San's lingo was most amusing with its mixture of Cockney and Japanese.

"You'd look 'zactly like my Jap dolly if you only had a bald spot on top," said Mildred as she led her new friend to the sunny nursery where she and Dodo reigned supreme with the Irish Katy to do their bidding.

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"And phwat Haythen is this?" cried Katy when she saw the little Japanese girl. "And ain't she the cutey?"

"She's my bes' beloved," announced Mildred. "Me'n' Cho-Cho-San is gonter be each other's doll babies. I'm a-gonter be her kick-up dolly an' she's gonter be my Jap dolly."

"Oh, I'm so 'appee! I'm so 'appee!" was all the tiny Haythen could say as she danced around the nursery.

"Aunt Nance done said we could be her flower girls, too," went on the loquacious Mildred. "We's all gonter get married day after another day."

"All the doll babies going to be married!" sang the guest. "Kick-up dolls and Japanese dolls!"

The Williams girls arrived next and close on their heels Margaret and Jessie. I cannot bring myself to designate the girls by their married names any more than they could one another. Husbands were not much in evidence at that gathering. The talk was all of the past. Of course Andy, the soon-to-be husband, was allowed some consideration, although the first night after the arrival of the guests even he was debarred and the old chums had a kimono party in the library. The host fortunately had an engagement that took him from home, otherwise he would have had to spend his evening shut up in his den.

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The revellers opened the ball by singing "Drink her down," to each one in the crowd. Molly's old guitar was brought out and Otoyoy produced a tiny ukelele which added much to the harmony. After the singing was finished and every one drunk down, the words that were used most often were: "Do you remember?" All of the scrapes were recalled and talked over. Bits of gossip were recounted that had never come to light before, the noblesse oblige of the college spirit having kept matters dark, but now that the years had rolled by there seemed to be no longer reason for silence.

"I'd like to get into some mischief this very night!" cried Judy. "I've been good and pious so long I feel like whooping life up a bit."

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"I'm game," drawled Katherine Williams.

"Did I hear an aye from the eminent educator?" questioned Judy.

"That's me!"

"I'll do whatever it is if I don't have to walk too far," said lazy Jessie.

"But what are you to do?" from Margaret, in whom the spirit of adventure was not so rampant.

"Listen to the Gentleman from Missouri!" cried Judy. "Come on and we'll show you."

"I like very muchly to be in the vehicle of musicians but I also like muchly to know what is the ultimately destination," said Otoyoy softly.

"She means the band wagon! She means the band wagon!" cried Judy. "Oh, my dear little Otoyoy, if you were changed I could not bear this sad grey world."

"Others, too, have notly changed," said Otoyoy slyly.

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"What are you planning, Judy honey?" asked Molly, laughing.

"I haven't any plan—nothing but something crazy and adventurous. I am dead tired of being so good and proper. I have rolled bandages and drawn threads and cut gauze until I feel like a machine. I want to have a romantic adventure. I'd like to put a tick-tack on Miss Walker's window—I'd like to burn asafetida on the teacher's stove, or put red pepper in the Bible so when she opens it to read she would sneeze her head off. I might content myself with making an apple pie bed for my dear brother-in-law—"

"Oh, please not that!" begged Molly. "My supply of sheets is stretched to the limit."

"O. Henry would advise you to go out in the night and await Adventure. Adventure is always just around the corner. Step up to him and tap him on the shoulder," suggested Katherine.

"It is very comfortable in here," purred Jessie.

"Infirm of purpose!" cried Judy.

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"Well, I'm not infirm of purpose," said Molly. "I've been purposing all along to have a Welsh rarebit and make some cloudbursts and I'm still going to do it. If you Don Quixotes want to go off and hunt trouble in the meantime, though, you are welcome, only don't stay too long."

"Ain't Molly the broad-minded guy, though? Live and let live was always Molly. Aren't you coming, Nance?" And Judy sprang from her cross-legged position on the rug ready for any fray. "Come on, Margaret! Come on, Edith."

"Don't you know Edith is too stuffy to do such a thing? She's afraid her perfectly good husband would not approve," teased her sister.

"No such thing, but I'm not going. I mean to help Molly. You crazy kids go get in all the trouble you want to. Me for the house this night!"

"And Margaret? You, too, must keep the 'home fires burning,' I fancy."

"I am going to stir the rarebit," announced Margaret firmly.

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"I'm going to pick out nuts for the cloudbursts," purred Jessie.

"I must whip lace," blushed Nance.

"Oh, you middle-aged persons! I bite my thumb at you!" cried Judy. "Who among you is young enough to go hunt adventure?"

"I told you I intended to go," said Katherine, looking rather longingly at the crowded shelves of poetry that she was simply dying to poke in. "No one is going to call me middle-aged."

"And I, too, will take greatly pleasure to knock the kindling from the shoulder of Adventure," said little Otoyoy.

"She means the chip! She means the chip!" screamed the delighted Judy. "Oh, Otoyoy, I love you in all the world next to my immediate family!"

It took but a moment to slip on great coats over kimonos and then, heavily veiled, the three adventuresses started forth, with admonitions from Molly not to be gone more than half an hour.

"And please don't get arrested!" she called after them. "Kent says he always expects Judy to get arrested some day. This spirit of adventure seizes her every now and then and nothing will stop her."

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"It is well it struck her here at Wellington instead of in New York. She can't get into very much mischief here," laughed Edith.

"She could in the old days," put in Margaret, "but now that she is not compelled to keep rules I fancy she will not care to break them. What a Judy she is! It must be great to have her in the family, Molly."

"Indeed it is! She is the favorite in-law with the whole lot of Browns. Mother adores her and all the boys think she is just about perfect. Even Aunt Clay can't help liking her."

"I wonder what they will find to-night. I almost wish I had left the lace off of this old camisole and gone with them," said Nance.

"I think you need not hunt adventure right now," drawled Jessie. "Any girl who is deliberately getting married and going to the war zone will have enough to keep her busy for a lifetime. I don't believe they will do more than go to the drug store and get limeades."

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"You don't know Judy and Katherine," said Edith, "and little Otoyoy with her determination to knock the kindling from the shoulder of Adventure. I wonder what Mr. Matsuki would say if he could know that his sedate little wife is engaged in such a harum scarum pursuit."

"Why, he would just smile and bow and look more like an ivory Buddha than ever. Otoyoy has the charming little gentleman completely under her thumb. She works a kind of mental jiu jitsu on him and he just lets her have her way. The joke of it is he thinks she is the most docile, obedient

little wife in all the world, and so she is. She simply makes him want what she wants," explained Molly.

Molly was busily engaged in the preparations for the midnight feast. It would have been simpler and easier just to have gone to the kitchen and made the rarebit over the gas stove, but that would not have been at all like college days and this night must be as near a reproduction of those times as possible. Chafing dishes must be used and dishes must be scarce or the spell would be broken.

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CHAPTER XIII

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ADVENTURE

It was after ten o'clock as the three veiled figures glided from the square house on the campus. The night was dark, fit for the deed they had to do. They did not know what the deed was but whatever it was the intrepid females were fully prepared to do it.

"First we'll go by Prexy's house and perchance she may see us and then we'll run. That will be fun!" suggested Judy. "Nothing would so warm my old blood as to be taken for a junior."

It so happened that a consultation was being held at the president's home and as they passed, Miss Walker opened the front door and Professor Green emerged.

"Ministers and saints defend us! My brother-in-law!" cried Judy.

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"Who is that?" called Miss Walker as the three girls ran swiftly out of the broad band of light pouring from the open door.

"Run for your lives!" hissed Judy.

"Shall I chase them?" laughed Professor Green. "I'd much rather not."

"No," sighed poor Prexy. "I fancy they are up to no harm, but it is late for girls to be out alone. Such terrible things seem to be happening all over the world. I'll have to deliver a lecture to the whole student body, I am afraid, about late rambles and pranks."

"Those girls were veiled, so evidently whatever they were doing they did not want to be recognized. I'd hate to hold your job, Miss Walker. I'd much rather be the humble professor of English."

"Surely it is not a sinecure," laughed the president, "but when all is told, my girls are a pretty good lot. Their mischief is never, at least hardly ever, serious. How glad I am to see Judy Kean again,—Mrs. Kent Brown! She is the same old Judy. Such pranks as that child could play! I shall never forget when she dyed her hair purple-black."

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"Judy is a great girl. I am glad we married into the same family," declared the professor. "But tell me, Miss Walker, how Misel is doing. I feel quite responsible for him since it was I who introduced him to you."

"The students like him. He seems to be able to impart knowledge. I am afraid he is too handsome, however. It isn't quite safe to have a professor too good-looking. College girls are very impressionable." Then Miss Walker realized she had made quite a break. Edwin Green was certainly a very good-looking man but not the type to make girls languish with love. While M. Misel was a much more romantic figure with his flashing eyes and lameness.

"Are the girls losing their hearts to him?" laughed Edwin. "Again I am thankful I am what I am and not what others are."

And so the two old friends chatted in the doorway while the three veiled figures made their way towards the village.

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"We got them going that time," panted Judy after the run through the dark. "I bet you anything Prexy lectures the girls to-morrow morning. Dear Prexy!"

"Let's tick-tack the math teacher. I bet you she's still out of bed thinking up deviltry to make the girls miserable with on the morrow," suggested Katherine.

"I can make a noise very muchly like a cat. Would not that be as gruesomely as a mathematickack? We might be the Musicians of Bremen, as one reads in the beautifully fairy story."

"Fine, Otoyoy! Here's her domicile! Cut loose!" whispered Judy. "I'll be the donkey and Katherine crow like the rooster."

Crouched down under the window where a light still burned for the much abused teacher of

mathematics, the Musicians of Bremen, all but the dog, got ready for their song. The noise was something shocking. Judy's bray was so lifelike that little Otoyoy sprang aside as though in fear of kicking hind legs.

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A dog in the neighborhood, feeling that harmony could be established by his voice alone, joined in the chorus.

Windows were opened on the campus! Silence reigned supreme!

"Don't run!" whispered Judy. "Scrooge down close to the wall."

"Who is there?" called the math teacher.

Mr. Dog went on howling as though he had been responsible for the whole infernal racket. His timely tact seemed to satisfy the curious ones and windows were closed, lights went out and the campus took itself off to bed.

"Once more for luck!" commanded Great Commander Judy.

"Practice makes perfect," so this time the Musicians of Bremen outdid themselves. Otoyoy made a most wonderful pussy; Maud Adams herself could not have been a more realistic chanticler than Katherine; and Judy's donkey was so good that one could almost see the ears wagging as her great bray made night hideous.

"Now run before they have a chance to open their windows!" and Judy was up and off in the darkness with the two other girls close on her heels.

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"I bet you investigating will go on at a great rate to-morrow," gasped Katherine, as after leaving the college grounds they came to the outskirts of the village.

"It was so funnily," giggled Otoyoy. "We must amusement make for the smally Mildred and Cho-Cho when the to-morrow has come."

"I can't believe I am a full-fledged teacher in a model modern school in our great metropolis," said Katherine. "I feel just exactly like a schoolgirl,—not even a college girl. I know I could run a mile and there is no mischief I would not welcome."

"I tooly!" agreed Otoyoy. "It seems but a dream that I have honorable husband and smally babee, Cho-Cho. I feel like badly naughtily Japanese girl in masque."

"Well, it is surely great to be a boy again just for to-night," declared Judy.

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"What next?" asked Katherine.

"Next will be our great adventure! This has been only in the foothills of happenings. Soon we will have something really great come to us," encouraged the captain.

The village was well-lighted on the principal street, but that the girls avoided and crept down the side streets where all was quiet and almost dark, except at the corners where small gas-posts sent out feeble rays of light. They passed comfortable homes surrounded by large yards where the élite of Wellington lived. The élite were evidently a well-behaved lot, as they were all safely bestowed in bed, sleeping the sleep of the just as our naughty girls crept in front of their spacious mansions.

Next to the great, came the near great: a row of pleasant cottages, each one with its little garden separated from its neighbor's by neat whitewashed palings. After these, they approached a cottage set in a large yard and isolated as much as if it were in the country. It was well back from the street and instead of the white palings of its neighbors, it boasted a box hedge about five feet high and at least three feet broad. Generations of close clipping had made this hedge as solid as a brick wall. The yard enclosed was laid out as a formal garden with box labyrinth and winding paths. In the rear was a summer-house with stone pillars covered with ivy. Two stone benches were on each side in this quaint house where no doubt dead and gone lovers had sat and perhaps caught rheumatism. Box bushes were placed at the four sides of the garden and these had been cut to represent armchairs by some zealous gardener long since passed away. The modern shears had but followed the lines of the original ones and the armchairs were still there although somewhat lopsided and hazy in drawing. There was the sun-dial and a snub-nosed stone Hebe who held aloft her little pitcher with a cup in the other hand ready to serve the Gods with imperceptible nectar.

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Our girls' eyes had become accustomed to the darkness and they peeped over the hedge (at least Katherine and Judy did, poor little Otoyoy was too short), plainly discerning the charming ensemble of the little formal garden.

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"There, Adventure awaits us!" said Katherine melodramatically.

"I want muchly to see," pleaded Otoyoy. So Judy lifted her up for a peep.

"I believe that is where the Misels live," said Judy. "It looks quite different at night, but I'm almost sure it is the place. Molly and I called at dusk and we came up on the other side, but I think it is this cottage. Isn't it lovely? I am so sorry for them, they do seem so friendless, somehow. Madame is already working for the Red Cross. Molly says she can make surgical dressings faster than anybody she ever saw. She takes them home and does them and brings

them back so neatly folded and tied up that they think it is perfect foolishness to inspect them. They are sure there will be no mistakes where such a careful worker is on the job. M. Misel is so lame he can hardly locomote."

"Let's go in their garden and sit down a little while," suggested Katherine, who but a few moments before had declared she could run a mile. The sedentary life as a teacher had not improved her wind. Her spirits might have been those of a schoolgirl but her endurance was equal only to a full-fledged teacher in a model school.

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They passed through the small green turnstile and silently crept around the labyrinth to the summer-house. The three girls sank on one of the cold stone benches and peered out into the picturesque garden. Their veils were raised but ready to be pulled down at a moment's notice.

