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The Voice of Authority

A Farce in Three Acts

By

BERTHA CURRIER PORTER

*Author of "The Village Postmistress," "Gadsby's
Girls," "The Mishaps of Minerva,"
"Lucia's Lover," etc.*



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BOSTON
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The Voice of Authority

CHARACTERS

JEAN CAMPBELL, *the stenographer, engaged to Bert.*
PRISCILLA CARTER, *the newspaper woman, engaged to Ralph.*
MARTHA STEARNS, *the cooking teacher, engaged to Max.*
GLADYS CUSHING, *the butterfly, engaged to Charlie.*
MARGERY WHITING, *the bride-to-be, engaged to Billy.*
ELIZABETH KENNEDY, *independent, not engaged at all.*
DR. E. T. SIMPSON, *the physician.*

And

THE VOICE OF AUTHORITY, *unseen but all-powerful.*

TIME.—The present.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

All three acts take place in the interior of a camp.

ACT I.—A Friday afternoon in late August.

ACT II.—Saturday forenoon.

ACT III.—Sunday forenoon.

COSTUMES

JEAN, PRISCILLA, MARTHA and ELIZABETH wear camping suits, with rolled-up sleeves and turned-away necks. GLADYS is frilly and ruffy at all times. MARGERY wears a very stylish summer suit, and carries a well-worn suit-case, covered with foreign labels. DR. SIMPSON wears an appropriate business suit, and carries the regulation bag of a rural practitioner.



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201

The Voice of Authority

ACT I

SCENE.—*Interior of a camp. If possible, a large fireplace at one side. Wide door at center back, with sliding windows at either side of door. It is absolutely necessary that there should be a screen door and window screens that may be opened in some way. There should be a broad green vista from door and windows. Doors at L., leading to kitchen and bedrooms. Long rough camp table in middle of room. Rustic chairs, a hammock swung, suit-cases scattered about, magazines, dishes, books, flowers and vines in great disarray. Fungus, cones and outdoor trophies on mantel above fireplace. Couch near one of the windows. The camp should show unmistakably that it has been occupied for nearly two weeks by girls on a vacation.*

(JEAN CAMPBELL, PRISCILLA CARTER, MARTHA STEARNS, ELIZABETH KENNEDY and GLADYS CUSHING are lying listlessly about. An air of discontent is manifest. After a pause, MARTHA, in the hammock, turns slowly, and speaks.)

MARTHA. Did I hear a team going by?

ELIZ. (*hurrying to the window*). Now I wonder who that could be? I didn't get a very good look, but I thought 'twas Mis' Higgins, drivin' down to the village. It sounded just like her horse. I s'pose she's just got round to doin' her marketin'. If she ain't the most shif'less creature. Don't you think I'm rapidly acquiring country habits, girls? Didn't that sound like one to the manner born?

JEAN. Who was it, really?

ELIZ. *Really*, it was the postman. And the box looks brimming over. If mine eyes deceive me not, there is e'en a pile upon the ground.

ALL (*with great animation*). Oh, the mail!

(*They rush out, leaving ELIZ. alone.*)

ELIZ. Yea, verily, the mail! Ten days ago they never wanted to see the city again. There was no place like the country, but now — (*With an expressive gesture.*) The rural solitude palls.

(*The girls return, laden with armfuls of letters of all sizes, circulars and large and small parcels.*)

PRIS. Play fair, now. "Don't get excited, and don't be misled —" Put it all on the table, and *don't push!* (*They place everything on the table, pushing aside the things already there to make room. They crowd around, reaching and scrambling for letters.*) Here's a bundle for you, Jean. Where's my letter from Ralph?

GLADYS. Oh, dear—can't anybody find my blue envelope from Charlie?

MARTHA. Give me that yellow one over there—that's from Max!

GLADYS. Here's a whopping big envelope—why, this is for you too, Jean! What do you suppose it is?

MARTHA. This seems like a can of something—who's this for? Why, it's all for Jean, almost. What did you send for all these things for, Jean?

PRIS. More circulars—isn't there anything for me? Here's a lot more for Jean—what does it mean?

MARTHA. Jean's awfully popular to-day. The box wouldn't begin to hold it all. The landscape was simply covered with mail.

PRIS. Well, it's the first time I've seen any male on the landscape. (*Opens a circular.*) Oh, listen to this—(*Reads.*) "What is a vacation without a cow? Take your own cow with you, and avoid all risks of germs, contamination and disease! Cows to rent for limited seasons.—Cows trained to follow picnic parties.—Cows as tame as kittens.—Tether your cow beneath the trees while you enjoy the beauties of nature." Well, did you ever? Why didn't this come sooner? See what we've missed. What's that one, Martha?

MARTHA. A circular about foot-warmers for autoing, driving, sitting outdoors, and so forth.

GLADYS. We do *so* much of that in this sporty place! I'd

rather have some hand-warmers—especially with this lovely moon! Oh, I've struck something grand—samples of cookies—hurrah, girls! Here's manna from heaven—something ready to eat—no work to prepare—no dishes to wash afterward —

JEAN. Those are my cookies—give them to me!

ELIZ. I'll have one, thank you.

MARTHA. Me, too.

(They all scramble for the cookies, devouring them before JEAN can seize them.)

ELIZ. Now here is a circular that applies to you all. This is something truly enticing. Listen:—"I want a man"—oh, it says in small letters underneath, "or a woman of intelligence"—I think I'll apply for that position.

PRIS. Is there anything more to eat?

JEAN *(gathering up the samples)*. Yes—there's cream of wheat, and grape-nuts and cornflakes and condensed milk and evaporated eggs and puffed rice and flour and salt and loaf sugar and malted milk, and there may be more—but you're not going to have a single mouthful!

MARTHA. Who sent you all these anyway?

JEAN. I suppose Bert did—it would be just like him. I only hope he enjoyed writing for all these samples.

ELIZ. I imagine he did. Probably he dictated them to the stenographer.

GLADYS. Oh, girls, here's a dear little sample of talcum powder! I don't think this is such a bad joke after all.

ELIZ. No, it has its good points. Here's a clothes-pin—just what I want! I'll hang my washing up this very minute. *(She goes into the bedroom, returning with several wet handkerchiefs and collars.)* Where's a piece of string, somebody? The clothes-line broke the last time Gladys washed her linen skirt.

MARTHA. I've got a corset-lacing—won't that do?

ELIZ. Splendid!

(MARTHA produces the corset-lacing from a vase on the mantel, and exit ELIZ.)

GLADYS. She'll have to iron those hankys if she dries them outdoors. It's an awful lot of work doing them like that. I'd rather stretch mine on the mirror.

JEAN. Yes—I've noticed that fact. The few times I've tried to look in the mirror—save the mark—it has been veiled in—well, I suppose you call it white!

PRIS. It's so small you can't put but one handkerchief on it at a time.—Here's some dandy writing-paper—two sheets—you don't need it, Jean. Let me have that. I've used mine all up, and I must write one more little letter to Ralph.

JEAN. Whose mail is this, I'd like to know? Give me back all those samples!

CHORUS. Stingy! Stingy!

JEAN. I don't care! We're always needing something that we don't have, so I'm going to save these for the rainy day. When any one really *needs* a thing, I'll cheerfully produce it. And next Sunday night, we'll have a farewell jamboree and divide the spoils. [Exit.

GLADYS. It seems as if we had been here a long time. Say, girls, don't you think it would be nice to write to the boys, and ask them down to spend Sunday? They could come on that early train and go back on the midnight. I've looked it all up in the time-table.

Enter ELIZ.

ELIZ. I heard you! So that is what you've been poring over the time-table for, is it? Backslider—I've noticed you moping for Charlie all the last week. If I was so feeble-minded that I couldn't go two weeks without seeing a man, even if I was engaged to him, I'd at least try to keep the shameful fact to myself. Didn't we all agree to spend two weeks together—just us girls—no men allowed?

MARTHA. Of course we don't want them! It's just heavenly to be here by ourselves. We can do exactly as we please—we are perfectly free from all conventions——

PRIS. And we can wear all our old duds!