"Ghosts might walk in such a garden," whispered Judy.

"The bench is coldly like a ghost," shivered Otoyoy.

CHAPTER XIV

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AS SEEN FROM THE SUMMER-HOUSE

"And now, Adventure, come forth!" commanded Katherine in sepulchral tones.

The side door of the cottage, leading to the garden, now opened as though at Katherine's orders, and a broad ribbon of light fell across the labyrinth, picking out the snub-nosed Hebe and the sun-dial and one of the box chairs to illuminate. A man's figure was silhouetted in the doorway, a figure so beautiful that the artist in Judy gasped. He had on running togs which exposed his clean-cut limbs and shapely shoulders. A woman stood beside him and Judy recognized the outline of Madame Misel. The Greek god of a man was strange to her, although there was something familiar about the poise of his head on its column-like neck.

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The woman spoke in German in a low clear voice. Judy and Katherine both knew German fairly well and Otoyoy had some knowledge of it. They heard Madame Misel say distinctly:

"It is wiser if you wait until midnight for the exercises. Some of these blockheads might be out."

"Oh, absurd!" answered the man. "There is no one in this whole stupid place with the spirit to be from under cover after ten. I am cramped enough and must run and leap. Stand aside!"

"Misel, himself!" gasped Judy. Where were his crutch and cane and his lame back?

The girls sat as still as the stone Hebe. It was inky black in their corner of the summer-house where they cowered, not afraid at all but ready to knock the chip from the shoulder of Adventure. Judy's first instinct on recognizing Madame Misel was to make herself known and explain their presence in her garden at such a late hour, but the realization that Misel was the man in running togs, which usually means running, glued her to her bench. What did it all mean?

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The door was shut and then Misel began a series of exercises of which any circus actor might have been proud. He began by leaping over the clipped hedge of the labyrinth,—back and forth with most surprising gyrations. It was so dark that it was difficult to follow his every movement, and so rapid were his leaps and bounds that he was now here, now there before eyes could be focussed to take in the impression. Then almost without the girls realizing what had happened, he had cleared the five-foot hedge and was out on the deserted street running like a deer.

"Quick, before he is back!" gasped Judy, and the seekers for sensations were out of the garden and through the little turnstile in not much more time than it had taken the master of the house to leap the hedge.

Without a word they hastened back to the college grounds. As they turned a corner, they ran plump into Misel, who seemed to have let off steam enough to be trotting contentedly home. They need not have feared him. He was much more anxious to escape from them than they were from him. He turned and ran like the wind in the opposite direction.

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"Gee, I wish we could have tripped him up!" exclaimed Judy.

"And I might have jiu jitsued him most neatly," put in little Otoyoy. "I think he is what you might call a traitor-r-r."

"I was never more excited in my life. What will the girls think when we tell them of what has happened to us?" panted Katherine.

"Do you realize we have run against a tremendous thing?" said Judy soberly. "Almost international importance! I fancy we must keep kind of quiet about it. Of course we will tell Molly and Edwin and the girls, but I have an idea this thing will have to be worked up slowly and

cautiously. I bet you it will be a case of secret service men and enemy aliens and what not. Why should Misel have pretended to be lame? Why should they come to live at Wellington? Why—a million whys about the whole matter!”

“One thing:—Misel thought we were college girls on a lark and he will have no fear of our saying we met him or anyone outside the campus at such an hour,” said Katherine wisely.

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CHAPTER XV

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THE PROFESSOR AT A KIMONO PARTY

The Welsh rarebit was just assuming its required thickness and smoothness and the toast was done to a turn ready to receive its libation of cheese, when the wanderers came pattering in.

“Where is Edwin?” demanded Judy.

“In his den! You see this is a kimono party and gentlemen are not admitted,” said Molly, helping Judy off with her coat and veil. “Now tell us all about it! Something has happened, I can see by your eyes and hair.”

“Happened! I should say it has! Something has bounced! Call Edwin! I don’t give a hang if we are in kimonos! I’ll be bound he does not know a kimono from a ball gown—I can’t tell it twice.”

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“Otoyo and I are not dumb. We might help out when you fall by the wayside,” laughed Katherine, “but I, for one, don’t mind the professor.”

“Nor I! Nor I!” chorused the others.

“I think mine is vastly becoming,” Jessie whispered to Margaret, who called her a vain puss.

Edwin came in, rather pleased at being admitted and being allowed to have some of the party.

“I never expected to get in on a fudge party,” he said, contentedly settling himself by Judy, who was bursting with news.

“Now begin!” commanded Margaret, rapping for order in much the old manner of class president and presiding officer.

“Begin at the beginning!” begged Edith.

“Well, first we went by Prexy’s, just to get the feeling of youth back in our veins. She saw us, but we chased by.”

“So it was you! I wish I had run you down,” cried the brother-in-law.

“It is a blessing you did not or a good story would have been ruined,” said Katherine.

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Margaret rapped for order and Judy took up the tale.

“Then we went to call on Mattie Math. She was burning the midnight oil, at least the 10 P. M. oil, and when we acted the Musicians of Bremen, she threw up the sash.”

“The hash? What hash?” asked Jessie, who often arrived a bit late. Shrieks and more rappings from Margaret.

“My, how much I have missed in never being asked to a kimono party before,” whispered the male guest in Judy’s ear.

“After we had brayed and crowed and meowed and a dog had barked for us——”

“All together!” cried Katherine, and the musicians gave a sample of their performance, Mrs. Matsuki outdoing all cats by her lifelike caterwauling.

“After that, we went silently down to the village.”

“I don’t believe it, not silently!” asserted Edwin.

“No interruptions from the minority! We went silently down to the village, veils down, steps stealthy, eyes open and mouths shut. The garden at the Misels’ was most inviting in its sweetness and beauty. Of course we wanted to go in and rest on the nice warm stone benches, so we walked through the turnstile and seated ourselves in the little dark summer-house, there to await Adventure.”

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“Bang! Adventure comes stalkingly in!” cried Otoyo.

“Leaping was more like it!” from Katherine.

"Yes! Who should come springing from the side door, totally oblivious of us, but Misel, stripped for running and looking like a detail from a Greek frieze!"

"Monsieur Misel! Why, Judy, you are mad! Misel is so lame he can't stand alone without crutch and cane!" cried Molly.

"Lame your grandmother! He is a perfect circus actor. I have never seen a private citizen with such control of his muscles. He actually turned somersaults over the hedge in the labyrinth, walked on his hands better than I can on my feet, and cleared the five-foot hedge that borders the street with as much ease as—as—I eat this fudge," reaching for another piece.

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"But, Judy, are you sure it was he?" asked Edwin excitedly.

"Of course I am sure!" And then Judy repeated the conversation they had overheard between Misel and his wife. "My German is shady when I have to use it, but I can understand very well."

"So can I," declared Katherine.

"And while I am constructionally verily faultily, I comprehend can," said Otoyoy, so excited that she ran off to adverb forms as was her wont in times of stress.

"This is serious," said Edwin solemnly. "So serious that I feel I must do something about it and do it immediately. What time is it, honey?" he asked Molly.

"Eleven-fifty! Why, what can you do? Not go fight Misel—not that!"

"No, not that, at least not that yet, although I should like to break his lying crutch over his traitorous head. I must get in touch with the Secret Service. War will be declared any day now and Germany is getting busy even in quiet Wellington."

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"You forget Exmoor College is so near," put in Margaret. "Our college boys will officer the new army in part. I'll wager anything that this man has already begun his pacifist propaganda here in Wellington and at Exmoor, too. Has he been to Exmoor?"

"Why, certainly! He got me to take him over and introduce him, the beast!" stormed Edwin. "Please pack my little grip for me, honey," he asked, drawing Molly to him. "I can catch the twelve-forty to New York. Don't give out that I am away. We had better do a little camouflage act of our own. I am ill, very ill! That will do! Let it be—what shall it be?"

"Mumps!" cried Edith.

"Not mumps, please!" cried Jessie. "Nothing contagious or we might catch it!"

"Or worse than that, even, be quarantined!" laughed Nance.

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"Pretty hard on you, honey, as it would stop the ceremony," suggested Molly.

"What do you usually have when you have anything?" asked Margaret with her judicial manner.

"Neuralgia!"

"Then neuralgia would be the natural thing to have when you have not anything."

"Of course! Then, Molly, all day to-morrow your poor husband is ill with neuralgia. Not even the servants and children must come in my darkened room. I'll be home in the night and wake up the next morning feeling much better," and Molly hurried off to pack the grip.

"In time to give the bride away!" suggested Judy.

"May I tell Andy all about it?" asked Nance shyly.

"Of course! We would not be so cruel as to make you start out with a secret from your lord and master," said Edwin.

"It makes me so mad to think how kind Andy was to that man, offering his medical services to him and what not. I know the brutes had a good laugh over his gullibility. Andy told me afterwards that he could not understand the case, and if the man wasn't shamming, it was the most peculiar thing he had ever seen: the way he jumped up out of his chair when he was so lame."

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"Now I remember that very night that I heard Madame Misel call her husband a fool on the way into the dining-room. I had forgotten all about it until this minute. I kept wondering what she meant," said Molly.

"I tell you they are deep ones," put in Katherine.

"Not a bit of it!" stormed Judy. "They are the worst of all fools because they think no one else has any sense. Bobby, my beloved parent, always says that is the worst kind of fool. That the wise man, who wants to put over anything, must go to work with the idea that all the persons he wants the scheme to get by with have as much and more sense than he has. Now these Huns think they are the only pebbles on the beach and take for granted that they are dealing with children and fools, and as a rule they get caught up with."

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"Not before they do lots of damage, however," said Nance.

"I hope in this instance their machinations have not done any," said Edwin devoutly. "Be sure and give the Misels no inkling they are suspected. All of you remember to be as polite as usual to them if you happen to run across them."

"I'll try, but it will surely go against the grain," said Judy, her eyes flashing.

"Prove your father's statements, dear little sister, and we shall let these foreigners know that we are not the blockheads they call us."

"Also we are not the sleepily heads that must go bedwardly at such earlyly hour," and little Otoyó opened her almond eyes very wide to show that she at least would neither slumber nor sleep until the enemies to her country and her adopted country were safely caught up with.

Molly came in with the grip packed. Some fudge was tucked in to help out his journey and Edwin, with the warm wishes of the kimono party, started on his patriotic travels. [186]

"Remember to let Prexy know I am almost dead with neuralgia and do not let a soul but Andy on to the fact that I am off on a journey. I'll creep in to-morrow night. Keep your eyes open for deviltries that the Misels may be up to, but don't let them know you are not the dummies they think you. They will not be classed as alien enemies until war is formally declared, and that will be day after to-morrow, according to the latest news."

Nance was quietly stitching while most of the above conversation was going on, but her thoughts were very busy. The idea that was uppermost in her mind was that the day United States was to form an alliance with the nations, she was to form one equally strong with her Andy.

CHAPTER XVI

WAR RELIEF

Edwin Green occasionally had an attack of neuralgia that incapacitated him for work for at least a day, so when Molly solemnly gave out the news that her poor husband was suffering with one of his spells of that painful malady, sympathy was expressed by servants, teachers, and students. Blinds in the invalid's room were carefully closed and the door locked, with the key in Molly's pocket. Instructions were sternly given that nobody must disturb him. When he felt better he would ask for what he wanted. Little Mildred was very sad that she was not allowed to take him his "tup of toffee."

"I weckon he's a-gonter die, sho," she confided to Cho-Cho-San. "Only my mother don't know it or she wouldn't be a-smilin' an' laughin' so hard." [187]

"I am going to work this morning at my war relief, even if we are to get married to-morrow," declared Molly at breakfast. "If I let anything short of death interfere I get into bad habits, and the work simply must be done. They are crying out for more and more dressings."

"Let's all of us go help! We can turn out oodlums of work if we try," cried Judy.

"Not Nance!" insisted Molly. "I know she has a lot of little stitches to put in before to-morrow."

"If you will excuse me, I will beg off," blushed Nance. "Andy is coming in this morning for a few moments, besides."

"I tell you, you must stay at home to take care of poor dear Edwin," laughed Judy. "It would look terribly heartless for all of us to go leave him."

"Oh, I forgot Edwin!" declared Molly, just as Kizzie came in with a stack of waffles. The girl looked at her mistress in astonishment. What was coming over her Miss Molly, "fergittin' of the boss and then a-larfin' about it?" [188]

"Shall I take Andy up to see him?" asked Nance soberly.

"Perhaps!"

"Hadn't we better take the kids along so their noise won't disturb poor dear Brother Edwin?" suggested Judy, "Mildred and Cho-Cho and Poilu, the puppy." Poilu was a diminutive mongrel, the love of Mildred's heart.

"Oh, Mother, please, please!" begged Mildred.

"I'm so 'appee! I'm so 'appee!" sang Cho-Cho as Molly smiled her consent.

"They can play in the churchyard and will be good, I am sure," she declared.

And so Nance was left to put in her finishing stitches, to receive her lover and to take care of the fictitious case of neuralgia. [189]

"Hot cloths on his head if he is in very great agony," Molly called back as the gay throng started for the war relief rooms. "There is more aspirin in the top drawer if he is in much pain."

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Nance had a busy morning answering the 'phone, which rang many times with inquiries for the popular professor. Mary Neil sent a box of candy to Molly as a kind of consolation prize and Billie McKym sent Edwin a pot of flowers. Lilian Swift sent a basket of fruit.

"If their friends rally around them so for an imaginary disease, what would they do if something were really the matter?" thought Nance.

M. Misel and Andy met at the front door, Misel to inquire for the poor ill man and Andy to catch a glimpse of his Nance. Misel had walked slowly and painfully across the campus from his class room. Nance, from the window, had watched him approaching and she could but admire his patience as he made his crippled way.

"It must be worse to have to pretend to be lame than to be lame," she said to herself. "I wonder if Andy is still fooled."

The two men came into the library together, Andy showing great solicitude for the disabled foreigner. Misel was so extremely polite and seemed so distressed at Edwin's illness that Nance could hardly believe that Judy and the girls could be right in the discovery they had made the night before. His manner was perfect, so respectful, so kindly and courteous.

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"I believe I am to wish you joy, Dr. McLean,—and I do so with all my heart." Andy grinned his appreciation. "My wife and I were quite charmed by Miss Oldham. I hear you are to go to the front to assist poor stricken France. I admire the courage of your fiancée to contemplate going with you."

"It would take more for me to stay away," whispered Nance softly.

"Ah, it is the spirit of the women which is what the Germans have to fight!"

"Is not the spirit of the German women quite as courageous as ours?" asked Nance, looking at Misel keenly.

"Ah! *Wunderschön!*" his eyes glowed. Suddenly the fact that he had dropped into German seemed to embarrass him. "That is—that is the word for the German women, just as 'wonderful' is the one for the Americans."

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"Tell me about Edwin," interrupted Andy, as though he meant to put Misel at his ease again. "Is he very ill?"

"Oh, very!"

"Can't I go up to see him?"

"Molly said he was not to be disturbed. These headaches just wear themselves out. He will be all right to-night."

"But there is something to be done before it wears Edwin out as well as itself," insisted the young doctor.

"Molly says not!" Nance shook her head at Andy as much as to tell him he was talking too much, and that young man subsided until Misel had gone. Then Nance revealed to her lover the whole nefarious plot.

"I had my doubts about that man from the first. I could not see how anyone as lame as he was could have jumped up so briskly. The beast! How could you be so polite to him?"

"Camouflage! Fighting the devil with fire!"

"I am glad old Ed took matters in hand so promptly. I tell you these college professors show up pretty well in these times! Wilson and Green forever!"

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In the meantime the industrious war relief workers were hard at it. The be-aproned and berchiefed ladies of Wellington held their séances in the basement of the little church. It was astonishing how large was their output, but busy fingers had been steadily at work ever since word had come from France that wounded men were dying for lack of surgical dressings, and that word had come very soon after the breaking out of the World War.

Women with earnest faces were bending over the long tables, some rolling bandages; some tearing cotton cloth; some pulling threads for careful cutting of gauze, later to be deftly folded in the prescribed shape. In one corner, cotton batting was being fluffed up for the making of fracture pillows. Huge baskets were being emptied by one group as they stuffed the pillows, while others were being filled by the fluffers, as Judy called the women whose duty it was to pick the cotton. Much sneezing went on in this corner and he who wonders why, might try once fluffing unrefined cotton.

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"Let me make the tampons!" begged Jessie.

"I know why! Because they look like powder puffs," teased Edith.

The house party was received with enthusiasm by the Wellington workers. There always seems to

be more work than can be accomplished and then workers come and by hook or crook the task is completed. All of our girls had done some war relief work, so it was easy to set them to their stints. Pretty Jessie could make tampons that were so soft and so regular that they really did look like powder puffs. Katherine could pick cotton as fast as Mother Carey can chickens and her advent caused an increase of sneezing. Edith stuffed fracture pillows just to show that she could go faster than her sister. Margaret rolled bandages with a precision equal to her parliamentary ruling when she was presiding officer. Otoy and Judy and Molly folded the gauze into the neat little six-inch squares. This is the most difficult part of the work, requiring such accuracy that only the expert should choose that table. The edges must come just together, no threads must be left on the gauze, the corners must be turned under exactly enough and the finished articles stacked in even piles.

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Madame Misel came in with the work she had taken home to finish. Never were such neat, wonderful dressings as hers. In the short time she had been at Wellington she had accomplished the work of two women, bringing in great stacks of the accurately-made dressings.

It was difficult for the girls to treat her with the courtesy they knew it was policy to employ. Behind that calm mask they could now detect the lying spy. Her expression was as demure as ever and she spoke with the same hesitation that they felt was assumed, just as her husband's halting gait was. Why they should have taken up that particular disguise, Molly and her friends were at a loss to know.

Madame Misel was almost a beautiful woman. Animation would have made her quite beautiful, animation and better dressing. Her hair was parted in the middle and brushed as slick as glass, coiled in a tight knob at exactly the wrong angle. She habitually wore an old-fashioned basque of a bygone cut buttoned up close to the neck with a narrow band of white collar, which but accentuated the severity of her garb. Her shoes were broad and ugly with no heels, her skirt skimpy and badly hung.

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Judy studied the countenance of the foreigner as she bent over her work. The nimble fingers moved very rapidly as she folded the gauze.

"Gee, I'd like to sketch her!" Judy whispered to Molly. "A mixture of Mona Lisa and the Unknown Woman and plain repressed devil!"

She whipped out her sketch book, which was never far from her, and with a few strokes had Madame Misel's pose, then with a skill that was quite wonderful had suggested her features. The model moved uneasily as though conscious of scrutiny, but before she looked up Judy had closed her book and was demurely folding gauze. Madame arose and walked away, standing by the table where Margaret was rolling bandages. Judy again whipped out her book and made a rapid impression of the unstylish figure in its flat shoes and tight basque.

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Just then little Mildred and Cho-Cho came screaming from the churchyard where they had been playing happily. Mildred had in her arms the poor little much-petted puppy. Blood was streaming from the creature's leg and he was giving forth pathetic wails.

"A big dog done bitted him all up!" cried Mildred.

"Greatly dog 'ave 'urt little puppee!" said Cho-Cho-San.

"First aid to the injured!" exclaimed Judy, as she took the bleeding canine in her arms. The pile of beautifully made dressings Madame Misel had just brought in was on the corner of the long table. Without a by-your-leave, Judy snatched up one from the top and bound it around the poor gory leg. "There, you poor little precious! You may be part French poodle, anyhow, and surely a wound is a wound."

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Madame Misel put out a hand as though to stay her, but before she could say anything Judy had the dressing wrapped around the puppy's little leg.

"Too bad to take one so perfectly made, but I just grabbed the one closest to hand. Now, Mildred, you and Cho-Cho can be Red Cross nurses and little Poilu can be your wounded warrior. Take him out and nurse him carefully. It isn't much of a place and no doubt with good care he will be all well by to-morrow."

"I—think—it—would be—advisable to—apply—iodine to the wound—is it—not so, Madame Brown? I shall be pleased to—go to—my—house—and—procure some," faltered Madame Misel.

"I don't think it is really necessary," insisted Molly. "We shall be going home presently and I can put some on then. You are very kind." Enemy alien or not, Madame Misel was certainly very thoughtful to want to take the trouble for the pet. Molly, ever ready to see the good in persons, had a feeling that this quiet, pleasant woman could not be shamming. Perhaps Misel was not what he should be, but not this wife, who was so untiring in her labors of mercy.

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When they started home, the roly-poly Poilu seemed to have recovered entirely. He did not even limp, so he was spared the ordeal of having the stinging iodine poured on the wounded leg. It was nothing more than a scratch anyhow, Judy declared.

At midnight Edwin returned, letting himself quietly in the front door. Molly was waiting for him, eaten up with curiosity about what had transpired. He had been closeted with the Secret Service officials, who considered the matter of the gravest importance. Two of the cleverest and most

cautious of the detective force were put on the job.

"They were no doubt on the train with me," he said, "but I have no idea what they look like or what disguise they themselves will employ. At least a dozen persons got off the train at Wellington Station and all of them or none of them may have been Sherlock Holmeses."

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"I hope your neuralgia is better," laughed Molly.

"Well, the joke of it is, I really did have neuralgia all day, not severe enough to keep me from enjoying a very good luncheon with your brother Kent and Jimmie Lufton at the Press Club, but quite bad enough to keep you from having told a lie."

"Poor dear! I am so sorry for you to have suffered at all, but it is certainly considerate of you to be instrumental in saving my soul. And now, since to-morrow is the wedding day, we had better get all the sleep we can."

CHAPTER XVII

[201]

TILL DEATH DOTHS US PART

The small home wedding that Nance and Molly had originally planned grew to be quite large. Little by little it seemed impossible to get married without first one person and then the other. Andy had many friends at Exmoor and Wellington; Dr. and Mrs. McLean knew half the country and had a long list to be invited; Nance wanted the whole faculty and some of the girls who were favorites of Molly's; Kent Brown arrived from New York bringing with him Mr. Matsuki, frankly delighted to be included in so honorable an assemblage.

"Surely they can't all of them sleep here," said Edwin to his wife as he put on his wedding garments.

"They can, but they won't," she answered, laughing at his woeful expression. "The house party breaks up after the ceremony. Do I look all right?"

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"Beautiful!"

"I mean my dress!"

"But I mean you! I don't know anything about your dress except that it is blue as it should be."

"Can you find your collar buttons and is your tie all right?" asked the anxious housewife as she accepted with very good grace the embrace Edwin felt was necessary to his happiness just then.

"Yes! Everything O. K.! I am sorry for the bride because you are so lovely, honey. Nance is a pretty girl but I am afraid nobody will see her because of the matron of honor."

"Such a goose! Now I must go look after the flower girls. Katy has them coralled in the nursery where they can't get dirty. They are the sweetest looking creatures you ever saw in your life. Dodo looks like a beautiful cabbage rose himself, his cheeks are so rosy. I wish Mother could see him."

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"Why doesn't she come on to the wedding?"

"Sue needs her in Kentucky. The only trouble about Mother is that there is only one of her. I need her more than anything right now. If she were here she would take hold of this wedding breakfast and I would know it would come off right," sighed Molly, who, true to her character, had planned to do enough for two persons. "Thank goodness, Judy is here!"

The ceremony was to be at twelve and then a wedding breakfast served. This meant Molly was to be very busy. The girls were helping, but at the same time they were more or less flustered trying to get themselves dressed all in one room. They had determined to make this a gay light wedding as to clothes at least. There was a feeling of excitement in every breast, excitement mingled with sadness. Was not this the most momentous day in the life of every true American? War was declared! Perhaps had they realized just what war meant, those girls could not have donned those gay, bright garments. Would they have had the courage to wish their friend God-speed so cheerily? I believe they would. They were of the stuff of the mothers of men. On that second of April, 1917, every woman in the United States must have felt somewhat as Molly Brown's college friends felt. It was a feeling of excitement, awe, exhilaration and dread combined.

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Nance was gowned in white with a wonderful lace veil Otoyó had brought as her present. It was as filmy as the clouds that rest on Fujiyama, the sacred mountain of Otoyó's country.

"Only suppose she had brought a tea basket like mine! What would that have looked like on your head?" giggled Judy, who was in a strangely hysterical state. She was one girl who very well knew what the war was to mean. Had she not been on the outskirts of war in 1914 when she was

stranded in Paris? Had she not seen the soldiers marching off bidding farewell to their nearest and dearest,—sometimes a final farewell? Kent had spent all the time he could in training camps since they had been opened to citizens of the United States, and now he was confident of receiving a commission. Perhaps it would mean that her husband would be in the trenches in a short time. She wanted him to want to go, was proud of him for wanting to,—but oh, the agony of it all!

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Almost time for the ceremony now! Molly made her final tour of inspection. Edwin, Kent and Mr. Matsuki were safe in the den where they eagerly discussed politics. Dr. and Mrs. McLean arrived, holding Andy between them as though they might lose him before it was time.

"I meant to help you, Molly, child, but my hea-r-r-t is so joompy I am afraid it will be best for me to compose meself," said the poor mother. "Don't let Andy know!"

Molly kissed the dear lady and asked Katherine to stay near her. Katherine's dressing was always a simple matter, as her gowns consisted of shirt-waists and skirts in various materials to suit various occasions. She declared she could dress in the dark and look just as well as though she had had cheval glasses and a blaze of light.

The other girls were ready and came down to the parlors to help receive the guests. Nance was lovely and looked as fresh and sweet as a white violet as she sat in her room sedately awaiting the hour. A visit to the nursery disclosed the children piously standing with backs to the window and arms held well away from their fluffy skirts, as charming flower girls as one could find.

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"I'm so 'appee! I'm so 'appee! I'm Mildred's Japanese dollee! She's my kick-up dollee!" sang the little Cho-Cho-San. "All I want is bald spot, and all she wants is stick up hair!"

"Ain't we your little comforts, Muvver?" asked Mildred.

"Indeed you are, my darling! Now when Judy calls, you come running so you can go down the stairs in front of Aunt Nance. Judy will have your wreaths all ready. Where is Katy?"

"She's peeking at the comply."

"Well, you kiddies be good and don't get your dresses mussed. It is almost time now. Don't wake Dodo." Of course Dodo had gone to sleep, since there was nothing more important on hand just then. Molly hurried off to the kitchen to see that the wedding breakfast was coming on as she had planned. Mrs. Murphy had hobbled up to help Kizzie, and Mrs. McLean had sent over her two maids.

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"All they need is a boss," sighed poor Molly. "If I only could be two places at one time!"

But whose familiar figure was that seen through the scullery door? The maids were all in a broad grin and Kizzie, as she expressed it, "was fittin' to bust."

"Mother! Mother! Where on earth did you come from?" and Molly had that dear lady clasped in her arms. "What are you doing in the back? Come on and hurry and get dressed! It is almost time!" Molly felt like little Cho-Cho when she cried out: "I'm so 'appee! I'm so 'appee!"

"I just this minute arrived and have no idea of dressing!" cried that dear lady when she could speak.

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"Of course you needn't dress! You are lovely as you are—your hair is a bit mussed—and——"

"You mussed it but it will do very well for the part I am to play. I have no idea of appearing. I mean to serve this breakfast."

"But, Mother, I couldn't let you!"

"Nonsense! That is what I hurried on for. Why, child, when I realized that you were having a house party and a wedding and going to serve a great breakfast, I simply jumped on the train with a hand-bag and flew to you. You always have behaved as though you were triplets. Now run along and don't tell a soul I am here. I can be honored later on; now I want a big apron and room to operate. Kizzie has already told me what the breakfast is to be and you need not think about it. Run along!"

"Well, one more hug and I am gone. Aren't you even going to peek at the comply, as Mildred says?"

"Oh, I'll see the ceremony, never fear; but fly, Molly! The guests are coming."

Molly felt as though she really could fly. Her mother's arrival had relieved her of all fear about the wedding breakfast. It would be obliged to go off without a hitch now. Dear, dear Mother! How like her to come quietly slipping in the back way just in the nick of time!