JEAN. And never care what time it is—my idea of heaven is a place where there aren't any clocks—and we can take as long as we like for our meals——

GLADYS. Oh, well, of course, if you don't want to—but you've all been talking about the boys so much lately, and I thought—well, girls, I may as well confess—for my part, I shall *die* if I don't see a man pretty soon!

ELIZ. I thought you saw the postman every day—you simply camp on the mail box.

GLADYS. Is he your idea of a man? I call him a fossil—a

prehistoric relic. Never mind. I'll try to exist for three days longer, but I'm going to telegraph Charlie to meet me at the train, and (*defiantly*) I shall probably fall on his neck right there in the station! You may as well be prepared for the fact, Elizabeth.

ELIZ. I can stand it if he can.

JEAN. Isn't it almost supper time, girls? Of course, I wouldn't look at a clock, but my stomach reminds me of food.

PRIS. The clock has stopped anyway. What time is it by your watch, Martha?

MARTHA. I don't know—I set it by guess.

GLADYS. Oh, Martha, make us something good, won't you?

MARTHA. Look here—I came on this expedition for rest and change, not to feed four starving maidens six meals a day.

ELIZ. But, dear, you do make such delicious things!

JEAN. Yes—and you make them so *easy*, too.

MARTHA. I'm the easy proposition here, all right. That's where the trouble comes. What do you want?

GLADYS. Marshmallow pudding and angel cake!

JEAN. Steak and fried onions—I'm on a vacation!

ELIZ. Mushrooms and French fried potatoes.

PRIS. Anything that is filling, as long as there is a lot of it!

MARTHA. Perchance it would be well to see what the larder holds. [*Exit.*

GLADYS (*crossing to PRIS., aside*). Say, honey, will you do something if I will?

PRIS. What?

GLADYS. Will you write and ask Ralph ——

Enter MARTHA, raging. She seizes GLADYS and shakes her.

MARTHA. Gladys Cushing, this is the fourth time that you've sneaked off and left a whole sink full of dirty dishes! You said this morning you'd wash the breakfast dishes with the dinner ones, and you haven't washed *any*! There are just *two* clean dishes in this whole camp, and they're *salt-cellars*!

GLADYS. I wanted to finish that letter to Charlie before the postman went by, and then I forgot all about them. You needn't pinch me so, Martha. I'll do them now. It won't make any difference if supper *is* late. There's nothing to do in this stupid old hole but eat and sleep, anyway!

MARTHA. And write letters to Charlie!

GLADYS. Give me your apron, and I'll do the cussed old

dishes. Crosspatch—just because you wrote to Max in the forenoon —

(*She snatches MARTHA'S apron, and flounces off to the kitchen.*)

JEAN. And I'm simply starving!

ELIZ. Cheer up, my child! Feast your eyes upon the peaceful prospect without. Drink in the beauties of nature! Imagine that vacation cow grazing gently on the green!

JEAN. I'd rather see her as steak on the broiler!

Enter GLADYS.

GLADYS. How can I wash dishes, I'd like to know, when there isn't a bit of hot water, and the fire's out?

MARTHA (*from the hammock*). Build it, sweetheart—that's what I've done several times.

GLADYS (*nearly weeping*). I can't build a horrid old wood fire, and you know it!

ELIZ. Then you surely aren't prepared to wed with Charlie!

JEAN. Hunger has driven me to that point of desperation where I'll e'en build a fire. Come on, sweet unsophisticated maid, and learn of me. [*Exeunt JEAN and GLADYS.*]

PRIS. Elizabeth, did you get the sugar at the store yesterday?

ELIZ. No!

PRIS. Then I don't believe there is a bit in the house. (*She looks in the sugar-bowl.*) No, not a speck. It's all gone here, too.

MARTHA. I saw Gladys eating that this forenoon.

Enter JEAN.

JEAN. Whose turn is it to get in the wood?

MARTHA. Oh, good gracious, it's mine! I'm doomed. I can't escape that diabolical kitchen. How's the fire—burning yet?

JEAN. What a silly question! Of course it isn't! I can't make a fire without wood, and there isn't even a toothpick in the wood-box. (*Sarcastically.*) The gas stove seems to be out of order.

PRIS. What have you been doing all this time?

JEAN. Mopping up Gladys' tears. If she had had sense enough to cry over the dish-pan, we could have given the dishes a salt-water bath.

ELIZ. (*chanting*). Oh, for a man—oh, for a man—“a mansion in the skies!”

MARTHA. Come on, Elizabeth. Put some of that energy into helping me tote wood. [*Exeunt MARTHA and ELIZ.*]

JEAN (*sitting down wearily*). There are some things about working for a living that aren't so bad after all.

PRIS. Why, I've had a great time. Of course you can't expect everything to go absolutely smooth when we're none of us used to housework, but I'm getting lots of material for my story. I know the girls wouldn't mind being put in a book, would they?

GLADYS (*looking in from the kitchen*). Priscilla Carter, do you know you haven't made the beds yet? And you'll have to put clean sheets on ours, because I was so hot this afternoon I filled the hot-water bottle with cold water and took it to bed with me when I took my nap, and it burst. I forgot to tell you. The mattress may be wet, I guess.

PRIS. (*starting up*). “Curses!” [*Exit into bedroom.*]

JEAN. I'm not absolutely sure that five people can take a rest cure successfully—together. I shall be glad to get back to work. Running a typewriter will seem like reclining on “flowery beds of ease” after this experience. (*She wanders to the window.*) Why—there's a buggy, the second one to-day—it's stopping! (*Calls.*) Girls—girls—there's somebody coming!

PRIS. (*hurrying from the bedroom, stumbling over sheets that drag from her arms*). What is it? A telegram? Do they miss me at home?

ELIZ. (*looking over JEAN's shoulder*). Some one has heard what a happy home this is.

(*MARTHA and GLADYS rush in from the kitchen. MARTHA has an armful of wood, that falls everywhere. GLADYS is generally dishevelled, with red eyes, smutty nose and arms.*)

MARTHA. Great heavens! Is it somebody coming here? We're just ready for company.

GLADYS. Is it a man?

MARTHA. If it is, I hope he isn't hungry.

JEAN. It seems to take them a long time.—There's a man getting out—see him?

CHORUS. Oh, let me look!—Let me see.—Oh, oh, is he coming here?

GLADYS. Gracious, I'm a sight!

(She hurries into the bedroom.)

ELIZ. No, he's getting in again.—It's a girl.—He only helped her out. He's handing her a suit-case—a mammoth one. It's terribly heavy.

JEAN. Oh—he's going away! She's coming here, though—why—why, can it be?—Why—it is.—Who do you suppose it is? Girls, it's Margery Whiting!

PRIS. Come back, Gladys. Don't bother to fix up—it isn't anybody. It's only Margery.

(They all rush out to greet the newcomer, returning as GLADYS comes from the bedroom. They group about MARGERY WHITING, and all talk at once.)

ELIZ. Isn't this scrumptious? But, Margery, honey, how could you get away now?

JEAN. With the wedding only next Wednesday?

MARTHA. And this is Friday.

GLADYS. How could Billy let you come? Oh, have you seen Charlie lately?

MARG. Oh, isn't this the dearest place? My, how good it seems to be quiet! Well, I'll tell you—I've—run—away!

GLADYS. Run away? Aren't you going to be married? What's the matter?

MARG. Oh, don't worry—I'm going back again. But you see it has been such a whirl, with teas and dinners and presents and dressmakers and tailors and—families! Why, I was just nearly dead! So, when I broke down last night, and nearly bit poor Billy's head off, the dear thing—oh, girls, it's a shame you can't all marry Billy—he's the dearest thing that ever happened—he just said, "There, Margery, you cut it all out. You beat it down to camp with the girls, and stay over Sunday, and let the whole blamed business go hang!" So here I am.

GLADYS. But your clothes?

MARG. All ready but finishing—and Billy said he'd rather have me in good condition than my clothes. He said—oh, girls, never mind what he said, but I don't see what I've ever done to deserve Billy!