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One could have heard a pin drop in the old square house on the campus as the first strains of the wedding march arose and the rustle of skirts on the stairway announced the approach of the wedding procession. Andy was shaking and shivering in the hall, tightly clutching his father's arm. He had declared that Dr. McLean must be his best man and would hear of no other. Of course he was just as scared as the groom always is, at least, all proper grooms.

At Judy's signal the little flower girls came dancing from the nursery, their fluffy skirts flying. The wreaths and garlands were handed them and they marched down the stairs feeling much more

important than Nance herself.

"Heavens!" thought Molly as she followed them with Nance, "what on earth is the matter with Mildred's hair?" It was standing up in a most peculiar way. Instead of the curls that Katy had so carefully made, her ringlets had been brushed out and Molly realized that at least four inches of her daughter's hair had been cut off. "And Cho-Cho-San! What has happened to her?" In the middle of the child's head was a bare spot at least three inches in diameter. It looked as though it had been shaved. [210]

Whatever the matter was, it affected the flower girls not in the least. With many tosses of those shorn heads they marched into the parlor, scattering their posies as they had been told. When Otoyo saw the bald spot on the head of her offspring she almost fainted and had to hold on to the ready arm of honorable husband. Cho-Cho-San had clipped Mildred's hair to make it stand up like a kick-up dolly, and Mildred had stolen her father's safety razor and converted her little friend into a veritable Japanese dolly.

Nothing but the solemnity of the occasion kept Molly from hysterics. The little wretches must have got busy after she made her visit to the nursery. Evidently they were doing what Mildred called "playing true." Cho-Cho was a Japanese dolly and Mildred was a kick-up. The little visitor did look exactly like one of those fascinating Japanese dolls, and Molly could but smile in spite of her distress. She was afraid to catch Judy's eye as she stepped back to let Andy take his place by Nance's side. [211]

Never had the wedding ceremony seemed so impressive as on that second of April. Every mind was filled with the importance of the step that the country was taking, and with the prayer that Andy and Nance would prosper, was breathed the thought that the United States might come out victorious.

Nance was to go with Andy's unit in the capacity of interpreter. She was not a brilliant French scholar but was thorough in her knowledge of that as of everything she had undertaken. She frankly declared that she had been separated from Andy long enough and she intended to follow him to the ends of the earth if need be. It was that wonderful fact that made Andy's "I will!" so strong and clear. His tremblings left him and he stood by his dear girl like the soldier of the Red Cross that he was. Nothing was impossible or too hard if Nance was to be with him. [212]

Mrs. McLean's good, honest face was like an angel's as she gazed on her new daughter-in-law. No jealousy was depicted there—nothing but adoration, gratitude that the girl was to make her Andy happy. Poor Dr. McLean was sobbing like a baby and his good wife had to put her arms around him to comfort him.

All over! "Whom God hath joined together let no man put asunder." Andy clasped his Nance with the look of: "I dare anyone to try!"

Otoyo and Molly held a whispered consultation over their imaginative offspring and decided that nothing was to be said or done to the culprits on that day of days,—the reckoning must be deferred.

Those infants were greatly astonished, somewhat relieved and secretly chagrined that their prank was not noticed. They had expected to be even more important than the bride in their rôles of Japanese and kick-up dolls. [213]

"I weckon nobody don't love us 'nough to spank us even," pouted Mildred.

"Japanese babee gets not spank-ed—but honorable mother frowns on Cho-Cho when she loves her most after naughtiness—but now—but now—she smiles, but not with love," was the wail of the companion in crime and misery.

The efficient helmsman in the kitchen steered the wedding breakfast to safety. The affair went off with such expedition that the housekeepers present marveled at Molly's cleverness.

"She must have trained her servants wonderfully well," whispered one.

"I remember the joke they got off on Molly in college," laughed Miss Walker. "It was that she came of a family of famous cooks."

"It is not only the cooking now," said Mrs. Fern, Edwin's cousin and the mother of the perfect Alice. "It is the way it is served and the orderliness of the waitresses. I wonder that Molly can be with her guests while it is being done unless she has had a caterer come up from New York. I simply have to be in the pantry myself when my daughters entertain on a large scale. That is, unless I can hire someone to come take charge, and Wellington does not boast such a person. Alice is very particular but not willing to do much herself,—not able, in fact," she added lamely, a little afraid of having criticized her perfect daughter in public. [214]

Mrs. Fern was very fond of Molly and admired her greatly in spite of the fact that she could not help bearing her a tiny secret grudge for marrying Edwin Green. That good lady had in her heart of hearts hoped that Alice was to bear off the professional prize. Perfect persons are not always very pleasant to live with and Alice Fern was no exception to the rule. Mrs. Fern wished no harm to Edwin but she would have been glad to shift her burden of perfectness to other shoulders.

"We are just asking ourselves how you do it, my dear," she said as Molly came up to see that all was going well with her guests.

"Do it! I'll tell you a secret that I was not to divulge but I am simply bursting with it: Mother is in the pantry! She came in the back way, without my even knowing she had left Kentucky, and now she is directing operations. She refuses to appear until the party is over."

"Ah, that is the reason for that glow in your eyes!" exclaimed Miss Walker. "I used to say when you were a college girl that I could tell by your expression when the western mail had brought you a letter from Kentucky."

"I didn't know it showed so," blushed Molly, "but it does make me feel warm all over when I know my mother is near."

CHAPTER XVIII

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THE PUNISHMENT OF MILDRED

The last rice thrown and the bridal party gone! Molly and Judy all that was left of the gay girls! The old crowd once more dispersed! I wonder if they will ever come together again. It had been a perfect time, and Molly, although dead tired, was very happy that she had been able to gather them in under her roof. All that worried her now was the fact that Mildred was to be punished. How, she was not certain.

Mrs. Brown, no longer in her apron but now the most honored of all, was ensconced on the sofa with Dodo in her arms and Mildred snuggled up close to her side. The child's eyes were big and sad. Her little cropped head was drooping and her mouth trembling. Even Granny was not noticing her naughtiness. Evidently nobody loved her!

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Kent was seated on the floor, his head against his mother's knee, where, without exerting himself, he could see Judy's animated face and bright fluffy hair. Perhaps the time was soon coming when he would have to be far away from these beloved women. He was sure of his commission now and was ready for his country's call, but oh, it was hard to be uprooted from the pleasant spot where love had planted him! Ah, well! The war could not last forever and maybe there was a good time coming for all of them. It was hard to leave Judy, but it would be harder to take her with him if duty sent him to France. He did not criticize Andy McLean in the least. He knew his own business and Nance wanted to go with him but he, Kent Brown, had no idea of exposing his Judy to any more horrors of war. The taste both of them had had of it was enough.

The little group around the fire was very quiet. Dormouse Dodo went off into his usual soporific state. Judy was knitting rapidly, and the click of her needles was all that broke the stillness. Judy always declared she did not mind knitting if she could just make her needles click. Molly was too tired to knit, too tired to do anything. If only she had settled matters with her first born! Her conscience told her it must be done and done soon. If only something would happen to keep her from having to do it, whatever it was to be. She actually prayed for strength to take the matter up and also that she would not have to take it up.

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Suddenly on the twilight calm of the library there arose a broken-hearted wail! Mildred had broken out into an abandon of grief. Her wails rent the air.

"Gee whilikins! I thought the Germans had come," exclaimed Kent, jumping to his feet.

"My darling, what is it?" asked Mrs. Brown as Mildred clutched her around the neck.

"Oh, Granny, Granny! My muvver hates me!"

"Oh, Molly! What have you done to this angel?" asked the grandmother almost sternly.

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"Nothing! I declare!"

"That's jes' it! She ain't done nuffin! That shows she hates me. Kizzie done say, 'Who de Lord loveneth he chases,' an' I done did the wusseth thing I could do an' my muvver she ain't so much as said: 'Why, Mildred!' I wants to git spanked! I wants to git spanked!"

"Why, darling, what have you done?" asked Mrs. Brown, trying to control her risibles.

"I done shave-pated, number-eighted my little Haythen friend. Kizzie called Cho-Cho:

"Shave pate, number eight
Hit yo' haid against the gate."

"It sho did hurt Cho-Cho's feelings. And Cho-Cho, she slish-slashed my hair off so's I'd look cute. Nobody ain't told us we look cute—and nobody ain't spanked us nor nothin'—and nobody don't love us." This tirade came out between sobs.

Kent and Judy roared with laughter but Molly and her mother tried to look sad and mournful.

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"Molly, I'm astonished! Why don't you spank your kid? I never heard of such an inhuman parent," teased Kent.

Molly was very happy indeed. The miracle had come! Her prayer was answered. She did not have to punish Mildred. Mildred was punished.

"You wouldn't have treated yo' dear little children so mean, would you, Granny?"

"You bet she wouldn't have," insisted Kent. "Why, if I had shave-pated, number-eighted my little Haythen friends, your granny would have torn me limb from limb and beaten me black and blue."

"Sho nuf?"

"Yes, indeed, and if my little Haythen friend had chopped off all my pretty curls, I am sure her mother would have thrown her in the fire and poked holes in her with a red hot poker."

"Jes' 'cause they loved you so much?"

"Yes, just because they loved us so much."

"Me'n' Cho-Cho wisht we could git throwed in the fire," sighed the repentant Mildred. "But, Uncle Kent," and she got up and put her little mouth close to his ear, "don't you think I made a mighty cunning little Japanese dolly out'n my Haythen friend?"

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CHAPTER XIX

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A DEATH

"Aunt Judy, my Poilu is tellible sick! He can't open up his mouf mo'n 'bout a minute far. Won't you please, ma'm, punch it open wif the button hook so's I kin poke some breafkast down him?"

Mildred had the little puppy clasped in her arms and he did seem to be very miserable. His eyes were partly closed and his teeth were tightly clamped together.

"I weckon that big ol' dog what eated a piece out'n him done made him so sick."

"But, honey, that was a week ago, and if it had been going to make him sick it would surely have affected him long ago. It was nothing but a scratch, and don't you remember Aunt Judy bound it up so tight it only bled a moment?"

Judy and Kent had remained at Wellington for a visit. Kent was so soon to join his regiment that he felt he could not tear himself away from his mother and sister, so they had lingered on after the other guests had departed. The bride and groom had also returned after a flying visit to Nance's old home and were now with the McLeans, Nance declaring that Andy's mother must have all she could of her son before he was to sail for France.

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Judy took the puppy in her lap and smoothed his silky sides. The little fellow opened his eyes and gave her a grateful glance. Mildred did squeeze a little too tight when a fellow felt as sick as poor little Poilu did.

"Maybe we had better get the doctor for him," suggested Judy. "There come Andy and Aunt Nance now, across the campus! Call them, Mildred! Andy is not too proud to doctor a dog."

Mildred delightedly ran to the door and waved her arms frantically. "Hi there, brideangroom! brideangroom! Somebody's mighty sick in this here house. Better hurry up or they might go deaded!"

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Andy and Nance quickened their pace and hastened into the house.

"Who is it?" they cried anxiously.

"It's my littlest brudder!"

"Dodo! What is the matter with my little husband?" asked Nance anxiously.

"'Tain't Dodo! He ain't my littlest brudder. I'se got anudder brudder. Ain't you knowed about him?"

Nance and Andy were much mystified, but they followed the amusing little creature into the library. Nance thought perhaps the big-hearted Molly had adopted a French orphan,—Molly was quite capable of doing it.

"There's my brudder!" and Mildred pointed to the suffering puppy. "Ain't it too bad he's got a tail?"

Andy laughed as he lifted the poor little Poilu to his own knees.

"What is the matter with him, Andy?" was Judy's anxious query.

"It looks like the last stages of tetanus." The patient was even then in a violent convulsion. Andy mercifully laid his handkerchief over the little fellow's head, dreading that Mildred should see his suffering. [225]

"I'd put him out of his misery but he will be gone in a moment anyhow," he said sadly. "Has he been hurt?"

"A week ago he got bitten by a dog, but it was a mere scratch and did not amount to a row of pins, so Molly and I decided."

"Did you put anything on the wound?"

"Nothing but a surgical dressing down at the war relief rooms. I remember it was one of the beautifully made dressings Madame Misel had just brought in——"

Andy sprang up, a wild light in his eye. The puppy had breathed its last so he handed it over to Judy without more ado.

"Where is Molly?"

"She has gone down in the village to pack supplies at the war relief rooms. There were lots of things to get off, so she went quite early. I am to follow a little later, just as soon as Kent finishes primping. What is the matter?" [226]

"There may be much the matter. You and Kent come as fast as you can," and Andy and Nance hurried off without any more explanation.

The news was broken to Mildred that her pet was no more and her bruised heart was much comforted with promises of a funeral later on when Kizzie got time to make arrangements. Kent and Judy caught up with Andy and Nance before they reached the old church where the war work was carried on.

"What under Heaven is the matter?" panted Judy.

"It may be nothing, but I must investigate. Let's go in as quietly as possible. Does Madame Misel still work on the surgical dressings?"

"Yes, indeed! And such beautiful work as she does! Molly insists that she must have a great deal of good in her to give so much time to this work. Sometimes I think I must have dreamed that they spoke as they did that night in the garden. Why should pro-Germans and spies choose this particular spot, anyhow?" [227]

The workroom was filled with very busy ladies when our young couples entered. Molly was tying up dressings, after carefully inspecting and counting them. An order had come for many bandages and other dressings and all hands were at work trying to get them off. Madame Misel was deftly arranging the rolled bandages in pyramids and then tying them with strings made of the selvedge torn from the cotton. Nothing goes to waste in this war work. Madame's countenance was as calm as ever as she bent over her work, but when she saw the two men enter, Judy noticed a sudden alertness in her glance and a tiny spot of red on her usually white cheek. As she pulled the selvedge string, she must have given it an unusual tug for it broke and the tightly-rolled bandages flew hither and yon over the floor.

"Humph! There is no telling how many germs got picked up in that scatteration," muttered Andy as he stooped and gathered the bandages.

"The—bandage—does—not—touch the—wound," said Madame, evidently forgetting she was speaking to a surgeon. [228]

"No?" said Andy shortly.

"Molly," he said, "I must speak with you a moment."

"Well, Andy dear, I am awfully busy. You come home to luncheon with me, you and Nance, and then you can speak all you've a mind to."