GLADYS. Have you seen Charlie?

JEAN. What's the news down town? But I don't suppose you have had a chance to see any of the office folks.

MARTHA. Have you seen Max? He was going to send

me some reports, and I haven't heard a word from him since day before yesterday.

ELIZ. (*lifting the suit-case*). Goodness, Margery, have you brought your trousseau down here? This suit-case weighs a ton!

PRIS. How much did you think you'd need to stay three days?

MARG. Handle that with care and respect, girls! That's not clothes—that's "eats"!

(*Chorus of rapture. They all fall upon MARG. and embrace her.*)

JEAN. Bless you, my child! Never before did I realize how much I loved you.

GLADYS. Are they *cooked*?

MARG. Most of them are. There are four chickens —

CHORUS. Oh—oh—oh!

MARG. And a loaf of devil cake, and a loaf of angel cake, and —

PRIS. Heavenly! But don't tell me any more yet. My system can't stand the shock. Isn't there one single *canned* article there?

MARG. Not one!

MARTHA. And some one else cooked all these! And all I've got to do is eat them!

ELIZ. Come on—let's all get busy and wash those dishes, and then we'll have a perfect gorge.

MARG. Oh, let *me* wash the dishes.

GLADYS (*quickly*). Here's my apron! (*Exeunt MARG., MARTHA and ELIZ. GLADYS to PRIS. and JEAN.*) Girls—I'm going to break my word. I'm desperate! I don't care—I'm going to write to Charlie this very night, and command him to come down Sunday—to hear her talking about Billy —

PRIS. I know Ralph would enjoy the fishing here.

GLADYS. Ask him—ask him.—We'll swear them not to tell. The girls will think it just happened.

JEAN. Well, if they both come, I don't see any reason why Bert should be left out, do you?

GLADYS. Let's do it! We'll slip out after the rest are asleep and mail the letters in the box. Margery'll have to sleep here on the couch, and if she sees us we can say we are after a drink or going to look at the moon, or something. We'll manage.

JEAN. } All right.
 PRIS. }

Enter the others.

ELIZ. What are you plotting? You look guilty.

GLADYS. Oh, nothing particular. Are the dishes done?

MARG. Yes, and now we'll eat. Let's light up. It's getting so dark. Doesn't it get dark early in August? Why, it's almost September, isn't it?

PRIS. (*lighting lamps and candles*). Our electricity is out of order, like the gas stove.

(They set the table, and open the suit-case, putting the delicacies on the table with cries of rapture and anticipation, then sit down to eat.)

MARG. (*aside to MARTHA*). Martha, dear, I didn't dare tell the others, because I knew you came down here to be away from the boys for a while, but Billy's coming down for the day, Sunday, and he's going to bring Max. Are you very angry?

MARTHA. Angry? Margery, you're an angel! I don't know what the rest will say. I've been dying to write for Max to come, but they have been so firm (all but Gladys, of course) and I wouldn't be the first to weaken. Oh, you darling!

ELIZ. More secrets—what's Martha hugging you for, Margery?

MARG. Hugging—that makes me think. You know that nice boy that drove me over?

CHORUS. No, we don't!

GLADYS. Of course not—we began to think that men and boys were extinct down here until we saw you bringing a specimen.

MARG. Anyway, you know his folks. Mrs. Stebbins, in the village—the woman who lives by the store and has those *dear* little children? I almost hugged the life out of that little four-year-old. Isn't he the cunningest thing? I was waiting in her house for her brother to harness, and he just loved me all to pieces. And the baby—I held him every minute. I couldn't bear to let him out of my arms! He must be an angel when he's well. He was dear enough to-day, although he was sick.

PRIS. Sick? Oh, what a shame! We've become quite fond of that baby. What's the matter?

MARG. Mrs. Stebbins didn't know. He seemed quite hot and feverish. He looked as red as a lobster. Mrs. Stebbins said if he wasn't any better to-night she was going to have the doctor.

JEAN. Is there a doctor in this place?

PRIS. Of course—there's always a doctor. I've seen his sign—haven't you? E. T. Simpson, M. D. He lives in the red house the other side of the town hall. I've never seen him, though.

ELIZ. Oh, he's probably an old reliable, like all these country doctors.

GLADYS. He's the same as all the other men in this place—he keeps himself mighty scarce.

MARG. Girls, would you care if I went to bed early? I'm dreadfully tired. It came on suddenly.

MARTHA. It is the reaction.

JEAN. There's nothing to do but go to bed. We may as well all get some beauty sleep. I'll bunk in with Priscilla and Gladys, and you can have the couch out here, Margery—or the hammock.

MARTHA. Margery can come right in with us.

ELIZ. If she does, I stay here. I won't sleep three in a bed.

GLADYS. We will, though. Say, let's leave the dishes. I'll wash them in the morning.

MARTHA. Just as you did the others, I suppose?

GLADYS. No, honest I will. I feel happier somehow since Margery came. I'm almost resigned to washing dishes. Come on, girls, I'm dead tired. Good-night.

PRIS. Come, Jean. Good-night, you folks.

[*Exeunt* PRIS., GLADYS and JEAN.]

MARG. I don't want to sleep out here all alone.

MARTHA. There's nothing to hurt you.

ELIZ. If you feel nervous I'll sleep in the hammock. I have, lots of times. Where's the puff, Martha?

MARTHA. In my room. Come on in.

[*Exeunt* MARTHA, ELIZ. and MARG.]

Enter, very cautiously, PRIS. and GLADYS.

GLADYS. I'm going out with these letters now. Then I'll feel sure.

PRIS. Don't make a noise. I'll wait for you.

[*Exit* GLADYS, outdoors.]

Enter, in kimonos, MARG. and ELIZ., carrying a puff.

ELIZ. Why, Priscilla, I thought you had gone to bed.

PRIS. I have—almost.

ELIZ. Don't wait for us. I'll put the lights out. Good-night.

PRIS. (*reluctantly*). Good-night. [*Exit.*]

MARG. (*lying down on couch*). You'll lock the door, won't you, Elizabeth?

ELIZ. We never do, but I will if you feel uneasy. Are you all right? I'm going to put out the lights.

MARG. Yes—good-night.

ELIZ. (*locking door, putting out lights and climbing into hammock*). Good-night.

(*There is a pause, then faint scuffling noises are heard on the veranda.*)

MARG. (*whispering*). Elizabeth—Elizabeth—there's some one on the piazza!

ELIZ. It's nothing but a hedgehog after the garbage pail. Throw your shoe at him.

MARG. I can't—I'm scared!

ELIZ. Well, I will, then.

(*She goes to the window, raises the screen, and throws her shoe violently into the darkness.*)

GLADYS (*outside*). Oh—oh—Priscilla, what are you doing? You nearly killed me—let me in!

MARG. It's Gladys!

ELIZ. (*opening the door*). Yes—it's Gladys. (*Enter GLADYS.*) Gladys Cushing, where have you been at this time of night?

GLADYS. To the mail box with a letter, but that's no reason why you should throw your shoe at me.

ELIZ. Was that letter to Charlie?

GLADYS (*meekly*). Yes, Elizabeth.

ELIZ. (*meaningly*). Oh—

PRIS. (*coming out with a candle*). What's the matter? You didn't lose my letter—oh—

JEAN (*appearing in the doorway*). I thought I heard somebody—oh—

MARTHA (*peeping out*). Is anybody sick?—Oh—

ELIZ. (*looking slowly from one to another*). Oh—I see.—That's what all that hugging meant! Margery, is Billy coming, too?

MARG. (*sitting up defiantly*). Yes, Elizabeth, he is!

PRIS. And Ralph!

MARTHA. And Max!

JEAN. And Bert!

ELIZ. (*climbing into the hammock*). It looks as if it would be up to me to wash the dishes!—Good-night.

CURTAIN

ACT II

SCENE.—*The same. Saturday forenoon. ELIZ. is ironing her collars at the table. MARG. is in the hammock. JEAN is prying up flattened hooks on a clean shirt-waist with a nail-cleaner. MARTHA is studying a cook book, and PRIS. is untangling some fish-lines.*

JEAN. I wish I had the Chinaman here that ironed this waist. I'd make him pry up these hooks he flattened. Gracious! There goes another one! Hasn't anybody any hooks and eyes?