"I must speak now," whispered Andy sternly.

"Heavens! Is anything the matter?" asked Molly.

"I am not sure," and Andy drew her towards the vestry at the back of the church. "Tell me, Molly, have you packed all the dressings that that Misel woman has made?"

"Why, no, not all of them! Why?"

"Have you mixed them with the others?"

"No! They are so beautifully folded that I do not have to inspect them, and so I have put them in boxes to themselves. She is the best worker I ever saw." [229]

"Molly, I shall have to ask you not to get this shipment off to-day."

"But, Andy, it is most important! The poor wounded are bleeding to death and the ship sails in two days. We must get them off this evening if they are to catch that boat. What is your reason?"

And then Andy told her of the puppy's death. He said the fact that his first aid had come from those very rooms, and that tetanus, or lock-jaw, had set in on a perfectly healthy puppy when he had a mere scratch from another dog, made him suspicious that tetanus germs were on some of the bandages.

"Why, Andy, that is ridiculous! Poor Madame Misel may be in sympathy with Germany in spite of all she says, she and her husband, but she could not do such a vile thing as that." Molly could not help feeling impatient and indignant with her old friend. "Only look at her sweet face and all thought of such infamy will leave your mind."

Andy did glance towards Madame Misel and the look of venomous hatred that he surprised on her face was shocking. The young physician laughed grimly. "Molly, you are no judge of persons unless they happen to be angels. You think wings are getting ready to sprout even from our enemies."

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"Perhaps they are! Who knows?"

"You may be right, but in the meantime, please don't let any of these dressings get off. I must see those Secret Service men. Where are they?"

"Edwin knows, I believe, but he has not told me."

Molly was irritated beyond endurance. How was she to let these women know that the shipment must be held up? It was all of it so absurd. The women had done the work and now these men must come poking their fingers into the pie that they had had none of the work of making. The idea of accusing Madame Misel of such a crime! Judy, too, seemed to be doubting the stranger, and Nance, of course, would be aiding and abetting Andy.

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"I shall have to ask you to be very quiet, not to give this creature an inkling of our suspicions," commanded Andy sternly. "That is very important."

"Well, naturally, I'll hardly be so rude as to let her think anyone is so unkind as to doubt her," and Molly's lip trembled.

"Molly, dear Molly, don't hate me so. I can't help seeing that something is wrong and if I have the slightest suspicion, I must surely probe to the bottom. You must see that."

"Of course I do, Andy, but I just can't bear to have anybody abused, especially a woman who makes such lovely dressings," and Molly tried to smile at her friend.

"Well, I'll depend upon you to stop the work of getting them off and still not let the woman know she is under suspicion. Just go on packing but do not make the shipment."

"I hate to resort to such subterfuge, but I'll do my best," sighed Molly.

"Wouldn't it be better to bring one criminal to justice than to kill thousands of poor wounded men by dressing their wounds with tetanus germs?"

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"Of course, only—but—you see——"

"Yes, I see that your heart is so tender and you are so honest yourself you think all the world must be like you."

Molly went sadly back to her packing, all the joy and zest gone out of her work. How could nice men like Andy and Kent think such things about a poor defenseless woman? No doubt she did have a sneaking sympathy for Germany. Was not that natural? Had she and her countrymen not been under German rule long enough to consider the kaiser as their rightful ruler? Because her husband chose to pretend to be lame was no reason why everybody should think Madame Misel capable of such a dastardly thing as putting tetanus germs on the bandages of poor wounded soldiers. That was something no woman, no matter how bad, could do,—and surely this woman was not bad, not really bad. Molly Brown was so constituted that one had to be proven to be bad before she could believe evil of him or her, and then, as a rule, she would find some excuse for the sinner if not for the sin.

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Nance and Judy stayed on to help in the work, while Andy and Kent went to find the Secret Service agents. While the task of making bandages, etc., went rapidly forward, the detectives quietly ransacked the cottage occupied by the Misels. This was the first opportunity they had had of going over the house. The occupants had never before left it alone. Much of dire importance was discovered. Among other things a small laboratory where no doubt all kinds of evil germs were incubated. The search was made very rapidly, as they were anxious to leave things in such order that the owners would not suspect that they were under surveillance.

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CHAPTER XX

GERMS

As the two quietly-dressed, intelligent looking men were in the act of going through a desk, they saw from the window the slow and painful approach of M. Misel. Without a word they let themselves out of a back window, left open for emergencies, and before the master had opened the front door the detectives were over the back fence and out of sight. They were desirous of catching more than the Misels in their net and did not want to act too quickly.

Had they peeped through the window, they would have seen Misel with an impatient gesture sling his crutch in one direction, his cane in another.

"Lena!" he called, in anything but a gentle tone. "Lena!" And then with muttered curses, when he found his wife to be absent, he settled himself to look over the bunch of mail he had just obtained at the post-office. One letter he examined very critically before opening. It was an inoffensive enough looking envelope, addressed on a typewriter and with a postmark from New York. It had the appearance of a circular or advertisement of some sort, being made of cheap, greyish-white paper, the kind of letter one would wait until last to open in a pile of mail, being sure it was of no especial interest or importance. Misel seemed to find it very interesting, however. It was the one he chose from all the letters and papers, and as he examined it, he scowled darkly.

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"Lena!" he called as Madame Misel hurriedly entered the cottage, "Lena, some fool has been meddling with my mail!"

"Perhaps not such a big fool as you are!" she answered tartly.

"Look! The envelope has been opened before. Of course it is the letter from Fritz von Lestes, the one we have been awaiting." He tore it open and read aloud: "'The paint which you have ordered will be delivered immediately. Am sorry there should have been any delay. I am sending a light grey, as agreed upon.' Umm—I don't see how they could make much out of that."

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"Let me see the letter.—Of course they can make much out of it as there is no address,—you men bungle things so! Why should a man who is in the paint business write a letter with no address and sign his name so illegibly that no one could make it out? He should have had a letter head and a business envelope."

"And speaking of bungling,—why did you go and leave the house with no one in it? Can't you see that is imprudent?"

"Mrs. Green came for me and I had no excuse.—Besides, I am sure if I am by when the dressings are handed in that no one will inspect my work. I have been packing all morning and have seen to it that my labor has not been in vain."

"Oh, peerless woman!" he said sarcastically.

Madame Misel said nothing but busied herself over the luncheon. Suddenly she gave a little cry, half distress, half indignation. Misel hastened to her.

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"What is it?"

"Look! This back window is not quite closed! Did you open it?"

"No! I have not been here in the kitchen."

"Then someone has been in the house," she announced in a dead tone.

"Are you sure?"

"Of course! I left the windows locked, stupid! Look about and see if all is in order."

The detectives had worked as neatly as detectives can work, but the Misels found several traces of them. In one room a chair had been moved; in another a drawer had not been shut as close as Madame was confident she had left it; papers had been turned over in the desk, Misel was sure, although none were missing.

"Someone has been in the laboratory, too! Look at this crucible! I always place them so,—and this has been turned."

The pair faced each other with despair on their countenances.

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"What now?" they gasped.

"We must make a flitting this very night!" exclaimed the woman. "Thank goodness, nobody dreams that you are not crippled nor that I am anything but the homely hausfrau I appear. The dressings will be off this very afternoon, too, so my work is completed in that line, at least. If you could boast as much, no doubt you would not mind leaving. I told you to begin the teaching at Exmoor sooner."

"The youths were not ripe for it. I have begun in a way, but not much has been accomplished. Perhaps the person who has been here is just some prying neighbor and we are not really being watched. Go out and see if you can discover anything!"

When Madame Misel peeped through the windows of the old church she saw enough to make her turn pale. Andy McLean was there with two strange men and Professor and Mrs. Green. Molly was weeping bitter tears as she untied the carefully packed surgical dressings. Madame saw at a glance that it was her work that was being examined by the men. She did not stop to make sure what they found on her beautifully made dressings, but turned and fled towards the cottage that she called home.

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"Why is she weeping?" she asked herself, and there was woman enough in her to know that Molly wept because one of her own sex had proved faithless.

Blinds were pulled down in the cottage with the lovely old garden, and the activities that ensued could only be equaled by a circus breaking up to leave town. Madame Misel moved with a quiet precision that showed she was an adept at making a quick get-away. Misel worked with a fury of impatience. He went through his desk, scattering papers hither and yon and burning everything of no value. Other documents he stowed carefully away in his breast pocket. The laboratory was dismantled and small, mysterious-looking vials packed in boxes and placed in the huge suit-case that seemed to hold most of their belongings.

A letter was written to the landlord informing him that his tenants had been called out of Wellington by the illness of a fictitious sister. A month's rent was enclosed. Another letter was written to the postmaster asking that mail be forwarded to an entirely imaginary address. The work proceeded rapidly. The cottage was always in apple-pie order, as Madame Misel was certainly an excellent housekeeper.

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"You must write to the president of the college," commanded Madame.

"Naturally! Must I use the same sister?"

"Of course! Why two lies when one will suffice?"

A letter to Miss Walker was dispatched forthwith.

"And now for our disguises,—or rather the time has come to discard our disguises!" cried Madame almost joyfully. "I hate to appear as such a frump!"

Misel's disguise was composed principally of cane and crutch, but at his wife's instigation he shaved his mustache. With the help of a checked suit and red necktie and a brown derby hat a trifle too small for him, the pathetic and interesting teacher of the French language was transformed into the type of man one sees hanging around a race track. With a clever brush Madame put a quirk in his eyebrows that completed the portrait. Then a bit of court plaster was stuck on one of the perfect teeth which gave the handsome Misel a sinister look and suggested to the beholder former battles and fisticuffs in which he had been struck in the mouth.

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"Even your dying sister will not recognize you!" exclaimed his wife.

Madame's transformation was even more startling than her husband's. First she shook out her smoothly brushed hair and with the help of curling tongs soon had a wave that the finest hair dresser in New York could not have exceeded. She piled her abundant hair up in curls and twists and coils, pulling out puffs over her ears. Then with pencil and rouge pot and powder puff she went to work on her countenance. A raging beauty was the outcome, but rather fast and loud looking. A lavender suit lined and slashed with corn-colored silk was then donned, with many rings and bracelets. The flat-heeled shoes were packed away in the suit-case with the sober costume, and high-heeled French boots were fitted on in their stead. A plentiful sprinkling of musk was added so that the nostrils were assailed as soon as the eyes.

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"Tough sports!" would have been the verdict of anyone meeting the Misels. They had decided on the night train to New York. The cottage was carefully locked, the key enclosed in the letter to the landlord, which they posted on their way to the station. Everything was going smoothly. The station was empty when the pair stepped upon the platform and in a moment the New York train came steaming around the curve.

"Thank God, we are getting away unnoticed!" gasped Misel.

"Thank God if you choose, but it would be more to the point if you thanked me. I can't see that anyone has helped you but me."

"Oh, well! Have it your own way!" said the spurious bookmaker as they boarded the train.

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"Someone got left," he laughed as they took their seats in the chair car. "I saw a man and woman running down the road just as we got aboard. I am glad they got left. Whoever it is might have recognized us."

"Nonsense! Didn't I tell you your own dying sister would not know you?" and Madame Misel smoothed her lavender draperies and jangled her many bracelets and rings, peeping in the mirror meantime to adjust her large beplumed hat. There was a commotion in the end of the Pullman and she heard a familiar voice. In the mirror she espied a familiar face, and under the heavily laid on rouge, the woman paled and the hand that adjusted her hat shook. Misel buried his face in the evening paper some traveler had left in his seat, while the innocent cause of their perturbation found a seat with the help of the porter.

CHAPTER XXI

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HER FATHER'S OWN DAUGHTER

"I don't see why you take it so hard, Molly darling," said Judy as Molly told her of the detectives' findings and of the perfidy they had unearthed.

"Why, I fancy I am grieving that such wickedness can be in this world," sighed Molly. "I liked Madame Misel so much."

"Well, I never did like her," declared Judy.

Molly smiled, well remembering Judy's enthusiasm on arriving at Wellington and telling of the interesting couple she had met on the train.

"I know what you are thinking about—of course I said they were interesting, but I never did like the woman much—she was too catty for me."

This conversation was interrupted by the loud ringing of the telephone bell, which proved to be a long distance call for Judy from Mr. Kean in New York. His marching orders had come and he was to sail for France in a few days, and for the first time on record he could not take his little wife with him. Building roads and bridges in war time was very different from times of peace, and France at that time was no place for delicate little ladies.

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"You had better come right up to New York on the next train," was his ringing command. "Your mother needs you and I must see you, too."

"All right, Bobby! Meet me at the Pennsylvania Station. I'll take the 12.45—I am not going to let Kent come. He must be with his mother one more day,—his mother and Molly. So long! Be sure and meet me!"

Then such a scrambling ensued! Kent must be persuaded he was neither wanted nor needed, a few things hurled into a bag, her sketch book tucked in her jacket pocket, and Judy was off like a whirlwind. She and Kent ran all the way to the station only to see the train pulling out as they stepped upon the platform.

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"I can get it! Keep the old bag!" cried that young woman as she sprinted down the track, her young husband running lightly by her side, laughing in spite of himself. If you have never run after a train and caught it you cannot realize the triumphant feeling Judy had as she grasped the rail and swung herself up on the rear coach. Fortunately it was not a vestibule train or she would have been shut out. Kent slung the bag up after her and then stood in the middle of the track until his Judy was lost in the darkness.

"What a girl she is!" he laughed to himself. "What a dear girl!"

The dear girl was rescued by a rather indignant brakeman and led through the empty coach that happened to be hitched on to the train and finally installed in the chair car, after many explanations and excuses had been made to train conductor and then Pullman conductor.

Young women have no business on night trains with no tickets—certainly no business in boarding those trains from the rear, thereby risking their own necks and making the railroads liable to damage suits.

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"But you see my father telephoned me from New York," she confided to the train conductor, a grizzled looking old fellow with a decidedly military bearing. "He is going to France next week and he simply had to see me.—Perhaps you know my father," she added with a certain assurance that everybody connected with railroads ought to know Bobby.

"More than likely!" was the grim reply. The conductor had no idea of being cajoled into good humor by this daring girl.