ELIZ. You aren't going to wear that hot, stiff thing with a linen collar, are you?

JEAN (*shrugging her shoulders*). I'm obliged to. Bert hates Dutch necks.

MARG. What are you studying, Martha?

MARTHA. I'm hunting for something that Max likes. We must go to the village soon and lay in some supplies.

Enter GLADYS, with 'soiled lace waist.

GLADYS. Say, Jean, wasn't there any gasoline among your samples? My Irish crochet waist is a mess, and I simply must clean it before Charlie gets here. What on earth are you doing with those lines, Pris? There aren't any hooks, you know. All our hooks are giving the horn-pout indigestion—I hope.

PRIS. I know—I'm going to get some more hooks when I go to the village. Ralph is so impatient, he'd never straighten out these lines, and I know he will want to fish.

ELIZ. (*dramatically*). "Man—the noblest work of God"—the shadow of his coming, twenty-four hours in advance, doth transform a maid from a peevish, sullen creature to a joyous, blithesome elf!

GLADYS. Quit it, you superior spinster, and get me some soap. I want to wash.

ELIZ. I'll see what I can find. After all, Gladys, I'm rather glad you decided to ask the boys down. We *do* need some men around here.

PRIS. Hear! Hear!

JEAN (*anxiously*). Are you sick, honey? Where do you feel worse?

ELIZ. It must be enlargement of the heart, for I'm moved to make you an unparalleled offer. Listen! I'll do all the work to-morrow, so you girls can have a good time.

GLADYS. Oh—you angel!

PRIS. After the mean way we treated you, too!

JEAN. That wouldn't be fair—why, there will be twelve or fourteen people here.

ELIZ. Oh, of course I might ask for a little help once in a while.

ALL. Of course—sure—we'd be glad to help.

ELIZ. For instance, Bert could chop a few cords of wood. It's in the bargain that we're to leave as much as we found when we came.

JEAN. Bert?—Chop wood?

ELIZ. And Charlie could wipe the dishes for me—there will be a lot of them, for I'm planning a course dinner.

GLADYS. Charlie—indeed!

ELIZ. While Ralph—he's tall—could clear out the stove-pipe. The stove doesn't act very well, and I think there's soot in the chimney.

PRIS. I don't think that Ralph knows how to clean out stovepipes.

ELIZ. Then the faucet leaks—Billy could pack that and clean out the trap, while Max —

MARTHA. I think we'd better share the work, as usual.

ELIZ. (*laughing*). You geese! I was only tormenting you—I'll give you a perfectly grand dinner.

MARG. You must have had a lovely vacation, girls. This is such a beautiful spot. It is so nice and quiet, too. I like the situation of the camp. It is so far in from the road that the noise does not disturb you, and yet you can see all the "passing"—is that the local color?

MARTHA. It's quiet here, all right. And as for the "passing," if more than two teams go by in a day we think that the village is on fire or some such calamity. I think we should all expire at the sight of an automobile.

JEAN. Only nothing exciting could ever happen in this burg. I can't imagine anything happening, can you, girls?

(THE VOICE OF AUTHORITY *is heard outside, shouting.*)

VOICE. Is anybody home?

MARG. (*sitting up in the hammock*). Who's that?

GLADYS. A man!

MARTHA. What a funny way to do! Why doesn't he come to the door and knock, not stand out there and shout that way?

VOICE (*louder*). Is—anybody—home?

GLADYS. Oh, dear, I'm scared!

JEAN. There's nothing to be scared of in broad daylight. I guess six girls are a match for one man, any day.

ELIZ. (*going to the door and looking around*). I can't see him.

MARG. What does it mean?

VOICE (*from side*). Don't come out, miss. Are you all in there?

GLADYS. Oh—oh—what shall we do?

(*The girls begin to seem very uneasy and afraid.*)

ELIZ. Where are you? What do you want? (*To MARTHA.*) Martha, call the dog.

MARTHA (*loudly*). Come, Butch—here, Butch.

VOICE. There ain't no dog there. All I want to know is—are you gals all there?

ELIZ. What if we are? What is it to you? Why don't you come out here where I can see you?

GLADYS (*whimpering*). Oh, I wish Charlie were here!

MARGERV. Why did I ever leave Billy?

VOICE. It's this to me—if ye *ain't* all in, I'm goin' to git ye in, an' if ye *are* all in, I'm goin' to keep ye in!

CHORUS. Keep us in *here*!

ELIZ. Who are you?

VOICE. I'm taown constable, that's who I be, an' selec'men have put this camp under quarantine an' ordered me on guard. Now, you git in an' shut the door, 'cause I'm comin' 'round front, an' I don't want to meet no germs!

CHORUS. Quarantine!

GLADYS. Germs? Why, what does he mean?

JEAN. Oh, Margery—that baby!

ELIZ. (*to the VOICE*). But none of us are sick.

VOICE. Don't make no difference. One of ye was seen in Mis' Stebbins' yesterday, holdin' her baby what's down with scarlet fever, an' ———

CHORUS (*in horror*). *Scarlet fever!*

(MARGERY screams and collapses. ELIZ. comes in and shuts the door. GLADYS runs toward MARG., but is seized and held by MARTHA.)

MARTHA. Don't touch her—she is infected. Margery, you surely have been exposed to the fever—where do you feel sick?

MARGERY. All over!

PRIS. Who knows anything about scarlet fever?

(They look at each other in ignorance and dismay.)

GLADYS. Can't we look it up in the encyclopedia?

MARTHA. Who ever heard of an encyclopedia in a camp?

GLADYS. Well, why didn't somebody bring one?

MARG. (moaning). Oh, dear—oh, dear — (Suddenly.) I felt queer last night. You know I did, girls! Oh, I must go right home.

JEAN. You can't—he won't let you.

(They group themselves on the side of the room, away from MARG.)

MARG. I'd like to see him stop me! He's afraid himself! Besides, he's nothing but a voice—we haven't seen anybody.

ELIZ. He is the voice of authority. The law is behind him. There's no use—we can't help it—we've got to stay.

MARTHA. How long?

JEAN (going to window). There he is, sitting on that big rock out there. He's only a little man —

ELIZ. (laughing hysterically). You were all wanting a glimpse of a man—and now here's one!

JEAN (calling out the window). Sir—Mr. Constable, if you please, how long must we stay here?

VOICE. I dunno—week or ten days, I think likely.

CHORUS. A week or ten days!

MARG. A week! I'm going to be married next Wednesday—I can't stay here a week—oh—perhaps I'll never be married—perhaps I shall die and they'll bury me in my wedding dress, like that girl in the chest —

MARTHA. I can't stay. I have to go to work Monday noon!

JEAN. I'm due Monday morning.

GLADYS. Margery, what did you ever go into that house for?

ELIZ. Did the baby seem very sick? Perhaps it isn't scarlet fever. Babies have all kinds of things, you know.

MARG. Oh, perhaps it isn't! Perhaps I shan't die, after all. How do folks feel when they have scarlet fever?

PRIS. I don't know.

MARTHA. I don't either. I never had it.

ELIZ. I suppose they feel feverish.

GLADYS. Oh, Jean, is there anything in your samples that tells about scarlet fever?

JEAN. Perhaps so—I'll look. [Exit.]

MARTHA. I wish Max was here—he knows everything.

PRIS. Ralph would tell us just what to do.

GLADYS. I think Charlie would say send for a doctor.

MARG. Of course! That's the first thing Billy would want me to do. Why didn't we think of that before? How stupid of us! And Dr. Simpson right in the village!

PRIS. And anyway, he'll be a *man*!

ELIZ. How can we get word to him? I'll interview that Cerberus on guard. *(She opens the door.)*

Enter JEAN with samples in a suit-case.

VOICE. Get in there—you can't come out!

ELIZ. I'm not coming out. Only would you please go to the village for us and get Dr. Simpson to come here?