"He is Mr. Robert Kean,—Bobby!"

The conductor was suddenly a changed creature.

"Know him! I should say I did! Bless my soul, if you don't look like him—same eyes—same mouth! Ha, ha! See Bob Kean missing a train! Not much!" and the erstwhile stern captain of the train now grasped Judy's hand. "Come on, I'll see that you get a chair, Miss Kean. I'm certainly pleased to make your acquaintance."

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"I'm not Miss Kean any more,—I'm Mrs. Kent Brown now.—It was my husband who pitched me and my luggage on the back end of the train."

"Married! By jiminy! I can't believe Bob Kean has a married daughter! And your husband aided and abetted you in jumping on the back of fast trains, did he?" and the once grim captain laughed aloud. "Well, I'm glad you got a game husband. I don't know what your father would have done with a 'fraid cat."

Judy's entrance in the Pullman caused some commotion. The old conductor was laughing heartily and the brakeman was in a much pleasanter frame of mind as he handed over Judy's bag to the grinning porter. There were about eight persons in the chair car as Judy entered and Judy-like, she immediately became intensely interested in them.

Of course, the spot of color made by a flashy dame in lavender attracted her attention first, and then her companion in loud checks cried out to be noticed. What a couple! Race track written all over both of them! Even from three seats off Judy could smell the musk on the woman. The man's face was hidden by the newspaper and the woman seemed to be engaged in rapt contemplation of her beauty in the narrow little mirror by her chair. To Judy's disappointment the gaudy dame whirled her chair around so she could not see her face.

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"I bet she's a peacherino!" she said to herself.

There were other persons in the train that proved interesting, too: among them a mother and child who appealed to Judy's artistic sense; a G. A. R. veteran who was sure he had been in worse battles than the Marne; an ancient lady from Louisiana who made our young artist wild to paint her white hair and patrician nose. Opposite Judy's chair was a young man, (or was he a young man?) At least he was not an old man! There were a few tiny lines around his twinkling bright blue eyes, but his movements were as alert as a college athlete's, and his mouth, though very firm, had the saucy expression of a street boy. Judy was sure she had seen his face before. The way his hair grew on his forehead in a so-called widow's peak reminded her vaguely of someone, —the cleft chin she was sure she had known somewhere. He was interested in her, too, she could plainly see. He had a pleasant, dependable expression, the kind of look one felt meant that in time of trouble he would be a good person to call on. He was making himself generally useful to the madonna-like mother and child; he had assisted the ancient lady from Louisiana to get up and sit down several times since Judy had so unceremoniously boarded the car.

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"I wish I knew where I had known him. His face is as familiar to me as my own."

She felt in her jacket pocket for her sketch book. She must get an impression of the mother and child, and the old lady was destined to be sketched in, too. She longed to do the youngish-oldish person opposite, but he was too close for her to permit herself such a familiarity. She turned over the leaves of her book and suddenly came upon the page given up to the Tucker twins and their friend Page Allison. What delightful girls they were! Suddenly she could place the resemblance seen in the gentleman across the aisle. Of course his forehead and widow's peak were the same that Dum Tucker owned, and his cleft chin was the identical one belonging to Dee Tucker. Could he be their father?

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She remembered what the girls had told her of their delightful father. He was a newspaper man in Richmond, Virginia, and according to the twins was just about the most wonderful person in the world. Page Allison, too, had given him praise, although not quite so wildly unstinted as his daughters.

"I think I'll drop something and let him pick it up for me and get in a conversation with him," Judy laughed to herself. "He is such a squire of dames, he is sure to pick it up."

She turned the pages of her sketch book until she came to the quick impressions she had made of Madame Misel at the war relief rooms.

"The wretch!" was her inward comment, and her thoughts went back to the last days at Wellington. She looked up; her eye was again chained by the gaudy lavender spot and she suddenly became conscious that she could see the woman's face in the large mirror at the end of the Pullman. Her eyes were down as she perused the pages of a magazine.

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Another familiar face! Where under Heaven had she seen just that chin and nose? Her eyes fell again on the open sketch book. Why, it is Madame Misel—no other! With quick strokes she copied the sketch and then cleverly added the beplumed hat, fluffy collar and fashionably cut coat. The woman stood up for a moment to get something from the pocket of her great coat, hanging on the hook at one side, and then Judy took in her general contours standing, and added some draperies to the full length figure she had also obtained of Madame Misel in the work room. High heels were put on the flat, unstylish shoes. The straight severe dress and basque were transformed into the fashionable, if gaudy, creation. Judy was careful not to erase any of the original lines and all of the new parts she sketched in in dots and dashes.

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The gentleman opposite was plainly interested in what she was doing and it evidently required all his self-control to keep from asking to be allowed to see.

"They are the Misels and they are running away!" flashed into Judy's mind. "It is up to me to stop them—but how? The gent in checks is undoubtedly Misel. They can't fool me; I remember his ears too well and the way his hands held things."

She glanced across the aisle and her eyes met the bright blue ones belonging to the widow's peak and cleft chin.

"What would Bobby do in this case?" she asked herself.

"Use the sense God gave him and get help if he couldn't cope with a thing single-handed," she answered herself.

She accordingly let her sketch book slide from her lap, rubber and pencil hopping gaily after it.

"Oh, thank you so much!" she exclaimed as the squire of dames immediately dived for the belongings and restored them to her. "I would not lose my sketch book for worlds." [254]

"I should say not! I have a daughter who is very much interested in art,—in fact, she is studying in New York now,—her specialty is sculpture, though."

"Yes, I know her! She is Dum Tucker!"

"You know my Dum! How wonderful! And how did you know she was—I was her father?"

"By your widow's peak! I also know you are Dee's father by your chin."

Mr. Tucker changed his seat, taking the one by Judy.

"By Jove! You artists are a clever lot. You would make a great detective, Mrs. Brown. You must excuse me for knowing your name, but I heard you tell the captain what it was,—Mrs. Kent Brown. My girls have written me how kind you have been to them and I have been dying to make myself known to you, but was waiting for some kind of opening wedge." [255]

"And I, too, Mr. Tucker, have been wondering where I had seen you, when I found your girls' pictures in my little book. See! Here they are!"

"And little Page, too!" He exclaimed eagerly scanning the sketches. "You are wonderfully clever at a likeness."

"Do you think so? I—Mr. Tucker—I deliberately scraped up an acquaintance with you because I want you to do something for me," and Judy looked frankly into the honest eyes of her new acquaintance.

"Why, Mrs. Brown, you know I am at your service."

"I was sure of you somehow, even if I had not been almost certain you were related in some way to Dum and Dee Tucker. My little sketch book told me that and it told me something else, too, but I must begin at the beginning."

Judy, whispering, began with her meeting of the Misels, of her interesting the Greens at Wellington, of Misel's substituting in French at the college and of Madame's work in the war relief. Jeffrey Tucker's eyes flashed as the newspaper man in him scented a rousing good story. When Judy got to the part where she and her friends went out in the night to hunt for adventure and found it in the manly shape of Misel taking strenuous exercise for a cripple, he beamed with joy and felt in his pocket for a pencil. Judy rapidly told him of the puppy's wounded leg and of the tetanus germs as well as ground glass being found in the dressings. He set his square jaw and looked as though he could eat the kaiser and all his crew at one mouthful. [256]

"And now I have come to the *dénouement!*" gasped Judy, excitement making her breathless. "If I could recognize you by your likeness to my sketches, I fancy I could also recognize Madame Misel by sketches of herself. I got two of her this morning at the war relief. The detectives did not arrest them, as they want to get others in their dragnet, but in some way the spies must have caught on to the fact that they were under suspicion, as they sneaked away."

"Are you sure?" [257]

"Sure as shooting! In fact they are on this train."

"No!" excitedly.

"Now, Mr. Tucker, you must compose yourself if we mean to catch the creatures!"

"Certainly!" and the eager man sank back in his seat and tried to look as though he were having a mild conversation with the attractive young woman who had jumped on the back of the moving train.

"Now that is better! Keep that nonchalant expression for what I am going to tell you——"

"All right, fire away!"

"They are on this coach, just three seats down.—Good boy, not to jump out of your skin! Now I am going to show you my sketch of the woman before and after. See, there is no doubt about her! You walk to the smoker and on the way back get a good look at her face and I bet you will be convinced."

Jeffrey Tucker did as he was bid, giving Madame Misel such a casual look that he aroused no suspicion in her mind. [258]

"Gee! This is great! I'd rather bag some of these spies than do big hunting in the African Jungle. Now, most wise of all female detectives, what do you advise? We must act quickly."

"I think you should take the conductors, both train and Pullman, into your confidence, and then send telegrams to New York to have the spies met with the proper reception. You can telegraph Bobby, I mean my father, if you think it best, and he can get in cahoots with the Secret Service people in New York. Bobby is the kind of man who doesn't let things go wrong. When he bores a hole in the mountain it comes out on the opposite side just exactly where he meant it to,—when

he swings a bridge across a river it stays swung,—there is no giving way of supports and undermining from washings,—Bobby knows. If you telegraph him, he'll have detectives there all right and they will have the necessary warrants and handcuffs, too."

"Well then, Bobby it is!" and Jeffrey Tucker quickly took Mr. Kean's address. Next the conductors were interviewed, and those good Americans quickly complied with any and every request. A long and explicit telegram was written to the gentleman who did not let mistakes happen, another one sent to the chief of police, in case Mr. Kean should not be at home to receive the telegram, (Jeffrey Tucker being the kind of man who did not let mistakes occur, either,) and then there was nothing to do but sit quietly in the Pullman and wait for the train to steam into New York.

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It seemed to Judy to be hours and hours, although the time certainly passed pleasantly with the friends she made on the train. She and Mr. Tucker talked to everybody except the two sporty looking individuals, and they would have had the audacity to talk with them if they had been given the slightest encouragement. But the Misels kept their backs studiously turned to their fellow travelers and did not court sociability.

CHAPTER XXII

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THE ARREST

"Suppose they get off at Manhattan Junction and go to the Hudson Terminal instead of the big Pennsylvania Station!" panted Judy, her eyes shining with excitement and her fluffy hair standing on end as though an electric shock had gone through her system.

"Who is giving the game away now?" teased her new friend. "I thought of that and warned the chief when I telegraphed him. If they do get off there, I'll get off, too, and you can go on to the other station where your father will meet you."

"Not much I will! I'm going to keep my eye on that lavender spot until I see those wrists with something on them besides gold bracelets. You see, I feel responsible for this pair, having been the one to introduce them to Wellington society. If they get off at Manhattan Junction, so do I. Bobby will understand! He would have no use for me if I didn't see it through."

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"I believe you are a real patriot, Mrs. Brown."

"Of course I am! But one thing sure I am not going to give my husband to the cause, and my father, and then let these mean spies go Scot-free. Now my dear friend and sister-in-law Molly,—Mrs. Edwin Green,—is so good that she can't believe anyone can be bad. She is just as patriotic as I am but she can't believe in the perfidy of Germany and the Germans. I truly believe she would not have the heart to nab these wretches even if she could not deny their guilt. Molly is an angel herself and I fancy maybe her angelic qualities do rub off some even on the worst characters. She may have helped this Madame Misel some, who knows? But I am going to help her even more by letting her get a taste of real punishment."

"And I am going to do my best to help you help her," laughed Mr. Tucker. "We are nearing Manhattan Junction now and I do not see our friends making ready to get off."

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The pair sat quietly while the train stopped for a moment for passengers to change for the downtown station. Judy and Mr. Tucker were on the alert to leave the train if they saw the slightest movement on the part of the Misels, but the latter sat in evident certainty of their disguise not having been penetrated.

"Now the curtain is to go up in a moment!" cried Judy. "I have never been in such a stew of expectation!"

The train had entered its under-water tunnel and in what seemed hardly a minute they found themselves in the Pennsylvania Station. Jeffrey Tucker, true to his nature, must assist the old lady from Louisiana and the mother and child, but this time he assisted them by calling the porter and, with a generous tip, put them in his hands. He had other and more urgent fish to fry.

"There's Bobby!" cried Judy. "They have let him through the gates!"

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So they had, and others, also. Mr. Robert Kean was eagerly scanning the windows of the coaches as they slowly passed in review. By his side were several alert looking men in plain clothes and near them were some brass-buttoned policemen.

"You go out first," whispered Mr. Tucker to the impatient Judy, who looked like a hunting dog straining at the leash. "I'll bring up the rear in case of a bolt."

The Misels got up quickly and without any delay moved towards the door. They seemed perfectly unconcerned, the woman patting her curls and hat into shape and Misel actually having the hardihood to cast an ogling glance at Judy. That young woman returned his admiring look with a

saucy toss of her head, entering into the game with her usual vim.

One hug for Bobby and a whisper in his ear:

“The handsome dame in lavender and the lout in checks!”

He in turn handed the information on to the plain clothes men, who were ready with their bracelets not made of gold. [264]

The arrest was made so quietly that the mother and child who were in the midst of it never did know what was going on, and the old lady from Louisiana took her serene way right by the handcuffed Madame Misel without knowing that that lady had had an addition made to her bangles. Misel was inclined to give some little trouble. When he realized they were trapped, he started back into the chair car, but was met in a head on collision by Jeffrey Tucker, who had a few football tricks left over from his not so far distant youth.

“Get out of my way! You fool!” cried the enraged Misel.

“Softly, my friend! The exit is the other way,” purred the redoubtable Mr. Tucker, at the same time putting up his guard, seeing the foreigner was about to spring upon him. “Madame has gone out by the door behind you.”

Bang! Misel’s fist shot out, but Jeffrey Tucker was a match for any ordinary boxer, having practiced that manly art to keep up with his daughters who always put on the gloves to settle any difficulty, and, as they expressed it, to let off steam when the family atmosphere got too thick. He dodged the blow, holding his guard ready for the next. [265]

Before the furious creature could recover himself after having given the empty air such a drubbing, the detectives approached him from the rear and in a twinkling he was overcome.

“What does this mean?” he asked, attempting an air of dignity.

“You shall have to come and find out!” was the laconic reply deigned him by the grim policeman who had him in charge.