VOICE. Can't leave! I'm put here to protect the health of this community, an' it's my duty, an' I'm goin' to do it.

JEAN *(over ELIZ.'s shoulder)*. You'd be protecting the health of the community by getting a doctor to make us well.

VOICE. Can't be did! My orders is to stay here till relieved, an' here I stay! I'll send word by postman when he comes, if ye want me to. Or perhaps Doc'll come drivin' by within hailin' distance.

JEAN. All right. Thank you. That's the best we can do, girls. Now let's see if there is anything here for scarlet fever. Margery, stay over there. I don't think you'd better come too near us. Now just where do you feel sick and how?

MARG. I felt a good deal better this morning, but now I feel sick everywhere!

JEAN. Does your back ache? Here are some pills for backache.

MARG. Awfully! Give me one of those.

JEAN. Oh, these aren't any good after all. There aren't

any pills here. There's only a circular—you have to send ten cents in stamps to get the pills!

GLADYS. Here is some cold cream. That's fine to grease your nose if you have a cold. Do you feel as if you had a cold, Margery?

MARG. I *do* feel chilly.

(GLADYS *tosses the tiny tube of cream to MARG., who anoints her nose.*)

PRIS. Oh—see—here's a whole plaster—no, that's for rheumatism.

MARG. I have pains enough—give me the plaster!

(PRIS. *throws her the plaster.*)

GLADYS. What's this? Oh, shaving soap—can't I have that for Charlie, Jean? (*Screams.*) Oh—girls—girls——

ALL. What is it?—oh, what is it now?

GLADYS. The *boys!* We forgot all about them! They're coming to-morrow! They'll get it too! What shall we do?

MARTHA. Stop them!

JEAN. How can we?

ELIZ. I never saw such girls! First you want the boys here, and then you don't! Let them come. Perhaps they can overpower the constable.

MARG. We can't expose them to disease.

VOICE. Here's Doc!

ALL. Oh, the doctor has come!

ELIZ. I hope he has some sense.

MARG. Oh, I feel *so* sick!

GLADYS. Anyway he is a man! He'll do something!

(*A knock at the door. The girls all rush to open it, falling back in dismay at the sight of DR. E. T. SIMPSON, entering with her black bag.*)

CHORUS. *A woman!*

DR. SIMP. Yes, ladies, a woman, like yourselves. One of your own sex, full of sympathy. But also a physician, at your service. Where is the patient? My time is limited. Mrs. Stebbins' baby is down with scarlet fever, and——

MARG. (*groaning*). We know it—I held that baby yesterday. Oh, *do* you think I'm going to have scarlet fever? And shall I die? Can't I go home?

(DR. SIMP. *thrusts a thermometer into MARG.'s mouth, while the others crowd about, watching anxiously.*)

ELIZ. Do you think there is any necessity of quarantine?

DR. SIMP. By all means! I myself suggested to the selectmen that they employ the most rigorous methods to prevent an epidemic.

GLADYS. You did this then?

DR. SIMP. Certainly. I should be derelict in my duty, did I neglect any possible precaution to avoid the spread of this dread disease. The case under observation has hardly progressed enough for me to decide whether it is scarlatina simplex, which is a comparatively mild form; scarlatina angniosa, which attacks the throat; or that most terrible scourge, scarlatina maligna, the results of which are too horrible, insidious and far-reaching for a layman's mind. (*The girls show increasing apprehension. MARG. drops the thermometer from her mouth. DR. SIMP. calmly replaces it, resuming.*) From its inception among young children, I hope it will prove to be scarlatina simplex, yet that in its first stages cannot be distinguished from scarlatina maligna. The symptoms are identical. We have the shivering—— (*MARG. shudders.*) The lassitude——

MARG. Oh, I'm so weak!

DR. SIMP. The headache. (*MARG. puts her hand on her head.*) The hot, dry skin, flushed face, loss of appetite, furred tongue, and so forth and so forth.

(*She looks at the thermometer.*)

MARTHA. Is she very sick, doctor?

DR. SIMP. There is some fever here.

(*She feels MARG.'s pulse.*)

MARG. (*groaning*). Oh, doctor, can't I go home?

DR. SIMP. On no account. The period of contagion in this disease is comparatively vague. Cases are on record where furniture, clothing, or even a small piece of infected flannel has communicated the disease after a long interval.

ELIZ. Mercy—this whole camp may be infected!

DR. SIMP. Very probably. Still, it may not be so. Opinions differ as to which particular period is most virulent. I should suggest isolation of the patient in one room, merely as a precaution——

MARG. Don't put me anywhere alone ! I shall die if you do—I know I shall !

GLADYS. You don't want to give it to all the rest of us, do you ?

ELIZ. We'll all talk to you through the door.

MARTHA (*to* DR. SIMP.). If we have to stay here, how can we get our supplies from the village ?

DR. SIMP. I will order the necessaries of life at the store. The boy will be allowed to bring them to the edge of the field, and Mr. Hackenberry, who will remain on guard, will convey them to the piazza. When he has departed to a safe distance, you may take them into the house. He will also convey any verbal messages that you may wish to send. From time to time I will have a boy come down the road to receive information. No letters must leave the house on account of contagion.

ELIZ. An interesting situation—truly !

DR. SIMP. I will leave some tablets to be taken every half hour while the patient is awake. You need not wake her to give them. Also, if I may have a glass of water —— (*JEAN gets the water.*) Thank you. A teaspoonful of this every two hours. Avoid all excitement. Eat only liquid food. I'll be in to-morrow. Good-morning. [*Exit.*]

MARG. I'm not going into that room ! I'm going home !

VOICE (*with sounds of letters being slapped on the piazza*). Here's your mail.—Hold on, don't come out yet ! I ain't fur enough away.

(*GLADYS rushes out, returning with a handful of letters, which she distributes.*)

GLADYS (*holding her letter in the tips of her fingers*). Horrors ! I wonder if I'm all covered with nasty crawly germs, like you, Margery. I almost hate to open poor Charlie's letter.

MARG. (*reading her letter and bursting into tears*). Oh, girls, listen to this—poor, poor Billy—if he only knew—listen—he says, “Honey-sweet, do be careful of yourself. There are so many things that might happen before Wednesday ——”

PRIS. He never thought of scarlet fever, I know.

MARG. (*continuing*). “The train might be wrecked ; the stage horses might run away ; and if there is any lake, you might be upset in a boat. I am coming early on Sunday,

dearest, to take care of my own ——” Oh—oh—oh—and he can't even *see* me!

MARTHA. Now, the doctor told you to avoid excitement. You go in the bedroom and lie down, and perhaps when she comes to-morrow, you'll be better.

MARG. Pooh! A woman doctor! What does she know about anything? I don't believe there is anything the matter with me. I'm going to pack my suit-case and go home.

ELIZ. You can't, and that's all there is to it! Now you must have some consideration for the rest of us. You don't want us all to have scarlet fever, do you? I'm immune to almost everything, and if you don't go in that bedroom and lie down, I'll come and put you in! Move, now!

MARG. You're the meanest thing I ever saw!

(She retreats as ELIZ. advances, finally entering the bedroom. ELIZ. closes the door.)

PRIS. *(softly)*. She will get out if she can—I saw it in her eye.

JEAN. Lock the door.

ELIZ. There isn't any lock on it.

MARTHA. Tie a rope around the handle, and fasten it to the table. That's heavy enough to hold. Do it easy, so she won't know what we are up to.

ELIZ. Give me the straps of my suit-case.

MARTHA. Here they are.

ELIZ. *(fastening the door)*. She won't know. I was as quiet as a mouse.

GLADYS. She will be simply crazy to-morrow when Billy comes.

ELIZ. Let to-morrow take care of itself. We needn't worry about Billy or any of the other boys. That gorgon out there won't let them within a mile of the camp.

(Very cautiously, during the following conversation, the door-knob is turned, and the door pulled a little at a time. The table moves imperceptibly toward the door until the straps are slack.)