“Mr. Kean, I am sorry to tell you, but your daughter will have to come to the police court to tell what she knows of these persons,” said the leader of the plain clothes men.

“I’m not sorry! I want to see it through!” cried Judy.

“And so, we are to thank you for this indignity,” hissed Madame. [266]

“Thank me or the picturesque garden by your cottage—whichever you choose. It is a stirring thing to creep in that lovely garden on a romantic night and suddenly to see a poor lame man who has won the sympathy of the community, come springing out in running togs and have him beat Douglas Fairbanks and George Walsh in his jumping. Then to have the gentle, courteous Madame Misel boldly state that Wellington is composed of blockheads,—all in perfect German, too, which was a strange language for such good Frenchmen to employ in the bosom of the family.”

“Judy, I wouldn’t say any more!” said her father, but his eye was twinkling as he tucked his daughter’s hand under his arm.

Mr. Tucker and Mr. Kean met as long lost friends. They were what Judy called soul brothers from the first. The old train conductor stopped to exchange greetings with his one-time acquaintance. He was loud in his praise of the young lady who had scared them all to death by jumping on the rear end of the moving train. He said nothing of the scolding he had given her before he found out she was Bob Kean’s daughter. [267]

The sketch book was convincing evidence that the sporty couple were no other than Monsieur and Madame Misel. Judy told her story well to the chief, showing the clever sketches taken before and after.

While they were at the police court, a long distance message was received from Wellington with the news that the flitting of the spies had been discovered by the detectives sent there on the case.

“It would have been too late if you had not been so wide awake,” the chief informed Judy.

“And I could have done nothing if Mr. Tucker had not taken hold,” declared Judy.

“Why, my dear Mrs. Brown, you would have found some other way, I am sure. You do not come of a breed that lets accidents happen.”

The Misels turned out to be pure Prussian, with not one drop of the blood of Alsace in their veins. Their name was Mitzel and they had many crimes to answer for. They had been on the stage prior to the war and the man was a noted acrobat and prestidigitator; the woman had traveled with her husband and assisted him in his work on the stage, being the hypnotized lady, the Herodian mystery, the disappearing spirit, the person who got tied up in the chest and had a sword run through her,—anything, in fact, that is usually required of the assistant in such a business. They were employed to act as spies and to disseminate all the German propaganda in their power. [268]

Misel, or Mitzel, was to have insinuated an anti-draft spirit at Exmoor, the male college near Wellington. Also to influence the girls at Wellington, who in their turn were to influence their brothers and sweethearts.

"Oh, Bobby! Only suppose we had not gone out that night in search of adventure!" cried Judy, when she was safe under her mother's wing.

"Why don't you just suppose you had never been born?" boomed the delighted Bobby. "When you were once born you were sure to be out hunting adventure. You are made that way, eh, Mother?" [269]

"Yes, I am afraid she is," sighed that tiny lady. "You and Judy are exactly alike."

"Do you mind?" asked her big husband humbly.

"No, I would not have either one of you different. But I fancy Kent and I are in for lives of anxiety."

"Well, he likes us the way we are, too," declared Judy, blushing.

"Well, I have two things to say:" declared Mr. Kean, giving a mighty yawn, "I am glad I let you have a Parisian education if with it you can make clever enough sketches to catch these German spies; and the other is, that it is high time we were all of us in bed."

Madame Mitzel, before she was sentenced to the imprisonment that she so richly deserved, requested an interview with Judy, which was granted, although Judy was most reluctant. [270]

"I can't bear to see her again! She looked like a snake caught in a net."

"I—want—you—to tell—Mrs. Green—that—I—am sorry for—her to—know—about me—That is all! If—I could—have—had a woman—like that—to—be—my friend—in my—youth—I would have—been different." She spoke in the faltering manner she had used at Wellington, one she employed in speaking English, and then she plunged into voluble German, so rapid that Judy could hardly follow her:

"But you! You have outwitted me and I cannot but admire you for it, but I hate you with all my heart."

"That is all right! I'd rather have your hate than your love! I'll tell Molly, though."

Before we leave the Misels, or Mitzels, for good, I must tell you that the shipment of paint arrived at Wellington as the mysterious dealer had informed Monsieur Jean Misel it would. One of the Secret Service men remained in Wellington to receive it. It was light grey, as was promised; at least, it was marked light grey on the outside of the six large cans. On opening these cans, which I can assure you the detective did with the utmost caution, many things besides paint were disclosed,—in fact, there was no paint there at all. He found various chemicals, necessary for the making of the modern bomb; poisons of all sorts, and innocent looking little vials containing deadly germs. Those six cans if let loose on the unsuspecting community would have caused as much damage as the imps in Pandora's box. [271]

Even Molly had to confess that the Misels were not very good persons, and when her husband gave her to understand that her own little Mildred and Dodo might have been poisoned by polluted water had the foreigners accomplished all they no doubt intended to with some of those bottled germs, the young mother came to the conclusion that they were not only not very good but they were extremely wicked, and perhaps just imprisonment was too mild a punishment to be meted out to them.

CHAPTER XXIII

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THEY ALSO SERVE

There was a very serious meeting of students of Wellington being held in the library of the Square Deal. Twenty of the leading spirits of the student body had asked Mrs. Edwin Green to let them confer with her on a most important matter.

The college authorities had announced that the H. C. of L. had affected Wellington just as it had every person and every institution, and students' board would have to be raised for the ensuing year. This came as a blow to the majority of girls. Going to college is an expensive matter at best, and while there are many rich girls gathered in those institutions, the majority come from homes of moderate incomes and many from actual poverty. It will never be known how many sacrifices had been made to educate some of those Wellington girls, and the H. C. of L. had affected their families just as much as it had the institution; and the news that the following year college expenses would increase had caused much consternation in the student body. [273]

"We won't stand for it!" said one tense little girl from Indiana, who had been working her way

through three years of college by doing all kinds of odd jobs, which reminded Molly of her own strenuous student days.

"It's harder on you than me, Mary Culbertson," said a sturdy sophomore. "You haven't but one more year. At least I haven't wasted as much time in this old joint as you have."

"But, my dear, please don't look upon it as wasted time," begged Molly.

"Well, I came for a degree and if I don't get it, I consider I have wasted two years. I might just as well have taken a job at home. A teacher's place was open for me then and now it may be filled for good. A degree will give one a better salary, but two years of college won't get you anywhere."

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"I am sure some scheme can be worked to keep down the expenses," insisted Molly.

"We can't live on less food!" bluntly declared Lilian Swift.

"Nor plainer!" from a discontented one.

"It might be plainer without being less nourishing," suggested Molly. "How about your doing some light housekeeping on your own hook and not trying to board with the college?"

"But I am sure the college authorities do not make money on the girls as it is," said Billie McKym, who had come to the meeting from truly altruistic motives, as expenses made no difference to her personally. "If a great body of girls cannot be fed on the amount charged now, I am certain a girl could not live on less if she went in for herself."

Billie, with all her wealth, had a good keen eye for business and understood the management of money rather better than any poor girl at Wellington.

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"I reckon you are right," said Molly sadly. "Would you girls mind if I ask my husband to come in and talk it over with you?"

"No!" in chorus. "Bring him in!"

"Not that knowing how to read Chaucer in old English will make him wise as how to live on nothing a year," whispered one.

Professor Green was in the den with his cousin, old Major Fern, who had motored in from the country to have a chat with his favorite kinsman. Molly entered, smiling at the clouds of tobacco smoke which almost obscured the two gentlemen.

"Edwin, I know the Major will excuse you for a moment. I need you badly."

"Of course, my dear! But I hope it is nothing serious that is beclouding your fair brow," said the old gentleman with the courteous manner of his generation.

"Yes, it is serious in a way," and Molly told her husband and his cousin what was the problem the girls had brought to her to solve.

"Of course, I can't blame the college authorities," she sighed. "It is hard to feed people as it is, and with expenses going up, up, I know they will have to raise the board. But on the other hand, there are many girls who simply cannot pay more than they are already paying. I feel for them, as I was one of them when I was at college. If the board had been raised one nickel I should have had to stop. I almost had to as it was. If it had not been for Edwin's fondness for apples, I should have been degreeless to this day."

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"Adam and I!" laughed the professor. "But what do you want me to do, Molly? I am yours to command."

"I don't know exactly! I thought you might talk to the girls and we might keep on thinking and praying until some solution is reached."

"I have a proposition to make that might interest your college friends," said Major Fern. "They may scorn it, but on the other hand they may like the idea. Let me talk to them."

"Oh, how lovely! I knew there would be a way," cried the optimistic Molly.

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"Wait until you hear it first," smiled the old gentleman.

Molly led the way to the library, where the twenty girls were having a hot discussion on ways and means. She introduced Major Fern, who took his seat among them and beamed on them with kindly eyes.

"Ahem!" he began. "I am not much of a public speaker but I am going to put a plan before you and see how it strikes you. I understand that you are making a kick because of the raising of board for the ensuing year——"

"We are!"

"Well, you know that everything is going up?"

"Everything but prayer!" from the discontented one.

"Even that may be going up, too," he answered solemnly. "Now listen: Perhaps you know that I

am rich,—not so rich as some, but richer than I have any right to be or any reason for being——”

Here Mary Culbertson tossed her proud little head as much as to let him know that charity was not what she wanted. Major Fern saw her and smiled his approval. [278]

“I have no idea of offering any of my ill-gotten gold to you.—I know how you would hate that. In fact, I haven’t any gold to offer. I am rich only in land and about as poor as they make ’em in other things. I am really land poor, having much more land than I have any use for or can till. I can’t get labor to keep up my farms. I have been thinking of selling an especially fertile farm about four miles from Wellington, but I don’t want to lose money on it, and if I sell at this time I am sure to. This farm comprises about two hundred acres of as good land as one can find in these parts, and that is saying a great deal. And now I am coming to my scheme——”

The old gentleman paused while the girls waited in breathless eagerness.

“I will let you have this farm if you will work it for me,—have it for as long as you need it. You don’t know what can be done in the way of intensive farming if one can get the labor. You could raise enough potatoes to run your mess for the winter; enough tomatoes and beans to can, and what’s more you can can them right on the spot.” [279]

“Hurrah! Hurrah!” shouted Billie McKym. “The problem is solved or I’m a Boche.”

“Are you willing to undertake it?” asked the Major.

“Of course we are willing!” cried Lilian.

“The ones who live far can take the first part of the summer, and the last, just before college opens, and the ones who are close can fill in during the midsummer,” said Molly, immediately grasping the possibility of the plan.

“Well, I’ll leave it to you young ladies to work up, and when you care to, I’ll take you over the place. There is a good house and well and plenty of fruit,—apples to feed to the hogs——”

“That suits me!” declared Edwin, who had been quiet while his cousin was unfolding the plan. “I see no reason, seriously, why this idea should not be wonderfully successful,—not only should it bring you back to college and keep you for the same, or even less, money than you have hitherto had to pay, but it will at the same time help materially in the food situation that the country is going to have to face.” [280]

“Will you be one of that committee that must take hold of this thing?” asked Billie.

“If the student body so wishes!”

“Well, we so wish!” came from twenty throats.

“You and Mrs. Green,—she is already one of us. As for you, Major Fern, we hardly know how to thank you for what you have done,” said the president of the juniors.

“Don’t thank me! I have done nothing! Instead of selling a farm at a loss when I can’t get labor to work it, I am going to ask some beautiful young ladies to work it for me.”

“We might drink him down,” whispered a timid girl.

“Of course! Drink him down!”

And without more ado the twenty girls, with Molly chiming in and Edwin holding down a second, sang: [281]

“Here’s to Major Fern! Drink him down!
Here’s to Major Fern! Drink him down!
Here’s to Major Fern! Here’s to Major Fern!
Drink him down! Drink him down! Drink him down!”

“Fine! That beats a wreath of bay,” beamed the dear old gentleman. “And now I’ll take myself off. I forgot to say I’ll have the land turned under for you and give the use of a team whenever you need it.”

He was gone. The girls, who only a few moments before had felt so depressed, were now filled with hope and animation. Degrees were to be had, after all. Of course it meant work, but that would be fun.

“Oh, gee! I’m happy!” cried Mary Culbertson. “But we must get busy in a hurry.”

“First we must see Prexy and get her to coöperate,” suggested Molly.

“Sure! Let’s do it in order, and find out if we do our part if the college authorities will do theirs. I dote on digging potatoes, myself,” said Lilian.

Committees were formed immediately; one to see Prexy; one to go view their estate; another to look into housing conditions; another to canvas the student body and find out who would and who wouldn’t, who preferred to plant and who to reap. [282]

Billie McKym was wild with enthusiasm. "Do you realize, Molly, that I won't have to spend a summer in Newport, after all? I can put it up to my relations that I am needed in these parts. I mean to ask for a larger allowance, though, as I can help out some on the sly. I am thinking about buying some Close-to-Nature houses and presenting them to the agricultural club. We shall have to have overalls, too,—and farming implements.—I think I'll make Grandmother and Uncle come across in good shape."

Prexy, Miss Walker, was not only willing to cooperate but delighted that the students were finding a way out of the difficulty. It was a deep grief to her, this raising of prices, and she knew only too well how many girls would be cut out of their degrees by this necessary step.

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Many interviews with Major Fern had to be arranged and many meetings of committees had to be held, but finally everything was under way for the agricultural club's work on the farm so kindly donated by its delighted owner.

"By Jove, I begin to feel that I'm helping to win the war!" he declared. "I have been hating myself for a useless hulk of a veteran who was too old to fight and too old-fashioned to suggest to others how to fight, but if I can be the means of keeping a lot of girls at college I think I am doing pretty well; especially if by so doing, those girls will grow food enough for themselves. Every potato is equal to a hand grenade and every bean to a bullet."

CHAPTER XXIV

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THE TRENCHES

Molly and Edwin found themselves deeper in this agricultural scheme than they had at first bargained for. If it was to be done at all, it must be well done and quickly. There must be order and system. Suddenly they awoke to the realization that if it was to be well done and quickly done, it was up to them, the Greens, to do it.

"I am afraid, my dear, that you must be the chaperone and I must turn farmer. This is a stupendous undertaking and for the good name of Wellington we must see it through."