VOICE. Hey, you, inside there. I'm coming with some groceries Doc sent up. You stay in there till I get out o' the way. I'm taking two of the oranges. It's hot work, sittin' out here in the broiling sun.

GLADYS. Don't feel obliged to stay there on our account.

JEAN. I suppose he'd like my sunshade, but he won't get it. I don't care if he fries! I once complained because there weren't any trees in our front yard, but if there was even a small bush to afford him shade, I'd go out and chop it down.

(Bundles are deposited noisily on the piazza.)

PRIS. *(calling out the door)*. Scoot, now—I'm coming after the sugar. *(She goes out and returns with bundles.)*

MARTHA *(motioning toward MARG.'s door)*. Isn't she quiet?

ELIZ. Perhaps she has gone to sleep, poor thing! It really is terrible for her.

GLADYS. Yes. A postponed wedding is so unlucky.

MARTHA. I wonder if she wouldn't like some orangeade? I'm going to make her some.

PRIS. Let's all go and help Martha. It will be something to do, and will keep us from thinking. Besides, we can't see that—creature—squatting in our front yard.

GLADYS. And eating our oranges!

MARTHA. Come and help me, every one of you. It will be better than wandering about and wailing, and there's plenty to do. If we are going to be here indefinitely, we must make the best of it and prepare for a siege. Jean, you bring pencil and paper, and write the order I will give you for the store. Gladys, you get onto your yesterday's job, and *wash and wipe all* the dirty dishes. Priscilla, make the beds and sweep, and, Elizabeth, beard the lion in his den, and bring in a cord or two of wood.

[Exeunt all but ELIZ.]

ELIZ. It's lucky I'm brave.

(She goes to the door, only to be hailed by.)

VOICE. You can't go away, young woman.

ELIZ. *(sarcastically)*. I'm so enraptured with this spot and its surroundings that I wouldn't leave if I could. I'm only going to the wood-pile for some fuel. You don't object to that, I hope? Oh, it may be that you'd like to bring in the wood for us—is it so?

VOICE. I ain't here to fetch wood. I'm town constable, an' I'm responsible —

ELIZ. I've heard all that before. I'm coming out now, so if you are at all fearful, you'd better move further away.

VOICE. I reckon I'd better keep my eye on you.

ELIZ. Don't get near enough for any bacteria to leap onto your anatomy.

(Exit ELIZ. The fastened door now opens a little, and MARG., dressed for the train, peeks out. She squeezes through the small space, shutting the door carefully behind her, and pushing the table back so that the straps are taut once more. She looks nervously about her, then runs and looks out the door.)

MARG. (aside). He's away down the field. He's back to the camp—he's talking to somebody.—Now is my chance.

(She slips quietly out. In a moment the girls come in from the kitchen. MARTHA carries a glass of orangeade. She taps gently on the fastened door.)

MARTHA. Margery—Margery, dear, don't you want some nice cold orangeade?—Margery, wake up—answer me, dear—it's Martha with something good for you.—I'll put it on the floor and you can open the door and get it.

(JEAN and PRIS. quietly push the table toward the door, loosening the straps.)

GLADYS. I can't hear a sound. You don't think there is anything the matter, do you?

MARTHA (louder). Margery—Margery.

PRIS. Open the door.

MARTHA (opening the door and looking in). She isn't here!

PRIS. She's gone home.

GLADYS (running to the window, followed by JEAN). Oh, look—look! (The girls crowd around the window and door.) There she goes.—He's chasing her——

JEAN. Say, he can run some, if he is an old fossil!

MARTHA. He's between her and the road.—Oh, she can't do it—she can't—here they come——

ELIZ. (outside, shouting). Run, Margery, run—dodge him——

MARTHA. Elizabeth is there, too.

(Shouts and cries from ELIZ. and the VOICE are heard, but not a sound from MARG., who is saving her breath for running. The VOICE grows nearer.)

VOICE. Hi, you, get back there, now! Back, I tell you—I won't stand no nonsense—I'm here to protect the health of this community, an', by gum, I'm goin' to do it!

MARG. (*very close to the camp*). Don't you stop me! I'm going home—I'm going to be married.

VOICE. You'll be more likely to be buried if you don't go back!

MARG. (*nearer*). Let me pass.—I'm—I'm just—*plastered*—with scarlet fever germs, and if you don't stand out of my way, I'll—I'll—*hug* you!

VOICE. I guess not. Get in that camp!

MARG. (*shrieking*). Oh—don't—don't point that thing at me!—You cruel, hateful beast—you brute—stop—*stop*—I say.—Oh, I'll go—I'll go.—Only put that away!

GLADYS. Mercy—that creature has a *revolver*!

(*The girls shriek and shrink away from window and door.*

The door flies open, and MARG., sobbing and crying, rushes in. She stands on the threshold, stretching her arms toward the road, and sobbing.)

MARG. Billy—Billy——

CURTAIN

ACT III

SCENE.—*The same. Sunday morning, about ten o'clock. The curtain rises on an empty stage.*

Enter, wearily, GLADYS.

GLADYS. Such a night! I haven't slept a wink! First—Margery's hysterics—then there was a thunder shower—then Jean fell out of the hammock and hurt her elbow. I feel perfectly wretched! I'm as weak as a rag—I haven't a bit of strength. (*Sinks on the couch.*) I shouldn't be a bit surprised if I had the fever, too. (*She takes up a hand mirror and examines her tongue.*) Yes, my tongue is all furred, just as the doctor said. I'm in for it, sure. Probably we'll all have it.—I wonder if it disfigures a person much. I'm going to ask the doctor when she comes—— (*She lies down.*) I never felt so helpless in all my life!

Enter JEAN, with her arm in a sling.

JEAN (*crossly*). Why didn't you stay and help me dress? You knew I couldn't do my hair with this lame arm, and Priscilla has nearly scalped me. I look like a fright. What's the matter with you, anyway?

GLADYS. Please don't scold, Jean. I'm feeling miserable. I know I'm going to have the fever. I have that terrible lassitude the doctor spoke about.

JEAN. I shouldn't wonder if we all had it. I ache all over, myself, and I haven't been able to eat much breakfast. Get up and let me have some of that couch.

GLADYS. I won't—there's the hammock.

JEAN. I've had all the hammock I want for one while.

Enter MARTHA.

MARTHA. For pity's sake, don't squabble, girls. Things are bad enough without making them any worse. Margery is too sick to get up this morning, and I don't feel at all well, myself. I've been cooking for two hours, and I'm burning with fever—just look at my face!

GLADYS. You *are* awfully red and hot-looking. I'm weak as a rag myself.

JEAN. I ache all over.

Enter PRIS., very despondent.

PRIS. Oh, girls, isn't it awful! I never would have come on this vacation if I'd known what was going to happen. I didn't sleep well at all. You all made such a rumpus. And then that shower scared me almost to death! And just as I was getting a little nap, I heard the most awful thump—as if the chimney was falling down or something —

JEAN. It was only *I* falling out of the hammock! I nearly broke my arm.

MARTHA. We are all sick this morning.

PRIS. I'm sick myself. I feel so languid, and my head aches. I got up about four o'clock and looked out, and—oh, girls, I saw the *sunrise!* I never saw one before. It's almost like a sunset, isn't it? Did any of you see it?

MARTHA. Yes—I saw the sunset and the moonrise, and the moonset and the sunrise, and all the star-rises and star-sets, and the thunder and the lightning, and the rain, and if there is anything that happened last night that I didn't see, it was a mistake! I never went to bed all night!

Enter ELIZ.

ELIZ. Margery's asleep now. I hope when she wakes up she will feel better. How is your elbow, Jean? Martha, isn't there something I can do?

MARTHA. The only thing I know of is to give me a little sleep for last night.

GLADYS. Couldn't you make me some toast?

PRIS. We're all sick, Elizabeth. I know I'm in for the fever. I wish the doctor would come.

ELIZ. Well, I think we'd all feel better if we got out into the fresh air. Let's sit on the piazza and watch for the doctor.

MARTHA. A good idea. We can hear Margery if she wakes, Priscilla can continue her study of the heavens, and I can get forty winks in a rocking-chair.

(They straggle languidly to the screen door. GLADYS tries to open it, but fails.)

GLADYS. I'm actually so weak I can't even open that door.

MARTHA (*trying it*). Why, what ails it?

JEAN. It sticks, that's all. Let me do it.—There's something the matter with it—it won't open.

ALL. Won't open?

ELIZ. Oh, you are the weakest set—let me get hold of it.

(*She pushes violently, but ineffectually.*)

PRIS. Perhaps it's locked.

JEAN. There isn't any lock on the screen door.

ELIZ. (*peering out sideways*). It *is*—it's bolted on the other side—that—that—imbecile out there has put on a bolt in the night and fastened us in!

MARTHA. He must have been mighty quiet—I didn't hear him.

JEAN. Probably he did it while it was thundering.

MARTHA. Try the windows.

(PRIS. and GLADYS rush to the windows, but find the screens immovable.)

PRIS. The screens are nailed down!

GLADYS. We're prisoners!

ELIZ. Well, we won't be long! If one man thinks he's going to keep us in here with his silly old bolts and nails on screen doors, he'll soon find out his mistake! Gladys, get me the carving-knife.

GLADYS. And my manicure scissors!

(GLADYS runs after knife and scissors, while the girls struggle actively with door and windows. All signs of fatigue disappear.)

VOICE (*as MARTHA and ELIZ. attack the wire screening*). Don't ye tetch that bolt, now! Leave them screens alone. Quit yer funny business—there. I come near losin' one o' ye last night, an' I ain't takin' no more chances.

GLADYS (*screaming and pulling them away*). Oh, don't do it, girls! He's got that revolver! Oh, I'd rather stay here and starve than be shot!

(*An automobile is heard in the road, tooting loud and frantically.*)

PRIS. He's going away—there's an automobile out there, and he's—oh, girls—girls.—There's *Ralph*!—Girls—girls—it's *the boys*!

Enter MARG., rushing in with her hair down, and clasping a kimono about her.

MARG. Is Billy there? Oh, let me see him.—He'll save me.—Let me go, girls—don't you understand?—It's Billy!

(They all crowd about windows and door, pushing each other.)

PRIS. Don't take up all the room!

GLADYS. I can see Charlie! There he is—oh, doesn't he look grand?

JEAN. Bert has on his best suit—crazy thing! Let me have some room, can't you?

MARTHA. There's Max! I see the sun on his spectacles—thank heaven! I'll have some one to help me!

GLADYS. Why don't they come in? What are they waiting for?

MARG. I'm so glad I brought my pink linen suit. I'll go and put it on this minute. [Exit.]

PRIS. Everything will be all right now! Oh, Ralph's waving at me! Hullo—hullo, Ralph! *(She waves joyfully.)*

JEAN. Don't take up the whole window! *(Calls.)* Hurry, Bert, hurry! Why are they waiting?

ELIZ. *(who has not joined the rush to the window).* Possibly because they are not allowed to come in. You seem to have forgotten that we have been exposed to scarlet fever, and are in strict quarantine!

(The girls turn away from the windows and face her, aghast.)

MARG. *(from the bedroom door).* Do you mean to tell me that my Billy will let anything stop him from coming to me when I am in danger?

ELIZ. Of course you don't want to expose Billy or any of the other precious ones to the infection of scarlatina maligna? You know you are all sickening with fever—you said so yourselves!

GLADYS. I'm perfectly well!

PRIS. There's nothing the matter with me——

JEAN. Oh, Elizabeth, you don't suppose he won't let the boys in, do you? When they're right out there in the road?

ELIZ. That is exactly what I suppose. And neither will he let us out.

(Exclamations of dismay.)

VOICE. Say, you—there's some young fellers out here in a automobile that wants to come in. Say you invited 'em down. You can't go invitin' company when you're in quarantine. You ought to know better'n that. Now ——

Enter MARG., doing her hair.

(The following remarks are delivered as nearly as possible at once.)

MARG. We didn't invite them when we were quarantined—we invited them before —— And one of them is the man I'm going to marry, and if you think ——

GLADYS. They're not afraid of scarlet fever or anything else, and you just let them come in now!

JEAN. Can't you let them just come to the piazza?

MARTHA. Please let us out in the field so we can speak to them.

VOICE. Can't tell a word you say when you all talk to once, so.

(The girls flock round the windows, motioning and waving to the boys.)

ELIZ. Be quiet, girls. Let me talk to him. *(She goes to the door.)* Here, you—officer—whatever your name is—we invited these gentlemen down to spend Sunday, never suspecting any such calamity as this. They don't know what is the matter. Will you let me go out near enough to explain to them?

VOICE. They know—I told 'em you'd all got scarlet fever, or you was goin' to have it—same thing. An' you can't come out. I'm here to protect the health o' this community an' ——

ELIZ. So you said before. You're certainly doing what you're expected to do. Will you let one of them come near enough to hear what I say?

VOICE *(sourly)*. No.

ELIZ. Will you carry a message to them?

VOICE. No! I ain't here to chase back an' forth in the broilin' sun. I'm here to protect ——

MARG. *(shouting from the window)*. Billy—Billy—come here and kill this idiot.

ELIZ. He won't do anything.

MARTHA. Then we'll have to do it ourselves.

MARG. Oh, isn't it awful! To see poor Billy out there, and not be able to say a word to him! Look, they're all talking together—what do you suppose they're saying?

ELIZ. I don't believe my mother would want me to imagine!

MARG. Billy is shaking his fist at the imbecile.

JEAN. I do believe they are contemplating a rush at him.

MARTHA. They mustn't do that—he will shoot them.

PRIS. They are—they're coming—no, he's making them go back.—Oh, girls, they are perfectly furious!—They're trying to say something to us. Gladys, can you tell what they mean?

GLADYS. No, I can't. We *must* communicate with them. What shall we do?

MARG. I know—flash a mirror, the way you do from mountain tops. The sun in this window is just right. Billy and I have a whole code of signals that way, too.

GLADYS. You genius! Here's a mirror—now flash to him that we're quarantined here, and he must get us away.

MARG. I can't flash that. I don't know how.

MARTHA. What can you flash?

MARG. Why—just “Do you love me?” and “Yes, of course I do,” and “You're quite sure?” and—things like that.

ELIZ. Highly practical, and *so* useful in the present emergency!

MARG. Perhaps you can offer a suggestion.

GLADYS. Look, girls—they are all sitting in a row on the wall — (*Girls again crowd around windows.*) They're taking out their handkerchiefs—oh, they're crying —

JEAN. They mean they are sorry we are sick.

MARG. We're sorry, too. Handkerchiefs, everybody. Let's respond.

(*All weep vigorously in pantomime.*)

PRIS. What are they doing now?—They're all lying down—oh, they mean are we sick abed?

ALL. No—no. (*They emphatically shake their heads.*)

ELIZ. Let's all shout at once and see if they can hear us. When I say three, we'll all shout, “Can—you—hear—us?” Now—one—two—three.

ALL (*yelling*). Can—you—hear—us?

MARTHA. Nothing doing—I guess they can't.

GLADYS. They are shouting at the man. They are beckoning to him. They are waving something at him.—Gracious, girls, he's going out there to them.

ELIZ. I know what they're waving without looking—it's money.

MARTHA. But he is shaking his head, no.

ELIZ. And saying, "I'm here to protect the health of this community"—I'll bet on it.

PRIS. Can't anybody think of anything? Hasn't any one any code of signals?

GLADYS. Let's all think hard.

PRIS. How do folks talk with each other when they can't make them hear? What do deaf people do?

GLADYS. Talk on their fingers—and I can do it! And so can Charlie! If I can only attract his attention.

ELIZ. Wave the table-cloth at him.

MARTHA. They are all talking together again—the creature is coming back to his post.

GLADYS (*waving the table-cloth*). There, Charlie's looking.

MARG. Tell him to tell Billy I *will* marry him.

MARTHA. Tell him to tell Max I'm not sick.

PRIS. Tell him to tell Ralph to do something at once.