"It will mean work all summer for you, when you so need a holiday, you poor old fellow."

"I need no more holiday than you do. You haven't been idle one minute this whole college year. I have a feeling that this summer we have no business with holidays anyhow. The world is too busy, too upset for any of us, who are able, to lay off. I mean to dig and delve here at home and do all the good I can."

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"I think we ought to rent the Orchard Home for the summer, don't you?" asked Molly, turning her head away so her husband could not see what it cost her to make that suggestion.

"Why, Molly honey, I can't bear to think of it. It is hard enough on you not to be able to go to Kentucky for vacation, but I don't think you should have to think of strangers as being among your apple trees."

"It won't be bad, not nearly so bad as you think. At least, the little brown bungalow won't be quite so lonesome as it would be empty all the year, and we might buy tons of seed with the rent money or even take care of some war orphans."

"I guess you are right,—you usually are. I'll write to a real estate agent in Louisville immediately and put it on the market for the summer. I hate to do it, though. Not that it will make so much difference to me. Wherever you are is my Orchard Home, honey!"

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The Major's farm was dubbed "The Trenches" by the members of the agricultural club. It was a suitable name, for these girls felt that they were in the war almost as much as the soldier boys themselves.

Early in May Molly moved to the old farmhouse to superintend arrangements for the many girls later to be housed there. It was decided to run the place more or less as a military camp is run, with squads detailed for various duties.

"Only our trench digging will be in the potato fields and our drilling in the bean patch," Billie declared.

Billie was in a state of ecstasy from the first. She was General Molly's aide-de-camp, giving time, money, and thought to the undertaking.

"It is so splendid really to be helping! I wanted to do something to help the Government and now I believe I am going to. I should like best to shoulder a gun and take a crack at the Huns, but since that cannot be, I'll shoulder a pick and take a crack at the soil."

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Billie, whose post-graduate studies at Wellington were not very important, had cut and gone to

The Trenches with Molly. They had installed themselves in a corner of the rambling old farmhouse and were as busy as bees getting ready for the thirty girls who were to land on them the last week in May. Katy and the two children were with them, but Kizzie had been left in Wellington to look after the master, who was up to his neck in work for the finals at college.

The students at Wellington had been canvassed from A to Z, and with a deal of clerical work, all of the ones who were to join the agricultural club had been enrolled and their time of service settled on and arranged for. Billie had donated six Close-to-Nature houses which were to be set up on the grassy lawn of the old farm. The cots she had wheeled out for her uncle. Farming implements, such as hoes, rakes, spades, gasoline ploughs and cultivators she had, as she expressed it, "blasted out of Grandmother McKym."

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"They don't understand me in the least, my uncle and my grandmother, but they love me, I really believe, and I fancy they always hope I'll come to my senses and marry in 'the set' some of these days. They are really dears," Billie explained to Molly as they helped to unload the wagons that had just arrived laden with the tents and implements.

"I think they are certainly very generous," declared Molly, pulling out a bundle of rakes.

From the beginning these girls had determined not to be dependent upon the merely masculine to fetch and carry for them, and Molly and Billie had pitched in with a will to do without men if need be.

"Oh, yes, generous enough! They are glad when I let them off with nothing more troublesome than writing checks. I believe Uncle Donald was scared stiff that I might insist on his coming down here to help dig. And as for Grandmother,—she would rather ante up thousands of dollars than have to drag her silk skirts around in the wet grass here at The Trenches. They don't see for an instant that I am kind of patriotic in helping this way. They think I am just a faddist. Maybe I am, but somehow I feel that I have ideals! Do you think I am just a silly goose to think so?"

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"No, indeed! I know you have ideals,—I should hate to think you didn't,—very high ideals," said Molly, as together they wheeled the barrow laden with hoes and rakes out to the tool house. "I reckon your uncle and grandmother have them, too, only perhaps they are not so open about them."

"Oh yes, they have them. Uncle Donald loves to talk about them, but Grandmother isn't so keen on expressing herself. Sometimes I think his ideals are mostly literary and hers sartorial. He is a great reader of *belles lettres* and Grandmother has an instinct for clothes that is truly remarkable."

"You have it, too."

"Well, I do like 'em, but I like to dress other persons better than I do myself. If I had been poor, I'd have gone into the business. I may do it yet, but now until this war is over it seems to me it doesn't make a bit of difference how anyone is dressed—anybody but Mother Earth. The soil dressed with a good fertilizer is more important than silk raiment."

[290]

"How about literature?" laughed Molly, her friend's enthusiasm amusing her and at the same time pleasing her. "Do you think writing should stop as well as dressing?"

"Oh, of course scribblers will scribble and anyone who has a message to deliver will have to spout it out, war time or not, but they may not think they are so all-fired important. A letter from the most ignorant soldier at the front will have more real stuff in it than all of the vaporings of the poet who only imagines gunfire."

"And here far from the strife——"

"Here we will make sonnets with hoe and rake!"

"Our lines made by the gasoline plough shall be beautiful and harmonious!" suggested Molly.

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"Our onion patch shall be worthy to be put into verse along with Eugene Field's Onion Tart," said Billie, going Molly one better.

"Our potato field shall be as full of solid refreshment as Charles Dudley Warner's five feet of classics. Only smell the newly-ploughed earth! Isn't it delicious?"

The wagons were unloaded, the farming implements piled neatly in the tool house and the Close-to-Nature houses dotted about the lawn ready for the stupendous task of being put up. The girls were waiting for Katy, whom they had dubbed "the powerful Katrinka," to come help them with that job. Katy was in her element. She had been born and raised in the country, and now that she was once more where things were growing, where she could help them grow, she was as happy an Irish girl as there was in all the land. Nothing was too difficult for her to do and her great strength helped Molly and Billie out of many a quagmire of work that seemed too heavy for them to accomplish without masculine aid.

"And now Oi'm ready for to help put oop the little play houses," she said as she joined Molly and Billie.

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"That's fine," said her mistress, "but before we begin, just let's smell the ploughed ground a little. Don't you love it, Katy?"

"Sure! And it beats the perfumery that comes in a bottle, to my moind," said the girl, sniffing delightedly.

"I don't see why they don't bottle the smell of new ploughed earth just as they have new mown hay," laughed Billie. "I know two who would want to buy it."

"Deed and Oi'd buy a gallon of sooch smells!"

"Do you know Masefield's 'Everlasting Mercy,' Billie? You and Katy listen while I tell you the part about ploughing and then we'll put up the tent houses."

Very charming was the picture made by this group of girls. So Edwin Green thought as he walked silently across the lawn of the old farm. Katy, the sturdy Irish girl, was not without picturesque lines. Her look was somewhat that of Bastien Lepage's peasant Jeanne d'Arc as she stood in rapt reverie while her beloved mistress gave voice to those wonderful lines of England's greatest modern poet. Billie looked very down-to-date in her khaki overalls and stubby shoes, while Molly was very Mollyesque in the blue linen blouse that was the only true Molly Brown blue.

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She did not hear her husband as he stepped lightly across the green spring grass and he motioned to Billie not to let her know he was there. He stood silently, with bared head while she recited. Molly's voice had always appealed to Edwin, in fact it had been the first thing that had attracted him—and when Molly recited poetry!

"The past was faded like a dream;
There came the jingling of a team,
A ploughman's voice, a clink of chain,
Slow hoofs, and harness under strain.
Up the slow slope a team came bowing,
Old Callow at his autumn ploughing,
Old Callow stooped above the hales,
Ploughing the stubble into wales.
His grave eyes looking straight ahead,
Shearing a long straight furrow red;
His plough-foot high to give it earth
To bring new food for men to birth.

[294]

"O wet red swathe of earth laid bare,
O truth, O strength, O gleaming share,
O patient eyes that watch the goal,
O ploughman of the sinner's soul.
O Jesus, drive the coulter deep
To plough my living man from sleep.

"Slow up the hill the plough team plod,
Old Callow at the task of God,
Helped by man's wit, helped by the brute,
Turning a stubborn clay to fruit,
His eye forever on some sign
To help him plough a perfect line.

* * * * *

"I kneeled there in the muddy fallow,
I knew that Christ was there with Callow,
That Christ was standing there with me,
That Christ had taught me what to be,
That I should plough, and as I ploughed
My Savior Christ would sing aloud,
And as I drove the clods apart
Christ would be ploughing in my heart,
Through rest-harrow and bitter roots,
Through all my bad life's rotten fruits.

"O Christ, who holds the open gate,
O Christ, who drives the furrow straight,
O Christ, the plough, O Christ, the laughter
Of holy white birds flying after,
Lo, all my heart's field red and torn,
And thou wilt bring the young green corn,
The young green corn divinely springing,
The young green corn forever singing;
And when the field is fresh and fair
Thy blessed feet shall glitter there,
And we will walk the weeded field,
And tell the golden harvest's yield,
The corn that makes the holy bread
By which the soul of man is fed,

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The holy bread, the food unpriced,
Thy everlasting mercy, Christ."

Katy wiped her eyes and Billie winked away the tears that would gather. Molly turned and saw Edwin standing only a few feet from her.

"Oh, Edwin, I didn't know you were there. I declare I haven't been spouting poetry ever since we got here! We have done a lot and were going now to put up the tent houses, but you aren't to help. I'll give you some tea and let you rest up after your tramp. We weren't expecting you until Saturday——"

"And don't want me now?"

"Want you! Why, Edwin Green, B. A., M. A., P. H. D.! You know I always want you," and then Billie and Katy thought it was time to leave the married lovers alone for a while. [296]

"I want to help put up the houses, though," insisted Edwin as he and Molly wended their way to a pretty little arbor covered by a crimson Rambler that gave promise, if one might judge from the many buds, of being a glorious sight later in the season.

"But we can do it later by our lonesomes. You don't know how many things we can do without the help of men, especially when one of us is as powerful as Katy and one as spunky as Billie."

"And how about you?" and he pinched her rosy cheek.

"Oh, I'm not much force, I am afraid, but I have the bump of stickativeness which is sometimes as good as strength and takes the place of cleverness."

"Do you really think you girls could run this farm without the help of a man?"

"Of course we could, once the heavy ploughing is done, and Katy says she could have done that, too, if we had wanted her to. Do you want to go off on a trip somewhere and let us try to run it without you?" [297]

Edwin looked searchingly into Molly's blue eyes. His gaze was long and earnest and in his brown eyes Molly read a kind of sadness she had never seen there before.

"Edwin, dearest, what is it?"

"Molly, it isn't anything unless you want it to be."

"Tell me!"

"Would you think it right or wrong if I should try to get into the service, military service, I mean?—I have taken an examination and am physically fit.—I won't apply to go into training at Fort Myer unless you approve.—It rests entirely with you, honey."

"You must go if you think it right." Molly spoke without a tremor, although it did seem to her for a moment as though her heart would burst. How could a heart get so big all of a sudden? And then it seemed to her she was sounding cold and unemotional when Edwin wanted something else. "I—I—want you to go! I think it is right for men just like you to go—men with brains and the power of taking hold and leading—I wouldn't have you stay behind for me for anything on earth. I—I—am proud of you and want you to do exactly what you think is right, and—and—I think you are right—just as right as can be—and—and—I love you more than ever." [298]

It seemed to both Edwin and Molly that at no time since their walk in the forest of Fontainebleau when the eternal question had been settled between them had any moment been so filled with love and understanding as now when he folded her in his arms. His Molly! His own, brave, true Molly! Her Edwin! Her honorable, courageous Edwin!

"I thought that I could content myself by digging and delving, but somehow I have been feeling lately that if you would consent, it was up to me to do something else. I don't feel critical in the least towards the men of my age who are not going to the war,—not the younger ones, either, if they do not feel called upon,—but somehow when one has been called as I have, I think he should answer. I don't know why a staid college professor should think it is his vocation, but I do think it, and, oh, dearest, it is good of you to take it this way!" [299]

"I could take it no other way. Is not my mother giving God-speed to her sons? Is not Judy encouraging Kent? Is not Nance not only sending Andy but going with him? Who am I that I should say you shall and you shan't do things for your country?"

"But you see, dear girl, there are the children to take care of in case—in case—in case I should—should—well—stump my toe."

"I can take care of them as my mother did of all of us. My father died when I was a tiny child and still my mother raised me. But don't stump your toe. Pick up your feet when you walk—and—and——"

Here Molly came very near shedding the tears that she felt must be shed sooner or later, but she was determined that it should be later and that her soldier boy should not see them. She jumped up and offered to race him to the house where Katy was laying the tea table on the porch. [300]

Edwin knew Molly too well not to understand that this gaiety was nothing but camouflage to conceal emotions that she was too brave to show.

“What will your mother think?”

“She will think that I have married well,” was her gay rejoinder.

“And what does my Mildred think when I tell her her daddy is going to be a soldier?” he asked as he held the little girl close in his arms.

Mildred had been busy with a tiny hoe and shovel on a patch of ground given over to her tender ministrations. Her hands were very grubby and her face not much better, but Edwin seemed not to mind the general griminess of his daughter.

“Oh, I say bully for Daddy! An’ I bet if Dodo’ll wake up, he’d say he was a-goin’, too. Boys is so rombushtious.”

* * * * *

And now we must leave Molly Brown and her College Friends at the momentous hour when their country is plunged in a great and righteous war. What the future holds for them is as much a mystery as what it holds for any of us. One thing is sure: Molly is doing her duty,—doing it cheerfully and bravely. Around her are college girls and more college girls, each one doing her bit. And so the fields are ploughed, the crops are planted and gathered. Fruit and vegetables are preserved and canned. The men and boys are training for the trenches, but the women and girls are in training, too.

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Molly often thinks of that moment when she stood sniffing the up-turned mould, with her husband standing near listening to her as she recited the lines from Masfield; and now as the days multiply she finds comfort in Masfield’s ending to “The Everlasting Mercy”:

“How swift the summer goes,
Forget-me-not, pink, rose.
The young grass when I started
And now the hay is carted,
And now my song is ended,
And all the summer spended;
The blackbird’s second brood
Routs beech leaves in the wood;
The pink and rose have speeded,
Forget-me-not has seeded.
Only the winds that blew,
The rain that makes things new,
The earth that hides things old,
And blessings manifold.”

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THE END

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