JEAN. Tell him to tell Bert to —

GLADYS. Say—it would take me the rest of my days to spell all that on my fingers. I'm no natural-born dummy.

(*She spells on two hands at the window, while the others watch anxiously.*)

MARG. You're so slow, Gladys. Can't you hurry?

GLADYS. Keep quiet—why—he's spelling, too—oh, I can't see him.—I'll bet he can't read what I'm saying.—Get me the field-glasses, somebody—quick! (*They hurry for them.*) There—oh, shall I ever get this focus.—Why, where is he?

MARG. Let me look at Billy.

GLADYS. Keep her off, will you? I can't see a thing when you jiggle so.

MARTHA. What does he say?

JEAN. The others are getting into the auto again—they are going away.

GLADYS. He says — (*Waves her hand and calls, "Spell slow—I can't see very well."*) He says—w-a-i-t.—*Wait!*

ELIZ. It really doesn't seem necessary, under the present circumstances, to have an automobile full of men come away down here from town to tell us to *wait!*

MARG. Let me come.—Let me come.—Oh, Billy is going away and leaving me.—They've gone.—They've gone!

ALL (*blankly*). Gone? What now?

MARG. Well, anyway, I won't postpone my wedding. I'll marry Billy on Wednesday, if I have to stand here and shout the responses to him in the road, while old "protect-the-health" out there guards the minister.

ELIZ. You'll have to develop your voice some, or Billy will never know whether you're saying, "I will" or "I won't."

MARTHA. And you've got to "first catch your Billy." He's gone away.

VOICE. Say, you—in there?

JEAN. What is it?

VOICE. It's pretty hot out here, an' I'm tarnal dry. Make me some lemonade!

PRIS. What do you know about that for nerve?

ELIZ. How are you going to get it? We can't get out, and you don't dare to come to the door, for we will all stand and blow germs at you.

GLADYS. Don't enrage him, Elizabeth. If he's going to guard us for a week or ten days, we'd better be careful. (*To the VOICE.*) The doctor will be here soon, sir, and we will send you out some by her—all sterilized.

(*Automobile is heard honking in the road.*)

ALL. The boys—the boys—— (*They rush to windows.*)

MARTHA. Why, there is Dr. Simpson in the auto with them!—Oh, they are going away again.

MARG. Look at that old thing wave her hand at my Billy!

ELIZ. Isn't your Billy waving at her? I guess she will find "the patient" better this morning. I thought she told you to avoid all excitement, Margery.

Enter DR. SIMP.

DR. SIMP. Good-morning, young ladies—I am the bearer of a message——

MARG. For me?

GLADYS. What did Charlie say?

MARTHA. Tell me, quick.

JEAN. I saw Bert speaking to you.

DR. SIMP. For you *all*. Oh, my dear young ladies, how very distressing is your present predicament. How infinitely more than I could have dreamed. Truth is stranger than fiction, indeed. I fear that yesterday I must have seemed cold and unsympathetic, in my professional capacity. But, believe me, my dears, I am at heart a girl, like yourselves. I am all sympathy. And truly, in this world of so much sorrow and suffering, how blessed is the golden sunshine of love!

JEAN. What is the message?

DR. SIMP. My dears, why, oh, why did you not confide in me yesterday? Why did you not tell me that these estimable young men were coming to-day, to share in your vacation festival? Perhaps then my professional zeal would not have so overshadowed my humanity. I could have notified them—I could have spared them the horrible shock of coming here—joyous, anticipatory—only to meet with the rebuff of the law—but the health of the community must be considered.

ELIZ. (*aside*). Where have I heard those words before?

GLADYS. But what did they *say*?

DR. SIMP. It is the greatest good of the greatest number. The individual must be sunk in the mass. When I heard these delightful youths——

MARG. I'd like to hear what you heard!

DR. SIMP. And still, if they had not come——

JEAN. You said, a long time ago, that they sent a message.

DR. SIMP. Oh, yes! As I was saying, if they had not come, I should have missed one of the greatest chances of my professional career! I was on my way here, when I met the young men speeding sadly along in their delightful machine. From my bag they deduced the fact that I was a physician, and surmised my errand. In the course of the conversation, one of them—the one with the spectacles——

MARTHA. Max!

DR. SIMP. Yes—the homely one—(MARTHA *glares at her, while the girls giggle*) said that Dr. Leopold Van Valkenberg, the eminent authority on fever germs, was staying at the next town, and in the most delicate manner they insisted on my allowing them to call him in to confirm my diagnosis. They have motored after him now. I fear they may exceed the speed limit.

ELIZ. They are perfectly safe if they do. The whole police force is even now in our front yard.

DR. SIMP. I am to meet them in the village at once, where we shall see the Stebbins baby. I will immediately return and tell you —

MARG. Whether we have the fever or not?

DR. SIMP. Oh, no! You will have scarlet fever, of course. There is no doubt of that. But, with the benefit of his immense research, I shall be able to tell you whether you will suffer from scarlatina simplex, scarlatina angniosa or scarlatina maligna! [*Exit, leaving the screen door unbolted.*]

ELIZ. What a comfort it will be to know that!

PRIS. We shall have two doctors at us now, instead of one.

VOICE. Well, they said they'd send it out by you.—Here, you—inside there—where's my lemonade?

MARTHA (*throwing a lemon out at the VOICE*). There's a lemon—that's all you'll get from us!

JEAN. It's no use, girls. We might as well make up our minds to stay here. The only thing to do is to dose up all we can, and have it as light as possible. I'm going to bathe my face in witch-hazel. That's as near disinfectant as we have. I'll get my samples and we'll divide up according to symptoms.

[*Exit, returning with boxes and bottles.*]

MARG. My throat is dreadfully sore.

JEAN. Here's about three drops of peroxide—gargle that!

(*MARG. mixes a gargle and gargles violently.*)

PRIS. My head aches awfully.

JEAN. Here's a big pill—I don't know what it's good for—but take it.

(*PRIS. takes the pill.*)

MARTHA. My face burns like fire.

JEAN. I'll find something for that in a minute.

(*An automobile horn toots loudly in the road.*)

VOICE (*calling*). What in tunket do you want now?—Gosh, they're back again.—Stay there, I tell ye.—I'll blow a hole in your tires, as sure as fate.

GLADYS. Charlie has come back!

MARG. (*despairingly*). What of it? It's no use. They can't do anything for us.

MARTHA (*at window*). Look at Dr. Simpson—she is simply racing up to the camp.

Enter DR. SIMP., very much out of breath.

DR. SIMP. My—dears—my dears—Dr.—Van—Valkenberg—had gone before I—could reach the village.—I met those charming young men coming to meet me, and once more they assisted me. They brought me here speedily to tell you —

ALL. What—oh, what?

DR. SIMP. Dr. Van Valkenberg saw the baby. He is a wonderful man. At a glance his trained eye read the baffling symptoms.—It was *not* scarlatina maligna—it was *not* scarlatina angniosa—it was not *even* scarlatina simplex! It was —

ALL. Tell us—tell us —

DR. SIMP. It was—an *eye-tooth*!

MARG. (*to GLADYS*). An eye-tooth!

MARTHA (*to JEAN*). An eye-tooth!

PRIS. An eye-tooth!

ELIZ. (*to DR. SIMP.*). An eye-tooth?

MARG.

JEAN

PRIS.

GLADYS

MARTHA

} (*turning to ELIZ.*). And the *boys* did it!

VOICE (*rising in terror*). Git away now!—Git away.—I was only doin' my duty—(*trailing away in the distance*) I was here to—protect—the health—of this —

GLADYS. What on earth is the matter with him?

MARTHA. The boys have taken up the pursuit of the law!

ELIZ. Girls—do you hear? The Voice of Authority fades away. The quarantine is off, and we can go home!

DR. SIMP. (*beaming on them*). Yes—yes.

ALL (*looking at each other in wonder*). We—can—go—home!

(*After a second, they make a dive for their suit-cases, and begin to pack frantically.*)

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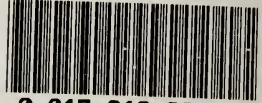
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